

SATURDAY 6 JUNE - SATURDAY 12 SEPTEMBER

THE
LISTENING
ROOM:

David Bowie

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Welcome to the fourth edition of the Bold Tendencies Listening Room. Each year we select a historical cultural figure and explore their life through the world of music, running alongside our award-winning live events programme. Past years have included the likes of Susan Sontag, Edward Said, James Baldwin and Derek Jarman. We invite you to select tracks from our vinyl library and step into Euphoria, a theme that “asserts the possibility of something other, not as a retreat from the world but as a mode of being and being together that is free, uncompromising and insistently alive”.

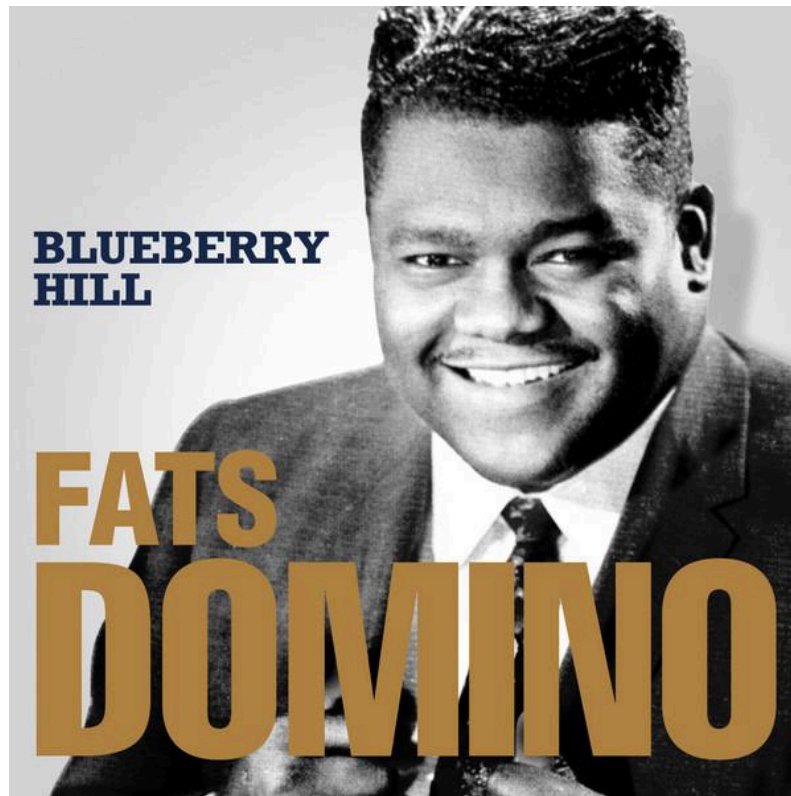
This year we have chosen a musician who needs little introduction. David Bowie, a South London native, was born in Brixton in 1947, as London rebuilt itself from the devastation of the Second World War. Moving to Bromley in 1953, his years South of the River marked a transition from suburban schoolboy to musical icon.

This Listening Room explores Bowie not only as a musician but as a serious and voracious fan of music. A figure whose passions ranged from classical music to reggae, electronic, disco, funk, psychedelia, rock and glam. Threaded throughout is a sense of place: the South London suburbs, venues and communities that shaped him, from the early gatherings at the Beckenham Arts Lab to the recording locations that punctuate his extraordinary catalogue, situating Bowie within our own South London home.

Selected Albums

Blueberry Hill - Fats Domino
Hound Dog - Elvis Presley
The Fabulous Little Richard - Little Richard
Everything's Alright - The Mojos
Bob Dylan - Bob Dylan
David Bowie - David Bowie
The Planets Op. 32 - Gustav Holst
The Velvet Underground and Nico - The Velvet
Underground
Oh Yeah - Charles Mingus
Disraeli Gears - Cream
The Turn of The Screw - Benjamin Britten
The Rise and Fall of Mahagonny City - Kurt Weill
Diamond Dogs - David Bowie
Private Dancer - Tina Turner
Funky Kingston - Toots and Maytals
The Last Poets - The Last Poets
Discreet Music - Brian Eno
Low - David Bowie
Pure Dynamite! Live at the Royal - James Brown
The Buddha of Suburbia - David Bowie
Timeless - Goldie
Earthling - David Bowie
Ballade No. 1 in g. Minor, Op. 23 - Frederic Chopin
Neu! - Neu!
Le Sacre Du Printemps - Igor Stravinsky

Blueberry Hill - Fats Domino (1956)



"Blueberry Hill" was a monumental international hit for Fats Domino in 1956, becoming a rock and roll standard and his biggest pop success. The track is enshrined in the Grammy and Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, but also holds a special historical significance as the very first record David Bowie bought. "Blueberry Hill" was also famously performed impromptu by Mick Jagger and Keith Richards during their 1965 tour of Ireland.

