

Mixmasters Round 16

Sweet Sixteen - compiled by Mixmaster Steven Reule

And off we go on another round. Sure, the rounds have gotten slower but everything gets slower with age. And, like a fine wine, things get better too. Who would have thought we'd still be doing this and loving it after all these years?

This time is round sixteen, so I called my mix "Sweet Sixteen". And sweet it is, since my mix is loaded with explosively, fantastically, wonderfully good tunes. This time I used all great songs to make your scoring easy! Seriously, though, I started out as I always do, with the intent of using all artists new to Mixmasters. And I nearly succeeded, but at some point I decided to use three artists that were previously used. Don't worry, I still included a bunch of artists that haven't been used before. I've continued my practice of using more than one song by many of the artists, because I feel that you can't really get the true feel of an artist from one song. So you will see multiple songs by some artists. This is for your own good and you will no doubt thank me for it someday. Well, maybe.

And that brings me to the bonus disc. I have included (for free!) a bonus disc with more songs by the same artists. So if there are artists you are interested in, this will give you more to go by. Of course, you don't need to rate the bonus disc. If you want to give me your opinions, that would be great, but it's not necessary. Sharp-eyed Mixmasters will notice a group on the bonus disc that is not on the "real" disc. They barely missed the cut, so I let them be on the bonus disc.

And again this round I am going for the coveted "best packaging" award. Does that translate into better scores for the songs? Yes, no, probably, whatever. I just hope you enjoy the mix and find it good enough to play over and over. If not, it makes a great Frisbee...

The songs

INGRID MICHAELSON: Die Alone

Album: Girls And Boys (2007)

"You make me think that maybe I won't die alone"

I love the way this starts, that's one of the reasons it's the first song on the mix. I saw her in 2008 at the Bumbershoot Festival in Seattle (www.bumbershoot.org) and was captivated by her straightforward and innocent charm and her infectious song-writing. There are a bunch of songs on this mix by her, spread over my two CDs this round. This one is a novel twist on a love song. I love it. The song, the voice, the writing, it's a great pop song.

DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE: Crooked Teeth

Album: Plans (2005)

"You're so cute when you're slurring your speech"

OK, you got me. I used this artist before. But the songs I used before were from a very early album and DCFC have refined and mastered their sound now. This album, from a couple years ago, has become one of my favorite albums. It's a nearly perfect pop masterpiece, with outstanding lyrics (pay attention) and catchy melodies. Wonderful.

KATE NASH: Foundations

Album: Made of Bricks (2007)

"My fingertips are holding on to the cracks in our foundation"

I got this as a cardboard-sleeve promo so I have no idea about who plays on it or anything. But I am truly smitten by her ultra-British delivery and her attitude. Plus, the song has some great hooks. If you like her songs on my mix, get the CD.

WEEZER: Beverly Hills

Album: Make Believe (2005)

"My fashion sense is a little wack"

Amazingly, Weezer has not been used in Mixmasters before. Really? Well, probably everyone has heard this song before but everytime I hear it I still think it's great, so maybe you won't mind the familiarity either.

MARIE DIGBY: Umbrella

Album: Unfold (2008)

"When the sun shines we shine together"

This is a remake of the Rhianna mega-hit, but for me this version is way better. I'd rather hear the straightforward deliver than the R&B warbling of the original. This seems so much more honest and direct.

YEAH YEAH YEAHS: Phenomena

Album: Show Your Bones (2008)

"You're something like a phenomena"

I'll be seeing this band at this year's Bumbershoot Festival in about 5 weeks or so, and I'm really looking forward to it. Her voice is just great. And the songs are interesting too, not really sounding like anyone else.

AMY MACDONALD: For Something More

Album: This is the Life (2007)

"I'm your best friend every day, but I wish for something more"

I'd never heard of this woman, but apparently she's sold a bunch of albums in other parts of the world. This album is very likeable and she may be poised for bigger and better things. I like her voice and accent and the songs are nice too.

MAVIS STAPLES: Interesting

Album: Time Waits For No One (1989)

"Like a bad politician you walked into the room"

Mavis was one of the Staples Singers long ago, but has made a slew of solo recordings too. A couple of them had heavy involvement from Prince, starting with this one. You can hear his influence all through the track. It's a funk-fest and Mavis has the perfect voice for that. The Princely guitar keeps the groove going and keeps it, well, interesting.

JACK'S MANNEQUIN: Drop Out – The So Unknown

Album: The Glass Passenger (2008)

"I'll give you this confession, I am taking you with me, where we can contemplate our chemistry"

I know this band was used before, but only a little and that was from an earlier album. Since the latest album came out, I've been playing it over and over. It's such a great mix of pop, rock, and emo, with lyrics beyond most pop music. These guys should be all over

the radio, in a fairer world anyway. When I am King things will be different. Anyway, buy this album. It gets better and better the more you listen to it.

