

Overzicht van CD's gekocht in 2013.

Wall of Sound – Naturally 7



Naturally 7 zijn Roger Thomas, Warren Thomas, Rod Eldridge, Napoleon “Polo” Cummings, Dwight Stewart, Garfield Buckley en Armand “Hops” Hutton. De band wordt in 1999 opgericht in New York en brengt a capella muziek. Of toch niet. Naturally 7 is geen typische a capella band. Wat ze brengen omschrijven ze zelf als ‘vocal play’.

Met hun unieke stemgeluiden klinken ze als een volwaardige popband evenwel zonder één instrument op het podium. De gitaren, drums, piano, bas, zelfs trompetten en percussie komen uit de muzikale kelen van deze zeven heren.

In 2007 breekt Naturally 7 door als support act voor Michael Bublé. De wereld leert hun unieke stemgeluiden kennen. Chris Martin en Brian Eno worden eveneens gecharmeerd door hun muziek en nodigen de band in 2009 uit om samen te werken. In 2010 staat het zevental enkele keren met blueslegende BB King op het podium en zorgt Naturally 7 voor muzikaal vuurwerk tijdens de Olympische Spelen in Vancouver. In datzelfde jaar sluit Roger, Warren, Rod, Napoleon, Dwight, Garfield, en Armand aan bij ‘Crazy Love’-Tour van Michael Bublé. Op 27 mei vorig jaar verschijnt hun meest recente album ‘Wall of Sound’ met nummers zoals ‘In the Air Tonight’, ‘As Tears Go By’, ‘Broken Wings’, ‘More Than Words’ en ‘Bridge Over Troubled Water’.

(Night of the Proms - 2012)

Betoverende Efteling Melodieën – Efteling

Nieuwe release van 2012 ...



Wolven OST – Koen Buyse



Soundtrack bij de gelijknamige serie op VRT.

B-Sides: The Tracks That Got Away – Katie Melua

We are releasing a collection of Katie's B-Sides; originally found on the singles only, which haven't been available for some time now. This will be a digital (download) only release.

The album is called: B-Sides: The Tracks That Got Away

Release date: **3rd December 2012**

Track Listing:

Downstairs To The Sun
Turn To Tell
Shirt Of A Ghost
Deep Purple
Jack's Room
Anniversary Song
Stardust
Market Day In Guernica
Pictures On A Video Screen
Cry Baby Cry
Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds
Sometimes When I'm Dreaming
Fancy
Junk Mail
Straight To DVD
This Year's Love

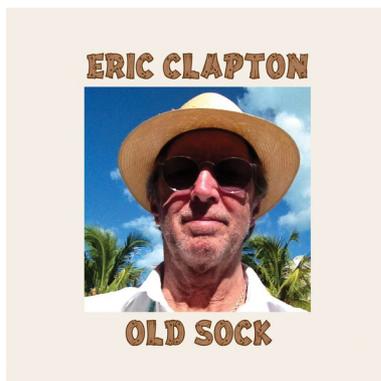


Katie
Melua

B-Sides

The
Tracks
That
Got
Away

Old Sock – Eric Clapton



Switching from a major to his own Bushbranch imprint on Gary Hoey's independent SurfDog label is, to the say least, a little unexpected from Eric Clapton, but now that he's reached the ripe old age of 67, the guitarist isn't so concerned with proving himself. On *Old Sock*, his 20th studio album, he sounds downright happy to be slowly dropping off of the mainstream radar, not bothering with any music that could conceivably be called pop, or even writing his own songs. Only two of the 12 songs on *Old Sock* are new, and he didn't write either himself; they're co-writes between his longtime right-hand man Doyle Bramhall

II, Nikki Costa, and Justin Stanley, and the vaguely propulsive blues-rock of "Gotta Get Over" and cheerful lite reggae bounce "Every Little Thing" fit neatly into the sunny nostalgia offered on the rest of the record. And "sunny" describes Clapton's sound, mood, and styles here, as he favors reggae over the blues, turning both Otis Redding's "Your One and Only Man" and Taj Mahal's "Further On Down the Road" into lilting bits of sunsplash, covering Peter Tosh's "Till Your Well Runs Dry," and getting so besotted with good cheer on "Every Little Thing" he brings in a bunch of kids to sing the closing chorus, a jarring addition that treads the border of good taste. When Clapton does dip into the blues, it's on a grandiose "Still Got the Blues," a tribute to the late (and somewhat underappreciated) British blues guitarist Gary Moore, so it's clear his heart now lies elsewhere, namely shuffling along with Paul McCartney to "All of Me" and knocking out Leadbelly's "Goodnight Irene" as a

