



Pitchfork Album Reviews

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Outline

1. What is Pitchfork?
2. Our Data
 - a. Pitchfork Reviews
 - b. YouTube Streams
3. Numerical Analyses
 - a. Raw Data
 - b. Genre Breakdown
 - c. Artist Breakdown
 - d. Stream Comparisons
 - e. Author Breakdown
 - f. Time Analyses
4. Issues Encountered
5. Further Questions
6. Conclusions



What is Pitchfork?

- One of the premier music review and rating sites
 - Generally concentrates on new music, but Pitchfork journalists have also reviewed reissues and box sets
 - Generally focuses on “indie” music
- Rates albums on a scale of 0.0 to 10.0
- Contains written critique of album as well
- Amasses to a total of ~18,000 reviews (and counting) since 1999
- **Big question: Are they biased toward certain music?**

King Krule

The OOZ



BEST NEW MUSIC

TRUE PANTHER / XL • 2017

by Jayson Greene
Contributing Editor

/ ROCK

OCTOBER 13 2017

The producer born Archy Marshall crafted *The OOZ* to be alien and timeless. It is the richest and most immersive album the London singer-songwriter has made yet, under any name.

Archy Marshall doesn't star in his own music—he wanders through it. You might find him spotlit and center stage, foregrounding his violent voice like a fist denting chrome.



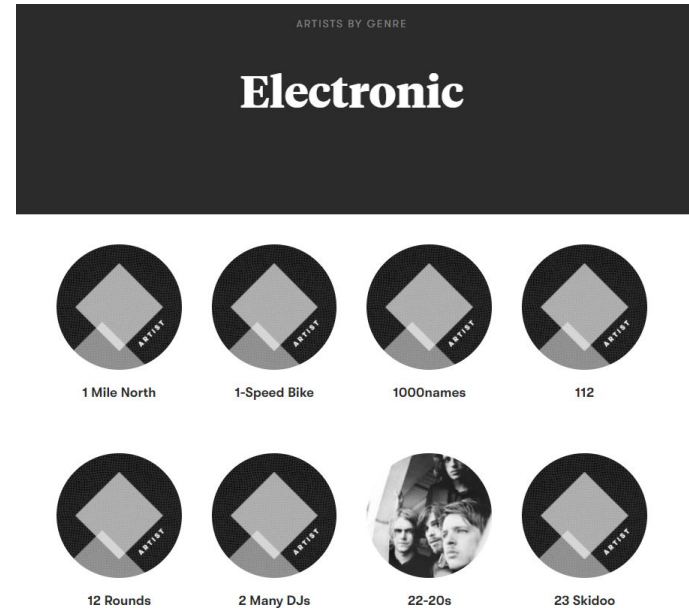
Data Collection

Pitchfork Data

<input type="checkbox"/>	artistNameAlbum	albumName	albumReleaseYear	artistName	authorName	body	genre	publishDate	rating	title	url
<input type="checkbox"/>	theMIND - Summer Camp	Summer Camp	2016	theMIND	Matthew Ra...	<p>...	Rap	2016-08-12T...	7.0	Summer Camp	/reviews/albu...
<input type="checkbox"/>	Blondes - Persuasion	Persuasion EP	2015	Blondes	Cameron Cook	<p>With the ...	Electronic	2015-08-11T...	7.3	Persuasion EP	/reviews/albu...
<input type="checkbox"/>	Moris Tepper - Head Off	Head Off	2004	Moris Tepper	Johnny Loftus	<p>Moris Tep...	Folk/Country	2004-09-22T...	7.5	Head Off	/reviews/albu...
<input type="checkbox"/>	Snowglobe - Our Land	Our Land Bra...	2002	Snowglobe	Brad Haywood	<p>In July of ...	Rock	2002-08-04T...	8.0	Our Land Bra...	/reviews/albu...
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sentridoh - Weed Forestin'	Weed Forestin'	2012	Sentridoh	Mark Richard...	<p>In 1986 a...	Rock	2012-03-16T...	8.2	Weed Forestin'	/reviews/albu...
<input type="checkbox"/>	Jim and Jennie ar	Rivers Roll o...	2005	Jim and Jenn...	Joe Tangari	<p>If you've ...	Folk/Country	2005-04-11T...	7.3	Rivers Roll o...	/reviews/albu...
<input type="checkbox"/>	Scott Walker - The Childhoo	The Childhoo...	2016	Scott Walker	Winston Co...	<p>To call <a...	Rock	2016-08-22T...	7.9	The Childhoo...	/reviews/albu...
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dani Siciliano - Likes...	Likes...	2004	Dani Siciliano	Scott Plagen...	<p>Even if yo...	Jazz	2004-01-25T...	6.9	Likes...	/reviews/albu...
<input type="checkbox"/>	Richard Horowitz - Eros in Arabia	Eros in Arabia	1981	Richard Horo...	Andy Beta	<p>When it c...	Experimental	2017-10-14T...	7.8	Eros in Arabia	/reviews/albu...
<input type="checkbox"/>	Plaid - Reachy Prints	Reachy Prints	2014	Plaid	Miles Raymer	<p>Plaid hav...	Electronic	2014-05-23T...	6.0	Reachy Prints	/reviews/albu...
<input type="checkbox"/>	DJ Rashad - 6613	6613 EP	2015	DJ Rashad	Meaghan Gar...	<p>It's a safe...	Electronic	2015-07-10T...	7.3	6613 EP	/reviews/albu...
<input type="checkbox"/>	Akitsa - Grands Tyrans	Grands Tyrans	2015	Akitsa	Andy O'Connor	<p>Montreal ...	Metal	2015-06-04T...	7.7	Grands Tyrans	/reviews/albu...
<input type="checkbox"/>	Converge - Jane Doe	Jane Doe	2001	Converge	Christopher ...	<p>The Pitch...	Metal	2002-07-02T...	7.7	Jane Doe	/reviews/albu...
<input type="checkbox"/>	LV - Sebenza	Sebenza	2012	LV	Ruth Saxelby	<p>The Sout...	Electronic	2012-09-07T...	8.0	Sebenza	/reviews/albu...

