

Sonic Highways – Foo Fighters

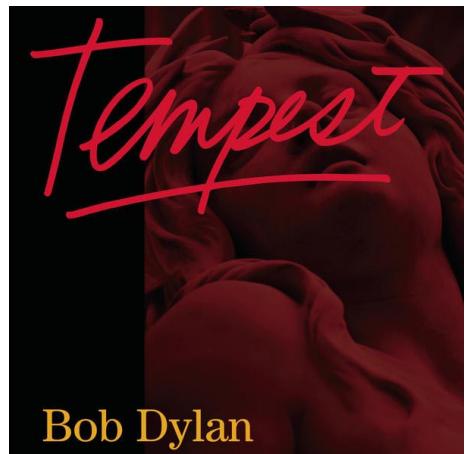


Nobody ever would've thought the [Foo Fighters](#) were gearing up for a hiatus following the vibrant 2011 LP [Wasting Light](#), but the group announced just that in 2012. It was a short-lived break, but during that time-off, lead [Foo Dave Grohl](#) filmed an ode to the classic Los Angeles recording studio Sound City, which in turn inspired the group's 2014 album, [Sonic Highways](#). Constructed as an aural travelog through the great rock & roll cities of America -- a journey that was documented on an accompanying HBO mini-series of the same name -- [Sonic Highways](#) picks up the thread left dangling from [Sound City: Real to Reel](#); it celebrates not the coiled fury of underground rock exploding into the mainstream, the way the '90s-happy [Wasting Light](#) did, but

rather the classic rock that unites the U.S. from coast to coast. No matter the cameo here -- and there are plenty of guests, all consciously different from the next, all bending to the needs of their hosts -- the common denominator is the pumping amps, sky-scraping riffs, and sugary melodies that so identify the sound of arena rock at its pre-MTV peak. There are a few unexpected wrinkles, as when [Ben Gibbard](#) comes aboard to give "Subterranean" a canned electronic pulse and [Tony Visconti](#) eases the closing "I Am a River" into a nearly eight-minute epic, but the brief eight-song album just winds up sounding like nothing else but the [Foo Fighters](#) at their biggest, burliest, and loudest. They've become the self-proclaimed torch bearers for real rock, championing the music's history but also blessedly connecting the '70s mainstream and '80s underground so it's all one big nation ruled by six-strings. That the mainstream inevitably edges out the underground on [Sonic Highways](#) is perhaps inevitable -- it is the common rock language, after all -- but even if there's a lingering predictability in the paths the [Foo Fighters](#) follow on [Sonic Highways](#), they nevertheless know how to make this familiar journey pleasurable.

Tempest – Bob Dylan

Fifty years after [Bob Dylan](#)'s debut album appeared, we get [Tempest](#). Since he returned to recording original material on 1997's [Time Out of Mind](#), he's been rambling through American musical styles -- blues, country, folk, rockabilly, swing -- that were popular before he was even on the scene. [Tempest](#) continues the exploration, but more urgently than on [Modern Times](#) and [Together Through Life](#). It's a gritty, cantankerous record with abundant images of violence, lust, and humor, though the latter is often black. His protagonists settle scores with lovers, enemies, and power brokers; they're often self-aggrandizing and self-deprecating simultaneously. Most of these are story-songs, though none but "Tempest" tracks in a linear fashion. "Duquesne Whistle" opens nostalgically with steel and acoustic guitars playing a swing melody reminiscent of [Bob Wills](#). When the band enters, it becomes a rockabilly shuffle with teeth. "Soon After Midnight" is a ballad with hazardous warnings ("...Two-Timing Slim/Who's every heard of him?/I'll drag his corpse through the mud"). "Narrow Way" is a blues wailer that faintly looks back at "Maggie's Farm." [Dylan](#)'s lyric contradictions are in full force; the song asks unanswerable questions while expressing rage and vulnerability ("...Even death has washed its hands of you" and "Put your arms around me, where they belong"). "Pay in Blood" is a rocking venomous boast with one of his more memorable refrains: "I pay in blood, but not my own." "Early Roman Kings" is a basic rewrite of [Muddy](#)



