

PUNKS LISTEN

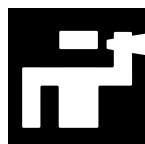
COMPILED BY NIALL McGUIRK
AND MICHAEL MURPHY



HOPE PUBLICATIONS

For all our family and friends and in special memory of those no longer with us
in body but forever in our hearts.

In memory of Kathlyn Murphy, Joe McGuirk and Brian Bestley



Hope Publications, Dublin 2022

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ISBN 978-0-9955475-4-4 (paperback)

ISBN 978-0-9955475-5-1 (hardback)

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Compiled by Niall McGuirk and Michael Murphy

Printed by www.rotatorpm.com, a subsidiary of www.rotatorvinyl.com,

specialist vinyl and CD production and packing experts

www.hopcollectiveireland.com

Hope Publications: 31 Hazel Road, Donnycarney, Dublin 9

E-mail: Niall@thumped.com



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LISTEN

It was never our intention to do a series of ‘benefit books.’ We’re just two lads from Dublin who bonded over punk rock in the 1980s and have been friends ever since. For us, punk was more than just something to listen to. It was something to think about. It was about values. About inclusivity. About breaking stereotypes. About creativity. The message of punk was that anyone could be involved. It was an invitation to roll up your sleeves.

Punk also gave us a sense of community – a feeling that somewhere there were people who thought like us. Or who had completely different viewpoints from us but would listen to our views or teach us about their perspective.

Inspired by that sense of punk community in 2017 we released a book to raise money for the Syrian refugees. Thanks to the people who wrote for the book, and the people who bought it, we were able to give €5,000 to the Red Cross Syrian Refugee appeal. We followed this up with a book to assist the NHS workers and patients during the Covid-19 pandemic. Again, thanks to the writers and the buyers, we were able to donate €10,000 to the NHS Charities Together Covid-19 appeal.

The book in your hands now is raising funds for the Red Cross Ukraine Crisis appeal. We’re delighted with the book. We called or wrote to people we know and asked them to write about a record that meant a lot to them. Then we asked if they knew anyone else who might write for the book. They asked people they knew. The circle kept on widening. People wanted to help, and they made time to write really great pieces. People offered to proof-read the book (any mistakes are ours though). People offered to design the book. It looks so good because Russ Bestley made time to design it. People offered to approach printers for us.

We’re delighted that the people whose records and books we bought are in this book. It’s a really encouraging feeling when you hope for people to write in a book for an important cause, and they respond with such enthusiasm and creativity. Sincere gratitude to every one of you.

Quick note

We generally list people by some of the bands they were/are in, or some of the books they wrote. We list them by the records or books that we know best by them. Apologies if we left some band or book names out. But space was tight.

Final thought

We did this. Over to you now. There's probably something you can do to try to make the world a better place.

Niall and Michael

Listening to the radio

Craig Leon (producer Ramones, Blondie, etc.)

The most important album in my life wasn't an album. It was the radio.

In '55 or '56, I'd listen to the radio way up on the dial all night. I rarely slept. I still am that way. You hear this a lot from people who grew up in rural America, and I grew up as rural as you can get: in a swamp. When you'd go up the right-hand side of the dial in those days, you'd get either country music or R&B and blues music. There were a lot of live concert broadcasts on those stations. You'd get Howlin' Wolf, B.B. King and artists like that.

Late at night, you'd get a clearer signal. Way down in Florida (we were on the water, so it was very receptive) you'd get stations from all around the Caribbean – Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica – as well as the Grand Ole Opry, out of Nashville, WSM, and the R&B/blues stations. I'd flick through them at night and imagine all of those faraway places with those brilliant sounds. So the first 45 record that I drove my father crazy to take me to the record store to get was Howlin' Wolf's '*Smokestack Lightning*' which was the scariest thing I had ever heard. I thought it was great that you could tell a horror story with sound. We had to order it because I lived in an area that was segregated. I hadn't learned yet to go across the tracks to where the cool people lived – which were mostly black people. But on our side, the so-called honky side, I guess, you had to order Chess Records. So he did – he got me '*Smokestack Lightning*'.

What was the album that made a huge impression on me? Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony No. 6*, by The Philharmonia Orchestra, conducted by Herbert Von Karajan, on Angel Records. I used to nick it from my dad's collection and play it for ages, over and over again. I think that a lot of it had to do with Angel on the red label spinning around on the turntable of my little, crap record player. I know that I ruined the record for my dad but he never mentioned it to me.

So I grew up with a very schizophrenic background, which shaped exactly what I do. I saw no difference between Beethoven and Howlin' Wolf. It was all music and it all sounded great. And I heard nothing dividing any style of music by genres. So I grew up listening to everything, but luckily (?) I developed a lifelong interest in the unifying link between classical, blues and country called music.

“I don’t have a favourite record...”

John Robb (Membranes, Goldblade)

Music, like my own cauldron of emotions, is far too fluid and ever-changing to be able to nail down into a list. That’s far too rational and far too safe! And would be like trying to nail an octopus to a plank of wood which, of course, being vegan would be inconceivable. Of course, there have been moments in my life when certain records have had a massive impact. They were a combination of the whole of the pop culture thing going on around them as well. The threads and the attitude were as important as the noise and the words.

Glam rock in my teens painted a picture of world that was intangible and beyond the one I was living in. It was like a magic castle full of strange elves like Bowie and Bolan and The Sweet and even Butlin’s bouncers like Mud or Slade who made great stomping records full of sci fi and future freak that soundtracked teenage years and ran parallel to the pounding northern soul backbeat of growing up in Blackpool.

Punk rock handed over the keys to that magic castle: the insane intensity and claustrophobic wall of sound of the Pistols, the manifesto guitars as machine guns of The Clash, the northern soap opera lovesick songs of Buzzcocks, the dark psychedelia of The Stranglers were all game-changers amongst a million DIY punk rock 7” singles that got their one play on Peel and showed that you too could create and be part of the new noise.

Which I did.

With the Membranes.

Whilst falling in love with contemporary noiseniks like the post-punk partizans. From then on it was further adventures – either going back before punk rock’s year zero to get immersed in blues or jazz, or fast forward into the future with electronic music and hip hop and then to the now and the ever-splintering musical landscape where black metal can fuse with folk or electronica to create astonishing new soundscapes or weird and wonderful sounds pop up from unlikely corners of the globe. A music space where teenage grrls like Hotwax can change the narrative and Grimes can push the pop envelope.

In the anti-war context of this book, I want to leave you with this astonishing Russian group called Shortparis who make stunning records that seem to combine everything I ever loved, but with a Russian twist and an anti-Putin anti-war message that has recently seen them thrown in jail. They prove that music is still a potential political and creative force....

Billie Holiday, ‘Strange Fruit’ (1948)

Funkcutter (singer and trumpeter of Anarchistwood, VJ and *Punkvert* filmmaker)

My dear departed South African father, Mervyn Rosenberg, was an anti-apartheid activist during the 1950s and very much involved with the African National Congress. The ANC at the time was an outlawed and “terrorist” organisation due to its views on equality. Dad was also a huge music fan, particularly of jazz. He would play his many records daily. Growing up, our many homes across the world were filled with the sounds of Louis Armstrong, Nat King Cole, Harry Belafonte, Miriam Makeba and a host of other divas.

One track that he firmly imprinted upon my young and avid mind was ‘*Strange Fruit*’, as sung by Billie Holiday. This tune was significant as the images conjured up by “black bodies swingin’ in the southern breeze” were intensely vivid. My father explained that in many places in the world people were divided by the colour of their skin and that in the southern states of America a lynching would lead to bodies of unkempt executees being left like rotting fruits on the bough. Family members would be too afraid to even rescue the bodies and so put their loved ones to a more fitting rest.

This was very informative to me when we moved from London to West Virginia in the 1970s where the racial divisions seemed very stark in the classroom to the pre-teen me. The scent of magnolias was indeed sweet and fresh but the bitter crop was the strained relations between groups of people who lived in the same town but in totally different worlds. The stench of slavery and white power tainted social interactions in the US (and across the “western” world) for many years and still does.

‘*Strange Fruit*’ resonated with my father, recalling how he grew up in the 1930s and 1940s of Johannesburg and Cape Town where whites and “coloureds” could not mix legally. As a non-Afrikaaner Jew, one might also be treated as a second-class citizen by virtue of Boer-led society, if not actually in law and a kind of ability to “pass”, as least until your surname was mentioned. He attempted to redress the balance by assisting his fellow humans in their fight against apartheid. Some of this activism included smuggling six-foot-plus black guys out into the then Rhodesia dressed as nuns and other capers. Equality was an obvious right for all to him and his peer group. These views were not as welcomed by the dominant National Party who disenfranchised the coloured folk who made up 80 per cent of the population. They also sent political activists like my father to prison and so to avoid this he was politely

asked to leave his country of birth in the late 1950s. And he came to the UK to seek his fortune.

Many years later, I researched more into the song ‘*Strange Fruit*’ and was amazed to discover the history of the writers. The music was written by Milt Raskin who was a jazz pianist with a fabulous pedigree, having worked with Count Basie, Artie Shaw and of course Billie Holiday. More fascinating to me, as a wordsmith myself, the lyricist, named as Lewis Allan, was in actual fact Abel Meeropol. Meeropol was a Harvard graduate who became a teacher of English at DeWitt Clinton high school and lists social activist and author James Baldwin as one of his students. Abel and his wife Anne took in the children of the last people to be executed for treason in the United States, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, after accusations of selling atomic secrets to Russians. Michael and Robert Meeropol, as they adopted the name, are staunch anti-war activists and went on to found the Rosenberg Fund for Children which provides support for children in the US whose parents are targeted, progressive activists.

For me, this tale joins many dots in my own family history and current life. To have the song so firmly embedded in my conscience from youth makes me even more proud of my father and the morality he bestowed upon me. I want everyone to listen to ‘*Strange Fruit*’ and take in the words. We must continue to prevent the scene described happening to anyone – any animal for that matter – and take a stand against injustice across the world whenever we can. Writing, protesting, informing each other. Then we know we are not alone in our fight for fairness and basic human rights and feel empowered to stand up, however huge the oppressor. There’s more of us.

Psychedelic felicitations,
funkcutter x

Original field recordings by Hugh Tracey, *Tanzania Instruments* (1952)

Andy Moor (The Ex, Dog Faced Hermans)

This CD is part of a great collection of Hugh Tracey recordings. Re-released by Michael Baird on his SWP Records label, it is a collection of recordings of traditional music from Tanzania (at the time called Tanganyika) and includes some of the best field recordings ever made, partly because they were recorded with such high quality and partly because they were recorded at a time when most white people were not interested in African music, mostly in the 1940s and 1950s. This music is gone forever and in some cases these recordings are

all that is left, but this collection is also great because it is not just an academic documenting of music: there is some beautiful music in this collection and fascinating-sounding instruments featuring master musicians performing either instrumental pieces or accompanying songs. Michael Baird made his own selection dividing the tracks up based more on tribe rather than instruments or styles – there are so many different styles of music on this one CD and very strange and bizarre ones that one would find very hard to identify where they come from.

I first discovered many of the songs on this CD after having recorded an LP called *African Strings* onto a cassette. I found it in New York in the home of the incredible cellist Tom Cora, with whom I was touring with The Ex in the early ‘90s. This LP, *African Strings*, was a collection of recordings from Hugh Tracey from The International Library of African Music from South Africa. I wore that cassette out with so many plays and was so happy when Baird decided to re-release this music on CD 30 years later. Track 4, ‘*Tubuke Ku Kaya Kwa Mwankenja*’ by Mwanjila Nsolo, is one of the weirdest thumb piano sounds I’ve ever heard: totally hypnotic. Track 8, ‘*Ngwikdika Sadanga Wapamagulu*’ by Pancras Mkwawa, has an equally strange and bizarre low-stringed instrument, a six-stringed trough zither called a ligombo, as does track 17 – another kind of trough zither called a nanga, probably my favourite-sounding instrument ever.

All this music shaped my own playing and has stayed with me for 30 years since I first discovered it. I would recommend checking out the whole SWP series of Historical Recordings of Hugh Tracey: about 30 CDs of music from East, Central and Southern Africa. Ol’ Dirty Bastard from Wu-Tang Clan said once of his own music on his track ‘*Raw Hide*’: “See this ain’t something new that’s just gonna come out of nowhere. No, this is something old ... and dirty. And dirty.” The music that we all listen to today comes from somewhere and one of the places it comes from is the music on this CD.

Jimmy’s Jukebox, Derry (1950s)

Eamon McCann (author, *War and an Irish Town*)

There were 420,000 US troops stationed all over Europe in the years after WW2. The American Forces Network (AFN), blasting out from a huge transmitter in Frankfurt, was set up to divert and entertain them. A majority of the soldiers were 25 or under. They were disproportionately black. AFN’s music spoke to its audience. There were 400 or so GIs living in a US communications

facility on the Dungiven Road in Derry. Many went out with Derry girls. This connected our street to Frankfurt and onwards to Memphis, New York and New Orleans. When I was at St. Columb's in the '50s, cool kids listened to Luxembourg. Really cool kids listened to AFN.

Alan Freed, "America's King of Rock and Roll" – I imagine he'd conferred the title on himself – had a regular slot on AFN. It was he who introduced us to Big Joe Turner, Wanda Jackson, Bill Haley, Chuck Berry, Big Mama Thornton (who wrote *'Hound Dog'*), Elvis Presley, Eddie Cochran, Little Richard, Gene Vincent, Jerry Lee Lewis, Buddy Holly, Bo Diddley, Gene Vincent, Carl Perkins and a mixum-gatherum of other greats. Nobody had ever heard anything like it.

We didn't have a record player. Nobody on our street did. Not that I knew anyway. But Leo Macari was a fellow AFN aficionado and his father, Jimmy, owned an ice-cream shop on William Street, much favoured by the GIs. Jimmy's jukebox had records by all of the above, thruppence a time, five for a shilling. That's where we spent Sunday mornings when our parents thought we were at mass.

I reckoned I was well-in with American music. At 15, I was a rock'n'roll snob. It was only when I reached university that I lived in a house with a record player. The first album I held in my hand was *King Creole*. Not Elvis's best but, hey, it was Elvis, on account of which it is still my favourite of all time. *'Hard-Headed Woman'*, *'Lover Doll'*, *'Crawfish'*, *'As Long As I Have You.'* Ah... Sure, there have been more distinguished offerings in any number of genres. But there's a time to live, a time to die and a time for rock'n'roll. Back then, back there, in Jimmy Macari's ice-cream shop, that was my time, the right time for rock'n'roll.

I think my favourite album ever was Marianne Faithfull's *Broken English*. Or Dory Previn's *Mythical Kings and Iguanas*. Or T Bone Burnett's *Trap Door*. Or, now that I come to think of it, Sinatra's *Songs For Swinging Lovers*. Or *The Undertones*. Or Mario Lanza's *Student Prince* album.

Let me think.

Blind Willie Dunn's Gin Bottle Four, Jet Black Blues/Blue Blood Blues (1954)

Ted Carroll (Chiswick Records and Ace Records)

Featuring: Joe "King" Oliver (cornet), Lonnie Johnson (guitar), Eddie Lang (guitar), J.C. Johnson (piano), Hoagy Carmichael (vocal and percussion); recorded 30 April, 1929.

The seven-inch single is the ULTIMATE mid-century collectable. There's something magical about a great single. The Smiths' guitar maestro Johnny Marr

(who went so far as having the "45 rpm" logo tattooed on his arm) had it right when he said: "The seven-inch single, as an entity, is an absolutely powerful, possibly otherworldly, object."

This was the very first seven-inch record that I ever bought. In 1956 there were virtually no dedicated record shops in Ireland. You could buy records from electrical shops, sometimes hardware or newsagents' shops. Cooke's was a stationery and fancy goods shop situated in George's Street, just opposite the top of Marine Road, Dún Laoghaire. Upstairs they had a wee record counter which can't have been very successful, as in 1956 it was having a closing-down sale.

I rooted around among the boxes of loose records on the counter in search of a bargain and managed to buy a couple of seven-inch records for a total of 3/- (three shillings – or 15 pence). By pure chance one was by Blind Willie Dunn and his Gin Bottle Four and at the time, although I was fairly well-versed in the history of jazz, I had no idea of the significance of this record.

In those days, many jazz 45s and 78s listed the individual musicians involved, in very fine print on the label. I noticed the name King Oliver (cornet) among the musicians and as I knew that he was a leading New Orleans musician, I bought the record on spec., even though I had no idea of who any of the other featured musicians were, apart from Hoagy Carmichael, whose name I just about recognised. When I got the record home and played it, I discovered what a real gem it was, featuring sublime acoustic guitar duets by Lonnie Johnson (12-string) and Eddie Lang (six-string). Lang and Johnson are now both credited with being among the very first guitarists to feature single-string guitar solos on record.

The guitar playing was superb, melodic and rhythmic, with Hoagy Carmichael adding a few lazy scat vocals to both sides. Already, at the age of 14, I was a big fan of Django Reinhardt and realised that the guitar sound on this record was very similar to his. This was no coincidence as it turned out, as Lonnie Johnson and Eddie Lang were both early influences on Django. Later Lang and Joe Venuti (violin) recorded guitar/violin duets in America that were to influence the great French recordings of Stephane Grappelli and Django Reinhardt a few years afterwards. On this record it was obvious that the musicians were busking along, creating a few sides just to earn some money. Although all the musicians were seasoned professionals, this was purely a pick-up ensemble put together to help pay the rent. It was Eddie Lang's session, and the name Blind Willie Dunn was used to disguise the fact that Eddie Lang was quite a well-known white musician. As far as I am aware this was one of the earliest integrated recording sessions featuring as it did both black and white musicians.

Later I learned more about these sessions. ‘*Jet Black Blues*’ and ‘*Blue Blood Blues*’ were just two of the tunes recorded that day. Lonnie Johnson was already established as a successful blues artist who had recorded with Victoria Spivey, Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington. Likewise, Eddie Lang was a very well-known jazz guitarist who worked with Adrian Rollini, Bessie Smith and Bing Crosby and many others and was known as “The Father of The Jazz Guitar”. So, as it turned out, my chance purchase from a stationary shop on my way home from school, turned out to be a most noteworthy record, which still has pride of place in my collection.

Billie Holiday with Ray Ellis and his Orchestra, *Lady in Satin* (1958)

Eugene S. Robinson (Oxbow, Buñuel)

There’s a lot of hagiography around Holiday. Strikingly similar to what congeals around Sylvia Plath and other doom artists. But in regards to Holiday and this record I find that my prelude to understanding it came from *The Dutchman*, the play by Amiri Baraka, formerly LeRoi Jones, wherein he claimed that the subtext for all of what Holiday sang was: “Fuck You.”

And in the case of Holiday you get the sense that this was the case far ahead of her singing a note. But this record is a hypnotic version of the aforementioned. A fevered dream of music...that also includes outtakes and spoken asides. And sure: doom. But even more than that, the fuck you that is almost my family credo.

I listened to this record and nothing else BUT this record when I wrote *A Long Slow Screw* and it felt then and it feels now like cliff-diving. Into possibility. Out of misery. Or the other way around. And the heavy dash of romanticism doesn’t leaven this at all. It just makes it heavier...

“for someone you adore... it’s a pleasure to be sad...”

This knife cuts going in AND coming out.

So, say hello to hopelessness.

Miles Davis, *Kind of Blue* (1959)

Garry Bushell (writer)

A great question. And a difficult question. Punk changed my life, so you might expect me to go for the first Ramones album or The Clash’s debut; possibly even Dead Kennedys’ invigoratingly frenzied *Fresh Fruit for Rotting Vegetables*. I could make a strong case for *Born to Run*, *What’s Going On?* or (*What’s the Story*) *Morning Glory?* as well. But my all-time favourite album is a lot older than any of

those. *Kind of Blue*, by Miles Davis, was released in 1959, four years after I was born, and yet it remains utterly timeless to this day. It’s Miles’ masterpiece, the greatest jazz album ever made. In my opinion it is the absolute peak of post-war Western music.

Kind of Blue has a chemistry second to none. Earlier that year, Davis assembled some of the finest musicians of the era including John Coltrane (tenor sax), Wynton Kelly (piano), and the great Jimmy Cobb (drums). Yet it cost peanuts to make. All of the six sidemen – the others were Bill Evans (piano and, arguably, co-composer), Julian “Cannonball” Adderley (alto sax) and Paul Chambers (bass) – were on basic union rates and the instructions trumpeter Miles gave the musicians were vague. Cobb later recalled: “He’d say, ‘This is a ballad. I want it to sound like it’s floating.’” He trusted the musicians to inspire and feed off each other; to follow their instincts. It worked. The result is inspired. Where most rock is about getting off your head and maybe giving the status quo a punch up the trousers, *Kind of Blue* seems to touch the edges of something bigger, something transcendental. Cobb said it sounded like “it must have been made in heaven.”

During lockdown, I played it most days and yet I was hearing different things every time I listened to it. It never feels stale. I use it still as a soundtrack to switch off, or wind down to, or for inspiration when I’m writing the *Harry Tyler* novels. Wherever it takes me, and usually it will be smoky nightclubs or midnight beaches, it feels like the coolest, most sophisticated place on the planet.

I never heard the album until the early ‘80s. The music my parents played was either country (don’t get me started on gunfighter ballads...) or musicals, and my own path to the music press was paved by Motown, UK pop reggae, rock, glam rock and punk. Jazz was always out there, someone else’s music; an unfocused mess, I thought. Until I found this.

There are other great jazz albums of course – not least *The Blues and The Abstract Truth* by Oliver Nelson, and many other LPs that I will love unconditionally until I peg it, from Bowie, Sabbath, the Beatles and many more. But nothing on earth comes close to *Kind of Blue*. I suspect nothing ever will.

Johnny Hallyday, ‘*Kili Watch*’ EP (1960)

Dany Tort (Blitzkrieg POP podcast, Shades Network Radio)

1. ‘*Le p’tit clown de ton coeur*’; 2. ‘*Oui j’ai*’; 3. ‘*Kili Watch*’; 4. ‘*Ce s’rait bien*’
How my godmother (accidentally?) shaped my taste for loud music.

The *'Kili Watch'* extended 45 rpm by Johnny Hallyday was released in November 1960, and I got a present of it for my third birthday in 1961 from my eighteen-year-old godmother. This had been a radio hit for nearly a year by then: Johnny's fiery interpretation of its onomatopoeia served instead of lyrics was on par with the more famous "Ma-ma-mow, pa-pa, ma-ma-mow, pa-pa, Ma-ma-ma-ma-mow, pa-pa, ma-ma-mow, pa-pa's" from The Trashmen's *'Surfing Bird'* and "Woo eee aha aha" from The Cramps in *'She Said'*.

His "Kili kili kili kili watch watch watch watch Keom ken ken abas" did not fail to arouse the enthusiasm of a whole new bunch of young people, and of course my three-year-old mind never fully recovered. This silly "yogurt" talk had been shaking the transistor radio airwaves for a year, and now my father's electrophone with its stacking facility for 45 rpms.

The *'Kili Watch'* EP oozes rebellion, bad behaviour and cheekiness. Johnny's posing on the dark red cover and Teddy boy quiff, playing guitar with one knee on the ground said it all. Of course, I did not know then, at the age of three, that at the time Johnny was the target of the chroniclers, it was the time of the concerts "with problems", where the chairs flew and the bottles landed on the stage. In short, France did not understand then who was this UFO that is Johnny Hallyday! That summer, a failed attempt was made against General De Gaulle, on the road to his home of Colombey-les-deux-Églises.

I am pretty sure that it was also said this was not proper singing. Remind you of anything else? And then it was 1977!

Bobby "Blue" Bland, *Two Steps from the Blues* (1961)

Tav Falco (The Panther Burns)

Within a merger between Duke Records of Memphis and Peacock Records of Houston, the LP was recorded at innovative Universal Recording in Chicago and released on the Duke label in 1961. It was not until 1963 that I turned on to this record, hanging out on lazy afternoons at the Wagon Wheel Drive-In up in the hills of Arkansas. The record convinced me. In his turbulent operatic delivery twisting the devil's interval into ruthless, demented arias, I understood with emotional certainty what it means to be mistreated. Betrayal never sounded more poetic to our cabal of renegade hillbilly poets.

Others thought so too, as the album had soared in popularity, 18 weeks on the charts, and lodged in the hearts and minds of those who prize the golden-throated chime of a sissy blues singer whose range oscillated from basso profundo

to silvery falsetto: a similar veneration of Jewish violinists of Eastern Europe whose resilience and sweet tone were celebrated.

Bobby Bland grew up in the church on the edge of Memphis, and the church rings true in his every vocal tone. He left school in the third grade to work in the cotton fields, but benefitted in a sense from his illiteracy in that he was free from print-stress orientation while his aural sense took precedence. In the 1950s Bland became a protégé of Ike Turner, yet he enjoyed little success.

When Bland drew the attention of Peacock Records man Don Robey in Houston, his fortunes began to change. With arranger and songwriter Joe Scott behind Bland, a string of dark blues dirge hits split the airwaves and hare-lipped the charts like a hatchet chopping pine saplings. As on the album, the backing band of Bland was razor-tight: wailing, darkly melodic, mournfully fatal, and transcendent. The band was actually a dusky orchestra in wilted black tuxedos, as witnessed in a concert in 1966 at the Memphis North Hall Auditorium that I attended. It was a triple header with Bobby "Blue" Bland, B.B. King, and Jackie Wilson. Robert Palmer of the *New York Times*, and Arkansas poet Randall Lyon were with me, and I reckon we were the only white people in the audience. Although Jackie Wilson was sensational and had every female in the house standing up in their seats weeping, it was Bobby Bland who brought the audience to the threshold of the divine.

There never was, and was not thereafter, and never will be an album soaked in such a delirious magical confluence as *Two Steps from the Blues*. It is the spiritual embodiment of a purely American ethos fully realised, utterly haunted, choked in misery, enigmatic, and abandoned in holy spew. Don Robey, as producer of the album, produced a sonic and poetic marvel of enduring brilliance. According to business manager Evelyn Johnson, "Robey didn't know a record from a hubcap." Does it matter that he did not know what he was doing? As Federico Fellini retorted, "Don't tell me what I am doing – I don't want to know." Still Don Robey knew how to put celestial orbs into motion and to allow magnetic fields to draw very dark currents.

The Beatles, *Meet The Beatles* (1964)

Handsome Dick Manitoba (The Dictators, Manitoba's Wild Kingdom)

I had my very own rock'n'roll radio program for 14 years at Sirius XM. I was on five nights a week. One of the questions I came up with over the years was, "What's your favourite song?" In a way, I knew it was a silly question because I

probably have hundreds of favourite songs; well, let's just say a hundred. I can wake up today, and tomorrow my song changes and so on and so on. Even though I called it silly I thought it was fun radio.

I myself have changed my favourite song many, many times, as I mentioned above. It's an impossible question to answer because it's an impossible question to stay put, as far as albums go. I will apply the same criteria I did to my songs, no offense to me calling it silly, but instead of picking my favourite, I'm gonna pick some album that is either my favourite, NOW, or one of my favourites, but more importantly I'm adding to your question about calling it "the most important album of my lifetime."

At 10 years old, in 1964, The Beatles exploded. At that age it's probably the beginning of your height of being inspired and influenced by music, finding your own way to your own music, paving the beginning of the long road to loving music for the rest of your life, and that paving started, for me, with *Meet the Beatles*. It was an explosion that was heard worldwide, the "Big Bang" it has been called, along with the first appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, therefore not only is it my favourite, or one of my favourite, albums, but it is – in my personal musical experience, which now cover 68 years – the most important record of my life.

The Beatles, 'A Hard Day's Night' (1964)

Nicky Forbes, a.k.a. Rocky Rhythm (The Revillos)

Sshhhlllaannnngg!

The opening chord sent shivers up my spine and exploded in my brain. The following two and a half minutes changed my life. Completely. I had no idea what I was hearing was an F with a G on top (on a 12-string). I was only seven years old. I went into the cinema wanting to be a train driver. I came out wanting to be a pop star! The song – and the film – was *'A Hard Day's Night'*.

Encapsulating the zeitgeist of the 1960s beat era, the song is euphoric, uplifting. Written by Lennon in one day and performed by the lads when in their early 20s, *'A Hard Day's Night'* showcases all the magic ingredients of The Beatles at their height. Lennon's distinct vocal in the verse combines with the twang of Scouse-accented harmonies that sit over Ringo's trademark, swishing hi-hat beats and swinging, mesmerising bass drum pattern. The combination of electric, plus Gibson J160E acoustic guitars and Hofner bass, gel together in perfection. McCartney's middle-eight refrain is driven by Ringo's use of the

cowbell in this section and the solo is a masterpiece: Harrison's guitar part is duplicated by George Martin on piano – an often-overlooked recording trick that adds that special zing.

Over the years the original recording has been remastered, resulting sadly in losing some of the mid-range, i.e., the "excitement" frequencies around the 1K mark, where the snare drum, guitar and acoustic guitar live. Each remaster takes the audio further away from the original. Listen to the vinyl mono single, on a juke box or valve record player, transport yourself back 60 years and dwell in the sweet, big boomatic audio innocence of those times.

There was a reason why The Beatles only ever stayed for the mono mix. That was the important one. They left George Martin alone to do the stereo versions. Harrison reportedly never listened to the stereo *Sgt. Pepper* album until some years later. Yes, there are other songs that have a start that always really make me sit up: Bolan's chord at the start of *'20th Century Boy'*; the opening riff of the Pistols' *'Pretty Vacant'*, but for me it will always be *'A Hard Day's Night'*, with its stunning chorus, right upfront, no messing. When I feel a bit depressed, I only need bring the needle down onto this gem, await the orgasm of that chord, "and I feel alright."

Thelonious Monk, 'I Surrender, Dear' (1965)

Franz Nicolay (The Hold Steady, Mark Eitzel, Frank Turner, etc.)

The carpenter undertook to build a house, a regular A-frame house, with four windows, a front door and a back door, three bedrooms, a kitchen and two bathrooms – without using a single right angle – each corner torqued as far as it could go without causing a general collapse. This beam was hesitantly, unevenly milled; that wallboard snapped with a chalk line but scored by hand without recourse to a ruler's edge. The second-story floor was laid, sanded, and varnished, the high windows trimmed, before the first floor was anything but stud-frame, a Baba Yaga hut on pine chicken legs.

Halting, the carpenter sketched and amplified, elaborated, affixed; expunged and extirpated. The blueprint was borrowed and general and soon all but its outlines were obscured. The lumber was ordered at the last extremity and arrived, scuffed and dented, just before – or just acceptably after – the recommended scheduled deadlines. The carpenter spent a whole week on his knees hammering filigree into a sheet of tin, affixing it to the porch façade. It caught the sunlight and shone. The next day he removed it and it was not seen again. Nor

was he, for some time: he worked indoors, now, out of sight, and it wasn't until after he had abandoned the house that a curious neighbour discovered carved and finished cherry wainscoting in a near-hidden interior closet. There was a rude elegance to it, they had to admit, even if the relation of the artisanal and the banal seemed haphazard. The question was whether – how – he intended to inhabit the thing: we'll see come Fall.

Masons lay the first stone in the northeast corner, at the convergence of the dark cold north and the rising sun. When the carpenter disappeared, he left that corner of the roof toothy and unfinished and when the first snow came, the drifts slouched down the hall. The spring melt and rain flooded the basement and eroded the south wall. Only then did the carpenter reappear and spend the night in his new house, huddled hard by the disconnected boiler, beneath the irregular rafters.

Lesley Gore, *The Golden Hits of Lesley Gore* (1965)

Ian Wagner (writer/musician, founder of Shades Radio Network)

Sometimes it pays off to browse your friends' record collections, particularly if they are willing to lend a title or two to a responsible friend. I have got into so many great albums like that, many all-time personal favourites. This one particular day in about 1989, when I was about 16, was like that. I was browsing through my friend Reg's great LP collection. I happened to find one I was interested in hearing, a compilation of '60s teen pop singer Lesley Gore's hits.

Lesley Gore's most remembered hit was the quintessential '60s girl-pop saga '*It's My Party*', with the striking ballad '*You Don't Own Me*' close behind, though '*... Party*' sequel '*Judy's Turn to Cry*' also got some oldies play. I felt sure that the rest of the tunes on the compilation would be cool as well. I asked Reg if I could borrow and tape the LP, he agreed. (Thanks Reg!)

Well, dear reader, my hopeful feelings proved correct beyond dreams wildest!! Not only did I find the collection of great '60s radio pop candy I wanted, but I also got the conceptual female rock opera I didn't know that I needed. To me, this record told legitimate raw truth from beginning to end. A tale of quite specific teenage female alienation that I recognised from friendships, as I had always felt more comfortable around girls than guys. The themes of the lyrics said what I knew to be true, and that I related to heavily myself as an outsider from traditional teen male culture. Turns out there were reasons for this, compared to the relative vacuity of much other Sugar Shack teen pop lyrics of that era.

Producing these early Gore classics was none other than producer/arranger wunderkind Quincy Jones, decades before he would help define '80s pop with Michael Jackson. I think few would assume that the almost white-pop defining '*It's My Party*' had a black producer. Or that the arranger of this uber-American pop anthem was a fellow jazz veteran of Jones', Claus Ogerman, from Germany.

But it goes much further than that: Gore herself was not only Jewish in a world of Connie n' Sandra pixie shiksas, but also was a closeted lesbian, forced by her management to take part in teen-mag "dating" publicity schemes with fellow teen star Johnny Crawford. Combine this with the teen-romance boy-girl sagas that were the product of this creative alliance, and you have the ultimate white American heterosexual teen pop being made by older black and German jazz musicians and a nice Jewish lesbian. So, naturally, the subversion was inbuilt on Lesley Gore's great 45s.

The opera itself begins with '*... Party*', naturally, the heartbreaking, though extremely upbeat-sounding, saga of Lesley, Judy and Johnny at said social function. Johnny is the first of many male villains described vividly on the album, scarcely waiting a moment after arriving at the party, his *steady girl's* party no less, to sneak off with another girl. But Lesley's declaration of defiant public sadness razor cuts through the saga, the point of the whole enterprise is the demonstration.

The sequel to '*... Party*' is '*Judy's Turn to Cry*', the type of direct sequel/follow-up that is usually a death knell for a pop artist. But smartly, the chorus here has a catchy and unique melody all its own, and may in fact be superior to the original. As one may guess from the title, Lesley gets revenge on her rival, by getting Johnny back. This victory may seem hollow, as Johnny is clearly not worthy of the girls, but again the tone is oddly strident. As with the spectacle of sadness in '*It's My Party*', Lesley does these things simply because she "wants to".

In between the two halves of the *Party/Judy* saga, the album places the irresistibly catchy '*She's a Fool*', which seems to be describing Judy's careless behaviour towards Johnny during their brief romance. She "has his love but treats him cruel," but Lesley knows soon "he will tell her 'girl, be on your way!'" and come back to her. These sad games and rituals of teen courtship are no less sad for the knowledge that we have all done the same.

'*Just Let Me Cry*' could take place at any stage of the on-off Johnny romance. The ultimate gloom of the lyrics clashes with the New York sunshine pop of the backing to an even more intoxicating degree than '*... Party*'. '*That's The Way Boys Are*' follows the depressing string out to its logical endpoint, as she lays out the

shocking details of the dream romance gone sour: her boyfriend looks at other girls, treats her like crap, yet all she can do to justify her unwavering devotion to this creep are five undeniably true words: “that’s the way boys are!” Again, the cheery tone of the record just makes the scenario even more cruel.

The flip to the second LP side is met with the stern, dramatic descending three-note intro to the deathless anthem ‘*You Don’t Own Me*’, possibly the most utterly punk rock record ever released. Whereas the earlier tracks found Lesley in disturbingly compliant mode, here Lesley rejects the very idea of being possessed and controlled, even telling her presumed suitor not to “say I can’t go with other boys”! In the bridge section, she declares her intention to “live my life the way I want, to say and do whatever I please”! This stunning attitude assault may seem incongruent with the other lyrics on the record, but I always think of this song as still being from the same POV as the other songs. In the film *T.A.M.I. Show* (1964), the best rock concert film in life, Lesley’s spiky vocal delivery makes the song even more defiant: “You don’t ... OWN me ...” The wild thing about the tune is that it was written by two male professional songwriters, another of the interesting outsider paradoxes of this record.

‘*Maybe I Know*’ finds poor Lesley back where she started, in a relationship that seems defined by infidelity, humiliation and bewildered resignation. This sad subject matter may seem to be the stuff of sobbing Tammy Wynette country ballads, but it is presented here in the catchiest pop manner possible, with more hooks than a fisherman’s tackle box, with producer, arrangers, session players and singer firing on all creative cylinders.

‘*Hey Now*’ brings back the attitude, with a funky girl-group vibe to boot due to prominent backing vocals and grinding NYC-sassy street-beat, by far the most soul-oriented of Lesley’s hit records. ‘*Look of Love*’ was written by the star writing team of Jeff Barry and Ellie Greenwich. In this song, the actual devotional gaze is the subject. But there is the usual teen/melodrama complication of the gaze itself as witnessed, described, and admired by the former object of the male looker’s affections. Still, the admiring recognition remains resolute.

The LP closes with a song that seems almost sarcastic – ironic in light of the entire rest of the album, where not one other song speaks of a healthy romantic relationship. ‘*This is Sunshine, Lollipops and Rainbows*’, written by none other than *The Way We Were* composer and mum favourite Marvin Hamlisch! The lyrics here seem almost a parody of the female teen-pop aesthetic, with not a cliché left unstated. But the ultra-brisk tempo and punk-brief running time leave no room for regret.

In 1996, the film *Grace of My Heart*, directed by Allison Anders, was released. In this tale of a Carole King-like professional songwriter, there is an episode where the writer is tasked with writing a hit for a strikingly big-haired, sexually closeted teen ingenue portrayed by Bridget Fonda that is clearly modelled on Lesley Gore. A song is created for her to sing that subtly portrays her double life and secret passions. ‘*My Secret Love*’, the wonderful song in the film, was co-composed by none other than Lesley Gore herself. There are definitely records that blazed trails for me, saved my life, etc.; *The Golden Hits of Lesley Gore LP* is definitely one that changed it. All hail the compilation LP as artistic statement! All hail all the Riot Grrrls goin’ on! May your road to sonic Heaven be paved with 45s of solid spun-gold hits! It’s our party!!

The Beatles, *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967)

Kevin Godley (10cc, Godley & Creme; video maker: Hozier, The Beatles, U2, Blur, Snow Patrol, etc.)

It’s 1967 and I’m a graphic design student by day and a rock’n’roll drummer by night and doing both is starting to screw me up. I didn’t particularly want to be a designer, it was just the closest thing to a proper job that the art world had to offer, and art college was the place to be if you were looking for something and we were all looking for anything to soften the blow of grim and boring adulthood. It was a Monday morning, as I remember it. I’d driven back to Stoke college after the weekend and there was a palpable change in the air. People were grinning more than usual. What the fuck? It hit me as soon as I walked in. MUSIC! I was hearing music, lots of it and not just coming from one room, it was everywhere. In every studio I stuck my head into there was a party going on. *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* was blasting out at full volume. Students and tutors alike had downed tools and were drooling over the Peter Blake-designed gatefold sleeve (probably the first) and free-form dancing, getting lost in the record. Every room was playing a different track too, so a glorious, random mess of sound seemed to be spinning Stoke-on-Trent off its Potteries hinges.

It’s difficult to explain the feeling, the euphoria, but those young Beatle upstarts had upended everything with *Sgt. Pepper*. Sure, it was pop, but it was way more than that. Every track was a jewel, a mad, liberating explosion. This was our Mona Lisa, our Guernica, our Sistine Ceiling. It was High Art and in many ways the heart of the ‘60s renaissance. It was also a moment in time that may never be repeated, but it’s stayed with me because those two sides of

black vinyl supercharged my spirit. Screw graphic design. I was off to London to make records!

The Dubliners, *A Drop of the Hard Stuff* (1967)

Donal Greene (Radioactive International)

My dad brought home *A Drop of the Hard Stuff* when he lived in London in 1967, prompting my mother to buy a second-hand Dansette automix so they could listen to it. It was an optimistic purchase as they could potentially stack 10 records onto its central spindle. As each record finishes, the next disc drops onto the turntable, a mesmerising feat for myself and my siblings just a few years later back in Dublin. We grew up listening to nursery rhymes on the Dansette. The Dubliners album was always in the stack so we knew all the words and sang along enthusiastically.

The first three songs on side one got the heaviest rotation. Track one, ‘*Seven Drunken Nights*’ and seven-year-old me singing along to a tale of a drunk going home each night searching for his wife’s lover. ‘*The Galway Races*’ is a more upbeat trad/folk arrangement, but the song that stands out the most is ‘*The Old Alarm Clock*’. It tells the story of a young Irishman who on arrival in London gets arrested for the possession of an alarm clock that could be used as a timing device in a bomb. He goads the judge about how his clock could make the peelers dance with a few sticks of gelignite. Thinking back now, I wonder how an album with such content reached number five in the British charts.

A murder ballad with a schoolyard rhyme refrain opens side two. The haunting ‘*Weile Waile*’ tells the story of infanticide, with lyrics like “she stuck the penknife in the baby’s heart”. Next, ‘*The Travelling People*’ by Ewan MacColl beautifully recalls the life and ways of the Traveller community. ‘*The Limerick Rake*’ is a cheeky ballad about a man recalling all his travels and lovers, regularly stopping short recounting the full story, saying “Agus fágaimid siúd mar atá sé” – enough said about that. Not all the tracks are songs, there are plenty of instrumentals with reels such as ‘*Colonel Fraser*’, ‘*The Fairmoy Lasses*’ and ‘*Sporting Paddy*’ giving this album an all-round folk/trad feeling. Side two ends with ‘*Paddy on the Railway*’, a tune I sung for many years as I worked the railways myself.

My dad still takes the old record out for a spin, but not on the Dansette anymore. It lasted until the 1980s when me and my brother hooked it up to modified walkie-talkies and broadcast *A Drop of the Hard Stuff* onto all the radios on our road – it was our first step into pirate radio that eventually grew into Radioactive.

Adge Cutler & The Wurzels, *Recorded Live at the Royal Oak, Nailsea, Zummerzset* (1967)

Kaos (Chaos UK)

Back in 1967 a young Somerset “folk” singer called Adge Cutler released a live album, *Adge Cutler’s Family Album with The Wurzels* recorded in a pub, The Royal Oak in Nailsea, near Bristol. This album with its “live” production values, between song banter and sheer country “pubbishness” was something that was pretty much unheard-of at the time in the UK and it absolutely blew my mind as a young child. EMI had insisted that Adge and Co. had to try and recreate the raucousness of their pub performances so a studio set would not do them justice. It had to be live. From the very first moment I heard it, Adge and his band became my Sex Pistols a decade before the fact. They not only took the piss out of themselves the audience and their music, they even swore, much to the chagrin of EMI who painstakingly “bleeped” out the foul language. Yet there was something else about them, and that was the fact that the mainstream could not pigeonhole them, they were laughed at and derided, nobody understood a word they said, and they all drunk vast amounts of cider. For us locals, this was our Ronnie Drew, our David Bowie and our Johnny Rotten! Adge was anti-establishment (virtue et industrial) and anti-pop (freak out). He sang about us, for us and he never let it go to his head. Even when he had a modicum of success, he remained propped up at the bar with the lads and lasses. In 1974 Adge died in a car crash; he has absolutely no idea how his music influenced my music and subsequently the whole drunk punk “drink cider” scene that was born out of it! He wasn’t the Big Bopper, or Buddy Holly, or Eddie Cochran. He was Adge Cutler – say his name!

Pink Floyd, *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* (1967)

Roger Miller (Mission of Burma)

Pink Floyd’s first LP, *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*, was for years my desert island masterpiece. I discovered it in 10th grade when it came out. I was a bass player and a friend pointed out the cool bass line in ‘*Chapter 24*’. I was not impressed. HOWEVER, as I listened, I became impressed by many, many other things. I was just starting to play in bands and was writing Hendrix and Seeds knock-offs. But the more I listened to *Piper*, especially as I learned the virtues of psychedelic drugs, this record spoke to me like no other. I recall dreams from childhood, and many of Syd’s lyrics were dream-like, unfiltered

from the subconscious. Like real dreams, they are not all bright and cheery: there are dark visions too. *'Lucifer Sam'* is like fragments of stories, strung together by a cat; just like dreams are also fragments glued together by a thread we rarely understand. And the sounds were dream-like too, morphing around in unexpected ways. I still use dreams in my work.

I was also somewhat of a late bloomer. Is that why I loved the child-like lyrics of *'See Emily Play'* or *'The Gnome'*? I still love Lewis Carroll and L. Frank Baum, even now that I've "matured". Perhaps I carry my child inside me still. Perhaps I carry Syd inside me still.

And the sounds they produced – now THAT was psychedelic! Barrett got sounds out of his guitar that were more akin to Stockhausen than Chuck Berry. I was fascinated by new sounds, and *Piper* supplied those in overdrive. And free-form improvisation! Everything I was looking for, even if I didn't know it, was there. In 1969 I co-formed Sproton Layer, my first all-original band. *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* was the model.

The Jimi Hendrix Experience, *Axis: Bold As Love* (1967)

Nels Cline (guitarist/composer/improviser – Wilco, The Nels Cline Singers, CUP, Pillow Wand, Mike Watt & The Black Gang, Scarnella)

In Harvey and Ken Kubernik's recent and entertaining/informative new book *Jimi Hendrix: Voodoo Child*, I weighed in at the back saying that *Electric Ladyland* was likely the late master musician/magician Jimi Hendrix's masterpiece. And though I can't actually imagine anyone really having only one favourite record, today I am listing the second Jimi Hendrix Experience album *Axis: Bold As Love* as my "favourite album". It's at least fun to imagine that I have one favourite, and even more fun to list this as my favourite as it really is a masterpiece of creativity and energy that has never lost its lustrous power over me, that has never ceased to be inspirational.

When I heard *'Manic Depression'* from the ever-impactful first Hendrix Experience album *Are You Experienced?*, I was truly galvanised and, from that moment on, decided that participation in the magic of music making was to be my life's path. With the release of *Axis*, it seems to me that Jimi, Noel Redding, Mitch Mitchell and engineer Eddie Kramer had, astonishingly, reached an even higher level of sonic alchemy/crushing hot rocking and finesse, and that Jimi's songwriting had advanced significantly. Stone classic songs! *'Bold As Love'*, *'Spanish Castle Magic'*, *'Up From The Skies'*, *'Little Wing'*, *'If 6 Was 9'* ... it's

overwhelming! These songs and sounds live in my heart and soul like lifelong friends while shining with a searing glow that will certainly warm and illuminate to the end of my days.

Sound is magic to me and *Axis: Bold As Love* is one of the most potent and magical creations ever committed to tape. And today it can be my "favourite album" – why not? Just thinking about it, letting it play in my head, takes me to a special place – a place I like to live in, now and forever.

Nico, *Chelsea Girl* (1967)

Norman Westberg (Swans)

Nico's *Chelsea Girl* is a record that I sometimes just need to listen to. I suppose that it is certain songs – *'These Days'*, *'Chelsea Girls'* and *'I'll Keep It With Mine'* – that are the standouts with me. That said, I will play the entire record and find myself lost on every track, always finding little things that I love. The sparse and simple instrumentation is both soothing and a perfect backdrop for the story that the songs tell. I have never really sat and thought about what I like about it before today. Might be her unique voice and phrasing, the songwriting, the instrumentation; I can imagine all of the songs with only the guitar and her voice, like the last, *'Eulogy to Lenny Bruce'*. This is one of so many records that continue to make me love and appreciate music.

Nancy Sinatra and Lee Hazlewood, *Nancy & Lee* (1968)

Delia Sparrow (Mambo Taxi, Ye Nuns)

"Best album ever...". I have one a day forever. But today I have a *Nancy & Lee* t-shirt on ... it's as though someone was going to ask me what my favourite album ever was or something

Lee Hazlewood is the best boy singer ever; Nancy Sinatra is one of the best girl singers ever. It's a twofer/"buy one, get one free" of an album! And it has strings and things from Billy Strange for added free gift-iness on top.

From the oozy psych dream backwards phase birth-of-dream-pop gateway drug *'Some Velvet Morning'* to the yippee-ki-yay yee-hah shit kickiness of *'Greenwich Village Folk Song Salesman'* this is a lush pop all-banger-no-clanger of an album. If you don't have this album then you're wrong. It also has (the Phil Spector-associated) *'You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'* with Lee taking you down to depths you didn't know you could go 'til Nancy drags him back up again; the absolute classic (written by Lee) *'Summer Wine'*; and my personal favourite

'Sand' with wistful doe-eyed Nancy crooning to Lee about... well I'm not sure but I think maybe something went on there... don't tell Frank.

The first single I ever got from a charity shop was '...Boots...' by Nancy in an Oxfam on Kentish Town Road. I lucked out! I remember me and my friend Elvina putting it on and being astounded by its excellence to the extent that we worked out a dance routine to it (feel free to ask me for a demo next time you see me). Later on, I remember the boys in the record shops in Camden Town being obsessed by Lee Hazlewood and having an almost mythical cult to his glory. Later I succumbed to this cult and even today hold my radio interview disc with Lee in reverence and awe and *A House Safe for Tigers* is the most expensive album I've ever purchased. I like to believe that if Lee had ever met me, I'd have been one of the ladies he recorded duets with.

Otis Redding, '(Sittin' On) The Dock of the Bay' (1968)

Tim Quirk (Too Much Joy, Wonderlick)

Otis Redding's early death would have been a tragedy no matter what, but listening to this song, which he'd just finished recording two days before his plane crashed en route to a gig, makes his loss feel even more profound, as it suggests the soul belter had discovered a rich new artistic vein to mine. So we didn't just lose his voice on December 10th, 1967, we lost all the songs that would have come after this one, songs that married the emotional wallop of his soul ballads to a broader musical vision.

Based on this song alone, that vision would have been world-conquering. 'Dock of the Bay' became Redding's first number one hit, and sold over a million copies. While many of those were no doubt bought by fans mourning Redding's recent demise (poor Steve Cropper, the song's co-writer and guitarist, had to mix the song two days after Redding's death, so insistent was Atlantic Records honcho Jerry Wexler about getting a single out to stores immediately), the song also brought Redding an entirely new audience. And it's remained in pretty constant rotation on radio stations and in bars, restaurants and stores for the past 50-plus years because it sounds so perfect, and so timeless. Those opening bass notes, accompanied by some very casual-sounding acoustic guitar strums and the sound of lapping waves, set up a sense of repetition that Redding makes explicit with his very first words: "Sitting in the morning sun/I'll be sitting when the evening comes." The tide and the ships move in and out while our narrator remains motionless. We're only 30 seconds into the recording, but we already

know everything we need to about the singer, and can imagine his thoughts and feelings as easily as his view.

This song has probably resonated for so many listeners, for so long, because it sounds so light, even as it grapples with a pretty heavy existential weight. The singer goes on to tell us he's travelled 2,000 miles, from Georgia to San Francisco, but now he just sits here, because his roaming hasn't brought him any more peace or satisfaction than watching those boats does. He's insignificant compared to the mighty forces he's watching play out, but his attention is the only currency he really has to spend, and he has no hope or expectation of anything ever changing for him.

When I was 18, I moved from New York to California to go to college, as did a close friend from high school. One day I told him to meet me in San Francisco, but I didn't tell him why. We rode the cable car up Powell Street and down to Ghirardelli Square, with my friend asking me the whole way where we were headed and me just shushing him. I walked us out to the end of a pier, sat him down, and handed him one half of my headphones. I stuck the other half in my ear, pushed play on the cassette I'd queued up in my Walkman, and we listened to Otis Redding sing '(Sittin' On) The Dock of the Bay'. Granted, we were callow youths with our whole lives in front of us, but I'm pretty sure that's not the only reason the song sounded so triumphant to us. There's a secret inside the song or, rather, inside the singer of the song.

He's not content; he's lonely and disappointed. But there's a noble kind of power in his acknowledgment of that. This is not a song about wallowing in misery – it almost makes sitting on a dock with nothing better to do than watch the tide roll in and out sound like a victory. And not a shallow one, either: he doesn't waste a single breath on how pretty the sunrise or sunset might be, or how lovely the waves, or how majestic the ships. The man himself, his implacability, is the most remarkable thing in this picture. When he starts whistling toward the end of the song, it's not because the scene has made him happy. He's whistling in the face of his own meaninglessness. That's even better than a pretty sunset.

Pearls Before Swine, *Balaklava* (1968)

Jeffrey Lewis (Singer Songwriter)

The atmosphere and mystique are just unbeatable. I remember first seeing the LP in a used record store around 1995 and being very creeped out by the medieval-looking cover art, *The Triumph of Death* by Breughel, and the scary

pen-and-ink sketches on the back cover. There was no indication of who this band was, no photo of the band anywhere. It was in the “psychedelic” section of the record shop but it didn’t look like any of the bright flowery 1960s psychedelia I’d ever seen. It was scary. I stayed away from it. Then when I finally heard it, it was otherworldly. The strange singing voice, with a lisp, the whispered background vocals, the ambient nature and percussive sounds and echoes, or full orchestrations. Some of it was lush, some of it sounded accidental. Then it suddenly strips down completely for the solo acoustic ‘*There Was a Man*’ which is even more creepy because of the contrast. Side two is a bit of a let-down because it’s just a relatively dull Leonard Cohen cover then the relatively dull ‘*Lepers and Roses*’. But the final tracks are ‘*Florence Nightingale/Ring Thing*’ which is two and half minutes of creepy/mysterious music as good as side one; even though ‘*Ring Thing*’ is just a recitation from *The Lord of the Rings*, it’s done in a ritualistic and scary way.

Then the whole album ends by spinning itself backwards, not literally, but the audio spins rapidly in reverse back through the whole album, till the final thing you hear on side two is the master tape slowing down and starting to play back to the beginning of side one. This is all an intense and unique experience, this record.

Since I first got this vinyl, around late 1996, I’ve listened to it countless times. It was a big influence on my early songwriting, ‘*There Was a Man*’ was one of the first songs I learned how to play. I’d already been aware of the album because of seeing the creepy cover in a store in NYC, and wondering what it was, but what the music reminds me of is the first time I heard any of it, in the middle of the night in northern California in 1996. There was a Thursday night local radio show where this old hippie would play obscure psychedelic records, and he played ‘*I Saw the World*’ on the air. It was like 2am and afterwards he announced “that was Pearls Before Swine” and I was like “THAT’s what that creepy album sounds like?!” It was incredible. I knew I had to get that album immediately. So it reminds me of being up late alone in a little room in northern California listening to the radio, very quiet. It makes me feel transfixed and transported.

I don’t know if modern listening methods give enough weight to the experience. I mean, if you were streaming this album from Spotify on your phone while driving to work, I don’t see how it could grab you in its fingers and pull you to another dimension. But if you listen to it alone, in a quiet room, on vinyl, it just might really fuck you up. At least side one, especially. Good albums

have that power, especially if they are unique. The album cover is part of it too. And the fact that it’s on ESP-Disk records, with ordering info in Esperanto and no real info about who/what this band is or what they look like or where they’re from, all just adds up to a powerful artistic experience. I don’t know what else you’d want of any music, other than power like that. Power to move you, take you some place you’ve never been.

The Move, *Move* (1968)

Danny Benair (The Quick)

KHJ radio in Los Angeles was one of the main Top 40 stations to hear new music. They would play new songs in their “bubbling under” chart listing. Which meant for a week a 45 would blast out of your radio and from there it would either disappear or enter the charts. ‘*Flowers in the Rain*’ by The Move was one of those records. I ran to my local record store – Mays Music Mart – and purchased the 45 on A&M. A week later airplay was gone except for my Panorama City bedroom.

Summer ‘68 I was given a choice by my mother: you can spend two weeks in London, but you must spend the summer in Israel visiting family. I took the bait and while in Israel I heard many great records The radio stations were very influenced by the UK. I stumbled into a department store and on the wall was the first The Move album. Artwork by design collective, The Fool. The wonderful pop psych nugget with multiple vocals propelling drums powerful bass lines and great guitar riffs hit me from track one, ‘*Yellow Rainbow*’. It included the 45 that turned me on to the band ‘*Flowers in the Rain*’.

On many a quiet day in Tel Aviv I played this over and over. The record with songwriting by Roy Wood would influence my first band The Quick. We borrowed some riffs, drum beats and bass tone as often as we could. When I made it back from trip overseas with my little stack of records I knew I was the only kid maybe in LA with the first album, and a Israeli copy to boot!

The Mothers of Invention, *Mothermania: The Best of The Mothers* (1969)

Dick Lucas (Subhumans, Citizen Fish, Culture Shock)

The Mothers, a.k.a. The Mothers of Invention, were Frank Zappa’s band, and I had heard none of their songs before this “best of” record came to my attention at the age of 14. A schoolfriend was trying to sell it to anyone who’d have it for 50 pence, and no-one else was interested, so I went for it, and was very glad I did!

It was 1975, punk hadn't yet blown apart the standards of pop and rock music, yet here was a band that was so unlike anything heard before, it was sensory overload! Music that hooked, grated, bounced, interrupted itself, subverted any notion of style and was full of unpredictability: lyrics about 'Brain Police', 'Plastic People' and talking to vegetables? it was like The Goons met X-Ray Spex! With its humour, sarcasm, social criticism and plain weirdness, it was – and still is – a unique record that pre-empted punk and shattered any illusion that music or lyrics had to conform. "Gonna smother my daughter in chocolate syrup, and boogie 'til the cows come home."

Johnny Cash, *At San Quentin* (1969)

Paul Hanley (The Fall, Brix and the Extricated)

One of the things I'm always grateful for is the musical education I got growing up. Like a lot of people my age with older brothers, this included Bowie, T.Rex, The Velvets et al., but I was also introduced to some great stuff by my parents and aunts and uncles. This wasn't usually done by playing records; mainly it was what they chose to sing at parties. The Dubliners were always a heavy presence, of course, but my dad leaned more towards Country and Western, particularly Frankie Laine. His party piece was 'High Noon', which he'd sing while pretending to play an acoustic guitar.

Unlike many of their contemporaries The Fall were far too canny to discard their musical heroes in the light of punk's supposed "resetting of the clock", so a love for Country and Western was nothing to be ashamed of there either. Though Marc Riley was the first to find a way to integrate this into The Fall's sound (when presented with Marc's instrumental 'Weaver Bird', for instance, Mark swiftly furnished it with a brilliantly suitable lyric about the travails of long-distance lorry drivers) it remained part of the group's arsenal for the rest of its existence.

So everyone I knew liked C&W. And of course everyone I knew loved Johnny Cash, so I did too. In fact everyone in Manchester seemed to love Johnny Cash – the documentary that accompanied the *At San Quentin* album was actually filmed by Granada (but then so was most of the decent musical content from the '60s). It's possible I saw the film before I heard the album, but TV in those days was quite transitory – it could be years before the chance to rewatch something came along. If you wanted to repeat the experience of *At San Quentin*, you needed the record.

Even devoid of the images, the atmosphere and tension of a group playing in front of hardened criminals is palpable, as is the inmates' unbridled joy at being treated to such a stellar set. Of course, Johnny wastes no time setting up an "us versus them" dynamic, by informing a clearly delighted (not to say deliberately wound-up) audience that he's there to do what they want rather than the prison governor or Granada TV producer. He also gets them onside by regaling them with the time he ended up in the Starkville City jail just for picking flowers – though he neglects to mention he was arrested in someone's garden and charged with public drunkenness. It's clear that Cash put a lot of thought into the show – even composing the astounding '*San Quentin*' especially for the occasion. The reception it receives is testament to its power, as is the huge "boo!" that greets the guard delivering a glass of water to John between its back-to-back performances. Cash obviously enjoyed pushing the envelope of what would be allowed on record or TV in 1969 – gleefully including both profanity and a highly risqué warning to the cameraman not to bend over in front of the inmates. He also unveiled his version of 'A Boy Named Sue' for the first time, and though it's evident he and his band weren't overly familiar with it, it's this performance that was eventually released as a single and became his biggest hit. Interestingly, though I always assumed the beeping out of the "son of a bitch" line was done by Granada, it's only on the record: the words appear in full in the film. When me and my wife Julie saw him do it live in 1991 he provided the beep himself. He also ended the song with "If I ever have another son, I think I'm going to name him 'Manchester'" to rapturous applause. It's no wonder we loved him, is it?

Subsequent re-releases have thankfully expanded the album to include the rest of the songs performed that night, including the guest appearance by Carl Perkins. While I'd certainly recommend both listening to the whole thing and watching the documentary, the 10 tracks and nine songs of the original album are more than enough to fully convey the power of this matchless event and its astonishing performer. It really is that good.

It could be argued that some of the actual performances on *At San Quentin* are affected by Cash's understandable nerves. But, as the contemporaneous review in *Rolling Stone* noted, this is more than made up for by "the feeling that actual human communication is taking place." Surely that feeling is the only thing that can justify the release of a live album of songs rendered more professionally elsewhere. And if that's true, then *At San Quentin* is the greatest live album of all time.

The Hollies, 'He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother' (1969)

Stephen Travers (The Miami Showband)

Since the '60s, I've been influenced and inspired by the music and songs that formed the soundtrack to my adolescence, and I continued to draw comfort from them throughout my life. Sadly, I understand, only too well, the pain of losing friends and comrades and so, as I watch the futility of the war and the madness and senselessness of the violence, and the displacement and bravery of so many every day on my TV screen, a song, recorded by The Hollies in 1969 entitled '*He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother*', keeps going 'round in my head.

When this is all over, I hope we will remember, above all else, the extraordinary heroism and resilience of the "ordinary" people of Ukraine. Seems like we'll never learn. It's still the powerless who suffer when the powerful play with their toys. Perhaps that's the true reason this song has run like a burning wire through my life:

The road is long/With many a winding turn
That leads us to who knows where?/Who knows where?
But I'm strong/Strong enough to carry him
He ain't heavy, he's my brother.

King Crimson, *In the Court of the Crimson King* (1969)

Ben Harding (Senseless Things, 3 Colours Red, The Charlemagnes)

In the Court of the Crimson King by King Crimson has stayed with me since I first heard it – I must have only been about seven or eight. Dad was a jazzier, with occasional forays into rock. This was in his collection. Mum was a folkie; the equivalent from her collection was *Parcel of Rogues*, by Steeleye Span, which I also hold very close to my heart. As you can imagine, the King Crimson debut's artwork disturbed me, but piqued my curiosity. As for the music, I didn't know what to make of it at first, but it certainly held my attention. I listen to it regularly still, and it's never lost its power. The epic sweep of the (almost) title track – a definitive template for how progressive rock would progress – the lightness of touch of the two quieter tracks, the flute-haunted '*I Talk to the Wind*' and the dreamy, Mellotron-dazed '*Moonchild*'. The beautiful despair of '*Epitaph*'. But ultimately it's the raucous fuzz and utterly mad saxophone of track one, side one – '*21st Century Schizoid Man*' – which still disturbs and thrills me in equal measure. Breathy Mellotron, evoking a dying torture engine in a blood-slick cell, fades before the massive riff kicks in, as heavy as anything Sabbath ever cut. Punches of

an uber-distorted guitar, which then loops into (still) the most terrifying guitar/sax solo ever committed to vinyl in an awesome metal-jazz workout. All of which serve to underline the lyrics – as relevant today as they were in 1969, at the height of the Vietnam War:

Cat's foot, iron claw
Neurosurgeons scream for more
At paranoia's poison door
21st century schizoid man

Procol Harum, *A Salty Dog* (1969)

Marshall Keith (Slickee Boys)

When I was young, it seemed like I lived in a hellish world. Bad things were going on at home in my family. Thousands of kids were dying in Vietnam. Assassinations were an ongoing thing. Politics seemed pointless. I thought "Everybody dies, including me." I gave up on the idea of growing up and carrying a briefcase.

My long-haired friends and I would frolic around Rockville, Maryland. It felt like most "straight" people hated us. So when I was 15, I hitchhiked to New York with a friend. We got to hang out with the hippies in Washington Square Park. It felt more like home than my actual home did! But reality set in, and we had to hitchhike back home. Coming back was like returning to prison. But at least there was cool music – Jimi Hendrix, The Doors, etc.

A friend played me this album called *A Salty Dog* by Procol Harum. The album cover was a parody of Player's Navy Cut cigarettes. The original picture on the cigarette pack is of a proud, neatly trimmed sailor, but on the album cover picture, it's a sickly old sailor with crazy haunted eyes. It made sense to me. Life burns you out until you're dead or crazy.

The music in the title track was unexpected. It starts with the sound of seagulls, and then an orchestra starts playing this strange repeating chord. But it's beautiful and peaceful, like you're going to church or something. The story is: these sailors are searching for paradise, but get lost and seasick. Here are some lyrics: "The twisted path, our tortured course/And no one left alive." The song ends with "your witness, my own hand". WTF? I imagined some sailor wrote this in 1868, put the message in a bottle, and then 100 years later Procol Harum found it in a box in an attic or something.

I figured out what that strange chord was at the beginning of the song. It felt like I had unlocked some big mystery. I began to realise that I could figure out

just about anything if I just sat down and tried to pick it apart. I think that was the moment I started thinking “I’m a musician.”

Miles Davis, *In A Silent Way* (1969)

Danny Frankel (Urban Verbs, Lou Reed, etc.)

I love this record because it grooves in this murky, subliminal way and it was very distinct at the time, identifying that era (late ‘60s) when jazz musicians were crossing over, using mid-eastern and rock sounds. Impressionistic-sounding, especially in the first section when there is no rhythm and it’s free. It’s the first Miles record to use editing techniques.

It makes me feel like I was just born and the world is new. A new thing is happening that is reflective of the world at the time. Civil rights, art, the war, culture, and patchouli oil! Sign of the times. People should listen to it because it provides a link to later adventures in sound and it’s so exciting that it helps people see a clear picture in dealing with world issues, cures, and science.

At approximately 31 minutes and 26 seconds into the piece they burst into ecstasy (especially Miles and drummer Tony Williams) after being restrained in a very effective spooky way. It’s like jumping into a cold lake! Tony changes from that hypnotic beat to crashing, splashing and impulsive fills, then it retracts back to the spooky groove. It’s as if Miles said to Tony: “Ok Tony, at the second half of my solo, tear it up!!! *In a Silent Way*... check it out!

David Bowie, ‘*Space Oddity*’ (1969)

Andrea Orlick (formerly A&R and Public Relations I.R.S. Records, MCA Records, Geffen Records, Universal Music)

How My Science Teacher Blew My Seven-Year-Old Mind.

In 1969 (grade two) my public-school science teacher told us we were going to have an impromptu “field day” – not odd for him as one morning he took us for “spins” riding around the school parking lot in his brand-new Volkswagen convertible. On this day however, I remember walking into class wondering why a record player was set atop the AV stand. I thought, what a let-down as it wasn’t the ever-thrilling sight of the movie projector or even better, TV to watch an Apollo take-off or something. We sat giddily, heads turning this way and that, whispering about what our audio lesson might be.

Mr. Shamie lowered the blinds, turned off the lights and asked us to put our heads down on our desks. He began, in a somewhat melancholic yet eager

manner, “I want to play something for you. Listen very carefully, listen to the words ... it’s very important.” Some shrugged, but we settled down, lowered our heads, and waited. What began was eerily seductive – I mean, my go-to at the time was The Partridge Family, so quite the juxtaposition – but then, with every increasingly demonstrative chord ...

BAM, time shifted.

I was suddenly not seven anymore, I was wiser and seemingly all-knowing, I now understood the laissez faire actions of the hippies that gathered in the baseball bleachers, and yes, my mind was blown. I felt that fluttery – not in a boy-crush kinda’ way – but that anxious unsettling feeling building in my stomach as I tried desperately to imagine the utter fear, terror, and fate of this man.

We listened to ‘*Space Oddity*’.

Thirty or so years on I tracked down Mr. Shamie. I wanted to thank him. Thank him for his ever jovial and spontaneous manner and to let him know that on that spring day in 1969 when he introduced us to David Bowie, he seeded in me an intense desire; a love for all things musical, one that eventually led me to working in the music industry.

Rodriguez, *Cold Fact* (1970)

Sonic Boom (Spectrum, E.A.R, Spacemen 3)

I guess this LP was mostly overlooked in its day, back in 1970. But in that magical way that is one of the more benign side effects of our highly fraught total computer immersion world, it has since found a wide and deeply appreciative audience through the internet and its successful re-issue 15 years ago on Light in the Attic records.

The LP covers a range of moods and goes from the light euphoria of ‘*Sugar Man*’, a song about the highs, lows and heavenly blows of scoring street drugs and of dealers, to the pensive and enquiring ‘*I Wonder*’ which asks “I wonder how many times you had sex/and I wonder do you know who’ll be next.” This is the kind of social quipping that was exemplified by Lou Reed in *The Velvet Underground* and in my mind is the sort of underbelly context most writers sadly steer clear of.

Rodriguez songs are very much rooted in the freewheelin’ San Francisco Haight-Ashbury world of communal living, free love (read: “sex”) and the general primal screaming of a generation begging for racial equality and an end to America’s injustices and foreign wars by proxy.

Tough times: Vietnam and Nixon; Ku Klux Klan and paisley fashions; Manson and Kenneth Anger fermenting somewhere a few blocks away. It wouldn't surprise me to know they all crossed paths somewhere. Right around Beach Blanket Babylon Boulevard.

'*This Is Not a Song, It's an Outburst: Or, the Establishment Blues*' (yes, that's a song title) leaves you in no doubt that the kids were trying alternative solutions to the mass dysfunction of the American Dream and were not all just floating around, head in clouds, as widely repeated. On *Cold Fact* (presumably riffing on "Colfax" one of the better-known SF streets) you hear one of the foremost and evocative artists of the era clearly feeling swamped but impassioned by the inherited problems of society and government.

The playing, arrangements and production of the record are tight and charming. An open and interesting stereo array of shoulder-shrugging drums, acoustic guitar and tight bass form the core, with twists and turns of almost leery-sounding brass punctuation and wise-cracking strings in counterpoint to Rodriguez' voice. It's an elegant and efficient-sounding production.

People compare Rodriguez with Dylan of the late '60s, but I think there's less smoke, mirrors and bike chains in these careful social précis and we see and hear the heart and soul of a human being unwinding, unfolding and at times unhinging. I can't recommend higher.

The Rolling Stones, *Get Yer Ya-Ya's Out!* (1970)

Abaad Behram (Razz, The Howling Mad, Johnny Bombay and The Reactions)

Lucky me, I had a wealth of musical influences to draw on when learning how to be a musician. While The Beatles were gods, for me, it was the Stones, who were my kind of vibe to hang out with and play to.

When *Ya-Ya's* was released, I was in high school, and it totally blew me away for so many reasons. First of all, it was a live album, with Stones songs that stood on their own as classic versions. Most importantly, it displayed two stellar guitarists, Mick Taylor and Keith Richards, at the height of their musical prowess. The teachers had arrived, and this student was more than ready.

This was the album that I cut my musical teeth on. No YouTube tutorials, no lessons, just me and the needle dropping incessantly – until I could nail those insane tight rhythms of Keef. The wonky intro to '*Little Queenie*' was a lesson in itself. This was the moment I learned that the right hand (lefties excepted) ruled the world. It's the hand that chops, accents, is your volume, your tone and

creates the magic I was hearing on *Ya-Ya's*. I was determined to get that shit down. Definitely one of those "stick the food under the door, Ma!" periods of my life.

The mark of a truly great band is to be able to create something fresh – live, and live is where it really happens, right?

Simon and Garfunkel, *Bridge Over Troubled Water* (1970)

Hugo Burnham (Gang of Four)

Uncharacteristically for this ageing post-punk rocker, I must share my wholesale love for Simon and Garfunkel's *Bridge Over Troubled Water*. The title track went to #1 on the UK charts just a few weeks before my 14th birthday, when I had become deeply, deeply into music. I was more of a rocker kid, my favourite bands being Creedence (the first band I ever saw live, and whose *Green River* was the album I almost wrote about here), The Who, Stones, etc. and reggae – lots of Trojan Records reggae, which was everywhere in the pop charts and on the telly. But the pure and majestic sound of this single made me go out and buy the album. Actually, I think I asked my mum to get it for me. Ok, she did; but she'd also bought me *Let It Bleed* for Christmas in '69 ... so, brava, Mum!

My brother and I had a Dansette-style record player in our shared bedroom, that I'd jury-rigged so that we each had a speaker beside our beds. Then I made it a speaker either side of mine, so I could hear it in "stereo". Many nights lying there drenched in sound. So, even given the poor-quality-Fi, it wasn't just the wonderful songs that got me – I started becoming aware of the production. The actual sound of the thing. The space around the songs. Glorious. And when I got a pair of big-assed headphones for my 14th birthday a month or two later – DAMN! (or, the more characteristically English, "Bugger me!"). It was as exciting a discovery as ... well, wanking was at that age.

The sound of that album still makes the hairs on the back of my neck (no... not my palms) stand up. Through all the different music that I've loved and dug into over the ensuing 52 years, *Bridge Over Troubled Water* still amazes: the songwriting, the performances, the sounds, the production. Just stellar. Or, as Stanley Kowalski would have it, "STELLAR!"

Elton John, *Tumbleweed Connection* (1970)

Barry Young (The Idiots)

I have a vivid memory from when I was only 10 or 11 years old. My mum had bought a Christmas present for my older cousin and left it in the front room. It

was an album. My natural curiosity led me to have a sneaky look. It had a striking cover, in a mock old western style of a young man with glasses sitting on an old railway station platform. The artwork was fantastic and when I opened it out, it also included a booklet with lyrics and further illustrations in the same style. I wanted to know more, and while the name of the artist on the cover meant nothing to me, I was keen to hear this record. I can't actually remember just how much later it was before I actually got the album myself, but when I did, it I was not disappointed. I loved it.

The album was like a love letter to the old American west, with songs such as the opening track, *'Ballad of a Well-known Gun'*, which captures the whole western vibe, through the laid-back *'Country Comfort'*, ethereal *'Come Down in Time'*, and the atmospheric *'My Father's Gun'*.

Musically the tracks ranged from country rock style, with an undoubted nod to The Band, to the gospel-influenced epic album closer *'Burn Down the Mission'*. I have always loved Bernie Taupin's lyrics and think that on each track on this album he successfully uses them like snapshots, capturing the themes in a simple yet poetic style. While I have since listened and loved a wide and varied range of music, nearly 50 years on *Tumbleweed Connection* by Elton John remains my favourite album.

Swamp Dogg, *Total Destruction to your Mind* (1970)

Derwood Andrews (Generation X, Empire, Westworld, Moondogg, Tone Poet)

This is my favourite album. Here's why...

Before we were force fed "robo music" via the internet and social media, there was a mystery to all things, a chance of true discovery. On a visit to a record shop in Camden Town, London, early 1980s, I was flicking through a pile of albums when I came across this one. First off, the album cover was nuts; dude sitting on a flatbed trailer in shorts reading something with an ashtray on his head. The title was brilliant, the liner notes were funny and the song titles seemed interesting.

I got home, put it on the record player and heard the first vocal line which is "Sitting on a cornflake", I was hooked... Swamp's voice is electric, soulful and desperate. The songs were of the time, social comments, blatant and with a sense of humour. The band and production was in your face and simply brilliant, not your typical bland R&B. He really was the black punk rocker, totally against the grain and out on his own. With songs like *'The World*

Beyond', *'These Are Not My People'*, *'Redneck'* and *'Synthetic World'*, he quickly became someone I needed to research and collect.

Many years later an opportunity arose for me to work with him on *Generations 1: A Punk Look At Human Rights*, which included artists like Green Day, Joe Strummer, Bad Brains and The John Doe Thing, so we were in proper company. I produced a version of *'Synthetic World'* under the name Swamp Dogg Does Moondogg which was released by Ark 21 Records in 1997, and for the next several years I got to play guitar with him in California and Europe. My hopes were realised when we recorded a blues album in two days, which was released as *If I Ever Kiss It... He Can Kiss It Goodbye* in 2008.

A whole new path opened up for me just by seeing a crazy album cover. The music has stood the test of time and, if anything, sounds even better as it marches on. Music saves lives, keep on listening.

Sonny Sharrock, *Monkey-Pockie-Boo* (1970)

Ajay Sagaar (Dandelion Adventure, Donkey, Bhajan Boy)

Do you know when the possibilities are endless? Have you ever been able to claim a free space in your mind to know that anything you do or say or think is FREE? Have you ever been able to feel that your life offers the chance to make the lives of others that little bit better? When are we able to find a space in our busy lives to actually reflect and understand what is really important to us as human beings? Those moments of self-reflection are rare, but if you find the time to sit down and perhaps read a book, or go for a run or maybe put on some music and really LISTEN, then those moments can be found.

Listening to Sonny Sharrock is a portent of the freedom we seek as human beings in all aspects of our lives. An impulsive thought or action based on feeling. As Sonny stated: "I see players that think, and you can tell they're thinking of the next phrase to play or the next thing to do, the next little cute trick, and that's sad, man, you know. That's not makin' music; that's puttin' together puzzles, you know. Music should flow from you and it should be a force; it should be feeling, all feeling, man."

Syd Barrett, *Barrett* (1970)

Tim Pope (film/video director: The Cure, David Bowie, Iggy Pop, etc.)

Without a doubt, my favourite album of all time has to be Syd Barrett's eponymous *Barrett*, recorded in the period just after he had left Pink Floyd.

