

(on the record)

## PAOLO NUTINI

**These Streets**  
(Atlantic)

On his debut album *These Streets*, 19-year-old Scot troubadour Paolo Nutini showcases a pop-rock, neo-soul, rootsy folk range, documenting his travails, romantic and otherwise. The eclecticism shows command of audible variety. But Nutini seems most appealing when fully fusing his palette.

If only more of the disc sounded like the opener, "Jenny Don't Be Hasty," a tasty helping of pop-rock in the Thin Lizzy vein, complete with handclaps. Nutini punches home the infectious groove with his unique soulful rasp (think of a bassier, less parched Rod Stewart) sounding natural singing atop grinding guitars.

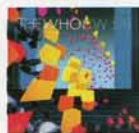
The record, however, finds an acoustic-strumming Nutini shifting mostly between bedroom-soul arrangements and rootsy song structures, recalling David Gray, or a Kinks-Era Ray Davies on his folkier excursions.

Songwriting bona fides are evident on "Autumn." Accompanied by lilting, major-key piano, he sings a heartfelt tribute to his grandfather, a hero whom Nutini says inspired him toward music, and to whom, Nutini agonizes, he had not properly expressed his appreciation—"I was too young to say it, but I swear he knew."

Incorporating such grit and grind of experience might better lift Nutini's lighter repertoire of boot-tappers and neo-soul balladry. He might also do well to boost the Thin Lizzy vibe with his talent for the descriptive lyric, to steer clear of the thin-aided, romantic soft-core of labelmate James Blunt. By channeling, say, the mid-70s, post-Faces solo work of The Rolling Stones' Ronnie Wood, Nutini could pull off a masterful, auricular trick—afferent promise *These Streets* does well to reveal.

## The Who

**Endless Wire**  
(Universal Republic)



It's surprisingly the quieter moments that prove best on *Endless Wire*, the first full-length studio offering from The Who in 24 years. When Pete Townshend and Roger Daltrey—the remaining, critical half of the original Who—are at their most introspective, the emotional power of their 46-year collaboration fully fuses, the baggage of their band's storied past is partially but refreshingly doffed, and a different, but no less intriguing Who, takes sonic shape.

Most impressive are the image-rich, acoustic-leaning numbers such as "A Man In A Purple Dress," "God Speaks of Marty Robbins," and "Black Widow's Eyes."

Check "Mike Post Theme" for proof Daltrey's inimitable, full-throated vocal phrasing mixed with Townshend's treble-edged, snarling, buzz-saw guitar—which he continues to wield like a sensory scythe—still deliver the goods.

"Who will walk through the mirror door?" "Will there be music or will there be war?" Daltrey asks in "Wire and Glass," Townshend's rock opera section. Tension resolves in the gorgeous number, "Tea & Theatre," a poignant reminiscence between a man and a woman who "did it all...instinctively" between whom "a thousand songs still smolder."

Tough timbre conundrum: Covering old ground left little room for Townshend and Daltrey to explore their quieter, less show-cased acoustic oeuvre, sprinkled tantalizingly, but too intermittently, throughout.

View *Endless Wire* then perhaps not against the past but as a debut, the first offering of a new Who rife with novel sonic and lyrical possibilities: A door in the mirror, opening.

## TOM PETTY

**Highway Companion**  
(American Recordings)



Little has changed regarding Tom Petty's formula for the pop elixir on his third solo album, *Highway Companion*. He continues his tradition of imbuing bloodshot, hum-bucker soul and SoCal Rickenbacker jangle with a touch of the Southern gothic, echoing his metamorphosis from Gainesville, Florida-boy to Laurel Canyon sage to Malibu rock royalty.

An album of dark, road-oriented themes with a laid-back, pop-leaning backdrop, "Highway Companion" is mostly acoustic-driven, reverb-laden chords accenting Petty's lyrical lines—vignettes of inescapable pasts, trapped destinies, and transient ennui, in which to run is to hope.

There's just a touch of the Petty growl supplied in various rations by Heartbreaker guitarist Mike Campbell, who tracks throughout.

Significant homage is paid to the unique cinematic expanse of the Southern California night with the starlit, open-stringed acoustic strumming and Fender Rhodes of "Night Driver", on which Campbell's laser-like slide adds ethereal ambience. Similarly, the atmospheric oddity of Campbell's vibraphone interludes on "The Golden Rose" adds a pleasing sense of aural consequence.

*Highway Companion* could be better company. Particularly for those who feel Petty is best pissed and screaming into the FM night.

The decidedly laid-back, wistful demeanor threatens to devolve toward a melancholy languidness that, at its worst—such as with "Damaged by Love"—recalls an efficient but rather bloodless backtrack for a scene in an Ed Burns romantic comedy, a road Petty has traveled before. The intriguing exceptions—"Night Driver", "Jack", and "The Golden Rose"—are what save *Highway Companion* from that fateful, wrong turn. But just barely.



## Beck

**The Information**  
(Interscope)

Beck's latest disc, *The Information*, is a more mulled-over reaction to the countrified confessional, Allman Brothers-meets-trance-chill-out heartache of 2002's *Sea Change*, which freaked out hard-core fans.

*The Information* is metagalactic. Its mélange of groove-oriented, space-age boogies should push the indie-rock set onto the dance-floor. Deliciously diverse, it may be the best recorded showcase of Beck's funky, white boy multitudes.

Standout tracks include "Dark Star", which boasts good lyrics and blues harp: Noir creeping bass lines and sweeping violins intermingle with intergalactic, synth screams and old school turntable scratching, while Beck whisper-sings about "auto-pilot drivers...riding out on the ice age".

"No Complaints" seems a groovy bit of acoustic sunshine until the R2D2 birdcalls and dialtone-whistling keyboards remind us we're in the Dadaist zone. Oh, and Beck's dog is from Modesto. Got it? Modesto.

MPCs basically unite here, like so many fingers across an over-inflated balloon (or little rubber buttons). And behold on "Motorcade": A tiny xylophone! And you can hear the little mallets!

Such efforts can sound overly self-conscious at times. But if Beck is truly afraid of embracing his inner Prince, the aversion seems to serve him by forcing out more sonic splatter-paint.

Whether he can continue this trajectory or not is uncertain. To further light up body and mind may force a more seamless fusing of deep space with the dance floor. Still, take the message from *The Information* of Beck's intention, like the celestial ways of the universe, to magnetize you whether you're in motion or at rest.



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