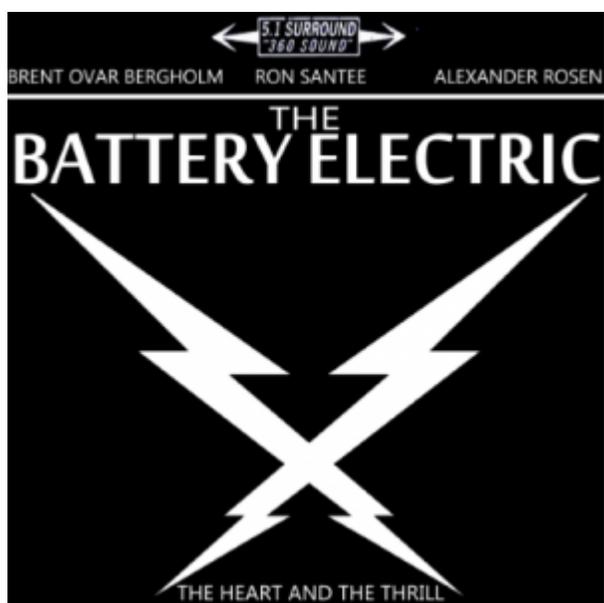


# Top 20 Albums Of 2015 (Because 10 Wasn't Enough)

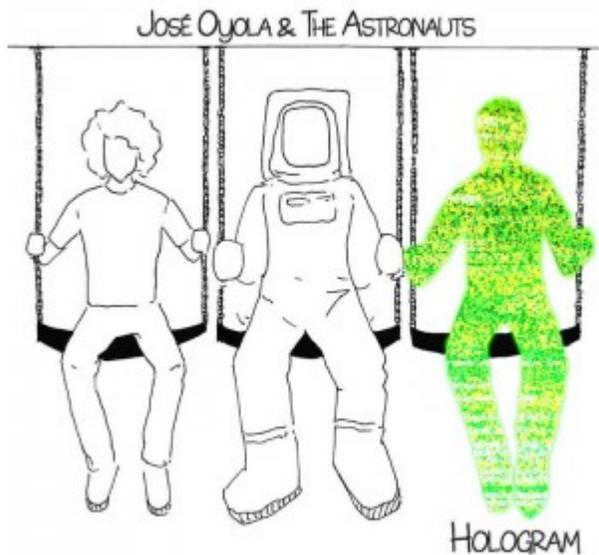
There's a lot to be said for music in 2015. It was a year of consistently great albums from both the independent and mainstream. A few acts came out of nowhere to deliver masterpieces while a few vets released some of their best work in years. As we reach the second half of the 2010s we see music reflecting on the tumultuous times — youth are using art to combat their feeling of alienation and being cast aside. 2015 was a year of poignancy and profundity on countless levels and it was reflected in the music. It also was a year of prodigies and wunderkinds reaching their potential, and here are my Top 20 Albums of 2015, because 10 wasn't enough.

20.) The Battery Electric - *The Heart and The Thrill* (Little Dick Man)



A bunch of wildmen from Asbury Park, New Jersey, who fuse Misfits-esque punk, '70s heavy metal and vintage Motown soul, The Battery Electric are bound to give a shock to your system with their second full length, *The Heart and The Thrill*, that came out in March. Ron Santee can absolutely wail on vocals and Brent Bergholm scorches on guitar. Alexander Rosen holds it down on bass with Santee also playing drums on the album. These guys' charisma shows with *The Heart and The Thrill*. "Heathen," "Key Party" and "Crown Royal" are bound to rev you up.

19.) Jose Oyola & The Astronauts - *Hologram* (Purebred)



New Haven, Connecticut, indie musician Jose Oyola manages to head into a different dimension with his music on the new album he did with The Astronauts in *Hologram*. His bilingual lyrics that shift between English and Spanish, intelligent songwriting reflecting his thoughts on the world and outer space along with his uncanny way of finding a groove and rhythm in complex structures makes Oyola truly stand out. "Inside/Out" is catchy along with having a killer bass line, "Lune" has a distinct edge with Oyola riffing on electric guitar, and "Miedo" combines indie rock and mariachi for something truly special. *Hologram* is the epitome of a musician not being afraid of being himself, and that's why it's on this list.

