

# 50 ESSENTIAL LPS 1997-2010

HERE THEY ARE: CREAM'S PICK OF THE BEST ALBUMS FROM OUR FIRST 50 ISSUES. YOU MIGHT BE SURPRISED TO NOTE THE LIKES OF OASIS AND U2 MISSING, BUT THEN WE FELT THE RECORDS THESE ACTS DELIVERED SINCE OUR BIRTH IN 1997 JUST DIDN'T LIVE UP TO THE POWER OF THEIR PERENNIAL PREDECESSORS.



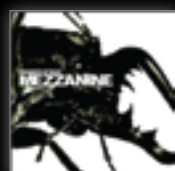
**RADIOHEAD**  
**OK Computer (1997)**

Dubbed 'the first album of the 21st Century', 'OK Computer' sees analogue go trippy via synthesisers, as electronic gets caught between a rock and an ironic place. And who hasn't placed 'Paranoid Android' in their top 100 tracks of all-time?



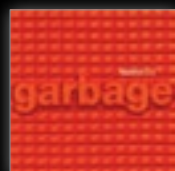
**BJÖRK**  
**Homogenic (1997)**

Prepping us for the ultimate postmodern fin de siècle, Björk mashes cultures, class, gender and geography to deliver a gem of an ambient-meets-alternapop LP.



**MASSIVE ATTACK**  
**Mezzanine (1998)**

Still on that brooding trip-hop tip that these Bristolers virtually invented, 'Mezzanine' was never going to be as big as 'Blue Lines', but epic in its awe and angst just the same.



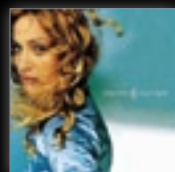
**GARBAGE**  
**Version 2.0 (1998)**

Shirley Manson and her boys sent rock through the motherboard and had it come out sounding like one bugged-up, fabulously boisterous postmodern mess.



**AIR**  
**Moon Safari (1998)**

Possibly the most name-dropped album of its year, Air's debut was a breath of fresh ambience that led to a string of film soundtrack work for the kooky French duo.



**MADONNA**  
**Ray Of Light (1998)**

The album that threw Madonna into the limelight of credibility, the Zen hippy sentiment was balanced well with the gal's finger-on-the-pulse club-floor sensibility.



**MOBY**  
**Play (1999)**

The must-have Moby LP, 'Play' pressed the button on funk, soul, blues and balladry, each genre crossing markets effortlessly, albeit even sneaking into sandshoe advert territory.



**BECK**  
**Midnite Vultures (1999)**

Capturing the essence of the century just past, this was an eclectic LP influenced by the old school funk of Parliament, the hey-day of Prince, the saucy soundtracks of Bond, traditional Indian instrumentation, and even the robotic antics of techno pioneers Kraftwerk.



**SUEDE**  
**Head Music (1999)**

More glam than the early-day Smiths-style Suede, this LP packs in the guitar riffs, with choruses that keep ringing in your head way after the record's ended.



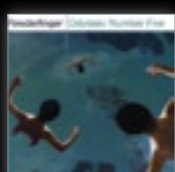
**GROOVE ARMADA**  
**Vertigo (1999)**

"If you're fond of sand dunes and salty air..." Who doesn't recall the summery air of Groove Armada's sophomore LP? As for 'I See You Baby', it had us shaking our asses well into the new decade.



**TORI AMOS**  
**To Venus And Back (1999)**

Packed with cryptic lyrics that even the most ardent Freudian couldn't solve, especially 'Datura' (an Edith Sitwell-style ode to flora with female genitalia connotations) and 'Riot Poof' (we won't even begin to analyse that one).



**POWDERFINGER**  
**Odyssey Number Five (2000)**

Australia's favourite college band, each and every deep and meaningful track here is worthy of thesis dissertation. Best soaked coming down, sunbaking on the porch on a Sunday morning.



**AVALANCHES**  
**Since I Left You (2000)**

A fabulous album made from some 600 samples, borrowing from virtually every genre – acid jazz, ambient electronic, wah-wah funk, mock doo-wop, psychedelic rock, Oriental torchsong, Latin fiesta, disco bliss and bubblegum pop. And we're still waiting for album number two.



