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Weekend Books & Music Edited by Charlotte Heathcote www.express.co.uk/books QUITE A GOOD TIME TO A taste of honey BE BORN: A Memoir 1935 - 1975 ** By David Lodge Harvill Secker £25 LATE in his first volume of is so bittersweet The PHANTOM the nervous

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HONEYDEW **** **By Edith Pearlman** John Murray, £16.99



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THE BRILLIANT ORIGINAL

situation while a narrative unfolds over several hundred pages.

neydew

But a good collection of short stories offers even richer fare. with snapshots of many different lives and underlying themes binding them together. That is certainly true of Edith Pearlman's meticulously observed new collection

Many of the stories are set in Godolphin, a small Massachusetts town not far from Boston. They are tales of suburban existence, of love and longing, of loss, failure and misunderstanding and often of isolation.

But such is the life-affirming power of multi prize-winning Pearlman's storytelling that there is a crumb of comfort to be derived from each resolution. however apparently desolate.

She has a remarkable eye for both the ordinary and extraordinary and there is more than a faint hint of melodrama in

even the most down-to-earth of domestic situations The opening story is a case in

point: a widowed pedicurist

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PRIZE WINNER: Edith Pearlman

ALBUM REVIEWS

THE GO-BETWEENS: G Stands For Go-Betweens Vol 1 **** (Domino)

With the cost of this fascinating box-set stretching to over £110 it is unlikely anyone other than obsessive fans of the Aussie indie darlings is likely to invest but those that do are in for a treat With a mix of vinyl and CD, you get a whole lot of music for your money. Their first three albums have been remastered for vinyl (along with digital downloads) with a fourth LP of their first five rare singles collated, including I Need Two Heads, released on Glasgow's Postcard Records back in 1980. Alongside the vinyl are four CDs of radio sessions, live tracks, studio outtakes and various rarities from 1978 through to 1984, and a mammoth 112-page book, with memories from one of the band's two driving forces. Robert Forster. The first 600 sold also get a random book from the personal library of his late co-frontman Grant McLennan, who died suddenly in 2006 of a heart attack. A great

examination of a band developing from exuberant vouth to refined genius DAVE ESSON

THE PHANTOM BAND: Fears Trending ****

(Chemikal Underground) These seven tracks arrive just six months after the release of the Glasgow band's last album - unsurprising, considering they were recorded at the same sessions as Strange Friend, and the title is an anagram of the previous one. But it's understandable that this septet was separate from those earlier songs – they are a harder, darker beast. The sound on Denise Hopper is oddly that of Tex-Mex meets Turkey, while brooding Kingfisher would not be out of place on a Bad Seeds album. and closer Olden Golden is a Gothic Caledonian folk epic. **DE** Ryan Adams deciding to

EARLS OF LEICESTER: Earls Of Leicester ***

Rounde Veteran Dobro meister Jerry Douglas realised his life's

plying her trade is watched from across the road by a recently separated man. Both are lonely but they have no future together just the chance to tip each other into facing up to their own failures of moral responsibility Sometimes the drama lies in the less obvious.

Honeydew, the title story, appears initially to be about a dangerously anorexic young girl at an expensive school. Instead, the main thrust of the story is about a different kind of personal development.

HREE of the stories

are set in Godolphin's antique shop Forget Me Not owned by middle-aged Renata, who acts as a kind of unofficial psychiatrist

An understanding of people is a prerequisite as she needs to identify the needs of her individual customers.

She listens to them but rarely speaks, allowing them to use her shop as a place of safety and retreat.

Pearlman's prose is subtle ironic and mostly unadorned so the odd metaphor has all the more effect. For one character. sadness [is] always wedged under her breast like a doorstep Each story is a masterpiece of economy and the collection as a whole is the perfect edside book

ambition when he made this

album of timeless favourites

from the bluegrass songbook

of Americana founding fathers

Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs

of the Foggy Mountain Boys.

beautifully with banjo, guitar

and fiddle on classics such as

Big Black Train Shuckin' The

Corn and Dim Lights. Thick

Smoke. Renowned Nashville

Camp add to the blue chip

line-up, which also features

Union Station, on upright

★★★★ (Magnolia)

Barry Bales, Douglas' longtime

DREW HOLCOMB & THE NEIGHBORS: Medicine

For those of you unsettled by

embrace a more rock-orientated

sound, fear not, as you should

Holcomb, whose introspective

Americana will hit all the right

spots. He and the Neighbors,

merely deflect your affections to

bandmate in Alison Krauss and

DAVID HAMILTON

banio player Charlie Cushman

and solo singer/guitarist Shawn

Douglas's dobro melds

VANESSA BERRIDGE

there

most enjoyable

(Train Wreck)



SC*

/das

**** By Emma Hooper Fig Tree £12.99 ONE of the biggest debuts of the year is as beautifully written as it is beautifully produced.



Great writer, boring memoir

R autobiography, David Lodge writes about anticipation that he 100

felt when he read reviews of his books. He says: "I have

never pretended to be indifferent to reviews, which, in spite of all the back-scratching and backbiting, the envy and selfpromotion that contaminate many

De

of them, collectively give the author the first reliable indication of whether his new book is a hit, a miss or something in between. This book is certainly "something in between" and as a long-standing admirer of Lodge it gives me no pleasure to say this is much closer to a miss than a hit.

It starts with 100 or so pages guaranteed to put off all but the most committed fan as he describes his upbringing and childhood with a mixture of banality and nit-picking emphasis on

uninteresting details. Lodge describes the first 40 years of his life, beginning with his birth shortly before the outbreak of war and encompassing his schooldays university, National Service, career in academia and novel writing.

