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30TH BIRTHDAY ISSUE

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THIRTY YEARS AGO, A NEW music magazine appeared on the shelves. One of our greatest ever songwriters was on the cover: Paul McCartney (not a Sir at that point). And so was Lenny Henry.


They did though. All these records and the remaining 445 of our Modern Classics thrillingly re-shaped the sonic landscape. They’re the documents that tell the fascinating story of music in Q’s lifetime, full of their own mysteries and tales – laid out by our writers on the following 120–odd pages.

We also talk to some of the architects of these masterworks – including Bono, Johnny Marr, Wire, Kasabian, Brett Anderson and Liam Howlett – picking through the personal journeys they’ve each taken since 1986. And then, of course, there’s Sir Paul – a man who’s stayed crucial to modern music by inspiring, making and being inspired by many of the records on the list. I’m sure you’ll disagree with some of our selections and approve of others. We’re confident that it’s a robust distillation of all the noise into unimpeachably great music. And, really, that’s what Q’s always been about. Enjoy the issue.

MATT MASON, SENIOR EDITOR

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[^...and their modern classic album of the last 30 years...^]
BETH ORTON
KIDSTICKS
OUT MAY 27
1 NEW ORDER
SINGULARITY
Written by New Order and Tom Rowlands. Published by
New Order who are published by Universal Music
Publishing, and Tom Rowlands is published by BMG Rights
Management. P & C 2015 New Order Ltd under exclusive
license to Mute Artists Ltd. Licensed courtesy of Mute
Originally titled Drop The Guitar
when New Order played it live in
2014. That title was deemed to give
too much away, but note that
Singular’s edgy, icy synth-rock was
appropriately produced by Tom
Rowlands of The Chemical Brothers.

6 JOHN GRANT
SIGOURNEY WEAVER
Written by John Grant. Published by Blue Mountain Music
Ltd P 2010 Bella Union, under exclusive license to V2
Records International Ltd (f/Cooperative Music.
Licensed courtesy of Bella Union (TMC). www.
johngrantmusic.com. On: Queen Of Denmark
Grant’s wry memories of trying to fit
into a new town when he was a
teenager coming to terms with his
homosexuality not only packs some
brilliant one-liners, but also a mighty
gust of a chorus built around
Sigourney Weaver killing aliens.

11 SLEATER-KINNEY
ROLLERCOASTER
Written by Sleater Kinney. Published by BMG Gold Songs/
Songs Of Big Deal/Code Words/Exiles (ASCAP). All Rights
administered by BMG Rights Management (US) LLC. P & C
2005 Sub Pop Records. Licensed courtesy of Sub Pop
Records. www.sleater-kinney.com
On: The Woods CD / LP / Digital via Sub Pop Records
The greatest trio of the last couple
decades? Probably. The most
furiously powerful? Definitely. This
is pop-punk that gasps for breath at
the top of a fairground ride, then
delivers a stomach-churning thrill.

We’re not saying that this is the definitive list of the
best 15 songs of the last 30 years. That would be
stupid to attempt and impossible to do. But if you’re
looking for a spread of superb, inventive tracks that
highlight the adventure and excellence of music in
Q’s lifetime, you won’t find better than this. From
unchartered territory where Americana meets
Krautrock to straightforward but beautiful love
songs, this is our birthday present to you.

*Due to licensing and distribution issues, the cover-mounted CD is not available for overseas or Q/Empire value pack purchasers.
2 THE WAR ON DRUGS
ON DRUGS
Bradfield’s call to working-class Richey Edwards reveals James Dean
KNOW WHY Fellowship / Kobalt. Published by Foxes
HE DOESN’T
FOXES
12
This stripped-back remix of the Entertainment (UK) Ltd. Licensed courtesy of Sony Music
Published by SM Publishing (UK) Limited. P & C Sony Music
Written by James Dean Bradfield, Sean Moore & Nicky Wire.
7

3 alt–J
LEFT HAND FREE
Written by Joe Newman / Gus Unger-Hamilton / Thom
GREEN
Published by SONGS ltd. Kobalt Music Group.
P & C Kobalt Music Ltd. BMG Company. Licensed courtesy of Infectious Music Ltd
in the UK. On: Stealth Sonic Orchestra remix
Its jocular, easy-going Southern rock vibes means Left Hand Free is probably Leeds trio alt–J’s least typical song, since they inhabit a proggy realm normally. But it’s also the song that remains their global ambassador, hence its appearance on the Captain America: Civil War OST.

4 FATHER JOHN MISTY
WHEN YOU’RE SMILING AND ASTRIDE ME
Written by Josh Tillman. Published by Copyright Control
Here, Josh Tillman’s poetic, confessional alter-ego Father John Misty delivers the most straightforward love song for his wife from 2015’s I Love You, Honeybear LP.

5 NICK CAVE & THE BAD SEEDS
JUBILEE STREET
Sent by Cave, music by Cave. Ellis Published by Mute
SONG
Licensed courtesy of Belladisc Ltd under exclusive licence to Kobalt Label Services: www.nickcave.com
On: Jubilee Street
Witness Nick Cave and his Bad Seeds at their most restrained, the gentle pulse of the song propelling Cave down malevolent reflections upon those “good people on Jubilee Street”.

7 MANIC STREET PREACHERS
A DESIGN FOR LIFE
(Stealth Sonic Orchestra Remix)
Written by James Dean Bradfield, Sean Moore & Richey Wire
Published by SONGS ltd. Kobalt Music Group. Distributed by Kobalt Label Services Limited
This stripped-back remix of the Manics’ first single after the disappearance of founding member Richey Edwards reveals James Dean Bradfield’s call to working-class solidarity in a ghostly new glory.

8 BURIAL
DISTANT LIGHTS
Written by W. Bevan. Published by Domino Music Publishing
P & C 2007 Hyperdub Ltd. Licensed courtesy of Hyperdub
Burial’s debut album in 2006 was the sound of a city in the deepest night: mostly asleep uneasily, but some reverberating to the rhythm of a ravey night. It was the first bus home after a night in a club. It rewrote the dance album. Distant Lights is a stand-out track.

9 THE SHINS
AUSTRALIA
Written by James Mercer. Published by Sony ATV
The highlight from James Mercer’s Albuquerque indie rockers’ third LP, Wincing The Night Away, is the sort of jaunty, spiggily indie-rock you’d expect from one of the finest practitioners of the genre. Named after a continent that has no bearing on the song’s lyrics.

10 FRANZ FERDINAND
THE DARK OF THE MATINÉE
Written by Alex Kapranos
Alex Kapranos wrote this yearning melody walking home from school imagining being successful and describing his success on Terry Wogan’s sofa. And then that success happened with this. Spooky!

12 FLEET FOXES
HE DOESN’T KNOW WHY
Written by Robin Pecknold. Published by Foxes Fellowship / Kobalt
It was the album (see page 300) that won this year’s Mercury Prize. It rewrote the dance album. It was the ravey night. It was the first bus home. It was a night in a club. It rewrote the dance album. Distant Lights is a stand-out track.

13 THE CORAL
DISTANCE INBETWEEN
Written by James McCartney / Alsy Western
Published by Normal Music/Domino Publishing Co Ltd.
On: Distance Inbetween
After a six-year hiatus, due to band members concentrating on individual projects, the Warrington-based combo’s eponymous début (voted second best album of 2008 in Q, no less).

14 LAMBCHOP
IS A WOMAN
Written by Kurt Wagner. Published by Delicious Henderson Music / Adm Big Music, BMI
All rights administered by Cold Front Music P & C 2002 City Slang
Licensed courtesy of City Slang worldwide rights.
On: Is A Woman
Nashville-based Lambchop leader Kurt Wagner comes from the great American songwriter tradition that includes the likes of Randy Newman, and this whimsical calypso from 2002’s Is A Woman album (see page 63) demonstrates his craft at its very height.

15 BILLY BRAGG
WAITING FOR THE GREAT LEAP FORWARDS
Written by Billy Bragg. Published by BMG Music Publishing
P & C 2006 Holy Bragg / G. Dru Bragg. All rights of the producer and owner of recorded work reserved. Unauthorised copying, hiring, renting, public performance and broadcasting of this record is prohibited.
On: Worker’s Playtime
Producer and owner of recorded work reserved. Unauthorised copying, hiring, renting, public performance and broadcasting of this record is prohibited. Cooking Vinyl, PO Box 1485 London W11 2AZ England email: cooking@cooking vinyl.com web: www.cookingvinyl.com UK Code: 7.105 Made in the EU. Licensed courtesy of Cooking Vinyl worldwide rights. Bragg at his most tunefully jubilant, and disproves the widely-held opinion that pop and politics don’t mix.
Sir Paul McCartney fondly remembers the advert for Working Week’s second album on the back of the first issue of Q from 1986.
Paul McCartney was Q’s first ever cover star. Thirty years on he returns to help us kick off our birthday celebrations...

How are you?
I’m verrrrry good, thank you.

Where are you right now?
I just landed down South. I was up in Liverpool doing my kind of masterclass with the students there [at the McCartney co-founded Liverpool Institute For Performing Arts]. It was nice. It’s great with the students, y’know. Very gratifying.

Can you remember what you were doing in 1986?
No way. Haven’t got a clue.

You’d put out your Press To Play album...
Oh yeah. So I was riding around on the Underground [in the video for Press where Paul surprised members of the public by travelling alongside them]. That was fun. Videos had become such huge productions, so I was trying to think of a very simple way to do something. And I like travelling on public transport, y’know. Ever since I was a kid I would always take a bus and go a few stops and get off just to have a look around. In New York or in Paris or in London, I sometimes take the Underground.

Do you try to disguise yourself?
No. The thing about the Underground is nobody looks at anyone. If I do get somebody saying, “Are you Paul McCartney?” I say, “Are you kidding? D’you think he’d be on the
If completely different story to was on the couch.” He had a
Ringo said, “No, he didn’t, he was
“Elvis met us at the door.”
Ringo’s or George’s. I said,
without, but it didn’t tally with
I had a very clear picture in my
Meeting Elvis for instance.
we all remembered differently.
but there were quite a few things that
remember loads of things in common,
because when we got together we could
official truth of the history.
”Calling “The Bible”, the
and create what we were
just decided we would try
Wrong along the way. So we
they were getting facts
happens – was that people
That was the idea. What
Beatles reunited for the
you all sitting around with the headphones
vocal booth. There was a great feeling with
you are playing along to John’s vocal,
which is how it would’ve been
when we recorded for real.
Around the same time
Britpop came along and
Oasis were accused of
ripping off The Beatles.
Did you think they were?
No, cos they were young,
fresh and writing good songs.
I thought the biggest mistake
they made was when they
said, “We’re gonna be bigger
than The Beatles.” I thought,
“Y’know, so many people have
said that and it’s the kiss of
deathe.” Be bigger than The
Beatles, but don’t say it. The
minute you say it, everything
you do from then on is gonna
be looked at in the light of
that statement.
For War Child you
re-recorded “Come Together
with Paul Weller and Noel
Gallagher. Did you think,
“Ah, that’s where my old
haircut from 1966 went?”
(Laughs) Well, they weren’t the
only people who had done that.
It was quite prevalent, y’know.
It’s never really gone away.
The main thing they were asking
was if I still had my old clothes.
I said, “Yeah.” They were
saying, “Awwww, brilliant.”
Actually, funnily enough, I was
I discovered a couple of years ago on a hanger
and I thought, “This looks nice.” I looked
inside and it was made by the old Beatles
tailor. It was an old Beatles jacket of mine.
Did it still fit?
Well, y’know what, that was the most
amazing thing about it. I thought, “No way
am I gonna get into this…” But yeah… it was
roomy enough to fit.
Flaming Pie in 1997 was seen as your
strongest album in years. Had listening
back to the old Beatles stuff for
Anthology reinspired you?
I think probably, yeah. That’s always a good
idea. I should do it every time. I used to do it
with The Beatles – listen to the previous
album we’d made and then just think, “OK,
there’s where the bar is set. Let’s try and
improve on that.” I think listening to
so much stuff on Anthology, I probably
just honed the sort of standards meter
or whatever you’d call it.
Down the years you’ve also made three
more experimental albums with Youth as
The Fireman. Was the idea to challenge
yourself and shake up your process?
Yeah. I’d run into Youth, cos he did a mix for
me. Then we were just sort of saying, “Oh,
it’d be great to get in the studio and just
totally goof around and not have to be
too serious.” I said, “Tell you what, why don’t you
come down to my studio and we’ll just see
what happens?” The first one was a sort of
psychedelic trance instrumental, which was
great fun to do. He’d just say, “How about
drums on this?” And I’d go, “OK” and I’d run
out, play a bit of drums and then he’d edit it
down. So it worked very well. It meant that
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I could just not really think too hard about it and just enjoy playing.

I suppose you’re not thinking about commercial pressures when you’re doing something like that?

No, we didn’t think about the commercial pressures. But I must say, I wasn’t too excited about it. I suppose you’re not thinking about commercial pressures when you’re doing something like that?

Playing with the surviving members of Nirvana – especially recording a new song, Cut Me Some Slack – must have been an energising moment?

That was really great. Dave Grohl just rang me up. He said, “I’ve got a couple of friends coming over, d’you wanna come over for a jam? We’ll do something like Long Tall Sally.” I’d just been given this crazy cigar box guitar by Johnny Depp and I was enjoying putting it through this little crazy amp and wailing on it. So I said, “Let’s do Long Tall Sally. The Beatles did that and we’re probably not gonna better it, so let’s just think of something else.” So I started wailing on this guitar, Dave dived on the drums, and then...

**OASIS’S BIGGEST MISTAKE WAS SAYING THEY’RE GONNA BE BIGGER THAN THE BEATLES.**

Oh yeah. They were special. One of the most cool things of recent years was seeing the 2015’s *Montage Of Heck* documentary on him and he’s playing And I Love Her. That was out of the blue. If you’d asked me what song of mine Kurt Cobain might know, I don’t think I’d have come up with that one. And he does a great little version of it. I love it, cos it’s got a lot of soul.

**Last year you collaborated on three songs with Kanye West. What were your impressions of him? He’s seen by the outside world as being a tad unhinged…**

Some great artists are seen like that by the outside world as being a tad unhinged…

**What about the viral video clip that showed you being refused entry to a post-Grammys party?**

Oh, that was hilarious. The great thing was that people who were writing about music were writing down to people. So it was nice to see a magazine like Q just devoted to covering music in a kind of intelligent way. It felt like we had our own magazine.

**What does Q mean to you?**

It’s a good read. You know it’s not gonna be stupid. I think the whole thing…

**How’s 2016 treating you so far?**

Well. Very well.

**The Pure McCartney “best of” is out 10 June. Read Q’s review on page 120.**

You can watch Paul McCartney and The Beatles whenever you want with Sky Arts on demand.

**PAUL McCARTNEY:**

A MUSICIANS TRIBUTE

Paul McCartney headlines a star-studded concert, in which the likes of Dave Grohl, Coldplay, Alicia Keys and Neil Young each give their takes on Beatles classics.

**THE RONNIE WOOD SHOW: PAUL McCARTNEY SPECIAL**

Sir Paul McCartney chats, jams and reminisces with Ronnie Wood, revealing the hits that have influenced his phenomenal career.

**THE BEATLES: FROM LIVERPOOL TO SAN FRANCISCO**

Fascinating look at The Beatles’ journey from Liverpool’s Cavern Club to the biggest stages on the planet.

**BECOMING THE BEATLES**

Friends and former colleagues of the Fab Four cast new light on the early days of the band, including PR man Tony Barrow and tour manager Allan Williams.
THE KILLS

ASH & ICE
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My Modern Classic

Sunday Night Music Club host Danielle Perry joins this issue’s big conversation by making the case for a masterpiece of domestication.

Originally titling it Domesticika, Björk wanted to create an intimate, domestic album – something more private and introverted than Homogenic. The album sleeve lists no more than 11 studios that were used in the making, from Iceland to New York to Spain. The packaging is all in white, the vinyl, too – with the iconic swan a centrepiece rendered in delicate swirls and pencil line on the cover.

Working with experimental duo Matmos and electronica producer Opiate, Björk samples household sounds for some of the sampled beats: cards being shuffled, ice being crushed... They’re manipulated so well that it’s the perfect scratchy rhythm to sit next to a music box or a simple harp. It’s cold and warm, lonely but comforting. It’s an intimate, private listen, with opener Hidden Place stating her intent from the first chorus: “We go to that hidden place...”

Musically it has everything: interesting programming and beat sampling; orchestration to die for; and Björk’s unique vocal, yearning and whispering her way through what I imagine is her Saturday in the hills of Iceland, surrounded by nature, and then to her New York loft apartment full of lit candles and serene lines.

I could go on for hours. And when I was lucky enough to interview her in 2011, I had way too many questions. Sitting with her in a hotel in Little Venice – her with bright red hair, wearing a Japanese kimono – I felt every bit the giddy fan as we talked about musicology and the universe.

All I know is that when it clicks for you with Björk, you’re in for a very special ride.

“Listen to The Sunday Night Music Club from 8pm every week on Absolute Radio.”

My favourite 55 minutes and 33 seconds of the past 30 years: Björk’s Vespertine.

vespertine adjective
1. (botany, zoology) appearing, opening, or active in the evening: vespertine flowers
2. occurring in the evening or (esp of stars) appearing or setting in the evening

I remember sitting at a house party in New Cross, London around 2000. Music filled the house. J5, De La Soul, Smashing Pumpkins, The Herbaliser and then – I remember it like it was yesterday – Björk’s Homogenic came on. Hearing that determined electronica battling with such lush orchestration was like being struck by lightning. That was the moment I realised Björk was the artist for me, the instance that it clicked. But this column isn’t about Homogenic, it’s about the follow-up, 2001’s Vespertine. It’s an absolute masterpiece.

FURTHER LISTENING...

BACK TO ’96
Absolute Radio, 10 June, 9-10am
Christian O’Connell marks the start of Euro 2016 with an hour dedicated to the hedonistic anthems of 1996.

LIVE ISLE OF WIGHT FESTIVAL 2016
Absolute Radio, 10 June, 8-10.30pm
Listen to headliners Stereophonics’ full set, live and direct from the festival main stage.

LIVE ISLE OF WIGHT FESTIVAL 2016
Absolute Radio, 11 June, 8-11pm
More live music from the festival, including highlights of Iggy Pop and Richard Ashcroft’s performances from the main stage.

CATFISH AND THE BOTTLEMEN
Absolute Radio, 26 June, 9-10pm
Recorded Live In Session for Absolute Radio, including a new interview with the band.

LIVE ISLE OF WIGHT FESTIVAL 2016
Absolute Radio, 12 June, 5-9pm
Ocean Colour Scene’s Moseley Shoals set live from the main stage.

Wight heat: hear Stereophonics’ festival set.
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Ah yes. The Kinks, past masters of the art of biz snap and crackle, and now you you YOU can go right along with them.
“Everybody’s in Show biz” their iconic double album, still splits it: half studio with some of the Kinksiest Kinks songs in an age (“Celluloid Heroes” for one, “Supersonic Rocket Ship” for another), the other half live in-concert at Carnegie Hall AND now with a whole disc’s worth of bonus tracks, previously unissued studio sessions, outtakes and unheard live material!

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The Kinks.
That’s REAL show biz, kid.
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There are great records. Then there are modern classics – 476 albums whose innovation and excellence transformed music during Q’s lifetime, inspiring further masterpieces. The ultimate record collection starts here...
pen with a sample of an elderly lesbian singing a song from the WW1 trenches. Bleed into an ode to regicide. Follow it with others about death, despair, martyrdom, transvestism and public transport fatalities. Along the way try rhyming “spanner” with “piano” and throw in a few jokes about domestic violence, STDs and mental illness. Then finish on a song about tits.

This, dear children of the 21st century, is how to make a modern classic. The Queen Is Dead would never happen today. Mainly because the music biz that allowed these Northern mavericks the creative freedom to be on an indie label capable of competing in the charts with heavyweight majors is ancient, pre-digital history. But back in 1986, between the cocky magnificence of The Smiths and the faith of Rough Trade such unthinkably eccentric masterpieces were possible – even ones that took the piss out of the very patron footing the bill (Frankly, Mr Shankly’s merciless roasting of Rough Trade MD Geoff Travis).

Their third LP was actually recorded in 1985, partly in a studio next door to Status Quo, whose Rick Parfitt once paid them an impromptu visit when lost: it took him a full drunken minute to realise the quiffy bloke with the chin the size of a bedside cabinet wasn’t Francis Rossi. More ominously, its delayed unveiling, strangled in contractual legalese, already hinted at the offstage strains conspiring to the band’s inevitable doom less than a year after its belated release.

Unquestionably, the best writing of Morrissey/Marr stretches beyond its 10 tracks, but The Queen Is Dead remains the obvious maypole around which anyone daring to argue The Smiths’ case as the most consistently brilliant pop group of all time usually twirls. Today, while it’s a somewhat sad reminder of the days when Morrissey fashioned his hatred of the monarchy into sublime rock’n’roll art, as opposed to toxic online gibberings of David Icke lunacy, as an album it’s forever the pillow of aspirations upon which every post-millennial indie band continues to dream. Its title sabotages any hope but if ever a record’s legacy deserved a knighthood, this is it.

SIMON GODDARD

Key Track: The Queen Is Dead
In 1985, Paul Simon was in the creative doldrums, battling middle age, poor sales and a bad hairpiece. But his fortunes would change after hearing a tape of South African mbqanga group the Boyoyo Boys. At the height of apartheid, he controversially flew to Johannesburg to record with them and other musicians, creating the basis of Graceland, an album that incorporated not just mbqanga but zydeco and pop. The Boy In The Bubble, You Can Call Me Al and Diamonds On The Soles Of Her Shoes became ubiquitous hits and put South African music on the world stage.

**Paul Simon**

*Graceland (Warner Bros)*

**The Fall**

*Bend Sinister (Beggars Banquet)*

Implausible then, unthinkable now, but in 1986, after nine LPs, The Fall were almost mainstream. They had a commercially inclined producer (John Leckie); a thrusting label, and, in Mark E Smith’s wife Brix, a hint of glamour. On Bend Sinister, they had the songs too, be it the insidious little hook of Shoulder Pads 1#, their Glitterstomp version of The Other Half’s Mr Pharmacist, or Gross Chapel – British Grenadiers, which showed Smith had been listening to Joy Division, just as so many, from Sonic Youth to Foals, would listen to The Fall. They would never be so appealingly subtle again. JA

**Janet Jackson**

*Control (A&M)*

Still only 19, the youngest of the Jackson clan already had two albums under her belt before Control arrived in early 1986. Yet this was to prove a game-changer of epic proportions. Producers Jam & Lewis’s innovative, R&B sonic template-stew of synth-driven pop, funk and industrial beats provided the backing for Janet’s sassy, streetwise songs of female empowerment. The result? Control notched up 14 million sales, five Top 5 US singles and bestowed Janet with superstar status on a par with her mid-’80s contemporaries such as Madonna, Prince and, of course, her brother Michael. *MY*

**Peter Gabriel**

*So (Charisma)*

“Peter Gabriel is seen by some people as ‘The Establishment’. Which is *mental*, considering everything he’s done, including So. I wasn’t old enough to fully understand it when it came out as I was 12. So as a kid I first liked the fun elements of Sledgehammer and Big Time. But the real themes of So are about the age of greed, the bigger-is-better Westernisation of the globe and what was happening to the country under Thatcher. So it’s as far away from ‘Establishment’ as you can get. It’s still my favourite LP of his, and I’m now lucky enough to be able to call Peter a friend. Every time Elbow record at his studio, he comes in to listen. He’s a very sweet man with an inventive mind.”

**Elbow**

*Guitar Gangster (Warp)*

Guy Garvey holds Peter Gabriel’s So album: “as far away from ‘Establishment’ as you can get.”

**XTC**

*Skylarking (Beggars Banquet)*

Exquisitely crafted pop with the intellectualism offset by producer Todd Rundgren’s West Coast warmth and string-led sumptuousness.

**Prince**

*Parade (Warner Bros)*

Doubling up as the Under The Cherry Moon soundtrack, these 12 tracks cover enormous musical ground with a thrilling, psychedelic sense of adventure.

**Run DMC**

*Raising Hell (Def Jam)*

The rhymes still land as hard as the beats, but Rick Rubin brings more hooks to the trio’s bullish hip-hop. Triple-platinum sales ensue.

**Cameo**

*Word Up (RCA)*

With killer tunes and a patent leather codpiece, Larry Blackmon and friends update funk in line with the electronic fascinations of ‘80s pop and hip-hop.

**Slayer**

*Reign In Blood (Elektra)*

The super-heavy, Rick-Rubin-produced thrash set that proved the Californians’ big breakthrough.

**R.E.M.**

*Fables From The Hill (I.R.S.)*

The rhymes still land as hard as the beats, but Rick Rubin brings more hooks to the trio’s bullish hip-hop. Triple-platinum sales ensue.

**Billy Bragg**

*Talking With The Taxman About Poetry (Chrysalis)*

More impassioned tales of love and politics – with added studio sheen and Johnny Marr.

**The The**

*Infected (419)*

Matt Johnson’s electro-pop/post-punk hybrid dismantles modern living with a musical intensity and lacerating lyrics.

**New Order**

*Brotherhood (Mute)*

Rather than blend their rock and dance influences, the band’s fourth album segregates them on the A- and B-sides. Across the board, it’s one of their warmest records.

**Elvis Costello**

*King Of America (A&M)*

Declan MacManus’s stirring return to folk-rock and country is as emotive as it is authentic.
How are you?
Great, thanks.

Where are you right now?
In my studio near Manchester.

Can you remember what you were doing in 1986? You'll have to remind me.

You were releasing The Queen Is Dead. Were you aware you were making a classic?
Going into the album felt different from the others. Because of the success of Meat Is Murder and the momentum that the band had gathered, I thought we needed to go up a notch creatively. I was in my usual mode of fearlessness and pride – it helped to be young and to know that you are in the best rock’n’roll band in the world.

What do you remember about recording it?
It was quite fragmented, we did some stuff at RAK then more at a residential studio in Surrey. Behind the scenes things were even more out of control than usual, which is saying something for The Smiths. One of us [bassist Andy Rourke] had been in a drugs bust and we'd had to bring in a kid on guitar, Craig Gannon, which we were totally OK with. We were also in the middle of a court case with our record company [Rough Trade]. I drove down overnight from Manchester to Surrey with my guitar tech to try to kidnap the tapes of the album when there were two inches of snow lying on the ground. But it helped make us who we were. We were wilfully single-minded, without any regard for anything happening outside the band.

You're on record as saying you actually preferred The Smiths' final album, Strangeways, Here We Come. Strangeways was more suited to my taste, in that it has an atmosphere of not trying too hard. In contrast, The Queen Is Dead seemed to be bursting with richness – it was so rich in its Smiths-ness. But there wasn't enough space in it for my liking. I think I left out a lot of things [on Strangeways...] that I would normally leave in, which showed a degree of confidence and of being OK with yourself. That influence came from The Beatles' White Album and Bowie's Ziggy Stardust, they were the two albums I was listening to mostly at the time.

You quickly went from being a guitar hero in The Smiths to, among other things, making dance music with Electronic. I never saw modern dance music as being any different from the dance music I liked in the mid-'70s – the Fatback Band, Bohannon...

What was The Smiths’ guitar whizz doing in 1986? In his “usual mode of fearlessness and pride”, apparently.
Chic – only it was made with modern machines. The club explosion shook everything up, as did Happy Mondays and The Stone Roses, and I saw that anyone standing on the sidelines pulling a face would be left behind. The first Electronic album came out of a moment of real freedom and excitement; the catalyst of that was MDMA, which made the curmudgeons all the more obvious.

Was that late-'80s/early-'90s period a fun time for you?

It was a very strange time for me, actually. An amazing weight had been lifted from my shoulders at the end of The Smiths (1987). At the same time everywhere I looked it seemed I was getting a kicking for splitting them up. Not since Yoko Ono has anyone ever had such negativity about breaking up a band! That’s quite hard to take when you’re 25. I’m not talking about fans, I mean the media. But real-life told a different story, because when your partner in The The is Matt Johnson and in Electronic Bernard Sumner you’re with the right guys. So, all in all, yes, I was having an amazing time.

What were your motivations for joining Modest Mouse and The Cribs in the noughties?

Modest Mouse came out of a way of life I have followed since being a teenager, which is a musical experiment that has turned out really well. It was about following a feeling. I had no idea what was going to happen but the music was so good that it was a no-brainer. So much so that I moved to [the band’s native] Portland. The LP we made [2007’s We Were Dead Before The Ship Even Sank] went to Number 1 in America, but if it hadn’t got into the Top 200 it wouldn’t have changed how I felt one little bit. With The Cribs we went into the rehearsal room with a view to writing a couple of songs for a seven-inch single but then all these songs just poured out and I stayed for the exact same reasons I did in Modest Mouse – the chemistry was great.

What has been the high and low points of the last 30 years?


You’re currently on tour with soundtrack composer Hans Zimmer, who you worked with on The Amazing Spider-Man 2 score in 2014. Do you get the same buzz as playing solo stuff?

It’s great! I’m in my studio at the moment listening to the set through a PA because we haven’t played for a couple of weeks and I have a gig coming up in Prague.

How’s your memoir going?

I’m four-fifths of the way through. I’ve got two months to finish it but I’ve got a lot of ground to cover. Not easy this writing lark, is it?

Has it taught you anything?

Yes – no matter what, you must learn not to second-guess yourself. People recognise when you do something for reasons that are genuine; the fact that my trajectory may be seen as eccentric is a bonus.

What does Q mean to you?

Noel, Phil Collins, Michael Stipe, Ian Brown, Foo Fighters, Paul McCartney... the fact you treat Nick Cave and PJ Harvey with the same respect as Pink Floyd or Kate Bush. You have the best music awards ceremony in the world, and you’re still out there doing it. Congratulations!

Where will you be in 30 minutes’ time?

I’ll still be sitting here listening to epic film soundtrack music.
expanding their popularity from hometown Dublin to the USA. But far from nipping in to capitalise on their leapfrog to the summit, U2 virtually vanished for 20 months, surfacing only to promote good causes. Behind the scenes, they were laying the ground for the biggest success of their career and arguably their masterpiece.

Already fascinated by America’s landscape and people on tour, not until Bono met Bob Dylan and Van Morrison at a concert in Dublin did he encounter American roots music, a stellar education furthered when Keith Richards played him classic blues recordings by Robert Johnson and John Lee Hooker. But invited by a refugee aid organisation to El Salvador where the US-backed military dictatorship terrorised the peasantry, Bono was lucky to escape America’s political dark side when caught up in the crossfire of an army mortar attack.

Reflecting U2’s fast-widening horizons, these experiences and others fed into the LP working-titled The Two Americas but renamed after The Joshua Tree in Death Valley, which was depicted in the black and white picture on the album sleeve by photographer Anton Corbijn. It was a perfect image, the band portrayed grimly in panoramic, brilliantly visualising the atmospheric, dramatic and emotionally tough music within. Like all blockbuster albums of the era, its first three tracks screamed hit, two of them, With Or Without You and I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For, U2’s first US Number 1 singles, seeding album sales which reached 25 million.

Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois’s future-retro production had a cinematic depth and peripheral vision that made the shiny digital mainstream sound passé overnight, inspiring both a roots music and valve-amp revival. But more than that, with Bruce Springsteen by then nearing 40, The Joshua Tree met an unfilled generational need for a romantically yearning, truth-seeking moral hero of its own. Bono was that rock messiah.
How to follow the best-selling album of all time? For the King of Pop, the post-Thriller years were a period of radical transformation – as Bad’s disquieting cover image showed. But musically Jackson and producer Quincy Jones hadn’t lost their magic touch, even while fashioning a harder-edged sound that drew on electro, even while crafting a harder-edged sound that drew on electro, hip-hop and new jack swing. Crucially, too, Jackson could still conjure the kind of indelible pop hooks that would resonate for decades – witness The Weeknd’s cover of Dirty Diana and Kendrick Lamar’s nod to Smooth Criminal on King Kunta – even if he’d never reach such heights again. RH

**Key Track:** Bad

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**THE JESUS AND MARY CHAIN**

**DARKLANDS**

*(BLANCO Y NEGRO)*

“I still play it a lot, I think the songwriting is amazing. (Debut album) Psychocandy was chaotic and angry, but Darklands goes inwards. There’s a sadness to it, a sense of depression almost. I’d been out of the band for a year-and-a-half when they recorded it, and I never saw it coming, I’d never played any of the songs on it.

“Does it have a musical simplicity like the Ramones? No! The Ramones never wrote a song as poetic as Down On Me or About You. I just don’t think the JAMC get the credit and respect they deserve as songwriters. April Skies is a rock’n’roll song but it will also break your heart; it’s rare to get that duality in a record. The words on Deep One Perfect Morning are great – “And my thoughts are turning backwards/And I’m picking at the pieces/Of a world that keeps turning.” If Ian Curtis had written that, people would say how fucking beautiful it is.

“They were also learning how to build up tracks on this album with producer/engineer Bill Price, who had worked on Never Mind The Bollocks and London Calling. There’s a lot of pain there, and righteous anger. And no feedback – just great songs.”

**Pleasant to Meet Me**

*(SIRE)*

**THE REPLACEMENTS**

Although it arrived at the height of hair metal, Guns’ debut largely spurned the bubblegum hedonism of their Sunset Strip peers, instead turning in a sound that was akin to Aerosmith being dragged through the gutter. These were lived-in songs about heroin, crime, nasty sex and booze, rattling with aggression, melody and, occasionally, fragility. Like a white trash counterpart to NWA’s Straight Outta Compton, released the following year, Appetite’s almost-punk attitude helped usher in the next generation of rock artists. JM

**Key Track:** Welcome To The Jungle

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**GUNS N’ ROSES**

**APPETITE FOR DESTRUCTION**

*(GEFFEN)*

**ERIC B & Rakim**

**PAID IN FULL**

This East Coast hip-hop duo’s debut was dubbed inconsistent on release. Listen to it now, and you hear the innovation, the ongoing range, the material reflects an intense writing period. Oh, and it should have been a treble…

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**PET SHOP BOYS**

**ACTUALLY**

The second LP by Messrs Tennant and Lowe is ‘80s synth-pop’s high-water mark, its glorious sense of lyrical ennui being married to irresistible melodies.

**PRINCE**

**SIGN ‘O’ THE TIMES**

For his ninth album, Prince opted for a double. Typically wide-ranging, the material reflects an intense writing period. Oh, and it should have been a treble…

**THE SMITHS**

**STRANGEWAYS, HERE WE COME**

Richer production and a sense of Phase II for Britain’s greatest indie band couldn’t stop them falling apart. Strangeways… proved to be a fine swansong.

**R.E.M.**

**DOCUMENT**

The album upon which Michael Stipe’s mumbling effectively ended for good. R.E.M. never looked back…

**PUBLIC ENEMY**

**YO! BUM RUSH THE SHOW**

Rick Rubin’s production still sounds crisp in the same way that PE’s abilities continue to thrill on this landmark debut.

**TOM WAITS**

**FRANKS WILD YEARS**

The odd churning accordion is just the start on an album that plunges you into a frenzied cavalcade of hope, fear and joy.

**BIG BLACK**

**SONGS ABOUT FUCKING**

Steve Albini’s Chicago noise crew announced their split – then delivered their most uncompromising statement.

**ERIC B & Rakim**

**PAID IN FULL**

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**GEORGE MICHAEL**

**FAITH**

The moment when pop star became credible artist, keeping the pop hooks and creating an era-defining piece of work.

**THE CURE**

**KISS ME KISS ME KISS ME**

The album that broke The Cure Stateside and to an infinitely wider audience. Why? All you need to do is listen to Just Like Heaven.

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**THE JESUS AND MARY CHAIN**

**DARKLANDS**

*(BLANCO Y NEGRO)*
Over the past three decades the U2 frontman has amassed enough pearls of wisdom to make him rock’n’roll’s number one sage. To mark the 30th anniversary of the magazine he has graced the cover of no fewer than 26 times, he shares a few of them here…

PHOTOGRAPHS SAM JONES
“WE NEEDED MORE RULES. THOU SHALL NOT WEAR A MULLET FOR A START, A ROCK STAR SHOULD NOT LOOK LIKE HIS HAIR IS IRONED.”

“I don’t really feel like walking on water today...”

U2’s Bono, Los Angeles, 2016.
1. **THOU SHALT BELIEVE IN THE BLANK PAGE.**

Everybody has one. Cos everybody is one. Fill it up. Tear it up. Let it tear you up. A blank page threatens the author with emptiness, but that’s OK. Believe in it and believe you can make your mark on it. It’s your future. Your only hope. It’s the place you need to be. Move in. Have faith in the blank page. It can be anything, and it is the only thing that can truly save your life. That’s what I now know Richard Hell was talking about in Blank Generation years ago. It’s possibility. The poet spoke the truth. As I’m sure he knew he must.

2. **QUESTION EVERYTHING.**

Like many things, I learned this from the band oracle Larry Mullen Jr. He took me aside after a gig and told me he needed to tell me something extremely important. He took my hand. Looked deeply into my eyes, and said, “Bono, question everything.” I said, “Why?”

3. **WHAT’S GREAT. WILL WAIT. BUT NOT FOREVER.**

4. **WHEN ACCUSED OF GENIUS, GENEROUSLY AND HUMBLY CONFESSION.**

Be quick to do it for fear of further accusations of tardiness, lethargy or humility. A self-confessed genius is a great thing, and there are far too few of them in this world, though perhaps a few too many on the Northside of Dublin, currently speaking, where being backwards about being forward is an unknown performance so far.

