

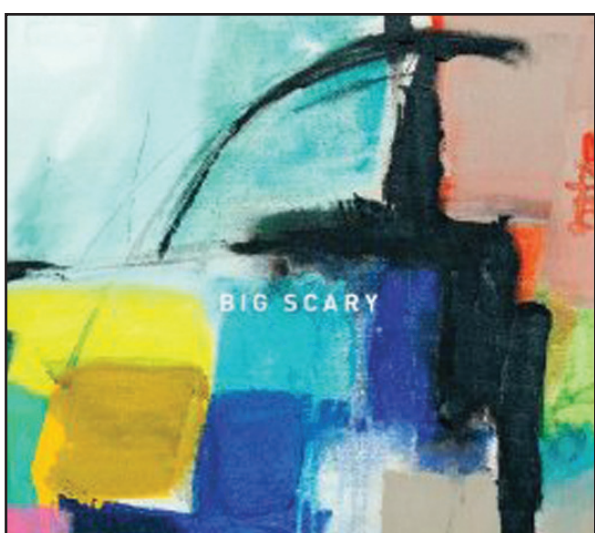
Van Morrison is 'Born to Sing'

BY JEFFREY SISK

'Born to Sing: No Plan B'

Van Morrison (Exile)
★★★★

Irish troubadour Van Morrison has one of those magical voices that never seems to age. Over the course of a career that's spanned parts of six decades, the 67-year-old Morrison can be counted on to deliver a first-rate record every couple of years. "Born to Sing: No Plan B" is his best album since 2006's "Pay the Devil" and finds Morrison on top of his game throughout the 10-track, 60-minute release. Morrison enhances many of the tunes with his signature vocal quirks and his songwriting is as sharp as it's been in years.



good chance you've heard a song or two from Australian indie duo Big Scary. They've had their music featured in an AT&T ad and on ABC's "Grey's Anatomy" and are now poised for even bigger success with the release of "Vacation," their full-length debut. The 10-track release flirts with greatness — especially the first half of the set — before losing steam down the stretch, but I have every reason to believe big things are in store for Big Scary.

The first four tracks — "Gladiator," "Leaving Home," "Mix Tape" and personal favorite "Purple" — are flat-out fantastic, and though they can't maintain that pace, there are a handful of other tunes worthy of multiple spins. "Child in a Tree" is a mellow grower, and I have

come to appreciate "Got It, Lost It" and "Of Desire." With Halloween right around the corner, what better time to get to know a band called Big Scary?

'Bend Beyond'

Woods (Woodsist)
★★★★

Like a fine bottle of wine, lo-fi alternative folk outfit Woods keep getting better with age. I first discovered them in 2010 with the release of fifth full-length "At Echo Lake," and my esteem for them grew with last year's "Sun and Shade." They've taken things to a new high on album No. 7, the sublime "Bend Beyond." Frontman Jeremy Earl's falsetto is in peak form on this dynamic collection of 12 uniformly strong tunes.

The wispy title track sets the stage and Woods follow that up with the twangy gem "Cali in a Cup." Additional standouts include "It Ain't Easy," "Back to the Stone," "Find Them Empty," "Size Meets the Sound," "Impossible Sky" and "Something Surreal." With three outstanding records in as many years, Woods have cemented themselves on my list of favorite bands.

'All Day Pass'

Boyfrndz (Self-released)
★★★★½

Ho-hum. Another day, another first-rate band coming out of the indie hotbed of Austin, Texas. Boyfrndz formed in 2010 out of the ashes of We the Granada and released a blink-and-you-missed-it self-titled debut last year. "All Day Pass" should be the album that puts these guys on the map. Recorded live in just three days, these 12 tracks show what the trio is all about.

First single "Surf's Up" has garnered some alternative radio airplay and ranks among the better entries on "All Day Pass." Other keepers include opener "Colts," "Hear Say," the title track, "Polite in Public" and "Sooner or Later." The Boyfrndz sound likely won't appeal to everybody, but this is a talented young band on the rise.

