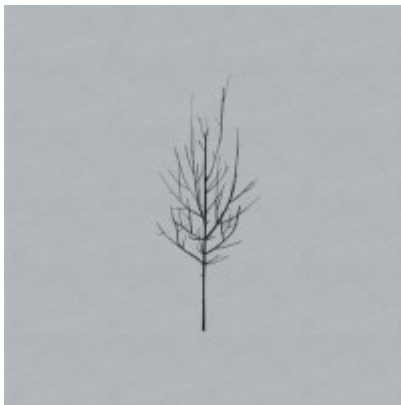


Music | Bittles' Magazine: The music column from the end of the world: August/September New albums reviewed Part 2

If there is one thing I have learned from life so far it is that sadness can be a fine thing. It let's you know you are human in an increasingly robotic world. Without sadness the majority of great art and literature would be shallow, soulless things. By **JOHN BITTLES**

Imagine *Steppenwolf* without the crippling sense of loneliness, **Van Gogh** without the madness and despair, a *Catcher In The Rye* where **Holden Caulfield** has both family and friends. It simply can't be done, as to do this would be to remove everything that makes them remarkable, tragic and true. This rule applies to music too! I know this is a personal thing, but all of my favourite songs and albums have at least a twinge of desolation, an air of anomie, or the admission that someone, somewhere doesn't quite fit in. This is what makes them stand out and rise above simple sloganeering, crassness, or the aural equivalent of hiding your head in the sand.

Thus, this week's album reviews concentrate on the exquisite sorrow that can exist within us all. Amongst others, I'll be reviewing the hushed confessional rock of **Low**, the forlorn soundtrack work of **Thomas Ragsdale**, the aural haze of **Liz Harris**, new group **Helen** and the fed-up fug of **The Telescopes**. But that's not all, as we also have the menacing electronics of **Senking**, the slacker rock of **Mac DeMarco**, the dance floor ambiance of **Heathered Pearls**, the confessional story-telling of **Destroyer**, and more. In short, if you like music, happy or sad, then this is the place for you.



This week, quite aptly, we'll begin with the hushed desolation of **Low**. Anyone who enjoys staring out of windows, or relishes moments of quiet contemplation should already be well acquainted with the output of the band. Case in point, *C'mon* was one of the stand-out albums of 2011, while their recorded output goes all the way back to 1994. After the underwhelming *The Invisible Way* from 2013 the group return in fine form this September with the gorgeously brooding *Ones And Sixes* LP. As ever, it is the twin vocals from husband and wife team **Alan Sparhawk** and **Mimi Parker** that make up the heart and soul of the band. Opener *Gentle* is, as its name suggests, a gentle tune filled with a heavy sense of yearning. This is followed by the spiky guitar strum of *No Comprende* to ably highlight how the band are at their best when they are willing to mix things up. From here we get the sullen majesty of *No End*, the hollow thump of *Into You* and the surprisingly electronica-inspired *The Innocents*. Hushed, beautiful and powerful, *Ones And Sixes* is a celebration for all those who revel in their tears. **9/10**.



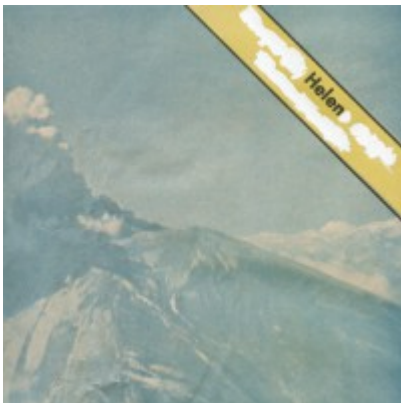
You may have to wait until the end of September for *Closing Ice*, the new album by electronic adventurer **Senking**, but trust me when I urge you to pre-order it now. Anyone who likes their electronic music deep, dark, bass-fuelled and sexy should be drooling in expectation as we speak. Not since *Heavy Traffic* by **Witchman**, or the excellent *My Demons* by **Distance** have I experienced an album with such beautifully scuzzed-up bass. Containing nine mid-paced, yet huge tracks that never once give in to the urge to descend into pointless brutality, *Closing Ice* is one of the most thrilling things you will hear all year. Throughout the record **Senking** utilizes the best elements of techno, ambient, jungle and breaks to create something refreshing and new. Tracks like *Serpent*, *Grolar*, *Lighthouse Hustle* and *Hitchhiker Perspective* prowl around the listener with evil intent, brimming with a sense of pent up anger and righteous rage. Body music for getting lost on the dark side, this simply must be heard. **10/10**.



