

music

GOLDFRAPP



GORILLAZ

Plastic Beach

(Parlophone)

★★★★★

Whether you like his output or not, it's hard to view Damon Albarn as simply a musician as on the strength of this album he's certified himself as a composer and visionary. It's based on an ecological concept so there'd be no point in inviting Mos Def, Bobby Womack, Snoop Dogg and Lou Reed without having the material to back it up. *White Flag* blends grime with Arabic music and makes earlier singles such as *Dare* sound like child's play. With its bass line firmly plugged into early disco, *Stylo* has a wonderfully funky streak with fantastically eerie noises like the sounds of helicopter blades spinning through the air. Mark E Smith sounds suitably angry and shipwrecked on *Glitter Freeze*. Even when the compositions threaten to overwhelm, there's plenty of interesting sounds to marvel at.

LIANNE STEINBERG



RUFUS

WAINWRIGHT

*All Days Are Nights:
Songs For Lulu*

(Decca)

★★★★★

Armed with only his piano and theatrical voice, Wainwright, affected by the loss of his mother to cancer, has made his most intimate, exposed album. The mournful tone is tangible in the vibrato of his voice. Opener *Who Are You New York?* rolls around the question as piano arpeggios insistently tumble beneath his voice. A combination of deeply personal songs alongside adaptations of Shakespeare's sonnets adds plenty of gravitas and his flamboyancies are reined in by stark performances.



GOLDFRAPP

Head First

(Mute)

★★★★★

Within the first synth chords of opener *Rocket*, you half expect Olivia Newton John to start singing, such is the hi-energy, retro disco sound of this album. The influence of Giorgio Moroder is writ large throughout. What makes Goldfrapp all the more chameleon like in their ability to keep fans guessing is the fact that Alison Goldfrapp's vocals never dominate the songs. The title track sounds like a lost Abba song while *Alive* is buoyed by blinding optimism in its lyrics. With such bold colours, it's safe to assume that they're not taking themselves so seriously this time around.



ASH

A-Z Vol 1

(Atomic Heart Records)

★★★★★

Marking the halfway point in their release of 26 singles, this album is packed with the big guitar pop songs you'd expect from the Irish trio. Although it opens with a La Roux-style synth intro, it's not long before Wheeler adds a lovelorn melody and swooping chorus. All of the songs have a signature sound that recalls their mid-1990s heyday. Wheeler's off-key vocals are saved by bristling energy on *Joy Kicks Darkness*. *Pripyat* is an epic piano ballad that plays to Wheeler's romantic side but placed next to the punk stomp of *Ichiban* the album never bores or rests on its laurels.



Q&A: The Wonder Stuff

Miles Hunt lays claim to the legacy of his 1990s band by drafting in new members and touring their celebrated second album *Hup* on an anniversary tour.

Do you still get the same buzz from playing the songs?

We are blessed, and always have been, with the greatest audience the UK has to offer. I think the buzz has been amplified – it means far more now than it ever did. Maybe it's because the songs don't belong solely to the band anymore, we are merely the custodians. The songs really belong to the lives of the people who have had them as their soundtrack for the last two decades.

Why was the time right to tour *Hup* again?

Like birthdays, marriages and any other significant moments in people's

lives, most of us enjoy marking an occasion. *Hup* was our breakthrough album. Two top 20 singles and countless front covers of the UK music press, we were a hard band to ignore 21 years ago.

Does playing the material remind you of the original players?

The young man that I was when we wrote the songs is a stranger to me now – same goes for the people that were there in '89 but latterly chose to walk away. I'm still proud to stand next to Malcolm Treece when we play though. It was Malc and I that did the lion's share of the writing, it was our voices that people were listening to back then and it'll still be our voices they'll be listening to this time around.

What do you remember of the final performance at the Phoenix

Festival in 1994 when you decided to call it quits?

I would have been happier not to play that show. I was looking toward an unknown future, the creativity of the band had stagnated, it was a miserable place to be. I learned a serious lesson back then though – to never place myself in only one environment, especially one where other individuals could derail me.

If you could pick a star line-up from the band's history when you were at the peak of your powers, which era/album would it cover?

I'm in it now. The line-up of the Wonder Stuff 2010 has the best players it has ever had and the other members of the band are four of my favourite people in the world. I've never been able to say that before.

LIANNE STEINBERG