

the cut



March 2016

RJD2
Kurt Vile and the
Violators
Torres

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Last week, I slipped away from Pittsburgh in the early hours of the morning while it was still under a blanket of snow. Now, after a much needed vacation, and with a new issue of *The Cut* coming out, I've got to say this year is looking up.

As always, Chris Schuler is kicking this issue off by not pulling any punches in the latest Music News. Then we're bringing it into the 21st century, with some thought-provoking editorials on producers in pop music and artists taking their music offline, as well as a piece by Brooke Ley on musicians in the realm of social media. If the present's not your cup of tea, we've also got a glowing review of 50s nuclear-themed music by Paige O'Riordan.

The rising temperature may have you thinking of spring and new beginnings, but for every dawn there must also be a sunset. In this

month's mixtape we decided to reflect on the loss of a dear friend, the Skibo Cafe. I trust you'll find our selection respectful to its memory.

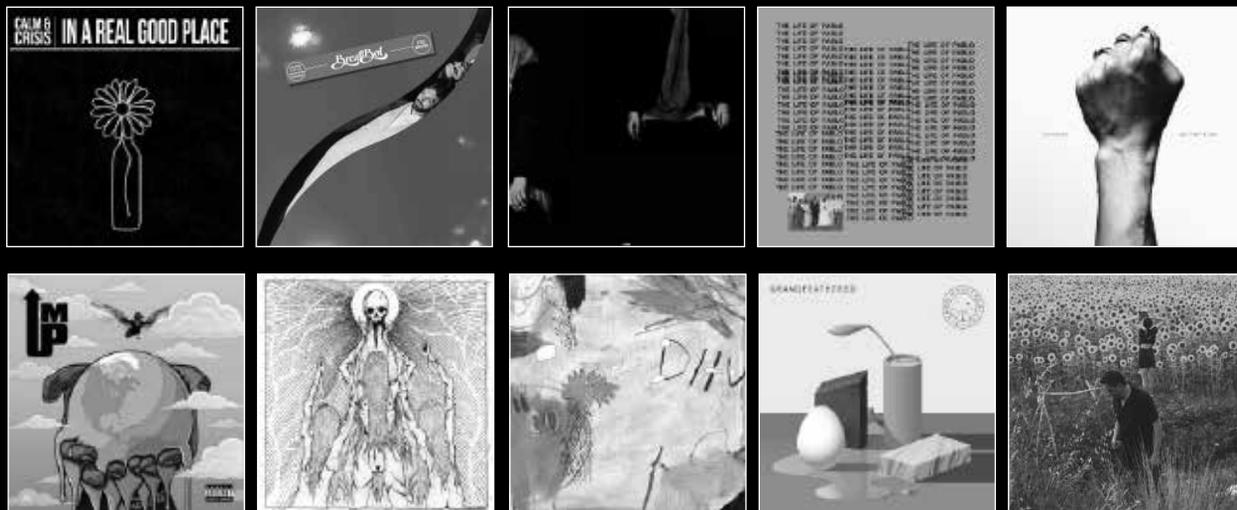
Of course, far be it from us to not celebrate its life by going to some great concerts. We managed to catch Torres at Club Cafe and Ina Rastegar did some great reporting from Kurt Vile's show at Mr. Small's. To top it all off, Catherine Kildunne decided to kick it with RJD2 after his Pittsburgh show and ended up getting more out of him than she expected (ask her in person for more details).

So, why not have a seat outside and read up on the latest in music both at home and abroad? You'll probably see me out there, since I can finally bike without screaming icy curses into the unforgiving darkness (note to self: write a song about that later).

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Arun'.

Arun Marsten
Editor-in-Chief
The Cut Magazine

Recommended Albums



Top Row from Left to Right: *Calm and Crisis - In a Real Good Place*, *Breakbot - Still Waters*, *Bones - Useless*, *Kanye West - The Life Of Pablo*, *Savages - Adore Life*

Bottom Row from Left to Right: *Young Thug - I'm Up*, *Lost Salt Blood Purges - Only the Youngest Grave*, *DIIV - Is the Is Are*, *Pinkshinyultrablaster - Grandfeathered*, *JesulSun Kil Moon - JesulSun Kil Moon*

10 Songs You Need To Hear

- 1 **Surrender** Savages
- 2 **Moving Parts** Calm and Crisis
- 3 **Hot Head** Death Grips
- 4 **Out of Mind** Diiv
- 5 **No Chill** Vic Mensa and Skrillex
- 6 **If I Get High** Nothing But Thieves
- 7 **Forgiveness** Mrs. Magician
- 8 **Haven, Mass** Bon Iver
- 9 **Cough Drop** The O'my's
- 10 **Veni Vidi Vici** The Black Lips



Music News

By Chris Schuler

⌘ I was there when LCD Soundsystem announced they would be reuniting to tour this summer. I was there when they announced they would be recording a new album. I was there when internet commenters told James Murphy he was a sell-out. I was there.

