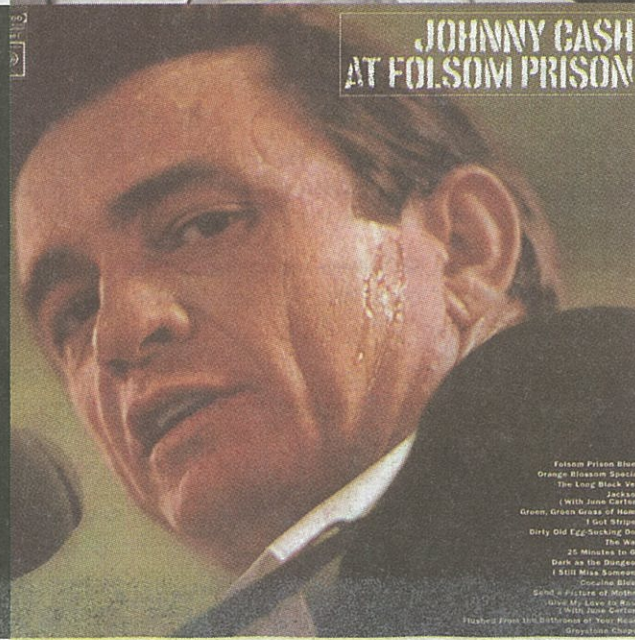
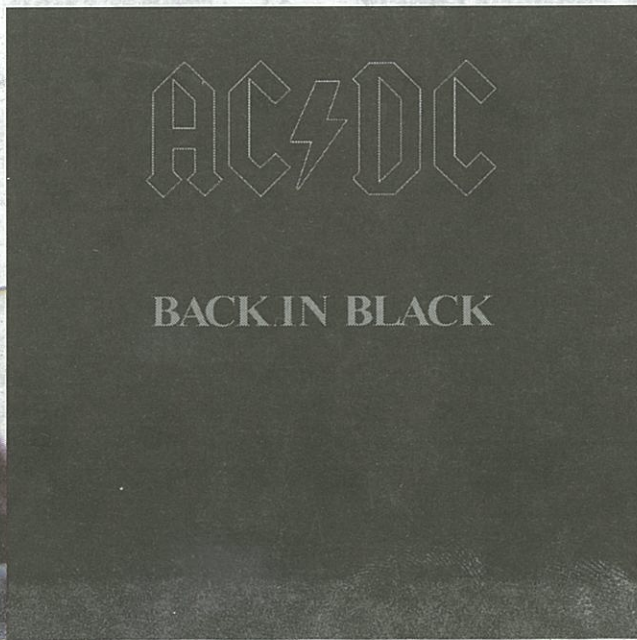
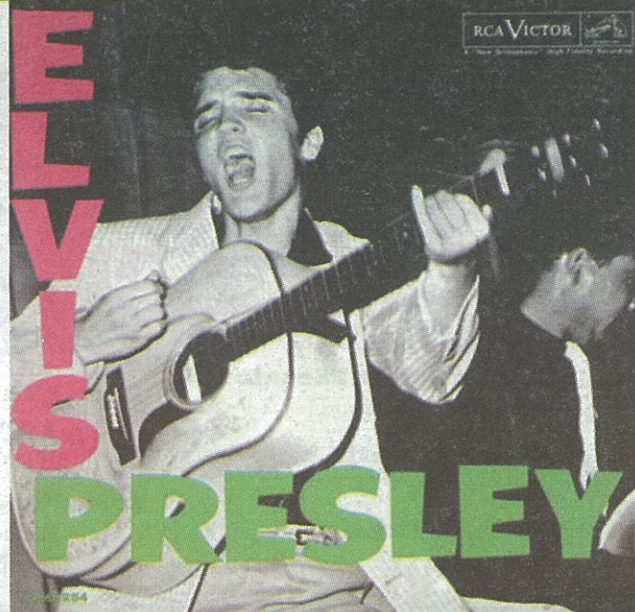


# Classic 1955 to 1980 Albums

A celebration of vinyl's golden era

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For those of us who love the warm, analog sound and a physical listening experience that includes reading the liner notes, studying the artwork and flipping the record over, vinyl will always be superior.

Starting in the middle of the past century artists from across the musical map got serious about releasing long-playing (LP) records rather than singles. For the next quarter century, vinyl albums reigned supreme. Compact discs debuted in the early 1980s and digital music continued gaining popularity,

with streaming music services taking over about a decade ago. Interestingly, the past decade has also witnessed a vinyl revival, with Forbes reporting that vinyl records are projected to sell 40 million units this year, nearing \$1 billion in sales for the first time this millennium. So, in the spirit of spinning the

black circle, here's a list of 50 albums spread over the golden era of vinyl — just one album per artist, at least one album per year, and no multi-artist or soundtrack albums. Here you will find seminal works representing the best in pop, rock, blues, folk, funk, disco, punk, reggae, country, jazz, and electronic.

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# “In the Wee Small Hours”

## Frank Sinatra

RELEASED: 1955 LABEL: Capitol

Frank Sinatra should have been the happiest man on the planet. The svelte, handsome 39-year-old with those deep, blue eyes had successfully transitioned from teen idol to adult star. After numerous career setbacks he was on top of the world, blazing a trail that would lead to his place as a 20th century phenomenon. The critically-acclaimed blockbuster film “From Here to Eternity” earned him a 1954 Oscar for Best Supporting Actor while his ebullient single “Young at Heart” inundated the radio airwaves.

Despite all these career successes, though, Sinatra’s marriage to screen star and sex symbol Ava Gardner had fallen apart.

She filed for divorce in June of ’54 and about a month later was photographed by the Associated Press dining with her lover, Spanish matador Miguel Luis Dominguin, at a hotel in Reno, Nevada. Imagine Sinatra’s reaction when he saw that photo! The singer, who had quite the temper, didn’t let rage get the best of him, though, at least not while preparing “In the Wee Small Hours,” recorded in February and early March of 1955 and released in April of the same year.

Sinatra would later call “In the Wee Small Hours” his “Ava album.”



“Frank had been preparing his new album, his third for Capitol, for months, meticulously planning the song list and the sequencing of the tunes and, collaborating closely with (pianist Bill Miller) and (arranger Nelson Riddle) — often at Sinatra’s house — working out every note, phrase, and nuance,” writes James Kaplan in his book “Sinatra: The Chairman.”

Sinatra’s first 12-inch LP, “In the Wee Small Hours,” is 16 ballads that follow a single theme of busted love and loneliness. It’s also the first of Sinatra’s superb concept albums to build a theme around an opening title track. Fittingly, David Mann and Bob Hilliard composed “In the Wee Small Hours of the Morning” during a post-midnight session. Sinatra’s tender delivery perfectly conveys

the gut-punch pathos of such lines as, “In the wee small hours of the morning, that’s the time you miss her most of all.”

Throughout the album the arrangements are minimal, no soaring strings, nothing sappy. Plenty of musicians contributed, adding everything from drum and bass to harp and French horns, but Sinatra’s voice remains where it belongs: at the forefront, right in your ear. He’s clearly focused on expressing his melancholy mood and does so with a sublime mix of vulnerability and command. His phrasing — the stuff that would make him a favorite of such jazz legends as Miles Davis — is mesmerizing.

The choice of material is impeccable, too, including such gems as “Mood Indigo,” “Glad to Be Unhappy” and “When Your Lover Has Gone,” and Cole Porter’s “What Is This Thing Called Love?”

“In the Wee Small Hours” has been called one of the first concept albums, but that honor really doesn’t matter in considering its legacy. It is sorrow transformed into artistic gold.

A favorite of such greats as B.B. King, Tom Waits, and Marvin Gaye, it is also the album that made it OK for tough guys to sing sad songs. For that alone, its influence is incalculable.

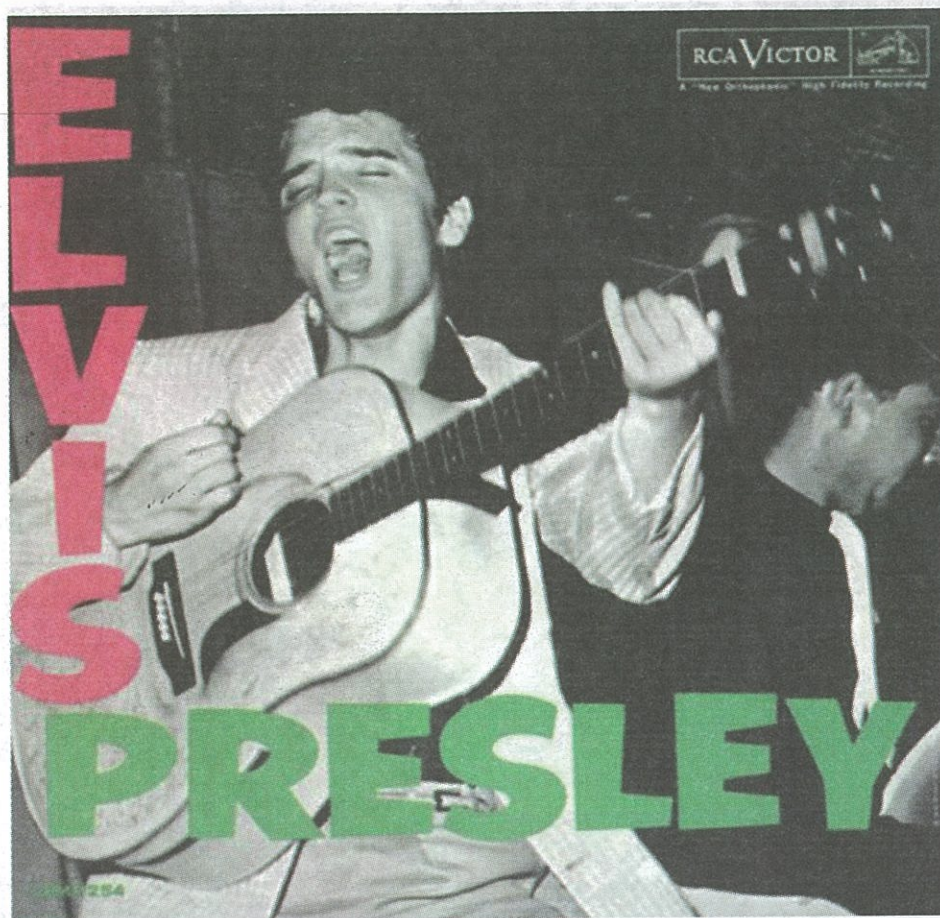
# “Elvis Presley”

## Elvis Presley

RELEASED: 1956 LABEL: RCA Victor

**M**outh agape, eyes shut, acoustic guitar held high on his chest revealing the region below the waistline, the “Elvis Presley” album cover photo captures the game-changing energy emanating from the striking young man as he played a packed Fort Homer Hesterly Armory in Tampa on July 31, 1955. White Southern teens witnessed a look of ecstasy coupled with equally euphoric sounds and were freed in ways they could not even understand on that hot, summer night in Florida. An album of sexually-charged songs would soon be paired with that image and consumed by youths nationwide and, well, things changed.

Elvis Presley’s self-titled debut album features the singer and rhythm guitarist raw and powerful, cocksure and playful, displaying a preternatural mastery of interpreting blues, R&B, country, and pop as his own to help define this new commodity called rock ‘n’ roll. The first rock ‘n’ roll album to reach No. 1 on the Billboard Top Pop Albums chart, “Elvis Presley” came out March 13, 1956, just as the Presley single “Heartbreak Hotel” and packed, scream-filled concerts were making the singer a national star. Television appearances would soon



solidify his unprecedented level of original rock stardom.

“Elvis Presley” collects songs the singer had recorded in January of 1956 with producer Steve Sholes for RCA Victor and melds them with recordings Presley did the previous two years with Sam Phillips at Sun Studios. The 21-year-old Presley (vocals, acoustic guitar), Scotty

Moore (electric guitar), and Bill Black (bass) had been together since the first recording session in July of ‘54 and D. J. Fontana (drums) joined them a couple months later. The album also includes contributions from ace session players such as guitarist Chet Atkins and pianist Floyd Cramer.

The album opens with Presley’s

supercharged cover of his pal and former Sun recording artist Carl Perkins’ rockabilly exemplar “Blue Suede Shoes.” The vocals are loose and assured, the rhythm section propulsive, and then there’s Moore’s succinct, fiery guitar solos, which almost steal the show. It’s all about Presley’s pining vocals on the next number, the ballad “I’m Counting on You,” before he successfully covers Ray Charles’ “I Got A Woman” by wisely avoiding trying to copy the peerless original. Presley does the same on side two with Little Richard’s “Tutti Frutti,” doing a fine job of making it his own rather than attempting to challenge the manic explosion of the original.

The most haunting track on the album, “Blue Moon,” comes second to last. Presley’s voice sounds so enchantingly sad as he swings high and low through the lonesome lines: “Blue moon / You saw me standing alone / Without a dream in my heart / Without a love of my own.” Yes, the young rock and roller could not just sell, but own, Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart’s 1934 popular ballad as well, if not better, than anyone. But this is a rock ‘n’ roll album and it closes with a revved-up rendition of Clyde McPhatter and the Drifters’ recent hit “Money Honey.”

# “Here’s Little Richard”

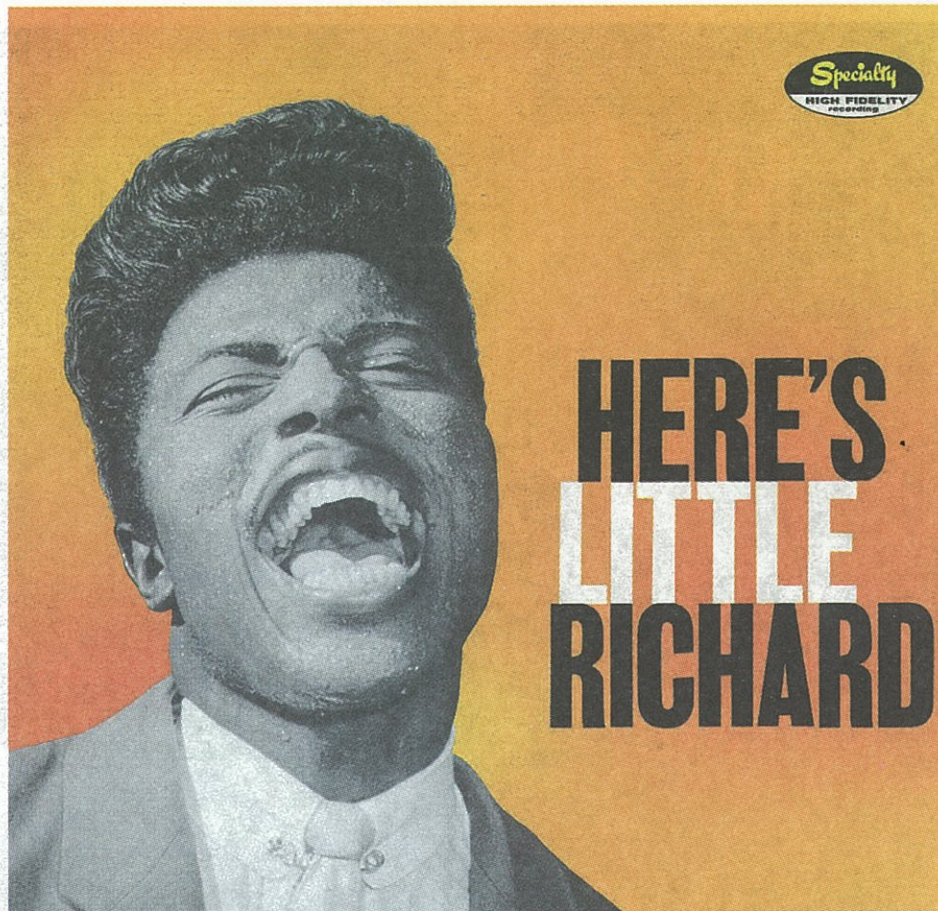
## Little Richard

RELEASED: **1957** LABEL: **Specialty**

Little Richard spent years on the chitlin’ circuit trying out myriad styles, including an act he did in a dress and heels as Princess Lavonne. He also cut a few sides for RCA Victor and Peacock before entering J & M Studio in New Orleans and recording the wild, sexy, rock ‘n’ roll juggernaut “Tutti Frutti” in September of 1955.

Born Richard Wayne Penniman on December 5, 1932, in Macon, Georgia, Little Richard was the third eldest of Leva Mae and Charles “Bud” Penniman’s 12 children. Father, like son, was split between the sacred and spiritual, a church deacon who sold moonshine on the side and owned a nightclub called the Tip In Inn. The elder Penniman would be gunned down near the entrance of his club on February 14, 1952, according to Preston Lauterbach’s book, “The Chitlin’ Circuit: And the Road to Rock ‘n’ Roll,” giving Richard extra incentive to make a living playing what he had been raised to fear, “the devil’s music.”

“Here’s Little Richard,” released in March of 1957 by Specialty Records, is built around the singer’s hit singles for the label dating back to “Tutti Frutti,” the obvious choice for lead track of the debut album. The opening scream of “a-wop-bop-a-loo-bop-a-wop-bam-boom!” comes through the speakers like a sexual awakening and the song just never



relents. Recorded with producer Bumps Blackwell and Fats Domino’s backing band, “Tutti Frutti” started as a dirty ditty Richard had penned and played on the circuit — perhaps as Princess Lavonne, judging by the lyrics about “good booty” and what do with it. Blackwell had the lyrics cleaned up before the recording by Richard.

The first side of the album also contains the definitive and likely first

version of the Blackwell and John Marascalco rocker “Ready Teddy” as well as the boogie-woogie blast “Slippin’ and Slidin,’” a song about a trifling woman Richard based on two previous songs with similar sounds and themes resulting in the multiple names on the songwriting credit. “I won’t be your fool no more,” Richard howls before a red-hot saxophone solo by New Orleans great Lee Allen.

Flip “Here’s Little Richard” over

and listeners are greeted with another lusty classic, “Long Tall Sally.” Credited to Blackwell, Enotris Johnson, and Richard, the song contains the chorus “Well long, tall Sally, she’s built for speed, she got everything that Uncle John need” and listeners, at least anyone paying attention, understood what made Sally so special.

Side two also contains the hit “Rip it Up” and “Jenny, Jenny,” the latter co-written by Richard. These are both piano-pounding songs celebrating good times with plenty of slightly veiled sexual references. But even without the lyrical cues, there’s Richard and his “woooooooooooooooooos,” which perhaps better than any line ever sung sum up the essence of rock ‘n’ roll.

Little Richard quit the music business in 1958 to preach and his recording career never really recovered despite several comeback attempts. “Here’s Little Richard,” though, has quite the legacy with “Long Tall Sally” alone recorded by such artists as The Beatles, Elvis Presley, The Kinks, rockabilly queen Wanda Jackson, and German heavy metal stars Scorpions. In 2010, the U.S. Library of Congress National Recording Registry added “Tutti Frutti,” noting that “even in the less-suggestive version that was eventually released, Little Richard’s unique vocalizing over the irresistible beat announced a new era in music.”

# “After School Session”

## Chuck Berry

RELEASED: **1957** LABEL: **Chess**

Of the many rock 'n' roll pioneers to emerge in the late 1940s and 1950s none possessed as much talent as Chuck Berry. He married blues and country to create a singular style featuring witty lyrics mostly about youthful subject matter and delivered them with careful diction. Instantly memorable melodies and blazing guitar licks accompanied these poetic slices of teenage life.

And here's the thing, Berry entered the music scene as a fully-formed music genius. In 1955, he walked into the Chess Records offices and played owners Leonard and Phil Chess a revved-up rewrite of the old country song “Ida Red.” Renamed “Maybellene,” it reached No. 5 on the Billboard pop chart that same year. Following the release of a bunch more singles now considered classics, Chess issued Berry's debut album, “After School Session,” in May of 1957. The cool cover is a still from the previous year's film “Rock, Rock, Rock!” and all the tracks were culled from previously released singles except for “Roly Poly,” “Berry Pickin’,” and “Together (We Will Always Be).” While by no means a cohesive statement by Berry it remains his finest album — barely besting the hits heavy “Chuck Berry Is on Top” (1959) — thanks to its diversity.



“After School Session” opens with the rock 'n' roll anthem “School Day (Ring! Ring! Goes the Bell),” which includes the lines “Hail, hail rock and roll / Deliver me from the days of old.” (“Hail! Hail! Rock and Roll” is the title of the must-see concert film and documentary about Berry released three decades later.) Side one also contains the hit rapid-fire lyric-delivery of “Too Much Monkey Business” and the deep track “Wee

Wee Hours,” a hardcore blues featuring tasty piano by Berry's chief collaborator Johnnie Johnson.

Side two starts with the pounding “Brown Eyed Handsome Man,” which one can only imagine started its life in Berry's brain as “Brown SKINNED Handsome Man.” Music critic Jon Pareles, for The New York Times, wrote that with the song Berry “offered a barely veiled

racial pride.” Following the guitar and piano instrumental workout “Berry Pickin’” and “Together (We Will Always Be),” which finds Berry delivering the romantic lines like Nat King Cole, comes the expertly written “Havana Moon,” a first-person lyric about a Cuban man longing for his American girl delivered over a lovely Latin melody.

“It is the differences in people that I think gives me a tremendous imagination to create a story for developing a lyric,” Berry wrote in his autobiography. “I had read, seen or heard in some respect all the situations in the Havana story. Certainly, missing the boat and surely missing the girl had been experienced many times by me.”

Songs on “After School Session” have been covered by such diverse acts as The Beatles, AC/DC, Waylon Jennings, The Beach Boys, Buddy Holly, and Nina Simone. Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis and Elvis Presley performed “Brown Eyed Handsome Man” during the 1956 jam session resulting in the album “Million Dollar Quartet.” The Rolling Stones, the band with the greatest debt to Berry, named their 2016 double concert album recorded in Cuba “Havana Moon.”

# “Lady in Satin”

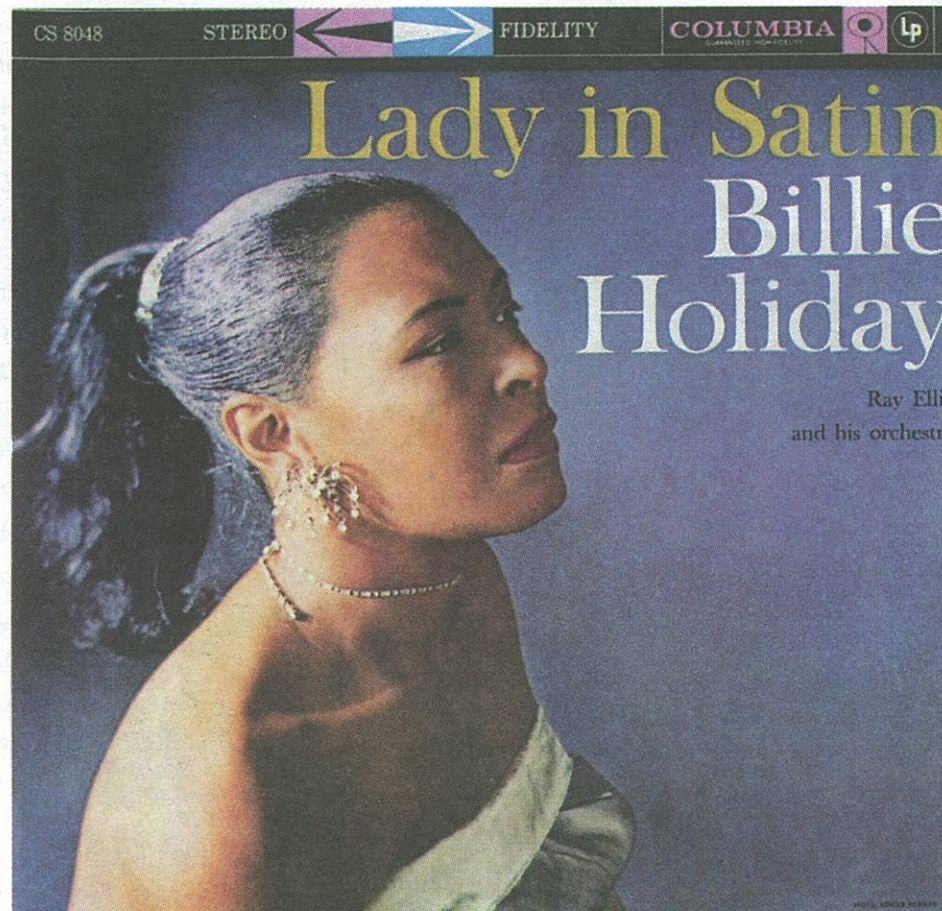
## Billie Holiday

RELEASED: 1958 LABEL: Columbia

Billie Holiday did her best singing on singles issued in the mid 1930s and two decades later her voice had deteriorated after years of hard drugs and drinking. Holiday had a horrible childhood and self-medicating would kill the vocalist, the most important in jazz history, at age 44. Holiday's upper register had been ravaged, her breath not very strong, but when it came time in February of 1958 to record “Lady in Satin,” her penultimate and greatest album, she still had the uncanny ability to deliver a line and make it sound lived in like few others.

“Here you have Billie Holiday really stripped down to the minimum,” said A. B. Spellman, poet and music critic, on NPR. “You can hear the slurs, the way she breaks notes, the way she bends even one-syllable words. You can hear her — how she phrases, you can hear the liberty she takes with melodies, how she sings above or behind it. You can hear it better on the earlier records, but what you can't get on the earlier records is this incredible life in the music.”

“Lady in Satin” opens with “I'm a Fool to Want You.” One of the few songs her friend Frank Sinatra, a great admirer of hers, contributed lyrics to, rewriting certain lines before recording the ballad in 1951. The original is heartbreaking but Holiday's rendition delves even deeper into the naked emotion of



such lines as “Take me back, I love you / Pity me, I need you.”

Holiday courts romance next with “For Heaven's Sake” then returns to the theme of the opening track with “You Don't Know What Love Is.” One of her most memorable performances, it is an interpretation of the ironic Hoagy Carmichael title “I Get Along Without You Very Well.”

Side two starts with the album's

masterpiece, “You've Changed.” A popular song dating back to 1941, it's a lyric about faded love, sure, but one can't help wonder if Holiday is not only recalling past lovers, but perhaps even looking into the mirror as she sings the closing lines: “You're not the angel I once knew / No need to tell me that we're through / It's all over now You've changed.”

While the 4-CD “Lady Day: The Master Takes and Singles” is probably

the best place to hear Holiday in top form, “Lady in Satin” is her finest album, a collection of songs she chose to make a beautifully sad statement late in her life.

“I would say that the most emotional moment was her listening to the playback of ‘I'm a Fool to Want You,’” said the album's arranger Ray Ellis, in 1997. “There were tears in her eyes... After we finished the album I went into the control room and listened to all the takes. I must admit I was unhappy with her performance, but I was just listening musically instead of emotionally. It wasn't until I heard the final mix a few weeks later that I realized how great her performance really was.”

“Lady in Satin” was met with mixed reviews upon its release in June of 1958. Holiday recorded one more album before dying on July 17, 1959. “Lady in Satin” was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame in 2000. That same year, Holiday was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in the “early influences” category.

