



News

- Top Stories
- Sports
- Business
- Entertainment
- Community News
- Editorial
- Weather

Classifieds

- Links
- Business Directory
- Subscriptions
- Our Newspaper
- Personals
- Fun and Games
- Consumer Guide
- Personal Finance
- Lifestyles

Entertainment

## The 10 best albums of 2004

By Matthew G. Solovey, *Hershey Chronicle* Editor 12/23/2004

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**1. Atomship: Crash of '47 (Wind-Up) - It's good to see that creativity is not dead in rock music. A very atmospheric record with dark and bizarre lyrics, with a heavy dose of progressive rock - think Pink Floyd meets Dream Theatre. Why aren't these guys huge?**

**2. The Killers: Hot Fuss (Island) - It's an 80's pop album recorded in 2004 that just works. Catchy songs abound with some quirk, including the extremely-catchy "Somebody Told Me" and "All These Things That I've Done."**

**3. Alter Bridge: One Day Remains (Wind-Up) - The debut album of three-quarters of Creed plus one new singer stands up as a strong rock record. It's got the pop influence that made Creed so popular, but with much more pleasing vocals.**

**4. Trans-Siberian Orchestra : The Lost Christmas Eve (Lava) - On the last of their Christmas albums, Trans-Siberian Orchestra continues to mix a slew of musical styles successfully.**

**5. Bon Jovi: 100,000,000 Bon Jovi Fans Cant' Be Wrong (Island) - Four CDs, one DVD, and more Bon Jovi songs than you can shake a stick at, this box set is fascinating. Designed fully with the fan in mind, 100,000,000 Bon Jovi Fans gives listeners a trip through the band's career by providing all the songs you didn't hear.**

**6. Steve Broderick: Steve Broderick (available on CDbaby.com) - The Black Crowes-influenced first solo effort of this New York singer hits all the right notes. Soulful lyrics with emotional performances make this one standout. A balanced record of ballads and classic-influenced rock.**

**7. Europe: Start From the Dark (T&T) - Yes, the very same Europe of "The Final Countdown" fame is back with their first CD in over 10 years. It's an updated sound, yet retains the band's finer qualities. A welcome surprise.**

**8. Brides of Destruction: Here Come the Brides (Sanctuary) - Nikki Sixx of Motley Crue and Tracii Guns of L.A. Guns team up for this hard rock album with a heavy dose of 80's rock with a modern edge. It may not be the caliber of Motley's and L.A. Guns' best, but this record is certainly better than some of the later material from either of those bands.**

**9. Submersed: In Due Time (Wind-Up) - This is just a solid rock CD. It may not be spectacular, but it's enjoyable, even with the preachy lyrics. Single release "Hollow" should have been a hit.**

**10. Kelly Clarkson: Breakaway (RCA) - Call it a guilty pleasure, but Kelly Clarkson's sophomore album is fun to listen to, even if it is a little Avril-ish. Straying away from pop and leaning more towards rock, Clarkson shows once again why she was the first "American Idol." Evanescence's Ben Moody writes a track too.**

By Steve Standridge *Staff Writer*

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**1. Green Day: American Idiot** - Not only is this the best album of the year, it's Green Day's best offering so far. It is mature, political and musically-diverse while still rocking as hard as ever. Top songs: "American Idiot," "Boulevard of Broken Dreams," "Jesus of Suburbia."

**2. Mourning September: A Man Can Change His Stars** - This is a great emo CD with not one bad song in the bunch, and it's probably the most consistent rock record of the year. Top songs: "Closer to Closure," "April Dreams," "Hold On."

**3. Alter Bridge: One Day Remains** - Singer Myles Kennedy is what Creed was missing. The addition of Kennedy's voice to the already-talented group of musicians makes this an unbeatable album of pure rock. Top songs: "Open Your Eyes," "Broken Wings," "In Loving Memory."

**4. U2: How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb** - This is classic U2, going back to the roots of what made this band the phenomenon that they are today. Atomic Bomb is a perfect mix of rock and pop, with the signature Edge guitar sound and Bono's unique voice. Top songs: "Vertigo," "Crumbs From Your Table," "Yahweh."

**5. Sparta: Porcelain** - Former members of At the Drive-In come together for a solid rock album. Soaring vocals and hypersonic guitars create a beautiful wall of sound. Top songs: "While Oceana Sleeps," "Lines in the Sand," "Syncope."

**6. Prince: Musicology** - The Purple One constantly reinvents himself. On this CD, Prince gets back to basics with a stripped-down serving of funk and soul with signature tales of romantic escapades. Top songs: "Musicology," "Illusion, Coma, Pimp and Circumstance," "Life 'O' the Party."

**7. Bad Religion: The Empire Strikes First** - This is one band that never loses sight of where it came from and keeps the focus on cranking out one great record after another. Empire is just another collection of outstanding political punk. Top songs: "Los Angeles is Burning," "Let Them Eat War," "God's Love."

**8. Breaking Benjamin: We Are Not Alone** - This is a great rock group that improves with each release. Filled with menacing, angst-ridden hard rockers, Not Alone is by far their best yet. Top songs: "So Cold," "Simple Design," "Firefly."

**9. Brandtson: Send Us a Signal** - This underrated and overlooked emo band is putting out album after album of good rock. Send Us a Signal is another step in the right direction. Top songs: "Who Are You Now?," "Drawing a Line in the Sand," "Just Breathe."

**10. Incubus: A Crow Left of the Murder** - Incubus sticks with the formula that works on Crow. The sound is eclectic, innovative and undeniably unique. Top songs: "Megalomaniac," "Pistola," "Talk Shows on Mute."