front porch singalong. Clapton indulged in this shameless, warm-hearted celebration of the past on 2010's *Eric Clapton*, but that album bore all the hallmarks of a carefully considered major-label effort: the sound was immaculate and the song selection had the well-considered thrust of a history lesson. Here, he leaves all those classy trappings behind, picks up his guitar and plays a bunch of songs he likes, maybe even loves. It's not an especially compelling reason to make an album but it's not a bad one, either, and the same can be said about the experience of listening to *Old Sock*: it's a pleasurable way to while away the time.

Simple – Daan

We hadden het 'm nooit aangegeven, maar sinds zijn nieuwe cd '**Simple**' op de mat viel weten we het wel zeker: **Daan Stuyven**, frontman en songschrijver van de groep **Daan**, is een uitslover.

In plaats van zich een halve middag aan de keukentafel te nestelen met een fles wijn en een lijstje van alle songs die op zijn soloplaten en die van zijn groep **Dead Man Ray** stonden, daarin te schrappen tot er een beresterke *best of* overschiet en die lijst vervolgens te overhandigen aan zijn platenfirma ('Graag rond de eindejaarsfeesten in de winkels, jongens en meisjes') ging hij liever *all the way*. Lees: hij sommeerde toetsenist **Jeroen Swinnen**, geluidsman **Bert Van Roy**, drumster **Isolde Lasoen** en de Franse cellist **Jean-François Assy** naar een studio in de Ardennen, pelde er de krappe anorakjes en morsige debardeurs van vijftien van zijn beste songs, schreef er van puur enthousiasme twee nieuwe bij ('**Protocol**' en '**I'm What You Need**') en drapeerde vervolgens bloedmooie cello's, piano's, vibrafoons, trompetten en een occasionele gitaar om hun blote schouders. Het resultaat is tegelijk de meest stijlvolle en gesofisticeerde plaat uit zijn carrière.



Daan Stuyven is ook een onverbetterlijke grapjas. In *BobbeDaanland* rijmt 'exes' op 'Texas' én op 'cactus' (hier in een ongemeen swingende versie van '**Exes**'), beantwoordt Isolde Lasoen de onwelvoeglijke vraag '*How deep is your fjord?*' zonder verpinken met '*Is my fjord? Is my fjord?*' ('**Swedish Designer Drugs**') en staan de ontboezemingen van de vertellers in '**Wifebeater**' en '**Drink & Drive**' haaks op de fluwelen arrangementen. Al is het zeker niet al *goofiness* wat de klok slaat: '**A Single Thing**' (nog altijd met voorsprong de ontroerendste song van Dead Man Ray) is dankzij die strijkers nog mooier dan de versie op 'Cago'. Ook '**Neverland**' overtreft moeiteloos het origineel: 't is een tikje korter dan op 'Victory', maar de afgrond waar de verteller boven zweeft is nóg peillozer, de duisternis die 'm inkapselt nóg zwarter. Ook nieuweling 'I'm What You Need' haakt zich ondanks de tekstuele gemeenplaatsen ('*I'm a player and you are my toy*', duh!) moeiteloos vast in ons gehoor, en in de instrumentale opener 'Protocol' lokt Lasoen de luisteraar met haar sirenenzang naar de toppen van **Goldfrapps** 'Felt Mountain'. Twee voltreffers erbij.

Verder nog melden dat het een blij weerzien was met oude bekenden als '**Ashtray**' en '**Simple**' (allebei uit Daans solodebuut 'Profools') en dat het geestige '**Icon**' hier in twee versies voorbyschiet, in het Engels en het Frans ('**La gueule du loup**').

Slechts twee minpunten: in '**Housewife**' - van oorsprong een opzweepend synthesizerbombardement - misten we de, euh, opzweepende synthesizers (dan nog liever het fake strijkersarrangement van 'Death of a Housewife (Allegretto in C Minor)', en de vingervlugge cellopartij van Assy in '**Victory**' deed ons te veel denken aan de strijkkunsten van **Apocalyptica** - u weet wel: het langharig muziekschooltuig dat **Metallica** naspeelt op cello.

