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12 new left-leaning albums worth a listen

Tuesday, October 14, 2014

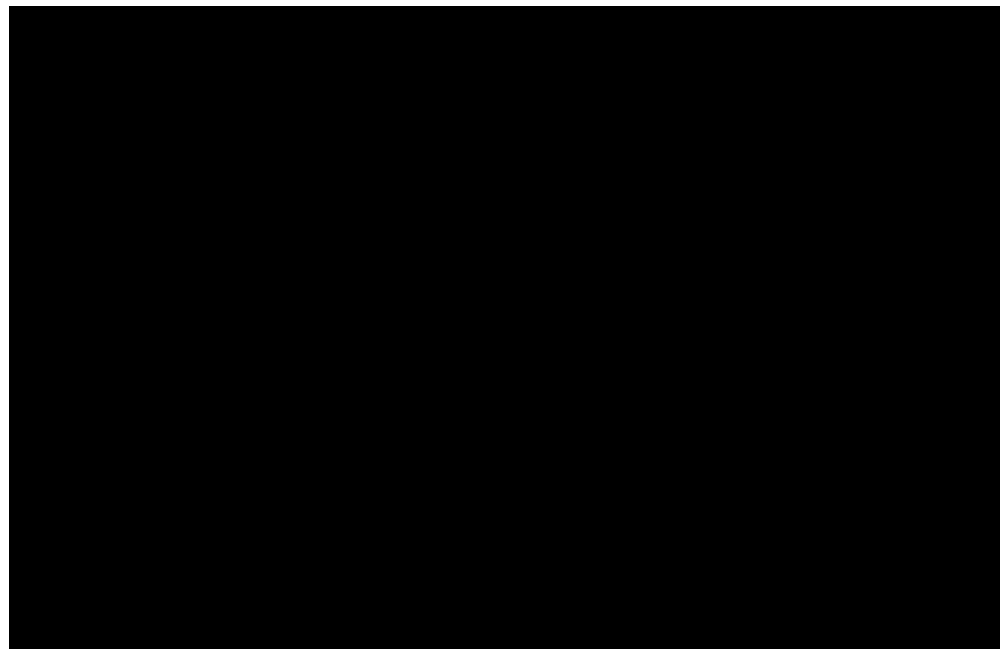
By [Mat Ward](#)

Here's this month's radical record roundup, from Irish rock to Australian pop. What album, or albums, would you suggest? Comment below, on [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#).

1. In a month when Bob Geldof urged the Scottish to vote against independence and U2 held a desperate-looking [free album launch](#) with fellow tax dodgers Apple, it was a relief to see a new album from dissenting Irish rockers **Black 47**. Their new compilation, *Rise Up*, is a welcome reminder that there are plenty of Irish musicians that don't suck up to the establishment. The New York City-based band are named after a traditional term for the summer of 1847, the worst year of the Great Irish Famine. *Rise Up* blasts through the past 25 years of their best political songs, from "Downtown Baghdad Blues" to the irrepressibly infectious "San Patricio Brigade" and new song "US of A 2014". Sadly it also marks the end of their quarter-century long existence. But it's amazing they lasted that long, considering their history of tragedies, near-manslaughters and British record labels who refused to promote them. <http://bit.ly/1tytAZ7>



With *Rise Up*, Black 47 go out with a bang.



2. Western liberals have long held up Christine Lagarde as some sort of paragon of glass ceiling feminism. So they may have choked on their cornflakes on seeing the recent news that French authorities had formally opened a negligence investigation into Lagarde, head of the International Monetary Fund. The news would have come as less of a surprise in the global south, where the harsh realities of the IMF are a far cry from the benign image projected by the Western corporate media. **Seun Kuti's** song "IMF", which asserts that the acronym actually stands for "International Mother Fucker", may not be to everyone's taste. But there's little doubt it accurately sums up the anger felt by those who are at the sharp end of the fund's policies. It's found on his latest album, *A Long Way To The Beginning*, which reconfirms that he is well shod to follow in the footsteps of his father, the legendary political afrobeat pioneer Fela Kuti. <http://bit.ly/1vMx3pE>

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With housing and utility costs ridiculously high, budget cuts that help the rich but hurt the rest and real wages falling, it is hardly a surprise. But as rogue US "zillionaire" Nick Hanauer joked: "The thing about us businesspeople is that we love our customers rich and our employees poor."

