



WELCOME

CURRENT TOP 21

BOOKS & DVDs

POLITICAL ARTICLES

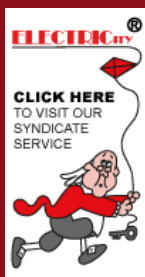
POLITICAL SONGS

PAST LISTS

LINKS

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TOP 21 A weekly guide to the music industry's buzz and latest releases, in full review.

The Promise: The Lost Sessions - Darkness on the Edge of Town, 2 CD Set Bruce Springsteen
Columbia / Sony



All of these 21 previously unreleased cuts were recorded between Bruce Springsteen's ubiquitous *Born to Run* (1975) and *Darkness on the Edge of Town* (1978). They hold the dream of the 1950s and 1960s with the reality of the punk rock season. His sneer, like other early rockers' - was seductive in its conflict and pleasure and rage.

These aren't necessarily going to be Springsteen's new hits, but they piece together an interesting time in his life - after his catapult to fame, but during a period of messy banishment from the recording studio. It's heavy on the backup vocals and pre-1980s pop sound, but not ever compromising in its duty to rock 'n' roll. There are a few surprises on this double album, as well - did you know that a half-finished version of "Because the Night" was first created by Springsteen during this period? Yep, and it's on here in in finished glory.

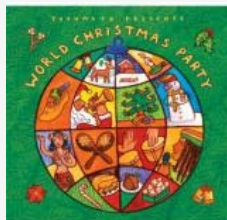
Author:
Sophia A. Strosberg

Editor's Note: Bruce Springsteen has earned his legendary status as New Jersey's Poet Laureate. And if Bob Dylan would permit, he would be the greatest poet of modern USA history.

Single of the Week: "Racing in the Street"

[Purchase from Amazon](#)[Download from iTunes](#)

World Christmas Party Various Artists
Putumayo



World Christmas Party is for when you're tired of the shopping and pressure and stress of the holidays. It's for when you are finally ready to cozy up with some eggnog, when it's time to dance with your friends, when it's time to play outside in the snow. You'll get the rhythms that are missing from the cold halls of the mall. Latin, Reggae, African and jazz sounds flow easily into traditional Christmas carols, allowing just the right amount of singing along while giving you something different from the usual 1/12th of the year that usually consists of the same Christmas songs as nauseum.

Author:
SAS

Give Putumayo a chance to light up your Scrooge. You'll at least be able to fantasize about being somewhere warmer, whether it's New Orleans, Jamaica or Brazil. *World Christmas Party* is entirely sincere. It's upbeat and danceable, too, and strikes the perfect balance between tradition and you're desire to get away from the usual old thing.

[Purchase from Amazon](#)

I Am... World Tour, CD / DVD Beyoncé
Park Wood / Music World / Columbia / Sony



Author:
SAS

Beyoncé's act is huge, but her voice is even bigger. There's a reason this performer has gotten so much attention. Funk, hip-hop, R&B or pop, she is always at the top of the heap. She is the hugeness that Kanye West perpetually tries to capture in his production. She is the pop star that Lady Gaga looks up to. Of course, on a live album like *I Am... World Tour*, you can hear the stadium noise rustling throughout the entire album, which is a little distracting. But the high energy is inspiring, and the range of instrumentation you hear is fantastic and simply goes above and beyond what you'll hear on a studio recording.

Get ready for everything from electric guitar to African drum beats to Middle Eastern melodies and, above it all, Beyoncé howling her heart out. Everyone's favorites, Jay-Z and Kanye, make guest appearances on the CD and DVD as well. Beyoncé had her hands deep in producing, directing and editing this album, so you'll get to know her a bit better - and who knows in what that creative direction this will

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Blake Shelton Loaded: The Best of Blake Shelton
Reprise / Warner Bros.



On this retrospective of what Blake Shelton has accomplished since 2001, you get to hear his most sincere cries and croons. His heart is wide open in every song. His talent is making the stories come alive, making them so sincere you'll think you heard them from a friend. He sings about crime and love and family and hard times.

It's interesting to hear Shelton's style transform and mature as we are taken through a sampling of each of his albums. He becomes more willing to do slow songs as time goes on, it seems. He's more comfortable than ever in his roll as a blues laden, easy listening romancer. If you get this album before checking out his other stuff, you'll be able to browse a catalogue of his sound on a single recording.

