



THE CRITICAL CD ROUND-UP

Paddy Casey: Addicted To Company

Sony BMG

★★★★☆



Having conquered Ireland, Paddy Casey has made no secret of his desire to break America. On his third album, the Dublin

singer-songwriter sets his stall out early on. Partly produced in Los Angeles by Def Jam guru George Drakoulias, *Addicted To Company* is bathed in soulful retro-grooves and Motown strings. Not that the record is exactly a dynamic reinvention. For the most part, Casey seems happy to regurgitate the mellow, melancholic atmospherics of his multi-platinum 2003 LP, *Living*. On the opening track, *Sound Barrier*, he tacks a dirge-like melody to stereotypically angsty lyrics. Later, on the title song, Casey quickens the pace a tad, crooning over a 1970s electro-beat which, of all things, puts you in mind of a disco-era David Gray. He even has a stab at a big indie rock-out on *City*, which features a booming rhythm line and oodles of irony-free heavy guitar. There's always been a tendency to write Casey off as a meat and veg strummer, yet *Addicted To Company* contains enough brashly original moments to suggest that, with a dash of good fortune, he may yet have a colourful future. *Eamon de Paor*

Indeed, Travis are a neat reference point here, the jangle and ache that regularly surface only requiring Fran Healy's needy voice for the image to be complete. Instead, we get Tunstall's – and this is a good thing; with sales has come confidence and she's increased her range; folky-smooth comes just as easily as rockishly raucous these days.

But that's raucous for the catch-all supermarket audience – this is a really good record, but well, not quite fantastic. *Ben East*

Josh Ritter: The Historical Conquests of Josh Ritter

Independent Records

★★★★☆



Josh Ritter's last album, *The Animal Years*, was supposed to make him a star. Things didn't quite work out that way,

although the record did, of course, top the charts in Ireland, where the Idaho bard has always enjoyed a huge following. For the follow-up, Ritter moves away from the glossy production and slick hooks of *The Animal Years*, weaving a grittier, more world weary sound. He also seeks to broaden his range, upholstering his folksy ditties with swathes of piano and even a few strings.

Sometimes the results go awry, as on the bar-room knees up, *The Right Moves*, which might put older listeners in mind of the theme from *Only Fools In Horses* as covered by a country and western band. Mostly, however, the quality control is typically peerless: *To The Dogs Or Whoever* skates on a jangling guitar and lilting Americana vocals while *Edge Of The World* demonstrates Ritter's gift for Springsteen-esque sweep.

Indeed, in its own, unshowy way, *The Historical Conquests...* is arguably Ritter's most rounded LP yet. Certainly, fans will relish every little-boy-lost vocal inflection and plaintively plucked chord. The question, as ever, is whether the rest of

KT Tunstall: Drastic Fantastic

Relentless

★★★★☆



KT Tunstall admits that her first record had to have the edges taken off it by a grasping record company for it to be a success. But

four million albums later, the Scottish singer is hardly going to do a Radiohead, and *Drastic Fantastic* is once again perfectly pleasant, ticking off radio friendly boxes as it goes; the feisty first single *Hold On*, the soaring ballads, the Travis-alike strumalong.

the world is paying any heed.

Eamon de Paor

The Go! Team: Proof Of Youth

Memphis Industries

★★★★☆



Basically just band leader Ian Parton mucking about with some samples, the rest of The Go! Team had no involvement with debut album *Thunder, Lightning, Strike*, and Parton made no money from it, as it turns out samples are really, really expensive. This neatly explains why *Proof Of Youth* sounds near-identical to its lauded predecessor, only with more live musicians. That's basically a good thing: lead single *Grip Like A Vice* is the best song The Spice Girls never made, Fake ID's mega-twee ending is gorgeous, and in general it's every bit the hoard of goofy gems their debut was.

However, there's no escaping the fact that fossilised snails have made more progress since *TLS* came out three years ago, and if they pull the same trick in 2010, it'd seem a bit rich. For now though, best just accept the fact that The Go! Team have earned the right to make this record.

Andrzej Lukowski