The album cover dates from 1939, when Columbia Records art director Alex Steinweiss decided his label’s offerings might find a wider audience with some added visual appeal. Since the very first Steinweiss design, an album of show tunes by Rogers and Hart, album covers have represented the apotheosis and nadir of graphic design, and have touched all points in between. Last weekend we asked our readers to select the best album covers of all time. British bands took four out of five of the top spots. In the age of the digital download, the album cover is sadly a lost art – which probably explains why 90 percent of the albums that readers selected come from the 1960s and the 1970s.

Here are the Top 5:

1. The Beatles ‘Abbey Road’
   - July 2018
   - The London Issue
   - The London Issue
   - Total reader votes: 1,202
   - Designer: Hipgnosis
   - Total reader votes: 1,202
   - Pink Floyd had designed several of Pink Floyd’s previous albums, with controversial results: the band’s record company had reacted with confusion when faced with the collective’s non-traditional designs that omitted words. Their initial inspiration for Dark Side was a photo of a prism on top of some sheet music.

2. The Clash ‘London Calling’
   - 1979, CBS Records
   - Ray Lowry
   - Total reader votes: 955
   - Hipgnosis had designed several of Pink Floyd’s previous albums, with controversial results: the band’s record company had reacted with confusion when faced with the collective’s non-traditional designs that omitted words. Their initial inspiration for Dark Side was a photo of a prism on top of some sheet music.

3. Nirvana ‘Nevermind’
   - 1991, Geffen Records
   - Robert Fisher
   - Total reader votes: 755
   - The cover was originally going to show the Beatles playing in a park. That slowly evolved into the final concept, where they stand amid cardboard cutouts of their heroes. The band originally planned on including Leo Gorcey, Gandhi, Jesus Christ and Adolf Hitler. Common sense kicked Hitler off the cover, the still-linger ing bitterness of John Lennon’s “bigger than Jesus” comment kicked Jesus off the cover and Gandhi got the boot over concerns that India wouldn’t print the album.

4. Pink Floyd ‘Dark Side Of The Moon’
   - 1973, Harvest Records
   - Hipgnosis
   - Total reader votes: 933
   - Hipgnosis had designed several of Pink Floyd’s previous albums, with controversial results: the band’s record company had reacted with confusion when faced with the collective’s non-traditional designs that omitted words. Their initial inspiration for Dark Side was a photo of a prism on top of some sheet music.

5. The Clash ‘London Calling’
   - 1979, CBS Records
   - Ray Lowry
   - Total reader votes: 955
   - Hipgnosis had designed several of Pink Floyd’s previous albums, with controversial results: the band’s record company had reacted with confusion when faced with the collective’s non-traditional designs that omitted words. Their initial inspiration for Dark Side was a photo of a prism on top of some sheet music.
The London Tube has around 1.37 billion passengers annually. It rests as deep as 55.2 meters underground and as shallow as 2.5 meters.

Harry Beck and London's iconic Tube map by Dan Carrier
After World War I, striking modern posters began to transform the stations of London's underground railway system into public art galleries. The posters, now part of an exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art, were the crucial face of a pioneering public transport campaign for coherence and efficiency that also included station architecture, train interiors — and Harry Beck's map.

The tube map almost never made it out of its creator's notebook. The designer was Harry Beck, a young draughtsman who drew electrical circuits for the Underground. Beck's biographer, Ken Garland, befriended him in the 1950s, and before the designer's death in 1981 he uncovered the story behind the creation of what Beck called "the diagram".

"As a native of a small village in Devon and moving to London to study art, I found the metropolis impossible to navigate," Garland recalls. "I would get on the tube and see Harry's diagram. London suddenly made sense, and so I asked people at the college if they knew who the designer was."

Garland was told that HC Beck could be found at the London College of Printing, where he taught part-time, and he paid him a visit. They soon became friends. Beck first drew his diagram in 1931 — a difficult time for the newly established London Transport Passenger Board. With money tight, the board's employees could be laid off at short notice. Beck, then 29, had been employed as a "temporary" since he first started in 1925. While at work drawing an electrical circuit diagram, he had an idea: a new map that would make London "impossible to navigate."

"Beck could be found at the college in the middle of the night," Garland continues. "He would not take no for an answer. He went back to the publicity department with a revised copy, and finally they agreed to produce one. But for something that is so recognizable as a piece of "trade-mark" art, Harry Beck was not, according to Garland, part of the modernist movement that was sweeping through the psyche of painters, sculptors, other designers and filmmakers of the period. "He was not influenced by contemporary art," says Garland. "He knew little or nothing about it."

"The diagram", as Beck insisted it was called, was a lifelong obsession. As new routes were added, Beck would tinker with his design. He was constantly seeking to improve its clarity, and when the publicity department realized they had a hit on their hands, he had to fend off "helpful" suggestions from tube bosses.

For the best part of 30 years, his home was turned over to the map," recalls Garland. "There were sketches all over the place. The front room would often have a massive copy spread out on the floor for Harry to pore over. His wife Nora would find, when making their bed, a pile of scribbled notes under the pillow that Harry had been working on in the middle of the night."

But in 1939, after nearly three decades of working on the diagram, he was unceremoniously dumped from the publicity team. "Nora would find, when making their bed, a pile of scribbled notes under the pillow that Harry had been working on in the middle of the night."