⌘ Taylor Swift took home the Grammy for Album of the Year, millions and millions of bloggers tied for the “Stale I’m’a Let You Finish Joke” of the Year.

⌘ Human thinkpiece-generator Beyonce performed at the Super Bowl, generating approximately 20 trillion words with her Black-Panther-themed set. Coldplay apparently also performed.

⌘ Kanye West’s new album, *The Life of Pablo*, was reportedly pirated over 500,000 times in the week after it was released. Pretty much once for every tweet he made in the lead-up to the release.

⌘ Speaking of Kanye, Twitter, and piracy, Kanye recently got in a feud with Deadmau5 after accidentally tweeting a picture of his computer with The Pirate Bay open. Looks like producers know who their Real Friends are.

⌘ President Obama said that his favorite song from the last year was Kendrick Lamar’s “How Much a Dollar Cost.” Vice President Biden responded that, for the 23rd year in a row, nothing could top Dr. Dre’s “Deez Nuuuts”.

⌘ After Tidal managed to botch not one but two exclusive album releases, Samsung reportedly attempted to purchase the streaming service. No word yet on whether I will get a \$50,000,000 buyout after failing my midterms.

⌘ Bernie Sanders publicly endorsed Phish at a rally in Vermont, calling them “one of the great American bands” and locking in the 3 Phish phans who will be able to find a polling station this spring.

⌘ David Bowie passed away January 10, just two days after the release of *Blackstar*. Rest in Peace, Starman.

THE BAND AND THE PRODUCER

By David Dwyer

As more and more producers leave their bands, or at least assert themselves independently, the focus of public attention seems to be shifting from band members towards recognizing the producers behind the music.

Jamie xx, of the xx, established himself as an amazing solo act years ago, and in late January, Rostam Batmanglij left Vampire Weekend to work on his career as a producer. These recent developments are jarring because they disturb the classic viewpoint of a band as an entity with one leader. However, when producers leave the band, they highlight the producer's role in music-making, which is sometimes hard to define.

Jamie xx has work that complements the xx's work in tone and introspective qualities. "Loud Places" on his debut *In Colour* features bandmate Romy Madley-Croft, yet his songs differentiate themselves from his band's by being more expansive and sprawling, while keeping the same layered tonality and awareness of space.

Rostam's recent work with Carly Rae Jepsen on "Warm Blood" off of *Emotion* draws on the weirder pop elements of his previous work with Vampire Weekend. The title lyric is a dark yet perfectly evocative line about love: "Warm blood feels good, I can't control it anymore." Even though he is working with a different genre, this line is the epitome of the attention to detail and theme that the two can bring to the table.

These two instances have changed the way I approach bands. Before I focused on the producers, I listened to a band's music as an unchangeable whole, made by the artists in the spotlight; but as more producers enter the public eye, their handiwork may also start getting the attention it deserves.

STAYING OFFLINE MAY BE AN ARTIST'S BEST BET

Adele's *25* broke a fifteen-year-old record for first week sales when it dropped last year, moving 3.4 million units. That week, it accounted for over 40% of all albums sold. It was the first album ever to sell more than a million units in multiple weeks, with 1.1 million sold in its second week and 1.2 million more in the third. It sold over twice as much as the nearest competitor, Taylor Swift's *1989*. Combined, these two sold more than the next six best-selling albums. It's fitting that these two releases are grouped together, since they belong to two of the highest-profile artists to remove their music from streaming services. In an era where streaming accounts for more than half of the total albums sold, Adele and Swift have found gargantuan success by breaking the mold.

Let's compare them to another record-breaking album. Kanye West released his newest album, *The Life of Pablo*, as a Tidal-exclusive, leading to more than half a million torrent downloads in one day. A Torrent Freak executive said he

had never seen anything like it before. It's too early to tell what sales of this album will be like, but Tidal users have reported problems with streaming and faulty credit card charges, leading to a grim outlook for Ye's sales even before declaring that it would never see a physical or digital release outside of the service.

Sure, all three of these artists are anomalies – absolutely no one is as popular as Taylor Swift or Adele right now, and few artists can make bloggers salivate like Kanye. Drag City, an indie label, refuses to release its albums to streaming services, but Joanna Newsom is never going to crack the top 10, no matter how acclaimed her albums become. Still, her most recent album reached no. 30 on the charts, while Billboard has declared that Kanye's won't even be counted. For now, it seems like not playing ball with the streaming services is an artist's best bet. It's almost enough to make me give up my Spotify subscription.

