



Cherie Currie

Blvds Of Splendor BLACKHEART

Former Runaway finally comes home.



A lucky few may have bagged a truncated early copy of this star-studded, return-to-form third solo album from the former Runaways vocalist as it enjoyed limited release last Record Store Day, but its convoluted history reaches far further back than that. In fact work on these recordings (with ex-GN'R/Velvet Revolver drummer Matt Sorum in the production chair) commenced in 2010. But life, in some of its more bizarre incarnations, got in the way.

Initially, Currie decided to concentrate on her chainsaw carving (yes, you read it right), then 2015's *Reverie* album with her notorious ex-mentor Kim Fowley took precedence due to Fowley's failing health, and in 2016 she suffered serious injuries while chainsaw carving (what are the chances?). It's perplexing in retrospect that *Blvds Of Splendor* should have spent quite so long occupying Currie's back burner. It's a decidedly front-burner kind of record and, not to put too fine a point on it, her solo career's been in virtual stasis since her debut post-Runaways outing (*Beauty Is Only Skin Deep*) of '78.

Blvds Of Splendor positively drips with self-assurance. Currie's vocal performance, which could be dramatic to the point of histrionic in Runaways days, now carries a strength and gravitas that suits her respected pioneer status. And her band?

Packed with high-profile A-list acolytes giving their very best (Smashing Pumpkin Billy Corgan, Slash and Duff GN'R, Brody Dalle, Juliette Lewis, The Veronicas augmenting a core combo that features Sorum, and Currie's son Jake Hays), they're clearly having a ball.

Exploding out of the traps with the all-Gunners-blazing *Mr X*, *Blvds* clearly means business and compounds the muscular groove with *Roxy Roller* (where *You Drive Me Wild* riffing meets Suzi Q dynamics). Corgan makes his mark with a Pumpkins-esque title track (all emphatic strings, pinging guitar harmonics, scrubbing acoustics and co-sung choruses). *Force To Be Reckoned With* swaggers with loose-ass Stooges hand claps and delinquent 'na-na-na's, while *Rock & Roll Oblivion* cranks up the drama to compelling effect, leaving the listener baffled as to why Currie hasn't been making records like this for the last 40 years.

There are also, perhaps predictably, hand-picked covers. An emotive assault on *The Air That I Breathe* soars reliably, while a closing all-hands-(Dalle/Lewis/Veronicas)-on-deck romp through The Runaways' *Queens Of Noise* is pure ballsy joy.

An appropriately splendid return that's more than worth the wait.



Ian Fortnam

The Bobby Lees

Skin Suit ALIVE NATURALSOUND

Big Apple screamin': Gotham fights back.

None-more-feral upstate New York noiseniks the Bobby Lees have stripped garage rock to its barest essentials on this second set with Jon Spencer (delivering his usual trademark up-claustrophobically-close-and-personal production job) at the controls. It's rock'n'roll as it ought to be: off-the-hook, unhinged, ravaged by Satan, hysterically vital, kicking both serious arse and against polite society's pricks. Guitars crash down unlikely Robert Quine scales, vocals emote wildly. It's a blues explosion, alright.

As undisciplined as No Wave, as steeped in comatose cool as 70s CBGB's original Blank Generation (whose Richard Hell-penned anthem is delivered in appropriately savage style at the album's conclusion) and as stylishly ferocious as the Yeah Yeah Yeahs. *Guttermilk* is 90 seconds of attitude: Sam Quartin coughing up roaring gobbets of pure angst against an unstable backdrop of canyon-deep Sun Studios reverb; guitarist Nick Casa sounding uncannily like Jon Spencer himself on an all-messed-up-like-an-Elvis-from-hell blurt through *Ranch Baby*. Whatever, if you haven't read enough to buy the bastard yet, you probably don't deserve it.



Ian Fortnam

Paradise Lost

Obsidian NUCLEAR BLAST

Power and beauty from Halifax's finest with album 16.



While pacing the floor and gnawing your knuckles in lockdown, there

are two ways you can handle the unique horror of 2020. You could take the full-colour, bright and optimistic option. But if that's just not in your DNA, then *Paradise Lost* are back with the perfect noise for embracing, owning and then casting out the darkness.

Three years on from the uncompromising *Medusa*, *Obsidian* finds the band playing to their strengths magnificently, from the ponderous, paranoid, string-drenched doom of opener *Darker Thoughts*, to the utterly magnificent, sumptuous goth dream of *Ghosts*, a thing of inky wonder that combines militaristic, driving rhythms with atmospheric, swirling riffs. With 32 years of influences and

invention under their belt, they mix in metal and alt.rock flourishes with laser accuracy, packed with ideas but not a note surplus to requirements, with frontman Nick Holmes's portentous growl piling drama on top of the drama.

The volcanic glass the album takes its title from is said to protect against negative energy, and here *Paradise Lost* pull the same trick by turning the bleakness in on itself to create something beautiful.