Hound Dog - Elvis Presley (1956)



Originally penned by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller for Big Mama Thornton, this twelve-bar blues track is most recognisable in Elvis Presley's iconic 1956 recording. Bowie ultimately saw Elvis as a mythic figure drawing much inspiration for his Ziggy Stardust persona from the King of Rock and Roll's own distinct glam. In 1971, Bowie finally got to see his hero perform live at Madison Square Garden; however, it wasn't the event Bowie wanted. The boy from Bromley turned up to the show mid-set, dressed head to toe in full Stardust attire and as the crowd stopped watching the show and shifted focus towards Bowie, Elvis was left feeling like a side-act at his own show.

Presley and Bowie actually shared a birthday, and just six months before his death, Elvis phoned Bowie to ask him to produce his next album after hearing "Golden Years". Tragically, the collaboration between the two artists never came to fruition.

The Fabulous Little Richard - Little Richard (1959)



This 1959 release was Little Richard's final album during his initial rock and roll period, featuring overdubbed female backing vocals to create a more mellow sound. Richard left show business shortly after its release due to a divine vision involving a burning plane.

For a young David Bowie, Little Richard was a colossal influence; seeing his band in a film at age nine inspired Bowie to take up the saxophone, and he later declared that hearing "Tutti Frutti" was akin to hearing God.

Bob Dylan - Bob Dylan (1962)



Bob Dylan's self-titled debut marked the beginning of one of the most extraordinary careers in popular music. It was released in March 1962 by a twenty-year-old Dylan, who, aboard a freight train, had arrived in Manhattan from Minnesota the previous year.

Dylan had been rejected by labels like Elektra, Folkways and Vanguard before meeting producer John Hammond at a rehearsal in a New York apartment. Hammond, who had previously worked with Billie Holiday, Bessie Smith and Count Basie, signed him on the spot and by November 1961 they were recording *Bob Dylan* in Columbia's Studio A on Seventh Avenue.

Though the two never became close friends or collaborators, David Bowie was a lifelong admirer of Dylan. Bowie wrote "Song for Bob Dylan" for his 1971 album *Hunky Dory*, and addresses Dylan by his birth name: "Now, hear this, Robert Zimmerman, I wrote a song for you". A decade prior, Dylan's 1962 debut featured a tribute to Woody Guthrie in "Song to Woody", forming a pattern of artists speaking to their heroes musically.

Everything's Alright - The Mojos (1964)



Released in 1964, the single "Everything's Alright" was a UK Top 10 hit written and performed by The Mojos, a beat group from Liverpool who played through the city's gig circuit and are also immortalised with a plaque at the famous Cavern Club. In an unusual move for the era, all five members of the band were credited with writing the track.

David Bowie later recorded his own version of the hit for his 1973 cover album *Pin Ups*, which coincidentally featured former Mojos drummer Aynsley Dunbar. The impact of the beat period on all young British acts of the sixties will forever be credited to bands like The Beatles, but acts like The Mojos are essential in telling a full history.

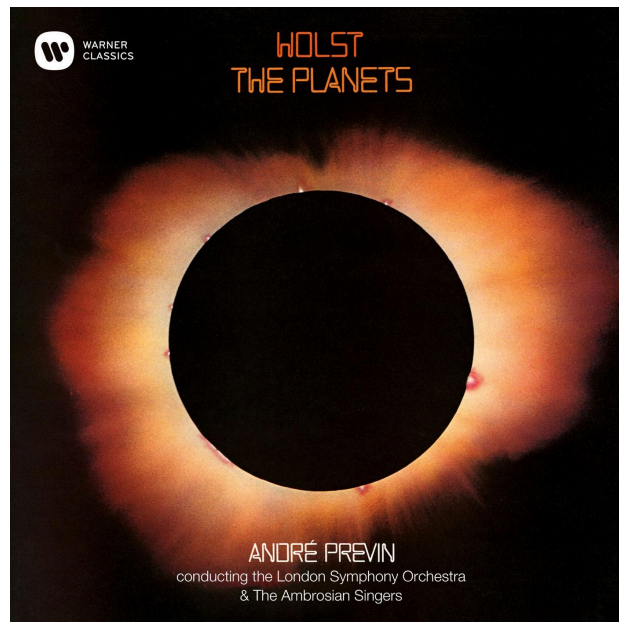
David Bowie - David Bowie (1967)



David Bowie's self-titled debut was released in June 1967. Inspired by *Pet Sounds*, Bowie and collaborator Dek Fearnley taught themselves to read and write orchestral arrangements for this release. The album grew from a string of singles that had failed to chart in 1966, and despite good reviews it went largely unnoticed again, as a result of poor promotion.

Around the same time, manager Kenneth Pitt returned from New York with an unreleased acetate of *The Velvet Underground & Nico*, picked up during evenings with Andy Warhol and Lou Reed. The effect on Bowie was, by his own account, "shattering".

