

A Grave With No Name

Passover

★★★★★

Forged Artifacts, cat no tbc (CD/LP)

Do not pass this over!

Alexander Shields has talked before about how his music reflects his insular nature, it's part of the reason that A Grave With No Name live performances are rare. Instead, the haunting apparitions and lingering beauty of his work is captured in all its hibernal starkness on his lo-fi, art-rock recordings.

Almost everything is pared down in his songs. His guitar is minimalist and sparse, his voice mixed low and understated; the drumming of Daniel Paton brushes across the cymbals or thoughtfully pushes the beat in angular syncopation. Less is so much more; it's all about the quietness, the melancholy and the reflective moments.

But while the playing and the vocals are submerged, what *Passover* has at its core is heart. Shields is writing about mortality, experienced close at hand, reconciling spirituality with life. It shimmers across the ambience of *Blunt Knife*, lingers unspoken in the midpoint Interlude, and gently renders its mood of wistful loss on *Wren*. Insular, yes, but in being laid bare it speaks with a strong purpose.
Ian Abrahams

Pete Astor

One For The Ghost

★★★★★

Tapete TR 396 (CD/LP)

Ghost stories

Having established himself as a jangle-pop classicist of note with *The Loft* and post-C86 shoulda-beens *The Weather Prophets*, Pete Astor then radically changed direction. Taking a trip into left field, he went on to helm experimental, if critically-acclaimed projects *The Wisdom Of Harry* and *Ellis Island Sound* since the turn of the century.

Astor has since settled into teaching, lecturing at London's University Of Westminster. However, he restarted his musical career with 2012's *Songbox* and enthusiastically re-engaged with the chiming, erudite pop that first built his reputation

on 2016's well-received *Spilt Milk*.

The logical extension of the latter title, *One For The Ghost* again finds Astor back in harness with Proper Ornaments' guitarist James Hoare and *The Wave Pictures'* rhythm section of Franic Rozycki and Jonny Helm. He's clearly stoked with his new charges too, for they roll in behind their leader with a Loft-esque verve on *You Better Dream*, outsider anthem *Walker* and the potent, rockabilly-flavoured *Golden Boy*.

By contrast, the inherent world-weariness of *Spilt Milk* again seeps through lyrically. The wry, Chris Difford-esque football analogies in the ailing relationship-related 'Injury Time' ("they think it's all over, it is now") show Astor has retained a keen sense of humour, yet *Dead Fred* and the mortality-facing titular track are befitting of a record stuffed with songs intended to both "celebrate and grieve".
Tim Peacock

Bardo Pond

Volume 8

★★★★★

Fire FIRE 5165 (CD/LP)

In a bit of a jam

Bardo Pond are better at jamming than *Bonne Maman*. While much of their hazily sprawling output feels decidedly jam-oriented in the first place, since 2000 they've used their *Volume* series to showcase some of the headiest improvisations captured at their Lemur House base in Philadelphia. Previous instalments were put out on extremely limited CD-Rs, with a more widely distributed double-disc highlights package from ATP Recordings in 2005. The latest chapter comes courtesy of Fire which is not the first label to have noticed that the Philly spaceheads' freeform psych rehearsals hit the same levels of lysergic inspiration as their albums "proper" (which also happen to be recorded at Lemur House).

Granted, there tend to be fewer of Isobel Sollenberger's blissfully stoned vocal lines on the *Volume* material. She compensates for this with her equally divine flute playing; the perfect foil to the thick and colourful smog of noise weaved from the Gibbons brothers' deeply distorted guitars.

Bardo Pond often shine brightest at their most long-form and *Volume 8's* closing track is a case in point. The only conceivable criticism that could aimed at *And I Will* is that it winds down after just 17 short minutes. *JR Moores*



Bardo Pond:
out of the darkness

Peter Matthew Bauer

Mount Qaf (Divine Love)

★★★★★

Kobalt/Fortune Tellers, cat no tbc (LP)

Walkman walks on

The Walkmen's solo projects come thick and fast these days. As they're on an indefinite hiatus, and with many of these efforts sounding not unlike the band themselves, the records act as pacifiers of a sort for fans hoping for a reformation.