Those seeking a little beauty in their lives will be well served with the bitter-sweet symphony of *Bait*, the new album by Manchester composer **Thomas Ragsdale**. Originally conceived as a soundtrack to the movie of the same name by **Dominic Brunt**, for the album's release the **worriedaboutsatan** member took the original pieces and fleshed them out until they were strong enough to work in isolation of the film. Recalling the sense of majestic grandeur conjured by the likes of **Vangelis** or **Nils Frahm**, the record contains so many moments of outstanding beauty that you can feel your heart soar. Picks include *Warning Mass* whose desolate and haunting piano refrain is the sound of a tortured and lonely soul, *As The Rain Went On Falling* which recalls empty countryside and crumbling ruins, while *The Dales* is a touching piece of music that lovingly caresses the soul. Heart-rendingly exquisite, *Bait* is a record to get lost in time and time again. **9/10**.



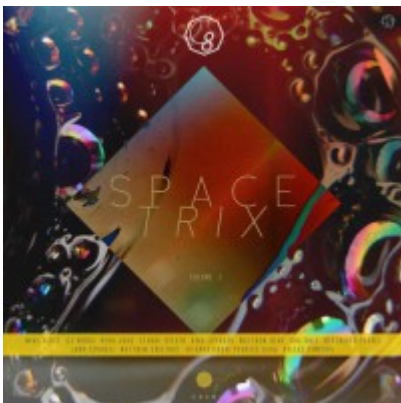
This August **Mac DeMarco** (the **Jack Johnson** it's OK to like) follows up his career break-through *Salad Days* with another slacker collection of stoner singalongs. Mac has claimed that the *Another One* mini album is "a concept album about love". Luckily the album never descends into concept album cliches such as 20 minute guitar solos, or vocals about alien races enslaving all the hamsters in the world. What we get instead is eight folk-infused songs brimming with wit and charm. At times recalling **Kurt Vile's** nicer younger brother, **Mr. DeMarco's** songs always stop short of being overly sentimental or twee. *The Way You'd Love Her* is a jangly ode to unrequited love, while tracks like *No Other Heart* and *A Heart Like Hers* could make even the most grouchy among us break into a smile. While it's no great development from *Salad Days*, only the most deluded would be upset that the singer-songwriter isn't pushing the boundaries of sound. **7/10**.



Next up we have **Helen**, the ethereal new project from **Liz Harris** of **Grouper** fame. Originally conceived as a thrash metal band, their debut album *The Original Faces* finds them successfully mining the ambient indebted folk with which she made her name. A super-group of sorts, the record sees Liz join forces with **Jed Bindeman** on drums, **Scott Simmons** on bass and the mysterious **Helen** on backing vocals to create something that could easily have come out on *4AD* or *Creation* in the mid 80s when shoegaze and jangly were all the craze. This is no bad thing! The band, at times, resemble a spikier version of **The Cocteau Twins**, or a jangly **The Jesus & Mary Chain** while never sounding forced, reductive, or like a creative venture which ran out of ideas. Songs such as *Motorcycle*, *Covered In Shade*, or *Allison* are slow and pastoral, yet always seem to exist in an alien and darkened world. Grungier efforts like *Dying All This Time* and *Felt This Way* create a thrilling juxtaposition to the more reflective moments in what is a varied, imaginative record that is the antithesis to stodgy or staid. **8/10**.