We hadden het 'm nooit aangegeven, maar dankzij 'Simple' zet Daan Stuyven groepen die twaalf bestaande songs bij elkaar kletsen en er doodleuk 'Best of' opzetten genadeloos in hun hemd. Al blijft hij ook een geweldige leperd. Met een doodgewone verzamelaar had hij de verkoop van zijn *back catalogue* ongetwijfeld een pootje gelicht; nu dwingt hij zijn oude én nieuwe fans allemaal richting platenzaak. *Victory!* Die hem overigens van harte is gegund.

Come Around Sundown – Kings of Leon



Kings of Leon have always acted like rock & roll royalty, even before *Only by the Night* went platinum in 12 different countries. What started off as good-natured posturing turned into the real deal in 2008, though, when “Sex on Fire” and “Use Somebody” helped redefine the Followill boys as the new champions of arena rock. Gone were the songs about transvestites and coked-up supermodels; in their place were Top 40 anthems that swung for the fences, armed with U2-sized guitar riffs and giant, lighter-hoisting choruses. Releasing that sort of album -- the kind that soccer moms blast in the family minivan -- has its downside, too, and Kings of Leon found themselves struggling to prove that they hadn't

forgotten about their older fans. All of this makes *Come Around Sundown* the most important album of the band's career, since it gives Kings of Leon a chance to choose which side of their audience they'd like to keep.

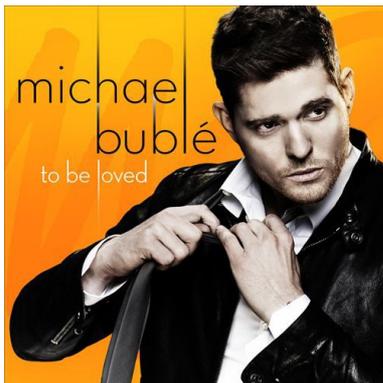
The answer? Well, none of these songs are as blatantly commercial as “Use Somebody,” but none have the artsy, Appalachia-meets-London charm of *Aha Shake Heartbreak*, either. After touring in support of *Only by the Night* for two years, the guys are acutely aware that loud, booming anthems are the best way to fill a stadium, and *Come Around Sundown* is engineered to sound as immense as possible. Nowhere is this more evident than in Caleb Followill's choruses, most of which seem to revolve around sustained high notes, and Matthew Followill's guitar lines, which split their time between moody textures and cyclic, reverb-heavy riffs. The few diversions from that template are some of the album's best moments -- “Mary” sweetens the band's sound with a little doo wop, and “Beach Side” focuses on casting a mood rather than creating a spectacle -- but they're too scattered to change the “go big or go home” mentality, and the twangy “Back Down South” (which soared during the band's mid-summer 2010 tour) never quite leaves the ground in its recorded version. All detours aside, this is super-sized, guitar-driven, modern rock pomp, a sort of *Only by the Night: The Sequel* aimed at those who prefer their KOL songs big and bombastic. Kings of Leon haven't gotten to the point where “Use Somebody” is their default setting, but it *has* become their benchmark, and *Come Around Sundown* attempts to replicate that song's success while still giving the middle finger to Top 40 radio. Sometimes, it works. Other times, Kings of Leon sound like they've flatlined their sound while trying to streamline their appeal.

Goodbye Yellow Brick Road – Elton John

Goodbye Yellow Brick Road was where Elton John's personality began to gather more attention than his music, as it topped the American charts for eight straight weeks. In many ways, the double album was a recap of all the styles and sounds that made John a star. Goodbye Yellow Brick Road is all over the map, beginning with the prog rock epic "Funeral for a Friend (Love Lies Bleeding)" and immediately careening into the balladry of "Candle in the Wind." For the rest of the album, John leaps between popcraft ("Bennie and the Jets"), ballads ("Goodbye Yellow Brick Road"), hard rock ("Saturday Night's Alright for Fighting"), novelties ("Jamaica Jerk-Off"), Bernie Taupin's literary pretensions ("The Ballad of Danny Bailey"), and everything in between. Though its diversity is impressive, the album doesn't hold together very well. Even so, its individual moments are spectacular and the glitzy, crowd-pleasing showmanship that fuels the album pretty much defines what made Elton John a superstar in the early '70s.



