The Definitive Guide to 1971 Entertainment

Top 20 TV Shows, Movies, and Music Released in 1971

TELEVISION SHOWS OF 1971

1. All in the Family

- **Premiere Date:**January 12, 1971
- **Notable Cast:**Carroll O’Connor, Jean Stapleton, Rob Reiner, Sally Struthers
- **Achievements:**Ranked #1 in Nielsen ratings; won 8 Emmy Awards in its first season
- **Cultural Impact:**Revolutionized television by addressing previously taboo topics like racism, homosexuality, rape, and abortion. Archie Bunker became an iconic character representing conservative working-class America, while the show used humor to confront social issues during a time of significant cultural change.

2. Columbo

- **Premiere Date:**September 15, 1971
- **Notable Cast:**Peter Falk
- **Achievements:**Won numerous Emmy Awards, including 4 for Falk’s performance
- **Cultural Impact:**Revolutionized the detective genre with its inverted mystery format where viewers see the crime committed at the beginning. Falk’s rumpled detective with his trademark raincoat, “just one more question” catchphrase, and beat-up Peugeot became iconic elements of American pop culture.

3. The Flip Wilson Show

- **Premiere Date:**September 17, 1970 (continued strong through 1971)
- **Notable Cast:**Flip Wilson and various guests
- **Achievements:**Second highest-rated show of 1971; first successful variety show hosted by an African American
- **Cultural Impact:**Wilson’s character Geraldine Jones became a cultural phenomenon with catchphrases like “The devil made me do it!” The show regularly featured A-list celebrities and musical acts, helping to integrate primetime television.

4. Marcus Welby, M.D.

- **Premiere Date:**1969 (continued as #3 show in 1971)
- **Notable Cast:**Robert Young, James Brolin
- **Achievements:**Third highest-rated show of 1971
- **Cultural Impact:**Presented medical issues to mainstream audiences and helped establish the medical drama as a television staple. Dr. Welby's compassionate approach to medicine contrasted with the more clinical approaches of later medical dramas.

5. Upstairs, Downstairs

- **Premiere Date:**October 10, 1971
- **Notable Cast:**Gordon Jackson, David Langton, Jean Marsh, Angela Baddeley
- **Achievements:**Won multiple BAFTA and Emmy Awards
- **Cultural Impact:**This British drama about the relationship between servants and their aristocratic employers became an international phenomenon. The show's examination of class differences and social history would influence numerous period dramas that followed.

6. The Persuaders!

- **Premiere Date:**September 17, 1971
- **Notable Cast:**Roger Moore, Tony Curtis
- **Achievements:**One of the most expensive television shows made in Britain at that time
- **Cultural Impact:**While more successful in Europe than America, the pairing of American Curtis with British Moore as playboy crime-fighters symbolized the transatlantic cultural exchange of the era. The show's stylish portrayal of wealthy adventurers influenced later action series.

7. Alias Smith and Jones

- **Premiere Date:**January 5, 1971
- **Notable Cast:**Pete Duel, Ben Murphy
- **Achievements:**Popular Western series inspired by the success of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid
- **Cultural Impact:**The show’s lighthearted take on Western outlaws seeking amnesty reflected changing attitudes toward antiheroes in American entertainment. The series was tragically affected by Pete Duel’s suicide in 1971, which shocked fans.

8. Gunsmoke

- **Year:**1955-1975 (ranked #4 in 1971)
- **Notable Cast:**James Arness, Amanda Blake, Milburn Stone
- **Achievements:**Fourth-rated show of 1971; longest-running primetime drama with 20 seasons
- **Cultural Impact:**Continued to dominate television ratings in its 17th season, demonstrating the enduring appeal of the Western genre as it was beginning to fade from cinema. Marshal Matt Dillon remained one of TV’s most recognizable characters.

9. The Mary Tyler Moore Show

- **Year:**1970-1977 (ranked #10 in 1971)
- **Notable Cast:**Mary Tyler Moore, Ed Asner, Valerie Harper, Ted Knight
- **Achievements:**Multiple Emmy Awards; ranked #10 in 1971 ratings
- **Cultural Impact:**Continued to break new ground in its second season with its portrayal of an independent, career-minded single woman. The workplace family at WJM-TV created a template for ensemble workplace comedies that follows to this day.

