

THE BLADE

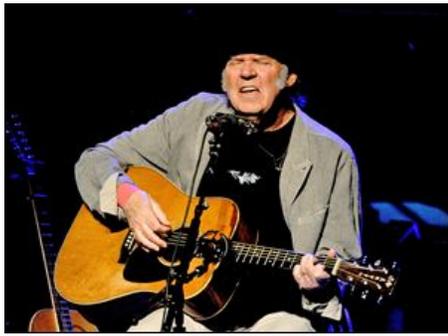
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PEACH WEEKENDER

Sounds: Neil Young returns to roots on 'A Letter Home'

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BLADE STAFF AND NEWS SERVICES



Singer/songwriter Neil Young performs at the Dolby Theatre on March 29 in Los Angeles.

A LETTER HOME

Neil Young (Reprise)

Neil Young's sporadic concept records aren't for everyone. *A Letter Home* should be. While still an esoteric venture — Young recorded it in a refurbished 1947 Voice-O-Graph — the songs he chose are familiar ones, making this more accessible than previous out in left field Young releases.

Among the songs: Bob Dylan's *Girl From the North Country*, Bruce Springsteen's *My Home Town*, Willie Nelson's *On the Road Again* and *Crazy*, and Gordon Lightfoot's *Early Morning Rain*. They are a reflection of Young's roots and musical backbone, made all the more clear by the heartfelt and intimate delivery.

Now, back to the box.

Young, 68, was captivated by the Voice-O-Graph that Jack White had restored and made available at his recording studio in Nashville. Typically used by amateurs to record one song at a time, which is immediately laid down on vinyl, Young decided to cram himself into the phone booth-sized contraption and record an entire record.

The songs sound like they came from another age — complete with scratches, pops, and imperfections usually only heard on old vinyl records. Adding to the idiosyncratic approach, Young fashioned the entire record as a letter home to his deceased mother, delivering her a playlist of some of his favorite tunes.

It's clear these songs are a part of Young's musical DNA, and it's almost as if the listener is being invited into his living room for a private concert — delivered from inside a phone booth, of course.

— SCOTT BAUER,
Associated Press



GHOST STORIES

Coldplay (Parlophone/ Atlantic)

Chris Martin's breakup album deals with love and loss in generalities rather than specifics. But then, not many words rhyme with "Gwyneth."

"I'm ready for the pain," Coldplay's frontman sings on *Oceans*. "I'm ready for a change."

Martin and Gwyneth Paltrow announced in March they were uncoupling after more than a decade of marriage, which intensified anticipation Coldplay might stray from





than a decade of marriage, which intensified anticipation. Coldplay might stray from its familiar formula on the band's sixth album, *Ghost Stories*. The lyrics do suggest Martin's trying to escape ghosts in his past, but he surrounds his singing with the digital drone of synthesizers and never digs too deep to describe his heartache. Blood

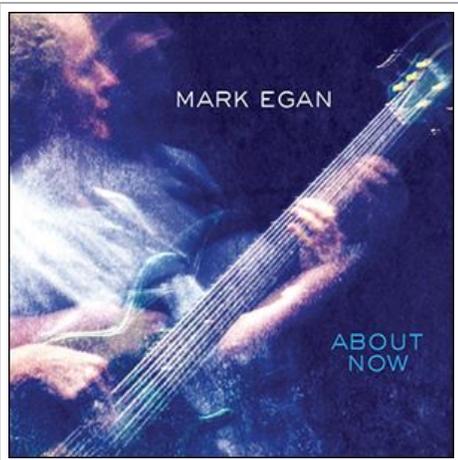
on the Tracks this is not.

Instead, the band's music remains appealing mostly for its surface sheen. Several arrangements on the nine-track set are intimate by arena-band standards, and the best sound like Martin singing in his bedroom. Another's Arms offers a dreamy chorus for Bic wavers, and the band cranks it up on A Sky Full of Stars, which was co-produced by Avicii and has a thump and hook to please the club crowd.

Most of the album was created with producer Paul Epworth, best known for his Grammy and Oscar-winning work with Adele, as well as Florence + the Machine and Foster the People. But Epworth doesn't bring out the best version of Coldplay.

On *Ghost Stories*, there's little piano, guitar, or percussion, and there are few memorable melodies or surprises, which is why a discordant guitar note on True Love stands out. The soft focus of the words and music makes for sterile gauze, which is one way to treat a wounded heart.

— STEVEN WINE,
Associated Press



ABOUT NOW

Mark Egan (Wavetone Records)

Mark Egan continues to show he is in an elite class of electric jazz bass players on this, his 20th album on his own Wavetone label. As a youth, Egan studied under the late Jaco Pastorius, who redefined how the electric bass can step out as a lead instrument — not just one for accompaniment — during his heyday with the groundbreaking modern jazz group, Weather Report.

What Egan learned from Pastorius has resulted in greatness for him in the modern jazz genre, as well, although the influence of Pastorius, while still evident, is probably not as obvious on *About Now* as it is some of Egan's earlier albums. *About Now* isn't as much about showcasing Egan's amazing soloing technique as it is the powerhouse jamming and interplay of a fine modern jazz trio that has produced a strong, lush, and

complex sound that can be both frenetic and tight.

The disc reunites Egan with drummer Danny Gottlieb and keyboardist Mitchel Forman, who played with Egan while he was in the Pat Metheny Group. In addition to Metheny, Egan has performed over the years with other big names in modern jazz and rock, such as Larry Coryell, Pat Martino, Sting, Stan Getz, Bill Evans, Joan Osborne, Roger Daltry, and Duran Duran off-shoot Arcadia. *About Now* shows more of his musical versatility and vision. The disc features Egan on a five-string fretless Pedulla bass, occasionally overdubbed by his double-neck, 8-string fretless bass..

— TOM HENRY