Emma Johnston

Throwing Muses

Sun Racket FIRE

Grime and glory aplenty on the Muses' murky tenth.



As much as vocalist/guitarist Tanya Donnelly's melodic silver

linings are missed on the reunited *Throwing Muses'* more recent albums (well, recent-ish; the last, *Purgatory/Paradise*, was in 2013), it's heartening to find Kristin Hersh back to her proto-grunge roots. Hersh famously feels like a slave to her own songwriting, and this tenth album feels more like a stalking creature than ever, creeping from the murky art-garage depths of *Dark Blue*, and *Bywater* sounding as dank, menacing and malformed as their late-80s heyday, even while Hersh is singing about flushing a goldfish called Freddie Mercury to freedom. There's a filth and frenzy to the likes of *Frosting*, *Bo Diddleley Bridge* and the otherworldly *St Charles* that perfectly counterpoints Hersh's more delicate and intricate solo work, echoed here on cranky junkstore ballads like *Kay Catherine*, *Milk At McDonalds* and *Sue's*.

Sun Racket is a worthy addition to a formidable canon.



Mark Beaumont

House Of Lords

New World-New Eyes

FRONTIERS

Lords have their house in order.

There's been a tendency in recent years to tar any band that broke through in the late 80s with the 'hair band' brush, but when *House Of Lords* hit the rock scene in 1988 they had more in common with Whitesnake and Deep Purple than with the likes of Poison. At their best, they paired hard-rock heft with radio-friendly choruses

shot through with AOR DNA, and that's the case on the majority of *New World-New Eyes*.

The present line-up, centred on original vocalist James Christian and the long-serving Jimi Bell (guitar) and BJ Zampa (drums), have proved their worth since 2005 with a stream of consistently good albums, and they don't disappoint here. Feelgood rockers *One More* and *The Both Of Us* balance polish and power chords, *Chemical Rush* flips from a Zeppelin-eque riff into a slick, strident chorus, and there are accomplished performances throughout from Christian and Bell.



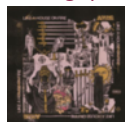
Rich Davenport

Asking Alexandria

Like A House On Fire

SUMERIAN

Owning up and owning it.



If this was Asking Alexandria's second album – following their

2017 self-titled 'debut' – they'd be lauded for how their tough, hard-rock sound is shaping up. But it isn't. This is their sixth album, and they spent the first three building up a solid metalcore fan base on both sides of the Atlantic. That began to crumble when singer Danny Worsnop tore his vocal chords (and/or got tired of screaming,

depending on who you believe) and quit in early 2015. He returned the following year after the band's ill-fated dalliance with a replacement, and the aforementioned self-titled album signalled the change.

Like *A House On Fire* completes the transition. *The Violence* and *Antisocialist* are big-sounding, anthemic rants with hooks, *I Don't Need You* is a ballsy ballad and Worsnop's 'clean' vocals are commanding. They even own up on *Here's To Starting Over*. Whether it will be heard over the howls of "sell-out" from metalcore fans is another matter.



Hugh Fielder

Hawklords

Hawklords Alive

HAWKLOARDS/SHELLSHOCK

Reanimated splinter group keep space fires burning.



Even if none of the current members of Hawklords played a major

role in the story of the band whose name they briefly stole the front half of in 1978, since re-forming in 2008 they've stayed true to the same Hawkish spirit. Their prolific recent output and this sparky live set from last year shows that they can certainly be regarded as honourable fellow travellers.

A rousing *We Are One* from 2013's comeback album of the

same name opens the set with rare verve, and is followed by an equally stirring stab at Robert Calvert's *Aerospaceage Inferno*.

The emphasis, as it was in 1978, is on a more direct, sometimes punkish take on space rock. Big, ebullient choruses beef up the sonic swirls and the synth flourishes, and even if their take on *Masters Of The Universe* suffers from muffled vocals in the mix, the finale of *Brainstorm*, fronted by a guesting Nik Turner, is a curious but crowd-pleasing romp.



Johnny Sharp

Alestorm

Curse Of The

Crystal Coconut NAPALM

Shanties on steroids from piratical Scots.

Pirate-metal is the nicest of genres, but with their sixth album Alestorm remain committed, setting out their fuckaneering manifesto on galloping-hooves opener *Treasure Chest Party Quest* ('We're only here to drink rum, shoot guns and live for the party'). Po-faced music fans will voluntarily walk the plank rather than listen on, but the band's splice of humour, heaviosity and hooks often impresses, with *The Darkness* the obvious reference point, and *Tortuga* coming on like Rage Against The Machine in eye patches.

It gets repetitive before the end, but there are still smirks to

be had, especially on the football hooligan-style diss track *Shit Boat (No Fans)*, on which the Alestorm crew sling insults at a rival frigate ('Your pirate ship can eat a bag of dicks/Your poop deck is a shithole and your rudder is crap'). In these bleak times there are worse places to be than tied to Alestorm's mast.