To Be Loved – Michael Bublé



Vocalist Michael Bublé's 2013 studio album, *To Be Loved*, is a slick and classy Bob Rock-produced affair that follows up his hit 2011 holiday album, *Christmas*, and once again showcases the Canadian crooner's take on swinging pop music. Most longtime Bublé fans will have a sense of what to expect here and, in that sense, should be quite pleased with the album. As with previous Bublé releases, *To Be Loved* finds the vocalist tackling a handful of American Popular Song standards and some more contemporary pop covers. This time around, Bublé even peppers the album with a few very vintage '60s soul-sounding numbers. To these ends, Bublé kicks things off with a brightly swinging take on "You Make Me Feel So Young," turns in a neo-soul version of the Bee Gees "To Love Somebody," and digs deep into Smokey Robinson's "Who's Lovin' You." Also adding flavor here are a few guest appearances including duets with actress Reese Witherspoon, Bryan Adams, and the Puppini Sisters. As with Bublé's last few albums, he gets some co-writing credits, with songs like the sunshine pop-sounding, "It's a Beautiful Day," and the atmospheric orchestral ballad, "I Got It Easy," registering as two of his best originals. Ultimately, *To Be Loved* isn't just a perfect showcase for Bublé's voice, it's also one of his most diverse and enjoyable albums.

Stay Gold – Ozark Henry

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Together Alone – Alex Hepburn



Mocht Frankie Miller nog actief zijn, hij had zijn landgenote Alex Hepburn al om een duet gevraagd. De Schotse zangeres toont op haar eerste album *Together Alone* klinkt immers het meeste als zichzelf in rauwe rhythm-'n-blues-songs als *Get Heavy*, waarin haar schuurpapieren stem een vergelijkbaar - maar wat eleganter - timbre heeft als die van Janis Joplin. Vanzelfsprekend wordt Hepburn vandaag door een slimme platenfirma naar voor geschoven als onderdeel van de retro-soulrevival.

Het cd-schijfje is een imitatie-vinyl, en in het rijtje mooie soulballads (single *Under* doet het in de Ultratop al erg goed) vindt Hepburn gemakkelijk een plaatsje tussen Amy

Winehouse zaliger en Adele. Ze staat ook in dat genre haar mannetje, al heb je soms het gevoel dat ze zich dan wat inhoudt. Onderhuids bliest dan het raspaard dat lonkt naar de volledige vrijheid.

Knuffelrock 2013 – Various Artists

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The Soundtrack of my Life – Bettles



Tijdens de blind auditions van “The Voice van Vlaanderen 2012” is het meteen raak voor Bert “BETTLES”

Voordeckers...

De beginwoorden van Neil Diamonds ‘Girl’ slaan in als een bom, Bert kiest voor Koen Wauters als coach, eindigt derde in de wedstrijd en pakt voorjaar 2013 uit met een plaat vol bewerkingen van nummers die een rol gespeeld hebben in zijn leven: "The Soundtrack Of My Life".

Zijn jazzy stemgeluid in de hartverwarmende versie van ‘If You Could Read My Mind’, gewaagde nummerkeuzes zoals ‘White Room’ van Cream en ‘Into My Arms’ van Nick

Cave. BETTES kruipt in de huid van Johnny Cash in ‘A Thing Called Love’, uit zijn muzikale liefde voor CCR in ‘Have You Ever Seen The Rain’ en toont zijn respect voor het unieke duo Paul Michiels en Jan Leyers in ‘Downtown’. BETTES zet een festival beslist in vuur en vlam met zijn stomende vertolking van ‘Touch Me’ van The Doors of een vrolijke versie van de klassieker ‘The Free Electric Band’.

1. Girl (Neil Diamond)
2. A thing called love (Johnny Cash)
3. Love is a stranger (Eurythmics)
4. Mainstreet (Bob Seger)
5. White room (Cream)
6. If you could read my mind (Gordon Lightfoot)
7. Downtown (Soulsister)
8. Have you ever seen the rain (CCR)
9. The sun ain't gonna shine anymore (The Walker Brothers)
10. The free electric band (Albert Hammond)
11. Into my arms (Nick Cave)
12. Touch me (The Doors)

Country Man – Robby Longo

“The Voice van Vlaanderen 2013”-finalist ...

