

Torres' voice is *high*. Tower block high, spectral, cloudlike and at odds with the opening few plain acoustic chords of *Juniper Arms*, which opens *Pearls To Swine*. It's versatile too though, with a winsome melody inherent in it, and ability for it to soar above its backing that recalls – yes, typically – Jeff Buckley, but also modern day indie heroes like Perfume Genius. While producer Erik Wofford (Bill Callahan, M Ward) works his usual magic, it is Torres' tones that take this record into the realms of great. At its warmest - Where I'm Calling From for instance – the sound feels totally effortless, graceful, swooping around like some big bird on a beautiful but desolate desert vista.

There's no escaping it, that voice is what draws you back. Torres apparently took five years out of recording between his debut and this album, and it feels like he's matured, honed himself in that time, producing a most considered beauty. *Jake Kennedy*

Ultimate Painting Dusk

★★★★★
Trouble In Mind

TIM 117 LPC 1 (CD/LP)

Kick back and relax

You could describe Jack Cooper and James Hoare as reticent. Evasive even. Their third album begins with them hiding from would-be debt collectors, peaking through the blinds, and ends with a track called I Can't Run Any More.

The sound is important. It's a mix that blends its influences into a distinct new identity somehow. You might have read about the Beatles references, and the Velvets are obviously the elephant in their sonic room. But there are also great swathes of *Dusk* that recall Ride at their dreamiest, Pavement's mid-90s B-sides or Teenage Fanclub's template.

Yet the magical thing is how you know it's an Ultimate Painting record. Has music got to the point where everything is so blurred, so well mixed up, that new musical identities take shape? Only Ultimate Painting could make tracks that sound so simple – wandering between chords, sparsely drummed and dually harmonized – yet complete. *Dusk* goes nowhere, basically. It ambles, seems happy to hide behind the sofa, but is charming, feels totally complete and when it ends you feel the urge to hit repeat. Again. *Jake Kennedy*

The Undertones

The Undertones

★★★★★
Union Square Music

SALVOLPV 006 (LP)

Hypnotised

★★★★★

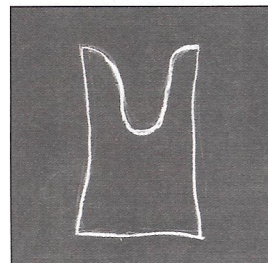
Union Square Music
SALVOLPV 007 (LP)

Derry's finest – never cool, always brilliant

After releasing the evergreen Teenage Kicks on Belfast label Good Vibrations, Sire Records were quick to snap up Derry's Undertones with what proved to be a less-than favourable deal. Nevertheless, they did steer their re-issue of the single to No 31 in the charts in October 1978.

Early in 1979 the band moved into Eden Studios in Acton, London, for their self-titled debut album, recorded in under a fortnight. Not that it showed, packed as it was with pop-punk classics including two hit singles, Jimmy Jimmy and Here Comes The Summer, both penned by guitarist John O'Neill, who also wrote Teenage Kicks. It deservedly made the Top 20, rising to No 13.

And no "difficult second album" problems with *Hypnotised*, recorded at Wisseloord Studios in Hilversum, North Holland and Eden, and released the following year. From wonderful opener More Songs About Chocolate And Girls (which would have made a great album title) to the stomping My Perfect Cousin (promoted by its hilarious Subbuteo-charged video) and surprisingly tender Wednesday Week – both hit singles – and an effective, beefed-up cover of Under The Boardwalk, it became their biggest hit album, making No 6. And both these beauties come on 180gm vinyl, remastered from the original tapes. *Shane Baldwin*



Xylouris White Black Peak

★★★★★
Bella Union BELLA 570 V (CD/LP)

Not inspired by goats

Consisting of Cretan lute player George Xylouris and Dirty Three drummer Jim White, Xylouris White make a racket that verges between aping traditional Cretan folk to almost rockabilly blow



Van Der Graaf Generator Do Not Disturb

★★★★★

Esoteric Antenna EANTCD 1062 (CD/LP)

Still putting the power into trio

Van Der Graaf Generator continue their remarkable coda with another incredibly accomplished album. *Do Not Disturb* is their third studio outing in the trio format, and it continues the melodic invention and surprises of 2011's *A Grounding In Numbers*. This time, rather than building the tracks from improvisation, the band rehearsed to make a coherent whole, amalgamating the prepared pieces to make longer songs.

