



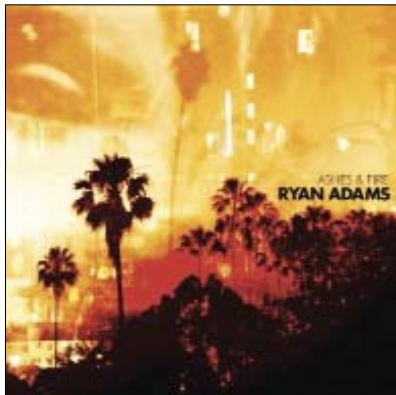
JUSTICE
AUDIO, VIDEO, DISCO
(NEW ELEKTRA)

It's been four years since Parisian duo **Xavier de Rosnay** and **Gaspard Augé** released the debut **Justice** album, **Cross**. After the extended hiatus, the two have returned with an album that nearly abandons the ideas of the first album. "Civilization," the first single and the second track from **Audio Video Disco** is as much rock as it is dance, with just a touch of Prince in the sound. Following other dance crazed bands like MGMT, **Justice** thinks a bit bigger than a guy with a laptop making waves at a club. Their brand of music is filled with riffs straight off of a prog record, grooves akin to Chakka Khan's, and influences ranging from new wave to gospel with plenty of classic rock to give the tunes more punch. Lending a refreshing vocal change to the album, Morgan Phalen of Diamond Nights has a guest spot on the album's ninth track, "New Lands." If you're not into dancing, perhaps **Audio Video Disco** is even better suited for fast driving and speed popping. Or better yet, sitting in the safety and comfort of one's own living room, cranking up the stereo and enjoying the fast ride **Justice** gives the imagination.



FLORENCE + THE MACHINE
CEREMONIALS
(UNIVERSAL REPUBLIC)

Florence + The Machine's front woman **Florence Welch** has a knack for the spooky, both in her vocals and in her lyrics. Fans of the band will be pleased to know that **Ceremonials**, as the album title would certainly indicate, is abundant with **Welch's** macabre musings. The album contains such dynamic tracks as the wildly emotive ballad "Never Let Me Go," and "Shake It Out," which is already showing some early commercial appeal in the UK. Akin to the track "Hurricane Drunk" from **Florence + The Machine's** previous album **Lungs** is the fifth track from **Ceremonials**, "Leave My Body," which recklessly proclaims, "I don't want no future, I don't need no past." It seems fitting that bands like **Florence + The Machine** are grabbing more attention these days, as we all crave more cake in this time of Ramen noodles. **Welch's** voice is strong and dramatic, and the ensemble's arrangements are as lush and romantic as they are baroque. The first single from **Ceremonials**, "What The Water Gave Me," has already been marched out with a video, complete with flowing dress twirls. Be sure and take a listen to what's said to be the second, "No Light, No Light."



RYAN ADAMS
ASHES & FIRE
(CAPITOL)

Ryan Adams is quite possible the currently reigning King of Hard Knocks (rivaled only by Justin Townes Earle). **Ashes & Fire** captures a softer, sweeter side of **Adams**, with wistful observations and gently told love stories. It's almost as if the disquieted soul of the singer-songwriter has found some peace in this world. The album is decidedly more polished than **Adams'** many past releases, as a result of working with British producer Glyn Johns, best known for his work with The Rolling Stones and The Who. This clarity of production makes the sharp contrast of the vulnerability of this **Ashes & Fire** all the more compelling when it's compared against his earlier albums. (Incidentally, some of **Adams'** most popular early albums were produced by Glyn's son, Ethan Johns.) The smoky voiced Norah Jones makes a subtle appearance on the track "Kindness." "Do I Wait" delivers some of that classic heart **Adams** is so known for and "Come Home" shows a most extreme tenderness. As is indicated by the cover art of this release, this Jacksonville, NC born musician has gone a long way in his young life, thus far. Perhaps what this album showcases is the mellowing out of a once restless soul.



