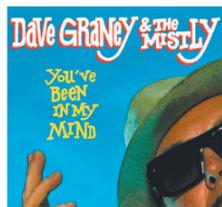


the critical list

MUSIC with Noel Mengel



ROCK

DAVE GRANEY AND THE MISTLY
You've Been in My Mind
(Cockaigne/Fuse) ★★★★★

SINGER, songwriter and rock 'n' roll survivor barely does justice to describe Dave Graney, the keen-eyed observer of Australian life whose memoir, *1001 Australian Nights*, is illuminating on what it's really like as a working musician on the road that never ends. And Graney still is working, adding to that vast catalogue of sardonic commentary and sexy, hip-shakin' grooves. The name of the band keeps changing but his co-conspirators are old hands, including Clare Moore on drums and guitarist Stuart Perera. Graney's eyebrow remains arched as he tucks into topics such as fleeting fame (*Flash in the Pantz*), self (*I Don't Wanna Know Myself*) and origins (the dazzling *Mount Gambier Night*), all delivered with relish at finding he's still making music. An hour spent with a Graney record is an effective antidote to popular-culture overload. It's proof that the world is not as stupid as it might appear.

Noel Mengel

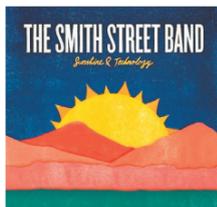


ALT COUNTRY

SHERRY RICH
Dakota Avenue
(Vitamin) ★★★★★

SHERRY Rich grew up on Bribie Island, made a country rock/power pop classic with Ash Naylor in The Grapes in Melbourne, moved to Nashville where she worked with Jay Bennett, a key member of the early Wilco. Between 1999 and 2001 they worked on these tracks in Wilco's Chicago loft studio with members of the band and guests including pedal steel great Al Perkins. When Bennett was fired from Wilco, these songs went on the backburner. After Bennett's death in 2009, Rich felt she owed it to him to complete them, and with a great mixing job by Shane O'Mara, the songs finally see the light of day, sounding as fresh as if they were recorded this morning. Anyone who loved that Grapes record will swoon over this, from the Byrds-ian pop of *Hopeful Heart* to the lump-in-the-throat ballad *Saving it All*, co-written with Bennett, and the sweetly sighing country-rock of *Same Old Paradise*. Sublime.

Noel Mengel



ROCK

THE SMITH STREET BAND
Sunshine and Technology
(Poison City) ★★★★★

BARELY a year after their acclaimed first full-length *No One Gets Lost Anymore*, this rising Melbourne folk-punk five-piece are back and the results are even more impressive than their debut. The titular opening track is a punchy number that contains all the elements that made their last album so accessible – frontman Wil Wagner's verbose lyrics broad Australian accent accompanied by melodic guitars and a watertight rhythmic backbone. Highlights include the perversely catchy *I Want Friends*, *Why I Can't Draw*, which is custom-made for a crowd sing-along, and *Young Drunk*, a more subdued affair with Wagner alone on acoustic for the first minute. Another standout is closing track *Don't Mention the War*, a plaintive slow-burner. Wagner's earnest, accomplished blue-collar songwriting abilities belie his youth and if the quality of this release is any indication, the band have a long career ahead of them.

Daniel Johnson



SOUNDTRACK

JAMES HORNER
The Amazing Spider-Man
(Sony) ★★★★★

HE MIGHT be the third biggest superhero in the world, but Spider-Man is still associated with a campy cartoon theme song from the '60s. There have been three previous big-screen outings, but he's never had a memorable main title march like Batman or Superman, despite Danny Elfman's best efforts. Does that change with James Horner's score for the new reboot? Well, no. There's nothing here that screams "memorable superhero theme tune", rather it's dark and moody. Whether that's a failure of the composer or a limitation of the movie is arguable. There are dramatic horn and string flourishes and haunting choral harmonies. But it's hard to listen to *The Amazing Spider-Man* without recalling Horner's earlier efforts such as *Titanic*. John Williams' *Superman* was never in danger as most iconic superhero theme, nor Elfman's *Batman* as runner-up.

John O'Brien



CLASSICAL

FLORILEGIUM
Vivaldi Sacred works for Soprano and Concertos
(Channel Classics) ★★★★★

IN THE 21st century it is not easy to visualise exactly the Venetian world of a composer such as Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741). Not all that long ago, a critic described Vivaldi's music, on the rare occasions when it was then performed, as repetitive chattering. Today we know better, thanks to the *Four Seasons*. Dedicated scholarship continues to uncover Vivaldi creations, such as the recently discovered and jolly *Il Gran Mogul* concerto for flute, strings and continuo on this disc. Florilegium co-founder and current director Ashley Solomon is soloist in the work, one of three instrumental concertos on the program, one for violin, all performed on Florilegium's period instruments. The soaring soprano of Elin Manahan Thomas illuminates two works, the brisk psalm *Laudate Pueri Dominum* and the motet *Nulla in Mundo*.

Patricia Kelly



SOUL

BEN L'ONCLE SOUL
Ben l'Oncle Soul
(Motown France) ★★★★★

FRENCH Motown? Oui oui, monsieur. After all, Paris is the home of Peugeot and Citroen, just as Detroit – the original "motor town" – is the capital of American soul. Never mind that Benjamin Duterde – aka Ben l'Oncle Soul – actually hails from Tours, 250km southeast of Paris. While it's true this self-titled debut stirs the ghosts of American soul greats Sam Cooke, Marvin Gaye and Otis Redding, it's not all homage and shameless emulation. *Ben l'Oncle Soul* also shimmers with sharp instrumental invention and Duterde's virtuoso vocals. With half of the album's 14 mostly original songs sung in French, the concise arrangements owe as much to the Mark Ronson school of neo-soul as they do Motown. The blueprint is Duterde's cover of the White Stripes' *Seven Nation Army*, stripped back from its original rock bluster to a kind of dubstep minimalism. It is, 'ow you say, une entree delicieuse.

Phil Stafford

