

Interview: Michael Bonnier
 Photograph: Michael Clement

Jonny Greenwood

The Radiohead guitarist and soundtrack composer takes questions on computer games, unusual instruments and raising chickens: "Lots of burials to do..."

WE'VE RECEIVED a record haul of questions for Jonny Greenwood. Hundreds, in fact, asking the Radiohead guitarist and soundtrack composer about everything from the welfare of his chickens to rather intense inquiries about the effects pedals he used on early Radiohead B-sides. Ostensibly here to discuss his latest soundtrack, for Paul Thomas Anderson's new film, *The Master*, Greenwood is also happy to reminisce about his teenage years as a viola player in the Thames Vale Youth Orchestra, tell us about his favourite current computer games and update us on the status of specific unreleased Radiohead tracks. "We have a long history of writing songs and having them hang around unrecorded for years," he explains. Now, on with your questions...



STAR QUESTION



How did you get into writing soundtracks, and how does it differ from writing pop songs? As you can guess, I'm jealous of your new calling...

Matt Bellamy, Muse
 It's just a different way of collaborating with people – like being in a band with a director, and a bunch of images and stories – instead of drummers and bass players. It's fun! Don't be jealous. Plus, you and I would only ever get to see the most pampered side of the job. Composers who do it properly all the time aren't treated too well – on many films they're ranked way below, say, make-up, in order of importance, and not given much freedom to try things out. I was just offered a film because they had to 'let go' of their current composer and I think that happens a lot – in fact, I probably came close during the scoring for *The Master*. I kept adding jazz flute. Paul kept sending me pictures of Ron Burgundy.

How did you begin your collaboration with Paul Thomas Anderson? What attracted you to his films?

Shane Rubano, Ithaca, NY
 He found some bootleg recordings of some of my orchestral stuff, and tried it on a few early scenes for *There Will Be Blood* – then he asked for more. He's enthusiastic about music – he came to the strings recording day in Abbey Road and we were both buzzing about being that close to an orchestra.

What was the first guitar you bought – and which was the first song you learned?

Nicolás Gauna, Buenos Aires, Argentina
 I bought a Fender acoustic for £40 from a 'for sale' column in the *Oxford Journal* when I was about 14, then an electric one from my teacher when I was 16. I still have the acoustic, but the electric one was stolen in Leeds on the first Radiohead tour (at the Duchess Of York, I think... it was a cream Telecaster if anyone's seen it). I don't remember working out many songs by other bands – maybe

"Psycho Killer" by Talking Heads. There was a tiny guitar room at school where teenagers hung out playing each other U2 songs – but I never had any U2 records.

Any idea why the soundtrack for *We Need To Talk About Kevin* was never released? And will it eventually see the light of day?

Laura Taylor, Penge
 It wasn't long enough. There were a few pretty steel-strung harp things, but the rest of it was mostly laptop-generated stuff broadcast to, and recorded from an old LW radio... It's good in the film, but not exactly *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* on its own.

STAR QUESTION



Do you write "rock" songs as well as modern classical meltdowns like *There Will Be Blood*?

