

## This week's top albums

<http://www.thesun.co.uk/article/0,,2006140003-2007430855,00.html>

September 21, 2007

### IAN BROWN – The World Is Yours

#### Rating \*\*\*

FIVE albums into a solo career based as much on charisma as songs, *The World Is Yours* is the first to marry his messianic tendencies with a credible chance at world domination.

The title track recalls his UNKLE collaborations; the beats chunky but less frenetic, allowing room for luscious sweeps of strings.

And it is perhaps the string arrangements which give the album its overriding personality, adding texture and atmosphere to the bare bones of the songs.

*Illegal Attacks* is an anti-war duet with Sinead O'Connor. The lyrics blunt and the melody basic but as with his solo career as a whole, self-belief carries it off.

It's an uncomfortable, awkward choice for a single, but a credit to his headstrong, no-sell-out solo mission. **JS**



### BABEL Pearl Street Raga

#### Rating \*\*\*1/2

ADDING some soul, style and a twist of psychedelia to the current folk boom are six mighty fine musicians from Bristol.

On their debut mini album, *Babel* show bucketloads of promise – vocally, lyrically and musically.

By adding violin, cello and accordion to the basic guitars/percussion, they create full, warm settings for Danny Coughlan's yearning vocals.

It begins with the playful title track, which sounds both timeless and modern, but it's slow burners such as *Daylight Lost* and *Shangri La* that leave the lasting impressions.

The biggest downside is that, with just seven tracks over 28 minutes, you're left hankering for more. Watch this space. **CS**

## MARC BOLAN & T.REX Greatest Hits

Rating \*\*\*\*

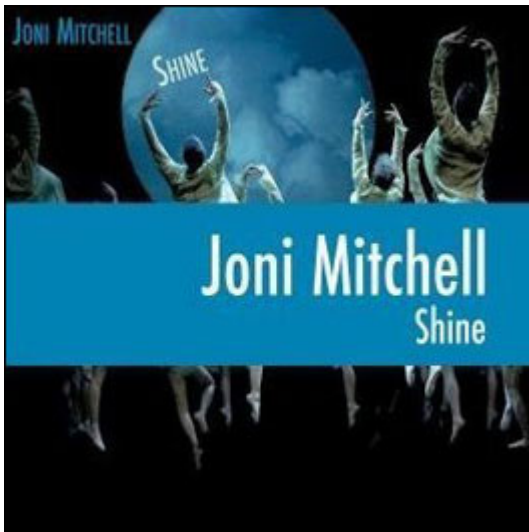
IF you don't own a Bolan compilation get one now. During the early Seventies, T.Rex provided an integral part of the country's soundtrack.

Clocking up ten Top Tens, Marc Bolan was the king of Glam with his deceptively simple tunes produced by Tony Visconti.

He influenced people then and still does today (think Mika, Fratellis, Scissor Sisters, Goldfrapp et al).

From the hippest hippy to Glam's brightest star, Marc was planning a new metamorphosis when he died in a car crash in 1977. He was just 29.

Thirty years on, his music still shines. **SFO**



## JONI MITCHELL - Shine

Rating \*\*\*

JONI MITCHELL comes to an astonishing conclusion on Shine – that war is a very, very bad thing indeed. Thanks, Joni, I'll tell everyone I know.

I'm not arguing with her, it's just the lyrics on state-of-the-nation songs This Place, If I Had A Heart and the title track are unbelievably trite – and at odds with the sophistication we've come to expect.

It rather mars Joni's comeback after five years in retirement, a return that on all other accounts is to be welcomed.

But there's still plenty to enjoy, not least One Week Last Summer – a beautiful instrumental and the best track – and the stripped-down Hejira feel of the music.

There's also a revamp of her eco anthem Big Yellow Taxi, which shows she used to write with a lot more subtlety. **SJC**

## **TWO GALLANTS - Two Gallants**

**Rating \*\*\*\***

THE desperate duo from San Francisco are back with their third album, still sounding like the house band for the last-chance saloon.

