



Biffy Clyro

The Myth Of The Happily Ever After WARNER

Lockdown experimentation from the everinventive Scottish trio takes on a life of its own.



hen Biffy Clyro released their eighth album, A Celebration Of Endings, in August 2020 it was a bittersweet experience. On the one hand, it revealed itself to be a creative high point of their career, an adrenalised and moving collision of their punk roots and pop nous, seasoned with the glorious, instantly recognisable weirdness they've somehow smuggled onto mainstream radio playlists. On the other hand, it arrived during the stillest of summers, when playing the songs live – this band's entire reason for existing – was out of the question.

Rather than falling into the comforting arms of Netflix marathons, the band retreated to their Ayrshire farmyard rehearsal space and started work on what was intended to be a reaction piece to ACOE, but became its own unique beast. Darker in tone than its predecessor, nihilism goes into battle with hope, dark and light fight for supremacy, while frontman Simon Neil bares his soul with the confidence of a man who has taken time to explore and accept his own strengths and flaws.

Musically, there's a lot to digest, a sense of euphoric panic rising in the brassy, joyous Witch's Cup and the soaring A Hunger In Your Haunt, which is anchored by a trademark stuttering breakdown guaranteed to make it a live highlight.

Separate Missions is shadowy synth pop that Depeche Mode in their prime wouldn't turn their noses up at, while mournful opener DumDum's echoing percussion and out-of-body vocals that seem to float up from the void make it a cinematic but disconcerting listen. Lyrically, meanwhile, there are returning Biffy motifs loaded with meaning: witches, religion, horses, The latter is hidden in the title of Haru *Urara*, a reference to a Japanese racehorse known as "the shining star of losers everywhere" for continuing to give her all in the face of consistent defeat. And this, as the song builds from a downbeat moment of contemplation to metamorphose into a gleaming, thunderous stadium rock anthem, is the crux of the record. We are, as Errors In The History Of God suggests, a giant mistake as a species, and yet we keep going, keep striving to be better. We end on a meandering, unpredictable, entirely wonderful moment of madness with Slurpy Slurpy Sleep, Working itself into a frenzy alongside a heartfelt plea to not waste a precious second on hate and division: 'We're only here once. Please give it all you've got before the rhythm stops... Give love to everyone.' Beautiful in style and intent, The Myth Of The Happily Ever After has magic written into every note.

Emma Johnston

They Might Be Giants

BOOK IDLEWILD RECORDINGS

Deluxe lyric and photography tome with a marvellous pop twist.



A driver in a gold mask. Doors painted on a wall. Cellophane

people shells. A couple with huge eyeballs where their heads should be. Simply describing the Brian Karlsson photographs accompanying the They Might Be Giants lyrics in the deluxe book housing their latest album BOOK seems to write even more TMBG lyrics, which may be the boffin pop duo's post-modern intent. The album itself is as fine a collection of infectious, genrehopping melodic vignettes about random stuff as they've produced in recent years: punk pop songs biographing a dinosaur (Brontosaurus), go-go power rock about waking up (I Can't Remember The Dream). new-wave ragtime about various forms of physical and emotional poison (Darling, The Dose). Synopsis For Latecomers comes on like a drama-rap lecture entitled "Who ate the babies?", Moonbeam Rays is a masterclass in surf-rock loneliness and there are even bouts of Middle-Eastern lounge samba (Super Cool) and experimental noise montage (If Day For Winnipeg). I couldn't put it down.

Mark Beaumont

Crazy Lixx

Street Lethal FRONTIERS MUSIC
Old-school hard rock like
they're not supposed to make
any more.



Hair metal never died, it just went underground. Swedish

bombshells Crazy Lixx have spent the best part of 20 years making Steel Panther look as frivolous as Radiohead, building a small but dedicating following of people who haven't stopped partying since 1989.

Their eighth album is as immaculate as modern hard rock gets. Street Lethal knows exactly what it is – any album featuring a song called Caught Between The Rock'N'Roll is leaning into the clichés, and doing it with a massive wink. But there's nothing jokey about the massive choruses that prop up Anthem For America and The Power, while blockbusting ballad

One Fire - One Goal is the sound of a million bubble perms being tossed in slow motion.

It's preposterous, naturally, but it's also a massive amount of pure, unembarrassed fun. And if the world needs anything right now, it's that.

Dave Everley

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Starlite Campbell Band

The Language Of Curiosity SUPERTONE

Retro rockers who are offering a fresh twist.



