



The Pitchfork 500: Our Guide to the Greatest Songs From Punk to the Present

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FROM THE BRAIN TRUST BEHIND PITCHFORKMEDIA.COM -- THE WEBSITE *THE LOS ANGELES TIMES* DECLARED "AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE IPO D GENERATION'S LEXICON, A MUST-READ" -- A FRESH GUIDE TO THE 500 BEST SONGS OF THE PAST THIRTY YEARS.

Named the "best site for music criticism on the web" by *The New York Times Magazine*, Pitchforkmedia.com has become the leading independent resource for music journalism, the place people turn to find out what's happening in new music. Founded in 1995, Pitchfork has developed one of the web's most devoted followings, with more than 1.6 million readers monthly who tune in for daily reviews, news, features, videos, and interviews.

In *The Pitchfork 500: Our Guide to the Greatest Songs from Punk to the Present*, Pitchfork offers up their take on the 500 best songs of the past three decades. Focusing on indie rock (Arcade Fire, the Shins), hip-hop (Public Enemy, Jay-Z), electronic (Daft Punk, Boards of Canada), pop (Madonna, Justin Timberlake), metal (Metallica, Boris), and experimental underground music (Suicide, Boredoms), it features all-new essays and reviews written with the sharp wit and insight for which the site is known.

Kicking it off in 1977 with the birth of punk and independent music, *The Pitchfork 500* runs chronologically, with each chapter representing a distinct period and offering a narrative of how the musical landscape of the day influenced its artists. The book opens with David Bowie, Lou Reed, Iggy Pop, Kraftwerk, and Brian Eno, the "art-rock godfathers" who set the tone and tenor for the next thirty years, and wraps up in the present, when bands connect with new audiences through social networking sites and prime-time TV placements -- and when a single mp3 can turn a niche indie artist into a global sensation. Sidebars like "Yacht Rock," "Runaway Trainwrecks," "Nanofads," and "Career Killers" call out some far-from-classic musical trends and identify the guiltiest offenders.

Modernizing the music-guide format, *The Pitchfork 500* reflects the way listeners are increasingly processing music -- by song rather than by album. These 500 tracks condense thirty years of essential music into the ultimate chronological playlist, each song advancing the narrative and, by extension, the music itself.

The Pitchfork 500: Our Guide to the Greatest Songs From Punk to the Present Details

Date : Published November 11th 2008 by Touchstone

ISBN : 9781416562023

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Format : Paperback 208 pages

Genre : Music, Nonfiction, Reference, History

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From Reader Review The Pitchfork 500: Our Guide to the Greatest Songs From Punk to the Present for online ebook

Eric says

Once I've listened to all the songs written about in this book, I'll be able to tell you if this survey is as myopic as the daily Pitchfork download and its "who is the bigger hipster" popularity contest. But on first read, I'm impressed with the range of music noted here, even if at times the selection seems willfully ignorant of touchstone singles because the bands were more popular when they released them. (Music critics are a notoriously cranky lot and always are trying to establish the obscure sophistication of their taste.) What's nice is that the writing does express unabashed love for the music it speaks of, and that emotion comes through even in the most cerebral of the entries.

Mark Desrosiers says

In which a gaggle of pointdexters attempt to wax hilarious, authoritative, and/or iconoclastic on their nuevo canon. As you can guess, two thirds of the book is just Pitchfork scribblers' take on the received pre-2000 canon -- very few surprises, unless you are shocked by the inclusion of "I Can't Go For That (No Can Do)" and the *Suspiria* soundtrack. Some mildly informative sidebars too, on grindcore and twee pop and such: BUT the sidebar on "Yacht Rock" was so droll and snobby it catapulted me into a violent pro-Firefall fugue state.

The 'forklifters don't make it very explicit in the book, but the last third is really Pitchfork's celebration of their own turn-of-the-century Gen-Z canon. There are many groovy songs here (also lots of indefensible wuss music on the order of Devendra Banhart and Animal Collective). But the writing damn near inverted my corneas with its preposterous press-kit wankery, e.g. "Many critics hoped Radiohead would become the biggest band in the world; instead they threatened to become the best." (That's a quote from editor-in-chief Scott Plagenhoef, in case you were worried I'm picking on some starving freelancer.) If we eat any more S'Mores like that we're likely to pass out before the circle jerk even gets off the ground!

There are three interesting writers here: Nate Patrin, Douglas Wolk, and Julianne Escobedo Cabedo. Look for their initials. As for the rest, have a bottle of whiskey and a damp washcloth at hand.

Amanda Raab says

For a few months in 2003 I read Pitchfork as a part of my regular blog roll. All of a sudden it was *the* place for reviews, news, and mp3 links. I guess. The writing was spotty and the collective egotism enormous. In one album review I remember, the contributor cited a band's participation on the compilation in question as a re-gaining of their 'indie cred.' ...and that was it. All I could think was, 'But is it good? What was the music like? Isn't that why we're reading all this anyway? For the love of the music?' It occurred to me that maybe Pitchfork lost sight of that. Then and now, the site seems to bask in the glow of its own buzz-creating abilities.

