

10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1 by Midnight Oil

▶ Midnight Oil - 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 (1982) [Album]

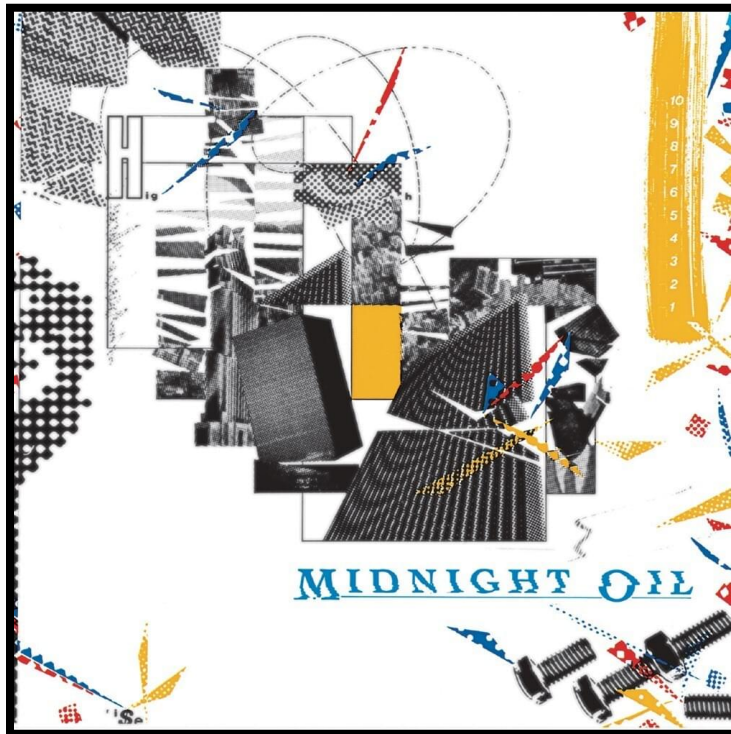
Midnight Oil are an Australian band known for their punchy lyrics and energetic live shows. They were formed in 1972 in Sydney, Australia by Rob Hirst (drums) Jim Moginie (guitar, keyboard) and Andrew James (bass 1972-1980) as Farm. They put out an ad, looking for a lead singer and in 1973 Peter Garret joined the band. They were joined by guitarist Martin Rotsey who would remain with the band for the rest of their career.

In their early years they gained success in Sydney's surf community. However, they broke into the mainstream in 1982 with their album *10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1*. Midnight Oil had middling success for the next couple of years until their most famous album *Diesel and Dust*. This album contained their only song to have major international success: *Beds are Burning*. They continued making music for the next couple of decades, until disbanding in 2002 so Garret could pursue a career in politics. The group reformed in 2009 and only stopped touring in 2022!

Midnight Oil had initially intended to have their breakthrough in 1981 with *Place Without a Postcard* but it failed to gain real traction. In 1982, looking for a new sound, they headed to England, where they got a nightly gig at a club in Sussex. While in England, they met a young producer named Nick Launey who had worked at KTEL in the late 70s, however they were unsure about collaborating as they came from completely different scenes. One night Launey went to see them perform live and his mind was blown; "The energy in Rob's drumming [...] was amazing and Peter was just on fire. I really liked AC/DC. But this was like intelligent AC/DC". The combination of Midnight Oil's Aussie pub rock sound and Launey post-punk production, as well as the band's pent up anger and potent lyrics make for an album that is truly like no other.



Midnight Oil in 1982. From left to right: Jim Moginie, Rob Hirst, Martin Rotsey, Peter Garret, Peter Gifford



10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 album cover.

Track 1. - “Outside World”

▶ Outside World (Remastered Version)

“Outside world” is a unique medley of different electronic sounds, all playing the same two notes while an ominous electronic chugging sound serves as bass. The goal of the opening track is to create a somewhat uneasy, yet floaty feeling in what I can only describe as “Nuclear Psychedelia”. Peter Garrett's lyrics paint a picture of the speaker's paranoia of world events (the outside world). Near the end of the song Hirst's drums finally kick in, creating a grandiose crescendo that builds and builds, until all of a sudden it tumbles into a low electric hum that continues into the next track.

