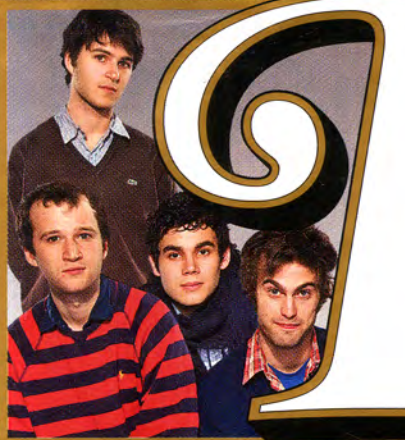
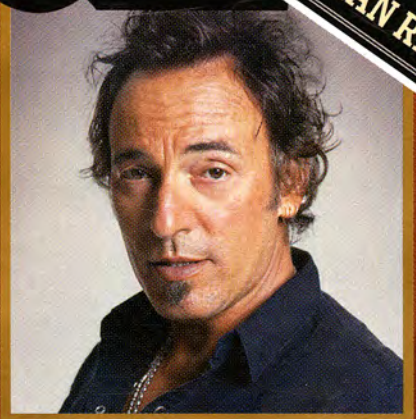
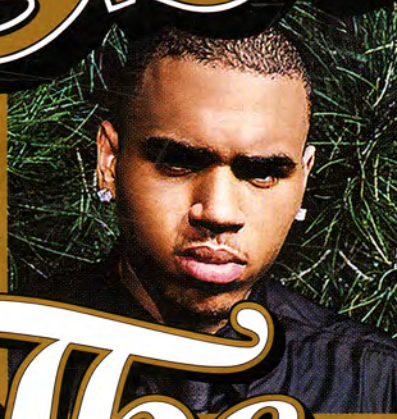


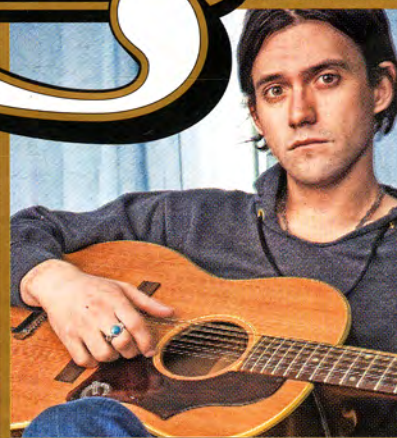
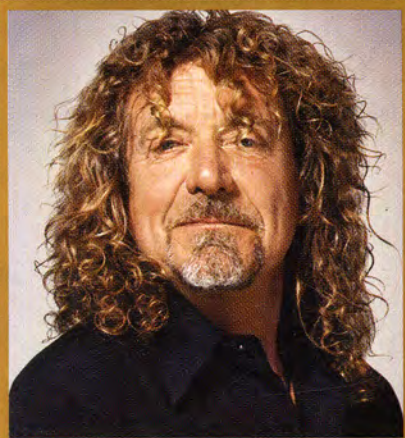
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BEST RECORD STORES



BETTER THAN BIG BOX Amoeba Music's store in Los Angeles

Amoeba Music

Los Angeles

Prepare for an embarrassment of riches when you walk into Amoeba Music on L.A.'s Sunset Strip - a 35,000-square-foot warehouse packed with more than a million LPs, CDs and DVDs. Amoeba's L.A. flagship (the others are in Berkeley and San Francisco) also offers free in-stores from acts like the Raconteurs and PJ Harvey, an expert staff that knows the eclectic stock inside out and a vast and ever-changing collection of used CDs. "When you come in here, it's almost like a treasure hunt," says Amoeba exec Ilene Barg. "If you have twenty dollars, you can walk away with a big stack of music."

Dusty Groove

Chicago

Though this Chicago shop's Website allows fans everywhere to browse its vintage funk, soul, hip-hop and jazz LPs, those who live in Chicago get an added perk: Dusty Groove lets you order from its perpetually updated site and then swing by the store to pick up your purchases.