“Although her brief life was fraught with tragedy, Holiday left a transcendent legacy of recorded work,” read the opening lines on the rock hall's official website. “Her pearly voice, exquisite phrasing and tough-tender persona influenced the likes of Janis Joplin and Diana Ross, among others.”

# “Kind of Blue”

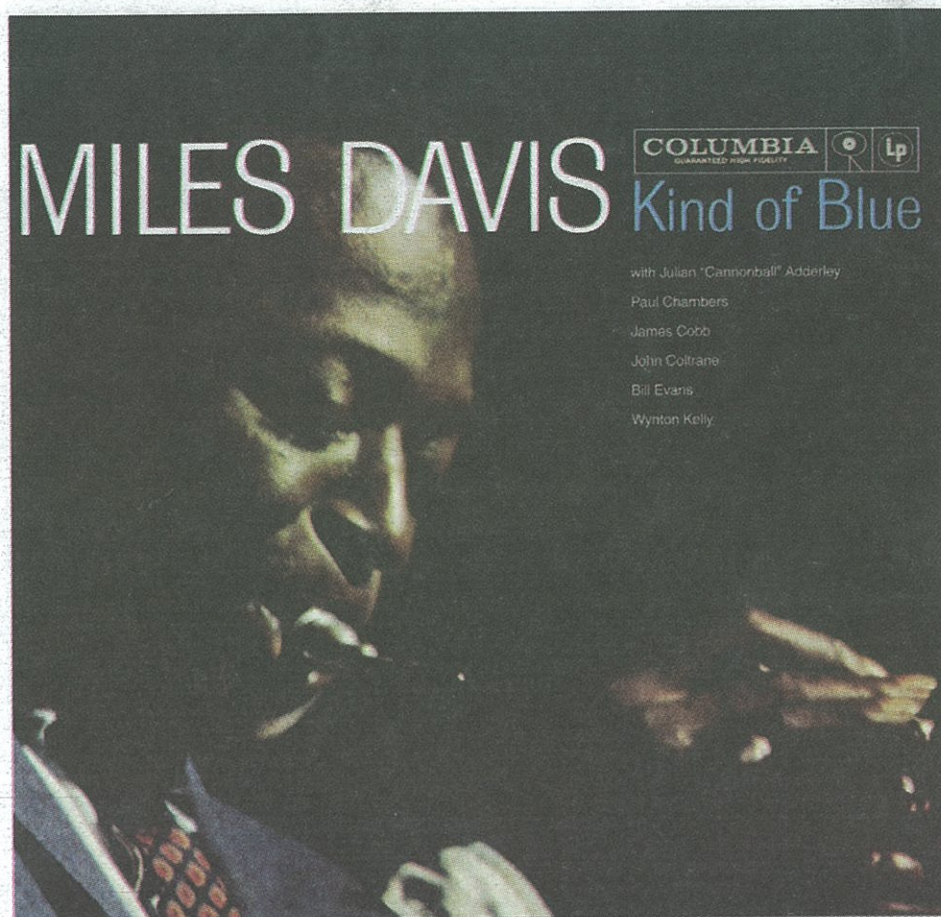
## Miles Davis

RELEASED: **1959** LABEL: **Columbia**

As a trumpeter, composer and bandleader, Miles Davis had already established himself as one of the foremost figures in jazz before stepping into Columbia’s 30th Street Studio in New York City on March 2, 1959, to start recording “Kind of Blue.” Davis introduced a new style of melodic bebop while performing with saxophonist Charlie Parker in the mid-1940s and played a pioneering role in the cool jazz and hard bop movements of the late ’40s and early ’50s. Starting with his 1958 album “Milestones,” Davis explored modal jazz, which eschewed chord progressions in favor of modal improvisation.

For “Kind of Blue,” Davis assembled a jazz supergroup — in the truest sense of that overused term — of John Coltrane on tenor saxophone, Julian “Cannonball” Adderley on alto saxophone, Bill Evans on piano (except on “Freddie Freeloader”), Paul Chambers (bass), Jimmy Cobb (drums), and Wynton Kelly (piano on “Freddie Freeloader”). Davis is credited on the original album with composing each of the five tracks but Evans (later credited as a co-composer on two tracks) and the rest of the band were also essential in the final product, which is one of the most perfect albums ever made.

“I didn’t write out the music for ‘Kind of Blue,’ but brought in



sketches for what everybody was supposed to play because I wanted a lot of spontaneity in the playing,” Davis says in his autobiography. “Everything was a first take, which indicates the level everyone was playing on. It was beautiful.”

“Kind of Blue” opens with the Davis composition “So What.” It’s nine minutes of sophistication and soul, a piece of music that instantly pulls the listener into a sonic sanctuary

where restraint and subtlety rule supreme, setting the mood for the rest of the album. Next comes the blues number, “Freddie Freeloader,” also nine minutes, followed by the soft, haunting “Blue in Green.” Later co-credited to Evans, the piece opens with his lyrical piano playing and just the rhythm section before we’re greeted by the smokey salutations of Davis and Coltrane. It’s the only track where Adderley lays out.

Side two opens with the hushed yet driving 11-minute “All Blues.” The bass line repeating, it creates a hypnotic sensation allowing for deep exploration by the soloists. In the album liner notes, Evans writes that the piece is “a series of five scales, each to be played as long as the soloist wishes until he has completed the series.” It sounds like a formula for self-indulgence, but not with these performers, not on these dates. The album closes with the nine-minute “Flamenco Sketches.” The other track to later be credited to Davis and Evans, it’s a piano ballad with no melody, just improvisation. It’s mysterious and memorable, loose yet focused, the epitome of what makes “Kind of Blue” such an essential work of art.

Coltrane, Evans, and Adderley would go on to be star bandleaders themselves, with Coltrane rivaling Davis for jazz supremacy before dying in 1967. Davis would make the landmark jazz fusion album “Bitches Brew” album in 1970. But “Kind of Blue,” often cited as the best selling and most acclaimed jazz album of all time, remains the crowning achievement for all involved. A favorite of such diverse artists as Duane Allman and Quincy Jones, its importance is perhaps best summed up by hip-hop icon Q-Tip, who said, “It’s like the Bible, you just have one in your house.”



# “Joan Baez”

## Joan Baez

RELEASED: 1960 LABEL: Vanguard

A minority during a time of widespread bigotry, Joan Baez never quite fit in as a youth fluent in Spanish and English, telling Kurt Loder that before becoming a star at age 18, “the only image I had of myself was of a dumb Mexican. I’d come from a place where Mexicans were called dumb peach-pickers. So I already had a big identity problem. I was just sorting things out, and all of a sudden somebody said, ‘Bingo, you’re the Madonna with the achingly pure soprano.’”

Yes, the achingly pure soprano and Baez’s uncanny ability as a teenager to identify with ancient tales of sorrow made her a star virtually from the start. She performed around Boston University, where she attended, and attracted the attention of established performers such as Bob Gibson, who invited her to perform with him at the inaugural Newport Folk Festival in July of 1959. She sang two duets with him and the response to the young beauty with the transcendental voice led to her record deal with Vanguard.

A collection of 13 traditional songs, the self-titled album features Baez, age 19, accompanying herself on acoustic guitar with Fred Hellerman, of The Weavers, playing second guitar on only a couple songs. The album opens with “Silver Dagger,” a song about a young woman who



turns away a suitor after being warned by her mother that all men are liars who will say anything to bed a woman and then, “leave you alone to pine and sigh.” Baez also sings with an authority that belies her age and background on the sad tale of a woman who becomes a prostitute in New Orleans in a place called “House of the Rising Sun.”

A staple of the folk scene before Baez recorded it, she manages to make

rebuffing him because she’s engaged to another man, who is at sea. They go back and forth, Baez then switching to narrator role for the big reveal. It’s not an easy song to pull off — many have tried — but the 19-year-old singer does it with ease.

“Joan Baez” includes two songs she likely learned from recordings by the Carter Family: “Wildwood Flower,” a solid rendition found on side one, and “Little Moses,” from side two. Baez’s reworking of the obscure “Little Moses” is a more melodic, more emotive, and all around richer telling of the great story of the infant taken in by Egyptian royals unaware they’re raising a Hebrew boy, one who will later lead the Exodus of the Israelites out of Egypt. At its core, “Little Moses” is about overcoming oppression, something Baez would dedicate her life to as an activist, being honored with the “Spirit of Americana” Free Speech Award at the 2008 Americana Music Honors & Awards.

“All My Trials” a singular statement of finding peace in the face of death. “Hush little baby, don’t you cry,” Baez sings with the heartbreaking stoicism a mother must convey in such a situation. “You know your mama was born to die, all my trials, Lord, soon be over.”

Side two opens with “John Riley,” the disguised true lover tale in which Baez sings first as the man courting the woman and then as the woman

“Joan Baez” was inducted into The National Recording Registry of the Library of Congress in 2014. Baez herself was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2017, largely based on her leading role in the American roots music revival movement that exploded following the release of her highly influential and timelessly engaging debut album.

# “King of the Delta Blues Singers”

## Robert Johnson

RELEASED: **1961** LABEL: **Columbia**

Robert Johnson went down to the crossroads of Mississippi highways near his home and sold his soul to the devil to be the best blues singer, guitarist and songwriter to ever live, so the story goes. But the way the deal went down Johnson never enjoyed much fame during his lifetime, playing juke joints and making just 41 recordings, none receiving national airplay upon release, before dying a miserable death at a young age.

Johnson was quite the ladies man and struck up a relationship with a woman married to the owner of a local juke joint. The man found out and prior to a performance at his place he had someone hand Johnson a half-pint of booze with a broken seal. Johnson survived the poisoning but while recovering at the home of a friend contracted pneumonia and died Aug. 16, 1938 in Greenwood, Mississippi. He was 27 years old.

John Hammond, one of the most important record producers and talent scouts of the past century, convinced Columbia Records to issue the album “King of the Delta Blues Singers” in 1961. It’s a compilation of 16 recordings, which were mostly previously available as 78s on the Vocalion label, originally recorded in 1936 and 1937. It’s just Johnson and a clutch of mostly original compositions but, to quote,



Keith Richards, you listen and think, “This guy must have three brains!”

Johnson’s vocals jump out of the speaker, rumbling and gruff, high and eerie. The emotional impact is immediate and sustains itself throughout the album. You believe every line because each one is delivered as if a confession. And then there are the lyrics, direct and poetic. Johnson brags about having “womens in Vicksburg clean to

Tennessee” but then admits that one particular woman “has got a mortgage on my body, now, and a lein on my soul.” Yeah, blues lyrics don’t get any better than that one from “Traveling Riverside Blues.”

If Johnson were just a singer and songwriter it would be more than impressive, but when you add the guitar playing to the skill set, well, that Faustian deal seems plausible.

Johnson played slide with the tone of a master and his boogie bass lines played on the bottom strings of the guitar caused Richards and others to think there were two guitarists playing. That acoustic guitar also often sounds as if it were a second vocalist, another technique adopted by virtually every blues guitarist to follow, but rarely equalled.

“King of the Delta Blues Singers” became the first album inducted by the Blues Foundation into the Blues Hall of Fame, in 1980, and Johnson was an original inductee into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame six years later as an early influence on rock and roll.

The greatest testament to the legacy of Johnson, though, is the number of artists who have covered his songs, with Led Zeppelin’s 1969 recording of “Traveling Riverside Blues” — Robert Plant also quotes “Kind Hearted Woman Blues” and “Come on in My Kitchen” — becoming a hit single when it finally surfaced more than two decades later. Eric Clapton released an entire album of Johnson’s songs, titled “Me and Mr. Johnson,” in 2004 and it reached No. 6 on the Billboard 200 pop albums chart.

“Robert Johnson to me is the most important blues musician who ever lived,” Clapton says in the liner notes to the “Robert Johnson: Complete Recordings” box set.

# “Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music” Ray Charles

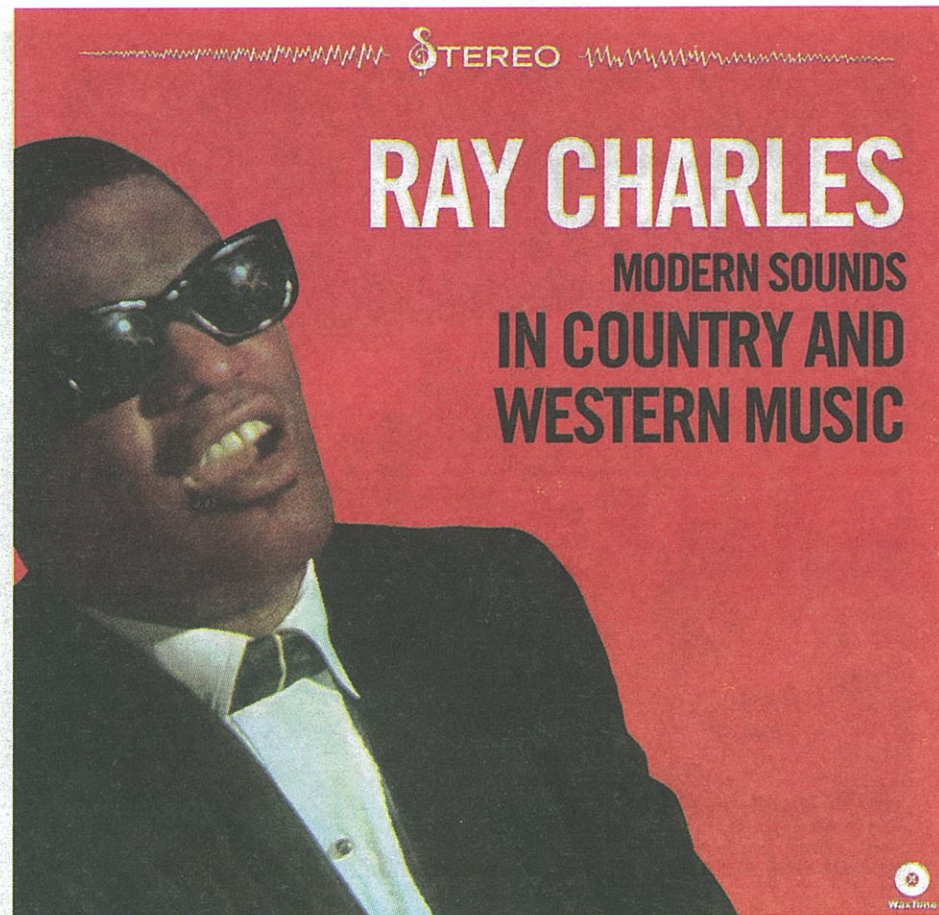
RELEASED: 1962 LABEL: ABC-Paramount

“They told me how this might injure my career,” Ray Charles recalls in his autobiography. “They told me how all my fans had been loyal to me. They explained how I might irritate some people, how I might lose my following. And even though I listened and understood what they were saying, I ignored them and made the record anyway.”

Charles had become a star by 1961 with largely a black following, doing rhythm and blues, jazz, and a few pop sides for Atlantic and then ABC-Paramount Records. But country? By a black man? By Brother Ray? It sounded strange to everyone except Charles, who grew up in rural Georgia with the Grand Ole Opry performing in his head.

Of Charles’ many essential albums, “Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music” remains the most accessible in the best way possible. It’s classic country with urbane big band and string arrangements, Charles’ voice so inviting as he alternates between cheerful swingin’ numbers and sad ballads buoyed by the arrangements.

The album opens with a reworking of the Everly Brothers hit “Bye Bye Love” featuring Charles going back



and forth with the Raelettes on the rocking kiss off, making it sound like some kind of rowdy divorce party. Next up is “You Don’t Know Me,” the Eddy Arnold hit about unrequited love, which Charles sings over strings as if given one opportunity to win back his love with a soulful vocal. Side one ends with a bluesy take on “Born To Lose” that transforms a simple lyric into a

serious meditation on loss.

Side two opens with another bluesy number, “Worried Mind,” featuring a jazzy piano solo by Charles, who shows off his piano chops again on the album closer, Hank Williams’ up-tempo ditty “Hey Good Lookin’.” But it’s the excellent Williams ballad “You Win Again,” also on side two, where Charles really shines, giving listeners a near perfect pairing of

singer and song. It’s fun hearing Charles put his own lyrics to the traditional “Careless Love” before delivering the album’s huge hit “I Can’t Stop Loving You.” Don Gibson, the author of the ballad, had a country hit with it in 1958 and so did Kitty Wells the same year. Then came Charles’ version, which went on to do the unthinkable, reaching No. 1 across the charts: the Billboard Hot 100, the Billboard R&B Singles, the Adult Contemporary, and even the UK Singles Chart.

“Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music” went gold with sales of more than 500,000 in its first three months and made Charles a superstar. “Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music, Vol. 2” came out six months after the first volume and sold just as well. Charles would continue to have country hits through the 1970s and ‘80s.

“Many people are confused about my decision to do country music,” Charles explains in his autobiography. “They think ABC dictated to me. They think ABC produced these albums for me. Not true. For better or worse, the records were my ideas. Anyone who knows me understands that I really like this music. Not for show, not for shock, but for my own pleasure.”

# “Live at the Apollo”

## James Brown

RELEASED: **1963** LABEL: **King**

James Brown had been thrilling chitlin circuit crowds for years as a frontman and bandleader who could out sing, out dance, and out cajole pretty much any other performer in show business. Capturing one of those killer performances on film was not going to happen, but a live album? That was a possibility.

Brown's first hit single, “Please, Please, Please,” for which he received a songwriting credit, came out in 1956 and sold over a million copies, but then his singles flopped for a couple years before he bounced back up the rhythm and blues chart with another original, “Try Me,” in '58. By '62, Brown had a whole bunch of hits, including “I’ll Go Crazy,” “You’ve Got the Power,” “Think,” “If You Want Me,” “I Don’t Mind,” “Bewildered,” “Lost Someone,” and his newest, “Night Train” and “Shout and Shimmy.” But none of his studio albums — collections of mostly previously released singles — even charted.

Brown, whose sobriquets at the time included Mr. Dynamite and The Hardest Working Man in Show Business, needed to get that “star time” concert experience on record. Great live jazz albums started coming out fairly regularly by the mid-1950s and by 1960 Ray Charles

had already released two live albums. Syd Nathan at King Records, though, refused. So, Brown financed the live recording himself, which took place October 24, 1962 at the Apollo Theater in Harlem, New York.

Brown and his big band, the Famous Flames, are sharp as a brand new razor as they rip through hit after hit on side one, the crowd screaming its approval for the familiar sounds

of songs learned from 45's. But then something special, something unlike anything captured on record before and hardly since happens: Brown launches into “Lost Someone.”

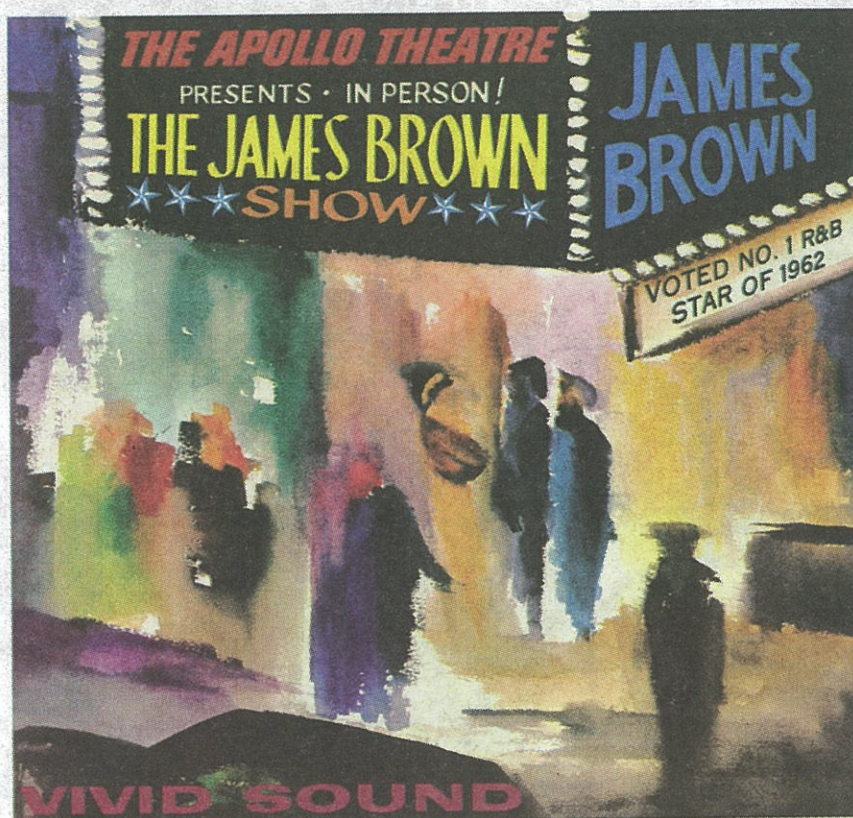
It's nearly 11 minutes of sweet, soul music that starts on side one, fades out, and resumes on side two. It is Brown working the crowd into a frenzy, female screams exploding louder than the horns, louder than

the screams coming from the singer on stage. Brown is begging for love, begging for the love of the whole sold-out room and that is exactly what he gets.

“Lost Someone” ends with a big Brown scream, the same repeating horn riff, and then, boom, Brown hollers “please, please, please,” and we're off to a six-minute medley of hits before the finale, a wild ride on the “Night Train.”

“Live at the Apollo” is the album that made Brown a superstar and taught future soul and rock acts how to make a live album. It's the album that paved the way for a career that made Brown part of the first class of inductees into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Added to the National Recording Registry by the Library of Congress in 2004, “Live at the Apollo” captures an unbelievably close relationship between performer and audience.

“That's a hard feeling to describe — being on stage, performing, and knowing that you've really got it that night,” Brown recalls in his autobiography. “It feels like God is blessing you, and you give more and more. The audience was with me, screaming and hollering on all the songs and I thought, ‘Man, this is really going to do it.’”



RECORDED LIVE AT THE FAMOUS APOLLO THEATER, NEW YORK CITY

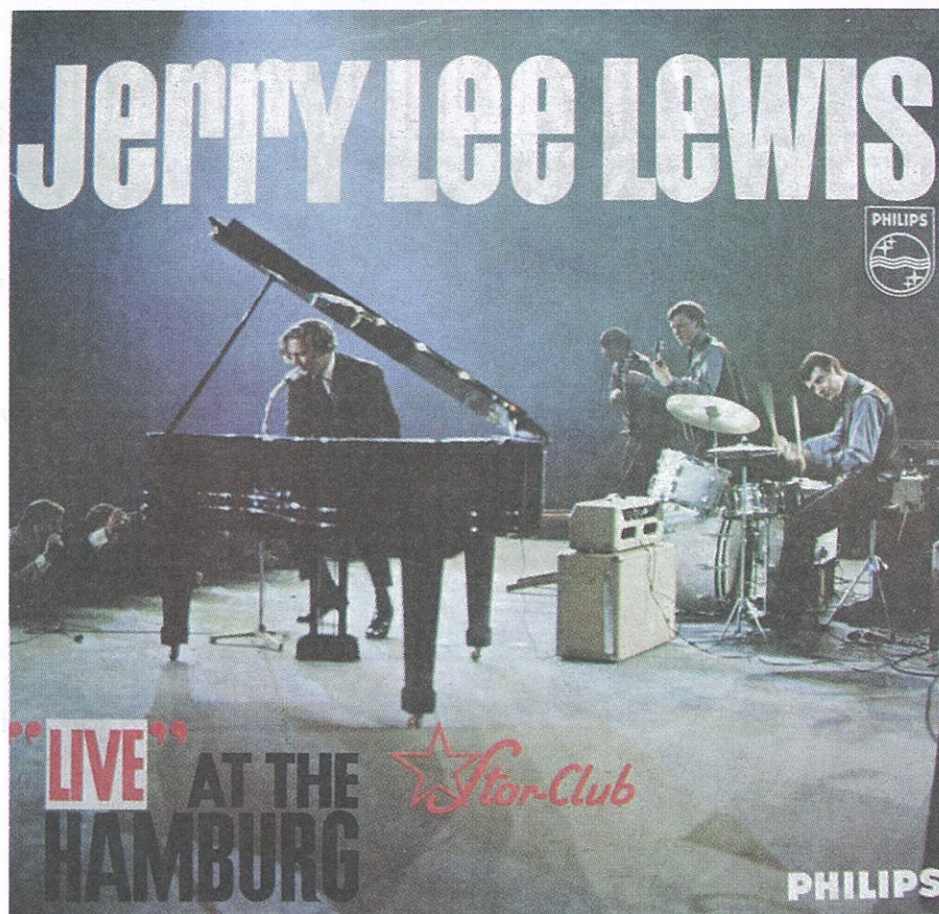
# “Live at the Star-Club, Hamburg”

## Jerry Lee Lewis

RELEASED: 1964 LABEL: Philips

A former cinema in the strip club district of Hamburg, The Star-Club opened April 13, 1962, with a concert headlined by a young, unsigned English band that had been building a reputation throughout the German port city for playing rock 'n' roll covers. The Beatles were still playing the Star-Club, which maybe held 1,000, when Jerry Lee Lewis arrived in Great Britain the following month as a star challenging Elvis Presley for the rock 'n' roll crown. Shortly after his arrival, though, a London reporter learned about Lewis's third wife, his 13-year-old cousin Myra Gale Brown. The tour was cancelled and Lewis seemed poised to spend the rest of his life back in Louisiana as a farmer who played piano and preached on the side.

Lewis, though, did not crawl back home. No, The Killer continued recording and touring and made it back to Europe a couple years later to play that same Star-Club on April 5, 1964. By then, The Beatles were recently minted mega stars in the U.S. and here was Lewis, the man who was supposed to be The King of Rock 'N' Roll, coming in behind them at a nightclub, nearly 30 years



old and nearly seven years removed from his signature singles “Whole Lotta Shakin’ Goin’ On” and “Great Balls of Fire.”

Lewis’ performance, though, would prove anything but tired as he pounded the piano and threw his voice around the room as if he wanted to set the place ablaze. “Live

at the Star-Club, Hamburg” features Lewis with the Nashville Teens backing him but all you really hear, and all you really need to hear, is that fiery piano and those madman vocals, a mix of singing and shouting and speechifying. There’s also the crowd chants of “Jerry! Jerry! Jerry!” between songs.

Lewis performs as if hellfire were real and right at his back. “Whole Lotta Shakin’ Goin’ On” and “Great Balls of Fire” have never sounded so incendiary. Lewis has his way with hits by Ray Charles (“What’d I Say”), Little Richard (“Long Tall Sally”) and his former Sun Records label mate Elvis Presley (“Hound Dog”). Lewis slows down the pace just once, and not much, so he can sing Hank Williams’ “Your Cheatin’ Heart,” a revenge song that finds the singer relishing each line, grinning like the devil.

From start to finish, the album is a tour-de-force and probably the purest, hottest rock 'n' roll performance ever captured on tape.

Lewis would later claim he never got paid for “Live at the Star-Club, Hamburg,” which for years was only available in Europe. Talking to Rick Bragg, though, for his 2014 biography, he did acknowledge that it “was a big monster record.” The Killer also acknowledged how big the Beatles had become in early 1964 and then says, in typical Jerry Lee Lewis fashion, “I never did care for the Beatles all that much, to tell the truth.”

