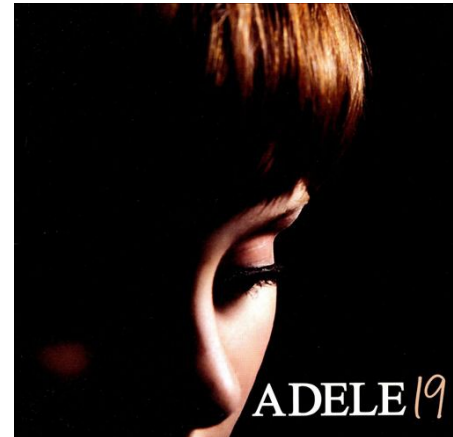


19 – Adele

With just a couple of cursory listens to the few tracks that popped up all over the Internet through 2007, comparisons were made between [Adele](#), the much-hyped brassy British songstress, and [Amy Winehouse](#), the...much-hyped brassy British songstress. However, after a solid listen to [19](#), the first full sampling by the up-and-coming [Adele](#), listeners are forced to throw all comparisons to the wind; [Adele](#) is simply too magical to compare her to anyone. Bluesy like it's no one's business yet voluptuously funky in a contemporary way, [Adele](#) rocks out [19](#) with a unique voice and gritty sound that dazzle endlessly. Synthesizing blues, jazz, folk, soul, and even electric pop, [Adele](#) mystifies through her mature songwriting skills and jaw-dropping arrangements. As the album opens with "Daydreamer," [Adele](#)'s illusionary instrument -- over minimal sounds -- engulfs the listener with a gorgeous feeling of awe and wonderment. On "Melt My Heart to Stone" and the bona fide hit "Chasing Pavements," [Adele](#) allows herself to soar over the strings and power her way through these incredible songs. The upbeat "Right as Rain" is just wonderful, with clear [Ashford & Simpson](#) influences speckled all over it in an upbeat set. Nearly all the tracks seem to have been nurtured to glory over months as labors of love. What's simply awesome on [19](#) is its capability to capture the listener through mere teasing; [Adele](#) doesn't shout for attention, and doesn't rely on anyone but herself to prove she's worth it, in the same vein as [Sara Bareilles](#), another heavily praised artist of 2007. The jazzy "Best for Last" is as retro as the tunes get on the album, yet it still manages to steer away from being boring or old-fashioned. The only awkwardness throughout all of [19](#) is the overly poppy galactic "Tired," which sounds as though it might have fallen off a [Lily Allen](#) track list, something that doesn't suit [Adele](#) as a musician. As far as artistic drive goes, it seems as though [Adele](#) is hoping to capitalize on the sounds of 2007 by borrowing elements of [Feist](#), [Regina Spektor](#), [Norah Jones](#), and even, yes, [Amy Winehouse](#); yet [Adele](#) blends all the artistic pizzazz of all those ladies into her own set of manipulative, glamorous wonder. Plus, as a terrific songwriter at merely 20 years of age, the Brit has so much room to expand her artistic dimensions into a full-fledged artist that it's no wonder most critics see her as the top new talent of 2008. This debut isn't an empty promise of a great career; [19](#) is a fleshed-out stunning portrayal of a young woman with a talent beyond her years who deserves immense credit for a unique style that never fails. A beyond stellar debut in both quality and originality.



Knuffelrock 2014 – Various Artists



The Great Scam – Admiral Freebee

Alle figuren die op ‘**The Great Scam**’ staan verzameld, hebben – zo beeld ik me in – hetzelfde leven achter de rug: ’t zijn welmenende loebassen die een keer te vaak op het hart zijn getrapt door te veel scharminkels van vrouwen, en nu aan de rand van de spoorweg aan de eigen sjarel snokken. Kortom: geen wereldschokkende verrassing voor een **Admiral Freebee**-plaat. Maar geen nieuws is, toch in dit geval, goed nieuws.

Was ‘**Do Your Duty**’ een trucker, hij liet een walrussnor staan en zich door zijn vrienden met ‘Biff’ aanspreken. Maar: niet onaardige dijenkletscountry. ‘**Poet’s Words**’ wil tussendoor iets te opzichtig aan onze hartsnaren plukken, maar ‘**No One Here**’ is dan weer een song die op repeat mag. Er zindert ook aldoor een aanstekelijk livesfeertje tussen de noten, en dat is geen toeval: Freebee is op zijn best als zijn jeansbroekpop ongewassen blijft. ‘The Great Scam’ is, dat u dat weet, overigens overduidelijk opgevat als meezingplaat.

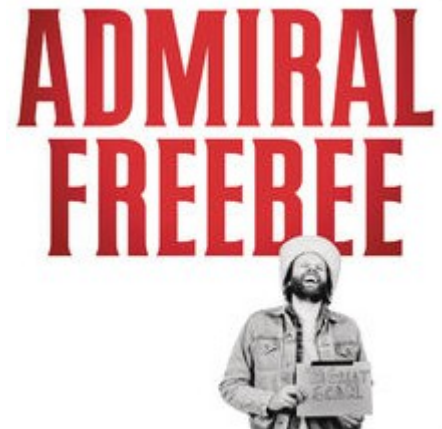
Single ‘**Nothing Else to Do**’ is een zomerbries, ontworpen om hier en daar door gewillige rokjes te ruisen, maar we luisteren liever nog eens naar ‘**Finding My Way Back to You**’, classic rock die de sinussen los trilt. Het is de song met **J Mascis** op gitaar, en tevens de eerste keer dat we bij werk van de **Dinosaur Jr.**-man aan **Slash** moeten denken.

Dan, halverwege deze recensie, komt ineens een anonieme, telefonische tip binnen: door een schrijlings over de hoorn gedrapeerde snuitlap brabbelt iemand dat we ‘nú naar ‘Kathleen’ van **Townes Van Zandt** moeten luisteren, en daarna naar ‘**I Don’t Wanna Feel Good Today**’ van Freebee’. En: ‘Dat daar iets aan de hand is!’ Blijkt dat beide songs inderdaad met min of meer dezelfde zinnen beginnen – maar big deal: iederéén laat zich toch inspireren?

Als we iets later tot de vaststelling komen dat ‘*If you wanna sharpen your knives on your own mistakes*’ uit ‘**The Land of Lack**’ niet alleen een mooie uitdrukking is, maar tevens één die **Tom Waits** tien jaar geleden al bedacht, gaat de *conspiracy theorist* in ons evenwel door het lint. Twee uur verder hangt onze muur vol met post-its en stukjes gespannen touw; na een korte Google-ronde vinden we ácht tekstuele vondsten en originele zinswendingen die onmiskenbaar gelicht zijn uit songs van muzikanten die – toeval komt niet in gezinsverpakkingen – tot de Freebee-invloedssfeer behoren. Onder meer **American Music Club**, **Howe Gelb** en **Leonard Cohen** mogen zich bestolen voelen.

Is dat het wat **Tom Van Laere** met *the great scam* bedoelde? De plaat als tekstpuzzel? ‘Kijk eens wat ik durf terwijl u nietsvermoedend naar mijn songs zit te luisteren!’ Zou kunnen, maar misschien koestert hij gewoon een kijk op samplen die postmoderner is dan we van hem hadden vermoed, en doet hij dat al vijf platen lang. Het beïnvloedt onze mening nauwelijks.

Sterker: de grootste truc is dat Admiral Freebee er al vijf platen zonder noemenswaardige evolutie in slaagt onze aandacht bij de ballen vast te houden. ‘The Great Scam’ is daarmee ook zijn vijfde goeie op rij. Kijk om u heen, en probeer tien andere muzikale Belgen te vinden die in de mainstream blijven met een gelijkaardig palmares. En: probeer die *tumbleweed* te ontwijken.



