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BUMPER CHRISTMAS DOUBLE ISSUE

WU-TANG
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36 MANGERS

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MUSIC QUIZ

BRANDON
FLOWERS
TALKS NEW ALBUM,
THE BAND'S FUTURE
AND SLAYING RUDOLPH

JOHN
LYDON

NEVER MIND THE BAUBLES,
HERE'S A SEX PISTOL

ROYAL BLOOD
RIFFIN' AROUND THE
CHRISTMAS TREE

BIG REVIEW
OF THE YEAR

ALEX TURNER'S
SPEECH
DID IT SPARK A ROCK
REVOLUTION?

MORRISSEY'S
COMEBACK
HAS HE RECLAIMED
HIS CROWN?

U2'S ALBUM
CLANGER
IS BONO FINISHED?

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BABY IT'S
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that doesn't say f---ing Noel on the front" NOEL GALLAGHER

Christmas card

"I'd like an iPhone, a laptop, a new haircut and a





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REGULARS

4 SOUNDING OFF

6 ON REPEAT

22 ANATOMY OF AN ALBUM

'The Beach Boys' Christmas Album'

23 SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE

Tim Wheeler

72 2014 QUIZ

74 REVIEWS

► **ALBUMS**

Mark Kozelek – 'Sings Christmas Carols'

Los Campesinos! – 'A Los Campesinos! Christmas' and more

► **FILM**

The Hobbit: The Battle Of The Five Armies and more

► **LIVE**

Julian Casablancas

+ The Voidz

Manic Street Preachers

Shamir

The Smashing Pumpkins

and more

86 GIANT CHRISTMAS CROSSWORD

88 THINGS WE LIKE

90 THIS WEEK IN 1994

SHAMELESS PLUG!!!

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FEATURES

24 Brandon Flowers

Is he human or is he Santa?

29 John Lydon

Snoooooow future – the ex-Pistol delivers the King's Speech

30 The NME Singles Panel

Kirsty Wark, Ricky Wilson and Wild Beasts debate the tracks of the year



34 Royal Blood

Glory to the newborn kings! Ben and Mike play with their baubles in Chicago

38 Karen O

Fairytale in New York with the Yeah Yeah Yeahs singer

42 Radio 1 boss grilled

Jingle bellend? You decide, as George Ergatoudis answers your questions

52 Gerard Way...

...in a manger. The year the MCR frontman turned Britpop revivalist

56 Wu-Tang Clan

Bring da muthafuckin' reindeer: RZA talks the Clan's sixth album

70 Have a blue Christmas

The story behind Low's gloomy 'Christmas' album

A Sunny Day In Glasgow	75	Karen O	6, 38
Aphex Twin	8, 12	Kasabian	9, 16, 33, 54
Arcade Fire	54	Kate Bush	12
Arctic Monkeys	10, 16	The Killers	6, 24
Ash	23	The Kinks	58
Azealia Banks	37	Kirsty Wark	30
The Beach Boys	22	Klaxons	13
Beady Eye	13	The Knife	13
Biffy Clyro	55	La Roux	12
Billy Bragg	16	Liars	37
Billy Childish	58	Laura Nyro	58
Bloody Knees	66	Liam Gallagher	8
Bob Geldof	9	The Libertines	8, 12
Bobby Womack	48	Lily Allen	8
Bombay Bicycle Club	65	Lonelady	65
Caribou	31, 37	Lorde	16
Carter The Unstoppable		Los Campesinos!	7, 65, 75
Sex Machine	59	Low	70
Childhood	30	Malcolm Middleton	6
Chlöe Howl	66	Manic Street Preachers	55, 80
Cornershop	59	Mark E Smith	9
Courtney Love	8	Mark Kozelek	74
The Crookes	6	Marvin Gaye	59
Crystal Castles	13	Morrissey	9, 13
Death Grips	13	Mystery Jets	66
Deer Tick	6	New Order	65
Dent May	6	The Orwells	16
Diplo	6, 16	Paramore	54
The Districts	6, 65	Prince	13
The Drink	7	Pulled Apart By Horses	7, 64
Dum Dum Girls	7	Pussy Riot	60
Dutch Uncles	54	Queens Of The Stone Age	8
DZ Deathrays	7	Ramones	46
East India Youth	30	REM	90
Elastica	58	The Residents	59
Enter Shikari	64	Reuben	59
Evil Blizzard	7	Rilo Kiley	58
The Fat White Family	32	Royal Blood	33, 34
The Flaming Lips	7	Run The Jewels	32, 58
Foals	64	Shamir	81
Foo Fighters	12	Sleaford Mods	16
Friendly Fires	65	The Smashing Pumpkins	81
Fucked Up	64	The Smiths	54
Future Islands	31	Smoke Fairies	6, 75
The Gaslight Anthem	65	Snoop Dogg	16, 59
George Ergatoudis	42	The Sonics	59
Gerard Way	52	SSD	59
Gorgeous Bully	7	St Vincent	8, 33
GRMLN	7	The Stooges	45
Gruff Rhys	6	Superfood	66
The Heath And The Holy	7	Swans	64
Hookworms	37	Swim Deep	54
The Horrors	64	The Vaccines	37
Iceage	54	Viv Albertine	30
Iggy Azalea	16	The War On Drugs	32
Jamie T	12, 33	The Wedding Present	59
Jay Z	9	White Lung	54
John Lydon	29	Wild Beasts	30, 64
Julian Casablancas	37, 78	Wolf Alice	66
Kaiser Chiefs	12, 30	Wu-Tang Clan	56

LETTER OF THE WEEK

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PRO BONO ADVICE

So, Santa, I walked into a pub the other day (I still go to those a lot, you know, the guy in my local tells all the visiting reporters that I'm a really down-to-earth guy) and who should I see in the snug but Ban Ki and Barack! I got a round in, and I was telling them how tired you looked when I saw you at the G8, and before you know it we were sketching a plan on beer mats to help you out.

You see, we think your problem is in the delivery system. The chimney model is out of date. The home coal fire is dead. The sweeps have left the building. By this point, Zuckerberg had walked in. He says you need to meet kids in the middle. Bring the gifts right to them.

Who's got time to go to a fuckin' tree? So we got Geldof up on FaceTime, and we've figured it all out. Sit tight because this is gonna blow your jolly mind: you don't even need to deliver a physical gift. You just implant memories of having had a gift INSIDE THEIR BRAINS and place them in an artificial coma until Boxing Day.

Everyone wins! A relaxing day for mum and dad, presents beyond their wildest dreams and then some for the kids,



and no packaging waste. We were on to shots by this point, so we just went ahead and got it signed off by The Big Man, because it's such a great idea, we knew you couldn't possibly object. Catch ya later, Red.

Bono, via email

Santa: Wait, what? I tried to call someone about this but all the contacts in my iPhone said 'Bono'.

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of a walnut to begin with. In the summer, everything was beautiful. My love and I made headlines together, and sweet music (well, she screamed) and traded bodily fluids (well, her blood). Yes, I am Boris the slow Loris, onetime connoisseur of Lady Gaga's alabaster flesh. We had a connection, she and I, a connection so strong that it took two of her bodyguards to prise us apart. And now, at a time of year when love should snuggle close against the cold, she's stepping out with some old crooner! A leather-faced romancer of old ladies! A seasoned swinger! Love is truly a lie.

Boris the slow Loris, via email

DING DONG OUR LILY ON HIGH

Alright, Santa, still, For this Christmas, I would like last Christmas back. I'm not asking for a Tardis. Just gimme back one year and I promise, I'll make it count. I just want to go back to when 'feminist' was just something everyone assumed I was before they were confronted by the horror of me trying to tackle it head on. I want to go back to when 'Sheezus' was probably just some shit joke Kim Kardashian made that made Kanye do that crushing disdain face. I want to go back to when I was the one who started petty little fights that made desperate headlines rather than just being a notch on Azealia Banks' spatpost. Love, Lily Allen, via email

Santa: Seems reasonable, Lily. But maybe this time remember that if you're gonna shoot your mouth off, you need a better defence than 'it's just pop music, don't worry about it.'



WAR ON WAR

At Christmas time, as a song once reminded us, there's no need to be afraid. We winsome, melancholy indie-rock types should be able to shamble our rifles along through the snow, the clanging chimes of doom softly muffled in paper chains, to the manger of peace. We should be able to celebrate unmolested by strange, slightly demented old men and their public bullying campaigns. For this reason, we've got some of our most emotive friends together, and we've formed the Union Of Feelings. Feelings are something to be proud of. Evil and snark are things of the past. We will stand strong against the

Mark Kozeleks, the Nicky Wires, the Noel Gallaghers of this world and tell them: no barb of yours can pierce our warm reverb. We hope one day you'll join us, but until now, please buy our charity single 'Dude, What The Fuck, Chill Out'.

Adam Granduciel, via email

Santa: What a lovely enterprise, Adam. I ran your plan past our chief elf here at the North Pole, Mark E Smith of The Fall. He said, "Fuck off, you beady cunts."

LIBERTINE BELLS

Alright gaffer, I need three half-decent songs and a fucking miracle.

Carl Barât, via email

Santa: We can deal if you cut me in on those ticket takings.

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

Dear Santa, There I was, just putting my Morrisons pigs in blankets in the fridge (under 'p',

between the Percy Pigs and the pomegranate juice), and I thought, 'Hey, Santa's a successful self-employed entrepreneur. He must know all about tax. See I'm having a bit of trouble figuring out my 2013-2014 return. There's so many boxes and questions and treacherous loopholes. I want to do the right thing, Santa, as long as it isn't much effort. I've given money to charity so that's probably enough, right? Gary Barlow, via email

Santa: Let me help you out there, Gaz. Gimme that pen. See this box over here that says 'Be a wealthy, superior, selfish and hypocritical wanker while still trading on your man-of-the-people image'? Don't tick that. You want this one over here that says 'Pay your tax, you gimp'.

ARTSOP

Dear Santa, Christmas is a hard time when your heart is broken, and it's even worse when your heart was only the size

Santa: I'm in the same sorry boat, Boris. Mrs Claus has gone off to Amarillo with Tony Christie. Come over to the Pole, we'll get some tins in.



LOOK WHO'S STALKING

I met Childhood in this dive bar in Prague, and I was so shocked and bedazzled! At first I was nervous and introduced myself by my famed screen name, Jack Bauer. As the nerves settled we got on famously, and talked guitars, sports cars and Emilio Estevez for hours.

Kiefer Sutherland

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 UNIVERSAL

NME TRACK OF THE WEEK

1. The Districts
Father Christmas

'Father Christmas' – taken from charity compilation 'It's Coming On Christmas' and originally by The Kinks – is a restrained, sorrowful take on festivities from the Pennsylvania band, and sleigh bells shake slowly and moodily as Grote moans: "Father Christmas, give us some money". So sublimely depressing, it'll make you want to cancel Christmas entirely.

Rhian Daly, Assistant Reviews Editor

2. The Killers
Joel The Lump Of Coal
(feat. Jimmy Kimmel)

Of The Killers' nine Christmas singles to date, this looks like their best shot at festive immortality. The story follows a "lump of anthracite" called Joel who's tricked by Santa into thinking he's about to become "a special Christmas gift", only to be dumped on a naughty brat as their "booby prize". The song ends happily though, and it's great to see that smug twat Santa getting a shoeing.

Mark Beaumont, writer

3. Smoke Fairies
Christmas Without A Kiss

Looks like someone's popped some 'Psychocandy' in the usually Zen folk duo's stocking instead of a bag of chocolate coins. There's a definite Jesus And Mary Chain influence on this seasonal offering, as the band lace dreamy noise-rock riffs with their trademark Fairport Convention worthy harmonies. "I foolishly bought mistletoe and then I tore it down", goes the refrain, like Fairport singer Sandy Denny having a strop over the yule log.

Leonie Cooper, writer

4. Deer Tick
White Havoc

'White Havoc', or 'Tis The Season To Be Scuzzy' as Rhode Island bunch Deer Tick might have titled this fuzzy festive curio, has just the right balance of schmaltz and snarl. Taken from the second annual Converse Rubber Tracks 'Noise To The World' compilation, it pits warm Michael Bubl  -esque piano against rickety distorted guitars, like if someone had spiked Wham!'s eggnog while recording 'Last Christmas'.

Al Horner, Assistant Editor, NME.COM

5. Diplo & Alvaro
6th Gear (Bethlehem Edition)
(feat. Kstylis)

What would Christmas at Diplo's Mad Decent label look like? Twerking elves, gurning reindeers, Santa Claus decked in neon body-paint... terrifying, basically. This would make the perfect soundtrack. It was originally released in the summer and features Amsterdam's DJ Alvaro and vocals from rapper Kstylis. Diplo's dipped this seasonal re-up in jingle bells and festive strings.

Lucy Jones, Deputy Editor, NME.COM

**6. The Crookes**
You're Just Like Christmas

Sheffield's The Crookes' newest festive effort's a whole lot jauntier. Sounding like The Smiths after two-for-one pitchers of mulled wine and an injection of 'The Jean Genie' guitars, they serenade a girl who makes it "easy to believe". "I want you to kiss me though I've no mistletoe" is George Waite's coy, killer line, crooned from beneath his shabby Santa hat.

Matthew Horton, writer

7. Gruff Rhys
Set Fire To The Stars

The Super Furry Animals man's transition from stoned-seeming joker to elder statesmen of culturally enriching pop continues. Following 'American Interior', his concept album tracing the journey of Welsh explorer John Evans, he returns with this track from his score for November's biopic of poet Dylan Thomas, its title lifted from one of his works. With muted trumpets and jazzy basslines, Rhys has never sounded classier.

Dan Stubbs, News Editor

8. Malcolm Middleton & David Shrigley
A Toast

Arab Strap man Malcolm Middleton has teamed up with David Shrigley, the Turner Prize-nominated artist best known for sustaining the greetings card industry with his line-sketch-plus-slogan aesthetic. 'Toast' is a preview of an album's worth of electronic soundscapes and swearing. It's worth hearing for the bitter, opening: "Greetings and good fucking wishes to you and your fuckhead arsehole family". Christmas cheer and all that.

Hazel Sheffield, writer

9. Karen O
Marshmallow World

Her debut solo album 'Crush Songs', released this September, might have been a fragile affair – all skeletal songs written in the aftermath of a relationship dissolved – but Karen O's got her cheer back on this bitesize Dean Martin cover. Over horns and fanfares, she gives us one minute of jazzy festive imagery ("The world is a snowball/ See how it grows") with enough glee to last the whole holiday.

Rhian Daly, Assistant Reviews Editor

10. Dent May
I'll Be Stoned For Christmas

Dent May hasn't done a lot since 2013 album 'Warm Blanket', this December the Mississippi singer has appeared on a debut album by the rapper Pell and found time to write this Christmas tune. "I'll be stoned for Christmas this year, I'm sorry Mama", he goes over spacey synth lines, before taking us through his typical festive season: "I have opened all my presents, sweaters and slacks, so hit me up and tell me what you've got".

Tom Howard, Assistant Editor

ESSENTIAL NEW TRACKS

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11. Dum Dum Girls On Christmas

Dum Dum Girls' gauzy pop isn't exactly Christmassy, so, instead of tackling the saccharine side of the season, they target morose reflection. "It doesn't feel like a holiday", singer Dee Dee goes, over sliced-up drumbeats and synths. But the message here is ultimately positive. As Dee Dee repeatedly asks "What have we but these memories?" the band sound warmer than ever.

Ben Homewood, Reviews Editor

12. Evil Blizzard We Three Kings

"Bands like Evil Blizzard, they give me hope that music is alive and kicking." Mark E Smith there, tipping the Preston noisemongers. On their festive cover of 'We Three Kings' – taken from an EP filled with merriment, cheer and Hawkwind-style sludge rock, no less – they come across a little like Black Sabbath. Except this time, the bass is impenetrably doomy, and the solos make Temples, Pond et al sound about as safe as a Taylor Swift remix album.

Matt Wilkinson, New Music Editor

13. Los Campesinos! When Christmas Comes

"I wished away the last year/It was the worst of times..." It may be the season of goodwill to all men, but for Los Campesinos! songwriter and perennial miserabilist Gareth David, it's business as usual. Bells jingle and female backing harmonies flutter, but wait – what's that? "In the morning, you're lying next to me", he suddenly intones. A year of misery saved by finally getting the girl. LC! happy? It's a Christmas miracle.

Lisa Wright, writer

14. The Drink New Year Carol

The Drink's debut album, 'Company', was one of the most original surprises of late 2014: over an arid post-punk rhythm section courtesy of Daniel Fordham and David Stewart, Irish singer Dearbhla Minogue sang haunted melodies that evoked both Electrelane and Welsh male voice choirs. For Xmas, the trio have done a traditionally beautiful, pared-back cover of Benjamin Britten's interpretation of Welsh folk song 'Levy-Dew'.

Laura Snapes, Features Editor

15. Pulled Apart By Horses Merry Christmas Everybody

Slade's 1973 festive chart-topper 'Merry Xmas Everybody' has been waiting for someone to come along and give it a menacing punk-rock makeover. We reckon Noddy Holder would approve of Pulled Apart By Horses' roughing up of the original version – especially the bit where frontman Tom Hudson screeches Holder's famous "It's Chriiiiistmas" line as if he's just found out his turkey's stuffed with semtex.

Greg Cochran, Editor, NME.COM



16. The Heathen And The Holy Hey Merry Christmas

The Heathen And The Holy are Noah And The Whale's Tom Hobden and Fred Abbott. If nothing else, they prove it's not just Charlie Fink in NATW who has a Tom Petty obsession. What starts out as a simple ode to their favourite Christmas things – joy, laughter and mince pies – soon turns into a seasonal stomp, with bells on – quite literally. There's also a choirboy to add to the festivities.

Andy Welch, writer

17. DZ Deathrays Lonely This Christmas

Aussie duo DZ Deathrays aren't ones to do things by halves. For their part of their split release with Pulled Apart By Horses (see number 15 on this page), they've covered Mud's classic and it's as rip-roaring a version as you'll ever hear. Shane Parsons and Simon Ridley attack the track with gusto, smothering it in their usual buzzing, thrashing riffs and head-banging attitude. One to put on as the festive drinks take effect.

Rhian Daly, Assistant Reviews Editor

18. GRMLN Before December (You're Alive)

Want a new skateboard from Santa? This song from 21-year-old musician Yoodoo Park, aka GRMLN, is the perfect soundtrack for tearing around, popping Boxing Day kickflips. Born in Kyoto, Japan, the singer moved to southern California when he was young. September's 'Soon Away' album was full of sonic references to his new home, and this is no different: a fast, effervescent blast for those who favour baggy shorts.

Ben Homewood, Reviews Editor

19. The Flaming Lips & Yoko Ono Happy Xmas (War Is Over)

The Flaming Lips and Yoko Ono team up once more for this cover of John Lennon and Yoko's 1971 Christmas classic celebrating festive spirit and pleading for war peace. Though this rendition – which forms part of 'All Is Bright', a new 40-track festive collaboration album from Amazon – is more psychedelic than Lennon's original, it retains those familiar choral harmonies and upbeat, twinkling sleigh bells.

Nadia Khomami, Acting News Reporter

20. Gorgeous Bully Love Song For Someone Else

Gorgeous Bully is the project of Manchester-via-Falmouth-and-Plymouth songwriter Thomas Crang, who specialises in twangy declarations of love and loneliness. You wouldn't recognise this as a Christmas song at surface level – it's just Crang's reverb-heavy voice, a spare guitar part and a chilly synth. But its devoted sentiment is the perfect distillation of what the season should be about rather than the extraneous bells and whistles.

Laura Snapes, Features Editor

The Year

►“Fuck everything. Fuck The Man. Fuck Imagine Dragons and fuck the Grammys”

JOSH HOMME, annoyed that Queens Of The Stone Age's awards performance with Nine Inch Nails was cut short

FEBRUARY

▲“You know, I have a big speech, but I'm not going to say it. This is my family”

COURTNEY LOVE, burying the hatchet with Dave Grohl APRIL

▲“Choosing all women to perform was a really great way to do it. Those guys are all feminists and Kurt was a feminist”

ST VINCENT on playing with Nirvana at the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame APRIL

◀“All I can do is do my best. The labels and the radio stations won't play the better stuff”

LILY ALLEN responds to criticism that her new music is “docile pop rubbish” MARCH

►“Carl's my brother. There was a time when I'd have died for him, and that turned into a time when I wanted to kill him. But now I'm ready to die for him again”

PETE DOHERTY
on Carl Barât JULY

►“Whenever one of the most celebrated and influential electronic fartist, Richard D James can compete with the music flip to influence built”

APHEX TWIN's bizarre press release announcing new album 'Syro' AUGUST

►“I accept this challenge and nominate SpongeBob SquarePants, Ivor The Engine, and while we're on cartoon characters, Noel Gallagher”

LIAM takes the Ice Bucket Challenge AUGUST



◀ "There has been a great deal of speculation about what triggered the unfortunate incident. But the most important thing is that our family has worked through it"
JAY Z, BEYONCÉ and SOLANGE's statement on the elevator episode MAY

▼ "I just never imagined it would be possible to connect with an audience on such a powerful and intimate level; to feel such... well, quite frankly, love"

KATE BUSH on her Before The Dawn shows OCTOBER

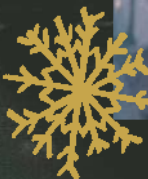
▼ "Pubs sold out at 9.30pm – every landlord in Leicester owes me a beer!"
Kasabian's SERGE PIZZORNO reflects on their homecoming show SEPTEMBER

2014

It's the year that Nirvana reunited, Kate Bush returned to the stage, Liam split Beady Eye, Dolly brought Nashville to Glastonbury and Alex Turner made a clarion call for rock'n'roll. Over the next 10 pages, we look back at 2014 – starting here with the quotes of the year

▼ "They have scraped cancerous tissues four times already, but whatever. If I die, then I die"

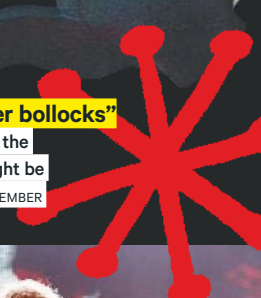
MORRISSEY reveals he's being treated for cancer OCTOBER



◀ "Complete and utter bollocks"
BOB GELDOF's response to the notion that Band Aid 30 might be patronising to Africans NOVEMBER

▶ "I watched a bit of Glastonbury on BBC for the first time in my life this year. I literally forced myself to watch five minutes of Metallica without vomiting"

MARK E SMITH of The Fall, on the festival circuit SEPTEMBER





At the start of the year, Arctic Monkeys' Alex Turner promised rock'n'roll would return "looking better than ever". Are Royal Blood the beginning of the bounceback?

Out of the black

SWAMP THING

Alex Turner's Brits speech

"That rock'n'roll, it just won't go away. It might hibernate from time to time and sink back into the swamp. I think the cyclical nature of the universe in which it exists demands it adheres to some of its rules. But it's always waiting there, just around the corner, ready to make its way back through the sludge and smash through the glass ceiling, looking better than ever. Yeah, that rock'n'roll, it seems like it's fading away sometimes, but it will never die. And there's nothing you can do about it."

10
That rock'n'roll, eh? Back in February, Alex Turner amused and bemused viewers of the Brit Awards with a speech in which he argued that rock music was in the doldrums, but would be back with a vengeance. It was laughed off as the ramblings of a hubristic rock star who'd drunk too much champagne, but Turner's wasn't a lone voice: in July, super-producer Greg Kurstin told *NME*, "It's a hard time for rock. Everything is so pop right now, so I'm waiting for something to be the anti-version of that." A month later, something momentous happened: Royal Blood's eponymous debut topped the album charts with 66,000 sales in its first week of release – and the 'Rock Is Back!' thinkpieces started flooding in. As the year draws to a close, then, is rock'n'roll *really* about to re-conquer the zeitgeist, or was Royal Blood's success an anomaly?

There are encouraging signs, but nothing to get too excited about. Going by the Official Charts Company's data for the third quarter of 2014, of the 40 best-selling albums in the UK this year, nine were what might be termed 'rock' albums, with two of those – 'Royal Blood'

and Haim's 2013 release 'Days Are Gone' – being debuts. That's a clear improvement on last year's total of six (with no debuts), but the average age of those bands has also increased from 34 to 37, suggesting that rock'n'roll, far from being a young person's game, is increasingly becoming a middle-aged one.

That said, 2015 should provide a far more accurate gauge of the genre's chart vitality. New albums from the likes of Noel Gallagher, Coldplay and Muse are guaranteed successes, but the real test will be whether bands like Slaves, Public Access TV, Wolf Alice and The Districts can make the same sort of impact as Haim and Royal



Blood have in 2014. James Endacott, the boss of 1965 Records and the man who signed The Libertines to Rough Trade, is optimistic that talk of a rock'n'roll resurgence isn't just a lot of hot air.

"It all comes round in circles – always has done and always will," he says. "Rock bands have never gone away, they've just not been fashionable for a while. We'll definitely see an A&R scramble to sign 'rock music' – record labels want to sell records and at the moment rock music is selling a few records. You must also remember that A&R folk like a scramble. It makes a change from sitting on a fence."

If there is a 'Royal Blood effect', however, it's not yet powerful enough to have shaped the BBC's influential Sound Of 2015 longlist, which features just

three rock bands (Slaves, Wolf Alice and Sunset Sons), none of whom are among the favourites to win. On the festival front, meanwhile, rock acts continue to dominate the headline slots, and of those that have already been announced, the trend is once again towards tried and tested, reunited or heritage acts like Metallica, Muse and Fleetwood Mac.

Having announced three of his own dates at Wembley Stadium next July, the next breakthrough festival headliner is surely Ed Sheeran, which hardly counts as a victory for "that rock'n'roll". Kasabian's Serge Pizzorno hopes that will be the catalyst for young Brits to finish what Royal Blood have started. "If Ed Sheeran is the next big headliner, then use that as a fucking weapon," he says. "Get

your guitar and hit it harder than ever, because if that's out there, then you've got a fucking chance, man. I wanna see some kids from nowhere just take it and run with it."

■ BARRY NICOLSON

Wolf Alice



"GET YOUR GUITAR AND HIT IT HARDER THAN EVER"

Serge Pizzorno

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TheYear

Comebacks – everyone was doing them in 2014, from the reclusive to the destructive to the missing-presumed-dead. But who nailed it and who crapped out? PR expert Mark Borkowski gives us his verdict

The year in comebacks

Kate Bush

► **BEFORE** Lesser spotted. Even a reported invite to perform at 2012's Olympics Opening Ceremony failed to lure her out of the house.

► **THE COMEBACK** Sold out 22 oversubscribed and hugely theatrical shows at London's Eventim Apollo. She drowned, she flew, she thrilled.

► **MARK BORKOWSKI SAYS** "I think the two greatest non-PR PR campaigns were David Bowie the year before and Kate Bush in 2014, who proves you can be counter-intuitive about how you push forward. People could learn from the way she used the credibility of her career and didn't do any press. She let the feeding frenzy begin and she never intervened at any moment."

Jamie T

► **BEFORE** After touring 2009's 'Kings & Queens', Jamie T went to ground. Some said he was dead, others said he'd given up music.

► **THE COMEBACK** Out of the blue came a third album, 'Carry On The Grudge', and his biggest ever UK tour, which swiftly sold out.

► **MARK BORKOWSKI SAYS** "The album didn't get great reviews, but he did sell out shows in America and Australia. What he's done is re-engage with how good a live performer he is, which was wise. To sell out in America is a pretty resounding success for the guy – he's cracked the most difficult part of the world."

La Roux

► **BEFORE** Elly Jackson and writing partner Ben Langmaid hadn't released anything since 2009's self-titled, critically acclaimed synthpop debut, despite years in the studio.

► **THE COMEBACK** An excellent second album arrived, but it came with a very public spat between Elly and Ben, who had parted ways in the intervening years. Radio 1 refused to playlist its singles.

► **MARK BORKOWSKI SAYS** "Here's someone who's spent her time telling people it wasn't a comeback. Clearly she hadn't dealt with fame particularly well, and the way she has promoted the album suggests that she's still not happy being a pop star. Whether that will push her forward, I don't know."

Foo Fighters

► **BEFORE** Dave Grohl busied himself with movie-making – 2012's *Sound City* documentary – after the 2011 release of 'Wasting Light'.

► **THE COMEBACK** Grohl merged his newfound love of being behind the camera by accompanying new Foo's album 'Sonic Highways' with a TV series.

► **MARK BORKOWSKI SAYS** "There was a big media campaign and the HBO documentary, but the expectations of the epic Foo Fighters coming back didn't really come through. It probably wasn't as big as they wanted it to be because it didn't engage with a new audience."

The Libertines

► **BEFORE** Having split in 2004, the band briefly reunited for Reading & Leeds in 2010. After that, all was quiet on the good ship Albion.

► **THE COMEBACK** In April it was revealed the



band would be reforming again for a huge Hyde Park gig. Further dates followed. At the end of the year, they signed a deal with Virgin EMI for album number three.

► **MARK BORKOWSKI SAYS** "There was a huge expectation and the media was ready for it, but in some way the fun and games and fireworks show that started at Hyde Park – a great opening chapter – never carried forward. They've struggled to do what they used to like doing, which was causing a certain amount of disruption – and that, for a lot of people, was disappointing. We expected more."

Aphex Twin

► **BEFORE** Richard D James' last LP under the Aphex name was 2001's 'Drukqs'. After that, the electronic wizard went undercover with the pseudonym The Tuss.

► **THE COMEBACK** Announcing his return with a blimp floating over Hackney and a Deep Web treasure hunt, 'Suro' followed in September.

► **MARK BORKOWSKI SAYS** "This one was strange, because here's a very secretive artist on a record label that usually shuns big campaigns creating a huge amount of hype, particularly by directing people to the Deep Web. But it matched his quirkiness and the brand values of Aphex Twin. It compounded his legend."

Prince

► **BEFORE** Presumably at home at his purple palace, Prince hadn't released an album since 2010's '20Ten', given away with the *Mirror*.

► **THE COMEBACK** Hung out at Lianne La Havas' house in Leyton, played surprise gigs across the UK and put out two albums in September.

► **MARK BORKOWSKI SAYS** "Remarkable. He owned the conversation for two months with the brilliantly staged gigs. Everything he did – his social media and the way he followed up – was pure, beautiful Prince and a massive success. But commercially, it stagnates: he hasn't crossed over into making a massive commercial success."



Kaiser Chiefs returned in 2014, minus Nick Hodgson. (Left) Prince

Kaiser Chiefs

► **BEFORE** Following 2011's flop fourth album, 'The Future Is Medieval', frontman Ricky Wilson became a judge on BBC's *The Voice*.
 ► **THE COMEBACK** 'Education, Education, Education & War' – their first album without drummer Nick Hodgson – went to Number One.
 ► **MARK BORKOWSKI SAYS** "I don't think there was a huge audience for the Kaiser Chiefs album, but it did chart highly, possibly as a result of the exposure gained from being on *The Voice*. I see them becoming a bit of a cabaret act, which is not necessarily what they would want."

Morrissey

► **BEFORE** Was without a record deal following 2009's 'Years Of Refusal', his ninth solo LP.
 ► **THE COMEBACK** Harvest released 'World Peace Is None of Your Business' in July. Label and artist parted ways less than a month later.
 ► **MARK BORKOWSKI SAYS** "I'd expect more from his first album in five years. It seemed he was only half-engaged with the process. You didn't feel he really bought into it."

Noel Gallagher

► **BEFORE** Noel's debut High Flying Birds LP came out in 2011. Thereafter he could be found either on tour or on *Newsnight*.
 ► **THE COMEBACK** Definitely didn't reform Oasis, but did announce a solo album for next year. The media blitz included *Celebrity Gogglebox*.
 ► **MARK BORKOWSKI SAYS** "He maintained his credibility, moving through the gears. He used social media well, doing a Q&A with fans. Good stuff, and you just know that he's got a lot in reserve." ■ LEONIE COOPER



Liam Gallagher

Splitsville

These bands went their separate ways in 2014. But what are the odds of seeing them again?

Crystal Castles

► **DATE SPLIT** October 8
 ► **REASON** "My art and my self-expression in any form has always been an attempt towards sincerity, honesty, and empathy for others. For a multitude of reasons both professional and personal I no longer feel that this is possible within CC," tweeted singer Alice Glass.
 ► **WHY THEY'LL BE MISSED** Alice Glass was the brilliantly feral antithesis to anodyne pop stars – a frontwoman who might either punch you or kiss you at any moment.
 ► **ODDS ON REFORMING** 12/1

Klaxons

► **DATE SPLIT** Announced on October 24, final show January 30, 2015
 ► **REASON** None given. Klaxons merely tweeted that their forthcoming live dates would be their last.
 ► **WHY THEY'LL BE MISSED** They were MDMA-zing! Klaxons' first album spawned the nu-rave movement and their latest ('Love Frequency') hinted at a return to party-starting greatness.
 ► **ODDS ON REFORMING** 2/1

Beady Eye

► **DATE SPLIT** October 25
 ► **REASON** Man of few words Liam Gallagher merely said the band are "no longer". But guitarist Andy Bell said, "Liam had been pretty quiet for a while, and then he just let us know that his heart wasn't really in it any more."