The Planets Op. 32 - Gustav Holst (1918)

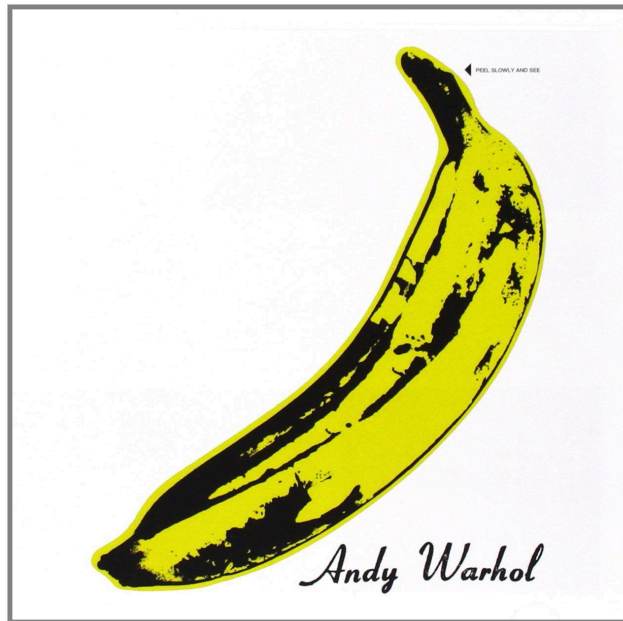


The Planets, Op. 32, is a renowned seven-movement orchestral suite composed by English composer Gustav Holst. Each movement within the suite is named after a planet in the Solar System and is designed to reflect its specific astrological significance. Holst himself described the composition as "a series of mood pictures" that act as "foils to one another," deliberately featuring "very little contrast in any one of them". The suite uniquely concludes with its final movement bringing in a wordless female chorus to join the orchestra.

For David Bowie, the suite served as a crucial early influence; in a 2003 interview, he specifically cited *The Planets* as one of the key works that taught him "classical music wasn't boring". His deep fascination with the piece manifested very early in his career: in the mid-1960s, a 19-year-old Bowie (still performing as Davy Jones) fronted a band called The Lower Third, who actively incorporated the movement "Mars, the Bringer of War" into their live repertoire. Their unique, aggressive rendition featured guitar feedback alongside Bowie playing the harmonica.

The suite's influence continued to echo throughout Bowie's later artistic endeavours. *The Planets* was well-known to the British audiences of his generation because it was used in the BBC's 1950s *Quatermass* science fiction serials. This early television exposure, coupled with the cinematic release of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, directly influenced his seminal 1969 hit "Space Oddity". The connection endured into the next decade, as excerpts from Holst's suite were featured in the 1976 film *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, which starred Bowie as the eponymous protagonist. Furthermore, Bowie's lifelong connection to the composition is preserved in a live performance recording where he is featured introducing a version of "Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity".

The Velvet Underground and Nico - The Velvet Underground (1967)

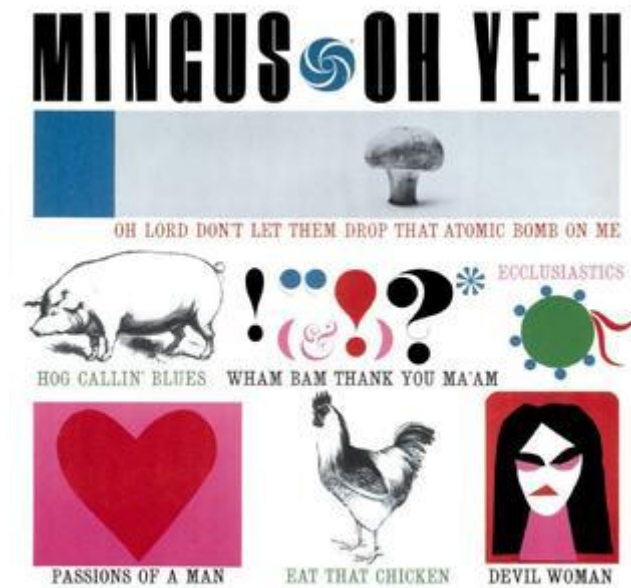


The Velvet Underground & Nico is the highly influential debut studio album by the American rock band The Velvet Underground and the German singer Nico. The record masterfully incorporates elements of avant-garde music into brash, minimal, and groove-driven rock. Over this sonic backdrop, lead singer and songwriter Lou Reed delivers explicit lyrics spanning gritty themes of urban life, sadomasochism, prostitution, and drug abuse.

The album had a profound and "shattering" effect on a young David Bowie. In December 1966, Bowie's manager, Kenneth Pitt, visited New York City and acquired an unreleased acetate of the record after spending time with Lou Reed and Andy Warhol. When Pitt brought the acetate back and presented it to Bowie, the track "I'm Waiting for the Man" — which features chunky guitar, clunking piano, and jackhammer drums to tell the story of a man buying heroin in Harlem—immediately caught his attention. Bowie was so captivated that he went straight to his band at the time, The Buzz, and insisted they learn it immediately. As Bowie recalled, they learned it right then and there and were performing the song on stage within a week.

Reflecting on this early adoption in a 2003 interview with *Vanity Fair*, Bowie proudly noted: "Amusingly, not only was I to cover a Velvet's song before anyone else in the world, I actually did it before the album came out. Now that's the essence of Mod". The impact of the album and Reed's songwriting endured long after that initial discovery; biographer David Buckley notes that Lou Reed's distinct writing style directly influenced Bowie's iconic 1977 anthem "Heroes".

