

Indie Album Reviews

REVIEWS BY JOHN B. MOORE

Abe Partridge Cotton Fields and Blood for Days

(Skate Mountain Records)

It's not too tough to pin down Abe Partridge's influences on his latest. Everyone from John Prine and Townes Van Zandt to Dylan and Willie, can be heard throughout "Cotton Fields and Blood for Days." And like his musical heroes, the Mobile-based Partridge shares a knack for strong storytelling, slightly off-kilter vocal delivery and a tendency to turn in perfectly imperfect country songs with a strong streak of punk rock and individuality.

The appeal of his sophomore effort, "Cotton Fields and Blood for Days" can best be understood by listening to just two songs; The seemingly traditional "Ride Willie Ride (or Thoughts I Had While Contemplating Both the Metaphysical Nature of Willie Nelson and His Harassment by the Internal Revenue Service)" and the slightly more raucous "I Wish I was a Punk Rocker." Musically, the styles are pretty different, though both boast acoustic guitars, "Ride Willie Ride" hues closer to a traditional country waltz, while "I Wish I was a Punk Rocker" overlays a distorted guitar and backing vocals. But both sport Partridge's smart, impressively droll lyrics, a hallmark of his music.

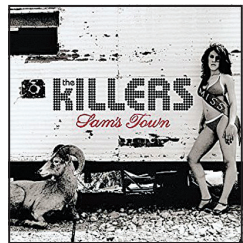
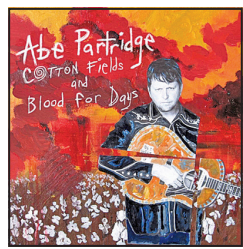
Along with eight originals, the album closes with a brief but spirited cover of the spiritual "Satan Your Kingdom Must Come Down."

The Killers Sam's Town and Day & Age

[Vinyl Re-Release] (Island/UMe)

Vegas synth rockers, The Killers, seemed to come out of nowhere in 2004, with their wildly successful debut "Hot Fuzz". While that record housed some of their biggest hits, it was the albums that followed that really showed the Vegas-based group's depth.

UMe and Island have just released two of the group's best albums on 180-gram vinyl (2006's "Sam's Town" and 2008's "Day & Age"). If "Hot Fuzz" was the band excising their Duran Duran and Muse influences, "Sam's Town" was the band discovering everyone from Springsteen to Petty and spiking that synth sound with classic rock. Lyrically and musically, this album is less sterile and more mature than its predecessor. While Brandon Flowers still sings some odd lyrics (more on that in a minute), he's also putting out some of his most thoughtful on this record. You can practically here Springsteen in a line like "They say the devil's water, it ain't so sweet/You don't have to drink it right now/But you can dip your feet/ every once and a while" ("When We Were Young"). Elsewhere on the record, "Read My Mind" is a fantastic pop song, from start to finish. There are some weaker tracks here and there (like the formulaic "Bones"), but overall a great sophomore record that managed to eclipse their debut.



In 2015, the band put out "Day & Age," probably their most underrated record to date. Flowers is back with more head scratching lyrics on this one like the grammatically puzzling line "Are we human or are we dancer" (from "Human"), but damn the song is infectious. "A Dustland Fairytale," in the middle of the record, just may be the best song the band has ever recorded, followed not too far behind by "Neon Tiger," also off "Day & Age."

Helen Kelter Skelter Melter

(Shaking Shanghai)

Oklahoma's Helen Kelter Skelter are quite possibly the only shoegaze band out there that can boast about having an organ weaved throughout their sound. To be fair, they are much more than just another in the seemingly endless list of bands to rediscover this genre.

On "Melter," their sophomore effort, H/K/S play a moody, solid mix of rock that also manages to include psychedelia, swamp and even hints of glam here and there (especially on a song like "Fly Thru Clouds"). The result is, more often than not, impressive. Songs like "Time Bomb" with its jerky guitars and synth lines sits perfectly next to a track like "Tracers," with its Sabbath-like rhythm section, sounding like a completely different, but just as laudable band.