This is the second solo album after he had famously become disillusioned and disenchanted with the whole rock'n'roll machine, the idea of being a star, and had walked from London back to Cambridge to live with his elderly mother, Winifred. Two members of the old band, Rick Wright and Dave Gilmour, supervised the sessions for *Barrett* and by the sounds of it they were not that easy, with Syd's mental faculties and his relationship with reality on the wane. In effect, by listening to the album we are voyeuristically engaging in its very process of being put down to tape, and Syd's clear struggles to do so, and in this way it is unique and I can think of very few albums that take us on this journey. If I had to pick three tracks, I'd say 'Rats', 'Maisie' and 'Gigolo Aunt'. A random sample of the lyrics from 'Rats' goes: "Bam, spastic, tactile engine, heaving, crackle, slinky, dormy, roofy, wham, I'll have them, fried bloke," etc. Blimey! Whatever he's on, I'll 'ave some of that!! I suppose having been around a few rock stars in my time, I am fascinated by the ephemerality of talent and just how fragile this all can be. I remember once talking with David Bowie – who, like me, was a huge Syd fan and covered Syd's Floyd period 'See Emily Play' – about the idea of how so many musicians tread a delicate line with their own mental state, and how in fact the line between "being sane" and the opposite are sometimes quite close. Like me also, he had in his family some mental illness – in his instance, his half-brother, Terry, about whom he wrote with the song 'The Bewlay Brothers'. Wherever I go in the world, *Barrett* has always travelled with me, at first on my hissy cassette Sony Walkman and later digitally. It transports me through a variety of moods – hey, who cannot feel up and great about things when Syd serenades us with, "Grooving around in a trench coat. Jiving on down to the beach to see the blue and the grey. Seems to be all and it's rosy, it's a beautiful day"? I have worked with so many of my teenage heroes from Iggy Pop to Bowie, and I am just grateful I never met Syd, as for me he's just "the one that got away." Once when I was in Cambridge, I did visit from the outside of his little pebbledash house in a cul-de-sac and I saw that his living room window was open which meant he was definitely in. I only stayed for a couple of moments, as in no way did I want to interfere with the seclusion he clearly sought. There are many wonderful photographs people snapped of him in later years as he rode around Cambridge on his bike, and in my living room at home I have a signed picture by Mick Rock of Syd. I hope his later years gave him the freedom he wanted and thank goodness he recorded this album.

Spirit, *Twelve Dreams of Dr. Sardonicus* (1970)

Terry O'Neill (manager, Thin Lizzy; promoter, McGonagles, Dublin)

1967 was the Summer of Love. I was 16. We all went to Courtown in Wexford for the August weekend wearing flowers in our hair but without the acid or weed that fuelled Haight-Ashbury. By 1970 and early 1971 we'd caught up. By then I loved so many albums by great artistes it was unreal. What a great time to be alive. Bob Dylan, The Beatles, The Byrds, Jimi Hendrix, The Stones, Joni Mitchell, The Band, Neil Young, Frank Zappa, Captain Beefheart and many others had all released great albums which still remain some of my all-time favourites. However, the number one position, if there is such a thing, must go to a band that never really made it with an album that a lot of people never heard.

On *Twelve Dreams of Dr. Sardonicus*, Spirit said it all. I don't like trailers for movies because I want to see it fresh. I don't want to know where and when it's set. If possible, I don't even want to know who the director or stars are. The less I know the better. I love spontaneity. Even naming song titles on *Dr. Sardonicus* might tell you too much and spoil the surprise. I want people to sit down and listen to this, properly and uninterrupted. Loud. If I start dissecting the great songs, sung by great singers and played with excellence by fine musicians with an immaculate production then that might raise the expectation and spoil it for you. I suppose I can tell you who Spirit are without ruining it: Randy California on guitar and vocals (Gary Moore's favourite guitarist), Ed Cassidy drums, Jay Ferguson vocals and percussion, John Locke on keyboards and Mark Andes on bass and vocals. The album was produced by David Briggs and released in late 1970. Please take the time to enjoy this masterpiece.

Oh no, I'm only supposed to write 300 words about this record and (luckily... for you) I've gone over....

The Stooges, *Fun House* (1970)

Henry Rollins (Black Flag, Rollins Band)

There are a lot of albums I like almost as much as my favourite. I listen to *Machine Gun Etiquette* by The Damned every Friday night to get the weekend started. I've played *Master of Reality* by Black Sabbath, *The Crack* by the Ruts, *Diminished Responsibility* by UK Subs, *Unknown Pleasures* by Joy Division, *Raw Power* by The Stooges and *Low* by David Bowie and many others at least hundreds of times over the decades. My favourite album is *Fun House* by The Stooges. Recorded in May of 1970 at Elektra Studios in Los Angeles, California and released later that

year. I first heard it when I was 20 and as rough as my understanding of music was at the time, I understood it was a perfect and visionary work. Over 40 years later, after listening to perhaps thousands of albums, *Fun House* strikes me as an absolute standalone, like *Kind of Blue* by Miles Davis and *A Love Supreme* by the John Coltrane Quartet.

The Stooges – Iggy Pop on vocals, Dave Alexander on bass, Ron Asheton on guitar and drummer Scott Asheton – had the great idea to bring hard-swinging saxophone player Steve Mackay as an honorary band member at almost the last minute to record on some of the tracks. The songs on their own are incredible but Mackay’s input allows *Fun House* to truly electrify the senses.

The band and the producer, Elektra company man Don Gallucci, were all in their early twenties. The band tracked one song per session, over and over; most of the time the final take was the keeper. The entire *Fun House* sessions have been released on CD and recently as a limited LP box set, complete with a booklet and extensive liner notes. From the notes, there’s a part that explains *1970: The Complete Fun House Sessions* is not an expanded edition of the album. The LP is an abbreviation of this box set. One is the novel; the other, a table of contents. I listen to the sessions recordings once a year. I think *Fun House* should be heard at least once by anyone who likes punk or rock music.

The Stooges, *Fun House* (1970)

Steve Leckie (Viletones)

There’s a race of men that don’t fit in
A race that can’t stay still
So they break the hearts of kith and kin
And they roam the world at will.

I first read this written on the inside steel door in a Toronto jail, and it really spoke to me. To me it said that there’s a universe of kids just like me, and that it’s been around forever and will never die. The Stooges were saying that, The Stooges were living that – like me it’s in our souls. Jail’s bad, I was in but at this point they were not.

I was in another band named Viletones, and as bad as my time in jail was, I had something powerful to keep me going. I knew *Fun House* the record and those songs going around in my head made this funhouse I was in about the best place in the world to know that record, and God knows that prose piece on the inside of the jail’s door kept me focused. See, I was 12 or 13 when I first

came to love The Stooges’ *Fun House*, and nothing made me feel more guilty. I had to keep my new Stooges LP a secret from all my friends who were in love with Glitter/glam English bands. London had that sound down and it’s great for some; but Detroit, Michigan was where all the really cool and really dangerous bands lived and plied their trade.

‘Course along with The Stooges you had the band called Death, the *Kick Out The Jams*-motherfucking MCS – and the Motor City Five ruled Detroit – but the most dedicated to the lost cause was simply called The Punks, a band so hellbent on doing EVERYTHING their way that when they left the Detroit comfort zone for the only time it was 1976 and they played (er, kinda), at CBGB, but never would they again, they were sickened that the word “punk” was being used as a way for the kids at CBGB to identify themselves. Didn’t those kids know that on that Bowery stage, were THE PUNKS. And had been so, like The Stooges, since 1969. The Stooges didn’t have that attitude of “it’s done our way or no way”.

Uptown on Park Avenue South, no less, Iggy, who by the way was in The Stooges – this is before Bowie swooped him up – among tons of band changes renamed the outfit to Iggy and the Stooges. More on that later. The opposite in mindset to the band The Punks, Iggy dove into everything New York could give him. He’s the Man of the moment hyping *Fun House*, and the Warhol crowd at Max’s Kansas City loved what they SAW, not so much Stooges *Fun House*, but Iggy was more than fine with Andy, Candy Darling, Little Joe, The Lou Reed Wild Side. BUT The Stooges equally loved everyone down, and really down on The Bowery, where it was so nasty guitar player Ron Ashton could get back into his head-to-toe Nazi uniform and ain’t no one on the Bowery gonna say shit, not to a Stooge! He never made a decision about his uniform, but when you’re the only one wearing one, let’s just assume Ashton knows he’s bringing New York a guitar player bad ass they ain’t never seen, but what New York hadn’t really seen was a taste of the best Detroit had to offer. The New York clubs were up to see Detroit Stooges, but The Stooges showed them only half, ‘cause the other half was Berlin. Bowie steps in and that lineup don’t get to play Europe – Iggy and his new crew made sure of that. And *Fun House* was never the same, certainly when promoting it was concerned. Iggy was on his ‘*Search and Destroy*’ mission and Bowie was tucking him in at night. (Note: my band just didn’t get a dance card.)

Side One: ‘*Down on the Street*’, ‘*Loose*’, the epic ‘*TV. Eye*’, and the seven-minute ‘*Dirt*’. Side Two: ‘*1970*’, ‘*Fun House*’, and the insane last track ‘*L.A. Blues*’, with sax player Steve Mackay, who gives you more than a clue of what music on

29 tabs of the famous bad batch brown acid sound like. Produced by Detroit's own Don Gallucci for Electra Records perfectly, it still stands in my book as *the* very best vocal performance Iggy ever gave. My bet is that the band knew this was to be the last Stooges record.

When *Fun House* came out it was a total flop; it didn't do anything outside of Motor City, Toronto and New York. Radio wouldn't touch it and news of the boys' on- and off-stage lives were beyond the beyond. Yet *Fun House* is loaded with that same dark poetry as Jim Morrison's, but played by guys who could barely spell (true). It's a record of tremendous pain and feelings. Iggy's words most of the time don't really matter, and the coda, '*L.A. Blues*', does more than prove the nasty, most times dirty mystery of *Fun House*. Who's even gonna try to get why Iggy moans "Oooo I'm in DIRT ... but I don't care"?

The entire album has a masterly in-designed cover: it's a flip-open record and that's where we got to look into the eyes of the four Stooges: Iggy, the brothers Ron (guitar) and Scott (drums) with Dave Alexander on bass. *Fun House* is a soundtrack for Bad Boys on Acid and when it came out, as said, it flopped on first release. I hold that it's lost its true meaning as a work of art – again, it was understood in the early '70s, but now it doesn't have a house of mirrors, like all funhouses do. By the third LP it's all a Bowie-as-puppet-master project to get the world to take Iggy very seriously called *Raw Power*: Iggy and The Stooges, not the real Stooges; it's intense, but it ain't DETROIT INTENSE. So now I don't need prison doors prose to understand that:

There's a race of men that don't fit in
A race that can't stay still
So they break the hearts of kith and kin
And they roam the world at will.

By Canadian/British Poet Robert Service*
All of this is my testimony to *Fun House*

Groundhogs, *Split* (1971)

Ferdia Mac Anna (author)

Big F and Big D in the Groundhog room. Summer, 1971.

Big D and Big F (me) sit in a long rectangular windowless room in Big D's house being gleefully pulverised by the Groundhogs' new album, *Split*. The room contains a record player, two huge floor speakers and two small chairs. Big D sits

in front of one speaker. I'm in front of the other. After each song ends, we switch. Then we play the LP again.

Louder than volcanos and merciless in assaulting all senses, Groundhogs' tunes contain melodies seemingly unrelated to tuning. Song subjects include mental breakdown (all of Side One), mercurial ex-girlfriends ('*Cherry Red*') and a twisted ode to bin collectors ('*Junkman*'). The only relief from the aural cacophony comes with an acoustic take on a John Lee Hooker blues, '*Groundhog*', from whence the band derived its name. Nevertheless, at its gentlest, Tony McPhee's acoustic guitar sounds like a heavy goods vehicle screeching up a cliff in first gear.

It's fair to say the Groundhogs are unglamorous. Tony T.S. McPhee (guitars, vox), Ken Pustelnik (drums), Pete Cruikshank (bass) look like psychotic garbagemen who sleep in a storm drain. On the band's only appearance on *Top of the Pops*, all that's visible are cascades of moving hair out of which jut beat-up guitars along with an occasional glimpse of patched denims. (Recording of the performance has long since mysteriously disappeared from BBC vaults.)

Nobody I know likes them. I rarely meet anyone who has heard of the band let alone admits to owning any of their albums. It can be argued the Groundhogs are the nearest progressive rock ever came to punk. But it can also be said their only redeeming feature might be a fearlessness around noise. Their songs are idiosyncratic, bizarre, chaotic, aggressive, unpredictable and entirely their own. They don't SOUND like ANY OTHER GROUP.

For Big D and Big F, the Groundhogs made weird, astounding, original music, much of it quite bonkers and yet also compelling while occasionally beautiful, particularly the guitar solos. '*Cherry Red*' which opens Side Two, is demented in a way that makes the listener feel exhilarated, refreshed, and slightly mad. Listen for the random cowbell that occurs only once, in the introduction. No surprise the tune was recorded in one take.

Side One features four songs – '*Split – Part One*', '*Split – Part Two*', '*Split – Part Three*' and '*Split – Part Four*' – which makes more sense if you consider Tony T.S. McPhee based the cycle around a panic attack following his only brush with drugs, a few tokes on a spliff. He explained, "I seemed to lose my entire personality. I never talked to anyone, because nothing seemed to be worth saying. I don't reach any conclusions – it's just what happened, that's all."

Few critics hailed them, though other musicians, particularly those following an eccentric or individualistic path, adored them. Julian Cope is a big fan of *Split*:

...A shamanic whirling that shattered and scattered the beat around in several directions at once. The frenzied drumming of Ken Pustelnik reduced the kit to the role of moronic street gang defenceless against one lone Kung Fu hero. Side Two opens with their most famous song of all: *'Cherry Red'*. Another sonic clatterwail in the Groundhogs' more-is-more/hit-everything methodology ... and a vocal, which shifts from alpha male to soul castrato. McPhee's guitars swallow the rhythm section whole, then he undermines us all by becoming his own female backing singer.

Split is not the kind of thing to inflict on other listeners, unless you want to clear a party or risk having passengers exit your car halfway down a motorway.

The rectangular music room is long gone, and I lost touch with Big D after our teenage years. I am grateful to him for introducing me to a truly original, dynamic and deeply strange group. Wherever he is, I hope Big D still plays the Groundhogs and listens out for the loopy single clunk of the cowbell on *'Cherry Red'*.

Emerson, Lake and Palmer, *Tarkus* (1971)

Paul Cripple (Reagan Youth)

I don't know if I can pick one favourite, it's very difficult. If you listen to the first Hendrix Experience record, there's nothing to complain about there. If you listen to the first Sabbath album, there's not one note that's off. But I want to talk about a record that was important when I was growing up.

I had this one friend, Dave, who I met in elementary school. In middle school they had a Paper Mâché class, and most kids made a hand or a head, but this friend of mine he made a Tarkus – a tank like an armadillo, which was on the cover of a concept album by Emerson, Lake and Palmer. He became the singer in my band.

When I was growing up, ELP were one of the biggest, if not *the* biggest, rock bands. Guys who were cool as fuck in school, and had muscle cars but got A grades, proved it by listening to Emerson, Lake and Palmer. The thinking man's rock'n'roll. I loved that they had a lyricist – and he wrote some pretty amazing lyrics.

My sister was a few years older than me, and she was the best-looking girl in the neighbourhood – and she went to a lot of rock concerts. Being that she was older than me, she knew a lot more about rock music – but she didn't

know more than Dave. I was sticking with this guy because, shit – he knows more about fucking rock'n'roll than my sister. His dad wouldn't let him out too much, so he just sat and listened to every rock station.

When Dave and myself started Reagan Youth, Bad Brains would let us hang out. They were in their mid-twenties; we were teenagers but were learning from these excellent musicians. Dave used to say they were the ELP of hard-core punk. And when you listen to the ELP keyboards it's like Keith Emerson wrote the soundtrack to every video game out there. I love the past and here I am reminiscing about an album that came out in the early '70s.

I loved the anti-war theme and I think bands like ELP were an influence for me and Dave – here was some really intelligent stuff that was pointing out some evils in society, and how war is a horrid thing. It breaks my heart to see war anywhere. Do you think Putin's gonna get hurt?

This planet needs some healing. Peace!

Dave and Ansil Collins, *Double Barrel* (1971)

Kim Clarke Champniss (Much Music, Canada; author, *Skinheads, Fur Traders and DJs*)

I was a London schoolboy when the 1970s started, attending Latymer Upper, an all-boys grammar school in Hammersmith (just down the road from the Odeon cinema, which doubled as a famous music venue, and is now known as the Apollo). I was a happy-go-lucky lad, cheeky, blessed with reasonable intelligence, and more than a drop of vinegar and piss running through my veins. The big questions for me were not how can I save the planet or what university should I go to? But how could I meet girls, why had my football team, Fulham F.C., dropped so badly to the Third Division, and how could I get a job? I turned 16 in 1970 and girls were far more interesting than books, Fulham F.C. was going down, and UK unemployment figures were going up. Money was tight for everybody, as tight as the lid on the jar that contained my dad's homemade apple sauce. There was the usual parental tension at home that almost every young person goes through as they transition from youth to adulthood. Mine was no different.

But the '70s were a different decade than those that had gone before. I could feel it. I saw it at home. My parents relaxed their strict rules. I saw it at school. Young new teachers were appearing at the front of class with fresh ideas and new approaches. I saw it everywhere, subtly at first, and then major changes. The decade built on the successes that the '60s generation had won (as my older

brothers reminded me). There was more liberalism. More expectations. People were no longer shocked if young unmarried couples said they lived together. There were the new aspirations of purchasing a swanky hi-fi stereo unit, a colour TV, a new car or, my goodness, even your own house. Women were becoming more vocal in their demands for equality. There was a pronounced awareness of global, racial, sexual, gender and economic issues. People were going to march, strike, fight and sing about elements that were important to them. On top of all that the UK went metric in the 1970s. Currency was decimalized in February 1971 eliminating such traditional denominations as the shilling, the florin (two shillings), and the ten bob note (ten shillings), replaced by 5p, 10p, and 50p coins. There was an end to the traditional. This was a New Britain. But it was messy on all fronts.

There was a café opposite my school – the 220. It was owned by an Indian family that had emigrated to the UK. How they made any profit I'm not sure. There was a small stream of regular customers, but we skint schoolboys were its main clientele. Sometimes tough yobs from the neighbourhood would make their presence known by seating themselves menacingly at the laminated tables by the door. But mainly it was our school hangout; from youthful teens like me, on the verge of manhood, to experienced senior sixth form boys on their way to bigger things in life, like university. But there were two other important elements to the 220: pinball machines and a well-stocked jukebox. The two pinball machines were at the very back of the café and this is where the colourful characters hung out. That's where I hung out. I became, as The Who would sing, a pinball wizard, making sixpence (later 5p) last an eternity with constant replays.

But it was the well-stocked jukebox that dominated the atmosphere of the 220. It was never quiet. We fed our lunch money into the Rock-Ola machine constantly. Those songs mark a place in time for me. As I have learned, music has the magical power of capturing and preserving memories, both individual and universal, as if they were embedded in amber. One of the most popular songs in 1970 was 'Sugar Sugar' by The Archies even though it had been released the previous year. It was a monster hit, holding down the top spot for eight weeks at the end of 1969. It was co-written by Canadian Andy Kim. Many years later I would help out Andy when he revived his career in the 21st century. It was my karmic payback for the countless times I heard the tune in the 220. As I write this, I remember that smoky café, playing pinball, and listening to the following tunes – a top 10 playlist of hits and events from those first years of the decade. I have turned up the imaginary volume in my mind to help recall a transitional period. The songs trigger remembrances, some of them specific to the music itself, some

tangential. Music forever played in the background during that period. It helped shape my world and my young imagination.

In 1971 a new sound was in the air and it resulted in an unusual hit. Dave and Ansil Collins with 'Double Barrel'. The musical style was ska, Jamaican music that had been popularized not only by the Caribbean population that had emigrated to the UK, but by British mods and skinheads. Skinheads had emerged about 1969 out of the mod scene. They were predominately white, working class young people, but they allied themselves to Jamaican youth, hence their appreciation for ska music. Their world revolved around Wimpy hamburger bars, pubs, discos and football grounds. When they were not fighting each other, they searched out their enemies in this vicious game of tribal warfare – the leather-clad rocker. They looked for trouble and usually found it. There were major violent incidents – even murder – of “paki-bashing” (violence towards people of Indian and Pakistani origin) and “queer bashing” (the baiting and beating up of homosexuals).

There had already been a few ska/reggae hits on the British charts by the likes of Prince Buster, Desmond Dekker, and Jimmy Cliff, but this track by brothers Dave and Ansil Collins (on a label subsidiary of Trojan Records) highlighted skinhead culture. From the vocal boast at the beginning of the track informing the audience that “I am the magnificent”, to its clippity-clop musical style that seemed to encourage the boots and braces dance steps of that teenage cult, it became an anthem of sorts. It was played a lot on the public address system at football grounds. Whenever a skinhead entered the 220 café (whether from school or an outsider) this tune would be programmed on the jukebox. But the song also crossed over into mainstream culture. The song went to #1 on the UK charts May 1971.

Joni Mitchell, *Blue* (1971)

Neville Farmer (musician, author, *XTC*, *Song Story*)

There are albums I play more. There are Joni songs I play more. I could have chosen *Hunky Dory*, *Abbey Road*, *Animals*, *Waiting for Columbus*, *What's Going On*, *Harvest*, *English Settlement*, 1977, *10*, *Nevermind*, *A Walk Across the Rooftops*, *The Bends*. But I am picking Joni Mitchell's fourth album, *Blue*, because it is perfect.

For over half a century, it has been a recurring theme from the soundtrack of my life. Every note, every word, every hookline, chord, arpeggio and vocal inflection is just so ... right. Self-produced during a period of global and personal turmoil, Joni created an album so tightly wound it smarts. It is a flawless collection

of sparsely arranged incredibly beautiful songs. The leanness of the recordings creates a claustrophobic intimacy. It exposes the scratchy piquancy of the Appalachian dulcimer and Joni's unique guitar tunings, the silver-lining solution to the polio damage to her hand. The percussive complexity of her piano style, sparring with her switchback vocal chicanery needs no orchestral embellishment. There is not an ounce of fat on this record anywhere. It's just her and you. In your room. In your head.

And my God, it is heart-rending. On first listen, Kris Kristofferson told Joni Mitchell, "Jesus, Joni, save something for yourself." Of course, he and the Laurel Canyon musical community recognised who the subjects were and thought she'd sold them out. She felt she'd become so transparent to the media's prurient and misogynist scrutiny of her rock'n'roll love life, she might as well use the album as a catharsis. So, *Blue* is a blunt biographical outpouring of love, bitterness, rage, sarcasm, hope, vulnerability, guilt, loss and desperation. It communicates in such a naked, focussed way, only the coldest heart couldn't feel its arrows.

Of course, as an eleven-year-old, I just heard invented stories about invented people. I didn't know or care that 'Blue' was James Taylor, 'My Old Man' was Graham Nash or 'Little Green' was her lost daughter. I didn't know a Sunset Pig was a Hollywood cop or the redneck on the Grecian Isle was some guy called Cary she'd picked up on her European sojourn. No, the stories were mine to imagine with. Each was depicted in fine outline by her flawless lyrical eloquence for me alone. I wallowed in every phrase. I would defy anyone to listen to 'The Last Time I Saw Richard' and not experience the visceral roller-coaster overwhelm of the woman hiding behind bottles in a dark cafés, mulling bitterly over lost love. But I didn't care who Richard was or whether the woman was Joni. I was living that anguish through her.

Fifty years on, it is still that exquisite pain I seek out in moments of melancholy and isolation. There is something so comforting in knowing that she understands my angst, my fears. Just as it was for her, listening to *Blue* is a catharsis in moments of trouble.

My mother said to me recently that I introduced her to Joni, but I didn't. She bought *Blue* when it came out. She used to sing 'Little Green' to me, equally unaware that it was about a daughter that Joni felt she could not adequately mother, who she gave away. I sang it with her and she welled up. Whatever Joni's story behind that song, or any of the songs on *Blue*, they belong to the listener. That, surely, is the greatest gift a songwriter can give her audience.

David Bowie, *Hunky Dory* (1971)

Garry O'Neill (author, *Where Were You? Dublin Youth Culture & Street Style 1950-2000*)

Facebook top 10 album selections, although interesting, some were evidently predictable; others wholesomely diverse and surprising. I have three, probably equally predictable too as they jostle and traded top spot intermittently over mood and age, constructing a snapshot of life before 18. Reflective, energizing and spiritually uplifting, if that sounds like an eager Maynooth College conscript, alas it's merely the feelings induced by three very different but hugely influential records. What's number one today?

1970s Dublin. Music is constant as a kid. Radio, television and a black Bush record player. Dad sings at home, Perry Como and Johnny Cash. Nobody plays an instrument. Ms Fitzpatrick, my senior infant schoolteacher in 1973, introduces me to live music. Singing with an accompanying jaunty, lilting style of piano playing – Mrs Mills meets Winifred Atwell – dancing a merry jig atop foot pedals as hammers pound strings. Resonating and reverberated, my minor chest cavity hit but feeling no pain, a physical musical awakening, which comes full circle at a future reggae sound system night. That particular piano sound would surface at home, regularly, throughout the '70s on one LP in particular.

The gleam of glam fades, new music escapades, national security inhales, cultural juggernaut impales. Older corner boys are over Roxy, T.Rex and The Sweet; mired is a Gallagher-Lizzy-AC/DC rock axis. Then, a newer wave, Rrrright now. 1977 punk debuts are lent, swapped, broken, rebought, repeat. I loved The Stranglers' keyboard sounds and the reedy, thinny production of the first Clash LP.

Get off your arse, DIY, biro band names on jacket, the energy of youth. Released two months shy of my tenth birthday, the Sex Pistols' *Never Mind the Bollocks* proved, as did punk itself, massively influential. Shaping teen and adult attitude alike, leaving an indelible impact, a hugely important record that still burns bright, invigorating and intoxicating, summoning streams of invincibility, vital vitriol, exuding a lexicon of energised youth.

The intro to Ian Dury's 'Plaistow Patricia' from his *New Boots and Panties!!* LP, seemed almost music hall compared to the arrival of Rotten's yelping, venomous fucks on 'Bodies'. Claustrophobia and paranoia, council tenancy and cheap essential scenery, anarchy and insanity, cheap comment and blind acceptance, throbbing squirm and the fascist regime.... Vacant, liar, faggot,

abortion, lazy, destroy. A chucked-in-the-deep end listen. Effective, absurd. Oh to be 10 years old again. I loved chart-stringed pop reggae of the early '70s, so roots/dub were a natural successor, striding hand-in-hand with punk throughout adolescence. There's many a favourite – Culture's *Two Sevens Clash*; the psychedelic soul of George Faith's *To Be a Lover* – then sometime in late 1981, a BASF C60 cassette tape arrived home containing quite possibly the greatest reggae LP ever made: step forward The Congos' *Heart of the Congos*.

A true appreciation of it unfurls in an appropriate loud setting during summer '85. The Road Rockers biker group's regular Saturday night session in The Glimmerman pub, Upper Clanbrassil Street. The LP is played near in full on those nights, through decent, large (possibly Wharfedale) speakers, in a revered, almost spiritual, appraisal by the DJ Joey Murtagh.

Lost in a heavy trance-like stone, absorbed in a blanket of Lee Perry's earthly, dense, sticky Black Ark production rhythms, solid foundations for the group's mesmerizing falsetto/tenor/baritone harmonizing interplay of Rasta reasoning and Old Testament lyrics. Noah's sugar-pan, seven golden candlesticks, 30 pieces of silver, Daniel in the lion's den. The record leaves, as music sometimes does, a deeply profound, spiritual comforting and awareness that continues unabated into year 54. Play on.

Beatles/Stones record spins dissipate; a cosmic hippie dude rules the roost, wham bam pre-glam. As Pistols and Congos trade blows for second spot, today's top spot LP is the first album I ever liked in-full. Continually and exhaustively spun at home pre-glam, post-Ziggy, on and over the peaks of punk and beyond lays David Bowie's *Hunky Dory*. By age eight in 1976, the LP is firmly embedded. Songwriting and characters. A bitch, some brothers, a baby and pretty things/ghouls. Warhol, Zimmerman, Garbo and Crowley, what are these things? Who are these people? I loved art, the record/cover are regularly rescanned, the pink hues of flesh and yellow hair, those French bags, the handwriting, that vivid orange label, RCA Victor, stereo, A GEM PRODUCTION, Ken Scott – assisted by the actor.

False start/laughter on *'Andy Warhol'*, why did he leave that in? I'd ask over and over, nobody knew. Chameleon, comedian, Corinthian and caricature, for sure. *'Quicksand'* felt somewhat personal, resonating strongly having lost my eldest brother David to a drowning accident in '71. In essence, the LP is the most reflective/personal album of choice. Bowie and Wakeman's piano parts were a huge draw, alluring both then and now, transporting me back to Ms Fitzpatrick's classroom. My Mam dug Bowie. We all did. Always there, but not there, overtly

commercial and non-commercial, zig-zagging Starman, Stardust and Blackstar. Knowledge comes with death's release... indeed.

Slade, *Slade Alive!* (1972)

Andy Riff (The Dark)

The first album I bought was *Slade Alive!*, released in March 1972. It was recorded on 19th to 21st October in 1971 at Command studios, 201 Piccadilly London W.1. UK. Produced by Chas Chandler, it remained in the charts for 58 weeks, reaching No 2. It contains three original songs plus cover versions.

Before this I had bought *'Coz I Luv You'* by Slade, their first No. 1 single, which stayed at No. 1 in the charts for 4 weeks. I liked the album because it sounded so good, the best live album I had ever heard at the time. It captured the gigs' atmosphere and what Slade were all about. Even now it takes me back and reminds me of how that kind of music made you feel good, and it still sounds as good now as it did then. This album made me want to start a band myself, and to achieve things with my own band.

It's still well worth listening to now because Slade wrote great songs and were one of the biggest bands of the seventies. They had great stompers like *'Cum On Feel The Noize'* and *'Mama Weer All Crazee Now'* to name a few. They're still played and enjoyed today – Oasis covered *'Cum On Feel The Noize'*.

I met Don Powell in the Ship pub, in Waldorf Street in 1980 whilst having a drink. We were playing at the Marquee supporting The Vibrators. I said to one of my band members "that's Don Powell over there". I went over and told Don that we were playing at the Marquee that night. I invited him to come along but he couldn't come because he was legless. He asked who my band was, and I told him: The Dark. He wished me all the best of luck in the world. I told him I was a massive Slade fan and that I had their first album. *Beginnings* by Ambrose Slade.

He replied, "I played on that – but I don't even have a copy myself".

Thin Lizzy, *'Whiskey in the Jar'* (1972)

Ted Carroll (Chiswick Records and Ace Records)

I could not write about my favourite records without mentioning *'Whiskey in the Jar'*, the old Irish folk song adopted by Thin Lizzy to become their very first hit record. Philip Lynott's musical history included a spell after he left Skid Row in 1969 performing some of his early compositions while accompanying himself on acoustic guitar in Dublin pubs and folk clubs. It is from this period that *'Whiskey*

in the Jar' originates. Fast forward approximately three years to when Thin Lizzy were slogging around the UK rock circuit as a three-piece, looking for a break. By this time Phil had become proficient on bass guitar and the band had improved their stagecraft and were building up a devoted following. At this point to add variety to the set, they began to feature *'Whiskey in the Jar'* with Phil playing acoustic guitar instead of bass.

Meanwhile the band's record label Decca wasn't showing much enthusiasm for a third album, so Chris Morrison and I approached Frank Rogers, Thin Lizzy's recording manager at Decca and it was agreed that Lizzy would just record a single for Decca and if it was not successful, we could secure an early release from the Decca contract. A recording date was set for September 1972 and Thin Lizzy started rehearsing the two songs that they were planning to record. The A side was to be a heavy melodic rock song of Phil's called *'Black Boys on the Corner'* and Phil suggested that they might record *'Whiskey in the Jar'* for the B side.

I turned up at the final rehearsal before the band was due to go in the studio and they ran through both songs. When Lizzy got through playing *'Whiskey in the Jar'*, Phil asked me what I thought. I said that if the band could go in the studio a week later and play it "just like you have now" it might well be a hit. Eric's incredibly catchy guitar figure repeated twice on the intro and his flowing guitar solo in the middle eight complimented Phil's hoarse vocals so perfectly that the combination seemed irresistible. In fact everything worked out fine, Lizzy went into Decca's state-of-the-art studio in Tollington Park with Nick Tauber producing and Derek Varnals* engineering and *'Whiskey'* came out sounding like a possible hit.

On 3 November, Lizzy set off on a 20-date UK tour of major venues supporting Slade and the *'Whiskey in the Jar'* single was released on the same day. It took six weeks until mid-December, before the record picked up its first play on BBC Radio One. Just after this Lizzy left to undertake a three week Irish tour and they arrived in Dublin to find that their single was No. 1 in the Irish charts, thanks to strong play on Radio Éireann and Radio Luxembourg.

Chris Morrison and I decided that we should re-promote the record at Radio One, immediately after Christmas. I asked Tim Booth (our pal from Doctor Strangely Strange) to produce some artwork to help promote the record. Tim who was a talented commercial artist created a cartoon strip of the *'Whiskey'* lyrics, showing Phil as the Captain Farrell character and he also produced some artwork identical to the label on the whiskey bottle that Phil was holding in the cartoon. We bought about 40 'Baby Powers' (miniature bottles of whiskey), and

soaked them in warm water to remove the Power's label and replaced that with the special label from the cartoon.

We re-serviced all the BBC producers & DJs, as well as Capitol Radio and some local radio stations, with a special package with the radio play version of "*'Whiskey in the Jar'* [3:34], Thin Lizzy bio. and photo, cartoon of the lyrics and the miniature bottle of whiskey. Our plugger mentioned that the record was No. 1 in Ireland and immediately we started picking up lots of airplay on Radio One and "*'Whiskey'*" began to clamber up the charts, eventually peaking at No.6 in the UK. Thin Lizzy made a couple of appearances on *Top of the Pops* and then the record commenced climbing the charts in other parts of Europe where they were doing TV spots. *'Whiskey in the Jar'* in addition to the UK and Ireland, was released in Holland, Belgium, France, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Denmark, USA, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Greece, Yugoslavia,, Italy, South Africa, Mexico and Rhodesia and the single charted at No.7 in Germany, 14 in Belgium and 12 in Sweden.

A couple of footnotes:

The released version of *'Whiskey in the Jar'* [52303] lasts for 5 minutes and 32 seconds, whereas the promotion copy for radio play [52304] last for just 3 minutes and 34 seconds, still pretty long for a radio play single. Listening back in the studio we realised that at over 5 minutes, the record would never get played on the radio, so an edited version was produced, with most of Eric's guitar solo in the middle removed and a few other tiny snips.

*Derek Varnals was one of Decca's leading studio engineers and worked on many hit singles apart from *'Whiskey in the Jar'*, including *'Shout'* by Lulu and *'Nights in White Satin'* by The Moody Blues. Derek also engineered sessions with John Mayall, Caravan, Keef Hartley, Mellow Candle, The Flirtations, East of Eden, The Zombies, Billie Davis, Them and many other Decca artists.

Roxy Music, *'Virginia Plain'* (1972)

Paul Simpson (Teardrop Explodes, Wild Swans, Skyray)

August, 1972. I'm sitting near the back of the chemistry lab in Deyes Lane Secondary Modern School trying to avoid being gassed or set on fire by class maniacs Stephen Topping and "Woolly" Wolstenholme. I'm listening to Radio One on a palm-sized battery-powered radio hidden in the inside breast pocket of my blazer. There's a wire running up my sleeve, the earpiece hidden from view by my cupped hand. I'm lost in a complicated fantasy involving Alison Wright, the aquiline-nosed South Asian girl with the shortest skirt and highest platform soles in school.

Suddenly I'm zapped back into reality by the strangest, most exciting music I've heard up until this point in my young life. It's like kitsch 1950s

cartoon space-age music and I can't quite believe what I'm hearing. Just as I'm beginning to get my head around its simple complexity, the record finishes abruptly on an unaccompanied vocal. "What's her name? Virginia Plain." I'm speechless, looking wildly about the room for someone – anyone – with whom I can share this epiphany. But no one else has heard it. My heart is beating faster than it was and no other record the DJ plays can match the pop thrill of those few moments. Roxy Music, Roxy Music, Roxy Music.

Chicory Tip, 'Son of My Father' (1972)

Graham Fellows (Jilted John)

This song blew me and my mates at school away when we first heard it in 1972. Like 'Little Willy' by The Sweet, and even 'Chirpy Chirpy, Cheep Cheep', I knew it was rubbish, but great rubbish, and it stirred something powerful in my adolescent dustbin brain. It started sparsely – De de duh de de duh – I'd not heard such a hooky riff since 'Sugar Sugar' by The Archies, and it was played on an actual synthesiser (the first time a Mini Moog was used in a pop single, I later heard). The lead vocalist couldn't really sing but it didn't matter – I was waiting for that amazing arpeggiated Moog solo in the middle and then the football chant chorus:

Son of my father/Moulded, I was folded, I was preform-packed/
Son of my father/Commanded, I was branded in a plastic vac.

Years later I discovered the tune was written by Giorgio Moroder and the original lyric was in German, which could explain the slightly odd lyrics. Still – what a cracker, and an intrinsic sound of my youth, reeking of paper rounds, skinny ribbed sweaters and Brut deodorant.

Various Artists, Nuggets: Original Artyfacts from the First Psychedelic Era 1965–1968 (1972)

Michael (Conzo) Connerty (Female Hercules, Afterwardness)

Is it cheating to pick a compilation LP? Anyway, this blew my socks off when I heard it in my teens and most of the tunes on it have not only passed the test of time but remain solid and infinitely reliable musical pals. Hard to know where to start in terms of individual tracks, but why not Roky Erickson's peerless vocal and Tommy Hall's "wubba-wubba" electric jug playing on 'You're Gonna Miss Me', a record that sounds like it was recorded in a cave and is completely otherworldly

at the same time. Does he in fact deeply regret leaving his sweetheart or is this a raucous wail of hitting-the-road liberation? No such doubts as to where the Count Five stand on 'Psychotic Reaction', Drimnagh native Sean Byrne's definitive garage rock (American pronunciation: "garojji") cracker. At the sound of that intro whose ears do not prick up like a dog hearing the postman's bike? Gotta love records with a pretend party going on in the background and The Premiers' 'Farmer John' also kicks off with the following MC/audience exchange: "Has anybody seen Kosher Pickle Harry? No! If you see him tell him that Herbert is looking for him.... Ok ladies and gentlemen, here we go: The Premiers!"

It's a double album, and there really aren't many duds, which, in the context of the sub-genre of obscure 1960s comps that this LP singlehandedly initiated, is quite an achievement (though I could definitely live without 'Run, Run, Run' by The Third Rail). A small complaint would be the entirely unsuitable Grateful Dead-esque cover art, but sure what can you do? (The reissue art is even worse.) There's a real chance that if the great Lenny Kaye hadn't had the brainwave of putting this collection together in 1976, many of these tunes by the likes of The Chocolate Watchband, The Standells and The Electric Prunes would have been consigned to history's dustbin, or at least been inaccessible to me in 1980s Dublin. They'd all have been rediscovered by now of course when there is virtually no corner of the recorded musical cosmos that hasn't been given a shot in the arm and fresh re-exposure. This was one of the first records to do that kind of archaeological dig back then though, and thank Christ for its existence! Without it I would not have heard the excessively plaintive harmonica that underscores 'Moultly' from The Barbarians, telling the true story of how he overcame the loss of his hand (to a homemade pipe bomb in his teens) to become a drummer: "maybe you think you're a little different or strange – listen to me now, 'cos I've been through it all." And what about 'Pushin' Too Hard' by The Seeds? More frantic angst of the "hey-just-leave-me-alone!" variety and another top-notch vocal performance. And Nazz's: 'Open My Eyes' – Todd Rungren's first single, way over-produced compared to everything else on here – and fantastic! And The Leaves' vigorous rendition of 'Hey Joe'. And The Shadows of Knight. I could go on....

Neil Young, Harvest (1972)

Joolz Denby (artist and author – *Wild Thing*, etc.)

I first heard *Harvest* when I was hanging around in the town's "poster shop" – a big thing in the 1970s – attempting to physically absorb the Fillmore East posters

in a gormless arty teenage way. I was obsessed with drawing and poetry to the point where not much else could attract my attention and the kind hippies who ran the little shop let me sit around day after day inhaling the art. They were very stoned. One day – it was a cold bright day with a white winter sun high in the hard blue sky – I was as usual in the shop, wearing my father’s old ankle-length army greatcoat which had been altered to fit me, while the cool light flittered in through the long narrow windows and refracted off the glass wind chime hanging by the brass till. My attention was on the big Doors calligraphic poster as I sat on the low, wide windowsill scattered with embroidered cushions.

Then there was the click and whirring scratch of a needle dropped onto vinyl and a voice, not a polished rock or pop voice, but a ragged, real voice, sang a ballad that should have been an easy-going country blues, but done by that voice had a timeless bittersweet edge of melancholy and yearning that stopped me dead. Myself and the hippie listened to the album all the way through that afternoon. Customers were shushed, other hippies came in and stayed, no one interrupted the music. There was a respect and veneration for the art that stopped idle chatter. The immediacy and raw but elevated emotions in the songs made me cry, sniffing into the thick khaki wool of my coat sleeve and even the hippie wiped his eyes at *‘Needle and the Damage Done’*. It was as far from the strutting macho cock rock or slick hollow bubble pop that I’d known before as it was possible to be. Soon afterwards a boy who was trying to get my attention bought me a copy of the album and I was grateful but annoyed he’d inscribed it with his name and a sappy dedication. This was real art, real creation. It wasn’t to be made ordinary by “love you loads” and a row of x’s. I was an arrogant girl.

And still, at 67, every time I load the record player with my third copy of *Harvest* I feel the same squeeze in my chest, hear the sharp tinkle of the glass chimes, smell the damp wool and patchouli, see the white fractured light bleaching the psychedelic colours on the Doors and Hendrix posters hung on the wall. I feel my youth stitching through my old veins and I remember knowing for the first time what genuine talent that bowed to no one, that transcended time and fashion, really was. My life as an artist has been an attempt to walk that path, to break things apart, tear them down in order to make them again, to make them different, to hold up a mirror to the jaded gaze and say, “This is real.” *Harvest* made me a music fan, it made me understand music as power and it made me know what, when the time came, I had to do in music and the execrable tedious pit of the music industry. It gave me heart. It gave me courage. I am forever grateful.

David Bowie, ‘Starman’ (1972)

Lee McFadden (Alternative TV, Minny Pops, Swell Maps, C21, Cult Figures, Television Personalities)

I was born at the beginning of 1967. My parents told me that music was ingrained in me at a very early age. When I was about 2 or 3 they would give me a pile of singles – and ask me to pick out the one they suggested – I would get it right each time. My Uncle suggested that it may be to do with the colours of the labels – so Mum and Dad did the same thing where every single’s label was blue. I still managed to complete the task – nobody ever figured out how.

When I was five Mum and Dad knew I was a fan of Rupert The Bear – and Jackie Lee’s theme of the programme was in the charts and was going to appear on *Top Of The Pops*. After she finished I carried on watching – and saw the famous performance of David Bowie singing ‘Starman’. I was transfixed by his appearance and the melody hooked me instantly. By the time I was 9 I owned 10 Bowie albums – and to varying degrees stayed a fan until his death. Tears formed in my eyes when I heard the news on the morning of 11 January, 2016.

The interest in music was already there at 5 – but that view of “Starman” made me the music enthusiast I am today – and basically shaped my life. I still have an attraction towards melodic songs with somehow off-kilter lyrics – something a little bit off the beaten track. “Starman” still fulfils that premise. It is quite simply my favourite song – and always will be. It’s more than a song. It’s a signpost to my life.

David Bowie, *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* (1972)

Cynthia Sley (Bush Tetras)

I was 15 (October 1972) when I bought the David Bowie record, *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*. I remember that my friend, Olga, showed me the record first. She brought it over to my house one night and I took a look at this alien man on the cover ... gorgeous, androgynous rocker with his guitar slung over his shoulder standing in a dark, wet, city street. Full of mystery and sex appeal. I almost fell in love before I even heard a song. She put it on the turntable and I was immediately transfixed. I only heard side one at her house since my mom was home and thought it was a bit too loud. Olga said she’d be going to see them play in Cleveland. I begged to join her. I begged my parents to let me go. It would be my first rock concert ever. My life depended on it. So

that weekend I took my allowance to the record store and bought it. I had lots of Motown singles and my older sisters had turned me onto The Beatles, the Stones, Led Zeppelin, but this was different. This was mine! I'll never forget taking off the wrapper and sliding that vinyl on the turntable. Over and over I'd play both sides, because really both sides are masterpieces, and together they turned me onto this alternate universe of weirdos and profound loneliness. I finally felt like I belonged. Cleveland can be a very alienating place to grow up when you don't fit in anywhere. I thought... Wow, others feel like me, like they were guiding me to fly my freak flag. David could never sit in the living room with my parents! By the time I went to the show at Cleveland Public Theater in November, I had memorized all the words. I wore my coolest threads. I hung over the balcony screaming, "Wham Bam! Thank you Ma'am!" with all the other screaming masses. It was packed. His hair was bright, bright orange. Mick's was bright, bright yellow. The whole band wore outfits that were so outrageous. It was the whole package! The album took on a life force that night and after that, I continued to play it to death. I wore it out. I was and am a fanatical fan of his music, but that album has a precious place in my heart. It helped make me who I am today. And I continue to let my freak flag fly.

Lou Reed, *Transformer* (1972)

Pete Holiday (Radiators, Trouble Pilgrims)

By 1972, the glam rock era had exploded from a single glitter teardrop under Marc Bolan's eye on *Top of the Pops*, to a fully fledged youth subculture. Bolan and Bowie were finally basking in the critical mass adoration they had worked hard to achieve. Bolan, from the hippy underground of acoustic guitars and crossed legged performances; Bowie, a tunesmith, with a range of significant hairstyles indelibly linked to his latest adventure.

It was Bowie's interest in gender fluidity that brought him to the attention of the New York social elite. Bowie's connection with Reed developed via his first visit to Warhol's Factory. Bowie's homage to Warhol appeared soon after on the *Hunky Dory* album, while Velvet Underground songs '*White Light/White Heat*' and '*Waiting for The Man*' became part of the Bowie touring set-list. Bowie, in a benevolent touch, had already offered '*All the Young Dudes*' to Mott the Hoople. Lou Reed, now a cult underground solo star, needed a springboard to the mainstream. Their relationship would be a marriage made in Heaven. Bowie, with (more than) assistance from Mick Ronson, was appointed to produce their RCA label-mate's new album, *Transformer*.

The album is a secret diary of almost voyeuristic proportions, documenting the day and night existence of the special ones. The white-faced black eyed handsome man stares out from the front cover, eyes float past you to the more interesting action behind, on the streets, in the hood, where the brownstones decay and the silkscreen covers the cracks. Boy/girl, girl/boy, no one cares as long as you have a dollar. Side one of the LP sets the daytime activities from the '*Vicious*' "you hit me with a flower, you do it every hour" playfulness through a '*Perfect Day*' spent with you, along to a '*Walk on The Wild Side*' as the night falls. Side two deals with the '*Make Up*' preparation through to the telephone gossip to find out who did what to whom to the exhausted come down on '*Goodnight Ladies*'.

The record stands out for me because of its "day in the life" approach, the interconnect between the events and characters and the musicality of the arrangements that have stood the test of time. I return to *Transformer* often and remain faithful and supportive of its intention to shine a light on the fact that we all have a soul behind the mask.

Jimmy Cliff, *The Harder They Come* (original soundtrack recording) (1972)

Chris Bald (Embrace, The Faith, Ignition)

I first discovered this album as a twelve-year-old: a friend's older brother had it. I had heard calypso music, but reggae was a whole new thing. I didn't understand at first that it was multiple artists. I was instantly mesmerized by the sounds I was hearing. It was the first time that real life was being discussed in the music I was listening to. It was also an introduction to a different culture in a deeper way than history lessons. To put some perspective on my mindset at the time, ABBA and Elton John were my current radio favourites. This was in middle class America in 1976 – it wasn't until I found punk a few years later, that I found the kind of truth in music and lyrics again.

It was also the seed of my love of reggae music that has kept growing as I have. It's one of the few records that has remained a constant in my life. I went through mainstream radio rock, new wave, prog rock and punk with these songs in my heart. I didn't see the movie until my later teenage years, again an education in culture and reality. I can't listen to it without a newsreel of emotions mixed with history of the world running through my brain.

I think that of any album I have ever heard, this one opened up more perspectives about life in these times. I had grown up with very little religion in my life, these songs made me aware of faith and hope. Not that it made me want

to go to church or believe in god, just the idea that sometimes it takes something else to get through the toughest trials of living. It has remained an inspiration to me and helped me get through some of the darkest moments of my life. There is a joy in the music that offered respite from starkness of the life described in the words. I don't know what my life would be without this selection of tunes playing in my heart, but I do know that I feel lucky to have found it so young.

David Bowie, 'The Jean Genie' (1972)

Pete Jones (PiL, Department S, Cowboys International, Brian Brain)

As 1972 drew to a close, there I was, a shy, skinny and rather spotty fifteen-year-old desperately trying to figure out what the world was all about, pathetically trying to get my leg over and finding it all terribly confusing. Then, 'The Jean Genie' was released, by a superstar of the greatest magnitude and who I came to adore for the rest of his – and probably my – life. I went out and bought the single with my schoolmates, Tony and Dave. We took it back to my house and placed it on the Dancette. We must have played it 15 or 20 times on the trot, parading around the front room, imitating Bowie's moves with what we thought was great aplomb. In reality, just kids prancing about. My friends and I had formed a band that year and called ourselves Cosmosis, influenced in part by Bowie's connection with the Universe. We were gonna be huge! But of course, we weren't.

For me, 'The Jean Genie' is a perfect pop song: with Mick Ronson in the driving seat, Bowie wound his unfathomable lyrics round the Woody and Bolder pulsing beat, bloody marvellous. Dave and I had an argument about whether it was "chimney stacks" or "Jimmy's stacks" that Bowie proclaimed love for in the second line. I was right of course – it was "chimney stacks". The song spent the next 13 weeks in the UK chart, only pipped from the top spot by some precocious Long-Haired Lover From Liverpool, in itself a tragedy. I didn't care, I had my copy, I played it to death and of course, went out and bought *Aladdin Sane* the following year. I saw Bowie at Earl's Court that year too, my first proper concert, and it was the best thing I'd ever experienced in my life. The overnight stay at the Earl's Court youth hostel wasn't so great, but that's another story.

Bowie has been a lifelong influence on me and he certainly helped shaped my world view as a young man while I struggled to make my way amongst the rock'n'roll circus. A great songwriter, a great showman, a unique talent that we'll never see the like of again. Thank you for everything, David Robert Jones.

Alice Cooper, *School's Out* (1972)

The Shend (Anzahlung, The Cravats, Very Things)

When asked to do this, I did consider naming a totally made-up LP that no one had ever heard of so folk would think I'm really hep and obscure but on reflection that would have involved being a pillock and no doubt someone would still say Bowel Meringue's *Wardrobe Sock* came out in '68, not '69 so instead I'm going for Alice Cooper's *School's Out* from 1972 because I'm really, really old.

To an impressionable fourteen-year-old this was fantastic. The single was out as the school summer hols approached and even though I was more interested in getting new pedals for my bicycle than overthrowing the system at that juncture of my life, the whole LP seemed to stick a finger up at everything society held dear in a gloriously uplifting way. It annoyed the hell out of my parents – he had a girl's name, they wore make up and the whole band looked like they'd just survived an explosion in a clown factory. 'Luney Tune' had this creepy menace to it and 'Public Animal #9' was a whole Cagney film in a song. In fact, every track is a story backed by incredible music from an incredible band. Reworking *West Side Story* on 'Gutter Cat vs. The Jets' was an act of genius and I still sing the words silently in my head sometimes when cheesed off in public.

Producer Bob Ezrin shaped the whole thing to perfection and Alice should never have got rid of that original band, or started playing golf come to think about it, but I still own my original copy (never got the highly flammable paper panties with mine, sadly) and that No. 1 single, 'School's Out' still gets a blast at least once a month here at Shend Towers.

Alice Cooper, *Billion Dollar Babies* (1973)

T.P. Burgess (Ruefrefx)

I love the dead before they're cold
 Their bluing flesh for me to hold
 Cadaver eyes upon me see... nothing.
 – 'I Love the Dead'

Picture the scene. The school room of an inner-city, Belfast secondary, in 1973, at the height of The Troubles. 9.15am, Monday morning. The harassed form teacher is calling the roll and trying to pacify a classroom full of hormone-soaked thirteen-year-olds: "Anderson..." "Here Sir." Arnold..." "Here Sir." "Bailey..." "Here Sir." "Bunting..." "Here Sir." "Burgess..." "Burgess...?" I was sitting in the front row, directly in front of him. But I wasn't really there. I had been listening

clandestinely all night, to Alice Cooper's *Billion Dollar Babies* and particularly his outrageous tongue-in-cheek paean to necrophilia, '*I Love the Dead*'. The song ends with an increasingly aroused Coop reaching climax with his deceased amor!

Long before punk rock, it was perhaps the most overtly, deliberately offensive recording I had ever heard. And I loved it. So much so, that I had memorised the lyric and, unbeknownst to my half-awake self, was now reciting it aloud as the hubbub of the attendance ritual continued all around me.

I love the dead before they rise/No farewells, No goodbyes/I never
even knew your now-rotting face./While friends and lovers mourn
your silly grave/I have other uses for you, darling.

I can still recall the look of disbelief and abject disgust on Mr Cameron's face! The album itself was "all killer, no filler" and immediately went to No. 1 in both the United Kingdom and United States. The singles '*Elected*', '*Hello Hooray*', '*Billion Dollar Babies*' and '*No More Mr. Nice Guy*', all charted. The band – supplemented by the brilliant guitar work of Steve Hunter and Dick Wagner and produced by the sublime Bob Ezrin – were seldom better.

I always have trouble picking a "favourite" album. Like a movie or novel, there are so many sub-genres to take into consideration. I could comfortably pick a different favourite record from the punk, blues, rock, prog, country, folk, alternative, or indie canon. But Alice Cooper's *Billion Dollar Babies* was arguably where it all began.

Iggy and The Stooges, *Raw Power* (1973)

Al Quint (Suburban Voice)

It was the summer of 1976 and I was in the middle of a somewhat lonely adolescence. I spent a lot of time in my room listening to records and devouring music magazines and books like *Circus* and *Creem*. I had a paperback book called *Rock Revolution*, about different genres and eras in rock. There was one chapter called 'The Heavy Metal Kids' written by the legendary Lester Bangs. His definition of heavy metal was pretty broad – he considered The Velvet Underground's *White Light/White Heat* one of the "definitive heavy metal statements". He also mentioned Blue Öyster Cult, the MC5 and Iggy and the Stooges. It definitely piqued my interest and I ended up checking out all of those bands over time. Bangs offered very high praise for The Stooges' *Raw Power* and I was lucky enough to come across a copy of it at a head shop in Lynn, MA called Headlines Boutique. What was a head shop, you ask? A place

where they sold drug paraphernalia – bongos, rolling papers, etc, along with the requisite tapestries, T-shirts (I got a light-blue Kiss shirt where the logo was an iron-on transfer there in 1977). I can still remember the smell of incense. Those stores disappeared when Governor Ed King, a right-wing Democrat (he eventually became a Republican) signed a Bill that outlawed the selling of bongos, etc, in Massachusetts.

Headlines had a small crate of used records on the floor. I flipped through them and came across an LP with a strange-looking guy on the front cover. I flip it over and the white dripping letters say Iggy and The Stooges – *Raw Power*. My mind clicks that this is the Iggy I'd just been reading about. I asked the clerk if I could hear a bit of it. The minute I heard the opening chords to '*Search and Destroy*' I was sold. He skipped from one track to another – "Here's a quieter one" which was '*Gimme Danger*' or maybe it was '*I Need Somebody*'. So I pulled \$3 (can't remember if I paid sales tax) out of my pocket and the record was mine. Best \$3 I ever spent.

I don't remember how many times I played that record over the first few weeks I owned it but it was a lot. It was absolutely vicious-sounding – James Williamson's guitar lashing out like a snake's tongue and Iggy's seething, sometimes sensual/sensuous vocals. It was pure overkill. And then there was Bowie's production, which was crude and tinny but that's also lent to its uniqueness. I remember '*Gimme Danger*' being used effectively in the Mad Magazine movie *Up the Academy*, every time the villainous commanding officer entered the room. There was the surging title track, with a plinking piano meshing perfectly with the rhythm. There was the ass-shaking '*Shake Appeal*' (duh). Then there was the incendiary conclusion, '*Death Trip*'. And then there's one of the greatest opening lines in rock'n'roll history on one of the greatest songs in rock'n'roll history, '*Search and Destroy*' – "I'm a streetwalkin' cheetah with a heart full of napalm." Genius-level stuff.

Raw Power was unlike any album I'd heard up to that point. I didn't realise it at the time and never really thought about it for many years but *Raw Power* was the first punk record I owned. At the time, I thought it was good hard-rock album but I wasn't aware of punk yet. And since it came out in 1973, they were well ahead of the curve. Whatever the case, it completely changed my perspective about rock'n'roll. I wanted to hear more music that was edgier and dangerous-sounding. Fortunately, punk came along for me at just the right time, about a year later.

My \$3 copy is beat-to-shit and the cover has a lot of ring wear. I do have three different CDs and a cassette. I don't have it on eight-track, though. I'm hoping

that, since next year is the 50th anniversary of its release (!), they'll do some sort of deluxe LP package, in the meantime, my beat-to-shit copy will have to do.

John Cale, *Paris 1919* (1973)

Jon Langford (Three Johns, The Mekons, Waco Brothers, Skull Orchard)

Hard not to be embarrassed by the gaps in our youthful knowledge. First day I arrived at Leeds University in October 1976 I met Andy and Chalkie who would eventually front our punk band The Mekons. They were my Freshers group leaders and were supposed to show me all the facilities and points of interest on the sprawling *Clockwork Orange* campus. Of course, we just went to the pub and Andy told me how his mate Andy Gill was forming a band that was going to be a cross between Dr. Feelgood and the Velvet Underground. They were looking for a drummer and I might consider getting my drumkit shipped up from Wales pretty sharpish as punk was about to happen.

I loved the Feelgoods (having seen them on *The Geordie Scene*, a regional ITV music show that somehow popped onto our screens in Newport right in the middle of the prog-rock hippy hangover that blighted my teenage years) but had no clear idea who The Velvet Underground were or what they sounded like. Which was odd, 'cos I knew about Lou Reed via Bowie and *'Walk on the Wild Side'* but didn't make the connection. Stranger still, I was fully aware of John Cale having heard his lovely, weird, war ballad *'Half Past France'* sung at the folk club down by the docks in my hometown, years before. I'd asked the singer what it was and finally traced it back to Cale's album *Paris 1919* which seemed to me to be as Welsh as Dylan Thomas, Chapel or sheep. It is an album of haunting poetic mid-paced anthems that never gave up the slightest hint of Warhol's Manhattan, minimalist classical experimentations, proto-punk or drug-ravaged decadence. Of course I worked out who the Velvets were pretty quick and it blew my mind that John was part of all that.

The early Gang of Four, whom I did not join, save for one weird gig at the Russell Club in Manchester, did a great version of *'Sweet Jane'* that set me straight. Mekon Sally Timms covered *'Half Past France'* on a solo record I played on in the '90s and it's a song I still whip out now and then when circumstances require. It's one of the best songs I've ever heard mostly because it remains perpetually mysterious to me.

I was lucky enough to meet John Cale at a benefit gig we played together in Austin Texas and for some reason I was terrified to meet him. Turns out my Mum

and Dad's next door neighbour was his cousin, so we had much to talk about and he was not scary at all. I told him how I first heard his music in a Welsh folk club butted up next to *'The Wild Rover'* and *'Streets of London'*. He seemed unsurprised.

The Who, *Quadrophenia* (1973)

Matt Pinfield (MTV *120 Minutes*)

One of many albums that absolutely changed my life was The Who, *Quadrophenia* (original 1973 release). Although it was written as a period piece, rock opera, to rival Pete Townshend's original successful monster that was *Tommy* (as a reflection of mod culture in the early-mid 1960s), it spoke to me as a confused young boy trying to navigate through early puberty, and using rock'n'roll to speak for me to try and understand the world around me. With themes of parental misunderstanding, longing for love and acceptance, feeling awkward and angry, and sometimes sad, it spoke to the young teenager in me. A double album which connected with so many young American male teens – even though it was based on a completely British phenomenon – it was a testament to the emotion and confusion of youth, a precursor to the punk rock that would surface half a decade later.

What all my favourite albums have in common is that they take you on a journey. *Quadrophenia* is a perfect album: Townshend's lyrics and songwriting – his scoring and early use of synthesizers ushered in the '70s with their previous album *Who's Next* – he explored further on this record; John Entwistle's relentless bass attack, which he played like a lead guitar driving the sound with a booming underlying melody; Keith Moon's orchestral bombastic drumming which created the tension and drama like no other drummer could; and, of course, Roger Daltrey's incredible vocal range, going from some of the greatest screams in rock'n'roll history to singing with longing, restraint and beauty.

All these years later, it still resonates with me as an adult. Even though I'm light years away from that confused teen wondering what my place was in the world, the songs and performances simply hold up – a testament to The Who and Pete Townshend's longevity as one of the greatest rock bands of all time.

The Who, *Quadrophenia* (1973)

Justin Sullivan (New Model Army)

I was nine years old when I first heard the Who's *'My Generation'*. My response was to run around the house screaming and doing much air guitar playing and

even more air drumming and planted a kind of ‘fuck you’ punk rock attitude in me forever. From that moment, the Who were always a group that I liked (especially watching Keith Moon on *Ready Steady Go*) but I didn’t really connect with them in the same way again until *Quadrophenia*.

I was a typically confused seventeen-year-old and the album had everything that I wanted and needed – beauty, violence, mystery, melody, sex, pathos, romance, fury and the sound of the sea. It mixed orchestral splendour with rock chaos. Very few bands that could do the chaos thing quite as well as The Who but to be able to combine that with a carefully constructed thematic orchestration (without ever using an actual orchestra) was an astonishing feat. The album made sense of the World that I was growing up into when nothing else did. I remember listening to it repeatedly on the newly acquired family headphones at an unbelievable volume, which almost certainly began the deterioration of my hearing at an early age, but never mind because it saved my soul.

It doesn’t matter that the album is a study of a teenage gang thing that I was too young to have been a part of, because the themes of excitement and alienation are timeless. Neither does it matter that the music is now inevitably accompanied in most people’s heads by images from the film – although I think the film is very good too. There are so few people these days that would attempt such a thing and probably none that could pull it off. Modern recording technology (while in theory making anything possible) would probably bleach the life out of such an enterprise, so the fact that music will never be made like this again only increases its wonder.

The album remains my favourite rock album ever although I don’t listen to it too often. I try not to overuse magic in my life lest it lose its power, but I know it’s always there to go back to – like blood family or a reliable god.

The Who, *Quadrophenia* (1973)

Dave Smalley (Dag Nasty, DYS, All, Down By Law)

And I think to myself: What a wonderful world.

Because writing about, or reading about, or even just thinking about, a favorite album is joy. It brings you back to that moment when you first bought that record, or first heard that one song that drew you in and inspired you and filled you with emotion, happiness, excitement, head-banging power, reflection, whatever else. But then the challenge: how do you possibly narrow it down? It’s the classic variation of the desert-island disc question and all kinds of

permutations come up – well, I’d want a double-album to get more songs to listen to; but, I’d want one with deep lyrics to keep me thoughtful; but maybe one with pure danceability and soothing melody to bring happiness and get you moving on the island; but maybe one album that impacted my life... Each approach leaves you with a different, awesome choice.

So, here’s how I decided which album to choose for this moment – with the caveat that it was a tough call. I thought of dozens of brilliant hardcore and punk albums; I thought of the first Iron Maiden or Judas Priest records; or *Diary of a Madman*; or The (English) Beat or The Specials or The Jam. The Lambrettas’ *Beat Boys in the Jet Age* was a contender, as was The Ramones’ *Rocket to Russia* or the first album by The Clash. I was going to go with Metallica’s *Kill ‘em All* and talk about how that album changed the world and blew the doors off all previous iterations of heavy rock music, and how it still is just one of the most brilliant, exciting, heavy blasts of power ever recorded. And I was going to talk about how DYS used to lift weights to that album, and how I went to see Metallica at the Channel in Boston with the legendary Cliff Burton on bass, I think it was in 1984, and that blazing fury of a show is still in my top three concerts of all time.

But then I thought of the most important albums that really shaped me. And I thought of which one I listened to the most on long drives as a young man who just got his driving licence, in his family’s Fiat Strada cassette deck. Which album I put in my Walkman the most of all. Which one I sat downstairs with the headphones on at the turntable, reading the liner notes and lyrics and being taken on a rollercoaster of life emotions. On reflection it became pretty apparent: it’s the greatest rock record of all time. One that is a story, indeed THE story of youth and rebellion and struggle and maturing. One that was turned into a movie that captured every teenage boy who ever struggled to find himself, who got his heart broken by a girl, and who finally fitfully started to follow his own drumbeat.

That album is *Quadrophenia* by The Who. With the magic musical combination that was Roger Daltrey, Pete Townshend, Keith Moon and John Entwistle – a combo that I’ll put up against Paul, John, Ringo and George, or Mick, Charlie, Keith, etc, or whomever else. With lyrics that jump out and capture what it’s like to be a teenager of any time, any place, any class, even though it’s set in a very specific time, place and class. With bravado that makes you want to take on anyone, not scared of a bloody nose. And with songs that soar to heights only music can take you, via the greatest songwriter of his generation,

and via the four greatest players in their respective roles (yes, you can argue that Hendrix was a better guitarist than Pete, but you can't argue against Pete's overall aura of emotive magic).

Quadrophenia was punk before punk, because it was rebellion and style and musical consistency in 1973, before 1976 and Johnny Rotten, Joey Ramone or Joe Strummer. Indeed, one can argue that the punk rock house we all loved and lived in and continued to add additions to, was built on a foundation of a few breakthrough records of inner rebellion – that list, of course, is a subject for another story and another time. In the interim, though, *Quadrophenia* defined me and thousands of others, and made us thoughtful, passionate players on our individual and collective journeys.

Wings, *Red Rose Speedway* (1973)

Tim Burgess (The Charlatans; broadcaster, Tim's Twitter Listening Party)

By Wings – or, more accurately, by Paul McCartney and Wings. Rumour has it that they added Macca's name on this second Wings outing, thinking that some people weren't aware the ex-Beatle was in the band. Seems hard to believe but label/management folks can get some mighty strange ideas, believe me. I can safely say that I haven't been affected by an album like I have been with *Red Rose Speedway* for at least 10 years – it was released when I was five but it was a good few years later that myself and the album made each other's acquaintance.

We get Romantic Macca via *'My Love'* and *'One More Kiss'* – they both soothe the heart – but it's *'Little Lamb Dragonfly'* that moves me beyond comprehension. It transcends any understanding, but it spoke directly to me, but not just me. My life took tons of weird turns over the last 10 years, driving miles to try to get my baby (now almost 9) to sleep. Only McCartney worked. Only this track worked. In 2020 when touring stopped, this song told me life isn't set at 40 and to write a double album and to call it: *Typical Music*. Who said music doesn't change anything? Thanks Paul. Side two kicks off with the beguiling *'Single Pigeon'* and takes in the mesmerising *'When the Night'*. As a stand-alone album it is incredible by anybody's standards but when you realise that its predecessor *Wild Life* came out only 16 months previously and the follow-up, *Band on the Run*, arrived a mere seven months later, you realise that we really are in the presence of genius.

New York Dolls, *'Personality Crisis'* (1973)

Bernie Furlong (The Golden Horde)

'Personality Crisis' falls into one of several self-defined sub-categories in which I tend to group favourite pieces of music. Songs I want played at my funeral is one such heading, but everyone has a list like that, right?

For *'Personality Crisis'*, the category I'm thinking of is songs with words I've considered getting as a tattoo. A small but exclusive handful of lyrics make up this category. Several songs by The Fall, almost every track on Subway Sect's *What's The Matter Boy?*, *'Oh Bondage, Up Yours'*, of course, and, surprising, even to me, three songs written, or co-written, by Johnny Thunders. Sometime in the mid- to late-1980s, when I was still a member of The Golden Horde, myself, Simon and Des decided to get "Born to Lose" tattoos. The guys followed through but I chickened out. More recently, I've toyed with lines from Heartbreakers' *'It's Not Enough'*, but *'Personality Crisis'* has stayed near the top of the list for years and not just because the lyrics are worthy of being permanently branded on my body. It came into my life courtesy of a compilation album called *New Wave* which came out in 1977, the year I travelled to London to have my life changed by punk rock.

It is odd, perhaps, that I hadn't heard *'Personality Crisis'* before this. After all, the song had been around since 1973 when it first appeared as the opening track on the New York Dolls self-titled debut album. But this was the 1970s and I was a teenager in rural Ireland where, unless you had the advantage of having an older sibling (let's face it, a brother) with a decent record collection, or somehow managed to catch John Peel playing them (not sure if he ever did but I assume he must have) you were in the dark. The song wasn't exactly punk, or certainly not as I'd experienced it in London that summer. It was something else. Grungy, more rock'n'roll, but with guitar playing that reminded me of the Pistols and a vocal that was far more glam rock than anything I knew from the London punk scene. There was something of the Rolling Stones in there too, although that wouldn't have impressed me in 1977. The full-pelt opening guitar riff, with the rinky-dink piano joining in is like a stab of adrenaline into the heart. Johansen's opening vocals screaming: "Ahoouooooo! Yeah Yeah Yeah! No, No, No No, No Nono NO" were both rallying cry and a denial, a statement of intent, right at the start. And then the lyrics come in and what strange lyrics they are.

Well we can't take it this week/And her friends don't want another speech/Hoping for a better day to hear what she's got to say....

I can't say I understood or even now really understand these lyrics but they spoke to me as poetry sometimes does, drawing out feelings, and confusion and longing that I barely understood and could not articulate. I was the "she" in those lyrics. What eighteen- or nineteen-year-old doesn't believe they are having a personality crisis? Back then, it gave me the words to describe my own turmoil, to articulate the inner rage, confusion and sadness I felt.

The song sounded, and still sounds like, what I imagined New York to be in the '70s: wild, exciting, dirty and glamorous. It has the rawness and snottiness of punk combined with the transgressive edge and gender fluidity of glam rock. Whether or not I ever do have its lines inked on my skin '*Personality Crisis*' will remain on my personal playlist and it might just go on that funeral list too.

New York Dolls, *New York Dolls* (1973)

Brian Young (RUDI, The Sabrejets)

"When I say I'm in love, you best believe I'm in love! L-U-V!"

Like every other kid growing up in East Belfast in the 1970s I dreamt of being the next George Best. But one glimpse of Marc Bolan and T.Rex stomping and strutting through '*Jeepster*' on ITV's *Lift Off With Ayshea* and poor Bestie was yesterday's news. It's still my all-time fave 45 and probably always will be! I was hooked! Bowie's iconic gender-bending performance of '*Starman*' on *Top of the Pops* was another gamechanger and through his patronage I was introduced to Lou Reed/The Velvet Underground and Iggy and the Stooges. With the likes of Roxy Music, Mott the Hoople, Slade, Suzi Quatro, Gary Glitter, Mud, Cockney Rebel and The Sweet regularly battling it out in the mainstream charts, it was a great time to be a teenager! But for me the best was yet to come.

Little did I know that when I picked up *Melody Maker* in July '72 to read an interview with Marc Bolan about T.Rex's new album *The Slider*, I was about to discover the band who would change my life forever. Lurking in the back pages was a short article by Roy Hollingsworth on a scruffy looking bunch of Big Apple degenerates: the New York Dolls. As far as I'm aware, this was the first ever write-up in the UK music press about the band and it was love (or should that be LUV?) at first sight! I cut the article out – and still have it! Even though the Dolls didn't have a record deal at this point and I'd not heard a single note they played, I just knew that this was the band for me! From then on I scoured the weekly rags for each and every mention of my new-found scuzzball heroes, heartbroken when original drummer Billy Murcia OD'd during the band's

first visit to London in November '72 but overjoyed when they finally inked a major deal with Mercury Records. At last I'd get to hear what they sounded like! I immediately ordered their first UK 45 '*Jet Boy*' and self-titled debut album from Grahams Record Shop on the Albertbridge Road here in East Belfast. Though the album hit the racks in July '73 in America it wasn't released here until October of the same year, a month before the band were due to return to Europe for a series of live dates and TV appearances. I'd collected all the reviews I could find, filing them away in my ever-expanding Dolls scrapbook. The press was bitterly divided, many dismissing them as talentless faggots, but some of the hipper scribes, like Nick Kent, then at his peak, raved about the record: "The New York Dolls are trash, they play rock'n'roll like sluts and they've just released a record that can proudly stand beside Iggy and the Stooges' *Raw Power* as the only album so far to fully define just exactly where '70s rock should be coming from ... welcome to the faaabulous '70s!" That was good enough for me! And, in hindsight, wasn't he spot on?!

Even before you played the record, the album cover demanded a reaction, dividing opinion and provoking outrage, ridicule and scorn as the Dolls lounged louchely on some sort of fancy sofa/chaise longue, dressed to thrill in all their satin and tat, looking like a bunch of street-tough drag queens out for a rumble that any sane member of the public would cross the street to avoid. But there was nothing fey or camp about this bunch – they looked damn scary! This record most certainly wasn't for the faint hearted! Oh and the cute but stylish lipstick killer logo was perfect for painting onto the back of your favourite jacket too! Mercury, optimistically took out dozens of ads in the press. Some simply reproduced the already controversial album cover but I much preferred the one which featured the band glaring menacingly while frontman Johansen raised his dukes ready for a fight and prepared to take on all-comers. I couldn't wait to play it – but nothing coulda prepared me for the jolt I got when the needle hit the vinyl!

To kick things off, no album ever had a better first track than '*Personality Crisis*'. This is the Dolls at their fiery and feisty best: a streetwise glam racket with pounding drums, wailing guitars, hooks to die for and those killer Dolls '60s girl group trademark backing vocals. Johansen's pithy lyrics are super cool and sophisticated and his vocals sparkling and sensuous. For many people this remains the Dolls' finest work. Second cut '*Looking for a Kiss*' opens with a knowing nod to the Shangri-Las – "When I say I'm in love you best believe I'm in love L-U-V"! More thumping drums, duelling guitars and Johansen's commanding vocals reflect mixed up teenage angst and alienation – unlike all

those other Big Apple slobs he “ain’t lookin’ for no fix...just a little pick-me-up kiss!” Aw shucks! ‘*Vietnamese Baby*’ hurtles out of the traps next, continuing the no holds barred assault on your senses while taking a chilling sideways look at the unwanted side effects of America’s continued involvement in Vietnam. Phew! A change of tack follows with the irresistible ballad ‘*Lonely Planet Boy*’. Written by Davey Jo before he joined the Dolls it’s a melodic paeon to unrequited love – but with a twist! Guitar maestro Johnny Thunders would later rework the guitar riff for his timeless classic ‘*You Can’t Put Your Arms Round a Memory*’. Side one judders to a halt with ‘*Frankenstein (Orig.)*’, presumably titled so no one would mix it up with the self-indulgent tripe by Edgar Winter. Syl penned the music to this six-minute-long streetwise mini-opera – a warning of sorts about the myriad perils and dangerous predators that lay in wait for all those impressionable young kids flocking to New York City in search of kicks and fame. The big apple in this song is rotten to the core. And that’s just side one!!!

Meanwhile, somewhere along the way, I’d answered an ad in the *NME* small ads placed by a certain Steven Morrissey from Stretford, Manchester who was trying to establish a UK fan club for the Dolls. Desperate to impress, I penned a short note claiming that I’d been a fan since the Rick Rivets days. Pure teenage braggadocio! But Steven wrote back immediately demanding to know who Rick Rivets was! (He was the Dolls original guitarist – real name George Fedorcic who later played in The Corpsegrinders, The Brats and The Rick Rivets Band – now sadly deceased.) We became firm penpals, bonded by our love for New York’s finest, exchanging ultra-lengthy impassioned letters celebrating the godlike genius of our Gotham City heroes. For the record, despite what you may read elsewhere, the fan club never did actually get off the ground either. We kept in close contact even after the Dolls split and along the way, he hipped me to all the new bands visiting his hometown – and when Heartbreakers played Manchester on the Anarchy Tour in ‘76 he sent me an original ticket and some photos he’d taken of the band. Apparently he tried to speak to Johnny and Jerry but got tongue tied! Later, in 1981, he gave me one of the first copies of his New York Dolls book published by Babylon Books signed and dedicated with the annotation “originally titled ‘Look Jane Look, See Transsexual Junkies’” and a spiffy photo booth snap of himself. We continued to keep each other posted on our own musical escapades – he came to see RUDI play when we supported The Jam at Manchester Apollo in 1982 and we stayed in touch right up until The Smiths broke real big. I’ve still got dozens of those old letters and can’t resist dipping into them every once in a while.

Planxty, *Planxty* (1973)

Stan Erraught (Stars of Heaven, The Sewing Room)

In 1973, when I was 12, my class in school was brought, one afternoon, to the Savoy Theatre in Galway to see Planxty play an all-ages show. It seems slightly astonishing now, but my school was, as I didn’t realise then, quite progressive for Ireland at the time. We were schooled through Irish, something that, in the complex linguistic politics of the country was often identified with a conservative and insular nationalism but which actually, seen in hindsight, informed a much more liberal and exploratory educational experience than contemporaries of mine recall from their more conventional tuition through English. At any rate, despite the excitement of an afternoon away from the classroom, Planxty, while certainly on my radar, as they would have been for most people in Ireland by then, the year after the release of their debut album, would not have been central to my developing musical identity. I was the child of older parents, already in their 30s when Elvis hit, who were scornful of all popular music, and deeply suspicious and “disappointed” in my growing preoccupation with T.Rex and Bowie and my attempts, to their dismay, to grow my hair, and dress in the flares and platforms uniform of glam-informed teenage male semi-delinquency of the era. For us, Irish folk music, of various kinds, was familiar, but also a bit square.

That show was a revelation. At least some of the effect was down to the sheer excitement of one of my first full-scale live gigs: the volume alone, despite the entirely acoustic instrumentation, was something else. The appearance of the band was also more than a little unsettling: while Galway in 1973 was already beginning to develop a reputation as a hospitable environment for “hippies”, I’m not sure if I had ever seen people quite as hairy or scruffy-looking as this, and certainly not on stage. Bearing in mind that then almost all the Irish acts I would have seen on TV would have come out of the showband milieu that dominated live entertainment and much of the airtime on RTÉ, then a single channel monopoly of Irish TV and radio, and would have worn the “smart” uniforms that were expected in the dancehalls, and the shock of the unkempt can be more easily understood. That show was massively impressive: I was, for one thing, absolutely fascinated by the instrumentation, particularly the hurdy-gurdy that Andy Irvine produced at one point, a fascination that has stayed with me nearly half a century later. Nevertheless, despite purchasing in a sale in Golden Discs (records were expensive!) Christy Moore’s solo record, *Prosperous*, that was almost the rehearsal for the first Planxty album, I didn’t become a fully fledged folkie. When

I did begin to play music a few years later, it was, as is almost universally the case for my generation, spurred by punk.

