



Lil Wayne

Free Weezy Album ★★★★ 1/2

That's *Free* as in gratis (assuming you subscribe to Tidal). And *Free* as in apparently unaffiliated with the record label he's currently suing. The latter may be why Tunechi is in a good place on this outing, gleefully spitting his demented couplets and rude rhymes atop everything from buzzy bounce-beats and ominous grooves to soul ballads and James Brown revamps. Free your mind.

Meek Mill

Dreams Worth More Than Money ★★★★

Meek Mill meets MLK? Not quite. The Philadelphia rapper may have dreams — but based on his second major-label release, they're mostly the usual fantasies about wealth, power, sex, respect and being the illest of the ill. Fortunately, his aggressive delivery and muscularly thwacking tracks remain convincing and entertaining enough to be worth the price of admission.

Little Boots

Working Girl ★★★★

Business suits? Voice-mail messages? Isn't music supposed to provide escape from daily drudgery? Not to Victoria Hesketh, it seems. The U.K. popster turns work into play on her third album of glossy electro-dance fare — though thankfully she stops short of writing club-floor odes to photocopiers, team-building exercises and having your lunch stolen from the communal fridge.



Ghostface Killah & Adrian Young

Twelve Reasons to Die II ★★★★ 1/2

Ghostface is unstoppable. In more ways than one. The prolific Wu-Tang's third album in about six months continues the saga of slain Mafia hitman Tony Starks, whose remains were pressed into vinyl in Vol. 1. This time, rising gangster Lester Kane (Raekwon) plays the albums to resurrect Starks in a gang war with the mob who killed him. (No, really.) Meanwhile, Wu-Tang sensei RZA narrates, while Adrian Young unleashes another slate of ominous hip-hop tinged with old-school funk and soul. What more reason could you need?



Veruca Salt

Ghost Notes ★★★★ 1/2

You can't fight the Seether. So the reunited original lineup of Veruca Salt don't try on their first album in 18 years. That is not to say these songs don't sport some familiar-sounding power-chord riffs and string-scraping textures, along with Nina Gordon and Louise Post's close harmonies and enigmatic lyrics. It's just that now they deploy them in a more mature and measured manner. Which means they are able to effectively mine their alt-rock past without stooping to slavishly recreating it. And that makes this a surprisingly solid and satisfying comeback. Don't fight it.

D.O.A.

Hard Rain Falling ★★★★ 1/2

Bloodied but unbowed. After failing to become a B.C. MLA, Joey (S***head) Keithley is back at his day job. And back with a vengeance. The 16th D.O.A. disc finds the 59-year-old Can-punk gravel-gargler as fired up as ever, spurring his latest rhythm section through old-school punk and ska tirades against pipelines, racism, police shootings and warmongering. Politics' loss is punk's gain.



Cradle of Filth

Hammer of the Witches ★★★★

Black metal and black magic. You get plenty of both on the U.K. extremists' 11th studio album, as frontdemon Dani Filth and his umpteenth lineup (including two new guitarists and a keyboard player) power through another brutal hour of whiplash thrashing, accursed wailing and nefarious tales of covens, deflowered virgins, vampyres and other family fare. Fire up the cauldron.



Breaking Benjamin

Dark Before Dawn ★★★ 1/2

What didn't kill him made him ... well, about the same. After six years, an acrimonious breakup, legal hassles and health issues, singer-guitarist Benjamin Burnley remains not only unbroken but virtually unchanged on his fifth album. And no matter how you feel about his brand of post-grunge — all midtempo wallop, grinding guitars and dark-hearted chest-beating — you have to admire his resilience.

iwrestledabearonce

Hail Mary ★★★★ 1/2

Some fights you just can't win. These L.A.-via-Louisiana metalcore iconoclasts used to get flak from purists for their irreverent song titles and non-metallic elements. So, for this fourth album (and second with scream queen Courtney LaPlante) they buckle down, get serious and dish out 45 punishing minutes of fiercely frenzied mayhem. So now people are accusing them of selling out. Which is like accusing a Category 5 hurricane of going soft when it becomes a 4. Either way, they'll still messyouupgood.

Cairo Knife Fight

The Colossus ★★★★ 1/2

To find great music these days, you have to know where to look. Case in point: Cairo Knife Fight. In contrast to the first word in their name, they're from New Zealand. But in keeping with the other two-thirds of their handle, the duo's debut album is a razor-sharp set of tightly wound, aggressively swaggering alt-rock that can go toe to toe with any of Josh Homme's umpteen bands. Consider yourself forewarned.

Girlpool

Before the World Was Big ★★★★

Two can be the magic number. It seems to work for this female Philadelphia duo. Armed with only a guitar, a bass and girlish voices, they display more depth, breadth and inspiration than many bands — due in no small part to their charming tunes and willingness to undermine their folk-poppy harmonies with angular guitars and blasts of noise. Their world is about to get bigger fast.

Pins

Wild Nights ★★★★

Is wild one of those words that means something else in the U.K.? Or are these Manchester gals being ironic? Because make no mistake, while their second album is many things — mostly a punky amalgam of '60s-inspired garage-rock, surf and girl-group pop, with some desert-rock swamp 'n' swagger for good measure — it's about as wild as a trip to the indie record shop.

