

JACK COLWELL AND THE OWLS Picture Window

INDEPENDENT

2.5/5

Sydney's very own classical-composer-turned-alternative-pop-star, Jack Colwell, brings his self-described 'chamber-pop' to life on his debut, *Picture Window*. With piano, flute and creepy vocals, Colwell unveils a world of labyrinths and banquets, but doesn't quite pull it off, musically. The woodwind and Antony Hegarty-esque vocals, coupled with Colwell's baroque style, just don't sit right. However I did enjoy 'Captain's Melody' and the haunting shake of Colwell's voice, tinged with frustration, on 'The Labyrinth'. The lyrics also rate high. ~CORMACK O'CONNOR



NED COLLETTE + WIREWALKER

2

INERTIA

4/5

Angular yet soft; lush but still sparse; unsettling and, at the same time, vaguely familiar. Ned Collette's new album, *2*, eludes simple description. Recorded between Berlin and Melbourne, this is not the bass/guitar and drums line up of Collette's previous release. The songs on *2* are shaped around nylon string guitar and floating layers of keyboards. 'Il Futuro Fantastico' opens the album with witty rapid fire lyrics and jazzy, noodling guitars, followed by the loungey croon of 'Stampy'. There's an uneasy mix of funk and folk, 80s synths and lyrical, left-of-centre storytelling. The uneasiness works in Collette's favour, drawing us in with hushed overtones and an intimate sense of space that permeates the nine songs in this collection. Collette continues to explore his musical vision by taking us on a journey with unexpected twists and turns.

~ROGER THORNHILL



NEIL YOUNG AND CRAZY HORSE Americana

REPRISE/WARNER

3/5

In his 66th year, and with five decades of music behind him, it's not a stretch to assume Neil Young doesn't have a lot left in the tank. For *Americana*, his 34th studio album, Young has called upon his long-suffering, consistently brilliant backing band, Crazy Horse, to create a playful collection of contemporary folk songs, ranging from 'Tom Dooley' and 'This Land is our Land' to a perplexing version of 'God Save the Queen'. At this point in his Hall of Fame career, Young clearly owes the world nothing. But, compared to Bruce Springsteen's recent inspired effort, this collection of standards is disappointing, to say the least. Young is still capable of brilliance, given the scope of recent works like *Le Noise* and *Chrome Dreams II*. *Americana* simply isn't in the same league. Better to burn out than to fade away? Time will continue to tell. ~NICK MACKAY



REGINA SPECTOR What We Saw From The Cheap Seats

WARNER MUSIC

4/5

Regina Spektor is cool. Listening to her newest album *What We Saw From The Cheap Seats* is like hearing stories you've heard somewhere before. Spektor's quirky and unique piano, accompanied by bilingual vocals, is masterful. Opener 'Small Town Moon' is a catchy start to an epic album. Slower tracks like 'Firewood' and 'How' illustrate beautiful stories, adding emotion. Regina Spektor has done it again with this offering of happiness and hope. Be excited and listen with greed. ~ELIZA CHURCH



ALBUM OF THE MONTH

MISSY HIGGINS The Ol' Razzle Dazzle

ELEVEN

4.5/5

Missy Higgins's third studio album almost didn't happen. After a five-year break from music, it seemed we might never hear from the jazzy-voiced, piano balladeer again. However, there's nothing like a well-timed comeback to re-ignite a career. Higgins's voice has never sounded so strong, emotional and empowered as it does on these tunes, and the time spent in the States has done wonders for her songwriting. *The Ol' Razzle Dazzle* is her most varied, interesting and beautiful collection of songs so far. She has taken risks with production but nothing sounds trite or forced. The current single 'Unashamed Desire' is a standout, with its big chorus and passionate lyrics adding a classic pop feel with edge. Elsewhere, there's signature piano ballads ('All In My Head', 'Cooling Of The Embers'), a touch of blues ('Watering Hole'), and the kind of pop songs that wouldn't feel out of place on a Supertramp album ('Temporary Love'). Missy Higgins has always been ahead of the pack with her mature and heartfelt songwriting, and this album proves she still has what it takes. Inspiring. ~CHELSEA REED