► **WHY THEY'LL BE MISSED** A world in which Liam Gallagher has no outlet to swagger around being a total boss is a sad world indeed.
 ► **ODDS ON REFORMING** 5/1

The Knife

► **DATE SPLIT** Announced on August 21, final show on November 8
 ► **REASON** "We don't have any obligations to continue, it should only and always be for fun," said singer Karin Dreijer Andersson.
 ► **WHY THEY'LL BE MISSED** From understated dancefloor fillers to conceptual tours (their last had the audience doing aerobics en masse), The Knife did leftfield pop with style.
 ► **ODDS ON REFORMING** 8/1

Death Grips

► **DATE SPLIT** July 2
 ► **REASON** "We are now at our best and so Death Grips is over," said a statement. "Death Grips was and always has been a conceptual art exhibition anchored by sound and vision. Above and beyond a 'band'"
 ► **WHY THEY'LL BE MISSED** Albums leaked on purpose, X-rated artwork and some of the most passionate, visceral musical output around: Death Grips were a band who never did it by halves.
 ► **ODDS ON REFORMING** 8/1
 ■ LISA WRIGHT

Odds supplied by William Hill, correct at December 8, 2014

Out of time

Remembering those we lost in 2014

Tommy Ramone

January 29, 1949–
July 11, 2014

Ramones' first drummer and last surviving member died following treatment for cancer of the bile duct.

► **FAMOUS FAN** Blondie's Debbie Harry said, "Tommy seemed to me so understated compared to the rest of the Ramones... his light, very accessible style made those early songs loved."

Scott Asheton

August 16, 1949–
March 15, 2014

The drummer and founding member of garage-rock and punk pioneers The Stooges died after three years of ill health. Bandmate Iggy Pop broke the news, describing Asheton as "like my brother".

► **FAMOUS FAN** Noel Fielding tweeted, "I can't believe Scott Asheton passed away. That's ruined my day, week, year."

Bobby Womack

March 4, 1944–
June 27, 2014

The soul singer, most famous for his 1972 hit 'Across 110th Street' and 2012 comeback album 'The Bravest Man In The Universe', died after a struggle with prostate cancer and Alzheimer's.

► **FAMOUS FAN** Damon Albarn said, "He taught me things that will never leave me, and he will never leave me."

ALSO MISSED

Dave Brockie aka Oderus Urungus

Gwar frontman, August 30, 1963–March 23, 2014

Frankie Knuckles

Godfather of house, January 18, 1955–March 31, 2014

Mark Bell

Musician/producer, LFO, 1971–October 12, 2014

Benjamin Curtis

Secret Machines/School Of Seven Bells, September 23, 1978–December 29, 2013

Isaiah 'Ikey' Owens

Keyboardist, last seen in Jack White's band, December 1, 1974–October 14, 2014

Nick Talbot

Aka Gravenhurst, May 14, 1977–December 4, 2014

► **Posters of Bobby Womack, the Ramones and The Stooges begin on page 45**



Vinyl is back, streaming is wobbling and the former biggest band in the world can't give their music away. What's going on, asks Kevin EG Perry

Was 2014 music's weirdest year ever?

This year, over a million vinyl records were sold for the first time in two decades. Meanwhile, HMV posted a £17 million profit just a year after going into liquidation.

In other news, up is down. Black is white. Cats and dogs are living together.

It's been a mixed-up year for anyone trying to make sense of the music biz, and a nightmare for anyone trying to predict the future. Physical music sales were supposed to have been lifeless, yet in July HMV boss Paul McGowan called the business "very profitable" and claimed it no longer has a single loss-making store in the UK.

Live music is booming, too. Total revenue from ticket sales well exceeds that from recorded music, yet the money is shared among a dwindling number of huge artists. While small venues like Leeds' Cockpit and London's Buffalo Bar have closed, the O2 Arena in London sold more tickets in 2014 than any other venue in the world. Ticket sales are still blighted by touts, so Foo Fighters came up with an idea for their US dates: selling tickets to people queuing outside venues. That's right, like in the '70s.

The return of vinyl records was arguably less of a surprise, particularly among music obsessives. The Horrors' Rhys Webb

recently told *NME* that the increase in sales reflects the fact that "people are rebelling against the invisible idea of streaming and downloads and embracing the physical release that makes vinyl records and everything about them so special". It's a nice idea, and true of many music fans, but let's not count our records before they're pressed. Nobody's listening to vinyl on the bus or in cars or while pounding the streets. Digital music continues to dominate sales, and an increasing number of people simply aren't buying music at all, relying solely on streaming for all their music needs.

Based on data from the first half of the year, digital sales of MP3s will continue to fall this year after peaking in 2012, when 1.3 billion tracks were sold in the US. Meanwhile, despite their well-publicised tiff with Taylor Swift (she withdrew her entire catalogue claiming that they weren't valuing her art), Spotify enjoyed another bumper year. Kevin Brown, head of label relations for Europe, told *NME* he believes "2014 is the year streaming truly became mainstream". He would say that, but the numbers are hard

to argue with: Spotify has 50 million users worldwide, over 10 million of whom are paid subscribers, and they listened to more than seven billion hours of music this year. Brown confidently predicts this will increase next year. Meanwhile Google are ploughing resources into Google Play, a subscription service that will challenge Spotify, and already scored a coup in getting exclusive rights to Take That's new album.

It's not just Taylor Swift who's concerned. Kasabian's Serge Pizzorno argues that streaming services are hurting new bands. He told *NME*: "Bands like us were able to play so many shows when we were starting out, gain a following, then get to a point where we could play big shows. The money that comes in from that keeps you afloat, but that's not happening for new bands – especially if they're getting stiffed on the records. That needs to be the debate, rather than what it means for bands like us. If we were starting out now, I don't even know if we'd make it."

Meanwhile, the spectre of illegal downloading hasn't gone away. Last week came news that The Pirate Bay – one of the most popular illegal download sites – has been

Thom
Yorke

**"IF WE WERE STARTING
OUT NOW, I DON'T
KNOW IF WE'D MAKE IT"**

Serge Pizzorno, Kasabian

raided by Swedish police and taken offline. In September, however, Thom Yorke allied with BitTorrent – formerly best known for filesharing and piracy – to release his 'Tomorrow's Modern Boxes' album in a paid-for bundle. Yorke described it as an "experiment"; BitTorrent boss Matt Mason told *NME* the now-legit company plans to seize an opportunity created because the music business has "given up on selling people music". But it remains the case that if people can avoid paying for stuff they invariably will. The exception is obviously a U2 album, which 95 per cent of iTunes users made clear they would rather have forcibly inserted into their rectums on eight-track cassette than magically appear as a free download on their iPhone.

The furious reaction to U2's giveaway points to the same truth that rising vinyl sales does: those of us who love music still want our music collection to represent us as individuals, to reflect our choices. This feeling of ownership should, in theory, give paid-for music an advantage over the likes of Spotify, which is the reason they provide countless options for playlisting and favouriting music. They want to create the illusion that you 'own' your little corner of the cloud. There's even nostalgia for the simpler early days of MP3s: when Apple announced it is to discontinue the storage-focused iPod Classic, demand for the last of the devices skyrocketed.

As for what 2015 holds? Fuck knows. As a wise man once said: I never make predictions, and I never will.

Footie, fitness and fighting...

2014's oddest news stories revisited



JUMPING JACK CRASH

Mick Jagger blamed
by Brazil fans for
World Cup defeat

Since 2010, The Rolling Stones' frontman has backed six World Cup teams who've promptly crashed out. This year he championed hosts Brazil, who then suffered their heaviest loss in World Cup history. Locals dubbed him 'The Angel Of Doom'.

DON'T LOOK BACK IN LYCRA

Liam Gallagher "takes
to running backwards"
to stay fit

Far from the cigarettes and alcohol of his youth, Liam G was spotted 'retro running' (ie running backwards) around his local north London neighbourhood. Onlookers say he "still retained his frontman sneer".

ALL THINGS MUST PASS

George Harrison memorial
tree killed by infestation
of beetles

A memorial pine tree in Los Angeles' Griffith Park, planted in tribute to the late Beatle, was ironically killed by a nasty infestation of the band's arthropod namesakes. A new tree has since been planted in its place.

ALL YOU NEED IS GLOVES

DMX offers to fight Trayvon
Martin's killer

Rapper DMX scheduled a celebrity boxing match with George Zimmerman, the man acquitted of killing unarmed black teenager Trayvon Martin. "I am going to beat the living fuck out him... Once I am done with him, I am going to whip my dick out and piss on him, right in his motherfucking face," said DMX. The fight was cancelled.



DMX:
fighting talk

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

£378m

Dr Dre's annual earnings, according to Forbes, helped by May's sale of Beats Audio to Apple

£26,000

The amount US restaurant chain Arby's paid for Pharrell Williams' famous hat at auction

\$5m

What RZA claims to have been offered for the one-and-only copy of Wu-Tang Clan album 'Once Upon A Time In Shaolin'

3.5

Percentage of line-ups occupied by all female-bands at six of the biggest UK festivals

£16m

Amount of Nirvana's money Courtney Love claims she has "blown" since 1994

£42m

Calvin Harris' earnings in the last 12 months, making him the highest-paid DJ in the world for the second year running

£1.2bn

The total sum of money invested by artists including Arctic Monkeys and George Michael into the Liberty tax-avoidance scheme

26 minutes

Time it took for Glastonbury 2015 to sell out

£17.5m

Fortune left by Lou Reed in his will, which was read in June

Daytrippers

**What happened to
the people who had
15 minutes of fame
in 2014?**



Jesse Helt

▶ **THEN** Helt was the 22-year-old Miley Cyrus took to August's MTV VMAs in a bid to raise awareness of youth homelessness.
▶ **NOW** It was discovered Helt was wanted for parole



violation. He was jailed for six months in October.

Doggy Parton

▶ **THEN** Named after the festival's big-hit act, this pup was found by Glastonbury's clean-up team.
▶ **NOW** Happily the dog was reunited with her owners

following a public appeal.

Josh The Raver

▶ **THEN** Josh lost a finger at an illegal rave in Croydon in June, but carried on partying because "the bass was hard".
▶ **NOW** By October, 28 people had been arrested in connection with the rave. Josh was never reunited with his digit.

Christ Bearer

▶ **THEN** The Wu-Tang Clan affiliate made headlines in April when he cut off his penis and jumped from a second-floor balcony.
▶ **NOW** Having had his penis reattached by surgeons, Christ Bearer has reinvented himself as a stand-up comedian. Well, you've gotta laugh.

TheYear

2014: brilliant, wasn't it? Not according to Sleaford Mods.

The band's Jason Williamson pours a cup of cold piss on the year's big stories



Mods: life is rubbish



On U2's album giveaway

Jason Williamson "It would be different if it was a band nobody knows, but because Bono's such a massive cunt it didn't go down well with people. I was on tour with The Specials and [frontman] Terry Hall went to the shop to get a phone. He ended up getting an iPhone, got it back and this fucking U2 album's staring him in the face. He went absolutely bananas – the same as every other bastard in the country. Bono's very spiritually corrupt. I read somewhere they made something stupid like £60 million from it anyway, but it scares me; it's a bit like the Tories – if you spend too much time reading about them then it's frustrating because there's nothing you can do about it. They need hitting. I don't support violence, but he makes me so angry."

On Ed Sheeran announcing three nights at Wembley Stadium

"It's just marketing, that's all it is. It's not anything to do with the strength of the tunes, but the image of it and teaming up with Pharrell... Once you get in with that crew, you're laughing. You've got all these sexy songs and all that shit he's doing

now, but it's coming from some white guy who's quite relatable. You can understand why he's got big, but it's nothing to do with his music. If you listen to the songs, they don't grow on you, they're just there."

On Alex Turner's Brits speech

"What he needs to do is go out to the garage, get the electric saw, saw his legs off and then eat them. He's full of shit. That rock'n'roll? What rock'n'roll? He's got no rock'n'roll left in him. Maybe in that speech he was trying to claim it back and try and make himself look like this important person. There's nothing on 'AM' that stands out. At the start he was too young, he used to irritate me – I'm not dancing to you, you cunt. I always thought he was talking about stuff he didn't really understand."

On the band of the year

"There isn't one. I've just been listening to loads of old stuff. Honestly, nothing's got me excited. I've not been taken by anything that's captured it. I'm warming to Fat White Family, I talk to the singer every now and again – they're about the closest thing to something that I could actually admire this year."

Fat White
Family: close
to admirable



The year in beefs

It's not always peace'n'love in the music world. Here are some of 2014's most memorable spats

THE BEEF

The Orwells vs Arctic Monkeys

► **WHO SAID WHAT** Orwells frontman Mario Cuomo criticised the Arctic's live show for being "synchronised". Alex Turner responded by telling Cuomo he should be "trying to get laid rather than watching [them] every night".

► **WHAT HAPPENED NEXT** The Orwells then labelled the Monkeys "the hip Backstreet Boys". Turner and co were too busy being the UK's biggest band to care.

► **WINNER** Arctic Monkeys

THE BEEF

Billy Bragg vs Kasabian

► **WHO SAID WHAT** Billy Bragg said the Leicester troupe "are there to remind us how true ... *Spinal Tap* was"; Serge labelled the attack "embarrassing" and said it "undermines [Bragg's] credibility".

► **WHAT HAPPENED NEXT** "With '48:13', I'm not trying to be clever, that's the whole point!" said Serge, thus basically rendering Bragg's quip null and void.

► **WINNER** Kasabian

THE BEEF

Iggy Azalea vs Snoop Dogg

► **WHO SAID WHAT** Snoop tweeted a photo of an albino man with cornrows, comparing it to Iggy. Azalea said she was "disappointed". Snoop called her "a cunt".

► **WHAT HAPPENED NEXT** "It's like the guy that asks for your number and then says you ugly and a bitch when you say no," said Iggy.

► **WINNER** Iggy Azalea

THE BEEF

Lorde vs Diplo

► **WHO SAID WHAT:** Diplo promoted a Kickstarter promising to help Taylor Swift "get a booty". Taylor's pal Lorde enquired whether Diplo was also trying to sort out his "tiny penis".

► **WHAT HAPPENED NEXT** Lorde said the tweets were in jest and that Diplo – "a big brother to me" – just needed to be told "not to say stupid shit".

► **WINNER** Lorde

THE BEEF

Jack White vs The Black Keys

► **WHO SAID WHAT** Leaked private emails revealed White referring to Black Keys' Dan Auberbach as an "asshole". The Black Keys acknowledged that "everyone says fucked-up shit in private" and blamed the media.

► **WHAT HAPPENED NEXT** White issued a long, uncharacteristic apology saying sorry to almost everyone he'd ever offended.

► **WINNER** Both





best of 2014

st. vincent
st. vincent

£5



young fathers
dead

£8



east india youth
total strife forever

£8



temples
sun structures

£8



mogwai
rave tapes

£8



WILD
BEASTS
PRESENT
TENSE

wild beasts
present tense

£8



the horrors
luminous

£8



real estate
atlas

£8



interpol
el pintor

£8



metronomy
love letters

£8

julian casablancas+the
voidz
tyranny

£8



the twilight sad
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and nobody wants
to leave

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GOING OUT

THE BEST WAYS TO RING IN THE NEW YEAR



Superfood headline this year's Club NME NYE Ball. (Above) Carl Barât

NEW
YEAR'S EVE
SPECIAL!

Club NME NYE Ball

Last year, Brummie band Superfood rang in the new year by supporting Wolf Alice at Club NME's annual end-of-year party. Exactly 12 months later, they're stepping up to headline the bash, bringing the surreal joy of debut album 'Don't Say That' with them. Glaswegian synthpop trio Prides will open the night.

► **DATES** London KOKO (December 31)

► **TICKETS** £17.50 from koko.uk.com with £2.18 booking fee

Carl Barât & The Jackals

As well as reuniting with his old band The Libertines, Carl Barât has had a busy year getting a brand new group underway in The Jackals. Never one to take it easy, he'll squeeze two shows into one night this New Year's Eve as he and his new gang dash from

south London to east for these intimate gigs.

► **DATES** London Amersham

Arms (December 31), London Jack Rocks The Macbeth (31)

► **TICKETS** £25 from viewlondon.co.uk with £2.50 booking fee

Lily Allen

The outspoken singer is known for her love of partying, so expect

her to be on fine form as she makes a special appearance at this year's Hogmanay celebrations.

► **DATES** Edinburgh Princes Street Gardens (December 31)

► **TICKETS** £42.50 from ticketmaster.co.uk with £5.30 booking fee

Future Of The Left

The Cardiff band headline

Bristol Exchange's New Year's Eve mini festival, where they'll be joined by a number of local bands, including Hysterical Injury, Forgery Lit and The Tame. The event is split over two stages, so there's plenty to discover while waiting for the midnight chimes.

► **DATES** Bristol Exchange (December 31)

► **TICKETS** £15 from wegotickets.com with £1.50 booking fee

Ming City Rockers

The '70s-punk-loving quartet released their self-titled debut album

earlier this year. They'll perform highlights from that record at a celebratory and cosy gig in their hometown of Hull.

► **DATES** Hull Raine Club (December 31)

► **TICKETS** £6 from NME.COM/tickets with 60p booking fee

Julio Bashmore

The house DJ and producer for Jessie Ware is due to release his debut album next year, but before that he'll head from his native Bristol to Liverpool to drop a set of heavy-hitting dance bangers that should see in the new year nicely.

► **DATES** Liverpool East Village Arts Club (December 31)

► **TICKETS** £35 from tickets.ents24.com with £2.37 booking fee

Queen & Adam Lambert

The former *American Idol* runner-up continues his association with the legendary band as he joins up with Brian May and co to provide the build-up to the midnight countdown. If you can't make it (or tickets are just too pricey), the whole shebang will be broadcast live on BBC One, too.

► **DATES** London Central Hall (December 31)

► **TICKETS** £109.50-£157.50 from tickets.ents24.com with £8.65 booking fee

Stealing Sheep

The Liverpoolian psych experimentalists have had a quiet couple of years after putting out

FIVE TO SEE FOR FREE

Thrills don't come cheaper than this

1. Vant

Shacklewell Arms, London
London-based newcomers play festive show in Dalston.

► December 17, 8pm

2. Kid Manners

Start The Bus, Bristol
DJs get Bristol gig-goers in the party mood.

► December 17, 8pm

3. Viv Albertine in conversation with Thurston Moore

Rough Trade East, London
Book-based chat.

► December 18, 7pm

4. Kagoule

The Old Blue Last, London
The Notts trio bring their grunge sounds to Shoreditch.

► December 20, 8pm

5. Nai Harvest

A Nation Of Shopkeepers, Leeds
Emo duo put on a free NYE show.

► December 31, 7pm



See Kagoule for free in London



their first album, 'Into The Diamond Sun', on Heavenly Recordings in 2012. They'll be gearing up for a busier 2015 with this show in their home city.

► **DATES** Liverpool Kazimier (December 31)

► **TICKETS** £15 from tickets.ents24.com with £1.50 booking fee

Annie Mac

BBC Radio 1 presenter, DJ and club-night curator Annie Mac returns to Manchester for the second New Year's Eve in a row as she tops a bill that features some of the best in UK dance. Redlight, Hannah Wants, Monki and more will all appear.

► **DATES** Manchester Albert Hall (December 31)

► **TICKETS** £38.50 from tickets.ents24.com with £3.85 booking fee

2015: A Bowie Odyssey

If you fancy spending New Year's Eve doing something more glam than sweating in a sticky club, head to London's Shacklewell Arms for a special Bowie night, where The Spiders From Mars will recreate the Thin White Duke's hits live onstage. And make sure you dress the part – the organisers are offering a £50 bar tab to the best Bowie costume on show.

► **DATES** London Shacklewell Arms (December 31)

► **TICKETS** £5 from billetto.co.uk with 50p booking fee



STAYING IN

THE BEST MUSIC ON TV, RADIO AND ONLINE THIS CHRISTMAS



See La Roux on *Top Of The Pops* on New Year's Eve

Top Of The Pops

► **WATCH** BBC One, December 25, 2pm; December 31, 4.15pm

The pop show is reanimated for its festive double-header once again.

This year, Fearne Cotton and Reggie Yates will celebrate Christmas with Gorgon City, Jess Glynne and more, and they'll invite Charli XCX and La Roux into the BBC studios for a special New Year's party a week later.

Kate Tempest

The Radcliffe & Maconie Show

► **LISTEN** BBC 6 Music, December 26, 1pm

As Mark Radcliffe and Stuart Maconie present a look back at their best bits from the last 12 months, they're giving listeners the opportunity to revisit their interview with poet and rapper Kate Tempest. Also featured are John Lydon, Daniel Radcliffe, Blondie and more.

The Bee Gees

Joy Of The Bee Gees

► **WATCH** BBC Four, December 22, 10.35pm

Discover the Gibb brothers' history in this programme celebrating the Mancunians' genre-spanning career. *The Bee Gees At The BBC... And Beyond* follows, offering live performances from the network's archives.

The Who

Quadrophenia Live In London

► **WATCH** Sky Arts 1, 9pm, December 27

In 2013, surviving Who members Pete Townshend and Roger Daltrey reunited to perform their seminal rock opera 'Quadrophenia' in full. Relive that night at Wembley Arena with this footage from the gig.

Johnny Cash

Christmas Special 1978/1979

► **WATCH** Sky Arts 1, 8pm, December 19
The country legend

St Vincent

Wise Women

► **LISTEN** BBC 6 Music, 4pm, December 24

In the first of three episodes in this special series (the other two are hosted by Neneh Cherry and Alison Goldfrapp), St Vincent caps a stellar year by presenting and curating a one-off two-hour show. Tune in to hear some of her favourite songs, plus conversation and a specially selected Wise Gift track.



19

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TheWeek

The nominations have been compiled
and the shortlist for the NME Awards
2015 with Austin, Texas can be revealed.
Go online now to vote for your favourites

NME Awards shortlist revealed

Best British Band

Supported by
MARSHALL

Marshall

Alt-J
Arctic Monkeys
Chvrches
Kasabian
Royal Blood
The Libertines

Best Album

Jamie T – 'Carry On The Grudge'
Kasabian – '48:13'
La Roux – 'Trouble In Paradise'
Royal Blood – 'Royal Blood'
Run The Jewels – 'RTJ2'
St Vincent – 'St Vincent'

Best International Band

Supported by
AUSTIN, TEXAS

Austin
— LIVE MUSIC CAPITAL OF THE WORLD —

Arcade Fire
Foo Fighters
Haim
Interpol
Queens Of The Stone Age
Tame Impala

Best Live Band

Supported by
DEAD CROW



Arctic Monkeys
Fat White Family
Foo Fighters
Kasabian
Royal Blood
The Libertines

Best New Band

Circa Waves
FKA Twigs
Jungle
Royal Blood
Slaves
Superfood

Best Solo Artist

Jack White
Jake Bugg
Jamie T
La Roux
Lana Del Rey
St Vincent

Best Festival

Bestival
Glastonbury
Isle Of Wight
Latitude
Reading & Leeds
T In The Park

Best Track

Supported by **TITO'S**

Tito's



Future Islands – 'Seasons (Waiting On You)'
Jamie T – 'Zombie'
Jungle – 'Busy Earnin'
Kasabian – 'Eez-eh'
Noel Gallagher – 'In The Heat Of The Moment'
Royal Blood – 'Little Monster'

Best Video

Fat White Family – 'Touch The Leather'
FKA Twigs – 'Two Weeks'
Jamie T – 'Zombie'
Jungle – 'Busy Earnin'
Peace – 'Lost On Me'
Royal Blood – 'Figure It Out'

Best Music Film

Nick Cave – 20,000 Days On Earth
Finding Fela
Kasabian – Summer Solstice
Pulp – A Film About Life, Death And Supermarkets
Supremensch: The Legend Of Shep Gordon
Edwyn Collins – The Possibilities Are Endless

Best Film

Boyhood
Frank
Get On Up
God Help The Girl
The Inbetweeners 2
Northern Soul

Best TV Show

Girls
Game Of Thrones
Foo Fighters: Sonic Highways
Peaky Blinders
Sherlock
True Detective

Dancefloor Filler

Iggy Azalea feat. Charli XCX – 'Fancy'
Jamie T – 'Zombie'
Kasabian – 'Eez-eh'
Mark Ronson & Bruno Mars – 'Uptown Funk'
Metronomy – 'Love Letters'
SBTRKT feat. Ezra Koenig – 'New Dorp. New York'

Worst Band

5 Seconds Of Summer
Bastille
Blink-182
One Direction
The 1975
U2

Villain Of The Year

Bono
David Cameron
Harry Styles
Nigel Farage
Russell Brand
Taylor Swift

Hero Of The Year

Alex Turner
Dave Grohl
Kate Bush
Noel Gallagher

Russell Brand
Taylor Swift

Music Moment Of The Year

Alex Turner's Brit Awards speech
Jamie T's Reading comeback
Kasabian headline Glastonbury
Kate Bush returns
The Libertines reunite
Nirvana reunite at The Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame

Best Fan Community

Jamie T
Kasabian
La Roux
Muse
Peace
Royal Blood

Small Festival Of The Year

End Of The Road
Festival Number 6
Field Day
Liverpool Psych Fest
The Great Escape
Tramlines

Book Of The Year

Bernard Sumner – Chapter And Verse
Ian Curtis, Deborah Curtis

and Jon Savage – So This Is Permanence

Jesse Frohman – Kurt Cobain: The Last Session
John Lydon – Anger Is An Energy: My Life Uncensored
Viv Albertine – Clothes Clothes Music Music Music Boys Boys Boys
Steve Hanley – The Big Midweek: Life Inside The Fall

Reissue Of The Year

Led Zeppelin – 'Led Zeppelin II'
Manic Street Preachers – 'The Holy Bible'
Oasis – 'Definitely Maybe'
Pixies – 'Doolittle'
Public Enemy – 'It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back'
The Smashing Pumpkins – 'Adore'

Best Band Social Media

?uestlove's Twitter
Alana Haim's Twitter
Albert Hammond Jr's Twitter
Fat White Family's Facebook
Liam Gallagher's Twitter
Slaves' Facebook

VOTE NOW!

Head to NME.COM/awards to vote. The winners will be announced at the NME Awards 2015 with Austin, Texas ceremony, which takes place at London's O2 Academy Brixton on February 18. To be in with a chance to rub shoulders with the famous and the infamous at the music world's most riotous bash, head to NME.COM/tickets



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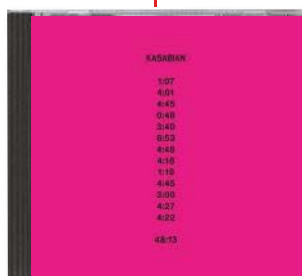
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to be kind: 2cd

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48:13

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warpaint

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lacuna

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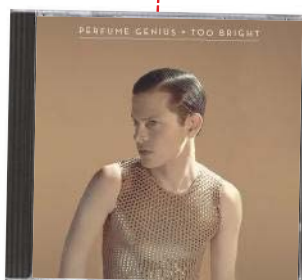
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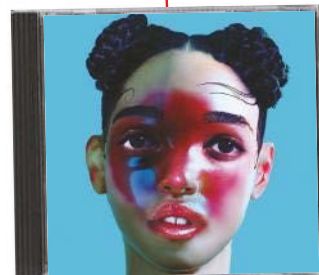
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ANATOMY OF AN ALBUM



"THE FOUR FRESHMEN WERE A BIG INFLUENCE"
Brian Wilson

The BEACH BOYS'

CHRISTMAS ALBUM
LITTLE SAINT NICK • THE MAN WITH ALL THE TOYS • MERRY CHRISTMAS, BABY
FROSTY THE SNOWMAN • SANTA CLAUS IS COMIN' TO TOWN • SANTA'S BEARD • WE THREE KINGS OF ORIENT ARE
BLUE CHRISTMAS • CHRISTMAS DAY • WHITE CHRISTMAS • I'LL BE HOME FOR CHRISTMAS • AULD LANG SYNE



STORY BEHIND THE SLEEVE

'Christmas Album' was put together in October 1963 and June '64, so The Beach Boys were pulled in from the Californian heat and made to wear thick woollens for the naff but suitably innocent image. It was shot by Capitol Records' staff photographer George Jerman, who would later take the group to San Diego Zoo for the cover of 'Pet Sounds'.

FIVE FACTS

- 1 'Christmas Album' comprises five originals and seven standards. The standards are fully orchestrated, with arrangements by Dick Reynolds.
- 2 'Christmas Day' – one of the originals – was the first time Al Jardine took the lead vocal on a Beach Boys song. Brian gave him another shot in March 1965 with 'Help Me, Rhonda'.
- 3 The lead single from the album, 'The Man With All The Toys', is just 92 seconds long. On the other hand, the only carol on the album, 'We Three Kings Of Orient Are' clocks in at 4:04 minutes – the longest song The Beach Boys recorded in the entire 1960s.
- 4 Brian Wilson was unhappy at the time of the release of 'Christmas Album'. He had a nervous breakdown in the same month, and permanently pulled out of touring.
- 5 The Beach Boys didn't record another Christmas song until 1974. A full album was planned for 1977, then discarded, but tracks from the sessions turned up on the 1998 compilation, 'Ultimate Christmas'.

THE BACKGROUND

In 1964, The Beach Boys released four records – three studio albums and a live one. They hadn't yet hit their creative peak (that would come in 1966 with 'Pet Sounds'), but they'd hit a commercial stride. 'Christmas Album' was both a cash-in and a significant piece of work in a much-maligned genre, and its genesis can be traced back to December 1963, when the group first released their signature Christmas song 'Little Saint Nick', which opens 'Christmas Album'. 'A Christmas Gift For You From Phil Spector' also came out in 1963 and it's likely that Brian Wilson was trying to match its quality. Most notably, he recruited another of his heroes, Dick Reynolds of The Four Freshmen, to help with arrangements.

LYRIC ANALYSIS

"There's a tale about Christmas that you've all been told/And a real famous cat all dressed in red" – 'Little Saint Nick'

Brian called the first half of the album the "teen side", hence the description of Father Christmas as "a real famous cat all dressed in red".

"He yanked the beard right on off of his chin/And in his eyes I could see he was hurt" – 'Santa's Beard'

Easily the weirdest song on the album. It finds Mike Love taking his five-year-old brother to a department to meet Santa, only to find out he's not the "real" Father Christmas.

"And if you happen... happen to be listening to this album right now..." – 'Auld Lang Syne'

Dennis delivers a Christmas message to fans over 'Auld Lang Syne', but fluffs his lines. Exactly why Brian, a perfectionist, left the mistake in remains a mystery.

"Oh why did we break up/There's still time to make up/If just for Christmas" – 'Merry Christmas, Baby'

The rest of the LP might deal in traditionally chirpy festive fare, but here Brian Wilson allowed himself a more reflective moment, detailing

a failed relationship that the protagonist is longing to salvage.

WHAT WE SAY NOW

The album's become such a classic, it's easy to forget how odd it must have been for fans to hear a group known only for songs about sun, surf and girls to record a set of Christmas songs.

FAMOUS FAN

Songs from 'Christmas Album' have been covered repeatedly by notable Beach Boys fans. Our favourite version? 'Little Saint Nick' done by **John Denver** and **The Muppets** in 1979.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"There's a very definite influence of The Four Freshmen on the arrangement as well as the [vocal] delivery, and obviously we all look up to and admire the style of The Four Freshmen."
Brian Wilson, 1964

THE AFTERMATH

The band's relentless release schedule showed no sign of easing up: they released three albums in 1965 that marked the beginning of Brian's experimental phase. It's no coincidence that he smoked his first joint in December 1964, just as America was enjoying the innocence of 'Christmas Album'. The album itself is one of the few festive records to stand the test of time.

THE DETAILS

- ▶ **RECORDED** October 20, 1963; June 18–30, 1964 ▶ **RELEASE DATE** November 9, 1964 ▶ **LENGTH** 25:05 ▶ **PRODUCER** Brian Wilson
- ▶ **STUDIO** Western Recorders, Hollywood ▶ **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** Didn't chart ▶ **WORLDWIDE SALES** 500,000+
- ▶ **SINGLES** Little Saint Nick, The Man With All The Toys
- ▶ **TRACKLISTING** ▶ 1. Little Saint Nick ▶ 2. The Man With All The Toys ▶ 3. Santa's Beard ▶ 4. Merry Christmas, Baby ▶ 5. Christmas Day ▶ 6. Frosty The Snowman ▶ 7. We Three Kings Of Orient Are ▶ 8. Blue Christmas ▶ 9. Santa Claus Is Comin' To Town ▶ 10. White Christmas ▶ 11. I'll Be Home For Christmas ▶ 12. Auld Lang Syne

THIS WEEK...