High Hopes – Bruce Springsteen



There isn't another [Bruce Springsteen](#) album like [High Hopes](#). Cobbled together from covers -- of other songwriters along with the Boss himself ("American Skin [41 Shots]" and "The Ghost of Tom Joad" are both revived) -- and outtakes from the last decade, [High Hopes](#) doesn't have the cohesion or gilded surfaces of [Wrecking Ball](#), but neither is it quite a clearinghouse of leftovers. Inspired in part by [Rage Against the Machine](#) guitarist [Tom Morello](#), who has proven to be a brother in arms to [Springsteen](#), as well as a substitute for [Steven Van Zandt](#) in [the E-Street Band](#), [High Hopes](#) certainly bears the proud stamp of [Morello](#), both in its workingman's politics and in its cinematic sound. Much of this record oscillates between the moody and militant, particularly in the politically charged numbers, which are often colored by percussive guitar squalls. Here, the [RATM](#) guitarist often resembles a [Nils Lofgren](#) stripped of blues or lyricism -- think of the gusts of noise on "Tunnel of Love" without any melodicism -- and that's a bracing change for [Springsteen](#), who has shown interest in atmospherics but usually when they're coming from keyboards, not six strings. Such sociological talk suggests [High Hopes](#) is nothing but rallying cries and downhearted laments, but the fascinating thing about this unkempt collection is how these protest songs and workingman's anthems are surrounded by intimate tunes, ranging from a cover of [the Saints'](#) latter-day "Just Like Fire Would" to a strangely soothing interpretation of [Suicide's](#) "Dream Baby Dream." [Morello](#) reportedly had as much to do with the inclusion of these covers as he did with the record's set pieces -- a stirring "The Ghost of Tom Joad," "American Skin" (which can't help but seem like a reference to the 2012 shooting of Trayvon Martin in this context), and "High Hopes," a [Tim Scott McConnell](#) song first recorded in the '90s -- and there's a certain sober passion that ties all these songs together but, in turn, it makes the rest of the record all the more compelling because the pieces simply don't fit. There's the rousing Gaelic rock of "This Is Your Sword," sounding a bit like a rejected closing credit theme for *The Wire*; "Down in the Hole," which rides the same train-track rhythm as "I'm on Fire;" the complicated waltz of "Hunter of Invisible Game," softer and stranger than much of the rest here; "Harry's Place," a bit of synthesized *Sopranos* noir that sounds much older than its ten years; and the absolutely glorious "Frankie Fell in Love," as open-hearted and romantic a song as [Springsteen](#) has ever written. Strictly speaking, these 12 songs don't cohere into a mood or narrative but after two decades of deliberate, purposeful albums, it's rather thrilling to hear [Springsteen](#) revel in a mess of contradictions.

Outlaw Gentlemen & Shady Ladies – Volbeat

In the two-and-half years since [Volbeat's](#) wildly successful [Beyond Hell/Above Heaven](#), they've traveled some miles, both literally and figuratively. They toured not only Europe but the U.S. and Canada in support for nearly a year, and parted ways with lead guitarist [Thomas Bredahl](#). A permanent replacement was found in [Robert Caggiano](#), formerly of [Anthrax](#), who was enlisted to produce [Outlaw Gentlemen & Shady Ladies](#) and play on select tracks. His addition has proved integral to the band's ever evolving sound. While the meld of various kinds of heavy metal, country, and rockabilly is still present here -- it is now undoubtedly the sound of [Volbeat](#) itself -- the lines between those styles are less pronounced. The sometimes jarring shift from rockabilly to thrash, from death metal to the [Johnny Cash](#)-country on previous albums, still happens, but here these sounds often coexist within



the same song. While it is accurate to say that this set is more accessible than anything [Volbeat](#) has attempted previously, it is also the most ambitious set of tracks they've committed to tape. The songwriting is tight, focused; there are lots of hooks, most of them heavy -- thanks, no doubt, to [Caggiano's](#) presence. His playing style is full of insanely catchy riffs, vamps, and intricate melodies. [Michael Tomas Poulsen's](#) vocals still blend [Elvis](#), [James Hetfield](#), and [Keith Caputo](#), but they growl less; they're expressive and natural sounding. Hard rock and vintage HM are the prevalent sounds here -- as heard on cuts like "Pearl Heart," the riff-arific "The Nameless One," and the aggressive attack in "The Hangman's Body Count." The slow, doomy chug of "Room 24" melds early [Black Sabbath](#) to death metal with [King Diamond](#) guesting on vocals. Another surprise is in the cover of [Young the Giant's](#) "My Body." Thanks to [Poulsen's](#) awesome singing and the blasting guitars, it could pass as a [Volbeat](#) anthem. An excellent example of all the band's styles converging at once is in "Black Bart," with death metal, [Gun Club](#)-style punk-country, and even [Thin Lizzy's](#) twin lead guitars. Former [Dubstar](#) and [Client](#) vocalist [Sarah Blackwood](#) sings with [Poulsen](#) on "Lonesome Rider," where slap bass rockabilly and hooky '80s metal commingle. [Thin Lizzy](#) also get channeled on the killer "The Sinner Is You," while Civil War-era banjo introduces the theatrical country meets death metal choogler "Doc Holliday." A high lonesome desert harmonica à la [Ennio Morricone](#) introduces closer "Our Loved Ones," which is as fine a melodic headbanger as anything the band's ever cut. While it is accurate to say that [Outlaw Gentlemen & Shady Ladies](#) is more accessible than anything [Volbeat](#) has attempted previously, it is also the most ambitious -- and arguably enjoyable -- set they've committed to tape.

By Absence of the Sun – Triggerfinger



De hoes zegt: aristocraten. **Ruben Block**, **Mario Goossens** en de **LangstePolle** die ik ken, zetelen in een adellijk blauw kitschpaleis. Overdag drinken ze trotse bellen cognac, en na zonsondergang, wanneer ze de dienstmeid een extra herpesblaasje bezorgen, rimpelen hun pakken. En voor het zingen de kerk uit, want een beetje kasteelheerklootzak doet niet aan conceptie beneden z'n stand.

Het is het puntje ironie dat **Triggerfinger** de afgelopen jaren toevoegde. 't Zijn neurotische straathonden, maar ze dragen kostuums en balzaalschoenen. Ze spelen door alle wereldgodsdiensten verboden gitaarrock, maar lokken beugelmeisjes naar hun concerten door een aardige **Lykke Li**-cover te *tingeltingelen*. Ze hebben een frontman die een jaar

van slag is als hij 'Bonita Avenue' van **Peter Buwalda** leest, maar op het podium met zijn heupen vrouwen tot katzwijn vouwt. U keek het de afgelopen jaren vergenoegd aan, en riep dat het fantastisch was. Ik ook.

Nu is er '**By Absence of the Sun**', een plaat veel minder goth dan haar titel. Het is de vierde, de tweede geproduceet door **Greg Gordon**, en er is wel wat veranderd. Méér groove en méér song. Melodieën die hun rijbewijs gehaald hebben. Goossens en Lange Polle met meer geil en goesting dan ooit. Plus: Ruben Block is vijf zangers geworden. In '**There Isn't Time**' en in de strofes van '**Big Hole**' doet hij een goeie **Dan Auerbach**. Of neem '**Off the Rack**': lome, poppy geilheid, en Block die zijn stem richting gevorderde player plooit.

'**Perfect Match**' kent u al: de single. 't Is een popding, eigenlijk, de op plaat gestanste versie van de minirok. 't Is het tweede nummer op de plaat, en het antwoordt perfect op opener '**Game**': stem en stonerrockriff dagen uit, en het spelletje waaraan vriendelijk tot deelname wordt verzocht is er geen met monopolygeld.

Triggerfinger is verpopt, maar niet verflauwd. Het blijft rock-'n-roll die zonder mantelpakje de wereld in *catwalkt*. '**Trail of Love**' had op de recentste van **QOTSA** gemogen, het refrein van de

titel song eigenlijk ook. De lichte overacting van vroeger zit in 'Black Panic'. En 'Halfway There' is sinister spul van sinistere boeven.