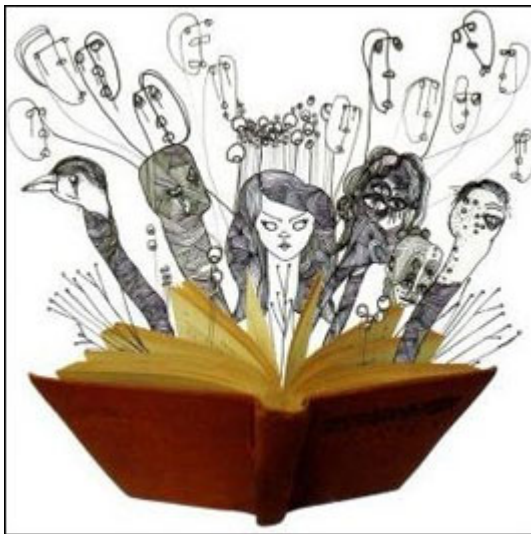
Wasted, lo-fi country/punk/blues perhaps best describes their trade and such is the intensity of their anguished vocals and rickety arrangements you'll be groping for the bourbon.

Here, they're a little more controlled and reflective than on last year's *What The Toll Tells*, filling their songs with high, lonesome harmonica.

But the atmosphere of darkness, emptiness and pain remains.

*Trembling Of The Rose* and *Ribbons Round My Tongue* are typically taken real slow but the pace quickens on *Despite What You've Been Told* for welcome variation.

Music to wallow in. Pass the bottle. **CS**



## **FUTURE OF THE LEFT - Curses 3**

**Rating \*\*\***

RISING largely out of defunct Cardiff alt-rockers Mclusky, a band that doesn't play things by the book.

Dealing in raw, unconventional song structures and built round the angry vocals of Andy "Falco" Falkous, this is an uneasy but entertaining ride.

With 14 songs clocking in at just over 37 minutes, nothing gets too bogged down, from the overtly political F\*\*\* The Countryside Alliance to a simple story of Falco's cat Manchasm.

Occasionally, sparkling tunes break to the surface but mostly this is scuzzy, full-on heaviosity. Final track, a simple piano-led ditty called *The Contrarian*, contrarily turns the grinding brutality on its head.

Not easy to recommend to everyone but admirable for its striking individuality. **CS**

**MICHAEL CAINE - Cained**

**Rating \*\*\***

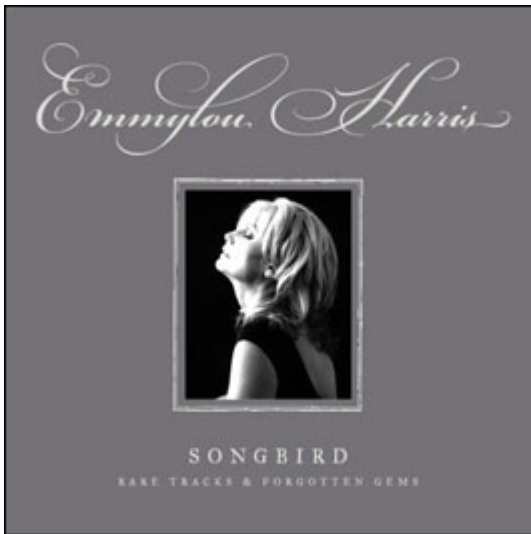
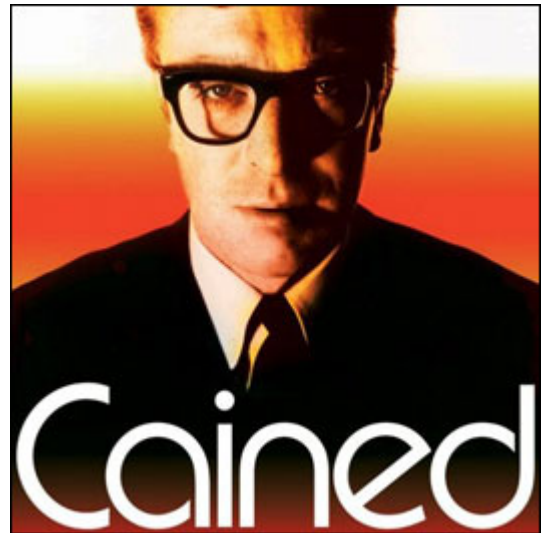
IF ever there was a moment to do that old Michael Caine "not a lot of people know this" impression, now's the time.