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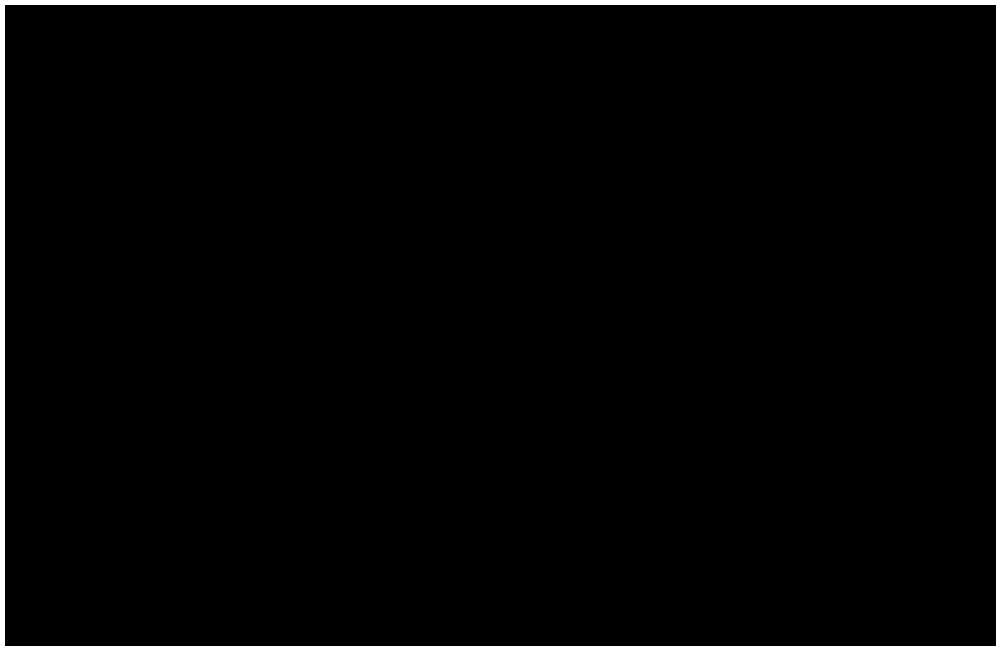
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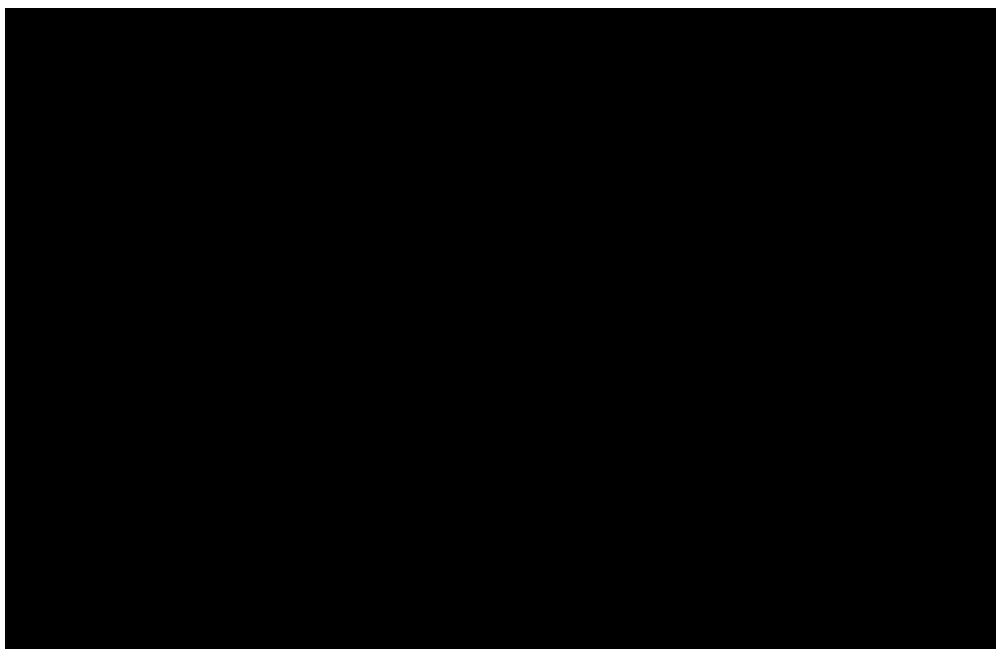
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3. Another musician more than qualified to follow in his father's footsteps is **Frank Yamma**, who has just released his new album, *Uncle*. Frank's father, Isaac Yamma, pioneered singing in language with the Pitjantjatjara Country Band. Frank, who speaks five languages, continues that tradition on *Uncle*, a far more upbeat affair than his previous album, the harrowing *Countryman*. Frank has had his fair share of troubles, from homelessness to alcoholism, but has also had a prolific and successful career. With *Uncle*, it sounds like he is really starting to enjoy himself again. Although he still touches on painful subject material, such as the family feuding on "One Lonely Night" and feelings of loss on "A Black Man's Crying", he also includes celebrations of life, like the unbridled love song "You And Me". <http://bit.ly/1D48KYC>