5. **THE BEST U2 ALBUM IS ALWAYS THE ONE WE’RE WORKING ON.**

Because the music of what is, is fine music. But the music of what might be, is finer still. Still searching for the crock of gold. The journey is the destination, etc, etc. Get out there and enjoy your football...

6. **A SINGLE TRANSFERABLE PHRASE IS AN ESSENTIAL AND HANDY TOOL.**

That I don’t possess. In any situation, whether being harangued, bored, seduced, abused or adored, it would be helpful. I complained about this to Jarvis Cocker who understood the problem at the molecular level and offered, without missing a beat, “It’s a lot to take in, really.” He explained that this STP always cooled folks down or at least put them on a pause – whatever they were on about. Lemmy, while musing pleasantly on this and that, be it the injustice of the world, the horrors of war, or the perfidy of a man’s love for women, would shrug and say, “Oh, well, you can’t have everything, where would you put it?” A phrase that works on every occasion is an invaluable exit strategy. I need one. However, when speaking to Q scribes, beware the pithy quote out of context. I just did a one-and-a-half-hour briefing with the United States Senate on the refugee crisis. Off-script, in the last five minutes, I made one joke about sending Amy Schumer, Sacha Baron Cohen and Chris Rock in to fight ISIS and that’s all that ended up on the news. I guess people don’t want me to be funny...

7. **THOU SHALT BELIEVE IN TWO THINGS AT THE SAME TIME.**

Though I’m not sure about this one.

8. **THOU SHALT NOT PLAY GOLF.**

Limitation leads to innovation and a rule book is useful even if you eventually tear it up. U2 had musical notes we wouldn’t use (certain bendy ones from a blues scale on guitar) and lyrics we decided were against the law like BABY and CRAZY. It took 20 years but we eventually loosened up on both and included the forbidden “baby” in the title of our seventh album and had it appear 23 times in the music. In truth, we needed more rules. Thou shalt not wear a mullet for a start, a rock star should not look like his hair is ironed. Thou shalt not play golf is another. When we started as a band we committed to the principles of a golf free-band. Many mistakes were allowed for some of us who did terrible things that deserved firing but nobody ever played golf. Except, we think, The Edge.

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**WITH OR WITHOUT Q**

So, from the top, travel with us through U2 and Bono’s record-holding 26 Q cover appearances...

- July 1987
- February 1988
- November 1988
- April 1989
- July 1992
“LARRY MULLEN JR LOOKED DEEPLY INTO MY EYES AND SAID, ‘BONO, QUESTION EVERYTHING.’ I SAID, ‘WHY?’”
9

IT'S NOT ABOUT THE MONEY, IT'S THE MONEY.

There are more than a couple of reasons to get the money right, but let’s start with the fact that it’s the number one reason bands break up. Not musical differences, it’s money differences. The songwriting, how it’s shared, who did what when and why that song was left off, etc, etc. If you’re the only one in the band who writes, remember the thing that will make your song famous is the band’s playing of it. In U2 we decided to split things equally. I think it’s at the top of the list of reasons we’ve lasted so long. Also, do the math or make sure you have somebody numerate to do it for you. Pay attention to business, it’s really a drag when it goes wrong. Ádam Clayton, normally so fastidious about his friends, his art, his style, can fill you in on what can happen when you’re too preoccupied with beauty... ugly stuff. Just because you’re smart with your art or your activism doesn’t mean you have to be dumb with your money.

10

THOU SHALT NOT BREAK UP THE BAND.

As Joe Strummer screamed, “Break the law but don’t break up the band!!!!” There’s nothing more arduous but nothing more fun than a band. I’ve met only one person who left a great band and told me that life was better having rid the room of argument... but, apart from Sting, remember all of you who go solo, that the innate friction of a real band brings out special qualities in your music, as does the acquiescence inherent in for-hire musicians however talented... it’s different, it’s a different kind of sound. I know many great records were made on wages but it’s not the same... Why oh why do bands break up (see Commandment 9)...

Note: watch out for answering your own rhetorical questions...
Well, as sure as follows three, in anthropology we discover that the male finds it harder and harder to work around other males as he reaches so-called maturity. So stop trying. Picasso said it takes a long time to become young. This is why a protracted adolescence, a refusal of adulthood is somewhere close to the centre of rock’n’roll. Creativity needs brightly coloured crayons. Believe it or not, my best friend Guggi and I pledged to stay age eight when we were eight and mostly we have succeeded (though I have spotted hair growing on his face and back, and he talks about girls more). As a final subpoint, I would mention it is enviable to have best friends who knew you before you were famous, even better if you can marry one.

11

NEVER SPEAK ABOUT YOURSELF IN THE THIRD PERSON.

Bono hates that.
ever one to follow convention, in December 1987 Prince performed one of his most infamous about-turns, taking even his record company by surprise as he opted to halt the release of his next project The Black Album – despite Warner Bros having already pressed 500,000 copies. Later stories alleged that his change of heart was brought on by a bad ecstasy trip at a club in Minneapolis, but there was also speculation that he was unhappy with The Black Album’s saturnine mood. By contrast, Lovesexy, the LP he put together to replace it in just a matter of weeks, was a joyous celebration of everything which had made him great over the previous decade – including music, religion and, most important of all, sex.

His most carnal album since 1980’s Dirty Mind, Lovesexy’s cover art was daring even by Prince’s standards – fashion photographer Jean-Baptiste Mondino depicting him as a kind of enraptured deity who had just floated down naked from funkadelic heaven. An Prince himself reportedly called it his “gospel” album, it’s an evocation of physical as well as spiritual love, with Anna Stesia’s George Clinton-like injunctions – “Ravish me, liberate my mind” – suggesting that if you free your ass, your mind will follow. There was also a rediscovered sense of freedom, one which showcased Prince at his most musically liberated and daring, spicing up his trademark electro-funk with Eye No’s surprise sound effects and Dance On’s glitchy edits.

As epitomised by Alphabet St’s irresistible pop-dance groove, Lovesexy was the work of an artist at his prolific peak, the culmination of a creative surge which in the space of two years had produced visionary double-album Sign O’ The Times and The Black Album’s sprawling jams. Unsurprisingly, it’s this phase of Prince’s career that would inspire future funk pioneers, from Beck’s Day-Glo Midnite Vultures to Janelle Monáe’s psychedelic hip-hop soul. For Prince himself, clouds would loom over the next decade. But in the late-’80s he made Paisley Park his own purple paradise – and Lovesexy, more than any other album he recorded during the period, was its soundtrack.

After four albums of careful calibrating, Sonic Youth’s vision for intellectually rich avant-garde rock reached its apogee with Daydream Nation. Sounding dazed but not confused, on songs like Teen Age Riot and the 14-minute odyssey of Trilogy they thrilled with altered tunings, fuzzy riffs and “fuck you” attitude. A major-label deal and more great albums would follow before their painful implosion, but this remains their defining moment. Daydream Nation fertilised the next generation of bands who would revel in the artful manipulation of noise. And also how difficult I was to my parents. And what I wanted to do with my spare time, which was to dye my hair and learn how to play guitar. It continues to be an inspirational album to me now. It’s not a record that’s ever collapsed or sealed itself away. It’s an album that I can go back to a lot and it still feels as fresh and inspiring as it did the first time I heard it. It’s a record that just doesn’t get tired.”

“Pixies' Surfer Rosa was the record that hit me hardest when I was around 13 years old. It put everything into focus for me about what I wanted to do and who I wanted to be. And also how difficult I was to my parents. And what I wanted to do with my spare time, which was to dye my hair and learn how to play guitar. It continues to be an inspirational album to me now. It’s not a record that’s ever collapsed or sealed itself away. It’s an album that I can go back to a lot and it still feels as fresh and inspiring as it did the first time I heard it. It’s a record that just doesn’t get tired.”

Foals’ Yannis Philippakis: “Pixies’ Surfer Rosa put everything into focus for me.”
Disillusioned by five years of living in London and permanent squabbling, The Go-Betweens sloped home (albeit to Sydney rather than their Brisbane base) for Christmas 1987. They bought some cheap guitars, hired an expensive studio and crafted their finest LP. Streets Of Your Town was irresistibly catchy, but it spoke of butcher’s knives and battered wives, while Was There Anything I Could Do? set a template for lush despair. When the album’s commercial success failed to match its critical acclaim, the band split, but, timeless, whipsmart and eerily perfect, its influence had only just begun.

PUBLIC ENEMY
IT TAKES A NATION OF MILLIONS TO HOLD US BACK
(DEF JAM)

It would be almost impossible to overstate the importance of Public Enemy’s second LP. Even in 2016, The Bomb Squad’s reinvention of hip-hop’s sonic palette sounds futuristic, be it Rebel Without A Pause’s whistling-kettle beat or their ingenious Slayer sample on She Watch Channel Zero?! This incendiary production served Chuck D perfectly as he nailed everything in his cross hairs – racism, inequality, WASP culture – with perfect lyrical aim. That it stands as one of rap’s finest hours is undeniable, and so is its ripple effect. Everyone from Rage Against The Machine to 2Pac were taking notes. GG

Key Track: Bring The Noise
The Stone Roses’ debut was a kickstarter to a lot of things. They’re fucking boss tunes, amazing songs. There’s no dead weight, even the one that’s the same tune backwards! It’s as inventive as it’s arrogant. Love it. They’d obviously steeped themselves in the soup of songwriting and psychedelia but it’s still uniquely them. The romance of the Roses: it’s romantic music that inspires people to sing along and it’s not shit! It’s open-heart surgery, which is what music should be. It’s beautiful and suddenly it was alright to play guitar again, it wasn’t a backwater. “It really opened the door for the stuff that came after. There’s a lot happening for British bands at that time. I hope there’s a band out there now who will kick-start it for everyone else, it’s just so vile right now. You turn on the radio and you know you’re being advertised to. It tires it me out, the wiffle now. It was at after they released their debut things for everyone else, it’s just so vile right now. That was such a tragedy musically, but at least it’s all come right for them personally now. No need to get your knickers in a twist about what came after. MATT MASON

Key Track: I Am The Resurrection

The Stone Roses must sometimes feel that they’ve been hoisted by their own petard. The band who sang, “The past was yours but the future’s mine”, who responded to comparisons with The Rolling Stones with, “This is 1990 so I say the Rolling Who?”, will forever be hamstrung by history – continuously marked down for not repeating the unrepeatable magic of their debut album. Wherever you stand on The Second Coming or last month’s All For One single, 1989’s The Stone Roses gave us more than we can reasonably demand. Its combination of swagger, adventure and emotional vulnerability was an acknowledged gateway for Oasis and The Verve, while the keystone role the Roses played in bringing together club culture and indie-rock in a saucer-eyed hug laid the ground for another modern masterwork: Primal Scream’s Screamadelica. Most of all, though, despite being heavily rooted in ’60s psychedelia, The Stone Roses has that un-coachable quality of timelessness – a record so charged with vitality and ambition that it sounds newborn today.

MILLI VANilli are rumbled for not actually singing on any of their hits... Ice Cube quits NWA... Seven of the year’s 18 UK Number 1 singles are produced by Stock Aitken Waterman... and The Rolling Stones are on the cover of Q.
SOUL II SOUL
CLUB CLASSICS
VOL. ONE
(VIRGIN)

As a DJ and club promoter in the '80s, Jazzy B was instrumental in bringing together a remarkable cross-section of London subcultures. So it's no surprise his debut album as a writer and producer had the beatific, inclusive feel – not to mention the heavyweight basslines – of a sunny weekend at the Notting Hill Carnival. Working alongside fellow studio wizard Nellee Hooper, who would later assist in Björk and Massive Attack's evolution, the duo filtered jazz, disco and dub through modern, hip-hop-influenced beats – and in Caron Wheeler discovered a UK soul voice that would take them to the top of the charts. RH

Key Track: Keep On Movin'

GALAXIE 500
ON FIRE
(ROUGHTRADE)

Forget Vampire Weekend; Boston's Galaxie 500 were the original Ivy League indie-rock band and prime movers in redefining what it meant to be an underground artist, particularly in the US. (Drummer Damon Krukowski even went as far as to cite a Greek philosopher as an influence on his playing). The Harvard-educated trio's second of just three albums is where they perfected their Velvets-indebted sonic aesthetic: three chords, spiralling solos, the fragile, broken beauty of Dean Wareham's voice. They split two years later, on the cusp of wider acclaim, but On Fire remains the crowning moment in their all-too-brief career. MY

Key Track: Strange

THE CURE
DISINTEGRATION
(FIGION)

The point when the Crawley goth-rocker's, already established by the late '80s as one of the world's biggest cult bands, officially became one of its biggest period. Shaped by Robert Smith's heavy LSD use and fear of hitting 30, and conceived in a caustic studio atmosphere (co-founder Lol Tolhurst was sacked during early sessions), The Cure's eighth LP was so full of self-loathing that the band's US label feared the worst. Yet such was Disintegration's sombre beauty and commercial impact (it sold 2.7 million) that The Cure ended up, as Smith later lamented, "becoming everything I didn't want us to become – a stadium rock band." MY

Key Track: Keep On Movin'

SOUL II SOUL: their debut had the feel of “a sunny weekend at the Notting Hill Carnival.”

BOB DYLAN
OH MERCY
(COLUMBIA)

In 1989, after Dylan & The Dead and the slapdash Down In The Groove, it was surely all over for Bob Dylan. Instead, Oh Mercy marked the beginning of a creative rebirth which continues to this day. In cahoots with producer Daniel Lanois, Dyla harder on his songs he had in years. The results, whether the state-of-the-nation addresses Political World and Everything Is Broken, the sinister Man In The Long Black Coat and What Was It You Wanted? or the apocalyptic standout Ring Them Bells, was Dylan at his best once again. Who could doubt him? A

Key Track: Ring Them Bells

DE LA SOUL
3 FEET HIGH
AND RISING
Full of positive vibes, remarkable textures and deep, sampled grooves, De La Soul's debut is typified by The Magic Number and Me, Myself And I.

NEW ORDER
TECHNIQUE
Balearic beats collide with alt-rock to create the Manchester pioneers' defining statement.

LOU REED
NEW YORK
The former Velvets leader delivers a literate, conceptual album that observed the world through a dark, shaded lens.

BEASTIE BOYS
PAUL'S BOUTIQUE
The Beasties showcase their musicality on this second LP, creating a rich tapestry of sound and rhythms matched to tongue-in-cheek rhymes.

SPACEMEN 3
PLAYING WITH FIRE
Purity. Love. Suicide. Accuracy. Revolution. So reads the sleeve of an LP where '60s psychedelia meets German minimalism. The effect is mesmeric.

NEVILLE BROTHERS
YELLOW MOON
Daniel Lanois's atmospheric production turns the spotlight on the rich harmonies of the New Orleans veterans on an LP full of soulful Creole charm.

NINE INCH NAILS
PRETTY HATE MACHINE
Trent Reznor brings the US noise and the electronic underground to the mainstream on this inspired debut.

NIRVANA
BLEACH
The sheer pop nous of About A Girl was enough to suggest that Nirvana were about to break out of the grunge melee.

NENEH CHERRY
RAW LIKE SUSHI
Neneh Cherry's sonically rich debut is built on the moves and grooves of British club culture.

TOM PETTY
FULL MOON FEVER
Blue-collar rocker Petty's first album away from The Heartbreakers is co-written with Jeff Lynne and it shows. I Won't Back Down and Free Fallin' provided the monster hits.

THE CURE
THE GROWN UP YEARS
(EMI)

A decade into the Cure’s career, Robert Smith was well aware that time was running out. A time for reflection. A time to consider the future. The result was Disintegration: the last Cure album released before Smith became the creative force that would drive the band for the next 40 years...
The La’s was unique in the sense that its chief creator couldn’t stand it. Three years before its release, back in 1987 when the Liverpool group first signed to Go! Discs, singer/songwriter Lee Mavers had boasted about the all-conquering prospect of the still-unmade record, promising it would “go down as one of the best debut albums, if not the best.” When it finally appeared in 1990, Mavers publicly condemned the release and urged fans not to buy it.

The problem was that Mavers insisted the label had put out the record against his wishes after he’d quit the sessions with producer Steve Lillywhite (who was forced to finish the record from the remaining takes he had at his disposal). In the preceding years, The La’s had burned through producers at an alarming rate in thwarted attempts to capture the sounds in Mavers’s head on tape.

The results of the first real effort to record the LP – overseen by The Cure/Associates’ mixing desk sergeant Mike Hedges – had been frustratingly binned by the band leader. When that version finally surfaced in 2008, as part of a Deluxe Edition reissue, it revealed itself to be a variously grittier and spacier take on The La’s’ rattlingly great songs. But by that time, nearly two decades in, the cleaner, punchier Steve Lillywhite version had become frozen in stone and attained classic album status.

Mavers might have hated his own record, but the modernist Merseybeat and indelible melodies of The La’s, delivered with attitude and conviction, were to prove hugely influential. At a time when music was still lost amid a fog of ’80s reverb and studio gimmicks, There She Goes in 1988 had shone through as a reminder of what brightly burning songwriting was all about. The Gallaghers were listening closely: Liam’s snarly vowel-mangling in Cigarettes & Alcohol could be traced back to Mavers in Son Of A Gun; Noel claimed that Oasis’s mission was to “finish what The La’s started.”

Away from the drama of its creation, The La’s was the sound of a band wonderfully out of step with their era. As a result, they ended up making music that is utterly timeless.

TOM DOYLE

Key Track:
There She Goes

“My favourite album from ’86 onwards? It’s probably a toss-up between The Stone Roses and The La’s honestly, but it’s very, very equal with those for which is the better record. Can I have two? The Stone Roses meant a great deal to people in Manchester and it was a brilliant, brilliant English pop record and without them Oasis would probably never have existed, but The La’s LP comes from somewhere else, it’s otherworldly and the Roses were a band’s band and Mavers is the mad lazy genius. I couldn’t split the two of them. You could also throw Screamadelica in there.”

NOEL GALLAGHER

“My MODERN CLASSIC”
**November Rave On EP**, released in 1989, described to fans as much Let It Bleed as The Happy Mondays were doing and where, but it would be another 12 months before producers Paul Oakenfold and Steve Osborne would tease this era-defining LP from the notoriously haphazard, E-guzzling Mancs.

Paul Oakenfold and Steve "Era-defining": Happy Mondays’ Bez and Shaun Ryder in 1990.

The title of their Madchester classic was released in November 1989, described to fans as much Let It Bleed as The Happy Mondays were doing and where, but it would be another 12 months before producers Paul Oakenfold and Steve Osborne would tease this era-defining LP from the notoriously haphazard, E-guzzling Mancs. Genuinely små generis, and often as much Let It Bleed as The Fatback Band, the snapping grooves and spangly guitars of Kinky Afro, God’s Cop and Loose Fit represent the apotheosis of the UK indie-dance collision, with Shaun Ryder’s surreal street poetry (“Son, I’m 30, I only went with your mother cos she’s dirty”) elevating the whole thing into great art. And the cover of Step On is totally genius, of course. PG

**Key Track:** Kinky Afro

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**DEPECHE MODE**

**VIOLATOR**

(ROUGH TRADE)

You can’t beat Depeche Mode’s first decade for steady ascent. The better they were, the bigger they got, and they achieved sinister perfection with album number seven. Violator’s heavyweight electro-blues somehow sounds both stadium-ready and intimate, interspersing ars-noto barstormers like Personal Jesus with shadowy ruminations on Martin Gore’s old favourites – sex, religion, sin and guilt. This was Depeche Mode’s peak as a simpatico quartet (“Enjoy The Silence was a ballad before Alan Wilder and producer Flood got their hands on it), uniting the bloodlines of Kraftwerk and Johnny Cash in a production as hard, black and shiny as a beetle’s shell. DL

**Key Track:** Halo

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**AZTEC CAMERA**

**STRAY**

(SIRE)

In 1983, Roddy Frame had emerged as the boy wonder of Scottish indie, as adept with romantic bedit poetry as he was at playing mind-boggling jazz-rock figures on a Gretsch guitar. His band’s third LP, Love, released in 1987, had brought mainstream pop success but, considering Stray’s overtones of melancholia, little spiritual salve. Frame’s new neighbourhood in Notting Hill casts a long shadow, notably in his corollary fellow resident B.A.D.’s Mick Jones for single Good Morning Britain, a galloping state-of-the-nation address, as well as on the mournful Notting Hill Blues. PG

**Key Track:** Good Morning Britain

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**PET SHOP BOYS**

**BEHAVIOUR**

As assured as they ever sounded and as intelligible as Liz Fraser’s lyrics have ever been. Yet still on a beatific plane all of their own.

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**Key Track:** Good Morning Britain

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**COCTEAU TWINS**

**HEAVEN OR LAS VEGAS**

As assured as they ever sounded and as intelligible as Liz Fraser’s lyrics have ever been. Yet still on a beatific plane all of their own.

**JAMES**

**GOLD MOTHER**

A 1991 re-sequencing and re-release brought commercial success but, from the off, this was a bold leap into cock-eyered arena rock.

**KINKY AFRO, GOD’S COP AND LOOSE FIT**

Elevating the whole thing into great art. And the cover of Step On is totally genius, of course. PG

**Key Track:** Kinky Afro

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**PET SHOP BOYS**

**BEHAVIOUR**

Neil Tennant cracks opens his heart a little more as the tunes get warmer. The result: their finest album to date.

**PUBLIC ENEMY**

**FEAR OF A BLACK PLANET**

Explosive, impassioned, innovative and chaotically funky. Business as usual for the world’s most important rap group.

**THE FALL**

**EXTRICATE**

Despite Brix Smith being jetisoned, The Fall still retain their melodic vitality – with nods to Manchester’s current taste for dancefloor grooves.

**DEE-LITE**

**WORLD CLIQUE**

A psychedelic, irresistibly uplifting disco-ball shimmer that’s so much more than just mega hit Groove Is In The Heart.
My Bloody Valentine (Kevin Shields at the back): created a “re-imagination of guitar music.”

Creation Records had hoped My Bloody Valentine’s second LP would take five days to record. When it actually emerged two years later, label chiefs Alan McGee and Dick Green had suffered meltdowns waiting for a record shrouded in rumours of peculiar working practices, label-threatening costs and bandleader Kevin Shields’s intense micromanagement. For the 49 minutes it took to listen to Loveless though, they must have thought it was worth it. After Primal Scream’s Screamadelica, it was Creation’s second masterpiece in the space of six weeks. A re-imagination of guitar music that could induce hypnosis and vertigo simultaneously, its melodies were swaddled in fluting, churning noise spun by the tremolo arm of Shields’s guitar. While the band had been away, British indie had been overrun by shoegazing’s pale imitators, but Loveless crushed them with its vision and ambition. Even Shields found it tough to follow; it would be 22 years before the next MBV release.

Key Track: Only Shallow

“My MODERN CLASSIC”

Thurston Moore, ex-Sonic Youth frontman

“You’re Living All Over Me by Dinosaur Jr and Loveless by My Bloody Valentine feel like the American and British answers to the same question. When Sonic Youth and Dinosaur came over [to the UK] there was a connection to what we were doing and what Kevin Shields and Bilinda Butcher were orchestrating. There’s a lot of new information in these two records, especially when you sit down and play them as a whole. It’s funny, I can’t recall ever having listened to either on digital media, they’ve always been proper records to me. If I had to pick one, I’ll pick Loveless because I’m living in London now. I might run into them.”
ICE CUBE
DEATH CERTIFICATE
(PRIORITY)

Ice Cube had already established himself on the ferocious AmeriKKKa’s Most Wanted, but it was 1991’s Death Certificate that proved his definitive solo statement. In part this was achieved via No Vaseline, one of hip-hop’s most infamous diss tracks that eviscerated his old N.W.A. compatriots’ integrity. Yet that is only part of the story.

On songs like Alive On Arrival and Black Korea, Ice Cube articulated the powder keg that was Los Angeles’ conflicting racial and social tensions with such eerie precision that he essentially prophesied the 1992 LA Riots. The division between life and art was microscopic here. GG

Key Track: Alive On Arrival

PRIMAL SCREAM
SCREAMADELICA
(CREATION)

The story of Screamadelica’s genesis has been told to death — leather-trousered rockers drop E, see the light and enlist DJs to produce an era-defining masterpiece — yet what remains remarkable is just how impossibly brilliant the album still sounds 25 years on. A kaleidoscopic symphony of house, psychedelia, gospel, dub and Stones-y rock’n’roll, it may be synonymous with the ecstasy experience but can still blow the mind of anyone who’s never tried anything stronger than a lager shandy. Primal Scream struggled to top Screamadelica, but, to be fair, no one else has got close since either.

Key Track: Higher Than The Sun

NIRVANA
NEVERMIND
(GEFFEN)

Very few records become touchstones for a generation of music fans right across the globe, but such was the fate of Nirvana’s second LP, Nevermind, a 24-million-selling behemoth that married the inky psychological darkness of Black Sabbath with the melodic incandescence of The Beatles, just at the moment when heavy rock music looked doomed to self-parody. With Kurt Cobain spewing forth a torrent of beguiling nihilism, an extraordinary map of a beautiful but damaged human being emerged. Cobain’s death in 1994 only added to its profound resonance.

Key Track: Smells Like Teen Spirit

TEENAGE FANCLUB
BANDWAGONESQUE
(CREATION)

When Scottish indie-rockers Teenage Fanclub signed to Creation Records, boss Alan McGee had only modest hopes for what would become their third album; instead, Bandwagonesque sold 400,000 copies worldwide, spirited along by its mellifluous hooks, keening harmonies and an unashamed debt to the lopsided chug of cult US rockers Big Star. It was a hard record not to like, with the bittersweet strains of bassist Gerard Love’s Star Sign (“there’s a black cat on the floor — big deal”) and Norman Blake’s shoulder-boppin’ The Concept and What You Do To Me radiating retro-pop magic.

Key Track: The Concept

R.E.M.
OUT OF TIME
An album on which our four protagonists embraced their inner pop joy, and showed it to the world.

RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS
BLOOD SUGAR SEX MAGIK
Rick Rubin helps funk-metal outfit turn down the riffs and create a deeper mood. Results are spectacular.

PEARL JAM
TEN
If Nirvana were grunge’s answer to the Pistols, Pearl Jam are The Clash. This debut outlined their ambition to make classic rock music matter again.

A TRIBE CALLED QUEST
THE LOW END THEORY
Once dubbed “the Sgt Pepper of hip-hop”, this second LP by Queens hip-hop crew is as rich and varied as that suggests.

JULIAN COPE
PEGGY SUICIDE
A deep and complex affair, Cope’s seventh album is both political and personal.

U2
ACHTUNG BABY
A seismic sonic reinvention is married to a set of lyrics where introspection and universal appeal meet.

METALLICA
METALLICA
Thrash metal’s answer to AC/DC’s Back In Black transformed the LA four-piece from underground titans to stadium headliners.

ICE-T
O.G. ORIGINAL GANGSTER
A cornerstone of gangsta rap which offers an uncompromising street-level view of the world set against a claustrophobic musical backdrop.

MASSIVE ATTACK
BLUE LINES
Drawing on hip-hop, soul and dub, it is the space in the sound that defines Massive Attack’s music on this startling debut.

THE KLF
THE WHITE ROOM
Initially designed as a soundtrack to a road movie, The KLF reworked the original music to create something rare: an acid house album you could genuinely call a masterpiece.
R.E.M.
AUTOMATIC FOR THE PEOPLE
(WARNERS)

When R.E.M. announced they were splitting in 2011, the musical landscape was unrecognizable as the one in which they'd released their first album, Murmur, in 1983. The Athens, Georgia band had almost single-handedly enabled so-called “alternative” rock's transition into the mainstream. Before R.E.M., groups like R.E.M. didn’t have hits. After R.E.M. all bets were off. What’s astonishing now, though, is how little they compromised along the way.

The UK and US Number 1 hit, 1991’s Out Of Time, laid the groundwork for its successor, on which R.E.M. again melded ’60s pop, rock and folk with baroque classical strings. R.E.M. embarked on a working road trip in late ’91: spending a few weeks recording at U2 producer Daniel Lanois’s New Orleans facility, before doing the same at other studios around the US.

The plan was to make an album more upbeat than Out Of Time. But before long, they’d dumped the faster rock tracks thinking they weren’t good enough, and written slower songs that addressed the gnawing fact they’d all turned 30, and adolescence was becoming a distant memory. “Lyrically it’s dark and musically it’s oddball,” guitarist Peter Buck told Q.

Only three songs, The Sidewinder Sleeps Tonight, Ignoreland and Man On The Moon, came close to fulfilling their original brief. Michael Stipe’s Elvis impersonation on Man On The Moon proved R.E.M. could still be playful. But few multi-platinum albums begin with a song as remorselessly downbeat as Drive. Throughout, the music had a yearning quality to match the lyrics. The catch-all sentiment behind the hit ballad Everybody Hurts had universal appeal. And when Stipe sang, “Readying to bury your father and your mother/What did you think when you lost another?” on Sweetness Follows he spoke directly to an audience, whom, like the band, were coming to terms with growing older.

For all its pain and sorrow, the whole album plays like an oddly uplifting eulogy. R.E.M.’s not-quite mid-life crisis rewarded them with another UK and US hit. Many earnest American rock bands (Counting Crows, anyone?) arrived in its wake. But none would make another Automatic For The People. MB

Key Track: Everybody Hurts

R.E.M.

1992

Kurt Cobain marries Courtney Love... amid outrage from the highest reaches of US government, rapper Ice-T pulls the track Cop Killer from his metal band Body Count's debut album... and Morrissey is on the cover of Q.

THE BLACK CROWES
THE SOUTHERN HARMONY AND MUSICAL COMPANION
(DEF AMERICAN)

In May ’92, with Nirvana in their plaid-clad pomp, these Atlantans’ devotion to ’70s boogie-rock seemed as outdated as their wardrobe. However, their second LP’s mix of good-time riffing and heartfelt balladry laughed in the face of grunge miserablism, thanks to Chris Robinson’s rasp and a vinyl-friendly production from George Drakoulias. A sonic inspiration to everyone from My Morning Jacket to The Black Keys, their back-to-the-future mindset would later be taken to its ultimate conclusion by Jack White. PM

Key Track: Remedy

Dr Dre's The Chronic

“The Chronic was its tipping point. MM

Key Track: Nuthin' But A “G” Thang

THE BLACK CROWES

The Southern Harmony and Musical Companion
(DEF AMERICAN)
Stephen Malkmus insists Pavement’s debut remains the best of their storied discography, praising its “unrepeatable energy” and absence of self-consciousness. He’s got a point. More wry and structured offerings would follow, but Slanted sounds pretty much like three men (as the band were at this point) losing their minds while the reel-to-reel is left to capture everything. It offered alternative rock a path of cock-eyed experimentation that could still produce something fiercely approachable. As Richard Hawley recently told Q: “It was bizarre... but the tunes!” JM

**Key Track:** Zurich Is Stained

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**THE ORB**

**U.F.ORB**

(BIG LIFE)

With The Orb’s second album, former Killing Joke roadie Alex Paterson spirited ambient techno out of the chill-out room and on to Top Of The Pops – where he and collaborator Thrash played chess to the squelchy dub of single Blue Room. A collage of cosmic synth, tongue-in-cheek samples and contributions from prog guitarist Steve Hillage and bass maestro Jah Wobble, it remains the gold standard for electronic voyagers and led some to dub them “the new Pink Floyd”. In 2010, however, Paterson went one better, recording 2010’s Metallic Spheres with David Gilmour himself. RH

**Key Track:** Blue Room

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**R.E.M.:** Automatic for The People “plays like an oddly uplifting eulogy.”

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**NEIL YOUNG**

**HARVEST MOON**

Shaking off a bout of tinnitus, Young unplugs for an emotionally candid sequel to 1972’s Harvest.

**SPIRITUALIZED**

**LAZER GUIDED MELODIES**

Jason Pierce pieces together beatific pulses, hums and drones into a hypnotic first draft of his space-rock gospel.

**SUGAR**

**COPPER BLUE**

With the grunge generation co-opting the fiery power-pop he traded in with Hüsker Dü, Bob Mould delivers a new masterclass in the art.

**PJ HARVEY**

**DRY**

On her spiky and melodic debut, Polly Jean Harvey is both vulnerable and sensual. Her riffs, though, are always searing.

**LEMONHEADS**

**IT’S A SHAME ABOUT RAY**

Evan Dando finesses his alloy of punk, power-pop, country and folk into a short but sweetly melodic career best.

**NICK CAVE & THE BAD SEEDS**

**HENRY’S DREAM**

More songs about love, death and darkness set to music that mixes pop classicism with menace and aggression.

**THE STAIRS**

**MEXICAN R’N’B**

Long-lost, faithfully-recorded-in-mono homage to ’60s pop and garage – little of it Mexican.

**APHEX TWIN**

**SELECTED AMBIENT WORKS ’85–’92**

Melodic minimalism rooted in techno and acid house and realised into one of the great touchstones of ambient electronica.

**ALICE IN CHAINS**

**DIRT**

Heroin addiction, war, death and other dark tropes are all ruminated on over a psychedelic grunge soundtrack.

**RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE**

**RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE**

It may have inspired nu-metal, but this fusion of sheet metal guitars, righteous hip-hop and political invective is so thrilling, you can forgive it anything.
WU-TANG CLAN
ENTER THE WU-TANG (36 CHAMBERS)
(LOUD)

The early '90s were a confusing time in New York hip-hop. Great records poured out, but though the jazz samples and intricate rhyming thrilled the purists, they couldn’t compete for sales or headlines with California’s G-funk or even the strip-club chic of Miami bass. Two albums released the same day, 9 November 1993, proved pivotal to its future. Midnight Marauders by A Tribe Called Quest put the seal on the Daisy Age and from Staten Island came a nine-man crew with Enter The Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)

Wu-Tang Clan had untidy backgrounds – drug dealing, legal issues, failed music careers – and it was often a struggle keeping them together long enough to record, let alone perform live. But their unruly individualism was integral both to their business plan – they signed to RCA subsidiary Loud, which allowed all members to pursue solo careers elsewhere – and their music. This was the real sound of the streets: not just raw, grimy, sometimes ugly, but chaotic, as if even Clan auteur RZA didn’t even know what would turn up when. His beats were melodically pinned to soul samples – including Gladys Knight & The Pips – and spattered with kung-fu snippets, a concrete landscape dotted with crazy paving and abstract graffiti.

“Bring da motherfuckin’ ruckus,” they bellowed on the opening track and their ruthless pavement politics introduced a new hardcore style to New York hip-hop. Soon the likes of Biggie, Nas and Mobb Deep were showing their influence. A clothing line, Wu Wear, swiftly followed. But the Wu’s was a ground-up revolution. The album yielded no conventional hits, but went platinum in 14 months.

By defining their own place in the industry, and selling it on the back of a clearly defined brand and unimaginably uncompromising music, they realigned hip-hop’s place in the wider culture as the last word in authenticity. Before Wu-Tang Clan, hip-hop had to sell itself to American business. Afterwards, American business came to hip-hop.

**Key Track:** Wu-Tang Clan Ain’t Nuthing Ta Fuck Wit
A record that works best just after midnight, when the brain becomes a bit strained and the mind gets weird, the Cincinnati band’s fourth album is an emotionally eviscerating piece of work, dealing primarily in themes of masculinity and sex. Mainman Greg Dulli flails himself bare throughout, panting, “Ladies, let me tell you about myself – I’ve got a dick for a brain”, and what follows is an unflinchingly self-critical body of song. Musically, such self-exploration is perfectly soundtracked by tinny R&B chops and sad country rock. One of the most discomfitingly honest records of the ’90s...JM

**Key Track:** Debonair

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**SMASHING PUMPKINS**

**SIAMESE DREAM**
(CAPITOL)

“I loved them. It all went a bit prog after a while but this album is great and full of tunes and the sound of it is great. I’ve been listening to it non-stop for the last few weeks. Coincidentally I just got a T-shirt off eBay called ‘Smashing Cookies’ that combines The Cookie Monster and the Smashing Pumpkins logo.”

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**SUEDE**

**SUEDE**
(NINE)

With the UK music scene in thrall to grunge’s plaid-shirted dourness, Suede flounced over the horizon like emaciated knights in charity shop blouses with a debut album that provided a thrilling injection of sexually ambiguous sediness and sorely missed glamour. Brett Anderson’s amalgamation of Bowie and JG Ballard found its perfect foil in Bernard Butler’s Mick Ronson-meets-Johnny Marr guitar fireworks. Follow-up Dog Man Star tore the pair’s working relationship apart, but they had already kicked the door down for a new wave of smart, stylish and distinctly British bands. CC

**Key Track:** The Drowners

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**THE AFGHAN WHIGS**

**GENTLEMEN**
(BLAST FIRST)

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**PAUL WELLER**

**WILD WOOD**
(GO! DISCS)

It seems inconceivable today, but at end of the ’80s Paul Weller was without a record deal and playing gigs in pubs. His ’92 self-titled solo debut put him back in the game but it was Wild Wood that re-established the former Jam leader as a musical force with an importance in the ’90s to rival the one he had the decade before. With the record harking back to rootsy touchstones Traffic, Small Faces and Nick Drake, it’s the undimmed strength of songwriting and fire in the then 35-year-old’s belly that meant that Paul Weller was on a par with the new generation of acts who had grown up with pictures of him on their bedroom walls. JM

**Key Track:** Debbonair

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**WE ALSO LOVED...**

**NIRVANA**

**IN UTERO**
Their third, final and most corrosive album – even if some of it was cleaned up after label Geffen showed concern and Kurt Cobain felt numbed listening to it at home.

**BJÖRK**

**DEBUT**
Informed by house, Manchester clubs and Bristol’s trip-hop scene, Debut was an irresistible alloy of eccentricity and accessibility.