The Beach Boys' Christmas Album

Before reaching their creative peak with 'Pet Sounds', The Beach Boys released this wholesome festive record

SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE



The Mighty
Boosh



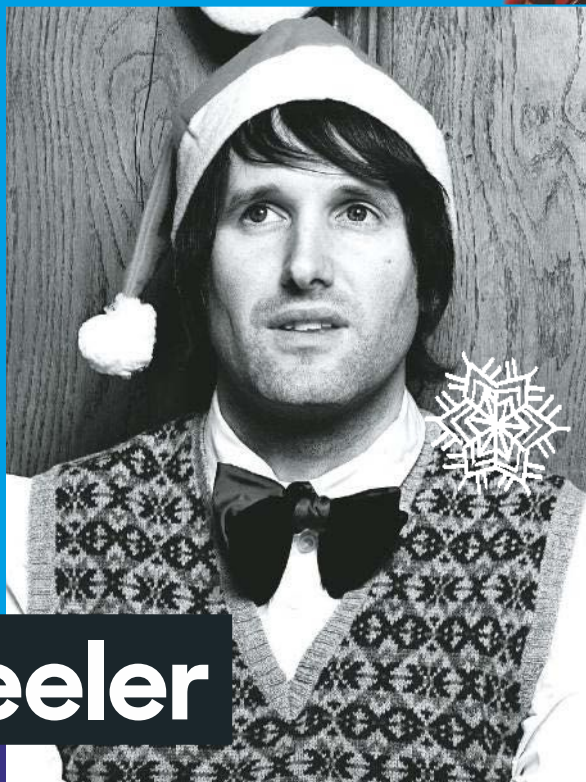
Wizzard



Tim

Wheeler

Ash
frontman



THE FIRST SONG I REMEMBER HEARING 'Our House' - Madness

"I have a strong memory of walking into my older brother's room, aged six, and this was playing. I ran into Suggs on a night out when Ash were doing well, and he had an odd rock'n'roll conversation with me, telling me to make sure I take care of my mortgage. It was boring, but he was right."

THE FIRST SONG I FELL IN LOVE WITH 'I Want To Hold Your Hand' - The Beatles

"My parents had this great Beatles compilation called '...Oldies (But Goldies!)', which contained their early singles. The last song was 'I Want To Hold Your Hand', which is a template for what I hold to be a great single."

THE FIRST ALBUM I BOUGHT 'Hits 6' - Various

"I was 10, and just starting to get into music. It had all the

big songs of 1987 - George Michael's 'I Want Your Sex', Mel & Kim's 'Respectable'..."

THE SONG THAT MADE ME WANT TO BE IN A BAND 'Run To The Hills' - Iron Maiden

"Me and Mark [Hamilton, Ash bassist] became friends

"I HAD A SORE NECK FROM HEADBANGING TO IRON MAIDEN"

because he was wearing an Iron Maiden patch. 'Run To The Hills' was our big anthem. I remember having a sore neck all the time from headbanging with short hair."

THE SONG I CAN NO LONGER LISTEN TO 'Human Nature' - Michael Jackson

"On the tourbus once, the DJ we'd brought with us stayed up listening to a mix of this over and over. I was too

drunk to get up and switch it off, even as the hangover kicked in around 8am. I wanted to kill him."

THE SONG THAT MAKES ME WANT TO DANCE 'I Want You Back' - The Jackson 5

"It's got such amazing, positive energy, and the bassline is killer. I'm an intermediate dancer. I definitely can't moonwalk! I took up salsa dancing but I struggle because everything's in threes. For a rock musician, everything's in fours!"

THE SONG I DO AT KARAOKE 'Brown Eyed Girl' - Van Morrison

"I like to represent the Northern Irish, and they normally don't have 'Teenage Kicks' on karaoke machines. Years ago, I went through a phase of trying to do ambitious ones. I sang 'Bohemian Rhapsody' with Chris Martin when we toured the states with Coldplay. We wanted to rename it 'Bohemian Crapsody' because it wasn't good."

THE SONG THAT REMINDS ME OF CHILDHOOD CHRISTMASES 'Do They Know It's Christmas?' - Band Aid

"I remember this song coming out in 1984 and a load of us seven-year-olds belting it out at a Christmas party. I sang on the Band Aid 20 version but the first one was a lot better. In fact, the one at the Christmas party was better."

THE SONG THAT REMINDS ME OF MY DAD 'As Time Goes By' - Herman Hupfeld

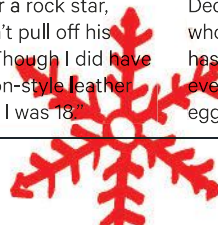
"Casablanca was one of my dad's favourite films and I can picture him playing this at the piano. When he was in the dementia ward, they had a piano in there, and I snuck a bit of his playing on the track 'Medicine' [on solo album 'Lost Domain', which concerns the death of his father]. I'd hold the sustain pedal down and he'd play random notes. It was like a strange ambient music."

THE SONG I PLAY ON CHRISTMAS MORNING 'I Wish It Could Be Christmas Every Day' - Wizzard

"I'm a sucker for the big, glam rock Christmas hits. This one is raucous, fun and not too sentimental. You can hear a big Phil Spector influence on Wizzard, which is perfect because as everyone knows, Phil Spector made the greatest Christmas album of all time. I had a fun time a few years ago making a Christmas album with Emmy The Great. The dream was to have a mega hit and live off December's royalties for the whole next year. It obviously hasn't happened yet but if it ever does I will buy you all eggnog lattes."



Suggs,
Madness



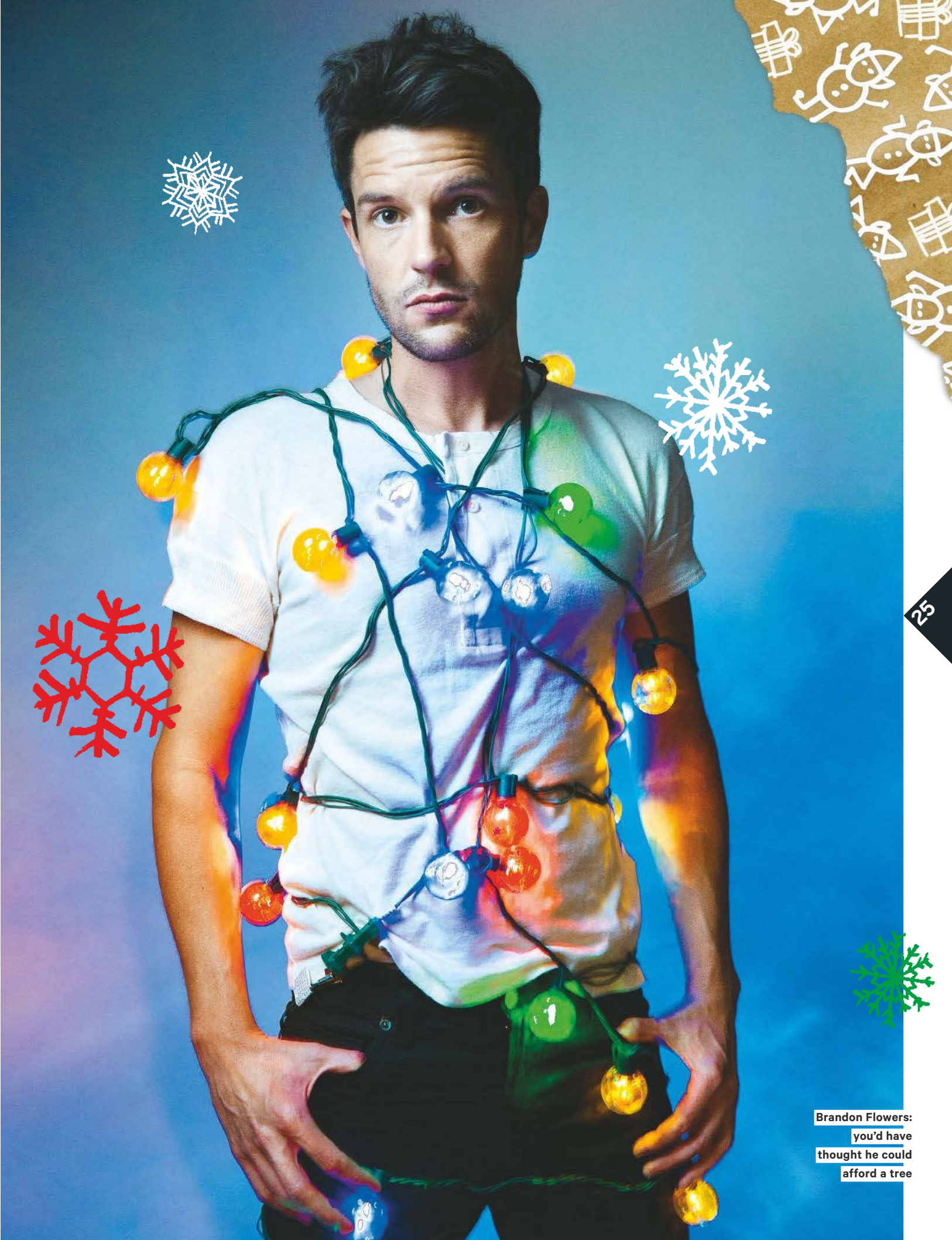


"WE'RE GOING TO KISS RUDOLPH GOODBYE"

As The Killers return with their ninth Christmas single, frontman Brandon Flowers takes a break from making his new solo album to tell Mark Beaumont why he still believes they can become the world's biggest band

PHOTOS: AUSTIN HARGRAVE





Brandon Flowers:
you'd have
thought he could
afford a tree

ohn Lewis have their drippy penguin. Sainsbury's have recreated one of the greatest triumphs of humanity over the futility of warfare to flog their fatted turkeys. But the winner by far in Christmas 2014's sentimentality stakes is Joel, the most unloved festive character since *South Park*'s Mr Hankey (to whom he bears a slightly unfortunate resemblance).

Joel – the title character of The Killers' ninth annual Christmas single, created by US talk-show host Jimmy Kimmel, who guests on the track as Santa – is the archetypal lump of coal that a vengeful Santa leaves as a "booby prize" for those kids who've been naughty this year. But Joel has other ideas. The minute Santa has heartlessly dumped him, Joel gets to know his sobbing, rueful new owner, learns the root causes of his bad behaviour and decides that nobody deserves to be punished at Christmas. So – The Killers having presumably consulted *Interstellar*'s dodgy physics adviser – he molecularly condenses in the boy's hands, turning himself into a massive diamond. An unloved outcast becoming a festive hero; Joel is essentially an environmentally unfriendly Rudolph.

"We watched *Back To The Future* in Soho in London one night," explains Brandon Flowers of the origins of the life-affirming seasonal epic 'Joel The Lump Of Coal', "and of course [the soundtrack is] doused in Huey Lewis. It made me think how much we loved his voice growing up. One of the things we like to do is collaborate on our Christmas songs, and Jimmy [Kimmel] is friends with Huey and we know Jimmy, so we thought, 'Let's ask Jimmy to connect us and we'll try to do a song with Huey Lewis.' So I reached out and Jimmy came back and said, 'How about we write a song together?' and somehow along the way Huey lost his involvement. Jimmy had this idea of a lump of coal who goes to a bad kid and gives up his life and becomes a diamond. It's kind of genius that it hasn't been used."

Surely they'd have been biting each other's fingers off over sparkly singing Joels on Black Friday. Brandon laughs. "I could see some kind of stuffed lump of coal in future, maybe a little book. It might turn everything on its head. Kiss Rudolph goodbye!"



The Killers' 'Joel The Lump Of Coal' video

Jimmy Kimmel,
far right, with
The Killers



"YOU'VE GOT TO PORTRAY SANTA IN A NEGATIVE LIGHT!"

BRANDON FLOWERS

Traditionally the Yuletide cash-grab is an arena for international superstars to duke it out with 1970s stalwarts, charity celeb choirs, Facebook fightbacks and whoever wins *The X Factor*. Most bands with any sense know they'll never top 'Fairytale Of New York', so they don't try. But since 2006, The Killers (as well as Sufjan Stevens) have been leading the pack in writing Christmas songs with wit, panache and no little credibility.

"It really started from being asked to do the Red campaign," Brandon explains. "Bono asked if I wanted to do a Gap ad, and at the time I was feeling too cool to do a Gap ad, I guess. I'd probably do the ad now. December 1 was Aids Day, so I said, 'Instead of doing the Gap ad, why don't we give you a Christmas song?' And it's ended up becoming a tradition now."

The trick is to affectionately play up the Christmas song while keeping

a stony poker face, continually ramping up the star power in the process. The first single, 2006's 'A Great Big Sled', was a classic case of whacking sleigh bells and snow scenes onto your usual sonic style (in this case, euphoric Americana) and featured Toni Halliday of '90s London duo Curve. By the third

song, 'Joseph, Better You Than Me', they were exploring the inner life of the man cuckolded by God with a little help from Elton John and the Pet Shop Boys' Neil Tennant.

Further singles portrayed moving family scenes ('Boots', 2010), Christmas as a beacon of hope in trying economic times ('Happy Birthday Guadalupe!', 2009) and comedy cowboy Yuletide barn dances ('The Cowboy's Christmas Ball', 2011) and often came with videos starring rock and Hollywood greats. "There's a Warren Zevon reference in [last year's] 'Christmas In LA', and he made an animated appearance," says Brandon, "and we got [legendary octogenarian actor] Harry Dean Stanton and Owen Wilson in the video, so that was really cool. You'll never get Harry Dean Stanton, Warren Zevon and Owen Wilson together again."

Several of the singles have involved a psycho Santa exacting hot-lead revenge on child gunmen ('Don't Shoot Me Santa', 2007) or generally naughty little boys ('I Feel It In My



Bones, 2012). 'Joel The Lump Of Coal' features a similarly cruel and remorseless Claus who doesn't just punish the bad kid but mocks Joel for being worthless, filthy and full of carbon-emitting poison. All of which leads to the logical conclusion that Brandon must still be enduring the after-effects of a traumatic childhood incident on the knee of a shopping-mall Santa. He laughs. "No, I just try to turn things on their head every now and then and do something that hasn't been done, and this is continuing in that theme. Santa has to be portrayed in a negative light if he's going to give a lump of coal to a bad kid."

Festive frivolity aside,

recording 'Joel...' was a "good refresher" for The Killers after a quiet year where they played just four very short tours and a headline slot at V Festival. "You start to adjust to normal life," Brandon says of the time they've spent away from the tourbus. "We'd been off the road for a while and then you're thrust onto the stage in front of 70,000 people and it's more thrilling than it would've been if we'd just been on the road doing it every night. But it's always light-hearted going in and doing a Christmas song."

Last June, drummer

Ronnie 'Big Talk' Vannucci told the press that the band would be taking an extended hiatus before getting back in the studio, which was mostly due to guitarist Dave Keuning wanting to spend more time with his family. This second hiatus is looking to last as long as the one they took between 2008's 'Day & Age' (which they stopped touring two years later) and 2012's 'Battle Born', though that fourth album is partially responsible, too: working with five producers made the process so arduous that they've become studio-phobic.

KILLER CHRISTMAS

As the Vegas band release their ninth festive single, Brandon casts his eye back over the previous eight



A Great Big Sled 2006

Brandon: "We recorded it in Mark Knopfler's studio. He actually popped his head in while we were recording. It's a great song. In the beginning stages I was trying to think what The Flaming Lips would do if they wrote a Christmas song, and that's what we got! What's funny is that it sounds nothing like The Flaming Lips."



Don't Shoot Me Santa 2007

Brandon: "Great video. Our buddy who's an actor on a show called *Criminal Minds*, which is pretty successful, he went to school with our buddy who played Santa. His parents own a strange desert ranch and so we were able to shoot it out there. That's sort of the most beloved Christmas song by this band."



Joseph, Better You Than Me 2008

Brandon: "I remember being at church around that time and somebody bringing up Joseph, and I'd never really thought about him. He's a carpenter but there must be so much more to Joseph than that. This is kind of going a little more in-depth. Some of the troubles that he must've gone through. It's an underrated and overlooked one."



Happy Birthday, Guadalupe! 2009

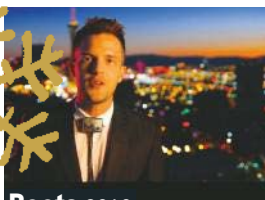
Brandon: "I started writing it on an airplane. That was approaching it from the standpoint of the recession had hit and there was a lot of trouble going round. It's sort of about throwing all of that out the window during Christmas time."

"It was a nice thought," Brandon recalls of working with Steve Lillywhite, Damian Taylor, Brendan O'Brien, Stuart Price and Daniel Lanois. "Everybody's got talents and something to offer; put them together and make something fantastic. It didn't really work out, it was pretty stressful. But the touring was great – the tour for 'Battle Born' was the best that we've experienced so far. So I don't think it put too much of a stress on things, it's just you're around each other so much it's probably good to have a little distance and then you're ready to do it again." Coming together for one-album bursts is probably the way The Killers will continue to work now, says Brandon, "unless there's some sort of rejuvenation. It seems to be the natural way for us."

When it comes to album number five, the conversation has only gone as far as how they'll do it, rather than what it'll sound like. "We've definitely learned to rely on technology and what [outside producers] have to bring," Brandon admits. "On the first record nobody outside of the band really did that. We've talked about going back and being more self-sufficient, self-reliant. For that to happen, everybody's gonna have to be at their best."

In the meantime, Brandon is working on a second solo album, the follow-up to 2010's 'Flamingo', with Haim and Vampire Weekend producer Ariel Rechtshaid as his "co-captain". 'Flamingo' was essentially a Killers album that the rest of The Killers wanted a break from making; when Dave Koenig and Mark Stoermer insisted on having some time off from the band, Brandon simply carried on with the writing and touring cycle he'd grown accustomed to, producing a solo album steeped in Vegas mythology, billowing Killers-style grandeur and choruses that could have been declared Nevada state monuments. Besides boasting a heavier religious slant and more personal themes – 'Magdalena', for instance, was all about a Mexican

KILLER CHRISTMAS CONTINUED



Boots 2010

Brandon: "I was born in the desert but I spent my formative years in Utah, where we actually had white Christmases. I got really sentimental and I feel like I was able to capture being 10 years old and the excitement of Christmas. I was also able to look back and tell you about my mother, and that's what makes that my favourite one."



The Cowboy's Christmas Ball 2011

Brandon: "I had a book of cowboy poetry that I was reading one night and I came across [William Lawrence Chittenden's] *The Cowboy's Christmas Ball*. It was set in Texas and I took it and changed all of the Texas imagery and I made it a Nevada river. That's my kids' favourite."



I Feel It In My Bones 2012

Brandon: "I believe the killer Santa is gonna be a trilogy, so this was part two. We brought him back and it was fun to do that – the video turned out great."



Christmas In LA 2013

Brandon: "That's with Dawes, a band I've grown to love. They're a band from LA, so it's a part of their fibre. It paints a dreary picture of living in a beach town at Christmas time." **Joel The Lump Of Coal (2014)** **Jimmy Kimmel:** "[This may] very well may be the greatest holiday song ever recorded by non-chipmunks."

pilgrimage route Brandon was thinking of following – it was the ambitious pop album that would naturally have followed *'Day & Age'* had the band stayed together to make it.

For this second record, though, Brandon wanted to shake up his musical Magic 8 ball to make an album that's distinct from his day band. He admits that he had grown "a little bit" complacent in the interim years, and was looking for a shove clear of his comfort zone. "Even though I'm still young, you can start to get set in your ways," says the 33-year-old father of three. "Change is good and there's always growth, I'm always looking for that. It's nice to be able to steer the ship, and that's what you'd think I'd do on my own album, but I'm letting Ariel take over every now and then. That's led to some really exciting things and sounds that I never would've used. As I've gotten older I'm much more open to that – I'm much more open to other people's strengths and really trying to utilise them – and that's where Ariel comes into the picture. He's really knowledgeable about every genre; it's pretty incredible what he's able to reference and pull out. It's definitely going to be different, but I'm still in the thick of it, hammering away."

With The Killers occasionally coming off like a fairly joyless endeavour these days, and a swell of platinum albums under their belts, it seems fair to ask what motivates Brandon to make music these days. "It's just there," he says. "You can't label people when they're kids, but I guess it's always been there and I'm so thankful that I found this outlet, otherwise my aspirations in life were to be a valet parker. That was it, those guys make good money! It's not my parents' fault or anything, it's just that was the world we knew. So I'm so grateful that I was able to find this. After playing Wembley Stadium I don't know what else we're gonna aim for, but something was certainly fulfilled by reaching that point. It didn't put any fire out – I still want to create and I still want to get better."

Whenever The Killers do re-emerge, however, they'll be at a crossroads: whether to use their June 2013 Wembley Stadium show as a trampoline into the

stadium circuit and fulfill their Vegas spectacular potential, or to retreat into the comfort of the arenas. To U2 or not U2.

"There's definitely a drive that we're lacking," Brandon muses. "It takes a lot of work, and that's fine, everybody's different, everybody's gonna have their own road that they go down. Other than Coldplay, I'm not sure if anybody's made the dent that U2 were able to make. They were so much a part of the landscape and the timing of when they were coming out. It's changed so much now – there's so much music out there and so much noise to compete with, it's strange times. I'm not sure if anybody's going to be able to do what they did. So sometimes it's frustrating with four different people and four different personalities in this band, we don't have that whole history that U2 have of these four young kids that knew each other and grew up in the same town, that bond that they have."

"MY ASPIRATION IN LIFE WAS TO BE A VALET. THAT'S IT"

BRANDON FLOWERS



Brandon at V Festival, Chelmsford, August 2014

have a comparable legacy despite being the band who proved that 21st-century indie rock could conquer the biggest venues in the world. Does it bother them that they can't seem to match up to their heroes? "It is frustrating," admits Brandon, though he still won't be deterred from his ambition. "People actually talk about how they don't feel like they're adequate, and it's a big band. I don't feel like that – I feel like I can do it."

But would the Bono acolytes ever follow suit and push their album on 80 million iTunes users? "Not now!" says a laughing Brandon. "There are people that said some really mean things about it, but it makes sense. If somebody's gonna do it, of course it's gonna be U2 – they do everything before everyone. It just happened to backfire this time a little bit."

While waiting for the band's legacy to cement itself – and for the other members to commit to another record and tour – Brandon will have to settle for owning the alternative Christmas anthem, and 'Joel...' will keep The Killers' festive legacy glittering. While most of their Christmas singles have been fan collectibles that have rarely made much of a dent on the charts, 'Joel...' and its stop-motion video – featuring an adorable Joel being tricked into Santa's sleigh under the impression

he's about to become a precious Christmas gift, only to be told "*You stupid lump/You're just the thing to teach this brat/That Santa ain't no chump*" – have become something of an iTunes hit. It looks set to be the band's most memorable Christmas tune yet, a cute festive character study and heartening morality tale to sit alongside Rudolph, Frosty and the Little Drummer Boy. But isn't it a bit of a dodgy message to be dishing out to the kids – that you can be bad all year and still get a massive diamond for Christmas?

"You should be able to take part in the festivities and the spirit," says Brandon, defending the Yuletide rights of naughty kids everywhere. "But I wasn't very mischievous when I was a kid, so I got pretty much what I wanted." ■

The king's speech

Anger is an energy, proclaimed the man formerly known as Rotten – and 2014 has offered plenty to get mad about. **John Lydon** is on forceful form for his NME Christmas address...

This year has been very busy. I've had the book [his second biography, *Anger Is An Energy*] to get together, I've had to prepare for this new [PiL] album that we're recording, and so musically I haven't paid any attention to what anyone has been getting up to. And maybe, in many ways, that has proved to be very healthy for me. I'm a pop enthusiast; I always will be. But although I know the fast track to garnering a hit single, I prefer the uncontaminated approach – that way I maintain that killer word of mine: integrity. It's important to wake up in the morning and feel good about what you do.

I'm absolutely oblivious to Band Aid 30. I avoid all radio and TV.

Another charity? Gawd, just what the world needs. There are times in your life when you need solitude. All these charity events just seem to be glory-hunting. Somewhere in there, there's someone with good intentions, but the rest tend to be an awful lot of liggers. The message is always dissipated in these things.

What we need is better government. Voting is essential.

Please involve yourself in the process. People should start approaching it from a Town Hall point of view. Go there and make trouble if you need to, to get your point across. All politics begins at home. Voting is the one thing we managed to win off the toffs, and we can't abandon it.

I don't think Ukip are dangerous, but their message is deliberately jumbled, and therefore creating confusion. You don't know what you'll get if that

lot get in. They're just as power-hungry as the rest of them. Their talk about immigration is subdued racism, and that's unfortunate because it's an important issue. Immigration: is there a cap on it or isn't there? Is it *really* a free-for-all? What is the NHS and is it strictly for the citizens of said country? People are confused, and they get drawn into headline-mongering. It really bloody annoys me. I like to read, and yet I'm confused by it all – and I really bloody shouldn't be. I'm here but for the NHS. For me, it should be a prerequisite of any decent society. Am I against privatisation? Absolutely. Once you introduce a cash profit, you create corruption and favouritism and cronyism.

It's this that the truth gets sucked up into. Politicians all seem to be arguing over the same points and principles, and usually from the same angle. But it all becomes meaningless tripe. And it drives away people who want to contribute to politics. We're being disenfranchised by minutiae. I'm seeing this in America too. That last guy who ran against Obama [Mitt Romney], he was introducing the concept of corporations [having the same legal rights] as people. That's a very dangerous concept, and that's putting us into the workhouse scenario all over again. It's Dickens without the humour.

I'm not a violent person, but it really does make me angry. I'm not going to tolerate any society that wants to enslave me for the betterment of the one per cent. Everyone deserves the best opportunity the country can provide and is that being done? No. It doesn't solve the long-term issue of the economic stupidity of the people who are running the show. The death of small music venues? There you go. It's developers and estate agents bugging up the place.

Music is a challenge to the status quo. Any society that doesn't like its fellow citizens and live music and having fun is not a society I feel I need to contribute to. I was in Jamaica for family reasons, and no-one was complaining about the music playing all night there. It's soothing and beautiful. It's our unity, it's what bonds us, it's the blood in our veins and it's being denied. It's fucking ludicrous. All of these things is why I can't live here. I can't cope with the tedious, narrow-minded bollocks that goes on.

I come from a long line of people who have what are called values – not morals, they're for the religious. And if I'm different from most of the rock people out there, then I'm pleased, because I always resented that corrupt side of celebrating idiot drug-takers, morons and sexual disease-spreaders. I'm no way dictating what people should or shouldn't do, but I believe in loving and respecting each other, for all the obvious reasons. With family, you take the good with the bad, and you stick by them. These are the things I stand up for. ■



Ben Romans Hopcraft

► DAY JOB Fronts Childhood



Hayden Thorpe

► DAY JOB Fronts Wild Beasts alongside Tom Fleming



Viv Albertine

► DAY JOB Formerly guitarist of The Slits; this year released memoir *Clothes, Clothes, Clothes. Music, Music, Music. Boys, Boys, Boys.*



All I want for Christmas is

Will Doyle

►DAY JOB Is the Mercury-nominated artist East India Youth

Ricky Wilson

►DAY JOB Fronts Kaiser Chiefs; judge on BBC's *The Voice*

The chair**Kirsty Wark**

►DAY JOB Presenter, *Newsnight*

tunes...

NME voted these 10 songs the best tracks of the year. But how do they hold up to external adjudication? Our formidable celebrity panel tries them on for size

PHOTOS: ED MILES

Future Islands**Seasons (Waiting On You)**

4AD

Ricky: "[Performing this song on *Late Show With David Letterman*] really did put them on the map. But the thing about it is, everyone was talking about it 'cos of his dancing, but it's so real. At first you laugh, then you realise he really means it. He said it would have happened anyway, and you go, 'Nah, you were on national TV,' but because it's so real, because he means it, I understand what he meant. But *Letterman* really sped things up."

Hayden: "It's endearing because it's so genuine."

Kirsty: "It's that soaring chorus too, it's quite an uplifting song."

Viv: "Generic. Old-fashioned. Bruce Springsteen. Well done. Could have been made 20 years ago. The actual video was like a Marlboro Man advert."

Ben: "I'm more infatuated with the performance than the music, I think. He reminds me of a David Lynch character."

Caribou**Can't Do Without You**

Merge

Kirsty: "I know it's incredibly reductive to say this, but I keep thinking 'Hot Chip.'"

Ben: "I do like Caribou, I like the new album, but I prefer the older stuff."

Will: "Me too. I was initially disappointed with this track when I first heard it, but I've come to really like it over the last few months. It felt like a bit of a summer anthem. It's very pleasant."

Viv: "I like its repetition, but you can anticipate the build-up. It's a bit clichéd. A bit corny."

Hayden: "I was living in a basement flat in Stoke Newington, getting back late at night when we were on tour. There was this building work going on at 8am repeatedly for weeks and weeks, and I was just ready to knock the head off the guy. Then out of the house came this fella and I stormed up to him, and he goes, 'Oh, hello, I'm Dan.' It dawned on me it was Dan [Snaith, from] Caribou – he was building a studio. Over a period of six months, I heard this album emerging through the wall. So I have an emotional attachment to it." ➔

SINGLES PANEL

Ricky: "You hate it?!"

Hayden: "I love it. I think it's also very refreshing that he's a sober mathematician who makes dance music. There's something quite pure about that. His thesis is on something like..."

Kirsty: "He has a doctorate in mathematics from UCL for his work on overconvergent siegel modular symbols."

Viv: "Though it's a bit worrying though isn't it, mathematicians making great music?"

Fat White Family Touch The Leather

Hate Hate Hate

Will: "Has anyone seen the video for this?"

Kirsty: "Yes!"

Will: "That's a video."

Kirsty: "His face is amazing."

Will: "Isn't it? It's shot in barely perceptible slow motion, he's having a fag, while the guitarist is riding a skateboard, showing his arse."

Viv: "I think the whole band's hilarious. He's like the villain in *Monsters, Inc.*, the slimy one voiced by Steve Buscemi. I think Fat White Family are pantomime, basically – they're obvious baddies, and back in the day you knew the difference between a band that really was edgy and radical, and pantomime. Pantomime would be things like Alice Cooper or Arthur Brown, and I do wonder sometimes if people can tell the difference. They aren't really bad guys, despite their pantomime faces and the hairy bottom."

Kirsty: "It's trying too hard?"

Viv: "They don't live the life. Look at Iggy, he lived the life. Or us [The Slits], we lived the life."

Ben: "I've actually been mates with these guys since we were teenagers – they've been together for about eight years and nobody was ever really interested. It's amazing that they haven't really compromised and now they're getting recognition for it. They're quite true to themselves."

Hayden: "I've not heard it. It's well executed."

Ricky: "You know when you're a fan of someone and you don't want to meet them but you'd kind of like to be insulted by them?"

Viv: "They're nice boys, I'm sure... Just acting like bad boys."

Kirsty: "But if they're making good music while they're doing it, I kind of don't care."

The War On Drugs Red Eyes

Secretly Canadian

Kirsty: "Talk about Springsteen!"

Ben: "And Tom Petty."

Viv: "America's so big, there's room for you to keep reinventing the wheel. But Britain's such a small island, I feel there's not room for people to keep regurgitating old stuff. Here, even with punk, after we'd had our 15 minutes, it was like, 'Right, fuck off, get off the island!' There's not enough room, not enough press. But with the internet, we've become an international country. Is there room for this?"

Kirsty: "I think there's room for it, but it's whether or not there's any great moment to it."

Will: "I'd usually hate something like this, but it's all

"Who votes we take
this debate down
the pub?"

about the concept. I think it's pretty inoffensive."

Viv: "It's so bland, it is offensive."

Hayden: "They're a good imitation of a lot of things. I first heard them when we were driving through America and I thought it was beautiful. But also I think we as Brits are more sold by this kind of music – because it seems authentic."

Ricky: "If they were from Hull, it'd be terrible."

Will: "It does go on a bit."

Run The Jewels Blockbuster Night Part 1

Fool's Gold

Viv: "They're wordsmiths. I like the very simple, understated background. There's passion in it that you don't often hear."

Will: "Killer Mike's got one of the best flows I've

heard in a while, and I loved the album before this as well. I haven't actually dived into this one as much. I always feel like I'm not an authority to be talking about this – I am probably the whitest man in pop music."

Ricky: "That's my title."

Will: "I like that track, I don't think it's the best thing they've done."

Ricky: "They do switch between something that feels like you've heard it before, then a line will pop out at you, like a punchline."

Viv: "They're on a mission."

Ricky: "I think it's so far the one where they sound the most like they're enjoying themselves."

Will: "It is done with a lot of humour."

Viv: "Serious things can be done with a sense of humour, which I think is underrated in music."

32



Kasabian

Eez-eh

Columbia

Will: "I always find it really difficult with this band, I think they're such an easy target."

Ricky: "They're very clever at doing what they doing. They know who their audience is."

Viv: "I see this on a *Scooby-Doo* chase scene, Shaggy and Daphne."

Kirsty: "Nobody's gonna stand up for Kasabian?"

Ben: "I just don't really understand why they're talking about Google so much."

Will: "Cos it's topical, man, yeah?"

Ricky: "I think they know it's silly."

Kirsty: "They don't take themselves seriously."

Will: "Before this album got released, I read them talking about lyrics from this song that got cut: 'People commit murders/Horsemeat in our burgers', which I thought was incredible."

Kirsty: "Why did they take it out?"

Will: "At what point did they go, 'You know what, that's not good enough'? And then stick with the '...Google' line. What was their editing process?"

St Vincent

Digital Witness

Loma Vista/Caroline International

Ben: "I like this song. There's really interesting intervals in the melodies."

Kirsty: "She sings so beautifully. I think she's really talented."

Will: "She's an incredible performer, she thinks about everything."

Ricky: "I love the fact that the biggest hooks are like, 'yaaa!'"

Kirsty: "It's this very strange sound!"

Ricky: "It's really drawing me in."

Will: "It seems so effortless, doesn't it?"

"Humour is underrated in music"

Viv Albertine

Kirsty: "The way she layers her own voice is fantastic."

