



Cancer Bats

★★★★

Searching for Zero

Death is brutal. Ditto Cancer Bats' *Searching for Zero*. As it should be. Reportedly fueled by the passing of several close friends, the Toronto

NOW HEAR THIS

metalcore's fifth album is a cathartic outpouring of grief and anger, with primal-scream frontman Liam Cormier raging against the dying of the light as his bandmates support him with furious

riffage, powerhouse grooves and muscular sludge every bit as heavy as these songs' subject matter. Play it loud enough to wake the dead.

Seth Avett & Jessica Lea Mayfield

★★★★ 1/2

Seth Avett & Jessica Lea Mayfield Sing Elliott Smith

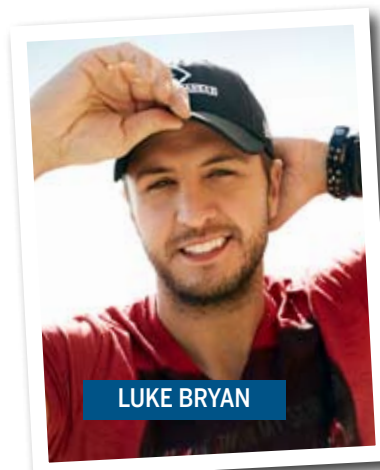
Misery loves company. But at least it's good company. As their album title makes clear, singer-songwriters and sometime tourmates Seth Avett and Jessica Lea Mayfield join forces and voices on this full-length tribute to tragic troubadour Smith. A true labour of love, the stripped-down affair spans and celebrates his career without reinventing it, as Avett and Mayfield tenderly render the late balladeer's bleakly beautiful works with rootsy simplicity and emotional sincerity.

Luke Bryan

★★

Spring Break... Checkin' Out

Enough is enough. Even for Bryan, it finally seems. After seven EPs in as many years, country star Bryan supposedly says this will be his last trip to spring break. Which seems about right for a 38-year-old married father of two. But that doesn't stop him from singing another handful of radio-ready ditties about pickups, motels, romance, parties, shots, hangovers and the beach — and how much he's going to miss it all. Grow up already, dude.



Modest Mouse

★★★★

Strangers to Ourselves

No wonder Isaac Brock feels like a stranger: It's been almost eight years to the day since the singer-guitarist released his last Modest Mouse album. Thankfully, he seems to have made good use of his time. The Portland band's long-overdue sixth album — the followup to 2007's lacklustre *We Were Dead Before the Ship Even Sank* — captures

album of the week

Brock back at his idiosyncratic and iconoclastic best. Armed as always with blackly humorous lyrics (One of many magnificent examples: "God is an Indian and you're an a**hole / Get on your horse and ride"), his endearingly yelpy pipes and an eclectic music slate that runs the gamut from David Byrne funk and psychedelic country to calliope rock, lilting Caribbean pop and serial killer hip-hop, Brock takes you on a colourful, meandering jaunt through his bizarre worldview and unorthodox craftsmanship. Strange but true. And truly intriguing.



Brandi Carlile

★★★★ 1/2

The Firewatcher's Daughter

She's not out of the woods yet. After five albums, Washington singer-songwriter Carlile remains one of roots music's best-kept secrets. And an artist who's still capable of delivering a heartrending acoustic ballad and a scorching electric rocker with equal conviction and perfection — as these dozen emotionally deep and compelling cuts make abundantly clear. Though she's still one hit away from the fame and mainstream acclaim she deserves, it shouldn't be long now — where there's smoke, etc. Keep your eyes peeled.

Of Montreal

★★★★

Aureate Gloom

There are two sides to every story. Even when Kevin Barnes is the only one talking. The eccentric frontman's 13th Of Montreal album — reportedly created during the "golden despondency" of his recent divorce — proves as self-contradictory as its handle. No surprise for a breakup album, Barnes is a bundle of raw nerves and emotional indecision, pinballing back and forth from bitterness to forgiveness and grief to optimism (often in the same song). And he's no more settled on the musical side, colouring his frank self-examinations with a shapeshifting mix of '60s pop and '70s art-rock that nods at everyone from The Kinks and Zeppelin to Talking Heads, Iggy and Bowie's Berlin period and more. Story of his life.



