

GARDEN & GUN

The Year in Music: 2016

BY MATT HENDRICKSON - DECEMBER/JANUARY 2017

From outstanding female newcomers to a railroad ode to a Blue Ridge fest filled with surprises, a look back at the best of 2016

To put it bluntly, 2016 was a gut punch for music fans. The deaths of the icons Merle Haggard, Ralph Stanley, Guy Clark, Prince, and David Bowie, among others, cast long shadows. But it wasn't all sorrow and tears. The sounds of Americana rang strong, and a number of female artists arrived on the scene with stellar debuts. Though the legends can never be replaced, the following highlights prove that great music never dies.

Album of the Year

Lucinda Williams

The Ghosts of Highway 20

Lucinda Williams released her latest epic way back in February, which seems like a billion years ago. But it's an album that continues to reveal its lyrical nooks and crannies and her most personal record to date (and that's saying something). Williams's unparalleled storytelling resonates as her voice groans with weariness and reflection on "Death Came" and "If There's a Heaven," seethes with contempt on "Dust," and soothes on the touching "Place in My Heart." The renowned Bill Frisell is the lights-out guest instrumentalist, filling her songs with shimmering guitar. Though it's heavy-duty stuff, no one but Williams can make heartache and longing so compelling.