Author:
SAS

Editor's Note: He has created a brilliant meditation on reality and fantasy.

[Purchase from Amazon](#)[Download from iTunes](#)

A Star in the East Cherish the Ladies
Big Mammy



A Christmas album is a Christmas album. But Cherish the Ladies, an all-women Celtic music group that strives to maintain the folky spirit of Celtic music, has done a knock-up job creating something a little different. *A Star in the East* certainly has some well-known Christmas carols on it, but many are played as part of medleys with other traditional Celtic tunes - "What Child Is This?" is played with "Greensleeves"; "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" is played with "The Maid I Ne'er Forgot," etc.

Cherish the Ladies is not a mushy, delicate, overproduced Celtic music group. They play their instruments with great talent, often with no need for vocals, and keep the Christmas vibe high throughout the album. Sometimes merry, sometimes mellow, you'll hear whistle, flute, accordio, fiddle, piano, mandolin, banjo and other instruments throughout the album. If you're looking for something Celtic on Christmas, and you want it to stay true to the jig-and-reel roots of the genre, check out *A Star in the East*.

Author:
SAS

ARTIST TO WATCH

[Purchase from Amazon](#)

Country Classics with a Bluegrass Spin The Grascals & Friends
Cracker Barrel / BluGrascal



The game on *The Grascals & Friends: Country Classics with a Bluegrass Spin* is passionate hands fiddling and picking in thumping rhythm and throats calling out the words in bluegrass style - but to traditional country tunes. Even the slower songs on the album carry water, and it's interesting to hear that side of The Grascals. Still, fast songs like "The Devil Went Down to Georgia" are requirements for a talented bluegrass band like this, and there are at least a couple good ones like that on *The Grascals & Friends*.

The Grascals created this in conjunction with a bunch of their musical friends - from Dolly Parton to Charlie Daniels - for Cracker Barrel. While the Grascals are indeed a clean-sounding band, their guests dirty things up a bit, and you wouldn't guess that this was made for sale at the odd chain restaurant and shop.

Author:
SAS

Opus Collection: The Bee Gees The Bee Gees
Hear / Rhino

This 15-track "best of" collection of Bee Gees songs epitomized not just the Bee Gees, but also the music of a generation of mental and cultural exploration and hope. The trio of brothers always write with the purpose of digging a little deeper into each emotion, to expose the double-meanings of everyday life.

Sometimes bursting with psychedelic vocal harmonies, and other times borrowing from - and then defining - the funk explosion of the time, the Bee Gees made sure to keep up with the times throughout their career as a band. The genius of the Bee Gees is, of course, owed in part to the black artists who were doing all of this before them. But that doesn't diminish their accomplishments - honing their three



distinct voices to perfection, writing songs catchy enough to hook the most awkward wallflower, and keeping a hopeful and forward-looking attitude alive in music.

Author:
SAS

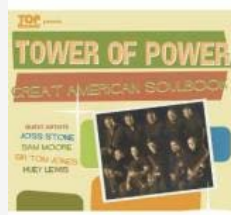
Editor's Note: Nothing if not professional, the Bee Gees enjoyed two mega-careers playing two sorts of music: lush, Beatles-like pop, and high-gloss disco. Their voices have always been like horns blowing rhythmic sounds.

Single of the Week: "Stayin' Alive"

LATE BUT GREAT

[Purchase from Amazon](#)

Great American Soulbook Tower of Power PRA / TOP



The Tower of Power is a full band and choir that played soul and funk in its most danceable form. Twiddling guitars, funk bass, tons of brass, sparse organ, lead vocalist and backup singers explode into a body rocking wave of sound on *Great American Soulbook*.

The energy winds down here and there for a slow-dance or two, but everything stays feeling positive. Having a great lead vocalists star is particular songs, including Larry Braggs, Tom Jones, Joss Stone, Sam Moore and Huey Lewis, really made the dream come true, especially since their passion is infectious, whether they are singing about dancing or loving, whether they are singing a well-known classic or an underexplored gem.

Author:
SAS

Editor's Note: When Lenny Williams was its florid lead vocalist, Tower of Power was in the first rank of funk, artistically and commercially. Even without him, it's punky rhythm section and tight jazzy horns are always worth hearing.

