

MARTIN STEPHENSON AND THE DAINTEES: Bayswater Road ★★★

(Barbaraville)
He's been in the music business for 35 years now, but Stephenson shows no signs of slowing down or diminishing the standards he's kept since the brilliant *Boat To Bolivia* album. *Bayswater Road* has a retro rock feel to it, with opener *The Whisky* setting the stall out for an eclectic set. *Secret Crush* sounds like some lost '50s hit, while *Shoot* also benefits from some great guitar work. Recent single *High Sierra Snow* is a standout that will be gobbled up on Radio 2. **DE**

THE LAFONTAINES: Common Problem ★★★

(A Wolf At The Door)
Combining rap, rock and electronica isn't a particularly Scottish pastime, but The LaFontaines are a very intense and individual proposition. Their

second album sees a band that, according to rapid-fire front man Kerr Okan, is "not as young and naive" any more and that is projected through their fiery music. They are ready to sort the world's woes, as indicated on the bolshy title track and the perfectly titled opener *Explosion*. Mixing the genres shouldn't work, but their infectious enthusiasm sees them succeed. **DE**

KENNY CHESNEY: Live In No Shoes Nation ★★★★★

(Blue Chair)
(As Chesney approaches his 50th birthday, this 29-track album looks back at his dynamic decade at the pinnacle of US country music, regularly playing sell-out stadium tours and chalking up tens of millions of album sales. Each song here is a live performance, hand-picked by the man himself - memorable bar and beach anthems and

trademark heartfelt ballads. Kenny's pals are all here, too. Taylor Swift duets on *Big Star*, Eric Church helps out on *When I See This Bar*. The Zac Brown Band provide reggae backing on *Everybody Wants To Go To Heaven* and Old Dominion swell the sound of *Save It For A Rainy Day*, while Dave Matthews pops up on a medley of Bob Marley's *Three Little Birds* and Steve Miller's *The Joker*. **DH**

COUSTEAUX: CousteauX ★★★★★

(Silent X)
In the early 2000s, Cousteau made a splash, with Liam McKahey's croon and Davey Ray Moor's songwriting, but superstardom eluded them and they went their separate ways. A gap of 10 years sees the duo reunite (hence the X on the end of the band name) and it's like they've never been apart. McKahey's voice has elements of Nick Cave, Mark Lanegan and

Scott Walker, and the songs have a dark, brooding feel. Libertine Carl Barat joins them on co-write *Innermost Light*. **DE**

HOWIE PAYNE: Mountain ★★★★★

(Full Stack)
Payne was the front man of Scousers with jangly guitars *The Stands* before branching out on a solo career in 2009. It's been almost eight years since his debut, and it feels like he's mellowed in the intervening years. Still an excellent songwriter, his vibe appears to be nearer Laurel Canyon now, with multi-layered harmonies and acoustic guitars to the fore. It's simple but oh so effective on tracks like *High Times*, *The Brightest Star* and *Quick As The Moon*. **DE**

STRAY: All In Your Mind ★★★★★

(Esoteric)
A precocious prog and hard rock quartet who burst on the British



MELLOWING: Howie Payne

scene in the late '60s while the members were still only 15 or 16 years of age, Stray's early recorded output is collated in this excellent four disc box set. Their five albums between 1970 and 1974 are remastered on the first three discs, with the fourth a set of demos and rare tracks. Despite never truly breaking through, their dexterity,

especially that of guitarist Del Bromham, is evident from the opening track, the nine-plus minutes of *All In Your Mind*, subsequently covered by Iron Maiden. **DE**

HUSKER DU: Savage Young Du ★★★★★

(Numero)
The recent death of drummer and co-vocalist Grant Hart due to cancer saw the dreams of many Du fans for a reunion of the Minnesota punk trio quashed, but this three-disc compilation of demo and live tracks from their earliest days before their first studio album will go a long way to placating the baying mob. It shows how Hart, bassist Greg Norton and incendiary guitarist and vocalist Bob Mould gradually honed their fierce sound. The remastered 69 recordings (47 previously unreleased) are still of differing sound quality but what is always there is the visceral power. **DE**