

AustralianSuper


How does your super compare?
See how we stack up by comparing past performance

Question 1 of 2
Select salary range

20 - 40k 40 - 60k 60 - 80k
80 - 100k 100k +

Radiohead

In Rainbows



SELF-RELEASED / ATO • 2007

9.3
BEST NEW MUSIC

by Mark Pytlak
Contributor

ROCK

OCTOBER 15 2007



Like many music lovers of a certain age, I have a lot of warm memories tied up with release days. I miss the simple ritual of making time to buy a record. I also miss listening to something special for the first time and imagining, against reason, the rest of the world holed up in their respective bedrooms, having the same experience. Before last Wednesday, I can't remember the last time I had that feeling. I also can't remember the last time I woke up voluntarily at 6 a.m. either, but like hundreds of thousands of other people around the world, there I was, sat at my computer, headphones on, groggy, but awake, and hitting play.

Such a return to communal exchange isn't something you'd expect to be orchestrated by a band who's wrung beauty from alienation for more than a decade. But if the past few weeks have taught us anything, it's that Radiohead revel, above all else, in playing against type. It's written in their discography; excluding the conjoined twins that were *Kid A* and *Amnesiac*, each of their albums constitutes a heroic effort to debunk those that came before it. Although 2003's *Hail to the Thief* was overlong and scattershot, it was important insofar as it represented the full band's full-circle digestion and synthesis of the sounds and methods they first toyed with on *OK Computer*. So, after a decade of progression, where do we go from here?

If the 2006 live renditions of their new material were anything to go by, not much further. With few exceptions, the roughly 15 songs introduced during last year's tour gave the impression that after five searching records, Radiohead had grown tired of trying to outrun themselves. Taken as a whole, the guitar-centric compositions offered a portrait of a band who, whether subconsciously or not, looked conciliatory for the first time in its career. Although a wonderful surprise, their early October album announcement only lent further credence to the theory. Where they'd previously had the confidence to precede albums like *OK Computer* and *Kid A* with marketing fanfare worthy of a classic-in-making, this sneak attack felt like a canny strategy to prepare fans for an inevitable downshift.

The brilliant *In Rainbows* represents no such thing. Nonetheless, it's a very different kind of Radiohead record. Liberated from their self-imposed pressure to innovate, they sound-- for the first time in ages-- user-friendly; the glacial distance that characterized their previous records melted away by dollops of reverb, strings, and melody. From the inclusion and faithful rendering of longtime fan favorite "Nude" to the classic pop string accents on "Faust Arp" to the uncharacteristically relaxed "House of Cards", Radiohead's sudden willingness to embrace their capacity for uncomplicated beauty might be *In Rainbows'* most distinguishing quality, and one of the primary reasons it's an improvement on *Hail to the Thief*.

Now that singer Thom Yorke has kickstarted a solo career-- providing a separate venue for the solo electronic material he used to shoehorn onto Radiohead albums-- Radiohead also sound like a full band again. Opener "15 Step"'s mulched-up drum intro represents the album's only dip into *Kid A*-style electronics; from the moment Jonny Greenwood's zestful guitar line takes over about 40 seconds in, *In Rainbows* becomes resolutely a five-man show. (For all of Yorke's lonely experimental pieces, it's easy to forget how remarkably the band play off each other; the rhythm section of Phil Selway and Colin Greenwood are especially incredible, supplying between them for a goldmine of one-off fills, accents, and runs over the course of the record.) A cut-up in the spirit of "Airbag"-- albeit with a jazzier, more fluid guitar line-- "15 Step" gives way to "Bodysnatchers", which, like much of *In Rainbows*, eschews verse/chorus/verse structure in favor of a gradual build. Structured around a sludgy riff, it skronks along noisily until about the two-minute mark, when the band veers left with a sudden acoustic interlude. By now, Radiohead are experts at tearing into the fabric of their own songs for added effect, and *In Rainbows* is awash in those moments.

The band's big-hearted resurrection of "Nude" follows. The subject of fervent speculation for more than a decade, its keening melodies and immutable prettiness had left it languishing behind *Kid A's* front door. Despite seeming ambivalent about the song even after resurrecting it for last year's tour, this album version finds Yorke wrenching as much sweetness out of it as he possibly can, in turn giving us our first indication that he's in generous spirits. Another fan favorite, "Weird Fishes/Arpeggi" brandishes new drums behind its drain-circling arpeggios, but sounds every bit as massive in crescendo as its live renditions suggested it might. "All I Need", meanwhile, concludes the album's first side by dressing up what begins as a skeletal rhythm section in cavernous swaths of glockenspiel, synths, pianos, and white noise.

With its fingerpicked acoustic guitars and syrupy strings, "Faust Arp" begs comparisons to some of the Beatles' sweetest two-minute interludes, while the stunning "Reckoner" takes care of any lingering doubt about Radiohead's softer frame of mind: Once a violent rocker worthy of its title, this version finds Yorke's slinky, elongated falsetto backed by frosty, clanging percussion and a meandering guitar line, onto which the band pile a chorus of backing harmonies, pianos, and-- again-- swooping strings. It may not be the most immediate track on the album, but over the course of several listens, it reveals itself to be among the most woozily beautiful things the band has ever recorded.

