

# FILTER ALBUMS

## Brand New Heavies

★★★★★

Get Used To It TBNH LTD

**Acid Jazz pioneers return refreshed and rejuvenated.**

American chanteuse N'Dea Davenport wasn't the Heavies' first vocalist – Jay Ella Ruth was – but when she joined in 1991 the Ealing funk group's commercial fortunes were transformed. American hits followed, until her exit in 1995 spectacularly stalled the group's momentum. Twelve years and several unsatisfactory replacements later (including Siedah Garrett and Carleen Anderson), Davenport returns to the fold. It's like she's never been away. The unique musical chemistry she had with the band first time around is spectacularly revived here, especially on the breezy, rolling disco-soul of Let's Do It Again and an ace remake of Stevie Wonder's I Don't Know Why (I Love You). Terrific.

Charles Waring

## Bill Callahan

★★★★★

Woke On A Whaleheart DRAG CITY

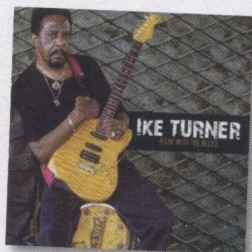
**The Smog has cleared!**



Spring is in the air chez Callahan. Both album title and fledgling 'solo' guise flag up renewal. It's no secret: Bill, alt-rock's unwavering pessimist, has found love with harp pixie Joanna Newsom. "It's hard to think what I was doing with all the thinking before you," he revealingly wonders on From The Rivers To The Ocean. The music, jointly conceived with Royal Trux's Neil Hagerty, still has the from-odd-angles of Smog records, but now there's exquisite light amid the shade. Callahan sings about life, rather

than an all-eclipsing fear of death. Nature used to terrify him; now he marvels at fertility (the tingling Sycamore). On final tune A Man Needs A Woman Or A Man To Be A Man, worry sets in: "I don't know if I'm to be trusted, in our room, alone". Then, his gal returns, the sky ignites with cascades of dazzling colours, and love conquers all.

Andrew Perry



## Ike Turner

★★★★★

Risin' With The Blues ZOHO ROOTS/MUSIC AVENUE

**Fourteen new guitar-driven, blues-infused reasons to like Ike.**

As if he's the maniacal offspring of Dorian Gray and a pit bull terrier, the ageless, always agile Turner (the inventor of rock'n'roll as we know it – and, with Bobby Blue Bland, the sole survivor of Sun Studio's mid-century blues roster) yanks his hard-won past into the future. Eschewing the keyboards (his favoured instrument) for the wildly inventive, tremolo-heavy guitar sound he perfected in the '60s, he lays down monster licks on a set list that's laden with classic blues. Turner's always been a reluctant frontman, though here his vocals sound ragged but oh-so-right, particularly on the redemptive Jesus Loves Me ("I'm a bad boy/But Jesus loves me anyway"), a primordially funky Caldonia, and a justly delivered A Love Like Yours, originally heard on *Nutbush City Limits*.

Andria Lisle

## James Taylor's 4th Dimension

★★★★★

Picking Up Where We Left Off REAL SELF

## Reverend Cleatus And The Soul Saviours

★★★★★

2lbs Of Funk! (In A 1lb Bag) SOUL COOKERS

**Third generation Hammond hero back in quartet setting, Cleatus is fourth generation.**

James Taylor first played Hammond organ in The Prisoners, a rambunctious garage rock combo from Kent. They split in 1986, he formed his own quartet to excel on a funky R&B reworking of the Blow-up theme and an LP of soundtrack instrumentals. He's since experimented with Charles Earlandesque acid jazz, JB funk, Johnny Hammond-styled rare groove, pure soul with vocalist Alison Limerick, and recently took to the road with a funk orchestra. Now in a more intimate setting with guitarist Nigel Price, his very own Grant Green, he delivers an instrumental piece that looks to Herbie Hancock and Charles Kynard. It's his finest work in years. Meanwhile, on their debut Reverend Cleatus, a London-based five-piece, mix Brian Auger cosmic fusion, The Meters' New Orleans funk, JB forthrightness and a bit of ska too. Cool!

