

# REVIEWS



**VANILLA FUDGE**  
**SPIRIT OF '67**  
PURPLE PYRAMID (CD)

★★★★★

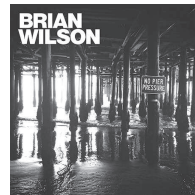
Back in the day, Vanilla Fudge built a formidable reputation out of reinterpreting the music of others. It seemed a fairly simple formula at the time – take a well-known rock or soul standard, add some bombast, a dose of psychedelia and repackage it for the world. At least it was enough to allow them to make their mark; their sonic assault on the Supremes' "You Keep Me Hangin' On" turned that track into an FM smash, enough to help them achieve headline status (Led Zeppelin was their support act on the Brits' first tour of the U.S.) and even influence their peers (legend has it the Beatles were so taken with Fudge's first album that they locked themselves away for an entire weekend, dropped acid and listened to it repeatedly). Clearly then, any attempt to deride them as merely a cover band misses the mark. For Vanilla Fudge it was as much about their sound as it was others' songs, and in those heady days of the late '60s, that was all it took to make a profound impression.

Now, some 45 years later, the band has regrouped (bassist Tim Bogart is the only original member to opt for retirement) and so we find keyboardist Mark Stein, drummer Carmine Appice, guitarist Vince Martell and new recruit, bass player Pete Bremy, revisiting their classic formula, as well as several standards from the year of the band's birth – 1967. It's a risky proposition – after all, "Whiter Shade of Pale," "I Can See For Miles," "Last Train to Clarksville," "I Heard It Through the Grapevine," "Tracks of My Tears" and the like are all well inscribed in the collective consciousness. And yet, for better or for worse (depending on one's perspective), the Fudge has made each their own, mostly by adding additional passages and magnifying them into a symphonic state. Consequently, these songs are transformed entirely and able to stand on their own. Whether or not they will ever substitute for the originals is anyone's guess and purely a matter of individual taste, but credit is due the band for making the attempt regardless.

The album's one original entry, "Let's Pray for Peace," gives the disc a powerful coda, and its timeless message – as simple and straightforward as it seems – is clearly well-intentioned. Sadly, the fact that plea is still needed all these decades later is the main reason "Spirit of '67" remains as timely as ever.

– Lee Zimmerman

16 GOLDMINE June 2015



**BRIAN WILSON**  
**NO PIER PRESSURE**  
Capitol  
(Deluxe Edition)

★★★★★

"No Pier Pressure" is Brian Wilson's first album at new material since 2008's "That Lucky Old Sun" (though the intervening years did see the release of 2010's "Brian Wilson Reimagines Gershwin" and 2011's "In the Key of Disney"). There's a nice pun in the title; a statement that Wilson doesn't feel any pressure to live up to his storied past, perhaps?

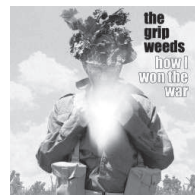
Some of these songs were originally intended for a follow-up to the Beach Boys' 2012 reunion album "That's Why God Made the Radio." Inner band turmoil put paid to that notion, but there's still a partial Beach Boys presence on the album. You can't miss those gorgeous trademark harmonies on "What Ever Happened," which features Beach Boys Al Jardine and David Marks, for example. It's trademark Wilson, too, a song that looks back sadly at the changes time has brought, along with an underlying wariness about the future ("What's going to happen to me?"). You'll find a similar melancholy on "The Right Time" (with Jardine and Marks), and "Tell Me Why" (with Jardine), though the upbeat "Sail Away" (with Jardine and the Beach Boys' Blondie Chaplin) has a more optimistic mood.

There are a number of other guest appearances on the album, though Wilson has enough of a voice to carry the show on his own. "On the Island" (guest vocalist Zoëy Deschanel) and "Guess You Had to Be There" (guest vocalist Kacey Musgraves) veer too close to easy listening. But trumpeter Mark Isham is a nice choice for the instrumental "Half Moon Bay."

And Wilson's sad, sweet voice bookends the album, opening with "This Beautiful Day" (with sunny sentiments such as "Life goes on and on/like your favorite song") and closing with "The Last Song," with lines like "There's never enough time enough for the ones that you love" that will tug on your heartstrings. Wilson's in fine form on this album, which should please his fans; he'll also be following up the album's release with a tour.

A final note: the deluxe edition of the album has three more tracks than the standard edition, so that's the one to buy.

– Gillian Gaar



**THE GRIP WEEDS**  
**HOW I WON THE WAR**  
Jem (MVD7134A CD)

★★★★★

On the most excellent "How I Won the War," New Jersey's fab Grip Weeds offer up 17 swirling, slightly trippy sonic

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land mines that are simultaneously catchy as all get out and slightly dangerous, to boot. The 'Weeds rock like mad ("Rise Up"), write pitch-perfect, rockin' pop numbers ("Rainbow Quartz") and imbue each and every tune with ace musicianship, urgent vocals and sparkling, inventive arrangements that never leave the melody behind.

Beatlephiles will recognize "How I Won the War" and the band's name as the title of a 1967 film featuring John Lennon and the character he played (Musketeer Gripweed), respectively. The Grip Weeds' definitely have that '60s-ish vibe happening, but their sound is firmly planted in the here and now: the guitars alternately ring and bite, Kurt Reil's drums are across-the-board amazing (think Keith Moon) and the lead vocals of Kurt Reil and his brother Rick help put each of the 13 tracks across with flair and passion. (There are 17 tracks total, four of them brief interstitial instrumental pieces.) When lead guitarist Kristin Pinell adds her harmony vocals to the mix, the results are quite effective indeed, and Pinell's lone lead vocal here, the sweetly mellow "Over and Over," makes one wish for more.

