

NEW MUSIC

Albums from the Flaming Lips and Bobby Avey
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By JON PARELES and BEN RATLIFF
Published: April 15, 2013

THE FLAMING LIPS

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'The Terror'

(Lovely Sorts/

Warner Brothers)

The goofy costumes, flashing lights, confetti blasts and general hilarity of the Flaming Lips' concerts largely conceal the sense of dread that has also run through their songs in a recording career that has now lasted

for an improbable 30 years. But there's no escaping bleakness on "The Terror," which willfully tosses away nearly anything that might offer easy pleasure or comic relief.

"The Terror" embraces repetition and abrasiveness more monolithically than previous Flaming Lips albums. Through three decades Wayne Coyne has led his band on an uncharted trajectory amid punk, psychedelia, studio obsessiveness, science fiction, mysticism and noise; Steven Drozd, who joined the Flaming Lips as their drummer in 1991, largely shapes the music.

Along the way, Flaming Lips albums have usually offset their gloomy moments with garage-rock stomps or melodic confections; even the band's generally bummed-out 2009 album, "Embryonic," had some crash and shimmer. "The Terror" rarely does; it's a take-it-or-leave-it album that's willing to be inert or annoying. But its obsessiveness brings its own rewards.

The lyrics find cosmic repercussions in a lovers' breakup; loneliness turns to contemplation of grim human compulsions and the end of the universe. "However love can help you/We are all standing alone," Mr. Coyne sings in

the title song. The album's prettiest melody carries "Try to Explain," which concludes, "Try to explain why you're leaving/I don't think I understand." It's the kind of majestic pop chorale that has been a Flaming Lips staple, but this one is deliberately set amid emptiness: no drumbeat, just watery chords that waver slightly over a foundation of

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BOBBY AVEY

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sustained distortion, keeping the song moody and unmoored.

Throughout “The Terror,” the band’s guitars have been all but supplanted by keyboards and synthesizers, often set to loop and drone, with eerie sounds welling up out of nowhere. The album includes just nine songs in 55 minutes, and about halfway through comes “You Lust,” which marches along for 13 minutes on an unvarying four-note electric piano line. But that song, and the seven-minute “Butterfly, How Long It Takes to Die,” grow incantatory, with inexorably surging drums in “You Lust” and a slow-motion spatial barrage of notes and textures in “Butterfly.”

At times the music falls short of its arty ambitions; “Turning Violent,” with a falsetto vocal and an ominous pulse, is too close to Radiohead for its own good. And when, after brooding for nearly an hour, Mr. Coyne concludes “Always There in Our Hearts” with an affirmation of “The joy of life that overwhelms” amid cacophony and echoes, he doesn’t sound all that convinced. The album’s spell of solitary desolation can’t be set aside so easily. **JON PARELES**

BOBBY AVEY

“Be Not So Long to Speak”

(Minsi Ridge Records)

[Bobby Avey’s](#) “Be Not So Long to Speak,” a solo-piano record of mystery, patience, imagination and clear design, could have been made only by a jazz pianist. It values individual touch and rhythm and phrasing, abruptness and negative space.

But it goes where it wants. It is full of will to not be easily reduced and categorized, though it is frequently very beautiful. It owes a lot to the harmony and atmospheres of Debussy and Ravel, but here and there — for instance, on his own “Late November” and his version of the Michael Jackson hit “P.Y.T.” — it turns polytonal and polyrhythmic, with a piano-as-tuned-drum-set conception. (He’s either internalized Cecil Taylor or others who have internalized Cecil Taylor.) It’s not background music.

You may not have heard much about Mr. Avey unless you keep track of the saxophonist Dave Liebman, with whom he’s worked off and on since 2006, before he graduated from music school. That year they made a duo record together, “Vienna Dialogues,” playing versions of classical lieder.

Four years later, with his trio and Mr. Liebman as a special guest, Mr. Avey put out his first record, “A New Face.” He’s played with the excellent saxophonist Miguel Zénon, both in Mr. Avey’s own group and in a recent project called “Authority Melts From Me,” based on his field research of Voodoo drumming in Haiti.

You’d think what he’d want to do now is work his trio all over the place, establishing a group sound and a live presence. Instead, here’s a profound, moody solo-piano album. It’s the cart before the horse, in a good way.

“Be Not So Long” makes sense within the context of a handful of records from the last 40 years or so, first-time solo-piano records by musicians with something to say: Don Pullen’s “Solo Piano Album,” Matthew Shipp’s “Symbol Systems,” Jason Moran’s “Modernistic,” Vijay Iyer’s “Solo,” Brad Mehldau’s “Live in Tokyo,” Harold O’Neal’s “Marvelous Fantasy,” Craig Taborn’s “Avenging Angel.” Like those, this has the unmistakable feel of an attempt at doing something new. Most of these tracks are Mr. Avey’s own compositions, or the frames of them, filled in with elaborations and dream-world repetitions.

Sometimes, as in “Isolation of Rain,” those repetitions, and generous use of the sustain pedal, are ends in themselves; other times, as in his reharmonized, slightly bitter version of “Stardust,” there’s clever and careful development, a true beginning and end. Keep an eye on this guy. Start, perhaps, with his [solo-piano concert](#) this Saturday night at 8, at Klavierhaus, 211 West 58th Street, Manhattan. **BEN RATLIFF**

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