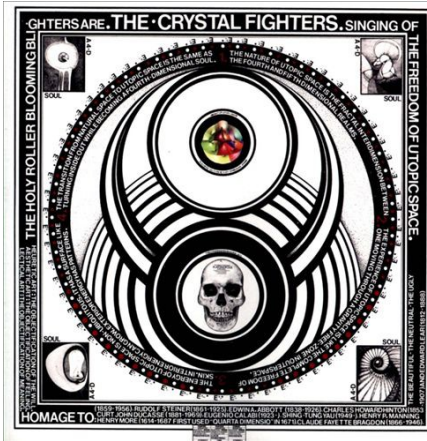
In de afsluiter worden overal in de stad de honden losgelaten. Er druipen klodders agressie langs hun muilen, ik hoor ze tuberculeus hoesten, en ze slissen iets in het hondenchinees. Triggerfinger zal gelukkig nooit 'Master of All Fears' worden.

Ghost Stories – Coldplay

Around the time [Coldplay's](#) sixth album, [Ghost Stories](#), was scheduled for release, lead singer [Chris Martin](#) announced he was divorcing his wife, the actress [Gwyneth Paltrow](#). In light of this news, it's hard not to see [Ghost Stories](#) as a breakup record, a romantic confessional written in the wake of a painful separation. Certainly, the album bristles with references to broken hearts and regrets, ruminations on how the past informs the present, its every song infused with an inescapable melancholy, but the album doesn't play like a deep wallow in sorrow. It is soft, even alluring, a soundtrack to a seduction, not a separation. Much of that feel comes from the record's smooth crawl forward, how it's never hurried and always accentuating its good side, but there's also a sense that [Martin](#), or the band in general, is anxious to hit a reset button, to slowly recede from the artiness of the [Eno](#)-encouraged excursions of the late 2000s and reconnect with the sweet, simple band responsible for [Parachutes](#). Like any attempt to revive the past, it's hard to reconcile that those were indeed different times. As majestic as they sounded in 2000, there was no denying [Coldplay](#) were a basic rock band, anchored on six strings and rarely finding textures outside of the confines of an amplifier. Fourteen years later, keyboards are at the group's foundation, a significant shift accentuated by their succumbing to a hallmark of modern production: they have a producer for every track. [Coldplay](#) may not be forceful, but within their incessant politeness they do have a distinctive personality, one that shines through whatever tricks individual producers bring to the table. Stars that they are, they can afford to enlist EDM sensation [Avicii](#) and R&B stalwart [Timbaland](#) to color individual tracks (they're responsible for "A Sky Full of Stars" and "True Love," respectively), giving [Ghost Stories](#) a fleet electronic facility that undercuts [Coldplay's](#) reputation as a dogmatic rock band without ever suggesting the group is adventurous. It's a nifty trick, a record that skirts any accusation of stodginess yet still feels as comforting as a warm bath, which is why [Ghost Stories](#) never feels heartbroken. Often, it feels like the lament of the sensitive soul who just had his heart broken but won't let his pain detract him from picking up that pretty girl at the end of the bar. This may seem a contradiction but it also suits a band like [Coldplay](#), who at this stage of their career quite clearly want to be everything to everybody. If your heart is shattered and you want to slide into self-pity, turn here. If you are feeling free and want to woo a new love, turn here. If you want to just enjoy every soft, supple turn a rock band could do, turn here. [Coldplay](#) are here for comfort, as [Ghost Stories](#) proves time and time again.



Cave Rave – Crystal Fighters

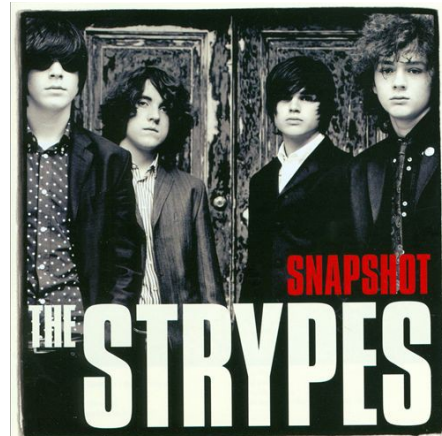


Three years after [Crystal Fighters](#) issued their debut, [Star of Love](#), a collision of eclectic, engaging, and occasionally unfocused sounds and ideas, the band returned with a streamlined sound and roster on [Cave Rave](#). The trio of [Sebastian Pringle](#), [Gilbert Vierich](#), and [Graham Dixon](#) smooth away the rough edges of their debut on this set, crafting a sound that is more focused even as it incorporates not just [Star of Love](#)'s Basque instrumentation but also Mexican and African elements into sunny, feel-good electro-pop that recalls [Yeasayer](#) and [Friendly Fires](#). While the firecracker former vocalist [Mimi](#) is missed, this new sound is just as engaging in a different way, particularly on its vibrant singles. Even without the beachy sound effects, "Wave" would effortlessly conjure visions of

summer and vacation, a feeling that extends to the tropical "You & I" and "LA Calling," which sounds a lot more exotic than the City of Angels usually does. All of these songs are a far cry from writing an album based on an unfinished opera written by one of the bandmembers' grandfathers, which [Crystal Fighters](#) did on [Star of Love](#), and all of them share a similar rousing mood, whether they lean more toward bittersweet or joyous. [Cave Rave](#) is not for those who have even a slight curmudgeonly streak, as the band urges listeners to "feel love inside your heart forevermore" on "Separator" and to "party 'til dawn like a new millennium" on "No Man." At times, the album borders on overdone, as on "Bridge of Bones," a massive power ballad that even includes a gospel choir, but overall, these songs are a fine reintroduction to a band that has worked hard to emphasize its strengths and come up with new ones.

Snapshot – The Strypes

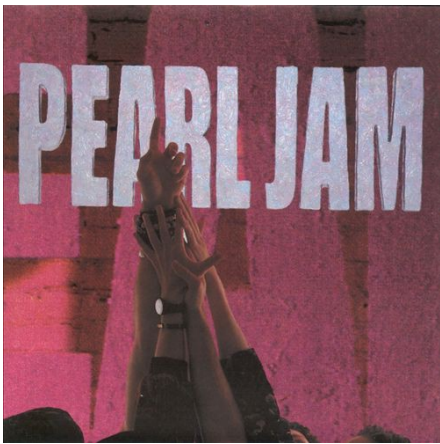
The [Strypes](#)' unlikely combination of teens playing music inspired by pub rock and the blues drew equal amounts of hype and goodwill from a constellation of rock stars. Before they even released their debut album, they'd signed to [Elton John](#)'s management company, toured with [the Arctic Monkeys](#), played with [Paul Weller](#), and counted [Roger Daltrey](#), [Dave Grohl](#), and [Noel Gallagher](#) as fan club members. This who's-who of support, and [Snapshot](#) itself, often feel like a last-ditch effort to get 21st century kids into rock instead of the rap, dance, and pop that captured their imagination (and the charts). Regardless of the hype and hopes surrounding the album, it reveals that [the Strypes](#) love and are well-versed in the sounds of British blues-rock, pub rock, and the blues musicians who started it all.



However, this studious nature is a blessing and a curse: the band knows how to make three chords crackle, and they're just as tight, if not tighter, than players with decades more practice -- witness [Ross Farrelly](#)'s harmonica solo on "Blue Collar Jane" or [Josh McClorey](#)'s guitar work on "What the People Don't See" and "Heart of the City" -- but they often feel too reverent of the past to give these songs the grit they need. This is especially true on their covers of [Bo Diddley](#)'s "You Can't Judge a Book by the Cover" and [Muddy Waters](#)' "Rollin' & Tumblin'," both of which feel more like enthusiastic simulations than genuine performances. This may be due in part to the production by [Chris Thomas](#) (who also worked with [the Beatles](#) and the [Sex Pistols](#)). While [Snapshot](#)'s sound isn't slick, it lacks in-the-red realness that makes [the Strypes](#)' more recent elders like [the Black Keys](#) and [Jack White](#) so riveting at their best. And while the band may shrug off [Beatles](#) comparisons, the boyish energy with which they bound through these songs evokes a particularly well-recorded night at the Cavern Club. Like the Fab Four during that time, [the Strypes](#) sound the most confident on

their own songs. There's a bit of a young [Liam Gallagher](#)'s sneer to [Farrelly](#)'s voice on "Perfect Storm" (no wonder the band recruited him after hearing his version of "Wonderwall"), and he sounds anything but timid despite his complaints on "Hometown Girls." Elsewhere, [the Strypes](#) flex their songwriting chops on "What a Shame," where tightly coiled verses unleash bashed-out choruses. [Snapshot](#) might be more successful at reassuring rock fans of a certain age that some young people find sounds three or four times older than them exciting than it is at getting kids excited about bluesy rock. Taken on its own terms, though, it's a solid debut from a band that can only benefit from more experience.