Rating: 7/10

Track 2. - “Only the Strong”

▶ Only The Strong (Remastered Version)

“Only the Strong” picks up where “Outside World” left off. It opens with the sound of the band warming up their instruments, before Peter Garrett's electrifying vocals bring the album to its proper opening. The combination of the driving beat and frequent stops make “Only the Strong” the perfect introduction to *10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1*. The band's lyrics meander through themes of loneliness and isolation. The speaker explains his frustration at not being listened to: Speak to

me, speak to me. I'm at the edge of myself. I'm dying to talk. Look at me, won't you look at me". The song fits into the album's theme of the nuclear escalation of the 80s by discouraging young people from losing sight in what they believe and telling them not to fall into feelings of helplessness and depression. The frustrated theme of the sound fit well into the band's emotions at the time. Having been staying in a hotel room in England and living off of take-out for a few months, the band was frustrated, pent-up and homesick and those emotions are perfectly captured in both this song and the closing track: "Somebody's Trying To Tell Me Something".

Rating: 9/10

"Only The Strong" Lyrics:

When I'm locked in my room

I just want to scream

And I know what they mean

(One more day of eating and sleeping)

Speak to me, speak to me

I'm not spoken for, I'm ready to talk

Look at me, look at me

I've been broken up and shaken down

Speak to me, speak to me

I'm at the edge of myself I'm dying to talk

Look at me, won't you look at me

Back once more at the point of no return

When I'm locked in my room

I just want to scream

And I know what they mean

Only the strong



the Zig Zag club in England, where Midnight Oil would refine "Only The Strong".

Track 3. - "Short Memory"

▶ Short Memory (Remastered Version)

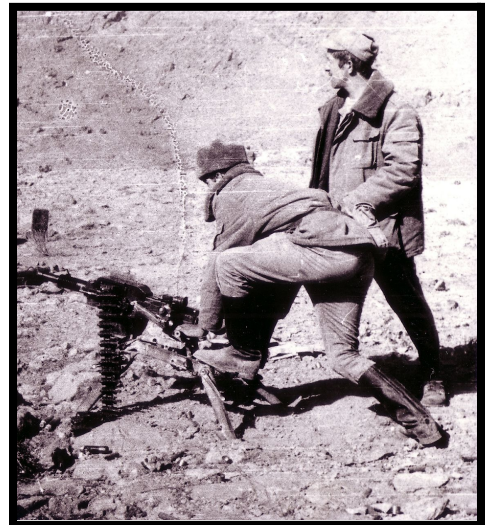
"Short Memory" mixes absolutely no terms. The lyrics are upfront and direct, in a "We Didn't Start The Fire"-style list of historical events. The central theme of the song is that of history repeating itself. This is exemplified by Garret's rant at the end of the song: "If you read the history books you'll see the same things happen again and again. Repeat repeat short memory

they've all got it". The overtly political nature of the song became especially stark when Peter Garrett introduced the song by saying "this one goes out to Henry Kissinger, who got the Nobel Peace Prize for bombing the living daylight out of Cambodia". Musically, "Short Memory" is notable for Rotsey's catchy guitar riff, which remains present throughout the song, as well as Jim Moginie's stellar keyboard part. "Short Memory" remains eerily relevant today with lines such as "Conquistador of Mexico, the Zulu and the Navajo. The Belgians in the Congo short memory" and "A smallish man Afghanistan, a watchdog in a nervous land. They're only there to lend a hand short memory". Garret makes sure that the song continues to provoke thought by adding new lines to the song while performing, such as: "partition of Arabia" and "Russians in the Ukraine"

Rating: 9/10

"Short Memory" lyrics:

Conquistador of Mexico, the Zulu and the Navajo
The Belgians in the Congo short memory
Plantation in Virginia, the Raj in British India
The deadline in South Africa short memory
The story of El Salvador, the silence of Hiroshima
Destruction of Cambodia short memory
Short memory, must have a, short memory
The sight of hotels by the Nile, the designated Hilton style
With running water specially brought short memory
A smallish man Afghanistan, a watchdog in a nervous land
They're only there to lend a hand short memory
Wake up in sweat at dead of night
And in the tents new rifles hey short memory
If you read the history books you'll see the same things happen again and again
Repeat repeat short memory they've all got it
When are we going to play it again
Got a short, got a short, got a short, got a short
They've got a short must have a short they've got a short aah
Short memory, they've got a.



