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PLAYLIST



**ROOTS**  
**ELECTION SPECIAL**  
Ry Cooder



Like Felix the Cat, Ry Cooder has an impressive bag of tricks and reaches in and takes a big handful for this commentary on the US presidential election. The most prominent tone is irony, delivered with a nod and a wink, and all the time from the

left. Tracks such as *Mutt Romney Blues*, *Guantanamo* and *The Wall Street Part of Town* best illustrate his political leanings. But unlike Steve Earle's *The Revolution Starts Now*, *Election Special* does not dissolve into pastiche, with Cooder keeping a firm grip on the tiller. The great guitarist covers the breadth of his career working up songs in folk, country and rock stylings, with an excellent blues in *Cold Cold Feeling*. But this is a simple affair, son Joachim playing percussion while Cooder plays guitars, mandolin and bass. Arnold McCuller contributes a harmony vocal. **Henry Lyall**



**ROCK**  
**MAGIC**  
Smash Mouth



"Whatever happened to Justin Bieber?" muses Smash Mouth frontman Steve Harwell. Such sentiments are hard to top from a pop-rock band consisting of

40-year-old men whose last hit was in 2001. Smash Mouth may have once provided the soundtrack to boozy summer afternoons, but *Magic* seems to resemble the inevitable next-day hangover. What's here is the same energetic guitar work and Harwell's trademark vocals that propelled *All Star* and *Walking on the Sun*, but their fun surf-rock influence has been abandoned and what's left feels past stale. **Finian Houlihan**

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# GOING SOLO

Ronan Keating is about to hit the airwaves with a new album and make his movie debut, writes **Sally Browne**

Ronan Keating is quoting from 1980s hit teen movie *The Breakfast Club* perfectly. Line for line, he gets it all right, with the accents spot on.

It's one of his all-time favourite films, along with *The Great Escape*, the James Bond movies and the latest Batman series.

Keating, 35, is a huge film buff – a watch-it-several-times, learn-the-words, wonder-how-that-scene-could-have-been-shot-differently film buff. He's always wanted to break into acting and, this year, gets his chance with the release of the musical *Goddess*, directed by Mark Lamprell, who wrote *Babe*.

It's morning in London and Keating is in a good mood. He's been tweeting vigorously about the new season of *The X Factor* and is gearing up to hit the red carpet for the premiere of British comedy *Keith Lemon: The Film*, in which he has a cameo.

Right now, though, he's on the phone to talk about his new album, *Fires*. It's his first record of new material in six years. Not that he's been idle: Ronan has been barely out of the public eye – as a judge on *The X Factor*, touring with Boyzone and releasing plenty of compilation albums, such as last year's much-loved collaboration with Burt Bacharach, *When Ronan Met Burt*.

But the seasoned pro admits that releasing a new record is daunting.

"It's a scary thing because you're putting your heart and soul into something – turning these songs into little creations of your own," he says.

"There's blood, sweat and tears in these songs. It's been an interesting few years for me and I've found it difficult to put pen on paper and actually write and create. Whereas, over the past 12 months, I feel in a very positive place, a great place, and I'm ready to write and ready to push forward."

There's plenty of pop gems to be proud of on *Fires*, from the super-cool production of *Love You and Leave You* and the upbeat catchiness of *Nineteen Again*, written by Rick Knowles and Greg Alexander, whom he worked with on *Love is a Rollercoaster*, to the beautifully gentle *Lullaby*, which contains a surprise rap break by hip-hoppers Kiz.

The first single off the album is *Fires*, and

Keating is in the process of choosing the second single. *Wasted Light* is the frontrunner. He plans to record a trilogy of music videos, which will tell a story.

"There's a sense of optimism across this album for me and that's something that I've tried to push," he says.

"The whole momentum in this album is about the next stage in my life and moving forward."

The video for the single *Fires* is not a love story but is about passing the baton on to his new self.

"*Wasted Light* (also) has that feeling," he says. "It has optimism. It's about, it's OK, I'm ready to just keep going on this boat ride on my own, so it's that sense of momentum, of that moving forward, that whole positivity, that's kind of where I'm coming from."

Of course, Ronan's fans will be aware that recently he went through a period of darkness. This year, he spoke

publicly about his split from his wife of 14 years, model Yvonne Connolly,

following his affair with a backing dancer.

The couple has remained on good terms for the sake of their children, Jack, 13, Marie, 11, and Ali, 6.

It might be harder to sing love songs, but Keating says that the album isn't autobiographical.

"I haven't written songs about anyone at all on this album, other than just drawing from the emotions and the places that I've been," he says.

"I've hurt enough people. I've caused enough trouble and heartache. I don't want to do that on this record. I just want peace."

Now he's focusing on spending time with his kids, as well as the myriad projects he has on the go.

His daughter Marie is also getting into acting, with a role in the upcoming horror flick *Dark Touch*, due out in February.

"She is in a session as we speak this morning," her dad says. "She's very busy reading other scripts and getting other offers, which is very exciting at 11 years of age. It's incredible."

"I'm so proud of her and in so many other ways than just that," he says. "She's a wonderful, big-hearted soul. I'm so lucky with all my kids."

Movies have always been a passion for Keating, the youngest of five kids who grew

I've found it difficult to put pen on paper and actually write and create

## GIG GUIDE

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up in Dublin and hit the limelight with Boyzone when he was just 16. He tried out for the musical *Moulin Rouge*, in the part that went to Ewan McGregor, and recently read for *The Hobbit*. But it's the Australian-made film *Goddess* in which he gets his big break.

In the rom-com musical, due out this year, he plays a marine biologist working in the Antarctic, whose wife, a singer (Laura Michelle Kelly), is discovered performing via her webcam.

"She has to leave to pursue her dream and I have to come back and mind the kids,

but she leaves the webcam on, so all these women continue to watch me in the house with the kids, which is where the humour comes in," Ronan says.

"There's seven or eight songs in there and it's a beautiful film. I've loved every moment of this, I really did.

"I'm a big fan of film. I mean, we're all fans of films but I would go and see movies three, four times. My friends don't understand that.

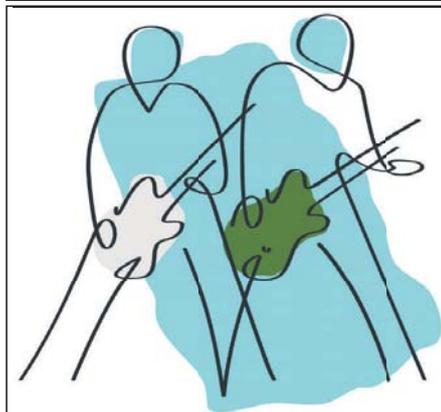
"I just recently watched the new Batman movie. I mean, wow. It got a lot of negative

press. I don't know who's watching these films and writing these reviews. I think they're crazy, seriously."

Keating is also thrilled his big movie break is happening in an Australian film, as Australia is his second home. He'll head here shortly to continue with *The X Factor*. Look out for more tweets on that soon.

"I love Australia. I love the people. I have a very strong connection there," Ronan says. "It's important to me."

Fires is out on Friday.



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