

Nazareth: heavy, no-frills rock'n'roll.



## Nazareth

Rock 'N' Roll Telephone UNION SQUARE

One of Britain's undisputedly great rock singers proves he isn't finished just yet.



Dan McCafferty has reached the end of the road, but not the end of his career. Last year the Nazareth singer, now 67, said he was retiring from touring with the band. His decision was made shortly after he collapsed on stage during gigs in Switzerland and Canada. He is suffering from the lung condition chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and as he explained to *Classic Rock*: "If you can't do the job, you shouldn't be there – Nazareth's too big for that."

As a result, the future for Nazareth and Dan McCafferty is uncertain. In February 2014, the band announced 41-year-old Linton Osborne as their new singer. Born near Dunfermline, where Nazareth formed in 1968, Osborne took the job with McCafferty's blessing.

But this new Nazareth album, their 24th, was recorded with McCafferty. And there remains some doubt as to where they go from here. A statement on the band's website reads: "This may be the last album to feature Dan McCafferty." And yet the old fella himself insisted: "I could always make another record."

There is only one absolute certainty in all of this: Dan McCafferty is still a powerful and soulful rock'n'roll singer. He can't get through 90 minutes on stage any more – that part of his life is gone.

But in the more forgiving environment of the studio, where he can allow himself time between takes, he can still cut it. His performance on *Rock 'N' Roll Telephone* is proof of that.

With co-founding member Pete Agnew on bass, his son Lee on drums and Jimmy Murrison on guitar, the album is very much in the classic Nazareth tradition – heavy, no-frills rock'n'roll, with that rasping voice its unmistakable signature. And while there's nothing to rival their 70s standards such as *Hair Of The Dog* or that monumental version of *Love Hurts*, there is plenty here for McCafferty to get his teeth into.

*Speakeasy* and *God Of The Mountain* have him hitting the ball-tightening high notes that made him an inspiration for Axl Rose. On the badass title track, he sounds like Brian Johnson's evil twin. And on *The Right Time*, a mournful, country-tinged ballad, he proves why Axl wanted him as his wedding singer – an offer that was famously refused.

Dan McCafferty long ago sealed his reputation as one of the all-time great rock singers. If this album does prove to be his last, he'll be bowing out with that reputation intact.

Paul Elliott

## John Wesley

Disconnect INSIDEOUT

Former Porcupine Tree fella pulls out the angsty licks. Without knowing the first thing about John Wesley, you can tell this man has been through it lately. It's in the battle-torn sleeve art, the gloriously turbulent axe work, the bruised and bloodied vocals. And on *Window*, he pleads: 'I am not well/Not how I used to be/Seems I stumbled and fell... I think I want to get out.'

So with Wesley's MO being bold guitar run-outs to match his vocal expansion, he initially hits a Bends-era Radiohead groove on the title track, and by *Any Old Saint* we're into Rush territory, reinforced by the presence of Alex Lifeson thrusting a *Vapor Trails* stake through the chest of *Once A Warrior*.

As heroic blues-rock and alt-angst collide, this prog sideman leaves collaborators Porcupine Tree, Fish and Sound Of Contact behind to create soulful heart-on-sleeve anthems that fans of Ryan Adams and Keith Caputo would lap up.

Jo Kendall

## Little Matador

Little Matador FICHTER

Bullish debut from new alt.rock 'supergroup'.

Arctic Monkeys aside, too few UK bands possess genuine swagger. Little Matador, however, already sound like they own the world. Partly, such confidence stems from experience – frontman Nathan Connolly plays guitar in Snow Patrol, while his bandmates have a collective CV that includes stints in Idlewild, LaFaro and The Frames – and partly from the knowledge that theirs is a most formidable union.

At their best, the quintet come on like a home-grown Queens Of The Stone Age, assimilating classic rock riffs, punk-ish spirit and a healthy respect for noise into driving, locked-in grooves. Over this, Connolly harnesses his full emotional range in an unflinching, forensic dissection of the bloodied carcass of a broken relationship.

From the confrontational snarl of *Gimme All You Got* to the pugnacious *Liar Liar*, via the smoulderingly atmospheric *Give & Take* and the new day dawning kiss-off of *Leaving Anyway*, this is grown-up rock music with rare heart, passion and determination.

Paul Brannigan

## Asia

Gravitas FRONTIERS

Continental drift.



Asia vocalist/bassist John Wetton calls *Gravitas* "pure unadulterated and stereotypical Asia" – and therein lies the problem. The absence of guitarist Steve Howe and the arrival of replacement Sam Coulson aside, matters have barely changed since the band made their recording debut in 1982. Asia are now a band so out of time that they resemble the moss on the trunks of cover artist Roger Dean's mouldering space-age floating forests.

Still, Wetton talks a good game, describing opening track *Valkyrie* as "other-worldly" and "stratospheric" in his erudite sleeve notes. But as the album wears on you realise these remarks are very wide of the mark indeed.

The problem with Asia is that for all their grandiose intentions and lush instrumentation, they're just not pompastic enough. When Coulson's guitar cuts in dramatically – as on the openings to the title track and *Heaven Help Me Now* – matters improve greatly. But to be honest, the new guy is a bit-player in an album full of formulaic songwriting from Wetton and keyboardist Geoff Downes; one way or another each track is rooted in Asia's biggest hit *Heat Of The Moment*.

The two bright spots are *Till We Meet Again*, which provides a surprisingly joyous and uplifting finale, and the stuttering Supertramp-isms of *Nyctophobia* (fear of the dark). Now if Asia had written a song called *Arachibutyrophobia*, that would've been really interesting.

Geoff Barton  
\* Fear of peanut butter sticking to the roof of the mouth.

## Guided By Voices

Cool Planet FIRE

Garage-pop delight from prolific Ohioans. Robert Pollard's GBV have spent more than 30 years shedding the superfluous fat from rock music and feasting only on the lean bits. It's made for a ridiculously productive career, racing through ideas at breakneck pace and creating albums packed with songs as brief as they are memorable. *Cool Planet*, incredibly, is the sixth in two years, during which time Pollard has also issued