

Alleen bij jou – Sergio

single ...



Stay Gold – First Aid Kit



Swedish sisters Johanna and Klara Söderberg have taken what, in the era of TV talent shows and Internet stars (they were once YouTube sensations themselves), has become a rare path to major-label success. Their hard work and growth within a trusting and nurturing indie label climate have helped develop and mature their sound from the enchanting folk of their debut to the polished Americana that dominates *Stay Gold*. Making the jump from Wichita to Columbia Records for their third full-length has given the duo the scope to dream bigger, and that's exactly what they've managed here with an assured and comprehensive collection of songs. Noticeably more expansive than any of their previous work, *Stay Gold* has a rich texture of classic country instrumentation and stirring string arrangements,

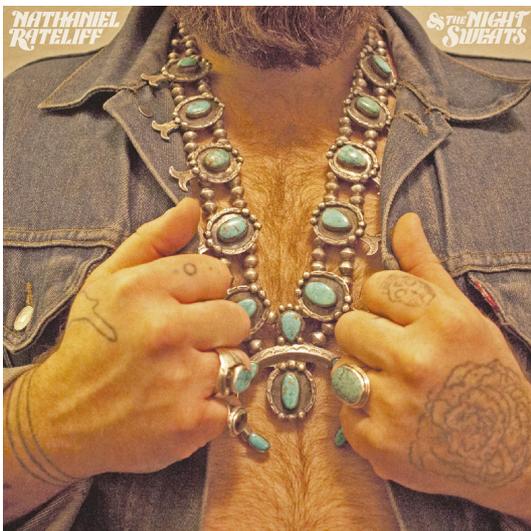
matching their soaring vocal melodies. They were first noticed when a charming woodland set of acoustic Fleet Foxes covers gained attention for their beautiful vocals, which are still the main draw on this release, with their close harmonies again empowering every song. The timeless chorus adorning "Cedar Lane" sets the song up for a belting finale, and the closing salvo "How could I break away from you" feels bold yet reassuring. There is plenty of introspection here that sees the sisters focus on their experiences and journey thus far, and being on the road since they were just teenagers has undoubtedly shaped the defiant slow burner "Shattered & Hollow" and the wandering dreams and vulnerability that seep into "Waitress Song." Despite the obvious shift toward a country-influenced sound with a real romping, foot stomper in "Heaven Knows," there are still folk ballads here -- "Fleeting One" and "A Long Time Ago" -- that show the delicacy and heartbreaking capacity of First Aid Kit. With a genuine sense of melancholy that is far beyond their young years, the Söderbergs have taken the mild success of their sophomore record, *Lion's Roar*, in their stride, and with the expert hand of Bright Eyes' Mike Mogis once again producing, the lush harmonies and melodies of this album show that they are worthy of a place in the mainstream.

MNM Big Hits 2016 Vol.1 – Various Artists

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Nathaniel Rateliff & the Night Sweats – Nathaniel rateliff & the Night Sweats



Songwriter [Nathaniel Rateliff](#) established himself as a critically celebrated folksy Americana singer/songwriter on 2010's [In Memory of Loss](#), his Rounder Records debut. Though he played in straight-ahead rock & roll bands before then, his independent releases since have been of intimate, poignant, and pensive songs. Until now. This self-titled offering on Stax is a hard-swinging, house-rocking affair that draws heavily on vintage R&B, soul, and proto rock & roll. Though [Rateliff](#) has displayed emotion in his vocals since the beginning, even fans have never heard him like this. Influences from [Sam & Dave](#) to [Van Morrison](#) to [Sam Cooke](#) range freely on this set -- and he has the voice to pull it off. The sessions were helmed by producer [Richard Swift](#), who captured [Rateliff](#) and his large band -- complete with a swaggering horn section (and occasionally subtle strings) -- with just enough reverb