Soviet troops conducting a firing exercise in afghanistan. 1986

Track 4. - “Read About it”

▶ Midnight Oil - Read About It

One of three singles on the album, “Read About It” is, in my opinion, Midnight Oil’s greatest song of all time. It utilises the minor key, while still being loud and having a driving beat behind it, which makes for an incredibly catchy melody. It never loses any energy, even when it’s just Peter Garret and Rob Hirst’s cowbell, it remains incredibly high energy. Throughout most of the song Peter Garrett’s vocals are backed up by a second recording so that he harmonises with himself. This combined with the rest of the band on backup, adds to the previously mentioned perfect combo of the band’s high energy and the minor key of the melody. It’s hard to say that any particular band member takes centre stage in this song, because every single one of them is on their A game. The song’s lyrics however, is where it truly shines. “Read About It” exemplifies the theme of the album and the band’s central focus at the time: the nuclear arms race.

The first verse explores themes of wealth inequality and corruption, with lines such as: “The rich get richer, the poor get the picture” and “The bosses want decisions, the workers need ambitions”. The line in the chorus: “You wouldn’t read about it” alludes to the concept of ‘manufactured consent’, where people remain content with the status quo because the media leaves them in the dark about their government’s actions.

The second verse explains the precarious situation the world was in at the time, as, if either the United States of America or the Soviet Union launched nuclear missiles, the other side would launch thier’s and the world would end in a radioactive inferno. Midnight Oil compares the USA and the USSR with the contrasting lines: “Hammer and the sickle, the news is at a trickle” and “The stars and stripes are running for their own big show”. In one of the final lines of the second verse Garret encourages the audience to “Imagine any mixup and the lot would go”.

Rating: 20/10

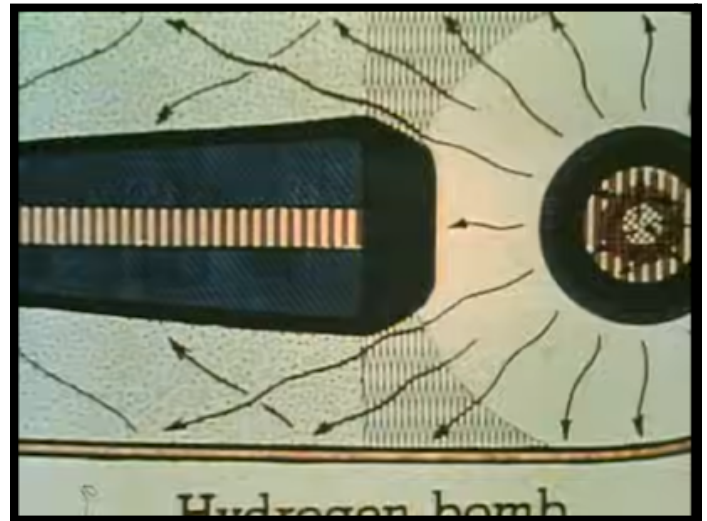


Midnight Oil recreating a shot from the “Read About it” Music Video.

from left to right: Rob Hirst, Peter Gifford, Peter Garret, Jim Mogle, Martin Rotsey.