'Titanic and Other Stories'

Tim Heidecker (Orion Read)

★★★★½

When comedian Tim Heidecker learned that the title track of the new Bob Dylan album "Tempest" was a 14-minute epic about the Titanic, the funnyman set out to record an equally epic song about the fateful ship. "Titanic" bests Dylan by more than a minute and tells the story from the 1912 maiden voyage of the ship clear through to this year's decision by director James Cameron to re-release his 1997 Oscar-winning film in 3-D. With a more than respectable approximation of the Dylan nasal drawl, Heidecker's "Titanic" is worth the purchase price all by itself.

There's also a cover of Dylan's 1970 tune "All the Tired Horses," a song about the failed sequel to the 2007 film "Wild Hogs," and surprisingly effective closer "Earthquake Blues." Even though the remaining five tunes don't quite measure up, I suggest taking a trip aboard "Titanic."

'Self Entitled'

NOFX (Fat Wreck Chords)
★★★

NOFX have been fixtures on the punk scene for almost 30 years and the guys haven't tweaked their formula too much. "Self Entitled," NOFX's 12th studio effort, sounds an awful lot like the 11 albums that preceded it and if you're a fan of Fat Mike, Smelly, Melvin and El Hefe, chances are you'll enjoy this

12-track, 30-minute release. There are some nice moments to be found — "72 Hookers," "I Believe in God-dess," "She Didn't Lose Her Baby," "I, Fatty" and "Xmas Has Been X'ed" — but it's nothing we haven't heard before. Casual fans might want to give it a spin, but I doubt they'll spend too much time revisiting it down the road.

'Heavy Halo'

Empress Hotel (Park the Van)
★★★★

One of the great things about reviewing music is when I get bowled over by a terrific band and/or album that I didn't see coming. Such is the case with new Orleans-based indie pop outfit Empress Hotel, whose infectious "Heavy Halo" debut is an absolute delight.

The brainchild of brothers Ryan and Eric Rogers and singer/songwriter Micah McKee, this talented outfit cites influences as varied as Sparks, Prince and Roxy Music, and incorporate elements of each into the 11-track release.

From the opening notes of "Mach Bach" clear through the final strains of "Lonely Soul," there isn't a bad song to be found here. Empress Hotel are especially effective on the title track, "Baby Octopus," personal favorite "Holly," "Auld Lang Something" and "Search Lights." Highly recommended.

Angel Olsen leaves listeners emotionally affected, wanting more

BY BRIAN KRASMAN

'Half Way Home'

Angel Olsen (Bathetic)
★★★★

Angel Olsen is as raw and honest as they come. It's impossible to walk away from her music unaffected emotionally. Her sophomore effort "Half Way Home" is a revelation in singer-songwriter magic, and her record easily could find room on your shelves alongside works by Laura Marling, Ani DiFranco, and Jolie Holland.

This gorgeous, unforgettable record captures an artist in the throes of emotion as Olsen goes back and forth from quiet folk to '60s soul and pop throwback to syrupy country rock, all within 11 songs. Her voice quivers sometimes, dominates other moments, and is purely unique both in sound and delivery. Everything's a keeper here, but vulnerable "Acrobat," crushingly sad "Lonely Universe," practically whispered "Always Half Strange" and the soul-splitting closer "Tiniest Seed" are personal favorites. Go find this now.

'Shut Down the Streets'

AC Newman (Matador)
★★★★½

It always seems weird to me that Carl Newman, frontman and lead songwriter for the New Pornographers, requires a solo outlet. What he does on his own is not dramatically different from his primary band.

That said, Newman has a knack for catchy power pop songs, and maybe he has an overflow problem, necessitating the solo joint. Whatever the reason, there are a lot of Porn-style jams here such as "Encyclopedia of Classic Takedowns," "Money in New Wave" and "Hostages" most complete with female backing (sometimes from Neko Case), but he changes it up a bit on folk-ish "Not Talking," "Do Your Own Time," and accordion-laced "You Had to Be There."

'Reviver'

Callers (Partisan)
★★★★½

Had duo Callers decided their calling was in mainstream R&B, they could do that, no problem. Most of that is because of Sara Lucas' way-smooth vocal stylings.

The group's third record "Reviver" instead is a little too quirky and weird for mainstream, I'm thinking, but that's fine.

