

CLASSIC POP

THE BEST OF

2018

JOIN US AS WE SERVE UP OUR PICK OF THE FINEST NEW ALBUMS, REISSUES, COMPILATIONS AND BOOKS TO HIT PLANET POP IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS...

WYNDHAM WALLACE, IAN GITTINS, MARK LINDORES AND STEVE HARNELL

NEW RELEASES

1

LILY ALLEN
NO SHAME
PARLOPHONE

A tour de force of pop nous, Allen's fourth defied haters with sensitivity and caustic wit. Sparing no one, least herself, it conceded addictions (*Everything To Feel Something*), infidelities (*My One*) and tabloid persecutors (*Come On Then*), then, in *Three*, offered insight into the mother/child relationship.

3

JANELLE MONÁE
DIRTY COMPUTER
ATLANTIC

"I'm not America's nightmare, I'm the American dream," *Crazy, Classic, Life* insisted, but uncomfortable truths like: "The same mistake, I'm in jail, you on top of shit" probably provoked American conservatives, as doubtless did *Django Jane's* "Let the vagina have a monologue". A feast of funk, hip-hop and R&B that former mentor Prince would applaud.

2

ELVIS COSTELLO & THE IMPOSTERS
LOOK NOW
CONCORD

On arguably his finest collection since 1989's *Spike*, Costello combined his sometimes-acerbic articulacy with a heart-on-sleeve sentimentality so effective even Burt Bacharach and Carole King failed to eclipse him. From galloping opener *Under Lime* to Broadway-esque closer *He's Given Me Things*, this represented a master at work.

1



3



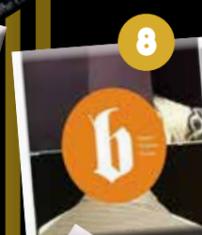
2



10



8



9



7



6



4



4

THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE QUEEN
MERRIE LAND
STUDIO 13

Following autumn's Gorillaz album, *The Now Now*, Damon Albarn reappeared alongside Simon Tong, Paul Simonon and Tony Allen to mourn the state of Brexit Britain. The title track's "We cheer on the clowns as they roll into town" encapsulated contemporary populism perfectly.

5

TRACEY THORN
RECORD
MERGE RECORDS

Wonderfully articulate, unreasonably calm (given contemporary sexual politics), and blessed by one of Britain's finest voices, *Record* found Thorn and favoured producer Ewan Pearson delivering "nine feminist bangers". Openly middle-aged, predominantly electronic, it was confrontational, celebratory and confessional, especially on *Dancefloor* and the epic, emancipated *Sister*.

6

THE INTERNET
HIVE MIND
COLUMBIA

A generous hour of neo-soul with grooves that often ran deeper than the Mariana Trench, as on *Beat Goes On*, which burst open halfway through to reveal its drum 'n' bass heart, and the seductive *Come Over*. *Wanna Be*, meanwhile, could have been the work of Erykah Badu herself.

8

BRÜCKEN FROESE
BEGINN
STRIKE FORCE ENTERTAINMENT/CHERRY RED

Propaganda's Claudia Brücken and Jerome Froese, son of Tangerine Dream's Edgar, validated their reputations on this album of moody synth-pop. Boasting skittering beats, sleek electronica and potent melodies – especially on *Cards* – it was also unafraid of the dark, as *Wounded* attested. If this was the *Beginn*, let there be a *Mitte* before the *Ende*...

10

JOHNNY MARR
CALL THE COMET
NEW WOODOO/WARNER

Finally emerging from a spotlight normally hogged by his increasingly cranky former Smiths colleague, guitar-hero Marr's third album may have sometimes lacked lyrical bite but still reclaimed his legendary group's legacy. *The Tracers* was as ferocious as *The Queen Is Dead*, and on *Hi Hello*, he out-Mozzed Mozza himself.

9

ERIKA
FALLING IN LOVE WITH SADNESS
ERIKA RECORDS

The former Ninja Tune signing returned to the theme of 2017's *Melanfolie* (a symphony, no less!) with 10 tracks whose vulnerable humanity belied their glistening electronic production. As convincing in a club as in a lonely kitchen, tracks like *Run* and the stately *Promises* made this indispensable.

COMPILATIONS

Ian Gittins' favourite collections of 2018



NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL NOW
NOW

One hundred albums into the never-ending, Spotify-defying chart-hit compilation series, *Now That's What I Call Music!* put out this boxset featuring one song from each album. From Culture Club's *Karma Chameleon* to George Ezra's *Shotgun*, here was 35 years of British pop history.



SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER
VIRGIN EMI

In 1978, its helium vocals and dazzling harmonies kept the Bee Gees-helmed *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack album at No.1 for a scarcely believable 18 weeks. Forty years on, its disco divinations such as *Stayin' Alive*, *You Should Be Dancing* and *Jive Talkin'* still sounded like freshly minted funky gospel.



REVAMP: REIMAGINING THE SONGS OF ELTON JOHN & BERNIE TAUPIN
VIRGIN EMI

Elt and Bernie have quite the stellar back catalogue to pick from and today's popsters filled their boots. Mary J Blige was awesome on *Sorry Seems To Be The Hardest Word*, Florence Welch blew the doors off *Tiny Dancer* and even Ed Sheeran's *Candle In The Wind* was oddly palatable.



REVOLUTIONARY SPIRIT: THE SOUND OF LIVERPOOL 1976-1988
CHERRY RED

This exhaustive 5CD set, complete with 56-page booklet, celebrated all musical things Liverpool since the days of punk: Deaf School, Big In Japan, Echo & the Bunnymen, Teardrop Explodes, OMD, China Crisis, Dead Or Alive, A Flock Of Seagulls, Frankie... every Scouser going except, bizarrely, Pete Dinklage and Wah!



STILL IN A DREAM - A STORY OF SHOEGAZE 1988-1995
CHERRY RED

An early 90s music scene, shoegaze had its roots in the 80s swirl of the Cocteau Twins and The Jesus & Mary Chain. This 5CD set traced its lineage all the way through A.R. Kane and Loop to Ride and Lush.

REISSUES

1
SOFT CELL
KEYCHAINS AND
SNOWSTORMS:
THE SOFT CELL STORY
UNIVERSAL

After nearly 40 years of high camp and drama, Soft Cell were never going to head off with a mumbled "Tara, then." Here was the send-off they deserved: nine career-spanning CDs of insatiable electro-pop from a truly unique British duo.

4
THE POLICE
EVERY MOVE YOU MAKE
UMC

A general aversion to the preening Sting has meant The Police have at times failed to receive the kudos they are due, but this half-speed 11LP vinyl boxset confirmed them as spiky-haired kings of New Wave pop excellence – and the title track remains the best anthem about stalkers ever written.

2
PET SHOP BOYS
PLEASE/ACTUALLY
PARLOPHONE

Speaking of truly unique British duos... the Pet Shop Boys' *Further Listening* reissues are a lengthy and ongoing project but nothing in their canon surpasses the beauty and majesty of these first two albums, which bequeathed the world *West End Girls*, *Suburbia*, *Shopping*, *Rent* and *It's A Sin*. Utterly glorious.

5
PIXIES
COME ON PILGRIM...
IT'S SURFER ROSA
4AD

A reissue of the Pixies' game-changing first two albums, first released in 1987 and 1988. Scabrous white noise, feral Dick Dale surf guitar, outer-space fixations, guttural profanities yelled in Spanish AND that loud/quiet thing... no wonder David Bowie once called them the "psychotic Beatles".

8
BOW WOW WOW
YOUR BOX SET PET:
THE COMPLETE RECORDINGS
(1980-1984)
CHERRY RED

Malcolm McLaren's masterplan involved melding Burundi beats with sexual taboos. The result was a riotous one-off of a band with hooks to burn, even if the innuendo he ladled into the mouth of 14-year-old Annabella Lwin left a nasty after-taste.

10
PUBLIC IMAGE LIMITED
THE PUBLIC IMAGE IS ROTTEN
UNIVERSAL

One disc gathered Pil's wilful and wanton array of singles, from the bilious clarion call of *Public Image* through the acidic *Death Disco* to the honeyed earworm that was *Rise*. Four more boasted rarities and dance remixes. Not one fan of this colossal band got the feeling they'd been cheated.

9
YAZOO
THREE PIECES
MUTE

Or *Four Pieces*, if you preferred them on vinyl. This welcome reissue of Vince Clarke and Alison Moyet's two early-80s albums showed that few bands in that era came closer to marrying the robotic allure of early synth-pop with the classic heartbreak and soul of Tamla Motown.

3
KATE BUSH
KATE BUSH REMASTERED
CD BOX 1
RHINO

The end of the year saw a tremendous reissue of Kate Bush's back catalogue in its entirety and here was the pick, collecting her albums from 1978's *The Kick Inside* to 1993's *The Red Shoes*. Fifteen years of insatiable, mystical folk-pop from this most quixotic of artists – here was a dreaming indeed.

