

The White Buffalo DARKEST DARKS, LIGHTEST LIGHTS

"Things have got to change," sings Jake Smith on *Avalon*, the second track of The White Buffalo's new album, *Darkest Darks, Lightest Lights* - and that's clearly been a subject on his mind when crafting his sixth opus. The general vibe of *Avalon* is a compelling case in point, shedding the limitations of his brooding acoustic singer-songwriter past to mine the Springsteen fault with aplomb - crafting a driving track that in fine Boss tradition, vividly tells the story a character from the wrong side of the tracks. It's a vibe that suits Smith's gravelly baritone to a tee, but also gives him a chance to showcase his electric playing more than ever. The scuzzy slapback-drenched blues of *Robbery* is another example of this, while the Lizzy-esque *The Heart And Soul Of The Night* reveals an unexpected injection of good-time 70s rock 'n' roll. *The Observatory* shows that his prowess as an acoustic player is undimmed, but these returns to balladry mainly serve to remind us that he's better served focussing on this new, more bombastic direction. **GJ**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Bruce Springsteen, Chuck Ragan*

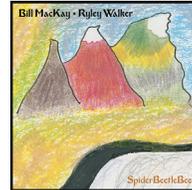


Bill MacKay & Ryley Walker SPIDERBEEBEE

This is the second collection of instrumental acoustic music to spring from the friendship of like-minded Chigagoan guitar players Ryley Walker and Bill MacKay, and over these eight tracks, the pair once again give themselves free rein to explore a wide diet of folk and traditional styles - sometimes faithfully, sometimes a great deal less so. There's something joyful about a pair of young, experimental artists delving into myriad styles - from folk and blues to raga, Latin and baroque - with such abandon, but with a keen eye for considered melody and song structure at the heart of everything. The standout is *I Heard Them Singing*, where Walker's rolling fingerpicked chords give a psychedelic sheen to the fiery lead lines of MacKay's five-string requinto. Fans of Walker's breakout 2015 solo record, *Primrose Green*, will be well versed in his talents as an acoustic player, and MacKay is an ideal foil, the pair's intricately intertwining acoustics driving each track on a journey through many styles and moods. **GJ**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Ryley Walker, Bert Jansch*



My Sad Captains SUN BRIDGE

My Sad Captains want to inject your drizzly autumn days with a shot of dreamy, breezy guitar-pop, and *Sun Bridge* is the instrument they've crafted to administer it. Since their last album, 2014's *Best Of Times*, the line-up has been in flux, with drummer Jim Wallis and guitarist Nick Goss departing before the album's sessions, and bassist Dan Davis moving on shortly after completion. But with well-travelled guitarist Leon Dufficy joining singer/guitarist Ed Wallis for album four, there's a fresh injection of ideas that allows the band to push on regardless. *Everything At The End Of Everything's* simple, Fendery clean melody line adds a languid vibe that counterpoints the driving drums and shimmering synths, while *Don't Pull Yourself Apart* is a REM-vibed slice of catchy guitar-pop that shimmers with delicate, ethereal guitar interplay. An album that invites you to turn off the lights, get comfortable and immerse yourself in its dreamy, delicate soundscapes. **JG**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Camera Obscura, The Field Mice*



Godsticks FACED WITH RAGE

Godsticks have come a long way since their 2010 debut, evolving from their original prog leanings into a much heavier beast. *Faced With Rage* is underpinned by tightly knit thunderous rhythms, blended expertly with the virtuoso lead work and distinctive vocal style of frontman, Darran Charles. During its 56-minute runtime, the Welsh four-piece cram in a multitude of stylistic flourishes. There are lashings of Mastodon, Cleft and Gojira, to name a few, but the album really shines when proceedings relax a little, particularly on standout track, *We Are Leaving*. If we're nit-picking, we'd have liked to see Charles stretch himself vocally a little more - he's got the range of a Vedder-Cornell hybrid and it would have been great to see him cut loose and show us what his pipes are capable of. It's no deal-breaker, however, and with the instrumentation never less than faultless, this feels like a record on which Godsticks have properly nailed their colours to the mast. **CM**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Mastodon, The Safety Fire*



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