Because Caine, it turns out, is a massive fan of chill-out music. He's been making his own compilation tapes for years – hence this album.

And it's a decent collection, too, with covers of Summertime by Wass and Lay Lady Lay by Magnet, through to Chicane's No Ordinary Morning and Bent's Swollen, to jazzier Stan Getz's Street Tattoo and Eva Cassidy's Field Of Gold (the only bum note).

There's also Hurry To Me from Roy Budd, the jazzman who wrote the great Get Carter theme. Funky old bugger. **SFO**

**CS**



**SANDY DENNY - Live At The BBC**

**Rating \*\*\*\***

THERE'S a poignant moment on this album, when Fairport Convention singer Sandy Denny tells an interviewer she hopes her music will one day be more popular.

Six years later, in 1978, she was dead – without ever knowing the affection and respect she came to be held in.

So she'd no doubt be thrilled how fans clamour for albums like this – three discs of solo live recordings plus a DVD of concert footage. It's marred only by the doubling up of a few songs and some ropy sound.

But Denny's wonderful voice and astonishing songwriting ability shine through. **SJC**

**OKKERVIL RIVER - The Stage Names**

**Rating \*\*\*\* 1/2**

IN the nicest possible way, Will Sheff is a bit of a drama queen. His narrative songs ripple with lyrical and musical tension.

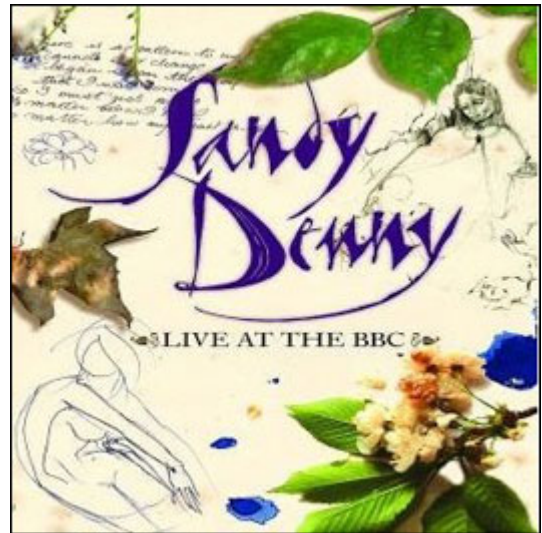
The fourth album by his band from Austin, Texas, is the most ambitious and fully realised effort of a nine-year career.

There's jaunty indie pop, weepy country rock and orchestrated folk.

A Girl In Port even boasts a glam stomp that wouldn't have been out of place in the mid-Seventies.

And the way closing song John Allyn Smith Sails segues into a rewrite of Sloop John B is worth the price of the album alone.

God only knows where some of Will's stories are going but boy do they sound good. **CS**



**SIGMATROPIC - Dark Outside**

**Rating \*\*\*\*1/2**

QUITE possibly the coolest sounds to come out of Greece are these luminous studies in electronica, folk and rock.

Sigmatropic is essentially a vehicle for the gifted Akis Boyatzis, who creates serene cinematic soundscapes to frame fascinating vocal performances.

Friends helping out offering their services here include Giant Sand's Howe Gelb, who lends his laidback drawl to the trip-hoppy White, and Willard Grant Conspiracy's Robert Fisher, whose sturdy baritone brings power and grace to two songs. (Check out *The Blue Side Of The Sun*.)

