

Music | Bittles' Magazine

I am moving house this month, and have thus gone a little bit insane. But since I have always believed that all great art needs a mixture of talent, madness, depression, anger and despair I'm attempting to put all the stress and emotional turmoil to good use by writing a story about a cowboy rat, (he's called Bradley Scott, and he doesn't like ketchup, shampoo commercials, or people who make fun of his hat). By **JOHN BITTLES**

Anyway, as if to prove my point two of the best albums this months come from **Björk** and **The Charlatans** who have used music as a way to deal with some pretty devastating events. Rest assured that it's not all doom and gloom this week though, since we've also got the lush deep house of **Kevin McKay**, the dub techno riddims of **Salz**, the laidback indie of **Peace**, the lush electronics of **Levon Vincent**, and tons more.



Yet, it seems only fitting to begin with the cathartic and brave return of Iceland's finest export **Björk**. Rush-released after an online leak, *Vulnicura* sees **Björk** channel every bit of pain and anguish caused by the dissolution of a relationship into nine mesmerising and devastatingly beautiful songs. Heartbreakingly honest, the tracks on *Vulnicura* simmer with a sense of passion, anger and fear to create a dense yet rewarding piece of art. This may not be the most uplifting album around, but it forcefully works its way into your very soul until you genuinely feel her grief. *Stonemilker* opens the record with an outpouring of sorrow and bitter resignation by reflecting on a relationship that is disintegrating beyond repair. On the epic *Lionsong* meanwhile her voice positively soars with such a deep sense of despair that it is like listening to someone crying through the walls in the flat next door. This theme is continued throughout the LP with her misery characterised with such intensity on the mesmerising *Black Lake* that it is agonising to hear. Melancholic and intensely personal, yet brimming with an inner beauty that could shatter an unguarded heart, *Vulnicura* could well be **Björk's** most rewarding album since *Debut*.

Some new album to cuddle up to this February



This month also welcomes the return of **The Charlatans** with their twelfth studio album *Modern Nature* which highlights a band in surprisingly good form. The record sees the band recover from the death of drummer Jon Brookes with a unexpectedly life-affirming collection of songs. At times gorgeously bittersweet, the record luxuriates within a sun-kissed, soulful feel that completely revitalises the former baggyists until they sound nothing like a band that have been going for over 25 years. *Talking In Tones*, *Come Home Baby* and the lead single *So Oh* open proceedings with a morose, yet blissful air. From here the album takes in the **Simple Minds** alike *Keep Enough*, the unbridled romanticism of **Emilie** and the vintage **Charlatans** of *Let The Good Times Be Never Ending* (make this a single, please!). In short, *Modern Nature* finds one of Britain's most treasured bands stride confidently into the future while also rediscovering their creative edge.

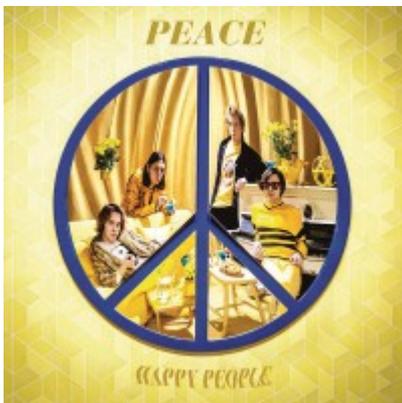


Kevin McKay's *Glasgow Underground* label is remembered with much misty-eyed fondness by seasoned clubbers due to the slew of incredible deep house records they released in the mid to late 90s from the likes of **Romanthony**, **Mateo & Matos**, **DJ Q** and **Muzique Tropique**. *GU* was renowned for releasing house music so deep that you could get lost in the bassline of a single track for months. This February, Kevin re-evaluates some of the label's past glories with *Glasgow Underground 97:07*. What you get for your hard-earned bucks is an epic four jam-packed CDs to remind us all why we fell head over heels in love with house music in the first place. Mixed by **Kevin McKay** himself, and separated into Deep, House, Disco and Eclectic sections each of the four discs overflow with an abundance of heart and soul. And any album which includes three of my all time favourite tracks in *Just A Mood* by **Studio Blue**, *Stella Sunday* by **Muzique Tropique** and the slamming *Floorpiece* by **Romanthony** is gonna receive much love. Buy on sight!