4. Released on the same day and the same record label as Frank Yamma's *Uncle* was **Radical Son's** new album, *Cause 'N Affect*. But the similarities don't end there. The album also features language prominently, kicking off in strong voice with well-known Dharug language teacher - and sometime *Redfern Now* actor - Richard Green. Radical Son is well-known for his cameo appearances with hip-hop artists and is something of a chameleon, turning from smooth soulster to explosive emcee at the drop of a hat. The father-of-eight spent much of his early life in solitary confinement in some of Australia's toughest jails for beating up prison guards. But the Kamilaroi-Tongan's power is all restrained like a well coiled spring on this album, much of it sounding like butter wouldn't melt. <http://bit.ly/11dzrfl>

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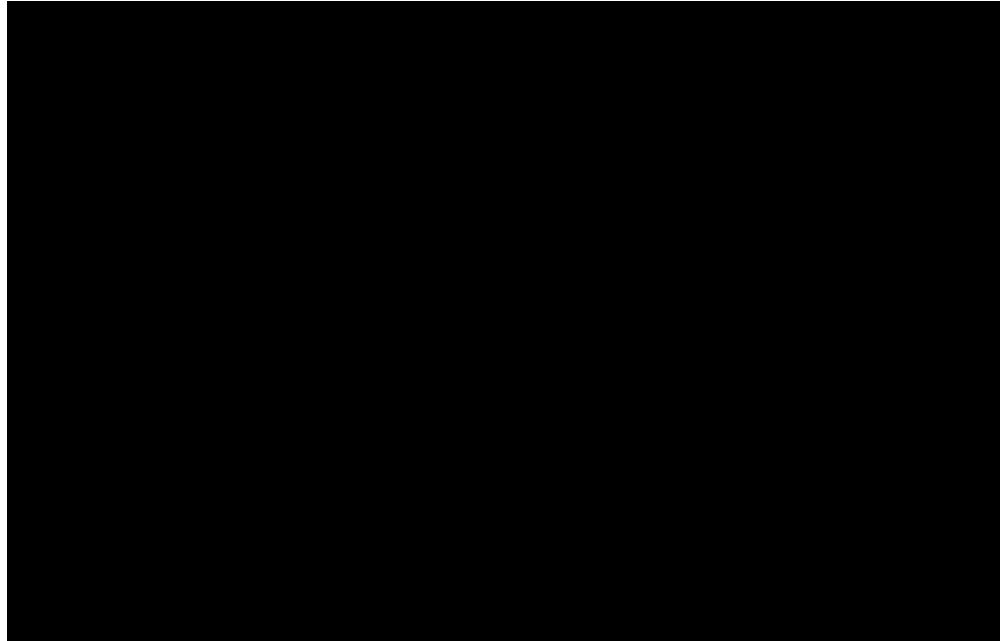
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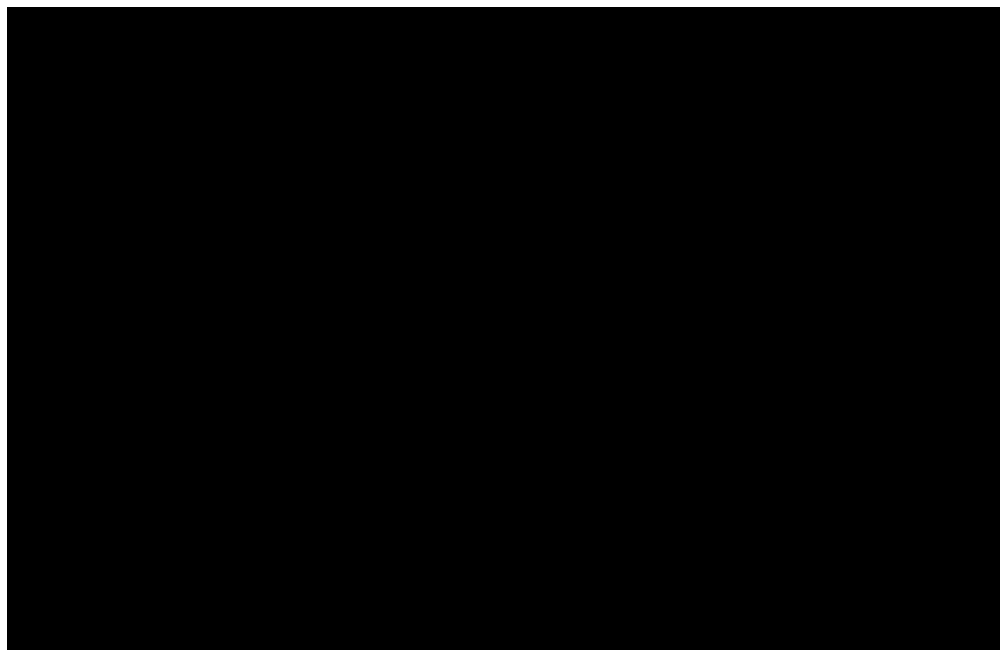


