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 [artists directory](#)

 [music reviews](#)

 [musicographies](#)

 [best albums](#)

 [links](#)



Note: If you can read french, go to the french section for additional content.

FEATURED REVIEW: [Guns N' Roses](#)

FEATURED NEW ARTIST: [Hercules And Love Affair](#)

OTHER CD REVIEWS:

[Nickelback](#) - [Pendulum](#) - [Deborah Cox](#) - [Elvin Bishop](#) -
[I Am Ghost](#) - [Fear Before](#) - [American Speedway](#)

DVD REVIEWS:

[Sex Pistols](#) - [The Beatles](#) - [Laibach](#)

OTHER NEW FINDINGS

REVIEWS COMING UP NEXT MONTH

KEY FOR THE STARS

ARCHIVES:

 [2008](#)

 [2007](#)

 [2006](#)

 [2005](#)

 [2004](#)

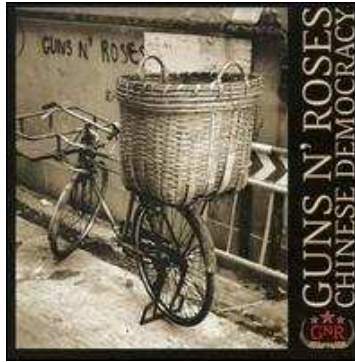
 [2003](#)

 [2002](#)

 [dvd](#)

You can also search by artist names if you visit the [artists directory](#).

FEATURED REVIEW:



Guns N' Roses - Chinese Democracy

As soon as in 1994, **Axl Rose** started to work on this new album. But the direction he wished to give to it, with a more industrial style, created dissension within the group, having caused the departure of all the other members except keyboardist **Dizzy Reed**. Since that time, various release dates were announced, demo versions appeared on the Web and the group performed in concert on several occasions, especially in Los Angeles. Many fans, including me, didn't believe anymore to be able to hear this album which became a real joke. Finally, it will have been necessary to wait for the end of 2008 to see the famous *Chinese Democracy* on the shelves. The album would be the most expensive in history considering every hour spent in studio. It's thus the first studio album by Guns N' Roses since 1993 whereas the band had presented an album of covers, [The Spaghetti Incident?](#). And it's necessary to go back to 1991 to find the last album of original compositions by the band on the twins *Use Your Illusion*. I acknowledge that I didn't have many expectations about this new record, but I was greatly surprised at the first listening. The sound is not as industrial as it was announced, even if we can find moments of it at one point or the other, reminding us of the nu metal sound of the late 90's. We rather easily recognize the sound of Guns N' Roses (of the *Use Your Illusion* era), not only because of the single voice of Axl, but also because of the music played by a panoply of musicians. In fact, through the 14 tracks included here, adding up more than 71 minutes, we straightforwardly hear the logical continuation of both *Use Your Illusion* albums. I believe that if the album had been released 10 years ago, it could have become one of the best albums of 1998. Unfortunately, in 2008, the musical scene is passably different and many new artists of great talent appeared since that time. On another side, all the work which was put together to polish each song makes so that the production is of great quality. And we have to admit there are extremely solid compositions on *Chinese Democracy*, most of them becoming more interesting with each new listening. The record misses uniformity somewhat, but I thought the same thing about both *Use Your Illusion* albums at the time and they became classics. Even if it won't be the case for *Chinese Democracy* from an artistic point of view, it remains that we have in hands a surprising album, an album of great quality.

★★★★½





[↑](#) Top of page

FEATURED NEW ARTIST:



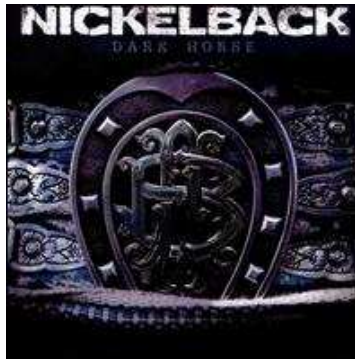
[Hercules And Love Affair](#) - *Hercules And Love Affair*

