

Fast Jackal's Lucky 7 2018: Our countdown list of picks for Best Record of the Year with key tracks, album reviews and ratings.

Record #7: "All at Once" by the Screaming Females – unique, precision guitar heavy instrumentals.

Screaming Females returned this year with their seventh record, "All at Once". Writing new music has the habit of becoming simply a routine for many musicians at this stage in their career, but there is nothing routine about this particular record.

With Marissa Paternoster leading as vocalist and guitarist, this three piece band recorded their most developed and overall best album to date towards the beginning of 2018. This record shines incredibly brightly among the others in their sprawling catalogue, and sets itself apart in unique and surprising ways.

"All at Once" is composed of precise guitar work, which builds on itself throughout each song while simultaneously driving its listeners senses to the edges of their seats and beyond. This lively and altogether inviting guitar work plays in combination with vocal performances that rival top performers in a varied handful of genres: garage rock, punk, and punk inspired music everywhere.

Our Rating: 8.5/10

Key Tracks: I'll Make You Sorry, Black Moon, Soft Domination, Glass House, Fantasy Lens

Record #6: "Young & Dangerous" by The Struts – commanding high energy attention.

The Struts, "Young and Dangerous" proved to listeners this year that the band isn't just a rock n' roll novelty act. Demanding to be taken seriously, The Struts released an album that commanded the attention of 2018, long-time and new listeners alike.

Composed of songs with themes encompassing the band's, occasionally over-abundant, but often comical ego, notable tracks 'Body Talks' and 'PreMadonna Like Me' speak to a high energy vibrance. More sensitive, carefully produced and orchestrated tracks sound straight out of the 70's and 80's glam rock movement, with tracks such as, 'Somebody New'.

This is an incredible effort by The Struts, one that has potentially been overlooked by so many as 'a joke' because of a lack of understanding towards the history of the genre and the effects of the modern-day rock n' roll revival that has so vividly occurred within the past decade.

This record is extremely well done, a collection that is sure to get blood pumping, one that should give smart rock n' roll fans something to celebrate. The Struts show no signs of becoming another burnt out band at the end of a fleeting career, but have built something else entirely for themselves that has the potential to be very, very special if the members of this group play their cards right.

Rating: 8.5/10

Key Tracks: Body Talks, In Love With A Camera, Bulletproof Baby, Who Am I? and Somebody New.

Record #5: “Lush” by Snail Mail – indie rock eclecticism in action.

“Lush” is a visceral beauty, brimming with obvious sincerity, depth, and a unique culmination of bubbly ferocity. Snail Mail’s debut album combines solo artist Lindsey Jordan’s appreciation for indie rock giants of the past with powerful vocals and clean, decisive playing, despite the ambient tonality. “Lush” curates a sub-genre all its own, together emotionally transparent and modestly complex in its technicality.

Jordan has a background as a classically trained guitarist, apparent as she ensures that each note resounds with clarity. Each song is layered in heavy, yet lighthearted, chords and multiple tracks, but the vocals and instrumentals are clearly preserved and passionately delivered. Despite being labeled as an indie rock album, the wide range of musical influences is apparent throughout the writing.

Though lyrically the album is reminiscent of the diffidence of adolescence, the frustration of unrequited love, and the abashed veracity of “teenage” melodrama, it can hardly be overlooked, even by those unconvinced of its relevance. Jordan’s talents are not impressive for her age; they are simply impressive.

Contributions from touring bandmates, drummer Ray Brown and bassist Alex Bass, allow Jordan to set her creative stage with driving bass lines and high-tuned drums, complimenting the vibey reverb that colors much of the guitar tones. This punk-inspired Baltimore-born electrifies sound and expels wisdom with a candor relatable to teenagers wading through uncertainty with smiles on their faces, and to those who remember being those teenagers themselves.

As the album concludes with the lyrical Anytime, Jordan singing, “I want better for you”, one doubts that her vibrance, or that of Snail Mail’s, will be fading any time soon.

Rating: 9/10

Key Tracks: Pristine, Let’s Find am Out, Full Control, Deep Sea, Anytime.

Record #4: “Future Me Hates Me” by The Beths – masterful sincerity in joyful hooks.

From the hand-painted cover to the lyrical sincerity produced under the guise of bubbly guitar pop, “Future Me Hates Me” echoes the conventions of a choppy garage punk debut album in the best way. Openness and honesty are key traits for lead singer and songwriter Elizabeth Stokes, as is her versatile vocal range.

