

On record

→ The week's essential new releases

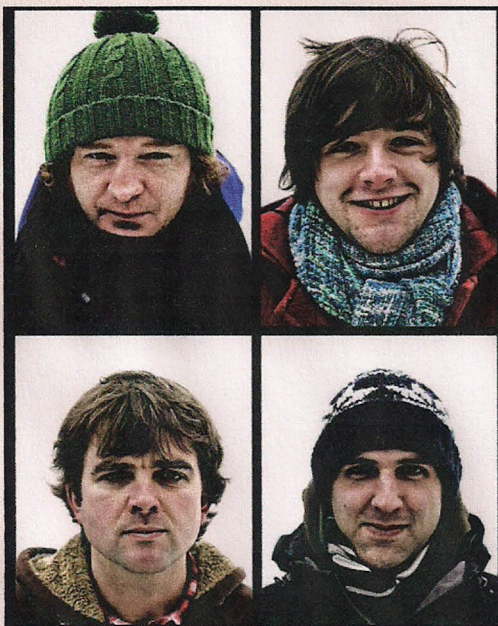
CD
OF THE
WEEK

Pop, rock and jazz

Y NIWL
Y Niwl
Aderyn Papur

★★★★

First things first. It's pronounced "uh nule" and it means the Fog, an excellent name for a band who are inspired by the surf-rock sounds of sunny 1960s California, but are reimagining those sounds in the noticeably less sunny environs of northwest Wales. The band say their bassist's cottage, where they practise, has "had electricity for nearly a year now, so that's made rehearsing much easier". While the image that suggests, of them playing there 13 months ago without a 240V current to power their reverb-drenched amps, is ridiculous, they can certainly do very well without any of the technological advances of the past 40 years. They use the instruments and recording techniques of the 1960s, playing everything live, with no overdubs. The result is a sound that fairly authentically captures the spirit of Dick Dale and the Surfaris: I say "fairly authentically" because the band's organ sound probably belongs to a slightly later, more drug-fuelled segment of the decade. Y Niwl are a Welsh-language band, but the thoroughly enjoyable tracks here are instrumentals, so that won't be an issue, until you try to make sense of the track titles. Mind you, Welsh-speakers aren't at much of an advantage, because they're all just numbers — and it all begins with Pedwar (four), because Un, Dau and Tri were on an earlier EP. If you like your guitars twangy and your track titles essentially meaningless, this is for you. **ME**



THE GURUS
Closing Circles

★★★

Rainbow Quartz RQTZ169



This Barcelona trio emulate the pop/rock classics of the mid-1960s and early 1970s. The opener, I Don't Care About It, employs jangly Rickenbacker guitar and, unsurprisingly, sounds like the Byrds, while Caught by the Rain adds a nastier sneer, moving further towards the sound of Tom Petty circa Damn the Torpedoes. Lunatic Lover evokes Todd Rundgren on the cusp of his blue-eyed-soul period, and Be My Wife (not the Bowie song) calls to mind Robyn Hitchcock or early REM. When the band enter weirder territory, on Necronomicon and Strange Believer, they sound less sure of themselves, although the instrumental wig-out The Tongue-Twister is one of the album's best moments. That aside, the Gurus never transcend their influences; but if you like their influences, that won't be a problem. **ME**

CIARA
Basic Instinct

★★

LaFace/Sony 88697720922



The impression that Ciara is caught between warring impulses deepens here on a patchy fourth album. The American has always conveyed a sense of struggling to accommodate a banking for artistic experimentalism and a desire to bank the cash. As Beyoncé has demonstrated, it is possible to do both: Single Ladies was a smash, but is, sonically, deeply strange. At her best, Ciara repeats that trick. Yeah I Know's verses are fabulously dark, the rumbling bass, vocal refrains and brutally minimal beats brightening suddenly into an addictive chorus. Girls Get Your Money is just as good, its harmonies somehow both assertive and defeated, its chorus quickly undislodgable. But so much here is simply formulaic R&B-by-numbers, and serious cherry-picking is required. **DC**

BREATHE OWL BREATHE
Magic Central

★★★

Hometapes HT038CD



Recorded in a cabin in a remote part of Michigan, this Ann Arbor trio's fourth album is a fragile affair, where every texture counts and you almost feel as if you are in the cabin with them. Micah Middaugh's elusive lyrics and Bill Callahan-like voice float among the folk instrumentation, ornamented by Andrea Moreno-Beals's cello and vocal harmonies. Dragon plays to their strengths while also highlighting a weakness for whimsy. Its spoken-word intro is a misstep, but the song itself builds into something of real emotional heft, as the two singers repeatedly, insistently ask: "How do you stop loving someone?" And Swimming, which on one level is almost intolerably "hullo clouds, hullo sky", gradually overwhelms all doubt with its conjuring of forlorn nostalgia and escapism. **DC**

THE PUDDLE
Playboys in the Bush

★★★

Fishrider FISH005



New Zealand lo-fi heroes the Puddle's engagingly sloppy indie pop was epically unadorned. But what the band's own press release tellingly describes as "florid saxophone embellishments" on some songs suggests that, for a quarter of a century, these apparently inspired folk-art amateurs might actually have been frustrated exponents of emotionally explicit mainstream rock. There's a sub-Velvets classic lurking in In Dreams, but someone's honked over it. Nonetheless, fans of Pavement and the 1990s American slack school can squint and see the southern-hemisphere source of those insouciant grooves, and the decision to retell Norse mythology chug-guitar-style on the nine-minute Valhalla is inspired. **SL**

REVEREND DEADEYE
The Trials & Tribulations
of Reverend Deadeye

★★★

Hazelwood HAZ073



Joining the queue of post-Seasick Steve floorboard-stomping bluesmen, Brent Burkhardt trails the usual misspent-childhood story, losing his eye tormenting snakes on stage with his Pentecostal revivalist family. Hymns to Jesus, Satan, booze, blues and drugs are barked one-man-band-style over kick drum and rusted electric guitar, but, despite the authentic Flannery O'Connor flourishes of the Reverend's press bio, the album reeks a little of artifice, even as it corrodes your eardrums and sets your toes a-tappin'. That said, the endearing huckster's reading of the standard Jesus on the Mainline swings more than convincingly. **SL**

BLEU
Four

★★★★

Lojinx LJX026CD



One of those American power-pop wizards seemingly doomed to languish in semi-obscurity, William McAuley took the familiar route he and his ilk are fated to travel: great first album, picked up by a major for his second, victim of label politics, dropped. Four was recorded using funds McAuley raised among his fans, but deserves a far wider audience. A major label might, of course, have had something to say about Dead in the Mornin', a berserk last will and testament to a mash-up of gospel, prog and brassed-up soul; or When the Shit Hits the Fan, a song that, given a different title, you could imagine soaking up airtime with its crooning, swooning MOR blowiness. The latter is just one of many glittering pop gems on an album studded with the things. **DC**