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CONTENTS

SONG OF THE YEAR.....3

ALBUM OF THE YEAR.....5

BEST ALBUM FROM LAST YEAR
I ONLY LISTENED TO THIS YEAR.....17

GIG OF THE YEAR.....19

DISAPPOINTMENT OF THE YEAR.....21



An Introduction

For those who might not know: every single year, I do a wrap-up of my favourite music of every calendar year, which has been exclusive to the AusMusic Discord.

Last year, I tried something different: I started doing writeups for my top 5 albums of the year, short reviews. This first foray into music criticism was a big leap for me, but I decided to go one step up again this year, and create a sort of zine, to display my rankings in a PDF. This allows me the freedom to write more about the music I've listened to this year, whilst also re-teaching myself how to use InDesign.

I have seen, on rare occasions, people bemoaning the state of music this year: after all, 2024 is looking more and more like one of the best years in music of this decade. And yes, the pop charts look abysmal and shitty, no matter how hard Billboard and ARIA introduce new rules to try and freshen them up, but great new music goes nowhere. You just need to know where to look. That's been true ten years ago, that's true now, and that'll still be true ten years from now.

Truly, one of the great things that make life worth living is discovery. There'll always be a new favourite film you've never seen, a new favourite game you've never played, a new favourite food you've never tried, and, relevant to this zine, a new favourite song or a new favourite album you've never heard before. As these new things replenish in perpetuity, then truly, each new year brings a level of excitement towards what new discoveries one will make.

Here's to that next year of new discoveries.

Warmly,


Hamish N

Hamish

BEST SONGS OF 2025



10
RAYE
WHERE IS MY HUSBAND!




9
David Byrne
Everybody Laughs



8
Fontaines D.C.
It's Amazing To Be Young



7
Pulp
Spike Island



6
Ethel Cain
Nettles

5

Ninajirachi
iPod Touch



4

Mouseatouille
Harry and the Jets



3

Wet Leg
mangetout



2

Geese
Cobra

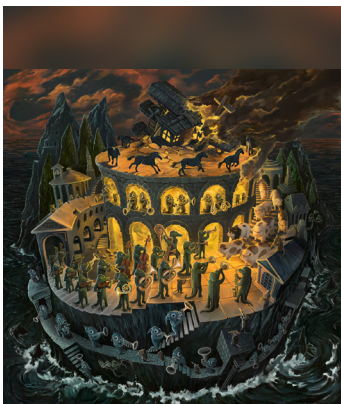


1

Folk Bitch Trio
Hotel TV



BEST ALBUMS OF 2025



10

King Gizzard and the Lizard Wizard *Phantom Island*

With a little help, King Gizzard have shown us a missing piece that I never thought I needed: an orchestra. I hope it's not the last time they do this.

Favs: "Phantom Island", "Deadstick",
"Aerodynamic", "Lonely Cosmos"



9

Jerskin Fendrix *Once Upon A Time... In Shropshire*

Academy Award-nominated composer Jerskin Fendrix makes a triumphant return to making quirky pop music with an equally delightful and heart-rending portrait of his hometown and childhood.

Favs: "Beth's Farm", "Jerskin Fendrix
Freestyle", "Ski", "King Lear"

8

The Last Dinner Party From *The Pyre*

An incredibly confident and wildly theatrical follow-up to last year's *Prelude To Ecstasy*, TLDP have made another stunning feast to sink your teeth into.

Favs: "Second Best", "This Is The Killer Speaking", "The Scythe"



7

Ninajirachi *I Love My Computer*

Take everything I said about Magdalena Bay being terminally online last year and triple it. Nina's made an album strongly reminiscent of late-2000s EDM, and the experiences of growing up with the internet. Absolutely incredible.

Favs: "London Song", "iPod Touch", "Fuck My Computer", "Infohazard"



6

Wet Leg *moisturizer*

Rhian Teasdale, Hester Chambers and company return with my most anticipated sophomore release of the year. *moisturizer* is a massive step-up from their debut, allowing them to properly surpass the virality that "Chaise Longue" got them back in 2021.

Favs: "mangetout", "davina mccall", "CPR"



I've
fallen
in love
with a
feeling.