Ben: "Also she's an amazing guitar player. She's got really cool guitar tones. I didn't think you could do it live, but I've seen her and it's incredible."

Viv: "It's everything a single should be."

Kirsty: "It's absolutely a single, isn't it?"

Viv: "And the only woman on the list. She's in a class of her own, I think."

Jamie T

Zombie

Virgin

Ricky: "I kinda like the *Only Fools And Horses* vibe! When he says 'zombie', he's really saying 'Rodney'! I really like him, so I really like this."

Viv: "It's kind of lazy, really, isn't it?"

Ricky: "I think that's the point of it."

Viv: "Like, 'I don't care, that's the

point.' There's a whole art movement that says that."

Royal Blood

Little Monster

Warner Bros

Ben: "So many rock influences in this – Queens Of The Stone Age..."

Kirsty: "...all the way back to Zeppelin."

Ben: "It's so riff-based, that's the whole hook."



Kirsty: "Anyone want to stand up for this one?"

Viv: "I do quite like that little riff. I looked them up and they've only been going for a few years, and they've gone straight in and had success, and I just think, fuck 'em, you know?"

Kirsty: "Bastards!"

Viv: "And with something that is so generic."

Ben: "It's pretty rock. I guess that's the point. I read something that they said, that they're anti-hipster music. I think their intention is to make middle-of-the-road rock riffs. It's not really for me."

Ricky: "The older you get, the more cynical you get, 'cos you've heard everything before. Something like this comes along and you dismiss it a little bit, then you realise, like, oh, there's loads of kids out there for whom this is new."

Kirsty: "They might go back and listen to the canon, all the old rock stuff."

Ricky: "Yeah, a foot in the door, but that stuff's not getting played on the radio and this is."

Viv: "People keep saying, 'Viv, you're so cynical, you've heard it all before' – but do you keep repackaging the wheel and saying you've reinvented it in 2014?"

Ricky: "I didn't say you were cynical!"

Viv: "No, no, but I am!"

Mac DeMarco

Chamber Of Reflection

Captured Tracks

Ben: "I think this is one of my favourite songs of the year. It's got an inner-city kind of vibe. Slightly '80s. It's a bit crooner, also a little bit punk to me, actually, even though it doesn't sound like it."

Viv: "It's very melancholic, it's got a lot of atmosphere."

Hayden: "It's the first time I've heard it. I think it sounds great. The synth line is really amazing."

The Verdict

The panel raise their hands for each track that they like, leaving St Vincent and Mac DeMarco neck-and-neck...

Hayden: "I think St Vincent is phenomenal. I love what she does, what she stands for. The only thing is that sometimes I want my emotions to be touched more than my intellect, and sometimes, I think, this song is so clever, and so genius, musically astonishing, but I'm struggling to feel it. I'm not being moved by this, more confounded by it."

Will: "She's very choreographed, and it looks great and it works, but in comparison with the Mac DeMarco track... You can feel that in your stomach."

Ben: "You know the 'I Prefer Your Love' song on St Vincent's album? She obviously does have that skill."

Viv: "I would vote for Mac DeMarco."

Hayden: "What do you think they're about? 'Digital Witness' and its relevance on the year, the comment on the now?"

Kirsty: "About us increasingly living our lives through technology, not actually conducting our lives with face-to-face humans. That is very of the year."

Viv: "But maybe he says it a bit less didactically. He emotes it."

Ben: "Maybe Mac's is the individual's perspective, and St Vincent is the overview perspective of society."

Kirsty: "What breaks through more? A lot of people listening to St Vincent will identify with it because she's singing gorgeously, really emotionally, about something that is so emotionless."

Will: "In terms of the songcraft, St Vincent's is the better song."

Hayden: "I'd agree, just about. But I do think Mac's is beautiful. It's slow for a single, which is a hard thing to do."

Viv: "Mac is more daring as a pop song. I adore her as a performer, but just on the single Mac's struck me emotionally."

Ricky: "Can I just go with Kasabian? They're friends of mine."

The panel vote one last time.
The winner is, by a whisker...

Winner!



Once in Royal

This time last year, Royal Blood were in a dirt-cheap studio, making what would become the biggest-selling British rock album in years – and the ticket to their dream lives. Mischa Pearlman finds them in frosty Chicago with the world at their feet

PHOTOS: JENN FIVE

It's cold in Chicago. Minus eight degrees celsius, to be exact. The kind of cold that stings, but also the kind that makes it feel like Christmas. And for Mike Kerr and Ben Thatcher, the festivities are just starting. Holed up in the warmth of their spacious backstage dressing room, the two halves of Royal Blood are in the Windy City to kick off a series of festive-themed gigs. Tonight they're opening for local political punks Rise Against at The Nights We Stole Christmas, a two-evening event hosted by WKQX, an Chicago alternative radio station. In every sense, it's a world away from where the Brighton-based pair were this time last year...

"We had just done our first London show at the Barfly in Camden," says Ben, whose imposing presence behind the drumkit gives the band their power. "And we'd just been announced in the BBC [Sound Of 2014] long list, so it was all kind of kicking off."

"'Out Of The Black', our first single, was getting some radio play on Radio 1," adds vocalist and bassist Mike. "And we'd just released that on nothing, on our own label."

"We hadn't even signed a record deal," points out Ben.

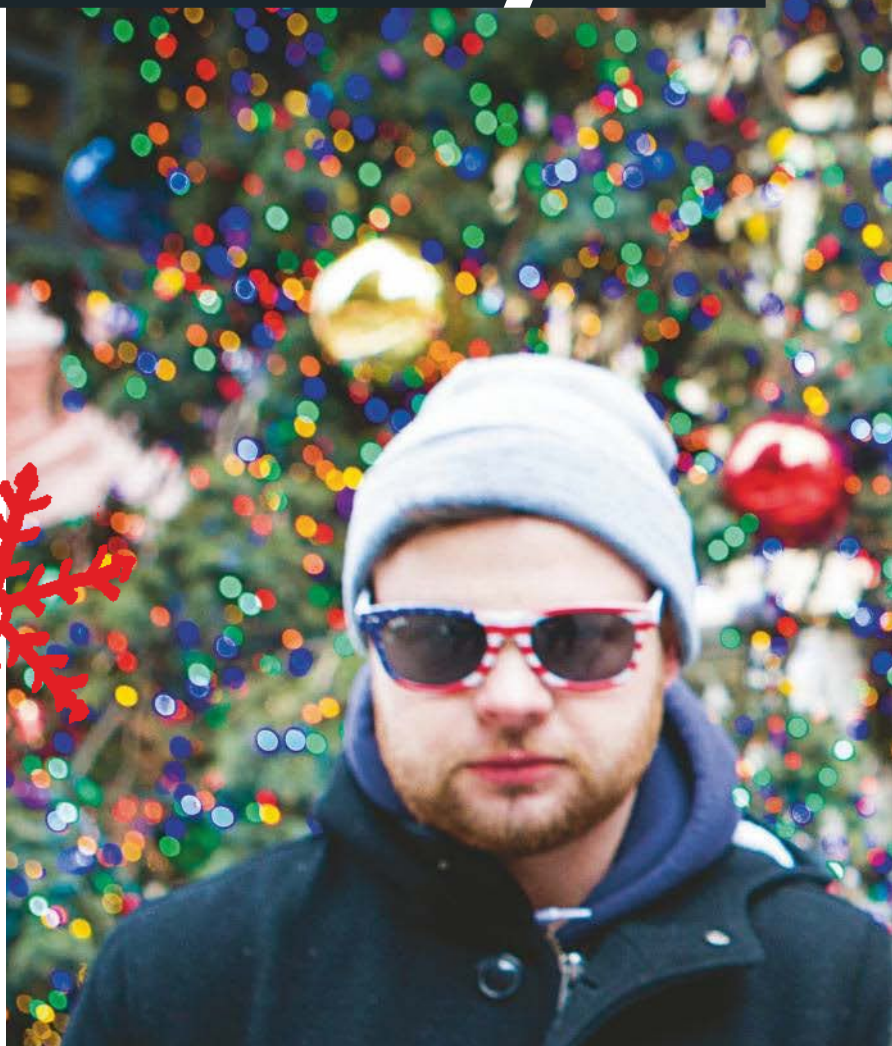
Mike corrects him. "No, actually, we had. We'd just signed a record deal. It's December. So only just."

What's happened to the pair since has taken on a kind of mythical resonance; an

almost unbelievable string of events that saw the band make an avid fan of their hero and major influence, Jimmy Page – and, most significantly, release the UK's fastest-selling rock debut in three years. Their ascent continues to gather pace – in July and August next year, they'll be supporting the Foo Fighters on a run of US dates.

"If you had asked us individually before Royal Blood even started which band we'd most like to tour with," beams Ben, "the Foo Fighters would be the ones. So to get the opportunity on this album run is insane."

Insane is the perfect word to describe the rise and rise of Royal Blood. Yet if the whirlwind that surrounds them keeps getting crazier, the two of them are the calm at the centre of the storm. Incredibly mild-mannered, neither seems in any way



Ben (left) and
Mike in Chicago

Blood's

David's city...



fazed by what's happened to them over the course of their huge year. They're immensely appreciative – "We fully recognise that we're effectively lottery winners," says Mike – but they're not letting it change them in the slightest.

"We're still Ben and Mike from our towns," says Ben chirpily, "and we have friends that phone us and leave us voicemails telling us that! It's brilliant."

"I mean this," says Mike, with feeling. "We're really just here for the music. Everything else we've kind of gone along with. But ultimately, we're just here because we like what we do and we like playing. I think that's the reason we got here in the first place – because we enjoy it, and that's why we work so hard at it."

Royal Blood have always worked hard. At the end of last year, they set the ball rolling for that debut album

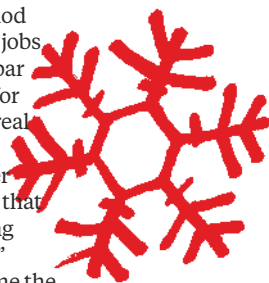
by booking cheap studio time between Christmas and New Year, the only period in which they could escape from their jobs (Mike was working as a chef, Ben in a bar and as a drumming tutor). They paid for the two days themselves, but with no real expectations.

"I was just praying," says Mike, "after the money we'd spent on that session, that it wasn't a waste of time. The only thing I wished for was that it sounded good."

As it turns out, those sessions became the foundations of the album, the songs that would follow on from 'Out of The Black's' aggressive opening gambit. Thanks to a publishing deal with Warner/Chappell Music, both were able to quit their jobs, and the rest of the album was recorded more or less chronologically in bursts over the coming months until its release on August 25. But it almost didn't happen at all, as Mike explains.

"I remember those first mixes actually not sounding very good, and thinking" – he lets out an exaggerated sigh of resigned disappointment – "Ah, fuck. It didn't work. It doesn't sound quite right." And then we thought about it differently and Tom [Dalgety, who co-produced the record with them] sent back another mix, and I remember thinking, 'Cool. This is already the best band I've ever been in!'"

"And that," chimes in Ben, reliving the pair's eureka moment with a big grin on his face, "is the mix that's on the album!" ➔



35

The Royal family
Christmas





"Getting to play with the Foo Fighters is insane"

BEN THATCHER



Royal flush

Mike and Ben's musical highlights of the year

2014's best...

Band

Mike: "I haven't really liked many bands this year, if I'm honest, but St Vincent has been my favourite producer of music this year."

Ben: "Ryan Adams. His songwriting's really good and as strong as it's ever been."

Album

Mike: "I'm going to keep with St Vincent. It's just such a great record."

Ben: "And I'm sticking with Ryan Adams. His new album is one of my favourites."



Single

Mike: "I'm going to go with Jungle, 'Busy Earnin'. I mean, once you've heard one song you've heard them all, but it's a great song."

Ben: "Iggy Azalea, 'Fancy'. It's a mega tune! As soon as it comes on you know what it is and your face screws up."

Musical moment

Ben: "Metallica and Dolly Parton at Glastonbury. Metallica because it was brilliant to see them on that stage and it actually went down really well. Dolly for the same reasons."

Mike: "Queens Of The Stone Age at Reading. I'd seen them many times before, but I don't think anyone played a better live set the whole year."

"It is," confirms Mike. "That's when I decided this is a band I want to pursue and put as much time into as possible, because it felt like something I was proud of."

Since then, it's been non-stop. Tour has bled into tour – they estimate they've played around 140 gigs in the past year – yet they're just as enthusiastic as ever. In fact, before they take to the stage, they're positively itching to do so, full of pent-up restless energy. It turns out they're not very good at sitting still.

"I can't wait to get onstage tonight," exclaims Ben. "We haven't played for maybe eight days – that's the longest time this year. We've been playing every other day, so to have this long without playing, I'm buzzing about it!"

By far the more stoic of the two, Mike's excitement is less visible, but that doesn't mean he doesn't feel the same.

"Being in the routine of a tour is great," he offers. "I think as a musician the moments when you feel your best are in the middle of a tour. Because it's second nature."

Still, the more or less constant playing hasn't been without its consequences. Directly before heading to Europe halfway through November, Royal Blood were forced to postpone three dates on their UK tour.

"I got tonsillitis," Mike recalls, "so I took three days off. Then I just got back on the road and was still on antibiotics, and the road ran me down even more. I got gastroenteritis and ended up in hospital in Milan. It was a mixture of exhaustion, the time of year and antibiotics killing my immune system. We're just grateful it didn't happen earlier. I'm amazed we got through that much, and as much as it pains me that we let people down, I'm glad we didn't try to do it and do a bad job. I mean, I could barely walk."

"We just overdid it," states Ben. "We're only human."

Christmas, then,

is the chance for them to feel a little bit more human again and reclaim some of the normality that's eluded them over the past year. Both are heading back home to their families – Mike to Worthing and Ben to Rustington, south-east coastal towns a 20-minute drive apart – to have a bit of a rest after everything that's happened.

"I'll just be doing what everybody else does at Christmas," says Mike. "Eating loads and

just hanging out with family." He'll also be putting his old cheffing skills to the test. "I'll be doing the Christmas dinner, as I always do. I make it on my own every year, normally for about 10 people."

"One of the hardest things about my job," says Ben, "is being away. And at Christmas I'm back. But I get back and I want to be away again. As much as I love my friends and my family, I need to play the drums."

There'll be plenty of opportunities for that in 2015.

And although the Foo Fighters tour is going to delay it somewhat, there will be a new album. At the moment, they have no idea what it'll be like. After the runaway success of the first, they'll have their choice of producers. Not that they're even thinking about that at this stage. Right now, there's only one thing that's certain.

"I want to work with Mike!" exclaims Ben, laughing. It sums up their attitude perfectly. Onstage they give it their absolute all and fire up every crowd – later that night, as Ben stands triumphantly on the drumkit before ploughing into the audience, the Chicagoans there for the headlines go absolutely wild. But behind the scenes, Royal Blood are just two ordinary guys who have had the most extraordinary year, and who will keep doing what they love for as long as they're able.

"We just want it to flourish musically," Mike says modestly, "and make sure we're always getting the best out of ourselves. As long as we're doing that, everything else doesn't really matter. This is still an exciting project for us. I can't really hope for anything. I don't really need anything. I've got everything I need right in front of me. I've still got my bass and enough money to stay out of the kitchen." Except on Christmas Day, obviously... ■



36



Mike onstage at WKQX – House Of Blues, December 1



RANDOM XMAS MEMORIES



Julian Casablancas

What type of cheese would you most like to see under your tree?

"Uh... Mozzarella. Do you people give each other cheese in the UK? Is that something you do?"

No. It's just a question. If Father Christmas laid an egg, would you eat it?
"No, because it would be a human embryo and that



Azealia Banks

Tell us a family Christmas story.

"I was nine. My sister LaTwoine had been dating this boy, Marlon, but they broke up. Marlon and my mother were still close, so he came by to give her a bottle of champagne. He left and LaTwoine's new boyfriend Eric arrived. Mom says something about someone coming by, but didn't mention Marlon by name. So I'm like, 'Who? Marlon? He was here today.' LaTwoine's face falls, and Eric leaves. That was their first proper fight."

Favourite festive song?

"Skating" by Vince Guaraldi Trio."

would be disgusting. Where's it even coming out of?"

Is it acceptable to give your girlfriend a gun for Christmas?

"Is it bad luck to give someone a gun? Uh... maybe I would, if she's into guns or she's into protection."

I think you're overthinking these questions.

"I overthink everything. It's a blessing and a curse."

What is your son going to be wearing on Christmas day?

"Some kind of magical Christmas pyjama costume."

And you?

"The same. Matching."

Is Christmas nice?

"For some. I don't know. The spirit of it is, I think, a positive thing."

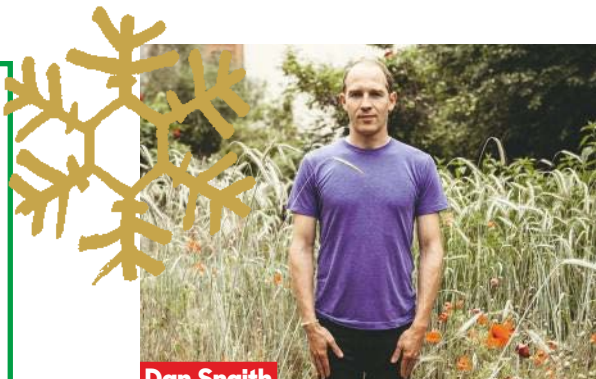
Angus Andrew Liars

What's your biggest Christmas disaster?

"When I thought it would be good to do the turkey in the barbie. I hadn't done that before. The end result is that you shouldn't. I ruined the turkey. Never again. It kind of deflated – which is a really awkward part of the process and not attractive."

Where's the strangest place you've woken up on New Year's Day?

"Stretwh. I think Cairo. I was there once and woke up with some pretty random people sleeping outside, which is something that I don't normally do, and certainly not in Egypt. I had a bit of a bender there and made some casual friends. It's certainly something to tell the kids about."



Dan Snaith Caribou

How was Christmas for you as a kid?

"We didn't have any of our extended family in Canada, so while everyone else was visiting relatives, for us Christmas was the time we sat around together and played music. My parents are old British folk enthusiasts, so we'd sing old carols, but the most boring and tedious ones – you know, half in Latin. I'd be like, 'Jesus Christ, can't we sing "Rudolph", mum?' But it's made me quite nostalgic about those songs. Apart from that, this was Canada, and there's 10 feet of snow outside. I'd zip up and stay on that sled as long as I could."

Who should make a Christmas song?

"There are hip-hop Christmas songs, but they're mostly from a more naive era. I want someone to bring some harsh urban reality to Christmas. I'd like to see a Lil Wayne or Lil B Christmas album. You know at every mall there's a Santa's grotto, where you go sit on Santa's lap? I think Lil B could do that. He's got a big heart, a twinkle in his eye."



The Vaccines

How would you modernise Santa?

Justin Young: "I know what I would do – I'd give him a scooter, a micro scooter. Have you seen how quickly people get to work on those things?"

Wouldn't it make all the reindeer redundant?

Justin: "Yeah, but there's Christmas dinner..."

Do you give presents to each other?

Árni Árnason: "We do Secret Santa every year."

Justin: "Do we?"

Árni: "Yeah, you got me a Lakers outfit last year!"

Justin: "See, that's good, that's not just like a snow globe!"

Árni: "Four people doing Secret Santa is really weird though."

Justin: "Because somebody will be like, I'll spend £200, I'm going to really spoil them, and then the other guy will just spend a tenner."

Árni: "There's a budget, but people ignore it."

Why are musicians no longer any good at writing Christmas songs?

Justin: "I think if you listen to most old Christmas songs, they're shit, but we grew up with them so they're ingrained in us. When people write a good new one it seems try-hard or overly earnest."

What's the secret to a perfect Christmas Day?

Justin: "Snow! But that's so boring I don't want to say it. I remember one Christmas dressing up as Father Christmas and riding a pony – that was a white Christmas. I borrowed it to surprise my parents. I was, like, four. It's difficult to explain."

MJ Hookworms

If you could eliminate one aspect of the holiday season, what would it be?

"I'm self-employed, so I hate all of it, because everybody disappears for a week and I can't get any work done. I'd eliminate the whole thing."

What's the best Christmas present you've bought one of your bandmates?

"I live with SS from the band and I bought him five jars of vegan mayonnaise, which is his favourite thing. I reckon he could eat a jar a day."



What's your dream Christmas dinner?

"Pizza. I have this argument with my mum every year. I've been vegetarian since I was a kid, so obviously I'm not arsed about turkey. Pizza, absolutely. Do I ever get to have it? Do I fuck. It's always nut roast."

O

come

all

ye

ye

ye

faithful



With Yeah Yeah Yeahs on hiatus, this year **Karen O** reached into her private vaults to release the intensely personal solo album 'Crush Songs'. She tells **Al Horner** why getting intimate was more terrifying than anything she's done in her day job

Ever since she can remember, a battle has raged within Karen O. "There's the hopeless romantic, then there's the grizzled fucking survivalist, and the two are just kicking the shit out of each other in there, bidding for supremacy," she says with the warm, goofy laugh that caps almost all of her sentences. "It's kind of fucked up but a pretty commonplace feeling I think."

Her emotional inner warfare won't come as news to fans of the 36-year-old musician. For 14 years now, it's been the bedrock of Yeah Yeah Yeahs – one minute she's a glitter-costumed fireball of defiance, the next she's lamenting love and loneliness in songs like 2009's 'Skeletons', and shedding real tears in the video to 2003 single 'Maps' because her boyfriend, who'd promised he'd drop by to say

goodbye before she jetted off on tour for two months, hadn't showed. It's always been this way. Beneath the wailing anarchy of one of the millennium's most feral performers has always beaten a fragile, honeycomb heart.

In 2014, though, O (short for Orzolek) fully embraced her romantic side – "locking the other guy in the attic, so to speak", to release her arresting debut solo album on Julian Casablancas' Cult Records label in September. Recorded in her LA apartment between 2006 and 2007, 'Crush Songs' pondered "that feeling of wanting love but not knowing when or if you'll find it" over creaky acoustic guitars and lo-fi tape hiss. When she wrote these songs, Orzolek had spent months submerged in exactly that kind of uncertainty – having split up with film director Spike Jonze, the then 28-year-old "wasn't sure I'd ever fall

in love again", as disclosed in the album announcement. As the album's first single 'Rapt' purred, "*Do I really need another habit like you? Love's a fucking bitch*".

Life, not just love, was a "*fucking bitch*" to the singer in 2006. Not included in said announcement were details of how frayed her relationship with her Yeah Yeah Yeahs bandmates had become while recording second album 'Show Your Bones'. "I really contemplated quitting. Things had gotten pretty bad between us," she told *NME* of her working relationship with guitarist Nick Zinner, soon after the album's release. "The future felt completely unwritten." She told another interviewer: "Nick and I were on really bad terms. We were forced to support the record, and we had to be around each other a lot – at the shows, on the bus. It was [a bad] alchemy." Was it a coincidence she then began writing solo music, or was she preparing for life as a solo artist in case the rifts in the band proved too great to heal? Is 'Crush Songs' secretly the launchpad to the post-YYs solo career she never needed to use?

"Oh, I had no intention of that at the time!" she insists. "It was just me trying to express all the fucked-up shit I felt. 'Show Your Bones' was a really hard record to make; a dark, tense time. The majority of the pain, craziness



and suffering you feel making a record is in the studio, piecing it together. You do interviews right after coming out of that environment and end up saying things like that.”

Instead, ‘Crush Songs’ is a postcard to herself from a different time in her life – a collection of dusty, roughly recorded vignettes from 12 months of

emotional turbulence that’s taken seven years’ worth of courage-building to make public. “Even when the whole thing was a done deal, like two weeks before the record came out, I was having second thoughts, like, ‘No! What am I doing?! Is it too late to put the brakes on?!’ It’s a big thing to bare yourself to the world on your own.” The songs, she explains, were “taking up space in my head and my heart” – and she had to get them out. “It just took a while to commit to the idea of sharing something so personal.”

It’s a good thing she finally plucked up the nerve. From the hushed, Daniel Johnston-ish folk of ‘Day Go By’ to the swarming melancholy of ‘NYC Baby’, with its sad, longing lyrics about leaving “*my baby in New York City... ‘cos my arms are empty and the phone it rings a-plenty but I’d rather have my baby*”, ‘Crush Songs’ is the heart-on-sleeve emotional core of Yeah Yeah Yeahs in devastating close-up. Lullaby-like and threadbare, tracks rarely extend beyond 90-second glimmers of guitar and breathy vocals, like intimate diary doodles rather than carefully constructed songs.

Live, it’s a world away from her main band’s barrage of noise and theatricality. “Totally different,” she says. “I mean, it hasn’t been so bad as when I first started playing Yeah Yeah Yeahs shows, when I’d need, like, four or five margaritas before getting anywhere near a stage. But I didn’t know what to expect the first time. It was all new. Like, uhh, am I supposed to wave my arms around? How do I do this when I’m not leaping around?” She breaks into a mimic panicked scream that collapses into laughter. “HOW DOES THIS WORK?!”

The first gig of the tour was at New York’s McKittrick Hotel in September. Nick Zinner was there, leaping onstage to play a few songs with Karen, as was her husband, music video director Barnaby Clay. “There’s other significant exes on there, but a lot of the album’s about him,” Orzolek says warmly. “It’s a strange feeling but a nice one to go back

CULT LEADER

Karen O on having Julian Casablancas as her label boss

“Of course he’s a good boss! He’s a fucking amazing guy. His team are amazing, too, doing the right things for the right reasons. Julian’s honestly so loving and enthusiastic and generous with his support. He wouldn’t let me doubt that I should put this record out, and just took that worry out of my hands. We both came out of this same New York school of indie-rock at same time, like a decade ago, but on different sides of it. I think we both admired each other from afar, but never really knew or had met all that many times, which isn’t what people presume, funnily.”



Solo show at the McKittrick Hotel, New York, September 10, 2014

“I’m a chronic crusher. It lands me in trouble...”

Karen O

Jersey, where her first big crush was Johnny Depp. “That’s not so embarrassing, is it? I had posters on my wall. I’ve been a chronic crusher since. It’d sometimes land me in trouble.”

Orzolek’s being pulled away – she’s performing tonight with Nick Zinner at Vice’s 20th birthday party in Brooklyn, where they’ll play ‘Maps’. She needs to get to the venue, venturing into a city lit up for Christmas, though she’s not feeling it yet. “It’s difficult with everything happening here at the moment – the protests. There’s a lot of anger, understandable anger.”

It’s been over a year since Yeah Yeah Yeahs’ last show, at Rio’s Circuito Banco do Brasil festival last November. Have she and Zinner been working on new material with drummer Brian Chase? “We’re on a bit of a hiatus at the minute, so nothing yet,” she explains. “We have to wait to get the urge, get that itch. The time needs to be right and we’re OK waiting for that, I think. When we do it’ll be like muscle memory, this unspoken thing between the three of us where it all just... locks in.”

Their last album, 2013’s ‘Mosquito’, was good but overstuffed and wasn’t reviewed well. That doesn’t mean they’re approaching its follow-up with any apprehension, though. “It’s a pretty dangerous hole to fall down, reading your own reviews, so it’s not something I personally do,” she says. “All you can do is try to make albums you can stand by and be proud of, that are a snapshot of where you were at the time. It won’t stop us, nothing like that.”

So what next? Knuckling down with YYs? Or has finally releasing ‘Crush Songs’ after seven years given her new confidence as a solo artist she wants to explore? “To tell you the truth, I don’t know! 2015 right now is an open book for me. I’m just gonna ride with it.” ■

and revisit the beginning of what we have now. There haven’t been any awkward conversations at the breakfast table about how he feels about this record about him. Maybe I should ask him! I think he’s cool with it. He helped out [directing the underwater music video for ‘Rapt’] so I’m gonna assume he’s OK. Barnaby’s pretty unflappable.”

We talk about how, culturally, crushes are thought of as “a goofy teenage thing” when, actually, the sensation can follow you for your entire life (“It’s totally an adult thing as well. No matter how old you are they rush up on you and swarm your senses”) and how appropriate the word is for the feeling it describes:

a crush, powering down on the pit of your stomach like a scrapyard car compactor. “It seemed like the simplest summing up of what ties together these songs that had been sitting around for so long,” she says.

Born in South Korea to a Korean mother and Polish father, Orzolek grew up in New



With YYs bandmates Brian Chase (left) and Nick Zinner (right) in 2013

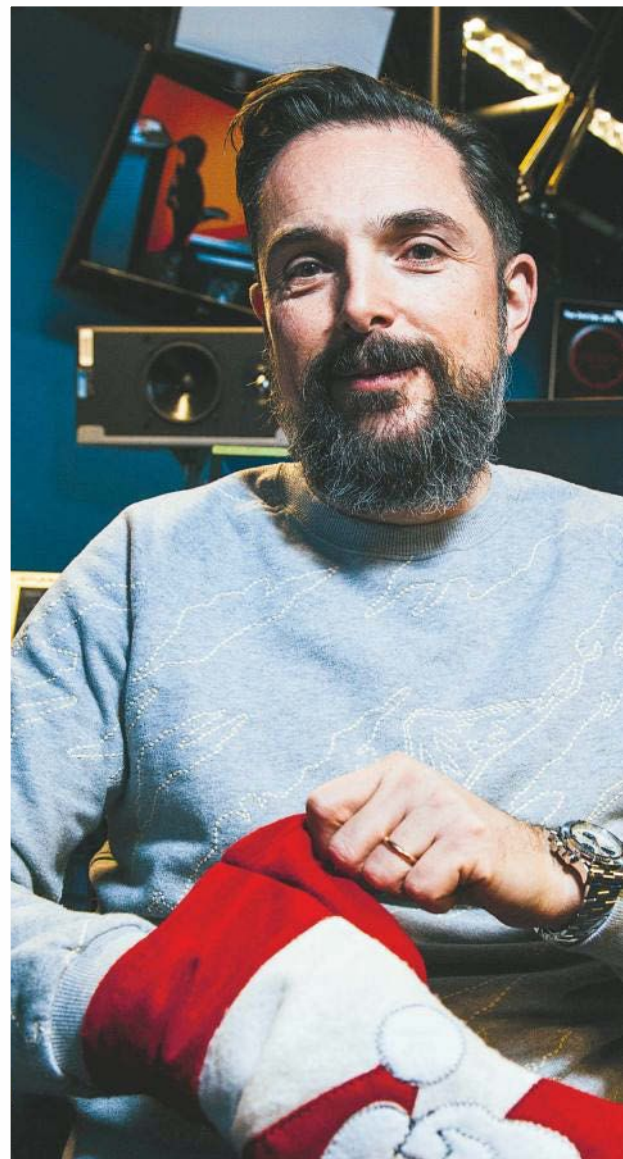
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HE'S MAKING A PLAYLIST,



Reckoning in a chair in the belly of BBC Broadcasting House, sporting Nike high-tops and a thicket of facial hair, is the joint most powerful man in British popular music, alongside Simon Cowell.

And right now he's displaying something between a grin and a grimace as I remind him of Lily Allen's recent review of his tenure at the summit of UK radio: "Nobody at Radio 1 knows what the fuck they're doing."

"Ha! Well, you can't please everybody," he replies. But that's sort of George Ergatoudis' job: he's head of music at BBC Radio 1, which, as its public-funded status dictates, is supposed to cater to the tastes of the

nation's music listeners under the age of 30, doing what its commercial competitors can't get away with. On one hand, that's playing bands like Pulled Apart By Horses during the day, which is undoubtedly a great thing. But on the other, the station's monopoly over what music does and doesn't become popular often makes them a target.

Perhaps 2014 has been a more difficult year than most for the station: on top of Lily's tirade – issued after the 'Sheezus' singer was dropped from the Radio 1 playlist – Ergatoudis was forced to deny accusations from La Roux's camp that her comeback singles were denied airtime because, as *The Sun* claimed, she had been deemed "too old" at 26. Radio 1 said farewell to Chris Moyles in September 2012 as part of its bid to draw in a younger audience, but the average age of the station's listeners still hovers at around 33.7 years old, and Nick Grimshaw's breakfast show hasn't been as popular as they hoped. Overall, the station's audience has fallen 2.5 per cent from this time last year, to 10.6 million listeners (Radio 2 has 15.6 million; 6 Music 1.99 million).

Is the station fulfilling its remit? Is it a dead horse? Is it ruining the music taste of a nation?



HE'S CHECKING IT TWICE...

... he decides who's naughty and who's nice. BBC Radio 1 boss George Ergatoudis is one of the most controversial figures in British music. Al Horner gives him a Christmas roasting to find out what really goes on inside Broadcasting House

PHOTOS: JORDAN HUGHES

"Radio 1's always a target for criticism simply because we're so visible," reasons Ergatoudis. "We make such a significant impact that it puts us in the firing line." In other words, blaming the commercial failure of La Roux's album 'Trouble In Paradise' on a lack of support from the station is plain scapegoating?

"That was a really difficult one. There were a lot of enthusiastic voices in those playlist meetings who felt passionately about La Roux. But when it comes to crunch time, we have to make difficult decisions. Blaming us might be part of the story. Don't rely on us."

Despite the controversy and the challenges, Radio 1 does undeniably good work too: Zane Lowe remains an important launchpad for alternative artists into more mainstream waters, as does Huw Stephens, who's nipping at his heels. They're adventurous with new projects, too: in October, Chvrches, Foals and Bring Me The Horizon were among those on a blockbuster roster of artists roped in to rescue the 2011 film *Drive*.

