

SPECIAL COLLECTOR'S **stereophile** ISSUE 2016

10 YEARS OF RECORDS TO DIE FOR

500

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MUSIC—
GREAT
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ROCK RECORD
REVIEWS: P.12

35 PAGES OF
CLASSICAL
RECORD
REVIEWS: PP.90, 106, 124

20 PAGES
OF JAZZ
RECORD
REVIEWS: P.68

10 PAGES OF
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AS WE SEE IT

10 YEARS OF RECORDS TO DIE 4

By JOHN ATKINSON

A

udiophiles are regularly accused of being interested in the gear first, and in music a distant second. Yes, we all love our audio systems, but owning such a system would be pretty pointless if we didn't have music to play on it.

Something that *Stereophile's* reviewers have in common is that, no matter how expensive their audio systems, their collections of recorded music are worth more. So at the beginning of each of the last 25 years, this magazine has celebrated its love of music by publishing "Records to Die For" (R2D4), a list of the two albums every reviewer,

whether of hardware or of software, could not bear the thought of leaving behind.¹

For this special edition we have collected the past 10 years' worth of record reviews featured in "R2D4"—some 500 albums organized by musical genre and listed alphabetically.² Choosing a category for most recordings was straightforward: a collection of works for pipe organ is clearly "Instrumental"; Beethoven's Symphony 7 couldn't be anything but "Classical Orchestral"; and an album from the seminal band Little Feat is clearly "Rock." But how do you classify an album by a Chilean rock band featuring songs based on South American folk tunes? (As "World Music," I decided.) Where is the dividing line between avant-garde jazz and modern classical music? (I put the Aphex Twin's *Computer Controlled Acoustic Instruments Pt.2*, described by Steve Guttenberg as an "inspired mish-mash of sampled acoustic instruments," in "Instrumental.") Should I include Johnny Cash's *American Recordings* in "Country," or recognize the singer's unique artistry by putting it in "Vocal," along with Elly Ameling, Kathleen Ferrier, Ella Fitzgerald, and Frank Sinatra? (It's in "Vocal.")

I ended up with six portmanteau categories: "Classical Orchestral & Film Scores," "Chamber Music & Instrumental Works," "Opera, Choral & Vocal," "Jazz," "Rock, Pop, Country & R&B," and "Folk, Blues & World Music." And considering that *Stereophile's* founder, the late J. Gordon Holt, strongly felt that classical orchestral music was the *only* music worthy of being played through a true high-fidelity system, it is perhaps surprising that by far the largest category, with 48 pages of reviews, is "Rock . . .," followed by "Jazz" at 20 pages. Even "Opera . . ." at 15 pages' worth of reviews, is longer than "Classi-

If you bought every one of these 500 albums, you would have an extraordinary record collection.

cal Orchestral"'s 14 pages. But this is to be expected, given that jazz is really the modern American equivalent of the 19th century's "classical" music, and that the baby-boomer generation that sustained both album sales and the market for high-performance audio came of age in the 1960s, when the Beatles pioneered the concept of the rock album. (And, yes, all of the Beatles' albums are included here, as stereo LP and mono CD and LP collections, with *Abbey Road* and *Love* highlighted with individual reviews.)

With 46 writers contributing to this collection and 500 albums reviewed and recommended, it's surprising how little overlap there is. Yes, two writers chose Neil Young & Crazy Horse's *Ragged Glory*, two others chose Ry Cooder's *Paradise and Lunch*, and two more chose the Kinks' *Muswell Hillbillies*. But the vast majority of albums in this special issue's 148 pages are one person's special treasure. There are three albums each by Laurie Anderson and Miles Davis, two each by the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band (one in "Rock . . ." and

one in "Folk . . ."), Joanna Newsom, and Bad Brains (!)—but perhaps to no one's surprise, the artist with the greatest number of recordings recommended is Bob Dylan, with nine, ranging from 1963's *The Freewheelin'* (in "Folk . . .") to 2006's *Modern Times* (in "Rock . . ."). In "Classical," the only composer to have all of his symphonies included is Anton Bruckner. And on the Alternative Rock side of things, indie label Drag City has four albums recommended.

We hope you enjoy this special issue—if you bought every one of these 500 albums, you would have an extraordinary record collection. If you're new to the monthly *Stereophile* magazine, we've been writing about high-performance audio components and the recordings to play on them since November 1962. Check out www.stereophile.com, and our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/stereophilemag/—if you like what you find, *Stereophile* is available as a print magazine, and in electronic editions published by Zinio and Apple Newsstand. See you on the newsstand. —John Atkinson



John Atkinson (JAtkinson@enthusiastnetwork.com) was given his first tape recorder 50 years ago. Ever since, he has been fascinated by making and playing recordings of music with the highest possible quality. He has been the editor-in-chief of *Stereophile* since 1986, and before that was the editor-in-chief of the UK's *Hi-Fi News* magazine.

¹ All 25 years' worth of R2D4 recommendations can be found at www.stereophile.com/category/records-die. Our sister websites AudioStream.com and AnalogPlanet.com also publish lists of recommended downloads and LPs at, respectively, www.audiostream.com/category/lovely-recordings and www.analogplanet.com/category/aaa-vinyl.

² If a recording listed here was previously reviewed in *Stereophile*, the volume and number of the pertinent issue(s) appear in parentheses at the end of the review. For example, a listing of "(XXXV-12)" indicates that a review of the recording appeared in the December 2012 issue (Vol.35 No.12).



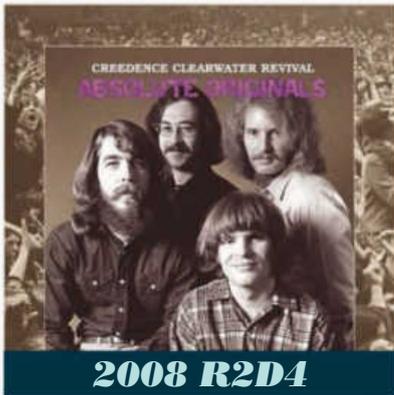
ANALOGUE PRODUCTIONS



RECORDS TO DIE FOR

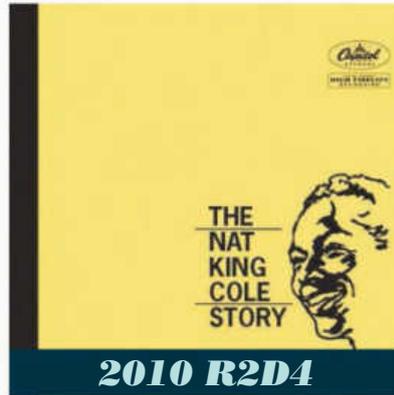
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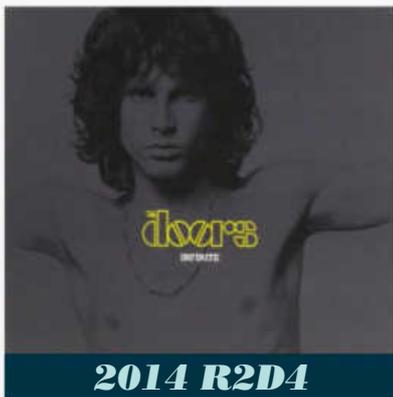


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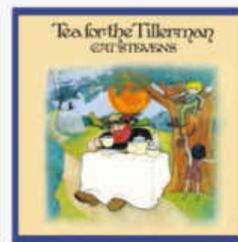
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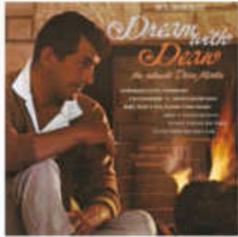
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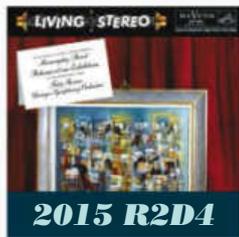
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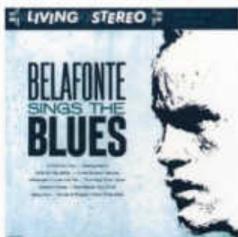
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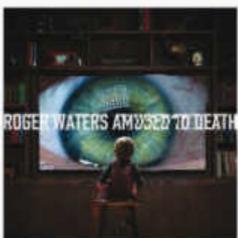
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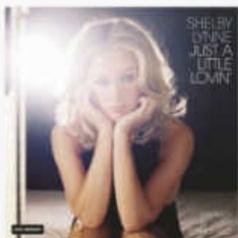
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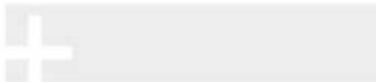
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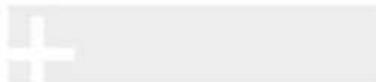
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analog; Audiostream.com, devoted to
computer audio; and InnerFidelity.com,
devoted to headphone and portable listen-
ing. Check them out.

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ROCK, POP, R&B, ALTERNATIVE & COUNTRY MUSIC ON RECORD

By ROBERT BAIRD

By the time rock'n'roll came around, mono recording was well established, the stereo revolution was just around the corner—and even in the very earliest rock'n'roll records, manipulation of the sound was evident. While some performers preferred to overload microphones and amplifiers to get a raw sound that might vaguely approximate what you'd hear if you caught the band live in some sweaty joint, others began to use the studio to create an entirely new art form. In Elvis Presley's recordings for Sun Records, for example, a reverb effect, what Sam Phillips called, "slapback," is liberally slathered on the sound. The recording studio itself, and all that could be done there, became a ghostly but essential member of the band. Sounds and performances could be manipulated by musicians, producers, and engineers to previously unheard-of degrees. The expanding gulf between the live experience and the recording studio seemed to have reached its widest point in the late 1960s, when the Beach Boys' Brian Wilson, and the Beatles and their producer-engineer, George Martin, began to spend weeks—months—in the studio, recording and re-recording, bouncing music between multitrack recorders, meticulously layering recordings, to assemble grand feasts of sounds, effects, and music that pushed the technology of the time to its outer limits.

New instruments appeared. Where once the Theremin had been the height of electronic invention, the Mellotron, the synthesizer and its descendants, Yamaha's DX7 keyboard, MIDI, and, finally, sampling are all new developments that have made recording rock music easier or harder, less emotional or more intellectual, depending on your point of view.

The digital sound technologies that began in the late 1970s further expanded the options available in the studio. Suddenly, splicing audio tape by hand, once a prized and much-admired studio skill, was no longer mattered. Rather than building up a master mix from overdubs recorded on bits of tape, digital technology allowed all of those parts to be virtually "flown in" with much greater ease. Pro Tools, a digital audio workstation developed by Avid technology and designed to work with Apple OS, OSX and Microsoft Windows, now does the work of both the multitrack tape recorder and the mixing board. Launched in 1991 in a four-track version,

Pro Tools has evolved over the years, and in 1997 reached a capacity of 48 tracks at a resolution of 24 bits. It can handle surround-sound mixes, sample rates of up to 192kHz, and produce digital audio files in a range of formats, including uncompressed WAV files.

The wholesale conversion to digital recording gave rise to a heated debate among audiophiles about which sounds best: digital or analog recordings. Despite many improvements in software and hardware over the years, to many an analog lover's ear digital still sounds harder and brighter than the purer, warmer essence of analog. High-resolution digital files that can be downloaded, and careful new remasterings and high-quality LP re-pressings, have given both sides new urgency.

The digital workstations that convert audio recordings into digital files, to make them easier to mix and manipulate via a raft of tools and effects collectively known as plug-ins, have also allowed rock bands, in particular,

The wholesale conversion to digital recording gave rise to a heated debate among audiophiles about which sounds best: digital or analog recordings.

to record at home everything from demos to finished albums. This trend, in which every rock band becomes its own producer and engineer, has meant that professional recording studios have fallen on hard times. Many famous studios, including the Hit Factory and Sony Studios in New York City, and Sound City in Los Angeles, have gone bankrupt. In *Sound City*, a 2013 documentary about the studio directed by Dave Grohl, of Nirvana and Foo Fighters, Grohl defended the Sound City's Neve 8028 mixing console: "Because [the 8028] is considered obsolete, people think, why use it? But there's a life to it. There's more to that board than just wires and capacitors and knobs and shit. There's something inside." And in his speech at the 2012 Grammy Awards, when the Foo Fighters won for Best Rock Performance, Grohl made a plea for recording studios: "The human element of making music is what's most important," he said. "It's not about being perfect. . . . It's not about what goes on in a computer." —Robert Baird

 Robert Baird has been writing about music for 30 years, the last 20 of which as Music Editor of *Stereophile*. Having also served as Editor-in-Chief of *CD Review* and Music Editor of *New Times* in Phoenix, AZ, he's also written for a variety of publications including *Rolling Stone*, *USA Today*, *Magnet*, and *No Depression*.

**20/20:
20/20 & LOOK OUT!**

Oglio 81581 (CD). 1979–80/1995. Earle Mankey, Richard Podolor, prods.: Bill Cooper, eng. AAD. TT: 74:22

 There was an explosion of great music in the late 1970s that included hundreds of New Wave and power-pop bands. These were not the goofy hair-wavers of the '80s, but more in line with early Elvis Costello, Paul Collins' Beat, and XTC—punchy, noisy pop songs that mashed the recent punk uprising with early-Beatles sensibilities. One of the greatest but least celebrated of these groups was 20/20. Part of the reason for the latter may be that after the release of *20/20* they quickly fell apart musically, and then actually. If you can find a copy of this CD, you'll be richly rewarded—it's like uncovering buried treasure. If there were justice in the rock world, 20/20 would be heroes and Duran Duran a mere footnote. Do your part and check out this disc; be advised that it contains both the band's eponymous debut (the reason for this review) and its weaker follow-up, *Look Out!*—**Jon Iverson**

**ALICE IN CHAINS:
JAR OF FLIES**

Columbia CK 57628 (CD). 1993. Alice in Chains, prods.: Toby Wright, eng. DDD. TT: 30:51

 Though *Dirt* may be Alice in Chains' defining album, this quiet EP lacks some of that earlier record's angst and doom, which would eventually consume singer Layne Staley en route to his fatal heroin overdose. In place of a death knell, one finds plaintive lament and acceptance wrapped in lush orchestration, with lyrics ("We chase misprinted lies / We face the path of time") that outshine the preponderance of metal fare. The band's aching calling-card harmonies satisfy through-

out, whether vocally ("No Excuses"), instrumentally ("Whale & Wasp"), or as blues pastiche ("Swing On This"). But the inward-looking, acoustic-guitar-drenched "Nutshell," cloaked in dismay and blessed with insight, points more to the group's essence and to the 1990s that were to come.

—**Ben Finane**

**TERRY ALLEN:
HUMAN REMAINS**

Sugar Hill SHCD-1050 (CD). 1996. Terry Allen, Lloyd Mains, prods.: Alan Crossland, Jay Hudson, engs. AAD? TT: 54:04

 "Gone to Texas": "I don't need no chicken shit businessman telling me what to do . . . / I don't need no sweet-faced woman goin' sour-mouthed on me . . . / I don't need no weekend warrior protecting me / he's as dumb with his gun as he is with his tongue / and he's shooting off on TV!" I've always wanted to tell the world about the internationally esteemed conceptual artist and outlaw country singer Terry Allen, here singing with a star-studded bunch of Armadillo World Headquarters graduates that includes David Byrne, Charlie Sexton, Joe Ely, and Lucinda Williams. Before Sugar Hill bought up Allen's catalogue, you could buy his records only at art museums. Art meets the Trickster (again)—at the crossroads!

—**Herb Reichert**

**DAVE ALVIN:
ASHGROVE**

Yep Rock 2075 (CD). 2004. Greg Leisz, prod., Mark Linett, eng. AAD. TT: 52:18

 Whether Dave Alvin is reflecting on his own career or recounting the tale of "Everett Ruess," the teenage journal-writing drifter who disappeared in the Utah badlands, *Ashgrove* is Alvin at his literary, storytelling best. He takes us deep inside his characters—the

backsliding Vietnam vet of "Black Sky," the desperado chasing his ex across the Southwest, a neglected boy taking refuge in his transistor radio, a man hallucinating in a hospital bed—from a novelist's point of view. "You give your dreams away as you get older," he writes in "Everett Ruess." *Ashgrove* is where a lot of those dreams went. (XXVII-9)—**Leland Rucker**

**LAURIE ANDERSON:
HOMELAND**

Nonesuch 24055 (CD). 2010. Laurie Anderson, prod., eng.: Lou Reed, Roma Baran, prods.: Pat Dilleit, Mario McNulty, Marc Urselli, engs. DDD. TT: 66:22

 It's said that one waits half an hour for a London omnibus, whereupon three come along at once. After I'd scanned the new-release lists fruitlessly for months, new CDs by three of my favorite artists appeared simultaneously. I didn't even reach the end of the Chemical Brothers' newie; I spun Arcade Fire's *Suburbs* a couple of times before acknowledging yet again that this fine band, much like the Grateful Dead in its pomp, is much better in concert than on record.

Then I played Laurie Anderson's *Homeland*. Then I played it again. And again. Several weeks later, it has rarely left my CD player. I even found time to watch the accompanying explanatory DVD (itself worth the package price), and given *Homeland*'s outstanding sound quality, was surprised to discover that Pro Tools was used extensively to stitch together fragments of live recordings with others created in the studio. The resulting collage works exceptionally well: very recognizably Laurie Anderson and, in my view, her masterwork. *Homeland*'s music and lyrics are often startlingly original: "The reason I really love the stars is that we cannot hunt

them." This is unusually intelligent music.—**Paul Messinger**

**LAURIE ANDERSON:
LIFE ON A STRING**

Nonesuch 79539-2 (CD). 2001. Laurie Anderson, Hal Willner, prods.: Martin Brumbach et al, engs.: Robert C. Ludwig, mastering. DDD. TT: 44:12

 Saying that *Life on a String* is one of Laurie Anderson's most accessible works is kind of like saying that three of your car's four tires hold air—it's true, but not particularly relevant. As much literature as music, the album is full of stories and images that are sometimes perfectly in sync, and at others are challenging and strangely at odds with each other, inviting—no, forcing—the listener to assemble the pieces in his or her own way. The music is beautiful and haunting, and the production and sound serve it well. (XXIX-2)—**Brian Damkroger**

**LAURIE ANDERSON:
STRANGE ANGELS**

Warner Bros. 7599259002 (CD). 1989. Laurie Anderson, Roma Baran, Mike Thorne, Ian Ritchie, Peter Scherer, Arto Lindsay, Leon Pendarvis, prods.: Neil Dorfman, Bob Clearmountain, Jay Healy, Josh Abbey, engs. DDD. TT: 46:03

 I've two LP and two CD copies of this wonderful album, 'cos I've worn out one of each through a mixture of overplaying and abuse. Even 20 years on, it's still full of Anderson's characteristically dry, wry wit, and sounds every bit as fresh as the day it was made. Anderson doesn't make many albums, but nearly all of them show quite superb musical and songwriting originality, and a high quality of recording (possibly the influence of onetime *Hi-Fi News* writer Mike Thorne among the producer credits). *Strange Angels* is perhaps her most accessible recording—"least weird" might be more accurate. Its combination of intelligence

and variety make it one of very few "pop" albums that continue to defy the passage of time. (XV-2)—**Paul Messenger**

DOROTHY ASHBY: AFRO-HARPING

Dorothy Ashby, harp, unknown musicians
Cadet B0000027-02 (CD). 1968/2003. Richard Evans, prod., arr.; Kevin Reeves, mastering. AAD? TT: 36:00

 Dorothy Ashby's *Afro-Harping* is a time capsule of sorts, a late-1960s soul-jazz romp that perfectly evokes an era. Deep, string-driven grooves like "Soul Vibrations" and "Life Has Its Trials" had me reelin' back in the days of black lights, beads, and incense. Ashby's harp playing owes a lot to guitarist Wes Montgomery, and she's funkier than Alice Coltrane. The title track's live-in-the-studio soundscape is deep and wide; play this CD in the dark to get the full effect.

—Steve Guttenberg

PHIL AUSTIN: ROLLER MAIDENS FROM OUTER SPACE

Epic/Laugh.com LGH 1151 (CD). 1974/2003. Phil Austin, prod.; Oona Elliott, Michael C. Gwynne, engs. AAD. TT: 45:52

 Phil Austin is a member of the Firesign Theatre, and his contributions to the creations of that unique audio troupe of metaphysical clowns were always, to my ear, the most darkly brilliant. *Roller Maidens from Outer Space* is Austin's sole solo album, released in 1974 and almost immediately out of print. It's a surreal farce about the main characters of *I Love Lucy* and *The Adventures of Ozzie & Harriet*, here thinly disguised as *Oooh Juicy!* and *The Regular & Ethyl Show*. They've hired, from his own series, the noir-ish Dick Private to investigate their mounting suspicion that there might be A World Elsewhere, be-

yond the TV set(s) in which they all live. Meanwhile, the hapless jock of a local Christian TV station attempts to navigate Pledge Week as he plays songs that continue the plot(s) in ways of their own ("Come on, Jesus—show yourself!"), constantly prompted by an exasperated engineer not nearly as off-mike as he thinks he is. Dick Private descends into a hellish nightmare world that references Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* in an unprecedented attempt to make it across The Channels. It's also about the Watergate hearings (this was 1974), the Second Coming (Jesus returns as the brother of a certain Cuban sitcom star), feminism, the transmigration of souls, and the end of the world. It's also a country album. In his four songs, Austin sends up Elvis, Jerry Reed, Doug Kershaw, and Kris Kristofferson, his comedic and dramatic timing is inerrant, and the songs ain't bad. This audio phantasmagoria's many kaleidoscoped stories do not easily give up their secrets, but each hearing reveals more; Austin's cultural criticism is biting but never bitter, and the result is a sense of delighted wonder at human existence itself. The three other Firesigners appear in various parts, along with many others, and the album is beautifully produced, with great sound. Available only from www.laugh.com.—**Richard Lehnert**

THE AVALANCHES: SINCE I LEFT YOU

Modular 31177-2 (CD). 2000. Robbie Chater, Darren Seltmann, prods. DDD? TT: 60:46

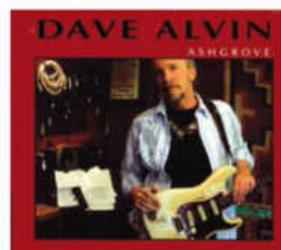
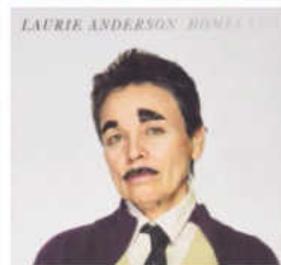
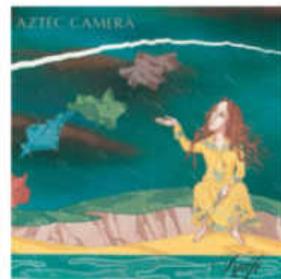
 Vacation: sunshine, sand, beautiful girls, clear crashing waves, dancing, laughter, fun. For a sonic summation of summer, the Avalanches' *Since I Left You* gets my vote. Created almost exclusively from samples, the album's kaleidoscopic

soundscapes, textures, and beats come together to create real compositions that miraculously hold together. Though made from other people's records, *Since I Left You* refuses to make overt references to other styles, songs, or to any other album ever recorded. While being one of the most innovative recordings ever made, the album's ability to project the feeling and fun of an endless summer party makes me come back to it again and again.—**Erick Lichte**

AZTEC CAMERA: KNIFE

WEA 2292-40483-2 (CD). 1984. Mark Knopfler, prod.; Nigel Walker, eng.; Matt Butler, asst. eng. AAD? TT: 39:31

 Before Mogwai and Belle and Sebastian, there was Roddy Frame and Aztec Camera. The Scots love their shortbread and their music sweet (the women are another story), and post-punk/new-wave Aztec Camera is certainly that. With bursting love songs like the catchy opener, "Still On Fire," the too-exuberant "All I Need Is Everything," or Frame's self-conscious attempt to fashion a funny/serious metaphor in the wonderfully jumpy "Just Like the USA," this is sweet, sunny guitar pop with a nerdy Scottish twist. *Knife*, the band's sophomore record, has to my ears always had a couple of key advantages over their much-praised debut, *High Land, Hard Rain*. Some of that edge comes from producer Mark Knopfler, who gives singer-songwriter-leader Frame's sweet melodies lots of interesting textures, many from David Ruffy's snappy, varied drumming. The rest of it comes courtesy of strummed and picked guitars, most played by former Orange Juice guitarist Malcolm Ross, who was part of the band for only this album. After *Knife*, AC



essentially became a Frame solo project. But here, a coherent band still surrounds Frame's winsome vocals with swirling guitars and layers of cheesy new-wave keyboards. The final charm is the off-kilter lyrics by Frame, then 20 years old, which are often wide-eyed and tongue-tied in the same moment: "Where the mad road goes, 'neath the shapeless glow / Or will we swop ourselves like children / for the value of our innocence / A gentleman's a golden card and a red, red rose." Jabberwocky with a brogue.—**Robert Baird**

THE B52'S:

THE B52'S

Island ILPS 9580 (LP). 1979. Chris Blackwell, prod.; Robert Ash, prod., eng. AAA. TT: 39:14

🔊 In 2008, the B52's finally realized their error and dropped from their name the "grocer's apostrophe," which was such an integral element of this 1979 vinyl release. The band was founded, almost by accident, in Athens, Georgia, and has a delightfully light touch—a fine sense of humor comes through strongly in numerous tracks, especially the wonderful "Rock Lobster." Can the B52's be categorized? Possibly not, but I hear echoes of 1950s rock 'n' roll alongside punk-rock sensibilities, all underpinned by delightful tongue-in-cheek humor. This band never takes itself seriously, yet manages to be utterly original. Therein lies its charm.—**Paul Messenger**

BAD BRAINS:

BAD BRAINS

ROIR RUSCD8223 (CD). 1982/1996. No prod. listed; Bad Brains, mix prods.; Jay Dublee, eng., mix prod.; Wayne Vican, mix; Stanley Moskowitz, mastering. ADD. TT: 36:18

🔊 It was a revolutionary idea in 1979 and it remains so today. As it was put to me, they were "four

African-American cats who mixed Bob Marley and the Sex Pistols, if the Pistols could have actually known how to play their instruments." Washington, DC, native Gary Miller, better known as Dr. Know, was a fusion jazz guitar guy who veered way off the reservation, recruiting bassist Daryl Aaron Jenifer, drummer Earl Hudson, and "throat" H.R. (Paul Hudson) to form Bad Brains. Their peak did not last long, really only two records: this 1982 cassette-only debut and 1983's *Rock for Light*, the latter produced by, of all people, the Cars' Rick Ocasek. After that, the vision proved too fragile and the quartet split into two factions, one headed by Dr. Know and wanting to play more metal-leaning rock, the other led by H.R. and determined to move toward reggae. But for three or four years, Bad Brains were the baddest-assed live act on the planet. I had the pleasure of seeing them just after buying this ROIR Records cassette. After I'd raised my lower jaw and remembered how to breathe again, I was shocked at how much raw energy the music had: loud, fast, and very real.

Listen to the side-by-side tracks of a menacing, frenzied "Banned in D.C." and the chill "Jah Calling," and the power of the band's unique mix of speed and volume in league with/opposition to groove and soul becomes clear. Driven by Know's fast riffing, the brief, rumbling "Pay to Cum" is the Brains' best-known track; in comparison, the work of most white punk-rock bands of the era sounds weak and washed out. Clearly, anything recorded on cassette has audio problems—this is by no means an audiophile recording—but a 1990 LP reissue by Dutch East Trading Company and this 1996 ROIR CD have greatly

eliminated the distortion and broadened the sound palette. At this writing, Dr. Know/Gary Miller was in the hospital, reportedly in grave condition from an unspecified disease. Hopefully, by the time you read this he will be well on his way to a full recovery.—**Robert Baird**

BAD BRAINS: ROCK FOR LIGHT

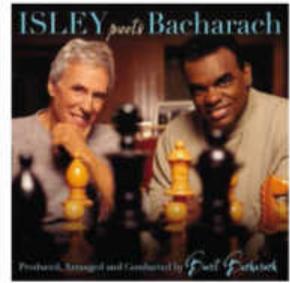
Caroline 1613 (CD). 1983/1991. Ric Ocasek, prod.; Ian Taylor, eng. AAD? TT: 42:02

🔊 At their apex, Bad Brains were a force of nature. Not only could they play their instruments—they began as a jazz-rock fusion band in DC before hitting hardcore—they were also visionaries. *Rock for Light*, remastered in 1991 and reissued with three extra tracks, contrasts punk blasts with dub reggae idylls, the latter giving the listener a much-needed break from all the Sturm und Drang. Before this album, the band was energetic but primitive. After it, they ditched their punk conventions in favor of heavier rock 'n' roll. It's here that, with producer Ric Ocasek, Bad Brains serve up the perfect storm of Rasta sound and hardcore fury.—**Bob Gulla**

BURT BACHARACH & RONALD ISLEY: HERE I AM

DreamWorks B0001005-2 (CD). 2003. Burt Bacharach, Ted Perlman, Ronald Isley, prods.; John McClain, Ronald Isley, exec. prods.; Alan Sides, Al Schmidt, mix engs.; Steve Genewick, Tom Sweeney, asst. engs.; Wil Donovan, Jimmy Hoyson, second engs.; David Chase, ProTools eng.; Alan Yoshida, mastering eng. DDD? TT: 58:19

🔊 Ever since I heard "Anyone Who Had a Heart" in 1963—growing up in England, it was Cilla Black's cover rather than Dionne Warwick's original, of course—Burt Bacharach's songs have played a major role in the soundtrack to my life. And Dusty Springfield's



"The Look of Love" is, of course, one of the brightest stars in the high-end audio firmament. But in all those years, I never envisaged what a rococo-ranged R&B singer such as patriarch Ronnie, of the extended Isley family, could and would do with these standards. Piling mordant upon ornament, swoop upon flourish, trill upon turn, Ronnie Isley takes these perhaps overfamiliar melodies on journeys of unexpected harmonic exploration. His "The Look of Love," for example, begins with a melancholy figure based on the "don't ever go" and "I love you so much" tags from the chorus, overlying a stark electric piano vamp. After a fairly straight reading of the song, Isley and Bacharach construct from the opening raw material an inspirational vocal coda. Almost always, Ronnie succeeds in convincing the listener that this is how Burt intended the songs to sound, helped by the composer's lushly sparse scoring and a sound, recorded live in Hollywood's legendary Capitol Studios, that is to die for. It might verge at times on High Camp, but *Here I Am* is still High Art.—**John Atkinson**

THE BAND: MUSIC FROM BIG PINK

Capitol 72435-25390 2 (CD). 1968/2000. John Simon, prod.; Don Hahn, Tony May, Rex Updegraff, Shelly Yakus, engs.; Cheryl Pawelski, Andrew Sandoval, Dick Hirthe, reissue prods., compilers; Dan Hersch, remastering. AAD. TT: 74:05

🔊 There is a distinctly American flavor to the 11 songs that comprise



the debut album of the mostly Canadian The Band. Part of that is the behind-the-scenes presence of Bob Dylan, who wrote and cowrote songs, painted the cover, and bestowed on the group an instant karma. The Band, an almost perfect ensemble, with no lead instrument or voice, and with sometimes coarse, loud harmonies careening off the sophisticated arrangements like a pinball machine, didn't last long. But the music here is rootsy and familiar and yet mysterious and eternal. Even today, *Music from Big Pink* retains its otherworldly qualities; it is still delightfully strange. (XIII-5)—**Leland Rucker**

THE BAND: ROCK OF AGES

Capitol/Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab MFSL1-348 (2 LPs). 1972/2012. The Band, prods.: Phil Ramone, Mark Harman, engs. AAA. TT: 78:19

Allen Toussaint's sympathetic horn arrangements, performed by top jazz musicians, propel this "greatest hits live" recital taken at breathtakingly deliberate tempos before an adoring, raucous crowd at the Academy of Music, in New York City, on New Year's Eve 1971. Whatever tensions were dividing the group dissipated as the Band immediately achieved lift-off and remained in orbit throughout the evening, with the definitive "Chest Fever," a haunting "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down," and some of the best vocalizing this or any rock group has ever achieved on stage. MoFi's mastering beats Bob Ludwig's original,

and that's saying a lot; plus, the vinyl is dead quiet. Get in the analog time machine, but you'll need the seedee reissue for Dylan's surprise encore walk-on.

—**Michael Fremer**

PATRICIA BARBER: CAFÉ BLUE

Patricia Barber, vocals, piano; John McClean, guitar; Michael Arnpol, double bass; Michael Walker, drums, percussion

Premonition/Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab UDSACD 2002 (SACD/CD). 1994/2002. Patricia Barber, prod.: Jim Anderson, Jeffrey Lane, engs. AAD? TT: 53:44

This album hooked me when I first heard Barber's cover of Miles Davis's "Nardis," through Dynaudio's loudspeaker exhibit at the 2010 Consumer Electronics Show. This track combines remarkable dynamic range with startlingly natural reproduction of the original acoustic. In his liner note, former *Stereophile* contributing editor Chip Stern writes, "the musicians play as much with the sound of the room as they do with each other, letting notes ring in the ether, relishing the decay, and bathing in glow of an exceptionally resonant acoustic space before raising the emotional stakes to a fever pitch." I also love Barber's own "Too Rich for My Blood," which mixes her wry blues lyrics with Michael Arnpol's driving bass line, and ends with an explosive drum solo by Michael Walker. Recording engineer Jim Anderson used an analog acoustic chamber for the reverberation, which in part accounts for this recording's remarkable ambience. (XVIII-10, XIX-2, XXX-1, XXXV-1)—**Larry Greenhill**

SYD BARRETT: WOULDN'T YOU MISS ME? THE BEST OF SYD BARRETT

Harvest/Capitol 5 32320 2 (CD). 2001. Syd Barrett, Peter Jenner, Malcolm Jones, Roger Waters, David Gilmour, Rick Wright, prods. AAD? TT: 73:24



The Beach Boys, ca. 1965.

In my opinion, when Syd Barrett left Pink Floyd, he took the band's sense of humor with him. Much of that humor reemerged in the two solo albums, *The Madcap Laughs* and *Barrett*, that he made at either end of 1970, and which make up most of this 22-track compilation. Barrett's humor is classic British whimsy, very much in the tradition of Walter De la Mare and Lewis Carroll, so it might not have universal appeal. But humor is a rare flower in the rock jungle, and the tunes are as imaginative as the lyrics; this is a rare treat, and a poignant reminder of what might have been.

—**Paul Messenger**

THE BEACH BOYS: THE SMILE SESSIONS

Capitol T2580 (2 CDs, HDTracks hi-res downloads). Mark Linett, Alan Boyd, Dennis Wolf, compilation prods. ADD. TT: 79:20/64:06

While Brian Wilson's 2004 completion of his abandoned *SMiLE* project may have been a personal triumph, I was left with the feeling I was listening to a competent cover band trying to recapture the feel, and perhaps the reason, for Wilson and Van Dyke

Parks's phantasmagorical trip through America. The 2004 album lacked Wilson's modular recording, his "wrecking crew" session musicians, and, most important, the sun-drenched yet melancholic harmonies of the Beach Boys themselves. *The SMiLE Sessions* restores his original vision, and offers a glimpse of what might have been had Wilson been able to find the mental energy and emotional support to finish his magnum opus in 1967. Hearing *The SMiLE Sessions*, I finally understood that this album truly deserves its mythical status as one of music's greatest unfinished works. I also recommend you find online the bootleg *Alternate Brian Wilson Presents SMiLE*.