Het langverwachte debuutalbum van Vlaanderens populairste ‘knuffelcowboy’ overtuigt van de eerste noot. De finalist van The Voice Van Vlaanderen die het tot de tweede plaats schopte met zijn cowboyboots, geeft met “Country Man” alvast de aftrap van een bloeiende carrière. De grootste countryhits van vroeger en nu door de heerlijke stem van Robby Longo, dit is een album om te koesteren!



Time – Rod Stewart



Once he became a superstar, Rod Stewart essentially gave up on songwriting because, let's face it, it's easier to play endless football and cavort with models. Every once in a while his muse returned, so he tried a little bit harder, such as in 1988 when he spun Bob Dylan's "Forever Young" into a song of his own, which wound up as the last hit single of his that he ever wrote. After that, he floated through the '90s before finding a comfortable groove as an old-fashioned crooner in the new millennium, spending no less than a full decade revisiting songs from the Great American Songbook. Authoring his memoir -- simply titled *Rod: The*

Autobiography -- jostled something within the old boy and

he picked up his guitar once again, writing songs about his past and present. Hearing that Stewart strapped on a guitar suggests that perhaps he's returned to the well-weathered folk-rock of his earliest solo albums and, certainly, parts of *Time* -- the 2013 album that has his greatest concentration of originals in a quarter century -- flirt with folk. Appropriately, these are the songs where Rod is besotted with the past, offering what amounts to a capsule synopsis of his memoir on "Can't Stop Me Now," revisiting his early pre-fame days as a busker on "Brighton Beach," then telling us all to "Love the life you live/Live the life you love," a sentiment that manages to not be the stickiest thing here thanks to a wealth of love songs to his third wife, Penny. Stewart's overwhelming devotion certainly seems sincere -- it's a common thread that ties *Time* to *Rod: The Autobiography*, which had a running theme of how he was saved by the love of a good woman -- but it's also quite drippy, not helped by his decision to thread in elements of the Vegas schmaltz of his *Great American Songbook* ("Picture in a Frame") within what's essentially his revival of the glassy adult contemporary pulse of his *Out of Order/Vagabond Heart* days. At this point, after years of synthesized soft rock and glad-handed standards, this is a reflection of who Rod Stewart is in 2013: he is still a crowd-pleaser, still a bit of a sap, ready to romanticize days gone by but wanting to sound modern. As such, *Time* winds up a bit muddled, swinging from moments of genuine sweetness toward sharp saccharine, but even with all its flaws it's nice to hear Stewart engaged again, both as a writer and a singer.

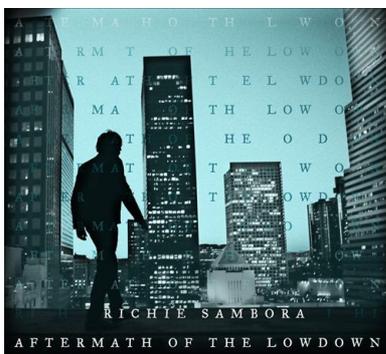
Ketevan – Katie Melua

Having reunited with her longtime mentor, former Wombles singer/songwriter Mike Batt, for her 2012 symphonic album, *Secret Symphony*, vocalist Katie Melua continues in an orchestral vein with her sixth studio album, 2013's *Ketevan*. Much like its predecessor, *Ketevan* is a languid, often cinematic-sounding album that builds upon Melua's talents as an interpreter of other people's material as well as her own songs. Having taken a creative detour to work with electronic producer William Orbit for 2010's *The House*, Melua once again returns to her roots as Batt's protégée. Raised in the Eastern European state of Georgia, Melua moved with her family to England when she was eight. Batt discovered the then 19-year-old Melua while she was attending the Brit School of Performing Arts in 2003. Subsequently, they have worked together on most of her albums. Taking its title from Melua's Georgian birth name, *Ketevan* features songs and arrangements from Batt, as well



as contributions from his son [Luke Batt](#). [Melua](#) also earns a handful of co-writing credits herself, as on the sinewy "Love Is a Silent Thief" and the '60s-influenced torch song "Chase Me," both of which beautifully showcase her crystalline technique and softly soulful style. As with other [Melua/Batt](#) productions, [Ketevan](#) also serves as a vehicle for [Batt](#) to flex his melodic skills as a songwriter and arranger. A veteran of '70s bubblegum pop, [Batt](#) has also experimented with rock opera and adult contemporary music, all of which he brings to bear on his work with [Melua](#). Here, he frames [Melua's](#) voice in grand, sweepingly romantic arrangements on songs like "Sailing Ships from Heaven" and "I Will Be There," which sound something like [Kate Bush](#) singing [Scott Walker](#) compositions. Similarly, the [Melua/Mike Batt/Luke Batt](#)-composed "Where Does the Ocean Go?" is an ambitious folk-inflected epic inspired by poet [Samuel Taylor Coleridge's](#) "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Fluid and utterly gorgeous, [Ketevan](#) is a unique and delicate vessel.