10. The Partridge Family

- **Year:**1970–1974 (ranked #16 in 1971)
- **Notable Cast:**Shirley Jones, David Cassidy, Susan Dey, Danny Bonaduce
- **Achievements:**Hit soundtrack albums; top 20 in Nielsen ratings
- **Cultural Impact:**By 1971, David Cassidy had become one of the biggest teen idols in America, with “Partridge Family” merchandise and music dominating youth culture. The show represented a sanitized version of counterculture, making rock music safe for family viewing.

11. Sanford and Son

- **Premiere Date:**January 14, 1972 (premiered mid-season during 1971-72 TV season)
- **Notable Cast:**Redd Foxx, Demond Wilson
- **Achievements:**Immediate ratings hit, reaching #6 in its shortened first season
- **Cultural Impact:**Adapted from the British series “Steptoe and Son,” this sitcom centered on a Black father and son junk dealers in Los Angeles. Redd Foxx’s transition from adult-oriented comedy albums to primetime television helped bring authentic Black humor to mainstream audiences.

12. The NBC Mystery Movie

- **Premiere Date:**September 15, 1971
- **Notable Series:**Columbo, McCloud, McMillan & Wife
- **Achievements:**Ranked #14 in 1971 ratings; innovative rotating format
- **Cultural Impact:**Pioneered the “wheel” format of rotating different series in the same time slot. Each of the mystery shows featured distinctive detectives that expanded the range of crime-solving personalities on television.

13. The Sonny & Cher Comedy Hour

- **Premiere Date:**August 1971
- **Notable Cast:**Sonny Bono, Cher
- **Achievements:**Top 30 show in its first season; Emmy-nominated
- **Cultural Impact:**Successfully transitioned the pop music duo to variety television, featuring comedy sketches, musical performances, and their playful banter. Cher’s elaborate Bob Mackie costumes became a weekly fashion event, influencing 1970s style.

14. Mannix

- **Year:**1967-1975 (ranked #7 in 1971)
- **Notable Cast:**Mike Connors, Gail Fisher
- **Achievements:**Seventh-rated show of 1971; multiple Emmy nominations
- **Cultural Impact:**Featured one of television’s first regular African American characters in a drama series with Gail Fisher as secretary Peggy Fair. The show balanced hardboiled detective action with character development and social issues.

15. Here's Lucy

- **Year:**1968-1974 (ranked #11 in 1971)
- **Notable Cast:**Lucille Ball, Gale Gordon, Lucie Arnaz, Desi Arnaz Jr.
- **Achievements:**Top-rated comedy in its Monday night timeslot
- **Cultural Impact:**By 1971, Lucille Ball had been a television staple for 20 years, with this series featuring her real-life children. The show maintained her physical comedy while incorporating current events and celebrity guests, including Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton in a famous 1970 episode.

16. Hawaii Five-O

- **Year:**1968–1980 (ranked #12 in 1971)
- **Notable Cast:**Jack Lord, James MacArthur
- **Achievements:**Consistently high ratings; 12 seasons total
- **Cultural Impact:**The police procedural set in Hawaii featured exotic locations and the iconic catchphrase “Book 'em, Danno.” The series showcased Hawaii’s multicultural population and tourism appeal, while its theme song became one of television’s most recognizable.

17. The Mod Squad

- **Year:**1968–1973 (ranked #21 in 1971)
- **Notable Cast:**Michael Cole, Clarence Williams III, Peggy Lipton
- **Achievements:**Maintained strong ratings in its fourth season
- **Cultural Impact:**Featured three hip young counterculture types working undercover for the police – “one black, one white, one blonde” as the marketing noted. The show tried to bridge the generation gap during a time of youth rebellion against authority.

