

On The Record

Albums

Caro Emerald

Deleted Scenes From The Cutting Room Floor (Dramatico) ★★★★★
 THIS album has notched up 27 weeks at number one of the album chart in Caro's native Holland – eclipsing even Michael Jackson's Thriller. The Dutch have got good taste, for this set of songs boast an ingenious mix of jazz, swing, mambo and hip hop. The nearest comparison would be with Paloma Faith, or Alesha Dixon in show tune mode. The good thing is that this is not some cut-and-paste affair with loops of rhythm stitched together with repetitive loops of jazzy brass and then overlaid with a vocal. These are proper songs – all newly written – in a 1940s and 1950s style but

given the beefy bottom end of a hip hop-flavoured rhythm. Just occasionally, as on Absolutely Me, the balance tips more to old school hip hop, and there is a right old scratch-fest, but most of these songs are like newly-minted period pieces, full of bounce and zest.

Neil Young

Le Noise (Reprise) ★★★★★
 ONE influential reviewer has described Neil Young's latest album as 'unlistenable'. Anyone who has experienced Young's 1991 Arc-Weld album would know he can get a whole lot more unlistenable than this. Le Noise is not pretty, though. Young has recorded voice and guitar which has then been titivated by producer Daniel Lanois, whose best-known stock in trade is spacious, reverby soundscapes. So Young's guitar is made huge, and the voice occasionally looped disconcertingly. Beneath Lanois' sonic artistry is a set of songs whose sentiments fans can take to heart – the simplicity of Walk With Me, the thought-provoking ideas of Love And War. But only the real diehard will want to

hear this album over and over again.

Darrell Scott

A Crooked Road (Full Light Records) ★★★★★
 YOU may have seen him as one of the members of the folk jam which is BBC 4's wonderful Transatlantic Sessions. You may have seen his name attached to Robert Plant's latest project, Band Of Joy. Now it's time to give Darrell Scott his due in his own right. For A Crooked Road is a collection of songs right from the heart, ringing with sincerity and emotion. It's not just the smoothly expressive voice, or the intelligence of the man's guitar playing, it is that, like those others in the rare collection of American folk and country artists who really matter, Scott seems to be imparting universal truths about life and love. The Open Door – the highlight of Scott's Transatlantic Sessions appearances – is also perhaps the best song here, weaving simple poetry and philosophy into something moving and yet dignified and restrained. Likewise, A Father's Song states, to a rolling piano theme, the simple truth about how Scott's music puts food on the family table but also takes him away from his children, whom he namechecks at the end of each chorus. Be still my trembling lip.

The Wanted

Heart Vacancy (Geffen) ★★★★★
 THERE must have been a period in the 1980s when critiquing pop music become a pointless game as every British pop star's career was moulded by the distinctive signatures of Stock, Aitken and Waterman. Roll ahead 25 years, and the same

problem presents itself. The advent of pro-tools means even the bedroom boyband can sound like a major-label backed operation and the rules on what samples and loops maketh the pop record are just as conditioned as they were back in SAW's day. In accordance, The Wanted's debut ballad on Geffen plays by all the right rules, over-egging the acoustic guitar, dubbing the drumbeats, swapping vocals between singers of varying abilities, and moodying things up a bit with some piano. It's a hit, for sure, but pop wasn't always a bi-word for regurgitation – it used to be creative, too.

Paul Taylor

Singles

Mt. Desolation

Departure/State Of Our Affairs (Island) ★★★★★
 AS the main musical instrument in Tim Rice-Oxley's bread and butter band, Keane, has shifted further and further away from the piano towards the keytar, it's become easy to see why this traditional songwriter needs an outlet like Mt. Desolation. In many ways, the band is the sum of its parts – the influences of Mumford And Sons and Brandon Flowers showing through explicitly (even when Rice-Oxley's vocals border on the Bonzo Dog Band) – with a seriously alt-country agenda. If Departure is the evening hoe-down, AA-side State Of Our Affairs is the heartbroken moment you watch the girl/boy of your dreams leave the party with someone else.

Eliza Doolittle

Roller Blades (Parlophone) ★★★★★
 IF we can just get through an Eliza Doolittle song without her whistling, CityLife might give the young singer-song-

writer a chance. Certainly, the chirpy swish of Roller Blades avoids what's fast becoming her trademark for a near three minutes, hopping harmlessly through a melody that sounds like the logical audio end game of working in an industry where getting your song on a mobile phone advert is really where the money is. And then, just when you think she's got through it without a whistle...

Cloud Nothings

Hey Cool Kids (Wichita) ★★★★★
 TAKE a punt on a bedroom songwriter in 2010, and it should probably be Cloud Nothings. His records are so lo-fi they'd make Kevin Shields himself weep in envy, but they're also crammed with ebullience and unpretentious indie ambition. In truth, Hey Cool Kids sounds like the racket you hear the warm up band making when you're standing in a queue for a gig listening in at the stage door. But it also shows remarkable promise; a decent producer prepared to talk Dylan Baldi into cleaning up just a little bit of the deliberate scuzziness that clouds the melody could turn this into an indie gem.

Sarah Walters

Jazz

Sara Mitra

April Song (Impossible Ark) ★★★★★
 SARA Mitra is of Irish-Indian stock, married to jazz drummer Tim Giles, and was heavily pregnant during the recording of this, her debut record. These personal details have a bearing on the outcome of April Song. Mitra's voice is light and breathy yet intense, and her own songs are candid and searching. The adventurous arrangements play up the tension and contrast between horns and strings, and the sound is a lot richer than the modest resources might

suggest. That unsettling migrant's song The Old Country – as odd and out-of-time as Strange Fruit when Curtis Lee and Nat Adderley wrote it in 1961 – projects the singer's darkest fear: it's only a small step from citizen of the world to total outcast. In reality, Misra makes the most of her dual-heritage, nay multiple-heritage. The intelligence of her songwriting, together with the sensuality of her singing, make for a winning combination.

Mike Butler

Classical

Gottlieb Wallisch

Mozart In Vienna (Linn) ★★★★★
 Mozart: Sonata no. 18, K576; Fantasy in D minor, K397; Sonata no. 17, K570; Rondo in A minor, K511; Variations on Unser dummer Pöbel meint, K455. Gottlieb Wallisch, piano (SACD Linn CKD 352, full price)
 THERE can be few performances of Mozart's piano music as perfect in every way as this one. Young Austrian Gottlieb Wallisch plays a modern piano but gets a sound from it that seems totally right for Mozart – bright, clear and never heavy-weight, though he uses remarkable subtleties of timing and phrasing to extract the greatest expressiveness from the music. The selection is a broad one: music Mozart wrote in his 10 – his last – years in Vienna. The sonatas are late works and evidence of his interest in the contrapuntal masters of the past, besides the emotional depth he was then putting into his music. The Fantasy and the Variations on a Glück comic opera aria are more Mozart the showman, but what depth of resources and lightning wit he has to show – and the Rondo is a private, sad little piece that opens a window into his soul.

Robert Beale

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