INGRID MICHAELSON: The Hat

Album: Girls and Boys (2007)

"It was my first one and it was too small, it didn't fit you at all, but you wore it just the same"

She has this knack for writing songs about relationships that are unique and clever. And they are catchy so they reel you in. I love her charmingly innocent sound. This is so good. And you may have heard the chorus in a commercial, but don't hold that against her. That's how wonderfully infectious her songs are!

DUFFY: Mercy

Album: Rockferry (2008)

"I don't know what you do but you do it well"

You have probably heard this one a million times too, but if Amy Winehouse can make it to Mixmasters, then Duffy can too. It's a huge radio hit but I still like it every time I hear it. This blue-eyed soul is fun and she pulls it off. I like this album a lot better than Amy's, check it out. And be sure to hear the "talk/rap" in the background in the middle. Listen with headphones.

THE TING TINGS: Shut Up And Let Me Go

Album: We Started Nothing (2008)

"I ain't freakin', I ain't fakin' this, shut up and let me go!"

Isn't this a great beat and a cool vocal? I love her voice and delivery. This song got some airplay too, so you might have heard it. Either way, buy their CD, it's a fresh interesting sound. Love that voice too.

KATE NASH: Mouthwash

Album: Made of Bricks (2007)

"I'm saying "uh-oh" on a Friday night"

More British talk-singing and another catchy song. As I said, her voice is not typical for a singer-songwriter, but the sarcasm, attitude, and cleverness come through strong. It's not about a perfect voice, it's about being unique and witty and with great hooks. But I like the voice too. And the song bounces and rocks.

SICK OF SARAH: Not Listening

Album: Sick of Sarah (2008)

"You know you're crazy and you're not quite sane"

I'd never heard of this band and I didn't love everything on their CD, but I did really like some of the songs, especially this one. It's a fast-paced pop-rocker with some attitude. It chugs along without faltering and that chorus is killer too.

THE PRETENDERS: Love's A Mystery

Album: Break Up The Concrete (2008)

"If seeing is believing, then love's a mystery"

Who said country couldn't be cool? Well, maybe it was me, I don't remember. But anything Chrissie Hynde sings has her toughness and honesty, no matter what the style of song is. This is a nice ballad and if it leans a little toward country, well, I won't hold that against it. I've loved her voice and music for about thirty years now. The Pretenders are still putting out new music every now and then, not just coasting on their glory hits as

so many bands do. This latest album is quite good and they are still doing fresh new music.

INGRID MICHAELSON: The Way I Am

Album: Girls and Boys (2007)

“If you were falling, then I would catch you....”

You might have heard this one, it was used in a commercial and was on the radio a bit too. It’s such a simple and straightforward love song, but not sappy and dumb, just honest. And the melody and hand-claps are just irresistible. Nice background vocals too. Sweet.

JACK’S MANNEQUIN: Hammers And Strings (A Lullaby)

Album: The Glass Passenger (2008)

“Andy, the doctor’s prescribed me the pills. But I know I’m not crazy, I just lost my will. So why am I taking them still? I need something to believe in...”

I really like this album and I really like his voice. It’s great for this emo-pop. This is a great rock ballad, with a chorus that gets in your head and doesn’t leave. Yeah, and that’s good thing. I think they have a gift for lyrics too, which it always a big plus. A near-perfect pop-rock ballad.

YEAH YEAH YEAHS: Way Out

Album: Show Your Bones (2008)

“The face ain’t makin’ what the mouth needs”

This one has a chugging beat and with a cool vocal. She has an unusual voice but I think it works really well for this type of modern rock. Can I understand the words? Well, some of them. But it’s the overall feel that makes it a good one.

WEEZER: Perfect Situation

Album: Make Believe (2005)

“What’s the deal with my brain?”

The geek boys rock out and that’s usually a good thing. Very catchy verses and then the anthemic chorus comes in. Of course it’s “boy doesn’t deserve girl”, what a perfect theme for a rock song. And it hella rocks!

THE TING TINGS: Be The One

Album: We Started Nothing (2008)

“I don’t wanna be the one, making all the noise”

This might be the most straight-ahead pop song on their CD but it’s all good. The propulsive beat moves it along and it has a nice pop hook. And of course she has a great voice, slightly detached and pouty. Love it.

THE PRETENDERS: Boots Of Chinese Plastic

Album: Break Up The Concrete (2008)

“By the way you look fantastic”

It’s a fast-paced country-ish rocker. But with Chrissie’s vocals it will never be country. Her tough delivery and wonderful voice make this a quick-rockin’ delight. Nice guitar too, oh yeah. Do I hear some bite?

DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE: I Will Follow You Into The Dark

Album: Plans (2005)

“If heaven and hell decide that they both are satisfied, illuminate the NOs on their vacancy signs”

One of my favorite songs ever. Simple, direct, honest, and how much deeper can a love song get than offering to follow your lover as they pass away. How Romeo and Juliet! This is very nearly a perfect song. Does that exist? No matter how many times I hear this I get a chill and am stunned by the depth of emotion mixed with the deep and clever lyrics. Brilliant songwriting.

That is it for the “real” mix. I will list the songs for the bonus disc too in case you want to know where they came from, but you don’t need to rate these.

CAUSE AND EFFECT: It’s Over Now

Album: Trip (1994)

They didn’t make it on the mix because the sound didn’t really fit this time. It’s a good CD though, check it out.

AMY MACDONALD: This Is The Life

Album: This is the Life (2007)

Almost used this one for the mix, but it’s a little repetitive and I liked the other one better.

JACK’S MANNEQUIN: Swim

Album: The Glass Passenger (2008)

I’m loving this album and this is a really nice rock ballad.

INGRID MICHAELSON: Be OK

Album: Be OK (2008)

Simple, kind of sing-songy, but it’s catchy and real and it gets in your head.

KATE NASH: Pumpkin Song

Album: Made of Bricks (2007)

It was hard to pick which songs to use by her. This one was almost on the mix. Get the CD, it’s a good one and you won’t hear it on the radio.

DUFFY: I’m Scared

Album: Rockferry (2008)

I used the big hit on the mix, but this one shows off her retro voice better. I usually don’t like this dated sound, but she pulls it off. Somewhere Dusty Springfield is liking this.

THE PRETENDERS: Break Up The Concrete

Album: Break Up The Concrete (2008)

How can you go wrong with that Bo Diddley beat? I just love love love her voice. And this track (plus the others I used) prove that The Pretenders are still doing great new music, even if almost no one knows it.

YEAH YEAH YEAHS: Gold Lion

Album: Show Your Bones (2008)

A little dash of Siouxsie and the Banshees, maybe, but a more modern sound. This one had to grow on me a little, so it didn’t make the cut. I like it a lot now, maybe you will too.

MARIE DIGBY: Spell

Album: Unfold (2008)

Very quiet and sparse, so it didn't get used, but I might question that decision. This could be riveting and powerful in concert.

SICK OF SARAH: The Hardest Part

Album: Sick of Sarah (2008)

I'm not huge on this band but some of their stuff I like. This is their second-best song IMHO so it made the bonus disc.

DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE: A Diamond And A Tether

Album: Plans (2005)

A recent track that is pretty good, but not as good as the two I used on the real mix. But still, they are a great band and should be huge. They're getting there.

INGRID MICHAELSON: Lady In Spain

Album: Be OK (2008)

So many songs by her I wanted to use. There's variety in her albums and so it was hard to pick. I like this one a lot and it almost made it. Maybe it should have.

AMY MACDONALD: Let's Start A Band

Album: This is the Life (2007)

This is a good one, I was concerned a bit that it started out kind of low-key and took a while to build. Nice mood, though, with the horns here and there.

MAVIS STAPLES: The Voice

Album: The Voice (1993)

Yep, Prince was involved in this album too. So you know it's funky. I think he's there in the background vocals and lyrics. Mavis is a treasure.

DUFFY: Syrup And Honey

Album: Rockferry (2008)

So spare of a sound, I didn't know if it would work on the real mix. It shows off her voice and her retro sound.

JACK'S MANNEQUIN: Miss California

Album: The Glass Passenger (2008)

Listed as a bonus track on the CD, I think it's about kidnapping someone and making them your captive love. Or is it? The lyrics are clever. "You'll be missed, Miss California. When they can't find you you'll turn into a mystery. But you're no mystery to me..." Yow, but it's so damn catchy and clever!

MARIE DIGBY: Voice On The Radio

Album: Unfold (2008)

I thought this one might sound a little too "mainstream", and maybe it does. But there's something to be said for a well-written pop ballad.

THE TING TINGS: That's Not My Name

Album: We Started Nothing (2008)

I like this one more as I listen to it more. It has bit of a B-52's feel to it. Lots of attitude and her cool vocals. Would be a big dance hit in a better world.

CAUSE AND EFFECT: Crash

Album: Trip (1994)

This was going to be the last track on my real mix, but it's a little long and it just didn't seem to fit. I like it though, so I put it here.

WEEZER: Freak Me Out

Album: Make Believe (2005)

Is this a cool song or what? It's so nice and peaceful but the lyrics aren't. So the bonus CD can end mellow but still a bit ominous. A nice combination.

Love, peace, and happiness!

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