

Midge makes strong solo show in Fragile

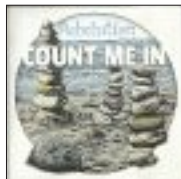
CDReviews

MIDGE URE - FRAGILE

FRAGILE is the first album of original tracks from Ultravox frontman Midge Ure in more than 10 years. This is truly a solo album because Midge has recorded everything himself — apart from some keyboards and programming by Moby on Dark, Dark Night and drum samples by Russell Field on I Survived. Midge also engineered and produced the album which combines all the influences of his career. There appears to be a nod to progressive rock in the soundscapes of tracks like Star Crossed and the title track; and electronics are well to the fore on Dark, Dark Night and Become. It is a very atmospheric — some may say ambient — sounding album with no rough edges. Midge's engineering and production skills have made this a very polished album.



official UK release. Hailing from Southern California and formed 10 years ago, the band recorded this fourth album late last year in Miami and Burbank, and the sunshine seems to have permeated the music. Vocalist/guitarist Eric Rachmany says the album "was truly fun to make and is an honest expression of who we are." From the opening, title track, which sports some excellent electronically enhanced vocals, the album is upbeat throughout and the band are out to spread their tenet of love and positivity. Aided by singer Collie Buddz on Hate To Be The One, who has toured with the band and legendary reggae singer Don Carlos on Roots Reggae Music, this is high-class music. More Love had shades of UB40 in it, and there's even a slower tempo track in Fade Away. Let's hope that they retain their independence and not give in to any corporate overtures that may dilute their sound. Easy Star Records/ 87 Music.



GRAMERCY ARMS - THE SEASONS OF LOVE

GRAMERCY Arms is a New York based collective of musicians and artists centred around songwriter/producer Dave Derby. Rainy Orteca, Kevin March and Sean Eden. This, their second full-length album is a cracker, heavily influenced by

the sounds of 70s and 80s pop and rock. Building on their debut release, the band has collaborated with Lloyd Cole and many others which made recording a logistical nightmare. The scheduling of recording session with all the various artists meant that the album took five years to complete, but it is well worth the wait. The first single taken from the album also opens it — the very catchy Always In Love — unapologetic pop music which is full of fun. It's followed by the more reflective Beautiful Disguise with emotional vocals from the aforementioned Lloyd Cole and Joan Wasser. Another slower song is Playing With Fire. There is a definite Beatles' vibe going on here with Novemberlong chugging along in a Penny Lane sort of way and Yours Untruly certainly gives a nod to the style of John Lennon. Multi-layered with great vocals and a happy beat, just the thing for a summer party.

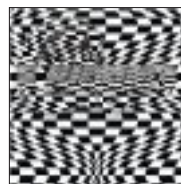


CHICAGO - NOW (CHICAGO XXXVI)

PURVEYORS of some of the slickest music of the late seventies and eighties, Chicago returns with an album which can truly be termed a group record. They have perfected their own mobile recording system called 'The Rig' which is powerful, flexible and always

travels with the band — as they are seemingly never off the road. This enables recording sessions to take place in the most unlikely of places: for instance most of this album was recorded in hotel rooms around the world. It also allows each of the band's songwriters to become supervising producers while Hank Linderman gathers it all together and is the coordinating producer. The result is this album. Known for classic hits like If You Leave Me Now, Hard To Say I'm Sorry and 25 or 6 to 4, this is Chicago for the 21st Century. The title track is mid-tempo funk with a hint of Earth Wind and Fire, but with all the traditional Chicago hallmarks of high production values and exemplary vocals. Following on, More Will Be Revealed brings more rock into the mix and more than justifies the band's tag as a rock band with horns.

The nonet is still led by Robert Lamm and Lee Loughnane and is second only to the Beach Boys as the most successful American rock band of all time with 22 Gold and 18 platinum discs. As Chicago albums go, this has to be one of the best — there's even a patriotic paean to their homeland with America (the chorus intoning 'America is free'). If you love Chicago, you'll love this.



Martin Hutchinson

BookReviews

Pulitzer-winner's psychological prowess

The Snow Queen by Michael Cunningham is published in hardback by Fourth Estate, priced £16.99 (ebook £7.63). Available now

WITH his latest novel, the Pulitzer prize-winning author of The Hours again demonstrates his psychological craftsmanship. In The Snow Queen, the ordinary lives of a few New Yorkers emerge from Cunningham's pen with skillful ease.