**PJ HARVEY**

**RID OF ME**
Like In Utero, a raw, abrasive, Steve Albini-produced document of pain and catharsis. With added blues thump.

**THE AUTEURS**

**NEW WAVE**
Bearing the Top 20 hit When The Shit Goes Down, this is the LA rappers’ finest amalgam of street-corner tough talk and weed-smoked whacked-out-ness.

**THE BOO RADLEYS**

**GIANT STEPS**
A try anything approach transforms the Merseysiders from mere shoegazers into purveyors of gripping psych-dub-jazz-pop symphonies.

**BLUR**

**MODERN LIFE IS RUBBISH**
The transformation from shambolic baggy-no-marks into thrilling documentarians of contemporary culture begins...

**CYPRESS HILL**

**BLACK SUNDAY**
Bearing the Top 20 hit When The Shit Goes Down, this is the LA rappers’ finest amalgam of street-corner tough talk and weed-smoked whacked-out-ness.

**PEARL JAM**

**VS**
A heavier, more aggressive rendering of grunge than their debut. It sold close to one million copies in five days.

**ST ETIENNE**

**SO TOUCH**
Disco sophistication, classic pop nous and kitchen-sink daydreams meet on the Londoners’ infectious second album.

**MAZZY STAR**

**SO TONIGHT THAT I MIGHT SEE**
Propelled by mesmeric single Fade Into You, the duo’s shadowy, sultry Americana edges into the mainstream.
ow are you?
I’m good.

Where are you right now?
I’m sitting in my garden, enjoying the sunshine with a cup of tea.

Can you remember what you were doing in 1986?
I was probably feverishly learning the words to Cemetery Gates. I remember queuing at Rounder Records in Burgess Hill to buy The Queen Is Dead. I think everyone else was getting Nik Kershaw records.

You and Suede bassist Mat Osman were in a band called Geoff in 1986, what was that like?
Bands around then like The Housemartins had this anti-rock stance, so we wanted the least rock’n’roll name possible. We thought Geoff was quite un-rock’n’roll. We used to wear blue lab coats, that was our look!

In 1993 you were on the cover of Q...
The “Can you stomach Suede” one? It was a weird thing, we’d only done two singles and it was the height of Suede mania, which was a lot of fun but looking back it was a bit premature to get a Q cover.

Can you stomach Suede?
It was that period of my career when I was taking my shirt off quite a lot, so it was appropriate!

It seemed like you were out there on your own, then Britpop happened and there were lots of British bands...
That’s the way it seemed to us too. History has been rewritten a bit because people talk about all these bands starting together but it was only Suede in ’93 really, the other bands joined in the slipstream. It was a very exciting time, it didn’t feel like we had any contemporaries.

How’s 2016 been so far?
Well! I’m just thinking about writing a new Suede album. I don’t really know what it’s going to be like yet. When I’m writing I’m very instinctive. It always looks like artists are much more in control of their work than they are. They give the impression they know what they’re doing but I don’t think most of them do. You stumble through it, then make sense of it afterwards.

Are you surprised to still be in Suede?
Yes! Even when we re-formed we didn’t know where it was going. I didn’t want to keep going round on a lap of honour. So yeah, I am surprised we’re a creative entity again, but it’s a nice surprise.

How do you feel about a new generation knowing Suede as the band with Richard Osman from Pointless’s brother on bass?
Less proud of that! Do I watch? You can’t not watch, it’s always on! I remember Richard as a teenager. Actually, it was 1986. We were obsessed with the ’60s and one day he stormed into Mat’s room where we were playing guitar and declared: “The ’60s were rubbish and Love were rubbish!” A real grumpy teenager! (laughs) He’s a very sweet man and he often comes to Suede gigs. I cheer his success from the sidelines.

Is there a song from the last 30 years that you wish you’d written?
NYC by Interpol. There’s something about that song that’s just amazing. It’s really drone-y but really inspiring, and it’s really hard to make the drone-y sound uplifting. So I really envy them.

What does Q mean to you?
The Pet Shop Boys. I did a nice interview with Neil Tennant for you about 20 years ago and I’ve stayed friends with Neil since. He’s a lovely chap and you sort of brought us together.

What’s been your high point and low point of the last 30 years?
Career-wise, the low point was the period just before we split up in 2003, that was pretty grim. The album A New Morning was a mistake. I couldn’t see any way back, so I suppose the high point was re-forming.

“IT REGRET BERNARD BUTLER LEAVING THE BAND VERY MUCH. I’M SURE HE DOES TOO.”

“IT’S GOT TO BE THE QUEEN IS DEAD BY THE SMITHS – A CLASSIC. I STILL LISTEN TO IT AND MARVEL. IT BRINGS YOU INTO THEIR WORLD. THAT WAS SOMETHING I REALLY WANTED FOR SUDE: A UNIVERSE OF YOUR OWN. IT’S A LIFESTYLE CHOICE, YOU’RE NOT JUST CHOOSING A PAIR OF TROUSERS OR SOMETHING.”
Any regrets?
I regret Bernard Butler leaving the band very much. I’m sure he does too in lots of ways, but you can’t go back. Things get broken and they’re un-mendable. It’s can’t go back. Things get broken does too in lots of ways, but you know who’d never had a homosexual claimed to be a bisexual man... as a young man you don’t know which bits will be picked up on. You’re very honest – that’s what I’ve learned over the years. Being in a band teaches you to be a bit dishonest. It’s sad because it’s quite cynical, but it’s true. I regret running my mouth off in the early days.

Where will you be in 30 minutes’ time?
Working on a new song, but it’s very sunny which is distracting. I find it much easier to work in the winter. As soon as there’s sun I want to go outside and have a beer. So depending on how my song goes, I’ll either be fiddling with lyrics or sitting outside with a bottle of Sol! PAUL Stokes
Arguably the most important British rock album of the last 25 years, Definitely Maybe more or less single-handedly reintroduced native guitar music to the top flight of UK pop. In the few years before the Gallagher brothers exploded onto the scene, rock was dismissed as passé by cultural commentators, as the many forms of dance music which spread from 1988’s acid house invasion predominated.

Of course, there were plenty of cool bands, but, judging at the highest level, these were cult concerns. It was Oasis who finally took rock back to the mass appreciation it had enjoyed in the 1960s and ’70s.

Liam, Noel and crew were clearly no strangers to rave, though. They’d gobbled the E’s, and greeted the sunrise in Lancashire fields (“but I never ran around with my shirt off,” noted Gallagher Sr), and they were bored of the forgettable music which soundtracked these high times. They craved songs, no-nonsense classics that were relevant to their Chemical Generation.

So much has been written about Noel tapping into the anthemics of the football terrace. He certainly was, but equally this debut album spoke for the battered emotions of the early-’90s all-night drug-prowling wolf. At the heart of Live Forever and Slide Away was a tired-and-emotional, us-against-the-world vulnerability – a depth beyond mere bluster, which has afforded them longevity.

There were also, of course, more mad-for-it antics than you could shake a stick at – the hilarious drink-beer-smoke-tabs reductivism of Cigarettes & Alcohol, and Rock ‘N’ Roll Star’s unstoppable wish fulfillment.

Definitely Maybe, however, wasn’t casually knocked out. It was a slog, going through a whole bunch of inconclusive sessions, until Noel buddied up with Owen Morris, a producer happy to beef up his sound with umpteen multi-tracked guitar parts – much as Steve Jones had done on Never Mind The Bollocks, Here’s The Sex Pistols – without detracting from Oasis’s rip-roaring energy. It was a life-or-death mission to reinstate the guitar and its attendant songcraft in our nation’s affections, and, God bless ’em, they succeeded. ANDREW PERRY

Key Track: Live Forever
When Blur began work on their third album in summer 1993, few could have predicted its extraordinary impact on British music, fashion and art. Damon Albarn’s fascination with Englishness had been tentatively explored on its predecessor, *Modern Life Is Rubbish*, but the swaggering *Parklife* offered a full-blown, Kinks-ish immersion into the contemporary British experience, from Girls & Boys, a Bowie-esque synth-pop romp about randy 18-30 package holidays, to the Mockney knees-up of the title track and elegiac, *Shipping Forecast*-referencing *This Is A Low*. Britpop took flight here – the rest is history. 

**BLUR**

**PARKLIFE**

*FOOD*

When Dummy arrived in 1994, it was immediately a peerless record. Fellow Bristolian trip-hop indicate Massive Attack and Tricky may have padded a similarly lolling sound, but in the alignment of claustrphobic spy soundtracks, the creeping dread of sci-synths and the astonishing vocals of singer Beth Gibbons, Geoff Barrow’s outfit cornered the market for icy, slacker melancholy... until they shredded the rulebook again three years later, with a deathly bleak, eponymous follow-up. It took 11 years for the next one, Third, but it shared the same urge for constant innovation.

**NAS**

**ILLMATIC**

*COLUMBIA*

By 1994, Dr Dre’s G-Funk had led West Coast hip-hop’s settlement of the mainstream. Over on the East Coast, Nasir Jones’s debut lacked any such commercial impact but, set to the jazz-mottled beats of blue-chip producers such as Pete Rock and DJ Premier, its unvarnished images of poverty and social struggle in a crack-flattened “rotten Apple” remains one of hip-hop’s most vivid and influential exercises in storytelling. Nas’s introspection and honesty provided Jay Z and Biggie Smalls with the template for their own street tales – and gave New York hip-hop a compelling new voice.

**PORTISHEAD**

**DUMMY**

*GO! BEAT*

“Jefferd has an international pop star... and I had this kind of voice, it's a natural high tenor voice and in the mid-90s that was not considered cool. It was more gruff voices like Kurt Cobain. That record gave me the confidence to believe that the kind of voice I had was cool. I didn’t sing up until the age 18 when an album got out.”

**JEFF BUCKLEY**

**GRACE**

*COLUMBIA*

“It’s hard not to pick Grace by Jeff Buckley. It’s not just a great album, it really inspired me. I had a naturally high tenor voice and in the mid-90's that was not considered cool. It was more gruff voices like Kurt Cobain. That record gave me the confidence to believe that the kind of voice I had was cool. I didn’t sing up until the age 18 when an album got out.”

**MANIC STREET PREACHERS**

**THE HOLY BIBLE**

A staggering, nihilistic skewering of the 20th century, the band’s rage embodied by cauterising guitars and frenetic rhythms.

**MASSIVE ATTACK**

**PROTECTION**

Will forever be called a trip-hop touchstone but, rather, it’s a slow-simmering gumbo of hip-hop, dub, electronica, soul and shifting emotions.

**PEARL JAM**

**VITALOGY**

The sound of Pearl Jam frontman Eddie Vedder reclaiming himself from fame on an album that swerves from stark ballads to raucous anthems.

**PULP**

**HIS ‘N’ HERS**

The melodic accessibility that’s woven into off-kilter artfulness and a dark heart made Jarvis Cocker a pop star.

**THE NOTORIOUS B.I.G.**

**READY TO DIE**

One of the great hip-hop debuts. So what if the beats are a little samey? The rhymes are sharp, witty and relentlessly scintillating.

**HOLE**

**LIVE THROUGH THIS**

Not the first perfectly poised fusion of pain, power and melody to be delivered by a Cobain, and not far off the heights of Nevermind either.

**BEASTIE BOYS**

**ILL COMMUNICATION**

An ever-so-slightly finessed take on Check Your Head’s restless, deeply funk gonzo hip-hop. The trio have never rhymed better than here.

**GREEN DAY**

**DOOKIE**

Infectious, Buzzcockian thrills delivered with tongues in cheeks. A wave of 90’s pop-punk bands were clearly paying close attention.

**SUEDE**

**DOG MAN STAR**

Suede indulge their paranoia, anxieties and broken hearts on their headily ambitious second album.

**PAVEMENT**

**CROOKED RAIN, CROOKED RAIN**

A bit more polished, a bit more country and even more catchy than their debut, but just as thrillingly unpredictable.
The idea of “dance music for rock fans” has become tired in the two decades since The Chemical Brothers’ debut album but there’s no doubt that Exit Planet Dust devised a blueprint for electronic acts hoping to fill the space usually occupied by their guitar-bearing cousins. Nobody ever found a bigger beat than Leave Home or Chemical Beats, while the cosmic cloud that swirls around Alive Alone or Life Is Sweet underlines the close links between dance culture and old-school psychedelia. A huge record, in every sense: big-tent music for a gathering of the tribes.

**Key Track:** Leave Home

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*DORIAN LYNSKEY*

**Key Track:** Common People

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**PULP**

**DIFFERENT CLASS**

(ISLAND)

Remember funny old Jarvis with his pointy limbs, arched eyebrow and scandalous waggling bum? The camp working-class hero offering a sideways look at British culture in the ’90s? Wasn’t he a laugh? Well, yes and no. Inside Different Class’s irresistible indie-disco Trojan horse lurked sexual jealousy, class anxiety and lurid revenge fantasies. This slippery duality made it Britpop’s finest hour.

Jarvis Cocker had waited too long to mess up his big break once 1994’s His ’N’ Hers had primed the pump. He’d been fronting Pulp through thick and (mostly) thin since 1978 and he was 32 when Different Class came out. He didn’t need to fabricate characters like Damon Albarn in order to psychoanalyse Britain when he had so many potent experiences to draw on, including a frustrating ’70s adolescence (Disco 2000), a stint on the rave frontlines (Sorted For E’s & Wizz) and a memorable liaison with a rich Greek art student.

Common People is Different Class in a nutshell. It starts off as cute social comedy before racing, with claustrophobic velocity, to some very dark places where pride wrestles with shame. Class identity is complicated when, as Mis-Shapes tells us, you’ve been a brainy, gangly, fruity outsider in a world of blokes who don’t take kindly to funny business. The ambiguous album title hints that not slotting cleanly into a tribe can be a source of both strength and angst.

Some of Pulp’s new fans were turned off when funny old Jarvis turned sour on 1998’s This Is Hardcore but the clues were already there in Underwear’s melancholy promiscuity, Bar Italia’s comedown blues and the chillingly obsessive I Spy, a miniature Mike Leigh film in which sex is a weapon of class war. This South Yorkshire Serge Gainsbourg became a national treasure because Pulp were such a brilliant, dynamic pop group, made huge and unstoppable by Chris Thomas’s production, well-aware that this could be their only shot at mass communication. But it’s no wonder that Cocker fell on fame with hungry desperation and then vomited it out. He’d already told us, if we were listening, that there’s a big difference between desire and fulfilment.

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**BJÖRK**

**POST**

(ONE LITTLE INDIAN)

“It was unlike any other album at the time and I really enjoyed immersing myself in the sonic universe that she created. It’s so forward-thinking, yet it perfectly fit into the time and landscape when it was released. She’s not afraid to travel from the fanfare of songs such as I Miss You to Army Of Me, which is dark and techno, to Hyper-Ballad, which is four-to-the-floor and very emotive. Björk is such a pioneer, so dedicated to her art, and so closely linked to themes of nature, passion, love, the body and raw, childlike feelings... and on Post all those themes fell together in the most perfect way.”
Like all great records, Maxinquaye created its own world. This one was packed with glorious contradictions, all bound together by Tricky’s tricky personality merged languid beats with an undercurrent of menace; a refusal to compromise with all-out-accessibility; the serenity but paranoia of hardcore drug smoking and, crucially, Martina Topley-Bird’s classically rich vocals with Tricky’s feral growl. The man himself would soon despise being held responsible (alongside Massive Attack) for the “Bristol Sound”, but music wouldn’t be the same again and Maxinquaye’s ripples continue to cover the waterfront, touching Jack Garratt as much as PJ Harvey. A

Key Track: Brand New You’re Retro
Aphex Twin, aka Richard James, responsible for “weirdly timeless sonic innovations.”

And the Top 40 success of the soothing On EP in 1993, the Warp label weren’t the only ones expecting Cornish producer Richard James to compliantly join Leftfield, Orbital and other electronic dance acts making commercial headway. Instead we got 1997’s techno metal deviance Come To Daddy with its grotesque Chris Cunningham video, and a year earlier, the Richard D James album.

Heralded by the producer’s serial killer mug leering out of the cover art, its 33 minutes sat uneasily in the pop mainstream, then as now. Here is a rhythmic base inspired by the triple-speed junglist offshoot drill’n’bass, accompanied by beguiling melodic, tonal and chordal figures that shimmer and float above the tumult. Opener 4 brings a curious bucolic air with its sampled violin motif, and numerous moments of placidity follow, including the voice-manipulated To Cure A Weakling Child, the orchestral Goon Gumpas and the serenely mysterious Yellow Calx.

But the trapdoor to James’s subconscious is always ajar. Here was a Freudian basement soundtracked by downloading modems, colliding micro-programmed beats and the peristaltic gurgling of acid house, informed by transgressive humours. With its junk shop whistles, boinging springs and church organ, consider closer Logan Rock Witch Aphex’s answer to Bike off Pink Floyd’s The Piper At the Gates Of Dawn: seeming levity that slowly reveals the alien and deeply ominous. Girl/Boy Song meanwhile, possibly inspired by an androgynous off licence employee in Aphex’s early-’90s Stoke Newington manor, is a beguiling synthscape of Vaughan Williams strings and breakbeat clatter. Hilariously, it was later used in a Bank Of America ad.

It didn’t sell hugely, but among those listening were Radiohead, Boards Of Canada, Flying Lotus, Mogwai and others, all of whom took notice of James’s weirdly timeless sonic innovations and indifference to the commercial. The irony was that Richard D James was arguably his last proper album. Since then, there’ve been compilations (2014’s Syro included) and last year’s SoundCloud dumpings. But they haven’t had the focus and cohesion that Richard D James had. IAN HARRISON

Key Track: Girl/Boy Song
It’s a reflection of the Manics’ singularly contrary mind-set that an LP birthed amid the trauma of guitarist Richey Edwards’s disappearance in 1985 should prove their most commercial to date. Stirring and hymnal, songs like A Design For Life, Australia and the title track enjoyed a remarkable sense of occasion, transforming adversity into defiance. Edwards’s revelatory spirit remains present in his lyrics for Kevin Carter and Small Black Flowers That Grow In The Sky, and on an extant guitar part on No Surface All Feeling. An anti-Britpop triumph.

Key Track: A Design For Life

In 1994, Weezer’s self-titled debut camouflagecd frontman Rivers Cuomo’s demons in sunny alt-rock to huge acclaim. Pinkerton distilled the fallout. Very much Cuomo’s own Portrait Of The Artist As A (Troubled) Young Man, the frustrated howls punctuating opener Tired Of Sex set the tone. Indeed, modern emo largely finds its lineage in these incredible songs of self-recrimination. It tanked commercially and it took Rivers Cuomo years to overcome his embarrassment for writing about, among other things, sniffing letters from an 18-year-old fan. But that painful awkwardness is its power.

Key Track: The Good Life
or a few months in 1997 the Prodigy looked like the future. Britpop’s bubble had burst and US rock was still in the post-grunge doldrums so the most exciting rock’n’roll band on the planet—a perfect storm of noise, energy and controversy—consisted of four ex-ravers from Essex. Unlike their fellow travellers in the “electronica” revolution, The Prodigy had the incendiary obnoxiousness of punk and gangsta rap and, in leering rave-goblin Keith Flint, an instantly iconic frontman. The Prodigy were courted by Madonna, Oasis and U2, decried by the professionally outraged and embraced across the world to the tune of 10 million albums. That the music industry did not, in fact, shift on its axis took nothing away from the pulverising force of their third album. “It’s rock and it’s electronic and it’s visceral and it’s emotional—it’s everything, you know?” said Skrillex in 2012.

It’s revealing that Liam Howlett was bemused by the anger over the Kool Keith sample on Smack My Bitch Up. It never occurred to him that anyone would take it literally. The Fat Of The Land is a gleefully, nihilistically amoral record which deals exclusively in menace and hysteria. Whereas 1994’s Music For The Jilted Generation directed its middle finger at the Criminal Justice Bill, this album has no specific target, no community spirit, nothing to say, really, beyond the brutally simple agenda of Firestarter: burn it all down and dance in the flames. It’s adolescent rebellion purified and inflated to blockbuster scale. Howlett’s weapons-grade production is a message in itself: the depth-charge kick drums, the noises that screech like tyres or clank like war machines, the whiplash twists, the passages of eerie feminine beauty that save it from mere machismo, all topped off by Flint and Maxim’s vague yet urgent commands. You couldn’t claim that an album which includes Kula Shaker’s Crispian Mills, Saffron from Republica and a Skunk Anansie sample completely transcends its time and place but The Fat Of The Land’s evil weight can still knock you off your feet. DORIAN LYNSEY

Key Track: Smack My Bitch Up
Leaving their Britpop bounce behind them, Blur made a daring, frazzled homage to US indie-rock, the punky anthem Song 2 becoming their biggest hit.

THE CHARLATANS
TELLIN’ STORIES
The Charlatans emerged defiant after the death of Rob Collins, the biggest anthems of their career leading their fifth LP to triumph.

THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS
DIG YOUR OWN HOLE
Tom Rowlands and Ed Simons inject their funky beats with a fired-up swagger and psychedelic grooves.

PRIMAL SCREAM
VANISHING POINT
Primal Scream stormed back into view with an album of modernist rock’n’roll and dub-heavy experimentation.

DAVID BOWIE
EARTHLING
Drum’n'bass, industrial metal, electronic beats that gave way to free-form piano solos… He was David Bowie. He could do whatever he wanted.

RADIOHEAD
OK COMPUTER
The album that defined pre-millennial angst, Radiohead’s third album has become the standard by which all intelligent rock albums have been measured.

BJÖRK
HOMOGENIC
Bjork’s fourth album brings together avant-garde weirdness, pop hooks, textured beats and orchestral grandeur together in perfect harmony. Stunning.

PORTISHEAD
PORTISHEAD
The trio disappeared deeper into the abyss on this atmospheric second, their hypnotic trip-hop bolstered with the added urgency of a crack live band.

BOB DYLAN
TIME OUT OF MIND
Dylan’s first new material in seven years marked his re-emergence as a creative force.

ÉTIENNE DE CRÉCY
SUPER DISCOUNT
One of the founding fathers of the French house scene, De Crécy created a majestic debut that helped to redirect dance music.
How are you?
I’m good.

Where are you right now?
In the studio in King’s Cross.
I’ve got a couple of things bubbling, away from the band. It’s a nice, unpressurised, experimental, turn-it-up-and-see-what-happens kind of zone.

Can you remember what you were doing in 1986?
Yeah, actually! I went to my first concert, called UK Fresh ’86, in Wembley Arena. It was a hip-hop thing with everybody who was big at the time – Grandmaster Flash and loads of UK stuff.

As a kid, that was my thing.

How might you describe your “look” back then?
Ha! Well, I’d been through a couple of looks by that stage. I’d been through the 2-Tone thing – you’d try and cheat the school uniform by wearing loafers and Sta-Prest trousers and white socks. Then the casual look came in – Tacchini tracksuit tops and stuff. Then when electro came out, it went into more the Nike wind-cheater and puffer jackets.

What about when acid house hit in ’87–’88?
Fucking knows what I was wearing then. That wasn’t my best time for clothing. Blame the drugs, right?

How would you describe the impact that rave had on you?
My mind was just blown – the excitement of the M25 parties after the moodiness of hip-hop. I’d just passed my driving test so I was the designated driver, but I didn’t give a fuck, man. I’d just jump in the blue Escort and rock on! While I was going out raving, that was when I was basically writing all the early Prodigy tunes.

During the early ’90s, you were outsiders, to a degree, but The Fat Of The Land went to Number 1 throughout the world in 1997. Was there a special magic when you were making it?
What happened was, I was rolling all the time. After [1994’s] Music For The Jilted Generation, I did a couple of remixes, then rolled straight into writing The Fat Of The Land. The first thing I wrote was Firestarter, as an instrumental. I rang Keith Flint up and said, “Come round, check it out.” I played it to him, and he said, “If I’m gonna be doing vocals, I wanna be on this!” So we just hooked a mic up, and finished the track there and then. Done!

The song and its video gave the band a certain infamy at the time...
I was sitting in my house, in Braintree. There were no gates, anyone could just walk up to the front door, so I’m looking out, and I could see this geezer outside. I always kept a baseball bat next to the door. So I opened up, and he goes, “Liam, yeah?” “Yeah, who are you?” And he stepped into my house, just run in, and he goes, “Firestarter, raaaaaaargh!” And he pulls out a match, so I grabbed the bat and just chased him down the street.

WHAT’S THE BEST ALBUM OF THE LAST 30 YEARS?
“If you’d asked me in 1990, I would’ve said, Licensed To Ill by the Beastie Boys, or Public Enemy’s second album. But the albums I keep coming back to are, like, The Chronic by Dr Dre, and Rage Against The Machine’s first album. We were in LA when that came out in ’92, we went into Tower Records or whatever, and got that and The Chronic. We were in LA for three weeks, and we just played them every day. I didn’t think, ‘This is rock, this is hip-hop,’ I just heard a fucking energy, I wanted to take some of that and inject it into our sound.”
There was a similar reaction to Smack My Bitch Up. Would bands do similarly incendiary things these days? We question everything too much now, that’s the trouble. Anything controversial – just leave it to fucking Miley Cyrus. It’s impossible. It’s not even on any of our radars.

In ’96, you supported Oasis at Knebworth. In front of 125,000 people, MC Maxim busted out the line, “Maggie Thatcher, suck my balls”...

Hahaha, really? Noel Gallagher was a fan of the band – he liked Poison. LG [ie, Noel’s brother Liam, aka Howlett’s ex-brother-in-law] wasn’t a fan of the band. It was a good gig, but I hate doing gigs in the light. We’re a night-time band, know what I mean?

Q put you on the cover towards the end of 1997: can you remember what else was in the magazine? Can you remind me of the cover?

It was with the Spice Girls, Counting Crows and The Levellers...

Ha. Well, we’re still going, ain’t we?

What’s the best thing you’ve read in Q?

I don’t remember fuck-all. I just look at the pictures. I remember seeing a picture of me, Keith and Jimmy Page. That was alright. But you know, press and The Prodigy – we’re not lurvies. But we’ve come to your awards. You’ve given us good support over the years, given us good reviews for our records. And you’re still going, ain’t ya? That’s cool.

Where will you be in 30 minutes’ time?

I’ll be rocking on with this music, headphones on, in the studio. It’s cool, man – just experiment, and see what happens. ANDREW PERRY

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**PULP FICTION**

(EMI, 1994)

“Any of you fucking pricks move, and I’ll execute every motherfuckin’ last one of you!” snarls Amanda Plummer (aka Honey Bunny) as the opening scene of Pulp Fiction, maverick director Quentin Tarantino’s second feature film, reaches its climax. As Plummer and Tim Roth (aka Pumpkin) attempt to hold an entire diner to ransom, in slam’s frenetic riff to Dick Dale’s 1962 surf classic, Misirlou, inviting the viewer in to enjoy an impressionistic journey into every day tales of LA’s violent underworld. Like Martin Scorsese before him, Tarantino’s decision to use existing tracks rather than commission a score allowed him to marry sound and image in an inspired manner. Moreover, Pulp Fiction’s soundtrack ushered in a new wave of crate-digging cool as far as Hollywood’s relationship with music is concerned.

**Key Track:** Urge Overkill – Girl, You’ll Be A Woman Soon

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**TRAINSPOTTING**

(EMI, 1996)

There is nothing complicated about the soundtrack to the adaptation of Irvine Welsh’s debut novel. And yet it is hard to understate the cultural resonance that this collection possesses. In many respects it creates a continuum that starts with the likes of Iggy Pop and David Bowie and arrives at Britpop and techno. Allied to director Danny Boyle’s portrait of Edinburgh’s scag-filled underbelly, the music itself takes on new meaning – Lou Reed’s Perfect Day becoming something of a requiem as Ewan McGregor’s character, Renton, overdoses.

**Key Track:** Underworld – Born Slippy, NUXX

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**O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU?**

(LOSTHIGHWAY/MERCURY, 2000)

The Coen Brothers’ Great Depression jailbreak caper came with a soundtrack packed with music written during that time. However, most of the tracks were ably re-recorded by the soundtrack’s producer T-Bone Burnett who, despite allowing deliberate rough edges to remain, also ensured a uniformity in the sound. The result is a 19-track collection of ‘30s dustbowl tunes which found a new audience – the sales of the album topping seven million copies in the US alone and scooping three Grammy’s.

**Key Track:** The Soggy Bottom Boys – I Am A Man Of Constant Sorrow

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**MUSIC FROM AND INSPIRED BY THE MOTION PICTURE 8 MILE**

(REPRISE, 2002)

Described by Q as being “a different class to the usual OST fare”, the soundtrack to Eminem’s dark, gritty, semi-autobiographical film benefits from four new tracks from the man himself, as well as members of the Shady Records family (50 Cent, D12, Obie Trice). Heavyweights such as Jay-Z, Nas, Xzibit and Gang Starr also chime in on what is a well-paced and tightly sculpted 16-track affair.

**Key Track:** Eminem – Lose Yourself

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**INCEPTION:**

Music from the Motion Picture

(EMI, 2010)

German-born composer Hans Zimmer cut his teeth in new wave and punk before embarking on a career in film. Having scored over 150 movies, he has helped define what a modern soundtrack could be. His work on Christopher Nolan’s heist flick, Inception, is arguably his finest work. Zimmer enlisting Johnny Marr to play guitar on eight of the 12 tracks and creating a soundworld that nods to both Vangelis and Morricone, without ever losing his own sense of mischief.

**Key Track:** Time
having evolved out of the Bristol soundsystem scene in the late-’80s, Massive Attack were always a collective enterprise, their success built on shared musical obsessions and astute collaborations. But by the time the group’s core trio – Robert “3D” Del Naja, Grant “Daddy G” Marshall and Andy “Mushroom” Vowles – started work on their follow-up to the era-defining Blue Lines and Protection, all three were working to different agendas. In fact, they were almost working on separate albums, producer Neil Davidge later recalling that for much of the recording process only one band member was in the studio at a time.

Ironically, though, the sour mood and fractured soundscapes that resulted would suit the times. With “trip-hop” on the wane, the dub and hip-hop influences that had shaped their earlier work were due an upgrade. Yet few expected a shift as radical as the one that occurred. Taking inspiration from Del Naja’s fondness for post-punk (Man Next Door even samples The Cure) and a growing interest in electronica, Angel set the Jamaican lilt of singer Horace Andy against a backdrop of proto-dubstep bass and the distorted riffs of guitarist Angelo Bruschini, Inertia Creeps spliced Afrobeat drums with 3D’s monotone rap, while Teardrop, the album’s most perfectly realised fusion, featured the Cocteau Twins’ Elizabeth Fraser in what was a virtual blueprint for Goldfrapp’s otherworldly chill-out.

Against expectations Mezzanine proved to be the group’s best-selling album to date and their first to top the UK album chart. And while the internal rifts were never repaired – Vowles left soon after its release and 2003’s 100th Window was virtually a Del Naja solo album – it liberated the group to explore new configurations. In many ways, Mezzanine marked the beginning of the Massive Attack of today, a kind of protean audio-visual experiment as likely to soundtrack a multimedia installation, notably 2013’s collaboration with award-winning documentary maker Adam Curtis, as headline a festival.

Their first two albums were classics; but Mezzanine took Massive Attack to another level. **RUPERT HOWE**

**Key Track:** Teardrop
MERCURY REV
DESERTER’S SONGS

A record made by a band on the ropes – after the commercial failure of 1995’s See You On The Other Side, Mercury Rev were in disarray, deep in debt and without a drummer, while guitarist Grasshopper had joined a monastery. It’s no coincidence that the key themes within the band’s fourth album concern running away. Meanwhile, songwriter Jonathan Donahue was on his second breakdown, later saying, “the world wasn’t exactly waiting for another Mercury Rev album”. Yet what followed was the release of this cinematic collection of majestic psych-pop. It proved their commercial breakthrough and made them critical darlings – Mercury Rev’s Deserter’s Songs were their Redemption Songs, too. JM
Key Track: Holes

AIR
MOON SAFARI
(VIRGIN)

On an aptly-named album, Versailles duo Air boldly went where downtempo electronica had never been before. Ebbing and flowing between music of great scale and touching, intimate moments, Moon Safari was both boldly futuristic and charmingly retro, blending space-age bleeps with sunset lounge vibes, disco and classic French pop to concoct passages of exquisite bliss. A series of lightweight chill-out albums and compilations would follow, but most missed the emotional depth tucked away within Moon Safari’s laid-back demeanour. Air might’ve been chilled, but they were always compelling. PS
Key Track: Kelly Watch The Stars

MADONNA
RAY OF LIGHT
(MAVERICK)

Ever since she frugged in cherry spandex behind Patrick Hernandez on the video of his 1979 disco epiphany Born To Be Alive, Madonna’s soul has always been in dance. Yet somehow between pervy pics with Vanilla Ice and her yodelsome turn as Eva Perón, the ’90s Madonna lost the proverbial “groove” of her imperial ’80s. Ray Of Light recovered it, spectacularly, in pupil-dilating techno and trance-out ballads that sold the feeling of Sam lost in the healing fields of Glastonbury to the masses. Pop has never been the same since its 39-year-old Queen yanked club culture into the mainstream. SG
Key Track: Ray Of Light

SPARKLEHORSE
GOOD MORNING SPIDER
(PARLOPHONE)

In 1996, Virginian Mark Linkous was on tour supporting avowed fans Radiohead when a reaction to valium and prescription antidepressants plunged him into a coma. Clinically dead for three minutes, he spent the next 12 weeks rehabilitating at London’s St Mary’s hospital. This is where his second album roots itself, working through anger, vulnerability, isolation and optimism, while twisting Americana and fragile balladry with samplers, children’s toys and field recordings. It earned the admiration of Tom Waits, PJ Harvey and a host of alt-Americana bands. MM
Key Track: Saint Mary

WE ALSO LOVED...

BELLE & SEBASTIAN
THE BOY WITH THE ARAB STRAP
Three albums in, and Stuart Murdoch’s cult heroes serve up more lush, literate indie tales.

LAURYN HILL
THE MIS EDUCATION OF LAURYN HILL
The product of an intense period of songwriting, Lauryn Hill’s post-Fugees debut remains an epochal, neo-soul masterpiece.

THE BETA BAND
THE THREE EP’S
The definition of avant-pop, cult Scottish outfit absorb influences as diverse as prog, electronica and folk to create a sound that is intense as it is broad.

NEUTRAL MILK HOTEL
IN THE AEROPLANE OVER THE SEA
Like a bedroom Brian Wilson, Jeff Mangum is an eccentric pop architect. This rich, jerky second album is his vision fully realised.

BOARDS OF CANADA
MUSIC HAS THE RIGHT TO CHILDREN
Ambient sound and electronic experimentation collide on a debut full of hypnagogic charm.

OUTKAST
AQUEMINI
OutKast’s third album is full of ambition, experimentation and has George Clinton guesting on Synthesizer, underlining Aquemini’s cosmic lineage.

ELLIOTT SMITH
XO
Smith delivers 14 tracks of hushed glory in which Beatles-styled melodies slyly lurk on his major-label debut.

GANG STARR
MOMENT OF TRUTH
Ten years into their career, MC Guru and DJ Premier delivered a fifth jazz-groove-inspired album where the rhymes were sharper.

UNKLE
PSYENCE FICTION
Thom Yorke, Kool G Rap and Ian Brown are among the guests that line up on an album where alt-rock meets James Lavelle’s sample-heavy soundscapes.

MANIC STREET PREACHERS
THIS IS MY TRUTH TELL ME YOURS
The successor to Everything Must Go continues the Manics’ march into more sophisticated musical territory.
In January 1999 Eminem was staying in the New Jersey apartment of his manager Paul Rosenberg, when the video for his new single My Name Is popped up on MTV. Suddenly, the 26-year-old, who two years previously had been working as a short-order cook in Detroit, realised his long-cherished dream of making it as a rapper might actually work out after all. As he recalled later, “That’s when it was like, ‘OK, this isn’t a joke any more.’” Instead the joke would be on those who doubted a white kid from the Detroit badlands could be taken seriously in hip-hop, let alone become the best-selling rapper of his generation.

The story has since taken on mythic status, not least because Eminem himself helped author it – starting with the creation of this disaffected and divisive alter ego, an idea which apparently came to him on the toilet during one of the lowest points of his life. But having recorded the original Slim Shady EP in Detroit in spring 1997, it wasn’t until a copy made its way to Dr Dre, via Interscope boss Jimmy Iovine, that it became clear he was onto something big. During early sessions in Los Angeles, Dre and Eminem clicked straight away – legend has it that My Name Is was recorded in an hour. Later completed in Detroit with local producers Mark and Jeff Bass, the result was a revelation, tracks such as My Name Is, Role Model and the self-explanatory Just Don’t Give A Fuck boasting a feral energy and scabrous wit previously unheard in hip-hop.

Even though the unexpectedly reflective Rock Bottom suggested there was more to The Slim Shady LP than simply Eminem sticking a middle finger up to the world, accusations of misogyny, homophobia and glorification of violence followed, along with a $10 million lawsuit from his mother. But sales in excess of five million in the US alone showed how widely this new voice resonated. Today, echoes can still be heard in Nicki Minaj’s twisted alternate personality Roman Zolanski, not to mention the many disguises Eminem has tried on since. All those other Slim Shadys are just imitating, however; any search for the real Slim Shady starts here.

