



DANDIEGO RECORD OF THE MONTH



April 2026

Real Ones,

I think we can all agree that if the first of the month is on a Friday, I'm allowed the grace period of Saturday the 2nd and Sunday the 3rd to get this out in time to not be late for April. It's not that I've been too busy, it's not that I don't enjoy writing these. Honestly – it's that my Spotify has lost touch with me so much that it is starting to turn me off. There was once a time that I swear my Spotify account knew me better than I did. When Daylist made it's debut I was all over it – and it was just giving me endless paths of exploration for music in genres I enjoyed but had not heard before. I looked forward to Friday's for more than just Friday – as this is when Release Radar refreshes each week with new releases from artists you listen to frequently. The more you use Spotify, the better it can cater to you. Discover Weekly refreshes on Monday, which is a playlist of songs that Spotify thinks you will like based on your listening history. As of late, my Daylists have literally just been the same 10 songs and artists (that I *don't* like) with annoying names like **Progressive Trance Disco Lontamer James Madison Coffee House Melodic Sunday Morning**. My Release Radar is giving me one Jay-Z track per week (from the 90s) as the first track. Like maybe he's doing re-releases now? Or its like a 25 year anniversary of the release? Idk man. But I've been pretty low on Spotify lately. Which has kind of softened my connection to music. So my record choices have not been as fluent as they have in the past. I've also done almost 30 of these now. But the show must go on!

This month is one I've wanted to do for a while but keep forgetting about when I need to make a selection. This is another album that was in my primary rotation through middle and high school. I got this album at Tower Records in NYC in 2004. I'm talkin' Walkman days. Yes I had a name brand super cool Walkman CD player that is apparently worth about \$479.99 now. Waiting at the bus stop and on the morning bus rides. I actually used to take the stereo in the bathroom and play this CD while I took a shower. With the current state of rap music apparently mirroring our President's approval ratings, we are going to look at **2Pac's Loyal to the Game** album this month.

I mentioned wayyy back when we did Mac Miller's **Balloonism** that many rappers create a "lock stash" of tracks they keep on layaway in the event that they die or go to jail. That way the songs can engineered after the fact, new music can be released, and the family (and record companies) can still benefit from their work while otherwise incapacitated. That's what most of Loyal to the Game is. This was an Interscope Records production, so there were a lot of hands in this pot. It's full of big name features like Eminem, 50 Cent, Jadakiss, Lloyd Banks, and even Elton John! Yes – the far and away biggest hit on this album is Ghetto Gospel, for which the melody and hook is sampled from Elton John's *Indian Sunset*. This album in general, is pretty hard. Hard like tough, thug, assertive. But Ghetto Gospel and Don't You Trust Me offer a softer and more emotional appeal. Pac was a very smart, aware, and multi-talented artist. His emotional intelligence, range, and understanding is part of what puts him as a primary contender for GOAT. His songs are *actually* about something. He uses rhetorical schemes, metaphor, and pathos appeal to tell a story or prove a point. A good rule of thumb when judging a rapper is how good do they make simple rhymes sound? Like, when they rhyme something like "funny" and "money" – how does it sound? Does it sound like a grade school snippet strung together just because their vocabulary isn't too illustrious, or are they actually saying something significant in between the rhyming words? Pac's rhyme schemes were usually pretty simple, but what he was saying in between, and as a whole, makes everything sound that much more significant.

Like several of the prior albums, this is one that I love literally every single track on it. Soldier Like Me and Black Cotton (both feature Eminem) both check those metaphorical and intelligent boxes. The Uppercut, Loyal to the Game, N.I.G.G.A., Crooked N***a Too are those tough, rebellious tracks that personify his image.



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Out on Bail and Hennessy are the fun kind of tracks that show a more positive outlook not often projected by Pac. Sidebar – the features on this album are truly insane. To me, this was the golden age of rap (unfortunately after his passing). But like, albums were sold on CD hardcopy and that was how you got your music. Music Videos dominated 5 primary cable channels. And the videos actually had a plot and weren't just dudes dressed in ridiculously baggy pants throwing money in front of cars at a block party while 2 chicks drop it low. Like have you ever been to a block party that ridiculously off the hook? No of course not. I mean maybe in college but that would be like the best party of the year for an SEC party school and it's just like their Tuesday afternoon in the music video. Anyway – I think that each track with features kind of takes the shape of those featured. I don't know how else to describe it – but the Jada tracks and Lloyd Banks tracks just sound like Jada and Lloyd Banks tracks. The Eminem tracks all have that Eminem feel. Hennessey just has that Obie Trice sound and feel. Obviously Ghetto Gospel has a much different sound as well.

I asked Google who the biggest current rappers were, and it replied:

“Top current rappers as of April 2026 include dominating figures like Drake, Kendrick Lamar, J. Cole, and Yeat, alongside rising stars and high-performers like GloRilla, Playboi Carti, Doja Cat, and Rod Wave.”

Then... I got really sad. I don't think many in this chain are out there bumping that new Yeat – but then again you never know. This album is the product of a lot of music geniuses working together. Interscope took kind of a lot of heat as many record labels did in recent history, but I think it's worth looking past corporate greed to just enjoy this masterpiece that really helped project Pac's image and presence even after his *supposed* death. One of my favorite lines on this album is actually by Jada. This line was definitely in my AIM profile or one of my *away messages*.

“You a leader when you can get a leader to follow you.”

That line used to motivate me as a kid to work hard when no one was looking. To me, it helped me understand that by not giving 100%, I was only cheating myself. Something coaches preach but you need to arrive at on your own to truly understand. I'll leave you with those words, and see you all in a few weeks!

Keep it Surreal,

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

September 2025: Push the Button – The Chemical Brothers



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October 2025: Mac Miller – NPR Tiny Desk

November 2025: LEAVE OF ABSENCE

December 2025: Your Top Songs 2025 – DanDiego

January 2026: This Is All Yours – alt-J

February 2026: Sticks and Stones – New Found Glory

March 2026: Us Against the Crown – State Radio

April 2026: Loyal to the Game – 2Pac