5

Black Country, New Road *Forever Howlong*

After 2022's album of the year *Ants From Up There*, the road has been quite bumpy for Black Country, New Road. To quickly summarise, their frontman and principal songwriter Isaac Wood left the band days before the album's release for mental health reasons, leaving the now-six-piece band to start anew. Quickly, the band rebounded with a series of live shows, debuting brand new material primarily written by bassist Tyler Hyde, pianist May Kershaw, violinist Georgia Ellery and saxophonist Lewis Evans. This material, released on 2023's *Live At Bush Hall*, showed the first definitive sign that no matter what lay ahead, Black Country, New Road will be okay, and with this year's release *Forever Howlong*, their first studio album since Wood's departure, the band have certainly and concretely removed any remaining doubt in the band going forward. "BC,NR, friends forever", indeed.

From the word go, *Forever Howlong* hooks you in: the kooky harpischord intro on "Besties", leading to Lewis Evans' triumphant saxophone and the accompanying lyricless vocals finally breaking through to the surface. As both the album opener and its lead single, "Besties" has BC,NR's distinctly baroque sound beautifully melting together with the off-kilter pop sensibilities of Georgia Ellery, here making her vocal and songwriting debut with the band. After years of writing for her side project Jockstrap, getting to hear her bring her songwriting back to BC,NR is an incredible delight. A debut like this, front and center instead of playing violin in the background, is truly impressive from her.

Speaking of incredible delights: the two tracks I loved the most from Bush Hall — "The Boy" and "Turbines/Pigs" — were written by the incredible May Kershaw. Songs like "For the Cold Country" feel like they have been ingrained with centuries of folklore, as if they've been passed down from generation to generation. My personal favourite song from May, and one of my favourites from the album, is "The Big Spin", a lovely waltz which injects some, dare I say, whimsy into the band.

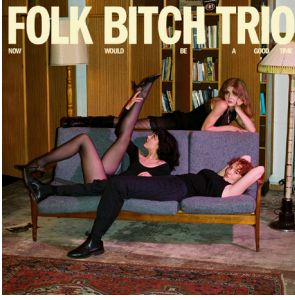
However, I think the emotional core of the band going forward is in the songwriting of Tyler Hyde. Her big contributions to this album — "Nancy Tries To Take The Night" in particular — add a much darker edge to proceedings. Privilege and wealth, dangerous gossip and bullying and most prominently, the darkest form of new motherhood, are all themes that permeate her writing.

It is here, in *Forever Howlong*, that Black Country, New Road have found a new phase of their short yet nevertheless storied career: a troupe of merry musicians, wandering the lands. The abandonment of their frontman structure has allowed them to flourish, with this beautiful blend of baroque pop, ancient whimsy and deep-rooted emotion. To say that BC,NR have found their way together assumes they were lost to begin with.

Favs: "Nancy Tries To Take The Night", "Besties", "The Big Spin" and "Mary" **8**



**SHOW ME WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE
WHEN YOU COME UNDONE.**



4

Folk Bitch Trio *Now Would Be A Good Time*

Having met in high school, Gracie Sinclair, Jeanie Pilkington and Heide Peverelle decided to start singing and making music in Year 12. Their name, “Folk Bitch Trio”, coined at this time, captures what to expect from the band: folksy singer-songwriter music, but from my impression of them as a live act a few weeks ago, very open to joke around and have a blast. Five or six years later, the now-24-year-olds have been signed to American indie label Jagjaguwar, now getting to share a label with artists like Bon Iver and Angel Olsen, but they still call Melbourne home. Years of cutting their teeth in smalltown pub gigs, supporting the likes of Alex G, Courtney Barnett and, above all, Julia Jacklin (one of many clear influences on the group), has led to their debut album, ***Now Would Be A Good Time***, which has heralded the arrival of an already fully-formed Australian band.