RUPERT HOWE

Key Track: My Name Is
THE FLAMING LIPS
THE SOFT BULLETIN
WARNERS

Further proof that it’s never too late to change. For eight albums over 13 years The Flaming Lips bumbled along, offering slightly frizzled, vaguely psychedelic rock. For their ninth, Wayne Coyne upped his game beyond measure, shedding his quirkiest aspects to create an eve-of-millennium masterpiece that would spawn a generation of lesser imitators. The Beach Boys’ Love You was the obvious starting point but along the way, Coyne incorporated aspects of Jellyfish, Love, Pet Shop Boys and the Grateful Dead without sounding like a facsimile of “love” to breaking point and Porcelain. Every bit as effective doesn’t end there, its ambition is intoxicating. Its blues, ambient and rock, it was a masterclass in eclecticism. Its fusion techno, hip-hop, gospel, blues, ambient and rock, it was a masterclass in eclecticism. Its effectivenes doesn’t end there, either, as Moby tempered Play’s euphoria with private despair on songs such as Natural Blues and Porcelain. Every bit as concerned with the soul’s salvation as rhythmic ecstasy, this was progressive dance music in more ways than one. GG

Key Track: Natural Blues

MOBY
PLAY
MUTE

So thoroughly was every song from Play pillaged for film soundtracks and TV ads, it’s easy to forget how staggering it is when played in sequence. Like Beck and the Beastie Boys, Moby’s guiding principle was thus: everything is permitted. Fusing techno, hip-hop, gospel, blues, ambient and rock, it was a masterclass in eclecticism. Its effectivenes doesn’t end there, either, as Moby tempered Play’s euphoria with private despair on songs such as Natural Blues and Porcelain. Every bit as concerned with the soul’s salvation as rhythmic ecstasy, this was progressive dance music in more ways than one. GG

Key Track: Natural Blues

THE MAGNETIC FIELDS
69 SONGS
CIRCUS

Exactly what the title promised: 69 love songs from the fertile mind of Stephin Merritt. A compulsive genre-hopper (indie, American songbook, Neil Hannon-style drollery), Merritt stretched the definition of “love” to breaking point without needing a quality control button. These flab-free, twee-free, equally tragic and wistful, mature set.

Key Track: Long Forgotten Fairytale

BONNIE ‘PRINCE’ BILLY
I SEE A DARKNESS
DOMINO

The sixth album by Louisville songwriter Will Oldham, his first as Bonnie “Prince” Billy. Like his 1997 LP, Joya, it mixed darkness and mordancy into his folk songs but it’s also a richly melodic set, Appalachian really, with a title track that blew up far beyond its parent album. It’s one of the highlights of Johnny Cash’s American recordings – covered on 2000’s American III: Solitary Man – and, in 2008, it inspired an installation by Turner Prize-winning artist Susan Philipsz. Oldham even reworked the song himself on 2012’s Now Here’s My Plan EP, transforming it into perky country rock. JM

Key Track: I See A Darkness

WE ALSO LOVED...

BECK
MIDNITE VULTURES
Never a man to limit his musical horizons, Beck takes a left turn on his fourth album, abandoning his lo-fi approach to lay down 11 funk-inspired work-outs.

BLUR
19
The most emotionally charged of Blur’s albums, 13 deals with break-ups and internal strife in open terms, with added space in their sound courtesy of producer William Orbit.

DAVID BOWIE
HOURS...
One of the first albums to be pre-released digitally, Hours... sees Bowie and guitarist Reeves Gabrels delivering a wistful, mature set.

SHACK
HMS FABLE
The Liverpudlian cult heroes’ stirring third LP straddled the worlds of ‘80s epic indie rock and ‘60s psychedelia.

SUPER FURRY ANIMALS
GUERRILLA
SPAs third album is the Welsh outfit’s attempt at synthesizing their love of four decades of pop into one album. Broad in sound, its ambition is intoxicating.

DEATH IN VEGAS
THE CONTINO SESSIONS
Death in Vegas’s second LP sees Richard Fearless and Tim Holmes mixing broken beats with late-night psychedelia.

MOGWAI
COME ON DIE YOUNG
The proud creators of the “Blur Are Shite” chest-warmer, Scottish post-rock outfit Mogwai deliver an album full of heavy, slo-mo menace.

SMOG
KNOCK KNOCK
Maryland-born songwriter Bill Callahan (aka Smog) tightens his neo-folk sound and creates a well of finely-crafted tunes.

KELIS
KALEIDOSCOPE
The Neptunes–produced debut that heralded the arrival of 20-year-old Kelis – and a major R&B talent – onto the world stage.

TLC
FANMAIL
Released five years after their debut and a period of financial turmoil, TLC emerged with a second album full of slick R&B futurism and lyrical defiance.
After making a strong neo-soul impression with his Brown Sugar debut album in 1995, D'Angelo pulled a disappearing act. Suffering from writer’s block, he puffed weed, lifted weights and dreamt up his next move. Five years later, Voodoo appeared, redrawing the blueprint of R&B.

Album-orientated where the genre had become increasingly all about the single and programmed beats, D'Angelo’s second album was a triumph of loose, head-nodding grooves and intriguing sonic murk. In thrall to Sly And The Family Stone’s There’s A Riot Goin’ On and the ‘80s wonder of Prince, its noir atmosphere was blacker than The Black Album. Recorded in lengthy sessions at the Jimi Hendrix-founded Electric Lady Studios in New York, Voodoo pushed neo soul forward in a way that the progressive guitarist surely would have approved of. Songwriting frustration served D'Angelo well in the end, since Voodoo was based on a series of hypnotic jams that conjured up the dark magic of its title, not least on Chicken Grease and Devil’s Pie with the singer’s… just… behind… the… beat… vocal delivery. At a time when soul had lost its mojo, Voodoo echoed the warmth and human feel of its best 1970s records, while advancing the formula post hip-hop, with even its drum machine beats played live to lose the computerised rigidity.

In its more traditional parts, Voodoo is open-hearted (see Send It On, a message to his new-born son Michael). In its sonic voyaging, with the one-man hall-of-mirrors choir and backwards guitars of The Root, it is subtly psychedelic. In creative terms, D'Angelo zoomed ahead of his contemporaries, even if his shirtless appearance in the video for Untitled (How Does It Feel) created a prison for him as a perceived sex symbol, deeply unsettling the singer. Record execs had fretted about the uncommercial tones of the album. In the end, it debuted at Number 1 in the US chart.

As such, Voodoo was a turning point for R&B. D'Angelo set the bar several notches higher and opened doors into audio moodiness for The Weeknd and Frank Ocean. Without it, modern-day soul music might now sound far less adventurous. TOM DOYLE

Key Track: Devil’s Pie

D’Angelo: “redrawing the blueprint of R&B.”
Before catapulting themselves into mainstream affection on a wave of synth stomps and S&M imagery, Goldfrapp emerged in 2000 as a sustained musical

**Radiohead**  
代号：A  
（乐队 widespread psychological fatigue + emergence of copycat bands）

Thom Yorke's sudden distaste for melody = electronic, symphonic, startling left-turn.

**Coldplay**  
**Parachutes**  
Insistent melodies and dark moods wrapped in sensitive skin for turn-of-the-century indie-rock fans rattled by Kid A.

**Eminem**  
**The Marshall Mathers LP**  
Miasmic, unsettling, offensive, scabrously funny and more personal than the last one. The century's first hip-hop masterpiece.

**PJ Harvey**  
**Stories from the City, Stories from the Sea**  
Without sacrificing any of her edge or volume, Harvey celebrates the joys of love and melody.

**Madonna**  
**Music**  
Madge's vital synthesis of electronic futurism and adventure with some good ol' downhome country-and-folk flavours.

**Primal Scream**  
**XTRMNTR**  
Political invective, punk, hip-hop, psychedelics and electronica collide on every activist's favourite Scream album.

**Jill Scott**  
**Who Is Jill Scott? Words and Sounds Vol 1**  
R&B that draws in jazz, hip-hop and spirituality to provide a captivating background to Scott's gutsy vocals.

**Elliott Smith**  
**Figure 8**  
Smith's busiest, richest record doesn't lose any of his heartbreaking intimacy among all the lush arrangements.

**Badly Drawn Boy**  
**The Hour of Be Wilderbeast**  
Damon Gough's insistently catchy, gently melancholic, Mercury Prize-snatching debut.

**Super Furry Animals**  
**Mwng**  
SFA claimed to be on “pop strike” while making this Welsh-language masterpiece. Don’t be fooled: this is indelibly melodic psych pop that’s pronounced “mane”.

**Goldfrapp**  
**Felt Mountain**  
(MUTE)  
Before catapulting themselves into mainstream affection on a wave of synth stomps and S&M imagery, Goldfrapp emerged in 2000 as a sustained musical

daydream. Indeed, Felt Mountain remains tantamount to stumbling through the proverbial rabbit hole into a lush art-pop vista. So exquisitely rich in sound are songs like Paper Bag and Human, it’s still hard to establish the root of their enchantment: is it Alison Goldfrapp’s lullaby delivery or Will Gregory’s gorgeous orchestration? The answer, of course, is that it’s the perfect alignment of both. Goldfrapp would make bigger-selling albums, but they’ve yet to make a better one. GG

**Key Track:** Human

**OutKast**  
**Stankonia**  
(LAFACE)  
Atlanta’s OutKast first made their mark on rap with their charismatic 1994 debut Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik, an album loaded with counter-intuitive rhymes and Southern-fried funk. In 2000, that sound went global thanks to Stankonia’s hit Ms. Jackson – an ode to mothers of ex-girlfriends everywhere. At a time when rap operated in defined thematic lanes, Stankonia was hip-hop without borders. It begins with a guitar squall on Gasoline Dreams, takes in the jungle-influenced B.O.B. and ends with the blissed-out title track. Not since De La Soul had hip-hop been so wildly expressive. GG

**Key Track:** B.O.B.

**Grandaddy**  
**The Sophtware Slump**  
(V2)  
Before fronting Grandaddy, Jason Lytle worked as a toxic waste handler and a sponsored skateboarder. Despite such urban pursuits, the fuzzy melodies and unfussy vocals of Grandaddy’s second LP evoke a more bucolic landscape. At the heart of this sweetly melancholic album though, is a paranoia about technological revolutions and the depletion of natural resources, while musically it set a template for millennial cosmic Americana. Grandaddy’s Slump proved their peak, but it also opened the door for the apocalyptic bent of like-minded bands such as Midlake. GG

**Key Track:** The Crystal Lake

**Queens of the Stone Age**  
**Rated R**  
(INTERSCOPE)  
QOTSA’s second LP may begin with the blunt-force riffing of hedonists’ shopping list Feel Good Hit Of The Summer, but it’s a more nuanced record than that introduction suggests. By turns melancholy, optimistic and euphoric, it shapes its low-slung riffs with purpose and melody rather than stoner-rock’s wilful repetition. Guests stumble in and out – Mark Lanegan, Rob Halford – but Josh Homme and bassist Nick Oliveri are the propulsive backbone of a record that sketches a map in the desert for Arctic Monkeys and Royal Blood to eventually study. MM

**Key Track:** The Lost Art Of Keeping A Secret

While on tour in Spain to support Muse’s debut LP Showbiz, Matt Bellamy got drunk and ate an entire chorizo sausage, which he promptly vomited over himself. It was a low point on a trip where nothing was going to plan. Bellamy arrived home from the tour wondering if the band should split. “I came back from that and said, ‘If we don’t start having a good time, I don’t really wanna do it.’ So when we did Origin Of Symmetry, it was all about having a good time,” said Bellamy years later. That all-or-nothing spirit is at the core of Muse’s second album.

The trio had already set their intention to be the most grandiose rock band of the new millennium with a series of littering live shows, but they were lacking one key ingredient: the songs. Showbiz only hinted at Bellamy’s majestic space-rock ambitions. Here, though, Muse let loose, setting out a sonic blueprint that would serve them well through the trio of records that made them one of the biggest bands in the world. With its title inspired by Hyperspace, a book by physicist Michio Kaku about parallel universes and higher dimensions, it matched highfalutin concepts with classic-rock riffing and prog-style operas. Muse had found their magic formula. Origin... was recorded in fits and starts around an intensive touring schedule but their histrionic sound was so distinctive it flowed perfectly. A quartet of epic, explosive songs gave the album its spine: New Born and Citizen Erased were like mini rock musicals, Plug In Baby resembled Johann Sebastian Bach by way of Wayne’s World and Bliss was a cascading, cosmic pop song. These tracks were overblown and ridiculous in the best way possible. Everything that Muse went on to achieve with the success of Absolution and Black Holes & Revelations could be said to have taken its DNA from Origin Of Symmetry. Here, young, hungry and ready for their big moment, Muse were ready for lift-off.

NIALL DOHERTY

Key Track: Citizen Erased
GORILLAZ

GORILLAZ
(PARLOPHONE)

After adding a literary, fin-de-siècle upgrade to British indie with Blur, Damon Albarn undertook another reinvention—this time using free-flowing raps, sharp hooks and DJ Shadow-esque beats. Intending it as a comment on the lack of substance in modern pop, he used animated characters created by flatmate Jamie Hewlett to front the project. Musically, the collaboration with producer Dan The Automator and members of his San Francisco hip-hop circle was an equally impressive mash-up of sounds and styles, an addictive shot of dystopian pop. Gorillaz not only gave Albarn his first US success, but also freed the Blur man for subsequent genre-hopping projects and operas. PS

Key Track: Tomorrow Comes Today

THE STROKES

IS THIS IT
(ROUGHTRADE)

Into a dismal world of nu-metal angst and post-Britpop slurry descended The Strokes. Five unbearably pretty uptown boys slumming it in downtown rock’n’roll, they remodelled the music of their outsider forebears (The Velvet Underground, Television) into the 21st-century’s first great debut. Is This It was a galvanising force, an indie paradigm-shift that rejuvenated music and fashion and sent a generation of bands searching for deeper truths. Heavy duty, in more ways than one.

Key Track: The Modern Age

JAY-Z

THE BLUEPRINT
(DEF JAM)

Released on 11 September, 2001, Jay-Z’s sixth album still made a dramatic impact—that it confirmed New York’s greatest rapper as a global phenomenon on New York’s worst day was a poignant irony. The key to The Blueprint’s success isn’t hard to unpick: well-crafted beats by newcomers Kanye West and Just Blaze (alongside Timbaland and Eminem), choruses cut-and-shut from ’60s and ’70s classics, plus a masterclass in good-humoured rhyming dexterity that still manages to hospitalise his two local rivals, Mobb Deep’s Prodigy and Nas. No skits, no padding, loads of hits. The greatest rap album? Probably. TX

Key Track: Takeover

RUFUS WAINWRIGHT

POSES
(ISLAND)

Before the opera and the Judy Garland recreations and the settings for Shakespeare sonnets, Rufus Wainwright knew how to write pop songs. His second LP overflows with them, urbane and lavishly arranged, yet each one tethered to a killer tune. Inspired by a stay at New York’s Chelsea Hotel, Posesexplores addictions of every kind, a confection of high and low, fantasy and fierceness. “I’m drunk and wearing flip-flops on Fifth Avenue,” Wainwright sings on the title track, the sound of a songwriter hitting their peak somewhere between the gutter and the stars. VS

Key Track: Poses

Gorillaz: “an addictive shot of dystopian pop.”

THE AVALANCHES

SINCE I LEFT YOU
Australian duo reach back to The Beach Boys’ mood pieces to create a blissful, psychedelic debut which is both intimate and lush.

THE CHARLATANS

WONDERLAND
Northwich indie heroes continue to expand their sonic palette to create a reassuringly warm-sounding seventh album.

BOB DYLAN

LOVE AND THEFT
Bob enjoys himself on his 31st studio album, which crackles with humour, passion and fine songs.

TOOL

LATERALUS
The third outing by LA quartet Tool is one of the most complex and adventurous rock albums of recent times. Progressive in the true sense of the word.

RADIOHEAD

AMNESIAC
The successor to Kid A continues Radiohead’s deconstruction of rock music while searching for deeper truths. Heavy duty, in more ways than one.

THE WHITE STRIPES

WHITE BLOOD CELLS
Detroit duo bring the blues and ’60s melodic joy back to modern rock on this tight-but-loose third outing. The mainstream tuned in.

DAFT PUNK

DISCOVERY
Parisian duo return to the spirit of ’70s and ’80s disco grooves on a textured and driving second album. Opener, One More Time, is their pop spearhead.

N*E*R*D

IN SEARCH OF...
Pharrell Williams and Chad Hugo (aka The Neptunes) pull out an electro-funk calling card which evolved a year later as they added the rock.

CANNIBAL OX

THE COLD VEIN
The debut album by Harlem duo Vast Aire and Vordul Mega proves that underground hip-hop is alive and well.

LOW

THINGS WE LOST IN THE FIRE
The Minnesotans find a quietly stunning balance between sorrow and optimism, and torpor and warmth, on their fifth and most immediate album.
Chris Martin approached the second Coldplay album, his anxiety was reaching peak levels. He worried about not being able to top Yellow, the breakthrough hit that had propelled the worldwide success of the band’s debut album, Parachutes. He worried about dying and he worried about going bald. Only one thing prevented a full-scale meltdown: a song that Coldplay had written towards the end of the Parachutes sessions but was too late for inclusion. The track was called In My Place and Martin saw it as the sole reason to make a second record. Beginning with a thumping drum beat, it was an imposing anthem that cut a cord from the hushed intimacy of the band’s debut. It is the song that became a signpost to the all-conquering Coldplay of 2016, a song fit for stadiums and Superbowls alike.

But if In My Place was the green light for an album of monumental rock anthems inspired by Radiohead’s The Bends, U2’s The Unforgettable Fire and Echo & The Bunnymen’s Ocean Rain, it still wasn’t a straightforward process. Basing themselves at Liverpool’s Parr Street Studios, where the majority of Parachutes was recorded, a batch of initial songs were scrapped when they were deemed too similar in style to their debut. In their place emerged a set of tracks with a mighty swagger: the stomping Politik, the menacing swirl of Daylight and, most impressively, the epic flow of Clocks. Even when they returned to plaintive ballads, as they did on The Scientist, there was now something outward-looking and universal about the sound. It connected on a huge scale, selling more than 20 million copies and making Coldplay one of the biggest bands in the world. It simultaneously put an end to the acoustic-led sound that had dominated the early noughties and ushered in an era of rock that echoed the grand statements of the ’80s, Arcade Fire seizing the mantle most successfully. For Coldplay, it set a new standard to keep up. It's odd to think now that these songs, now such a staple of the mainstream musical landscape, were once brand new and unheard.

Coldplay planted a flag with A Rush Of Blood To The Head. They were here to stay.
Two years after Sigur Rós’s nervy 1997 debut Von, Ágætis Byrjun established their sound: essentially they floated better than anyone else. Recorded in a converted swimming pool, () was the same, but much, much more. The packaging omitted song titles and credits; the lyrics were sung in the made-up language, Hopelandic, so the music had no option but to stand alone. Split between a light first half and a darker second, there was beauty beyond words and titles, not least on the piano-propelled Untitled #3, or the drum-based Untitled #7. Amazingly, Americans bought it and bought into Sigur Rós in droves. JA
Key Track: Untitled #3

**SIGUR RÓS**

*Q (PATCAT/PIAS)*

In the early noughties, Britain was crying out for a new band to continue the lineage of stylish indie-rock mavericks stretching from The Smiths to Suede to Blur. Enter The Libertines: a real-life kitchen-sink drama starring two doomed romantics, Peter Doherty and Carl Barât, hell-bent on creating a mythical place called Albion, where Chas & Dave, The Clash, hard drugs and the ghost of Tony Hancock all had a vital place. The fact that their debut album teetered on the ramshackle only added to its charm, while Time For Heroes, Tell The King and Begging became exhilarating totems of early-millennial hedonism. PG
Key Track: Time For Heroes

**THE LIBERTINES**

*UP THE BRACKET (ROUGH TRADE)*

Propelled as it was by the explosive single All My Life, the temptation is to remember One By One as a moment of career grandstanding as Foo Fighters upgraded to arena status. The confidence of this track belied a torturous creative process. It started after drummer Taylor Hawkins’s near-fatal overdose, soon descended into indifference and eventually saw the original recordings scrapped. Later re-recorded in just seven days, they captured the missing energy magnificently, but the bruises remain on Dave Grohl’s lyrics to Times Like These. This is the Foos fighting for their existence. And winning, GG
Key Track: Times Like These

**FOO FIGHTERS**

*ONE BY ONE (RCA)*

Key Track: Untitled #3

**LAMBCHOP**

*IS A WOMAN (MERGE)*

“I first heard this midway through a trip across America, the perfect place to hear it. I became obsessed with how it was put together – it seemed to be made with a different set of instructions to the ones I had. Seemingly mundane objects and actions are lifted by Kurt Wagner’s words and voice and given immediate importance. Each song takes hold of you from start to finish. I wanted to know how he did it. I met Kurt at a gig, we became friends and spoke about writing songs together – eventually he suggested I wrote the music and he would supply lyrics. He said he’d put words into my mouth I wouldn’t normally say. We ended up writing a whole album together [2012’s Oh No I Love You]. I’m not sure I’d ever come across anything quite as magical as this album, though. It’s like the comfiest check shirt ever made.”

**WE ALSO LOVED...**

**BECK**

*SEA CHANGE*

Beck Hansen processes the break-up of a relationship with gorgeous, ruminative country-folk on his most honest record to date.

**DAVID BOWIE**

*HEATHEN*

Reuniting with Tony Visconti, The Dame’s creativity emerges again with adventure and an unease that evokes post-9/11 New York.

**THE CORAL**

*THE CORAL*

Precocious debut indebted to the acid-fried musical happenings on the US West Coast during the ‘60s. With added ska and skiffle.

**DOVES**

*THE LAST BROADCAST*

It’s an old trick but an irresistible one when done with this well: dark emotions set to euphoric music built from powerful melody and intriguing detail.

**BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN**

*THE RISING*

Partly inspired by a stranger who told him, “We need you now” in the wake of 9/11, The Boss reflects, mourns and searches for optimism on this stirring album.

**THE STREETS**

*ORIGINAL PIRATE MATERIAL*

Startling combo of Everyman street poetry and 2-step beats. Proof that British hip-hop is best when it stops looking at America.

**QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE**

*SONGS FOR THE DEAF*

Intense, groovy, unrelenting hard rock from Josh Homme and friends, who this time include Dave Grohl and Mark Lanegan.

**THE FLAMING LIPS**

*YOSHIMI BATTLES THE PINK ROBOTS*

Wayne Coyne goes electronic on another panoramic, multi-layered flight of psych-fantasy. As ever, humanity and warmth beat strong beneath the weirdness.

**INTERPOL**

*TURN ON THE BRIGHT LIGHTS*

Brooding indie-rock debut that’s single-minded enough to let spiky melody and propulsive energy burn through the gloaming.

**WILCO**

*YANKEE HOTEL FOX*TROT*

A fevered dismantling of alt-country and indie, rebuilt into art-rock that earned them the tag “The American Radiohead”.

**THE CHARLATANS**

*TIM BURGESS, THE CHARLATANS*

“My Cult Classic”

The Charlatans’ Tim Burgess with the “magical and comforting” Is A Woman by Lambchop.
THE WHITE STRIPES

ELEPHANT (XL)

Rock music had been disappearing into a Radiohead-aping digital void when The White Stripes first blazed into the UK in July 2001. Even as Hotel Yorba was making their first dent on the charts that winter, Jack White was ruminating on how it takes just one song to go properly supernova, à la Nirvana’s Smells Like Teen Spirit. By early 2002, he was in possession of such a tune.

Seven Nation Army, with its world-beating riff, proclaimed a return to analogue rock’n’roll values, in defiance of ProTools’ potential for infinite musicianly over-indulgence.

Its parent album, Elephant, was largely recorded across two weeks in April 2002 at Hackney garage-rock bastion Toe Rag – an unthinkable birthplace for a multi-platinum record at that time.

Even more remarkably, with hindsight, the record wouldn’t actually be released for a further 11 months, while a marketing strategy was mapped out. You’d think that in those fallow weeks, at such a make-or-break stage, White would have had second thoughts: maybe he’d written something new that would fit better here, or he could add an overdub there.

In truth, he’d actually gone cold on beat-pop nugget Hypnotize, and drummer Meg disliked his gender politics on Girl, You Have No Faith In Medicine. But no, Jack stood firm: that was the album, two weeks’ work, with wavering vocals, bum notes and all – a message which re-routed the way untold millions of people (and bands) thought about recorded music.

Beyond the sonic politics, Elephant was quite simply a masterpiece, fit to dine at the same table as the classics of any era. The breadth of mood and compositional style was staggering. Factor in the forlorn paranoia of the Meg-sung In The Cold, Cold Night and the sweetness of I Want To Be The Boy To Warm Your Mother’s Heart, and here was a songwriter of exceptional dexterity, on peak form.

Pop-cultural commentators had talked about rock being at the end of its narrative, a transformative energy from the 1950s and ’60s that was now spent, meaningless. Elephant, with its fierce artistic rigour, blew that notion apart for good. ANDREW PERRY

Key Track: Seven Nation Army

YEAH YEAH YEAHS
FEVER TO TELL (INTERSCOPE/DRESS UP)

The Strokes had opened the floodgates for New York bands and it was those whose music tapped into the city’s heart and soul that really connected. While Interpol’s debut existed in a state of post-9/11 anxiety and nocturnal melancholy, Fever To Tell was like its riotous little sibling. This is music that sounds like it’s stumbling out of a warehouse party and re-applying its eyeliner on the way to the next blowout. Guitarist Nick Zinner and drummer Brian Chase concoct art-rock grooves but it’s Karen O who steals the show. Her performance veers from cocky shrieking to stark vulnerability, often in the same song. ND

Key Track: Maps

DIZZEE RASCAL
BOY IN DA CORNER (XL)

The first grime album to achieve mainstream recognition, this debut from 19-year-old East Londoner Dylan Mills made the self-diagnosed “problem for Anthony Blair” the youngest ever winner of the Mercury Prize – and an unofficial spokesman for a post-millennial generation of disaffected urban youth. With its angular, dancehall-inflected beats and cocky, whip-smart rhymes which introduced words such as “screwface” to the lexicon, it also signalled UK hip-hop’s break from American conventions. Ironically, star rappers such as Kanye West and Drake are now looking to grime for inspiration, but this is where the revolution started. RH

Key Track: Fix Up, Look Sharp

“An unofficial spokesman for urban youth”**: Dizzee Rascal.
FOUR TET
ROUNDS
(DOMINO)

A former student at the Elliott School in West London, whose alumni include Hot Chip and The xx, in the late-90s Kieran Hebden’s rapid musical evolution took him from art-rock trio Fridge to the jazz-infused electronica of his early solo experiments as Four Tet. Ten months in the making, Rounds remains his masterwork, an intricate mesh of criss-crossing percussion and dizzying harmonics which, on tracks such as the limpid She Moves She, connected trip-hop beats to dubstep sub-bass – and inspired a new generation of detail-obsessed bedroom producers, not least a young Jamie xx.

CAT POWER
YOU ARE FREE
(MATADOR)

Crystalline beauty has sometimes been Chan Marshall’s enemy, breakdowns having affected her both personally and artistically. Yet emotional candour is also one of her greatest assets. While early Cat Power recordings could sometimes prove painfully raw in places, the crystalline beauty of 2003’s You Are Free was fortified with a diamond core. Darkness still infuses some of the record’s heavier moments but it doesn’t overwhelm Marshall, and much of the record soars joyously like a summer breeze. Happy/sad; strong/weak; loud/quiet, You Are Free finds Cat Power balancing her contradictions brilliantly as she weaves together a thrilling musical patchwork. PS

WE ALSO LOVED...

BLUR
THINK TANK
Out goes Graham Coxon, in come sounds drawn from jazz, hip-hop, dub and Damon Albarn’s growing affection for African music.

KINGS OF LEON
YOUTH & YOUNG MANHOOD
Garage rock, Southern charm and lustrous moustaches distilled into a downhome take on The Strokes.

MUSE
ABSOLUTION
The trio’s apocalypse-rock grandeur and theatrics are at their most engaging when done with such pop nous.

RADIOHEAD
HAIL TO THE THIEF
On the band’s sixth album, electric guitars and acoustic drums are allowed back in – but only on condition they bend to the will of more exploratory song structures.

MANITOBA
UP IN FLAMES
Since re-released under his Caribou moniker, Dan Snaith’s sunny, busy “head music” is a worthy companion to the bucolic trips of The Flaming Lips.

BROTHER ALI
SHADOWS ON THE SUN
Undoubtedly the best album by a Muslim albino MC, largely thanks to the detail, power and flaring emotions of his delivery.

EVAN DANDO
BABY I’M BORED
Seven years after The Lemonheads’ seams finally came apart, Dando returns in a far more settled frame of mind. It produces remarkably satisfying results.

JAY-Z
THE BLACK ALBUM
He’s long broken the promise that this was his farewell, but it’s Shawn Carter on peak form, with top-drawer producers striving to match his sparkling wordplay.

OUTKAST
SPEAKERBOXXX/
THE LOVE BELOW
The Atlantan duo’s relationship was at the point where their fifth album had to be two solo records. Both riveting, both adventurous, both armed with a killer hit in The Way You Move and Hey Ya.

THE CLIENTELE
THE VIOLET HOUR
Enchantingly sleepy indie-pop wrapping its comfort blanket around the deep-set ache of an oft-broken heart.
“Eezers need excitement,” said Mike Skinner on The Streets’ 2002 debut Original Pirate Material, his raver’s progress down a path scattered with Rizlas and chips. Those thrills seem even more elusive on follow-up A Grand Don’t Come For Free, a record that begins with the protagonist failing to return a DVD before being thwarted by a cashpoint. On paper, it could be a contender for World’s Most Boring Concept Album, a collection of songs that Skinner might have found down the back of a sofa – maybe the one he’s slouching on in Wouldn’t Have It Any Other Way, “roaching a spliff, watching EastEnders or The Bill”.

Yet Skinner turns empty Tennent’s Super cans into gold, elevating JD Sports and betting shops into the backdrop for potent drama. During the record’s creation, he was fascinated by screenwriting manuals and it shows in his detailed narrative, transplanting grand artistic themes – love, loss, passing time – into a club, kitchen, burger bar. The protagonist meets a girl called Simone; he moves in, they fall out. His TV is broken, so is his heart (Dry Your Eyes). The title, meanwhile, refers to mislaid money, a mystery that can only be solved in the final song if he makes the right moral choices. It’s Groundhog Day, if just getting out of bed and not punching somebody were enough to make the magic.

There’s a stream-of-consciousness quality to these songs, a remarkable immediacy that masks Skinner’s careful craft. Beats are lean and tense, whipping about like a plastic bag in a concrete precinct, or pumped up and full of bouncy aggro. On Blinded By The Lights, the hero sees Simone kissing someone else but he’s taken too many pills to care, words vaporising into blurry euphoria as the music thumps around him. There’s a snapshot directness here – traceable down through Alex Turner or Kate Tempest – but despite Skinner’s clarity, communication is still wobbly. His phone is always going wrong, battery dying, no reception (“Mate, you’re fuzzy”). Yet behind these dropped connections crackles a narrative vividly fixed in time and space, a story about being young, hopeless yet still oddly hopeful. Its signal remains strong. VICTORIA SEGAL

Key Track: Blinded By The Lights
“It doesn’t really sound like it was made in the last 30 years, but this record is faultless. Wonderfully heart-wrenching songs, wonderful pace and intensity. I was probably one of his younger fans, but I remember a lot of kids my age were loving it. We were into Jeff Buckley’s Hallelujah, playing guitars and getting a bit heartfelt, and it was a great moment. When I was making my album, I’d come home from the studio, put it on and sing along. I got to a point where I was sat playing PlayStation, trying to take my mind off music but with music on, and I could harmonise to the entire album. You can’t do it with everything, but not harmonise to the entire album. (ie, sound jagged and angular, but with music on, and I could learned the lessons of post-punk trying to take my mind off music the homoerotic Michael, they’d never quite re-created the explosion of their 2004 debut, but they’ll always have it as their heady calling card. From the knowing, self-referential stomp of Take Me Out to the Motors-meet-Kraftwerk swirl of Auf Achse via the big choruses of The Dark Of The Matinée and Krautrock (Spiders (Kidsmoke)) to explosive Krautrock (Spiders (Kidsmoke)) and 15 minutes of piercing static replicating the migraines he suffered (Less Than You Think). Its sonic spread was counterbalanced by Tweedy’s voice – a numb lament that betrayed his crumbling psyche – and established how far American could be prodded and warped. MM Key Track: Somebody Told Me

FRANCIS BAY

RACHAEL

RAY LaMONTAGNE

TROUBLE

(RCA)

“It doesn’t really sound like it was made in the last 30 years, but this record is faultless. Wonderfully heart-wrenching songs, wonderful pace and intensity. I was probably one of his younger fans, but I remember a lot of kids my age were loving it. We were into Jeff Buckley’s Hallelujah, playing guitars and getting a bit heartfelt, and it was a great moment. When I was making my album, I’d come home from the studio, put it on and sing along. I got to a point where I was sat playing PlayStation, trying to take my mind off music but with music on, and I could harmonise to the entire album. You can’t do it with everything, but there’s always something new to find with his songs.”

By the time the successor to 2002’s Yankee Hotel Foxtrot was released, Wilco’s creative centre Jeff Tweedy was in rehab for prescription med addiction. In between, he forged a haunted update that stretched from Beatles-evoking piano pop (Humingbird) to explosive Krautrock (Spiders (Kidsmoke)) and 15 minutes of piercing static replicating the migraines he suffered (Less Than You Think). Its sonic spread was counterbalanced by Tweedy’s voice – a numb lament that betrayed his crumbling psyche – and established how far American could be prodded and warped. MM Key Track: Somebody Told Me

THE KILLERS

HOT FUSS

(VERTIGO)

Growing up in the bubble of Las Vegas listening to English pop, The Killers were always going to be different. They had a charismatic frontman in Brandon Flowers and the unerring ability to conjure rare drama in their songs. The UK returned the compliment for the ultimate Transatlantic band, sending this debut to Number 1 and charting it for 247 weeks. Flowers’s end-of-tether vocals blended perfectly with stentorian guitars to make pop as it should be: epic, bushy tailed and fist-pumping. JA Key Track: Take Me Out

FRANZ FERDINAND

FRANZ FERDINAND

(DOMINO)

Blazing a trail for whipsmart guitar bands, Franz Ferdinand never quite re-created the explosion of their 2004 debut, but they’ll always have it as their heady calling card. From the knowing, self-referential stomp of Take Me Out to the Motors-meet-Kraftwerk swirl of Auf Achse via the big choruses of The Dark Of The Matinée and Krautrock (Spiders (Kidsmoke)) to explosive Krautrock (Spiders (Kidsmoke)) and 15 minutes of piercing static replicating the migraines he suffered (Less Than You Think). Its sonic spread was counterbalanced by Tweedy’s voice – a numb lament that betrayed his crumbling psyche – and established how far American could be prodded and warped. MM Key Track: Somebody Told Me

DANGER MOUSE

DESTROY ROCK & ROLL

Putting Jay-Z’s Black Album vocals to music from The Beatles’ White album, Brian Burton establishes himself as the world’s most in-demand producer.

MADVILLAIN

MADVILLAINY

Underground hip-hop’s cracked geniuses, Madlib and MF DOOM, unite on a labyrinth of weed-stained vignettes that combine invention and accessibility.

SCISSOR SISTERS

SCISSOR SISTERS

Camp but committed, brash and baleful, the New Yorkers’ debut dismisses any whiff of novelty with sophisticated songcraft.
ow are you?  Good. Did you miss me?
Where are you right now?  At home, in my front yard. In Las Vegas terms, my house is ancient, from the 1960s, with a lot of trees around. So it stays cooler here.
Can you remember what you were doing in 1986?  [Flowers was five years old] I don’t remember, I was somewhere out here in the heat.
Wasn’t that the year your dad had a religious “epiphany” and was baptised into Mormonism?  I was five or six, yeah. My father felt it so strongly that day, that he was baptised that night. They couldn’t get a church open fast enough, so they allowed my aunt Joyce to do it in her swimming pool. It was cool!
When was the last time you listened to Hot Fuss?  I hear the songs on the radio and I quickly turn over the station, it’s an instinct. It’s not uncommon for people to hear things about their voice they don’t like, or the recordings. Everybody wishes they could go back and re-do things. But I do acknowledge there was some magic captured.
Q have selected Hot Fuss as one of the best debuts of the last 30 years. Something you’d agree with?
I will say it’s one of them. If you ask me, The Strokes’ debut is better. Guns N’ Roses’ debut is better. But I do think we’re up there and I’m proud of it. Going back to The Strokes’ debut – that was a real driving force for us. I really wanted to beat it.

What’s the best album of the last 30 years?
“The Joshua Tree” by U2. It still has a lot of power. They were taking on big subjects [religion, heroin, the Salvadoran Civil War, Ronald Reagan’s US foreign policy…]. It was such a brave thing to do, these guys from Ireland, to take on America and be so transparent about it. I don’t know if anybody would even be allowed to do that any more. To do that tastefully and have such amazing songs, it’s monumental.”

How’s 2016 been so far?  It’s been fun. The Killers are back and trying to write. We were supposed to get together with Elton John last week [for a long-mooted writing session], in Vegas and he got… a cold or something. But I don’t rule it out. I’m sure I can learn from him.

What’s been your greatest highlight of the last 30 years?  Playing Thunder Road with Bruce Springsteen in Belgium at a festival. Playing Wembley Stadium. Opening for Morrissey. Those real pinch-me moments.

You once said, “I’m more confident in my handsomeness than I am in my wisdom.” Has that changed at 34 years of age?  Maybe the two will be at a crossroads, at some point! I’m trying to hold on to everything.

