

Critics' Picks: Albums

WEEZER, "HURLEY" (out Tuesday). Album number eight arrives with the big grinning mug of actor Jorge Garcia (a.k.a. "Hurley" from "Lost") on the cover and promises to be chock-full of the metal and punk-edged power pop on which Weezer made its name.

MAROON 5, "HANDS ALL OVER" (Sept. 21). The Cali-spawned Top 40 hitmakers return with another passel of slinky, glossy urban pop-rock, lite funk, and keening falsetto-dusted ballads. This time uber-producer Robert John "Mutt" Lange helps offer another glimpse into the mind of dance-music-sex-romance-obsessed leader Adam Levine.

NO AGE, "EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN" (Sept 28). No Age has always sounded a lot bigger than a duo, and its songs have always felt a lot more substantial than your average punk ditties. The group's second studio album finds the Los Angeles indie heroes pushing the limits of how much noise can fit into a catchy pop song — or, for that matter, a basement.

KENNY CHESNEY, "HEMINGWAY'S WHISKEY" (Sept. 28) The country superstar took a pass on touring this summer to work on his 12th album. The title track pays homage to one of Chesney's literary heroes, and big-voiced Vermont rocker Grace Potter shares the microphone for the sassy "You and Tequila."

NEIL YOUNG, "LE NOISE" (Sept. 28). Young enlisted fabled producer Daniel Lanois for his next album, which features Young alone on acoustic and electric guitars. If Lanois's previous work with Emmylou Harris and Willie Nelson is any barometer, "Le

Noise" could be one of Young's most haunting recent releases. **GUSTER, "EASY WONDERFUL"** (Oct. 5). It's been four years since the Boston-bred pop-rock quartet last released an album, the delectable pop gem "Ganging Up on the Sun." Judging by the available tuneage, including the breezy first single "Do You Love Me," "Easy Wonderful" is going to be just that.

NE-YO, "LIBRA SCALE" (Oct. 5). With 2008's "Year of the Gentleman," Ne-Yo leapt from R&B sensation to pop star. For his fourth album, Ne-Yo explores the relationship between money, fame, power, and love. First single "Beautiful Monster," a thumping Europop confection, doesn't stray beyond his usual format.

ANTONY AND THE JOHNSONS, "SWANLIGHTS" (Oct. 12). Just in time for the long, cold winter, Antony Hegarty lends his sterling warble to a new set of starkly stirring ballads, this time accompanied by a 144-page book of his drawings, photography, collages, and writing.

SUFJAN STEVENS, "THE AGE OF ADZ" (Oct. 12). Abandoning his plans to record an album about

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every US state, the indie-folk star returns with his first album since last year's "The BQE." To whet appetites, last month Stevens released an EP that features his signature blend of finger-picked folk and expansive chamber pop.

SUGARLAND, "THE INCREDIBLE MACHINE" (Oct. 19) Don't let the reggae breakdown in single "Stuck Like Glue" or the duo's new steampunk look fool you. Jennifer Nettles and Kristian

Bush push the envelope on their new album with more wide-screen rock elements and retro-pop bounce, but this "Machine" still operates with contemporary Nashville precision.

KINGS OF LEON, "COME AROUND SUNDOWN" (Oct. 19) Sticking with the production team of Angelo Petraglia and Jacquire King (who scored a Grammy for producing last year's KOL hit "Use Somebody"), this time the Tennessee family band brings a bit of gospel spirit into its highway-ready rock.

TAYLOR SWIFT, "SPEAK NOW" (Oct. 25). It may look like Swift is pulling a Stevie Nicks on the cover — caught mid-twirl in a blur of purple silk — but the lead single "Mine" is reassurance that this young country superstar is rising to the occasion of her third album, penning all the songs herself and even incorporating lush orchestrations.

KID CUDI, "MAN ON THE MOON II: THE LEGEND OF MR. RAGER" (Oct. 26). If its predecessor, last year's "Man on the Moon: The End of Day," was any indication, this Cleveland-born rapper will again be jumping genres like hurdles in the race to the finish line. A rocking new single, "Erase Me," features Cudi singing and a Kanye West cameo.

LIL WAYNE, "THA CARTER IV" (Nov. 5). Lil Wayne's fourth installment in his "Tha Carter" series shares its release date with . . . Lil Wayne. He's currently serving a (probably reduced) year sentence on Riker's Island, but "TV" has been in the works since 2008. Just don't expect any advance singles — Weezy's keeping the leaks on lock.

NICKI MINAJ, "PINK FRIDAY" (Nov. 23) The wait is over. Since releasing her mixtape "Beam Me Up Scotty" last year, Queens



rapper Minaj has been teasing fans with news of her debut. Judging from the first single, "Check It Out" (featuring will.i.am), Minaj has her sights equally on the pop and hip-hop charts.

MICHAEL BRODEUR, JAMES REED, SARAH RODMAN



FREDERICK M. BROWN/GETTY IMAGES (LEFT); RICK DIAMOND/GETTY IMAGES

Left: Nicki Minaj's debut album, "Pink Friday," comes out in November and Taylor Swift's third album, "Speak Now," in October.