On *Do Not Disturb*, Peter Hammill notes "the passage of time and the cascades of shared memory and experience illuminate the songs". And what songs they are. Room 1210 – from which the album's title track emerges – is both melodious and lyrically opaque. With its spritely, aggressive rock and shifting time structure, Forever Falling harks back to the directness of the K Group. Alfa Berliina highlights Hugh Banton's warm Hammond playing; and there's even time for a moody instrumental interlude (Shikata Ga Nai). (Oh No I Must Have Said) Yes references Hammill's Rikki Nadir bark; the song's increasingly frantic jazz interludes show that the invention, intelligence, and musicianship that has continually drawn followers to the group is as present as ever. "We are all lost for words" Hammill surmises on Almost The Words. Thank heavens he isn't. *Daryl Easlea*

DISTURBING PETER HAMMILL...

Your last albums have grown out of improvisation, yet this is more structured. What signalled the change in approach?

When we first discussed the album we were aware that this might be the last studio effort that VdGG would ever attempt. In the light of that, it was important that we were sure of the material – that it reflected both our historic life and our present one. So that inevitably involved a lot of advance preparation and a certainty about what the songs were all

outs. Added to this, they're on record as saying their debut, *Goats*, was inspired by goats ambling on a mountainside. So, there's plenty to like here.

Their willful experimentation persists on album number two. White's drums are absolutely pounding throughout, but recorded so organically that they are always capable of surprise. Xylouris's lute seems the perfect sparring partner, insistent and picking. While "Lute rock" is a term

you perhaps won't hear that often, it's somehow the perfect description here. Songs soar, the backroom power of the drums and lute driving everything, the latter clearly influenced by classic guitar lines, but pushing them somewhere new. Always experimenting.

Subtly and unobtrusively produced by Fugazi's Guy Picciotto (as *Goats* was), *Black Peak* then finds the envelope pushed further still. If the concept sounds impenetrable at first – off-

about. The fact that we decided – for the first time in living memory – to fully rehearse the material before hitting the record button meant that the structures had to be robust and fully in place. Having said that, there was still plenty of room for off-piste playing and – very old school – we weren't going to know exactly how the individual pieces of each song fitted together until the post-recording stitching process began. Another album, another way of working. So far, so VdGG.

Which tracks particularly stand out for you on the album?

Naturally, I love 'em all in their wildly different ways. But for complexity and surprise twists, Brought to Book. As a – surprisingly calm – exit, Go. And for a combination of sympatico playing and moving-right-along directness, Room 1210. I'm being unfair on the others, obviously.

You say it's a vital addition to the canon; would you compare it to anything you have done before?

Elements of what we've done, where we've been are there in spades. But there are, of course, several fresh wrinkles involved here. I'm particularly pleased that we've managed to find some areas to explore simply as a trio (or a variety of different trios!), without a welter of overdub-itis stuff. I'd say it's a summation of the VdGG-as-a-trio work, certainly.

You've now been together longer and released a similar amount of records to all of your original incarnations. How does that feel?

It's quite extraordinary actually. We'd never have imagined 10 years ago that we'd have made the albums and done the live shows we have since then. I think we've far, far exceeded our individual and collective expectations in this particular stint. Hooray for us!

Can you ever see a time when you are not doing this?

Well, nothing lasts forever . . . but one should never say never!

putting even – keep at it. The journey Xylouris White are on seems well worth tagging along with. *Jake Kennedy*

The Wolfhounds

Untied Kingdom (Or How To Come To Terms With Your Culture)

★★★★★

Odd Box ODD 30 (LP/CD)

Culture clubbed

East London indie stalwarts The Wolfhounds featured on the landmark comp C86, yet their fierce angularity and frontman David Callahan's