Oh Yeah - Charles Mingus (1962)



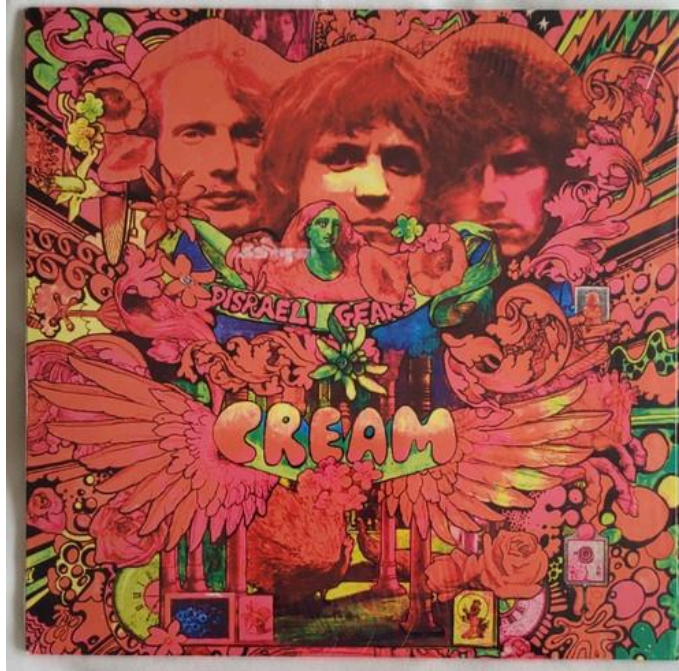
Oh Yeah is a studio album by the American jazz musician and composer Charles Mingus. While it was released in 1962, its impact on rock history emerged a decade later when it directly inspired one of the most famous musical moments in David Bowie's catalogue. During the inventive and unexpected false ending of "Suffragette City," Bowie screams the lyrics, "Ohhhh, wham-bam, thank you, ma'am". This iconic inclusion was directly borrowed from Mingus's album.

There are two differing accounts of exactly how this phrase made its way into the song. Bowie's own version traces back to around 1961, when he was a regular at the London department store Medhurst. He noted that the shop had an unlikely but fantastic record department run by a 'married' couple Jimmy and Charles and Jimmy, the younger partner, initially recommended the Mingus record to him. Though Bowie lost that initial Medhurst copy, he continuously re-bought the print as it was re-released over the years, ensuring the track "Wham Bam Thank You, Ma'am" remained firmly lodged in his mind.

Conversely, an alternate origin story comes courtesy of Bowie's school friend, George Underwood. Underwood remembers a specific instance

at Haddon Hall when Bowie first played "Suffragette City" to him on a twelve-string guitar. At the end of the performance, Underwood spontaneously shouted "Wham, bam, thank you, ma'am!" — a deliberate reference to the track from *Oh Yeah* album — and this enthusiastic outburst is what obviously ended up on the final record.

Disraeli Gears - Cream (1967)



Disraeli Gears is the second studio album released by the British rock band Cream. The record represents a significant creative pivot for the group, as they veer away from their foundational blues roots and instead indulge more deeply in more psychedelic sounds.

Bowie was inspired by Cream's sound throughout his career – band member Mick Ronson coached musicians to “play like Cream” while recording *The Man Who Sold the World* in 1970 and Bowie named the band as a major inspiration for the sound of *Tin Machine* in 1989.

The Turn of The Screw - Benjamin Britten (1954)



Composed by Benjamin Britten, a central figure of 20th century British music, *The Turn of The Screw* was written in a surprisingly short amount of time in 1954 – just 4 months.

The story centres around a young governess sent to an English country house to care for two children. Throughout the opera she becomes convinced that the children have been corrupted by the ghosts of previous servants, which leads to a tragic outcome.

When talking about the process behind his 1974 suite of songs “Sweet Thing” in *Diamond Dogs*, Bowie expressed envy of being able to create something like *The Turn Of The Screw* where there is little to no spoken dialogue at all.

The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny - Kurt Weill (1927)



Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny is a political-satirical opera, with music by Kurt Weill and a libretto by Bertolt Brecht and Elisabeth Hauptmann. It began as a short piece in 1927, inspired by Brecht's poems about the fictional American city of Mahagonny, and grew into a full-length opera as the idea got further. The opera's music is a unique fusion that mixes traditional classical opera with popular sounds of the 1920s, specifically jazz, cabaret and ragtime.

Though mostly sung in German, several numbers including "Alabama Song" and "Benares Song" are performed in English. To European artists at the time, the USA represented the ultimate symbol of wild capitalism, freedom and lawlessness. The opera's critique of greed and American society is one Bowie often shared throughout his own music.

Diamond Dogs - David Bowie (1974)



This dystopian glam-rock concept album was heavily influenced by George Orwell's *1984* and William S. Burroughs' "cut-up" writing style. It followed two major rejections for Bowie: a proposed Ziggy Stardust rock musical and a television adaptation of *1984*. He channelled his frustrations into creating Hunger City, an urban wilderness where his Orwellian ambitions formed the backdrop of a dystopian, post-apocalyptic nightmare.

