



# albums

you, if you said that these were the best days of our lives! — but of course they are, for Blur fans especially. And just as you've been lulled into a smooth, sentimental state, along comes the jumpy 'Charmless Man', with its 'la, la, la' chorus and Graham Coxon's guitar caning! All that's only four songs in!

The strange thing is, despite its perfect pop and super smoothies, the overriding theme of the album is futility. If *Modern Life* was Albarn's idealistic view of England, and *Parklife* was the naughty, fun-loving side, *Escape* is his powerless disgust with what his country is becoming. But as heartless as it sounds, if it's Damon's disappointment that makes him turn out songs like 'The Universal' and 'It Could Be You', then I hope he never snaps out of it. Well, not completely anyway.

What makes *The Great Escape*

so much better than *Parklife*? The same thing that made *Parklife* so much better than *Modern Life*. Albarn's twisted observations are getting darker, the pop is more infectious than Ebola, and you want to listen to the thing over and over. That's what it's all about, really, isn't it?

A Brit-pop masterpiece.

JOHN TAITE

**GOLDIE** *Timeless*  
(FFRR)

And now, heeeeeeeeeee's Goldie, one of the first jungle artists to be signed to a major label and the first to get any real media coverage. *Timeless* breaks out of the jungle mould, though. It does everything — jazz, soul, ambient, hardcore — and merges them all into what Goldie would rather you just called 'music'. It's juxtaposition that sets Goldie apart as an

innovator. Layer 'pon layer, 'pon layer is his style. There are the adrenalin rushes of BPMs racing at 170, the delicate ambient style synth over top, the blips, bass and samples. And he's managed to part the beat sea to let the lyrics through.

When soul gets a look in, it's new urban soul, technological soul that will spin the heads of purists and make them spew. The vocals of Cleveland Watkiss, on 'Adrift', rise above all these sad pulses of sound and a lonely sax. 'State of Mind' is more jazz, but the deconstructed production, the strings and the synth, the backlooped beats and tinkling ivories take it beyond just jazz. 'Sea of Tears' starts out solitary guitar, becomes beats, bass and strings, becomes ocean samples, and then comes crashing down into this sad little guitar again. It all takes 12 minutes. It feels like three minutes.

Goldie's music is to London what hip-hop was to New York — he's absorbing the environment and regurgitating it musically. *Timeless* was produced by Rob Playford (the boss of the immaculate Moving Shadow label), so you have an idea of how smooth this sucker is gonna be. It's all the newest in new. Perhaps too new for many — but once you're in, you're fully into it.

JOHN TAITE

**KING LOSER** *You Cannot Kill What Does Not Live*  
(Flying Nun)

In the corner of the lounge bar sits the new King Loser album, huddled up, desperately dragging on a cigarette, looking cool as fuck in second-hand threads. In walks the *Pulp Fiction* soundtrack, a smart suit and newfound friends. They stare in total awe at Loser, wishing they could be only half as cool.

On YCKWDNL (catchy acronym), King Loser do Dick Dale's 'Miserlou', the opening track on the *Pulp Fiction* album. If you accuse Loser of bandwagon jumping, you'll probably, first, be punched in the face then, secondly, chucked a copy of 1993's *Sonic Super Free Hi-Fi*, which included

songs like 'Surf's Lost' and 'Dick Dale'.

Original surf music seems the epitome of health compared to King Loser's dirtier and sleazier take on it. Guitars die of effects overload, drums (or possibly drummers) explode, keyboards run rampant, while lazy vocals are crooned over the songs by both Celia and Chris Heazlewood. It ends up much more than the sum of its influences.

The surf stuff is only half of Loser's game. They also excel with the exquisite duet 'Morning Dew', the pounding, squally guitar-led 'Song Remains the Same', the 3Ds-y 'Broken Man'. In fact, every song could be singled out for a kiss and a badge of merit.

You knew it had to happen sometime — fashion and King Loser finally coincide. But when fashion inevitably moves on, YCKWDNL will still be the hellish summer groove album that will not die.