Ten – Pearl Jam



[Nirvana](#)'s [Nevermind](#) may have been the album that broke grunge and alternative rock into the mainstream, but there's no underestimating the role that [Pearl Jam](#)'s [Ten](#) played in keeping them there. [Nirvana](#)'s appeal may have been huge, but it wasn't universal; rock radio still viewed them as too raw and punky, and some hard rock fans dismissed them as weird misfits. In retrospect, it's easy to see why [Pearl Jam](#) clicked with a mass audience -- they weren't as metallic as [Alice in Chains](#) or [Soundgarden](#), and of Seattle's Big Four, their sound owed the greatest debt to classic rock. With its intricately arranged guitar textures and expansive harmonic vocabulary, [Ten](#) especially recalled [Jimi Hendrix](#) and [Led Zeppelin](#). But those touchstones might not have been immediately apparent, since -- aside from

[Mike McCready](#)'s [Clapton/Hendrix](#)-style leads -- every trace of blues influence has been completely stripped from the band's sound. Though they rock hard, [Pearl Jam](#) is too anti-star to swagger, too self-aware to puncture the album's air of gravity. [Pearl Jam](#) tackles weighty topics -- abortion, homelessness, childhood traumas, gun violence, rigorous introspection -- with an earnest zeal unmatched since mid-'80s [U2](#), whose anthemic sound they frequently strive for. Similarly, [Eddie Vedder](#)'s impressionistic lyrics often make their greatest impact through the passionate commitment of his delivery rather than concrete meaning. His voice had a highly distinctive timbre that perfectly fit the album's warm, rich sound, and that's part of the key -- no matter how cathartic [Ten](#)'s tersely titled songs got, they were never abrasive enough to affect the album's accessibility. [Ten](#) also benefited from a long gestation period, during which the band honed the material into this tightly focused form; the result is a flawlessly crafted hard rock masterpiece.

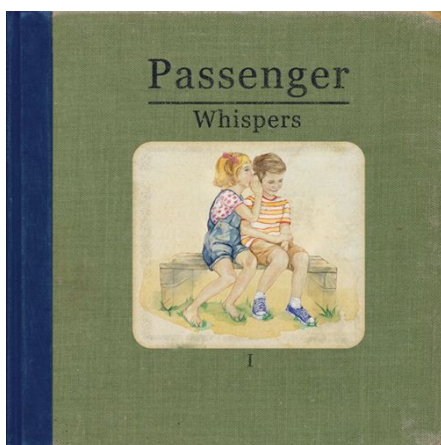
Mechanical Bull – Kings of Leon

[Kings of Leon](#) hit it big in 2008 with their album [Only by the Night](#) and the accompanying one-two punch of singles "Sex on Fire" and "Use Somebody." The success of those singles propelled them into the upper echelon of arena rock bands and found them at a crossroads between the post-punk-influenced sound of their previous albums and the anthemic, [U2](#)-influenced approach that they'd begun to explore on [Only by the Night](#). Perhaps not surprisingly, the band's follow-up, 2010's [Come Around Sundown](#), while by no means a disappointment, seemed strained, as if the band was trying too hard to balance its early sound with its later hits, all while digging even deeper into its Southern roots. Which is partly why the band's sixth studio album, 2013's [Mechanical Bull](#), comes as sweet relief. While still retaining [Kings of Leon](#)'s penchant toward bombastic, hooky choruses and driving guitars, [Mechanical Bull](#) feels breezier and less labored than [Come Around](#)



[Sundown](#). Even the title feels like a cheeky double entendre that references both the band's Southern upbringing (lead singer [Caleb Followill](#) and his bandmate siblings were raised in Oklahoma and Tennessee) and the gear-like machinations of the rock industry. Front-loading an album with the leadoff single can often be a sign of weakness in a release, but not in this case. Kicking off with the passionate "Supersoaker" merely sets the tone for this album. In fact, two of the best cuts come midway through, with the yearning "Wait for Me" and the bluesy, [Primal Scream-esque](#) "Family Tree." Elsewhere, "Rock City" brings a heavy [Mott the Hoople](#) vibe to the fore and the raging "Coming Back Again" finds the band delving into [War-era U2](#). Having grabbed their career by the horns with [Mechanical Bull](#), it's clear that [Kings of Leon](#) aren't letting it get away from them anytime soon.

Whispers – Passenger



British singer/songwriter [Mike Rosenberg](#), otherwise known as [Passenger](#), continues exploring the broader sonic palette he developed on 2012's [All the Little Lights](#) with his sixth studio album, 2014's [Whispers](#). As he did last time, [Rosenberg](#) once again teamed up with [All the Little Lights](#) producer [Chris Vallejo](#). Together, they deliver a batch of evocative acoustic folk and indie pop songs that are often expanded with orchestral flourishes. That said, [Rosenberg's](#) main instrument of choice here is still the acoustic guitar, and all the songs on [Whispers](#) retain the Brighton-based artist's core intimacy. Influenced by both traditional British folk and more modern singer/songwriters, [Rosenberg's](#) work here falls somewhere between the earnest classicism of [Mumford & Sons](#) and the

contemporary pop of [Ed Sheeran](#). Vocally, he has a distinctively poignant chirp of a voice that sounds something akin to an elf who stayed up all night smoking, drinking, and sharing stories with friends. Which isn't to say he sounds wizened, just world-weary and steeped in a kind of twee ennui. Whether he's singing about growing older ("27") or delving into a poetic allegory about loneliness ("Bullets"), [Rosenberg](#) has a knack for intimate revelations that still read as universal. He also has a gift for melody, and cuts like the melancholy "Heart's on Fire" and the similarly hushed "Rolling Stone," with its [Van Morrison-esque](#) woodwind backgrounds, are pleasantly enjoyable songs, perfect for introspective listening on warm summer afternoons. Ultimately, with [Whispers](#), [Rosenberg](#) has crafted an album of sweet, hummable anthems for tender-hearted troubadours everywhere.

Silver Linings – Milow

De voorbije twee jaar heeft *Milow* hoofdzakelijk in Californië doorgebracht.

Om te herbronnen, denkt een mens dan. Maar op 'Silver Linings' is van een opmerkelijke koerswijziging geen sprake. Voor het mooie weer, dan? Mogelijk, maar ballads als 'We Must Be Crazy' en 'Wind Me Up' lijken eerder gebaat bij regenweer. Om zich beter te kunnen toelekken op de Amerikaanse markt, misschien? Allicht, maar voor country light à la 'The Golden Hour' hebben ze daar al leveranciers genoeg.

Opener 'Learning How to Disappear', met een refrein dat mij tot ver na mijn dementie zal achtervolgen, is richtinggevend voor de plaat: hitpotentieel bij trossen en zo *catchy* dat het je buis van Eustachius verstopt voor je er



erg in hebt. **Milow** is duidelijk nog steeds de **Pieter Aspe** van de popmuziek. Wat hij ook doet: het glibbert lekker weg, is stevast herkenbaar en vereist het binnengieten van zes Duvels vóór beluistering. Nog dit: er zit bij wijze van bonus een liveplaat bij 'Silver Linings', met acht songs die Milow 'niet goed genoeg vond om op de reguliere plaat te zetten, maar té goed om weg te gooien'. Prima voor de klantenbinding, maar geen klassieker in wording. En dat denk ik van de reguliere cd eerlijk gezegd ook.

