

on a handful of tunes, the album's title rings too true. Fans of this longstanding folk institution will feel as if we've been here before.

Justin Jacobs

Kamasi Washington *Fearless Movement*

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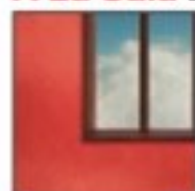


Kamasi Washington long ago transcended the jazz mainstream—his appeal is such that, at this point, a sizable percentage of his audience, despite an ecstatic appreciation of what he does, may not even listen to any other jazz artist. The saxophonist/composer has become so emblematic of the genre that sometimes it seems as if he's been around for decades, but *Fearless Movement* is only his fifth album as a leader, and that he's attained his status without diluting his music makes his success all the more commendable. Thus, when Washington announced, prior to the release of this new effort, that the double-disc *Fearless Movement* was to be a "dance record," it's understandable that some veteran fans may have gotten a bit nervous. But not to worry: Washington's idea of dance music is a far cry from all that soulless pounding that defines that tag today. Sure, you can dance to these tunes—there are times that you may even be unable to stop yourself—but this is Kamasi Washington music through and through. That means that, among other trademarks, some of the names in the credits will be familiar: **Thundercat**, the bassist who's upended the meaning of bass, is a beast on "Asha the First," an early track on the set. **Terrace Martin** is featured on alto sax on "The Visionary," a song he and Washington co-wrote with regulars **Brandon Coleman** and **Cameron Graves**. But **George Clinton** and **André 3000**—who brings his flute to "Dream State," which also happens to contain some of Washington's fiercest sax work on the recording—also make their presence known. And kudos-plus to another Washington mainstay, **Ronald Bruner Jr.**, whose drumming throughout has never been more stupendous.

Jeff Tamarkin

Khruangbin

A La Sala DEAD OCEANS



Above all else, **Khruangbin** are vibe masters—as chic as a high-end perfume ad, as luxuriously chill as a post-edible nap on a pleasure cruise. But what makes them special is the grit, the hiss, the natural reverb—all of the human touches that have helped them seamlessly build from an obscure, free-flowing, globally minded psych-rock band into a



Kate Nash

tastemaking big-deal festival draw with high-profile collaborations (a pair of killer EPs with Leon Bridges) and grooves warm enough to soundtrack Miller Lite ads. That arc, perhaps predictably, yielded the wider breakthrough of 2020's *Mordechai*, their third full-length set and first with prominent vocals—and as evidenced by "Time (You and I)" and "So We Won't Forget," they could have kept cruising comfortably down that hooky highway. Instead, with follow-up *A La Sala*, they've pivoted back to more raw, stripped-down arrangements, mostly prioritizing atmosphere over conventional songcraft. But who could possibly complain? Khruangbin utilize just about all of their favorite tools: **Mark Speer**'s surf-rock reverb pairs nicely with **Laura Lee**'s purring bass on "Fifteen Fifty-Three," while "Hold Me Up (Thank You)" is pocket-funk perfection, with a barely there vocal gliding over Lee's percolating bass, Speer's slippery guitar reverb and **DJ Johnson**'s minimalist drumming, veering into Latin territory in the B-section. Yet, the centerpiece is "May Ninth," a smiling but tear-streaked psych-soul pitter-patter-like strolling through the park on a spring day, with a storm cloud on the horizon. The vibe has never been thicker. *Ryan Reed*

Kate Nash

9 Sad Symphonies KILL ROCK STARS



9 Sad Symphonies, **Kate Nash**'s fifth studio album, is her first for Kill Rock Stars, which seems like a fitting home for the English singer-songwriter.

And, along with a shift in label, this record finds Nash exploring some new sonic territory, highlighting string arrangements both lush and sparse, analog and digital, that evoke classic Hollywood and perfectly support her delicate lilt. (The change of pace is refreshing after the screaming that characterized her last studio effort, 2018's *Yesterday Was Forever*.) Nash and Danish producer **Frederik Thaae**, who worked on *Yesterday Was Forever*, as well as Nash's 2023 off-Broadway play, *Only Gold*, nest these strings atop a broad base of rhythm and percussion, both orchestral and electronic, including hand drums and hand claps, another stalwart Nash embellishment. Add some familiarly delicate piano and the occasional acoustic guitar, and the result is uniquely Kate Nash—vulnerable and excited, cheeky and cinematic, effervescent and triumphant, if self-consciously. However, she seems to occupy a more depressed headspace—also familiar territory for Nash—during the album's opener, "Millions of Heartbeats," lamenting that, "The spark is lit at such a low flame." It's not surprising given that the tune was written in the shadow of the pandemic, a low point for Nash that included the cancellation of her hit IFC show, *GLOW*. She ultimately lands in a cautiously hopeful, somewhat familiar place by the end of the song and remains there throughout much of the album, though she does take some emotional detours on "My Bile" and "Space Odyssey 2001." And while she revisits depression and anxiety on "Ray," she ends that song in a

hopeful place, leveling up to giddy and hopelessly in love on the album's closing track, "Vampyre." Punch-drunk love suits Nash.

Matt Hoffman

Willie Nelson

The Border LEGACY

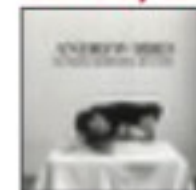


It's not just that **Willie Nelson** is still making music at 91, it's that the quality hasn't suffered one tiny little bit. *The*

Border, by someone's count, is his 75th solo studio album. Add in the collaborative efforts, live ones, etc., and, says a press release, that number more than doubles. Force of nature, anyone? *The Border*, to be fair, does reveal a little rust in those remarkable pipes, but hey, like we said, Nelson is still going strong at 91 freakin' years old. The 10 songs here, four of them co-written by Nelson and his longtime producer **Buddy Cannon**, are all solid, with "Once Upon a Yesterday" and "How Much Does It Cost" especially potent. "How much does it cost to be free?/ Free from the heartache still living in me," Nelson asks rhetorically in the latter, a plodding, insistent blues, and if he knows the answer he's not telling. The title song, the product of Rodney Crowell and Allen Shamblin, is timely but largely apolitical, focusing not on the issue that permeates the news but rather the human side, the tale of a border guard doing a job amidst impossible odds. As always, there's fun stuff too, and "Hank's Guitar," co-authored by Cannon and Bobby Tomberlin, is pure Willie: "Funny how a dream can be so real," he sings as he lays out the vivid picture of the late country great who "held me close against his chest and he wrote 'Your Cheatin' Heart.'" Nelson's helpmates here include, as always, his faithful harmonica-blowing sidekick **Mickey Raphael**, and a dedicated team that anticipates and fleshes out the singer's every note. *The Border* is classic Willie Nelson, as if there's any other kind. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Andrew Bird Trio

Sunday Morning Put-On LOMA VISTA



Although his decades-long career has mostly consisted of more indie-leaning releases, the early work of **Andrew**

Bird—singer-songwriter, violinist, whistler extraordinaire—was much more aligned with his myriad jazz influences, including his first albums with the collective Andrew Bird's Bowl of Fire, which presented a modern interpretation of the type of high-energy, "hot-club" jazz made popular by artists like legendary guitarist Django Reinhardt. Flash forward to today, when the newly minted **Andrew Bird Trio** (featuring Bird, drummer **Ted Poor** and bassist **Alan Hampton**) offer up *Sunday*