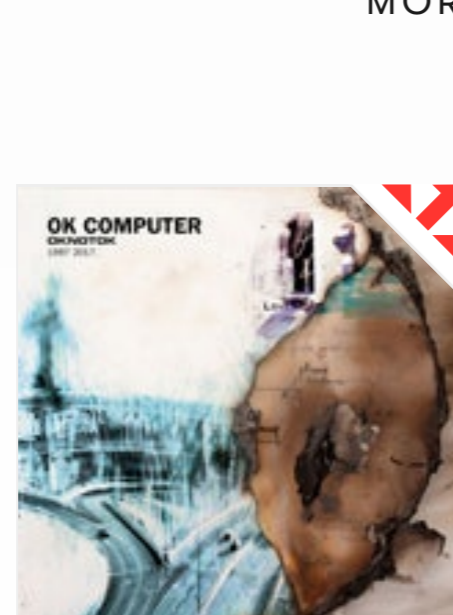
With its lethargic, chipped-at guitar chords, "House of Cards" is a slow, R.E.M.-shaped ballad pulled under by waves of reverbed feedback. While it's arguably the one weak link in the album's chain, it provides a perfect lead-in to the spry guitar workout of "Jigsaw Falling Into Place". Like "Bodysnatchers" and "Weird Fishes/Arpeggi" before it, "Jigsaw" begins briskly and builds into a breakneck conclusion, this time with Yorke upshifting from low to high register to supply a breathless closing rant.

Finally, the closer. Another fan favorite, Yorke's solo versions of "Videotape" suggested another "Pyramid Song" in the making. Given the spirit of *In Rainbows*, you'd be forgiven for assuming its studio counterpart might comprise some sort of epic finale, but to the disappointment of fans, it wasn't to be. Instead, we get a circling piano coda and a bassline that seems to promise a climax that never comes. "This is one for the good days/ And I have it all here on red, blue, green," Yorke sings. It's an affecting sentiment that conjures up images of the lead singer, now a father of two, home filming his kids. A rickety drum beat and shuddering percussions work against the melody, trying clumsily to throw it off, but Yorke sings against it: "You are my center when I spin away/ Out of control on videotape."

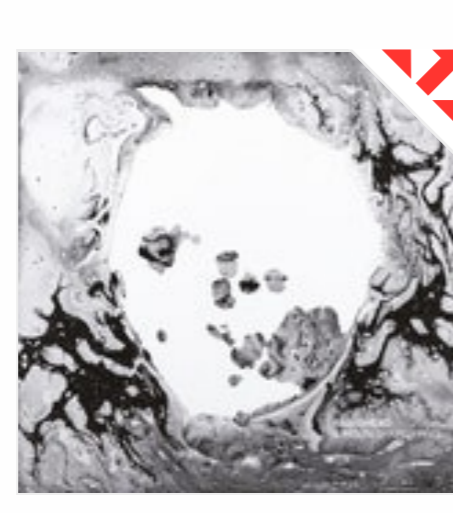
As the real life drums give way to a barely distinguishable electronic counterpart, Yorke trails off, his piano gently uncoils, and the song ends with a whimper. The whole thing is an extended metaphor, of course, and, this being Radiohead, it's heavy-handed in its way, but it's also a fitting close to such a human album. In the end, that which we feared came true: *In Rainbows* represents the sound of Radiohead coming back to earth. Luckily, as it turns out, that's nothing to be afraid of at all.




