



# ALBUMS OF THE WEEK

TEGAN & SARA



**Tegan & Sara** ★★★★ 1/2  
Love you to Death

Once you go pop, you just can't stop. Not if you're Tegan and Sara, that is. Following in the footsteps of their 2013 commercial makeover *Heartthrob*, the Quin sisters reteam with producer Greg Kurstin and return to the dance floor with another batch of synth-fuelled romance. Thankfully, their superior songwriting elevates this beyond the usual club fodder.

**Garbage** ★★★★ 1/2  
Strange Little Birds

Garbage have never been the happiest band. But with their sixth album, Shirley Manson and co. go dark like never before. She supplies confessional lyrics and intimate vocals for tellingly titled cuts like *Empty* and *Marginalized*. The band contributes their shadowy modern-rock twang and sombre industrial-pop glitchery. Misery has seldom sounded so cool.



NICK JONAS

## 29 new (& old) discs you need to hear (or not)

**Nick Jonas** ★★★★  
Last Year Was Complicated

Complicated — and cured, apparently. "Aw, s\*\*\* throw some bacon on it," sings Nick Jonas on his latest disc. I have no idea what that means, but it's a fine idea: The sound of sizzling pork would have been more mouthwatering than this flavourless batch of falsetto-soaked pop penned, performed and produced by the usual hired-gun hitmakers. Pass.

**Neil Young & Promise of the Real** ★★★★  
Earth

"Welcome to Neil Young's Rainforest Cafe. While you peruse our GMO-free menu, enjoy our in-house music: A dozen environmental songs from throughout Neil's career — plus a 28-minute version of *Love and Only Love* — all taped on his last tour and sweetened with samples of birds, bears, whales, insects and more. Can I bring you a gluten-free water?"

**Mumford & Sons** ★★★★ 1/2  
Johannesburg

First they went electric; now they're getting eclectic. After plugging in for 2015's *Wilder Mind*, the British folk-rockers connect with African artists Baaba Maal, Beatenberg and The Very Best on an EP created in two days. Not surprisingly, enthusiasm and immediacy trump compositional complexity in these upbeat, jammy creations. A pleasant detour.



GARBAGE



MCCARTNEY

OLDIES & GOODIES

**Paul McCartney** ★★★★  
Pure McCartney

Ever wondered what Paul McCartney's favourite Paul McCartney songs are? Here's the answer. Macca curated this anthology, which mixes 39 tracks (or 67 in the deluxe set) from his 45-year post-Fabs career. Nearly all his solo and Wings hits are here, along with Fireman fare and a few deeper album cuts. No major surprises, but still his best comp to date.

**Allen Ginsberg** ★★★★ 1/2  
The Last Word on First Blues

Rock lyrics are seldom poetry. And poets seldom make good rock. So don't expect Beat legend and *Howl* scribe Ginsberg to give Bob Dylan a run for his money on this three-disc compilation of cuts from '71-'81 (including a slew of unreleased fare). But do expect loose-limbed folk singalongs, gay anthems and leftie rabble-rousers — some with Dylan in the backing band.

**case / lang / veirs** ★★★★  
case / lang / veirs

Three is the magic number. Particularly when it's these three. Alt-country firecracker Neko Case, retro-pop chanteuse k.d. lang and indie folkie Laura Veirs join forces and voices for an album that seamlessly blends their songwriting talents and vocal strengths — while their honeyed harmonies add up to something more than the sum of its parts. Exquisite.

**Fitz & The Tantrums** ★★★★ 1/2  
Fitz & The Tantrums

From timeless to timely. For their tellingly self-titled third outing, these L.A. popsters hit the reset button, jettisoning their classic soul stylings and flashing forward to embrace contemporary pop sonics and songcraft. Singles like *HandClap* are still enjoyable, but much of it is too generic and commercial for its own good. Did somebody say moneygrabber?