BRETT DENNEN
LOVERBOY
(DUALTONE)

Think Ray LaMontagne meets Whiskeytown meets much more interesting instrumentation. There is reggae, there is pop, there is soul - there is pretty much whatever the song seems to call for. **Brett Dennen** carries himself as a child of privilege, seemingly taking as much liberty with production, arranging, as his whims demand. "In many ways this is my first album," **Brett Dennen** is quoted as saying, though it is in actuality his fourth. But **Dennen** had to work hard to prove himself for those first three, which must contribute to the luxurious nature of this album's production. **Loverboy's** first single, "Sydney (I'll Come Running)," is pure, catchy pop, with narrative lyrics and a feel good beat. Its chorus is undeniably catchy, and if nothing else on the album grabs you, you may find yourself with this track on repeat for many listens. "Must Be Losing My Mind" is a more mid-tempo, finger snappy sort of track, and the up-tempo "Little Cosmic Girl" is rewardingly happy enough to be on a car commercial in the near future. If **Brett Dennen** is reinventing himself by taking all these liberties, the new-found lack of boundaries has certainly aided his creativity by comparison with earlier releases.



YO MA, STUART DUNCAN,
EDGAR MEYER & CHRIS THILE
THE GOAT RODEO SESSIONS
(SONY MASTERWORKS)

As bluegrass mandolin player and **The Goat Rodeo Sessions** musician **Chris Thile** explains: "The term 'goat rodeo' is used in aviation and other higher risk situations to describe a scenario that requires about 100 different things to right at once if you intend to walk away from it." This room full of virtuosos, which includes **Thile**, "Master of the Double Bass" **Edgar Meyer**, bluegrass fiddler and vocalist **Stuart Duncan**, and of course, distinguished classical cellist, **Yo-Yo Ma**, makes for an entirely new kind of sound, one that is both accessible and yet pushes the limits of classical, blue grass, and new acoustic all at once. The album's second track, "Quarter Chicken Dark," is the jaunty, playful tune featured on the two teaser videos that have been posted all over the Internet in promotion of the release. Several of the tracks possess this kind of playfulness, such as "Goat Rodeo" and "Hill Justice." Other tracks such as the two featuring singer Aolfe O'Donovan (Crooked Still,) "No One But You" and "Here and Heaven," are romantic, nuanced pieces. **The Goat Rodeo Sessions** as a whole is built on the tension created by four such sensitive musicians playing in a room together.



JANE'S ADDICTION THE GREAT ESCAPE ARTIST

(CAPITOL)

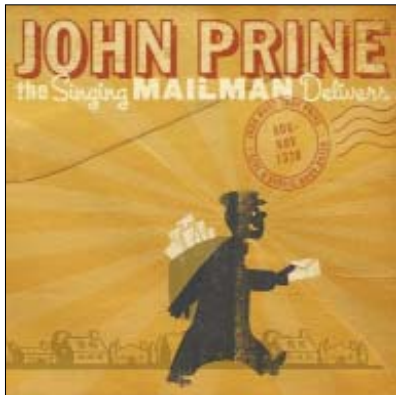
Have you ever found yourself wondering, "What would a band like *Jane's Addiction*, who shaped the music and culture of the early 90s, sound like today?" Well, wonder no more. It's been twenty years since the band hit mainstream and the first Lollapalooza took the concept of the outdoor music festival and blended it into a carnival freak side show. Some of the core components *Jane's Addiction*-isms are there, as exemplified by *Ferrell's* nasal delivery of acid soaked lyrics and *Dave Navarro's* side-winding, serpentine guitar on opening tracks "Underground" and "End to the Lies." But you won't hear a new "Three Days" on this album. *The Great Escape Artist*, after all, has emerged after two decades of freaks taking the mainstream. "Broken People" could just as easily appear on a U2 album, while "Irresistible Force" and "Twisted Tales" might be heard over the counter of a Starbucks Coffee. While *Jane's Addiction* may no longer seem as weird and radical as they once did, the album still essentially delivers the natural progression of the *Jane's Addiction* sound. The songwriting has become more front and center than the frenetic histrionics of *Ritual de lo Habitual* and *Nothing's Shocking*. After all, they're adults, now.



DIRTY PROJECTORS + BJÖRK MOUNT WITTENBERG ORCA

(DOMINO)

If there is a greater musical match in this world for *Björk* than *Dirty Projectors*, all the of the planets may swing out of line. The collaboration was born from a benefit concert in a bookstore in New York back in 2009, where both *Dirty Projectors* and *Björk* were first asked to play and then asked to collaborate as part of the performance. As some miracle of the universe would have it, a member of *Dirty Projectors* came across the sight of some white whales swimming in the ocean, and thus the songwriting began. Head *Projector* David Longstreth penned the whale songs, sent them to *Björk*, and the arranging and rehearsing followed quickly after. The album was recorded almost entirely live in a matter of just a few days. *Dirty Projectors* and *Björk* alike have a knack for strange antics, bizarre lyrical matter, and organic song craft. To some, that makes them an acquired taste. The songs on *Mount Wittenberg Orca* exemplify all of these characteristics, delivered from the perspective, in some cases, of the whales. Check out "All We Are," "No Embrace" and "Sharing Orb." If you pick this one up, the proceeds help create protected areas for whales.