18. The F.B.I.

- **Year:**1965-1974 (ranked #17 in 1971)
- **Notable Cast:**Efrem Zimbalist Jr.
- **Achievements:**Made with the cooperation of the actual FBI under J. Edgar Hoover
- **Cultural Impact:**Presented a heroic, unambiguously positive portrayal of the Federal Bureau of Investigation during a period when anti-government sentiment was growing. The show's procedural accuracy and ripped-from-the-headlines cases provided a contrast to more counterculture-friendly crime shows.

19. The Carol Burnett Show

- **Year:**1967-1978 (ranked #23 in 1971)
- **Notable Cast:**Carol Burnett, Harvey Korman, Tim Conway, Vicki Lawrence
- **Achievements:**Multiple Emmy Awards; consistent ratings success
- **Cultural Impact:**By 1971, the variety show had established itself as a comedy institution with recurring sketches like “The Family” (which later spawned “Mama’s Family”). Burnett’s audience Q&A sessions and the Tarzan yell became signature elements of American comedy.

20. Rowan & Martin’s Laugh-In

- **Year:**1968-1973 (ranked #22 in 1971)
- **Notable Cast:**Dan Rowan, Dick Martin, Lily Tomlin, Ruth Buzzi, Goldie Hawn
- **Achievements:**Earlier seasons topped ratings; remained top 25 in 1971
- **Cultural Impact:**Though past its ratings peak, the rapid-fire comedy show continued to influence American humor and language with catchphrases like “Sock it to me” and “Very interesting.” The psychedelic aesthetic and political humor captured the era’s cultural shifts.

MOVIES OF 1971

1. The French Connection

- **Director:**William Friedkin
- **Notable Cast:**Gene Hackman, Roy Scheider, Fernando Rey
- **Achievements:**Won 5 Academy Awards including Best Picture, Director, and Actor (Hackman)
- **Cultural Impact:**Revolutionized the police thriller with its gritty realism and the famous car-chasing-elevated-train sequence, often cited as the greatest chase scene in film history. Popeye Doyle represented a new kind of antihero cop - brutal, racist, but effective.

2. A Clockwork Orange

- **Director:**Stanley Kubrick
- **Notable Cast:**Malcolm McDowell, Patrick Magee
- **Achievements:**Nominated for 4 Academy Awards including Best Picture
- **Cultural Impact:**Sparked international controversy for its depictions of violence, with Kubrick himself withdrawing the film from British release. The film’s striking visual style, including the Droogs’ costume design, influenced fashion, music videos, and cinema for decades.

3. Dirty Harry

- **Director:**Don Siegel
- **Notable Cast:**Clint Eastwood, Andy Robinson
- **Achievements:**Massive commercial success; established Eastwood as a major star
- **Cultural Impact:**Created the template for the vigilante cop film with Harry Callahan’s disregard for procedure and civil liberties. The “Do you feel lucky?” monologue became one of cinema’s most quoted sequences, while the film sparked debates about police methods and justice.

4. Fiddler on the Roof

- **Director:**Norman Jewison
- **Notable Cast:**Topol, Norma Crane
- **Achievements:**Won 3 Academy Awards; nominated for Best Picture
- **Cultural Impact:**Successfully adapted the beloved Broadway musical to film, exploring themes of tradition versus modernity through the story of Jewish life in pre-revolutionary Russia. Songs like “Tradition” and “Sunrise, Sunset” entered the popular culture.

5. The Last Picture Show

- **Director:**Peter Bogdanovich
- **Notable Cast:**Timothy Bottoms, Jeff Bridges, Cybill Shepherd, Ben Johnson, Cloris Leachman
- **Achievements:**Won 2 Academy Awards; nominated for Best Picture
- **Cultural Impact:**This black-and-white elegy for small-town America and lost innocence exemplified the New Hollywood's artistic ambitions. The film launched the careers of several major actors and showed that contemporary directors could successfully revisit classical Hollywood styles.

6. Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory

- **Director:**Mel Stuart
- **Notable Cast:**Gene Wilder, Jack Albertson, Peter Ostrum
- **Achievements:**Initially a box office disappointment but became a beloved classic
- **Cultural Impact:**While not immediately successful, the film grew into a family classic through television broadcasts. Gene Wilder’s portrayal of Willy Wonka balanced whimsy with menace, while songs like “Pure Imagination” and “The Candy Man” became standards.