[Purchase from Amazon](#)[Download from iTunes](#)

We Wish You a Metal XMas and a Headbanging New Year, 2 CD Set Various Artists Armoury



The Metal Kids have all grown up, and are now making (and listening to) Christmas albums at Christmas instead of, say, Danzig. But of course, they'd rather hear some ripping guitar and shouty lyrics instead of that mainstream happy-go-lucky stuff. Note, however, that for all the rock 'n' roll vibe on this album, it is created with a jolly spirit and a tounge-in-cheek kind of humor, which is usually what you need at this time of year. And they do this without mincing a single "Jesus Christ."

Alice Cooper sings "Santa Claws Is Coming to Town," and Tim "Ripper" Owens (Judas Priest) sings "Santa Claws Is Back in Town." Ronnie James Dio sounds like he wouldn't mind if Satan's power took his soul in "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen," and Chuck Billy's death grunts are anything but silent in "Silent Night." His attempts at melody are amazing, though, and will leave you thoroughly satisfied with the variety of metal and love that went into *We Wish You a Metal XMas and a Headbanging New Year*.

Author:
SAS

Editor's Note: With the late Ronnie James Dio, Lemmy, Alice Cooper, etc., this is a classic, even though Christmas has passed.

MIGHTY, MIGHTY!

[Purchase from Amazon](#)

Celtic Christmas Orla Fallon WLIW21 / WNET / Elevation



A touch of Celtic magic actually works quite well with traditional olden-day Christmas carols like "A Soalin (Soul Cake)," "Joy to the World" and "Away in a Manger." A bit of flute and fiddle and some vocal accompaniment do quite well. So forgive Orla Fallon when some of the songs become unbearably cheesy.

The entire album is reminiscent of Celtic Woman, her former band. It's overly relaxing and gratingly saccharine at times. However, for an ethereal Christmas album, the sound is fine; families may use it to decrease the tension at family

Author:
SAS

gatherings. So break out the fruitcake and wine and hang up your most shimmering chandelier - we've got a Christmas album more twinkly than a thousand icicles falling in an echo chamber.

[Purchase from Amazon](#)[Download from iTunes](#)

***The Sound of Sunshine* Michael Franti & Spearhead**
Boo Boo Wax / Capitol / EMI



The Sound of Sunshine is another drop in the posi-core Spearhead bucket. *The Sound of Sunshine* seems to affirm Spearheads jag down the road of reggae music (one song features Lady Saw), but it reveals a jog toward rock as well. Michael Franti's band is all about the acoustic sound, which gives this even more of a flip-flops-on-the-beach sound. In fact, the title perfectly reflects the vibe of the album.

It's hard to forget about Spearhead's olden days, when it had at least one foot firmly in the hip-hop world. You can still hear the hip-hop on *The Sound of Sunshine*, but more dominant is a rosy, jammy sound. It's fun, and Michael Franti is dedicated to the movement, making this some righteous music even with its breezy, carefree sound.

Editor's Note: Michael Franti & Spearhead create warrior music. You must listen to all of their albums while you prepare to go into battle.

Author:
SAS

Single of the Week: "Shake It" feat. Lady Saw

LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL!

[Purchase from Amazon](#)[Download from iTunes](#)

***I'm Having Fun Now* Jenny and Johnny**
Warner Bros.



Jenny and Johnny - you may not have heard of them, because this is the couple's first album together, but you've heard Jenny's voice before as the front singer for Rilo Kiley and with other artists, including the Postal Service and Bright Eyes. She's got a great voice that perfectly compliments the echoing and humming production of *I'm Having Fun Now*, as well as her boyfriend's voice.

Old beach rock and innovative mingling of vocals are key elements of *I'm Having Fun Now*. They go all the way scratchy rock for us here, and they actually do sound like their having fun, for all their mellow attitude. The lyrics are nicely varied, too, from sex to drugs to politics to relationships. Switchblades and slavedrivers - it's pretty intense, but it's not going to set you crying because it's all sung with such sexy abandon.

