

## Music | Bittles' Magazine: The music column from the end of the world

Over the last couple of weeks it seems all that everyone has been talking about in the world of music is the return of **Adele**. The blanket coverage given to 25 would make anyone think she was the only artist to be releasing music anymore. Thankfully this is not the case! **By JOHN BITTLES**

Whether you enjoy **Adele's** brand of inoffensive MOR or not, it is important to know that there are other people out there who are releasing albums which could greatly enhance your life. For instance, **Guy Garvey** has just brought out his gorgeously downbeat debut solo LP. **Roots Manuva** and **Congo Natty** have just released what may respectively be the rap and dub albums of the year, while **Ralf Hildenbeutel** and **Mario Hammer And The Lonely Robot** are poised to unleash two stunningly beautiful journeys into the heart of the electronic soul. And that's not all! There is also the futuristic synth-play of **ESB**, the introspective rock of **El Vy**, the sonic headfuck of **Kode 9**, and lots more.

As I have been feeling in need of a cuddle over these last few days it seems fitting to begin with some introspective soul-baring ...



**Guy Garvey's** band **Elbow** are one of the few cases where a group is beloved by both middle-aged women and hipster dudes. Their heartfelt rock has touched a collective nerve, while the band's earnest eulogies, rousing choruses and from-the-heart lyrics are something that even those raised on the banalities of the *X Factor* can enjoy. This month heralds the release of *Courting The Squall*, the **Elbow** lead singer's debut solo LP. Perhaps a little more jazz inflected than his previous work, the record has the vocalist exploring the world of wistful nostalgia which he has all but made his own. Opening with the out of time format of *Angela's Eyes*, it's not until the title-track, a beautiful and stirring elegy where his rich baritone takes centre stage, that the album truly comes alive. From here, the listener should simply lie back, relax and enjoy the ride as the album merges crowd pleasing balladry with downbeat philosophising to great effect. Taking a couple of listens to get right under the skin, this may just be **Guy Garvey's** best work since the emotional majesty of *Asleep In The Back*. **9/10**.



Next up we have the introspective hip hop of Britain's own beatsmith **Roots Manuva**. Over the years **Roots Manuva** has released some of the most vital beats and rhymes known to man. This autumn he returns with his sixth LP *Bleeds*. Stirring, powerful and awe-inspiring, the record finds the rap figurehead in sparkling form. At turns angry, playful and mournful, the album is a fully realised listening experience which thumps its way directly into the joy centres of the brain. Opener, *Heartless Bastards* is an infuriated tirade against capitalism that ably demonstrates Mr. Manuva has lost none of his edge. In a fantastic trio of opening tracks *Crying* features the rapper rhyming over looped baby cries, while *Facety 2:11* is gloriously deranged. The rest of the LP is well worth a listen too though; *Don't Breathe Out* utilizes an uplifting soul sample to wondrous effect, *Stepping Hard* has one of the year's best bass grooves, while *I Know Your Face* is a melancholy joy. Anyone bored of the too slick production and tired bragging of the majority of hip hop should go out of their way to give this a try. **9/10**.



This November **Matt Berninger** of **The National** teams up with **Brent Knopf** from **Menomena** under the strange moniker **El Vy**. The result is the wonderful *Return To The Moon*. The duo's debut album sees the usually morose **Matt Berninger** in surprisingly playful yet reflective mood. Being released from the demands of being a singer in a successful rock band appears to have allowed the vocalist to shed the shackles and have some fun. As with **The National**, it is Matt's rich baritone which is the star player on here and which gives the LP its identity and edge. After the title-track perfectly sets the mood, *I'm The Man To Be* merges a funky bass roll with louche lyrics to instantly bring a smile to the face. Further in, *Paul Is Alive* is rich and graceful, *Silent Ivy Hotel* recalls the majesty of **Nick Cave**, *Sad Case* sounds dark and troubled, while *Careless* finishes the album with a healthy dose of self-reflection. Resisting the urge to be difficult or obtuse, something which affects a lot of side projects, *Return To The Moon* is an engaging and rewarding listen that will stay with you like a good friend. **8/10**.



The artist formerly known as **Rebel MC** makes a very welcome return this month with a dub version of the excellent *Jungle Revolution* which was released way back in 2013 under his **Congo Natty** guise. The aptly named *Jungle Revolution In Dub* features 16 bassbin bothering versions of tracks from his previous LP. In the press blurb **Mikail Tafari** reminisces that “Dub was the soundtrack of my youth... Sometimes I would not move from those speakers for hours. The bass would vibrate through my whole body.” One listen to the album is all it takes to understand exactly what he means, as the urge to crank up the bass and the volume is overwhelming when playing these tracks. After a brief introduction by none other than **Lee Scratch Perry** the album instantly springs to life with killer mixes by the likes of **DJ Madd, Adrian Sherwood, King Yoof** and **Mungos Hi-fi**. When it’s done right dub is one of the most exciting sounds known to man, something which *Jungle Revolution In Dub* demonstrates all too well. **9/10**.



