

Status Quo

Classic Album Selection

★★★★★

Universal 0600753387191 (5-CD)

Hearty introduction to the band that don't need one...

Taking "If you only had five Quo albums..." as its premise, should you know Quo for their heads-down, hard-boogieing rock singles (rather than their psych/pop era), then this does the job, albeit with some repetition. Diehards recently celebrated the return of the classic "Frantic Four" line-up of Rossi, Lancaster, Coghlan, Parfitt, and their setlist largely comprises tracks from this collection – though not 1980's No 3 *12 Gold Bars* singles set.

That collection aside, this box focuses on four studio pillars, namely 1973's *Hello*, their sixth studio sojourn, sonically cementing their savvy move to heavy blues-rock. Drummer Coghlan stepped up to the co-writing plate on the *Roll Over Lay Down* EP, while the No 5 hit *Caroline* and anthemic *Forty-Five Hundred Times*, stand out. Album eight, 1975's *On The Level*, went in at No 1, assisted by the shoulder-swaying *Down Down* and denim-rockers such as *Little Lady*, plus a cover of Chuck Berry's *Bye Bye Johnny*. The following year's uniquely self-produced follow-up, *Blue For You*, hit the top spot too, with singles *Rain* and *Mystery Song* easing the way, along with the heavy riffage found on *Is There A Better Way?*.

Live Aid turned out to be the four musketeers' last hurrah until 2012; John 'Rhino' Edwards and Jeff Rich were on rhythm duties for 1986's *In The Army Now*, their diverse 17th set. Laudable, if not wholly vintage Quo, it takes in covers the likes of the title track, which kept them riding high in the charts. *Tim Jones*

The Third Uncles

Anthology: 1987-89

★★★★★

Four Thirds FT 002

Welsh rare bits

Too muso-inclined for the post-C86 indies, yet too spiky and challenging for the majors, Cardiff quartet The Third Uncles ended up falling through the cracks in the late 80s. It wasn't for a lack of commitment, though. Extensive UK gigging led to their one official release (the three-track *Bluedress Day 12"* EP) and a publishing deal with Chrysalis in 1988 but, with a fully-fledged recording deal remaining elusive, the band effectively split in 1989.

The self-explanatory, 16-track *Anthology: 1987-89*, however, suggests they really

coulda been contenders. The three tunes from the moodily poised *Bluedress Day* aside, it's all previously unreleased fare but, despite being collated from a variety of sources (16-track Chrysalis demos, live TV recordings and La's-esque porta-studio sessions), it's long on quality and surprisingly cohesive. Tracks such as *Grill* and the gripping *Wicked Sun* showcase a tight, proficient unit with a penchant for smouldering, primary-colour rock and niggly, Police-style whiteboy reggae breakdowns, while doe-eyed frontman Ayres injects a tinge of Elvis Costello-ish vitriol to the otherwise blissful *Don't Kill Me*.

Admittedly, there are a few misfires (the faux-rockabilly *Melissa*, the overblown *I Can See For Miles*-referencing *Sniper In Your Heart*) but the dynamic live favourite *Lost My Heart To The Girl Who Lost My Number* could certainly have flown the Welsh flag in the Top 40 in pop's pre-Madchester cosmos. *Tim Peacock*

Toyko Blade

The First Cut's The Deepest

★★★★★

Hear No Evil Recordings

HNECD 007 D (2-CD)

Prime cuts: 1983-2013

Toyko Blade's career is a microcosm of the NWOBHM scene, minus its major stars: forming at the dawn of the 80s, they changed names/line-up, went glam(ish), had label issues, split and reformed. Considering that guitarist Andy Boulton has been the only constant, their legacy is surprisingly solid, as this compilation demonstrates.

The group's earliest phase, a single released as Genghis Khan, is strongly reminiscent of period Iron Maiden; indeed, those four tracks could almost be from Maiden's *Killers*, though they predate that album, even as they look ahead to the sound of *The Number Of The Beast*.

Meanwhile, the group took on a more commercial hue after 1984's *Night Of The Blade*, featuring new vocalist Vicki James Wright (later of hair metal also-rans Johnny Crash).

