

Album of the Year: Kendrick Lamar

- Maeve Reilly

Now that the Super Bowl is over, it's time to focus on the next big event of the month: the most important night in music of the year, the 58th Annual Grammy Awards. In December, the complete list of nominees was released and since then, the outcomes of awards have been speculated and debated over and over again. Lots of buzz has surrounded what is arguably the most esteemed Grammy of all, the award for Album of The Year. There are five artists from various genres in the running, Alabama Shakes for *Sound and Color*, Chris Stapleton for *Traveller*, Kendrick Lamar for *To Pimp a Butterfly*, Taylor Swift for *1989*, and The Weeknd for *Beauty Behind the Madness*. Although all five artists should feel very proud of their all-around incredible work, this year, rap artist Kendrick Lamar deserves to take home the title for Album of the Year.

Sound and Color, the soul/jazz album by Alabama Shakes, contains 12 songs loaded with intense emotion, percussion, and groove. More than anything, the standout vocals of female lead singer, Brittany Howard brings the wow-factor to the group's sound. Last year, Chris Stapleton, a fairly new artist, released the 14-track country album *Traveller* that quickly became popular and even held the title of Billboard's #1 album for a period of time. The strengths of the album include Stapleton's impressive and soulful voice as well as the fact that the songs are far more melodic than the majority of mainstream twangy-country music. However, the placement of many moderately slow songs in a row causes the album to drag a bit when listened to as a whole. On the pop side of things, everyone and their mother has heard Taylor Swift's iconic *1989*—and probably more than once. Swift's lyrical gift, as well as her skill for creating addictive melodies, makes *1989* an absolute popmasterpiece. In the R&B world, The Weeknd dominated 2015. *Beauty Behind the Madness* showcases his flawlessly stunning tenor voice as well as his goose-bump-worthy runs and riffs. Not only does the album feature other acclaimed artists such as Ed Sheeran and Lana Del Rey, but also it includes huge hits like "Can't Feel My Face" and "The Hills."

Despite the glow of these four albums, Kendrick Lamar's *To Pimp a Butterfly* shines even brighter. The 17-track rap album includes a wide variety of rhythms and beats to compliment Lamar's lyrically driven work, drawing on both jazz and hip-hop influence. The African American artist uses his music to share his personal experiences with black pride and black shame and to take a stand against the racial injustice in America today. His powerful words in tracks such as "Alright" have become anthems of inspiration for the Black Lives Matter movement and for people everywhere struggling with the effects of racism. Even though there are five impressive and rightfully nominated albums in the running for the award, *To Pimp a Butterfly* is fresh, powerful, and relevant and will, hopefully, on February 15th, become 2015's Album of the Year.