Where will you be in 30 minutes’ time?  The front end of my truck is shaking, there’s something really wrong with it. So in 30 minutes I’ll be at the Ford dealership, in the servicing department.
That one's on us: Brandon Flowers on the cover of Q's July 2005 issue.

MODERN CLASSICS...

Essential LIVE ALBUMS

LED ZEPPELIN
CELEBRATION DAY
(ATLANTIC/SWANSONG, 2012)

Led Zeppelin’s performance at the Ahmet Ertegun Tribute Concert on 10 December, 2007, at London’s O2 Arena was one of the most anticipated shows in Q’s history. In fact, Led Zep’s performance also served as a fine reminder of the band’s remarkable dynamics, the trio of Jimmy Page, Robert Plant and John Paul Jones and drummer Jason “Son Of John” Bonham delivering a performance that was captured for posterity by British director DCarruthers’s cameras. While the film hit the big screen, the commercial release came in hybrid form – the most satisfying being the two-CD and double DVD set, the second disc of which contained the footage of Zep in rehearsal at Shepperton Studios from one single camera angle, offering a unique informal view of the world’s greatest rock band. Phil Alexander

Key Track: Kashmir

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
LIVE/1975-85
(COLUMBIA, 1986)

By the mid-’80s The Boss had become known for his marathon live sets. This 40-track affair – available on five LPs, three CDs, three cassettes and, indeed, three 8-track cartridges – was manager Jon Landau’s innovative attempt at replicating that experience, while chronicling his charge’s rise from club land to arena-filling superstar status. Presented almost in chronological order, the album’s core comes from a 1978 gig recorded at LA’s Roxy Theatre which captures the E Street Band and their boss in utterly devastating form. Key Track: Backstreets

ERIC CLAPTON
UNPLUGGED
(REPRISE/DUCK, 1992)

Following a period of intense personal turmoil in which Eric Clapton lost his manager, two of his road crew, and his four-year-old son, Conor (who fell from the 53rd floor of a New York apartment), the guitarist eventually returned to music, and finally agreed to record an intimate acoustic performance for MTV. A relaxed version of Layla sits alongside his ode to his son (the supremely moving Tears In Heaven) and assorted blues covers, on what remains a deeply affecting and emotional experience. Twenty-six million people agreed. Key Track: Tears In Heaven

NEIL YOUNG & CRAZY HORSE
ARC-WELD
(REPRISE/WARNER BROS, 1991)

As grunge exploded, plaid-wearing Neil Young found himself hailed by a new generation of bands and fans. His 1990 album, Ragged Glory, confirmed his desire to continue rocking hard, but this three-CD set surpasses even the rawness of that work. The first two discs – dubbed Weld – capture Neil Young & Crazy Horse at their most uncompromising. Arc, the final disc, meanwhile is a remarkable sound collage of feedback and snatched lyricism, produced with the encouragement of Sonic Youth’s Thurston Moore. Key Track: Cortez The Killer

NIRVANA
MTV UNPLUGGED IN NEW YORK
(DGC, 1994)

Released just over six months after Kurt Cobain’s death, this acoustic set served as a sharp reminder of exactly what had been lost. Prior to the recording of this performance in December ’93, Nirvana had grown increasingly tired of their own thrashing live performances. This more restrained approach here confirmed the group’s musicality and humanity through their own songs as well as on a clutch of inspired covers – David Bowie’s The Man Who Sold The World being the most poignant. Key Track: Where Did You Sleep Last Night?
The Strokes revitalised indie-rock at the start of the new millennium, then the arrival of Arcade Fire reshaped it completely. The Canadian outfit from Montreal looked and acted like a cult, or at least a particularly theatrical branch of the Woodcraft Folk, and their breathless, intoxicating live shows genuinely felt like nothing you’d ever seen before. That feeling of release and exhilaration is captured perfectly on the band’s debut. At the time of its release, Funeral managed to sound both timeless and make everything else seem out of date. Its songs had a woozy familiarity. It was music that belonged in the lineage of great rock outsiders, a feeling strengthened by the Talking Heads cover in their live set and the homage they paid to David Bowie and Iggy Pop with the Lust For Life-aping outro of Wake Up.

The band formed around core husband-and-wife duo Win Butler and Régine Chassagne in Montreal in 2001 and had already gone through one line-up shuffle before recording began at Montreal’s Hotel2Tango studios. The spectre of death hung over Funeral’s creation: Chassagne’s grandmother died in 2003; Win and guitarist brother Will’s grandfather in February 2004 and multi-instrumentalist Richard Reed Parry’s aunt in April 2004. Out of the sombre circumstances, Arcade Fire crafted one of the most euphoric albums of the decade. What elevated their ragged, indie grooves to something truly special was the hooks. Every track had something to spark a mass singalong, not least Wake Up’s dam-busting chorus.

It sold over a million copies and completely recalibrated the sound of alternative rock. Now, everyone needed a big “Whoa, oh!” Arcade Fire bit in the middle. Coldplay wrote one, as did U2. It became a common occurrence for band members to thump away at auxiliary drums at the front of the stage just like Arcade Fire and, for a time, it also became acceptable for groups to wear waistcoats, something that Mumford & Sons would base their early career on. Next, Arcade Fire would move on to a more widescreen Springsteen-style sound, perhaps to reflect the huge venues they were now capable of filling. But here, out of loss and confusion, they made their defining statement. They’ve never sounded more alive.

NIALL DOHERTY

Key Track: Wake Up

"Release and exhilaration": Arcade Fire change the face of alternative rock.
In the 12 years since The Red Shoes, Kate Bush’s reputation had grown almost as much as her mystique. With upstarts snapping at her feet, Aerial was a chance to leave the pack behind: and she did. Indeed, she would play the second disc, A Sky Of Honey, in its entirety in her Before The Dawn concerts in 2014. Sprawling, uncompromising, and touched by genius, it was Kate Bush in excelsis: renaissance pop,proggy undercurrents, washing in excelsis: renaissance pop, by genius, it was Kate Bush uncompromising, and touched with baroque second album with the extent of his ambitions on a double LP but Damon Albarn’s elegant melancholy is still the absorbing core.

KATE BUSH
AERIAL
(EMI)

ANTONY AND
THE JOHNSONS
I AM A BIRD NOW
(ROUGH TRADE)

SLEATER-KINNEY
THE WOODS
(SUB POP)

Like his obvious forebear Jimmy Scott, who also possessed an arresting, feminine voice, Antony Hegarty was always an outsider. Hegarty’s second outing with his Johnsons was a manifesto for outsiders everywhere. Part chamber pop, part soul-baring introspection, I Am A Bird Now was also the moment Hegarty’s songwriting began to soar. His tremulous voice was always a beacon of despair, but when he was joined by Boy George on You Are My Sister, it was almost unbearably moving. Lou Reed and Rufus Wainwright also guested, but there was only one star here. JA

Key Track: King Of The Mountain

Sleater-Kinney’s seventh album marked the start of the trio’s 10-year hiatus, but it was wild and fierce enough to echo all the way down that decade. Produced by Dave Fridmann, The Woods shows what happens when a band bloodied by riot grrrl take on macho classic rock, using the heaviest riffs to smash out space for their own anger and attitude. Their rejuvenation of this noise is underlined on Entertain, where Carrie Brownstein attacks backwards-looking bands: “Nostalgia, you’re using it like a whore.” Here, though, Sleater-Kinney dragged the past into our present, a new perspective on an old dark art. VS

Key Track: You Are My Sister

KANYE WEST
LATE REGISTRATION
(ROC A FELLA)

Having mastered hip-hop on The College Dropout, Kanye revealed the extent of his ambitions on a baroque second album with Fiona Apple producer Jon Brion. Pushing in several directions at once, Late Registration presents Kanye at his most pop (Gold Digger), his most political (Crack Music) and his most sentimental (Hey Mama). His compulsion to have a finger in every pie – invoking Curtis Mayfield and Gil Scott-Heron, inviting both Lupe Fiasco and The Game – conveys generosity rather than the neurosis of his later L.P.s. In hindsight, victory-lap anthems like Touch The Sky and Celebration were the last time he would sound truly happy. DL

Key Track: Gold Digger

““The last time he sounded truly happy”: Kanye West in 2005.”

WE ALSO LOVED...

GORILLAZ
DEMON DAYS
Co-producer Danger Mouse helps add more Technicolor and musical adventure on the cartoon crew’s second LP but Damon Albarn’s elegant melancholy is still the absorbing core.

COLDPLAY
X & Y
Having discovered they had the Big Music within them on A Rush Of Blood To The Head, Coldplay embrace their stadium-shaped future.

KAISER CHIEFS
EMPLOYMENT
Fizzing, observational, highly hummable art-pop debut that put the Leeds band in the lineage of Blur and XTC.

BRIGHT EYES
I’M WIDE AWAKE, IT’S MORNING
Conor Oberst tackles the political and personal on his most stately and fully realised collection of indie-folk.

THE WHITE STRIPES
GET BEHIND ME SATAN
Jack White unlocks some restraint, hush and the door to the cupboard with all the pianos in it. A thrilling slalom of sounds and styles from a band you thought you had pegged.

NEIL YOUNG
PRAIRIE WIND
A return to country-rock, with Young reflecting on his father’s death and his own mortality following a brain aneurysm.

EELS
BLINKING LIGHTS AND OTHER REVELATIONS
With 33 songs split between lush pop and emotive ballads, Mark Oliver Everett picks through his life that’s been touched by an extraordinary amount of grief.

SIGUR RÓS
TAKK...
Another exemplary collection of majestic post-rock from the Icelandic masters of atmosphere.

LCD SOUNDSYSTEM
LCD SOUNDSYSTEM
James Murphy mints arguably the finest collision of dancefloor kinetics and indie-rock aesthetics since New Order’s Technique.

SUFIAN STEVENS
ILLINOIS
A baroque take on indie-folk that’s bestowed with satisfying range and indelible melodies.
my Winehouse could only write songs if she really felt them and she could only really feel them if they hurt. When she died in 2011, leaving so little music behind, her greatest album was hard to listen to because it addressed so directly the forces that brought her down. But it also showed how beautifully she could finesse her struggles into instant classics.

At the end of 2004 Universal were eager for Winehouse to start writing the follow-up to her modestly successful debut, Frank, but she had nothing to write about. Only when her caddish new boyfriend Blake Fielder-Civil broke off their affair and returned to his girlfriend the following year did the songs start to flow. She would stay up deep into the night on the kitchen floor of her Camden flat with pen and paper, her guitar and a bottle of vodka, seeking solace and inspiration in The Shangri-Las’ girl-group apocalypse I Can Never Go Home Anymore. After the pain came the pleasure of making the record with Salaam Remi in Miami and Mark Ronson in New York, on such a roll that she could take a darkly funny conversation with Ronson and turn it into Rehab in three hours. Remi skewed towards jazz and R&B, Ronson drew on her love of Brill Building melodrama and Winehouse infused it all with hip-hop swagger.

She showed the world her scars but she never played the victim. Back To Black’s success set the stage for brokenhearted, retro-flavoured British singers such as Adele and Sam Smith but none of them have matched Winehouse’s tart wit (“There’s nothing you can teach me that I can’t learn from Mr Hathaway”), narrative precision (“Then you notice likkle carpet burn”), idiosyncratic language (“What kind of fuckery is this?”) and unerring ability to translate detailed autobiography into universal art.

“She said, ‘I feel like I’ve got 10 silver bullets and that’s my album,’” remembered Ronson. “She knew she’d done something that was better than what anyone else was doing by a long shot.” Here, at least, she mastered her pain.
There was clearly a message in the fact that Thom Yorke announced his debut solo album midway through a Radiohead tour: it wasn’t the end of anything, it was just the start of something else. Recorded with long-term collaborator Nigel Godrich in the producer’s Covent Garden studio, The Eraser was Yorke fully immersing himself in beats and loops. But rather than an album of difficult electronica, what emerged was a record that featured some of the singer’s strongest melodies in years. It was Godrich’s idea to keep Yorke’s voice untreated amongst the digital trickery around it. It turned The Eraser into something more special than a side-project, opening up a new creative avenue for the restless frontman to return to in the years since. **Key Track:** Harrowdown Hill

**THOM YORKE**

**THE ERASER**

(XL)

As the producer behind Slum Village, Detroit’s James Dewitt Yancey was a gifted beatsmith whose ear for head-nodding beats made him the natural heir to legends such as DJ Premier. Yet it’s on his instrumental LPs that he created a new musical vocabulary, here braiding starting miniatures from fragments of funk, soul and electronics – with Lightworks sampling synth pioneer Raymond Scott. Tragically, Yancey died from a rare blood disorder in 2006, but his example inspired the next generation of hip-hop futurists, Flying Lotus included. **Key Track:** Lightworks

**J DILLA**

**DONUTS**

(STONESThrow)

“Rubber soul: Thom Yorke flies solo in style.”

**KASABIAN**

**EMPIRE**

Recording their second after finishing a tour with Oasis, the Leicester buccaneers up their scale and imagination.

**GNARLS BARKLEY**

**ST. ELSEWHERE**

Cee-Lo Green hooks up with producer du jour Danger Mouse to lend their vivid imaginations to their grand agit-rock.

**BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN**

**WE SHALL OVERCOME: THE SEEGER SESSIONS**

Springsteen offers his own interpretations of activist-folk songs made popular by Pete Seeger, bringing energy and horns to the protest.

**MUSE**

**BLACK HOLES & REVELATIONS**

Matt Bellamy gets bolder in his theatricality as Muse add some dancefloor propulsion to their grand agit-rock.

**TV ON THE RADIO**

**RETURN TO COOKIE MOUNTAIN**

De-cluttering their sound, the New York art-rockers are still full of abstraction and imagination.

**JOANNA NEWSOM**

**YS**

Five tracks over 55 minutes, each travelling through multiple sonic avenues and trapdoors, while bringing more depth and restraint to that singular voice.

**BOB DYLAN**

**MODERN TIMES**

Dylan’s 32nd studio album is also one of his most instantly approachable, stocked with exuberant rock’n’roll and blues.

**CLIPSE**

**HELL HATH NO FURY**

The apex of the Virginia duo’s Neptunes-produced tales from the coke trade, where bleak landscapes are lightened by smart rhymes.

**DESTROYER**

**DESTROYER’S RUBIES**

New Pornographer Dan Bejar warms up his mannered, cerebral rock abstractions until they verge on immediacy.

**ALI FARKA TOURÉ**

**SAVANE**

Released four months after he died, the Malian blues master called this his “best album ever”. Lush, serpentine and spiritual, it stands up to that claim.
Radiohead arrived at their seventh studio album emotionally drained and out of ideas. They had ground to a halt after the exhaustive world tour to support 2003’s Hail To The Thief and there was no one to force them into action. Their record deal with Parlophone had recently expired and they were now free men to do as they pleased, prisoners of their own inertia. Their dithering was made worse by the fact that long-time collaborator Nigel Godrich wasn’t available for his usual production guidance. They considered splitting as self-produced recordings throughout 2005 bore no fruit, with sessions overseen by Björk collaborator Mark “Spike” Stent only serving to underline how far off the pace the band were. A short tour of the UK in summer 2006 showed them they had the songs – versions of Bodysnatchers, 15 Step, All I Need, Videotape, Jigsaw Falling Into Place and Weird Fishes/Arpeggi were all debuted – if not the focus. Shortly afterwards, Godrich arrived and gave them what Thom Yorke described as “a walloping kick up the arse”.

Setting up studio at Tottenham House, a derelict mansion in the Wiltshire countryside that required the band to bring their own bed, breakfast and electricity, headway was finally made. What emerged was a captivating symbiosis of the band’s different dimensions, where electronic beats sounded live and real instruments were steeped in digital treatment. Eight years after declaring an allergy to melody while making Kid A, Yorke had written some of his best. The orchestral lushness of All I Need and Reckoner were new creative peaks, while the minimalist beauty of Videotape showed that they now knew when to strip things down too.

Of course, there are many reasons why In Rainbows could be considered a modern classic in industry terms, with the Pay-What-You-Want system the band employed to sell it through their website and the way it appeared suddenly, heralded just a week before release by Jonny Greenwood through the band’s Dead Air Space blog. That has become the norm now but at the time it was shocking and exciting. Once the world moved on and that business daring dissolved, what remained was some of the most sumptuous music of Radiohead’s career. A decade after OK Computer, they had crafted another classic album. Their legacy was assured.

NIALL DOHERTY

Key Track: Reckoner
KINGS OF LEON
BECAUSE OF THE TIMES
(RCA)

On their first two LPs, Kings Of Leon were art-tinged Southern rockers. On this third they were Southern-tinged art rockers. They swapped their stomping choruses for something more expansive and more durable and leapt from the boogie ghetto to become the American Top 30 act and the automatic British chart-toppers they remain. Sounding utterly broken on The Runner, while Knocked Up makes you fear for the baby it’s supposed to be celebrating. Matthew Followill’s guitars rose to Jonny Greenwood territory, but the catch in his cousin Caleb’s voice had never been so affecting. JA
Key Track: Knocked Up

LCD SOUNDSYSTEM
SOUND OF SILVER
(EMI)

Taking Brooklyn cool, post-punk angularity and James Murphy’s willingness to emote on All My Friends and the plinky but elegiac Someone Great, LCD Soundsystem were dance music, but not quite as it had been done before. If sound-sculpting in a way that was both avant and accessible was Murphy’s forte, lyrically he was hardly a punch puller whether reminding us that “New York’s the greatest if you get someone to pay the rent” or swatting music journalism on Watch The Tapes. Across the Atlantic, Daft Punk and Hot Chip took notes, but Murphy was always his own man. JA
Key Track: Someone Great

THE SHINS
WINCING THE NIGHT AWAY
(SURPOP)

During 2004 comedy drama Garden State, Natalie Portman’s character declared that The Shins’ track New Slang “will change your life”, instantly doubling sales of their first two albums and anticipation for their third. Bruised by a break-up and perhaps aware that he shouldn’t fuck this up - frontman James Mercer spent three years crafting that album. Inspired by The Beta Band, he emboldened his fragile, tuneful indie-pop with more structural adventure. The Shins progressed without Natalie Portman looking foolish and Sub Pop got their biggest-selling album to date. MM
Key Track: Sea Legs

M.I.A.
KALA
(XL)

Having brought a dash of revolutionary politics to Western dancefloors on her debut Arular, this was the point at which London-born, Sri Lankan-raised Mathangi Arulpragasam perfected her global mash-up, along the way dipping into dancehall, hip-hop and even, on the irrepressible Jimmy, Bollywood disco. But it was the Clash-sampling, Major Lazer-produced Paper Planes which provided the tipping point, breaking into the US Top 10 and adding a radical edge to the soundtrack for Slumdog Millionaire. At times her confrontational style could grate, but from this point on there was no questioning her star quality. RH
Key Track: Paper Planes

In July 2007, when Justin Vernon cautiously emerged with his debut album as Bon Iver (it was self-released in the US before its European release in 2008), you would have had to go a long way before you found someone who would have marked him out as a future Kanye West collaborator. The circumstances that surrounded the creation of For Emma, Forever Ago had quickly hardened into the stuff of myth: heartbroken by a failed relationship and a failed band, liver broken by a bout of mononucleosis, Vernon spent a hard Wisconsin winter holed up in his father’s hunting cabin an hour outside of his hometown, Eau Claire. While there, he did odd jobs, killed two deer for meat, watched TV (his band name came from a greeting given in Northern Exposure, French for “good winter”). More significantly, he also started to fill the blanketing solitude and quiet by writing the songs that would become For Emma, Forever Ago, emotions long kept on ice slowly thawing into this music.

The resulting record also melts down the idea of the confessional singer-songwriter and reshapes it into something new and strange: “only love is all maroon/gluey feathers on the flume” sings Vernon on Flume. Yet despite their cryptic words, these songs communicate plenty, crystallising atmospheres of complete physical and emotional isolation into beautiful modern folk songs.

Originally self-released in a run of 500, For Emma, Forever Ago grew into a record of remarkable stature. That might partly be due to the anguished Skinny Love finding a whole new audience through Birdy’s 2011 cover, making the song an unlikely X Factor audition piece. Kanye West obviously saw something move beneath the permafrost layering of Vernon’s vocals, too, calling him to collaborate on My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy.

Yet while Bon Iver went on to bigger sounds, bigger things – Beth/Rest off the second self-titled record sounds like an ’80s soft rock classic – For Emma, Forever Ago remains a small wonder.

**Key Track:** Blindsided
FLEET FOXES
FLEET FOXES
(BELLA UNION)

Fox-in-chief Robin Pecknold dreamed up American rock’s most spellbinding pastoral fantasy since The Band: ancient-sounding folk-rock redolent of the woods and mountains of the Pacific North-West, performed by men who looked like 19th-century homesteaders. Sceptics called it twee, but Fleet Foxes’ debut avoided back-to-the-land clichés with its almost mystical communion with nature and its shudders of mortality – it’s a record of shadows as well as sunlight. The secret sauce is the group’s sublime harmonies, which achieve a pagan magic on White Winter Hymnal. DL

Key Track: White Winter Hymnal

ELBOW
THE SELDOM SEEN KID
(FIGTICION)

When The Seldom Seen Kid won the 2008 Mercury Music Prize, it was vindication for a beloved band’s years of toil. Much as it elevated them to alternative national treasure status though, it didn’t win through sentiment. Merging Guy Garvey’s skew-whiff, conversational voice, lush arrangements and carefully nurtured melodies, the deal was sealed by its contradictions. It’s grandstanding yet humble and, more intriguing still, brazenly mainstream and undeniablyarty. Those contradictions collide in the gospel-tinged scarf-waver One Day Like This, the greatest moment of a great LP. JA

Key Track: One Day Like This

THE BUG
LONDON ZOO
(NINJATUNE)

Berlin-based English producer Kevin Martin’s third LP in his Bug guise was arguably the angriest record of the new millennium. A Molotov cocktail mix of ruffneck ragga, digital dancehall and glitchy dubstep, this uncompromising state-of-the-capital address raged against gentrification, injustice and, in the vituperative words of the late Spaceape, “Fuckaz” everywhere. If that other noughties dubstep landmark, Burial’s Untrue, was the soundtrack to a Stockwell-bound nightibus home, London Zoo was the perfect sonic assault to accompany a Notting Hill Carnival riot on the day of the Apocalypse. SM

Key Track: Poison Dart

VAMPIRE WEEKEND
VAMPIRE WEEKEND
(XL)

Naming songs after Oxford commas and Mansard roofs, playing Afro-pop guitars while dressed for the yacht club, Vampire Weekend gave critics who dismissed them as glib Ivy League gadflies plenty of ammunition, but the band were always one step ahead and there’s a lot going on beneath their debut’s brisk, breezy surface. Pin-sharp frontman Ezra Koenig wrestles with questions of personal and cultural identity as both participant and wry observer, while producer and keyboardist Rostam Batmanglij pulls off high-wire acts like M79, where classical music meets Graceland. The only thing Vampire Weekend did wrong was to make such irresistible pop look easy. DL

Key Track: Oxford Comm
That slightly fevered, febrile feel of teen romance while producer Jamie Smith showed uncanny sleight of hand as he fused reverb-heavy guitars and abstract digital shimmer. Taking cues from such disparate influences as post-punk minimalists Young Marble Giants, the ambient pop of David Lynch collaborator Julee Cruise and South London dubstep, they shifted seamlessly from Fantasy’s subsonic bass vibrations to Basic Space’s soft-touch house and Infinity’s subtle homage to Chris Isaak’s late-’80s rock’n’roll ballad Wicked Game.

For all its apparent introversion, the album proved an immediate critical and commercial success, winning the 2010 Mercury Prize and breaking into the Top 10. It even filtered into the global mainstream – Shakira covering Islands; Rihanna sampling Intro for Drunk On Love.

And while keyboardist Baria Qureshi’s sudden departure from the group in October 2009 cast a brief shadow, 2012’s equally radiant follow-up Coexist replicated their UK success in America. Even when Smith stepped out as a production star in his own right he did so as Jamie xx. As all great minimalists know, sometimes it’s the smallest details which make the biggest impact.

RUPERT HOWE

Key Track: Basic Space
Animal Collective’s eighth album performed an unlikely manoeuvre: it’s an LP of experimental modern-psychedelia that somehow found itself in the upper reaches of both the US and British charts. The key to their crossover success was good chemistry. Working with pop-hop co-producer Ben H Allen, Animal Collective concocted the perfect blend of airy vocal harmonies, rhythmic pizzazz and far-out instrumentation to transport the listener into their own blissfully tripped-out universe. They’ll never surpass it. **Key Track:** My Girls

**ANIMAL COLLECTIVE**

**MERRIWEATHER POST PAVILION**

*(DOMINO)*

Robin Pecknold called Grizzly Bear’s third LP “the best record of the ’00s” – generous praise from the man behind Fleet Foxes’ stellar debut a year earlier. The kinship between the two bands is clear on Veckatimest (as are resonances with Animal Collective, Beach House and Bon Iver) but Grizzly Bear were still their own beast. Partly recorded by firelight in a Cape Cod cottage, the record shows the New Yorkers bringing their jazz-trained urbanity to melancholy folk meditations, sky-blue harmonies and beautifully arranged fish metaphors, creating music that plunges into deep emotional waters. **Key Track:** Two Weeks

**GRIZZLY BEAR**

**VECKATIMEST**

*(WARP)*

After three admired but commercially lukewarm albums, Versailles’ Phoenix had lost their major-label deal and were struggling to find a place to inspire their fourth. Eventually, the less-than-glamorous surroundings of a home studio belonging to Philippe Zdar of Cassius helped conjure a series of alt-pop mini symphonies that radiated brilliant warmth, particularly on Love Like Sunset (Parts I & II). A lesson in how to add new depth and adventure to sophisticated pop, the inspiration was ultimately from within. **Key Track:** 1901

**PHOENIX**

**WOLFGANG AMADEUS PHOENIX**

*(V2CO-OPERATIVE)*

Though their mix of Primal Scream’s dance-rock posturing and Oasis-sized choruses had produced a run of great singles and two Top 5 LPs, Kasabian were yet to make a truly great album. The sheer scope and audacity of their third record both achieved that and silenced those who’d dismissed them as laddish baggy copyists. Described by Noel Gallagher at the time as like “a frog in a top hat wearing a monocle, smoking a cigar”, it’s a suitably demented phantasmagoria that took in Moroccan street music, drum’n’bass, acoustic pop, Krautrock and sampled movie dialogue about emus. You didn’t get that from The Enemy. **Key Track:** Fire

**KASABIAN**

**WEST RIDER PAUPER LUNATIC ASYLUM**

*(COLUMBIA)*

**WE ALSO LOVED...**

**YEAH YEAH YEAHGS**

**IT’S BLITZ!**
The trio head onto the dancefloor armed with songs full of human warmth and melancholy beneath the synthetic beats.

**MUSE**

**THE RESISTANCE**
Muse’s fifth album is their already bold proposition writ larger with orchestral grandeur and the staggering, three-part Exogenesis: Symphony suite.

**U2**

**NO LINE ON THE HORIZON**
After five years away, U2 return in exploratory mood with Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois prodding them out of their comfort zone.

**DOVES**

**KINGDOM OF RUST**
An expansive vision of the trio’s North–West surroundings that hit the button marked “Big Music” without blurring their dark roots and psychedelic visions.

**THE HORRORS**

**PRIMARY COLOURS**
Memories of the thin garage punk of 2007 debut Strange House are detonated with this wide-eyed trip into Krautrock, shoegazing and the girl-group sound.

**FEVER RAY**

**FEVER RAY**
The Knife’s Karin Dreijer Anderson’s draws the curtains for a decayed, discomfiting refit of her day band’s electro-pop.

**SHACKLETON**

**THREE EPS**
Lancashire dubstep producer settles on a more nocturnal, minimalist vision inspired by his new home of Berlin.

**FLORENCE + THE MACHINE**

**LUNGS**
Harp swooned, drums clattered and Florence Welch hollered, howled and soothed on a preciously sure-footed debut.

**MANIC STREET PREACHERS**

**JOURNAL FOR THE PLAGUE LOVERS**
Richey Edwards’s final lyrics are put to brutal riffs and folk interjections on a companion piece to The Holy Bible.

**EMPIRE OF THE SUN**

**WALKING ON A DREAM**
Psych-funk and ’80s pop buddy up on an LP providing pre-emptory consolation to those who’d come to regard MGMT’s Congratulations a bit too weird one year later.
ow are you?
Tom Meighan: Exhausted.
Serge Pizzorno: Absolutely knackered.

Where are you right now?
SP: Leicester – we're in the centre of the universe.

Can you remember what you were doing in 1986?
SP: Probably watching the World Cup, watching Maradona.
TM: Watching The Goonies.

What were your obsessions back then?
SP: Stickers.
TM: My one was movies because my mum worked in a video shop so I got to see all the films. [kitsch horror film] Critters, I got some nonsense, honest to god!
SP: Mums and dads back then weren't savvy to the classification ratings. They didn't give a shit. My old man got me Robocop, I was only about 11. [To Tom] You shouldn't have been watching Critters at five years old. You wouldn't do it now, you'd shit it.

What was the first record you bought with your own money?
TM: Bad by Michael Jackson, it was on cassette.
SP: Got My Mind Set On You by George Harrison. It was a 12-inch. I remember it being massive.

What about when you got a bit older?
SP: Rave tapes were my big obsession. I had a record bag but no records, it was just tapes of things like Fantasia, all the big raves you could buy, the DJ sets. I would have been 11. I used to wear white gloves. I went to an underage rave in town. The older lads there were frightening, proper bully vibes. People were just getting filled in and that. [To Tom] You were into Cypress Hill, weren't you?

Did you get into Britpop when it came along?
SP: We were the perfect age for Britpop. When you first saw Liam and Noel in a Man City shirt you were like, “Who are these two? What’s this?” You’d never heard anyone talk like that in a band before. They made it alright to play the guitar.

What were your first impressions of each other?

WHAT’S THE BEST ALBUM OF THE LAST 30 YEARS?
SP: “It’s difficult to choose your favourite, there’s too many. I always go with DJ Shadow's Endtroducing. There’s obvious things like Definitely Maybe that are massive turning points and even Kid A. That was a massive, massive one for me, too.”
TM: “Michael Jackson's Bad. Smooth Criminal and all that. It’s got to be. When you hear that back it’s an incredible-sounding album. It’s [starts singing the drum part to The Way You Make Me Feel] Boom boom chk! Boom boom chk! Honestly, you listen to it – it’s fucking massive.”
WE SHARED A BEDROOM ON A FARM FOR TWO YEARS. EVERY MORNING WE'D REEL OUT A SPLIFF AND WATCH MAGNUM, P.I. IN BED.

SERGE PIZZORNO
Drummer, and switching to bass, before seeking solace in therapy.

A brief period of reconciliation saw them head to Alabama's legendary Muscle Shoals Sound Studio for an 11-day recording session. The emotional bloodletting of Next Girl proved that, this time, their pop hooks were sharper – a point borne out by tunes that include the driving Everlasting Light and the scuzz-glam stomp of Howlin' For You. A late addition to the album, the psychedelic groover Tighten Up was cut months later in Brooklyn with Danger Mouse.

Following an initial mix deemed too polished, the Keys enlisted veteran mixer Tchad Blake to restore grease and grit to the recordings. Released on 18 May, 2010, Brothers sold 70,000 copies in its first week in the US. Tighten Up, meanwhile, seduced reluctant radio programmers, helping the album on its way to the million mark. The album's impact on fellow musicians was equally evident (U2 and Arctic Monkeys would enlist Blake’s services), while Auerbach would go on to produce everyone from Dr John to Lana Del Rey.

In February, 2011, the Keys attended the Grammy Awards in LA, rubbing shoulders with Lady Gaga, Justin Bieber and Christina Aguilera. Brothers scooped three awards. Dan and Patrick stayed for approximately 15 minutes. PHIL ALEXANDER

Key Track: Tighten Up
Plan B, aka Ben Drew: giving concept albums a good name.

PLAN B
THE DEFAMATION OF STRICKLAND BANKS
(679)

Ben Drew’s first album as Plan B, Who Needs Actions When You Got Words, was an outstanding slab of British hip-hop. Amazingly, The Defamation Of Strickland Banks was a concept album detailing the travails of a jailed singer. More amazing still, it was a classic and convincing soul album (with very occasional nods to rap), where Drew turned out to have a proper singing voice in the tradition of Smokey Robinson. She said finger-clicked like Amy Winehouse; Hard Times was orchestrated like Barry White; Free had genuine uplift and Drew had emerged as a major and fearless talent. JM

Key Track: Hard Times

JOHN GRANT
QUEEN OF DENMARK
(BELLA UNION)

For all their many moments, The Czars were still an indie rock band. On their demise, John Grant took time out, joined forces with Midlake and produced Queen Of Denmark, a drama queen of an album which chronicled lost love with dollops of bitterness and the assertion “I feel just like Sigourney Weaver when she had to kill those aliens.” In other hands it wouldn’t work. In Grant’s, his chocolatey, almost sunny baritone gives his dark tales of drug abuse, depression and self-laceration a grandeur all their own. Misery had never sounded quite so cocky or so luxurious. JM

Key Track: Chicken Bones

JANELLE MONÁE
ARCHANDROID
(BIG BEAT RECORDS)

While Kansas-born Monáe is still awaiting the global adulation her talent deserves, there’s no question her debut is a classic as solid gold as the treated profile that adorns its sleeve. A loose concept record, hung around the story of an android who falls for a human (the 1927 German expressionist classic Metropolis was a key influence), it stretched from the big emotions of Cold War to the twinkle-toed soul of OutKast collaboration Tightrope. If Monáe isn’t spoken of with the same reverence as key influence James Brown, just two LPs into her career there’s still time. JM

Key Track: Cold War

LAURA MARLING
I SPEAK BECAUSE I CAN
(VIRGIN)

As the 21st century began, few predicted a folk revival led by a bunch of teens and 20-somethings was on the cards. Despite Marling being one of the scene’s youngest protagonists, she spearheaded the renaissance. Her second album brilliantly meshed the folk tradition with modern concerns. Marling’s songs didn’t just assume folk’s clothes – as best displayed by the title track and Rambling Man, she tailored something of her own. With her backing band on this record a nascent Mumford & Sons, Marling helped to revive a genre for modern ears. PS

Key Track: Rambling Man

WE ALSO LOVED...

ANAÏS MITCHELL
HADESTOWN

Extraordinary folk opera resetting the ancient Greek myth of Orpheus in the Great Depression, with fellow folkies including Bon Iver’s Justin Vernon taking lead roles.

ALI FARKA TOURÉ & TOUMANI DIARATÉ
ALI & TOUMANI

Elegantly sparkling duet between Mali’s late desert-blues specialist Touré and his kora-playing compatriot, mixing ancient folk tradition with new compositions.

ROBERT PLANT
BAND OF JOY

The Golden God continues to engage his folkly impulses as he reinterprets artists as diverse as Los Lobos and Low with versatility and invention.

THE NATIONAL
HIGH VIOLET

The struggles that breed their sorrow may be everyday, but there’s great majesty to The National’s elegiac anthems.

PAUL WELLER
WAKE UP THE NATION

Sticking with the creative thinking that fuelled 2008’s 22 Dreams, and charged by excitement and rage, Weller conjures sonic left turn after sonic left turn.

MGMT
CONGRATULATIONS

Curbing the pop tendencies of their debut, the duo wrap themselves in fascinating layers of cock-eyed psych-rock.

BEACH HOUSE
TEEN DREAM

The Baltimore duo burn away some of the haze of their textured dream pop to add more shape and an invigorating shimmer.

DRAKE
THANK ME LATER

Superstar-in-waiting establishes navel-gazing as a legitimate hip-hop pastime on downbeat, minor-key debut.

KANYE WEST
MY BEAUTIFUL DARK TWISTED FANTASY

Having crawled out of 808s & Heartbreak’s pit of despair, Kanye lets rip a cathartic roar of unrivalled-in-Major-League-hip-hop ambition.

ROBYN
BODY TALK

Stirring cries of love soldered onto pop hooks and imaginative dancefloor moves.
In 1917, Major General Fabian Ware founded the Imperial War Graves Commission in order to remember the casualties of World War One. Ware said that he heard the voices of the fallen talking to him and couldn’t rest until he’d done right by them. PJ Harvey heard his words in a Radio 4 play while she was starting to write Let England Shake and she felt a similar urge. The album is more folk than rock and a kind of folk music that Harvey invented herself, with her autoharp, her sturdy melodies and her high, stark voice, as a means of communicating with the dead.

Let England Shake may have come out in 2011 but it suggests, in the words of The Last Living Rose, “the grey, damp filthiness of ages and battered books and fog rolling down behind the mountains”. It’s a record with the density and ambition of a novel or an art exhibition, collaging letters, diaries, artworks, history books, poems and songs into an eternal narrative of war and nationalism which draws threads from Gallipoli to Iraq, Afghanistan to Jamaica. Landscape, a major component of 2007’s White Chalk, reappears here as a passionless witness, going about its ancient business while “soldiers fall like lumps of meat”. Crudely, it’s a record about the relationship between blood and mud.

Harvey’s methods make Let England Shake a strangely humble masterpiece in which the singer feels more like a reporter or historian than a creator. Many of the most memorable images, lines and hooks are taken from other sources and Harvey’s job is to make them speak to each other about terrible things. She had always changed direction with each album but Let England Shake was so different that when she played the songs live they seemed to operate according to entirely different rules from her back catalogue. For that reason it’s one of the few classic albums that hasn’t really influenced anybody else, because how could it? At once brand new and as old as the hills, it exists on a different plane, among the ghosts.

