

## REVIEWS

classic. But the honey-voiced singer-songwriter didn't stay put within that nostalgic vibe. Rather, with each album, it seems like he's zeroing in on his own iconic style. Maybe that's why he named his fourth record *Leon*; this 13-track collection is refreshingly personal and astonishingly beautiful. Bridges traveled to Mexico to lay down these warm, airy R&B tunes, which are lit up with fluttering live instrumentation. Simply put, Bridges is among the best at what he does. You won't find soul music that feels as unique, authentic and damn good as this anywhere else in 2024. Bridges' 2020 collaboration with groove-masters Khruangbin leaves its imprint here as well—second single "Laredo" paints an impressionistic evening in the Texas town, the singer vibing with a new lover over a heartbeat-bassline and twirling flute. "[She] grew up in a border town, took me to an empty dive/ Such a pretty silhouette, show me how to two-step," he coos. "What if I stayed in Laredo just one more night?" It's sexy, it's catchy, it's magic. On *Leon*'s first track, "When a Man Cries," Bridges opens his chest and lets his heart spill out over echoing piano and a steady beat: "Turn my pain into power/ My fear into desire." This opening salvo carries through the album—a once-in-a-generation talent facing self-doubt and showing his true colors. It's a spectacular beginning to an album that weaves between uplifting soul ballads ("Never Satisfied") and undulating grooves ("Peaceful Place"). *Justin Jacobs*

### Soulive

**Cinematics, Vol. 2** SELF-RELEASED



The jazz-funk combo **Soulive**, who made waves at the beginning of the century with high-profile releases

through Blue Note and opening spots for The Rolling Stones and Dave Matthews Band, have been rather quiet over the last 10-plus years. *Rubber Soulive*, a reworking of The Beatles' *Rubber Soul* material, arrived in 2010, and five years ago, they dropped an EP of originals, *Cinematics*. Which is why it was rather surprising to get a new studio offering from the group earlier this year. Recorded in August 2023, *Cinematics, Vol. 2* picks up where its predecessor left off, and, as its title suggests, often feels like a film score. The five songs included span just a hair over 20 minutes, with the musicians staying true to their patented grooves, but, at times, they lean into a much darker vibe. Songs like "Cabriolet" and "Beatrix" would work well during important scene transitions, where one could imagine the main characters taking care of business, whatever that may be, while the '70s throwback



Yemen Blues

funk of "Don's Place" could have found a home in a sleazy neo-noir flick from the same era. "The Viper" finds guitarist **Eric Krasno** driving a bit harder with his guitar, as keyboardist **Neal Evans** hammers down bouncy keys, giving the tune a light/dark juxtaposition. On closer "Milligram," the trio explore a more poignant sound—a feeling of finality dripping throughout the tune. It's all to say that this rare offering from Soulive hits home and makes perfect sense. *Mike Ayers*

### Father John Misty

**Mahashmashana** SUB POP



For his fans, **Father John Misty**'s appeal may be even more tied to his idiosyncratic, utterly unique lyrical

worldview than it is to his music and melodies. You tune in to hear what this mysterious musician—Father John Misty is, after all, the alter-ego of former Fleet Foxes member **Josh Tillman**—is going to go off about this time. Will he dissect a seedy LA afterparty or dismantle the hypocrisy of religion? On his sixth album, *Mahashmashana* (which means "a great crematorium" in Sanskrit), Father John Misty succeeds on both fronts. These eight tunes are as captivating lyrically as they are musically. In fact, the record is his most enjoyable listen since 2015's beloved *I Love You, Honeybear*. *Mahashmashana* opens with its title track, a nine-minute, fully orchestrated epic. Misty expertly tucks lines like, "A perfect lie can live forever/ The truth don't fare as well/ It isn't perched on lips mid-laughter/ It ain't the kind of thing you tell" between huge, sweeping

string-section swells and perpetually stomping percussion, building to a satisfying peak with a screaming saxophone. He dives directly into "She Cleans Up," his most overtly rocking tune in years, a scuzzy guitar blowout with Misty shouting into the void: "Hallelujah, guess we gave the karmic wheel a spin!" By the time "Josh Tillman and the Accidental Dose" begins with jazz-bar piano riff and short, cracked guitar lines, it's clear: Father John Misty is fun again. On *Mahashmashana*, Misty doesn't abandon the cinematic flair of 2022's *Chloë and the Next 20th Century*; rather he adds some muscle to his sound—cranked up intensity, faster tunes and his usual barroom brooding mixed with a devilish grin. And a few tunes may even make you dance. *Justin Jacobs*

### Yemen Blues

**Only Love Remains**

KARTEL MUSIC GROUP



The term "world music" has long underserved the artists it has been applied to, but for **Yemen Blues**, it just

might be accurate. For nearly 15 years, the collective has been deftly blending musical styles and languages from across the globe. At the core is **Ravid Kahalani**, a Yemenite-Israeli who plays the guitar-like North African gimbri and sings in a patchwork of Hebrew, Arabic, French and English. On *Only Love Remains*, the band's latest (and, frankly, greatest) album, you'll hear hypnotic Moroccan gnawa-style music, Arabic electro-grooves, down and dirty blues and stomping hip-hop, all mixed up into something unlike any band

that exists. World music? Sure. This record will transport you to another time and place altogether. Rhythm is at the core of *Yemen Blues*, but not the steady four-counts you're used to. Drummer **Dan Mayo** and percussionist **Rony Iwry** lay down mesmerizing polyrhythmic patterns through these 11 tracks, creating a musical playground for bassist/oud player **Shanir Blumenkranz** and absolute madman **Kahalani** to go wild. Let's use "YYY" as an example. We've got **Kahalani** repeating a tumbling gimbri melody, hooting and hollering in Arabic about the magic of each present moment as the tension builds. When Mayo drops a heavy drum-machine beat, **Mallian rapper Oxmo Puccino** enters with a rumbling verse in French. You may not understand a word, but you may also be out of your seat, your body gyrating. *Only Love Remains* brings in heavier, more aggressive sounds than *Yemen Blues* has created before; the lovely, classical-folk elements of earlier albums are gone. In their place is a gruffer, electrifying style that reminds us that everyone, all over the world, needs a soundtrack as they lose their minds. *Justin Jacobs*

### Kishi Bashi

**Kantos** JOYFUL NOISE RECORDINGS



If you're hip to **Kishi Bashi**, then you probably associate the name with a certain amount of preciousness—after all,

he's a Berklee alum and accomplished film composer who's produced plenty of lush, artful chamber-pop that's heavy on the violin. But for his fifth album—which arrives after the Emmy-nominated doc *Omolyari* and