

The lean, green, Don McLean machine

four albums from the between-thrash hiatus are now remastered and reissued.

The pulverising *Coma Of Souls* (1990) is the best of them, especially with the addition of a 16-song concert from the same year. Like all thrash, it's fast and violent by definition, but the special sauce in Kreator's case has always been the shrieked, batshit-mental vocals from Mille Petrozza, who sounds as if he actually wants to kill you when he sings.

The ridiculous tempo of the tracks helps to hammer home the message too; see the title track, *World Beyond, Agents Of Brutality* and more. A few of the songs – *People Of The Lie* and *Mental Slavery* among them – slow things down to pedestrian speeds, so keep your finger near the skip button.

Three more albums, *Renewal* (★★★, 1992), *Cause For Conflict* (★★★★, 1995) and *Outcast* (★★★, 1997) are also being reissued. Fortunately, their current material is much faster, heavier and better than any of these. *Joel McIver*

Levellers

We The Collective

★★★★

On *The Fiddle OTFCD 029 (CD/LP/2LP)*

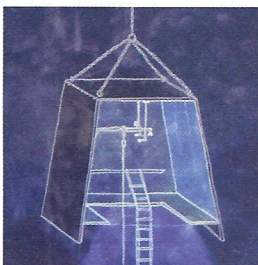
There is more than One Way

It might seem that the acoustic album, like the covers record, has become an increasingly ubiquitous, obligatory card to play in the absence of new material, but that's a disingenuous thought here. Celebrating Levellers' 30th anniversary year, and given their songs have always loaned themselves to this approach, a permanent record of them

unplugged is appealing.

Passionately realised with accompanying string section, and arrangement input from producer John Leckie, it can feel more of a Mark Chadwick solo album than a proper Levellers set. Bookmarked by classics – *Exodus* to open, the inevitable, though always life-affirming, *One Way at the end* – and with a couple of new songs included, it's the angular attack of his guitar and the righteous anger in his voice that's naturally front and centre.

Of those new tracks, *Shame* has a vital sense of purpose, a striking volley at disgraced and disgraceful politicians that says three decades on, the Levellers message still resonates powerfully. Their songs represent those dispossessed from society, and that message is as sharp in these revitalised realisations as it ever was. *Ian Abrahams*



The Low Anthem

The Salt Doll Went To Measure The Depth Of The Sea

★★★★★

Joyful Noise JNR 225 (CD/LP)

It's deep!

Lots of different experiences and adversities combine in the Rhode Island folk-rock turned minimalists' fifth album, from uncovering, in a John Cage biography, the fable that lends

itself to the record's title, to the influence of Cage in their use of abstract sounds and aural artefacts, and on to a tour van crash that destroyed much of their gear and temporarily side-lined the band's Jeff Prystowsky.

The titular fable informs the story arc of the 12 brief songs here. The salt doll, trying to discover its origins, puts its foot into the sea, finds it dissolves, and eventually is fully absorbed into the ocean. Similarly, these lo-fi recordings, written largely during Prystowsky's convalescence by co-founder Knox Miller, merge and dissolve into a cohesive, engrossing, mood piece.

What prevails, thanks to the album's sonic emptiness is a sense of stark beauty; a desolation that hangs, lingering, in the air, like mist across a wild landscape.

To paraphrase just a touch, post-crash, necessity is very much the mother of inventiveness here. But out of that echoing vastness comes a gentle sense of melody that reveals itself, bit by bit, through repeated visits. *Ian Abrahams*

Mabel Greer's Toyshop

The Secret

★★★★

Hagger Bayley Music MGTC2 2 (CD)

Can you keep a...?

Mabel Greer's Toyshop are well-known to Yes fans as the musical cocoon (try saying that after a stiff drink) from which the prog giants emerged. Founder members Clive Bayley (vocals/guitar) and Bob Hagger (drums) reconnected after guitarist Peter Banks' passing in 2013, and issued *New Way Of Life*

(2015), a mix of original-era material and new songs, featuring Yes men Billy Sherwood and Tony Kaye.

The Secret, with a posthumous appearance from Banks the only cameo, raises the question of whether Bayley and Hagger, with new members Max Hunt (keys) and Hugo Barr (bass), can deliver a full album of valid new music. With no pun intended, the answer is "yes."

The modern-day Mabel's sound couches Bayley's lower-register vocals, not unlike Justin Hayward (The Moody Blues) or John Wetton (ASIA), in classic prog guitar and keyboard tones, taking nine strong songs as the basis for extended, intricately layered arrangements (the elaborate *Love's Fire*, *Swan*, and *More And More's* psych-folk-blues hybrid), guitars are sometimes a little busy around the vocals, but interlocking convincingly.

Though not a concept album, *The Secret* makes for an engrossing end-to-end listen from a band with something worthwhile to offer, irrespective of their family tree. *Rich Davenport*

Matthews Southern Comfort

Like A Radio

★★★

MIG MIG 02032 (CD)

Not quite on our frequency

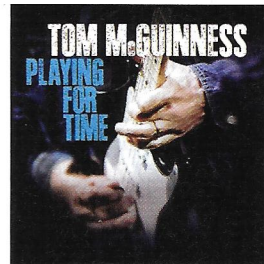
With a notable CV that includes Fairport Convention, Plainsong and a string of often excellent solo albums, it's always heartening to see Iain Matthews producing new music. Unfortunately, the reactivated Matthews Southern Comfort's *Like A Radio* never really catches fire, despite finding Matthews in fine voice.

There are tantalising moments when the band's creative gifts burst forth but too often they are diluted either by rather unsuccessful attempts at social critiques or by some forgettable songs. It feels like Matthews still has much to say and on the soulful *Right As Rain*, which feels personal and passionate, this works beautifully. Some other brighter moments include a sprightly return to Goffin & King's *To Love* and an affecting revisit of Darcy Farrow.

Elsewhere though, you find yourself wanting more lyrical economy, even when, on tracks like *Chasing Rainbows* and *Jive Pajamas* (terrible title), you have the fascinating prospect of Matthews apparently reflecting on his early 70s relocation to the US.

Overall, however, the album's attempt to fuse the band's folk-rock roots with Americana feels unwieldy. Here's to next time.

Steve Burniston



Tom McGuinness

Playing For Time

★★★★

Repertoire REPUK 1329 (CD)

Miller lite

Third in The Blues Band pecking order behind Paul Jones and Dave Kelly, Tom McGuinness is finally stepping into the spotlight with a compilation of two early 00s solo albums, adding a few new tracks for good measure.

Had things been different, the ex-Manfred Mann guitarist could have followed the career trajectory of pal Eric Clapton – on this evidence he's no six-string slouch and the vocal performance on opener *Long Hard Road* has real impact. Acoustic ditties like *Momma Tried To Tell Me* hark back to the McGuinness Flint era of the early 70s, while the ultra-smooth *Midnight* is one of several homages to New Orleans; Allen Toussaint, on this occasion.

Backing comes mainly from multi-instrumentalist Marcus Cliffe, but the results – excerpted from self-released albums *Tom McGuinness* and *Double Take*, the latter so obscure it doesn't even appear on Discogs – are way beyond demo quality. The "white boy from Wimbledon,"