

Popular music

selected by [John Potter](#) in the [December 11, 2013](#) issue

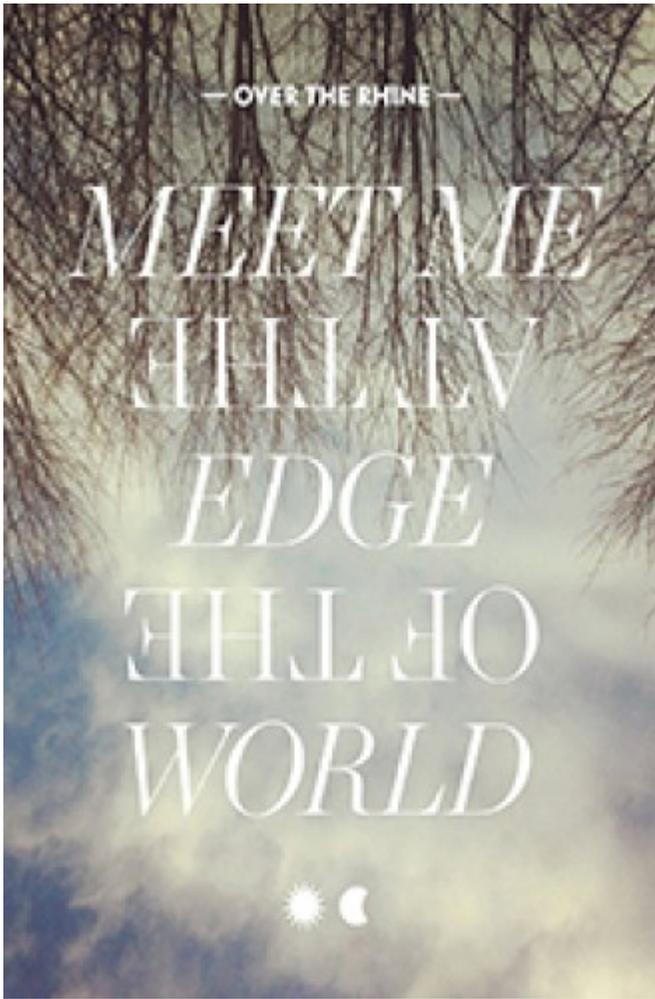
In Review



Modern Vampires of the City

By Vampire Weekend

XL



Meet Me at the Edge of the World

By Over the Rhine
Speckled Dog



Random Access Memories

By Daft Punk
Columbia



Yeezus

By Kanye West

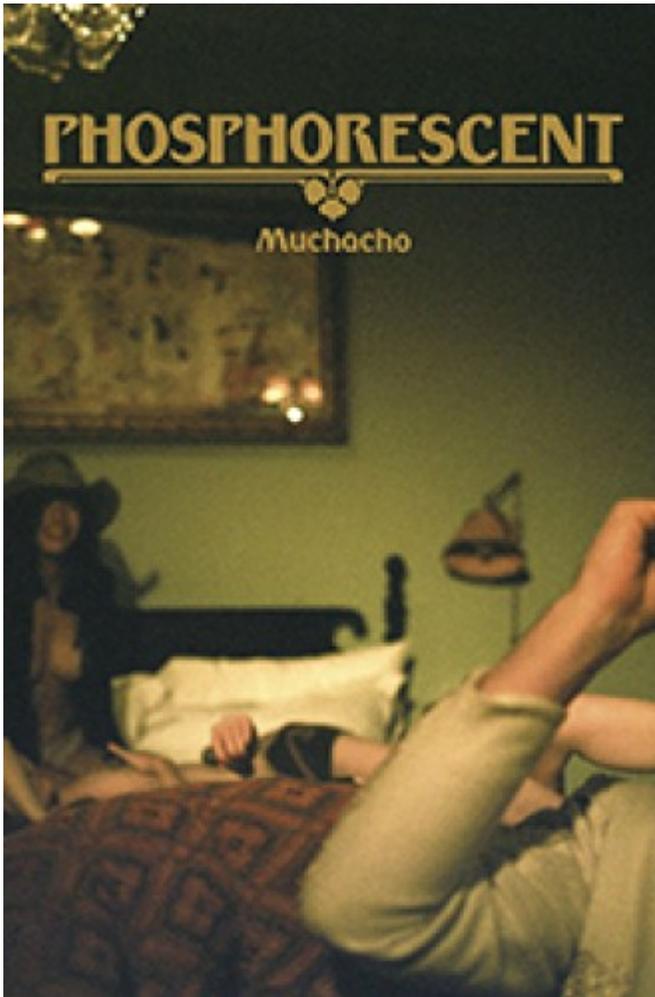
Def Jam



Amok

By Atoms for Peace

XL



Muchacho

By Phosphorescent
Dead Oceans

Modern Vampires of the City, by Vampire Weekend. The chamber-pop quartet's third LP finds the band in a more introspective state than the Afropop-infused bounce of its earlier albums. If the effect is a sometimes sleepier sound, it also results in the group's most stylistically varied set of songs. Ezra Koenig's dense lyrics remain sneakily profound, but here he largely turns his attention away from the group's usual Salingeresque prep-school characters and toward matters of faith. Album standout "Ya Hey"—likely a variation on "Yahweh"—is one of the many that wrestle with belief and doubt. In it, Koenig addresses God directly, opening with "Oh, sweet thing / Zion doesn't love you / And Babylon don't love you / But you love everything."

