

The 50 Best Shoegaze Albums of All Time

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- 4AD
- [Blonde Redhead](#)

23

2007

30

By 2007, the New York trio [Blonde Redhead](#) had been celebrated for over a decade as cerebral art-rockers, cult favorites of their lane; the upending of their tight, neurotic structures on [23](#) was a release of reigns. The group's seventh (and first self-produced) album, it's a thrilling spread that feels spontaneous and vigorous. Simone and Amedeo Pace offer a deep gravity in sprawling, warm guitars than pulse and blush, piano lines that puncture, and tinny hi-hat percussion that conveys only a mote of passing time. Singer Kazu Makino channels the glum wonderment of classic shoegaze in the title track, sighing with featherweight elegance, "23 seconds, all things we love will die/23 magic, if you can change your life," while Amedeo Pace's distorted vocals on "Publisher" edge ever-closer to bluesy yelps over draping, mathy guitars and subtle electronic fuzz. It's artful in its lack of borders. —Stacey Anderson



Listen: [Blonde Redhead: "23"](#)

- Creation
- Def American
- [Medicine](#)

Shot Forth Self Living

1992

29

[Medicine](#) hail from sunny Los Angeles, not exactly a hub for shoegazers. But what makes this trio an indelible part of "the scene that celebrates itself," across a pond and then a continent, is the roaring, fuzz-laden music of their debut, [Shot Forth Self Living](#). The album's resonant centerpiece, a chugging dirge cheekily named "A Short Happy Life," features vocalist Beth Thompson crooning, "If you smile now, I just might melt" and evoking images of "honey sliding across the floor." Beneath the tinnitus-inducing feedback, Medicine often fixate on love's slow fade, that familiar theme of many shoegazing songs, balancing it with less likely doses of off-kilter instrumentation and effects (banjo, a ham radio, the [hurdy-gurdy](#)). [Rick Rubin](#)'s label released it in America,



and it was a heady, if under-embraced, boost to the standard shoegaze formula. –Paula Mejia

Listen: [Medicine: “A Short Happy Life”](#)

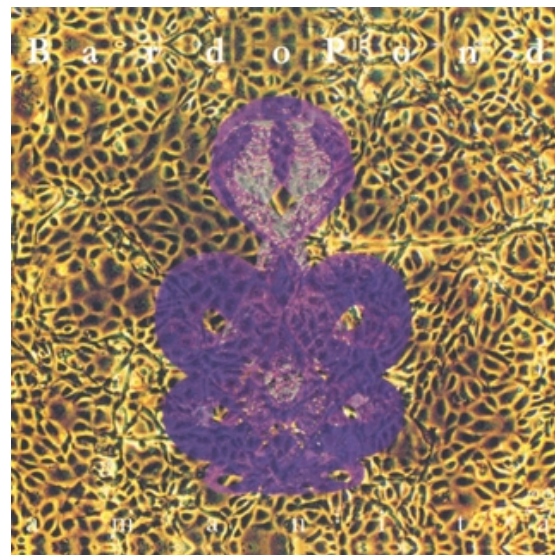
- Matador
- [Bardo Pond](#)

Amanita

1996

28

On *Amanita*—named for the bright red, white-speckled mushrooms that look like they’d provide great trips—[Bardo Pond](#) find the heart in fuzz. Guitarists and brothers Michael and John Gibbons uncoil blasted-out lines that instinctively channel what the 1960s psychedelic godfathers 13th Floor Elevators called “the third voice.” Here, Bardo Pond find their power in churning jam structures, the kind that suggest someone left [Neil Young](#) and [Crazy Horse](#) in a barn and returned a few days later to find them still going, their jangle pleasantly warped.



Bardo Pond’s third album and debut on Matador Records, *Amanita* provides a (relatively) hi-fi entry point for the band’s massive and continuous output. The third voice emerges almost literally throughout in a mixed-for-mindblows swirl of near-pop anthems (“Sometimes Words”) and silver, flute-lined zone portals (“The High Frequency”). Shoegazers, perhaps, by a dint of looking for the nearest local hallucination, not all of the Philadelphia band’s psychedelic advice is necessarily good wisdom for trippers. And don’t eat the red, speckled mushrooms. –Jesse Jarnow

Listen: [Bardo Pond: “The High Frequency”](#)

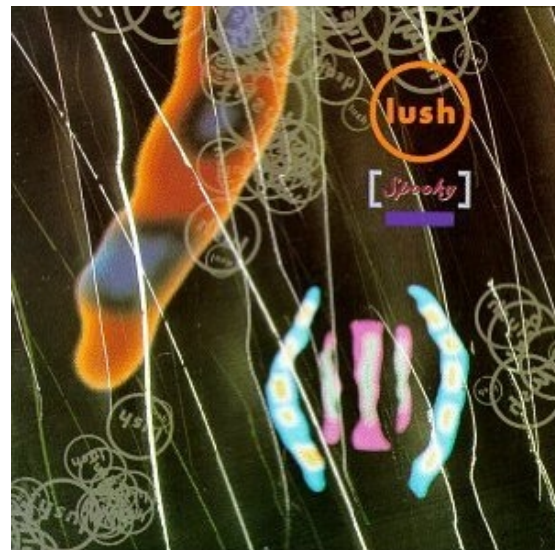
- 4AD
- [Lush](#)