6
DAVID BOWIE
LOW/"HEROES"/LODGER
PARLOPHONE

There was a fair degree of Bowie reissue action in 2018. Most people could take or leave his *Loving The Alien* 80s boxset, but this spring re-release of his audacious, experimental and brittle Berlin trilogy was essential: "My complete being is within those three [albums]," said Bowie. "They are my DNA."

BOOKS

Our essential reading list covers hip-hop, fashion and fascinating autobiographies and a biography



1
BEASTIE BOYS BOOK
BEASTIE BOYS, FABER & FABER

The ultimate companion to the music, artistry and ethos of one of the US's most original and inspiring acts, *Beastie Boys Book* charts their rise from punks to bratty rappers, kings of cool and hip-hop's elder statesmen through touching and humorous anecdotes, thousands of photographs and memorabilia. Everything a band autobiography should be.



2
VOGUE X MUSIC
VOGUE MAGAZINE, ABRAMS

An exhaustive chronicle of the relationship between music and fashion from the pages of the world's most esteemed style bible. *Vogue x Music* is packed with era-defining portraits of the biggest names in rock, pop, soul, jazz and rap in all their glory, courtesy of the past century's greatest imagemakers.



3
COAL BLACK MORNINGS
BRETT ANDERSON, LITTLE BROWN

An authentic account of the Suede frontman's pre-fame life, exquisitely told in the manner you'd expect of a superb lyricist. Managing to perfectly evoke his working-class roots and awkward teen years before arriving in London, Anderson's warm and engaging memoir is impossible to put down.



4
MY THOUGHTS EXACTLY
LILY ALLEN, BLINK PUBLISHING

As the title suggests, *My Thoughts Exactly* is more an account of someone attempting to make sense of everything that's happened to her – good and bad – than a straightforward autobiography, taking the reader along for the ride as she does so. At times witty, at others harrowing, always captivating.



5
MORRISSEY: ALONE AND PALELY LOITERING
KEVIN CUMMINS, CASSELL

A fantastic reminder of Morrissey and his impact during his time in The Smiths and his early solo years, *Alone And Palely Loitering* comes as close as you can get to the mania of Mozza's live shows in the 80s and 90s and the sheer adoration in which he was, and is, held by his ever-faithful audience.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

2018 SAW TRIUMPHANT RETURNS FROM ALL SAINTS, GAZ COOMBS AND JOHNNY MARR

It's happened to Radiohead and Coldplay – now Arctic Monkeys have joined their ranks as a band whose frontman and songwriter has begun to wholly shape their artistic vision, rather freezing out the contribution of a stellar lead guitarist. My first reaction to the Sheffield quartet's new album *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino* was essentially "Where the hell is Jamie Cook?", but Alex Turner's slow-burner has casually slunk into my list as a favourite of the year. All this while totally dispensing with the earworm hooks that made its predecessor *AM* so captivating.

Two recent *Classic Pop* cover stars have also turned out superlative new albums this year; Johnny Marr and All Saints. Marr's solo career continues to go from strength to strength. From the urgent riffing of opener *Rise* and a rare backwards glance via the Smiths *Hi Hello*, *Call The Comet* was packed with highlights and the eerie *Walk Into The Sea* is proof positive of a talent still loathed to rest on his guitar-hero laurels. All Saints were equally impressive, playing to their strengths yet still pushing their sound forward. Their career-best LP *Testament* features club bangers, pristine electro-pop and slinky modern R&B.

No doubt All Saints would have been equally struck as I was by the 80s R&B vibes of the excellent *Hive Mind* by The Internet. It's become the Californian outfit's worldwide breakthrough album, and quite rightly so.

Closer to home, Damon Albarn's heart-on-the-sleeve response to the Brexit debacle with *The Good, The Bad & The Queen's Merrie Land* struck a chord with me, while Gaz Coombes' evolution from cherubic Supergrass frontman into a multi-faceted singer-songwriter of the first order came to fruition with the sublime *World's Strongest Man*.

Few, if any, albums have matched an early standout for me this year – *All Nerve* by The Breeders. Done and dusted in little over 30 minutes, this was all killer and no filler, particularly lead single *Wait In The Car*.

Meanwhile, a constant stream of boxsets through *CP*'s doors in 2018 has seen some impressive bells-and-whistles archival deep dives. Although both of the Wings albums *Wild Life* and *Red Rose Speedway* were middling at best, the range of extras in their associated boxes was astonishingly rich. Those behind the recent Howard Jones reissues of *Human's Lib* and *Dream Into Action* were equally thorough and imaginative. It's not always just about the music...

Steve Harnell

Editor