“Read About It” Lyrics:

The rich get richer, the poor get the picture
The bombs never hit you when you're down so low
Some got pollution, some revolution
There must be some solution but I just don't know
The bosses want decisions, the workers need ambitions
There won't be no collisions when they move so slow
Nothing ever happens, nothing really matters
No one ever tells me so what am I to know
You wouldn't read about it, read about it
Just another incredible scene, there's no doubt about it
Hammer and the sickle, the news is at a trickle
The commissars are fickle but the stockpile grows
Bombers keep a-coming, engines softly humming
The stars and stripes are running for their own big show
Another little flare up, storm brewed in a teacup
Imagine any mix up and the lot would go
Nothing ever happens...
You wouldn't read about it, read about it
One unjust ridiculous steal, ain't no doubt about it
You wouldn't read about it, read about it
Just another particular deal, there's no doubt about it



*Diagram of a hydrogen bomb, taken from the
“Read About It” music video. 1982*

Track 5. - “Scream In Blue”


▶ Scream In Blue (Remastered Version)

Scream in blue opens with an incredibly messy and distorted guitar part, which then phases into a more cohesive groove, supported by Hirst's drumming. The instrumental section of the song comes to an intense crescendo, interrupted by a lonely piano. The song then transitions to something resembling a ballad. The song is told from the perspective of a person who can only see their partner in secret. The line “Let sheets keep secrets that no one else could know” suggests that the two can only see each other in private; that their love is a secret.

Rating: 7/10

**“I think if you love the Oils, then you love *10 to 1*,” says Moginie.
“There’s something about the sound of it that doesn’t sound like any other bands from that time. The dynamics of it are mercurial and curly. *Diesel* is a very clear record and it sounded good on the radio, but *10 to 1* was wilder. It was more...It was more us”
-Jim Moginie**

Track 6. - “US Forces”

 Midnight Oil - US Forces

A scathing critique of US foreign policy, “US Forces” highlights the impact the American government has had on the world stage. It opens with a simple cord being strummed on a guitar. Accompanied by a synthesiser, until Peter Garret begins the song with the line “US Forces gives the nod. It's a setback for your country”. This line suggests that American global policy has had negative effects on other country’s domestic affairs. Another section of note is the line “Divided world the CIA say who control the issue Divided world the CIA Say who control the issue you leave us with no time to talk you can write your own assessment”, which alludes to the CIA’s numerous interferences in other countries domestic affairs, as well as the American government’s lack of transparency.

Rating: 9/10

“US Forces” Lyrics:

US Forces gives the nod
It's a setback for your country
Bombs and trenches all in rows
Bombs and threats still ask for more

Divided world the CIA

Say who control the issue
You leave us with no time to talk
You can write your own assessment

Sing me songs of no denying
Seems to me too many trying
Waiting for the next big thing

Will you know it when you see it
High risk children dogs of war
Now market movements call the shots
Business deals in parking lots
Waiting for the meat of tomorrow

Sing me songs of no denying
Seems to me too many trying
Waiting for the next big thing

Everyone is too stoned to start emission
People too scared to go to prison
We're unable to make decisions
Political party line don't cross that floor
L. Ron Hubbard can't save your life
Super boy takes a plutonium wife
In the shadow of ban the bomb we live

Sing me songs of no denying
Seems to me too many trying
Waiting for the next big thing

Sing me songs of no denying
Seems to me too many trying
Waiting for the next big thing

Sing me songs of no denying
Seems to me too many trying
Waiting for the next big
We can wait no longer, wait no longer, wait no longer

We're waiting
We're waiting
We're waiting



The vinyl label for the single release of "US Forces".

Track 7. - “Power And The Passion”

▶ Midnight Oil - Power and the Passion

“Power And The Passion” is easily one of Midnight Oil’s greatest songs. Its catchy beat, tight harmonies and electrifying lyrics make for what is without a doubt an all-time classic. The song features a legendary drum solo by Rob Hirst that ends with the sound of Hirst smashing a lightbulb. His solo on “Power And The Passion” is, without a doubt, one of the most unique and iconic drum solos in rock and roll history. It also contains a line that is burned into the heads of any Oils fan: “it’s better to die on your feet than live on your knees”; a paraphrasing of a quote by Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata.