Lois Wilson

## Mark Ronson

★★★★★

Version SONY BMG

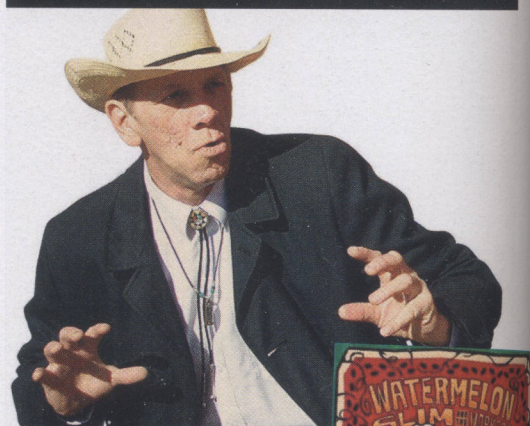
**Pop producer du jour makes familiar noise.**

London-born, New York-bred, Ronson is the party DJ of choice for A-list stars, and his production skills helped shape the sound and success of Lily Allen and Amy Winehouse. *Version* shows he's not short on confidence, taking (mostly) British guitar pop and re-working it with brassy arrangements and his showbiz chums as guests. A meaty backbeat makes Winehouse's take on The Zutons' Valerie a loving Stax pastiche, The Jam's Pretty Green becomes woody dancehall and The Jackson Five's syziffs on Radiohead's Just might draw a quiet chuckle. A coffee table record, then, but one not made any smarter by Robbie Williams' listless traipse through The Charlatans' The Only One I Know or a prophetic take on The Smiths' Stop Me If You Think You've Heard This One Before.

Ben Machell

## BLUES

BY TONY RUSSELL



## Watermelon Slim & The Workers

★★★★★

The Wheel Man NORTHERN BLUES

**Another blue-plate special of blue-collar blues.**

THIS BAND'S eponymous CD, *MOJO Album* of the Month in May 2006, went on to be my Album Of The Year, and, as I write, the combo are in the running for half-a-dozen Blues Music Awards. That the phrase "a hard act to follow" means nothing to William 'Watermelon Slim' Homans is perfectly clear from this storming successor, which is every bit as tough, clever and compelling. Slim expertly shuffles his cards, now dealing a full-on ensemble piece, such as the title song or Drinking & Driving ("You better pull over, baby, stop drinking and driving me away"), and now a gentler, older number like Cat Iron's Jimmy Bell or Furry Lewis's Judge Harsh Blues, beautifully sung with solo slide guitar. This truck driver-turned-bluesman is in for the long haul – grab a ride.

## ALSO RELEASED

### Phillip Walker

★★★★★

Going Back Home DELTA GROOVE



Walker's cautionary tales about women have the caustic tone of his former colleague Lowell Fulson, but his guitar playing is even drier and more bitter. Incapable of making a poor or ill-thought-out record, this is one of his best, with sympathetic touches by Rusty Zinn and Al Blake.

### James Blood Ulmer

★★★★★

Bad Blood In The City: The Piety Street Sessions HYENA

Because of tracks such as Katrina and Survivors Of The Hurricane, this has been called Ulmer's most political record, but like the previous *Memphis Blood*, *No Escape From The Blues* and *Birthright*, *Bad Blood In The City* is most impressive – and least predictable – when he takes on familiar songs, such as his poignant reading of Bessie Smith's Backwater Blues.

### Jimmy Burns

★★★★★

Live At B.L.U.E.S. DELMARK



After two exemplary studio albums, the Chicago-based singer-guitarist plays some of those tracks, plus others, in a jubilant set at one of the city's best clubs. Burns' forte is reworking standard blues with imagination and soul, qualities not coarsened by the live set-ting. The performance is also available on a Delmark DVD.

### Johnny Mastro & Mama's Boys

★★★★★

Take Me To Your Maker NUGENE

*Take Me To Your Maker* deploys the same dark materials as the Californian quartet's 2006 *The Black Album*: pugnacious singing and harp playing by Mastro, snarling, amp-scorching guitar by Dave Melton and a blues sensibility as rough as unplanned timber. The press release says it's "a more polished production" than its predecessor; believe me, you won't notice. *TR*

Bill Callahan:  
get happy!