By Chris Schuler

SOCIAL MEDIA AND MUSICIANS

By Brooke Ley

Over the past month, several musicians have attracted media attention due to their posts on Twitter. The two most prominent of these events have been B.o.B's conspiracy theories and Kanye West's feud with Wiz Khalifa. Rapper B.o.B posted several tweets regarding his belief that the earth was flat, only to receive a response from astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson about the faulty science behind these statements. B.o.B responded with a rap filled with conspiracies and anti-Semitism, prompting Dr. Tyson to respond with a rap of his own.

Another Twitter feud occurred between Kanye West and Wiz Khalifa. As Kanye was gearing up to release his album "The Life of Pablo," he released some tweets that were almost purposefully provocative. (E.g. "This is not the album of the year. This is the album of life.") This led to criticism from Wiz Khalifa, who believed that the original title of the album, "Waves," was taking away credit from the creators of the way movement of hip hop, such as Max B. He followed this with, "Hit this kk and become yourself." Kanye interpreted kk as Kim Kardashian, although it actually meant Khalifa Kush, and proceeded to go on an over 30 tweet rant. But when Amber Rose, Kanye's former girlfriend and the mother of Wiz Khalifa's child, got dragged into the attacks, she tweeted, "Awww @kanyewest are u mad I'm not around to play in ur asshole anymore?" Kanye replied with, "Exes can be mad but just know I never let them play with my ass... I don't do that... I stay away from that area all together."

This raises questions about what musicians' relationships with Twitter and other social media should be. Twitter, in these cases, has proven that it can have an effect on music. B.o.B revealed his anti-Semitism and general belief in conspiracies through his songs, and Kanye changed the name of his album to "Life of Pablo." However, I would argue that Twitter has more of an effect on the audience themselves than the musicians.

Twitter's format can make it an easy source of drama. However, as soon as one drama begins to die down, it can be typically forgotten when replaced by another. For example, B.o.B's feud was soon overshadowed by Kanye's, and Kanye's feud with Wiz Khalifa was essentially forgotten after the release of his album.

However, due to the number of people these messages are able to reach, tweets by famous musicians can begin to affect the audience. Neil deGrasse Tyson addressed this in a sketch on the *The Nightly Show* stating, "If you want to think the world is flat go ahead, but if you think the world is flat and you have influence over others...then being wrong becomes being harmful." Kanye's often derogatory comments to Amber Rose in the past have been shown to deeply hurt her, leading her to host events such as "Slutwalk." This event seeks to support women who have been subject to slut shaming and create awareness for the lack of accountability for double standards and sexual assault. Kanye also tweeted recently, "BILL COSBY INNOCENT !!!!!!!!!!" perpetuating harmful ideas that fail to recognize Bill Cosby's problematic behavior.

So what does this mean for musicians and Twitter in the future? Celebrities are only human, so we can still expect them to express their opinions on Twitter. Many times, this can serve to humanize them and allow them to gain a closer relationship with their followers and fans. However, it can also lead to drama and other issues. I don't think that celebrities should not have Twitter or should focus on using social media simply as a marketing tool. I think they should be free to utilize it as they wish. That being said, I agree with Dr. Tyson that musicians need to be more aware of how their tweets can be harmful to both their audience and, perhaps, their music.



String Quartets at The Miller

The latest performance series at the Miller Gallery, String Quartets at the Miller, seems to be another failed attempt to remove classical music from grand concert halls and dusty library shelves and place it in an intimate environment. The ensembles weren't on an elevated stage. The pieces were prefaced with historical details. People were trying hard to make it an inclusive and engaging experience.

The music itself was also good. The performance featured string quartets by Haydn, Mozart and Bononcini. The Mozart 'Dissonance' String Quartet in C Major, performed by the School of Music Honors String Quartet, was extremely compelling, particularly the slow, progressive opening that gained it its nickname. However, as usual, Haydn left much to be desired. The second movement of his 'Emperor' String Quartet in C Major was an especially bland theme and variations.

What was the problem with the performance you might ask? The venue was good, the program was good, the performers were great. Isn't that all you need? The question I came away asking was, "What is the point?" Why was this performance happening in a contemporary art gallery, surrounded by an exhibit on minimalism? What was it trying to convey?

If it was just trying to present aesthetically pleasing music, then a recital hall would have worked just as well, if not better, than a contemporary art gallery. If on the other hand, as was suggested by the series' partnership with the course titled "The String Quartet: A Social History", the performance was intended as a musical window into the sociopolitical ethos of the time, the introductory information given was grossly inadequate.

