

Ron Carter and Danny Simmons

The Brown Beatnik Tones - Live at BRIC House BLUE NOTE



Ron Carter has played on more than 2,200 recording sessions—most famously with Miles Davis' Second

Great Quintet—in every conceivable configuration. It's second nature for him to find his place within the music while simultaneously influencing its direction. He is one of few acoustic-jazz bassists who could step out onto a stage, as he does here, accompanied only by a spoken-word artist, and keep a listener spellbound. Plucking, bending and sliding, taking unexpected turns and providing close accompaniment, he's still—in his 80s—a wonder to behold. **Danny Simmons**, the co-leader at this gig, is the co-founder of Def Poetry Jam as well as a painter. His words are colorful, sharp, provocative—he alternately jabs and floats, making rhythms not to be showy but because that's where his poetry takes him. Carter picks up on every nuance—he tones it down when it needs toning, adds color where color is required and picks up the pace when the action requires heat. The nine tracks here (six featuring the duo setup, and one with fellow Def Poetry Jam alum **Liza Jessie Peterson**) are, despite the album title, only tangentially related to the Beat movement, but the association is understood. This is not passive listening; you want to be involved, to hang on each of Carter's words and phrases. Some—"Where Do I Begin" and "The Jigaboo Waltz" in particular—are so densely packed with imagery and information they require numerous hearings just to grasp Simmons' intent, while others are not quite that penetrating. For the other two tracks, including a moody take on the standard "There Will Never Be Another You," Simmons takes a break and Carter is joined by pianist **Donald Vega** and guitarist **Russell Malone**. They're reminders of what Ron Carter more typically does—and that he can do anything. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Jeff Lynne's ELO

From Out of Nowhere COLUMBIA



Jeff Lynne is stuck in the looming shadow of **ELO**, possibly by design. When the symphonic-rock maestro revived the brand for 2015's *Alone in the Universe*, he did so as "Jeff Lynne's ELO," underscoring a painfully obvious fact: Lynne and ELO are one in the same. As the primary architect of the band's maximalist, post-Beatles prog-pop, he's entitled to that name recognition. But that move also emphasized his fixation on a particular aesthetic—for better



Ron Carter

or worse, Lynne's probably going to keep recycling the spirit of "Mr. Blue Sky" from here to eternity. *From Out of Nowhere*, the 14th ELO LP, checks all the obvious boxes (outside of the previously dispensed-with strings): At age 71, Lynne's voice remains an ageless, expressive instrument, draped gracefully around lush guitars and keyboards; and all of these bittersweet melodies would've slotted in seamlessly on the band's big-budget 1970s albums like *Face the Music* and *A New World Record*. There are moments of retro bliss: The opening title-track rides a jangling 12-string electric guitar through a comforting, descending chord progression; and the playful "Sci-Fi Woman" weaves theremin whooshes and gritty guitar leads around a melancholy hook. But so much of this material feels like leftovers of a tasty dish re-heated on a busted microwave, like the plodding "Telephone Line" knock-off "Losing You" and the painfully lame early-rock boogie "One More Time." Lynne is a master living and breathing rarefied air, but *From Out of Nowhere* only hints at his greatness. *Ryan Reed*

City and Colour

A Pill for Loneliness STILL



Dallas Green has traded in extremes for the better part of two decades. As one of the vocalists in the early-2000s band Alexisonfire, he added some melody to otherwise speaker-busting, nerve-in-forehead screamo act. When he launched **City and Colour** in 2005 on the side before splitting from his former band in 2011, he swapped nightmares for lullabies—his first two solo records were totally acoustic, lovelorn daydreams. In Green's third act, though, he's struck a balance: Starting with 2015's moody *If I Should Go Before You*, the Ontario-born singer-songwriter fully embraced classic rock-and-roll; white-hot punk and hushed folk be gone. And with *A Pill for Loneliness*, that balance feels natural; it's easily his best City and Colour effort, an expansive, plugged-in and guitar-forward collection of gorgeous ballads and buzzing, midtempo rock songs. Green's voice—a high and

