BLUE CARTOON
Are You Getting On HARDWIN
A bit of blue for the dads...

Delightfully obscure, Blue Cartoon originate from Austin, Texas where they built a reputation for sprightly pop rock. Seemingly believing that direction was becoming a bit stale and predictable, they've refined their approach to embrace widespread ranging influences, and Are You Getting On is the uplifting end result. The cliché in the accompanying press release refers to their sound as being what you get if you put '60C, Roxy Music, T. Rex, Todd Rundgren and Yes into a blender'. Add The Beatles in there and it's a pretty accurate portrayal of Blue Cartoon's amalgam and talismanic repositioning. It's often a winning mix, firmly rooted in the 70s. The title track and 'Dreaming Beautiful Songs have the polish of The Idle Jets at their finest. Only Cowboy In Timbuktu is a playful song that captures the band's blistering humour, with the experimental, reggae-infused Gray Horizon also proving unexpectedly successful. That said, there are moments where the music lacks clout. The pedestrian plod of Everyday's A Saturday has the unfortunate air of a Wings B-side, and The Primrose Path is a morose way to end an album that contains moments of unbridled flair. RW

DEAN ALLEN FOYD
Road To Atlas CRUISHER
Swedish quartet's mental psych-rock concoction.

Despite the name and cover art, this isn't a reissue from some long lost 60s acid rock follies, having raised slightly startled smiles with debut LP The Sounds Can Be So Cruel last year, these Stockholm psych-rockers continue to surprise and delight in a way that's incredibly detached from modernity, but not exactly stuck in the past either. There's a gritty pulse to their blend of spacedness and demented, colourful urgency that stops you dismissing them as hackneyed throwbacks. Sadness Of Mankind starts all twingly with Syd Barrett stylings, before skewing into angular chords and organ. Insects gets freakier still with its Free-jazz vibe and rumbling bass backdrop, synth twiddles and rugged guitar spiralling into anarchy. Bluesy grooves are never too far away, keeping things weird but not floating totally into magic mushroom land. The infectious Hendrix-esque hook of HWY Lost (Revisited) twists and turns amid early Dr Who-tingling whirs, and the atmospheric closing title track is oddly beautiful in an imaginative, post-rave way. Dean Allen Foyd bid a hearty 'balls' to the 21st century as we know it. You'd be crazy not to get involved. PG

DILLINGER ESCAPE PLAN
One Of Us Is The Killer POWY SMASHER
The New Jersey mathcore rockers ratchet up the pace, again.

Dillinger's previous album, Option Paralysis was arguably their most eclectic work, and also featured some of the most mind-flayingly intense sections of experimental rock ever recorded. On One Of Us Is The Killer, the band have retained a degree of that eclecticism. On the stellar title track they approach, by their standards, radio friendliness, while other songs like Hero Of The Soviet Union trump even the most radical excesses of their last album. Needless to say, this is a good thing. From opener Prancer onward, it's hard sometimes even to process what's going on. Passages and ideas whizz past, only locking into place as your mind plays over them later. This is key, for at its heart this record is - in relative terms at least - accessible enough that you can remember riffs, melodies and even whole tracks, returning later for another fix. Understanding Decay, Paranoa Shields and Nothing's Funny all borrow from mainstream atmospheric alt-rock circa the Smashing Pumpkins' Machine, but still can't resist sliding back into brilliant, sublime madness. Dillinger will always be a somewhat niche band, but this record captures them at their best. AL

JAZZ PROG
Sid Smith rounds up the best releases from prog's jazzier reaches.

Chancing upon a baroque organ in a Bavarian abbey, Keith Jarrett was entranced by the otherworldly sounds its ancient stops and pedals produced. Hymns, Spheres (ECM) dates from 1976 but now appears on CD, in unexpurgated double-disc form, for the first time. It's a remarkable harmonic exploration as Jarrett revels in the natural reverberation of his surroundings and the spectral emanations of these pipes. Astonishing and often eerily proto-ambient, it ranges from belligerent grandiosity to delicate intimacy with Jarrett's customary improvisational fearlessness. A unique outing in his extensive catalogue. Volf (MKDK) is the third album by Phlox, and while listening to it there are times when you'd swear it's come straight from Canterbury rather than Estonia. This pristinely recorded in-concert appearance bristles with Zorn's Jason Fender Rhodes, siren-seduced guitar and bubbling sax. Crisp and smartly propelled time-signatures underscore several succinct and accessible melodies whose very tunefulness is yet another echo of the Canterbury ethos. While informed by jazz, there's a decent amount of straight on rock in Phlox's make-up that means fans of National Health and late-era Soft Machine would be wise to investigate without delay. The spacey ripples of Soft Machine are almost detectable in parts of Synesthesia (Cuneiform) by the Paris-based Kandinsky Effect, though the overall language is overtly jazz-based. Revolving around American saxophonist Warren Walker, electric bass and drums lock around his fluent lines with an unshakable tightness. Taut, economic improvising around strong melodies ensures this is incisive stuff.

Norwegian-based The Geordie Approach take a different tack entirely, swirling out into abstract, vibrant soundscapes that shake with fevered invention. Featuring trioVD guitarist Chris Sharkey, Inatuen (Bruce's Fingers) is a dense and febrile collage as bass, drums and shrieking electronics collide and tussle with Sharkey's outstandingly splenetic. Pat Metheny's Tups: John Zorn's Book Of Angels, Volume 20 (Nonesuch) pays homage to the sax player's famously acerbic compositions. True, Metheny's filtering has the effect of smoothing off some of Zorn's jagged edges, but the guitarist's trademark élan and often breathtaking lyricism bring a yearning, transformative quality to the pieces which ensures this is a two-way meeting. There's a bittersweet quality about the ravishing tunes on Resume (ECM) by Eberhard Weber. Having lost the ability to play following a stroke in 2007, Weber has painstakingly edited together a series of in-concert bass solos, adding keyboard textures and occasional drum and brass overdubs from Michael DiPasqua and Jan Garbarek. The broad, sonorous tones of his five-string bass sing from the heart, making the loss of this towering giant of European jazz all the more poignant. Though it's his Colours quartet that he's rightly celebrated for, this is an elegant swansong.