Pitchfork Genres

- Electronic
- Folk
- Jazz
- Pop
- Rap
- Experimental
- Global
- Metal
- Rock



Pitchfork API

pitchfork.com/api/v2/search/?sort=name asc&types=musicgroups&status=published&hierarchy=genres%2Frock&size=1&start=0

JSON Raw Data Headers

Save Copy

```
count: 6003
previous:
next:
results:
  category:
  list:
    0:
      id: "59298fd05e6ef9596931e778"
      name: "!!!"
      slug: "59298fd05e6ef9596931e778"
      display_name: "!!!"
      description: ""
      url: "/artists/916-chk-chk-chk/"
      similar:
      genres:
        0:
          display_name: "Rock"
          slug: "rock"
      image:
        m: "https://media.pitchfork.com/photos/59298fd05e6ef9596931e77c/1:1/w_300/117c3b79.jpg"
        sm: "https://media.pitchfork.com/photos/59298fd05e6ef9596931e77c/1:1/w_150/117c3b79.jpg"
      image_credit:
      image_credit_url:
```

Genre

Increment to get the next artist

Link to artist page

pitchfork.com/api/v2/entities/artists/916-chk-chk-chk/

JSON Raw Data Headers

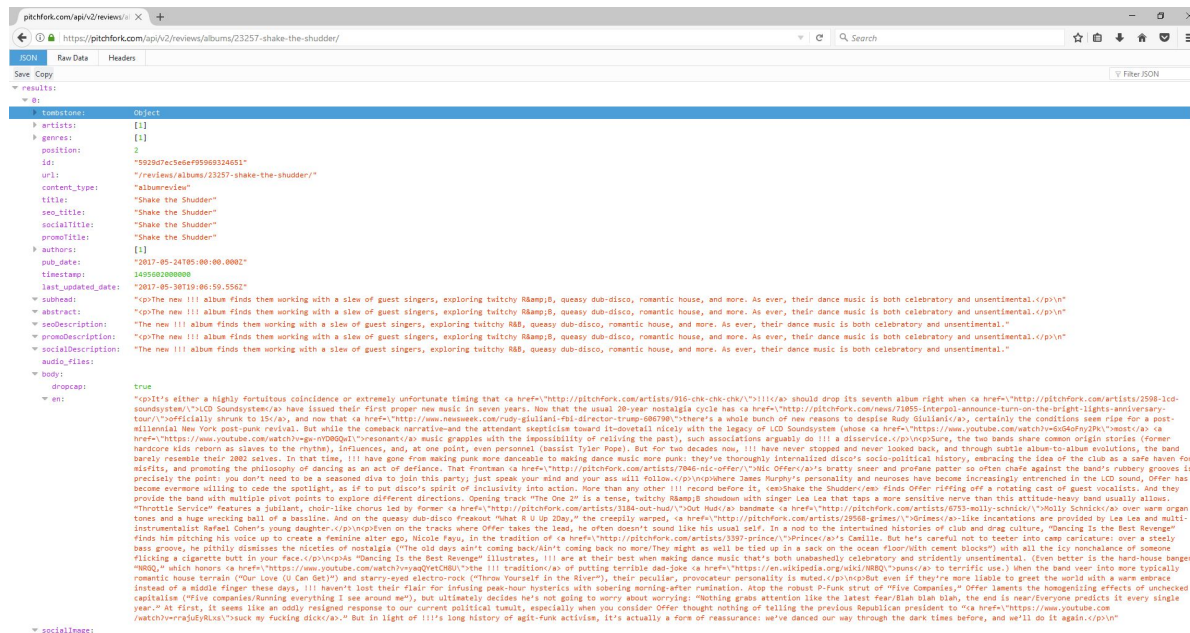
Save Copy

```
albumreviews:
  count: 8
  items:
    0:
      tombstone:
      artists: [1]
      genres: [1]
      position: 2
      id: "5929d7ec5e6ef95969324651"
      url: "/reviews/albums/23257-shake-the-shudder/"
      content_type: "albumreview"
      title: "Shake the Shudder"
      seo_title: "Shake the Shudder"
      socialTitle: "Shake the Shudder"
      promoTitle: "Shake the Shudder"
      authors: [1]
      pub_date: "2017-05-24T05:00:00.000Z"
      timestamp: 1495602000000
      last_updated_date: "2017-05-30T19:06:59.556Z"
      subhead: "<p>The new !!! album finds them working with a s"
      abstract: "<p>The new !!! album finds them working with a s"
      seoDescription: "The new !!! album finds them working with a slew"
      promoDescription: "<p>The new !!! album finds them working with a s"
      socialDescription: "The new !!! album finds them working with a slew"
```