Barrett Meeks is forty-ish and yet again unlucky in love when, walking through Central Park, he catches sight of an eerie light in the sky; inexplicably meaningful to Barrett, he begins to question its significance while haltingly seeking his own.

At home his brother, Tyler, nurses his dying wife-to-be and tries to compose their wedding song. As snowflakes fall outside, Tyler pursues the elusive magic of creativity in the snowy vials of cocaine that he keeps in his bedside cabinet.

In their quests for purpose, the brothers meditate on life in all



its perplexing, unexpected, cold impartiality, and seek glints of meaning amidst the smothering snow.

A novel for dreamers, delivered in Cunningham's beautiful, spare prose.

Blood Whispers by John Gordon Sinclair is published in paperback by Faber & Faber, priced £12.99 (ebook £4.99). Available now

BLOOD Whispers is the follow-up to Sinclair's debut Seventy Times Seven and fans of this 'fast and bloody' style will no doubt be thrilled.

Keira Lynch, successful lawyer to the down and outs of Glasgow, finds herself embroiled in the life of Kaltrina, a prostitute on the run from a ruthless Serbian gang leader.

She is no stranger to unrequited violence, with the tale of her own background unravelling behind her, yet only seems to be getting herself deeper and deeper into a world of lies and corruption in the present.

As the plot unfolds, she is left wondering who she can trust and, more importantly, who is watching her every move. This novel packs a certain punch and has a pace that keeps you guessing. A web of names, relating to gang members, police



officers and CIA personnel, not to mention the protagonist's past, does lead to a little overkill, but Sinclair has managed to muster enough intrigue to push readers through to the end of the book.

DVDReviews

Period classic is policing perfection

Z CARS - COLLECTION TWO

SADLY, most of the early episodes of Z Cars have been wiped, in keeping with the BBC's short-sighted policy of re-using videotape in the seventies. But what does remain ranks among some of the best police dramas ever produced.



Forget The Bill, Z Cars had been blazing a trail through the annals of realistic and gritty drama since 1962 — and what's more — it's "oop north". For the uninitiated, the show is set in the fictional town of Newtown, just north of Liverpool and centres on the exploits of police patrolling the streets in their 'Z' Cars. The show made for one of the first TV appearances for the force of nature called Brian Blessed, who played PC 'Fancy' Smith, and spawned the spin-offs Softly Softly and Softly Softly: Task Force as well as creating the unforgettable characters of Inspectors John Watt and Charlie Barlow, played to perfection by Frank Windsor and Stratford Johns.

The two-disc set contains six stories from 1972 including Witness, about the intimidation of a witness, and Takes All Sorts, which stars the blustering Inspector Pratt on the night shift. The other four stories are Sins of the Father, Damage, Day Trip and Public Relations and all are around 50 minutes each.

And as well as the tribute to James Ellis, there are interviews with cast members Ian Cullen, Douglas Fielding, Geoffrey Hayes and Gary Watson.

Yes, it is now a period piece, they are not called Z Victor anymore. But, it was realistic, entertaining, and the first and arguably best portrayal of the police at work ever to appear on TV.

LIVERPOOL FOOTBALL CLUB: SEASON REVIEW 2013/2014

LIVERPOOL have just had their best league season in a couple of decades and only just missed out on the premiership trophy.

This DVD, running at just under two hours, looks at the whole season, game by game — including the double over great rivals Manchester



United, victories over Arsenal, Everton and Manchester City, not to mention the demolishing of Tottenham Hotspur.

The SAS strike force of Suarez and Sturridge led the attack which resulted in the club's highest-ever goal tally in a top-flight season with 101 (of which 31 were scored by Luis Suarez). Every one of that century-plus of goals is on the DVD, as well as the FA and Capital Cup games — and sadly, the goals against.

It all makes riveting viewing, not just for reds fans, but for fans of class football, as played by one of the greatest teams that the English league has ever produced.

Along the way, there are interviews with manager Brendan Rodgers and key players including Captain Dependable himself — Steven Gerrard.

The success was a team effort, which is a echoed by all interviewees and manager Rodgers is already looking towards the new season with a positive outlook. Relive the whole season in the comfort of your armchair — great gift for Father's Day.

Martin Hutchinson