MITCHELL HAWKES

**BLACK GRAPE** *It's Great When You're Straight... Yeah*  
(Radioactive)

Well, Damon Albarn may say: 'It's a helping hand that makes you feel wonderfully bland,' but Prozac certainly did wonders for Mr Shaun Ryder. That last Happy Mondays album was a miserable outing of vegetabilised rubbish — they deserved to split. With Shaun hooked on smack and crack, it looked like it was all over for the legend of lad. But, damn, this is good.

It's Black Grape now, though, because the rest of the Mondays abandoned Shaun after he'd messed up their lives and careers. He's hooked up with Kermit from the Ruthless Rap Assassins, and of course Bez is still tagging along adding, um, his Bezness.

Unlike the Roses, who thought rock was the way to salvation, Ryder has stuck to what he does best. *Straight* has brought with it all the attractions of baggy — the funky guitars mixed with dance beats — and taken on 1995 without shame. Kermit's toasting adds a tasty flavour to the proceedings, while Shaun's stream of uncon-

sciousness vocals have risen from the dead — the smug grin is back, the dazed glaze gone. The songs are damn strong, like the heyday of *Pills Thrills and Bellyaches* — that strong. As 'Reverend Black Grape' only hinted at the groovy energy of 'In the Name of the Father', so funk glories like 'Yeah Yeah Brother' only touch on the seedy menace of 'Shake Well Before Opening'.

*Straight* is the sound of a man who has beaten an addiction. It's joy, maaaaan, with some of the brightest and dirtiest beats, some of the funniest and stupidest lyrics ('Jesus was a black man / No, Jesus was Batman / No, that was Bruce Wayne'), some of the coolest riffs, and some of the best fun to come out of the UK this year.

The blacker the grape, the sweeter the juice.

JOHN TAITE

**PET SHOP BOYS** *Alternative*  
(Parlophone)

**NEW ORDER** *(The Rest of) New Order*  
(London)

For better or worse, the Pet Shop Boys and New Order have been influential in the art of developing the 12 inch remix, and of using the 12 inch format as a depository for more indulgent B-side efforts.

The latter is the case on *Alternative*, a lavishly packaged and exhaustive double CD of the Pet Shop's flip side flotsam and jetsam. At worst, these are maybe melodic also rans or poorly judged ambitions like the ('The Sound of the Atom Splitting'), but Tennant and Lowe still seem to have a welter of catchy, melancholic synth lines and ironic disco grooves. It's just over the length of a double CD, the inconsistent ingenuity of even the Pet Shop Boys seems interminable.

(*The Rest of) New Order* is the remix alternative to last year's pretty decent (*The Best of*), and it's an obvious attempt at maintaining the band's public profile in the absence of new material, should that ever be forthcoming.

Most of the remixes here fall into the extended, repetitive and functional dancefloor fodder.

Exceptions include the always brilliant and virtually intact 'True Faith', and a superbly uplifting total renovation of 'Touched by the Hand of God'. There's also a bonus CD, which has the terrifying prospect of seven remixes of 'Blue Monday', with only the ambient and reggae readings doing anything imaginative. The rest is certainly not the best.

GEORGE KAY

**KYUSS** *...And The Circus Leaves Town*  
(Elektra)

As I write, the temperature is still around 35 degrees and the sun has been down for an hour or two. It's the ideal listening state for a new Kyuss, album as it's the same sort of brain scrambling heat that spawned this music. Somehow, I'm beginning to understand how a band from Palm Desert can make the swamiest, murkiest sound imaginable. It's delirium rock. Everything is twisted and warped by the heat, slowed down and heavied out to a point close to critical mass, then launched at the listener's cortex.

Kyuss have moved away from their last album's, massive 20 minute long epics, towards more traditional songs, but they stay pretty twisted. New drummer Alfredo Hernandez is pretty much perfect with bassist Scott Reeder. Thus, the bottom end is about as firmly anchored as any rock band have managed, so guitarist Josh Homme can really work his art over this heavy artillery. The riffs shift from sludgy rumble to pure menace all too comfortably, and periodically just fly skyward in the best rock tradition. It's a hard album to pin down in a few hundred words, but that's why it's so damn wonderful. Long live the desert rock.

KIRK GEE

**DUSTY SPRINGFIELD** *A Very Fine Love* (Columbia)

In 1968, in Memphis, Dusty recorded what remains arguably her very best album. Twenty-five years later she went to Nashville. Sadly, the results do not encourage comparison.

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