MNM Big Hits 2014.1 – Various Artists



MNM Big Hits 2014.2 – Various Artists

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Terms of my Surrender – John Hiatt



[John Hiatt](#) has always had one foot in the blues, and he's decided to wade waist deep into the music on 2014's [Terms of my Surrender](#). There isn't a lot of 12-bar on this album if you're a purist about such things, but the tone of this music is smoky and rich like a Deep South BBQ joint, which suits the gruff texture of [Hiatt](#)'s voice just fine, and the rootsy mood of the songs is reinforced by the production and arrangements. [Hiatt](#) primarily plays acoustic guitar on [Terms of my Surrender](#), which cuts back the volume of these performances but adds a lot to the slinky middle-of-the-night groove of the music; [Doug Lancio](#), lead guitarist with [Hiatt](#)'s road band the Combo, produced this album, and the results sound organic and spontaneous, more so than his previous albums with producer [Kevin Shirley](#), without obscuring the easy precision of [Hiatt](#) and his bandmates. The interplay of the band is solid, with Nathan Gehri's bass and [Kenneth Blevins](#)' drums resting comfortably in the

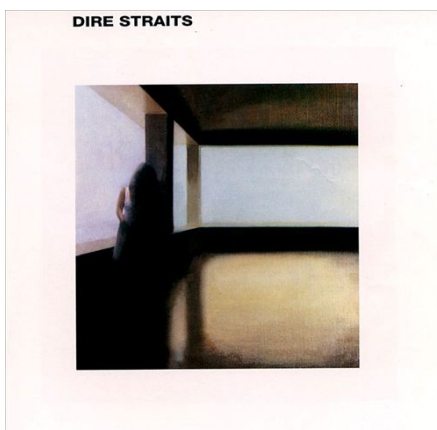
pocket as [Hiatt](#) and [Lancio](#) conjure ghostly melodies with their guitars. "Here to Stay" and "Nothing I Love" are simple but effective blues-based numbers that deal with the tough side of love, while "Marlene" and "Come Back Home" are more cheerful variations on similar themes, and the quality of the songwriting here once again serves as a reminder of just how good [Hiatt](#) is -- this is a guy who can crank out an album of new material every couple years, and he always delivers a handful of real gems without sounding rote, whether he's sounding ominous on "The Wind Don't Have to Hurry" or offering snarky humor on "Old People." On [Terms of my Surrender](#), [Hiatt](#) has the blues, and he's got the goods, and this is another solid chapter in a recording career that's drifted into an unexpected but pleasing renaissance.

Unorthodox Jukebox – Bruno Mars

[Bruno Mars](#)' debut album [Doo-Wops & Hooligans](#) made the talented singer/writer/producer into a star, he racked up hit singles, hosted *Saturday Night Live*, and became something of a romantic icon thanks to loverman anthems like "Just the Way You Are" and "Grenade." On the way to writing and recording his second album, [Unorthodox Jukebox](#), something seems to have gone sour for [Mars](#). Where on his debut he sang about falling on a grenade for his girl, on this record he's more likely to throw her on top of a grenade. Between the songs about how he can't help but succumb to the dubious charms of young girls ("Young Girls"), the "B" who stole his money and left him broke ("Natalie"), and the type of charmer who can only be made happy by fat stacks of money ("Money Make Her Smile"), [Mars](#)' opinion of the opposite sex seems to have taken a nosedive. Add in the song about taking cocaine and having a romantic evening so violent the cops are called ("Gorilla") and it's clear that the heart of the album is a cold, dark one. That the rest of the songs have some of the easy-going charm of [Doo-Wops](#), like the lilting reggae come-on "Show Me" or the [MJ](#)-inspired disco jam "Treasure," isn't quite enough to overcome the queasy feeling that comes with even a cursory listen to the lyrics. It's too bad, because at his best, like on the single "Locked Out of Heaven," which sounds like a breezy mashup of "Beat It," [the Police](#), and [Dire Straits](#), or on the [Sam Cooke](#)-inspired album-closing ballad "If I Knew," [Mars](#)' light vocal delivery and way with a hook is quite appealing. The record sounds good, too, with able production help from heavy hitters like [Mark Ronson](#), [Diplo](#), [Emile Haynie](#), and his own crew, [the Smeezingtons](#). Too bad it's a step back from [Doo-Wops](#) in so many ways, leaving people who saw promise in his debut shaking their heads in disappointment and hoping [Mars](#) can sort out his feelings about women and get back to being a sweet romancer, instead of an icky hater.



Dire Straits – Dire Straits

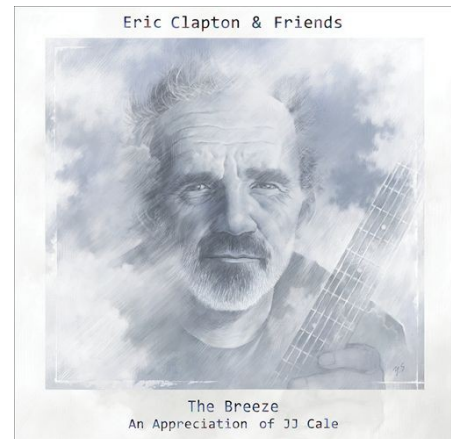


[Dire Straits](#)' minimalist interpretation of pub rock had already crystallized by the time they released their eponymous debut. Driven by [Mark Knopfler](#)'s spare, tasteful guitar lines and his husky warbling, the album is a set of bluesy rockers. And while the bar band mentality of pub-rock is at the core of [Dire Straits](#) -- even the group's breakthrough single, "Sultans of Swing," offered a lament for a neglected pub rock band -- their music is already beyond the simple boogies and shuffles of their forefathers, occasionally dipping into jazz and country. [Knopfler](#) also shows an inclination toward [Dylanesque](#) imagery, which enhances the smoky, low-key atmosphere of the album. While a few of the songs fall flat, the album is

remarkably accomplished for a debut, and [Dire Straits](#) had difficulty surpassing it throughout their career.

The Breeze – An Appreciation of J.J. Cale – Eric Clapton

In a sense, nearly every album [Eric Clapton](#) recorded after 1970 has been a tribute to [J.J. Cale](#). On that first solo album, [Clapton](#) cut a cover of [Cale's](#) "After Midnight" and while he was under the spell of [Delaney Bramlett](#) for that album, soon enough [Slowhand](#) began drifting toward the laconic shuffle that was [Cale's](#) stock in trade. [Clapton](#) never hesitated to credit [Cale](#), dropping his name in interviews, turning "Cocaine" into a modern standard, even going so far as to record an entire duet album with the Oklahoma troubadour called [The Road to Escondido](#) in 2006. In other words, [E.C.](#) owed [J.J.](#) little but after [Cale](#) passed at the age of 74, the guitarist decided to pay a full-scale tribute in the form of the 2014 LP [The Breeze: An Appreciation of J.J. Cale](#). Working with most of his regular



band, [Clapton](#) also invited a host of friends who share a soft spot for [Cale](#), including [Tom Petty](#), [Mark Knopfler](#), [John Mayer](#), [Willie Nelson](#), and the Oklahoma-based singer [Don White](#), whose vocals are within the range of the departed [Cale](#). All of these musicians don't distract from [E.C.'s](#) version of [J.J.](#): everybody slides into an exceedingly laid-back, pristine roots groove, one that barely rises above a steady simmer -- only "I'll Be There (If You Ever Want Me)" boogies, but "Cajun Moon" skips along, too -- and one that's executed with the precision of old pros. Occasionally, a personal stylistic quirk stamps a track with a signature -- there's no mistaking [Willie's](#) idiosyncratic phrasing or [Knopfler's](#) Strat -- but otherwise, everybody is operating at the same relaxed pace, differences between the musicians disappearing alongside the distinctions between songs. It's all perfectly pleasant and a convincing testament to what [Clapton](#) learned from [Cale](#), although its silvery monochromatic shuffles suggest [J.J.](#) was a little more one-dimensional than he actually was.