Aftermath of the Lowdown – [Richie Sambora](#)



With the title of [Aftermath of the Lowdown](#), his first solo album in 14 years, [Richie Sambora](#) could very well be referring to a bunch of personal problems that plagued him in the back half of the 2000s. Certainly, there is an element of confession running throughout [Aftermath of the Lowdown](#) but what's more striking about this, [Sambora's](#) third solo album, is that it is not only emotionally charged but also musically adventurous, the guitarist straying far from [Bon Jovi's](#) teased [Springsteen](#) tributes. [Sambora](#) dabbles in some modern sounds, explicitly evoking [Coldplay](#) on "Every Road Leads Home to You," but more often he suggests [Bowie](#) by way of [Aerosmith](#), retaining his bloozy leads but indulging in trashy glam stomps as frequently as he shows a fondness for lively pop that's artful and almost a little soulful. After beginning with a deluge of heavy guitars that fall within the realm of expectations, [Aftermath of the Lowdown](#) then takes several left turns, so much so that it's never entirely clear what kind of song will follow next. This sense of adventure explains the album's release on [Dangerbird Records](#) and it also makes the album something else entirely: a record that firmly establishes [Sambora's](#) artistic identity outside of [Bon Jovi](#).

As It Ever Was – [Absynthe Minded](#)

1. Space
2. End Of The Line
3. As It Ever Was
4. How Short A Time
5. Fighting Against Time
6. Little Rascal
7. Only Skin Deep
8. 24 7
9. You Will Be Mine
10. Picture In A Frame
11. Crosses
12. Get Around

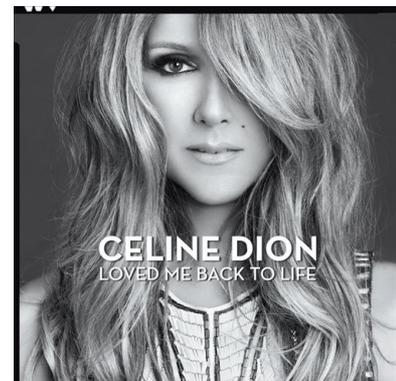
Lightning Bolt – Pearl Jam



Perhaps it's destined that a band who considered the Who and Neil Young idols would have no quarrel with middle age; nevertheless, the settled nature of Pearl Jam's *Lightning Bolt* comes as a bit of a jolt. Long ago, Pearl Jam opted out of the rat race, choosing to abandon MTV and album rock radio, ready to take any fans who came their way, and in a way, *Lightning Bolt* -- their tenth studio album, arriving 22 years after the first -- is a logical extension of that attitude, flirting with insouciance even at its loudest moments. Often, this record seems to ignore the very idea of immediacy; even when the tempos are rushed and the amplifiers are revved up, Pearl Jam never quite seem to be rocking with abandon, choosing to settle into comforting cacophony instead. Then again, nothing on *Lightning Bolt* -- not the wannabe breakneck rocker "Mind Your Manners," not the tightly coiled title track, not the glam stomp of "Let the Records Play" -- proceeds with any manner of urgency, with even the loudest rockers unveiled at a measured pace that allows plenty of space for solos by Mike McCready. The guitarist has room to roam and the band has a supple, natural interplay that only comes from almost 30 years of collaboration, but here more than ever, all the emotional notes seem to derive from Eddie Vedder, who is not only the chief songwriter/lyricist but a spiritual touchstone. Eying the milestone of 50, Vedder is very comfortable in his skin: he's no longer raging against the dying light or tilting at windmills, he's choosing his battles, knowing when to lie back so he can enjoy the rush of rock pushed out from his familiar, but never lazy, colleagues. This unhurriedness may seem to run counter to the rebellious spirit of rock & roll, but for all their insurrectionist acts, Pearl Jam weren't upstarts: they eagerly accepted the torch of arena rock when it was handed to them. On *Lightning Bolt*, they've grown into that classic rock mantle, accentuating the big riffs and bigger emotions, crafting songs without a worry as to whether they're hip or not and, most importantly, enjoying the deep-rooted, nervy arena rock that is uniquely their own.