**MISSY ELLIOTT**  
**Miss E... So Addictive (2001)**

Getting her freak on, Missy 'Misdemeanour' made anything but an error with this LP that sees R&B, hip-hop and soul combined, sounding sharper than a bowl of mama's clam chowder.



**GORILLAZ**  
**Gorillaz (2001)**

Never one to do things by the book, Damon Albarn chose to launch his post-Blur career by introducing the concept of a virtual band in Gorillaz. With their self-titled debut, the four animated members busted out a thrilling mesh of Britpop and hip-hop, best showcased in the ridiculously catchy lead single 'Clint Eastwood'.



**DAFT PUNK**  
**Discovery (2001)**

The grooves are so deep, you just want to scratch the surface to find some meaning, but there is none, and that's what's so inane and fabulous about these masters of disco and disguise.



**PINK**  
**Missundaztood (2001)**

Then pink by hair colour, too, Alecia Moore proved she could deliver variety, from the subtle hip-hop of the title track, through the bass-heavy and acoustic beauty of 'Just Like A Pill', to the punchy percussion of 'Get The Party Started'. An impressive sophomore effort, even with naff graffiti on the sleeve.



**SNEAKER PIMPS**  
**Bloodsport (2002)**

Far darker and more fucked up than 'Spin Spin Sugar' ever was, the contents of this album was brilliant bloody stuff: a slick build-up of acoustic, rhythm, bass and strings worthy of symphonic tribute.



**SILVERCHAIR**  
**Diorama (2002)**

Even the bright colours on the sleeve of this LP indicated that Daniel Johns and partner were in the mood for a brighter, feelgood, celebratory sound for the most part. But while much of it is benevolent, some tracks do sting like 'The Lever', 'One Way Mule' and 'Without You'.



**COLDPLAY**  
**A Rush Of Blood To The Head (2002)**

Having wooed all with the dramatic splash of 'Yellow' on their debut, Coldplay set about cementing themselves as the world's most huggable stadium-fillers with this pitch-perfect set of melancholic pop. Intelligent, unguarded lyrics, wonderfully melodic and brutal when it needed to be, 'A Rush Of Blood...' is one of the finest follow-up albums of all-time.



**THE STROKES**  
**Is This It (2002)**

Equipped with a New York Dolls ethos, injected with a slap-and-tickle Euro humour, these pouting pop/rocksters even managed to have their faux punk sound beatmixed (ironically of course) into a Christina Aguilera track.



**GOLDFRAPP**  
**Black Cherry (2003)**

Song titles heavy in the adjective department ('Crystalline Green', 'Hairy Trees', 'Deep Honey', 'Strict Machine') hinted at some very colourful sonics and way trippy lyricism.



**JAY-Z**  
**The Black Album (2003)**

Old-school-sounding in parts yet utterly modern overall, 'The Black Album' showed Jay-Z at the top of his game. So classic in its basis, an a capella version of the album was released to provide material for remixes and mashups, leading to Dangermouse's 'The Grey Album', an unauthorised collection of Beatles 'White Album' tunes turned rap.



**THE KILLERS**  
**Hot Fuss (2003)**

Few LPs in recent memory evoked as much excitement as the debut from Las Vegas four-piece The Killers. With perhaps the best opening half of any Noughties album, 'Hot Fuss' curled the toes of shoe-gazing rockers and dancefloor diehards alike. Frontman Brandon Flowers' response to a newspaper ad listing influences Oasis and The Cure was never more evident than on this.



**THE WHITE STRIPES**  
**Elephant (2003)**

Having caught the world's attention by embracing the power of simplicity and understatement in a time characterised by musical excess, Jack and Meg White saw no need to change the formula with their fourth album in as many years. Dressed as always in red, white and black, their 'Elephant' is a classic set of low-fi stomps including a rollicking version of 'I Just Don't Know What to Do With Myself' and of course, a little tune called 'Seven Nation Army'.