Bob Dylan

[Waters](#)' "Mannish Boy." [David Hidalgo](#)'s old-world accordion plays the signature swaggering, razor-sharp guitar riff underscoring the notion that the blues are universal, timeless. [Dylan](#)'s nasty rasp fueled by lust, vengeance, and power is balanced by his wicked humor: "I can strip you of life, strip you of breath/I can ship you down, to the house of death...I ain't dead yet, my bell still rings/I keep my fingers crossed like the early Roman kings." Musically, "Tin Angel" looks back to "Man in the Long Black Coat" for a frame. Lyrically, this is [Dylan](#) at his storytelling *best*; its twists and turns would be right at home on [Blood on the Tracks](#) and [Desire](#) -- and it would have made a great closer. Sadly, that's not the case. The nearly 14-minute, 45-verse title cut retells the story of the Titanic with references to history -- and the [James Cameron](#) film. Hearing it once is enough. "Roll on John," [Dylan](#)'s elegy for friend [John Lennon](#), closes the set. He uses a slew of [Lennon](#)'s own lyrics as a tribute. The end result is moving but clumsy. These last two cuts aside, [Tempest](#) is still a damn fine album. [Dylan](#) is in mostly excellent form -- even when sloppy; it sounds like he's having the time of his life.

Everybody Knows – Sharon Robinson



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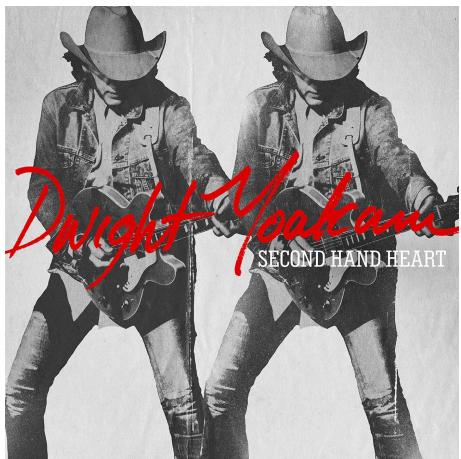
A – Agnetha Fältskog

[Agnetha Fältskog](#) faded into a quiet retirement in the late '80s, resurfacing with an autobiography in 1996 and then a collection of covers, primarily standards, called [My Colouring Book](#), a 2004 release loosely tied into the popularity of [ABBA](#)'s jukebox musical *Mama Mia*. Despite these projects, she never pursued a full-fledged comeback, not until 2013 when she released [A](#), a collection of new songs written and produced by [Jörgen Elofsson](#), that received a major multinational push. [Elofsson](#) wrote hits for [Britney Spears](#), including the fizzy early sensation "(You Drive Me) Crazy," but the touchstone for [A](#) is his masterwork of pageantry, "A Moment Like This," the song [Kelly Clarkson](#) sang at the conclusion of the first season of *American Idol*. There are hints of disco here and there, most prominently on "Dance Your Pain Away," and a bit of pure pop ("Back on Your Radio" is a terrific statement of adult contemporary purpose), but for the most part [A](#) is straight-down-the-middle Europop ballads, the kind [ABBA](#) pioneered and the kind [Fältskog](#) still feels very comfortable singing. Throughout it all, she sounds strikingly robust -- she may not hit the high notes anymore but she never sounds thin -- and part of the credit should go to [Elofsson](#), who crafts his songs and productions to showcase [Fältskog](#) at her best. Much of this feels familiar but not precisely like music she's made before. Rather, this is stately, sweet Europop, the kind that could have been released any time over the last 30 years, but it's given a warm, reassuring quality



by [Agnetha Fältskog](#), who retains an appealing, easy touch that separates her from her successors and still resonates all these years later.

Second Hand Heart – Dwight Yoakam



Dwight Yoakam recalibrated his career with 2012's 3 Pears, returning to his former home of Warner and reconnecting to the nerviness of his first albums. With Second Hand Heart, Yoakam continues this unfussy revival, sharpening his attack so the record breezes by at a crisp, crackling clip. Once again, he's reviving himself through reconnecting the past but what gives Second Hand Heart life is specificity, both in its songs and sound. The former is what makes the greatest initial impression, as it seems as if he's synthesized all the big Capitol Records acts of 1966 into one bright, ringing sound. To be sure, there's a fair amount of Bakersfield here, especially apparent on the loping drawl of "Off Your Mind" and the crackerjack rockabilly of "The Big Time," but the Beatles loom even larger than Buck Owens, surfacing in the

chiming 12-strings of "Believe" and harmonies of "She" and evident in the general spirit of adventure that fuels Second Hand Heart. Some of Dwight's tricks are familiar -- the jet propulsion of "Man of Constant Sorrow" borrows a page from the glory days of cowpunk -- but his execution is precise and he never lets the record settle in one groove for too long, not even when he tears through "Sorrow," "Liar," and "The Big Time" at a breakneck pace. Such sequencing gives Second Hand Heart momentum but what lasts are the songs, a collection of ten tunes -- all originals save the standard "Sorrow" and the sweet denouement "V's of Birds" -- that are sturdy yet sly, their hooks sinking into the subconscious without ever drawing attention to themselves. All this means is that Second Hand Heart is prime Dwight Yoakam: traditional yet modern, flashy yet modest, a record that feels fresh but also like a forgotten classic.