List of album reviews for the artist

Link to artist page

Link to the review



Pitchfork Data Organization

- Album Name
- Album Release Year
- Artist Name
- Genre
- Review Author Name
- Review Publish Date
- Review Score
- Review Title
- Review Body
- Review URL

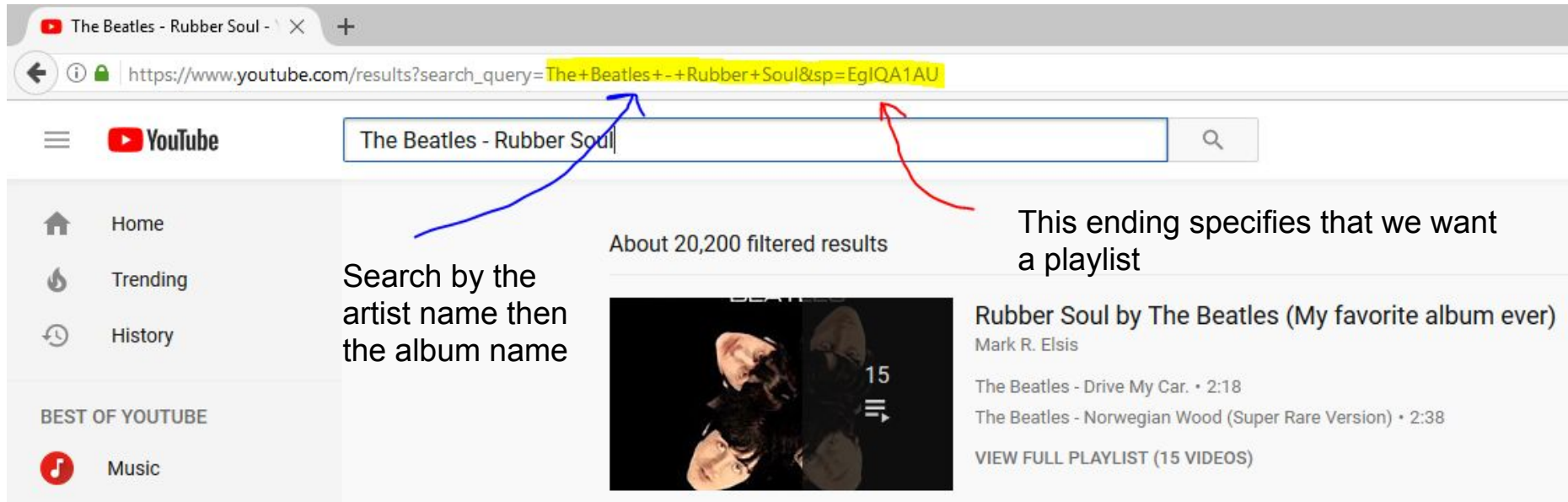
artistNameAlbum	albumName	albumReleaseYe	artistName	authorName	body	genre	publishDate	rating	title	url
theMIND - Summ	Summer Camp	2016	theMIND	Matthew Ra...	<p>...	Rap	2016-08-12T...	7.0	Summer Camp	/reviews/albu...

- Stored in a DynamoDB instance on AWS
 - NoSQL
- Keyed on Artist Name - Album Name



DynamoDB

YouTube Stream Counts



The screenshot shows a web browser with the YouTube search results for "The Beatles - Rubber Soul". The address bar contains the URL: `https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=The+Beatles+-+Rubber+Soul&sp=EgIQ1AU`. The search bar contains the text "The Beatles - Rubber Soul".

Annotations on the image explain the search query syntax:

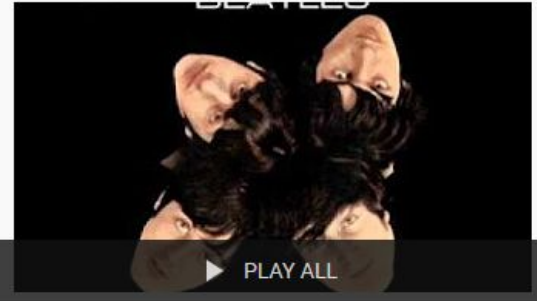
- A blue arrow points from the text "Search by the artist name then the album name" to the search bar.
- A red arrow points from the text "This ending specifies that we want a playlist" to the `&sp=EgIQ1AU` part of the URL.