JOHN PRINE THE SINGING MAILMAN DELIVERS

(OH BOY)

John Prine is to the American songwriter as Billy Collins is to the American poet. Long before he was recording his songs and performing before audiences, *Prine* was a mailman in a Chicago suburb. To pass the time and occupy his mind while he delivered mail, *Prine* wrote songs along his route. From that creative process was born a style of songwriting that is as concise as it is poignant, as light and joyful as it is sad and profound. In 1970, *Prine* held a residency at Fifth Peg in Chicago, performing three nights a week. During that time, he also made his first recording at WFMT Studios. *The Singing Mailman Delivers* is a two disc release containing both the original WFMT recording and collection of live recordings performed during *Prine's* residency at Fifth Peg. This rare, first look at the songwriter shows *Prine* as the consummate poet and song craftsman from his very earliest days. Between songs banter on the live tracks reveals *Prine's* cunning wit and folksy charm. Songs like "Your Flag Decal Won't Get You Into Heaven Anymore" and "Great Society Conflict Veteran's Blues" are as timeless as they are pertinent to the day they were written.



THE FAMILY FORCE 5 III

(TOOTH AND NAIL)

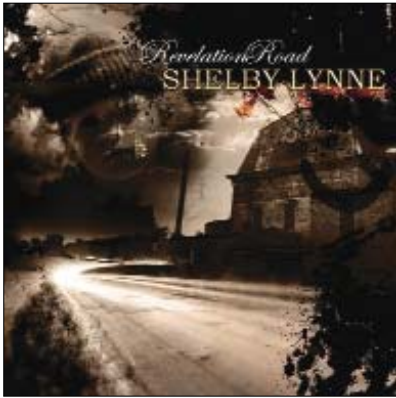
The Family Force 5 is back with their third album, in case the title didn't tip you off. This one is just as full of the bling as the cover would like to suggest. These guys work hard and take their roles as entertainers very literally. Their music is built on dynamic drama and locked-in grooves so that when their album gets put on at the party, either you have to dance or you have to leave the room. And partying is what *The Family Force 5* is all about. Their 2006 debut album, *Business Up Front, Party In The Back*, was released on a major label, and when that party didn't go their way, they made their own party, taking charge of their own destiny with constant touring and driving their own digital sales into six figure territory. As the band evolved, their sound began to move into more electronic territory, and the dance party just kept getting bigger. You can expect to hear "Tank Top," a track very much informed by the old Miami Bass sound of the 90s, in the late night dance clubs. "Paycheck" and "Mamacita" will likely also be big dance hits. Age recommendation: 21 and under.



MATRACA BERG THE DREAMING FIELDS

(DUALTONE)

It all starts with a low tremolo guitar, resonating and rumbling in a way that pulls at unspoken places. Deep in your core, you know without words, this is a song – indeed, an album – that's about loss, desolation, realizing what life is made of and the fact that even you know it just keeps coming. If *Matraca Berg* has made a name for herself, it's been for the gorgeous honesty she brings to longing, desire, survival and sometimes even fighting back. *Matraca Berg* has served as a cartographer for the hills and valleys of women's souls, doubts, loves and sorrows for her whole life. It is how she earned her first #1 at 18 and Grammy nomination at 22. That emotional transparency can be heard all over *The Dreaming Fields*: In the terror of fading beauty that is "Silver & Glass," the memories and loss that permeates "Racing The Angels," the lost way of life that grounds the title track, even the world weary traveler seeing the commonalities in "A Cold Rainy Morning in London in June." Uncompromising in its simplicity, unyielding in its knee-buckling willingness to face the moments completely, *The Dreaming Fields* is an atmospheric record for grown-ups, literary types, fans of songwriters who plumb the deepest part of humanity and hippies who like to sink into a record and drift.