Caffeine – Sharon Robinson

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No Place in Heaven – MIKA



Pop music careers move so quickly that by the time [Mika](#) released [No Place in Heaven](#), he was essentially a veteran performer. Between this album and 2012's [The Origin of Love](#), he turned 30 and served as a judge on *X Factor Italy* and France's *The Voice: La Plus Belle Voix*, adding to the feel that he was a more adult voice in the pop world. [No Place in Heaven](#) confirms this feeling in the best possible way. While most pop music is all about youth and "mature" is often a euphemism for safe and boring, [Mika](#)'s version of maturity emphasizes what has always been best about his music -- memorable words and melodies served up with a theatrical flair. Where [The Origin of Love](#) focused too much on trendy dance-pop, here [Mika](#) steps away from the mainstream with

songs that explore his roots as a person, a gay man, and an artist in equally heartfelt and clever ways. "Good Guys" even turns one of [Oscar Wilde](#)'s most famous quotes ("We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars") into a widescreen chorus as [Mika](#) pays tribute to other queer heroes including [James Dean](#), [Andy Warhol](#), and [Arthur Rimbaud](#). Meanwhile, [Mika](#)'s character sketches are even richer now that they're more personal. He confronts his relationships with his parents, asking his father "Do you think that you could learn to love me anyway?" in a way that's pleading but not desperate on "No Place in Heaven," and skewering his mother's wishful thinking on "All She Wants" (the answer: another son). Alongside songs like these and more conventionally confessional songs like "Hurts" and "Ordinary Man" is more escapist fare, proving [Mika](#) knows when to lighten the mood. "Talk About You" is so hooky and lyrically developed that it could be a show tune, while "Oh Girl, You're the Devil" is the kind of strutting, falsetto-driven pop [Scissor Sisters](#) or even [Maroon 5](#) would love to call their own. A truly mature pop album, [No Place in Heaven](#) finds [Mika](#) growing into his talent -- which is growing as well.

MNM Big Hits 2015.1 – Various Artists

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MNM Big Hits 2015.2 – Various Artists

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Unvarnished – Joan Jett & the Blackhearts



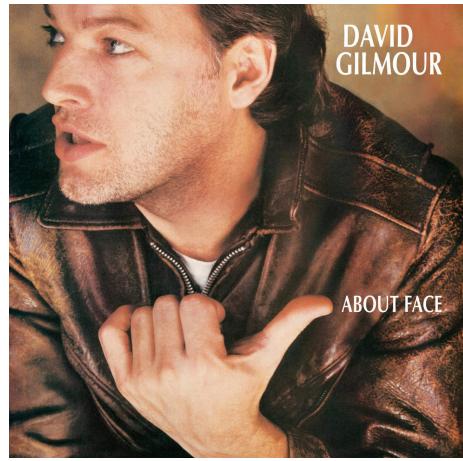
[Joan Jett](#)'s first album in seven years, 2013's [Unvarnished](#), starts off with a big bang. "Any Weather," her rocked-out collaboration with [Dave Grohl](#), sounds like a classic [Blackhearts](#) track with loud, tight guitars, a killer chorus, and [Jett](#)'s growling voice front and center. It's a bracing call to arms that lets the listener know right away that [Jett](#) hasn't forgotten how to rock, not even a little. It's [Grohl](#)'s only appearance on the album, but it's a perfect way to start. The rest of the record features her longtime bandmates [Dougie Needles](#) on guitar and [Thommy Price](#) on drums, plus her mentor and co-writer from the very beginning, [Kenny Laguna](#). Their presence speaks to [Jett](#)'s ability to keep her friends close, but it's also important because [Unvarnished](#)