Waterloo

Austin

Waterloo not only offers all the best indie and mainstream releases but proudly promotes a huge array of Texas roots and rock bands from Ray Price and Joe Ely to Okkervil River and Spoon.

Other Music

New York

Other Music is going twelve years strong as downtown Manhattan's best-curated record shop - complete with a killer array of psych rock, No Wave, electronica, French pop and much more.

Vintage Vinyl

Fords, New Jersey

Love punk, emo and metal? The staff here could have told you about My Chemical Romance or Taking Back Sunday before they broke, and the store still draws top Warped Tour acts for free gigs and album signings.



Rodriguez-Lopez (left) and Bixler-Zavala in New York in January

BEST PROG-ROCKERS

Mars Volta

THE MARS VOLTA SPECIALIZE IN explosive soundscapes and wild, anarchic live shows. Their songs can be two-minute punk bursts or twenty-minute excursions into Latin jazz, funk, metal and atonal noise - including shout-along choruses with lyrics like, "Exoskeletal junction at the railroad delayed!" "It's the pop narrative," says singer Cedric Bixler-Zavala. "It's just not pop the way some venues or avenues of art define what pop is." Guitarist Omar Rodriguez-Lopez clarifies: "It's *perverted* pop." The killer riffs and hooks explain how a band that cites German art rockers Can as a key influence ended up with three Top Ten albums. "Our bridges may be long, but there's rarely a time when we don't do the chorus," Rodriguez-Lopez says.

Over the course of their first three studio discs, the Mars Volta became ever more experimental - their third, 2006's *Amputechture*, pushed fans to the limit with long stretches of atonal

and only one song under six minutes. But they pulled back from the brink with this year's *The Bedlam in Goliath*, focusing on punk riffage and wowing fans with their ability to make complex music accessible. "We love pop's architecture," Rodriguez-Lopez says. "Here's this structure that's been used all throughout history. How far can we take it? What can it be?" **EVAN SERPICK**

KEY TRACKS

1. **"Roulette Dares (The Haunt Of)"** Metal riffs, psychedelic explorations and a killer hook make this track - from 2003's *De-Loused at the Comatorium* - an excellent introduction to the Mars Volta.
2. **"Cicatriz ESP"** No studio cut compares to their dizzying gigs, but this ecstatic forty-three-minute jam from the 2005 live album *Scabdates* comes closest.
3. **"Wax Simulacra"** In under three minutes, this punk blast from *Bedlam* sums up everything awesome about the band.

BEST GUITAR-HERO BAND

Dragonforce

With more than seven minutes of insanely fast guitar shredding, Dragonforce's 2006 song "Through the Fire and Flames" is hardly hit-single material - but it has nevertheless been on iTunes music store's Top 100 for the last twenty-three weeks. Credit Guitar Hero III, which uses the epic track as the game's ultimate challenge. "There's just so many notes," says GH III lead designer Alan Flores, adding that it took three times longer than usual to program the song into the game. "It's brutal." YouTube is overflowing with clips of kids banging away on their plastic guitar controllers at carpal-tunnel-syndrome-inducing speed - and even the guy who really played all those notes is impressed. "I'm definitely worse on the game than the real guitar," says the British band's guitarist, Herman Li, who got into music when he became sick of video games. "When I see those YouTube clips, I think, 'I wish I could do that.'"

GET THIS: Hilarious YouTube videos of kids as young as nine taking on "Through the Fire and Flames."



SHREDHEADS DragonForce's Li (left) and Sam Totman in 2007

HERBIE HANCOCK PICKS BEST JAZZ GUITARIST

Jazz guitarist **Lionel Loueke** - from the tiny West African nation of Benin - has a new album out on Blue Note. "He's comfortable in any setting, whether it's straight-ahead jazz or avant-garde," says Hancock. "And in his hands, the guitar is no longer just this instrument that you pluck. He turns it into a percussion instrument - he sticks paper between the strings to give it kind of a marimba sound."

