

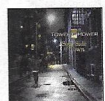
enthusiasm that makes nearly every number a sudden standout. In the past, Costa has channeled John Lennon and Nick Drake to opposite extremes but, this time around, he simply harnesses his own identity as a pop savant with the hooks, assurance and savvy needed for attention-grabbing songs. The assertive sound of album-opener "I Remember It Well" leads into the irresistibly effusive "Sharon" and later, the equally infectious "Time Tricks." Even when Costa opts for reflection over resolve, as illuminated by songs such as "Ritchie" and "Real Love," the melodies come across as affecting as ever. Costa claims that *Santa Rosa Fangs* was intended as a conceptual work revolving around three California siblings in a post-adolescent struggle for identity, but the narrative is less important than the resilient refrains and the illuminating ambience that shines through. Five albums—and a documentary soundtrack—in, Costa has found his own voice and all the additives needed to set him up for stardom. Or, to put it another way: *Santa Rosa Fangs* is every bit as incisive as its brazen title implies.

Lee Zimmerman

## Tower of Power

### Soul Side of Town

ARTISTRY/MACK AVENUE



50 years after forming, the members **Tower of Power** have released their 25<sup>th</sup> album, and it's not an insult to say that *Soul Side of Town* is wholly consistent with pretty much everything that the band's ever done. ToP found the formula that works for them right at the outset and they've largely stuck with it—no need to pretend to be something they're not. A good part of the reason for that lack of deviation can be attributed to the stability in the group's front line. Co-founding saxophonists **Emilio Castillo** and **Stephen "Doc" Kupka** and rhythm section extraordinaires **Francis "Rocco" Prestia** (bass) and **David Garibaldi** (drums) are right where they've always been, and although numerous other musicians and vocalists have come and gone, the core four's vision has stuck around for good. This album, which they began working on in 2012, includes two different lead vocalists, **Ray Greene** (who has since joined Santana) and newcomer **Marcus Scott**. Both are excellent and steeped in soul tradition, but Tower of Power has never relied on their singers to define the band, and that rule still applies. Among the highlights is the title track, a danceable feast of hot guitar licks, punchy sax, wailing lead vocal, slick backup singers and that ever-funky bottom. Bookending it are two tributes to the band's career-long home base, the East Bay, all steamy and sweaty and Latin-fied. It's all instantly identifiable—a few seconds in, anywhere, and you know who you're listening to. *Jeff Tamarkin*

## PLUNDERING THE VAULTS

### Procol Harum

**Grand Hotel** (2-Disc Expanded Edition)

**Exotic Birds and Fruit** (3-CD Edition)

**The Prodigal Stranger**

(Remastered & Expanded Edition) CHERRY RED



Contrary to popular opinion, **Procol Harum** didn't slide into a creative decline after the 1971 departure of guitarist Robin Trower. Instead, the British prog-rock band expanded to a quintet, recruiting guitarist **Mick Graham** and bassist **Alan Cartwright** for their unsung masterpiece, 1973's *Grand Hotel*.

This new edition of the LP showcases the album's literal symphonic sweep, sweetening the orchestral flourishes ("TV Caesar") and sharpening the band's heavy, organ-driven attack ("Bringing Home the Bacon"). The bonus tracks, meanwhile, are barely worth a cursory listen: The early version of the title-track feels half-formed without the grandiose orchestrations of the final product. The band retreated from the strings for their seventh LP, 1974's *Exotic Birds and Fruit*, a set of leaner, harder-rocking tracks that emphasized Graham's bluesy guitar riffs ("Conquistador") and the ornate dual keyboard attack of frontman **Gary Brooker** and **Chris Copping** ("As Strong As Samson"). This lavish reissue offers a perfect chance to revisit their most underrated album, but the muddy fidelity of the BBC radio concert on disc two will likely confine you to the original set. (Nonetheless, Brooker's random, between-song stage chatter gives the set some extra replay value.) But one of these reissues is not like the other: 1991's *The Prodigal Stranger* was a commercial flop in its time, and it remains a dud almost three decades later. The hype was heavy back then, with Trower and original organist **Matthew Fisher** rejoining the lineup for the LP. But their talents were underutilized at every turn, and the songs themselves were an insult to the band's esteemed legacy. The album marked an awkward slide into middle age—the sound of a band appealing to its early fanbase while conceding to the trends of modern-rock radio. They

Pamela Littley

nodded to "Higher Love"—era Steve Winwood—with dismal results—with the bland belting of "The Hand That Rocks the Cradle," attempted to layer in a borderline hip-hop beat on the lifeless "Man With a Mission," and piped in some canned synth-strings on world-weary ballad "You Can't Turn Back the Page." No amount of revealing bonus tracks can save *The Prodigal Stranger* from itself. *Ryan Reed*

### The Flaming Lips

**Scratching the Door: The First**

**Recordings of The Flaming Lips**

**Seeing the Unseeable:**

**The Complete Studio Recordings**

**of The Flaming Lips 1986-1990**

WARNER BROS/RHINO.



If today's **Flaming Lips** were a film, then multi-instrumentalist **Steven Drozd** would be the director, and singer **Wayne Coyne** would be its charismatic star. The frontman's enigmatic stage presence and conceptual grandeur is the inextricable nucleus storing the band's DNA. So it's easy to forget that Coyne's brother **Mark** fronted the band in its embryonic form. *Scratching the Door* documents that

overlooked period, back when the Lips reveled in noisy post-punk that hardly resembles the symphonic, psychedelia that flowered later on. It isn't unlistenable—if only because of our illuminating hindsight. Thirty-two years ago, no one knew that these Oklahoma goofballs would eventually craft *The Soft Bulletin*, but we do, so we can smile at their deadpan quest for freedom on "My Own Planet" and amateurish atmospheric "Garden of Eyes." Many of the rarities and demos are laugh-out-loud ludicrous, like feedback-drenched covers of Led Zeppelin's "Communication Breakdown" and the *Batman* theme song. And the originals sound equally indebted to classic-rock heroes: In its aimless first form, minor-key ballad "Jesus Shootin' Heroin" comes off like an improvised Bob Dylan parody, down to the nasally vocal tone. *Seeing the Unseeable* collects remastered versions of the band's first four LPs for Restless Records, showcasing their early edginess at Pink Floyd psychedelia ("One Million Billionth of a Millisecond on a Sunday Morning" from 1987's *Oh My Gawd!!!*) and poignant emotional breakthroughs ("Rainin' Babies" from 1990's *In a Priest Driven Ambulance* (With Silver Sunshine Stares)). As

**RE**  
MARKET

**VISIT RELIX MARKET**  
**LIMITED EDITION POSTERS, PA**