

THE EIGHTIES: LOVE AND UP CLOSE

The second in a two part series glorifying the live concert album. This week: the best and worst of the 80's.

Dear Mr Ferguson:

Thank you for sending for our pamphlet "The Intellectual Approach to Picking to Top Albums for a Year-End or Decade-End Review Articles." Best of luck.

1) Pick one-third to one-half of the top "X" records of your list from certified chart toppers. Pick one-third (X/3) if you've got an ear for alternative music but aren't truly converted. Also pick X/3 if you hear music from other planets, hosts of angels, the hordes of hell, etc. DONT REVIEW THIS MUSIC! Stick with the earthly material. You may need to sell your writing to a magazine with a middle of the road readership so that you can get enough money to pay your shrink or to purchase some "pharmaceuticals." All others pick one-half (X/2).

This factor (either X/2 or X/3) utilizes simple division that even you can calculate except if you've decided on a "top ten" list, for example, and go for X/3. This complicates matters since you'll have to pick 3.33 chart-topping records for your list. Note the significance of this number - it sort of looks like 33 1/3, but then, remember, no one buys LPs anymore. Chuck it! Round down to three (safe) or up to 4 (but not on an exam) and get on with it. This is the 80's so forget about being "true to yourself." (If you are a math major, stay with the 3.33 value - you'll figure something out.)

2) Add a couple of sentimental favourites (ie. some stuff YOU really liked) even if they actually weren't very good. To calculate this number take the cube root of the square of your IQ divided by your net income (this factor is subject to change if and when the GST is implemented). You should come up with the number 2. If not, you've a) made a wrong calculation, b) lied about your IQ, or c) you had no net income because you're a student. Use the number 2, anyway, and continue.

To choose your sentimental favourites for inclusion on your list it's best to go with music of a particular genre such as rap, heavy metal, thrash, etc., rather than with mainstream records. You'll curry favour with the segment of the record-buying public that laps up this material. The rest of them won't realize it's dreck, especially if its obscure enough that most have probably not heard it. They'll just assume that they missed out on something good that you are calling to their attention. At worst, they will poo-poo your selection (not so bad) but if you're really skillful (ie. you can bullshit) you'll be applauded for "championing the rights of the musically downtrodden" or the "musical minority brethren" by standing up for records that were overlooked by other publications. (Sprinkle in plenty of phrases like these to justify some of your selections and to invoke sympathy from liberal-minded readers who abhor discrimination.)

3) Well, you're on your own from here on, kid. What do you expect for \$35? Besides we've got you safely halfway through the list. Choose 5 more albums from among a) brilliant new artists, b) jaded has-been who pulls through with unexpected comebacks, and c) artists with a social or environmental statement. People love these larger-than-life storybook endings where the good guys come out on top. Stay away from political bands! Ditto for those sporting horns and reeking of the stench of hell.

4) Thanks for the \$35.

Sincerely

The B. Sucker Correspondence School for Writing.

Here they are: The Top Five Albums of the 80's

No, it's not a top ten list for two very good reasons. First, everybody else is doing top ten lists of everything under the sun. More importantly, I couldn't think of ten live albums that deserved to be called top ten and a top eight just didn't sound right. Besides there is something about the number five that is as natural as the number 10...

(thumb) PETER GABRIEL - Peter Gabriel Plays Live.

Manna from a man whose first three albums were each called Peter Gabriel. This fact might lead one to suspect he's an egotistical shit. He's not. Considering the man had written Biko long before the anti-apartheid bandwagon got rolling in the music business, suggests some sort of holier-than-thou attitude as well as uncanny prescience. His work is suffused with a subtle, yet powerful, moral righteousness that doesn't sound preachy - just "right" - and that could explain the enduring power of Biko versus Sun City, for example.