Author:
SAS

[Purchase from Amazon](#)[Download from iTunes](#)

***Red Neck, Blue Collar* Bob Frank**
Memphis International



Politically conscious and still 100 percent country, Bob Frank's *Red Neck, Blue Collar* is a nice break from the choice that too often must be made between the two. Songs like "Red Neck, Blue Collar," "One Big Family" and "Incident at the Laundromat" reveal his political commentary, while "Judas Iscariot" and "Pledge of Allegiance" show his deeply spiritual contemplations of the place of Jesus and Christianity in U.S. consciousness today. "Coming Into Glen Rock" is the country tear-jerker; it's about a truck driver whose brakes malfunction but he allows himself to crash rather than hit a group of school children.

Though it may be unconventional in some ways, Frank's sound is wholly hillbilly. Winding guitar and banjo and a country twang are the building blocks of his song. Songs like "Little Ol' Cabin Home" and "Out on the Prairie" are about the country and cowboy lifestyle. Bob Frank made his first album in 1972, and then took a 30-year hiatus. Now that he's come back, he's got plenty to say. Every song on this album is distinctive and memorable.

Author:
SAS

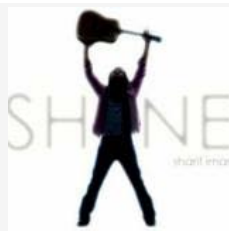
Editor's Note: The lyrics truly personalize the revolution.

Single of the Week: "One Big Family"

POLITICAL ALBUM OF THE WEEK

[Purchase from Amazon](#)[Download from iTunes](#)

***Shine* Sharif Iman**
Fox / Chocolate Soul Music



Optimistic music blooms from Sharif Iman, whether he is speaking of his past or his future, of his religion or his love, of the ladies or the guys. He speaks of Tennessee, New York City, Santa Monica. But he always comes back to how his heart is in Nashville, the city that lends him the big-country sound that counterpoints his self-described "chocolate soul child" music.

Somewhere between adult contemporary, R&B and rock lies Iman, and he'll charm you even if he gets hokey at times. If you are looking for inspiration on any aspect of life, you can believe that this singer and musician will have some shining words for you. It's chill, it's normal, it'll be great on the chilled-out normal radio stations. But the important thing is that the guy behind the music isn't faking. He's really inspired. And that's what brings *Shine* to life.

Author:
SAS

[Download from iTunes](#)

The Once The Once Borealis / Linus / True North



The Once give us folk-gypsy music with old-country flavorings, well-oiled harmonies and plenty of pretty instruments including the bodhran, mandolin and accordion. Electric guitar is sometimes allowed to enter the picture, adding a Fairport Convention, psych-folk spin to the tracks. There's a song by Leonard Cohen, one by Tom Waits, and a few other tracks by various other songwriters. The rest are traditional songs.

The occasional a cappella moment shows off the best of the trio's vocal abilities, but the instrumentation is a true treat as well, as far as creating a vintage ambiance. British Isles and European traditional folk may be left behind by some as too quaint and worn. The Once, however, shows us that this music, which transformed once as it traveled the the Americas, can continue to evolve and be just as exciting and as ever. While the traditional songs on this album may be played differently by The Once than they were back in the day, they are surely being played with an intimate closeness to the spirit in which they were written.

Author:
SAS

NEW ARTIST OF THE WEEK

[Purchase from Amazon](#)[Download from iTunes](#)

I Wanna Play Various Artists Wanna Play Fund / Victory University / NAMM



The tagline for *I Wanna Play* is "An album to put music instruments into the hands of every child in America." At first, you'll think that *I Wanna Play* is actually a compilation of talented but underprivileged children playing instruments that they now have thanks to the Wanna Play Fund. Unfortunately, it's not. But instead, you get famous songs like "Danny Boy" and "Honkey Tonk Woman" sung by famous people like George Jones and Ray Price.

If you'd like a compilation album featuring everything from bagpipes to country twangs to searing pop violins, and you love children but don't necessarily want to hear them scraping away in digital format, check out *I Wanna Play*. Features Aaron Tippin, Lorrie Morgan, John Anderson, George Jones, Neil Sedaka, Ray Price, Ronnie Milsap, Darryl Worley, Louise Mandrell and Tracy Lawrence.

Author:
SAS

Single of the Week: "Swingin" by John Anderson

Exploding Head A Place to Bury Strangers Mute



Metal on metal clashes into dance rhythms and twinkling stars. Chanting punk-esque vocals fall in the background, pulsing into your head as the most organic part of the ensemble. It's the sophomore album from A Place to Bury Strangers. Strangers may need to run and hide, but fans of noise rock will have found a rhythmical brick to place into their wall of sound.

