



P.W. Long

God Bless the Drunkard's Dog

Southern Records/Black Diamond

What P.W. Long accomplishes like no other is to fuse country-tinged blues and post-core metallic buzz with razor acuity. His growling, hot-steamed, Sunday-on-a-Friday-night, punk-blues séance is vintage. It's matchless sustenance to those in the know.

Long's been refining his red-lining gospel plaint since he first unveiled it in 1991 in *Mule*, which left two full-length classics in its taste-making wake: the band's self-titled 1992 debut, and the Steve Albini-produced follow-up, *If I Don't Six*. (Both as fresh as the day they were mastered.)

Leaving in 1996 to distill more machine-tooled, whiskey soaked Fender mayhem, Long hooked up with Jesus Lizard drummer Mac McNeilly and bassist Dan Maister to form P.W. Long's Reelfoot, culminating in 1998 with a masterpiece of accretive sonic expression, *Push Me Again*.

The follow-up to single-coil heartbreaker *Remembered*, Long's post-Reelfoot 2003 solo jaunt, *God Bless* shows Long top his high lonesome game.

Metric tides of sound crash and wail and burn. Warm distorted major chords and angular key changes morph from barn-burning ("Jackie Lake"); "Crazy Tonight") to mournful ("Sweetest Weirdo"; "Saskatune"; "Bog"); to sinuous and soaring ("Nogales Rose"; "Shake"; "[Let 'Em] Roll").

Long imbues his unique handling of the Southern groove, regardless of guitar volume, with deep-welled empathy. It's the ache that magnetizes, as much as Long's penchant for dirty good times. Brother Long: God bless.



Bebel Gilberto

Momento

Six Degrees Records

In the mists of the Fumaça Waterfall in Bahia, Brazil, visitors speak breathlessly of unmatched, almost magical contentment and mystery—a kind that must be experienced to be understood.

Take heart uninitiated: To receive such unparalleled enchantment, queue up Bebel Gilberto.

The honey-voiced, singer-songwriter, musician daughter of famed Bossa Nova co-founder João Gilberto, evokes the seductive, soulful hedonism for which her beguiling home country is partly known.

Momento will transport you immediately to the breezeways of Rio's Rua dos Otis and the sun-dappled verandas of Leblon and Ipanema, with sand in your shoes and Caipirinha in hand, whether you're mired in the cubical gulag at the office, puttering around a landlocked backyard with a garden hose, or ice fishing on Lake Superior outside Duluth in February.

As depurative and satisfying as ever, Gilberto purrs, whispers and honey-drips her way through 11 tracks of dissonant seventh chords, rosewood marimba burbling, muted surdo bass and lounge-beat flourishes.

Whether it's the zabumba drums, steel-stringed acoustics and lilting Pifanos flutes of the Forro-styled "Cacada," or the strum, beat and click of "Os Novos Yorkinos," Gilberto suffuses all with calm warmth and goose-bump melody.

She compels us needlessly in between the wind chimes and galloping percussion of "Bring Back The Love" to "cha... cha, cha... chill out, chill out..." Like a musical massage, *Momento* sates completely.



Grinderman

Grinderman

ANTI-

Nick Cave is the poet laureate of rock-n-roll. In 2004, Cave, a pianist, scrapped his long-held process of composing fully fleshed songs in an office he goes to everyday to write in Brighton & Hove on England's South Coast where he lives, deciding instead to take a set of partially developed songs into Misère studio in Paris with a pared down Bad Seeds lineup, consisting of himself, violinist Warren Ellis, bassist Martyn P. Casey and drummer Jim Sclavunos.

The result was *Abattoir Blues/The Lyre Of Orpheus*, a must-have double-disc of novel-quality lyricism, of the theatrical, minor key, noir soul sort of which Cave is only capable. Grinderman is the raw core of the band that produced that gem.

And now, another; with Cave (mostly) on guitar this time. Apocalyptic, aggressive, modern and propellant without artifice, *Grinderman* deeply satisfies. The no-bullshit swagger here is singular: "Get it On"; "No Pussy Blues"; "Depth Charge Ethel"; "Love Bomb." All are infused with Cave's bluesy menace and war zone poetry.

He laments the "easily offended" on "Honey Bee"—"Ack-ack, positions everyone!"—and lampoons reasoned man on "Go Tell the Women": "We are scientists/We do genetics/We leave religion/To the psychos and the fanatics... Go tell the women we are leaving..."

Grinderman are skeleton key to rock's quadrupedal torpor: It's up on its hind legs on this record.

Virgin Records

We knew the reunited Stooges would shred the tents at SXSW like a backfiring Detroit hot rod; an incendiary device launching a swift mule kick to the keister of anyone complacent enough to think rock-n-roll is "just fine," as is.

The Weirdness, the band's fourth and first album in 34 years, incites. Bloggers have savaged the record. Hooey: Don't believe the tripe. The twee and preening like to stamp their bona fides without ghost-jumping their own thin-boned ideologies. This album rocks, and it rocks hard.

Iggy Pop remains the most exciting deliveryman since Howlin' Wolf. And the Asheton brothers (Ron) on guitar and (Scott) on drums bring the same contusive powder of their window-bursting, bowel-liquefying legacy. It's not *Funhouse* and *Raw Power*. But it can't be.

Facing the absurdity head-on, Pop describes himself on "Trollin'" in a topless Cadillac, ogling the girl next to him, noting accurately, "...I know you'd do it too..."

The Stooges are about transcending frustration, not inducing it. Their purpose is to get you up off your ass to act out a fugue-blues-groove and make your pants fall off, to get you past your inhibited muck. Meaning comes through the osmosis of doing, not through stasis and analyses. Pop seized on this decades ago. The Stooges brought it to the world. Now they're banking it.

Rufus Wainwright

Release the Stars

Geffen Records

Rufus Wainwright shows how culturally rich popular music can be. Possessing superlative song-writing talent and ice cold musical confidence, this Baroque pop master raises the bar to heights peers rarely scale.

The Verdi-loving piano player is composing his way into the same heady pantheon as Leonard Cohen and Brian Wilson by sitting down at the keys and keeping his gates open.

Seamlessly blending opera, rock and chamber soul, Wainwright bridges the classic with the modern, creating a sound uniquely his own; one so fresh, stylish and compelling, with lyrics so open-hearted and savvy, it makes less learned artists seem startlingly deficient.

From the first touched chord, there's a depth and edge apparent, made all the more powerful by a back-leaning, relaxed singing style, in which Wainwright sinuously stretches out lyrical lines in a rise and fall cantando. It's mournful, solitary and magnetizing.

His fifth and first self-produced record is also his most realized. Funny he went to Berlin to record a "bare bones" set: Timpani resound and hunting horns peal. Yet somehow the vibe stays intimate.

"Tulsa" is a ballet of plucked and weeping violins; a guitar flutters between crescendos on "Slideshow." On the title track, a gospel rave-up of Elvis brass and choral vocals, Wainwright throws down for mass ascendance: "...Didn't you know old Hollywood is over?... Release your love... Release the stars..."