



Eazy Sleazy: The Definitive 2000s Indie Mixtape

by Dom Lepore

Travel back in time with the classic songs that soundtracked excess.

PREFACE

Most aesthetics are indisputably linked to music. A special beauty is evoked when listening to songs so strongly associated with a cultural moment, as they are so deeply engraved in its simulacrum. Retrospections of indie sleaze reveal it was nothing short of chaotic spontaneity. Dodgy Polaroid self-portraits, side-swept bangs, perpetually smudged lipstick and eyeliner; essentially, the hipster reigned supreme. Dressing with a hint of opulence, while owning an IDGAF attitude, meant you were 'in' with the times. It was cool to look camp.

Do you know what was the backbone for that? The crazy, overcompressed bit-heavy electropop, and decadent electric indie rock that crossed hyper-niche musical borders, all of which stuck as indie sleaze's staple soundtrack. These 'cool' songs were distributed through Tumblr, MySpace, and music blogs, the latter now a struggling art form following the tragic unfolding of pivotal counterculture mag Pitchfork into the macho GQ. Despite this media setback, the aesthetic's apparent comeback has also seen the music dominating the parties of the late 2000s become widely celebrated once more. Music festivals such as America's Just Like Heaven have brought back the big names that scored these maximalist dance parties: Phoenix, Passion Pit, Yeah Yeah Yeahs, M83, and MGMT are just some on the roster. That, and the recent discourse substantiating the aesthetic's revival, must be more than enough.

As we're ageing into adulthood, perhaps what we need is a bolt of optimism to strike our lives, making us feel a blissful naivety once more. With the aforementioned artists remaining active since indie sleaze's initial dissipation, it's almost as if the aesthetic never really faded. More people than ever are in the know, thanks to TikTok distributing these hits to new generations, who weren't even there for its heyday. The 2000s-era and its smattering of mashed up indie, disco, and electro rave doused in a vaguely '70s–80s throwback is still of interest. Its continued admiration has formed a new kind of indiedom within itself, with younger generations seizing its novelty, and those older—there in the moment—owning it once more. So, to revel in this kitschy nostalgia, here's a musical time capsule curating the party iPod's very best dancefloor anthems that made the roofs of those parties explode.

'Dance Yrself Clean' (LCD Soundsystem)

If there's one sure-fire way to kick off a party, it's with LCD Soundsystem's most cleverly boisterous song. Opening quietly, this portion emulates the trickling of keen guests into the home of whoever's hosting the function, as they discover through friends that a party not to miss is already underway. Bandleader James Murphy emerges by mutedly humming beneath tinny hand claps. Then, unsuspectingly, as if welcoming everyone for finally rocking up, the beat drops. The party livens up as a sudden surge of synthesizers pummel your eardrums while you dance all over the place in the best way possible—without a care in the world. Murphy makes a profound call to arms as he vigor



ously holds his notes: ‘Put your little feet down / And hang out!’ Fit for any party’s initiation—or conclusion, when everyone’s living on one last sliver of energy—this song’s placement at either end of the playlist is appropriate; ‘Dance Yrself Clean’ is indie sleaze’s ‘Stairway to Heaven’.

‘Walking on a Dream’ (Empire of the Sun)

Aussie electropop heroes Empire of the Sun spearheaded the genre’s crossover into mainstream discourse around the late 2000s. In retrospect, their over-the-top, lavish costumes and visuals that bordered on the other-worldly and supernatural, mirrored indie sleaze’s grip on maximalism. ‘Walking on a Dream’, however, is the perfect middle-ground that balances the exaggerated extravagance and earnest artistry surrounding the aesthetic. The pastoral, psychedelic tune floats with a light acoustic groove, emitting good vibes with its key motif of coming together by love: ‘Is it real now? / Two people become one’. The song’s reach is boundless—American rapper Wiz Khalifa brought it into his world as ‘The Thrill’, effectively resampling it into a party rap jam. In any form, ‘Walking on a Dream’ is a unique deflection of indie sleaze’s overt hipsterism—it’s a musical comedown that paradoxically lifts any party’s spirits.

