

1. Can't Buy a Thrill (1972) → The Merchant of Venice

Rationale: *Can't Buy a Thrill* is Steely Dan's debut album, blending jazz, rock, and witty lyrics about money, love, and moral ambiguity. *The Merchant of Venice* explores similar themes—wealth, love, and the moral complexities of contracts and mercy. The album's cynical yet catchy tone mirrors the play's mix of comedy and darker undertones, especially in songs like "Dirty Work" and "Reelin' In the Years."

2. Countdown to Ecstasy (1973) → Romeo and Juliet

Rationale: *Countdown to Ecstasy* is more introspective and melancholic, with songs about doomed love and existential longing. *Romeo and Juliet* is the quintessential tale of tragic romance, and the album's moody, poetic lyrics (e.g., "My Old School," "Pearl of the Quarter") capture the play's blend of passion and fatalism.

3. Pretzel Logic (1974) → A Midsummer Night's Dream

Rationale: *Pretzel Logic* is playful, surreal, and full of wordplay—much like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The album's eclectic mix of jazz, rock, and absurdity ("Rikki Don't Lose That Number," "Any Major Dude Will Tell You") mirrors the play's whimsical, dreamlike atmosphere and its themes of love, confusion, and magical intervention.

4. Katy Lied (1975) → Much Ado About Nothing

Rationale: *Katy Lied* is polished, sophisticated, and full of sharp, sarcastic lyrics about relationships and social facades. *Much Ado About Nothing* is a comedy of wit, misunderstandings, and romantic sparring—perfectly matched by the album's clever, cynical charm (e.g., "Black Friday," "Doctor Wu"). Both works revel in the art of verbal duel and the absurdity of human behavior.

5. The Royal Scam (1976) → Macbeth

Rationale: *The Royal Scam* is darker, more aggressive, and thematically focused on power, betrayal, and moral decay. *Macbeth* is Shakespeare's most intense exploration of ambition and corruption. The album's gritty, jazz-infused rock (e.g., "Kid Charlemagne," "The Fez") mirrors the play's brooding, violent atmosphere and its descent into madness.

6. Aja (1977) → Hamlet

Rationale: *Aja* is Steely Dan's masterpiece—complex, layered, and deeply introspective. *Hamlet* is Shakespeare's most philosophically rich play, full of existential questioning and moral ambiguity. The album's lush arrangements and lyrical depth (e.g., "Deacon Blues," "Peg") reflect the play's themes of indecision, mortality, and the search for meaning.

7. Gaucho (1980) → Twelfth Night

Rationale: *Gaucho* is sleek, ironic, and full of stories about mistaken identities, love triangles, and social satire. *Twelfth Night* is a comedy of errors, disguise, and unrequited love—perfectly matched by the album's smooth, sophisticated sound and clever storytelling (e.g., "Babylon Sisters," "Hey Nineteen"). Both works blend humor with a touch of melancholy.
