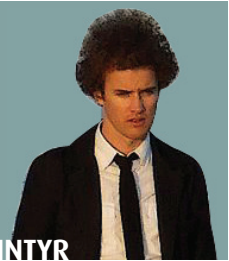


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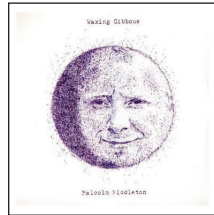
COLIN MACINTYRE



LA ROUX
La Roux
(Polydor)
★★★★★

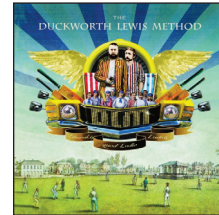
Considering the current crop of female disco pop divas releasing debut albums in the last 12 months, sometimes the heart and soul of each artist gets lost in the indiscriminate categorising. The debut album from La Roux (singer Elly Jackson and producer Ben Langmaid) has none of the brash Hollywood sheen of Lady GaGa or the grungy appeal of Ladyhawke. Instead, this is a heartbreak album, soundtracked by day-glo synths and clacking drum machines. Moving her voice from falsetto to a more breathy tone, there's no sense that these lyrics have been phonetically punched in to fit the spaces between Human League keyboard melodies. *Cover My Eyes* is a mournful slow dance dedicated to disbelief and hurt ("When I see you walking with her/I have to cover my eyes"). Picking up the pace on *Quicksand* and *Bulletproof*, there are songs you can dance to, albeit alone and at the end of a long disappointing night.

LIANNE STEINBERG



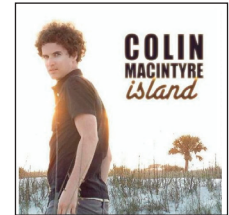
MALCOLM MIDDLETON
Waxing Gibbous
(Full Time Hobby)
★★★★★

There are few songwriters who can make misery and nihilism sound so joyous, but on bouncy, melodic opener *Red Travelling Socks*, backed by a choir of harmonies, he may have almost raised a smile. *Shadows* has his voice collide with those of former Arab Strap member Jenny Reeve, adding a new dimension. *Box And Knife* is a fantastic slice of bold dynamics as it moves from haunting acoustic verse to chest-beating chorus. Although he may be taking a break from his solo work, it seems that appreciation for Middleton's talents will only grow stronger with his absence.



THE DUCKWORTH LEWIS METHOD
The Duckworth Lewis Method
(Divine Comedy Records)
★★★★★

This album will appeal to a very slight demographic. Firstly, the presence of former Divine Comedy man Neil Hannon and his friend Thomas Walsh lends a certain eccentricity to affairs and secondly, this is cricket-themed album. It's all quite quaint but they add a disturbing sensuality to affairs with track *The Sweet Spot* and there's sing-a-long humour on *Jiggery Pokery* which features Phil Jupitus. But after a while all the talk of creases, leather and heading off to Pakistan becomes a little grating on those who don't share the same love of the gentlemen's game.



COLIN MACINTYRE
Island
(Future Gods)
★★★★★

Former Mull Historical Society singer sees him stripping back the sounds for a warm, acoustic album. His soft voice cascades over the melody in *The Long Road To Me* and *Out Stealing Horses* sees him sharing vocals with King Creosote. Strings swirl, adding plenty of depth and emotion to the music but it never threatens to overwhelm the songs. The pull of his native Isle of Mull is still evident in lyrics and the nagging sense of escapism that comes from living so close to the sea. Rather than aiming for the obvious pop song, this is one singer-songwriter whose work is contemplative and subtle.



Q&A: Pixie Lott

Having been groomed for success at theatre arts training school, she was spotted when she was only 14 years old. Currently on tour with girl band The Saturdays, her debut album is out in September.

You've just had a number one single but you're only 18. Are you ready for success?

I've been really prepared because I've been working on the album since I was 14 and I've wanted to release it every year since then and now the material is a lot stronger and I'm more experienced so I'm really ready for it.

Wouldn't you prefer to be fronting a band to get a more collaborative feel?

I really wouldn't like to be in a band.

Some people are made for being in a band and some people are made to be solo. I'd rather not share a song - I'd rather just do my own music.

Don't you have more control in a band than with LA-based songwriters whose purpose is to write big hits no matter who the eventual singer is?

No, because it feels like my vibe and initial idea. Working with such top class songwriters really helped to bring out the best in me and I feel like my songwriting has come on loads and having the best producers really helps. I'd go to America for seven weeks at a time and each day we'd be in the studio and I'd make the best out of the opportunity and try and get as much out of it as I could.

Was there a particular style that you always had in mind for this album?

I've always been into soul singers and I've always sung in that style but I wanted to keep it poppy and contemporary. I'm only 18 so I've not gone through a lot of heartbreaking experiences but that doesn't mean you can't be a soul singer. It's the style I sing in and you can't teach it.

How strange has it been finding your freedom and independence by being groomed for superstardom?

I've grown up in the industry and the business. I've grown up a lot quicker having to work so hard and keep to a schedule but I'm used to it.

LIANNE STEINBERG