The death of an old Indian in San Jacinto is the focal point of this vignette that spans the ages from when men were a part of the land to the arrival of the white man who carves up the land. The passionate delivery is as strong a statement for the rights of aboriginal peoples and their culture as will be found in today's music. The primitive jungle rhythms of The Rhythm of the Heat evoke powerful, savage elements from somewhere deep in the human psyche. The emotional tension mounts to a thundering crescendo as adrenaline and drums toss you about then leave you limp and exhausted. The parallels between the hunt and the ensuing frenzied killing and sexual desire and fulfillment are obvious and reaffirm the power of basic rock rhythms.

Shack the Monkey is the rocker that most associate with Gabriel and this version is a sure pleaser. Again the emotional aspect Gabriel imparts on this song allows it to surpass the limitations of the studio version (powerful as it was). The allegorical Salsbury Hill and the healing Lay your Hands on Me round out the best of the album. Anyone who has seen Gabriel in concert will recognize the explicit trust he places in the audience as he allows them to lay their hands on him during the performance of the latter song. Perhaps the most remarkable and honest gesture performed by an artist.

Peter Gabriel Plays Live is the best album in the career of an important artist. Listening to it demonstrates that while he may have been largely ignored by the general public between his leaving Genesis to the release of the highly successful album So, he was hardly ignorable.

(index finger) THE SMITHS - "Rank".

The Smiths' rocket flight exploded in high orbit and perhaps that's the best way for a band to part company. This recording captures the band late in their career and at their peak. It also demonstrates that the band didn't revolve solely about the Morrissey/Marr axis. Morrissey's vocals and Marr's guitar are still the dominant features of the recording but the drumming and bass of "what's their names" adds a dimension that was perhaps, in retrospect, not given sufficient space on the studio albums. Highlights of the album are Still Ill and Ask. (Nature is a language/Can anybody read?). Morrissey's grunts, snorts, yodels and other assorted vocal gymnastics add a new dimension to his lyrics as the studio

versions are taken from the showroom for a hair-raising spin around the block. They pass the road test, and more.

No Smiths' album would be complete without the requisite "death" songs. Whether it be emotional or physical, death, dying, and decay are facts of life that few artists place in life-affirming perspective. The irony stemming from two lovers agreeing to meet at The Cemetery Gates gives way to sobers reflection and finally to renewed zest for life. The dirge-like cadence and the imagery of I Know It's Over create a mood that builds to an emotional climax which convincingly demonstrates the largely untapped potential for the musical analysis of the "mysterious finality" in our death-denying, death-fixed existence.

All the other tunes from the breakneck London and The Queen is Dead to the quirky Panic and the bizarre Blgmouth Strikes Again confirm the mantle of genius.

They will be missed. (But they'll be back! - Ed.)

(impolite finger) U2 - Live Under a Blood Red Sky. Fair is fair, so, despite the most recent live venture, I won't dock U2 marks. Besides, the circumstances surrounding the making of this album and Rattle and Hum are different. Back then Bono and Co. were a popular band on the verge of superstardom. All that was required was the monumental final thrust. This is it. Packs all the wallop of a D-Day to capture this continent. 11 o'clock tick tock may be their best moment.

Outstanding versions of Gloria, Sunday Bloody Sunday, and New Year's Day, make the studio versions pale by comparison. The other tunes: I Will Follow, Party Girl, The Electric Co., and 40 make the studio versions shrivel in the light of day, crumple to powder, and blow away.

Their best work to date (I'm still hopeful). The albums that follow (Unforgettable Fire, Joshua Tree) were cynically engineered to mop up the last remaining traces of opposition. And the rest, they say, is history.

(ring finger) TALKING HEADS - Stop Making Sense.

The fevered torment of the opening track's Psycho Killer captures the obsessive-compulsive homicidal maniac that may lay in all of us. Doesn't sanity seem boring by comparison? Every time I listen to Swamp I form this mental image of mutant alligators holding Miami hostage and calling out for "No Nukes". Guess the Dolphins will be looking for a new stadium.