to make it sound live. "I've Been Falling," with its upright piano and handclaps, delves deep into vintage [Morrison](#) territory without really emulating him (though [Rateliff](#) comes closer on the album's last track, "Mellow Out"). The raw soul passion in "Trying So Hard Not to Know" evokes the historic Stax ethos perfectly, while sidling up to [the Band's Big Pink](#) era. "S.O.B." has verses saturated in Southern gospel, with foot stomping and handclaps as the only accompaniment, before the entire band erupts in a carousing chorus. This reverses gospel's usual Saturday-night-to-Sunday-morning course; it is one of the rowdiest broken-heart songs you'll ever hear. "I'd Be Waiting" is a tender, wide-open love song with a late-night jazzy soul feel. The singer's voice is haunted equally by the spirits of [Cooke](#) and [Bobby "Blue" Bland](#). If this album has a weakness -- and it does -- it's that [Rateliff's](#) use of these forms and styles in his writing is not only basic -- which is fine -- but overly formulaic. Only the pedal steel-driven Americana in the absolutely lovely "Wasting Time" -- which recalls the [Gregg Allman](#) of [Laid Back](#) -- deviates; one or two more songs in this vein (especially with this band) would have made all the difference. That's a small complaint, one that will deter few. [Rateliff's](#) world-weary, deeply expressive tenor and lyrics place him on a different level than any of the current crew of revivalists.

MNM Big Hits 2016 Vol.2 – Various Artists

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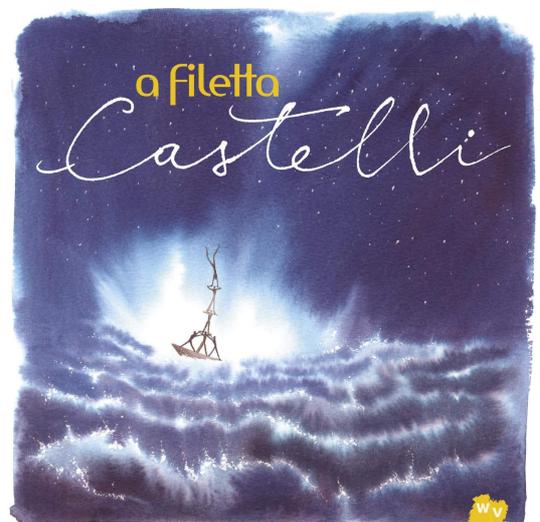
Rosetta – Vangelis



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Castelli – A Filetta

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Young as the Morning Old as the Sea – Passenger



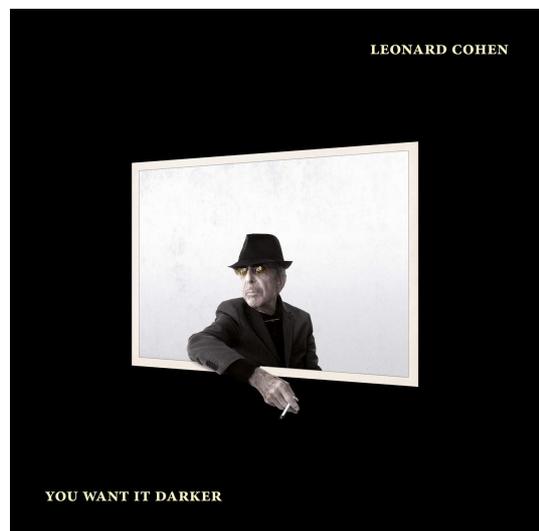
Passenger's eighth studio album, 2016's **Young as the Morning Old as the Sea**, is a lushly produced album rife with subtle melodies and lyrics that reveal singer/ **Rosenberg**'s soul-scratching itch to wander windswept rural landscapes. While **Young as the Morning Old as the Sea** follows on the heels of his stripped-down 2015 effort, **Whispers II**, given **Rosenberg**'s use of orchestral arrangements and varied instrumentation from organ and trumpet to lap steel guitar, the album has more in common with 2014's **Whispers**. As on that album, **Rosenberg** here pairs with producer **Chris Vallejo**, a longtime collaborator. Together, they decamped to **Neil Finn**'s Roundhead Studios in Auckland and, later, Linear Studios in Sydney to capture these nuanced, often delicately rendered compositions. Once again, the primary focus with **Passenger** is **Rosenberg**'s folky, poetic, acoustic guitar-based songs built around his idiosyncratic voice. It's a distinctive combination that brings to mind the fantastical combination of an elfin troubadour and **Van Morrison**, as well as more grounded comparisons like **Amos Lee** minus the R&B influence or **rett Dennen** with the Southern twang replaced by a British lilt. An air of wanderlust and a celebration of the life-renewing power of nature