**By Todd Thatcher Staff Writer**

**1. Green Day: American Idiot** - It says a lot that the smash title track is one of the weaker songs on American Idiot, Green Day's first studio record in four years. But the energetic punk tune is standard-issue compared to standout cuts like the emotional power ballad "Boulevard of Broken Dreams" or the rocking but affecting "Holiday."

And it doesn't hurt that the lyrics, which tell the story of a disaffected youth stumbling aimlessly through an American wasteland, are the band's most compelling and mature to date. If this epic concept album isn't better than the seminal Dookie, it's easily that record's equal - an impressive feat for a band that's been at it as long as Green Day.

**2. Guided By Voices: Half Smiles of the Decomposed** - After the sub-par Earthquake Glue, many devoted fans thought indie-rock pioneers Guided By Voices' best work was behind them. However, mastermind Bob Pollock had long promised that the group's final album would be a fitting send-off, and indeed it is. From the acoustic-pop bliss of "Girls of Wild Strawberry" to the quirky garage-rock of "Sleepover Jack," to the sentimental, prog-leaning "Window of My World," Half Smiles works as a career-spanning best-of record. GBV never achieved the widespread recognition they deserved, but for the faithful, their final goodbye is a bittersweet one indeed.

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**3. Jimmy Eat World: Futures** - Jimmy Eat World distance themselves even further from the crop of emo up-and-comers with *Futures*. Their first new album in three years finds JEW stretching their sound to both extremes of the soft-hard spectrum - "Pain" is a driving rocker, laced with gang vocals and a nasty, Slash-biting guitar solo, while "Night Drive" is a dream-like ballad built on programmed beats and soft acoustics. The band does it all with equal aplomb, making the long wait for their *Bleed American* follow-up well worth it.

**4. The Lost Patrol: Songs About Running Away** - Is there any style of music Dennis Lyxzen doesn't excel at? First he screamed for renowned and influential hardcore band *The Refused*; next, he took the reigns of the *International Noise Conspiracy*, helping the socialist collective deliver a funky, punk-infused take on garage rock. And with his second solo record, Lyxzen continues to delve into singer-songwriter-style folk-rock. But instead of radio-friendly folk-pop, his emotional, bare-bones take on the genre calls to mind greats like Bob Dylan (the rousing "Out of Date") and Elliot Smith (the mellow "Restating the Obvious").

**5. Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds: Abattoir Blues/The Lyre of Orpheus** - With this double-disc opus, mad poet Nick Cave and his Bad Seeds prove once again why there have been so many accolades heaped on them over the years. Unlike many such sprawling sets, almost every track here seems vital. On opener "Get Ready For Love," Cave intones the title with a frightening fervor while the band works up a stomping swamp-blues-meets-gospel stew. Alternately, lead single "Nature Boy" is a surprisingly-tender folk-pop excursion that will sadly never make it to the radio airwaves. In a perfect world, Cave wouldn't be an underground legend - he'd just be a legend.

**6. Wilco: A Ghost is Born** - Stripping off most of the post-modern, heavily-effected ambiance that made *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* such a hit with critics and fans alike, Wilco deliver a follow-up that is alternately easier to digest and more challenging. In the former category are beautiful-sad piano ballads "Hell is Chrome" and "At Least That's What You Said." In the latter category is the 10-minute-plus "Spiders," a not-entirely-successful proto-techno/noise-rock fusion. Sure, not everything on *Ghost* works, but even Wilco's failures are more interesting than 95 percent of what commercial radio is playing today.

**7. Zao: The Funeral of God** - On this ambitious concept album about the death of God, metalcore innovators Zao beat the odds and - with no original members left in the band - deliver the record of their career. From the harmony-laden "The Last Song of Zion," which manages to be beautiful and brutal at the same time, to the positively-frightening crush of "Praise the War Machine," this is powerful stuff, guaranteed to keep mosh pits moving and make you think. And that's not something you can say about every metal CD.

**8. U2: How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb** - 2001's *All That You Can't Leave Behind* was tipped as U2's return to rock-and-roll form, but while that was a solid disc with a number of standout songs, *Atomic Bomb* is the real deal. Here, Bono opens up his heart and reaches for the heavens, while The Edge's guitars come already arena-fied with endless delay and more melodies than 10 more-technically-skilled players could manage. The band hasn't sounded this sincere and passionate since the seminal *Joshua Tree*. Decade three is looking to be another great one for these living legends.

**9. Showbread: No Sir, Nihilism is Not Practical** - These spastic art-punkers are already one of the few bright lights in the over-saturated emocore scene, a place firmly established by their full-length debut, *No Sir, Nihilism is Not Practical*. See the sonically-brutal "Dead By Dawn" - which throws throttling guitars, gurgly synths, and throat-searing vocals into the mix - or the multi-part epic "And the Smokers and the Children Shall Be Cast Down." Showbread have so many ideas, there should be no sophomore slumping here - only the question of how to fit it all onto one CD.

**10. Powderfinger: Vulture Street** - *Odyssey No. 5*, the American breakthrough album for Aussie alt-rockers Powderfinger, was a melancholy affair, comprised primarily of contemplative ballads. *Vulture Street* is its polar opposite. For the most part, Powderfinger seem to have nothing but rock and roll on their minds here, and the transition is surprisingly successful, with "Rockin' Rocks" and "Roll Right By You" standing out from the pack. And when the band strips down on mellow cuts like "Love Your Way" and "How Far Have We Really Come?," the effect is equally-powerful.



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