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Music 123

founders of the First Presbyterian Church Of Elvis The Divine, UK, and are obsessed with country music and the blues. Now they've signed to a major label and recorded an unexpectedly good album. Rumbling through biting riffs and veering off into well-performed gospel, rap and country blues, with samples of anyone from Howlin' Wolf to Johnny Burnette, they sound like the missing link between Black Grape, Hank Wangford, The Tubes and the early Mothers Of Invention. At their best, they are slick, tuneful and wildly original — Ain't Goin' To Goa is the funniest attack on hip-hop since We're Only In It For The Money, and U Don't Dance 2 Techno Avymora is a gloriously bad-taste, druggy country-death song. At their worst, they show off their fake American accents to a bluesy shuffle and sound too laid-back to be anarchic. But they can't be dismissed as a novelty band. They should star in the first acid-house revivalist country musical. (RD)

Led Zeppelin
The BBC Sessions (Atlantic) (2CDs)
★★★★

The Led Zeppelin catalogue has been remastered and re-mastered with shameful frequency, but this collection of material recorded for BBC broadcasts in 1969 and 1971 offers a useful cross-section of the group's best material, and is a reminder that before they drowned in dinosaur bombast, they were one of the most formidable performing outfits in rock. Disc one was recorded in 1969, the year their first two albums were released, and concentrates on their rootier, bluesier early material. There's a loose, feral quality about most of this stuff that shows why they're originally made such a devastating impact on audiences, particularly impressive because there was nowhere to hide on these sessions: they just had to get up and play it live. The combination of technique and raw feel on What Is And What Should Never Be, or the various versions of Communication Breakdown, is often astonishing. Disc two finds the quartet mixing in some folk and Celtic noises with the blues and the hard rock, including a fine Going To California, while their live take of Stairway To Heaven brings some tension to an over-familiar warhorse. Norfams might even get converted. (AS)

Smoke City
Flying Away (Jive)
★★★★

Smoke City's chanteuse, Nina Miranda, is now English but started life in Brazil, with a spell in France somewhere in between. And it shows — Flying Away has a distinctly international flavour. You'll know Underwater Love — sensual lyrics in both English and Portuguese over what sounds like the James Bond theme tune. It's the music from the Levi's ad, the one with the mermaids. This is as good as it gets, but it's all fun, without really meaning anything — the peak of banality is reached on Numbers, which is just that: a string of numbers chanted in various languages over an incessant bossa-nova beat. So don't expect any great insights, but Flying Away will take you on a bizarre little journey between the dancefloor, the lounge and the beach. A charming debut. (SW)

Reviews by Caroline Sullivan, Dan Glatzer, Robin Denslow, Adam Sweeting and Sam Wollaston.



La bohème

All the world's a stage for alchemical fops Elcka, who invent heroically monumental music. By John O'Reilly

Elcka
Rubbernecking (Island)
★★★★

POP CD OF THE WEEK
As a kid growing up, you quickly figure out that the cheapest means of escape (other than your parents' drinks cabinet) is to become a bohemian. But how? You create your own sources of prestige, borrowing a look from Ciccio, stealing a copy of Genet's *The Thief's Journal* and smoking like Truman Capote. You become a star in your own movie. But if you live in a small town, you may as well wear a huge flashing neon sign that screams "Dickhead".

Reviews of Elcka identify a similar profile. On a brick constitutional through the suburbs of British Pop you meet bands that are either the boys-next-door or girls-next-door, or the lads who beat you up for being a nancy boy. Elcka have been marked out as foppish, dandyish and voguish. It's true that just as listening to rock occasionally inspires you to get out the air guitar, so an Elcka song will get you voguing in your living room. But Elcka, unlike Suede, are more bohemian than dandy. If the timorous dandy only needs a mirror to live, the bohemian needs a screen, a stage. Elcka, as the album title Rubbernecking suggests, rummage through the ruins of a beat-light culture with the conviction

that in the carnage something glorious can be found. Vocalist Harold proclaims imperiously on Supercharged: "Shine/let us shine/let us burn through their eyes with a merciless pride/ we'll feast/ explode/ scattering platinum cover the lot of them... life's such a bore/ unlock the door/ make believe will save us/ dirty rich and famous." Both on record and on stage, where the bespoken Harold resembles David Hemmings circa Blow-Up, they bring a swagger and swank to their aerobic accumulation of sounds and images. The songs are furnished with chords and vocals from early Roxy Music to Bowie and The Cure. This is monumental pop. It aims at something heroic in the

belief that it offers a line of flight out of mediocrity, as on the chorus of Statusque: "Who would contain us/ Now we're so statusque/ tell me would you detain us/ Now we're so statusque." Or on the lustrous Hobbling to Lose, whose story is Bowie's Heroes, with a melody that is a variation on The Kinks' So Tired and a vocal climax that is Ashes to Ashes, where Harold growls "I'm the last man/ cockroach sapiens/ bandit that clings to the hip and the tongue/ But I'm here and now/ in this temporary town/ So won't you give me your name/ Give me your number."