When I finally did go back to that Planxty record, and their later records, and those of Donal Lunny's subsequent group, The Bothy Band, it was with a recognition and a familiarity that goes back to that earlier live experience and a realisation of exactly how important they were in the Irish music scene within which I was now "professionally" immersed. Much as many rock record collections will include a token *Kind of Blue* or *A Love Supreme* or, perhaps, *What's Going On*, it wasn't unusual, when leafing through other people's record collections in Ireland, when such a thing was possible or acceptable, to come across the striking black and white cover of *Planxty*, nestling among the Rory Gallagher, Bob Marley or The Cure LPs. Not, however, as simply a token folk record for rock fans to demonstrate their breadth of taste: it was, as I will argue, a record that functioned culturally, and even musically, in a similar fashion to many canonical rock records in other territories – and one that is central to the story of Irish music generally in the near half-century since.

The penny dropped for me in conversation with Sean O'Hagan, then of Microdisney, later of the High Llamas, who named it as a favourite, along with, I think, records by Steely Dan, the Beach Boys and Chic. If I recall correctly, he compared the interplay of stringed instruments between Lunny and Irvine – bouzouki, mandola, mandolin, sometimes guitar – to the work of Rodgers and Edwards with the Chic Organisation: one of those analogies that is both unlikely and, once you grasp the grounding of it, unanswerable. Since then, I've never been able to hear Planxty, and particularly that record, as anything other than sui generis: no more bounded by the notion of being a "folk" band than the Beach Boys are surf-rock.

Of course, it is a folk album, unequivocally. Unlike British bands that resemble them in the magnetic influence they exert on rock, such as the Fairports, Pentangle and early Steeleye Span, Planxty never dabbled with electric instruments, nor, apart from the bodhrán, is there any percussion on this record. Nevertheless, it is, in many ways, an album unimaginable without the rock culture of its period. One speculative, but I think supportable, comparison would be with The Band: like *Music from Big Pink*, and perhaps even more, *The Band*, *Planxty* the album reimagines Ireland and Irish music in a way that seems to have sprung fully formed from a collective imagination that encompasses the musicians who made it, the audience that heard it at the time, and some notional relation to a deep popular mode of history and memory. It has that same sense

of a music that was always there, at the edge of consciousness, although having never quite found expression before: but once it was, Irish music – all of it – was never quite the same.

The record thus demands to be understood also as a key document of the notional modernisation of Ireland, and Irish culture, itself a much-contested periodization. It is also an implicitly political record, given that it emerged in the bloodiest year of "The Troubles" in Northern Ireland and was made by musicians who were unapologetically Republican in their politics, although, with two exceptions, there are few examples of anything even implicitly political on the record. However, the cultural impact of a record that was both unafraid to be Irish, but also conceptually ambitious and eclectic, cannot be understood apart from this context.

Todd Rundgren, *A Wizard, A True Star* (1973)

Tesco Vee (The Meatmen)

Todd Rundgren, Philly boy, member of the Nazz, the guy who recorded Meat Loaf's *Bat Out of Hell* on spec when nobody would touch it (then sold it for \$750,000) is a musical genius who was playing around with psychedelic drugs and crafted this soaring, atmospheric concept album that captures Numero Uno for my favourite slab of all time. Per Wiki, Todd "envisioned the record as a hallucinogenic-inspired 'flight plan'" and maybe, yes, I was tripping balls at the time as well, but when I first heard the surging synth grinding intro to '*International Feel*', I fell flat for this nearly one-hour-long majestic pop masterpiece, hook, line and platter. Todd claimed this one cost him half his audience (fools) and he then formed Utopia. Shame that such a novel concept LP conceived, produced, engineered, and performed by one man, would cost the creator anything. The album is basically two long tracks that traverse the musical stratosphere with groundbreaking production and superlative songwriting. After nearly 50 years this one still gives me chills. On side two Todd performs some of his favourite soul classics, but somehow it all fits.

One might ask how a nasty foul-mouthed hedonist like myself could call this slice of musical perfection #1? It's called Good Taste! Quite frankly it was close. The first Captain Beyond album is also right up there and is a thud rock classic, and there can only be one #1. So there it is. If you've never heard this album, gobble some magic mushrooms, turn out the lights, pop on the headphones, and enjoy.

U-Roy, *Dread in a Babylon* (1973)

Jim “Daddy Kool” Schwada

Some artists are gateway drugs. Listening to The Grateful Dead or the Flying Burrito Brothers led me to the harder stuff – Merle Haggard, Bobby Bland, The Louvin Brothers. So it was with Bob Marley. Marley’s music was a revelation to my midwestern teenage ears – I loved the patois and the way he twisted “birth certiFICATE on me now” to fit ‘*Rebel Music*’, but what I loved more was an introduction to even more exotic cats, the deejays and toasters named after movie gangsters or spaghetti western antiheroes: Dillinger, Trinity and royalty, princes Jazzbo and Far I, the Roys, I and U. The blood, fire, and apocalyptic biblical prophecy in the music was alien to me but the infectious rhythm and fondness for collie weed was not.

It would be near impossible at this remove to recommend a single album whose music influenced me most, but I can without hesitation recall the ALBUM COVER that did: U-Roy’s *Dread in a Babylon*, encountered in the sale bin at the local used record shop. There’s the man himself, barely visible behind a huge cloud of smoke, preparing to reason with de breddrin. Ah for the good old daze. Zines back in the daze.

Brian Eno, *Here Come the Warm Jets* (1973)

Marc Burch (former DJ and promoter, NYC Tenement Museum)

I was 17 when I first dropped the needle on side one of Eno’s debut solo LP, *Here Come the Warm Jets*. There are five tracks on each side for a grand total of 10 compositions by this self-proclaimed “non-musician”. After he left Roxy Music, I guess there wasn’t room enough in the band for two Br(i/y)an’s and so Eno launched his solo career.

On the first of many records and with the help of an extraordinary group of musicians – the members of Roxy Music sans B Ferry; Robert Fripp and John Wetton from King Crimson; Chris Spedding, Busta Cherry Jones, Bill MacCormick, Paul Rudolph and others – Eno created the greatest rock LP I’ve ever heard. Just from the jump you know that you’ll be listening to something that’s a mix of glam with the heaviness of Crimson and then you have to factor in the Enossification that is going to be applied to the compositions – and yes, Enossification is a word. I first saw it in the credits on Genesis’s opus *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway*. Not only is Eno playing and singing on this record, he and Chris Thomas are credited with mixing not just any “rock” album,

what you have here is an aural alchemical experiment disguised as a “rock” LP. There’s a synergy of instrumentation, of musical styles and applications. In these 10 assemblages, you can hear the Bo Diddley beat; doo wop; maybe some Hawaiian slide guitar; yodelling, caveman drums; and throughout these pieces are electronics and processes that take it to another level. There is an energy and dreaminess that is uniquely Eno. Every song continues to surprise. There is so much depth of sound with layers and layers of sonic disruption. Every time I listen to *Here Come the Warm Jets* I am baffled and amazed. It’s so crazy and drives me backwards and forwards.

My three favourite tracks are ‘*Baby’s On Fire*’ featuring the greatest guitar solo I have ever heard, as Robert Fripp unleashes a searing guitar solo that sounds like an inferno accompanied by an assortment of throbbing electronic sounds bubbling in the mix.

‘*On Some Faraway Beach*’ starts out both melancholic and hopeful. This song is dreamy and sad. You hear despair, longing and almost surrender in Eno’s wailing vocals. The drums and piano slowly build up to a titanic swell and the despair is finally swept away with a crescendo of waves washing up on the faraway beach. Paul Thompson can really pound those drums! The title track and last cut on this LP has a religious majesty to it as a wind chime lightly tinkles in a sonic sea breeze. The drums rise up in the mix of what can be only described as an orchestral kazoo-like buzzing along with random plunky piano sounds and some indecipherable lyrics float to the surface and then the record ends and you are left to wonder how this was created. Was it the oblique strategies? Was it chance or some kind of cosmic magic that shaped this ultimate rock album? In the words of Eno, “Why ask why?/For by the by and by/All mysteries are just more.”

And here I am writing about this record 40 odd years later. *Here Come the Warm Jets* is fun, curious, exciting and mysterious. I always wished I could have been in Majestic Studios in London, September 1973, when this record was being created. I dreamed about it once. I just remember a bunch of blue light and the accompanying orchestral cacophony.

Joni Mitchell, *Court and Spark* (1974)

Steve Ignorant (Crass, Slice of Life)

Court and Spark reminds me of being a spotty little teenager stuck in a dingy little bedroom in Dagenham – trying desperately to get out. It makes me feel nostalgic. It was the first album I heard from Joni Mitchell that was orchestrated. It reminded

me of David Bowie's *'Wide Eyed Boy from Freecloud'* – really orchestral crescendos.

I think people should listen to it because it might inspire them if they have musical capabilities - and if they haven't – to start writing or read poetry. The way she sets out the lyrics is like reading a poem – and that inspired me to write poetry and songs. And it might inspire other people to do that. It gave me, not a sense of freedom, but a sense of hope. It gave me a sense of wanting to get out there and start doing something.

I always find inspiration in Joni Mitchell.

Randy Newman, *Good Old Boys* (1974)

Brian Foley (The Blades, The Vipers [IRL])

Good Old Boys by Randy Newman was released in 1974. It is a thought-provoking, humorous, sometimes scathing portrait of the Deep South.

It is full of lush orchestral arrangements, with harmonies on some tracks by Don Henley and Glenn Frey and some haunting slide guitar from Ry Cooder. It's underpinned by Newman's rolling New Orleans piano style and topped off with his trademark acerbic lyrics.

None more so than the first track *'Rednecks'*. With its use of the 'N' word it probably wouldn't see the light of the day in these times. Written from the point of view of a racist redneck it starts with just a piano and vocal and then the band with full orchestra kicks in. He sings of rednecks talking funny, drinking too much and laughing too loud and not knowing their ass from a hole in the ground and keeping the black folk down. But then near the end of the song he suddenly turns the tables and lambasts the so-called liberal northerners who treat the black community no better, putting them in a cage in Harlem, New York City; in a cage on the South Side of Chicago; in a cage in Hough in Cleveland, in East St. Louis, in Roxbury in Boston.... Nearly 50 years later and the song is just as relevant today.

'Birmingham' on the other hand is a loving tribute to that American city in the heart of Jefferson County. A carefree, upbeat song with shades of Stephen Foster. The orchestra, with brass to the fore complements the simple sentiments of the song and the catchy chorus:

Birmingham, Birmingham
The greatest city in Alabam'....

One of the most covered tracks on the album is the song *'Guilty'*. A tale of an everyday loser, in trouble again, drunk and coked up and showing up late at his

girl's place. It resonates with anyone who has ever been "guilty" of messing up when it comes to trying to stay on the straight and narrow. There's a discordant woodwind section which perfectly mirrors the unhappy state of mind of the protagonist and his sad admission at the end: "You know I just can't stand myself/ And it takes a whole lot of medicine/ For me to pretend that I'm somebody else."

On the track *'Louisiana 1927'* Newman evokes the disastrous floods which occurred back then when there were "Six feet of water in the streets of Evangeline." He sings of President Coolidge paying a visit and the strings are almost crying as he ends on the repeated plaintive line: "They're trying to wash us away...."

In the blackly humorous *'A Wedding in Cherokee County'*, Newman sings about the bride's papa being a midget, her momma being a whore and her grandad ... a newsboy "til he was eighty-four." And typical of Newman, the wedding night doesn't turn out well either: "But though I try with all my might/ She will laugh at my mighty sword...."

In *'Kingfish'* Newman eulogises Huey Long, who was governor of Louisiana from 1928 to 1935. He even sings a song that Huey Long wrote called *'Every Man a King'* – a vaudevillian, piano singalong which segues into *'Kingfish'*. It starts with sinister-sounding strings lambasting the unfriendly French of New Orleans and then takes off with a lovely brass arrangement lionising the larger-than-life Huey Long and all his achievements:

Who built the highway to Baton Rouge?/ Who put up the hospital
and built your schools?/ Who looks after shit-kickers like you?

Every track on the album shines through, from the plaintive love song *'Marie'*, its strings dripping with sadness and heartfelt lyrics of true love, to the harmony-laden melody of *'Back on My Feet Again'* to the blue collar worker's plea to Nixon in *'Mr President (Have Pity on the Working Man)'*. It's a record I return to time and again. The melodies are at times heart-wrenching. The lyrics are honest and funny and bittersweet. In the wee small hours it's the perfect album.

Brinsley Schwarz, *'(What's So Funny 'bout) Peace, Love and Understanding?'* (1974)

Eamon Carr (Horslips)

I'd been up all night. Again. It was an early summer morning 1974. I went outside. On a laneway that connected old stables to a narrow road, I met an excited Charles Ward. He'd just collected the morning post. Charles and brother Kingsley owned the stables, near Monmouth, which were being turned into recording studios

with royalties from Dave Edmunds' hit '*I Hear You Knocking*'.

"Do you want to check this?"

Inviting me into his farmhouse kitchen, he put a white label 45rpm test pressing on the turntable of a well-worn Dansette. Strident opening power chords, that reminded me of The Who, crashed out. Then came the voice.

As I walk this wicked world

Searchin' for light in the darkness of insanity....

We looked at each other approvingly. It was Brinsley Schwarz, a band I'd seen perform in Liberty Hall. Sure hadn't I shared a peace pipe with bass-player Nick Lowe in Amsterdam? This was a revelation, though. It was monumental.

The sound was in the upper register. That bright topsey sound you hear when either the artist, or the listener, is firing on amphetamines. I knew I was hearing a timeless classic. But, in 1974, it was also somehow out of time. There was much to digest.

If you're a musician the chances are you'd like to write a song that might mean something to somebody, somewhere, sometime. A song with the capacity to improve peoples' lives. Without admonition, Nick Lowe had eloquently achieved that objective, advocating compassion and compatible coexistence. All in three and a half minutes of glorious harmonic pop. I confess to having experienced a momentary twinge of envy. But there was much to celebrate. I felt a rush. The song lifted my spirits and made me feel emboldened. A clarion call, it still does. Never more so than today.

I ask myself, is all hope gone? ... /There's one thing I wanna know/

What's so funny 'bout peace, love and understanding?

King Crimson, *Red* (1974)

Franz Valente (Buñuel)

One of my favourite albums is *Red* by King Crimson. Although it was released in 1974, it has still much to say, because it lives in a timeless dimension. I feel the magic every time I listen to this album, it just nourishes the soul and body.

Andy Fraser, ... *In Your Eyes* (1975)

Jon Tiven (artist/producer: Alex Chilton, Mick Farren etc.)

As I don't know what anybody else is writing about, I would like to write about an album that I'm pretty sure nobody else would. That is the first solo album by

Andy Fraser, previously songwriter and bassist in Free, which has a silver cover with his photo on it. That record gave me the greatest lift upon first hearing and has never failed me since. The songs are all soul-stirring rockers with a serious r&b groove, and the presentation is wholly original – no guitars, a three piece with lead bass (Andy), a drummer (Kim Turner) and an electric pianist (Nick Judd) all supporting Andy's vocals, which remind one of no one but perhaps a taste of Allen Toussaint is in there. For my money, Andy was the single most underrated singer/songwriter in contemporary rock music, so you should not miss this. Lead bass solos, songs like '*Baby Forever*' and '*Double Heart Trouble*' are fantastic, and I can't say enough good things about this one.

The Who, *The Who By Numbers* (1975)

Ed Wenn (Sink, The Stupids, Dealing With Damage)

It wasn't until Kermack joined my band, Sink, towards the tail-end of 1990 that I was exposed to The Who's early 1970s output. Growing up, I'd not really had much to do with their music beyond hearing the odd single on the radio, but after a gig one night, back at Kermack's flat, on the 17th floor of an east London tower block, he played me song after song from their albums *Live At Leeds* (1970) through to *The Who By Numbers* (1975) and while I liked what I was hearing, I was knackered from the long day and at 3am begged him to stop. With a glint in his eye, he said he'd just play one more; a little song called '*Won't Get Fooled Again*'. Just under nine minutes later he left me alone and I finally got some peace and quiet and passed out on his sofa. The git. It must have stuck though because from that moment on, there were two Who freaks in our band.

Saying that a drummer "plays like Keith Moon" is a sort of lazy shorthand that's often misused – usually by people who haven't really studied Moon's drumming – but our boy Kermack really did play like Keith Moon; deliberately, blatantly, exhilaratingly and unapologetically so. He was a force of nature who drew people to him, and it was a huge blow to everyone around him when he was diagnosed with cancer and died in his mid-20s.

At some point down the road a little, I started playing a cassette of *The Who By Numbers* in the car. I ended up playing it A LOT and the more I played it, the more it felt like Kermack was with me in the car listening to the album with a big grin on his face, air drumming and singing along.

Truth be told, it's a weird Who album: the big single from it is a low point, the production isn't as punchy as it could, Daltrey's hardly on there, and there's

something not-quite-glued-together about the piece as a whole. Moreover, on first listen Townshend's frequent whining about the tragedy of being a hugely successful musician could rub people up the wrong way but, despite all of that, *The Who By Numbers* got to me like no other Who album before or since. I played it so much and ended identifying it with Kermack so strongly that on some level I forgot that it was Keith Moon playing drums on the album and not Kermack. It's an emotional listen for me on a lot of levels but hugely inspiring at the same time. Townshend's lead guitar playing on '*How Many Friends*' does something to me that I still can't explain (!!) and his vocals on '*However Much I Booze*' are a perfect mix of defiance and self-loathing. When we were in the studio, Kermack loved to quote the line "Take 276, you know this used to be fun." from Entwistle's '*Success Story*' and in the final analysis that's the main reason that this record means so much to me; I can put it on and for 37 minutes I get my friend back.

The Trampms, '*Hold Back the Night*' (1975)

Eamonn Dowd (The Swinging Swine, The Racketeers)

In 1977 I saw Graham Parker and the Rumour on RTÉ television performing a great song called '*Hold Back the Night*'. A rocking soul song with great brass and Parker's trademark visceral vocals. It was recorded live in front of a very appreciative audience at the London Hippodrome. Introducing the song, Parker said: "This song is from our EP '*The Pink Parker*'..."

I was never able to find that EP but I had a few of his albums and instinct told me it was likely a cover. But long before there was an internet, how was I to find out who recorded the original? Thankfully I had recorded Parker's version onto cassette by holding the microphone up to the TV speaker.

Fast forward 25 years and I'm in New York's Lower East Side, flicking through boxes of secondhand singles. It wasn't really a record shop. They had secondhand furniture, beat-up old leather jackets, trinkets, magazines and flashlights. And there I found it. '*Hold Back the Night*' from 1975 on Buddha Records by The Trampms, a classy Philadelphia R'n'B/soul outfit. It cost me \$1. (I later learned they were best-known for their biggest hit, '*Disco Inferno*', which was included on the *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack LP.)

It was two weeks later when I got back to Dublin that I finally got to play the seven-inch. (My hosts in NYC didn't have a record player.) And what a record it was and is! Upbeat, great vocals, brass, and in many ways a great Saturday night record, despite the loneliness and heartbreak conveyed in the lyrics:

Hold back the night, turn on the lights/Don't wanna dream.../
Dream about you baby/Loneliness is haunting me when I go
to bed, honey/Like a character in a book that I have read, huh/
Now when the sun goes down and the moon is near/I'm scared to
death 'cause your face appears.

A week or so later with my band The Racketeers I had played a gig in Dublin and went for a few late drinks with Cormac Figgis, the graphic designer, artist, DJ, photographer and musician. He had designed a few Racketeers sleeves and posters and we used to hang out. Later it made complete sense to ramble back to my damp ground-floor flat in Rathmines for more drinks and listen to some music. We'd take turns DJ-ing. Cormac would rummage through my collection and find all the punk and post-punk stuff as well as Thin Lizzy and the Stones. That night I chose a few by Irma Thomas, Betty Everett, Clarence Carter ... all good soul stuff as we drank wine under a thick haze of smoke. But when I put on '*Hold Back the Night*' and hit PLAY the mood shifted up a notch. Cormac said, "Play that one again." We must have listened to it five times over the course of the night.

As the sun was coming up and both of us were starving, I took to cooking pasta with a creamy sauce. "This needs something else," I said. "Wine," said Cormac, so I threw half a glass into the pan and got the parmesan from the fridge as he stuck on The Trampms, one more time. Within a month Cormac had built up a fine collection of obscure soul gems and I reckon The Trampms were the catalyst. Good times. That's what great records are supposed to do: entertain and enlighten. I never get tired of listening to it.

Patti Smith, *Horses* (1975)

Dunstan Bruce (Chumbawamba, Interrobang)

"Jesus died for somebody's sins, but not mine."

There, right there is the greatest opening line to any album, ever.

That's not even a discussion; it's just fact.

It's such a provocative fuck you line.

It forces you to decide instantly; are you in?

Or are you out?

I was in.

As a spotty teenager who had discovered Patti Smith through some late-night episode of the *Old Grey Whistle Test* I had already had my tiny mind blown into a thousand pieces.

I'd bought her first single 'Hey Joe'/'Piss Factory' and that had caused all sorts of headfuckery.

Who the fuck was this woman?

What sort of woman is she?

Is she even a woman?

Yeah, she blew the fucking doors off all my ideas of conventional gender roles, of femininity, sexuality, androgyny, beauty, poetry and what a female rock star could be.

It felt dangerous.

Confrontational.

Challenging.

Whilst everyone was slavering over Debbie Harry I was being totally confused by Patti Smith.

Fucksake.

But still to this day I get that thrill, feel a chill every time I catch sight of Smith's defiant gaze on the cover of *Horses*.

It's so powerful.

Uncompromising.

Strong.

And the thing is; the album itself is not even that easy a listen.

It doesn't seduce you.

You don't fall asleep to it.

You don't fuck to it.

Or fuck with it.

It's demanding and it jumps about stylistically all over the shop.

But that's not the point.

The music's not the point.

Not on this album at least.

The music is the most dramatic backdrop for her lyrics, her words, her poems, her enormous, towering presence.

She's a fucking goddess.

Back then it was like nothing I'd ever heard before; it's not sweet or harmonious or haunting or ethereal.

It just insists that you listen, engage and embrace its brashness, its ferociousness, its bold edgy art-punk garage rock with Smith's singular, uncompromising mystic voice spitting bars like the dirtiest lil' drill kid could only ever dream of doing.

Horses is more like a film score, a soundscape, which captures that gritty, grotty

world that was mid-'70s New York which would pave the way for so much to come.

It changed everything for me.

It introduced me to something new and daring and exciting and other.

It was the start of my 40-year love affair with Patti.

And we're still going strong....

The Quick, *Mondo Deco* (1976)

Robin Wills (The Barracudas)

Ok, so perhaps it's not my favourite album of all time, but it is certainly one of the most important and a real life-changer that always takes me back to my sixteen-year-old self in my last few weeks at school before escaping from my safe European home. I had probably first read about The Quick in *Bomp*. The band had all the trappings that would have hooked me in at the time – a Kim Fowley discovery, production by Earle Mankey (those powerful guitar slashings on Sparks' ...*Woofers!!!*) plus NO FACIAL HAIR (a prerequisite in those proggy jazzy days of meandering crap). The album full to the brim with teenage anthems. 'Hi Lo' was naïve lust, but any cuteness was shattered by guitarist and songwriter Steven Hufsteter's power chords. Steven was like Pete Townshend and Jeff Beck rolled into one. Danny Benair was a budding Keith Moon who could tone it down to a Dave Clark when the song requested it (the pounding on 'Anybody' – rarely has the power of a drumkit exploded in such an exhilarating way on vinyl). Oh and 'My Purgatory Years' was my song, my Teenage Wasteland and the soundtrack to my last few walks to school.

Kim had launched The Runaways (also on Mercury) at the same time and they got all the plaudits and notice. The Quick often got short shrift as a Sparks pastiche, but that was just plain lazy. The Quick were the ultimate in punk-meets-mod-meets-pop. The perfect mix of power and anglophile melodicism. It might mean fuck all to you, but it meant everything to me then as it does now and means that this 62-year-old will be 16 Forever....

Bob Dylan, *Desire* (1976)

Stano (The Threat, artist, musician)

I finally settled on *Desire* by Bob Dylan, it was a toss-up between *Horses* by Patti Smith and *Tilt* by Scott Walker. I played all three last night trying to make my decision and what I realised was that even though they're radically different, all have lines that have stayed with me.

Horses: “Jesus died for somebody’s sins, but not mine.”
Tilt: “Farmer in the city, do I hear 21, 21/I’ll give you 21, 21.”
Desire: “Always on the outside of whatever side there was/
 When they asked him why it had to be that way/
 ‘Well’, he answered, ‘Just because.’”

I was 15 when I bought *Desire*. I played it constantly for a year, the imagery was so vivid, really cinematic, each song like a movie running in my head. And like all great movies every viewing revealed more, that’s how it was with these songs. The track ‘*Isis*’ reminds me of cowboy movies I watched when I was a kid, the spaghetti westerns. While listening to the lyrics I could feel the sun and the bitter cold and the wide-open spaces. Then a track like ‘*Hurricane*’ about injustice, which I think is probably one of the greatest songs ever written.

When I examine the connection between these lyrics now, I see that they are all about outsiders and that’s maybe why I relate to them. When I was a kid in Artane in Dublin, before all the houses were built, I spent my days wandering the fields with my dogs. I didn’t seek the company of the other lads, I was happy exploring the nature and wildlife with the dogs. Music was always in my consciousness from the radio but when I got my first record player I had music on repeat for the first time and it opened up a world of possibilities to me, I wasn’t aware of it at the time but it was planting the seeds for my future.

I could say the same things about Scott Walker as I’m saying about Dylan and even though they are very different artists I still have a deep connection to both. The more I learn about Dylan, the way he shuns stardom, the fact that now he spends most of his days making these big old gates out of scrap farm machinery. I suppose that image of Dylan not being a musician but more like a Hobo in a Tom Waits song, he could just as easily be the character in Walker’s ‘*Farmer in the City*’.

I’ve always liked things off the beaten track – I’m always collecting bits and pieces, words, images, scraps of wood, I take photos of shapes on the bark of trees, peeling paint, rusting metal which I use for my record sleeves. I’m interested in how things transition from one form to another. And that’s how I work in the studio, I take a sound and turn it into something else. I’ve always liked the way that Dylan juxtaposes words. Trying to put into words and describe what music means to me is really difficult but in essence I suppose it’s the way it conjures up feelings, smells and endless visual possibilities. To me the magic of music and lyrics when listening to an album or a record is you can’t touch it, you can’t hold

it. I suppose it’s the same when people read books; if I wasn’t dyslexic maybe I’d relate in the same way to books. I never try to analyse or figure why some artists have such an impact on me, they just do. The reason why I think people should give *Desire* a listen is that lockdown in a strange way created the space for me to go back to this album and listen on repeat like I did before life and commitments kicked in, and it didn’t disappoint – it really is as valid now as it ever was.

James and Bobby Purify, ‘*Morning Glory*’ (1976)

Fachtna O’Ceallaigh (artist manager, ex Boomtown Rats, Sinéad O’Connor)

It is, of course, an exaggeration to suggest that music needs to be life-threatening. But... it should challenge us mentally and emotionally and even physically sometimes. When you stand way too close to the bass bins during a sound system clash and your solar plexus feels in danger of absolute demolition from the ripples and rumbles of the bottom end, well, that’s pure pleasure in a physical sense.

The mental and emotional challenges that music throws our way are perhaps less tangible although as the prophet Bob Marley said “when it hits, you feel no pain.” The train on any particular day can take us on a slow, despair-filled journey through melancholy and even deep, heart-rending torment and destruction and yet, the very next day when you fire up that amp and press play on your chosen sound vessel, be it a Technics 1200, a Pioneer CD player or, much more likely, your Spotify streaming outlet, you can find yourself surfing waves of inexplicable joy, exhilarated and grinning like a disbelieving five-year-old in the most fabulous sweet shop ever.

In my world the primest of prime music is always life-threatening in the sense that it will invariably bring on palpitations and a rapidly increased heart rate simply by virtue of the uncontrollable unbridled joy I am feeling as I allow myself to be engulfed by the sounds. Sometimes, to be honest, I look around in fear that someone else has seen me making a complete fool of myself.

The summer of 1976 was, I now know thanks to Wikipedia and not my memory, remarkable for its high temperatures and beaming sunshine. Dublin – where I was perched, anxiously, even desperately, scanning the horizon for a way out – was in the early stages on an incoming economic depression (not that it was in great shape at the best of times) that would manifest itself in all its downtrodden, massive unemployment, no hope ways in the eighties. And we also began to experience the very early days of thug/drug culture with the

first glimpses of the greater availability of heroin, something that was soon to devastate large swathes of righteous, upstanding working-class communities and families all over the city.

One song stays forever in my soul from that time: ‘*Morning Glory*’ by James and Bobby Purify. It was a hit, albeit relatively minor, reaching the late twenties in the UK Top 30 sometime in August, 1976. They had a massive tune, ‘*I’m Your Puppet*’, ten years previously that hit big in both the US and internationally but not a lot since then. The brothers (who were not actually blood brothers) of ‘66 had changed by ‘76, one had departed to be replaced by another, equally sweet-sounding soulful brother. The quality did not drop in any way.

‘*Morning Glory*’ is the song to blast as loud as possible to completely uplift your spirits, specifically, as you start your day but, really, whenever the hell you want to. It is uncompromisingly positive, full of life with its “no more sorrow, I aint gonna worry ‘bout tomorrow” and “oh what a feelin’, it’s better than a medicine for healin’” lyrics and an absolutely cracking backing track with a charging horn section, ingenious r’n’b guitar fills, a melodic b line that defies prediction and a drummer who has us all clinging on to the sides and the roof of the train he is driving. ‘*Morning Glory*’ and indeed James and Bobby Purify are largely underreported and virtually unheralded. I cannot definitively say what really is my ‘favourite’ record of all time; like every music lover I know, there are – thankfully – infinite numbers of tunes in my all time faves’ crates but one thing I know for sure is that as I live and breathe ‘*Morning Glory*’ will find its 7” vinyl way on to my decks multiple indeed countless times from now until the end of my days.

And if I am lucky enough to have it as the soundtrack to my last gasp then for sure I will die a happy man.

Stevie Wonder, *Songs in the Key of Life* (1976)

Scrote, (solo artist, Double Bari Sax Attack!, Quadruple Bari Sax Attack!, scr011, The Extemporary Elites)

The idea of picking one favourite album is a bit daunting but surprisingly one album in particular immediately came to mind. A very beautiful and peaceful Miles Davis record but it didn’t quite sit right for this occasion being that it is also kind of blue which is not what I’d like to pass on right now.

So I started flipping through various record covers for inspiration when a long-time favourite poked through like a ray of sunshine. From there, I had no doubt what to pose as my favourite album and it couldn’t be more appropriate in

my eyes: *Songs in the Key of Life* by Stevie Wonder. The first song, ‘*Love’s in Need of Love Today*’, is ever-poignant. From there the album lifts us higher and higher.

I first heard this record blasting through neighbourhood windows, car stereos, and transistor radios like the universe was being born. My parents had just moved our family to a new city. As a shy prepubescent, the uncertainty and fear of new surroundings, a new school, a new home, and new kids was soothed by the funkiness of ‘*Sir Duke*’, the cool confidence of ‘*I Wish*’, the childlike inquisitiveness of ‘*If It’s Magic*’, the devotion of ‘*As*’, and the driving celebration of ‘*Another Star*’. All unapologetically inspiring a dream of strength, hope and love.

This record really is life in song. The rhythms of life. The melodies of life. The harmony of life. The joy of life. The new heartbeats of life. It dances. It sings. It overjoys. It marvels at things bigger than us. It becomes things bigger than us and takes us along to become bigger than us ourselves.

This is exactly what I want to pass on today.

Doctors of Madness, *Late Night Movies, All Night Brainstorms* (1976)

Atila the Stockbroker

My favourite record is the Clash’s first album and my second favourite *Electric Warrior* by T.Rex. The first because the songs were brilliant and pioneering, fit their time and the production totally changed the way I felt about major label recorded music (as seeing the Clash did about live music) and the second because it was the first album I ever bought, aged 13, and my musical and lyrical direction started there! But I don’t want to talk about those two, or indeed any other record familiar to most of us in the underground/punky scene. I want to talk about the most underrated, pioneering and more or less totally forgotten record of all time, *Late Night Movies, All Night Brainstorms* by the Doctors of Madness.

The Doctors were the missing link between the Velvets, Bowie and punk. Driving and powerful (‘*Waiting*’, ‘*B-Movie Bedtime*’) sweeping and lyrical (‘*Mitzi’s Cure*’, ‘*I Think We’re Alone*’) infused with the spirit of the Velvets’ first album and Bowie’s Ziggy period and utterly unique for its time. And what made it unique above all was that it was an album led by an indescribable electric violin. I’m a fiddle player and the moment I heard Urban Blitz I got a pickup, plugged it into my bass guitar amp (my instrument at the time) and turned it up to 10. Everything I have done fiddle-wise from that moment is based on Blitz’s style, best described as frenetic beauty; John Cale’s viola on steroids.

But it came out in 1975. The Doctors were getting a good following, but one day in Manchester they were supported by a band called the Sex Pistols, and as leader Richard “Kid” Strange says, in that moment he knew his career was over. (It wasn’t – he’s still writing great songs – but he never became the star he craved to be). The Doctors were too weird and lyrical both for what came before punk and what came afterwards. For me, and a select few, that album remains the greatest “lost” album of all time. And now you can all listen to it on Spotify. Please do.

Ramones, *Ramones* (1976)

Gaye Black (The Adverts)

This, the Ramones’ first album, was one of the first punk albums to be released, around the same time as I moved to London in 1976, so I raced off to Paddington and bought it and played it to death. It was so new, so fresh, and with 14 songs in under 30 minutes, an amazing bombardment of stories and riffs. ‘*Blitzkrieg Bop*’, ‘*Chain Saw*’, and ‘*I Don’t Wanna Go Down to the Basement*’ in particular have echoed through my head regularly over the years and always make me feel happy. I think anyone who hasn’t come across the Ramones before should give it a try for an instant dose of energy and enthusiasm.

Ramones, *Ramones* (1976)

Peej (a young aging rocker)

The Ramones to the guillotine?

Today’s subject for judgement and sentencing is the Ramones’ self-titled inaugural album. Rock’n’roll’s continued existence is a philosophical nightmare for any contemporary rocker to tackle. What was then the burning bush of teenage rebellion seems to have aged into a conservative, mythic past. Homeric heroes of the genre stand tall behind veiled curtains. They mystify and harken to a glorious golden age of music now lost to the cold-euphoric pastiche of disco beats infecting the ever-repeating cycles of chart music.

This narrative is untrue. There is bad music now, but there was bad music then. There was good music then and there still is.

Let’s call those legends of rock what they are: dinosaurs. But, “Rock’n’roll can never die” wept (read: commanded) Neil Young as he ripped his final remains from the crypt of Spotify earlier this year. He has rejected the capitalist music machine and, in the process, abandoned the children – and future rockers – of today who will never discover his music through that platform. By holding

onto his own rebelliousness he has snuffed out one of the main arteries of distribution for his music. This points to a fundamental flaw in rock’n’roll as a musical form. That is, that it was born out of the embers of the liberal-bourgeois French and American Revolutions. It purports to be revolutionary while evidently being commercial in nature.

The question then for the rocker of today is thus, how do we reconcile our rock’n’roll rebellion with the overtly commercial and institutionalised aspects of the thing. My answer is that we do not. Instead we must maintain the spirit of rock’n’roll while rejecting the genre itself. I hope, dear reader, you will not misunderstand me. I am not calling for the point blank dismissal of rock’n’roll music. To ignore rock’n’roll would be akin to denying ourselves of Bach, Dalí or Gaudí. Instead, I am calling for a “loving” rejection in which we embrace and admire what rock’n’roll was while resolutely moving forward into the future of music. There was something here – what was it and what can we learn from it?

As a 30-year-old listening to the Ramones for the first time I’m reminded of dusty cobwebs. The initial gut reaction is distaste (I’m easily reminded of the sentiment: “It’s just noise”). However, upon revealing the spider-silk within ... a revelation – the beauty. While realising I was nodding my head along to ‘*I Don’t Wanna Walk Around With You*’ I had a flashback to a younger self jamming along to the likes of Green Day, Weezer, Sum 41 and Blink-182 – these were my rock-idols growing up. Between distorted droning guitars and comically emotive singing, the connection now seems obvious. I learned, as it were, to love the Ramones. What can I say, if you’re not bopping along while listening to ‘*Judy Is a Punk*’ you’re doing the Ramones wrong.

But this music is not some childish vent of angst. Rather, it is a call to the twin banners of fun and freedom. That same call was expressed by those rockers that came before and after the Ramones. Little surprise then that while the Ramones, in the day, may have sounded rebellious, they now sound borderline traditional! Such is the tragic fate of all successful rebels that they must ultimately be rebelled against themselves. So, to the young rockers of today I say, dance to the Ramones to lift your spirits; admire their call and take that feeling with you as you leave them behind and plough ahead on your own musical rebellions. The internet has democratised music production to the point where anyone can create the music they love in their own bedroom – I dare you tell me that isn’t the most rock’n’roll thing since Presley’s gyrating hips.

Vive la France, Vive la Révolution, Vive le Rock’n’roll!

Sex Pistols, 'I Wanna Be Me' (1976)

Rémi Pépin (Guernica and author)

I, too, wanna be me.

So here we are. We buried deep in some 20th-century dungeon the whole conversation about A-side versus B. And for good measure, we also threw in the little vinyl disc that spins 45 times per minute, as we couldn't be bothered with stuff that no longer serves any purpose and isn't worth a dime.

The whole thing happened insidiously, just like in any good old scam. It all began in the mid-'80s when the CD started taking over vinyl. This new small, plastic contraption was meant to fully restore the sound quality but, above all, it was cheaper to make and as expensive to buy. Then came the digital technologies, and with them, the online streaming platforms and the switch towards the total dematerialisation of music. Slowly but surely, the internet gave the world a giant and lousy jukebox, full to the brim of highly compressed tunes. The copyrights that used to go to musicians also started to wither away in the process. As to the record sleeves, they were reduced to a measly 2x2 Post-it, shrinking the *Sticky Fingers* zipper to an XXS size or the cow on the *Atom Heart Mother* cover to the size of a Pokémon. Gone is the small plastic adaptor that was used to listen to singles with big central holes (much smaller in the British version). And gone is the hand device that was used to change speed on the record-player from 33 to 45 revolutions per minute. As for the strange little tube used to pile singles on top of each other, creating a sort of pre-historic playlist, it is now long forgotten.

The single is gone.

The Top-50 hero has left the building.

And what a pity!

It's a pity because not only did the single offer the prospect of finally owning the tune that you had just heard on the radio and of listening to it again and again, but also, icing on the cake, because you could also discover the tune on the other side. So you had the hit that would blow you away but also, just like the toy in the cereal boxes, the extra tune as a bonus. And even if it was often forgotten, the B-side quickly became a precious treasure to any self-respecting punk. The Sex Pistols were particularly good at this, sticking numerous original titles and all kinds of cover versions on the B-side of their calls for riot and anarchy.

This was the very end of the 1970s and I had just bought *Anarchy in the UK* in the only shop that sold punk rock in Paris. It was on the Left Bank, beside the former Latin Quarter, and getting there was a bit of an obstacle course. The

metro journey offered countless possibilities of hostile underground encounters, and the surrounding area of the shop was the ultimate playground for those who wanted to fleece the innocent kid who had just bought the latest X single or the new Y album. As a rule, three or four skinheads would stand a few streets below, patiently waiting for the innocent victims to walk by, proudly holding the plastic bag with the shop logo. If they were lucky, those thugs would just take away their precious possession. But on a bad karma day, they would also throw a few slaps across the face into the mix, for good measure. But luckily for me that day, there were no skinheads to be seen. Those morons were probably busy sniffing glue or terrorising some respectable guy somewhere else in the capital. I quickly headed back to my suburb, terribly proud of my new possession which I couldn't wait to put on full blast.

And predictably, in less than 15 seconds, I was blown away, both by the devastating intro and by the sardonic snigger of this demented singer. I did what anyone does when they stumble upon such an infinite source of pleasure, and listened to the A-side nonstop. Such were my enthusiasm and my trust in Johnny Rotten that I truly believed for long afterwards that Anarchist really did rhyme with Antichrist. To the despair of my English teacher.

And that could have been that, had I not felt a bit guilty for neglecting the B-side. So I flipped the record over. And listened. The tune, like many others, started with the usual chainsaw guitar, then toc toc toc, the snare drum set the tempo, the bass guitar smoothly gelled it all together, waiting for Johnny to lash out, once more, at the whole world.

"I wanna be me/What a plan!"

Until then, I knew that Lennon and McCartney wanted to hold their girls' hands, and even become their men. Mick Jagger, less sentimental, just wanted to make love to her. Iggy, who was far more intense, wanted to turn the volume up to 11 and be her dog (and also lose his heart on the burning sands).

But Johnny Rotten couldn't care less about teenage romance. What he really meant with this title, echoing the Clash's *'What's My Name'*, was that he wanted to be himself. And while I couldn't understand everything, given my poor level of English at the time, I totally got the urgency of the situation, and that I could understand.

Damn it, I also wanted to be me.

What I didn't know yet, however, was that to get to that stage would take me far more than three minutes and six seconds of pure rage.

(Thank you to Agnès Maillot for the translation)

The Damned, 'New Rose' (1976)

Bitzy Fitz (The Strougers, Lee Harveys)

Something was brewing across the pond in the UK in 1976. Music had become stagnant and overblown. I didn't mind Bachman Turner Overdrive but Pink Floyd and Led Zeppelin were the complete opposite of what I wanted to listen to. Their songs were overblown and did not appeal to me in any way. They did not make me want to get up and smash things to smithereens. I wanted the short sharp shock of the hairs on the back of my neck standing up when I made a connection with music but a change was coming. Pub rock was fast becoming the precursor to what we know now as punk. Bands like Dr. Feelgood, Kilburn and the High Roads, Eddie and the Hot Rods and Ducks Deluxe, all looked like they walked off a building site, denim-clad or, in the case of Dr. Feelgood singer Lee Brilleaux, a filthy white suit. They oozed menace with sneering vocals and played a mixture of heavy 12-bar rhythm and blues with fuzzy overdrive and feedback. It was a back-to-basics movement that wanted to take a stand against the flashy glam rock and boring progressive rock that was prevalent at the time.

John Peel was a British DJ who became an institution during his lifetime. He played the songs other stations were afraid to play. My late pal Denis "Chopper" Byrne turned me on to Peel. The Damned were a British punk band who had released their debut single 'New Rose' on Stiff records on October 22, 1976; Peel had them in to do a session on BBC Radio 1 in December of that year. Trying to tune into the BBC or any other "foreign" radio stations in those days was a nightmare in terms of reception but you persevered by moving the small transistor around the bedroom to stop the static. I remember The Damned played 'Stab Yor Back' and 'Neat Neat Neat' and then something of a "eureka!" moment occurred: Damned singer Dave Vanian parodied The Shangri-Las' 'Leader of the Pack' with his opening line, "Is she really going out with him?" Cue the tribal call to arms, as it were, of Rat Scabies' drumming, making you want to get up and fucking smash things to smithereens as Brian James' visceral guitar shreds glam rock, hippy rock, folk rock, heavy rock and all the other rocks into a tiny billion pieces. I remember thinking out loud, "What the fuck was that?" It would be a further six months before the Irish home-grown *Hot Press* music magazine was born so I was buying the *NME* for any information on this new phenomenon they were calling punk rock.

Muddy Waters, *Hard Again* (1977)

Greg Sowders (The Long Ryders, The Coal Porters)

Muddy Waters reminded us all he was still the King Bee with *Hard Again*. The band was Johnny Winter, Pinetop Perkins and the great Willie "Big Eyes" Smith on drums and harp. This record made me want to be a blues drummer. It was perfect timing. Punk rock was flexing its early muscles, then Muddy dropped this record that had more attitude than anything else out there. The Ramones, Pistols, Stones, Iggy ... everyone had to take a knee and bow down. His 'Crosseyed Cat' sat in the corner, licked himself while staring us down; the 'Blues Had a Baby and Named it Rock 'n' Roll': the 'Mannish Boy' was still in charge. My younger self now had the blues as a part of my rock'n'roll apprenticeship, along with punk, Gram, Merle, Stones, Stooges and Prince Buster. It was time to start a band!

Reggie Knighton, *Reggie Knighton* (1977)

Jude Carr (*Heat* fanzine)

The "Hope" signal in a gigantic cone of light pierces the dusk sky. Niall and Michael are at it again ... offering Help. I can help them by writing a bit about a favourite album, they said. *Ramones* is obviously the greatest LP ever released – we all know that – so this time I will pass on it. Reggie Knighton's self-titled LP on CBS gets the nod. The home studio demos of songs written by Knighton in 1976 persuaded CBS to get him into a Hollywood studio and this resulted in this masterpiece released in 1977.

1976 was a great year for music, but also for sci-fi and comics. It was the Bicentennial in the USA. DC and Marvel combined to produce *Superman vs the Amazing Spider-Man: The Battle of the Century*. Meanwhile Reggie was writing 'Tricentennial Woman'. This album jumped out of the browsing bin the moment I saw it. The cover was a strange sci-fi take, a blend of the *Blind Faith* cover (without the naked eleven-year-old girl, thankfully) and something from Hipgnosis. The song titles were intriguing: 'Girl From Pluto', 'Drug Dealer', 'Tricentennial Woman' and 'VD Got to Idi'. Songs like 'Jenny', 'Every Night' or 'Glow in the Dark' had wonderful lyrics, twisting the love song idea. Jenny was the victim of a radiation poisoning, the girl who glows couldn't go out in case she gets sent to a laboratory, while 'All Night Long' manages to name-check Adolf Hitler and Charlie Manson: "I never was a family man, never put an X on my face." The album featured session musos including a couple of Little Feats and a chap who was in Toto! However this is a Reggie Knighton record. He wrote

all the songs, played guitar and sang. I struggled to describe its sound when I featured it in *Heat*. I went for Wimp Rock! We decided it was our album of the year in 1977.

Television, *Marquee Moon* (1977)

Helen Fitzgerald (*Vox* fanzine, *Melody Maker*)

Pick one album, the instruction said; describe why it's important to you and how it made you feel. Immediately scores of albums went whirring through my head – how could I narrow this down? For ease I picked a year, 1977, the year I turned 18, bursting with sass and wonder at the transformative, inspirational powers of literature and rock'n'roll.

Back then they were my only tickets out of homogenous, grey suburban Dublin. Patti Smith's *Horses* had already worked its aural and lyrical magic on me – like a subversive and exclusive new language. A call to arms for those of us repulsed by disco, showbands and the M.O.R. fodder on TV and radio. So I was primed, ready and waiting to again be blown away by something urgent and new. In 1977 two albums thrilled me beyond all others: *Before and After Science* by Brian Eno and *Marquee Moon* by Television. Very different sonic constructions and moods, both utterly beguiling. Adored them then and still do, both fully standing the test of time.

Eno's masterwork is sublime but more than any other recording, *Marquee Moon* with its visceral urgency takes me right back to the unfettered excitement of being 18 and discovering brilliance. Two guitars, bass, drums and one coolly affected accent on vocals – from this simple base layer Television created songs with right-in-your-face immediacy: some sparse and unadorned, some swoopingly melodic ... all full of force and brio. I just love the neat clarity of their sound, the instrumental definition, the joyful semi-combative interweaving of guitars, the perfect rhythms and the mood.

Every track is stand-alone perfect and the title track is thoroughly mesmerising. From the snaking intro, the joyous guitar jousting (and solos), peaking crescendos, fake endings burbling back into life with indelible riffs, this is 10 whole minutes of songwriting and instrumental virtuosity. With vocals you'll be hearing in your sleep. No fluke that it regularly makes the "Best Songs of All Time" lists. The lyrics to the album don't electrify me on a stand-alone basis (moody New York underground rock scene noir) but as an adjunct to this wonderful music they are just perfect. Phrases, words and chords meld

together so well. Tom Verlaine sings the word "hesitating" like no one else did or ever will.

This was the album I played loud before parties or gigs to get me in the mood for a great night out. It still works for me and, I imagine, for many others. So, if you have a music-loving friend who has never heard *Marquee Moon*, clamp some headphones on them and leave them alone in a room with this sterling artifact.

Television, *Marquee Moon* (1977)

Dave Clifford (*Vox* fanzine)

The year was 1977 or '78. The location was Dublin, a claustrophobic and oppressed institution, abandoned to unemployment, industrial unrest, emigration and the corruption of a dogmatic church. You could count on a psychotic reaction greeting you at any street corner, and it usually did. However, punk was filtering through from the UK and was giving rise to a more creative way of living and doing. It seemed like the perfect response to a sterile city. From the beginning I was in. Bands like Wire, The Mekons, Buzzcocks and The Adverts were my new stimulant. My pursuit was vinyl.

Passing what looked like a record shop I did a quick retreat. To call it a record shop was a bit of a stretch. Two blokes inside with a couple of boxes of records some sellotaped to the window. One of these caught my attention. Television: *Marquee Moon*. This had to be punk. The cover was captivating. Was this a band or a street gang? On impulse I handed over 1.99, unsure whether this was legit or not. But who cared. Punk was playing hell with moral judgements! On the way home I had a quick scan of the inner sleeve and lyrics.

My eyes are like telescopes/I see it all backwards: but who wants
hope?/If I ever catch that ventriloquist I'll squeeze his head right
into my fist.

Holy shit, digging this already. In the door and onto the turntable. Needle down on 'See No Evil'. The thirteen second intro and there's no going back. The A side was on repeat for the rest of the day. Looking out the window I was listening to the rain but was definitely hearing, hearing something else. I was still playing it when the darkness doubled and lightning struck itself in a tattooed night. In awe, I was abandoned to *Marquee Moon*. What I loved about it most was the way it transcended the boundaries of the more class conscious UK punk. Television also covered some early garage rock like the 13th Floor Elevators, another favourite of mine from the '60s. This hybrid art punk thing really appealed to me

and would eventually inspire me to begin publishing *Vox* magazine. The album is shot through with the interplay and the counter melodies of the two guitarists, Tom Verlaine and Richard Lloyd. Primary and secondary roles were swapped freely, as dissonance, hooks and solos gave rise to a unique composite. Patti Smith once likened Verlaine's playing to a thousand bluebirds screaming. Hard to surpass a description like that. In the process the blues were stripped away and replaced by a piercing poetic delicacy. As individuals Verlaine and Lloyd may have hated each other's guts, but musically they were inseparable. This sets it apart from anything else at the time.

The knockout title track does need some unpacking to show Verlaine's obsessive vision in the creative process. It was honed to perfection over many years. It began life as a twenty verse acoustic piece, and eventually got electrified with The Neon Boys in 1973, a band he put together with Richard Hell (later of The Voidoids and Heartbreakers). It was recorded by Eno for a potential Island Records release but Verlaine rejected the production. He felt he was the only one with the ability to produce it and the vinyl version would certainly confirm this. They had rehearsed it so much that he practically recorded it live, uncompressed and without studio effects. He thought it was a pop song, but I've heard a seventeen minute version and this is definitely not pop. In fact it's impossible to label. The dual guitar opening is a thirty second morse pulse that builds to a blistering composite of tense, ascending rhythms, hooks, riff and solos. Here was something to address the psychosis of our times.

I've been listening to this album for forty five years and it still resonates with freshness every time. Even now it sounds radical and innovative. Parts of it will always remain enigmatic and I'll never successfully break into the lyrical interpretations. Then again good poetry should never disclose itself fully. Television put the post into punk and were way ahead of themselves as early as 1973. In fact so far ahead of themselves that Lloyd stated the band would be out of place anywhere! They had moved on when others were only discovering safety pins and leather jackets.

They never achieved commercial success in the US, but the album did chart in the UK. Eventually they would go on to inspire an endless inventory of bands ... Echo and The Bunnymen, Sonic Youth, REM, Pavement, Josef K and of course one of Dublin's finest, The Atrix. Tom Verlaine once said that with every performance you should go beyond yourself and in some strange way, I think *Marquee Moon* will always achieve that.

Richard Hell & The Voidoids, *Blank Generation* (1977)

Mike Watt (Minutemen, FIREHOSE, The Stooges, mssv)

I love Richard Hell & the Voidoids' *Blank Generation*. The album was a total sea-change for me – the idea the bass player could be important in a band in those days was totally not in my wheelhouse and this band had one that also wrote all the tunes, tunes I dug big time. I loved the guitars also and I know they had a huge effect on d boon ... it was a HUGE album for both of us. I cut out a picture of Richard Hell from the record inner sleeve and taped it onto my bass and that was like a “line in the sand” for people who had no respect for the movement.

Richard Hell was my first punk rock hero. Like he sings in ‘*Liars Beware*’ “...your blind side's turned to the boys with a mission” – I can remember the first time I heard that to this day.

We keep on keepin' on....

David Bowie, *Low* (1977)

Paul McLoone (The Undertones)

My favourite album of all time is *Low* by David Bowie - the album he released in 1977; one of two Bowie albums that came out that year. The other was *Heroes*. And around that period he was also working with Iggy Pop – producing the *Lust for Life* and *The Idiot* albums in quick succession. So it was an extraordinarily creative period for Bowie in the middle of his most creative decade. It's my favourite album for all sorts of reasons. I got into it at a very formative time when I was a teenager really getting serious about music when I was fourteen/fifteen. It landed at a time when I was very open to really cool music. Or at least I was trying to be open to really cool music! It came at a really good time for me. When you are that age you're just soaking everything up. It stayed with me all through the years and has consistently been my favourite album because I don't think there's ever been anything quite like it.

And certainly, Bowie never made another record quite like it. It's kinda unique, and it's almost unique by design. You get the impression that it was created to exist in its own sound world. It uses a very specific bunch of sounds – particularly the famously processed drums. Tony Visconti created that sound. He often gets overlooked in the Bowie story, especially in the so called ‘Berlin trilogy’, he gets overlooked in favour of Brian Eno's involvement. Of course, Eno was crucial to those albums – but he didn't produce them. Mr Visconti did! It exists in its own vacuum – I'm trying to avoid using the term ‘sonic landscape.’

But there you go – I’ve used it! It’s been very influential down through the years. An obvious example is *Unknown Pleasures* which takes a similar approach to *Low* in that it creates its own sound world with its own set of rules and operates within them. Famously divided into two sides: a more up-tempo side one and the much more downtempo, ambient side two although, fun fact: strictly speaking there are more instrumentals on side one of *Low* than there are on side two. There are two instrumentals on side one, and there’s only one track on side two that doesn’t feature Bowie’s voice. That’s one for down the pub!

It is brilliant, it’s perfectly sequenced. The band are incredible, particularly Dennis Davis on the brilliant sounding drums and it is all brilliantly put together. It divided opinion at the time, and it probably still does – to the extent that NME famously ran two reviews of it at the same time, one being positive and one being slightly less enthusiastic. It’s a very influential album, it’s a great record and it also features one of Bowie’s greatest singles, ‘*Sound and Vision*’, which coincidentally came out on my tenth birthday, 11th February 1977. It’s such a cool single that Bowie doesn’t even bother showing up until halfway through, it’s a great, great song.

So, it’s an album that’s got everything, the wonderful moody stuff on side two, ‘*Warszawa*’ and ‘*Subterraneans*’, very bleak sounding tracks in a certain way, but very beautiful. With the more up-tempo rock stuff on side one, there are two amazing instrumentals – ‘*Speed of Life*’ and ‘*A New Career in a New Town*’ (great title for a beautiful instrumental!). And it’s got ‘*Be My Wife*’ which is another of his great singles, and, of course, ‘*Breaking Glass*’ which is small, short and perfectly formed. I just love it! I could talk about it all day – but I won’t – because I know I’m supposed to be keeping this vaguely brief.

Iggy Pop, *The Idiot* (1977)

Mike Scott (The Waterboys)

Perhaps and probably the greatest comeback album of all time. From addiction, LA burnout and incarceration in a mental hospital, our hero reinvented himself physically, spiritually and sonically with music of grandeur, depth, power and pain that stands alone as a work of brilliance, which is enough, but which also influenced the following decade and beyond.

Singing in faux-Germanic deep voices? None of those ‘80s blokes did it better than Iggy who sang that way for real. Industrial synth music? No record ever invoked industrial as well as *The Idiot*’s closing track, ‘*Mass Production*’.

Wry, ironic romance? Iggy’s ‘*China Girl*’ is ahead of them all. Decadence? No one ever topped ‘*Nightclubbing*’. Gonzo-yet-intellectual punk rock? ‘*Funtime*’ is the cornerstone of the genre. Biography and reminiscence? ‘*Dum Dum Boys*’ is the It of the It. Rock-funk? A year before Chic, nine years before ‘*Sledgehammer*’, Iggy’s ‘*Sister Midnight*’ set the template. Every track a wonder, every arrangement a meisterwerk. Produced and co-written by David Bowie without whom it could never have happened, *The Idiot* is a beautiful, subterranean, magnificent moment in rock.

Sex Pistols, ‘*Anarchy in the UK*’ (1977)

Post Punk Podge (Post Punk Podge and the Technohippies)

I was in transition year in secondary school aged 16. My principal warned me that if I didn’t purchase a new tie for my uniform that I would be suspended for a week, as I had lost the one I had. I was meant to have a new tie by the end of lunchtime the next day; instead, I spent the money my mother gave me on a CD of the Sex Pistols *Never Mind the Bollocks...* in Empire Music. I had only ever heard ‘*Anarchy in the UK*’, as my friend had put it on a mixtape for me. As I sat at the back of class with my CD Walkman in between classes listening to the CD it felt like I had been transported to a new world. All the jocks with their hurleys and sliotars looked at me in disgust as I bellowed along to ‘*Anarchy in the UK*’.

It made me want to tell everyone in the world to get fucked. I knew that anger was an energy from growing up in a broken home, but not in a positive way. Needless to say, I got suspended and spent the week watching movies and getting stoned with my pals who I had a band with and jamming for hours. They were simpler times in what was a different world in 2002. John Lydon’s influence has been huge on my life and shortly after I got into PiL’s *Metal Box* from reading an article about them in *Mojo* magazine. When I wrote ‘*Post Punk Election Party*’ that was meant to be my Public Image, the song that defined my band – a riveting opening musical letter to the powers that be. Thank you, John Lydon, a.k.a. Johnny Rotten, for being such a legend.

Sex Pistols, ‘*Did You No Wrong*’ (1977)

Chris Haskett (Rollins Band)

I hope I’m never on a desert island with only one disc. I’d need a shipping container to carry my desert island discs. But I have to choose one. So my choice is the ‘*God Save the Queen*’ seven-inch. Not the A-side, but the B-side ‘*Did You No*

Wrong. That song has had its hooks in me since I first heard it. I got those singles pretty much as they appeared and loved them all from first listen (and still do), but *'Did You No Wrong'* is underappreciated and overlooked. It's got the essential Pistols chunkiness. It's fat. You want to take a bite out of it. It's also one of the only songs driven by a riff rather than a chord progression (*'Pretty Vacant'* is the other). I play plenty of actual guitar but *'Did You No Wrong'* is one of the few songs I HAVE to play air guitar to.

Sex Pistols, *'God Save the Queen'* (1977)

Vic Godard (Subway Sect)

I'd like to write about *'God Save the Queen'* and why it had and still has an effect on me today. When I hear the start of the record it stirs a feeling. When I heard the song for the first time it was on a cold November night in 1976 out in the wilds of Hendon. The regular faces we saw at all the gigs before that weren't there for some reason. To find out when and where the next Sex Pistols gig would be you had to ask someone like Nils Stevenson or Sid or someone else connected to the group, as their gigs weren't listed in the music press. Things were changing fast now though, and the group had recently got a lot more together musically, having better amps as well. Every time we saw them, they seemed to get a little less ramshackle, and had introduced Anarchy in the UK to the set, which had been over reliant on '60s covers up to then. We knew all the songs so well because I used to take my little cassette player to every London gig. You never knew when the group would hit the stage, so I turned it on in my pocket and hoped for the best, usually with great results. Those early cassettes still represent the real Sex Pistols for me, but sadly because Hendon was a long schlep for us, I didn't take it that night.

I was with Rob Symmons (Subway Sect co-founder) and as soon as Jones hit the riff, we turned to each other in excitement like we did when they had a new song. Something else strange happened as well; something I'd never seen done on stage. He read the words from a scrunched-up piece of paper. Rotten had a talent for doing things first and getting people to copy him. He didn't want people to copy him as he did these things to be different to the rest; if the rest all did as *he* did he'd be like one of them again. I'd seen people use handkerchiefs on stage before, but they were either impersonating Louis Armstrong or were Louis Armstrong; so either way it would be to wipe the sweat from their brows. Rotten used his to blow the snot out of his nose between songs which is something a

rock star would never do. If a rock star admitted to even owning a handkerchief, their career would be up the spout. Not only that, but once he came on stage at the Lyceum eating a burger and continued biting bits out of it throughout the first few songs. He always had a pint of lager on stage and often it got knocked all over the wires during the first song. So we got the feeling this is a human being on the mike, not someone trying to make out they were someone else as had been the case before the Sex Pistols appeared. Although he was at pains to point out his humanity, Rotten had stage charisma above anyone else I've seen. Maybe it's because we were lucky enough to witness him at his peak, but the only performers I've seen that could dominate the stage like Rotten were Richard Hell, Tony Bennett, Frank Sinatra, Dillinger, Clint Eastwood and Charles Aznavour.

I would imagine it's particularly apt for today. It divides opinion like her majesty herself. It's a love-or-loathe situation like the whole stinking fake-aristocracy honours system. It's always been the way Britain has operated since the Normans invaded. This song makes the case for a change; something that looks an even bigger impossibility now than it did in 1976. On that November night, the first chords announced a sneer from Rotten that could never be equalled. He held up his A4 sheet of paper like a town crier of old and sang/sneered his way through them with a belief he couldn't achieve on a Stooges/Who or Small Faces cover. We'd never seen a singer with a lyric sheet. So we assumed the song had only just been written and they were trying it out for the first time. The recorded version captures the live sound they got that night. The vocal is the best of all The Sex Pistols' output along with EMI. In fact, if this song were to be adopted as the national anthem, even I might "go native" and start waving the flag!

The Clash, *The Clash* (1977)

Suggs (Madness)

I was living off Tottenham Court Road in London in 1977. Capital Radio, a new station, has started and in 10-foot letters on the smoked glass entrance someone had spray painted in red paint: 1977 THE CLASH.

The following day I bought a music paper – either the *NME* or *Melody Maker* – and the middle spread was a photo of the aforementioned: back to camera up against the wall. I was 16 and wandered into the Roxy, in Covent Garden, one night – can't even remember why. Eater were on stage, average age 15. *'White Riot'* by The Clash came on. Don Letts was DJ-ing.

Reggae/punk. That Clash LP!! London's burning!!!

The Slits, *Peel Sessions* (1977)

Danbert Nobacon (Chumbawamba)

“Punk Rock Saved My Life” as the t-shirt slogan once said, or at the very least in my case it put my life on a whole new trajectory which, 40 years later, I am still exploring. I was 15 when punk rock began to explode across the smaller towns of northern England. Every weekday night from 10 until midnight, instead of doing high school homework, I would listen to the John Peel Show on the BBC, and he played widely diverging strands of music, which, put quite simply, no one else did. This included the emerging punk rock, and many punk bands would be invited to the BBC studios to record a handful of songs on a strict one-day time limit for what were known as *Peel Sessions*. Punk rock bands working with highly trained but off-times cantankerous BBC recording engineers (as Chumbawamba later found out) provided some spectacular results.

The first Slits session is simply mind- and body-blowing. As a teenage boy listening to my first-ever girl band I had never heard anything so utterly raw and female and visceral. *‘Love and Romance’* offers sardonic girl-to-girl insight of the pitfalls of trad “love” and “romance”, powered by driving bass and drums, against a chorus of audio orgasming, punk girl purring and caterwauling, which made a fifteen-year-old boy fall in love with a kind of girl who I never knew even existed.

I am sure these recordings, in part, are some of the reasons we wanted girls to join the fledgling Chumbawamba after our first six months as a boy trio. And certainly my first audio love with punk rock girls is why I get women to sing on my records and why, like on my new album, their various vocalizations become so addictive and enchantingly haunting to me.

Eddie and The Hot Rods, *‘Do Anything You Wanna Do’* (1977)

David Newton, (guitarist/songwriter, The Mighty Lemon Drops, Blue Aeroplanes, Starfish, Thee Mighty Angels)

The (long, hot) UK summer of 1976: I was 11 years old (about to turn 12 at the end of August) and had just spent my first year at “the big school” (Parkfield Secondary Comprehensive in Wolverhampton). Music had already started to play a major part in my life earlier in that decade: my pre-teens had been a mix of most things Top 30, especially loving bands like Sweet, Mud, Mott the Hoople, Hello (actually my fave band) and of course our own regional heroes Slade (or “THE Slade” as they were known locally). In addition to this by ‘75/‘76 I was also listening to quite a bit of what my mates’ older brothers/sisters were into: some

were into prog/heavy rock (as we called it then) and others more into Northern Soul (which was really big in Wolverhampton) and, weirdly, somehow, I actually liked/bought records by both (crazy huh?).

Then, that summer, watching *Top of the Pops* one Thursday night (as usual), an up-and-coming band Eddie and The Hot Rods appeared, doing *‘Get Out of Denver’*. It stood out: it was really fast, about two minutes long, had no more than three chords, and the band all had short hair and looked really young, like they’d just walked into the BBC television studio off the street or something. This was just pre-punk (in Wolverhampton at least), so that Saturday I spent my pocket money on their *‘Live at the Marquee’* EP and it blew my mind – they instantly became my new favourite band, so naturally I tracked down their two previous singles and eagerly awaited their debut LP *Teenage Depression*, due in December.

The Hot Rods were a young four-piece band (guitar/bass/drums/vocals) from Canvey Island, Essex, and their music was initially described (pre-punk) as “high energy R&B” (not unlike fellow Canvey boys Dr. Feelgood). Over the next few months we all started hearing more and more about “punk” – it was an exciting time, so I bought *‘Anarchy in the UK’* when it came out in December (though I must admit I was a bit disappointed at first as it wasn’t as fast/energetic as the Hot Rods). Then in 1977, of course, punk really started to take off and alongside the Hot Rods I was buying UK stuff like The Clash, The Damned etc., and also US-ers like Television, Patti Smith etc., and then, just before the summer, Eddie and The Hot Rods (now called simply The Rods, with an additional guitarist/co-songwriter Graham Douglas, ex Kursaal Flyers) released a brand new, non-album song called *‘Do Anything You Wanna Do’*. I bought it right away (on the then-new 12” format), took it home and, wow, this one totally blew me away – I couldn’t believe how great it was.

Before long, my mates dug it, it was on Radio One and then *Top of the Pops* etc., eventually entering the charts and reaching the Top 10 where it stayed throughout most of that summer. The album that followed, *Life on the Line* (which opened with the single) entered the album charts and the band now found themselves playing not pubs/clubs but larger halls/theatres etc., and I finally got to see them live myself for the first time the following year (at the 1,800-capacity Wolverhampton Civic Hall, supported by an up-and-coming band called The Members). It was a truly memorable night for fourteen-year-old me. *‘Do Anything You Wanna Do’* was (and still is, in my humble opinion) one of, if not THE song of the UK post-Silver Jubilee summer of 1977, and one that

still stands up today as well it did back then. It's a remarkable, truly wonderful record, a timeless classic!

The Motors, 1 (1977)

Beppo (Spermbirds)

My first best record is hardly known by anybody, nor is the band. They came from England, and they were called The Motors. The LP was called *1*, because it was their first LP. The style of The Motors is best described as a mixture of rock and pub rock, with a tiny punk-influence. I first saw them in a music show on German TV in 1977 when I was 14 years old. They played a song called '*Dancing the Night Away*', which is odd, because the song is not really fit for TV. It is generally quite long, and it has a long buildup until it really gets started with vocals and all. Nowadays TV-shows wouldn't play a song like this because the audience doesn't have the patience for long buildups anymore.

There are several good songs on *1*, but '*Dancing the Night Away*' is the absolute highlight. I've already mentioned the long buildup – it is the thing which makes this song so special. It builds up musical tension in a way I have rarely heard ever after, and it leads the listener slowly to the core of the song, which has two musical ingredients that I still love to hear nowadays: fast guitar chords played with muted strings (we at Spermbirds and Kick Joneses call it "rattern"), and double harmony voices with the second voice singing in a deeper tune than the first voice. These are the basic musical tools which give this song its great driving dynamics.

When I first heard the song, I got goosebumps all over (I still get them from time to time when I hear it). Immediately two things were sure: I had to get the record (which I did a few weeks later), and I was to play in a band (which I did a few years later. It was a band called Kahlschlag, and no, despite the name it was not a Nazi band. It was with Markus and Frank, who later co-founded the Spermbirds and Walter Elf with me.

The Motors' *1* was probably my tenth record or so, but it was my first rock record. It features the soundtrack of my fourteen-year-old self, searching for my own music and my own style. I wanted to have some sort of music for myself, a music that I didn't have to share with my parents and my hippie-music-loving classmates. No, I didn't want to sit at the fireplace, getting stoned while listening to '*The Carpet Crawlers*' by Genesis. I wanted something harder, and I wanted it for myself.

Nowadays, you wouldn't really call The Motors' music "hard". Actually, you wouldn't even have called it hard back then in 1977. Because even then, there was much harder stuff than the Motors – for example the Sex Pistols, just to mention one. But I was living in Kaiserslautern, 100,000 inhabitants in the southwest corner of Germany, close to the French border. And while punk records from England made it to the big German cities like Berlin or Hamburg quite quickly, they wouldn't immediately reach Kaiserslautern (only months later). To me, The Motors were hard. And best: nobody knew them except me. Until I met a guy at school who knew them, too. He became my best friend. We were the chosen ones – only we would know the really good stuff. We were elite, and we would be the future core of the Kaiserslautern small town punk scene. We were arrogant, and it was cool. The hippies were arrogant, too, but they weren't cool. They listened to shitty music.

Years later, a young G.I. called Lee Hollis came to Kaiserslautern and brought with him records like *Milo Goes to College* from the Descendents and *Earth A.D.* from Misfits. That was much harder stuff than The Motors. But that's a different story....

Sex Pistols, *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols* (1977)

Emma Paulissen (musician, Moron; actor, *Punk for Life*)

The Sex Pistols were the first punk band I've ever laid eyes on. I was 13 or 14 at the time and I was listening to something I like to call dad rock (Bon Jovi, Alan Parsons Project, Level 42 – you know, that kind of music).

At some point I started watching an anime (Japanese cartoon) called *Nana*. It was about punk music, punk fashion and a lot of drama. I loved it and I still do, to this day. They mentioned Sex Pistols and Vivienne Westwood a lot and so I did a deep dive into those two things and fell in love. I started listening to *Never Mind the Bollocks...* and watched all the documentaries I could find. Listening to and watching them made me feel powerful and I felt like I finally found the group of people I wanted to be a part of.

My English wasn't so good when I started listening to them, so I didn't understand half of the lyrics, but it still gave me the feeling like I was a free young rebel ready to slap some cops in the face and piss on government statues and honestly that's all I want from music.

Whenever I listen to them now, I feel a sense of nostalgia although I'm only 21. I feel like I'm becoming the woman that thirteen-year-old Emma would

look up to and Sex Pistols, *Nana* and Vivienne Westwood were the start to that, so I will forever be grateful to them!

Sex Pistols, *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols* (1977)

John Ashton (The Psychedelic Furs)

The Sex Pistols' *Never Mind the Bollocks...* changed everything for me. It is perhaps the perfect rock album.

The Clash, *The Clash* (1977)

Nancy Barile (author, *I'm Not Holding Your Coat: My Bruises and All Memoir of Punk Rock Rebellion*)

When I graduated from my suburban Catholic high school located outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, I was woefully ignorant. I could not have told you the difference between a Democrat and Republican. I didn't vote. I didn't understand politics, and I had no concept of how government affected the individual. When I moved to Center City, Philadelphia, at the age of 20 and became deeply involved in the punk rock scene, I embarked on a new educational journey. I started to see how the world worked, and music was my teacher. One album in particular opened my eyes to the power people had to effect change: The Clash's self-titled debut studio album. On that record, the Clash spoke out about unemployment (*'Career Opportunities'*) and the U.S.'s cultural imperialism (*'I'm So Bored With the U.S.A.'*). I learned about the I.R.A., class struggle, race relations, culture wars. The album was INTENSE, especially for a privileged and clueless white girl. Even the cover art was incendiary. Musically, (*'White Man In Hammersmith Palais'*) was constructed in a way I had not heard before, with touches of reggae and rock and incredible drum work. *'Police and Thieves'* ignited an interest in reggae that brought me to the 1978 *Rockers* movie and then to its incredible soundtrack, which included Junior Murvin's original of the song. The Clash record had passion and integrity – it was clear how committed the band was. Listening to each side was a gateway to new understandings and a call to action. I'll always be grateful to The Clash for helping me find my place in the world, and for enabling me to recognise I could make a difference. As people get older, I feel they sometimes forget the lessons learned in their youth, and I think that's sad. Maybe if people think back to the ideals they held dear in the past, the causes they once championed, and the music they were inspired by, the world would be a much better place.

Ian Dury, *New Boots and Panties!!* (1977)

Steve Lindsay (Deaf School, The Planets)

I'd known of Ian Dury for a while before the release of *New Boots and Panties!!* In 1975 I'd seen him perform as front man of Kilburn and the High Roads – a kind of pub rock/art school band. He was a striking figure even then, with his intense demeanour and razor blade dangling from one ear – a year or so before punk fashion adopted the look.

Fast forward to 1977 and the release of the album. It was gobsmacking! Truly momentous for me and my contemporaries. Everyone these days is familiar with Dury's aesthetic and we all know and love *'Hit Me With Your Rhythm Stick'* and *'Reasons to Be Cheerful, Part 3'*, but, back then, this album was quite a shock to the system.

The main reason I love it is because it combines his edgy, uncompromising lyrics and delivery with the amazing musicianship of the Blockheads, his backing band. This combination is magical and showed us that it was not necessary to dumb-down to shake things up. In fact, Dury was a huge fan of Steely Dan and many of the songs (co-written with maestro, Chas Jankel) give Fagan and Becker's jazz chords a run for their money.

Fast forward again to 1978 and imagine my delight to learn that the Blockheads (actually, just keyboard player Mickey Gallagher, guitarist John Turnbull and drummer Charlie Charles) had agreed to produce a couple of songs of mine. Working with them in the studio was an utter joy! A few months later, under the band name of The Planets, I found myself on *Top of the Pops* performing one of the songs we'd recorded: 'Lines'.

The original release of *New Boots and Panties!!* didn't even include Ian Dury's single at the time, *'Sex and Drugs and Rock and Roll'*, which only serves to emphasise just how perfect the record is in its own right.

1977 ...

John Fleming (fictionalist, *Irish Times* journalist)

A fried egg on toast one lunchtime in 1977. I am listening to the radio – some Dublin pirate. "Whatever happened to Leon Trotsky? ... And Sancho Panza?" I waited until the end of the song and took my time strolling back to school, deliberately late at 2:10. Twisted truth made an excuse: "I had to hang on to hear who sung a song." *'No More Heroes'* by The Stranglers. "A line about Shakespeare roles..." "Okay Fleming, sit down and shut up." On a splintery nearby desk

etched in monastic black Bic biro: *Rattus Norvegicus*. Some inquiries led me to an unlikely source and the borrowing of two LPs.

1981. A tune in my head. It plots a dense escape route from urban traps but also stabs at a manifesto against a city, any city. The guitars and lyric lines of *'Leave the Capitol'* take me into the ether: The Fall's narrative drama spirals to mystical heights with mesmeric techniques some musicologist bore might try to explain away. This tune of hypnosis delivers a novel's worth of insight in a few short minutes. Walking across supermarket tarmac and a drying patch of cat-paw wet cement, I feel mapped on some selective global landscape. Mark E. Smith's song and its magnificence grow in my mind and overwhelm me. Why aren't the streets alive with the sound of this music? I race home to put on the *'Slates'* EP to listen and marvel and inevitably be disappointed, for music can be over-mythologised.

The Fidelity 3-in-1 music centre facing the family china cabinet has a seven-inch single impaled on its spindle. I am 17 and making some decisions about directions to take. In the bleak Ireland of early 1982, my mind is half-wired into the Telesis electronic industry report and the sturdy structures of engineering courses. Study options are being corralled on a sinister CAO college application form. I switch speed from 33 to 45 and place the needle clumsily. It slips off the edge of the vinyl flat earth and the industrial tear of the cheap cartridge turntable itself is amplified. I reposition the needle correctly on the opening grooves and a strident pop electronic piano emanates. Chris Green's intro notes are expert and off-kilter and soon John Borrowman sings: "The agony of watching your life/Makes it hard to watch my own..." Rough clarity is imparted to me. It will take one year repeating the Leaving Cert within the Rathmines clock tower for a decision to come to fruition: I will pursue things to do with scripts, fiction and the written word. The single is returned to its sleeve. It is *'Procession'* by The Atrix.

A student about to meet a pal in Mulligan's of Poolbeg Street late one afternoon, I descend into the stygian pit of Basement X on Bachelors Walk. A certain Rough Trade LP is acquired. The last song is stunning – a paean to being out late and staggering home. It's a deft theatre of vivid words and sparkling music, and a more subtle take than the violent echo chamber version on the Peel session. "She squeezed my hand in the back seat of a taxi..." It is *'Everybody Is Dead'* by Microdisney. I had first seen them supporting The Atrix in the Magnet bar: an early exposure to nascent brilliance that set the bar high for me from day one.