ethereal, but powerful thing—has always been at the center of his music, but he's finally got a fleshed-out sound to match him, and the strongest songs he's written in years. The heavy drums, wide-open guitars and Green's soaring vocals on "Astronaut" actually match the lyrics. Singing about floating "above the curvature of the earth" could be laughably cheesy, but Green lands it beautifully. *Loneliness* was produced by Grammy-winning **Jacquire King** (Kings of Leon, Norah Jones), and he lets the songs breathe—Green's choruses are huge but not over-polished, the guitars just ragged enough. Even when Green dips back into the more brooding style of *If I Should Go*, he comes out with beauty: "The War Years" would've been a smoldering standout on that album. Here, it's just another song on a record ripe for relistening. *Justin Jacobs*

Lightning Bolt

Sonic Citadel THRILL JOCKEY



There's one question that **Lightning Bolt** fans ask after the release of a new album from the noise-rock legends: Have they chilled out? And the answer universally hoped for is a resounding: Nope. Across seven albums since 1999, the bass guitar/drum duo of **Brian Gibson** and **Brian Chippendale** have unleashed hell in the form of unrelenting, punishing noise—warp-speed, doomsday riffing and Chippendale's impossibly complex drumming, all with an unsettling, psychedelic bent. These songs seize and writhe and whip into an instant tornado; all you can do is hold on. They're back for album seven with *Sonic Citadel*, their first since 2015. And to answer the question above: No, naturally, they have not chilled out. Even their name is lethal. The album opener is called "Blow to the Head," and it begins with violence descending—explosive low-end and Chippendale beating his kit into submission. "Big Banger" is also truth in advertising, with some of Gibson's fastest, most visceral riffing ever. But they do broaden their colorful palette a bit; picture "Don Henley in the Park" and "All Insane" merely as moments to let your pulse return to a healthy

clip. The former's dreamy vocal melody and winding, whimsical guitar takes a page from Animal Collective; that the vocals are near the top of the mix is, in itself, a Lightning Bolt experiment. The latter is the closest to a straight rock-and-roll song that the duo has made, without any true tantrums. Is this Lightning Bolt's bid for the mainstream? No. Radio would never touch this. But to see them experimenting, while never losing the plot, is a true victory. *Justin Jacobs*

The Milk Carton Kids

The Only Ones

MILK CARTON RECORDS



With only seven songs, *The Only Ones* is really more an EP than an actual LP, but even so, it asserts the fact that **The Milk Carton Kids** are heirs apparent to Simon & Garfunkel and the other vintage duos that relied on only two voices, soft harmonies and some guitar to define their delivery. Actually, asserts may not be the appropriate word for their particular pedigree, given that their quiet, subdued style is so hushed and delicate, they'd be easily drowned out by even a marginally more intensive outfit. Happily though, they ply their reticent approach with a general lack of concern, either about being absorbed by the ether or the fact that they force their audiences to lean in to listen. Here again, there's no concession to modern mores, what with the fact they rely only on the barest arrangements and most minimal accoutrements possible. Yet for all their tender trappings, **Joey Ryan** and **Kenneth Pattengale** are astute entertainers, as evidenced by the wisecracks and rapport they share onstage. Five albums in, any change in direction might be a shock to the system. Still, that's also a relief in a way; after all, there's plenty of flash and verbosity already imbued in the pop lexicon these days. So even if certain songs, especially "I Meant Every Word I Said," "As the Moon Starts to Rise" and "I'll Be Gone" suggest that Paul and Art were providing input from the sidelines, it's no matter—subtlety and sensitivity are their decidedly effective assets. *Lee Zimmerman*

Cigarettes After Sex

Cry PARTISAN



Greg Gonzalez sure knows how to savor a mood—or, more specifically, one particular mood: a chilly, reverb-y dream-pop swirl spawned from romance and lust, two colors intertwined like threads in a winter scarf. Like his band's self-titled 2017 LP—a sleeper hit so trendy, Taylor Swift included the band on a Spotify playlist of songs she "loves"—Cry