A husband- and wife-led group who divide their time between the

UK and Europe, the Starlite Campbell Band have a fresh take on 60s and 70s British R&B, a clean sound and an enthusiastic approach that gives their second album, *The Language Of Curiosity*, an immediate appeal.

The songs are all original – although there are hints of Brown Sugar on Gaslight, and a more direct nod to You Really Got Me on Said So, but the atmospheric guitar solo later on owes absolutely nothing to the Kinks. There are also shades of Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac on slow-burning ballad It Ain't Right.

Their songs are well constructed, following the format of their favourite era, and they know the importance of a good hook. In contrast to their retro musical style their lyrics have an engaging, contemporary flavour with subjects ranging from lying politicians to refugees via casual sex.

Hugh Fielder

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The Joy Formidable

Into The Blue HASSLE

Melodic noise-gazers charge ever further into relevance.



As one of very few bands to recognise the pop potential of revisiting

shoegaze back in 2007, The Joy Formidable have spent a decade watching themselves grow into fashion from a distance. First dream pop and nu shoe echoed the oceanic hooks of *Whirring* and *Austere*, now Wolf Alice top the charts with a brew drawn from the same suave-gothic chalice. Singer Ritzy Bryan acknowledges the link by delivering *Gotta Feed My Dog*

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- the glowering fulcrum of this fifth album - in breathy Ellie Rowsell-like whispers, but otherwise TJF stick to their guns on an album of romantic turmoil and outsider self-assurance that's equal parts waft and heft. Chimes is a power-pop gig in the crypt of the sonic cathedral; Sevier the sound of thrash metal chasing ambient music around the pews. The band's heartgrabbing riff hooks found on Into The Blue and the sultry Siouxsie Farrago are in short supply, but as closer Left Too Soon grows from astral acoustic ballad to customary cataclysm, there's no let-up in their seductive assault. Blue Weekend fans: here's the Wolf mother.

Mark Beaumont

Lucifer

Lucifer IV CENTURY MEDIA RECORDS

Hell ain't a bad place to be.

Like sinking back into the



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Like sinking back into the silk-lined interior of a luxury burial

casket, there's something ever so comfortable about *Lucifer IV* - 11 immaculately upholstered raves from the grave in that familiar 70s Lucifer style, Nicke Platow Andersson in charge of writing and Johanna Platow Andersson providing those seductively sweet vocals. Gothic proto metal anthems rarely come better formed than

Archangel of Death, Crucifix (I Burn For You), the playfully punning Wild Hearses and the chirpy crypt-trip that is Mausoleum. It might all be schlock horror rock'n'roll but it's executed with power, precision and expert pacing; the brisk canter of Bring Me His Head and Phobos are about as fast as things get, but there's plenty of ghoulish groove in Cold As A Tombstone, Orion and Louise. Four albums and the formula

fine, thank you very much.

Essi Berelian

seems to be holding out just

Candlebox

Wolves PAVEMENT ENTERTAINMENT

Seattle veterans still brilliantly mixing pop rock and grunge.

As soon as All



Down Hill From Here Now slides into gear, it's clear Candlebox

have another winner. Seventh album *Wolves* is laced with the instant melodic sensibility and spikey grunge style rhythms which have always been the Seattle band's trademark.

The glowering Sunshine and the anthemic My Weakness are as good as anything they've done before, with Kevin Martin's vocals wringing every drop of emotion from the slow-burning We. And Nothing Left To Lose shows they can still light up the trail with blazing riffs, while

Trip has an unmistakable Tom Petty timbre.

Never a band to follow trends, Candlebox are still a force.

Malcolm Dome

Mastodon

Hushed & Grim

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Twenty years in, Georgia's prog-metal heroes continue to amaze with album eight.



At this stage in Mastodon's career, you simultaneously know what

you're going to get, and also have no idea what to expect. It's Shrödinger's Prog. All of the touchstones fans treasure remain: tooth-rattling riffs; three equally powerful but individually unique vocalists combining to create a beautiful, intensely masculine melodic tapestry: tricksy time signatures and wild flights of musical fancy ensuring we never quite know where the journey will take us. And yet, despite all the thunder, Hushed & Grim is the most delicate record to date, filled with emotion. doubt, grief, regret and sorrow.

In *The Crux* alone, twitchy, claustrophobic metal makes way for a dreamy, mournful middle section that punches the heart without mercy. *The Beast*, meanwhile, is built on a solid foundation of blues, manipulated and twisted into

something bigger, darker and purely Mastodon, while Middle-Eastern flourishes on *Dagger* bring in a new dimension. That's just the tip of a colossal iceberg – this is a work of beauty and beastliness in equal measure.