What this concert needed was a sense of purpose, an idea to communicate. It's not enough to play notes well. The choice of venue, the program, the program notes, all of these play crucial roles in communicating with the audience, roles which this concert just didn't seem to acknowledge, or which it reduced to the level of a gimmick. The series has two upcoming events: one on March 20th featuring works by the Romantic composers Schubert, Beethoven and Brahms, and the other on April 10th featuring works by Britten, Bartok, Herrmann and Berg. As a purely musical experience, I am sure these will be at least as good as the last, but don't go expecting much more.

By Kabir Mantha

CONCERT REVIEWS

The first time I saw Kurt Vile and the Violators, in 2012, they played to a very small crowd at one of the more popular venues in my hometown. I enjoyed the show then, but the fact that the audience consisted of only two rows was a bit underwhelming. Even though a show can seem more personal when so few people are around, the ambience can lack the energy that a larger crowd provides. This time around, though, Kurt Vile and the Violators, played a sold-out set at Mr. Smalls. Their lo-fi, folk-rock sound doesn't need an invested audience, but Vile still seemed to enjoy the response from a full crowd of people occasionally shouting encouragements between songs. The audience even sang along to his more popular songs, like "Pretty Pimpin" and "Jesus Fever."

Vile took a somewhat unconventional route with the set list, however, deciding to play "Pretty Pimpin," arguably his most popular song, third in the fifteen song setlist. Even more unusual, he had his band leave so he could play two solo acoustic songs in the middle of the set. I feel that he would have benefitted from a setlist that let him build up to more popular, accessible songs. However, I did enjoy the

Certain types of bands tend to fare better in bars. There's a reason your stereotypical "bar-band" plays a Stonesey brand of blues rock – it fits the atmosphere. To be fair, Club Cafe is as much a music venue as it is a bar (or as much a club as it is a cafe, if you prefer), but it wasn't the place that I would have expected Torres' brand of vulnerable, passionate indie rock to excel.

The opener, Palehound, seemed to confirm my suspicions. Their music had a heavy emo influence, and songs where they embraced the punkier side of that sound worked very well. Songs where lead singer and guitarist Ellen Kempner played solo lacked the oomph to really own the venue. Unfortunately, I was standing next to a table of ravenous fans of hot wings; twinkly arpeggios are nothing next to the sound of meat being sucked off a bone. I'd like to give the band another shot, but only if it were far away from any sort of catering.

acoustic songs, which were "Stand Aside" and "Dead Alive." These songs allowed Vile to be center of attention, and he certainly deserved it. In my opinion, his true talent lies in his lyricism, and he used these opportunities to show off his chops.

This tour was promoting Kurt Vile's newest album, *blieve im goin down*, which was released towards the end of last year. The record fits more comfortably as a rock album than his earlier work, and the harder hitting sound definitely played to the strengths of his band. Without Vile's acknowledgement and thanking of the band members, you might forget they are there for a bit, given Vile's raw magnetism on stage, but they still play an essential role in creating the atmosphere of the show.

Torres was a whole other story. Mackenzie Scott howled her way through the set, ensuring that my attention never wavered from the music. She and her band created a textured, pulverizing wall of noise, but they managed to keep the nuance that makes her albums so compelling. Through it all, her stage presence kept every eye in the venue locked on her. By the time she played "Sprinter," her biggest hit to date, the guy next to me could have been playing quarters and I wouldn't have noticed.

The show was loud, intense, and intimate. The small size of the club may have contributed to that partially, but I'd bet that even in a sold-out Mr. Small's this band could put on a heart-wrenching show. Hopefully over the next few years they'll get a chance to prove me right.

Kurt Vile and the Violators

By Ina Rastegar

Torres

By Chris Schuler

Ma

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wedn
		1	2
6	7	8 Less Than Jake at Altar Bar Dressy Bessy at Club Café	9
13	14	15 SWMRS at Smiling Moose	16 The Who at Co Center Dr. Dog at Sta
20	21	22	23
27	28	29	30

rch

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	3	4	5 Jukebox the Ghost at Mr. Small's
	10	11	12
onsol Energy ge AE	17 Hoodie Allen at Stage AE	18 Carly Rae Jepsen at Mr. Small's Yung Lean at Altar Bar	19 Titus Andronicus by Cattivo
	24	25 Tobacco/BMSR by Cattivo Cage The Elephant/Foals by Petersen Events Center Talkers by Spirit Hall	26 Echo Lightwave Unspeakable by Assemble
	31		





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By Catherine Kildunne

Ramble Jon Krohn, more commonly known as RJD2, is a producer who has been making instrumental hip-hop and indie electronica since the mid-90s. We sat down with him after a recent concert to talk to him about his early career, most recent album, and the evolution of his production process.