pervade the album. As **Rosenberg** sings on the title track, "I wanna feel a Russian winter/I wanna go to my Polish grandmother's home/I wanna see Hungarian lanterns/I wanna walk on a road that leads to Rome/I wanna be free as the wind that blows past me." And while there is a palpable joy in many of these songs, there is also a bittersweet quality, as if **Rosenberg** has been through a breakup or other loss. It's a tone he strikes best on his gossamer, Elizabethan-tinged duet with U.K. folk siren **Birdy**, "Beautiful Birds." They sing, "One day you asked for a different song/One that I just couldn't sing/I got the melody sharp and the words all wrong/Those were the last days of spring." Certainly, there are hooky, anthemic moments on **Young as the Morning Old as the Sea**, including the rambling, waltz-like "If You Go" and the rousing, declaratively romantic "Anywhere," both of which bring to mind a pleasing mix of **Mumford & Sons** and **the Beautiful South**. That said, these are deeply thoughtful and sophisticated songs that may take more than one listen to truly appreciate. Ultimately, with **Young as the Morning Old as the Sea**, **Passenger** has crafted an album that, not unlike the oceans, fields, roads, and relationships that inspired it, remains with you, calling you to return.

You Want It Darker – Leonard Cohen

Given the subject matter in its title track, Leonard Cohen's advanced age (82), it's tempting to hear **You Want It Darker** as a last album. In advance of its release, he even told *The New Yorker* that he was ready to die, only to walk the comment back later. Whether it is or isn't, **You Want It Darker** is a hell of a record. Cohen wrote these songs alone and with old friends Sharon Robinson and Patrick Leonard. Son Adam produced, stepping in while his father was suffering from a severe back injury that required him to sing from a medically designed chair.

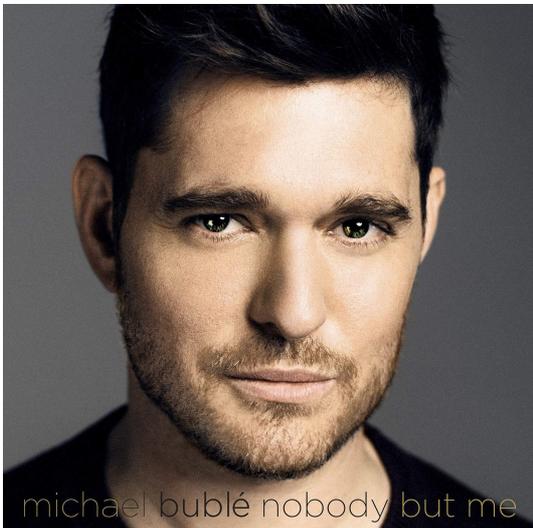
Cohen's sepulchral voice expresses a wealth of emotion through its grainy rasp. He remains defiant even while acknowledging failures, regrets, brokenness, and even anger. Redemption arrives, if at all, through unflinching honesty. The title track single is introduced by a choir and a foreboding bassline. Its lyric is as much an indictment of religion as a reflection, personal confession, and doubt. Cantor Gideon Y. Zelermyer engages with the sacred even as Cohen wrestles with it. For every, "Himani, Himani/I'm ready my Lord..." there is a counter: "...Magnified and sanctified/Be thy Holy Name/Vilified and crucified/In the human frame/A million candles burning/For the help that never came...." In the final verse he asserts: "If you are the dealer/I want out of this game," but he's answered by Zelermyer's and the choir's resolute devotion. "Treaty" recalls the melody of "Anthem" as piano, synth strings, and chorale highlight the poignancy in the lyric. Cohen equates past hopes and perceived truths with his guilt:



"We sold ourselves for love but now we're free/I'm sorry for the ghost I made you be...." "Leaving the Table" is a bittersweet country waltz where Cohen reveals things he no longer needs (even if he wishes he did), and underscores impending exit: "I don't need a pardon/There's no one left to blame/I'm leaving the table/I'm out of the game." The intersection of the blues, Yiddish folk, and gypsy musics on "Traveling Light" flows through bouzoukis, mandolins, and drum loops. Their union recalls the haunted musical qualities on 1984's *Various Positions*.

In song after song, Cohen delivers lyric juxtapositions that settle scores with God, past lovers, and himself. He sounds like a spent Jeremiah muttering to himself and arguing with his creator in a cave rather than the biblical one transported to heaven in a fiery chariot of victory. But even after all this, Cohen can't quite give up the ghost. The tender stringed reprise of "Treaty" closes the set with a faint -- and perhaps desperate -- twinge of hope: "I wish there was a treaty/between your love and mine." Despite his long list of gripes, sins, and losses, Cohen's instinctive opening to whatever light remains prevails on *You Want It Darker*. When all contradictions are nakedly exposed in truth, all one can do is embrace them and wish for the best. Brilliant.

Nobody But Me – Michael Bublé



Ever since crossing over with his 2005 soft rock hit "Home," Michael Bublé has attempted to balance his love of traditional jazz standards with his knack for sincerely delivered contemporary pop material. It's something his similarly inclined crossover contemporaries, from Harry Connick, Jr. and Jamie Cullum to Josh Groban and Diana Krall, have all attempted with greater and lesser degrees of success. Even before them, legends like Frank Sinatra and Nat King Cole regularly strayed beyond the pages of the *Great American Songbook*, hoping to wrangle the odd country & western, polka, or latest British Invasion hit into submission. That said, Bublé is arguably the best at doing the crossover dance. Blessed with a warm, inviting voice and attractively louche stage presence,

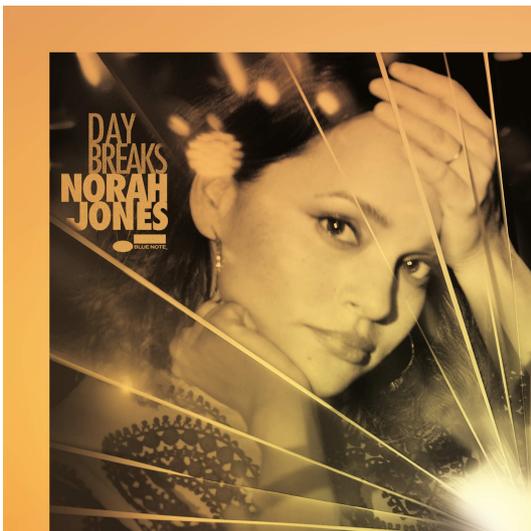
Bublé is a 21st century Bobby Darin; a mutable lounge act who knows when to swing, when to play it straight, and when to pepper a lyric with just enough tongue-in-cheek to let the hipsters know that you smell the cheese too. It's a multi-layered skill set that's helped him achieve a level of mainstream success on par with that of his more pop-oriented peers. Not surprisingly, he keeps the dance going with his slick, superbly executed ninth studio album, 2016's *Nobody But Me*. Co-produced by Bublé along with a cadre of big-name pop producers including Johan Carlsson, Alan Chang, Jason "Spicy G" Goldman, and the Monsters & Strangerz, the album is not dissimilar from the Canadian artist's past works. Here, we get a handful of well-curated standards, from a jaunty reading of the Matt Monro classic "My Kind of Girl" to a lush, orchestral take on "The Very Thought of You" to a brightly swinging, Sinatra-esque version of "My Baby Just Cares for Me." And while it's Bublé's finely honed talent for delivering these urbane, time-tested songs that remains the foundation of his appeal, he continues to defy easy categorization with his various forays into newly penned, modern radio-ready pop. Cuts like the crisp, '50s rock-meets-2000s-hip-hop title track, the twangy and soulful "Today Is Yesterday's Tomorrow," and the ukulele-accented duet with Meghan Trainor "Someday," are peppy anthems that make the most of Bublé's charm. Ultimately, that Bublé can successfully transition on *Nobody But Me* from the uber-earnest acoustic guitar boy band romance of "I Believe in You" to the giddy, mandolin-soaked, Dean Martin-pastiche of "On an Evening in Roma (Sotter Celo de Roma)" and make both work is at the least an enviable skill and at best, a kind of pop magic. Very few of his contemporaries can do that and nobody but Bublé can own it like he does here.