Islands: Essential Einaudi – Ludovico Einaudi



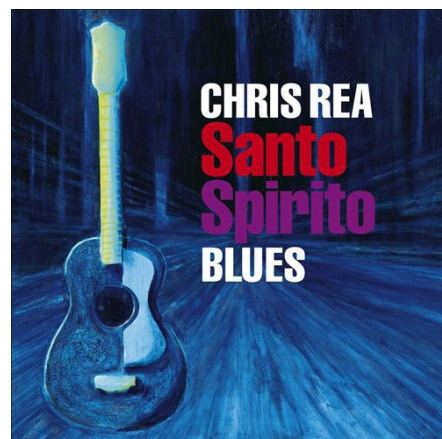
One of those composers whose name you might not be instantly familiar with, but whose music you certainly will be, Italian pianist [Ludovico Einaudi](#) has been captivating audiences for the best part of two decades with his beautifully delicate and minimal arrangements, many of which have gone on to become soundtrack staples for everything from costume dramas to TV adverts to Hollywood films. Celebrating his increasingly popular output, [Islands: Essential Einaudi](#) compiles the Milan Conservatory graduate's most recognizable pieces, with material from his first solo piano record, [Le Onde](#) ("Questa Notte"), right up to 2009's synth-based [Nightbook](#) (the gothic cello-led title track), alongside a brand new composition, "The Earth Prelude." There are also two of his

contributions to the small screen, "Fairytale," whose simple melodies reflect the elegance of the 2002 Keira Knightley ITV adaptation of *Doctor Zhivago* it appeared in, and the suitably haunting "Berlin Song," which soundtracked Shane Meadows' unflinching kitchen sink drama, *This Is England '86*. The bombastic symphonies of "Primavera" and the warm subtle strings of the ubiquitous "Divenire," both collaborations with [the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra](#), show [Einaudi](#) is just as capable of producing a more expansive sound, but his trademark, ambient ivory-tinkling is much more powerful when it's left to its own devices, as on the lilting "Passagio," the

gorgeously melancholic "Dietro Casa," and the effortlessly soothing "I Giorni," the title track from his 2001 breakthrough which recently and belatedly entered the U.K. Top 40 following Radio1 DJ Greg James' championing it as the ultimate therapeutic track to unwind to. [Einaudi](#)'s signature sound may be a little too sedate for those who like their neo-classical music a little more rousing, but [Islands](#)' ability to stir up emotions with just a few chords shows that his works are far from easy listening fodder.

Santo Spirito Blues – Chris Rea

Never one to do things by halves, gravelly voiced guitarist [Chris Rea](#) continues the prolific and rather maverick streak which has recently seen him record an 11-disc "history of the blues," and an album under the guise of a fictional '50s instrumental band: that being his 23rd studio effort [Santo Spirito Blues](#). Released in a CD/DVD package alongside a documentary on bullfighting and a black-and-white, Florence-based drama about redemption, (both of which feature separate, original soundtracks) -- the first release since his [Still So Far to Go](#) compilation unexpectedly returned him to the U.K. Top Ten -- attempts to build on its momentum with 13 quintessentially [Rea](#) blues-rock numbers. The muted percussion, country guitar hooks, and triumphant brass section of "Electric Guitar" help provide yet another ode to his instrument of choice; the classic, chugging riffs driving the rhythms and upbeat melodies of "Dancing My Blues Away" and "Rock and Roll Tonight" could have been lifted from his late-'80s/early-'90s heyday; while there are unashamed nods to [the Rolling Stones](#) on the harmonica-driven "Never Tie Me Down," and to [Dire Straits](#) on the melancholic jazz-rock of "The Chance of Love." However, there are a few surprising, left-field touches which compensate for the plodding slow blues of the Kate Moss-inspired "The Way She Moves" and the formulaic boogie rock of "The Last Open Road." The booming basslines, electro beats, and twanging guitars of "Dance with Me All Night Long" have an unexpected hint of [Depeche Mode](#)'s "Personal Jesus" about it; the timely "Money" opens with an ambient jazz intro before turning into a banjo-plucking slice of country-blues; while "You Got Lucky" is a feel-good, Hammond organ-led, honky tonk number which is sure to rouse a few barrooms around his former Middlesbrough hometown. [Santo Spirito Blues](#)' overall ambitious concept proves that the just-turned-sixty-year-old certainly no longer holds any commercial aspirations, but the main disc's resolutely old-fashioned feel suggests the upper reaches of the charts may be beckoning once again.



Wenn Das So Ist – Peter Maffay



Hands All Over – Maroon 5

Doubling down on the blue-eyed soul that's always been their cornerstone, [Maroon 5](#) up the ante on [Hands All Over](#), stripping their rock to the bare minimum, giving every song, even the power ballads, an immaculate tight groove. It is the exact opposite move expected from the hiring of superstar producer [Robert John "Mutt" Lange](#), the man responsible for some of the greatest hard rock and heavy metal albums in history, but [Lange](#) has a knack for focusing on the elements that define a band's core character, and with [Maroon 5](#) he's realized how [Adam Levine](#) possesses a relative lack of lead singer ego. He is undoubtedly the superstar of the outfit -- the skinny pretty boy with the high voice -- but all things considered, he disappears within his band, co-writing much of the album with



keyboardist [Jesse Carmichael](#), letting the song and vibe take precedence over performance. [Lange](#) preserves this dynamic, turning [Maroon 5](#) into a clean, efficient machine. There is no fat on [Hands All Over](#) -- in its standard edition, its 12 songs run a crisp 40 minutes, with no song cresting over the four-minute mark -- and the sound is blindingly bright, almost incandescent in its spotless surfaces. (*My version ... released in 2014 has 14 tracks ..*) As pristine as the sound is, [Hands All Over](#) is not sterile and [Lange](#) retains the group's sense of soul. If anything, his precision is an asset, as it not only accentuates [Maroon 5](#)'s essential character as well-tailored loversmen, his focus echoes down to the songs themselves. Some of the cuts may not sink their hooks in immediately, but track for track [Hands All Over](#) is [Maroon 5](#)'s best album, capturing their character and craft in a cool, sleek package.

Songs of Innocence – U2

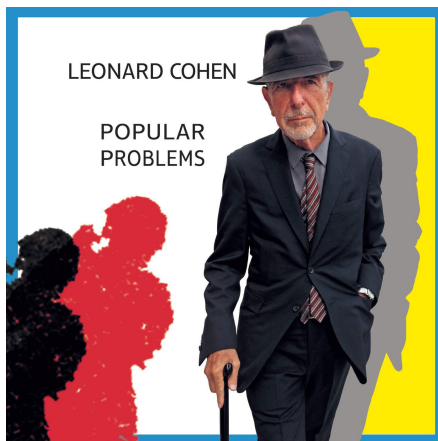


Many U2 albums experience a difficult birth, but their 13th studio record underwent a particularly extended labor. Gestating for years, possibly started immediately after 2009's *No Line on the Horizon* and ushered into existence by many midwives, *Songs of Innocence* appeared suddenly in September 2014, nearly nine months after "Invisible," the presumptive lead single for the record, flopped. "Invisible" is nowhere to be found on *Songs of Innocence*, yet its vaguely electronic thrum did indeed turn out to be a taste of where U2 were headed after those endless sessions wound up shepherded by Danger Mouse. *Songs of Innocence* -- its title taken from William Blake, although many music nerds may first think of David Axelrod -- does indeed incorporate electronic elements

in a way no U2 album since *Pop* has, weaving samples, loops, and other flourishes within music that otherwise adheres to the self-conscious classicism that has been the band's stock in trade since Y2K. Which is another way of saying that where the U2 of the '90s looked forward, the 2014 U2 are looking back, aware of a legacy that includes decades of arena-filling anthems, the deliberate reinvention of *Achtung Baby*, and their initial inspiration from the great spark of punk rock. The latter also provides the thematic fuel on *Songs of Innocence*, a quasi-autobiographical coming-of-age story from Bono that begins with the big bang of "The Miracle (Of Joey Ramone)." This opening fanfare doesn't sound a thing like the Ramones, nor does "This Is Where You Can Reach Me Now" sound like its reported inspiration, the Clash: they, like everything else here, sound like U2, albeit a U2 who are beginning to carry the weight of their years somewhat uneasily. Majesty doesn't come easily to them anymore, so they've replaced surging melodrama with a brittle, insistent clamor that's intended to dazzle. It's busy enough to be bracing yet it's also wearying, exuding a