Towards the end of *'Stay Free'*, there is a sudden startling disco bassline. In 1979, I signed up for a year's subscription to the *Hot Press* ("Ireland's most fortnightly music paper") because the offer came with a free copy of one of their yearbook's top 20 LPs of the previous year. I cut along the form's dotted line with a pinking shears. I wrote *All Mod Cons* as my first choice and *Give 'em Enough Rope* as second and sent it off with a postal order. But a postal strike intervened. After several weeks, I ventured into Dublin city centre to the *Hot Press* office to collect my undelivered copies. Mount Street Upper was hard to find as I presumed it was part of Mount Street, when in fact it was parallel. A shadow stretched from the Pepper Cannister Church as I rang a doorbell and went up the lime-carpeted stairs. Stacks of previous papers were piled everywhere. Front-page covers boasted interviews with Elvis Costello, Ian Dury, Wreckless Eric. I collected my LP from the stunning and friendly receptionist and the three or four issues stalled by the post. Can I take a few back-issues? Of course! Off I went home happy, my face and hands blackened with print ink. The strike ended seemingly months later. I had moved on to buying the *NME* in the shop at the KCR. The fortnightly *Hot Press* deliveries recommenced. And some still-unrectified administrative error led to me also getting my back-up choice in the post: The Clash's second LP. What a deal! The world had never been so copious or kind.

One of the first times I heard Elvis Costello and the Attractions: it was an overture of sticks hammering out the drum intro to *'(I Don't Want to Go to) Chelsea'*. For a stark six seconds, there was nothing but drums that cleared the way for years of technicolour music and blurred memories. Songs enter your bloodstream. They feed you noise, melody and notions; portraits of the world; statues of deconstruction. Pop music is language filleted into fists and feathers, into abrasion and sheen. Notes in hierarchies that plummet or climb. Drums and wires. Repetition. Pyrotechnics mashed into a three-minute mess. Ugly mayhem that makes beautiful sense in mere seconds. This is the precision of chaos, articulate mastery rendered by casual magic. Music at its best is a series of moments of epiphany.

Bob Marley and the Wailers, *'Jammin'* (1977)

Brian Seales (DC Nien, Tokyo Olympics)

Favourite songs are indelibly linked to ones memory, to when you first heard them and in whose company you heard them with. The song *'Jammin'*, from the album *Exodus* by Bob Marley and the Wailers, has been played way more than

any other song in my collection and inevitably it is played on a warm sunny day. I first heard Exodus with the rest of DCNien and our road crew, who had fantastic taste in music, in a house on the banks of the river Liffey one warm summers evening in 1977, on a really good sound system blasted out at full volume.

There are so many great songs on this album but ‘*Jammin*’ remains the most played song for me. It has a rhythmic bounce which few songs have surpassed and this is down to the excellent but simple bass line and drumming by Aston Barrett and Carlton Barrett respectively. A proper groove! The rim shots on the drums provide a powerful backdrop and the bass drum just melts into the bass guitar riff. None of the instruments conflict with each other. The electric piano, organ, percussion and guitars all drift in and out and play their respective parts perfectly. Bob’s singing is heartfelt and the song later became a fan favourite at live gigs. Bob, his wife Rita (who sings backing vocals on the song) and some of his crew had just survived a politically driven assassination attempt in Jamaica in 1976, and while recovering had moved to London where they recorded *Exodus*. The original song on the album even has the line “no bullet can stop us now”, which is not in all subsequent versions for some reason.

The overall composition, mix and production (by Bob himself) of the song are outstanding. It suggests to me that it actually was a jam session which the band made up as they went along but the vibe they produced in the studio was hardly ever reproduced live on stage. I have watched loads of live versions of this song on *YouTube* and they are all played a little too fast. This is a common problem with musicians playing live where the adrenaline of a live gig distorts time and tempo. The best live version of it is one by Ziggy Marley from 2019, still a little too rushed but close. The cover by Kiko Bun for the 40th anniversary of the release of *Exodus* gets the pace and the feel spot on. ‘*Jammin*’ is a song whose sentiments are still as applicable today as they were back then. Play it at the loudest volume you can on a good sound system and you will feel like you are in the middle of it with the band.

The Heartbreakers, *LAMF* (1977)

Tom Crossley (The Phobics, Bad Karma Beckons)

Three hundred words about my favourite album? Well, I’m known for rambling so at least it will be an exercise in discipline, and if it makes ONE person go and buy *LAMF* by The Heartbreakers – then job done! This LP has been part of my life, nay my DNA, since 1977 when I excitedly slapped it on my cheapo portable

record player (no stereo set up, that came later). I didn’t care about the muddy mix. A dozen prime cuts of thrilling, high energy ‘50s rock’n’roll, ‘70s NYC street punk swagger and nefarious sexy danger – what’s not to like? Switchblade guitars exchanging stabbing thrusts with a rhythm section tighter than a sharkskin suit, a handful of zip gun pomade piled in a sharp DA – from Gotham, to London, with love LUV – Bingo!

This album is like a social housing Pandora’s Box of my life, with twelve entrancing rooms that I have (re)visited many, many times and some I resided in as a callow (read shallow) youth – full of sex ‘n’ drugs and rock’n’roll. Every time there’s still something new to find – another closet, or drawer to explore and watch out for those hidden panels and trapdoors. Some rooms I lost the keys for the sake of my health and sanity, and you can’t put a memory in your arms...but press your ear close to the door – a contact high for sure.

Side 1: Drop the needle and you’re met with ‘*Born to Lose*’, or is it ‘*Born too Loose*’? Either or, a cautionary tale, bookended by another, ‘*Chinese Rocks*’, the best song about heroin since ‘*Heroin*’ and what a riff! In between you can find ‘*Baby Talk*’, ‘*All By Myself*’, ‘*I Wanna Be Loved*’ with its unashamed Yardbirds cop, and ‘*It’s Not Enough*’, a wistful yearning ballad which would not be out of place in any great western movie soundtrack.

Side 2: ‘*Get Off The Phone*’ (sage advice these days) opens proceedings before ‘*Pirate Love*’s drunken guitar staggers across the deck (pun intended) then it’s a triple ‘love song for objects’ salvo of ‘*One Track Mind*’, ‘*I Love You*’ and ‘*Goin’ Steady*’ – feel free to insert your own subject/metaphor. Last but not least ‘*Let Go*’, the only song I own which references baseball cards, now I have a vision of Johnny and the boys blowing a celestial bubble gum bubble! As for the muddy mix? Well, I have I have tinnitus and a better stereo now but 28 different versions of this damn recording and counting – it that alright?

Mink DeVille, *Cabretta* (1977)

John Fisher (Dandelion Market promoter)

Cabretta was the first album from Mink DeVille, the semi-legendary band fronted by the ever-charismatic Willy DeVille. I first heard the band in 1977 on *The Old Grey Whistle Test* and the next day, I went out and bought the album in Advance Records on King Street. The track I had heard was their first single (and biggest hit), ‘*Spanish Stroll*’ and it became my favourite song of the summer – and ever since.

I got the album home, put it on the turntable and listened. At first, confusion. The first sound you hear has always reminded me of an old, noisy vacuum cleaner being switched on. Not what you expect to hear from the latest New Wave band of the day. But after 15 seconds, a beautiful bass, drums and guitar groove pumps out an intoxicating rhythm that oozes New York, Hispanic-style charm. Then Willy starts singing “I see you walking down the street...” Pure magic. There are a couple of covers like the exquisite *‘Little Girl’*, a reworking of The Crystals *‘Little Boy’*, and *‘Cadillac Walk’*, a tough-talking, street walking badass track written by John “Moon” Mulligan. But it’s Willy’s own heartfelt, tender ballads that make this my ultimate desert island disc. I never tire of listening to the aforementioned *‘Little Girl’*, *‘Mixed Up, Shook Up Girl’*, *‘Can’t Do Without It’*, *‘She’s So Tough’* and *‘Party Girls’*. Even on recorded wax, Willy’s plaintive and unique voice is captivating and compelling with its unique mix of tenderness, angst and toughness.

The sad thing is that this is the only record that features the original band that had been playing CBGBs and the other New York venues of the time. Due to pressure from record companies and managers, the band was dropped after this album came out. They wanted to market him as a solo act and didn’t want to be tied down by musicians. I once asked Willy to autograph my copy of the album. He looked at the back cover and saw the picture of his then backing vocalists, The Immortals. “Man, I still miss those guys,” he mused. He always worked with great musicians and producers but there’s something about *Cabretta* that makes it sound extra special.

Listening to the album today, I still feel the same awe and admiration that I felt when I first played the vinyl album back in ‘77. It’s easy to imagine Willy as a modern-day Bernardo from *West Side Story*. A sharp dressed, misunderstood outsider from the wrong side of the tracks. His songs are sometimes heartfelt and tender, occasionally tough and earthy but always filled with passion and charm.

What else is there to love about Willy? Well, he had an Irish grandmother and I know that he was hoping to return to Ireland to explore his Irish heritage. Sadly, it didn’t happen. But he left a fine legacy of music that will forever keep his name alive for anyone who listens to him.

There are six Mink DeVille albums, eight Willy DeVille albums and several fabulous live albums to choose from. But to get started, you can’t go wrong with this sublime musical gem. And don’t forget to listen out for the Hoover at the very start of the album....

ABBA, *‘Chiquitita’* (1978)

Aston Stephens (Boss Tuneage record label)

Having released almost 500 records on my label over the past 32 years, the idea of picking a favourite from those and how it made you feel seemed like an impossible task – so I thought back to when my love of records began and I pinpointed the exact moment.

I want to transport you to a small bungalow in Coventry in 1978. I am five years old, coming up to six, and I am visiting my grandparents. The visit is even more special as me and my parents have moved to Essex about a year earlier so this is the first time I have seen them for several months. I am an only child and so is my dad, so I am their only grandchild, and therefore, as you would expect, they spoil me rotten. I remember enormous helpings of tinned strawberries and ice cream, and this being the late ‘70s and with only three channels to choose from on the telly, my grandad decides to play some singles. He has one of those classic multi stack record players, where you can stack half a dozen singles on top of each other.

My grandad has recently retired, and has taken up what would be in effect his second job, as a landscape artist – he would actually excel at this, having paintings hung in the Royal Academy a few years later. Therefore the house has a faint smell of oil paint permeating from the spare bedroom down the hallway, and I remember an excitement as my grandad stacked these 7” singles and then reaches for a spare unused paint brush which he uses to remove any fluff off the stylus before pressing start. The turntable springs into life and the first record drops: an unmistakable orange label with white circles and a logo that says “Epic” – it’s *‘Chiquitita’* by ABBA up first. The record drops on the slipmat and the stylus arm moves across.

My grandma is five years younger than my grandad, so is still working her way to retirement at this point. She works as a cashier at a building society but is quite clued up on chart music, working alongside younger staff, so is up on the latest singles in the hit parade, ABBA being her absolute favourites. Obviously the music scene in Coventry at this point is about to explode, and she would regularly see Lynval Golding, who banked at that building society, and Horace Panter actually rented the flat above – this is just before The Specials would become household names. I sit cross-legged on the carpet by the record player, absolutely mesmerised by the mechanics of the record player, and in complete wonder that this little needle is making sound coming

out from it. I sit there transfixed watching record by record play, watching the stylus work its way across the grooves, and the anticipation and excitement whether one or two singles would drop next, as one by one as the records stack up the sound coming out gets wobblier and wobblier. But I am fascinated with the whole process.

My grandparents had got married in Coventry in November 1940. As many of you will be aware, at that time, Coventry has been savaged by war. My grandparents spent their wedding night in an air raid shelter. My grandad goes with the wedding rings to the remains of Coventry Cathedral before the day and says a prayer. They manage to get a wedding cake simply because the couple it had been made for had been killed in the bombings a week earlier. With my grandma's black Irish humour, in later years, she would say "Not so lucky for them, but lucky for us," as it was shaped like a horseshoe. When I moved away to Essex, my grandma would send me pocket money each week in a letter, and from that point on, having been transfixed by records at their house, I ditched buying Matchbox toy cars and would go with my mum and dad to Boots or Woolworths in Chelmsford to buy a 7" single, to play on their similar record player we had at our house. The first one I bought was The Barron Knights – a couple of years later, I would be buying The Specials.

My grandma would continue to send me pocket money right up until 2012, at which point, she started writing them to Jake, my son when he was born. My grandad would die three months before Jake was born, having defied the odds after a fall which had left him bedbound and sent home on palliative care due to secondary bone cancer, where the doctors had given him three days to live. He would actually go on to live for a further 18 months, and walk again, and even paint again, much of this due to the inward resilience this generation had, having been through World War II. He was 97 when he died.

My grandma would die in 2018, aged 98. I was lucky enough to get the chance as an adult to get to know them not just as loving grandparents, but as people, and with the reason for this book existing, it seems somehow more poignant to tell this story. They, along with my parents, gave me nothing more than the utmost support and unconditional love, in a safe environment that allowed me to take that love of records and mould it into something that has defined my adult life, and for that I will always be eternally grateful, and realised the little day to day things we take for granted can be removed from us without warning.

The Only Ones, 'Another Girl, Another Planet' (1978)

Aidan Murtagh (Protex)

I have to admit that when I was first asked to write a few lines about my favourite record I thought it would be a simple thing to do. When I got down to it I soon began to realise that there are so many great songs and pieces of music that mean so much to me and many of which have precious memories linked to them making the task more complicated than it first appeared. There is one record that I have kept going back to throughout the years and continue to play often and that is 'Another Girl, Another Planet' by The Only Ones. I was a teenager when it was released in 1978 and I remember it coming out during an exciting, cool, creative time for music, everything seemed to be changing. It is a powerful record, nicely produced and came in a very arty sleeve. As a listener it somehow elevated me to another place, filling me with energy as all great rock'n'roll does.

The arrangement of the song went against the normal structure of the time. The muted guitar strings of the intro captured me immediately, then the magnificent buildup transformed into a crescendo as the entire band played. It was unusual to have a guitar solo at the start of the song before hearing any vocals – what a fabulous guitar solo this is. Peter Perrett's vocals are unique, you either love or hate them (and I love them), his nasal tone adding a distinctive quality. Is he singing about drugs or about a crazy Yugoslavian girl he claims to have met? Who knows, but it sounds fantastically poetic as his voice, together with John Perry's second soaring guitar solo, lift you to another stratosphere. This record is a special treat every time I hear it. It is so uplifting and is packed into just over three minutes as every power pop rock song should be. For me it is pure genius, one of the greatest songs ever written. If you haven't yet heard it, get listening!

The Stranglers, *Black and White* (1978)

Ricky McGuire (Desperate Measures)

I bought this record in 1978, a few months after its initial release and it has been on my record player nonstop ever since. I love the sound, the production and the strangeness of the songs and of course, JJ Burnel's incendiary bass playing, which is a huge influence on my own bass style. When I listen to it now, it takes me straight back to my early teenage years. I was 13 and completely absorbed by punk music, although as a stand-alone album, it's unique and not exactly punk, but more an idea taken from that sound and pushed along a different route using dark foreboding sound and imagery.

If you don't know this record, then I'd recommend it as a precursor to the post-punk sound giving rise to bands such as Joy Division, Killing Joke, Bauhaus etc. It also gave me the confidence to pick up a bass guitar at the age of 14 and I played along to this album and many more, which set me on a path to music and recording and henceforth the bass player I've become today. I was also lucky enough to see The Stranglers touring this album at the Glasgow Apollo in September 1978 and what a fabulous gig that was, certainly a great introduction to live music. I can only highly recommend this album, so don't hesitate ... go and buy it now!

The Stranglers, *Black and White* (1978)

Graeme Mullan (music supporter)

All quiet on the Eastern Front...

My Stranglers obsession began with my first hearing *Rattus Norvegicus* at a mate's house in early 1977, followed by seeing them perform 'Go Buddy Go' on *Top of the Pops* – their menace and underlying mischievousness as they mimed (Hugh and JJ having swapped guitars for the performance) struck a chord with this disenfranchised youth – through a cancelled gig in Belfast, to eventually seeing them live in 1978 at The Ulster Hall, and I was hooked.

In between all that, in May 1978 the band released, arguably, the first post-punk album – their third, and contentiously their best, album *Black and White*, and it is still as pertinent today as it was back then. Covering topics as diverse and topical as war, the breakdown of law and order, emergent technology, via Yukio Mishima and the concept of time, to the end of the world.

I remember hearing the album played in its entirety pre-release on the John Peel Show. By now I was buying every release by The Stranglers I could get my hands on – US import EPs from Good Vibrations or Jap imports via mail order from Adrian's Records. On the day of the album's release (with its free white vinyl 7" included), my mate and I bunked off school after assembly and registration, hightailing it to Good Vibrations record shop to get a copy hot off the press. No mention of the band name or album title on the front cover, just the now-iconic picture of the band – WOW. I carefully carried the still-sealed record around school all day, only releasing the vinyl upon my return home. Immediately it was on my turntable and I was digesting the lyrics from the inner sleeve as the record played. The concept continued, as rather than A-side/B-side, it was White Side/Black Side. This was a new sound for the band but one that

had been preceded by the single 'Five Minutes'. It was a more stark soundscape which wove perfectly with the lyrical content. The White Side features 'Tank', a rumbling bass driving the track to its explosive end, and 'Nice'n' Sleazy', the bastard son of 'Peaches', with its off-beat chopped guitar and reggae-influenced bass runs. Other highlights include 'Rise of The Robots', a pre-*Terminator* vision of technology taking over, and the classic 'Toiler on the Sea'. Not forgetting the psychedelic 'Sweden' (where the clouds are interesting).

The Black Side is a darker view of the world: 'Curfew', 'Threatened' and 'In the Shadows' exude a sense of oppression and paranoia. Perfect for a kid living in Belfast in the '70s. The discordant jarring chords, the syncopated drum work, a barracuda bass, striking synths with ambient Hammond and the lyrics are also suitably prescient today, with the men from the steppes moving into the vacuum – delivering a new kind of freedom. I was introduced to Yukio Mishima and hara-kiri and the true meaning of jubilee in the twinned 'Death and Night and Blood (Yukio)' and 'Do You Wanna' where home is a black leather jacket. Closing this side is the super weird 'Enough Time', possibly the most disturbing, enduring and prescient track on the album, ending with a morse code message courtesy of Dave Greenfield (RIP): S.O.S. THIS IS PLANET EARTH. WE ARE FUCKED. PLEASE ADVISE. A message to some alien overseer? ... and a hint towards *TheMeninBlack*.

The Stranglers, *Black and White* (1978)

Wayne Elliott (DJ)

The Stranglers never were a punk band. Viewed with suspicion as ageing pub rockers hitching a ride, their attempts to be outrageous seem even more sexist and crass now than they did at the time. Which makes their 1978 album *Black and White* all the more remarkable. By now punk was over bar the shouting (which is still going on...) with the chosen ones reinventing themselves to prolong their lifespan. Weller dug even deeper into his 1960s mod roots, Strummer and Jones hitched themselves to an American producer, Lydon did something altogether more adventurous than any of them. The Stranglers meanwhile kept the toughness of their sound and added both experimentation and a softness that would ensure their longevity. I have seen *Black and White* called the first post-punk album. Bollocks. That is probably *Pink Flag*. It was, though, a far more adventurous record than any of the class of '77 had managed so far. 'Tank', 'Curfew', 'Toiler on the Sea'... the deranged, distorted reggae of 'Nice 'n' Sleazy' with

Dave Greenfield's still-astonishing keyboards. The gentle toughness of the free seven-inch 'Walk On By' was a genius move... no one would have put Bacharach and The Stranglers together. JJ's bass on 'In The Shadows' and 'Threatened'. For me it sits firmly alongside *First Issue* and *The Scream* as one of the building blocks of the post-punk landscape. After a gap of over 25 years, I saw The Stranglers earlier this year... a healthy set of these songs got an airing and still sound glorious.

999, *Separates* (1978)

Mike Magrann (Channel 3, CH3)

In a just world, 999 would remain in that upper tier of punk pioneers. Those international touring acts such as The Damned or Buzzcocks that grace us on regular intervals to play the hits live. But they have suffered that indignity that many of the greats share, relegated to afternoon slots at festivals or lumped in with other forgotten pioneers. I discovered them in the early eighties when 'Homicide' miraculously migrated to regular daytime airplay in Southern California, KROQ. It was the *Separates* album that really connected with me, a near perfect collection that shows the Niners at their full songwriting power. A collection showing that punk could be so much more than snarl and spit. Melody and dynamic, wit of lyric and unexpected back beat, these were all the things that made the band stand apart. 'Let's Face It', a track that simply moves, became such a favorite it was the first song that we ever played in public, at a backyard party. That track goes right into the trippy 'Crime', a song that showcases the band's penchant for shadow and threat, before dissolving into the trippy punk jazz stylings of 'Crime Pt II'. 'High Energy Plan', 'Rael Rean'? C'mon man! 'Feelin' Alright with the Crew', which became our ready-to-go-party anthem, just as our older brothers would put on 'Saturday's Alright for Fighting' before hitting the streets, joint in pocket and condom in wallet. Of course, the lead-off track is 'Homicide', one of the most perfect songs ever recorded. Impossibly grooved, in the pocket, with slashes of guitar work above bubbling bass, Nick Cash's voice ringing clear as an air raid siren splitting the midnight sky in two,

We saw 999 the first time at Santa Monica Civic, along with 3,000 fans, filling the arena on the strength of that hit. Later, we would follow them to triumphant returns to the Roxy or Whisky, heady days that they immortalized in *Hollywood*. The years passed and they came over less frequently, and it puzzled me. *How could you not know 999?* I would say to the kids that would come to our own shows and ask if we wrote 'Titanic Reaction'. Finally, we were able to

share the stage with them in the early 2000s. By that time, however, their star had cooled, and we shared a week traveling up and down the California Coast, playing to half empty rooms of disinterested fashion punks. But still, it seemed ok.

Nick and the lads seemed to just happy to be on holiday here in the sun, and we were thrilled to share a breakfast table with the heroes that meant and mean so much to us. In the years since, our bands have shared the bittersweet label of *underrated*, or worse, *where are they now?* When I am asked for the rare interview with younger people, they inevitably wrap the interview with, *so who are you listening to now?* I take a practiced pause, as if thinking, and simply answer, yeah, a band called 999. *You should check them out.*

Steve Reich, *Music for 18 Musicians* (1978)

Thor Harris (The Angels of Light, Swans)

My favourite record on the face of the earth is Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians*, first released in 1978. This piece of music is about an hour long and it's one piece that is perceived more like an hour-long meditation. It contains 14 movements that are sewn together seamlessly. It is mainly driven by marimba and clarinet. Many of the series of pulses are based on the lung capacity of the players. A pulse will go until the player is out of breath.

I believe the way the piece pulses has a similar effect to meditation, although I am still a novice at meditation. The 6/8 time signature does not allow for mental complacency the way 4/4 might. The entire piece is written around 11 chords but moves through all harmonies without feeling like anything at all has changed. This piece brought new life and excitement to the world of classical minimalism. If you have not heard it, you are in for a treat. Play it loud and spend the hour as though you were on a mild hallucinogen.

Wire, *Chairs Missing* (1978)

Steve Michener (Big Dipper, Volcano Suns)

When I first met Gary Waleik, the guitarist who would play a big part in my life, he had answered an ad that I put in *The Phoenix* looking for a guitarist and a drummer. After my year in The Pods I had acquiesced to the fact that I was going to play bass and had even started enjoying it. It was a much better fit for me, I discovered, since I could hide in the back and my mistakes would go mostly unnoticed, at least compared to a guitarist, and the technical requirements were much less than those of the other instruments. Bob, the first guy who responded

to the ad, played guitar so I asked Gary, the only other person to reply, if he would consider playing drums and he showed up at our first practice with his cousin Jeff's green kit. I loved him already.

That first band didn't really work out, mostly because Bob was a bit of an oddball and had trouble remembering what parts he had played on the songs from practice to practice. Looking back now, I realise that he was probably on the spectrum but we just thought he was spacey and stopped calling him. That left Gary and me without a real band but we had forged a strong friendship and started hanging out together. I have fond memories of showing up at his uncle's four-story Brookline brownstone where my new friend lived in a top-floor bedroom and making my way up the 14-or-so narrow staircases that led to Gary's garret. There, we would watch Bruins games, play guitars, and listen to the latest punk rock songs on his stereo. We talked constantly about forming another band but we had so many ideas in our heads from all the incredible music bombarding us that we didn't know where to start.

Gary and I had similar taste in music and he introduced me to many bands in that musty attic, including all the latest punk and hardcore bands, like Minor Threat, The Minutemen, Hüsker Dü and, most notably, Wire. Their first album, *Pink Flag*, was a revelation to us: here was a band clearly influenced by and capable of playing hardcore, but there was so much more there than just anger and fast songs.

Then, when he played their second album, *Chairs Missing*, it was as if we had unlocked the vault with all the musical answers that we sought. It was also like discovering the headwaters of so much of the great music that we were enjoying: you could hear, for instance, how many of our heroes (like Mission of Burma) had drunk deeply from these waters. In one year, Wire had progressed beyond the relatively rudimentary *Pink Flag* and created a record where noise, pop, conceptual, Kraut rock, intelligence, and raw punk coalesced into a flawless symphony that achieved everything that I could ever dream of doing in a band.

'*Mercy*' became the template for my bass style, and '*Sand in My Joints*' and '*I Am the Fly*' perfectly outlined for us how a band could mix noise and melody into a three-minute song, while '*Outdoor Miner*' somehow managed to be the perfect pop tune while lasting under two minutes. To put it mildly, we were inspired.

All of this research under Professors Lewis, Gilbert, Newman, and Gotobed came in handy a few months later when Gary and I answered an ad in *The Phoenix* placed by (now ex-) Burma drummer, Peter Prescott, looking for a guitarist and bassist to form a new band. We instantly bonded with Peter over

our love for *Pink Flag* and *Chairs Missing* and proceeded to write dozens of songs together, all of them strongly informed by those two perfect first albums by Wire. Listening now, I'm still amazed by this record and it makes me want to grab a guitar and try to change the world.

The Lurkers, *Fulham Fallout* (1978)

Micky Bones (musician/artist)

In 1976 I was 14. I already knew Bowie, Mott the Hoople and Alex Harvey. The *Melody Maker* introduced me to The Dolls and Iggy, John Peel provided the soundtrack. In August 1977 I heard The Lurkers first single '*Shadow*'. I bought it. It went on to sell 10,000 copies. I was hooked! Their follow-up single '*Freak Show*' did not disappoint and, in May 1978, their third single '*Ain't Got a Clue*' reached number 45 in the singles chart, selling over 15,000 copies.

There was a cracking second John Peel session too which showcased new songs for the forthcoming debut album... I could not wait.

When *Fulham Fallout* arrived, I was ill and confined to bed. My parents had reluctantly bought me the album as a present after much pestering from myself. The problem was that I was too ill to play it, my condition was getting worse and hospital was a possibility. All I wanted to do was play that record and I honestly believe that my desire to hear it was instrumental in my recovery. I wrote to Howard Wall (Lurkers singer) a year or so later, telling him what that record meant to me and I got a splendid letter back from him with a pack of four badges. I still have that letter and just the one badge.

Fulham Fallout was released in April 1978 – it's loud, fast and there is not one bad song on it. On the 14 songs, the subject matter varies from the semi-political, class-aware '*Total War*' to the nihilistic '*Self Destruct*', the surprisingly sad and reflective '*Gerald*' and a breakneck run-through of The Crystals '*Then I Kissed Her*' retitled appropriately. This is full-on British 1970s punk rock played with skill and charisma. On a good night, there was not a band to touch them and on a bad one even more so. The icing on this particular Lurkers cake was that their fourth single '*I Don't Need to Tell Her*' earned the band an appearance on BBC's Top of the Pops owing to its chart position of number 49.

The Lurkers were much more than a three-chord punk band, more booze than speed with a bleary-eyed nod towards the dirty low down rock'n'roll of The New York Dolls. There is a subtlety in the song writing and an intelligence in dealing with mental health issues ('*Shadow*', '*It's Quiet Here*', '*Gerald*'). The tone

is sympathetic as opposed to that of many of their contemporaries who played by the punk rock rules.

Oh, and I still have that badge: it says 'I love The Lurkers.' I still do.

Various, Farewell to the Roxy (1978)

Marcel Stol (musician: Neuroot (NL); co-founder of punk squat venue Goudvishal in Arnhem; co-author, *Goudvishal DIY or die! Punk in Arnhem 1977-1990*)

At first infected with the punk virus upon hearing *Never Mind the Bollocks* at a high school party, age thirteen, 1977. This was the first punk record I bought. The second punk record I bought was *Farewell to the Roxy* in 1978. The Roxy was the first punk club where all the first UK punk bands could regularly play and as such the Roxy gave birth to punk as a scene. The first *Live at the Roxy* compilation album had all the more well known, 'major' bands on it and was released by a major, corporate, record company. *Farewell to the Roxy* was released by a small independent label and of all the bands on it, only the UK Subs grew to be well known but only years later, in the 1980s. In 1978 the UK Subs were just as anonymous and unknown as the Crabs, The Red Lights, the Acme Sewage Co. or the Blitz on this album and not even the best I thought.

Until this day I keep getting back to this album to witness the on-the-fly-there-and-then invention and birth of punk and for hearing the sheer and utterly pure adolescent, playful essence of punk as it first started. Loaded with non-conformist attitude and, dare I say it, even witty comedy. On eternal rotation in my playlist.

The Clash, '(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais' (1978)

Tim Satchwell (author, *Combat Ready; All the Peacemakers*)

'*Police and Thieves*' (Clash version) is often cited as the kick-off point for the "Punky Reggae Party". For me, it's '(White Man)...' that really blends the genres.

Why do I love it? It's a song of many layers and it's a kind of cultural reference. I remember buying it, the pink die-cut sleeve with The Clash printed on "stage right." I was only aware of the other colour options later, blue, yellow and green. I played it over and over and over again. From the opening "One. Two. A one-two-three-four," it's a captivating song. Musically, it's such a great arrangement, it's punk rock reggae! It's about space, it's about highs and lows, it's about Topper's extraordinary drumming.

I didn't know much about reggae at the time, maybe I felt it wasn't part of my culture, but it was part of mine now, and it took me on a voyage of discovery. The song has such a range of emotion, the melancholy of Mick's harmonica part – it's uplifting and sad at the same time. The Clash really nailed it. Lyrically, it's a kind of confession, about disappointment, a commentary on the state of the music scene. Joe is at his poetic best, with classic line after classic line, humour (a little pop at The Jam) and social commentary. Turning Rebellion into money. Why should people listen to it? Should people listen to it? Maybe in these days of multi-genre crossover music, it's not such a big deal to the "youth". What would a sixteen-year-old make of it? For people of a certain age, I'm sure they would connect: it's a musical and cultural statement, and it's on the set list at my funeral.

Various Artists, :30 Over D.C. ~ Here Comes the New Wave! (1978)

Rob Moss (Artificial Peace, Government Issue, Rob Moss and Skin-Tight Skin)

:30 Over D.C., a compilation album released in 1978 on Limp Records, is a favourite record of mine. After playing sides 1 and 2, I declared: "I, too, will write songs." And if it didn't exist, I might not have ever formed a band. When I was in high school, Brian Gay and I would listen to that album and we'd write songs in his mom's living room. Songs we felt could've been on :30 Over D.C. – it was our touchstone. Then, about a year after we first heard stuff on that album, like 'The Break' by The Penetrators, 'Attitude' by The Slickee Boys, 'Get Up N' Dance' by Jeff Dahl, and 'I Hate' by White Boy, we started playing hardcore punk. And Artificial Peace and Government Issue were some of my bands. The music got faster, but I never forgot :30 Over D.C. and the bands on that album.

A few years ago – after about a 35-year hiatus from music – I got back into songwriting and making albums. And :30 Over D.C. continues to inspire me. So much so that I asked several musicians who played on that album to play on mine. Marshall Keith, of the Slickee Boys, Martha Hull, also of the Slickee Boys, and Glenn Kowalski (a.k.a. Jake Whipp) of White Boy, all said "Yes" when I asked them to be a guest musician on my songs.

:30 Over D.C. contained 16 songs by 16 mostly Washington, D.C. scene bands that spanned a range of genres: alternative rock, new wave, noise, punk, art rock. It was produced by Skip Groff, whose shop, Yesterday and Today Records, was where I bought it, along with many more albums, and where I made many friends. Who would've thought that one album could make such an impact on one person?

DEVO, Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are DEVO! (1978)

Macky (The Bobby Lees)

There are a bunch of albums that could hold the mantle of “my favourite of all time.” For brevity’s sake, however, my pick would have to be *Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are DEVO!* by the (semi eponymous) DEVO.

Though music has always been a central part of my life, finding this album was the first time that I really felt like I could take control of my own music taste. It was here that I finally felt that nothing in art is arbitrary, that life and the things in it are beautiful because they’re beautiful; not because anyone said they should be labelled as such. I got into this record when I was 14, which is to say that it could seem contrived to attribute my seemingly sudden brain kindling to a single piece of art during a time in human life so ubiquitously characterized by its continuous and rapid forward changes. That being said... DEVO’s first album and the effect it had on me can’t be understated. After all, I don’t know if I would’ve survived puberty’s evolutions were it not for the immanence of DEVOLUTION!

Personal waffling aside, DEVO as a band captured something almost impossible to replicate. Nowhere is that sense more pure and condensed than in this album. I often hear people talking about how “revolutionary” this record was “for the time” but when I think about it I’m not sure I know of anything since that’s been able to hit quite the same nerve. Not only that, but they weren’t the first to do obtuse synths, or weird stilted vocals, or talk about science, or dress and dance in unison, or et cetera ... but they were the first to be DEVO. Not only are they more than the sum of their parts, they figured out how to (via a hodgepodge of the uncanny, the alien, and the recognisable) become something never before seen that simultaneously felt like it had been there all along. If you’ve never experienced this album, check it out!

DEVO, Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are DEVO! (1978)

Hugo Higgins (French promoter)

DEVO – Are We Not Men?

Q: AM I A BOY?

A: I AM DEVO!

Culturally, growing up in France in the ‘70s was a nightmare. Even if we had great food, the radio played awful chansons françaises and assorted variétés crap like Johnny Hallyday or Claude François was the sonic assault my ears had to endure on our three national TV channels.

I was a long-haired, lonely, weird kid, often mistaken for a girl and laughed at by the vicious little fuckers at school. My parents were definitely not the average baguettes-and-beret French family: my long-haired, bearded dad played keyboards in a prog-rock band named Spheroe – they released a couple of albums – and my mum was in her hippie era, painting bottles for cheap decoration of our modest apartment located in the grey-zone suburbs of Lyon. Since I was raised in a music-loving environment, I grew up listening to records by The Beatles, Hendrix, Led Zeppelin, Jeff Beck or Blossom Toes (got a seven-inch as a gift from my parents’ trip to London!) at an early age. By the age of 10 or 11, I had also attended shows by Tina & Ike Turner, Magma, Stanley Clarke, Santana and Genesis, on their *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway* tour. But that was my parents’ music; I needed something of my own but had no clue how to find it. In 1977, I started tripping on pictures of the brand new punk movement that was covered in *Best* and *Rock & Folk*, the two national French rock magazines. I would cut and paste pictures, articles and reviews of everything related to punk in a big notebook, but since it was nowhere to be seen or heard on French media, I had to wait a few months before actually hearing what the music sounded like.

In the first days of January 1978, my mom bought me the Sex Pistols’ *Holidays in the Sun* seven-inch and it definitely crushed me. It sounded exactly as I expected – dark, angry and aggressive – and it immediately made me beg my mom for more! A couple of months later, my wish was fulfilled on my 13th birthday when I was gifted a copy of the Pistols’ *Never Mind the Bollocks...*, which I played endlessly for months ... until a new treasure hit my braincells.

Going through the record collection of a music maniac friend of my parents, I came across a copy of the just-released, first album of a strange-looking band I had read about in my precious rock mags: *Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are DEVO!* The double-sided cover itself was intriguing: a screaming man in a doctor’s white coat, wearing swimming goggles and surgical gloves was on one side, while three screaming men with punk sunglasses and stockings over their heads were on the other. The inner sleeve with live pictures of the band and the yellow vinyl were also quite surprising at the time. I expected something strange and not as energetic as the Pistols: how could it top that Steve Jones guitar sound and that Johnny Rotten puking voice?

Well ... it took me about 10 seconds into *‘Uncontrollable Urge’* to fall in love with DEVO! It was the fastest thing I had ever heard at this point of my life and the singer was spitting all his words at the speed of light. I also dug the weird keyboards sound, which I knew a bit about since I used to play with my

dad's Korg synthesizers instead of working on my percussion skills. I had heard the Stones' *'Satisfaction'* before, but DEVO's cover was off the charts ... like the remaining 10 crazy songs of the record. Seeing how I loved the LP, the good man who owned that piece of greatness was kind enough to give it to me: now I had two amazing punk records to listen to, the start of a great collection!

In the following months, I also used the lyrics sheet to learn/improve my English reading/speaking, which made me love DEVO's weird world even more: songs about satellites falling to earth, mongoloids (I drew a record cover for it for a school art project, ha ha!) and that general futuristic/dadaist/de-evolution topics, which all blew my young mind.

Shortly after that cherished discovery, a 30-minute set of DEVO live in Paris was broadcast on French national TV: I was in heaven in front of my black-and-white screen and even if it was church time on Sunday, I had found my own religion! By the time I bought their new and equally-as-great *Duty Now for the Future* second album months later, I was on a full-on punk-new wave-industrial-experimental-underground music ride.

Forty-four years later, the journey is still on.

Regrets, I have a few ... never seeing DEVO is one of the biggest.

But the 30 bands I drummed for in France and the US, the 14 albums I recorded, the hundreds of shows I played or attended, the dozens of radio shows I hosted, the thousands of records I bought, the articles for zines I wrote, the few shows I booked for bands such as Fugazi, Nomeansno, Doughboys, Victims Family, Samiam, Moving Targets or a DJ named Jello Biafra, the 10 USA trips and 20 London trips to see shows and buy records and all the great people I met in the music scene...it all started here, in DEVO-land, 1978!

X-Ray Spex, *Germ Free Adolescents* (1978)

Manda Rin (Bis)

A favourite album of mine is one that many music lovers will probably own: X-Ray Spex, *Germ Free Adolescents*. It was released in 1978, so it's obviously an album I didn't actually hear until it had been out for about 20 years, but certainly a record that I can't see ever dating. Singer Poly Styrene has probably influenced many of my favourite singers like Kathleen Hanna, Corin Tucker and a large quantity of musicians within the Riot Grrrl movement. Poly was a female of colour making music in the '70s, which was an admirable task to embark upon. Her determination and courage shines through the songs on this album and is

the encouragement I needed when I started to write songs. With X-Ray Spex she created a powerful energy of punk with meaningful, political, yet fun lyrics. Songs like *'The Day the World Turned DayGlo'* explores the consumerist world that we live in and was decades before the calls for climate change and escapism from plastic toxicity. Then there's songs like *'I Can't Do Anything'* with lyrics, "I can't read and I can't spell/I can't even get to hell," with a slightly more downbeat pop edge to it.

The standout *'Oh Bondage Up Yours'* is a punk classic for feminists like myself when it begins with the spoken "Some people think that little girls should be seen and not heard/But I think 'Oh bondage, up yours!'". Her raised voice in those previous four words are in that "do-not-mess" style that many singers – including myself – have kindly copied in our own songs. This band are powerful, they had something to say, and topped it off nicely by being very good musicians too. I wish I could have seen them perform live as Poly is mesmerising in any videos I've managed to see, but I was only a baby when this came out. *Germ Free Adolescents* is an album that people will talk about for many, many more years.

Thin Lizzy, *Live and Dangerous* (1978)

Roisin Dwyer (writer, *Hot Press*)

My thirteen-year-old world changed utterly and inexorably on hearing Thin Lizzy's *Live and Dangerous* for the first time. I borrowed the 12-inch gatefold double-album vinyl artefact in all its weighty glory from my brother-in-law, recorded it onto BASF 90-min tape and, from then on, it was destined to be played continuously on the family stereo or on my older sister's battered Sony Walkman.

A new world had opened up. What was happening to me? The music made me feel elated. Life had new meaning. I adored the riffs. Phil's lyrics. Brian Downey's thunderous but nuanced drums. The excitement that listening to the album generated defied description: I was transported to another state of being. I wanted to be part of THIS ... whatever it was.

As quickly as I could, I saved up enough pocket money to buy my own precious objet d'art. Its leather-crotch-filled cover. Its inside sleeves with photos of the men who were responsible for the life-altering sound. I quizzed my older siblings endlessly. What did they know about Phil Lynott? What did they know about Thin Lizzy? What did they know about the music? Every hour brought a fresh grilling. I quickly became a pariah, a pest to be avoided unless you secretly wanted to be subjected to another tedious interrogation. I devoured the information on

the back cover. Who were these magical personae? And their cohorts with strange names like Bluesy Huey Lewis and Chalkie Davies? Rats and Radiators? It was my life's mission to find out more. To know more. To be initiated.

Each of the four sides has a different mood. There is still no album opener as exciting as the crowd chant before *'Jailbreak'* revs up and twangs into gear, followed by the raucous *'Emerald'*; the yearning melody of the glorious *'Southbound'*; and the rollercoaster ride of Lizzy's adrenaline-soaked version of Bob Seger's ode to the teen queen, *'Rosalie'*. Side two brought the seductive sway of *'Dancing in the Moonlight'* and the aching sense of loss that fuels *'Still in Love With You'* – the latter in particular showcasing Robbo and Scott's contrasting six-string prowess.

Magnificent as disc one is, however, it is when we hit side three of *Live and Dangerous* that things power majestically into full-on overdrive. It is perhaps the most perfect slice of live action in the history of rock'n'roll: opening with the extraordinary, resplendent double-whammy of *'Cowboy Song'* and *'The Boys Are Back in Town'*, it blazes defiantly into one of Philo's greatest songs, the mischievously confessional and teasingly revealing *'Don't Believe a Word'*. The Hendrix-esque *'Warrior'* spaces us out momentarily, before *'Are You Ready'* grabs us by the scruff of the neck and drags us back to the middle of the melee.

It is Brian Downey's moment to shine on side four, with the percussive perfection of *'Sha La La'*. *Live and Dangerous* is one of those rare things – a live album which makes you feel part of the experience of the gig itself. Phil intros the individual members of the band on *'Baby Drives Me Crazy'*, before the sound of the crowd baying for *'The Rocker'* introduces the song that brings the most perfect live album EVER to its conclusion. Regardless of anything Tony Visconti might say!

The crucial thing, for me personally, about *Live and Dangerous* is that it gave me a true sense of belonging. Phil was warm and larger than life. He implored the crowd to "clap your hands for me" and jokingly asked the girls if they wanted "a little more Irish in them." He introduced the band and guests like they were beloved kin Who was John Earle anyway? Another question for a long-suffering family member.

I discovered that this was a tribe I could be part of – by buying albums, learning more and spreading the righteous word about their brilliance. Every Saturday, donning a Thin Lizzy t-shirt, I took my worse-for-wear Freebird Records bag full of *Black Rose* fanzines (essential reading material) to town on the bus. I always sat upstairs, my sellotaped-together Walkman (long-commandeered

from my sister) blaring out the music from the Hammersmith Odeon or Seneca College to impress (or more likely infuriate) my fellow commuters. I didn't care.

My quest for Lizzy and related material took me to the fabled Freebird, Abbey Mall, RPM, Borderline, George's Street Arcade and inspired a first-ever visit to the palace of the legendary Mr. Murray, whose shop was one of the rare indoor establishments that stocked bootleg tapes. O'Connell Bridge and the north side of the Ha'penny Bridge were essential pitstops for these coveted supplies also. Oh, the joyous days when a rare find took place. My disbelief at uncovering *Funky Junction Play a Tribute to Deep Purple* in RPM!

I had graduated to hardcore fan at this stage, no longer asking questions but, instead, boring people senseless with monologues instead. Years later at my job interview in *Hot Press*, Niall Stokes would remark on my good fortune at hearing such a seminal album at a tender age. In the years that followed, *Hot Press* gave me the opportunity to meet and interview most of the former Lizzy members and to establish a working relationship of sorts with them across various projects over the years. Gentlemen all!

The late, great Frank Murray was a regular caller to the *Hot Press* office, and we enjoyed frequent friendly banter. I remember once someone telling me that he had said he "liked my vibe." Imagine what my thirteen-year-old self would have thought of all this! *Live and Dangerous* remains as powerful and as potent as ever. Listening to it now is like sitting down with an old friend. I am honoured to still be a member of Phil's gang.

The Clash, *Give 'em Enough Rope* (1978)

Jeremy (Levellers)

Favourite album or record? That's a tough one – I have many! But here's the two that were the most significant for me early doors. I'll try to bring it down to one eventually, so bear with me!

I remember talking in the *Great Gig Memories* NHS charity book about Nick Burbridge (of McDermott's 2 Hours) and his early band The Crack, and how they introduced me to folk music, so here's the story of how I fell in love with my other interest: loud, garage guitar. I was 14+. It was instant and all-embracing.

What happened was I bought AC/DC's *Let There Be Rock* – basically because the older kids I looked up to were wearing AC/DC t-shirts! I got that particular album 'cos it had a picture of the band playing live on the cover and it looked energetic and cool. Apart from that, I'd never heard of them before, which

just made it all the more enticing.... So, I put the record on. You can hear guitars being plugged in, tape machines warming up and feedback all over it. This was electric music being played live and it was one titanic racket. Blew my tiny mind! I was hooked and recorded it onto a C90 cassette so I could play to my mates on the bus to school.

Around the same time I saw The Clash play a Saturday morning TV show. This time I knew the name because my older cousin had had a brief flirtation with punk rock a year or so previously. I was a bit too young then but watching Strummer & Co. on that show was another revelatory experience! Dressed all in black they blew through 'Career Opportunities' then sat down for a brief interview. I'd already made up my mind to get their new album but when Strummer said, "Anyone can do what we do – just give it a go," I knew my calling: I nicked my sister's neglected acoustic guitar and started learning there and then. But I digress....

Anyway, I went out and got *Give 'em Enough Rope*, The Clash's new record. Another mind-blowing guitar monstrosity – but this time with lyrics I could properly relate to, as a suburban teenage outsider type. So that immediately went on the other side of my C90 and I rushed round to my best mate's house to crank it on his rudimentary boom box. We played the shit outa that cassette until it literally fell apart! I'd play that thing to anyone that'd listen and to many others that wouldn't. The cool kids on the school bus would play Led Zeppelin – they thought AC/DC was low brow stuff indeed and The Clash were punk, not even music at all! So, no kudos points for me with those guys and the girls all thought it was too noisy.

I wouldn't be doing what I am now, though, without those albums. I still think *Let There Be Rock* is the most intense garage rock'n'roll ever recorded and *Give 'em Enough Rope* starts with 'Safe European Home', 'English Civil War' and 'Tommy Gun' – say no more!

'English Civil War' especially meant a lot to me, being partly about football hooliganism and the rise of the right – that was the everyday casual violence my friends and I had to cope with growing up in small town Britain then. So that album particularly gave me hope and somewhere, musically, to belong.

It has to be my transformational record. It introduced me to politics, activism, DIY culture and to playing music myself.

And it's loud as fuck!

Can't ask for more than that.

Postscript: I was fortunate to be able to say all that to Joe himself when he came to play on Levellers' 'Just the One' EP. Guy was a legend and still sorely missed.

The Clash, *Give 'em Enough Rope* (1978)

Belvy K (The Catatonics/7 Seconds/UK Subs/D Generation/Libertine)

This is still probably my all-time favorite record. The songs are great and it really shows Topper Headon at the top of his game. Topper is the best rock drummer of all time if ya ask me – he could play anything and always had a swing. My two biggest drummer influences are Topper on this album and Clem Burke from Blondie on *Eat to the Beat*. I can't tell you how many hours under the headphones I spent learning these recs. Drove my parents crazy. This record makes me feel triumphant and happy. I think the beginning of 'Safe European' is the best album opener of all time. And then there's 'Tommy Gun'! 'English Civil War'! And 'Stay Free'! Sooo many great songs. This is The Clash at their absolute peak IMHO. People will hate on me, but I rate *London Calling* below this. It's probably The Clash's least-appreciated album (besides *Cut the Crap*), but like I said, I think it's the band at their best and most energetic. The film *Rude Boy* was shot on the UK tour for this record (I believe) and the power and energy just flies off the screen and still blows me away to this day.

Funny story: I actually got to hang out with Joe Strummer in Toronto after a Mescaleros show and we just spent the night talking of Topper and how criminally underrated I thought *Give 'em Enough Rope* was. Some wiseass punk rock kid telling the GOAT, Joe fucking Strummer, what was what! LOL Seriously 'tho, one of the best nights of my life. Fucking magical.

If I'm feeling down or depressed, I'll just put that on and bam – instant mood change. It's such an uplifting powerhouse of a record.

Siouxsie and the Banshees, *Join Hands* (1979)

Herman de Tollenaere (Cheap 'n' Nasty; *Pin* zine; co-founder Rock Against Racism, Netherlands)

What is my favourite record? There are so many! The 'Wild Fire' EP by Les Lou's? These 75% French 25% Dutch women were my original inspiration to get into punk in 1977. Should I say Ivy Green and their album of the same name, the first Dutch punk band, the first interviewees and first subscribers of my fanzine *Pin*? Something by Crass or Poison Girls with whom my band Cheap 'n' Nasty played its first concert? The Ramones? Their *It's Alive* is fantastic. So is *Germ Free Adolescents* by X-Ray Spex. The Undertones' 'Teenage Kicks' EP? *Damned Damned Damned*, by the Damned? Or Shonen Knife from Osaka, Japan? *Inflammable Material* by Stiff Little Fingers? The UK Subs, or the Mo-dettes, both

so great to play with? Zounds, with whom we toured in the Netherlands, Belgium and Berlin, just after their first EP *'Can't Cheat Karma'* had come out? Our own *'Covergirl'* EP – that is not personal vanity because not me, but our bassist/female lead vocals Terry, wrote all four songs on it, and I play it a lot? The Linda Lindas? Maid of Ace's *Maid in England*?

I choose *Join Hands* by Siouxsie and the Banshees. With the song *'Regal Zone'*, making mincemeat of political authorities. While *'Icon'* makes mincemeat of religious authorities. *'Icon'* may be the most difficult punk song to sing – Siouxsie succeeds fantastically. The Banshees' interview in *Pin* quotes it. At that Amsterdam interview, Terry sat between Steve Severin and Siouxsie. As Steve is also a photographer, that meant two photographers, two bassists and two singers all next to each other. *'Poppy Day'* is based on the poem *In Flanders Fields*. That starts as an anti-war poem, becoming a pro-war poem in the last lines. Good that the Banshees leave the last lines out. Some of my ancestors are from Flanders Fields, so devastated by World War I.

Swell Maps, *A Trip to Marineville* (1979)

Sean Forbes (Wat Tyler, Hardskin)

My top five albums of all time have always been the same. I love new albums but these always stay with me: Meat Loaf, *Bat Out of Hell* (1977); Blondie, *Parallel Lines* (1978); Swell Maps, *A Trip to Marineville* (1979); The Photos, *The Photos* (1980); Flux of Pink Indians, *Strive to Survive Causing Least Suffering Possible* (1982).

Cheddington is a small village in Buckinghamshire and the Cheddington Punx (three people) used to buy records between us because we were young and poor. The first was *Inflammable Material* by Stiff Little Fingers and because that was such a hit with us all, we went for the next LP on Rough Trade and that was the Swell Maps. We wanted loud, raw and rude punk and what we got with the Swell Maps was far out, weird and awkward. It blew our little minds. We didn't understand it. But because we bought it, and it would be at least a month or two before we got another album, we just played it and played it until it became just as essential as Stiff Little Fingers. Even now, 43 years later, it's musically dense and sprinkled with odd sounds and magic. I never got to see the Swell Maps, as when they were supposed to play Aylesbury, Friars, they got beaten up by skinheads during the day. I thought Swell Maps were super-obscure and in an art task at school I copied their *Real Shocks* sleeve and amazingly got busted by my

teacher who knew it was not my own work. I thought she was the coolest ever after that. Swell Maps always made me feel that anyone can make music and were a massive influence on Wat Tyler. Do whatever you want, even if you can't play it well. So you now know who to blame for Wat Tyler!!

Public Image Ltd, *Metal Box* (1979)

Jerry A. Lang (Poison Idea; author, *Black Heart Fades* Volumes 1-3)

As a young punk rocker, I curiously checked out reggae and dub, from sucking up every Clash interview, Johnny Rotten Top Ten, *NME*, etc. Joe Carducci who went on to work for Black Flag and SST Records, lived in Portland, Oregon, and did a weekly radio show. I heard one song off Dr. Alimantado's *Best Dressed Chicken in Town*. By this time, I had heard all the name checks in *'(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais'*, I knew U-Roy, King Tubby, but this toasting! The production! I could hear the tracks leaking in the background! It sounded like it was from another planet. I felt like I was getting stoned just listening to it. It was as cool as Al Green but as underground as Metal Urbain. I picked up pieces like it was spoken in code. I loved it but it was a puzzle. About a year or so later the first PiL record came out and then *Metal Box*, and then I understood. "That's it!" I sighed, "WOW."

Various Artists, *Rebel Music – An Anthology of Reggae Music* (1979)

Jem Moore (Serious Drinking)

This double LP was owned by my friend at school who had been tipped off via the John Peel show or the *NME* or *Sounds*. Growing up with pop music (charts) and "progressing" to sensitive singer-songwriter stuff, I fully embraced the new wave of punk rock as a licence to assert my independence. This involved listening to J. Strummer and J. Rotten tell that reggae was good. I wasn't that independent. I needed someone to tell me what to do. As a white, downwardly-mobile, middle-class revolter, I wasn't immediately convinced, but exposure to this compilation did the trick.

My friends and I never embraced Rastafarianism but we did venture to the Wellington Arms round the back of Watford Junction where we knew the West Indian community had the good sense to serve Red Stripe and cultivate a jukebox containing many *Rebel Music* cuts. And there was a pool table. Over time the pub became a regular meeting place for any South Herts outsiders – a punky reggae party in microcosm, where tales of gauntlet-running from white-towel-socked, furry-diced Escort-driving soul boys were swapped.

The music is pure nectar – the cream of early 1970s reggae including Dennis Brown’s alternative *‘Money in My Pocket’* with the superior guitar riff; and *‘The Russians Are Coming’*, Val Bennett’s astonishing take on the jazz standard *‘Take Five’*. The outside of the gatefold sleeve is almost a pastiche of a naff Music for Pleasure/Woolies party album, with no hint whatsoever of the contents contained therein.

I bought my own copy of the record from Watford market and left home a few weeks later after my Mum accused me of “getting into voodoo.” Forty-three years on and I partake of “the contents contained therein” at least once a month.

Wire, *‘40 Versions’ (1979)*

Momus (The Happy Family, solo artist; author)

It starts with a churn, to which is added a chirp. These are guitars, but also objects, colours, textures, drones, decoys. There’s nothing flashy or trite about the guitars: some of the sounds are fat and brown and close and dry, others wet and shrill and distant, like marsh birds shrieking as they rise. Soon synths join in, adding something lush and opalescent. Everything oscillates between two major chords, like a person vacillating between two identities. It’s 1979, and this is the final track on Wire’s third album, *154*. The title refers to the number of concerts Wire have played at this point. The cover is an abstract assemblage – almost Constructivist – of shapes and colours, a visual correlative to the sounds, both artful and random. The sleeve concept is credited to Bruce Gilbert, whose guitar lines are as carefully placed in the music as the pink squiggly line is on the cover.

In the opening seconds of *‘40 Versions’* one senses the presence not just of the group members themselves – ex-art students who have been concerning themselves for some time with ducks, flies, ex-lion tamers, news services, swimmers and chopped-off limbs – but of their producer Mike Thorne. The green label in the centre of the spinning vinyl album says Harvest, a label name which conjures spectral memories of Pink Floyd and the Canterbury prog scene. So although this is post-punk – the new broom which was supposed to sweep that arty hippy stuff away – there are psychedelic tugs, acid flashbacks. But hush, an EBow is referencing Fripp’s line on Bowie’s *“Heroes”* and Colin Newman is singing! “I never know which version I’m going to be,” he’s saying, like one of the bewildered zombies at the end of a Spike Milligan sketch (“What are we going to do now?”), “I seem to have so many choices open to me!” There are total eclipses and Niagara Falls to distract us, but the song seems to be circling around the multiverse

hypothesis of quantum mechanics. Or the sperm competing to penetrate the egg that becomes each of us. Or the idea that we are all actors auditioning daily for the role of ourselves. It could be a frightening theme, but somehow it’s hopeful and heartening. Tomorrow will come, and with it a new decade in which we can be anyone. The song fades into a prayer-like (and Eno-like) chant voiced by Graham Lewis, ending in gentle chaos with an “Amen” and a dazed guitar figure, a sort of wounded pheasant trying to take flight. Perhaps in 1980 we will be awful, but here at the end of 1979 there are many possibilities, all glistening with hope.

Joy Division, *Unknown Pleasures (1979)*

Conor Ferguson (writer, photographer, filmmaker)

It looked different. It sounded different. And it made a difference to a doomy fourteen-year-old boy trying to find a world to belong in, while simultaneously cultivating a fringe. What makes this record tower over so many other great albums is its sense of place, of time, its defiant yet restrained energy, its powerful psyche. (And if there is an album that cast a longer shadow over subsequent decades, kindly pop it in a stamped, self-addressed envelope: I’m not listening.)

Released in June 1979, but by the time I started listening to it, Curtis was a year dead. However, my older brother, Johnny – also sadly no longer with us – who had introduced me to the band, had omitted this tragic coda. So, when I fell in love with the album’s darkness and isolation, I wasn’t aware of the turmoil it was expressing – just the mystique of its cover; of the snarling guitar and growling bass; the sibilant, crystalline drums; and Curtis’s bleak lyricism. Together they presented a rough guide to existentialism and ennui for a lad who hadn’t quite got around to perusing Sartre and Camus.

The whole thing is also haunted with the ghosts of post-industrial Britain. The urban decay, the factories and foundries shuttered in Thatcher’s onslaught. And listening in the dark (or in a haze of “blem” if you were a bit older) took you down those oily, empty streets with their obscure noises and shadows ready to swallow you up if you didn’t keep your wits about you or turn the light back on.

This crepuscular world was largely the making of producer Martin Hannett (RIP). It was largely thanks to him that it sounded so different; an album with its own sense of architecture or psycho-geography. He layered in unexpected sounds – a spooky loop here, a glass bottle shattering there; he even sampled the industrial elevator that was in the building where the album was recorded. It felt like the production was echoing the encroaching darkness inside Ian Curtis’s mind.

But was this healthy? I remember someone saying, “Sure, no wonder you’re depressed, listening to that music.” But it was the opposite. Unknown Pleasures provided a comfort of sorts to someone feeling awkward, isolated and slightly wary of the onrushing adult world. It was an invitation to a club where those who felt they didn’t-quite-belong could belong.

Jim Hall and Bob Brookmeyer, *Live at the North Sea Jazz Festival 1979* (1979)

Andrea Lombardini (Buñuel)

This wondrous performance, captured live and released for the first time 20 years after the concert, embodies the essence of freedom and impromptu invention in music. The duo is rather unique: guitar (Hall) and valve trombone (Brookmeyer) but the material consists of standard songs familiar to every jazz player and listener, which helps in keeping the listener aware while enjoying all the adventurous reharmonisation mastered by the well-known players – Jim Hall and Bob Brookmeyer. The beauty of the melodic lines, perfectly phrased, the richness of harmonic inventions, the subtle, implied, swinging pulse make this music inspiring and a true representation of social life in sounds: freedom can only grow out of mutual respect, patience, sharing and listening to one another.

The Clash, *London Calling* (1979) and *Sandinista* (1980)

Michelle Cruz Gonzales (musician, Bitch Fight, Spitboy, Kamala and the Karnivores; author, *The Spitboy Rule: Tales of a Xicana in a Female Punk Band*)

I started listening to *London Calling* by The Clash circa 1984, about five years after its release. I was only 14, but as I came of age, listening to that record, I learned more from it, and The Clash’s *Sandinista*, than I ever did from school then – and learning is freedom. From the song ‘*London Calling*’ I learned about global warming, the atomic clock, and how to recognize an apocalyptic text. I leaned about Jamaican rude boys from ‘*Rudie Can’t Fail*’, about race riots in Brixton, and about the Spanish Civil War and the poet García Lorca from the song ‘*Spanish Bombs*’ which is sung partially in Spanish, the language of my grandparents. I also learned about international imperialism and the 1979 Russian invasion of Afghanistan from ‘*Washington Bullets*’: “If you can find an Afghan rebel/That the Moscow bullets missed/Ask him what he thinks/of voting communist.”

The Clash were unflinching and direct even when employing a variety of metaphors and other literary devices such as the metonymy (as used above

using the word “bullets” to refer to the Russian army). They critiqued abuses of power, championed resistance movements, and imparted an important fact to their young audiences: when informed and organized, everyday people have power. In one of my all-time favourite Clash songs ‘*I’m Not Down*’ (on *London Calling*), they sing about class structure and bullying, a song that felt like it was tailored just for me and the realities of my own life:

If it’s true that a rich man leads a sad life from day to day/
Then what do all the poor do with their lives on judgment day/
With nothing to say/I’ve been beat up, I’ve been thrown out/
But I’m not down, no, I’m not down...

I sing this song often to myself when I’m down, and when Donald Trump was elected president and people were still debating whether he was an autocrat, I found myself singing a line from ‘*(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais*’: “If Adolf Hitler flew in today/They’d send a limousine anyway.”

I may have grown up on welfare in a really small town in a rural part of California where most people knew or cared very little about politics, but I learned about world affairs and how to critique it through Clash lyrics. It’s an education that continues to serve me and in the form of song.

Stiff Little Fingers, ‘*Gotta Getaway*’ (1979)

Buck (Defects)

I’d like to write about a song from my youth that kinda sums it up for me personally. I’m sure everyone has heard about the shite that us young punks and everyone else went through living in a hate-filled society in our lovely city of Belfast. The song is ‘*Gotta Getaway*’ by Stiff Little Fingers – all the songs they did meant something but by fuck did I wanna get away from the daily killings, bombings and general fear though we all got used to the fear as it was normality.

Peace.

Swell Maps, *A Trip to Marineville* (1979)

Sned (Generic, Boxed In, Health hazard, One By One, Blood Robots, Mienakunaru)

This is the most defining album and my first thought. I became a teenager as punk rock was sweeping the nation. I’d listen to John Peel and soaked up any and all information like a sponge. The smaller obscure releases would get play on Peel

and would be written of in the back pages of *Sounds* – it was a happening time for do-it-yourself culture. I mail ordered the self-released ‘*Read about Seymour*’ seven-inch from Swell Maps; it was great. I bought their other seven-inches on Rough Trade. Loved their style, great songs. I liked that they were the same sort of unkempt scruffs like we were.

Nothing could prepare me for this album though, bang crash wallop halfway through side one, the way I like it, then it starts getting wild from ‘*Harmony in Your Bathroom*’ onwards. The noise, the rhythm, it’s hypnotic and descending into chaos for ‘*Bridge Head pt 9*’ which ends the side.

My fifteen-year-old mind is blown already. Side two is nuts. ‘*Gunboats*’ is an eight-minute dirge morphing into the improv of ‘*Adventuring into Basketry*’ – we are now into fully experimental sound collage. I’m listening on headphones, the cymbals are swishing side to side – using the studio as an instrument these maniacs are just throwing everything into the mix.

Talk about a formative experience, this changed everything. I had no idea about Can or Faust or such like – I’d been lured via the punky songs into this whole new realm of music/noise/freeform/experimental/whatever goes. So much variety, creativity, spontaneity, energy. Serious Fun. Noise punks and Freejazz heads could all relate. BOTH kinds of music!

Adam and the Ants, *Dirk Wears White Sox* (1979)

Ian Glasper (author, *The Day the Country Died: A History of Anarcho Punk, 1980-1984*)

When asked to write about my favourite record ever, there are many, many contenders – Discharge, Rudimentary Peni, Subhumans, Dead Kennedys, Crass, Voivod, Killing Joke etc. all take a bow – but there could really be only one. That is, if we’re talking about the very bestest record. Ever.

Adam and the Ants were my entry into the punk scene really, but the first record I got by them was the – admittedly brilliant – *Kings of the Wild Frontier* album, sometime in 1980, when it seemed the whole world was going Ant crazy. Soon after, Adam and the Ants was the first band I saw live, at the Birmingham Odeon, and I was so blown away by the spectacle – not to mention the thrilling undercurrent of deviance – I just had to backtrack and pick up the earlier records.

Imagine my amazement then, when I first heard Adam’s debut album, *Dirk Wears White Sox*, after being lured in by ‘*Ant Music*’ and ‘*Dog Eat Dog*’. This sounded like a whole different band, and of course, that’s because it was, Adam

losing his original band to Malcolm McLaren’s horribly flawed Bow Wow Wow project soon after *Dirk* was released.

I was literally floored by what I heard, but I only really appreciated the mastery of what had been captured years later, as the sublime genius of the compositions really sunk in. They’ve been under my skin ever since, and not a week goes by without me spinning the whole album in its entirety. Seriously – I’ve listened to this album thousands of times, and I honestly don’t think I’ve ever skipped a track, because this is simply perfection from start to finish. There isn’t a single note in a single song that I would change. The performances are impeccable – whirling dervish guitars, wildly imaginative and jangling on the senses, creeping menacing bass and thunderously precise percussion, all a dizzying backdrop to Adam’s intense and flamboyant vocal delivery. The undoubted highlight is ‘*Never Trust a Man (With Egg on His Face)*’, which in my humble opinion is the heaviest song ever recorded that doesn’t rely on a squelchingly heavy guitar tone for its impact. This is staggeringly, emotionally heavy, and – as with much of the album – it’s the stuff they don’t play that resonates ... the voids between the notes ... the tension between the drum hits. It’s stark, minimalist and deeply profound.

I pored over the lyrics; amazed by their subtle power, and the rich vein of dark humour that underpinned every song. I immersed myself in lines like: “I could never see the point of showing them you’re the boss/when they drag you through the city streets and nail you to a cross...” and “I could be religious – if you didn’t have to kneel down/I could be religious if a god would say ‘Hello!’” This was truly music without fear, without constraint, that existed far beyond anything my thirteen-year-old brain had at that point conceived. It set me to dreaming, and for that I am eternally grateful.

Crass, ‘*Big A Little A*’ (1980)

Nath (Armoured Flu Unit, Abrazos, Liberty, Haywire)

The seven-inch is the punk rock format of choice as far as I’m concerned: short(ish) blasts of expletive, enthusiasm and exuberance. Perfect for the shorter attention span and none of that filler that sometimes ends up on an album. This one is hardly short – in fact one side is longer than both sides of most punk 45s.

I was 10 when I picked up ‘*Nagasaki Nightmare*’/‘*Big A Little A*’. This record generated conflicting emotions. ‘*Nagasaki Nightmare*’ and the accompanying artwork/info scared the absolute shit out of me, growing up five miles from

Portland naval base that would likely receive a nuclear strike. *'Big A Little A'* on the other hand filled me with hope. Children sing a nursery rhyme, then an acerbic guitar roars out of the speakers drowning them out. Steve Ignorant's vocal kicks in and heralds a pounding *tour de force*.

I'd always been a natural rebel. I'd been brought up with tales from my grandad of how family members had cheekily got one over on their boss. I got told off at playschool, infant's school and birthday parties for misbehaving and answering back to authority figures. Maybe that's why I took to punk when it broke. All that excitement and pissing off adults.

In one song, Crass took on the state, the monarchy, the church, colonialism, school – the whole damned system! *'Big A Little A'* provided substance and nuance which my sponge-like brain soaked up. I now understood that there was more to this “anarchy” than two fingers in the air! And Crass did it with great humour. Funny voices. The ending with the copper saying “Ello, 'ello, 'ello” and Steve Ignorant scarping. To this day I love the saucepan noise! Yes, there was hope. We could be exactly who we wanted to be and we could have fun at the same time.

Ruts, *Grin & Bear It* (1980)

Ivor Hanson (S.O.A, Faith, Embrace, Manifesto, clear; author, *Life on the Ledge: Reflections of a New York City Window Cleaner*)

Hearing *Grin & Bear It* for the first time in Michael Hampton's room after a band practice in 1981, I could feel my life changing with every track. Song after song, the drumming didn't just speak to me but demanded: listen to Dave Ruffy play. RIGHT NOW. As I took in his tom fills, his off-beat cymbal crashes and snare hits – his precise abandon – Ruffy's drumming sounded like perfection; like possibilities; like things I could rip off. Or at least try to. But, of course, The Ruts are in no way just their drummer.

Paul Fox's ever-sharp guitar – listen to its resonating grit as *'Secret Soldier'* ends, or the incisive riffs throughout *'Staring at the Rude Boys'* – growls and bites, even when it steps back to lend a barbed wire cloud of atmosphere, to say, *'Demolition Dancing'* or *'Love in Vain'*. Add in Segs' fluid bass lines – as on *'Babylon's Burning'* – and Malcom Owens' rough, melodic, honest, anguished vocals and you've got an incredible band playing incredible songs. And *Grin & Bear It* has so many of them: *'West One (Shine on Me)'* with its church-bell guitar riff; *'S.U.S.'* with its menacing chords and anti-cop message; and, of course, *'H-Eyes'*, the anti-dope anthem burdened with irony in light of Owen's overdose.

I'll just go ahead and name the album's remaining tracks: *'In a Rut'* and *'Society'*. The Ruts were punk, post-punk, rock, reggae; raucous, aggressive, innovative, with a catchiness that snarled; tight, meticulous ... I could go on. But *Grin & Bear It's* gift comes down to its urgency. And as I asked Michael to play the album again and wondered how soon I could buy my own copy, I knew I wanted such unrelenting, can't-be-ignored urgency in my own drumming, my own bands, and my own life.

DEVO, *Freedom of Choice* (1980)

Ray Ahn (The Hard-Ons)

My mother was gravely ill in 1980. She was about to die, all except for a life-saving operation to remove a brain tumour the size of a grapefruit. She suffered terribly from epilepsy. She was a goner for all money. The doctor told us it was risky but they needed to operate straight away. I was 14; my brother Stephen was 12.

Our family had been in Australia for only five short years. It felt bewildering. What was happening to our lives? They operated on her. We saw her lying there, in the ward. Her head was the size of a prize pumpkin. Her face the colour of shiraz. We let her rest. We prayed. We are atheists. Yet we prayed.

My father took us to the local mall to cheer my brother and I up. We went into “Best and Less,” a clothing store for the budget-conscious. They had a handful of records – all slightly cheaper than regular record bars. My father wanted to buy us an LP we could all listen to – to cheer us all up. To lift our sore and sorry spirits. I immediately picked out DEVO's *Freedom of Choice*, having witnessed the film clip to the title track a little earlier. I stared at that TV set, slack-jawed and absolutely entranced. Seduced. Invigorated. 100% won-over. And fascinated. My mother came home. She left half her body weight back at the hospital. She survived. To this day, she is alive. It probably was a miracle. I don't know.

Forever I will associate the DEVO album with my mother's rise from the dead. I still cannot believe it. To this day. As I type these words, my eyes become heavy with tears. They told us she was likely on her way out.

Years later, I met DEVO backstage in Sydney. I told the story of my mother and association with that DEVO LP. Bob 1 was genuinely moved. He told me so. I was moved that he was moved. The pathos of that moment washed over me like a warm wave.

The music on it is staggering. A real triumph for the thinker. The outcast. The dancer and the kid with hope beyond the school yard. Just have a listen to

'*Gates of Steel*'. The melody and rhythm collide head-on all the while maintaining outrageous and unthinkable tension. Think: FUN.

Music is magic. I saw it for myself.

The Skids, *The Absolute Game* (1980)

Peter McCluskey (The Strougers)

The Skids' album *The Absolute Game* was the final sublime long player to feature the gargantuan talents of Richard Jobson (front man/vocalist) and Stuart Adamson (musical genius/guitarist). Little did the two boys know at the time of the album's release in late 1980 it would be their final album together – a fact the superb craftsmanship and quality of the song writing would seem to refute.

The Skids, from early appearances on *Top of The Pops* and kid's afternoon TV programmes to the final hurrah of this album, were always on my "best bands" list, nestled cosily in between U2 and Echo & The Bunnymen. I was lucky enough to catch them live on two occasions – once in Dublin in my local cinema, The Cabra Grand – what a night that was. The second time was in London in a non-descript Polytechnic, heaving at the seams, the walls visibly drenched in sweat.

The Skids were a once-off-never-to-be-repeated kind of group who, despite their lack of any serious formal music education, rarely disappointed in terms of the originality of their songs which they seemed to casually churn out, hooks and tunes just bursting out of every pore. *The Absolute Game* captures the band at the top of their own musical game and ranks not only as their biggest commercial success but also as undoubtedly one of the very few consistently brilliant new wave albums ever released.

The album contains three singles, none of which, I was surprised to find out, cracked the top 30. The opening '*Circus Games*' is probably the best known and packs a punch that, at the time of release, knocked many a complacent middle-of-the-road act out of its slumber and into a fretful spin and certainly gave them plenty to think about. '*Goodbye Ciivilian*' is a melodic slice of pop but not as immediate and was probably more known for the fact that it was issued as a 7" picture disc, while '*A Woman In Winter*' was a melancholy outing and didn't stir the Classic Tune meter much more than half way around the dial.

There is a maturity about the music and the lyrics on this album compared to their first two albums but important to state that the energy and verve is still present and boisterously disruptive. The band were never the darlings of the press – given their healthy disregard of the fawning/insincere music hacks of the day.

But, in the end, myself and the regions of fans didn't care if there were pretty boys press pieces or not about them in *NME* or *Melody Maker*. We had the albums and singles to pour over, the volume turned up, our cricket jumpers hanging off our shoulders, our full-on Jobson swagger going on and our brilliant shards of Adamson guitar to play the hell out of.

The Absolute Game was afoot – absolutely.

The Sound, *Jeopardy* (1980)

Jeff Pezzati (Naked Raygun, The Bomb)

First some background info on the band. The band was active in the 1980s. I got very lucky and saw them live in New York City at Danceteria (famous 4 story nightclub) in or around 1985???. Sadly, later, the singer was massively depressed and killed himself by jumping in front of a train. They actually got a decent amount of air play on commercial radio with a great song called '*Heyday*' but I'm here to write about another song from the same album called '*Missiles*'.

The English pronounce it 'miss eye els'. The lyrics are so haunting the chorus keeps asking,

Who the hell makes those Missiles?

Who the hell makes Missiles, Missiles?

Who the hell makes those Missiles?

When they know what they can do?

It's a frantic plea to those involved to STOP the process. And couldn't be more appropriate for these times.

Young Marble Giants, *Colossal Youth* (1980)

Helen McCookerybook (The Chefs, Helen and the Horns; author; lecturer)

I love this album because it captures perfectly the extraordinary sound of the band live. After the energy of punk receded, a fascinating landscape of bands and artists were left in its wake who thrived in an atmosphere of freedom: do-it-yourself had become do-what-you want. It's hard to describe just how exciting it was to go out in search of new live music and find so much variety.

We'd heard Young Marble Giants on John Peel's show, so of course when they came to town, to The Clarendon in Hammersmith, every musician worth their salt got hold of a ticket and went along. Picked out by spotlights in the dark venue were three exceptionally nervous performers who created a unique

atmosphere: twanging bass, choppy guitar, tootly keyboards and a gentle female vocalist who deadpanned emotionally charged lyrics over the tension created by the black-clad brothers.

Of course, I had to get hold of their album. Like the night itself, the cover was black and white: stark and uncompromising. And there was the music: just as it had been in the live performance. There was no pretention or artifice here; it literally sounded as though the trio was making it up as they went along, almost timidly exploring what they could do with their stark palette of sounds.

At the heart of this album is wonderful emotional song crafting. It has its own atmosphere. The song 'N.I.T.A.' is as close to perfection as a song can be, summoning loneliness and heartbreak in a minimal-pop arrangement: a synthetic heartbeat, drawn-out organ chords that nod in the direction of Ivor Cutler, a thwacking guitar part, minimal bass, and delicate, floaty, wispy vocals. Nobody else sounded like them back then, and nobody has since. You must listen, if you haven't heard them. What an inspiration!

Adam and the Ants, 'Dog Eat Dog' (1980)

Matthew Worley (author, *No Future: Punk, Politics and British Youth Culture 1976-1984*)

It was only two drummers, but it sounded like 12. My pop music epiphany came on 16th October 1980: Adam and the Ants performed 'Dog Eat Dog' on *Top of the Pops* and I bought the single with pocket money on the Saturday.

I was nine, one month off my 10th birthday and I'd never seen anything like it. Two drummers!! Two!!!! I'd not got pop savvy enough to know about The Glitter Band, so this was a revelation. As was the way the beats drove the song while the bass and guitar underpinned then danced around it. And Adam, with a white stripe across his face and a Hussar jacket, yelping and singing his way through lyrics that were defiant – tribal – with an innocence shining through. I was hooked; I wanted to know more.

At school the next day my mate Chris had had a similar revelation. No one else did: they stuck with Madness and Gary Numan. But Chris and I went on a mission to find what we could. We bought the single, then 'Antmusic' a month later. I asked for the *Kings of the Wild Frontier* album for Xmas but got given Madness' *Absolutely* on cassette instead. Ok, but not what I most desired. A W.H. Smith's voucher helped rectify the situation and on it went. I found a cash-in but brilliant book by Fred and Judy Vermorel in Jarrolds (Norwich's top

department store) that revealed a pre-history of the Ants: punk, McLaren and Westwood's SEX, songs with odd names like 'Zerox' and 'Never Trust a Man (With Egg on His Face)'. There were references to Nazi Germany and futurist manifestos. And then there was the Sex Pistols, who seemed so seditious and disruptive. I invested in a copy of *Never Mind the Bollocks...* and was converted. Pocket money bought more punk records and the music papers. I followed the leads and through the 1980s read about those futurists, and situationists, and dada, then J.G. Ballard and anarchy.

In effect, Adam Ant was the first historian I engaged with. His songs (and his style) took from the past to reimagine the present. Listen to the songs, read the interviews, and you hear names and references to Eric Fromm, Joe Orton's *Prick Up Your Ears*, Hitler's *Table Talk*, Marinetti, Allen Jones, Jordan, Dirk Bogarde, the Kennedy assassination, Arapaho Native Americans, sexual fetishism and Cleopatra. New worlds opened and new ideas were found. Who needed school when pop music taught you so much ...