**The Lonely Island** ★★★  
Popstar: Never Stop Never Stopping

Brevity really is the soul of wit. That's partly why TI's shorts are a hoot, while their albums — including this soundtrack — fall flat. Sure, their well-crafted teen-pop and hip-hop parodies about mansions, the Mona Lisa, homophobia and crack raise a chuckle. But at 49 minutes, the disc has too many duds to earn an encore. Really, they can stop anytime.

**Peter Dinklage & John Brekin' Point** ★★★★  
Breakin' Point

Emphasis on break. It's been five years since we've heard from the Swedish popsters behind 2006's whistling hit *Young Folks*. The good news: This seventh set has more upbeat ditties with catchy hooks, clever lyrics and even some whistling — plus production from Paul Epworth and Greg Kurstin. The bad news: Nothing here is as great as *Young Folks*.

**Train** ★★★  
Does Led Zeppelin II

What is and what should never be. As promised in the on-the-nose title, the California popsters faithfully and flawlessly recreate Zep's sophomore disc from stem to stern. But while former Zep tribute-band frontman Pat Monahan's Plant impersonation is spot on and the band hits all their marks, it's hard to see the point. Thank you — but no thank you.

**Pkew Pkew Pkew** ★★★★ 1/2  
Pkew Pkew Pkew

As Spinal Tap taught us: It's a fine line between stupid and clever. And like the Tap, these Toronto pop-punks pretend they're the former. But don't be fooled by their turbo-charged snot-rockets about skateboarding, pizza and booze — the sharp lyrics and sharper riffs prove they're smarter than the average bro. Give them a shot. Just don't call them chief.

**White Zombie** ★★★★ 1/2  
It Came from N.Y.C.

File under: First bites. Before they became the snarling horror-rock shlockmeisters of *More Human Than Human* and *Thunder Kiss '65*, Rob Zombie and co. were just another noisy punk band. And here's their early output: 39 tracks of ramshackle bashing and screechy vocals from their first two albums and four EPs, plus a handful of outtakes and a massive book. Sink your teeth in.

**Rolling Stones** ★★★★  
Totally Stripped

And extensively fleshed out. The Stones upgrade and revamp their 1995 live album *Stripped* — featuring songs recorded at smaller venues on the *Voodoo Lounge Tour* — with a new set list and (if you score the deluxe version) full concert DVDs from the three shows that formed the bulk of the original album and a 90-minute doc. It's a much bigger bang.

**The Damned** ★★★★  
Don't You Wish That We Were Dead

Breakups and makeups. Feuds and failure. Prog and pirate shirts. British punk pioneers The Damned never made things easy. But they made them interesting. This exhaustive, unflinching 110-minute doc from director Wes Orshoski delivers the whole sad, sordid, strange and silly *Folks*.

**Jon Bellion** ★★★★  
Human Condition

From *Monster* to *Human*. Singer-songwriter Bellion co-wrote Jason Derulo's *Trumpets*, Eminem's *Monster* and more. Now he comes into his own with a jawdropping major-label debut that sets his sweetly soaring vocals and grim existential musings against offkilter alt-R&B grooves, artfully manipulated samples and idiosyncratic arrangements. He's destined for greatness. Unconditionally.

**Michael Franti & Spearhead** ★★★★ 1/2  
Soulrocker

Can you really hit the club floor without shoes? Michael Franti can. For his ninth release with Spearhead, the eternally barefoot troubadude continues his evolution, adding elements of electronica and dance music to his jammy summer-festival melting pot of folk, rock, hip-hop, funk, reggae and dancehall. If he keeps this up, he'll be ready for the rave tent.

**DVD & BLU-RAY**

saga via frank interviews and tons of archival footage. Sweet sweet sweet.

**Mika** ★★★★ 1/2  
Sinfonia Pop

Mika knows how to put the orch in orch-pop. The flamboyant British singer-songwriter teams up with Canadian conductor Simon Leclerc for this sophisticated yet vibrant 93-minute concert, performing *Grace Kelly*, *Love Today* and other career hits and highlights with a full symphony in a gorgeous 19th-century Italian theatre. Formalwear not required.