Add in fine vocals contributions from Akis and sultry - voiced band member Anna Karakalou and you've a thoroughly engaging listen. **CS**



## DROPKICK MURPHYS - The Meanest Of Times

Rating \*\*\*

CLEARLY these barmy Bostonians take their cue from their brothers across the Atlantic on the Emerald Isle.

Their turbocharged brew of punk and Celtic folk brew draws comparison with The Pogues – and that band's Spider Stacy pops up on the typically rabble-rousing Flannigan's Ball.

If anything, their whiskey-soaked anthems are even more OTT, the songs coated with monster singalong choruses and wild guitars and barely a pause for breath.

The mayhem subsides a bit on Fairmount Hill when frontman Al Barr gives a steady rolling folk vocal that can stand proud next to the work of a certain Mr McGowan. Praise indeed. **CS**



## Ben Harper and the Innocent Criminals - Lifeline

Rating \*\*\*\*

THIS is Harper's eighth album and his best for some time.

It was recorded with his band The Innocent Criminals in a Paris studio straight after a nine-month tour.

The whole thing was put together in seven days using analogue equipment.

The result is a confident quality record, fusing Southern soul, gospel, folk, country, rock and blues into a cohesive whole.

It sounds like it could have been made in the Seventies and the influence of Bill Withers, Van Morrison, Otis

Reading and Cat Stevens are apparent. Ben Harper can sing and the Criminals can play and they've produced an acoustic soul master-class. **SFO**

**FOO FIGHTERS - Echoes, Silence, Patience & Grace**

**Rating \*\*\*\***

BACK with legendary Pixies producer Gil Norton for the first time in ten years, Dave Grohl and Co return to their stadium-rawk numbers – in triumphant form.

This album is everything you want from Foo Fighters – power vocals, explosive-tempo guitars and swaggering anthems.

The Pretender already has a place on their next Greatest Hits collection, a pulsating, fans' favourite with infectious pop hooks balanced perfectly with rock attitude.

The Ballad Of Beaconsfield is a Led Zep-influenced number, inspired by the tale of the Tasmanian miners trapped underground last year and features female jazz 'guitar god' Kaki King.

The harrowing Let It Die, the mammoth Long Road To Ruin and the laid-back electric Summer's End are the other highlights of this mighty album. **JS**



**FIGHTSTAR - One Day Son, This Will All Be Yours**

**Rating \*\*\*\***

FIGHTSTAR return with their second album having climbed a credibility mountain in recent months.

In fact, people might just have forgiven frontman Charlie Simpson for once being in Busted – not an easy task in a genre where integrity is all.

But they've paid their dues and worked their way up from nowhere on the rock scene. The fact they've earned respect and not just expected it, speaks volumes in itself.

Heavier, slicker and as focused as ever, tracks such as 99 and We Apologise For Nothing embrace an epic, panoramic sound that sweeps you off your feet.

It's aggressive but emotive, with heaps of melody among the huge, riffs. Fightstar are 100 per cent credible and a band the UK can be 100 per cent proud of!

**DEVENDRA BANHART - Smokey Rolls Down  
Thunder Canyon**

**Rating \*\*\*\* 1/2**

YOU could easily argue that Devendra is the most free-spirited, creative artist making albums right now.

His latest effort is a sprawling, inventive affair that goes way beyond the psych-folk label that people like to pin on him.

He's thrown any number of styles into the mix – reggae, salsa, gospel, West Coast pop, doo-wop (ie Shabop Shalom featuring Nick Valensi of The Strokes) and more. But it's the heart-on-sleeve confessionals that really give this album its strength – Bad Girl and the compelling closing run of Freely, I Remember and My Dearest Friend.



Perhaps the only reason it doesn't merit 5/5 is because Devendra has given too much of himself, tried too many ideas. When he's good, however, he's practically unbeatable. **CS**