Bright power chord progressions and ebullient harmonies somehow befit the dark topics and complexities explored throughout the album, beginning most vividly with the

overwhelming sense of self-deprecation that pervades the title track and packages its earnestness in a distinctly peppy tone and jangling instrumentals.

Despite obvious pop and punk roots, current members of The Beths studied jazz at a university level. All three members frequently draw on this knowledge throughout the album to incorporate unique progressions and tones that juxtapose well against the overall sunny disposition, punk-angst, and lyrical frankness that sets this infectious collection of glittering self-destructions so far above others of its kind.

Rating: 9/10

Key Tracks: Great No One, Future Me Hates Me, You Wouldn't Like Me, Happy Unhappy.

Record #3: "What A Time to Be Alive" by Superchunk - a driving anger no less watered down by time.

A cohesive fistful of pointed energy and anger, Superchunk's "What A Time To Be Alive" is perhaps their most galvanizing record to date; forceful while retaining a sense of universal timelessness and connectivity. The album drops no names, save for turning Chelsea Manning into a catchy, albeit rallying, cry for change.

Though this 11 song collection is a breathlessly urgent definitive response to the Trump administration's rise to power and the flawed institutions that allowed this to happen, the album in its entirety speaks far more to the blatant and continuous evil of institutionalized corruption and the general villainy of old, white men.

Notable tracks include "Reagan Youth", a song that acknowledges the role of resistance punk in molding rebellions across generations of frustrated youth during conservative political regimes. Longevity and consistency, in Superchunk's case, only strengthens the tangibility of their frustrations with experience rather than drowning them in exhaustion. The album's title track, while less of a sober reflection, rails against the current regime in a much-needed proclamation that invigorates the rest of the album to the forefront of early activist punk, decades later and no less powerful.

Rating: 9/10

Key Tracks: Reagan Youth, What a Time to Be Alive, Dead Photographers

Record #2: "Bottle It In" by Kurt Vile - wading leisurely in existentialism.

Vile roams through the sprawling landscapes of this album with a particularly unconcerned contemplative anti-narrative, drifting through each song in an aimless state of emotionally driven introspection on which his guitar follows in the same, rambling manner. Repeated, swinging-toned progressions and the lack of concrete deliberation or chronological narration, in conjunction with the absence of definite beginnings or conclusions, make this album at first a slightly dazed and monologue-heavy listen.

Despite the mellow rumination and contentment mulled over in many of the tracks, one cannot avoid the sense of foreboding and overall dissatisfaction that Vile and the darker tones that pervade songs like “Cold Was the Wind.” portray. Having typically embraced indulgence towards colloquial, inconclusionary narration, Vile sounds surprisingly lost in a place that generally requires no map or compass.

Though its composition and occasional lack of cohesion, as well as the lengthy meditative and conversational free-floating instrumentals ask the average listener to engage in a timely relationship with the album, many find the hazy psyche-driven collection a peculiarly rewarding, albeit heady, undertaking.

Rating: 8.5/10

Key Tracks: Bassackwards, One Trick Ponies, Cold Was the Wind, (bottle back)

Record #1: “Historian” by Lucy Dacus – an album at the beginning of a career to outlast time.

“Historian” is the slowly building, nuanced product of Lucy Dacus’s lulling, lyrical voice. Dacus catalogues a rich legacy with a sensitive poise that is at once sonorous and enticing. Mellow tones ebb the listener into a contemplative solace broken by the addition of breath-taking strings, and of course, spoken word samples that set the album apart from other similarly dark and honeyed compositions. Instrumentation rolls from one sound to the next with irregularity and unpredictability, yet still flowing with ease and a confidence that shines much more brightly than in Dacus’s previous album, “No Burden”.

Strong lyrical content is expected from this particular, majestic wordsmith when considering her musical background; however, the less “catchy” tracks on this album have the gravitas of subtlety without sacrificing their transparency or conviction. Dacus’s relationship to time and change throughout this collection follows the same continuous motion as her veering guitar tones, but despite the mourning contemplations that form the album’s foundation, an elegy of optimism is omnipresent, tucked carefully behind complex melodic lines and long-lasting talent.

Rating: 9.5/10

Key Tracks: Next of Kin, Night Shift, Addictions, Body to Flame, Timefighter