

Jack Bruce

Rockpalast: The 50th Birthday Concerts



MIG/INTACT Without a doubt, one of the great losses of 2014 was that of bass giant and vocalist **Jack Bruce**, who died at age 71 on Oct. 25. Back in 1993, Bruce celebrated his 50th in style with a two-day concert at the E-Werk in Cologne, Germany—now reissued in several different audio and video configurations. The one to have is the all-inclusive package that spreads the concerts—which featured guests such as **Gary Moore**, **Ginger Baker** and **Bernie Worrell**—over two DVDs, adds a CD of “lost tracks” and also tosses in a bonus DVD containing a full Bruce documentary and bonus material. Bruce and his colleagues were in fine form throughout the birthday show, which, of course, includes Cream classics as well as a variety of Bruce solo tracks and covers. But the unexpected highlight is the documentary, generous with the vintage footage and commentary from the already-missed musician. *Jeff Tamarkin*

as magnetic when it gets weird: “Summer Breaking” snakes into a groove reminiscent of vintage Steely Dan, and “Daffodils” is an after-midnight ode to a mythical drug, climaxing with a chemically altered guitar solo. *Uptown? Special.* *Ryan Reed*

Zs

Xe NORTHERN SPY



Inasmuch as they are led by a saxophone player, the composer/conceptualist **Sam Hillmer**, the long-running Brooklyn group **Zs** could be said to derive from the higher-purposed musical disciplines of New York’s spiritual and lofty jazz worlds of the late ‘60s and ‘70s. Like most of the band’s full-lengths, the 42-minute *Xe* plays like a fiery manifesto, stated in Hillmer’s extended saxophone techniques and supported by **Greg Fox**’s rigorous drumming. *Xe* is at its most transcendent when it is at its most propulsive, which is most of the time thanks to Fox, a relative **Zs** newcomer. Blowing past their own obviously schooled wonkiness, **Zs** and *Xe* seek territory that creates pleasure through prolonged accelerations, unexpected rhythmic tricks, mind-popping saxophone/cymbal explosions, well-paced musical detonations and occasionally show-off fireworks. It works, and *Xe* provides massive third-mind kicks for the earballs. *Jesse Jarnow*

Tommy Talton

Until After Then HITTING THE NOTE



Although he first made music in a garage band that presumptuously dubbed themselves **We The People**, **Tommy Talton**’s best known as part of the early ‘70s country-rock combo **Cowboy**. A staple of the storied Capricorn label, the band’s members later served in the company’s house band, while Talton

himself helped label mate **Gregg Allman** launch his budding solo career. These days, Talton tours with his own outfit, recording only occasionally, and fronting a bluesier sound with a brassier swagger. That approach is well represented on *Until After Then*, a ruggedly reliable set of songs that’s modest in ambition but varied enough for all ‘round enjoyment. Although a song like “Distant Light” shows off his soulful side, it’s the laid-back charms of “My, O, My,” “She Was There” and “Love U a Little” that hint at **Cowboy**’s mellow core. Hardly groundbreaking, but a solid set all the same. *Lee Zimmerman*

Sleater-Kinney

No Cities to Love SUB POP



Opening like their breakthrough classic *Dig Me Out* with a lone fuzzy, dissonant guitar riff before exploding with a chiming, stringed response and **Janet Weiss**’ typically propulsive drums, it takes all of about 20 seconds for **Sleater-Kinney** to declare their triumphant return. The Portland, Ore.-based trio comes out of the gate as if they never stopped running 10 years ago, and in fact, instead of sounding rusty or tentative, the band sounds tight and practiced, with **Corin Tucker** and **Carrie Brownstein**’s dueling guitars and vocals belying a maturity and technical facility that finally matches **Weiss**’s. If there’s anything particularly new, then it’s a greater embrace of pop harmonies in the choruses, and some actual jamming in spots—both on display in the near-perfect “A New Wave.” There isn’t a weak track in the lot, and if there’s anything at all to complain about, then it’s that the 33 minutes ends way too quickly. *Wayan Zoey*

75 Dollar Bill

Wooden Bag OTHER MUSIC



75 Dollar Bill come thumping and screeching joyfully out of New York on their proper debut, *Wooden Bag*, taking a few tracks to warm up, but soon locking into a hypnotic zone of trance-fuzz guitar, box percussion and nu-primitive transcendence. Following two cassette releases, *Wooden Bag* is an increase in sonic fidelity only; the duo of guitarist **Che Chen** and veteran experimentalist **Rick Brown** sounds as much like a no-fuss, radically tinged street band as ever. The two trade in conversational hypnotism, found between Chen’s almost casually minimalist guitar repetitions and Brown’s spare rhythms. On the 15-minute slow swirl of “Cuttin’ Out,” the two achieve a river-like flow, finding naturally dramatic breaks and passages as phrases break down and open up. The burning “Hollis” is music for dancing, music for marching, music for heads, music for dozens, music for all. *Jesse Jarnow*

