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Ted Leo has backed himself into an enviable corner by releasing so many tightly wound, politically charged punk albums. His latest, *Living with the Living*, spills over with all the things we've come to expect from Leo -- angry politics ("Bomb. Repeat. Bomb"), undeniable riffs ("The Sons of Cain," "La Costa Brava") and epics ("The Lost Brigade," "The Toro and the Toreador") -- but alternately offers some fresh ideas. "The Unwanted Things" represents an unexpected detour into traditional reggae while "Bottle of Buckle" is Irish balladry right down to the tin whistle solo. The diverse sprawl resembles another overstuffed punk classic, the Clash's *Sandinista*, not just in the sheer quantity and quality of the songs, but in the way even standard issue tracks (such as "Army Bound" or "The World Stops Turning") play a pivotal role in the album's pacing and flow. Leo's a big picture kind of guy, and, taken as a whole, *Living with the Living* may be his most ambitious album yet. It's music from the heart for the here and now, performed with breathless passion by someone sprinting to keep up with his own ideas while struggling to make sense of the often hopeless world spinning around him.

-- Joshua Klein

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