**Key Track:** The Words That Maketh Murder
The goth hooligans who emerged from Southend’s shadows with 2006 single Sheena Is A Parasite had dematerialised by the release of their third LP five years later. With Skying, The Horrors built on the transitional surge of its predecessor Primary Colours, leaping into the experimental pop ether and bringing back core samples from Krautrock, shoegazing and the wobblier end of ’80s chart pop (The Teardrop Explodes in particular). There’s still darkness in these songs, but on Monica Gems or I Can See Through You, it’s splashed with vivid new patterns. Magnificent modern psychedelia that expands both sound and mind. v5

Key Track: I Can See Through You

St. Vincent
Strange Mercy
(4AD)

Annie Clark’s first two albums as St. Vincent established her as a cult maverick, albeit one who struggled to make an emotional connection. Strange Mercy was a different beast entirely. Without losing her musical adventurism and her way with role playing and tale telling, she discovered how to move hearts, most affectingly on the bereft Champagne Year. There was real, raw beauty on Dilettante and Year Of The Tiger was a harrowing saga of isolation. With that and with as many ideas as Kate Bush, she waltzed into the American Top 20 and to a whole new level of acceptance. A4

Key Track: Year Of The Tiger

Adele
21
(XL)

Forty years after Carole King’s Tapestry, it took another young woman to change the music industry with an album that likewise obliterated sales records with sheer force of empathy. The genius of Adele’s 21 was elevating the sobs of mate-grizzling-on-shoulder heartbreak into some of the simplest yet most affecting pop of modern times. These were the ballads of the girl next door, except the girl next door was Tottenham’s answer to Aretha. Her promotion of British music around the globe can be easily measured (21 has sold over 30 million to date) but never underestimated. A modern classic by a national treasure. SG

Key Track: Someone Like You

The Weeknd
House Of Balloons
(XX)

Initially offered as a free download via his website, Abel Tesfaye’s debut had an ambition and flair which elevated it above a typical mixtape. With input from Drake’s production team, the Toronto singer’s lovelorn falsetto evoked a nocturnal world of drugged-out sex and fevered soul-searching all set to an eerie musical backdrop, which drew on Siouxsie & The Banshees, Beach House and Nine Inch Nails. Two more equally assured albums followed later in the year, positioning Tesfaye at the vanguard of a new wave of R&B stars in thrall to the darker side of desire. RH

Key Track: Wicked Games

Florence + The Machine
Ceremonials
Building on the epic pop of her debut, Florence Welch elevates herself into the Big League.

Bon Iver
Bon Iver
All the magnificent songcraft of that bewitching debut – just now stretched into soft-rock, jazz and ambient textures.

Coldplay
Mylo Xyloto
The quartet blast the sleep from their eyes with a grandiose set of pop swagger and panache.

Jay Z & Kanye West
Watch The Throne
The creative tension between rap’s commander-in-chief and his one-time beatsmith raises both their games on inventive, luxury-wrapped hip-hop.

Metronomy
The English Riviera
There can’t be too many concept albums about the Devon coast. It’s certainly hard to imagine one finer than this synthesis of club-vibrancy, post-punk tautness and pop hooks.

Kurt Vile
Smoke Ring For My Halo
The Philadelphia troubadour masks the scale and energy of his alt-Americana inventiveness under a deceptive haze of “Duuuuuuuuuuuude!” slackerism

Wu Lyf
Go Tell Fire To The Mountain
Subject to a fast-flowing stream of hype, largely by doing no interviews, the Mancunians delivered a set of capacious, spiritual, epic rebel-indie.

Radiohead
The King Of Limbs
Surprise release split between an A-side full of dizzying rhythms and a B-side continuing the reconciliation with melody that had begun on In Rainbows.

Tinariwen
Tassili
The Tuareg desert bluesmen suspend their dynamic, electric sound in favour of gentler acoustic songs and hook-ups with TV On The Radio and Wilco.

Wild Beasts
Smother
Cumbersome clever dicks serve up more sensual-yet-intricate, electro-smaettered indie-rock.

The Horrors launched the “magnificent modern psychedelia” of Skying in 2011.

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Ceremonials
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All the magnificent songcraft of that bewitching debut – just now stretched into soft-rock, jazz and ambient textures.

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The creative tension between rap’s commander-in-chief and his one-time beatsmith raises both their games on inventive, luxury-wrapped hip-hop.

Metronomy
The English Riviera
There can’t be too many concept albums about the Devon coast. It’s certainly hard to imagine one finer than this synthesis of club-vibrancy, post-punk tautness and pop hooks.

Kurt Vile
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The Philadelphia troubadour masks the scale and energy of his alt-Americana inventiveness under a deceptive haze of “Duuuuuuuuuuuude!” slackerism

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Subject to a fast-flowing stream of hype, largely by doing no interviews, the Mancunians delivered a set of capacious, spiritual, epic rebel-indie.

Radiohead
The King Of Limbs
Surprise release split between an A-side full of dizzying rhythms and a B-side continuing the reconciliation with melody that had begun on In Rainbows.

Tinariwen
Tassili
The Tuareg desert bluesmen suspend their dynamic, electric sound in favour of gentler acoustic songs and hook-ups with TV On The Radio and Wilco.

Wild Beasts
Smother
Cumbersome clever dicks serve up more sensual-yet-intricate, electro-smaettered indie-rock.

The Horrors launched the “magnificent modern psychedelia” of Skying in 2011.

Florence + The Machine
Ceremonials
Building on the epic pop of her debut, Florence Welch elevates herself into the Big League.

Bon Iver
Bon Iver
All the magnificent songcraft of that bewitching debut – just now stretched into soft-rock, jazz and ambient textures.

Coldplay
Mylo Xyloto
The quartet blast the sleep from their eyes with a grandiose set of pop swagger and panache.

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Even ardent fans of Tame Impala's psych-pop debut, 2010's Innerspeaker, may have lived under the misapprehension that it was the work of a "proper band". After all, they toured as a four-piece, fronted by Kevin Parker, the toast of the alt-rock scene in the isolated Australian city of Perth. When it came to recording, however, Parker operated almost entirely solo, either in his bedroom in suburban Daglish, or on tour, where he would layer up tunes using an all-new computer program which offered an infinite number of tracks to fill per song. By his own admission, the mid-20-something Aussie was "drunk on potential".

It was in the title of his second record that Parker confessed to his methods. Lonerism, on release, was very plausibly hailed as a Pet Sounds for the digital age. Here was a wild-eyed geek blitzing crazy sounds into his laptop, stacking up dense sonic delights with such limitless vision. It felt like vintage psychedelia thrillingly born in inner space.

While Parker's melodies throughout were blissfully sun-kissed, doubtless informed by both his surfy coastal locale, and a love of late-'60s pop, his lyrics were certainly not dripping with hippy-dippy positivism. Implicit within the "lonerist" concept was a loser mentality, reflected in song titles such as Why Won't They Talk To Me? and She Just Won't Believe Me. Indeed, his touring bandmates giggled at the notion of their shambling pal being elevated as some kind of new Brian Wilson.

Yet, Lonerism undeniably captured him as a fabulously gifted artist, in breathtaking transition. Where Innerspeaker had been a godsend for aficionados of squealing psych-rock guitar, from Jimi Hendrix to My Bloody Valentine, this time he'd been bingeing on synthesizers, feeding them through effects units, making for soundscapes of wondrous retro-futurism. Four years on, the whole mind-melting experience still seems to point the way boldly forwards.

**Key Track:** Feels Like We Only Go Backwards
New sensations don’t come much humbler than Frank Ocean. The Odd Future crew’s mellowest member became the R&B singer for people who didn’t follow R&B with his indie-friendly 2011 mixtape Nostalgia, Ultra but his official debut didn’t use the hard sell. Despite Channel Orange’s audacious scope, and showstoppers like the stark backseat confessional Bad Religion and prog-soul tour de force Pyramids, the overall effect is subtle, humane and fuzzy round the edges. Ocean’s a deft storyteller, drawn to conflicted situations at the expense of his own ego. In a bluntly narcissistic age, Ocean’s quiet compassion strikes deep. DL

Key Track: Pyramids

Jack White’s solo debut wasn’t especially hard to predict: those hysterical vocals backed by something “authentic” which hardkened to early rock’n’roll at its most primal (Rudy Toombs, author of the sole cover, I’m Shakin’, was dead before The Beatles released an album), while sounding unmistakably 21st century. More surprising was how Blunderbuss was less art project, more heartfelt divorce album, without a raised eyebrow in earshot. Naturally, the self-production sounded exquisite and this magnificent album was yet another curveball from a man who can’t stop delivering them. JA

Key Track: Blunderbuss

The soul legend’s first album of original material in 18 years found Bobby Womack still in tune with the times. Or as he later put it, “When you tell the truth you never go out of style.” With production by XL boss Richard Russell and Damon Albarn, the result was a beguiling fusion of vintage and modern, Womack’s gravelly soul framed by spare electronic beats, subtle melodic touches and a suitably smoky cameo from Lana Del Rey. Womack died in 2014, but his last musical statement was also one of his greatest. RH

Key Track: Please Forgive My Heart

During sessions for her first major release, Montreal’s Claire Boucher spent nine days recording in her flat without food or sleep, forcing herself into a hallucinatory state. Little wonder the musical “visions” that resulted had such a striking, other-worldly quality, Boucher filtering her airy, heavily treated vocals through self-produced electronics which riffed on K-pop, blissed-out ambient and glitchy techno. Inevitably, it drew comparisons to Björk’s mould-breaking early works – but, as 2013’s equally intoxicating follow-up Art Angels confirmed, Grimes is a talent all of her own making. RH

Key Track: Genesis
Most folk, other than their dogged devotees, had started to write off Arctic Monkeys after the tough-to-penetrate desert rock of Humbug and the sturdy but largely hit-free Suck It And See. Then, in 2012, came the single – a pummellingly excellent tongue twister of frustrated lust and a product of Alex Turner's then-obsession with Led Zeppelin. Thunderous and vital, it sounded like the best thing they'd ever done. Their next release, the crunching, rifftastic , was even better – and a song so strong that the band confidently opened their headline Pyramid Stage set at Glastonbury with it only a week after it had come out.

Recorded in initially trying circumstances in LA (when Elvis Costello & The Attractions' drummer Pete Thomas had to sit in for incident where he bust his hand), the resulting album AM was a marvel. Despite Turner's denial that this was the Monkeys' LA Record, No.1 Party Anthem sounded like it documented a trawl through the darker corners of Californian nightlife. Meanwhile, Arabella came over like an open-topped sunset drive down the Pacific Coast Highway with a glamorous companion.

Now as then, AM sounds like a virtual greatest hits set. In the end, six singles were pulled from it, including the orientated post-party lope of and the breezy glam-pop of . The acronymic title of AM pointed to the fact that Arctic Monkeys knew they had made perhaps their defining record. It was the point where they pulled themselves out of the indie ghetto and set their sights on higher ambitions, not least when the Elvis-quiffed and cocky Turner started throwing rock star shapes onstage. This live capering, in tandem with the sterling tunes, and helped by a tireless touring schedule, saw the Monkeys rise higher than ever before in America. The point proven by AM was that you could never second-guess Arctic Monkeys. In the future, we may well look back upon it as the beginning of their imperial phase.

Key Track: 

When You're High? and the breezy glam-pop of Snap Out Of It.

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TOM DOYLE

Key Track: Do I Wanna Know?
DAFT PUNK
**RANDOM ACCESS MEMORIES**
(DAFT LIFE/COLUMBIA)

Having digitally crafted their way to top-table status among dance producers, Daft Punk casually took world on its head with their first studio album in eight years. Random Access Memories is a contemporary dance record created the same way Frank Sinatra albums were made: forget sampling, get an actual orchestra and the actual Nile Rodgers in the room.

So while some disciples had ventured into a reductive, digital rabbit hole, the Parisian robots returned with a human piece of art for the world to dance to. And with the Pharrell-fronted Get Lucky, the dancefloor was theirs again (not to mention the gym, hairdressers, corner shop, department store…) PS

Key Track: Get Lucky

RUN THE JEWELS
**RUN THE JEWELS**
(FOOL’S GOLD)

This collaboration between two veteran rappers wasn’t meant as a big break. But that’s what it became for Atlanta’s Killer Mike and New York’s El-P. After the latter had produced the former’s 2012 LP R.A.P. Music, something clicked. A year later, the pair’s self-titled debut – released as a free download – reconfigured what it meant to be a modern hip-hop artist, using Jay Z and Kanye West’s Watch The Throne to anchor its recurring theme of rampant materialism. Over furious beats, the pair let their dextrous wordplay take centre stage. New hip-hop royalty had been anointed. NO

Key Track: Banana Clipper

SAVAGES
**SILENCE YOURSELF**
(MATADOR)

Unashamedly in thrall to PJ Harvey, Bauhaus and Siouxsie & The Banshees, Savages were smart enough to twist their influences into something all their own on their debut. Singer Jehnny Beth’s guttural howl added intensity to her band’s post-punk clutter which gave these tales of hopeless lovers and miscommunication extra layers of aggression. Intriguingly, the bitter, piano-led closer Marshal Dear showed they could slow things down without sacrificing their intensity. A compelling demonstration of how spirit and execution can shake a band free of their influences. JA

Key Track: Marshal Dear

KURT VILE
**WAKIN ON A PRETTY DAZE**
(MATADOR)

The lo-fi approach to Kurt Vile’s first four albums reaped appropriately low sales. For his fifth, he made the great leap forwards and found himself in demand in the US and Europe enhancing the raft of changes he’d hinted at on 2011’s Smoke Ring For My Halo: a proper production, long, dreamy, careworn songs (think a quieter Dinosaur Jr or a less self-assured Conor Oberst) such as the free-flowing KV Crimes and Brittle, jittery art-punk pinned to their cerebral pop.

Key Track: KV Dreams

WE ALSO LOVED…

DAVID BOWIE
**THE NEXT DAY**

Its arrival did what we thought was impossible in the age of information saturation – it took us all by surprise. It was a joyful, fearless, excellent record too.

CASS McCOOMBS
**BIG WHEEL AND OTHERS**

The Californian’s double album of torch songs, funk workouts and hazy rock was dressed with wry observations.

STEVE MASON
**MONKEY MINDS IN THE DEVIL’S TIME**

After the raw, personal Boys Outside, the former Beta Band man unspacks his polemic for a fiery, funky take on the state of the nation.

PARQUET COURTS
**LIGHT UP GOLD**

Brittle, jittery art-punk pinned together with sharp-as-tacks hooks and delivered with energy that belies their slacker-rock rep.

KANYE WEST
**YEEZUS**

Kanye’s never one to do things quietly but this is his most abrasive album – fevered and brave, compelling and confusing.

FOALS
**HOLY FIRE**

Priming themselves to catapult out of the art-rock niche, the Oxford band add explosiveness to their groove-driven indie rock.

LAURA MARLING
**ONCE I WAS AN EAGLE**

The Twickenham folkie makes her LA album – a warm, romantic update with flashes of swagger and humour.

BILL RYDER-JONES
**A BAD WIND BLOWS IN MY HEART**

The former Coral guitarist retires to his childhood home to make fragile, intimate, consumingly melodic bedroom-folk.

REYONCE
**BEYONCE**

A surprise release – this would become a thing – that delivers addictive pop, hip-hop and murky R&B with striking poise, aggression and technical skill.

VAMPIRE WEEKEND
**MODERN VAMPIRES OF THE CITY**

From the Ivy League to the Big Leagues – the New York quartet aim for the stadiums by adding euphoric choruses to their cerebral pop.
THE WAR ON DRUGS
LOST IN THE DREAM
(SECRELY CANADIAN)

The artwork for Lost In The Dream showed The War On Drugs' mainman Adam Granduciel, long hair hiding his face, sat in front of a window. The sun was shining outside, but only some of it made it into his room. The image mirrored the music. The War On Drugs' third album sounded like a heat haze coming off a desert road.

Six years after forming, the Pennsylvanian alt-rockers cracked the US indie chart with their second album, 2011's Slave Ambient. By now, Granduciel had parted company with the group's co-founder, Kurt Vile, and turned The War On Drugs into a conduit for his twisted take on Americana — and his alone. Slave Ambient was good. But the follow-up, Lost In The Dream, was a giant leap forward.

Under The Pressure and An Ocean In Between The Waves were heartland American rock songs reconfigured to accommodate their composer's disparate influences — basically, Mark Knopfler and Spiritualized — and troubled mindset (much of the album was composed during a post-tour comedown).

The former, with its motorik rhythm and lyrics about “runaways” and “babes”, suggested Tom Petty jamming with '80s synth-pop group A Flock Of Seagulls. Meanwhile, An Ocean In Between The Waves conjured memories of every drive-time rock anthem ever made, but with Granduciel sobbing behind the steering wheel. The exquisite Eyes To The Wind even threw in a retro sax solo; a flashback for older listeners to '80s cop drama Hill Street Blues — that, or the soundtrack to a grainy VCR porn movie.

Lost In The Dream was such an intoxicating listen because it counterpointed every exultant chorus and riff with deep melancholia; when Granduciel started whooping during Red Eyes, he sounded not so much triumphant as in agony. This was arena rock, but without the sexual bravado and pick-up trucks.

Released in March 2014, Lost In The Dream was a US Top 30 hit and landed the band a new deal with Atlantic Records. You suspect that in Adam Granduciel's world, the future could never be seen as bright. But, like his room on that front cover, the sun will find its way in.

MARK BLAKE
Key Track: Under The Pressure

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MARK BLAKE
Key Track: Under The Pressure
ALT-J
THIS IS ALL YOURS
(INFECTIOUS)

The Mercury Prize tends to send its startled recipients into spirals of panic. Winning the 2012 vintage for An Awesome Wave only spurred alt-J on to better things, while unfurling an impassioned sense of fun where Hunger Of The Pine sampled Miley Cyrus and the fridge-magnet lyrics spun cycles of beguiling nonsense that would have delighted Lewis Carroll. There was beauty almost everywhere, there was whistling in Warm Foothills and big harmonies in Every Other Freckle, but like those who listened and followed, including Everything Everything and Foals, the big picture rather than individual songs was the key. JA

Key Track: Every Other Freckle

BECK
MORNING PHASE
(CAPITOL)

A spinal injury forced the prolific Beck Hansen to take six years to follow up 2008’s Modern Guilt. When it emerged, he called it “a companion piece” to 2002’s Sea Change. Yes, it was more melodic, down-tempo folk-rock. Where the latter had indulged Beck’s sorrow though, Morning Phase salved his world-weariness with shimmering optimism. Morning literally sounds like dawn breaching the curtains – a sense of emerging from the storm rather than suffering it. In an age when male troubadours were being hurriedly packaged and punted out by labels, Beck provided a timeless, time-taken masterclass in the art. MM

Key Track: Blue Moon

ED SHEERAN
X
(ASYLUM)

It’s easy to mock Ed Sheeran’s puppy dog keenness, but the only man to play Wembley Stadium wholly solo has single-handedly pushed live performance on. It wouldn’t be possible if the songs weren’t mustard-cutters. His second album topped the UK and American charts and was the sound of a man settling into his groove. He collaborated with Pharrell Williams and Rick Rubin among others, but in the musical equivalent of removing shoes to enter a stranger’s house, they bent to his rules. Ultimately, for all Sheeran’s genre-bending, X showcased a songwriter in the classic tradition. He was just better than his peers. JA

Key Track: Sing

FKA TWIGS
ARE WE THERE
LP1
(XL)

FKA twigs – aka Tahliah Barnett – came from Gloucestershire, but no one would have blinked if she actually hailed from some far-flung constellation. The only thing more extraterrestrial than her 2014 debut’s hyper-stylised videos was the music itself. LP1 transfixed listeners precisely because no one genre could accommodate it: R&B, trip-hop and electronica were all in twigs’s remit as her crystalline vocals cut through skittering drums and larval instrumentation. Odd as the submerged beats were, they only served to pronounce the sexual tension and intimacy of her lyrics. From out of nowhere, a singular talent had arrived. GG

Key Track: Video Girl


WE ALSO LOVED...

D’ANGELO AND THE VANGUARD
BLACK MESSIAH
After 14 years, the soul man returns, near-seamlessly slipping back into the murky textures and loose funk of 2000’s Voodoo.

DAMON ALBARN
EVERYDAY ROBOTS
Melodically were being hurriedly packaged and punted out by labels, Beck

ST. VINCENT
ST. VINCENT
Annie Clark’s “party record” investigates warmer textures of art-rock and future funk without sacrificing her wit or cock-eyed perspective on the world.

ROYAL BLOOD
ROYAL BLOOD
As muscle-bound and cacophonous a sound as two men can make, the Brighton duo’s riff-laden debut is underpinned by riveting grooves.

SLEAFORD MODS
DIVIDE AND EXIT
Nottingham’s punk-rap unit come for your idiots on their finest collection of enraged despair and potty-mouthed protest songs.

APHEX TWIN
SYRO
Richard D James wanted to be “more friendly” with this Aphex Twin LP. Thus warm accessibility shapes his latest adventures in acid house, techno and jungle.

SHARON VAN ETENN
ARE WE THERE
Unvarnished candour is stapled to dramatic vocals and elegant, slow-burning melodies on New Jersey singer’s fourth.

SUN KIL MOON
BENJI
More hard-won wisdom about life and death from Mark Kozelek. His sixth LP as Sun Kil Moon carries his most accessible melodies, gently picked with great virtuosity.

MANIC STREET PREACHERS
FUTURELOGO
Recorded in Berlin at the same time as the more pensive Rewind The Film, the Manics revivify themselves with a stirring, questing homage to Krautrock.

FUTURE ISLANDS
SING
On their fourth LP, the Baltimore trio brilliantly finesse the balance between crafted electro-pop and impassioned vocals.
child of the post-gangsta era, Kendrick Lamar was just a one-year-old when N.W.A. released Straight Outta Compton in 1988. Yet having grown up on the very streets immortalised by the album, his own career as a rapper has, in ways, been a response to its messages and informed by the same realities of poverty, violence and racism. Yet if the coming-of-age drama detailed in 2012’s good kid, m.A.A.d city was Lamar’s attempt to tackle his own life story, its follow-up To Pimp A Butterfly was even more ambitious, expanding the narrative to include not just his experience but that of America itself.

As an idealist and a realist, Lamar has said he takes inspiration from Tupac Shakur, his teenage idol and another artist with an advanced sense of his own destiny. On the final track, they even engage in an imagined dialogue. Yet Lamar’s “conflicted” awareness goes deeper, to the point where it actually destabilises the music – jazz-inspired, off-kilter opener Wesley’s Theory, produced by electronica maverick Flying Lotus, throws the kind of West Coast G-funk Tupac pioneered into a state of flux. In fact, much of the album’s power comes from its willingness to leave differences unresolved, the self-empowering message and righteous funk of King Kunta and Alright undercut by protracted moments of self-doubt, as on the haunting, ferocious meditation on race, The Blacker The Berry.

Even Lamar’s list of collaborators is head-spinning, alternative singer Anna Wise mixing it with Snoop Dogg, bass virtuoso Thundercat and Pharrell. Musically daring, lyrically questioning, To Pimp A Butterfly was part soliloquy, part state-of-the-nation address – with an impact to match.

Even Barack Obama gave it the nod, inviting Lamar to the White House and declaring the jazzy How Much A Dollar Cost his favourite song of 2015. Many musicians claim they’re going to change the world; on the evidence of To Pimp A Butterfly, Kendrick Lamar might actually achieve it. RH

Key Track: King Kunta
FOALS
WHAT WENT DOWN
(TRANSGRESSIVE/WARNERS)
There was a sense of now-or-never about the fourth Foals album. The Oxford quintet had it in their grasp to become one of the UK’s biggest guitar bands and What Went Down was the push they needed. By propelling them to arena and festival headliners for the first time in their career, it was a definitive record. It’s here that their technical, taut rhythms were loosened into hug-your-mate rock anthems, where the choruses felt as mighty as the grooves. Releasing the incendiary title track as its first taster acted as a menacing mission statement: Foals’ big moment was now. ND
Key Track: What Went Down

NEW ORDER
MUSIC COMPLETE
(MUTE)
Touring during the early ‘10s had taught New Order something: crowds really went for the dance numbers. So after a period of personal and professional disruption – notably the departure of Peter Hook – the band suddenly flamed with clubby impulses again. Thirty-five years into their career, Music Complete is one of their most vital and vibrant records, the ebullient disco-funk on People On The High Line and Tutti Frutti offsetting the gorgeously plangent rock of Academic. At an age when some bands settle into the comfy armchair of reissues and nostalgia tours, New Order sound freshly minted. MM
Key Track: Tutti Frutti

FATHER
JOHN MISTY
I LOVE YOU, HONEYBEAR
(BELLA UNION)
Having pootled around the US indie backwaters as J. Tillman and a Fleet Fox, Josh Tillman created his Father John Misty alter-ego as a chatty hipster. It didn’t quite work on 2012’s Pure Fun, but three years later the transformation was complete. Tillman merged acerbic lyrics (“I hate that soulful affection white girls put on/Why don’t you move to the Delta?”), expansive musical warmth and a vocal sweetness that allowed newly married Tillman to “lift up your wedding dress someone was probably murdered in” and walk away unscathed. JA
Key Track: Holy Shit

FLORENCE + THE MACHINE
HOW BIG, HOW BLUE, HOW BEAUTIFUL
(ISLAND)
After two gothic wind tunnel albums, it was time for Florence Welch and her Machine to literally change the record. So, with occasional exceptions, most notably the title track, she calmed herself without turning into Adele. She simultaneously broadened her musical palette and took a more personal lyrical turn, in the wake of what she described as a nervous breakdown. The results, be it the brassy uplift of Queen Of Peace or the soulful throb of Mother, were more than the album of transition her change of horses threatened. Instead, Welch transcended her past and her next chapter began here. JA
Key Track: Queen Of Peace
DAVID BOWIE
BLACKSTAR
(ISOCOLUMBIA)

On 11 January, 2016, the natural impulse for many people waking to the news that David Bowie had died the previous day was to reach back into his golden years, paying tribute and seeking consolation through the songs – so many of them – most tightly knotted into their lives. Yet there was also, unusually, another option available to grieving fans on that bleak Monday morning, one that wasn’t about the past, but about new questions, new perspectives.

The previous Friday, on his 69th birthday, Bowie had released his 25th album Blackstar, a record that was greeted with pleasure and acclaim. With his death, however, its meaning suddenly and inescapably shifted. A dark and disconcerting record already, it took on the weighty, magnificent status of a final report, a last goodbye. The astonishing title track, as cryptic as Station To Station with its intimations of ritual magic and mythical transformation, was compelling when it first emerged in November 2015, accompanied by a startling black metal Wizard Of Oz video. In January, it became almost unbearably intense. Yes, there were occult codes and messages to pick up from the album’s experimental jazz and electronica signals – was the line on Dollar Days, “I’m trying to/I’m dying to” or “I’m dying, too” – but most remarkable was how Blackstar made death seem like a deliberate act of transformation. “Ain’t that just like me?” he sings on Lazarus.

Key Track: Blackstar

It’s a lot of weight for a record (or person) to bear, but if Blackstar stands as a monument, it’s not a hushed grey mausoleum, but a crackling transmitter. Nobody could claim the terrifying Sue (Or In A Season Of Crime), the Nadsat chatter of Girl Loves Me or “Tis A Pity She Was A Whore (“Man, she punched me like a dude”) are the sound of somebody going gently anywhere. Even the closing I Can’t Give Everything Away resists sentimentality, referencing Low’s A New Career In A New Town. It’s a record made by a mind that’s still racing, still moving on. In May, there were reports that if the album’s sleeve was left exposed to sunlight, a whole galaxy would appear inside the black star. It’s not finished yet.

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RADIOHEAD
A MOON SHAPED POOL
Quick-released magnificence. See review on page 104.
ROD STEWART
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---

110 BEYONCÉ
Pop’s queen gets both personal and political on her latest offering.

104 RADIOHEAD
There’s been an explosion of gossip, theories and speculation surrounding the Oxford quintet’s ninth album. Here’s the definitive review.

113 JAKE BUGG
The Nottingham troubadour breaks out of his comfort zone on his eclectic third LP.
Ill but unnoticed in the shadows, Iggy Pop quietly takes a seat behind the guitar amps, and glugs on a bottle of water. The war-torn 69-year-old icon – hips demolished from years of hyperactive service, walking today like a lady who's lost the stiletto off one of her high heels – gathers his strength for one of the hot-ticket shows of his roller-coaster career.

This one-off UK appearance, backed by the superstar combo responsible for his recent album, Post Pop Depression, sold out in minutes. Team leader Josh Homme struts about the stage in a band-uniform red sparkly jacket, while his four bandmates, including two of his Queens Of The Stone Age sidemen, tune up. All look extra-pumped.

On the kit, Matt Helders from Arctic Monkeys suddenly thunders out a beat so recognisable and inherently galvanizing, the whole venue leaps as one from its seat. Iggy, in black with not much underneath, tears up to the mic, and a wave of euphoria rushes through the crowd. “Here comes Johnny Yen again!” he yowls, and so the title cut from 1977’s Lust For Life raises the curtain on what feels like one of the most celebratory rock shows the capital has ever seen.

Why so good? The sheer energy in the room is staggering – a smack-round-the-chops reminder, in our age of iPhone/selfie distractions, of the electricity a gig can generate. Iggy himself seems overwhelmed.

Monkey magic: Arctics drummer Matt Helders lends a hand.
EVEN TODAY, IGGY IS A MAGNET FOR SEXUAL FRISON. THE SIGHT OF HIM, PUSHING 70, TOPLESS, IS FABULOUSLY EMPOWERING.

Setlist

Lust For Life
Sister Midnight
American Valhalla Sixteen
In The Lobby
Some Weird Sin
Funtime Tonight Sunday
German Days Mass Production Nightclubbing Gardenia
The Passenger
China Girl Encore
Break Into Your Heart
Fall In Love With Me
Repo Man Baby
Chocolate Drops Paraguay Success

off Lust For Life and its predecessor The Idiot. With Bowie and their glam-era peer Lou Reed no longer with us, it feels a true privilege to see this master mining such a momentous phase in his catalogue, while also busting out commensurate new stuff.

Early on, the death-foreseeing, steel-pan-tootling American Valhalla lurches into the manic mid-'70s lust of Sixteen, and then Some Weird Sin, where Iggy fully upholds the song's deviant impulse: "Free the motherfucking hall," he barks, before eventually emerging from the front rows with a trickle of blood on his brow, and his trousers at half mast, red briefs showing.

Even today, Iggy is a magnet for sexual frisson. The sight of him, pushing 70, topless, his once ripped musculature sagging, yet still commanding awe, is fabulously empowering. Patrolling the stage's open wings, at one point he neatly sidesteps the embrace of a lady of roughly his own age, and makes a beeline for a 20-something instead.

After another sortie into the moshpit, he emerges gently purring, "No, let go of my pants, baby!" Back stage centre, another young woman darts up and smothers him with kisses. "I got a good job," he admits.

And what a tremendous fist of it he still makes, navigating songs of youthful derangement and mature refection with equal mastery, Deeper into the set, he tackles Mass Production, the industrially clanking finale to The Idiot, an album which stiffed bitterly at the time. No one leaves; everyone's mesmerised by its mechanical grind.

Iggy's zest as a performer has never flagged. Even as his records dipped in quality through the '80s and '90s, he was always reliably insane onstage. On the Stooges trail since '03, shows were marred only by iffy reunion material. Post Pop Depression was duly signposted as a spiritual continuance of Iggy's two LPs hatched in Berlin in 1977 with David Bowie; it has a twilight melancholy to it, facing mortality with weary ill-temper.

Here, its elegant croon-tunes are a perfect counter-balance to the bangers.

“Hey, turn the lights on in this dump,” he orders, eyes twinkling as the illustrious Albert Hall roars back its love to him. “Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, FUUUUCK!” he gibbers. The seated area on the Hall's floor quickly turns into a bear-pit, into which the late-sexagenarian star – the original stage diver – repeatedly hurls himself.

Paraguay concludes with the singer angrily fantasising about stuffing a laptop so far down a young techie’s throat, that they excrete it at the other end of their digestive system. Rarely has Iggy’s furious old-world perspective felt so relevant, so necessary. There’s been talk of retirement. After tonight, he may reconsider. ANDREW PERRY

You can watch Discovering: Iggy Pop whenever you want with Sky Arts on demand.

DISCOVERING: IGGY POP
Critics discuss the life, career and music of the legendary singer – whose band The Stooges were the progenitors of punk – in this fascinating documentary.
HEIR TO THE THRONE

The self-proclaimed new king of rap wows London with a stately performance.

“I am the purest form of hip-hop.” Pusha T, Brixton, 27 April 2016.
PUSHA T
ELECTRIC BRIXTON, LONDON,
WEDNESDAY, 27 APRIL, 2016
★★★★

Hip-hop is never starved of rappers laying claim to the crown. It’s precisely why Pusha T waited for the right moment before christening his magnificent 2015 album King Push – Darkest Before Dawn: The Prelude. Five hours before showcase at Electric Brixton, collapsed into his dressing room’s sofa and decked out in an Adidas tracksuit, hood up, with both feet resting on the coffee table, he’s friendly yet unequivocal while discussing rap royalty.

“Man, I’ve lived through so many different eras of different people having their time,” he begins in his soft Virginian accent. “I stuck to my guns. I feel that people have to give me the crown for authenticity and the crown for lyric-driven hip-hop. You have to give me the crown to create a wave before it was even in style to talk about drug culture. And for sophisticating it.”

Fast approaching 40 years old, Pusha’s currently enjoying the most fruitful time of his career as both a rapper and the President of Kanye West’s label, GOOD Music. He’s in a celebratory mood backstage, not just because tonight is sold out but also because his “SoundCloud scavenger” skills are paying dividends: his new signing, NYC rapper Desiigner, has just hit Number 1 in the States. Now both star and star-maker, Pusha’s come far since emerging under Pharrell Williams’s tutelage with his brother, Malice, as part of rap duo Clipse. In 2002 their debut, Lord Willin’, infiltrated the mainstream, eventually exchanging its drug-infested songs for a platinum plaque. After two more albums, Malice renounced narcotic philosophising to devote himself to religion; Pusha meanwhile only intensified it for his solo career. His emphatic stamp on rap has been to forensically examine the three Ps of drug dealing: paraphernalia, profit and paranoia.

Five hours later at 9.30pm, Pusha T appears onstage as a man transformed. He’s bracketed by two neon crosses proclaiming “Sin Will Find You Out” and the tracklist is now replaced with a lavish coat which is quickly shed to reveal a bulletproof vest. Despite the deafening volume, from the moment he begins Darkest Before Dawn’s Intro it’s hard to concentrate on anything but the intensity of his delivery. He doesn’t even appear to blink as he clinically executes M.F.T.R. and Keep Dealing. It’s exhilarating to behold and Electric Brixton’s crowd makes it known.

After 10 ice-blooded songs, he unexpectedly introduces Desiigner, possessing aforementioned US Number 1 single, Panda, to the stage. His rowdy mini-set impresses, not least for concluding with a stage dive, but it also accentuates his mentor’s individuality. Nothing confirms how Pusha has effectively snorted the hip-hop rulebook than when his dark minimalist solo cuts Numbers On The Boards and Untouchable are received like radio-friendly hits. These beats would expose a lesser talent, instead they only magnify his.

While Pusha includes his brilliant verses on Kanye West’s So Appalled and Runaway, plus Clipse’s Grindin’, it’s a shame he omits 40 Acres and Alone In Vegas – songs that make explicit the confessional nuances otherwise layered in his material. Still, the world can scratch away at his “cocaine superhero” veneer when the full King Push album arrives later this year. For now he’s preoccupied with the bigger picture. “I am pure hip-hop,” was his final message backstage. “That’s the only thing I want you to get from my show. I am the purest form of hip-hop. Certain things I cared about in rap have been lost. When I was young, rappers were the culture. I want you to be able to look at me and say, ‘He’s setting trends; he’s the almanac of fly.’”

Sadly, not a single punter chants “almanac of fly” tonight, but they do chant “King Push!” a lot. He may have placed the crown on his own head, but it is with the people’s blessing that it remains affixed tonight. GEORGE GARNER

“"I WANT YOU TO BE ABLE TO LOOK AT ME AND SAY, 'HE'S SETTING TRENDS; HE'S THE ALMANAC OF FLY.'" PUSHA T

Setlist

- Intro
- M.F.T.R
- So Appalled
- Pain
- Keep Dealing
- F.I.F.A
- Noseptogia
- M.P.A.
- Blocka
- Millions
- Panda – Designer
- Zombie Walk – Designer
- Freestyle 4 – Designer
- Freestyle 2 – Designer
- New God Flow
- Runway
- Retribution
- Grindin’
- Numbers On The Board
- Crutches, Crosses, Caskets
- Untouchable
- Encore
- Sunshine
- Don’t Like
- Mercy
- Move That Dope

High T (clockwise from top left): getting the party started; King Push has his own cross to bear; Brixton makes some noise.
According to some of the online gossip that has exploded around Radiohead's ninth album, it might be their last. It could also be Thom Yorke's break-up record. Rolling Stone has claimed it marks the birth of the "new artisanal" Radiohead (whatever that means); Time magazine reckons it's all about "precarity and the possibility of anything good being an illusion".

This torrent of speculation and theorising is, self-evidently, what happens when you suddenly put out your first LP in five years on a Sunday night at 7pm, while offering almost no commentary of your own. It cuts down on the workload, but inevitably generates so much more heat than light that a few statements of the bleeding obvious become almost revelatory.

This much – probably – is clear. A Moon Shaped Pool contains some songs that have been kicking around Radiohead's repertoire since as far back as 1995, hence the speculation about whether a clearing-out of the creative cupboards denotes some kind of last
word to the world. All that aside, it is a much more human record than 2011’s somewhat vexing The King Of Limbs, and much more musically rich: the kind of album, perhaps, that a lot of their fans might have wished for after 2007’s multi-textured In Rainbows.

