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# U2 returns to relevance with sloganeering rock

U2 has rarely been accused of lack of ambition. From record-breaking tours to headline-grabbing human rights campaigns, yet after four decades together the band inevitably has wondered how to move forward.

If 2017 has been chaotic for the world, the year has given fresh relevance to U2. The group's first album in three years, "Songs of Experience," sees Bono and Company returning to U2's founding faith in rock as a means of inspiration, at a historical moment when many listeners may be better disposed to activism than cynicism. President Donald Trump's shadow hovers over much of the album, which came out on Friday after a delay of a year, which U2 said it needed to fine-tune its message after the right-wing tycoon's shock election victory.

"Don't take it lying down / You got to bite back / The face of Liberty's starting to crack," Bono sings on "Get Out of Your Own Way." On "American Soul," the Irishman sings for the United States as an ideal higher than a messy, divided nation, singing: "It's not a place / This country to me is a thought that offers grace / For every welcome that is sought." Kendrick Lamar, one of the most venerated voices of hip-hop, brings together the two tracks as he flips around the words of the Gospel of Matthew to restate: "Blessed are the bullies / For one day they will have to stand up to themselves."



## Needed to fine-tune its message

earlier passion, even if few tracks seem destined to join the band's classics.

"The Blackout," the first song released off the album, brings the energy of 1980s U2 with Adam Clayton's bass line pounding the way for The Edge's heavily distorted guitar. "The Little Things That Give You Away" and "13 (There is a Light)" show anew U2's knack for the understated, with The Edge comfortably in the background, while the band stopping short at a return to full-effect ballads.

### No more free album

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### Flashes of early U2

"Songs of Experience," U2's 14th studio album, is a companion of sorts to the group's last album, 2014's "Songs of Innocence," the juxtaposed concepts in the titles an allusion to a poetry collection of William Blake. "Songs of Experience" maintains the confessional approach of the previous album, with Bono, when not taking up the state of the world, reminiscing about his life's 57 years from his gratitude for support early in his career to his enduring love for his wife.

But if "Songs of Innocence" saw U2 half-heartedly adopting the lighter pop-rock style of bands whom the Dubliners once inspired, "Songs of Experience" carries flashes of U2's earlier passion, even if few tracks seem destined to join the band's classics.

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Irish rock band U2, Bono (C), The Edge (R), Adam Clayton (L) and Larry Mullen Jr (2L), accept the global icon award during the 2017 MTV Europe Music Awards (EMA) at Wembley Arena in London on November 12, 2017. — AFP

as a free release on iTunes. Apple sent out "Songs of Innocence" to iTunes' half-billion users as part of a promotion, delighting some fans but triggering a flurry of complaints that the band was presumptuous in believing the whole world wanted to listen.

Bono still has no shortage of detractors. Weeks before the album's release, the longtime advocate for international development was among wealthy figures named in the leak of the so-called Paradise Papers showing how he parked money overseas to avoid tax.

There is no indication Bono did anything illegal and he welcomed the transparency. Still, he may find embarrassing, even out-of-context, his line on "Red Flag Day" off the new album, "Paradise is a place you can see when 43 years." But "Songs of Experience" shows U2 thinking large, opening with an unusually futuristic meditation for a band so focused on problems on Earth. Bono, at once reflective and triumphant, sings: "So many stars / So many ways of seeing / Hey, this is no time not to be alive." — AFP

## 'Spiderman' nearly squashed at birth: Stan Lee

One of the most successful comic book characters in history, Spiderman, nearly didn't get off the ground, 94-year-old creator Stan Lee admitted on Thursday. Lee told reporters in Tokyo he came up with the idea while watching a fly climb a wall and wanted to create a superhero with the same abilities. "Somehow calling him 'Flyman' didn't sound dramatic enough. What else could he be? Mosquito man? Then I said Spiderman. And it sounded so dramatic," said Lee.