Recorded in Barnes and other studios around London, it would be one of the last times Bowie recorded in the city for the next six years. The iconic half-man, half-dog cover image was considered too provocative at the time and was censored, only to be restored in its original form from 1990 onwards.

The Last Poets - The Last Poets (1970)



The Last Poets are widely regarded as pioneers of spoken word and forerunners of rap, giving voice to the anger and urgency of the civil rights era on the streets of New York. Their first ever performance took place on the birthday of Malcolm X, and their name was inspired by the South African revolutionary poet Keorapetse Kgositsile, who believed he was living in the last era of poetry, before guns took over.

Among their early influences was a legendary student occupation protest at Howard University in 1968, where protesters' chanted in the spirit of defiance, just months before the assassination of Martin Luther King. By the time they began recording in 1970, they had forged a raw, uncompromising sound that would leave a lasting mark on Bowie who named this album among his 25 favourite albums of all time.

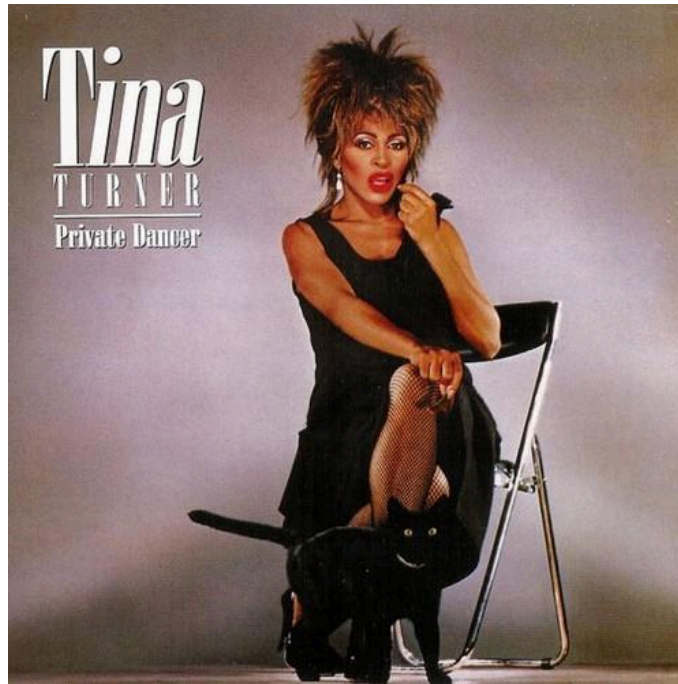
Funky Kingston - Toots and Maytals (1973)



Funky Kingston is actually the name of two distinct albums by the legendary Jamaican reggae group Toots and The Maytals. Released as an album in both Jamaica and the UK, as well as a compilation for wider audiences in the US, *Funky Kingston* is widely considered a deeply authentic reflection of Jamaican music at the time, brilliantly merging the island's syncopated rhythms with a rock and roll looseness and Motown-soaked soul. Its lyrics candidly refer to the difficulties of being working-class and living in Jamaica, whilst simultaneously celebrating life and joy despite ongoing hardships.

For David Bowie, the record was a major touchstone: he was heavily inspired by the raw, Otis Redding-style soulfulness of the group's charismatic frontman Frederick "Toots" Hibbert. This potent blend of grounded lyricism and infectious, upbeat energy made the album a cornerstone of the 1970s global reggae explosion.

Private Dancer - Tina Turner (1984)

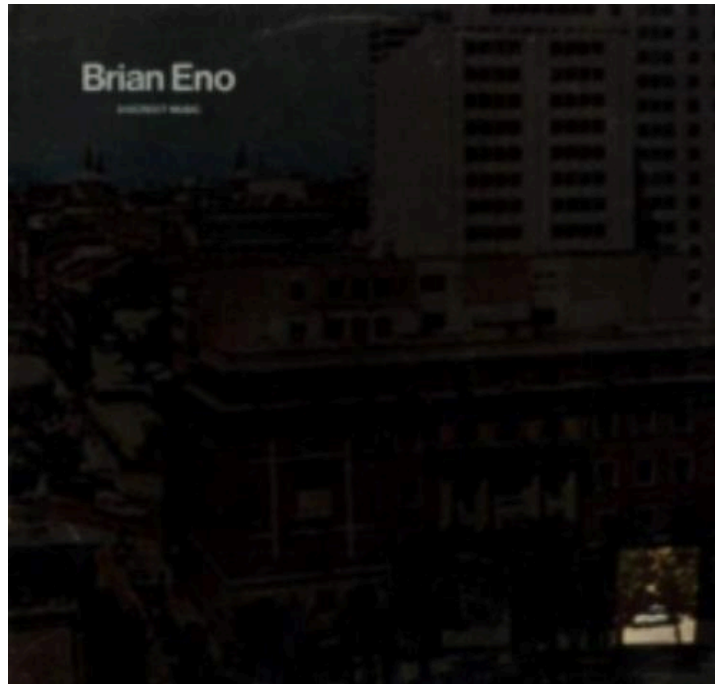


Private Dancer is Tina Turner's fifth solo studio album, released in 1984 by Capitol Records, and it marked her comeback after years of struggling as a solo artist. The album turned her into a global superstar and is widely seen as the record that redefined her career.