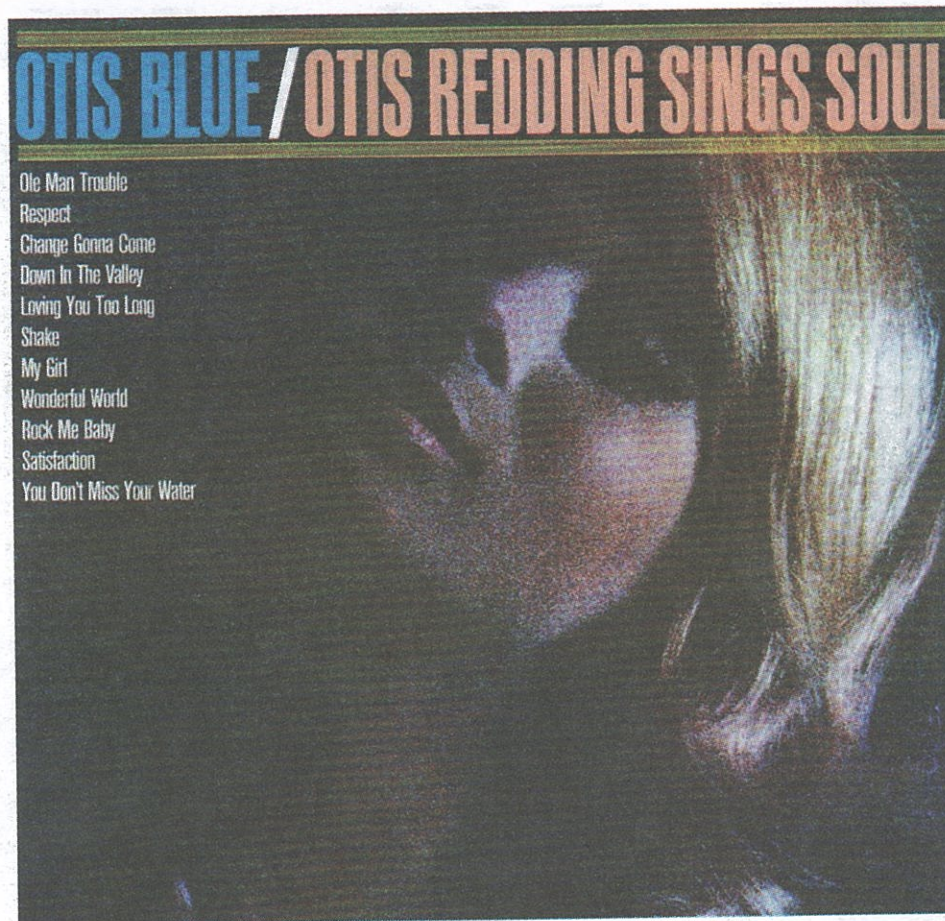
# “Otis Blue/Otis Redding Sings Soul”

## Otis Redding

RELEASED: **September 15, 1965** LABEL: **Stax**

At the height of his creative powers as a singer and songwriter following two studio albums and years on the chitlin circuit, Georgia native Otis Redding had finally started enjoying mainstream attention, with the hit single “I’ve Been Loving You Too Long,” when he entered Stax Recording Studios in Memphis on July 9, 1965, to record, over just two days, the material resulting in “Otis Blue/Otis Redding Sings Soul.” It’s a soul album, but its real artistry comes from the singer’s ability to create unadulterated Southern, gospel-influenced soul from material that included rock, blues, urbane R&B and Motown. The album also benefits from the ace musicianship of house band Booker T. & the M.G.’s, horn players from The Mar-Keys and The Memphis Horns, as well as piano playing by Isaac Hayes.

“Otis Blue” opens with the slow-burning Redding original “Ole Man Trouble,” which recalls the 1927 show tune “Ol’ Man River” and comes from Sunday church services as much as it does from Saturday nightclub performances. Punchy horns and a rollicking backbeat set the stage for the next song, “Respect.” Another Redding original, it’s straightforward statement about a hardworking man who wants to be treated right by his woman when he returns home. It’s a bit of fun before Redding delivers the most plaintive performance of his career.



Ole Man Trouble  
Respect  
Change Gonna Come  
Down In The Valley  
Loving You Too Long  
Shake  
My Girl  
Wonderful World  
Rock Me Baby  
Satisfaction  
You Don't Miss Your Water

Sam Cooke died from a gunshot to the heart by a motel manager about six months before the recording of “Otis Blue.” Redding had great admiration for Cooke and included three of his songs on this album, including “A Change Is Gonna Come.” Cooke succeeded in writing the song as an anthem for the Civil Rights movement but it’s also a highly personal song. These aspects were not lost on Redding, especially as he delivers the lines, “It’s been too hard living, but

I’m afraid to die / ‘Cause I don’t know what’s up there, beyond the sky.” The lines allude to the “Ol’ Man River” lyric, “I’m tired of livin’ And scared of dyin’,” another aspect of the song surely not lost on Redding.

Gospel and love intertwine “Down in the Valley,” the song originated by soul giant Solomon Burke and given a gruffer reading by Redding. Side one closes with the equally sensual and romantic “I’ve Been Loving You Too

Long,” which Redding co-wrote with Jerry Butler.

Side two opens with the euphoric groove of Cooke’s “Shake” and then Redding sings “My Girl” with such depth that subsequent listenings of the Motown original by the Temptations might sound saccharine in comparison.

Redding then returns to the Cooke songbook one more time for the feel-good “Wonderful World,” which is a tribute, sure, but Redding refuses to copy the smoother vocal style of its originator. And then comes Redding at his bluesiest on “Rock Me Baby,” a raunchy version featuring nasty guitar licks by Steve Cropper.

The Rolling Stones’ first hits — in 1963 and ‘64 — were largely covers of songs by black artists such as Chuck Berry, Arthur Alexander and Bobby Womack. Redding turned the tables on this album, remaking the Stone’s “Satisfaction” as if the original were merely a demo for him to use as a guide, even altering the lyrics. To this day, it’s just as rewarding to hear the original as the Redding version. To close the album Redding gives a faithful reading of William Bell’s country soul classic “You Don’t Miss Your Water” — because to mess with such perfection would just be silly, and Redding was anything but silly when it came to recording, and never more successful than on “Otis Blue/Otis Redding Sings Soul.”

# “Pet Sounds”

## The Beach Boys

RELEASED: **May 16, 1966** LABEL: **Capitol**

Any self-respecting member of the counterculture in early 1966 eagerly awaited the next album by The Beatles, Stones or Dylan. The Beach Boys? Not so much. All those silly surfin’ songs and that nonsense about “Be True to Your School,” no way.

What they didn’t know, though, was that the reason Beach Boy Brian Wilson had stopped touring with the band was to make an album — inspired by Phil Spector and The Beatles — that would be much different. Wilson wanted to get the honeyed vocal harmonies created by him and his siblings Carl and Dennis Wilson, cousin Mike Love, and fellow band members Al Jardine and Bruce Johnston on tape with an amusement park assembly of psychedelic sounds, grounded in lyrics that would be timeless tales of love won and lost, or just feeling sad for not fitting in with those jocks who were true to their school. Wilson produced the album and wrote most of the songs with lyricist Tony Asher and then recorded them with the Beach Boys, augmented by a small army of the best session musicians in the recording industry.

“Wouldn’t it Be Nice” opens with lead vocals by Brian and instrumentation marked by the sublime use of some rocking accordions. It’s a song about being young and wanting to be older, a feeling every listener has likely experienced. Brian sings lead vocals again on “You Still Believe in Me,” which features beautiful use



of a bicycle horn. Love takes lead vocals — with harmony by Brian on the choruses — during “That’s Not Me,” a song about a young man striking out on his own and then returning home, perhaps to his high school sweetheart, while filled with trepidation. The title says it all for “Don’t Talk (Put Your Head on my Shoulder),” with Brian on lead, singing over a rich sweep of violins, viola and cello. The banging of the drums signal the love triangle fallout of “I’m Waiting for the Day,” sung

with a most welcome toughness by Brian.

Side one probably should end with the trippy but mellow instrumental “Let’s Go Away for Awhile” but then there’s “Sloop John B.,” a Bahamian folk song, with Brian and Love sharing vocals, that Capitol Records insisted Brian include. It’s catchy, it’s close enough thematically to the rest of the material, and it’s doubtful anyone complained about its inclusion.

“God Only Knows” features Carl Wilson on lead vocals opening a portal to some stacked harmonies that sound, yes, heavenly, delivered over a symphony of guitars, keyboards, strings, accordion and those prominent sleigh bells. It might just be the perfect pop song. Love and Jardine share lead vocals on “I Know There’s an Answer,” which includes the cautionary line “They trip through their day, and waste all their thoughts at night.” Love sings lead on the love affair meditation “Here Today,” goosed with some fun trombone in the choruses.

The rest of the album is pretty much all Brian. He sings lead on the highly personal “I Just Wasn’t Made for These Times.” The instrumental title track, written with James Bond in mind, follows and then there’s the finale of “Caroline No,” with Brian’s voice sounding as sweet and sad as it ever would on record.

“Pet Sounds” influenced The Beatles’ “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band” and countless other classic albums, three decades later helping to inspire Radiohead’s “OK Computer,” and in more recent years cited as an influence by Fleet Foxes. For Wilson, though, the greatest compliment came from a Beatle. “It makes me feel very proud that Paul McCartney told me ‘God Only Knows’ is his favorite song,” Wilson told me during an interview to advance his acclaimed “Pet Sounds 50th Anniversary Tour.”

# “Blonde on Blonde”

## Bob Dylan

RELEASED: 1966 LABEL: Columbia

The “Blonde on Blonde” recordings took place mostly in Nashville — a strange move for a folk-rock hipster based in New York City — and feature session players accustomed to backing country artists. Robbie Robertson, the electric guitar slinger who was on the front line with Dylan during the battlefield, boo-filled concerts that took place during the first four months of ‘66, contributes, too. The recording sessions would find Dylan at the top of his game trying to top himself one more time.

The double-album “Blonde on Blonde” opens with a pun of getting stoned, strangely titled “Rainy Day Women #12 & 35,” and then Dylan plays around with Delta blues on “Pledging My Time.” Next, he pulls the listener in for one of the most fascinating journeys of his career. “Visions of Johanna” runs over seven minutes without an obvious theme or focus other than the singer being haunted by “these visions of Johanna.” The song’s lyrics are as elusive as they are alluring, with an engaging melody and backing instrumentation, most notably the swirling organ and Dylan’s own harmonica playing. Side one ends with “One of Us Must Know (Sooner or Later),” a fairly direct breakup song with a rollicking backbeat.

“I Want You,” the kind of bizarre love song that only the Dylan of the



mid-’60s could have penned, opens side two. Next comes the surrealistic ramblings of the loopy carnival ride “Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again.” Dylan sounds so earnest as he delivers the elliptical lyrics it’s impossible not to give serious consideration to the potential perils of mixing Texas medicine and railroad gin. Dylan disguises — sort of — a mean woman blues as a fashion critique on “Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat,” which is wonderfully

silly with some serious guitar soloing by Robertson. “Just Like a Woman” is pretty and sweet in that Dylan chauvinistic way.

Side three is all songs — no epics — and while lightweight compared to, say, “Visions of Johanna,” they are by no means filler. “Most Likely You Go Your Way and I’ll Go Mine” is a rocking riot and not only because it includes the line: “You say my kisses are not like his, but this time

I’m not gonna tell you why that is.” “Temporary Like Achilles” is more postmodern blues and “Absolutely Sweet Marie” is alt-country decades before the genre existed and includes the bumper-sticker line “to live outside the law, you must be honest.”

“Fourth Time Around” is rather hilarious but only when heard in the proper context: It’s mocking The Beatles’ “Norwegian Wood,” basically taking the Lennon/McCartney melody and poking fun at their attempt at Dylanesque lyrics. Or maybe it’s a loving homage. “Obviously 5 Believers” is Dylan back strutting the blues with nonsensical lyrics about jugglers, believers and lust, given a big boost by Robertson’s guitar and the harmonica of Charlie McCoy.

The entire fourth side of “Blonde on Blonde” is dedicated to Dylan’s bride Sara Lownds, immortalized in the churchy-sounding 11-minute epic “Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands.” Typically coy about this type of stuff, Dylan sings on the 1976 song “Sara” about “staying up for nights in the Chelsea Hotel writing ‘Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands’ for you.” It’s a lovely example of Dylan marrying words as sounds to the melody and singing in a stoner croon. It’s a spellbinding repetition of riches that allows the listener to lose themselves in what Dylan would later describe as “that thin, that wild mercury sound.”



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# "I Never Loved a Man the Way I Love You"

## Aretha Franklin

RELEASED: **March 10, 1967** LABEL: **Atlantic**

"I think of Aretha as Our Lady of Mysterious Sorrows," Jerry Wexler wrote in his autobiography "Rhythm and Blues." "Her eyes are incredible, luminous eyes covering inexplicable pain. Her depressions could be as deep as the dark sea. I don't pretend to know the sources of her anguish, but anguish surrounds Aretha as surely as the glory of her musical aura."

After five years recording at the more prestigious Columbia, Franklin, the conflicted daughter of a preacher man, finally found a producer who understood her, and understood how to make her a superstar when she signed with Wexler, in late 1966.

Paired with the white boys with soul from Muscle Shoals, the Memphis Horns, and background vocals by her sisters Carolyn and Erma (as well as Cissy Houston, mother of Whitney Houston), Franklin recorded her first album for Atlantic, "I Never Loved a Man the Way I Love You." It opens with the greatest cover in the history of pop music, Franklin's ownership of Otis Redding's "Respect," a song she reworked — adding among other key elements the "sock-it-to-me" call and response — while on tour prior to signing with Atlantic.

"The call for respect went from a request to a demand," Wexler told



David Ritz. "And then, given the civil rights and feminist fervor that was building in the 1960s, respect — especially as Aretha articulated it with such force — took on new meaning. 'Respect' started off as a soul song and wound up a kind of national anthem."

Side one of "I Never Loved a Man the Way I Love You" also includes the hit title track, a song raw and sensual

and vulnerable, but delivered with a total sense of self pride. The singer is declaring her love, admitting weakness for the man, but she's doing so with pluck and sass. "Baby, you know that I'm the best thing that you ever had," Franklin sings, "Kiss me once again."

In case there's any doubt about the singer getting her "R-E-S-P-E-C-T," especially in its most sexual

interpretation, side two opens with the Franklin original "Dr. Feelgood." A song about the greatest cure of all delivered by a woman who gets what she wants, when she wants it.

In its own way as important as "Respect," Franklin also delivers the ultimate quid pro quo love song "Do Right Woman, Do Right Man." Composed by ace songwriters Chips Moman and Dan Penn, Franklin got first crack at the song — Moman was a guitarist at the recording sessions — and hit it so far out of the ballpark that even after covers by such accomplished stylists as Etta James and Willie Nelson, Franklin's original remains the definitive version.

Franklin would go on to record one great album after another — at least one per year through 1972's "Young, Gifted and Black" — with Wexler at Atlantic. She became a leading voice of the civil rights movement, virtually the voice of black America, and even returned to the church to record probably the most popular gospel album of all time, "Amazing Grace." Forever the Queen of Soul, Franklin easily ranks among a handful of the greatest recording artists of the past century.

"I worked with three geniuses," Wexler told me. "Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin and Bob Dylan."

# “The Velvet Underground & Nico”

## Velvet Underground

RELEASED: **March 12, 1967** LABEL: **Verve**

“**B**ack then we were surprised at how vast the reaction against us was,” Lou Reed told a *Creem* magazine reporter in the 1980s. “I thought we were doing something very ambitious and I was very taken aback by it. I used to hear people say we were doing porn rock.”

When the Velvet Underground’s Andy Warhol-produced debut album came out in March of 1967, the record-buying public had heard Bob Dylan and Ray Charles sing separately about getting “stoned,” a term that also referred to getting drunk, and John Lennon sang about a place where “nothing is real” on The Beatles’ trippy new single “Strawberry Fields Forever.” Drug references, probably, but nobody chronicled the realities of drugs and street life in general like chief songwriter Reed did on “The Velvet Underground & Nico,” which often couched the lyrics in progressive sonics that poured through the speakers like an exotic foreign language.

Joined by bandmates John Cale (celesta, viola, piano), Sterling Morrison (bass), and Maureen Tucker (percussion), the album opens with the ethereal “Sunday Morning,” Reed strumming his guitar and singing tender and soft with Nico’s gentle vocals in the background. The next track, though, is a propulsive, angular rock attack over which we first hear the classic Reed vocal, the Brooklyn native talking as much as singing, total deadpan, about the difficulties of buying drugs from a street dealer on “I’m Waiting for the

Man.” The third track returns to the feel of “Sunday Morning” with “Femme Fatale,” which Reed wrote, at Warhol’s urging, about his “superstar” Edie Sedgwick. Someone had the brilliant idea of having actress/model Nico on lead vocals and she sounds as if she were Reed’s German-raised twin sister.

Side one gets even more interesting with “Venus in Furs.” Tucker’s tribal bass drum and tambourine immediately grab you along with



*Andy Warhol*

Cale’s electric viola before it becomes clear that Reed is singing about S&M. Reed plays a variation on a Chuck Berry guitar riff and delivers Dylan-esque alliterations on “Run Run Run,” the story of a bunch of junkies. The first side closes with the stately and psychedelic “All Tomorrow’s Parties” sung by Nico.

Side two opens with one of the most honest, poetic and pioneering rock songs ever recorded. Written by Reed

in 1964 and recorded for this album in May of ‘66, “Heroin” offers a first-person account of an addict describing the euphoric rush of shooting smack while also trying to make sense of his debilitating addiction. The music rises and falls before building to a frantic, feedback-laden blowout — fading to silence just past the seven-minute mark.

Reed calls out a wild child he can’t tame on the jangle pop of “There She Goes Again” and then Nico takes lead vocals on the slower tempo, but equally catchy “I’ll Be Your Mirror.” The album closes with a pair of abrasive art rock numbers: the 3-minute “Black Angel’s Death Song” (check out Cale’s hissing) and the nearly 8-minute “European Son,” a feedback-drenched warning shot fired at the parents, teachers and preachers who would “spit on those under 21.”

Regarding the album’s weak initial sales yet tremendous influence, it’s best to revisit something Brian Eno said in 1982 while being interviewed by *Musician* magazine.

“I was talking to Lou Reed the other day and he said that the first Velvet Underground record sold 30,000 copies in the first five years,” Eno said. “The sales have picked up in the past few years, but I mean, that record was such an important record for so many people. I think everyone who bought one of those 30,000 copies started a band!”

# “Are You Experienced”

## The Jimi Hendrix Experience

RELEASED: **May 1967 (Europe); August 1967 (U.S.)**

LABEL: **Track/Reprise**

Jimi Hendrix became an overnight success in England after spending three years in his native United States on the chitlin circuit playing guitar with such acts as The Isley Brothers, Little Richard, and Curtis Knight and the Squires. Bassist Chas Chandler of the Animals signed on as Hendrix’s manager and brought him to London in late September of 1966 where he would assemble the Jimi Hendrix Experience with backing by Noel Redding (bass) and Mitch Mitchell (drums).

By mid December, Hendrix had released the single “Hey Joe” backed with “Stone Free,” and the following month it cracked the Top 10 of the UK Singles Chart. “Purple Haze,” released in March, became an even bigger U.K. hit and then the “Wind Cries Mary” single started inundating airwaves before the “Are You Experienced” album came out May 12. By the time the album reached the U.S. on August 23, Hendrix was an established star in England and had already delivered his jaw-dropping, guitar burning performance at the Monterey Pop Festival in California.

A heady mix of chitlin circuit sounds awash in psychedelia, no single album can be seen as a blueprint for Hendrix’s daring debut, and that’s exactly what he aimed to achieve. “We don’t want to be classified in any category,” Hendrix told the Record Mirror. “If it must have a tag, I’d like it to be called ‘Free Feeling.’ It’s a mixture of rock, freak-out, blues and rave music.”

The U.S. version of “Are You



Experienced” opens with “Purple Haze,” featuring that heavy, distinctive guitar riff and solo with lyrics that everyone figures were about LSD. Charles Cross writes in his Hendrix biography “Room Full of Mirrors” that “the song was inspired by a dream he had that mirrored the novel ‘Night of Light: Day of Dreams’ by Jose Farmer, of which he had read an excerpt.”

Side one continues with the jazzy hard rock of “Manic Depression” and

Hendrix’s rendition of “Hey Joe,” about a man who shoots his unfaithful wife and makes a run for Mexico. Hendrix’s vocal is what makes the song, the only one on the album he didn’t write, as he sings with the conviction of a troubled man running from the gallows. The dark lyrics of “I Don’t Live Today” — “feel like I’m sitting at the bottom of a grave” — are accompanied by some of Hendrix’s most inspired guitar playing, including spot-on use of feedback and distortion.

A Bob Dylan fan, the influence comes through most clearly on the side two opener “The Wind Cries Mary,” the ballad Hendrix reportedly wrote in a single day after a fight with his girlfriend resulted in him sweeping up the broken plates she had left behind before storming out. The soul-rock “Fire” comes next followed by the longest and most diverse track on the album, the nearly 7-minute “Third Stone From the Sun,” a trippy instrumental peppered with spacey spoken word sections by Hendrix and Chandler, who produced the album.

“Foxy Lady” is one of Hendrix’s most popular and greatest songs, the artist blending the blues with the kind of melodicism being perfected by The Beatles. The album closes with the title track, which features Hendrix inviting listeners to new experiences, — Sexual? Mind-altering substances? He never states — over a sound effect that resembles the scratching of records hip-hop artists would later implement.

“Are You Experienced” is the rare debut album to be an immediate critical and commercial success. The album set a new high for what could be accomplished with an electric guitar while also featuring Hendrix’s singular songwriting and everyman, but highly effective, singing. The album was chosen in 2005 by the Library of Congress, in recognition of its cultural significance, to be added to the National Recording Registry.

# “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band” The Beatles

RELEASED: **June 1, 1967** LABEL: **Parlophone/Capitol**

**P**aul McCartney had a crazy idea to make an album by The Beatles, but not by The Beatles: “We would be Sgt. Pepper’s band, and for the whole of the album we would pretend to be someone else.” For the first four months of 1967, McCartney, John Lennon, George Harrison, Ringo Starr, producer George Martin and audio engineer Geoff Emerick would work in Abbey Road Studio on what would become “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band.” The album would loosely follow McCartney’s concept, with each song flowing directly into the next without the standard three-seconds of silence between tracks.

The album opens with nightclub noises and then the propulsive title track, featuring a boisterous lead vocal by McCartney matched by Harrison’s striking lead guitar work, and then the surprise of four French horns entering just after the 40 second mark. Yep, we’re in for something different here. The song then seamlessly transitions into the timeless pop of “With a Little Help from My Friends” followed by a fade out and then Lennon’s LSD homage “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds,” probably the most psychedelic song of the psychedelic 1960s.

Side one also includes the classically influenced “She’s Leaving Home,” a Lennon–McCartney song that poignantly captures a mother’s



grief upon learning her daughter has gone away. Quite a mature lyric, it also features Lennon and McCartney sharing vocal duties while accompanied by a glorious string arrangement. Lennon’s spooky “Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite!” achieves a creepy carnival atmosphere thanks to Martin’s pioneering use of studio trickery.

Harrison’s sitar showcase “Within You Without You,” essentially a

piece of Indian classical music with lyrics espousing the teachings of Hinduism, opens side two, marking a clear distinction from anything The Beatles or any other Western band had done before. “When I’m Sixty-Four” — which McCartney originally wrote when he was 16 — is a charming pop nugget that flows nicely into another McCartney love song, “Lovely Rita,” and then comes a nice shot of Lennon’s cynicism

matched by lacerating lead guitar work by McCartney on “Good Morning Good Morning.” Animal noises close the track before the faster, funkier “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band (Reprise).”

The album closes with its finest composition, “A Day in the Life.” Lennon sings the first three verses, which detail the dreary news of the day, before singing “I’d love to turn you on.” Then comes the bouncy bridge sung by McCartney, who sounds optimistic about greeting the day no matter what awaits him. Back to a final verse by Lennon with him repeating at the end “I’d love to turn you on.”

“Sgt. Pepper,” which also happens to feature the coolest cover artwork of all time, topped the British and U.S. charts, won four Grammys, including Album of the Year, and remains one of the bestselling and most influential albums of all time. In 2003, the U.S. Library of Congress selected “Sgt. Pepper” for the National Recording Registry.

“It’s crazy to think that 50 years later we are looking back on this project with such fondness and a little bit of amazement at how four guys, a great producer and his engineers could make such a lasting piece of art,” McCartney says in his newly penned introduction for the definitive “Sgt. Pepper” Anniversary Edition box set released May 26, 2017.

# “Songs of Leonard Cohen”

## Leonard Cohen

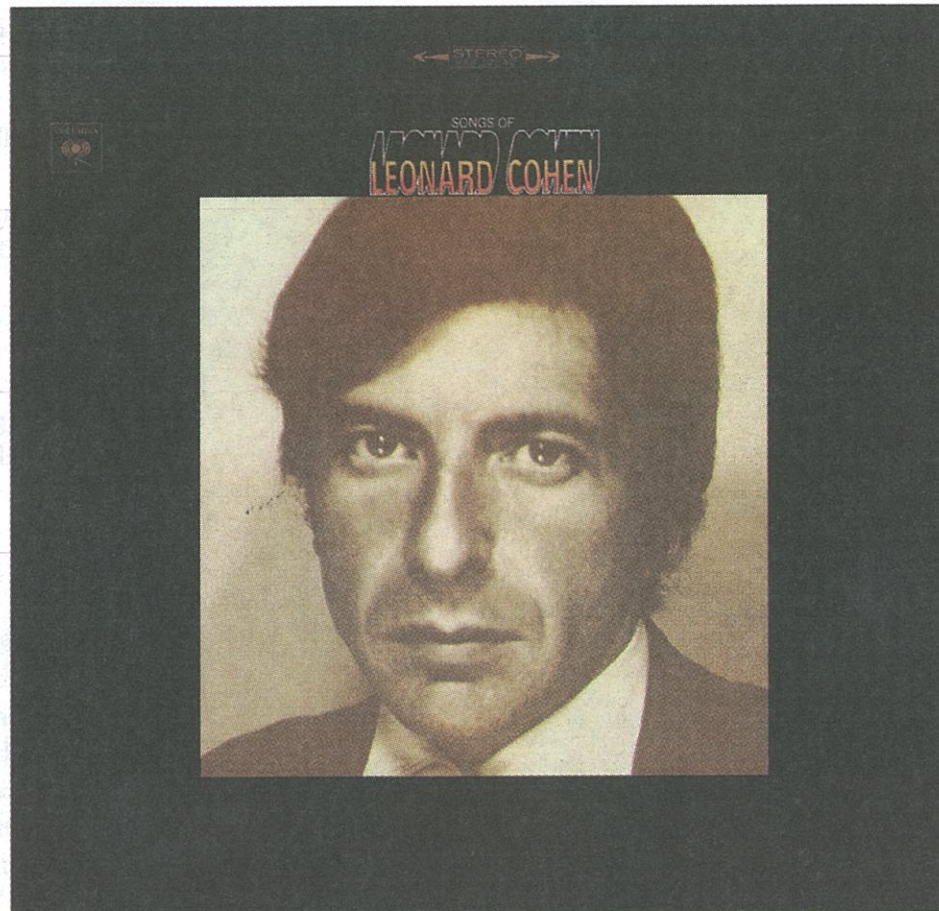
RELEASED: **December 26, 1967** LABEL: **Columbia**

A goddess of inspiration, an avant-garde dancer in her late teens named Suzanne Verdal, had an impassioned but platonic relationship with Leonard Cohen. That relationship prompted him to write the poem that would become the first song of the already published poet and novelist’s debut album “Songs of Leonard Cohen.” Sylvie Simmons, in her Cohen biography “I’m Your Man,” does a better job than anyone of describing the eternal beauty of “Suzanne.”