#### 18.) Wild Sun - Little Truths (American Laundromat)

Wild Sun are a fantastic alternative rock trio from Westerly, Rhode Island, that are some of the most talented musicians in New England. Glenn Kendzia writes pristine son



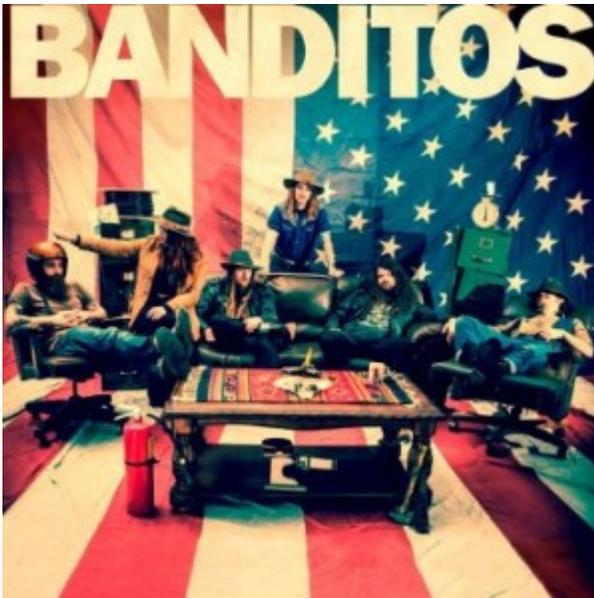
gs while bassist Paul Fazio and drummer Cameron Raubeson syncopate perfectly as a rhythm section. Together they create a tightly knit and flowing sound on their debut album, *Little Truths*. "Shy Hinges" is an emotional love song with an amplified punch, "The Vacation" is one of the best songs to come out of The Ocean State in a few years, and "Windowless Room" has infectious angst. The future looks bright for Wild Sun and hopefully their follow-up will be even better.

17.) Evans The Death - *Expect Delays* (Slumberland/Fortuna Pop!)



With all the music coming out of the United Kingdom, you probably didn't expect an up-and-coming act not familiar to us in The States to make this list. Evans The Death from London put out an awesome album with *Expect Delays*. Classic British indie with hints of raw noise and punk rhythms reminiscent of Siouxi & The Banshees take things over from track to track. You're bound to gravitate to "Bad Year," "Enabler" and "Sledgehammer." *Expect Delays* is a very underrated album from a band that are on to bigger things in the coming years.

16.) Banditos - S/T (Bloodshot)



Honky-tonk, country-stained rock 'n' roll is what Banditos are all about, and you'll know why once you listen to their self-titled debut that came out in May. They really push the envelope in an age where anything related to folk music is becoming increasingly copied, redundant and boring. What Banditos do best is play at a feverish pace with grit and soul. It all comes together to make for wonderful music that'll wow you. "The Breeze," "Waitin'" and "Cry Baby Cry" are going to make you dance.

15.) Atlantic Thrills - *Vices* (Almost Ready)



In Providence, one of the highest anticipated releases of 2015 was Atlantic Thrills' second album, *Vices*. They absolutely delivered and even took a few risks by going with more of a polished surf and vintage route rather than the sheer rawness of their self-titled debut that came out last year. *Vices* still has the party vibe Atlantic Thrills are known for, and that's all that matters. Speaking of partying, "Live For The Weekend" talks about just that. "Bed Bugs" is a jumpstarter that'll make you boogie, and "Treat My Baby" has a doo-wop vibe that'll stick in your head.

#### 14.) Leon Bridges - Coming Home (Columbia)



Some musicians are considered a blast from the past and then there's Leon Bridges from Fort Worth, Texas. His voice harks back to Otis Redding and Sam Cooke, and his guitar playing is reminiscent of B.B. King. Bridges also dresses like something straight out of the late '50s and early '60s. His debut album, *Coming Home*, that came out in June has that old-school tone. Check out the title track "Coming Home," the straight talkin' "Smooth Sailin'" and the gospel ballad "River;" they each exemplify Bridges' finest talents.

