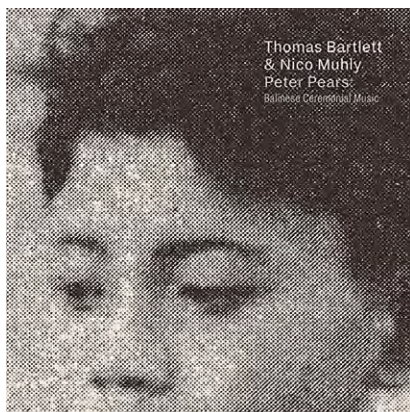




MUSIC ●●●●● SONICS ●●●●●

**Thomas Bartlett & Nico Muhly:  
Peter Pears: Balinese Ceremonial  
Music.** Nonesuch.

It's a long way from Vermont to Bali. It's also a long time between the 1930s and today. But classically trained composers, producers, and pianists Bartlett and Muhly magically bridge both gaps with this unique project. From the three pieces of Colin McPhee's *Balinese Ceremonial Music* (1934–1938), Bartlett and Muhly derived the rhythms, melodies, and forms they reconfigured and recombined for nine original songs: Extensively enhanced with electronics, they sound a lot more like Sufjan Stevens, Bon Iver, Iron and Wine, or Bartlett's electronic-ambient alter ego Doveman than a brassy gamelan orchestra in Ubud. Supporting Bartlett's whispery vocals are pianos, violins, viola, cello, vibraphone, maracas, tenor and bass drums, and harmony vocals. The enjoyment of these rich, warm, melancholic chamber-pop tracks is boosted immeasurably by the interspersing of the stark, acoustic, interlocking, often pentatonic patterns of McPhee's gamelan transcriptions "Gambangan," "Pemoengkah," and "Taboech Teloe." Bartlett painted his lyrics from a palette of things he said as a child and his metaphysical sense of connection to Bali, McPhee, Britten, and Britten's partner Peter Pears. **Derk Richardson**

**Further Listening:** Anna Calvi: *Strange Weather*



MUSIC ●●●●● SONICS ●●●●●

**Angélique Kidjo: Remain in Light.** Kravenworks.

A Benin native, Kidjo is a powerhouse singer raised on traditional and popular African music as well as Western soul and rock 'n' roll. Collaborating with artists from Dr. John to Philip Glass, she sings in any style she pleases despite silly complaints that she isn't African or purist enough. Refusing to write propaganda for Benin's communist regime, she left for Paris in 1983. After Kidjo heard the Talking Heads' hit "Once in a Lifetime" it stuck with her for years, and when she discovered the original *Remain in Light* in 2016 the social messages spoke to her. She has covered the entire album, highlighting the African-influenced rhythms while staying fairly faithful to the songs' structures. On her *Remain in Light* some songs, most notably "Houses in Motion," are not in English. Occasional electronic sounds echo Brian Eno's original production, but Adrian Belew's howling, caged, "lone rhino" electric guitar in "The Great Curve" is freed, cheered on by raucous horns as it runs away in the background. "Once in a Lifetime" is even more of a party; this diva has made a record as worthy as its predecessor. **Stephen Estep**

**Further Listening:** Fela Kuti: *Zombie*; Ali Farka Toure with Ry Cooder: *Talking Timbuktu*



MUSIC ●●●●● SONICS ●●●●●

**Courtney Barnett: Tell Me How  
You Really Feel.** Mom + Pop.

Past Courtney Barnett records have reflected a garden-variety disillusionment with present-day society through the lyrically sly snapshots and offhand, surrealistic takes of a grunge-loving humorist. While Barnett's keen wordsmithing remains on full display on *Tell Me How You Really Feel*, her lyrics are far more straightforward. On "Nameless, Faceless" she sings, "He said 'I could eat a bowl of alphabet soup / And spit out better words than you' / But you didn't"; in a nod to Margaret Atwood, the chorus adds, "Women are scared that men will kill them." What follows is perhaps Barnett's most ripping track to date, "I'm Not Your Mother, I'm Not Your Bitch." But there's more to the record than pure angst. On "City Looks Pretty" she wrestles with her own success: "Friends treat you like a stranger and / Strangers treat you like their best friend, oh well," and tracks like "Hopelessness" and "Need a Little Time" bring levity to the crushing depression and self-doubt of our times. Though focused on specific people or experiences, the cathartic messages found on this album translate to all. The stakes were high this time out, and Courtney Barnett crushed it. **Jocelyn Hoppa**

**Further Listening:** Snail Mail: *Lush*; Kevin Morby: *Harlem*