sounds like a vintage [Jett](#) album, from the handclaps to the way the guitars are recorded. Just like on her best albums from long ago, there are songs that conjure up [the Glitter Band](#) (the stomping "TMI"), simple good-time rockers ("Down the Track"), angry blasts of punk energy ("Reality Mentality"), and melancholy ballads (the sweetly sad "Soulmates to Strangers"). Delivered in classically sneering style by [Jett](#), who sounds truly inspired and tough as nails, the songs have all the hooks and style of her classic era. The only thing that's different are the lyrics as [Jett](#) delves into matters of loss, mortality, and getting older. Sometimes a little awkwardly, but always with an endearing honesty that makes it work. For example, "Hard to Grow Up" could have sounded cliched, but [Jett](#)'s sincere vocals and the huge guitar sound paste right over any lyrical concerns. The only song that lets the side down a little is the last one, "Everybody Needs a Hero." It's the only song not written by [Jett](#), and while it's cool to hear her rough-hewn voice singing with strings backing her, the mawkish nature of the words and melody is a handicap she can't surmount. Despite this slight stumble, [Unvarnished](#) is exactly the album [Jett](#) fans have been wanting since she took an unfortunate turn toward the mainstream in the late '80s. She's done some stuff that has come close since then -- [Pure and Simple](#) had some nice moments and [Sinner](#) was a solid outing -- but this is the first time she's recaptured the sound, feel, and punch of her early work over the course of an entire record. It's not exactly a comeback, because she never went away. It's more of a rousing welcome to anyone who might have forgotten how great she was in her prime. Whatever you want to call it, [Unvarnished](#) is a great rock & roll album from a true rock & roll survivor, and if the words rock & roll mean anything to you, it's an album you need to hear.

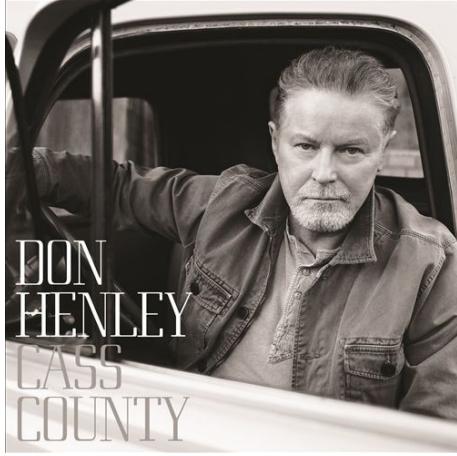
About Face – David Gilmour

[David Gilmour](#) released his second solo venture in 1984, following the apparent dissolution of [Pink Floyd](#). He had released a record on his own in 1978, but [About Face](#) is much more accessible. [Gilmour](#) has a stellar band backing him, including [Jeff Porcaro](#) (drums), [Pino Palladino](#) (bass), and [Anne Dudley](#) (synthesizer). The songs on [About Face](#) show a pop sensibility that [Pink Floyd](#) rarely was concerned with achieving. Although the album didn't attract the attention of a Floyd release, several cuts did manage to get airplay. "Until We Sleep" is rife with shimmering synthesizers and cavernous drums, and "Blue Light" was a minor pop hit, with [Gilmour](#)'s trademark delay-drenched guitar giving way to a driving, horn-laced rocker. [Pete Townshend](#) wrote two of the tracks:

"Love on the Air" and the propulsive "All Lovers Are Deranged." Of course, there's more than enough of [Gilmour](#)'s fluid guitar playing to satisfy, including the gorgeous "Murder," a gentle acoustic track that explodes with some fiery organ by [Steve Winwood](#) and concludes with a fierce coda. [About Face](#) is well-honed rock album that is riveting from beginning to end.



Cass County – Don Henley



[Don Henley](#) doesn't move fast because he can afford not to hurry. He can spend the better part of a decade waiting out a record contract, labor on a 90-minute [Eagles](#) reunion for maybe half a decade, then take another eight years before returning with [Cass County](#), his first solo album in 15 years and only fifth overall. That's the mark of a man who takes his time, but all that chronology pales compared to the true journey [Cass County](#) represents: a return to [Henley](#)'s country roots, whether they lie in the blissed-out, mellow sunshine of Southern California or the Texas home that provides this record with its name. According to prerelease scuttlebutt, the album began as a covers project -- on the deluxe edition, there are remnants of this record, including a poignant "She Sang