The quality remained high but, with subsequent releases, the Blade somewhat lost their edge, ensuring that *Disc Two* is a more carefully picked selection sadly omitting 2011's *Thousand Men Strong* album (and, sadder still, including an ill-advised 80s synth-funk instrumental). Still, the collection showcases the seam of quality metal that runs through Toyko Blade's career – even during the leaner periods. *William Pinfold*

Todd Rundgren heads off for a sundowner

Todd Rundgren State

★★★★★

Esoteric Antenna EANTCD 1017

Empire State human

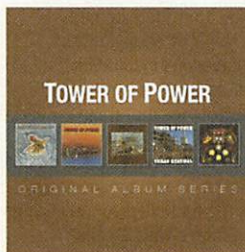
Forty-five years into a career that's majored in encouragingly confounding detours, Todd Rundgren still displays scant partiality for the soft option. There are plenty of Todd-watchers who quietly pray that he'll simply record another pop-rock album, with traditional instrumentation, of *I Saw The Light* derivatives. To wish for this, however, is to grievously misunderstand what makes Rundgren such a valuable anomaly among his peers.

State is awash with processed beats, synth chatter and chilly electronica, so its textures may deter some older fans (despite the fact that this sort of stuff has, to some degree, featured in Rundgren's albums since *A Wizard, A True Star*). But listen to the lusciously unmistakable chording of *In My Mouth*, or the white-soul-via-McCartney vocals that breathe colour over the electro-trance sheen of *Smoke* and warm the empty-machine-room air of *Imagination*: everything that was ever great about Rundgren is all over this. Even the bluntest songs (*Angry Bird*, *Party Liquor*) have a dark, cautionary subtext, while the bereft, beautiful *Something From Nothing* ("about becoming dependent upon faith, which is as much a danger as a source of solace in troubled times") genuinely stands shoulder to shoulder with Rundgren's finest ballads. *Oregano Rathbone*

Q&A Todd Rundgren

Did you have a particular "state" in mind, or is the ambiguity the whole point?

Well, I like words with multiple meanings: it



Tower Of Power Original Album Series

★★★★★

Warner/Rhino 8122796831 (5-CD)

Sizzling 70s South Bay funk'n'soul reissued

This chronologically sequenced pack captures San Francisco's long-running R&B aggregation at the apex of their commercial fortunes in the early-to-mid-70s, during an extremely fertile stint at Warner Bros. *Bump City* was their inaugural release for the

Looney Tune label back in 1971: a solid platter of staccato funk and sweet soul ballads fronted by singer Rick Stevens, whose tenure with the band was cut short when he was jailed for murder.

He was replaced by the super-soulful Lenny Williams on the band's eponymous third album, from '72, which included their biggest US R&B hit, the plaintive ballad *So Hard To Go*. Even better were that set's über-funk juggernauts, *What Is Hip* and *Soul Vaccination*, both of which came to epitomise TOP's tautly syncopated sound.

Williams stayed on for the terrific *Back To Oakland* – another combustible funk and soul fusion and, arguably, the group's best LP – but left to pursue a solo career in '74. Hubert Tubbs was recruited for

the group's next two long-players, *Urban Renewal* and 1975's *In The Slot*; the former album was almost as strong as *Back To Oakland*, but the latter, their final studio set for Warners, marked the onset of the group's commercial decline. *Charles Waring*

UFO

On Air: At The BBC 1974-85

★★★★★

EMI, cat no tbc (5-CD+DVD)

Clamshell box of UFO Auntie-aircraft flights

Michael Schenker fans who missed out on his *Walk The Stage* 5-CD live box set can apprise themselves this month of a 14-song EMI best of, taking in choice MSG and UFO cuts (one unissued); for those whose budget stretches to this expansive set (complete with



gives you squirming room when someone tries to pin you down as to what it all means! But it started out as the idea of a state machine, which is when you set up the same piece of music to repeat over and over, and it doesn't change unless you interject yourself into the process. I recently went to a performance for an artist I was working with, and he did a 40-minute improvisation with his laptop and a couple of iPads, and suddenly realised... hey, I did that in 1992! I thought, maybe I should relearn the stuff I forgot since then about using this equipment for an improvised live performance.

You've always looked forward where your own music is concerned. Do you regard nostalgia as counter-productive?

The thing I'm most petrified about is stasis: the idea that, at some point, I would reach the end of a line. That's the reason why you sometimes have to provoke: nobody wants to watch a baseball game that's 17-to-two at the top of the ninth inning. The other team's never coming back, the stands are empty! This is kind of the way I see my career: unless I keep it interesting, the audience will just leave...

Do you look back on any of your productions with fondness or pride?

Sometimes with fondness. Pride is a hard thing to justify: the biggest-selling album I was involved in was *Bat Out Of Hell* and, while a lot of people think that was real astuteness on my part, I did the record because I thought it would be a spoof on Bruce Springsteen. And, at the time, Meat Loaf had a label that was going to pay for it! So often you would say, "Oh, I'm so proud I discovered Meat Loaf," but everyone else discovered him kind of legitimately: they took him seriously, whereas I never did! So what does that make me? *As told to Oregano Rathbone*