



Transformations

The High Llamas' homage to a changing city.

One of the best highs of a High Llamas record is savoring the sounds that trigger a ponder on the 'tween-the-cracks stuff of everyday life—the people, places and things we breeze by and normally wouldn't pause to consider. One gets more of this mindful mood in *Here Come the Rattling Trees*, the English/Irish band's first new set in five years. A song cycle originally created as a theater production by chief Llama singer/multi-instrumentalist/arranger Sean O'Hagan, it was inspired by all the people he met while bicycling around his borough of Peckham in southeast London. O'Hagan wove musical soundtracks into the stories of these local denizens, who shared their dreams and disillusionments with him amid the district's transformation.

O'Hagan's tales have titles like "Amy Recalls Barham Trees," "Bramble Black," "Livorno" and "Plumber Recalls Me to the Common," evoking in words and tones Peckham's progression over the last 25 years, for better and for worse. As a result, the music is all about gaping at the past and, at least in some small way, suggesting a better future.

Over the course of 10 High Llamas albums since 1992, O'Hagan—who has also collaborated with Stereolab, Super Furry Animals and Sondre Lerche—has pursued a harmonically sophisticated music that combines, in his words, sweetness and modernity. He laces *Rattling Trees* with simple ornaments like acoustic and electric guitar, vibes, reedy organ, bell-toned electric piano, brush drums and his own choirboy vocals. Each cheerily yearful track contains at least one aural surprise that, if its magic doesn't pounce as you round the corner up that never-explored mental alleyway, will occur in due course to the close, careful listener.

John Payne



The High Llamas
Here Come the Rattling Trees
(Drag City)

MUSIC RECOMMENDATIONS



Vektor
Terminal Redux
(Earache)

➤ Ten brutal tracks of progressive thrash from these Philly-via-Phoenix metallians deliver the anticipated whiplash riffs, almost inhuman drumming, raspy-throated howls... and a children's chorus? What the fu! But there it is, right in the middle of "Charging the Void." Shocked me like a

stray wire! This is pure, icy thrash otherwise, warmed by the occasional unexpected resolve. The tight, circular lixx that intro "Panopticon" quickly devolve into the stinging harmonics and rapidly snaking bass lines that characterize the album. A must for lovers of the genre. *Polly Watson*



Abbath
Abbath
(Season of Mist)

➤ After parting ways with famed corpsepaint commandos Immortal, Olve "Abbath" Eikemo has emerged from Norway's icy hinterlands with his solo debut. Backed by European extreme-metal notables and English lyricist Simon Dan-caster, Abbath delivers eight frosty blasts of high-speed

riffery steeped in winter, war and Norse mythology, while giving sonic nods to Ozzy Osbourne, AC/DC and the departed Swedish cultists Bathory. Despite Abbath's grim pedigree, however, you don't have to be a black-metal enthusiast to enjoy this record: It's pure head-banger heaven. *J. Bennett*

DVD RECOMMENDATIONS



Across the USA in 51 Days: The Movie!
The Melvins
(Ipecac)

➤ In 2012, fabled underground rock band the Melvins set a world record when they played all 50 states—plus DC—in 51 days. Shot completely on mobile phones, this DVD dedicates a minute to each stop on the tour, as guitarist/vocalist King Buzzo, drummer Dale Crover, bassist Trevor Dunn

and their trusty road crew survive fake explosions, real flaming airplane wings, and a cavalcade of drunks, weirdos, and porta-potties on their pilgrimage into posterity. Plus, in true Melvins fashion, there's plenty of trenchant commentary and oddball humor dispensed along the way. *J. Bennett*



Forbidden Zone: Special Edition
Richard Elfman
(MVD Entertainment)

➤ The greatest politically incorrect stoner-movie musical of all time is now available on DVD. Starring performance art-rockers Mystic Knights of the Oingo Boingo and Hervé Villechaize (from *Fantasy Island*), the film blends *Popeye*-style animation and Theatre of Cruelty live action. First

released in 1980, *Forbidden Zone* has since graced many a midnight-movie screening populated by hammered freaks spitting up their popcorn at the depiction of a dreamscape featuring topless princesses, dancing frogs and more ethnic stereotypes than Archie Bunker could conjure. *Michael Simmons*

GAMES RECOMMENDATIONS



Fallout 4
PS4, Xbox One, PC
(Bethesda Softworks)

➤ Once again, we emerge from our vaults and wander the wasteland for a virtual vacation filled with super-mutants, ghouls and a Pip-Boy crammed with quests. Boston as it stands in a parallel universe 200 years after nuclear war proves to be a lovely host for *Fallout 4*. A new system

makes its debut, exemplified at its best by the weapon and power-armor modifications, and at its worst by a toolbox for needless settlement-building. Stripped-down dialogue choices and the lack of a karma system render this *Fallout* the most passive role-playing experience in the series. *Tyler Merfeld*