Where are they from? You have one guess. That's right, New York. And where are they going? Maybe to hell, but probably to your local dingy venue, where you'll be able to buy \$2.00 PBRs and rock out. Your mom days to remember your earplugs with all that distortion and clanging. But that could ruin the feeling of the kick drum, so consider your options carefully.

Author:
SAS

[Purchase from Amazon](#)[Download from iTunes](#)

Hungry Ghosts Lee Negin Passing Phase



It's poetry set to the soundscape of 1980s science fiction. Spaceships whiz by Frank Zappa and P-Funk, who are standing not far away. A pair of turntables spin with the B-52s dancing atop them. Smoke and acid storm around until you see monsters and angels floating out of the mouths of gurus. Lee Negin is trying to tell us something with this music, and with the help of a careful listen to the masses of abstract and changing noises, along with the slightly more cohesive vocals and samples, you just may get the message.

From the instruments of India to the atmosphere of Antarctica, *Hungry Ghosts* will give you sounds that are all over the map. It's electronic, but it's not something you're going to dance to unless you are doing some kooky performance art. Still, it's a stimulating listen. So take some time to ponder intellectual relativity and the space aliens living in your inner ear.

Author:
SAS

SO NICE GOTTA DO IT UP TWICE! (created by the original
NYC D.J., Jocko, 1955)

[Purchase from Amazon](#)[Download from iTunes](#)

Cory Walker
Cory Walker



Cory Walker is 16, deep voiced already, and singing with a passion not often heard in adults. Influenced by a range of musicians, but with a focus on country music, he covers songs by Alan Jackson, Mel Tillis, Fats Domino and many others. Walker is also a guitarist - he plays a riding rhythm or solo in the midst of every song.

It's fun to hear a youth exploring the sounds of other artists - his earnest interpretations are worth checking out. And since he's so young, this could well be the start of a country music career. His song choices are not limited to a school-boy repertoire. Rather, you'll hear about sweet lovin', hard times and life lessons. However, his "Every Mother's Nightmare - Every Schoolboy's Dream" is amazing, and it was written just for him.

Author:
SAS

[Purchase from Amazon](#)

There Is No Competition 2: The Grieving Music Mixtape Fabolous
Desert Storm / Island Def Jam /Universal



Fabolous has made another themed mixtape about the death of his competition, and while his mixtape thing is getting kind of repetitive, the EP, taken as a whole, has solid synth beats and good rhymes. It's short enough to keep you interested the whole way through and still leave you wanting more. Even though it's supposed to be music to accompany death, it's entirely listenable, with beats that are evil but not as horror-house as Waka Flocka Flame's, and lyrics that take a healthy dose of sex and fun into consideration.

The music is well balanced without becoming battered by taste. It should prep you for Fabolous's future albums... though you could also just wait for his longer ones. Still, the video game music and the crystalline flow of Fabolous is something to pay attention to.

Author:
SAS

Editor's Note: Breezy, monumentally conceited and blessed with an agile flow and mind for wordplay.

Single of the Week: "You Be Killin' Em"

[Purchase from Amazon](#)

The Band Perry
The Band Perry
Republic Nashville / Universal



These young, accordion- and guitar-toting siblings recently grabbed a corner of Nashville glory. Their wholly rock and country finger-picking sound, complete with electric guitar, fiddle, mandolin, and other sounds, is well-fronted with the voice of Kim Perry. Her brothers join her here and there with backup harmonies.

Perhaps the most exciting thing about The Band Perry, besides their ability to popularly fuse country with hip rock, is their interesting lyrics. "I never liked the taste of crow / but baby I ate it," sings Kim at the opening of the album. Later on, she hollers about an eager lover who got "a new tattoo, burning like a brand / two little hearts on my rodeo man / I wasn't looking for a permanent thing / so don't shoot the ink until I take the ring." A family band with cute lyrics like these can't go wrong. It'll be fun to see where The Band Perry goes in the country charts with their sassy attitude.

Author:

SAS

Single of the Week: "Double Heart"

IF YOU LIKE MUSIC, YOU'LL LOVE THIS!

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