The search results show "About 20,200 filtered results". The first result is "Rubber Soul by The Beatles (My favorite album ever)" by Mark R. Elsis, with a video thumbnail showing the Beatles. Below the title, it lists two other videos: "The Beatles - Drive My Car. • 2:18" and "The Beatles - Norwegian Wood (Super Rare Version) • 2:38". A link to "VIEW FULL PLAYLIST (15 VIDEOS)" is also present.

YouTube Stream Counts

- The top playlist was selected.
- The total view count for the playlist is shown.
- The view count and playlist URL were stored in dynamoDB with the appropriate review.

<input type="checkbox"/>	artistNameAlbumName	albumName	albumReleaseYe	artistName	authorName	body	genre	publishDate	rating	title	url	viewCount	ytUrl
<input type="checkbox"/>	The Beatles - Rubber Soul	Rubber Soul	2009	The Beatles	Scott Plagen...	<p>To moder...	Rock	2009-09-09T...	10.0	Rubber Soul	/reviews/albu...	565676	https://www.y...



Rubber Soul by The Beatles (My favorite album ever)

15 videos • 571,463 views • Last updated on Dec 3, 2015



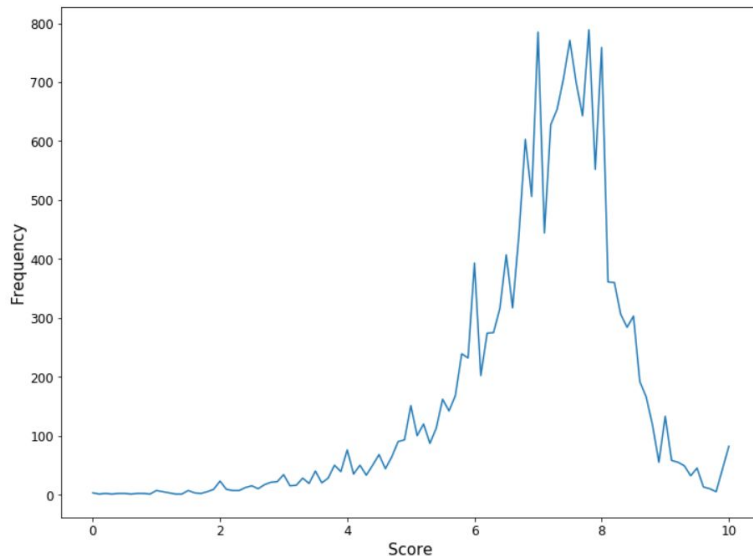
Numerical Analyses

Analyzing the raw data

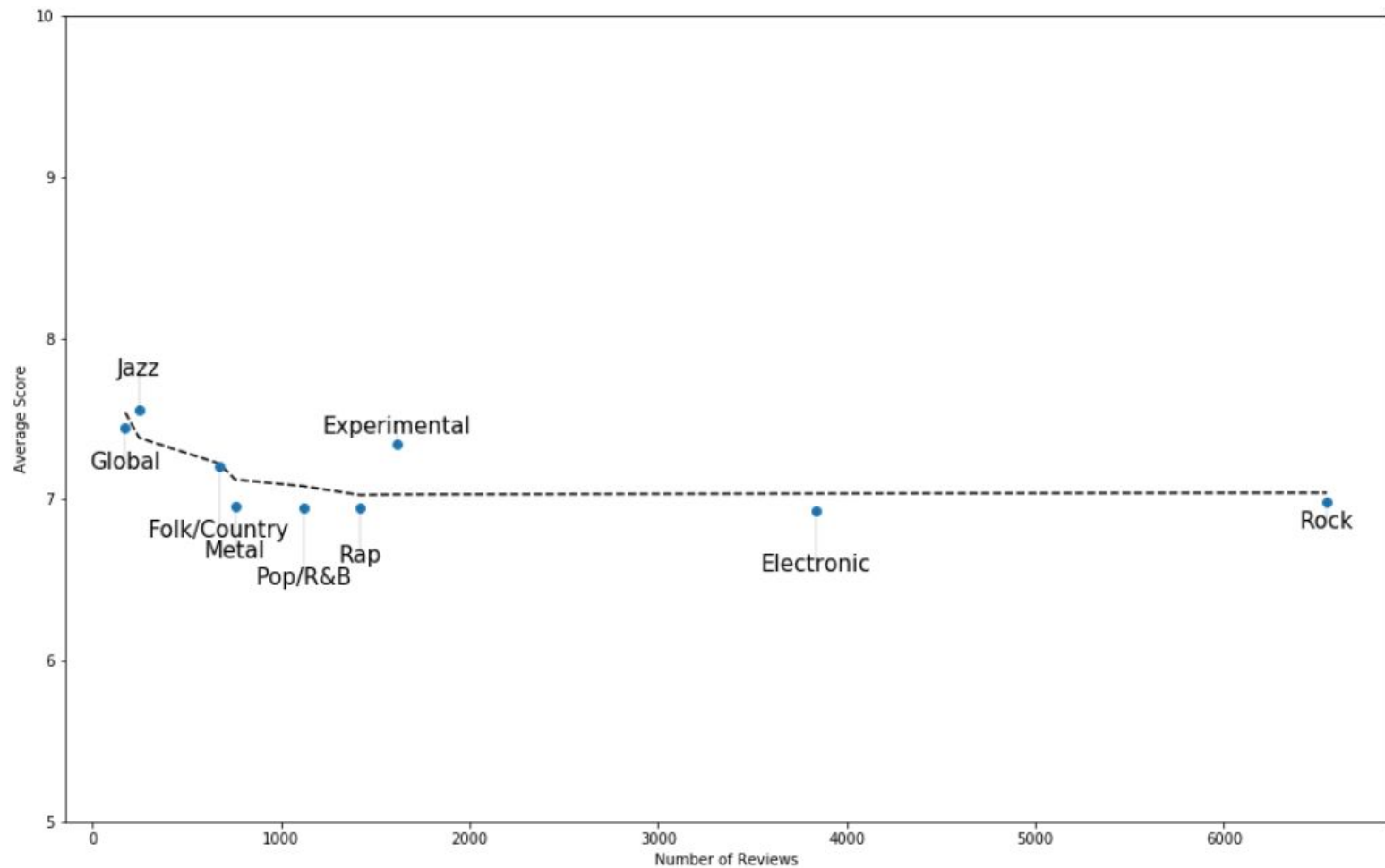
- Average rating for all albums is 7.02 with an std of 1.27
- Mean by genre:

	count	mean	std
genre			
Electronic	3834	6.934038	1.283513
Experimental	1618	7.346106	1.063343
Folk/Country	673	7.206538	1.037361
Global	175	7.446857	1.021931
Jazz	249	7.553815	1.161546
Metal	758	6.959763	1.380216
Pop/R&B	1121	6.948707	1.253146
Rap	1422	6.949719	1.261924
Rock	6546	6.981485	1.310626

All Review Scores



Looks pretty normal...



Highs and Lows

82 albums received a perfect 10/10.

Some notable ones:

- 6 Beatles albums
- 5 Prince albums
- Radiohead - *OK Computer* and *Kid A*
- Kanye West - *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*
- Neutral Milk Hotel - *In the Aeroplane over the Sea*
- Guns 'N' Roses - *Appetite for Destruction* (???)

And 3 got a 0/10...

- Jet - *Shine On*
- Travis Morrison - *Travistan*
- Liz Phair - *Liz Phair*

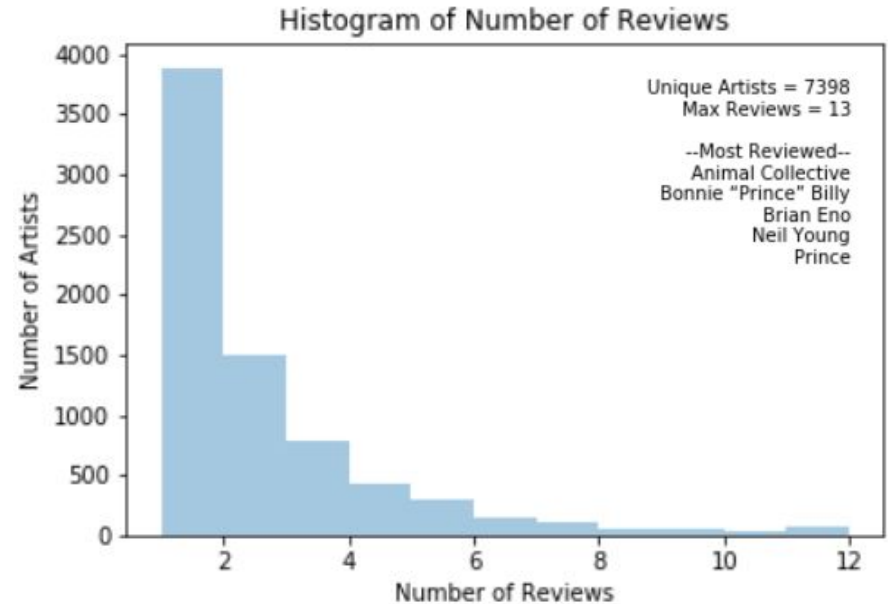
Sorry if you are fans of any of these albums and feel they deserve better.



Analysis of Artists

Highest rated artists with more than 1 review:

- My Bloody Valentine
 - 2 reviews, 9.55 average
- D'Angelo
 - 3 reviews, 9.53 average
- A Tribe Called Quest
 - 2 reviews, 9.50 average
- John Coltrane
 - 3 reviews, 9.50 average
- The Velvet Underground
 - 7 reviews, 9.46 average





The “Pitchfork favorites”

- Let’s consider some so-called “Pitchfork favorites” such as Grizzly Bear, Fleet Foxes, and Bon Iver.
 - These are artists that the online music community considers Pitchfork to unanimously overrate.
 - If you do a quick Google search of “pitchfork bias” you will see countless references to artists that Pitchfork supposedly loves.
- Compare their Pitchfork album reviews with Metacritic which averages ratings across the internet
 - Metacritic is out of 100, so scores were converted to the same scale as Pitchfork
- Sampled the discographies of the “Pitchfork favorites” and compared the Pitchfork score with the Metacritic score.

