

ALBUMS

R&B

ARETHA FRANKLIN A Woman Falling Out of Love

Producers: various
Aretha's Records

Release Date: May 3

It's been a long time since we've had new music from the Queen of Soul—eight years since "So Damn Happy," not counting her 2008 Christmas album. And Franklin's unspecified health issues of the past year have only added to the anticipation for her new Walmart-exclusive set, "A Woman Falling Out of Love." The good news is that she's still in good form. Franklin's legendary voice is robust and still merits r-e-s-p-e-c-t, particularly on the emotive gospel tracks "New Day" and "Faithful," the latter a duet with fellow Grammy Award winner Karen Clark-Sheard. Franklin—who penned three songs on the album and produced five—also turns in a lusty rendition of B.B. King's "Sweet Sixteen" and offers a moving take on the theme from "The Way We Were" (featuring Ronald Isley). But the track "Theme From a Summer Place" is rendered a bit hokey by spoken parts. Elsewhere,



TINIE TEMPAH Disc-Overy

Producers: various
Capitol Records

Release Date: May 17

This young English MC first drew notice as a member of the United Kingdom's hipster-beloved grime scene. Several years later, though, Tinie Tempah has more or less become Britain's B.o.B, churning out radio-bait singles with catchy, sung hooks and pop-rap production values. Last year his major-label debut, "Disc-Overy," was one of England's biggest commercial hits. Now the album arrives on U.S. shores equipped with three bonus tracks clearly designed to repeat the trick here: "Till I'm Gone" pairs Tempah with rapper Wiz Khalifa over a sparkly groove produced by duo Stargate, who also helmed the moody "Love Suicide" (featuring Ester Dean). For "So Addicted" the rapper recruited knob-twiddler Boi-1da (Drake, Eminem). Even without those U.S.-only cuts, "Disc-Overy" seems well-suited for an American breakthrough, though you sometimes wish Tempah sounded like he was having more fun on his ascent. Only "Miami 2 Ibiza," an appealingly trashy collaboration with Swedish House Mafia, shakes loose the stink of uncut ambition.—MW



tempo. Classic influences from Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd and Heart appear on the songs "Say No More," "Disappear" (which closes with a Hendrix-esque solo) and "Up From Dust." She also touches on old-school progressive rock with "Flames" and "Morning Time" while ruminating on higher consciousness and emotional paralysis. Although every cut is a worthy listen, the track "Everything Becomes Whole" is the clear champion: Its propulsive beat and Fimm's ardent performance indicate that it would be a fiery trip indeed if she decides to take a longer detour through alternative rock territory.—CT

FUNK

DENNIS COFFEY

Dennis Coffey
Producer: Al Sutton
Strut Records

Release Date: April 26

Save for his 1971 instrumental hit "Scorpio," Dennis Coffey's name is probably best-known to funk and soul aficionados. He does, after all, have a Hall of Fame session résumé, primarily with Motown (the wah-wah on the Temptations' "Cloud Nine" is on the tip of that iceberg)—but also with luminaries from Funkadelic to Quincy Jones and Barbra Streisand. Coffey's first album in five years shows that at 70 years old he can still shred with the ferocity of Steve Vai and Joe Satriani. And mix those six-string fireworks with the cool taste of a true Funk Brother. "Dennis Coffey" covers all of those bases by mixing original instrumentals—including the shagadelic "7th Galaxy" and the feisty "Miss Millie"—with an army of guest vocalists joining for songs Coffey originally played on. Among them are Parliament's "All Your Goodies Are Gone" (with Mayer Hawthorne), Cold Fact's "Only Good for Conversation" (with Paolo Nutini) and 100 Proof (Aged in Soul)'s "Somebody's Been Sleeping in My Bed" (with the BellRays' Lisa Kekaula). All that makes for a revelatory set that should shine some overdue spotlight on this unsung hero.—GG

"How Long I've Waited," "Put It Back Together Again" and the smoky "When Two Become One" follow a polished, contemporary path. And her presidential inaugural arrangement of the bonus track "My Country 'Tis of Thee" is a souvenir of a late-career high point.—GG