7. Shaft

- **Director:**Gordon Parks
- **Notable Cast:**Richard Roundtree, Moses Gunn
- **Achievements:**Commercial success; Oscar-winning theme song by Isaac Hayes
- **Cultural Impact:**One of the defining films of the Blaxploitation era, presenting a heroic, sexually confident Black detective. The character of John Shaft offered African American audiences a powerful protagonist, while the film's style and music influenced fashion and culture beyond the Black community.

8. McCabe & Mrs. Miller

- **Director:**Robert Altman
- **Notable Cast:**Warren Beatty, Julie Christie
- **Achievements:**Julie Christie nominated for Best Actress
- **Cultural Impact:**Altman’s “anti-Western” reimagined the genre with its muddy, rainy Pacific Northwest setting and Leonard Cohen soundtrack. The film’s critique of capitalism and American myth-making represented the counterculture’s revision of traditional Hollywood genres.

9. Klute

- **Director:**Alan J. Pakula
- **Notable Cast:**Jane Fonda, Donald Sutherland
- **Achievements:**Jane Fonda won Best Actress Oscar
- **Cultural Impact:**Fonda’s portrayal of call girl Bree Daniels brought new complexity to female characters in mainstream cinema. The film’s paranoid atmosphere and moral ambiguity anticipated the conspiracy thrillers that would dominate mid-1970s cinema.

10. Harold and Maude

- Director: Hal Ashby
- Notable Cast: Ruth Gordon, Bud Cort
- Achievements: Initially unsuccessful but became a cult classic
- Cultural Impact: This dark comedy about a death-obsessed young man and his 79-year-old lover defied conventions about romance and age. Its Cat Stevens soundtrack and counterculture sensibility made it a touchstone for those who felt alienated by mainstream values.

11. Diamonds Are Forever

- **Director:**Guy Hamilton
- **Notable Cast:**Sean Connery, Jill St. John
- **Achievements:**Commercial success; Connery’s return to Bond role
- **Cultural Impact:**Connery’s final official appearance as James Bond (until 1983’s non-Eon “Never Say Never Again”) marked the end of an era. The film’s Las Vegas setting and campier tone reflected changing tastes in action cinema as the franchise sought to modernize.

12. Carnal Knowledge

- **Director:**Mike Nichols
- **Notable Cast:**Jack Nicholson, Art Garfunkel, Ann-Margret, Candice Bergen
- **Achievements:**Ann-Margret nominated for Best Supporting Actress
- **Cultural Impact:**This unflinching examination of male sexual attitudes across decades challenged censorship standards with its frank dialogue and subject matter. The film captured changing sexual mores and gender roles during the sexual revolution.

13. Vanishing Point

- **Director:**Richard C. Sarafian
- **Notable Cast:**Barry Newman, Cleavon Little
- **Achievements:**Cult classic status
- **Cultural Impact:**This existential road movie about a car delivery driver racing across the American Southwest became a counterculture favorite. The minimalist storyline and spectacular car stunts influenced countless road movies, while the white Dodge Challenger became an automotive icon.

14. Straw Dogs

- **Director:**Sam Peckinpah
- **Notable Cast:**Dustin Hoffman, Susan George
- **Achievements:**Controversial critical success
- **Cultural Impact:**Peckinpah’s unflinching portrait of violence and controversial rape scene ignited debates about the portrayal of violence in cinema and the nature of masculinity. The film’s exploration of primal violence beneath civilized veneer resonated during a time of social upheaval.

15. The Hospital

- **Director:**Arthur Hiller
- **Notable Cast:**George C. Scott, Diana Rigg
- **Achievements:**Paddy Chayefsky won Oscar for Best Original Screenplay
- *_Cultural Impact:**This black comedy about a suicidal doctor and a failing hospital system offered a scathing critique of American healthcare. Coming after M_A_S|H, the film continued cinema's critical examination of medical institutions.