“Power And The Passion” explores a variety of lyrical themes, including societal conformity and government control. Each verse provides a critical view of Australian society in the 80’s, verse one features the line “People, wasting away in paradise”, suggesting that the Australian people were filling their lives with materialistic things instead of enjoying the natural beauty around them, leading them to feel empty inside; “wasting away”. Verse two paints a picture of an idyllic beach crowded with people “Breathing eucalypt, pushing panel vans”. The description of the people suggests a level of ignorance and conformity: “Stuff and munch junk food, laughing at the truth”. Verse three describes the idyllic appearance and the unglamorous reality of Australian life. On the surface: “buildings clothing the sky, in paradise Sydney nights are warm, daytime telly, blue rinse dawn”. But in reality: “dad’s so bad, he lives in the pub, It’s an underarm and football club”.

Rating: 10/10

“Power And The Passion” Lyrics:

People, wasting away in paradise
Going backwards, once in a while
Taking your time, give it a try
What do you believe, what do you believe?
What do you believe is true?
And nothing they say makes a difference this way
Nothing they say will do
You take all the trouble that you can afford
At least you won’t have time to be bored
At least you won’t have time to be bored

Oh-oh, the power and the passion
Oh-oh, the temper of the time
Oh-oh, the power and the passion
Sometimes you’ve got to take the hardest line

Sunburnt faces around, with skin so brown
Smiling, zinc cream and crowds, Sundays the beach, never a cloud
Breathing eucalypt, pushing panel vans



The Youtube thumbnail for the “Power And The Passion” music video.

Stuff and munch junk food, laughing at the truth
'Cause Gough was tough 'til he hit the rough
Hey, Uncle Sam and John were quite enough

Too much of sunshine, too much of sky
It's just enough to make you wanna cry
It's just enough to make you wanna cry

Oh-oh, the power and the passion
Oh-oh, the temper of the time
Oh-oh, the power and the passion
Sometimes you've got to take the hardest line

I see buildings clothing the sky, in paradise
Sydney nights are warm, daytime telly,
Blue rinse dawn
And dad's so bad, he lives in the pub
It's an underarms and football club
Flat chat, Pine Gap, in every home a Big Mac
And no one goes outback, that's that

You take what you get to get what you please
It's better to die on your feet than to live on your knees
It's better to die on your feet than to live on your knees

Oh-oh, the power and the passion
Oh-oh, the temper of the time
Oh-oh, the power and the passion
Sometimes you've got to take the hardest line



The single cover for "Power And The Passion".

Track 8. - "Maralinga"

▶ Maralinga (Remastered Version)

The lyrics of "Maralinga" describe the desolation seen after the British nuclear sites at Maralinga. In the 1950s the British government tested nuclear weapons at several different sights in Australia, one of which being Maralinga, South Australia. However they failed to take proper precautions or warn indigenous people in the area of the potential danger. They also failed to ask the Indigenous people of the area to use their land, as it was, in fact, sacred land! Mushroom clouds from the test reached heights of up to 14 kilometres high and blew radioactive particles as far as Townsville, on the northeastern coast of Australia. Sickness and cancer remained prevalent in surrounding areas for decades afterwards and there are still areas of Maralinga that are uninhabitable, and will remain uninhabitable for thousands of years to come. Ironically, an incident eerily similar to this one would inspire Midnight Oil's most popular song "Beds Are Burning".

Rating: 7/10

“Maralinga” Lyrics:

I come from a land of wide open spaces
Where the world turns around us and we just follow suit
There's heat in the air and peace reigns supreme
Got white flags on the clothes lines and the deals are new

In the wind, the ashes fly
The poison crown, the charcoal ground

And if you can't see the smile in me
That's where I want to be

There's only God, There's only Christ
Think I'll lie down, for just a while

So watch and check them out and listen as we learn
Throw the pearls before the swine, ebb and flow and turning tide
Yes we watch and catch them down no matter how they jump
The pigs will have to come to ground, we've got to make it happen now
It's not really that new, try and make it happen now
What are we to do, maybe there's a chance for you

All around, an eerie sound
Their dreams a cloud, their world in shrouds
In the wind, the ashes fly
Not much time, but time to try
And if you can't see the smile in me, that's where I want to be
I want to be here at the, I have to be here at the end



A nuclear bomb being detonated at Maralinga.