—**Erick Lichte**

THE BEACH BOYS: SURF'S UP

Brother/Capitol 5 04439 2 (CD). 1971/2012. Beach Boys, prods.: Mark Linett, Alan Boyd, Dennis Wolfe, reissue prods. AAD. TT: 33:40

Remastered and reissued this year as part of the Beach Boys' overhyped

and underperforming 50th anniversary and tour, *Surf's Up* (1971) first surfaced on CD in 1990, and again in 2000 as half of a twofer (with 1970's *Sunflower*). Raise your hand if you also own the vintage Quadraphonic vinyl. Catalog cash-in notwithstanding, its subtle charms—which seduced a teenage yours truly back in the LP era—endure. The late, angel-throated Carl Wilson in particular shines here, and with two of brother Brian's greatest-ever tunes, "Till I Die" and "Surf's Up," closing things out (the latter, co-written with Van Dyke Parks, was originally slated for the doomed *Smile*), the listener is left levitating in ecstasy as the final notes fade away. To this day, I get misty when I hear those songs—that

teenage me gently inhabiting my being for a precious few minutes. (XIV-2)—**Fred Mills**

**THE BEATLES:
ABBEY ROAD**

Parlophone CDP 0946 3 82468-2-4 (CD). 1969/2009. George Martin, prod.; Geoff Emerick, eng.; Allan Rouse reissue producer. Alan Parsons, Tony Banks, asst. engs. AAD. TT: 47:26

After the usual rack-ing of an increasingly feeble brain, followed by time spent pacing in front of shelves trying to ferret out yet another pair of super-obscure treasures, I sat and pondered which records really were the heaviest in my collection. Which ones really were the indisputable King Kongs? The stone classics that never grow old? Records from which so much

else continues to flow?

Once I'd framed it that way, *Abbey Road* immediately jumped into my head. The only problem was that I was sure that everyone and their mother had already chosen *Abbey Road* as R2D4s past.

Turns out, much to my wondering eyes, that no one in the long history of "Records To Die For" has ever given *Abbey Road* the nod, probably for the same reason I almost didn't: they assumed it had already been done to death. Needless to say, with the much-improved sonics of its 2009 reissue, *Abbey Road* is even more glorious than before—if that's possible. A final burst of whatever camaraderie was left among the fabulous foursome, the album's set of

tunes, some of them admittedly goofy, still make for one of the most consistent albums ever made. There's nary a bad song here. Favorites include the late George Harrison's exquisitely sexy "Something," Sir Paul's saliva-spewing howl in the sentimental mush of "Oh! Darling," and the portentous "The End," in which you can feel as well as hear the finality. The most astonishing, ascending run of creativity in the history of popular music had ground to a halt. The Beatles were over. (XI-2)

—**Robert Baird**

**THE BEATLES:
IN MONO**

Apple 5099969945120 (CD). 2009. George Martin, prod.; Geoff Emerick et al, engs.; Allan Rouse, reissue prod. AAD. TT: 9:52: 03

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⏻ If you're among the sane, sound-loving Beatles fans to whom the debate surrounding their newly remastered catalog does little more than call to mind the voice of the fat, ponytailed comic-book dealer from *The Simpsons*, take my advice: the Beatles' *In Mono* is the box to buy. It offers the Beatles' first 10 original albums (*Please Please Me* through *The Beatles*), plus two CDs of non-album singles, all mastered exquisitely well—I would even say surprisingly well—from the original mono mixes. This is surely the closest anyone will come within my lifetime to the punch and color of the original British LPs, and unless you already own *Sgt. Pepper's* or *The Beatles* on import mono vinyl, there are

performances in this set that you literally *have not heard*. A towering set, and easily the first digital issue that honors rather than obscures the sheer brilliance, originality, charm, and excitement of the music. —**Art Dudley**

THE BEATLES: IN MONO

Apple 6337971 (14 180gm LPs). 1963–1968/2014. George Martin, orig. prod.; Norman Smith, Geoff Emerick, Ken Scott, others, engs; Sean Magee, Steve Berkowitz, mastering. AAA. TT: 7:36:22

⏻ That in 2014 a major entertainment conglomerate released an all-analog, superbly packaged set of 14 LPs is, by any definition, miraculous—almost as miraculous as what the Beatles accomplished musically in seven years (compare with

2007–2014).

Meticulously mastered from the original master tapes by Sean Magee and Steve Berkowitz (tape copies were used for first LP and *Mono Masters* 2-LP compilation), and well pressed by Optimal, in Germany, the discs in this set are arguably the best-sounding mono Beatles albums ever released—and that includes the original pressings, which were bass-shy in order to be playable on that era's kiddie phonographs. At \$328 including a hardcover book, it's a bargain that won't be around forever. —**Michael Fremer**

THE BEATLES: LOVE

Capitol 3 79808 2 (CD, LP, DVD-A). 2006. George Martin, Giles Martin, prods.; Paul Hicks, remix. ADD. TT: 78:53



⏻ George and Giles Martin's ingenious remix—actually, a reimagining—of 26 classic Beatles tracks to accompany a Cirque du Soleil production is so fresh, so meticulous, that this particular Beatles freak—who has memorized every note of every Beatles release—feels that *Love* qualifies as a new Beatles recording. Despite the tendency to layer instrumental and vocal lines from songs

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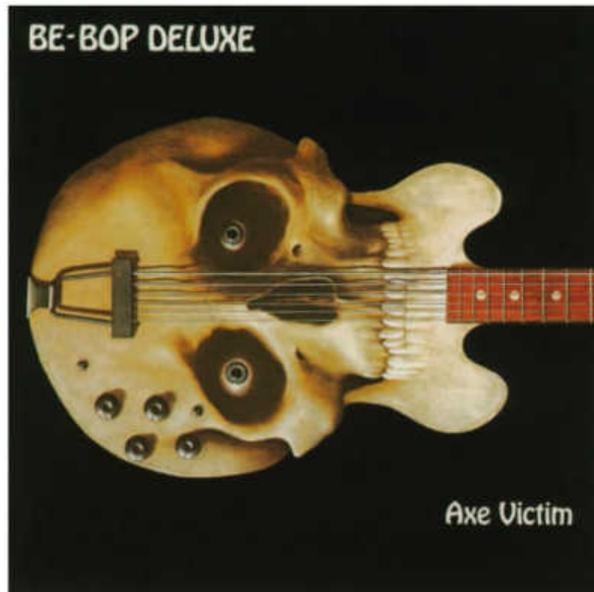
from different time periods, the recording never devolves into gimmick or cliché. The colorless and pristine sound quality transcends that of other Beatles recordings, which indicates to me that it's time to remaster the entire Fab Four catalog.

—Robert J. Reina

THE BEATLES: STEREO VINYL BOX SET

EMI 33809 (14 LPs). 2012. George Martin, Phil Spector, orig. prods.; Norman Smith, Geoff Emerick, Ken Scott, Philip McDonald, Glyn Johns, orig. engs.; Allan Rouse, project coordinator; Paul Hicks, Steve Rooke, Guy Massey, Sean Magee, Sam Okell, remastering. ADA.

 Half the fun of anything to do with the Beatles is the inevitable arguing. Nothing in the world of music can whip up a howling cataclysm of controversy like the mention of the band and its remarkable universe of music, which to my ears gets more singular and more predominant with every passing year. After 2009's wonderful boxed set of original albums on CD, all re-remastered—not remixed, which would have provoked worldwide rioting—comes the mother of all provocations, the spark to the Liverpool powder, as it were: the Beatles' *Stereo Vinyl Box Set*. Months before it appeared, when it was still just a glint in the eye of the folks at EMI, the voices for and against began to chatter. There is no fanaticism like Beatle fanaticism, and everyone has now chosen a side and pitched in (for the full story, check out www.analogplanet.com). No, the LPs were not pressed at RTI or a similarly high-quality facility. Yes, there is a raging debate about the merits of the sound quality. Some of the new LPs do indeed sound better than others. No, the record sleeves were not laminated. No, nothing will ever top the original UK pressings—or will it? Some retailers shipped the sets



to customers in oversized boxes that damaged them. Some devotees find the outer sleeve that slips down over the entire set annoying. Almost everyone except the purist contrarians agree that the 252-page book that comes with the set is the finest individual Beatle collectible yet devised. Whatever your convictions, this set is beyond essential. gorgeously packaged and remastered with great care—don't be silly—this music is where the phrase "to die for" began!

—Robert Baird

BE-BOP DELUXE: AXE VICTIM

EMI LC 0542 (CD). 1974/1991. Bill Nelson, Ian McClintock, prods.; Mike Ross, Pete Silver, Rod Harper, Steve Nye, engs.; John Leckie, mix. AAD. TT: 61:24

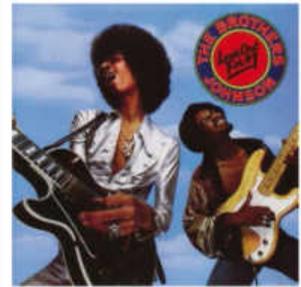
 Going to high school in California in the mid-'70s, we had our fantasies of what post-Beatles England was all about, based entirely on import records found at the local vinyl shop: Bowie, Mott, and Roxy at the glam end of the store; ELP, Yes, Genesis, Camel, Floyd, and Crimson over in prog; Purple and Zep in heavy metal; and then the bands that didn't quite fit, like Sparks and

10cc. One album that evoked England especially well for me was *Be-Bop Deluxe's* first, from 1974. In the middle of side 2 is "Adventures in a Yorkshire Landscape," an underrated classic if there ever was one, and the rest of the Bowie-like album bristles with Bill Nelson's fiery, prog-gish guitar work. *Be-Bop Deluxe* would soon leave behind all glam pretense, but for this one moment, they typified the England of my dreams . . . until the Sex Pistols came along and changed it all again.—Jon Iverson

BECK: GUERO

Geffen B0000 3481-02 (CD). 2005. Beck, Mike Simpson, The Dust Brothers, Tony Hoffer, prods., engs. DDD. TT: 46:50

 If *Odelay* remains Beck's zany tour de force, *Guero* finds the eternal hipster emerging from the post-breakup melancholy of *Sea Change* with a more mature voice and a superior songwriting prowess. Playing the role of the outsider, Beck the guero (white boy) fills a Latin funkiness with aphasia: "See the vegetable man in the vegetable van / With a horn that's honking like a mariachi band." The album's



musical landscape winds from lounge ("Earthquake Weather") to swampy fat-back ("Go It Alone") to hangman ballad ("Farewell Ride") with the ease, elegance, and nonchalance we've come to expect from Beck.—Ben Finane

THE BIRD AND THE BEE: THE BIRD AND THE BEE

Metro Blue/Blue Note 3 68251 2 (CD). 2006. Greg Kurstin, prod., eng. DDD. TT: 35:48

 Track for track, no pop recording of the past five years has so originally and imaginatively redefined songwriting as has this one. Quirky and sensuous, witty and superbly crafted, its 10 songs evolve in most unexpected and delightful ways. Greg Kurstin uses keyboards, drum machines, and guitars to orchestrate gem-like settings for Inara George's breezy lyrics, little-girl leads, and sunny harmonies. Stylistically, *The Bird and the Bee* spans sunny pop and dance music to jazzy, flowing works. "Fucking Boyfriend" will probably be the track that puts this group on the map, but every tune is as wryly crafted. George, by the way, is the daughter of the late,

great Lowell George, founder of Little Feat. This apple has not fallen far.—**Daniel Buckley**

THE BLACK CROWES: AMERICA

American 43001-2 (CD). 1994. Jack Joseph Puig, prod., eng.; Jeff Sheehan, eng. DDD. TT: 54:11

 The Black Crowes had already out-Stoned the Stones to reclaim Southern rock for the South before *America* captured them at their most complex and sublime. The album effortlessly serves up a slow-smoked barbecue of country blues, rock, gospel, funk, and hippie jam—with no easy singles and plenty of killer riffs. The secret's in the sauce, supplied by the real-deal Baptist-Sunday-morning keyboards of Eddie Harsch ("Descending") and the guest flavoring of Bruce Kaphan's hallowed steel guitar ("Wiser Time"). The meat comes from the deceptively talented brothers Robinson: Rich's gritty, fuck-you guitar ("She Gave Good Sunflower") lashing against vocalist Chris's potent authenticity ("Nonfiction"), which push the band unassumingly toward transcendence. (XVIII-1)—**Ben Finane**

BLACK SABBATH: PARANOID

Warner Bros. 3104-2 (CD). 1971. Rodger Bain, prod. AAD. TT: 42:13

 Yeah, that's right, I'm talkin' about "War Pigs," "Paranoid," "Iron Man," "Fairies Wear Boots," monster riffs, and tasty licks. *Paranoid* is the sound of the whole genre of heavy-metal music escaping the confines of its witch-mother's womb, sliding down her razor-studded birth canal, chewing off its own umbilical cord, then scurrying into the night to wreak vengeance on the hypocrites of the world. Not only did *Paranoid* invent heavy metal, it contains the sounds of a band that breathed

and moved together. Tony Iommi, Bill Ward, and Geezer Butler play with reckless abandon and intuitive feel for one another. This record should serve as a template of how mastering should be done and how a rock album should sound.—**Erick Lichte**

THE BONZO DOG BAND: THE BEST OF THE BONZO DOG BAND

Rhino R271006 (CD). 1990. Apollo C. Vermouth (Paul McCartney), Gus Dudgeon, Gerry Bron, others, prods.; Terry Brown, Andy Johns, others, engs. AAD. TT: 72:25

 The Bonzos were the apotheosis of 1960s British comedy applied to popular music. Their albums were daft collections of brilliant pop structures often in service to parody, absurdist ditties and manic visions perfectly suited to the mind-altered state of late-1960s psychedelia. The group's two visionaries, frontman Vivian Stanshall and musical director Neil Innes, somehow meshed perfectly in the fragile but singular vision of this completely uncompromising project. This album shows the breadth of the band's concerns, from Stanshall's twisted literary references to everything from Kipling to Sartre, to Innes's way of folding Beatles-esque melodies into the unlikeliest of arrangements. Includes their hit-single ode to amphetamines, "I'm the Urban Spaceman"; Stanshall's seduction masterpiece, "Tent"; and a version of "Sound of Music" that will forever change the way you think about the song.

—**John Swenson**

DAVID BOWIE: THE MAN WHO SOLD THE WORLD

Rykodisc RCD 10132 (CD). 1970/1990. Tony Visconti, prod.; Ken Scott, eng. AAD? TT: 54:01

 Something old: A lot has been said about the

gnarled, bass-heavy sound of this, the first proper David Bowie album (his previous records being opportunistic collections of styles with no real center), which kick-started the glam era. But I love it. The project was assembled and recorded by producer and bassist Tony Visconti in Bowie's recently purchased gothic manor, and Visconti was not shy about shoving his bass guitar up next to Mick Ronson's buzzing, dreamy guitars. The sound quality and playing are a little coarse in spots, but it doesn't bother me at all, since the music and mix are so wondrous. I only wish Bowie could drop all pretense and perfection and do it again.—**Jon Iverson**

DAVID BOWIE: STATION TO STATION

RCA APL1-1327 (US LP), RVP-6027 (Japanese LP). 1976. David Bowie, prod., eng.; Harry Maslin, eng. AAA. TT: 38:08

 Appearing on Dick Cavett's television show in 1974, the coked-out "Thin White Duke" sang a ragged "1984" and then, nervously and obsessively stroking a walking stick, submitted to an interview during which he regressed to a semi-infantile state. A year later, still so zonked out he claimed to remember nothing of its creation, he recorded this pivotal masterpiece. Perhaps the lavish, recently released multi-disc edition of *Station to Station* was Bowie's attempt to reconnect with it. It got me to reconnect with one of my favorites from that unsettled time, via the original American and Japanese pressings, the sound of which I doubt the remaster will approach.—**Michael Fremer**

THE BROTHERS JOHNSON: LOOK OUT FOR #1

A&M SP-4567 (LP). 1976. Quincy Jones, prod.; Chris Brent, Peter Chaikin, engs. AAA.

 When it comes to funk, R&B, and soul, the 1970s was a crazy-rich decade, and this very solid album, produced by the Q himself, has always held a special place in funk history. Although they had a bigger single, "Strawberry Letter 23," which hit No. 5 on *Billboard's* Top 100 in 1977, the Brothers Johnson never again made this good an album. Guitarist George and bassist Louis Johnson, a pair of L.A. boys who paid a lot of solid dues by playing with Billy Preston and the Supremes before releasing this, their debut album, had, by '76, also become accomplished songwriters. Except for a cover of "Come Together" that, unlike a lot of Beatles covers, funk, R&B, or otherwise, actually works, they wrote everything on this record. The brothers hit here with a record that moves between genuine funk workouts like "Thunder Thumbs and Lightnin' Licks" and the immortal chants of "Get the Funk Out My Face"; the infectious single "I'll Be Good to You," with its prominent roiling guitar in the chorus's background; and my favorite, the so-silly-it's-great ballad "Land of Ladies." Choosing a favorite funk record from the '70s is nearly impossible, but this gem belongs on any list of masterpieces.—**Robert Baird**

GREG BROWN: THE LIVE ONE

Red House CD 78 (CD). 1995. Greg Brown, prod.; Don Julin, eng. DDD. TT: 69:24

 Perhaps best known for his appearances on *A Prairie Home Companion*, folkie Greg Brown has an impressive discography of solid, catchy, and usually relevant tunes. It's hard to pick a favorite disc, but even harder to argue that his studio work, good as it may be, doesn't pale in comparison to his intimate, inclusive live shows. *The Live*



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One, recorded in 1994 in JR's Warehouse in Traverse City, Michigan, does perhaps the best job of capturing the magic of Brown's performances. It's well recorded and nicely produced, and the opening cut, "Just By Myself," is alone worth the price of admission.—**Brian Damkroger**

JAMES BROWN: LIVE AT THE APOLLO

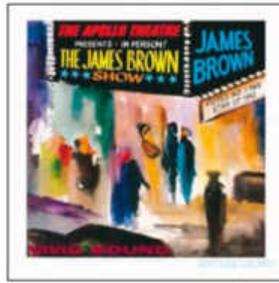
Polydor Chronicles B0001715 (CD). 1962/2004. James Brown, prod.; Tom Nola, eng.; Harry Weinger, reissue prod.; Ellen Fitton, remastering. AAD. TT: 40:47

 I grew up in a small Southern textile town, and one summer afternoon in the early 1960s observed a caravan of cars and trucks speeding past our house, all bearing US and Confederate flags. Excited, I asked my father if we could join the "parade," but he explained that "it's not our kind of parade"—that the people were afraid of all the changes going on in America, and they sometimes went out and did mean things. A year or so later, when I started buying records, I discovered *Live at the Apollo*, recorded in 1962. The album's power floored me; in that instant, I understood what those folks had been afraid of.—**Fred Mills**

STEPHEN BRUTON: WHAT IT IS

Dos 7002 (CD). 1993. Tom Canning, prod.; Dave McNair, eng. AAD? TT: 43:11

 Austin's Turner Stephen Bruton was always something of a well-kept secret among connoisseurs of hip, contemporary American music. A stellar songwriter, storyteller, and guitarist with a keen wit and an open-hearted spirit, he produced memorable albums by the likes of Alejandro Escovedo, Marcia Ball, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Hal Ketchum, and Chris Smither. And for decades, as a touring musician, he performed with Kris Krist-



offerson and Bonnie Raitt. But T.S., who succumbed to cancer last May, also made some wonderful albums of his own. *What It Is*, his first, is a five-star showcase of his myriad talents, from electrifying Keith Richards-esque playing on "This Train Is Gone" to heart-wrenching vocals and slide guitar on his breakup tour de force, "Getting Over You," a song lovingly covered by Willie Nelson with Raitt herself. That songs on *What It Is*, like the gorgeous "Too Many Memories," have also been recorded by such A-listers as the Highwaymen (Kristofferson, Nelson, Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings) and Patty Loveless is yet another testament to Bruton's craftsmanship and timeless good taste, which are everywhere on this masterpiece.—**David Sokol**

JEFF BUCKLEY: GRACE

Columbia CK 57538 (CD). 1994. Andy Wallace, prod., eng., mix. AAD. TT: 51:48

 It's just a scale. A scale. So why does it have such an effect on me? The bridge passage in each verse of the title track of the only studio album Jeff Buckley completed before his untimely death in 1997 begins with that most mundane of things, a pentatonic E-minor scale. Yet each time I hear it, my flesh goose-bumps in anticipation of the climax to come. This is extraordinarily well-crafted, intelligent rock from a musician whose guitar playing synthesized influences from Jimmy Page (in his use of rhythmic me-



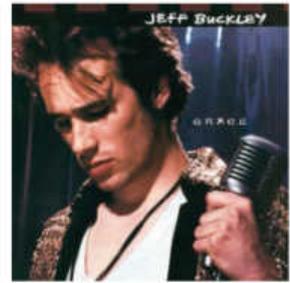
lodio lines to provide a song's propulsive power) to Joni Mitchell (in his use of open tunings, chords in unfamiliar inversions, and with unexpected tonics). But Buckley was also a vocalist with enormous range who channeled such diverse influences as Nina Simone ("Lilac Wine") and Dame Janet Baker (Britten's "Corpus Christie Carol"). Here he benefited from equally well-crafted sound that features light and shade, power chords and harmonic subtlety. His reading of Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" is definitive. Check out Daphne Brooks' book-length essay on *Grace* in *Continuum's* 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ series (ISBN 0-8264-1635-7) for all the things I wished I had the wit to write. (XVII-11)

—**John Atkinson**

JIMMY BUFFETT: CHANGES IN LATITUDES, CHANGES IN ATTITUDES

ABC AB-990 (LP). 1977. Norbert Putman, prod.; Marty Lewis, Alex Sadkin, engs. AAA. TT: 41:28

 In 1977, Jimmy Buffett was a not-quite-successful singer-songwriter with a bagful of catchy, good-time tunes and a gift for engaging audiences—typically, small ones—with entertaining patter about life in the Florida Keys. 1974's *A1A* was great, and those of us who saw Buffett in the dive bars he played loved him, but we never expected him to become wildly popular, or to create an album like *Changes in Latitudes*. The songs are all strong, the craftsmanship is first-rate,



and the sound is pure analog at its clean, clear, harmonically rich best.

—**Brian Damkroger**

JERRY BUTLER: ICE ON ICE

Mercury SR 61234 (LP). 1969. Kenneth Gamble, Leon Huff, prods., engs. AAA. TT: 31:02

 I burst into Robert Baird's office, frantic but smiling: "Have you heard Jerry Butler?" I had just discovered Butler through Pandora Radio. This was about the time RB was taking the first steps toward his outstanding interview with Kenneth Gamble and Leon Huff (Vol.31 No.9), and he excitedly introduced me to the world of Philly Soul artists, including Teddy Pen-dergrass, Billy Paul, and the O'Jays. But the one I most connected with was Butler, for his all-knowing delivery and unwavering confidence.

In *Ice on Ice*, Butler tells, in a mature style and in his refined yet husky groan, heartbreaking stories of love and loss. Gamble and Huff's lush production includes various delectable instrumental choices, including nylon-string guitars, metallic flutes, tightly tuned snares, airy vibraphones, an endless choir of background singers, and soaring, intertwining strings. The arrangements, in combination with The Ice-man's stellar pop songcraft, provide a timeless album on any plot of the emotional and sonic spectra. If you can't find the vinyl, all tracks are available on the Collector's Choice Music CD reissue—which includes, on the same

disc, Butler's *The Iceman Cometh*.—**Ariel Bitran**

CALEXICO: FEAST OF WIRE

Quarterstick QS 78 (CD). 2003. Craig Schumacher, prod., eng.; Joey Burns, John Convertino, prods.; Nick Luca, eng. AAD? TT: 50:33

With *Feast of Wire*, Calexico, once a side project for Giant Sand drummer John Convertino and bassist Joey Burns, has turned serious and blossomed into its own full-fledged collective (like Giant Sand), full of ideas and promise. The vibe of what used to be an entirely instrumental project has always been spare eclecticism spiked with plenty of noise, exotic instruments, and experimentalism run rampant. These tracks, while still spare, conform to song structures and are better-recorded. There's also more drama these days, a better sense of allowing songs to build and expand.

These seemingly disparate elements come together to great effect in the instrumental "Close Behind," where insistently strummed Norteño guitars meet pedal steel guitar, violin overdubs, and the kind of galloping chorus TV cop shows like *Hawaii Five-O* have always employed. The next tune, "Woven Birds," has an ascending chorus in which the vocals are accompanied by orchestral bells and clusters of stringed instruments. "Whipping the Horse's Eyes," a short duet between pedal steel and cello, is a striking interlude, and "Crumble," with its interplay of muted trumpets and trumpet solos, is jazz. And "Across the Wire" with its mariachi trumpets, strummed guitar, and button accordion, embodies the flavor of the band's home town of Tucson, Arizona. —**Robert Baird**



CALEXICO: HOT RAIL

Quarterstick QS 62(CD). 2000. Joey Burns, John Convertino, prods.; Craig Schumacher, Nick Luca, engs. DDD? TT: 53:17

Seems to me that any kid growing up in the 1960s has been pre-seasoned for the music of Calexico. We were repeatedly peppered with romantic notions of neo-Mexicali: Clint Eastwood westerns, Herb Alpert shuffles, and salsa in a jar. It is this cultural amalgamation of North American fantasies that Calexico—two gringos from Tucson—taps into so well: moody vocals, accordions, mariachi trumpets, marimbas, maracas, and strumming, twangy guitars. And when they aren't strolling through a dusty town south of the border, they slither into a somnambulant side alley to conjure Tom Waits without the raspy growl.—**Jon Iverson**

JOHNNY CASH: UNCHAINED

American 43097-2 (CD). 1996. Rick Rubin, prod.; Sylvia Massey, eng. AAD? TT: 43:46

It may be absence making the heart grow fonder, or emotional blowback from the new film about a small part of his life in which Joaquin Phoenix uncannily echoes some of his facial expressions, but Johnny Cash seems to have been in

John Convertino (left), and Joe Burns (right), of Calexico

my CD player an inordinate amount this year. And while *At Folsom Prison* may be his *Sgt. Pepper's* and *The Fabulous Johnny Cash* his first coherent (and still great) album, it's *Unchained*, the second of his four albums produced by Rick Rubin, that recaptures and expands on the verve and sparkle that always made the man (in black) and his work so indispensable. With Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers as the backup band providing a loose feel that at times is almost jammy, alt-rock tunes such as Beck's "Rowboat" and Soundgarden's "Rusty Cage" mix well with spot-on versions of classics like "Sea of Heartbreak," "Memories are Made of This," and Cash's own Sun-era rockabilly number, "Country Boy." One of the final highlights in the career of a larger-than-life icon of popular music. (XX-2)—**Robert Baird**

**NICK CAVE AND THE BAD SEEDS:
THE BOATMAN'S CALL**
Mute/Reprise 46530 (CD). 1997. Flood, prod.; Paul Wright, Paul Hicks, Paul Corkett, engs. DDD. TT: 51:53

Fifteen years after its release, Nick Cave's 10th studio album remains one of the most consistently

moving pop albums I know: 12 songs, mostly about extinguished relationships (one of which is said to have been with singer PJ Harvey), wherein the writer blends raw candor with poetic distance while maintaining a uniquely (for rock) *spiritual* perspective throughout. Piano and organ dominate, along with the brilliant electric bass playing of Martyn P. Casey. No matter where you find yourself in this generally down-tempo collection, the next minor chord is never more than one measure away—and that's a key part of its dark charm. Wonderful stuff.—**Art Dudley**

NICK CAVE & THE BAD SEEDS: THE LYRE OF ORPHEUS

Mute CDStumm233 0724386467201 (CD). 2004. Nick Launay, prod.; Guillaume Dujardin, Laurent Binder, asst. prods.; Ian Cooper, eng. AAD. TT: 39:27

The Lyre of Orpheus—the quieter, somehow more intense and urgent side of Nick Cave's new double album—is a tribute to Love: the idea, the powerful sustainer. The first half of the pair, *Abattoir Blues*, while also excellent, lacks a bit of Lyre's over-the-top mystery and wonder, not to mention its "little white clouds and gamboling lambs." Take, for instance, "Babe, You Turn Me On." With its spoken-word verses riding gently against brushed-snare rolls, soulful wah-guitar, and plinking piano notes falling like a rainbow of fruit flavor, Cave breathes, "Babe, you turn me on / Like an idea / Like an atom bomb... Boom!" I'm not kidding; "Boom!" isn't actually written on the lyrics sheet, but it's in there. The rest of the album only gets better. Or worse, depending on your point of view.

—**Stephen Mejias**

CHICAGO: CHICAGO TRANSIT

AUTHORITY

Rhino R2 76171 (CD). 1969/2002.
James William Guercio, prod.;
Fred Catero, eng. AAD. TT: Does
anybody really know... (76:36)

Which 1960s band had a guitarist that Jimi Hendrix held in awe? It wasn't Cream, The Who, or Led Zep. Pick up Chicago's first album and you'll understand why Terry Kath's playing prompted Jimi to remark to the band, "You know, your guitar player is better than me." Forget those wimpy top-40 songs from the 1970s. This is when Chicago was basically a foursquare rock'n'blues outfit with an incredible horn section in the back seat. It may not be audiophile-accurate, but what a fantastic crankupable recording! The bass-guitar cabinet is right in your room along with Kath's aggressive guitar. Great songs sporting kick-ass bass, drums, and guitar, along with tight, inventive horn arrangements. What more could you want? (XXVI-4)—**Jon Iverson**

**CIRCUS GUY:
THE LOVELY LUNA**

Culbrain CUBR001 (CD). 1999. John Sharples, prod.; Bruce Hathaway, Greg Frey, engs. ADD. TT: 44:44

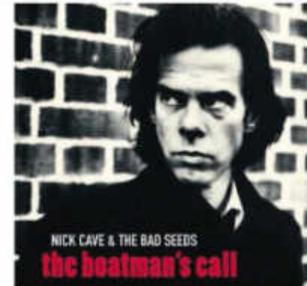
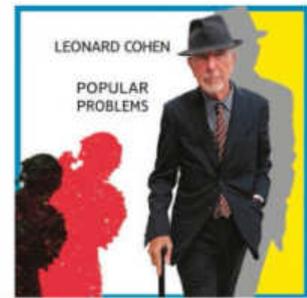
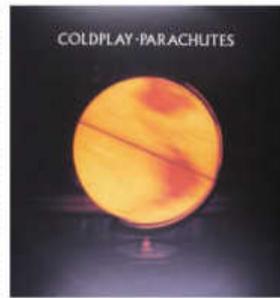
This lost gem from late in the last millennium is primarily the work of one guy, singer-songwriter-guitarist Michael Culhane, and his crack New York band. After sold-out gigs at such hotspots as the Mercury Lounge, Culhane and company put together this album of extraordinarily well-crafted, power-pop-tinged confections in the Bill Lloyd and Aimee Mann traditions (yes, it's that good, and yes, there's a hidden track). Each of the first six people I played it for had a different favorite. Culhane, with no sense of irony, names George Harrison, Curtis Mayfield, Blue Oyster Cult, and Glen Campbell among his musical heroes, and writes

songs that are simultaneously smart and ridiculously catchy. "I Wrote It Down," inspired by having unexpectedly stumbled, years later, across an old grade-school journal, begins with a Middle East-inflected chorus (Culhane's mom grew up in Baghdad) but quickly vamps into delicious contemporary rock. "Enchanted" is that rare love song that refuses to get gushy. Its video was shot in the shadows of the pyramids (thanks, YouTube). Why Egypt? The band regularly did post-9/11 goodwill tours, sponsored by the State Department, that took them everywhere from Kuwait and Syria to Israel and Palestine. If that indicates how uncynical Culhane is, that's the point. His sweet, unjaded optimism comes through loud and clear on *The Lovely Luna*, whose songs get better with every listen. A 10th-anniversary reissue is imminent.—**David Sokol**

**LEONARD COHEN:
LIVE IN LONDON**

Columbia 8697405022 (2 CDs). 2009. Edward Sanders, prod.; Stephen J. Spencer, eng. ADD? TT: 2:31:11

Admittedly, it's cheating to include a new release here; albums need years to season before they can prove their greatness. But as I write, I've just come back from seeing The Bard put on an astounding concert, and as its set list and performances closely mirrored those of *Live in London*, I feel confident in my selection. All the classics are here, from a grave yet sardonic "The Future" to a show-stopping, extended take on Cohen's greatest composition, "Hallelujah." More important, though, is *that voice*: older, yes, but no less elegant, still dipped in romance and tragedy, and abetted by an ensemble of sterling musicians and singers. Hallelujah, indeed.—**Fred Mills**

**LEONARD COHEN:
POPULAR PROBLEMS**

Columbia 88875014292 (CD). 2014. Patrick Leonard, prod.; Jesse E. String, eng. DDD. TT: 36:00

Leonard Cohen recently turned 80, but this latest collection of tunes is easily his best since *The Future*, and that one came out 22 years ago! The Voice is deeper than ever, and while the backing tracks feel slick and a tad hollow, he's having fun, the pulse is strong, the observations keen, and the old man's still confessing long-held sins. When Cohen turns off the synths and is accompanied by flesh-and-blood musicians for "You Got Me Singing" and "Samson in New Orleans," he sounds decades younger. Methinks Cohen has a lot more great tunes left to write.

—**Steve Guttenberg**

**COLDPLAY:
PARACHUTES**

Parlophone 5 40504 2 (CD). 2000. Ken Nelson, prod., eng.; Mark & Ken Phythian, engs.; Andrea Wright, Jim Coles, Paul Read, Simon Biernicott, Jon Bailey, Ben Thackeray, Jon Withnal, asst. engs. AAD? TT: 54:14

This album hooked me when, listening to Sirius XM, I heard "Yellow," remixed by Alpha for Coldplay's

EP *Mince Spies* (2001). I couldn't get frontman Chris Martin's plaintive, haunting voice out of my head. I preferred the original version from Coldplay's first album, *Parachutes*. "Yellow"'s simple but intensely romantic lyrics, its intoxicatingly slow and dark atmosphere, and Martin's plaintive falsetto totally captivated me. Mackenzie Wilson of *Rolling Stone* aptly describes how the band's "gauzy acoustics and airy percussion" create "dream pop landscapes," as heard in "High Speed" and "Shivers." The guitar chords and large soundstage of "Spies" create a sad, eerie, chilling feeling I can't shake off. This album's a keeper.