Hymns Out of Tune" and a duet with [Dolly Parton](#) on [the Louvin Brothers'](#) "When I Stop Dreaming" -- and the album does begin with a version of [Tift Merritt](#)'s "Bramble Rose" that finds space for both [Mick Jagger](#) and [Miranda Lambert](#), a sign of the star firepower on [Cass County](#). Plenty of other guests pop up here, including [Merle Haggard](#) and [Martina McBride](#), although there's no doubting [Henley](#) is the center of [Cass County](#), but the nice thing about the record is that he's not calling attention to himself, not in the way he did when he loaded up albums with somber six-minute anthems. For the first time in decades -- four, to be precise; [One of These Nights](#) was the last time he explicitly dabbled in country-rock -- [Henley](#) prefers to paint on a small canvas, abandoning sociological epics for tales of longing and heartbreak. He'll still adopt a cynical sneer -- "No, Thank You" is quintessential spiteful contrarianism, salvaged by a boogie borrowed from "Achy Breaky Heart" -- and the elegiac "Praying for Rain" disguises its environmental activist heart in the form of sun-bleached hippie country, but the shift to expertly constructed miniatures benefits [Henley](#) considerably, pushing the focus onto his skill as a craftsman while also suggesting how, in the age of bro-country, this kind of cosmic American music functions as a traditional throwback. This is also where [Henley](#)'s stubbornness winds up as an asset: he doesn't feel like he's succumbing to either nostalgia or the present; he stoically carries on according to the way things ought to be, and,

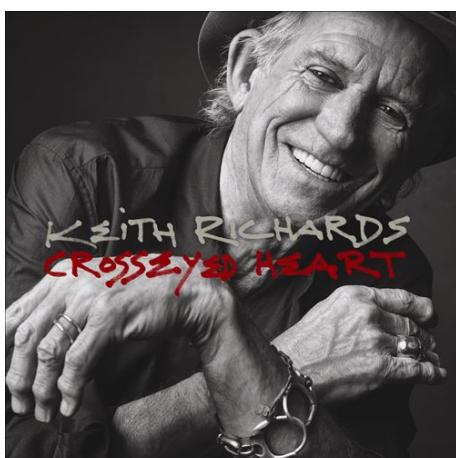
against all odds, he winds up with a record that's not only easier to enjoy than most of his solo records, but also stronger song for song than many of the early [Eagles](#) albums.

Rattle That Lock – David Gilmour

Former [Pink Floyd](#) guitarist [David Gilmour](#) is not prolific. [Rattle That Lock](#) is only his fourth solo studio album (though it follows his late band's final album, [The Endless River](#), by only ten months). [Gilmour](#) recorded some 35 songs for this set, some dating back 18 years. Trimming them to ten couldn't have been easy. Titled for [John Milton](#)'s second book in *Paradise Lost*, [Rattle That Lock](#) is structured as an informal song cycle to reflect the sometimes random, sometimes weightier thought processes of a typical person in a single day. It begins, appropriately, with the instrumental "5 A.M." Orchestrated by [Zbigniew Preisner](#), [Gilmour](#)'s signature slow, bluesy, Stratocaster sting enters just 30 seconds in, followed by fingerpicked acoustic guitars, gentle synths, and electric piano amid chamber strings to announce the title-track single. It's the first of five songs co-written with novelist [Polly Samson](#), [Gilmour](#)'s wife. His meaty guitar lines mirror the spirit of the lyrics, which reflect dissent and the redemption that lies in the freedom to choose. Co-producer [Phil Manzanera](#)'s Hammond organ, two funky basslines, and soaring chorus vocals from [Mica Paris](#), [Louise Marshall](#), and the Liberty Choir provide a smooth AOR feel. "Faces of Stone" is a waltz done as a tango, colored by [Floyd](#)-esque atmospherics and an extended wailing guitar break. The ageless harmonies of [Graham Nash](#) and [David Crosby](#) grace "A Boat Lies Waiting," a moving, understated tribute to [Pink Floyd](#) keyboardist [Richard Wright](#). [Gilmour](#)'s slide hovers above [Roger Eno](#)'s elegant piano, chamber strings, and the cry of gulls. [Samson](#)'s lyrics are economical but mighty, capturing bittersweet nostalgia, pain, and loss in their poignancy. "In Any Tongue" chillingly examines the toll of a global war run by men with deadly joysticks (to drones) in their hands: "God help my son/What has he done?...I hear 'Mama' sounds the same in any tongue...." In "Beauty," [Eno](#) and [Gilmour](#) trade contrasting minimal piano and blues-rock guitar lines as strings and reverb bridge them. Second single "Today" commences as a hymn, but erupts into wonky funk driven by [Guy Pratt](#)'s bass. Here the silken, rockist disco of [Wall](#)-era [Floyd](#) clashes with [Speaking in Tongues](#)-era [Talking Heads](#), and it all works -- dramatic orchestral accompaniment notwithstanding. Instrumental closer "And Then..." features [Gilmour](#)'s expressive Strat and acoustic guitars. [Andy Newmark](#)'s drums and [Danny Cummings](#)' percussion frame them amid a backdrop of strings. This tune is so lyrical that [Gilmour](#)'s guitar playing literally sings, making it one of his finest instrumentals. As a whole, [Rattle That Lock](#) reveals more confident and developed songwriting from [Gilmour](#) and [Samson](#); they'll be a near-symbiotic team in the future. It is a snapshot of where [Gilmour](#) is as a musician in 2015, and not by any means a grand portrait or statement to sum up his career.