16. Play Misty for Me

- **Director:**Clint Eastwood
- **Notable Cast:**Clint Eastwood, Jessica Walter
- **Achievements:**Eastwood’s directorial debut
- **Cultural Impact:**This thriller about a radio DJ stalked by an obsessive fan established Eastwood as a director while creating the template for later stalker films like “Fatal Attraction.” Jessica Walter’s performance as a mentally unstable fan brought new complexity to female antagonists.

17. Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song

- **Director:**Melvin Van Peebles
- **Notable Cast:**Melvin Van Peebles
- **Achievements:**Independently financed and distributed; major commercial success
- **Cultural Impact:**This revolutionary independent film about a Black man on the run from white authorities was dedicated to “all the Brothers and Sisters who had enough of the Man.” Its success demonstrated the commercial viability of Black cinema and helped launch the Blaxploitation genre.

18. Bananas

- **Director:**Woody Allen
- **Notable Cast:**Woody Allen, Louise Lasser
- **Achievements:**Critical acclaim; early Allen success
- **Cultural Impact:**Allen’s political satire about a New Yorker who becomes involved in a Latin American revolution blended slapstick comedy with social commentary. The film established Allen’s persona as the intellectual nebbish in absurd situations that would define his early career.

19. Sunday Bloody Sunday

- **Director:**John Schlesinger
- **Notable Cast:**Peter Finch, Glenda Jackson, Murray Head
- **Achievements:**4 Oscar nominations including Director and Actress
- **Cultural Impact:**Groundbreaking in its matter-of-fact portrayal of bisexuality and a male homosexual character (Finch) who was neither stereotyped nor punished by the narrative. The film's adult approach to complex relationships signaled cinema's increasing maturity.

20. Two-Lane Blacktop

- **Director:**Monte Hellman
- **Notable Cast:**James Taylor, Dennis Wilson, Warren Oates
- **Achievements:**Critical acclaim; cult status
- **Cultural Impact:**This minimalist road movie starring musicians James Taylor and Beach Boy Dennis Wilson as taciturn street racers represented the existential alienation of the post-1960s era. Its documentary-like approach to American car culture captured a vanishing slice of Americana.

MUSIC OF 1971

1. Carole King – “Tapestry”

- **Released:**February 10, 1971
- **Key Tracks:**“It’s Too Late,” “I Feel the Earth Move,” “You’ve Got a Friend”
- **Achievements:**4 Grammy Awards including Album of the Year; 25+ million copies sold
- **Cultural Impact:**One of the best-selling albums of all time, “Tapestry” perfectly captured the singer-songwriter movement with its personal, introspective lyrics and piano-based melodies. King’s honest portrayal of relationships resonated particularly with women listeners, while the album’s warmth and accessibility bridged the generation gap.

2. Led Zeppelin – “Led Zeppelin IV”

- **Released:**November 8, 1971
- **Key Tracks:**“Stairway to Heaven,” “Black Dog,” “Rock and Roll”
- **Achievements:**One of the best-selling albums in history (23× platinum in the US)
- **Cultural Impact:**Contains “Stairway to Heaven,” arguably the most iconic rock song ever recorded. The album’s blend of hard rock, folk, and mysticism, combined with its enigmatic packaging (no title or band name on the cover), created a template for rock mystique that countless bands would follow.

3. The Rolling Stones – “Sticky Fingers”

- **Released:**April 23, 1971
- **Key Tracks:**“Brown Sugar,” “Wild Horses,” “Can’t You Hear Me Knocking”
- **Achievements:**#1 album in both US and UK; first release on Rolling Stones Records
- **Cultural Impact:**Featured the Andy Warhol-designed zipper cover, one of rock’s most famous album packages. The music showcased the Stones at their most decadent and bluesy, with songs addressing taboo subjects like drug use, interracial sex, and the dark side of 1960s idealism.