Granted a rare interview with the man in charge of it all, we asked bands and readers what they wanted to know...

Sarah Grayson, NME reader: I was really disillusioned by an *Observer* article I read earlier this year: the writer sat in on a playlist meeting where you described bands as "brands" and measured their suitability for Radio 1 by the number of Twitter followers they had. Is that really the best way to assemble playlists?

"I completely understand that. What's driven me to do this job is a ridiculous passion for music. When I was 13 I had a music fanzine. All my life it's been this massive driving force for me. I completely get the artistry of people making music. But doing what I do, you need to start applying some science to it. So yeah, I end up using jargon terms in meetings, but I completely respect that music's an artform that's about creativity, not 'brands' and 'engagement' and 'reach'. The reality is, although we have a quick look at social media stats, there are more important things. Shazam, for example, is much more passion-driven: no-one gets out their phone to find out the name of a song they absolutely hate. Other than that, a big part of how we decide our playlists is simply gut instinct: what we think our listeners want to hear."



Tom Hudson, Pulled Apart By Horses: How do bands like us get on daytime radio? How did that happen?!

"Us playing Pulled Apart By Horses on daytime shows says a lot about our ethos. On daytime radio, we're looking for a really diverse range of sounds. It's what makes us different

from commercial radio. If you look at, say, Capital, they're very focused on the Top 40. XFM's focused on rock and alternative. What we do is mix up everything we think is relevant to young audiences. Huw Stephens and Zane... It's really important we break acts. There's plenty of opportunities for UK guitar acts. Royal Blood, Catfish & The Bottlemen, you only need to look at them this year."



Rob Da Bank, Radio 1 DJ: If you could listen to one DJ, living or dead, for the rest of your days, who would it be?

"It's a cliché, but it really would be John Peel (below). The fact he'd play everything from African music to hardcore rock and R&B... there was no other way to digest that insane range of music. My personal taste is pretty eclectic and I owe it all to him."



Rhys Webb, The Horrors: Why isn't anyone filling John Peel's role?

"Well, it's about being genuine. John Peel was a one-off: he was passionate about a massive range of music. When the right presenter comes along who's passionate about a wide range of music, who appeals to our young audience, there's no reason why there couldn't be a new Peel."



Geoff Rickly, No Devotion: A lot of people say that tastemakers like John Peel don't exist any more. Do you feel that your DJs still drive culture? Or do they follow market forces? ➔



"A big part of how we decide our playlists is simply gut instinct"

GEORGE ERGATOUDIS, RADIO 1



Paul Thomas, NME reader:

'Fess up – what Live Lounge cover do you wish had never happened, because it's so bad? "You can't ask me that! Alright... Foster The People's was a bit disappointing. They covered Drake's 'Hold On, We're Going Home'. A bit of a crash!"

Matt Teller, NME reader:

How much personal pleasure do you get from seeing a band like Royal Blood (right), who Radio 1 pushed heavily, go on to score one of the biggest

"I think we've got some great, very influential voices here. Zane is playing a massive range of music. And you couldn't count how many amazing bands who go on to great things go through Huw Stephens' show, which is really eclectic and covers all sorts of things."

Chloe Ryans, NME reader: If an established band doesn't get their new single playlisted, is that the end of the road for them with Radio 1?

"Not at all. If someone's been on before, it means there's something we recognise and love about them. If they miss out next time, it's not us snubbing them for life, but rather a case that maybe they need to go away and reinvent themselves. Picasso went away and reinvented his art. If you're a genius and an artist, you can do that. Jack Peñate's a good example – there's a huge amount of love and belief in him at Radio 1. I was sure it was going to come off for him. But when we last playlisted him our research told us our listeners weren't really responding to it, so he came off. But I'm sure he'll be back."



Brandon Flowers, The Killers: Am I too old to be played on Radio 1 now I'm 33?

"Again, not at all. It's about how old we see a musician's fanbase as being, not the artist's own age. Everything's judged on its own merit. There's really no guideline on age or a cutoff point where suddenly someone's too old. Artists like Damien Rice and Jose Gonzales are acts I think are tremendously talented, and

definitely have young fans. But you've got to be serious and ask where the average age of their fans lies – does it skew young or does it skew 30 and above? In those cases, it came to crunch time – we love the music but had to leave them off our playlists."



Duncan Wallis, Dutch Uncles: Do you consider it an issue at playlist meetings when an artist or band is caught using a tax loophole scheme?

"That's a tricky one... To be honest, we leave that for the tax authorities to deal with. We're always mindful of what the public think of an artist. It also comes down to the material – whether it's a great song, whether people will love it."

NME: Does the same apply to people like Chris Brown, who continues to be playlisted despite a history of violence against women?

"That's another difficult one. I'd give the same answer, really. It's about our personal passion for it and gut instinct."

Neely Jayanthi, NME reader: Does it bother you that Radio 2 is more popular than Radio 1?

"Ha! It doesn't. Radio 2 are charged with serving an audience aged from 40 to death. We're charged to get an audience that's under 30. You do the maths. The scale of their audience is absolutely enormous compared to ours. They should be doing better considering the listeners they could be getting!"

selling albums of the year?

"A massive amount of pleasure. When I was 14 my mate had a pirate radio station [that I'd help out on] and the idea was simple: you want to get your enthusiasm and passion for records you love over to people. Radio's the ultimate way to do that – even now, with Spotify and everything else. Radio 1 is the biggest version of that there is, one of the biggest stations in the world, and broadcasting those passions to a global audience is a really special thing. I still get a big thrill out of it. But obviously all the pride and credit lies with Royal Blood – they absolutely smashed it."

Tyler Crannock, NME reader: Be honest: do your kids listen to Radio 1?

"I've got a 19-year-old son who's quite anti-Radio 1 – he's a vinyl-head buying lots of obscure stuff. But he told me the other day, 'You know I listened to some of the specialist shows and came across some seriously brilliant stuff.' That's what those shows are there for. It won't always be for everyone – some people want just the hits, chart music, and that's what commercial radio does. On the other hand, a lot of NME readers won't like the mix on daytime Radio 1. But we're really good at what we do, which is provide a mix of what's relevant to young people in 2014." ■





NME

Scott Asheton (back)

The Stooges

1949-2014



NME

Tommy Ramone (left)

Ramones

1949–2014





NME

Bobby Womack

1944-2014

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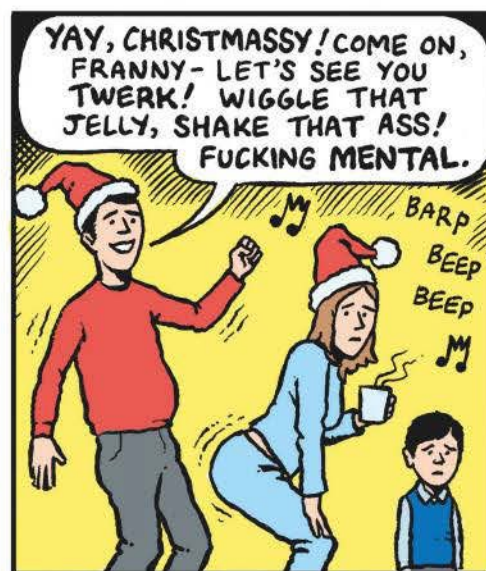
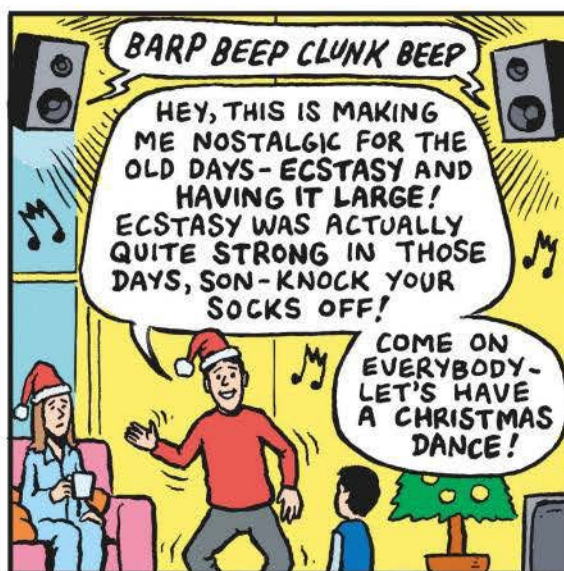
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Merry Aphexmas!



by Krent Able



Jingle all the Way

This year marked the former emo king's transition from My Chemical Romance frontman to fully fledged solo artist, shaking off his old anxieties and learning to have fun again. Gerard Way tells Barry Nicolson that it's just the beginning

PHOTO: BRINSON + BANKS

Christmas came early for Gerard Way this year: on the morning of November 28, to be exact, roughly 88 seconds after the trailer for JJ Abrams' new *Star Wars* movie went live. "Oh I loved it!" says the former My Chemical Romance frontman from his home in Los Angeles. "Just the fact that it opens on a shot of a young, black stormtrooper is incredible, and it says a lot about what they intend to do with it. Then the second character you see is a woman, and I'm excited by that, too. We have to push diversity in our creative endeavours whenever we can. With music it can be tricky, but when you're making a book or a comic or a film, that's when you can really push it. There's no bigger genre franchise than *Star Wars* and if they can use that to bring these things to the forefront, that's amazing."

It's apt, if entirely unsurprising, that while everyone else is geeking out over cutesy ball-droids and redesigned lightsabers, what most appeals to Gerard Way is the un-white-maleness of it all. My Chemical Romance was all about venerating the outsider and giving voice to the under-represented, and just because the band are no more doesn't mean those themes don't still resonate with Way himself. Quite the opposite, in fact: Way is a self-described feminist and long-time proponent of women's rights, and at his solo shows this year, he's been especially vocal in


his support for the transgender community. He may no longer be a figurehead for the issues that matter to him, but it seems he's happy to remain a mouthpiece for them.

"I've always talked about how women related to rock'n'roll, the sort of behaviour that's expected from them, and I've always tried to discourage it – not by telling them what to do, but by trying to make the environment of the show feel safer for them," he says. "What we're used to is women being treated like objects or groupies, and I'm strongly opposed to that. MCR came out at a time when women were still heavily objectified in music, and we got a lot of flak from certain nu-metal artists because we were saying quite the opposite of what they were. It's not just female audiences either, but musicians: it'd be nice to get to the point where we talk about artists solely as artists, and not about their gender."

Continuing on this theme, he talks about how Twitter and Facebook "really bring to light how much more work we have to do as a society. But one of the progressions I've seen is that, due to social media, being transgender is now something that people talk about; it's something they're becoming more aware of. I feel a kinship with that group because I know what it's like to feel confused about things."

That may be true, but these days Gerard Way doesn't strike you as a man who's confused about much of anything. After years of "planning, strategising and over-thinking everything" with My Chemical Romance, he's enjoying the freedom and impulsiveness that comes with being a solo

**"Suddenly there
are so many
opportunities
open to me"**



artist – “the feeling that I can change and progress even more dramatically than before. There are suddenly so many more opportunities open to me; maybe not what I’ve been used to financially, but I’ve stopped caring about how much money I’m gonna make.”

We talk about the things Way definitely will do with his newfound autonomy (he’s touring Europe and Australia in the New Year, and there’s more comic-book work in the pipeline) as well as the things he’d like to do, such as directing a movie, or, intriguingly, “different musical projects”. I ask whether one of those projects might involve Carl Barât, with whom he was rumoured to be starting a band last year.

“No, but I’m glad you brought that up,” he replies. “What’s true about that is that he and I started talking towards the end of MCR. He’d recently become a father, and it was really nice for me to have somebody to reach out to like that, even though we didn’t talk much about the band breaking up. At one point we did plan on meeting up and maybe doing something together, but there was no talk of starting a band, really. We’d just sort of catch up with each other.”

For the moment, Way is more focused on writing the follow-up to ‘Hesitant Alien’. Embracing of the scuzzier end of Britpop on his solo debut was a risky move, but one that’s paid dividends – indeed, although he was confident that his fanbase would accept the change, he was surprised by how warmly

it was received. The plan is to start recording album number two in September – by which point, he anticipates, he’ll have “changed things up again. The stuff I’ve been writing recently feels a lot more akin to songs like ‘Get The Gang Together’ – it feels like it’s moving in a garage-y, old soul music kind of direction. I want to use horns, backing vocals, things like that. Even though I do the majority of my writing on the guitar, I don’t know how prominent it’s gonna be. So it’s moving in a different direction, for sure.”

Could he ever see himself returning to the sort of grand, operatic rock’n’roll My Chemical Romance were renowned for?

“I definitely miss the theatricality of it a little bit,” he admits.

“Now that I’ve gotten *not* doing something theatrical out of my system, I feel like it would be nice to get back into concepts again, maybe explore some more visual stuff.”

Before that, though, he’s got Christmas to contend with – never a trifling matter when you have a five-year-old daughter. “Having a kid gives you a completely new reason to be excited about the holiday. Christmas is something that’s still magical for them, so you can have a lot of fun with that.”

Will your house be a riot on Christmas day?

“No, it’s actually pretty low-key,” he says. “We try to keep the holiday very relaxed and as simple as possible – we always see our close friends, and obviously I’ll spend a lot of time with Mikey...”

A few days before our conversation, Way’s brother and former bandmate posted an open letter to his fans in which he wrote frankly about how his renewed struggles with drug addiction and a return to rehab have hampered the progress of his first post-MCR endeavour, Electric Century. Understandably, Way isn’t keen to discuss it, saying only that his brother “is doing amazing, really amazing, and it’s nice to see him in a good place again”.

As the year draws to a close, you might almost say the same for Gerard Way himself: let loose from

the shackles of MCR, he’s currently in the best place that he’s ever been, personally and professionally. “I’m free to look at the bigger picture and see what else I can throw my creative energies into,” he says. The subtext is clear: My Chemical Romance was just the origin story; now, the real fun begins. ■

WHILE GERARD WATCHED HIS FLOCK...

Mr Way’s musical highlights of 2014

Artist

“I have to choose Grimes, because she’s the real deal. Not only is her music really interesting and progressive, but she does all her own stuff. A friend who works with her tells me that she has a really strong vision of what she wants to do. She’s like her own art director, coming up with the concepts and doing things by hand.”

Album

“Eagulls are amazing. I always think a great band should remind you of stuff that you like without ripping it off, and that’s what Eagulls do for me. They remind me of the stuff that I loved when I was young, but at the same time, it sounds wholly new.”

Personal peak

“Aside from some really awesome family stuff that happened in 2014, Reading and Leeds was probably my highlight of the year; just coming over to the UK to play those shows and seeing thousands of people there. I really didn’t expect that.”

RANDOM XMAS MEMORIES



Hayley Williams
Paramore

Which bands should get on the Christmas song bandwagon?

"There's a hardcore band called Turnstile – they have this heavy '90s influence. I feel like it would have a lot of attitude. There aren't enough heavy Christmas songs, they're all pop or country songs. I want something that I can bulldoze around to."

It's the 20th anniversary of Mariah Carey's 'All I Want For Christmas Is You' – are you a fan?

"I'm a fan of that entire album ['Merry Christmas', 1994]. I grew up on it – not iTunes, the real thing. It's not Christmas until I put on the CD."

Mish Way White Lung

What would you get your bandmates for Christmas?

"[Drummer] Anne-Marie's birthday is near Christmas and every year she makes this huge ice swan in her freezer, so I would make her a crystal ice swan so she could have it all the time. I would make [guitarist] Kenny a strong homemade liquor and [bassist] Hether a cool leather harness – she loves all her BDSM stuff. She could wear it onstage and on her sexual adventures."

Who's slacking by not writing a Christmas song?

"Charli XCX could do a Mariah Carey-style Christmas song – she could team up with Grimes and people would eat that shit up."

Apparently you're the only person in the world who likes brussels sprouts?

"I've loved them since I was a child. Fry them with butter and salt and do bacon on the side. They're so good!"



Kasabian

What's the secret to a perfect Christmas?

Tom Meighan: "Just getting the whole thing right, really. The dinner's massive, but people fuck it up all the time. Alcohol is probably the one essential. That, and don't invite the black sheep members of the family over, because it'll only end in tears."

What would you like to see the Queen address in her Christmas speech?

Serge Pizzorno: "Is it necessary that she even does one? It's pointless. It's never on in our house. She should probably address not having one – go on the telly and go, 'Look, there's no point in this.'"

Do you give presents to your bandmates?

Have you had any good gifts from them?

Serge: "We don't really do that. Tom's birthday is quite near Christmas so I usually just get him something nice for that. I got him a shark's jaw – one of those things that Quint from *Jaws* has got up in his house. Tom always picks you up something mad: he got me a *Breaking Bad* bobble head and a Sid Vicious model."

Tom: "Will I be getting a present for Serge? Yeah, a kiss under the mistletoe!"

What's Christmas like round your houses?

Tom: "I've got a two-year-old daughter, so it's gonna be lovely for her: paper everywhere, lots of running around, loads of presents. And for me to see it through her eyes will be really nice too. When I was young I used to get so excited about Christmas. I'd be in my parents' room at four in the morning trying to wake them up."

Serge: "Pure family, mate. That's why we live in Leicester still. My missus' mum and dad live round the corner, so it's a real family zone. Grandmas, grandads, they all come round to ours."



Elias Rønnefelt
Iceage

If you had to make Christmas presents for your bandmates, what would make?

"I'm not very good with crafty kind of things. I'd probably make some ashtrays or some cups out of clay."

What would be your dream Christmas dinner?

"I don't eat meat, so it's really boring at my family Christmas. I can only eat the potatoes."

You don't sound like a Christmas fan. Any festive songs you like?

"'Fairytale Of New York' – it taps really well into the melancholy of Christmas time. The chances of Iceage writing a Christmas song are extremely slim to zero."



Mike Joyce
The Smiths

What should the Queen address in her Christmas speech?

"I think she should wear a 'Queen Is Dead' T-shirt! And maybe tell the truth instead of this cosseted opinion of what's happening in the world. They [the royals] don't understand about money, war, strife and struggle and

the realities of life that 99.9 per cent of the country deals with on a daily basis. They don't live normal lives."

Who do you think should be in charge of sorting out a Christmas peace treaty?

"Morrissey. I like that when he puts his arguments forward, there's no flimflam, no compromise. For that I've

always adored him. I became vegetarian after 'Meat Is Murder' in 1985. All my kids have grown up vegetarian and that was his doing."

Did you give each other presents in The Smiths?

"Just cards – we were seeing each other every day for five years, so presents didn't come into it!"



Nicky Wire
Manic Street Preachers

What's the best fictional Christmas?

"The original, Alistair Sims *Scrooge*. Or a *Doctor Who* Christmas special, I guess. I'm a bit worried about this year's one. I do love Peter Capaldi though. I've just never known a *Doctor Who* try not to be *Doctor Who* more. As a devotee of *The Thick Of It* I do find it hard to separate [the characters] because I know every line Malcolm Tucker ever said."

What makes a perfect Christmas day?

"Closing the doors, closing the windows, no visitors, Quality Street, Roses, After Eights, pomagne – which is a really cheap champagne from the '70s – *Top Of The Pops* Christmas special, *Doctor Who*. Lots of presents, lots of really tacky trimmings. I guess a '70s Christmas really. I try to recreate that every year. It's just when it felt real. The best Christmas ever was when I had 'Psychocandy' on vinyl from my mum and dad. I had a terrible hangover, playing 'Never Understand' to try and cure a hangover – and it actually *sounds* like a hangover."

What bits of the holiday don't you like?

"I can't stand fucking New Year. New Years and birthdays symbolise creeping death to me."

The Manics did a Christmas song once...

"We did attempt our own, 'The Ghosts Of Christmas'. We never released it in the end. It's actually quite good: it's got a sax solo, it's very kind of Noddy Holder. And it's quite funny, as well, for me. I think the last really decent attempt was *The Darkness*. It was a proper Christmas record. I think it's demoralising because you know you've got no chance of it being a Christmas Number One now. It seems like unless you get a John Lewis ad or something, it's just pointless doing it. But it was such a part of culture growing up that it seems a sad thing that it's disappeared."

Do you watch the Queen's speech?

"I've never watched the Queen's speech in my life. My mum and dad never put it on. That's what I would abolish about Christmas. It's just so fucking boring, it would ruin the mood."



Will Butler
Arcade Fire

What does an Arcade Fire family Christmas look like?

"We'll all go to my mum's: Win, Régine and the kids. We've gotten together a few times. The kids are pretty mellow, they're good kids. My parents are very excited

about having them around. We don't really plan charades, but we talk a lot, we sit around eating cheese and crackers. It'll be winter, so we'll

go out and pace around in the snow. They only got the internet fairly recently, so it used to be sitting around reading books, but now it's sitting around reading books and checking your email."

Any family traditions?

"My mum's family is a giant family with a ton

of musicians, so there's a lot of history. There are carols that were written by Alfred Burt, who was in my grandpa's band, and they're really beautiful. They're modern, from the 1940s and '50s; really beautiful 20th century carols. We listen to them a lot – the old records of the Columbia choir, which is basically my mum's whole family. Her great uncle ran Columbia, so the choir is all people she grew up with. There's normally a Christmas party and everyone comes around and sings carols and drinks eggnog."



Duncan Wallis
Dutch Uncles

What presents would you make your bandmates for Christmas?

"The thing they'd really appreciate would be homemade whiskey – not that it would do them any good; it'd probably kill them. But I'd still try. Our bass player Robin dabbles in making ale, but that just looks really boring. I've tried Irish moonshine before – it's salty stuff!"

Do Dutch Uncles have a notorious Christmas story?

"Last year on Christmas Eve eve, before we all went back to Marple [in Stockport] for Christmas, our drummer got himself a kebab and some fried chicken after a heavy night and it destroyed him. He couldn't hold anything down for three days. It ruined his Christmas."



Austin Williams
Swim Deep

Lily Allen called Band Aid 30 "smug" – do you agree?

"There's nothing smug about charity, is there? It is what it is – the really famous people who travelled there on private jets, they could be giving that money to the cause... We'd have taken part if they asked, but I'd have sent Cav, because it's a bit boring when the frontman does everything. Also, I know he's a big Harry Styles fan, so they could finally be united."

How did you spend last New Year's Eve?

"We went to see Wolf Alice. Ellie and everyone played at Koko in London. It was really good actually. Then we all went back to mine – it's a good place to party."

What's your festive tipple?

"Me and Zach [Robinson, drummer] have been drinking a lot of sherry – he always brings it home. It's delicious, really warming. It's a good time of the year for it. Gallons of it – straight."



Ben Johnston
Biffy Clyro

"If you had to make presents for you bandmates, what would you make?"

"If I tried hard enough, I'd make them guitars. Why not, y'know! It's a difficult profession, but I'd make them both wonderful custom guitars. I think I'd mimic their body hair in terms of styling – Simon's would have a black, wet look to it and James' would be orange."

Robert Diggs, the 45-year-old MC and beatmaker better known as RZA, leader of the Wu-Tang Clan, is barking breathlessly, his voice quaking with emotion. "There's a nigga in the video for [1993's] 'CREAM' stood behind Raekwon. See him? Just a guy from the block. Nice kid. He's dead now. Choked out by the police. He didn't do nothing. But that's America. Always has been."

It's the day after a New York grand jury announced there'd be no criminal case against a Staten Island police officer caught on film choking unarmed black father-of-six Eric Garner to death, on suspicion of selling untaxed cigarettes. "I'm not a political person. I'm a spiritual person," says RZA. "But this shit happened on my doorstep outside a place where as a kid I used to get turkey sandwiches. Me and my friends would do rap battles on the sidewalk right next to where it happened." He pauses for a moment, the situation depressingly familiar to him, but his anger still palpable. "Today is a sad day."

Twenty-one years ago, RZA produced and rapped on Wu-Tang's era-defining debut 'Enter The Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)': 58 minutes of gritty NY boom-bap threaded with samples from martial arts movies and blaxploitation films, it changed hip-hop forever. But two decades later, he explains, he didn't expect to be having the same conversation he was having in 1993, expressing the same frustrations about police brutality towards young black men.

"Barack Obama's inauguration was a declaration to the world that America was committed to racial change. But here we are," he says. "It happened in our childhood and it's happening now. The way

I see it, your tax dollars are an investment in your city, your community, people that protect our freedoms. Things like the Garner case make you question that process, though. Like, I'm paying taxes for what? To go to see *Interstellar* at the movies, eat a big box of popcorn with my daughter, then get choked out by some policeman for being in the wrong place at the wrong time on the way out? Nah."

It's just two weeks after a court ruled that the white Missouri policeman who shot dead unarmed 18-year-old Michael Brown in August 2014 wouldn't face court for his actions. Gross injustices like these are exactly the reason why the world needs Wu-Tang and their uncompromising tales of black empowerment, says RZA. "It's the entire reason why this new album exists," he seethes. "A better tomorrow is what we all need to be working to make happen."

'A Better Tomorrow'

is the name of Wu-Tang's much-delayed new album – and it took a *lot* of work to make it happen. Finally arriving three years after it was first talked up by Wu-Tang rapper Raekwon, and seven years after the group's fizzing rap fable '8 Diagrams', the record's release was initially intended to coincide with the 20th anniversary of '...36 Chambers', but creative differences between the

THE WEIRD WORLD OF WU

June 2011

Raekwon announces new Wu-Tang album

July 2011

Ghostface says it'll be released in May 2012

April 2012

GZA disputes the album will ever happen

January 2013

The group confirm work has begun on the record

July 2013

Inspectah Deck says unheard ODB verses will feature on the album

March 2014

Raekwon and RZA fall out over the direction of the group. Raekwon claims he's "on strike" from Wu-Tang. RZA tells the press Raekwon won't appear on 'A Better Tomorrow'

group pushed the album back to the point where fans wondered whether it would ever see the light of day. Rumours of a total breakdown in communications between RZA and Raekwon quickly scuttled across the internet after the latter's genius missive from the studio, which read: "It's like getting the United Nations to all agree on one fucking thing. Italy ain't having it. Japan is on some shit. You know what I mean? Now, here it is, the 20-year anniversary that's so decorately respected that we might not even be on time for this shit."

"It's good to see the Wu-Tang family under one roof", beams Masta Killa on the album's O'Jays-sampling closing track, the Motown-y 'Wu-Tang Reunion', but it's hard to believe him.

RZA is refreshingly open on the rift, though his report is not what Wu-Tang fans will want to read. "There was a lot of opposition within the Wu-Tang circle to doing the album... I'll level with you, the chemistry's not all that good right now. We've all done this long enough to know this process isn't just like, you make an album, then that's that. It's like a presidential campaign. You don't just make the policies then sit back. You create your platform,

then you gotta take it out to the people." Another pause. "It's like there's an energy in the group that stops some people enjoying their own success. They gotta sabotage it."



Cappadonna

Masta Killa

GZA

RZA

Raekwon

IN THE BLEAK

'A Better Tomorrow', Wu-Tang Clan's long-delayed sixth album, has arrived at time of great

I wonder if he's referring to Ghostface Killah, who elected to release his own solo album '36 Seasons' in the same week as Wu's 'A Better Tomorrow'; or Raekwon, who on the eve of the release was tweeting links to his own new solo album with barely a mention of Wu-Tang. But the rapid-fire RZA has his own analogy.

"You got a girlfriend? Right. It's like you get a girlfriend and you and your girlfriend have a child, but it comes out with one arm. What you gon' do, Al? You gonna love that child, make the best out of that situation and help it have the best life it can? Or are you gonna lock it in a dungeon, Quasimodo that shit?" Are you trying to tell me 'A Better Tomorrow' has come out deformed, not how you intended, I ask. "Nah. That's just sometimes what I feel."

Even if his bandmates don't seem that enthused, RZA – who, as well as dropping verses on 'A Better Tomorrow', crafted most of its beats, with production help from Rick Rubin – clearly adores the record. And rightly so: from the marching-band funk shuffle of '40th Street Black/We Will Fight', in which Method Man lays out Wu's siege mentality ("the game is the world versus us") against old-school scratching and distant brass, to 'Preacher's Daughter', borrowing samples from Dusty Springfield's country classic, it's not the fierce street sound they built a hip-hop kingdom from, but it is pulsing with positive energy.

"The goal was always to change hearts and touch souls, man. It's like

that from the minute you get it in your hands, from the cover. That's an imagined city where everyone's culture is respected. We got the Eiffel Tower. The Hollywood Hills. We got you guys' wheel [he means the London Eye, though it's Big Ben on the final sleeve]. It hit me that I thought the world had got better; but really it had just got better for me, not for others."

That's why the world needs a new Wu-Tang album, he says. "It doesn't take a good politician to call out there being something wrong at the minute, it just takes a good human." His only regret about the album? "I tried to get James Blake to do a hook on

'A Better Tomorrow' but we couldn't make it happen in time," he laments. The pair worked together on Blake's 'Overgrown' standout 'Take A Fall For Me', an icy electronic nocturne that saw RZA rap about "fish and chips with vinegar", awash with despair as the object of his affections threatens to marry another man. "I have no doubt we'll work together another time, though."

As RZA's keen to point out, it's the wider world that's in need of 'A Better Tomorrow', not hip-hop. He singles out Killer Mike, whose rap duo with El-P, Run The Jewels, took their name from '...36 Chambers' cut '7th Chamber', for special praise. "I've watched him develop into this incredible socially conscious artist, and it's so great," he says. "We need socially conscious hip-hop now more than ever."

We move on to the matter of Wu-Tang's legendary 'lost' album, 'Once Upon A Time In Shaolin', a 31-track epic the group made around the same time as 'A Better Tomorrow'. Only one copy was made, and that is currently locked in a vault in Morocco. There are no plans for the record to be released. Only a handful people in the world have heard it, and RZA says it'll probably stay that way: "Most likely people will never get to listen to it. That's why we did it." At a time when music seems to have less monetary value than ever, the record exists to prove a point. "There'll be a big press release soon," he adds, amid rumours the group may take the one existing copy around the world to museums. "I'm under a NDA [non-disclosure agreement] about it at the minute, but there'll be news soon." RZA also says he can't comment on the story that Skrillex bid \$5m for the album, but promises that "it sounds totally different to anything".