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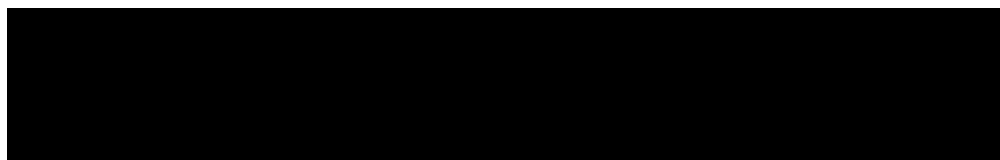




5. Political electronic music acts are as rare as robot's teeth. Therefore, disaffected dance music denizens from Down Under may be delighted to discover that one of the best - if not THE best - hails from Melbourne. The stupendous sonic sculptures that fling out of the speakers from **Sirus**'s latest album, *Broken Hearts Corporate Minds*, show that although dubstep's time may have passed, there's no denying the genre's timeless power. Most political electronic music acts make statements only through the song titles. But Sirus go two steps further. They scatter satirical samples throughout - *Democracy Now*'s Amy Goodman never sounded so cool. And they add some biting lead lyrics that sound like Andy Serkis's Gollum leapt out of his lair and grabbed hold of a mike and FX pedal. <http://bit.ly/1BGgBsJ>

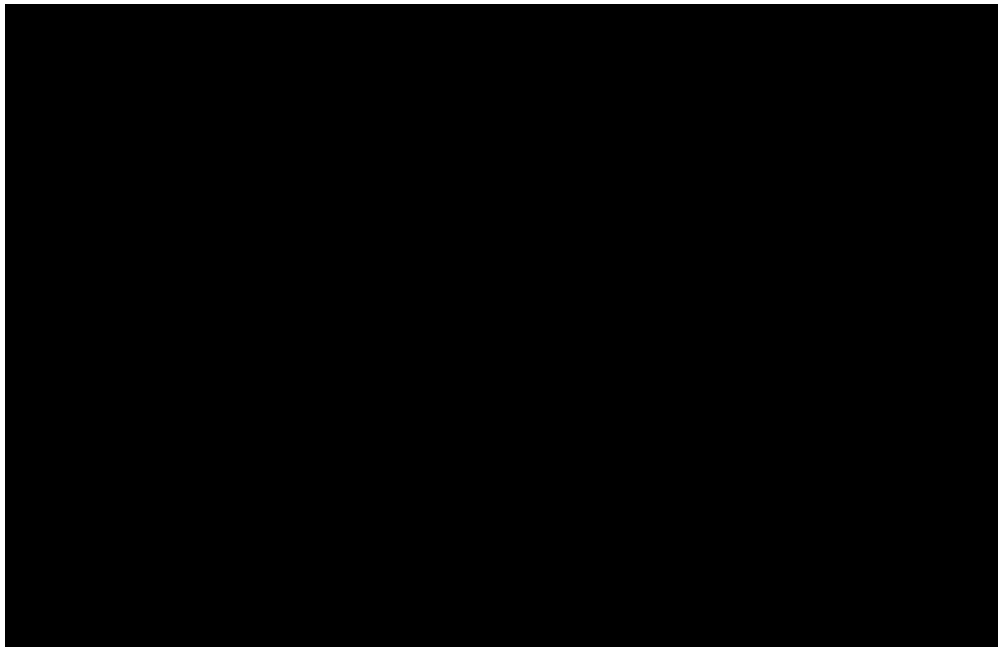


6. Dutch-based multi-instrumentalists **Omnia** have returned with another album of environmentally-conscious songs. *Earth Warrior*, they say, is "all about the Living Earth and the fight against her destruction by humanity". The self-described "Crazy-Pagan Nature-Shamans" have built a huge following in Europe through festival-friendly live shows which make use of indigenous instruments from all over the world. On the album, drummer