La Vie Est Belle/Life Is Beautiful is the debut album from the much-hyped Cape Town-based artist **Petite Noir**. As with all blog sensations, it was with some trepidation that I had my first listen, suspicious that it wasn't talent that had people talking about them, but the fact they have a lot of cool friends. Luckily that is not the case with **Petite Noir**. With a vocal style which recalls **Bloc Party's Kele Okereke**, the singer ably shows that last year's *The King Of Anxiety* was not just a flash in the pan. For instance, *Best* is an 90s style indie dance groove, *Freedom* a dark dance floor throb, *Just Breathe* a lost synth-pop classic, while the title-track is a killer blend of down-tempo, pop and rap. Apparently inspired by a range of artists including **Mos Def**, **Fela Kuti** and **Tabu Ley**, the singer himself describes the music on the LP as 'noirwave', a reductive yet somehow apt term. By taking the best of 90s indie and injecting a hint of futurism, spirituality and funk **Petite Noir** has made the kind of record that will make his mother proud. **8/10**.



Space Trix vol. 1 is a new ambient flavoured series which, according to its compiler **CJ Mirra**, is "a compilation of tracks (some new and some reworked) mixed binaurally in true 3D sound, especially for listening on headphones." My first thought on reading this was 'isn't that just stereo?'. Thankfully, the results of this attention to detail is a far richer listening experience than your run-of-the-mill mixtape. The record features a variety of largely beatless tracks by luminaries such as **Claude Speeded**, **Matthew Dear** and **Heathered Pearls**. Yet, it is the lesser known acts who really stand out and make the LP a must buy, with my personal favourites including the splendidly forlorn *Upsides* by **Kirk Spencer**, the ambient dub explorations of *Things In Themselves* by **John Connell** and the magnificently epic *Moon Ego* by **International Peoples Gang**. Synth washes and pastoral textures abound in a relaxing yet entertaining listening experience. One for space voyagers and horizontal adventures everywhere! **9/10**.



After 2011's breakthrough LP *Kaputt*, **Dan Bejar** and his **Destroyer** project have been remarkably quiet of late. All that changes this August though, with the release of the singer-songwriter's much anticipated new album *Poison Season*. At times touching, others rocking, the album is a winning mixture of **Richard Hawley** baritone rich laments and the classic 80s rock of **The War On Drugs**. Containing the whimsical romanticism of a **Marc Almond**, Dan is a lyricist to treasure, with the album featuring a cast of characters that could have stepped out of a **Paul Auster** novel. Each song is like a short story, leading you through the perils, laughter and tragedy that exists in everyday life. Opener *Times Square* is a gorgeous piece of orchestra-assisted soul-searching, *Forces From Above* a slow-building tempest, *The River* a **Van Morrison** alike folk ditty and *Midnight Meet The Rain* a 60s style groover. Fans of soul-searching rock with an abundance of enthusiasm and heart are in for a treat. **8/10**.



In *Hidden Fields* Staffordshire-based rockers **The Telescopes** have just released an album which is more vital sounding than anything released by an almost 30 year old band has any right to be. Unfairly lumped in with the **My Bloody Valentine**-led shoegaze scene of the late 80s, the band have given us a huge body of music over the years, including drone, noise rock, psychedelia and more. Really, the only thing you need to know about a **Telescopes** record before you play it is that it will be deep, dark, edgy and great. The band's eighth LP opens with the deranged feedback frenzy of *You Know The Way*, ably highlighting how, even in advanced years, the band are still just as uncompromising as ever. The stoned rock of *Absence* and *In Every Sense* meld with the gorgeous noise of *Don't Bring Me Round* to form the dark heart at the centre of the LP, while the 15 minute opus *The Living Things* brings things to conclusion in stunning fashion, a creative peak in a distinguished career. In a world consumed by the scourge of 'polite rock' we need

bands like **The Telescopes** more than ever before. **8/10**.