SHELBY LYNNE
REVELATION ROAD
(EVERSO RECORDS)

Shelby Lynne has the kind of voice that was made as much for rock and roll as it was for country. The production on her albums registers as timeless and warm. **Lynne** has been in the music business for many years, but it wasn't until her breakthrough album, released in the U.S. in 2000, *I Am Shelby Lynne*, that she got the world's attention. **Lynne** seems to have been especially prolific as of late, having self-released two albums in 2010 alone. The quick turnaround does not seem to hurt the quality of her songwriting, as this album is just as cohesive as it is complete. Listen for the swagger in "Woebegone" and "I Don't Need a Reason to Cry," and for the resolve in "I Won't Leave You." The plaintive tones of **Lynne's** voice put "Even Angels" in a different time and place, as though it's coming from the jukebox across the room of a dive bar. **Revelation Road** sounds as though **Lynne** and her band are performing in a smoky club and you are sitting at the end of the bar. You're the only patron in the room, and Grammy Winning **Lynne** is singing to you.



VARIOUS ARTISTS
THE TWILIGHT SAGA: BREAKING DAWN - PART 1 SOUNDTRACK
(ATLANTIC)

Back in the days when being goth was considered edgy, we never imagined vampires would inspire music quite like this. Very far from Bauhaus, indeed, the new hit single for the latest film in the **Twilight** saga, "A Thousand Years," is a fittingly vampire lovesong sung by **Christina Perri**, who is best known for her breakout performance of "Jar of Hearts" on *So You Think You Can Dance* is as sweet as a CMT song. The lovable vampires of the movie, other than drinking blood and being immortal and all, are just your average youngsters with average adolescent problems, not far away from say, from the kids on TV's *Dawson's Creek*. At points, the soundtracks for these movies are just as down home, and for many hard-working musicians, making it onto the soundtrack is their big break into the world of mainstream exposure and cross-market introductions. Included on the soundtrack are such lovely liets as **Iron & Wine's** "Flightless Bird, American Mouth," and **Bruno Mars'** angsty "It Will Rain." The soundtrack also contains some previously unreleased and unheralded tracks, including **The Features'** "From Now On" and **Sleeping At Last's** "Turning Page." If you love the **Twilight** movies, you'll want this soundtrack.



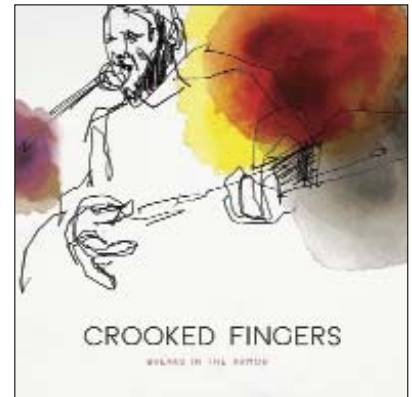
WILD FLAG
WILD FLAG
(MERGE)

The four musicians who make up **Wild Flag** have known one another for well over a decade. Brownstein and Weiss were in Sleater-Kinney and toured with Timony's band Helium on numerous occasions. Brownstein and Timony played in a side project called The Spells. Rebecca Cole's Portland-based band The Minders was a frequent opener for Sleater-Kinney. Weiss and Cole play together in the 1960's garage-rock cover band The Shadow Mortons. If someone drew a visual representation illustrating the ways in which all indie bands are interconnected, Brownstein, Cole, Timony, and Weiss would be in the same tiny sphere, so playing together felt almost inevitable. After collaborating on a score for a documentary, the ease with which they worked together proved infectious and promising. Future practices were scheduled, songs were written, and **Wild Flag** was formed. And what's it like? Imagine Helium's snaky guitars melded with the maximum RnB of Sleater-Kinney's *The Woods* and you'll start to get the idea. This is very much ensemble playing – a mix of groovy punk and psychedelic jamming. It's a potent brew that will likely grow stronger as the band continues touring and honing it's sound... And it might just be one of the best rock records of 2011. Dig.



CHRIS ISAAK
BEYOND THE SUN
(VANGUARD)

For years, **Chris Isaak** has melted hearts with his crooning voice and perfectly styled pompadour. Now, he and his long-time band have rounded out the sound with a session in the legendary Sun Studios in Memphis. The album both tributes the music that Isaak grew up on as a kid as well as shows his range as a musician. While many may shy away from Isaak covering the songs that have so obviously influenced his own music, his sincerity is undeniable as he sings songs made famous by Elvis Presley or Roy Orbison, as seen in "It's Now or Never" and "So Long I'm Gone." Not entirely an album of covers, an **Isaak** original is **Beyond the Sun's** first single. "Live It Up" is a feisty rocker that fits right in with the cover songs, somehow neither derivative or pandering. Other standout tracks on **Beyond the Sun** include the wildly sexy "Trying to Get to You" and the album's sweet closer, "My Happiness." Rather than jumping the proverbial shark with a recording of songs by his heroes, **Chris Isaak** seems to have delivered a long awaited consummation between the era he lives in and the era he comes from.