Emma Johnston

Quill

Riding Rainbows QUILLUKCOM
Up, up and away in their
beautiful balloon.



Drummer Bev Bevan is, of course, one of the founders of ELO. He also

saved Black Sabbath's bacon in '83 on their woozy *Born Again* tour. Lately he's been spending his time with Quill, a British folkprog institution lead by Joy Strachan-Brain that has boasted members of Diamond Head, Cuddly Toys. Ark and more over the years. Riding Rainbows, their latest album, also has its share of celebrity sightings, including ex-Sab singer Tony Martin, who lends his bluesy rasp to the spacev neo-ballad We're Only Human, and Amen Corner's Andy Fairweather-Low, who drips his buttery vocals all over the mellow early 70s radio-rock pastiche Black Dog Day. And as the album's title - and the presence of a violin player - may suggest, this is largely a pastoral pop affair, breezy and warm, not unlike the Fifth

Dimension, if they were from that *Wicker Man* island.

Sleazearinder

Toledo Steel

Heading For The Fire

DISSONANCE

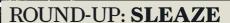
Traditional heavy metal with a serrated edge.



The New Wave Of Traditional Heavy Metal may not match its NWOBHM

antecedent in terms of prominence, but for those paying attention, it's reassuring to see young contenders taking up the mantle as Saxon and Judas Priest edge ever closer to retirement. Since 2011, Southampton's Toledo Steel have stirred up quite the buzz, and Heading For The Fire cuts a distinctive swathe through the trad metal pack. Armed with a contemporary guitar tone sharp enough to shave a bison, they load each song with a fistful of vicious riffs (Into The Unknown, On The Loose), recalling the melodic bludgeon of Accept and Diamond Head. Smoke And Mirrors is a shade more generic, redeemed by a punchy chorus, but in the main they interpret traditional metal tropes with verve and imagination, landing knockout blows with Wicked Woman and Last Rites.

Rich Davenport





Experiment
This Will Leave A Mark

TRANSUBSTANS



It's been nearly 20 years since Swedish speedrockers Rickshaw took a dirtnap and Experiment. Taking their cues from the strutting sleaze of *Powerage*-era AC/DC and everything good that came out of Detroit in 1973, the band have become standard-bearers for down'n'dirty, street-level rock'n'roll. *This Will Leave A Mark* is their tenth album and it's a doozy. There's a satisfying undercurrent of 80s Sunset Strip sleaze to a lot of tracks here, especially on slinky rockers like opener *DirtShot* and the

shamelessly cock-rocking Benefit Of The Doubt. It's like Jizzy Pearl and Stephen Pearcy are in the room with 'em, winking lasciviously and tapping their fairy boots to the beat. Elsewhere underground punk'n'roll hero Jeff Dahl pops in for the fiery Hand Grenade, the band goes total doom for the Satanic panic of Devil's Lake, and they otherwise pulverise everything in sight. Horns up.

The Prehistorics

Racket Du Jour SELF-RELEASE



Fifth album from Australian rock'n'roll legends so underground this is the first time you're

hearing about them. If you have certain expectations about Aussie rock bands (ie they should sound like Radio Birdman with a sprinkle of The Scientists), this will exceed those. They also do powerpop so good I forgot I hated powerpop.

Gasolines

Cannonball Run SELF-RELEASE
THEGASOLINESPOCK RANDCAMPCOM



Speedball rockabillyinspired action rock psychosis from Norway that leans heavily towards the

Glucifer end of the balls-out rawk'n'roll spectrum. Like sure, that pompadour and Elvis medallion will get you in the door, but once you get there, it's a goddamn free-for-all. Furious. Will probably give a few of you heart attacks.

By Sleazegrinder

Siouxsie & The Skunks

Songs About Girls

IOUXIEANDTHESKUNKS.BANDCAMP.CO



Spooky Italian garage rockers who sound like skeletons banging away in the graveyard. Best is the creepy-

crawl of Jesus (All Your Friends Are Fake) and the hilariously nihilistic I Wanna Die (Something Good) - like a cartoon giraffe tossing herself into a dumpster.

The Trash Crawlers

Buzz Off MOMMY'S MISTAKES



Berlin's Trash Crawlers sound like Betsy Bitch fronting a 70s punk band, only Betsy can't

she's just bellowing the whole thing. It's raucous, punchy and threatens to careen outta control at any moment. I dunno what the fuck *Red Leather* is about, but it sounds like a crucial teenage anthem.

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