So why would I read their book? Two reasons: 1)it was free; 2)I'm a sucker for a good list.

And that is essentially what it is. A list of (important, seminal, representative?) songs from 1977 to 2007. The emphasis is, of course, on indie rock, the site's bread and butter, but there are plenty of pop and rap tracks just to show these folks aren't immune from the sugary temptations of top 40 radio and TRL.

What you won't find is folk (save for obligatory contemporary darlings Bright Eyes and Devendra Barnhart), jazz, or country (save for a one-page overview of alt-country). So, comprehensive it isn't.

But it is surprisingly engaging and almost smug-free. Pitchfork creator Schreiber collected a big stable of writers (like Douglas Wolk, Michaelangelo Matos, Maura Johnston) to create a valuable assessment of the past thirty years of modern rock and pop.

Danschafer118 says

These guys love a lot of pretentious crap.

C.E. says

Nifty quasi-alternative take on the past 30 or so years of music. As can be expected from the gang at Pitchfork (Basically the online equivalent of Spin or Rolling Stone for the indie-rock set) the list includes a lot of non-mainstream gems. This probably isn't the most useful guide--there's not much here that Pitchfork fans don't already know and for more pedestrian music fans, much of the stuff is too far afield to arouse their curiosity--but the entries are lively and I found it fun to be brought back to some forgotten gems from days gone by. Far from essential, but still fun.

Scope says

Awww, yeah - this was one of the best gifts under the tree for me this Christmas. The indie-rock-leaning music website Pitchfork.Com has put together their list of the best songs from 1977 to the present. Musicians on the list range from obscure (This Heat), to cult (Throbbing Gristle), to mainstream (Kelly Clarkson). Each song is given an insightful short critique, while sub-lists (such as "The Songs That Ended it All") will make music lovers smile. Pick this up and watch your iTunes budget disappear.

Jonah says

A pretty no-frills presentation... not what you'd expect given the lovely visuals of the book's parent website. Nonetheless, I was chipping away at this book over the past two years, imposing on myself that I would not only read through it, but listen to every one of the 500 songs. It's a nice accomplishment, and I made some really interesting musical discoveries. Kudos to all the deep dark corners of the Internet. There are some songs that really cannot be gained through traditional means, even through regular online channels. But there was a YouTube or a blog post about everyone of these songs.

Now, would I be motivated to tackle the book 1001 Albums You Must Hear Before You Die?

Reggie says

[Update:] A few highlights of the music this book pointed out that I am willing to admit I missed and/or overlooked on the first run:

Minutemen - *History Lesson, Pt. 2*

Old R.E.M. - this probably has more to do with my wife's request that I obtain R.E.M.'s back catalogue through approximately 1992 than this book. Either way, I missed R.E.M. in their salad days.

Big Black - *Kerosene*. One of the dudes from Volcano Choir recently stated something to the effect that this is his ring tone and will likely remain so for eternity. I can understand why.

Fugazi - I think I was too young to appreciate Fugazi in their prime. Definitely worth revisiting. See, eg., *Waiting Room* and *Merchandise*.

Young Marble Giants - *Final Day*

The Replacements - *Bastards of Young*.

Arab Strap - *The First Big Weekend*.

Drive Like Jehu - *Luau*.

The Vaselines - *Son of a Gun*. Covered by Nirvana, but the original is better.

Billy Bragg - *A New England*. I will readily admit that I didn't know about this dude until Wilco played with him.

Tom Waits - *Jockey Full of Bourbon*.

Elliot Smith - *Needle in the Hay*.

GZA - *4th Chamber*. Okay, I didn't miss this one. If you were ever behind the I-mark I drove in college you would know this. Regardless, it had been years since I heard this song. A great Wu product.

Bonnie Prince Billy (see, e.g., *I see a Darkness*) and Palace Music. This is the music you could drink yourself to death with. Great stuff. Makes Uncle Tupelo sound downright uplifting.

The contributors at Pitchfork are obviously way too cool for school most days. I understand that these people eat, sleep, and shit indie music for what i assume is a fairly meager living, but they really take music snobbery to a whole new level. Seriously--in order to properly review this book I will have no choice but to single-handedly fund a bailout of the Russian economy. The side tangents I have already explored with my digital imports as a result of this book all but ensure that there will be a steady supply of triple distilled vodka for every man woman and child in Moscow.

My proper review of this book is likely to include sections devoted to both the most obscure and the most unlistenable songs of the Pitchfork 500. Einstürzende Neubauten's "Halber Mensch" will almost certainly feature prominently in both sections. If they aren't already playing this song at Gitmo, I say crank it up. Napalm Death's "Twist the Knife (Slowly)" and Darkthrone's "En As I Dype Skogen" would also be nice additions to the Gitmo soundtrack.

One thing this book does have going for it is that for the most part the hip hop selections are solid (at least in my humble and extremely white opinion).^{*} The one possible exception is T.I.'s "What You Know." That being said, I guess it is marginally necessary to document the crunk movement in some manner.