Spooky

1992

27

Shortly after the release of their debut album, *Spooky*, [Lush](#) were invited to play Lollapalooza’s mainstage by [Perry Farrell](#) himself. It helped the London quartet break through stateside, but was still a less-than-likely festival booking—because, unlike other rock records of the early 1990s, *Spooky* doesn’t rely on blistering noise to make its points. Its brilliant intricacies remain best appreciated alone, through headphones, and preferably in a room where long shadows creep onto the walls. Each element in the mix—from the caffeinated



basslines in “For Love” to the reverbed guitars in “Fantasy”—is layered on thickly yet proportionately. Its lyrical themes, which range from hazy dreams to long-lost friends, are helmed adroitly by co-vocalists and guitarists Emma Anderson and Miki Berenyi—together, they set a template for the kind of wistful musings that shoegaze became known for. Their incantations are only frightening in how wonderful they are. —Paula Mejia

Listen: [Lush: “For Love”](#)

- [Drag City](#)
- [Domino](#)
- [Flying Saucer Attack](#)

Further

1994

26

In the early '90s, the Bristol, England shop Revolver Records served as an informal hub for bands who were picking up where [Loveless](#) left off. Foremost in this loose scene were [Flying Saucer Attack](#); on their early 7” singles, the duo of Dave Pearce and Rachel Brook explored a sound that broadened the immersive guitar whorls of traditional shoegaze to encompass elements of krautrock and British folk. It was a style neatly summed up by the alternate title listed on FSA’s 1993 self-titled album: “rural psychedelia.”



[Further](#), FSA’s 1995 Domino debut, best encapsulates their approach, with feedback squalls, fingerpicked lullabies, and throbbing low-end falling equally into place in a gorgeous, heavily textured expanse. It isn’t hard to hear links to [Further](#) in an impressively varied array of acts, from the misty electronics of [Boards of Canada](#) to the avant-folk of [Richard Youngs](#), from the skyscraping interludes of early [Deerhunter](#) to the abstracted intimacy of [Grouper](#). FSA continued to refine their sound on later albums, despite Brook’s mid-'90s departure, and last year, Pearce returned with the first FSA album in 15 years, [Instrumentals 2015](#). Still, [Further](#) remains their apex. —Marc Hogan

Listen: [Flying Saucer Attack: “Still Point”](#)

- [Creation](#)

- [The Boo Radleys](#)

Giant Steps

1993

25

The Boo Radleys' songwriter/guitarist, [Martin Carr](#), named his band's 1993 album after [John Coltrane's](#) 1959 LP, but *Giant Steps* also is a winking acknowledgment of another kind: He's the first to know that the Liverpool quartet has taken a huge leap forward. Although they hardly renounce the thunderous swirl and delicate suspension of 1992's *Everything's Alright Forever*, the Boo Radleys treat that candied rush as an absorbed language, with Carr choosing to pursue a grand vision that unifies psychedelia, British guitar-pop, jazz, and dub. Part of the appeal of *Giant Steps* is that the Boo Radleys' enthusiasm leads them to attempt fusions that would scare away other bands: Witness "Lazarus," which begins with an elastic reggae beat before becoming consumed by sheets of guitars, wispy harmonies, and stabs of brass. "Lazarus" is essentially *Giant Steps* in microcosm, but the album gains strength through its own untrammelled ambition. At the dawn of britpop, the Boo Radleys chose expanding consciousness over provincial patriotism, and the results are still majestic. —Stephen Thomas Erlewine



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Listen: [The Boo Radleys: "Lazarus"](#)

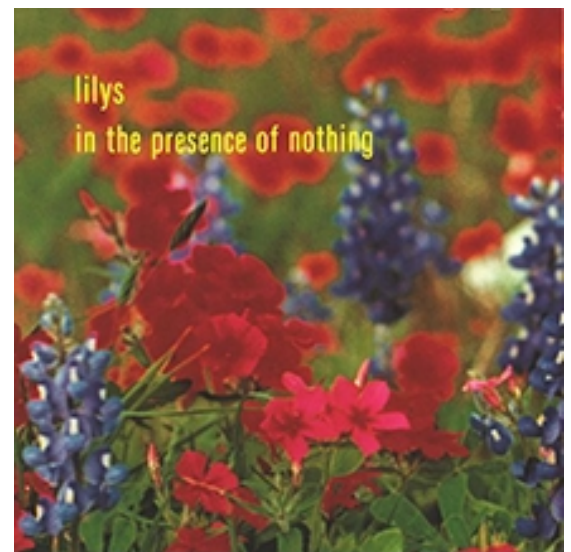
- [Slumberland](#)
- [Lilys](#)

In the Presence of Nothing

1992

24

In their earliest years, [the Lilys](#) never could disguise their debt to [My Bloody Valentine](#). *In the Presence of Nothing*—a stellar shoegaze title that conveys a giant, shimmering abyss but was intended as a jab at [Velvet Crush's](#) debut *In the Presence of Greatness*—opens with "There's No Such Thing as Black Orchids," five minutes of oceanic waves of drone that consciously conjure memories of [Loveless](#).