Lee decided to make his new creation a teenager and give him "many personal problems." "He won't have enough money, he lives with his aunt who is ill and needs medicine and he has to take care of her. And he's also got to fight the bad guys," he said. He took the idea to his publisher who said: "Stan, that is the worst idea I have ever heard." Superheroes have to be adults and cannot have any problems — that's why they are superheroes, said his boss. And another thing: "People hate spiders so you can't call a hero Spiderman!"

Lee was nevertheless allowed to slip a Spiderman story into the last edition of a book and it became an instant hit. "Just for fun, to get it out of my system, I put Spiderman in that last edition and forgot about it," he said. "A month later, after all the sales figures were in, my boss came running into my office and said: 'Remember that character Spiderman we both liked so much, let's make him a regular feature.'" "And that's how Spidey was born," said Lee to applause and laughter. The energetic 94-year-old, who admitted to driving around the streets of Tokyo in a "Super Man" drag car late the previous evening, was asked how he kept so active. "Being busy is the best medicine there is. As long as you're not busy



being a villain," he said. As for how he came up with the idea of Spiderman, the answer was simple: "I'm very lucky. I'm brilliant." Lee was in Japan to promote the second edition of the Tokyo Comic Convention that opens on Friday. — AFP

## Netflix renews 'Stranger Things' for third season

Stranger Things fans rejoice: more adventures in the Upside Down are on the way. Netflix said Friday it had renewed its hit 1980s-set nostalgic supernatural drama, which has won critical acclaim and instant fame for its cast of young stars. "Should we make another season of Stranger Things?" the subscription-only streaming giant teased with an interactive poll on Twitter before adding: "season 3 is officially happening!!!"

No date was given for the season three premiere. According to Nielsen, around 15.8 million viewers tuned in to watch the first episode of the show's second season within the first three days of its October 27 launch. Netflix does not release information about viewership. But those numbers would make "Stranger Things" one of the most popular television shows in the United States, not far behind AMC's hit show "The Walking Dead." "Stranger Things" tells the story of a group of young friends living in a small town in Indiana in the 1980s and the odd happenings that threaten them all. It premiered in July 2016 and won five premiere Emmy Awards in 2017. It had earned a whopping 38 nominations, including one for 13-year-old breakout star Millie Bobby Brown. — AFP



## Takreem honors prestigious Arab men and women



TAKREEM was founded to celebrate such Arab men and women who are each making history in their own way. Following Beirut, Dubai, Manama, Paris, Marrakesh and Cairo, the 2017 TAKREEM Award Ceremony was held in Amman-Jordan in presence HM Queen Noor Al Hussein as well as members of The Hashemite Royal Family and more than 1000 invites from different parts of the world. This year, the following laureates have been recognized for their achievements:

- Arab American National Museum - Arabs of America for the Cultural Excellence Award
- Ghanim Al-Muftah - Qatar for the Young Entrepreneur Award
- Jasoor - Syria for the Humanitarian and Civic Services Award
- Maah Alrousai - Kuwait for the Outstanding Arab Woman Award
- Dr Nafila Hwalla - Lebanon for the Excellence in Education Award
- Sarah Toumi - Tunisia for the Environmental Development and Sustainability Award

- Dr. Zohair Al Halees - KSA for the Scientific and Technological Achievement Award
- Al-Bustan Seeds of Culture - USA for the International Contribution to Arab Society Award
- Raymond Debbas - Lebanon for the Corporate Leadership Award

HRH Prince Sultan bin Salman (KSA) and Mrs. Melik El Nimer (Turkey) received a Special Distinction Award. Maroun Seman (Lebanon) was posthumously bestowed a Lifetime Achievement Award. The "Legacy Award" was given for the first time to the memory of HM King Hussein bin Talal. Mrs Lada Al-Shaikhi hosted the 8th Award Ceremony that was followed by a gala dinner. A press conference, in the presence of the laureates and the strategic partners, was organized the next day, followed by a luncheon and a series of panel discussions. TAKREEM was given invaluable support by the following strategic partners: Renault-Nissan, Nesma, Salam International, Barclays, Horizon and CXC. The Award night was generously sponsored by Arab Bank, Abdak, JK Holding, Zain and OMD.

