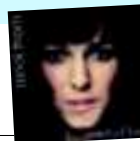




170 The Hold Steady
The E Street Band's
rightful successors?



170 Foals
Less maths, more
guitar hooks



172 Sandi Thom
Now wishes she was
a blues-rocker

Music



Brothers in (tremolo) arms: Michael Landau (left) and Robben Ford (second right)

Renegade Creation

Renegade Creation

★★★★

Provogue

Michael Landau and Robben Ford fire off one another to deliver a blues-rock studio album with hints of expansive fusion – a concoction sure to set guitar players' spider senses tingling

As soon as you hear Robben Ford croon "Birds fly over soft and mean/Take the shape of a Flying V", the cat is out of the bag – this new collaboration with legendary sessioneer Michael Landau is one aimed directly at us guitar players. Taking well-travelled fusion rhythm section bassist Jimmy Haslip and drummer Gary Novak as their foundation, the pair bob and weave over eight vocal and

two instrumental tracks, hammering away at their fretboards like their lives depend on it. A mix of driving blues-rock, slow blues, jazz-inflected instrumentals, and surprisingly straight-ahead AOR rock choruses, it'll surprise a few of Ford's fans familiar with his more measured outings.

In fact, what's refreshing is that nothing here is overly cerebral, and while the playing is constantly high-calibre, the emphasis on raw emotion and, we assume, spur of the moment improvisation makes this much more rewarding than mere self-indulgent, by the numbers plank-spankery.

The contrast between the two players' styles is an interesting one – Ford seems to consciously venture outside of the tasteful and well-mannered jazz-blues



instincts he's fostered to really smear a handful of grease over his melodic leadlines, while Landau adds touch, bite, woozy Strat gristle and constant tonal variation

with the guile of a man who's played on more sessions than we've owned plectrums.

As for the highlights, well, instrumental track Peace is a masterful exploration of how far full and partial chord melody can be pushed while still remaining accessible; and Who Do You Think

You Are delivers that gloves-off sparring, cutting-contest vibe that all guitar players secretly love to hear. So whether you're a blues fan looking for something with a bit of a leftfield swerve here and there, a guitar player looking for a ringing earful of new licks, or a fan of the bluesier end of the guitar spectrum in general, there's something here for you. [BW]
Standout tracks: What's Up, Peace, Renegade Destruction, Who Do You Think You Are
For fans of: Robben Ford, Michael Landau, guitar playing

Ford ventures outside of jazz-blues to smear a handful of grease over his melodic leadlines, while Landau adds touch, bite, Strat gristle and constant tonal variation

© MIK GLEN

Albums



The National High Violet

★★★★ 4AD



Melancholy indie writ large

These US indie stars, beloved of Pitchfork and lauded by the press, return with a more guitar-oriented approach reminiscent of their high watermark, 2005's *Alligator*, than its follow up, *Boxer*. It is built around the melancholy melodies of vocalist Matt Berninger's bitter confessional and there are plenty of subtle touches.

Guitar highlights include the amphetamine buzz of fast tremolo on *Anyone's Ghost*, the atmospheric outro of *Afraid Of Everyone* and the general anthemic drive of lead single *Bloodbuzz Ohio*. For those who like their indie dark and intense, this is a brooding drama. [OB] **Standout tracks:** *Anyone's Ghost*, *Bloodbuzz Ohio*
For fans of: *Arcade Fire*, *REM*, *Modest Mouse*

Exit Calm

Exit Calm
★★★★★ Club AC30 Records

Brits with a huge sound and great future ahead

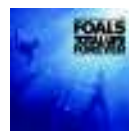
The best British guitar bands of the last 25 years have often paired otherworldly guitar with the earthly emotions of hope and despair. It's a mix

mastered by very few but already highly potent in this *Barnsley* four-piece's debut. It's soaked in Rob Marshall's guitar; a bold player with a keen grasp of creatively using delay and reverb to create a huge canvas for addictive songs that meld psychedelic tendencies with sharp hooks.