The big thing that makes Folk Bitch Trio so listenable is their ability to be blunt but without sacrificing tremendous beauty. The songwriting here is confessional, a relatable window into Gen Z young adulthood. In an interview with the *Guardian*, they described the album as being “about the turmoils of being in your twenties, and the pathetic little tragedies you have.” An early stand-out track, “**Hotel TV**”, details a sex dream about an old partner: “And do you ever think of me, in the night / when you hear a car passing by, and you’re wishing I was inside? / ‘Cause I lay beside him, in the night / and I had a filthy dream, to the noise of the hotel TV.” Other tracks, like “**Cathode Ray**”, or “**The Actor**”, revolve around frustrating relationships, and the difficulties of trying to get through to the other party. To some extent, these can all be things we can deeply relate to, whether in our past or present. The gift with Folk Bitch Trio is how they imbue each song with incredibly earnest emotions.

Overall, the quality of the music shows a band that sound wiser than their years. There’s just something about ***Now Would Be A Good Time*** that has stayed with me since the album released in July. The Melbourne-based trio have harmonies that feel almost familial, the way they just melt into a coherent whole. Pure alchemy.

Favs: “Hotel TV”, “God’s A Different Sword”, “The Actor”, “Cathode Ray” and “Foreign Bird”.



I think I'm
where the
bloodline
ends.



3

Hayley Williams *Ego Death at a Bachelorette Party*

I feel like every year has at least one surprise release that causes people to go nuts, and this year, it's Hayley Williams' turn. The Paramore frontwoman initially released her third solo album as seventeen separate tracks, which could only be played on her website. This incredibly stripped back release must've felt like breaking the shackles — at the age of 14, Hayley had signed a batshit twenty-year record deal with Atlantic Records, which covered both her work with Paramore and any solo work she would release. Now 36, and having fulfilled her obligations with Atlantic, *Ego Death* feels like Hayley finally getting to spread her wings.

Two of my personal favourite tracks here, the album's title track "**Ego Death at a Bachelorette Party**" and "**True Believer**" both weave an incredible tapestry, showing, in no uncertain terms, Hayley's complete disgust for the racist roots of her home town of Nashville, Tennessee. Right out of the gate on the former, she declares that "I'll be the biggest star / at this racist country singer's bar", a line that could refer to *many* racist country singers who own bars in Nashville (for the record: Hayley revealed it's Morgan Wallen, telling him to "meet me at Whole Foods, bitch."). On the latter, she sings about Nashville being overtaken by the worst of Christianity, which is perfectly and bluntly expressed as she sings "they say that Jesus is the way, but then they give him a white face / so they don't have to pray to someone they deem lesser than them".

At its core, a decent amount of the album revolves around Hayley's relationship with Paramore lead guitarist Taylor York, and as fans of the band have surmised, things have not been going well for them. Near the very start of "**Love Me Different**", Hayley ponders that "You said that I deserved someone who knows what I am worth / Now I wonder what am I worth to you?", while on the SZA-influenced "**Good Ol' Days**" she breaks down how they kept their relationship a closely-guarded secret as far back as their 2017 album *After Laughter*. And even on "**Discovery Channel**", she interpolates the chorus to "The Bad Touch" by the Bloodhound Gang, reinterpreting the sexual overtones of "you and me baby, ain't nothing but mammals / so let's do it like they do on the Discovery Channel" into a song about something truly dysfunctional and ugly. However, it's on the track "**Parachute**" where the most heartbreaking revelation emerges, regarding Hayley's short-lived first marriage in 2016: "And you were at my wedding, I was broken, you were drunk / you could've told me not to do it, I would've run, I would've run". To rip the band-aid off like this, in such a public manner, building this incredible portrait of a relationship gone south, requires a fair bit of bravery. It's some of Hayley's strongest work yet, and it's been on constant rotation in my household.

Favs: "Mirtazapine", "Ego Death...", "True Believer", and "Discovery Channel"

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②

Viagra Boys *viagr aboys*

When Sebastian Murphy burps halfway through the opening line in this album's opening track, "**Man Made of Meat**", I knew I was in for a good time. The Swedish post-punk band's latest album is a departure from the band's more politically charged material: Murphy himself said in a statement that this album was intended to be "a bit simple and stupid – because that's how I am," and boy, this album does what they've set out to do tenfold.

viagr aboys is, for the most part, a series of grotesque images of modern life, which we can all mostly relate to, to some degree: brain-rotting dopamine hits ("**Man Made of Meat**"), the cultish pursuit of good health ("**Pyramid of Health**"), thinking about what our dogs are thinking about ("**Uno II**"), relationship insecurity from discovering a bog body ("**The Bog Body**"), and masturbating in the supermarket while "get[ting] ingredients for my perpetual stew" ("**Store Policy**"). It's rough round the edges, quite rowdy, and a hell of a good time, I think it's as simple as that.

