



**Hard-Fi**  
**Once Upon a Time**  
 Atlantic Records (37m 59s)  
 ★★★★★

WITH 'No Cover Art' emblazoned across the front of this album, Hard-Fi are making a bold statement about the death of the record sleeve. It follows that they should be judged with similarly big statements and many have criticised it as cheap self-promotion. This would hold if the music was crap, which it really isn't. Emboldened by their debut's delightful pastiche of ska, pop and punk rock, the follow-up is a similarly diverse affair, with grimy subject matter delivered triumphantly with buckets of soul too. Who needs cover art anyway?  
**Download:** 'Television', 'The King', 'Help Me Please'

**Neil Dunphy**

**Paddy Casey**  
**Addicted to Company**  
 Sony BMG (40m 31s)  
 ★★★★★

PADDY Casey fans will be delighted with the long-awaited follow-up to 2003's *Living*. Casey has been to LA, got himself some hot musicians and recorded a steaming, funky, sexy beast of an album. And I never thought I'd find myself writing that. A million Mercury music prizes can't buy the effortless tune-smithery Casey has in his DNA. Yeah he sounds like Gilbert O'Sullivan sometimes and James Taylor but it's always the best parts of them. The big question now is whether there is a single here that will launch Crumlin's finest to the wider world.  
**Download:** 'City', 'Addicted to Company', 'Refugee'

**ND**

**Josh Ritter**  
**The Historical Conquests Of Independent Records**  
 ★★★★★

WHAT a pleasant surprise. After creating folk-ish records that never particularly grabbed me, Ritter, a token Irishman in the David Gray vein of assumed citizenship, has built an eclectic and strong album of country, rock and roll, and even a hint of spiritualism. The clanging guitar and piano old-school indie of 'Mind's Eye' make it head-boppingly listenable, as are most of the tracks - even when it gets a little too well-hey-there-little-missy on 'Next To The Last Romantic'. The fleecing of a hook from Arcade Fire on 'Empty Hearts' is a dubious though.  
**Download:** 'Mind's Eye', 'Next To The Last Romantic'

**Una Mullally**

**Malajube**  
**Trompe L'Oeil**  
 City Slang  
 ★★★★★

YOU have to hand it to the Canadian government. All of those artist grants are sure going a long way to create some lovely records. Here's another one: breathy near-perfect summer tunes crafted with the expertise of musical angels. You can't move for hooks and melodies, or for endless wide cacophonies that should really soundtrack road trips to the beach. Layers and layers of sweetness somehow avoid cheese and combine to form a sunburst of pop. Just in time for the Indian summer too.  
**Download:** 'La Monogamie', 'Jus De Canneberges'

**UM**

**Kenny Werner**  
**Lawn Chair Society**  
 Blue Note  
 ★★★★★

JAZZ listeners like to know who's playing on an album before they buy, so listing the musicians on the cover always helps. Not surprisingly, Blue Note decided to stick with this custom for pianist and composer Kenny Werner's new album, since saxophonist Chris Potter, trumpeter Dave Douglas, bassist Scott Colley and drummer Brian Blade together represent the very creative pinnacle of American jazz. Led by the sagacious Werner, ego doesn't seem to have been a spectre at the recording session and the result is a masterpiece, of both the composer's and the musician's art.

**Cormac Larkin**

**Handel: Nine German Arias**  
 Carolyn Sampson / The King's Consort  
 Hyperion (70m 33s)  
 ★★★★★

HANDEL wrote little music in his native German tongue but these arias, settings of poems by his contemporary and friend Barthold Heinrich Brockes, while enjoying the buoyancy of themes of joy and enchantment in nature and God, do not differ hugely from the techniques and character of Handel's Italian operatic writing. Sampson, one of the best Handel sopranos, gifts these arias with her golden tone and discerning musicality and gracefulness. Alexandra Bellamy's excellent performance of three early Handel oboe sonatas make for well-judged listening variety.

**Karen Dervan**