This week we'll finish with *Body Complex*, the new LP from **Jakob Alexander's Heathered Pearls** project. Full of rich IDM-style melodies, deep ambiance and synth-laden atmospherics the album makes the perfect soundtrack to whiling away the hours. While his debut LP, *Loyal*, was a largely beatless affair, *Body Complex* introduces techno rhythms and dance floor beats to his glacial soundscapes with bewitching results. The wider focus means that the album is a richer, fuller experience than some of his previous affairs. The change in pace and structure also allow for some truly great stand-out moments. For instance, *Sunken Living Area* has a spine-tingling driving house groove, *Interior Architecture Software* marries **B12**-style atmospherics to a steady 4/4 thump while the rising trance synths on the superbly named *Abandoned Mall Utopia* means it will work just as well in a sweaty club as in the comfort of your own home. Immaculately produced, *Body Complex* is a record of stunning depth and focus and will find favour with fans of the mid-paced house of the likes of **Tin Man**, **Lawrence** or **Efdemin**. **8/10**.



A special mention must also go to: *Atarashi Nin~tsu No Tanjo* by **2814** - Resembling a dream that will never come true, this reissue of last year's vaporwave classic is a melancholic ode to a future that will never be, **9/10**, *Presido* by **Deceptikon** - In a month brimming with quality electronica, the mournful strings and heart-rending beats on *Presido* still stand-out. Those seeking emotional resonance to compensate for the rise of blank-state culture should snap this up now, **9/10**, *Pain* by **Deaf Wish** - Like an electric jolt to the heart, the album's jagged rock is dangerous, frightening and thrilling as hell, **7/10**, *Company* by **Slime** - Out now on *Domino's* experimental off-shoot *Weird World*, **Will Archer's** new LP is an

R&B-infused slice of electronic pop, **7/10**, *Neida* by **Nuage** - Inspired by a fairy tale about a young boy following an eerie call, this is a sublime eight track album of techno, broken beat, ambiance and more, **8/10**, *Zentrum* by **Jacques Renault** - In a soulful and groove-filled record the *Let's Play House* boss displays a deep understanding of house, **6/10**, *The Tired Sounds Of Stars Of The Lid/And The Refinement Of The Decline* by **Stars Of The Lid** - Anyone who missed these two great LPs first time out (i.e. me) really needs to track this down. Haunting, thoughtful instrumental music that has passages so beautiful you could cry, **9/10**.



And let's not forget: *Green Lanes* by **Ultimate Painting** - The sophomore LP by the duo of **Jack Cooper** from **Mazes** and **James Hoare** of **Veronica Falls** is a bit of a grower. Give it time though and this could become a firm friend, **7/10**, *Woodwork* by **A. Karperyd** - An album of surreal ambiance from the Swedish veteran. The melancholy beauty of *Natural Nature* and the title-track make this a must for those who like it slow, **8/10**, *Turkey* by **Mike Krol** - This Summer sees the garage rock maverick return with his third LP which features additional band members and a beefed-up sound. Dumb, but fun! **7/10**, *Cache* by **Happy Ghost** - This one passed me by on release. Yet, better late than never, as the record's deep, driving house grooves are too good to not be heard, **7/10**, *Thank You I'm Sorry* by **Crooked Brothers** - One for campfires, or staring out the window on a wet summer's day, **6/10**, *Dis Cover Donna Regina As Covered By...* - A collection of strange and otherworldly covers of songs by the veteran duo **Donna Regina**. While the quality may vary there is enough here to delight alternative pop fans all the same, **6/10**, *Steaming Satellites* by **Steaming Satellites** - Fans of alt rock, or the likes of **Balthazar**, **Modest Mouse** or **Deus** will find much to enjoy here, **8/10**, and *All Around Us* by **Briana Marela** - Staying just the right side of twee, the Seattle artists' second album is a lush collection of soft pop songs filled with the joys of the world, **7/10**.

| [JOHN BITTLES](#)