MORE ALBUM REVIEWS FOR RADIOHEAD

- 

OK Computer OKNOTOK 1997 2017
BY: JAYSON GREENE / JUNE 22 2017
BEST NEW REISSUE

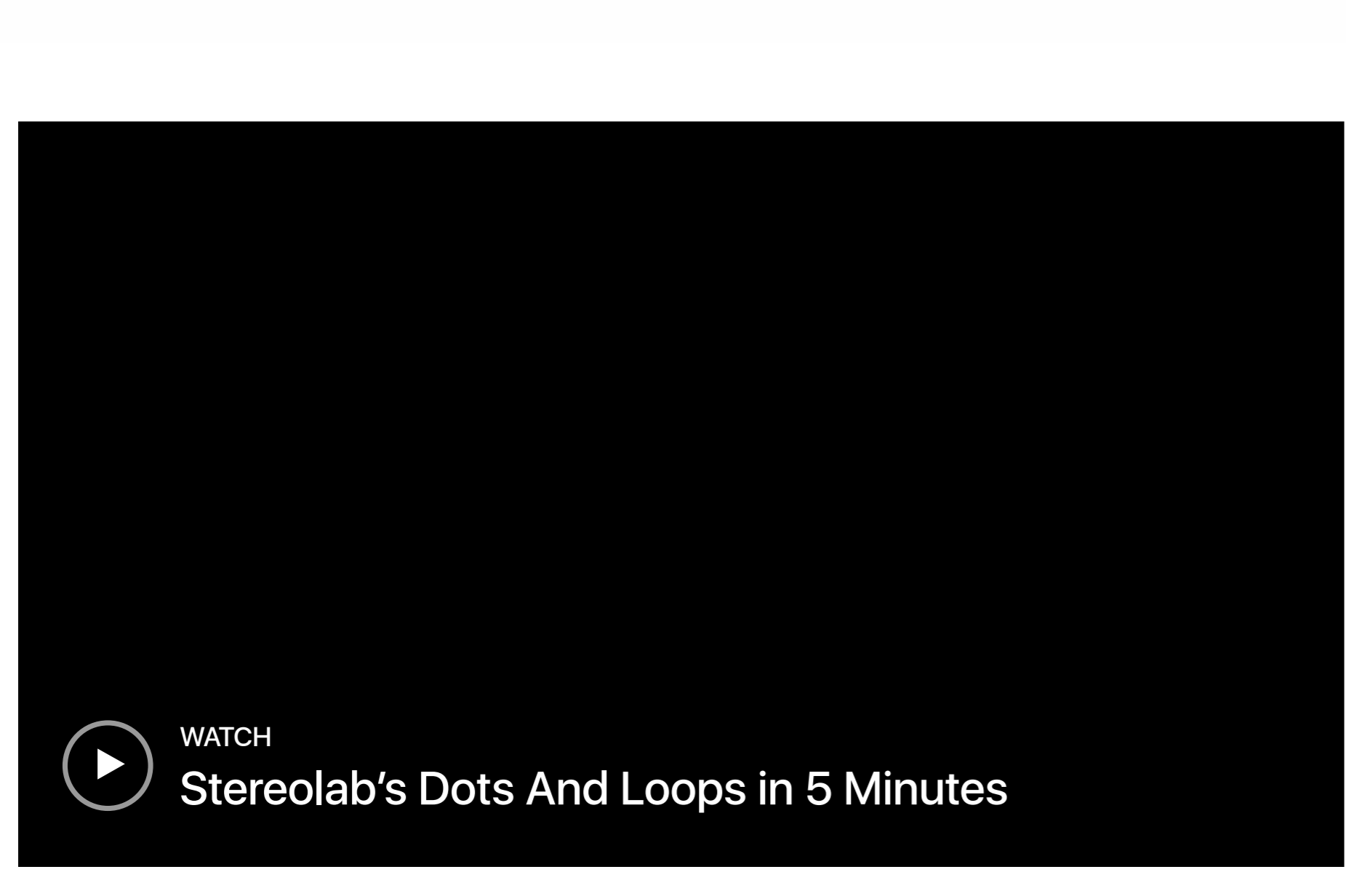
Twenty years on, Radiohead revisit their 1997 masterpiece with a deluxe reissue. The bonus material includes familiar B-sides and a few previously unheard recordings that hint at an intriguing road not taken.
- 

A Moon Shaped Pool
BY: JAYSON GREENE / MAY 11 2016
BEST NEW MUSIC


With their ninth studio album, Radiohead move beyond the existential angst that made them music's preeminent doomsmen, pursuing a more personal--and eternal--form of enlightenment.
- 

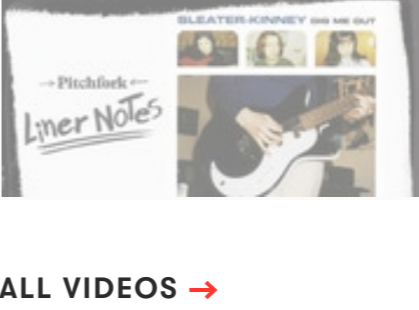
TKOL RMX 1234567
BY: JESS HARVELL / OCTOBER 10 2011

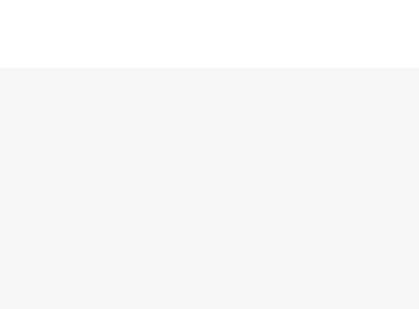
This 19-song, 2xCD compilation features uneven remixes of songs from *The King of Limbs* by artists like Caribou, SBTRKT, Jamie xx, and Four Tet.



TRENDING VIDEOS ON PITCHFORK

- 

Explore Stereolab's *Dots And Loops* in 5 Minutes
▶ PLAY NOW
- 

Explore Sonic Youth's *Daydream Nation* in 5 Minutes
▶ PLAY NOW
- 

Explore Sleater-Kinney's *Dig Me Out* (in 5 Minutes)
▶ PLAY NOW

ALL VIDEOS →