

Disagreeable Summer Edition

21 August 2022 | Jonah D, editor-in-chief

What I'm listening to:

Album: Eccentric Soul: the Prix Label | Various Artists

A fabulous compilation of obscure 60s soul on a reissue label. Ideal for dancing the night away.

Album: Combat Rock | the Clash

The funky and disjointed swan song of 70s punk legends. 'Rock the Casbah', and I right?

Track: Bombshelter pt. 2 | the Halo Benders

A pointed and sophisticated political statement played as twee as can be by a longtime Boise band.

Track: Alone Again Or | Love

The first highlight of doomsday-psychedelia album *Forever Changes*. Superb slab of LSD tango.

Track: Out of the Races and Onto the Tracks | the Rapture

The fantastic debut of the premier dance band of the 2000s apeing Gang Of Four.

Track: Happier | Olivia Rodrigo

A beautiful and fantastically minimal piece of heartbreak expressing ideas I've rarely heard in song.

Reviews:

Puberty 2

Mitski

2016

Highlights: Your Best American Girl, Fireworks, Once More to See You

Author: Jonah Dayley

There's something really special in the way that Mitski is able to display so many sides simultaneously, both lyrically and musically. In the way that she is able to form a complete portrait, all the messy details included, flashing back and between the present and the moment in which you translate from childhood into adulthood. When you look at someone's life, you start out seeing everything as these large, general shapes. They're born, they learn basic people skills, they go to school, etc. The thing is, as you look at it more and inspect it closer, you start to see all these little details, these countless filaments and little pieces that make up their life. And the more you look at it, the more you'll see. The more complex their life will become to you, the more nuance you'll see, the more depth the person will have. This album follows this same principle. Every time you look at it again, you'll see another layer of complexity, another side of it that you never noticed before.

Sometimes when you listen through the album, you'll hear the brighter moments. To say they're happy would be reductive, it's more the general fortification of the soul. You'll hear lines like 'You mother wouldn't approve / of how my mother raised me / but I do, I finally do', and they'll stick with you. Then maybe another time when you listen to it, you'll pick up on the darker and more painful moments, like the raw 'My Body's Made of Crushed Little Stars'. Frankly, 'Fireworks' is fit to replace Radiohead's 'No Surprises' as this century's anthem of complete deadpan detachment. The key, though, and the most interesting part, is that Mitski is able to create such a

complete self-portrait, all the best and worst parts of herself included, and that it's own mural of shattered glass will reflect yourself back at you in a broken but beautiful image on the wall across.

Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain

Pavement

1994

Highlights: Gold Soundz, Fillmore Jive, Silent Kid

Author: Jonah Dayley

There's something about Pavement that makes it both one of the most amazing bands ever and simultaneously makes them the worst: they're highly opaque and borderline inscrutable. Pavement will alternate between haunting melodies backed with squealing guitars and the most insightful lyrics you've ever heard (and frankly some of the most quotable), and even a line later working back into an impassable crucible of wordplay and free-association. For example, "Goodnight to the rock and roll era / Cause they don't need you anymore" followed immediately with "Their composure are so distracted / Jazzbo's skinny arms / And the dance faction, a little too loose for me." On Crooked Rain, phrases and hooks are cut up and rearranged throughout a song in such a manner that they evoke not just everything, but highly specific everthings. Taken at face value, none of it really makes sense. But the key is that as a whole, songs and lyrics will point with a thousand little arrows at exactly what makes sense and what's important.

Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain belongs to a special category. It is not, in fact, an album full of songs that are nearly perfect. Instead, however, it is nearly a perfect album when taken as a whole. For instance, '5+4=Unity' as a song is sort of strange, as twinkling piano intermingles with wails of Stephen Malkmus, but it provides a near ideal transition between two of the best songs on the album. All over this is happening. I would argue, in fact, that only about half of the album is utter brilliance, and the rest serves as the necessary connective tissue. But really, that's all you need to get you point across. Frankly, when making a statement about quality over the quantity and polish of art, there isn't much better you could do.

Heartbreaker

Ryan Adams

2001

Highlights: When You're Young, You Get Sad, Amy, Shakedown On 9th Street

Author: Texbox'd

Don't fool yourself into thinking that Heartbreaker is anything more than a country album brilliantly produced by a young genius. Yes, before he was the coke-addled dysfunctional husband of Mandy Moore, or Menierere's Disease recluse there are some who may have used the "G" word to describe his work from 1999-2004. Heartbreaker might be the only country album to open with a bet about a Morrissey song, and after many listens it's clear that the young Adams has an encyclopedic knowledge of pop music. But with that idiosyncrasy out of the way, the music opens with an actual "Whoop!" while David Rawlins and Emmy Lou Harris bring the guitars roaring to life. This is country music that sounds like it isn't country music doing what country music does best: humanizing sadness, longing, lust, cavalier confidence, regret, and homesickness, and even mundane business. But unlike most country music this one is poetic without sounding forced or extra. Despite the record's polish it never sounds manufactured. If you aren't familiar with Ryan Adam's large catalog of work-- start here.

Early Music

Voxtro

2022

Highlights: Rise Up in the Dirt, the Start of Something, Raised By Wolves

Author: Jonah Dayley

As far as great music goes, there's really three kinds. The kind that challenges closely-held beliefs and flips the game upside down, the kind that provides some big insight into humanity, and the kind that has more fun than anyone else. Of these three, Vixtrot certainly falls closer to the third than anything else. The Texas indie-pop quintet takes countless great records of the first two kinds and uses them to build something powerful that hits with more joy pretty much any of the sort of hypnagogic pop of the present.

The first half of then flies by as some cocktail of the strongest twee of last century and a dumpster's worth of hooks that you've already heard but will never be able to place. Ramesh Srivastava's lyrics are actually quite simple, smart enough throughout to avoid sounding treacly as the quick romanticisms slip by, like 'Come by and see me / I'm a love letter away'. In most other contexts, any line along similar lines would at best be strained and difficult to excuse, at worst falling flat, but the ebullient and innocent voice of Srivastava somehow manage to avoid all of that and really convince you of honesty in his words. Ultimately, the combination of fantastically orchestrated slabs of pop with an attitude that's sweet without being treacly create a cocktail of powerful emotions expressed easily with complete clarity of thought.

Stoney Street (track)

Amon Tobin

1997

Author: Jonah Dayley

It opens with delicate, fairly cinematic strings. By the time it's finished, it tells the story of back-alley meetings and musty french side-streets within a world's worth of breakbeat drum 'n' bass and dusty jazz samples. There is never a dull moment, from the moment the fireball string bass comes thumping in at volume 10 to the moment when the background hissing creeps up and eventually takes over. 'Stoney Street' is the sound of prowling around a metropolis, not knowing what will happen to you next.

'Stoney Street's biggest power lies in the fact that it spans the gap between cast-off jazz and dance music so well. The breakbeat samples form really sharp grooves that sound like they're sweating on their face, and the smooth saxophone lines allow it to glide along as if nothing is wrong, even right before your sub-woofers blow out. It's beautiful, really, the fusion of gentle horns and strings with a frankly dangerous rhythm section that keeps a knife right up against your throat the entire time, without moving a millimeter.

Frankly, the importance of the song is hard to overstate: this song basically invented modern electronic music DJs. Outside of rave, there was no real concept of the DJ as an artist themselves; in hip-hop they were more of a supporting role to the MC. Amon Tobin's six minutes composed entirely of other cannibalized music birthed entire new genres in an instant. You can still hear the impact today in the thud of the bass.

Any review suggestions? New releases from new artists? Want to write for Disagreeable?

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