—**Larry Greenhill**

**RY COODER:
CHAVEZ RAVINE**

Nonesuch 79877 (CD). 2005. Ry Cooder, prod.; Rail Jon Rogut, eng. AAD. TT: 70:08

Crazy concept: A 15-song historical narrative about the destruction of a Latino barrio in 1950s L.A., "where the sidewalk ends" to make way for Dodger Stadium at Chavez Ravine: a sleazy tale replete with cool cats, AM radios, ward healers, a touch of McCarthyism,



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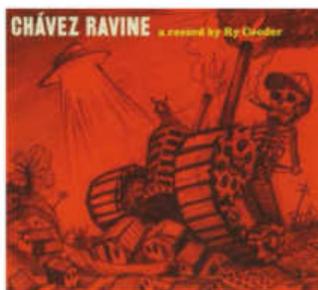
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backroom deals, bulldozer operators—even a Space Vato in a UFO. Even crazier: Tell that story through the prism of the conjunto, R&B, soul, and jazz grooves of that lost world remade by Little Willie G, Lalo Guerrero, and Don Tosti. It's a true tale genuinely worth telling, and it's Ry Cooder's peculiar genius that he can narrate this peculiar yarn and make you shake your ass off while you listen. (XXIX-2)—**Leland Rucker**

RY COODER: PARADISE AND LUNCH

Reprise 2179-2 (CD). 1974. Lenny Waronker, Russ Titelman, prods.; Lee Herschberg, eng. Bobby Hata, John Neal, asst. engs. AAD. TT: 37:24

⊕ The kind of record that would never be made today by any major record label, Cooder's 1974 masterpiece was the one time this heretofore sideman (from the Rolling Stones to Captain Beefheart), whose solo career on record had been variable, finally aligned the planets and cut a knockout album. Aided by ace players like drummer Jim Keltner and bassists Russ Titelman and Chris Etheridge, not to mention guest appearances by tenor sax player Plas Johnson (best known for the theme to *The Pink Panther*) and the great Earl "Fatha" Hines on piano, Cooder's distinctive guitar work leads a session of only highlights. All songs here meet at the crossroads of gospel, blues, folk, and country collectively known as American roots music. At the album's heart



are two of the choicest moments from Cooder's solo career: the traditional call-and-response gospel classic "Jesus on the Mainline," and Bobby Womack's r&b standard "It's All Over Now." While his soundtrack work is fine, this remains the reticent guitarist's magnum opus—so far.—**Robert Baird**

RY COODER: PARADISE AND LUNCH

Reprise K44260 (LP), Warner Bros. 7599272122 (CD). 1974/1987. Russ Titelman, Lenny Waronker, prods.; Lee Herschberg, eng., mix. AAA/AAD. TT: 36:51

⊕ Ry Cooder's fourth solo album, from 1974, tends to be overlooked—unjustly, in my opinion. I have most (if not all) of Cooder's early solo albums, yet this is the one I turn to most often, not only for an idiosyncratic collection of songs that are full of wit, humor, and irony, but also for the recording quality, which is among the best I've heard. Mercifully free from any "concept," it's a wry and eclectic collection of fine American songs that have stood the test of time, and is one of a handful of discs I play to visitors, who invariably jot down the details before they leave.—**Paul Messenger**

ELVIS COSTELLO & THE ATTRACTIONS: ARMED FORCES

Columbia 35709 (LP). 1979. Nick Lowe, prod.; Roger Bichirian, eng. AAA. TT: 36:40

Includes three-song EP: *Live at Hollywood High*

⊕ I always start my R2D4 process by contem-



plating past submissions and how I felt about them, then and now. At one point, *Armed Forces* was playing, and I tried to remember what other album I'd picked that year. I looked, looked again, and was stunned to discover that *Armed Forces* had never been one of my R2D4s. Wow—it's been one of my absolute favorites since the first time I heard it, and in my opinion is one of the best rock albums of all time. Every song is intricately and intelligently crafted, with layers of musical and lyrical nuance. Costello's delivery strikes just the right tone, the sound is great, and Nick Lowe's production assembles it all beautifully. (XVII-1)—**Brian Damkroger**

ELVIS COSTELLO: MY AIM IS TRUE

Stiff/Mobile Fidelity Sound Labs MFSL 1-329 (180gm LP). 1977/2009. Nick Lowe, prod.; Bazza, eng.; Shawn R. Britton, remastering. AAA. TT: 37:00

⊕ Declan Patrick Aloysius MacManus's raw debut album has never sounded as vital, coherent, and nuanced as it does on this surprising, almost shocking remastering, which stuns the George "Porky" Peckham original LP (UK Stiff), as well as the four CD editions that followed (Columbia, Ryko, Rhino, Universal). The glassy overlay and gauzy scrim obscuring all previous LP and CD editions has been replaced with a level of transparency and tactile three-dimensionality that opens a window onto producer Nick Lowe's bril-

liant, low-budget game plan. Even if you've heard it a thousand times before, you'll hear new, key instrumental lines and backup vocals previously hidden in plain view. UK track order, plus "Watching the Detectives." (XVII-1, XXIV-12)—**Michael Fremer**

MARY COUGHLAN: TIRED & EMOTIONAL

Mystery/WEA MRLP1 (LP), MRCD1 (CD). 1985. Erik Visser, prod. AAA/AAD? TT: 33:57

⊕ This is the 1985 debut album of Irish singer Mary Coughlan, a troubled woman—not for nothing, one may speculate, is the album's title a reference to a British euphemism for being drunk—with a great folk/blues/jazz voice. (She later recorded an album of Billie Holiday songs.) Coughlan was discovered by Dutch musician Erik Visser (Flairck), who produced *Tired & Emotional*. The end result has probably a bit too much Visser, and the synths sound pretty dated today, but no matter—Coughlan's singing easily carries the album. It ends with "Seduced": just her voice, accompanied by double bass. Through a good system, you can "see" both her and the bass. One of my desert-island albums, if only for its sheer humanity.—**Markus Sauer**

CRACKER: THE GOLDEN AGE

Virgin 8 41498 2 (CD). 1996. Dennis Herring, David Lowery prods.; Joe Chiccarelli, Wayne Cook, others, engs. ADD? TT: 48:17

⊕ This one was supposed to be the major-label breakthrough for Cracker, but alas, it whistled right past the target. Nonetheless, it has stood the test of time, for being both a demo-worthy recording (in spots) and full of great songs. "Big Dipper" and "Dixie Babylon" stand out as great-sounding, crunchy, hippie country blues numbers, nestled

between more aggressive outings that cash in on the 1990s' grunge leanings. What happened? Probably nothing here is a stone-cold hit to anchor the rest of the great material, and in those days, that could make or break you.—**Jon Iverson**

CREAM:
ROYAL ALBERT HALL,
LONDON MAY 2-3-5-6
2005

Reprise/Rhino R2 970421 (2 DVD-Vs). 2005. Martyn Atkins, video dir.; John Beug, exec. prod.; James Pluta, Scooter Weintraub, video prods.; William Bullen, video edit.; Simon Climie, audio prod.; Mick Guzauskie, audio mix; Bob Ludwig, audio mastering. Linear PCM (16-bit/48kHz) two-channel, DTS Surround & Dolby Digital 5.1 soundtracks. DDD. TT: 2:10:00

**ERIC CLAPTON &
VARIOUS:**
CROSSROADS GUITAR
FESTIVAL

Reprise/Rhino R2 970378 (2 DVD-Vs). 2004. John Beug, David Horn, video exec. prods.; Ron de Moraes, video dir.; Mona Nimiec, Mitch Owgang, video prods.; Gary Bradley, editor; Elliot Scheiner, supervising audio eng.; Keith Winikoff, technical dir.; Simon Climie, Mick Guzauskie, Tom Bender, mix; Ed Cherney, Kooster McAlister, Greg Ondo, audio engs.; The Hit Factory, audio mastering. DTS Surround, Dolby Digital 5.1 soundtracks. DDD. TT: 3:30:00

When making my final choices for this year's listing, I was more than surprised to end up with two DVD-Videos of live concerts—no music CDs, SACDs, or DVD-As made my final cut. Yes, Cream's Albert Hall concert is also available on a 2-CD set (Reprise 9362-49416-2), but the CDs' sound is not significantly different from the DVDs' LPCM soundtrack, and while the CDs have the same concert program, they offer just one alternate take ("Sleepy Time Time") compared with the DVD's three ("Sleepy Time Time," "We're Going Wrong," "Sunshine of Your Love"). These three geezers amply demonstrate that

all that is required for great music making is talent and empathy. Ginger Baker plays with mastery of time, while Eric Clapton demonstrates a consistent maturity in the construction of his solos that occasionally escaped him in the 1960s. I was fortunate enough to be at the Friday-night concert that contributes most of the material to this set, and I thought at the concert that only Jack Bruce was overshadowed by his playing of 37 years ago. That impression is reinforced by repeated playing of the DVD. Not that he doesn't play superbly—and the sounds of his Hartke-amplified Warwick fretless and Gibson EB-1 basses are way better than the fuzzy, midrangey Marshall stacks he used to use—but compared to his younger self, he tends to leave opportunities unexplored. But still, a concert to remember for a lifetime.

The *Crossroads Guitar Festival* DVD was released in 2004 and has stood up to repeated playings in the year since. Clapton is joined by a galaxy of guitar talent, ranging from the obvious—Billy Gibbons, B.B. King, Eric Johnson, Joe Walsh, Steve Vai, John McLaughlin, Carlos Santana, Robert Cray, Jimmie Vaughan, Buddy Guy—to the unexpected: David Hidalgo, Vince Gill, James Taylor, John Mayer, Dan Tyminski, Larry Carlton, Honeyboy Edwards, Hubert Sumlin, Robert Randolph, JJ Cale, Doyle Bramhall II. Not one of them phones it in. However, the stars for me are the many uncredited sidemen, led by the incomparable Booker T. and the MG's, with Steve Cropper. Recorded live at the Dallas Cotton Bowl, the sound has refreshingly wide dynamic range and some of the best live drum sound I have heard. Why can't studio-produced rock CDs sound

this natural, this unforced, this good?

—**John Atkinson**

**CREEDENCE
CLEARWATER
REVIVAL:
ABSOLUTE ORIGINALS**

Analogue Productions APP CCR7 (8 LPs, 45rpm). 1967–71/2004. Saul Zaentz, John Fogerty, Creedence, orig. prods.; Chad Kassem, reissue prod.; Kevin Gray, Steve Hoffman, remastering. AAA. TT: 101:31

This set of eight 45rpm LPs might be the most luxurious item I own, but it's a slice of nirvana. There's a disc of excerpts from each of the seven original CCR albums, and a bonus disc of alternate mixes. The sound is unbelievable, and the quality and packaging are just as wonderful. CCR's music and sound may be the definitive soundtrack for the late 1960s and early '70s, but just as aptly describe the American experience of today. Whether describing "the voice of rage and ruin" or hanging out "Down on the Corner," these songs are perfect.—**Brian Damkroger**

**CROWDED HOUSE:
WOODFACE**

Capitol CDP 7 93559 2 (CD). 1991. Mitchell Froom, Neil Finn, prods.; Tchad Blake, Max Garcia, eng. ADD. TT: 48:13

These New Zealanders have made a stack of tasty albums over the years, but never has the band resonated as soundly as on this, their third. Frontman Neil Finn cowrote a batch of the songs, including "Four Seasons in One Day" and "It's Only Natural," with brother and sometime-bandmate Tim, and what lush, dare I say, Beatle-esque songs they are. Drop-dead-gorgeous layered harmonies abound. Even at their most poppy, the lyrics are pointed (in "Chocolate Cake," they invoke Andrew Lloyd Webber, Liberace, and Americans' insatiable appetites), and

the boys never compromise their meticulous songcraft. And please don't hold it against them that Jimmy Buffett chose one of Woodface's gems, "Weather With You," as the title song of his chart-topping 2006 CD.

—**David Sokol**

**DE LA SOUL:
3 FEET HIGH AND
RISING**

Tommy Boy TBCD 1019 (CD). 1989. Prince Paul, De La Soul, prods.; Sue "In the House" Fisher, Bob "The Amazing" Coulter, Dan "Bust a Harmony" Miller, Chris Irwin, engs. AAD? TT: 67:18

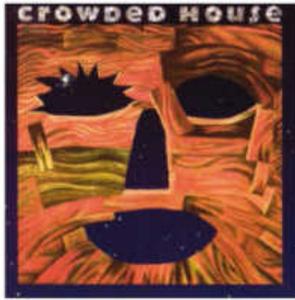
Listening to *3 Feet High and Rising* today, it seems to have come from a vastly different and far more innocent universe. It's not just the subject matter—De La Soul's trippy D.A.I.S.Y. (Da Inner Sound, Y'all)—age raps were the very antithesis of the gangstaisms that would rule the 1990s. But in the days before strict adherence to sample clearance (a lawsuit by the Turtles against De La Soul would change all that), Prince Paul's genius-level production created a soundscape that couldn't be reproduced today—not because of any lack of musical intuition or ability, but simply because of business. I'm all for everybody gettin' paid, but I'm just sayin'...

—**Daniel Durchholz**

**DIED PRETTY:
FREE DIRT**

Aztec Music AVSCD041 (2 CDs). 2008. Rob Younger, prod.; Dave Connor, Alan Thorne, engs. AAD. TT: 2:11:46

The mid-1980s were arguably Australia's golden era of independent rock, thrusting into the international eye such acts as Hoodoo Gurus, Scientists, Celibate Rifles, Stems, and Died Pretty. The Pretties' 1986 magnum opus, along with the preceding *Out of the Unknown* and *Next to Nothing* EPs (both featured



on disc 2 of this expanded reissue, which also includes some excellent live tracks), have aged well enough to still stop you in your tracks, as much for Ron Peno's feral howl and Dylan-Reed lyrics as for the ambitious arrangements wrought by Brett Myers's blistering guitar and Frank Brunetti's magisterial keys. Translation: sinewy, cinematic psychedelia powered by pure punk poetry.—**Fred Mills**

DONNA THE BUFFALO: LIVE FROM THE AMERICAN BALLROOM

Wildlife Music WM001 (2 CDs).
2001. Donna the Buffalo, prods.;
Alex Perialas, eng. DDD. TT: 119:54

Live records rarely hold up, in my book, and a two-CD live set is a stretch. But Donna the Buffalo is not your average live band. In this sextet, songwriting craftsmanship, a lofty cosmic perspective, and two superb front singers (songwriters Jeb Puryear and Tara Nevins) meld in geosynchronous orbit with zydeco crosscurrents, rocking country accents, and the bodacious grooves that only wild-eyed souls with steel guitars, fiddles, accordions, rub boards, and the obligatory rompin' stompin' rhythm section can generate in front of an ass-packed, wild-whooping crowd! Big energy and songs that will stay in your head—and in steady rotation on your stereo—for years to come.

—**Daniel Buckley**



THE DOORS: THE SOFT PARADE

Elektra/Analogue Productions
AAPP 75005-45 (2 45rpm LPs).
1969/2012. Paul Rothchild, orig.
prod.; Bruce Botnick, orig. eng.;
Chad Kassem, reissue exec. prod.;
Bruce Botnick, Jeff Jampol, reissue
supervision. AAA. TT: 34:09

The tunes on the Doors' fourth album covered the broadest range of genres and arrangements, but the title track, a five-movement suite 8.5 minutes long, was alone worth the cost of the album. I thought it was impossible to improve on Bruce Botnick's neutral and detailed engineering on the original Elektra vinyl, but Chad Kassem's 45rpm, 200gm reissue, stamped on two discs by his own Quality Record Pressings, has more inner detail, deeper bass, more extended highs, wider dynamic range, and more delicacy. Over the last 20 years, many record companies have claimed, largely erroneously, that their "audiophile" vinyl reissues of classic jazz, rock, and classical music exceed the sound quality of the original LPs. Here, Chad Kassem has actually done it, and by a wide margin.—**Robert J. Reina**

MOLLY DRAKE: MOLLY DRAKE

Squirrel Thing ST-4 (mono CD).
2012. Recorded by Rodney Drake;
John Wood, Cally, prods.; Simon
Heyworth, mastering. A-D. TT:
37:31

In my small town is a shop, less an antique shop than a compendium of ephemera—things not



valued in their own time, or ever intended to be kept or cherished. The shopkeeper sometimes binds together similar items—postcards, concert programs, tickets—in small albums of plastic sleeves. I once opened one of these tiny volumes to find a series of strips of thin, colored pasteboard, each the size and shape of a small bookmark, some edged with an embossed floral pattern. On each was a column of horizontal lines, on some of which were written masculine names: a first name followed by an initial. It was a collection of the dance cards of one young girl's débutante season, from a century ago. Some cards were full; others bore only a few names. I wondered who this girl had been. What had those evenings been like? Had she married one of these boys? How long had she lived? Who had she become?

My fingers began to shake. I closed the album carefully, as if it were made of moths' wings. I felt I had violated a privacy, seen something I had no right to see. I was tempted to buy the thing, if only to take it home and burn it, bury it—let this poor dead girl and her lost world rest in peace. Instead, I replaced it on a table full of such revenants.

This collection of the songs of Molly Drake (1915–1993) evokes that sense of intimacies almost too fragile and tender to survive their revelation. A member of the upper class and a daughter of the British Raj, Mary



(Molly) Lloyd was born in Burma, where she returned after schooling in England. She married Rodney Drake in Rangoon, and they resettled in England, for good, in 1952. Molly wrote these 19 songs in the 1940s and '50s, and these performances of her singing them and playing piano were recorded in the '50s by Rodney in their living room, first on lacquers and then on a primitive tape recorder. She never performed them in public. The sound quality is poor, if sometimes surprisingly good for their age and source. It's amazing they exist at all.

The songs themselves are mood pieces, sometimes of surprisingly unpredictable structure, by a woman with a fine-tuned sensibility and, apparently, a rich inner life. The musical language is that of songs of the 1930s and early '40s mixed with Edwardian parlor pastorales, hints of Scots folk songs, Anglican hymns, tiny drops of tango, and the blues as filtered through Noel Coward. Some, mere fragments, break off in mid-verse; others ("Love Isn't a Right") are naïvely earnest, artless in the best sense. Many speak of or hint at darker experience, of bright hopes dimmed by disappointment and grief, of the futility of trying to hold on to happiness ("Happiness"). The words may be upbeat or wondering, or put a brave face on small things that loom large in the heart—as in "I Remember," about how even the most precious memories, treasured

because shared with a loved one, can turn out not to be shared at all: "Now we can be grateful / for the gifts of memories / for I remember having fun / two happy hearts that beat as one / when I had thought that we were one / but we were you and me."

Listening through the hiss and crackle, it is the sadness and deep loneliness in Drake's voice that I find almost unbearable. Even "Breakfast at Bradenham Woods," on the face of it a glowing recollection of a happy outing, becomes an elegy for the last good time enjoyed by someone who can now expect no more, someone who knows she "could never go back without breaking the spell." The songs are almost whispered, as if sung to herself. Drake may sound over-elocuted, even prim, to a modern ear, but she would not have sounded so to her own era and class. Professional singers work all their lives to sing so expressively with so little apparent effort. The intimacies revealed are not shocking or surprising; what makes them powerful is how deeply and unaffectedly felt they were by the woman who wrote and sang them, who seems never to have been interested in having anyone else hear them. Each time I hear these songs, I am not sure I should have, and am so glad I have.

In 1974, a more lasting sadness came for Molly Drake, when her only son killed himself. That son was Nick Drake, of whose music I have yet to hear a single note. Whether that has best or worst prepared me to write this, only Nick and Molly will ever know—but I thought at least one appreciation of this woman and her songs might be written by someone whose hearing of the mother is neither expanded nor shrunk by having heard the

son. —Richard Lehnert

THE DREAM SYNDICATE: MEDICINE SHOW

Water/Runt WATER242 (CD). 2010. Sandy Pearlman, prod.; Paul Mandl, Ken Huntcovsky, Eric Van Soest, engs. AAD. TT: 77:21

⏻ For this celebrated Amerindie outfit's sophomore release, the bloom was more than just off the rose: some critics had squirted weed poison at the whole damn bush, decrying the '84 LP as a big-budget, glossily produced—courtesy Blue Öyster Cult majordomo Sandy Pearlman—sellout compared to 1982's *The Days of Wine and Roses*. Time, though, and a stunningly remastered 2010 reissue that includes as a bonus a smoking live FM broadcast, also from 1984, has vindicated the maligned *Medicine Show*. All the elements that made yours truly a devotee back in the day are recast in vivid sonic terms, from the reverb-rich ambience and arena-worthy Big Guitars to songwriter Steve Wynn's *noirish* lyric character studies and a subversive punk vibe that hints at how the underground would go aboveground a few years later. —Fred Mills

DR. JOHN: BABYLON

WOV 270 (CD). 1968/2002. Mac Rebennack, Harold Batiste, prods.; Soulful Pete, eng. AAD? TT: 38:01

⏻ Dr. John's apparently sudden post-Katrina radicalization has taken some people by surprise, but not those fans familiar with his second album, *Babylon*. The title track, with its apocalyptic description of a world gone off the rails, fit the zeitgeist of late-1960s rock, but Mac wasn't just flipping the bird at "The Patriotic Flag Waver," he was describing life in a psychedelic hell epitomized by the title track and "Twilight Zone." Nor did



Mac find any solace in the Woodstock generation, as he skewered acid-rock guitar on "Lonesome Guitar Strangler," even as he used it to showcase his own string-bending prowess. Through it all, the otherworldly arrangements have a strange beauty, as on the eerie ballad "Glowin'."

—John Swenson

BOB DYLAN: BLONDE ON BLONDE

Columbia/Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab MSFL 3-45009 (3 45rpm LPs). 1966/2013. Bob Johnston, prod.; Roy Halee et al, engs.; Michael Brauer, Steve Berkowitz, remix. AAD. TT: 69:80

⏻ Mobile Fidelity's 45rpm reissue of *Blonde on Blonde* adds new luster to my favorite Dylan album, which is to say one of my favorite albums, period. This is the electric-rock Dylan that forced even the folkie purists to readmit the prophet to the pantheon: such poetry, wit, reverie, and rambunctiousness had never before and has never since been unfurled in pop music. As good as my original pressing sounds, it's a shadow of MoFi's wide-groove reissue, which puts Dylan and the band *right there*: his vocal modulations so tingly, the organ, guitars, and drums so present. (XXI-2)—Fred Kaplan

BOB DYLAN: INFIDELS

Columbia CH 90317 (SACD/CD). 1983/2003. Bob Dylan, Mark Knopfler, prods.; Josh Abbey, eng. AAD. TT: 42:16

⏻ A lot of people, even some seriously plugged into the music of the last



quarter of the 20th century, lost sight of Bob Dylan between *Desire* (1976) and *Time Out of Mind* (1997). Perhaps it was his trilogy of Christian-leaning records, or maybe it was the perceived inconsistency of the rest, most of which hardly revealed that they were the work of the best songwriter of our time. In any case, the great white wonder did make some fine music during those lost decades, and none better than *Infidels*, which directly followed the aforementioned trilogy. This remarkably sturdy collection showcases many sides of the artist: the political observer ("Union Sundown"), the worldly commentator ("Neighborhood Bully"), the voice of wisdom ("Man of Peace"), even the romantic ("Don't Fall Apart on Me Tonight"). Dylan's songs are catchy and melodic, his voice evocative and tender, and his band stellar—led by the pulsing rhythm section of Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespeare, former Rolling Stones guitarist Mick Taylor, and coproducer and Dire Straits frontman Mark Knopfler. If you haven't spun this one in a while, there's a very good chance you'll be caught off guard by just how good it sounds, sonically and musically. —David Sokol

BOB DYLAN: THE BOOTLEG SERIES VOL. 4: LIVE 1966—THE "ROYAL ALBERT HALL" CONCERT

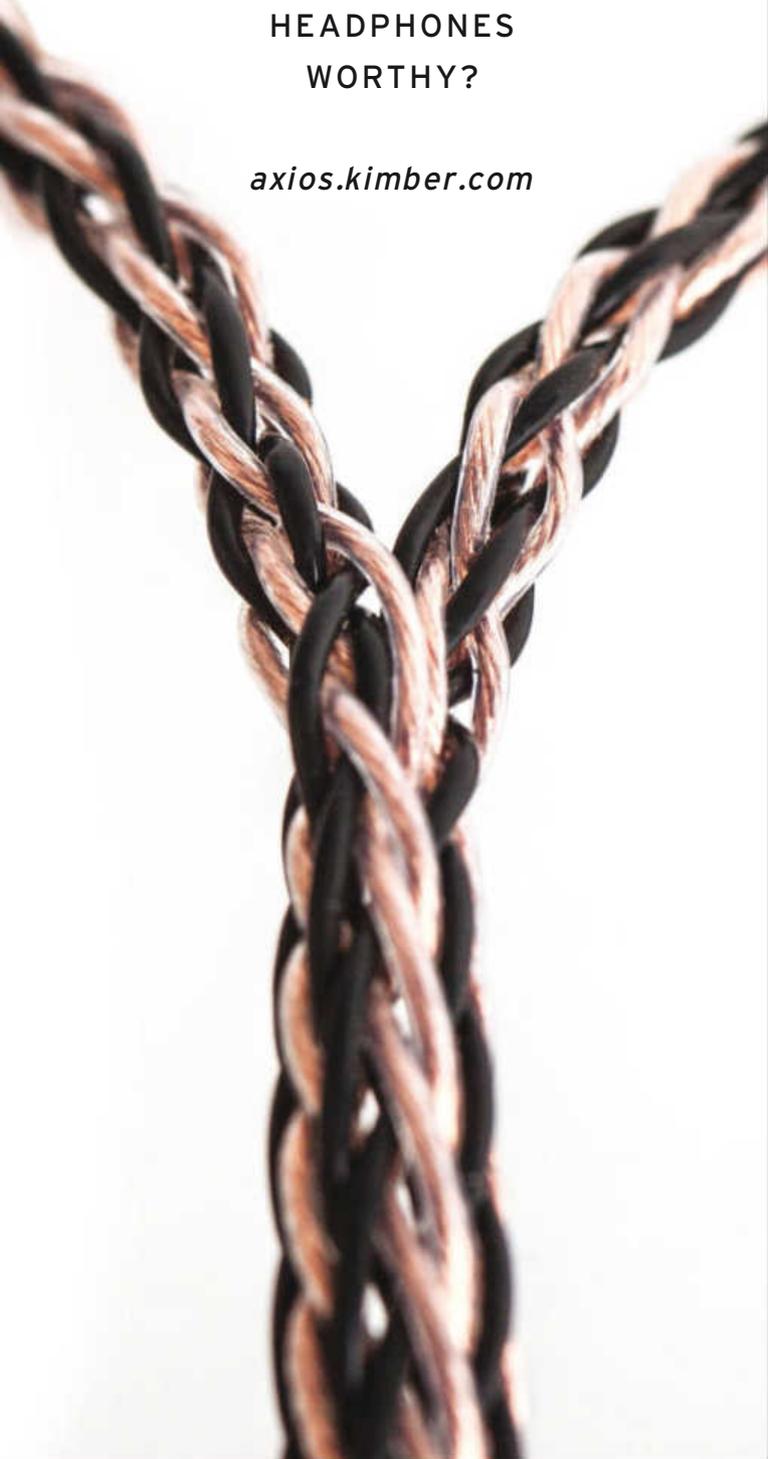
Columbia/Legacy C2K 65759 (2 mono CDs). 1966/1998. Jeff Rosen, prod.; Vic Anesini, Steven

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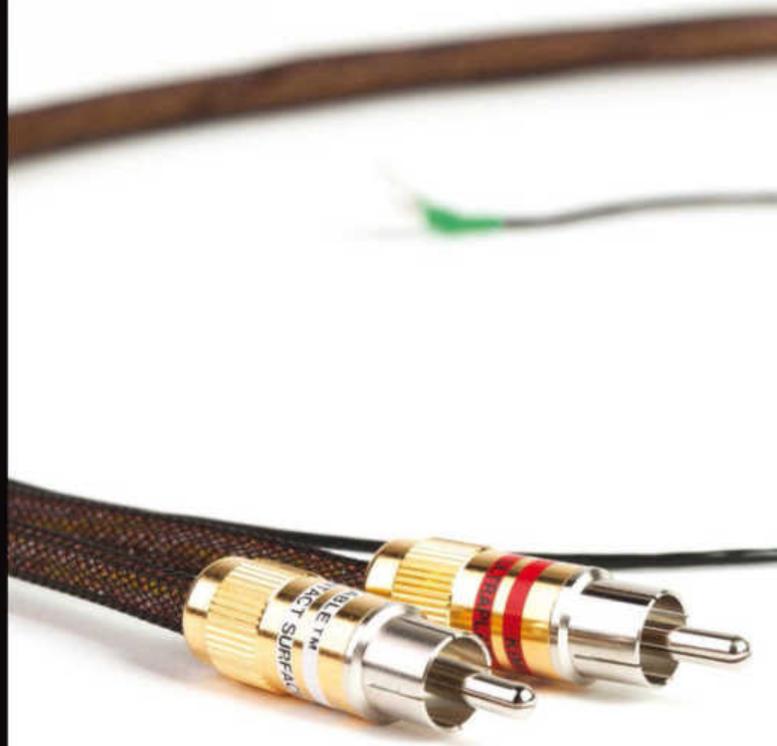


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Berkowitz, Michael Brauer, Greg Calbi, engs. AAD. TT: 95:18

As the scare quotes in the title of this two-CD set hint, the recording was actually made at the Manchester Free Trade Hall, a few days before Dylan's appearance at the Royal Albert. Disc 2 is the official version of the famous bootleg, when an electrically amplified Dylan and the Hawks came out for the concert's second half, to be greeted by the notorious "Judas" heckle. This is one of rock's seminal albums, but it would be a mistake to overlook disc 1's solo acoustic set, which I play more often than disc 2—it has the better songs, and for me, Dylan has always been, first and foremost, a songwriter. Acoustic or electric, anyone who can sandwich "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue" between "Visions of Johanna" and "Desolation Row" deserves utmost respect—and the monaural recording quality is quite delightful. (xxii-2, 9)

—Paul Messenger

BOB DYLAN:
THE BOOTLEG SERIES
VOL.10: ANOTHER
SELF-PORTRAIT
(1969–1971)

Columbia/Legacy 88883-73489-1 (3 180gm LPs, 2 CDs). 1969–1971/2013. Bob Johnston, Al Kooper, orig. prods.; Neil Wilburn, Don Puluse, Glyn Johns, orig. engs.; Jeff Rosen, Steve Berkowitz, prods.; Greg Calbi, mastering. AAA/AAD. TT: 113:27

Surprisingly, the period wherein Dylan "threw it all away" turns out to be among the best in Columbia/Legacy's *Bootleg Series*. Mostly assembled from *Self Portrait* and *New Morning* demos, unreleased alternative versions, basic tracks without overdubs, some fragments, and a few tracks more complex than the versions originally released, *Another Self Portrait* showcases the liberated, pure-music-making Dylan unshackled from the chains

of being his "generation's spokesperson," into which he'd arguably locked himself. Critics back then, such as Greil Marcus, wrote "What is this shit?"; fans thought likewise and felt betrayed. Reconsidered now, we can exult in Dylan's liberation, as Marcus does in his annotation here. Exemplary packaging and sound make the vinyl box a treasure. (xxxvi-11)

—Michael Fremer

BOB DYLAN:
MODERN TIMES

Columbia 8287687606 (CD). 2006. Jack Frost, prod.; Chris Shaw, eng. AAD. TT: 63:53

On one album, the most varied musical styles of Dylan's career—equal parts Bing Crosby, Tiny Tim, Memphis Minnie, Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, and Chuck Berry—with lyrics that at times play off obscure poems written during the Civil War. It's perhaps a mellower bard ("my cruel weapons have been put on the shelf"), a fellow now ready to admit that "I'll be with you when the deal goes down." But there's just no way to stop chuckling when you hear Dylan scratch out the phrase "the buying power of the proletariat's gone down," or know what he means when he drawls, "I've sucked the milk out of a thousand cows." Modern times, indeed.

—Leland Rucker

BOB DYLAN:
NASHVILLE SKYLINE

Columbia CK 9825 (CD). 1969/1988. Bob Johnston, prod.; Charlie Bragg, Neil Wilburn, engs. AAD. TT: 27:07

With all due obeisance to the power, majesty, and brilliance of *Bringing It All Back Home*, *Highway 61 Revisited*, and *Blonde on Blonde*, Bob Dylan never laid his heart more vulnerably open than on *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, *Blood on the Tracks*—and *Nashville Skyline*. The first two are by

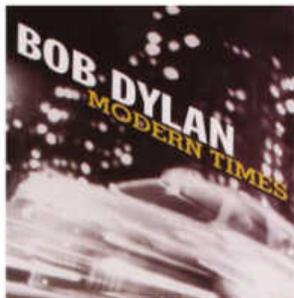


Bob Dylan, ca. 1963.

turns ecstatic and anguished (*Another Side* was also hilarious). *Nashville Skyline* is something else. As reviled as it was revered when first released, in 1969—Dylan going country was bad enough, but Dylan going Nashville?—it remains the album of his I would choose had I to choose but one. It's not an acoustic album, but it sure feels like one, and it's the height of producer Bob Johnston's work with Dylan: full, rich instruments and voices. And from the brilliant choice of first track, a boozily heartfelt duet with Johnny Cash on "Girl from the North Country," the two of them never quite agreeing with each other—or themselves—on pitch or timing or lyrics, through "I Threw It All Away" and "Lay Lady Lay" to "Tell Me That It Isn't True" and "Tonight I'll Be Staying Here With You," these songs sound as if they've been

lying around forever, just waiting for someone to sing them. Dylan croons smoothly (he'd given up smoking), his voice almost unrecognizably fuller, less nasal and rough than usual—he wears these tunes like well-broken-in leather slippers.

For me, the album's highlight is "One More Night," and how Dylan's voice soars in the final verse: He's lonely as he waits through one more long night for his love, he's not sure he'll ever get her back, but he sounds so happy that he still has even a chance. After this album, Dylan almost never exposed himself so vulnerably in song or in voice, and that's our loss and his. But for 27 minutes in 1969 he did it, sounding eager and hopeful and lucky to be doing so, and for that I will always be



grateful.—Richard Lehnert

BOB DYLAN: WORLD GONE WRONG

Columbia CK 57590 (CD). 1993.
Bob Dylan, prod.; Micajah Ryan,
eng. AAD. TT: 43:58

⏻ They're calling this the worst economic period since the Great Depression. Fifteen years ago Bob Dylan channeled the Mississippi Sheiks, popular among Great Depression audiences because, as he observes, "their songs are faultlessly made for these modern times." And so they are: Songs of hypocrisy, lust, and economic and political turmoil. Songs blaming the other guy. Songs, written decades ago, that show that, as a species, we haven't changed much. Last week Dylan played a Sheiks song on a radio show organized around the theme of "Blood." "Sitting home alone, you're not gonna write a song like this," he said afterward. We could use more of those these days. (XVII-1)

—Leland Rucker

BOB DYLAN & THE BAND: THE BASEMENT TAPES

Columbia/Legacy B001NERPHS (CD). 1975/2009. Bob Dylan, The Band, prods.; Garth Hudson, eng. AAD? TT: 76:04

⏻ How can something that existed for years only as myth prove so powerful a reality well after its time? Released nearly a decade after it was made, and now freshly available in a digitally remastered version, these sessions paved the way for the entire range



of what is now known as Americana, and are arguably the greatest performances not only of The Band but of Bob Dylan as well—great not in some concert-setting sense, but *great* in the sense of music as the carrier of archetype, the moment when dreams overtake consciousness, the blink of an eye when the fiddle is played by the spirit of the ancestors. Outside of time. Channeling field hollers, blues, gospel, and back-porch performances by unknown hillbillies who worked off the tuning produced by a bottle of moonshine and barefoot girls dancing a hoedown in the dust. Music for falling from a rope swing into a cold mountain lake on a hot summer day.

—John Swenson

EARTH, WIND & FIRE: THAT'S THE WAY OF THE WORLD

Columbia/Speakers Corner PC33280 (180gm LP). 1975/2013. Maurice White, Charles Stepney, prods.; George Massenburg, eng. AAA. TT: 34:75

⏻ Anyone alive and musically aware in the 1970s who says they didn't willingly ooze into a loved one's arms while *That's the Way of the World* was playing is clearly evading or suppressing. If you were alone, just the opening bars made you want to kiss your own knee! With Maurice and Verdine White joined by Philip Bailey, the smooth vocal trio of Earth, Wind & Fire became an unstoppable force in 1975 when this multiplatinum



monster—the soundtrack to a film that flopped—burst upon an unsuspecting world. Bailey's showpiece, "Reasons," and the album's bouncy opening track, "Shining Star," added to the power of this realization of Maurice White's all-encompassing musical vision. Reissues don't get much lushier than the glossy gatefold jacket, beautifully reproduced lyrics sheet, and quiet surfaces of the 180gm vinyl from Speakers Corner in Germany of this edition of an album that has always sounded spectacular, thanks to the learned ears of original engineer George Massenburg.