Killing Joke, *Killing Joke* (1980)

Scott McCloud (*Soulside, Girls Against Boys, Paramount Styles*)

"Music for pleasure, is not music no more."

It was not until the mid-'80s that I heard this record. I was already involved in the DC punk scene, which included a culture of sharing mix tape cassettes of favourite or hard-to-find gems and artifacts. These were often ornately crafted with magic markers or cut-up photos, and very detailed listing of the tracks. Perhaps that's how I came across *Killing Joke*. But my earliest memory of it is from owning the physical LP. I feel like it was 1987. From the first insistent keyboard line of 'Requiem' I was instantly hooked. What was this? It didn't even seem like a finished song. Just an enormously open canvas of an idea. Menacing. Thrilling. Dark.

And the vinyl record came with no information. No band photo. No insert. Sheer plastic sleeve. Just the raw cover image of what I thought looked like some shadowy figures standing on the Berlin Wall (I later learned this was a picture from the Irish Troubles). *Killing Joke* was like nothing I'd heard before as a teenager. I was well aware of The Clash, The Sex Pistols, Generation X (the band), Buzzcocks and The Psychedelic Furs. The ubiquitous, yet never-mentioned U2 who, by this point, had broken mainstream rock radio in the US. *Killing Joke* was something far more sinister, mysterious and intriguing. Who were the people behind this release? Was it popular or a rarity? Back then I'd look at the credits, to

see the names of the people. Jaz Coleman? Who was that? Where was he from? What did he even look like? Youth? What kind of name was that?

As much as I loved the punk rock of DC, with Minor Threat, Bad Brains, and Rites of Spring, *Killing Joke* seemed like a window to another alternative to the alternative – which led to NIN, Swans, Joy Division, Public Image Ltd., and Einstürzende Neubauten. At least it felt like it was my entry into what was then called “industrial”: Ministry; Big Black. Wire, another favourite, was putting out records like *Snakedrill* and *The Ideal Copy*. All of this felt like new exciting directions.

What captivated me the most about *Killing Joke*, especially this record, was its use of repetition. Relentless riffs, pummelling towards the horizon. Songs like *‘Wardance’* and *‘Change’* felt primitive in just the right way. Stripped of anything non-essential. Intuitive rather than overwrought. Anti-social and yet inviting the listener into a different worldview. Why was I attracted to this? Who knows. But I was. It even resonated with my “classic rock” early metal roots: AC/DC, Judas Priest, Black Sabbath. Yet the minimalism made it sound like a Highway to a different kind of Hell. Or a futuristic dystopia. Or something better. A Girls Against Boys song like *‘In Like Flynn’* is highly informed by these influences, so many of which became latent, over time, forever lurking.

Years later, in 1998, I was in London doing a press tour for a Girls Against Boys album. Our band got comparisons to *Killing Joke*, *The Fall*, etc. – all bands I loved. I was proud of these tenuous associations. In London I was headed to an interview with MTV Europe. I don’t remember the neighbourhood, but since lunch I’d been having a few glasses of wine with our new Universal press agent. It was raining, and as dusk was falling she and I made our way to the MTV studio. In the taxi I realised, or began to think, that I was not dressed appropriately for an MTV interview. We were passing a DKNY store and I demanded we pull over. With no time to try new clothes I just pointed to a mannequin in the front window and said: “I’m walking out like that.” We laughed. Credit card. I walked out 20 minutes later. Dressed like the window mannequin.

We got to MTV. And into the green room. Time to spare. I smoked a cigarette and opened a beer in a green bottle. I was nervous and feeling somewhat ridiculous. And then, to my absolute astonishment, Jaz Coleman walked in dressed in a long black coat. Looking impossibly tall and intimidating, there he was. He was with his publicist and I was with my publicist, just the four of us, and I could not speak. I wanted to introduce myself. Say: “Hi, I’m your greatest fan.” But I was struck numb. Struck dumb. He was going on before me. He idled for

a moment but seemed incredibly calm. I envied his composure. He didn’t even look in my direction. I was invisible. He left the green room. Then 15 minutes later it was my turn. In another half hour it was over.

I always wished I would have dared to say hello. But the moment escaped and there were other things to go and do. For the rest of the night I was proud, though. I’d stood right next to one of my absolute heroes. And I didn’t embarrass myself by even saying a word.

Go-Go’s, *Beauty and the Beat* (1980)

Cassie Fox (founder, LOUD WOMEN; bassist, I, Doris)

There’s a long-standing joke in the Fox household. My husband Chris is one of those who can give you, at a moment’s notice, right off the top of his head, in ascending order, a musical top five of any kind. Top five power pop albums (Cheap Trick – *At Budokan*; Redd Kross – *Third Eye*; Raspberries – *Raspberries*; The Pursuit of Happiness – *One Sided Story*; Matthew Sweet – *Girlfriend*). Top five The Replacements B-sides (*‘If Only You Were Lonely’*; *‘Election Day’*; *‘Hey Good Lookin’*; *‘Tossin’ ‘n’ Turnin’*; *‘Route 66’*). Top five gigs at the Clarendon in 1988 (Milk Monitors/Thee Hypnotics; Senseless Things/Los Bastardos; Cardiacs; Stupids; Lime Spiders).

This seems to be a skill I failed to pick up over the years. Or, more to the point, a skill I never saw the point of picking up – much to Chris’ chagrin. He’s only gone and committed to spending the rest of his life by my side, poor bugger, perhaps with visions of all those long winters’ nights ahead of us spent endlessly sifting, sorting, categorising and re-sorting an ever-expanding theoretical library of “the best” records. But I just can’t do it! I can’t hold in my head all of the records, evaluate them, shortlist them, put them in order. I certainly can’t choose a top record of all time. Well, that’s to say, I’d give you a different one depending on when you asked me. I’ll assert my feminine right to change my mind like my mood; as regular as the tide, as unpredictable as the weather.

All that said, today I’m feeling kinda Go-Go’s-ish, so I’m picking *Beauty and the Beat* as my favourite record of all time today. I love the Go-Go’s with all my heart – they are (on most days, in fact) the number one band that I would like to have been in. Just the coolest women ever! Watching the recent (excellent) rockumentary on the band made me love them all the more. Hugely talented musicians each of them – Belinda Carlisle, Jane Wiedlin, Kathy Valentine, Charlotte Caffey and Gina Schock – brought together in the LA punk scene

and propelled by brilliant songs and big ambition. They were the first all-female band to gain worldwide success and were finally inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2021. This album is a masterclass in songwriting, and I've certainly, erm, learned a lot from several of these big punky pop bangers. The songs are infused with fun, sisterhood, and top-grade riffs. All the best things. *'We Got the Beat'* is the stand-out single for me – I can't imagine a day when this song wouldn't get happy feet on the dancefloor.

So there you have my top album today. Tomorrow I might say *Surfer Rosa* by Pixies. Or *Sign O' The Times* by Prince. Or even last year's *Comfort to Me* by Amyl and the Sniffers ... I really can't put any of these in order though.

Dexys Midnight Runners, *Searching for the Young Soul Rebels* (1980)

Eoin Freeney (Chant! Chant! Chant!)

Reminds me of....

A radio dial is heard as it cuts across the stations. Deep Purple sing *'Smoke on the Water'*. Next we hear Johnny Rotten snarl about *'Holidays in the Sun'*, followed by The Specials with *'Rat Race'*. Then it happens: a musical grenade is launched, a voice instructs us all to "For God's sake burn it down."

We're on the Soul Train, it's 1981, we've come from 'downmarket' Dublin via London to support our local team: Ringsend's finest The Blades are to play their first UK gigs in West Runton, Norfolk. Luckily, one of our gang, Janet, has remembered to bring her tape recorder, but sadly no tapes. I gladly produce a tape snatched from the shelf as I ran out the door that morning. In goes the tape, a button is pressed, it's game on!

For the rest of the weekend, Dexys Midnight Runners' *Searching for the Young Soul Rebels* is played back-to-back with the sombre drum machine and looping basslines of Young Marble Giants' album *Colossal Youth*. Dexys win, due mostly to a heady mix of lyrical arrogance, fired-up brass, and more introspective lyrics on bigotry, unrequited love, soul references and passion, yes passion by the trumpetful. It helps, of course, that we're all in our early 20s, just about getting our lives on track, exploring each new stage, each possible station of departure, happy to court this new music, this new prophet even, this train – a metaphor for life. Eyes meet, hearts skip and Kevin Rowland sings "Don't come any closer," as if he can read our minds.

The cover of this debut album, depicting 1971 civil unrest in Belfast, only adds to the sense of dislocation in the lyrics. Rowland, of Irish heritage,

rails against the ignorance of those who know little or nothing of Irish literature, and their bigotry. He namechecks both Irish, and later other European literature greats as a way to understand the world. Sean O'Casey, Wilde, O'Brien, the names are invoked on each beat of *'Burn It Down'*, our train's noisy rattle hitting each beat in staccato unison as all our voices again erupt on the line, "Shut your fucking mouth, (beat), 'til you know the truth."

When Dexys sing "Seven days [is] too long without you," I know that feeling too. *'Geno'*, their first No. 1 hit – a tribute to Geno Washington, whom Rowland saw live when just a kid, explodes into our sunlit carriage, transporting us yet again to imagined wide, flare-filled northern dancefloors, searching for like minds, searching for the young soul rebels.

X, *Los Angeles* (1980)

Joyce Raskin (Scarce, author, *Aching To Be*)

I was 16 when I first heard the voices of Exene Cervenka and John Doe mix together in an unusual female/male harmony on the album *Los Angeles*. The band simply known as X, with a photo of an X on fire, was the most punk thing I had ever seen. I had grown up in Washington, D.C. listening to local punk pioneers like Minor Threat, Rites of Spring, and Bad Brains among others – but it was all men.

As a young musician myself trying to find female role models it was not easy at that time. There was the exception of the cool Kim Coletta of Jawbox, and the all-girl band Fire Party, but by the time I was playing shows Jawbox was on the road, and Fire Party had broken up. When I heard the song, *'Your Phone's Off the Hook, But You're Not'*, led strongly by Exene Cervenka's urgent vocals, I thought she embodied how I felt inside as a teenage girl – wanting to be loud, strong, and everything opposite of who I was at that time.

In my sophomore year at RISD I finally got to see X live. Seeing Exene perform live was transformational for me. She was indeed the role model I had been looking for. This was the essence of female punk; and it felt more punk to me than anything a man had ever done. Exene was freer. She wasn't posing. She was in it. Exene was all at once – a punk, a poet, a chanteuse, a lovelorn woman, vulnerable, strong, feminine, flirty – her own unique person.

When I toured in the '90s with my band Scarce (male/female lead vocals), we were often compared to X. Through Exene I had found my own voice. When I was looking for people to give me quotes for a book I wrote entitled, *My*

Misadventures as a Teenage Rock Star, I sent a copy to Exene Cervenka. I didn't expect to hear from her at all. Exene not only took the time to speak to me on the phone about my book, but she also gave me a great quote. In addition, Exene joined me for a book reading in Los Angeles where my band Scarce performed as well. Exene volunteered to read my book instead of me and hearing her read my words was a moment I will treasure forever. Later that night at a second show she even hopped onstage while we were playing, and sang back-up to one of my songs.

'*Johnny Hit and Run Paulene*', '*Soul Kitchen*', '*Sex and Dying in High Society*' and '*The World's a Mess, It's in My Kiss*' are still in heavy rotation at my house. Even at 66 years old Exene and the band X kill it onstage – truly inspirational, truly feminine, and truly punk. Thank you, Exene, for the inspiration and the music. Thank you, X, for albums-worth of punk music.

Wipers, *Is This Real?* (1980)

Leigh Arthur (Extravision)

I've found more great records with the shift from crate digging to online platforms that make a wealth of music history available at my fingertips. So, I'm not passive-aggressively complaining about that when I recommend the strange joy that comes with holding this record physically. When you first see the cover of this album you know something isn't right. In person, it's hard to tell which way is up and flipping it over to see the back cover doesn't make it much clearer either. The vibrant yellow is striking against bold structured bars. The erratic lines of a chaotic formless form starts to hint at what's inside.

I don't remember when I first heard this album but, once I did, I felt like I always needed it. Later, when I lived in Phibsboro, I would walk around the area pretending to myself that '*D-7*' was the local anthem for Dublin 7. Something in this music reached a part of my core that the other music I'd been exposed to growing up couldn't reach. I heard that Greg Sage would press his own records as a child with his father's record lathe. He would study the grooves in the vinyls with a microscope, noting that the bass made the greatest impact, so he chose the bass as his first instrument. On this record, I adore his guitar lines. Don't talk to me about the crunchy tone that pushes and pulls you straight out of the gate on '*Return of the Rat*', or the anguished solo on '*Don't Know What I Am*'. Still, the bass remains the beating heart of this record and it's fighting hard to stay alive.

There is a frantic immediacy to Greg Sage's delivery – begging, bargaining, pleading for you to listen. I recognised that inner turmoil and responded in turn

by needing to hear, needing to listen, gripping the edge of my seat, needing to know if it could all work out for him. The energy reflected back at me from the speakers mirrored something inside me that no one could see. Something unsettled and unresolved that no one knew about.

Part of this introspection must be why Wipers are one of the foundational favourites of so many punks and rockers. It would hardly be an article about Wipers without mentioning the Nirvana covers that brought the band to mainstream audiences. '*Up Front*' alone is covered by both Poison Idea and Corin Tucker. In fact, there is an entire album of bands covering '*Eight Songs for Greg Sage and The Wipers*' and '*Fourteen Songs*'.

So, what is it about Wipers and *Is This Real?* that resonates with so many artists and musicians? In '*Alien Boy*', Greg Sage sings about his schizophrenic friend James Chasse, who was beaten to death by the police 20 years before the song was released. Too many people are misunderstood and mistreated by the inadequate structures of society. It's not set up for them to succeed or survive. Hearing someone scream about the escape you crave, saying '*Let's Go Let's Go Away*', we're in this together – that's powerful. We're searching for a sanctuary that doesn't exist.

So, why does it feel like Greg Sage can bring me there? I listen over and over and over again until the last song, '*Wait a Minute*'. Just one more minute and I can figure this out.

The [English] Beat, *Wha'ppen?* (1981)

Korey Horn (Suedehead, The Aggrolites, Shuffle and Bang!)

As I sit here writing this, I'm listening to my favourite record of all time. I have many favourites, mostly unlikely favourites. Like, I don't know if many people would picture me listening to jazz fusion, Brazilian funk, or some '60s Latin jazz, then immediately switching it up and listening to Gorilla Biscuits, or maybe The Smiths.... But then immediately switching it up again to get knee-deep on some Alton Ellis, The Skatalites or The Upsetters. My playlists can seriously be all over the place!

This could be why my favourite album of all time is *Wha'ppen?* by The [English] Beat. A close second (maybe even equal) is *Special Beat Service* also by The Beat. The Beat has been my favourite band since I was five years old. I grew up in a very musical family. My ska and reggae influence comes from my uncles: Uncle Steve and Uncle Mike always had tunes pumping as they got suited

and booted, and zipped away on their Vespas. That rude boy/mod style has stuck with me til this day. We all still ride Vespas too.

This record encompasses all the styles I gravitate toward musically. It's heavily reggae-influenced. It has some mod influence. Beautiful chord changes. Witty lyrics. World music vibes. It fills all voids for me. My favourite track on this record is probably 'Drowning' ... no wait, maybe 'Dream Home In NZ'. Or maybe 'Walk Away'? Oh man! In my book, they are all good! This is why this is my favourite album. It's an album I never get tired of; it always makes me feel good. It always sounds nice to my ears and my soul. There isn't one track that I skip. Thank you to The [English] Beat for creating my favourite album of all time!

Agent Orange, *Living in Darkness* (1981)

Pete Craven (Land of Treason distribution)

I'm winding the clock back to the early '80s, when I was getting tuned in to more and more of the fresh sounds drifting over from North America, and on a compilation album I heard the Agent Orange song 'Everything Turns Grey'. Like, wow! How great was that! Soon after, my ears were pulverised by the pounding fury that is 'Bloodstains'. Agent Orange was clearly a band I needed to hear more of. And sure enough, both these songs, and six more, were included on their *Living in Darkness* album. I fell right in love with this record. It was exhilarating music, an adrenalized melody-drenched post-punk hybrid stacked with themes of frustration, loneliness, and alienation. They're emotions many a disaffected youth felt and could relate to.

All these years down the line I still have a few of them kicking around. I'm also a beach boy at heart, never happier than being on the shoreline soaking up the sound of crashing waves, so the wicked surf guitar vibe running thru these songs added a completely different dynamic that had me captivated. I guess the deadly cover of Dick Dale's 'Miserlou' was the moment surf and punk truly collided ... set the standard for a zillion other bands. The durability of this album, and its continued allure to new listeners for over four decades, is the song's enduring relevance ... I mean, seriously ... 'Too Young to Die', 'The Last Goodbye', 'A Cry for Help in a World Gone Mad' ... and that epic four-plus-minute title track, are all pretty much the amped soundtrack to feeling totally crushed by the brutality engulfing many on Planet Earth right now. A constant creeping anxiety about where this is all headed: "No matter what you think or do or say/ Everything turns grey" Holy moly, they keep on delivering the ... *Darkness*!

This is a record I can stick on any time. Whatever my mood its guaranteed get my full attention. Yep, an epic album. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise!

Agent Orange, *Living in Darkness* (1981)

Alexandos Anesiadis (author, *We Can Be The New Wind*)

I was in my late teens, an absolute lover of NY hardcore like Agnostic Front, Cro-Mags and Leeway, as well as crossover (DRI, Suicidal Tendencies, Excel) and UK82 punk like Discharge, Chaos UK, GBH or my absolute faves, The Varukers. A kid always ready to explode, pissed-off 24 hours a day!

I then got, totally by accident, alongside four other records (CH3's *After the Lights Go Out*, Accüsed's *The Return of Martha Splatterhead*, Slapshot's *Back on the Map* and Offenders' *Endless Struggle*), Agent Orange's first LP, *Living in Darkness*. I can even remember the name of the seller, whom I found on an ad on *Maximumrocknroll*; his name was Greg Paull, and he was either from Milwaukee or Minneapolis. He threw in *Living in Darkness* as a gift, with a note mentioning "enjoy, I think you're gonna like it".

It was a typical sunny summer day the day I received the package I was long awaiting; I was absolutely happy that my records finally arrived, and all of them remain to this day some of my most favourite ones. However, when the needle dropped to *Living in Darkness*, chills and goosebumps started to rise.

Each and every song on it, stuck in my mind for weeks. It was so catchy, it was ridiculous. I was jaw-dropped with 'Everything Turns Grey' and 'Bloodstains', while the eponymous anthem was the perfect soundtrack for my troubled teen years. While say Minor Threat and Uniform Choice helped me keep my sanity through difficult times, *Living in Darkness* acted like a catharsis; it was my alienation with my peers and society, my desperation, transformed into art.

And musically, it was an open invitation to other forms of music, that I was ignorant off: the surf lead guitar, the garage drum beats, the 1970s metal riffing, all blended and twisted via their incredible filter. *Living in Darkness* is still, after 20-plus years a regular mainstay on my turntable, and every time 'Too Young To Die' kicks off, I time travel to that era with a big smile on my face (oxymoron!). Plus, I was so happy to meet Robbie Fields (owner of Posh Boy Records) in Rome, and sharing my love for this release, alongside interviewing Mike Palm (guitarist), for my *We Can Be The New Wind* book. Who would have ever thought!

State Of Alert (S.O.A.), 'No Policy' EP (1981)

Ethan Minsker (author, *Rich Boy Cries for Momma*; filmmaker, *Anything Boys Can Do*; *Man in Camo*)

Lineup: bass, Wendel Blow; drums, Simon Jacobsen; guitar, Michael Hampton; vocals, Henry Garfield (a.k.a. Henry Rollins).

I am dyslexic. I grew up in Washington D.C., and in 1981 I was 11 and going to the Lab School off Dupont Circle. In that same year, Ronald Reagan was shot a block away. I was new to punk rock and an older kid, Simon, was the drummer in a band called S.O.A. that put out the second album on the Dischord label. When he got the first pressing, he was giving them away free at school. A teacher gave him a funny look and begrudgingly took her copy. Other kids who had never listened to a punk record in their life were taking copies. I am sure those ended up in the trash bin. But for me, punk rock was a salvation. Punks didn't care how well you did in school. They don't care how well you read. And they never picked on you because you were different or dyslexic. At the time, punk was everything to me.

Pressed on translucent green vinyl, I desperately wanted one. But I was too shy to ask. Forty years later I'm still looking for that record. I refuse to pay the \$1,200 on eBay for an original pressing. I have other pressings of it. And I still listen to it. There's something about that teenage angst and disregard for formality. They didn't care about perfection; you feel their desperate need to bang it out: "Don't be a fool, No choice for you/They're gonna do what they wanna do" (from 'Warzone').

These songs have been a large influence on what I do creatively. You may not be an expert in what you're doing, but sometimes it's better just to force it out. Don't hold in your desire to make something – let it explode out of you.

It's a fantasy that I will be flipping through the racks at some mom-and-pop shop and finally discover one. I even wrote a book about the D.C. punk scene and sent a copy to Simon, thinking maybe that would get me that green seven-inch. No dice. The search continues.

And that's OK because it kickstarted my habit of collecting. Each record has a connection to a moment in time. Not just to the music, but to the shop and what was happening in my life. It's something about breaking the seal, letting it slip out of the sleeve and into your hand. Holding the record between your palms and gently gliding it into place on the turntable. It's the smell of new records. The static just before it burps to life. And the possibility that a song you've never heard before may stick with you forever.

Sunnyboys, Sunnyboys (1981)

The Death Set (band)

The album that presses my most nostalgic buttons. Legendary Australian power pop/proto punk band. The first album I would run around the living room with, my brother doing a bizarre dance, reminiscent of getting the water out of one's ear. Found via the surfing movies I grew up watching. In a sense it was realising there was an alternative underground to what was musically and culturally spewed upon me. It certainly reminds me of Australia after all these years away, as I'm driving up these windy roads from Big Sur to Seattle and the ragged coastline reminds me of home. It's a fitting soundtrack.

Fischer-Z, Red Skies Over Paradise (1981)

Tony St Ledger (Trouble Pilgrims)

As a lover of all genres of music, when Michael asked me to write a piece about my favourite album my head went into a complete tailspin. But instantly the answer came to me based on the context that this piece may fit for consideration in the Hope Collective Red Cross Ukrainian humanitarian appeal.

Fischer-Z's *Red Skies Over Paradise* album just jumped out of my heart. I played in a band called Blue Russia back in the day and people always asked why the name Blue Russia? Our concept was that we believed that people from all over the world shared the very same values of love, compassion and the basic human instinct of care and nurturing of their families and each other. We understood that the divisions in society were carefully crafted and maintained by governments and their puppet masters, resulting in the development of a constant mistrust between countries and nations with the huge financial benefits through arms deals for the very few. In fact, Fischer-Z could release *Red Skies Over Paradise* today, as the lyrical content and meaning would still be totally relevant. It's so poignant that it actually proves the visionary and songwriting skills of John Watts on what I believe to be an assemblage of post-punk new wave songs in this rock opera album of epic proportions!

Having worked in the engine room in bands for most of my life and as a former bass player, now rhythm guitarist, singer songwriter in Trouble Pilgrims, the relationship between bass, drums and guitars is hugely important to me. This album totally set my heart and soul on fire in 1981 on my very first listen. David Graham's deep bass, with clever riffs moves and locks perfectly into the superb drum work of Steve Liddle and the lyrical content of Watts.

The standout track for me is *'Battalions of Strangers'*, as it takes you into the fear and trepidation that I am sure that all the young men and women from both sides who pulled on their khakis and walked into this great unknown together. At the end of the day all mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters forced into this unimaginable situation cloaked in the possibility of death with this insane decision to inflict total destruction on the people of Ukraine: a senseless war that will now change our world forever and ignites all our fears all over again of arms race, Cold Wars and, dare I say it, nuclear war doomsday scenarios.

Gold medallions for the proud men in khaki/Those battalions
of strangers. Those battalions of strangers/No one wants to lead
the way/Be the first death of the day/Leave his family behind/
It must all be in the minds/of battalions of strangers, of battalions
of strangers....

Jean-Paul Sartre said that “When the rich wage war, it’s the poor who die,” and that has been the way all along – it’s as if we as humans have been sleepwalking and have learnt absolutely nothing from our bloody history and so here we go again!

Red Skies Over Paradise, I suppose, could be described as the perfect hybrid mix of new wave and rock’n’roll. I love Fischer-Z’s unapologetic use “as a three piece” of keyboards throughout this album and how the keyboard pieces enhance and lift every song. It’s all there: *'Cruise Missiles'*, *'Berlin'*, *'In England'*, *'Luton to Lisbon'* and *'Red Skies Over Paradise'*, incorporating a punk attitude, new wave with white reggae twist. Top class tracks with the ever-solid bass and drums foundation stitched together beautifully with choppy punk style guitars swamped with Blackpool style Wurliitzer-sounding keyboards expressed with the distinctive vocal energy of John Watts.

Yes, this is a journey album and it gets better and better with every listen. *Red Skies Over Paradise* is a mix of musical genres and unique song writing skills and it’s all there from start to finish. I love *'Marliese'*. For me this has all that passion of a great love song as it stirs up all the emotions of heartbreak, passion, jealousy, betrayal and love ... just the way we like it!

Wipers, *Youth of America* (1981)

Joachim Hiller (*Ox* fanzine)

I hate Lonely Island lists, those lists of five or 10 or 20 records you would take with you to an island where you would be cut off from so-called civilisation for the foreseeable future. But if I were forced to make one, and provided I had a solar

panel on this island and thus electricity to run a record player, Wipers’ *Youth of America* album would be right at the top of my list.

Wipers? People under 30 can hardly be assumed to be familiar with the output of this legendary band from Portland, Oregon. It’s been quiet around Wipers mastermind, singer and guitarist Greg Sage, born in 1952, who recorded his first records with the band formed in late 1977 in 1978, who, as a wrestling fan, recorded a record with wrestling star Beauregarde, who happened to live in the neighbourhood, and went from the *'Alien Boy'* EP (1980) to the epochal *Is This Real?* album (1980) to my favourite *Youth of America* (1981). Then came *Over the Edge* (1983), another flawless early work by Wipers, and with a little distance, *Land of the Lost* (1986), which belongs to the somewhat more sceptical middle phase but is still solid, followed by the already rather weak fifth long player *Follow Blind* (1987) and *The Circle* (1988), which can at best be described as “solid”, after which the band broke up in 1989.

In 1993, Greg Sage wanted to do it again, which might have had something to do with the admiration of bands like Nirvana, Melvins, Mudhoney or Dinosaur Jr. at that time. In the same year, *Silver Sail* was released, an okay album, which was followed by the colourless *The Herd* (1996) and the (apparently final) late work *Power In One* (1999), as well as the seemingly final break-up of the band, whose head has since dedicated himself to the administration of his own estate. At least for *Power In One* Sage, who had overestimated himself by doing everything on his own (drum computer...), had brought the old Wipers drummer Steve Plouf into the studio. So the trademarks – Sage’s distinctive guitar work and the somewhat droning vocals, as well as monotonous, driving drumming – were right. Sage had moved away from Portland years ago and lived (and still lives) in Phoenix, AZ, where he built a purely analogue studio with tube equipment.

But back to the late 1980s: at that time the Wipers were the standard, really everyone in Germany who had a broader punk horizon owned the albums *Is This Real?* and *Youth of America*, produced under licence by the legendary Hamburg label Weird System in 1987, as well as the *Alien Boy* EP, and a few years later, in 1990, it was again a German label, now Gift Of Life Records, part of the record wholesale company Fire Engine, that pressed *Over the Edge* and the early work (again). There was no getting around the Wipers – or there was, like me: when the band went on tour in Germany in 1986 for the *Land of the Lost* album, I had an important exam the next day, couldn’t go and was annoyed beyond measure, as *Youth of America* had long since become one of my most listened to records.

But I was to get my second chance. At the beginning of the 1990s, there was another Wipers tour. I went of course and melted away at the Odeon in Münster. Even if the current record was weak, songs like 'Youth of America' and 'When It's Over', and generally the hits of that album, but also 'Is This Real?', 'Dimension 7' or 'Pushing the Extreme' were still killer live.

On their debut *Is This Real?* Wipers were still within the playing time range of conventional rock songs with 12 tracks. *Youth Of America* was a surprise: on the A-side only four songs and already with the opener 'Taking Too Long' rather "chubby" than the usual harsh tones, then 'Can This Be' and the quite sharp 'Pushing the Extreme' – and finally 'When It's Over', with an almost orchestral intro by guitar master Sage, which piles up over six minutes 25 seconds to a dramatic, incredibly captivating hit, a song like a thunderstorm and accompanied by piano (!) sounds. I don't know anyone who is left without goosebumps by this song, where the vocals only start after three and a half minutes. "Will you be laughing, when it's over?" sings Sage, and what sounds like the ultimate break-up song was probably more indebted to the mood of doom in the cold war USA: "Land of the free, home of the brave... Do you think we will ever be saved?"

'No Fair' on the B-side continued in a similarly dramatic and equally depressive and aggressive manner, before the sixth and last song followed, the incredible 10 minute 23 seconds breaker 'Youth of America', which you definitely needed courage to play as a DJ back then.

Youth of America/Is living in the jungle/Fighting for survival
with the wrong place to go/Youth of America/There's pressure all
around/The walls are coming down, the walls are crumbling down
on you/It is time we rectify this now/We've got to feel it now/Got
to feel it now, now, now.../Whoa!/They attack you from the right
side/Down the left side/Down the middle 'til you don't know who
you are/Stick around because it don't really matter/They'll try to
put you 6 feet under the ground/It is time we rectify this now/
We've got to heal it now/Got to heal it now, now, now...

Give this record, this song to a young, angry adult who listens to it over and over again on headphones, this desperate music building dramatically and towards a climax, with guitar tracks carefully layered by Sage, and you have someone in front of you who is extremely emotionalised and touched. This is something that only very, very exceptional music does to people. Punk? Is that punk or hardcore? We never thought about it, we never had any doubts.

And today? You can see people wearing T-shirts with the distinctive barbed wire peace logo at relevant concerts again, after a long dry spell the important records are available on vinyl, and wherever Jens Rachut is on stage with his band, whatever it may be called, you can assume that 'D-7' will be played as an encore and the Wipers torch will be carried on like this.

Wipers, *Youth of America* (1981)

Brendan Canty (Rites of Spring, Fugazi, The Messthetics)

Born unto me, in black and white, in a stack of LPs sitting on my sister Hilary's floor, against the wall of a walk-up garage apartment in Olympia Washington, was The Wipers' *Youth of America* LP. It was only one year old in 1982 when I first saw it, but the legends surrounding it were already multiplying quickly. Supposedly Greg Sage had borrowed a bunch of equipment from a sound company, Concert Audio, and set up in his house where he could obsess, and bounce and bounce and bounce. They say there were 99 guitars on *Youth of America*. I believe it – it sounds in a way like an Alvin Lucier experiment. The multi-tracking make it into something else, otherworldly, aggressive and terrifyingly atmospheric. The music is brilliantly orchestrated. There is piano all over this record. It's recorded like an opera. Anytime I think of cinematic rock music, I think of Wipers. A soundtrack in search of a film. The drama never ceases, throughout *Youth of America* – 'Taking Too Long', 'Can This Be', 'Pushing the Extreme' and the perfect ender, 'When It's Over' – 31 perfect minutes of glory. The dubs on the solo section of the song 'Youth of America' are so fluid and unapologetically apocalyptic. Truly evil-sounding. As propulsive as The Ramones, as trippy as Hendrix, as disciplined as Suicide, as territorial as an endangered wolf, there is no greater 10 minute 27 second song in the history of rock'n'roll. Sam Henry drumming at 187bpm, constant as your heartbeat while being chased by a bear. He was to me one of the most lyrical drummers ever, but on here is a king of stamina.

'Can This Be' could be a Ramones song. If it were on any other record, not surrounded by masterpieces, it would easily be a garage rock anthem. Again Sam Henry and Brad Davidson are robot warriors of soul. 'Pushing the Extreme' is passionate darkness. If Bauhaus rocked a bit more they might end up in this pocket. Again, with a piano/bass extended middle eight (more like 800), full of pathos and melodrama, if there's any song that makes me wish Greg had written an opera, this is it. And in the end, 'When It's Over' is without a doubt the greatest production on any record ever. This song made it onto every mixtape I ever made

in the 1980s. I've yearned to make something that soars this high, that builds with such angst to a climax that allows for such release. Again with the piano. Perhaps this is the one with a million guitars? So many harmonies in there. This song needs no vocals. This song needs no oxygen. This song is perfect. This song makes the boring Earth sing and soar and roar and rumble. The piano in the middle again. Production is the key. One day it will all be over? Yes, but not yet: 41 years after its release, no one has topped it. It is one of the most brilliant pieces of studio work ever made. If a band was assembled to replicate this live, it would have at least a dozen guitar players, a grand piano or two, Brad Davidson's bass, and the late great Sam Henry holding down the rhythm and allowing our brains to evaporate for a glorious 31 minutes. It will never happen, so we will continue to listen to this record, the true noir masterpiece of the 1980s. Forever in black and white.

The Diagram Brothers, *Some Marvels of Modern Science* (1981)

Peter Jones (Paranoid Visions, Lee Harveys)

So ... my favourite album, or the album that means most to me, or just a review of a great album I have been in a quandary about this.

Do I select the album I believe is the most significant in my lifetime (*Never Mind the Bollocks*)? Do I select the album that has had the longest effect on me (*Stations of the Cross*)? Do I select a ridiculously obscure, and likely not very good, album that will make me seem a lot cooler than I am (any number of those)? Do I select an album I adore, by an artist I adore, and choose because they are a friend of mine (any number of those)? Or do I select an album that, while it was very successful and the band were also very successful and the album has stood the test of time ... people seem to have forgotten about it?? After careful consideration, I'm going for the latter!

The Diagram Brothers were a post-punk band from Manchester who existed between 1979 and 1982. My first exposure to them was when my sister told me about a track she had heard on John Peel that had babbled on about various animals by a band called The Diagram Brothers. At that stage I was about 13 or 14 years old and used to listen to Peel until 11pm and had my stereo set up with one of those timer plugs we all had lights attached to for when we were on holidays, so it would come on at 11pm ... the record and play buttons were already depressed and the radio was set to BBC and there was a C120 cassette in the machine so I could always record the last hour of the program, listen to it the

following day and sometimes edit compilations of my favourite tracks using two cassette players. I was obviously delighted when I heard the said track '*We Are All Animals*' on their repeated Peel session and was instantly hooked to their XTC-like funky, punky weirdness.

The Diagram Brothers went on to release '*... Animals*' as a 7" (I believe Peel lent them the money) and later '*Bricks*' – both of which are stunning – but the arrival in 1981 of *Some Marvels of Modern Science* was a game-changer. In an attempt to make the perfect album, *Some Marvels...* has a stunning silver and red cover featuring a schematics of a toaster on one side and an atom bomb on the other side. There was a folder with an insert about each song. And, above all else, classic funky tunes, discordant guitar playing which is still a mystery to me, and lyrics that were as sharp as anything I'd heard before or since.

The band were experts in crafting songs with a serious message, but presenting them in a humorous manner, which gave an extra punch to the politics. Take a track like '*Ron! The Morris Minor's Gone*' which is the tale of an unemployed car mechanic in Thatcher's Britain who used to steal cars at night, service them and return them the next day because he loved what he used to do but couldn't find a job. Or '*Isn't it Interesting How Neutron Bombs Work*', which does exactly what the title states ... the Diagram Brothers were all scientists and felt it would further the cause of the CND movement if they gave an explanation on how an atom bomb works and what it can do. '*Bikers*', my personal favourite, takes a swipe at machismo: "It's frightening if they can't see your eyes/so we wear sunglasses."

However, most appropriately for today, is the classic '*I Didn't Get Where I Am Today By Being a Right Git*', a play on Reggie Perrins' boss CJ, that highlights the arrogance of the ruling classes ... in keeping with the theme of this book, the song features the lines "I don't care if the Russians invade somebody else/as long as it doesn't affect my holiday."

Please seek the band out; you'll thank me later!

Black Uhuru, *Red* (1981, Island Records)

Bobby Sullivan (Soulside)

This remains one of the most audibly stunning albums in my collection. Right from the start, '*Youth of Eglinton*' bursts out with layers of percussion, melody and vocals. In that song, this new line-up (with Michael Rose on lead vocals and the haunting backups of Puma Jones) leaps onto the world stage with an update

on what's happening in the streets of Brixton, linking the social/political struggles in the UK, Jamaica and Africa. The sound of a real piano instead of a synthesiser reverberating with the skank of the guitar glides over the heavy vibes of arguably the best rhythm section in music – Sly & Robbie. And on top of all that, the lead guitar carves out an additional melody that still plays in my head periodically since the day I first heard it.

This album came out right after the death of Bob Marley, as well as the Brixton riots, simultaneously saving reggae music from an unimaginable loss and leading a new generation of artists with their ear to the ground and something important to say. The messages in the lyrics span a multitude of culturally important subjects. Well-covered is positivity in the face of adversity, respect for women, the righteousness of Rastafari, a strong work ethic while enjoying the herb, mystical magic and calls for revolution. "It's a time for every style," they proclaim, while proudly citing the challenges of a working-class life. "I may not be a movie star," Michael Rose belts out. "I don't drive a fancy car; I can afford only a Winchester cigar. From the day I was born and given life, I & I a actor, genius, name it – genuine character." This album inspires me endlessly, but it also warms my soul with its sheer majesty of sounds and rhythm.

ABBA, *The Visitors* (1981)

Tosh Flood (The Divine Comedy)

I discovered this album, or it discovered me, much later in my life.

For me, ABBA are only second to the other fab four and I don't trust anyone who doesn't love either band. Like everyone else, I knew the pop hits, but this was a revelation to me.

Their final album, made and released in 1981 before they split up until they surprised everyone by getting back together to release the *Voyage* album, 40 years later. I rate that highly too, by the way. *The Visitors* is a dark, glacial, expansive record that was one of the first albums to be recorded digitally, which ideally suits the time and place, as it was made during the Cold War era.

It starts with the title track which features Frida's vocal, sounding strange, otherworldly, and almost Lennon-esque against a backing of backwards-sounding guitars and a synth-heavy soundscape mapped out by Benny Andersson. Lyrically, the song tells the story of a dissident waiting for the visit of secret police.

Following that, the underrated single '*Head Over Heels*' is a tango with a bridge that could have been written by Sparks. The album, as a whole, features

lyrics that deal with adult themes: the anti-war '*Soldiers*' states: "Soldiers sing the songs that you and I won't sing/Let's not look the other way"; relationship breakdowns are covered in the songs '*When All Is Said and Done*' and the hit single '*One of Us*'; while '*Slipping Through My Fingers*' is about a parent seeing their child starting school and how quickly time passes.

The only light relief on the album is on the track '*Two for the Price of One*'. On this track and throughout the record, the backing vocal arrangements by Agnetha and Frida are stunning. With the use of multi-track, together they sound like an operatic choir on the song '*I Let the Music Speak*' which points the way to the musicals that Benny and Björn would later write. The album ends with '*Like an Angel Passing Through My Room*', a lullaby of sorts underscored with the ticking of a clock replicated on synth.

All of that aside, it's an album that I have listened to more than any other over the past 10 years; the only other that comes close is *Never For Ever* by Kate Bush. Both albums helped me through a time of depression, panic attacks and near poverty. Music helps to keep my head together. Both of those albums mean as much to me now that I'm happier and in a much better head space and place.

The Fall, *Room to Live* (1982)

John Linger (Girls In Synthesis)

This album gets a bad rep, after the release of *Hex Enduction Hour*. But I think it's amazing; there is a rawness and spontaneity that isn't captured on other Fall records. Every Fall album has something incredible to offer, and the world is a sadder place without them. There are tons of bands around at the moment trying to sound like them and/or Mark E. I wish they'd stop – I actually find it offensive.

Dexys Midnight Runners, *Too-Rye-Ay* (1982)

Brendan Lynott (Trouble Pilgrims)

Am I writing this from a perspective of when I first heard it, when I hear it today, or a combination of the 40 years of non-stop listening? I'm not sure; let's assume it's a combination of all three! Forty years is a long time in a life; two thirds of the alleged three score and ten, yet there is still something new to hear every time I listen to this masterpiece. It surges with grace and beauty, combining a savage bass and rhythm with pounding brass and soaring violin. I still play it through from start to finish, (because that's the way albums should always be bloody played, he says, in his best grumpy old man snarl!).

And it still juxtaposes the bounce back from the sublime – the songs, the musicianship, the performance, the passion, the definitive version of ‘*Jackie Wilson Said (I’m in Heaven When You Smile)*’ – to the ridiculous (the denim dungarees, the scarves, the massive photo of Jocky Wilson, Scottish darts player, as the backdrop for the *Top of the Pops* performance of ‘*Jackie Wilson Said...*’, or the jazz fusion break in ‘*Plan B*’. None of which stops it being magnificent.

And let me get the controversial piece out of the way right now: I don’t like ‘*Come on Eileen*’. Not because of the song – it’s a cracker – but because of what it became, a faux celebration of paddywhackery that allowed people to link arms and swing around dancefloors all over the world in a mad swirl of self-righteous Celtic passion. But listen to the lyrics people: coercion? consent?

So, to hear this for the first time as a 21-year-old know-it-all Dubliner (living in a country with few opportunities and still heavily under the influence of a yet-to-be-disgraced Catholic hierarchy), was mind-blowing. Here was a bunch of people who could mix traditional Irish music, rock, soul, brass, and scathingly insightful lyrics, all blended together by the flawless, surging, and heart-rending violin playing of Helen O’Hara and Steve Brennan. This album just demands to be listened to repeatedly.

I listen to it with the same awe and love today as I did 40 years ago. Back then I thought “old” would happen when I reached the age of 30; now I’m 61, I’m beginning to realise what “old” actually is. The song ‘*Old*’ captures it perfectly. The entire album is driven by a stunning rhythm section supported by a wonderful brass section, with Kevin Rowland’s vocals ranging from suave smooth sophistication to savage screaming. Still gives me the shivers every time I listen to it. And, whilst I am even more cynical and jaded than I was a 21-year-old post-punk poseur, I’m not too old to get a wonderful thrill when Helen O’Hara liked a tweet about my radio show. Star struck at 61; the love continues.

This wasn’t an album of music at the time; it is an album that has accompanied me on my journey through life and where I still haven’t quite yet managed to believe in my soul; there is no Plan B.

Crass, *Christ the Album* (1982)

Barry Cooke (Dead Fridge in the Road)

The first record I bought was *Autobahn* by Kraftwerk but my street cred dropped, from a height with my next purchase being *Sladest* by Slade. A couple of years later, I was blown back, like in a storm by the massive energy of the Sex Pistols,

Clash and Sham 69. Finding my way as an innocent 16-year-old in the bad old days, this was “electrifying”. Some quotes from *Grease* are permanently burned in and sadly inescapable. Maybe the family situation and borderline poverty made me sensitive to the wrongs of living and made me want to change the world. Punk was a beacon but not a very identifiable one and was possibly just going to be my teenage angst tribal identity.

There were skinhead punks who were not far removed from being Nazis. There were others who lived in squats as hippy types and beggars. Another lot were the middle class “see me, I am cool types”. The Clash had answered some of my social and political beliefs but were not personal and edged on the side of commercial. During my first years of my plumbing apprenticeship and seeing the next stage of life, Crass appeared in front of me. Here were a group that embodied so much of the punk symbiosis. My life changed.

Crass said and did so much in the small space of their albums. They started with their albums displaying “PAY NO MORE THAN £3”. They used capitalism yet put their beliefs and ideas forward such a simple message. It gave a voice and means for new musicians to get out there. It showed how capitalism could work humanely.

In *Christ the Album* Penny Rimbaud wrote a booklet giving his or their ideas on anarchy. It was eye opening. From what I remember, it was really a treatise on respect, love and cooperating together. The ultimate hippy, socialist, pure religion philosophy brought to my consciousness.

The incredible artwork that came on their albums done by Gee Vaucher gave so much too. It was black and white, reflecting in real time what the world felt like then. There were so many statements in her art reflecting what was happening in the world both in black humour and scary depictions. Even the end loop space on the records had tiny messages etched onto that gap.

I end with a quote from Steve Ignorant, “I might wear a lot of black, but my life is full of colour.”

“*Summer in Dublin...*” (1982)

Niall McGuirk (Hope Collective, musician Not Our World)

So, I’ve been sending out messages to people trying to explain this book. Telling everyone there are no rules. We have some guidelines but left it up to the writer to write. Knowing that people’s favourite records can change on a daily basis we asked the question and got some interesting answers.

Picture the scene. 1982. Dublin. Summer. Bagatelle have a song called ‘*Summer in Dublin*’. I was 14, I didn’t care for the song as it wasn’t considered punk rock. It did have a line in it about Grafton Street. The exotic shopping street on the the south side of Ireland’s capital — its fair city. The south side was an area I never remembered being on. That summer I got a chance to travel across the Liffey. My friend (also called Niall) had to tend to a garden. On the south side. Do I need my passport?

My bus trundled through the monochrome northside until we got to the colours of Rathmines and Ranelagh. *Summer in Dublin* indeed. I had a Walkman and I now had a reason to listen to music while travelling. I went through my tapes and the journey past the border in O’Connell Street was taken up by The Ramones *It’s Alive*. The city was alive, and my expectations were high. 1,2,3,4 and my world exploded. Those guitars, those tunes. We sang along on the bus, took turns with the headphones. Magic. And then two weeks later it was over. My holidays ended. Back to the Northside boy. Our peasant’s work was finished. But I still had my trusty walk person. The World Cup was kicking off. The streets had their own tournaments. Jumpers for goalposts and grazed knees became our badges of honour. I was mostly in goal. The boy on the outside. As I went to collect the ball, I dreamed of the World Cup and wondered who the Ramones would be. I was a mix of Hungary and Peru, Nyilasi and Quiroga. We had the boombox going on the streets, providing the soundtrack to our games was that Ramones tape.

At night after our mammoth games in the street interspersed by the games on the TV, I would fall asleep with my headphones on. On the flip side of the Ramones tape was Naked, the UK anarchist punk band on Bluurg Records. I fell asleep wondering about the politics of the world. “Why doesn’t everyone just treat everyone well?” was my mantra. And then they could all dance to the Ramones. We would all be happy then.

I had got an album by the Au Pairs and was enthralled by their sound. X-Ray Spex had provided some day-glo relief as The Clash, The Damned and The Pistols were the focus of conversation. Who is the best punk band? I loved them all but wanted everyone to like the Au Pairs. They just seemed so interesting, they weren’t out to shock, and music wasn’t just entertainment to them. My world was changing.

At night, when John Peel wasn’t fading in and out of our bedrooms as we struggled to get proper medium wave reception, I would listen to pirate radio. *Alternative Sounds* was one such show. I won a compilation tape (no they weren’t called mix tapes then on Dublin’s Northside) one week. I had to venture into

Base X and collect my prize. A home taped compilation with *This Is Boston Not LA* on one side and the DC compilation *Flex Your Head* on the other. My life changed. I still had my brothers’ records to listen to but now I had my politics through Bluurg Records and the tunes of the Ramones and the world of US hardcore was now opened up.

How exciting. When we played tennis on the streets during Wimbledon I spoke of Minor Threat and SSD. I didn’t want to go down the alcohol-filled road so many of my peers were about to embark on and I would not need to. I found my tribe. I had discovered the south side of Dublin, my world had opened and punk rock became global. There was no turning back. I’m still excited.

“It’s not a record. Technically, it’s not even legal...” (May 1982)

Michael Mary Murphy (author, *Punk’s Not Dead But Its Organs Are Being Harvested in Ireland*)

My favourite record? It’s not a record. Technically, it’s not even legal.

It’s May 1982. In hesitant Saturday morning sunshine, I’m walking down Dawson Street, a chic shopping area in Dublin. But my mind’s not on shopping. I’m doing something new. It feels revolutionary. I’m walking *and* listening to music. Not to the radio. That’s too risky. I could be forced to listen to a song I don’t like. My time’s too precious for that. My tastes are too narrow and precise.

No. I’m listening to *my* music, the music of my choice. And as laughable as it must sound, I have a sense of freedom that makes me giddy. I was part of the generation that first experienced music as something that you could take with you. A private prepared pleasure. Not the ghetto blaster on the shoulder. Although we did that. Even on the bus. Even on the train. Sorry about that. We are Generation Walk-people. With the new-fangled Japanese innovation, The Walkman. And I’m listening to The Clash.

My brother John has just bought *Combat Rock*. I taped it at home. A C90 cassette tape. On the other side are my favourite singles: The Jam, The Stranglers, SLF, The Undertones, U2, The Ruts, The Skids, The Ramones, Chic, Echo and the Bunnymen, Sister Sledge, Bowie, Bowie, Bowie, Virgin Prunes, Psychedelic Furs, Spizz, Wah! Madness, The Specials. A whole wide world on a tape.

In 1982 I’m walking in my world, but I’m walking in The Clash’s world too. With snakes in concrete, kings and boogeymen, Lauren Bacall, the Missa Luba, Sean Flynn and the ghost of *Taxi Driver*. I am lost in the moment. I find myself in the 90 minutes of sonic moments that whirr around my little portable mechanical

device. I can still feel every second of that tape. I instinctively anticipate the next song on that tape when I hear any of those songs. Sometimes when I hear them, I feel a form of grief that I am no longer walking around Dublin carefree anymore in my torn jeans and Chuck Taylors. Statistically, most of my music-listening days are over. I'm fifty-seven years of age. How many more times will I get to listen to my favourite records? Time is ticking even as the grooves spin and spiral towards the hole in the centre of the record. But the music stretches time. It catapults me back to first hearing those records. The smell of them. To spooling the cassette tapes back to a favourite song. With a pencil.

I didn't know it at the time, but it's my last rebel waltz with The Clash. The last album from them that I loved from start to finish. But something else was dawning. In 1983 I heard 'Bittersweet'. John Peel I assume. I had discovered New Model Army. To me, their records are what I would hope everyone's favourite records are to them. A celebration. A challenge. A consensus. A cause. A cartography. A carnival. A consciousness. A culture. Yes, a culture. And they're also a candle. A campfire. If I had a wish, it's that everyone feels that warmth. I'm still glowing with it. I am old. I am young.

Dead Kennedys, *Plastic Surgery Disasters* (1982)

Alison Braun (photographer; author, *In The Pit: Photography by Alison Braun 1981-1990*)

I always looked up to Jello Biafra as a punk mentor to me and hung on every piece of music the band released. He always challenged me to question what I read in the media and speak my truths to power. This was Dead Kennedys' second album and by far it was – and still is – my favourite punk record. It is a hard-driving masterpiece of anger and political grief whose colourful lyrics are still relevant 40 years later. When the band would launch into 'Bleed for Me' live, I would jump up and start dancing, regardless of whether I had a camera around my neck or not. The dissonant guitar sound notes on the chorus were felt in my spine. This album encapsulated everything that was punk for me. I'm 56 years old now and still play this album over and over. It never did get old.

The Forgotten Rebels, *This Ain't Hollywood* (1982)

Henrike Baliú (Singer for Brazilian punk bands Blind Pigs and Armada)

From 1964 to 1985, Brazil lived what is now known as the years of lead. Twenty-one dark years under a right-wing military dictatorship, a police state that violently

persecuted whoever opposed the regime. My father was born in 1947 and was raised by his grandmother in Rio de Janeiro. Rock'n'roll was his passion and in the early 1960s he'd save up his school lunch money to buy the latest singles from Elvis Presley, Chubby Checker and other rock pioneers. He'd come back home from school starving but knowing that at the end of the month he'd have enough to spend on a seven-inch record.

Life wasn't easy, money was short and his grandmother was also raising his older sister and younger brother. At a very young age, my dad realised he'd have to figure something out, find a career or something, so he enrolled at the naval school to become a Brazilian navy officer. In 1965, he graduated top of his class and studied naval engineering. He wanted to build warships but his love for rock'n'roll remained, as did his record buying habits.

I was born in 1974 and three years later my dad was sent to Southampton, England, to oversee the construction of a couple of frigates the Brazilian navy had ordered. He saw The Boomtown Rats on British TV and that was a game-changer in his musical taste. He went out and bought all the punk records he could find: The Clash, Generation X, The Sex Pistols, The Stranglers and a few others. By 1978, we were back in Brazil. Import records were extremely hard to come by and punk would soon rear its ugly head in the Brazilian suburbs in the form of violent street gangs and groundbreaking bands like Olho Seco, Inocentes, Ratos de Porão and Cólera.

But all this went unnoticed by my father. He was busy working and caring for his fast-growing family. By 1982, I already had three younger sisters and there was a secret project brewing in the Brazilian navy – they wanted to build a nuclear submarine so they picked out the navy's best naval engineers and sent them off to study nuclear engineering abroad, each one in a different university. So right after the 1982 Soccer World Cup, which traumatised little eight-year-old me (but that's another story), we were all on a plane bound for the United States of America with diplomatic visas.

Ann Arbor was our destination. My dad started going to the University of Michigan where one of his classmates introduced him to American hardcore. Every Friday night, he'd tape the *All Out Attack* radio show hosted by Bill Bored on WCBN to listen to during the week. On one of those nights, Bored played 'Surfin' on Heroin' by the Canadian punk rock band Forgotten Rebels three times in a row. The following week my dad was at Schoolkid's Records to pick up a copy. They didn't have one but we did have a holiday coming up and my parents decided we'd spend it in Toronto where my dad finally bought a copy of the

This Ain't Hollywood LP. I was a big Iron Maiden fan and I'd listen to Maiden, Twisted Sister and Michael Jackson's *Thriller* while playing with my GI Joes. "Hey Henrike, that stuff you listen to is pretty cool, but check out this tape I made for you," my dad said one day. "There's some good stuff here, like the Forgotten Rebels, Stiff Little Fingers and some other stuff I think you'll like." I didn't really pay much attention but I thanked him anyway. The tape lay there for a few days, unplayed. When I finally decided to listen to it on my boombox, I was blown away. Man, what was this music that was coming out of the speakers? This was energy in the form of sound, this was real, this was made for me. It changed my life. I was around 10.

We came back to Brazil in 1985. The military dictatorship fell, there were democratic elections, my dad and his team were busy figuring out how to enrich uranium to use as fuel on the nuclear sub and I had a new passion, punk rock. The Forgotten Rebels' *This Ain't Hollywood...* is my desert island record, the LP that shaped me, the album that made me want to start a band and be those guys rocking out on the cover. It has helped me go through some sad times. It's been there when I've wanted to celebrate something.

I still get goosebumps when I listen to it. It's the record of my life. It's punk rock at its finest. It's rock'n'roll's greatest moment in my opinion. You can disagree and that's alright, I don't care, because it's special to me and that's all that matters.

I've been criticised for being a punk rocker and singing in a punk rock band while having a father who is a high-ranking naval officer. Again, I couldn't care less about what people say. My dad found a way out of a hard life by joining the navy. Because of the navy, my family lived in Michigan. Because we lived in Michigan, my dad found out about The Forgotten Rebels and because of that band I started The Blind Pigs in 1993 and my life has never been the same. But sometimes I ask myself, was it a blessing or a curse?

Bad Brains, *Bad Brains* (1982)

Drew Stone (filmmaker; musician, Antidote, Incendiary Device)

My favourite album is actually not an album at all. In February of 1982 the Bad Brains debut studio "album" was a "cassette only" release on ROIR. This thing was mind-blowing to us at the time and for a couple of months it's all we listened to. Everything else took a backseat as we would just flip the tape over and over and over again. The Bad Brains live shows leading up to this release

were absolutely incendiary and this recording certainly captures that energy. Recorded and produced by the late great CBGB soundman Jay Dublee, a.k.a. Jerry Williams, at his 171-A Studios on Avenue A in NYC, this raised the bar as far as musicianship and sheer controlled chaos went. Everyone had to ramp up their game after this one. This is one of those rare releases that I can put on all these years later and it still holds up, transporting me back to that special time and place in New York City and yet still sounding fresh and relevant.

Minor Threat, *Out of Step* (1983)

James Sherry (K-Line, Desperate Measures, Dealing With Damage; Division PR)

Picking one favourite album is no easy task, after a lifetime of music, there's just so many! But there are a few moments where a record made such an impact, that you can clearly remember where you were and how you felt when you first heard it. Back in the mid-'80s, I was really into tape trading, regularly sending and receiving C90 tapes back and forth across the globe, crammed full of demos, albums and live tapes from a huge network of underground bands. It was how music spread in that pre-internet age. Most mornings a tape would fall through my letterbox, and I'd listen to it on my walk to school and then sometimes, in the lessons where I could get away with it, I would hang one headphone out of my pocket into one ear and have half an ear on the music, the other half just about on the class.

On one of these such occasions I remember being completely bowled over by the sounds coming out of one headphone. As was the custom in those days, you'd often fill the tape up with something you hoped the other person might not have heard before, and this time, the tape had been filled with Minor Threat's *Out of Step* album and I was hearing it for the first time, through one headphone, in the middle of a lesson.

But even in those far from ideal circumstances, the power and energy of the music nearly knocked me off my desk and I couldn't wait to get out of class to listen to the tape properly. On that walk home I played the Minor Threat tracks over and over, constantly rewinding the tape for repeat listens of 'Betray' and 'Little Friend' etc. – songs that are now so familiar and burnt into my subconscious that they're almost like hymns or nursery rhymes because I've heard them so many times. But I'll never forget that first hearing, when I should have been concentrating in class!

Scream, *Still Screaming* (1983)

Nicole Thomas (Fireparty)

After being in love with a record for decades, the question of love becomes a bit murky. Is love rooted in the quality of every song or is love a result of the record becoming a blanket of familiarity that soothes the soul in uncertain times? I love Scream's *Still Screaming* for both reasons. Doing the math, I've now loved this record for the majority of my life. It's a searing blast of energy that yanks me into the present moment no matter what I'm doing or how many decades have rolled by.

It has the magical power to push the blood faster through my body and cause my fist to raise in defiance at the injustices that are ever present in this world. I often jump around my house chanting along to *Still Screaming* when times are tough and I'm feeling apathetic because I know that it will lift me and ignite the fire to continue the fight. This record has spoken to me at every challenging political moment since my first listen and the answers offered – solidarity, justice and peace – still ring true. These songs are lyrical masterpieces that have held their relevance over time. It's a record that asserts its presence and challenges listeners to fight for what is right, now.

Jonathan Richman and the Modern Lovers, *Jonathan Sings!* (1983)

Jennifer Denitto (solo artist, Linus, Scarlet's Well/The Monochrome Set)

My first boyfriend spent a lot of time playing me records, and was a bit older, so while he wooed me I got a musical education. This was in '89, so it was pre-internet, vinyl/cassette only! Early on, Jonathan Richman was established as an unofficial mentor to our relationship. When he first played *Jonathan Sings!* I was hooked by the time it got to '*Give Paris One More Chance*'. (I'd been to Paris.) Being 17, I had no idea at that time that what I loved was the exuberance, gentle humour, witty but not too clever lyrics, plays on words within rhymes ('*That Summer Feeling*': "flop down on it ... cop down on it"), and optimism running through the record.

I started being a musician properly around then, and the boyfriend became bandmate then "just friends." I think I was lucky enough to see Jonathan at Glastonbury once I became independent, and he played a few songs from this album, I was over the moon. Only after many years of musicianship did I realise that I also loved the melodies and harmonies – subtle, astounding and uplifting, backing singers Ellie Marshall and Beth Harrington contribute beautiful, pure

and clear voices. Then, after many more years, having morphed into a drummer myself, Michael Guardabascio's drums are a revelation in how to play just enough to complement the songs but also let it rip with drum rolls when needed ('*Those Conga Drums*').

For some reason I only listen to this in vinyl form. Now that I'm much older, the themes of enjoying life and music ('*This Kind of Music*', '*Those Conga Drums*'), not caring what other people think ("What will the neighbours tell your wife?"), self-respect ("Stop this car – I'm getting out") and even now I am a mum, recognition that our children are individuals that need to have their curiosity fulfilled to develop ('*Not Yet Three*'). Yes, so my favourite album: I suppose it's a blueprint on how to live – not necessarily always achieved!

The Chameleons, *Script of the Bridge* (1983)

Mark Curran (artist and educator)

"Give that a listen." John handed me a cassette: "last night's Peel Session." We were studying for the Leaving Certificate, the final government exams of senior school in Ireland. "Think you'll like it." Friends since we were five or six, John Fleming and source of new musical education. A welcomed distraction in early June 1983, as those final exams, loomed.

I know now that it was their second Peel Session. The Chameleons from Middleton, Greater Manchester, England. Dave Fielding and Reg Smithies, unusually, two lead guitarists, John Lever, who had had six weeks to learn the drums before they opened for U2 on an early UK tour, and Mark Burgess, bass player and emotive vocalist.

"In his Autumn 'fore the Winter/Comes mans' last mad surge of youth...."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

A voice sample crackles on vinyl through the needle, suddenly a riveted, repeated two-string riff, and pleas of '*Don't Fall*' from the singer, as merciless drums kick in. A song, finally completed, during the making of that Peel Session in June and now the opening track of their debut album released in August. The same month, I took the ferry and train to London to trawl Oxford Street in search of a copy. At first, somewhat happy to hear in several shops that the record was sold out, meaning others had noticed how special this band was too, my frustration grew. In the end, however, I found one, in a basement, the name of the record shop now forgotten. The cover featured the glorious colour-pencil montaged drawings by Reg, one of those two guitarists, whose work would adorn

the covers of their subsequent albums. Inside, a fold-out poster, with photographs of the band by Tony Skinkis.

The album immediately seared with post-punk brilliance. To my then-younger ears, a lineage of sorts, including Tom Verlaine/Television, The Clash, Echo and the Bunnymen, The Durutti Column, Gang of Four, The Sound, Psychedelic Furs and Joy Division. Having witnessed the last-ever gig by the Sex Pistols in the UK, at aged 14, Mark Burgess was also there the night of the infamous Joy Division gig at Derby Hall, Bury, when Ian Curtis was too ill to perform and a riot broke out.

A sound, at times powerful, at times melancholic, which to this day, is instantly identifiable, as this band – shaped sonically by guitars plugged through echo/delay, flange and chorus and layered, at necessary moments, with synths, all grounded with measured brilliant drumming and a dynamic bass, the same source of that powerful melodic voice of urgency. With blistering intro and refrain, ‘*Up the Down Escalator*’, their second single, on class and ambition, a soaring classic. ‘*Here Today*’ is powerfully inspired by the final moments of John Lennon while, ‘*A Person Isn’t Safe Anywhere These Days*’ rages against the everyday violence in Thatcher’s Britain – “stay safe, stay sane”. Having also debuted on the Peel Session as ‘*Second Skin (Films)*’, retitled for the album as, ‘*Second Skin*’, dealing with immortality, the song would become an anthem, and was included on Peels’ Christmas “Festive Fifty” that same year.

The band would further record two superb albums, the latter having signed to Geffen Records in the US, bringing them close to the point of a larger breakthrough, only to split following the sudden death of their manager and mentor, Tony Fletcher. They would later reform then split again. Currently, Burgess and Smithies tour and record as “Chameleons”, irrevocably estranged from Fielding, while sadly the drummer, John Lever, passed away in 2017. The Chameleons have been influential, inspiring bands like Interpol, Verve, Slowdive, Oasis, The Flaming Lips, Editors, Fontaines D.C. and The Murder Capital. Critically lauded, Peter Hook of Joy Division/New Order has said, they were the only band of significance following on from Joy Division. Deserving of a much wider audience, the *NME* would pronounce them as “the greatest band you have never heard of,” a brutal label with some truth. However, the advent of social media channels and music/video sharing platforms has helped to redeem profile and address some of that neglect. Nonetheless, if you haven’t, I would urge you to listen to this magnificent band and when you do, as Mark Burgess notes on the back of their debut album, “to obtain the best effect from this LP, please turn it up.”

Aztec Camera, *High Land, Hard Rain* (1983)

Geraldine Quigley (author, *Music Love Drugs War*)

This gem of an album is as fresh as it was in the ‘80s. I rediscovered it recently and was transported back to the kitchen in our first house, to a dark and cold afternoon in 1985. We didn’t have much, not even jobs, but we had music and this was the soundtrack to our days. From the open bars of ‘*Oblivious*’ there is honesty here, and empathy, and the beautifully crafted lyrics of Roddy Frame. In the renaissance of Scottish pop, they are the highlight for me. His words touch the soul.

“They call us lonely when we’re really just alone.”

“We threw our hands up high, we nearly touched the sky/We clicked our heels and spat and swore we’d never let it die.”

This is music for a generation and it spoke to us, newly married, out on our own and feeling the fear of those early days on a council estate in Derry.

Don’t listen to this album on anything other than vinyl; it’s a work of art. The songs are vibrant, passionate. And at their heart is the exquisite, ‘*We Could Send Letters*’. It begins: “You said you’re free, for me that says it all/You’re free to push me and I’m free to fall.” This is bitter-sweet story-telling in a minor key, building to a magnificent key change and the heartache inducing,

Just close your eyes again
Until these things get better
You’re never far away
But we could send letters.

Frame was 15 when he wrote that. There are no poor tracks on here, no fillers. The final song, ‘*Down the Dip*’, is masterful in its acoustic simplicity, so full of determination and hope.

There are other albums I might have chosen, but none – not one – speaks to me like *High Land, Hard Rain*. It makes me dance and sing, laugh and cry along to its teenage love pop. I want to go back to that kitchen in 1985, to when we had nothing, only nerve. I want to hear it play on our midi system and tell the person I was then that everything is going to be okay.

Hüsker Dü, *Metal Circus* (1983)

Joe McRedmond (Hoover, Crownhate Ruin)

I found this very hard at first to narrow down. Do I go with the first punk record I bought with my own money? That was Generation X’s self-titled

record which I got for \$3 as an import after my friend ordered it, but he instead found another copy elsewhere. Or do I go with the first hardcore record I bought, which was The Circle Jerks *Wild in the Streets* for \$5 from another kid in junior high school who turned rockabilly that year between 1982 and 1983 and sold all his punk records?

I finally realized that the one record that meant the most to me was Hüsker Dü's EP '*Metal Circus*'. I originally taped it from a friend's copy onto cassette, and the other side had The Freeze's *Land of the Lost*. I remember listening to it a lot on a boombox outside in front of my parent's house while playing various lawn sports. I would've been in 10th grade when it came out and quickly absorbing as much hardcore music as I could get my hands on. And a lot of crucial genre-bending music came out within that year. Minutemen's *Buzz or Howl Under the Influence of Heat* which I got from Toxic Shock. The Faith's *Subject to Change* which I got from Dischord. Government Issue's *Joyride* and Marginal Man's *Identity* also came out within a year. Mission of Burma's *Vs.* preceded them all in late 1982.

What has kept me listening to *Metal Circus* besides the general great song writing and originality of the music, is the actual sound of and technicality of the guitar playing. It always seemed like it would be something hard to figure out chord wise, and definitely hard to figure out sonically. It influenced my own guitar playing as far as trying to come up with unusual chords rather than relying on barre chords and standard progressions. I think the record pushed me in the direction of playing a lot of two fingered chords with a lot of open strings droning at a high volume. Not just your typical folky open chords, but different patterns up and down the neck of the guitar.

I almost don't even have to actually listen to the record anymore, it's so ingrained in my head. I can just pull it up just by closing my eyes. It also brings me right back to my parent's front yard in 1983 before I even knew what it was like to play loud guitars in front of people. The record was also lyrically important to me, just for the line in '*It's Not Funny Anymore*':

Act like you want to act
Be what you want to be
Find out who you really are
And don't pay any attention to me

The first time I heard it, I couldn't believe someone was saying exactly what a teenager wants to hear, and then follows it up by saying "and by the way, don't pay any attention to me". I'll never get that verse out of my head.

Hüsker Dü, *Zen Arcade* (1984)

Eugene Lee (music supporter)

How do you pick a favourite album or record? Anybody with more than a passing interest in music, both popular and unpopular will balk at the idea. How do you choose what's better or best from over a century of recorded music? Robert Johnson's recordings over Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue*. Massive Attack's *Blue Lines* over *Heart of the Congos*, Dinosaur Jr's *You're Living All Over Me* versus Nomeansno's *Wrong*. Where do you place your flag in constantly shifting sands?

Zen Arcade, the nominal second LP from Minneapolis band Hüsker Dü released in 1984 is for me one of the records that defines my eighties and acts a template for a lot of the music that I have loved since then. I want to qualify a couple of things that I have just mentioned. Shorthand for 'the eighties' in film and TV tends to be big hair, big make-up, big shoulder pads, big snare drum sounds, red braces, big profits. This was not my eighties. I mentioned that while this album influenced a lot of the sounds that I loved after its release, the band themselves acknowledged that they stood on the shoulders of giants with a love of The Byrds and The Beatles, both of whose work they covered, along with their own take on American hardcore punk that they helped define.

The band's first releases, *Land Speed Record* and *Everything Falls Apart* fall firmly within the louder, faster, rules hardcore aesthetic. These records are what they are and are no less thrilling and wonderful for it. 1983's *Metal Circus* gave a clearer indication of what was to come with the band able to broaden their musical palette while still retaining the power and noise of punk yet not shying away from melody in this maelstrom. They made no secret of their ambition as this quote to fanzine editor Steve Albini shows, "We're going to try to do something bigger than anything like rock & roll and the whole puny touring band idea. I don't know what it's going to be, we have to work that out, but it's going to go beyond the whole idea of 'punk rock' or whatever."

One of the things that captured me about this LP is the soundscape where all of the instruments and the vocals merge together. The drums are the antithesis of a cavernous eighties reverbed drum sound. The vocals, either Grant Hart's tuneful voice or Bob Mould's visceral howl are on the same level as the guitar noise, bobbing over or under the sound in a distorted sea of noise. One of the features of their live set was the constant noise. If a song didn't segue into another then the intervening gaps were filled with feedback, back line hum, but no silence. Never silence.

Subsequent reviews of this LP always mention how this is a break with hardcore and a ground zero for the Ameri-indie sounds that followed from Pixies and most obviously Nirvana. Yes, there is beautiful piano on *'Monday Will Never Be the Same'*, there are the gossamer tunes like *'Pink Turns to Blue'*, acoustic guitars of *'Never Talking to You Again'*, plus the final track *'Reoccurring Dreams'*, over 14 mins of a psychedelic punk rock nightmare. But there are tracks the LP also contains – enough blistering hardcore shown by the likes of *'Pride'*, *'Indecision Time'* or *'Masochism World'* – to bring any fan of the genre along for the ride. I love that Mould's exorcism of personal demons doesn't require an overt political target as is so often the case with punk rock. The personal is political though but it doesn't mean that the record sounds dated as might be the case.

The record encapsulates for me the joy of travelling at speed but with a purpose. It was also another direction to look in and it refuted The Clash's *'I'm So Bored With the USA'* assertion (Ramones and Dead Kennedys being notable exceptions). It contributed to opening the doors to the SST, Dischord et al, *Maximumrocknroll*, book your own life independent ethos for me. It's played its part in a musical journey that has lasted over 40 years for me and still burns as fiercely as it did in my 19-year-old's self.

Billy Bragg, *Brewing Up with Billy Bragg* (1984)

Rónán Hession (author, *Leonard and Hungry Paul*; musician)

There was a period in my life when I discussed my choice for favourite album on an almost daily basis. I agonised over it as though it were a high-stakes decision with life-changing consequences for me and, I supposed, the artist chosen. In my over-earnest early twenties, I hadn't yet learned that what mattered to me didn't necessarily matter to everyone. It was a lesson I would learn, if not the hard way, then certainly the slow way. In the 25 years since, the place of music in my life has changed. It's no longer a way for me to communicate the tribe I belong to, nor is it – and here's the major change – the yardstick I use to judge others. I have mellowed to the point where someone can choose a Greatest Hits as their favourite album and I will still be in a conversation with them five minutes later.

The thing about time – or, more specifically, perspective – is that it has allowed my favourite album to choose itself. The greatest albums are those that simply will not go away. In my case it's an album that hit my life at just the right moment and which has continued to make sense to me every time I have listened to it since.

I bought *Brewing Up with Billy Bragg* in Golden Discs in Artaine Castle shopping centre, on cassette, a few years after it had come out. I don't remember how much it cost, but I was impressed that Billy Bragg sought to prevent profiteering by stating on the cover that it should cost £3.99 or less. Its 11 songs are mostly just Billy singing in his I-have-never-been-to-speech-and-drama-in-my-life Barking accent and his electric guitar sounding like someone dropping cutlery on tiles. In other words, it was utterly unpasteurised and, to my ears, spellbindingly authentic in a way I had never heard before. I had always loved the intelligent, political pop of The Jam, The Specials, The Housemartins, but with Billy, there was something instantly relatable about the solitary crusading spirit of his songs.

In the early 1980s, BBC news appeared on breakfast TV and so myself and my siblings watched it every morning, not because we were precocious, but because it was TV. The world of breakfast TV – miners' strikes, the Falklands, Thatcher, and the deliberate sundering of British society which is still playing out today – was also the world of Billy Bragg's songs. At a time when there was much of what I saw that I didn't understand, Billy Bragg was asking all the right questions. He was idealistic without being dogmatic. He made me want to think harder about things.

Had Billy Bragg simply catalysed my own political awakening, he might have remained an important part of my past, but part of my past nonetheless. But what has kept him in my heart all these years is the idiosyncratic genius of his love songs. *'The Saturday Boy'*, *'St. Swithin's Day'*, *'The Myth of Trust'*, *'From a Vauxhall Velox'* – these are sophisticated songs that capture the cocktail of vulnerability, poignancy and carnal self-interest that fuels the downtime imagination of any young person.

Brewing Up with Billy Bragg is as magic now as it was then. I have never forgotten how it taught me that caring about the people in my life and caring about the world go together. Love is always engaged.

The Smiths, *The Smiths* (1984)

Colin Coulter (author; editor, *Working for the Clampdown: The Clash, the Dawn of Neoliberalism and the Political Promise of Punk*)

Seventeen is as good an age as any to fall in love. Only this was, of course, not like any other love. As is the nature of many grand passions, it had been in the bloodstream a while before declaring itself. The debut single *'Hand in Glove'*

released in May 1983 – with that daringly (for the time) homoerotic sleeve and those belligerently (for all time) socialist lyrics – had certainly struck a chord. But it would be the other side of the summer before the penny would drop in earnest. The occasion was, inevitably, a session recorded for John Peel that was broadcast three weeks into my final year at school and which my elder brother, not for the first time, had the prescience to capture on tape.

Amid the austerity of the analogue age, that cassette would become very treasure, the last thing played before trudging to school, the first after sprinting home. All four of the tracks in what was already their second Peel session attested to the band's spiralling reputation as the finest of their generation. But it was with *'Still Ill'* that The Smiths stole my heart forever. Played time out of number on ever more translucent tape, that song began to disclose a whole world of possibilities that never quite seemed to exist before. After a while, even those reckless pledges that "there are brighter sides to life" seemed to be coming to fruition.

For in that gilded autumn of 1983 something else entirely improbable began to take shape. A certain someone who had been a friend for a while was in the process of becoming something rather more. The soundtrack of that unlikely fledgling romance would be provided principally by the suitably lovelorn compositions of The Smiths. Released as a single at Hallowe'en, *'This Charming Man'* had whetted the appetite even further for the forthcoming debut album, but that now appeared to be receding into the distance. There were dark rumours in the inky that the eponymous long player was not quite up to scratch and its release would be delayed while the project was salvaged by legendary producer John Porter. That deferral provided a painfully apposite metaphor for what might at a stretch have been termed my love life at the time. The evolution of The Smiths' debut album and that of my first big romance both seemed to proceed at little more than glacial pace. We used to wait, after all.

And then, at last, there was a release date from Rough Trade. After months of delays, *The Smiths* was to hit the racks on Monday, 20 February, 1984. While I was, as always, flat broke, my older brother was both gainfully employed and a voracious record collector, so I was entirely confident that he would pick up a copy the moment the album reached Belfast. But plans can fall through, as so often they do. Every day that week, I waited for our Tom to return home with the album and every day I was disappointed. In the middle of the following week, though, the additional day of the leap year was due to fall. Folklore holds this to be an auspicious time and so it was to prove. As the light

faded that Wednesday, 29 February, 1984, I was chatting to a friend at the top of the Oldpark Road when I saw my brother in the middle distance getting off the bus, his step a little brighter than usual and under his arm the unmistakable form of 12-inch vinyl. On his way home from work, he had stopped off at Belfast landmark Caroline Records and procured a copy of *The Smiths*. And not a moment too soon.

At a distance of almost four decades, it remains difficult to capture just how seminal, original, wilful – and, most of all perhaps, how deeply, deeply strange – that album was for those of us who waited for it be released. And, indeed, for those who would first encounter it long after it first appeared. The Smiths would, needless to say, release even greater long players than their vaunted debut. But there is no album in their body of work that retains quite the same personal resonance for me than that first one. Those 10 singular tracks recall more vividly than anything else a critical time when everything in the world around me was beginning to change, for good as well as for ill. Within a few days of hearing *The Smiths* for the first time, there was a stolen birthday kiss with herself; within a week, the miners were on strike and facing the full vindictive might of the Thatcherite state.

That nascent romance for which The Smiths provided the score would peter out in time. Which is, of course, entirely fitting in its way. But my love for the band remains undimmed even after all this time, and even after all the indignities its vocalist would visit on us subsequently. Listening now to those sardonic, scabrous, and, yes, socialist songs on their debut album calls to mind a time when the field of personal and political possibility seemed suddenly to broaden. As with so many other people, The Smiths gave me a sense that perhaps the good life might just be out there after all. It is simply impossible to imagine a world without them.

Kate Bush, *Hounds of Love* (1985)

Sinéad Gleeson (author, *Constellations*; broadcaster)

For some, it's about, "It's in the trees – it's coming!", a rain-making machine, or a deal with God intoned over erotic, intricate choreography. I can't think of an album with a stronger first side: songs that were both critically revered and commercially successful, but then *Hounds of Love* is a high water mark. Those opening songs are some of her biggest hits, the ones other bands cover, the ones people who don't know much about Kate Bush know the words to. And while

each song lines up in its own monolithic way, *Hounds of Love* – for me – is all about the flipside, the seven tracks known as *The Ninth Wave*. Bush originally conceived this group of songs as a conceptual film about a woman lost at sea; bobbing in the water, disconnected, stricken. Perhaps it's why the songs sound so anguished, eulogistic.