Everything Is My Family – Crystal Fighters

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Day Breaks – Norah Jones



Norah Jones took liberty with her blockbuster success to set out on a musical walkabout, spending a good portion of the decade following 2004's *Feels Like Home* experimenting, either on her own albums or on a variety of collaborations. *Day Breaks*, released four years after the atmospheric adult alternative pop of the Danger Mouse-produced *Little Broken Hearts*, finds Jones returning home to an extent: it, like her 2002 debut *Come Away with Me*, is a singer/songwriter album with roots in pop and jazz, divided between originals and sharply selected covers. Such similarities are immediately apparent, but *Day Breaks* is much slyer than a mere revival. That term suggests a slight air of desperation, but Jones comes from a place of confidence on *Day Breaks*, happy to demonstrate everything she's

learned over the years. Often, these tricks are deliberately sly: she'll pair her torchy original "And Then There Was You" with a woozy, bluesy cover of Neil Young's "Don't Be Denied" that winds up evoking *Come Away with Me*, then follow that up with the dense, nocturnal rhythms of "Day Breaks." She threads in versions of Horace Silver's "Peace" and Duke Ellington's "African Flower" while inviting saxophonist Wayne Shorter and organist Lonnie Smith in to play -- moves that signal that there's a strong, elastic jazz undercurrent to *Day Breaks* that means this record breathes more than her debut. Such a sense of quiet adventure gives the record depth, but what gives it resonance are the exquisitely sculpted songs. Jones' originals feel as elegant as time-honored standards, and all her covers feel fresh. The former speak to her craft, the latter to her gifts as a stylist, and the two combine to turn *Day Breaks* into a satisfying testament to her ever-evolving musicianship.

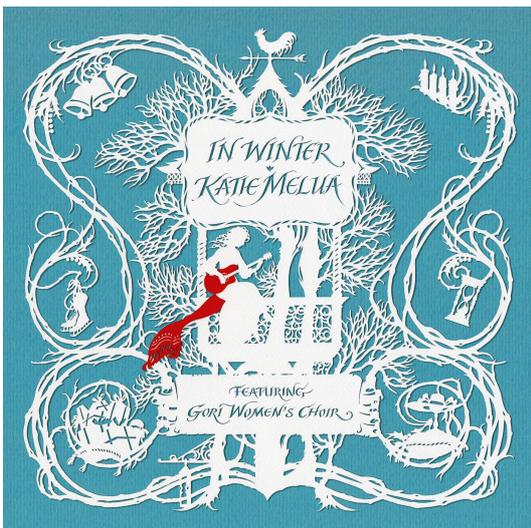
Walls – Kings of Leon

It's easy to forget that when Kings of Leon broke through in 2008 with *Only by the Night*, they were already four albums deep into their career. Buoyed by the popularity of hits "Sex of Fire" and "Use Somebody," the Tennessee four-piece transformed from ragged, post-punk upstarts into arena-bait arbiters of anthemic, mainstream rock uplift, exposing their abiding love for U2 in the process. In some ways, the tonal shift made sense to a band poised to storm the awards stages next to similarly grand-minded acts like Coldplay and the Killers. It's a stance the band has assumed unflinchingly, if somewhat doggedly on subsequent albums like 2010's *Come Around Sundown* and 2013's *Mechanical Bull*. Although those albums had their brighter moments (the driving "Supersoaker"),