The Cut: You've been making music for a super long time now, right, for about 20 years?

RJD2: The first record I produced came out in 1998, so yeah, it's coming up on 20 years.

TC: Were you making music for a long time before that?

RJ: I played in bands and such. I was involved in music since I was 11 or so. So, it's been more than 20 years that I've been involved in music in some capacity.

TC: How has that process changed for you?

RJ: Oh man, I could write tomes on it. You know that first phase from before I started making records was, kind of just a different era. Everything was live shows, it was just a different world. I haven't thought about it in so long, so I'm jogging my memory back to that time period. It was small, it was insular. The biggest you could really perceive doing anything would be being able to headline a local show. So the

idea of going on tour didn't even register or occur to me as a possibility. And then I was a DJ in a rap group, and I started making records in the late 90s. I got a chance to make my first solo record in 2001. So, I see those as kind of the two big turning points in my career: having my name as a credit on a record as part of a group and then having a solo record under my own name released nationally. Even since then, it's changed so much. Obviously, record sales are—the record industry is in a different place. The touring industry is in a different place, and I'm in a different place. At a point you realize you're going through life and change is occurring on all facets of your life and at least for me, your industry.

TC: I guess if everything is changing at the same time it's hard to register when one thing's changed. Sorry, I'm a college student, so I'm thinking about change all the time.

RJ: Yeah, I think what you're probably reacting to is the fact that nothing happens in a vacuum, so you can't assess anything without the input the other components are having. Throughout all that, I was also at a point where I was willing to throw, in terms of time and resources, anything and everything that I had at a career. I was in my early 20s, I would go out on the road for two months if I had to. And then life changes, and at a certain point that's not what you're willing to do. In the end it's



hard to assess exactly what any one particular change is causing.

Me: *Dame Fortune* is coming out in a little bit less than a month, and you just finished an album last year with STS. How did that provide an influence or a jumping off point for *Dame Fortune*?

RJ: I feel like for me, doing a particular type of song or album or collaboration, can scratch a creative itch, so a big part of making records for me is curiosity, and being curious about what's going to come out of the creative process of making a song. Making that record with STS, for the very obvious reasons, that was a full length rap record. So I didn't feel, the need to load *Dame Fortune* full of rap songs or collaborations with rappers. Not that that's not fun, but I kind of distance myself from it and then come back to it, if that makes any sense.

TC: For the single "Peace of What," the buzzword in every article that I've read has been "soulful." Was that influenced by working with someone from Philadelphia, [Jordan Brown, the featured vocalist] or was it independent of that?

RJ: It was independent of that. I had a demo version of it and brought it to Jordan to execute. He did a phenomenal job with it, and I'm very happy. That relationship is a thing

that I like to think would have come about wherever we would've called our residency. I connected with Jordan through making the record with STS because he was singing a bunch of hooks on it. From there we just had a relationship, and then I had this song, and I thought he was a good fit for it. But I would have called him if I was living in California or Mexico or wherever. His voice, first and foremost, is what came to mind when I thought of someone that might be a good candidate for executing the song.

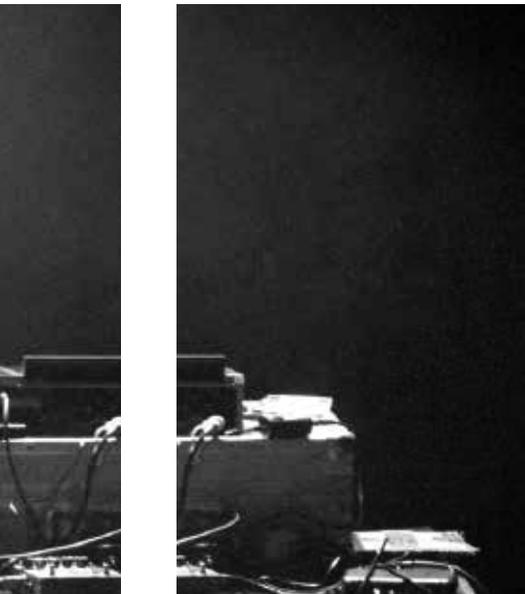
TC: Something I've always been curious about was how do you know when you're done with a song or with an album? Is it hard to tell?