The album had a much broader pop-rock sound in comparison to her previous work and included seven singles, symbolising a commercial comeback. The album spent a remarkable 147 weeks on the UK charts, indicating its long lasting popularity.

Tina Turner included David Bowie's "1984" on Private Dancer, and later she said Bowie had helped reopen the door to her career by attending one of her shows when Capitol was considering whether to re-sign her.

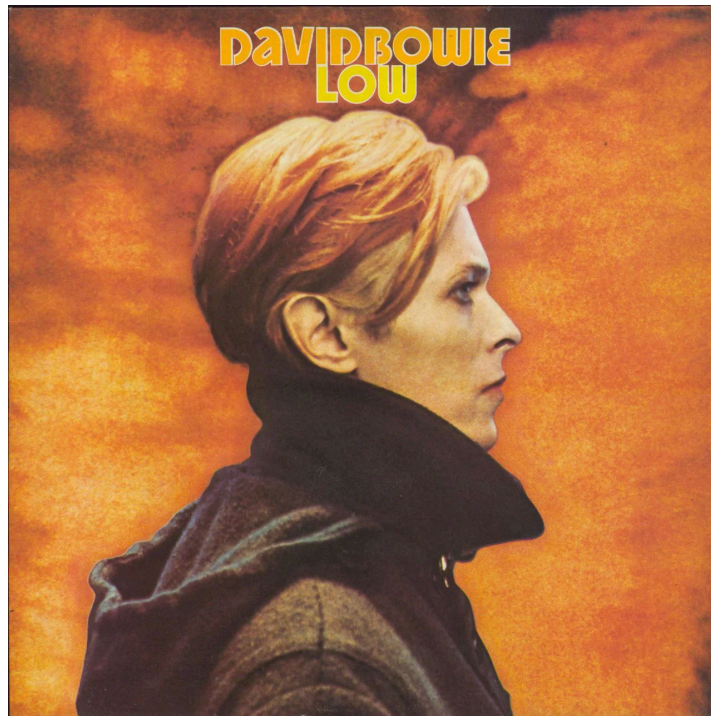
Discreet Music - Brian Eno (1975)



Released in 1975, *Discreet Music* is the fourth studio album by Brian Eno, and notably the first he released under his full name. The record was intentionally created to play in and blend seamlessly with the subtle background audio of various, or any given, situations. It became a firm favourite of David Bowie, who listened to it obsessively during his American tour.

Bowie and Eno—a former Roxy Music keyboardist and conceptualist—had met occasionally since 1973, but they reconnected backstage following a London show in May 1976. This reunion led to their legendary collaboration on Bowie's late 1970s Berlin Trilogy. Biographers Marc Spitz and Hugo Wilcken highlighted Eno's ambient works as a key influence on the sound Bowie sought for his album *Low*. This influence is most evident on *Low*'s eerie instrumental centrepiece, "Warszawa," which layers Eno's minimal keyboard drones with Bowie's wordless, choral-like vocals. The track abandons traditional rock structure in favour of mood and texture, foreshadowing ambient and post-rock movements while crystallising the haunted beauty of *Low*'s second side.

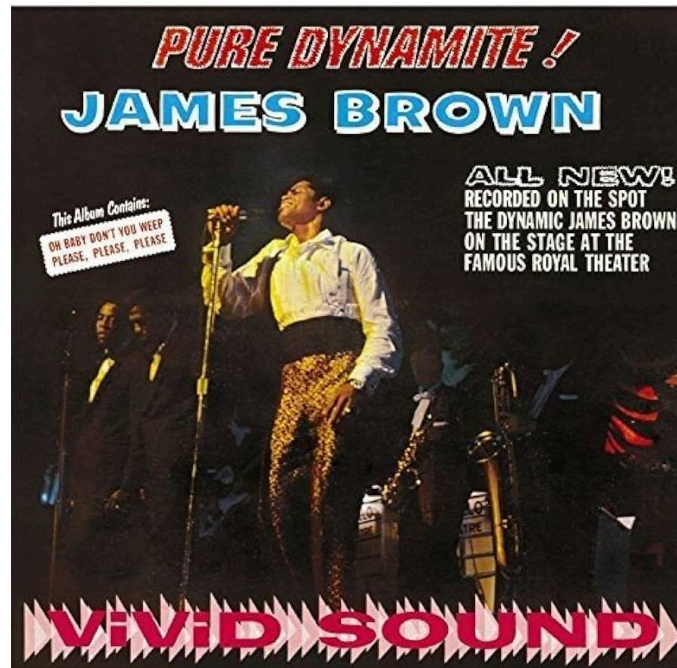
Low - David Bowie (1977)



David Bowie's *Low* was one of the boldest reinventions of his career; the album was recorded mostly in France in 1976, with final sessions in West Berlin, and, followed by *Heroes* and *Lodger*, it became the first release in what is now called the Berlin Trilogy. Bowie worked with producer Tony Visconti and collaborator Brian Eno, whose influence helped shape the album's experimental and ambient side.

