

Albums that marked the noughties

From Radiohead's 'Kid A' to Amy Winehouse's 'Back to Black,' here's a look back at 10 of the most influential pop and rock releases of the past decade

BY SAM REEVES
AFP, PARIS

RADIOHEAD Kid A 2000

(No. 1 in *Rolling Stone's* best 100 albums of the decade, No. 2 in *Billboard* critics' top 20 albums of the decade, No. 14 in *NME's* best 100 albums of the decade)

The vast, experimental soundscapes of *Kid A* marked a further shift away from the guitar-driven anthemic rock tunes of the band's early days.

It was the first Radiohead album to make it to number one in the US, but it was anything but commercial with the traditional tools of the rock musician ditched and a vast range of influences on display from jazz to modern classical music. "*Kid A* is like getting a massive eraser out and starting again," Radiohead leader Thom Yorke told *Rolling Stone* in October 2000. The US magazine called the album "experimental and abstract, rooted in complex, mind-blowing electronic soundscapes."

THE STROKES Is This It? 2001

(No. 1 in *NME* top 100, No. 2 in *Rolling Stone* top 100, No. 3 in *Billboard* critics' top 20)

The overnight success of indie-rock band The Strokes took them from a dank basement to enormous stardom in a veritable New York fairy tale.

Their urgent angst well reflected the hectic post-9/11 megalopolis and their story was marked by impossible glamour and walks on the wild side, smashing out tunes such as *Hard to Explain* and *Last Nite* which had echoes of towering predecessors like the Stooges and Television.

Britain's *NME* wrote of the album: "If it is a truly great statement of intent, one of the all-too-infrequent calls to arms that guitar music can provide, one of the best and most characterful debut albums of the last 20 years."



ARCADE FIRE Funeral 2004

(*Billboard* critics' No. 1 album of the decade, No. 6 *Rolling Stone* top 100, No. 7 on *NME* top 100)

While the deathly title may repel even the most moody of black-clad teenagers, hit the play button and prepare to be enveloped in a life-affirming swirl of strings, horns and xylophones. But it is far from just a glorious wall of noise played by as many as 15 musicians — the Canadian group's emotional strength struck a resounding chord and embraced loss, love and fragile hopes.

Critics across the world hailed it as truly original, and a tidal wave of copycat acts followed in its wake.



N'SYNC No Strings Attached 2000

(No. 1 selling album of the decade: *Billboard*)

The bubblegum boy band is no longer together, but its 2000 album *No Strings Attached* produced international hits such as *Bye Bye Bye*, *It's Gonna Be Me* and *This I Promise You*.

Hated by the rock critics, the group beat the competition — with more than 10 million copies sold, it remains the biggest-selling album of the decade and now there is always Justin Timberlake to keep fans happy.



EMINEM Marshall Mathers LP 2000

(No. 7 on *Rolling Stone* top 100, *Billboard's* Artist of the Decade)

From murder fantasies to self-mutilation and drug addiction, Eminem, an angry young white man, showed us his dark side on this landmark record and confirmed his place as one of the most creative talents in rap.

The lyrics did not please some of the celebrities he insulted — even his mother has sued him for slander. And while moralists railed at his raw and vulgar lyrics, his lyrical and musical virtuosity are almost unparalleled. He was *Billboard's* artist of the decade just for the number of top 100 hits he has had beating global R 'n' B stars such as Usher and rap rivals like 50 Cent.



JAY-Z The Black Album 2003

(No. 4 on *Rolling Stone* top 100 albums, No. 22 on *NME* top 100, No. 6 on *Billboard* critics' albums of the decade)

Feted as one of the greatest rap albums of all time, the hip-hop superstar produced the perfect mix of radio-friendly fodder and well-chosen nuggets of soul. Vocal samples from all-time greats such as the Doors and Jackson 5 power the tunes to ever greater heights, fuelled by Jay-Z's musical virtuosity that put him up there with pop's greatest tunesmiths.

"I'm the compadre/The Sinatra of my day," he rapped. And not many disagreed. *Rolling Stone* said: "It rounded up a bunch of surefire beats and turned the greatest rapper on Earth loose."



ARCTIC MONKEYS Whatever People Say I Am, That's What I'm Not 2006

(Number four on *NME* top 100, 41 on *Rolling Stone* top 100, 15 on the *Billboard* critics' top 20)

Throw into a bubbling musical cauldron ingredients from some of the greatest British bands of all time — The Beatles, The Kinks, The Smiths — and out of the swirling kaleidoscope of colors explode The Arctic Monkeys.

Rising out of the grim industrial heartland of England, the young stars have a very modern claim to fame — they were one of the first acts to come to the public's attention via the Internet.

Their brand of youthful, urgent punk rock made them an instant sensation with teens and pop connoisseurs alike. And their talents as tunesmiths of the first order had the critics cooing with delight.



BOB DYLAN Modern Times 2006

(No. 8 on *Rolling Stone* top 100)

Dylan's snarl is back to its old best and with *Love and Theft* from 2001 he produced two of the most acclaimed albums of the decade. The 10 songs drip with the growl of a drifting cowboy and *Modern Times* sounds like it was cut by the guitar-toting rebel many thought had slipped irretrievably out of reach 20 years earlier.

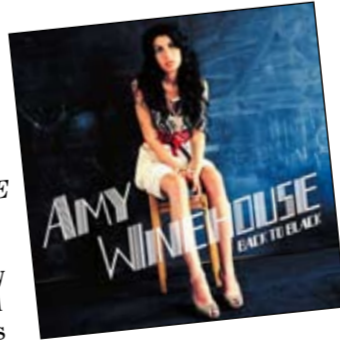
Heartfelt lyrics pour out over painful blues and beautiful folk, fusing together perfectly. "Almost every song retraces the American journey from the country to the city, when folkways were giving way to modern times. The mood is America on the brink — of mechanization, of war, of domestic tranquility, of fulfilling its promise and of selling its dreams one by one for cash on the barrelhead," wrote *Rolling Stone*.



AMY WINEHOUSE Back to Black 2007

(No. 5 in *Billboard* critics' top 20, No. 19 in *Rolling Stone* top 100, No. 27 in *NME* top 100)

With her beehive hairdo, rasping voice and unhealthy relationship with drugs and alcohol, it was hard to miss Amy Winehouse on the radio or in newspapers in 2007. The glorious soul revival album won five prizes at the 50th Annual Grammy Awards equaling the record set by Lauryn Hill, Alicia Keys, Norah Jones, Beyoncé, and Alison Krauss for top women artists. There are not many women among the top critics' lists, and it looks uncertain whether Winehouse will bounce back from her troubles. "It's hard to recall, before the tabloid barking drowned out all else, how fresh this sounded — how funny, hip, instantly classic," said *Rolling Stone*.



WHITE STRIPES Elephant 2003

(No. 5 in *Rolling Stone* top 100, No. 18 in *NME* top 100, No. 8 in *Billboard* critics' top 20)

The US rock duo's first release on a major label saw them move away from the minimalist guitar and drums roots to a thumping rock, which elevated them to arena stars.

Jack and Meg White tell us the story of love and life's vicious ups and downs, and the tale swings from the intimate, as in *You've Got Her in Your Pocket*, to desperate struggles to hold it together in *The Hardest Button to Button*.

Max Dax, editor-in-chief of German music magazine *Spec*, picked them for his top 10 of the last decade, writing: "Jack and Meg White almost single-handedly rescued punk rock from insignificance."