Loved Me Back To Life – Céline Dion

Loved Me Back to Life is Celine Dion's first English-language album in seven years, but even that long gap of time doesn't tell the whole story. The last time Dion placed in the Billboard Top 40 was in 2002, when "A New Day Has Come" reached 22, and the last time she saw the Top 10 was in 1999, when "That's the Way It Is" reached number six. That's a roundabout way of saying that Dion's days as a formidable hitmaker are long gone, but the interesting thing about *Loved Me Back to Life* is how the French-Canadian diva has seized this opportunity to try a little bit everything, ranging from duets with neo-R&B stalwart Ne-Yo to covers of Janis Ian's "At Seventeen." Some of this piecemeal feel is due to the album's convoluted creation, growing from a simple studio re-creation of her on-going Vegas revue *Celine*, but then expanding to something a little more modern and something with a subtle but palpable R&B undercurrent. This soulful streak surfaces on the duets -- the aforementioned Ne-Yo collaboration "Incredible," plus Stevie Wonder sings his "Overjoyed" on a Tricky Stewart production -- but also in the stuttering rhythms of



"Somebody Loves Somebody," the slow-burning "Didn't Know Love," and the lively, new jack swing of "Save Your Soul" (strangely, the two *Babyface* productions -- "At Seventeen" and "Always Be Your Girl" -- are thoroughly colorless adult contemporary). Still, that suggests *Loved Me Back to Life* is a livelier, riskier album than it actually is; despite these deeper grooves and sparkling surfaces, there's no question this is a *Celine Dion* album, a record that flirts with new ideas but never hooks up. Yet, that flirtation counts for something: it means the album is livelier, less self-conscious, less beholden to the expected, and quick-footed enough to not seem mired in show biz glitz. That doesn't mean *Loved Me Back to Life* will reverse her *Billboard* chart trajectory -- there's nothing here that screams big hit -- but it's something better: the work of a diva who is comfortable in her own skin.

Gold Dust – Jonathan Jeremiah



Sans Attendre – Céline Dion

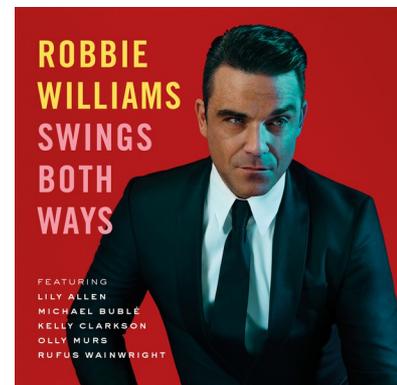
For her first album in five years, *Céline Dion* returns to her native French, cutting a moody collection called *Sans Attendre*. Perhaps it is the relatively diminished commercial expectations of a French-only album but there's an appealing small-scale aspect to *Sans Attendre*; certainly it is melodramatic but it is not garishly bombastic. The production is relatively restrained and, in turn, it gives plenty of space for *Dion* to grandstand on these tales of heartbreak, aging, and death. These aren't songs of love; they're songs of loss, and while there is certainly an affectation to *Dion*'s performance, there's also genuine pathos and the small scale of *Sans Attendre* makes for one of her better albums of recent memory.