This album marked David Bowie's artistic change, moving away from what had already made him famous and towards a new identity. It also helped establish the kind of adventurous, genre crossing Bowie that later artists kept returning to especially in electronic and post punk music.

Pure Dynamite! Live at the Royal - James Brown (1962)



Pure Dynamite! Live at the Royal is a 1964 live album by James Brown and The Famous Flames, recorded at the Royal Theatre in Baltimore, Maryland. It was released on King Records and followed the huge success of *Live at the Apollo*. The title comes from Brown's nickname at the time, "Mr. Dynamite".

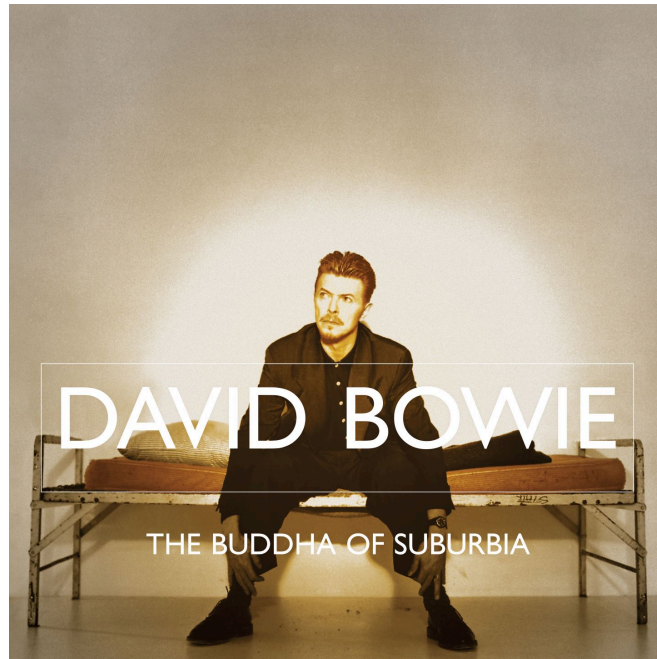
James Brown rose through the R&B and soul circuit before becoming one of the most influential performers in modern music. By the time of this album, he had already built a reputation for intense stage presence, sharp band leadership and a sound rooted in gospel, R&B and early soul. The Royal Theatre itself was a major stop on the Black entertainment circuit, which gives the record an important live performance context.

Through vinyl, the record captures the atmosphere of live performance as opposed to a polished studio product. It is also notable for recycling and re-presenting singles Brown and The Famous Flames had already released. The album peaked at No.10 on the Billboard pop album chart,

showing just how far Brown had pushed soul music into the mainstream by 1964.

David Bowie later credited Brown's live work, especially the unforgettable experience of first hearing his *Apollo* recording. *Pure Dynamite! Live at the Royal* comes from the period of Brown's live performance power and explosive stage identity.

The Buddha of Suburbia - David Bowie (1993)



The Buddha of Suburbia was David Bowie's 19th full studio album and was released in 1993. It emerged from the BBC adaptation of Hanif Kureishi's novel, a South London coming of age story about class, identity and escape. Although connected to television, the album became much more than a soundtrack: Bowie reworked material into a full studio release that reflected his own 1970s memories and creative influences.

The album sits at the intersection of Bowie's own nostalgia, Kureishi's South London coming of age story, and BBC drama. It remains a fascinating, underrated Bowie album with strong links to South London's cultural landscape.

Timeless - Goldie (1995)

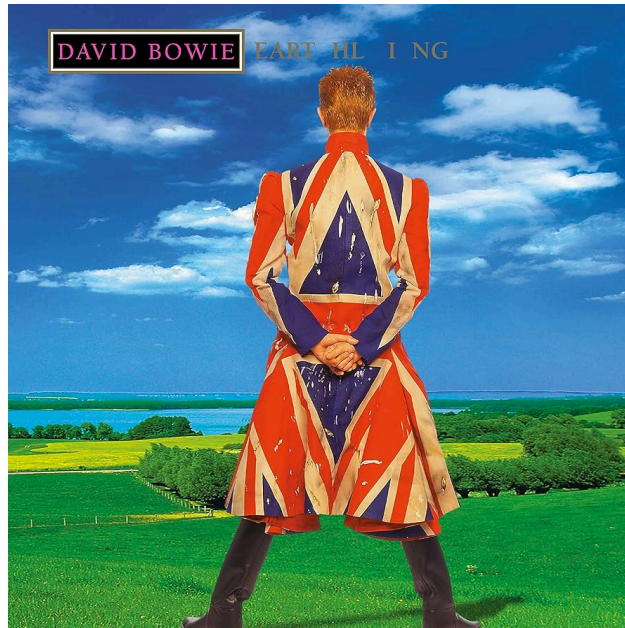


Goldie's *Timeless* is a landmark drum and bass album that helped define the sound of UK electronic music in the 1990s. The album's long, cinematic tracks gave a deeper emotional and musical range than many listeners expected from electronic music at the time.