All their references are points of departure, goadings for their own charged theatricality. When The Circus Comes opens up with a spate that could be Human League or even early Depeche Mode, but you get lost in the folds of sound right up until Harold's John Lydon finale. At times it's almost gothic. But Elcka are about ascending to an adventure, rather than romanticising suffering: "I still await the day/ when I'm upped and snatched away/ to join the ancient cast/ I'll see the future, future in the past... I'll dazzle with my art/ Because I'm an acrobat/ without a safety net/ because I've found/ my God in castanets."

If the music has an architecture, it's baroque. And it's more like a caustic cabaret than theatre. On Leather Lips, where I swear I could hear strings right out of Duran Duran's Rio, Harold snarls of menacing, suburban suffocation: "Bungalows and eggshells homes/ and a view as long as any place/ could take your leather lips/ baggy hips/ slow resignation of an imminent occasion/ that is yours." Heavy Metal, New Romanticism, Bomp — a few examples of the self-parody that results from a blind fascination with the heroic. But Harold has the charisma, and Elcka have enough intensity, and occasionally spite, to avoid the pomposity and the torpor of the overblown.

On their best songs, like Look at You Now, they mix up the tenues, and the music generates a sweeping momentum. If there is magic to what they do it is alchemy. It's about changing the base metal of the everyday into the precious.

Acid jazz celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. James Maycock says it's still going strong

Goatee grooves

Various Artists
Jazz Thang! (BGP)
★★★★

Various Artists
What's The Word ??? (BGP)
★★★★

Sarah Webster Fabio
Ju Jus: Alchemy Of The Blues (BGP)
★★★★

SANDAL WEARING
CDs OF THE WEEK
The term "acid jazz" started as a joke. Gilles Peterson explains: "In 1987, Nicky Holloway was playing some mad acid house records. It was up to Chris

(Bangs) and me to follow up on the DJ front and we weren't sure what to do, so we said, "If that was acid house, this is acid jazz." They then played Funk Inc's The Better Half, a raw and funky jazz song from 1972. Ten years later, the genre is now recognised around the world. Jamiroquai and the Brand New Heavies, two acts that reflect the most commercial side of the music, have huge followings, while other groups like Preakpower and Smoke City continue to supply songs for stylish advertisements. It is an eclectic term that has described the music of Galliano and The Young Disciples, the Latin rhythms of Snowboy and Greyboy, who successfully married the

sound with instrumental hip-hop. Back in the late 1980s, a small but fanatical group, which also included Eddie Filler, Jez Nelson, Paul Bradshaw and Russ Dewbury was determined to take jazz away from the world of repressed hoffins and to focus on the experimental, open-minded spirit that was always the driving force of jazz. They unearthed the funkier side of jazz music that had flourished only amongst black audiences in big American cities in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This was the music of Pacho and the Latin Soul Brothers, Charles Earland, Eddie Harris, Lennie Hatton Smith and Ivan "Boogaloo Joe" Jones, among others that had been influenced by the parallel developments in Latin, soul and funk music. Fifteen years after its demise, this music was renamed "acid jazz" by a group of Englishmen and exported back to America. The musicians are unlikely to be found in jazz guides — instead of embracing the avant-garde experiments of

Ornette Coleman, they recorded jazz music that was danceable. The music was rich with the sound of congas, electric pianos, raw saxophone solos and Hammond organs, an instrument serious jazz critics were most sceptical of. This year BGP Records, the first label to start reissuing these obscure jazz classics, are celebrating their 10th anniversary by releasing 3 albums that reflect the wealth of this music: Jazz Thang and What's The Word... are two very thorough collections, compiled by Russ Dewbury from the Prestige Records catalogue. Ju Jus was recorded in 1975 by Sarah Webster Fabio, an irrefutable black poetess. Her spoken words, including homages to Ray Charles and Johnny Hodges, are backed by a potent musical background of funk, jazz and blues music. And contemporary acid jazz can prove a successful antidote to the ever-increasing flood of house music and the robotic nature of swingbeat.