

# America V: One Hundred Highways

Johnny Cash (Universal) ★★★★★ 4 stars

This is the last recording Johnny Cash made before his recent death, and listening to it almost feels like eavesdropping at a funeral. The record was produced with reverence and respect by long-time collaborator and friend Rick Rubin, and the results are worth hearing.

Recurring themes of death and the afterlife propel the album. "Like the 309" is the last song Cash wrote and is worth the price of the album alone. Cash's voice alternates between fragile and deeply resonant as the effects of his ill health become obvious. "God's gonna cut you down" features that man in black at his most menacing, and he brings instant gravitas to his cover of "If you could read my mind". Cash's cover of Springsteen's "Further on (up the road)" arguably outdoes the original. "Rose of my heart" is meaningful enough, but during the song Cash sounds a whisker away from breaking down, making it almost too difficult to listen to.

To Rubin's credit, he doesn't over think it and lets Cash do his thing without any extravagant or self indulgent accompaniment. After such a long and prolific career, you would think Cash himself would have been proud for this to be his last record.



# Desert Lights

Something for Kate (Sony BMG)

★★☆ Two and a half stars

Something for Kate Frontman, Paul Dempsey is undoubtedly an extremely talented songwriter. However, this album doesn't quite reach the heights that many have been expecting for some time. *Desert Lights* is the band's fifth studio release and it doesn't feel as though the band has come as far as they probably could have over that time. While this album is a real improvement on their last album, there is room for improvement.

There are impressive songs on the album, like "California", "Impossible" and catchy first single "Cigarettes and Suitcases" but as an album it doesn't quite scale the heights that the band is undoubtedly capable of.

The appointment of Brad Wood (famous predominantly for his work through the Seattle grunge period) was seemingly inspired but doesn't seem to have had the effect that it could have. Pete Dinklage lends his voice to a few tracks, but again, it seems to just miss the mark.

Music reviews by **Richard Feely**,  
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