For me, Kate's music is not a singular thing, a deep lone furrow of audio – it has always gravitated toward the physical and visual. There's a distinct synaesthetic, multi-disciplinary quality to her work. *The Ninth Wave* crests from the emotive 'And Dream of Sheep', which always strikes me as the most perfect funeral song, to the experimental 'Waking the Witch'. Quietly tucked away amid these brine-soaked songs is one of my favourite tracks by Kate, 'Watching You Without Me', another lament for loss and love, a swirl of sadness. I still count my blessings that I saw Bush perform them in London, where I sat, overwhelmed at the spectacle of her live show, that she and I were in the same room, that the air around me filled up with her unforgettable music.

It's you and me-hee, Kate.

The Mekons, *Fear and Whiskey* (1985)

Russ Bestley (Watch You Drown; designer; author, *The Art of Punk*)

Leeds' finest post-punk stalwarts The Mekons seem to have had an uncanny knack of narrating parts of my life over the past 44 years. My wedding vows included the lyrics to their seminal 1978 single 'Where Were You?' (along with a reading from George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*), while their (temporarily at that point) posthumous collection, *The Mekons Story 1977-1982*, charted a radical history from art punk to DIY experimentalism that seemed to reflect the persona of the listener as much as that of the producers. More especially, the 12" EP 'The English Dancing Master', which appeared almost from nowhere in 1983 after the group had broken up, seemed to resonate with my life in a deeply fundamental way. 'Last Dance' – like 'Where Were You?', another love song about missed opportunities – felt deeply personal, presaging a soundtrack that wove in and around my life over the following 40 years.

The band had been going through something of a hiatus during this period, having been kicked out by Virgin Records after one album and returning to their independent, DIY and radically experimental roots. Jon Langford had meanwhile found a level of success with The Three Johns, while the new politics of Thatcherism and the 1984-85 miners' strike provided a reason – if one was

needed – for a renewed activism among punk's former alumni. An expanded line-up of The Mekons, featuring former Damned guitarist Lu Edmonds along with Steve Goulding (formerly of The Rumour) on drums and Susie Honeyman on fiddle played a series of gigs to support the miners before going into the studio to record their breakthrough folk/punk/country album *Fear and Whiskey*. The recruitment of lead guitarist Dick Taylor, an elder statesman formerly of The Pretty Things, added a sense of dynamism and flair to the group's melodies that makes them sound timeless, like a punk band exploring musical histories spanning back through decades – or centuries.

The album spans a range of genres and styles, opening with 'Chivalry' – a half-spoken, plaintive vocal by Tom Greenhalgh is backed by a wistful violin refrain and simple back beat:

I was out late the other night/Fear and whiskey kept me going/
I swore somebody held me tight/But now there's just no way of
knowing/I saw your face in a crowded bar/Excuse me please!/At
least I thought it was you/Now I just don't know where you are/
My suit was smart when I put it on last week/All I could remember
as I walked down the street/was the rain and tears on your face/Oh
gee, I guess I'm just a disgrace.

It's something of a(nother) return to 'Where Were You?', though by this time the protagonist is even more adrift in an existential wasteland of drink and loneliness. 'Trouble Down South', re-recorded from an earlier version of the song, moves the narrative to the Vietnam War. 'Hard To Be Human Again' is heavier, darker, bleaker, while 'Darkness and Doubt' shifts from a kind of personal neurosis toward a more overtly political commentary on the picket lines of the miners' strike:

In the clear red dawn/We moved like a tide/But I went down/In a
baton charge/Darkness and doubt/Just follow me around.

Closing side one of the album, 'Psycho Cupid (*Danceband on the Edge of Time*)' shifts to a spoken word kitchen sink drama narrated by Shelagh Quinn:

My dad burnt the toast this morning/I came into the kitchen and
saw the cup of tea fall from his trembling hands/Then he was
crying among the fragments, piecing nothing together/He said I
was ungrateful.

Side two opens with 'Flitcraft', a nod to traditional English folk in waltz time,

with *'Abernant 1984/5'* following suit, at least musically, in another impassioned tribute to the miners:

The wind and the rain beat on his fair head/As he stood in the
darkness wishing he was dead/Only 17 when he went down the
mine/And it's a year that he's been out on the line.

'Last Dance', a reworking of that earlier recording from *'The English Dancing Master'*, returns the listener to a pastoral English folk dance, the lyrics narrating a story of forlorn love.

Fear and Whiskey is an album that brings The Mekons' traditional approach to songwriting full circle, linking loneliness, love and longing to the plight of working classes under an authoritarian government and what would become known retrospectively as the economic and social agendas of neoliberalism. The personal is very political here and the group's adoption of instrumentation associated with older folk traditions is both deliberate and telling: the album concludes with *'Lost Highway'*, a song popularised by Hank Williams as far back as 1949. Essentially, the song's lyrical concerns are largely indistinguishable from the group's own material at this point in time:

I was just a lad, nearly twenty-two/Neither good or bad, just a kid
like you/And now I'm lost, too late to pray/I'm rolling down that
lost highway.

In one way this foretells a subsequent shift within The Mekons, with Jon Langford, Sally Timms and Steve Goulding relocating to the USA and beginning to explore the history of country and folk on that continent. By the late 1980s a transatlantic Mekons line-up had embarked on a mission to embrace the roots of what would become known as Americana along with English musical – and radical, political and artistic – traditions. It's a journey that a number of dedicated fans, myself included, have followed for nearly 40 years. The *'Last Dance'* plays on.

The Jesus and Mary Chain, *Psychocandy* (1985)

Mike Dines (co-editor, *Tales from the Punkside; The Aesthetics of Our Anger: Anarcho-Punk, Politics, Music*)

I can't remember the first time I heard The Jesus and Mary Chain. Whether it was through my best mate at school Mark Jarvis, through my listening to the John Peel Show, or via a random buy in the local HMV, I just can't quite remember that far back. But the band, and their seminal album *Psychocandy* was, for me, a sonic

revelation: a gateway drug to the likes of the Velvet Underground, Discharge and Crass. For others, the album was a feedback-induced mess, thrown together in a cold afternoon in a council flat in East Kilbride. But personally, I thought they were incredible. I couldn't "hear" the feedback – it all seemed perfectly "normal" to me – and could only hear these carefully crafted tracks full of barely audible nuggets of lyrical genius. From the "Sometimes, I walk sideways/to avoid you/when I've annoyed you" in *'You Trip Me Up'* (followed by the inimitable "love's like the mighty ocean/when it's frozen/that is your heart") to *'In a Hole's* "How can something crawl within/my rubber holy baked bean tin," and *'Never Understand's* "The sun comes up another day begins/and I don't even worry about the state I'm in," the album flows through a series of angst-ridden pictorial snapshots. And each accompanied by the almost mystical, timbral soundscapes, the rock'n'roll-inspired guitar licks and the driving Stooges-like bass lines. If Mark had introduced me to the Mary Chain, then he also left an indelible mark on another of our mates, Simon Kenward. Being into his metal, and respectfully telling us that he wasn't a great fan of the band, we dragged him along to see the band at the Portsmouth Guildhall in the late 1980s. With Bobby Gillespie now replaced by an unconvincing drum machine, Simon told us that it was (and still is), via a variety of expletives, the worst gig he had ever had the misfortune to attend (to be honest, I could see where he was coming from). And on hearing this, Mark always flashes me a wry smile. His work was done. Legend.

The Jesus and Mary Chain *Psychocandy* (1985)

Lolo Wood (The Wup Chow, Ye Nuns, The Fallen Women, Joanne Joanne)

I first became aware of The Jesus and Mary Chain on the cover of *Smash Hits* in July 1986, where they were described as "loud, spotty and weird". I loved anything that *Smash Hits* described as "weird", so I was intrigued. I was expecting them to be "difficult listening", noisy and impenetrable, but the single they were promoting at the time, *'Some Candy Talking'*, turned out to be a languid, jangly '60s-style pop song that reminded me more of The Bangles than The Fall. The next song I heard, the earlier *'You Trip Me Up'*, was considerably noisier, but still very much a SONG with verses, choruses and a TUNE. I'd never heard dissonance and melody combined in this way before. I was smitten!

I'm not gonna lie, as a thirteen-year-old girl, part of the reason I was so taken with them was that they were young, good-looking Scottish guys with cool haircuts in leather trousers. I've had a thing about Scottish accents ever since.

I only recently found out, in Bobby Gillespie's memoir *Tenement Kid*, that the early JAMC videos were directed by a gay man, Tim Broad, which explains why the camera lingers so lovingly over the black-clad bodies of the band, including Bobby himself, who was the drummer on *Psychocandy*.

The way I discovered the album itself couldn't be more 1980s. I taped it off my friend Mandy, but we only had time to tape side one when I went round to her house; we had to do side two a few weeks later. So I got to know side one intimately before I heard side two, and I still prefer it, even though objectively side two is just as good. Then when I finally got my own vinyl copy of the album, I was shocked to find that 'Some Candy Talking' wasn't at the end of side one. Turns out it was only added to the CD and cassette reissues when it was a hit. What a swizz, as they used to say in *Smash Hits*!

From the Phil Spector intro of 'Just Like Honey' to the last feedback echo of 'It's So Hard', every track is a lovingly crafted noise-pop gem. I'd never heard feedback used as an instrument before, and when I finally saw them live in the SFX in Dublin in September 1987, it sounded wrong when the exact screeches and rumbles didn't appear in the places they did on the record. It changed how I thought about the possibilities of music – it was possible to be abrasive and angry without being shouty and tuneless. Not that there's anything wrong with being shouty and tuneless – some of my other favourite records fall into that category. But to communicate the same emotions with the melody, structure and hooks of a perfect pop song? That's the sweet spot I've been chasing ever since I first got obsessed with this album, and I still don't think anyone's done it better.

New Model Army, *No Rest for the Wicked* (1985); Pearl Jam, *Ten* (1991)

Aleksandr Mikitenko (underground singer-songwriter and non-fiction translator from Odessa, Ukraine)

I guess that February 24, 2022, is a day I will remember in detail 'til I die. I could never have imagined that one day I would wake up into a nightmare like that. My family and I live in Odessa, Ukraine, and there is a military unit nearby our house. At about 5:30a.m. that morning we were awakened by the sound of falling bombs. Then a rocket was launched, so loud and powerful that our house shook. We were totally shocked. So began the most insane war that I could ever imagine.

A month has passed since that day, and I'm writing this very late at night while my family and I are sheltering outside the city and an air raid alert has

recently ended. In these recent days, which seem like one endless day, I often recall the words of the outstanding filmmaker Kira Muratova, who lived in our city, Odessa. When she was asked in 2014 whose side she's on, she answered like this:

Figuratively speaking, I'm not above the battle – I take the side of Ukraine, but I am a deeply committed pacifist, I do not accept any war, and I don't know how to survive and how to get out of a system where there are such things as 'defend your motherland' and 'fight for your homeland.'

These words of hers were a great support for me in 2014 and are still my moral guideline. But my real mainstay is music. I know that when the guns fire, the muses are silent, but through all these days, music supports me. I listen to it a lot. Music does not replace the cruel reality outside the window, it does not help me to escape it. But it works like some kind of neutralizer. It helps me to accept the reality, to live in it and to feel beauty even when everything falls apart. (And the final scene of *Fight Club* came to my mind while I was writing that last sentence.)

Have you ever wondered what kind of music you would choose to listen to if you knew you could die today? Well, that's such a weird thing to think about, but now I can tell you something about it. In the early morning after the first bombing we were totally shocked and, of course, we couldn't sleep any more. We were numb and didn't understand at all what to do. I looked at my almost six-year-old daughter – somehow, she was still sleeping and I realised that I had to get myself together, prepare breakfast for her and somehow start that insane day. I had a bunch of different feelings: confusion, jitters, disbelief. Also, I thought that maybe those bombs might have fallen on us and we could already be dead.

And then suddenly it started playing in my head: "Oh I, oh, I'm still alive..." I know, the theme of that song is completely different, but that line made me get myself together! So I went to the kitchen, put the CD of *Ten* on my stereo, made myself a cup of coffee and started that insane day! I heard the explosion of another bomb outside the window while Pearl Jam were blasting out and I was like, "Fuck off, I'm still alive!" Thank you, Eddie and the rest of the band – that was a scary but unforgettable magic moment!

And I also remember very well how, on the second day of the war, out of habit we went for a walk in a nearby park. It was a sunny, windless day. And there was a deafening, post-apocalyptic silence! It was so disturbing and weighed so heavily on our brains that we almost literally ran back home and did not leave the

house for about a week. That evening I put the needle on New Model Army's *No Rest for the Wicked* and it was a relief: the music expressed and reflected exactly what I felt. In that moment, the opening bass thrill notes went straight to my heart and the familiar line "You're so frightened, everybody's so frightened..." suddenly sounded very different. And then these lines from the album's final song, '*The Attack*': "Even in this age of concrete, even in this age of reason/There comes a time when you put your life/Into the hands of the gods!" I found that sentiment very comforting. It may sound fatalistic, but it's hard not to be a fatalist these days. And I was no longer so scared. Thank you, Justin and the rest of the band.

Perhaps music supports me in such a powerful way because I'm also a musician, an underground punk rocker, and music is not just a background or soundtrack of my life – it is my life. For me, punk rock means to be who you really are, not to change your core life principles and beliefs, even if society or current circumstances push you to do it, and to question authority and always think for yourself. Punk rock is unlikely to save you from a bomb dropped on you but I think it's the best way to survive among those whom one of my own songs calls "stupid people, aggressive believers and cautious rebels."

The Waterboys, '*Spirit*' (1985)

Segs (Ruts, Ruts DC)

I've avoided the obvious like ... *Ziggy Stardust...*, *Hunky Dory*, Roxy Music, Alice Cooper, *Slade Alive!*, *Transformer*, *Porcupine*, *Big Hits (High Tide and Green Grass)*, *Motown Chartbusters*, *Club Reggae*, *Dreadlocks Dread*, *Burnin'*, *Led Zeppelin III* (and IV) ... the list is pretty long.

Today, though ... '*Spirit*' from *This Is the Sea* by The Waterboys: "What spirit is, man can be."

Help me drop a Peace Bomb.

Prince, *Around The World In A Day* (1985)

John Myers (Shane MacGowan and the Popes)

I'll never forget the first time I saw Prince. I'd love to say that it was at Wembley Arena or some other legendary place like that, but no – the venue was my parents' house in Camden, watching *Top of the Pops* whilst eating pork chops with overly boiled red cabbage. How appropriate that my consumption of purple mush was accompanied by '*Purple Rain*'. I'd first heard his music the year before on the radio, with *1999* coming across as a sound from another dimension. Now I

could see this musical maelstrom of James Brown, Jimi Hendrix and Sly Stone – I was completely and utterly captivated. My Irish mother on the other hand, upon seeing him on the TV, uttered "What the feck is that?" in a withering fashion. I really should have called social services at that point.

Fast forward a year and the previous main object of my musical affections, Freddie Mercury, had been thoroughly cast aside for "the dwarf dipped in pubic hair," as Boy George once charmingly described him. Years later, I realised that Prince and Freddie could co-exist in consensual and mutual harmonic harmony, but for now, I was obsessed with the former. I spent much of my time recording Prince-influenced songs (I do believe that's the polite way of saying "ripped off") on my Tascam four-track tape recorder. Thankfully, a new album of his entitled *Around The World In A Day* arrived to save the world from further musical crimes of my doing.

And what a superb work it was and still is. I can still recollect excitedly waking up on the day of its release, purchasing it on vinyl (you know, that hipster format – for people who don't have turntables) and listening to it repeatedly for the rest of the day whilst poring over the stunning gatefold sleeve. This was no artistic re-treading of his multi-million selling previous album, with Prince's creative intentions firmly established by the Middle Eastern elements of the opening title track. Indeed, those first few opening seconds of otherworldly synth flute still come across as a pointed "f*** you" to the perplexed fans who expected *Purple Rain Pt. 2* – and by Christ did I love the brazen ballsiness of that. It's that spirit which probably encapsulates this album more than anything else for me. With this release, Prince really did cement his place on a small list of "pop" acts that dared their audience to follow them wherever they went artistically, much as The Beatles, Bowie and Todd Rundgren did before him. After all, it takes a certain boldness to follow up a huge commercial success with a left turn which you know could be a comparative flop, albeit in Prince's case one that still went double platinum 11 weeks later...

The broader range of influences on display in this album really had a huge impact on my musical intake and outlook. For example, there's a ballad on it entitled '*Condition of the Heart*' that wears its Joni Mitchell heart on its sleeve. Around this time, Prince gave an interview where he stated that the last album he loved all the way through was *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*. Both of these things acted as a gateway into discovering Joni, for which I am very grateful. All the best albums work in this way – they make you want to discover the artistic lineage behind them, and I usually find myself so impressed by how they inform

but don't consume such incredible artists who are inspired by those who've come before them. I guess I'm not talking about Boyzone with this one.

I've also always loved the overriding influence of psychedelia on this album too, even if the closest I've gotten to acid is taking medication for reflux. He harnesses its exploratory nature which lends even the more typical Prince-esque tracks such as *'Pop Life'* and *'America'* more of a left field element. It also feels like his most personal and introspective album, with lyrical references to loneliness cropping up so many times that you feel like asking him "U ok, hun?"

But of course, he was fine – its reflective nature ultimately enabled Prince to figure out where to go to next creatively. *Without Around The World In A Day*, we wouldn't have had the avant garde masterpieces *Parade* and *Sign O' The Times* that followed. It's a supremely important transitional work, much in the same way that Stevie Wonder's *Where I'm Coming From* prepared him and his audience for the glorious run of '70s albums that followed. There's a real tangible excitement in listening to an artist at an embryonic stage of realising their true potential. And that's what resonates most of all within me when I listen to this genre-embracing collection as a whole, which does remind me that Prince taught me that it's ok to have a wildly eclectic taste in music. And also that it's ok to be a shortarse.

Stormtroopers of Death, *Speak English or Die* (1985)

Alex Johnson (Wonk Unit)

Hello darling. Today I want to write about a record that changed my life: *Speak English or Die* by Stormtroopers of Death (S.O.D.), Roadrunner Records, 1985 (I think). I was at school and I remember my best mate Kelly lending me this album with some weird fucked-up skull on the cover. I was about 13, I guess, and the only band I'd previously been into was Madness (I had their photos on my bedroom wall ripped out from *Look-in* magazine).

There were a bunch of weird, naughty, metal kids in class that were always going on about bands like Metallica and suchlike (they had patches on their denim/MA1 flight jackets too which I was also kinda intrigued by) and I was curious about what this thrash metal/punk thing was that they were always going on about. I went into my nan's room that night and put it on her turntable ... BAAAAM, my life changed forever. I'd previously never heard a distorted guitar, that massive chug. I'd never heard thrash drums, I'd never heard a vocal of just brutal shouting like Billy Milano's. WTF was this music?? I couldn't even understand what he was saying but yay, the lyrics were on the inner sleeve! I

remember trying to follow those lyrics, waiting for the "mosh" section. I turned it up as loud as I could, I could never get it loud enough – and my nan's stereo went loud!!

That shit made a young, drunken, insecure teenager wanna go and get fucked up, made me wanna destroy, gave me fuckin' power. This music was a secret; normal folk didn't know about this shit. I was in the elite club of the enlightened. We were punk as fuck, we thrashed, we moshed, we punch-danced, we were better than the rest of the fuckin' idiots that didn't understand hahaha and we didn't give a fuck about what other people thought of us. I guess that's called teenage rebellion. It was perfect and beautiful and I'll never forget that feeling. Thank you. Xx

Hüsker Dü, *New Day Rising* (1985)

Morgan Brown (Pardon Us)

I was maybe 14 when I first heard *New Day Rising* by Hüsker Dü. I was already an avid devourer of music – heavy metal, classic rock, 1960s pop, 1950s rock'n'roll, contemporary indie rock – but hadn't really found a musical identity of my own. Discovering music was a different process in those pre-internet days, with a large element of random chance, especially living in rural Cumbria where my record shopping options were either local car boot sales or, if I was lucky, the two hit-and-miss second-hand record shops in Carlisle, my nearest city. It was in one of these – Vinyl Vaults, sadly no longer in business – that I encountered a copy of *New Day Rising*. I had been listening to and enjoying Bob Mould's 1990s band, Sugar, and had read vague hints in the NME that he had previously been in a punk rock band with a funny Scandinavian name. I wasn't too sure about the whole punk thing – I didn't know much about the genre beyond the already-tired mohawks and safety pins cliches, but the record looked intriguing, and was priced reasonably enough for my accumulated pocket money to cover the cost. So I took the plunge.

When the needle hit the first groove of the title track, I was an immediate convert. The pounding migraine throb of the rhythm section, the bristling acid-scorched wash of guitar, the two ragged voices screaming over one another... I'd never heard anything quite like it, and yet there were familiar elements there, beneath the bulldozing sonic assault. *'I Apologise'* was delivered with fury, but was brilliantly melodic, and packed with snarky attitude; *'Books About UFOs'* was an out-and-out 1960s pop tune, and *'Celebrated Summer'* was turbo-charged folk rock, and possibly the greatest song I'd ever heard in my life to boot. I heard an

intensity and aggression I'd only previously encountered in the extreme fringes of metal, blended with the introspective booze-woozy confessional style of *Tonight's the Night*-era Neil Young, all swept along in a wave of amphetamine fuzz and surprising jazzy swing. Needless to say, it was rather more than I had expected from a "mere" punk rock record.

Over the following months, I delved enthusiastically and haphazardly into other areas of punk rock, being constantly delighted, confounded and exhilarated by what I heard. From that moment on, I knew that, although I'd always listen to a wide range of music, I was undoubtedly *a punk*. After nearly three decades of playing in punk bands, collecting punk records, putting on punk shows and even occasionally attempting to write books about punk bands, that conviction remains unchanged. The entire course of my adult life – the friendships I've made, the beliefs I hold, the places I've visited – has been informed by my connection with punk rock. And it all began with *New Day Rising*, the record that literally changed my life – clichés be damned!

Naked Raygun, *All Rise* (1986)

Roger Andreassen (Life, ... But How To Live It?, Danger!Man)

It's pretty much an impossible task to pick just one single record among all those I've loved and listened to over the years. So many of them have meant so much to me, and have inspired me in so many different ways, in different periods of my life. One that still stands out, and that I still keep coming back to is the album *All Rise* by Naked Raygun.

Back in the mid-'80s, way before the introduction of email and the internet, the way we were introduced to new bands and music from other countries was by tape-trading and letters (with soaped stamps). The internet has made so much more music accessible to everyone, but the sheer volume of accessible music makes finding the really good gems more or less like finding a needle in a haystack. Tape-trading was on a far more personal level, as the music on the tapes came recommended by trusted friends/penpals from all over the world.

One of those tapes I received was a live recording of the Chicago-based band Naked Raygun from 1987. They played a set based around their album *All Rise* from 1986. I was completely blown away. To my ears it was the product of a perfect melting pot of super-catchy punk tunes, melodic vocals, simplistic powerful riffs with a "less is more" approach that worked wonders for the band. The lyrics were also super catchy, and easy to sing along to. I played that live tape

to shreds, and as I was planning a trip to the US that summer, I decided that I would try to find out if Naked Raygun had any gigs planned for the time I was there. They did!!! ... so I timed my visit to Chicago to their gig at the Metro.

As there was really no way to make sure I could get a ticket for the show, I decided to call Jeff Pezzati (the singer of Naked Raygun) the day before the gig to ask him. He and his girlfriend were super nice, and they asked where I was staying. I was on a budget, so I was sleeping at the central Greyhound Station as I had a valid bus ticket ... the punk way. I was fine with that, but they invited me to stay over at their place instead. Super friendly people! They took me along for a pub-crawl and to an obscure gig with Urge Overkill who had just released their first single. They also put me on the guestlist for the Naked Raygun gig (as it was completely sold out in advance)! I was a young kid at the time, and being treated this way by my favourite band helped shape me, and it has truly inspired the way I have later interacted with others.

After returning from my trip to the US I started a band called Life, ... But How To Live It? ... and the rest is history. I finally got a vinyl copy of *All Rise* that same year, and I still play it every time I do a DJ set or host a party at my house. A total classic that still means the world to me!

Dag Nasty, *Can I Say* (1986)

Dario Adamic (Goodwill Records/No Plan Records owner)

It's extremely difficult to answer the question that wants you to point out your favorite record. I'm sure I've had many favorite records over the years. *Rocket To Russia* by The Ramones, *Life's A Riot With Spy Vs Spy* by Billy Bragg, *Start Today* by Gorilla Biscuits, *Mush* by Leatherface, Tracy Chapman's first album, *Something to Write Home About* by The Get Up Kids. But here's a record that I consider a milestone of hardcore/punk music, a record that has managed to merge energy, melody and aggression. A record that has the same effect on myself no matter if it's the umpteenth time I've been listening to it. Tunes that still give me chills when I hear them. The record is: *Can I Say* by Dag Nasty.

I heard this record for the first time when I was 18 and at a time when I only listened to punk rock and had very little regard for hardcore. It was the second half of the 1980s. A friend of mine and I used to exchange mix tapes and Dag Nasty were on one of his tapes. This was much faster than bands I used to listen to at the time, but nevertheless carried an important dose of melody, which is something I couldn't do without in music. The guitar was aggressive, sharp. It

was cutting the air with its riffs. And when vocals came in, with that urgency and desperation, I thought I was in heaven.

This record surely opened doors to hardcore for me. I went on to appreciate bands I overlooked before. The 1990s came soon and I immersed myself in hardcore and bands like Gorilla Biscuits, Battery, Ignite, Chain of Strength, Turning Point, Life... But How To Live It?, Leatherface, Post Regiment. The door to hardcore was for me surely opened by Dag Nasty and their *Can I Say* album. They released several albums later on, but that chemistry was gone. That sound that can be urgent, direct, tormented, vibrant and melodic at the same time is something this band created, recorded and never found again, but it was enough to inspire generations that would step into their shoes for years to come.

Pussy Galore, *Groovy Hate Fuck* (1986)

Jane McKeown (Lung Leg, Peter Parker, Spread Eagle)

Aged 15 I walked into a record store in Glasgow and bought *Groovy Hate Fuck* by Pussy Galore. I fell in love with the band immediately upon sight of them standing defiantly in a field on the front cover of the album. The songs mirrored the band's cool, confrontational visual aesthetic with real DIY fuck you attitude, which is exactly how I was feeling at the time. I had already dyed my mousy brown hair black, bought my first leather biker jacket and raided my mum's underwear drawer for a pair of fishnet tights.

Sonically the album sounds like a screaming hall of knives with a catchy back beat. A too-cool-for-school primal scream for the alienated youth of the late '80s. '*Cunt Tease*' with Julia Cafritz shouting "Fuck you" at the end of each verse is still my favourite song ever! I didn't have a clue what I was going to do with my life once I left secondary school. Art school beckoned, encouraged by my teachers, but I was too far gone down the path of transgression by then and I just couldn't see that happening. Music and gigs seemed to be the route I was taking but it hadn't crossed my mind yet that I could be the one playing the gigs in my own band ... until ... I saw Julia Cafritz staring at me defiantly from the cover of *Groovy Hate Fuck*. She played one string licks on the geetar and hollered out lyrics with an attitude.

Two years later at the age of 17 I started my first band, Snagglepuss. I played the bottom two strings of my brother's guitar until I could afford to buy my first bass. Fast forward eight years and my new band Lung Leg has been asked to support Free Kitten (Kim Gordon and Julia Cafritz's supergroup). I

arrive at the venue and Julia is mulling around the floor. I take a deep breath and approach her, overwhelmed with the need to thank her, tell her, be near her aura. I can't remember our conversation, but I remember her warmth and that scowl on the record cover was replaced with a warm welcoming smile. The evening passed like a vivid dream of women united in the power of their song floating on a sea of possibilities.

Crowded House, *Crowded House* (1986)

Beth Alice (photographer, @TheChickWhoClicks)

Since I was very, very young, I've loved music. Each of us has a soundtrack to our lives, like stepping stones (or stepping songs!) that create who we are musically. Think about this: does every person in your life have a song that you associate them with? Mine do, and I love that! Some of the "stepping songs" that transformed my love of music early on were: '*Aquarius*', '*Let It Be*', '*Changes*', '*Wish You Were Here*', '*The Rubberband Man*', '*Superstition*', '*Oh Yeah*', '*When Poets Dreamed of Angels*' and so many more! These songs led me to my next beloved album.

While in college, I interned at Capitol Records. I was enchanted by this new band Crowded House putting out their very first record of the same name. I loved Split Enz (of course), but this new combination of the Finn brothers and their band mates was magical. Every day when I came to work I heard their album on full rotation everywhere at Capitol's offices, on the radio and, of course, on my turntable! Their lyrics spoke to me, their melodic vocals and smooth guitars – enchanting! Today, when I hear Crowded House's first album, it takes me to a place of serenity, a moment in time from my younger life that still resonates beautifully with me. Years later, I was in Los Angeles at a music industry convention. Everyone was casually talking, having drinks with hors d'oeuvres and then, suddenly, the guys from Crowded House walked right into the room and stopped in the middle of the crowd. They had their instruments with them and they started playing '*Something So Strong*'. It felt as though our good friends just dropped by with their guitars to jam a bit! What a rush it was to see them performing all of the songs that made me love them from the very beginning.

The Housemartins, *London 0 Hull 4* (1986)

Enrico (Los Fastidios)

The first time I listened to The Housemartins, on a tape, I was taken with the sound: I loved it immediately, one song better than other, easy listening, easy

loving. A really funny pop-punk album with soul influences. All the songs perfect for having a great night at the pub, at home with friends, at the party. I remember that when in the rock discotheques the DJs turned The Housemartins' songs on, the people got crazy, a lot of fun on the dancefloor. Great music with cutting lyrics, sung as you can sing the easiest song of your life, although rich with very serious and social references. I loved The Housemartins in the past and today I'm still into the new songs from Paul Heaton (The Housemartins' singer) – I really think he is the real King of Pop!!! For me it was more than a dream to share a song together with him on Los Fastidios' 2018 album *Joy Joy Joy*.

One Last Wish, 'My Better Half' (1986)

Mark Andersen (Positive Force DC collective; co-author, *Dance of Days: Two Decades of Punk in the Nation's Capital*)

A moment. A feeling. A sound. Something tiny but true becomes something enormous and undeniable.

Life contains such shards of magic, if only we can be present for them, awake enough to see, to hear, to feel. It is not easy or simple, but we can sometimes stretch past the comfortable and conventional – “the done and the dead” – to what could be. Music can be a key to unlock this door. As a truism from the African-American gospel tradition asserts, “to sing is to pray twice.” This aphorism suggests that there is something profound that rises when word and emotion meets melody and chord, something past craft, something deeper than art. This ineffable *something* might be called “soul,” or perhaps even “truth.”

Mystery and miracle can inhabit a moment. In itself, this speck of time is infinitesimally small. Yet, somehow, it can reverberate past the mundane towards what might be called “eternal.” To me, that is what One Last Wish's *My Better Half* embodies.

The song sprang unexpectedly out of a quixotic decision by this short-lived successor to the immensely influential Rites of Spring to play a show three hours away in Virginia Beach on August 17, 1986, despite an approaching hurricane. The venue, Artz Deli, was near the beach, and as the storm built and the band played, the glass panels behind them onstage quavered, in danger of buckling. Street signs outside bent and shook in the unrelenting gale.

Immediately after the set ended, lead singer Guy Picciotto ran out of the club alone – “to get my head together,” he later recounted – racing down to the beach which was just blocks away.

Guy: “It was pouring rain and the wind was blowing the sand around so it stung your face – it was really spectacular like a [William] Turner painting with all the elements just smudging everything in a big blur. I was staring at the ocean feeling wiped out from just having played and had one of those moments where you feel yourself sort of dissolving into the natural space around you. At some point I got too close to the water and got sucker-punched by a wave that totally soaked me. This snapped me out of it, and I hustled back to the venue drenched.”

Guy concedes that the show “might not have been practical or an intelligent move,” but the evening – especially that moment of clarity and consequence on the beach – stuck with him: “It was just a small thing that happened but it ended up becoming the seed for *My Better Half*.”

If the evening had crackled with the electricity of disaster risked yet somehow dodged, the song uses that as a jumping-off point for engaging nothing less than the challenge presented by life itself. Few songs strain for such meaning; even fewer have music so perfectly matched to propel the words past simple, spare prose to something more exalted and lasting.

A taut, descending guitar figure uncurls, as if offering a clarion call. After two brief measures, drums rise to meet it, followed by the entire band. The song bursts outwards as word and chord contend, clashing off one another.

Built on a clear, ringing gallop of a riff, the song hurls a challenge with its opening verse:

I would engage the world as my ally/I would engage the world/
against jealous fear and bitter ambition/that only aspires to the
done and the dead...

The chorus sketches a moment of decision, defiant and joyous, lifted by ascending guitar lines:

I went down to the sea/I don't care if you don't believe me/
It talked to me about my life/it spoke with the voice of reason/
It told me to risk it all/with the chance of nothing returned....

A terse, telling query – “Isn't that the task of love?/Isn't that the challenge of love today?” – follows, suggesting there is some deeper standard to which we must answer, that more is at stake than self-indulgence or whimsy, that betterment of self and others are bound together. As the second chorus fades,

the guitars drop away suddenly, leaving only raw, insistent voice underpinned by muted bass and drums:

Why do we make it so hard?/Why live our lives in distance/
Why do we make it so hard?

Then the band re-engages, guitars blazing, racing across the final 20 odd seconds, hammering home a final statement:

I thought life should be a chance/to defeat statistics/I thought life
should be a chance/And if sometimes I don't pursue it/the sea
speaks/my better half.

The song is not quite two minutes long, yet in that brief span a whole universe seems to reside, a wide-open vista of possibilities there for the taking, if only we have the courage to rise to meet the moment, the willingness to put ourselves on the line.

Thirty-six years later, Guy mused:

Maybe it's a bit over the top as a lyric but I actually think most people have moments like that in their lives, unexpected shocks where they are informed in some weird immediate way by the environment around them, getting a fragment of insight, incentive or existential clarity that offers a new sense of orientation or footing.

By some happy accident, the song arrived to my ears at a "risk it all" moment in September 1986. My life began in a tiny homestead shack erected by my Danish grandfather Otto upon his arrival in the harsh beauty of rural northeastern Montana, nestled on the edge of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation. We had no indoor plumbing; water came from a hand-operated pump in the front yard, baths were done in a galvanized tin tub with water heated on a coal-burning stove, the fuel extracted from a small mine on a nearby hill. We had no bathroom, only an outhouse in the backyard, with a Sears Roebuck catalog for toilet paper.

Not long after my Grandma Grace's untimely death, my father had left school, going to work to help support the family at age 14. I grew up in bunk beds shared with my older brother lovingly carved into the wall of my parents' bedroom by his skilled, diligent hands. While our circumstances improved by the time I reached my teenage years, life was still humble.

Given this background, it was hardly preordained that I would go on to college, much less that I would get to attend a fancy East Coast graduate school.

Nonetheless, with the tireless efforts of my parents – and massive help from student loan programs – I found myself attending Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) in Washington DC in summer 1984.

I arrived bearing my family's pride and weighty expectations that I would take full advantage of the opportunity. This school, essentially, was a ticket into the lower echelons of the American ruling class, the culmination of all my parents' labour. The idea, roughly, was to leave behind my punk radicalism of the past decade – which had somehow co-existed with academic excellence while in college in western Montana – for mainstream success, i.e., not having to toil at manual labour. My mission was to do my classwork, not make waves and learn to say "yes."

It was not to be. My shock upon being plunged into the cauldron of DC's troubled racial politics and yawning economic inequality was jolting enough. Combined with the re-election of Ronald Reagan, followed by a summer spent in war-torn, impoverished Central America – whose agony was fueled partly by Reagan's policies, policies I would be expected to implement in my chosen career path – this all left me deeply shaken, unsure of how to proceed.

By mid-1986, I had graduated and, as a holding action, had taken a minimum wage job at a left-wing bookstore, Common Concerns. However, huge decisions loomed. Seeking to avoid them, I found sanctuary in DC's burgeoning Revolution Summer-era punk scene, immersed in the work of Positive Force (PF), a punk activist group I had co-founded the previous year.

Through PF, I helped set up One Last Wish's first show on August 10, 1986, a No More Censorship Defense Fund benefit supporting embattled Dead Kennedys' front man Jello Biafra. Assembled out of remnants of Rites of Spring and Embrace – two units which had been vastly important to me over the past year – the band quickly proved itself worthy in its own right.

But a new song the band debuted the following month at yet another PF benefit – this one for Student Action Corps for Animals – riveted me. Its words were anything but crystal clear in live performance but one phrase in the chorus rang out: "Told me to risk it all."

The line stuck with me, made indelible by the passion of that performance and, perhaps, partly because it articulated what many DC punks were already trying to live. Two months later, the band went into the studio to record – and essentially fell apart there, having played six shows total over the course of four months. One of the band members gave me a tape of the session, which, at the time, was not slated for release in any form. While the fractured band was

dissatisfied with the results, I thought it was great and convinced them to allow me to use one song, *'Burning in the Undertow'*, on the PF benefit compilation LP *State of the Union*.

However, the new song I recalled from the SACA benefit – *'My Better Half'* – stood out above all the others. I played it over and over and over again, so enamored with it that I screwed up my courage to ask Guy for the lyrics, and he graciously complied. To me, the song embodies all that was/is best in punk as I know it: the courage to take on the world, to challenge ourselves to live a life that “defeats statistics,” i.e., goes beyond the realm of what is considered possible. If the words sing with a sense that anything is possible, mixed with the anguish of knowing yet not doing, the music makes it live and breathe.

'My Better Half' was hardly the only spark for what came; there were so many great songs, amazing people and powerful ideas in the air at the time. Nonetheless, in the months that followed my first hearing its exhortation to “risk it all,” I made decisions – abandoning my career path, deciding to write the book *Dance of Days*, co-founding our punk commune, Positive Force House, going to Sandinista Nicaragua as a “brigadista” in defiance of US law – that would set the course of my life for good. This turn took me away from everything my elite school could have enabled, drawing me toward something riskier but, for me, far more real.

This was no small matter. Simply facing my non-comprehending parents was agony. It seemed like I was betraying all the hopes invested in me, all their back-breaking labour, tossing it aside for some vague if deeply felt adventure. It all seemed a terribly flimsy wager to them, and the guilt and fear I felt at the time was aching and immense. Fortunately, the music gave me the courage to see it through, for I have never made a more righteous and rewarding gamble.

'My Better Half' has been a faithful companion on my journey across decades, through many other decisive moments. For many years afterward, I hung the handwritten lyrics gifted to me by Guy on the wall wherever I went, consigning it to a file folder only when I realised that sunlight was causing the ink to fade. Even now, as a married sixty-something father of kids ages eight and 12, I carry the words in my heart. Back then, I was a starry-eyed country boy perhaps too naive to be scared. Now I am a certified senior citizen who has seen more than I care to recall while working in DC's inner city for more than three decades, most recently with We Are Family DC.

Yet if my context has transformed, the song's truth still shines. To this day, *'My Better Half'* simultaneously lifts me and challenges me to not take the

easy way, but to attempt what seems like the real way, the true way. My life heads now towards its final act. Not all of those past moments have been admirable or courageous. Yet, if sometimes I don't pursue it, the sea still speaks to my better half, pushing me to aim higher. The tale is not yet told, not for me, not for anyone reading these words. The task of love still lies before us, demanding – and offering – so much. May we continue rise to the occasion, again and again, in whatever time remains in this life.

Faster Pussycat, *Faster Pussycat* (1987)

James Domestic (Domestics, Pi\$\$er, Kibou Records)

This isn't the first time I've been asked to write something about a record that's either influential in a musical sense, a view-on-the-world sense or simply a “I bloody love this record” sense. That said, much like those ridiculous “what's your favourite record of all time?” questions, there are always many records, many answers and many musings to be had. You don't let one record have an impact, pull down the shutters and stop there, do you?

Anyway, today I'm not going to write about some amazing hardcore punk record, or some funk, reggae or soul. I'm going to write about a hair metal album – Faster Pussycat's self-titled debut from 1986. Yeah, you heard!

Okay, so to call this “hair metal” is possibly a little misleading. Certainly, the band sported all the dyed hair, eyeliner, bangles and poses of that whole scene, but this first album is, in reality, more like a punked-up blues record. I first heard this in either 1988 or 1989 when I was pretty into metal, thrash and rawk and was just starting to delve further into punk via “the classics” – The Clash, The Pistols an' all that, and had been playing guitar for maybe a couple of years or so. There's a lot of *Never Mind the Bollocks* in this album, that sadly Da Pussycat (as absolutely no one called them to my knowledge) ditched by the time of the follow-up where they essentially tried to make an eighties Aerosmith record.

I was in a band at school called Tantrum! (latterly The Sly and then The Je\$u\$ Suite... what *was* I thinking!) and we covered *'Bathroom Wall'* off of this album. I could even do the bluesy lick and a fairly decent approximation of the guitar solo with those little Chuck Berry kinda slidey bits on the B and E string. Well, it sounded okay in my 14-year-old brain; not sure I'd want to hear it played back now though!

Anyway, to say “I digress” would clearly be an understatement. This album is a killer in its field. Some really great songs on this, bashed out with punked-up

abandon and Taime Downe (excellent rock'n'roll name!)’s bluesey screech giving it plenty of sleazy attitude. As a 14 year old, this was the stuff I can tell you! ‘*Don’t Change That Song*’, the aforementioned ‘*Bathroom Wall*’, ‘*Bottle in Front of Me*’, and the Beastie Boys-esque ‘*Babylon*’ are just four of the delights here.

Fast forward a good few years to about 2016 when I’m staying at Charlie Claesson’s house in Sweden while I’m over there recording some vocals on the Bring the Drones LP, *Ignorance Paradise*, and it transpires that Charlie – lest we forget, the drummer in Swedish hardcore deities Anti-Cimex – is also a big fan of this album (he quite likes the follow-up too but I won’t hold that against him). A kindred spirit! After a few beers, we start watching Faster Pussycat videos on YouTube and the early promo vids are still great in their way, but when we get to more up-to-date live stuff, it’s a bit too tragic to look at. Taime Downe has, er, “filled out” considerably from his snake-hipped wiggling days (haven’t we all!) and his voice sounds pretty shot too. It’s quite depressing really but we put on a live recording of Discharge during the *Grave New World* period with Cal high-pitched screaming his way through ‘*State Violence State Control*’ and we laugh like drains.

Rites of Spring, ‘All Through a Life’ (1987)

Chris Leo (The Van Pelt)

Is it fair to say that most of the times we wake up with a song in our head, it’s a horrible song? A terrible song you do everything in your power to supplant with a good song yet to little avail? Or is it just that all of my friends are assholes apt to text me a Smashmouth lyric at 6am if I let them know the day before I was planning on making music the next day thereby scuttling all of my noble intentions? A consolation prize for me, by the time I’ve given up and moved on, is that at some point every day I’m visited by Rites of Spring’s ‘*In Silence/Words Away*’. Every day might not be an exaggeration. It’s that unattainable ‘*Louie Louie*’ 2.0: crafted with ingredients accessible to all but executable by nearly none. Like that pizza margarita you tried to make yourself in New Jersey after a trip to Naples. The ingredients here are ROI adding a simple call-and-response between the music and vox to a sort of call-and-response/doubling-back within the lyrics themselves:

“But in taking what it took from me”

“The only way out is through myself to you”

“Because I can’t stand this silence, it speaks too loud for me”

It took me 200-plus pages once to write a book called *If You Cut It It Will Grow* wherein the protagonist must craft a wordless letter in order to save his

relationship. It takes Guy three minutes to argue with words that if ‘words... do no justice... what have I left to use?’

Embrace, *Embrace* (1987)

Will Smith (Dig BMX, Belfast Gig Collective)

I’ve always really struggled to explain to people outside of “our world” exactly what type of music it is that I listen to. With this record, I actually struggle to explain what type of music it is to pretty much everyone. Featuring Ian MacKaye (on vocals) and ex-members of Faith, this at the time promised to be my dream combination and it didn’t let me down.

An album that flows seamlessly from anger – to introspection – to exasperation, *Embrace* became my go-to record in a period of my life when I was figuring a lot of stuff out. Dead Kennedys *Fresh Fruit...* album stoked the fire of questioning everything that was going on around me whilst Minor Threat/7Seconds (and others) provided an energy that I didn’t know existed in music and made sense of my quests for both individuality and community. *Embrace* was different though, and for me it was the first record that really helped me make sense of, and (literally) embrace, the varying daily struggles of trying to make sense of my own thoughts and feelings. It felt like a benchmark, a soul-searching defining moment, and a comforting warm blanket, all at the same time.

To this day I still couldn’t describe the sound of *Embrace* and it’s a record that I don’t even think of in terms of individual songs. It just flows as one from start to finish. A lot of my feelings are trapped in music and I think this album might just be the reason why.

My insecurities

They got nothing to hide

My emotions are my enemies

For being on my side”

(‘*Give Me Back*’ – Embrace)

R.K.L., *Rock’n’roll Nightmare* (1987)

Michael Kopijn (musician, Bloedbad, Catweazle, PCP; writer, *Bacteria*, *Nederpunk* zines)

When I get into high school in 1980, I am immensely impressed by the punx in higher classes. I blindly buy the records from the bands graffitied on their jackets and schoolbags like Crass, UK Subs, Dead Kennedys, The Exploited. Needless

to say, these releases change my life and soon after, I start my first band, organise concerts, squat places, join a collective, make and contribute to fanzines followed by doing radio, touring – “managing” and driving bands, setting up European tours etc. I am knee-deep in the underground DIY punk scene for decades. I started as a singer in bands because I couldn’t play an instrument but somehow I was always very guitar-orientated, probably because my father played guitar in ‘60s bands. After Dead Kennedys and MDC play in Amsterdam in 1982, I get heavily into DIY hardcore punk thanks to the latter and when R.K.L.’s *Rock’n’roll Nightmare* comes out in 1987, I am definitely sold. They tour The Netherlands in 1988 and 1989 and are for me the best live band ever. I travel with them on their Dutch dates and Bomber, their drummer (who also plays the bass guitar on the LP) shows me some drum tricks. In the band that I sing with, I fool around with the drums in between practice breaks and eventually end up playing one song behind the kit. This is an incredible and essential musical influence for the rest of my life. Without this release and band, I would have never become a drummer. There’s a lot of records that eventually influence and shape me, but this one literally got me going on the drumkit and since 1988 I will always be that self-taught drummer kid in a lot of punk bands.

Cardiacs, ‘Burn Your House Brown’ (1987)

Derek Philpott AKA (co-author, *Grammar Free In the U.K: The Lockdown Letters*)

I first saw Cardiacs live by mistake. They were so alien to anything I’d ever encountered before that I could only conclude that they were either the best or the worst band on Earth. As time went on, though, it became clear to me that they were both unique and brilliant. I subsequently saw their leader and mastermind Tim Smith perform over 100 times in his many guises.

‘*Burn Your House Brown*’ from the 1987 album *Big Ship* (barely) contains everything that I adore about them. It’s technical punk – itself a paradox – passionately yet ferociously yet flawlessly performed, and it opens with what sounds like an industrial saw in a factory. Then there’s a complicated keyboard reminiscent of an early Genesis song played by a virtuoso organist desperate to complete the take as they’re busting for the toilet. Then it’s ska at ramming speed, then tribal drumming, then a shouty shanty, then I give in.

Lyricaly, it playfully anthropomorphises household appliances (“oven cries,” “the fridge is unaware,” “unplug Katie”), and mythologises the mundane.

Cardiacs constantly mined these surreal suburban themes throughout three decades, injecting folklore into white goods and glorifying our everyday monotonies. They also highlighted the grotesque isolation of the school playground, the visceral dread in the collective unconsciousness of not wanting to go into work tomorrow and explored understated dramas such as the discomfort of experiencing a room “lit with McDonald’s lighting.”

Cardiacs’ frenetic homage to animated mod cons operated within a late-‘80s environment where not being chained to commercial sensibilities meant expulsion. Their refusal to acknowledge the trends of the times ultimately makes them timeless. They revealed to me that anything is possible.

How many moshpits thrash about to a song not about toppling an oppressive regime but instead an ugly Hoover’s pretty tube being sucked into the floor...?

Big Dipper, Craps (1988)

Matthew Caws (Nada Surf)

I’d like to think that if I heard Big Dipper today, without having heard them before, I would love them as much as I do now, without all the factors and circumstances that led me to seeing them a few times in the late ‘80s and to everlasting fandom. I think their music is timeless. But let’s look back anyway.

My older sister and I, both latchkey kids, listened to New York radio obsessively, as soon as one of us was tall enough to reach the stereo’s controls. WPLJ, WNEW, WCBS and any others we could tune in, and find again. When she was 16 and I was 13, she discovered WNYU and dove headfirst into “new music,” which was shorthand then for new wave, punk, post-punk, no wave and whatever else was on the college radio charts. I was still in classic rock heaven but some of these new and exciting sounds bled through the bookcases, sheetrock and bunkbed that split the small room we shared into two even smaller rooms. Pretty soon I was hanging out on her side and reading her copies of *Trouser Press*.

Six years later I befriended the manager of a tiny record store called Record Runner, in a basement on Cornelia Street in the West Village. His name was Michael Carlucci and he was easy to talk to. He took an interest in me, maybe because I showed so much curiosity about whatever he was playing. and he very quickly became my mentor, turning me on to non-greatest-hits Dylan and Byrds, the Velvet Underground, Nick Drake, Television, Patti Smith and any number of other artists who would become centrally important to me.

Michael was the lead guitar player for a group called Winter Hours. Just a couple of months into knowing him he asked me if I'd want to cover for him in the shop while the band went on tour. I of course said yes, and to this day it's been the happiest job I ever had. Record Runner didn't take credit cards, there was a great bagel shop around the corner, and there were musty stacks of old music magazines. I snacked away and dove further into my music education. Later that year Michael asked me if I'd like to go on tour with the band as their roadie. I of course said yes to that too! He found another employee and off I went. Winter Hours shared stages with Miracle Legion, Translator, Dreams So Real, the Hoodoo Gurus and so many others. I loved my spot at the side of the stage. My own very young band The Cost of Living even played with them a few times.

My life really centered around music. I was going to shows as often as I could afford, and checked out, thanks to hanging around the store, what felt like every new album on the small handful of indie labels who were in a position to release a record across the country. This is how I came to give Big Dipper's Homestead Records debut *Heavens* a spin. Michael told me that the singer had been in a band from Wichita, Kansas called The Embarrassment, who had a great single called 'Sex Drive' (this is very true, find it on YouTube and give it a listen) and that other members had been in the Volcano Suns and Dumptruck, both top-notch bands I'd seen already. Two songs on *Heavens* jumped out right away: 'She's Fetching' and 'All Going Out Together', both hook-rich slices of pop-rock with dazzling guitar playing. The band were clearly smart, but they were cool about it – they made a word like “seismograph” sound necessary and fantastic.

Their sophomore album was *Craps*, and this one knocked me out all the way. The band was a marvel. Bill Goffrier's voice is high and clear and strong, with a distinct keening edge. He and Gary Waleik made up in my mind one of the truly great guitar duos of rock history. They played intertwining lines and riffs like an even more song-serving Tom Verlaine and Richard Lloyd. Johnny Marr is in there too, Peter Buck also, even James Honeyman-Scott – everything I found, and still find, thrilling about the liminal space between “rhythm” and “lead.” Bassist Steve Michener was a perfect match for them, playing catchy and inventive lines that enhanced the harmonics all while creating a propulsive and agile mass of sound and low end in tandem with solid-and-unique (the golden formula) drummer Jeff Oliphant. A jewel among jewels, the best known song is 'Ron Klaus Wrecked His House', about a friend of Bill's whose home was scheduled for demolition. He had a house-cooling party and invited everyone to bring sledgehammers and crowbars to help destroy the home ahead of schedule:

Who threw the doors out of the windows/and the windows out
the doors?/Brought the outside into the inside/and the ceiling to
the floor?

The track starts with a sneaky bass riff and drops right down into a half-time sing-along anthem guaranteed to rock any party or mix tape. I've been a guitar player for four decades and while I'm no virtuoso, I can generally understand what I'm hearing, even if I can't necessarily play it myself. There's a break towards the end of 'Ron Klaus...' that I don't understand. What I mean is that I can't even *picture* how they're playing what they're playing. I keep it in the same category as the second break in The Who's 'Can't Explain', another moment that I can't figure out but that beguiles me so much that I may not *want* to crack its code.

Craps is elsewhere populated with a Swiss UFO-believing mystic, Abraham Lincoln (who the band are worried about), a life-affirming witch, and other assorted visions both personal and existential. Have I mentioned the hooks? The celestial melodies? All hits front-to-back, this is the album I play for the “fan who has everything,” for anyone with discerning taste who needs a new love, a new gift, a new undiscovered gem from music's always-brilliant past. Search and enjoy.

Asexuals, Dish (1988)

David Bason (War Orphan, Barfbag)

A funny thing happens when you discover punk rock at a really young age. It's different from mid-teen rebellion. That three-to-four-year head start leads you down a weird path. I got turned on by the kids one year ahead of me in seventh grade. I quickly dove in deep because it gave me a sense of identity at a crucial age. Kids are not known for their subtlety, so you lay it on thick with the boots, haircut, spikes and slogan t-shirts because you're 12 years old. You're young enough that playing dress-up is still something that makes sense. You're still dressing-up for Hallowe'en once a year and candy is still a priority.

Punk has an incredibly strong pull. It's like a drug dealer saying, “the first time's free,” knowing you'll be back every day following. It's like marketing cigarettes with bright colours and fun flavours to kids. How could I not want to be part of a clan of kids with spiky hair and bright, shiny belts with cool stuff painted on the back of a leather jacket?

The really addicting thing is that it's an intellectual exercise as much as it is musical. Once you buy into protest music you don't crave anything else. You can't go backwards because music without a message seems to lack a critical

element. You can't unsee slogans like "Fight War Not Wars" or "Talk=Action=0". It transforms the way you understand music and even the world. You realise that most people are not turned on, which only emboldens your beliefs.

Eventually you go so deep into your subculture of counterculture that the only move left is to counter your own culture. It's like that line from *Goodfellas*: "When you can't borrow another buck from the bank or buy another case of booze, you bust the joint out. You light a match." Once you've rebelled against the system, the patriarchy, corporations, and police if you're so inclined, but you're still not 15 years old, you start looking for something else. You rebel against your very own scene because it's the most punk rock thing to do.

By the time I was in 10th grade I was making fun of punk rockers, calling them The Barmy Army (much respect to The Exploited). I delved deeper into different styles of music because I felt I'd been to the end of the counterculture road and there was nothing left. I was very naively under the impression that I was enlightened. I ended up growing my hair out and going through a Jimi Hendrix phase because I thought there was nowhere to go. I ended up having to have conversations with hippies about things I didn't care about, and I didn't like the associations I was getting. I still wanted punk, I just didn't want the flash of it, I wanted the substance. I wanted music that still punched. I wanted music with a message. My friend Damian Marner had an older brother who was into punk rock. I went to their house one day and was given a record by Asexuals. The first song had horns. The record had melody, it had songs about feeling alienated and not knowing where home was. It was the perfect record, and it was catchy!!

Asexuals' *Dish* remains among my favourite records to this day. It's the perfect record for a kid who got tired of punk records, wanted something new but hoped it could retain everything he held dear in music.

Fire Next Time, *North to South* (1988)

Sam McGrath (co-founder, *Come Here To Me!* history blog; occasional DJ)

I'm a huge fan of Dexys Midnight Runners, The Blades, The Jam, The Redskins, The Style Council, The Faith Brothers, The Housemartins and The Neurotics. I've attempted to define their shared sound as 1980s up-tempo brass-driven left-leaning Motown-influenced soul. One lesser-known band that deserves inclusion in this subgenre is Fire Next Time from Leicester. I first came across them by chance on YouTube about 10 years ago. I loved what I was hearing and was intrigued that they had left no real online presence or a Wikipedia entry. Pulling

information from some niche music blogs and Discogs, I discovered that they were active from 1985 to 1988.

Fire Next Time released four singles and one album – *North to South* – on Polydor in 1988. It's a powerful piece of work. The Redskins and Dexys clearly influenced the driving brass. Lead singer James Maddock's vocals and lyrics drew positive comparisons at the time with Bruce Springsteen. There are also hints of The Waterboys and Lloyd Coyle throughout. Many of the strongest songs are blistering class war anthems. '*Can't Forgive*' is a rallying call about the power of labour when it flexes its muscle ("Change, there's gonna be/Watch out boss, there's more of us than you") and the power of solidarity ("We can support them and unite/We can make links that never break"). '*We've Lost Too Much*' is an uptempo ballad about a council worker who has just been made unemployed ("When I told my wife and kids I was nearly in tears"). The first-person narrative then switches to a business owner who, in order to maintain his personal wealth, "need[s] to make a few redundancies." He is direct and honest – "I don't care about their families/this is business, don't you know nothing."

'*Following the Hearse*' is a mid-tempo radio-friendly song with a dark plot about a sparsely attended funeral of a former miner who had crossed a picket line. Maddock is unforgiving ("Cry, daughters cry/let your tears turn to shame"). Written just a few years after the bitter miners' strike, the lyrics are particularly mature for Maddock who was only in his mid-20s:

Some traditions breathe, they breathe a fire that warms/like the sun,
the battle's won/Saltley Gate and Pentonville/I'd give anything if I
could see their faces now/When, when the lives, lives of men and
women stand like a solid band/Solidarity/Together we can win.

The album *North to South* is a wonderful piece of late 1980s social commentary with hugely evocative lyrics. One comment on YouTube summed things up: "If the word underrated should ever be used then it can be used with this band. How come *North to South* wasn't a smash hit album? The songwriting in that album was pure genius."

It's a question I asked myself and I found out some answers recently. Even though they had a multi-album deal, Polydor saw Acid House as the next big cash cow and dropped the band just a few days before the album's release and there was little or no promotion of *North to South*. What a pity.

There are several copies of the LP available online for as little as €5. The album isn't available on the major streaming services but all tracks have

been uploaded onto YouTube. I suggest you give it a listen as well as to James Maddock's solo career.

Pagan Babies, *Next* (1988)

Carl Prenter (photographer)

If I had to choose my favourite album of all time, without hesitation I'd pick *Master of Puppets* – a musical masterpiece from start to finish, in my opinion. However, there's a very different record that I love because it evokes memories of a musical pathway and a departed friend. The band is Pagan Babies and the album is *Next*.

It was 1989 and my friend Rory Byrne had returned from the regular Saturday pilgrimage to *The Sound Cellar*. His purchase this week was a release by a band I'd never even heard of (which Rory was quite pleased about because I had a habit back then of being quite smug if I knew about a band before everyone else!). Due to several crossover bands breaking into the Metal scene, like D.R.I and Suicidal Tendencies, I'd become interested in American Hardcore, but I hadn't come across Pagan Babies before. Always feeling like an outsider, I was constantly searching for music that was on the fringes and as far away from mainstream as possible and was quickly losing interest in Metal because it was becoming too popular amongst my peers in school. Rory was also starting to listen to similar bands – Crumbsuckers and Fugazi were two of his favourites. That fateful afternoon, Rory took the Pagan Babies record out of its sleeve and the ritualistic first listen was about to begin. I loved the cover art straight away – graffiti style cartoon image and a spray-painted Pagan Babies logo. As soon as the anticipatory silence was ruptured by the opening track, '*Makin' Up for Lost Time*', I knew we were listening to something special. Fast and catchy songs, aggressive raw guitar sound and a punchy clear vocal style. By the time we get to the third song, '*Fuck You, I'm Punk!*', with a Beastie Boys type blend of Hip Hop, Rap and Hardcore, I'm hooked. The record also includes a couple of excellent covers – '*The Bitch*' by Slaughter and the Dogs and a great version of '*Beyond the Fringe*' by Lime Spiders.

This record will always be special to me because it represents the joy of discovering new music off the beaten path. Bands like Pagan Babies and thousands of others like them doing it for the music, themselves and the fans. This record was swapped from Rory to me and back again several times before remaining with me until this day. We talked about music and this record during

one of our final chats on the phone shortly before he passed away in 2009. I'd give anything to listen to it again with him. When I play it now, I play it loud in his honour and it takes me back to some great McGonagles' gigs and musical memories from the past. We may go our separate ways – but these tunes my friends are here to stay.

SNFU, *Better Than A Stick In The Eye* (1988)

Trevor McGregor (Treble Charger, Josh Kastner, SNFU)

The first time I heard *Better Than A Stick In The Eye*, it blew me away. Most punk albums I had listened to up to until that point were so serious. *BTASITE* had a twisted sense of humour to it. From songs about futons to shopping malls that ate people, I had never heard anything like it. The music itself was on the edge. It was controlled chaos, always on the brink.

The unique riffs, tempo changes and the tribal, tom-heavy drums were in my mind, a step forward for hardcore. The entire album was eye-opening for me. It proved that to make a punk album you didn't have to be angry – you could be funny, sarcastic and do whatever you wanted. And that's exactly what SNFU did.

Ignition, *Machination* (1988)

Jason Farrell (Swiz, Bluetip, Retisonic, Red Hare)

I never got to see The Faith. They broke up when I was 13, a few months before I learned there was a distinction between punk and hardcore (and that I definitely preferred the latter). It was another few months till I learned DC had a thriving hardcore scene, and then a couple more till I realised The Faith were my favorite band. While *Subject to Change* remains one of my favorite albums, much of my connection to it is secondhand – events of my own that I stapled to the music at a later date. So, I will not be speaking about this particular favorite beyond back story.

I was primed to love all bands that stemmed from Faith – Embrace, Rites of Spring, Bells Of – and would go see them play whenever my teenage schedule allowed. I think actually witnessing these bands perform their songs in a live setting, prior to hearing them recorded, deepened my relationship with the songs. As a result, the *Embrace* and *Rites of Spring* albums are also among my favorites... but I won't be speaking of them either. Of all the bands that branched out from Faith, Ignition felt to me like they carried an obvious, direct sonic lineage. They came at a time when I was just starting to play guitar in my first real band, Swiz.

Even after a few years The Faith connection still meant a lot to me, so perhaps I was predisposed to love Ignition.... But they would have won me over anyway through their music, lyrics and energy. They had a strong work ethic, touring relentlessly, with an urgency that showed they knew it couldn't last. This was an inspiration to me, and something I studied at the shows we played together. I felt an additional kinship being active with them in helping to represent the scene I loved, and while I was proud my band was among their contemporaries, I did not feel us to be their equals. What I loved the most was their volatility and underlying spookiness. It would conjure these unexpected moments live that still stick with me: Alec could get so lost in it... almost transcendence. Chris Bald too... but with a more destructive energy. All of these memories and feelings come back to me each time I listen to *Machination*.

Stretchheads, *Five Fingers Four Thingers a Thumb a Facelift and a New Identity* (1988)

Allan McNaughton (Glue, Giant Haystacks, Airfix Kits, Neutrals)

As a youthful convert to hardcore punk initially via skateboard magazines, the first groups I was truly into were (1) American and (2) no longer extant (or at least a few albums past their best). In 1986, regarding the black and white photos in the insert of a Minor Threat cassette from 1981 felt like studying ancient history, even though they were only five years past. It really felt like we had missed something. Through chance meetings, overheard conversations, late night radio programmes and starkly obscure monochrome posters, we started to discover that there were actually things happening NOW....

I'll backtrack a bit. There was a local music scene, of course. There were indie bands even in our provincial ex-mining village. The prevailing attitude seemed to be an overwhelming desire to recreate the '60s, from the Byrdsian jangly guitars to the floppy haircuts and flares and, most importantly, to do all this under a constant fug of hashish smoke.

Don't get me wrong, I love The Byrds as much as the next fella, but this stuff was of little use to a wee mob of BMXers buzzed out their nuts on sugar, curried chips, and Dead Kennedys.

Enter Stretchheads. Every bit as blisteringly fast, hectic, and urgent as the American hardcore punk we had been weaned on, but coming from somewhere else entirely (Erskine, apparently). Although you could pick out little threads of influence here and there, they really sounded like no one else we had heard at the

time. (Thirty-five years on, I have since heard much, much more music from all over the world and have still not heard anything that sounds quite like this album.) They certainly seemed to have nothing at all to do with the retro '60s nostalgia trip scene. I picked up the *Five Fingers...* album from RAT Records in Glasgow, where I bought my first Minor Threat tape and first copy of *Maximumrocknroll*. Flipping over the cover I realised that the guy behind the counter of the shop was pictured on the back. It was drummer Richie. He didn't say anything at the time and I didn't either. The music was propulsive, abrasive, and noisy but even though vocalist P6 was shouting and screaming into the mic (or, in a live setting, screaming into the face of a terrified punter), they rarely sounded angry – a disjointed and surreal sense of humour always shone through.

Stretchheads may as well have been transported down from Jupiter and yet they were just four guys not that different from us. Somehow they found it in themselves to come up with something completely unique, and for a few years we were lucky enough to live in the same era and the same town as the best band in the world. The lesson was obvious: what is happening RIGHT NOW is way more important than false nostalgia for something you missed the first time, whether it's the '60s of Laurel Canyon or the Velvets, or the early '80s hardcore of Black Flag and Minor Threat.

Bad Religion, *Suffer* (1988)

Tim Cundle (author; *Mass Movement* zine)

The phrase "game changer" is usually tossed around like a broken frisbee, bouncing from pillar to post and back again until it loses all of its momentum and meaning. In my five decades, I've stumbled across more than my fair share of game-changing records, all of which prised open my imagination and exposed me to a miasma of musical possibility, but I've only encountered one life-changing album.

I was 16 years old when *Suffer* was released, and the first time I heard it, it was a gut punch realisation that I wasn't alone. *Suffer* helped me to understand that other people felt the same way about the world as I did, that they questioned the nature of reality, our individual roles in the greater whole of existence and were desperately searching for the same impossible answers as I was. And it did all of those things in a rapid fire buzzsaw assault of insanely catchy choruses, melodies and harmonies that hammered their point home in less than 30 minutes.

I fell in love with the record the first time I heard it, and I've been hopelessly infatuated with it ever since. In the 33 and some change years since

then, it has been a constant part of my musical diet, and hasn't lost a modicum of its immediate power or urgency, and even though every word and every note is imprinted on my cerebellum, whenever I listen to *Suffer* (which is probably far more often than I should) it still sends shivers of nervous excitement up and down my spine and makes every cell in my body tingle with unadulterated pleasure.

Living Colour, *Vivid* (1988)

Nabil Ayers (President, Beggars Group records; drummer; author, *My Life in the Sunshine*)

In 1989, I was a seventeen-year-old high school senior who was obsessed with music. I'd played drums for most of my life, I'd recently picked up guitar, and I'd hoped to join a real rock band as soon as I reached my imminent adulthood. But as a bi-racial kid with an afro living in Salt Lake City, nobody who played in the bands I loved looked like me. I fantasized about receiving a call from someone who'd say that Bill Stevenson couldn't do the next Descendents tour, and that they needed me to fill in behind the drums. Or that Dave Navarro needed a break, and they'd love me to play guitar in Jane's Addiction. Of course, my fantasies weren't realistic, but they felt even less realistic because of how I thought others perceived me. There were many reasons why I didn't end up playing in Descendents or Jane's Addiction, but in my teenage brain, the biggest reason was the way I looked.

Then I heard Living Colour's debut album, *Vivid*. My uncle Alan is a New York jazz saxophonist who exposed me to a wide variety of music at an early age, and he told me about Living Colour. Before I ever heard the band, Alan explained guitarist Vernon Reid's jazz roots, which I recognized immediately the moment I finally heard *Vivid*. There were guitar solos, wild outfits, and slick MTV videos, but I could tell that Living Colour was much more than some prefabricated hair metal band. These were musicians – who were also Black – and they were playing rock music in a way that had never moved me to such a degree.

When I saw Living Colour perform in a packed, tiny Salt Lake City rock club, I experienced a pre-show moment that was equally as powerful as the show itself. A few minutes before Living Colour went on, a guitar tech walked on stage, picked up Vernon Reid's guitar, and played a quick, shredding solo. For those few seconds, I was in awe. The guitar tech also happened to be Black, and in that moment, I had the most simple, powerful revelation: There are more of us out there. This is possible.

Pixies, *Surfer Rosa* (1988)

David Gedge (The Wedding Present, Cinerama)

I first heard tracks from *Surfer Rosa* in the same way that I first heard all the records that were any good ... which was when John Peel played them on his radio show. It was one of those records that sounded like nothing you'd ever heard before. It's full of interesting ideas; brilliant songwriting but with unorthodox arrangements, evocative (and occasionally downright weird) lyrics, innovative playing, odd panning of guitars and vocals, a huge drum sound. Immediately after hearing it, I decided that I wanted the engineer, Steve Albini, to record The Wedding Present. We tested how the relationship would work on an EP called '*Brassneck*', and then we recorded our third studio album, *Seamonsters*, with him. I've worked with Albini several more times over the years and it's always been great.

The overall production on *Surfer Rosa* is atmospheric in a kind of other-worldly way ... but it still sounds very natural. Albini told me that he edited the tracks together from different takes and other bits and pieces from the sessions (in the old-fashioned way, by splicing the tape) so maybe that adds to the "edgy" feel. The conversations that the band had in the studio that were also recorded and ended up on the finished album are another reason why I love this LP. I really enjoy hearing stuff like that. I'd like to ask them how much of it was spontaneous and how much was planned. Once you get over how mould-breaking a record is, it's the songs that keep you coming back to it and '*Gigantic*' is one of those rare moments in pop music where everything comes together and just works. The melody, the lyric, the performances ... that extended end section with the repeated guitar riff. It's undoubtedly one of the finest love songs ever committed to tape. I play it a lot when I'm DJ-ing.

I think the artwork's perfect, too. The photography suits the mood and, well, it's a Vaughan Oliver design, isn't it? Everything he did was amazing. *Surfer Rosa* lifts my spirits and reminds me how great pop music can speak to you. It also makes we want to run back into the studio and try to write a song with a line as good as "You're so pretty when you're unfaithful to me" in it. A copy of the album was given to me as a birthday present by my then girlfriend, Sally Murrell, on 23 April 1988. Looking back to that time with Sally and I lying on the bed in my room in the house I shared in Leeds 2 with some German students ... *Surfer Rosa* blasting out of the stereo, the sunlight streaming through the window and The Wedding Present basking in the success of the recently released *George Best* ... it felt like anything could be possible.

Pixies, *Doolittle* (1989)

Stu Diggle (Litterbug)

There are several candidates when it comes to influential albums that disturbed your natural emotions. That's not a hint for Buzzcocks, but *Singles Going Steady* was that hit after hit record. An honorary mention has to go to *Never Mind the Bollocks* as a record that made my ears prick up and realise things had changed dramatically. Ramones *It's Alive*, showed me exactly how it should be done. A blueprint for life perhaps, or maybe not?

Where to begin? On acquiring a C90 cassette back in 1989, on which a friend recorded the Stone Roses debut album and on the other side the Boston-based Pixies work of art. Naturally the Roses album was an accessible easy listen. In this era, I spent a lot of time driving around Blackpool with mates in the car, rather than frequenting local night spots full of drunken rage, or so it always seemed in Blackpool. With this cassette, it reached the point where a collective decision was made to rewind *Doolittle*, rather than give Stone Roses (no The) their share of airtime.

The album was a difficult listen at first, but after about three weeks it hit me on the back of the head with awkward tracks like 'Dead', 'I Bleed', 'Mr. Grieves' and 'No. 13 Baby' all coming to the fore. The running order of an album was and still should be crucial, like a band's live setlist. Opening with 'Debaser', a rip-roaring, off-kilter indie club classic with traditional Pixies signature introductory bass line, you have punk influence doused with Black Francis' magical lyrics. Quickly followed by the quiet loud trademark song 'Tame', we are off to a blistering yet controlled intense beginning. The harmonies/backing vocals of Kim Deal dovetail perfectly as the songs rage. Instantly I knew this was like nothing I'd heard before.

This album taught me that lyrics didn't need to be so obvious and that dynamics are a crucial part of keeping the listeners attention. Our band Litterbug have often stolen parts from Pixies ideas, though no doubt we've failed to reconstruct too successfully with one guitar in a three-piece act.

Pixies, *Doolittle* (1989)Gina Arnold (author, *Half a Million Strong: Crowds and Power from Woodstock to Coachella* and *Kiss This: Punk in the Present Tense*)

Doolittle is the last of a series of three blistering records Pixies released towards the end of the 1980s, a portrait of a band in the process of altering the sonic zeitgeist.

The energy it emits could power a car, and it does power some of us through our lower octane moments: if you listen to it on your way to work, you will feel like you stepped on an invisible gas pedal. Also, its lyrics are strange and remote and revelatory. They don't tap into the typical fraught and whiny emotions of indie rock, i.e., love and loss; the content of Pixies songs will never make you reconsider a life decision, or wallow bathetically in a stew of regret. Indeed, on first listen, their lyrics barely even connect with being a person in the world. But here's the thing: (a) sometimes one doesn't want to be reminded that one is a person in the world; and (b) that impression is erroneous.

Here are the most unique aspects of the Pixies' sound: a lead bass riff opener, a manic guitar that sounds as if it is being played with a violin bow ("no chops" was apparently the instruction in the band want-ad), and the high-pitched shriek of singer Black Francis, whose vocal style could best be described as "baby in extended tantrum." Even when he sings tunefully it sounds like his fat face is going bright red with effort. Then, there are the harmonies of bassist Kim Deal, which become increasingly compelling as they become ever more infrequent. Plus, song lyrics which are frankly bonkers.

Or are they? The opening track on *Doolittle*, 'Debaser', is a scene-by-scene description of *Un Chien Andalou*, Luis Bunuel's sadistic 1929 film, concluding with the line, "I want to grow up to be a debaser!" (Exclamation points, in Pixies music, are audible.) Is it an exuberant send-up of artsy films, or is that sentiment – I want to grow up to debase women on film – compelling because for so many men it's true? Maybe the song just says the quiet part aloud. The recognition that the world of men sucks isn't unique to this song, either, because Pixies' songs usually reference the grossness of humanity. Their albums abound in images of mutilation and harm, broken bodies and broken faces, molestation and sexual deviance, but all are sung in cheery sing-song, as if to say get used to it. These songs remind us that there is an undertow of darkness to everyday life. I mean, surely 'Monkey Gone to Heaven' is the most legible description of climate crisis yet written: "There was a guy/an underwater guy who controlled the sea/Got killed by ten million pounds of sludge, from New York and New Jersey," it begins. Surreal? Alas not.

Another thing that distinguishes Pixies from other bands of its era is that they were neither all white nor all male at a time when almost every indie rock band was both. On stage, Kim Deal was a powerful counter-presence to Black Francis, almost like a piece of kryptonite standing silently by his side, radiating. When she would step forward to the mic to make a rare lead vocal contribution – "This is a song about a superhero, and it's called 'Tony's Theme'!" – the crowd

would press its unified bosom forward to meet her. It was a visible thing, and it never didn't happen. I know, because I saw it over and over again after a series of unfortunate events trapped me in Europe without a passport on tour with the band for a full week in 1990, and at every concert, the reaction to Kim was marked and extraordinary. Actually, all of the shows I saw that week were marked and extraordinary. Every single night it was exactly like Pixies had two invisible straight lines around them. You know the ones they use in mathematics to signify absolute perfection?

Doolittle was originally going to be called *Whore*, but its title was changed to a reference in a different song, 'Mr. Grieves', the man who "talks like Doolittle." Doctor Doolittle, you may recall, could talk to animals; the author, Hugh Lofting, invented him in letters to his daughter from the Front of World War I in part because of his distress at the hideous death of the horses in battle. He wanted, he said, to be able to talk to them and explain what was going on. As if someone could explain World War I to anyone! But that combination of seeming to make sense in the midst of the unimaginable chaos that is, let's face it, life on earth, is the same sensibility that undercuts the Pixies' oeuvre; it is an exact correlation to their sound and their sentience. Imagine a man in the trenches writing furiously to his daughter, while above him rages a thunderous calamity, peppered with the high squeal of terrified animals being gored to death by bombs. Imagine being in Ukraine today. The Pixies are wedged, like Mr. Lofting, beneath ten million pounds of sludge, yearning to translate all that inexplicable cruelty and nonsense into sheer sonic gold.

On *Doolittle*, they do.

Mega City Four, *Tranzophobia* (1989)

Lloyd Chambers (Misfortune Cookie, Bear Trade)

Having just experienced the privilege of another short tour with my current band, it always gets me back to thinking about how much my life and outlook on it was shaped by one band in particular. As a teenager in the pre-internet age, I spent much of my time devouring the music press and two hours of John Peel on BFBS in my upstairs bedroom in a married quarter in West Germany, and on weekends I'd hunt out record shops from Duisburg to Venlo, Köln to Düsseldorf, searching for the sounds that spoke to me.

Upon returning to England in the late '80s I quickly immersed myself in the multitude of gig offerings London offered at that time, and rapidly developed

an affinity for the rough yet melodic bands which seemed to be born at that time. Mega City Four became the shining lights, for me; musically, lyrically, and their attitude of DIY/taking their songs out to anywhere and anyone who would listen struck a chord as brightly as the opening to debut single 'Miles Apart'.

They were also – importantly – just genuinely fucking nice people. Through following them I met lifelong friends, and later I worked for them (after seeing them around 70 times) for many years. This instilled a greater thirst for travel, broader musical horizons, and a recognisable sense of trust and belonging amongst people you'd never met but shared the same principles.

Now, more than 30 years later, I continue to take that passion and outlook into music I have been lucky enough to make and which has run through my entire life and being.

The *Tranzophobia* LP encapsulates all of the above for me. When it was released it was a translation of the live sets I'd experienced over numerous gigs into a document; a manifesto for my life. That collection of songs will never fail to reinforce the impression that this band, those times and the people involved left on me.

"There's a big hole where your dreams should be..."

Ramones, 'Pet Sematary' (1989)

Lisa Lathwell (The Ramonas)

I love the album *Brain Drain* by the Ramones as it's quite dark and some more obscure Ramones songs are on there, like 'Zero Zero UFO' (which I love). However, 'Pet Sematary' off the album, I will say, is my favourite. I love to sing it and I would say it's the most requested song we get at gigs. We also had the privilege of playing it in Germany in front of Daniel Rey who wrote the song, which is a great memory.