**Melody Gardot** ★★★★ 1/2  
Live at the Olympia Paris

Gardot's life story — she began

writing songs as therapy for severe brain injuries after being hit by a car in 2003 — would make a compelling doc. Sadly, this isn't it. But it is a transfixing 101-minute Parisian gig by the enigmatic singer-songwriter, dominated by cuts from her R&B and soul-influenced 2015 album *Currency of Man*. It'll do nicely for now.

**Imagine Dragons** ★★★★  
Smoke + Mirrors Live

Still bummed about missing Imagine Dragons on tour last summer? Well, sulk no longer: The Las Vegas pop-rockers are making it up to you with this 95-minute concert DVD (taped at Toronto's Air Canada Centre) featuring hits like *Radioactive*, *Demons* and *Shots* — all enthusiastically played on a stylishly decorated but annoyingly dark stage. Never mind the smoke and mirrors; how about some lights?

**The Temper Trap** ★★★  
Thick as Thieves

They lost their guitarist. They recruited songwriters from outside the band. They spent nearly three years recording. And they ditched the experimentalism of their last album for chiming, soft-centred indie-rock anthems. If those aren't enough red flags to make you think twice about these Aussies' third disc, well, it's your life. Don't say you weren't warned.

**letlive.** ★★★★  
If I'm the Devil ...

There's more than one way to be heavy. So while the Angeleno post-hardcore rabble-rousers' fourth missive might lack some of the punk wallop and propulsion of its predecessors, it more than makes up for it with the emotional and political heft of its lyrics — and the stylistic breadth of the band's increasingly progressive songwriting. The devil's in the detail.

DARRYL STERDAN

Sounding off about the latest music

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THE DAMNED

**Architects UK** ★★★★ 1/2  
All Our Gods Have Abandoned Us

Rebuild it and they will come back. Returning to the scene of 2014's killer *Lost Forever // Lost Together*, the Brit metalcore vets lay waste to the competition once again with their relentless onslaught. Between the white-hot blowtorch vocals, faith-based lyrics and the intricately wound, brutally extreme riffs, these songs leave no doubt who the true gods are.

**Summer Cannibals** ★★★★  
Full of It

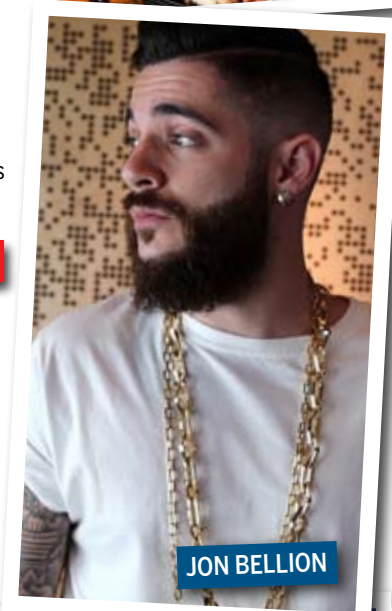
They took their name from a Patti Smith cut. They're on Kill Rock Stars Records. They're from Portland. They're led by fearless and fearless singer-guitarist Jessica Boudreaux. And their crackling third album fuses Pacific Northwest garage-punk to emotional intensity — and then smacks you between the eyes. Fill up.

**Band of Skulls** ★★★★ 1/2  
By Default

You can play it too cool. Which is what these British garage-rockers seem to be doing with that title. Far from the musical surrender it implies, their fourth album feels like a deliberately planned affair, goosing their blues-rock tracks with shorter songs, sharper melodies, punchier beats and a glammier vibe at times. They're using their head.



MICHAEL FRANTI



JON BELLION

CASE / LANG / VEIRS



LONELY ISLAND



FITZ & THE TANTRUMS