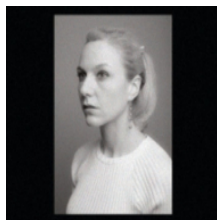


## HEDVIG MOLLESTAD TRIO

**Enfant Terrible** RUNE GRAMMOFON

Scorching, metal-edged jazz rock.

Building upon the grungy bluster of 2013's *All Of Them Witches*, the third album by this talented Norwegian team displays an increasing depth. Taking the totemic force of the rock power trio, Mollestad presides over an irresistible mix of jam-band alacrity and methodical rigour. Her snarling zig-zagging guitar runs are laced with a spectral afterglow that crackles and glows with tangible energy in a group sound that's saturated and raucous, eagerly embracing a boundary-leaping philosophy - if it works, they use it. *La Boule Noir* takes the metric trickiness of Soft Machine's *Hazard*



Profile and gives it some Black Sabbath heaviness. Ivar Loe Bjørnstad's heat-seeking drumming (he stokes the equally great prog/electronic outfit Cakewalk) combines with Ellen Brekken's rubbery, loquacious bass work to offer a rhythmic springboard that enables Mollestad's runs to take off and fly, without ever being tied down themselves. Though Mollestad understandably does most of the melodic heavy-lifting, what comes across more than anything on *Enfant Terrible* is how trust and mutual support can lead to a product much bigger than the sum of its parts. **SS**

## OBLIVION SUN

**The High Places** PROPHASE

Happy The Man men are back to show us how it's done.

Keyboard whiz Frank Wyatt and guitarist/vocalist Stan Whitaker were members of 70s unit Happy The Man, who reunited in 1999 and proffered an album, *The Muse Awakens*, five years later. Maybe they should have kept that title for this little nugget of symphonic, melodic prog. It seems these dyed-in-the-wool musicians had a lot more prog in their locker, and that same muse led them to this new incarnation. Its line-up completed by drummer Bill Brasso and bassist David Hughes, Oblivion Sun purvey live and lively symph-style rock that doffs its cap to the golden era of the 70s and, at its



most modern, the late-80s. *The High Places* opens pleasantly with the instrumental *Deckard* (do you know any man who doesn't love *Blade Runner*? Nor me), and we get mid-tempo non-vocal *March Of The Mushroom Men* before the beautiful *Everything*, an

acoustic ballad that builds gracefully, with Whitaker's natural West Coast voice warming it up nicely. The six-part title suite is where the prog synapses really start firing and the shadow of Gabriel, Collins and band looms large. That's not to take away from the Sun's sincerity and quality, though. There is real love here. **GRM**

## PLANK

**Hivemind** AKOUSTIK ANARKHY

The Manchester electro-heads' second - neither creepy nor crawly.

Where their 2012 debut *Animalism* concerned itself with all things mammal, Plank (they're named after kosmische producer Conny) return with a work inspired by the insect world. Though they cite *Close To The Edge* and Camel's *The Snow Goose* as influences, really Plank are at the front of the new prog phalanx, their technically-precise pieces reminiscent of Can and Neu! yet their modernist approach also aligning them to fellow glitch-dabbling electro innovators like 65 Days Of Static and Teeth Of The Sea. *Aphidility* is a brilliant piece of death disco; alongside *Waterboatman* it's the



soundtrack to a slo-mo dancefloor massacre in an early 80s horror flick (is John Carpenter the most name-checked influence in prog these days?). Besides, there just aren't enough bands sampling cicadas, crickets and the novelist Nabokov, as Plank do on

the celestial-sounding *Metamorphosis*. This trio can really play, too. The orchestration throughout *Hivemind* is deft and the arrangement fluid and impeccable as the band move between blissful, Popol Vuh-style ambient heaviness (on *Drone*), metronomic jams, math rock and full-tilt psyche wig-outs. Basically, it's the bee's knees. **BM**

## MOSTLY AUTUMN

**Dressed In Voices** MOSTLY-AUTUMN.COM

The darker side of Autumn...



If you ever thought that Mostly Autumn were a soft touch, then this album will change your mind. *Dressed In Voices* is dark, gloomy, and offers little in the way of comfort. But then that's the very reason it could be this enduring prog band's most complete work so far.

**Stunning and inventive - their most complete work so far.**

Conceptually, it's about someone reviewing their life as they are at the point of dying, having just been shot by a rampaging maniac. *'I'm not dead, not alive,'* vocalist Olivia Sparnenn intones on *Running*, putting everything into stark perspective. The gruesome subject is tackled from the angle of the death being a pointless, almost accidental one - wrong place, wrong time - but also sees incidents across this life cut short as offering nothing to suggest the central character has anything remarkable in his past.

Maybe what composer Bryan Josh is trying to tell us is that, ultimately, each person's life is little more than a compound of trivialities. But those are personal experiences to each individual, and are therefore unique to that person, and cannot be dismissed as irrelevant.

Each track is thoughtfully created and presented, offering glimpses of a life unfolding, yet you can never escape the feeling that it's all being played out in the shadow of that impending bullet. *'Would you take it away,'* sigh Sparnenn and Josh in mournful unison on *First Day At School*.

What the ominous atmosphere allows the band to do is to get away from any temptation of being joyful for its own sake. But, there's still an uplifting quality to the music that links in with the sense of the central figure not belonging anywhere. There's a displacement that's realised on *Home, The Library* and most tellingly on *Box Of Tears*.

In some ways (and this is high praise indeed), the album reflects the storytelling technique used in the classic movie *Sunset Boulevard*, when the key character's body is seen lying dead in a swimming pool at the start, and then he relates the back story leading to this demise. There, and here, everything inexorably converges to this climactic moment.

*Dressed In Voices* is a stunning, inventive work, lifting Mostly Autumn to a new stratum. It has so much variety and passion, both in the music and the narrative, that it takes a few bites to even begin to get to grips with the content. In some ways, it's a movie waiting to happen, and the visual aspect of this tale is remarkably brought to the surface by the musical construction. More than anything, Mostly Autumn have set the bar extremely high for themselves, and this might be the start of a fresh season for them.

**MALCOLM DOME**