

On record

the week's essential new releases

Pop, rock and jazz

KATE BUSH
50 Words for Snow
Fish People/EMI FPCD007

album of entirely original material since sprawling and utterly uncategorisable the 65-minute, conceptual 50 Words for Snow follows this year's Director's Cut, on which Bush reworked songs from The Sensual World and The Red Shoes. If Aerial raised the stakes for addressing the unexpected anxieties and mental triggers contained in her routine, her new album proves no less compelling and beguiling — and idiosyncratic. The album features Stephen Fry intoning a litany of vivid descriptions ("Hooded wept", he purrs; "Injoompoola"); Elton John duets on the airy, snowed-in at Wheeler Street; the stunning cover photo tells the story of a dog reunited with its owner in the afterlife; and Misty sees Bush in a tryst with a snowman, and includes the historically lubricious line "I can feel him in my hand". Musically, the album finds her most spare: several tracks feature more than voice (thicker now, and even more musically resonant), piano, bass and drums. It's rarely successful — there are times when she goes for more sonic grandeur and open spaces, or jazz colourings — but then along comes a track that's compelling, overwhelming. Among them, and yet again you think, there is nobody else close to this extraordinary woman. **DC**



ALAN WILKINSON
Practice
Bo'Veavil WEAVIL45CD



The future of British free improvisation is safe in the hands of modestly monumental musicians such as Alan Wilkinson, captured here alone

and virtually naked, blowing his horn unaccompanied in a disused hospital in Dalston, east London. A stately and stark take on Ornette Coleman's Lonely Woman shows sceptics that Wilkinson can carry a tune should he wish to, and that means you have to trust him on the other tracks. Long, squiggled lines flatten into vast plateaus of sustained sound; duck-parp reed blab blends into talking tongues; and the barrier between endurance and transcendence blurs beatifically. Solo sax free-improvisation album of the year. **SL**

BARREL
Gratuitous Abuse
Emanem EMANEM5020



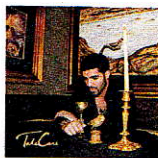
Alison Blunt, Ivor Kallin and Hannah Marshall spontaneously score three lengthy pieces, and a short spasm, for violin, viola and cello.

Barrel's music, they admit, involves a lot of scraping. Initially, the trio's genetic make-up means it is difficult for the listener to peer through the shadow of the classical tradition or the minimalist avant-garde and hear the sound that's actually there. Yet by the final piece, Moths & Feathers, Barrel sound unlike anything else. Flurries of notes and clunky bridge nudge noise flutter around gracefully drunken descends, three dowager duchesses sliding down the banister in a rain of ripped confetti. **SL**

DAUGHTERS & SONS
Not When
Underground CHEM164CD

First there was rock music. Then there was post-rock music — bands who removed the vocals to play instrumentals with rock-band instrumentation. That was all pretty clear. Post-rock bands started *singing*. We were supposed to call that? Well, not so much. If so, King's Daughters & Sons is a piece from Louisville, Kentucky, a post-post-rock band — one, at that. Drawn from the tradition of the For Carnation, Rachel's and King News, they are very much in the tradition, but the music they play is a traditional post-rock pattern of long verses, when the weight of the music seems to press down on every note, followed by exhilarating releases. The result is music infused with a sense of freedom. **ME**

DRAKE
Take Care
Island 2783262



"We live in a generation of not being in love," Drake sings towards the end of his second album, and little that has gone before dents the impression that the Toronto rapper isn't finding fame easy. Propelled to wider success by his duet with Rihanna on What's My Name?, Drake has carved out a niche with his languid, introspective hip-hop confessionals, and Take Care plays to this strength. His stellar status is confirmed by the guest artists here, who include Rihanna (on the Jamie xx/Gil Scott Heron-sampling title track), Stevie Wonder, André 3000, Nicki Minaj, Rick Ross and Lil Wayne. Genre purists can be sniffy about Drake. But who cares when he produces tracks as infectious and laid bare as Doing It Wrong and Look What You've Done? **DC**

RIHANNA
Talk That Talk
Mercury 2790454



Talk That Talk has a work rate worthy of a singer releasing her sixth album in seven years, its 11 tracks dispatched in a mere 37 minutes. Dubstep, dancehall and Euro-trance compete on a fun first half that doesn't stray far from the album's predecessor, Loud, and peaks with the slinky, percussive title track, which features Jay-Z rapping about needing to pee. The second half includes summery trip-pop (Watch n' Learn) and a Caribbean take on techno (Drunk on Love). What raises Rihanna above her synth-pop peers is distinctive, versatile vocals that are never swamped by the beats. And what lets her down is tacky lyrics that Pussycat Dolls would be ashamed to sing. "Suck my cockiness", she yelps on Cockiness (Love It), like a woman with one eye on her watch. **LV**

SEAL
Soul 2
Warners 9362495471



Although he's an immaculate vocal stylist and can deliver a song with power and conviction, there's scarcely a trace of soul in Seal's pristine voice. For a man thus limited to make one album called Soul seemed a bit cheeky; to make another one is beginning to get annoying. Working with not one but two producers — Trevor Horn and David Foster — who are famous for preferring a performance of clinical perfection over one of great feeling only makes things worse. If anyone in the studio took a second to think about what the lyrics to What's Going On actually mean, it doesn't show. Seal has discovered a lucrative franchise in a genre with which he has little natural affinity. The one mitigating factor is that he may act as a conduit back to the classic originals. **ME**

DUD OF THE WEEK