



COUNTRY MUSIC 2017

ALBUMS OF THE YEAR

The year certainly isn't over yet – there's big albums from Chris Stapleton and Faith Hill and Tim McGraw out in December – but from the releases *Country Music* has had time to digest, here's the 30 we've judged the best of 2017.

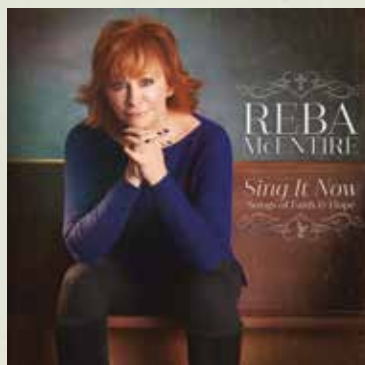
Words by *Country Music's* review team

Country may well be at a crossroads in 2017: as a "genre" it's undoubtedly as big as it's ever been, and the sheer expanse of fine releases has been a real joy. The best thing is, they're all quite different and things seem to be increasingly split between an even more mainstream-sounding country-pop and a palpable return to the music's roots.

One mistake that shouldn't be made is to think that all the younger artists are the pop ones, as it's often the "veterans" such as Shania Twain, Little Big Town and Lady Antebellum adding the radio sheen while it's the relative newcomers such as Margo Price and Jarrod Dickenson that sound steeped in tradition.

The UK's own artists have grown too, showing that a broader take on 'Americana' can really pay dividends: maybe it's an actual advantage living far from the Music City machine in Nashville.

Anyway, here's *Country Music's* picks in broadly chronological order. Dive in!



REBA McENTIRE
SING IT NOW: SONGS OF FAITH AND HOPE (BIG MACHINE/UNIVERSAL)

This country-gospel double album artfully mixes traditional and modern styles all framed in McEntire's honeyed vocals. Spiritual and superb.
STANDOUT TRACKS *Oh Happy Day, Hallelujah Amen, Softly And Tenderly*



LITTLE BIG TOWN
THE BREAKER (CAPITOL RECORDS NASHVILLE)

Showcasing their full-force four-way harmonies, LBT's eighth album is a masterstroke of modern country. The songs may be about break-ups, but you'll fall in love with them.
STANDOUT TRACKS *Better Man, Happy People, When Someone Stops Loving You*



OLD DOMINION
HAPPY ENDINGS (SONY)

That name alone will have traditionalists calling Trade Descriptions, as OD's MO is high-sheen R&B-flecked country that's hyper-modern.

Class A pop.

STANDOUT TRACKS *Still Writing Songs About You, So You Go*



MARTY STUART AND HIS FABULOUS SUPERLATIVES
WAY OUT WEST (SUPERTONE/WRASSE RECORDS)

Shimmering like a soundtrack to a road movie that never was, Stuart's impeccable troupe deliver an album steeped in country.

STANDOUT TRACKS *Whole Lotta Highway (With A Million Miles To Go), Desert Prayer Part II*



ALISON KRAUSS
WINDY CITY (CAPITOL)

For her first solo studio album since 1999, Krauss delivers a beautiful collection of classics. The crossover "countryopolitan" softness hasn't suited all, but it's wonderful to hear that voice anew.

STANDOUT TRACKS *Gentle On My Mind, Poison Love, You Don't Know Me*



WILLIE NELSON
GOD'S PROBLEM CHILD (SONY)

Country's irrepressible mischief-maker, 84, reminds us how things should be done. "I've never been accused of being normal" he warbles on *Still Not Dead*. Praise be: Nelson remains extraordinary.

STANDOUT TRACKS *Still Not Dead, True Love, God's Problem Child*



SAM OUTLAW
TENDERHEART (THIRTY TIGERS)

Stepping outside the conventions of country, Outlaw's self-produced second LP offers unexpected colours that seem to grow with every listen. A shining future awaits.

STANDOUT TRACKS *Bougainvillea, I Think*



JADE JACKSON
GILDED (ANTI)

With echoes of Kathleen Edwards and a young Lucinda Williams, this moody but mighty fine debut by Californian Jackson glistens with a delicate beauty.