^{*}But for this list, it is entirely possible that I would have gone to my grave without knowing that I had lost

my copy of Ice Cube's Predator.

WOW! It is entirely possible that I will never be able to give this book a proper review. Does anyone happen to have Dinosaur's "Kiss Me Again" laying around in their music collection. It is entirely possible that it is only available on vinyl. If that is the case, can you do me another favor and rip it to mp3. I will need to procure and listen to that and 10 other songs unavailable from either Moscow or Steve Jobs to properly complete this review. In the meantime I will be sitting here trying to figure out why I don't get completely hot and bothered for Pavement.

Brad says

Not sure why the other reviews have slagged this book. I think it does a very good job of picking songs that trace the evolution of underground rock, electronic, and hip-hop music from their origins to their current state. Being a bit of a music-obsessed nerd, I tracked down each of the songs that I didn't already have (about 250) and listened to them, which made me admire the job they did in compiling the list even more. The criticism/description of each song was also quite good. I found their electronic/dance songs to be particularly great. Sure, I disagreed with a few of their picks, but that is a minor complaint. Overall a very good read for anyone into music beyond what you would hear on your radio or in your parents record collection

DeadWeight says

Look, when any 'zine publishes "their canon" there's bound to be a ton of butthurt about it, but as far as they go Pitchfork's is, begrudgingly as it may be to admit, the best of the lot - certainly hand over first ahead of Rolling Stones' own rockist cum-stained penta-centurion.

Pitchfork have earned their place as the preeminent 21st century tastemakers. They spent a lot of the last decade making a number of ballsy cultural calls that paid off, paying forgotten dues where they were owed, and opened the doors to whole other spheres of music journalism with their avant-garde, gonzo approach to criticism and eclectic tastes. More often than not pretentious, arrogant, and snotty - the current musical landscape would be a whole lot different without them and their oft-kilter canon is more a victory lap than anything else, but it's certainly worth the read.

Nathan says

It's good to know that my standards are aligned with Pitchfork, although their tendency to revolve around a holier than thou mentality and their inability to discuss songs properly vastly weaken this work. I'm still not sold on the importance of Italo disco or IDM, or T.I. for that matter. It can't be just me.

matt says

The insatiable desire to canonize reached epic proportions this year with the crowning of Animal Collective's Merriweather Post Pavilion as the best album of 2009 a mere few weeks into the calendar year. The absurdity of this kind of declaration would be laughable if it wasn't indicative of an overwhelming contemporary impulse for incessant categorization and list making. This type of dialogue can be an instructive exercise, especially in a medium like the internet that allows a bidirectional exchange of ideas that works to combat the exercise's tendency towards a meaningless exertion of one's cultural capital in the face of others. What the world does not need is yet another hegemonic cultural instructor looking to rewrite the book of classics, a tradition handed down from its currently irrelevant print forbearers like Rolling Stone and Spin. As an avid reader, what's made Pitchfork such an exciting and exceedingly relevant publication is its ability to be creative in the face of new technology while remaining at the forefront of the shifting nature of musical criticism. It's disappointing then to see the site wade into the overcrowded pool of coffee table anthologies, even if its pages dedicates space to less obvious touchstones than The Talking Heads and David Bowie. From its self-selecting time period criteria to the overtly snarky sidebars (say what you will about the site's reviews, they are never as condescending as they are here), the list itself offers fans of the site little additional insight while newcomers are slighted with pithy commentary that Pitchfork's online content has always avoided. The mere creation of a book seems like an odd and unnecessary bid for respectability and validation within the old guard of publishing, especially in the face of Pitchfork's savvy harnessing of new media. One of the great virtues (and faults) of the Internet is in its constant ability to revisit and revise, creating a body of work that is constantly in motion. Since the structure of the site itself has remained non-participatory in the face of universal and unending discourse on blogs, Pitchfork has perpetuated an aura of elitism in its dogmatic formation of an endless parade of infallible and meaningless lists, this being no exception. In the words of Ian MacKaye, "We don't need any more old ideas. We have plenty of those."

Tgaylord says

I like music

I like lists

I like Chicago

I like lists about music made/edited by a Website based in Chicago

Pitchfork is pretentious as all fuck

Aaron says

In spite of being a little lost through the first half of the book, this was fascinating. Sure, Pitchfork is self-righteous, pretentious, and somewhat of a villain (in my eyes at least), but when they do lists, I am in love.

The first half was difficult because I know nothing of obscure music during the late 70s and all through the

80s. Once I got to the best songs of the 90s and beyond though, it was a very enjoyable read, as I knew and even loved the majority of the songs they covered in this timeframe.

Perhaps I would have chosen some different songs throughout the book, but this represents Pitchfork, so I'm not surprised how this went.

Sue says

Good bathroom reading, and strokes your music ego by seeing how many of the 500 songs deemed cool by the hipster arbiters at Pitchfork are on your iPod. I haven't counted yet, but I'll update when I do.