Crosseyed Heart – Keith Richards



[Keith Richards](#) took his time to complete [Crosseyed Heart](#). It arrives 23 years after [Main Offender](#), his last solo studio album, but also 11 years after [A Bigger Bang](#), the last official [Rolling Stones](#) record, but [Richards](#) hasn't exactly been quiet in all those years. He helped [Mick Jagger](#) flesh out the leftover demos for expanded editions of [Exile on Main St.](#) and [Some Girls](#) -- conspiracists argued some of the writing happened in the new millennium -- and toured with [the Stones](#) on various anniversaries, but the feather in his cap was *Life*,

the 2010 memoir that established [Keith](#) as a razor-sharp raconteur for the masses that may never have paid attention to [Talk Is Cheap](#). When compared to that publication date, [Crosseyed Heart](#) arrives a mere five years later, so that's not such a long wait. Certainly, [Crosseyed Heart](#) hardly feels like it was labored over; it's not the work of a perfectionist hoping every element lands in its right place. It sounds like it was knocked out in a week, which is about the highest compliment that can be paid to a record as casual as this. [Main Offender](#) felt like the result of endless hours of expensive studio jams, but [Crosseyed Heart](#) feels like it fell into place, with its songs arising out of jams with a drummer instead of being excuses for jams. Bookended by acoustic numbers -- the first is the charmingly tossed-off title track, a song that feels clipped in its conclusion, the last a version of [Lead Belly](#)'s "Goodnight Irene," with the lyrics slightly modified -- the album does indeed bear the suggestion of a construction, a record that slides from obsession to obsession without calling attention to transitions. Nothing here is surprising, not the overdriven Chess boogie of "Blues in the Morning" or the ska shuffle of "Love Overdue," but that familiarity is an asset, because [Keith](#) luxuriates in his detours so much he winds up synthesizing his affections into a signature, a move highlighted by the soulful crawl of the [Norah Jones](#) duet "Illusion," a song where both singers seem seduced by the slow groove. "Illusion" mildly recalls "Make No Mistake," but where that [Talk Is Cheap](#) number underlined its Stax connections, [Crosseyed Heart](#) isn't so edgy: [Keith](#) no longer has to prove what he has to contribute to either [the Stones](#) or the culture at large, so he settles into his favorite sounds, loving to play the blues, rock & roll, country, and folk he's always savored, then sliding into the open-chord boogie that's unmistakably his. He may not forcibly claim this ground here but that's the appeal of [Crosseyed Heart](#): it's a winningly low-key record, where the atmosphere matters more than the songs, yet [Richards](#) doesn't neglect writing tunes this time around.

Hold On a Little Bit Longer – Eugene “Hideaway” Bridges

Eugene’s 2015 release **Hold On A Little Bit Longer** features a full horn section on several songs led by John Mills with Kevin Flatt on Trumpet and Jon Blondell Trombone. Bobby Baranowski is back on Drums, Otto Williams Bassist who first played with Eugene 15 years ago. Australian Clayton Doley plays Hammond B3 & Piano. Guesting on the title song, playing slide guitar, is Micky Moody, better known for his time with Whitesnake.

Het nieuwe album is een mengelmoes van soul, funk, blues, gospel en rock. Op deze cd wordt hij begeleid door uitstekende muzikanten met Clayton Doley op Hammond en piano, Otto Williams op bas en Bobby Baranowski op drums. Daarnaast een horn-section die geleid wordt door John Mills. De opening is een gepassioneerd gespeelde soultrack One More Time. Speciale gast op het album is Micky Moody (o.a. Whitesnake & Juicy Lucy), die de slidegitaar speelt op de titeltrack, het tweede nummer op het album. Een swingende rock ’n roll track die goed past bij de muzikale roots van Micky Moody.

