

THE LATEST RELEASES ON CD

COLLAPSE INTO NOW ★★★★★☆

REM (Warners)

Having returned to their rock roots on 2008's *Accelerate*, REM must have enjoyed it as much as the fans because *Collapse Into Now* picks up the baton. It opens with the muscular, tuneful *Discoverer*, Peter Buck's guitar swooping and diving, with more of the same on *Mine Smell Like Honey* and the punky *Alligator Aviator Autopilot Antimatter*. Elsewhere, soulful ballads tug at the heartstrings (*Oh My Heart*, *Walk It Back*, *Blue*, an eerie monologue featuring Patti Smith). Despite opening and closing with Stipe hollering *Discoverer*, REM are at their most questing on well-trodden territory. **CH**

LAST NIGHT ON EARTH ★★★★★☆

Noah And The Whale

(Young And Lost Club/Mercury)

On 2009's *The First Days Of Spring*, Charlie Fink sounded like a man on the verge of slitting his wrists, mourning the end of his romance with Laura Marling. His mother must have heaved a sigh of relief at hearing *Last Night On Earth*, in which the erstwhile folk outfit embrace bombastic Eighties pop and lighters-aloft, Springsteen-esque stories of coming-of-age, as fun as it's full of heart. Is there any genre this impressively dextrous band can't own? **CH**

LAST ★★★★★

The Unthanks (Rabblrouser/EMI)

Sumptuous string arrangements (recorded in their local village hall) and haunting brass refrains make *Last* feel much more accessible than the Northumberland folk quintet's first

three albums. Their key strength, though, is the interwoven voices of Rachel and Becky Unthank, spookily child-like on *Queen Of Hearts*, austere and moving on the title track. A gorgeously unhurried, utterly mesmerising masterpiece. **MT**

WHAT DID YOU EXPECT FROM THE VACCINES?

★★★★☆

The Vaccines (Columbia)

It is clear why this British four-piece are feted as the saviours of guitar music, their songs short, sharp shocks (*Wreckin' Bar* just 1m 20s long) of urgent, bolshy garage rock with killer singalong melodies. The Vaccines are so derivative, though, that you assume "the kids" haven't heard their dirtier, darker, edgier

influences like The Ramones, Pixies or Jesus and Mary Chain. **CH**

LONG PLAYER LATE BLOOMER ★★★★★☆

Ron Sexsmith (Cooking Vinyl)

Canadian troubadour Ron Sexsmith has probably earned the right to look as sullenly unhappy as he does on the inner sleeve of this, his twelfth album. For just how many joyful, beautifully-crafted pop songs does one man have to write to achieve big success? They come tumbling out thick and fast on *Late Bloomer - Get In Line, No Help At All, Heavenly - one up-beat, country-inflected gem after another*. He'll never be a star, sadly, because he doesn't look like one, but that doesn't stop his albums being great. **MT**

CHARLOTTE HEATHCOTE AND MARTIN TOWNSEND



SPOOKY: Rachel Unthank brings folk into 2011