Though the Lilys never quite managed to mimic the crushing volume of [Kevin Shields](#) and co., that subtlety was to their benefit. Kurt Heasley and Archie Moore's guitars intertwine, the punchy rhythms fighting with the fuzz, all providing a muscular bed for the band's whispered, circular melodies. Sometimes, the Lilys descend into moments of stillness, but they're never dull: They provides a necessary contrast to the thick, urgent beauty that drives this debut. Ultimately, it's not the similarities to My Bloody Valentine that are the great takeaway from *In the Presence of Nothing*: It's the sense of tarnished sweetness that lingers. —Stephen Thomas Erlewine

Listen: [The Lilys: "There's No Such Thing as Black Orchids"](#)

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- Fontana
 - [Catherine Wheel](#)

Ferment

1992

23

[Catherine Wheel](#) were the black sheep of the shoegaze family. They came from Great Yarmouth, a depressed and depressing town on the English coast with little in the way of musical heritage; their lead singer, Rob Dickinson, was a cousin to [Iron Maiden](#)'s Bruce Dickinson; and their four members seemed slightly older than their peers, with drummer Neil Sims having worked on an oil rig before the band took off. Musically, too, Catherine Wheel were different: While they embraced the swirling, distorted guitars and muttered vocals of shoegaze, their sound edged towards straight-up riff-rock at times, with nothing of [My Bloody Valentine](#)'s deviant experimentalism or [Slowdive](#)'s feathery beauty. What Catherine Wheel did have in abundance were goosebump-raising, brilliant songs that piled earworm choruses upon nagging guitar lines and lyrics that spoke to a generation of awkward adolescents ("I Want to Touch You," "She's My Friend," "Shallow"). A good half of the songs on *Ferment*, their debut, are enduring shoegaze-disco classics, while "Black Metallic," in its full seven-minute glory, makes a strong claim to being the genre's "Stairway to Heaven." —Ben Cardew



Listen: [Catherine Wheel: "Black Metallic"](#)

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- Goom
 - [M83](#)

Dead Cities, Red Seas & Lost Ghosts

2003

22

Dead Cities, Red Seas & Lost Ghosts was [M83](#)'s first international success, but certainly not the last. Yet many of the new listeners gained from the later releases *Hurry Up, We're Dreaming* and *Before the Dawn Heals Us* would probably find M83 unrecognizable here. On *Dead Cities*, Anthony Gonzalez and the since-departed member [Nicolas Fromageau](#) manage the most original take on shoegaze in years: It rings like the result of a year spent playing Nintendo while listening to Creation Records' catalog, maintaining the overwhelming grandeur while ditching the guitars for 8-bit effects, sawtooth synths, and ringtone drum rolls.



Dead Cities has an awkward place in M83's lineage now; it's been absent from their live sets for years, where even their pedestrian self-titled debut gets its due. Still, present-day M83 can be heard in it. The same emotional components of *Dead Cities* that made it so confounding to shoegaze purists—that earnest optimism bundled with a

deep respect for kitschy childhood nostalgia—make the band’s through line abundantly clear. –Ian Cohen

Listen: [M83: “Unrecorded”](#)

- [4AD](#)
- [Pale Saints](#)

The Comforts of Madness

1990

21

Caught between the full torrent of noise that followed [Loveless](#) and the earliest glimmers of dream-pop, Pale Saints never achieved the fame accorded to some of their peers. But the abundant idiosyncrasies on their debut, *The Comforts of Madness*, only sound better with age. It trades upon the hazy harmonies of [Cocteau Twins](#)—not for nothing was this the first album 4AD released in the '90s—while also suggesting the perpetual swirl of shoegaze and adhering to the indie-pop pioneered by graduates of [C-86](#).



A few of the songs on *The Comforts of Madness* could be placed comfortably alongside those from [the La's](#), another 1990 debut of note, but Pale Saints never cast their gaze back. There’s a restless urgency here, particularly when the volume swells and the rhythms intensify. That energy not only keeps *The Comforts of Madness* vital, it emphasizes Pale Saints’ inventiveness, how they channeled softness and rage into something distinctive. –Stephen Thomas Erlewine

Listen: [Pale Saints: “Sea of Sound”](#)