“‘Suzanne’ is a weightless, mysterious song,” Simmons writes. “The great songs, the ones that keep drawing us back again and again, are mysteries. We go to them not for familiarity and solace — although there is solace in ‘Suzanne’ — but for what is unknown, for something that’s hidden in them that continues to haunt us and make us seekers.”

It’s a helluva way to open an album, to launch a career, but Cohen entered the pop world a full-formed figure, a grown man of 33 — ancient by ‘60s flower children standards — and skipped right past the embryonic epoch most singer-songwriters have documented on tape.

Cohen’s authoritative, often seductive, baritone remains at the forefront throughout the album, where it belongs. He accompanies himself on acoustic guitar and there are session pros playing various instruments: bass, flute, mandolin, Jew’s harp, violin. The



album’s three most memorable songs — “Suzanne”, “So Long, Marianne”, “Hey, That’s No Way to Say Goodbye” — benefit from the backing vocals of Nancy Priddy, a muse herself who inspired the Buffalo Springfield song “Pretty Girl Why” (and is the mother of actress Christina Applegate).

Cohen, forever the ladies’ man, had many muses by the time he went to record his debut album, including Marianne Ihlen, a woman he met in

1960 on the Greek island of Hydra, where the two lived together for much of the decade. The opening track on side two and the only one on the album to include drums, “So Long, Marianne” is a highly melodic, breakup song. It’s a song of mixed signals, a song that covers all the emotions of the so-called amicable split.

“Well, you know that I love to live with you, but you make me forget so very much,” Cohen sings. “I forget to

pray for the angels, and then the angels forget to pray for us.” And then there’s the chorus, a cheery sing along if you’re not paying attention, or maybe even more so if you’re paying attention: “Oh, so long, Marianne / It’s time that we began to laugh / And cry and cry and laugh about it all again.”

“Songs of Leonard Cohen” closes with “One of Us Cannot be Wrong” a song of desperation with dark hues of humor. The story goes that Cohen wrote the song after being spurned by Nico, the German model and singer-songwriter probably most famous for her contributions to the Velvet Underground’s first album. “I lit a thin green candle to make you jealous of me,” goes the opening line. “But the room just filled up with mosquitoes, they heard that my body was free.”

“Songs of Leonard Cohen” didn’t sell that well and initial reviews weren’t universally glowing. Then again, Cohen’s best works were never fully appreciated in their time. Take “Hallelujah,” which first appeared on his 1984 album “Various Positions” that pretty much nobody noticed except Bob Dylan, who performed “Hallelujah” in 1988 during a concert in Cohen’s hometown of Montreal. By the 2000s, “Hallelujah” would be one of the best known songs on the planet and Cohen would be in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, one of the club’s respected and beloved singer-songwriters, when he died at age 82 in 2016.

# “At Folsom Prison” Johnny Cash

RELEASED: **May 1968** LABEL: **Columbia**

**H**is heart's pumping a fistful of pills as he takes the stage, humbly says “Hello, I’m Johnny Cash,” and then leaps like a panther into “Folsom Prison Blues.” The penitentiary’s packed cafeteria already sounds like it’s on the verge of a riot by the time the singer spits out the line, “I shot a man in Reno just to watch him die.” Cash wrote and recorded “Folsom Prison Blues” in 1955 and had played the song during a performance at the same California correctional facility before, but never with tape rolling, which is what happened on January 13, 1968.

Cash never spent a day in prison but he had been arrested in 1965 by a narcotics squad in El Paso, Texas, for possessing hundreds of Dexedrine capsules (uppers) and nearly as many Equanil (downers). The inmates at Folsom recognized Cash not so much as a celebrity but as a fellow rebel and he saw them as fellow sinners: no better, no worse than he. The inmates in that cafeteria that day, at least the ones near the front of the stage, also recognized Cash’s eyes were peeled, glazed and wild.

“I took more pills that morning than I ever had in my life.” That’s what “At Folsom Prison” producer Bob Johnston recalls Cash telling him. “He was scared,” Johnston said of *The Man in Black* in the definitive biography by Robert Hilburn, the only music



journalist at Folsom the day the concert was recorded.

Prior to “At Folsom Prison,” Cash hadn’t released an album he really liked since 1965’s “Sings the Ballads of the True West” and between the pills and the poor parenting guilt and a divorce and a suicide attempt in the fall of 1967, Cash was a desperate man in need of something — an album would do — that would make him proud.

Cash could’ve played it safe with “At Folsom Prison” and still had a hit album by just including a decent version of the title track and a few other fan favorites. But instead of peppering the setlist with well-known singles — he didn’t even include “I Walk the Line” — Cash opted for songs that he thought would speak to the inmates, even recording a song, “Greystone Chapel,” which was written by a Folsom inmate.

After opening the performance with “Folsom Prison Blues” Cash wisely slows down the pace with “Dark as a Dungeon” and one of his finest love songs “I Still Miss Someone.” And then Cash returns with a revved up cover of the old Western swing number “Cocaine Blues,” a song about a man on a bender who shoots his woman.

Side two finds Cash finishing a poignant solo acoustic set — punctuated by some funny, mid-song banter — before going into full comedic mode on a couple numbers. Then out comes June Carter for their duet “Jackson.”

Cash closes the set with his touching ex-con ballad “Give My Love To Rose” before blasting his boom-chick-a-boom convict anthem “I Got Stripes.” The pace slows again for “Green, Green, Grass of Home” and then “Greystone Chapel,” a fitting finale for an album performed in front of men as familiar with hell on earth as the promise of heaven.

“At Folsom Prison” showcased Cash as a truly authentic and captivating entertainer, paving the way for his ABC television show and making him accessible to fans of country, rock and, in later years, punk, and hip-hop. Cash would be a legend without this album, but this is the best place to get up close with the legend in all his wicked and righteous greatness.

# “Music From Big Pink”

## The Band

RELEASED: **July 1, 1968** LABEL: **Columbia**

**G**uitarist Robbie Robertson, drummer Levon Helm, bassist Rick Danko, pianist Richard Manuel, and organist Garth Hudson were Dylan’s backing band on his 1965-66 tour, with Helm returning to Arkansas early because he couldn’t stand the booing they received from the folk freaks who detested Dylan playing electric rock ‘n’ roll. On tour hiatus in June of 1966, Dylan wrecked his motorcycle while riding near his home in Woodstock, New York, and after convalescing went into seclusion. His backing band, eventually rechristened The Band, would join him about a year later, to make music for the sheer joy of it: quirky originals and covers of folk, blues, country, rock ‘n’ roll, R&B, and soul. It was the sound of Americana, long before there was a whole movement of music operating under that banner.



What would officially be titled “The Bootleg Series Vol. 11: The Basement Tapes Complete” and be released in 2014 as a six-disc set were the songs recorded by Dylan and The Band at the Big Pink house between June and October of 1967. Those loose songwriting and recording sessions had a huge influence on The Band’s debut album “Music From Big Pink,” which was recorded properly in New York and Los Angeles studios in early 1968.

In fact, The Band’s debut album opens with perhaps the most emotive song from the Big Pink sessions. Dylan and Manuel co-wrote “Tears of Rage” with the former singing lead on the ‘67 version. The Band’s rendition — the first heard by the general public — has Manuel on lead vocals, offering a sad reading of a sad song that conjures up a thousand scenarios that all smack of death and despair with no specifics whatsoever.

Side one of the filler-free “Music from Big Pink” closes with an equally peculiar song, albeit one with a decidedly more uplifting lyric and melody. Robertson, a Canadian like everyone else in The Band except Helm, wrote “The Weight” using the Deep South imagery he learned from touring the region and talking with Helm, giving it a surreal presentation likened to a Luis Buñuel film. For all of Robertson’s gifted songwriting

and guitar playing, though, it’s three other members of The Band — the ones who played their instruments and sang as well as any lead singer in any other group around — who really make “The Weight.” Helm sings lead on the first three verses and then Danko on the fourth, with the two men joined by Manuel on the chorus.

“Music From Big Pink” concludes with Manuel singing another Dylan lyric, “I Shall be Released,” an ostensibly straightforward song — sung high and lonesome — about an inmate dreaming of being set free. Of course, the metaphorical possibilities are myriad and that’s just one of the many reasons the song, like “The Weight,” has been covered by numerous artists.

“Music from Big Pink” was not a big seller but its impact is significant, serving as a bible for every bearded Americana artist to come along in the past half-century.

“They were real people living real life creating real music — drawing blood and playing for keeps,” writes Jim James of My Morning Jacket. “And as long as human beings walk the face of the earth their music will be blasting out of our hearts and minds: singing their songs from stages and campfires, pouring out of jukeboxes, laptops and turntables, car stereos and hi-fi setups so far in the future we can’t even imagine.”



# “Sweetheart of the Rodeo”

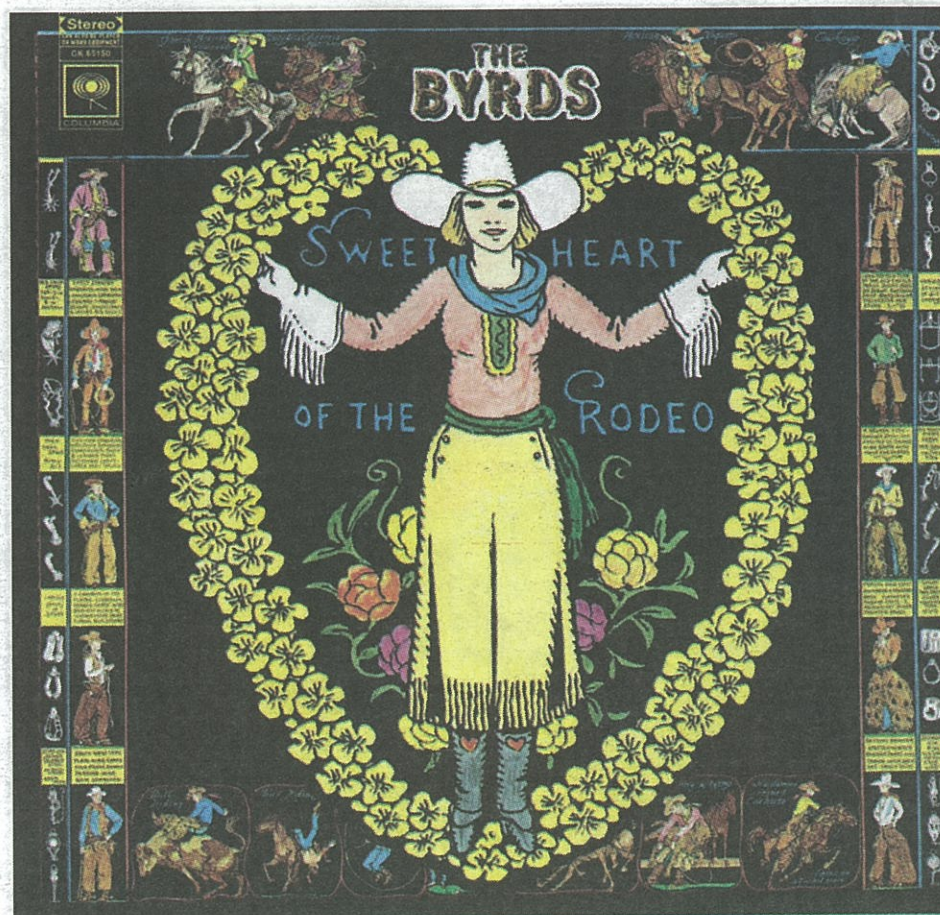
## The Byrds

RELEASED: **August 30, 1968** LABEL: **Columbia**

The Byrds’ “Sweetheart of the Rodeo” marks the first time an established rock band, one of the most influential of the mid-1960s, had gone full country. While Roger McGuinn remained the band’s leader, the honky tonk makeover happened in large part because of relatively unknown singer-songwriter Gram Parsons becoming a Byrd. Parsons didn’t last long, but his influence would prove profound.

“Sweetheart of the Rodeo” opens with a cover of Bob Dylan’s “You Ain’t Going Nowhere,” a positively cheerful song of living the married life sung by McGuinn and featuring pedal steel playing by Lloyd Green, a Nashville session player heard on numerous country hits. Back in 1959, country music stars The Louvin Brothers released the gospel album “Satan Is Real,” which features the “The Christian Life,” a first-person account of a man who turns to Jesus and sings with pride that he “likes the Christian life.” Over pedal steel and twangy electric guitar fills by Clarence White, McGuinn sings the song as if in church, not a single hint of irony in his voice or the band’s playing.

Parsons makes his lead vocal debut as a Byrd with a solid cover of the obscure tear-in-my-beer song “You’re Still On My Mind.” McGuinn then returns to his folk roots with a version of Woody Guthrie’s “Pretty Boy Floyd,” a glorification of a gangster that includes the classic lines: “As through this world you travel, you’ll meet some funny



men / Some will rob you with a six-gun, and some with a fountain pen.”

“Hickory Wind,” Parsons’ greatest recording, opens side two. Parsons coauthored the song with his former International Submarine Band member Bob Buchanan and sings every line as if he were utterly homesick, perhaps for a home that no longer even exists. He’s trying to make sense of a life gone wrong — a life complicated, by wealth and success — his sweet, plaintive

vocal augmented by his own piano playing as well as McGuinn’s banjo, Green’s pedal steel, and John Hartford’s fiddle.

Parsons also wrote the next number, “One Hundred Years From Now,” but McGuinn and Hillman share the vocals. Hillman also sings lead on Cindy Walker’s “Blue Canadian Rockies,” a country standard with a homesick sentiment similar to “Hickory Wind.”

Parsons returns to lead vocals for a faithful cover of Merle Haggard’s “Life in Prison,” a song in which an inmate who killed his darling in a fit of rage begs to die rather than live behind bars with her memory. The Byrds, with McGuinn back on lead vocals, return to Dylan for “Nothing Was Delivered,” a rather mysterious song set against a honky tonk backdrop of piano and pedal steel.

Along with The Band’s 1968 album “Music From Big Pink” (page 23), Parsons’ and Chris Hillman’s 1969 Flying Burrito Brothers album “The Gilded Palace of Sin” and Dylan’s “Nashville Skyline,” also released in ‘69, “Sweetheart of the Rodeo” laid the foundation for country-rock, a genre that would inundate the airwaves in the 1970s with hit recordings by such acts as Emmylou Harris, The Eagles, and Linda Ronstadt. “Sweetheart of the Rodeo,” though, perhaps more than any other album, would go on to influence the alt-country movement that became prominent in the early 1990s and now has become largely known as Americana.

Lucinda Williams, the genre’s greatest singer-songwriter, performed “Hickory Wind” during a 2015 tribute concert for Harris, who recorded Parsons’ signature song on her 1979 album “Blue Kentucky Girl.” “This is always one of my favorite songs,” Williams said before delivering a poignant performance that Parsons would have surely appreciated.

# “Dusty in Memphis”

## Dusty Springfield

RELEASED: **March 31, 1969** LABEL: **Atlantic**

“Dusty in Memphis” opens with one of the sexiest things on vinyl. The famed married songwriting team of Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil wrote “Just a Little Lovin’” and with Springfield’s delivery we’re hearing a song about sex, sure, but sex between a loving couple that knows the day’s struggles ahead will be a lot easier to navigate with “just a little lovin’, early in the mornin’.”

“Son of a Preacher Man,” a one hit wonder by writer John Hurley, features Springfield’s sultry vocal paired with a killer bass line by Tommy Cogbill and some punchy horns. While “Just a Little Lovin’” is about a couple starting the day with something better than coffee this song is about young lust. It’s a song about seduction, a song about an innocent enough walk through the backyard becoming what that preacher papa would call immoral. “Bein’ good isn’t always easy,” Springfield sings, “no matter how hard I try.”

Muscle Shoals songwriters Eddie Hinton and Donnie Fritts wrote “Breakfast in Bed” for Springfield, and they wrote it as pure sexual fantasy. The man has been hurt by his current love and seeks solace in the arms of a more than willing past lover, a role Springfield plays, enthralled at the idea of receiving



kisses in exchange for “breakfast in bed,” which takes on a whole new meaning in the context of such lines as “Don’t be shy, we’ve been here before / Pull your shoes off, and I will lock the door.”

Randy Newman wrote “Just One Smile,” which opens side two, and the song allows Springfield to show a level of vulnerability that she really had not displayed since “I

Just Don’t Know What To Do With Myself.” Thanks to this song’s grittier production, though, “Just One Smile” is even more sad, as the song opens with the singer asking, “Can I cry a little bit, there’s nobody to notice it?” And near devastating as she pleads, “Just one smile to make my life worth living.”

“Dusty in Memphis” is also notable for including three songs by Carole

King and Gerry Goffin and closes with their composition “I Can’t Make It Alone.” Written from the perspective of the lover who left and now wants to return, it’s a nice fit for showcasing Springfield as a first-class soul singer.

“Dusty in Memphis” sold poorly, despite strong reviews. By 1973, though, the album was finding its audience and influential music critic Robert Christgau, writing for *Newsday*, called it “a pop standard and classic.” “Son of a Preacher Man” became a hit with Generation X when Quentin Tarantino included the song in his 1994 film “Pulp Fiction” and on the platinum-selling soundtrack album.

Springfield’s influence can be heard on Amy Winehouse’s blockbuster 2006 album “Back to Black” and in the work of subsequent British pop singers such as Joss Stone and Adele. U.S. singers have also been inspired by Springfield and her opus, “Dusty in Memphis.”

“What makes a great singer is that you have to be completely naked within a song,” Shelby Lynne, who released an album of Dusty Springfield covers, told *Rolling Stone*. “Dusty was open to being fragile and letting her guard down.”

# “Stand!”

## Sly and the Family Stone

RELEASED: **May 3, 1969** LABEL: **Epic**

Sly and the Family Stone needed an album that showcased the band’s on-stage energy and trailblazing hybrid of psychedelic-informed pop, soul, rock and R&B. The group’s first two albums — “A Whole New Thing” (1967) and “Dance to the Music” (1968) — sound flat in comparison to their live performances and the hit single “Dance to the Music,” while catchy and innovative, fails to capture the extent of the band’s musicality and messages of social awareness. A rock group featuring men and women of different racial backgrounds, Sly and the Family Stone made a political statement just by taking the stage in the late 1960s, but that statement wouldn’t be fully articulated until the release of “Stand!”

Led by singer-songwriter, producer, and multi-instrumentalist Sylvester “Sly” Stone, the band also included his siblings Freddie Stone (vocals, guitar) and Rose Stone (vocals, keyboards), as well as Larry Graham (vocals, bass guitar), Cynthia Robinson (trumpet, vocals), Jerry Martini (saxophone) and Greg Errico (drums.) The group would record “Stand!” in the tumultuous months following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968.

The album opens with the title track, an anthem about taking a stand against the powers that be, yes, but one that also promotes tolerance.



Sly’s singing is augmented with joyous backing vocals, the song a funky good time with a break that sounds like proto-disco.

“I Want to Take You Higher” is all propulsive bass and drums, stacked with fiery guitar fills, celebratory horns, fierce harmonica, and pumping keyboard with lead vocals shared by Sly, Rose, Freddie, and Graham. It’s a five-minute party and everyone is invited to sing along:

“Boom shaka-laka-laka Boom shaka-laka-laka!”

“Everyday People” is the most pop-oriented song on the album and easily one of the most melodic songs the band ever recorded. It’s also the most straightforward in its message of equality, popularizing the phrase “different strokes for different folks” while proclaiming with gospel fervor “we got to live together.”

And then things get terrifically trippy with “Sex Machine,” a 13-minute freak out not to be confused with the song of the same name released by James Brown the following year. Sly sings lead on the upbeat album closer “You Can Make It if You Try,” a song teeming with a sense of positivity that would cease to exist on subsequent studio recordings by the band.

“Stand!” made Sly and the Family Stone superstars, and a few months after the album’s release the group gave the most famous performance of their career at Woodstock. Sly and the Family Stone continued to play a key role — along with James Brown — in defining 1970s funk with the follow-up albums “There’s a Riot Goin’ On” (1971) and, to a lesser extent, “Fresh” (1973) and “Small Talk” (1974), before the band crumbled under the weight of heavy drug use.

The members of Sly and the Family Stone were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1993 and in 2015, the Library of Congress called “Stand!” “one of the most successful albums of the 1960s” and included it in the National Recording Registry. In recent years, Sly Stone lived for a while in a recreational vehicle and suffered harsh legal blows while trying to recover millions of dollars in songwriting royalties.

# “Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere”

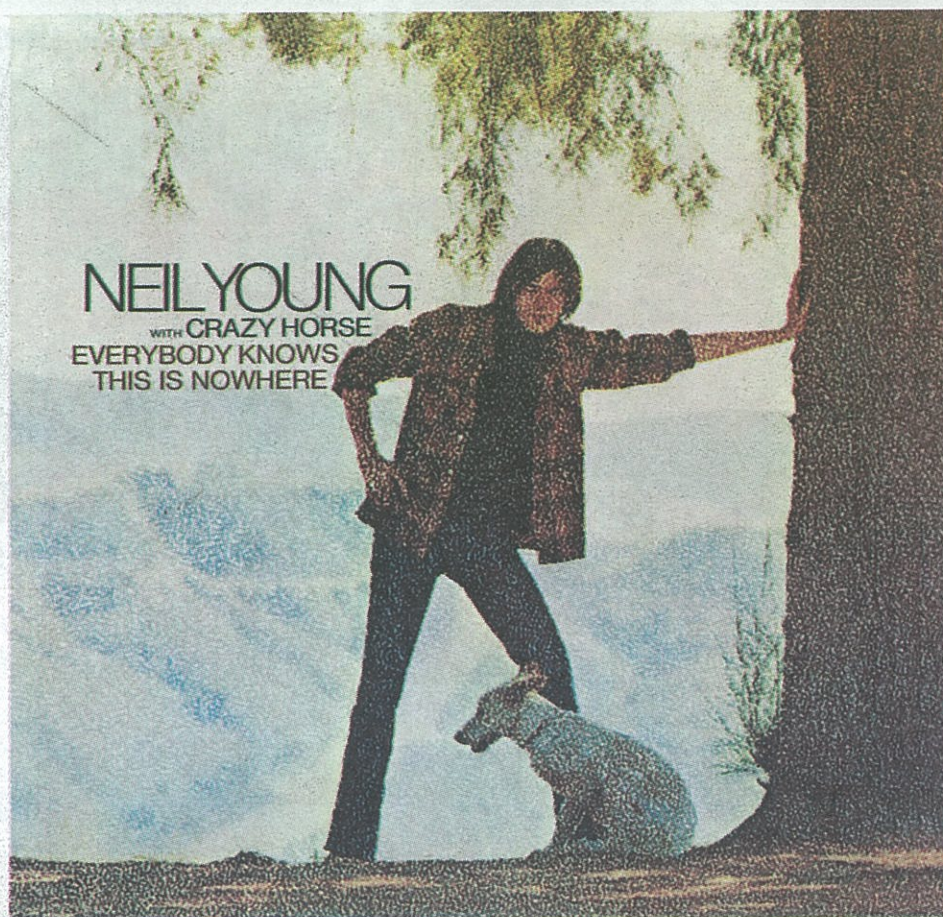
## Neil Young with Crazy Horse

RELEASED: **May 14, 1969** LABEL: **Reprise**

Neil Young busted out of the pioneering and popular folk-rock band Buffalo Springfield to make a self-titled solo album that amounted to much more of a whimper than a bang. The album had no focus, pretty much no one bought it and Young knew he needed to find a new direction if he were going to make it as a solo act.

Recorded just a couple months after the release of his solo debut dud, “Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere” has little in common with its predecessor thanks to the ragged but right approach Young took with the new backing band he called Crazy Horse, a group he would record and tour with on and off through the 2010s. While Crazy Horse’s Danny Whitten (guitar, harmony vocals), Billy Talbot (bass guitar) and Ralph Molina (drums, harmony vocals) played integral roles — especially Whitten — “Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere” would not have launched one of the greatest careers of the rock era without the songs, all written by Young.

“Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere” opens with “Cinnamon Girl,” a 3-minute pop song for people who like their pop built around a giant, distorted guitar riff and cryptic lyrics delivered in casual harmony by Young and Whitten. There’s also the famed — among guitar geeks, at least



— one-note guitar solo and those funky hand claps. It’s an ideal album opener, followed by the twangy sing-along title-track that captures that feeling of big city disillusionment all country boys, especially ones with hearts of gold, go through while living in L.A.

“Round & Round (It Won’t Be Long)” is a sad, sweet, folksy song with backing vocals by a young Robin Lane, which sets us up for

“Down by the River.” A twisted update on the ancient murder ballad tradition, the “I shot my baby” epic runs nearly 10-minutes. It’s mostly jagged, choppy, guitar soloing, Young’s distorted electric guitar sounding every bit as violent as the subject matter, which he delivers in disturbing first-person; praising the woman he loves, adores, and murders. It’s one of rock’s most spellbinding listening experiences.

The honky tonk-inspired lament “The Losing End (When You’re On)” opens side two just fine and “Running Dry (Requiem for the Rockets)” is a solid, violin-laced, psych-folk trip through regret. Nice songs, but really, just opening acts for Young’s other great rock epic, the 10-minute closer “Cowgirl in the Sand.” Young doesn’t have murder on his mind this time but his raging electric guitar still cries out like a killer, those notes like knives as he solos and solos between vocals about a woman-child caught between lovers, or maybe it’s a song about one woman-child with a multitude of lovers. It doesn’t matter. “Cowgirl in the Sand” is someone to fear and respect, and perhaps even pity, her being immortalized by the gravitas of Young’s guitar.

Young, one of the greatest singer, songwriters and guitarists of his generation, a guy with too many awards and honors to list here, made at least four more masterful albums in the 1970s, but none would be as influential and sound as fresh today as “Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere.” This was grunge music more than two decades ahead of its time, music that still sounds gritty and glorious and just a little bit dangerous today.

# “Live/Dead”

## Grateful Dead

RELEASED: **Nov. 10, 1969** LABEL: **Warner Bros.**

The Grateful Dead double live album “Live/Dead” probably would have never come out if the band didn’t owe its record company money. Formed in 1965 in the San Francisco Bay area and already a formidable live act a year later, The Dead inked a deal with Warner Bros and released a solid, self-titled debut album in ‘67 followed by a hybrid of live tapes and studio recordings that resulted in the psychedelic standout “Anthem of the Sun.”