However, there's another track on this album that knocked my socks off for an entirely different reason: "**Medicine For Horses**", the middle track of the album displays something truly bizarre: Sebastian Murphy's got a damn good singing voice, outside of that signature American drawl. It's a lot more pensive, delicate, and overall special, even if the centerpiece of its declaration of love is truly surreal and bizarre: "go ahead, break my neck, take the fluid from my spine." Taking the line literally, it's damn near nonsensical, but emotionally, it feels pure, earnest, and sincere. All these elements work together to make this song the best Arcade Fire song Arcade Fire never made (*more on that band later*).

Viagra Boys have pulled off something real special, and have scratched that itch deep inside me for more brown music in Ween's absence. It's one of those albums I thought I wouldn't enjoy, but ended up falling head over heels for.

Invest in Shrimptech Industries, you won't regret it. I sure as shit don't.

Favs: All tracks, but particularly "**Man Made of Meat**", "**The Bog Body**", "**Uno II**", "**You N33d Me**" and "**Medicine For Horses**".

***You were there
the day the music
died. I'll be there the
day it dies again.***





1

Geese *Getting Killed*

There is no doubt in my mind that 2025 is the Year of the Geese.

Over the past few years, both Geese and its frontman Cameron Winter have made ripples through the indie scene, but in 2025, it's like they exploded. The hype for their fourth album spread like wildfire, built off the strong cult following behind their 2023 release *3D Country*, and people slowly caught on to their distinct, and dare I say singular, art rock sound. Even people like Patti Smith, Nick Cave and Cillian Murphy have fallen for this scrappy bunch of Gen Z Brooklynites. It's also helped the band immensely that Cameron Winter's solo career has taken off too: his own album *Heavy Metal*, released in December last year, shows off one of America's best new singer-songwriters in a truly stunning fashion. To some, the hype felt a bit too much, but for me, this album met my expectations, and thank god for that.

From the loud, brassy freak-out chorus of "THERE'S A BOMB IN MY CAR" on opening track "**Trinidad**", all the way through to Max Bassin's relentless chugging drum beat on its six-and-a-half-minute epic closer "**Long Island City, Here I Come**" — a song that sonically feels like a marathon runner carefully dispersing his remaining energy before crossing the finishing line — I think the most impressive thing with *Getting Killed* is how it can dip into chaos but without overwhelming the listener. The pacing, how this album's structured, is incredible, with these high energy bits spaced out quite well between some of the slower numbers.

The album covers a fair bit of musical ground, too: take, for instance, the album's big non-single, "**Cobra**", which through guitarist Emily Green's and bassist Dominic Digesu's work, reminds me of Television's Marquee Moon: quirky, yet accessible. It's catchy, groovy, genuinely danceable, quite the polar opposite to the album's emotional peak, "**Au Pays Du Cocaine**", a mellow, relatively sparse track, which deals with love at the other end. In the former track, Winter uses what I've heard described as the three most used words in a love song: "*Baby*, let me *dance* away, *forever*." In the latter, he uses contrasts to highlight the mounting impossibility of a relationship, and the mismatch between his and his partner's needs, pleading "You can be free and still come home". Co-dependency can't be one sided. That's not how it works.

If anyone deserves the mantle of "Gen Z's first great rock band", as Dazed Magazine put it, Geese make a very good case for themselves.

Favs: "**Cobra**", "**Taxes**", "**Au Pays Du Cocaine**", "**Long Island City...**", **all of it.**

“I wouldn’t be
in the seminary
if I could be
with you.”





BEST ALBUM FROM LAST YEAR
THAT I ONLY LISTENED TO THIS YEAR

M.J. Lenderman *Manning Fireworks*

As a young man, there was one genre I used to hate above everything else: country music. However, in 2025, I really came to terms with how what I hated wasn't country music: it was pop music sung with a twang. You know, the Morgan Wallen types. (I have now brought up Morgan twice in this zine, and words can't describe how much of a scourge he is on modern music). For the most part, I'm still not a fan, personally, but now I'd tolerate it rather than outright dismiss it.