One of the loveliest albums that you’ll hear this month comes in the form of *Moods* by the German techno legend **Ralf Hildenbeutel**. Those of an advanced age may remember Ralf from his celebrated releases on **Sven Văth’s Eye Q** and *Recycle Or Die* labels, or for his production work on his label boss’s early LPs. He has been quiet of late, but one listen to *Moods* is all it takes to make you glad to have him back! The piano pieces are the perfect accompaniment to moments of soft reflection and contemplation. In fact, the gentle piano playing works in tandem with the lush orchestration and emotional atmospherics to create the perfect soundtrack to moments spent with the person you love. At their best tracks such as *Curious, Salt* and *Beyond* are beautifully affecting and waste no time in bringing a tear to the eye. All of which makes this a very special record which will particularly appeal to lovelorn romantics, heartbroken singles, cosy couples, or anyone who needs a little beauty in their life. **9/10**.



German label *Bureau B* are, perhaps, best known for their reissues of Krautrock legends such as **Roedelius**, **Conrad Schnitzler** and **LA Düsseldorf**. Yet, over the years they have also released excellent new music by **Ulrich Schnauss**, **Olucster** and **Lloyd Cole** to name but a few. This trend of unearthing vital new music is continued with the self-titled debut album by French trio **ESB**. The band make the type of electronic music which sounds completely out of time, sitting just as happily in the future as in the past. Throughout the record, basslines pulse, beats crackle, and retro synths combine with techno flourishes to wining effect. Some of my picks include *Spoon*, which sounds like a heartfelt ode to a love that will never be, *The Flashlight* which recalls the alien funk of **Kraftwerk** and the gorgeous slice of ambiance which is *X2*. Thrillingly realised and beautifully produced, with their debut **ESB** take the listener on an 70s inspired journey into the electronic world. **9/10**



Out now on the always on point *Hyperdub* label, *Nothing* is label boss **Kode 9's** first ever LP without long-time collaborator and much missed **The Spaceape**. Highly conceptualized and hyper-produced, the album takes techno as its template before condensing and mutating it into strangely hypnotic forms. The majority of the tracks on here are between two to five minutes long, with only the closing nine minutes of silence which makes up final track *Nothing Lasts Forever* straying from this formula. The brevity of the songs lends the record a continual burst of freshness, with the listener constantly fed new and interesting sounds. After a sedate beginning the album roars into life with the techno bass throb of *Void* which clears the cobwebs from the eardrums in fine style. Following track *Holo* is a jittery *Warp* inspired jam, *Vacuum Packed* a heady, footwork groove, *Respirator* is devastatingly intense, while the aforementioned *Nothing Lasts Forever* evaporates into the silence of loss. Deeply personal and affecting, *Nothing* is far from

an easy ride. Show a little patience though and you'll find much here to enjoy. **8/10**.



Mexican artist **Cubenx** entranced hearts everywhere with the weeping synths on his previous LP *On Your Own Again*. Four years later he makes a return to the album format with *Elegiac*, an altogether different kettle of fish. Reminiscent of the experimental techno and emotional electronica found on **James Holden's** *Border Community* imprint, *Elegiac* is a record of stunning depth, swirling melodies and more. *F.All*, *Treasures* and *Drizzling Lemon Pearls* open the album in a dreamy haze to recall, as does much of the LP, the atmospheric indie of **Lush** or the **Cocteau Twins**. In amongst the soft electronica *Flaneur* shakes things up with a deep house crunch, *Ryo* brings to mind the melodic trance of **Petar Dundov**, while *A Sheltering Sky* ends the album in discordant form. Ethereal and tranquil, *Elegiac* may not set the dance floor on fire, yet it has a deliciously foggy air which helps the whole thing grip you like a hug from your Mum. **8/10**.



*Portraits* by **Maribou State** from earlier this year was a soul-infused, downbeat delight. Recalling the best of 90s trip hop, the album was gloriously chilled, yet still managed to pack an emotional punch. The record makes a welcome return in remixed form (hence the title *Portraits Remixed*) this October (November for the vinyl fiends) with artists such as **Ben Pearce**, **Axel Boman**, **Glenn Astro** and **Gang Colours** injecting the original tracks with some dance floor sheen. *Naked Naked's* **Ben Pearce** kicks us off with the classic house style of his refit of *Midas*. Further in, **Axel Boman** transforms *The Clown* into a gorgeous deep house groove, **Glenn Astro** remixes *Midas* to within an inch of its life, and **Simona Drive** offers the pick of the bunch in the heartfelt beauty of *Wallflower*. While there is the odd dud to be found, there is more than enough here to keep house-heads and fans of the original album well amused.