Artist - Album	Pitchfork Score	Metacritic Score
Bon Iver - <i>Bon Iver</i> (2011)	9.5	8.6
Bon Iver - <i>22, A Million</i> (2016)	9.0	8.7
Grizzly Bear - <i>Veckatimest</i> (2009)	9.0	8.5
Grizzly Bear - <i>Painted Ruins</i> (2017)	8.7	7.9
Fleet Foxes - <i>Fleet Foxes</i> (2008)	9.0	8.7
Fleet Foxes - <i>Helplessness Blues</i> (2011)	8.8	8.5

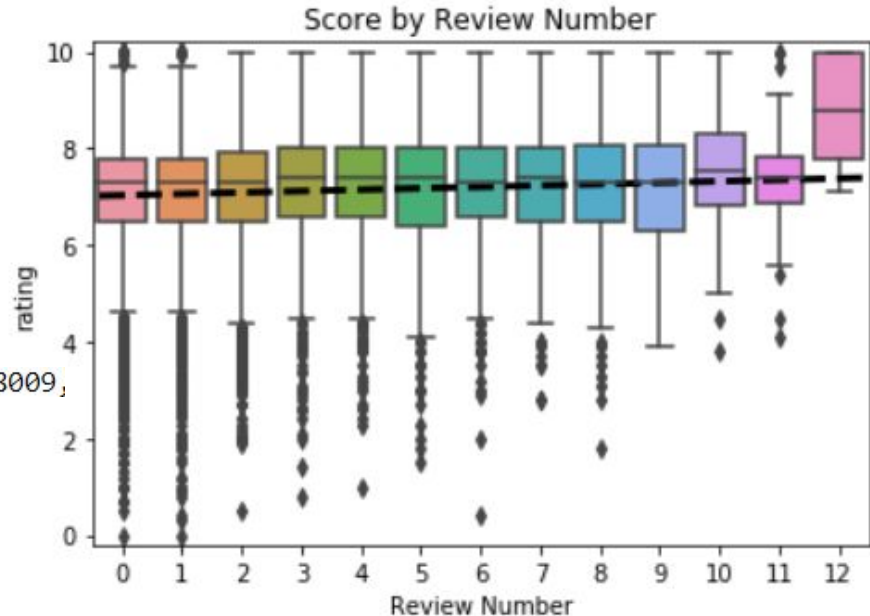
Across the entire discographies of the “Pitchfork favorites”, Pitchfork rates albums **.17 higher than Metacritic**.

The above just shows the top two albums for each artist.

How does number of reviews affect score?

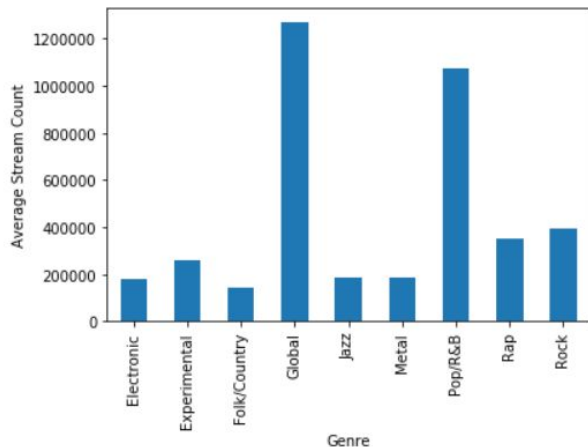
Linear regression does reveal a slightly positive slope meaning that the more albums you put out, the higher your review score will be.

slope=0.028917926599218005, intercept=7.0294038665578009,



Looking at Stream Counts

- Surprise, surprise. People listen to a lot of Pop/R&B and Global music
 - Global includes artists such as Bob Marley, Major Lazer, M.I.A., out of 172 total unique artists in this genre
 - Bob Marley's 3 reviewed albums each have 60 million+ reviews which drives this up tremendously

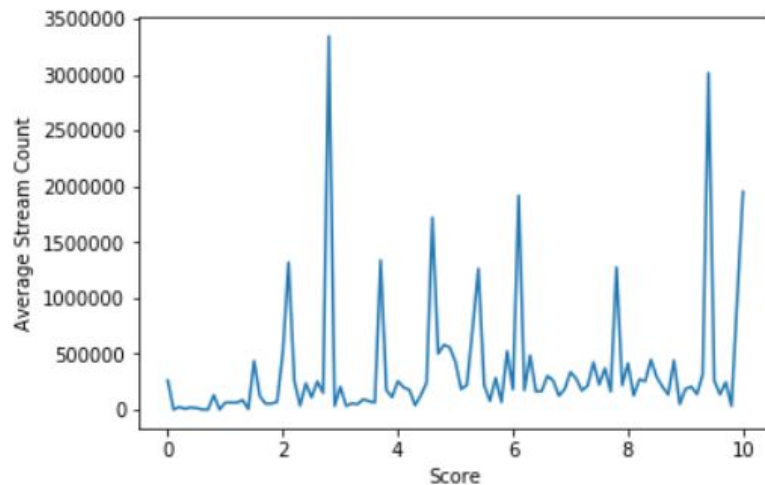


Stream Counts and Review Score

There is no correlation between the amount of streams an album has and the score it received from Pitchfork.