We finish with a simple question: what's RZA's favourite track from 'A Better Tomorrow'? The answer speaks volumes about his ambition for the album, in a week dominated by news broadcasts of black protests in America. "There's a song 'Never Let Go' that starts and ends with Martin Luther King samples. The ending quote [about "whirlwinds of revolt" leading to justice for black US citizens] – that's more relevant now than it ever was. Sadly." But he doesn't sound browbeaten by the realisation. Modern America's a troubled place. But Wu-Tang Clan don't want to believe it always will be. ■

April 2014

Wu-Tang fringe member Andre Johnson cuts off his own penis and attempts to jump from a second-floor balcony. He survives

May 2014

Band announce another new album, 'Once Upon A Time In Shaolin', of which only one copy will ever exist, claiming it features a collaboration with Cher

October 2014

Wu sign to Warner Bros/Parlophone and announce album date for 'A Better Tomorrow', with Raekwon back on board

December 2014

'A Better Tomorrow' finally sees the light of day



Method Man

civil unrest in America. Leader RZA tells Al Horner why radical change is the only answer

Inspectah Deck

U-God

Ghostface Killah

The greatest CHRISTMAS SONGS you've never heard

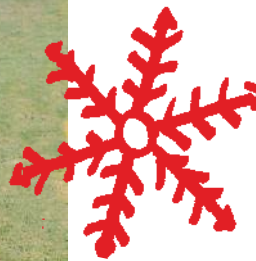
NME's guide to the lesser-known, actually great festive songs that'll ensure a simply wonderful Christmas time

The Kinks

Father Christmas (Arista, 1977)



Ray Davies: a man noted for his unparalleled kitchen-sink drama, but not for his jolly spirit. And so The Kinks' contribution to the Christmas canon – released a good decade after the band's Swinging London heyday – takes an odd tack: it's a first person account of a department-store Santa who's beaten up by a gang of street kids demanding money instead of toys. "Give my daddy a job 'cos he needs one", he cries, as faint-hearted listeners reach for their trusty Slade seven-inch instead. ■ DAN STUBBS



Run The Jewels

A Christmas Fucking Miracle (Fool's Gold, 2013)

Run The Jewels' sole festive cracker to date saw Killer Mike and El-P roaming a winter wonderland where "wildstyle ghetto child run wild" beneath a cityscape vista drenched "in the blood of good men". Not exactly 'Jingle Bells', then, but there's a valid point to the pair's gritty humbuggery: Christmas is the time when America's consumerist grotesquery bloats to its most repugnant, a backdrop to the duo's pledges never to buy into capitalism and sell out. Or, as Mike saliently snarls, "I would rather be in the jungle with the savages" than rubber-necking with "followers of things". A year on from its release, post-Black Friday, post-Ferguson, post-Eric Garner, it sounds horribly prescient. ■ AL HORNER



Wild Billy Childish & The Musicians Of The British Empire

Christmas 1979 (Damaged Goods, 2007)

On Christmas Eve 1979, garage-rock don Billy Childish returned to the UK from Germany, where he had been touring with his first band, The Pop Rivets. He was feeling good: his girlfriend had told him she still wanted to be with him, but then his father messed things up, came home pissed and "chucked the telly across the floor". This song is about how all the hope of Christmas can be ruined in a heartbeat. Chorus: "Merry fucking Christmas to you all!" ■ PHIL HEBBLETHWAITE

Rilo Kiley

Xmas Cake (Nettwerk, 2003)

The LA indie-poppers might make you want to munch Prozac rather than sweet treats on their darkly funny 2003 Christmas effort. Originally featured on charity compilation 'Maybe This Christmas Too?', Jenny Lewis sorrowfully describes a post-college descent into debt ("The loans were never enough/The credit cards are calling your bluff") while a carolling choir fa-la-las with almost cruel glee into a big, bombastic climax. ■ RHIAN DALY



Elastica

Gloria (Deceptive, 1995)

Elastica were the coolest of the Britpop stars, their new-wave tunes (often blatantly borrowed, as Wire and The Stranglers' lawyers noticed) setting them apart. Recorded for a Christmas-themed Peel Session in December 1994, 'Gloria' is leader Justine Frischmann's catty rewrite of 'Ding Dong Merrily On High' ("Oh so scary up on high.../ You're a sick girl, Gloria") set to a Ramones beat. Hosanna in excelsis, indeed. ■ STUART HUGGETT



Laura Nyro Christmas In My Soul

(Columbia, 1970)



Laura Nyro died tragically early, in 1997, at 49. But in her 1960s and '70s heyday, she was a leading light among the Brill Building songwriters in New York. 'Christmas In My Soul', from 1970's 'Christmas And The Bells Of Sweat', sounds like the fantasy of an American big city Yuletide, but is wrought with realism, Nyro lamenting "the heartlessness that darkens my soul on Christmas", and the "Black Panther brothers bound in jail". ■ LAURA SNAPES



The Sonics

Don't Believe In Christmas

(Etiquette, 1965)

A year after the release of their 1965 debut, garage-rock pioneers The Sonics put out perhaps the first anti-Christmas song. Over the course of its brief but brilliant one minute and 48 seconds, the band manage to refer to Santa Claus as "fat boy", accuse the reindeer of being pissed on moonshine and get slapped in the face after attempting a seasonal smooch under the mistletoe. Sounds just like the NME Christmas party. ■ LEONIE COOPER

SSD

Jolly Old St Nick

(Boston Rock, 1983)

When Boston straight-edge legends Society System Decontrol (SSD) decided to supercharge an old Yuletide chestnut in 1983, a motley crew of the city's bands (including one actually called Christmas) decided they would all come together for the hardcore festive compilation 'A Boston Rock Christmas'. And it sounds like Santa may not be so jolly any more, for here's a punk with an axe to grind: the song's "dear old man" isn't so much welcomed into the home as shoved straight back up that chimney with a red-hot poker, mince pies crushed underfoot. ■ APRIL CLARE WELSH

The Residents

Dumbo The Clown (Who Loved Christmas)

(Ralph Records, 1979)

It goes almost without saying that Californian band/art collective The Residents' entries in the canon of Christmas music – and there are many – are unusual (they tended to appear in public wearing eyeball helmets). None more so than 'Dumbo The Clown (Who Loved Christmas)': one of four Residents songs included on 'Subterranean Modern', a 1979 compilation of alternative San Francisco bands, it delivers an anti-consumerism message via rinky-dink electronics and a sarcastic, vocodered vocal. Don't expect to hear it soundtracking Topshop's sales.

■ PHIL HEBBLETHWAITE



The Wedding Present

No Christmas

(RCA, 1992)

In 1992, Leeds indie progenitors The Wedding Present set out to match Elvis Presley's record of having 12 Top 40 singles in a year. Releasing a single on the first Monday of every month, by November they'd managed 11, and with their hearts set on death or glory they threw themselves into the schmaltzy, overcrowded festive market with a distorted mess of a single called 'No Christmas'. Full of desperate emotional howls, buried deep beneath this frenzied gnarliness was an outstanding, if borderline inaudible, melody. It made it to Number 25. ■ MARK BEAUMONT

Cornershop

Every Year So Different

(Ample Play, 2012)

As part of their 2012 Singles Club, indie-rock duo Cornershop decided to get together with Trwbador – the Welsh Stereolab – to explore the duality of Christmas: the fact that it's the same every year but you're not, so every year is different. Over a cosy bed of what Tjinder Singh naturally described as "Northern brass, Italian strings and human funk", Trwbador singer Angharad Van Rijswijk unspools a traditional scene: presents are opened and roast dinners are eaten, garnished with a jus of pure *pop Français*. ■ MATTHEW HORTON



Marvin Gaye

I Want To Come Home For Christmas

(Motown, 1973)



You know when the season of goodwill is doing your nut in? You hate yourself for eating a million chocolates, you're broke and the prospect of spending more time with your family makes you break out in hives? Pop Marvin Gaye's 'I Want To Come Home For Christmas' on. It's about a prisoner of war who would give anything to come home, and it's a solid slab of perspective. Gaye wrote and produced it in 1972 as a tribute to Vietnam vets (it surfaced the following year on a Motown Christmas compilation), and it's one of the most soulful and sorely underrated festive songs you've probably never heard of. ■ LUCY JONES



Snoop Dogg feat. Nate Dogg

Twas The Night Before Christmas

(Doggystyle, 2008)

This retelling of Clement Clarke Moore's popular traditional Christmas poem begins with the sound of a match striking, then a deep bong hit. Then, over heavy bass and subtle seasonal chimes, Nate Dogg describes receiving "holiday head" while Snoop implants an immovable image into the listener's mind with the line, "The stocking was hung from my big fat dick/We was hoping to get some of that good shit from old Saint Nick". Merry Chrismizzle. ■ DAN STUBBS

Reuben

Christmas Is Awesome

(Hideous, 2007)

Surrey punks Reuben understand Christmas. They know that a time when you eat loads of food, have a day or two off work and get given Doctor Who DVDs from well-meaning grandparents is intrinsically brilliant – and they celebrated that fact on this infectious 2007 single. There's even a message for birthday boy Jesus from the band in between the riffs and drum solo: admittedly it's the rather mealy-mouthed "We're sorry about that 'nailed to a cross' business", but, of course, it's the thought that counts. ■ DAVID RENSHAW

Carter The Unstoppable Sex Machine

Christmas Shopper's Paradise

(Rough Trade, 1990)

On the cusp of a chart breakthrough, Carter The Unstoppable Sex Machine gave away a free seven-inch single to everyone leaving a pre-Christmas London gig in 1990. The ensuing chaos as 2,000 people failed to form a polite queue made this year's Black Friday riots look tame. With the church bells turned up and added samples of TV news reports on seasonal shopping, the acidic 'Christmas Shopper's Paradise' had become a self-fulfilling prophecy. But singer Jim-Bob's visions of the world's worst bring-and-buy sale ("We've got en-psycho-paedias, we've got pick'n'fix/We've got a government freezer full of benefits") are still apt a quarter of a century later. ■ ANGUS BATEY





HARK!

THE REBEL ANGELS SING...

Last Christmas, Pussy Riot had been out of prison for two days. A year on, they invite Kevin EG Perry on their whirlwind tour of London, talking Bowie, Borat and Vladimir Putin as well as their own musical future

Knee-high boots with six-inch heels. A calf-length black sequin dress with the words 'Free Pussy Riot' picked out in white. A bejewelled balaclava. "I ran three miles in a charity race dressed like this," says the bald, rangy man waiting patiently in the bracing south London night for his heroes to appear. "I'm a gay guy from Slovenia and these girls inspired me so much."

When Maria 'Masha' Alyokhina and Nadya Tolokonnikova finally emerge from the Greenwood Theatre lecture hall at King's College, where they've been speaking, they burst into filthy giggles. "Very nice!" says Nadya, mimicking Borat, for whom they've just professed their love onstage. "Sexy time!" chimes in Masha before they send the guy away with his dream selfie. They're used to this kind of attention. Pussy Riot are rock stars.

Not bad for a group whose live career lasted all of 45 seconds, but then Pussy Riot were never a band in any real sense. When they were arrested on February 21, 2012, less than a minute into making a video for their punk protest prayer 'Mother Of God, Drive Putin Away' inside Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, they weren't exactly hoping Simon

Cowell was going to offer them a record deal off the back of it.

"We're not really musicians or from the music world," says Nadya, laughing, as we head to the pub. "At that moment we just decided that we should do a punk band, and we got our friends together and tried to do a song. We did what we were able to. It wasn't brilliant, but it was enough for a political music video."

While they were awaiting trial, the music world came to them. Björk and Paul McCartney voiced their support. Madonna wore a balaclava during a concert in Moscow and told the audience she was "praying for their freedom". This solidarity meant a lot to them. Masha describes David Bowie as a "big inspiration" and says she "bought every issue of *NME*" when it was published in Russia. "I went to see Muse in Moscow in 2001," she remembers. "I was 13 and a big fan, so I was very excited. They were giving away the first copies of *NME* there. That's really how I started listening to music. It was kind of a guide for me."

When the pair were released after 16 months in prison on December 23, 2013 – under an amnesty law that they dismissed as a pre-Winter Olympics publicity stunt – they were international icons. In February they travelled to New York for an Amnesty International Concert and Madonna was there to welcome them. Away from the bright lights, Nadya and Masha say they were much

more interested in meeting their riot grrrl hero Kathleen Hanna and her former Le Tigre bandmate JD Samson. "We met JD just after we arrived in New York," says Nadya. "She was very interesting and we had a fruitful discussion. Now we're working together on some creative stuff – music stuff."

Nadya and Masha have spent the year since their release engaged in political activism of various kinds: they were horsewhipped by Putin's Cossack militia while protesting at the Sochi Winter Olympics, brought their case to the European Court of Human Rights and founded both an organisation, Zona Prava, and an independent news service, MediaZona, to campaign for the reform of Russian prisons. They haven't previously shown an interest in making music again, but Nadya clarifies that their primary aim is always their political message. "Our goal is not to make an album," she says, "but the form of our statements is very important to us and the video clip form is one we like. Maybe at some point in the future we will do an album, but right now we want to make videos."

They want to make something else go viral? "Yes," she smiles, "something like a virus."

The next day, Pussy Riot head to the Ecuadorian embassy, where WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has been holed up since June 2012 to avoid being sent back to Sweden to face sexual assault charges. I'm invited to meet them there, granting me access to the threshold of a surreal place where a police cordon still waits to arrest Assange if he tries to leave and the staff crack jokes about seeing the likes of Lady Gaga and MIA pass through their doors. ➔



Nadya Tolokonnikova (left)
and Maria Alyokhina;
(below) with Madonna

"I want to live the craziest life I can"

Nadya Tolokonnikova

Masha and Nadya are here to discuss the battles they share with Assange and how they can help each other. When they leave they're immediately pinned in the glare of TV cameras and barraged with questions: Why are they here? Should they be consorting with an alleged sexual predator? What do they see in him? As ever, the pair neatly deflect the subject back to their campaign for prison reform. Masha announces that they found common ground over WikiLeaks source Chelsea Manning, sentenced in August 2013 to 35 years' imprisonment and whose case they describe as "one of the most important in today's world".

Masha tells me that while their own time in prison was "difficult", she saw reasons to be optimistic: "I had conversations with guards and other prisoners which really influenced me. When a normal, common Russian girl who is completely outside of politics and civil society life tells you that she understands what you're doing, she appreciates it and wants to fight for her rights now – that's a real shock, and that's what I'm focusing on now because it's inspiring for me."

That evening we head to Parliament, where Nadya and Masha are speaking in support of a proposed law pertaining to the death of a Russian whistleblower called Sergei Magnitsky in prison. Despite the gravity of the situation, Nadya can't help cracking jokes. "We think it's a brilliant idea to invite

punks to Parliament," she says by way of introduction. "It's the nicest idea since you invited Ali G here."

Russian President

Vladimir Putin has thrown a lot at Nadya and Masha, but they've kept laughing in his face – touring the world, wisecracking as they meet world leaders and dissidents alike, openly ridiculing his alleged plastic surgery and propensity for topless pictures in front of one London audience. They may be venerated here, but in their home country Pussy Riot are often dismissed as troublemakers who don't represent young Russians. I ask Nadya whether there's any way of getting through to them. "What you're talking about is a question of courage," she says. "The reaction to us was really polarised between the west and Russia, because in the west we were treated like heroes but in Russia we were witches who were against religion. The Russian media just wanted to paint us black and not provide realistic information."

The way that Putin manipulates Russian media means a lot of people are uninformed – especially, Nadya argues, when it comes to feminist art. "I bet only a very small number of those Russian hipsters know what the riot grrrl movement is, or who the [punk art protestors] Guerrilla Girls were," she says. "There's a huge tradition of those sorts of groups [in the UK], but for some reason it seems that Putin doesn't want people to be really well educated. Educated people tend to ask questions."

She suggests that Putin's eventual undoing will probably be a result of his own hubris, and doesn't entirely rule out the idea of running for office herself one

day. "In the next 10 years I'm not allowed to do it, because under Russian law convicted criminals can't run for office for a decade. But after 10 years? I have no idea. Maybe! I wish I had more education to run the country. I have some suggestions, of course, but in a few years my picture of reality will be more clear. I couldn't continue my education in jail because I had to work, so I lost two years."

Away from the maelstrom that's accompanied their trip to London – giving sold-out public lectures, meeting celebrity

dissidents, speaking at Parliament – I ask Nadya to reflect on the last 12 months. A year ago, she was in prison. Now she and Masha travel the world, and everybody they meet seems to expect them to have the solutions to oust Putin, bring peace to Ukraine and end international totalitarianism, too.

"That's the strangest thing," she agrees. "We're not gods. We don't have answers to everyone's questions. But, you know, it's a miracle of solidarity that so many people want to support us. [18th-century German philosopher] Immanuel Kant wrote about something that happens sometimes when political changes take place. It's something like a miracle. When we have the power and the ability of all the people working together, we can get what we want."

She thinks for a moment, then says: "When I was 16, I said to my schoolmates that I wanted to lead the craziest life I can, and that if I can't do that I may as well just live in garbage." Putin himself would have to agree she's succeeded. Nadya

and Masha have two of the craziest lives on the planet. They're the prisoners who became punk icons. The rock stars of dissidence.

Does that burden weigh heavy?

"The only pressure I've felt in the last year was when I came out of prison and realised that so many eyes were looking towards me," says Nadya. "I realised that I have a really big responsibility. I used to talk a lot of bullshit, but now I don't have that option. So many people don't have a voice, like those in prison in Russia and around the world. We have to speak for them." ■

Rockin' in the free world

Pussy Riot's post-prison exploits

► **DECEMBER 23, 2013** Nadya and Masha released from prison ► **FEBRUARY 6, 2014** Appear at Amnesty International concert in the Barclays Center, Brooklyn ► **FEBRUARY 19, 2014** Beaten by Cossack police while protesting at the Sochi Winter Olympics ► **MARCH 6, 2014** While campaigning for prisoners' rights in the Russian city of Nizhny Novgorod, they are attacked by a group of unknown men who douse them with chemicals ► **MARCH 13, 2014** Officially launch their prisoners' rights group, Zona Prava – which translates as 'Law Zone' ► **APRIL 1, 2014** At the European Parliament the pair warn of a "new Iron Curtain" and call for tighter restrictions on Russian money in Europe ► **MAY 6, 2014** The pair meet US Senators in Washington DC to talk about human rights abuses ► **JULY 28, 2014** Appear at the European Court of Human Rights to begin process of suing the Russian government over their imprisonment ► **NOVEMBER 18, 2014** While visiting London, Nadya and Masha meet Julian Assange and speak at Parliament





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RANDOM XMAS MEMORIES

Rhys Webb The Horrors

What as-yet-unwritten festive song do you want to hear?

"I'd love to hear Kraftwerk's Christmas song. That would be fantastic. There would be sleigh bell hi-hats for percussion and they'd use their filters to create the sound of snow falling on rooftops. Ralf Hütter's vision of Christmas is what the world needs."

What presents would you make for your bandmates?

"I'd knit them jumpers with each other's faces on."



Rou Reynolds Enter Shikari

What's the worst thing that's ever happened at a Reynolds family Christmas?

"My family moved to Scotland for a few years when I was 11. We moved the week of Christmas and the drive up was the most horrendous thing ever. My mum was the last person getting in the car, and somehow my dad managed to drive over her foot. I don't remember why but we didn't go to hospital. Halfway there, we stopped at the service station and me and my brother ran off to the playground. He fell off the monkey bars and broke his arm; the bone protruding out of his elbow is burned into my brain. At the hospital, my mum got an X-ray too and found out she'd broken her foot."

Tom Fleming Wild Beasts



If you could eliminate one bit of Christmas, what would it be?

"That it starts just after October! I think it's around the first of November that the lights go on – like, oh my god, can we not? And of course people sharing their perfect presents in their perfect lives on social media – I don't need to see that."



Edwin Congreave Foals

In the event of a Christmas famine, would you cook the little donkey?

"Anyone who wouldn't is an idiot, because they'd die. The question is, would I be the first to cook the little donkey? I'd have to fight other people to it. Also, it'd be really far away from me – it'd probably be in Israel. I am vegetarian. But it's a famine, and I'm not so vegetarian that I'd die [for it]."

What's been your most disastrous Christmas?

"It was my second Christmas at university and everyone else had gone home for the holidays, but I'd been given special dispensation to stay because I had nowhere else to go – my family don't celebrate Christmas. It was freezing cold and I got mumps. And I was by myself. And then I dropped out of university."

Do Foals give each other presents?

"We're actually really bad at gifts. I think it's because for several years we've hung out with each other way too much and we take each other for granted. You've just reminded me that I need to get them all gifts... I'll buy them thermal underwear probably. That's an amazing gift. Can you request that they all get me thermal underwear too? I feel like I'm giving away a deep sadness at the heart of our band – we do really like each other!"

Michael Gira Swans

Which part of Christmas is rotten?

"Digesting the commerciality of it all. Christmas should be a sacred moment."

Why are there no good modern festive songs?

"Perhaps because these times we live in are so cynical. There's a song by John Lennon, 'Happy Xmas (War Is Over)' – that's probably the best Christmas song. That or something from my childhood sung by Disney characters."



Tom Hudson Pulled Apart By Horses

You've covered Slade's 'Merry Xmas Everybody' – why's that?

"I'm a Brummie, so I thought we've got to get a bit of Brummie Slade power on the go. We've done a horrible version of it. It's a big Christmas hit. We've

done a split release with DZ Deathrays and they've done 'Lonely This Christmas', so it's a double banger. We thought we should have done an original one ourselves 'cos we are just giving everything to Slade and they probably make enough money as it is."



Damien Abraham Fucked Up

Who would you like to see call a special Christmas peace treaty?

"Who wouldn't I?! There are so many places in the world where the mighty are oppressing the meek and I think just to save people's lives you need peace treaties. Whether it be Israel and Palestine, or in North

America – I wish cops would sign a peace treaty to stop killing young kids, young people of colour. It's fucking insane. I wish the cops would sign a peace treaty with the people that pay them!"



Julie Campbell Lonelady

Is Band Aid 30 smug?

"The calibre of artists in the original Band Aid was incredibly high compared with the current line-up. Geldof just wants money for a project he's clearly passionate about. But ultimately there shouldn't be a need for Band Aid, or any charity – there are enough resources to provide for everyone, and the technology and intelligence exists to make sure everyone has what they need, but we just don't do things that way."



Robby Grote The Districts

You have to make presents for your bandmates: what have you got to give?

"I would knit them all models of their respective Nirvana roles – so Braden would get Dave Grohl, Connor would get Krist Novoselic and Pat would get Pat Smear. Obviously I'd make myself Kurt."

Brian Fallon The Gaslight Anthem



Do you remember the first time you heard 'Fairytale Of New York'?

"One Christmas Eve when they played it on VH1. I called my local record store to see if they were still open and they had the tape of [The Pogues' 1988 album] 'If I Should Fall From Grace With God'. So I ran there and bought it. They're a great band."



Gareth David Los Campesinos!

You've got a festive EP – 'A Los Campesinos! Christmas' – coming out this year, haven't you?

"I really like writing to constraints – sometimes it's really hard when you've got this whole world of possibilities to write about. The idea of doing a Christmas EP is a really enjoyable way of writing. And there are no other seasonal holidays that have their own genre of music! The Christmas song is a brilliant thing when it's done well."

There's a cover of Mud's 'Lonely This Christmas' on the EP – is that your favourite Christmas song?

"It's one of my favourite songs full stop. I think it's so cheesy – the whole thing's a terrible Elvis impersonation, but done with such fantastic aplomb. It's so very miserable, it doesn't even try to be uplifting. It doesn't give you a happy ending. There's something to be admired in that. Our version is a terrible impersonation of a terrible Elvis impersonation."

Jack Savidge Friendly Fires



Santa needs to up his game. What does your version look like?

"I'd rather he travelled in a private jet. It's a

big operation – you're going to need to go private. You know that really awful professional poker player who has an Instagram account where it's just him surrounded by models and money all the time? I imagine Santa like that. He'd be doing selfies in every country on Christmas Eve."



Jamie MacColl Bombay Bicycle Club

What's the best Christmas song ever?

"I have to go with 'Fairytale Of New York', because my aunt [Kirsty MacColl] is singing on it. It was probably the first song I ever heard someone swearing on."

What would be your ideal Christmas dinner centrepiece?

"A pig on a spit in the middle of the table. Very 16th century. I would have had to have gone out and killed it myself – a wild boar. And then I probably wouldn't be able to live with myself."

What's the secret to a perfect Christmas Day?

"Keeping your divorced parents apart."

Bernard Sumner New Order

Are you a fan of the festive season?

"I like Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day, and after that I work. I remember needing an operation once and I asked the surgeon if he could do it between Christmas Day and New Year's Eve so I'd have something to do. I don't like that week. It's great for kids, but it's too commercialised, sales everywhere... but



I like the Christmas feeling. I remember loving Christmas when I was a kid, loving singing Christmas carols at school. It was respite from all the serious stuff at school."



Drunk & Drunkner

NME's festive pub crawl returns, with Rhian Daly as chaperone and chronicler on indie's booziest night out. Let the cross-dressing and punch-ups commence...

PHOTOS: JENN FIVE

Illness has struck this year's pub golf, so it's a depleted gaggle of indie stars arriving tonight to down booze, play games and – hopefully – make complete fools of themselves. Superfood frontman Dom Ganderton is first to arrive at our initial stop, the Shoreditch branch of BrewDog. He's minus bassist Emily Baker, who texted *NME* earlier promising to come for at least an hour, but then pulled out entirely. "She's just hungover!" Dom reveals, doing impressions of her "ill phone voice" and shaking his head with disappointment. Chlöe Howl turns up next, and there's immediate tension as she recognises Dom from a meeting at Glastonbury that he fails to recall. Sam Conway and Bradley Griffiths of Cambridge punks Bloody Knees take the focus off that social faux pas as they breeze in, singer Brad warning everyone that his jacket smells from a day spent selling hot dogs. Half an hour after the 7pm start, Mystery Jets' new bassist Jack Flanagan turns up, left to compete alone by "too sick to drink" bandmate and pub golf veteran Will Rees, who's yet to show. With the others itching to get drinking, the decision is made to start without him.

THE PLAYERS

Bradley Griffiths



► **BAND**
Bloody Knees
► **AGE** 23
► **SPECIAL SKILL**

Downing everything

Jack Flanagan



► **BAND**
Mystery Jets
► **AGE** 22
► **SPECIAL SKILL**

Clothes swapping

Sam Conway



► **BAND**
Bloody Knees
► **AGE** 24
► **SPECIAL SKILL**

Self-portraiture

Dom Ganderton



► **BAND** Superfood
► **AGE** 23
► **SPECIAL SKILL**
Sabotage

Chlöe Howl



► **AGE** 19
► **SPECIAL SKILL**
Mouthing off

Theo Ellis



► **BAND**
Wolf Alice
► **AGE** 22
► **SPECIAL SKILL**

Hyping



Spot the clue that the bar knew NME were coming

Before the games get underway, PlayStation-themed Christmas jumpers from Numskull are handed out, much to the contestants' delight. With festive knitwear on, the boozing begins as the players attempt to down the first drink of the night in one. Everyone succeeds – Sam going the extra mile by mixing his lager with half a glass of red wine – and they bag five points each. Our first proper round is a game of *Who Are You?*, in which players write the names of celebrities on Post-Its and attach them to the foreheads of the other competitors, who then get 20 questions (the answers must be yes or no) to guess who they are. Dom goes first, but fails to figure out he's pointy-haired celebrity chef Gary Rhodes without serious help from Brad and Sam. Sam eventually gets Linford Christie, but Chlöe comes unstuck with Dale Winton when she can't remember the last syllable of his surname. "It rhymes with run," offers Sam as she squeals with frustration. Jack strolls in late, starts his first drink, then lowers his bottle with more than half left, conceding that downing isn't a skill he possesses. His festive jumper has gone missing, so Sam valiantly offers him his instead, while Brad whips out some scissors and hacks the sleeves off his to give to his bandmate. Customisation done, it's on with the round. Brad gets Usain Bolt with 10 questions to go and celebrates by enacting the sprinter's famous pose. Jack then causes controversy when he gets *Art Attack*'s Neil Buchanan a little too easily. "He cheated!" yells Chlöe, incensed. We give him the benefit of the doubt – and three points.

SCORE

- ▶ BRADLEY 15
- ▶ SAM 9
- ▶ CHLÖE 9
- ▶ DOM 5
- ▶ JACK 3

ROUND 1



ROUND 2

The Police's 'Roxanne' comes on the bar's stereo so the next round of bottles are quickly cracked open. The group divide into those who drink on "Roxanne" and those who do so on "red light". It's a sorry state of affairs as no-one makes it to the end of the song, all giving up halfway through complaining of feeling too "gassy". Minus three points for everyone.

There's a long history of musicians being dab hands at art, so we decide to find out who among us is the next John Squire or Graham Coxon with a *Pictionary* round. Brad, Chlöe and Jack form Team Fantastico, leaving Dom and Sam as Team Foot. The round passes without much incident until Sam draws a picture captioned "massive ledge", which turns out to be a self-portrait. Team Fantastico fail to work it out, and Brad is outraged at Sam's claims when the answer is finally revealed.

The round comes to an end when a hovering heckler correctly – and very loudly – identifies Brad's cat drawing as Bagpuss, forfeiting the game and handing the points to Team Fantastico. With our musicians' sketches plastered to the window behind us, and a river of liquid flowing over the table, we decide on a change of venue. Brad seizes the opportunity to earn more points and downs all the beer that's left, checking that every bottle is empty before we leave. ➔

SCORE

- ▶ BRADLEY 22
- ▶ SAM 6
- ▶ CHLÖE 11
- ▶ DOM 2
- ▶ JACK 5



'Team Fantastico'?
Where's the pun in that?



ROUND 3



Strictly Come
Dancing,
Shoreditch style



Clothes swap
done: let
Twister begin



SCORE

- ▶ BRADLEY 27
- ▶ SAM 11
- ▶ CHLÖE 26
- ▶ DOM 7
- ▶ JACK 10

After a quick walk through London's Shoreditch we arrive at The Old Blue Last, where Wolf Alice bassist Theo Ellis is waiting for us. He's been out on a date with his girlfriend for her birthday and decided to bring her to witness a classic rock'n'roll battle. We make our way upstairs to the top bar and get straight back on with the drinking, lining up a row of tequila shots. This size of beverage proves more manageable for Jack, who does two in a row.

As we lay out the *Twister* mat, Chlöe realises her fashion choices might not be ideal for the game. Dom offers to swap his jeans for her skirt before changing his mind, leaving Jack to step up instead. "He's only a size bigger than me," Chlöe moans, holding out the waistband of his green jeans, but remembers there's a game to be won and starts mouthing off to anyone who'll listen about how she's going to "fucking win this".

Jack is first to lose his balance as our gang well and truly get to know each other. He's quickly followed by a toppling Sam. "Does it count if you sabotage someone?" asks Chlöe. The temptation proves too much for Dom, who gives her a hefty shove and gets disqualified. A tense, drawn-out battle ensues between Chlöe and Brad, but eventually Chlöe's earlier prediction comes true and pop reigns over punk.

"What's on
the TV?"



68



Who wouldn't want
to swap places
with Dom here?

ROUND 4



Indie stars in bar
avoidance shocker

With the news that he's currently in last place, Dom tries to rectify things by downing a bottle of Sol, eyes reddening with every gulp. Brad goes one better by following his beer with a shot of tequila, earning 10 points to Dom's five.

We find a metal pole for our indie heroes to dance under, and a round of limbo begins. Brad and Sam disappear for the majority of it, the latter on the phone to his mum. Jack displays an unusual technique, tucking his elbows in like a bird's wings. Dom's the winner, but Brad demands a rematch. We call it a draw as they threaten to limbo forever and injury looms as Dom bashes his head on the pole and Brad tumbles to the floor after clearing an unnaturally low height.

SCORE

- ▶ BRADLEY 47
- ▶ SAM 11
- ▶ CHLÖE 36
- ▶ DOM 22
- ▶ JACK 10



ROUND 5

With the contestants' focus diminishing as their intoxication levels increase, we decide the next round should be the last. We attempt to instigate beer-mat flipping with some specially branded Superfood beer mats, but Dom's having none of it, his face inches from *NME's* as he tells us off for messing with the merch. Instead, we opt for *10 Things*: each player is given a topic and has one minute to name 10 things that fall into it.

Jack gets Celebrity Chefs, then lists a series of "friends" who, he insists, are indeed famous cooks. We decide to go soft on him. Chlöe's protests of "I'm really thick" are unfounded as she aces Capital Cities, but Brad's not happy with London Landmarks. "Are you seeeeriouS?!" he bellows before just about managing to get 10 in less than 60 seconds. Sam opens his list of Acts Who Played Reading & Leeds This Year with his own band, and Dom demands another topic when we try and give him Songs By Arcade Fire.

SCORE

- ▶ BRADLEY 52
- ▶ SAM 13
- ▶ CHLÖE 46
- ▶ DOM 23
- ▶ JACK 13

BOOZE DRUNK

- ▶ 1 BOTTLE TEQUILA
- ▶ 12 SHOTS AGWA
- ▶ 30 BOTTLES SOL
- ▶ 25 BOTTLES BREWD OG LAGER
- ▶ 2 GLASSES RED WINE
- ▶ 3 GIN AND TONICS
- ▶ 12 CANS RED STRIPE

Champion Bradley:
totally pumped,
but 'armless

Tonight everyone's
a winner (except,
perhaps, dignity)

Verdict

Rowdy and quite drunk, everyone slinks off for a cigarette while we tot up the scores. "I'll be happy with second," Chlöe declares. She's in luck, as that's exactly where she comes. Jack and Sam tie in last place, with Dom third, leaving Bradley as this year's champion. There's some furore over who was actually second, Dom wrongly believing it was him. "How many more men do I have to push to the floor? I already did that Wolf Alice guy," yells Chlöe as Theo picks himself up from an earlier incident, rubbing his arm. "Fucking soft," he mutters as he's told of last year's broken elbow.

Bradley ushers us into the corridor to tell us just what winning means, his tacky gold trophy clutched tightly in his hands. "I looked at the competition and thought, 'None of these guys can booze like I booze,'" he slurs.

Leaning against the wall, he continues: "My biggest tactic tonight was being a legend. The thing is, people are gonna read *NME* and think, 'I wanna be like Bradley. He dresses OK. He drinks OK. That's the kind of guy I want to grow up to be.' And I win. I win."

Dom: "Get your
coat, Theo,
you've pulled"

Victory lap

Our supplies at The Old Blue Last have been drunk dry, but our rock stars aren't done yet. Onwards they go, first to take advantage of Chlöe Howl's Shoreditch House club membership, and then on to the warehouse where two of Swim Deep live. The Kooks' Luke Pritchard strolls in sometime later, regaling us with statements like, "In many ways, golf is like sex", while Chlöe cackles in the background and the party continues long, long into the night. ■

▶ Special thanks to Sienna O'Rourke and all at BrewDog, Shoreditch; Cal McRae at The Old Blue Last, Shoreditch; and to Numskull for kitting out our pub golfers – jumpers available at yellowbulldog.co.uk



Do they know it's Christmas time?



In 1999, slowcore pioneers Low released perhaps the most miserable festive album ever. Fifteen years later, it's become a seasonal classic. Frontman **Alan Sparhawk** tells **Jazz Monroe** about its enduring appeal

Eleven months a year, Low singer and guitarist Alan Sparhawk can't stand hearing his own music, but something in him melts come December. At home in Duluth, Minnesota, Alan and his wife – drummer/fellow singer Mimi Parker – will blast out Low's 'Christmas', careful not to disturb Alan's mother, who lives next door by the creek. As the album jangles to life, their kids go wild. "I cringe and shudder hearing something else by us," Alan admits, "but for some reason 'Christmas' gets the pass card. It's not a Low record, it's a Christmas record." He chuckles. "Who doesn't love that?"

At a glance, Low's miserablism doesn't exactly herald the clinking of eggnog glasses. Formed in 1993, the Minnesota trio cut their teeth at the forefront of 'slowcore', an underground movement characterised by its profound lack of movement. Slowcore pioneers like Codeine and Bedhead took their time to unravel desolate lullabies, resurrecting the sombre noise of Galaxie 500 and Slint. Fitting its understated nature, the sound was never huge, and was quickly overshadowed in US indie-rock by the rise of acts like Pavement. This is when Low played their trump card, and in December 1999 they gifted their fans with perhaps the greatest alternative Christmas album ever.