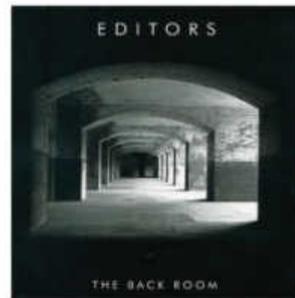
—Robert Baird

EDITORS: THE BACK ROOM

Fader Label FL-0905-2 (CD). 2005. Jim Abbiss, prod.; Loz Brazil, Cenzo Townshend, engs. TT: 43:42

⏻ If you want to know why I really love this album, it's because it was the first gift given to me by my girlfriend. The woman's got good taste. If that's not reason enough, then you should know that every track on *The Back Room* is a dark, beautiful hit. Deceptively simple songs are built around hypnotic and infectious bass lines, while reverb-drenched guitar riffs, syncopated drum rhythms, and layers of breathy, passionate vocals intersect at moments of blissful tension.

There is both power and beauty present here; the band just as naturally rouses strongly flying fists as it does softly swaying hips. "Bullets,"



for instance, with its grandiose chorus of screaming guitars and cymbal crashes, is an undeniable success, while "Camera," with softly-strummed chords and lulling, repetitive hi-hat rolls, is a lingering dream. "If we run, they'll look in the back room / Where we hide all our feelings," chants singer Tom Smith. Editors' *The Back Room* is a complete album and a wonderful gift.

—Stephen Mejias

FEAR: THE RECORD

Slash/Rhino R2 79941 (CD). 1982/2000. Gary Lubow and FEAR, prods.; Gary Lubow and Bruce Barris, engs. Mastered for CD by Eddy Schreyer and Future Disk. AAD?. TT: 31:40

⏻ The words *perfect* and *punk* probably don't belong in the same sentence, but that won't keep me from calling Fear's *The Record* the perfect punk album. Most people remember the group, if at all, for destroying the *Saturday Night Live* set and getting punk acts banned from the show for the rest of the 1980s. But it's the music that matters most.

The first thing a punk band must be able to do is play fast—and Fear could, together and in tune. Composer and lead singer Lee Ving could also sing, with a dose of fatalistic existentialism delivered with an appropriately punkish smirk. Any decent punk band also must be intolerable, and there's plenty on *The Record* to offend; "Fresh Flesh" is vile. But hey, for a punk band,

that's a good thing, right?

—Jim Austin

FILLE QUI MOUSSE:
TRIXIE STAPELTON 291:
SE TAIRE POUR UNE
FEMME TROP BELLE

Mellow MMP197 (LP). 1971/1994.
Gérard Terronès, prod.; Christophe
Henault, eng. AAA. TT: 35:16

In 1971, French journalist and musician Henri-Jean Enu and a collection of like-minded leftists entered the Futura Records studio and, in one day, laid down their one and only album. Due to Futura's financial difficulties, *Se Taire Pour Une Femme Trop Belle* (the album's original title) sat on the shelves for a few years. In 1973, five test pressings appeared.

Some credit the album's revival and subsequent reissues, official and not, to its inclusion in the infamous Nurse with Wound List, which came with that band's 1979 debut album, *Chance Meeting on a Dissecting Table of a Sewing Machine and an Umbrella*. Recently, on Mellow Records' Bandcamp webpage, I happened on *Se Taire Pour Une Femme Trop Belle*, listened to a few tracks, and hit Buy Now without batting an eye. Internet meandering at its most fortunate.

Psychedelic rock, surrealist poetry with barking dogs, jazz, found sounds, drone, noise, etc., etc.—and a song! Stick any one label on *Trixie Stapelton 291: Se Taire Pour Une Femme Trop Belle* and you'll come up worlds short. I'd call it . . . simply wonderful. For the perfect accompanying reading material, I recommend the Comte de Lautréamont's *Les Chants de Maldoror*, first published in 1868.

—Michael Lavorgna

FLAMIN' GROOVIES:
SHAKE SOME ACTION

DBK Works DBK 518 (CD).
1976/2005. Dave Edmunds, prod.:

Greg Shaw, exec. prod.; Gary
Hobish, remastering. ADD. TT:
35:56

So here's an album from some American guys who were imitating English guys who were inspired by American guys. A weird-sounding record, with heavily compressed bass and dodgy recording technique, but lovable nonetheless. The title cut communicates the Groovies' power-pop intentions, which never let up throughout. Plenty of Beatles, Kinks, Stones, Byrds influences on every track, at times almost veering into Rutles territory. The singing and playing are a bit loose, but that's why this one works when other pop imitators fail: The perfection is in the spirit of the songs, not the execution. Solid from front to back.

—Jon Iverson

FLEET FOXES:
FLEET FOXES/SUN
GIANT

Sub Pop SPCD 777, SPCD 781
(CDs). 2008. Phil Elk, prod., eng.,
mix. DDD? TT (both): 58:21

What a blast of fresh spring air: flowery harmonies rivaling the Beach Boys, earthy hippie sensibilities, and catchy tunes sprouting everywhere. These two CDs (*Sun Giant* is a five-song EP) each have key songs and really could have been released on one disc—they total less than 60 minutes and were recorded within months of each other, then released in reverse chronological order. Buy them together (but skip the import, which combines the two discs while omitting one song). The recordings aren't without problems: too much wet reverb, and the bass is tubby and blurred. But most else sounds wonderful. The songwriting is first-rate, the album covers are exquisite, and Fleet Foxes' distinctive sound will beguile.—Jon Iverson



FLEETWOOD MAC:
THEN PLAY ON:
DELUXE EDITION

Rhino 8122796443 (CD).
1969/2013. Fleetwood Mac, prods.:
Martin Birch, eng. ADD. TT: 69:43

First spotted in the mid-1970s in the girlfriend's parents' living room. I was immediately drawn to the exquisite cover. Turns out it belonged to her musically savvy older sister (who still works for a major record label). Bought a copy when I saw it contained "Oh Well," and quickly fell in love with *every* track on the album. This is the original bluesy Peter Green Fleetwood Mac, though on this album they stray from their roots as Danny Kirwan enters the fray and Green heads out the door. *Then Play On* deserves to be on any short list of rock must-haves, and part of any library that covers rock's golden years. Roughly hewn, but straight from the heart. Recently reissued in a superb-sounding Deluxe Edition that restores all the tracks on the original British LP and adds some extras.

—Jon Iverson

FLEETWOOD MAC:
TUSK

Warner Bros. K66088 (2 LPs),

Fleetwood Mac. Left to right:
Mick Fleetwood, John McVie,
Christine McVie, Lindsay
Buckingham, Stevie Nicks

original UK edition). 1979.
Fleetwood Mac, prods.: Richard
Bashut, Ken Caillat, prods., engs.:
Hernan Rojas eng. AAA. TT: 74:06

The record-breaking global success of *Rumours* doomed its much-delayed, way-over-budget follow-up. *Tusk* was criticized as overblown, self-indulgent, and lacking direction, all of which had some truth. But it has weathered well. Revisited 30 years on, it's a mostly delightful if disparate collection of high-class AOR that's worth a place alongside the Beatles' "White Album" or the Stones' *Exile on Main Street*. I can't speak for the remastered CDs, but system improvements now cut through the overproduction that made the original vinyl confusing, allowing fresh enjoyment of these fine songs and subtle, complex arrangements.—Paul Messenger

JULIA FORDHAM:
PORCELAIN

Virgin America 91325-2 (CD). 1989.
Julia Fordham, Grant Mitchell,
prods.: Hugh Padgham, Kevin
Maloney, prods., engs.: Dominic

Miller, Graham Dickson, Bill Padley, engs. A?D. TT: 47:17

One snappy response to Julie London's "Cry Me a River" might be, "Did you have any particular river in mind?" A very clever idea Julia Fordham had, to make a Cole Porter-esque list song ("For You Only For You") of the names of the rivers the newly resolute narrator rues having cried: "The Ganges, the Clyde, the Amazon, the Nile / the Avon, the Trent, the tears that I spent!" But the lyrics alone suggest only an idea of Fordham's languid, breathless, hypersexual delivery. Every time I've asked an audio-show exhibitor to play a track from *Porcelain*, people have scrambled to take notes. If you love Dido or Norah Jones, you'll love this. An undiscovered gem.

—John Marks

FOUNTAINS OF WAYNE: WELCOME INTERSTATE MANAGERS

S-Curve 5 90375 2 (CD). 2003. Chris Collingwood, prod.; Adam Schlesinger, Mike Denneen, prods., engs.; Richard Furch, Rudyard Lee Cullers, Matt Beaudoin, Rafi Sofer, engs. AAD. TT: 55:06

Every critic and serious music arguer alive overuses the "influenced by the Beatles" catch-all. When in doubt (the logic goes), always throw in "John and Paul" for gravitas. But then there are those albums where the feeling that John and Paul are hovering everywhere is inescapable. *Welcome Interstate Managers* is one of them.

Given that their name comes from a lawn-fountain store in northern New Jersey, it's no big surprise that FoW come from the same North Jersey brainiac pop lineage as The Feelies and Yo La Tengo. But here, on their third record, they've risen above their roots, written a bunch of tunes that could all be killer singles, and become

one of the great pop bands of this or any other era.

The "I Want to Hold Your Hand" teeny love anthem gloriously reappears here in the still-rising-as-I-wrote-this single, "Stacy's Mom" ("has got it going on..."). The cheeky wall-o'-guitar opener, "Mexican Wine," works the loud/soft dynamic to perfection, the perky, Latin-tinged "Hey Julie" is irresistible, and "Hung Up On You," the band's honky-tonk homage, is a howl.

Much of the genius here is in the details. There's the plunky, doleful guitar tone of "Hackensack," the familiar (ie, Beatlesque) upward vocal trill in the verses of the glistening "All Kinds of Time," and the moody, acoustic setting, piano chords, and chicka-chicka-chicka soul-guitar scratch of "Halley's Waitress"—all of which make this the kind of smart, animated, scampish pop record that many have attempted but few can master. (xxvi-10)—Robert Baird

FOUNTAINS OF WAYNE: WELCOME INTERSTATE MANAGERS

S-Curve/Virgin 5 90875 2 (CD). 2003. Mike Denneen, prod., eng.; Adam Schlesinger, Chris Collingwood, prods. AAD? TT: 55:10

When it comes to pop music for the new millennium, it doesn't get any better than this. Even if you weren't in love with "Stacy's Mom," a wistful, lustful teenage fantasy that was a surprise radio hit, there's lots to love here. I can't drive over the Tappan Zee Bridge without hearing "Little Red Light" (about how technology can't fix everything), and I smile every time I hear the opening lines of "No Better Place": "Is that supposed to be your poker face / Or was someone run over by a train." Half of Fountains of Wayne's songwriting team is Adam Schlesinger, who gave us

"That Thing You Do," and that might explain the infectiousness that oozes from every track here. But there's also super-smart poignancy—such as the lush, Paul Simon-esque "Valley Winter Song." It's très cool—full of youthful fun, pondering, quirkiness, and sweetness—and that's what, at least for me, Fountains of Wayne is all about. (xxvi-10, xxvii-2)—David Sokol

ARETHA FRANKLIN: AMAZING GRACE

Atlantic SD 2-906 (2 LPs). 1972. Aretha Franklin, Arif Mardin, Jerry Wexler, prods.; Ray Thompson, eng. AAA. TT: 94:18

It is no coincidence that most great American singers were praying and singing church people: think Blind Willie Johnson, Charlie Patton, Elvis, to name just a few. The church component was what made their music strong and deeply moving. And in my record collection, the Queen of Soul is surely also the Queen of Church. Aretha Franklin's soul-shaking live performances on *Amazing Grace* will show you heaven and shake all your devils out. It will also show you what a full-range, only lightly compressed live recording can do in your stereo system. Clean, deep bass; big, breathy space; and spiderweb detail combine with extraordinary tone to raise you up 'til you can see them shiny gates. (xv-2)

—Herb Reichert

THE FUCKING CHAMPS: IV

Drag City DC 197 (CD). 2000. Tim Green, Tim Soete, Josh Smith, prods., engs. AAD. TT: 38:52

No words here. Just amazing music. IV is the kind of album that will have you wondering how in the world such brilliance could ever be possible. Tim Green, guitarist and gearhead, has a house, and in his house there is a base-

ment, and in his basement there is Louder Studios, where bands like the Melvins and Cherry Valence, who can sing you with riffs and pummel you with bass kicks, come to play. The entire album is marked by thick blankets of virtuosic guitar playing (you'll end up trying to count how many guitars there actually are) and intense, precise drumming skewed by strange time signatures. It tosses the listener around with songs like "What's a Little Reign?" and "Vangelis Again," forcing fists to fly in the air and heads to bang in some triumphant glory, complemented by songs like "Lamplighter," whose Mellotron, acoustic guitar, and shrieking crowd create a soundtrack for a medieval morning. You might also hear talk of "indie," "prog," "math," and "metal," but not from me.

—Stephen Mejias

ROBBIE FULKS: LET'S KILL SATURDAY NIGHT

Geffen GEFD 25159 (CD). 1998. Robbie Fulks, Rick Will, prods., engs.; John Keane, King Williams, Dave Latto, David Henry, asst. engs. AAD? TT: 47:44

Back before the record business crunched its cyanide pill, the paradigm expected that everyone was dying to "get signed." What this meant in actuality was often exactly the opposite of what poor, fragile creative types needed or could survive. From the minute reluctant alt-country star, professional smartass, and genuinely talented songwriter Robbie Fulks got inked to Geffen Records, the bargaining began. Nashvilleian Fulks leaned more toward the folksy and acoustic, but the label ears thought the answer was to rock things up. Not opposed in principle to rocking, Fulks got convincingly charged and bashy on cuts like the title-cut opener



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and the follow-up, "Caroline" (with an effective opening stretch of silence in the right channel and its guitar-wash ending), before cutting loose on the swaying ballad "Pretty Little Poison" in a smashing duet with Lucinda Williams—they soar and kick ass, trying to out-sing each other.

There aren't many records that open with a stronger three-punch combination, and that strength carries through. "Take Me to the Paradise" (with a rising, sonically inventive bridge of car horns) is the kind of likable single someone in Labeland should have worked a little harder. Fulksian wiseassery returns in the buzzsaw-toned rocker "She Must Think I Like Poetry"; he effectively splits the difference between serious Celtic/bluegrass mysticism and Tap's "Stonehenge" in "Betherside"; and, if anyone in the past 20 years has written a better classic country shuffle than "Can't Win for Losing You," I'll fricassee my Buck Owens golf towel. When this quiet masterpiece failed to sell in Nirvana-like numbers, Geffen dropped Fulks. But when it came to taking a shot at the supposed big leagues, few have ever balanced commercialism and creative integrity with this much style and substance.

(XXI-11)—Robert Baird

FUNKADELIC: FUNKADELIC

Westbound/Ace CDSEWM210 (CD). 1970/2005. George Clinton, prod.; Milan Bogden, Russ Terrana, Ed Wolfrum, Bryan Dombrowski, engs. AAD. TT: 75:06

⊞ Though *Maggot Brain* (1971) and its Afro-delic freak-out title track are perhaps most often namechecked when singing the praises of early George Clinton, the self-titled 1970 debut of Funkadelic, his Detroit-based, LSD-gobbling soul-funk-rock outfit, is where true acolytes learn

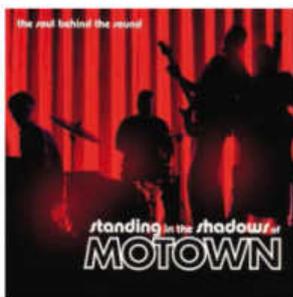


to free their minds. The rest will follow, natch. From the Horace Silver-tipping blues strut "Music for My Mother" to the swaggering rocker "I'll Bet You" to the loony "What Is Soul"—which would make Jimi Hendrix hoist his freak flag in salute—*Funkadelic* is seamless, sinewy, and, per the times, savvy. Grab this 2005 UK reissue, which boasts extensive notes and no fewer than seven proximate and choice bonus tracks.—Fred Mills

THE FUNK BROTHERS: STANDING IN THE SHADOWS OF MOTOWN (ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK)

Hip-O 440 064 691-2 (CD), Artisan 13780 1 (DVD-V, DVD-ROM). 2003. Allan Slutsky, Henry Weinger, Ted Greenberg, prods., except for: Holland, Lamont Dozier, prods., tracks 4, 10; Berry Gordy, Lawrence T. Horn, prods., track 15; Paul Elliott, David Scott, Pat Lawrence, exec. prods.; Kooster McAllister, eng.; Paul Prestopino, Marshall Fawcett, Chris Prinzevalli, asst. engs.; Kevin Reeves, mix, tracks 4, 10. ADD? TTs: 55:00 (CD), 110:00 (DVD-V).

⊞ "They played on more #1 records than the Beatles, the Beach Boys, the Rolling Stones and Elvis Presley combined...but no one knows their names" blares the blurb on the CD booklet's title page. But as a bass player, I had long been familiar with the name of one of the Funk Brothers, the Detroit session men who powered the inexorable rise of Motown in the 1960s: the late James Jamerson, the bass player's bass player. The seemingly endless



stream of Motown hits had played a major role in the soundtrack to my adolescence, and I had eagerly obtained Allan "Dr. Licks" Slutsky's book of Jamerson transcriptions when it was published in 1988.

However, I had never imagined that one day not just a movie but a great movie would be produced documenting the story behind Motown's musical magic. (The DVD comes with a second disc repeating much of the movie in hi-def, playable on a PC with Windows Media Player 9.) But *Standing in the Shadows of Motown* is not just an exercise in nostalgia: the surviving Funk Brothers provide the fuel for great live performances of Motown classics by Joan Osborne, Bootsy Collins, Chaka Khan, Ben Harper, and others, with Tom Scott channeling Junior Walker's tenor sax on "Shotgun." The original backing track to the Supremes' "You Keep Me Hanging On" is a revelation, but the CD track to which I keep returning is the remix of "Bernadette," which starts with Jamerson's damped bass playing solo for a chorus and a verse. His fatback Fender continues to occupy the song's center stage as the rest of the Funk Brothers creep into the mix, until Levi Stubbs punctuates a sudden silence with a shouted-out "Bernadette," the only vocal part on the cut. Spine-tingling stuff.

—John Atkinson

PETER GABRIEL:

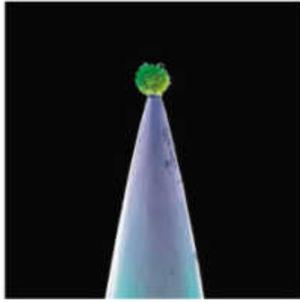
NEW BLOOD (SPECIAL EDITION)

with Ane Brun, Melanie Gabriel, Thomas Cawley, vocals; New Blood Orchestra, Louisa Fuller (leader), Ben Foster (conductor)

Real World 00038 (2 CDs). 2011. Peter Gabriel, prod., arr.; John Metcalfe, prod., arr., orchestrations, mix; Dickie Chappell, mix, eng.; Scott Barnett, Tobias Froberg, engs. DDD. TT: 2:32:06

⊞ I finished reading Walter Isaacson's biography of Steve Jobs as I prepared to write these brief reviews, and was struck by how adeptly Jobs re-created himself. He was not an artist as such, but Jobs's life illustrates how the artist who doesn't keep evolving ultimately fails. By that measure, Peter Gabriel's career is a continuing success, even if this 2011 album comprises second examinations of his earlier songs. Gabriel's *Scratch My Back*, which featured empathetic arrangements by John Metcalfe of other people's songs, was one of my 2011 "R2D4" picks; in *New Blood*, Metcalfe applies his orchestral imagination to a selection of Gabriel's own material. And again, there is no drum kit, no rhythm section. The sound of the orchestra, recorded at Air Lyndhurst in London, is rich and large, reminiscent of that on Joni Mitchell's *Both Sides Now*, from 2000, which was also recorded there. Occasionally the space on the accompaniment stands too much in contrast to the closeness of Gabriel's voice, particularly in the final track, "Solsbury Hill," which, for reasons explained in the booklet, is separated from the rest of the album by almost five minutes of ambient sound.

Two favorites of mine from *Security*, "Wallflower" and "San Jacinto," are here, along with two favorites from *So*, "In Your Eyes" and "Don't Give Up," though Norwegian singer Ane Brun's excessive vibrato in the latter takes some get-



ting used to after the glory of Kate Bush in the original, and the purity of Paula Cole in 1994's *Secret World Live* version. The second CD mainly comprises the orchestral backing tracks, which, if musically incomplete, bear witness both to the inventiveness of Metcalfe's arrangements and the completeness of Gabriel's musical imagination. —John Atkinson

PETER GABRIEL: SCRATCH MY BACK

with Jason Rebello, piano

Real World 1 (CD, 180gm LP, 4GB USB drive containing 24-bit/96kHz files). 2010. Peter Gabriel, Bob Ezrin, prods.; Tchad Blake, Dickie Chappell, mix engs.; Dave Bates, "song stimulator"; John Metcalfe, mix eng., arr. DDD? TT: 53:29

⏻ Back in 1969, my band shared the bill at a college in London's Holland Park district with a prog-rock band featuring a lead singer who also played flute. Although the band had a regular drummer, the singer accompanied himself with a kick drum that sat at his feet. The intervening decades allow me to admit that we were blown off the stage. That was my introduction to Peter Gabriel and Genesis, and PG has remained a favorite ever since. But I wasn't sure what to expect from *Scratch My Back*, a collection of cover versions of songs by artists as diverse as Radiohead, Lou Reed, David Bowie, Neil Young, Paul Simon, Arcade Fire, Regina Spektor, and Bon Iver—who, it is assumed, will one day return the favor by covering



Gabriel's songs on an album called *I'll Scratch Yours*.

The only justification for recording a cover version is that the artist can make it his or her own, as Aretha Franklin did with Otis Redding's "Respect." And Peter Gabriel, with often sparse, spacey, string-dominant orchestrations, and without drums of any kind, succeeds in doing that with every one of these 12 songs. Talking Heads' "Listening Wind," for example, with its early-1980s layered loops, was always an impressive sonic creation, but Gabriel cuts away the clutter to reveal its depths as a song, leaving you both horrified at the protagonist's actions while understanding his motives. Even when the lyrics are superficially banal, as in the Magnetic Fields' "The Book of Love," Gabriel's throaty delivery and John Metcalfe's empathetic arrangements transform them into a passionate expression of love. In an age when popular artists don't make albums as such anymore, *Scratch My Back* is a return to the paradigm; there is not a weak track on it.

—John Atkinson

THE GAP BAND: GAP BAND IV

Total Experience TE-1-3001 (LP). 1982. Lonnie Simmons, prod.; Michael Evans, Jack Rouben, Scott Simon, Lonnie Kelem, engs. AAA. TT: 42:05

⏻ The Gap Band's *IV* inspires a wider range of emotions than your average funk album. Like the album cover, "Early in the Morning"

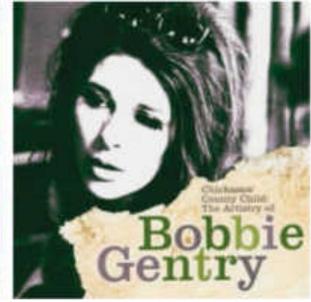


is gray yet hopeful, like waking to a dark morning with focused vision, like charging the New York City sidewalk to a storm of handclaps through the misty dawn. The day is yours to take. But "Season's No Reason to Change" takes the hopefulness out of your hands. Does the key change at the end ease your pain? Probably not, but the ecstatic "Outstanding" sure does, exuding the skin-tingling excitement of meeting your soul's equal. And that's just side 1. Ironically, the Gap Band's most ubiquitous number, "You Dropped a Bomb on Me," is buried between tracks on side 2. —Ariel Bitran

JERRY GARCIA: GARCIA

Rhino R2 78063-A (CD). 1972/2004. Bob Matthews, Betty Cantor, prods., engs.; Ram Rod, Bill Kreutzmann, prods.; James Austin, David Gans, Blair Jackson, reissue prods. ADD? TT: 77:06

⏻ Garcia is almost literally a solo album: Grateful Dead guitarist-vocalist Jerry Garcia sang and played all of the instruments save for the drums (supplied by the Dead's Bill Kreutzmann) and wrote all of the songs (some with Dead lyricist Robert Hunter). But it might as well be a Grateful Dead album, given the impact songs such as "Sugaree" and "To Lay Me Down" would have on the band's live shows for the rest of their long, strange trip. Garcia's solo versions, however, are superior to just about anything the band ever came up with.



Meanwhile, the avant-garde instrumental tracks suggest that in making *Garcia*, Captain Trips may have been peaking lysergically as well as creatively. —Daniel Durchholz

BOBBIE GENTRY: CHICKASAW COUNTY CHILD: THE ARTISTRY OF BOBBIE GENTRY

Shout! DK32278 (CD). 1968–74/2004. Gary Stewart, prod.; Dave McEwen, remastering. AAD? TT: 70:32

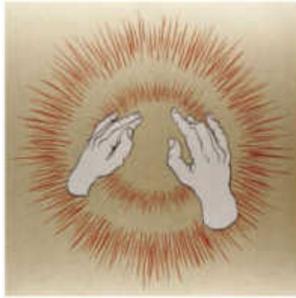
⏻ "Ode to Billie Joe" may be Bobbie Gentry's chief claim to fame, but *Chickasaw County Child* amply illustrates that she was far from a one-hit wonder—indeed, there's not a single song of the 23 collected here that I'd forego. Some days I prefer swamp-country ravers like "Mississippi Delta" and "Okolona River Bottom Band," other times I go for the unrestrained sentimentalism of "I Saw an Angel Die" or "Marigolds and Tangerines." The revelation of this collection is that Gentry and her collaborators created sonic worlds that sound like the Beatles but speak like Flannery O'Connor.

—Wes Phillips

LOWELL GEORGE: THANKS I'LL EAT IT HERE

Warner Bros. 3194-2 (CD). 1979/1993. Lowell George, prod.; George Massenberg, Donn Landee, Ray Thompson, engs. AAD. TT: 33:47

⏻ A short but utterly delightful epitaph to a great rock 'n' roller, who sadly died soon after this



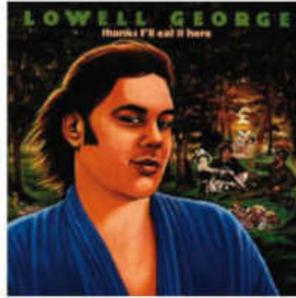
recording was completed in 1979. The band George had founded, Little Feat, was breaking up, because George wanted to keep on rocking while the other members were moving toward jazz, but this one and only solo outing finds him in a reflective, laid-back mood. With a huge roster of helpers that includes many of the great and the good of the West Coast music scene, and an eclectic mixture of songs, half of them by other writers, *Thanks I'll Eat It Here* is a powerful reminder that George sang as well as he wrote. I just hope the current CD transfer sounds as good as my vinyl original.

—Paul Messenger

**GODSPEED YOU
BLACK EMPEROR:
LIFT YOUR SKINNY
FISTS LIKE ANTENNAS
TO HEAVEN!**

Kranky Krank 043 (2 CDs),
Constellation CST 012 (2 LPs).
GYBE, prods. & engs. 2000. TT:
91:23

⏻ Last year I discovered a new (to me) musical genre: post-rock. The music takes part of its language from the dictionary of rock (distorted guitars, loud drums, etc.), but transcends the genre's clichés—there's a cello, for example. Each track is about 20 minutes long, builds slowly, gets louder, then ebbs away again. It's claustrophobic, paranoid, menacing, and depressed, but buried under all the angst are solace and beauty: Mahler symphonies—or Velvet Underground—for



the 21st century, if I may invoke two very farfetched comparisons. On this one, too, the sound fits the music: compressed, stark, dense.

—Markus Sauer

**GRATEFUL DEAD:
ANTHEM OF THE SUN**

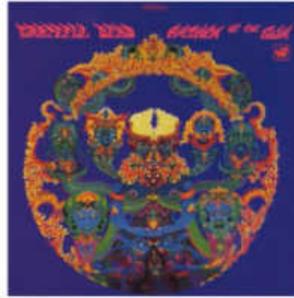
Warner Bros. WS 1749 (LP). 1968.
Grateful Dead, David Hassinger,
prods.; Dan Healy, Bob Matthews,
engs. AAA. TT: 38:57 (2003 CD
reissue with bonus tracks, TT:
75:46)

⏻ The Dead's second album is a mess, stitched together from a complex mixture of live and studio recordings. But it's a glorious mess, and one that becomes more interesting and involving with improvements in the hi-fi system. *Anthem* isn't pretty-pretty, *American Beauty* Grateful Dead. Rather, it's the apotheosis of experimental psychedelic rock, and an icon of its era. It's also, musically, a whole lot of fun. Phil Lesh's magnificent bass playing in "That's It for the Other One" is alone worth the price of the album.—Paul Messenger

**GRIMES:
VISIONS**

Arbutus/4AD CAD3208 (CD).
2012. Claire Boucher, prod., eng.;
Sebastian Cowan, eng. DDD? TT:
47:58

⏻ Some call it "witch house," the microgenre Grimes (aka Claire Boucher, of Vancouver) supposedly inhabits alongside other contemporary female electronic mavens such as Lykke Li or Zola Jesus. Ultimately, though, this complex yet



synapse-stroking femme-pop is as accessible—and potentially memorable, given the composer's operatic pipes—as Minnie Ripperton, Kate Bush, or Madonna. A perky '60s girl-group vibe collides with lush '80s synth lines and the abstract glitchiness of early-'90s techno artists. I've attended Grimes performances—an intriguing mixture of bravado, naïveté, and face-painted performance art—and can testify that whether you want to adopt, worship, or sleep with her, you won't come away unchanged by her visions. (XXXV-5)—Fred Mills

**EMMYLOU HARRIS:
WRECKING BALL**

Elektra/Asylum 61854-2 (CD).
1995. Daniel Lanois, prod.; Trina
Shoemaker, Sandy Jenkins, Mark
Howard, engs. AAD? TT: 53:05

⏻ It's been more than 35 years since, as Gram Parsons' protégée, Emmylou Harris first wowed anyone with a pulse for smart country music. Her mellifluous soprano was a knockout, and as she evolved into a headliner, it got only more breathtaking. And her musical taste, full of respect for the traditional, naturally veered toward what came to be known as alternative country. Now, 15 years after its release, *Wrecking Ball* still stands as the crowning achievement in a career full of them. Harris reinvents songs by such country-leaning heroes as Steve Earle, Lucinda Williams, Gillian Welch, former Hot Band member Rodney

Crowell, and Neil Young (who wrote the title song). Her shimmering vocals and delicate phrasings play absolutely perfectly against Daniel Lanois's stark, dark, rhythm-rich production. The bass virtually jumps out of the speakers. With *Wrecking Ball*, heavy with minor-key excursions, artist and producer turned country music upside down . . . and pointed to just how big and opulent the genre can be. (XVIII-12, XXI-2)—David Sokol

**PJ HARVEY:
LET ENGLAND SHAKE**

Vagrant VR651 (CD). 2011. PJ
Harvey, Flood, Mick Harvey, John
Parish, prods.; Rob Kirwin, John
Catlin, engs. DDD. TT: 40:08

⏻ *Let England Shake* sounds nothing like the nine PJ Harvey albums that preceded it—or like anything else in pop. These 12 recent songs, most of which pertain to her native England's ongoing fascination with war, find Polly Jean Harvey's voice, autoharp, and guitar supported with sparse bits of xylophone, sax, Mellotron, and percussion, building impressionistic sound structures that compel the listener in a manner almost beyond description. The almost disturbingly eerie chord sequence and childlike vocal of the title song will last with you long after the first hearing—and the manner in which Harvey sings the line "England's dancing days are done" is itself worth many times the price of the album.—Art Dudley

**RICHIE HAVENS:
NOBODY LEFT TO
CROWN**

Verve Forecast B0011631-02
(CD). 2008. Richie Havens, Brian
Bacchus, prods.; Jay Newland,
prod., eng.; Tom Gloady, Russell
Hoppe, engs. DDD. TT: 51:22

⏻ Richie Havens isn't the only Woodstock veteran to remain interesting, but he may be the only

one who can still make a record this vital. *Nobody Left to Crown* combines seven new Havens originals with a thoughtful selection of covers—his performance of Peter Yarrow's "The Great Mandala" is stunning—and a sound that hews close to that of his earliest records without seeming the least bit stale or unadventurous. Thanks are due in part to cellist Stephanie Winters and the Gerry Conway–esque drumming of Shawn Pelton, but the real stars are Havens' voice—and guitar: His is the virtuosity of earnestness, and his chording remains as unmistakable as ever. This would be essential listening from any artist, at any time of our lives; coming as it does from one of the wisest voices on the scene, it's an event. —**Art Dudley**

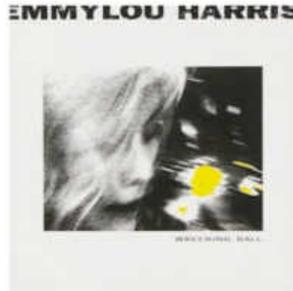
HEADS HANDS & FEET:

HEADS HANDS & FEET

Tony Colton, vocals; Albert Lee, guitar, dobro, vibes, Moog synthesizer, vocals; Ray Smith, guitar, vocals; Chas Hodges, bass, banjo, fiddle, vocals; Mike O'Neill, piano, organ, vocals; Pete Gavin, drums, percussion, vibes, vocals. With: Elton Dean, alto saxophone; Jerry Donahue, Ray Osborne, backing vocals.