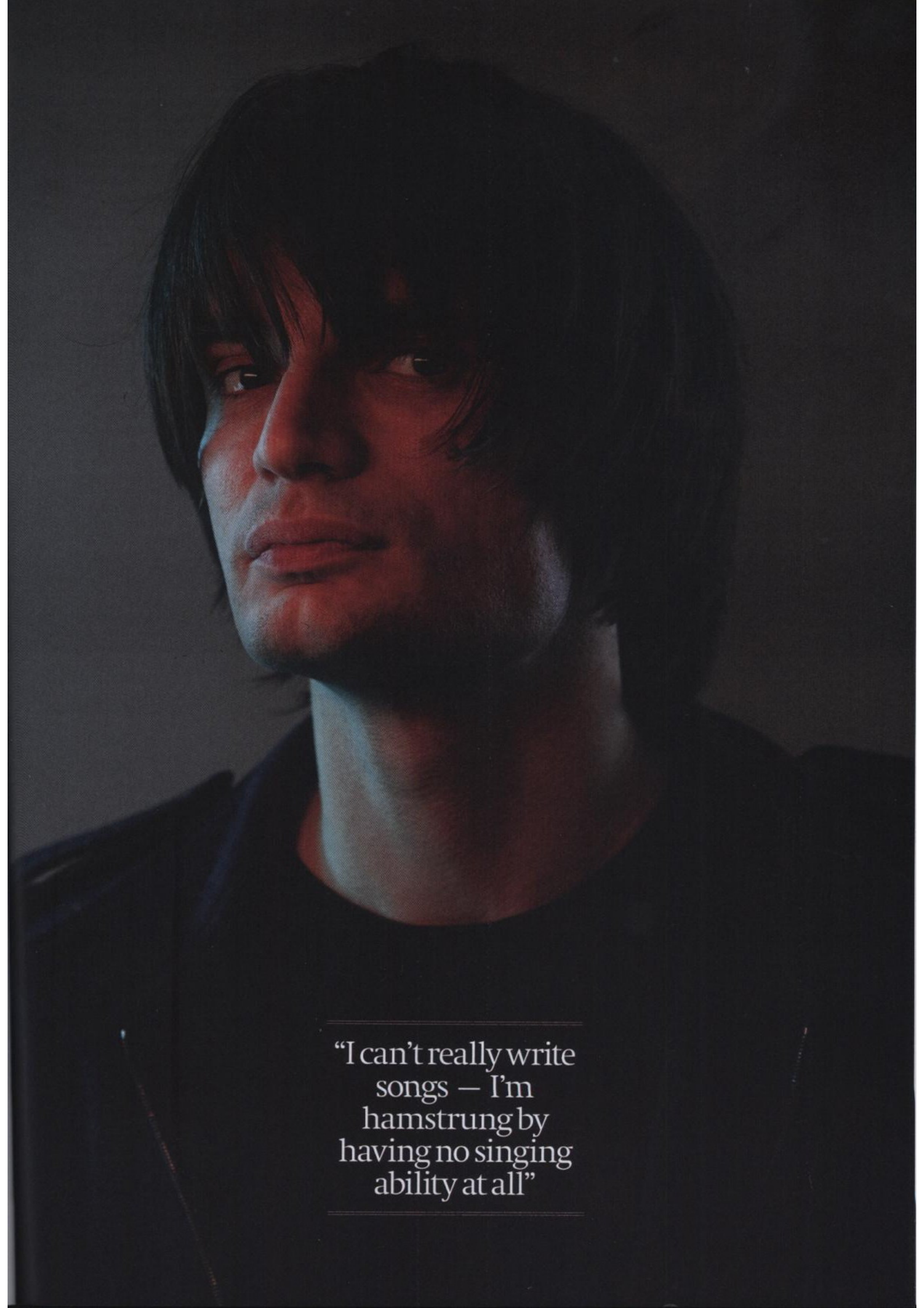
Stephen Malkmus

I'm hamstrung by having no singing ability at all – so aside from a few guitar chord sequences I can't really write songs. As for classical stuff, I find it pretty pleasurable at the moment working on paper – it's a bit like film photography, because there's this long delay between having the idea, and seeing if it comes out right. Weeks of work and it all comes down to one afternoon's performance, which is the first time you get to know what it sounds like.

How are the chickens doing?

Matthew Windham, Missoula, Montana
 They're OK – thanks for asking. Pretty good layers. Eggs taste great. Would you like a half-dozen? We get foxes every few years, and it all goes a bit crime-scene when that happens – lots of burials to do. The foxes tend to take just one or two, and just kill the rest.

The four new songs debuted on the current Radiohead tour are excellent. But can you



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The day job: Radiohead around the time of 2003's *Hail To The Thief*; and below, Daniel Day-Lewis in *There Will Be Blood* (soundtracked by Greenwood)

→ tell us what plans there are for unreleased fan favourites like "The Present Tense", "Burn The Witch", "Open The Floodgates" and "Big Boots", please?