Neither album sold that well, though, and The Dead were taking a long time recording their next studio LP, “Aoxomoxoa.” By January of ‘69 “our immediate concern was to record a live album and get it out as fast as we could, to help pay off the debts we incurred in the studio,” Dead bassist and singer Phil Lesh writes in his autobiography.

“Live/Dead” would be culled from three San Francisco concerts in early ‘69 that were captured on a then state-of-the-art 16-track recorder. “Dark Star,” one of the earliest collaborations between The Dead’s guitarist-singer Jerry Garcia and lyricist Robert Hunter, spans the entire 23-minute first side of the album. The band had spent more than a year developing the song in concert — always as an improvisational platform, no two performances ever the same — and



every twist and turn sounds inspired. In fact, in early ‘69 The Dead often performed “Dark Star” and then went straight into “St. Stephen” with the latter, from the same Fillmore West show, opening side two of “Live/Dead.” Drummers Mickey Hart and Bill Kreutzmann, along with Lesh’s bass, propel the song with Garcia’s lead guitar work intertwining with Bob Weir’s rhythm guitar contributions.

“Turn on Your Lovelight,” at 15 minutes, occupies all of side three. A rhythm and blues song first recorded by Bobby Bland in 1961, Ron “Pigpen” McKernan makes the song his own, ad-libbing lyrics and asides, cajoling the crowd into frenzy and then submission. It’s blues and soul with a psychedelic twist and jamming that serves the vocals rather than the vocals complementing the music, as is the case with “Dark Star.”

McKernan returns to lead vocals, and organ, for the Reverend Gary Davis gospel-blues number “Death Don’t Have No Mercy.” It’s a scary song, one probably best not heard with a head full of acid. “Death will leave you standing and crying in this land,” McKernan sings, his organ dominating before Garcia unleashes one of his best blues solos. The mood switches from bleak to freaky with “Feedback,” a performance that would hint at the famed “Space” segments that would become integral parts of Dead shows in the ‘80s and ‘90s.

“Live/Dead” concludes with 37 seconds of the hymn “And We Bid You Goodnight,” the harmonizing hinting at what the group would do on their 1970 studio album gems “Workingman’s Dead” and “American Beauty.”

The Grateful Dead’s first official live album — the band’s discography includes more than 140 albums, most of them concert recordings — serves as a template for the ever-popular jam band scene, capturing rock improvisation unlike anything that preceded it.

“We were after a certain sequence in the music, in the sense of it being a serious, long composition, musically, and then a recording of it,” Garcia said in 1971. “It’s our music at one of its really good moments.”

# “Abraxas”

## Carlos Santana

RELEASED: **September, 1970** LABEL: **CBS**

While a growing number of guitar heroes focused on playing harder, faster, and heavier during the late 1960s, Carlos Santana opted for long, sustained notes of striking beauty. After impressing Bill Graham with shows at the concert promoter’s Fillmore West venue in San Francisco, the Santana band landed a spot at Woodstock.

Perhaps you’ve seen the footage. The performance, which seems ready to become unhinged at any moment but never falters, is a frenzied, acid-fueled set of rock, blues, jazz and Latin music featuring an immortal performance of the band’s original instrumental “Soul Sacrifice.” No one played guitar like Carlos Santana — the Mexican born son of a mariachi violinist who fell in love with the blues as a teen — and the human quality of his tone instantly grabbed listeners. The band’s distinctive, self-titled debut album came out shortly after Woodstock and rapidly became a Top 10 hit. It’s an excellent, groundbreaking LP. The followup, released a year later in 1970, is even better.

Featuring the same lineup of lead guitarist Santana, lead singer/keyboardist Gregg Rolie, bassist David Brown, drummer Michael Shrieve, and percussionists José “Chepito” Areas and Michael Carabello, “Abraxas” is most famous for a pair of hit covers but also includes one of the most alluring instrumentals in the rock pantheon. Originally written and recorded by



guitar great Peter Green while he was a member of Fleetwood Mac in '68, “Black Magic Woman” gets the Latin treatment with Santana’s warm sustain matched by subdued percussion and a strong vocal by Rolie. For the next number, Santana pays homage to the “The King of Latin Music.” Tito Puente’s original 1963 recording of his “Oye Como Va” is a classic cha-cha-cha rhythm that Santana gives a rock makeover, Rolie’s Hammond B-3 organ front and center with the

driving percussion and plenty of space for the gorgeous guitar solo. Rolie delivers the repeated refrain, which translates to “listen to how my rhythm goes.”

The second side of the album features five songs every bit as enthralling as the more popular singles on side one, including Carlos Santana’s opus, his instrumental composition “Samba Pa Ti,” a song that the guitarist recalled as a defining moment in his

development as an artist.

“I remember being alone one evening, until then when I heard my records it was like seeing myself in the mirror and there was no me there, only a lot of other guitarists’ faces: B.B. (King), George Benson, Peter Green,” Santana said in a 2008 interview published by Mojo and circulating online thanks to songfacts.com. “That evening I heard ‘Samba Pa Ti’ on the radio and I looked in the mirror and it was my face, my tone, my fingerprints, my identity, my uniqueness. Because when I recorded it I was thinking of nothing, it was just pure feeling. I have a suspicion it came from stuff bottled up inside me, that I didn’t know how to express or articulate. I get angry because, ‘Why can’t I say what I really mean?’ Then ‘Samba Pa Ti’ comes out of me. And everybody understands it.”

The original Santana band made three classic studio albums including “Santana III” before splitting in '72. Santana has led the band that bears his surname through numerous lineups over the years but even with the blockbuster success of the star-studded “Supernatural” album of 1999, nothing quite compares to the music made by the original lineup inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in '98. And nothing quite compares to “Abraxas,” which the Library of Congress selected for preservation in its National Recording Registry in 2016 for being “culturally, historically, or artistically significant.”

# “Paranoid,” Black Sabbath

RELEASED: **October 1970** LABEL: **Vertigo/Warner Bros.**

“**D**iabolus in musica” translates to “the Devil in music.” The tritone interval, or diminished fifth, has been known to be the sound of Satan since at least the 1700s. Black Sabbath guitarist Tony Iommi implemented diabolus in musica in the main riff of “Black Sabbath,” the song most responsible for spawning heavy metal. Iommi played his composition to band mates Ozzy Osbourne (vocals), Geezer Butler (bass) and Bill Ward (drums). Lyrics were inspired by the works of supernatural author Dennis Wheatley and a Boris Karloff film called “Black Sabbath.”

The song opens Black Sabbath’s 1970 debut album of the same name that created a whole new genre of popular music.

“I came up with the riff and then Ozzy started singing a type of melody and then Geezer wrote the lyrics to the melody,” Iommi told me when asked about the song “Black Sabbath,” “...it always starts with the riff.”

Iommi had another killer batch of riffs ready for Black Sabbath’s second album, “Paranoid,” also released in 1970. The album opens with the ominous, nearly 8-minute, anti-war declaration “War Pigs” and then, bam, “Paranoid,” a song unlike



Sabbath had on its previous album, clocking in at under three minutes with a riff so infectious it would briefly make the band pop stars.

“The thing with ‘Paranoid’ is that it doesn’t fit into any category: it was like a punk song years before punk had been invented,” Osbourne says in his autobiography “I Am Ozzy.” “Mind you, none of us thought it was anything special when we

recorded it. To us, it just seemed a bit half-arsed compared with ‘Hand of Doom’ or ‘Iron Man’ or any of those heavier numbers. But (expletive) hell, it was catchy; I was humming it all the way home from the studio.”

Of all the mighty Black Sabbath songs, none have the enduring power of “Iron Man,” which closes side one of “Paranoid.” “I liked it,” Iommi

said of the riff. “I liked the feel of it. It always has to be that way with a song. I have to get that initial kick or I won’t use it. I have thousands of riffs we haven’t used.”

The “Paranoid” album is a relentless collection of riffs paired with equally potent, often scary lyrics by Butler, Osbourne’s eerie vocals the ideal delivery method for such lines as “Now the time is here, for Iron Man to spread fear / Vengeance from the grave, kills the people he once saved.”

Is Iron Man some kind of messed up Messiah? “Electric Funeral” is about nuclear apocalypse, right? And why exactly would a fairy wear boots? Everyone should have the pleasure of sitting down with “Paranoid” and asking himself such questions.

It’s those riffs, though, that truly make “Paranoid” a masterpiece, one that even those of us way past our teenage years happily return to again and again.

“But the fact is Tony Iommi turned out to be one of the greatest heavy rock riff-makers of all time,” Osbourne says in his book. “Whenever we went into the studio we’d challenge him to beat his last riff — and he’d come up with something like ‘Iron Man’ and blow everyone away.”

# “Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs”

## Derek and the Dominos

RELEASED: **Nov. 9, 1970** LABEL: **Polydor, Atco**

**E**ric Clapton’s personal and professional life took an interesting turn in 1970 because of his preoccupation with Pattie Boyd, wife of his good friend George Harrison. After recording with Harrison for what would become the former Beatles’ solo album “All Things Must Pass,” Clapton completed his self-titled solo debut album. Wasting no time, Clapton then recorded as Derek and the Dominos with his former Delaney & Bonnie bandmates Bobby Whitlock (vocals, keyboards), Carl Radle (bass) and Jim Gordon (drums).

“Driven by my obsession with Pattie, I was writing a lot, and all the songs I wrote for the Dominos’ first album are really about her and our relationship,” Clapton recalls in his autobiography. “‘Layla’ was the key song, a conscious attempt to speak to Pattie about the fact that she was holding off and wouldn’t come and move in with me. ‘What will you do when you get lonely?’”

Problem is, Clapton and the rest of the band went down to Criterion Studio in Miami during the summer of ‘70 to record with producer Tom Dowd and had just the framework for “Layla” and not much else. Fortunately, Dowd suggested that Clapton go check out the Allman Brothers Band he had just produced and Clapton was blown away by Duane Allman’s guitar playing. So



much so, he invited the Allman Brothers back to the studio for a jam session and then for Duane to play on the actual recordings, which he does for 11 of the 14 tracks on the double album.

“I was just going to play on one or two songs, and then as we kept going, it kept developing,” Allman said in a mid-1970 interview quoted in his biography “Skydog.” “Incidentally, sides one, two, three

weave in and out of each other and then harmonize on “Layla” — one of the all-time great rock guitar songs — makes it hard to believe the two men had only recently met.

“Duane and I became inseparable during the time we were in Florida, and between the two of us we injected the substance into the “Layla” sessions that had been missing up to that point,” Clapton wrote in his autobiography. In addition to the guitar virtuosity, the ‘Layla’ album also finds Clapton singing with the grit and soul of his favorite bluesmen. He’s crying out, after all, for the wife of a good friend.

“Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs” was not much of a hit upon release, but by the early 1980s critics were already calling it Clapton’s finest work and all seven minutes of “Layla” became a staple of classic rock radio.

And what about Pattie Boyd? She eventually divorced Harrison and married Clapton, who wrote for her “Wonderful Tonight.” And Harrison? He was happy for them and attended Clapton’s wedding party with Ringo Starr and Paul McCartney. Clapton and Boyd divorced after about a decade together and in 2007 she published her autobiography. Titled “Wonderful Tonight: George Harrison, Eric Clapton, and Me.” For its U.S. release, Boyd’s book debuted at No.1 on the New York Times Best Seller list.



# “Tapestry” Carole King

RELEASED: **January, 1971** LABEL: **Ode**

If Carole King had never released a recording of her own she would still be in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as one of the greatest songwriters of the 20th century. During the 1960s she, and then with husband Gerry Goffin, composed a string of hits including “Up On the Roof” (the Drifters), “Will You Love Me Tomorrow” (the Shirelles), and “The Loco-Motion,” which went Top 5 in three successive decades for many artists, including Kylie Minogue in 1988.

That must have been serious mailbox money and after King and Goffin divorced in the late ‘60s, she surely was not hurting at the bank. The pianist and composer relocated from New York to Los Angeles’ Laurel Canyon and, encouraged by her pal James Taylor, started singing her own songs. King’s solo debut album, “Writer,” failed to find an audience. Less than a year later, though, its followup, “Tapestry,” would make history.

The album opens with King pounding her piano on the lusty “I Feel the Earth Move,” which opens with the singer belting out the sing along chorus. In the 1960s, King composed the melodies while Goffin penned the lyrics. King wrote the music and lyrics on the majority of “Tapestry,” including “I Feel the Earth Move,” which became a No. 1 pop hit.

“So Far Away,” the next track on the album, is the quintessential example



of “easy listening” in the best way possible. It’s a sad lyric about long-distance lovers, and the transient nature of people in general. King plays gentle piano, accompanied by Taylor on acoustic guitar, her new husband Charles Larkey on bass guitar, session musician Russ Kunkel on drums and Curtis Amy contributing a flute solo near the end of the song.

“It’s Too Late,” which proved as popular as “I Feel the Earth Move,” comes next, a mid-tempo breakup

song that opens with the stinging opening lines of “Stayed in bed all mornin’ just to pass the time / There’s somethin’ wrong here, there can be no denyin’ / One of us is changin’, or maybe we’ve just stopped tryin’ / And it’s too late, baby now, it’s too late.” The woman is leaving the man, which, in 1971, was atypical for a pop song. For this lyric, King found a new collaborator, Toni Stern. The story goes she wrote the lyrics after her love affair with James Taylor ended.

Interestingly, few people benefitted more from “Tapestry” than Taylor. King’s original “You’ve Got a Friend” opens side two of the album. Her recording, to these ears at least, is far more emotive than Taylor’s but it’s his that reached No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100. In fairness, according to Taylor, King wrote “You’ve Got a Friend” as a response to Taylor’s “Fire and Rain.”

The other highlights of side two find King reclaiming two songs she wrote in the 1960s with Goffin: “Will You Love Me Tomorrow” and the Aretha Franklin hit “(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman.” While King didn’t write the lyrics, she sure sings them as if she did, making “Will You Love Me Tomorrow” particularly poignant.

Decades before singers such as Madonna, Whitney Houston and Adele were breaking sales numbers previously held by male acts, Carole King did it with “Tapestry,” which has sold 25 million copies. It earned four Grammy Awards in 1972, including Album of the Year, and showed the music industry that a woman could totally rock their man’s world.

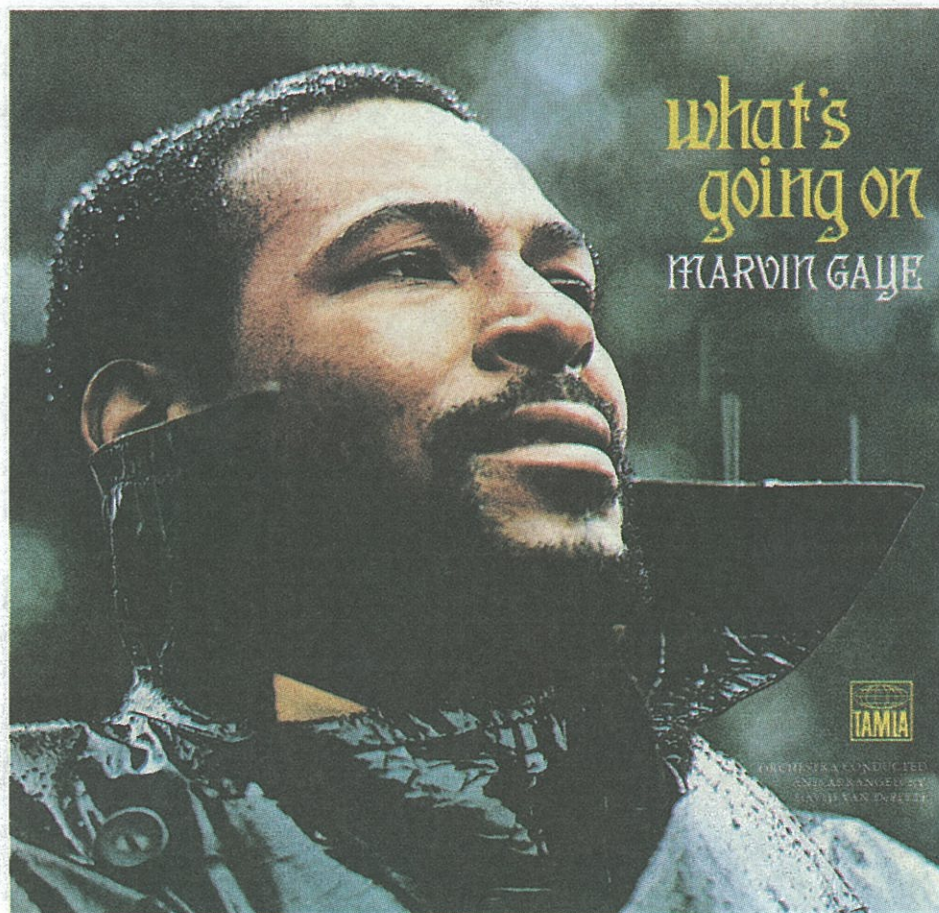
The music remains timeless, with King performing the album live in its entirety for the first time at the British Summer Time Festival in Hyde Park, London in the summer of 2016. To meet the demand for the performance, it was recently screened at approximately 600 U.S. movie theaters.

# “What’s Going On,” Marvin Gaye

RELEASED: **May 21, 1971** LABEL: **Motown/Tamla**

**M**arvin Gaye spent the 1960s at Motown rising from session player to solo star with a bunch of hit singles including “Ain’t That Peculiar,” “How Sweet It Is (To Be Loved By You)” and “I Heard It Through the Grapevine.” By the end of the decade, though, with Martin Luther King Jr. gunned down and the draft sending a disproportionate number of brown-skinned people to die in Vietnam, Gaye no longer wanted to record cheerful, pop-oriented songs featuring Motown’s signature sound. So Gaye went and self-produced Motown’s first concept album, a soulful collection of nine songs loosely presented from the viewpoint of a recently returned Vietnam War veteran. Motown founder Berry Gordy didn’t exactly embrace the idea and if the single “What’s Going On” had not been such a success — it nearly topped the pop charts — it’s doubtful the rest of the album would have been produced.

Protest songs in the United States had been around since the 19th century but had never before been delivered by a black man in possession of a sexy tenor with a three-octave range. “What’s Going



On,” which Gaye coauthored, starts out with background noise, as if you’re seated at a house party, before that mellifluous voice starts in with “Mother, mother / There’s too many of you crying / Brother, brother, brother / There’s far too many of you dying.” Now, that’s how you get a listener’s attention. Released in January of 1971, “What’s Going On”

sold so many copies Gordy had no choice but to let Gaye go forward with the rest of the album of the same name, which came out in May.

The “What’s Going On” album, featuring the Motown house band the Funk Brothers, cast its spell while touching on numerous hot-button topics before lamenting the destruction of the environment with

“Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology),” the final track on side one. The only song on the album that Gaye penned sans co-writer, it’s a protest song for the planet, a plaintive reminder of what was going on regarding the abuse of Mother Earth.

The album closes with “Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler),” a slice of bluesy funk that reflects the daily struggles of a black man in the ghetto. Alas, so much of the song is relevant today, especially the lyric: “Crime is increasing / Trigger happy policing.” Tying the album neatly together, “Inner City Blues” fades out and then comes a reprise of the chorus to “What’s Going On.”

“What’s Going On” was huge in 1971, spawning three Top 10 singles, and remains one of the most honored albums of all time. Love from the Library of Congress, entry into the Grammy Hall of Fame, and a top-tier spot on the list of pretty much every music publication found online has ensured the album’s place in history. Plus, if it weren’t for “What’s Going On” we probably wouldn’t have been able to hear Gaye’s other masterpiece, the highly sensual 1973 album “Let’s Get it On.”

# “Blue” Joni Mitchell

RELEASED: **June 22, 1971** LABEL: **Reprise**

The sweep of romantic highs and lows start in the opening song. Joni Mitchell continues exploring falling in love, breaking up and the emotional toll for the rest of “Blue”, putting you right there in her boudoir. The singer’s smoke-and-honey soprano is accompanied by mostly just her own dulcimer, guitar, and piano playing.

“Do you see how you hurt me baby?” she asks. “So I hurt you too, then we both get so blue.” So goes the opening song “All I Want,” which gives way to the valentine “My Old Man,” a straightforward love song that turns to the blues when he’s traveling.

The third track, “Little Green,” a minor key lullaby written in 1967 about “a child with a child pretending,” would decades later be revealed to be about the daughter Mitchell had placed for adoption. Why would the singer-songwriter, at the height of her creativity and already a commercial success, record a song she had written years before about one of the most painful episodes in her life? Only Mitchell knows, of course, but if you’re going to truly explore the highest of highs and the lowest of lows regarding the repercussions of romance, well, the song had to be on the album.

The album’s catchiest song, “Carey,” about fun in a tourist town with a mean man who is also “out of sight,” comes next, comes quick



and charming before we can spend too much time pondering its lyrics or those of “Little Green.” Side two closes with the title track, a dramatic piano ballad about the singer stuck in a situation rife with “acid, booze, and ass, needles, guns, and grass.”

If an album is going to even approach perfection, and “Blue” might just accomplish it better than any ever recorded, pacing is essential. Following the somber title track,

slow, sorrowful “Jingle Bells” before modifying it into a melody slightly more her own and singing about how “It’s coming on Christmas ... “Oh I wish I had a river I could skate away on, but it don’t snow here, it stays pretty green.” Homesick for Canada? That’s only part of the problem. There’s also the blood of heartbreak on the ice. “I made my baby cry,” she sings and you can’t help but want to shed a sympathetic tear, too, especially when she gets to the lines, “I’m so hard to handle, I’m selfish and I’m sad, now I’ve gone and lost the best baby I ever had.”

Just when you think an album cannot possibly contain a song any more emotional, out pours the hypnotic acoustic guitar chords of “A Case of You.” The opening lines, which sound like the start of the Great American Novel, are a dialogue ending with, “If you want me I’ll be in the bar.” It’s the setup for the drinking metaphor alluded to in the title. The chorus goes, her voice all sexual tension and somehow angelic, “Oh I could drink a case of you, darling, still I would be on my feet.”

But where does “Blue” end? With a paean to a past lover, of course, “The Last Time I Saw Richard.” The album, full of accolades too many to mention, really is a rare example of pop perfection.

Mitchell hits back with the pedal steel guitar-kissed “California,” a lovesick song, but one of the commonplace homesick variety with a mellow country sound. The song even finds her joking about smooching a cop if she ever gets back to the Sunset Strip.

Homesick, though, gets the royal treatment on “River.” Living in California, traveling the world, but born and raised in Canada, Mitchell sits down at the piano and plays a

# “At Fillmore East”

## The Allman Brothers Band

RELEASED: **July 1971** LABEL: **Capricorn**

The Allman Brothers Band members pushed their bodies, minds and souls to the limit touring the country basically nonstop for two years straight after forming, delivering awesome performances only hinted at on their outstanding but overlooked self-titled debut album and its follow-up “Idlewild South.”

On the road, in between begging for food and gas money and dealing with redneck racists who didn’t approve of their black drummer, the group created a unique synthesis of blues, rock, and jazz open to epic explorations of improvisation that, on special nights, never lost focus. Guitarist and unofficial leader Duane Allman knew for his band of younger sibling Gregg Allman (lead vocals, organ, piano), Dickey Betts (guitar), Berry Oakley (bass), Butch Trucks (drums), and Jai “Jaimoe” Johanny Johanson (drums) to finally graduate from obscurity and poverty to rock stardom their next album would have to be a live recording. And so the Allman Brothers returned to The Fillmore East in New York over a weekend in March of 1971, with Tom Dowd present to produce what would become the double album “At Fillmore East.”

While most live recordings before and since typically feature previously



released songs, not a single track on the entire first album of “At Fillmore East” appeared on the band’s first two studio LPs. It’s all blues covers starting with the Duane Allman slide-guitar showcases “Statesboro Blues” and “Done Somebody Wrong,” the latter also featuring harmonica player and regular Allman Brothers guest Thom Doucette. Side one closes

with the spotlight on Gregg Allman as he helms a smoldering 8-minute rendition of “Stormy Monday.”

“You Don’t Love Me” clocks in at 19 minutes, occupies all of side two, and displays, for the first time on record, the dual guitar brilliance of Duane Allman and Dickey Betts. Around the 7-minute mark the rest of the band lays out while Duane truly solos, pure, sublime improvisation.

This goes on for about two minutes before the rest of the band returns in full, rock-swing mode. Around the 16-minute mark, the band lays out again for Duane and he pauses between notes. A fan shouts out what everyone in attendance, everyone listening to the record is thinking, “Play all night.”

Oakley’s heavy yet supple bass drives the 5-minute instrumental “Hot Lanta” — credited to the entire band — that opens side three and then comes Betts’ masterful “In Memory of Elizabeth Reed.” The instrumental originally appeared on “Idlewild South” at about 7 minutes and here it runs nearly double that length with Betts’ guitar often crying like a violin, making a sound simply not heard from other guitarists, particularly in the rock world.

The Allman Brothers Band’s self-titled debut album closes with a 5-minute version of Gregg Allman’s “Whipping Post.” “At Fillmore East” closes with the same song, but now transformed into a 23-minute opus featuring the entire band sounding possessed as a song about the perils of unrequited love morphs into a musical statement about the hardship of life itself. “Good Lord,” a young Gregg Allman growls as if staring at his own grave, “I feel like I’m dying.”

# “Who’s Next”

## The Who

RELEASED: **August 1971** LABEL: **Track/Decca**

Pete Townshend wanted The Who’s next album to be another rock opera akin to “Tommy.” The “Lifehouse” project, though, didn’t happen. Instead, The Who blended the raw power heard on “Live at Leeds,” the 1970 performance culled from the legendary tour in support of “Tommy,” with judiciously placed synthesizer sounds to create the unpretentious hard rock statement “Who’s Next.” Guitarist Townshend wrote all the songs except one and Roger Daltrey sang lead vocals on most songs, with the killer quartet rounded by bassist John Entwistle and drummer Keith Moon.

The album opens with “Baba O’Riley,” the anthem about “teenage wasteland” that has the distinguishing synthesizer throughout the song, explodes into pure rock euphoria in the middle, and then simmers down with a fascinating violin solo played by one of Moon’s drinking buddies toward the end. “Bargain” also makes clever use of the synthesizer, this time often complementing, even sweetening, the muscular attack. The lyric is a bold declaration of love, with Daltrey’s macho delivery selling even an audacious line such as “to win you I’d stand naked, stoned and stabbed.”

The Who leave the synthesizer behind and go to the country for an acoustic ditty about the joys of one-night stands dubbed “Love Ain’t for the Keeping.” The pleasurable



albeit lightweight number serves as an ideal setup for the next track, the hilarious Entwistle gem “My Wife.” The singer’s bender lands him in the drunk tank with nothing to do but think about how he’s going to avoid being attacked by his angry wife, who will assume he was with another woman.

Side one closes with the “Song is Over,” an overlooked gem that features Townshend singing the

verses over gentle keyboards and then Daltrey, over a rock eruption, singing the chorus. The verses express melancholy while the chorus expresses determination, amounting to an ingenious juxtaposition of sounds and themes.