Capitol SVBB-680 (2 LPs). 1971. Tony Colton, prod.; Eddie Offord, Alan Hunter, engs. AAA. TT: 75:35

🔊 To the best of my knowledge, Heads Hands & Feet's eponymous 1971 debut on two LPs has never been issued on CD Stateside. (It was released on CD in the UK in 1996 by See for Miles Records, now out of print.) It's a shame—this jaunt through Americana by a crew of Brit rockers cofounded by guitarist Albert Lee and singer-songwriter Tony Colton is a rare jewel. While the album starts out with a rocking vibe typical of the era, by the time the band gets into the swamp-funky "Green Liquor" and the rollicking hoedown "Country

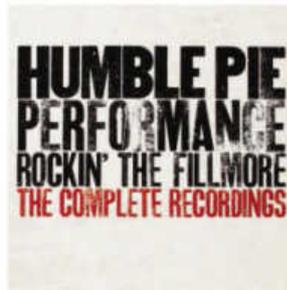


Boy" (which became a hit in 1984 for Ricky Skaggs), it's largely a hip country affair, with the dobro-flavored, fiddle-spiced "Tryin' to Put You On," the Appalachian-channeled "Devil's Elbow," and the banjo-plucked, shuffling "Everybody's Hustlin'," which distinctively enters the Johnny Cash zone (it's a shame he never covered the tune). Lee delivers tasty licks throughout, and Soft Machine alto saxophonist Elton Dean guests on two tracks. The slower tunes are average, except for two beauts: "Look at the World It's Changing" and "Song for Suzie." —**Dan Ouellette**

HETH AND JED: BETWEEN THE IN AND THE OUT

Space Rock SR-65092 (CD). 2005. Jed Weinstein, prod., eng.; Heth Weinstein, Jamie Cardiloro, prods. DDD? TT: 37:01

🔊 Weinstein brothers Heth and Jed (www.hethandjed.com) write catchy pop love songs with infectious melodies and subtly sophisticated harmonic structures that allude to an intellectual depth that grabs the mind and soul equally. The pair's greatest strength is their ability to formulate



and elaborate electronically manipulated electroacoustic arrangements that echo early Brian Eno as much as the folk singer-songwriter genre. In the live shows I've attended, these arrangements are cannily replicated by Heth's solo acoustic guitar and more than a dozen effects pedals, with a little support from bassist brother Jed. —**Robert J. Reina**

JOHN HIATT: BRING THE FAMILY

A&M/Music on Vinyl MOVLP786 (180gm LP). 1987/2013. John Chelew, prod.; Larry Hirsch, eng.; Joe Schiff, asst. eng. AAA. TT: 44:06

🔊 From Music on Vinyl in The Netherland—whose releases can be tricky to find in the US because they often hold only the European reissue licenses from major labels—comes yet another sumptuous LP reissue, this time of John Hiatt's great comeback album, *Bring the Family*. Here Hiatt finally had success as a performer of his own songs. It's also where he led a hired session band of Nick Lowe, Jim Keltner, and Ry Cooder! Side 1 is front-loaded with "Memphis in the Meantime," "Thing Called Love," and

"Have a Little Faith in Me," but side 2 contains one of Hiatt's sharpest social commentaries: "Your Dad Did." This has always been a fine-sounding recording, but this pressing's quiet and contrast in and around Hiatt's voice and Cooder's guitar in "Alone in the Dark" are positively breathtaking. New reissue pressings continue to reach ever-higher levels of quality and detail. (XI-5, XVII-11, XVIII-3)—**Robert Baird**

HOODOO GURUS: STONEAGE ROMEOS

HG/Virtual HG-1 (CD). 1984/2004. Alan Thorne, prod., eng.; Don Bartley, remastering. AAD. TT: 46:28

🔊 Still hailed as one the great debut platters from the Australian alt-rock explosion of the 1970s–80s, *Stoneage Romeos* (1984) was also a commercial hit, both in its native Oz and Stateside. It's not hard to hear why: the jangly "I Want You Back" sizzles with classic relationship angst; the boisterous "(Let's All) Turn On" is frat/garage rock run joyously amok; and the glam/tribal "Leilani" updates Gary Glitter's "Rock and Roll (Part 2)" arena-chant template for the college radio crowd. Recently remastered and expanded with three bonus tracks, *Romeos*, in all its trash-culture, reverb- and echo-soaked glory, is still aglow with a speaker-caressing analog warmth no amount of digital rejiggering can shroud. —**Fred Mills**

HUMBLE PIE: PERFORMANCE: ROCKIN' THE FILLMORE— THE COMPLETE RECORDINGS

Omnivore OVCD-23 (4 CDs). 1971/2013. Humble Pie, prods.; Eddie Kramer, Bob Ludwig, engs.; Peter Frampton, Jerry Shirley, reissue prods.; Ashley Shepherd, mix. AAD. TT: 4:03:40

🔊 A live album on a par with the Who's *Live*

at Leeds, the Stones' *Get Yer Ya-Ya's Out!*, and the Allman Brothers' *At Fillmore East*, Humble Pie's two-LP set from 1971 has held up, and not just because it's a key period artifact of the hard-rockin' early '70s. As evidenced on this four-hour expanded edition, not only is the titular performance (featuring the twin-guitar assault of Steve Marriott and a pre-*Comes Alive!* Peter Frampton) a brawny, ballsy one, with inspired readings of songs by Dr. John, Ray Charles, and Ashford & Simpson; thanks to studio whiz Eddie Kramer, it's also an electrifying sonic artifact that places the listener squarely in the front row. You practically feel the sweat being flung from the musicians' bobbing, shaking locks. (XXXVII-1)—**Fred Mills**

IAN HUNTER: THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH, AND NUTHIN' BUT THE TRUTH

Secret SMACD906 (2 CDs). 2006. Prod., eng., not listed. DDD. TT: 111:30

These two discs capture a 2005 performance at London's Astoria Theater, and includes songs spanning Hunter's Mott the Hoople and solo careers. I might have included "One of the Boys" or "Jerkin' Crocus," but overall, it's a great set. The early material is still fresh and vital, and the new stuff holds its own amid a career's worth of gems. Mick Ralphs' guitar work is great, Hunter's voice has roughened nicely, and the backup band manages to be chaotic and note-perfect at the same time. It's tough to pick a favorite song, but "Once Bitten Twice Shy" alone would justify the purchase. This is as good as rock'n'roll gets.

—**Brian Damkroger**

JAMES HUNTER: PEOPLE GONNA TALK



Rounder 11661-2187-2 (CD). 2006. Liam Watson, prod., eng.; Noel Summerville, mastering. AAD. TT: 41:01

We stumbled on Hunter and his band at this summer's California mid-state fair and, though I'd read the stories in *Mojo*, I had no idea what we were in for. The show knocked us out, and afterward we headed over to buy a CD. Hunter himself was signing discs, every bit the smooth British gentleman as the locals smiled and stared. Little did we know that this would turn out to be our favorite new recording of 2006. *People Gonna Talk* was recorded live to mono at infamous analog-only Toe Rag Studios. Hunter comes off as a cross between Sam Cooke and Ray Charles—like turning on the radio and all of sudden it's 1962. Great sound, tunes, and smokin' band, all in one. A no-brainer.—**Jon Iverson**

MICHAEL HURLEY: HAVE MOICY

Rounder 3010 (CD). 1976/1992. John Nagy, prod., eng.; Tom Foley, asst. eng. AAD? TT: 40:07

Devendra Banhart and Cat Power have recently made folksinger Michael Hurley a household name,

but anyone who's heard his 1975 collaboration with Peter Stampfel and the Holy Modal Rounders and Jeffrey Fredericks and the Clamtones knows that Hurley is one of the greatest songwriters of any era. "Sweet Lucy," Hurley's surreal invocation of the erotic and destructive power of Bacchus, and the communal-meal blues of "Slurf Song," present him at his proto-Americana best, while Fredericks conjures his own take on alternate reality with "What Made My Hamburger Disappear?" Stampfel's combination of speed-freak blues and old-timey back-porch mountain music is showcased on the hilarious "Midnight in Paris," with its insane banjo frailing, and one of the best songs his longtime writing partner, Antonia, ever wrote: "Griselda."—**John Swenson**

IKE & TINA: FEEL GOOD

United Artists/Pure Pleasure PPAAN UAS5598 (180gm LP). 1972/2013. Ike Turner, prod., eng.; Gerhard Augustin, prod.; Barry Keene, Jim Saunders, engs. AAA. TT: 25:76

Feel Good is perhaps Ike & Tina's nastiest, funkiest masterpiece—the title says it all. And if that

doesn't convince you, there's Tina's utter vocal abandon in "Kay Got Laid (Joe Got Paid)," and Ike's loose, spot-on guitar solo in "Feel Good." This one's a greasy groove from start to finish. No track runs longer than 3:30, and, significantly, Tina wrote every number except a brassy cover of the Beatles' "She Came in Through the Bathroom Window." The contrast between the front-cover shot of an exuberant Tina high-steppin' in a too-short dress and the scary back-cover shot of Ike ominously hidden in shadow gives more than a hint of what was afoot in their tumultuous personal life. The sound of this session has always been muddy and muted, but some notable sonic recoveries are preserved on this pressing from the UK's Pure Pleasure: less low-end rumble, and a crisper high end, with such previously unheard details as a shaker in "You Better Think of Something."—**Robert Baird**

JACOBITES: ROBESPIERRE'S VELVET BASEMENT

Secretly Canadian SC55 (2 CDs). 1985/2002. Bob Lamb, prod., eng.; Nikki Sudden, Dave Kusworth, prods., remastering; John Rivers, remastering. AAD. TT: 95:00

Rock writers generally don't get groupies, but sometimes our proximity to rock stars makes the notion theoretically . . . achievable. When Nikki Sudden's post-Swell Maps outfit, the Jacobites, issued their second LP in 1985, yours truly was so smitten by the British group's edgy blend of the Rolling Stones, the Velvets, and vintage blues that I wrote a hyperbolic 1000-word review. Five years later, Sudden comes to town on a rare US tour and, remembering my name, greets me like an old friend. In the dressing room after the show, I'm guzzling his Jack Daniel's and watching him

paw a local groupie known as the Dragon Lady. Noting my apparent envy, Sudden leans over to whisper in the ear of another lissome lass who'd come backstage. She promptly gets up, walks over, slides onto my lap, and begins, ever so delicately, to nibble on my earlobe . . .

(XXIV-2)—Fred Mills

JO JO GUNNE: BITE DOWN HARD

Rhino 7722 (CD). 1973/2000. Bill Szymczyk, prod., eng.; Allen Blazer, asst. eng. AAD. TT: 38:54

Ⓜ Not sure if this one's worth dying for, but then, part of being a music lover is the guilty pleasures, and this nugget from the early 1970s is certainly that. Led by former Spirit members Jay Ferguson and Mark Andes, SoCal pop-rock band Jo Jo Gunne broke out in 1972 with the single "Run, Run, Run," from their self-titled debut. On *Bite Down Hard*, they blow away the sophomore slump with hooky, sweet-chorused, hard-rock-edged tunes like the opener, "Ready Freddy"; the hit that shoulda been, "60 Minutes to Go"; and such rave-ups as "Rock Around the Symbol" and "Take Me Down Easy." The arrangements are filled with weird breaks, keyboard effects that were then the state of the art, and lots of Matthew Andes' inventive guitar work. Does it sound dated? To a point, sure, but in a genre forever overloaded with forgettable fluff, these guys, as evidenced by this record, had a moment or two when the juices flowed. Now available on CD from Collector's Choice.—Robert Baird

KILLING JOKE: FOR BEGINNERS

Caroline CAR 71711 (CD). 1980-88/2004. Various prods., engs. AAD. TT: 70:51

Ⓜ Vilified from the beginning by the press and the mainstream alike, Killing Joke was so far ahead of



their time that they created music virtually unrecognizable by contemporary audiences. But a loving look back at their work—especially the selection on this primer, which covers their early prime of 1980-1988—reveals a magical, innovative band at the unexpected intersection of late-'70s heavy metal and early-'80s New Wave. They were disconnected but passionate, robotic but meaningful, politically savvy but violent and visceral—in the end, Killing Joke utterly defied categorization, but their music flourished in the work of hundreds of more commercially successful bands that followed.—Bob Gulla

KING CRIMSON: IN THE COURT OF THE CRIMSON KING

Discipline Global DGM0501 (CD). 1969/2004. King Crimson, prods.: Robin Thompson, Tony Page, engs. AAD. TT: 43:48

Ⓜ For 37 years I failed to approach this germinal prog-rock opus with the one thing it most deserves: a mind open to the possibility that King Crimson had a sense of humor. My loss—but a pleasant "new" discovery as I move through

a time that often seems bereft of same. The music is beautifully colored and played with muscle, and the lyrics hark back to a more innocent (and thus acceptable) kind of pretentiousness. This album stands up and shouts, *Sure, I used to wear a brooch and a velvet frock coat: What's it to ya?* Dated sound (hot Mellotron, compressed everything else), but charmingly so, and perfectly competent. A brilliant record.—Art Dudley

THE KINKS: LOLA VERSUS POWERMAN AND THE MONEYGOROUND, PART ONE

Reprise 6423 (LP). 1970. Ray Davies, prod.; no engs. listed. AAA. TT: 40:15

Ⓜ The Kinks, arguably the best rock band ever, were led by Ray Davies, one of the greatest British literary minds of the latter half of the 20th century. His younger brother, Dave, is legendary in his own right for having invented the proto-heavy-metal riff that propelled the band's sound. Dave Davies is also an outstanding writer, and the best Kinks albums have a balance of songs by both brothers.

Lola . . . takes its title from Ray's gender-bending hit, a scandal-sheet theme that turns on a witty trope worthy of Oscar Wilde. The album is a song cycle about the wretchedness of the record industry, his observations delivered in a set of songs that includes "Powerman," "Denmark Street," "The Moneygoround," and one of my favorite Kinks rockers, "Top of the Pops." The album also includes Ray's transcendent "Apeman" and a beautiful love song by Dave, "Strangers."—John Swenson

THE KINKS: MUSWELL HILLBILLIES

Velvet 79801SA (SACD/CD). 2004. Ray Davies, prod.; Mike Bobak, Roger Quedsted, engs. AAD. TT: 44:39

Ⓜ I don't drink that much any more, but when I do, I like to dig out *Muswell Hillbillies*. I still get the occasional touch of acute schizophrenia disease and find myself screaming something about 20th-century men. In the '70s, we used to catch the Kinks whenever they came to town. Those days, the set was loosely based around *Muswell* tunes, and reached a climax with Ray Davies' admonition about "demon alcohol." We were sitting right up front one night in 1978 when the guy next to me, already a victim of the demon, splashed his glass of beer right up into Ray's face. Let's just say that Ray didn't react with the same enthusiasm as Country Dick Montana would in years to come. We never saw the Kinks do the "Alcohol" skit again. (XXXI-2)—Leland Rucker

THE KINKS: MUSWELL HILLBILLIES

Konk/Velvet 63467-79719-2 (CD). 1971/1998. Raymond Douglas Davies, prod.; Mike Bobak, eng.; Richard Edwards, eng. (bonus tracks). AAD? TT: 51:45

Ⓜ Somewhere in the early 1970s, when

even their hit "Lola" couldn't curry them popular favor for long. Ray Davies and company dropped one of their most charming, witty LPs ever. Thirty-six years later, the sentiments of such songs as "20th Century Man"—in which the singer bemoans the "aggravation" and "insanity" of modern times—ring loud and clear. But musically, Davies is no Luddite. A keen observer of the world around him, he longs for less excessive times, and when, in "Complicated Life," he sings "You gotta slow down your life or you're gonna be dead," the sentiment is timeless. And the boozy delivery of "Alcohol" makes me smile every time, despite the seriousness of the message that too much work will drive you to drink. Speaking of drinking, the bouncy "Have a Cuppa Tea," about his beloved grandma, still pokes a bit of fun at this timeworn British custom and winds up with the punchline, "For Christ's sake, have a cuppa tea." Real people are all over *Muswell Hillbillies*, and they're as real and relevant today as when Davies introduced them to us, back when a guy named Nixon inhabited the White House.—**David Sokol**

THE KLF: CHILL OUT

TVT 7155 (CD). 1990. Jimmy Cauty, Bill Drummond, prods. DAD? TT: 44:21

⏻ The KLF's classic ambient album, *Chill Out*, implies an all-night drive through the Deep South. Propelled by coffee, nicotine, and a rusted Ford Galaxie, sounds emerge and recede as the radio dial searches for signals and the traveler's mind drifts and dreams. Half-mad evangelists, traffic-accident reports, Tuvan throat singing, and endless samples ranging from Pink Floyd to Elvis are set against a backdrop of sustained synths and soulful



steel guitar. Without ever playing a proper song, the album motors down lonely, late-night highways as a unified whole. *Chill Out's* journey implies much about America and the open road. To me, it is a masterpiece of sound.—**Erick Lichte**

KRIS KRISTOFFERSON: JESUS WAS A CAPRICORN

Monument KZ 31909 (LP). 1972. Dennis Linde, Fred Foster, prods.: Tommy Strong, Mort Thomasson, Gene Eichelberger, engs. AAA. TT: 31:21

⏻ When I bought this record sometime in the late '70s, on the recommendation of a friend, I thought it sucked. For the life of me, I couldn't understand the fuss about Kris Kristofferson as a singer or a songwriter. A lot of time has gone by since then, and I've both developed a grudging respect for Kristofferson as a songwriter and grown to like this album a lot. It's a little uneven in places, but mostly it's compelling, catchy, and sounds excellent, showcasing Kristofferson, then wife Rita Coolidge, and a *Who's Who* of backing musicians.—**Brian Damkroger**

LADY GAGA: BORN THIS WAY

Streamline B0015373 (CD). 2011. Lady Gaga, Vincent Herbert, prods.: Olle Romo, Dave Russell, Rafa Sardina, engs. DDD. TT: 61:12



GARY WILSON: ELECTRIC ENDICOTT

Western Vinyl WEST079 (CD). 2010. Gary Wilson, prod., eng. DDD. TT: 32:08

⏻ These releases by Lady Gaga and Gary Wilson have so much in common. Both are perfectionist performance artists whose onstage personae leave some enchanted and others aghast. Both are musical talents who blend disparate musical genres, acoustic and electronic textures, and multiple instruments to create an intoxicating pair of releases that are intellectually stimulating yet unusually accessible. Wilson continues in his vein of crooning about all of those women in his past who either left him behind or never let him get close. As usual, he supplies all of the instruments and voice work, but separates many of the songs with short instrumental interludes that are either largely electronic or acoustic in a traditional jazz setting. I hear as much Bacharach as I hear Björk and John Cage in "Electric," and I'm pleased to hear some rare acoustic piano work by Wilson as well. Although Gaga's work centers around her vocals, keyboards, and synth programming, nearly two dozen guest musicians appear on *Born This Way*. I hear more Kraftwerk and less Madonna on this album, but Gaga's greatest deviation from her

In the studio and onstage, John Bonham, Jimmy Page, John Paul Jones and Robert Plant of Led Zeppelin dominated rock in the 1970s.

typical MO is the current hit "You and I," a hard-rock power ballad that wouldn't be out of place on a Dana Fuchs Band recording.

—**Robert J. Reina**

LED ZEPPELIN: IV

Atlantic SC-7208 (LP). 1971. Jimmy Page, prod.; Andy Johns, eng. AAA. TT: 42:25

⏻ Everyone's heard the tale, possibly apocryphal, of Robert Plant driving around the Northwest one afternoon when he hears a local radio station, in the middle of a fund drive, cue up "Stairway to Heaven." As the story goes, Plant phones in and pledges 50 bucks if the DJ promises to never play it again. Well, recently, my 10-year-old discovered Led Zep in a big way, to the point where he's making me play "Stairway" in the car every morning on the way to school. We're at 23 spins and counting. But you know what? The song is just as thrilling now as when I first heard it in the winter of '71, and played it over and over. Other tracks on the LP—the Sandy Denny-powered "Battle of Evermore," the thuggish blooze of "When the Levee Breaks," the tight-pants swagger of "Rock and



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Roll"—still thrill, too. I'm a teenager all over again. (XXV-11)—**Fred Mills**

CHRIS LEE: COOL ROCK

Misra MSR018 (CD). 2003. Matt Verta-Ray, Nicholas Marantz, Mark Nevers, Jim Demain, engs. AAD? TT: 31:23

 It's particularly nice when one of your friends records his own beautiful albums. Chris Lee's *Cool Rock* is the final installment in a series he calls *Love Songs in C Major*. This third album continues where the second one left off, but goes further, featuring longtime collaborators Steve Shelley and Jeremy Wilms on drums and bass, respectively, while introducing jazzy vibraphones courtesy of Yusuke Yamamoto and horns from the Antibalas Afrobeat Orchestra. When I finally felt ready to listen to something besides Tom Waits' *Rain Dogs*, it was *Cool Rock*. I hadn't put the CD in the player for months, but all the words to these eight simple, delicate, and undeniably honest pop songs came right back to me. I found myself singing along, and that, of course, was just what I needed. Only problem was, I couldn't reach the high notes. I reckon there's no skinny white guy with as much sass and soul as Chris.—**Stephen Mejias**

THE LEMONHEADS: COME ON FEEL THE LEMONHEADS

Atlantic 82537-2 (CD). 1993. Evan Dando, prod.; The Robb Bros., prods., engs. AAD? TT: 54:36

 After he was a punk and before he was a punchline, Evan Dando (and his Aussie cowriter Tom Morgan) sure could craft a song: tunefully ascendant electric-guitar bubblegum both snappy and sweet, all with impeccable economy of riffs, rhythm, imagery, and even actual time—most of

the best tracks don't last long enough to cook an egg. Punchier and odder than the more fêted *It's a Shame About Ray*, *Come On* turned Juliana Hatfield into a cross between Emmylou Harris and Ronnie Spector, put Rick James to poignantly ironic use years before David Chappelle, and just about makes the case for Dando as the grunge era's Harry Nilsson—or at least Pete Ham.—**Jason Cohen**

LITTLE FEAT: WAITING FOR COLUMBUS

Warner Bros. 3140-2 (CD). 1978. Lowell George, prod.; George Massenburg, Warren Dewey, Andy Bloch, engs. ADD. TT: 72:56

 In the 1970s, Little Feat was the band to beat. Leader Lowell George's masterful lyrics and wry wit, coupled with his searing slide-guitar work and the whole band's assimilation of the New Orleans sound, made this group one of the greatest of the era.

As much as I loved every studio album, this was a live band that cooked so hard and strong that you *lived* to see them in concert. Rarely does a live album stand up to the experience of being there, but *Waiting for Columbus* smokes the competition. Not only is it practically a Little Feat greatest-hits package, but every track features fiercely funky solos, especially the soaring sax and synth work in "Mercenary Territory" and the struttin' jive and gleaming slide of "Fat Man in the Bathtub." (XXV-12, XXVI-2)

—**Daniel Buckley**

LITTLE RICHARD: THE GEORGIA PEACH

Specialty SPCD-7012-2 (CD). 1991. Bumps Blackwell, Art Rupe, orig. prods.; Kirk Felton, remastering. AAD. TT: 58:35

 Little Richard made the national charts before Elvis Presley did, and

his gritty screech of a voice virtually defined rock'n'roll. This collection contains all his Specialty hits through the mid-1958, plus early tracks, such as "Baby" and "I'm Just a Lonely Guy," that show his roots in jump blues and gospel. Although Richard was from Macon, Georgia, Specialty recorded him mostly in New Orleans with musicians associated with Fats Domino, giving the music a slamming second-line beat. Some songs—"Rip It Up" or "Jenny Jenny," for example—seem less propulsive than they did in their day, but landmarks like "Tutti Frutti," "Slippin' and Slidin'," "Long Tall Sally," and "Good Golly Miss Molly" can still raise the roof.

—**Larry Birnbaum**

LITTLE RICHARD: HERE'S LITTLE RICHARD

Concord 7233840 (CD). 1957/2006. Art Rupe, Kevin Howlett, prods.; Cosimo Matassa, eng. AAD? TT: 44:46

 Rock'n'roll was invented in New Orleans, and this is one of the records that proves it. No marquee performer in the first wave of rock'n'roll stars was more exciting than Richard Penniman. But he was a bust until Specialty Records boss Art Rupe decided to cut him in New Orleans with the Earl Palmer/Lee Allen/Red Tyler gang, at Cosimo Matassa's J&M studio. Even that wasn't working until Richard took a break and hit the Dew Drop Inn, where he played his wild sex romp "Tutti Frutti! Good Booty!" just for kicks. This became the tune that launched Richard's career, and this set shows how, in his best work, the formula was copied over and over.

—**John Swenson**

DAVID LINDLEY: EL RAYO-X

Elektra/Asylum 5E-524 (CD). 1981. Jackson Browne, Greg Ladanyi, prods.; Greg Ladanyi, eng. AAD. TT: 39:31

To know David Lindley is to love him. If you *don't* know him but purport to love the Rock, then you owe it to yourself to check this one out. This former sideman to Zevon, Dylan, Ronstadt, Browne, etc. made only three official records with El Rayo-X, each more underappreciated than the next. But his 1981 debut ranks as one of the 1980s' great, unsung rock'n'roll recordings, striped with blistering slide-guitar blues, Tex-Mex, reggae, and R&B.—**Bob Gulla**

BILL LLOYD: RESET 2014

Whole in One (CD). 2014. Bill Lloyd, prod., eng.; Jonathan Bright, Doug Kahan, Jim DeMain, engs. DDD? TT: 59:39

 It's not easy to improve on perfection, and that was never the intention. But Bill Lloyd's idea of marking the 20th anniversary of his *Set to Pop*—perhaps the greatest power-pop album of all time—with a new companion album of its songs, including remakes, live recordings, and early mixes, was most inspired. Presented in their original running order with a couple bonus songs thrown in, song after song on *Reset 2014* rings out with fresh energy, like seeing dear old friends with new sparkle in their eyes. *STP* is so good because every one of its songs is lyrically keen, well crafted, and damn catchy. While the newly minted remake of "I Went Electric" rocks more than the original, "The Man Who Knew Too Much" takes on a softer tone, with piano and jangly mandolin. A live version of the tourist-trap misadventure "Niagara Falls," with its wink at Moe, Larry, and Curly, is grungier and even funnier than the original, while "Anything Less Than Love," one of rock's best album-closers and a wonderful ode to optimism, feels a bit more Beatles-esque in this early

mix. Another gem is a live version of "The S.W.A.T. Team of Love," recorded in 1994 at the Ace of Clubs, in Nashville, with Al Kooper on organ and Kim Richey on harmony vocal. As with that joyful reunion with old friends, you just don't want *Reset 2014* to end. (For more info, and to get a taste of *Reset 2014*, visit billlloydmusic.net.)

—David Sokol

THE LONG RYDERS: NATIVE SONS: DELUXE REISSUE

Prima SID-024 (CD). 2011. Henry Lewy, Paul McKenna, Earle Mankey, Ethan James, prods./engs. AAD. TT: 75:47

 The term "alt-country" is a cliché nowadays, but in 1984 it was decidedly outré for a group to come out sporting buckskins and Levi's to serve up twangy, pedal steel–adorned ditties of a Gram Parsons/Burrito Brothers/Byrds tilt. Cali mavericks the Long Ryders did just that, and their *Native Sons* album was groundbreaking enough to carve out a niche on college radio. This reissue adds their debut EP and early demos, proving that while they were well versed in country, bluegrass, and folk, at the end of the day they were an *American band* fully immersed in rock'n'roll and its many variants, from cosmic cowboy and country-rock to jangly pop and garage/psych.

—Fred Mills

THE LOUVIN BROTHERS: SATAN IS REAL

Capitol/Light in the Attic LITA 075 (2 LPs/CDs). 1959/2011. Ken Nelson, orig. prod.; orig. eng. not listed; Matt Sullivan, exec. & reissue prod.; Josh Wright, exec. reissue prod.; John Baldwin, remastering. ADA/ADD. TT: 70:36

 Although much of their material had sacred connections, the glorious sounds of Charlie and Ira Louvin's singing

was a profound influence on secular music—their close, high harmonies are especially reflected in the music of the Everly Brothers and the Byrds. Here, what may be their recorded masterpiece gets the deluxe reissue treatment, thanks to Seattle's superlative Light in the Attic crew. Thankfully, the album's already excellent sound has been retained, and its unforgettable original artwork—the brothers in white suits, behind them a looming red devil and roaring hellfire—is left untouched. Instead of a tribute record in which contemporary performers take stabs at their favorite Louvin tracks, disc 2 of this set collects 14 recordings from the Louvins' entire catalog, each selected by a modern admirer: Lucinda Williams, Mark Lanegan, Beck, Jim James, M. Ward, among others. Judging by the choices—which include "The Great Atomic Power," "When I Stop Dreaming," and "Knoxville Girl"—many of the decidedly secular and very noncountry alt-rock generation are big fans. Even better, the entire set is also available on two gorgeous 180gm LPs.—Robert Baird

LOVE: FOREVER CHANGES

Elektra Traditions/Rhino 8122 73537 2 (CD). 1967/2001. Arthur Lee, orig. prod.; Bruce Botnick, orig. prod., eng. Bonus tracks: Arthur Lee, prod.; John Haeny, eng. AAD? TT: 74:24

 Back in the December 2003 issue of *Stereophile*, I swooned (five stars' worth) over Love's *The Forever Changes Concert*. That live re-enactment of this glorious West Coast blend of rock, folk, country, and revolution—recorded in London to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the album's release in 1967—was proof, if anyone needed it, that Arthur Lee's masterpiece had stood the test of time.

But the original is even better (I'd give it six stars if I could). In the same league as *Pet Sounds*, *Revolver*, and *Blonde On Blonde*, *Forever Changes* is all heart and soul (Love was a multiracial band, after all), doing all it could to break down barriers, stereotypes, and prejudices. If you weren't tuned in to this overlooked gem when it first hit, this CD will give you a taste of those stormy yet thrilling days. If you were, this will pour out of your stereo with the warmth of a priceless vintage. The bonus tracks are generous and appropriate, but it's the original 11 tracks that are to die for. Here's to Arthur Lee and his lovely band for leaving them to us.—David Sokol

NICK LOWE: LABOUR OF LUST

Columbia JC 36087 (LP). 1979. Nick Lowe, prod.; Roger Bechirian, eng. AAA. TT: 32:13

 Sure, *Labour of Lust* is a guilty pleasure. It's unabashedly catchy, chock-full of sweet melodies, hooks, and adolescently sexist lyrics. Even the jacket photos of a shaggy-haired, stoned-looking Nick Lowe have a cheesy, 1970s-yearbook quality. It's kind of embarrassing to have it sitting out in the "often played" stacks, along with the symphonies, classic jazz, and serious, angst-ridden opuses by singer-songwriters. But dammit, it is catchy, it is beautifully crafted, and it *does* have some of the best power-pop songs ever recorded. One listen to this guaranteed pick-me-up will have you humming "Cruel to Be Kind" or "American Squirm" the rest of the day. An R2D4 for sure!

—Brian Damkroger

LYNYRD SKYNYRD: PRONOUNCED LEH- NERD SKIN-NERD

MCA 1685 (LP). 1973. Al Kooper, prod.; Bobby Langford, Rodney

Mills, Danny Rurberville, Dan Turbeville, engs. AAA. TT: 43:03

 Sometimes, when life drags you down, you sit down between your speakers and you don't know what to play. What do you do then? One solution, at least for those of us who were born in Alabama, is to have another bourbon. Then have another. Then another. Then have one more, and put on some Lynyrd Skynyrd, preferably *Pronounced*. You'll be okay after that, I promise. Another solution: accept that, as we get older, we get spiritually heavier. It's not as easy to move us as it used to be, and that's okay. Then put on some music that's satisfying, even if it doesn't turn us into sloppy, giddy adolescents.

—Jim Austin

THE MAMA'S AND THE PAPA'S: IF YOU CAN BELIEVE YOUR EYES AND EARS

MCA MCAD-11739 (CD). 1966/1998. Lou Adler, prod.; Bones Howe, eng. AAD? TT: 34:56

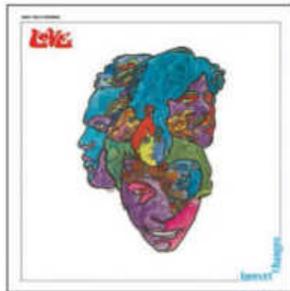
 Probably the only misstep on this, the L.A. quartet's timeless debut album, is the ungrammatical inclusion of those pesky apostrophes in the group's name. But musically the collection is above reproach, a combination of such mellifluous, ear-catching originals as "Monday, Monday" and "Go Where You Wanna Go," and swanky covers of songs by Leiber-Spector, Lennon-McCartney, and P.F. Sloan. Primary songwriter John Phillips's gift for marrying evocative lyrics ("Stopped into a church / I passed along the way") to gorgeous harmonies was already fully evident when "California Dreamin'" first burst onto the radio in late 1965, and nearly 50 years after its release, the song still sounds dark and chilly . . . and warm and fuzzy. Over the next few years, Phillips and company would turn out a string of

smart radio confections that refuse to grow old. But this is where that fascinating blend of folksy hipness and grounded, meticulous songcraft and arranging took root.—**David Sokol**

**AIMEE MANN:
I'M WITH STUPID**

DGC DGGD-24951 (CD). 1995. Jon Brion, prod.; Mike Denneen, Jack Joseph Puig, Jonathan Wyner, engs. AAD? TT: 56:19

 Aimee Mann's early struggles in the music business are legendary, and she never again reached the commercial heights of "Voices Carry," the song that took her band, 'Til Tuesday, into the Top 10 in summer 1985. But as Mann's star power declined her songwriting blossomed, beginning with her glorious swan song with TT, *Everything's Different Now*—perhaps the greatest breakup album ever recorded—and continuing with her solo career in the 1990s and beyond. *I'm with Stupid* is her second solo album, and never have the themes of love and longing and record-company neglect been more articulately woven together, particularly in the perfect album-closing "It's Not Safe," in which she throws down the gauntlet: "A thousand compromises don't add up to a win." *I'm with Stupid* is power pop at its richest (see radio hit "That's Just What You Are"), and the guest list includes composer and record producer Jon Brion, Squeeze's Glenn Tilbrook and Chris Difford, and Mann's soon-to-be husband, Michael Penn. For the squeamish (I doubt *Stereophile* has many of those), Mann has no problem using the F word, and no one sings it with as much genteelness and relish as she does in "Long Shot" and "It's Not Safe." Mann would see a much-deserved commercial spike a few years later, with the *Magnolia* soundtrack,



and would continue to make acclaimed top-shelf albums—but *I'm with Stupid* remains her greatest and smartest masterpiece. (XIX-6)—**David Sokol**

**THE MARSHALL
TUCKER BAND:
CAROLINA DREAMS**

Capricorn CPN-0180 (LP). 1977. Paul Hornsby, prod.; Kurt Kinzel, engs. AAA. TT: 37:18

 You know those songs that get stuck in your head, and run over and over in an endless loop? For most people, they're usually something like a jingle about laundry detergent that they want to get rid of before they go insane. Maybe it's because I'm already pretty much insane, but my earworms aren't unwanted intruders; they're like old friends dropping in, and remind me how much I like and have missed them. *Carolina Dreams* is kind of . . . well, let's just say "uneven"—but "Heard It in a Love Song" may be my favorite earworm, and the one that visits most often. I'm picking *Carolina Dreams* as an R2D4 because of one song? Absolutely.

—**Brian Damkroger**

MARY MCCASLIN:



OLD FRIENDS

Philo 1046 (CD). 1977/1996. Mary McCaslin, Jim Ringer, prods.; Michael Couture, eng. AAD. TT: 35:37

 In the late 1970s, I walked into a university-area bookstore in Tucson, Arizona, and heard a claw-hammer banjo chiming out a catchy melody. The tune was familiar, but I couldn't put my finger on what it was. "Ever since I was a young boy I played the silver ball," a twangy woman's voice intoned. "Holy crap!" I realized. "It's 'Pinball Wizard'!" It was as if I was hearing that anthem of my boyhood for the first time. A serious Who fan, I should have been repulsed. Instead I stood slack-jawed, beaming at the speakers. I bought Mary McCaslin's *Old Friends* on the strength of that tune, but there was so much more. Her cover of the Motown classic "My World Is Empty Without You Babe" has a matchless pathos, her version of the Beatles' "Things We Said Today" an introspective moodiness that tugged at my heart in ways the original never had. Another Beatles chestnut, "Blackbird," proved the perfect vehicle for McCaslin's buoyant spirit. Awe-inspiring

and thoroughly original as these and other covers were, it was her own title tune that ties the disc together like a reunion of the heart. This disc still reminds me that true genius resides in a singular voice illuminating unseen corners of a familiar sonic world.—**Daniel Buckley**

**JONI MITCHELL:
MINGUS**

Asylum AS 53 091 (LP), Warner Bros. 7559605572 (CD). 1979/1986. Joni Mitchell, Steve Katz, mix; Henry Lewy, Jerry Solomon, eng., mix; Bernie Grundman, mastering. AAA/AAD. TT: 37:20

 One of the least well known of Joni Mitchell's albums, *Mingus* is frequently and unjustly overlooked. Yet it's the default Mitchell that finds its way onto my turntable, thanks to a combination of fine musicianship from the Weather Report crew (Wayne Shorter, and Jaco Pastorius at his very best) and excellent sound (on my LP). Although the rap interludes between tracks can become tedious with repeated playing, it has arguably the finest version of "The Dry Cleaner from Des Moines" I've ever heard, with Mitchell's impeccable timing matching the band's.

