

THE HARD STUFF ALBUMS



Biffy Clyro

The Myth Of The Happily Ever After WARNER

Lockdown experimentation from the ever-inventive Scottish trio takes on a life of its own.



When 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 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, genre-hopping 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.

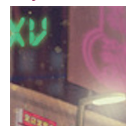
★★★★★

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

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

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*