Rob works up some jaw-dropping rhythms with Daphyd on the didgeribone, an instrument he learnt through its creator, Charlie McMahon of Midnight Oil fame. "Mutant Monkey" also returns to band leader Steve's recurring theme that, "humans are just spoiled naked space-monkeys with delusions of grandeur who are going to destroy the world they live in due to their in-built stupidity and the fact that they are obviously not natural to this world". <http://bit.ly/1te6IUz>

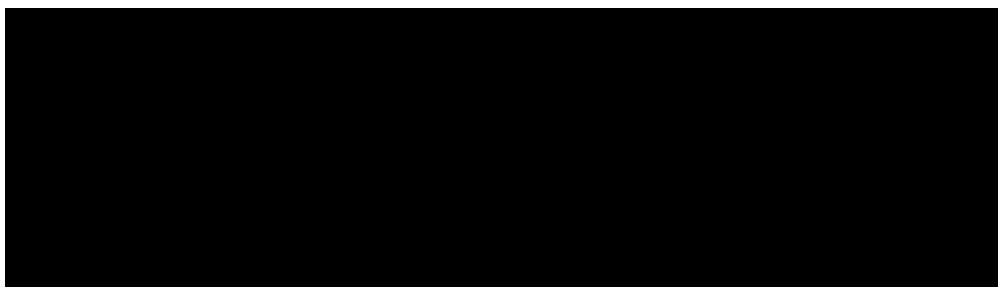




7. Surely one of the fastest ska acts in the world, **Bruce Lee Band** pack more of a punch than a kung fu kick to the cahunas. *Everything Will be Alright, My Friend* is the first album in 10 years by the punk supergroup headed by California-based Asian Man Records boss Mike Park. Over the truly impressive, breakneck-speed reggae jams, Park ruminates on racism, capitalism and the state of the world's political and eco systems. The singalong "Generations", featuring Jesse Michaels on guest vocals, asks: "What will we say to the generations that want to know why the world has gone? We saw the problem, so who can blame them? No-one told them they were wrong. What are we gonna say - except that we did nothing?" Park also records children's albums - approved by his own kids - so if you're seeking something worthier than the Wiggles, look no further. <http://bit.ly/1vOdheq>