The Frogs, *It's Only Right and Natural* (1989)

Elizabeth Nelson (Paranoid Style)

You know that song 'Come Sail Away' by Styx where Dennis DeYoung calls himself The Captain and asks you to board his weird soft-rock ship? This is what I always think of when I hear 'I've Got Drugs (Out of the Mist)' the opening track from The Frogs' world historic 1989 tour de force *It's Only Right and Natural*. "I've got drugs! Come along!!" singer Jimmy Flemion effusively exhorts his listeners. "Tonight! Blow your mind tonight!!" Now that's a ship I'll climb aboard.

Flemion, with his brother Dennis chipping in, toasting-style, makes for a compelling Sherpa, with his strangely adenoidal twang and fully packed agenda. Like a particularly excitable tour guide, he points out the attractions as we pass them by: “Out of the mist – there’s a hooker! Out of the mist – there’s a pimp!” And then the swerve: “Out of the mist – there’s a priest!” A priest with a yeast infection, it transpires. A drunken priest with a yeast infection to be more specific. Look, he told you we’d be seeing some stuff.

Shall we try, as best as we can, to carry on?

In the 33 years since the release of *It’s Only Right and Natural*, its reputation as an outré classic and reliably cool touchstone for indie-leaning artists to namedrop has somewhat obscured its actual standing as a wildly accomplished folk-rock gem reminiscent of everything from Iggy’s debauched Berlin-odyssey *The Idiot* to Leonard Cohen’s meditative over-share *Various Positions*. To acknowledge that it was initially received as a joke or a novelty or a deliberate provocation upon its release is to recognise with frustration how far out in front of the culture The Frogs truly were.

Sonically, the four-track reel-to-reel recording both evokes the early days of the Everly Brothers (the androgynous brother band that is their nearest progenitor) while closely anticipating modern lo-fi breakthroughs by artists like Magnetic Fields and Butterglory. Thematically, this is an unabashedly carnal record, one comfortably in the tradition of Marvin Gaye’s *Let’s Get It On* or Liz Phair’s *Exile in Guyville*. It is not so much plain-spoken as unvarnished. By the time you get to the fourth track ‘*These Are The Finest Queen Boys (I’ve Ever Seen)*’ and its meditation on “what to do when the butter runs out” you might recognise that you’ve been cast into the deep-end without much warning. Whether you elect to swim or flee the scene is the litmus test posed by The Frogs.

So it is with great, subversive art of every stripe. *It’s Only Right and Natural* connects powerfully to the character studies and gracefully debauched scenes of The Velvet Underground and Lou Reed’s *Transformer*, but also with Hubert Selby, Nelson Algren, Delmore Schwartz and other transgressive literary figures whose penchant for truth-telling resulted in subtle and unsubtle diminishment or outright dismissals of their achievements. *It’s Only Right and Natural* is a brief album – 14 songs packed into an astonishingly economical 31 minutes – but every last moment rewards replaying. Characters pass through in a dream-state pageant, each one deserving of their own long-form record: Hot Cock Annie, Richard Dick Richards, Baby Greaser George. There is world-building and fantasy, violence and mercy, and finally the classic closer ‘*Homos*’ a proto-Belle

and Sebastian high-school tale that casts the narrator as an accomplished jock whose favourite part of playing sports is seeing the dicks in the locker room.

In some counterfactual history where The Frogs emerged with *It’s Only Right and Natural* in 2022, there is little doubt that they would have been justifiably provided a red-carpet welcome into the upper echelons of the pop apparatus. Their anthems of self-empowerment and making love to every man in sight are practically old-fashioned in their romanticism, relative to the gloriously debauched exertions of succeeding generations. Once they were merchants of controversy. Now they are trusted uncles, ready to let you know when things have gone too far. When Jimmy sings “It’s been a month since I had a man” the only thing you really take notice of is his restraint. Who waits a month for anything anymore?

Who waits 30 years for their genius to be acknowledged? Geniuses, I suppose. There were other great records in 1989 – The Mekons’ *Rock & Roll* and Lou Reed’s *New York* – but there wasn’t one better or more forward-looking than *It’s Only Right and Natural*. One day, one hopes, it will gain its deserved stature atop the Tower of Song. It’s only right.

Radical Dance Faction, *Borderline Cases* (1990)

Priscilla Wong (Werecats, Dinosaur Skull)

I emphatically choose this 1990 album to talk about because I love dub and reggae but for this record, Chris Bowshe’s partly spoken vocals are totally unique. Above all, Linda’s vocals are hauntingly beautiful and still send shivers down my spine to this very day.

The song ‘*4 Chuck Chant*’ is the one that is still etched in my mind since the 1990s. It reminds me of the time when I was a young kid when I saw, many times on weekly shopping trips to Liverpool with my mum, a homeless alcoholic man in a dilapidated shop doorway. I was scared of how he looked. He was dirty, thin, skeletal and always shouting at something or anything. I looked at him more and more each time and found myself less frightened but wondering what had happened for him to end up this way. I remember feeling sad that no one loved or cared for him, that he was permanently cold and hungry, misunderstood. Nobody should have to live like that. As I got older, I realised that we are all a hair’s breadth from being in that position should fate deal us a bad hand. When I listen to this song it throws me back to seeing this poor suffering man and I do believe that this experience compelled me to pursue a career in care and I became a nurse – a career that I am very proud of to this day, 30 years later.

People should listen to this album because there were no other artists like Chris, Linda and RDF in any genre at the time, or even now. RDF are still going strong and if you go to one of their gigs you will see I am not the only one who is still a massive fan. They bring joy to the masses. RDF remains timeless and poignant in my heart and mind. Hail Chris Bowsher – you're a fucking legend, mate. x

Jailcell Recipes, *Two Years of Toothache* (1990)

David Gamage (Engineer Records, Earth Island Books, The Atlantic Union Project, Come The Spring, Rydell, Joeyfat, Couch Potatoes)

This album may be 30 years old now but still fills me with the same energy and passion for the punk rock scene it did back when it was first released. For that alone I'd say that it was definitely worth Jamie, the guitarist, having had a rotting tooth for all that time!

These songs, although maybe not the most subtle or polished, were from a place of genuine hardcore heart. Key tracks like 'Such is Life', 'Smiles' and 'Worn Down', where the vocalist, Robbie, tries desperately to encourage the listener with "Are you breathing all of your breath? Living your life to its full?... Start again, pick it up, try harder and don't be easily pleased" just make you get up and get on. Making the best of it and fighting your way through any situation.

The lyrics were about regular day-to-day life, but looked at it in such a positive way and the music, vastly developed with melodies and clever riffs since their pure speed and power first album, *Energy in an Empty Tank World*, just made you want to get up and dance.

I saw the Jailcells play many times, usually in small clubs, and their constant positive energy was infectious. It just rubbed off onto everyone in the audience. Here was a hugely underrated and almost unheard of UK hardcore band that had developed a legion of diehard fans by just having fun. This record absolutely encouraged me to be in a band and made it seem very much within reach of anyone. They'd hang out before or after the shows, get food or go skateboarding with us and I'm just not sure if Minor Threat, 7 Seconds, Descendents or Gorilla Biscuits would have joked around in the local shop with quite such silly accents. These guys rocked and the album was awesome, even to the point of adding DIY punk rock value with an extra 15 tracks on the CD version! The Jailcells, our Recipes.

Bad Religion, *Against the Grain* (1990)

Djordje (author, *Thoughts Words Action* blog)

Picking up one favourite record is always a difficult task to do. After all, music nerds like myself have hundreds or even thousands of favourite records for every possible occasion. I know that I am not the only one who thinks like that. The record I would like to pick for this occasion is *Against the Grain* by Bad Religion. Of course, somebody would say there are better albums by these renowned punk rockers, but I would like to go with this one. From the front cover artwork over excellent lyricism to the musical impact this record had on me the first time when I listened to it will always remain imprinted in my memory. It was unquestionably a game-changer for me.

There are plenty of good Bad Religion records, especially those released from the mid-'80s to mid-'90s, but there's something special about the *Against the Grain*. That unique blend of classic hardcore and LA punk blended all together in a colossal slab of harmonious noise gives me chills every time I decide to listen to this record. Of course, that wouldn't be a Bad Religion album without a couple of their signature moves, such as a perfect balance between vigorous, mid, and moderate rhythmic manoeuvres, excellent song structures, clever riffs, and catchy singalongs. Not to forget Greg Graffin's recognisable semi-distorted vocals, which marked the beginning of his transition from a hardcore punk singer to a highly experienced punk rock vocalist.

After all these qualities that I mentioned above, there's no wonder why many fans (like myself) across the globe include *Against the Grain* as their go-to Bad Religion album. As soon as I put the needle on that record, the avalanche of eloquence, intelligence, melody, and aggression comes to me like more than a necessary slap in the face or, should I say, a wake-up call to think about important topics that bother every single one of us. It forces me to think for myself, question everything, and still go against the grain after all these years. *Against the Grain* is an unavoidable lecture on how a melodic punk rock record should sound.

SNFU, *The Last of the Big Time Suspenders* (1991)

Kyle Hegel (Knucklehead, Territories)

I'm always stuck when people ask me about my favourite song, album or band. There is simply too much great music out there to be able to pick favourites. I do have a shortlist of bands and albums that I always come back to, but new stuff is constantly making its way onto that list, and I've never been able to narrow things

down past a solid top 10. I do, however, think I have an album that means more to me than any other. SNFU's *The Last of the Big Time Suspenders* is like a time machine for me. It's the first SNFU album I ever owned, and it's got a bunch of live tracks that take me right back into the crowd at the first show I saw them play.

I grew up in SNFU's home province of Alberta in the '80s and early '90s. I saw my first SNFU gig poster when I was about 10 or 11 on the bedroom wall of the older kid next door. Most trips to a local skate shop led to seeing at least one SNFU shirt on someone in the store. The artwork alone made you want to love the band. I started listening to SNFU on a regular basis in the seventh grade, when my friend Jay lent me his cassette tapes. By then they'd broken up and I thought I'd never see them play. In 1991 they released *The Last of the Big Time Suspenders* and it was in my tape deck steady. I started "playing" in my first band that year with Jay and Matt (yes, the guy I've been playing music with for over 30 years), and we wanted to be like SNFU. I got my first chance to see them live when they came to town on their Wrong Turn Down Memory Lane reunion tour. It was the second live show I'd ever been to and it's what got me hooked on punk rock for good. I still remember the opening bands; I still remember being pressed up front against the barricade they used to put up at the old MacEwan Hall ballroom; I remember the friends I went with – we're still friends today. Most of all, I remember being in the crowd completely captivated watching Chi Pig perform on stage. That night I had no idea that SNFU would be the band I'd see live more than any other over the next decade. Or that my own band would get to open for them. Or that over 20 years later I'd be sitting at a bar in Vancouver comparing the night's highlights with Chi Pig.

SNFU was foundational for me. They set the hook in me with that first show. Chi Pig set the live show bar so high that it never even crossed my mind to compare any other band to SNFU on stage. When you're young, you think the things you love will always be there ... until they're not. If I could go back and see any old band play again, it would be SNFU. Listening to *The Last of The Big Time Suspenders* is the closest thing I've found.

Halo of Flies, *Music for Insect Minds* (1991)

Frances Roe (Jam Jar Jail, filmmaker, photographer)

In the days before home taping saved music I stepped across the threshold of adulthood and started to buy records instead of *Beano* comics. First a couple of manic disco singles by Donna Summer, then feral schoolgirl anthems by Siouxsie

and the Banshees, the Cramps and the B52s. Scarcity bred obsessive listening. Setting a 7" single to repeat for an hour, every time the stylus lurched back to the start would become a fresh call to prayer and another three minutes of mad dancing before the next swirling finish.

"... We were at a party" *

"... There's no point in asking" **

A 12" EP with a two-and-a-half-minute intro, even better:

"... white on white" ***

Twelve-inch EPs, then LPs. Abundance, pausing to change sides once every 15 minutes or so was no bother. A smoke break. More tea? Less dancing. Double LPs – a marathon session with four crafted intermissions.

Recording from vinyl to two-hour cassettes, an album on each side. Stop. Open. Flip. Close. Play. A whole new album. Continuous contiguous flow had been achieved. Everything else was mixtapes. Punk, postpunk, hardcore, industrial, pop and electronic music magnetised onto a Manchurian Candidate parade of home-made cassettes.

By the end of the 1980s my tastes had coalesced around mainly American noise, garage, punk, math and hardcore with a dash of thrash metal. Having started in a band I was now listening less as a punter and more as an intensity-seeking participant. Big speakers from the old family stereo got hooked up to a cheap 3-in-1 player; so anything with a monstrous dirty bass sound and dragging, intense and immense double-kick drums, driven, chaotic, shambolic yet somehow pin-sharp, sneering, world-loathing, intelligently brutish and of a melodically bewildering structure was going to deliver shock and awe. Many great albums of the '80s and '90s were played through it. One of those was Halo of Flies: *Music for Insect Minds* [1991]. A 29 track [current Amphetamine Reptile re-issue] compilation of 7" & 12" releases from 1986 to 1991. Variable production standards hang true around a plumb-line of full-throttle ferocity, sweeping through piss-taking worlds of filthy garage sleazy stumbling psych monster punk noise. If you don't know it already try these tracks: 'Drunk (in Detroit)', 'Rubber Room', 'How Does it Feel to Feel', 'I'm Clean', 'Headburn'. Or play it through as assembled [that works].

It's a high-grade representative of its time and place, and of a band I wish I'd seen live. Nasty and brilliant. Expect no mercy. It's a ricocheting descent into the inferno, and digital versions don't break for a B Side.

*B52s: *'Rock Lobster'*

** Sex Pistols: *'Pretty Vacant'*

*** Bauhaus: *'Bela Lugosi's Dead'*

Leatherface, *Mush* (1991)

Kazu Onigiri (Waterslide Records)

I still can't forget the day when I first heard this album. As a high school student, I saw this album with the mushroom cover and I didn't know why, but I was attracted to it. Yes, this record was my first experience of Leatherface.

The moment I got home and dropped the needle on the turntable, the intro to *'I Want the Moon'* gave me goosebumps. Thanks to this album, I gained a lot of friends who I still keep in touch with to this day around the world. Every time I listen to this album, I think back to different scenes in my whole life. Drinking and fooling around with friends. Memories of the ex – my girlfriend at the time. Memories of commuting to school and work on Japan's crowded rush hour train.

And when I quit my jobs, I always listen to this album over and over, even when I'm having fun or when I'm facing a hard time. This album is always with me. And because of this album, I am still running on my own label even if it's still small. Who cares? Yes, I chose my life. Sometimes it's hard through life. But I can get through it because I learnt the salty side of life from the lyrics of Leatherface. I hope everyone finds music that supports them for their life. The possibilities are endless if you keep living. If you want to.

Sugar, *Copper Blue* (1992)

Padraic O'Sceachain (Cheapskate, Chimers)

I can remember the exact time I first heard it. 1992, third year in secondary school and I was standing in what was known as the glass hall of St. Kieran's College when one James Burke comes up to me and says, "I hear you like Hüsker Dü, have ya heard the singer's new band?" I hadn't. He handed me an earphone of his Walkman and we listened to the opening chords of *'The Act We Act'*; I remember initially thinking it was a bit too "rock" for my punk rock ears but by the time that chorus hit I was in. The swell of layered guitars, discordant notes hanging from everywhere, I'm still addicted to that sound. I'm sure I got a nice TDK 90 copy in the next few days from Burkie which came in handy for passing the time in science (and other) classes.

We saw Sugar at the height of their powers at Sunstroke '93 in Dalymount Park, driving up on a hired Hehir's bus that had usually meant a trip to Croke Park for the match up until that day. Bob Mould wore the "Liar, Lunatic, Lord" shirt and screamed his way through songs from *Copper Blue* and the newly released *Beaster*. It was the first proper big show I'd ever been to: big stage, big sound, the whole shebang. They came out, said nothing and then ripped our heads off with a half hour set of pure energy and melody. I loved it.

In his autobiography *See a Little Light: the Trail of Rage and Melody*, Bob Mould wrote that he poured every ounce of himself into the recordings for *Copper Blue*. You can hear it coming through the speakers. The songs are flawless in execution, almost mechanical but not lacking feel. For me it ticks every box that I want in a band. It kicks arse but with melody. It's got attitude but with a big heart. I can use all the cliches. It still sounds as fresh to me now as it did then. I hear something new every time I listen to it etc. It's still the benchmark all these years later.

Babes in Toyland, *Fontanelle* (1992)

Saskia Holling (Fudd; Sally Skull)

Pre the emergence of Riot Grrrl in the UK, I was regularly reading in the music papers about a host of women making music together in the States; bands such as Lunachicks, 7 Year Bitch, L7, and Hole. It was Babes in Toyland that I saw live in the UK (several times) in 1993 when they were on tour promoting this album, *Fontanelle*. Seeing Maureen Herman standing tall, and really owning her bass on stage made me want to pick one up (I did so a couple of years later in Sally Skull). Feeling the power of Lori Barbero's drums, and hearing these songs sung live by Kat Bjelland, dressed in her "good little girl" dress was a revelation; women did not have to play sexy on stage, nor did they have to sing sweetly – they could make whatever noise and music they goddam pleased ... I really wanted to do that. I bought the LP of course, and listening again to the songs whilst reading the hand-written lyrics printed on the record sleeve was simultaneously shocking and incredibly exciting: this band was completely unafraid! From the opening song *'Bruise Violet'* ("You got this thing that Really makes me hot ... You little bitch well I hope your insides rot") through to *'Handsome & Gretel'*, "My name is Gretel yeah I've got a crotch that talks" and to the closing refrains of *'Mother'* ("You are obscene and you know it") and the soothing tones of *'Gone'*, their lyrics gave me the courage to write out my own feelings of confusion and anger into

song format and to express them in a unique way in my first band, Fudd. Babes in Toyland were a perfect pre-cursor for me to the Riot Grrrl movement that landed on the UK shores shortly after their '93 tour. They inspired by making (and they still do) loud, angry, unapologetic and, yes, beautiful, music, and you can either like it or not – no compromise!

PJ Harvey, *Dry* (1992)

Sean Greene (painter and bassist, The Van Pelt, The Sin Eaters, Another Wall)

In the early '90s my sister Caitlin gave me a tape with *Dry* on side A and The Breeders' *Pod* on side B. She probably noticed I was into heavy music, but most of it was aggressive young men, so why not put some women in the listening mix? At the time, this was a mellow record for me, it was melodic and musical in a way that wasn't pop but it also wasn't hardcore or punk in the way that I was able to define in those days. As a bass player, the opening song 'Oh My Lover' really grabs me. The bass drives the song and allows Polly's vocals to float out on top and take on a power and emotion that at that time felt unfamiliar to me. It had the anger and frustration that I knew, but it went deeper with nuance and personal pain and humour as well. The rest of the album unfolds with such a variety of tempos and styles of riffs, but the words and vocal melodies hold it all together as one of the strongest and most unique musical statements I can think of.

Dry is a record that was hugely important to me as a person, and a musician. It is a record I continue to return to, and these days my definition of punk would include this album, because it appeared in a context burdened with expectations and unspoken rules that PJ Harvey disregarded in favour of creating something that was true to the core of her experience.

©, *Witch* (1992)

Daragh McCarthy (The Mighty Avon Jnr)

I have an extraordinarily vivid memory of first hearing this record. Sometime in 1992. It was a late summer afternoon as I came home to a top floor Aungier St flat flooded with sunshine, windows wide open, busses chugging in the street. The flatmate sitting with their friend, who recently returned from London, pulled out a Maxell cassette with "© Witch" scribbled on the label in biro. He had been working in John Reynolds' studio and fingered a sly pre-release copy before he split for Dublin. He had a look of satisfied glee when he saw our response to the dubby spoken word.

Particularly '5' the centrepiece of the album with its two Neil Young samples. The iconic harmonics from Buffalo Springfield's 'For What It's Worth' and the riff from 'Ohio', which had us up on our feet skanking when it kicked in. It did seem ballsy then to sample a hippie. Twice yet. In the same song. That riff brings a lot with it. Catchy as all get out, it also immediately communicates images of anti-war protest, historical state violence and looming imperium. Hefty for one sample. We hadn't heard anything like it – no one had heard anything quite like it I'm guessing. Laurie Anderson fronting ESG at Compass Point.

We spent the next couple of hours listening, rewinding and listening and rewinding, smoking cigarettes and drinking tea. The tape was quickly copied before yer man left, insisting we be cool and keep it to ourselves. Those days I'm not sure I possessed even one CD. It did in fact feel like we were cool with this extraordinary music to hand which we 100% knew not a single person in the entire country had heard. He hadn't much to tell about it except that *Witch* was the album and © was a poet linked to William Burroughs in some way. From New York. Her real name was Leslie Winer. There was obviously some Sinéad O'Connor connection. Our antenna attuned to anything beatnik, oppositional or outré, flickered and twitched invisibly. I learned later she had been a highly successful international model/muse.

She still occasionally releases great music and has been executor of street-beat Herbert Huncke's literary estate for decades; amongst a fistful of other extremely cool collaborations and activities. Your cool isn't worth much around Leslie Winer I'm telling you.

It is a huge credit to producer John Reynolds that whether on a cheap tinny tape recorder or a something where you can properly feel the bass, it still sounds fantastic. If they were on the money in the '90s, the words – imperial/corporate war, gender violence, media and late capital culture – are doubly crucial today. I held onto that tape for years before finally buying a CD version. And kept it then as a totem for more years after that. Leslie Winer has been called the "grandmother of trip hop". That is unsatisfactory. *Witch* is a post-punk minimal dub masterpiece

Vic Chesnutt, *West of Rome* (1992)

Brian Brannigan (A Lazarus Soul)

I first heard the chorus "watching the sleeping man" in the mid-'90s. I was taken by the rawness and rancour in the voice of James Victor Chesnutt, or Vic, as he

was known. I searched all the dingy basements of Dublin and finally discovered a CD by Vic that had two versions of 'Sleeping Man'. My enthusiasm was dampened when I realised that they weren't the song I was searching for. What I did discover would become one of my most treasured records.

Produced by Michael Stipe of REM, the album is a family affair, engineered by his best mate Scott Stuckey. Vic's wife Tina played bass and his teenage nieces played strings, their rudimentary playing so fragile and perfectly understated throughout, giving the record an intimate one take, in-the-room feel. Floating over this creaky lo-fi folk and country soundtrack, is a lived-in southern holler with all the pain and power of the great blues singers. A drink driving accident at 18, left him paralysed in a wheelchair and only able to play guitar by gluing a plectrum to a glove. It gave him a peculiar style of playing which is a huge part of his charm. The beauty of Vic is in the flaws.

Given his predicament, it's not surprising that songs like 'Sponge' and 'Where Were You' are full of self-deprecation and despair. Though he had a wicked sense of humour and was audacious in his rhyming. On 'Bug' he rhymes "a hotel full of Pakistanis" with "a front porch filled with greasy, greasy grannies." Maybe these queer couplings are off-putting, maybe the reason why at least five of these songs aren't folk standards already. 'Stupid Preoccupations' would give any Pogues song a run in the greatest drinking song contest. Followed by the devastatingly beautiful 'Panic Pure' in which he states, "I don't count my scars like the tree rings" – a lyrical genius.

The title track is a dark arts masterclass in songwriting, 'Famous Blue Raincoat' levels of perfection. Chesnutt finishes it with a primordial wailing – apparently it erupted spontaneously, and it seems to contain all the suffering of the world. Vic died of a muscle relaxant overdose on Dec 25, 2009. He was an old soul with a great wisdom in his voice and words, yet he was only 45 when he ran off and left us.

I shared a great love of Vic's music with my late brother, Gerry Brannigan and every time I play this album, I think of him. There were 20 years and seven siblings between us. We were in the front row for Chesnutt's Vicars Street show on April Fool's Day, 2000. We'd sometimes debate after gigs about what album 'Sleeping Man' was on. He'd claim *Drunk* and I'd reply there's a track called 'Sleeping Man' but it's not that song. It was after a few cans of Scrumpy Jack in his gaff one night, he produced his copy of *Drunk*. It was then the penny dropped, that I had a rare misprint. The cover was *Drunk*, the CD was printed with *Drunk*, but the music contained within was *West of Rome*.

Hoover, *The Lurid Traversal of Route 7* (1993)

Chris Snelgrove (The Last Mile, solo performer)

When I was 16, I went to a small show to support some friends and a band that I didn't know got up on stage and started setting up. They looked like they worked in a factory; Dickies pants, Eisenhower jackets, they were men of few words, setting up quickly and efficiently. They stood with their backs to the small audience and, when ready, they just started playing. I felt like I had been punched square in the face by a wall of sound and intensity that I had never experienced before. That band was called Hoover and they were from Washington DC. They had nothing for sale that night and would release their only album, *The Lurid Traversal of Route 7* over a year later.

How often have you seen a band live and then you get home and listen to their records and they don't carry the same power and passion and you end up disappointed? *The Lurid Traversal of Route 7* is the exception to this. From the onset of the ambient noise intro to the bass leading into the full band onslaught, this record doesn't relent. The music is very upfront, abrasive and discordant, yet at other times it's so gentle and fragile. Lyrically they are exactly as my impression of them was when they were setting up that first time. The lyrics are short, literal yet vague prose that often repeats in a manner that makes you feel like you're experiencing every word coming out of their mouth right there with them.

Listening to this LP on repeat when I got it, the second time they played in Montreal, actually changed the way that I wrote music and started experiencing music. Their bass player, Fred Erskine, became the person I tried to emulate most in my writing and playing style, even though I didn't play in bands that sounded anything like his. I started to lose interest in music that was all flash and no substance or emotion. I started expecting every band to play every show like it was their last and that their albums convey that same urgency once recorded. Hoover forever changed the way I play shows. I still give 100% of what I have when I'm playing and the same in the studio.

It's almost 30 years later and I'm listening to this album while I'm writing this. I listen to it probably more than I would like to admit. I ordered a copy of the reissue on vinyl because my original copy has been played so many times I wouldn't even attempt to guess. I play guitar mostly now, but I can play all of the basslines, tell you every drum hit, every change in tempo, and know every word. So that must mean something.

The Muffs, *The Muffs* (1993)

Georgie Wilsher (Beverley Kills)

Wow, I mean, so much to choose from, but The Muffs first (self-titled) album has to be one of my faves. I know when I put this on I'll be singing along to every line, and harmonising along the way; a total melodic, rock, pop-punk, grungy mix of fun – yet some poignant songs, sung by the late Kim Shuttock, and backed by the most ferociously tight band.

When I was asked to join Beverley Kills, I was pretty worried that I didn't have what it takes to be lead singer of a band, but hearing Kim in The Muffs, made me realise I too can sing, and that you just have to let your personality shine through. I could do this! Kim had the sweetest yet strongest vocals with the coolest tone and her epic screams made me love her so, and while there's a tinge of sadness in listening to this now, I always put it on when I need a boost.

The songwriting on this album is incredible, and there's some pretty varied tracks on there, but they all fit perfectly, and in the order I think they should be in. Important! They're no fillers, but my favourite songs are 'Lucky Guy', 'Baby Go Round' and 'Big Mouth'. If you don't know of The Muffs, this album is definitely the best place to start (hey, not all bands have such a great first album, huh!). And this makes me feel the absolute need to check out the latest stuff too – note to self: must get the last album that Kim produced and wrote the songs too, despite deteriorating with the awful disease (ALS) that eventually took her from us, way too young. RIP Kim, you beautiful badass, and thanks to Niall for asking me to write this piece that really made me think about the people and music I love.

The Breeders, *Last Splash* (1993)

Lorna Tiefholz (Hagar The Womb, Rabies Babies)

I stole this album on CD. I don't condone stealing, I would never steal now, but sometimes you are pushed. In the 1990s I worked for a music distribution company and the staff were low-paid and bullied, so we stole as compensation. I didn't steal at first, but the day that the boss demanded us to work unpaid overtime I left the building with a copy of Therapy?'s *Nurse* tucked inside my jeans and I never looked back. I worked there for seven years and got a decent CD and record collection out of it.

I was squatting and when we got an eviction notice I packed up my records and CDs and other valuables to store with a friend and just kept a few essentials, including a little portable CD player and two CDs – Bad Religion's *Recipe For*

Hate and The Breeders' *Last Splash*. In those days squatting in Stoke Newington was fairly easy, and we were expecting to be settled in a new place within a week or so, but this time we came across various problems and we ended up camping out in derelict houses for a couple of months.

The CD player and two CDs was our only music, so me and my squatmate Kel listened to both these CDs a lot in those months. Now when I hear either of those albums I can still remember how I felt at the time, sitting on the floor, in my sleeping bag, eating takeaway curry from foil tubs by candlelight, and stinking cos we hadn't got a water supply. Recently it was Kel's 50th birthday and he asked me to DJ at his party, I played 'Cannonball' and he immediately came up to me with a big grin shouting "our eviction song!"

But apart from my memories associated with it, *Last Splash* is amazing. It flows perfectly. All 15 songs are short and sharp and full of texture. The album is layered with beautiful riffs and delicate minimal tuneful vocals which flip to shouty, distorted, discordant chaos and fuzzy guitar. The album moves between grunge and pop and country and sentimental ballad so naturally. It has great lyrics, it's got some country-style fiddle, it's got some Velvet Underground-style rhythm guitar and it's bass heavy. *Last Splash* is a perfect album for any weather.

I don't have a favourite track – it's an album best listened to the whole way through, although my go-to heartbreak song is 'Do You Love Me Now?' It's an indulgent song for a break-up recovery. You just know that Kim Deal understands exactly what you're going through by the way she sings "Do you think of me like I dream of you? Do you wish you were here like I wish I was with you?"

Bikini Kill, *Pussy Whipped* (1993)

Eileen Hogan (lecturer; author, *Music in Ireland: Youth Cultures and Youth Identity*)

This is about an album I wish I had heard earlier in my life. I grew up on a farm in County Limerick. I went to an all-female Catholic primary school. I then attended an all-female Catholic secondary school. I suppose that was a fairly typical experience for a girl growing up in rural Ireland in the 1990s. I was a "lovely girl" in the best Irish Catholic tradition, a fiddle-playing harpist who loved reading and art and listening to music. In my mid-teens I discovered grunge. It was a revelation. The angst, the ennui, the frustration, the rage.... At the same time, I discovered gender-based double standards. I discovered slut-shaming and body shaming. I discovered that boys' credentials as music fans

were rarely questioned whereas girls' were routinely dismissed. I learned about the prevalence of sexual assault. I began to understand that 1990s Ireland was not so kind to lovely girls.

By the early 2000s my university studies had forged a feminist awakening and I developed the conceptual language for describing and critiquing girls' experiences. I learned that the personal is political. And I heard Bikini Kill for the first time. This was an epiphanous recognition: "Aha! So that is what my feminism sounds like." I revelled in the lyrics about holding your head up high, about radicalism and the sisterhood, and tasting revolution, about pussies and fucking. Lyrics that were brazen, courageous, and altogether unlovely.

I wish I'd heard them sooner, and although I came upon it later than I needed them, the impact of hearing them for the first time was nonetheless profound, political, educational, and even therapeutic.

Therapy?, *Troublegum* (1994)

Carol Hodge (singer/songwriter, Slice of Life)

Why I love it:

A perfect balance of darkness and light, heavy and poppy. For every '*Unrequited*' there is a '*Screamager*'. I love the way the tracks flow into each other, it's such a strong example of the album art form. Each song has maximum impact because of the songs surrounding it.

What or who it reminds me of:

When I was 13, I sneakily copied a cassette from my (older, cooler) brother, which he had in turn copied from his friend. The tape had *Troublegum* on one side and *Smash* by The Offspring on the other. I played it to death. It was 1994 or '95, and hardly any of my school friends were into alternative music, so I was responsible for introducing many of them to Therapy? and The Offspring. We met a group of boys from a different school who were a bit older, and couldn't believe their luck when they found some girls who had heard of Green Day, Therapy?, Soundgarden and The Offspring! It was one of those summers where you form an intense bond with new people, then drift apart just as quickly. I paired up with a lad named Lee, who I thought was just dreamy. I wonder what he's up to now.

How it makes me feel:

Young, free, angsty, understood. I went to see them perform *Troublegum* in its entirety in 2014 and it was sheer bliss. I love that music can fully transport you back to a time and a place in your life.

Why I think people should listen to it:

It definitely stands up today as an album that is all killer, no filler. Absolutely crammed with vocal and guitar hooks. Really simple, repetitive choruses that will squirm around your brain for days. Lyrically there is just the right amount of rebellion, sacrilege and a deep dive into mental health darkness.

Did it give me a sense of freedom or a sense of possibility?

Absolutely. I didn't know I wanted to be a singer or songwriter at that point in my life, but I did know that I felt marginalised and Other compared to most people my own age. It was an album that legitimised my dark inner turmoil with opening lines like: "Heaven kicked you out/You wouldn't wear a tie," "Don't belong in this world or the next one/wasting every day to my own end" and "The world is fucked, and so am I/maybe it's the other way round/I can't seem to decide." This album found its way into my life at a time when I was transmogrifying into a teenage rebel and I am forever grateful.

Voorhees, *Spilling Blood Without Reason* (1994)

Graham Sleightholme (Little Rocket Records)

In 1994, when this was released, I was a mere 19 years old. I was moving away from my metal youth towards DIY punk. I knew of Voorhees and had their great first EP but this LP and its timing landed as I was also moving 250 miles from home to a new city where I didn't know anyone. Enter 26 raging and raw hardcore blasts. Clocking in at just over 25 minutes and drawing heavily from Boston bands like SSD and Jerry's Kids, and with titles like '*Heroin Is Fun*', '*Defend Myself*' and '*Kill Yourself*' it was not out to please. Interspersed with horror film themes like '*Dawn of the Dead*' and combined with the *Friday the 13th*-inspired sleeve, it gives off the instant feeling of "fuck off." Blunt and brutal, just like the music. As much as they set out to hate everyone – and they took pops at both left and right – I took that anger and used it as some sort of shield against my new situation. It was my band, none of the older punks in this new city had heard of them. Most of them were wearing The Offspring or NOFX shirts which baffled me. The UK had a small but brilliant scene of its own and we should have been supporting it. Voorhees were northerners like me. It was recorded by a lad who went to my school. It all seemed to fit. I wrote to their label who put out some killer DIY releases and I wrote to more bands. I was finding my scene and my place, all the while playing this album endlessly and loudly. At some point down the line and after seeing Lecky and Co. live a few

times I got them down to play in Bristol. It was brilliant to watch them blast out their racket in front of a now great little scene that a handful of us had built. The band was all new members by that point, barring Lecky, but this new band were really funny and sociable even though the songs might not give that impression. I ended up being pretty good mates with most of them and over the years have booked gigs and released records with their other bands. I still play this album 28 years later and it still stands up as a classic.

Luscious Jackson, 'Deep Shag' from *Natural Ingredients* (1994)

Josephine Wiggs (The Breeders, Dusty Trails)

Whenever I hear anything from Luscious Jackson's first two records it transports me back to the 1993 Breeders European tour, when LJ came on the road with us as support. Jill Cunniff (vocal, bass), Gabby Glaser (vocals, guitar), Kate Schellenbach (drums), and Vivian Trimble (keyboards) got together in 1991 in their hometown of NYC, and with punk rock attitude and funky beats, created a distinctive blend of suave hip-hop/alt-rock/trip-hop.

On tour in '93, I watched their show every night, and the song I most looked forward to was 'Deep Shag'. It is still my favourite. For one thing, I cannot not nod my head along from the first note to the fade-out, as if in assent with the groove, a reaction I am not known for, as my friends can attest.

Speaking of the first note, the first two notes are punched in unison by the bass guitar and the kick drum. What a start. A breezy guitar riff jangles into view, swirling around the luxurious pulse of the bass, and tripping along with the nuanced 16th notes that undulate between high-hat and snare, propelling the song. Here in the intro, and gone before you've even realised what's happening, is that rarest of sonic artifacts, the bass overdub. Guitarists record this sort of layering All The Time, but when bass players want to do it, they are met with dead eyes and retorts such as "how are you going to play that live?"

I love how the song shifts into the chorus, ushered in by an understated drum pick-up, the utter perfection of the key change, the uplifting yet nonchalant piano, making a belated appearance, as if to say, Yes, I'm late, but I know how to make an entrance. And the lyrics, epiphanic and irresistibly sing-along: "Why do you make me feel so ... What I become, what I become ... I succumb to your embrace..." Yes, I sing along to 'Deep Shag'; and to most of *Tapestry*, too. And I love the drop after the second chorus – the guitar, out; exposing vocals, bass, and drums for a dubby breakdown; the abrupt reversal, four bars of chiming

guitar and vocals; then those three ebullient tom hits, launching the final chorus, and always compelling me, on air drums, to lift my fists and hit them too.

Heavens to Betsy, *Calculated* (1994)

Scott Satterwhite (lecturer; writer, *Mylxine* zine)

I first heard of Heavens to Betsy through the "thank you" lists of a few bands I really liked back in the early 1990s. At that time, I was really enamoured with the pro-feminist values of the record label Kill Rock Stars. I was beginning to find my politics at that time, and Riot Grrrl was my gateway. I know I wasn't the intended audience for Heavens to Betsy, but maybe I was a secondary audience. Not the woman I imagine they were hoping to reach, but the people who identified as men who often perpetuated sexism, homophobia, racism and classism. As a secondary audience, I was very much attuned to their message – and Heavens to Betsy had a message.

One thing that stood out to me in *Calculated* was the band's liner notes, and what they asked of their audience. They asked their audience to skip over buying the next "xxx whiteboyband's record" and buy books by black authors such as Toni Morrison, bell hooks, Audre Lorde and Alice Walker. Before that, I'd never seen a band put anti-racist education before checking out the latest record from their friends' bands. More interesting to me, Heavens to Betsy had no qualms looking critically at their scene. While focusing on women's empowerment, they also attacked racism in a way that I found inspiring. I read the books they suggested, and made my zine reflect that same feel as their work.

Musically, *Calculated* is simple, raw, caustic, and beautiful. Two people – Corin Tucker (later of Sleater-Kinney) and Tracy Sawyer – switched back and forth between bass, guitar and drums. For a two-piece, they were intense! Even listening to them now, I get chills. Songs like 'White Girl' spoke of intersectionality before I knew of the term. Race, gender and class were front and centre. A line from the song goes, "I won't change anything until I change my racist self." It's not that I'd never considered race or racism before, but I never thought I could be part of the problem, through action or inaction, especially as a punk. After all, how could a "real punk" have any racism in them? After all, isn't that we stood against? This issue still comes up. Hearing this song allowed me to reflect on the ways a racist culture infects the mind, but also helps with a remedy. Another song, 'Axemen', goes on to further challenge what bell hooks described as the "white supremacist capitalist culture" of the US (and one could easily say the West as a

whole). In this song, one of the verses has a student asking her teacher for advice, “Do you believe those white lies, you are supposed to teach in school?” The teacher responds “Don’t believe everything you read that’s written down. She said, don’t believe and then I will burn the school down.” Power!

What this record did for me was give me a sense of agency. As someone who identifies as male, to look critically at the system in which I was acculturated, I need to see the punk scene as part of that system, and work to make punk a better place in whatever ways I could. This ethos guided my zine, my distro, my short-lived record label, my teaching career and later the 309 Punk Project – a collective that moves to place pro-feminist, womanist, anti-racist and anti-oppression ideals first. We’re far from perfect, and stumble often, but thanks to punks like Heavens to Betsy, we have the tools to look critically at punk, with all its faults, and a soundtrack (at least in my head) to build a new world out of the ashes of the old.

Veruca Salt, *American Thighs* (1994)

Kate Fleet (Beverly Hills)

In 1994, a friend ordered *American Thighs* at our local Our Price, off the strength of single, ‘Seether’ – the Veruca Salt song most people are familiar with, if they’re familiar at all. It took so long to arrive that in the meantime she went and bought it at HMV in a bigger town. Win for me: I went straight “up” the shopping precinct, where, at that time, the boys from The Prodigy still occasionally roamed, to nab the copy that had now been put into stock. It was £15.99 which seemed a lot to gamble on the promise held by one song. Little did I know I’d still be playing (and now writing about) it 28 years later.

As someone with synesthesia, this album for me is fizzy. The CD itself is the colour of Parma Violets and the sound, the production that I love so much and is ultimately what makes it my favourite, puts the taste of Refreshers in my mouth. If that sounds too sweet, I’d say: akin to cutting your tongue on a sherbet lemon. Swirling, crunching guitars; odd progressions; melodic twists and turns; feedback so loud you can hear the amp in the studio shudder; unexpected, heady harmonies that taught me almost as much about what was possible vocally as my bandmates have since. Nina Gordon and Louise Post were a perfect pairing and to be looked up to: they could – can – really play. My highest of high points is the dreamy ‘*Number One Blind*’, with its hooky bass, thwacking snare and a feedback-crested solo that I have never tired of hearing. Now, look at that cover and tell me you don’t taste heart-shaped Jammie Dodgers.

Hole, *Live Through This* (1994)

Shawna Potter (War On Women)

This is tough. What does favourite mean? Best album of all time? The one I listen to the most? The one that means something or marks a turning point in my life? For me, *Live Through This* by Hole checks two out of those three boxes. I know it’s not the best album of all time, but it was so inspirational to me when it came out, and so influential to me musically. I kept it on repeat for years.

First, they are solid songs, but played by anyone else and they wouldn’t hit as hard. Second, the sound and space of the recording was so unique, like the subtle amount of overdrive, and how you can hear every instrument all the time in its own space. This is wild for an album so full of anger. She’s fucking pissed! The fact that they didn’t crank a Metal Zone to 10 and they didn’t make the recording overall too dry or tight, it actually allows you to hear the nuances, the levels, of that anger and hurt in her voice. It makes her seem more angry by comparison so that, in a way, she doesn’t have to overdo that either.

In thinking about what to contribute here, I put *Live Through This* on while I cleaned the house today. It’s been a while since I listened to it (the pandemic has been full of podcasts) but there was a comfort in knowing every single word, every single note and every single drum-fill. And there was an immediate outlet for my anger at the world right now; an anger that I find it hard to tap into these days. Survival fatigue and disillusionment have been getting the best of me. I’ve been keeping myself safe in my house, but in a way that keeps me small and disconnected. Maybe if I start listening to this album again I’ll tap into the feeling it originally gave me and start taking up space again.

Modena City Ramblers, *Riportando Tutto A Casa* (1994)

Chiara Viale (filmmaker)

This will be my seventh year in Ireland, but my heart has lived here for much longer. Landing in Shannon for the first time at 16, I learned what the word “home” really meant, and a part of me simply refused to leave, driving me back to the plane again and again, until I gave in, packed my bags and rejoined my heart in Ireland, where it truly belongs.

Modena City Ramblers is the band which soothed my heart and kept the fire alive inside of me all that time. Their beautifully crafted album *Riportando Tutto A Casa*, in particular sang of what I felt and helped me name my feelings. The songs, a blend of Irish and Emilian folk tunes, speak of Italian

politics, history, immigration, social issues and an unhinged adoration for Ireland. *Riportando Tutto A Casa* features perhaps the most famous Modena City Ramblers song: a powerful and engaging rendition of 'Bella Ciao', sung at demonstrations all over Italy to this day. Interestingly, the song is introduced by the melody of 'The Lonesome Boatman' by Finbar and Eddie Furey. Throughout the years, I was bound to revisit and rediscover *Riportando Tutto A Casa*, drawing more and more connections with Ireland. My newest realisation is the identity of the Dubliner mentioned in 'Morte di un Poeta' (Death of a Poet): he is none other than Brendan Behan.

Riportando Tutto A Casa is an album to be enjoyed by any folk music lover, and the beautiful melodies, engaging rhythms and the warm voice of Stefano "Cisco" Bellotti possess an energy that goes way beyond any language barrier. Since my first listen, Modena City Ramblers always meant freedom. They celebrate music that makes your heart beat faster, enveloping you in both tradition and novelty. Their tunes know no borders or age and sing of truths that we desperately need to be reminded of. They need to be sung at the top of our lungs, on the streets, in our rooms and in our hearts.

Chamberlain, *Fate's Got a Driver* (1995)

Vique Martin (*Simba* fanzine, Pirates Press Records)

The first time I heard some of these songs was live and I fell in love. A few days later I was given a copied tape and it didn't leave my Walkman for six months straight. I was 24 and my mother had died seven months before. And this was the soundtrack to me finding my way back to happiness.

I remember walking around Manhattan on a hot August day, 'Street Singer' filling my head, and it was the only time in my life I felt like a character in a movie. Coming out of the deep depression that comes from intense grief. The moment in the film where you cry tears of happiness 'cos you know the person IS going to be ok. It was touch and go for a while. But there they are, coming through the other side. Lyrics to this song are tattooed around my wrist, the only ones that are on my skin. They are there to remind me that fuck the people that don't matter. That life is too short for mediocrity. That I need to make good choices and move forward.

This band and all the reunions, all the shows, all the times that David's voice has been a balm for my pain, or a magnification of my happiness, cannot possibly be counted. I've cried more at their shows than all other bands put

together. Tears of grief and longing and happiness and good and bad memories – all intertwine with these songs. No single album in the world fills my heart with joy like *Fate's Got a Driver*. And it always will.

Oasis, (*What's the Story*) *Morning Glory?* (1995)

Michael Gaffney (Desperate Measures, Rich Ragany and the Digressions)

I love this album because, as a ten-year-old, I was just getting into finding all about music, this album came along and it was everywhere. Every street, every car in the summer of '96 was blasting this album. Takes me back to everyone feeling like they were in it together, whatever that means. But from the terraced houses of Liverpool we all were right into it. I think that album gave people a sense of belief like, "They're just like us," and a band to identify with. I started out playing guitar to Oasis songs because firstly I loved the band so much but also wanting to be something more.

Rocket from the Crypt, *Scream, Dracula, Scream!* (1995)

Dom Brining (Bear Away)

Rocket from the Crypt, the self-proclaimed inventors of rock'n'roll. And who am I not to believe them? I remember a relative asking me to go and buy an album that my brother would want for Christmas. So I bought this for him, but really it was for me. Possibly the greatest opening 1, 2, 3 hit put to tape in 'Middle', 'Born in '69' and 'On a Rope'. I remember it was always hard trying to describe to my friends what it sounded like. Blazing punk, hard rock, almost doo-wop at times, with a horn section. As a young, aspiring musician at the time, who was always looking for something new to play along to on my small practice amp and out-of-tune guitar, this is the album that has always stuck with me through the years. I missed the party the first time around, but managed to catch a few shows on their European reunion tour. Listen to the album. But seeing 'Come See, Come Saw' live is the best entertainment your money can buy.

Experimental Audio Research, *Beyond the Pale* (1996)

Michael Azerrad (author, *Our Band Could Be Your Life; Come as You Are: The Story of Nirvana*)

Years ago, I was going through a rough patch. And by that, I mean a patch that was even rougher than usual. Throughout that time, I obsessively listened to melancholic albums by Portishead, Mark Lanegan, The Sneetches, Wheat, Cat

Power and a few others. When I think back on my relationship to those records, I have a very clear image: it was like clinging to a life preserver. One of those albums was *Beyond the Pale* by Experimental Audio Research, which at the time included maestro Sonic Boom (Spacemen 3, Spectrum) making “spatial and ambient effects,” guitarist-saxophonist Kevin Martin (Techno Animal), veteran avant percussionist Eddie Prevost, and guitarist Kevin Shields (My Bloody Valentine). The album is six crossfaded tracks, a couple of them over 14 minutes, all drones and long tones. It’s spacey instrumental music with no clear structure, hyperextended howls of feedback, squalling guitar, oceanic cymbal wash, and slowly peeling saxophone entwining and untwining like tendrils of solid smoke. When I close my eyes and listen to it, I think of dissonant ritual horns sounding across misty, darkling valleys.

Darkness was my lingua franca at the time – nothing else made sense. When you’re in such a state, happy music just doesn’t cut it. It rings false. *Beyond the Pale* rang true. And yet while the music sounds like foreboding emanations from the abyss, it has a deep beauty to it, and that beauty gave me a glimmer that a better world is possible. It provided a little traction for getting out of the mire.

As far as musical life preservers, I don’t particularly recommend *Beyond the Pale* or any of the other records I listened to at the time – that’ll be different for everyone, because aesthetics are in the eye of the beholder. The point is, when you’re in a rough patch, hold on tight to something that has some beauty to it. And ride it all the way to the shore.

Weezer, *Pinkerton* (1996)

Chris Spaeth (Tidal, Belvès, Abermals, Memento Records)

When asked to write about my favourite record I immediately started doing a mental flip through my record collection, and pretty quickly came to a halt at *The White Album* by The Beatles. A record full of superlatives. Best folk song (*Blackbird*). Heaviest Beatles song (*Helter Skelter*). Most obvious heroin reference in a song (*Happiness Is a Warm Gun*). Most emo Beatles song (*I’m So Tired*). Most avant garde soundscape (*Revolution No. 9*). The list goes on. What a record. Every time I listen to it, it sounds fresh and timeless, much more so than other Beatles albums. Probably the best record ever made. But then again, the best record is not the same as my favourite record. For the latter, there would be an emotional connection with some phase in one’s life in a way that always transports you back to that time whenever you listen to that record.

So, that record that deeply touched me when I first listened to it, and still does, is a great album called *Pinkerton* by a weird band called Weezer. I was 16 when it was released. The music world was disappointed by the band’s choice to abandon their successful and already heavily plagiarized hit formula (heavily distorted chug-chug guitars over mid-tempo 3/4 or 4/4 beats), but that attitude really impressed me. It seemed like a big fuck you to the public. The resulting album, self-produced at the infamous Sound City studios in Van Nuys, CA, sounded rough and powerful – an aural blast, yet a highly melodic record. Judging by the lyrics and vocals, this record is emo as fuck. The emotional impact this record had on me was never really equalled after. I just totally felt it, felt every “OH!” Rivers Cuomo screamed from the bottom of his heart. This record was as much me as no other one I’d heard before. “Why bother? It’s gonna hurt me!” Yes, my sixteen-year-old self who had just been dumped by his first girlfriend could sing along completely convinced. But all good things must end, and while I still love this record today, more than 25 years later, the honesty of *Pinkerton* (and its relative lack of success) seemed to shatter the band completely. They sort of broke up and then reformed five years later to release the exact opposite of *Pinkerton*: a blatant rip-off of their successful *Blue Album* formula, only this time with zero emotion and honesty in the voice and lyrics. A good record, as many thought. I remember disagreeing with a girl I hung out with at the time who was also a Weezer fan and thought the *Green Album* was great, while I just felt betrayed. After that, I’d always check out every new record they released and was always disappointed in the same way (with the exception of 2016’s *White Album*, getting back to where I started this text, which again weirdly managed to tap into their early honesty, only to be followed once again by meaningless boring records after). This band is a phenomenon. They recorded one of the most honest and emotional records ever made, and at the same time they released some of the worst, terrible, shitty albums in the history of rock music. If schizophrenia was a band, it would be Weezer.

Skunk Anansie, *Stoosh* (1996)

Millie Manders (Millie Manders and the Shut Up)

One of my all-time favourite albums is *Stoosh* by Skunk Anansie. The first time I heard this album, I was 17 and had only just started to really explore my own musical tastes and direction. I knew I could sing and had had lessons at 15, but needed to hone my own style too. Skin’s voice showed me what it was to be truly

vocally dextrous. She has it all – range, soul, rock, screams... I was in awe of the way she could switch between styles. The lyrics were incredible to me too. So much anger and pain in songs that had hooks and bounce all over them. I must have listened to it on repeat a hundred times, and I tried to emulate the vocal sounds singing along. Skin was probably as much of a vocal tutor to me as my private singing teacher was at the time. I bought every album after that. I am still a huge fan, but have yet to see Skunk Anansie live. Perhaps one day stars (and tour schedules) will align to make that happen.

Björk, *Homogenic* (1997)

Áine Mangaoang (author, *I See Music': Beyoncé, YouTube, and the Question of Signed-Songs*)

Growing up in small town Ireland, my twelve-year-old-self had little hope of ever stumbling upon Björk's *Homogenic* when it was first released in 1997. I moved to Cork a few years later to study music, and thanks to a part-time job at a record store, I used my staff discount to slowly and steadily become acquainted with Björk's back catalogue. I started with *Debut* (1993) and *Post* (1995) before working my way up to *Volta* (2007) at which point I had quit the weekend job in order to focus on my studies (but really, in favour of playing some real-life gigs).

Of all her albums, *Homogenic's* sonic palette of volcanic beats and sumptuous strings had my teenage ears hooked. Although it was already a few years old by the time I first heard it, to me *Homogenic* still sounded so intensely and ever-so-shimmeringly new. The opening tracks seemed to jump to life with a sort of primal instinct. From the first few pulsating, trip hop beats of *'Hunter'* with its fuzzy bass laid under Björk's exquisite voice, and the urgent string parts felt like nothing else I'd ever heard before (except, of course, Björk). Her lyrics were equally unique, fluctuating between saccharine sentiments in *'All Is Full of Love'* – “You'll be given love/You'll be taken care of” to poking fun at Scandinavian mentality in *'Hunter'* – “I thought I could organize freedom/how Scandinavian of me”. The magnificent “state of emergency” Björk sings about with such fierce affection in an ode to best friend *'Jóga,'* are just part of what make this album so utterly irresistible to me.

Björk pushes boundaries constantly, bending and creating new genres to fit her sound. Her glistening synth set against harsh “volcanic” beats, furry basslines and playful drop section act as a precursor to dubstep. As a young violinist, I was captivated by her ability to add such sweeping string sections to her avant-pop

productions. To my ears, her vocals are so distinct, so raw, that even when she sings tenderly in tracks like *'Jóga'* and *'Unravel,'* a sense of urgency remains throughout, pushing the song (and the album) ever forward. In a(nother) quintessentially Icelandic love-song, the lulling ballad *'Unravel'* threads a metaphor of love and loss that unravels in a ball of yarn, at once evoking Icelandic myths and fairytales over a minimalist soundtrack of a sparse church organ and a distant, reverberated drum machine. The poetic impetus heard in tracks like *'Bachelorette'* radiate from the outset, opening in full theatrical flair with the brazen sounds of accordion, horns, timpani and string ensemble as Björk commands “I'm a fountain of blood, in the shape of a girl.” Add to all this the host of stunning and surreal music videos for *Homogenic's* singles (in particular those directed by Michel Gondry and Chris Cunningham) that only served to draw me into Björk's wild and deliciously weird world even more. This is the album that solidified her as the ultimate '90s multimodal, multimedia artist.

The hundreds of hours I spent listening to *Homogenic* (usually on CD, and often on my trusty Sony discman) while poring over the liner notes kept me occupied for many a long bus journey between Cork, Wexford and Dublin. Re-listening to the album in recent weeks has been like visiting an old friend; a source of infinite comfort in a world gone mad. Looking back now, little did I know then that my love of Björk's music would lead to the “emotional landscapes” of Iceland (and later, the Nordic region more generally) becoming my home for much of my adult life. How Scandinavian of me.

Rancid, *Life Won't Wait* (1998)

Matt Oastler (3 dBs Down)

1998 was very much a formative year in my life. Having turned 18 that year I was rapidly finding out about punk rock and in particular bands from the EpiFat So-Cal scene. These discoveries would not only shape my taste in music for at least the next 25 years but would also go a long way to cementing life-long bonds with bandmates and fellow gig-goers. I already enjoyed guitar music, thanks to my older brother getting me into grunge via a joining bedroom wall as a young teen. But suddenly I was being exposed to an exciting, blisteringly paced melodic racket.

And I loved it. Finding out that the likes of Bad Religion and NOFX had about 10 albums that I could go back, buy and devour in a kind of audio orgy was so exciting. Not only was there a vast backlog of albums I could catch up on

from these bands – there were also career-high releases being made at that very moment. One such album was Rancid's *Life Won't Wait*.

I was already very familiar with the band's previous release – the flawless 19-track *And Out Come the Wolves*. What I wasn't familiar with was the anticipation of waiting for a new record to be released by a band from this exciting scene. *Life Won't Wait* didn't disappoint. I remember putting it on and feeling like the album was exploding out of my speakers in a frenzy of harmonica, steel drums and loud guitars. Not exactly what I was expecting but I loved it. Within those diverse 22 tracks, there were plenty of ska punk and punk rock anthems to satisfy my expectations. The ska tune 'Hooligans' soundtracked that year and I'd put it on in my local rock pub at any given opportunity.

I started playing in a punk rock band myself at that time and we covered 'Black Lung'. Our bass player was good enough to play those Matt Freeman bass lines while the rest of us muddled through. I was in dreamland. Some 25 years later and I'm listening to the album as I write this. It's impressive for a record to feature a number of classic ska punk rock tunes, but the sheer expansive nature of it is something else. Plus listening to 'Hooligans' takes me back to being a teenager every single time. And who wouldn't enjoy that?

Less Than Jake, *Hello Rockview* (1998)

James Hendicott (author, *CONIFA: Football For The Forgotten: The Untold Story of Football's Alternative World Cup*)

In 2000, I was 16, and living in a rural town in Wiltshire known for its particularly elderly population. I went to school, I worked in the local supermarket, and music, to me, meant Oasis, The Verve, and the occasional bit of Prodigy or Placebo at a party in someone's back garden. Then, in the local McDonald's, someone stuck a headphone in my ear, and blasted what are now, to me, immortal opening words: "Last one out of Liberty City, burn it to the ground."

Music seems to have a host of "gateway drugs," the band that introduce you to a sound. For me, the upbeat, trumpet-infused pop punk of Less Than Jake were my gateway into the heavier stuff. *Hello Rockview* is perhaps their most iconic album, featuring a suited, Superhero-posed office worker on the front cover, what's inside is a boisterous celebration of angsty boredom and self-analysis that tends to annoy the 'real punks' because of its relative lack of politics and its upbeat ska vibes. For me, it spoke to hometown boredom and a need for space, for musical expression, and the idea of how much more there was to be discovered. I would

be 18 before my gigging world expanded beyond the local arts centre, where Terrorvision and Ash were the closest touring acts to punk (yeah, I know...). At best, the occasional metal acts would turn up, including one Medulla Nocte, who stunned our small town by playing a show wearing only clingfilm.

Hello Rockview was my soundtrack to it all. 'History of a Boring Town' became the essence to small-town teenage boredom. 'Five State Drive' was the theme to escapism, and 'Help Save The Youth Of America From Exploding' the backing track to our own petty teenage rebellion and resistance.

When I turned 18, Less Than Jake toured the UK, and I followed them, to Glastonbury, to Reading Festival, and to a series of gigs across the south of England, blowing all the money from my supermarket job. My friends and I stood in the front row clutching a huge blue and yellow flag that said, 'I Stalk Less Than Jake', a reference to their cult song 'My Own Flag'. The band gave us plescs, and beers, and occasionally edited their setlist on the fly after we shouted out tracks. In Southampton, the whole band crowded around us, three feet away as they blasted 'My Own Flag' into the ether. In between, we explored record shops, and drank in parks, and wasted days in Camden, or Portsmouth seafront, or pulling donuts in car parks in a friend's Fiat Punto that he later drove into an old oak tree.

They were the best days, the kind of teenage memories that stick with you. My taste moved on, but I still go every time Less Than Jake are in town, most recently in Dublin as my first show after covid, where I stood in the mosh pit and openly wept with relief that music was back. I still melt to the opening words of *Hello Rockview*, the theme of my teenage years, and escape into a different life. Last one of our Liberty City, burn it to the ground.

Plush, *More You Becomes You* (1998)

Alan Licht (musician; author, *Common Tones: Selected Interviews with Artists and Musicians 1995–2020*)

There used to be a magazine called *Musician: Player and Listener*, and for me this record occupies a space that reflects my experience as both. A stark 30-minute collection of nine songs played and sung alone at the piano by Liam Hayes, *More You...* is a rare example of an album that is neither a representation (or transposition) of a stage show, nor a multi-tracked concoction that could not be replicated in concert, as many studio albums tend to be. Liam had worked up the songs with a band but was dissatisfied with their playing and finally decided to go it solo.

In 1999 I was asked by the label, Drag City, to play bass in Plush for a label package tour in Japan (with Royal Trux and Smog; the same band members comprised Plush and Royal Trux but playing different instruments in each band). So I first heard this album with the purpose of performing the material live, and while I learned the songs more from a murky live cassette of the previous band lineup playing them than from the album itself, I certainly listened to both in tandem. In this way I encountered *More You Becomes You* as a finished product that also functioned as a preliminary demo for fleshing out the songs live rather than for recording them – an album that is complete but also incomplete, at least relative to my task of providing bass parts for its contents. I still love all the songs on this record, but more importantly I love the recordings because they were almost expressly “alternate” versions, as they deviated from the original intention of being realised by a band, while still feeling fully realised, as one would expect from a studio recording. *More You...* is very much in the Burt Bacharach/baroque pop tradition of the ‘60s and ‘70s, and the arrangements are tricky. We had only limited rehearsals before the tour, and I never played any of the songs perfectly in Japan. But there’s no bass lines on the album, so when I listen to it I don’t have to feel bad about not doing them justice, yet another plus.

Neutral Milk Hotel, *In the Aeroplane Over the Sea* (1998)

Amanda Palmer (Dresden Dolls; author, *The Art of Asking: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Let People Help*)

The very first night I rehearsed with Brian Viglione (and thereby officially started our band, The Dresden Dolls), was a red-letter day for the history books. We barely knew one another and had met at a party, mentioning to one another that we both wanted to start a band. We jammed out all evening in the basement of the arts collective where I lived in Boston, and we had that heady, infatuated feeling of having found a musical soulmate. That night, we kept cementing our new-found friendship and band-mate-hood, and Brian asked if I wanted to come to his sharehouse for pie and communion. When we got there, we hung out in his room and just kept talking about music, music, music. The Cure, The Doors, PJ Harvey, Swans, Nick Cave, Depeche Mode, Leonard Cohen, Nirvana – all the music we had in common and loved. Then Brian asked me if I knew Neutral Milk Hotel. “Neutral Milk ... what?” I said. He took out the CD *In the Aeroplane Over the Sea* and for 45 minutes, we didn’t speak, we just lay on his bed, listening to the cries and dreams from the speakers. The lyrics came straight from Jeff Mangum’s

inner workshop of pain, trauma, yearning and psychedelic obsession with the past, the wars, Anne Frank, the era of the golden age of radio. I found myself lost in his world. The drums crashed, the horns blared, then vanished, leaving just Jeff and a guitar and some of the saddest words and strums I’d ever heard. I cried. Brian cried. We held hands. Our band was, sort of, baptized by this record.

In a weird way, I think, this album the *Sgt Pepper’s* of my little generation – an album that wormed its way into so many people’s hearts. If you were there, you know. The other night, I was hanging out with an Irish banjo player in New Zealand. We were playing one another music that we loved and I said: “Do you know Neutral Milk Hotel?” He shook his head, and for 45 minutes, we lay on a bed and said nothing. It’s that kind of record. Go listen, maybe with someone you love.

The Birthday Party, *Live 1981–82* (1999)

Brian Viglione (Dresden Dolls)

It’s fair to say that this is the only album I’ve connected with that within the first 10 seconds of sound, yanked me by the hair, and turned me into a fan for life.

The first second opens with the shriek of an audience member that rings out over the hall; second two, the first emaciated guitar notes of the riff; second three begins with a piercing feedback that seems to immediately signal to the human nervous system that: *SOMETHING VERY BAD IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN* and you are about to enter “a world of shit” akin to Private Pyle’s mental breakdown in *Full Metal Jacket*. The guitars scratch their way across the riff twice and on second eight, a punishing rhythmic smashing of cymbals heralding that lamenting declaration, “I AM THE KING...”, and then the explosion of sound for the next 17 songs.

I love this record for providing both the kind of cathartic release I needed at a very stressful stage in life, and the immense amounts of creative stimulation from ingesting this wild musical paradox, like hearing meticulously crafted chaos. Hearing that insane combination of reckless abandon/total control in creating sound was very inspiring.

Hand in hand with the power and brute intensity of the band is a tremendous sophistication and depth, and to hear a band with that potential to be unleashing it in a live recording, chemistry ablaze, is the ultimate listening experience, for me.

This album emblemizes that sacred experience in my young life of poring over an unfamiliar record collection, being struck by an album cover that already

gets your imagination spinning, thinking “What’s THIS all about...?”, sitting down in a quiet room alone with no other distractions and giving your full, undivided attention to a piece of art you’re not even fully aware yet is changing your life, and broadening your understanding of and capacity for creative expression.

“Thank you, I love your haircut as well...”

Mike Ness, *Cheating at Solitaire* (1999)

Stephen Rapid (The Radiators, Trouble Pilgrims)

For many years after The Radiators had gone their separate ways, it was tradition for Pete Holiday, Philip Chevron and myself to get together once a year, usually around Christmas, to swap stories and see where our paths had taken us since we last met. It was late 2003 and Joe Strummer had just passed the year before. I mentioned that there was a Strummer Tribute night happening in Dublin a few days later and said in jest that if we had known about it a little earlier we might have been able to contribute. Philip suggested I get in touch with the organisers and see if they would like us to play a couple of songs.

This slightly surprised me as, other than the AIDS benefit in Hawkins House in 1987, we had all resisted the idea of reforming The Radiators to play the old material. Nonetheless, it felt like the right time and the promoters warmly received the idea of us playing a few numbers, as somewhat unannounced guests.

It was a bit of a scramble to put together a rhythm section at short notice, so I suggested Cáit O’Riordan, whom I had gotten to know through working with Elvis Costello, and my son Gareth on drums. The evening of the show, we gathered around the corner from the venue in Cáit’s apartment. Using the arm of a sofa as a drum, we quickly ran through the songs, brushed the dust off the leather jackets and walked to the Music Centre. We plugged in, turned up and off we went, just like we used to. We blasted through our short two-song set, as though we had a point to prove and in honour of the late, great Clash frontman. The reaction was warm and positive and it felt really good to play again. It was very quickly agreed that we would set a date and write an album’s worth of new material. Thus, The Radiators Plan 9 was formed and the album *Trouble Pilgrim* was born.

The point of this intro was that one of the songs we chose to play was also a tribute to Johnny Cash. We played ‘*Ring of Fire*’ in a hi-energy version based on the cover version by California punk band Social Distortion. The leader of that band Mike Ness subsequently went on to record a couple of albums under his own name that were a perfect combination of old school country and hard-edged

punk. The first of these albums, *Cheating at Solitaire*, released in early 1999 was a mix of original songs and diverse covers including Hank Williams Sr’s ‘*You Win Again*’, Danny Dill and Marijohn Wilkin’s tragic ‘*Long Black Veil*’ and Bob Dylan’s ‘*Don’t Think Twice, It’s All Right*’. All fitting with the overall cheating theme and the chosen context.

Two members of Royal Crown Revue provided the robust rhythm section. In many ways, the Telecaster twang and pedal steel guitar of Chris Lawrence was essential to the success of these recordings. He was a former member of The Neon Angels, who had an understanding of how to play in tandem with Ness’ high-octane Gibson Les Paul. I had the pleasure of watching Lawrence play with his former band in Dublin. They later played some tours together and Lawrence was also a part of the team on the second album of country covers titled *Under the Influences*. Joining Ness were guests Bruce Springsteen, Brian Setzer and Billy Zoom, adding additional vocals and guitar contributions.

While Ness’ voice was edgier than some of the new traditionalist singers of that era, it was imbued with passion, rasp and personality that is always honest, set against the fervent musical backdrop. ‘*Crime Don’t Pay*’ is a cautionary tale given an old school rock’n’roll outing with sax solo setting its downbeat tone. On a similar trajectory is ‘*No Man’s Friend*’, slow-paced, again with the sax upfront giving it its late-night, wet-street, noir sheen.

For the title track, Ness takes a step back and with the mandolin it would be recognisable to many Pogues fans as a sort of kindred spirit. ‘*Dope Fiend Blues*’ lures you into its junk-world. ‘*Misery Loves Company*’ also takes us to a darker place. This may lead one to think that this is something of a depressing listen, yet there is the solace that the blues (and punk) can offer by sharing its pain in a way that helps to ease that burden. ‘*Ballad of a Lonely Man*’ finds us back in the world of cow-punk and it is an album highpoint. One of his other passions is displayed on ‘*I’m In Love With My Car*’, which is exactly what you would expect from its title.

There are 15 tracks on *Cheating at Solitaire* that offer a distinct perspective from a punk rock viewpoint on roots music that is aligned by offering three (or four) chords and a very personal truth. Listening back after some time this album still has the power to impress and make me realise why I was so impressed when I first heard it. It is one of many such albums I could point to but is the one I have chosen. It has the ability to place conflict, both personal and wider, in a compelling setting.

Flogging Molly, *Swagger* (2000)

Michael Croland (author, *Oy Oy Oy Gevalt! Jews and Punk; Celtic Punk Superfan: Recaps & Reflections Chapbook, 2002–22*)

I first became acquainted with Flogging Molly because of *Swagger*'s opening track, 'Salty Dog'. Hearing the seemingly incongruous mix of an Irish jig with punk energy had me stomping my feet in my friend Will's car so exuberantly that he pleaded with me to stop because it distracted him while driving. It's no wonder that the band's beloved annual cruise is named after this signature song. 'Selfish Man' and 'The Worst Day Since Yesterday' compel me to shout and sing along, respectively. 'The Likes of You Again' is a perfect show opener, with its building intro bursting into an explosion of energy, and I've especially related to front man Dave King's touching take on losing his father since mine passed away. At seven minutes (about 12 minutes when performed live), 'Black Friday Rule' is the septet's magnum opus. Its killer guitar solo is unlike any other in punk rock, and from the fiddle solo through the coda speaks to my wannabe-Irish soul. The reel 'Devil's Dance Floor' forces listeners from a punk/rock background to appreciate how much a tin whistle can make you want to dance, comparable to Flogging Molly's broader incorporation of folk instruments throughout their oeuvre.

In the more than two decades since Flogging Molly released *Swagger*, I've fallen head over heels for ethnic punk, writing one book about Celtic punk and two about Jewish punk. *Swagger* still revs me up and brings a smile to my face, and its songs are what I most enjoy – and rock out to – during Flogging Molly concerts.

The Weakerthans, *Left and Leaving* (2000)

Larry Livermore (The Lookouts)

In 1998 I was introduced to a Canadian band called The Weakerthans. Over the next decade or so, I immersed myself in their work, following them like a latter-day Deadhead around Canada, the United States, and Europe, and getting to know the band along with many of their friends and fellow travellers.

I became convinced – and my opinion has not changed – that they were the greatest band ever to come out of Canada (no small feat given that country's rich musical tradition). I feel equally certain that their singer and chief lyricist, John K. Samson, should be elected Canada's poet laureate, and hold that position for life, if not longer. The Weakerthans made four albums before they dissolved, disappeared, went on hiatus, whatever it is you call it when bands stop playing

and recording, but don't formally break up. All the albums are wonderful, but the second, *Left and Leaving*, remains a fundamental element of my musical geography, as fresh as though I heard it for the first time only moments ago, as endearingly timeworn as if I'd been listening to it all my life.

The album is filled with treasures, but the title song especially haunts me. It evokes bittersweet memories, having served as soundtrack to the demise of an ill-starred and ill-conceived romance. But memories, as the song reminds us, rust and erode into lists of all we've been given, and that stay with us when all else has faded away. Melancholy and wistful? Sure, but the outro's "yellow highway lines" also lead us into a future as vast and limitless with possibility as all Canada itself, where the prairies of the Weakerthans' home province stretch for a thousand kilometres in every direction. It's a message of regret for past missteps and misapprehensions, coupled with the boundless hope and inspiration that is music's eternal gift to us.

American Nightmare, 'American Nightmare' EP (2000)

Chris Wrenn (Bridge Nine Records)

In the summer of 2000, I was spending a few late nights cross-legged on my floor assembling record covers by hand. They featured imagery of distressed stars and stripes – a play on the band's name, American Nightmare. Each one was folded at the top and bottom so the cover was split horizontally across the centre, enveloping a vinyl record inside. To keep it closed, a strip of cardstock with the band's logo across the front was printed and each had to be glued together one-by-one – a monumental task as there were over 1,300 copies of the record pressed.

"Fucking Jake Bannon," I thought to myself in dismay. Jacob was the front man of Converge and was a celebrated vocalist and accomplished visual artist. I was a fan of his art direction and glad that he was available to design my label's seventh release, but my fingers were covered in dried glue, it was two in the morning, and the weight of this project was taking its toll. I was surrounded by records laid out to dry on every flat surface in the room, each one waiting to be slid inside a protective plastic record sleeve. Wrapping a printed band around each record was a cool detail, but it added about 20 hours of assembly time to the process. I didn't know it then, but these extra details would prove to be more than worth it, because American Nightmare and their self-titled 7" were not only unique in their own right, but it was a record that would go on to

put the band, and my label, on the map. Six years prior to this, I had started the Bridge Nine label in my college dorm room and every inch of my tiny space was filled with records and merchandise. It was more of a glorified hobby during that time as I was only releasing one record a year: a couple for a band from my hometown, others for bands from the Boston area I had met through going to shows. It wasn't until I moved to Boston's Mission Hill neighbourhood after college that the label picked up speed.

In addition to distributing records, I began selling Bridge Nine skateboards at a shop on Newbury Street, a mile-long mix of cool stores and trendy boutiques in Boston's picturesque Back Bay area, and I had befriended the guy who worked the counter there. He had found a narrow, four-story townhouse in Mission Hill and had three spare rooms to fill. I, along with two other friends, moved in during the summer of 1999 and Bridge Nine was officially headquartered out of its sixth consecutive bedroom space. Tim, one of my new roommates, had been the guitarist for Ten Yard Fight, a band that had just played their final performance (which, fun fact, later became the date of the first ever Edge Day). Tim wanted to start a new band and began jamming with friends in his basement bedroom, directly below mine. Ten Yard Fight's roadie, Wes Eisold, became the vocalist of the band and moved into the spare bedroom on my floor. Wes later coined the band's name: American Nightmare. I had been a big fan of Ten Yard Fight and these guys were my friends, so it was an easy decision to offer to release their first record on Bridge Nine. But I had a major problem: I was basically broke and producing a record cost a lot of money.

It was my second year after college and I was making slightly above minimum wage as a window display artist at the largest music retailer in Boston, the three-story Tower Records on Newbury Street. I could just barely afford to live, much less launch a new band that was ready to drop everything and tour. I tried applying for loans from local banks, but they were understandably not willing to extend them to punk fans with no collateral looking to invest in a band. I regularly had side hustles going that helped me raise enough funds to release a record a year – selling bumper stickers to a large mall retailer, building signs for dance clubs in Boston – but I knew I'd have to come up with something that would turn a much larger profit if I was going to give American Nightmare the push that they needed. Luckily, living in Mission Hill meant that I was just a short walk from Fenway Park, the historic baseball stadium where the Boston Red Sox played to over 38,000 fans per game. That many people passing through with money in their pockets meant one thing: opportunity.

The Red Sox are a beloved institution, but hadn't won baseball's top prize, a World Series Championship, in over 80 years. The New York Yankees alternatively had the best winning record in the sport and generations of Boston fans had been tormented by the Yankees' dominance. The Yankees were the city's arch-rivals and this frustration regularly manifested as a chant with "Yaaankeeess succccckkkk!" echoing loudly throughout Fenway Park. It was heard during every game and was twice as loud when Boston played another team that hated the Yankees too. I decided to capitalize on this rivalry, following a long tradition of shitting on the New York Yankees dating back to the late 1970s, and created Yankees Suck merchandise to sell to fans outside of Fenway.

On Opening Day of the 2000 baseball season, I stood on the sidewalk outside of Fenway Park with my friends, anxiously waiting for that first sale as people streamed out into the streets. I didn't have to wait long. Within minutes, people began to line up in front of me and my backpack of Yankees Suck merch got lighter, while the pockets of my jeans filled with cash. By the end of that first outing, I had made more money on the street than my real job paid in a week. Within a month I was able to give American Nightmare and their self-titled debut the financial kickstart that they needed, hand-glued packaging and all. The whole enterprise was rich with irony: Red Sox fans, who for years harassed and even assaulted the punks who hung out down the street from Fenway at the city's beloved music venue The Rat, were now paying money to me that would directly fund a punk release.

"Damn it," I muttered, as I got another paper cut while folding and gluing *American Nightmare's* covers. Cumbersome as the project was, it was exciting to get to this point where the records were nearly ready. Months prior, when my loan requests were denied by bank after bank, I had thought I'd need to track down a silent investor to help get the band and my label to the next level. But the investment I found wasn't silent at all: it took blood, sweat, and most importantly the thunderous sound of 38,000 people all chanting "Yankees Suck." American Nightmare's rise marked a turning point in hardcore-punk, made possible in great part by Red Sox fans unknowingly underwriting them. This record was transformative for Bridge Nine as a label, opening the door to work with many other influential artists in the decades since. It is, without a doubt, one of the most important records to me.

Ghosts and Vodka, *Precious Blood* (2001)

Mercy Harper (Football, etc.)

This record taught me how to play music with Lindsay Minton, the guitarist and vocalist of Football, etc. When we first met, I was already playing in a band, but I really wanted to play with her. The thing was, she played with this twinkly emo style I had never heard and had a hard time wrapping my brain around. I jammed along to *Precious Blood* over and over, making up my own riffs to go along with the sounds instead of really “learning” it. It’s a beautiful and warm record, and although it’s mathy, there’s still so much space to contemplate and explore.

Ghosts and Vodka was a perfect opening into emo for me. I wasn’t ready for the scratchy vocals of Kinsella bands or the raw emotion of Rainer Maria quite yet. I couldn’t stand the crooning pop of more mainstream bands like The Get Up Kids and Saves the Day. As an instrumental band, *Ghosts and Vodka* could worm their way into my eighteen-year-old brain in a way more obviously emo bands couldn’t. Their sound is smart yet unpretentious, energetic yet contemplative, richly textured yet open. This was exactly where I needed to go with my playing to match Lindsay’s style, and *Ghosts and Vodka* allowed me to find my path.

Whereas other records I love are like beloved books or films where I know every line by heart, *Precious Blood* is more like a landscape painting – one that’s been in my house for years, but that depicts a place I’ve never been and will likely never visit. It’s nostalgic, sure, but it will always be a bit foreign to me. This allows me to notice different details and indulge in different emotions each time I explore it. I know this record, but I’ll never be able to fully understand all its sneakily clever twists and turns. That’s why it never feels tired to me.