there was a sense that just as KOL ascended to their rightful place in the post-U2 rock royalty, they became codified and predictable. On their seventh studio album, 2016's *WALLS*, Kings of Leon clearly attempt to crack the surface of that codified shell, hunkering down in Los Angeles with producer Markus Dravs (Florence + the Machine, Arcade Fire, Mumford & Sons), purportedly taking a looser, less critical approach to recording. The result is an album that does feel less claustrophobic than previous efforts, with a lean aesthetic that straddles the gaps between classic Tom Petty, '80s Fleetwood Mac, and more contemporary acts like Arcade Fire. It's a brief album, clocking ten songs in just over 40 minutes. There's also a handful of catchy, pulse-pounding cuts here like sanguinely ecstatic "Find Me" and the swaggeringly heavy-browed "Reverend," both of which find lead singer Caleb Followill retaining his position as the band's biggest asset; his emotive southern yawp rife with poetry and lyricism. The looser approach also pays dividends as the band dive into the kinetic Afro-pop jauntiness of "Around the World," and commit with wholehearted sincerity to the melodic '80s new wave-meets-'50s rock of "Eyes on You." And while no one will accuse Kings of Leon of taking huge creative chances here, cuts like the ballad "Muchacho," with its endearingly creaky, analog-sounding drum machine, and the sparkling, sweet-toned "Conversation Piece," have the feel of in-the-moment discovery, as if the band recorded them not too soon after working them out. Many of the tracks on *WALLS* also benefit from the added texture of keyboardist Liam O'Neill's various Moog synthesizers, pianos, and Mellotrons. For longtime fans, there are a few dependable arena belters here in the lead-off "Waste a Moment" and the yearning "Over," but, especially in regards to the latter, they beg you to push repeat. Ultimately, with *WALLS*, Kings of Leon have struck a nice balance between the garage band passion of their early work, and the large scale bombast that made them stars.

In Winter – Katie Melua



A gorgeously rendered holiday-themed effort, *In Winter* finds singer/songwriter Katie Melua backed by the 25-member Gori Women's Choir. The album is Melua's seventh studio production and first since parting ways with longtime collaborator Mike Batt. Recorded in her native country of Georgia (Melua left with her parents at age nine), *In Winter* is a lushly produced, thoughtfully conceived album featuring arrangements by esteemed choral composer Bob Chilcott. An acclaimed institution, the Gori Women's Choir are famous for their haunting classical harmonies. They prove a superb match for

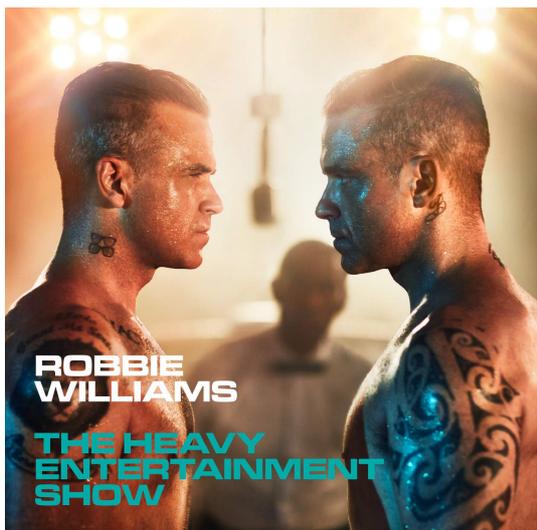
Melua, who both sings along with the choir and frames herself against its angelic, delicately layered harmonies. Although the album is technically a holiday-themed work, it's not a cheery collection of yuletide favorites. Instead, Melua delivers a handful of ruminative and lyrical originals, many inspired by her memories of growing up in what was then the Soviet Union, as well as the complex and often heartbreaking history of Georgia's civil war. She also weaves in several well-curated covers, including poignant renditions of Joni Mitchell's "River," Sergey Rachmaninov's "All-Night Vigil-Nunc Dimittis," and the hymn "O Holy Night." Melua even finds room to sing in Ukrainian, opening the album with a magical rendition of the traditional song "The Little Swallow," whose melody is better recognized to Western audiences as "The Carol of the Bells." These are warmly arranged, beautifully executed recordings that capture the stark, introspective beauty of a rural Eastern Europe in winter.