ETTA AND OTTO AND RUSSELL AND JAMES

One day Otto wakes to find his elderly wife Etta has gone on a

pilgrimage to see the sea for the very first time, walking hundreds of miles across Canada to get

Although her reasons are unexplained, it probably has something to do with the beloved sister who died near the

ending with the triumphant publication of what many believe to be his masterpiece, the glorious Changing Places.

These years are packed with incident but alas remain uninvolving due to the pedantic humourless style in which Lodge writes. The near-complete absence of laughs is a serious problem and excerpts from his younger, looser writing are altogether more entertaining

At times I was reminded both of Tom Maschler's self-promoting and

hilariously un-self-aware memoir Publisher and more irreverently of John Crace's Digested Read olumr

While you would never know that Lodge was a great comic writer on the basis of this book you suspect that the entire thing is a subtle send-up of the genre of biographical writing with increasingly irrelevant personal anecdotes becoming almost hilarious in their random insertion into the narrative. We learn, for instance. that the legendary scholar

sea during Etta's childhood. James is both her sister's stillborn son and the talking coyote who keeps Etta company on her trek.

Otto's best friend Russell is as devastated as Otto to find Etta gone. Both men have loved her ever since they were teenagers and she became their village

school teacher. The story flashes back and forth between the present and the past, in particular Otto's experiences during the First World War while Russell, disabled by a childhood farming accident. stayed behind with Etta. Is Russell the only person who wonders whether Etta chose the right man?

In the present, Otto tries to fill the long, lonely days by cooking Etta's favourite recipes and,

Frank Kermode was extremely pleased that he had driven from Manchester to Cambridge very fast in his new Mini. We don't learn his opinions on Shakespeare or Lodge or even Cambridge, all of which might have been more interesting

The book does have a few redeeming features. If you're a connoisseur of social history, some of the material here on National Service, 1960s academia or even Lodge's travels in America around the time of the rise of the counterculture is relatively illuminating.



NO LAUGHING MATTER: David Lodge

when Etta's cross-country pilgrimage makes her a local celebrity and her photograph appears in the local newspaper, Otto bulk buys the paper, cuts out her photograph and fashions papier mache animals from the leftovers which brings its own celebrity.

The novel has its frustrations. Most of the relevant facts are laid out early on, leaving the rest of the narrative to meander in places while some key details are too lightly sketched.

However Emma Hooper is such a natural storyteller that the flaws are easily overlooked and this deserves to follow in the footsteps of 2014's big debut novels The Miniaturist and Elizabeth Is Missing.

CHARLOTTE HEATHCOTE

who include his wife Ellie, have been creating music for 10 years now, and Medicine is the perfect prescription to perk up your life with Avalanche. When It's All Said And Done and love song You'll Always Be My Girl the

DE

CHIP TAYLOR: Little Prayers Trilogy ****

There's a playful nature to a 74-year-old responsible for penning huge hits like Wild Thing and Angel Of The Morning delivering a song about writer's block called Nothing Comin' Out Of Me That I Like when it's contained in a triple album of 30 tracks. Taylor (Jon Voight's brother in case you didn't know) wrote these songs over a period of seven years and the three discs have subtly different feels to them. On Behind An Iron Door, he talks of injustice and salvation like Solitary, where prisoners are locked up alone for long periods, searching for hope. The Love And Pain disc contains the

aforementioned writer's block track and Bardot, all about kids watching 'racy' movies. On final disc Little Prayers especially the recording allows you to hear every breath Taylor draws in his vocal. for an intenselv intimate DE delivery.

DAVID BRONSON: Questions *******

Big Arc) A few years back now, Josh Rouse wished he was Carole King and released the stunning 1972, full of vintage singe songwriter fare. Now New Yorker Bronson has followed a similar path to great effect. These songs hark back to the halcyon days of the likes of James Taylor. David Gates, Paul Simon and Jackson Browne, Song Of Life hints at Fleetwood Mac's Albatross, and Push prods away with an insistent chorus. He has some able assistance, including guitarist Carlos Alomar, key in

the sound of David Bowie's Young Americans, and backing vocalist Robin Clark, who helped Simple Minds on their Once Upon A Time album. DE

BETTYE LAVETTE: Worthy ******* (Cherry Red) Now approaching her 69th birthday, soul diva Bettye

pictured, has lived a life, being a mum at 14. divorced at 15 then succumbing to drugs and various dalliances with singing legends. But through it all she has possessed that vital ingredient - a terrific voice. Here she delivers 11 verv

personal interpretations of songs written by such legends as Dylan. Lennon & McCartney. Jagger & Richards and her producer Joe Henry. The powerful title track, written for her by Beth Nielsen Chapman and Mary Gauthier, is all about her finally feeling she has arrived after years of hardship. DE Some of the best writing comes late | it had on his family life seem in the book as Lodge discusses his son Christopher's Down's syndrome, writing tersely and movingly about struggling to give him as normal a life as he could in a society where those with Down's were dismissed as "mongols" and often confined to institutions

In this heartfelt section Lodge conveys a sense of outrage and anger that is mostly lacking from the rest of this rather polite book. Even the (extensive) material on

his Catholicism and the effects that

dictated not by passion but an adherence to the status quo.

Lodge is one of our greatest critics and novelists and this book will do nothing to change an established reputation as a grand old man of letters.

But it won't do much to enhance it either. It ends with a hint that a second volume is planned. Let's hope it's more compelling than this rather turgid disappointment.

ALEXANDER LARMAN



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