

the songs and flair. The bigger alt rock production may add something, but it has also diminished the underlying Bangles sweetness that made these ladies special. At least 'Quicksand' hints at this.

**Jon 'Mojo' Mills**

**SMILE DOWN UPON US**

**Smile Down Upon Us**

★★★★

WIAI WYA CD



I still remember very fondly the first Smile Down Upon Us record, released in 2008. I initially dismissed it a twee little thing, but soon came to warm to its playful and

delicate folktronic wonder. Eight years later, the duo of multi-instrumentalist Keiron Phelan and vocalist / electronicist moomLoo are charming me all over again.

This, their second record, is sometimes cheerful and bright. There's the glorious 'Millwall', which skanks its tale of gang culture over an 'Uptown Top Ranking' beat. 'Dragon Song' has a little friendly roar on it. But, more often, the mood is a kind of introspective hope. 'Butterfly Morning', 'Dance With The Silver' and 'Took By Crows' are subtle, teasing songs. Think of a slightly weepy Astrud Gilberto on a carousel.

If you don't like saccharine, there won't be enough spikes in this record to satisfy you. But if you enjoy tinkling rain and sweetly-intoned vocals, *Smile Down Upon*

*Us* has you covered with its captivating, quietly progressive ethos.

**Jeanette Leech**

**SONS OF THE VOID**

**Sons Of The Void**

★★★★

SUNRISE OCEAN BENDER LP



Tadpoles and Psychic TV alumnus David Max emigrated from the States to Switzerland a decade or so back since when he's released the underrated Simple Psychedelic Pleasures and has now collaborated with Nick Nobody on this his latest project.

*Sons Of The Void* provides a welcome

antidote to the crushing weight of drone and stoner-rock that constitutes so much of the psychedelic listening experience these days. By turns playful, inventive and melodic, tracks like the opening 'Leichenblume' (corpse flower), 'Absorption', 'Little Children' particularly 'The Things We Do' feature sparkling arrangements pitched somewhere between latter-day Fabs and a slightly unhinged Byrds. 'A Kick Like That', meanwhile, is a lush, swirling affair apt to wander off in a world of its own. It's the highlight of an impressive collection of tunes delivered with deftness of touch and more than a few neat hooks. We need more of this, really we do.

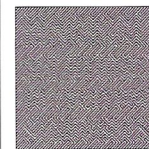
**Ian Fraser**

**TELSTAR SOUND DRONE**

**Magic Solutions To Everyday Struggles**

★★★

BAD AFRO LP



When the lead track is called 'Drugs Help' you have a pretty fair idea of what to expect, as Denmark's Telstar Sound Drone explore

very much the same territory as on their debut back in 2013. Now this sort of dark, narcotic-sounding tributary of Spacemen 3 and Loop has been done to death and really needs something special to pull it out of the primordial ooze. Some semblance of salvation is at hand in the form of 'Dark Kashmir', which makes excellent use of reverb and rather more variation of pace than is otherwise evident, sounding something like early Verve in wig-out mode. 'Strange Apples' is the other really noteworthy cut, a commendable, up-tempo take on Barrett-era Floyd. Truthfully there's nothing wrong with the rest, it's just that familiarity occasionally makes it sound like the aural equivalent of a paint by numbers book for grown-ups. Black and white, of course.

**Ian Fraser**

# Returning Legends

**HAWKWIND**

**The Machine Stops**

★★★★

CHERRY RED CD / LP



The latest release from prolific space-rockers Hawkwind is a dystopia-tinged concept album that

explores the world of EM Forester's short story of the same name. Written in 1909, the tale examines the role of technology in a computer-centric society. Under the direction of group mainstay Dave Brock, Hawkwind orchestrates mankind's need to rise above the death grip of "the machine".

The album features some spoken word portions over ambient tech-lullabies and soaring utopian guitar segments. 'Synchronized Blue' is a standout jam that is reminiscent of the band's incarnation in the early '70s, and 'Hexagone' is a lovely low-tempo electronic ballad. The album's concept and execution is clear and easy to follow, while still offering ample inspiration as new neural pathways

emerge in the digitised wonderland. *The Machine Stops* blends rock 'n' roll, new age and synth-psych in a most refreshing way while still maintaining the true Hawkwind sound.

