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THE BAND OF MANY COLOURS

American heavy metal band Baroness has the attributes of metal (loud, fierce, with heavy beats) but it is also vibrant and colourful

BEGINNING WITH their first studio effort in 2007, *Red Album*, every LP by Baroness, the heavy metal band from Savannah in the US state of Georgia, is titled with the name of a colour. Their second album was called *Blue Record*; then came 2012's *Yellow & Green* (it was a double album); and then, last month they released their latest, *Purple*. The colour thing for their album titles seems apt. Baroness, as I said, are a heavy metal band – some music critics affix prefixes such as ‘stoner’, ‘alternative’ or ‘sludge’ to their genre but the fact is that they are a heavy metal band. And heavy metal bands are? Well, they are loud, deep sounding, aggressive, distortion-loving purveyors of music that is not necessarily associated with colour other than different shades of black. Dark and brooding is how the music played by most heavy metal bands can seem. But Baroness are different. Their music, even when it has all the



BLENDING THE HEAVY AND THE LIGHT

Baroness (left, with frontman and guitarist John Baizley in the centre) performs in Chicago in 2012; and (above), Baizley's gorgeous Art Nouveau-inspired album covers of *Purple* (above, left) and *Red Album*

rades/ You sang your secrets through the tolling of the tide/ The fugitive rooms, the amateur tombs/ The silence and the cries/ The quickening beat/ Your march to the sea/ Never to return; and on *Purple*, their latest, there are guitar solos and drum lines, such as the one on *The Iron Bell*, which can make them sound like a southern jam band (albeit one that is probably amped up on speed and steroids).

Four years ago the future of Baroness may have seemed uncertain. The band, while touring the UK, met with an accident when its tour coach fell 30 feet, injuring most members of the band, two of them, the drummer and the bassist, very badly. Those two ultimately had to quit the band and to many it seemed that Baroness would never play again. But the remaining members, including frontman and guitarist John Baizley, bounced back after spending months in recovery. And then came *Purple*. As is customary for the band, Baizley not only wrote the songs but also did the cover artwork for *Purple*, which, as it has always been for the band's other albums, is gorgeous. Baizley's artwork is influenced by the Art Nouveau style; it is intricate and decorative with a mythological theme (an aside: if you want to explore Baizley's art, go to www.aperfectmonster.com).

Back to the music. In many ways, *Purple*, the first album by Baroness after the band's accident, carries a sense of the trauma that the band members underwent. It is dark; it is heavy; and, while Baizley's songs don't directly refer to the incident, the mood captures it. *Yellow & Green* was for me the most accessible heavy metal album I have heard. Its infectious melodic hooks, bright guitar solos and harmonised singing completely upturned my pre-conceived notions of a heavy metal band – much like another band, the black metal group Deafheaven had. In contrast, Baroness's first two albums were heavier, fitting the definition of the heavy metal genre better. Now, *Purple* takes another step in the evolution of the band: on this new album, the deep and loud sound is layered with melodies, guitar riffs and choruses – a perfect blend of the heavy and the light.

TAILPIECE: The late David Bowie's last album is the only one of his albums that doesn't have an image of him on the cover; instead it has a black star and that gives it its name, *Blackstar*. Bowie who died at 69 on January 10 after an 18-month-long battle with cancer was an itinerant experimenter – both with his music as well as his looks. Those who've tracked Bowie's brilliant career and his rapidly changing musical style – from art rock, glam rock, soul, funk, and electronic – will find that Bowie's last album is a jazz album with the singer fronting a jazz band. A perfect epitaph for a storied life.

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required attributes of metal – loudness; heavy beats; and fierceness – is also vibrant and colourful.

On *Yellow & Green*, there are songs, such as *Twinkler*, which begins with a melodic acoustic guitar (albeit against the background of a mildly ominous sounding giant fly's buzz); there are lyrics, such as those on *March to the Sea*, that can seem uncommon for a heavy metal band: *There was a whisper/Once there were heralds and pa-*

THE LEGEND FROM BRIXTON

David Bowie's last album, *Blackstar*, had the experimental singer fronting a jazz band, a perfect epitaph for a storied life



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