—**Paul Messenger**

**JONI MITCHELL:
SHADOWS AND LIGHT**

Asylum 704-2 (2 HDCDs). 1999. Joni Mitchell, prod., mix; Henry Lewy, mix, eng.; Skip Cottrell, mix; Andy Johns, Henry Lewy, engs.; Joe Gastwirt, mastering. ADD. TT: 84:00

Shout Factory DVD 30161 (DVD-V). 2003. Linear PCM & 5.1 Dolby Digital soundtracks. Tour Photo Diary. Joni Mitchell, dir. TT: 75:00

 "Every picture has its shadows / and it has some source of light / blindness, blindness and light." Thus goes the gospel-inflected, Da Vinci-inspired launch of what may well rank as one of the best live concert recordings of all

time: an all-grown-up Joni Mitchell weaving her musical magic at the Santa Barbara Bowl in September 1979, with a blue-chip band of Pat Metheny on guitar, Lyle Mays on synths and Rhodes piano, Don Alias on drums and percussion, Michael Brecker on tenor sax, The Persuasions on backup vocals, and the incomparable Jaco Pastorius on fretless Fender bass guitar in what is one of the few filmed performances of his tragically short career. (The 1979 tour dates and set list can be found here.) Mitchell stands revealed not only as an insightful lyricist and an eclectic melodist, but as a vocal technician fully worthy of fronting her virtuoso band as they play off of each other. Even when Jaco unleashes cascades of notes and harmonics, his contribution illuminates rather than darkens the music's message.

The programs on the two-CD set and the rather clumsily directed DVD are not identical. Though both start with the mood-managing sequence of "In France They Kiss on Main Street," "Edith and the King Pin," and "Coyote," the CD adds a drum solo from Alias that segues into "Dreamland," and a coda of "Woodstock" and "God Must Be a Boogie Man" (taken from the PA mix), in which Pastorius playfully duets with Joni. On the other hand, the DVD includes a short but masterful solo from Pastorius, in which he sets up an ostinato figure on his echo unit in order to jam on "The High and the Mighty" and Hendrix's "Third Stone from the Sun." Goosebump sandwich!

—John Atkinson

JONI MITCHELL: SHINE

Hear Music/Concord HMC 30457 (CD). 2007. Joni Mitchell, prod.; Dan Marnien, eng. ADD? TT: 46:58

 Joni Mitchell's first album of new mate-

rial in nine years. *Shine* is a superb collection of 10 songs that are at once compelling and poignant, exquisite and soulful, sublime and haunting. With the exception of the final track, "If," adapted from Rudyard Kipling's poem of that title, Mitchell wrote all the tunes. The instrumentation is sparse, with Mitchell on piano and guitar, and coloring the melodies with organic synthesized tones. While the title suggests the upbeat, *Shine* is a reflective album ripe with critiques of the desecration of the earth, musings on the state of heartlessness, lamentations on the loss of the holy, sober estimations of rampant greed, and a rumination on the "worshipping [of] our ego" that ultimately leads to the "shock and awe" of war.

—Dan Ouellette

JONI MITCHELL: TRAVELOGUE

Nonesuch 79817-2 (2 HDCDs). 2002. Joni Mitchell, Larry Klein, prods.; Geoff Foster, Helik Hadar, engs.; Allen Sides, mix; Bernie Grundman, mastering. DDD? TT: 2:07:05

 She might not be as prolific as Bob Dylan, but Joni Mitchell has few peers in the crafting of great songs. A "greatest hits" compilation tends to clump together studio recordings that were made across the decades, but 2002's *Travelogue* is refreshingly different. Mitchell's voice has dropped in pitch and become much huskier over the years, but her powers of interpretation have, if anything, significantly improved. It was therefore a stroke of near-genius to rerecord a "best of" compilation that accompanies her late-period voice with full orchestra and chorus—check out "The Sire of Sorrow (Job's Sad Song)" and weep! (XXVI-4)—Paul Messenger

MODEST MOUSE: THE MOON &

ANTARCTICA

Epic EK 63871 (CD). 2000. Brian Deck, prod., eng. ADD. TT: 59:53

 Listening to Modest Mouse's earlier recordings, it's not difficult to trace their songwriting progression. Gradually, the albums become more focused and complete, sonically more pristine and adventurous. This, their major-label debut, produced and mixed by Brian Deck of the Red Red Meat, is a wry, playful, haunting concept album that documents a desperate man's constant, perhaps futile struggle to find the point where the circle begins. Modest Mouse's website says that the songs were sent to them in "envelopes that had neither postmarks nor return addresses" from a fan and follower who, apparently, had lost touch with reality. Though the words and music within these rantings were "practically illegible," the soul is captured and conveyed by the band.

But *The Moon & Antarctica* isn't only about the manic throes of a lonely wanderer. The music complementing Isaac Brock's thoughtful lyrics is just as well-developed. Along with Brock's playful and spring-like guitar riffs, producer Deck layers Jeremiah Green's disco rhythms and hypnotic break beats with Eric Judy's looping, groovy bass lines, while integrating a symphony of atmospheric sounds to create some sort of otherworldly dance party. Violin, piano, banjo, lap steel guitar, and an assortment of swooshing, sprawling, echoing, backward-looping washes and sways complete the circle.—Stephen Mejias

VAN MORRISON: HIS BAND AND THE STREET CHOIR

Warner Bros. 1884-2 (CD). 1970. Van Morrison, prod.; Elliot Scheiner, eng. AAD. TT: 42:19

 Along with *Astral Weeks* and *Moon-dance*, *His Band and the Street Choir* outlines the styles of music that defined, more or less, the long and winding road Morrison would take for the next 40 years: energetic, memorable hit singles ("Domino"), R&B workouts with a conspicuous acoustic guitar and a Celtic edge ("Give Me a Kiss," "I've Been Working," "Blue Money," "Sweet Jannie"), sweet soul ballads that sound like songs you heard somewhere else ("Gypsy Queen," "Call Me Up in Dreamland," "If I Ever Needed Someone"), and existential folk music ("Crazy Love," "Virgo Clowns"). And all with nary a note wasted.

—Leland Rucker

VAN MORRISON: LIVE AT THE GRAND OPERA HOUSE BELFAST

Mercury 422 818 336-2 (CD). 1984. Van Morrison, prod.; Mick Glossop, eng., mix; Chris Blake, David Chapman, asst. engs. AAD. TT: 52:05

 Possibly the worst concert I ever attended was Van Morrison performing in Brighton, England, in the early 1980s. Van the Man sat at a keyboard for most of the first set, blowing perfunctory saxophone and letting members of his band sing lead vocal. It is a paradox, therefore, that this live CD, recorded about the same time, has been in constant rotation in my system for more than two decades. The songs are mainly drawn from the more spiritual catalog Van was recording at the end of the 1970s, rather than the classic albums he cut in the US at the beginning of that decade. Tempos are generally slow—dangerously, glacially slow in "Haunts of Ancient Peace," "Rave On John Donne," and "Vanlose Stairway"—but the band plays with persistent power. As Stephen Mejias said when he poked his head into my



office while I was writing these words, "This band swings!" I put that down to the presence of the great drummer Peter Van Hooke, who subsequently went on to commercial success with Mike and the Mechanics and can put more bounce in a backbeat than any drummer has a right to be able to. The incomparable Mark Isham on trumpet, James Brown alum Pee Wee Ellis on saxophone and flute, and David Hayes on bass guitar, ain't too shabby neither. "Yeah, this is hip," enthuses Van at the start of his intricate reworking of "It's All in the Game." And hip this CD indeed is.—**John Atkinson**

MOVING HEARTS: THE STORM

Tara 1304 (LP). 1985. Dónal Lunny, prod.; Andrew Boland, eng.; Connor Barry, John Grimes, asst. engs. AAA/AAD. TT: 37:47

⏻ This instrumental album, mixing traditional Irish melodies and instruments with a rock rhythm section, was in constant rotation in the mid-1980s, but I hadn't listened to it in years. It was my 2012 purchase of an Ayre Acoustics QA-9 A/D converter, which triggered my transferring to 24-bit/192kHz PCM many of my favorite LPs, that caused me to dig out *The Storm* from the darker recesses of my shelves of vinyl. Mixed at Dublin's famed Windmill Lane Studios, the album's marriage of two apparently disparate families of instruments works superbly well. The rock rhythm section



adds a propulsive groove, and the use of such "alien" melody instruments as bouzouki, saxophones, electric guitar, and bass clarinet adds to the appeal.

The musical form is generally that of Irish traditional music, with different double-time reels cascaded and repeated. The opening cut, the 13-minute "The Lark," for example, comprises seven sections in different but related keys: "The Lark in the Morning," "Earl the Breakfast Boiler," "O'Broin's Flightcase," "In the Mountains of Holland," "Oh Hag! You've Killed Me," "Peter O'Byrne's Fancy," and "Langstrom's Pony." The opening fades in over an ostinato D-major riff on marimba, with punctuating synthesizer chords and bass-guitar notes joined by drums, and then with Davy Spillane introducing the first theme on low whistle, joined by Declan Masterson on Uilleann pipes. A modulation to A takes us to a new melody, which is where the work stays, despite excursions to E, G, and back to D, while increasingly complex instrumentation and doubling of the melodies builds tension. And with a peak-loudness ratio of 20–25dB, this is not only a musical masterpiece but an audiophile one as well!—**John Atkinson**

GEOFF MULDAUR'S FUTURISTIC ENSEMBLE:
PRIVATE ASTRONOMY: A VISION OF THE MUSIC OF BIX BEIDERBECKE



DG Edge 028947458326 (CD). 2003. Dick Connette, prod.; Joe Boyd, exec. prod.; Eve Seltzer, Gary Carroll, Tristan Leral, Scott Lehrer, Dave Winslow, Mark Linett, Keith Weschler, Neil Couser, engs. AAD? TT: 42:18

⏻ Popular music is ephemeral by definition, anchored in the cultural and social values from which it emerged. Without reference to those values, it can be hard to understand what the fuss was about—unless the man or woman behind the music was a genius. Such was the case with cornetist Bix Beiderbecke, who drank himself to death in 1931: his haunting music should have been alienated by the intervening years yet seems familiar, even comfortable.

I first heard a Beiderbecke composition—"In a Mist"—on Ry Cooder's 1978 album *Jazz*, one of my 1993 R2D4 picks. "In a Mist" appears twice on *Private Astronomy*, *Stereophile's* October 2003 "Recording of the Month." While Geoff Muldaur's arrangements are very different from Cooder's, being mainly for wind ensemble, he treats this music as Cooder did, with affection and respect, allowing it to speak for itself. Delicate the treatment may be, but that doesn't mean this acoustic music doesn't rock when required. Just put on track 3 and dig Martha Wainwright (sister of Rufus, daughter of Loudon and one of the McGarrigle sisters) cutting an incisive path through the slow drag of "There Ain't No Sweet Man (That's Worth the Salt in My Tears)": timeless stuff.



(XXVI-10)—**John Atkinson**

GEOFF MULDAUR & THE TEXAS SHEIKS: GEOFF MULDAUR & THE TEXAS SHEIKS

Tradition and Moderne 045 (CD). 2009. Geoff Muldaur, Bruce Hughes, prods.; Stuart Sullivan, eng. AAD? TT: 49:15

⏻ Listeners who came of musical age during the folk scare of the early 1960s will immediately recognize here the voice of Jim Kweskin—though it's deepened since those early days of "roots music," his mastery of it has grown. This tribute to the early Piedmont string bands of the 1920s and '30s is a hoot, and Muldaur is ably aided by an all-star cast. Best of a very good lot are Muldaur's reprise of "Blues in the Bottle"—a standard back in the days of Jim Kweskin's Jug Band—and the trippy "Under the Chicken Tree." Not enough cowbell, perhaps, but extra points for virtuoso kazoo.—**Wes Phillips**

MY BLOODY VALENTINE: LOVELESS

Sire 26759-2 (CD). 1991. Kevin Shields, Colm O'Ciosoig, prods.; various engs. AAD? TT: 48:36

⏻ News of My Bloody Valentine's impending return to activity after a decade-plus hiatus sent me running for my copy of *Loveless*, the band's 1991 shoegazer masterpiece. Led by the monumental "Only Shallow," the album's swirling, psychedelic production is the perfect sonic carnival ride, leaving you dizzy and

disoriented in the most pleasant possible sense. The band spent two years in the studio crafting *Loveless*, in the process nearly bankrupting Creation, their groundbreaking and influential British label. It's easy to look back now and proclaim their extravagance worth the label's miseries, but alas, the album's reputation far outstripped its sales. But you know what? It was worth it. —**Daniel Durchholz**

RANDY NEWMAN: GOOD OLD BOYS

Reprise/Rhino (2 CDs). 1974/2002. Lenny Waronker, Russ Titelman, prods.; Lee Herschberg, eng.; Donn Landee, asst. eng. AAD? TT: 78:39

🔊 In *Good Old Boys*, Randy Newman's paean to his hometown of NOLA, Newman struck his most lasting musical currency. Despite his many gifts and long trail of essential albums, Newman has never quite equaled the melodies or the words that make songs like "Birmingham," "Louisiana 1927," and "Kingfish" so powerful.

Opening with the charming, inoffensive couplet of "Last night I saw Lester Maddox on a TV show / With some smart-ass New York Jew" ("Rednecks"), Newman goes on to successfully tight-rope his smart-aleck way along a knife edge between simultaneously harpooning and defending Southern society. In the aforementioned "Rednecks," the thrust is that while the South may be full of crackers ("College men from L.S.U. / Went in dumb, Come out dumb too"), the hypocrisy of the North—where everyone is free but racism also thrives—may, in the end, be worse. Newman's wry, laconic vocals, a blessed lack of novelty numbers (eg, "Short People"), and the support of such talents as Ry Cooder (guitars), Jim Keltner (drums), and three of those eternally annoying Eagles (I

can't always get what I want) arguably make this the most cohesive and focused album of a brilliant career. (XXVI-1)

—**Robert Baird**

JOANNA NEWSOM: DIVERS

Drag City DC561 (LP). 2015. Joanna Newsom, prod.; Noah Georgeson, prod., eng.; Steve Albini, eng. ADA. TT: 51:56

🔊 Joanna Newsom's fourth full-length album finds the songwriter taking her melodic skills in a slightly more adventurous direction and adding even greater depth to her uniquely literate writing sensibilities. On *Divers*, the singer-harpist opts for a more keyboard-heavy sound—Mellotrons and analog synths abound—and the results are consistently brilliant. Only "Goose Eggs," which relies overmuch on churning electric pianos, fails to take off. Newsom's subject matter is darker and less cozy—a little less warmly familial—than on past outings, but the inspired history/whimsy/reverie of "Sapokanikan" and "Waltz of the 101st Lightborne" will delight old fans and newcomers alike. I remember thinking Joanna Newsom was unlikely to top her 2006 masterpiece, *Ys*. I was wrong. (XXXVIII-12)

—**Art Dudley**

JOANNA NEWSOM: YS

Drag City DC 303 (2 180gm LPs/CD). 2006. Joanna Newsom, Van Dyke Parks, prods.; Steve Albini, Tim Boyle, engs. AAA/AAD.

🔊 The 24-year-old folk/psychedelic singer and harpist's second album features orchestrations by Van Dyke Parks, pristine harp and vocal engineering by Steve Albini, and lush orchestral engineering by Tim Boyle, all mixed by Jim O'Rourke and mastered at Abbey Road by Nick Webb. A unique young musical visionary presented in a sonically stunning and visually

spectacular package. Not to be missed on vinyl.

—**Michael Fremer**

GARY NICHOLSON: THE SKY IS NOT THE LIMIT

Ardeo CD9501 (CD). 2000. Gary Nicholson, Ricky Fataar, prods.; Rob Fraboni, prod., eng.; Clarke Schleicher, John Hurley, engs. AAD. TT: 55:19

🔊 In the world of smart country music, Gary Nicholson has long been an A-lister's A-lister, writing songs for everyone from George Jones and Waylon Jennings to the Mavericks and Trisha Yearwood. And B.B. King, Etta James, and Buddy Guy are among the multitude of luminaries who've tapped into the Nicholson songbook. But the songwriter, who seamlessly bridges country and blues, is also a topnotch recording artist, though few have heard those recordings. Many of the songs on *Sky* may be familiar to aficionados of hip country and rock from the 1990s: "The Trouble with the Truth" is the title song of Patty Loveless's 1996 album; "Somebody to Love You" has been recorded by Wynonna as well as Nicholson collaborator Delbert McClinton; and "Shadow of Doubt" closes out Bonnie Raitt's chart-topping *Longing in Their Hearts*. Nicholson knocks these all out of the park, as he does with the topical "The '90s Is the '60s." His savvy writing is filled with humor and wisdom. In "Somebody to Love You," he sings, "You need a job so you can make some money / You need a nice warm place to stay / A sense of humor 'cause life is funny / A big stick to keep the wolf away," before invoking such modern-day necessities as barbecue, jumper cables, and a snooze control. Plenty of fellow A-listers join the *Sky* party, including, just for starters, Raitt, McClinton, Don Was,

Vince Gill, and Lonnie Mack. Indeed, for these pros, and for anyone fortunate enough to hear this album, the sky is not the limit. (XIX-9)

—**David Sokol**

HARRY NILSSON: NILSSON SINGS NEWMAN

RCA/Speakers Corner LSP-4289 (180gm LP). 1970/2013. Harry Nilsson, prod.; Grover Helsing, others, engs.; Willem Makkee, mastering. AAA. TT: 25:17

🔊 Released in February 1970, three months before Randy Newman's *12 Songs* catapulted him to übercult status, Harry Nilsson's *Nilsson Sings Newman* is a short, sweet, complex tribute to the then-obscure Newman, who here accompanies the singer on piano. Nilsson pre-recorded Newman's piano and his own basic vocals at RCA Hollywood, then took the tapes to Wally Heider's, in San Francisco, where he added obsessive, complex, coke-fueled, background vocal overdubs and some instrumental accents. The deeper you listen, the more you'll appreciate Nilsson's impassioned singing, Newman's writing, and the intimate production, particularly the multipart background vocal overdubs. On quiet vinyl for the first time. —**Michael Fremer**

NIRVANA: NEVERMIND

Sub Pop/DGC/ORG 032 (LP). 1991/2009. Nirvana, Butch Vig, prods., engs.; Andy Wallace, mix; Jeff Sheehan, James Johnson, asst. engs. AAA. TT: 42:39

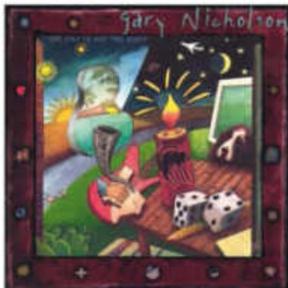
🔊 With its ironic title and unforgettable cover image, 1991's *Nevermind* was the beginning and the end. It begat Nirvana's brief run as superstars, and thus the pressures and emotional torment that eventually led to Kurt Cobain's suicide. It was also the end of something called The Great American Rock'n'Roll Album. We're

still waiting for another. This kind of ecstasy and fury and rebellion and teen angst just hasn't happened since. The fact that this masterwork of loud/soft dynamics is so frontloaded with great songs—"Smells Like Teen Spirit" (the colossus of rock hooks), "In Bloom," "Come As You Are," "Breed," "Lithium"—means that the other seven cuts have been criminally underrated. And on any record less well endowed, the furious "Breed" would have been the star. *In Utero* may be darker and more polished, but *Nevermind* is solid muscle—and well-recorded enough to improve with volume. Nice Bernie Grundman remastering on 180 gram vinyl. (XV-6, XVI-2, XIX-6, XXV-11)—**Robert Baird**

NITTY GRITTY DIRT BAND:

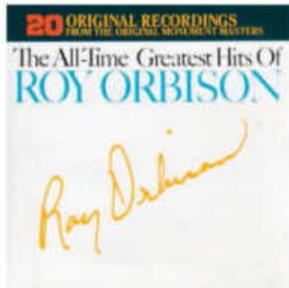
DIRT, SILVER & GOLD
United Artists UA-LA670-L3 (3 LPs). 1976. William McEuen, prod., eng.; Richie Cicero, Mike Denecke, Dino Lappas, Gary Mullen, engs. AAA.

⏻ For some semi-unhealthy reason—possibilities include the hoofbeats of approaching mortality, a belated regression to teenagehood, gobs of tannin clogging the brain synapses, a desire to absolve an unfairly denigrated musical decade (I suspect they all apply to varying degrees)—I have been stuck in a '70s music groove. Out of that charmed decade—to the haters I say, go and listen, then we'll talk—I chose two seminal albums from that decade's key year, 1976. Although the NGDB is best known for *Will the Circle Be Unbroken* (1972), that epic experiment in country-meets-country-rock, Nashville-establishment-meets-Colorado-hippies, it's this *other* three-LP set, from four years later, that is their masterpiece. An oversize mix of greatest hits and new material, *Dirt, Silver*



& *Gold* features damn near every kind of Americana you can think of, from straight-up folk ("Buy for Me the Rain") to bluegrass ("Soldier's Joy") to near rock'n'roll ("Bayou Jubilee"/"Sally was a Goodun") to novelty tunes ("Woody Woodpecker") and hippie rock ("Bowlegs"). There's even stuff like "Mr. Bojangles" and "House at Pooh Corner," which represent what I'd have to categorize under the unwieldy title of Roots Pop.

The list of contributing composers includes Randy Newman, A.P. Carter, Hank Williams, Jackson Browne, and Doc Watson. Besides the Dirt Band (at that point a quartet of John McEuen, Jeff Hanna, Jimmie Fadden, and Jim Ibbotson), the players include Doc Watson, Norman Blake, Vassar Clements, Roy Acuff, Mother Maybelle Carter, Jimmy Martin, and Russ Kunkel, to name just a few. The crowning touch to this mass of heartfelt music, which has been through one less-than-wonderful reissue on two CDs, followed by a slightly better one, is the album's dedicatee: bluesman Jimmy Reed. As triple albums go, this one ranks up there with a slim field of



contenders that include Led Zep's *How the West Was Won*, George Harrison's *All Things Must Pass*, The Clash's *Sandinista*, and Joanna Newsom's *Have One On Me*.—**Robert Baird**

ROY ORBISON: THE ALL-TIME GREATEST HITS

Monument/Columbia/Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab MFSL 2-304 (2 180gm LPs). 1972/2008. Fred Foster, prod.; Bill Porter, eng.; Rob LoVerde, Shawn R. Britten, remastering. AAA. TT: 52:21

⏻ Roy Orbison belongs in any record collection wanting to be called one. This ultimate two-LP set from his Monument era (the years that really count) contains all the big hits and some of the lesser ones, like "Working for the Man," that mash to a campy pulp "Chain Gang," "16 Tons," and maybe even "The Banana Boat Song." I don't care if you have the original Monument/Columbia issue, the DCC Compact Classics or S&P 180gm versions, or all of them—this new one from Mobile Fidelity is easily the best-sounding, and by an ear-bulging margin. You'll hear stuff you've never heard before, and what you have

heard before, you've never heard sound this good. (XVI-2)—**Michael Fremer**

GRAHAM PARKER: HEAT TREATMENT

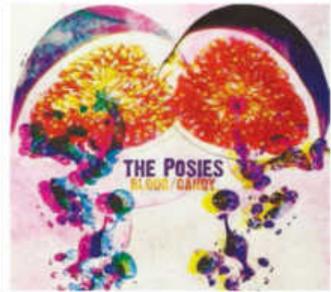
Mercury SRM-1-1117 (LP). 1976. Robert John Lange, prod., eng.; Dave Charles, Pete Kelsey, engs. AAA. TT: 35:41

⏻ *Heat Treatment* is Graham Parker's second and most upbeat album—or, more correctly, the one that comes closest to being upbeat. A friend once described it as "Graham Parker for beginners," a characterization that seems even more apt today, 35 years and 50 or so albums later. It's an engaging mix of up-tempo numbers and ballads, and Parker's edgy singing is served well by the Rumour's backup and Mutt Lange's production. True, *Heat Treatment* isn't as brilliantly caustic as such later albums as *Squeezing Out Sparks*, but it's the one I reach for first and most often.—**Brian Damkroger**

PARKS AND RECREATION: WHAT WAS SHE DOING ON THE SHORE THAT NIGHT?

Hush HUSH059 2006 (CD). Michael Johnson, prod.; Adam Selzer, eng. DDD? TT: 33:14

⏻ Classically trained Portlander Michael Johnson is best—if barely—known for making records as *Reclinerland*, a project that included members of the Decemberists and Norfolk & Western on 2003's *The Ideal Home Music Library*, ostensibly an unearthed trove of Tin Pan Alley compositions. His more recent project is (post)modern all the way—well-orchestrated and keenly orchestrated indie bombast bubblegum that's far too unabashed and swinging to be arch. "The Perfect Love" turns the words *semicolon* and *parentheses* into an exquisite lyric (the song is a faux-disco celebration of IM-



ing), while "Break Into Song" joins "Do You Believe in Magic" in the pop annals of self-reflexive, self-affirming sing-alongs. Call him the rich man's Stephen Merritt.

—Jason Cohen

PAVEMENT:
WOWEE ZOWEE:
SORDID SENTINELS
EDITION

Matador OLE 722 (2 CDs). 1995/2006. Doug Easley, Davis McCain, Mark Venezia, prods., engs.; Bryce Goggins, mix. AAD? TT: 96:39

Call it Pavement's *Fables of the Reconstruction* (Zowie Wowie?)—an itinerant and murky third album that feels like a rejection of its more structured (and career-enhancing) predecessor. But that's where the R.E.M. analogy stops dead: Wowie Zowie is also Pavement's best, a serpentine and seemingly disparate batch of nimble indie anthems, bratty art-rock clatter, high-desert psychedelia, and slow-drip epic ballads that feels more cohesive with each listen. The brand-new two-disc reissue features a stupefying 32 bonus tracks (live sessions, demos, B-sides, outtakes); it would be worth it for the catchy and acerbic *Pacific Trim* EP alone.—Jason Cohen

PAW:
DRAGLINE

A&M 31454 0065 2 (CD). 1993. Paw, prods.; Mr. Colson, prod., eng.; Doug Erickson, eng.; Andy Wallace, mix. AAD? TT: 50:29

Remember the early 1990s? Back when

grunge was more than just an excuse to write bad songs, the record business was still a going concern, and Nirvana had just made the last great rock record? Well, it just so happens that at one South by Southwest festival back there in the '90s murk, these guys suddenly became the toast of a good old-fashioned A&R war. Wining, dining, chicks in hot tubs—even racing dune buggies, if memory serves—these boys got the full treatment. Part of the fascination came from the fact that they were from Lawrence—certainly the most enlightened spot in Kansas, but a long way from Seattle or New York or any other loud, almost metal, guitar-driven musical furnace. Another, more important element was that the songwriting was there: a claim most grunge bands could not make. Ever. Meanwhile, in Totoland, guitarist Grant Fitch and singer Mark Hennessy, Paw's primary songwriters, had loud, hard-charging, chunky tracks like "Jessie," a salute to man's best friend in which a pedal steel suddenly pops into the bridge—and "The Bridge," which has the kind of hook usually heard only in poppier fare. Sure, they fell apart after this, their debut, but for a moment there it all clicked. It was grunge all right, but it had soul. And tunefulness. And it wasn't from Seattle.

—Robert Baird

TOM PETTY & THE
HEARTBREAKERS:
THE LIVE ANTHOLOGY

Reprise 517-462 (4 CDs). 2009. Tom Petty, Mike Campbell, prods.; Ryan Ulyate, prod., eng. AAD? TT: 4:48:09

It may be a stretch to call a box containing five CDs, two DVDs, a Blu-ray disc, and a mini-LP a "record," but for a diehard Petty fan it's definitely "to die for." Having seen the Heartbreakers roughly once every five years since the early 1980s, and knowing that concerts are where this band and their songs *really* achieve lift-off, I reckon this deluxe edition (it comes in multiple configurations, including this 4-CD edition), spanning 1978–2007, is as pure a distillation of Petty & Co. as they come. Lost nuggets and choice covers rub elbows with stone classics, all mixed with such extreme empathy as to conjure the aural illusion of a continuous, 62-song, five-hour show. And that's just the CDs . . .

—Fred Mills

PHISH:
LAWN BOY

Jemp 1077 (180gm LP). 1990/2013. Phish, prods.; Dan Archer, Dean LaBrie, engs.; Chris Bellman, remastering. AAA. TT: 47:49

My editor is going to kill me for writing again about Phish in R2D4, but my reason for discussing *Lawn Boy* is much less about the album's soul-ascending jams or heavy-metal screams and much more about this remastering, released on 180gm LP on April 21, 2013. It includes a bevy of blown-up and very goofy unreleased press pictures,

lyrics in big yellow type, and, most important, a spectacular remastering of the music by Chris Bellman, of Bernie Grundman Mastering. Page McConnell's piano sparkles with his light touch. Trey Anastasio's feedback has an extra bit of gnarl. The blackness between the grooves in the breakdown of "Reba" is 10' deep. I've listened to *Lawn Boy* on CD—mastered by Bob Ludwig—for 16 years of my life. Now, I feel as if I'm starting all over.—Ariel Bitran

PHISH:
RIFT

Elektra 61433 (CD). 1993. Barry Beckett, prod.; Pete Greene, Kevin Halpin, engs.; Greg Parker, asst. eng.; Chris Bailey, Tom Walters, studio assts. AAD? TT: 67:54

If there's any place to start with this wacky prog-jam-jazz-funk outfit, it's definitely *Rift*. A fan favorite, this record served as a transition for the band (the *Rubber Soul* of their studio recording career), moving from loose-tied but lifting jams (*Lawn Boy*) into more of the same equally elongated yet highly structured guitar solos, this time surrounded by condensed progressive-rock song structures. Compositions on their following record, *Hoist*, saw a quick departure from this formula, stripping away both the long-form guitar melodies and prog-rock tendencies. *Rift* kicks off with the galloping title track, which features transcendent modal development from guitarist Trey Anastasio and superb piano playing from Page

McConnell. The album then unfolds to show the many sides of Phish: "Sparkle" on the irreverent side, "Horn" on the pretty side, or "It's Ice" to show off that funky angular thing they do best. In "Fast Enough for You," one of the few Phish ballads, Gordon Stone lingers over the track with haunting pedal-steel work. *Rift's* most addictive number, "The Wedge," starts with a deep bass groove that's swallowed by an organ swell and punctuated by Anastasio's quick stops and starts. Also on this record is "All Things Reconsidered," Phish's rendition of the NPR theme. Recorded by Muscle Shoals veteran Barry Beckett and mastered by Bob Ludwig, the sound on this record is clear and expansive.—**Ariel Bitran**

PINK FLOYD:
THE PIPER AT THE GATES OF DAWN: 40TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

EMI 50999-503919-2-9 (3 CDs). 1967/2007. Norman Smith, Joe Boyd, prods.; Peter Brown, eng.; James Guthrie, Joel Plante, remastering. LSD. TT: Warped

⏪ If someone had told me in 1972 that, 36 years hence, rock'n'roll would have hit a wall and we'd be treasuring relics from our past, I'd have ripped a loud snort of derision—after all, things were progressing quite nicely by the early 1970s. But here we are, and the best thing I've picked up in 2007 is a 40th-anniversary repackaging of Pink Floyd's Syd Barrett–infused first LP. Get this three-disc edition, which includes both the mono and stereo mixes, along with a bonus disc filled with singles and outtakes. Despite purists who insist that mono is the way to go (lots more stuffing in the tracks), I'd rather trip out to the stereo mixes—the instruments sound way better, and it's more fun in the dark. A warning to the

uninitiated: this is not your *Dark Side of the Moon* Pink Floyd in any way, shape, or form. Hard to believe, but while this was being taped, the Beatles were in one of the other studios at Abbey Road working on *Sgt. Pepper's*.—**Jon Iverson**

PINK FLOYD:
RELICS

Harvest SW 759 (LP). 1971. Pink Floyd, Joe Boyd, Norman Smith, prods.; various engs. AAA. TT: 50:05

⏪ Compilations are seldom as high-minded as "real" albums, but this collection of singles, B-sides, and rarities does more than most Pink Floyd records to light the link between the group's original songwriter, the late Syd Barrett ("See Emily Play"), and the best early material ("Julia Dream," "Cirrus Minor," "Paintbox," "Remember a Day") by the group's other members. At more or less the same time they assembled this compilation, Pink Floyd were making *Meddle*, an altogether different-sounding and more serious project ("careful with that axe," indeed). Some 40 years on, it's *Relics* we remember—and enjoy—the most. An indispensable record, and quite possibly the best starting point for Pink newbies.—**Art Dudley**

PINK FLOYD:
WISH YOU WERE HERE

Columbia 68522 (CD). 1975/1997. Pink Floyd, prods.; Doug Sax, digital remastering. ADD? TT: 44:15

⏪ What with Wagner's *Ring* and Arvo Pärt cluttering my listening habits, I came to Pink Floyd late—but when I first heard this CD, just moments after the release of this remastering, I realized what I'd been missing. For starters, it's simply beautiful music—the 25-minute "Shine On You Crazy Diamond" is exquisite in its clarity and layering, and gives the lie to people who

believe that music—even without words—cannot be incredibly sad. The album is a series of sadnesses, complaints, and angers, but even without the text, who could do without the acoustic guitar intro in the title track? The recording, too, is stunning. Of course, I now have almost all of PF's catalog, but this CD is the one to die for.

—**Robert Levine**

THE POSIES:
BLOOD/CANDY

Rykodisc RCD 11094 (LP). 2010. Jon Auer, Ken Stringfellow, prods., engs.; Paco Loco, Scott Greiner, others, engs.; Greg Calbi, mastering. AAA. TT: 42:39

⏪ On their post-hiatus *Blood/Candy*, *Stereophile's* December 2010 "Recording of the Month," the Posies return with a tasteful use of melodrama, story-fueled lyrics, and hooky yet mature melodies reflecting a time off well spent. The first song, "Plastic Paperbacks," with bombastic drums and low-register harmonies, offers a darker Posies. But when the chorus hits, it hits hard. Though plaintive at the start, "The Glitter Prize" shines like daylight, and "So Caroline" offers a song about friendship, a relationship often forgotten in the world of rock'n'roll. It asks, "With friends like you, who needs anyone else?" Honest and humble. Their years apart served the Posies well. (XXXIII-12)—**Ariel Bitran**

QUICKSILVER
MESSENGER SERVICE:
QUICKSILVER
MESSENGER SERVICE

Capitol CDP 7 91126 2 (CD). 1968/1994. AAD.

SONS OF CHAMPLIN:
LOOSEN UP
NATURALLY

Acadia ACA 8067 (CD). 1969/2003. AAD.

H.P. LOVECRAFT:
TWO CLASSIC ALBUMS
FROM H.P. LOVECRAFT
(I & II)

UMG 314542821-2 (CD). 1967-68/2000. AAD.

IT'S A BEAUTIFUL DAY:

IT'S A BEAUTIFUL DAY

San Francisco Sound SFS 11790 DA (CD). 1969/2001. AAD.