‘I Bet You Look Good on the Dancefloor’ (Arctic Monkeys)

It’s a no-brainer that the high-octane, raw rock ‘n’ roll of Arctic Monkeys irreversibly altered the indie rock landscape during the 2000s. If their contemporaries The Strokes had a sleazy undercurrent to their undemanding

garage rock, then Arctic Monkeys in their infancy—before their clean-cut bluesy AM phase in 2013—held onto a sense of debauchery. The British rockers’ debut single ‘I Bet You Look Good on the Dancefloor’ is the band at their most authentic, drawing upon Britpop and the like. Whether it’s played at its original energetic tempo or dialled back with lead vocalist Alex Turner’s modern Bowie-isms, it’s still a banging tune capturing the youthful exuberance of nightlife that’ll never get old. Its enduring appreciation that extends to the band—who reached superstardom with this single—attests to its brilliance. ‘Dancing to electropop like a robot from 1984’, Turner exclaims—we sure are.

‘Last Nite’ (The Strokes)

Without the repetitive garage rock of America’s ordinary leather-jacketed heroes The Strokes, indie sleaze wouldn’t be what it is. Had they not emerged, the revivalism of all things blues rock to grunge—a practice sewn into the very fabric of the aesthetic—wouldn’t have existed. It’s hard to imagine a musical climate without The Strokes cementing themselves as a cultural touchstone for revolutionising rock. Like the Arctic Monkeys, their debut carries the most authenticity, but unlike Turner and Co lauding excess, lead vocalist Julian Casablancas explores the navigating of urban youth—the vulnerable side of the indie rock coin. ‘Last Nite’ is the definitive Strokes number that soundtracks both dancing heartily and post-party depression. On the latter, Casablancas defeatedly says ‘Oh, people, they don’t understand’. No other rock song guilt trips us with ‘you just had to be there’ better than this one.



‘Standing In the Way of Control’ (Gossip)

Gossip’s strutting dance-punk hit sounds like the riot grrrl rock of Sleater-Kinney, only it’s tamer. Still, it soars with its own idiosyncrasies, like frontwoman Beth Ditto’s shrieky, razor-sharp vocals cutting through the song’s grungy guitars. Hearing her bellowed chorus, ‘Standing in the way of control / You live your life / Survive the only way that you know’, makes the hedonistic ‘lose yourself’ energy of the aesthetic manifest into reality. When we were younger, living without a care in the world, surfing the internet and all, this stilted Strokes-y stomper makes for an appetising way to feast on that. It’s giving responsibility the middle finger.

‘NY Lipps’ (Soulwax)

Soulwax’s bleep-heavy nu-disco in ‘NY Excuse’ is already a renowned underground phenomenon circulating in the indie sleaze musical canon. However, this mashup of Lipps Inc.’s famous ‘Funkytown’ takes the tune to a whole new level, by tapping into the scene’s eccentric ‘80s homages. The famous cowbell-heavy groover and its chirpy guitar riffs are distorted to fit Soulwax’s track with its sassy narration: ‘This is the excuse, that we’re making (we’re making)’, exuding a carefree demeanour just like the aesthetic itself, reviving past genres and tropes. ‘NY Lipps’ is a bizarre time machine to the parties of yesteryear that urged anyone to boogie; Soulwax successfully took us back in time.

‘D.A.N.C.E.’ (Justice)

The bit-crushed, electro house hit ‘D.A.N.C.E.’ is one of Justice’s best—derived from its parent album, *Cross*, which samples over 400 pieces of music! Its infectious

guitar and bass lines, with a melody boldly inspired by Michael Jackson, puts any partygoer in the mood to dance. Although Justice’s jittering disco floor anthem has its origins in pop, the way it twists into something musically maximalist makes it a perfect fit for the colourful world of indie sleaze’s excessiveness. Its sole mantra becomes clear with the line ‘Just as easy as A-B-C’—Justice is right, dancing to it is effortless.

‘24 Hours’ (Sky Ferreira)

Sky Ferreira was perhaps the poster girl for indie sleaze’s unwashed aesthetic, once hanging out with the likes of Taylor Swift (who is, no question, well outside of today’s indie sphere) and donning mascara-ringed eyes and fashion with a vintage edge. Her discography is the ultimate summation of the aesthetic, since her output is largely frozen to when it was at its most prevalent. The ‘80s-esque synthpop ballad ‘24 Hours’ booms with heartfelt twinkles akin to New Order’s ‘Bizarre Love Triangle’, and sparkles just as luxuriously as Blondie’s ‘Heart of Glass’. As Ferreira valiantly begs ‘I wish these 24 hours would never end’, she’s speaking to the youth in all of us—we don’t want our carefree optimism to fade. The skyrocketing resurgence of indie sleaze screams nothing but a yearning for the era’s heyday, and with this song playing out like poignant end credits music, Ferreira has intimately captured that. A sincere, tear-jerking alternative dance anthem that takes us back to our exuberant glory days.