



CDs + LPs

Ian Hunter & the Rant Band

When I'm President

Veteran Rocker

Rating: 🎵 🎵 🎵 🎵



WHILE MOST OF THE OLD GUARD have slipped into the comfort of greatest hits packages, endless reissues, and victory laps, there are a select few who are making great music these days — like Ian Hunter. While the former Mott the Hoople frontman's latest, *When I'm President* (Slimstyle), doesn't quite reach the heights of the near-perfection of 2007's *Shrunkn Heads* or 2009's *Man Overboard*, it's a superb addition to his 40-plus-year canon. The playing of the Rant Band, especially drummer Steve Holley and guitarists James Mastro and Mark Bosch, bring the songs Hunter serves up into sharp focus. And more often than not, Hunter rocks harder than he has in years, and certainly harder than most seventysomethings I can think of.

Audiophiles may bristle at the overly bright mastering of *When I'm President*, but there's no doubt that Hunter is doing some of the best writing of his career and that he's surrounded himself with musicians who serve his songs in a sympathetic way. This is a mature album for mature people, but it also serves up just enough of a party atmosphere to make it quite the pleasurable listen. My vote: a resounding yes. — JEFF SLATE



J.S. Bach / Isabel Faust



Sonatas & Partitas

Classical Reference Disc

Rating: 🎵 🎵 🎵 🎵 🎵

AFTER YEARS OF REVIEWING large-scale orchestral music and opera for this magazine, hearing this Bach CD felt as if a virtual dust remover had cleared my head and cleaned my sound system. There are four simple, yet oh-so-complex reasons for this sensation: the music, the performer, the instrument, and the recording. Three of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin* (BWV 1001-1003) — the Sonata No. 1 in G minor and No. 2 in A Minor and the Partita No. 1 in B minor — are featured on *Sonatas & Partitas* (Harmonia Mundi). Achingly beautiful, architecturally perfect, and technically demanding in their decorative complexity, these works single-handedly established the violin as a solo

instrument and became the bedrock of its repertoire. The demands of musicianship, dexterity, and concentration that these works require are extraordinary, and German-born Isabelle Faust is up to the task. Her bold technique, limited use of vibrato, sure sense of structure, and strong interpretive instincts are called into play. Bach requires the player to create not only gorgeous melody and rhythmic vitality but also complex harmony and polyphony unlike anything heard before. Recorded at Teldex Studio Berlin by producer Martin Sauer and sound engineer René Möller, *Sonatas* captures the simplicity and complexity of this music, performer, and instrument without calling attention to itself. — ROBERT RIPPS



Ulver



Childhood's End

Post-Prog Covers Trip

Rating: 🎵 🎵 🎵 🎵

THERE'S ONLY ONE CONSTANT in the work of Norway's Ulver, and that's change. With roots in the creative ferment of that country's black-metal scene, the band has developed a boundary-defying, electronics-heavy chamber art pop with a scope that calls to mind Pink Floyd. So whatever are they doing releasing an album of heartfelt, beautifully realized covers of obscure '60s psychedelic chestnuts?

A few well-known tunes aside (Jefferson Airplane's "Today," the Byrds' "Everybody's Been Burned," the Electric Prunes' "I Had Too Much To Dream Last Night"), much of the material on *Childhood's End* (Kscope) will be familiar only to record collectors. Ulver have chosen a selection of the era's most elegiac tunes, dwelling on time and loss and fleeting memories of happiness — *Childhood's End* is definitely a comedown record, its darkness underscored by the cover art, reproducing Nick Ut's Pulitzer Prize-winning 1972 photo of 9-year-old Kim Phuc fleeing a napalm attack in Trang Bang, Vietnam.

Unlike, say, XTC's outings as the Dukes of Stratosphear, no effort has been made to pursue a period sound. Ulver's take on Gandalf's "Can You Travel in the Dark Alone" keeps the organ, drops the electric sitar, and pretty much cuts out the twee factor entirely. Many of the sonic trappings of the era are still in evidence: flanged vocals, Leslie cabinets on the guitars, slapback echo, hand-clap, wood-block, and finger-snap accents, organ soaked in tape delay (well, maybe). But beyond a few hard-panned effects (the guitars on "Everybody's Been Burned"), the stereo mix is naturalistic, and Ulver vocalist Kristoffer Rygg (seen in action at right, and arguably the best singer

to emerge from '90s extreme metal) is front, center, and clearly audible.

Ulver has looked back and recognized an ambitiousness kin to their own, and they're dragging it into the future. *End* is not so much a departure as a literature review; drawing the connections between Ulver's own experimentalism and the psych bands who, possibly without a clear idea of what they were doing, pushed the boundaries of rock in the '60s further than any of their mainstream contemporaries. And that's not just living in the past. — MICHAEL BERK



ULVER: RAPHAEL ARETAKIS/WWW.RAPHAELARETAKIS.COM