De variëteit is groot, maar dit is helemaal geen probleem. Zijn stem past bij de swing van Change your name en Along the Navajo Trail. Ook het instrumentale Yesteryear, Today Tomorrow sluit goed aan bij de swingende sferen van de vorige tracks. De songs gaan over het leven, de liefde, liefdesverdriet, vrienden en relaties. Hij weet het gevoel goed in een song te smeden en je tot een snik te bewegen in End of Time en Lost and Lookin.

Het is een album met in de teksten soms een serieuze ondertoon, maar ook weer een album waar je vrolijk van wordt. Over het leven, hier vertelt hij graag over en dit draagt hij ook over in zijn muziek. Zeer toegankelijk en zoals ik schreef gevarieerd. Een album om heerlijk te genieten bij een herfstdagje in de auto, de gedachten weg in de blues en gierend door de lowlands van Nederland.



Another Country – Rod Stewart



Perhaps nobody was as surprised by [Rod Stewart](#)'s return to songwriting as [Rod Stewart](#). [Rod](#) hadn't bothered composing a tune in nearly two decades when he decided to write a brand new bunch of songs for 2013's [Time](#), an album inspired in part by his 2012 memoir *Rod: The Autobiography*. Arriving after ten years of [Great American Songbook](#) albums, the change in style and song was refreshing, something fans (and some critics) noted. People pleaser that he is, [Stewart](#) decided to give them what they wanted for [Another Country](#): another set of originals, augmented by a slyly chosen cover in [Steve Harley](#)'s "A Friend for Life" (on the Deluxe Edition, he shows a bit of cheek by once again singing [Python Lee Jackson](#)'s "In a Broken Dream," which he sang back in 1978). The success

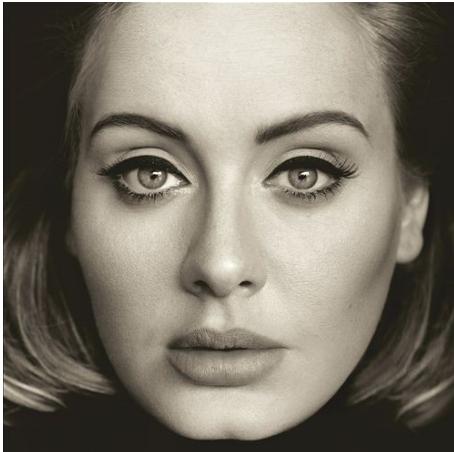
of [Time](#) loosened [Stewart](#) up a bit, so he takes some relative chances, moves that amount to a little bit of reggae ("Love and Be Love"), a [Mumford & Sons](#) stomp ("Hold the Line"), a sideways allusion to his MTV past (the synths on "Walking in the Sunshine"), cuts that rock a bit harder than anything on its predecessor ("Please"), and songs that triple-down on [Stewart](#)'s sentimental streak. Never afraid to wear his heart on his sleeve, the stickiness of "Batman Superman Spiderman" -- a song written for his four-year-old son, who slumbers surrounded by dolls of Woody & Buzz and super heroes -- is nevertheless alarming, as is his overcooked football anthem "We Can Win." As goofy as these numbers are, there's also something appealing about them: [Stewart](#) isn't afraid to be an old softie, and hearing him be an easy touch on his own cornball terms is endearing. Usually, he reels in his inclination to go a bit over the top, but this is still an album of love and family, one that's set to songs with slight Celtic and country lilt. He's not the man he was back in 1969, when his folk was simpler and hungrier, but he's not pretending to be. At 70, he's a content superstar taking stock of his life, where he is and where he's been ("The Drinking Song" is not boisterous, but a country song where he takes stock of what boozing cost), and it feels true to who he is today: an entertainer who is happy to reveal part of his heart because he now knows there's an audience who cares.

MNM Big Hits 2015.3 – Various Artists

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25 – Adele



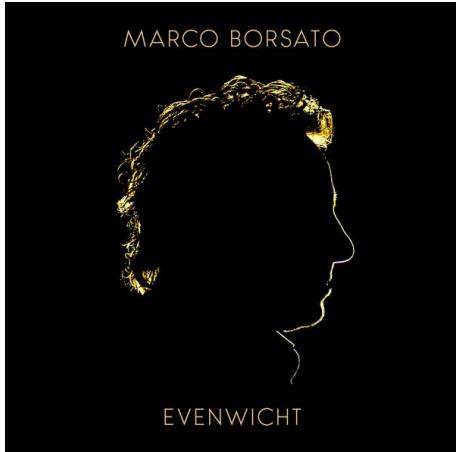
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Dark Sky Island – Enya