4. Marvin Gaye – “What’s Going On”

- **Released:**May 21, 1971
- **Key Tracks:**“What’s Going On,” “Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology),” “Inner City Blues”
- **Achievements:**Ranked #1 on Rolling Stone’s 2020 list of 500 Greatest Albums
- **Cultural Impact:**Revolutionized soul music by addressing social issues like environmental degradation, war, poverty, and urban decay instead of focusing solely on romance. Gaye’s concept album approach and lush orchestration created a template for socially conscious Black music.

5. The Who – “Who’s Next”

- **Released:**August 14, 1971
- **Key Tracks:**“Won’t Get Fooled Again,” “Baba O’Riley,” “Behind Blue Eyes”
- **Achievements:**Certified 3× platinum; widely considered The Who’s best album
- **Cultural Impact:**Arose from the ashes of Pete Townshend’s abandoned “Lifehouse” project, incorporating pioneering use of synthesizers while maintaining the band’s hard rock power. “Won’t Get Fooled Again” became an anthem of political disillusionment that remains relevant decades later.

6. Joni Mitchell – “Blue”

- **Released:**June 22, 1971
- **Key Tracks:**“River,” “A Case of You,” “California”
- **Achievements:**#3 on Rolling Stone’s 2020 list of 500 Greatest Albums
- **Cultural Impact:**Set new standards for emotional vulnerability and poetic sophistication in songwriting. Mitchell’s confessional approach, unusual guitar tunings, and jazz-influenced vocal phrasing expanded the possibilities of the singer-songwriter genre beyond simple folk music.

7. Sly & The Family Stone – “There’s a Riot Goin’ On”

- **Released:**November 20, 1971
- **Key Tracks:**“Family Affair,” “Just Like a Baby”
- **Achievements:**#1 on Billboard album charts
- **Cultural Impact:**Marked a dramatic shift from the group’s earlier optimistic sound to a darker, more cynical perspective. The murky production and lyrics reflected disillusionment with the failure of 1960s idealism and Stone’s own struggles with drug addiction.

8. John Lennon – “Imagine”

- **Released:**September 9, 1971
- **Key Tracks:**“Imagine,” “Jealous Guy,” “How Do You Sleep?”
- **Achievements:**#1 album in US and UK
- **Cultural Impact:**The title track became Lennon’s signature song and an enduring anthem for peace. The album balanced personal songs with political statements, while “How Do You Sleep?” contained Lennon’s pointed attack on former bandmate Paul McCartney, publicizing The Beatles’ bitter breakup.

9. David Bowie – “Hunky Dory”

- **Released:**December 17, 1971
- **Key Tracks:**“Changes,” “Life on Mars?”, “Oh! You Pretty Things”
- **Achievements:**Later certified platinum; critically acclaimed
- **Cultural Impact:**Released just before Bowie’s Ziggy Stardust persona emerged, the album showcased his songwriting versatility with its mix of folk, pop, and glam rock elements. “Changes” became a statement of artistic reinvention that would define Bowie’s career.

10. The Doors – “L.A. Woman”

- **Released:**April 19, 1971
- **Key Tracks:**“L.A. Woman,” “Riders on the Storm,” “Love Her Madly”
- **Achievements:**Gold certification within two weeks of release
- **Cultural Impact:**The final album recorded with Jim Morrison before his death in July 1971, it returned to the band’s blues roots after more experimental work. The epic title track became a defining portrait of Los Angeles, while “Riders on the Storm” showcased the band’s atmospheric side.

11. Janis Joplin – “Pearl”

- **Released:**January 11, 1971
- **Key Tracks:**“Me and Bobby McGee,” “Mercedes Benz,” “Get It While You Can”
- **Achievements:**#1 album for 9 weeks; 4× platinum certification
- **Cultural Impact:**Released three months after Joplin’s death, the album captured her at her vocal peak. Her cover of Kris Kristofferson’s “Me and Bobby McGee” became a #1 hit and her signature song, while the a cappella “Mercedes Benz” became her final recording.

12. Black Sabbath – “Master of Reality”

- **Released:**July 21, 1971
- **Key Tracks:**“Sweet Leaf,” “Children of the Grave,” “Into the Void”
- **Achievements:**Top 10 album in US and UK; later certified double platinum
- **Cultural Impact:**The band’s third album in two years further defined heavy metal with its down-tuned guitars and darker themes. Songs addressing war, drugs, and religious skepticism established metal’s countercultural credentials while influencing the development of stoner rock and doom metal.