MUSIQ SOULCHILD MusiqInTheMagiq

Producers: various
Atlantic Records

Release Date: May 3

"Now that I'm grown and I'm sexy . . . I'm ready for a change," Musiq Soulchild tells listeners early on his sixth album, "MusiqInTheMagiq." And there are changes afoot in these 12 songs. Still steeped in neo-soul stylings and a smooth, organic kind of buoyancy, the Philadelphia-bred singer/songwriter spends most of the set pledging devotion and fidelity. For instance, a chance encounter with a hottie at the gas station on "single" finds him driving away with only mild regret because his true love is back at home. And when things turn rocky on "back-towhere" and "dowehaveto," he's all about making it right rather than moving on. Musiq certainly makes it all sound right, from the club-tilted single "anything" (featuring Swizz Beatz) to the Motown-style bounce of "lovecontract." Other noteworthy moments include the slick pop crossover of "waitingstill," the soulful glide of the John Legend-assisted "silver&gold" and an assortment of slow jams ("sayido," "medicine").

Maturing but hardly mellowing, Musiq Soulchild's credentials remain admirably intact.—GG

ROCK

SARAH FIMM Near Infinite Possibility

Producer: David Baron
Sarah Fimm

Release Date: May 5

We always knew that Sarah

Fimm—consummate songwriter, enchanting singer/pianist—could jam in her own vibrant, transcendent kind of way. But the steadfastly independent artist has let her inner rock child loose on new album "Near Infinite Possibility," as her atmospheric soundscapes now throb and undulate with a new emphasis on guitar, percussion and

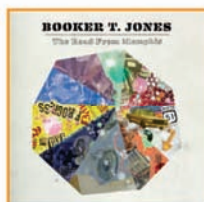


JENNIFER LOPEZ

Love?
Producers: various
Island Def Jam

Release Date: May 3

Buoyed by her job as the most discerning (and yes, beautiful) judge on "American Idol," Jennifer Lopez returns to the music spotlight with an album whose greatest strength, despite its title, lies in its precision: its actual sound, thematic diversity and the way it translates this now-41-year-old pop star's talents to 2011. Lopez was among the first to believably unite hip-hop, dance and pop, and the stable of hitmakers on "Love?" presents the artist with her best genre-mixing material in years. Not surprisingly, it leans most heavily on tension-building, four-on-the-floor productions, but there's also delicious R&B release to be found in songs like the-Dream-crafted bonus track "Take Care" and "I'm Into You" (featuring Lil Wayne). There are a few missteps: "Good Hit" is overwrought and echoes Nicki Minaj too closely, and the Lady Gaga contributions—"Hypnotico" and "Invading My Mind"—sound like possible discarded tracks from the forthcoming "Born This Way." But "Love?" almost always plays to Lopez's strengths, and when it does, it's a success.—MH



BOOKER T. JONES The Road From Memphis

Producers: Booker T. Jones, Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson, Rob Schnapf
Anti-

Release Date: May 10

A slap of organ-driven funk that captures Booker T. Jones in a tighter setting than 2009 Anti- debut "Potato Hole," new album "The Road From Memphis" is as forward-thinking as it is a tribute to his days leading Stax Records house band the MG's. The Roots drummer Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson, guitarist Captain Kirk Douglas and bassist Owen Biddle assume the roles of Al Jackson, Steve Cropper and Duck Dunn (respectively) in keeping the tracks—most of them Jones compositions—focused and intense, particularly on album highlights "Walking Papers" and "The Vamp." Guest vocalists deliver impressive results, especially the National's Matt Berninger, who duets with Sharon Jones on the smooth groove of "Representing Memphis." My Morning Jacket's Jim James and Lou Reed blend well on "Progress" despite their lack of traditional soul power. Confident performances and the richness in Jones' organ playing, along with Rob Schnapf's balanced and artful mix, give the album muscle, even with the dicey decision to cover Gnarlz Barkley's "Crazy."—PG