There are a couple of down moments on the record where it sounds like they had a song that wasn't quite there yet, but overall, a pretty ambitious album that pays off for the most part. H/K/S are easily the most intriguing rock band to come out of Oklahoma since the Flaming Lips.

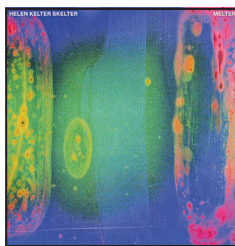
Singin' Utters Drowning In The Sea, Rising With The Sun

(Fat Wreck Chords)

Despite being around for three decades, "Drowning In The Sea, Rising With The Sun" marks the first time the Singin' Utters have put out a definitive Best Of collection from their catalog (there was a pre-Fat Wreck Chords era set and a collection of B-Sides and rarities, but nothing that properly covered the band's range and depth up to this point).

This 33-songs set highlights a band that rarely had a misstep; There have been some line-up changes and a brief hiatus over the years, but the group has never put out a bad album. There are no pretentious concept records to apologize for and no dips into niche genres (that's what side projects are for), just a career of satisfyingly brilliant music offering classic, hook-laden punk rock and nowhere is that more apparent than on "Drowning In The Sea..."

Spanning from their mid-'90s debut (though the band has been together since 1988), this set includes some obvious fan favorites, some staples from their live shows and several songs that have never been played before an audience before.



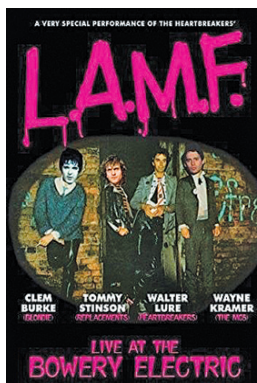
NEW RELEASES

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By John Moore

L.A.M.F. – LIVE AT THE BOWERY ELECTRIC (MVD Visual)

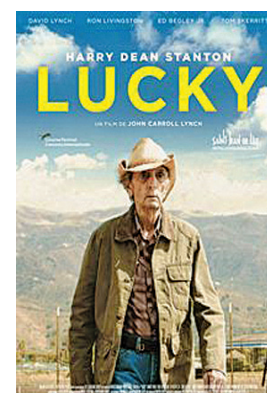
Johnny Thunders & The Heartbreakers only put out one official record, L.A.M.F.. In 2016, The Heartbreakers only surviving member, guitarist Walter Lure, pulled together a Punk Rock/New Wave dream team to help him re-create the album over two nights in New York. MC5's Wayne Kramer, The Replacements' Tommy Stinson and Blondie's Clem Burke filled out the band. The set, captured brilliantly here, covers the album in its entirety and thankfully, unlike most punk rock mementoes, the video and sound quality here are amazing. The music itself is raucous, raw and a little sloppy, exactly how it should be.



LUCKY (Magnolia Home Entertainment)

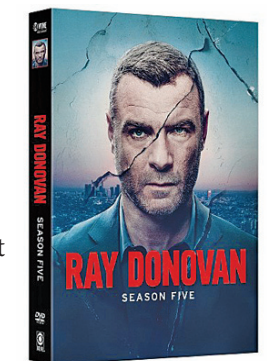
In Harry Dean Stanton's final role, he plays Lucky, a 90-year-old man set in his daily routines, living alone in a tiny town, populated by characters as quirky and compelling as he is. After passing out inexplicably in his kitchen (well, aside from the fact that he's 90), Lucky begins

to question spirituality and his purpose. Beautifully shot and acted, Stanton and his fellow cast members, (including David Lynch, Ed Begley, Jr. and Ron Livingston) serve the picture beautifully. A quiet, unassuming film that stays with you long after it's over.



RAY DONOVAN – THE FIFTH SEASON (Showtime Entertainment)

Five seasons in, the Liev Schreiber-led drama about a Hollywood fixer, shows no sign of aging. Through a series of bizarre, yet still gripping plot twists, the show still manages to surprise. In this latest offering Ray is undergoing court-ordered anger management courses, while protecting an actress from her abusive manager. Toss in blackmail, continuous family drama and an impressive amount of violence and season five plays out pretty much like the previous four – but that is far from being a bad thing.



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