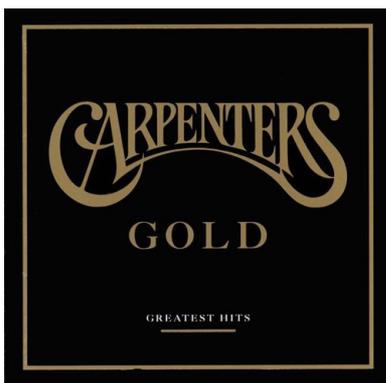
Duizend Spiegel – Marco Borsato



Swings Both Ways – Robbie Williams



Gold - 35th Anniversary Edition – Carpenters

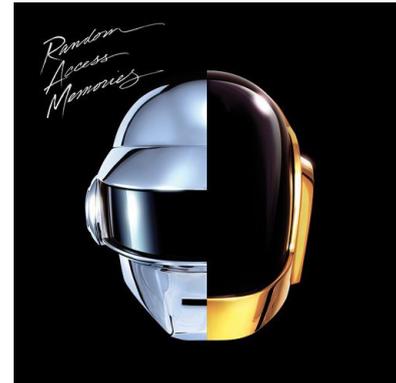


Usually the name Gold means "avoid this album." Many times small labels will buy the rights to some obscure songs by a big-name artist and then release it under that very title. But despite the name, this collection keeps the crap in the middle of the album, buried between the good stuff. In fact, this is a really good retrospective of this band. The dark and lonely ballads that Karen Carpenter sang take center stage, pushing brother Richard's pop contributions to the background. The album starts strong enough, featuring several of their biggest hits, including "Superstar," "Rainy Days and Mondays," "Goodbye to Love," and "It's Going to

Take Some Time." And the album ends with more big hits, such as "Top of the World," "(They Long to Be) Close to You," and "We've Only Just Begun"; even their Klaatu cover, "Calling Occupants of Interplanetary Craft," makes it. But the middle is a danger zone of filler, featuring forgettable tracks like "Please Mr. Postman" and its alikes. But this collection has the requisite amount of good Carpenters songs to make it worthwhile, and anyone who does not have these songs on album should give this a listen.

Random Access Memories – Daft Punk

When Daft Punk announced they were releasing a new album eight years after 2005's *Human After All*, fans were starved for new material. The *Tron: Legacy* score indulged the seminal dance duo's sci-fi fantasies but didn't offer much in the way of catchy songs, so when *Random Access Memories'* extensive publicity campaign featured tantalizing clips of a new single, "Get Lucky," their fan base exploded. But when the album finally arrived, that hugely hyped single was buried far down its track list, emphasizing that most of these songs are very much *not* like "Get Lucky" -- or a lot of the pair's previous music, at least on the surface. The album isn't much like 2010s EDM, either.



Instead, Daft Punk separate themselves from most contemporary electronic music and how it's made, enlisting some of their biggest influences to help them get the sounds they needed without samples. On *Homework's* "Teachers," they reverently name-checked a massive list of musicians and producers; here, they place themselves on equal footing with disco masterminds Giorgio Moroder and Nile Rodgers, referring to them as "collaborators." That could be self-aggrandizing, yet it's also strangely humble when they take a back seat to their co-stars, especially on one of RAM's definitive moments, "Giorgio by Moroder," where the producer shares his thoughts on making music with wild guitar and synth solos trailing behind him. Elsewhere, Daft Punk nod to their symbiotic relationship with indie on the lovely "Doin' It Right," which makes the most of Panda Bear's boyish vocals, and on the Julian Casablancas cameo "Instant Crush," which is only *slightly* more electronic than the Strokes' *Comedown Machine*. And of course, Pharrell Williams is the avatar of their dancefloor mastery on the sweaty disco of "Lose Yourself to Dance" as well as "Get Lucky," which is so suave that it couldn't help but be an instant classic, albeit a somewhat nostalgic one. Indeed, "memories" is the album's keyword: Daft Punk celebrate the late '70s and early '80s with lavish homages like "Give Life Back to Music" -- one of several terrific showcases for Rodgers -- and the spot-on soft rock of the Todd Edwards collaboration "Fragments of Time." More importantly, *Random Access Memories* taps into the wonder and excitement in that era's music. A particularly brilliant example is "Touch," where singer/songwriter Paul Williams conflates his work in *Phantom of the Paradise* and *The Muppet Movie* in the song's mystique, charm, and fragile yet unabashed emotions. Often, there's an almost gooey quality to the album; Daft Punk have never shied away from "uncool" influences or sentimentality, and both are on full display here. At first, it's hard to know what to make of all the *fromage*, but *Random Access Memories* reveals itself as the kind of grand, album rock statement that listeners of the '70s and '80s would have spent weeks or months dissecting and absorbing -- the ambition of Steely Dan, Alan Parsons, and Pink Floyd are as vital to the album as any of the duo's collaborators. For the casual Daft Punk fan, this album might be harder to love than "Get Lucky" hinted; it might be too nostalgic, too overblown, a shirking of the group's duty to rescue dance music from the Young Turks who cropped up in their absence. But *Random Access Memories* is also Daft Punk's most personal work, and richly rewarding for listeners willing to spend time with it.