

Favourite Things

CRITIC WRITER AND EX-PRO AUDIO ENGINEER WAYNE HYDE PICKS SOME INTERESTING RARITIES AMONG HIS 'TOP TEN'

The last time I was asked to name some favourite albums would've been during an interview at Air Studios in 1989. Sir George Martin asked me to name five LPs and then showed me around the facility: "McCartney's in that room, A-ha are in that room over there". A week later I was asked if I wanted the job, but I turned it down (which is a story for another time).



RUSH
Power Windows
Songs/Sound: 8/10, 8/10

I was 13 years old when I first got into hi-fi: a family friend with a B&W, Creek and Aiwa system would sit me down, crank up his 4040 amplifier and the room came alive. Even on cassette, the spatial effects, tightness and grooves break through on this 1988 digital recording. Intelligent nerd rock tunes and topics make this a favourite by Canadian rock trio Rush. Many songs have intros that feature sounds jumping from left to right and back again, and build up to drop into the rhythm that carries the tune through to the end. It's exciting stuff and great balance of prog rock and traditional verse+chorus arrangements – definitely a driving/cycling/jogging album for your playlist.

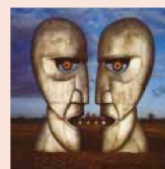
CAPDOWN
Wind Up Toys
Songs/Sound: 7/10, 8/10



Capdown ('capitalism downfall') is a relatively unknown ska/punk rock band from Milton Keynes whose success peaked on

the UK club scene in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Constant gigging earned a devoted following among teenagers who appreciated some intelligent punk in the mosh pit, and its third album *Wind Up Toys* is my personal favourite. The production and mix by Larry Hibbit captures Capdown to a tee and there's a snare drum sound throughout that adds the coolest signature to the record. The album may start a little weak but it grows and gets better track by track until the heart rate soars. *Keeping Up Appearances* starts with a simple strum on Keith Minter's aggressive guitar and then the track explodes. This album is best approached with an open mind on a day when the neighbours are away!

PINK FLOYD
The Division Bell
Songs/Sound: 6/10, 10/10



After seeing Pink Floyd for the first time live (twice in one week at Wembley Stadium), I was hooked. That was at the time of the release of *A Momentary Lapse of Reason* – an album marred by a rather dull overall sound that lacked dynamics. Then along came *The Division Bell*, which will be demonstrating the merits of a system at many a hi-fi show. Although the mastering is near perfect, the songs might have had a bit more get up and

go. However, *What Do You Want From Me* stands out, and I'm playing it right now in hi-res on Tidal: the Stratocaster stereo intro is fantastic. *Take It Back* has a great solid tempo and feel-good factor with glorious backing vocals that always remind me of the live performances, where Sam Brown and other incredible vocalists help fill out the sound.

RYAN ADAMS
Love Is Hell Pts I & II
Songs/Sound: 7/10, 10/10

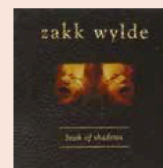


This two-CD package was the follow up to 2001's *Gold*, Adams's best selling album that I also recommend highly. *Love Is Hell*, however, is much

darker, as the name suggests. Produced by John Porter (Taj Mahal, Keb Mo, The Smiths and more), the sound is sublime – warmer than a fireplace at Christmas, and I've no idea how this has been achieved. Cue *The Shadowlands* with the lights dimmed and listen how the track starts lo-fi with a medium wave radio tone to it. Sit with it and halfway through it all slowly opens up beautifully, with reverse electric guitars, acoustics, strings, and rounded drums riding out to the end. I'm sure Adams and Porter must have had so much fun mixing this album. The cover version of *Wonderwall* breathes new life into the song, and with that sound mix too.

ZAKK WYLDE
Book Of Shadows
Songs/Sound: 9/10, 10/10

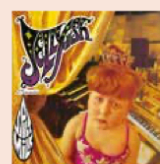
Book Of Shadows is the first solo album by Ozzy Osborne's god of a guitarist and co-writer Zakk Wylde. Taking a break from metal anthems and supporting his bat-biting colleagues, Wylde gets to churn out some simple lyricised country rock. (My copy is signed by the man himself, after I mixed



monitor sound for him and his band at a London show in 2000.) Produced by Ron and Howard Albert, the sound mix and mastering is perfect; I wish

he'd worked with them more often! If you enjoy a bit of country rock, don't let this pass you by: drums and bass drive every track with some of the best guitar riffs, licks and solos on the planet. Put on your seatbelt and hit play to *I Thank You Child* for a very dynamic experience.