It makes more use of Jonny Greenwood’s extra-curricular adventures in film scores and orchestral music than any of the albums that preceded it, and variously draws on the influence of English folk-rock, contemporary R&B, the now-standard left-field electronica, and the California singer-songwriter school circa 1972. Lyrics-wise, though it is streaked through with vague allusions to sadness and loss, not much is initially clear – aside from the fact that Thom Yorke obviously still thinks that narrative sense and clarity are among the many conventions he wants to escape. “Truth will mess you up,” he seems to sing on Ful Stop, a contention hammered home by Yorke repeating it 14 times.

Sometimes, then, as with just about everything they have put out from 2000’s Kid A onwards, A Moon Shaped Pool threatens to turn exasperating and anti-climactic. On first sight, the heart slightly sinks at those blank song titles: Daydreaming, Identikit, Present Tense. But more often than not, its authors’ musicality and drive to push their art wherever they want combine to work consummate wonders. In some places, this is a matter of jaw-dropping moments and musical touches – like the way that the skittering, prickly opening moments and musical touches – like the way that the skittering, prickly opening of Burn The Witch (which dates back to 2001) quixotically snaps into another passage so booming and portentous that it seems to be almost another song; or the beautifully incongruous guitar part on Desert Island Disk that sounds like it was copied over from Nick Drake’s Pink Moon.

For the most part, though, the excellence of what’s here is less a matter of particular details than the way they combine to produce long stretches of real magic. Decks Dark, which arrives three songs in, is a gorgeously sparse mixture of piano, bass, drums and choral vocals, which evokes deep angst (“And in your life, there comes a darkness/There’s a spacecraft blocking out the sky”) – in the midst of music so perfectly poised and melodic that its sadness is all the more affecting. Glass Eyes, which ends with the simple refrain “I feel this love turn cold” is cut from similar cloth, with a mixture of voice, piano and amazingly elegant strings that once again underlines the sense that in these hands, less really can be more.

And there is The Numbers: not only the most straightforward lyric here – a kind of green-political call to arms – but also the band’s most impressive collective performance. Its lazy groove suggests the lolloping pace of A Punch Up At A Wedding (from 2003’s Hail To The Thie), and the influence of the jazz-influenced folk maverick John Martyn. Once again, the orchestration, all serpentine, Eastern-ish touches, mixed up with stabbing menace – is just great. The whole thing stays stubbornly locked into much the same place, but is so good you want to go way beyond its allotted six minutes.

It all ends with True Love Waits, a song written over 20 years ago, a version of which – featuring just Yorke and his acoustic guitar – closed the 2001 live album I Might Be Wrong. Here, it’s built around one of this album’s signature sounds: echoing piano, which somehow evokes a state between waking and sleeping. The words, such as they are, of a piece with the broken syntax and opaque hints elsewhere (“I’ll drown my beliefs/To have your babies/I’ll dress like a niece/And wash your swollen feet”), but its refrain, by Yorke’s standards, is stark and simple: “Don’t leave/Don’t leave.”

In the absence of any word from Radiohead themselves, the fact that Yorke recently broke up with his partner of 23 years has been enough for Radiohead-watchers to seize on this latter song and use it as the over-riding theme here, and pronounce this album his heartbreak-heavy equivalent of Dylan’s Blood On The Tracks or Blur’s The Queen Is Dead. It might be; it might not be. Much more significant, surely, is what a piece of work this richly textured and musically adventurous says about him, and the other four people who created it.

A Moon Shaped Pool testifies to a point so simple that it often gets ignored. Twenty-five years ago, Radiohead were a quintet of callow young men who worried they sounded a bit too much like drooling fans of US indie-rock, who were on the verge of recording a breakthrough single that made it on to MTV’s Beavis and Butt-Head and threatened to kill their career before it had even begun. And here they are, once again in an orbit completely their own. The gossip, theories and speculation will bubble on but that, surely, is what matters. ★★★★ ★

JOHN HARRIS

Download: Daydreaming | True Love Waits | Burn The Witch | The Numbers
Sussex piano man returns vindicated and victorious.

**TOM ODELL**

**WRONG CROWD**

COLUMBIA, OUT 10 JUNE

In the end, Tom Odell had the final word. He was mocked on social media after his dad phoned a music paper to complain about a 0-out-of-10 review of his debut album Long Way Down, but it went on to sell over a million copies. To be fair, Odell was an easy fish to shoot: comfy upbringing, a graduate of the specialist BIMM music college, “discovered” by Lily Allen, major-label contract tucked under his arm before he was 20, Coldplay-lite piano ballads... he’d never survive, surely? Wrong Crowd reveals not just a survivor, but a songwriter only beginning to stretch his artistic legs. Avoiding the temptation of Long Way Down Pt 2, Wrong Crowd may still be driven by piano but it charts a new path for Odell. From the techno-pop of the opening title track to the tender closing gospel handclaps of Somehow, the 25-year-old digs into his childhood emotions – stressing these songs are exaggerations and extrapolations of those experiences – to find loss, tragedy, loneliness, failed love and dark uncertainty.

The album’s backbone is the kind of undulating piano pop that makes first single Magnetised thrillingly melodic. Along the way Odell crafts Concrete almost entirely out of percussion, somehow manages to musically resolve Gershwin-style Hollywood strings and Ronettes/Phil Spector drums on Silhouette, and even dips into pummelling rock for Daddy, a track imbued with the histrionic drama more associated with Muse.

It’s unlikely Odell’s father will need to make any Angry of Chichester phone calls this time around.

★★★★

**ANDY FYFE**

Download: Wrong Crowd | Magnetised | Still Getting Used To Being On My Own | Daddy

---

**Q&A Andy Fyfe talks to Tom Odell about his new album, his move to New York and that review...**

After Long Way Down got a 0-out-of-10 review from one magazine, do you now feel vindicated after a million sales?

“You have to take the highs and lows with a pinch of salt, although the two go hand in hand. Let’s just say I managed to leave all that stuff at work and slept OK at nights.”

So on a scale of 1-10, how pleased are you with Wrong Crowd?

“I’m really proud of it. I put so much work into it and feel content in that it really feels like mine, that it’s the album I desperately wanted to make. I still have a few problems with it, but they’re very minor.”

You took time off after two years constant touring and promoting and moved to New York. Was that to let off steam?

“I needed a break, to be honest. In the gaps between tours I was avoiding being on my own. I was desperately trying to keep it going, not because I was enjoying it but because it seemed terrifying to let it stop. But once I did stop I was a lot happier. I woke up in the morning and didn’t have to be anywhere, and went and bought a pint of milk and just had some normality. To write about anything real you have to be living in some degree of normality.”

Was it easy to write songs for this album?

“I just threw paint at the canvas and wrote about two hundred songs. I’d already written 21 songs in New York alone, but only one of them – Daddy – made the final album, and I nearly didn’t even put that on. Glad I did, though.”
Sensations on the global trance scene well before 2015’s We Are All We Need took them to the upper reaches of the album chart, UK production trio Above & Beyond are practised crowd-pleasers, their middle management dance anthems ideally suited to giant European dance festivals – or a taxing commute. This second album of orchestral reworkings of dancefloor favourites is clearly intended to show they can do “real” music, too. But the result is tasteful at best and mostly just bland, On My Way To Heaven's thumping techno replaced by glutinous jazz-funk and syrupy strings. Black Room Boy adds a touch of bluesy drama, but vocalist Zoë Johnston’s overly earnest delivery on songs such as No One On Earth has all the emotional resonance of an inspirational Facebook feed. ★★★

Download: Black Room Boy

**AMBER ARCADES**

**FAADING LINES**

HEAVENLY, OUT 3 JUNE

Dreamily melodic indie-pop from occasional human rights lawyer.

It’s not unusual for musicians to juggle being in a band with more reliable sources of income. Yet when she’s not performing as Amber Arcades, Dutch singer Annelotte de Graaf is a human rights lawyer who has worked at UN war crime tribunals. It’s impressive that she even had enough time to record an album, let alone one as accomplished as Fading Lines. Through a dreamy haze of cascading guitars and de Graaf’s airy vocals it gently floats between sigh-inducing, wistful pop (Constant’s Dream), swirling indie rock (Fading Lines and Right Now recall drummer Jackson Poliss’s day job in Real Estate) and cosmic retro-futurism (the pulsating, Neu!-indebted Turning Light). On this evidence, the law profession’s loss looks likely to be music’s gain. ★★★

Download: Come With Me | Fading Lines | Turning Light | Constant’s Dream

**AUGUSTINES**

**THIS IS YOUR LIFE**

CAROLINE, OUT 10 JUNE

Patchy third from NYC rabble-rousers.

There’s no doubting Augustines’ sincerity. Released in 2011, their debut Rise Ye Sunken Ships (they were called We Are Augustines for their first two records) acted as a form of electro-shock therapy for singer Billy McCarthy in the wake of his brother’s suicide. Two years on from its self-titled follow-up, a sense of desperation remains. “Rip my fucking clothes off, she said!” he roars on opener Are We Alive, while No Need To Explain exudes carpe diem earnestness thanks to McCarthy’s impassioned vocals. The trouble starts when they take their foot off the pedal. Skittering dance beats and limp arrangements prevent The Forgotten Way and May You Keep Well from being boogy (Gaslight) anthems, while a stripped-back Landmine isn’t half as explosive as it should be. ★★★

Download: Are We Alive | No Need To Explain | This Is Your Life

**BAND OF HORSES**

**WHY ARE YOU OK**

INTERSCOPE/AMERICAN, OUT 10 JUNE

Seattle dreamers’ sound revitalised.

Band Of Horses’ entry into the mainstream was seemingly marked with 2010’s Infinite Arms. It didn’t quite work out like that. Follow-up Mirage Rock was a step backwards and 2014 found them trying to buy time with a misguided acoustic album. For this fifth LP, leader Ben Bridwell recruited Grandaddy’s Jason Lytle as producer and Rick Rubin provides the sounding board role he had on Infinite Arms. Reassuringly, life is good once more. Dull Times/The Moon is a sprawling but understated epic; Whatever, Wherever suggests Surf’s Up-era Beach Boys; there’s whiplash call-and-response on In A Drawer; and some laugh-out-loud high notes on Solemn Oath. They’re back on track.

Download: Killer | Back Of Beyond | Black Magic

**WILL BUTLER**

**FRIDAY NIGHT**

MERGE, OUT 17 JUNE

Spirited live LP from Arcade Fire man.

“Boo the shit out of him – he needs it to perform,” says comedian Jo Firestone, charged with introducing the Arcade Fire’s Will Butler, and his audience enthusiastically comply. On the evidence of Friday Night, largely recorded in Chicago last June, Butler can take the joke. Bolstered by a band who hit the right balance between precision and exuberance, he hurtles through a commanding set, tracks from his album Policy – the abrasive yelp of Something’s Coming, for example – rubbing up against new songs, most strikingly the pomp-pop of Tell Me We’re All Right. Cracking with the background ambience of heckle and cheer, it’s a decent attempt at bottling live lighting, if a slightly self-satisfied one: “I came, I saw, I conquered – and then I went to bed.” ★★★

Download: Encore – Tell Me We’re All Right | Something’s Coming | Encore – Friday Night

**RUPERT HOWE**

A stereotypical cult act, Band Of Skulls have, nevertheless, always striven for the top, with big-league production and radio-hungry melodies behind their alt-grunge leanings. They’ve simply lacked that one killer tune to lift them into the top flight. For album four, they’ve tried to remedy that situation. Aided by Pixies producer Gil Norton, they’ve auditorily thrown everything at By Default. Subtly but significantly, Russel Marsden is foregrounded as lead singer, with Emma Richardson mostly providing harmony, or Dead Weather-style double-tracking. The killer tune, very feebly, is Killer, a terrific Royal Blood-ish commotion in sugar coating. Factor in the Zeppelin-style Black Magic, and Back Of Beyond’s Keef-and-Ronnie riffage, and here’s a package few classic-rocker could resist. ★★★

Download: Are We Alive | No Need To Explain | This Is Your Life

**CHRIS CATCHPOLE**

Augustines: “there’s no doubting their sincerity.”
Horrors frontman Faris Badwan and opera singer Rachel Zeffira take turns, track by track, to sing lead. They inhabit the same world: an imagined '60s, drifting into 2016 like dust particles in a sunbeam. Its gorgeous chamber-pop is painted from a muted colour palette, with Farfisa organs, Hollies/ Mamas harmonies and lyrics about weeping willows and late afternoons. Each member gets one up-tempo moment: for her the surf-pop of Be Careful Where You Park Your Car, for him the linear Krautrock of Standoff.

But there's something pointed in the fact that when T eardrops flurries upwards to its final top C, they still haven't met. Passing in the corridors, ships in the night.

★★★★

SIMON PRICE

Download: Standoff | Be Careful Where You Park Your Car | Chameleon Queen

THOMAS COHEN

BLOOM FOREVER

STOLEN/PIAS, OUT NOW

Ex-S.C.U.M singer exorcises his bereavement demons.

Two years on from his wife Peaches Geldof’s tragic passing, Cohen isn’t the most likely candidate for an uplifting folk-pop transformation. But here he resurfaces as a country-tinged singer-songwriter of poise and substance. This solo debut tackles life before and after Peaches head-on (it even takes its title from them, apart from the grammatical stocktaking. Couched among heart-wrenching tracks lie two upbeat pop nuggets, Hazy Shades evoking jaunty marital harmony, and New Morning Comes building via scatty piano chords to a glorious chorus of hard-won transcendence. These two should rightly establish Cohen for quality songwriting, not tittle-tattle.

★★★★

ANDREW PERRY

Download: Hazy Shades | Country Home | New Morning Comes

GALLANT

OLOGY

WARNERS, OUT NOW

West Coast soul man’s unsparring self-examination.

Generally used to denote a subject for academic study, Christopher Gallant’s “ology” has a more personal significance. The 24-year-old, LA-based singer has compared his debut album to offering his emotions up for dissection. Fortunately the results aren’t as gruesome as that sounds, though this is R&B at its most lovelorn, Gallant’s distinctive falsetto frequently reaching a pitch of near-desperation. Anchored by the dense, head-
The Kills – the duo of guitarist Jamie Hince and vocalist Alison Mosshart – have spent a decade and a half operating within a pretty tight stylistic register. The skeletal rhythms and heavy guitar distortion of their previous four albums have always been impeccably cool and frequently thrilling, but without ever really offering that killer moment to bust them out of their comfortable cult status. Ash & Ice is a clear attempt to change that.

Not only has it been five years in the making (due, in no small part, to Hince undergoing five separate hand surgeries), it’s also been mixed by Tom Elmhirst and Tchad Blake, whose credits between them include such commercial juggernauts as Adele, Amy Winehouse, The Black Keys and the Arctic Monkeys. Throw in a lavishly expensive-looking video for opening track Doing It To Death – a crisp and inventive fingersnap of R&B beats and careering guitars – and it seems pretty obvious that this time round the band are betting all their chips on black.

Listening, you can see why. Ash & Ice is surely the über-Kills record, a compendium of everything they’ve attempted to date but rendered here in the most fully developed sonic form possible. The dabblings with pop and R&B that have studded their last two albums – 2008’s Midnight Boom and 2011’s Blood Pressures – are pivotal here rather than just incidental (never more so than on the bright insistence of Let It Drop). The ballads, meanwhile, hit hard (particularly the keyboard-led starkness of That Love) but tracks such as the intoxicating and taut Bitter Fruit are the best songs the band have written. Ash & Ice isn’t really a reinvention but it does triumph as a bold restatement of just what makes The Kills unique.

★ ★ ★
JAMES OLDHAM

Download:
Doing It To Death | Let It Drop | That Love | Bitter Fruit

KNOCK ‘EM DEAD

Rock’n’roll duo set sights on the big time.

★ ★ ★
JAMES OLDHAM

Download:
Doing It To Death | Let It Drop | That Love | Bitter Fruit

GOLD PANDA
GOOD LUCK AND DO YOUR BEST

Essex electronica producer’s calming reflection on city life.

On his fourth full-length LP, Gold Panda manages to get the feel of an early morning run through a waking city across to someone who struggles to jog for the bus without passing out: the beats match hypothetical footfalls on an empty pavement, the feel of the clear cool air rings in the idiophonics, the textured soundscapes conjure images of weak sunlight glinting off skyscrapers. His obsession with Japan doesn’t show any sign of abating either, with the use of the shamisen lending several tracks a kabuki vibe. Panda’s records have always been preoccupied with travel and movement – but this one feels more grounded, less frantic and, despite that constant pulsing movement, more at home.

★ ★ ★
KATE SOLOMON

Download:
Chiba Nights | Autumn Fall | Time Eater

HIGHASAKITE
CAMP ECHO

Scandi indie-rockers tackle 9/11, Guantanamo Bay and God on third LP.

Back home in Norway, Highasakite’s second album, Silent Treatment, spent 94 weeks in the Top 40. Still angry, still morose, they’ve titled their third after a Guantanamo Bay detention camp and they’re taking on the world or, more specifically, American hegemony. As a result, My Name Is Liar is a tribute of sorts to George W Bush, while My Mind Is A Bad Neighborhood details US marines’ thoughts on bombing Iraq. Elsewhere, God is mulled over on Golden Ticket and the portentous Chernobyl speaks for itself. Crucially, for all the lyrical bleakness, it’s a sonically uplifting affair, with Ingrid Helene Håvik’s vocals adding warmth and enough hook-laden choruses to take them across the North Sea.

★ ★ ★
JOHN AIZLEWOOD

Download:
My Name Is Liar | Someone Who’ll Get It | God Don’t Leave Me
HARD DRINK

The personal meets the political on pop queen’s potent “visual” album.

BEYONCÉ LEMONADE
PARKWOOD/ COLUMBIA; OUT NOW

Just when Kanye West was thinking that his 2016 trophy for most talked-about record was in the post, along came Beyoncé to rain on his parade. Yes, West had Madison Square Garden for the launch of The Life Of Pablo, but there was an understated media-surfing confidence about using boxset-fetishists’ favourite HBO to unleash Beyoncé’s “visual album” Lemonade. More saliently, if the fascination of West’s record lay in his pathological self-obsession, his every thought stacked up for conspicuous consumption, Beyoncé’s sixth solo album plays a much subtler and stronger game.

It feels like a personal revelation, an act of emotional confession, telling a story of marital infidelity that seems to open up a seductive peephole into her life with Jay Z. Yet Lemonade isn’t just about the airless privileges and miseries of a luxury bedroom. True, false, or some artistic hinterland between, these songs of betrayal, pain and reconciliation set up a widening circle of resonances and echoes, especially in their visual form. What looks like a sophisticated version of “sources close to the couple say” gossip in fact comes wrapped around a quote from Malcolm X (“the most disrespected person in America is the black woman”), or the raw, startling words of Somali-British poet Warsan Shire. There are images of a New Orleans police car sinking into flood waters, or the griefing mothers of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown.

As a result, Lemonade hits hard. Beyoncé has chosen to portray herself like this, and those choices are bold, powerful and, at times, properly shocking. There’s not an awful lot more you can ask from a mainstream artist. What did I do wrong?/My bad.” She wants to snap, “Going through your call list/ I don’t want to lose my pride but I’m gonna fuck me up a bitch” on the slouchy dancehall sweetness of Hold Up (with writing credits for Vampire Weekend’s Ezra Koenig, Father John Misty and the Yeah Yeah Yeahs). It’s all wonderfully quotable (“Suck on my balls,” states the defiant middle-finger-happy Sorry), not that it would be easy to replicate such insouciant, liquid phrasing. Don’t Hurt Yourself, a collaboration with Jack White, releases all the howling blues furies of Pandora’s box into one song, the title latent threat, not concerned advice. It also casts God as a woman. After the woozy working women’s anthem of 6 Inch, starring The Weeknd, or the lightning-strike black-power call-to-arms of Formation (“I slay!”), there’s not much doubt about that.

The record’s eclectic electricity only cuts out once, on Daddy Lessons, which despite sounding a bit Sheryl Crow still makes powerful points about family and heritage, a Southern Gothic This Is The Ver. There’s a suspicion, too, that Lemonade might have been a more satisfying gesture towards the patriarchy if the wronged woman at the centre of these songs had walked out, rather than staying to emote through ghost-of-Nina-Simone piano ballad Sandcastles. As it is, it seems once the (still rare) female anger of Sorry and Don’t Hurt Yourself has been expressed, the status quo returns. James Blake appears on the electronic drizzle of Forward, while Love Drought is almost painfully abject: “What did I do wrong?/ Oh, I already asked that/My bad.”

Yet Lemonade remains a remarkable statement, a record that feels as if Beyoncé has something important to say, and will not – cannot – be stopped from saying it. Who would dare? She slays. ★★★★ VICTORIA SEGAL

Download: Hold Up | Sorry | Don’t Hurt Yourself | Forward
BARRY HYDE  
MALODY  
SIRENSPIRE, OUT 1 JUNE  
Futurehead frontman’s cathartic solo debut.  
Diagnosed with bipolar disorder in 2011, Barry Hyde has endured tough times of late. But it is the erstwhile Futureheads frontman’s mental crises – involving stays in Sunderland’s Cherry Knowle hospital, the collapse of his marriage and flirtations with mysticism – that have led him to this first solo LP. Initially envisaged as “a vampire musical”, it’s now a song cycle that ruminates on his condition and travels to an arch-pulp soundtrack of piano, strings and voice. Coming across like a North-East grafting of Brian Wilson and the Penguin Café Orchestra, there’s a restrained rawness and dread to dissociative vignettes such as Theme and Monster Again, though a cover of Prince’s Sometimes It Snows in April and the closing Thunder Song end the album on something nearing a hopeful note. ★★★☆☆  
IAN HARRISON  
Download: Theme | Monster Again | Sometimes It Snows in April

THE INVISIBLE  
PATIENCE  
NINJA TUNE, OUT 10 JUNE  
Life-affirming third album from South London experimentalists.  
Things haven’t gone quite to plan for this South London trio since a Mercury Prize nomination for their self-titled 2009 debut. The death of singer Dave Okumu’s mother was the inspiration for 2012’s reflective Rispah, while the guitarist’s onstage electrocution in Nigeria the same year would have been fatal but for the quick thinking of bandmate Tom Herbert. These experiences have focused their minds, as perhaps has being involved in the grand operation of appearing on Adele’s last two records. So Well is a sublime synth lullaby, while the Anna Calvi-assisted Love Me Again nods to the neo-soul of D’Angelo. As the album title suggests, the mastery of space and dynamics evident in Best Of Me and Memories must have taken years to perfect, but the results are spellbinding. ★★★☆☆  
PAUL AMODDY  
Download: So Well | Different | Memories | Best Of Me | Love Me Again

JC FLOWERS  
DRIVING EXCITEMENT AND THE PLEASURE OF OWNERSHIP  
ATP RECORDINGS, OUT 3 JUNE  
Sad sack indie-pop from London newcomers.  
Norwegian wunderkind Kyrré Garvell-Dahil maintains that his high-powered debut isn’t just tropical house, but considering that this booming genre is basically defined as “stuff that sounds like Kygo” that’s a tall order. You can see why his pleasant antidote to EDM bangers has made him ubiquitous. Midway between Coldplay and the Café Del Mar, Kygo’s unburdened dance music is benign and reassuring with a faint hint of melancholy, like an Instagram picture of a sunset. Singers including Tom Odell, John Legend and Foxes (only Intro is instrumental) are wrapped in feather-light piano, acoustic guitar, rustling percussion and Kygo’s twinkly synths motifs. The narrow emotional and musical range suggests Kygo doesn’t have unexplored depths, but he doesn’t need them. This will be many sun-dazed listeners’ feel-good hit of the summer. ★★★☆☆  
DORIAN LYNSEY  
Download: So Well | Different | Memories | Best Of Me | Love Me Again

LETS EAT GRANDMA  
I, GEMINI  
TRANSGRESSIVE, OUT 17 JUNE  
Double trouble from Norwich duo.  
Spilling from the conjoint imagination of teenagers Rosa Walton and Jenny Hollingworth, this wildly whimsical debut should be intolerable, like a Shampoo tribute night at the Overlook Hotel. Yet despite vocals that Joanna Newsom might find a bit manic-pixie, lyrics about butterscotch and starfish and a heavy hand on the recorder and ukulele, I, Gemini is enchanting. Friends since the age of four, their songs imply a Heavenly Creatures-style bond of secret languages and murderous jokes, an atmosphere fit for hatching the trip-hoppy Studio Ghibli pop of Eat Shiitake Mushrooms or the dark lulling of Deep Six Textbook. Rapunzel, meanwhile, suggests Paula Rego and The Raincoats as possible fairy godmothers. Yes, there’s a touch of the body-painted Glastonbury theatre troupe here, but Let’s Eat Grandma’s spell is binding. ★★★☆☆  
VICTORIA SEGAL  
Download: Deep Six Textbook | Eat Shiitake Mushrooms | Rapunzel

KYGO  
CLOUD NINE  
SONY, OUT NOW  
Tropical house superstar lays claim to the summer.  
Eleven years after swapping Harare for Hertfordshire, Kelvin Jones rose by Reddit, found himself played on Good Morning America and is hotly tipped. His debut album shows precisely what the fuss is about, although if the cliché-ridden We Are More is a yardstick rather than aberration, he may yet surrender to bland. Like a James Bay without the silly hat but with just as much charisma, a more chocolatey voice and trimmer melodies, Jones does the simple things and he does them well. For someone so naturally cautious, he’s at his best when he drops the troubadour shick and takes chances: the startling multi-voiced coda to Even Now; the delicious way in which Good Together twists itself around a simple but brutally effective hook; and the gripping In Your Place, which shows he’s more than a bog-standard lovesmith. ★★★☆☆  
JOHN AIZLEWOOD  
Download: In Your Place | Even Now | Good Together

The Invisible: “spellbinding.”
OLD-SCHOOL COOL

With interest in retro studio tech on the rise, Rupert Howe samples the history of Roland’s iconic TR-808 drum machine.

When Roland announced the arrival of the TR-808 drum machine in 1980, their slogan was “We design the future.” In fact, the 808 was soon superseded by high-end studio gear such as the LinnDrum, with the Japanese company dropping the unit in 1983. Yet its place in the history of dance music was already secure, thanks in large part to having provided the robotic funk that powered Afrika Bambaataa’s 1982 electro-rap classic Planet Rock.

Since then, the 808’s trademark sounds — huge bass drum, razor-sharp snare and clanking cowbell — have become as big an influence on hip-hop and electronic music as John Bonham’s Ludwig kit was on ‘70s rock.

In fact, so legendary is Roland’s black-and-orange plastic box that it’s even getting its own biopic. A forthcoming documentary from Planet Rock producer Arthur Baker, simply called 808, features endorsements from an array of celebrity devotees including Pharrell Williams, Ritchie Hawtin and Rick Rubin. The latter, against all scientific logic, even claims: “The rhythm of an 808 has its own internal groove.” Curious amateurs inspired to test his theory will need deep pockets, however. Back in the early ’80s, legend has it that TR-808s could be found in junk shops for £100. Today, a working unit can fetch £2500 on ebay. Such prices are partly the result of a renewed interest in vintage electronic instruments. The Horrors’ Tom Furse, for instance, has a studio set-up which includes a cabinet-size modular synthesizer, wood-panelled Prophet 5 keyboard and, naturally, a TR-808. There’s even a mini industry that has sprung up to supply these new analog aficionados. At one end of the scale, Doepfer MusikElektronik in Germany make Kraftwerk-quality modular systems with price tags to match; at the other, Korg’s LittleBits synth kit is a pocket-sized toy that sounds like Tangerine Dream played through a mobile phone. Neither is likely to achieve the legendary status of Roland’s creation. For one thing, their sounds could be emulated on a laptop in seconds. But without all the knobs, buttons and spaghetti of exposed wiring to play with, where would be the fun in that?

M CRAFT

BLOOD MOON
HEAVENLY, OUT 17 JUNE

Exemplary exploration on the theme of isolation.

Canberra-born London resident Martin “M” Craft created this remarkable album while living alone in a cabin on the edge of the Mojave Desert. Freed from the incessant roar of the city, he has made an album that only has one gear but is explored in wonderful, beautiful detail. A sense of almost otherworldly isolation fills the gentle, piano-centric Blood Moon, as completely as it does Nick Drake’s Pink Moon, but, happily for us all, there is a euphoric element to Craft’s loneliness underscoring Me And My Shadow or Afterglow. Chemical Trails is gorgeous enough to be the Eagles on a head-wrecking comedown, while Midnight is a Harold Budd-style exploration of deep (inner) space. A wonderful album that exists in its own little world. ★★★★

ROB FITZPATRICK

Download: Blood Moon | Me And My Shadow | Afterglow

MINOR VICTORIES

MINOR VICTORIES
PIAS, OUT 3 JUNE

Post-rock/shoegazing/indie superband.

Starting life as a noise project of Editors guitarist Justin Lockey, Minor Victories snowballed into a larger concern when Slowdive vocalist Rachel Goswell and Mogwai guitarist Stuart Braithwaite joined. Unsurprisingly, these parent bands are discernible in the dramatic, fine-tuned rockscapes of their debut: echoing Springsteen’s Dancing In The Dark, Scattered Ashes (Song For Richard) combines gauzey ethereality, muscle power and a nod to Phil Spector, while Higher Hopes starts slow and vaporous before resolving itself in an eruption of Mogwai-like bombast. The oddest moment has to be For You Always, where narky Mark Kozelek duets with Goswell on a song of an unfulfilled attraction of long ago, and the enduring affection that’s replaced it. Comically, the group never actually met while recording it. Imagine what they could do in the same room.

IAN HARRISON

Download: Scattered Ashes (Song For Richard) | Higher Hopes | For You Always

MITSKI

PUBERTY 2
DEAD OCEANS, OUT 17 JUNE

New York indie-rocker sends a message of hope amid despair.

The spaces in between being and not being content are where NYC alt-darling Mitski plays on her fourth album, the follow-up to last year’s breakout Bury Me At Makeout Creek. She’s mostly concerned with the sting in the tail of lost happiness. Her lyrics are folk-like in that they seem ancient yet new, delivered by a voice that’s both angelic and sharp as a whip-crack. Songs flit between hope and desolation – Your Best American Girl is a highlight, the chorus a raucous release from the sedate tension of its verses. Good luck keeping those eyes dry as Mitski chronicles the journey back from despair; by the end, at least, she’s on her way. ★★★★

KATE SOLOMON

Download: Your Best American Girl | Fireworks | My Body’s Made Of Crushed Little Stars

LAURA MVULA

THE DREAMING ROOM
RCA, OUT 17 JUNE

Second album from Birmingham’s experimental pop star.

“Write a song that can jig my foot,” Laura Mvula’s grandmother tells her on a track called Nan, a charming recording of a phone conversation. Mvula meets her brief on Overcome, a sacred-profane disco hymn featuring Nile Rodgers, but The Dreaming Room is more concerned with freeing mind and spirit than gratifying the body. It might have come out of a period of intense anxiety for Mvula, but it’s remarkably poised, perfectly calibrated vocal swells evoking the synthetic English pastoral of XTC (Angel) or Julia Holter’s experimental layering (People, featuring Wretch 32). It’s not a giant leap from Sing To The Moon, but there’s a fantastical, half-awake quality to these songs – somewhere between Sparky’s Magic Piano and Dorothy opening the door on Oz – that allows Mvula to jig the subconscious in expansive, intriguing style. ★★★★

VICTORIA SEGAL

Download: Overcome | Angel | Show Me Love

PETER, BJORN AND JOHN
BREAKING POINT
INGRID, OUT 10 JUNE

Morén, Yttling and Eriksson’s seventh.

It’s a decade old now, but the chirpy whistling of Young Folks may forever define Peter, Bjorn & John. They still know their way around a pretty tune, though, and they still understand the value of smart sweetness. Gimme Some (2011) attempted to shed their tweeness, but in the process it also shed some of what made them so endearing. This time around,
from the moment opener Dominos begins with a hearty, “And everybody goes...” followed by a guitar strum hijacked from George Michael’s Faith and a grossly distorted “…like dominoes”, their sense of impish fun has returned. Hard Sleep runs it close on the catchy front and, embracing rather than running away from their golden albatross, there’s even chirpy whistling on the title track.

JOHN AIZLEWOOD
Download: Dominos | Hard Sleep | Breakin’ Point

PHORIA
XNOVO, OUT 3 JUNE
Slow-moving soundscapers’ debut.

Not ones to be hurried, most of those who would become Phoria emerged from Salisbury in the last century, moved on to Southampton before coming to rest in Brighton in 2009. Since then, the least hardworking men in showbusiness have released three EPs, from which three songs including 2013’s Red, make the cut. No matter: Volition works. Merging James Blake’s spartan beats, Enya’s enigmatic warmth and the symphonic staleness of Sigur Rós, Phoria’s music moves at a glacial pace. These giant songs, rendered intimate by Trevor Howard’s despairing vocals and sky-high imagination, sweep all before them, not least on Loss, the sound of his self-titled 2012 debut, 22-year-old Jake Bugg has since been living the life his peers on Nottingham’s Clifton Estate can only dream about. However, despite recording Top 3 follow-up Shangri La in Malibu with Rick Rubin, dating supermodel Cara Delevingne and touring the US with Noel Gallagher, Bugg has always given the impression of being uncomfortable in the limelight.

Sulky in interviews, sullen in photographs and withdrawn onstage, his disengaged manner suggests that, far from enjoying his success, it has actually made him more miserable. Recorded between London, Malibu and Nottingham, On My One is the sound of Bugg finally getting it all off his chest. If that wasn’t enough to test the mettle even of magpie-minded millennials, Bitter Salt is a pulverising electro-rock stomp worthy of The Killers, and Ain’t No Rhyme is a funky, Beastie Boys-nodding hip-hop shuffle.

What binds these seemingly disparate musical elements together are the lyrics. “I’m just a poor boy from Nottingham/I had my dreams/But now they’re gone,” he laments on the title track, and the sense of teenage idealism having been crushed under the wheels of industry is inescapable throughout. “Tryna’ make it sound like the new phase/It’s only gonna be the same” he spits sarcastically in Gimme The Love, before snarling, “And now we’re gonna party my way!”

This determination to take responsibility for his career feels like a direct result of Noel Gallagher’s comment that he was “fucking heartbroken” to discover Bugg received a leg-up from professional songwriters including Iain Archer, formerly of Snow Patrol.

This time around, Bugg writes every track. It only makes the stand-out tunes even more impressive. Inspired by Ozzy Osbourne’s slow descent into madness during a three-month stay in Hollywood’s Le Parc Suite hotel in the ’70s, The Love We’re Hoping For is a spectral blues in the Crosby Stills & Nash mould. Livin’ Up Country is even better – the sort of pedal-steel assisted honky-tonk the Stones would have rattled off during their Exile On Main St pomp. Bugg’s solo mission doesn’t always work. Put Out The Fire feels like a tactical rehash of former glories, but his willingness to break free from his comfort zone speaks volumes for his integrity. Who knows, one day soon he may even smile.

PAUL MOODY
Download: Livin’ Up Country | The Love We’re Hoping For | Gimme The Love
Drake: “has earned the right to work on a larger scale.”

Drake’s new album arrives with a heavyweight thud. Weighing in at just over 80 minutes, this is another big statement from the Toronto rapper who has built a hip-hop empire on a manifesto of soulful vulnerability. Today, Drake is a superstar, but one with a sensitive side, the kind who still worries about the girl he left behind at the club even as he heads home with another in the leather-lined cocoon of his Bentley.

It’s a role with mass appeal, as recent chart successes show. And it’s no accident that Views not only has the running time of a movie, but plays out like one, too; a panoramic self-portrait illuminated by burnished synth tones and Noah “40” Shebib’s eerie, flickering production. It even has a loose, three-act structure, with the low-key opening given over to introspective reflection – opener Keep The Family Close worries over friendships and loyalty while Feel No Ways is a radiant yet wistful comedown from 2013’s love-struck hit Hold On, We’re Going Home.

The middle section boasts a tougher, truculent edge reminiscent of last year’s mixtape If You’re Reading This It’s Too Late. But it’s during the final sequence that everything clicks: One Dance’s Afro-electro bounce is the closest Drake’s come to fronting a club banger and Too Good’s sinuous R&B features a strikingly fresh Rihanna cameo.

There are moments the focus slips, notably Redemption’s slo-mo moan and the superfluous inclusion of Hotline Bling. But Drake has earned the right to work on a larger scale – and hip-hop is all the richer for it. ★★★★★

RUPERT HOWE

Download: Feel No Ways | One Dance | Too Good

GEMMA RAY
THE EXODUS SUITE
BRONZE RAT, OUT NOW

Essex noir-popper affected by Europe’s refugee misery.

Recorded in Berlin’s Candy Bomber studios, Gemma Ray’s sixth album comes with a naturally in-built desperation. The studio is housed within the city’s old Tempelhof airport and as The Exodus Suite was being created, thousands of Syrian refugees were being accommodated within the vast building. The circumstances lend an extra edge to song titles such as We Do War, Ifs & Buts and We Are All Wandering, the overriding feel one of claustrophobia. Her noir-pop, all reverb-drenched guitar, buzzy drums and pulsing keyboards, is most brilliantly caught in the snipping sinews of There Must Be More Than This, but if this record hints at great things, it just falls to grasp that greatness. Maybe it’s to do with the speed at which the album was recorded – at least one track, Acta Non Verba, appears to be improvised from start to end – but there’s an air around The Exodus Suite of something not quite being finished. ★★★

ANDY FYFE

Download: There Must Be More Than This | We Do War | Ifs & Buts

RECREATIONS
BABY BOOMERS 2
XTRA MILE, OUT NOW

Get Cape. Wear Cape. Fly man gets another name.