A Pentatonix Christmas – Pentatonix

The second full-length holiday outing from the Arlington, Texas-based, 2011 Sing-Off-winning a cappella group, A Pentatonix Christmas delivers a colorful set of Yuletide emissions with ample amounts of spirit and a truly impressive command of harmony. Acrobatic takes on "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen," "O Come, All Ye Faithful," and "I'll Be Home for Christmas" fit nicely alongside highlights from 2014's double platinum-selling *That's Christmas to Me*, but where the former only yielded one original offering, Pentatonix Christmas unleashes two self-penned Santa jams into the world, the winking "Good to Be Bad" and the festive "The Christmas Sing-Along." Also notable is a soulful rendering of "White Christmas," which sees the quintet teaming up with a cappella, jazz fusion, and pop legends Manhattan Transfer.



Heavy Entertainment Show – Robbie Williams



Establishing himself as the last of a particular breed, Robbie Williams makes his pop comeback on *The Heavy Entertainment Show*. A aptly titled, Williams is entertaining as ever, a consummate showman until the end. The album is a grab bag of ideas, darting here and there in its pursuit of a hit. However, this isn't too much of a distraction. Mr. Entertainment and his bombast do not disappoint. *The Heavy Entertainment Show* is his most invigorated album in years, a truer return to the pop realm than 2012's *Take the Crown*. Here, Williams dresses up his antics in expert production with plenty of cheekiness to spare. As the show begins, Williams announces "the charisma's non-negotiable" and "I'm about to strip and you're my pole." He's cocky, crass, and utterly engaging as a chorus of backup singers add,

"He would sell his children for a hit in Belgium!" Few pop stars can pull this off, yet from Williams, it's almost comforting to see him once again embrace his braggadocious ringmaster persona. Longtime producer Guy Chambers makes his return to Williams' circus, along with a number of high-profile guests. The Killers-penned "Mixed Signals" is an open-road epic that sounds like a *Battle Born* castaway, while Ed Sheeran and Benny Blanco join forces for the stomp-twang Avicii-

lite "Pretty Woman." Rufus Wainwright contributes songwriting and his velvety voice to a trio of brassy tunes, kick-stepping alongside Williams on the aforementioned title track, as well as "Hotel Crazy" and the grand outro "Sensational." "David's Song" -- penned by Jewel and Kara DioGuardi -- is a heart-rending soft rock ballad that overwhelms with a powerful closing guitar solo and orchestral swell. However, it's producer Stuart Price who proves most valuable. In addition to the Killers track, he injects the album with a pair of addictive standout synth numbers. Highlight "Bruce Lee" is a Bowie-stomping glam number that struts its way through the pack, while "Sensitive" amps up the sensuality with echoing synths, handclaps, and juicy bass. Elsewhere, there are a couple love-or-hate tracks that stick out. The Prokofiev-sampling lead single "Party Like a Russian" -- which sounds like something Muse would use to dramatically start a show -- is big on drama and creativity, but might rub some listeners the wrong way with its cultural generalities. Meanwhile, the boldly titled "Motherfucker" seems like it's trying a little too hard to shock, yet it's the finest example of Williams' schtick. A heartwarming dedication to his young son, it is ridiculous yet completely uplifting. As it explodes into a guitar-drenched Oasis B-side, Williams recites a litany of family woes that could affect his offspring. It'll make grandma blush, but at the heart of it all, he's confident that his son will "break the chain" of sin. Despite that title and explicit lyrics, Williams allows some sincerity to shine through the sophomoric, remaining hilarious and full of heart. Eleven albums in and he's still one of the most likable acts around, truly one of a kind.