Moldy Peaches, *Moldy Peaches* (2001)

Pete Bentham (Pete Bentham and the Dinner Ladies)

2001 was a big year for me. I broke up with my partner and moved from the suburbs to Liverpool city centre, where I once again became involved in a thriving DIY punk scene, that eventually led to me forming the band that I now lead. It was also the year that garage rock’n’roll came back into fashion with bands like The Strokes, The Hives and the White Stripes becoming popular. When The Strokes came to Liverpool, they brought with them The Moldy Peaches, a bunch of mates from New York who were part of the “anti-folk” scene, so called because it was acoustic music but without the pretensions of the singer/songwriter scene

and with an irreverence and a sense of humour that barred them from the folk clubs and deadly serious acoustic nights.

The Moldy Peaches show supporting The Strokes was great and they had a full band line-up but the album is basically singer Kimya Dawson and singer and acoustic guitarist Adam Green plus a few friends on various instruments, with most of it recorded on simple recording gear, often in their apartment. Listening to it for the first time, it’s a bit like the first time you hear The Ramones; it’s almost like a joke, in that you can’t believe how lo-fi and almost amateurish it is. But then you find that you can’t listen to anything else. Other records seem so fussy and indulgent after the rawness and purity of the sound of The Moldy Peaches. Also, the more you listen to it, you discover a depth to the lyrics that you don’t notice at first. The words have a childlike quality that is crude (and often downright filthy) with a heartfelt innocence. Bands that use humour (See Madness, Blockheads, Wonk Unit) are often dismissed as novelty acts, as people are too lazy to look below the surface.

It is exactly this childlike quality, as with Syd Barrett and Jonathan Richman, that gives you the feeling of freedom to feel part of it and to do something yourself that makes this simple music so inspiring. Being from Liverpool, The Beatles cast a big shadow. And there is no doubt about how amazing they were. But that music is too perfect, too rounded to inspire me. It’s to be looked at and admired, not to be embraced. Someone has written sleeve notes on The Moldy Peaches album that say: “By making their music appear crude and simplistic, The Moldy Peaches are mocking our own superficiality. They are saying – look at yourself.”

That’s proper punk rock that is.

Hot Water Music, *A Flight and a Crash* (2001)

Tom Dumarey (PunkRockTheory.com)

I still vividly remember hearing Hot Water Music’s *A Flight and a Crash* for the first time back when it came out in 2001. That’s because it made me realise I had been extremely misguided. Up until that point, my knowledge of punk rock was limited to bands like NOFX, The Offspring, Bad Religion and Pennywise. I also spent inordinate amounts of time listening to metal and – yikes – nu metal, thinking I had somehow stumbled across the most badass music ever made.

Then, all of a sudden, there were these four guys from the swamps of Gainesville, Florida, playing their hearts out, burning through 14 songs in 40 minutes and completely redefining not just punk rock, but music in general

for me. It hit me the second the opening track races out the gate. This was as aggressive and melodic as anything I had heard before, but with the intensity ramped up tenfold and somehow still managing to sound melancholic and warm. I got goosebumps when I heard Chuck Ragan belt out the line “give me a reason not to lash out” at the beginning of ‘*Jack of All Trades*’ and the 145 seconds of pure bliss that is ‘*Paper Thin*’ left me with my mouth wide open. And by the time I got to the climactic ending of ‘*Swinger*’, the slow burn of ‘*She Takes It So Well*’ or the downright epicness of ‘*In the Gray*’, this album had all but knocked me to the floor.

There’s an awful lot to like about *A Flight and a Crash*, and by extension every other Hot Water Music album: the gravelly vocals courtesy of Chris Wollard and Chuck Ragan, the heart-on-sleeve, confessional-like lyrics, the jagged guitar lines that shouldn’t work together but somehow always do and the tight and talented rhythm section that is Jason Black and George Rebelo.

Twenty-one years down the line, I still feel the same level of excitement whenever I listen to *A Flight and a Crash*. Or any other Hot Water Music album for that matter. They just released *Feel the Void*, their ninth full-length and easily one of their best. It’s a beautiful testament to this band’s prowess and ability. And they did it without singing about doing it all for the nookie or prancing around a forest at night with medieval weapons. Want to hear some real badass music? Give *A Flight and a Crash* a spin.

... And You Will Know Us By The Trail of Dead, *Source Tags & Codes* (2002)
Andy Pohl (Tsunami Bomb; Sell the Heart Records)

I remember quite clearly the first time I heard of Trail of Dead. It was watching them perform live on a short-lived television program called *Farm Club*. For anyone not aware of it, it was basically a showcase for unsigned bands, and also served as a vehicle to promote larger artists affiliated with the labels that were sponsoring the show (mainly Interscope, Universal, Def Jam and a few others). Host Matt Pinfield introduced them, and they completely obliterated the screen for about 3.5 minutes during a rendition of ‘*Richter Scale Madness*’. They left quite an impression on me, but I didn’t really see much more hype about them after that.

Fast forward to a few years later – I caught wind of their new album, *Source Tags & Codes*, at a local record store. I picked up a copy and was immediately drawn in by it. It was as bombastic and intense as I remembered them being on

Farm Club, and it held my attention the whole album through. I knew this was an important album, and an important band.

I think what helps to make this such an important album to me, was that it was a reminder to me just what can be done with guitars, bass, drums, and vocals. There are layers upon layers of some of the most beautiful arrangements on this album. The dynamic shifts within tracks like ‘*How Near, How Far*’, ‘*Heart in the Hand of the Matter*’ and album opener ‘*It Was There That I Saw You*’ carry you along on an epic journey.

The album is a perfect mix of progressive rock, punk and emo. While I’m sure there are plenty of artists you could cite as influences, what truly sets this album – and the band for that matter – apart is that they have managed to create their own style and sound, which you can’t easily pinpoint to any one, two or even 10 other artists. Not unlike other bands/albums from favourites of mine like Fugazi’s *End Hits* or Sonic Youth’s *Experimental Jet Set, Trash and No Star*, this album and this band just cannot be pigeonholed.

The Innocence Mission, *Befriended* (2003)

Patrick Barrett (Arrivalists, Hedge Schools)

“In music, silence is more important than sound” – Miles Davis

Train journey from London to Brighton, 2003: Sambas, check; headphones, check; windows to gaze out of, check; music mag for the reading miles, check – and from those printed pages a review of a record I’ve carried with me ever since, and forever will. *Befriended* was the sixth record by The Innocence Mission. Unknown to me, the cover art printed in the review drew me in. A sepia toned photo of a kiss, an embrace, a hug, a friendship. I’ve always bought records by gut, by instinct; this, no different. The printed review of it intrigued me: references to The Cowboy Junkies; vocal comparisons to the sublime Stina Nordenstam – I was in.

I stepped off the train in Brighton, hoping against hope I’d find this utterly obscure, quiet, unannounced magic in a shop. I did. Pre-streaming days in 2003, as they were, I’d to wait till I arrived back home to Dublin to load it up to my player. It has never left my side since. The underlying tone of the writing is kindness, is understanding, is simplicity. There are notes where notes should be, and none where none should be. Reverbs hanging in mid-air, voice, guitar, piano, suspended in the beauty of Karen Peris’s voice. *The Trinity Session* Cowboy Junkies reference made sense, landed, hung there. ‘*No Storms Come*’, ‘*Look for Me*

as *You Go By*, 'When Mac Was Swimming' – songs that have guided me, lighthouse moments, when you need the solace, when you need the breath, I've reached for this record for years, a recording woven with the fabric of kindness, the message of gesture, the touches of empathy. Life as I try to live it, is about gesture, small marks throughout the day, breadcrumbs, I suppose that's why this record matters, it makes me feel alive, I measure my humanity, my humility against it.

A musical spirit level. A balancing. Find it.

OutKast, *Speakerboxx/The Love Below* (2003)

Chris Harford (the Band of Changes, Rogue Oliphant)

1972 is my favorite year for music. The apex of the recording gear and the bands at the time appeared to peak, Big Star's *No. 1* record, Stevie Wonder's *Talking Book*, Bill Withers *Still Bill*, Bowie's *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust & the Spiders from Mars*, Rolling Stones *Exile on Main Street*, Neil Young's *Harvest* and the list goes on and on. I have a feeling a lot has to do with the fact that I was an impressionable kid with access to my older siblings record collection. I was ten in '72.

When my daughter Amanda turned ten in 2003 I have a vivid memory of driving around Miami in a convertible rental car with her and a bunch of her friends. I would cringe, turning the volume down when the song 'Stacy's Mom' came on the radio, once again, so I opted to pop in the newly acquired Speakerboxx CD into the sound system. (Mind you if 'Hey Ya' came on the radio it was celebratory and an obvious two and half minute pop masterpiece thus the volume would be turned up full blast. Of course, there are those that argue 'Stacy's Mom' is a pop masterpiece as well, just not my thing. We all have our opinions, no? And music is NOT a competition I must remind myself).

Speakerboxx/The Love Below is a double album released by the duo Outkast. *Speakerboxxxx* being the solo album by Big Boi and *The Love Below* containing the aforementioned 'Hey Ya' by Andre 3000. Over the years it's *Speakerboxx* which has endured with repeated listens while earning favorite album status. I prefer to listen to it in its entirety, generally on road trips or traveling on trains and planes, of course any time I'm on the dance floor too with 'The Way You Move' rivaling Andre's masterpiece for pop perfection. That horn line alone! That groove! Big Boi is a wonderful producer as well.

Speakerboxx opened the door into a brand-new audio world, refreshing, joyous, terrifying, curious and masterful. Nearly twenty years later this album still sounds fresh and clean and hangs with the albums from '72 as if it's an old

friend and we're hanging out down in the basement, listening on headphones, a magical world unto itself speaking truth about how we act as humans.

The Distillers, *Coral Fang* (2003)

Molly (Vulpynes)

Challenging as it is to narrow down a single album, I choose *Coral Fang* by The Distillers. Growing up I absorbed musical influences from all around me. I listened to what the older rockers in school raved about and at home I was soaking in whatever heavy metal and punk my parents were blasting.

The Distillers were one of the first bands I discovered on my own. I was a stubborn teenager who became slightly annoyed if anyone else around me was into them, simply because The Distillers were MINE. Thankfully I got over that. I was first drawn to the band from seeing photos of Brody in *Kerrang!* and *Metal Hammer*. There were very few female-led punk bands being covered in mainstream media back then. I had their previous album, *Sing Sing Death House* and although I also treasure that album, it was *Coral Fang* that hit me like a hammer in the best way possible.

Every song is impeccable, I can't skip any of them. The melodies still raise the hair on my neck. It is raw, unpolished, unfiltered. Truly why I love this album is because it's honest. You feel the anguish and the sincerity in Brody's screams as she purges the torment of falling in and out of love. A disgracefully underrated guitarist, Brody's playing is fast, infectious and catchy AF. That woman can write a hook. Standout tracks are 'Dismantle Me' and the guttural 'The Hunger'. Nu metal and emo passed me by, so *Coral Fang* is my personal embodiment of emo. I'm feeling emotional even writing this. The Distillers were the band I needed as a teenager and still do. I'm eagerly awaiting the follow-up 19 years later.

The Postal Service, *Give Up* (2003)

Michael Terry (The Jukebox Romantics)

When music opinions are subjective, how can one measure what perfection is? Some will even say things like "This is really good, but not my thing," or just everyone knows XYZ band is important but doesn't speak to them at all (I'm looking at you Beatles, Led Zeppelin, The Who). Now that I lost some of you after the blasphemy of the holy three above, let me get into my choice of favourite album (or one of them, 'cause picking one is impossible). It's 2003, and I'm 16/17 and deep into street punk, oi, going to The Bouncing Souls and Leftöver Crack

shows every weekend in the Lower East Side and playing in some of my first punk bands. One of my friends showed me ‘*Such Great Heights*’ on a mini disc player and I was like, “What the fuck is this? This is awesome.” Completely out of my current wheelhouse of musical taste at the time. So I went out and bought it immediately and for basically 10 years following I don’t think a week went by where I didn’t listen to *Give Up*. So, why?

The Postal Service’s *Give Up* is an anytime album. Yeah, it gets slow and dark but there are songs on there that can fit in with whatever mood you may be in. Dancey, slow, reflective, love songs, break up songs, love making songs, it has it all. I can’t tell you how many times I put this record on while driving on tour while the band sleeps as the sun comes up on an early morning haul or the same could be said to calm the post-show nerves as we drove through the night to our next gig or home. It’s my go-to airplane take-off record. There is not a bad song. It’s all killer, no filler. The band barely toured on it. They released a few songs here or there but this is their only album. Luckily I got to see them when they reunited for the 10-year anniversary and played a couple shows. It was an out of body experience.

The fact that *Give Up* was recorded fully distanced back in 2003 is insane to me as a musician even in 2022 with all the means of recording and file sharing now. Even at the height of the pandemic I felt like fully remote music, being made not in the same room as my band members, was useless and didn’t capture our energy or most bands’ energy who did the same. But these wizards pulled it off and then some using the USPS 20 fucken years ago. Brilliance. This record is perfection.

Muse, *Absolution* (2003)

Lev Naumov (Russian writer)

Eternal Vow to Sing for *Absolution*

Music is accompanying me almost always, for as long as I can remember. I can hardly recall, but anyway I’m pretty sure that my parents were listening to jazz with me. My youth was tightly connected with rock radio. Later I started to pay more attention to songs with deep poetry. Then something more experimental and classic at the same time. During a certain period of my life I was even writing about music. Now I’m listening while thinking, running, driving etc. – probably, I just can’t live in silence.

The fact is that music is a kind of mirror. It reflects the state of the soul. This makes such art form very special and distinguishable from others: for example, a book is usually changing your inside spirit, when music shows it up, making

it clear primarily for you. Obviously, sometimes such opportunity can be more topical and useful.

Why am I saying all this? The fact is that my favourite music is not a constant category. It was and still is permanently changing with me. Noticeable genre or aesthetical alterations clearly designate shifts of life periods. And here it goes: I think that Muse’s CD *Absolution* is the one which belongs to my personal top list for the longest time. I listened to it when I was happy and when I was sad. When I felt powerful and when I was ruined. When I love and when I hate. The key thing is that all the time it sounds extremely close and important, because it is not for “now”, it is for “always.”

Characterizing songs by Muse with some epithets, I will find a lot, but it would never be “contemporary,” because they seem not to be related to the moment at all. In some sense, they are “always” “contemporary.” Most common and usual cultural discourse consists of yearning for the “Golden Age”, for the time of perfection, for the canonical beauty which states no questions, but grants answers.

Saying this, I’m trying to reproduce my initial impression made by *Absolution*. From the first notes I felt that it is as perfect as *Symphony number 9* by Beethoven, *Tocatta and Fugue in D-minor* by Bach, Mozart’s *Requiem* or Paganini’s *Caprice number 24*. Believe me, there are no common rapturous sentences here. The comparability in art is definitely questionable and very subjective. But there is a certain level of artistic mastery and elegance above which even an idea of comparison, of hierarchy, of “quality” is completely useless. We can speak only about parallels, references and barely noticeable nods from one author to another. Moreover, the nods which we, as listeners or naive culturologists, address to someone may be just personal nods to us.

Absolution is a completely necessary and even required notion for human beings. This is something that distinguishes humanity from the group of amoebae. It is natural, it can be religious or purely spiritual. We can treat it as a form of love and this is what Muse do in some sense. Regardless of the guilt, such feeling is the key attribute of ethics and morality. You know, choosing the title for the current text, I was thinking a lot about the second word. “Eternal...” what? Is this a “need”? Or “importance”? Or “obligation”? All of these words fit, but for me it is more like a “vow.” Vow also builds bridges between Muse and medieval theosophy and monastic traditions. So, with this CD Bellamy & Co. brings today’s human to the level of perfection of the Vitruvian man. Such task is not just ambitious. In theory, as a plan, it sounds impossible or even crazily utopian. But for Muse it is already

an achievement. And I can't forget to mention that taking into account what my country is doing right now with its brotherly nation, I think that we all will sing for absolution more than ever before.

Courtney Love, *America's Sweetheart* (2004)

Suzi Moon (Civet, Suzi Moon)

On February 10, 2004, Virgin Records released the debut solo album by Courtney Love, shrewdly titled *America's Sweetheart*. I was just shy of 15 years old and was too young to have been affected by the whole '90s riot grrl thing. Up to this point, I'd been watching *Lizzie McGuire* on TV and listening to all the Warped Tour pop punk bands. When my sister brought *America's Sweetheart* home from the record store I quickly snatched it, captivated by the cover art featuring a beautiful, ethereal rock'n'roll pin-up angel on the cover, coyly smirking as if she held all the secrets of the universe in her soul. Turns out she did. I slipped the CD into my player and was hit with distorted guitars and a voice so raspy and powerful, so intense and compelling, it swallowed me whole. When Courtney growls, "Oh God you owe me one more song/so I can prove to you that I am so much better than him," I was baptized in 'Mono'. Here was a woman singing with urgency, pain, and guttural emotion unlike anything I had ever heard before. She spoke to my angst with a pure and biting delivery that made me feel seen. The lyrics on *America's Sweetheart* are some of the deepest, sharpest, and bravest I've heard a woman belt out.

While the record was considered a commercial failure post-Hole and referred to as "le disaster" by Love and co-writer extraordinaire Linda Perry, I wonder if they have any idea the impact their record had on girls like me. Love is quoted as saying that Virgin Records took liberties with mixing/mastering and album art, resulting in a final product that she was discontented with. The album hardly got the promotional budget it deserved, and Virgin Records allowed it to be overshadowed by tabloid headlines and gossip about Courtney Love's legal battles and drug addiction instead of focusing on the incredible album they had on their hands. Courtney Love, a true rockstar – unabashedly bleeding out her story for all the world to judge only to have her artistic integrity challenged by men in power. "Never gonna lose if I tell the truth," she croons on 'Uncool'. While it may not be the record most people identify her with, *America's Sweetheart* is the unconventional blueprint that inspired me to be the artist I am today.

Chumbawamba, *A Singsong And A Scrap* (2005)

Miriam McGuirk (Hope Collective)

I hate having to pick a favourite album. I get very stressed trying to narrow it down to one. Don't ask me a favourite movie or song - I just can't. So when I try, I look back at what shaped me and marked moments in time. Top ones that came to mind are The Jam – *All Mod Cons*, The Style Council – *Café Bleu*, The Housemartins – *Soup*, The Beautiful South – *Golddiggas*, *Headnodders & Pholk Songs* and Fugazi – *Repeater*. I could go on. The album I've picked isn't definitively my favourite album, but it's a standout. I've always loved Chumbawamba and especially loved them live. The energy and the touch of madness on stage was magic and their gigs always felt like a big occasion.

I had the privilege of seeing this album played live as an acoustic set in a seated theatre. I was blown away. It has the usual mix of political statements and melancholy and, as always, the vocals are second to none. For me it's a great sign when you listen to a song, and you imagine it playing at big occasions in your life. Is that just me? This album did this for me.

I love bands with women in them, and with a sense of humour, that don't take themselves too seriously and make valid points. Chumba have always delivered and stood the test of time for me. And they just make sense and tick a lot of boxes. That's as close as I come to a favourite. But it's just narrowing it down really.

Joanna Newsom, *Ys* (2006)

Maija Sofia (songwriter, *Bath Time*; artist)

Every time I hear the opening lines of *Ys*, I am 19 again, panic-struck by new love and the loneliness of London winter. I'd left my home in the Galway countryside for a strange, new city and a cold and distant man who lived there. I felt too feral to belong, out of place among traffic and tube stations, too shy to talk to anyone and longing for nature. All winter I listened to *Ys*, walking for hours across Walthamstow marshes, through the wetlands, under the graffiti-laden underpasses, to watch the overground trains pass against the darkening sky. "The meadowlark, and the chim-choo-ree and the sparrow" beckoning me out of my surroundings and into an alternate, mysterious world.

Ys is almost an hour long and spun with wild, medieval harp lines and elaborate verses on everything from arcane folklore to observations on the cosmos and anthropomorphic botany. Newsom often has more in common with

Keats and Shelley than she does with her folk-music peers, her lyrics are charged with a similar sublime Romantic yearning, as she conjures a world where rivers, plants and insects are bestowed with cosmic significance. It's the perfect album for someone yearning to escape the city; in *'Emily'*, pines are bathed in "rusty light", ants are overcome with "a hydrocephalitic listlessness" and a mud-cloud is "mica-spangled, like the sky'd been breathing on a mirror."

The album's masterpiece, *'Only Skin'*, which feels more spell than song, is the most succinct portrayal I've ever heard of the way the sublime fear of wild love and longing transforms the way we inhabit and perceive the world. Aeroplanes at night are ominously likened to "beached whales" and "shelled snails", cities pale into "flickering wastelands" and "life is thundering blissful towards death in a stampede." Towards the end the harp erupts into a kind of earth-deep shuddering, and Newsom is joined by Bill Callahan in a pulsing, incantatory circle of call and response chanting. To me it's one of the most unnerving moments in all of music, when suddenly all of Newsom's obtuse and obscure meandering give way to a moment of almost unbearable clarity, the way falling in love is like cracking open a chrysalis. Newsom's voice breaks like a wave as she cries, "I'll come across the desert with no shoes on/I love you truly or I love no one."

Burial, *Untrue* (2007)

Andy Cairns (Therapy?)

Favourite albums change as life changes. and agitated sounds that resonated with restless early years so often fade only to return when prompted by snatched snippets heard online or at gigs. By rights my favourite album should be a punk rock one. I grew up in the late '70s, early '80s, my first album was *Love Bites* by Buzzcocks and I was surrounded by punk music. Stiff Little Fingers, Undertones, Starjets, Outcasts, RUDI were from the same part of Ireland as me, Terry Hooley's Good Vibrations record shop was always part of my record hunting trips and at my County Antrim school, Ballyclare High School, there were even older kids in punk bands, Music For the Deaf, Pure Mania and Allotropes.

I moved from Buzzcocks, SLF etc. on to Discharge, Joy Division then on to Black Flag and Hüsker Dü with various diversions in between as my tastes broadened. To this day I still read punk zines and check out new bands but alongside them I have discovered many other voices and noises. My favourite album isn't a punk album. It's an album by a reclusive electronic musician from South London, William Emmanuel Bevan and he releases music under the alias Burial.

At a particularly dark time in my life most music left me numb, I was physically unwell and very depressed. I bought Burial's first album on impulse in a Cambridge record shop because there was a small handwritten note on the cover from one of the assistants saying it was hauntingly beautiful and besides I liked the cover image. Listening to it on long night walks to clear my head I picked up warm basslines and events in the sonic field that dissolved in and out of focus. It had the blueprint of UK dance music – dub even – but it was all sketched in faint lines and had a seam of melancholy running through it which reminded me of some of the greyscale soundtracks of Martin Hannett's work with Joy Division and even some of the more eldritch sections of early Black Sabbath records.

When the follow-up, *Untrue*, was released I was in the same shop on the morning of 5 November 2007 to pick up a copy. This time there were more vocal samples on the tracks but they had been manipulated, folded, pitched up and down and flowing in and out of focus. In the background there was vinyl crackle, sounds of clicks and metal objects, cigarette lighters shutting, bullet casings from video games and spectral, distant synths all sharing the space.

Snatched lines of vocals seemed to suggest loss and resignation – "It's all because you lied"; "I can't take my eyes off you"; "You look different"; "Once upon a time it was you that I adored" – but all rendered as if they were vapour seeping through ventilation shafts, floor grates, old radios, television static.

All of these parts came together as a whole experience, yes a melancholy one, but one in which comfort could be had in the understanding that it was a somehow shared experience. After a while I realised that what the record managed to generate through a modernist sound but with retro flourishes (crackle, hints of UK dance beats) was in fact empathy. Growing up in punk there was relatable anger, a ton of energy and at times a sneering sarcasm but not a great deal of empathy and there wouldn't be (to these ears at least) until the DC revolution summer scene and Hüsker Dü in Minneapolis started opening themselves up and baring all in a glorious barrage of tactile rage.

Untrue is music for the vulnerable, the lonely, the left behind. The sensitive who sulk in dark corners while others party; the unseen and the unheard. In the current climate, post-Brexit, Covid, Ukraine, this record is there again.

When it was released, it lifted me from a dark funk and got me back on my feet. I'm hoping that many people currently lost will get a chance to find something – anything – that offers succour and others will be there to help them.

For me *Untrue* will always be empathy in sound.

The World/Inferno Friendship Society, *Addicted to Bad Ideas: Peter Lorre's Twentieth Century* (2007)

Cilléin McEvoy (actor, *Life Begins Now*; *The New Music*)

"I am capable of anything and so are you". This cabaret punk record presents the proficiency of The World/Inferno Friendship Society. Opening with a beautiful overture as a tribute to actor Peter Lorre (the record is a concept album that continually references his films), it crescendos into Jack Terricloth and Sandra Malak chanting and asking Lorre where'd all the money go. Once this kicks in you cannot help but nod along, and if on your feet they might start to move despite you. From there we are brought along on highs and lows of elegance shredded by thrashing raw sounds, synonymous with the group.

Musically inspired by Kurt Weill, we get thrown back to the past while remaining firmly in the present. The collective thrive and commence a journey of wonder, providing ample suggestions that anarchy can be a necessity and a thing of beauty. The energy surging is electric, the lyrics full of poetry, catchy choruses and ideas too, even if some are bad (which Jack states he is addicted to). Malak's backing vocals elate the heart. Troubadour Franz Nicolay plays keys masterfully. The body feels all sorts of sensations while listening, mostly excitement, sometimes wistfulness.

The artwork is a reference to Fritz Lang's *M* (starring Lorre). The clutched hand is something that Jack did as he enticed the crowd to sing and dance along. As a filmmaker the album paints a dimension of myself, a marriage of music with cinema which inspires me on my journey forward. It transports me back to college in Edinburgh. It reminds me of playing tuba in orchestras and concert bands and it amazes me to hear a tuba accompany the warm sense of lure from Jack.

Terricloth was taken from the world in 2021. His music has and will continue to have a profound meaning in my life. The vibes give a sense of comfort, the words want you to live fully. Jack shares experiences and touches on truths in earnestness. *Addicted to Bad Ideas...* instills hope in the future, but it is apparent this only works when done together. We need to be brave and stay grounded.

The World/Inferno Friendship Society are a bright light for all who think they don't have a place in the world. In an interview Jack states: "Don't forget the struggle, don't forget the streets."

Eddy Current Suppression Ring, *Primary Colours* (2008)

Todd Taylor (publisher *Razorcake*; Gorsky Press)

There's music that can fill your ears. There's music that can fill rooms. There's music that can fill landscapes. The best music can do all three. I've taken the drive between the Los Angeles area and the small town outside of Las Vegas, where I grew up, countless times over the past four decades; it's an automatic drive. After getting off the interstate, there's 70 miles of light traffic and a straight two-lane road through a Joshua Tree forest.

When I grew up in the Mojave Desert, it's all I knew. I didn't know it's rare to see over 50 miles in every direction. It's arid and unforgiving, but its ecosystem has cunningly adapted. It's a singular landscape. What may look dead just may be dormant. One of my favourite plants there is creosote. It's totally unassuming. Tiny green leaves, never very large, never in big clusters. My favourite part of creosote is the way it makes the desert smell after rain. The water hitting the leaves releases its particular scent. To me, it's cubic miles of perfume; one of my favourite smells. And for about a week or two a year, creosote blooms with ultra-tiny yellow flowers. You have to get up close to even notice them. The tiny details are rewarding.

Eddy Current Suppression Ring's *Primary Colours* LP was one of over 10,000 pieces of music that were sent to Razorcake to review in the first eight years of our existence. It's one of my favourite records of the '00s. The cover – depending on which version you get – is either plain blue, red, or yellow, with just the name of the band and the album title written on it. Take the taut austerity of Wire, the very Australian dirt-moving power of The Cosmic Psychos, and deceptively simple, plaintive lyrics sung by a lead singer who, for mysterious reasons, performs in golf gloves. Then throw the comparative mile markers aside and just let the music wash over you. ECSR didn't have direct precedence for me and the record was a near-total surprise. It was a brand new landscape where the tiny details are rewarding.

This may sound a little strange coming from an editor of a DIY punk zine, but I'm not here to sell you on a band or a record. My goal is to find music that resonates with me. Music that adds more to a constantly evolving practice of music-making than takes away from it. Music that propulses into uncharted territory instead of retreating into nostalgia. Music that changes the way I listen to music. Music that's just satisfying to listen to and improves my quality of life. Music that extends beyond mere capitalist consumption. Fourteen years later

and the *Primary Colours* CD has never been out of arm's reach from the five-CD changer in *Razorcake* HQ that we listen to over 30 hours a week.

It's this unfussy durability that has made *Primary Colours* a staple, a part of my world, a simple, profound pleasure as evocative as the smell of creosote on a long desert highway when the rain starts to fall.

A Day to Remember, *Homesick* (2009)

Alek Browning (Stubborn Will)

A Day to Remember's *Homesick* was a turning point for me as music lover. A Day to Remember showed me that pop punk could be fun, but have substance to it (which I felt the genre was severely lacking at the time). As a fifteen-year-old kid, listening to the album, it was just a fun album to skateboard to, that had those tough guy break downs I loved. It truly blew me away musically. I'd never heard two genres put together, and sound so coherent.

I first wanted to not like the band (because of my hardcore, elitist attitude), but I kept coming back for more, and couldn't deny it any longer. Every song is great. It's one of the few albums I've listened to that I like every song. At 25, I still jam that album on a regular. It's nostalgic, it's musically timeless, and as I grow older, I realise the songs aren't just pop punk songs. They're songs that have perspective that I could only understand as a now 25-year-old. I think *Homesick* will forever go up on my list of top five albums, and I think right now it's at number one. Check it out, and get an understanding why my band Stubborn Will sounds the way it does.

Frank Turner, *Try This at Home* (2010)

Andries van den Broek (Bunch of Bastards, NL)

"Because there's no such thing as rock stars, there's just people who play music/ And some of them are just like us, and some of them are dicks/ So quick, turn off your stereo, pick up that pen and paper/ ... and take up your guitars, and come on, folks and try this at home."

An evening in spring 2006. Yer man not feeling very well, he decided to hit the sack early. But brush his teeth first, like a good boy. A look in the mirror scared the f*** outta him: the left side of his face hanging limp, difficulty moving his left arm as well. The missus drove him to hospital like crazy. Two weeks were being spent in the stroke unit. Not a happy place, although it soon turned out yer man only suffered a minor stroke and was the least bad off.

It was the time when downloading music (illegally, sorry guys, made up for that later by buying yer CDs) was a big thing. In previous weeks, yer man had downloaded a shit load of folkpunk music from bands hitherto unknown to him and put it on CDs. So stuck in his hospital bed, and still pretty bloody scared, yer man played them CDs on his Discman like there might be no tomorrow, which in fact was pretty much how it felt at that mo.

Long story short, yer man came out in good shape. According to a brain specialist, stimulating the brain might help regaining functions. So who knows, maybe here the saying "punk rock saved my life" holds true in a very specific way.

Once on his feet again, yer man picked up an accordion and tried to play along with the songs on them CDs. And yer man and the missus went to ev'ry folkpunk gig they heard of, out of relief and to celebrate life, probably. At one occasion, somewhere in central Germany, yer man must have mentioned the accordion to the lads of Mr. Irish Bastard. The following Spring, on March 17, them guys sent yer man an email inviting him to join them on an upcoming tour with Blood or Whiskey and Fiddler's Green (as their then-accordion player was either too nervous or too drunk to perform).

Never having played in bands before, yer man spent ages trying to figure out what words a proper musician might use to answer such an invitation. At long last he came up with words to the effect "Sounds like a cool idea! Which songs would be on the setlist?" One rehearsal was scheduled, at which yer man played Mr. Cool, complimenting the guys on their "proberaum," regardless of never having seen the inside of a rehearsal room in his life before. He must have passed, cause two weekends later he headed off to Hamburg with a rucksack and an accordion, to play mid-sized venues traveling in a nightliner bus.

It must have been on a Saturday in Backstage in Munich that the Mr. IB lads asked yer man for how long he had been playing in bands, him answering, to their astonishment: "Well, since last Thursday!". Another 30-odd gigs were played that Summer before later that year, on his 50th birthday, it was time to say goodbye, as too much travelling to and from Germany was involved.

That same summer, by the way, yer man also played a dozen or so gigs with The Mahones when they toured Europe. In years to come, yer man sat in on stage with many of his heroes. And years later, yer man started a band himself and started writing songs as well. At the tender age of 63, it still is among his bigger pleasures to hit the stage, the road and the bottle with his band Bunch of Bastards.

The Frank Turner song mentioned above was not the reason why yer man picked up pen and paper and, in his case, the accordion, but he sure can relate to the message of that song. Or to end with another Frank Turner quote, from the song 'I Still Believe': "Now who'd have thought, that after all/something as simple as rock'n'roll would save us all?"

St. Vincent, *Strange Mercy* (2011)

Kynsy (musician, *Things That Don't Exist*)

I really love this record is because of the number of good songs – all with a mix of interesting production and sounds that were fresh to my ears when it first came out. St. Vincent pushes boundaries with her arrangements of the pop songs on this record and she was a big inspiration to my own experimentation in arranging. Each song is a fusion of dark rock elements with electronic sounds that create a really interesting contrast for me. I listened to it again recently and after 11 years it stands the test of time. Her ideas still sound fresh and unique.

Title Fight, *Shed* (2011)

Rob Flynn (The Winter Passing)

I thought really hard about this because, obviously, it's hard to pick one album that's a favourite. This one is certainly one of my favourites but it's important for its significance at a time in my life when I was changing a lot. I think I brought a lot of what's in the record, and the ethos, with me through life. Title Fight are a massive threshold band for me. I was obsessed with them in 2007-2008 after their debut EP. So *Shed* was a highly anticipated second album for me after they broke through from being a DIY band to pushing into the mainstream.

At the time I really couldn't wait to hear it – and it lived up to everything I wanted it to be. I've always seen Title Fight as a massive influence – *Shed* was a massive, impactful, influential piece of work. I love the coupling of two different voices: one slightly more melodic, the other a bit gruff. I always appreciated their sensibilities of mixing heavy hard-core punk rock with more melodic pop-punk. That was always something that stood out for me. And I like their aesthetic as a band – two brothers, siblings being in a band together.

It was a massive album from that generation, and it really opened up so many avenues of creativity for my own band and for me personally. Ten tracks, all under three minutes long. Fast, scratchy, lots of throwbacks to '90s mid-west emo sounds. In my opinion – a perfect punk record.

Mumblin' Deaf Ro, *Dictionary Crimes* (2012)

Aidan Gillen (actor, *The Wire*; *Love/Hate*; *Bohemian Rhapsody*)

Where do you start with music? I know I'm supposed to be writing about one album but that's just not enough. Three hundred words? That's only a couple of paragraphs. Dunno ... music and my relationship with it is just too big and sprawling. I was always as obsessed with the apparatus (lo-fi record players with V and T knobs, Panasonic tape recorders, ancient radios, etc.) as the music itself and when you're four years old, Elton John, Slade, Cher, 10cc all sound great – and watching the record spin around is part of the thrill. I used the record player as a kind of art apparatus too, for doing spirals with biro and paint. Was I once obsessed with *Spanish Train* by Chris de Burgh? Yes I was. Did I fall in love with Roddy Frame? Yes. Did I use Roddy's lyrics in a love letter to a girl and pass them off as my own? Yes (no response). Was I one of the 50 people watching Prefab Sprout in The Buttery in Trinity on my 16th birthday even though I didn't have a ticket? Yes. John Carney's film *Begin Again* was originally titled *Can a Song Change Your Life?* which is a much better title and yes, a song can change your life constantly. I can't imagine my sixteen-year-old self without 'The Killing Moon' to soundtrack it. It's an obvious one for my generation but it's hard to describe to someone who doesn't get it how deep these tracks shape and colour your own character and worldview. Maybe we should go for it and just talk about B sides. 'The Butterfly Collector' or 'Liza Radley' by The Jam or Lou Reed's 'Perfect Day'? I will never forget turning over 'This Charming Man' to find 'Jeanie', lyrically better and more moving than the A-side ("There's ice on the sink where we bathe," "the low life has lost its appeal"). It made me want to live the low life and have ice on my sink, which I eventually achieved! I don't even want to get started on standing mesmerised by Johnny Marr in his Ireland soccer jersey on stage in the SFX, or Nick Cave in the same venue a few years later blowing the roof off. Julian Cope crawling through the aisles at the Royal Festival Hall in London. All the gigs I saw, even the bad ones, were great. But we're talking about records and it's impossible to pick, so it's always good to go with names that people might not know. In recent times I have found *Dictionary Crimes* by Mumblin' Deaf Ro to be a total gem. And like any album, there's a few particular songs that make it: 'Cheer up Charlie Brown', 'Cade Calf Call' and 'Little Mite' are all heartbreakers. It's in a milieu all of its own – inner suburban young father doubts – or something like that. Unsurprisingly Ró (Rónán Hession) went on to write a successful book: *Leonard and Hungry Paul*. As I try to write something coherent about that, the image of Lemmy onstage at

the Olympia in his boots and cavalry hat keeps jumping in and taking over. And I'm really glad I that I did see Lemmy, Bowie, Freddie, Jay Reatard, Mark Linkous, David Berman when they were all still here. If there's one thing anyone should do right now it's go out and see as many bands live as you can – buy tickets, buy the t-shirts or whatever after and spend some money at the bar. The industry and satellites around it have been almost eradicated over the last two years so do your bit and get it going again, you'll love it....

Amanda Palmer and the Grand Theft Orchestra, *Theatre is Evil* (2012)

Devon Carson (Airstream Futures)

One of my favourite records is *Theatre is Evil* by Amanda Palmer and the Grand Theft Orchestra. I love drama, and this record is comedy and tragedy with tons of theatrics. I love Amanda's fierce and honest lyrics and her fearless vocal performances. The collaboration between her and the musicians on that record results in this punky, operatic, dynamic, juicy, hard-hitting journey that completely exhausts the entire spectrum of emotions. I was lucky enough to see the record played live at The Metro in Chicago and Amanda's intensity was a revelation. She is a performer who is unafraid to reveal the best and worst of herself. Dripping sweat, waterfalls of tears, guttural screams. She has a hypnotic power over the crowd too. At one point, 1,100 people went completely silent as she crowd-surfed and sang a cappella. It's punk. It's melodic. It's theatre.

I've never heard a record like it since.

Stick to Your Guns, *Diamond* (2012)

Ken Stassen (Born Infected [NL])

When I first heard the song 'We Still Believe' I knew I just HAD to get the record this was on, and boy would it be a dive into a rabbit hole! I first heard the song when a co-student of mine introduced me to a "new" (to me, at least) form of music called hardcore. Not digging the whole tough guy side of it (yet) I found something really comforting in the melodies used by this band. Curious as I am I started researching the genre and tried to learn everything about it known to man. To me this record will always symbolise the start of a new journey. One where I made new friends for life, learned to express myself in a healthy way (although those bruises from moshing will certainly look otherwise to outsiders) and a place where I know I will always find a home away from home. Jesse Barnett as a frontman grew to be one of my prime examples as to what a frontman should

be as well, showmanship-wise and lyrics-wise. Interaction with the crowd, be it through singalongs, speeches (working on that) or a message that clicks with your audience is what a good frontman should provide, in my eyes. Even the way the lyrics are written on this album are influencing me to this day – subjects reflecting on society (good and bad) or diving into your own mind are subjects I'm attracted to as well when writing lyrics. Safe to say, this album made a huge impact in my life. And although those lyrics are not on this album, thanks to *Diamond* I will always be "married to the noise."

The Wonder Years, *The Greatest Generation* (2013)

Ben Pritchard (Side Project)

First of all, what a band. The Wonder Years have been a staple in my music collection since I first heard their album *The Upsides*. On their fourth full-length album, *The Greatest Generation*, the band manage to craft an experience like nothing I have heard before, each song has its own charm. Collectively, the album overflows with emotion that all links together on the final track, 'I Just Want to Sell Out My Funeral' which gives a nod back to most of the songs that have come before it. It's hard to say who this album reminds me of, it's pop punk, but it's poetic; it's catchy, yet mature. And I think that is what sets The Wonder Years apart from other bands and has allowed them to inspire most bands in the genre that have started out since hearing the band. I think people should give the album a listen as it has the ability to make you smile on your lowest days. There are songs that make you feel positive, others that allow you to reminisce and some that really open a connection between the band and the listener. *The Greatest Generation* gave me a fresh outlook on a genre I have stuck by since I was a teenager, and it has become an inspiration to many (myself included). Ultimately it is a near-perfect release and one of the albums I always turn to – whether I'm sat out in the sunshine or having a rough day, it just suits any mood and makes me feel positive.

TTNG, *13.0.0.0* (2013)

Joe York (Petrol Girls)

One of my favourite albums that comes to mind would be *13.0.0.0* by the math rock/emo band TTNG (formerly This Town Needs Guns).

It was an album I listened to a lot at university close to the time that Petrol Girls formed. I just love its perfect mix of complexity, simplicity and beauty. It has extremely intricate, long and rhythmically complex guitars and drums, but it

doesn't feel like the intention is to show off the band's skills – rather just their way of creating their unique sound.

To balance the complexity, it uses fairly simple song structures – most consisting of maybe three parts, and with only one guitar, one bass and drums. No effects or distortion and no vocal harmonies (as much as I love vocal harmonies!). The vocals are beautiful, sad and haunting, but still human and vulnerable. The lyrics read like poetry, and there's also some heavy themes including the death of someone close.

I'll admit that it's only the first half of the album that I find truly beautiful – it does feel like it trails off a little, but it's still enough for me to consider it a great album. I don't know why, and I'm not sure many others would feel the same, but to me the album feels like an ice-cold, crystal-clear lake.

The Apers, *Confetti on the Floor* (2014)

Barry Phillips (Demob, The Blitz Boys, et al; author, *In Search of Tito's Punks*)

In late October 2014 I moved from my spiritual home of Sheffield to The Hague. I was 52 years old, had just embarked on my third marriage (the very reason for leaving my beloved Sheffield) and both of my daughters were creating new lives on the other side of the world in Australia. Before meeting my spouse-to-be I had never even visited the Netherlands and 18 months later Dutch remained impenetrable to me.

From early 2013 we had successfully managed our burgeoning romance with weekends and occasional weeks in either Sheffield or The Hague. My new partner was raised on a ranch in Montana so the UK's underground punk scene was something of a culture shock but during our initial long-distance relationship she became an enthusiastic gig-goer on her visits to Sheffield and we travelled as far as Belfast, London and Newcastle to see relatively obscure bands in frequently dingy venues. With a typically Anglophone “we invented it” patronising attitude, I had resigned myself to a substandard punk rock experience after relocating to mainland Europe but was determined to at least give it a good shot. A week or so after making my move permanent, I got a gig alert for a Rotterdam-based punk band's album launch at a small venue in the city. The blurb made it clear that the band were huge fans of the Ramones, the bill included a Greek psych-punk band and the “Japanese Ramones.” It seemed a great opportunity to test the water.

The band was The Apers, the album they were launching was *Confetti on the Floor*. The venue, Rotown, was what would become familiar to us as a

typical continental café-bar set-up with a capacity of perhaps 150 maximum. It soon filled up but not uncomfortably so. The atmosphere was delightfully relaxed and the crowd comprised of notably mixed ages from teenage punks to 60-plus-old hippy types, with a pleasingly even gender split. A lot of those there obviously knew each other and the band, but it was mercifully free from cliques. People smiled at us and some tried to strike up conversations in Dutch. Met with my vacant stare and diffident apology they switched effortlessly to near-flawless English. The Greek psych-punks were an intoxicating mix of shambolic and hypnotic; the “Japanese Ramones” were exactly as you'd expect. The Apers came on and it was immediately clear that the bass-playing front man had terrific stage presence. His between-numbers expletive-laden schtick had the audience laughing from start to finish.

Despite the album being newly released, a considerable proportion of the crowd knew the lyrics and the whole gig was very much a communal affair. It was one of those supremely uplifting experiences when you look around and all you see are grinning faces. But it was still recognisably “punk” with rambunctious dancing, stage diving and crowd surfing. The four-piece crashed through an album full of tunes which were sparkingly fresh but still had that “heard it before” quality, crammed with hooks and harmonies, taut, vibrant, irreverent and street-tough (if the street was Bash Street).

The lyrics were sharp as a tack (remembering they are written and performed in a second language) and I defy anyone not to become a disciple when they have seen 100 very happy punters (including the three “Japanese Ramones” at the side of the stage), fists and index fingers jabbing skyward, bellowing the anthem of the besotted, budding vegetarian, seducer:

Hey Jamie Oliver, I did exactly what you wrote in your cookbook/
But the food came out tasting like total poo poo/And now my
girlfriend's left me and she won't come back any more.

Ok, maybe it doesn't translate from the stage to the page so well but trust me, if you'd been there you would have found it irresistible. If you hear it now you still will. It was drunken, joyous and (as we would discover is typical of Dutch gigs) utterly free from machismo or menace.

Of course we bought the album and t-shirts. The album became our “go to” pick-me-up whenever we were heading out on the town in the Netherlands and invariably when we came home “in good spirits.” For reference points ... of course Ramones, but also that cadre of second-generation Ramonesian bands

in the US which are so frowned upon by the UK punk-police (The Queers, M.O.T.O., and the Screeching Weasel/Vapids/The Riverdales/The Methadones stable). For first wavers? Think of The Boys circa *Alternative Chartbusters*.

It took on a far greater significance. Partly inspired by this gig, I was coaxed out of musical retirement by a punk band from the Jura region of France. *Confetti on the Floor* was quickly adopted by the band as our singalong soundtrack in the van as we travelled across France, Germany and the UK for gigs. Even more than that, that first evening at Rotown we spoke with the livewire front man, Kevin Apers, and he was charming and smart as heck. It transpired that he ran the Monster Zero label which put out the album, and albums for bands from all over the continent. He staged an annual “Monster Zero Mash” DIY multinational mini-festival each year in a different city, and over the next few years we went to the Paris and Innsbruck incarnations. The Apers played at both and songs from this album featured large. Then there were the numerous spin-off events in Belgium, Athens, Munich, Budapest, etc. where we met so many thoroughly decent folk from all over this shrinking punk planet, often bumping into faces from that first night in Rotterdam.

That launch party for this album was the best possible welcome to a whole new underground world of European punk. How else would I have discovered Jagger Holly or Dee Cracks (AU), Neon Bone (DE), The Priceduiques (BE), Zatopeks (EU), Lone Wolf (NL), Wau Y Los Arrrghs!!! (ESP), Sons of Buddha and Maladroit (FR), Riccobellis and The Peawees (IT) or all of the others too many to mention? As my now time-served spouse said when I told her about writing this piece, “It was such a lovely time. It showed how music really doesn’t have a ZIP code, does it.” Or equally profoundly in the words of the album’s second track:

To the bar for cocktails/To the bar for cocktails/Fuck my life and
fuck the world/To the bar for cocktails.

Martha, *Blisters in the Pit of My Heart* (2016)

Daryl Gussin (*Razorcake* zine)

Martha’s debut LP, *Courting Strong*, left an undeniable impact on me. It’s filled with painfully, jaw-droppingly relatable odes to being lonely without resentment, and understanding and accepting one’s personal sadness. The lyrics burnt off the haze of denial I had found myself in, and I learned the answers to questions I hadn’t been capable of asking. It’s a powerful record. And one that

seemed very hard to top, which is why I wasn’t sure if I was ready for another Martha LP in my life.

Luckily, the summer of 2016 brought us *Blisters in the Pit of My Heart*, and it’s as potent and emotionally relevant as anyone could hope for. It’s jam-packed with their high-energy, supercharged take on British indie pop. Quirky existentialism (which is the best form of existentialism) is propped up by these grand, immaculately structured pop songs that set the scene for tales of loss, loving, and coming to terms with the unfortunate realities we all face. Radical politics are casually tucked into love songs; love songs about revolutionary leaders are open in plain sight. *Blisters...* is a solid fucking record. An important record. An inclusive record. A record that can be enjoyed on many levels. The final track feels so touching; it’s as if they wrote it with each and every one of us in mind.

Martha is as relentless as any great hardcore band, yet trades blastbeats and mosh breakdowns in for multi-vocal melodies and laconic moments of personal reflection. They’re our reminder that it’s alright to be moody and self-indulgent, but for the love of god we need to care about things other than ourselves in this world. You will be coming of age till the day you die; never stop growing, never stop listening. Read the lyrics.

Jonathan Richman, *Ishkode! Ishkode!* (2016)

Ron Gallo (*Heavy Meta; Stardust Birthday Party*)

A few hours before I bought this record (from the merch table at his show at the Basement East in Nashville) I ran into Jonathan Richman at the grocery store. I was mid-checkout and just left all my stuff on the belt to go say hi. For 10 minutes we talked about guitars and Spanish music – he somehow knew I was a guitar player too and that I played a Jaguar. He’s either incredibly intuitive or I’m incredibly predictable or both, but probably mostly the latter. The whole time he was wide-eyed, fully immersed and present in the conversation with a total stranger – this is a good example of exactly what his music is.

I could say this about any of his records but I chose *Ishkode! Ishkode!* because it’s his most recent, it’s great and it’s not easily accessible on streaming. It’s been on loop lately because, like all of his records, it takes you away to a much simpler place, a childlike state, Here and Now, but free from the seemingly endless chaos of the modern world. In it but not of it. When that haunting first track ‘*Whoa! How Different We All Are!*’ comes in, I’m no longer going on day 730-something of pandemic-induced anxiety and global chaos – I’m driving

down a coastal highway in Italy, I'm in some sunlit piazza, I'm somewhere ancient yet new and there's no trash-covered streets, no Walmarts, no construction noise, nothing to become. This feeling persists all the way thru. *'Outside O'Duffy's'* is one of the best love songs ever written, second only to another of Jonathan's classics *'Everyday Clothes'*. Describing love in terms of feeling enough trust upon first seeing someone that you immediately want to give them your passport, wallet and keys is genius and hilarious. It's believable, profoundly simple – just like everything Jonathan does. Whether fumbling through a song in another language, quoting Paramahansa Yogananda or singing, “Wait, wait I wanna look at that more!” or like the time a friend of mine gave me Jonathan's business card as a gift: “Jonathan Richman: Arcane Masonry and Stone”. Listening to or seeing Jonathan Richman is a good guidebook on how to live properly and it couldn't be further than what is considered “normal” and for this we thank him.

Regarde, Leavers (2017)

Amalia Bloom

Ever since this album came out, it has always been a piece of us, in one way or another. It was autumn, and something of that season stayed indelibly linked to the record and its songs. Describing an album written by people you know in person is unusual, we are used to an imaginary that leads us to idolize musicians who are often physically distant from us. This creates a distortion of the music itself, often judged to be of lesser value when it does not belong geographically to an overseas mystery scenario.

We decided to talk about Regarde's *Leavers* because we have always sensed their incredible originality and mastery, in the arrangements, in the sounds and in the song writing. The fuzzy and sharp guitars, the distorted bass tones, the slow and strong rhythms as in *'Patterns'* and *'Last Summer'*, or the more dreamy atmospheres of *'Closer'* and *'Quiet and Keen'* have inspired us from the very beginning of our experience as a band. Between emo and alt-rock, this record is an example of how many gems can be hidden here and there in local scenes, away from the spotlight.

Purple Mountains, Purple Mountains (2019)

Leagues O'Toole (promoter; author, *The Humours of Planxty*)

My first attempt at listening to David Berman's comeback record as Purple Mountains since his passing in August 2019 has not gone well. As utterly perfect as every note and lyric hits it feels like an intrusion into a deeply painful diary

of a break-up and a breakdown. Berman's work as The Silver Jews has often been bittersweet and a sense of guilt has always loomed when listening to his self-deprecating confessionals but maybe his precise elevated lyricism was cut with just enough humour to feel acceptable. It was evident to fans that Berman experienced prolonged periods of substance abuse and depression, and not a huge surprise that he announced his retirement from music in 2009.

The darkness of *Purple Mountains* was shrouded in a sense of excitement when it first emerged in July 2019. He was back, after eight years in the wilderness, writing mind-blowing pop-poetry with incredible hooks and devastating lines, gloriously unabashed honky-tonk guitar and piano and melancholic pedal-steel, light-tripping fiddle. It was glorious. Berman was alive and well and seemingly transcending his demons. *'All My Happiness Is Gone'* sounded bleak on paper but it was sadness riding on a wave of windswept pop strings. *'Margaritas at the Mall'* is a wickedly metaphorical portrait of the purgatory of capitalism as Berman asks, “How long can the world go on with no new word from God?” This is David Berman at his best. *'Darkness and Cold'* brutally details Berman's acceptance of the breakdown of his marriage. Good as it is, I now find I can't listen the whole way through this song. Or this album, to be honest. *'I Loved Being My Mother's Son'*, a devastatingly simple tribute to his late mother, so simple and pure only a great writer could deliver it.

She helped me walk, she watched me run/She got where I was coming from/And when I couldn't count my friends on a single thumb/I loved her to the maximum.

It's truly heartbreaking.

There came a point in revisiting this record that I needed to turn it off and go to 1998's Silver Jews album *American Water* just for the relief of that opening line: “In 1984, I was hospitalized for approaching perfection,” for a slightly less devastating mood. There is a resounding sense of resignation about literally everything Berman sings on *Purple Mountains* but the achingly troubling fact of the matter is that this is amongst his greatest work, an album of sad brilliant bangs, released less than a month before he took his own life.

One would assume Berman, an astute individual, was all too aware of the dedicated love of fans from all over the world. During his trip to Ireland on a very rare tour with The Silver Jews in 1998 we saw first-hand how much his music, his persona, his words meant to those finally greeting him in the flesh. Yet that love wasn't enough. But we will continue to love him anyway.

“I don’t really like albums ...”Patrick Freyne (*The Irish Times*)

I am 47 years old now and I am finally able to admit that I don’t really like albums. I mean, there are lots of albums I appreciate, in my way. In a bid for normality I was going to pick *Surfer Rosa* by Pixies or *Let England Shake* by PJ Harvey or *Ease Down the Road* by Bonnie “Prince” Billy. But, truthfully, saying that any of those is my favourite album would really be a lie.

Firstly, I quite like greatest hits records. When makey-up television man Alan Partridge said his favourite album was *The Best of the Beatles*, I did not laugh. I thought: “Yes! That IS the best Beatles album. The clue is in the title!”

Secondly, though I genuinely love music, I tend to consume it like a toddler. My wife is a proper music collector and listens to full albums like a grown up, sometimes even reading the packaging material and checking upcoming live dates. I listen to music all the time, but in a form of infantile self-soothing I listen to the same two or three songs over and over again, usually as I work. Maybe once a day I listen to a full album right through, but more usually my musical listening is best summed up by a recent cry of despair from elsewhere in our house: “Oh my god, are you going to listen to that Haim song AGAIN?!”

At first, when this occurred, I felt ashamed, but now I feel confident in my choices and quite defiant. My favourite album is the same song played over and over again and it’s usually a song I’ve only recently discovered. At the moment my favourite album is the song ‘*No Reason*’ by Big Thief played 10 or 12 times over a few hours. I believe it’s on the Big Thief album *Dragon New Warm Mountain I Believe in You*. But I’ve only listened to that album in its entirety once, so I’m not certain of that.

MAGI-TRAK 104 (1930s)

Colm Olwill (DJ: PCP ina Shuí – Gramophone Disco)

My favourite record to write about is the record that got me into all things gramophone: *MAGI-TRAK 104*.

Back in 2002, I was outside our festival venue, the underground piano bar, as the June Glastonbury sun got higher. I was chatting to some trilby-hatted heads that somebody had told me were into 78s i.e., shellac* gramophone records. They invited me to look through their record box. As I rifled through, my fingers stopped as one caught my eye. “What’s this one?” “It’s a game record, we use when we have absinthe”. I’d come straight from the Sonar festival in

Barcelona and an anti-globalisation protest at an EU meeting in Seville, Spain. I had no money left but conveniently did have a bottle of primo New Orleans absinthe in my possession. They set up their picnic model gramophone, and my artist friend Caroline, sister of the composer Jennifer Walshe, made up the game/betting sheet.

The record was a magic, six-horse race. Every time the record was played, a ‘40s radio announcer narrated the last minute of the race. One of the six horses would win. The better placed a pound sterling on one of six squares: Zingaro, Centurion, Call Boy, Brown Jack, Windsor Lad, Spine Cock. They raced and one won by a neck. The winner got a shot of absinthe. The dregs of Glastonbury surrounded the gramophone player, tears in their eyes as they either couldn’t afford to or failed to win the bet. A small quantity of mercy was shown. I pocketed the coins, which was nice as I was broke and later that morning and into the evening spent them in a bar in the new area of Glastonbury: Lost Vagueness. On my return to Dublin, I went searching online for the record. I remembered the name and number and found a dealer with a copy.

On May Day two years later, I was at the Dublin protest of the EU meeting in Farmleigh House, Phoenix Park. Remember when that was a thing? Police in riot gear and riot vehicles held back the protesters from entering the park. I had a gramophone player in a shopping trolley at the edge of the reach of the water cannons. I played sweet bands, jazz and folk to encourage the protesters and help bump up the carnivalesque quotient.

Later, after trundling back into town, I ended up meeting friends in the Sackville Lounge, off O’Connell Street, for post-protest pints. Some of the best pints that can be had. The evening wore on and a crowd from the Abbey Theatre came in from some literary event. Snug as a gun, I had settled in a corner. I began to play a few records and had set up the horse race. A white-haired man took an interest and seemed to enjoy it. He was asking questions about it and I realised he was Seamus Heaney, Nobel prize-winning poet, national hero, etc. I handed him the record we had been discussing and asked him to sign it. He wrote on the label and, fair play, threw in a short poem about the record and added the date.

It has since gotten smashed. Shellac records are heartbreaking. They are as delicate as glass discs and carrying a box of them around to gigs results in hard-to-avoid smashes. The label is ok though, and I sourced another copy of *MAGI-TRAK 104*. I should frame the smashed one. I like how records travel, how they create situations, friendships and stories. How they can make you a few quid, get a party started or encourage a riot. Or how, like the 78 of Little

Richard's *'Long Tall Sally'*, they can electrify and possess a clockwork wooden box with a handle.

"What's worse than horse?" – Seamus Heaney, *I-V-04*

*As a fun aside, shellac is made from beetle secretion and one record takes between 5,000 and 30,000 beetles i.e., female lac bugs, *Kerria lacca*.

My lockdown albums

Karen Amsden (Hagar the Womb)

I was going to spend these few paragraphs describing how much I have loved *Pet Sounds* by the Beach Boys for the last 50 years. But I realised that the albums which got me through two years of sitting at the kitchen table (writing Covid guidance for care homes), are now all my favourite albums. A cluster of records, many purchased as a weekly reward from Resident Records (best shop in Brighton) or older loved albums, have been played in rotation to keep me going and drown out the noise of everyone else here. My family, also trapped at home, learned that my choice of album being played at full volume in the kitchen was a barometer that indicated how sad, angry or almost cheerful I felt at the time. It may be a coincidence that our neighbours emigrated to Australia during this time. Key records included:

- REM, *Automatic for the People* – if singing along to *'Everybody Hurts'* three times in a row, do not enter unless you also want to cry along
- Manics – if it was *The Holy Bible*, run away; if it was *The Ultra Vivid Lament*, it was safe to come in and make a cup of tea
- Nick Cave, *The Boatman's Call* – was cheering myself up by pretending to be PJ Harvey
- Amyl and the Sniffers, *Comfort to Me* – take the dog out for a walk until it's safe to return
- Sleaford Mods, *Spare Ribs* – new Covid guidance had been issued by the government and anger levels were high. I was banned from playing this when other Zoom meetings were taking place in the house, due to swears
- Gruff Rhys – a concept album about volcanoes indicated a rare level of jollity
- Arab Strap, *As Days Get Dark* – miserably contemplative, so offer coffee

- Pulp – cheerfulness and chocolate likely, along with stories about Britpop

Thanks, music and coffee. You have been my saviours.

Unknown Memories

Martin Moloney (Secretary-General IOSCO)

It's a strange thing about going through this life: there are some things, important things, that I find I can't remember. I remember as a very young child noticing my mother, who rarely sang, singing along to The Beatles. I remember playing my parents' records: Harry Belafonte advising me to stand up and fight and then Eartha Kitt recommending Hernando's *Hideaway*. I remember closely watching my grandmother's hands at Christmas, dancing across the piano keys as her adult children read and sang the endless words of Percy French's *'Abdul Abulbul Amir'*. I remember being puzzled at Mass when I couldn't harmonise my high-pitched breaking voice with my father's as he bellowed *'Soul of My Saviour'*. I remember the open revolver and the scattered bullets that, pre-Troubles, decorated the cover of an album of Irish rebel songs that was my first record purchase. I remember a sincere feeling of sadness as I listened to Mary Magdalene plaintively singing *'I Don't Know How to Love Him'* across the Gaiety stage in the first Irish production of *Jesus Christ Superstar*. I remember placing the single *'Cum On Feel the Noize'* by Slade on our record player and feeling it. I remember being introduced to Neil Young's admirable *Zuma* and who introduced me to it. I remember a sense of awe in the face of *'Dreamer'* by Supertramp and almost exactly the same sense when I heard *Marquee Moon* by Television. I remember my sincere puzzlement the first time I heard Crass. I remember starting to get the point when I paid attention to the Sex Pistols in the house in Drumcondra of someone I didn't really know. I remember my first time seeing The Golden Horde, in the Project Arts Centre, with the go-go girls. I remember my one time in the mosh pit at a Clash gig in the SFX when I flowed with the sea, as Mishima had recommended. And then there is *Unknown Pleasures* by Joy Division: the record whose bass lines I still hum when I am by myself. This was the perfect musical moment of my youth. I remember lifting the needle back again and again and again replaying individual lines of lyrics as I and a friend transcribed all the words of the whole album. Did Curtis sing: "... bereft of my destruction"? I am still not quite sure, but that's how I still sing it. Why would I correct my young, faithful self? I remember honestly believing that I wasn't wearing all-black because I was a Joy Division fan; it was

just synchronicity. I remember how angry I was at him, when I heard about Ian Curtis' suicide. I remember colouring black the covers of my four C90 minute tapes of Joy Division bootlegs. I remember what the 'Komakino' flexi single looked and felt like. I remember listening to New Order a few years later, talking about tomato ketchup bottle labels on the late-night Dave Fanning radio show. It wasn't a great interview. I remember all that and much more and yet I can't remember when I first heard that perfect album. I can't remember the first time I felt that alignment that comes when someone else turns your emotions into music. I can't remember how song after song after song first revealed their loyalty to the purpose declared by its immaculate design. I can't remember my first sense of unqualified respect for its Robespierrean austerity. And yet all that must have happened. I look inside for the memory; it isn't available. I relax and hope it will seep through. It doesn't. Maybe when I am very old as other thoughts decay, it will find the escape route to reveal itself. But for now, I just can't remember.

LIVE

The Pretty Things, live in Middlesbrough

Charles O'Connor (Horslips)

I can't believe it: The Pretty Things in Middlesbrough. Smoggy's delight. They are playing a club called the Scene, which is halfway between the town hall and the Purple Onion, owned by the McCoys, great place, I saw Stevie Wonder going in there once, getting out of a big car and going into the Purple Onion for a coffee, marvellous. Anyway, The Pretty Things at the Scene and I'm all ready – my mod outfit, I'm 16, I'm heading down to the Scene and I've found a seat, there's not many people there, quite surprising.

I'm sat down and The Pretty Things start ... wow.

It's the first time I realised that rock'n'roll is better live, I've never heard any real noise before, this is great. The 'Rosalyn' I know and remember was only from a record until now. So I'm sitting down, and of course it's Middlesbrough and so a fight breaks out. It seems that one of the Smoggys' girlfriends was doing a bit of the "how's your father" with one of the Italian sailors.

So I'm watching The Pretty Things play 'Rosalyn', my favourite single between bleeding arms and bleeding legs, actually bleeding, and I panic, but I think this is the only time I'm going to see them, and they continue playing so I sit there and watch. This is only my first live act, so a long way to go for me, and it gets so much better.

Rock Against Reagan, Lincoln Memorial, Washington DC (1983)

Dave Dictor (MDC)

Well, favourite gig is hard to say cause there have been 43 years of gigs and the memory fades. But one that stands out goes back to July 3, 1983, at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC. It was a Rock Against Reagan gig put on by the Youth International Party, or the Yippies as they are commonly known. We had done a nationwide tour at various state capitals and on a float on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, so the momentum had been building and we were touring with DRI, The Dicks, The Crucifucks and, at a few events, Dead Kennedys. It was a crazy time, with Reagan and the politics pushing that it was time to go back to a normal America, without Black rights and women's rights, and it seemed the Republicans were trying to push the social and political climate back to the 1950s. So there was a lot of tension at these various events, due to the police hassling the crowd. This was certainly true of the event in Washington. Band after band played and finally Dead Kennedys stepped onto the stage after an all-day event. The Capitol police were going all-out pushing the 10,000-plus people around. Biafra of the DKs observed this and was criticizing the police – fights were taking place between the police and the crowd. Biafra pointed at a nearby large helicopter hovering over the crowd shining large spotlights out into the crowd. Loud shouting by the crowd, with loud bullhorn speeches by the police. Biafra pointed to the helicopters across the way circling around the Washington Monument at the far end of the Lincoln Memorial. He said, "The evil police circling the Washington Monument, shaped as a klansman to remind us all that Washington owned slaves and this country was built on slavery." Pretty profound, and the crowd roared back in appreciation of this poignant statement at this tense moment of the event. Dead Kennedys finished up with 'Holiday in Cambodia' – I guess the song reminds us that "it's tough, kid, but it's life."

Being in a political band

Willem (Antillectual)

The atrocities happening in Ukraine give me a sense of being hopelessly pessimistic about the world we live in. The concept of war, (voluntarily) being a soldier and killing other people has never made sense to me. One lunatic, unilaterally deciding to kill thousands of innocent people, including his own citizens, completely destroys my usually optimistic worldviews and the urge to

spread them. Being in a political band has never seemed less relevant than now. But it is always important to stay hopeful; to support the people suffering, and to prevent escalation.

We toured Russia in 2011 and had an amazing time meeting the people there. Even though Russian state media say that Putin has lots of national support for his war, it's hard to estimate how the Russian people really feel about attacking their neighbours. When we were in Russia we met a lot of critically minded people, fighting injustice and supporting the opposition. We played with Pussy Riot, one of the most obvious countercultural acts, and there's many more in Russia. At the moment we're in touch with some of the people we met 10 years ago and they're highly ashamed of "their" leader.

Just like I don't refer to WW2 as a war against the Germans (but Nazis or Nazi Germany) I don't see the invasion of Ukraine as a war of the Russians. It is one dictator with a distorted view of history and reality, enabled by an elite that benefits from his power, while also being scared shitless to offend him with criticism. I don't think the Russian punk movement will overthrow Putin's regime on its own. But it's essential to support them and fellow critical Russians so that until Putin does disappear (he won't live forever) they stay hopeful about achieving the much-needed change in their country.

I'm kinda between the old rock/metal, punk rock and the rebel country

Joey Keighley (D.O.A.)

When I went to high school the popular records at the time were Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin. Eventually when I got into punk rock, I went to the top of a street with all my Led Zeppelin records and rolled them down the street and waited until the cars ran over them and broke them in to bits. I was 18-19 and I didn't want any more of the rock world that I grew up with. But one record from then stood out. It was really amazing. Dimwit, my old drummer, God rest his soul, joined this record club where you could get 12 records for a buck and then later on you had to pay more. What he came home with was Black Sabbath, *Paranoid*, and we were probably 14-15. We didn't know shit from Shinola. We listened to that, and we went: 'this is way too heavy.' That kind of started us out though before punk rock came along. We bought a song book and did really terrible imitations of Black Sabbath. Our high school band was awful beyond belief.

The first thing that we really got into was when we heard about punk rock. This was about June 1977 and no bands of any note had come to town. But

we saw a television special, and it was The Damned playing at some polytechnic or something. And the fans ripped off the ceiling as they were playing. This was on ABC TV, and they were saying 'destructive punk rock fan wreck venue'. I thought 'I want to be in a band like that – that looks like a lot of fun! This is the greatest thing ever.' Rat Scabies lit his drums on fire with lighter fluid – really amazing stuff. So then we got that album and we formed our first punk rock band. I think we had 14 songs, some of them were original and six of them were off that Damned record. '*Stab Yor Back*', stuff like that. So that was the real influential one. Then we heard the Sex Pistols singles, '*Anarchy in the UK*' and '*God Save the Queen*'. But I would say the Damned album was the key to us starting a punk rock band.

Then Dimwit again, being the visionary, found the first Ramones album. So that was key too. And that ads at the time in the magazines – it was the strangest selling technique – they said: '*The Ramones, the most unusual band in the last six years!*' Wouldn't you say the last twenty or thirty years? Whoever came up with that was an idiot. We got it and brought it home and threw it on the record player. We went, '*wow, it really all does sound the same, doesn't it!*' We didn't understand the style. Then the Ramones came to town and they played the big ballroom which fits 1,200 people. And they only sold two tickets. So they made the concert free. So about 100 of us showed up, saw the Ramones and went '*ok, that's punk rock!*' We finally understood it. So it was the Ramones, the Damned's first album and Black Sabbath preceding that. I don't have a specific favourite song or album, but I always go to *The Best of Johnny Cash* – he's still my hero. Not a perfect guy, but you know what, he was a fuckin' rebel, he took it to the man, and got in a lot of shit. And the other guy I really love, and I'd take The Best of, any time, is Willie Nelson. So I'm kinda between the old rock/metal, punk rock and the rebel country. Those are big records to me.

We didn't hear it right away, but when we started hearing about punk rock, we saw this magazine. And on the front of the magazine was Iggy Pop. We were like in high school. And the caption said: '*Iggy Pop – Man or Worm?*' And we were going: '*who is this guy?*' He had his shirt off and there was glass on the stage – '*that's insane*'. And then two years later we were covering '*I wanna be your dog*' and any Iggy song that we could find. So I would say *Raw Power* is definitely in my Top 10 without question. And The Clash first album was truly amazing. Unbelievable! I mean they made great records. The second album is great. Everybody talks about *London Calling* but the first one is just an incredible punk rock record with amazing songs like '*Career Opportunities*'.

And we would just play that over and over again just going ‘*wow!*’ That one was a big influence because they had the politics.

And thinking of music that has shaped me, I didn’t realise it at the time – I was just a kid – but my sister was into the folk, anti-Vietnam protest music. She was about eight years older, and she kept playing these songs. I realised later on that a lot of the influence on me, and my politics, were from those records. Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger, Peter, Paul and Mary and Bob Dylan. It took me thirty years to realise that my sister had stuffed that into my cranium – ‘*oh yeah, that’s where that came from!*’

The Comet Is Coming, The Sugar Club, Dublin

Roddy Doyle (author)

March 7, 2017

I’d listened to *The Comet Is Coming* before I saw them perform. I had their record, *Channel the Spirits*, and I’d played it while I worked. I could hear a saxophone in there but the rest of the sounds were a mystery. I liked what I heard but I didn’t know what I was going to see.

I’d been to the Sugar Club many times before; Booker T., Lee Fields, Sam Amidon, and Hauschka are great gigs that spring to mind. And I’d been there before it was the Sugar Club, when it was the I.F.T., the Irish Film Theatre. I’d spent much of the summer of 1980 in the place, in the dark, watching every film in a season of classic Italian films – Fellini, Antonioni, Pasolini, Rossellini, Visconti. The list of directors’ names feels like music, and that corner of Leeson Street and Earlsfort Terrace has always been a fountain of great images and sounds.

But: there were 37 years between the classic Italian films and the gig I was going to now, so it’s only a slight exaggeration to state that the average age of the audience shot up by a decade when I walked in. Being the oldest person in the room no longer surprises me and if I begin to feel a bit out of place, I remind myself that I’m the same age as Nick Cave and younger than Chrissie Hynde. Granted, Nick and Chrissie are the coolest people on the planet, but I can stay upright for ages and hold my glass without help, and the constant buzz in my ears is reward for a lifetime’s love of live music.

“The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there,” wrote L.P. Hartley. I don’t want to dwell on my age, I really don’t, but you do reach a point when the present becomes a bit of a foreign country too – especially the land of popular music. The Jam were called Paul, Bruce and Rick. The Comet Is

Coming are called Betamax, Danalogue and King Shabaka. I stood in front of the stage before the lads came on. I saw a stand for a sax; I saw the drums – very reassuring. And a box. I was sure it was a synthesiser but it still looked like a fuckin’ box and not a very promising one – some dull kid’s Junior Cert project.

I’d come to the gig with one of my sons. Some of the best gigs I’ve been to have been with my children – probably because I’m with them. His taste in music is wild, yet impeccable, so I relaxed. The box would deliver; the box would be wonderful.

And it was.

I’ve been to better gigs, perhaps, but never to anything as exhilarating. The kids around me – sorry about this, but all people under the age of forty-five are kids – bounced and swayed as if they’d no choice. That rapport between musician and audience, the sense that they know one another well, that there’s no divide, the feeling, almost, of home and shared life – I’d witnessed it before, especially at Aslan and Madness gigs. But this was a bit different. There was no one screaming for the hits, no one clapping for the old days. This was the present tense – music invented in front of me. It was mad and joyous; it was brilliant. It was jazz, apparently, but that night it seemed like everything.

Ten Commandments of Gig

Cathal Coughlan (Microdisney, The Fatima Mansions, Teilifis)

*FOOTNOTE this previously appeared in our *Great Gig Memories* book. Sadly Cathal died while we were compiling this current book. We've included this piece in his memory.

I have gigged. Sometimes very little, sometimes way too much. I began doing this as a confrontation with the general public, some forty years ago. I hope you won't mind, then, if I put forth my lifetime findings, the Ten Commandments of Gig.

1. The Act and the Audience: they won't always love one another

Evidence: Jackie Leven, quietly facing down a hostile Doll By Doll "audience" in Cork in 1980. All it took was a few unfaltering and simple words. Beneath a giant backdrop of Antonin Artaud's head and shoulders, and accompanied by Jackie's immanent staring eyes. Resulting in a silence – tense, but silent all the same. In contrast with my own fate as a performer on various occasions, handled with far less composure and, indeed, success.

2. The Act: always have transportation, with fuel on board.

Evidence, the first: Microdisney, including me, in its second month of existence, travelling the 160 miles to play in our nation's capital city of Dublin. Extreme shortage of petrol and rail strike. Meaning overnight travel, on deserted roads where fuel usage could be regulated. Witnessing various possible roadside mirages of (others') inebriation and nudity on the unlit single carriageway. Six of us then settling down to an in-vehicle pre-dawn snooze, under the obelisk in Dublin's Phoenix Park. Worth it.

Evidence, the second: some eight years afterwards, on a shoestring UK tour with the Fatima Mansions, inching along an office park driveway, just before lunchtime, somewhere in the English Midlands. The engine of the hired vehicle was roaring and rattling at giant volume, perhaps due to the fact that none of its ever-rotating cast of troubled custodians had favoured it with supplements of oil and water, or, indeed, any form of scrutiny at all. For weeks. The suddenly-turning heads, and repulsed faces, of business-dressed people through the floor-to-ceiling office windows gave our tableau the air of a menacing Jacques Tati movie. Not worth it, but hilarious.

3. The Audience: proximity to livestock makes them sleepy

Evidence: again in the English Midlands, the Fatima Mansions. Huge steel doors, for access to a working cattle market, were located just alongside

the stage. The audience was very tranquil indeed. Which might have been the force-field of primeval animal trading, or perhaps full stomachs from the apparent barbecues which had produced those blackened tinfoil pieces on the floors of the venue's toilets?

4. The Audience: rugby makes them talkative

Evidence: at Warrington, the proprietor preceded our soundcheck by soliciting reverence for his venue, "the Anfield of Rugby League" (sic). Our dressing room was a rather cluttered and dusty directors' box. The audience didn't give a monkeys, either way. It was Saturday night, and human roaring would be unconfined, all of it directed at one's mates.

5. The Venue: Americans – they like to have fun at work, and this is all work to them

I've quite often had reason to observe, both as a performer and as a punter, that venue and stage crews in the US tend (with notable psychotic exceptions) to exude a sense of fun, even joy, as they go about their work. This stands in contrast to the passive-aggression and clinical depression more usually exhibited in equivalent situations on this side of the Atlantic. Must be the lack of affordable healthcare.

6. The Act: don't play in car showrooms

Yeah, this is a big one, don't do it. Once happened in Foggia, Italia, with Microdisney. We played on one of the several podia, and the 1985 Datsun range commanded the remainder. One guy, out of his mind, kept screaming at me to, I quote, "take [my] fucking clothes off". While not meant to be taken literally, it nonetheless grew tiresome.

7. The Act: don't play L-shaped rooms with two PA systems and two sound crews

Bad. Also happened, mid-afternoon in Łódź, Poland. If asked, suggest Venue hires a second Act and makes it into a proper soundclash. Or blues jam.

8. The Act: check there's a venue

It's the year 2000 – I'm back from oblivion, rejuvenated! The Grand Necropolitan Quartet and I were booked to play a reputable medium-sized venue in central London. Just before the soundcheck, word arrived that the venue would be shutting down immediately, having lost its licence. Hilarity ensued.

9. The Act: don't expect your hometown to love you

Evidence: New Year's Eve, 2018/19, Rocket From the Crypt, playing a big

venue in San Diego, where they reside. Rattling the floorboards with wild rockin' noise and charisma. Full house, no takers.

10. Acts and Audiences: this ain't El Dorado, at least not the way they say

I get downcast when I hear people say things like “live work is where the living is earned”, or threadbare censorious stuff to that effect. True for some, but a mirage for most, and after the COVID time of writing this, who knows what will persist?

So where's the magic? It exists, and I've felt it most recently at shows in Dalston by Sean O'Hagan, Brigid Mae Power, Kenny Process Team and Daniel O'Sullivan's Dream Lion Ensemble, and at the final show in Deptford by the stellar revival known as This Is Not This Heat. Nights when energy and good feeling seem to palpably flow off the stage, to move around the room for a while and then flow back onto the stage, and on, in continuous exchange. Just as happened at shows in Cork by The Only Ones and Planxty, all those years ago. For that, perhaps we can all muddle through somehow.