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LEVON VINCENT

Rightly winning a sea of plaudits for his fab *Fabric* mix back in 2012, this month New York native **Levon Vincent** releases his exceptional debut album unto an unsuspecting world. The self-titled opus contains ten tracks of spine-tingling house that simply ooze and squelch electronic funk. The record rather aptly opens with *The Beginning* which features gorgeous use of electro elements to create a rich, melancholic air. As the LP begins to really get into its stride *Phantom Power* raises the bar by seducing with its clunking percussion and evocative synths, *Junkies On Hermann Strasse* increases the BPMs to dramatic effect, while *For Mona, My Beloved Cat - Rest In Peace* coaxes a tear or two from the eye. Pick of an amazingly strong bunch though is *Her Light Goes Through Everything* which is so good you could listen to it for hours and never get bored. With the entire album revelling within a low-slung house groove, this is a killer release from a producer with talent to spare.



I had myself all set up to hate *Happy People*, the sophomore album by indie sentimentalists **Peace**. To my mind the band play the type of anodyne guitar music that only seems to appeal to over-excitable teenage girls. But, you know what? *Happy People* really isn't all that bad. In fact, I would even go so far as to say that it is pretty damn good! Sure, it won't live long in the mind, yet the record's ten songs drift by in a pleasant enough haze. *O You* has a tinge of regret that completely catches you unawares, *Gen Strange* sounds a little like vintage era **Suede**, *Happy People* has a nice Calypso style groove, while **World Pleasure** finishes things with a very healthy dollop of funk. It's not going to convince a generation of kids to pick up a guitar, nor is it going to speak directly about the struggles in your life, yet, it is a very agreeable way to pass the time all the same!

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LA-based label *100% Silk* strike gold this month with not one but three quality releases that are more than worthy of getting out of bed for. The pick of a rather special bunch has classic house disciple **Policy** follow up his fine *Postscript* album from 2013 with the gorgeously evocative house synths of *The Republic*. Generously labelled as an extended EP, this has more depth, subtlety and ideas than most people's careers. The record's ten tracks are reminiscent of one long piece of music which constantly mutates and evolves until you can feel the hairs stand up on your neck. Inspired by a visit to his childhood neighbourhood in Taipei, you can sense a tinge of wistfulness and nostalgia within every beat and synth. Seriously, I love this so much that if I could lead each and every one of you by the hand to your local record store to make you buy this, I would.



Also from *100% Silk* and well worth a place in your heart and on your iPod are the delightful house tones on *Mirror Box* by **Cosby**. Perhaps best known for running the *Car Crash Set* label, **Cosby** has claimed that the record's six songs are perfect for "playing loud and long after the sun goes down", and who am I to disagree? The exquisite baseline on the title track alone is enough to keep me well supplied with goose-bumps for months. Last, but definitely not least is the solid house signature of *Phased* by **Potions**. The cassette's seven tracks explore a world of classic house sounds that maintain a solid thump and groove throughout their duration. There is a real sense of playfulness at work here that is endearing even as some tunes sound somewhat naïve. A stellar month for LA's best!

Some new album to cuddle up to this February



Out at the end of the month on the ever-excellent *Sonic Cathedral* label, and quite a bit noisier is the feral scream into the night that is *Dying*, the debut LP from Bristol-based noise-rockers **Spectres**. Recalling the noisier end of the **My Bloody Valentine**, **Sonic Youth** and **Vacant Lots** spectrum the band create an awe-inspiring wall of sound which seems to exist within its own drug-induced haze of feedback, squealing guitars and spiteful lyrics. Lead single *Where Flies Sleep* is a thoroughly righteous call to arms, *The Sky Of All Places* simmers with a foreboding sense of tension, while *This Purgatory* sounds like an uncontained howl of emotional pain. Claustrophobic and intense, if most modern rock music sounds too clean and well produced for your ears then say hello to your new favourite band.