One of the most talked about tracks is "Inner City Life," which appears across anniversary editions and track listings as a part of the album's core identity. The album also runs with a very distinct structure, the title track is a long opener, and the record feels more like a journey than a standard collection of singles.

David Bowie and Goldie became especially visible in the late 1990s, collaborating on the track "Truth," which appears on Goldie's 1998 album *Saturnz Return*. Goldie later said Bowie taught him "the power of reinvention" and he described Bowie as a strong supporter of his work.

Earthling - David Bowie (1997)



Recorded at Philip Glass' Looking Glass Studio in New York and Montreux, Switzerland, *Earthling* was heavily influenced by the UK underground dance scene, specifically drum and bass, jungle and techno. But Bowie was under no illusions about its commercial future in America: "I don't think it will catch on in a major way over here... I had America-mania when I was a kid, but I loved all the things that America rejects: It was black music, it was the beatnik poets, it was all the stuff that I thought was the true rebellious subversive side". The album, however, received largely positive reviews on release, with some critics considering it an improvement over its predecessor *Outside* (1995).

The album's cover is just as iconic as the music. Bowie wears a Union Jack frock coat made in 1996 by Alexander McQueen. Although relatively unknown at the time, McQueen was not easily impressed by celebrities, but admiring Bowie's sense of style, he agreed to design a bespoke suit for the album cover and *Earthling* era. Over the previous thirty years the Union Jack had carried very different meanings: a symbol of confidence in the 1960s, of oppression through the punk movement in the 1970s, and of the right through Morrissey's

controversial use of it at Finsbury Park in the early 1990s. By the mid-1990s Britpop had brought it back into fashion, with bands regularly posing with the flag for Melody Maker and NME. Following the release of *Earthling*, it became fashionable and was worn by artists including Eurythmics and the Spice Girls. For Bowie, image was always inseparable from the work. "One of my great loves is clothes," he said in 1974. "If you're really going to entertain an audience, then you have to look the part too".

Ballade No. 1 in g. Minor, Op. 23 - Frederic Chopin



Frédéric Chopin completed his *Ballade No. 1 in G minor, Op. 23* in 1835, pioneering the piano ballade as a distinct musical genre. The solo composition is celebrated for its narrative-like structure, seamlessly blending passages of bittersweet melancholy with a thunderous, technically demanding coda. Within the context of the Listening Room's programme, this piece is intrinsically linked to David Bowie's 1977 album *Low*. While staying at the Château d'Hérouville—a legendary French residential studio and a favourite creative retreat for many 1970s artists—Bowie claimed to have been haunted by the ghosts of Chopin and the 19th-century French writer George Sand. The historic chateau had actually served as a real-life sanctuary for Chopin and Sand during their famous love affair over a century prior. This lingering classical presence undoubtedly left a profound mark on Bowie's creative consciousness, adding a layer of eerie, romantic history to the pioneering ambient and experimental soundscapes he was developing at the time.

Neu! - Neu!



Neu! was a Krautrock band formed in Düsseldorf, West Germany in 1971 by Michael Rother and Klaus Dinger, following their departure from Kraftwerk. Rother and Dinger are considered some of the founding fathers of the Krautrock movement, a term utilised by German and British music press in the early 1970s, to the chagrin of some artists associated with the movement, to describe a new genre that merged electronic and rock sounds.

Neu!'s most distinctive contribution to music was the “Motobik” beat, a relentless, hypnotic 4/4 drumming pattern pioneered by Klaus Dinger. This pulse-like rhythmic engine became one of Krautrock's most recognisable signatures and would go on to influence generations of musicians.

David Bowie became deeply infatuated with the movement during the mid 1970s. The albums created in his “Berlin years”, recorded in collaboration with Brian Eno (*Low*, *Heroes*, and *Lodger*), bears the unmistakable influence of the broad Krautrock scene. Bowie has cited bands like Neu! as major inspirations for that era of his work, one of the most critically acclaimed periods of his career.

Le Sacre Du Princeps - Igor Stravinsky (1913)



In 1911, an image came to a Russian composer: a young girl, chosen as sacrifice, dancing herself to death in a pagan ritual. From that single image, Igor Stravinsky created a ballet centred around an ancient Slavic tribe welcoming the spring through rituals that culminate in a sacrifice to ensure the earth's renewal. Written for Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, it premiered at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées on 29 May 1913, with choreography by Vaslav Nijinsky and designs by Nicholas Roerich.

The avant-garde music and choreography provoked an uproar in the audience so severe that the premiere is now known for its riot. Stravinsky himself was completely unprepared for the reaction since the music felt natural to him. He spent the performance backstage, holding Nijinsky by his tailcoat through the chaos caused by the audience.

A year later, the same work received a triumphant concert performance, after which, Stravinsky was victoriously carried on the shoulders of his admirers. Today *Le Sacre Du Printemps* or *The Rite of Spring* is considered one of the most influential musical works of the twentieth century.

