



★★★★

Singer/songwriter Luke Rathborne first appeared on my radar a couple years ago with the split EP "Dog Years/I Can Be One," a world-weary collection of tunes that heralded the arrival of a talented new player on the indie scene. Ironically titled full-length "Soft" is anything but, as Rathborne and his bandmates kick out the jams on this infectious release. With nods to New Wave, garage rock and power-pop, the 11-song slab whisks by in less than 29 minutes. The so-so title track launches the set, but Rathborne finds his groove on "What More," the Cars-inspired "Eno," "Little Moment," "Last Forgiven" and "Deal." Good stuff.

'Close to the Floor'

Patrick Sweany (Nine Mile)

★★★★½

Nashville-based blues rocker Patrick Sweany has been making records since 1999 and latest slab "Close to the Floor" certainly ranks among his better efforts. Whether performing solo or fronting the rotating lineup of the Patrick Sweany Band (whose members included once future Black Keys founder Dan Auerbach), Sweany is a master of electric blues. "Close to the Floor" is a 10-track delight, with Sweany particularly effective on "It's Spiritual," "Every Night Every Day," "The Island," "Every Gun" and "Just One Night."

'Lickety Split'

Robert Randolph & the Family Band (Blue Note)

★★★★

Considering he's on the road for almost 300 days a year, it's easy to understand why three years have passed since Robert Randolph's last studio album. The master of the pedal steel guitar and leader of his first-rate Family Band, Randolph impresses us all over again with "Lickety Split." Randolph enlisted some famous friends for the 12-track release, including Carlos Santana ("Brand New Wayo," "Blacky Joe") and Trombone Shorty ("Take the Party"), and in addition to the stellar original tunes serves up a blistering cover of the Ohio Players classic "Love Rollercoaster." Welcome back, sir.

'Glimmers'

Them Swoops (+1)

★★★★

Just in time for the dog days of summer comes the sun-drenched debut "Glimmers" EP from Aussie indie pop duo Them Swoops. Dave McGann and Chris Goff serve up a four-track appetizer in advance of a full-length to come (hopefully) later this year. Infectious single "Work Around It" launches the EP (and brings it to a close with a superfluous but still lots of fun Ben Browning's remix of the tune) and Them Swoops also score with "Too Fast for Love" and "Rollerskate." "Glimmers" makes for some ideal poolside listening.

'Lenses'

Soft Metals (Captured Tracks)

★★★★½

Soft Metals generated some nice buzz with their 2011 self-titled debut, but I found the music of the indie pop duo (Ian Hicks and Patricia Hall) to be a little cold and off-putting. Things have warmed noticeably over the past couple years and though sophomore set "Lenses" still has some flaws, it's definitely a step in the right direction. After a ho-hum start to the eight-track release with the title track, Soft Metals take shape with standouts "Tell Me," "When I Look Into Your Eyes," "Hourglass" and "In the Air." A similar leap next time out could result in something truly special.

'The Definitive Doc Watson'

Doc Watson (Sugar Hill)

★★★★½

One of the most influential bluegrass musicians to ever grace the planet, Doc Watson died last year at age 89. He leaves behind a musical legacy that dates back more than half a century, and two-disc set "The Definitive Doc Watson" brings together much of his best work. These 34 tracks span Watson's entire career, and include classics "Black Mountain Rag," "Greenville Trestle High," "Blue Railroad Train," "Tennessee Stud," "Your Lone Journey," "Big Spike Hammer," "The Wreck of the Number Nine," "Shady Grove," "I'm Going Back to the Old Home" and many, many more. A fitting tribute to one of the greats.

'Hold'

WL (Prospect & Refuge)

★★★★½

What sets Portland-based indie trio WL apart from many of their peers is the moody vocals of singer/bassist Misty Mary. She's the anchor of "Hold," a raw and noisy gathering of 10 tunes characterized by distorted guitars and droned-out melodies. Amid all the chaos, however, Mary's voice stands out like a beacon and almost single-handedly makes me want to revisit keepers like "Sugar Pill," "Wasted Thoughts," personal favorite "It Doesn't Matter," "Point of Focus" and "In the Window."

