



MUSIC

FLO MILLI
You Still Here, Ho? (RCA)
☆☆☆

Back when the world was in lockdown and artists were unable to tour, the expectation was that it would lead to a glut of thrilling new releases when society reopened.

In reality, the past 12 months have seen plenty of albums hit stores, but only a handful sell in big numbers, most of which have come from established acts. With a few exceptions (Yard Act, Wet Leg) new artists have found it much harder to cut through.

Alabama rapper Flo Milli is tipped to buck the trend. Aged 22, she's already amassed over half a billion streams on the back of multiple viral hits and an acclaimed mix tape. *You Still Here, Ho?* is her debut LP, an expensively produced 15-track work packed full of confidence, energy and attitude.

"I'm the shit, I hop in the Lamb' and I go," she boasts on *No Face*, an up-tempo hip-hop groove about sexual desire drawled over minimal glitchy beats and ominous piano chords.

Pretty Girls and a swaggering *Conceited* are cut from a similar sonic cloth, with the later seeing Milli declare "bitch, I'm fabulous", just in case you still doubted her.

Sadly for her and listeners, the self-declared greatness is not replicated on the album as a whole, with too many songs merging into a forgettable mush of X-rated school yard taunts, repetitive beats and tired braggadocio.

RICHARD SMIRKE

SIMON GOFF & KATIE MELUA
Aerial Objects

(BMG)
☆☆☆☆

Despite being six tracks long, this collaboration between violinist and composer Simon Goff and hit songwriter Katie Melua packs a lot into its 31 minutes. Opening with a graceful *Tbilisi Airport*, the duo merge classical orchestration with sharp pop melodies and ambient electronica. Just as important is the sense of space and time at the heart of songs like *Textures Of Memories* and a gorgeous *It Happened*, which builds to a euphoric climax underpinned by Goff's violin, galloping percussion and atmospheric drones. Melua's luxuriant vocals draw you into an immersive soundscape.

GHOST WOMAN
Ghost Woman

(Full Time Hobby)
☆☆☆☆

Prior to recording his self-titled debut album under the moniker of Ghost Woman, Arizona's Evan John Uschenko was a touring musician for underground alt.rock acts like Jacco Gardner and King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard. Their influence can be heard in these 10 songs, along with a fat dollop of 1960s psychedelia and strung-out garage rock. A twanging *All The Time* sets the analogue retro tone, evoking dusty memories of *The Byrds* and *Jefferson Airplane*. Other tracks have a raw, sketchy feel with *Dead & Gone* set to a chugging motorik beat and the reverb-soaked *Do You* among the hazy highlights.

LIZZO
Special

(Nice Life/Atlantic)
☆☆☆☆

"Hi motherfucker, did you miss me?" asks Lizzo at the start of this exuberant follow-up to her 2019 breakthrough album *Cuz I Love You*. Despite claiming to be stuck at home "twerking and making smoothies" for the past two years, the singer has returned in sparkling form, marshalling her messages of resilience and body positivity into a series of jubilant party jams. *Grrrls* repurposes Beastie Boys' misogynistic 1987 song *Girls* into a celebration of female empowerment. *I Love You Bitch* is a swaggering slice of throbbing 1980s synth pop and *About Damn Time* reboots 1970s disco for the TikTok age.



INDIE CINEMA

Japanese animated film *The Deer King* (from 27 July, Showroom Workstation, Sheffield and region wide) is an epic fantasy from debut director Masashi Ando, best known for his animation work on several Studio Ghibli films, and Masayuki Miyajii, who worked on *Spirited Away*.

The film, based on a series of novels, takes place in the fictional land of Aquafa, where following a vicious war the Empire of Zol controls most of the land and citizens. When a pack of dogs race through a salt mine, swiftly followed by a deadly virus, an enslaved former soldier called Van and a young girl, Yuna, escape as the sole survivors. Finally free from slavery, Van and Yuna seek out a simple, peaceful existence in the countryside, but as the deadly disease runs rampant, they are caught up in a struggle to uncover the true cause of the plague ravaging the kingdom and find its possible cure.

Fans of anime will lap this film up as many of the ingredients of the genre are present: an epic journey, environmental messages, strange creatures and ancient mysticism among them. It looks gorgeous, vivid and fantastical, and the soundtrack is also suitably sweeping. Coming as this obviously does in the wake of the Covid pandemic, the story about the virus also seems particularly pertinent, although perhaps too long is spent focusing on medical explanations from the curious doctor Hohsalle, who is also investigating the disease. There are some grisly scenes to be found in amongst the pretty pastoral landscapes, and with a 15 rating, this is not a film to take the kids to see in the holidays.

Award-winning documentary *Fadia's Tree* (from 5 Aug, selected cinemas region wide) is a moving story about a Palestinian refugee stranded in Lebanon who dreams of returning to her homeland, one of over seven million Palestinians whose lives remain confined by their refugee status.

Having known Fadia for 15 years, filmmaker and artist Sarah Beddington is set the challenge to find an ancient mulberry tree that the woman remembers was in the grounds of her home. This debut feature from Beddington combines personal testimony, historical explanation and natural history to create something quite remarkable. During the search, Beddington meets ornithologists whose observations on the homing instincts of birds clearly have parallels with the unresolved problems of freedom of movement and exile in the region.

CHRISTIAN LISSEMAN