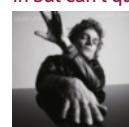


Henry Yates

Brendan Benson

Dear Life THIRD MAN

Hip-hop and electronica creep in but can't quench the rock.



An inspired grunge-pop songwriter, The Raconteurs' Brendan

Benson's on-disc associations with Jack White should be taken merely as recommendations for his superior solo albums.

Seven years on from *You Were Right*, this seventh initially finds him tinkering with auto-tune, electronic atmospheric and drum sampling on future funk and hip-hop-indebted tracks like *I Can If You Want Me To*, the synth country *Half A Boy (Half A Man)* and *Tron* rocker *Good To Be Alive*. His core alt.rock crunch drives the tracks but, like most rockers sacrificing the passion of flesh on string for a lick of modernity, it tends towards the clumsy, cold and tokenistic.

Luckily he stops chasing the Kendrick Lamar dollar three

songs in and starts indulging his buzz-pop heart and soul on Beatledeic, Wilbury-esque cracklers like *Dear Life*, *I Quit*, *Baby's Eyes* and a frankly boastful portrait of family bliss called *Richest Man Alive*.

Classic don't need varnish.

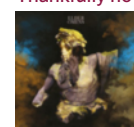


Mark Beaumont

Elder

Omens STICKMAN

Thankfully no sign of Damian.



For majestic spaced-out jams it's pretty hard to beat

Elder, who have now developed well beyond their early stoner and doom roots into a behemoth of intricately proggy heavy psychedelia. With new drummer Georg Edert on board, *Omens* is a sterling evolution of the work put into 2015's *Lore* and 2017's *Reflections Of A Floating World*, the five lengthy tracks benefiting from greater use of Michael Risberg's keyboard skills to lighten the ever-present oceanic swell of riffs. *In Procession*, *Halcyon* and *Embers*, in particular, have a welcome Floydian trippiness to them, with more space to let the compositions breathe and stretch to their full potential. Bags of melody, plenty of light and shade, and great songs. A cosmic triumph.



Essi Berelion

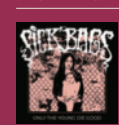
ROUND-UP: SLEAZE



Sick Bags: deliciously unhinged, snotty'n'roll.

Sick Bags

Only The Young Die Good SPAGHETTY TOWN



The current standard bearers of American sleaze rock puke up a deliciously unhinged EP of snotty'n'roll action. Vocalist Mel Medina sounds like some gum-chewing teenage delinquent

with nothing to lose, spitting venom and acid on street-tough glam-punk crunchers like *Livin' With Nothing*, *Loser Love* and the fearsome *Boys Bleed Too*. Sick Bags love Johnny Thunders and the Dead Boys and hate everything else, and they make that aggressively obvious here. It's all pure late-70s nihilistic gutter-rock scorch. The guitar leads of Paul Kirk are frequently alarming in the best way

possible. It sounds like he's literally trying to kill the thing, like it's an angry python and he's trying to strangle it to death before it gets him first. It adds another layer of chaos onto a spicy stew of rock'n'roll degeneracy that does not let up. Every track is a punch right in the throat. It's beautiful. Dig in and stay sick.



Danger

Good Times Overload

FAMILY SPREE



Blistering fuzz-rock action from Spain. Danger's sound is sorta Detroit-meets-Stockholm with an

Autobahn twist, like Sweatmaster and the Sonics and a metronome all driving off a cliff together. It's got organs, it's got tambourines, it's propulsive, it's the kinda thing that practically demands you kick holes through walls. Good times indeed.



Weird Owls

Shoot You Up SELF-RELEASED



Primo destructo-rock from Germany. Weird Owls have the vein-popping tang of sweaty, fleshy 90s noise/grunge

in their delivery, but their tunes are firmly rooted in four-on-the-floor rock'n'roll. Fast, fucked, furious. You know the drill. This EP will take you back to the halcyon days when you were pretty much guaranteed to get kicked in the head at least once at every rock show.



By Sleazegrinder

Knock Nevis

Since You Were Bloody

SELF-RELEASED



Heavy, floor-collapsing rock'n'roll from Athens. The guitar histrionics on this EP are downright reckless. Riffs fly at you

from impossible angles, solos like razor blades. They don't sound like anybody, really, except maybe Motörhead, and even then mostly in velocity and intensity. Excellent soundtrack music for the post-apocalyptic nightmare you're currently in.



Coughin' Nails

Self-titled SELF-RELEASED



Billed as a "horror movie on cassette tape!" but really it's the no-fi collapse of civilisation in under 10 minutes.

New Jersey's Coughin' Nails are so primitive I'm not entirely sure they're human. A deliciously ear-battering garbage bag of horror-tinged fuzz-punk and a few 60s garage rock covers (Seeds, Elevators, Sonics) that sound zero per cent like their source material. It's awful, but I love it.