#### 13.) Bully - Feels Like (Startime International/Columbia)



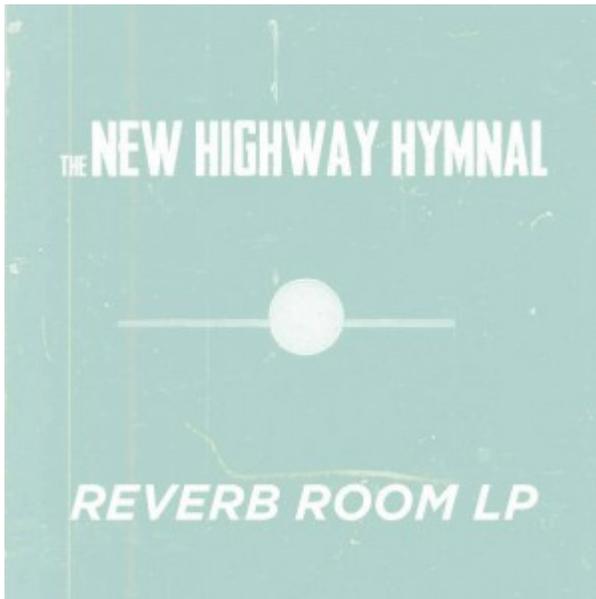
When the lead singer of your band is a former intern at Steve Albini's Electrical Audio studios in Chicago and is also an experienced engineer, it's almost a given that your album is going to sound great. That's what you get with frontwoman Alicia Bognanno and Nashville garage punks Bully's debut full length, *Feels Like*. There's a heart-on-the-sleeve aesthetic to Bognanno's songwriting that makes this album an absolute gem. "Milkman" is a thrasher that's hits you right from the start; the chorus in "Trying" will send chills up your spine and "Six" is relatable to anyone who was a rambunctious child.

#### 12.) B. Dolan - Kill The Wolf (Strange Famous)



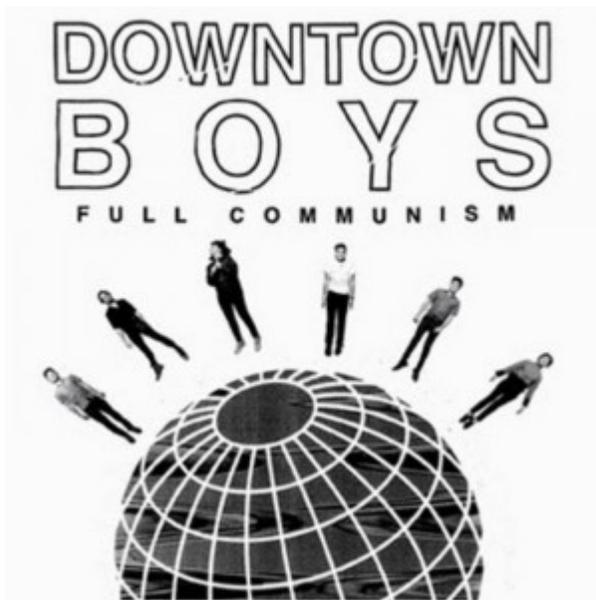
For the past few years, Providence hip-hop phenom B. Dolan was searching for a certain type of sound. He was trying to combine the power and spectacle of rock music with the lyrical flow of hip-hop and he found it with *Kill The Wolf*. It's an album that's different than a lot of local releases in The Creative Capital. At one point Dolan will dive into blues, then punk and then jazzy hip-hop. "Lazarus" has a bit of jazz and a lot of intensity, "Jailbreak" features fellow Strange Famous label mate Buck 65, New York City underground hip-hop legend Aesop Rock and the late Dave Lamb from Brown Bird on a track with a gothic blues influence, and "Alright" has this insane drum beat that'll hook you from the beginning. *Kill The Wolf* is definitely one of the crown jewels of The Creative Capital's music scene this year.

