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GO! Magazine's picks for '90s mixtape

BY BRIAN MCELHINEY • For The Bulletin

I t's '90s week at GO! Magazine, and as resident music person, I have been tapped to create the ultimate '90s mixtape. No, this was not my idea (that would be resident movie, history and calendar person, Makenzie Whittle, who contributed a bunch of these songs, as did resident visual art and theater person David Jasper). I tend to shy away from "best of" lists like this, because why should anyone listen to me? Besides, I'd just stuff it full of Nirvana songs (as would resident features editor Jody Lawrence-Turner).
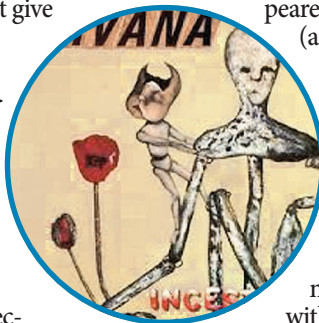
But we tried to be egalitarian. If your favorite '90s song isn't on this mixtape, go put it on there. I tried to hit most of the major musical movements and trends with at least one representative song, but I probably still ended up leaning on alternative rock. Again, just be glad I didn't give you a list of 20 Nirvana songs.

"ANEURYSM," NIRVANA ▶

Well, I'm allowed one, aren't I? "Aneurysm," a b-side to the "Smells Like Teen Spirit" single that also showed up on the band's 1992 odds-and-ends collection, "Incesticide," may be Nirvana's finest hour: a perfect mix of loud-quiet dynamics, punk-rock fury, metallic riffs and pop hooks (i.e. everything that made Nirvana, Nirvana).

"TORN," EDNASWAP

The song that launched Natalie Imbruglia's career was a cover. Written by Ednaswap vocalist Anne Preven and guitarist Scott Cutler with English musician Phil Thornalley in 1993, "Torn" was first recorded by Danish musician Lis Sørensen. Ednaswap's raw, grunge-tinged version appeared on its 1995 self-titled album (and then again on 1997's "Wacko Magneto," the version you can find on Spotify), and two years after that, Imbruglia turned the song into a pop sensation.

"ALBUQUERQUE," "WEIRD AL" YANKOVIC

You can't put together a '90s mixtape (or any mixtape, I'd argue) without Weird Al. "Albuquerque," from Yankovic's 1999 album "Running with Scissors," is an original song and the longest he has ever recorded. Over a grinding guitar riff, Yankovic delivers an appropriately weird story about being forced to eat sauerkraut, winning a one-way ticket to the titular city, trying to buy doughnuts and much more.

"CANNONBALL," THE BREEDERS

Pixies bassist Kim Deal stepped out from under Black Francis' shadow with The Breeders. "Cannonball" was the band's breakout hit from the group's 1993 sophomore album "Last Splash," and introduced the mainstream music world to Deal's quirky, hook-filled songwriting.

"FIGHT THE POWER," PUBLIC ENEMY

While this powerful protest single was released in 1989, a different version appeared on 1990's "Fear of a Black Planet." Public Enemy is one of hip-hop's most thought-provoking entities, and Chuck D is in fine form on this track, which remains painfully relevant today (especially in the wake of ongoing Black Lives Matter protests against police brutality nationwide).

"EVERLONG," FOO FIGHTERS

Dave Grohl's second entry on this mixtape is one of his best songs. Employing the loud-quiet-loud dynamics Nirvana became famous for, "Everlong" soars with emotion and sonic intensity. It's an earnest love song from a perhaps unexpected source.

"EVERYBODY (BACKSTREET'S BACK)," BACKSTREET BOYS

A '90s playlist must acknowledge the decade's boy-band craze. The Backstreet Boys may not have been the first, and they ultimately may not have been the most popular. But for a time in the late '90s, the highly danceable "Everybody (Backstreet's Back)" was inescapable.

◀ "CRIMINAL," FIONA APPLE

Fiona Apple was one of the best, smartest and weirdest artists to come out of the '90s crop of women singer-songwriters.