The album ebbs and flows into a unique mix, from the Verve comparisons (*We're On Our Own*, the towering *Hearts And Minds*) into the mantric second half of *Atone*, *Forgiveness and Recovery* that have more in common with *Sigur Rós* and *Unkle*. But whatever they're doing it's with a powerful sincerity and drive – musicians gazing at the horizon and leading the listener to follow. So far it's an incredible journey. [RL] **Standout tracks:** *Hearts And Minds*, *Reference*, *When You Realise*
For fans of: *Doves*, *The Verve*

Foals

Total Life Forever
★★★★★ Warner Brothers



Fluid second effort from the math-rockers

Thankfully the gorgeous guitar interplay that characterised *Foals* debut *Antidotes* is present and correct here. What's changed is that the awkward time signatures have been largely junked, the

jaggedness has been smoothed and everything is more fluid, funkier, and, on *Spanish Sahara* and *2 Trees*, almost trance-like. This is a headphones album, one to immerse yourself in and get lost amid the overlapping melodies and interlocking guitar lines. *Foals* appear to be rare beasts indeed: one of the few UK guitar bands who sound determined to map out fresh territory with the instrument, and they look set to be around for years. Cherish them. And this. [WS]

Standout tracks: *Miami*, *After Glow*, *2 Trees*
For fans of: *Talking Heads*, *Radiohead*

Band Of Horses

Infinite Arms
★★★★★ Columbia



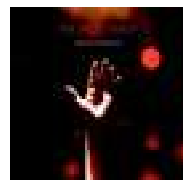
Flannel shirts, beards and beatific harmonies

Horses' third long player is an infectious slow-burner. Initially, *Infinite Arms* suffers from an apparent lack of a big, dynamic single – 2007's *Cease To Begin* had several, notably *Is There A Ghost*, a triumphant thunderbolt that was among the best songs of the last decade.

Happily, repeat listens of this album find hooks aplenty amid the more expansive, pastoral sound showcased

The Hold Steady Heaven Is Whenever

★★★★★ Rough Trade



Minneapolis' finest return and add to their credentials as perhaps the very best the USA has to offer right now

There are plenty of people lining up to tell the world that *The Hold Steady* are as good a band as exists in the United States today, and it's easy to see why. Breakthrough album *Boys And Girls In America* honed their imaginative and eloquent storytelling rock to perfection, and the comparisons with *Springsteen* were not mere hyperbole. If follow-up album *Stay Positive* delivered small progress, *Heaven Is Whenever* sees the band reach out into the heart of their homeland musically, marrying America's great country tradition with their Les Paul-fuelled rock. That's not to say the band have moved away from what they do best, however, and *The Smidge* is classic *Hold Steady* with its spiky punk riffing and clever lyrics – it's just that here it's married to an expansive bridge that even hints at psychedelia. *Hurricane J* is another jewel that swings wildly from quiet melancholy to relentless energy as it tells a simple story of dreaming of escape. If the seemingly eternal *E Street Band* ever do call it a day, *The Hold Steady* are worthy of picking up their torch. [PR] **Standout tracks:** *The Switch*, *We Can Get Together*, *Hurricane J*
For fans of: *Bruce Springsteen*, *The Replacements*, *Hüsker Dü*

Revisited:



Lou Reed Metal Machine Music (1975)

Gear: Unknown guitars and amps

Consisting of feedback generated by two guitars in various tunings left next to their amps, with the resulting squalls and strangled loops embellished and subsequently orchestrated by Reed into four distinct 16-minute 'Parts', *Metal Machine Music* is a unique burst of "energy music" to say the least. And in 2010, the *Metal Machine* rides again,

because Reed has recently toured with Ulrich Krieger and Sarth Calhoun as the *Metal Machine Trio*, and released a recording of that too – grandly subtitled *The Creation Of The Universe*. So was the original *Metal Machine Music* an avant-garde voyage into rock's unconscious and forefather of extreme heavy metal and industrial music? Was it a

contractual obligation grudgingly fulfilled, though Reed denies it, or even a 'joke' of some kind? Whatever the answer is, its influence has been cited by artists ever since its release, and samples of it turn up on records to this day, though Lou even admitted in the original liner notes that no one he knew had listened to it all the way through – even himself.