Ahead of Sufjan Stevens (who released 'Songs For Christmas' in 2006) and She & Him ('A Very She & Him Christmas', 2011), it was always Low who took pride of place under the indie-rock mistletoe. Recorded on an eight-track, 'Christmas' is

a 30-minute masterpiece that flits majestically from grave ambience to Phil Spector sound-avalanche, as wisps of vocal flicker like flames in the hearth. Their festive live shows raised the stakes with sleigh bells and whistles, and the move paid off: by the time of 2002's 'Trust', they were packing bags to join Radiohead's European tour.

As well as encapsulating indie-rock's oldest existential conflict – cynicism vs spirituality – 'Christmas' has a subplot all of its own. Alan and Mimi are devout Mormons, and Alan's faith later rejoined the story, this time in an alarming psychotic episode. Given his struggles, it's hard not to suspect the angelic-voiced singer – who has described himself as a religious "underachiever" – wrote 'Christmas' as a kind of redemption. "It's surrendering to the concept of, 'OK, it's Christmas, let's all be OK with singing religious songs,'" he concedes, laughing. "It felt good for the soul."



**"Maybe religion is
the last taboo"**

Alan Sparhawk

On this icy Thursday evening, Alan is in the basement where Low recorded 'Christmas'. Their first daughter arrived soon afterwards, and a sense of newborn discovery electrifies the LP: they experimented, Alan remembers, by "distorting this '80s thing called the Sonic Maximizer, frying it out. You hear that on 'Little Drummer Boy', this soft, blown-out distortion that's sprinkled on everything."

It's the details that matter: homely without being trad, the record has gravitas, contrasting five originals with festive staples 'The Little Drummer Boy', 'Blue Christmas' and 'Silent Night', recorded in the kitchen. But 'Christmas' has a dark core: hear 'If You Were Born Today' (Song For Little Baby Jesus), with its lyric "If





Low in 2013:
(from left) Mimi
Parker, Alan
Sparhawk and
Steve Garrington

LOW

delusions, depicting humankind's moral collapse, caused Alan to believe he was the Antichrist, condemned to await the imminent return of Jesus. "Especially for religious people, apocalypse is sort of a theme that comes up," he adds candidly. "When you go crazy it goes to your core, and what's your core? Well, if you're a religious person, that's the ultimate and most intense thing."

At his lowest ebb, Alan shut his eyes and mouth for two days, before friends took him to hospital. Today he values the experience: "There were thoughts I still believe are fairly accurate: that we're not only accountable for

who we are – in many ways we're also accountable for all mankind. We're accountable for that officer who killed Michael Brown. We're accountable for how many kids die of starvation this year, and for our corrupt government. How accountable? There's a perfect judgment that will weed that out."

You sense Alan remains shaken by the experience, but his disillusionment channels outwards rather than inwards. Low released the anti-George Bush album 'Drums And Guns' in 2007, and during our chat he argues for the legalisation of marijuana and praises the widely shared speech by Run The Jewels' Killer Mike on recent events in Ferguson.

"When things like Ferguson happen," he explains, "you start noticing what's real – the things that feel eternal and transcendent. You start sensing it when you see love, when you see a child being kind. Or when you finally find yourself doing something just to be nice, and not to get something out of it." As resolutions go, doesn't this feel a little – dare we say – Christmassy? Alan laughs. "It's a long, weird story," he admits. "We're

flawed people who are limping and stumbling through this beautiful tragedy. It's a cruel, cruel, beautiful world." ■

Why I love

'Christmas'

Famous fans on Low's festive favourite

Mark Kozelek

SUN KIL MOON



"I first got Low's 'Christmas' album at a show of theirs at The Mermaid Lounge in New Orleans, October 1999. It's my favourite Christmas album. What was even better was singing 'Little Drummer Boy' and 'Do You Hear What I Hear' with Alan Sparhawk recently in Duluth, Minnesota. Low's live Christmas shows are even better than their Christmas record."

Andrew Hung

FUCK BUTTONS



"I love Low's Christmas album, and I still listen to that an awful lot – all year round, actually. It's properly good, perfect for nighttime."

SS

HOOKWORMS



"Working in retail, you can be driven absolutely nuts by the compulsory eight weeks of the same Christmas chart songs over and over, as if your workplace wasn't irritating enough already. Thank you, Low, for granting 30 minutes of respite."

you were born today/We'd kill you by age eight". Alan explains it's about "what would happen to Jesus today. From innocent bystanders blown up by terrorists, to Michael Brown... it's a statement. What would happen to a boy born in the Middle East today?"

Low's righteous backbone always proved contentious in America, where, Alan says, "the music world still has a hang-up about religion". Despite The Killers' Brandon Flowers giving the religion a more mainstream face in recent times, Mormonism remains shy of progressive society's embrace. Alan suggests that "maybe religion is the last taboo. It's been seen as the source of all taboo".

In the UK, 'Christmas' – which followed the release of 'If You Were Born Today' as a seven-inch on Wurlitzer Jukebox in 1997 – enjoyed a low-key release on Rough Trade spin-off label Tugboat, but John Peel, then a late-night Radio 1 DJ, didn't just play it to death, he also harassed the station's daytime DJs to follow suit. Then Gap, of all places, used the album's stately centrepiece, 'The Little Drummer Boy',

for a TV campaign in 2000. In the ad, teenagers caught in a blizzard start a snowball fight rendered in slow motion, which fades into the slogan 'slow down'. It turned out to be advice the band should have heeded.

In 2005, after a couple of years of overkill, Alan retreated with a fellow Mormon friend to a cabin just outside Duluth. Part of his strain was religious: his brother had left home young to do missionary work, but Alan always lagged behind, first as an impulsive troublemaker, later due to "manic" mental health problems and, subsequently, addiction. But rather than settling the water, his stay in the cabin saw him nosedive.

"I was having delusional thoughts about who I was and what was going on in the world," he explains, matter-of-factly. Those



It's Quizmas

...and there's no need to be afraid. If you've been paying attention this year, that is – as NME's festive test will reveal

INDIE HITS

1 The title of a 2014 single by which band asked someone called Archie to take their hand in holy matrimony?

2 At the other end of the romantic spectrum, which band sang the lines "I will hate you forever" and "you really do disgust me" in 'Super Rat'?

3 Which singer made a video featuring his drummer playing drums with his bassist's severed arm at an empty pub gig?



4 Which Birmingham-based stars of the NME New Breed Tour set off a bubble machine at The Old Blue Last to accompany their song 'Bubbles'?



5 Which Temples song was featured in a Strongbow advert?

IN THE NEWS

6 Which two antiquated pop legends were due to support Morrissey on his US tour before he cancelled it?

7 Which band were stuck in a snowdrift in upstate New York for over 50 hours in November?



8 All 135,000 tickets for Glastonbury 2015 sold out in how many minutes in October?

9 Which band headlined the Saturday night of the Field Day festival in east London's Victoria Park?

10 Which singer was arrested mid-gig after climbing up the ceiling beams of a venue in Santa Barbara, California?

11 When Kate Bush embarked on her stint of shows at the Hammersmith Apollo this year, how many years had it been since she'd performed onstage?

12 Having already produced a cheese called Blue Monday, who applied for a license to create a fizzy drink called Britpop?



13 Who replied to a critical tweet in March to agree that her new material was "docile pop rubbish"?

14 Which singer was, somewhat surprisingly, named the most powerful figure in black and urban music by BBC Radio 1Xtra's Power List committee in July?



15 Metallica's Lars Ulrich accepted a drum challenge from Red Hot Chili Peppers' drummer Chad Smith and which lookalike movie comedian?

ELECTRONIQUIZ

16 Which returning electropop star decked out her tropical stage set with palm trees and surfboards?

17 Famed director Michel Gondry (left) directed his first music video in three years for which British band?

18 The debut album by which acclaimed Norwegian DJ was enthusiastically called 'It's Album Time'?

19 Which returning Warp Records legend initially announced his new album with a post on the Deep Web?

20 What long-awaited electro-rock album featured tracks called 'Government Trash', 'Virgins' and 'Right On, Frankenstein!'?





time...

WHO'S SLAGGING WHO?

Some insults that went flinging around the rock'n'roll shitstorm of 2014 – but who's talking about whom, or what?

21 James Blunt: “_____ has got a silver spoon stuck up his arse.”

22 Kasabian: “_____ is a fucking nightmare of the 21st century.”



23 Taylor Swift: “I’m not willing to contribute my life’s work to an experiment.”



24 Sleaford Mods: “_____’s got blood on his hands.”

25 Lias Saoudi, Fat White Family: “I find it unbelievable that people think of him the way they do. The guy is clearly a moron... I hate that little cunt, he’s a fucking joke. It was the least rock’n’roll thing I’ve ever seen in my fucking life.”



WHO SAID WHAT?

31 Who was booed for a 10-minute onstage rant in July that included the memorable line “fuck my face!”

32 In June, which Britpop survivor said “it started as a revolution, but ended up as slightly overweight men with their shirts untucked watching *The Italian Job* while getting sucked off?”

33 The singer of which band regularly cracked the following gag onstage this year: “I’d like to introduce you to the rest of the band... Ben on drums!”?

34 Which major pop punk figure said this year, “Condoning streaming is like condoning the Chinese that are killing elephants for their tusks and carving ivory statues”?

35 The guitarist from which UK rock band said the following

of her trip to Reading 2008: “I drank some unpasteurised milk, went down with my boys and then I pooped myself?”

36 Whose acceptance speech included the sentence: “I think the cyclical nature of the universe in which it exists demands it adheres to some of its rules”?

37 Which poet, author and singer said, “I’m very suspicious of fame, the whole pumping mess of it”?

38 Which band released a song with the line, “*Johnny Borrell fucks off to an island for four months at the height of his fame/Was his country bothered?/Was it fuck?*”?

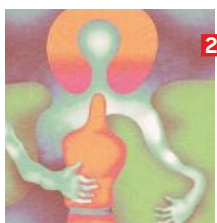
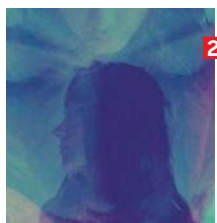
39 In January, who said of their forthcoming album, “it’s a dangerous, dangerous, dangerous, dangerous drug we’ve created”?

40 Who said, when asked if he’d ever write an autobiography, “I think ‘Fuck, that’s like a proper load of homework’... I struggle writing texts”?



SLEEVENOTES

Name the albums from these chunks of patterned sleeve...



Reviews

► THE DEFINITIVE VERDICT ■ EDITED BY BEN HOMEWOOD

NME
ALBUM
OF THE WEEK

Mark Kozelek

Sings Christmas Carols

Strip away their melancholy wrapping and the Sun Kil Moon frontman's festive covers are full of warmth and sincerity



shit" at a festival in Ottawa in September – you might be surprised to learn that it's *not* writing a song about what The War On Drugs might like to do to him on the 12th day. Nor has he reinterpreted that other time-honoured Noël classic as 'O Little Town Of Fuckin' Hillbillies'. The Sun Kil Moon frontman may revel in the role of indie-rock's great white grinch, but as 'Sings Christmas Carols' proves, he's no more immune to the spirit of the season than his furry green counterpart was.

And so this is Christmas, and what has Mark Kozelek done? If you've kept abreast of the 47-year old's antics this year – he dismissed an audience in North Carolina as "fucking hillbillies" and started a beef with The War On Drugs by labelling the Philadelphia band "beer commercial lead-guitar

From the moment it was announced late last year, the concept of a Mark Kozelek Christmas album made a wonderfully contrarian kind of sense: the former Red House Painters frontman is one of the least festive figures imaginable, which in the grand tradition of Seuss and Dickens, makes him an ideal candidate. He acknowledges as much on the opening track, 'Christmas Time Is Here' (from the much-loved animated TV special 'A Charlie Brown Christmas'), where his recording engineer plays the role of Linus to Kozelek's cheerless Charlie Brown. "Mark, you're the only person I know who can take a wonderful season like Christmas and turn it into a problem", he laments. "Of all the Mark Kozeleks in the world, you are the Mark Kozelek-iest".

Of all the leftfield ideas he's come up with, however, 'Sings Christmas Carols' isn't even close to being the Mark Kozelek-iest. He has a history with this sort of thing: 2001's 'What's Next To The Moon' was a collection



of acoustic AC/DC covers, and Modest Mouse received a similar treatment on 2005's 'Tiny Cities'. Despite the fact that he didn't actually write any of the songs, both of those records could be described as singularly Kozelekian. So it is with this one.

Yes, on first listen, '...Sings Christmas Carols' sounds willfully depressing: Kozelek's dolorous baritone and spartan arrangements (you'll find no sleigh bells here) make sure of that. Yet, as with this year's Sun Kil Moon album 'Benji', there's warmth and sincerity beneath the despair. It would be easy to take a sardonic tack with this material, but to his credit, he never does. There's no shortage of solemnly fingerpicked renditions of 'Silent Night' or 'The First Noel' out there, but coming from a perennial Scrooge like Kozelek, they seem dusted with more seasonal magic than the (many, many) others.

WHO IS MARK KOZELEK?

A guide to the indie-rock Grinch...
He's the man behind Red House Painters
Formed in San Francisco in 1989, slowcore fixtures Red House Painters released six much-loved albums before splitting up in 2001.

And Sun Kil Moon...

Kozelek has released six albums under the Sun Kil Moon moniker since 2003. The latest, 'Benji', appeared near the top of many Best Of 2014 lists.

He's also an actor

You may recognise Kozelek from his film appearances. He pops up in *Shopgirl* and *Vanilla Sky*, starring Tom Cruise, but his biggest role was as Stillwater bassist Larry Fellows in 2000's *Almost Famous*.

...And can be a bit 'difficult'

It's not uncommon for Kozelek to barrack his own fans, and this year's spat with The War On Drugs has snowballed into the pettiest indie beef in years.

It's an album better suited to quiet contemplation than photocopying your arse at the office party, but it's one you'll find yourself looking forward to digging out again and again. For now, though, turn the lights down low, put some ice in your drink and have yourself a very merry fuckin' Mark Kozelek-y Christmas. ■ BARRY NICOLSON

THE DETAILS

► **RELEASE DATE** November 1 ► **LABEL** Caldo Verde ► **PRODUCER** Mark Kozelek ► **LENGTH** 41:55 ► **TRACKLISTING** ► 1. Christmas Time Is Here ► 2. Do You Hear What I Hear ► 3. 2000 Miles ► 4. O Come All Ye Faithful ► 5. O Christmas Tree ► 6. Away In A Manger ► 7. O Little Town Of Bethlehem ► 8. God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen ► 9. Silent Night ► 10. The First Noel ► 11. I Believe In Father Christmas ► 12. Hark The Herald Angels Sing ► 13. What Child Is This ► 14. The Christmas Song ► **BEST TRACK** Christmas Time Is Here

MORE ALBUMS

A Sunny Day In Glasgow Sketch For Winter 1: New Christmas Classics

Geographic North



With this five-track EP by Ben Daniels' dream-pop band, Christmas music enters the ultra-limited-edition cassette tape market. It's the first of four wintry-themed releases by different artists on the Geographic North label and it crams a lot into its 15 minutes, including a cover of Mariah Carey's 'All I Want For Christmas Is You' done in barbershop quartet-style and a pastoral folk ode to British composer Vaughan Williams called 'Fantasia On Xmas'. Despite its title, 'Shut Your Mouth, It's Christmas' offers hope for the season: "If it's not that time of year that makes you happy/It's at least that time of year when someone calls you".

■ PHIL HEBBLETHWAITE

Various Artists Christmas Joy In Full Measure



Hand Of Glory
Hertfordshire singer-songwriter Mary Epworth and producer Will Twynham commissioned 12 artists to write a Christmas song for this compilation, which is like a chocolate selection box without the sickness. Epworth's own contribution, 'The Wolf And The Woods', sets scenes of kissing "under mistletoe" to magical synthpop. Young Knives opt for droning experimentalism, all medieval flutes and monotone chanting, while Mancunian newcomer Kiran Leonard's 'Huygens Probe' morphs from twinkling indie jangle into a psychedelic freakout and back again, incorporating the galactic atmospherics of the titular spacecraft that landed on Saturn's moon Titan. A seasonal collection to cherish. ■ RHIAN DALY



Los Campesinos! A Los Campesinos! Christmas

The Cardiff sextet's rollicking seasonal EP puts "a great big smile on somebody's face"

Nowadays, the one-off seasonal hit is a closed shop; indie bands seeking the kind of Christmas bonus Wizzard got in 1973 with 'I Wish It Could Be Christmas Everyday' must be inventive. Comprising six tracks including reworked '70s classics and carols, Los Campesinos!' new seasonal EP certainly is. It takes a similar approach to Sufjan Stevens' 'Songs For Christmas' EPs, particularly on an icicle folk version of 'The Holly & The Ivy'. The Cardiff six-piece's first release since 2013's 'No Blues' sees their perky alt-pop trussed up in tinsel and let loose in a toyshop. Frontman Gareth David rampages through billowing opener 'When Christmas Comes', 'Kindle A Flame In Her Heart' and the glacial 'The Trains Don't Run (It's Christmas Day)', flinging yuletide imagery like a toddler shredding wrapping. Right up to the cover of Mud's 'Lonely This Christmas' done as though it's East 17's 'Stay Another Day', this is a Christmas riot.

■ MARK BAUMONT

THE DETAILS

► **RELEASE DATE** December 8 ► **LABEL** Turnstile/Heart Swells ► **PRODUCER** Tom Campesinos! ► **LENGTH** 24:42 ► **TRACKLISTING** ► 1. When Christmas Comes ► 2. A Doe To A Deer ► 3. The Holly & The Ivy ► 4. Kindle A Flame In Her Heart ► 5. The Trains Don't Run (It's Christmas Day) ► 6. Lonely This Christmas ► **BEST TRACK** When Christmas Comes

Smoke Fairies

Wild Winter Full Time Hobby



For Smoke Fairies, winter is a time of year that "will always be bittersweet and wild". Thus 'Wild Winter' is a Christmas album, but one that reflects on loneliness. 'Christmas Without A Kiss' is a deflated opener, a slow surge of shoegaze guitars and frustrated lyrics ("Bring me his love"). Next is

a tranquil cover of Captain Beefheart's 'Steal Softly Thru Snow', which wraps the original's jerkiness in a thick winter blanket. 'Three Kings' rides a danceable bassline and 'Bad Good' sits awkwardly on Santa's knee ("Have you been bad/Or have you been good?") before the plaintive melody on 'Nothing To Divide Us' ends a record that, despite bleak inspiration, leaves a warm feeling.

■ BEN HOMEWOOD

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FILM

The final chapter in Peter Jackson's trilogy is a bloodthirsty Christmas epic

The Hobbit: The Battle Of The Five Armies



The title of this final instalment is not misleading: Peter Jackson is closing the door on his trilogy of *Hobbit* films with 144 minutes of non-stop, bloodthirsty warfare, and his main objective is to leave you awestruck. About time too. The trilogy began unconvincingly with 2012's *An Unexpected Journey*, but sparked into life with a little help from Benedict Cumberbatch's fire-breathing dragon in *The Desolation Of Smaug*. In *The Battle Of The Five Armies*, the director has created a gripping final chapter that ensures the franchise reaches a genuinely exciting climax, the film's large-scale battle involving tribes of men, elves, orcs and two separate groups of dwarves.

Based on JRR Tolkien's 1937 novel, the story that leads to this five-army showdown is knotty and complicated, but its driving force is greed. Martin Freeman's Bilbo Baggins and the dwarves have taken back Erebor, a mountain loaded with jewels and gold, but the riches go to their leader's head. Consumed by his fruitless search for the most precious gem of all, the Arkenstone, Richard Armitage's Thorin Oakenshield refuses to share Erebor's riches with the other tribes. So, despite a warning from Ian McKellen's Gandalf and the best efforts of pacifist Bilbo, full-scale warfare ensues.

The resulting battle takes up the majority of the extensive running time, but never becomes tiresome. Jackson flips between spectacular panoramas of



► **DIRECTOR**
Peter Jackson
► **IN CINEMAS**
December 13

Middle Earth consumed by conflict and more intimate and detailed one-on-one fight scenes. Evangeline Lilly's plucky Tauriel trails an orc who has hurt her loved one, the gallant Legolas (Orlando Bloom) tries to take out the same seemingly unassailable baddie, and Thorin goes head to head with the orcs' hulking leader. That last tussle is especially engrossing as Jackson throws in a succession of twists, turns and obstacles, including a perilous frozen lake, to ensure constant uncertainty as to who will prevail. Elsewhere, Billy Connolly gives an exuberant performance as bloodthirsty dwarf warrior Dáin Ironfoot by crashing around aggressively with his chest puffed out.

Jackson drags out the closing scenes, though. It's almost as if the director can't bring himself to say goodbye after so painstakingly bringing Tolkien's universe to life with his *Lord Of The Rings* and *Hobbit* trilogies – but the blend of emotional drama and spectacular CGI is so effective that it's easy to forgive him. This misstep doesn't stop *The Battle Of The Five Armies* from being the tightest and most satisfying of the *Hobbit* films and, ultimately, a truly epic finale. ■ NICK LEVINE

CINEMA

Penguins Of Madagascar



This spin-off from the animated *Madagascar* series places

a quartet of penguins in danger from an envious octopus called Dave, who's invented a 'Medusa serum' to turn them into hideous monsters. It's a brisk computer-animated story with some impressive set pieces – including one in which the penguins paddle gondolas around Venice – but there's a distinct lack of substance. Its message is somewhat mixed too: if physical appearance is so unimportant, as one penguin says, why are the writers so quick to restore the animals' looks after they've been blasted with the transformative serum? The redeeming feature is the enjoyable voice work of Benedict Cumberbatch, whose pompous, espresso-sipping grey wolf steals several scenes.

■ NICK LEVINE

6

DVD

Jake Bugg Live At The Royal Albert Hall



Jake Bugg's new concert film isn't exactly Christmassy. Recorded in

February, it opens with austere, monochrome shots of the Albert Hall's exterior, lending it a *This Is England*-style bleakness. Still, this is a pretty good stocking filler. 'Taste It' and 'Kingspin' – the latter featuring Johnny Marr – are bolstered for the big space, a reminder of how far the 20-year-old has come since those early demos. Clips of his fans are touching ("He's just like us, isn't he?"), but Bugg's monosyllabic interview scenes are most entertaining – of Marr's involvement, he shrugs: "I thought I'd better let him do the solos." Finally, sounding both elated and thoroughly bored by his success, he mutters, "It's like 'yeah man'. I wished for it and I got it." Thank God he sparkles onstage.

■ BEN HOMEWOOD

7

CINEMA

Dumb And Dumber To



Twenty years after their snot froze on an ill-fated scooter ride to snowy

Aspen in *Dumb And Dumber*, Jim Carrey and Jeff Daniels return as Lloyd Christmas and Harry Dunne. In this sequel to the Farrelly brothers' 1994 slapstick riot, the pair set out across America, pursuing two wildly different plotlines – they're

searching for a kidney donor for Harry as well as trying to find his adopted daughter. As in the first film, their stupidity knows no bounds, but the gross-out moments are queasier this time round (Harry's flashback to his adolescence involving peanut butter and the family dog is particularly horrible). Still, it's difficult not to laugh at the hapless pair, especially the rubber-faced Carrey.

■ DAN BRIGHTMORE

6

CINEMA

Exodus: Gods And Kings



With his 2000 opus *Gladiator*, Ridley Scott showed that there is room in 21st century cinema for flamoyant epics, and this reworking of Cecil B De Mille's 1956 film *The Ten Commandments* underlines his command of the spectacular. The Biblical plot is given a contemporary spin, with Moses (Christian

Bale) portrayed as a reluctant insurgent against the despotic regime of Rameses (Joel Edgerton). But even at 150 minutes there's little time between massed battles, plagues of frogs and tidal waves. The stars are the CGI teams behind the breathtaking recreation of ancient Egypt, while a superb supporting cast (including Sir Ben Kingsley and Sigourney Weaver) is left with little to do.

■ ANGUS BATEY

6



NME
GIG
OF THE WEEK

Julian Casablancas + The Voidz

The Coronet

London

Sunday, December 7

**The first UK show from Julian's new gang
is a fantastic early Christmas present**

PHOTO BY ANDY HUGHES

As a rock'n'roll gang, The Strokes don't ooze quite as much cool as they once did. So Julian Casablancas' new group, The Voidz, are here to recruit you instead, and their first proper UK gig tonight is enough to make you hack off your shirtsleeves and chop yourself a mullet. Julian remains static for the opening trio of 'Instant Crush' (his Daft Punk collaboration), 'Zerox' and 'Father Electricity', but ignites during the crunching 'Mutually Assured Destruction', throwing his mic stand to the floor and bending double to rasp the vocals. The twisting, 11-minute 'Human Sadness' follows, and sounds more cohesive than it did on September's 'Tyranny' album. Introduced as "a cover song", 'Ize Of The World' (from The Strokes' 'First Impressions Of Earth') fits in neatly but the 'Tyranny' songs shine brightest and rumble loudest. There's a new gang in town, and they sound fantastic. ■ RHIAN DALY

9



Manic Street Preachers

Barrowland, Glasgow
Monday, December 8

The agit-rock survivors tread the line
between entertainment and reverence
as they resurrect 'The Holy Bible' live

There's nothing more boring than a band who play by the rules,

even when the rules in question happen to be their own. Manic Street Preachers have been committing acts of self-sacrilege ever since they didn't shift umpteen million copies of 1992 debut 'Generation Terrorists' and press the self-destruct button, and they've survived every one of them. Indeed, long after their contemporaries have become defunct or dependable, it's their willingness to defy their own edicts – to embrace the arenas, to release best-ofs, to drop heavy-handed hints about splitting up only to keep soldiering on – that's kept them vital and unpredictable well into middle age.

On the face of it, then, the decision to mark the 20th anniversary of 'The Holy Bible' by playing the record in its full, stygian horror is just another of their wilful inconsistencies. "We've been offered tons of money to play 'The Holy Bible'," admitted Nicky Wire last year. "but the minute we do it, I kind of feel like, 'Well, that's it. We're irrelevant now.'" As soon as he uttered those words, of course, this tour – which begins tonight in Glasgow – was as good as booked. The money will be a welcome sweetener, but for the Manics the real action lies where it always has: in contradicting themselves. Not for nothing did they reserve that right.

Yet even with this year's 'Futurology' as a counterargument against those who'll say

they've given up the ghost, giving 'The Holy Bible' the nostalgia-tour treatment is fraught with potential banana skins. Nostalgia implies sentimentality – something that 'The Holy Bible' is entirely lacking in. Then there's Richey Edwards, the elephant missing from the room. While his contribution to the actual recording might have been negligible, 'The Holy Bible' is Richey's testament: it's his sickness, his hatred, his revulsion that gives the record its power. Without him, the whole endeavour runs the risk of becoming a misanthropes' karaoke night.

It all comes down to striking the right balance between entertainment and reverence. The attention to period detail evident here – from the camo netting above the stage to James Dean Bradfield's sailor suit – is commendable, as is the decision to play the album as a three-piece, with no additional musicians. This results in the odd rough edge, but this crowd will take a bum note or a fudged lyric on '4st 7lb' over a soulless reproduction. In any case, a minute or so into 'Yes' – when Bradfield starts trading lines with the audience about tearing off a boy's cock and calling him Rita – it's clear they've found their equilibrium.

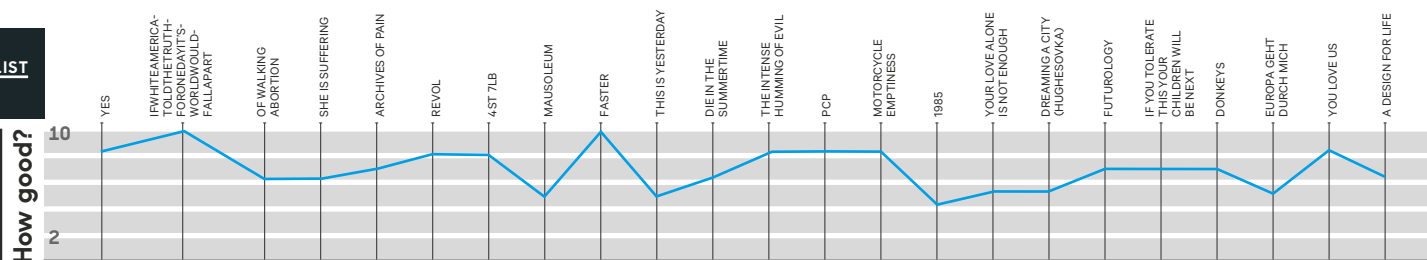
Besides Wire's droll "Happy fucking Christmas" and Bradfield's closing dedication to Richey, the band say little, but the songs still

NOSTALGIA IMPLIES SENTIMENTALITY, WHICH 'THE HOLY BIBLE' LACKS

have much to communicate. 'Ifwhiteamerica...'s electrifying refrain ("There ain't no black in the Union Jack/There's not enough white in the stars and stripes") sounds scarily prescient two decades later, when African-American males are gunned down with impunity by white police officers and members of our own government seem to blame everything but the weather on immigrants. Similarly, one can imagine the names of Bush and Blair being added to the murderers' roll-call on 'Archives Of Pain'.

The main set over, the band exit only to return 10 minutes later for a greatest-hits selection that blends the obvious – 'Motorcycle Emptiness', 'A Design For Life' – with the obscure, including a 1993 B-side ('Donkeys') and, seemingly out of sheer bloody-mindedness, a track from 2004's universally maligned seventh album 'Lifeblood'. Before they leave, Bradfield pointedly calls it an interval, *not* an encore. Even for the Manics, some things must remain sacred. ■ BARRY NICOLSON

SETLIST



Shamir

The Courtyard, London
Thursday, December 4

The flamboyant Las Vegas plays his ace
after a problematic debut UK show

Shit sound. Shit lights. Shit crowd. It's a nightmare situation for any singer, but for Shamir Bailey – creator of 2014's best release from a new artist, June's 'Northtown' EP – tonight must feel particularly galling. The 19-year-old from Las Vegas has songs so huge they veer from James Murphy-inspired freakouts to country ballads without being remotely confusing.

His debut UK show should have been a triumph, then; instead it's beset by technical problems, and everyone onstage knows it. But all is not lost. Whereas most singers would gladly fall into a hole and die when their monitors mess up, Shamir's different. He

soldiers on, knowing there's an ace card up his sleeve. As the gig comes to a natural, messy close, he deploys it, jumping offstage and shaking the hand of everyone in attendance. It's weird, confusing and, above all, very cool. Afterwards, everyone falls silent, so he picks up a mic and starts singing 'I'll Never Be Able To Love' a capella – a song about love and loss and being different to everybody else. It's what we've all been waiting for: proof. And for Shamir it means that, against all the odds, tonight has been weirdly triumphant.

■ MATT WILKINSON

SETLIST

- If It Wasn't True
- Sometimes A Man
- I Know It's A Good Thing
- On The Regular
- Make A Scene
- In For The Kill
- Hot Mess
- Head In The Clouds
- I'll Never Be Able To Love



8



The Smashing Pumpkins

Koko, London

Friday, December 5

Billy Corgan's reconstituted band play new
songs – and unveil a fearsome special guest

Tonight, at their first UK gig since July, The Smashing Pumpkins launch new album 'Monuments To An Elegy', and the songs from it fizz with fresh energy. That, you suspect, is partly down to The Killers' bassist Mark Stoermer and Rage Against The

Machine drummer Brad Wilk joining guitarist Jeff Schroeder and Billy Corgan in the band. 'One And All (We Are)' is a thunderous opener, its volume matched by two more new tracks, 'Tiberius' and 'Drum + Fife'.

The classics are hard to beat, though, and a sublime sequence of 'Disarm', 'Zero' and 'Bullet With Butterfly Wings' provokes manic pogoing. Then, as they return for an encore after a cover of Bowie's 'Fame' and 'Silverfuck', Marilyn Manson thunders out. In thick makeup and a vast black trenchcoat, he looks fearsome. Corgan must have forgiven him for once likening him to Charlie Brown: they rage through Manson's new single 'Third Day Of A Seven Day Binge' before the goth titan joins in on the Pumpkins' 'Ava Adore'. It's an exhilarating ending, and a sweating Corgan, buoyed by his special guest, is clearly still thriving.

■ RHIAN DALY

SETLIST

- One And All (We Are)
- Being Beige
- Hummer
- Tiberius
- Tonight, Tonight
- Drum + Fife
- Glass And The Ghost Children
- Stand Inside Your Love
- Monuments
- Drown
- Disarm
- Zero
- Bullet With Butterfly Wings
- Fame
- Silverfuck
- Third Day Of A Seven Day Binge (with Marilyn Manson)
- Ava Adore (with Marilyn Manson)

8

THE VIEW FROM THE CROWD



Ryan Murray, 33, Maryhill

"The 'Holy Bible' part of the set was absolutely brilliant – it's the daddy of Manics albums. But I'm not a fan of most of their other stuff, so for me the second part of the set was a bit shite."



Mark Carling, 28, Maryhill

"The 'Holy Bible' was the first album I ever bought and I've always wanted to see it live. So the first half was amazing – I was chuffed with it."