Joel Plaskett

★★★★

The Park Avenue Sobriety Test

Everyone's past determines their present. Even Joel Plaskett. And especially now, apparently. As its enigmatically acronymic handle hints, the restlessly creative and critically beloved Nova Scotia singer-songwriter's umpteenth album finds him sifting the ashes of his youth and coming to terms with impending middle age (he'll be 40 in April). On the lyrical front, that translates to a slate of nostalgic narratives dealing with life and death, love and loneliness, success and sacrifice, and grasping the difference between being broke and being broken — all delivered with his usual nimble wordplay, grounded narratives and off-the-cuff spontaneity. On the musical side, it means going with the flow, playing it by ear and ticking all the boxes in his stylistic repertoire, from scrappy indie-rock to acoustic folk-blues to Celtic-tinged fare and Americana jams reminiscent of Dylan and The Band's *Basement Tapes*. Put it to the test. You won't be disappointed.



Awolnation

★★★

Run

Aaron Bruno is a man on the move. The L.A. electro-rocker at the helm of Awolnation evades the sophomore slump on his second full-length — chiefly by dialing back the overused dance grooves and ADD songwriting of his 2011 debut *Megalithic Symphony*. In their stead: A more focused approach that emphasizes classic-sounding piano-rock and traditional structures (though he still flirts with electronica, emo, soulful synth-folk and plenty more over the course of the 55-minute album). It could use some sharper hooks, but all in all, a step in the right direction.

Santa Cruz

★★★

Santa Cruz

"We all need bona fide heroes," claim Santa Cruz on their eponymous sophomore album. It's easy to see where they found theirs. In stark contrast to their yacht-rocking handle, these Finns worship at the leopard-skin altar of classic glam-slam guitar-squeal headbangers like Mötley Crüe, Guns N' Roses and fellow countrymen Hanoi Rocks — with dashes of Buckcherry's foul-mouthed defiance and some electronica touches to make things seem slightly contemporary. Even so, this disc is less Santa Cruz than a Sunset Strip Cruise a circa 1985.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST

The Ramones

★★★★

Live at German Television

Hey, ho, let's go — to Germany in 1978, when Joey, Johnny, Dee Dee and Marky filmed this episode of the TV series *Musikladen* while touring for their fourth album *Road to Ruin*. Reportedly their first European TV appearance, it's also one of their best small-screen sets: A sweat-soaked, adrenaline-fueled document of the band at their peak, as they blast through 26 classics in 50 minutes on a cramped stage that can barely contain their frenzy and aggression. Even better: Along with the DVD, you get the full gig on 180-gram vinyl in a gatefold sleeve. Gabba gabba yay!



Texas

★★★

Texas 25

Apparently you CAN mess with Texas. Provided you actually are Texas — the Scottish band, that is. The long-serving soul-popsters celebrate their silver anniversary by reworking their back catalogue with retrophile producers Truth & Soul, who put old-school Motown and Stax filters on tunes like *Black Eyed Boy*, *Halo* and *I Don't Want a Lover*. Four new songs reward the faithful, while the bonus disc of original versions makes a fine primer for newbies.

Vanilla Fudge

★★★

Spirit of '67

Spirit, Sound and Set List. For their first album in eight years, these undying '60s stalwarts pay tribute to the year 1967 by covering everything from *I Heard it Through the Grapevine* and *Tracks of My Tears* to *I Can See for Miles*, *Break on Through* and even *I'm a Believer*. And, of course, by retooling them all into organ-drenched psychedelic-rock jams underpinned by Carmine Appice's funky midtempo wallop and topped with Mark Stein's burly vocals. They'll keep you hanging on.

Toto

★★

XIV

Old dogs don't need new tricks — provided they can still pull off the old ones. But despite the presence of three original members and a longtime frontman, these classic-rock radio mainstays can't recapture the magic on their first disc in nearly a decade. Granted, they do resurrect their impeccably crafted sound, from Steve Lukather's glossy guitar heroics to the vintage-sounding synths and arena-sized vocals. But the razor-sharp hooks and choruses of old have given way to forgettable corporate rock and sub-Steely Dan pop. Hey, nobody can hold the line forever.

