

Album Review: 150 points (7/24)

Select an album from the list below. You are required to acquire all of the songs included on your album of choice. You can either purchase them on iTunes (easiest way), get a password for Spotify, OR piece the album together via YouTube (which would be more time consuming). It doesn't matter how you get them, just know that it's your responsibility to hear/dissect all of the original tracks from the original album **in the order** they were intended. **The tracks need to be exactly those from the original album.** Your assignment is to write an album review.

This list contains albums that I consider musically valuable and in my opinion, require a keener ear and a more patient critic—your job is to demonstrate that you can be that person. In many cases, you'll have to move far away from what you are used to listening to and jump into a musical environment that will test your openness and musical maturity.

Album Critique List

1. Gretchen Parlato- In a Dream
2. Ella Fitzgerald & Louis Armstrong- Ella & Louis
3. Miles Davis- Kind of Blue
4. John Coltrane- Blue Train
5. Esperanza Spalding- Chamber Music Society
6. Dave Matthews Band- Under The Table & Dreaming
7. Metallica- Master of Puppets
8. Gil Scott-Heron- The Revolution Will Not Be Televised
9. The RH Factor- Distractions
10. The RH Factor- Hard Groove
11. Young Blood Brass Band- Center: Level: Roar
12. Jay-Z- The Blueprint 3
13. Panic! At The Disco- A Fever You Can't Sweat Out
14. Radiohead- In Rainbows
15. The Mars Volta- Octehedron
16. Outkast- Stankonia
17. Aphex Twin- Selected Ambient Works 85-92
18. Mumford & Sons- Sigh No More
19. The Roots- The Tipping Point
20. Gnarlz Barkley- St. Elsewhere
21. Michael Jackson- Thriller
22. Buena Vista Social Club- Buena Vista Social Club
23. Kirk Franklin- Hero
24. Eminem- The Marshall Mathers LP
25. Kanye West- Graduation
26. R Kelly- Write Me Back
27. Bruno Mars- Unorthodox Jukebox
28. Jamiroquai- Traveling Without Moving
29. Kendrick Lamar- Good Kid, M.A.A.D. City
30. The Brand New Heavies- Brother Sister
31. Mumford & Sons- Babel

ASSIGNMENT SPECIFICATIONS

What questions need to be asked and answered in an album review? When an album is considered musical and/or culturally significant, how might we actually prove or disprove this? Your review should describe to the reader the context of the album, some vital background information, any relevant musical/philosophical influences involved. Above everything,

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your review needs to describe what the reader can expect from the music and lyrics (where applicable) on the album. The end result is to objectively arrive at a place where you can speak your mind and feelings. Your job, is to say what the music is and what it isn't.

It's not your goal to discuss every track in great detail, just point out the artistic/musical/lyrical/social/cultural highs, lows and in betweens. Choose approximately 3-5 tracks on the album to discuss in great detail. In the detailed discussion, consider the following: form, instruments, texture, lyrical analysis (where applicable), general creativity, influences, songs that may have been sampled or arranged, etc. Discuss the remaining tracks in a broader sense, in less detail. This paper isn't a biography—while biographical information is important and should be included, it's ultimately about the music.

Your review needs to be **3-6 pages** (double spaced) in 12 point Times New Roman font with 1" margin. If you need more, take it. **All biographical and general factual information used requires citation.** Citations must be in-text, footnotes or endnotes. General "works cited pages" are not required, as they are listed on the back with no reference to which sentences contain cited information—in other words, they're useless. If you don't know how to use footnotes or endnotes, I suggest you google search it and learn how to incorporate them into this paper—this skill will serve you well at other colleges, learn it now. Papers with no citation will lose 20 points. Papers that are plagiarized (this includes paraphrasing) will fail, no exceptions or questions asked. It is impossible to successfully complete this assignment without citations—nothing can be hearsay (ex. "I know a lot about ___, I've listened to them forever!!").

Utilize the four points listed below in writing your review.

1. Start with the music and lyrics (where applicable) on their own terms. Measure levels of craftsmanship, creativity, thoughtfulness, and originality within the composed and performed sounds and words as you hear, and analyze them. In an album review, all tracks of the album do not have to be (and probably should not be) mentioned in detail. You should discuss several tracks in great detail, and others in less.
2. How does the music and words (where applicable) compare to other music within this genre (and other genres) from the same time period? Some times albums are important because they are part of a zeitgeist (a cultural movement/energy) and, on the contrary, because nothing of great value has surfaced from that specific time period.
3. Who are the musicians creating and performing this music? How did they arrive at this stage? What was the process like that specifically resulted in this album (i.e. the writing and recording of the album). Do they cite other artists and genres that were pivotal in inspiring to this moment? Who were their influences? More importantly, can you hear the sounds of other artists and genres seemingly resonating in the music? (These kinds of suggestions are tremendously helpful to readers to give them a better sense of how something might sound.)
4. What is the social context of the album? This is more important when reviewing an album from a previous decade, but is still applicable when reviewing current albums. It's important to understand the issues the artists might be writing about or inspired by. Also, it's important to understand the world of listeners that the artists intended to spring the music upon.

THE PRESENTATION

This portion of the assignment is nothing more than an informal presentation of your paper. Presentations will be done in class on 7/24—length is 5–8 min. You are expected to describe vital information about the artist and album, as it relates to the four points illustrated above. In addition to your discussion of the artist and album as a whole, choose a song from the album and discuss it in detail (form, texture, lyrical implications, sample identification, etc...). You will have access to the sound equipment and projector in the front of the classroom if you choose to utilize it. Higher grades will be given to those who are creative as well as informative in their presentations. Don't be lame...