D’Angelo & The Vanguard

Black Messiah RCA/SONY



This is a very good album. It’s dirty, funky, raw, powerful, and in many ways, both sociologically and politically, it’s necessary. But in the context of the 14-year wait for a follow-up to the now-

legendary *Voodoo*, it’s not great. The album is clearly overthought in its production, and underthought in disguising its influences. There’s a distracting tendency for the processing and engineering on **D’Angelo**’s parts to shift from line to line, obscuring the content of his otherwise soaring vocals, and it’s far too easy to name which **Prince** and **Sly** records he was listening to when writing some of the tracks. On the other hand, when **D** sounds like **D**, the results are just what his audience has been waiting to hear for over a decade. Both parts of “Back to the Future” and lead single “Sugah Daddy” are every bit as brilliant as they should be, and tracks like “Prayer” demonstrate that there’s a deeper rhythmic pocket to explore than even *Voodoo* suggested. On the grand scale of comeback records, running from *Chinese Democracy* at the bottom to *Syro* at the top, *Black Messiah* ranks solidly alongside *King Animal*—not quite the top, but pretty close. *Wayan Zoey*

Rhiannon Giddens

Tomorrow Is My Turn NONESUCH



No album title could be more prophetic. **Rhiannon Giddens**—singer, fiddler, banjo player and founding member of the Carolina Chocolate Drops—steps out on her own with a solo album that all but ensures her ascent toward stardom. Coming on the heels of her participation in the collective combo *The New Basement Tapes*, *Tomorrow Is My Turn* finds Giddens retracing signature songs by **Dolly Parton**, the **Gershwin** brothers, **Hank Cochran**, **Odetta** and **Nina Simone**, along with archival classics and original arrangements. She borrows heavily from her forebears with reverence and assurance, whether it’s the sultry coo of “Last Kind Words,” the rugged gospel-like exhortation of “Waterboy” or the torrid torch-song styling etched into the title tune. Producer **T Bone Burnett** steers the proceedings accordingly, imbuing a sepia-tinted feel that melds well with Giddens’ stately, assertive delivery. Given her commanding performance, the results bode well for many promising tomorrows. *Lee Zimmerman*

Bruce Katz Band

Homecoming AMERICAN SHOWPLACE



The blues typically comes in a variety of hues, but **Bruce Katz** has the wherewithal to simply play it straight. *Homecoming*, his first album in six years, offers an excellent showcase of his band’s blend of soul, funk, boogie and barroom honky-tonk, with Katz’s keyboards graciously sharing the spotlight with guest guitarists **John Hammond**, **Chris Vitarello** and **Jimmy Bennett**. Even drummer and latter-day **The Band** alum **Randy Ciarlante** takes center stage, singing lead on his own composition, “King Of Decatur.” The occasional vocal aside, Katz and company mostly choose instrumentals, each propelled by a supple groove that’s both solid and assured. Katz himself often comes across as a cross between **Booker T.** and **Jimmy Smith**, especially on songs like “The Czar” and “The Sky’s the Limit,” two tracks that

Mike Zito & The Wheel

Songs from the Road

Dana Fuchs

Songs from the Road RUF

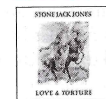


The blues seems best when played live, allowing passion and purpose to fully gel in performance. That’s especially evident on Ruf’s “Three for the Road” series of concert recordings, represented here by sets from **Mike Zito** and **Dana Fuchs**. (**Coco Montoya** is the third of the three.) **Zito** and his band **The Wheel** show that the blues is far from the monosyllabic idiom that other artists sometimes infer, courtesy of a set that incorporates resolute rockers (“Greyhound,” “Rainbow Bridge”) and more than a smattering of soul (a surprisingly restrained take on **Prince**’s “Little Red Corvette”). **Zito**’s vocals often bring to mind **Bob Seger**, while his fiery fretwork replicates a **Hendrix**-like flourish. **Dana Fuchs** is equally electrifying—a wailing and riveting vocalist who belts both blues and ballads in ways that recall **Janis Joplin**. On songs like “Bliss Avenue,” “Summersong” and “How Did Things Get This Way” she commands the stage and belts the blues in ways that only a seasoned performer can convey. Also of note, each offering includes a DVD with added songs, storytelling segments and exclusive interviews. *Lee Zimmerman*

typify his freewheeling approach. So while **Katz** doesn’t necessarily expand any basic blues parameters, he affirms its eternal appeal by merely parlaying an assertive sound. *Lee Zimmerman*

Stone Jack Jones

Love & Torture WESTERN VINYL



Stone Jack Jones has a rare blood condition that’s brought him to death’s door on two occasions, and those experiences affect every note on this album. His low, disconsolate baritone has a weary quality that gives his measured phrasing—somewhere between speaking and moaning—an unnerving impact. A glum, descending mandolin figure sucks you into “Russia,” where **Jones** drinks vodka and faces the unbearable pain of life. A musical quote from “Down by the Riverside” adds even more bitter irony to the lyric. Muted banjo and waves of distorted guitar give “Circumstance” an unbearable tension as **Jones** wonders, in a flat monotone, why he should go on breathing. If purgatory has a waiting room, then this is the music that will be playing on the sound system. *J. Poet*

Ibeyi

Ibeyi XL



As daughters of the late **Buena Vista Social Club** percussionist **Miguel ‘Angá’ Díaz**, twins **Lisa-Kaindé** and **Naomi Díaz** were raised surrounded by music. Their self-