Volume four of *The Telrae Mix By Salz* contains fourteen tracks of the lushest, deepest dub techno known to man. Mixed with aplomb by label figurehead **Salz**, the mix compiles highlights from the plethora of 10" releases on *Telrae* over the past year, adds FX and atmosphere, and blends them all together to make something so good it could give Bambi the horn. *Villa Nicht* by **Stefan Gubatz** and *Abstract Illusions (Tomas Rubeck Remix)* by **Andrea Cichecki** opens the set in fine style with low rumbling bass, echoing percussion and merely the a ghost of a beat. From here the set takes in the aural delights of the likes of **Van Boon**, **Freund Der Familie** and **Upwellings** to create wondrous soundscapes to the most vivid worlds you could ever dream. Sedate and trippy as fuck, this is an album which really does take you on a journey while revealing new depths with each and every immersion. Frighteningly good!

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Equally good is *Thousand Thursday* by **Michna**, which is so sonically adventurous and diverse that it constantly catches the listener by surprise by pulling together a series of disparate elements and blending them together in a thoroughly refreshing way. The 80s synth-pop style of *Solid Gold* with vocals by **MNDR** segues seamlessly into the hip house of *Nuroq Legacy*, which in turn blends beautifully with the sleazy groove of *Time Will Tell* to create a spellbinding mix. With so many sounds and ideas it would have been easy for *Thousand Thursday* to resemble an unmitigated mess. The fact that it succeeds so well is down to the sheer enthusiasm and sense of adventure which drips from each beat.



Somehow, it always seems that just when I am about to give up on dubstep something amazing comes along that completely blows me away. This month's saviour comes in the form of the excellent bass-scapes of **Scuba** Presents *Hotflush Vol 2: Dub Pressure (2005-2008)*. The compilation sees label head **Scuba** follow-up last year's *The Formative Years* collection with 17 highlights from the always impressive *Hotflush* catalogue. The compiler himself crops up with five tracks and is ably joined by the likes of **Benga & Walsh**, **Loafah** and **Jazzstepa** to highlight why *Hotflush* is so cherished by those in the know. The menacing bass tone on *Time Drive* by **Scuba** under his **Abucs** alias is more than worth the price of entry alone. Taking in a surprising variety of genres and styles this will find favour with anyone who is open-minded and is partial to a little bit of bass.

A special mention must also go to: *Glass Riffer* by **Dan Deacon** - Which has our underground hero reaching for the charts with an, at times, stunning collection of experimental yet emotionally resonant guitar-based tunes, *Concubine* by **Concubine** - A new project featuring **Noah Pred** and **Rick Bull** that will find favour with those who like their house music analogue and raw. Head over to www.concubine.cc from the 17th February to give it a go, *Teaspoon To The Ocean* by **Jib Kidder** - Operating within a dense, surreal world which is all its own, how much you like this album will probably depend on the amount of drugs you consume, *Mars Etc.* by **Aloa Input** - A very hip-sounding guitar and synths album which resembles a slightly

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hyperactive **Hot Chip**, *Coming Up For Air* by **Kodaline** - Like getting slapped hard in the face with a vulgar wet fish. Though not as much fun as that sounds, *Waxing Romantic* by **Travis Bretzer** - A wistful sea of acoustic guitars and slacker charm, and *Meda Fury 12345* by **Various** - R&S offshoot *Meda Fury* celebrate a year in existence with a compilation of highlights that is house music with more than a touch of class.

| [JOHN BITTLES](#)