“Getting in Tune” opens side two and is another fine example of the soft-loud dynamic of the band’s music on this album, with frequent Rolling Stones sideman Nicky

Hopkins playing warm piano before the big buildup. The lyric, which could be interpreted various ways, includes the line “I’m getting in tune to the straight and narrow” repeated numerous times. Townshend takes leads vocals and a much more direct approach on “Going Mobile,” a rollicking song about the joys of getting a mobile home, getting on the road, and getting free.

“Who’s Next” closes with two of the band’s best-known songs starting with the beautiful ballad “Behind Blue Eyes.” One of Daltrey’s finest vocal performances, the song is a monologue of sorts delivered by a sympathetic villain. It’s also one of Townshend’s more compelling lyrics.

“Won’t Get Fooled Again” has a great lyric, too, which basically serves as a big middle-finger to the hippie movement. The Who’s new hard rock recipe of drum, bass, guitar and synthesizer enhances the message, which is driven home by Daltrey’s banshee yell.

“Who’s Next” enjoyed immediate critical and commercial success. An instant classic, it holds up as well as any hard rock album of the golden vinyl era. As for “Lifehouse,” in 2000 Townshend finally released the “Lifehouse Chronicles” box set, which includes embryonic, solo versions of “Baba O’Riley,” “Won’t Get Fooled Again,” and “Who Are You.”

# “Led Zeppelin IV”

## Led Zeppelin

RELEASED: **Nov. 8, 1971** LABEL: **Atlantic**

Led Zeppelin didn't title their fourth album or even put their name on it. They didn't need to. By 1971, they were rock gods conquering the world with epic concerts in arenas filled with worshippers wherever they went. Led Zeppelin had blown out the blues on their first album, inspiring the band's admirers, from Black Sabbath and countless others, to go even heavier.

“Led Zeppelin II” followed the same path with bandleader, producer, guitarist, and songwriter Jimmy Page displaying a mastery of studio execution, particularly on the track “Whole Lotta Love.” The crushing Hammer of the Gods paean to Viking warriors “Immigrant Song” opens “Led Zeppelin III,” but the rest of the album features surprising folk and acoustic sounds.

The untitled album best known as “Led Zeppelin IV” combines all these elements, as well everything the musicians had learned during three years spent in studios and on stages, from the United Kingdom to North America to the Far East, during the band's rapid rise to stardom that started in 1968. For all the greatness of Zeppelin's first three albums, they would serve as building blocks for Page, singer/lyricist Robert Plant, bassist/keyboardist John Paul Jones and drummer John Bonham to create the nameless album released Nov. 8, 1971.



Page knew how to pace an album just like a concert and “IV” explodes with the double-dose of “Black Dog” and “Rock and Roll,” a pair of swaggering songs that are sexy, celebratory and hard-driving, songs that instantly make you feel the music not merely hear the sounds. For the third track, Zeppelin returns to its folk leanings with “The Battle of Evermore.” Page plays mandolin while Jones plays acoustic guitar and Sandy Denny,

of Fairport Convention, duets with Plant on the lyrics inspired by J. R. R. Tolkien's “The Lord of the Rings.”

“Stairway to Heaven” runs eight minutes and closes side one. It's Page's most dynamic composition paired with Plant's most interesting lyric. The song starts slow with acoustic guitars and recorders, building to electric guitars and Bonham's booming drums about halfway through. The song's

finale is a hard rock run featuring Page's colossal guitar solo, Plant's vocals growing increasingly intense before ending with the a cappella, “And she's buying a stairway to heaven.”

Flip the record over and the band is back boogying on “Misty Mountain Hop” but with a more subtle sonic thrust, the lyrics and vocals nuanced. A tricky time signature gives “Four Sticks” an exotic feel and then comes the ballad “Going to California.” Plant sings gently over Page's acoustic guitars and Jones' mandolin, ultimately telling himself “it's not as hard, hard, hard as it seems.” Following the folk song Zeppelin resurrects Memphis Minnie's ancient blues song “When the Levee Breaks,” which she wrote after witnessing the horrific Great Mississippi Flood of 1927. Page and Plant altered the arrangement and lyrics on Zeppelin's 7-minute version most famous for Bonham's doomsday drumming, a sound achieved by playing at the bottom of a stairwell.

Even the rock critics who trashed the band's first three albums, and there were oddly a lot of them, praised “Led Zeppelin IV.” A commercial juggernaut that continues to enthrall new generations, with 23 million units sold in the U.S. alone, the album casts a powerful spell, one that can make a 12-year-old boy a fan, still excited by all things Led Zeppelin as he approaches 40.

# “Exile on Main St.”

## The Rolling Stones

RELEASED: **May 12, 1972** LABEL: **Rolling Stones**

The Rolling Stones fled their native England to escape tax problems and were living a life of debauchery in the South of France. Unable to find a proper recording studio they set one up in the basement of Keith Richards' rented house. What was the band like at that time? “Stoned is the word that might describe it,” Jagger would later tell Jann Wenner. Richards admits as much — and more regarding his heroin addiction at the time — in his autobiography, but has decidedly fonder memories of the recording sessions that took place in that party house overlooking Villefranche Bay. “There was no preparation,” Richards recalls. “But that’s not the point; that’s rock and roll. The idea is to make the bare bones of a riff, snap the drums in and see what happens. And it was the immediacy of it that in retrospect made it even more interesting.”

“Exile on Main St.” opens with the gritty riff of “Rocks Off” accompanied by the dark, hostile lyrics delivered with spot-on cynicism by Jagger. Yeah, the Stones are at the gates of hell and salvation will only come by way of intense rock 'n' roll, which Richards and Jagger will sustain throughout the double album with the backing of band mates Mick Taylor (guitar), Bill Wyman (bass), Charlie Watts (drums) and a bunch of top-shelf sidemen.



The melodic rocker “Tumbling Dice,” the biggest hit off “Exile,” closes side one while side two features perhaps the most interesting songs, including the honky tonk of “Torn and Frayed,” with lyrics that seem as if penned by Richards about Richards: “Joe’s got a cough, sounds kind a rough, yeah, and the codeine to fix it / Doctor prescribes, drug store supplies, who’s gonna help him to kick it.”

“Happy,” which kicks off side three,

is Richards at his best, the guitarist singing the uptempo rocker with pleading lyrics he had written, something he had only done a few times before. A similar theme of love as deliverance appears on the equally catchy “All Down the Line,” which opens side four. “Exile on Main St.” closes with “Shine a Light,” a gospel-esque ode to dead band mate Brian Jones that points to the redemption suggested at in the final track “Soul

Survivor.” Or does it? “Soul survivor, soul survivor.” Jagger sings. “It’s gonna be the death of me.”

“Exile on Main St.” doesn’t always immediately grab listeners, even ones who consider themselves Stones fans. It’s messy and often downright mean, muddy and nihilistic. It’s also the most authentic record by the greatest rock ‘n’ roll band from the 1960s to survive the ‘70s, and subsequent decades, Jagger and Richards keeping the band together long enough to do such things as oversee a highly recommended 2010 reissue of “Exile.”

Richards played a larger role in the making of “Exile on Main St.” than Jagger, the driving force on previous and subsequent Stones albums. Perhaps this is why Jagger doesn’t have the same love for the album as his songwriting partner, despite its ranking among most music critics as the Stones’ finest work. “It’s a bit overrated, to be honest,” Jagger told Wenner. Richards remembers it being considered “the kiss of death” by the record company to release “Exile on Main St.” as a double album. “At first it seemed they had been proven right,” he recalls in his autobiography. “But then it just kept going and going and getting bigger and bigger, and it always had incredible reviews. And anyway, if you don’t make bold moves, you don’t get (expletive) anywhere.”

# “The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars”

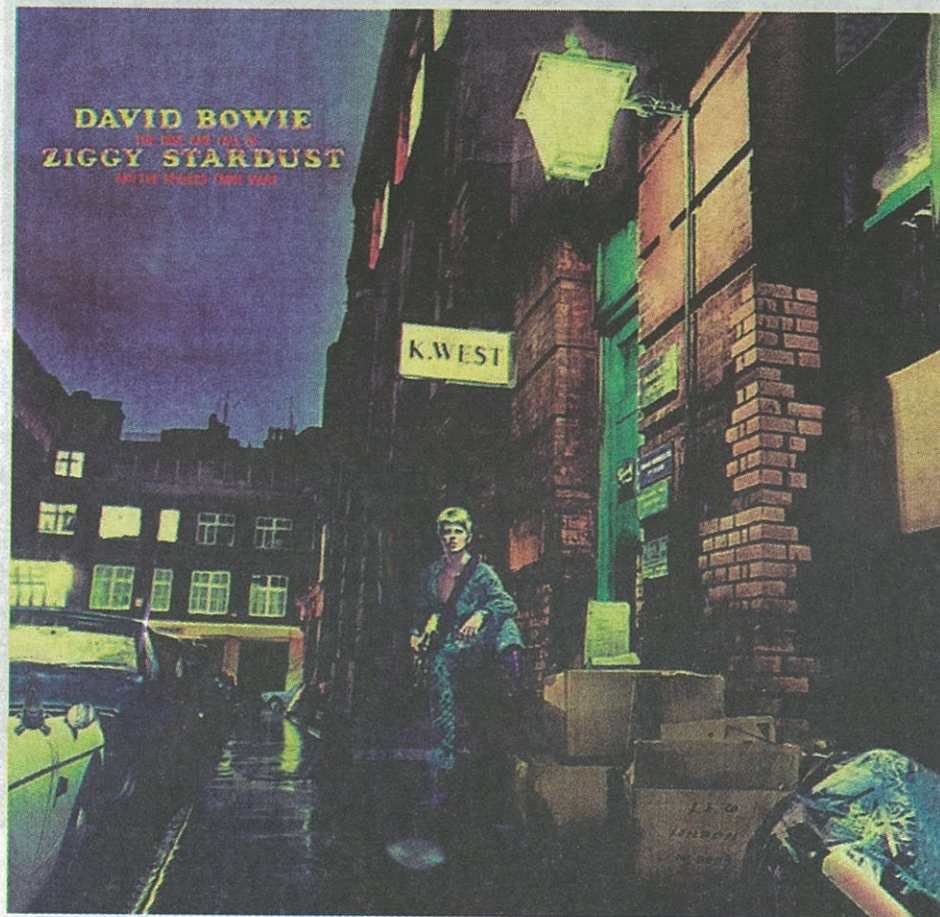
## David Bowie

RELEASED: **June 16, 1972** LABEL: **RCA**

**B**orn David Jones, David Bowie will forever be remembered as rock 'n' roll's great chameleon, and of all his towering characters none are more memorable than Ziggy Stardust. On one level, he's a fictional rock star serving as a conduit for extraterrestrials in the concept album “The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars.” More important, though, Ziggy Stardust dutifully served as Bowie's alter-ego for a year and a half in the early '70s. Through recordings, concerts and scintillating interviews, Ziggy Stardust acted as a pansexual prophet, saving innumerable youths from the dark, lonely corner of otherness.

“Ziggy Stardust” opens with the bleak, cinematic scene-setter “Five Years,” a fantastically sad song about humankind learning the earth is dying. Bowie invites the listener deeper into the dilemma when he breaks the fourth wall and sings, “Don't think you knew you were in this song.”

While the “Ziggy Stardust” album belongs solely to Bowie in terms of creation, it's hard to imagine it could have been executed as well without Mick Ronson, the guitarist who had been working with Bowie for the past two years. Ronson's macho



guitar riffs are the ideal foil for the androgynous Bowie, especially on songs such as “Moonage Daydream,” which plays a pivotal role in the plot development on side one and sets up “Starman.” The prettiest song on the album, “Starman” recounts Ziggy Stardust delivering the alien's message of hope.

Ronson's potent, repeating riff, then

Bowie's brief, sensual “oh,” followed by the sexier, sustained “oooooh, yeah.” A pause and an audible exhale, as if the singer just swallowed a shot of “milk-plus.” So goes the 20-second opening of “Ziggy Stardust.”

Appearing as track four on side two, the song proceeds to introduce us to the titular character, one doomed by death from rock 'n' roll adoration,

but not before the rocker gets his rocks off, described with glee in “Suffragette City.”

“Rock 'N' Roll Suicide” sounds as intensely theatrical as the opening “Five Years.” Ziggy Stardust must perform the ending messianic act. Not nailed to a cross, of course, but on the world stage.

Wearing red hair and red boots with avant-garde kimonos by Kansai Yamamoto, Bowie would bring Ziggy Stardust to audiences across the United Kingdom, North America, and Japan with his Ronson-led backing band The Spiders from Mars. Songs from both “The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars” and its sequel of sorts, “Aladdin Sane,” would be performed during the 18-month tour, along with previously released Bowie songs such as “Space Oddity,” “The Width of a Circle,” and “Changes.” Bowie retired Ziggy Stardust at the tour-ending show in London that would be filmed and finally given a worldwide theatrical release in 1983.

After Bowie's death from cancer in 2016, the “Ziggy Stardust” album re-entered the Billboard 200 pop chart at a new peak of No. 21, its influence and impact clearly undiminished in the four decades since its release.



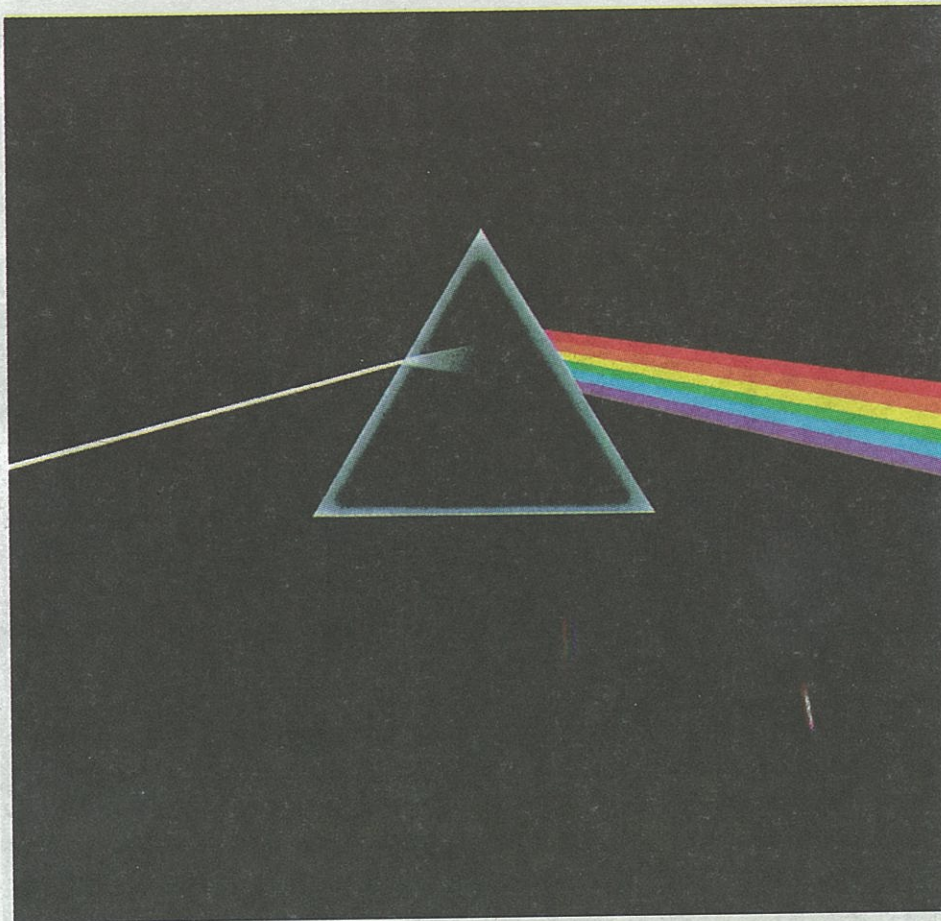
# "The Dark Side of the Moon"

## Pink Floyd

RELEASED: **March 1, 1973** LABEL: **Harvest**

Pink Floyd seemed destined for obscurity after singer, songwriter and lead guitarist Syd Barrett's LSD use and mental illness made it impossible for him to function in the group. The remaining band members — bassist Roger Waters, keyboardist Richard Wright, and drummer Nick Mason — replaced Barrett with David Gilmour, temporarily and then permanently in 1968. After a handful of mixed-bag records pointing in various directions, Pink Floyd found its signature progressive-rock sound on the 1971 album "Meddle," particularly the 23-minute closing track "Echoes." That same year Waters conceived "The Dark Side of the Moon" as an album about life's biggest stressors and the constant threat of insanity and death. The bassist and sometimes vocalist would for the first time take over as the band's sole lyricist.

"I've been mad for (expletive) years, absolutely years," are the first vocals heard on the album, spoken words delivered in the midst of the one-minute sound collage "Speak to Me." The fluid, calming melody of "Breathe in the Air" follows, with Gilmour reminding the listener that, yes, life is just one long, arduous "race towards an early grave." Side one's longest and most significant song, "Time," predates



the Woody Allen joke about life being miserable but over much too fast while essentially offering the same message. Gilmour's space-blues guitar solo adds a soothing element of catharsis to lyrics such as "shorter of breath and one day closer to death."

"Money" opens side two, with Waters' irresistible bass line and that catchy cash register making

his socialist lyrics part of a Top 20 sing along. "Money, it's a hit," Gilmour sings. Sure is. "Money," of all Pink Floyd tunes, is the one most responsible for making the band members all ridiculously wealthy rock stars.

The nearly 8-minute long anti-war song "Us and Them" is gorgeous, and, alas, enduring. The synthesizer and guitar solo instrumental "Any

Colour You Like" sets up the final two songs, "Brain Damage" and "Eclipse." Both are sung by Waters, his only lead vocals on the album. While not exactly a sonorous vocalist, Waters has the voice to sing these songs, to offer the cold, black closer, "And everything under the sun is in tune, but the sun is eclipsed by the moon."

"The Dark Side of the Moon" spent 741 weeks on the charts on its way to sell 45 million copies. A favorite among jam bands, it has been covered in its entirety by Phish, Gov't Mule and moe. Waters' band performed "Dark Side" in its entirety during a blockbuster world tour that lasted two years starting in 2006.

During this period, a reporter from Uncut asked Waters why "Dark Side" remained so popular. "The record is musically sophisticated and yet simple," he said. "The song structures are very simple. Lyrically, it speaks to successive generations who have continued to have the same concerns over and over and over again."

# “Innervisions”

## Stevie Wonder

RELEASED: **Aug. 3, 1973** LABEL: **Tamla**

Little Stevie Wonder had grown up. As a 12-year-old piano prodigy he played the chitlin circuit as part of his record label's Motortown Revue. A decade later, Wonder joined the greatest rock 'n' roll show on earth as the supporting act for The Rolling Stones' 1972 American Tour, often joining the Stones for an encore medley of his own hit “Uptight (Everything's Alright)” and their “(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction.” Later that year, Wonder released the critical and commercial triumph “Talking Book” and continued to win over R&B as well as rock crowds with spectacular performances at venues such as San Francisco's Winterland, where he closed a show with an amazing 17-minute rendition of “Superstition.”

Meanwhile, Wonder made his 1973 album “Innervisions,” writing, arranging, and producing all tracks, and on several songs playing every single instrument, in addition to the keyboard work that dominates the album.

“Innervisions” opens with the slinky funk of “Too High,” a cautionary tale about drug use, followed by the dreamy “Visions,” where Wonder questions ever truly finding peace on earth. A dark and driving synth line carries “Living in the City,” Wonder's



seven-minute standout about black men and women struggling to survive in a system rigged against them. Featuring one of his toughest lead vocals, Wonder plays every instrument on the track: Fender Rhodes electric piano, drums, Moog bass, T.O.N.T.O. synthesizer, and even the handclaps. Side two closes with the album's first love song, the bouncy yet subdued and, yes, sensual “Golden Lady.”

“Higher Ground” opens side two, the innovative wah-clavinet sound created by Wonder himself, who again plays every instrument on this song about reincarnation that the Red Hot Chili Peppers successfully covered in the late 1980s. Wonder has fun with Latin rhythms and a Spanish accent on “Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing,” a sweet, upbeat song about supporting your “pretty mama” when she's down and out.

“Innervisions” closes with the gorgeously composed diss track “He's Misstra Know-It-All.” Supposedly about Tricky Dick, Wonder sings of a big-mouthed man who talks fast, smiles while lying, will go anywhere for a paycheck, doesn't pay his debts and is in complete denial about any wrongdoing. “When you say that he's living wrong, he'll tell you he knows he's livin' right,” Wonder sings.

Expectations could not have been higher for “Innervisions.” Its predecessor “Talking Book” was one of the best selling albums of the year and winner of three Grammys. “Innervisions,” though, performed even better while enjoying the same critical praise. Most notably, “Innervisions” won the Grammy Award for Album of the Year, also picking up Best Engineered Non-Classical Recording, with “Living for the City” honored as Best R&B Song.

Wonder's classic period that started in 1972 would continue through “Songs in the Key of Life,” amounting to five albums in as many years that stand as monumental, pioneering incorporations of pop, funk, jazz and rock. The irony, by the way, that a blind man would create the most visionary albums of the 1970s was not lost on Wonder who famously said, “Just because a man lacks the use of his eyes doesn't mean he lacks vision.”

# “Good Old Boys”

## Randy Newman

RELEASED: **Sept. 10, 1974** LABEL: **Reprise**

**A** Los Angeles native who grew up in New Orleans, Randy Newman’s hummable tunes, often with bitingly ironic lyrics, had already been covered by a long list of stars including Ray Charles, Dusty Springfield and Three Dog Night before he released “Good Old Boys” in 1974. To this day, the album remains misunderstood by many.

Newman offered explanations during a radio broadcast concert soon after the album’s release. “So this steelworker as I was saying goes on to eventually sing this next song here, which I believe is offensive to black people, and to white people, and to Jews, and to gentiles, and to anyone with any kind of taste or breeding,” Newman says. “But it’s just this character doing it as part of this total concept album I was trying to slip by here, so I have really nothing to do with it.” And with that Newman, alone at the piano, plays “Rednecks.”

That controversial song opens “Good Old Boys.” It’s an ambitious collection of music about living, dying, loving, lots of drinking, drugging and dealing with corrupt politicians and the ghost of slavery in the South. It’s the pathos Newman conveys through these often despicable characters, though, that makes this album the greatest among the consistently intriguing studio albums the singer-songwriter has released, when not busy composing all those Oscar-

and Grammy-winning film scores.

Listen to “Marie” in a certain state of mind and you will weep. “I’m weak and I’m lazy and I’ve hurt you so,” Newman sings over gentle piano and strings, inhabiting the drunken husband confessing to his wife. “I don’t listen to a word you say, when you’re in trouble I just turn away. I love you, I loved you, the first time I saw you, and I always will love you Marie.”

### RANDY NEWMAN



### GOOD OLD BOYS

Everybody knows the next song, “Mr. President (Have Pity on the Working Man),” because of its inclusion on the “Forrest Gump” soundtrack. Written as a plea and farewell to President Nixon, it’s a rollicking ditty that ends with the lines: “Maybe you’re cheating, maybe you’re lying, maybe you have lost your mind.”

The protagonist of “Good Old Boys” is a functional alcoholic, a fact alluded to before on the album

and then fully revealed on the final track “Rollin.” He never drinks in the afternoon. He never drinks alone. But he sure does like a drink or two when he gets home, go the lyrics. “I sit here in this chair,” Newman sings. “I pour myself some whiskey and watch my troubles vanish into the air.”

Many of the songs from the critically acclaimed “Good Old Boys” would remain part of Newman’s concerts throughout his career, with “Louisiana 1927” becoming a hymn of healing following Hurricane Katrina. The most famous song on “Good Old Boys,” though, would eventually be retired.

“One thing that has changed is that I don’t play ‘Rednecks’ now,” Newman told the *The Daily Telegraph* in 2015, a couple years following his induction into the the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. “Things have got better in some ways for black people in this country but not significantly. However, the ‘n word’ is really anathema now. People think I’m a jaundiced sort of observer but I always think my audience, the audience in general, is intelligent enough to realize the people I’m writing about are less worthy and less observant of themselves than they are. My audiences don’t agree with my characters.”

# “Born to Run”

## Bruce Springsteen

RELEASED: **Aug. 25, 1975** LABEL: **Columbia**

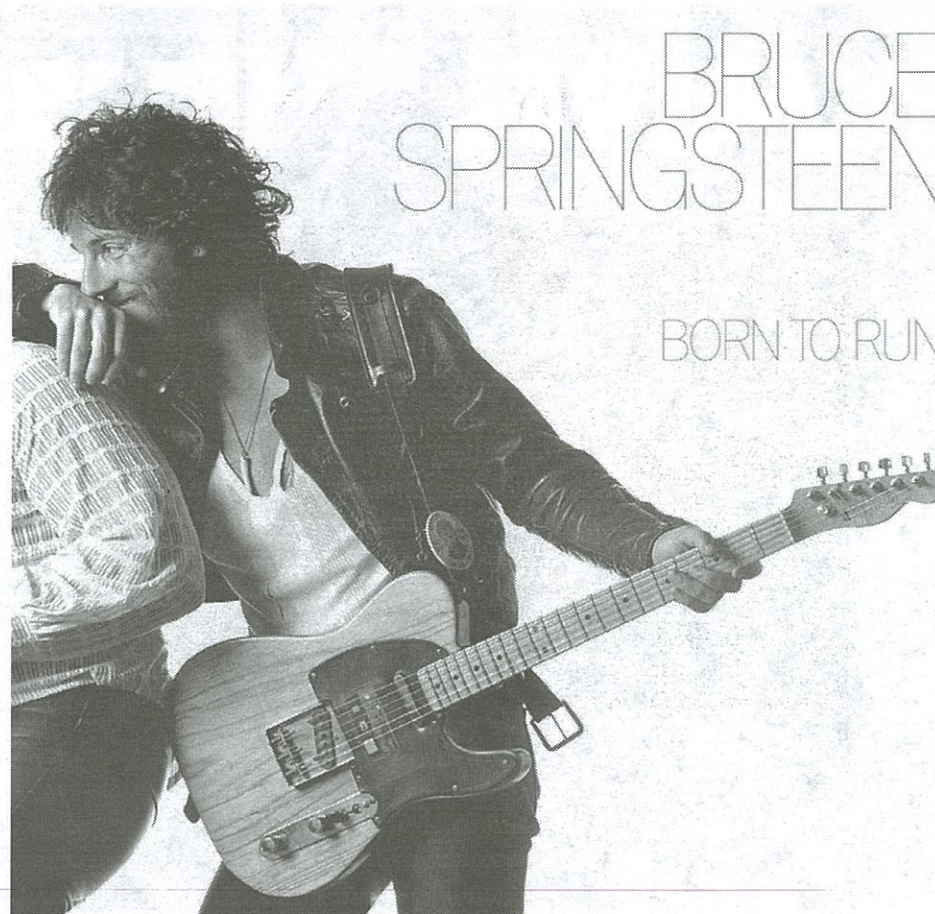
**B**ruce Springsteen’s first two albums were flops. Rock critics liked the scruffy singer-songwriter from Jersey and he had a loyal following in the Northeast. But without a hit Springsteen might just end up living the dreary, working-class life he witnessed while growing up in Freehold.

Springsteen spent 14 months recording “Born to Run,” with about six of those months dedicated to fine-tuning the title track.

