

BOOKS & MUSIC

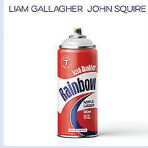
MUSIC REVIEWS

Just Another Rainbow
Liam Gallagher & John Squire,
Warner Music
4/5

With the much talked about Oasis reunion getting less likely by the day the brash younger Gallagher brother, Liam, has pulled a rabbit out of the hat with this new collaboration with the highly regarded Stone Roses songwriter and guitarist John Squire.

Gallagher and Squire have obviously clicked musically. The songs are good, Liam's Lennon-influenced vocals light up the sound, with Squire's lead guitar work is gritty but melodic.

Just Another Rainbow needs to be played loud, with no distractions. While the title track is for me the highlight, the other nine songs are consistently good. The Gallagher/Squire combination is pretty darn good.

**Deeper Well**
Kacey Musgraves,
Universal
4/5

For me, the standout American female country singers over the years are those with a unique and distinctive voice. 2018 was Kacey Musgrave's breakthrough year as a country singer, nabbing four Grammy Awards for her studio album *Golden Hour*. Her awards included Album of the Year and Country Record of the Year. Kacey had done the hard work leading up to her Grammy success, self-releasing her first three albums and then four studio recordings.

Now with *Deeper Well* Kacey Musgraves shows off her unique version of country music. The key elements are intimacy and intensity which few country singers bring to the table.

As you'd expect the title track introduces Kacey's go-to sound and she is in command of every song, all of them a little different. And with her more downbeat style, they hit home perhaps more than an in-your-face approach. That, for me, emphasises an excellent record. *Deeper Well* is worth exploring. Kacey Musgraves has definitely arrived.



— Tony Nielsen

Fighting the wicked step-mother label

However it finds you, motherhood is a whole new world. Meet Lulu La Ru — a 'Super Terrific Extra Parent' (also known as a S.T. E.P.-Mum). She's funny and sassy with a heart of gold and is embracing her new life with a sense of humour and a 'can do' attitude. Author Gina Bartlett, a step-mother of two young girls, introduces Lulu La Ru and shares her hilarious adventures as she rides the crazy, up-and-down rollercoaster of family life.

We asked Gina some questions:
Tell us a little about Lulu La Ru Steps Up As A Step-Mum

It's a collection of quirky, humorous stories that offer a refreshing take on families with step-mums. Written from the perspective of the fun, sassy character, Lulu La Ru, the book takes readers on a journey through the challenges she faces and lessons she learns as she embraces her new role as a step-mum. The narrative follows Lulu La Ru as she navigates the unpredictable world of family life, making it up as she goes along — often with hilarious results.

The book challenges stereotypes surrounding step-mums, offering a humorous perspective on the daily adventures of family dynamics. Unlike traditional narratives about blended families, or step-mums in particular, the focus here is not on the differences but on highlighting the universal aspects of family life. Growing up with influences such as Dr Seuss and Pam Ayres and drawing inspiration from a grandfather with a penchant for limericks, Lulu La Ru is crafted in a fun, rhyming style.

What inspired you to write this book? How much is it influenced by your own life?

The book was a passion project for my family and stems from my own experiences of becoming a step-mum, infusing authenticity into the characters and situations depicted in the book. My experiences echo that of Lulu La Ru's journey as I too was once a childless, successful, professional woman whose life took a profound turn upon embracing the role of step-mum. I experienced first-hand my step-daughters' bewilderment at how step-mums in movies or children's literature were always the mean, wicked party when their reality was the opposite. As many children live in this family dynamic, I



Author Gina Bartlett.



Lulu La Ru Steps up as a Step-Mum by Gina Bartlett, Moxie Press, \$19.99

wanted to put forward another narrative and provide my step-daughters with a book in their school library that reflected the type of family they lived in. I wanted other children to read these funny stories and realise that, whether they had a step-mum or not, family life was much the same. My step-daughters were actively involved in the project, contributing to the design of their characters and sharing real-life stories that served as inspiration, albeit with a touch of exaggeration for comedic effect.

What do you hope families will take away from reading your book?

I hope that my book will not only entertain but also normalise families with step-mums. The intention is to provide an inclusive narrative that showcases all women in mothering roles as being on the same team, working towards the common goal of raising happy, healthy and thriving children.

The book strives to counteract prevailing stereotypes and foster a sense of unity among diverse family structures.

Who will enjoy Lulu La Ru?

The audience for Lulu La Ru extends beyond blended families or those with step-mums, as feedback suggests that children and women alike can relate to and enjoy the humorous tales within. The stories touch on universal themes such as the challenges of preparing politically-correct, healthy, nutritious school lunches, dealing with the chaos children create and navigating the intricacies of school gate politics.