CROOKED FINGERS
BREAKS IN THE ARMOR
(MERGE)

Some songwriters simply mature rather than age. On this latest **Crooked Fingers** release, **Eric Bachmann** delves to new depths to bring up songs that are at once grappling with some invisible demons ("Went to the City") and after gaining the upper hand, tossing them back to the depths with great fury ("Bad Blood.") Not quite the blazing rocker that 2008's *Forfeit/Fortune* was, and not quite as spare as **Bachmann's** 2006 solo effort, *To The Races*, **Breaks In the Armor** falls somewhere in the middle of that range. The latest addition to the **Crooked Fingers** lineup, **Liz Durrett**, can be heard as the sublime voice in the background on many tracks, including "Black Candles" and "War Horse." As the front man of the fist pump inducing **Archers of Loaf** as well as the plaintive singer-songwriter of the more folksy **Crooked Fingers**, **Eric Bachmann** has spent the better portion of his music career as something of an indie rock hero, which has to be a tough rank to keep once you've gotten it. If there are **Breaks In the Armor**, the flesh and bone beneath seems to have grown stronger. Listen to "The Counterfeiter," "Bad Blood," and "Heavy Hours."



PATTON OSWALT FINEST HOUR

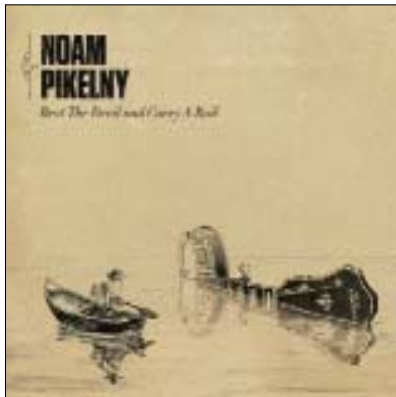
COMEDY CENTRAL RECORDS

Patton Oswalt's humor has capitalized on the self-effacing sweetness that seems to be the continuous thread through a wide range of regular TV appearances. Oswalt has appeared on Comedy Central's edgy "The Sarah Silverman Program" and HBO's wacky "Flight of the Conchords." His longest running TV character was as the nerdy, romance obsessed Spence on "The King of Queens." Currently, he plays the owner of a spy supply shop on Jonathan Ames' "Bored to Death." Though, Oswalt works a little blue from time to time, his brand of humor is light-hearted and elevated. Widely known for his own witty brand of stand-up comedy, covering topics ranging from slovenly living and American Excess ("The Miracle of Sweatpants,") food and materialism, ("The Museum of Spam") and, as a self-proclaimed atheist, religion ("The Power of Jesus.") *Finest Hour* is made up of live stand-up bits from a performance that first aired on Showtime on September 5th of this year. Containing twenty-three tracks of live comedy, you'll want to make a point to listen to "The Magic of Cursive," and "The Slob Avatar." Once you make the connection to Oswalt's comedic pacing, you'll start noticing his touches on some of your favorite TV shows, too.



SHE & HIM A VERY SHE & HIM CHRISTMAS (MERGE)

Do you ever feel like Christmas has gotten just a little too hi-fi? Every time you walk through the doors of Pier 1, you have to hear Ella Fitzgerald or Rosemary Clooney's big band bop version of *Sleigh Ride*? Well, dear friend, relief is in sight. The low-fi, I got too drunk at the Christmas party and decided to serenade my guests panache of **M Ward** and **Zooey Deschanel** to the rescue! The basis for almost every track is a pleasant, jangling guitar, with maybe a snare drum or two, and a production generously touched with reverb. Curated with the expected songs, *A Very She & Him Christmas* includes their own version of the aforementioned "Sleigh Ride," along with several spare arrangements of traditional crooners like "The Christmas Song" and "I'll Be Home For Christmas" with **Deschanel** on lead vocal. While most of the tracks sound just like you may expect from **She & Him**, the track worth adding this little indie-rock holiday jaunt to your collection is Number 5. "Christmas Wish" is a fun, 50s-tinged pop track featuring **M Ward's** gentle vocal. You can bet this tune will be on every hipster's holiday mix-tape. It's *A Very She & Him Christmas*, indeed.