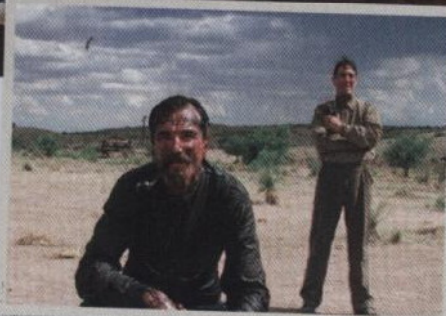
Nicolas Ormbrek, via email
We have a long history of writing songs and having them hang around unrecorded for years. "Nude" was a pretty old song – so was "The Daily Mail". Sometimes it just sounds right during rehearsals for a recording, and so we record it. Other times it sounds all wrong. I hope we'll get round to some of those – especially "Burn The Witch" and "Present Tense", which could be great, if we get the arrangements sorted out.

What are your favourite computer games right now?

Kaspar Oja, Estonia
I'm among friends here, right? Well... we're touring, so I'm limited to Mac laptop games. It isn't the best platform for gaming, as I'm sure you know. Or would know, if you were a nerdy gamer. I finished *Portal 2* on the first American tour – which was perfect, because all those sports arenas are exactly like *Portal* test chambers: dark corridors, gigantic windowless concrete boxes: it was a confusing time going from *Portal* and back to reality. Good game, though! I'd gone off FPS games, but was missing the exploration side of those games – so the two *Portals* were just right for me. What else? *Limbo*'s a good game. *Ski Safari* is very well written. So is *Plants Vs Zombies*. And I've just started to go through *Braid* for the second time... love the time-shifting idea, really makes my head ache.

Other than the ondes Martenot, what unusual instruments are you fond of?

Amy Brown, via email



and the ondes Martenot more old-fashioned...?

Paul Miano, Portsmouth, VA

I know, I know – this is the contradiction going round in my head the whole time. So basically, you reject all of them as out-dated... or treat all of them as equals.

I'm mindful that some bands retreat into collecting musical gear as a way of avoiding any actual songwriting/composing – endless discussions about weird old keyboards. It becomes about the sound of things rather than what is done with them: so I've just got to stop looking for new things to play, and instead learn to play the ondes Martenot properly. It deserves far more of my time than I give it.

What's your opinion on the decision to decline you a well-deserved Academy Award nomination for *There Will Be Blood* just because you included some older compositions in it?

Allen Gallagher, Paisley

I'll take the latter. I guess I was just pointing out how traditional it's become to form a guitar band – they're not quite dixieland jazz bands, but it's getting that way. Look at covers of the *Melody Maker* from the '20s, the '60s and then *NME* today – it goes: banjos, guitar bands... guitar bands. Maybe there's no other way of making exciting live music with a small group, and certainly the bones of it – playing a guitar in a room with a drummer – is utterly satisfying. But then, I'm happy to accept that a fucking ondes Martenot isn't much of a step forward. So... still working on that one. Caribou are rather amazing – and are very much a

"I'm happy to accept that a fucking ondes Martenot isn't much of a step forward..."

The bigger kick was just getting the job, and then that very happy day recording the strings in London – nothing was going to top that. Anyway, I have a Kermod Award, which I'm very proud of, even if it does look like a seven-year-old made it with Plasticine and gold spray.

You recently said in an interview you thought the guitar was "old fashioned". Can you clarify? Technically, aren't orchestras

band – so good new things can still be done with people hitting things.

STAR QUESTION



Does humour belong in music?
Adam Buxton

It's funny to get this question after one from Malkmus. His lyrics prove it does, and are some of the only ones I can quote off by heart: "...tell me off in

the hotel lobby, right in front of all the bell-boys, and the over-friendly concierge" – how it's sung, how it's phrased, the melody... perfect.

What do you remember of your teenage years as a viola player in the Thames Vale Youth Orchestra – and when was the last time you played one?

Nick Claiden, Whitby, N Yorks

It was the first time I heard a full orchestra play, so it was a special time for me. We used to practise at Larkmead School in Abingdon. I remember being impressed hearing this room full of strings all playing in tune (unlike school orchestras...). Mind you, I soon put a stop to that from the back of the violas. I only just managed to get in – it helped that I was playing the unloved viola. The director had us play lots of Sibelius, and I still listen to his music, the violin concerto being a pretty good way into classical stuff when you're a kid. I stopped playing in orchestras when we signed to EMI and started touring.