The producer behind Hercules And Love Affair is **Andrew Butler**, a DJ from Colorado. In 2007, he decided to create his own music with different musicians and singers. The group presents here its very first album, a record offering guaranteed entertainment. Perfect mixture between house and disco music, between brass and electronic beats, this self-titled album presents energetic and danceable music. Ambient electro is also explored on certain occasions ("Time Will", "Iris", "Easy"), but disco music dominates, a disco sound of the years 2000 which can hardly be compared with that of the late 70's, in spite of a few references. The modern sound benefits of an exceptional production which obviously pays more attention to the beats, but which also succeeds in well emphasizing the various instruments, creating a great musical richness. The album is all in subtleties and nuances, and it's a true pleasure to listen to it very carefully to try to detect everything, without ceasing following the beat. On the contrary to much of other albums of electronic music, this one wasn't made specifically for the clubs. It can thus live completely in your CD player, even if certain tracks have everything necessary to satisfy club dancers, including the first hit, the excellent "Blind". Not only the band succeeds magnificently in making disco music evolve, but it presents a completely original and unique album. A true feat of ingenuity for this new group with a future paved of gold! The US version of the album contains 2 bonus tracks ("Classique #2" and "Roar"), as well as an enhanced section presenting the video for "Blind".



[↑](#) Top of page

OTHER CD REVIEWS:



Nickelback - Dark Horse

Comes a time when we cannot say anything more about Nickelback, this Canadian rock band which is the perfect incarnation of corporate rock. Their previous album, *All The Right Reasons*, was probably their worst album in career, but it succeeded anyway becoming their best selling album to date with 8 million copies in the US (11 million worldwide) and 112 consecutive weeks in the top 30 of Billboard 200. For this eagerly awaited follower, the 4 guys decided for the production to trust the legendary **Robert John "Mutt" Lange** (**AC/DC**, **Def Leppard**, **Foreigner**). His influence can quickly be heard whereas certain tracks could have been recorded by Def Leppard 20 years ago. We find among others on "Burn It To The Ground" and "Shakin' Hands" vocal harmonies that are completely similar to what the British band offered us on *Pyromania* and *Hysteria*, 2 albums produced by Lange in 1983 and 1987. Put besides these comparisons which can be regarded as a wink or a copy very depending on which point of view you take, the contribution of Lange helps to cement the sound of the group and to bring it to another level. The danceable tracks have a little more power and the ballads contain more subtleties. On the other hand, most of the compositions remain under average, even poor. Guaranteed hits are obviously included, but after the first 3 tracks ("Something In Your Mouth", "Burn It To The Ground" and the hit "Gotta Be Somebody"), you are likely to get bored quickly. No matter what we can say about them, Nickelback were able to take the vacant place left by **Creed** in the years 2000 to become a world class band.



↑ Top of page



Pendulum - In Silico

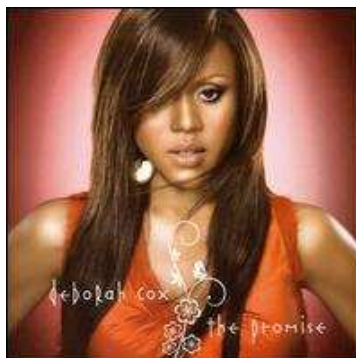
Pendulum is an Australian band based in England, working together since the beginning of the decade, but presented for the first time in America with *In Silico*. Their sound is based on drum n' bass, but it integrates various styles from rock to ambient electro, including industrial. Certain tracks of this album also have an obvious pop direction which can remind us of **Depeche Mode** ("Different"). Elements are comparable with **Moby** and the **Chemical Brothers**, but the name we quickly have in mind is **Prodigy**. Their danceable techno beats are completely contagious. Mixed with their powerful rock energy made of a perfect mixture between guitars and synthesizers, they catch us automatically to carry us until the end of this record of almost one

hour. Each song is unique and we really have the feeling to go on an exploratory journey in the middle of the underground music industry. The hit "Propane Nightmares" already creates a hype in clubs, but most of the 9 other tracks of the CD have as much potential, from the excellent opening track, "Showdown", to the superb conclusion, "The Tempest". Here is an incomparable album which will bring you very good moments.