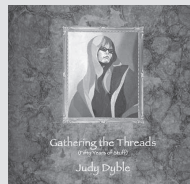
From the album-opening title cut, with its military-style drums, close harmonies and powerful instrumental attack to the final song, a spirited, faithful run through of the Beatles' "The Inner Light," the quality is of a consistently high level. Many of the lyrics deal with conflict and resolution, which speak to some of the problems the band faced during the recording of the album. Ultimately though, the group was able to push through the issues (which included losing their previous bass player and replacing him with Dave DeSantis) and produce their finest, most cohesive collection of songs to date.

"How I Won the War" is polished, damned-near-perfect garage pop for the masses, and it's sure to wind up on many year-end "best of" lists. Don't miss it. [www.gripweeds.com](http://www.gripweeds.com)

— John M. Borack

# Quick Picks

By Dave Thompson



## JUDY DYBLE

GATHERING THE THREADS (FIFTY YEARS OF STUFF)

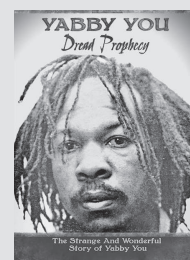
Starcrazy (Limited Edition CD box set)

**Genre:** Folkly-psycho-acidy

**Highlights:** "Wintersong," "Murder," "C'est La Vie"

**Summary:** 48-song, 3-CD ramble through the wild and weirder corners of Fairport's founding singer, beautifully styled and stylistically gorgeous.

**OUR TAKE:** BUY



## YABBY YOU

DREAD PROPHECY - THE STRANGE & WONDERFUL WORLD OF YABBY YOU

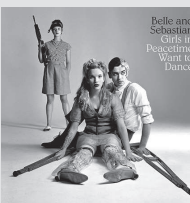
Shanachie (CD box set)

**Genre:** Reggae

**Highlights:** "Conquering Lion," "Jah Mercies," "Yabby You"

**Summary:** Three-CD collection of killer rarities, levitan dubs and dynamic 12-inch mixes by one of the founding fathers of roots. Great booklet, too!

**OUR TAKE:** BUY



## BELLE AND SEBASTIAN

GIRLS IN PEACETIME WANT TO DANCE

Matador (CD)

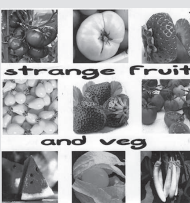
**Genre:** Alternative, Indie Rock

**Highlights:** "Enter Sylvia Plath," "Play for Today,"

"The Cat with the Cream"

**Summary:** Back with breathtaking vigor and a keen eye for restyled '80s dance-pop, B&S are as wordy as they ever were, but toe-tappingly fine as well.

**OUR TAKE:** DOWNLOAD



## VARIOUS ARTISTS

STRANGE FRUIT & VEG

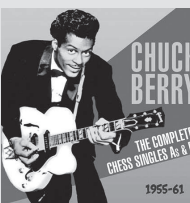
Fruits de Mer (CD)

**Genre:** Psychedelia

**Highlights:** "Hey Joe," "King of the Rumbling Spires," "Vegetable Man"

**Summary:** Not all the names will be familiar, but this 18-track collection by the UK's premier modern psych label is worth all the effort it'll take to find.

**OUR TAKE:** ACQUIRE (JUST DON'T ASK US HOW)



## CHUCK BERRY

THE COMPLETE CHESS SINGLES AS AND BS 1955-1961

Acrobat (CD)

**Genre:** Rock 'N' Roll

**Highlights:** Do you even need to ask?

**Summary:** The motherlode of Berry brilliance, 50 tracks wrap up every key note in his early career, and still the foundation of all we have grooved to since!

**OUR TAKE:** BUY

## LEAD BELLY

THE SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS COLLECTION

Folkways (5-CD box set)

This year is going to be a big year for Huddie Ledbetter, born in 1888 in Louisiana. Better known as Lead Belly, this singer/songwriter/12-

string guitarist, who died in 1949, laid down the template for topical songs, influencing the '60s protest movement, Great Britain's skiffle craze (which led to the Beatles) and even hip hop mythologizing. The songs he wrote have been recorded and performed by Bruce Springsteen, Bob Dylan, Frank Sinatra, Van Morrison, Tom Waits ("Fannin' Street"), Led Zeppelin ("The Gallis Pole"), Taj Mahal ("Linin' Track"), Creedence Clearwater Revival ("The Midnight Special"), The Weavers ("Goodnight Irene" which hit No. 1 in 1950), Lonnie Donegan ("Rock Island Line," a British No. 1), Nirvana ("Black Girl: Where Did You Sleep Last Night") and dozens of others. He represents, along with Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger, "The Holy Trinity" of American Folk Music, according to Grammy Museum Executive Director Bob Santelli, who has co-produced this lavish 5-CD box set, the first comprehensive overview of an incredible life. Complete with 140-page hard cover book, its 108 songs (16 never-before-released), reveal the breadth of Lead Belly's artistry. It's almost hard to fathom.

A convicted murderer who spent most of his 20s in jail, Lead Belly was discovered in 1933 by folklorists John and Alan Lomax, who marketed him as a "savage character from the swamplands." Co-producer Jeff Place told Alan Light in the New York Times he was often asked to perform in prison overalls once Texas Governor Pat Morris Neff pardoned him. "His image was that of the proto-gangster rap-



★★★★★

20 GOLDMINE June 2015

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