How many effects pedals have you got, and what's your favourite?

Antoine Charie, Lyons

Seven or eight? I like the ones that do a simple thing well, like shift pitch, or freeze audio. I'm not that interested in the fiddly stuff... different types of distortion pedals – all that. During the *Hail To The Thief* sessions I went through a period of only using clean, un-effected guitar sounds – it was a bit self-defeating and hair-shirted, but I wanted to try and avoid relying too heavily on pedals, and see if I could come up with interesting things without them.

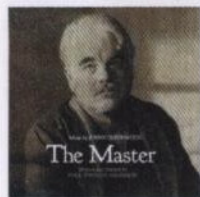
What is it about Penderecki that's influenced you more than, say, Stockhausen and Cage?

Jared Nagle, San Francisco

Well... the interesting thing about Penderecki is that he learnt all about electronic music in the '60s – and then took that knowledge into orchestration, using it to get much stranger sounds and textures than anyone else could get with synths. An orchestra playing his abstract stuff is a weirder thing to sit in front of than most things you'll hear out of a couple of speakers. Try and see a concert if you can. The first symphony is a good start. 🎧

The soundtrack to *The Master* is released on Nonesuch on November 5; the film opens on November 9

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Log on to see who's in the hot-seat next month and to post your questions!



JONNY GREENWOOD
The Master OST
NONESUCH

Radiohead guitarist's second Paul Thomas Anderson score
Greenwood's previous soundtracks have

experimented with high modernism (*From Here On Out*), free jazz (*Body Song*) and Japanese folk (*Norwegian Wood*). His second collaboration with director Paul Thomas Anderson is almost entirely orchestral, dominated by Debussy-esque romanticism (like "Alethia"), with touches of Charles Ives-style dissonance (check the rather lovely "Back Beyond"). Anderson's thinly veiled portrait of Scientology is set in the 1950s, and the period pieces – string-laden ballads by Ella Fitzgerald, Helen Forrest and Jo Stafford – provide some light relief, as does the Art Ensemble Of Chicago-style junkyard jazz of Greenwood's "Able-Bodied Seaman".

JOHN LEWIS

6/10



NEIL HALSTEAD
Palindrome Hunches
SONIC CATHEDRAL

Third solo album from former Slowdive/Mojave 3 man

As underrated as he is understated, Halstead

has long moved on from his shoegazing days, swapping soundscapes for exquisite songcraft – but there's a common dreaminess to both. Musically the pastoral mood of songs such as "Digging Shelters" and "Tied To You" evokes Donovan's *Fairytale*, the warm voice and gentle guitar providing the song's spine, textured with splashes of double bass, violin and piano. Like Boo Hewerdine, there's a lovely, unobtrusive intimacy about his songwriting, so graceful it drifts by like a sailboat on the horizon. When your attention drifts you barely notice it's there. But when you do, it evokes a warm and evocative pleasure.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

7/10



DARREN HAYMAN AND THE LONG PARLIAMENT
The Violence
FORTUNA POP!

Songs about witches, by London indie troubador

In the days when he fronted indie-popsters Hefner, Darren Hayman worked from a fairly small lyrical palette: girls he'd slept with, and girls he wanted to sleep with, was about the size of it. Women are the subject of *The Violence*, although credit to Hayman for expanding his brief, as these 20 songs chronicle the Essex Witch Trials of 1645. His is a personal, emotive take, and it proves very effective: "Elizabeth Clarke", the tale of a hanging put to sorrowful strums and melancholy brass, plucks deftly at the heartstrings, while a couple of interpretations of old Royalist songs prove that he's done his homework.

LOUIS PATTISON

8/10



MICK HUCKNALL
American Soul
ATCO

Simply Red man covers the classics
On his first solo outing Mick Hucknall has made precisely the album we

might have expected, recording a dozen US soul covers. His interpretation of the title, however, proves pleasingly inclusive, tending towards the downbeat and finding room for Antony And The Johnsons' "Hope There's Someone" and Perry Como standard "It's Impossible" alongside such staples as "That's How Strong My Love Is" (tepid), "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood" (tender) and a decent swing at Etta James' "I'd Rather Go Blind". Clearly heartfelt, *American Soul* is more rewarding than Phil Collins' recent album of Motown covers, but is ultimately defined by a similar sense of futility.

