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"Woman is a mystery"; La Femme stay on track.

Adrian Utley's Guitar Orchestra

★★★★

In C

IN VADA UK, CD/DL/LP

Not an Isaac Hayes sample in earshot as Portishead man waxes Rileyesque.

Half-a-century old next year, Terry Riley's infinitely adaptable recipe of 53 musical phrases in the key of C still demands a fresh approach from all those attempting to cook up their own dish with it. This piece has now become such a concert hall staple that you could call it 'the Louie Louie of minimalism', if Louie Louie wasn't minimal enough already. Recorded live at St George's Hall, Bristol, Utley's Guitar Orchestra garnish the disciplined thrumming of 19 of the West Country's finest axemen (including Utley himself and long-term P.J. Harvey foil John Parish) with four organs and a bass clarinet. At first, their collective response to Riley's act of incitement leaves a slightly deferential aftertaste, but repeated listens reveal a nuanced and ultimately satisfying take on this major-key marathon, its eternal ebb and flow recalling John Peel's loving tribute to The Fall – "always different... always the same".

Ben Thompson

Frederic Robinson

★★★★★

Mixed Signals

BLU MARTEN MUSIC, CD/DL/LP

Classical violinist, audio designer and now 'tronic innovator.

Electronica is now as overcrowded as every preceding genre, but German-born, Swiss-based Robinson



has found space, physically and literally, to fashion new dreams from old. Take the opening Theme Park; teeming with Far Eastern topography and switched-on lounge vox, it's jittery like dubstep, pulsing like Steve Reich. *Mixed Signals* is simultaneously airy and complex, an upstream surge of sounds that juggle for attention while never feeling crowded, even when his sister Melanie's delicate vocal joins The Brightest Things, Rain and Secret. Pizzicato strings, seeping ambience halfway between Bowie/Berlin and Sigur Rós, repeated motifs and occasionally a threat of glitchy disruption skirting a Mike Oldfield-style musical journey à la *Hergest Ridge*: Robinson has a dazzling ambition, on this nuanced, hypno-groovy 48 minutes that defies off-the-shelf convention.

Martin Aston

La Femme

★★★★

Psycho Tropical Berlin

DISQUE POINTU, CD/DL/LP

Retro-futurist surf-noir electro. Oui, c'est vrai.



So these guys from Biarritz went to Cali to hang with surfers. They returned with a sound approaching goth-glam-rockabilly-West Coast, a bizarre concatenation echoing Gene Vincent, Serge

Gainsbourg, The Beach Boys and Kraftwerk, with a *souçon* of Velvet Underground. It should be infuriating that La Femme use a different guest female vocalist for each track ("It suggests that woman is a mystery" – oh, obviously), except it sounds deeply fascinating. So *Hypsoline* is ver' sexy, with harpsichord, hothouse heavy breathing and a languid Bardot vocal, probably reading a shopping list; *Sur La Planche 2013* has a tough, punky shouter full of new wave briskness; and *It's Time To Wake Up* is a distaff Air, draping a husky, disaffected monotone over a slow dance-floor beat that makes unpacking the shopping a dangerously provocative business.

Glyn Brown

Lucas Ohio

★★★★

Slingshot Kid

LUCAS OHIO, CD/DL

Third album from a much-hailed San Francisco outfit.



It's the little things that often matter most and Lucas Ohio Pattie's band, The Shamblers, are pretty adept at providing such meaningful mini-moments – check the serpentine, mindworm of a guitar lick on *Always See You* (*Wide Awake*) that kicks this album into instant action; or the down-homey fills that turn Golden Roads into something approaching a Terry Allen dirt-road anthem before the Bay Area band sneaks into Johnny Blazes, with its reggae-flavoured approach. Mostly, though, it's hard-edged, folk-blues Americana, and as personal as lead guitarist/vocalist/songwriter Lucas Ohio can make it. But then, with the final track, a rollicking sing-along that comes steeped in whiskey and good times, Ohio

throws the listener's every early summation out of kilter. Lucas Ohio is heading in no obvious direction – only where he personally chooses to be. And that's no bad thing.

Fred Dellar



Melt-Banana

★★★★★

Fetch

A-ZAP, CD/DL/LP

Tokyo's mayhem-makers widen scope for their seventh studio album. Standard-bearers for Japan's underground scene, the hyperactive Melt-Banana turned John Peel's head in the late '90s ("One of the most extraordinary performances ever," he said on witnessing one session), but their Cinderella moment never arrived. After the manic post-punk of 2007's *Bambi's Dilemma*, *Fetch*, with its programmed rhythms and long gestation, finds the band a newly slimline two-piece in their pursuit of fresh territory. Emerging from the sound of waves, opener *Candy Gun* is slow to reveal its ruinous greatness, and that's only the first of several surprises here. There's melancholia amid the chaos on *My Missing Link*, which sounds like an old Who single played at 78rpm – backwards. Schemes Of The Tails has a hypnotic, art rock undertow, while radio-friendly closer *Zero* might as well be tAtU remixed by Fripp & Eno. Bags of FX-laden, superfast staccato havoc too.

Mark Paytress

Shearwater

★★★★

Fellow Travelers

SUB POP, CD/DL/LP

Covers, collaborations and confusion from the alt underground.



A collection of reinventions and collaborations from bands they've toured

with, the Texans' ninth album offers a mixture of the good, the bad and Coldplay. Here, Shearwater invite other bands to contribute to their versions of other people's songs. So Baptist Generals help turn Clinic's *Tomorrow* into an odd but ultimately rousing piece, while Clinic respond by covering Baptist Generals' *Fucked Up Life*. David Thomas Broughton, meanwhile, adds noises of sparrows and shovels recorded in North Korea to Shearwater's version of Xiu Xiu's *I Luv The Valley OH!*, elevating it to an almost Killers-sized anthem, yet a version of Coldplay's *Hurts Like Heaven* is underwhelming. With the title *Fellow Travelers* gleaned from a Trotsky quote which refers to "a protest against reality" being part of the creative process, it's possible that it all makes rather more sense to the creators than it does to the listener.

Ben Myers

The Melvins

★★★★

Tres Cabrones

IPECAC, CD/DL/LP

Melvins celebrate 30 years of sludge by reforming the original line-up.



Since signing to Mike Patton's Ipecac Records in 1999,

primordial proto-grungers The Melvins have enjoyed a long, sustained rejuvenation, so much so that their franchise is able to support projects like this, a fleeting reunion with original drummer Mike Dillard (who left The Melvins before they recorded their first album), with his replacement sticksman, Dale Crover, switching to the bass guitar. It's an indulgent set – their comedic runs through 99 *Bottles Of Beer On The Wall* and *You're In The Army Now* probably more fun to record than listen to – but head Melvin Buzz Osborne's promise to write new tunes in the style of the group's early slogs is kept via the sepulchral stoner-rock of *Dr Mule* and the colossal assault of *City Dump*. A lesser work compared to, say, 2008's *Nude With Boots*, *Tres Cabrones* nevertheless stomps with enough sulphurous, slothful might to satisfy the faithful.

Stevie Chick