STANDOUT TRACKS *Bridges, No Guarantees*

BEST OF BRITISH



WORRY DOLLS
GO GET GONE

With shades of Alison Krauss and the Be Good Tanyas, Rosie Jones and Zoe Nicol deliver an outstanding debut of quirky Americana.



JO HARMON
PEOPLE WE BECOME

Is Jo soul, blues or country? She's a bit of everything and a lot of talent on this second album, where she's backed by top Nashville sessioneers.



MY DARLING CLEMENTINE
STILL TESTIFYING

Love hurts on album number three, but this husband and wife duo make all the trouble and strife sound fun.



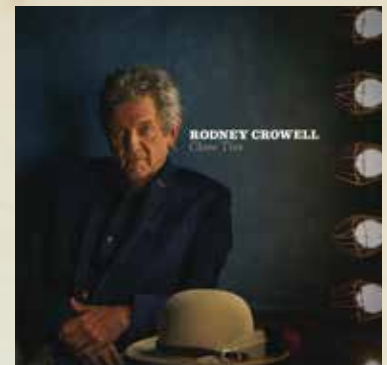
ELLES BAILEY
WILDFIRE

Recording in Nashville didn't stop Elles Bailey's own smoky-voiced character and songs shining through on this universally-acclaimed debut.



JESS & THE BANDITS
SMOKE & MIRRORS

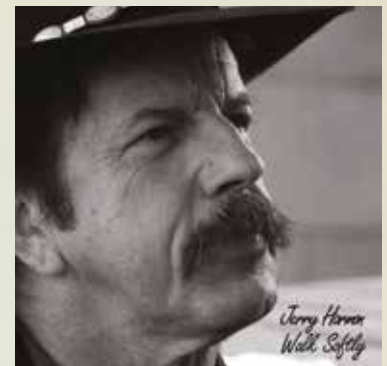
There maybe less twang on album two, but the songs have grown, leaning hard on frontwoman Jess Clemmons' gospel and soul upbringing.



RODNEY CROWELL
CLOSE TIES (NEW WEST)

Emmylou's Hot Band veteran delivers an LP that brims with both musical and lyrical class. Currently on hiatus, we can only hope one of country's masters still has much to give.

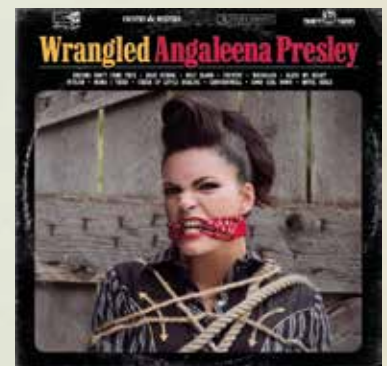
STANDOUT TRACKS *East Houston Blues, Nashville 1972*



JERRY HARMON
WALK SOFTLY (WRASSE RECORDS)

Crisply-observed tales from the veteran Appalachian treasure. Equal parts eloquent singer and reflective storyteller, Harmon remains the perfect antidote to the gaudy glare of modern Nashville.

STANDOUT TRACKS *Walk Softly, Want To Come Home, Man I Used To Be*

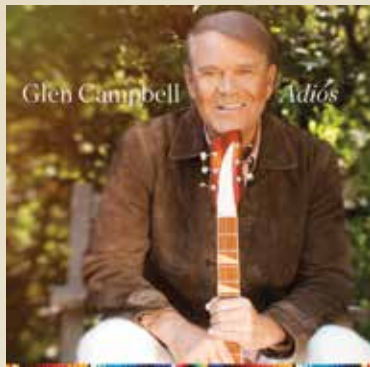


ANGALEENA PRESLEY
WRANGLED (THIRTY TIGERS)

An album of in-your-face sharp 'n' sassy twang. Co-writes with Chris Stapleton and fellow Pistol Annies Miranda Lambert and Ashley Monroe add a knockout punch.

STANDOUT TRACKS *High School, Country*

BEST REISSUES



GLEN CAMPBELL
ADIÓS (VIRGIN EMI)

One of America's greatest ever vocal craftsmen says goodbye on an album that could seem tragic, but is ultimately heroic. A touchingly beautiful farewell.

