

## Calexico

*El Mirador*

Anti-Records

Producers: Sergio Mendoza, Joey Burns, John Convertino

Calexico isn't the first band to successfully integrate mariachi horns into rock & roll (think Love's classic LP *Forever Changes*), but they take a range of "south of the border" tones (cumbias, ranchera) to make music that is both tuneful and emotionally resonant. As usual, Burns' vocals and Convertino's percussion are spot-on smooth, and the one instrumental evokes a desert highway at night. Calexico stands as a rare treasure, on the shelf with such unique roots-rock artists as Los Lobos, Tom Waits, and Chris Isaak. - **David Arnsion**



## Mary Gauthier

*Dark Enough to See the Stars*

Thirty Tigers

Producer: Neilson Hubbard

Affectionately known as a "truth-teller," this Grammy-nominee writes poignant and emotional accounts of the human condition. Gauthier's latest effort touches on new love, personal contentment and reflection. Her vocal delivery is equal parts darkness and light, jumping from a love song like "Fall Apart World" to the appreciative "Thank God for You." "How Could You Be Gone" is powerfully hypnotic in its examination of personal loss. Gauthier will take you on an enlightened odyssey. And it will be time well spent. - **Eric Harabadian**



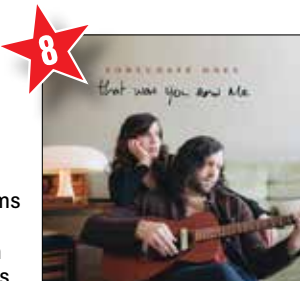
## Fortunate Ones

*That Was You and Me*

Sonic Records

Producer: Joshua Van Tassel

Fortunate Ones has achieved a JUNO nomination and 13.5 million Spotify streams for their sophomore album alone. As husband and wife, Andrew James O'Brien and Catherine Allan have endured the ups and downs of a long-term relationship, thus providing fodder for this goose bump-inducing record. Featuring buttery, back-and-forth harmonies that are achingly beautiful, they stand above their folksy peers. Absorbing the Canadian duo's newest is like eavesdropping on intimate conversations. Try not to blush. - **Andy Kaufmann**



## Placebo

*Never Let Me Go*

Rise Records/BMG

Producers: Placebo & Adam Noble

Placebo have released their eighth studio album, and this time the Brits are packing synths, complete with Brian Molko's signature repetitive hooks and thought-provoking lyrics. Unfortunately, what's lacking here is the punchy guitar of previous singles like "The Bitter End" or "Every You Every Me." Standouts on *Never Let Me Go* include "Beautiful James" and "Happy Birthday In The Sky." What's unclear after five plays is whether I'm still humming the hooks because they were clever or obtuse. - **Andy Mesecher**



## Jeff "Skunk" Baxter

*Speed of Heat*

BMG/Renew Records

Producers: Jeff Baxter and CJ Vanston

You've heard his licks add soul and sizzle to classics by Steely Dan, Donna Summer, Doobie Brothers and others. Finally, the guitarist extraordinaire delivers a stunning debut solo effort. There are rocking guitar throw downs, with "Apache" and the SD gem "My Old School," featuring Baxter on vocals. There are also lovely, serene instrumentals "Juliet" and "The Rose." In addition, the maestro's fancy fret work elicits exceptional cameos from Michael McDonald, Jonny Lang, Clint Black and Rick Livingstone. - **Eric Harabadian**



## James Lee Stanley & Dan Navarro

*All Wood and Led*

Beachwood Recordings

Producers: Stanley and Navarro

Stanley & Navarro's Led Zeppelin document is a testament to how they can take familiar, time-honored material and give it new life in ways both clever and sublime. Tunes like "Stairway to Heaven" and "The Battle of Evermore" are slightly enhanced, yet retain their organic core. However, "Rock & Roll," "Whole Lotta Love" and "Good Times, Bad Times" run the gamut from jazzy and samba-tinged to rockabilly. Folksy, bluesy and essential! - **Eric Harabadian**



## Yung Lean

*Stardust*

World Affairs

Producers: Various

Yung Lean cannot be contained to a singular label, but... this chaotic hyperpop experimental cloud rapper from Sweden has met his muse in FKA Twigs on "Bliss," lead single from *Stardust*. Other standouts are "Starz-2theRainbow," "All the things," "Lips." Two tracks get the Skrillex treatment, proving Yung Lean's introspections resonate from a festival mainstage to a dark bedroom, listening alone, mind racing. When the whole project is 35 minutes, there shouldn't be a discrepancy between the stars (pun intended) and sleepy tracks. - **Joseph Maltese**



## The Linda Lindas

*Growing Up*

Epitaph Records

Producer: Carlos de la Garza

The Linda Lindas have a lot to say about their newness to "the real world" and overcoming the powerlessness of youth. Their politically pertinent "Racist, Sexist Boy" was a screaming hit, but title track "Growing Up" and radically wise "Magic" kick off something big. They lit up a new riot grrrl wave while also giving space for Latin-fusion with "Cuántas Veces" and alt-pop with "Talking To Myself." The Linda Lindas are already so fierce and skilled—we can only expect them to get stronger and more self-assured with time. - **Elena Ender**