GRAEME THOMSON

5/10

WE'RE NEW HERE

My Jerusalem



➤ "A post-modern gothic soul revue," is how singer Jeff Klein describes *My Jerusalem*, the band he assembled two years ago with members of The Polyphonic Spree, Great Northern and The Twilight Singers. Klein's career began in 1999 as a solo artist, releasing three albums under his own name, after which he got sidetracked performing in other people's bands. But after four years playing keyboards with The Gutter Twins, he began to feel restless. "I started having lots of song ideas and there was a hunger to record them," Klein recalls. "There was a kind of awakening in me and everything clicked into place."

Compared to the simmering disquiet of its 2010 predecessor *Gone For Good*, the band's second album *Preachers*, recorded in three weeks in Spoon drummer Jim Eno's studio, comes over as an anguished howl in the dark. "We didn't consciously try to write a dark record," Klein reflects, "but there were a lot of demons that needed to be excised." While he won't divulge the nature of these demons, he will say: "the experience was definitely cathartic, as all musical experiences should be, but we were careful not to let it become a selfish record. You want to allow other people to get lost in it with you." FIONA STURGES



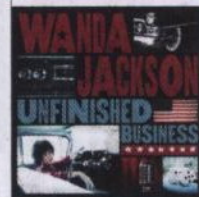
CATHERINE IRWIN
Little Heater
THRILL JOCKEY

Louisville songstress warms up beautifully
Given her standing as the dominant creative half of

Freakwater, the punkish-roots band she shares with Eleventh Dream Day drummer Janet Bean, Irwin's solo career is less than prolific. But while *Little Heater* may be her first in a decade, it's evidently been worth the wait. These stark, largely unadorned folk-country songs are given added edge by Irwin's faintly metallic voice, with delicate shadings from the likes of producer and multi-instrumental wizz Tara Jane O'Neil and pedal steeler Marc Orleans. Though the star guest is fellow Louisville local Bonnie 'Prince' Billy, who adds to the delicious air of rural disquiet on duets "Mockingbird" and "To Break Your Heart".

ROB HUGHES

8/10



WANDA JACKSON
Unfinished Business
SUGAR HILL

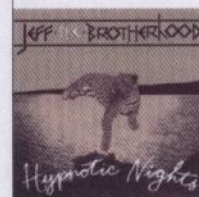
Mighty 35th album from the First Lady of Rockabilly

First-time producer Justin

Townes Earle has succeeded Jack White as guardian of the Wanda Jackson sound, guiding her through a fascinating mix of covers and originals. Both he and Jackson make a fine fist of it too, drafting in his own band as back-up and serving to magnify her wildcat vocals rather than attempt any form of radical reinvention. She's at her venomous best on "I'm Tore Down", an R'n'B chicken-shaker with real pizzazz, while there's a terrific gospel cover of the Woody Guthrie-Jeff Tweedy tune "California Stars" and "Am I Even A Memory", a great shuffle-country duet with Earle himself.

ROB HUGHES

8/10



JEFF THE BROTHERHOOD
Hypnotic Nights
WARNER BROS

Dan Auerbach produces the Nashville duo's major-label debut with mixed results

Jeff The Brotherhood, a guitar-and-drum duo, have been knocking about for a decade, recording for Jack White's Third Man among others, and here enlist The Black Keys' Dan Auerbach to co-produce their major-label debut. Brothers Jake and Jamin Orrall plough a familiar semi-feral blues-punk furrow for the most part, with varying degrees of success, but are best when they depart from the template. "Hypnotic Mind" has an ace unhinged solo, "Reign Of Fire" is pastoral folk-metal, "Hypnotic Winter" ends with a pleasing outburst of organ and the Sabbath cover "Changes" is a rather beautiful piece of unexpected electro-soul.

PETER WATTS

6/10