Anyway: this year, two albums have helped me realise that some country music can actually be pretty good: Neil Young's folk rock and country rock masterpiece *Harvest* (1972), and MJ Lenderman's fourth album, *Manning Fireworks*. As well over fifty years of articles and writeups and reviews have been dedicated to the former, I'd like to belatedly throw my hat in the ring for the latter.

I think the big thing that converted me to MJ Lenderman's music this year is its vibe, its sound. The music sounds vaguely reminiscent of Harvest-era Neil Young (in particular, "**Manning Fireworks**" and "**Rip Torn**"). but Lenderman's vocals remind me a lot more of 1990s slacker rock. I feel like, in an emotional sense, I can draw a line directly from Lenderman all the way back to Pavement's Stephen Malkmus. His singing is almost impossibly laidback, making this album the kind of combination that I didn't know I needed.

Right off the bat, with the album's title track "**Manning Fireworks**", I feel like Lenderman shows an incredible gift at storytelling, as he writes, as he told Double J, "a laundry list about what makes this character a jerk". And it doesn't stop there, either: a lot of the album has these miniscule portraits on down-on-their-luck people who have, and done, some bad shit, like how "**Rudolph**" takes two family friendly characters — Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer, and Lightning McQueen — and twists them into, respectively, a reindeer who's hit a doe with his car, and a drink driver who's "blacked out at full speed". One of my favourite little micro-portraits on this album is on "**You Don't Know The Shape I'm In**", where Lenderman sings "We sat under a half-mast McDonald's flag / Broken birds tumble fast past my window." A real quietly surreal bit of Americana in two lines. (As a former clarinet player: man, I loved the clarinet playing on this song, it really adds something beautiful here.)

I think, as time goes by, and as *Manning Fireworks* becomes indisputably my most-repeated album of 2025, I think it's truly flawless. It's not only such an easy listen for me, but an easy relisten. If I had listened to it last year, before I had done my end-of-year wrapup, then I absolutely would've put it in my top five.

Favs: all, but in particular "Manning Fireworks", "Rudolph", "Wristwatch", "She's Leaving You", "You Don't Know The Shape I'm In" and "On My Knees".



BEST GIG OF 2025

Magdalena Bay



Imagine this: You're sitting at home, at some sort of family gathering. You've heard that your youngest cousins/nieces and nephews are going to put on a performance. One of them puts on a CD in the boombox, and as the song begins, they come out, dressed in costumes, to dance to a routine they've clearly put the time and effort into coordinating. It's incredibly cute and charming.

Now imagine that, but bigger. Much bigger, and you'll have an idea of the kind of show Magdalena Bay have been putting on for their **Imaginal Mystery Tour**. The vibe of a performance is still there, the dress-up element too (for example, during **"Vampire in the Corner"**, Mica dons a sunflower headpiece). Everything with the aesthetic of this show feels homemade, but beautifully so. And this time, it's more than charming. It's more than simply cute. It's a great time, with a crowd singing along to every word, taking in the world that Matthew Lewin and Mica Tenenbaum have crafted.

My expectations of this show were already sky-high: for the very select few who have followed my Best Music lists, they'd be aware that Magdalena Bay's 2024 album *Imaginal Disk* was my #1 album of last year. It seemed immune to being rinsed to death, even as, at its peak, I listened to the album three times a day. Because of this, I was very glad to see that Magdalena Bay played all of *Imaginal Disk* in full. **"She Looked Like Me!"**, **"Image"**, **"Death & Romance"**, **"The Ballad of Matt & Mica"** and goddamn **"Cry For Me"** are all present and accounted for. To break up the album, Matt and Mica sprinkled in some fan-favorites from *Mercurial World*, like **"Secrets (Your Fire)"**, **"You Lose!"**, and above all, **"The Beginning"**, topping off the show with a perfect encore.

The one downside, above everything else, was the venue. Palace Foreshore is an alright venue in itself, nothing to complain about, but it's where it's located where there's a fundamental problem. There's only one way back into the city, and it's on a tram, which runs not very often that late at night, and when one does arrive, it fills up faster than you could possibly imagine. Plus, if there's a gig at the Palais Theatre next door — which there was — that only makes the struggle to make one of those trams back even worse.