“I wanted to craft a record that sounded like the last record on Earth, like the last record you might hear, the last one you’d ever need to hear, one glorious noise and then the apocalypse,” Springsteen writes in his autobiography, also titled “Born to Run.” “From Elvis came the record’s physical thrust; Dylan, of course, threaded through the imagery and the idea of not just writing about something but writing about everything.”

Lonesome piano and harmonica open the album as the singer drives up to his lover’s house at night, pleading for her to show a little faith and take that long walk from her front porch to his front seat. Mary, her dress waving like a vision, consents and away we go with this young couple down “Thunder Road.”

“Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out” offers



a fun, poetically-licensed telling of how the E Street Band formed, a band that would surely bring happiness to the bold, young lovers from “Thunder Road” and to all of us listening, especially when Clarence Clemons makes those joyous noises with his saxophone. Stepping out into the “Night” is what you work all day to do and “Backstreets,” which opens with Roy Bittan’s stately piano and organ playing, is where

the friendships of youth get left behind as young men are thrust into adulthood.

“Born to Run,” the album’s title track and centerpiece, opens side two. It’s a throbbing wall of sound, the sound of pure urgency, the sound of a kid desperate to break free of his small town shackles. “Baby this town rips the bones from your back,” Springsteen sings, “it’s a death trap, it’s a suicide rap. We gotta get out

while we’re young.”

“Jungleland,” the album’s final and longest song at over nine minutes, mirrors the storytelling of “Thunder Road,” except this time the lovers — Magic Rat and the “barefoot girl sitting on the hood of a Dodge drinking warm beer” — go on a journey that ends in tragedy.

“At record’s end, our lovers from ‘Thunder Road’ have had their early hard-won optimism severely tested by the streets of my noir city,” Springsteen would later explain. “They’re left in fate’s hands, in a land where ambivalence reigns and tomorrow is unknown.”

“Born to Run” grabbed the imagination of what seemed to be an entire generation of young people trying to make sense of their own fates. Two months after “Born to Run” came out, Springsteen appeared on the covers of Time and Newsweek in the same week. The album made Springsteen a star and freed him to pursue more mature and complicated themes in the future.

“This was the album where I left behind my adolescent definition of love and freedom; from here on in, it was going to be a lot more complicated,” Springsteen writes in his autobiography. “‘Born to Run’ was the dividing line.”

# “Ramones”

## The Ramones

RELEASED: **April 23, 1976** LABEL: **Sire**

The Ramones' self-titled debut did more than any other album to launch and define punk. It sounds like almost nothing that preceded it while capturing the energy and essence of the rock and pop sounds of the 1950s and early '60s. The band's unrelated quartet of outcasts from New York wore matching black motorcycle jackets, shared the same stage surname, and made music marked by speed and precision. The Ramones' songs, short and cleverly simple, were assaults on the excessive arena rock of the era and anything else that might get in the way of them finding salvation through rock 'n' roll — or at least escaping construction jobs — and having a good time.

“In the early days we heard that we weren't being taken seriously because we were fun,” lead singer Joey Ramone said in a 1995 interview with the Los Angeles Times. “I mean, like rock 'n' roll was always about spirit and fun.”

“Hey ho, let's go!” is the perfect opening to the perfect punk song, the three-chord masterpiece “Blitzkrieg Bop.” The Ramones' first single and the opener on their eponymous debut runs just over two minutes — the length of most of the band's songs — allowing no room for wasted notes or wasted words.



The words? Delightful nonsense.

The barrage continues for the rest of the album with 14 songs clocking in at less than 30 minutes. “Beat on the Brat” exactly what you think: a comical take on dealing with a delinquent child. “Judy is a Punk” is most interesting for the lines “second verse, same as the first” and “third verse, different from the first,” which brings metafiction to rock 'n' roll

while poking a sharp stick in the eye of the myriad mythmaking bands of the era.

The Ramones were big fans of the girl groups of the 1960s, and nowhere is that influence clearer than on “I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend.” Still speedy but slower than the other songs on the album, the sweet melody matched by Joey Ramones' tender delivery and the

backing vocals by his brother Mickey Leigh and album engineer Rob Freeman.

The Ramones would follow their debut with about 20 more studio and live albums while playing 2,263 shows before retiring in 1996. When Joey Ramone died in 2001 after a long battle with lymphatic cancer he was only 49 years old and his accolades included just one U.S. gold album, for the 1988 compilation “Ramones Mania.” The remaining members of The Ramones were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame the following year by Eddie Vedder, with Green Day performing a three-song set of Ramones songs concluding with “Blitzkrieg Bop.” By 2014, all four of The Ramones' original members were dead.

“When I put the Ramones on the stereo now, we still sound great,” Joey Ramone told David Fricke in 1999. “And that will always be there. When you need a lift. When you need a fix.”

# “Trans-Europe Express”

## Kraftwerk

RELEASED: **March 1977** LABEL: **Kling Klang**

German band Kraftwerk debuted its signature “robot pop” sonics on the 1974 album “Autobahn,” particularly on the opening track that occupies all of side one and intends to replicate the feeling of driving on their homeland’s high-speed highways. The seminal electronic album does feature some actual instruments, though, in addition to the various synthesizers and electronic drums.

For their 1975 follow-up “Radio-Activity,” Kraftwerk started using electronic instruments exclusively, the human vocals often processed through a vocoder for a cold sound consistent with the thwack of the artificial percussion and otherworldly synthesizer notes. Fully immersed in the new electronic devices they had perfected while touring and tinkering in their studio, Kraftwerk now had their classic lineup of lead singer/synth player/programmer Ralf Hütter and singer/synth player/programmer Florian Schneider, with electronic percussionists Karl Bartos and Wolfgang Flür. For “Trans-Europe Express,” Hütter composed the vast majority of music with Emil Schult collaborating on lyrics.

“Europe Endless” opens the album, a futuristic train ride past “parks, hotels and palaces” and then “real life and postcard views.” The juxtaposition of authenticity and



fantasy is further explored on the next track, “Hall of Mirrors.” It’s a slow song with creepy computer noises and incessant percussion that sounds culled from a factory designed solely to smash stuff. The nearly eight-minute song scarily repeats the line, “Even the greatest stars find their face in the looking glass.”

Hütter succinctly and aptly describes the title track of “Trans-Europe

Express,” as “sequencer rhythms playing themselves.” It’s the “untz untz” sound that remains the hallmark of every rave, techno and now, as it’s called, EDM (electronic dance music) event held around the world. While rave culture didn’t start until the late 1980s, the sequencer sound of “Trans-Europe Express” can be heard on one of the earliest and most important hip-hop records, Afrika Bambaataa & the Soulsonic

Force’s 1982 single “Planet Rock.”

The title track, “Trans-Europe Express,” which was released as a single around the same time as the album came out, reached No. 67 on Billboard Hot 100. It is also sampled on Paul Oakenfold’s 2001 “Swordfish” movie soundtrack.

Two different versions of the “Trans-Europe Express” album were issued: one sung in English, the other in German. The former reached only the upper regions of the American charts but ranked No. 30 on the Village Voice’s 1977 Pazz & Jop critics poll.

In subsequent years, the album’s influence has been incalculable on synth-pop, hip-hop, and especially EDM artists. The album has also been praised as a celebration of European unity. In a rare interview, to advance Kraftwerk’s 2017 English tour dates, Hütter talked to the Guardian about “Trans-Europe Express,” explaining that growing up in Düsseldorf, in the Rhineland, they were raised multilingual, with multi-European connections.

“It’s a four-hour drive to Paris, so we were always going to discotheques in France or hearing new bands in Brussels or spending the weekend in Amsterdam,” Hütter said. “It’s very pan-European, so when I wrote the lyrics with Emil it was like a fantasy story about that.”

# “Exodus”

## Bob Marley & the Wailers

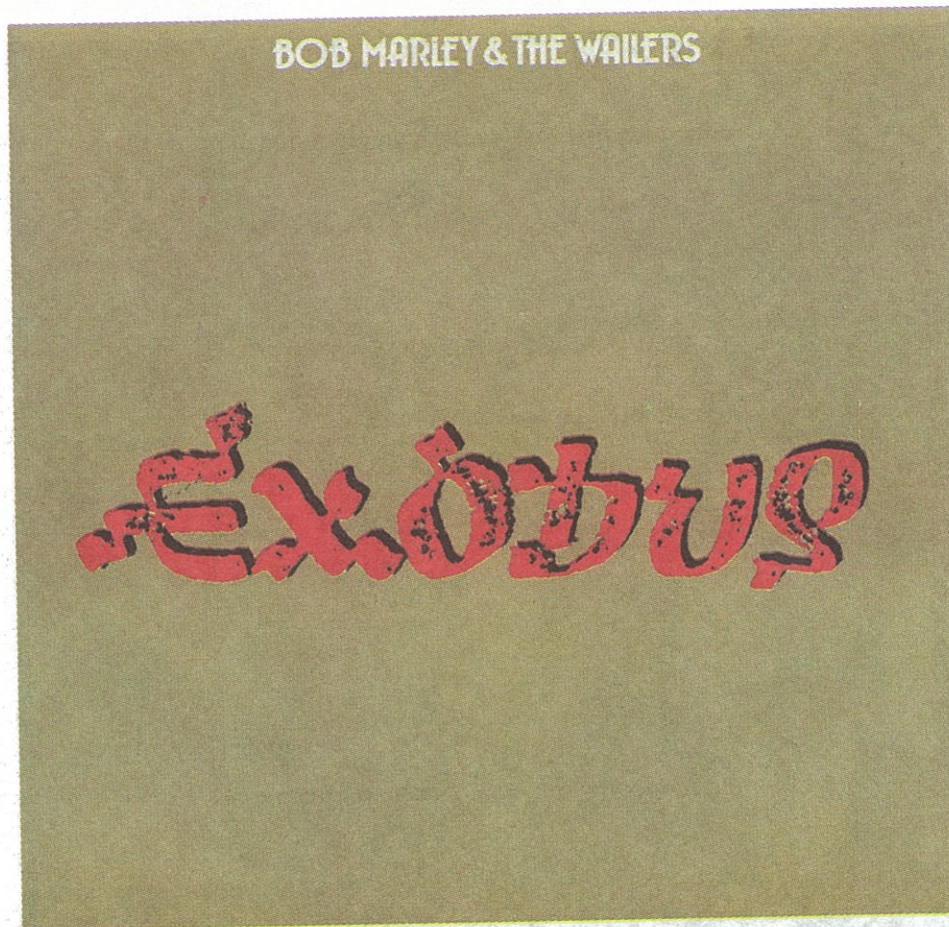
RELEASED: **June 3, 1977** LABEL: **Island**

**B**ob Marley’s rise to international stardom almost ended with a bullet.

Eric Clapton took the reggae singer’s song “I Shot the Sheriff” to the top of the pop charts in 1974 and then the next year Marley had his first hit outside Jamaica with “No Woman, No Cry.” Marley’s album “Rastaman Vibration,” released in the spring of 1976, went Top 10 in the U.S. and performed nearly as well in the U.K.

Later that year, though, the singer’s native Jamaica became entangled in political upheaval and assassins entered Marley’s home, shooting the singer, his wife Rita, and his manager Don Taylor. Miraculously, no one sustained critical injuries. Marley even played the previously scheduled, free, peace-promoting concert held a couple days after he was shot in the upper arm. But Marley soon would leave the dangers of Jamaica for London, where he would spend two years in self-imposed exile and record “Exodus.”

The title track, at seven minutes, is the centerpiece. It’s Marley and the Wailers taking reggae and a universal message of overcoming oppression, and melding it with a funk sound punctuated with horns. There’s even a little disco flavor in this highly danceable groove. “Jamming” sounds like a party until you get past the



sunny melody and chorus and pay attention to the verses. “No bullet can stop us now, we neither beg nor we won’t bow,” Marley sings. “Neither can be bought nor sold.”

Marley eschews politics on the next track “Waiting in Vain.” A song of longing with a tasty guitar solo by Junior Marvin, Marley delivers one of his most impassioned vocals with lines like “tears in my eyes burn,

while I’m waiting for my turn.” The most uplifting song Marley ever recorded, “Three Little Birds” is a sing-along likely inspired by the The I Three, Marley’s trio of backing singers, including his wife. “Don’t worry about a thing, ‘cause every little thing gonna be alright,” goes the chorus that has soothed so many of us.

The album closes with “One Love/

People Get Ready,” a song Marley first recorded as a member of the original Wailers in 1965. This definitive version takes the ska original and gives it a mellow makeover, crediting Curtis Mayfield for writing “People Get Ready,” which Marley interpolates into “One Love.” The songs share a similar message of finding deliverance in the face of persecution.

“Exodus” cemented Marley’s place as an international star. A Top 20 hit in the U.S. and U.K., it also charted in numerous other European countries, as well as Canada. The songs “Exodus” and “Jamming” would appear on Marley and the Wailer’s excellent 1978 double live album “Babylon by Bus.” Both songs, along with “Exodus” album opener “Natural Mystic,” were also performed during Marley’s final concert before the reggae icon died at age 36 from skin cancer in 1981.

Marley’s music would continue to grow in popularity after his death in a manner he could have never envisioned. Marley’s 1984 compilation “Legend” regularly sells between 3,000 and 5,000 copies per week, and has sold 11.6 million copies in the U.S. since 1991, according to Billboard.com. Five songs from “Exodus,” more than from any of his other albums, appear on “Legend.”

# “My Aim is True”

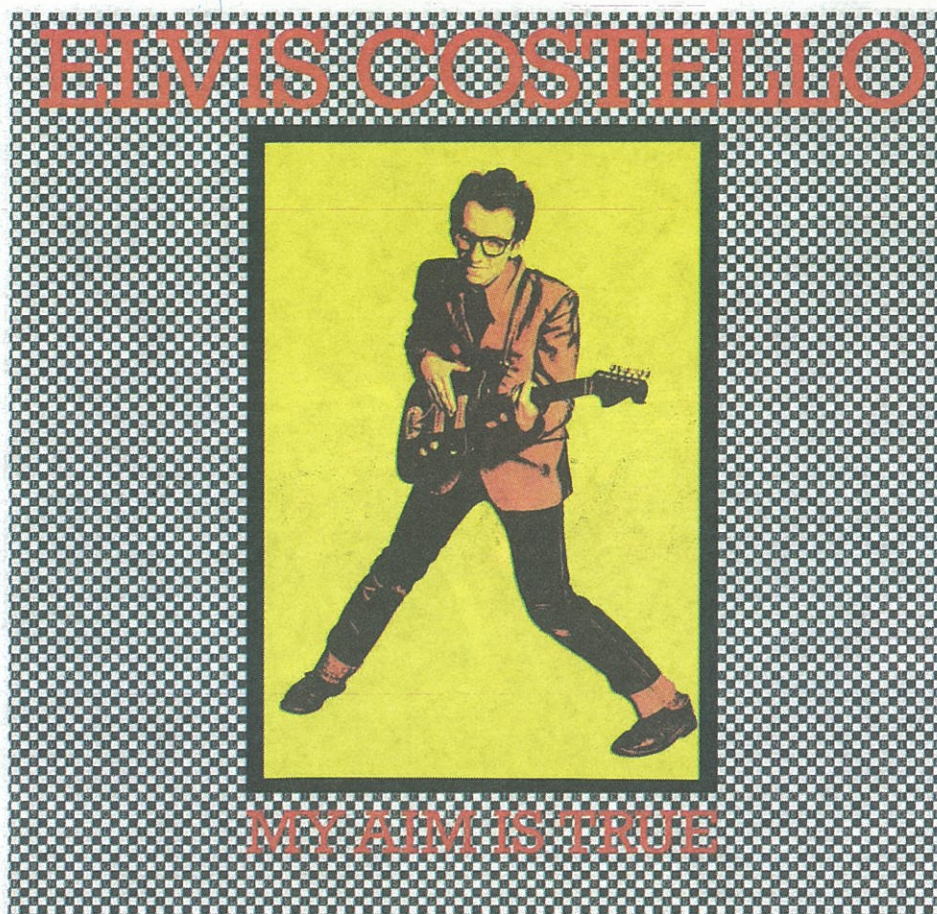
## Elvis Costello

RELEASED: **July 22, 1977** LABEL: **Stiff**

The eclecticism that informs Elvis Costello's 1977 debut album “My Aim is True” and defines his entire career, can be traced back to his father Ross MacManus. Best known for playing in Joe Loss' popular British big band in the 1950s, MacManus “also made money on the side doing — I call them ‘ghost records’ — cover records that were sold in the supermarket and at the petrol station,” Costello explained in a 2015 New York Times interview. “An Australian producer used to have him come in and record carbon copies of hits of the day, four titles in an hour.”

Born Declan MacManus, Costello would deftly incorporate manifold roots music influences, many introduced to him by his father, and present them with a singular songwriting wit and punk sensibility on “My Aim is True.” Of course, real life struggles also informed Costello's music.

Costello was married, raising a son and working a mundane office job while recording “My Aim is True.” So, it's fair to say the opening track “Welcome to the Working Week” is autobiographical. “Oh, I know it don't thrill you, I hope it don't kill you,” he sings. And anyone who has ever spent Monday through Friday fighting the old ennui in a cubicle farm can totally relate.



Any album that contains a song as pretty as “Alison” really can't be a punk album now, can it? Sure, it can. Listen to those lyrics. The pain is so authentic it gets cruel and near ugly as the singer does the exact opposite of getting “too sentimental.” Originally released as a single, “Watching the Detectives” does not appear on the original U.K. version of “My Aim Is True.” It does, however, fit just perfectly as the last

track on side one of the U.S. release. It's punk tension melded with reggae rhythms, the lyrics sounding like the scribblings of a film noir junkie. “Less Than Zero,” another rocker with reggae touches, finds Costello firing bile at British fascist Oswald Mosley. It's a song the singer would later describe as a “slandering fantasy.”

“My Aim is True” made Costello

an instant star who stood out from the other English punk artists of the time, because, like The Ramones from New York, he had a rich understanding of the music that came before. “When I made ‘My Aim Is True,’ my favorite record was Randy Newman's first album,” Costello said in a 2000s Rolling Stone interview. “Punk was supposed to be the Year Zero. I didn't buy it.”

Inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2003, Costello was honored for a career “that has been almost unmatched in its reach — from furious, biting punk-era nuggets to art-minded collaborations with an opera singer and string quartet — and consistency.” Listening to “My Aim is True,” it's all there, the fully formed work of the most consistently interesting, at times perplexing, singer-songwriter of his generation.



# "Van Halen" Van Halen

RELEASED: **Feb. 10, 1978** LABEL: **Warner Bros.**

Van Halen's first album is the sound pretty much every hard rock band desired for the next decade. Guitarist Eddie Van Halen achieved a distinctive tone locked forever in the now while crafting some of the most memorable riffs and hooks on record. His sympatico sibling Alex Van Halen on drums helped. So did the solid bass playing and sugary backing vocals of Michael Anthony. Lead singer David Lee Roth played an important role, too, selling the band's often juvenile lyrics with the chutzpah of a natural born showman.

But, really, Van Halen's startling originality resulted from a gifted teenager who spent more time with his six-string than he did with family or friends. "I don't want to sound like a geek but a guitar really means a lot more to me than an instrument, it's part of me, period," Eddie Van Halen said in a revealing 1984 interview posted on concertvault.com.

A spacey intro, a razor-sharp riff and then Roth singing, "I live my life like there's no tomorrow," and we're off "Runnin' with the Devil." The opening track to "Van Halen," it's still one the group's greats, which means, it's one the greatest tracks in hard rock history.

An instrumental focused on a single guitar solo can be pretty boring,



unless the guitarist is Eddie Van Halen unveiling his trademark two-handed tapping technique. Titled "Eruption," the track clocks in at under 2 minutes but would run at least twice that long in concert. It's easily one of the most original, compelling and influential guitar solos ever recorded.

While the four members of Van Halen share writing credits on nine

of the album's 11 tracks, their cover of The Kinks' "You Really Got Me" would be the highest charting single. An update of the 1964 original, it's a fine example of Eddie's fast and furious guitar playing finding a fine counterpart in Roth's playful vocals.

"Jamie's Cryin,'" with lyrics reportedly by Roth, concerns a groupie who feels sad about her one-night stand. One of the band's more

sensitive and mature songs, it's fueled by another first-class riff by Eddie with the icing on the cake provided by Anthony's backing vocals, which soar during the chorus.

Van Halen's debut album sold a million copies in less than a year on its way to certified sales of more than 10 million. The band's original lineup would record six albums culminating with the synth-laden blockbuster "1984." The band replaced Roth the next year with Sammy Hagar and from 1986 to 1995 released four No. 1 studio albums in a row, which today, though, just don't hold up as well as those records by the original lineup.

After decades of drama, Roth returned as lead singer full-time in 2007 and Van Halen recorded an acclaimed album five years later. Titled "A Different Kind of Truth," it recalls the group's original sound.

"You know, I don't know if Ed has ever felt good," Roth said in a Los Angeles Times interview to advance the new album. "There's a thin line between rage and great work. He really never enjoyed his fame or success, and that might be part of what compels him."

# “Parallel Lines”

## Blondie

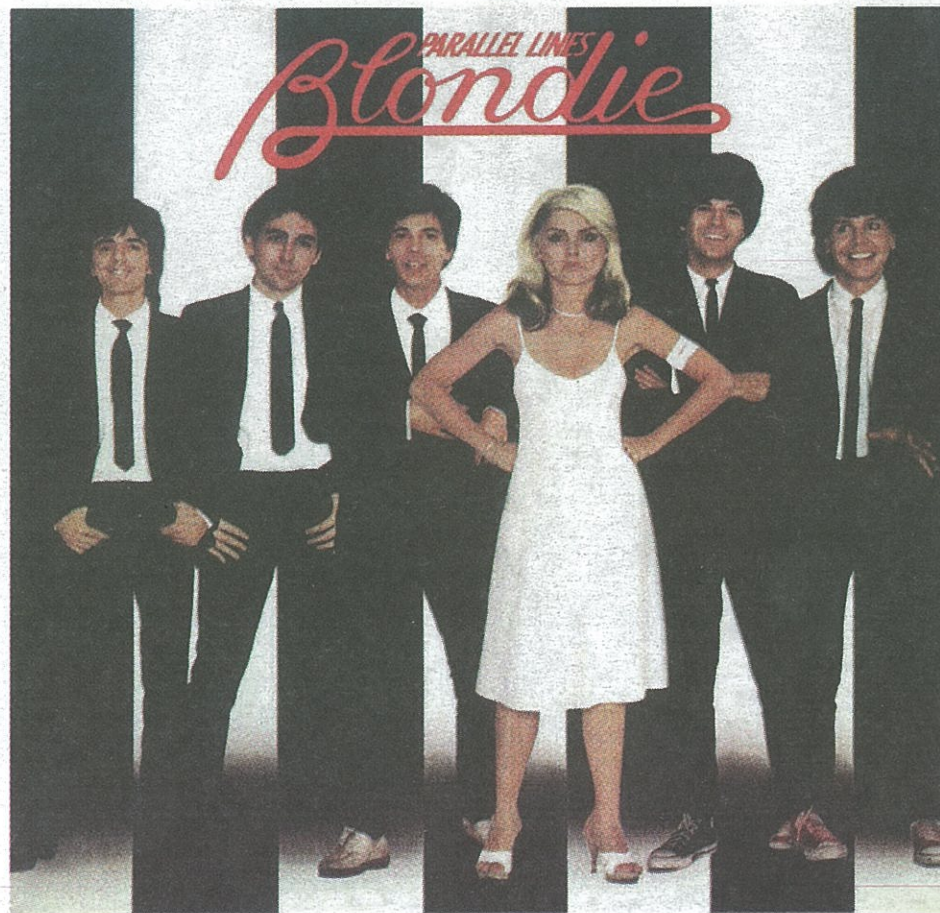
RELEASED: **September, 1978** LABEL: **Chrysalis**

Not long after New Wave band Blondie streamlined their sound and became superstars with the album “Parallel Lines,” an infamous Rolling Stone cover story noted that many people thought Blondie and lead singer Debbie Harry were synonymous: “a confusion that infuriates the band. There are even lapel buttons that announce, ‘Blondie is a group.’” Truth is, though, Blondie functioned as Harry’s platinum blonde persona, one of the most assured, alluring and intriguing in pop culture.

“When Blondie did finally hop out on stage as a character she would try to be bisexual or asexual and a lot of times, she would see and do things from the point of view of a third person,” Harry explained in her 1981 autobiography “Making Tracks.”

“Parallel Lines” opens with “Hanging on the Telephone,” the singer sounding every bit as sexy and formidable as she looks on the album cover. A smart remake of The Nerves’ power pop nugget, it’s as if it were written for none other than Harry to sing, particularly the repeated line “Oh, I can’t control myself.”

The singer then switches roles on her self-penned hit “One Way or



Another.” “That one is about this stalker boyfriend I had,” Harry would later tell biographer Cathay Che. “I broke up with him and he became a stalker and he was really good at it. He worked at a job where he was inhaling chemical fumes all day, and then he would drink at night, so he’d get really insane and then he’d start after me.”

For all of the fascinating, catchy songs on “Parallel Lines,” the album would not have made Blondie a global sensation without “Heart of Glass,” which went No. 1 here and abroad. Written by Harry and her boyfriend and band mate Chris Stein, the song is pure disco and completely at odds with the band’s roots in the New York City punk scene.

“When we did ‘Heart of Glass’ it wasn’t too cool in our social set to play disco, but we did it because we wanted to be uncool,” Harry says in her autobiography.

Blondie would release three more albums before going on hiatus from 1982 to 1997. During that time, Harry maintained a solo recording career and acted, most notably in the films “Videodrome” and “Hairspray.” Inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2006, Blondie, and particularly Harry, paved the way for a generation of women entering the pop world, with Madonna quoted as saying she “was hugely influenced by Debbie Harry. I thought she was the coolest chick in the universe.”

Shirley Manson of Garbage has stated, “Almost every female musician really owes a lot to Deborah Harry. I think if we hadn’t had role models who pioneered the way for a lot of artists like myself, we’d still be in a state of arrested development in terms of women’s forays in the music world.”

At press time, Garbage had a summer co-headlining tour scheduled with Blondie, which recently released the new studio album “Pollinator.”

# “Off the Wall” Michael Jackson

RELEASED: **August 10, 1979** LABEL: **Epic**

**M**ichael Jackson appeared destined for the dustbin of former child stars. His previous studio album, “Forever, Michael,” didn’t even crack the top 100 on Billboard’s pop chart. The movie that might have established him as an actor, “The Wiz,” flopped, and his new record label didn’t want him working with Quincy Jones, who was still considered too jazzy. The painfully shy Jackson took a strong stand, though, marching into the offices of his bosses at Epic and said, “I don’t care what you think, Quincy is doing my record,” and they agreed,” Jones recalls in his autobiography.

The producer, arranger, composer and musician who had already worked with Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin and Frank Sinatra played a key role in Jackson’s artistic growth. The producer he even hired a singing coach so Jackson could “expand his top and bottom range by at least a fourth, which I desperately needed to get the vocal drama going,” Jones wrote.

“Off the Wall” opens with the disco epic “Don’t Stop ‘Til You Get Enough,” a song that Jackson co-wrote and co-produced. The dance-floor anthem is the first song Jackson had creative control over and his



first single in seven years to reach No. 1 on Billboard Hot 100, where it remained in the top spot for six weeks.