RJ: It is hard to tell. That's been one of the hardest things to tell whenever you're making a song or a record. I find it gets easier the more you do it. It's kind of, I guess you could say, a quiet voice that is continually speaking to me. I think this is a common experience - I don't think it's unique to myself. It's continually informing where you go with the song, what it might need, and it's one of those things is that will inform when something's done or when it's not done. Sometimes when you get outside of the song template, when you're working on a song that has a format or arrangement that is abnormal, then it can be harder for those instincts to kick in. For me I try to jam into a song and make it as dense and as concise as

possible, until the point where I start having the sensation that this is too disorienting or there's too much going on. I need to cross that line and then pare things back a little bit very often.

TC: And over time, that has been a pretty straight phenomenon? From having difficulty knowing as much to it getting a lot easier?

RJ: Yeah. I distinctly remember making my first record and not having any idea if any of these songs were done. You're continually playing songs for your friends and people around you are saying, what does it need? What doesn't it need? What do I do here? Little by little, over the years, you just start doing that less and less.



Kanye West TLOP

By Donovan Powers

Where do I even start. I'm going to have a really hard time reviewing this album, because the term album is generous. Album implies that there is some through line, some level of polish and finish, some thought on the part of the artist to put forth a finished work. *The Life of Pablo* is not an album. *TLOP* is a bunch of tracks Kanye recorded during his refractory period, forgot to finish or mix or master, and then afraid people would actually listen to them he put them on Tidal in hopes people would just forget they ever existed.

So many of the artistic choices on this project baffle me. Throughout the entire album Kanye insists on using early 2000's autotune, except even Tpain did it more tastefully. Ye has always been a producer first and a rapper second, but he failed to do either of those things on this album. The lyricism is so bad it's laughable. I almost feel like it was intentional, like Kanye wanted to see how far he could go and still have people claim it's good. I want to quote some lines here but they aren't fit for print. The production is blatantly unfinished, there are so many points where the mixing sounds like some rando on soundcloud. Yeezy has even acknowledged this going so far as to announce the he will be releasing fixed versions of some songs. Like what? HE IS RELEASING BUG PATCHES FOR HIS ALBUM FAM. THIS IS A RAP ALBUM WITH DLC FAM.

Don't worry, not everything on this album is garbage. I have to admit I dig "30 hours," I wish the entire album was like that track. Chance's verse on the opening number is fire, but that's also sad because this guest verse is the best one on the album. I have never heard a Kendrick verse I didn't like, but his feature on "No More Parties" was at best mediocre. *TLOP* is not a good album. Your friends who are Kanye stans will try to tell you it is. It is not. Remember this, and maybe it won't have to happen again.

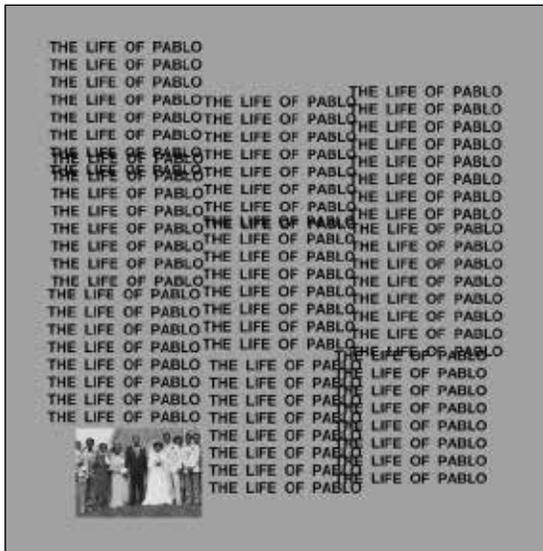
David Bowie Blackstar

By Sophia Suarez

David Bowie's swan song was released January 8th, only two days before the musical hero's untimely death. *Blackstar* is a melange of experimental jazz with melodies akin to that of Bowie's 1980s hit album, *Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps)*. Added to this unique mix are Bowie's vocals, which range from those of a soft and wandering crooner to a hard and screeching metalhead. The entire projects transports the listeners to Bowie's latest dreamland, one which now, in context, is darker than previous ones. The new universe is the *Blackstar*. It is no longer just an album. It is a new world created separately from a flamboyant persona or surrealist imagery. It is a world composed of the entire essence of David Bowie.

As listeners, we become empathetic to Bowie's influences and experiences. He draws from sources like ultraviolent language of *A Clockwork Orange* and the incestual violence of a 17th century play, making those themes his own. We also find ourselves intertwined in the mystery behind the subjects of death and longing which take a heavy place within his world. Two days after the release, of course, we found ourselves in a dreamland that was far too real.

Blackstar is extraordinary in that it is not just an album, but an epitaph. It is the last Bowie album released in his lifetime, a shining supernova. Posthumous will be released starting in 2017, and I am hoping this will lead us to discover not just life on Mars, but a whole new galaxy to be discovered.