Yes, picking Magdalena Bay for my Gig of the Year might just be another chance for me to praise them after giving them the #1 spot in my album list last year, but who cares. the concert met the hype I had going into it, Matt and Mica put on a hell of a show, and I think it's as simple as that.



DISAPPOINTMENT OF THE YEAR

**Arcade Fire: Not just
Pink Elephant, but
Arcade Fire in general.**

2025 was the year that Arcade Fire hit rock bottom. Capping off a rough year for the band, on October 31st of this year, Win Butler and his wife Regine Chassagne announced their divorce. To say that Butler and Chassagne are the driving couple behind the band is a borderline understatement, especially in recent years as band members Richard Reed Parry, Jeremy Gara and Tim Kingsbury have taken a backseat and become a backing band. They insist the band's continuing in spite of this, but I have my doubts it'll last.

The slow descent of Arcade Fire has been well documented through music discussion forums and the press, it's just a matter of where that descent started that there is still some conjecture. Whilst some point to either 2017's uneven *Everything Now* or 2013's divisive *Reflektor*, I can't help but wonder if The Suburbs winning Album of the Year at the Grammys in 2011, which sent the band viral overnight with Twitter asking "who the fuck is Arcade Fire?", sealed their fate, saddling them with an incredible amount of anticipation that, to some, they just couldn't meet. And then, to make matters worse: the allegations dropped. On August 27th, 2022, Pitchfork released an article detailing accusations made by multiple women of sexual misconduct by Win Butler. For a band whose first three albums effectively preached being a light in darkness, a decent chunk of their fanbase felt stabbed in the back. Since the allegations, I haven't been able to listen to the band without that distinct bitter aftertaste.

To bring us to the present, now: the centerpiece of Arcade Fire's 2025 is ***Pink Elephant***, a new album which doesn't have anything new to say, instead opting for lazy lyricism and one too many instrumental interludes to fill the gaps. Here's Win Butler's chance to respond to the allegations of sexual misconduct against him, and he's decided to just... not really say anything? One could construe the titular "***Pink Elephant***", in the title track's line "don't think about Pink Elephant" as being about the allegations, trying to get the audience to take the music as it is instead of letting exterior drama (using that term very lightly here) influence the opinions on the music. If someone were to interpret that line as such, then the music doesn't offer much solace. It's not easy to lose yourself in the music and just forget for a little bit. It says a lot that this era's best song is "***Cars and Telephones***", which was both not on the album, and an unreleased fan favourite that was written before Win and Regine even met in 2000.

Pink Elephant bombed, and bombed hard. Of the entirety of Arcade Fire's discography, it's their only album to not chart on the Billboard 200 at all. After barely selling out their tour and refusing to do any press at all, it seems like this album rollout ended with a bizarre performance on Saturday Night Live. On their first appearance in 2007, at the end of their song "Intervention", Win Butler smashing his guitar felt cathartic, an incredible emotional release. In 2025, in a performance of "***Year of the Snake***", Win tried smashing a resonant guitar, scrawled with the words "THE MACHINE IS BROKEN" like some pathetic wannabe Woody Guthrie, but the guitar doesn't make a dint. The guitar smash itself now feels hollow, weak, like a manchild having a tantrum while trying to relive former glory. If that's not symbolic, then I don't know what is. When, earlier in the song, he sings "And I'm a real boy, my heart's full of love / it's not made of wood", in a deep irony it feels completely ingenuine, the smile on his face concealing a line that can read as a desperate plea for people to see him as human and capable of real love, whether to the viewing audience, or to Regine Chassagne herself.

So, in the wake of lingering damage from three-year-old sexual misconduct accusations, a bomb of an album, and now the breakdown of Win and Regine's marriage, what now for Arcade Fire? As a fan of the band that got me through Year 12 in 2019, it sort of pains me to say that *I don't give a fuck anymore*. In the music, it sounds like they don't either.

THE BACK PAGE

*I don't know what to put on this back page, so have
my favourite music-related photo of 2025:
Miss Piggy at Sabrina Carpenter's final Short N' Sweet show.*