The highlight may well be the smoldering version of Burning Down the House, though the captivating version of Take Me to the River provides stiff competition. Proof the 80's may not always have been sane but they were a lot of fun.

(pinkie) WALL OF VOODOO - The Ugly Americans in Australia.

Who the hell? Wall of Voodoo that's who. From the hilarious opening introduction [see: "Let's have a real warm Melbourne welcome for Wall of Voodoo"/audience: (boo)/the band: "C'mon, you can do better than that"/audience: (boo even louder)] to the incredibly bizarre reworkings of Johnny Cash's Ring of Fire (all growed up and electronically embellished) and Woody Guthrie's Pretty Boy Floyd, this is an album of never-ending surprises. Mexican Radio and Far Side of Crazy are the hits and are admirably done. The biggest discoveries, however, are Wrong Way to Hollywood and Living in the Red. The former encapsulates the sense of helplessness and isolation of modern times as well as any song I've heard; the latter is a riveting, eerie piece that implies we've mortgaged our souls. Scariest than any tax grab Michael Wilson dreams up? We can only hope so. Living in the Red also features the most haunting ethereal backing vocals on any live album. If they weren't dubbed in... well, watch out for these guys.

THE WORST LIVE CONCERT ALBUM OF THE 80'S

And the loser is... The Rolling Stones.

The release of Still Life in 1981 marked a sad chapter in the career of what once was the best rock band in the world. Now they'll settle for oldest and richest.

I'm not saying that this is the worst album in absolute terms but, on the basis of what's expected and what's delivered, there is a brutal discrepancy unparalleled in recorded music. In my rating scheme they were docked further points for the meretricious album cover (ick).

Maybe my expectations were too high? Not likely. When this album was released, I had already gotten used to the fact that the Stones were living on borrowed time. Of the four live albums the Stones released two (Got Live if you want it, Love You Live) were spotty, Get Yer Ya-Ya's Out was a masterpiece, and then there's this. I expected them to be tamer, but not mediocre, and especially not this.

Let's Spend the Night Together was performed with such passion I'd bet the Stones are all virgins. Similarly, Shattered, Under My Thumb, Time is on my Side and Satisfaction, are desecrations in light of the originals. No redeeming features whatsoever. And its ten years too late to tell them it's over.

Presented by Peter Ferguson



Peter Gabriel - Rhythm of the Heat... over a nice hot cuppa

THE WORST MEAT EVENTS OF THE EIGHTIES

IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER, WHETHER YOU WANT IT OR NOT...

- Roseanne Barr** - Mistleads children into believing that being a large, bitchy person is funny and admirable. Should take diet tips from Oprah.
- Ronald Reagan** - Contributions to proctology are outstanding. Jane would have made a better stage coach than Nancy, though.
- Terrorism** - Improvement in hostage video needed to bring them up in network rating. Good points for their use of stunts and action props.
- Movie Sequels** - Deja vu takes on a whole new meaning. I'm waiting for something innovative; like, in Batman II, the caped wonder begins a reign of terror in Gotham City or Rambo becomes a dairy farmer in Idaho during tuff times.
- Professional Wrestling** - Dah, Aagh. What big muscles they have! Still haven't decided if it's real or not.
- Iran-Contra Hearing** - Bad script, bad acting, bad wardrobe, bad lighting, etc. Absence of Casey really left holes in the production. No one else could remember their lines.
- Heavy Metal Music** - Spandex, tongues, and primate growling peak in popularity. Proof that hair length and IQ have an inverse relationship.
- Geraldo Rivera** - Sensationalism extraordinaire. Kind of makes me want to look through old buildings in Moosejaw while banging my face with a folding chair.
- Tabloids** - News behind the news. Amazing contribution to Warhol's theorem on fame. They put an end to the shortage of birdcage liners and home-made kitty litter.
- Rolling Stones** - Know when to say when.

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