~ /5



✂✂✂✂✂~ /5

Bloc Party Hymns

By Daniel Deluca

Bloc Party is a band that once seemed like it could never disappoint me. Unfortunately, the original drummer and bassist left the band before the recording of their fifth album, *Hymns*. Both musicians were integral parts of the original band, and I began to worry. It turns out this fear was deserved. The rest of the album is a mess, filled with weird vocals and clear signs the band isn't sure what direction to move in. Featuring the bizarre country shuffle of "The Good News" and lackluster drumming on "Virtue," the rest of the album does not impress. Kele Okereke, usually incredibly inventive, lacks inspiration and the only track that shines is "Living Lux," where his vocals portray raw emotion over a simplistic beat. Not even small highlights can save the album, and one can only hope the band will get their sound back before it is too late.



✂️/5

Diiv Is the Is Are

By Chris Schuler

Is the Is Are opens with "Out of Mind" and "Under the Sun," two gorgeous, punky songs with shimmering guitars and undeniable basslines. I hated Diiv's debut, but for about 7 minutes I was convinced they had made me a convert. Unfortunately, I still had 56 minutes to go. The rest of the album meanders around, drifting through one beautiful track after another but failing to hold my interest past the first riff. The vocals do nothing to help; frontman Zachary Cole sounds as bored as I felt.

Make no mistake, no other contemporary band has guitar tones as perfect as Diiv's. Unfortunately, they don't seem to know what to do with them. With an album playing over an hour long, that's a cardinal sin. There may come a time when this band figures out how use all their pretty pedals for something useful, but they haven't yet. Avoid this album unless you wonder what The Cure would sound like after an Ambien overdose.



✂️/5

Dream Theater The Astonishing

By Halsey Hutchinson

The fact that Dream Theater is making a 13th album is no surprise to their fans - they've been the most consistent presence in the prog rock scene for close to 30 years. However, the content of *The Astonishing* is considerably different from any of their recent work, where 34 tracks describe the story of a Hunger Games-esque hero saving a dystopian future from the "noise machines" with the "gift of music." Of course the plot is contrived and laughable - this is a Dream Theater concept album. However, if you loved *Metropolis Pt. 1*, you'll love this album. Jordan Rudess' talent for creating memorable themes shines throughout the record, and, as always, it is hard to deny the musicianship of each member of this group. Highlights of the album include, but are certainly not limited to, "Lord Nafaryus" (unfortunately, not a typo), "Three Days," and "A Life Left Behind."



✂️✂️✂️/5

Porches Pool

By Lucy Denegre

Porches' first full length release, *Slow Dance in the Cosmos*, is an album you cry to at 3 am while smoking a cigarette. With even more synth, occasionally clubby drum machine beats, a lot of autotune, and very little of the previous album's guitar and drums, *Pool*, Porches' second LP, is practically a pop album. It's reminiscent of Hot Chip if they were a little more sadboy and still taking music seriously. Though Aaron Maine's crooning still comes through strong and the guy can write a heart wrenching melody, *Pool* is missing the rawness that made *Slow Dance* so good. Yeah, I could dance to it if I tried, but a lot of it is boring. Denser songs like "Hour," "Be Apart," and "Glow" shine through, but with its more produced tracks, this album, like its cover, could easily be described as "Aesthetic": very polished, not much content.



✂️✂️✂️/5

By Paige O’Riordan

ATOMIC LOVE

The Cold War brings to mind images of disillusioned soldiers, paranoid statesmen, and the threat of nuclear fallout. It was a grim time in history. Art is always influenced by the time period it was made in, and one would assume that anything from the Cold War era would be bleak. However, many musical artists turned these expectations on their head and produced topical but playful songs. They reacted to a culture of fear and paranoia in the best way they knew how: by making music.

The songs produced in this period have been called “atomic platters” by Ken Sitz, a pop culture historian. One of the main focuses of Cold War era music was the atom bomb, which was officially created in 1945. Its use to end World War II made it a household name. By the cold war, these weapons led to a threat of mutual self-destruction between the two great powers. A rash of public service announcements in the US told people what to do in case of nuclear fallout, normalizing the threat in the mind of the American public. While PSAs telling school children to “duck and cover” seem horrifying today, it was everyday life for a generation.