13. The Allman Brothers Band – “At Fillmore East”

- **Released:**July 1971
- **Key Tracks:**“Whipping Post,” “In Memory of Elizabeth Reed”
- **Achievements:**Often cited as one of the greatest live albums ever recorded
- **Cultural Impact:**Captured the Southern rock pioneers at their improvisational peak shortly before guitarist Duane Allman’s death. The extended jams demonstrated the band’s unique fusion of rock, blues, jazz, and country elements while establishing their reputation as a formidable live act.

14. Rod Stewart – “Every Picture Tells a Story”

- **Released:**May 28, 1971
- **Key Tracks:**“Maggie May,” “Reason to Believe”
- **Achievements:**Simultaneous #1 album and single (“Maggie May”) in both US and UK
- **Cultural Impact:**Represented the perfect blend of folk, rock, and soul that defined Stewart’s early solo work. “Maggie May,” originally released as a B-side, became an unexpected hit with its story of an affair between a young man and older woman.

15. Yes – “Fragile”

- **Released:**November 26, 1971 (UK), January 1972 (US)
- **Key Tracks:**“Roundabout,” “Long Distance Runaround”
- **Achievements:**Reached #4 on US Billboard chart
- **Cultural Impact:**Featured new keyboardist Rick Wakeman and artwork by Roger Dean, establishing the visual and musical template for progressive rock. The album’s technical virtuosity and classical influences helped elevate rock music to art status in the eyes of many critics.

16. Jethro Tull – “Aqualung”

- **Released:**March 19, 1971
- **Key Tracks:**“Aqualung,” “Locomotive Breath,” “Cross-Eyed Mary”
- **Achievements:**Certified 3× platinum in US; the band’s commercial breakthrough
- **Cultural Impact:**Though bandleader Ian Anderson denied it was a concept album, its recurring themes about religion and society’s outcasts gave it a unified feel. The title character became one of rock’s most vivid portraits of the homeless and downtrodden.

17. T. Rex – “Electric Warrior”

- **Released:**September 24, 1971
- **Key Tracks:**“Get It On (Bang a Gong),” “Jeepster”
- **Achievements:**Defined the glam rock movement in the UK
- **Cultural Impact:**Marc Bolan’s transition from acoustic folk to electric glam rock helped launch a new musical movement. The album’s combination of Chuck Berry–inspired rock with poetic lyrics and a flamboyant image influenced countless artists from David Bowie to the New York Dolls.

18. The Beach Boys – “Surf’s Up”

- **Released:**August 30, 1971
- **Key Tracks:**“Surf’s Up,” “Feel Flows,” “Disney Girls”
- **Achievements:**Reached #29 on Billboard album chart
- **Cultural Impact:**Marked the band’s continued artistic evolution beyond their early surf rock image with socially conscious lyrics and complex arrangements. The title track, originally composed for the abandoned “Smile” project, showcased Brian Wilson’s avant-garde compositional skills.

19. Santana – “Santana III”

- **Released:**September 1971
- **Key Tracks:**“Everybody’s Everything,” “No One to Depend On”
- **Achievements:**Reached #1 on Billboard album chart
- **Cultural Impact:**The last album to feature the classic Woodstock-era lineup, it continued the band’s fusion of rock, Latin rhythms, and jazz. Seventeen-year-old guitarist Neal Schon (later of Journey) joined the band, adding another dimension to their instrumental prowess.

20. Don McLean – “American Pie”

- **Released:**October 24, 1971
- **Key Tracks:**“American Pie,” “Vincent”
- **Achievements:**#1 album in the US; “American Pie” single topped charts for four weeks
- **Cultural Impact:**The epic 8-minute title track became a cultural touchstone with its cryptic references to “the day the music died” (Buddy Holly’s plane crash) and the cultural changes of the 1960s. The song’s nostalgia for a lost American innocence resonated with audiences experiencing post-60s disillusionment.