#### 11.) The New Highway Hymnal - Reverb Room (Self-Released)



Bringin' the fuzz and psychedelic tendencies are The New Highway Hymnal from the north shore of Massachusetts and their album *Reverb Room* that came out in January. Hadden Stemp has endless swagger on vocals and his guitar makes crazy amounts of distortion. Amelia Gormley on bass is the reason why there's such a fuzzy sound and her backing vocals provide a dream pop tone. Travis Hagan is like Animal from The Muppets on drums. "Isolation" is one of the best tracks to come out of New England in 2015, "By The Pool" will get you in the mood to start shaken' and "Television" is another danceable tune that critiques sitting in front of an electronic box.

10.) Downtown Boys - Full Communism (Don Giovanni)



The best album to come out of Providence in 2015 without a doubt has to be Downtown Boys' *Full Communism* that was released in May. It catapulted these sax-fueled dance punks to new heights in terms of popularity and the expansion of their mission. What's their mission you might ask? To break the status quo, to punch stereotypes in the face and to make their voice heard. "Wave of History," "Monstro" and "Future Police" are all excellent examples of how *Full Communism* is one of the most important albums out right now. Victoria Ruiz is an amazing force on the mic with the rest of the band being a rhythmic army.

9.) Screaming Females - Rose Mountain (Don Giovanni)



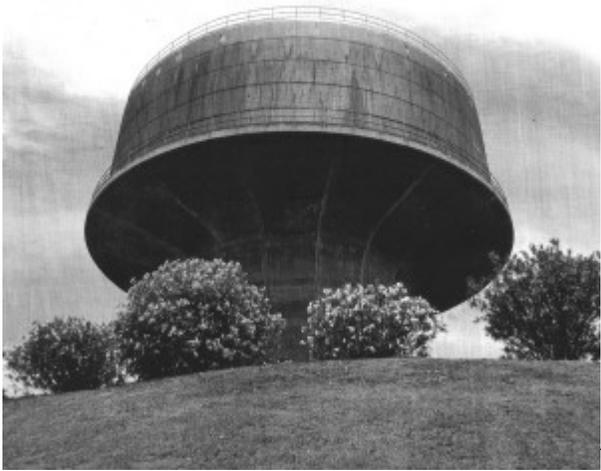
One of the best punk bands in the 21st Century so far has to be Screaming Females from New Brunswick, New Jersey. Their sixth studio album, *Rose Mountain*, cements that claim with frontwoman Marissa Paternoster consistently ripping it on guitar with each song. King Mike on bass and Jarrett Dougherty on drums are also one of the best rhythm sections in independent music. "Empty Head" is a perfect opening track to the album with an endless amount of riffs, "Ripe" sounds like something a metal band would write and "Triumph" has King Mike showing his skills on bass. The album also captured the trio's energetic live show, which is always a plus.

#### 8.) Wilco - Star Wars (dBpm)



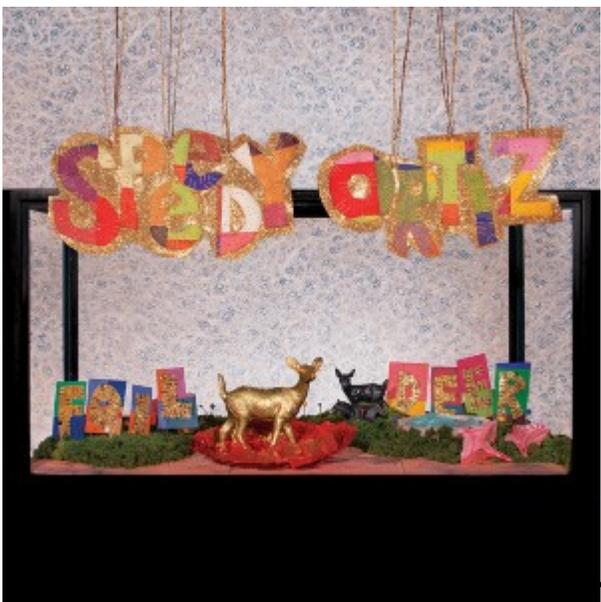
It's hard to say what was the most unexpected about Wilco releasing their ninth studio album, *Star Wars*, in July. Was it that they released it on their website with no prior announcements? Was it that they released it for free? Who cares? It's some of Wilco's best work. What I really liked about this album is that they used Nels Cline's noisy guitar skills to give each track some distortion. "Random Name Generator," "Pickled Ginger" and "Cold Slope" all bring the noise and has Wilco pushing the envelope. Definitely a departure from the band's usual alt-country style, but you have to appreciate that they're willing to try new things.