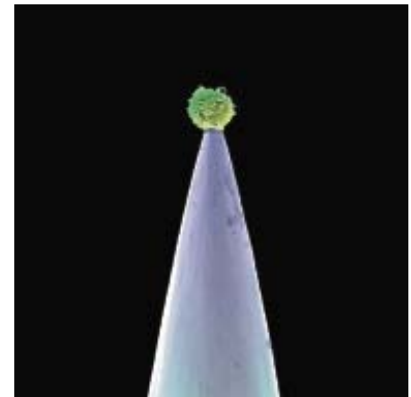
NOAM PIKELNY BEAT THE DEVIL AND CARRY A RAIL (COMPASS)

The young **Noam Pikelnny's** music career started as a member of Leftover Salmon, passed through the John Cowan Band for a couple of years, and finally ended in collaboration with Chris Thile (Nickel Creek) that would eventually become **The Punch Brothers**. As many talented bluegrass banjo players as there must be in the world, **Pikelnny** has stood head and shoulders above them all for the past several years. In 2010, he was awarded the Steve Martin Prize for Banjo and Bluegrass. Now, on his second solo release, Steve Martin appears as a special guest on the album on the tune "Cluck Old Hen," playing alongside **Pikelnny**. In fact, the album, though billed as solo, features many of bluegrass's most acclaimed musicians, including Tim O'Brien, Jerry Douglas, Stuart Duncan, Chris Eldridge, and Mark Schatz as well as other special guests, fellow punch brother Chris Thile, Aoife O'Donovan, & Bryan Sutton. There are twenty tracks in all, ranging from densely packed arrangements like "Jim Thompson's Horse" as well as spare arrangements such as "Fish and Bird," featuring Aoife O'Donovan. Keeping things in **Pikelnny's** immediate family, *Beat The Devil and Carry A Rail* was produced by another Punch Brother, Gabe Witcher.



BJÖRK BIOPHILIA (NONESUCH)

Björk is a woman of the times. Constantly pushing herself into the next phase of the 21st century, she challenges herself to stay ahead of the curve both in her music and in her delivery of that music, exploiting the limits of every medium related to her music, from costuming to photographs to videos to her website. *Biophilia* is no exception, as the ambitious album includes not only the strange futuristic birdsongs of **Björk's** musical landscape, but also offers an app suite for your ipod, iphone and ipod touch. It's the subject matter of *Biophilia* that makes it the most ambitious yet, while also bringing it down to earth — quite literally. It isn't often that a pop star uses subjects as unequivocal as she does on "Dark Matter" or "Virus." The first single from the album, "Crystalline," exemplifies how **Björk** uses text painting with her music, illustrating crystals in her choice of instrument. "Thunderbolt" is dark and meandering, while "Hollow" is sparse and follows a stream of conscious sort of vocal pattern. Using metaphor to explore scientific concepts that are ponderous, **Björk's** playfulness shines through the chaos. Though largely electronic, *Biophilia* explores the material and intangible elements of our universe.



PETER GABRIEL NEW BLOOD (REALWORLD)

Peter Gabriel has been gallantly walking the line between symphony and pop for the large part of his career. *New Blood* is a big, cinematic album, once again showing **Gabriel's** scope of imagination for song-writing goes well beyond the verse chorus and bridge. On the heels of *Scratch My Back*, an album on which he put his twist on a wide range of other artist's songs, **Gabriel** has turned back to his own songs to breathe into them new life, alongside composer/arranger John Metcalfe. Bringing together some of **Gabriel's** most revered songs from the span of his career, *New Blood* strips away the traditional rock instrumentation and reinvestigates them with orchestral arrangements. Rearranged in this way, some of the tracks are twinkling with Phillip Glass like motives as is found on "San Jacinto." The track immediately following that is "Intruder," which seems to nod to Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. Perhaps **Gabriel** is best loved for his unflinchingly, lush composition as in "Red Rain" and "In Your Eyes," both of which soar in this newly imagined treatment. All this is to say that if you love **Peter Gabriel** for his keen sense of drama, *New Blood* will delight you.