George Sinclair, 46, Hamilton

"This is the 35th time I've seen the Manics, and this gig is probably up there with the 14th or 13th! No, every time feels like the best time. I saw their last ever gig in Glasgow with Richey, and I'm so glad they're doing this tour, because 'The Holy Bible' deserves to be celebrated."



Amelia Sulhunt, 32, Edinburgh

"Even though the crowd enjoyed it, I thought the band seemed quite moribund during the 'Holy Bible' set, which is probably understandable. The second half felt more ebullient to me."

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1 Wild Beasts album is just the gift for when things are tight (7-5)
7+72D Have you got anything for me? A classic Buzzcocks record? (4-2-1-3)
10 An old Pink Floyd single? Just as well you kept the receipt (4-2-4)
16 "____, draw back your bow and let your arrow go/Straight to my lover's heart for me", Sam Cooke (5)
17 Findlay song can be switched both ways (3-3-2)
18 "And when she needs to shelter from _____ she takes a dip in my daydreams", from Arctic Monkeys' 'Arabella' (7)
19 (See 60 across)
20 (See 4 down)
22+33D Everything's OK about Elvis Presley having covered this Arthur Crudup blues number (5-3-5)
23 A song from James? Not today, thank you (8)
24 He appeared at both Live Aid and Live 8 (5)
25 "We got your message on the radio/Conditions normal and we're coming home", 1980 (5-3)
28 On the brink of being with U2 (4)
29+81D Don't keep hold of this Public Enemy disc (4-2-2)
31 Wannadies single that was destined to enter the charts (3)
32+33A Dry The River without taking a break (2-4)
34 "Girls comb their hair in the rearview mirrors and the boys try to look so _____", from Bruce Springsteen's 'Born To Run' (4)
35 A fiery piece from Amber Run (5)
37 Gave wrong name being involved with Suicide (4)
38 Ten never turned up for recording this Brian Eno album (5-3)
40 Gone to change a Dexy's Midnight Runners record (4)
41 "Let me kiss you hard in the pouring rain, you like your girls _____", from Lana Del Rey's 'Born To Die' (6)
44 (See 38 down)
45 A bit of childish reading from Slade (5)
47+99D Bossy gals upset by getting Fucked Up (5-4)

48 Stephen _____, formed a partnership with David Crosby, Graham Nash and Neil Young (6)
50+114A+111A Split up on the way out from seeing Sleaford Mods (6-3-4)
51 (See 107 down)
53 (see 115 across)
55 White Lies album recorded in the customary manner (6)
57 'Join The Dots' to find this Heavenly band (3)
58 Fiona Apple's album affected by the ebb and flow (5)
60+19A Yes, John Peel's set has been rearranged for an old country bluesman to appear (6-4-5)
63 You've already been informed - it's a Howler (1-4-3-4)
64 "Talk in everlasting _____, and dedicate them all to me", 1968 (5)
66 "So I'll start the revolution from my bed, 'cos you said the _____ I had went to my head", from Oasis' 'Don't Look Back In Anger' (6)
69 "It's times like these when I'm on my way back out of the _____", Foals (5)
70 "We headed _____ to find ourselves some truth", from George Ezra's 'Blame It On Me' (4)
71 It doesn't sound like Johnny Marr's work is kept here (8)
74 "Don't you know you've got your daddy's eyes/Your daddy was an _____", Starsailor (9)
75 First Pixies album to be released in 23 years (5-5)
78 "Did I disappoint you or leave a bad taste in your mouth", 1992 (3)
79 Joy Division album is the single of 48 across (5)
82 Bobby _____, whose '60s hits include 'More Than I Can Say' (3)
83 Grudging admiration for an Ash number (4)
84 Carl Barât played the role of this rock'n'roll star in the movie *Telstar* (4-7)
86 Bonfire night party includes a bit of The Stone Roses (4)
87 Somehow resists naming those on a Pulp EP (7)
90 "Is it any wonder why princes and kings are _____

that caper in their sawdust rings", from Oasis' 'Go Let It Out' (6)
92 (See 21 down)
94 Shane MacGowan's old backing band getting into Europop especially (5)
97 Prog rockers are a bit helpless (1-1-1)
99 Gary _____, wore 'The Crown' as a forerunner of rap (4)
100 (See 15 down)
101 Muse's first release was a bit unoriginal (3)
102 I'll need a shout when Blondie are playing (4-2)
104 Metal banged out on album by Japan (3-4)
106 "I was looking for a _____ and then I found a _____", from The Smiths' 'Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now' (3)
109 Stay where you are, it's The Hothouse Flowers (4-2)
111 (See 50 across)
112 Electronica band, _____ Dub Foundation (5)
113 More changes come to nothing, my love, for Basement Jaxx (5)
114 (See 50 across)
115+53A Now I do nil arrangements for Twin Peaks (4-5)
116 'The Little Old Lady From _____', The Beach Boys/Jan & Dean (8)
117 London rockers in safer organisation (7)

CLUES DOWN

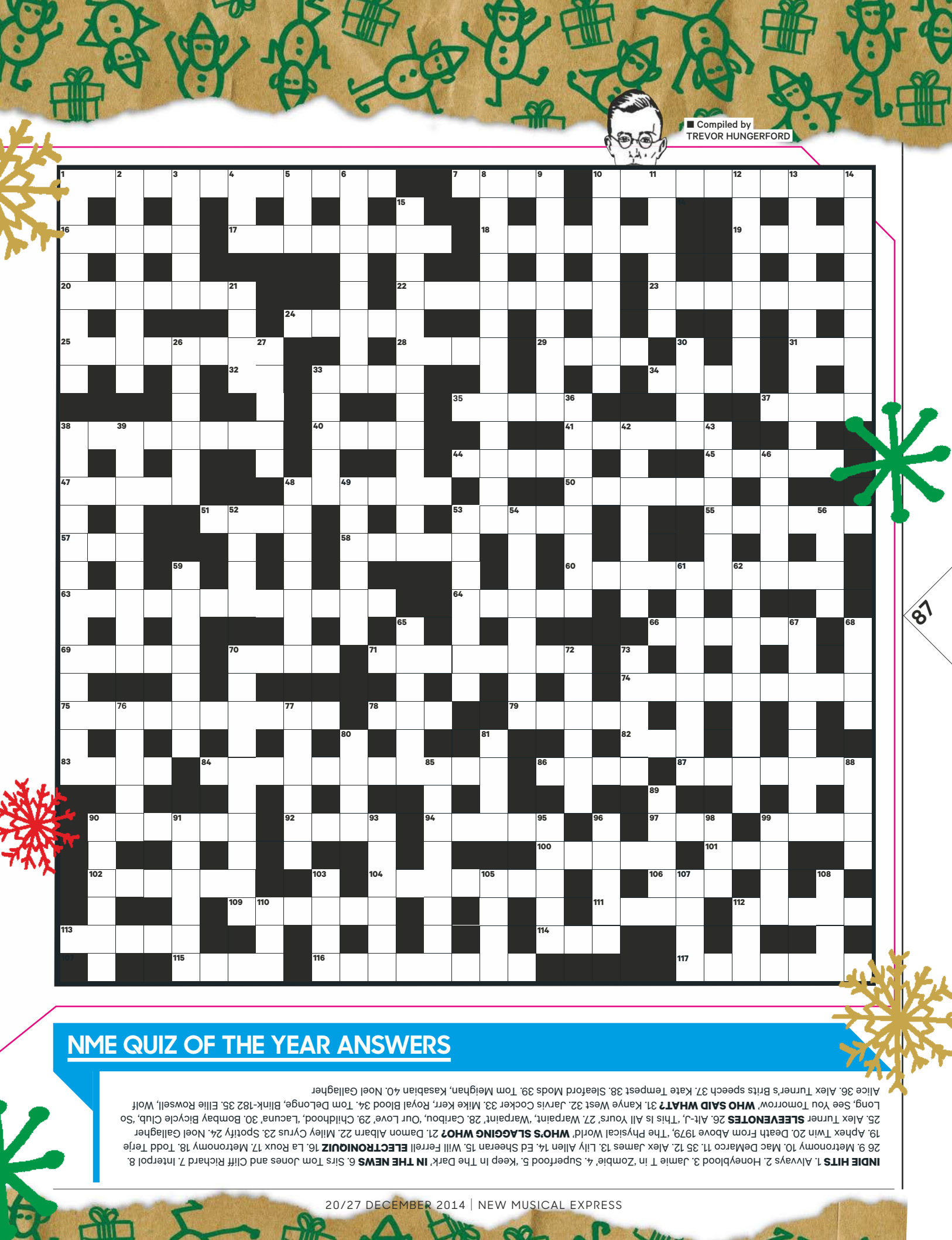
1 Catfish & The Bottlemen number to calm the audience down (8)
2 Interpol confuse themselves on own album (2-6)
3 Essex pub rockers _____ And The Hot Rods (5)
4+20A "Some things to be proud of, some stuff to regret", 2012 (3-7)
5 Their three Top 10 hits were 'Unbelievable', 'I Believe' and 'I'm A Believer' (1-1-1)
6 "I ain't seen the _____ since I don't know when/I'm stuck in Folsom Prison", Johnny Cash (8)
8 "I missed the last bus, I'll take the next train", 2001 (4-2-7)
9 The Bee Gees had a battle to get this album out (9)
10 Shovel it around for Maroon 5 (4-4)
11+12D What on earth was unlocked by Richard Ashcroft? (4-2-3-5)
13 Merchandise available when it's all over (5-3-3)
14+80D A smacker and a smack from Florence + The Machine (4-4-1-4)
15+100A "I'll tip my hat to the new constitution, take a bow for the new revolution", 1971 (4-3-6-5)
21+92A Tang, zest; mixed taste of a jazz legend who once recorded with Everything But The Girl (4-4)
26 That heavenly singing style from The xx (6)
27 The immaturity shown by Daughter (5)
30 "And I'm a coal train, fast lane, caught up in the dirty _____", from Jamie T's 'Zombie' (4)
33 (See 22 across)
36 "Human _____ is overflowing, and I think it's going to rain today", Randy Newman (8)
38+44A "Letters I've written never meaning to send", 1967 (6-2-5-5)
39 Both Limp Bizkit and Republica are prepared for departure (5-2-2)
42 London band fronted by Jehnnny Beth (7)
43 "Anger is an _____", from Pil's 'Rise' (6)
46 And the same again from Gossip (5)
48 No asses around (waiting on you) on Future Islands (7)
49 Can't it somehow become a number for Ned's Atomic Dustbin? (6)
52 '70s US hitmaker is in a solo booking (4)
53 Long-established methods used by Neil Young on album (3-4)
54 "I close my eyes, then I drift away into the magic night", Roy Orbison (2-6)
56+73D She took 'One Breath' and recorded her second album (4-5)
59 Long journey to see disco-era group or get album by Fischerspooner (7)
61 "Oh lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes-Benz/My friends all drive _____, I must make

amends", Janis Joplin (8)
62+68D "If you can't find a partner use a wooden chair", Elvis Presley (9-4)
65 Domino label post-punks whose gigs were attended by patients? (6)
67 "Now no-one's knocked upon my door for a thousand years or more", 1980 (2-6)
68 (See 62 down)
70 Death From Above 1979 performing with desire, perhaps (5-2-3)
72 (See 7 across)
73 (See 56 down)
76 "I've been searching for the daughter of the _____ himself/I've been searching for an angel in white", from Eagles' 'One Of These Nights' (5)
77 Gender change for the Loveless pair (6)
80 (See 14 down)
81 (See 29 across)
85 These New Puritans got bigger with this live album (8)
88 Her albums include 'Diamond Life' and 'Soldier Of Love' (4)
89 Michael Jackson song is a bit of a jinx for Sun Kil Moon (5)
90 A cosy covering for Catfish & The Bottlemen release (6)
91 Roll about in water by Coasts (6)
93 'Tired Of Hanging Around' with some Liverpoolians (6)
95+108D A map's a bit strange to use in finding something belonging to Santana (5-2-2)
96 Having put money aside to buy a Bob Dylan album (5)
98 "To change the mood a little I've been posing down the _____", from Squeeze's 'Cool For Cats' (3)
99 (See 47 across)
103 One part of a dance move to a Vampire Weekend number (4)
105 "It's been the _____ of many a poor boy", from The Animals' 'House Of The Rising Sun' (4)
107+51A Otis Redding album with soul bite, perhaps (4-4)
108 (See 95 down)
110 US hip-hop collective with an _____ Future (3)
112 "Call out the instigators, because there's something in the _____", Thunderclap Newman (3)

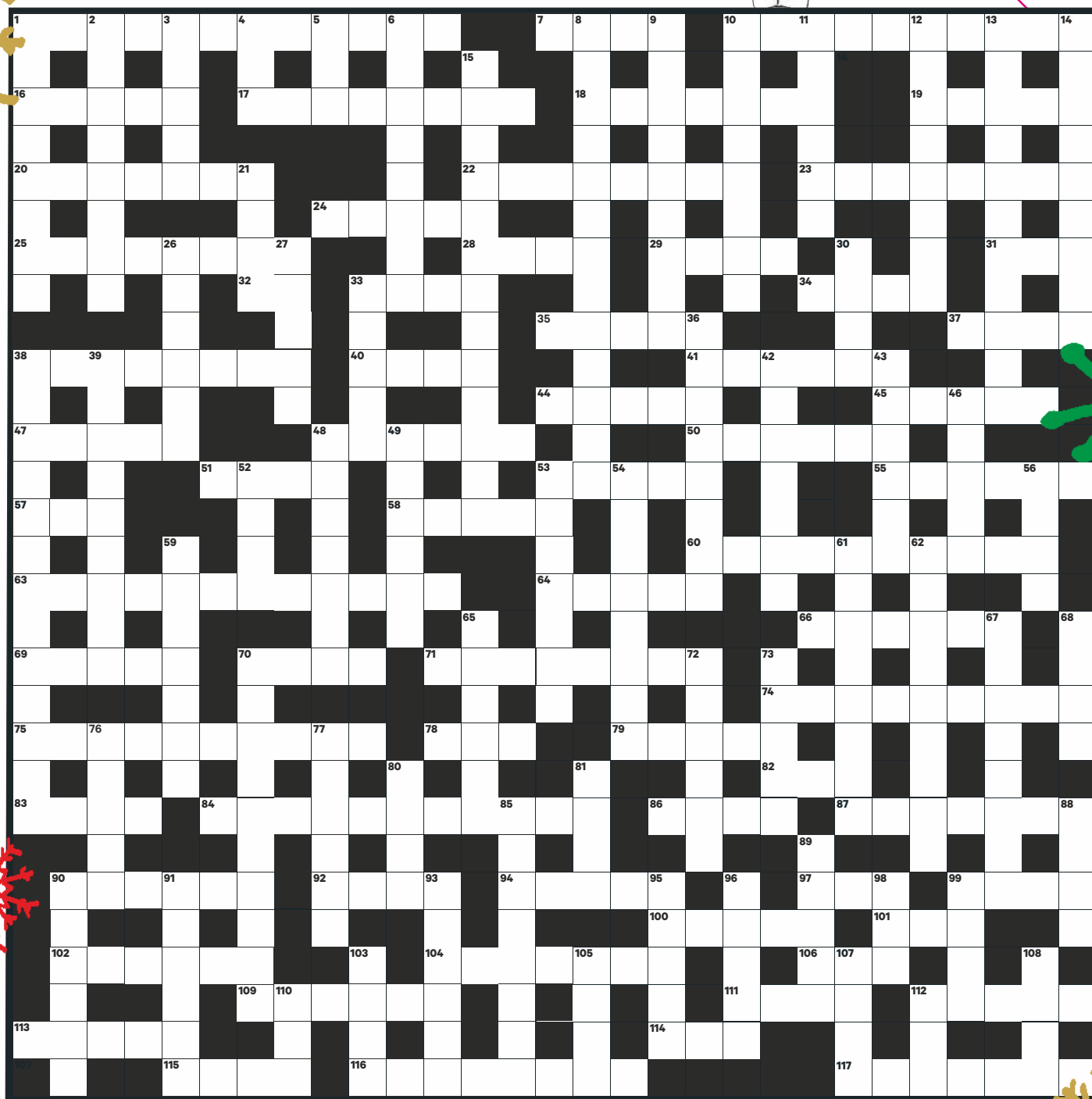
DECEMBER 6 ANSWERS

ACROSS 1 Charge, 4 Hold It In, 10 Now You Are Free, 11 Ulysses, 12+20D One Step Beyond, 13+14A I'm On Fire, 15 Them, 17 Sky, 18 Idiot, 20 Bloom, 22 Tie, 23 Stiff, 24 Style, 26 Arcadia, 28+30A+31A For Once In My Life **DOWN** 1 Centuries, 2 Always, 3 Good Song, 5 One More Time, 6 Dark Entries, 7+21D Theatre Of Hate, 8 No Hope, 9 Caustic Love, 16 My Desire, 19 Third, 22 Tiff, 25 Fray, 27 All, 29 El

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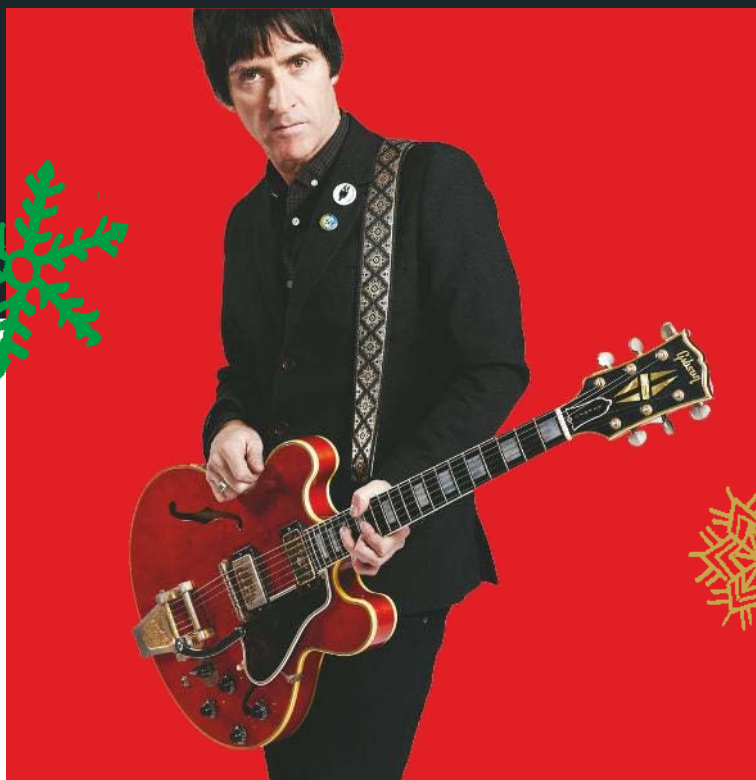
87

NME QUIZ OF THE YEAR ANSWERS

INDIE HITS 1. Always 2. Honeyblood 3. Jamie T in 'Zombie' 4. Superflood 5. 'Keep In The Dark' **IN THE NEWS** 6. Sirs Tom Jones and Cliff Richard 7. Interpol 8. 26. Metronomy 10. Mac DeMarco 11. 35 12. Alex James 13. Lily Allen 14. Ed Sheeran 15. Will Ferrell **ELECTRONIC** 16. La Roux 17. Metronomy 18. Todd Terje 19. Aphex Twin 20. Death From Above 1979, 'The Physical World' **WHO'S SLAGGING WHO?** 21. Damon Albarn 22. Miley Cyrus 23. Spotify 24. Noel Gallagher 25. Alex Turner **SLEEVENOTES** 26. Alt-J, 'This Is All Yours' 27. Warpaint, 'Warpaint' 28. Caribou, 'Our Love' 29. Childhood, 'Lacuna' 30. Bombay Bicycle Club, 'So Long, See You Tomorrow' **WHO SAID WHAT?** 31. Kanye West 32. Jarvis Cocker 33. Mike Kerr, Royal Blood 34. Tom DeLonge, Blink-182 35. Ellie Rowse, Wolf Alice 36. Alex Turner's Brits speech 37. Kate Tempest 38. Sleaford Mods 39. Tom Meighan, Kasabian 40. Noel Gallagher

THINGS WE'D LIKE FOR CHRISTMAS

THE FESTIVE SEASON'S OBJECTS OF DESIRE



GUITAR Gibson ES-335

Johnny Marr, Bernard Butler and Noel Gallagher all use the Gibson ES-335 when writing their indie anthems and entertaining crowds of thousands, so what better guitar to start penning your own future hits on? If this hollow-body beauty is a bit out of your budget, though, the Epiphone 335 offers a similar look and features for a fraction of the price.

► BUY £1,799, guitarguitar.co.uk

AMP Marshall 1973X

Part of Marshall's hand-wired series, the 1973X combo amp offers clean-cut vintage style and that famously rich guitar tone. The 18-watt amp is a reissue of the company's 1973 dual-channel product, which was only produced between 1966 and 1968. Perfect for use at home, in the studio and on the stage.

► BUY £1,729, andertons.co.uk



CIDER Brothers Toffee Apple Cider

There might be a while to wait before you can visit Brothers' glorious cider bus at Glastonbury, but that doesn't mean you can't still enjoy their fantastic flavoured drinks. Embrace winter Somerset-style with a bottle or two of festive Toffee Apple cider.

► BUY £20 for a case of 12, brotherscider.co.uk



CAMERA GoPro Hero

GoPro cameras are waterproof, freezeproof, shockproof and dustproof, which means you can capture those unforgettable moments whether you find yourself on a camel in a desert, up a mountain or even underwater. The GoPro Hero is a new entry-level addition to the game-changing HD camera range.

► BUY £99.99, gopro.com



HEADPHONES Polk Buckle



Technology meets cool design with Polk's new headphone range. The Buckle model comes complete with a brushed cotton and leather travel bag, is available in black and silver or brown, and includes a built-in three-button switch and microphone so you can move between audio and phone calls with ease.

► BUY \$199.95, polkaudio.com

RADIO Goodmans Heritage Radio

Combine your *Mad Men* fantasies with fab DAB sound with this retro digital and FM radio. Store up to 10 stations on its presets and get the sound you want with multiple EQ settings. You can also stream from your tablet or smartphone with the Bluetooth function.

► BUY £129, goodmans.co.uk



STREAM Deezer

Discover the slick streaming service, which boasts a library of 35 million tracks. Create your own playlists of your favourite tracks and sync them for offline listening, or use the Flow function to discover new tunes based on your previous listening habits.

► VISIT deezer.co.uk



JUMPER Numskull Christmas Jumper

Christmas jumpers needn't look like something your gran knitted. These festive pieces of knitwear from Numskull mix traditional seasonal patterns with PlayStation symbols, *Sonic The Hedgehog* and *Street Fighter* imagery.

► BUY £34.99, yellowbulldog.co.uk



SHOES Dr Martens Lorne

These women's Monk shoes come in a sleek and shiny cherry-red leather, with a buckle to make them stand out from other flats. There's also the trademark air-cushioned sole – Goodyear welted to the upper – that adorns every pair of Dr Martens, adding comfort to style.

► BUY £90, drmartens.com



JACKET Boxfresh

This Boxfresh Bietal jacket will keep you completely dry and looking stylish however bad the weather gets this winter. It's 100% waterproof and includes taped seams and a drawstring hood to keep you from turning up to Christmas parties looking like a drowned rat.

► BUY £130, boxfresh.com

LAPTOP Microsoft HP Stream 11

Get everything you need in one place with the new low-cost laptop from Microsoft, including a free one-year subscription to Office 365 plus access to unlimited radio playlist listens, with the chance to win gig tickets and money-can't-buy experiences.

► BUY £179.99, hp.com



nme

december 20 2014

what else is inside this
fun and festive issue:

feed your wife for £1
this christmas -
wife recipe guide
on page 329

and

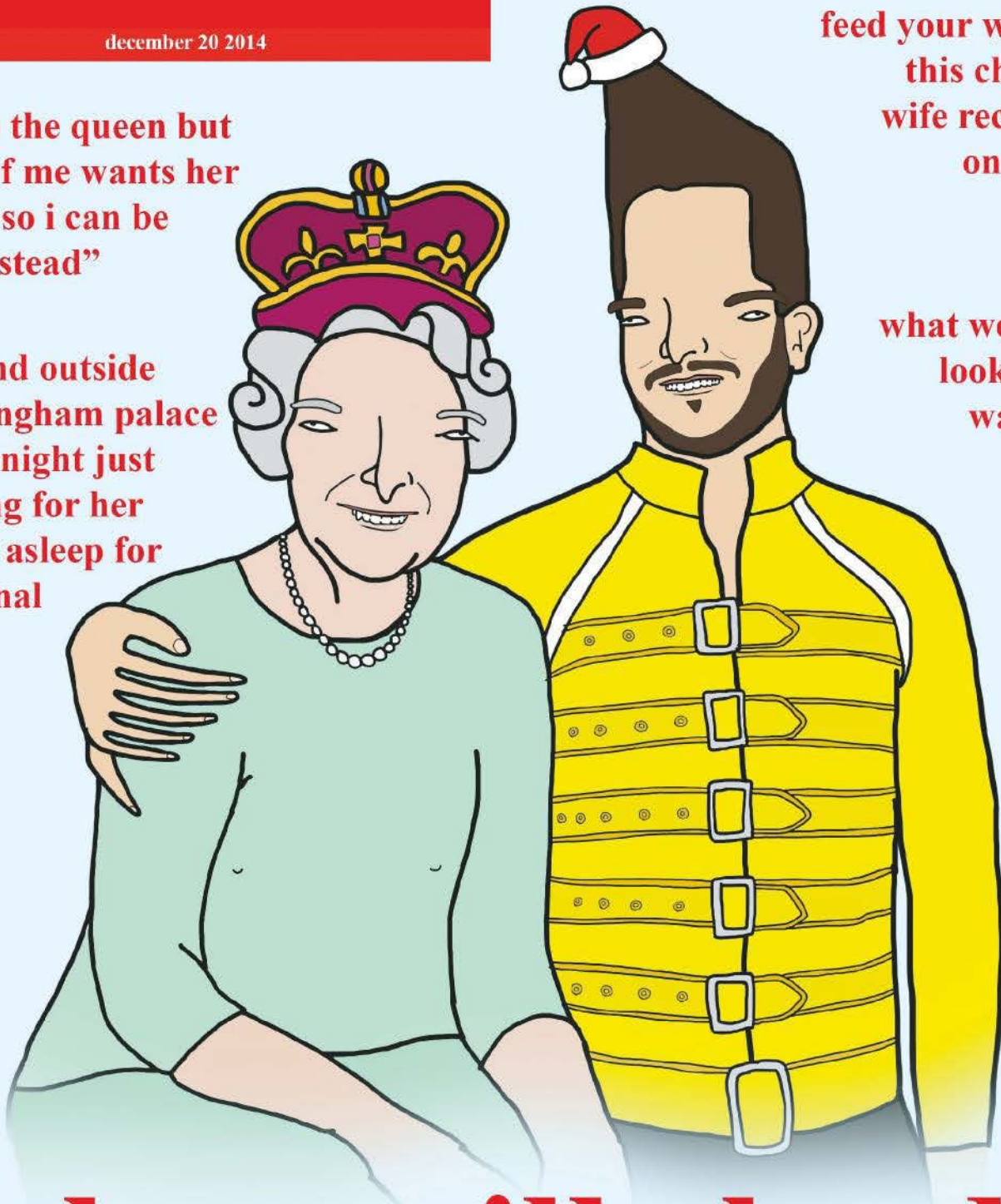
what would jesus
look like if he
was chinese

and

jamie
oliver
cooks
himself
inside
a 5 bird
roast by
mistake

"i like the queen but
part of me wants her
to die so i can be
her instead"

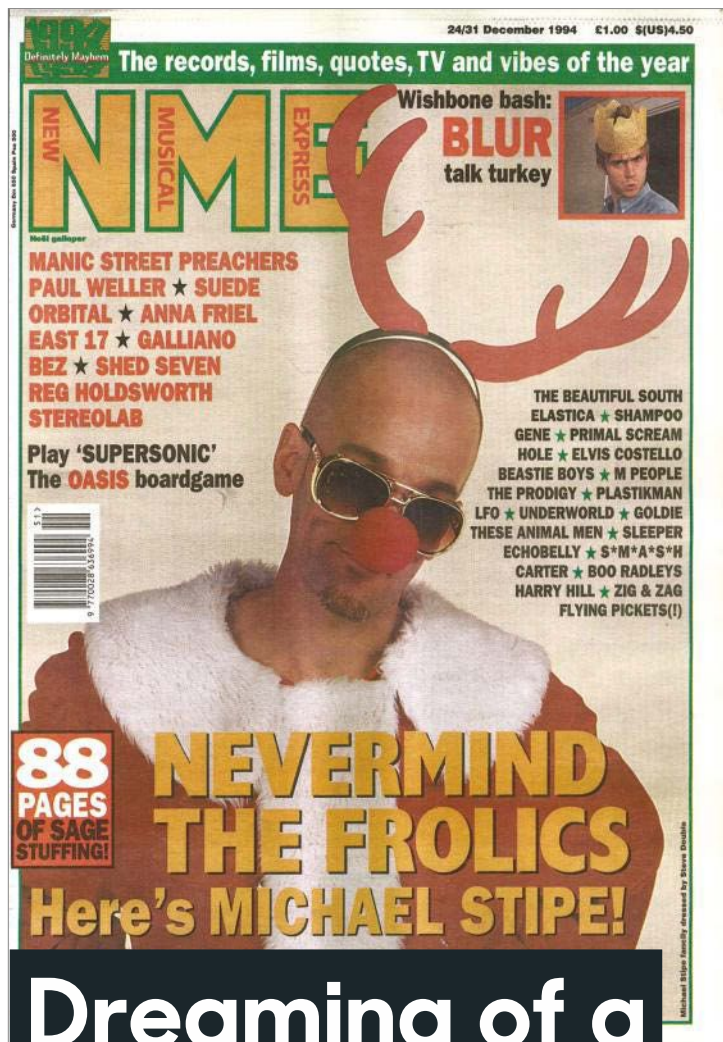
"i stand outside
buckingham palace
every night just
waiting for her
to fall asleep for
one final
time"



when will she die

adam lambert cant wait for the queen to die so he can
take over doing her traditional christmas day speech

THIS WEEK IN 1994



Dreaming of a Stipe Christmas

The REM frontman got festive for NME and recalled his days of "brown MDMA with heroin". We'll stick to sage and onion

Donning foam rubber antlers and a big red nose at his own insistence, REM's Michael Stipe hurls himself into the Christmas spirit by recalling his most memorable Yuletides – almost dying from scarlet fever and receiving a gift of a pair of hip-huggers from his dog – and claiming he'd gift Morrissey "a stocking cap". He then succumbs to the Great Christmas NME Lotto Interview, opening cracker-style envelopes with questions hidden inside. Has he ever used a dating service? "I never have and I don't

think I need to... I believe in the theory that anyone can get laid, it's just a matter of lowering your standards enough." Has he ever taken ecstasy? "X? E? I used to take MDMA... Brown MDMA with heroin, strong stuff." What does he tell people who don't know who he is when they ask him 'what do you do?' "I tell them I'm an air traffic controller."

SPROUTLIFE

To celebrate their breakthrough year with 'Parklife', Blur gather at London's Groucho Club for a meal bedecked with presents from NME. Damon tears open a copy of The Stone Roses' 'Second Coming' as Graham exclaims, "It's a Led Zeppelin album!" Dave gets a book about *Pulp Fiction*, which prompts the band to recall gatecrashing the premiere. "The great thing about selling a lot of records," says Alex, "is you don't have to constantly justify yourself. You can talk light-hearted shite." He then admits that he once bought his girlfriend a broom for Christmas.

ORBIT-LA

After dropping Belinda Carlisle samples into their transcendental set from atop a "tower of power" at LA's Shrine Auditorium, Orbital celebrate the end of their US tour by hanging out with Perry Farrell and ex-porn star Traci Lords and telling NME's John Mulvey about the strains of the success that followed their Number Four album 'Snivilisation'. "All of a sudden you've become a pawn in corporate power games between press officers in different countries," says Paul Hartnoll. "It's like, 'God, I hate flying and you want me to fly to Germany for three hours?'"

ALBUM OF THE YEAR



Oasis
'Definitely Maybe'
Oasis' debut tops our

poll. It's "the celebratory soundtrack to a year wracked with doubt and confusion".

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

- In the wake of Kurt Cobain's death, Dave Grohl and Krist Novoselic are auditioning drummers for a new band, with Grohl set to be frontman.
- Ash have had to turn down the chance to support Pearl Jam as they can't get the time off from their A-levels.
- James Brown is facing a 30-day prison sentence over charges of beating his wife.

NME

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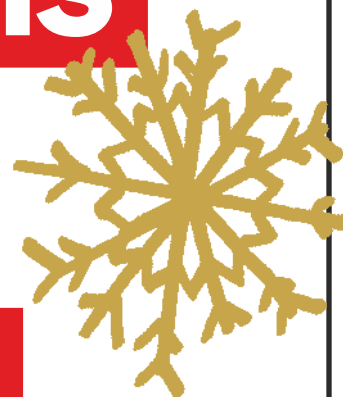
COMING IN
TWO WEEKS

NME's 50

Best Albums



Of The



Decade...

So Far



**COUNTING DOWN THE FINEST
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Who made the cut?



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