

BIRTH! SCHOOL! WORK! DEATH!

Robert Forster... on the soundtrack to his life



Roberta Flack *First Take* (Atlantic 588204, LP, UK, 1969) **£15**

Roberta Flack's *Killing Me Softly* was a big radio hit in Australia when I was about 12 or 13, but her breakout hit, *The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face*, arguably made a bigger impression on me. It's on *First Take*, her debut album, and that whole record's great. I love the cover, with the big Atlantic logo and the way she's bent over a keyboard in a nightclub. She cut it with a jazz group and it's just beautiful.



John Phillips *John Phillips: The Wolfking of LA* (Stateside-Dunhill, SSL 5027, LP, UK, 1970) **£35**

I love John Phillips' work with The Mamas & The Papas, but this was his first solo album and it sank at the time, so I only discovered it much later. His pop sensibility is still intact at this stage, but there's a country feel to it – there's a lot of pedal steel in there. Side One is especially flawless and the band are The Wrecking Crew, so it's full of beautiful songs that any top-notch singer-songwriter would die for. It's got this dark vibe to it. It's very Malibu, but with a feeling of the hippie dream going sour.



David Bowie *Hunky Dory* (RCA SF 8244, LP, UK, 1971) **£500**

I first discovered Bowie when I heard *Starman* on the radio in 1972 aged 15 and that was quite an epiphany. There was something really alluring about his voice. I bought *Hunky Dory* shortly after and it's still one of the best collections of songs I've heard. It's the sound of someone with a 12-string guitar who's not yet famous and feels like he's got lots of time. It's Bowie with long hair, the quirky hippie smoking hash at Haddon Hall, and it's the one where he attains singer-songwriter perfection before he becomes the rock star.



Roxy Music *Stranded* (Island ILPS 9252, LP, UK, 1973) **£20**

Roxy Music were the first band I saw live. I bought *Stranded* and saw them at Brisbane Festival Hall when they were touring the album in Australia in 1974. Brian Eno had gone by this time, but he's often said in interviews he thinks *Stranded* is the best Roxy album and I agree. I love *Song For Europe*, *Mother Of Pearl* and it's still got some of the experimentation and weirdness of the first two albums, but a little of their latter-day conventional pop sound. The perfect sweet spot.



Neil Young *On The Beach* (Reprise K 54014, LP, UK, 1974) **£70**

I bought *Tonight's The Night* in my teens in the 70s and I love that, too, but while I was aware of *On The Beach*, I only got it on vinyl in the 90s and it really affected me. Side Two, especially, is incredible. It's got a really spooky vibe; the songs have this drifting, narcotic feel to them and I love the beauty and bleakness of it. He weaves Richard Nixon, Patty Hearst and Charles Manson into his tapestry and somehow he just gets that whole 70s West Coast American vibe better than anyone else.



Ramones *Ramones* (Sire 9103253, UK, LP, UK, 1976) **£40**

I bought *Ramones* on import when it came out. I was 18, I'd just bought my first electric guitar, and being able to master their songs – just three chords and no lead breaks – was my entry into writing my own songs. The Ramones were fast, wildly funny and just brilliant.



Blondie *Blondie* (Private Stock PVLIP 1017, LP, US, 1976) **£20**

I still think Blondie's first album is their best; fantastic songs by an amazing band just before they became famous. Debbie isn't an icon yet, they look quite *West Side Story* on the sleeve, and the record catches them at the moment before punk set a lot of rules in stone. There's so much variety to it: Brill Building stuff like *In The Flesh*, some glam and some terrific mid-60s-style pop. It's inspirational and I still play it a lot.



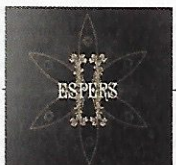
The Smiths *The Queen Is Dead* (Rough Trade ROUGH 96, LP, UK, 1986) **£25**

I was a bit disappointed by The Smiths' first two albums and thought [compilation] *Hatful Of Hollow* was much better. But then they delivered their masterpiece. It's definitely their best album and no two songs are remotely the same. *I Know It's Over* is a classic ballad and the band were at their peak. It's a really great mid-80s album from one of the decade's most influential bands.



Mercury Rev *Deserter's Songs* (V2 VVR 1002771, LP, UK, 1998) **£30**

I'm a big fan of Bob Dylan's *The Basement Tapes* and the first two Band albums, so I love that Woodstock, Catskill Mountains vibe that The Band and Dylan got together. Maybe it helps that Levon Helm and Garth Hudson guest on it, but with *Deserter's Songs*, Mercury Rev magically reference that same late 60s thing really well, yet it didn't feel like homage. When it came out, I was living in Regensburg in Germany, an old mediaeval city. My wife and I were just going to have our first child and that record caught the mood of the moment.



Espers *Esters II* (Wichita WEBB 110, LP, UK, 2006) **£20**

This has a real late 60s, early 70s folk feel. In the 80s, I got into the early Fairport Convention stuff and this has a bit of that and maybe Pentangle, too. Like *Deserter's Songs*, you can feel it's touching something back in history, yet it stands on its own. They've got a great haunting vocalist, Meg Baird, but there are also these heavy, Black Sabbath-y guitars in the mix and the songs are just really intricately put together. It feels like a great big winding clock and the songs just roll through these amazing chord changes. A mesmerising record, one of the best things I've heard in recent years.

Interview: Tim Peacock
Robert Forster's *Inferno* is out now on Tapete.