faint air of desperation that dampens the emotional pull of such lovely moments as "Song for Someone" and "The Troubles" (the latter featuring vocals from Lykke Li) while merely providing clatter elsewhere. Often, there's a nagging sense U2 could've pushed themselves a little harder sonically -- "Raised by Wolves" benefits from the coiled paranoia created by its frenetically circling vocals and guitars -- but that would've required risk, which they've been avoiding since Pop's garbled rollout. Instead, *Songs of Innocence* showcases how U2 desire to have things both ways. They camouflage their nostalgia in the sound of modernity; they play gigantic music about intimacy; they want to expand their horizons without leaving home. They want to be everything to everyone and, in attempting to do so, they've wound up with a record that appeals to a narrow audience: fellow travelers who either thrill at the spectacle or dig for the subtleties buried underneath the digital din. [Upon the surprise digital release of *Songs of Innocence* in September 2014, U2 announced the physical edition would appear a month later with an extra disc of bonus tracks. The band kept their promise, adding a second disc (along with finished artwork) to their thirteenth studio album for its physical release. Depending how you keep score, this second disc contains either 5, 10, or 11 tracks; the count is thrown off by five cuts being sequenced as one 22-minute track called "Acoustic Sessions" and a slightly alternate version of "Invisible" being buried as a hidden track at the end. Along with these "Acoustic Sessions" -- most being more fully arranged than the title suggests, particularly "Raised by Wolves" -- there is an alternate version of "The Troubles" and an "alternate perspective mix by Tchad Blake" for "Sleep Like a Baby Tonight," welcome variations all but which basically leave two songs as enticements for anybody other than the hardcore: "Lucifer's Hands" and "The Crystal Ballroom." Neither song seems to belong thematically to the loose semi-autobiographical narrative of the proper album and they're also more nimble than much of the record, with "Lucifer's Hands" benefitting from a dense percolating arrangement anchored by a trashy little guitar riff and "The Crystal Ballroom" evoking an arch, art-punk disco quite well. They might not have fit snugly onto the record but as individual songs, they're stronger than some of the tunes that made the cut.]

Popular Problems – Leonard Cohen



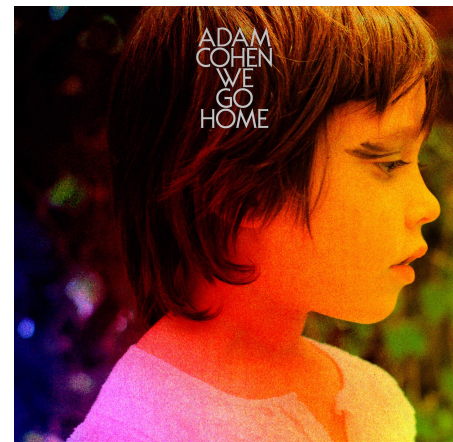
Leonard Cohen's *Popular Problems* is an uncharacteristically quick follow-up to 2012's *Old Ideas*. That record, cut in the aftermath of a multi-year tour, revitalized him as a recording artist. Producer Patrick Leonard (Madonna, Bryan Ferry) helms and plays on *Popular Problems*, and serves as co-writer on all but one tune. While Cohen's sound has revolved around keyboards since 1988's *I'm Your Man*, Leonard gets that the real power in the songwriter's lyrics are best relayed through his own own simple melodies. Everything here -- keys, female backing chorus, acoustic instrumentation, etc. -- is in their service. As always, Cohen's songs -- delivered in his deepest earth rasp -- offer protagonists who are ambivalent spiritual seekers, lusty, commitment-phobic lovers, and jaded,

untrusting/untrustworthy world citizens. He is them, they are him: strangers hiding in plain sight. Opener "Slow" is paced by a blues vamp from an electric piano and kick drum. "...You want to get there soon/I want to get there last..." is delivered in a streetwise croak. It's a fine career metaphor, but the hilarious double entendre is self evident, too: "...All your turns are tight/Let me catch my breath/I thought we had all night." "Almost Like the Blues" employs a 12-bar variant exoticized by hand percussion. Cohen juxtaposes visions of global horror with worry over bad reviews; he's culpable because of his vanity. Gospel provides illustration on some of the better songs -- there are no weak ones. It's used with razored effect on "Samson in New Orleans" to address the devastation -- physical, emotional, spiritual -- left by Hurricane Katrina. Cohen really attempts to sing "Did I Ever Love You." Though it comes out a measured growl, its impact is searing. It shifts from gospel to country jaunt only to circle back, underscoring the bitter, vulnerable truth in the lyric. He

observes: "The lemon trees blossom/The almond trees wither," before asking: "Was I ever someone/Who could love you forever?"; he knows the answer. The keyboards and tablas in "Nevermind," a narrative of treachery and global hypocrisy, create skeletal, tense funk. They're appended by Donna De Lory's Arabic chant for peace and safety in contrast to the lyric's scathing accusations. Gospel returns on "Born in Chains," a gentle but gripping first-person account of spiritual seeking with references to Judaism, Christianity, and Cohen's adopted Zen: "...I've heard the soul unfolds/In the chambers of its longing...But all the Ladders of the Night have fallen/Only darkness now/To lift the longing up." On set closer "You Got Me Singing," Cohen, accompanied only by acoustic guitar and violin, lays out hope: "You got me singing even though the world is gone/You got me thinking I'd like to carry on." It's an open-ended, affirmative sendoff. Popular Problems reveals that at 80, Cohen not only has plenty left in the tank, but is at his most confident and committed. This is his finest recording since 1995's *The Future*.

We Go Home – Adam Cohen

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All the way – Yannick Bovy



*Described as Belgium's answer to [Michael Bublé](#), Flemish crooner [Yannick Bovy](#) became hooked on big-band music after listening to his grandparents' [Frank Sinatra](#) and [Nat King Cole](#) records as a youngster. Encouraged by his musician father to become a singer, he regularly played with swing bands and reached the second round of *The X-Factor* before he was discovered by [Milk Inc's Regi Penxten](#), who invited him to appear on 2007 single *Better World Without You*. After honing his talents in the *Metropole Big Band* and *the North Side Big Band*, he released his debut LP, [Better Man](#), in 2012.*

MNM Big Hits 2014.3 – Various Artists

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lullaby and... The Ceaseless Roar – Robert Plant

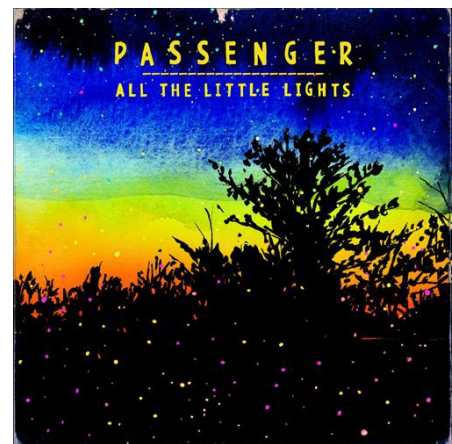


Returning to his native England after an extended sojourn in America, Robert Plant heavily reconnects with his homeland's mysticism on 2014's *lullaby and... The Ceaseless Roar*. Despite the shift in geography, the singer is picking up a thread he left hanging with 2010's *Band of Joy*. On that album, Plant blurred boundaries between several musical styles, playing covers with a group assembled by producer Buddy Miller, but here he shifts that omnivorous aesthetic to a collection of originals performed with his ever-changing band the Sensational Space Shifters. Certain flourishes sound familiar -- he remains equally enamored of English and Moroccan folk while retaining an enduring obsession with American blues and psychedelia -- but the feel is different, not as robust as *Band of Joy* or warmly

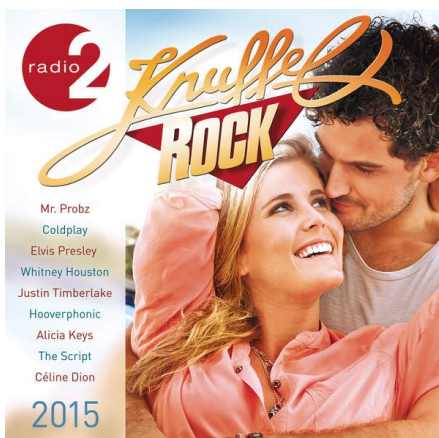
joyous as *Raising Sand*. *The Ceaseless Roar* may not get loud -- usually, when it rocks it sounds like a kissing cousin to a folk rave-up; sometimes, as on "Somebody There," it's chiming, crystalline, and bright like the Byrds -- but it is intensely meditative, finding sustenance within mystery. Plant is reflecting on where he's been -- singing "And if the sun refuses to shine" on "Pocketful of Golden," he tips a hat to his Zeppelin past; elsewhere he speaks of getting lost in America -- yet gingerly avoiding questions of mortality and resisting the allure of easy sentimentality. It's possible to hear the weight of his years on *lullaby and... The Ceaseless Roar* -- it is, in the best sense, mature music, dense in its rhythms and allusions, subtle in its melodies -- but he never feels weary, nor does he traffic in false nostalgia. He's building upon the past, both his own and the larger traditions of his homeland, both spiritual and actual, and that gives *lullaby and... The Ceaseless Roar* a bewitching depth. It's an album to get lost in.

