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The bigger the ideas, the better

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The Scotland Yard Gospel Choir (Bloodshot)

All hail the new indie-rock maestros. For the likes of Bright Eyes's Conor Oberst and Arcade Fire's Win Butler, it's not enough to helm a band when there is an orchestra's worth of ideas to be realized. The latest artist to craft grandiose songs with a heart of gold is Elia Einhorn of the Scotland Yard Gospel Choir. The Welsh-born singer-songwriter gathered 50 musicians to augment his Chicago-based chamber-pop collective for its self-titled sophomore album. The result is a brash, moving blast of indie-rock excess that's grounded by its frank lyrical treatment of Einhorn's struggle to make peace with his drug-dealer past and sexual identity. The album's two best moments are "Aspidistra," a jaunty rocker about buying drugs, and the disarmingly forthright love song "I Never Thought I Could Feel This Way for a Boy." The band's prettiest pop achieves Belle and Sebastian's wide-eyed winsomeness, but it doesn't worry itself trying for the latter's gloss. Vocals bend and break during the ballad "Obsessions," and "Everything You Paid For" is winningly ragged. Equally eager to bare his heart and to create grand musical opulence, Einhorn sings away his own loneliness with panache. [Sarah Tomlinson]