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INVESTOR RELATIONS

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Guide to Alternative Music Eric M. Olson, Senior Writer

Okay, my assignment is to make recommendations for an alternative music collection. Seems easy enough, except for defining that mind-bending, dictionary-twisting word "alternative." With music constantly crossbreeding and morphing into dozens of new forms, trying to define this genre with one comprehensive list seems only slightly less difficult than catching a greased pig.

So, while it might be easier to write separate articles for hyper-specific categories like Alt-Rock-Metal ([Slipknot](#), [Godsmack](#), [Staind](#)) or Alt-with-Numbers ([Blink 182](#), [Eve 6](#), [Matchbox Twenty](#)), I've sucked it up and put together some of my favorite albums that lie (at varying distances) outside the musical mainstream.

Prehistoric Alt

Husker Du: After starting out life as a speed hardcore band, Husker Du maintained that edge even as they began mixing pop and rock hooks into their attack. While the band's entire discography is worth diving into, [Zen Arcade](#) (originally released in 1984) and [New Day Rising](#) (1985) are inspired places to start.

The Replacements: In their first few years of playing live, [Paul Westerberg](#) and crew could be phenomenal one night and in chaos the next. In addition, on their early records, Westerberg's pop instincts often struggled to find space within the band's need to tear through songs. On [Let It Be](#) (1984), however, The Replacements finally pulled everything together to create the first of several alt-rock classics.

Sonic Youth: Daydream Nation (1988) was the last of Sonic Youth's five independent releases, and it's still the masterpiece of their career. Since then, they've released a string of solid major-label albums, including the inspired [NYC Ghosts & Flowers](#) (2000).

Jane's Addiction: It seems that either you love Perry Farrell's unique voice or it'll put you in a padded room. There's no denying, however, that [Nothing's Shocking](#) (1988) brought a brave new sound into the alternative world, (including the white-hot guitar of Dave Navarro). After Jane's Addiction split in 1992, Farrell formed the group [Porno for Pyros](#) and recorded the excellent [Good God's Urge](#) (1996).

Smashing Pumpkins: Gish (1991) remains my favorite Pumpkins album, as this debut beautifully combines Billy Corgan's ethereal melodies with blistering guitars and rapid-fire drumming. The equally brilliant follow-up, [Siamese Dream](#) (1993), transformed the group into stars with radio hits like "Cherub Rock" and "Today." The Pumpkins' most recent release, [Machina: The Machines of Gods](#) (2000) looks to be their last, however, with Corgan recently announcing the band will split after their current tour.

Talking Heads: Remain in Light (1980)
X: Under the Big Black Sun (1982)
Laurie Anderson: Big Science (1982), **Mister Heartbreak** (1984)
Echo & the Bunnymen: Ocean Rain (1984)
Kate Bush: Hounds of Love (1985)