Warner



↑ Top of page



Deborah Cox - *The Promise*

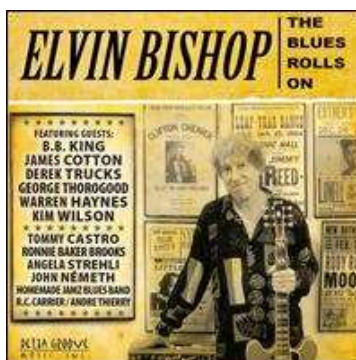
The R&B female singer originating from Toronto Deborah Cox is back on CD after a 6-year hiatus (if we exclude her tribute album to **Dinah Washington** issued in 2007). She gives huge expectations to us with the title of this new album. On the other hand, the 34 year old singer doesn't seem much to have progressed vocally and musically since her mega hit of 1998 "Nobody's Supposed To Be Here". Even if her biggest asset remains her voice, she uses it very few on this album, perhaps because most of the compositions are quite simply not exceptional. It's indeed necessary to wait for the 4th track for finally hearing an interesting melody ("Saying Goodbye"). The good beats of "Beautiful U R" and "Down 4 U" make it also effective. On the other hand, you will maybe fall asleep quickly with the title-track, on piano. Deborah seems to retain her voice on several occasions, her voice which was compared to **Whitney Houston's** in the past. A few moments throughout the 10 songs adding up 40 minutes will be able to possibly catch the attention of her biggest fans, but in general, *The Promise* doesn't succeed in responding to the great expectations.

Deco / Koch

★★½



↑ Top of page



Elvin Bishop - *The Blues Rolls On*

Legendary blues guitarist Elvin Bishop is back with a new album on which he pays tribute in a way to legends of the genre. He's surrounded here by many guest artists including **John Németh**, who sings on 3 songs in addition to playing harmonica on the last one, "Honest I Do" of **Jimmy Reed**. We can also hear guitars by **B.B. King** (on "Keep A Dollar In Your Pocket" of **Roy Milton**) and by the members of the **Allman Brothers**

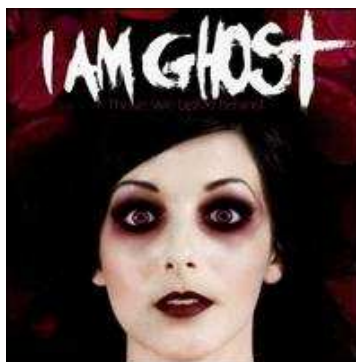
Band, Derek Trucks and **Warren Haynes**, as well as the voices and guitars of **George Thorogood** (on "Send You Back To Georgia" of **Hound Dog Taylor**) and **Ronnie Baker Brooks**. We can finally hear the excellent **James Cotton** on harmonica for "I Found Out" of **Junior Wells**. The 12 tracks offered on *The Blues Rolls On* were recorded on various occasions and they represent together a montage of some of Bishop's favourite songs with different friend musicians for most of them. The album thus presents a certain lack of uniformity which will maybe displease some. On the other hand, the classics presented here, all interpreted by old pros, won't leave anybody indifferent. In spite of its few defects, *The Blues Rolls On* is a solid record, with a quite beautiful energy, and which is in bonus almost a history lesson about blues music. It's thus a must for the fans of the genre.

[Delta Groove / Fusion3](#)

★★★★½



[↑ Top of page](#)



[I Am Ghost - Those We Leave Behind](#)

On this 3rd album, the band from South California I Am Ghost presents an unquestionable reorientation. The group, which underwent various changes of personnel in 2007 behind singer **Steve Juliano**, drops aside the rock opera of the excellent *Lover's Requiem*. The band concentrates on a punk/screamo/goth sound with very effective melodies and an incomparable energy. As for the incredible guitar solos, they are directly borrowed from the power metal movement. All that covering dark and tragic lyrics, typical themes to goth metal. It's thus a whole panoply of influences which I Am Ghost presents to us once again. The excellent "Don't Wake Up" gives the tone to this incomparable record which contains many unforgettable melodies. In the middle of the album, the very good "So, I Guess This Is Goodbye" is a sure hit. *Those We Leave Behind* is completely different from the previous album, but it's also very solid. I Am Ghost remains in my opinion a leader in the screamo genre thanks to a particular creativity.

[Epitaph](#)

★★★★½



[↑ Top of page](#)



[Fear Before - Fear Before](#)

The post hardcore band **Fear Before The March Of Flames** made an important change of sound and shorten

its name. The main difference is the voices whereas the group completely drops the throaty voice for rather using melodies. They're not always effective, but the effort is notable. By carrying out these changes, the band is getting closer at the same time to some classics of metal. In several moments we have the feeling to hear **Ozzy Osbourne** or **Mike Patton**, whereas on other occasions a little more theatrical, it's **King Diamond** that comes to our ears. We can even hear several guest singers from groups like **The Fall Of Troy**, **Heavy Heavy Low Low** and **Portugal**. The most important problem about this eponymous album is that the melodies don't seem to fit at all with the musical experimentation of the band which appears completely cacophonous in the background of several tracks. On other rather slow compositions like "Jabberwocky" and "Tycho", the ensemble mixes in a more acceptable way. It's a pity that their music becomes then so annoying! Finally, there are very few interesting elements on this record however promising. The biggest fans of the group will be perhaps pleased to see that Fear Before is still able to evolve. On the other hand, I saw greater evolutions in the past by other artists...