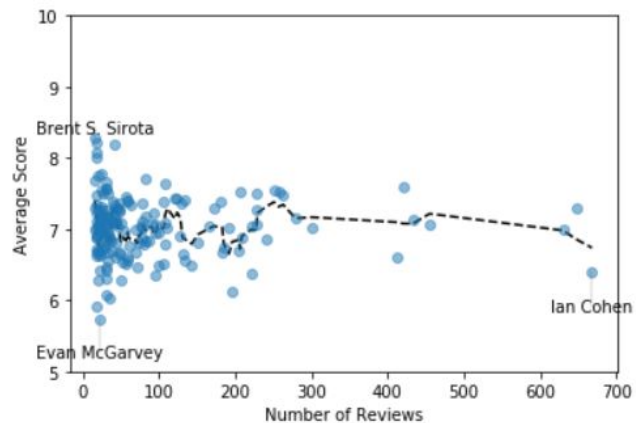
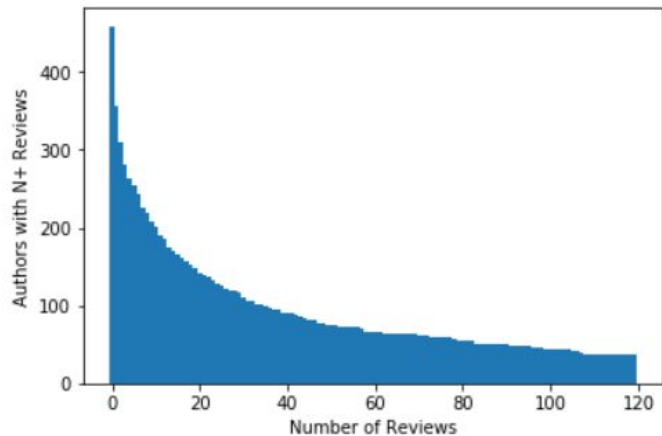
In fact, the most streams come from albums with a rating of 2.8, including popular artists such as:

- Bassnectar
- Eminem
- Ed Sheeran



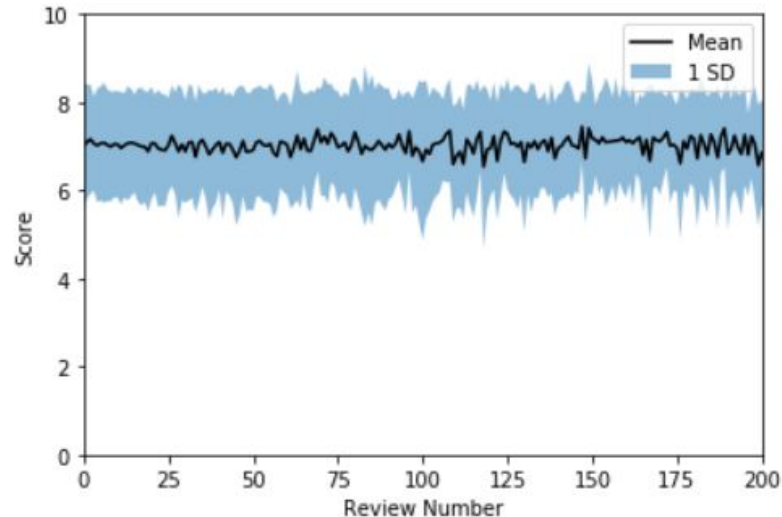
Reviewers

- Pitchfork has had over 400 different reviewers in its 18 years of existence, most have reviewed less than 50 albums.



Authors over time

- Authors do not generally get more or less harsh as they review more.
- However, there seems to be more polarization of review scores with reviewers with more experience.



Do authors have preferences?

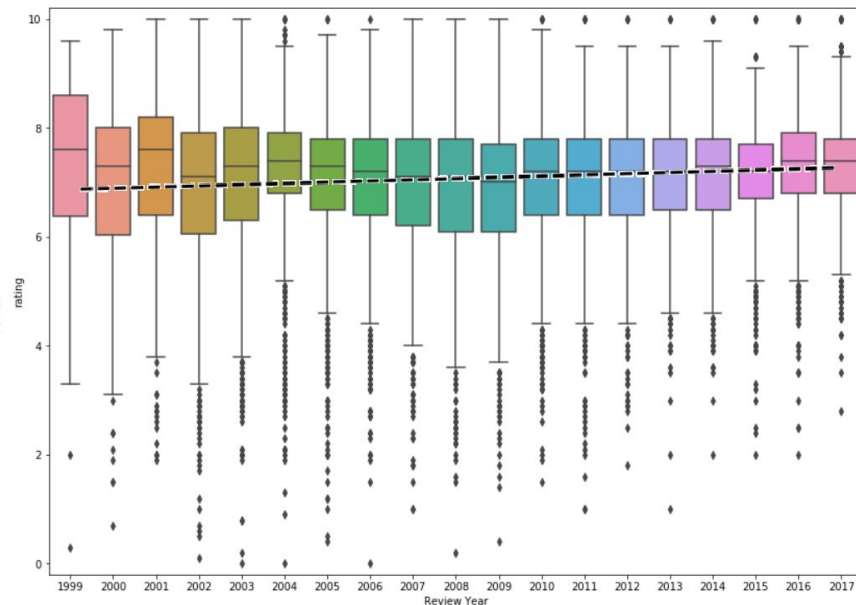
- Definitely, some more so than others.
- Comparing the most active authors shows that some authors rate genres much lower than others.
 - Only looked at authors who have reviewed more than 15 albums in that genre.