⏪ This was a perfect four-way tie: four stone(d) classics that belong in any collection of 1960s psychedelic rock. These acts were regulars around San Francisco at the time, but none of them had a worldwide hit that would cement their hall-of-fame status, as did Jefferson Airplane and Janis Joplin (although *It's a Beautiful Day*, led by violinist David LaFlamme, scored a minor hit with "White Bird," and Quicksilver made some progress with "Pride of Man"). Nonetheless, they were equally accomplished, and these discs are packed with great music. Anyone who wants to explore the "San Francisco Sound" and is ready to go beyond the Grateful Dead and "White Rabbit" can pick up the trail right here.—**Jon Iverson**

RADIOHEAD:
IN RAINBOWS

TBD/ATO ATCD47 (CD). 2008. Mark Stent, prod.; Nigel Godrich, prod., eng. DDD? TT: 42:34

⏪ So much was made of the marketing of this CD that the music almost got lost. Well, it's the most approachable album Radiohead has made, but it never cuts corners; Thom Yorke's vocals are more aggressive than introverted this time, but he still knows how to pine. More rock than psychedelia, they've added pianos, celestas, and the wonderful, wacky ondes martenot to their palette, which also includes strings and varied electronica. I'm not willing to claim that this is a cheerful CD, but it includes a real love song (the stripped-down "House of Cards"), and a kid's chorus (in "15 Step")

that contradicts Yorke's darkness. "Faust Arp" is actually reminiscent of the Beatles. But true fans need not fear—the final song, "Videotape," shows Radiohead at their most layered and complex. What gorgeous music.—**Robert Levine**

WILLIS ALAN RAMSEY:

WILLIS ALAN RAMSEY

Koch 8019 (CD), 1972/1999. Willis Alan Ramsey, Denny Cordell, prods.; Bob Potter, Peter Nichols, Wayne Dailey, Robin Hood. Elliot Mazer, engs. AAD. TT: 39:58

 Willis Alan Ramsey was 21 when he released this debut album. He has never released another. At the time, Ramsey was young, curious, and whimsical, open to anything, and obviously fascinated with country, soul, blues, history ("Boy from Oklahoma"), storytelling ("Ballad of Spider John"), and sex ("Muskrat Candlelight," "Geraldine and the Honeybee"). The album sounds like what it feels like to be 21 years old. Rumors of a follow-up still flourish, but when asked, Ramsey often jokes, "What's wrong with the first one?" Why mess with perfection?

—**Leland Rucker**

RAMSES III: I COULD NOT LOVE YOU MORE

Type TYPE 052 (translucent orange LP!). 2009. Daniel Freeman, prod., eng.; Stephen Lewis, Spencer Grady, prods. AAD? TT: 57:49

 Would you like to hear something extremely beautiful? Daniel Freeman, Stephen Lewis, and Spencer Grady sit calmly and wring subtle magnificence from lap-steel guitars, samplers, and keyboards, combining it all with their own pleading sighs and simple field recordings—trickling water, wind in the leaves, the sounds of birds calling to one another—to draw a painfully restrained and impossibly

lovely journey. The song titles mirror the moods: "We Shall Never Sing of Sorrow," "The Kindness in Letting Go," "All Shall Be Well." This album amplifies life's most exquisite joys and makes more bearable its deepest sorrows.

—**Stephen Mejias**

OTIS REDDING: THE GREAT OTIS REDDING SINGS SOUL BALLADS

Atco/4 Men with Beards 4M105 (LP), 1965/2002. No prod. or eng. listed. ADA. TT: 33:59

 While the late, great Otis Redding—whose tragic death in December 1967 robbed the world of a singer whose potential seemed unlimited—was always great shouting out "Try a Little Tenderness" and his other upbeat hits, it was his pleading way with ballads that was at the heart of his prodigious talent. Coming after his 1964 debut album, *Pain in My Heart*, and its hit, the ballad "These Arms of Mine," this collection of slower numbers was where the greatest soul singer of them all established his elemental connection with the Stax house band of Steve Cropper (guitar), Donald "Duck" Dunn (bass), Booker T. Jones (organ/keys), and Al Jackson Jr. (drums)—not to mention the Memphis horns: Wayne Jackson (trumpet), Charles "Packy" Axton (tenor sax), and Floyd Newman (baritone sax). The horn charts on nearly every cut are superb, though those in Redding's "I Want to Thank You," and Axton's accents in Delbert McClinton's "Keep Your Loving Arms Around Me," are textbook examples of the Stax brass sound. The album ends with the classic, snappy "Mr. Pitiful," which shows that Redding can also wend his vocal way through a mean groove. This new 180gm pressing from 4 Men with Beards is an improve-

ment over the original mono and stereo pressings; while those sounded decently crisp and dynamically acceptable, this new edition is much more spacious and detailed.—**Robert Baird**

DAVIS ROGAN: THE ONCE AND FUTURE DJ

Sousaphonk 004 (CD), 2005. Tim Stambaugh, prod.; Bruce Bennet, eng. DDD? TT: 73:26

 This album is Davis Rogan's answer to a loaded question asked by editors of Louisiana's *OffBeat* magazine in the early '00s: "Is New Orleans R&B Dead?" The answer is a resounding NO (as in New Orleans). Though he's a pasty-complexioned Irishman, Rogan channels such potentates of New Orleans R&B as Allen Toussaint, Ernie K-Doe, Fats Domino, and Professor Longhair in this all-original set of contemporary R&B classics. The songs are so good that, after listening to the album, TV producer David Simon tracked Davis down to rural France, where his Katrina evacuation tour had taken him, and hired him as a consultant for *Treme*, Simon's HBO series set in New Orleans. Simon went on to make a character based on Davis one of the central figures in the drama. Songs from this album, including "Hurricane," "I Quit," and "Godzilla vs. MLK," figure prominently in the *Treme* storyline.—**John Swenson**

THE ROLLING STONES: FROM THE VAULT: THE MARQUEE CLUB LIVE IN 1971

Eagle Vision EVSBD30983 (2 CD/BD), 2015. Derek Randal, prod.; Glyn Johns, eng.; Mazen Murad, mastering. ADD? TT:2:16:37

 Well alright, here we have the Rolling Stones in a London club taping a TV special on March 23, 1971. Have I got your attention?

The set list includes "Brown Sugar," "I Got the Blues," "Dead Flowers," and "Bitch," all from *Sticky Fingers*—which hadn't yet been released! Most live Stones albums are sourced from big arenas and stadiums where they trot out tired old tunes, but here the band is at a peak with fresh material, and Mick Taylor's guitar and Bobby Keys's sax leads are positively scrumptious. When the guys stretch out on "Midnight Rambler," you'll remember why the Stones were called "the greatest rock'n'roll band in the world."—**Steve Guttenberg**

THE ROLLING STONES: LET IT BLEED

Abkco 90042 (SACD/CD), 1969/2002. Jimmy Miller, prod.; Glyn Johns, eng.; Bruce Botnick, Jerry Hansen, George Chiantz, asst. engs. AAD? TT: 42:23

 With its layer-cake cover art, immortal exhortation of "THIS RECORD SHOULD BE PLAYED LOUD," and such songwriting darts as "Midnight Rambler," "Gimme Shelter," "Let It Bleed," and my favorite, the "trifle too satanic" "Monkey Man" (Jagger's unhinged, primate-like chattering near the song's end is marvelous), this is prime Glimmer Twins. Not the overt soundtrack for a drug trip that *Sticky Fingers* is, *Let It Bleed* still has plenty of audible evidence ("all my friends are junkies") of the good times that were then being had by all. It's also the record where Brian Jones slides out and Mick Taylor moves in, and it's the home of "You Can't Always Get What You Want," the most profound story of a moral that Keef and Mick ever managed. In this new DSD remastering, the sound is better than ever. *Exile on Main Street* has more range and *Sticky Fingers* is darker, but the group of songs was never stronger.—**Robert Baird**

**THE ROLLING STONES:
OUT OF OUR HEADS**

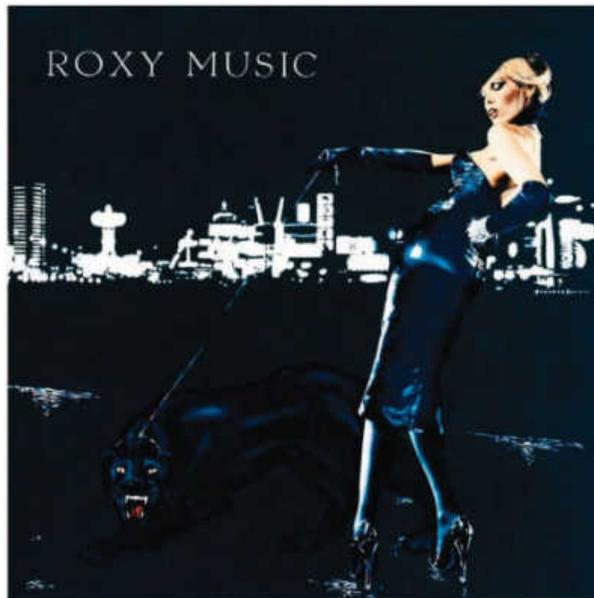
ABCKO 882 290-2 (SACD/CD).
1965/2002. Andrew Loog Oldham,
prod.; David Hassinger, eng. AAD.
TT: 28:09

It is a thing of magic to hear the moment when five individual musicians become a band: when the spark ignites, when the whip comes down. That's how *Out of Our Heads* feels. Not to say that the Rolling Stones hadn't shown plenty of promise on earlier singles and albums, but then they were mostly mimicking their heroes, for whom they were, out of their heads. But something happens here: It's the moment of inspiration, the point at which they take control of any song they cover, and at which Mick Jagger and Keith Richards' songwriting begins to come together. Richards said recently that the Stones didn't really nail "Satisfaction," that it took Otis Redding to finally get it right. I guess I can forgive them for the clumsiness of the hit single that changed their careers.—**Leland Rucker**

**MARINA ROSENFELD:
P.A./HARD LOVE**

ROOM40 RM452 (LP/CD). 2013.
Marina Rosenfeld, prod., eng. DDA/
DDD. TT: 32:14

Marina Rosenfeld is an experimental turntablist and sound artist with a special interest in large-scale collaborative works. Her sound installation *P.A.* combined live and recorded voices, field recordings, and performances by cellist Ok-kyung Lee. *P.A./Hard Love* contains recorded elements of the installation and adds original vocals by Jamaican dancehall singer Warrior Queen (Annette Henry), and more cello from Lee, who coaxes from her instrument unsettling, synth-like sounds. On the hi-fi, and especially through headphones, the album is a startling and thrilling experience. Electronics

**ROXY MUSIC:
FOR YOUR PLEASURE**

Virgin 8 47449 2 (CD). 1973. Roxy Music, Chris Thomas, John Anthony, prods.; John Middleton, John Punter, engs. AAD. TT: 42 groovy minutes

In a pivotal scene in the 2008 film *Flashbacks of a Fool*, set in early-'70s England, two kids mime to Roxy Music's "If There is Something" in a way that so perfectly captures the era it had me flashing back and playing Roxy albums for weeks. Which reminded me that their second album is the best of the bunch, by a note or two. It features Bryan Ferry's Count Chocula voice and the classic lineup, including Eno, and nothing can beat the closing numbers on each side of the original LP: "In Every Dream Home a Heartache" and "For Your Pleasure." Nothing.—**Jon Iverson**

sweep across and swirl about the stage. Things crackle, beep, and buzz. There are random chatter, traffic sounds, birdsong. You might hear soaring, Jimi Hendrix-style guitar feedback and fuzz. Three minutes in, Warrior Queen's beautifully recorded voice shocks with its presence and warmth. A minute later, the music has subtly morphed from abstract sound collage to dancehall jam. Listening to *P.A./Hard Love* is like being briskly transported back and forth from Kingston dance floor to New York art space and, every now and then, getting to exist in both places at once. Terrifying and magical.—**Stephen Mejias**

**RUSH:
CARESS OF STEEL**

Mercury SRM-1-1046 (LP). 1975.
Rush, Terry Brown, prods., engs.
AAA. TT: 44:51

Caress of Steel, Rush's third album, narrowly edges out their fourth, *2112*, as my R2D4. The sparse arrangements showcase their playing; in particular, Alec Leifsen's chord-based guitar style is shown off far better here than on their later, more complex albums. With *Caress* and *2112*, Rush exploited the album format with longer, more developed operettas than were possible with their later focus on radio-friendly singles. Yes, "I Think I'm Going Bald" is woe-fully out of place, the lyrics

are a little pretentious, and Geddy Lee's vocals are an acquired taste, but the music and sound are incredible. Rush at their very best.

—**Brian Damkroger**

**TOM RUSH:
THE CIRCLE GAME**

Elektra EKS-74018 (LP). 1968.
Arthur Gorson, prod.; Bruce
Botnick, Brooks Arthur, engs. AAA.
TT: 38:16

This quintessentially moody New England winter's evening album is where many listeners first heard the songs of Joni Mitchell, James Taylor, and Jackson Browne. Rush covers "Tin Angel," "Something in the Way She Moves," "Urge for Going," and "Sunshine, Sunshine," among others, and sequences them to chronicle the arc of a relationship. Crack studio cats Bernard Purdie, Eric Gale, Buddy Lucas, and Herbie Lovelle provide backup, along with the occasional string section. Preppy and tasteful (perhaps a bit too), with cover photography by Linda Eastman—and, of course, given the engineering pedigree, the sound is superb on the tan Elektra label.—**Michael Fremer**

**TOM RUSSELL:
BLOOD AND CANDLE
SMOKE**

Proper PRPCD 049 (CD). 2009.
Tom Russell, Jeff Palo, Barry Walsh,
prods.; Craig Schumacher, prod.,
mix. AAD? TT: 60:38

Mighty rivers. Exotic locales. Expatriates. Criminal acts. Mad love and jealousy. Tom Russell's stories—of Apache teens on a dangerous joyride, the 1811 earthquake that made the Mississippi run backward, the death of a mining community to black-lung disease, a hookup in San Cristóbal with Hank Williams and Nina Simone, a criminologist doubling as a folksinger in Nigeria, 1960s survivors caught somewhere

east of Woodstock and west of Vietnam—resonate with historical characters, life and death, and the spirit of a twisted, confused America, and have never been more evocative over the course of an entire album than here.

—Leland Rucker

THE SCIENTISTS: ABSOLUTE

Sub Pop SP-106b (CD). 1991. Chris Logan, Peter Watts, Paul Delnoy, Richard Mazda, Scientists, prods. and engs. AAD. TT: 62:01

🔊 “In my heart, there’s a place called Swamp-land / Nine parts water, one part sand,” moans vocalist Kim Salmon in this Perth, Australia, band’s “Swamp-land,” a fetid number that sucks the listener into a sonic bayou backwater while tipping a snakeskin hat to John Fogerty, Tony Joe White, the Stooges, and T. Rex. Grunge label Sub Pop caught a whiff and assembled this 16-song, 1982–86 overview, which spotlights such gems as “Set It On Fire” (Link Wray meets Suicide) and an actual Fogerty cover, “It Came Out of the Sky,” ablaze with a fuzz/d distortion sci-fi twang its composer never imagined. Nowadays the Scientists go overlooked, but their noxious skronk-blooze lives on in the still-extant Mudhoney and Jon Spencer Blues Explosion. —Fred Mills

GIL SCOTT-HERON: I’M NEW HERE

XL 4096252 (CD). 2010. Richard Russell, prod.; Rodaidh McDonald, eng., mix; Ichihō Nishiki, eng. DDD? TT: 28:25

🔊 “R2D4” is a strange place for an obituary, but this magazine needs to acknowledge somewhere the passing of Gil Scott-Heron (1949–2011). He was variously described as the godfather of rap and hip-hop, the black Dylan, and many other things, but attempts to label GSH with a neat, concise catchphrase

have always been futile, and necessarily fall short of doing justice to an artist with such a broad outlook. His musical roots were in blues, funk, and rock, but what made him special were his lyrics, and the wonderful baritone voice that conveyed those words straight into the hearts and minds of his fans, whether he was singing or speaking. His last album, *I’m New Here*, is clearly the work of an old man, but, like Johnny Cash’s *American Recordings*, it shows that accepting the darkness in one’s life doesn’t mean there’s no place for hope and resilience. The sound is stark, disjointed, yet strong and propulsive, and a wonderful reflection of the lyrics. Kudos to producer Richard Russell. A must-have album. —Markus Sauer

SEEFEEEL: QUIQUE

Medical MR021/Modern Classics MCR906 (2 LPs). 1993/2013. Seefeel, prods.; Adrian Harrow, Mark Clifford, Mark Van Hoen, engs. AAA. TT: 63:42

🔊 Originally released in 1993, at the tail end of the shoegaze movement, by London tastemaker label Too Pure, this low-key gem probably has more in common with ambient auteur Aphex Twin than the likes of Ride and Lush. As pure an expression of the sublime possibilities of the ambient/dub/rock intersection as they come, it frequently left my headphone-clad self slack-jawed and drooling during hemp-scented midnight listening sessions. In point of fact, the 2013 reissue (courtesy Light in the Attic imprint Modern Classics Recordings, and available on breathtakingly gorgeous splatter-blue vinyl) hasn’t lost any of its mesmerizing qualities, and no chemical enhancements are needed. Ladies and gentlemen, we are floating in space. —Fred Mills



SHPONGLE: MUSEUM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Twisted TWSCD45 (CD or 24-bit download). 2013. Raja Ram, prod.; Simon Posford, prod., eng., mix. DDD. TT: 61:15

ENTHEOGENIC: ENTHYMESIS

Universal Symbiosis (download). 2014. Piers Oak-Rhind, prod.; Glenn Schick, mastering. DDD. TT: 77:29

🔊 If the latest Pink Floyd isn’t doing it for you (me neither), there are plenty of new artists who’ve decided that we need modern space music that also shows off our hi-fi rigs. I’ve picked two for this year’s R2D4, the simple reason being that these albums are wonderful music, and a blast to listen to on a good stereo or headphones with the lights off—just like the old days.

Both releases are primarily instrumental, blending acoustic instruments and samples with computer-music programming, bucketsful of special effects, and expert editing. The senses of sound-stage depth, width, height, and movement in these recordings is phenomenal, creating immersive experiences that should push most audio systems beyond the walls. Subwoofers will definitely help.

Any and every recording by Shpongle is recommended; I’ve picked *Museum of Consciousness* only because it’s the latest. If Jimi Hendrix had been born 30 years later and played the computer, not the guitar, it might sound something like

Shpongle: shifting rhythms, complex electronic textures, and creative sonics galore.

Next is *Enthymesis*, the most recent album from Entheogenic, available as a download. More spacey and fluid than Shpongle, these works are still packed with impressive audio architecture that draws from DSOTM-era Floyd, global textures, and beyond. Picture waves of blissed-out hippie kids undulating on a beach in southwestern India at sunset and you’re halfway there. —Jon Iverson

SIMON AND GARFUNKEL: BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER

Columbia CK 9914 (CD). 1970/1990. Paul Simon, Arthur Garfunkel, prods.; Roy Halee, prod., eng.; Ted Brosnan, eng. ADD. TT: 37:13

🔊 A classic, for sure. Wikipedia describes this recording as folk/rock, and although I’m not a particular fan of folk or rock, I absolutely love *Bridge Over Troubled Water*—the song and the album. Most albums include tracks that make me reach for the remote and press Next. *Bridge Over Troubled Water* doesn’t. Each song has an effective melodic hook and something interesting to say. Other than the title track, my favorite is “The Only Living Boy in New York,” which also happens to sound fabulous, and shows improvements with the latest generation of digital playback. —Robert Deutsch

THE SIDEWINDERS: WITCHDOCTOR

Mammoth 9663-2-R (CD). 1989. Rich Hopkins, Dave Slutes, prods.; Eric Westfall, Steve English, engs. AAD. TT: 48:59

🔊 With American guitar bands on the wane and grunge in ascent, Tucson’s Sidewinders (later: Sand Rubies) were probably doomed, commercially speaking.

Artistically, though, their second album still blazes as brightly as the bad, crazy desert sun that spawned it, from jangly, R.E.M.-esque ballads to slow-burn Crazy Horse-y raveups to a memorable cover of Neil Diamond's "Solitary Man." Long a staple of powerpop collectors, it's also long out of print—sorta. In 2002, guitarist Rich Hopkins assembled a 10-CD Sidewinders/Sand Rubies box comprising live cuts and demos. Included was a bonus disc, stealthily titled *El Cuarandero*: in effect, *Witchdoctor* bootlegged by its own creator.—**Fred Mills**

SILVER JEWS: TANGLEWOOD NUMBERS

Drag City DC297 (CD). 2005. David Berman, prod.; Mark Nevers, David Henry, engs.; Joe Funderburk, John St. West, mix; Roger Seibel, mastering; Avi Korice, replication. AAD. TT: 34:51

Oh man, this is one heck of a sad-sack, shitfaced, tragicomedy of an album, and I do love it so, so much. Four simple hi-hat hits announce its wobbling entrance before it stumbles on over with tambourines, banjos, sci-fi synths, and jangly guitars. *Tanglewood Numbers* wraps a heavy arm around your waist and lets loose a beery hiccup: "Where's the paper bag that holds the liquor? / Just in case I feel the need to puke. / If we'd known what it'd take to get here, / Would we have chosen to?"

"Punks in the Beerlight," "I'm Getting Back Into Getting Back Into You," and my favorite, "How Can I Love You If You Won't Lie Down," are littered with this type of poetry, and David Berman's grainy baritone—sometimes weepy, sometimes crazed—is tenderly complemented by wife Cassie Berman's sweet, twangy delivery. The Bermans' perfectly messy, drunken romance is accom-

panied by an all-star cast of musicians including Stephen Malkmus, Brian Koztur, Bobby Bare, Jr., Will Oldham, and Paz Lenchantin.

—Stephen Mejias

SKULL SNAPS: SKULL SNAPS

GSF GSF-S-1011 (LP). 1973/2009. George Kerr, prod.; Ed Stasium, eng. AAA. TT: 30:71

Go ahead, admit it: Many of us harbor the same secret, and while the objects of our affection may differ, the process is the same. No, I'm not talking about uppers, downers, or sidewyers (eg, tequila). I'm speaking of the world of satisfying your whims on eBay, specifically the quest for old vinyl.

Funk LPs of the 1970s are a constant simmering obsession with me and many others. And while well-known masterpieces like Funkadelic's *Uncle Jam Wants You* or *One Nation Under a Groove* are of course great, it's the obscure titles, the one-offs, the out-of-print records, the bands that made a single great album and vanished, that are the holy grails that inspire delicious multi-year hunts.

One hard-to-find classic that's well known among deejays is the self-titled sole album by Skull Snaps, a short-lived, New York-based funk outfit. Originally released in 1973 on GSF Records, *Skull Snaps* in VG or better condition routinely sells in online auctions for upward of \$500. It was reissued on CD in the UK by Charly in the 1990s, and there have been three recent LP reissues, all on GSF: on black vinyl (2005), red vinyl (2009), and remastered in a set of two black LPs (2011) that has become as rare as the original pressing. The sound is typical early-'70s analog: warm in the extreme, but lacking some of the detail that comes from more



careful recording in a more exacting studio.

While *Skull Snaps* will never be a landmark of music history, it's enjoyable and enthusiastically played, with fairly hard-edged horns, wah-wah pedal funk, and vocals that make up in eagerness what they lack in pitch control. What really makes this a Record to Die For are the rhythms and drum patterns that have been sampled by the hip-hop world (Gang Starr, Ol' Dirty Bastard, etc.) to the point where tracks that used samples from this album are themselves now sampled. While "Didn't I Do It to You" leans toward Marvin Gaye, without Gaye's vocal gifts, "It's a New Day" is classic high-steppin' funk, with a tambourine, vocal, and drum break. Great cover art and the *D_a de los Muertos* image inside.—**Robert Baird**

THE SMITHEREENS: ESPECIALLY FOR YOU

Enigma ST-73208 (LP). 1986. Don Dixon, prod.; James A. Ball, Gray Russell, Carol Caffero, Paul Special, Frank Pankoc, engs. AAA. TT: 44:14

Especially for You isn't just a great and great-sounding rock album, it might just be the rock album. "Blood and Roses" got all the attention, and yes, it truly does reach in and grab your soul. But the real stunners are the two cuts that precede it, "In a Lonely Place" and "Behind the Wall of Sleep." Suzanne Vega's background vocal in the former is spectacular, and gorgeously showcased

by the production. And "Wall of Sleep" is pure adrenaline. The opening riff is like a '70 Hemi 'Cuda dumping the clutch at 5000rpm—the tires light up and time stops for a split-second, but before you can take a breath, they grab, and you'd better hang on: it's going to be a wild ride.—**Brian Damkroger**

SONIC YOUTH: SONIC NURSE

DGC B0002549-12 (CD). 2004. Sonic Youth, prods.; Aaron Mullan, Jim O'Rourke, John Golden, engs.; Juan Garcia, asst. eng. AAD. TT: 60:22

Sonic Youth has never struck me as a shiny, happy band. Chaos and violence are inherent aspects of their music. And while their latest album certainly isn't swinging slowly on anyone's front porch—the fat, dirty, hypnotic dueling guitars in the abrupt free-jam of "Stones" make Led Zep seem like a boy band—there is an unmistakable peacefulness and strange happiness to *Sonic Nurse*.

More than that, or maybe because of that, this album seems to be *alive* in a way that no other SY album has ever been. With the exception of "Unmade Bed," which comes in at 3:53, every song on *Sonic Nurse* is at least five minutes long; "Dripping Dream" tops out at 7:46. Yet no song is tiresome. These are broad, spaced-out, rocking, *grooving* strokes, and the band sounds very much in the moment, in love with what they're presently creating. It's not *Daydream Nation*, but it's exactly what I need from Sonic Youth right now, which is to say: We've grown together.

—Stephen Mejias

SONIC YOUTH: EXPERIMENTAL JET SET, TRASH AND NO STAR

DGC DGC24632 (CS/CD/LP). 1994. Butch Vig, prod., eng.; John

Siket, asst. eng.: Howie Weinberg, mastering. ADD? TT: 47:37

THE FLAMING LIPS: CLOUDS TASTE METALLIC

Warner Bros. 45911 (CS/CD/LP). 1995. The Flaming Lips, Dave Fridmann, prods., engs. ADD? TT: 47:37

 *Experimental Jet Set, Trash and No Star*, Sonic Youth's 10th record and the last to feature their classic lineup (Thurston Moore and Lee Ranaldo on guitars, Kim Gordon on bass, Steve Shelley on drums), was released during my senior year in high school. I owned it on cassette, and I'd be sure to grab it before jumping into Kim's car for long rides down Interstate 4, from Deltona to Orlando or Daytona Beach or nowhere at all. All we ever needed was a full tank of gas, the highway's broken white lines, and a starlit sky to lead us on and on. Up front, Kim and Stephanie would roll down the windows and exhale thick smoke from their Marlboros, while in the darkness of the cluttered back seat I nodded my head to the confident, relentless rhythms, searched for meaning in the strange lyrics, and committed to memory every bold and violent guitar line. Inside our minds, I imagine, we heard the same thing: the sound of freedom and possibility. Perfect and purposeful from beginning to end, *Experimental* was recorded by Butch Vig at New York City's Sear Sound and mastered by Howie Weinberg at Masterdisk. The sound is just like the music—open, beautiful, alive. (XVII-11)

A year later, I had moved from Florida back to New Jersey and was attending Fairleigh Dickinson University, where I fell in love with a blue-haired, red-lipped girl named Michelle. One painfully cold winter night, just before Christmas, she grabbed my hand and pulled me

along as she raced to catch the last bus from Teaneck to Hoboken. We arrived at a small rock club called Maxwell's, to see a band I knew nothing about. "The Flaming Lips," she told me, "are amazing!" I was skeptical until the band took the stage. After four clicks of the drum sticks, the side walls and ceiling and everything within sight—mike stands, monitors, even the band's gear—went ablaze with strings of bright Christmas lights. It was in this dream of color that the Lips tore through "Christmas at the Zoo," "Lightning Strikes the Postman," "Kim's Watermelon Gun," and the rest of *Clouds Taste Metallic*, making very clear that the band was on the verge of superstardom. While that live performance remains one of my all-time favorites, listening at home is an experience completely different but no less magical. Recorded by Dave Fridmann, *Clouds Taste Metallic* leaps, whizzes, and twirls through the listening room with enough vibrant, realistic color and impact to pull me back in time and send chills through my entire body.

—Stephen Mejias

THE SPENCER DAVIS GROUP:

THE BEST OF THE SPENCER DAVIS GROUP

EMI America CDP 7 46598 2 (CD). 1987. AAD? TT: 34:06

 If you've had your fill of Auto-Tuned and/or Pro Tooled tunes and crave musical authenticity, travel back to mid-'60s British R&B—specifically, to this collection. It may have been guitarist Spencer Davis's group, but it was Steve Winwood's singing and keyboards that put the band over the top with two Stateside megahits, "Gimme Some Lovin'" and "I'm a Man." The formula for all 12 tracks here is simple enough: The group pours

heavy doses of truth and soul into each tune, and Winwood puts it over the top. That's all, folks!

—Steve Guttenberg

SPIRIT: TWELVE DREAMS OF DR. SARDONICUS

Epic/Legacy EK 65003 (CD). 1970/1996. David Briggs, prod., eng.: Bob Irwin, reissue prod. AAD. TT: 54:20

 There never was and never will be an American rock band quite so willfully (perversely?) eclectic as Spirit. Five colliding musical visions (six, if you count producer Briggs's) magically meshed on their fourth LP, from 1970: a masterpiece of psych, folk, pop, and rock. The quasi-concept album is a broad-reaching countercultural commentary equal parts utopian ideals and post-Altamont cynicism. Guitarist Randy California passed away in a tragic drowning incident in 1997, but luckily, the year before, had penned detailed liner notes for this reissue—expanded with four bonus tracks—of his band's acknowledged classic. I interviewed him in the early 1990s, and he remains for me an inspiring hero. (xxvi-2)—Fred Mills

STEELY DAN: CAN'T BUY A THRILL

ABC/Speakers Corner 111886-1 (LP). 2000. Gary Katz, prod.; Roger Nichols, eng.; Tim Weston, asst. eng. AAA. TT: 40:39

 In the now-teeming world of new LP reissues, there are the cheapies, the reasonably heavy, and the big boys: sumo vinyl. If it's those extra-heavy pressings that make you salivate, this weighty gem is a Joe Louis of the reissue world. While the sound of the original was always good, this hard, carefully pressed platter seems to have more detail and presence. Of the 44 different CD and

LP pressings of *Can't Buy a Thrill*, this is the one to have: you'll never need or want another. Then there's that glorious music. Most bands tend to pack all their best ideas into their first recordings, and this one is no exception, though Donald Fagen and Walter Becker would come up with many more rewarding twists and turns in their short but glorious career. While FM radio play back in the day may have worn out certain tracks, such as the two side openers, "Do it Again," and "Reelin' in the Years," it's the deeper tracks that make this album such a classic—such as the rambunctious harmony vocals and Elliot Randall's solo in "Kings," Skunk Baxter's moaning steel guitar and the line "Am I myself or just another freak" in "Fire in the Hole," and David Palmer's plaintive vocal in the sublime "Brooklyn (Owes the Charmer Under Me)." There's not a wrong melodic turn on the entire album, which was recorded in L.A. by a band of New Yorkers who would forever change the definition of *soul music*.—Robert Baird

STEPHEN STILLS: MANASSAS

Atlantic 82808-2 (2 CDs). 1972/1995. Stephen Stills, Chris Hillman, Dallas Taylor, prods.; Ronnie Albert, Howard Albert, engs. AAD. TT: 72:00

 While Stephen Stills was basking in the glow of his heroics in the early-'70s supergroup Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, he, like everyone else in the band, was pursuing his own projects. *Manassas*, originally released on two LPs and receiving little notice compared to CSN&Y, captures Stills at his creative apex, fronting an accomplished session band that included ex-Byrd Chris Hillman and that nails the country-rock essence of the leader's 21 songs. What

makes this set so remarkable is that Stills & Co. mix it up unlike any pop band of the era (and few since), infusing the proceedings with Afro-Cuban rhythms (the jazz-inflected "Cuban Bluegrass," set aflame by Joe Lala's percussion), bluegrass (the fiddle- and mandolin-charged "Fallen Eagle"), country gospel (the sober "Jesus Gave Love Away for Free"), and swampy electric blues ("Jet Set"). While the best of CSN&Y sounds dated from overexposure, *Manassas* today sounds as fresh as it did when it first arrived.

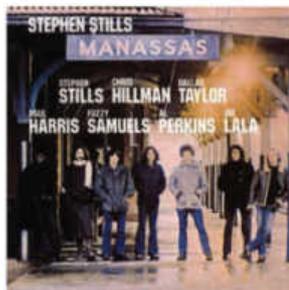
—Dan Ouellette

SUFJAN STEVENS: ILLINOISE

Asthmatic Kitty AKR014 (CD). 2005. Sufjan Stevens, prod., eng.; Alan Duches, mastering. ADD. TT: 74:15

I tried to ignore the hype surrounding Sufjan Stevens' ambitious plan to record a tribute album for each of our 50 states. It sounded like some sort of hyperintellectual hipster gimmick. And really: How would he ever make it to 50? I would not make the commitment. *Michigan* came and went. *Illinoise* arrived and I shrugged my shoulders.

When my stubbornness finally collapsed beneath the recommendation of a music-loving friend, I found *Illinoise* to be an absolutely beautiful mess of UFO sightings, serial killers, architects, blue-collared poets, wars, wasp attacks, and cream of wheat—all in an impossibly seamless state flag of triumphant jazz, wispy folk, silly show tunes, and playful jingles layered with whirlwinds of saxophones, sleigh bells, accordions, vibraphones, high-flying choruses, and undeniable hooks. At 74 minutes, *Illinoise* requires a commitment, but with all of its pleasures,



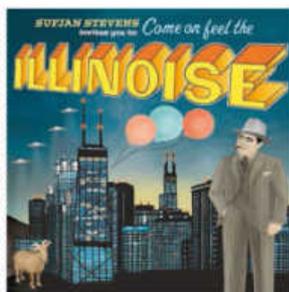
thrills, history, and soul, it's a commitment I'm now happy to make. I plan on going back and visiting *Michigan*, and I look forward to the 48 states to come.—Stephen Mejias

SWANS: THE SEER

Young God YG45 (2 CDs/3 LPs/WAV). 2012. Michael Gira, prod.; Kevin McMahon, Bryce Goggin, engs.; Doug Henderson, mastering. DDD? TT: 119:20

Michael Gira's Swans is one of those bands that I'd known about forever but had somehow managed to neglect until now. Why did I wait so long?! Anchored by its 30-minute title track, the band's 12th full-length album is a thrilling, unsettling, uncompromising masterpiece—my favorite album of 2012. Swans employ acoustic and electric guitars, thunderous percussion, harmonica, violin, clarinet, cello, piano, vibraphone, accordion, bells, samples, synthesizers, and more, fusing no wave, post-punk, primal blues, and the most violent noise. It's a terrifying and beautiful work, and by this time next year I fully expect to have devoured the band's entire catalog.