Since the late '80s, Irish singer/composer [Enya](#) has become the most unlikely of international stars, delivering lush, Celtic-driven pseudo-classical odes in her signature Wall of Sound vocal style, rarely granting interviews, never touring, and generally taking as much time as she wishes between albums. Bucking odds and industry trends, her popularity has remained steadfast, allowing her to become the best-selling Irish solo artist of all time. Following 2008's snowbound [And Winter Came](#), her silence stretched to eight years -- the longest of her career -- before the mists once again parted to reveal her eighth album, the evocatively titled [Dark Sky Island](#). Named for Sark, the smallest of Britain's Channel Islands and first in the world receive the Dark Sky designation for its lack of light pollution, it has all the thematic and sonic hallmarks typical of an [Enya](#) release but with significantly more highlights than on her two prior works. Since the release of her 1986 debut, changes in her overall approach have been subtle and critics have often derided her for her unwavering dedication to dated, late-'80s synth patches and her reliance on formulaic methods, but [Enya](#)'s consistency is actually one of her greatest assets. Her low public profile -- especially in the age of social media -- demands that her music remains the sole focus, and even if she and collaborators [Roma](#) and [Nicky Ryan](#) choose to keep working within their unique, self-designed milieu, it's one that they own completely and have nurtured over the years. Opening track "The Humming," with its eerie staccato swing and mystical musings on the cycles of the universe, is one of the strongest tracks she's produced in decades and resembles a dark cousin to 1991's masterwork "Caribbean Blue." Inspired lead single "Echoes of Rain" also harkens back to her [Shepherd Moons](#) heyday and features some fine, cascading piano work amid the pulsing strings and exalted vocal layers. [Dark Sky Island](#) also marks the return of Loxian, a language lyricist [Roma Ryan](#) first created for [Enya](#) on 2005's [Amarantine](#) and which is used here on the lavish march "The Forge of Angels" and the powerful "The Loxian Gate," which again echoes early [Watermark](#)-era standouts like "Storms in Africa" and "The Longships." While it would be unfair to call [Dark Sky Island](#) a throwback, it does manage to harness some of the power and creativity of [Enya](#)'s early days and pairs it with both the confidence and shadows of age.



Evenwicht – Marco Borsato



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A Head Full of Dreams – Coldplay

Released swiftly after [Ghost Stories](#) -- just a year and a half, all things considered -- [A Head Full of Dreams](#) plays like a riposte to that haunted 2014 album. Where [Chris Martin](#) spent [Ghost Stories](#) in a mournful mood -- his sorrow perhaps derived from his divorce to [Gwyneth Paltrow](#) or perhaps not; it's best not to read too much into the tabloid headlines -- the [Coldplay](#) leader sees nothing but sunshine and stars on [A Head Full of Dreams](#). [Martin](#) gives away the game with his song titles. He's quite literally having "Fun" on an "Amazing Day," living for the weekend and viewing his impending middle age as nothing so much as the "Adventure of a Lifetime." [Coldplay](#) match his optimism by tempering their signature soft focus, pushing themselves toward the light and undergirding the newfound positivity via glittering disco beats and a gossamer electronic sheen. Arriving after the deliberately dour [Ghost Stories](#), this infusion of backbeat and glitz does indeed feel welcome and bold but such determined levity also suggests the gusto of a greying divorcee boogying down on the deck of a cruise ship, determined to seize every bit of life headed his way. This *carpe diem* spirit courses throughout [A Head Full of Dreams](#), turning it into a 21st century equivalent of [Steve Winwood's](#) [Back in the High Life](#), a divorce record where every end seems like a fresh new beginning. Appropriately, [Coldplay](#) invite more than a few guests to help usher them into this brave new world, the showiest being [Beyoncé](#), who overwhelms the band's innate politeness on "Hymn for the Weekend," but [Tove Lo](#) eases right into "Fun" and [Noel Gallagher](#) amiably allows himself to be swallowed by the gentle wash of guitars and synths. All these cameos suit the overarching theme of [A Head Full of Dreams](#) -- how there's a big, bright, beautiful world just waiting to be discovered if you just open your heart and live a little -- and if this message is unabashedly corny, under the stewardship of [Chris Martin](#), [Coldplay](#) cheerfully embrace the cheese, ratcheting up both the sparkle and the sentiment so the album feels genuine in its embrace of eternal middle-aged clichés.

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