



Parquet Courts:
lunch bunch

70th birthday, but evidently not Van. In the two years since that milestone he's released four albums, two of which came out last year.

Just five months since his previous (and 38th) long-player, *Versatile*, the indefatigable curmudgeon of Caledonian soul indulges his jazz sensibility with a hugely enjoyable 15-song set that sees him collaborate with noted US Hammond B3 organ grinder, Joey DeFrancesco.

The chemistry the pair create is irresistible, with Morrison's desiccated bark of a voice ably complemented by his younger sidekick's greasy, finger-lickin'-good organ. The two offer a clutch of jazz and blues standards that include Cole Porter's Miss Otis Regrets, Johnny Mercer's Travelin' Light, and Peter Chatman's Everyday I Have The Blues, all of which are superbly rendered.

Arguably more significant than the covers are reconfigurations of material taken from Morrison's own back catalogue. Close Enough For Jazz and All Saints Day, two jazz-inflected cuts he wrote in the 90s, receive supercharged, hard-swinging makeovers, while Have I Told You Lately is transformed from a ballad into an effervescent, uptempo duet with Morrison's daughter, Shana. On this evidence, there's still plenty of gas left in Van's tank. *Charles Waring*

Willie Nelson

Last Man Standing

★★★★

Legacy, cat no tbc (CD/LP)

He's getting on a bit, in case you hadn't heard...

It's nigh on inevitable that any report of Nelson's current activities makes mention of the country singer's age. It's there in the first paragraph of

the press release that accompanies this album (he turns 85 two days after its release), and his longevity is, of course, referenced in the record's title.

Last Man Standing is his eighth release since signing to Legacy six years ago, and in common with 2017's *God's Problem Child* it finds Nelson reflecting on the passing years. It may be introspective but it's rarely sombre, the great man's wisdom laced with wit on the rollicking shuffle of Don't Tell Noah, the two-step celebration of a life lived well on Bad Breath ("...is better than no breath at all"), and the front porch self-eulogy I'll Try To Do Better Next Time.

The fact that all 11 tracks are new compositions by Nelson and his longtime producer Buddy Cannon is testament to the ongoing flow of his creative juices, at a time when he could be forgiven for merely putting his own stamp on standards or bygone country classics. The title track and the evocative Heaven Is Closed suggest he's far from done when it comes to bolstering his own canon of classics. *Terry Staunton*

New York Dolls

Personality Crisis: Live Recordings & Studio Demos 1972-1975

★★★★

Cherry Red CRCDBOX 52 (5CD)

Doll parts

Sometimes it's fun to discover that your favourite gang of notorious subversives once sounded like Nina & Frederik. But that's not the case here. *Personality Crisis*, a properly thrilling collection of early demos and revelatory live performances, confirms that the New York Dolls had their thing sewn up as tightly as Lenin's eyelids from note one.

Well, perhaps "tightly" isn't the most appropriate term for such an... *untoward* noise. For sure, they knew how to remorselessly gun a crunching, crashing, four-on-the-floor engine – the gargantuan debt The Sex Pistols owe to the likes of Mystery Girls, Human Being and Personality Crisis perpetually beggars belief – but over and above the blowtorch guitars and gobby, insurrectionary vocals, everything the Dolls did still left an intrinsically messy aftertaste of smeared lippy and broken stack heels, to their eternal credit.

Accordingly, these unkempt, bawling, delinquent, arse-wagging recordings represent the Dolls far more viscerally than their brace of studio albums. Even the fuck-ups work in their favour. The way Arthur Kane's bass gradually slips out of tune, unchecked, throughout the Planet Studios demos just sounds magnificently decadent and sleazy. By the time they're on Vietnamese Baby, the foundation is sculpted from Cheestrings. Meanwhile, the feckless, thrashy, no-way-out Endless Party demo foreshadows their own inevitable implosion.

Live, they sound like lightning rods for trouble: aftershocks of the MC5. Variable fidelity matters little – even if, say, Lone Star Queen from Detroit in 1973 excitingly sounds as though you're hearing it outside the venue while running after your hot-wired car. *Oregano Rathbone*

Okkervil River

In The Rainbow Rain

★★★★

ATO ATO 0442 (CD/LP)

Compliments to the Sheff?

Most of us wouldn't consider an autobiographical account

of a life-saving childhood surgical procedure the most obvious way to start the opening song of an album. But then most of us aren't songwriters as deft and capable as Okkervil River's Will Sheff. That the song in question – Famous Tracheotomies – not only goes on to poetically profile some of the great and good who have had the operation (Gary Coleman, Mary Wells, Dylan Thomas, Ray Davies), but makes something moving and weirdly life-affirming out of the connections, is quite staggering (I won't ruin the ending for you.)

That song also represents a new musical setting for Sheff, a balmy mix of Quiet Storm soul and celestial synths that are a world away from the frequently tortured, rootsy folk with which he made his name. And the most successful moments here follow a similar formula: the near-horizontal Family Song, and the blissed-out hymn to finding a kind of salvation, Shelter Song.

But it's a mixed bag. Elsewhere things go awry when Sheff goes more direct: see the big gnarly arena rawk moves of Pulled Up The Ribbon and the rather hollow country rock of Don't Move Back To LA.

Still, when this is good, it's properly great and, nine albums in, hints at an exciting future for Sheff and the band. *Jamie Atkins*

Parquet Courts

Wide Awake!

★★★★

Rough Trade RT 0001 (CD/LP)

You'll be floored

Despite steady growth over their seven prolific years, Brooklyn art-punk scene leaders Parquet Courts have never chased commercial

success. So wedded are they to their DIY ideals they don't even have a social media presence (gasp) and their music, which has veered off on interesting, Wire-shaped tangents from their stock-in-trade, a snotty, spiky, passionate garage rock, has been emphatically lo-fi.

So the announcement that Gnarl Barkley mastermind and studio wizard Brian "Danger Mouse" Burton would produce fifth album *Wide Awake!* was somewhat surprising. But rather than ready Parquet Courts for a mainstream assault, *Wide Awake!* is the sound of a band confidently extending themselves without losing any of their fire.

They still sound agitated by the world – guitarist-singer Andrew Savage is at his frothing best on the propulsive Violence and Total Football, the anthem they've always threatened to write, rattles along at breakneck speed.

But *Wide Awake!* is at its most inspired the further it strays from its comfort zone. The title track is the sort of jittery funk David Byrne once excelled at, Mardi Gras Beads is Parquet Courts at their dreamiest, while Burton brings his specific brand of strung-out melancholia to Back to Earth. All in all, a significant leap forwards. *Shaun Curran*

Gabriele Poso

Awakening

★★★★

BBE BBE 450 (CD/2LP)

Afro-Cuban jazz angel takes off

Life for Italian multi-instrumentalist Gabriele Poso has been one long musical quest since he was born 39 years ago and discovered his parents' collection of jazz, soul and Afro-Latin records. After writing songs on guitar, he started studying Afro-Cuban percussion in Rome in 1998, soon moving to Puerto Rico to get the feel and Cuba to gain the knowledge at Havana masterclasses before finally releasing his first album, *From The Genuine World*, in 2008, followed by 2012's *Roots Of Soul*. He then moved to Berlin, releasing 2014's solo confessional *Invocation*.

Poso joined the UK's esteemed BBE in 2017 and released *The Languages Of Tambores* to much acclaim. It's followed by this panoramic little beauty that manages that rare feat of taking an established musical form – Afro-jazz – to another level with new flavours, in this case cosmic jazz.