



DANDIEGO RECORD OF THE MONTH



February 2026

However many are still reading,

Before we dig in, I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the **Miami University RedHawks** Men's Basketball Team. At 28-0, The 21st ranked RedHawks are the only remaining unbeaten team in the country. With just 3 more games remaining vs. soft MAC opponents, the RedHawks actually have a shot at pulling off the perfect regular season feat and punching their ticket to an 11 seed in the tournament. Rise Up RedHawks, Love & Honor, beat the clock, see ya at Brick Street. This would be an amazing time to write for the *Miami Student*. Sorry if this color scheme is tough on the eyes, but I owe it to my alma mater to spread awareness.

It's been a minute since I graced you with some goodness – about as long as it could be by my standards actually. I pumped out January just two days into the month, and here we are at the end of February and I'm just getting down to it now. As many of you may know – I am now **back** in San Diego, safe and sound. There's a lot that goes into that, but despite the last few entries, this blog isn't meant to be my journal. It's about the music, and I intend to make a concerted effort to return it to such. That doesn't mean we can't have fun with it, and that doesn't mean it can't be at my expense. I'm sure there will be some overlap, but I'll try not to blur the lines as much.

Immediately following that sentiment let's dive right into an album that is a literal cornerstone of my personality! This month we are listening to **New Found Glory's Sticks and Stones!** This is just one of those joy-by-association albums for me. I'm not saying I peaked in 5th grade – but I certainly had a lot more good clean fun as a middle to high schooler. A lot of the music I listened to as I was developing sort of latched itself on to my core. When I hear a lot of that music, it just makes me feel a little more at ease, or comfortable in my situation. The joy lives inside me, and this album brings it closer to the surface. This album came out in June of 2002. It just feels so representative of the time. The bleach blonde spiked tips, the cocked sideways lifted trucker hats, the upbeat but rebellious lyrics and melody. A golden age if I dare say. I associate them with similar bands as Blink 182, Good Charlotte, Simple Plan, Yellowcard, etc. Kind of a boy band with some mild cayenne. Not quite a rock band as they've still got that soft, easy-listening sound. But not Backstreet Boys or NSYNC. Bands like this (in my opinion) opened the door for those such as Taking Back Sunday, Panic! At the Disco, and Fall Out Boy. They sort of laid the groundwork, and then those latter bands came in and gave it a little more of a tweak. Is that the evolution of music right there? We're just constantly tweakin' the formula with a flare of our own? I'm sure there's a college seminar on that somewhere. I guess this month's slogan can be **Stay Tweakin'!**

So, this album in specific. It's not their first, but is in all likelihood their most well known. It's short and sweet – 42 minutes in total. Touting hits such as My Friends Over You, Head On Collision, and Understatement – each 2.5-4 minute track is its own little rollercoaster ride. I think the band actually deserves a little more credit than they're given for their overall artistic contribution. The lyrics are pretty impersonal. Well, they *seem* very personal – but that's the point right? To get the



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listener to relate, build and strengthen the relationship with them to gain a life-long fan. I think this *can* come across as a sort of corporate move trying to max out the monetary value and engagement of a wider range of fans, but I don't believe this to be the case with NFG. In Art, there should be a certain level of *suggestion* to the piece. You don't want to do all the work for the viewer. You want to leave them room to fill in the blanks. I could (and often do) sit there for hours, attempting to recreate a photo exactly as it was originally taken. I might be able to do it. But what am I really doing there? Just *re-creating* something that already exists pretty much exactly as it already exists. Where's the creativity in that? The way I define and measure art is in the feelings it evokes. Are you drawn to it? Intrigued by it? Does it make you think, does it let your mind wander? Is there more than meets the immediate glance, are the levels to it, just like you? I think that's where NFG makes their argument for the higher tier. I've been a fan of the band since probably 2003. That's 23 years. I've seen them live at least 4 times. I've related to their music many a time during that span. Because there is room for interpretation. While there may have been a specific in mind in writing the songs, they apply to so many different scenarios. Yes – most of the tracks sound as if they're empowering themselves in speaking to an ex. But they encounter many different emotions. I actually think they show more emotion in their follow up album **Catalyst**. There's a little more range in their ballad type songs, and while not as overall catchy as **Sticks and Stones**, the album shows growth and evolution.

It's really hard for me to pick my favorite tracks of this album. It's one of those albums where each song in different periods of time has moved up my boards. Similar to Third Eye Blind's self titled album where there are no skip tracks. When you listen to an album so many times, you begin to venture away from the common path and dive deeper into those less traveled. The hits are definitely hits – I'll always indulge in My Friends Over You or Head On Collision – but I'd just as happily jam out to the album's *least* played track (per Spotify play counts; 2,047,812) Belated. Ironically – I would actually say Belated is one of my top tracks on the album. There you go, just like I drew it up.

As noted above, I've seen the band live at least and I'm pretty sure 4 times. Each show has been an absolute joy. The first time I saw them I was right up front in the pit at a small venue. Bassist Ian Grushka threw his pick into the crowd and I caught it. After the show I messaged him on Instagram sending him a photo and telling them how great they were. He replied back saying he was happy we had a great time and hoped there wasn't any blood on the pick (?). Each time I saw them live after that I messaged him ahead of time letting him know we'd be there, and he replied every time. Super cool when musicians engage causally with their fans. Makes everything seem a little more real. Also worth noting – the band has a phenomenal cover of Frozen's *Let It Go*. They play it at every show, and the lead singer comes out in a cheap Walmart style Elsa costume, and it is amazing.



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Please enjoy this months selection, and join me in sending thoughts and prayers to those on the East Coast. They've been getting pummeled by harsh winter weather for months now with no end in sight. Our hearts are with you. Until next time...

Stay Tweakin,

∞ Dan Diego



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Past ROTMs:

November 2023: Desire, I Want to Turn Into You – Caroline Polachek

December 2023: Depression Cherry – Beach House

January 2024: MTV Unplugged Live from New York – Nirvana

February 2024: Actual Life 2 – Fred Again..

March 2024: Music from the LOTR Trilogy – The City of Prague Philharmonic Orchestra

April 2024: Greatest Hits: Volume 1 – James Taylor

May 2024: Hybrid Theory – Linkin Park

June 2024: Ursa Major – Third Eye Blind

July 2024: Live 1997 – Daft Punk

August 2024: White Ladder, Live in Austin – David Gray

September 2024: Tidal – Fiona Apple

October 2024: Kid A – Radiohead

November 2024: Alive 2007 – Daft Punk

December 2024: Ten – Pearl Jam

January 2025: Balloonerism – Mac Miller

February 2025: Ceremonials – Florence + The Machine

March 2025: Narrow Stairs – Death Cab for Cutie

April 2025: Pang – Caroline Polachek

May 2025: 4:44 – Jay-Z

June 2025: Third Eye Blind – Third Eye Blind

July 2025: Live from Joshua Tree – Rufus Du Sol

August 2025: Magic – Bruce Springsteen



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September 2025: Push the Button – The Chemical Brothers

October 2025: Mac Miller – NPR Tiny Desk

November 2025: LEAVE OF ABSENCE

December 2025: Your Top Songs 2025 – DanDieg0

January 2026: This Is All Yours – alt-J

February 2026: Sticks and Stones – New Found Glory