Ben Lee

Love is the Great Rebellion ★★★★ 1/2

He used to breathe tornados. Now he spreads peace and love. Two decades into his career, Australian singer-songwriter Lee has grown from angst-plagued teen to grounded grownup. And on this set of winsome acoustic pop, he shares simple life lessons about learning to forgive, letting go of anger, living in the moment and opting for happiness. It's like therapy, but cheaper.



Son Lux

Bones ★★★★

"This moment changes everything," warbles Son Lux's Ryan Lott. And how. For his fourth album, the restless Denver electronicist expands his horizons and his one-man band, adding a guitarist and drummer to the mix. Not surprisingly, they enliven the proceedings, but wisely without drawing attention from his unpredictable genre mashups and suitably haunted vocals. It's a win-win. No bones about it.



Jay Reatard

Better Than Something ★★★★

Until the Light Takes Us

Various Artists ★★★★

A great movie is always worth replaying. And if you're looking for a truly rocking double bill, here are two recent outstanding titles that are back in circulation. First up: *Better Than Something*, a 2012 doc on late Memphis indie-rocker Jay Reatard. Featuring tons of performance footage and interviews with the corkscrew-maned provocateur shortly before his 2010 drug-related death, the 90-minute feature captures the restless and uncompromising spirit of a prolific artist who sensed he wasn't here for the long haul. The packaging is almost as impressive as the film — it comes in an LP sleeve that includes a 50-page book of reminiscences, interviews and pictures, plus a vinyl compilation of live recordings. The second feature: *Until the Light Takes Us*, the definitive chronicle of the bizarre Norwegian black metal movement of the '90s. From a musical subgenre

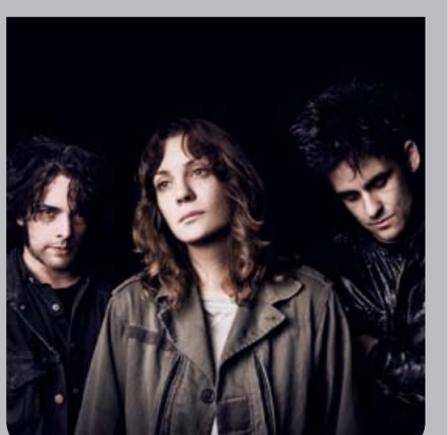


based on corpse-paint makeup, silly pseudonyms and grim heaviness, it spiraled into a cult-like movement that spawned a tide of death and destruction — church burnings, suicides and even murder among bandmates. The mesmerizing tale is told through extensive interviews with the survivors, including jailed killer Varg Vikernes of Burzum and Mayhem, along with his former friends and fellow musicians. The two-disc edition includes hours of unused interviews, outtakes, deleted scenes and even a 45-minute lecture on the history of metal. This is why your parents warned you about that stuff.

A MusiCares Tribute to Carole King

Various Artists ★★★★

One fine night. Singer-songwriter and piano-pop queen King gets the tribute treatment at this star-studded 2014 charity bash, as a roster of A-list women — from Alicia and Miranda and LeAnn and Gaga and Pink, oh my — plus a few token dudes join forces in various combination (Kacey Musgraves and Miguel?) to sing her praises and hits. The evergreen guest of honour even closes the 100-minute show with a handful of songs. You may not feel the earth move, but you'll still love her tomorrow.



Black Rebel Motorcycle Club

Live in Paris ★★★★ 1/2

What are they rebelling against? How about concert-film clichés? The dark-hearted California trio continue to play by their own cool rules on their latest 105-minute live DVD. They're sparingly (and often blindingly) backlit. They're dressed head to toe in hipster black. They barely move onstage. And they're shot with all the style of a foreign arthouse film. Even the accompanying 53-minute tour doc eschews the usual backstage shenanigans for thoughtful conversation with the musicians. Aces.

Ceremony

The L-Shaped Man ★★★★

First there was punk. Then there was (logically enough) post-punk. First Ceremony were a punk band. Now (logically enough) they're a post-punk band. And not only that: They're a post-punk band that channels Joy Division, right down to the brooding baritone intensity and chugging dynamic tension. They do it reverently and respectfully enough — but if that sort of love doesn't tear apart their audience, nothing will.

Lyfe Jennings

Tree of Lyfe ★★★★

Do as he says, not as he does. On his lush and laid-back sixth album, Jennings continues to be one of the more thoughtful crooners on the R&B/soul scene, weighing in on everything from the glorification of strippers to poverty and monogamy. Of course, it might sound better from a guy who hasn't been jailed for arson and domestic violence. But hey, nobody said Lyfe was simple.



Christopher Paul Stelling

Labor Against Waste ★★★★ 1/2

"Time don't mean nothing if you waste it." Stelling proclaims seconds into his third album. And fittingly, the Florida folksinger spends the next 40 minutes making every moment count. Every one of these 10 cuts possesses an innate urgency — thanks partly to the sheer hyperspeed delivery of his complex acoustic-guitar fingerpicking, but mostly due to the seriousness and sincerity of his lyrics, coupled with the emotional intensity of his delivery. There's not a second to lose.

Jaga Jazzist

Starfire ★★★★

Opposites always attract for Jaga Jazzist. Continuing their semi-official game plan of veering 180° with every album, the Norwegian instrumental explorers follow up 2010's proggy *One-Armed Bandit* and 2013's orchestrated *Live with Britten Sinfonia* with this synth-heavy set of flowing grooves and jammy excursions. It's not their most complex or compelling album, but that only means the next one probably will be.