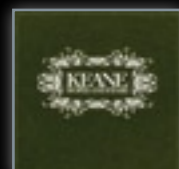
**KELIS**  
**Tasty (2003)**

Former church choir singer turned cheeky R&B minx brought us all to the yard with her third collection of funky teases. Right from the get-go, Kelis gets saucy and you can hear the juices flowing from the opening narration onward. >>

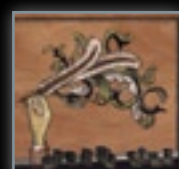


**FRANZ FERDINAND****Franz Ferdinand (2004)**

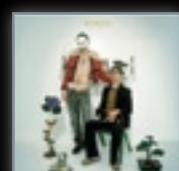
The band described by Liam Gallagher as 'Right Said Fred in a suit' proved they had much more going for them than just snappy get-ups with this debut long-player. Sound at once like the past and the future, the Glaswegians unleashed a collection of bouncy Britpop that breathed new life into an ageing scene.

**KEANE****Hopes And Fears (2004)**

Hot on the coat tails of fellow British nice-guys Travis and Coldplay, Keane produced this undeniably pleasant collection of piano-led pop tunes, including the gloriously inoffensive hit 'Somewhere Only We Know'.

**ARCADE FIRE****Funeral (2004)**

Inspired by the many deaths of various band members' family members at the time of recording, 'Funeral' is not short on the melodrama but maintains a certain humility that sees it ranking as many a rival rock act's 'album of the decade'.

**THE PRESETS****Beams (2005)**

Long before hitting the sunlight of the mainstream, the Sydney duo introduced dance music to many Australian audience segments (traditionally shy of it) with this stunning debut. The beats hit hard but were never without a melodic sensibility, and the resonating vocal of Julian Hamilton stayed with you long after the final track was over.

**WOLFMOTHER****Wolfmother (2005)**

In a year that didn't offer much original promise, three boys from Erskineville, NSW, donned their best Led Zepp-a-like drag and sonics to give us a true retro-progressive treat. We hear even the ex-Led Zeppers were impressed!

**BLOC PARTY****Silent Alarm (2005)**

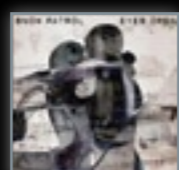
When 'rock' band Radiohead released the electronic beats-driven 'Idioteque' in 2000, people shat their pants. By the time Bloc Party debuted with their stunning 'Silent Alarm' in 2005, rock and electronica had become so intertwined that it was difficult to know where one ended and the other began. A beast of equal parts intelligence and emotion, this album served up a seductive new sound that all of a sudden made music seem more interesting.

**AMY WINEHOUSE****Back To Black (2006)**

Having now become the world's most spectacular car crash, it's sometimes easy to forget why Amy Winehouse caught our attention in the first place. 'Back To Black' is a masterpiece of soulful R&B, from a voice as powerful as it is seductive.

**ARCTIC MONKEYS****Whatever People Say I Am, That's What I'm Not (2006)**

"Don't release the album on the internet, don't give away free songs and don't put it out before the release date," record company execs told frontman Alex Turner who broke all those rules. 'I Bet You Look Good On The Dancefloor' (and the others) looked good on the charts as this became one of the fastest selling debuts of all time. A lethal mix of potent awareness and loveable ignorance, breathlessly paced and effortlessly catchy.

**SNOW PATROL****Eyes Open (2006)**

After flying under the radar for their first three albums, Snow Patrol released their most complete and confident collection to date, shooting them to dizzying new heights of commercial success. Forlorn lyrics scored to simple yet mesmerising instrumentation, the withdrawn futility in 'Chasing Cars' blissfully characterises the LP and became an anthem to a generation. Well, a theme for 'Grey's Anatomy', at least.

**MUSE****Black Holes & Revelations (2006)**

Teetering all the while on the knife-edge between ambitious and overblown was the brilliant third effort from English trio Muse. From shiny pop songs dressed up as dirty rockers ('Supermassive Black Hole') to epic anthems about galactic horsemen ('Knights Of Cydonia'), the apocalypse never sounded so good.

**ROISIN MURPHY****Overpowered (2007)**

After a decade long tenure as one half of electronic pop duo Moloko, Irish singer/songwriter Murphy has now earned a name for herself as an accomplished solo artist. Her second solo effort 'Overpowered' was particularly strong, melding trippy beats and loops with her trademark vocal to truly seductive effect.

**M.I.A.****Kala (2007)**

Led by the irresistible single 'Paper Planes', M.I.A.'s second album was an infectious muddle of urban hip-hop, dance and pop. Creative use of sound effects and samples from the likes of The Pixies and The Clash made this one of the most infectious and intriguing albums in recent memory.