Meet Me at the Edge of the World, by Over the Rhine. Songwriting duo (and married couple) Linford Detweiler and Karin Bergquist are prolific: this is Over the Rhine's 12th studio LP. And though it's a double album, there's very little fat to be found among the 19 country-tinged folk songs, which effectively alternate between melancholy and quietly celebratory. Named for the duo's Ohio farm, the record reflects the concerns and awareness of a couple growing older and more dissatisfied with modern America. ("I have seen the slow corruption of the best ideas of Christ / In the pulpits of our nation, Gospel turned into white lies," Detweiler sings on "All Over Ohio.") But it also romantically invokes the partnership of Johnny Cash and June Carter. ("I still get shivers when I hear you singing down the hall," the song continues.)

Random Access Memories, by Daft Punk. The fourth proper album—and first in eight years—from the French DJ duo of Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo and Thomas Bangalter is the most easily digestible of the electronic music stalwarts' career, showcasing vocalists and focusing more on traditional pop-song structure than in the past. It's perhaps the most "human" of efforts from the duo, who famously never remove their anonymous, robotic helmets in public. But a more accessible approach doesn't make for any less of a sprawling, genre-hopping record, reflecting the duo's wide range of influences and kindred spirits. *Memories* moves seamlessly from the sounds of disco (including summer's best pop hit, "Get Lucky") to early electronic music ("Giorgio by Moroder" features Italian dance music pioneer Giorgio Moroder), and from ballads to modern electronic dance music.

Yeezus, by Kanye West. Since his 2004 debut, West's output has grown increasingly experimental, pushing mainstream hip-hop into strange new territory. That progression culminates in *Yeezus*, the producer/MC's sixth album, which perfectly encapsulates all the traits that give ample fodder to West's detractors and champions alike. *Yeezus* is a bold exercise in dichotomy: between abrasiveness and vulnerability, sacred and profane, selfishness and justice, tenderness and (arguably) misogyny. West accentuates his larger-than-life persona throughout—winkingly at times, earnestly at others. In its first minute, album opener "On Sight" assaults (and excites) listeners with a barrage of electronic harshness, then pauses for a lengthy, unadorned gospel choir sample: "He gives us what we need / It may not be what we want." Is the song "I Am a God" unchecked egotism or a meditation on Psalm 82? Is "Blood on the Leaves" profound or in poor taste (or both)?

Amok, by Atoms for Peace. Upon the 2006 release of his solo side project *The Eraser*, Radiohead front man Thom Yorke sought the help of some prominent friends to take the album out on tour. With bassist Flea (Red Hot Chili Peppers), frequent collaborator and producer Nigel Godrich on keys and various other instruments, drummer Joey Waronker (Beck, R.E.M.) and percussionist Mauro Refosco (Chili Peppers), Yorke formed a supergroup of sorts, taking *Eraser's* cold minimalism and adding a warmer slinkiness to its songs. The same is true of *Amok*, the band's debut LP, which serves as a natural extension of Yorke's solo work. Taking its name from the *Eraser* track "Atoms for Peace" (itself named after a Dwight Eisenhower speech on nuclear war), the quintet builds choppy grooves around Yorke's fragmented lyrics, prophesying impending doom on the horizon.

Muchacho, by Phosphorescent. Singer-songwriter Matthew Houck's sixth LP under the name Phosphorescent may finally be the one to break through. The twinkling synths of album opener "Sun, Arise!" offer a glimpse of the lush soundscapes to come, signifying a break from the country twang that's made up most of Phosphorescent's prior discography. "Arise" builds into the string-laden hopefulness of modest indie hit "Song for Zula," which gives way to the fuzzy stomp and yelping vocals of "Ride On / Right On." There is heartbreak here ("I sang, 'Roll Away the Stone' / Set up a trembling in my bones / I sat there all alone / Cried and cried," Houck sings in "Muchacho's Tune"), but also a good-natured weariness ("But like the shepherd to the lamb / Like the wave onto the sand / I'll fix myself up / To come and be with you," the song continues).

This article was corrected on December 2, 2013.