#### 7.) Royal Headache - High (What's Your Rupture?)



When Sydney, AU garage punks Royal Headache unveiled their style evocative of Motown and The Ramones with their self-titled debut back in 2012, a bunch of fanatics were craving more. They satisfied their fans with their follow up, *High*, in August and it had them progress into more rigid punk anthems and deeper into old school R&B. There's definitely a lot more variety with this album as well, which shows a band heading down the right path. "Garbage" is the perfect song for anyone who's pissed off that they got burned, "Wouldn't You Know" is a ballad for the broken-hearted, and "My Own Fantasy" is a rager that confronts reality. They have said that this might be their last release; hopefully it isn't.

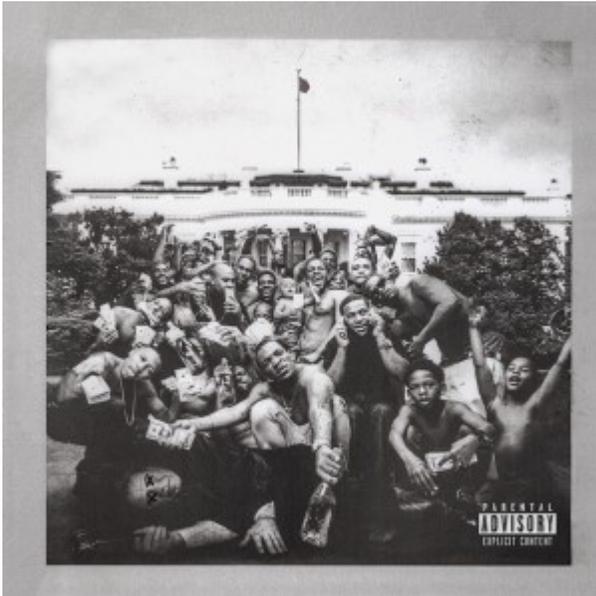
#### 6.) Speedy Ortiz - Foil Deer (Carpark Records)



This quartet originally started out in Western Massachusetts and now they're the most sought after band in New England. If you don't know who Speedy Ortiz are, then you probably know someone who does and they're most likely a huge fan. They're just that type of band that can do no wrong and when they released *Foil Deer* in April, it further showed how awesome of an alternative rock band they are. Sadie Dupuis' sardonic and dreamscaping songwriting is fantastic and drummer Mike Falcone, bassist Darl Ferm and guitarist Devin Mcknight round out an extremely talented and versatile foursome. "Raising The Skate" is one of the hits off of the album and the guitar structures jump out at you. "Puffer" gets groovy with a hot beat and "Swell

Content” is a twee punk electrifier. It’s going to be very exciting when Speedy Ortiz puts out their next release; we’ll just have to wait and wonder to see if it’ll be better than their most recent one.

5.) Kendrick Lamar - *To Pimp A Butterfly* (Top Dawg/Aftermath/Interscope)



After lighting the popular music world on fire with 2012’s good kid, m.A.A.d city, West Coast hip-hop trailblazer Kendrick Lamar had the world at his fingertips. This year he released *To Pimp A Butterfly* for his magnum opus with influences of funk, jazz and spoken word. Collaborating with George Clinton, Thundercat, Snoop Dogg and Ronald Isley, Lamar takes hip-hop back to its roots while giving it a jolt of something new. “Wesley’s Theory,” “King Kunta” and “How Much A Dollar Costs” are all fantastic tracks off an incredible album. Lamar puts an entire genre on its head and shifts it into a totally different direction.