On the record are some easy-going, dreamy cuts that should make for excellent nighttime listening, including seductive "Heroes"; soaring "Crush Times"; soul and pop throwback to syrupy country rock, all within 11 songs. Her voice quivers sometimes, dominates other moments, and is purely unique both in sound and delivery. Everything's a keeper here, but vulnerable "Acrobat," crushingly sad "Lonely Universe," practically whispered "Always Half Strange" and the soul-splitting closer "Tiniest Seed" are personal favorites. Go find this now.

'Glow'

Kaki King (Velour Music Group)
★★★★

Guitar virtuoso Kaki King is so good, so entrancing a player that she could release an album focused strictly on her string work. Actually, that's just what she did on "Glow."

Unlike past efforts, including 2010's excellent "Junior," this is all instrumental and really focuses on how astonishingly good and diverse King is.

While she has string ensembles here, some spacey noise effects there, her guitar takes center stage and leads you through spirited and cosmic "Streetlight in the Egg"; Eastern-flavored storyteller "Bowen Island"; wintry "No True Masterpiece Will Ever Be Complete"; and Celtic-inspired "Holding the Severed Self." King's a treasure you better take time to discover.

Brian Krasman is a contributing writer for Trib Total Media.

Marvel Comics' 'NOW' initiative is set to help refresh, not reboot

ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHILADELPHIA — It's not a reboot or relaunch.

Instead, Marvel Comics' new "NOW" initiative aims to recharge the publisher's heroes and villains, the publisher's editor-in-chief Axel Alonso said of the new effort that starts this week.

"This ain't a reboot, we're simply hitting the refresh button. 'Marvel NOW!' simply offers a line-wide entry-point into the Marvel Universe that you're already reading about," he said of the endeavor, which starts Wednesday with the release of "Uncanny Avengers" No. 1 in comic shops worldwide.

"All of the stories take place in the aftermath of 'Avengers Vs. X-Men.' New creative teams — each of which are deeply invested in their titles — will take your favorite titles in bold new directions," Alonso said of the calamitous events of the best-selling and just-concluded mini-series that saw the return of the fabled Phoenix force and the death of some key characters, notably Charles Xavier.

The move, announced earlier this year, drew some initial comparisons to rival DC Entertainment's relaunch of its entire line of comics a year ago, one that has helped boost its sales and market presence. The most recent figures for sales showed that in Sep-



"Iron Man" is part of Marvel Comics' new initiative aimed at recharging the publisher's heroes and villains.

tember while Marvel had the top-selling comic book, DC had spots two through 10.

Tom Brevoort, senior vice president for publishing at Marvel, said the new "NOW!" series aren't about relaunching characters with new origins or back

stories but about shaking up the characters with new writers and artists.

"Think of it as a game of musical chairs, wherein the best creators in comics all move to a new 'seat' in the form of a new title and character," he said, noting that those names

include Brian Michael Bendis, Steve Epting, Jonathan Hickman, Geoff Darrow, Matt Fraction and Leinil Francis Yu, among others.

"For as good as our recent runs have been, there was beginning to build a sense of complacency among the readership — like they know exactly what to expect from a Captain America or an X-Men or an Avengers, whether they liked it or not, because the same creators had been shepherding those properties for so many years," Brevoort said.

"By making this kind of a creative switch, we create energy and excitement across virtually the entirety of our publishing line all at once."

The new titles will include series featuring Iron Man, the now-named "Indestructible Hulk," Deadpool and the "All-New X-Men," among them.

Alonso said that longtime readers won't find their favorite characters radically altered in mind or matter.

"Nope. It's the same Universe that readers have been invested in for years," he said. "The only change is some subtle tweaks to some costumes."

Judy Garland's 'Wizard of Oz' dress could sell for millions at auction

ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES — The Dorothy dress is going up for auction.

Celebrity auctioneer Darren Julien says Judy Garland's original costume from "The Wizard of Oz" could sell for half a million dollars when it hits

the auction block next month.

The white puff-sleeve blouse and blue gingham pinafore has inspired countless Halloween costumes since the film was released in 1939. Although several identical dresses were made for the production, the dress to be sold is the only version

seen in the film and the only complete original dress to survive.

The outfit will be on view at London's Stafford Hotel beginning Tuesday, before being exhibited at Julien's Auctions in Beverly Hills, Calif., Nov. 5-9, prior to the auction Nov. 9-10.