STANDOUT TRACKS *Just Like Always, It Won't Bring Her Back*



JASON ISBELL AND THE 400 UNIT
THE NASHVILLE SOUND (SOUTHEASTERN RECORDS/THIRTY TIGERS)

More songs of love, loss and defiance from Alabama's golden boy, this potent blend of honey and grit shows that he's never been on better form. Triumphant.

STANDOUT TRACKS *Tupelo, If We Were Vampires*



CHRIS STAPLETON
FROM A ROOM: VOLUME 1 (DECCA/MERCURY)

Nashville's latest crossover sensation returns in imperious style, with nods to the past and a midas touch when it comes to songs. Sales matched its critical praise, too.

STANDOUT TRACKS *Either Way, Second One To Know, I Was Wrong*



GEORGE STRAIT
STRAIT OUT OF THE BOX VOL. 2

An enviable collection of hits and deep cuts from the past two decades.



JOHNNY CASH
THE ORIGINAL SUN ALBUMS 1957-1964

A beautifully packaged celebration marking 60 years of Cash. Buy this and get the t-shirt.



SONNY LANDRETH
RECORDED LIVE IN LAFAYETTE (MASCOT/PROVOGUE)

One for the country guitar-slingers, this showcases "the king of slydeco" atop his throne and pretenders to the crown will only marvel at his finger-twisting magnificence. Hail!

STANDOUT TRACKS *A World Away, True Blue*



LUKE COMBS
THIS ONE'S FOR YOU (COLUMBIA RECORDS NASHVILLE)

Lovin', drinkin' and buckets of regret – Combs has it all covered in a sparkling set that sounds fresh yet instantly familiar.

STANDOUT TRACKS *Hurricane, This One's For You, Out There*



LUKAS NELSON & PROMISE OF THE REAL
LUKAS NELSON & PROMISE OF THE REAL (FANTASY)

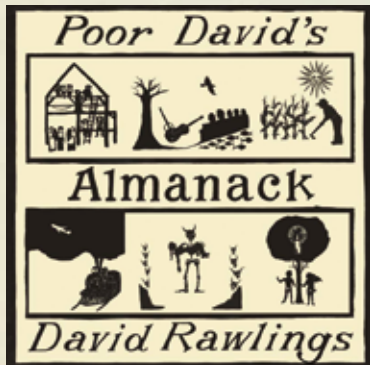
Willie's son delivers a goosebump-raising set. Forget the family lineage, it's his unique, pure songwriting that shines through.

STANDOUT TRACKS *If I Started Over, Just Outside Of Austin, Find Yourself*



PATSY CLINE
THE COMPLETE RELEASES 1955-62

A comprehensive collection, featuring every record that the revered star released.



DAVID RAWLINGS
POOR DAVID'S ALMANACK (ACONY RECORDS)

With wife Gillian Welch alongside, Rawlings is on top guitarin' form on an album that bubbles like some gothic folk masterclass. As some have suggested, these are love songs to music itself.

STANDOUT TRACKS *Cumberland Gap, Guitar Man, Yup*



MARGO PRICE
ALL AMERICAN MADE (THIRD MAN RECORDS)

Price proves 2016's award-winning *Midwest Farmer's Daughter* was no fluke with this provocative, charismatic and soulful twist on her throwback honky tonk sound [See page 88].

STANDOUT TRACKS *All American Made, Pay Gap, A Little Pain*



JARROD DICKENSON
READY THE HORSES (DECCA)

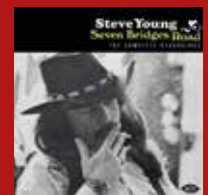
Country Music has been raving about the Texan for a while, and he's more than delivered here. Dickenson's tales have a bare beauty that's impossible to ignore [See page 92].

STANDOUT TRACKS *Take It From Me, Your Heart, Way Past*



VARIOUS ARTISTS
OUTLAW: CELEBRATING THE MUSIC OF WAYLON JENNINGS

A 2015 tribute show DVD/CD that will make you wish you were there.



STEVE YOUNG
SEVEN BRIDGES ROAD: THE COMPLETE RECORDINGS

An expanded forgotten 1970 masterpiece from a cult singer-songwriter.

There are a few albums, even some major ones such as by Faith Hill and Tim McGraw, that were released late in 2017; sorry, too late for Country Music to confidently call that they made the grade!