

# review the music

this week's essential reading

'How indie rock changed the world' by Deborah Cohen, [www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com)

'Indie's founding premise — that anyone could be a producer of art and culture, the more inventively off-centre the better — is now a staple of the new media of the information age'

# Pop's brave new world

PC Music is a new and unorthodox type of label, which releases its music mainly through a rudimentary web page. The music is coy, crafty and an extreme form of pop, writes [Andy Battaglia](#)



**PC Music: Volume 1**  
Various artists  
PC Music, Dh36

If pop music is bubblegum, the sounds assembled under the mantle of PC Music are the sickly sweet by-product of chemicals and compounds caked up in the corners of factory-grade bubblegum machines.

No element of it is less than entirely extreme: extremely poppy, extremely coy, extremely mysterious about what, if anything, it all means. But then it is also extremely sly, extremely knowing, and extremely crafty in ways that reward scrutiny, however much confusion and maybe even rage might be involved in the end.

In the simplest of terms, PC Music is a record label based in London and home to a new crop of young artists at work in electronically inclined arenas of club music and pop. Nothing PC Music-related is simple, however, so it's best to give up the ghost of conventional taxonomies and distinctions at the start. As a "label" it might be better understood as a "post-collective notion of a network on the internet", with a series of acts and releases linked for the most part on a rudimentary web page. As for calling the sounds "club music" or "pop"—yes, well, both are correct, but...

PC Music is most intriguingly approached as an art project more than a merely musical enterprise. That allows for more leeway in terms of the kinds of reactions it can withstand. The majority of music, save for outliers on the edges of the avant-garde, sets its sights on pleasure centres, those nodes in the mind and body where familiarity and surprise are rewarded in no uncertain terms. Music is made to please, for the most part. (The lesser part,

**I wanted to be a squirrel, I think.**

GFOTY, PC Music artist, when asked what she wanted to be when she grew up

in which music can be scary and perplexing and weird, is worth acknowledging too, but that's a minority rather than majority opinion to be sure.)

The easiest way to gain entry is by way of *PC Music: Volume 1*, a new compilation that gathers 10 songs by seven different PC-affiliated artists. The first is Hannah Diamond, a svelte would-be (and could-be) pop star whose sound is tight and toned to within a mite of snapping like an overstretched rubber band. "I know you like the way that I look, and it looks like I like you too," she sings to a prospective mate. "I like the way you like that I like how you look, and you like me too."

In the most inconspicuous of ways, it comes across as boilerplate love-song sentiment, pop plain and simple. But then go back over the words, noting all the repetition and subtle changes in inflection between "like" and "look", and it reads almost like something written by Gertrude Stein.

*Beautiful*, the second song on the compilation, introduces AG Cook, the mastermind in many ways of PC Music since its origins in 2013. The beat is another tight one, lithe and snappy in the midst of sonic smearing that evokes Aphex Twin and lots of bad trance. It works better together than it probably should, and then the occasion turns even more improbably rewarding with GFOTY, the strangest and most intriguing PC Music artist on the roster. Her track *USA* sizes up America in disarming fashion with just a few words: "It's big, everything is stars and stripes, a cowgirl is getting drunk tonight..."

The phrases get repeated over and over, in a voice that sounds like a cartoon character on helium. The production sounds like something punched up on a calculator and a chintzy keyboard. The result is glorious and repulsive. GFOTY (the name stands for "Girlfriend of the Year") is the reigning absurdist court jester of PC Music so far, with a lot of competition around her in a stable that prizes absurdity across the board. In a video interview for *Fact* magazine, she answers a question about what she wanted to be as a kid thus: "I wanted to be a squirrel, I think." In a trailer for a PC Music multimedia project called *Pop Cube*, she leads an ersatz cooking show that involves throwing raw chicken around the set and dementedly saying things like: "I like kitchens and I like knives."

*Pop Cube* was a spectacle in New York earlier this month that involved PC Music characters — some from the compilation and others including Sophie and QT, a bubbly personality who also markets her own energy drink — cavorting around a television studio, with live performances interspersed.

They arrived on a red carpet in flashy cars, as if stars already, and the media lapped it up. It was a lark transformed into a self-



**QT, one of the members of PC Music. The artist is a bubbly persona, who apparently markets her own energy drink.** Courtesy Diamond Wright

filled prophecy, a simulacrum that turned real. The same can be said of the PC Music sound, which is still the best and most worthwhile manifestation of the overall idea. It's worthwhile for how disinterested it is in doing its pop duty and rewarding the desire on the audience's part to

listen in and get something out of it. Indeed, a strange state of vulnerability and embarrassment attends the act of moving through PC Music: Volume 1 and taking in a song like "Wannabe" by Lipgloss Twins, a trifle that aims at the pleasure centres and makes it clear that pleasure centres

are easy targets. It aims, shoots through, and, when stopped, twists the arrow a bit too insistently and aggressively to be innocuous.

As pop listeners and fans, it seems to suggest, we are not especially complicated and complex in the end. Take it as an insult

or take it as relief — either way, there's comfort in the notion that point and truth can still transmit their way through the airwaves.

*Andy Battaglia is a New York-based writer whose work appears in The Wall Street Journal, Frieze, The Paris Review and more.*

## ▶ the playlist new sounds from a new club

**Every Night**  
Hannah Diamond  
(PC Music, 2014)

Diamond's third solo single and PC Music's first to be available as a paid download. The British musician is one of the label's more visible artists and her singing is characterised by a staccato and almost childlike vocal.



**Hey QT**  
QT  
(XL, 2014)

QT is the brainchild of American artist, Hayden Dunham. QT is a virtual character, who promotes an energy drink called DrinkQT. This was co-produced by the head of PC Music, AG Cook and features lots of synthesizers.



**Bobby**  
Girlfriend of the Year  
(GFOTY)  
(PC Music, 2013)

GFOTY is the alter-ego of British singer Polly-Louisa Salmon. Much of her work takes the form of remixes, and Bobby reflects on feelings of uselessness after the disintegration of a recent relationship.