JELLYFISH
Spilt Milk
Songs/Sound: 10/10, 8/10

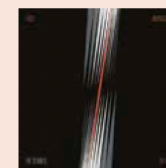


So you like the Beach Boys and the Beatles? *Spilt Milk* is for you. I love the album artwork: I don't know who the unhappy girl is, but the images of the

band's keyboards, drums, harps, gongs and dog strewn across the recording studio set a scene reminiscent of Sergeant Pepper. The opening and angelic *Hush* feels like you're being sleepily welcomed into a fairytale, until boom!... you're *Joining A Fan Club*. Notice the fat, full and slappy drum sound on the album: that's the signature sound of miracle record producer Jack Joseph Puig (also check out *By Your Side* by The Black Crowes). The track *Sebrina*, *Paste and Plato* has dynamics, silent breaks, and what sounds like door slams, mixed with big band bass drums. It's playful; it rocks; and the theme continues throughout the album. I'd compare it to eating sherbet, space dust and gob stoppers in one mouthful.

THE STROKES
First Impressions Of Earth
Songs/Sound 10/10, 7/10

It's the laid back, couldn't give a **** vibe of the singer that pulls me in every time. Track two *Juicebox* drives a groove along like the *Batman* theme, and as the first chorus arrives, lyrics like: *Why Won't You Come Over*



Here are screamed with a cutting rasp – catchy and addictive. On *Electricityscape* Julian Casablanca sings *I Wish Two Drinks Were Always In*

Me (to which I'd happily subscribe as well, though I'm not sure what my wife would say). And if *15 Minutes* isn't influenced by Shane McGowan and the Pogues then I don't know what is. Finally, *Heart In A Cage* opens with the lines *Will I Don't Feel Better When I'm ***** Around*. (Apologies for my French, but I think you'll get an idea of the album now.) But do give it a go, as it's actually a very catchy, guitar-jangly and tuneful album.

MARINA & THE DIAMONDS
The Family Jewels
Songs/Sound: 8/10, 7/10



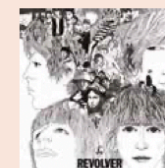
Welsh born Marina Diamandis is one of popular music's best kept secrets. Rarely interviewed and rarely on UK TV, after three albums and

worldwide tours behind her, she's doing just great. I'd describe her writing and style as 'very Kate Bush for the noughties', and this is particularly apparent in the whacky sounding *Mowgli's Road*. However, *The Family Jewels* is straight pop, albeit with a large slice of quirkiness on top. *Obsessions* is the stand out track – have a look on YouTube at her solo versions, recorded live with a piano. *Hollywood* and the classic *I Am Not A Robot* were both very catchy singles. With a great vocal range and clever lyrics (compared to most pop artists), Diamandis is no rough diamond.

THE BEATLES
Revolver
Songs/Sound: 8/10, 7/10

I know my scores look a little low on this one, but, hey it's still an amazing album (as if you didn't know that already). I prefer mine in mono, as stereo panning in this era was experimental and comes across as rather

WAYNE HYDE



distracting. I always felt a bit disoriented since the first day I heard this album, so I set up a playlist in the following order, and recommend giving it a try:

Tomorrow Never Knows, *Taxman*, *And Your Bird Can Sing*, *For No One*, *Eleanor Rigby*, *Love You To*, *Doctor Robert*, *She Said She Said*, *I'm Only Sleeping*, *Good Day Sunshine*, *I Want To Tell You*, *Here, There And Everywhere*, *Got To Get You Into My Life*, *Yellow Submarine*.

MUSE
Drones
Songs/Sound: 8/10, 9/10



Some regard Muse as an annoyingly 'operatic' rock band: I think the part that irritates people is how it achieves *Queen*-esque levels of

the above so easily on every album and in each live concert; vocalist Matt Bellamy makes it look so easy. *Drones*, however, is a bit more serious: to me, it's the best anti-war album I've heard in years. Sample *Psycho*, with its constant reminders of US soldiers brainwashed into operating remote killing machines: *I could use someone like you, someone who'll kill on my command*. Track five, *Reapers* fires the lyrics *We're all expendable* and then *Killed By Drones* at point blank range continuously at you. It's chilling, moving stuff, with a tight digital-war-like sound mix that carries the message loud and clear on any good hi-fi.