[Equal Vision](#)



[↑ Top of page](#)



[American Speedway - Ship Of Fools](#)

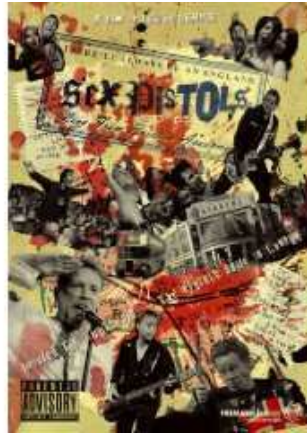
American Speedway is a band from Philadelphia formed early in 2007 and which makes punk rock n' roll reappear from the ashes, an extreme rock n' roll with an incomparable energy in the tradition of groups like the **New Bomb Turks**. The album *Ship Of Fools* was issued first in vinyl version, but it's now available everywhere on CD with 2 bonus tracks, "Pennsylvania" and "Watch Your Step". We can also hear their hit "One Foot In, One Foot Out" and the title-track starting the album with energy in a style reminding us of the **Ramones** in their best years. The song "American Speedway" is also very good, just like the excellent "Cocaine", my favourite of the CD which **Motörhead** would certainly have liked to play. The yelling voice of **Michael Thursby Speedway** somewhat brings the group closer to the metal scene, but their attitude remains primarily punk. The group doesn't care in fact of its social responsibility with lyrics as in "Drinkin' And Drivin'" and "Make Some Noise". All in all, the guys of American Speedway play what they want to play with an incredible energy. Their music doesn't have any commercial potential at all, but it won't leave anybody indifferent. This is a very good first album by a band which we would like to follow closely. Great pleasure for sure!

[Prophase / MVD](#)



[↑ Top of page](#)

DVD REVIEWS:



Sex Pistols - *There'll Always Be An England: Live From Brixton Academy*

To celebrate the 30th birthday of [Never Mind The Bollocks, Here's The Sex Pistols](#), the 4 original members of the Sex Pistols performed for 5 nights sold out at Brixton Academy in November 2007. It's one of these concerts we can visualize here in its entirety, in high definition and with a 5.1 surround sound. The montage succeeds in collecting perfectly the crowd's energy and **Johnny Rotten's** madness (we have to call him now by his real name, **John Lydon**). Even if we have practically the feeling to look at a concert by John Lydon and his musicians, it remains that the band offers a solid performance on stage during 77 minutes (the time to play about their entire repertoire plus covers). The only problem is that the scale of the concert and the images a little too polished doesn't fit very well with the underground punk movement they founded in England. The age of the musicians also removes even more credibility with their anarchist message. Right at Lydon's entry on stage, we have the feeling he just entered the skin of his character of young 1977 punk rocker. This is anyway a good concert which will make it possible for younger people to discover them on stage, but this type of performance cannot be compared with the atmosphere there was at the time in the small dirty venues they used to make disorder more often than any other bands in the genre. In bonus, we can view the documentary *The Knowledge* which presents a guide to London by the Sex Pistols. With more than 90 minutes of duration, it includes backstage footage of the Brixton concerts and other rare footage.

Fremantle / Rhino / Warner

★★★★½



↑ Top of page



The Beatles - *Magical Mystery Tour Memories*

Here is a documentary presenting the memories of various witnesses of the shooting of the [Magical Mystery Tour](#) movie by The Beatles in 1967. We can hear anecdotes of people who were close to The Beatles at that time, including among others Paul's brother, **Mike McCartney**, which contributed to the film. The narrator of the documentary is **Victor Spinetti** who played in the movie. This DVD makes it possible to discover many secrets behind the shooting of that film which was made to substitute a real tour, whereas The Beatles had decided to concentrate on their studio work. The 54-minute documentary is passably well done, even if we can

unfortunately hear no music by The Beatles themselves, as well as extracts from the film. On the other hand, rare or never seen video footage and photographs can be discovered here, which can be particularly interesting for a hardcore fan of The Beatles. This is also an essential document for any collector, but a larger audience is likely to be rather indifferent to such documentary presenting a very precise time of the career of The Beatles. Extras adding up 20 minutes present other details of the interviews not retained for the documentary, but they are rather useless. *Magical Mystery Tour Memories* can be regarded as an interesting documentary, but non essential...