DVDs

here. The feel throughout evokes the heritage of the band's North Carolina base in combination with an array of seventies West Coast flavours, while the shimmering electric and acoustic guitar textures underpinning Ben Bridwell's haunted vocals make this the perfect soundtrack for chasing the sun. [CV]

Standout tracks: Factory, Compliments, Older

Try if you like: CSNY, Fleet Foxes, The Shins

Mutiny Within

★★★★ Roadrunner



A successful blend of the melodic and the shred
Roadrunner

have form with successful metal acts and, judging by this debut, there's every chance this young US-based band will be their next Killswitch Engage. They do it by offering the technicality that many seek, with the songwriting chops most want. British vocalist Chris Clancy brings power to the immediacy of Images and Year Of Affliction, while guitarists Brandon Jacobs and Daniel Bage already have an impressive understanding of using their technical skills to enhance these songs. Silky legato and sweep picking abound, but it's always with an eye on melody – see the flowing, memorable phrasing in Falling Forever.

At times they sound like Killswitch covering Dream Theater – a progressive breed of metal condensed into a tight structure. There's great potential here. [DH]

Standout tracks: Awake, Falling Forever, Images

For fans of: Soilwork, Dream Theater, Symphony-X

Philip Sayce

★★★★ Provogue



Canuck Strat master blazes to glory
Chuck Jimi Hendrix, Robin

Trower, Lenny Kravitz and a bit of Gov't Mule in a magical

musical mincing machine and out would pop Philip Sayce. Welsh-Canadian in origin, his second album is a slab of psychedelic blues-rock that bursts with fuzzy, Uni-Vibed, wah-, delay- and reverb-soaked Strat tones. Extremely good they are too, giving voice to plenty of pentatonic riffage and some truly exceptional lead playing – not least that mentally fast alternate-picked pentatonic thing that everybody between Bonamassa and Eric Johnson wants to master. E, tuning, wide, devil-may-care vibrato and endless rakes and run downs scream SRV, but this is heavier and with more developed songs, complete with modern production. Philip has plenty of pro-band form, and boy it shows. [MT]

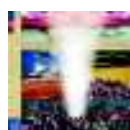
Standout tracks: Anymore, Little Miss America

For fans of: Robin Trower, SRV, Joe Bonamassa

Broken Social Scene

Forgiveness
Rock Record

★★★★ City Slang



Critics' favourites come of age
In the UK at least, this

sprawling Canadian collective are still more written about than actually heard. Expect that to change with this ambitious set that marshals a dazzling range of styles into a coherent, urgent-sounding whole. The Moog-y, Philly-stringed Chase Scene might sound like a relic from some forgotten seventies cop show and Water From Hell is a Flaming Lips-style anthem that morphs halfway into a banjo-led hoedown, but there's an ease and dexterity in the playing that stops any of these tracks falling into pastiche. Constantly intriguing, beautifully arranged and packed with impressive guitar work, we'd already put money on seeing this near the top of a few end-of-year lists. [WS]

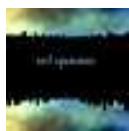
Standout tracks: Texaco Bitches, Forced To Love, Art House Director, Water In Hell

For fans of: Metric, Flaming Lips

Red Sparowes

The Fear Is Excruciating, But Therein Lies The Answer

★★★★ Conspiracy Records



LA post-rock outfit leave few questions
When dealing with a band

sporting members of Isis, you expect plenty of ambient, repetitive, but majestic guitar work. But while there are plenty of repeated phrases here, Bryant Clifford Meyer and Co keep it varied, taking what could have been by-the-numbers stoner-rock into something more interesting. The distorted riffing and bass and guitar harmony of In Illusions Of Order and the Floyd-esque clean arpeggios of A Mutiny are united by their sense of space, as the album takes you on journey over a rugged sonic landscape. While it lacks the originality and virtuosity of Russian Circles, it's clear that RS's third album is essential for post-rock fans. [JG]

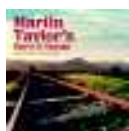
Standout tracks: In Illusions Of Order, In Every Mind

For fans of: Explosions In The Sky, Isis,

Martin Taylor's Spirit Of Django

Last Train to Hauteville

★★★★ The Guitar Label/P3



The British jazzier has nothing Toulouse...
You may

already be aware of Spirit of Django. Remember the 'Nicole... Papa!' Renault TV ads? The music was Martin and Co, and the guitarist has put the band back together to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Django's birth.

The material is closer to easy-listening than authentic gypsy jazz, but Taylor's wonderful touch and superb tone perfectly complement both the ever-present accordion and clarinet, plus the occasionally trite "Moi, monsieur?" musings from vocalist Alison Burns.