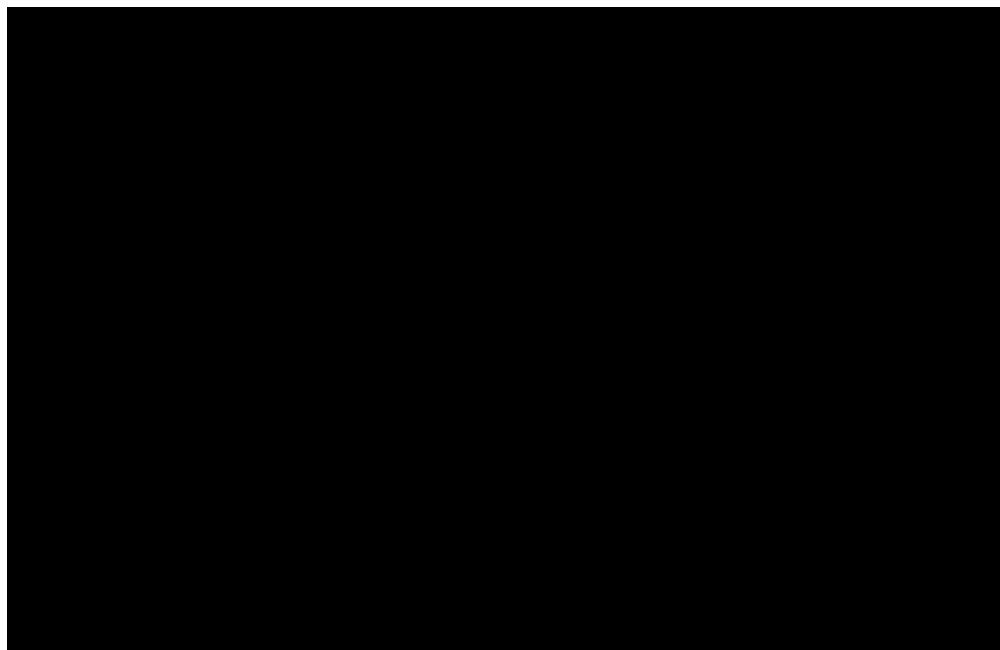


8. On their album *Black Bagged*, **Death Of An Era** show they're not your average metal band - sonically or politically. Sonically, they blend sweeping cinematic orchestration over the top of evil snatches of heavy guitar and drums that sound more like bursts of rapid machine gun fire. Politically, they ditch metal's fixation with sex and satan for the horrors of politics. When vocalist Daniel Simpson ditches the effects, his throaty roar becomes a melodic cadence departing nuggets of wisdom, from state terror to media propaganda and environmental destruction. As they put it on "Big Brother": "We're overcome by a blinding darkness. Our leadership's a ghost. Insidiously it takes our freedoms, one by one. Hot off the printing presses, your propaganda. Swallow it down with your morning coffee. Digest the news in the American way. God bless the motherfucking USA." Not bad for a band whose average age is 20. <http://on.fb.me/1ndDYso>

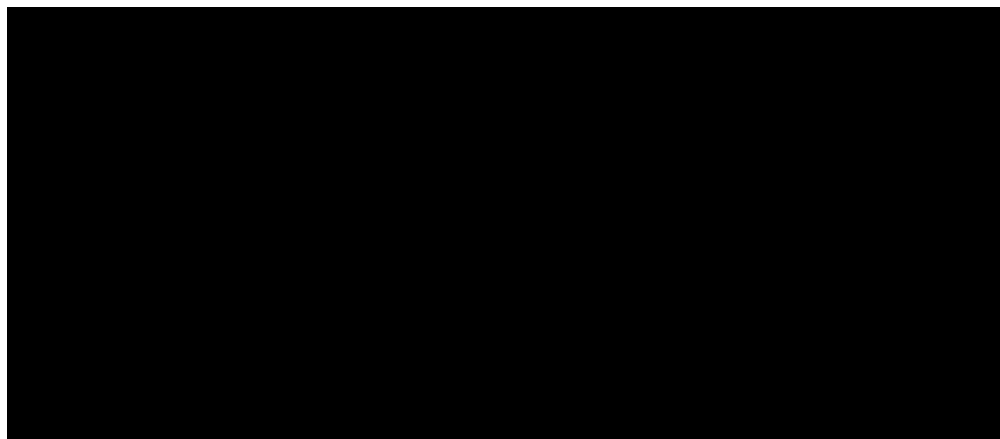





9. Found-sound soundclash specialist **Filastine** has a new mini-album out, *Aphasia*. Released as a free download at the same time was a "sound swarm" he made for an exhibition on street protests, held by London's V&A Museum. The sound swarm was played from loudspeakers on a "Bike Bloc" - a construction made from discarded bicycles welded into a "machine of creative resistance", the likes of which first appeared at the 2009 climate protests in Copenhagen. An accompanying booklet found on the museum's website shows how to build your own. Filastine is used to such constructions, performing from a shopping trolley on stage for his live act, which he is bringing back Down Under early in the new year. Commenting on the upcoming gigs, he said: "Good news - we'll be heading to Australia in January. Bad news - by the time we get there it might be one giant militarized coal mine." <http://bit.ly/1yioFmZ>