[Wienerworld](#) / [MVD](#)



[↑ Top of page](#)



[Laibach](#) - *Volk: Dead in Trbovlje*

Laibach is a collective of musicians formed in Slovenia almost 30 years ago. They offer us an industrial sound, sometimes atmospheric and sometimes energetic, entirely based on percussions, synthetizers and voices. They present us here a concert captured in March 2007 during the [Volk](#) album tour which presented songs based on or inspired by national anthems. The first half is primarily atmospheric whereas they offer us 13 of these 14 national anthems. After that hour in which several pieces will probably succeed in making you annoyed, or even asleep, the second half, much more dynamic, is very welcome. These 6 tracks will give you a good outline of the origin of bands like **KMFDM** and **Rammstein** which were able to add guitars to the genre. In spite of good moments, these tracks aren't able to awake the crowd and to bring back an atmosphere a little more festive in this concert which, in end of line, is only for their biggest fans. The concert ends in a prerecorded medley of almost ten minutes during which the musicians salute the crowd before leaving, and we're left in front of the credits. The DVD offers in addition ten videos of the tracks presented in the first part of the concert, plus "Vaticanae" which we cannot hear on stage.

[Mute](#) / [EMI](#)



[↑ Top of page](#)

OTHER NEW FINDINGS:

[The Raconteurs](#) - *Consolers Of The Lonely*

The Raconteurs are back with a new album, 2 years after their debut. This one is more constant until the end and includes great compositions, which is making it one of the best albums of 2008.



The Mars Volta - *The Bedlam In Goliath*

The 4th album by The Mars Volta is loud and fast for 76 minutes. Full of energy and creativity, it keeps our attention until the end. One of the best albums in the genre for 2008.



Stephen Malkmus & The Jicks - *Real Emotional Trash*

The former member of American alternative band **Pavement** is back with his 4th album. Extremely solid and cohesive, *Real Emotional Trash* presents excellent pop melodies. Some tracks will maybe seem too long to you, exceeding the 6-minute bar, but the unit is of an incomparable quality.



Sarah McLachlan - *Closer: The Best of Sarah McLachlan*

Here is the ultimate compilation for Canadian female singer Sarah McLachlan after almost 20 years of recording career. We can hear obviously all her greatest hits, in addition to 2 new songs, "Don't Give Up On Us" and "U Want Me 2". The 16 tracks are presented chronologically and the only element I deplore is the absence of a sufficiently detailed booklet. A [2-CD deluxe version](#) is also available.



Nightwish - *Dark Passion Play (2007)*

Symphonic metal band from Finland Nightwish comes back with an album a little more accessible than what they recorded in the past. The orchestrations are particularly well done, even if it's not always creative.



The Evens - The Evens (2005) et Get Evens (2006)

Here are the 2 very good albums by indie rock band The Evens. Created by **Fugazi**'s singer, **Ian MacKaye**, the group proposes a much more accessible rock sound than the band which made him famous.



[Top of page](#)

REVIEWS COMING UP NEXT MONTH:

**AC/DC - Portishead - Britney Spears - Fall Out Boy -
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↑ Top of page

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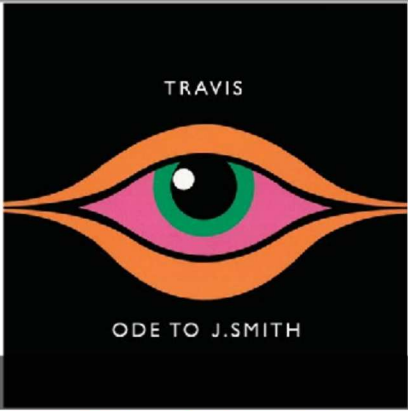
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TRAVIS

ODE TO J. SMITH

Travis

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A music widget interface for Travis's album 'Ode to J. Smith'. The main image is the album cover, which features a stylized eye with a pink iris, a green pupil, and orange eyelids. Below the cover is a navigation bar with a 'Travis' label on the left, a 'Get Widget' button, and a 'Privacy' link on the right. A horizontal scroll bar contains several small album cover thumbnails, with the current album highlighted.

[Haut de page](#) [Top of page](#)

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