



## GAVIN CLARK & TOYDRUM

### Evangelist

UNDERScore COLLECTIVE

**Songsmith's posthumous release is an atmospheric clarion call for recognition**

On the Hold Steady's track 'We Can Get Together' there's a tribute to Mathew Fletcher, the drummer in largely forgotten 90s indie band Heavenly, who took his own life in 1996. "He wasn't just the drummer / He was someone's little brother" Craig Finn sings. It's a sucker punch of a lyric that never fails to well me up, making the point that for every feted Cobain, Winehouse or Hendrix, there's a dozen equally talented, if lesser appreciated musical talents who checked out way too early.

This year we sadly added Gavin Clark to that list. The Nottingham songwriter battled the demons of depression, anxiety and alcoholism for many years while ploughing a lonely furrow since the late 90s in bands like Sunhouse and Clayhill, garnering the odd sparks of recognition for appearances on the soundtracks of films by his friend Shane Meadows.

On this posthumous release, Clark paired up with James Griffiths and Pablo Clements, the remnants of James

Lavelle's cinematic genre-splicing UNKLE project, who take the moniker of ToyDrum, for a concept album about a wayward preacher seeking redemption. Griffiths and Clements were determined to see the album through to completion after the singer's untimely death last February, aged just 46. And praise be they persevered to serve up a record that is equal parts campfire requiem and peyote-fuelled desert drive-by.

On the latter tip, there's the droney, psychedelic groove of 'Same Hands', with its grasping falsetto, incantations and rattling desert bells, and 'I Wanna Lift You Up', which stomps through a dusty Black Rebel Motorcycle Club meeting led by Clark's strung-out shamanic vocal and undercut with dirty, buzzsaw synth lines. Clark's voice is frequently overdubbed with his own claustrophobic halftones, suggesting the searing urgency of the turmoil he's marinating in. The pleading 'No One Will Ever Know' is a lo-fi riff on The Beatles' 'Tomorrow Never Knows' with its drum loops and fuzzy basslines, while 'Son Of Mine' features Clark's own son on backing vocals.

Ultimately, 'Evangelist' works best when the sparse atmospherics are pared back to leave breathing room for Clark's affecting vocal - a cracked, weather-beaten rasp that owes something to Joe Cocker and Springsteen at their most earthy, and even 'Pornography'-era Robert Smith at its most agonised. The spellbinding 'Whirlwind Of Rubbish' is the album's high watermark, a spaghetti western torchsong of whispered prophecies, Shakespearean emotions and desolate perfection. A touch of macabre hindsight can be a seductive thing, and it seems almost too easy to reflect that the album sounds like a final testament, such is its funereal, religious atmosphere. "I'll never feel this young," proclaims Clark with alarming clarity on the track of the same name, and it's hard not to flinch at the grim irony.

On the stark 'I'm In Love Tonight', Clarke breathes, "I am forgotten here," over Morricone-ish violins. After this swansong, there can surely be little danger of that. These songs are an evocative memorial to a powerfully desperate voice, who may just reach his biggest congregation yet.

JOOLS STONE





## GO MARCH

Go March  
UNDAY

**Belgian trio serve up electrifying debut packed full of motorik math-rock jams**

Think of all those albums you've read about that never saw the light of day; the painfully delayed releases or the "we just didn't like the end results" type quotes from musicians attempting to justify their stultifying post-studio self-doubt. Don't expect any of that sort of nonsense from the Go March fellas.

Bursting with carefree, exploratory energy, on the evidence of this promisingly complete debut they are about as prone to introspection as wolves on ecstasy. The Belgian trio that comprises guitarist Philipp Weies, keyboard man Hans De Prins and drummer Antono Foscez have collaborated here to create a long-player that thrums with an unshackled intuitive ebullience seldom heard in these digitally precise times. Their reference points – krautrock, melancholic synthpop and post-rock to name but a few – are broad, but the confident verve with which they pull them all together bodes extremely well.

On entering the studio their initial aim was to base the compositions on the controlled chaos of avant-rockers like

Lightning Bolt or Japan's Boris, but once they'd plugged in, tuned up and got down to business, things didn't quite pan out that way. "The moments when we just improvised were simply far more interesting," reflects Weies. They played the demos to a friend who compared the sounds they conjured up to a cross between Trans-Am and a Maserati... to which the guitarist replied, "Wow, we need to check them out!".

So yes, nobody's taking themselves too seriously here. Yet in conspiring to create the musical equivalent of a hybrid super-deluxe, six-litre, four-star, swagger-charged dream ride, they've also veered into uncharted musical territory. The results are hugely satisfying: here sophisticated and intricate; there powerful and grandiose. But at the same time they are soaringly, unpredictably crackpot: Battles meet Neu! in a soundclash bossed by Eno.

Barring the off-target southern rawk gee-tar of 'Earthbound', every track is a winner. The propulsive digital motorik of debut single 'Rise' recalls the electrified glam of Finnish rave-stompers K-X-P, and though early Kraftwerk or Neu! are channelled perhaps more literally on the equally brilliant 'Like A Record', it feels like it's being done with a knowing glint. But it's not all foot-to-the-floor. Passages of reiterated polyrhythmic loops are near trance inducing on the reflectively atmospheric closer 'The White Lodge', and on 'Slow Horse', the downtempo pace set by an imperious, pristine synth hum could stop a shire horse in its tracks.

An out-of-nowhere, instantly gratifying screamer, this is the future sound of Antwerp.

CARL GRIFFIN



Pic: Tim Lebacqz