Having shed his Get Cape. Wear Cape. Fly alter-ego in 2014 and finally recovered from a horrific bout of the parasitic invasion schistosomiasis, Southend-on-Sea’s Sam Duckworth managed a couple of solo albums before assuming yet another disguise, this one loosely honouring US comedy Parks & Recreation. Self-produced and almost wholly self-played, it finds Duckworth entering his 30s slightly less political than he once was, although Lifestyle Concept Store laments the moment “punk frock iconography turns up in Primark down on Oxford Street”. Instead, hurtling towards grumpy old man status, he’s writing of his own generation of baby boomers where Londoners flee to the sea on Zones 9 & 10 and where dating apps offer only “one-night mishaps”. As ever though, he’s smart, he’s compassionate and he’s without malice. He’s turning himself into a perceptive chronicler of our times. ★★★

JOHN AIZLEWOOD

Download: Zones 9 & 10 | Lifestyle Concept Store | Outdoor Type

SIGHT TO BEHOLD

Look out! Canadian rap sensation is on a roll…

Drake: Views
YOUNG MONEY ENTERTAINMENT / CASH MONEY, OUT NOW

At last, nearly two years after it was announced, Drake’s new album arrives with a heavyweight thud. Weighing in at just over 80 minutes, this is another big statement from the Toronto rapper who has built a hip-hop empire on a manifesto of soulful vulnerability. Today, Drake is a superstar, but one with a sensitive side, the kind who still worries about the girl he left behind at the club even as he heads home with another in the leather-lined cocoon of his Bentley.

It’s a role with mass appeal, as recent chart successes show. And it’s no accident that Views not only has the running time of a movie, but plays out like one, too; a panoramic self-portrait illuminated by burnished synth tones and Noah “40” Shebib’s eerie, flickering production. It even has a loose, three-act structure, with the low-key opening given over to introspective reflection – opener Keep The Family Close worries over friendships and loyalty while Feel No Ways is a radiant yet wistful comedown from 2013’s love-struck hit Hold On, We’re Going Home.

The middle section boasts a tougher, truculent edge reminiscent of last year’s mixtape If You’re Reading This It’s Too Late. But it’s during the final sequence that everything clicks: One Dance’s Afro-electro bounce is the closest Drake’s come to fronting a club banger and Too Good’s sinuous R&B features a strikingly fresh Rihanna cameo.

There are moments the focus slips, notably Redemption’s slo-mo moan and the superfluous inclusion of Hotline Bling. But Drake has earned the right to work on a larger scale – and hip-hop is all the richer for it. ★★★★★

RUPERT HOWE

Download: Feel No Ways | One Dance | Too Good

GEMMA RAY
THE EXODUS SUITE
BRONZE RAT, OUT NOW

Essex noir-popper affected by Europe’s refugee misery.

Recorded in Berlin’s Candy Bomber studios, Gemma Ray’s sixth album comes with a naturally in-built desperation. The studio is housed within the city’s old Tempelhof airport and as The Exodus Suite was being created, thousands of Syrian refugees were being accommodated within the vast building. The circumstances lend an extra edge to song titles such as We Do War, Ifs & Buts and We Are All Wandering, the overriding feel one of claustrophobia. Her noir-pop, all reverb-drenched guitar, buzzy drums and pulsing keyboards, is most brilliantly caught in the snipping sinews of There Must Be More Than This, but if this record hints at great things, it just falls to grasp that greatness. Maybe it’s to do with the speed at which the album was recorded – at least one track, Acta Non Verba, appears to be improvised from start to end – but there’s an air around The Exodus Suite of something not quite being finished. ★★★

ANDY FYFE

Download: There Must Be More Than This | We Do War | Ifs & Buts

RECREATIONS
BABY BOOMERS 2
XTRA MILE, OUT NOW

Get Cape. Wear Cape. Fly man gets another name.

Having shed his Get Cape. Wear Cape. Fly alter-ego in 2014 and finally recovered from a horrific bout of the parasitic invasion schistosomiasis, Southend-on-Sea’s Sam Duckworth managed a couple of solo albums before assuming yet another disguise, this one loosely honouring US comedy Parks & Recreation. Self-produced and almost wholly self-played, it finds Duckworth entering his 30s slightly less political than he once was, although Lifestyle Concept Store laments the moment “punk frock iconography turns up in Primark down on Oxford Street”. Instead, hurtling towards grumpy old man status, he’s writing of his own generation of baby boomers where Londoners flee to the sea on Zones 9 & 10 and where dating apps offer only “one-night mishaps”. As ever though, he’s smart, he’s compassionate and he’s without malice. He’s turning himself into a perceptive chronicler of our times. ★★★

JOHN AIZLEWOOD

Download: Zones 9 & 10 | Lifestyle Concept Store | Outdoor Type
Paul Simon

Stranger to Stranger

VIRGIN EM, OUT JUNE

His 13th solo offering.

Since 1986’s Graceland, Paul Simon’s songs have been mostly downbeat yet sounding upbeat, a rare divorce of form from content. Classic New York in his nostalgia, over-thinking and take on life, with Art Garfunkel’s angelic voice no longer sugaring the pill, Simon turned to the sounds of Brazil, the Bayou and beyond to pleasure the ear habituated to the songwriter’s guitar or piano. Perfectly balanced, 2011’s So Beautiful Or So What was a triumph, which Stranger To Stranger continues, spotlighting a voice still bell-like at 74 and with plenty to say. Microtone guru Harry Partch’s musical exotica shape and colour thoughtful songs, the best being the LP’s bookends and title track, respectively satiric-apocalyptic, poetic-philosophic and romantic-rhapsodic. ★★★★

VICTORIA SEGAL

Download: The Werewolf | Insomniac’s Lullaby | Stranger To Stranger

Spring King

Tell Me If You Like To

ISLAND, OUT 10 JUNE

Manchester four-piece summon the spirit of the indie disco.

Everything comes back around. A few years ago, there was a clutch of bands making music that sounded straight out of 1992 even though its creators, Peace and Swim Deep among them, were too young to remember watching Going Live!. Now Spring King arrive, sounding so much like they’ve been zoomed in from a Camden dive in 2003 that you can almost smell the BO. The quartet’s debut contains elements of The Hives’ FM-punk, Jet’s swaggering rock’n’roll and The Von Bondies’ snarling riffs. When it works, it’s fantastic: City is the best of the lot, hurtling along like it’s got dynamite strapped to its leg; while just when you think you’ve got the bouncing Who Are You? worked out, a saxophone solo appears. It’s an enjoyable take on life, with Art Garfunkel’s angelic voice no longer sugaring the pill, Simon turned to the sounds of Brazil, the Bayou and beyond to pleasure the ear habituated to the songwriter’s guitar or piano. Perfectly balanced, 2011’s So Beautiful Or So What was a triumph, which Stranger To Stranger continues, spotlighting a voice still bell-like at 74 and with plenty to say. Microtone guru Harry Partch’s musical exotica shape and colour thoughtful songs, the best being the LP’s bookends and title track, respectively satiric-apocalyptic, poetic-philosophic and romantic-rhapsodic. ★★★★

PHIL MONGREDIEN

Download: Devil’s Daughter | No Guide (For Elisabeth) | Boyfriend | Dolphin’s Dream

Tourist

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MONDAY, OUT NOW

Even out of the limelight, award-winning house producer shines.

Thanks to his co-writing credit on Sam Smith’s Stay With Me, 27-year-old Londoner William Phillips was the proud owner of a Grammy before he’d even completed work on his debut album. Apparently inspired by a messy break-up, its mix of febrile house beats and abstract electronica is unlikely to win him another; in contrast to his one-time labelmates Disclosure, there are no conventional songs here. Yet the mix is full of voices (including that of his ex-girlfriend), all snipped up into fragments or rendered as blurred tones. The result lends his exquisite productions a haunting emotional resonance, especially on To Have You Back’s twitchy R&B and Run’s flutey house groove, while on the effervescent Too Late he even captures some of the melodic sparkle which won him that award. ★★★★★

RUPERT HOWE

Download: To Have You Back | Run | Too Late

Skepta

Konnichiwa

BOY BETTER KNOW, OUT NOW

Grime veteran’s near-flawless fourth.

The disappointing grime LP is a well-worn genre trope and Skepta has made one or two himself (principally 2011’s Don’t It Again) while attempting that difficult balancing act between concrete roots and commercial sheen. Konnichiwa is his fourth and comes on the back of the grime resurgence he’s spearheaded. The initial feeling is one of reassurance, but then the thrill sets in. Konnichiwa is not just hit-packed (old singles Shutdown and That’s Not Me are both included), but almost flawless. The Pharell collaboration Numbers has the bass-heavy beauty of vintage Neptunes, while Corn On The Curb and Crime Riddim show age hasn’t withered grime’s brutal beauty. ★★★★

STEVE YATES

Download: Corn On The Curb | Numbers | That’s Not Me | Shutdown

Sophia

As We Make Our Way

(UNKNOWN HARBOURS)

The Flowershop Recordings, Out Now

Ex-God Machine man keeps following his wandering star.

There are moments on Robin Proper-Sheppard’s sixth LP as Sophia where he stumbles worryingly close to rambling man cliché, brooding, bruised, speaking more in sadness than anger. Yet it’s testament to his songwriting chops that he manages to unearth newly affecting relics in these ruins of crumbled relationships. The stately anguish of Baby, Hold On cuts straight to Sophia’s emotional heart, but the prog slow-burn of You Say It’s Alright and the synth-pop edge of California mean it’s never quite clear which road P-S will stray down next. It also makes As We Make Our Way… a journey worth taking. ★★★★

VICTORIA SEGAL

Download: Resisting | California | You Say It’s Alright

Tennis Bafra

Bummer

NO METHOD, OUT NOW

A long-lost Sonic Youth album! Or is it?

To anybody even vaguely acquainted with Sonic Youth’s 1987-1990 imperial phase, the second album from Swedish four-piece Tennis Bafra might sound oddly familiar. Throughout its 42 minutes, there isn’t a single song fragment that couldn’t be a long-lost out-take from Sister, Daydream Nation or Goo. The thrilling trade-off between dissonance and melodic release, the distinctive guitar sound and the vocals so indebted to Thurston Moore that they suggest that Johan Eriksson is Swedish for “Alistair McGowan” are all omnipresent and correct. All that’s missing is a Kim Gordon souralike foil. Yet Bummer is far better than just a plagiaristic facsimile: what they’ve recreated here is Sonic Youth’s sound, rather than their actual songs, and some of their own compositions – Devil’s Daughter, No Guide (For Elisabeth) – are a match for their influences. Original it isn’t, then. What it is, though, is hugely enjoyable. ★★★★★

PHIL MONGREDIEN

Download: To Have You Back | Run | Too Late

Spring King

“sounding like they’ve been zoomed in from a Camden dive in 2003.”

Thanks to his co-writing credit on Sam Smith’s Stay With Me, 27-year-old Londoner William Phillips was the proud owner of a Grammy before he’d even completed work on his debut album. Apparently inspired by a messy break-up, its mix of febrile house beats and abstract electronica is unlikely to win him another; in contrast to his one-time labelmates Disclosure, there are no conventional songs here. Yet the mix is full of voices (including that of his ex-girlfriend), all snipped up into fragments or rendered as blurred tones. The result lends his exquisite productions a haunting emotional resonance, especially on To Have You Back’s twitchy R&B and Run’s flutey house groove, while on the effervescent Too Late he even captures some of the melodic sparkle which won him that award. ★★★★★

RUPERT HOWE

Download: To Have You Back | Run | Too Late

Thank you for your submission.
**ALLEN TOUSSAINT**

AMERICAN TUNES

NONESUCH, OUT 10 JUNE

A master’s farewell sweepingly surveys America’s musical century in 88 keys.

New Orleans composer Allen Toussaint passed away in November, but not before completing this wonderful album of covers showcasing his mastery of pianistic romance, witicism and flourish. Produced by Joe Henry, as was its 2009 predecessor The Bright Mississippi, either solo or with discreet backing and cameo singer Rhianon Giddens, Toussaint pays tribute to his influences, not least his ebony-and-ivory guru Professor Longhair (Henry Roeland “Roy” Byrd), including a beautifully wistful Mardi Gras In New Orleans. But amid classics by jazz/R&B aristos Duke Ellington, Earls Hines and King, Bills Evans and Strayhorn, Fats Waller and more, Toussaint’s own Southern Nights is a peak, finding dimensions beyond his 1975 original. ★★★★

**Download:** Southern Nights | Mardi Gras In New Orleans | Big Chief

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**TWIN PEAKS**

DOWN IN HEAVEN

COMMUNION/ CAROLINE INTERNATIONAL, OUT NOW

Summery rock’n’roll that’s dead behind the eyes.

Chicagostoners Twin Peaks come with their Lynchian namesake’s tendency towards nostalgia. Their mellow third record Down In Heaven wears its late-’60s influences on its sleeve, with Pet Sounds’ harmonies and Rolling Stones edge bathed in echoey, indie-folk production that’s straight out of the Kurt-Vile Book Of Millennial Stoner Rock. A disingenuous longing runs through the album; this band just cannot fathom why you would not want them even while they’re brattily giving you permission to move on (‘Walk To The One You Love’) or sneering that you don’t want them even while they’re brattily acting, We Are Scientists sometimes tend to leave their more appealing aspects behind them when in a recording studio, here, Keith Murray and Chris Cain have got it right, with the unlikely assistance of their former keyboardist Max Hart who gives them the proper production they’ve long deserved. Wisely, they’ve resisted the temptation to go for laughs and instead the effervescent Hold On and Too Late are all-out pop, but when they rock out on the majestic opener Buckle and the spiralling, dreamy We Need A Word they’re a new wave Electric Light Orchestra. The more humble Want For Nothing serves as a reminder of how they once meandered, but this is the sound of a band hitting their stride, albeit belatedly. ★★★

**Download:** Hold On | Too Late | Buckle | Waiting For You

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**KEVIN MORBY**

MODERN COUNTRY

KRAUTROCK, OUT OCT 6

A catalogue of enjoyable sun-drenched soundtracks, too – an exquisitely warm, olde-worlde soup in which to bathe one’s auditory senses.

The more humble Want For Nothing serves as a real restless troubadour’s third LP for laughs and instead the effervescent Hold On and Too Late are all-out pop, but when they rock out on the majestic opener Buckle and the spiralling, dreamy We Need A Word they’re a new wave Electric Light Orchestra. The more humble Want For Nothing serves as a reminder of how they once meandered, but this is the sound of a band hitting their stride, albeit belatedly. ★★★

**Download:** Hold On | Too Late | Buckle | Waiting For You

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**WHITE LUNG**

PARADISE

DOMINO, OUT NOW

Canadian punks get a little too calculated on album number four.

Despite the mentions of coyotes and vultures, the Texan troubadour’s third LP is far stranger than such boho-hobo trappings suggest. A cold state-of-the-nation address, it possesses a beauty that can slice to the bone: double-edged and deep.
James Blake:
“navigating trouble before finding deliverance.”

James Blake: The Colour in Anything
Polydor, Out Now
A Mercury Prize winner for 2013’s Overgrown, Enfield’s James Blake has kept heavy company since emerging in 2009, with Beyoncé, Kanye West and more recently co-producer Rick Rubin among his collaborators and admirers. But now another arguably more magical name is involved – kids’ book legend Sir Quentin Blake (no relation).

Sir Quentin’s provided the elegantly shabby cover art, where the overcoated singer appears standing on a hillock giving a Mona Lisa smile against a grey sky. It’s an aptly enigmatic image for Blake’s third album, reportedly inspired by a new love affair after a period of self-doubt, and which finds him navigating trouble before finding deliverance.

With diversions into retro-house and Joni Mitchell-like solo voice and piano, the soundtrack’s a not unfamiliar blend of post-dubstep atmospheres, piano minimalism and torchy soul/jazz crooning, his voice pitched high and judiciously chopped and manipulated. In parts, currents of detached, lovelorn anxiety predominate: the skunky R&B lament Put That Away And Talk To Me wonders, “where is my beautiful life… do you like it when your heroes lose?” Balance comes when the barriers come down, as with intimate churchy tone-poem Waves Know Shores and the sweetly melancholic closer Meet You In The Maze, where a Laurie Anderson-like virtual choir of Blakes admit, “music can’t be everything.”

These songs are Blake at his best and most sonically inventive. At 75 minutes-plus and 17 tracks, though, the whole presents a challenge at odds with the sensitivity of these romantic reveries. But such is its holistic nature, the effort’s worth it. ★★★

IAN HARRISON

Download: Put That Away And Talk To Me | Waves Know Shores | Meet You In The Maze

Whitney Light Upon The Lake Secretly Canadian, Out June
Chicago natives with impressive country-rock debut.

Max Kakacek and Julien Ehrlich – former members of sparky but inconsequential indie outfit Smith Westerns – reinvented themselves as Whitney back in 2014, their falsetto country-rock speed-dialing into a lineage reaching back to Neil Young and Townes Van Zandt. With so many obvious vintage signifiers to their sound, they could have ended up a hokey pastiche but their debut album sidesteps that trap by dint of its sheer emotional drag and effortless charm. The warm intensity and easy-rolling melodies of tracks such as No Woman and Golden Days are both peppered with radiant brass arrangements and radiate a lovelorn pull that’s near impossible to resist. Anyone who’s ever loved a record by Midlake or the Fleet Foxes should investigate immediately. ★★★★

JAMES OLDHAM

Download: No Woman | Golden Days | Dave’s Song

Young Magic Still Life Carpark, Out Now
Globally inclined duo tame wild side.

In the ’50s, American composer Les Baxter and Martin Denny created a faux-ethnic “exotica” which took listeners on a musical voyage without leaving their living rooms. Young Magic’s first two albums performed similar tricks with alternative electronica, though for their third, Indonesian-born singer Melati Malay has gone direct to the source, returning to Java to trace personal stories and record in a beach shack. Strange, then, that on reuniting with long-time collaborator Isaac Emmanuel in New York they’ve tidied up the frayed global weave of their early work, opting for a smoother, more cohesive sound which morphs tastefully from Lucien’s soft-focus electronic pop to the gamelan-tinged R&B of IWY and Held’s breezy jazz shuffle. For all its varied cultural influences, Still Life rarely strays out of the comfort zone. ★★★

IAN HARRISON

Download: Put That Away And Talk To Me | Waves Know Shores | Meet You In The Maze
No country has done more to redraw the borders of good taste than France. From the FM fantasies of Daft Punk and Phoenix to the gold-plated kitsch of MB3’s Junk, French artists have salvaged prog-rock keyboard solos, garish saxophones and sentimental vocoders from the dustbin of history. Presumably there is no French phrase for “guilty pleasures” because a single arched eyebrow would have ruined everything. It was their open-hearted sincerity that made pop’s junk-shop discards de rigueur and left their Anglo-Saxon contemporaries regretting their snobbery.

The process started with Air. In 1996, back when Daft Punk were still making jacking house, Nicolas Godin and Jean-Benoît Dunckel sashayed out of Versailles with an exquisite cocktail of space-age romance and bachelor-pad sophistication: a long-gone vision of the good life retooled for the ‘90s. Their early EPs and 1998 debut Moon Safari had a guileless charm and retro-futurist eccentricity that chill-out followers like Zero 7 couldn’t replicate. Moon Safari’s absurdly beautiful opening track La Femme D’Argent sounds like waking up in a five-star hotel on Mars. It’s to their credit, if their commercial detriment, that they didn’t stick to this lush

### Vive la Revolution

Three Gallic-themed tastemakers...

**Phoenix**

**United**

* Ahead of its time, Versailles foursome PhoeniX’s spotless soft-rock revivalism was seen by some as an arch hipster pose, but it became one of the themes of the decade. ★★★★★

**Daft Punk**

**Random Access Memories**

* Discovery’s giddy prog-disco was an amnesty for ‘70s cheese. This Grammy-winning, global chart-topping colossus went further still with sci-fi show tunes, jazz fusion and sleek LA coke-rock. ★★★★★

**Les Rythmes Digitales**

**Darkdancer**

* OK, Jacques Lu Cont (aka Stuart Price) was only pretending to be French but he reclaimed ‘80s glitz, right down to a Nik Kershaw guest spot, in a very Gallic way. ★★★★★
formula. Starting with 2001’s prog-tacular 10,000 Hz Legend, they have zigged and zagged with mixed results.

Twentyears is an imperfect document, omitting such career-highs as Electronic Performers, Mer Du Japon and the unimpeachably beautiful Casanova 70 while leaning very hard on Moon Safari and 2004’s Nigel Godrich-produced Talkie Walkie, the two albums casual fans are most likely to own already. But the first disc still demonstrates their breadth, from the obsessive synth-pop grind of Sexy Boy to the twinkling orientalism of Alone In Kyoto.

Playground Love, their collaboration with Phoenix’s Thomas Mars for Sofia Coppola’s The Virgin Suicides, is drowsily erotic. The jaunty Alpha Beta Gaga recalls the ‘60s exotica of Jean-Jacques Perrey. The barmy Beck-featuring Don’t Be Light bounces between jazz, easy listening and Hawkwind.

That’s not to say that Air have never settled for the merely pretty. The rarities disc delivers on its promise – these tracks really are hard to find and some are previously unreleased – but there’s an awful lot of pleasant mood music that was understandably relegated to B-sides and soundtracks. It sometimes takes an outsider to nudge them out of their comfort zone, like Jarvis Cocker and Charlotte Gainsbourg on eerie duet The Duelist or Françoise Hardy on the two-minute pop gem Au Fond Du Rêve Doré. The late composer David Whitaker, who arranged strings for The Rolling Stones and Nico, reworked Remember, one of Moon Safari’s slighter tracks, into a swooning Hollywood love theme.

Air have worked wonders with other people’s material as well. The super deluxe edition, which follows in July, adds a third disc of remixes for artists from Depeche Mode to long-forgotten trip-hoppers Crustation, all executed with such lavish care that you can understand why Air did so few, though their commanding take on David Bowie’s A Better Future makes you wish they’d done more.

Like many Best Ofs, Twentyears tells a story of diminishing returns. Air did their best work in their first decade and their last two studio albums, 2007’s Pocket Symphony and 2009’s Love 2, were very thin Air. But it leaves you feeling that a band with such an idiosyncratic imagination could yet manage to dazzle again. ★★★★

DORIAN LYNSEY
Download: Le Soleil Est Près De Moi | Playground Love | Cherry Blossom Girl | The Duelist | David Bowie – A Better Future (Remix By Air)
Grace Jones
Warm Leatherette
Island, out 27 June
First instalment of her Compass Point Trilogy.

Grace Jones’s first three albums suggested she was nothing more than a model with attitude. In 1980, for her fourth, her label Island despatched her to the Bahamas, home of Compass Point Studio and into the musical arms of a house band featuring Sly & Robbie. They also told her to stop thinking she was a songwriter. Her ice-queen vocals clicked with the Compass Point All Stars’ rock-hard reggae and Alex Sadkin’s space-age production and suddenly Jones was on the way to a career most idiosyncratic. This luxurious wallow includes the original album with its confrontational versions of Chrissie Hynde’s Private Life and Roxy Music’s Love Is The Drug, plus assorted B-sides (including her demented take on Joy Division’s She’s Lost Control). ★★★★

JohN Aizlewood
Download: Love Is The Drug | Private Life | She’s Lost Control | Bullshit

Paul McCartney
Pure McCartney
Virgin/Mercury, out 10 June
Bespoke 4CD, 67-track collection of post-Beatles hits and non-hits.

Pure McCartney differs from every other McCartney collection in that the man himself has handpicked every song. McCartney’s shrewd enough to know people want “the hits”, but also that unearthing more offbeat personal highlights from his 46-year solo career makes this more interesting than the average “best of”. So, yes, there’s Band On The Run, Jet, Silly Love Songs, Mull Of Kintyre and Pipes Of Peace. But there’s also Jenny Wren, a charming acoustic single probably nobody other than McCartney remembers; a wonderful “White Album” reject Junk, and the long-forgotten faux-funk Arrow Through Me, a very modest US hit in 1978 – but that’s barely scratching the surface. Pure McCartney is the ideal primer for anyone daunted by his many and variable solo records. ★★★★

Mark Blake
Download: Maybe I’m Amazed | Jet | Live And Let Die | Coming Up | Junk

Moby
Everything Is Wrong ★★★
Animal Rights ★★★
Play ★★★

US dance maverick on black plastic.

Taken together these three albums mark the point at which Moby emerged from the rave underground to become the scene’s first global pop star. Previously a techno-inspired upstart with a knack for MDMA-friendly hooks, in the late ’90s he radically expanded his musical range. Some of the production on 1995’s Everything Is Wrong has dated, but its best moments still fizz like a shaken Red Bull, especially the euphoric Feeling So Real. The following year’s Animal Rights was a misstep, its stodgy punk riffs now sounding more Limp Bizkit than Minor Threat. But 1999’s game-changing Play, with its subtle electronica and inspired reworkings of vintage blues and gospel recordings is easily the pick of these reissues.

Rupert Howe
Download: Feeling So Real | Porcelain | Natural Blues

My Morning Jacket
It Still Moves
ATO, out 24 June
Kentucky alt-country rockers’ revered third album, re-upholstered.

It Still Moves was the album on which My Morning Jacket’s sprawling psychedelia-meets-folk rock came into sharper focus. Superior to its two predecessors, it’s remained a high-water mark in their career ever since. This 13th-anniversary collection includes a remastered version of the 2003 album; three previously unreleased tracks, and vocalist Jim James’s original 10 acoustic demos. These demos offer insightful sketches of the work in progress, but also illustrate how much his bandmates also brought to the project. Even after their last album, 2015’s impeccable The Waterfall, the likes of Master Plan, One Big Holiday and Run Thru are still the molder of My Morning Jacket’s sound: those booming, reverb-heavy riffs, the keening pop melodies and Jim James’s voice floating over the top of it all, like a lonely ghost. ★★★★

Mark Blake
Download: Dancefloors | One Big Holiday | Run Thru | Steam Engine

Max Richter
Songs From Before
Deutsche Grammophon, out now
Minimalist composer’s feted moment.

Reissued, quite probably, on the back of a favourable remark from David Bowie, who was a fan, Songs From Before is composer Max Richter’s third album, from a decade back. It’s easy to see why Bowie liked it: the minimalist arrangements wouldn’t be out of place on an Eno record, whilst the tunes, he claimed, were good enough for him to want to write lyrics to. Like a lot of modern minimalism, Songs From Before is easy on the ear rather than painful, and pieces such as Sunlight and From The Rue Vultan leave its melancholy with tunefulness. There are bursts of short wave static, pieces which would fit onto soundtracks by the likes of

**MUST BUY**

**The essential reissues of the last few months**

**ASSOCIATES**
Sulk

The Dundee glam-poppers too-small clutch of albums showcased a career of innovation and brilliance. Sulk, from ’82, is the gilded lion of the litter. It’s also one of the strangest collection of weird songs ever to land on Top Of The Pops.

**MANIC STREET PREACHERS**
Everything Must Go

More than any Manics record before or since, 1996’s Everything Must Go – it just didn’t speak for the masses – it spoke to them. Now remastered in a 20th-anniversary boxset, it represents ’90s rock’s ultimate triumph over adversity.

**VARIOUS ARTISTS**
Close To The Noise Floor

This brilliant four-disc, 61-track boxset of pioneering Brit electronica covers the period 1975–1984. The songs flow in and out of each other, making a grey, wistful music that sounds more like its era than punk ever did.

**VARIOUS ARTISTS**
The Ladies Of Too Slow To Disco

How Do You Are: Recordings

The Too Slow To Disco series has rescued ‘70s soft rock and pop disco from the bargain bin of history. This superior selection stars Carly Simon, Rickie Lee Jones, Eve Sands, Leah Kunkel and more.
Listening to Pet Sounds now, a half century after its release, it’s almost impossible to imagine the impact this boldly adventurous album must have had at the time. Along with Revolver, which arrived less than three months later, it changed everything, redrawing the possibilities of pop music.

In America, where it struggled to Number 10, it was seen as a commercial dud and almost killed The Beach Boys’ career. In the more open-minded UK, it was instantly trumpeted as a classic and made Number 2, directly inspiring Sgt. Pepper. Famously, even the members of The Beach Boys themselves (save for an enthusiastic Carl Wilson) were resistant to what was essentially a Brian Wilson solo album – as underlined by the fact that the aching Caroline, No was issued as a single under his name.

This was the beginning of a more painterly approach to studio sound, which would directly influence everyone from The Beatles to Pink Floyd and Radiohead. Even now, its stunning, experimental orchestrations continue to thrill, from the plucked piano string introduction of the harpsichord-driven You Still Believe In Me to sighing ensemble piece Let’s Go Away For Awhile, and wilfully nutso inclusions of bicycle bells and barking dogs.

Apart from the inclusion of previously unreleased live recordings, this four-disc, 100 track-plus 50th-anniversary edition doesn’t differ wildly from the extensive reissues in 1997 and 2006, with its mono and stereo versions and out-takes. But as digital remastering improves, another layer of audio grime is removed to reveal Pet Sounds in all of its pristine glory.

★★★★

ROLO TOMASSI

THE BBC SESSIONS

HOLY ROAR, OUT NOW

Britain’s mathcore maestros retrace their steps.

With a line-up that’s completely changed over the years around them, Sheffield siblings James and Eva Spence have been tempering snarling rock with flourishes of prog and jazz for 11 years now. Bringing together raw radio sessions recorded at the BBC Maida Vale studios in reverse chronological order, this compilation charts their progress alongside bandmates old and new. It kicks off in screamy yet intricate fashion with Howl, Empiresk and Illuminaire from 2012 release Astraea, plus Old Mystics from the same era. A more frenzied selection follows, with tracks from 2008 debut album Hysterics, as well as Film Noir from their self-titled 2006 EP. Although undoubtedly detached from their newer, more lucid sound, it’s a full-bodied introduction to one of the nation’s most underrated experimental outfits. ★★★

HANNAH J DAVIES

Download: Howl | Illuminaire | I Love Turbulence

VARIOUS

CHRIS SULLIVAN PRESENTS THE WAG

HARMLESS, OUT TO JUNE

Flashback to the sounds Soho partied to in the ’80s.

Back before London’s West End was eviscerated by property developers, its back-streets housed some of the nation’s best nightclubs, not least the Wag on Wardour Street, a venue which, in the words of writer and early regular Robert Elms, was always “nicely grotty”. Opened in 1982 by Chris Sullivan, a Welsh former punk and founder of new romantic jazz combo Blue Rondo A La Turk, it was also a haven for a multi-racial, dressed-up crowd who partied until the early hours to a soundtrack of gritty ’70s funk, wild Latin grooves, jazz stompers and post-punk disco – all well represented on this skilfully curated four-disc set covering the pre-acid house era from 1983 to 1987.

As for the club itself, it closed in 2001, to be replaced by an Irish theme pub. ★★★★

RUPERT HOWE

Download: (Do The) Spanish Hustle – Fatback Band | Hard Work – John Handy | Genius – Quando Quango

ANIMAL SANCTUARY

Brian Wilson’s pop game-changer, 50 years on.

The Beach Boys themselves (save for an enthusiastic Carl Wilson) were resistant to what was essentially a Brian Wilson solo album – as underlined by the fact that the aching Caroline, No was issued as a single under his name.

This was the beginning of a more painterly approach to studio sound, which would directly influence everyone from The Beatles to Pink Floyd and Radiohead. Even now, its stunning, experimental orchestrations continue to thrill, from the plucked piano string introduction of the harpsichord-driven You Still Believe In Me to sighing ensemble piece Let’s Go Away For Awhile, and wilfully nutso inclusions of bicycle bells and barking dogs.

Apart from the inclusion of previously unreleased live recordings, this four-disc, 100 track-plus 50th-anniversary edition doesn’t differ wildly from the extensive reissues in 1997 and 2006, with its mono and stereo versions and out-takes. But as digital remastering improves, another layer of audio grime is removed to reveal Pet Sounds in all of its pristine glory. ★★★★★

TOM DOYLE

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

PURPLE PROSE

Congratulations, Q, on putting out such a brilliant Prince: Portrait Of A Genius celebration in the last issue. Indeed he was, but the way your writers reminded us (Dorian Lynskey: “His premature death is an unsuitably ugly end to a surreally beautiful career.”; Sylvia Patterson: “He is this uniquely inspirational, one-man musical parade who turned our often-troubling planet into a euphoric purple party.”) in such emotive, insightful ways, and without ever sounding mawkish, was genuinely affecting. While Adrian Deevoy’s hilarious summation – “Funny little fucker” – is a fitting final send-off and always bears repeating. Thank you.

Adrian Cooke, via Q Mail

TALKIN’ BOUT MY GENERATION

Dear Q, While I applaud Years & Years’ Olly Alexander’s defiantly gay stance (though not necessarily his musical output) especially in these relatively conservative times, for him to say that there were no out gay pop stars who spoke “openly, confidently and unapologetically about their sexuality” when he was a kid, is a very queer viewpoint to have. Olly might’ve had to flick back a few chapters, but any pop fan cruising for Fairy Godfathers, surely should’ve tripped over Holly Johnson, Jimmy Somerville, Boy George or Erasure’s latex-smothered, high-heel-stacked, rhinestone-chapped songbird Andy Bell?

Darren Sole, via Q Mail

LIGHT COMEDY

Dear Q, I’m sorry, but who did you think you were fooling with that supposed lightsaber the guy from Years & Years was brandishing in the last issue? Now, I’m no Star Wars geek (I’ve not even see The Force Awakens and I do have a girlfriend. Honest!), but even I could tell that was a bloody torch! You can get them down Robert Dyas, £9.99 a pop. No Jedi Knight worth his salt would use one. C’mon, Q, have a word with your props department.

Dan Holdsworth, Devizes

JOHNNY TOO BAD

So David Quantick [Q360 Reviews column] reckons the worst act in the world must be a “friendless, hitless, unloved, undated grey mulch of a cloud of nothingness”. Isn’t that solo Johnny Borrell before he had to resuscitate Razorlight?

Mr Harsh-but-True, via Q Mail
WIN! An American Elite Stratocaster, worth £1439

Q has teamed up with the good people at Fender to offer one reader the chance to win an amazing American Elite Stratocaster, worth £1439.

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This Month’s Caption Challenge
Here’s David Bowie deep in conversation with a train conductor. Send your entry – the funnier the better – including your address, to captioncomp@Qthemusic.com or on a postcard to the usual Q address. See below for more details. Closing date: 17 June 2016.

Q359 The Winning Caption:
“When I said clause in the reunion contract, I meant... oh never mind!”
David Salisbury from Bletchley came up with this beauty and wins a Fender American Elite Telecaster guitar. Nice work, David!

SPIRE MESSAGE

Q360

Thomas Jefferson started a grove of “Sugar Maple Trees” at his home in Monticello with 60 trees from the Flushing nursery of one William Prince.

Steve Loraine, Maidstone

Not quite, Steve... “Sugar Maple Tree” comes from the old Dakota word Chanhassen, which is the Minnesota town where Prince’s Paisley Park studios are located.

SPIRIT STALKER

Dear Q, I saw this spooky looking James from the Manics photoshopping your Blossoms ad “show-through” from the previous page, Jim. Very spooky, indeed...
NICKY WIRE (MANIC STREET PREACHERS)

“I HATE COOKING PROGRAMMES. IT’S RUINED SATURDAY MORNINGS.”

He’s no fan of TV chefs or birthday parties. Nicky Wire does enjoying reading Q and listening to his “shitty demos” though.

When was the last time you had a birthday party?
I’ve only ever had one, which was when I was about six or seven. I just kind of hated it. People came to my house, I cried, I made everyone switch the lights off and my mum and dad got rid of everyone. I’ve not had one since.

When was the last time you read Q?
I read every issue of Q. I still love music papers. Q took fucking forever to put us on the cover! The shit you chuck on the cover now after just one album. We had to sell fucking 10 million albums just to get a cover!

When was the last time you listened to the band’s early recordings?
I think that most people know that I am the dullard of the band, that is, the band’s biggest fan. I tend to listen to a lot of our stuff, even early shitty demos. The earliest recording we’ve got is me, James [Dean Bradfield] and the original bass player Flicker, and there’s songs called Anti-social, Love In A Make-Up Bag, Dying A Thousand Deaths, there’s a bit of politics and a lot of not being able to get a girlfriend. A lot of that.

When did you last show someone your Brit Awards?
My mum shows them to everyone that comes round, ’cos she’s got them. She keeps them on display. Every time the gas man comes round, or someone to fix something, she just happens to pull one down.

When was the last time you were star-struck?
When I saw Anthony Hopkins in the Hyatt Regency in Cologne. He was just sat there, staring out of this big window in silence with that deep Welsh melancholia that we all have. I wanted to go up to him but I was too star-struck to do so.

When did you last forget how to play one of your songs?
Probably about two weeks ago in Copenhagen, or Stockholm, and it was You’re Tender And You’re Tired. I forgot a couple of the notes. I glared at one of the session guys and pretended it was them, but deep down I knew the shame was all mine.

When was the last time you missed a flight?
Two years ago doing Benicàssim. It wasn’t my fault. Our tour manager mistimed his drive from Leicester and it turned into a nightmare because he had my passport. But I didn’t shout at anyone. I kept it inside.

When was the last time you baked a cake?
I think it was probably again when I was about six or seven years old. My mum used to let me mess around with pastry, then give me the cream to lick the bowl out. I hate cooking.

When was the last time you listened to the band’s early recordings?

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