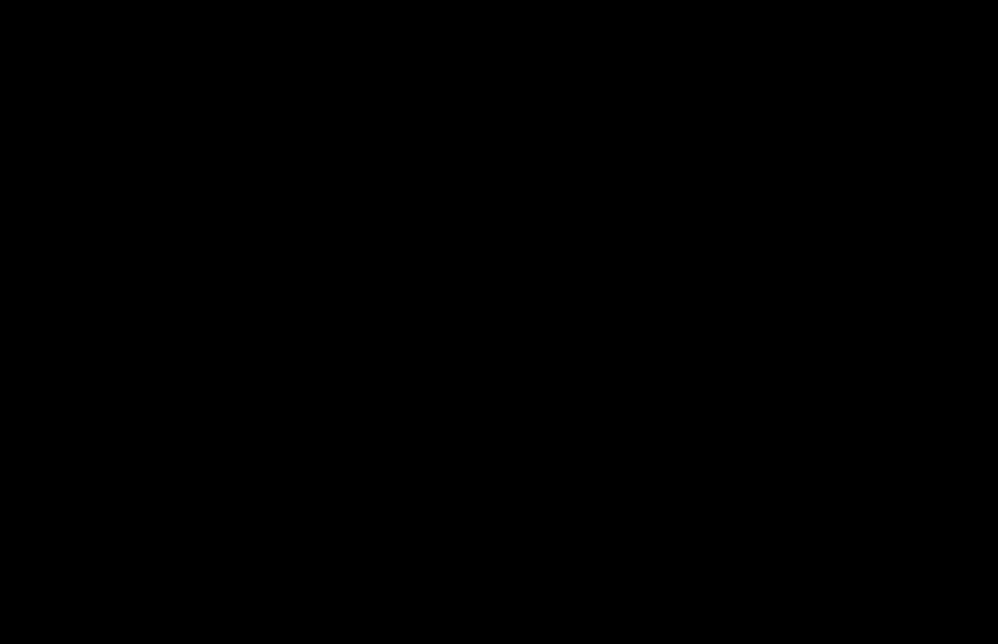


10. Byron Bay's metalcore maestros **In Hearts Wake** have returned with more heavy and heartfelt eco anthems. The standout track on *Earthwalker* is the pleading "Sacred", which laments: "When the brightest city has fallen and the last animal is diseased, starving children will inherit a wasteland. What then has money achieved? We cannot have infinite economic growth on a finite planet." Likewise, "Mother" adds: "When the Earth in your bones returns to the ground, perhaps then you will remember that this land does not belong to you, it is you who belong to this land." The landscape around Byron Bay almost serves as another member of the band, as seen in their lush and earthy videos. <http://bit.ly/1rcfu3F>





11. New York hardcore veterans **Sick Of It All** are back after a four-year hiatus with a powerful new album. Packing in elements of metal, punk and the Oi! movement, *Last Act Of Defiance* has been hailed by critics as some of the best work in their three-decade career. It bristles with the kind of song titles and lyrics that show how far the rest of the genre has veered off track in recent years. The 14 tracks reference everything from the dehumanising aspects of technology and media to the delayed release of classified government information and freedoms being taken away by the police state. Towering anthem "DNC" declares: "I'll always be a threat, to an unjust government. We should always be a threat to the highest power. We are born free, yearning for peace, which isn't the way we're headed. It's all about total control." <http://bit.ly/1oEjIKI>



12. **Missy Higgins'** politics have always been far more radical than her music. So it's perhaps not surprising that the book of essays she wrote to accompany her latest album, *Oz*, has been hailed as far more credible than the music - a collection of covers of Australian classics that some critics say she has flattened. The choices are commendable enough, from Slim Dusty's "Biggest Disappointment" and Warumpi Band's "Blackfella/Whitefella" to her duet with Amanda Palmer on Paul Kelly's "Before Too Long". Even if her sound is a little tame for some tastes, it's great that someone so mainstream is fighting in the left's corner, considering that she champions everything from LGBTQ awareness and Indigenous rights to environmental battles in the Kimberley. <http://bit.ly/1vHzEC5>

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