“Rock with You,” the second No. 1 single off the album, mixes elements of R&B, funk, soul, pop and, yes, disco. Rod “Worms” Temperton, a member of Jones’ “killer Q posse” production team composed the

song as well as the vocal and rhythm arrangements.

Temperton also wrote and arranged the title track, which hit No. 10 on the pop chart. It’s another simple lyric of escapism excellently played and produced with Jackson convincingly beseeching listeners to “leave that 9 to 5 upon the shelf and just enjoy yourself.”

Jackson displays his ability to deliver a gentle ballad on “She’s Out of My Life,” which singer-songwriter and “killer Q posse” member Tom Bahler originally wrote for Sinatra, who passed on the song. Jackson’s emotive reading made the soon-to-be-crowned King of Pop the first solo artist to have four Top 10 hits from one album.

“We attacked that record,” Jones writes. “Michael did most of his vocals ‘live,’ with no overdubs. The resulting record, ‘Off the Wall,’ sold 10 million copies. How’s that for jazz? Ironically, all the initial naysayers at Epic, black and white, kept their jobs because of the success of ‘Off the Wall,’ the biggest selling black record in history at that time.”

Jackson and Jones would collaborate on two more albums.

“To this day, the music we created together on ‘Off The Wall,’ ‘Thriller’ and ‘Bad’ is played in every corner of the world and the reason for that is because he had it all: talent, grace, professionalism and dedication,” reads a section from the statement Jones issued following Jackson’s death in 2009. “He was the consummate entertainer and his contributions and legacy will be felt upon the world forever.”

# “London Calling”

## The Clash

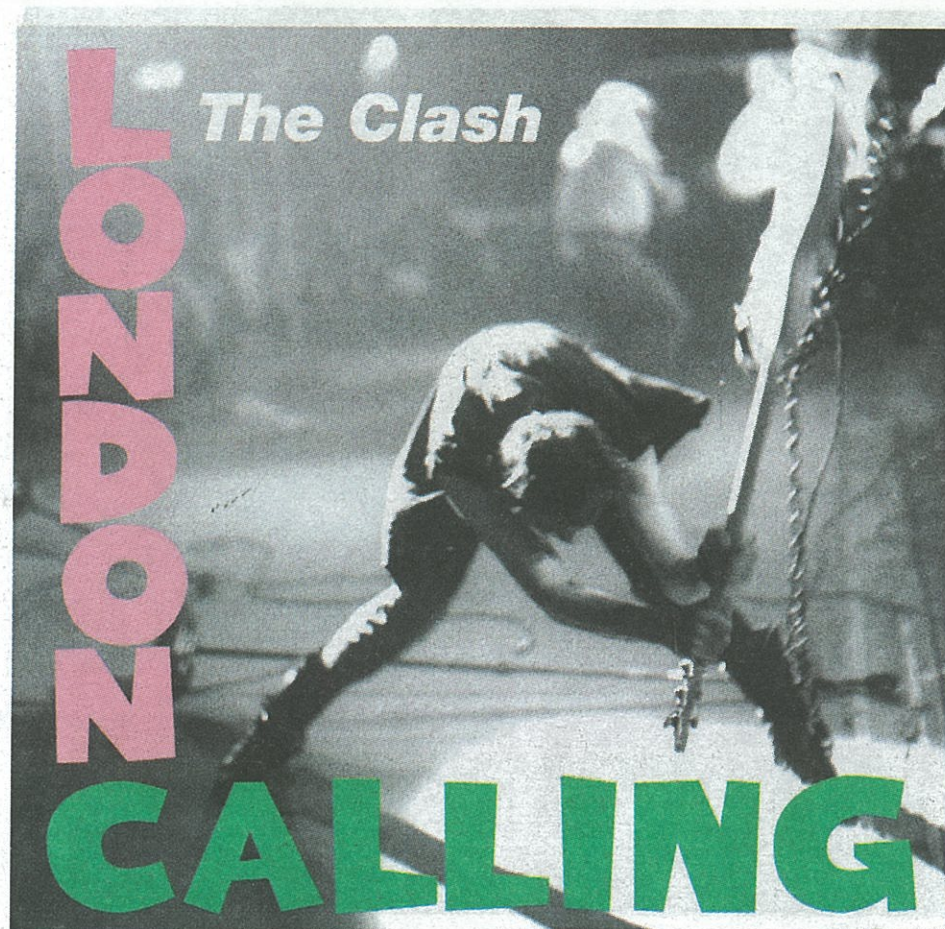
RELEASED: **December 14, 1979** LABEL: **CBS, Epic**

A black and white photograph captures Clash bassist Paul Simonon smashing his bass guitar against the stage like The Who’s Pete Townshend. The pink letters down the left side reading “London” and the green “Calling” across the bottom pay homage to the text of Elvis Presley’s eponymous debut LP. It’s a powerful album cover, one that alludes to the British punk band’s new sound incorporating rockabilly, reggae, R&B, pop and hard rock.

And then there’s the sense of desperation coursing throughout the 19-track double album. The Clash’s Joe Strummer (vocals, rhythm guitar) and his songwriting partner Mick Jones (lead guitar, vocals), Simonon (bass, vocals) and Topper Headon (drums) had recently parted ways with manager Bernie Rhodes. They were in debt and not exactly thrilled with the music business.

“I remember that things were so up in the air, and there was quite a good feeling of us against the world,” Strummer told *Rolling Stone* in the late 1980s. “We felt that we were struggling, about to slide down a slope or something, grasping with our fingernails. And that there was nobody to help us.”

“London Calling” opens with the crushing title track. It’s the sound



of mayhem, a soundtrack for the apocalypse. It’s Strummer the lyricist and Jones the composer in top form. “A nuclear era, but I have no fear,” Strummer bellows, “Cause London is drowning, and I, I live by the river.”

Then, on a song such as “Lost in the Supermarket,” The Clash offers melodic post-punk, with Jones on lead vocals delivering lyrics by Strummer about getting lost in the

suburban shuffle. “I came in here for that special offer, a guaranteed personality,” goes the chorus.

Simonon made his debut as a Clash songwriter and lead vocalist on “Guns of Brixton.” A reggae rocker that references the 1972 Jamaican film “The Harder They Come” starring Jimmy Cliff, “Guns of Brixton” would be covered by Cliff on his Grammy-winning 2012 album “Rebirth.”

“Train in Vain,” a pub-rocker with a great hook written and sung by Jones, closes the double album. It’s a hummable tune about a bad breakup. “Well, some things you can explain away,” Jones sings, “but the heartache is in me ‘til this day.”

“London Calling” immediately appealed to critics and the record-buying public on both sides of the Atlantic while expanding the boundaries of what a punk record could be. The Clash would follow it with the triple album “Sandinista!” and then in 1982 with their bestselling “Combat Rock,” which would be the last Clash album featuring Headon and Jones. Strummer and Simonon would gather replacement players for The Clash’s sixth and final studio album “Cut the Crap,” which came out in 1985.

In late 2002, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame announced that The Clash would be inducted the following spring. Strummer, Jones and Headon hinted at a reunion show to coincide with their induction. Alas, Strummer died, age 50, unexpectedly on Dec. 22, 2002 from a congenital heart defect. At the Grammy Awards in February 2003, millions witnessed an inspired performance of “London Calling” by Elvis Costello, Bruce Springsteen, Steven Van Zandt, Dave Grohl, Pete Thomas, and Tony Kanal.

# “Back in Black”

## AC/DC

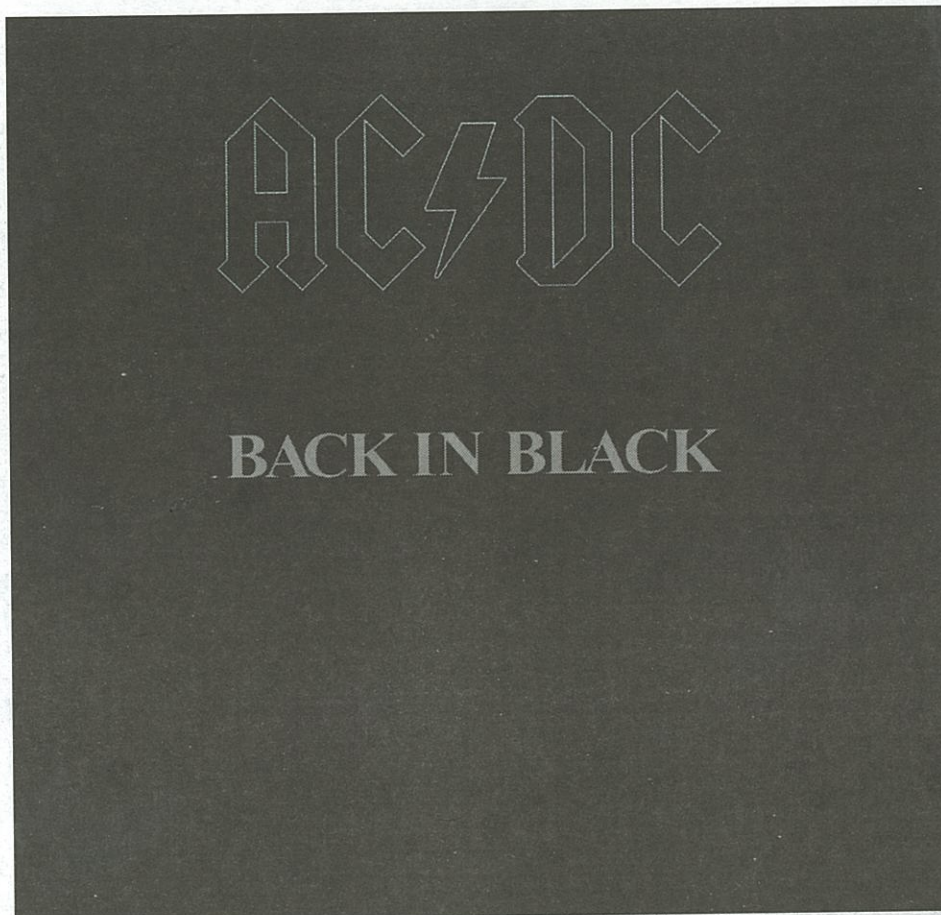
RELEASED: **July 25, 1980** LABEL: **Atlantic**

**A**C/DC lead singer and lyricist Bon Scott accidentally drank himself to death following the band’s breakthrough album “Highway to Hell.” AC/DC guitarists, siblings, composers and co-bandleaders Angus and Malcolm Young wasted little time before hiring relatively unknown English singer Brian Johnson.

“The band had met Brian in Newcastle and Bon had told them that if anything happened to him, here was their replacement,” recalled Phil Carson, the rare record executive thanked by name on an AC/DC album.

Joined by drummer Phil Rudd, bassist Cliff Williams and their new singer, the Youngs went back to work with “Highway to Hell” producer Robert John “Mutt” Lange, this time at Compass Point Studios in the Bahamas. They spent about seven weeks recording the Scott tribute album “Back in Black.” Released less than a half year after the singer’s death, the liner notes read “all songs written by Young, Young and Johnson.”

The album opens with a bell slowly rung four times in honor of their fallen bandmate. Angus enters with the main guitar riff of “Hells Bells,” followed by the rest of the musicians with Johnson’s distinctive wail



whipping through to the forefront, his vocals similar but more muscular than Scott’s. “You’re only young but you’re gonna die,” Johnson warns.

AC/DC has been praised over and over for the Young brothers’ guitar riffs, which are awesome. But the band’s secret weapon has always been the space left between the notes and the musicians’ ability to swing. The title track “Back in Black” is the

best example of the AC/DC dynamic, with Johnson’s armor-piercing vocals ideal for lines such as “forget the hearse ‘cause I never die.”

While the rest of AC/DC had already toured the U.S., Johnson had yet set foot in the states and while down in the Bahamas spent some time fantasizing about American women, which resulted in the lyrics to “You Shook Me All Night Long.” AC/

DC’s greatest party anthem, the song features a ridiculously catchy beat and chorus.

The heavy blues of “Rock and Roll Ain’t Noise Pollution” closes “Back in Black.” It’s a timeless celebration of rock and roll that, the story goes, Malcolm and Angus wrote in 15 minutes. Not bad for what became a Top 20 single.

“Back in Black” was an instant hit and now ranks as the second best-selling album of all time behind Michael Jackson’s “Thriller.” Nearly four decades after its release, the hard-hitting songs are everywhere, from sporting events to U.S. tanks entering combat. It’s sonic adrenaline and generation after generation gets hooked.

AC/DC would follow “Back in Black” with the chart-topping 1981 album “For Those About to Rock We Salute You” with Johnson remaining lead singer through the band’s latest studio release, 2014’s “Rock or Bust.” The album hit No. 1 in a dozen countries and reached the Top 5 in a dozen more, including the U.S. and U.K.

“No replacement vocalist has given a band a better second act than Johnson did for AC/DC,” writes Jesse Fink in his highly-recommended AC/DC book “The Youngs.”

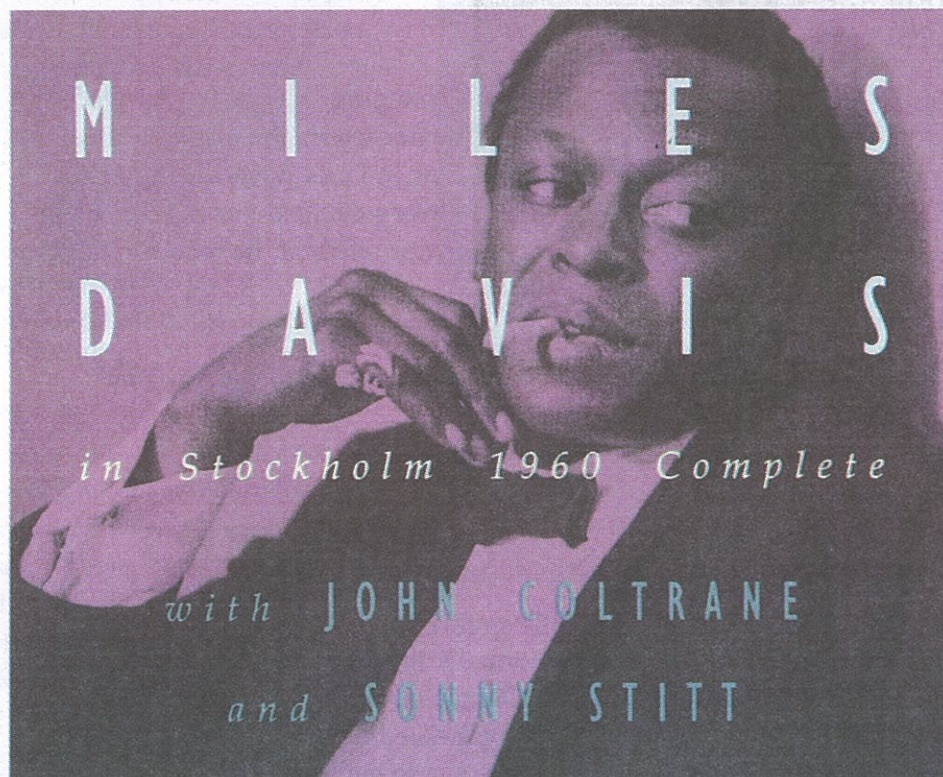
# From the Vault

Here's a list of mostly live recordings made between 1955 and 1980 that were not released until years later for various reasons. Many are now available on vinyl, but not all of them.

## **"With the Red Norvo Quintet: Live in Australia, 1959"**

**Frank Sinatra**  
RELEASED: 1997  
LABEL: **Blue Note**

The singer's Rat Pack schtick often gets in the way of the music heard on the famed 1966 "Sinatra at the Sands" album. To truly hear Sinatra at his best on stage, go with this concert from 1959.



**"Live in Stockholm 1960"**  
**Miles Davis with John Coltrane and Sonny Stitt**  
RELEASED: 1985  
LABEL: **Wrote Music**

A single vinyl album is available as well a 4-CD box set capturing Davis and Coltrane along with pianist Wynton Kelly, bassist Paul Chambers and drummer Jimmy Cobb playing in the modal mode pioneered on "Kind of Blue," with the digital box set set opening with a 15-minute "So What." In

addition to the recordings with Coltrane, the set also includes ones from the same tour the quintet made with his replacement on saxophone, the gifted Sonny Stitt.

## **"Live at the Harlem Square Club, 1963"**

**Sam Cooke**  
RELEASED: 1985  
LABEL: **RCA**

While Sam Cooke's 1963 studio album "Night Beat" just missed the final cut for the main section of this edition, "Live at the Harlem Square Club," recorded the same year, would have definitely made the cut had it been issued before the 1980 cutoff. Cooke's unrestrained exuberance is irresistible on this 36-minute set featuring such timeless hits as "Chain Gang," "Cupid," and "Twistin' the Night Away."

## **"The Bootleg Series Vol. 4: Bob Dylan Live 1966, The 'Royal Albert Hall' Concert"**

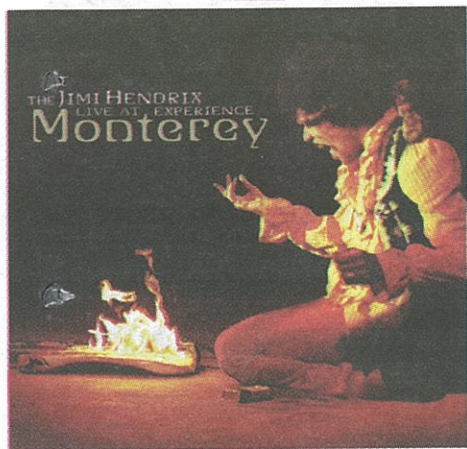
**Bob Dylan**  
RELEASED: 1998  
LABEL: **Columbia**

Dylan plays a mesmerizing 45-minute solo acoustic set followed by one of equal length featuring The Hawks (later renamed The Band) rocking with Dylan as if determined to bust the brains out of the folk freaks in attendance who refuse to quit booing. As great as his trilogy of mid-1960s studio albums are, this live double disc might be the best representation of Dylan's genius during this period.

## **"The Smile Sessions"** **The Beach Boys (recorded 1966-67)**

RELEASED: 2011  
LABEL: **Capitol**

The best way to hear "Smile," the unfinished and long unreleased Brian Wilson-produced followup to "Pet Sounds" is the 2011 vinyl release of "Smile." The 19 tracks (mostly) from the 1966-67 sessions are what the completed album probably would have sounded like and part of the "The Smile Sessions" box set. It's fascinating, but the best listening experience is the single vinyl album available for separate purchase. It's psychedelic mastery featuring the classics "Heroes and Villains," "Surf's Up" and "Good Vibrations" in a proper context. Wilson's 2004 recreation "Smile" is also an interesting album and the catalyst and blueprint, in many ways, for the superior 2011 "Smile."



**“Live at Monterey”  
The Jimi Hendrix  
Experience” (1967)  
RELEASED: 2007  
LABEL: Geffen**

Before famously setting his guitar on fire at the end of the set, Jimi Hendrix electrified the audience at the Monterey Pop Festival with a performance mixing blues (“Killing Floor,” “Rock Me Baby”) and contemporary covers (“Like

a Rolling Stone,” “Hey Joe,” “Wild Thing”) with his own impressive collection of originals (“Foxy Lady,” “The Wind Cries Mary,” “Purple Haze”).

**“Live at The Fillmore - 1968”**

**Santana**  
RELEASED: 1997  
LABEL: Columbia

Before the Santana band played Woodstock and became rock stars they were, along with the Grateful Dead, one of the original jam bands, playing at venues like the Fillmore in their hometown of San Francisco and blowing audiences away with unprecedented Latin rock adventures such as this double disc set’s 30-minute finale “Freeway.”

**“The Woodstock Experience”**

**Sly and The Family Stone (1969)**  
RELEASED: 2009  
LABEL: Sony BMG/Legacy

Of all the famous performances at Woodstock, Sly and The Family Stone’s sounds the most riveting after all these years. “During their unforgettable nighttime set, leader Sly Stone initiated a fevered call-and-response with the audience of 400,000-plus during an electrifying version of ‘I Want to Take You Higher,’” reads the band’s entry on the official Rock and Roll Hall of Fame site. All 50 minutes of the set can be heard on this album in the “The Woodstock Experience” series.

**“Live at The Fillmore East”**

**Neil Young and Crazy Horse (1970)**  
RELEASED: 2006  
LABEL: Reprise

Touring behind “Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere,” Neil Young and Crazy Horse delivered a 41-minute concert that upon release decades later sounds somehow, to these ears at least, even better than the studio album the show supported.

**“Live at Leeds” and “Who’s Next”  
Deluxe Editions  
The Who (1970-71)  
RELEASED: 2001/2003  
LABEL: Decca/MCA**

The original version of “Live at Leeds” is one of the all-time great live albums of the vinyl era, but at 37 minutes captures only a fraction of the Feb. 14, 1970, concert, which is presented complete — albeit in a slightly different order — on the deluxe edition. The deluxe edition for “Who’s Next” features a second CD filled with 14 tracks from the band’s show at the Young Vic on April 26, 1971, which rivals “Leeds” in terms of intensity. Rather than running through all of “Tommy,” it includes renditions of songs from the then unreleased “Who’s Next.”

**“Love, Power, Peace: Live at the Olympia,  
Paris, 1971”**

**James Brown**  
RELEASED: 1992  
LABEL: Polydor

Nearly a decade after making the game-changing “Live at the Apollo,” Brown had a brand new band of even greater talent, the original J.B.’s, with which he recorded this amazing show in Paris. Several of the J.B.’s split after it was recorded, though, and Brown decided not to release the album. Fortunately for us funk fans, Polydor released the recording in the early 1990s.

**“S.U.N.Y. at Stonybrook: Stonybrook, NY  
9/19/71”**

**The Allman Brothers Band**  
RELEASED: 2003  
LABEL: The Allman Brothers Band Recording  
Company

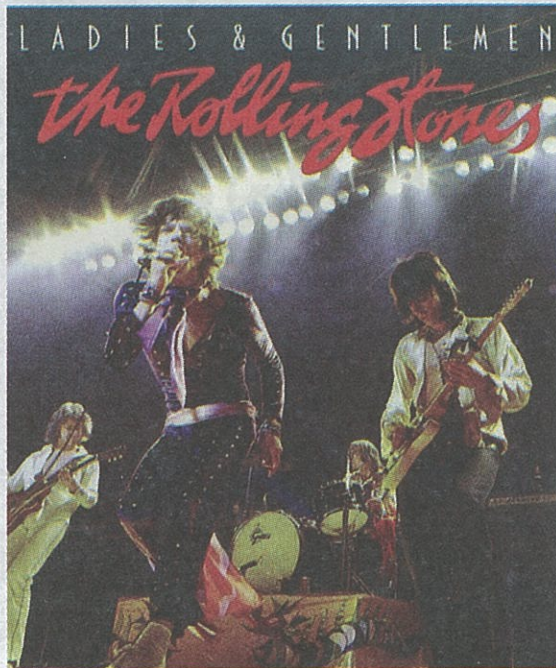
The Allman Brothers Band are in top form here with highlights including an early, 11-minute version of “Blue Sky” (which would not appear until 1972’s “Eat a Peach” album), as well as 19-minutes each of “Dreams” and “In Memory of Elizabeth Reed.” The sound quality is not perfect, especially early in the set, but not so bad that it distracts from the brilliance of the performance. Guitar great Duane Allman died in a motorcycle crash just over a month after this show, marking an end to the band’s most artistically creative era.

**“Santa Monica ‘72”****David Bowie**

RELEASED: 1994

LABEL: **Golden Years/Griffin Music**

Recorded from a radio broadcast of a show from the Ziggy Stardust Tour, this is essential listening for fans of the studio album released the same year and anyone interested in hearing slamming glam rock. Bowie would never find a lead guitarist better suited for his songs than Mick Ronson.

**“Ladies & Gentlemen”  
The Rolling  
Stones (1972)**

RELEASED:

**1974/2010**LABEL: **Eagle Rock  
Entertainment**

Four Texas shows from The Rolling Stones American Tour 1972, in support of “Exile on Main St.,” were filmed for what resulted in the concert movie “Ladies & Gentleman” that had a theatrical release in ‘74.

The film puts the viewer in a front row seat while

doing an ace job documenting The Stones at their best as a live band, with the songs sequenced like a typical setlist from the tour. The DVD is available for purchase and the soundtrack can be heard streaming on Spotify. The Stones’ 72 tour is equally famous for the offstage depravity that Robert Frank chronicled in his documentary film with the naughty title taken from the chorus of the unreleased Stones song “Schoolboy Blues.” The Rolling Stones have never authorized the release of the film but bootleg versions are all over the internet.

**“How the West Was Won”****Led Zeppelin (1972)**

RELEASED: 2003

LABEL: **Atlantic**

Touring in support of their mega-selling fourth album, Led Zeppelin were giants walking the earth when they came to Los Angeles for two shows in June of 1972. In addition to powerful versions from all their previously released albums, Zeppelin also played songs from their upcoming release “Houses of the Holy.” Page took soundboard recordings from each show and produced the 2003 triple disc “How the West Was Won,” the definitive live Led Zeppelin album, at least among official releases.

**“Hammersmith  
Odeon, London ‘75”****Bruce Springsteen &  
the E Street Band**

RELEASED: 2006

LABEL: **Columbia**

Originally a concert video and then made available as a double CD, this is Spingsteen and the gang in full force on stage during their “Born to Run” tour, with songs spanning their three album career plus the supercharged ‘50s

and ‘60s covers included in the “Detroit Medley.” “Hammersmith Odeon, London ‘75” made its vinyl debut for Record Store Day on April 22, 2017

**“Cornell 5/8/77”****The Grateful Dead**

The most famous bootleg on the planet — in 2012 it was selected for inclusion in the National Recording Registry of the Library of Congress — this show recorded on May 8, 1977, at Barton Hall, Cornell University, finally enjoyed an official release as digital download, CD and vinyl versions May 5. It’s The Dead at their best and most accessible, playing everything from cowboy songs to Motown done as hippie disco with a lengthy, spot-on performance of the ultimate fan favorite “Scarlet Begonias/Fire on the Mountain.”



Wade Tatangelo is an entertainment editor for GateHouse Media whose previous positions include music critic at Creative Loafing Tampa Bay (Fla.) and music editor at OC (Orange County, Calif.) Weekly. As a freelance music writer, his work appeared in daily and alt-weekly publications nationwide as well as the roots music magazine No Depression. Tatangelo’s own extensive vinyl collection played a key role in the writing of “50 classic albums: 1955 to 1980,” as well as numerous autobiographies, biographies and interviews appearing in periodicals. “50 classic albums” was also informed by interviews and a few candid conversations Tatangelo has had during the past 15 years with Gregg Allman, Dickey Betts, Jason Bonham, Donald “Duck” Dunn, Levon Helm, Tony Iommi, Brian Johnson, Little Richard, Roger McGuinn, Frank Sinatra, Jr., Jerry Wexler, and Brian Wilson. Tatangelo grew up in the compact disc era and for his 12th birthday his parents bought him a boom box accompanied by the CD “Led Zeppelin IV,” which he had already grown to love thanks to his dad’s vinyl version.

shows the show support