Author	Favorite Genre (Avg. Score)	Least Favorite Genre (Avg. Score)	Difference
Ian Cohen	Folk (6.78)	Electronic (5.96)	.82
Joe Tangari	Global (7.71)	Rock (7.22)	.49
Stephen M. Deusner	Folk (7.28)	Electronic (6.75)	.53
Brian Howe	Rap (7.18)	Pop/R&B (6.67)	.51
Stuart Berman	Experimental (7.36)	Pop/R&B (6.74)	.62

Pitchfork Reviews through the Years

Over the years, the mean review score has been increasing! Music is either getting better or reviewers are laxing up.

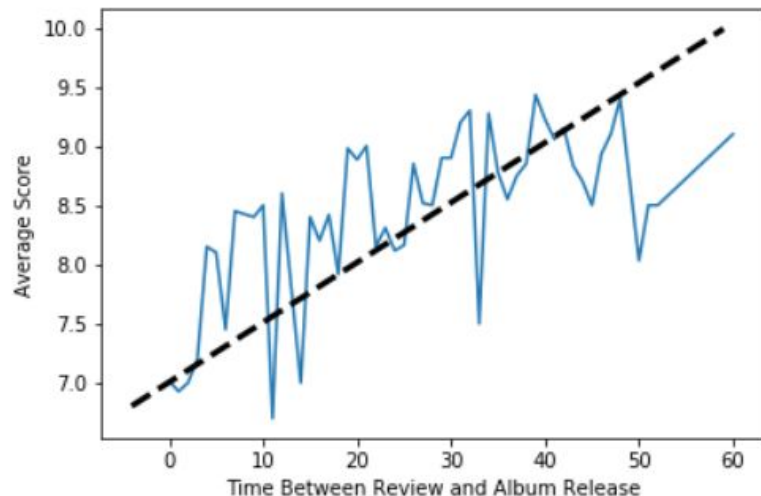
slope=0.018344231537222252, intercept=-29.837197548424431



Time between release and review

As was expected, albums that were rated long after release tended to do linearly better than those reviewed soon after release.

This makes sense as albums that are reviewed long after release are likely to be considered “classics.”



Genres over the Months

* means also month of most reviews
This calculation excludes December
due to its small number of reviews

Genre	Best Month	Score
Rock	September*	7.07
Electronic	October	7.07
Rap	May	7.09
Pop/R&B	April	7.19
Jazz	September	7.81
Folk/Country	January	7.33
Experimental	June	7.42
Global	September	7.72
Metal	March*	7.16

Final Thoughts



Issues Encountered

- Spotify API deprecated, so we were forced to just count YouTube streams
- Textual analysis did not give us any good information about the review content
 - Tried LDA (right) to see if we could group reviews into the 8 genres
 - Attempted sentiment analysis, but only a few reviews deemed “negative”

```
Topics in LDA model:
Topic #0:
album just song sound record time year music rock band
Topic #1:
album song record band music sound time just year rock
Topic #2:
band album record year rock sound just time music song
Topic #3:
band time sound music just song year album record rock
Topic #4:
song time rock music year band record album just sound
Topic #5:
music band time sound just record year rock song album
Topic #6:
album music song year record time just sound rock band
Topic #7:
band rock song record album time just year music sound
```



Further Questions

- Is it possible to predict the album score?
 - There are no numeric values beside the score, so it was challenging to determine a possible way to predict album scores.
 - Would probably require training a neural net on review content to associate what reviewers say and what the score is.
- Will Spotify ever re-instate its API?
- Gather purchase data and compare that with stream data and album scores
 - Do enough people still buy records to make this a viable measure?
- Is there a textual analysis model that would be useful for these reviews?



Conclusions

- Pitchfork does seem to have a slight bias toward certain artists.
- Stream counts have some obvious correlations with genre, but other than that, nothing too notable
- Time plays a small factor in review score
 - Over the years, the average score is getting higher
 - Albums reviewed long after release are rated higher (“classic effect”)
 - Day of week and month play no role in an album’s rating
- Some reviewers are more critical than others.
 - Reviewers are also biased toward certain genres.
- Textual analyses shows that the language across reviews remains quite consistent.

Questions?

<https://github.com/jtliso/pitchviews>