**MARK RONSON****Version (2007)**

With his aptly titled album 'Version', English DJ Mark Ronson at once offered respectful tribute and fresh takes on tracks by groups such as The Jam, Kasabian, Coldplay, and most notably The Smiths (with Daniel Merriweather) and The Kaiser Chiefs (with Lily Allen).

**RIHANNA****Good Girl Gone Bad (2007)**

Before making the headlines for all the wrong reasons, Rihanna was the talk of the town with her third collection of expertly-crafted R&B goodness. 'Good Girl Gone Bad' was a critical and commercial success all over the world, yielding a total of eight singles and earning the Barbadian a Grammy to stash under that Umbrella-ella-ella.

**SANTOGOLD****Santogold (2008)**

With her self-titled debut, American artist Santogold (or Santigold, as she is now known) endeavoured to 'break down boundaries and genre classifications'. That she did, with this nicely muddled palate of hip-hop, R&B, rock and electronica that set a new standard for musical creativity.

**KINGS OF LEON****Only By The Night (2008)**

Having indulged their inner redneck for much of their early career, Kings Of Leon ditched the beards and hit rock perfection with album number three. Stacked with enough singles to make radio producers weak at the knees, 'Only By The Night' showed the boys from Nashville displaying a masterful awareness of how to push things further and when to keep them simple.

**EMPIRE OF THE SUN****Walking On A Dream (2008)**

The musical sensibility and unique vocal of former Sleepy Jackson frontman Luke Steele combined with the dance music know-how of Pnau's Nick Littlemore proved to be a winning combination with this, one of the standout local albums of the decade. Then there were those outrageous costumes, lashings of face paint and elements of fantasia that seriously rivalled MGMT.

**LILY ALLEN****It's Not Me, It's You (2009)**

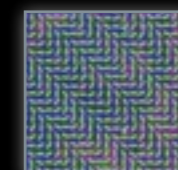
Telling it like it is has never been a problem for Lily Allen. Everyone from washed-up pop stars and drug-taking politicians to inadequate sexual partners copped a mouthful here, but her trademark cheek was matched with a stronger vocal and rapidly developing musical sensibility that made the whole package irresistible.

**LADY GAGA****The Fame (2009)**

One of the most rotated albums of 2009 showed that there is more to speculate about Lady Gaga than just the fact she rarely wears pants. A more thoughtful and postmodern work than it may first appear, her almost annoyingly catchy debut displays both hunger and contempt for fame in its examination of the cult of celebrity.

**GRIZZLY BEAR****Veckatimest (2009)**

One of the few non-electronic artists signed to Warp Records, the Brooklyn-based band delivered surprise psychedelic pop and 'freak' folk rock with their first two LPs, insisting that this third release would see them crossover with an injection of pop friendliness. And so it did.

**ANIMAL COLLECTIVE****Merriwether Post Pavilion (2009)**

For a group of lads who go by the ridiculous monikers of Panda Bear, Avey Tare and Geologist, Animal Collective produce some seriously good tunes. Released in the first week of 2009, their eighth album was their most commercially successful and with infectious rockers like 'Summertime Clothes' and 'My Girls', arguably their best.

**DAPPLED CITIES****Zounds (2009)**

The Sydney indie-rock outfit was the surprise find for 2009, taking basic guitar songs, injecting these with complex time signatures and tempo changes to create a new kind of experimental-pop-cum-art-rock. It's officially pronounced 'Zounds', by the way, and is slurred slang for 'Christ's wounds'.

**THE HORRORS****Primary Colours (2009)**

From the Smiths-esque opening strains of 'Mirror's Image' to the epic eight-minute closer 'Sea Within A Sea', the second album from England's The Horrors is a post-Erno tour de force.

**XX****xx (2010)**

Though topping UK charts late last year, XX only recently got the distribution deal they deserved in Oz. Don't be fooled by the leisurely pacing and gentle tones of lead singer Romy Madley Croft – the four 20-year-olds that make up The XX are a potent brew, charged with sexuality and vigour.

Reviews by Lisa Andrews, Patrick Lewis, Michael Mastess, Tyler Mathes and Antonino Tati