La Mer and J'Attendrai are guaranteed to get your feet tapping, while the likes of Rue De Dinan and Le Jardin

DVDs

Tom Petty And The Heartbreakers

Classic Albums - Damn The Torpedoes

★★★★ Eagle Vision



Have Ricky 12, will jangle! This release from the Classic Album series contains loads of extras that were edited out for the TV cut. Here we're taken back to 1979 and Tom Petty And The Heartbreakers third

album. This was a pivotal time for the band, as they were struggling for creative independence and to secure their musical identity.

This need is apparent in the songs and lyrics and has a lot to do with why this is considered a classic. Jimmy Iovine co-produced and Shelly Yakus engineered and together they breathed new fire into the recording process. It proved to be a match made in heaven with a recorded drum sound that was so huge the band layered guitars into an 'orchestra' to get a sound to match. At last the band had a recorded sound that was worthy of their live work. [RN]

Extras: TV commercial, Beat The Mix, The 12-String Rickenbacker (from cover shot), Even The Losers, Here Comes My Girl, Don't Do Me Like That – Vox Organ guitar

The Kinks

You Really Got Me - The Story Of The Kinks

★★★★ ABC



One of the sixties' most exciting and raw bands, The Kinks approach their half-century with their reputation enhanced. This US documentary neatly historicises them through live performances, showing rather than

merely telling us what all the fuss was about.

The director assesses the band's absorption of influences and how these diverse strands passed through their proto-psychedelic pop filter, while Ray Davies emerged as an all-time-great songwriter – albeit one destined to forever replay his early hits to screaming stadia.

There's a healthy collection of performances here, from before and after the US ban in 1965, a defining moment that sealed them off from – as the documentary puts it – the musical and social upheaval of the late sixties.

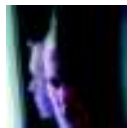
And the DVD's almost worth buying for the sight of a gaudily-dressed Jimmy Saville introducing the band before leaping up and down like a demented salmon. What a great band they were – and what are the odds on a reunion, we wonder? [OB]

Extras: None

Albums

Anglais will whip you straight back to that first sip of plonk on the school trip to Reims. C'est magnifique! [SB]
Standout tracks: Last Train To Hauteville, La Mer
For fans of: Django Reinhardt, John Jorgenson

John Grant
 Queen Of Denmark
 ★★★★★ **Bella Union**



Sensational debut solo record, featuring Midlake

John Grant, erstwhile frontman of overlooked US band The Czars, was practically through with music until he was persuaded by seventies-leaning baroque Texan folksters Midlake to record an album with them as his backing band. Good thing he agreed – Queen Of Denmark is a perfectly formed record that's beautifully poised between authentic melancholy and darkly oblique humour. Anyone who finds Midlake's choral vocals and lack of variation too cloying will love the arrangements and the expert playing on offer here, not to mention Grant's smooth baritone that sounds instantly classic. With its sublime pop hooks, recurrent sci-fi imagery, and a song about Sigourney Weaver for

good measure, Grant's prismatic songwriting deserves all the praise it'll doubtless receive. [OB]
Standout tracks: Sigourney Weaver, Chicken Bones, Marz
For fans of: Midlake, Elliott Smith, Rufus Wainwright

Dan Sartain
 Lives
 ★★★★★ **One Little Indian**

Garage-rock, refined
 Birmingham, Alabama's Dan Sartain definitely has the spirit of fifties rock 'n' roll in his soul, and his dark concoction of rockabilly, with side orders of mariachi, newfound glam rock and garage fuzz is as authentic a slice of stripped-down American angst as it's possible to get. His semi-hollowbody guitars scream throughout this third record proper, and there's an increased exploration of effects (tremolo, fuzz and backwards guitar) to enhance the attack of his stuttering rhythms and staccato melodic leads. The songwriting seems even more taut and focused than before, too, with each of the 13 songs weighing in at a lean fighting weight of under three minutes. It's a formula he's mastered – now we'd love to hear him stretch out, get unhinged and really explore his psyche. [OB]

Standout tracks: Anything I Say, Bohemian Grove
For fans of: The White Stripes, The Jon Spencer Blues Explosion

Sandi Thom
 Merchants And Thieves
 ★★★★★ **Thomcat**



No punks, no flowers, just Thom the blues-rocker

She may never be forgiven for the was-it-or-wasn't-it DIY success, but this doesn't mean Sandi Thom isn't an awesome singer. Inspired by some stand-in vocals when a certain Joe Bonamassa lost his voice, Ms Thom has rebirthed her musical self, turned all blues and produced this.