7/10.

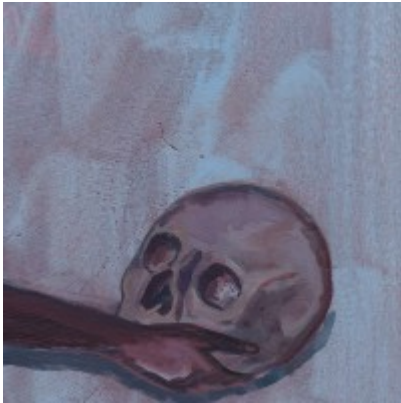


This month we'll finish with the sublime electronica of *L'esprit De L'escalier* by the wonderfully named **Mario Hammer And The Lonely Robot**. Out now on *Traum*, the album is a blissed-out affair, which recalls the work of **Vangelis**, **Pete Namlook** and more. Featuring an array of analogue synthesizers, the record is best enjoyed in one long, luxurious ride. With some of these tracks seeming to drip great, fat tears of loss, songs such as *Mono No Aware*, *Hyggelig*, the title-track and *Eigengrau* sound almost too good to be true. With numerous moments of heart-stopping beauty *L'esprit De L'escalier's* emotional ambiance and rich textures mean these songs will stay in the mind long after the CD has come to the end. In a vividly imagined world of bitter-sweet melancholy the only complaint I can muster about this is that there is no sign of a vinyl release so far! **9/10**.



A special mention must also go to: *The Right Place Where Not To Be* by **Giorgio Gigli** - A dense and rewarding collection of dark ambient soundscapes which is the type of thing I can listen to time and time again, **8/10**, *Under The Same Sky* by **Basic Soul Unit** - Ten tracks of tough house and techno which you should be hearing a lot of in your local clubs, **7/10**, *Es Ist Die Wahrheit Obwohl Es Nie Passierte* by **A Tribe Called Knarf**- Killer grooves, hip hop rhymes, reflective lyrics and a cheeky sense of humour combine on a leftfield rap album which is an awful lot of fun, **9/10**, *Blurse* by **Chevel** - Worth the price of admission for the hypnotic techno on opener *Comb* alone. The rest ain't bad either! **7/10**, *The Emissary* by **Jens-Uwe Beyer** - Warm electronica, piano compositions, dense ambiance and more can be found on the new LP in *Kompakt's Pop Ambient* series by the *Magazine* co-founder, **6/10** and *S/T* by **Nova Heart** - Hailing from

China, **Nova Heart's** electronic pop is a revelation! Combining the bass hooks of **Peter Hook**, the electronic sensibilities of **Friendly Fires** and the torch song vocals of **Beth Gibbons**, this will prove to be one of 2015's leftfield gems, **8/10**.



And let's not forget: *Romantic Psychology 1* by **Levantis** - *Ninja Tune* offshoot *Technicolour* release their first ever album with a record that urges you to get lost within its strangely familiar electronic world, **8/10**, *The Night Is Young Remixed* by **The 2 Bears** - A mixed bag of remixes with **Naum Gabo**, **Seahawks** and **Patice Baumel** all delivering the goods, **6/10**, *West Kirby County Primary* by **Bill Ryder-Jones** - The one-time **Coral** guitarist presents his third solo album of 'Bedroom music'. Wistful and melancholic, these ten songs will make the perfect accompaniment to wet autumn days, **7/10**, *Floods* by **Aris Kindt** - *Scissor & Thread* co-owner **Francis Harris** teams up with guitarist **Gabe Hedrick** for an album of dreamy ambiance and lush atmospherics, **7/10**, *Find What You Love And Let It Kill You* by **Hurricane #1** - 90s indie faves return with an album of passionate sing-a-longs and 80s rock style balladry, **6/10**, *The Sound Of The 16th Season* by **Sven Väth** - The techno legend's long-running mix series hits volume 16 with two CDs worth of groovy techno and boompity house, **7/10**, *10 Years Of Leftroom* by **Various** - Tracks and remixes by the likes of **Chez Damier**, **Mr. Fingers**, **Locked Groove** and label head **Matt Tolfrey** help celebrate the tech house label's 10th birthday in style, **7/10** and *Tiny Pause* by **Yippah** - An offbeat gem, the album's combination of psychedelic electronica and pastoral pop make this an extremely pleasant surprise, **8/10**.