Track 9. - “Tin Legs And Tin Mines”

▶ Tin Legs And Tin Mines (Remastered Version)

“Tin Legs And Tin Mines” is a call for social change and collective action. The line “Cry in the hope that there'll be tomorrow” depicts the anxiety and stress experienced by ordinary people living under the threat of nuclear annihilation during the cold war. The chorus of “Tin Legs And Tin Mines” consists of the phrase “who’s running the world?”, which is a call for people to remain sceptical of their leaders, and to question authority.

Rating: 8/10

Track 10. - “Somebody’s Trying To Tell Me Something”

▶ Somebody's Trying To Tell Me Something (Remastered Version)

“Somebody’s Trying To Tell Me Something” returns to the theme of paranoia. Similar to the first track, this song not only depicts the protagonist's paranoia, with lyrics such as “Breaking me down, desperate voices”, it also tries to emulate those feelings in the listener. Midnight Oil accomplishes this by implementing a heavily distorted bassline, played by Peter Gifford. This

combined with the song's anxious lyrics and Garret's frantic vocals perfectly capture what the band was looking for. Notably, this track features the album's runout groove, as it is the last track of the album.

At the end of the track there is a note, held for 30 seconds, this is because it is the digital emulation of the runout groove on the record. A runout groove or 'locked groove' occurs when a record is purposely designed to lock the needle of a record player in place, so that it loops the last part of the last track endlessly, until the needle is lifted. This endless, looping note helps contribute to the uneasy feeling meant to be felt by the listener.

Rating: 9/10

"Somebody's Trying To Tell Me Something" Lyrics:

... Breaking me down, lunatic noises
Breaking me down, desperate voices
Breaking me down, phone is blistering
Breaking me down, death by listening
... Somebody's out there, Somebody's waiting
Somebody's trying to tell me something
Somebody's trying to talk to me

... Cracking me up, silence threatening
Cracking me up, storm is deafening
Cracking me up, pressure brought to bear
Cracking me up, now I'm getting there

The Production Process

Nick Launey "would always have a razor blade out, doing zig-zag cuts on two-inch tape and splicing bits together.", his propensity for experimentation brought an entirely new sound to Midnight Oil and his production truly makes the album what it is. "He'd try anything to see what would happen. There were no rules." said Jim Moginie. Many of the peculiar, electronic sounds in the album were actually achieved completely manually by doing things such as play piano strings with drumsticks. He sliced different takes of Hirst's drumming together, in an attempt to "capture the energy of an Oils live show".

Many of the members of Midnight Oil were frustrated and homesick during the production process. Their frustration however was channelled into their music, making for an unforgettable performance. Rob Hirst recalls "going into the studio" and "taking it out on the kit". The frustration in the air is also excellently captured in the final track; "When Pete screams at the

end of 'Somebody's Trying To Tell Me Something', that's a real scream. Everyone was feeling it, I think".

The Legacy of *10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1*

10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1 has been called "the greatest Australian album of all time" (by me) and rightfully so. Its politically charged lyrics, outlandish sound, energetic playing, and emotional vocal delivery make it one of the most unique albums in the world. In the year it was released it ranked #3 on the Australian weekly charts, #5 on the year end charts, and it went on to be 7x platinum in Australia. It was given a four star rating from Rolling Stone and The Rolling Stone Album Guide and four-and-a-half stars by Allmusic, as well as six stars by me.

Personal Opinion

As is fairly obvious, I am a huge fan of this album and I legitimately feel like it is one of the greatest of all time. Its background, its composition, its subject matter, all combine to make a fantastic album that is truly like no other. *10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1* cannot be replicated. It is lightning in a bottle. It's the result of two completely different sides of music coming together and saying "hell why not" .

10/10.