All The Little Lights – Passenger

All the Little Lights, the third long-player from Mike Rosenberg, better known as the founder, vocalist, songwriter, and driving force behind English folk-rock outfit Passenger, continues in the vein of 2010's *Flight of the Crow*, offering up another evocative collection of heartfelt, largely acoustic, indie folk gems that invoke names like Coldplay, Van Morrison, Villagers, Mumford & Sons, and even Neil Young. Recorded once again in Australia, *All the Little Lights* represents an evolution in both Rosenberg's songwriting and his overall sound, maintaining the emotional intimacy of his previous outings while introducing a bigger and bolder production style.

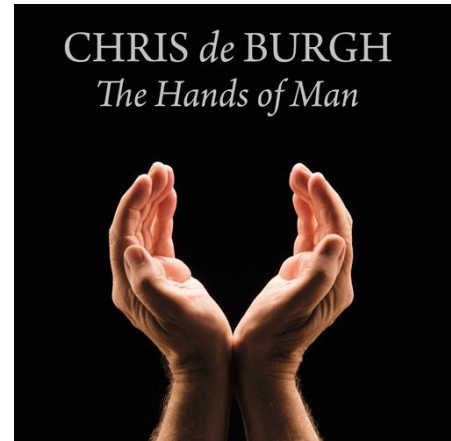


Knuffelrock 2015 – Various Artists



The Hands of Man – Chris de Burgh

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The Endless River – Pink Floyd

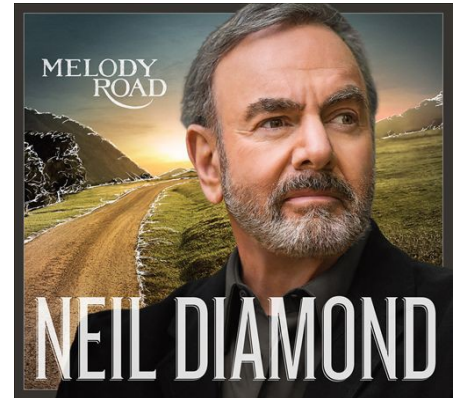


David Gilmour sang about an endless river on "High Hopes," the last song on what appeared to be the last Pink Floyd album, 1994's *Division Bell*. Twenty years later, the same phrase became the title of *The Endless River*, an album designed as Pink Floyd's last. Assembled largely from *Division Bell* outtakes initially intended as an ambient project dubbed *The Big Spliff*, the record was sculpted into shape in 2014 by Gilmour, Youth, Andy Jackson, and Roxy Music's Phil Manzanera by adding guitar and Nick Mason's drums to original tapes that were laden with keyboards from the late Rick Wright. He's not the only missing member of Floyd, of course. Roger Waters is absent, as is the long-gone Syd Barrett, but their ghosts are present throughout the primarily

instrumental *The Endless River*. Mortality is on the mind of the two remaining Floyds, mentioned obliquely in "Louder Than Words," the only song with lyrics here, but felt through allusions to all their possible pasts. A song unfurls with washes of synth pulled from "Welcome to the Machine," the four sides are structured like an ongoing amorphous suite à la "Shine on You Crazy Diamond," snippets of *Atom Heart Mother* slide against guitars that beat to the rhythm from "Run Like Hell," creating an impression of a band in a state of repose: they're not indulging in their past so much as reflecting on it, watching a tide of memories repeatedly roll in and out. Although very little about *The Endless River* is risky by design -- it is one of the most popular bands of the 20th century returning to slowly pulsating aural waves that characterized their biggest albums -- the very shift away from vocals realigns the band with not only *Wish You Were Here* (which this often resembles) but their pre-*Dark Side* records for Harvest, undercutting the arena-pleasing aspirations of the Gilmour-led reunion while underscoring how Pink Floyd always were an arty band at their core. Instrumentals are also a savvy solution to the trouble of working with uncompleted tapes -- it's easier to turn them into an ever-shifting suite than to graft on melodies -- but the comforting sway of swelling synthesizers and the soaring Gilmour guitar are sometimes unexpectedly moving. Gilmour and Mason know this is their farewell, so they're saying goodbye not with a major statement but with a soft, bittersweet elegy that functions as a canny coda to their career.

Melody Road – Neil Diamond

Leaving behind Columbia Records along with his latter-day collaborator producer Rick Rubin, Neil Diamond sets up shop at Capitol -- which now belongs to Universal Records, who owns his classic recordings for Uni and MCA -- and teams with producer Don Was for 2014's Melody Road. Diamond may have left his label of 40 years, but in an odd way, Melody Road is a return home after his stark wanderings of the 2000s. Rubin encouraged Diamond to be spare, sometimes recording him with little more than an acoustic guitar, but Was -- who is assisted by Jackknife Lee -- coaxes the singer/songwriter to bring back the schmaltz, an essential element of Neil's glory days that was largely ignored on the Rubin records. Was and



Lee retain a hint of that new millennial intimacy -- it's never once as overblown as his '70s records -- but the songs themselves alternate between stately ballads, effervescent bubblegum, and self-important pomp. As on his best '70s records, which Melody Road often resembles in both construction and consistency, Diamond is best when he keeps his ambitions relatively simple. There's majesty on the title track and haunting splendor on "Alone at the Ball," and they find their counterparts in the joyous "Something Blue" and "Marry Me Now," along with the spirited ramble of "First Time." Each of these songs evoke memories of Diamond's peak -- a little bit of "Solitary Man," a little bit of "I Am...I Said," a little bit of "Cherry Cherry" -- while the tedious socially aware slog of "Seongah and Jimmy" and endless ballad "(OOO) Do I Wanna Be Yours" bring back the Diamond that's often forgotten, the Diamond whose LPs often got bogged down in middlebrow aspirations. As much as these weigh down Melody Road, it's also true that there's never been a Neil Diamond record where he doesn't stray into this murky territory. What makes a difference here is the general lightness of his new songs and Was and Lee's sympathetic production; the two play off each other perfectly, turning this into the first latter-day Diamond record to feel quintessentially Neil Diamond.

Nieuwe Ruimte – Rob de Nijs



Rock or Bust – AC/DC

AC/DC's 16th album arrives after founder/rhythm guitarist Malcolm Young's departure with dementia, and drummer Phil Rudd's headline-grabbing charges for drug possession and making threats to kill. It's easily the greatest turbulence the band has experienced since singer Bon Scott's death in 1980. And yet, with Malcolm's nephew Stevie stepping in, the music sounds as eerily untroubled as ever. Indeed, *Rock Or Bust* sounds like every AC/DC album since *Back in Black*: rock-solid rhythms over which guitarist Angus Young and gruff-voiced Brian Johnson do their stuff. Most songs have big, Highway to Hell-type choruses, three have "rock" in the title and many feature rude double entendres. *Hard Times* isn't about recessionary economics, *Emission Control* isn't a stand against global warming and standout *Play Ball* isn't about sport. Not many of the tracks are as good as that one, but they all rock amiably and efficiently, and it's hard not to marvel at their ability to keep it up.