"Beck embarked on a letter-writing campaign to take back control of his idea," Garland continues. "He wrote to the publicity team, to the publicity department, to the public."

"The diagram's iconic status should not be underestimated," says Garland. "It has touched so many people. The tube diagram is one of the greatest pieces of graphic design produced, instantly recognizable and copied across the world. His contribution to London can't be easily measured, nor should it be underestimated."

Beck's map, published in 1908, betrayed the fact that different operators were competing with each other and could not agree where the Underground ended. "Harry laid out London's Underground routes as he would a circuit board, and made him suspicious of London Underground. He chose to sell the idea to a scientist (for just ten guineas), giving him control over the future integrity of his design. But as work in his old office began to pick up, his former colleagues remembered him: they had appreciated his help in the tube workers' orchestra and, in 1933, he was back on board and pitching his idea again."

Garland continues: "Beck would not take no for an answer. He went back with a revised copy, and finally they agreed to produce a small print run of 1,000 fold-out versions, put them in central London libraries and ask passengers for comments. One of the publicity team went to Piccadilly Circus and asked staff if anyone had been interested in the diagram. The maps had gone within an hour. Beck had proved correct, and the publicity department rang a public run of 750,000."

Harry Beck was good news for the tube. Passenger numbers had levelled off, and they needed a bright idea to sell the Underground. "Beck's map was the catalyst," says Garland.

More than a million were in circulation within six months of being commissioned. Well maps were next: Beck was paid a further five guineas to produce one. But for something that is so recognizable as a piece of "trade-mark" art, Harry Beck was not, according to Garland, part of the modernist movement that was sweeping through the psyche of painters, sculptors, other designers and filmmakers of the period. "He was not influenced by contemporary art," says Garland. "He knew little or nothing about it."

"The diagram", as Beck insisted it was called, was a lifelong obsession. As new routes were added, Beck would tinker with his design. He was constantly seeking to improve its clarity, and when the publicity department realized they had a hit on their hands, he had to fend off "helpful" suggestions from tube bosses.

For the best part of 30 years, his home was turned over to the map," recalls Garland. "There were sketches all over the place. The front room would often have a massive copy spread out on the floor for Harry to pore over. His wife Nora would find, when making their bed, a pile of scribbled notes under the pillow that Harry had been working on in the middle of the night."

But in 1939, after nearly three decades of working on the diagram, he was unceremoniously dumped from the publicity team. "Nora would find, when making their bed, a pile of scribbled notes under the pillow that Harry had been working on in the middle of the night."

"Beck embarked on a letter-writing campaign to take back control of his idea," Garland continues. "He wrote to the publicity team, to the publicity department, to the public."

"The diagram's iconic status should not be underestimated," says Garland. "It has touched so many people. The tube diagram is one of the greatest pieces of graphic design produced, instantly recognizable and copied across the world. His contribution to London can't be easily measured, nor should it be underestimated."

Beck's map, published in 1908, betrayed the fact that different operators were competing with each other and could not agree where the Underground ended. "Harry laid out London's Underground routes as he would a circuit board, and made him suspicious of London Underground. He chose to sell the idea to a scientist (for just ten guineas), giving him control over the future integrity of his design. But as work in his old office began to pick up, his former colleagues remembered him: they had appreciated his help in the tube workers' orchestra and, in 1933, he was back on board and pitching his idea again."

Garland continues: "Beck would not take no for an answer. He went back with a revised copy, and finally they agreed to produce a small print run of 1,000 fold-out versions, put them in central London libraries and ask passengers for comments. One of the publicity team went to Piccadilly Circus and asked staff if anyone had been interested in the diagram. The maps had gone within an hour. Beck had proved correct, and the publicity department rang a public run of 750,000."

Harry Beck was good news for the tube. Passenger numbers had levelled off, and they needed a bright idea to sell the Underground. "Beck's map was the catalyst," says Garland.

More than a million were in circulation within six months of being commissioned. Well maps were next: Beck was paid a further five guineas to produce one. But for something that is so recognizable as a piece of "trade-mark" art, Harry Beck was not, according to Garland, part of the modernist movement that was sweeping through the psyche of painters, sculptors, other designers and filmmakers of the period. "He was not influenced by contemporary art," says Garland. "He knew little or nothing about it."

"The diagram", as Beck insisted it was called, was a lifelong obsession. As new routes were added, Beck would tinker with his design. He was constantly seeking to improve its clarity, and when the publicity department realized they had a hit on their hands, he had to fend off "helpful" suggestions from tube bosses.

For the best part of 30 years, his home was turned over to the map," recalls Garland. "There were sketches all over the place. The front room would often have a massive copy spread out on the floor for Harry to pore over. His wife Nora would find, when making their bed, a pile of scribbled notes under the pillow that Harry had been working on in the middle of the night."

But in 1939, after nearly three decades of working on the diagram, he was unceremoniously dumped from the publicity team. "Nora would find, when making their bed, a pile of scribbled notes under the pillow that Harry had been working on in the middle of the night."

"Beck embarked on a letter-writing campaign to take back control of his idea," Garland continues. "He wrote to the publicity team, to the publicity department, to the public."

"The diagram's iconic status should not be underestimated," says Garland. "It has touched so many people. The tube diagram is one of the greatest pieces of graphic design produced, instantly recognizable and copied across the world. His contribution to London can't be easily measured, nor should it be underestimated."