

## BIRTHING MUSIC: DIRTY THREE



**DOUG WALLEN** *Music Editor*

WITH ALL DUE respect to anyone who's ever slaved over a mixtape or playlist, choosing music for the birth of a child is an especially daunting business. That's why, for the birth of our second child last month, I left the task to my wife, Kate. Besides, she was obviously the one who needed the music most. The key leg of active labour was accompanied by Dirty Three's classic album *Ocean Songs* (1998).

Kate did a lot of pre-listening to decide on just the right background, and we played a burnt CD of Erik Satie piano pieces earlier in the labour. But she chose *Ocean Songs* because she had good memories associated with it and found it powerful in an ideal way. As someone interested in astrology, she also saw a connection between the album's overt sea themes and the new little Pisces in our family.

The weekend after the birth, I took my two-year-old son to the Golden Plains music festival in regional Victoria. His attention was fleeting, and yet we found ourselves near the front of the crowd to watch New York blues band Endless Boogie finish their set.

My son convinced me to put him on my shoulders and from that perch he was in the thrall of the band's sprawling power. I later returned to the festival alone to see Urge Overkill, a band I loved as a teenager. However long – or little – we've been on this planet, music is always there for us.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANNABEL MEHRAN

## CHET FAKER THINKING IN TEXTURES

★★★★½

The debut EP from Chet Faker (the moniker for Melbourne singer-producer Nick Murphy), gives an almighty nod to the legions of neo-soul and R'n'B vocalists preceding him. But it distances itself from the bombast of forerunners with its impressively intimate subject matter and sound. *Thinking in Textures* is both from and about the bedroom, taking us on a journey of sexual yearning that's still somehow chilled-out and cruisy. In a voice at once familiar and hard to place, Murphy delivers a dub-influenced cover of Blackstreet's 1996 homage to a classy prostitute, 'No Diggity'. Murphy's hoarse rendition of Teddy Riley's lines, *I can't get her outta my mind/I think about the girl all the time*, communicates obsession and unrequited lust with a sophistication Riley couldn't muster. Stand-out track 'Cigarettes and Chocolate' is a genuinely inventive pastiche of ghostly vocal loops, beats and warm guitar, evoking the spook factor of Burial as well as the Avalanches at their most irrepressible. Definitely diggity. **KATE HENNESSY**



## LOCKED DOWN DR JOHN

★★★★½

Opening with raven squawks, bluesy vocals from Black Keys frontman Dan Auerbach and then the snarls of Malcolm John 'Mac' Rebennack Jr (Dr John himself), the title track of *Locked Down* is representative of this whole album. Over the next 40 minutes of experimentation, chapters of ad-libbed bedlam are offered up by hand-picked session players. Produced by Auerbach and full of neo-soul, Blaxploitation and Ethiopian funk resonances, there's modern New Orleans sonic drapery hanging off this robust and erogenous record. Dr John reinvents voodoo rock, Creole roots and his signature keyboard style, melding it with Auerbach-inspired 21st-century garage, blues and pop. Handclaps, hollers, beats, atmospheric nuances and a series of backing vocals all work alongside skidding guitar riffs to take the veteran's sound to a heightened state. With layered percussion and shrill woodwind bursts enhancing the urgency, it's like classic Dr John on overdrive. A stirring new frontier. **NICK ARGYRIOU**



## THE DEVIL'S RESOLVE BARREN EARTH

★★★★★

Finland's progressive death-metal stalwarts Barren Earth are a 'supergroup' comprising former and current members of Amorphis, Swallow the Sun and German thrashers Kreator. Their second album is a sumptuous exploration bubbling with delicate King Crimson-style jazz fusion, hard-driving riffs and spaced-out melodies. It's all helmed by clean and brutal vocal performances by Mikko Kotamäki, most despondently on 'The Dead Exiles' and beautifully slashing on 'Where All Stories End'. In the regal opener, 'Passing of the Crimson Shadows', twin guitar harmonies and twinkling acoustic passages shine through a 1970s synth haze. A Jim-Morrison-in-studded-leather sound creeps into the band's jams, as walls of organ form a backdrop for Cream-y blues licks. An alchemical brew of doom, death and progressive metal infuse this imaginative soundscape. And there's no shortage of chemistry between Barren Earth's members; *The Devil's Resolve* is rare in that you can trust the 'super' in 'supergroup'. **TOM VALCANIS**