Old-school electric blues tones abound; chiming tremolo, edgy distortion and bottleneck, all supporting compelling guitar work from Randall Breneman and a visit from Joe B on This Ol' World. Spanning Americana (Maggie McCall), Muddy Waters-type grooves (Runaway Train) and acoustic blues ballads, Thom's soulful delivery binds it together indicating this is where she belongs. [MT]

Standout tracks: This Ol' World, Let It Stay
For fans of: Bonnie Raitt, Susan Tedeschi, Dusty Springfield

DVDs

Chickenfoot
 Get Your Buzz On Live
 ★★★★★ **Eagle Rock/DC3**



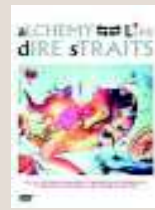
An entire show from the band's 2009 US tour, beautifully shot and comprising the band's debut album almost in full plus My Generation and Bad Motor Scooter, the latter a classic from singer

Sammy Hagar's first band, Montrose. Joe Satriani has flourished as a member of a band and, with his backline populated by Marshall rather than Peavey amps to give a tone any rocker would die for, he plays with genuine skill and pentatonic precision.

The additional hour-long documentary is a somewhat disjointed yet entertaining romp through Chickenfoot World. Highlights include Michael Anthony jovially yet steadfastly fending off questions regarding Van Halen, and hyperactive drummer Chad Smith's inability to cheer down to any degree whatsoever.

Nigel Tufnell fails in an attempt to interview a stoic Satch but, aside from the bemusing lack of a song select function, this is an engaging disc that has to be one of the final nails in Van Halen's already worryingly studded coffin. [SB]
Extras: Tour documentary, audio options

Dire Straits
 Alchemy - Dire Straits Live
 ★★★★★ **Universal**



This remastered version of the famous Hammersmith Odeon concert in 1983 shows Knopfler and Co on the cusp of stardom. Within two years Brothers In Arms would make them true global megastars.

So then, this is a very fitting Dire Straits time capsule – we might not get the big hits, but this captures a band on the rise and still offers some of their most enduring classics – Romeo And Juliet, the sublime Telegraph Road and Sultans Of Swing – all delivered with aplomb.

Indeed, one of the most enjoyable aspects of the concert are the lingering close-ups of The Headbanded One's right hand as he uses his clawhammer technique to coax those fluid clean runs and unison bends out of his red Strat – all in remastered 5.1 surround sound.

The one thing that will grate fans is the absence of Love Over Gold – this track featured on the original LP, but was missing from the original VHS release, and yet the video was included on the 2002 Sultans Of Swing greatest hits DVD. Why wasn't it restored to its rightful place here? But this is a minor quibble, as the rest of the concert is a 90-minute feast of technique and tone for Knopfler fans. [JG]
Extras: None

Also out:

Legendary Shack Shakers
 Agridustrial
 ★★★ **Colonel Knowledge**

A unique mix of classic rock, East Coast punk and rockabilly, roots and country styles, the Shakers provide a stark soundtrack to the day to day horrors that can comprise life in America's boondocks. Tracks such as The Hills Of Hell Itself may well instigate you rethinking that roadtrip along Route 66... [SB]

Hoken Aquarius
 ★★★★★ **Sensory**

A truly eclectic prog-based romp through sonic landscapes coloured by some of the strangest music this side of a Mike Keneally release. Yet the experience is totally gratifying, not least due to the incredible technique of guitarist Charlie Griffiths, and therefore comes highly recommended. [SB]

Levi/Werstler Avalanche Of Worms
 ★★★★★ **Magna Carter**

Furious guitar interplay is the order of the day here from these two members of Atlanta death metallers Dãath – but there are swathes of clean lead and synth textures to add variety. A neo-classical tinge to the leadwork dominates and there's an almost symphonic structure to the album as a whole. [BW]

Futureheads The Chaos
 ★★★ **Nul Recordings**

The north-east's premier exponents of XTC-inspired post-punk return with fire in their belly for album number four, giving some of their pop sheen a harder edge. The tunes remain, though, most notably The Chaos, Heartbeat Song and the über-catchy I Can Do That. [PR]