Last week, The National dropped a surprise new album. It’s called Laugh Track, and it arrived just five months after their previous LP released in 2023, First Two Pages Of Frankenstein. Since both records essentially draw from the same sessions, it makes sense that they have received similarly mixed reviews. To my ears, Laugh Track is somewhat more consistent, and the inclusion of “Smoke Detector” — easily the rawest and most rocking song on either record — automatically makes it feel relatively looser and jammier. But in the end Laugh Track has the same weaknesses as Frankenstein — too many celebrity guest stars, too many same-y sounding piano ballads, too much bloat. Here’s the thing though: I actually think there are some really great songs here. They just aren’t being showcased as well as they could be. Therefore, I have taken it upon myself to perform emergency A&R for The National. I have listened to the pile of 23 songs released on their latest records, and I have crafted (or Frankenstein’ed) a solitary 12-track, 60-minute LP that I think is much better than either First Two Pages Of Frankenstein or Laugh Track. Check out the album here.

-- Steven Hyden, Uproxx Cultural Critic and author of five books, most recently Long Road: Pearl Jam And The Soundtrack Of A Generation
In case you missed it...

The latest Indiecast episode has Steven Hyden and Ian Cohen talking about the fall of Jann Wenner and reviewing the album album by The National. Listen to it here.

Sufjan Stevens revealed he’s learning how to walk again in an emotional post about his rare autoimmune disorder diagnosis.

Stop posting NSFW photos on The Barenaked Ladies subreddit, moderators demand after facing issues.

Sky Ferreira fans flew a ‘Free Sky Ferreira’ banner outside of the Capitol Records building after album delays.

Our latest Indie Mixtape 20 Q&A is with Nation Of Language, who find love in many forms on their synth-pop LP Strange Disciple.
**WILCO**

This Chicago band has been so good for so long that it's easy to take a new album for granted. The new *Cousin* (due Friday) does break the mold by involving an outside producer, Cate Le Bon, who teases out Wilco's strange and experimental side on a set of unpredictable roots rock songs.

**LISTEN**

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**ANIMAL COLLECTIVE**

Last year's *Time Skiffs* felt like a comeback for this resolutely weird and long-running indie institution. And given how straight music sounds right now, it was nice to welcome them back into the fold. Now comes another record, *Isn't It Now?* (due Friday), previewed with a hooky single "Soul Capturer."

**SQUIRREL FLOWER**

This Chicago-based project from singer-songwriter Ella Williams has a habit of taking introspective, folk-leaning songs and exploding them unexpectedly with fits of righteous guitar noise. Her upcoming album, *Tomorrow's Fire* (due October 13), looks to expand her sound further with contributions from MJ.
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Indie Mixtape

Lenderman and Dave Hartley
(The War On Drugs.)

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DEEP CUTS

A. Savage

That’s not A Savage, but rather Andrew Savage, who you may already know and love from Parquet Courts. While that band is known for their prolific music-making ways, Savage still has found time to carve out an adventurous solo career, which continues with the forthcoming *Several Songs About Fire.*

LISTEN

Slow Pulp

This Chicago-by-way-of-Madison indie band made some waves with their 2020 debut *Moveys,* though progress was blunted somewhat by the pandemic. Therefore, the forthcoming *Yard* (due Friday) seems doubly consequential, especially since it shows off their impressive range, which veers from alt-country to introspective folk to zippy guitar pop numbers.
This seminal album by The B-52's was the band's fourth studio album released in 1986. It's now been re-pressed to an exclusive red vinyl and includes a special 7" copy of "Summer Of Love" and "Housework."

THROWBACK

'BITTE ORCA' by DIRTY PROJECTORS
If the return of Animal Collective has you feeling some aughts-era indie nostalgia, why not revisit this 2009 classic that fuses indie rock with R&B and world music.

LISTEN

LINER NOTES

Listen to Indiecast Episode 156

On the latest Indiecast, Steven and Ian delve into the recent controversy involving former Rolling Stone publisher Jann Wenner.

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