Gill Landry

★★★

Gill Landry

It's another dose of his own medicine. Old Crow Medicine Show guitarist Landry returns with his third solo album — and tones down the rootsy busker rave-ups of his day job in favour of laid-back country-folk and Americana troubadourism. The biggest surprise: His earthy, sincere tunes are topped with a warm baritone more reminiscent of Billy Bragg than Bob Dylan. Hey, even an Old Crow can learn some new tricks.

Tobias Jesso Jr.

★★★★

Goon

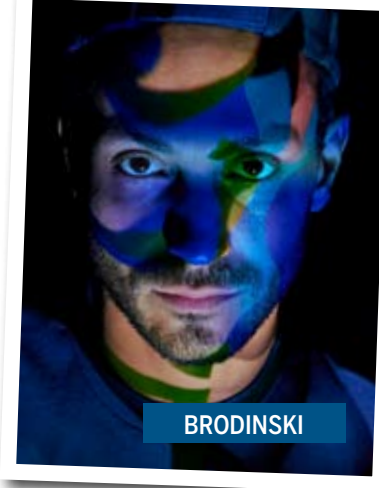
Nothing succeeds like failure. Take it from Tobias Jesso Jr. After the Vancouver bassist's music career and romance hit a dead end in L.A., he returned home and sat down at a family piano he could barely play. And what emerged was a slate of '70s-style singer-songwriter ballads — about failure, heartbreak and Hollywood, naturally — that sound like the best songs Harry Nilsson and Randy Newman never wrote. Now he's got an album deal, collaborators like Girls' JR White, Black Keys' Patrick Carney and New Pornographers' John Collins, boundless critical praise and an artistic voice of his own. We should all be so unlucky.

Pile

★★★★

You're Better Than This

Get ready to pile on. These rebellious Boston indie-rockers have been earning widespread kudos — and based on their third full-length, it's warranted. Noisy and gnarly and knotty, ramshackle and rambunctious, irregular and irreverent, *You're Better Than This* crashes, slashes, thrashes and bashes as it flashes back to the '90s in a tangle of messy mayhem. At the same time, though, there's no denying it's crafted and thought-out, its angularly dissonant guitars and syncopated rhythms playing off each other and against the frontman's unbridled yelping and smart-aleck lyrics. It doesn't get much better than that.



Mat Kearney

★★★

Just Kids

Everyone's got a tale to tell. And if you wanted to hear Kearney's, here's your chance. The sincere, spiritual singer-songwriter waxes autobiographically nostalgic on his fourth major-label release, reminiscing about his youth in Oregon, his move to Nashville, his slow-but-steady career growth and more. If you think that sounds a bit too self-indulgently personal, well, you're probably right. Thankfully, Kearney's husky Chris Martinesque vocals, catchy melodies and unique brand of synth-dappled folk-hop have enough universal appeal to keep you listening. That's just fine.

Brodinski

★★★★ 1/2

Brava

It's a small world after all. Particularly Brodinski's world. The prolific French DJ and remixer boldly and creatively crosses musical borders on his long-awaited debut album, melding dark techno wizardry with the gritty street-level dynamics of hip-hop, American trap and Dirty South rap. And with the help of strong guest vocalists like Slim Thug, Bloody J and SD, he crafts intoxicatingly rich yet hedonistically aggressive tracks that club kids and rap fiends can both love. Music may not be the universal language, but in Brodinski's case, it's definitely an international one.

In the pipeline

March 24

Courtney Barnett

Sometimes I Sit and Think, and Sometimes I Just Sit

Bee Gees

Bee Gees 1974-1979

The Cribs

For All My Sisters

Miley Cyrus

Bangerz Tour

The Go! Team

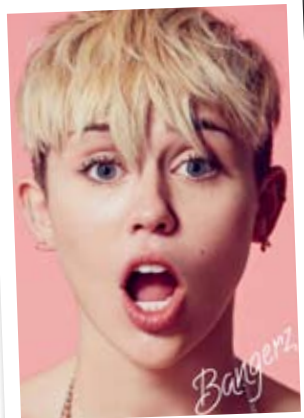
The Scene Between

Happyness

Weird Little Birthday

Laura Marling

Short Movie



Nellie McKay

My Weekly Reader

Van Morrison

Duets: Re-Working The Catalogue

Strung Out

Transmission. Alpha. Delta

Vetiver

Complete Strangers

Various Artists

MusiCares Tribute to Paul McCartney