JONATHAN BOULET We Keep The Boat, Found The Sound, See The Need, Start The Heart

MODULAR

4/5

The elaborately titled second long-player from Jonathan Boulet is a mature, sophisticated indie-pop adventure. Boulet has a knack for writing interesting and unconventional pop tunes which can alternately sound edgy and uplifting. The gifted multi-instrumentalist creates complex arrangements featuring an array of instruments and a rhythmically exciting sound. The drumming is relentless throughout much of the album, providing a core of energy that drives the colourful tunes. Some of the songs are instantly catchy and compelling, including single 'This Song Is Called Raggard' and the breezy charms of 'FM AM CB TV'. Others require multiple listens, in order to appreciate the choppy rhythms and layered complexity of Boulet's songwriting, such as the creeping melodies on 'Black Smokehat' and the foreboding atmosphere of 'Hallowed Hag'. Boulet's subtle melodies and smooth, expressive vocals have the individuality and range to match his ambitious songwriting. This is intelligent, eclectic pop. Give the hooks time to sink in and those jarring rhythms will make a lasting impression. Stay tuned — this guy is just warming up. ~LUKE SAUNDERS



ADAM MILLER Delayed

INDEPENDENT

4/5

On his fourth studio record, *Delayed*, Newcastle's Adam Miller showcases his musicianship, performing all of the album's 13 tracks on a custom-built Jeff Taugt acoustic guitar — not an easy feat, considering the symposium of sounds and moods on the record. Every track has its own unique elements and style within Miller's technical and intriguing jazzy groove, making it difficult to choose a standout. The record opens with the smooth and soulful 'Noah's Little Nod' before it begins to twist and turn, from the slow, emotional sounds of 'Last Kiss' to the brilliant blend of speed and technique on 'The Sleazy Song' and 'Honeysucker'. Guitar enthusiasts take note — Miller has delivered a string of crisp, funky songs perfect for a lazy Sunday afternoon. ~LUKE HENDERSON



RESIST THE THOUGHT Sovereignty

SKULL & BONES RECORDS/SHOCK

3.5/5

To describe this album as heavy would be an understatement — opener 'Legion' makes this clear from the get-go. There are some earth-shatteringly huge moments, like the bangin' opening riff of 'Extermination'. Some breakdowns resemble a home-brand Parkway Drive and the album tends toward the repetitive. However, quality metalcore riffs and great vocal layering make it easy to forget the mediocre moments. This heavy Aussie album will please most metal heads... Enya fans need not bother.

~THOMAS PEASLEY



MUSCLES Manhood

MODULAR

4/5

The follow-up album to 2007's *Guns Babes Lemonade* has been a long time coming but sees Melbourne electronica sensation, Muscles, reach new heights in his exciting career. In an interesting approach, each song on *Manhood* is a prelude to a track off his earlier album. The vocals are a bit of an acquired taste but if you like Muscles' previous work this is an album for you. Everything from the wailing siren synth of 'Boys Become Men' to the thudding drums of 'Heatwave' will have you begging for more and possibly jumping about in fits of happiness. Muscles is letting down his hair, going out and fucking up the night one banging dance track at a time. Yeah, uh-huh, uh-huh, yeah!

~CORMACK O'CONNOR



THE GASLIGHT ANTHEM Handwritten

UNIVERSAL

4/5

Four records into their career, it's pretty clear what listeners can expect from any new Gaslight Anthem release: out-and-out, heart-on sleeve rock and roll, that punches hard and fast and then scrambles to sustain that intensity for 40 more minutes. That's exactly the case with *Handwritten*, the Jersey quartet's fourth and perhaps finest record to date. Nods to Springsteen and Strummer run throughout — the 'Thunder Road' harmonica at the beginning of 'Keepsake', the 'hey hey hey' refrain of 'Howl' — more homage than hackneyed, however. Fans expecting a return to the scuzzy punk production of debut *Sink Or Swim* will be disappointed. But *Handwritten* is considerably dirtier than the band's last release, *American Slang*. Not every track is a winner — 'Too Much Blood' proves that the band is at their best when they keep to a tight three minutes — but there are certainly enough winners here to keep you warm through winter and into the spring. Excellent.

~MAX QUINN