The idea of the protest song is fairly well known today. Many popular artists released anti-Vietnam War songs, and the Woodstock music festival was staunchly anti-war. It is easy to find a simplistic explanation for those songs: the Vietnam War only increased in its unpopularity as time went on and the purpose seemed lost. Music was an easy and catchy way to express discontent. Less obvious is why songs that talk about the atom bomb and the Cold War in a positive manner were popular. Retrospectively, we can see that the use of the atom bomb caused massive amounts of human suffering and was possibly not needed to put an end to WWII. However, at the time, the atom bomb was a scientific novelty that had brought freedom back to world. There was a belief that the bomb was only the first of many scientific innovations that lead to carefree, easier living.

The Cold War coincided with the rise in power of the teenager. Before the 1950s, teenagers were not considered to be much more than children. However, the end of WWII brought them disposable income and plenty of consumer goods to spend it on. In order to examine the relationship between atomic platters and the political landscape, it is important to note that “the people who had not yet reached puberty at the time of the bomb were incapable of conceiving of life with a future”, according to Jeff Nuttall, who performed a survey on youth culture in 1968. They had grown up with the threat of nuclear annihilation, and in a culture of hyper-consumerism, nothing was off-limits if it would make a profit.

Today’s pop songs deal with topics much less weighty than nuclear fallout. However, this does not mean that all of the songs from the Cold War were dour and dry. “Atom Bomb Baby”, by The Five Stars, was all about how a woman was “a million times hotter than TNT”. And what better way to end a lover’s quarrel than confessing that “I just can’t stand another cold, cold war with you”, just like Floyd Tillman did in “This Cold War with You”? Sheldon Allman comforted his girl that he’d “love you all your life / Although that may not be too long” in his song “Crawl Out Through the Fallout”.

Many atomic platters pair their dark subject matter with a jaunty tune and some humor. The politics of the Cold War were incredibly pervasive. Though a love song with heavy-handed nuclear metaphors may seem disconcerting today, I believe that it would have been stranger if they did not exist. When the bomb seemed to be the starting point of a bright future, these songs reflected hope for the future. As paranoia set in, atomic platters were evidence of a generation looking at what appeared to suddenly be a bleak and non-existent future and rejecting the expectation of fear. Music was a familiar cultural touchstone and it allowed people to deal with the anxieties that arose during the Cold War in a non-confrontational manner.

PLAYLIST

“Crawllout Through the Fallout”

Sheldon Allman

“Atom Bomb Baby”

The Five Stars

“This Cold War with You”

Floyd Tillman

“Orange Colored Sky”

Nat King Cole

“Uranium Rock”

Warren Smith

“Atomic Baby”

Amos Milburn

“Atomic Cocktail”

Slim Gaillard Quartet

“You Hit Me Baby

Like an Atomic Bomb”

Faye Simmons

“Sputnik Baby”

Roosevelt Sykes

“The Senator McCarthy Blues”

Hal Block

“Rockin’ Behind the Iron Curtain”

Bobby Marchan and The Clowns

“My Radiation Baby (My Teenage Fall-out Queen)”

George McKelvey



R.I.P. Skibo

“Yellow Submarine” by The Beatles

Skibo was always so yellow.

Sarah Hempton

“All Night Diner” by Modest Mouse

Skibo was a front. Au Bon Pain's a coverup.

Naomi Berman

“The Pokemon Theme Song” by ???

I swear I heard this playing in Skibo on multiple occasions. And no, I was not under the influence of anything. I promise.

Imogen Todd

“I Slept With Someone in Fall Out Boy and All I Got Was This Stupid Song Written About Me” by Fall Out Boy

Andrew Carnegie made this school and then this cafe got named after his house.

Anonymous

“Here I Am” by The Rando Girl Who Wins in Camp Rock

Skibo was always good for giving us a good 'ole random Disney Channel throwback to help us get through our days. Somehow this song was almost always on just to remind us that Demi Lovato got robbed at the end of Camp Rock.. I'm still bitter about it.

Stephen Yamalis

“So Far Away” by Rod Stewart

This cover of Carole King's classic always tugs at the heart strings. Skibo may be gone but it will live on forever in our hearts. Skibo, it would be so fine to see your face at my door. R I P

Jack Taylor

“Heart Shaped Box” by Nirvana

I was an angsty eighteen year old freshman on a meal plan, and no establishment on campus resonated with my grungy side more than the simple, instant gratification menu of Skibo. They did as much with four ingredients as Nirvana did with four chords. This song was on their playlist for the months Skibo was my regular haunt, so it always makes me think of the spokescape of our generation.

Drevin Galentine

“All I Want” by Joni Mitchell

All I wanted was a pizza but it's 12:45 am and there are 20 people in line ahead of me :'(

Anonymous

“You Know I Should Be Leaving Soon” by American Football

Because if you never felt the employees eyes on you while you finished your meatball sub at 2:10 A.M., then you were a goddamn quitter.

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