Ultimately, the book aims to resonate with readers by portraying the shared experiences and humour inherent in the roller-coaster ride of family life, regardless of its unique composition.

Hugs are mums' best solutions

A Hug So Tight
by Holly Melville-Bell, Twig,
\$24.95

Written and illustrated by Holly Melville-Bell, this book aims to introduce non-verbal language to young readers. Included in the story of Lenny the Lor is sign gestures which are explained at the end. Lenny is very naughty and plays tricks on the other animals. They were all in fear of what Lenny would get up to next. Then one day he picks on a young monkey and his mother is not impressed. What will the mother do? Turns out she knows exactly what Lenny needs — a hug! Written by the author for her cousin Theo who was born with Down syndrome and is non-verbal.



— Ann Kilduff

Comedy of errors in face of endtime

The Prophet and the Idiot
by Jonas Jonasson,
HarperCollins, \$26.99

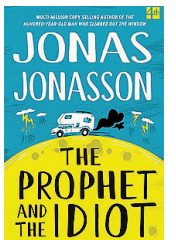
Jonasson is best known for his slightly silly but fun *The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out of the Window and Disappeared*. Occasionally we just need a silly read.

Apparently the atmosphere was destined to collapse on September 21, 2011 at 9.20pm. Self-taught astrophysicist Petra has done the calculations and then meets up with doomsday prophet Johan, and Agnes, who is an older widow but has an image online as a youthful influencer.

This unlikely trio head off through Europe to make the most of their last days. Their travels in an RV with the most delicious food Johan (he's the idiot) can produce is delightfully funny.

But together this quirky bunch get into so many scrapes and odd circumstances it's a comedy of multiple errors. It's been translated from Swedish but that doesn't detract at all from the dry, unintentionally hilarious escapades.

Jonasson has produced several novels with increasingly odd names — *Hitman Anders* and *the Meaning of It All*, *The Girl Who Saved The King of Sweden*. Suspension of disbelief is needed but a bit of fun never hurt. — Linda Thompson



Examining NZ state underbelly No punches pulled in journey

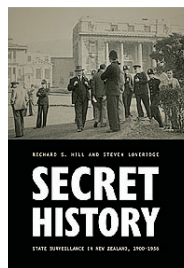
Secret History - State surveillance in NZ 1900-1956
by Richard S Hill and Steven Loveridge, Auckland University Press, \$79.99

It is a mistake to think the secret service is relatively new to this country.

At the turn of the last century it was police detectives who were assigned to spy on the spies and seditionists suspected to be in the nation's midst, remote as it was from the rest of the world.

They were there to be the eyes and ears of our national security up until the Cold War era.

Established author and academic Richard S Hill and historian Steven Loveridge have joined forces to bring us an intriguing insight into what Biet Professor James Belich calls "a fascinating examination of the underbelly of the New Zealand state... the realities of political policing."



Their comprehensive and thoroughly researched work covers an unsettled period that includes the depression and both world wars. Their insight into the following years is yet to come.

Do not be misled into assuming this is a hang-

on-to-your-hat spy thriller. Nor is it a textbook appealing to only a handful of scholars for whom covert surveillance is their specialist subject.

Rather, Hill and Loveridge have brought an understanding of how New Zealand's national security operated long before today's sophisticated, multinational Five Eyes intelligence organisation was established.

There's a lot to be learnt from it.

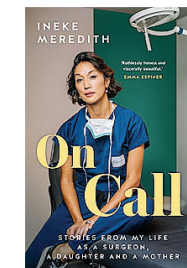
— Jill Nicholas

On Call
by Ineke Meredith, Harper Collins, \$39.99

On Call is an upfront and personal story by Ineke Meredith sharing her life as a surgeon, daughter and mother. No punches are pulled as Ineke takes us to the nitty gritty of her life as a specialist surgeon and her coping mechanisms following the diagnosis of advanced colon cancer in her mother.

She journeys with her mother's medical complications through surgery, chemotherapy then metastatic disease while putting her skills to use on other patients as a new consultant in surgery. We get to experience the sad stories mixed with funny and happy moments, while also dealing with the twin challenges of her mother's illness and as a single young mother.

Ineke Meredith comes across as a



compassionate, caring and intuitive individual. After spending part of her childhood in her parents native Samoa before winning a scholarship to study medicine. After graduating from the Otago Medical School in 2003, becoming a fellow of the

Royal Australasian College of Surgeons in 2014. Her specialisation is breast cancer and breast reconstruction.

Her motivation to share her life as a surgeon, a mother and the daughter of a mother with invasive cancer was inspired by her mother's shock diagnosis.

On Call is an inspirational read which I thoroughly recommend.

— Tony Nielsen