**Ashley Brooks**

**GRAHAM NASH**

**This Path Tonight**

★★★★

BLUE CASTLE CD+DVD / LP



"When you strip a song down to its very essence," says Graham Nash, "you either have a song worth singing...or you don't." It's pretty clear that - in *This Path Tonight*, Nash's first solo record of new music in 14 years - he does.

Ten of them, in fact - and all the elements you'd want are there: acoustic guitars, harmonicas, harmonies...and that Mancunian accent (which is as engaging in Nash as the Liverpudlian is in George Harrison).

The title track is a journey of reflection, its catchy chorus carrying

the singer to some resolution in 'Myself At Last', where self-discovery is finally achieved. 'Fire Down Below' brings a welcome dose of rock guitar, 'Golden Days' is a reminder of youthful hopes, but it is the closer - 'Encore' - that provides the album's most affecting moment.

So what do we do when "the last song is over"? Well, I don't know about you, but I'm going to play the record again.

**Greg Morse**

**EMITT RHODES**

**Rainbow Ends**

★★★★

OMNIVORE CD / LP



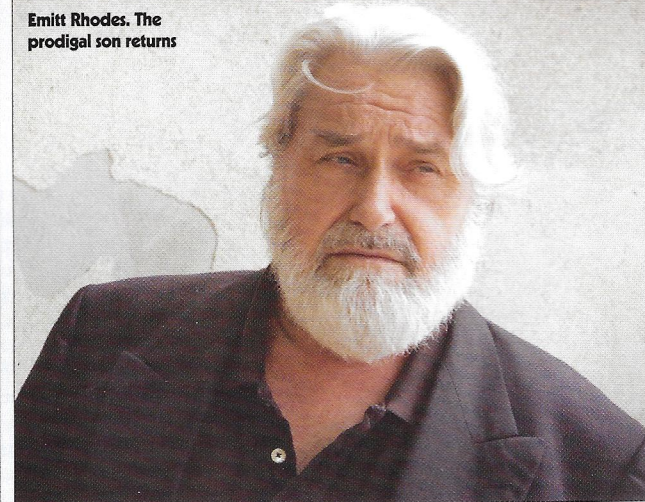
Emitt Rhodes was 23 when his last album came out. He's now 66. In the intervening years, the LA

wunderkind's reputation has grown exponentially, his name mentioned in hushed tones as his triptych of early '70s albums resonates ever deeper. "Long-awaited" doesn't seem enough.

Rhodes' voice is virtually unrecognisable from that of his younger self; deeper, warmer, weathered but still possessed of the fragile melancholy that imbued those records with real emotional depth. There are moments here when the years of tragedy and struggle are so candid it's almost hard to listen, despite their presentation as three-minute pop songs. The musical framework too has changed, the "one man Beatles" now aided and abetted by the likes of Jason Falkner, Aimee Mann and Jon Brion, giving proceedings a radio-friendly gloss of keyboard textures and rockin' guitars.

Newcomers may be confused but die-hards will hear 'Isn't It So' and shiver with recognition.

**Andy Morten**



Emitt Rhodes. The prodigal son returns

PHOTO BY GREG ALLAN

**DOUG TUTTLE**

**It Calls On Me**

★★★

TROUBLE IN MIND CD / LP



Doug Tuttle's *It Calls On Me* is a competent album. The New Hampshire psych revivalist knows how songs work, knows

how to assimilate his influences, and knows how to get that syrupy lo-fi production glow so coveted by the modern psych set. But it's that sheer level of competency that feels like album's undoing; with its robust song structures and period-piece reconstructions, *It Calls On Me* offers few surprises.

Things get off to a promising start with the popitistic, slacker-inflected folk-rock of 'A Place For You', with Tuttle orchestrating lush harmonies over a sun-dappled acoustic backing, whilst the drive-time rocker of a title track chooches along nicely in a soft-rock haze. This pedestrianism is difficult