'Crash Course'

Young Lyons (self-released)

★★★★½

Billing themselves as a mix between the All American Rejects and Passion Pit, Oklahoma newcomers Young Lyons make a nice first impression on debut EP "Crash Course." The seven-track release (though a pair of the tunes appear twice on the platter) is a terrific introduction to their catchy, electro-pop sound. "My Own Town" gets the party started, and Young Lyons score with "Kill," "I Give Up" and "Girlfriend's Got Me Down." The single/radio edits of "Kill" and "Girlfriend's Got Me Down" seem unnecessary, but this is a band on the rise.

'In a Warzone'

Transplants (Epitaph)

★★★★½

A punk supergroup featuring Tim Armstrong (Rancid), Travis Barker (blink-182) and Rob Aston (Death March), the high-octane "In a Warzone" is the first album from Transplants since 2005's masterful "Haunted Cities" and third platter overall. It doesn't quite match up with its predecessor, which incorporated elements of hip-hop through Aston's rapping, as Transplants go the more traditional punk route on the 12-track, 30-minute slab. The set-opening title track sets the tone, and the guys also shine on "Come Around," "Something's Different," "Silence," "All Over Again" and "It's a Problem." Rock on.

'Let's Adjourn to the Garden'

Tangled Star (Hidden Shoal)

★★★★

Australian outfit Tangled Star tread the line between country, rock and pop, and fourth album "Let's Adjourn to the Garden" may be the one that ups their profile on our shores. Craig Hallsworth is the guiding creative force

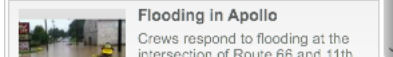


Gergely tour touts road, flood fixes in Mon Valley



Flooding in Donegaitwp

Flood waters washed away a bridge leading to the Stonehenge Lodge in Donegal Township.



Flooding in Apollo

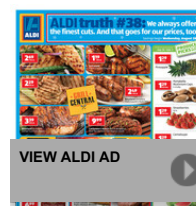
Crews respond to flooding at the intersection of Route 66 and 11th

## This Week's Deals

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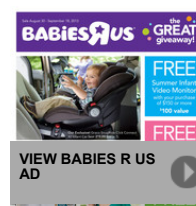
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What's This?

behind Tangled Star and he's put together a gem of a nine-track platter. Among the highlights here are "Crazy Bit O' Truth," "In Bed With the Averys," "Hasn't Made for Freedom," "Attic Space Conversion #1" and "Head in the Sand." It's time you got to know this band.

'Team Spirit'

Team Spirit (Vice/WBR)

★★★★★

Garage pop newcomer Team Spirit serves up a high-octane self-titled debut EP that's sure to get your heart racing over the course of 16 wildly enjoyable minutes. The opening tandem of "Jesus, He's Alright!" and "MRDR It's OK" lure you right in and Team Spirit doesn't let go the rest of the way. Additional keepers are "Teenage Love" and "Phenomenon." I can't wait to hear more from this band.

'Live On' & 'Danthology'

Dan Israel (self-released)

★★★★★ & ★★★★★½

Minnesota-based singer/songwriter Dan Israel has been cruising along just outside the mainstream for almost two decades and he's dropped two new albums that I'm hoping will make others aware of this gifted musician. His 12th release "Live On" ranks among the best offerings of his under-appreciated career. There's an appealingly world-weary rasp to Israel's voice and he utilizes it to maximum effect on the 11-track gem. The first three songs — "Rollin' Away," "Ain't Gonna Let the World" and the title track — are nothing short of perfect and though Israel can't keep up that pace, he still delivers the goods on "Release," "Falling Short," "You Just Kept Playing Your Guitar" and "Mile After Mile."

Those who want to hear more should check out the two-LP vinyl release "Danthology." This two-album, 25-song set spans Israel's entire career and features his best material. While you won't find a bad song on "Danthology," pay special attention to standouts "Brings You Back," "Some Time," "Waiting So Long," "Until You See a Sign," "Jump Through the Rings," "Second to None," "Occasionally" and "Left Out." Both of these releases are worth your attention.

'Exile'

A.S. (Inedible)

★★★★½

"Exile," the sophomore full-length from Paris-based indie duo A.S., is one of those albums that didn't blow me away at first blush but has grown on me steadily with every spin. Frontman Nick McRoberts (vocals/piano) has a haunting voice that dominates the 10-track release. It's not a feel-good record by any stretch of the imagination, but the songs "Do What You Want," "Probable Cause," "Invisible Kiss," "Pleasure and Pain" and "Reasonable Doubts" merit multiple listens.

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