

L: The Eels gave '96 their dreamy debut.

R: Cake: a Sacramento band who are seriously funny.



**3. Grant Lee Buffalo • *Copperopolis* (Reprise)**  
So full of Beatles-esque harmonies and acoustic tap-along melodies that it's hard for me to believe it got overlooked.

**4. Ben Folds Five • *Ben Folds Five* (Caroline)**  
This debut from the North Carolina band features bass, keyboards, and drums—no guitars. Picture a young, punk Billy Joel crossed with early Jellyfish, and that's BFF—"punk rock for sissies."

**5. R.E.M. • *New Adventures in Hi-fi* (Warner Bros.)**

This linear and poetic album reestablishes the band's underground credibility and is good from songs one to 10.

**6. Beck • *Odelay* (DGC)**  
With its patchwork of musical genres and overall scattered sensibilities, *Odelay* is a modern day tour de force.

**7. The Wallflowers • *Bringing Down the Horse* (Interscope)**  
With its pop-country jangles from Bob Dylan's son, Jakob, this is a fine debut from a band that will be around for a long time.

**8. Porno For Pyros • *Good God's Urge* (Warner Bros.)**  
Mellow and mature, this documents a band's coming into its musical own.

**9. Alice in Chains • *Unplugged* (Columbia)**  
A vibey and somber soundscape of pain and revelation, making this collection one of the best unplugged albums.

## Rebecca Kraus is the only female in this group. See masthead for more details.

**10. Neil Young • *Dead Man* (Vapor)**  
This lonely, melodic soundtrack for the Johnny Depp film is a sparse testament to the realities of modern America

**5. Eels • *Eels* (DreamWorks)**  
This Echo Park, CA, band makes introspection and somberness downright hummable.

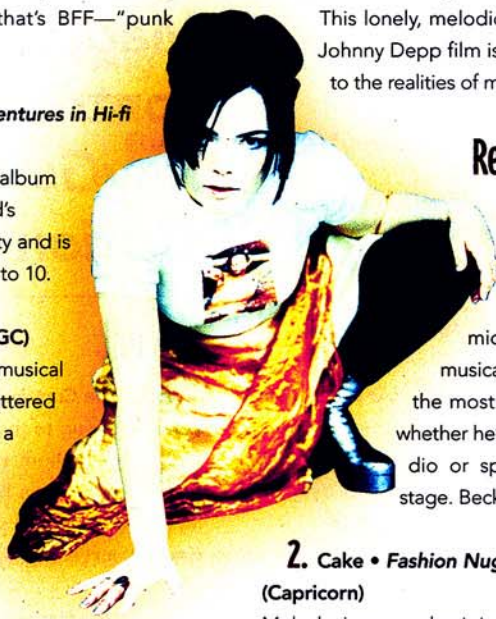
**6. The Cardigans • *first band on the moon* (Mercury)**  
If Nina Persson's lilting voice can't push music away from the brooding and Prozac-packing crowd of the '90s, then we surely are on the road to doom.

**7. Aimee Mann • *I'm With Stupid* (DGC)**  
In popular music, what matters is melody, melody, melody. Mann's bittersweet messages are a joy to swallow.

**8. Garbage • *Garbage* (Almo Sounds)**  
The musician's producer, Butch Vig, meets Shirley Manson's attitude and vocals for a smashing debut of layered pop with a diabolical edge.

**9. Masters of Jazz • *Female Vocal Classics* (Rhino Records)**  
One of a series of jazz greats. Sarah Vaughan alongside Billie Holliday next to Ella Fitzgerald—I've fallen in love, and I can't get up.

**10. Led Zeppelin • *Led Zeppelin* (Atlantic)**  
Yes, it's an old album, but still one of my year's favorites. The masters not only sing the blues with more authority than half the lot of today, they epitomize why any of us falls for rock 'n' roll in the first place.



Ruby's Leslie Rankine

### Rebecca Kraus

**1. Beck • *Odelay* (DGC)**

Beyond the two turntables and a microphone lies one musical genius, and one of the most entertaining artists, whether he's spinning in the studio or spinning, literally, on stage. Beck *has* got the beat.

**2. Cake • *Fashion Nugget* (Capricorn)**  
Melody, irony, and originality, as well as that punctuated cover of Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive," give this Sacramento-based band the punch to put a smile on my face.

**3. Elvis Costello • *All This Useless Beauty* (Warner Bros.)**  
In quintessential Attractions fashion, Costello and gang meld tunefulness with intelligence.

**4. Ruby • *Salt Peter* (Creation/Work)**  
This album is sprinkled with modern clanks, whirls, and dips that lie gracefully beside Lesley Rankine's staunch and beautiful voice.