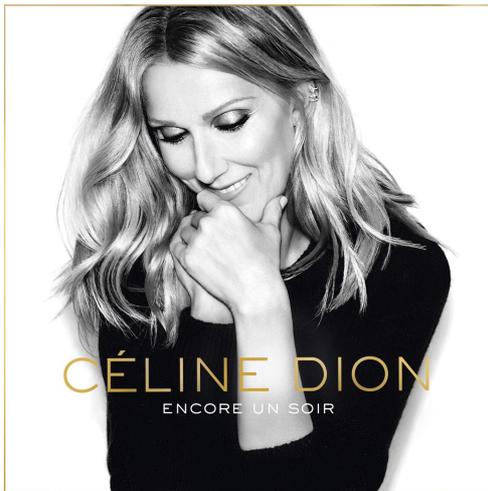
Long Live the Angels – Emeli Sandé

Emeli Sandé had three U.K. Top Ten hits as a featured artist before she released her 2012 debut album. Our Version of Events, a multi-platinum smash and the source of four additional Top Ten singles, continued the singer and songwriter's escalation. There was a somewhat similar lead-up to proper album number two. Between releases, she fronted the similarly successful likes of Labrinth's "Beneath Your Beautiful," Naughty Boy's "Lifted," and David Guetta's "What I Did for Love." That Sandé was sought by Rihanna, Alicia Keys, and Leona Lewis, and frequently had her songs performed on televised singing competitions, indicated the regard with which she was held as a writer. Long Live the Angels, her second proper album, is built to maintain her rank. Guest appearances are once again



kept to a minimum, placing the spotlight squarely on Sandé's gracefully open demonstrations of salvation, devotion, pain, and perseverance. (She married her long-term partner in 2012 and divorced shortly thereafter.) Sandé visited her father in Zambia and added his voice, as well as a local children's choir, to "Tenderly," a lilting plea for emotional refuge. On the sparse, snaking "Garden," another cut regarding shelter, Áine Zion provides the intro and outro, while Jay Electronica adds a burning intensity over the album's lone deep bassline. Apart from those spots and multiple powerful appearances from a gospel choir, it's all Sandé all the time. Ballads prevail as she deals with the consequences of a broken relationship, lamenting false dreams, yearning for fulfillment, and admitting her inability to simply brush it off. In "I'd Rather Not," she ultimately rejects the notion of a second chance, comparing the damage to natural catastrophes and bullet wounds. Sandé sings with more precision and force without overselling anything. There's also more nuance to her approach, as in "Lonely," where the line "Baby I'm outta here" is sung twice in a row, first with resolve, then with a deep ache. Certain listeners might bemoan the shortage of uptempo belters here, but one attentive and thorough listen presents a clear justification.

Encore Un Soir – Céline Dion



Celine Dion began work on *Encore un Soir* in the summer of 2015 when her husband Rene Angelil was quite ill. He passed away in January 2016, around the midpoint of the sessions, so it could stand to reason the album was a way for Dion to work through her grief, but this French-language record isn't quite as simple as that. For one, Dion's art isn't strictly autobiographical; she may pour herself into her performances but a correlation between her personal life and her recordings isn't easy to draw. Secondly, *Encore un Soir* is evenly divided between pop tunes and ballads, not too dissimilar from her usual albums. That said, there's a certain sense of restraint and deliberateness to *Encore un Soir* that does give it an emotional pull. It's too pat to call it a response to her husband's death -- after all, the

album was underway prior to his passing -- but at the very least the measured performances here suggest that Dion is starting to feel settled in her middle age, no longer wanting to push at the boundaries of her range but deciding to let her interpretations breathe. As such, this album is one of the subtlest and most moving collections in her catalog.

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