And so Bauer's second solo album is exceptionally Walkmen-esque – not in itself a bad thing. His voice is a throaty, scratched NYC yelp, just one notch below his old bandmate Hamilton Leithauser. The guitar lines also follow a similar spidery path as much from say, 2008's *You & Me*, but these do not great albums make, and while many elements of the 10 "love songs" on *Mount Qaf* are competent, deftly crafted efforts betraying a lifetime of attention paid to such things, any Walkmen magic is rarely present.

It only rears its head when drums thunder along on the second half of *Divine Love To Kill Fascism* and the end of *I Ching* (Alam Al Mithal). It would of course be unfair to compare Bauer's work to his previous band, were it not for the similarities, but one fifth of something is rarely as good as the whole. *Jake Kennedy*

Mike Bloomfield

Live At McCabe's Guitar Workshop

★★★★★

RockBeat ROC 3392 (CD)

Guitar great signs off in '77

The blues world lost a mighty talent when guitarist Mike Bloomfield succumbed to his demons in 1981. This low-key performance from four years earlier has been previously available under a variety of titles, notably *Prescription For The Blues*, *Junko Partner*,

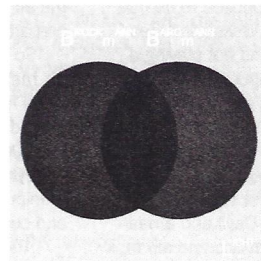
American Hero and *Knockin' Myself Out*.

Bloomfield is backed here by pianist Mark Naftalin, drummer Buddy Helm and bassist Buell Neidlinger in an informal environment that couldn't be further from the *Super Session* live album that had projected him into the public eye back in 1968.

The music on offer is loose but surprisingly effective, though songs like *Don't You Lie To Me* and *Junko Partner* will be over-familiar to most. It's far from a guitar showcase – some tracks, like *Walking The Floor* and *Rx For The Blues*, feature precious little guitar-playing at all – but the latter is a showstopper, a heartfelt plea from a man coming to the end of a troubled life.

Selections from the same venue and period have appeared on other albums, so it is a shame the whole known repertoire could not have been consolidated on a definitive release. Even so, this is well worth blues fans' attention.

Michael Heatley



Brockmann/Bargmann

Licht

★★★★★

Bureau B B 269 (CD/LP)

Oscillate wildly

When guitarist Franz Brockmann left the Berlin neo-Krautrock trio *Camera* in 2013, keyboardist Timm Brockmann shortly followed slot. Since then the two of them have been busy, Brockmann working with the

likes of NEU!'s Michael Rother, and Brockmann collaborating with Boris Wilsdorf – house engineer for *Einstürzenden Neubaten* – and *The Tiger Lillies*.

The result of their reunion is intriguing, and often brilliant. Tracks merge to create a mellifluous maelstrom of music – for example, the ambience of *Softarps*, with its hints of early Sigur Ros, takes its emerging melody into the pumping near-techno of *Horizont*. Layers of sound create contrasting moods, often contradicting one another. So the introspective opening section of *Schatten*, uneasy and unresolved, bursts into a tumult of tribal toms, pounding through the anxiety, and lifting the track into a hurricane of sound. It is replaced by *Meer*, a tender, ambient palate-cleanser.

There is great humanity among the analogue electronics. *Prisma* refracts seemingly randomly generated swells and pulses to create a rich tapestry of sound that brings to mind *Königsforst* by Wolfgang Voigt's GAS, while there's something almost cheeky about the 15 minutes of silence that separates the two ends of closer *Hyper*.
Paul McGuinness

Phil Campbell & The Bastard Sons

The Age Of Absurdity

★★★★★

Nuclear Blast NB 42512 (CD/LP)

Keeping the motör running

Motörhead's fans might reasonably expect that the trio would fall silent since the death of their founder and frontman Ian 'Lemmy' Kilmister in late 2015, but it's great news that this has not been the case.

Drummer Mikkey Dee has joined the *Scorpions*, while guitarist Phil Campbell – still a relatively youthful 56 years old – has assembled his own