4.) Hop Along - *Painted Shut* (Saddle Creek)



Frances Quinlan’s voice has a raspy quality, and that’s what makes Hop Along’s *Painted Shut* so damn good. It’s old school alternative rock with pop structures that has a way of hitting your soul. There’s also a couple of acoustic tracks to mix things up a bit. It’s such a hard hitting and emotional album that you can’t help but love it. “The Knock” has a chorus that’ll

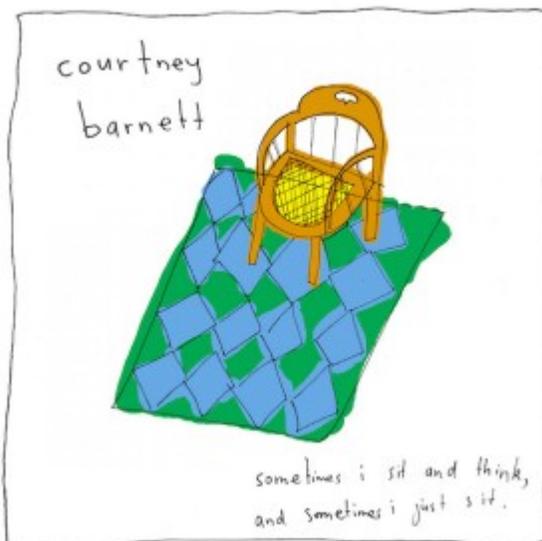
attach itself to your nucleus, "Texas Funeral" is shoegazey and distorted and "Powerful Man" stuns with a couple riffs that'll rock your socks off. This act from Philly is one of many reasons why the music scene in The City Of Brotherly Love has had a great year.

### 3.) Beach Slang - The Things We Do To Find People Who Feel Like Us (Polyvinyl)



Another act from Philadelphia who really know how to sock you in the heart, Beach Slang is one of those bands that already had a buzz about them before they put out their first full length album. *The Things We Do to Find People Who Feel Like Us* from start to finish is honest and genuine, the most punk of any punk rock record that has come out this year. Cheap thrills, broken hearts and alienation, James Alex and crew cover it all from track to track. "Throwaways," "Noisy Heaven" and "Young & Alive" are raging anthems for the broken. Beach Slang are a hugely refreshing band in a time where people don't even know if punk ideal exists anymore.

### 2.) Courtney Barnett - Sometimes I Sit and Think, and Sometimes I Just Sit (Mom + Pop Music/Marathon Artists/ Milk!)



Every year there's a musician who comes out of nowhere and makes a big splash. In March, Courtney Barnett from Melbourne, AU put out her debut full length

*Sometimes I Sit and Think, and Sometimes I Just Sit* and she became a bit of a garage rock sensation overnight. What makes her songwriting astounding is the way she blends pop rhythms. It's as if she's an amalgamation of Kimya Dawson and PJ Harvey. Barnett's lyrics also have a rebellious snark that you'll enjoy. "Pedestrian At Best" speaks to the girls who deal with mixed feelings. "Nobody Really Cares If You Don't Go To The Party" strangely makes me think of The Beatles as well as preaching the gospel of the hermit. "Aqua Profunda!" is a neo-mod track that has ultra distorted chord progressions. I'm very excited to see what Barnett does next because her debut is simply brilliant.

#### 1.) Fuzz - II (In The Red)



When I first heard this album from the project featuring Los Angeles garage rock prolific machine Ty Segall, Charles Moothart and Chad Ubovich it made me think of the glory of '70s heavy metal and '70s hard rock. The riffs alone will spark thoughts of Black Sabbath, Thin Lizzy and Motorhead (RIP Lemmy). With so many bands trying to replicate this style or at least come close to it, Fuzz got it right with *II*. Epic beyond belief with solos that'll warp your mind in two and put it back together again. Just listen to "Time Collapse Pt. II/The 7th Terror," "Pollinate" and "Say Hello" and try to tell me that Fuzz's *II* isn't one of the most badass albums to come out so far this decade. It's stupendously incredible music and that's why it's the best album to come out in 2015.

That's my list, so let the debating begin. Who knows what 2016 could bring? If it's as good as 2015 was for music then we're going in the right direction. Have a safe and happy new year and keep on listening.