—Stephen Mejias



JUNE TABOR & THE OYSTER BAND: FREEDOM AND RAIN

Rykodisc CD-10194 (CD). 1990. Oyster Band, prods.; John Ravenhall, eng. AAD. TT: 38:57

This hauntingly beautiful record is the product of a collaboration between the crepuscular vocals of the legendary June Tabor and the Celtic roots rock of the Oyster Band. Both entities have strong musical personalities of their own; together they make a perfect unit, with bassist Chopper and drummer Russell Lax carving out a stark architecture for the perfectly balanced colors of Tabor's lead vocals and harmonies from Alan Prosser and John Jones. The balance of material is superb, from a tart rendition of Shane McGowan's "Lullaby of London" through Richard Thompson's foreboding "Night Comes In," Billy Bragg's breakup anthem "Valentine's Day Is Over," and Tabor's magnificent reading of Lou Reed's Velvets vehicle for Nico, "All Tomorrow's Parties."—John Swenson

TALKING HEADS: BRICK

Rhino 08122 74722 2 1 (8 DualDiscs). 1977-1988/2005.

Talking Heads, Andy Zaks, prods.; E.T. Thorngren, Jerry Harrison, multichannel remix; Ted Jenson, mastering. Full list of contents at <http://talking-heads.net/brick.html>. ADD. TT: 451:00

Talk about a blockbuster! Rhino has underwritten the remixing of the Talking Heads' entire discography in 24-bit/96kHz multichannel sound and reissued it on eight DualDiscs. Bonus tracks have been added to the DVD-Audio and CD sides, including multiple video tracks with alternative takes. They've packaged the results in a classy white plastic brick, each disc retaining its original artwork. The previously unreleased material and alternate takes are fascinating, but the reason to get *Brick* is the consistently successful and thrilling multichannel mixes, which are the best I've heard. The surround effects are not distracting but part and parcel of the presentation—the thrust of the music is always up-front, while the surround channels immerse the listener in an aural context that is supportive and expansive. Beyond that, the clarity, in two or 5.1 channels, is such that even those intimately familiar with the original editions will hear this music completely anew.

—Kalman Rubinson

TALK TALK: LAUGHING STOCK

Verve 847-717-2 (UK CD). 1991. Tim Friese-Greene, prod.; Phill Brown, eng. AAD. TT: 43:29

Although Craig Roseberry made this fifth and final album from the UK's Talk Talk one of his 2004 "Records to Die For," I was late to the party, listening to the band's two post-rock albums only after reading engineer Phill Brown's autobiography, *Are We Still Rolling?* I was aware of Brown's ability to make audiophile-quality rock recordings with true

dynamic range and a real-sounding sense of space from Steve Winwood's first solo record, which was one of my "R2D4" selections for 2012. But when I read how *Laughing Stock* had been made—drummer Lee Harris playing unaccompanied patterns and grooves for 12 hours at a time, miked with a single Neumann U47 30' away in London's Wessex Studio, with spot mikes on the snare and kick drums—I had to hear the result. Brown ended up with 48 reels of 2" tape from which producer, keyboardist, and songwriter Tim Friese-Greene and singer-songwriter-guitarist/keyboardist Mark Hollis would select the drum take they liked best. From that take they would then create a song by overdubbing all instrumental and vocal parts. The result is a collection of sonically sophisticated explorations of space and groove that Roseberry described as "a haunting, meditative, intricate masterpiece." I can't say it better—I turn to this extraordinary album when I need to be transported into alternate worlds and different times—but the music will *not* be for everyone. The best summing up is given by Brown: "I settled Sally [wife], Becca and James [children] in front of my 12" Tannoy speakers and turned out all the lights. 'I just want 40 minutes of your time to play you what I have been up to for the past year,' I said. . . . I then played them the whole of *Laughing Stock* at a moderately loud volume. Nobody said a word. When it was finished Sally turned on the lights, and life continued as before. She made no comment on the album and never listened to it again." We've all been there! (XXVII-2)—**John Atkinson**

TEDDYBEARS: DEVIL'S MUSIC

Big Beat/Atlantic 2527035 (CD).



2011. Teddybears, prods.: Seb Roc, Herman Söderström, Graham Marsh, Janne Hansson, Joe Corey, engs. AAD. TT: 34:06

T Teddybears are a longtime Swedish production team that appears onstage and in videos in bear outfits. Who knew they secretly wanted to retrofit rock'n'roll? But that's just what they've done here. Rock'n'roll? Oh, it used to go like that; now it goes like this. "Rocket Scientist," with a sexy vocal from Eve, lays down the terms—"I'm the robot Elvis rocking my bionic pelvis . . . I am the killer shaking up some old rock and roll, fool"—and offers up the refrain of the year: "Them drum machines ain't got no soul." Elsewhere, "Get Fresh With You" borrows unashamedly from "Louie Louie" but sets it in a present-day inner-city neighborhood, and Cee Lo Green raids the funk pantry for the catty "Cho Cha." The crème de résistance is "Devil's Music," which gives the classic Bo Diddley/Johnny Otis shave-and-a-haircut riff a Mohawk, snips courtesy Robert Johnson, Eddie Van Halen, and Jimmy Page. "Better watch out for that devil's music / It's got a hold of my soul." Oh yeah.

—**Leland Rucker**

ALLEN TOUSSAINT: SOUTHERN NIGHTS

Reprise MS 2186 (LP). 1975. Allen Toussaint, Marshall Sehorn, prods.: Ken Laxton, Roberta Grace, engs. AAA. TT: 35:32

T Over the course of the past half century, Allen Toussaint (1938–2015) was the most important musi-

cian of New Orleans music: a peerless producer, songwriter, performer, organizer, conceptualist, and public persona, and a man who had time to listen to everyone he met and a kind word for all. *Southern Nights*, his masterpiece, underscores the subtlety of his approach to music. Toussaint was a master craftsman in the studio, with an unerring ear for popular success in his productions of other people's music, but his own records are understated, magnificent works of art. The title track is well known for the thumping hayride that Glen Campbell turned it into, but Toussaint's original shimmers like gossamer in an ethereal whisper that actually evokes the spooky feeling of a humid night in subtropical Louisiana, when the gentle Gulf breezes caress the live-oak leaves into a soothing, rustling dreamscape. This aural fantasy shows a great artist at work on material that is beyond commercial considerations.—**John Swenson**

THE TRIFFIDS: BORN SANDY DEVOTIONAL

Domino DNO103 (CD). 1986/2006. Gil Norton, prod.; Nick Mainsbridge, eng. AAD? TT: 42:32

T "She said, 'What's the matter now, loverboy / has the cat run off with your tongue?,' swoons David McComb on "The Seabirds," a string-sweetened, steel-ached elegy. "Are you drinking to get maudlin / or are you drinking to get numb?" It's still a tough question to answer thinking of the Triffids frontman, who died in February 1999 at the age of 37. This Australian "city & western" sextet shared a strong sense of romantic majesty with their better-known peers the Go-Betweens, as well as the same dark literary sensibility (or at least the same fondness for Leonard Cohen) as Nick



Cave. The band's acknowledged masterpiece, *Born Sandy Devotional*, includes one epic on the order of "Cortez the Killer" ("Lonely Stretch"), one song that improves on the Moe Tucker album-ending blueprint ("Tender Is the Night"), and, above all, "Wide Open Road," which embodies both the forlorn lonely sound of heart-break and the joyous solitary sound of Oz itself, from dirt to sea to sky. (XXIV-2)

—**Jason Cohen**

TV ON THE RADIO: RETURN TO COOKIE MOUNTAIN

4AD/Interscope CAD 2607 (CD). 2006. David Sitek, prod.; Chris Moore, eng. AAD? TT: 55:31

T Return to Cookie Mountain, TV On The Radio's sophomore effort is, by far, my favorite album of the year. If I wanted to be bold and silly about it, I'd say *Return to Cookie Mountain* is, by far, the very best album of the year. Period. And if I wanted to go even further, I'd say that TV On The Radio is the most important band in rock'n'roll right now. Exclamation mark.

This is an odd and unsettling, droning and magical mess of avant-pop, noise, punk, doo-wop, hip-hop, and soul that not only rewards its listener, but completely mystifies. Mystifies! Despite the experimentalism here—songs feature dense layers of distortion, sitars and synthesizers, violin and cello and clarinet, samples and saxophones accompanied by lyrics about werewolves, love, and war—TV On The

Radio has somehow created an addictive and vital pop album. If all this sounds like a crapload of reviewer hyperbole, then please just listen for yourself. —**Stephen Mejias**

U2:
ACHTUNG BABY: 20TH ANNIVERSARY DELUXE EDITION

Island Universal B0016043-02 (2 CDs). 1991/2011. Daniel Lanois, Steve Lillywhite, Brian Eno, prod., mix; Flood, eng., mix. ADD. TT: 78:30

 Only the greatest rock bands are able to completely transform their music in response to the changing culture they reflect. U2 achieved this feat on the remarkable *Achtung Baby*, which allowed the band to morph from the 1980s arena rock displayed on *Rattle and Hum* to the interactive extravaganza of *Zooropa*. It's not surprising that this feat nearly destroyed the group; rebirth ain't pretty, but it's worth it. The original release still sounds glorious—"Mysterious Ways," "Until the End of the World," "Even Better Than the Real Thing," and "One" are all defining moments in rock history—but the B-sides and remixes of disc 2 flesh out this music so well that this is one of the few examples of an anniversary release that actually improves on the original.

—**John Swenson**

U2:
WAR

Island/UME B0010949-02 (2 CDs). 1983/2008. Steve Lillywhite, Bill Whelan, prods.; Paul Thomas, Kevin Killen, engs.; Cheryl Engels, Arníe Acosta, remastering (overseen by The Edge). AAD. TT: 111:27

 This edition of the 1983 album *War*, part of Universal's ambitious overhaul of U2's back catalog, boasts a bonus disc comprising a dozen remixes, rarities, live tracks, and B-sides. It's the significance of the original LP, however—key cuts such

as the soaring anthem "New Year's Day" and the violin-fueled swooner "Drowning Man," and notwithstanding the glummy rocker "The Refugee"—that gives the record its lasting resonance. *War* decisively catapulted the Irish band to international prominence. Me too, in a sense: after witnessing the opening date of the US *War* tour, I was inspired to start a U2 fanzine, and began to gradually develop sufficient chops and reputation to turn professional journalist. Now you know who to blame.

—**Fred Mills**

VELVET CRUSH:
TEENAGE SYMPHONIES TO GOD

Sony 550/Creation 842914064330 (CD). 2006. Mitch Easter, prod., eng.; Velvet Crush, prods.; Lloyd Puckett, eng. AAD? TT: 45:52

 Back in the early 1990s, when rock music had just begun its violent overthrow of my brain, I wrote a local music column for an arts weekly in Providence, Rhode Island. The scene in my little town was fertile at the time, with able bands all vying for post-Nirvana major-label dollars. At the time, Velvet Crush was the ablest, a big fish in a small pond, marked by all the right influences, decked out in all the right clothes, and seen in all the right places. *Teenage Symphonies to God* is the band's masterwork and the answer to the question: What would happen if indie rockers merged the Byrds' *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* with the Stones' *Exile on Main Street*?—**Bob Gulla**

VIVIAN GIRLS:
EVERYTHING GOES WRONG

In The Red ITR 179 (LP). 2009. Mike McHugh, prod., eng. AAD? TT: 36:01

 It really is the greatest thing: Listening to this record on the hi-fi immediately takes me back to that

strange, magical night at Bamboo Beach in the sandy town of Isabela, Puerto Rico, the perfect setting for a Vivian Girls performance. With a smile that illuminates the entire island, Kickball Katy is just inches away, playing these tugging, lassoing riffs on her little Hofner bass; Cassie Ramone is off to the right, kneeling on the floor with her Fender Strat, reverb and the most radiant noise shooting off like white-hot stars in the overwhelming sky; Ali, in bright-red, heart-shaped sunglasses, pounds the kit with lightning rolls and furious passion. All together now, so simply, and pulsing with such great life, they sing, over and over again: "I can't, I can't, can't get over you."—**Stephen Mejias**

SON VOLT:
TRACE

Warner Bros. 46010-2 (CD). 1995. Son Volt, Brian Paulson, prods.; Hans Buff, Steve McKinstry, engs. AAD? TT: 42:12

 It's a fun—and maybe impossible—exercise to pick the best album to come out of the ashes of alt-country darlings Uncle Tupelo, and Wilco has certainly waxed a couple records to die for (*Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* and *A Ghost Is Born*). But *Trace*, the debut from Jay Farrar's then-fledgling band, is such a consistent affair in terms of tunefulness and sound that it would also be a wise choice. It's a musical journey filled with torrents of ragged, screeching guitars leavened with melodic twang and that bit of innocence that comes from Farrar's old-soul voice—and from his songs, which morph masterfully from one to the next while evoking dark nights, faraway places, and time fading away. The one nonoriginal here, the album-ending "Mystifies Me," from Ron Wood's 1974 beauty, *I've Got My Own Album to Do*, fits in sweetly. (XIX-1)—**David Sokol**

RUFUS WAINWRIGHT:
WANT ONE

DreamWorks B0000896-12 (CD). 2003. Marius deVries, prod., eng.; John Holbrook, Bob Ebeling, Jack McKeever, Andy Bradfield, engs. AAD? TT: 58:51

 Three years before returning to the scene and courageously reconstructing Judy Garland's classic 1961 Carnegie Hall concert, Rufus Wainwright created this gem of his own. A remarkable album that feels like the soundtrack to a gripping Broadway show for the new millennium, *Want One* is steeped in vulnerability, sexuality, romanticism, hope, and curiosity. Many of the songs, such as "I Don't Know What It Is," with its slow build and lyrical nod to Garland herself, are propelled by Wainwright's driving piano playing and have the melodic grandeur of classic late-1960s Beatles and Beach Boys. Really! And his voice, a supple tenor, is a thing of beauty. The supporting cast of musicians includes guitarist Charlie Sexton; drummer Levon Helm; Wainwright's mom, Kate McGarrigle, on banjo and accordion; and sister Martha Wainwright. Wainwright's dad, Loudon III, doesn't perform, but makes a cameo in the lyrics of the final song, "Dinner at Eight," about a tense father-son dinner date years earlier. It's provocative and emotional, and very different from the twisted song inspired by breastfeeding that illustrious Dad wrote and recorded, in 1971, about his then-baby son: "Rufus Is a Tit Man."

—**David Sokol**

TOM WAITS:
MULE VARIATIONS

Anti- 86547-1 (2 LPs). 1999. Tom Waits, Kathleen Brennan, prods.; Oz Fritz, Jacquire King, engs. AAA. TT: 70:33

 I first heard Tom Waits's wit and gravel in 1976,

on the way to a Rick Derringer/Foghat concert a friend had invited me to at the last minute. In the back seat of my friend's older brother's car, which I was not old enough to drive, I sat drinking Bud tall boys. "The Piano Has Been Drinking" caught my ear, tickled my brain, and served as my introduction to a lifelong love affair with Waits's music. And it wasn't just about music. It was about escaping a suffocating insipid sameness perhaps best expressed by Rick Derringer's performance of "Rock and Roll, Hoochie Koo" later that evening. Waits's *Small Change* offered hope, humor, and dreams.

Fast-forward twenty-odd years to *Mule Variations*, for which Waits corralled all of the voices he'd picked up, screeching some through a megaphone like a carnival barker offering depraved salvation. Marc Ribot, Charlie Musselwhite, and a host of other great players help move the music forward as Waits stomps around exploring some of his favorite haunts: religion, paranoia, love, loss, telling all his stories with glee, melancholy, doom, and, ultimately, redemption. "Come down off the cross. We can use the wood. Come on up to the house." (xx-8)

—Michael Lavorgna

TOM WAITS: RAIN DOGS

Island 422 826 382-2 (CD). 1985. Tom Waits, prod.; Robert Musso, Howie Weinberg, engs.; Dennis Ferrante, Tom Gonzales, Jeff Lippay, asst. engs. AAD. TT: 53:46

 My band broke up on the same day that my new apartment was broken into. Among other, more easily replaceable things, my guitar was stolen. It was a bad, bad day. For several days after, music did nothing but upset me. I didn't want to hear or play a single note.

When I did turn to music for comfort, there was only one album that I found bearable: Tom Waits' *Rain Dogs*.

It seems like a strange choice even to me, but I think it has something to do with the way the album vacillates between odd and playful songs, such as "Singapore" and "Cemetery Polka," and heart-wrenching blues like my absolute favorite, "Hang Down Your Head." *Rain Dogs* lets you get lost but doesn't let you go too far away. It's about being insane and catching a train and finding that home is everywhere. It was just what I needed.

As I write this, it occurs to me that I should go out and buy a dozen more copies of *Rain Dogs* to pass out to all my friends who were so supportive, who offered me places to stay and guitars to play. Because what I learned from all this is that nothing much matters as long as I've got my friends. —Stephen Mejias

SCOTT WALKER: THE DRIFT

4AD CAD 2603 (2 180gm LPs/CD). 2006. Scott Walker, Peter Walsh, prods. AAA/AAD.

 Scott Walker's *The Drift*, the elusive cult artist's first album since 1994's *Tilt*, is an intense, often frightening series of musical narratives exploring life's darker crevices. Walker's quavering baritone, carefully placed sound effects, and powerful orchestrations, all superbly recorded, add to the hyperpleasure and hyperpain of this gorgeous package; the vinyl edition comes complete with full-sized libretto. (XXIX-7)

—Michael Fremer

SCOTT WALKER + SUNN O))): SOUSED

4AD EAD3428A (24/96 download). 2014. Scott Walker, Peter Walsh, prods. DDD? TT: 48:32

 Scott Walker's voice could be described

as demonic. This meeting of Walker with Stephen O'Malley and Greg Anderson, of drone-metal band Sunn O))), provides the perfect background/foreground to Walker's twisted tales and crazy crooning. "When you first go into the room it's like entering a furnace . . . a furnace of sound," says Walker of working with Sunn O))). Perfect. Get *Soused*, strap yourself in, and turn it up to 11. —Michael Lavorgna

M. WARD: A WASTELAND COMPANION

Merge MRG433 (CD). 2012. M Ward, prod.; Mike Coykendall, John Parish, Alistair Chant, Eric Wofford, Tom Schick, engs. DDD? TT: 36:42

 At first, this quirky collection of songs, recorded in eight studios around the US and in the UK, struck me as just that—quirky. The recording and sound quality varied wildly from track to track, as did the themes and emotions of the songs themselves. But for some reason, I just couldn't take it out of my CD player, and the more I listened, the more I liked it. I grew to appreciate the scope and landscape being constructed, and the up-tempo pop of "Primitive Girl" and "Sweetheart" had me returning to this disc again and again. —Brian Damkroger

WAS (NOT WAS): BORN TO LAUGH AT TORNADOES

Geffen GEF 25592 (UK LP). 1983. Don Was, prod., mix; Jack Tann, David Was, prods.; Robert Kinkel, asst. eng.; Duane Bradley, Ken Collier, mix. AAA. TT: 35:31

 I don't know how this LP found its way into my collection in the early 1980s, but I've no regrets. Having lost it for years, I've now rediscovered what turns out to be a real gem. It's beautifully recorded throughout, and shows such great variety in both style and personnel that catego-

rization is impossible. Each track comes as a fresh surprise, and none more than the last, "Zaz Turned Blue," which features a delightful performance by classic torch singer Mel Tormé. Other guest singers include Mitch Ryder and Ozzy Osbourne. And the front cover is wonderful, so go for the vinyl.

—Paul Messenger

GILLIAN WELCH: THE HARROW & THE HARVEST

Acony ACNY 1109 (CD). 2011. David Rawlings, prod.; Matt Andrews, eng. AAD. TT: 46:07

 Gillian Welch is that rarity in contemporary folk music: the real deal. She writes without pretense, performs without affectation, and creates music that can stand alongside almost anything in the American traditional canon in capturing the light and shadow of rural life. As a writer, Welch's melodic and narrative gifts are equally strong, and those strengths appear to be at their zenith throughout this dark, beautiful collection.

On the all-acoustic *The Harrow & the Harvest*, longtime musical partner David Rawlings plays Brooks Smith to Welch's Jascha Heifetz, supporting her with appropriately sparse, dark-toned vocal harmonies and compelling steel-string guitar fills. The recording quality is pretty good, and the sleeve art kicks ass. A wonderful album. (XXXV-2)—Art Dudley

GILLIAN WELCH: THE HARROW & THE HARVEST

Acony ACNY1109 (CD). 2011. David Rawlings, prod.; Matt Andrews, eng. AAD. TT: 46:07

 On this album, eight years in the making, singer-songwriter Gillian Welch and guitarist David Rawlings, longtime partners who perform as the band Gillian Welch, have actually become one instrument,



one voice. Except for a banjo, a trace of harmonica, and some knee slapping, it's just two voices and two guitars working in perfect equanimity. The 10 songs, all cowritten by the pair, often seem foreboding and desperate, but you're not quite sure why. Iconic Civil War images linger and fade: camptown men, Gatling guns, silver daggers, Tennessee, Asheville boys, six white horses, the Dixie line. And, oh, the whiskey. No wasted notes. No frills. This is the best argument for not hurrying music I have ever heard. Fully realized folk music. —Leland Rucker

WHAT MADE MILWAUKEE FAMOUS:

TRYING TO NEVER CATCH UP

Barsuk BARK57 (CD). 2006. Michael Kingcaid, Drew Patrizi, Jim Eno, prods., engs.; Lars Goransson, prod.; Matthew Barnhart, eng. DDD. TT: 48:23

Passing through Jeff Buckley, the Cars, Franz Ferdinand, Interpol, Iron & Wine, Modest Mouse, Queens of the Stone Age, the Shins, Spoon, the Strokes, and Weezer en route to nowhere, the (revamped) debut album from Austin band What Made Milwaukee Famous never jells and never cares. The music, if schizophrenic, is great, with impeccable craft and a deft pop sense that eases the album's transitions over tight alt-rock that's laced with irony but never devoid of sincerity. The journey is exhilarating, the dense textures and bright



melodies providing copious scenery while the listener wonders at Milwaukee's shifts in consciousness.

—Ben Finane

THE WHO: A QUICK ONE

MCA 11267 (CD). 1966/1995. Kit Lambert, prod. AAD? TT: 56:32

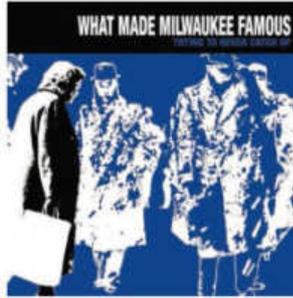
The discrepancy between the different versions of the Who's second album, released in the UK as *A Quick One* and in the US as *Happy Jack* after that song became a Top 40 hit, was resolved in this reissue, which includes all the songs from both albums (plus extras), and shows all facets of the band: the balance of savage twang and ethereal beauty in Pete Townshend's songwriting for the "mini-opera" "A Quick One While He's Away"; the macabre wit of John Entwistle's "Boris the Spider" and "Whiskey Man"; Keith Moon's surf-music obsession reflected in covers of "Barbara Ann" and "Bucket T"; and the extraordinary vocal harmonies created by the combination of lead singer Roger Daltrey's tenor with Townshend's soprano and Entwistle's baritone.

—John Swenson

THE WHO: BY NUMBERS

MCA MCAD-11493 (CD). 1975/1996. Glyn Johns, orig. prod.; Jon Astley, Andy Macpherson, reissue prods., remix. AAD? TT: 49:51

Released in October 1975, *By Numbers* was the Who's first studio release



following the ultra-ambitious *Quadrophenia* of two years earlier, and their last before Keith Moon's death. Kind of the Led Zeppelin III of Who albums, it's one of their most understated and underappreciated—and one of their best. Pete Townshend was in an introspective mindset at the time, and while he could lighten things up with ear candy like "Squeeze Box," for most of the rest of this album he went deep. He examines companionship in the chilling "How Many Friends," in which singer Roger Daltrey asks, "How many friends have I really got?" and quickly answers himself: "You can count 'em on one hand." And in the gorgeous "Blue, Red and Grey," Townshend, who sings this song and accompanies himself on ukulele, takes a deep breath and exults in the oft-overlooked beauty that is everywhere, concluding, "I like every minute of the day." The band, especially Moon, sounds superb throughout, abetted on four tracks by the great Nicky Hopkins on piano, who helps accentuate the songs' gentler sides. Bassist and cover artist John Entwistle's "Success Story" is a gem, a prescient three-minute glimpse into the fickle, fleeting realities of rock stardom. The three live bonus tracks are fierce, and include Moon's loopy introduction to "Squeeze Box." Making this stellar CD reissue even better is a fascinating contextual essay by omnipresent journalist John Swenson. And if you're in the



market for a *Memoir to Die For*, check out Townshend's *Who I Am*. Like much of the Who's best work, it's probing and intensely honest.

—David Sokol

THE WILD TCHOUPITOULAS: THE WILD TCHOUPITOULAS

Fontana Island 1625399082 (CD). 1976/1992. Allen Toussaint, prod., eng. AAD. TT: 37:12

This is one record I never grow tired of listening to—it keeps revealing deeper secrets 35 years after it was made. The Wild Tchoupitoulas represent the core identity of the legendary Neville family of New Orleans. Family elder George Landry, aka Big Chief Jolly in this Black Indian gang, enlisted the help of New Orleans funk pioneers the Meters, led by his nephew Art Neville on keyboards, and their producer, Allen Toussaint, to record a collection of Mardi Gras Indian chants arranged for a full band. Art and his three brothers—Cyril, Aaron, and Charles—would go on to form the Neville Brothers after singing together here. Classic Black Indian folklore—"Brother John," "Meet de Boys on the Battlefield," "Indian Red," "Big Chief Got a Golden Crown"—was codified for general consumption on this session, and New Orleans music has never been the same. —John Swenson

LUCINDA WILLIAMS: DOWN WHERE THE SPIRIT MEETS THE

BONE

Highway 20 H2001 (2 CDs), 2014. Lucinda Williams, Greg Leisz, Tom Overby, prods.: David Bianco, eng. AAD? TT: 103:12

 This is the kind of collection that, once upon a time in the 1970s, gave two-disc sets a legendary luster. A throwback to vintage country-funk swamp pop, it conjures the contradictory elements that made us fall in love with Williams in the first place: saucy yet sensitive vocals abetted by rutting-in-the-dirt twang and leavened-by-angels jangle, plus intimate turns of phrase that betray the hurt of an old soul and the ecstasy of one eternally young. It may be cheating to predict Desert Island Disc status for an album barely four months old as this sees print, but given the stark contrast between Williams's initial run of classics and her string of latter-day letdowns, *DWTSMTB* is more than just a comeback—it's a goddam reaffirmation.—**Fred Mills**

JESSE WINCHESTER: HUMOUR ME

Sugar Hill SH-CD-1023 (CD), 1988. Jesse Winchester, prod.: Bill Vorn Dick, prod., eng.: Jim Loyd, mastering. ADD. TT: 52:21

 Jesse Winchester never quite caught the break his artistry deserved, and two years ago he died. *Humour Me* is country, a bit of Caribbean, lots of quiet soul—the restraint of Al Green can be heard in almost every track, especially in the slow smolder of “I Want to Mean Something to You.” And look at the players on this album of pristine country pop: Russ Barenberg, Sam Bush, Jerry Douglas, Béla Fleck, Edgar Meyer, Mark O'Connor. The tunes are polished, the melodies memorable, and Winchester's languid phrasing and velvety voice—he had the sweetest falsetto in the business—make each track a primer in the art of song in-

terpretation. Winchester was that great rarity: an emotionally mature pop musician with a healthy respect for the complexities of life and love. He articulates subtle states of heart and mind, nuances of rueful regret and acceptance, that are part of every life but that even sensitive singer-songwriters seem to have trouble discerning. As in all his albums, he never grandstands—he seems the opposite of the romantic cliché of the dark, dangerous, intense, love-'em-and-leave-'em guitar-slinger. As he says in “Pushover”: “I'm a pushover, there ain't nothin' to me / A pushover, you can see right through me / Some people may say it ain't true / Oh but hey, baby, maybe they don't push like you.”

It's hard to top the beauty of the title track, a double waltz in 6/8 with a lovely loping tune to which these words are exquisitely sung: “Yesterday and just around the corner / Oh I was playing cowboys in the sun / I had a little dog that really loved me / There's times I feel like she was the only one // O darlin', you know you I'm just foolin' / You know I know your love for me is true // I remember loving Susan Parker / That's not the kind of thing that you'd forget / It's funny you know sometimes I imagine / I'm kinda sweet on Susan Parker yet // Oh darlin', you know I'm just fooling / You know the only one for me is you / Humour me, humour me / Oh I would pay no mind if I were you.” We've all been there, if perhaps few of us have known ourselves well enough to sing that chorus. And I've heard it described in no other song.

Winchester was a devout believer all his life, and seemed to take closest to heart the core teachings of compassion. His take on sinners, “They Just Can't Help Themselves,” is more loving than the sermons of most

preachers I've heard: “They hear a little voice / That lives down in their soul / saying 'Let's go and find a cozy little Hell' / And no one tells them No / And they just can't help themselves.” The gentleness with which Winchester sings these lines is tender beyond belief. You'll have to hear it for yourself.

A beautiful lesson in how to live a loving life. Irresistible. (XII-3)—**Richard Lehnert**

STEVE WINWOOD: STEVE WINWOOD

Island 842 774-2 (CD), 1977. Steve Winwood, Chris Blackwell, Mark Miller Mundy, prods.: Phil Brown, eng.: Robert Ash, Ray Doyle, asst. engs.: Lee Hulko (Sterling Sound), CD mastering. AAD. TT: 37:25

 At the fall 2011 AES Convention in New York, I was invited to take part in a workshop on “The Loudness Wars,” chaired by Thomas Lund, then with TC Electronic. As part of the preparation of my segment, I went hunting for rock albums with respectable dynamic range. Not surprisingly, I couldn't find any from this century that weren't dynamically compromised. But among the jewels I did discover was Steve Winwood's first solo record. Overshadowed in sales by the subsequent *Arc of a Diver*, the LP release of *Steve Winwood* was in constant rotation on my Linn at the end of the 1970s, and when I ripped the CD into my iTunes library, Pure Music's meters informed me that this album had as much dynamic range as a good classical recording, its crest factor exceeding 20dB much of the time.

Musically, the album wears its 35 years well. From the loping rhythm of the opener, “Hold On,” to the anthemic closer, “Let Me Make Something in Your Life,” both written with the late Jim Capaldi and featuring the dream rhythm section of Willie Weeks on bass and Andy

Newmark on drums, you're struck by the sparseness of the soundstage created by engineer Phill Brown, despite the many instrumental flavors created by Winwood. (“Now *this* is an audiophile recording!” I commented in my AES presentation.) But the track that sticks in your memory is the only survivor from the original sessions, “Vacant Chair,” cowritten with the late Vivian Stanshall in memory of Graham Bond. Alan Spenner's bass and John Susswell's drums underpin a hypnotic guitar riff from Julian Marvin as a multitruacked Winwood chants “o-ku nsu-kun no-ko”: in Yoruba dialect, “the dead are weeping for the dead.”

—**John Atkinson**

PETER WOLF: SLEEPLESS

Artemis 751125-2 (CD), 2002. Peter Wolf, Kenny White, prods.: Rob Eaton, eng. AAD? TT: 41:00

 It's great fun to listen to those early J. Geils Band albums on Atlantic, with the ever-rambunctious singing of Peter Wolf front and center. Three decades later, Wolf's swagger may have mellowed but his voice hadn't lost one ounce of punch. *Sleepless*—like, say, Keith Richards's *Talk Is Cheap*—is the product of a journeyman star wise enough to have perspective but frisky enough to make you forget he's not a kid anymore. *Sleepless* boasts astute track-by-track notes by the artist, and for “A Lot of Good Ones Gone” Wolf tells how the song—which he wrote with Will Jennings—makes him think of his friend John Lee Hooker, while invoking Muddy Waters and a Wolf named Howlin'. Another of the nonstop highlights here is a punchy version of John Scott Sherrill's “Nothing But the Wheel,” which a decade earlier had made the country charts for a twangy Patty Loveless.

Here, Mick Jagger guests. Other tracks on *Sleepless* feature Richards, as well as Steve Earle and longtime bandmate Magic Dick. The ace studio musicians, who include several once-and-future members of Bob Dylan's band, rock through-out, and it's safe to say that Wolf, who always sounds good, has never sounded better.—David Sokol

STEVIE WONDER: ORIGINAL MUSIQUARIUM I

Tamla 6002TL2C (1974). Stevie Wonder, prod.: Gary Olazabal, eng. AAA. TT: 85:44

My house is on fire. Dazed and delusional, I think I've already saved all the records I've listed in past years' R2D4s, so I rescue this one. Stevie Wonder's remastered greatest-hits twofer from 1982 is pure joy. Side 2 ("Superwoman," "Send One Your Love," "You Are the Sunshine of My Life," "Ribbon in the Sky") is dreamy; side 3 (the likes of "Sir Duke" and "Master Blaster") is a kick. A near-perfect pop compilation, and the original vinyl release sounds great, much better than the albums on which the songs first appeared. It's reference-quality pop.—Fred Kaplan

ROBERT WYATT: ROCK BOTTOM

Hannibal (Rykodisc) 1426 (CD). 1974/1992. Nick Mason, prod.: Steve Cox and Dick Plamer, engs. ADD?. TT: 39:31

Robert Wyatt's *Rock Bottom* is another older album, but for me it's a recent discovery. It was released in 1974, not long after Wyatt fell from a fourth-story window and became one of two wheelchair-bound musicians I wouldn't want to live without (the other is Vic Chesnutt). *Rock Bottom* is hypnotic; the first track, "Sea Song," is absolutely mesmerizing: "So until your blood runs to meet the next

full moon / Your madness fits in nicely with my own." If you don't own it, go get it—preferably from your local independent record store.

—Jim Austin

ROBERT WYATT: ROCK BOTTOM

Virgin V2017 (LP). 1974. Nick Mason, prod.: Steve Cox, Dick Palmer, engs. AAA. TT: 39:03

Recorded one year after a fall from a window left the former Soft Machine drummer paralyzed below the waist—the title refers to his paraplegia and, presumably, his state of mind during several months in the hospital—Robert Wyatt's *Rock Bottom* is the archetypal British art-rock album. Wyatt's lyrics range from deliberate nonsense to almost shocking bluntness—the opening number, "Sea Song," is a heartfelt and, at times, uncomfortably candid love song to his wife—and the music sometimes veers suddenly from whimsy to melancholy, as when an extended keyboard improvisation in "Alifib" morphs into an eerily sad chord sequence and vocal melody. Mellotron, Arp synthesizer, and harmonium dot the otherwise piano-driven landscape, as do intentionally compressed and downright Frippish electric-guitar improvs (Mike Oldfield's playing in the first half of "Little Red Robin Hood Hits the Road" is exquisite), and thus the production has an early-'70s stamp in the best possible way. Essential listening for fans of eccentric pop. (XXX-2, XXXIV-3)—Art Dudley

ROBERT WYATT/ GILAD ATZMON/ROS STEPHEN: FOR THE GHOSTS WITHIN

Domino DNO271 (LP). 2010. Gilad Atzmon, prod.: Robert Wyatt, Jamie Johnson, engs. ADD?. TT: 56:13

From the very start, as it shudders and quakes with the sort of alarming string arrangement you might hear in the soundtrack to an old black-and-white romance, *For the Ghosts Within* announces itself as a heavy, bitersweet treat. This unapologetically melodramatic stuff is syrupy with Ros Stephen's soaring string arrangements, Gilad Atzmon's honeyed clarinet and alto sax, and Robert Wyatt's strange, ethereal voice, all quivering and aching like fall's golden leaves on thin tree branches. Listen, for instance, as Wyatt's voice rises with the violins and clarinet, holding on to his words ("you were there . . . for me . . . in the air . . .") as if they were the tail ends of dreams, until he no longer can and lets them fall ("long before the day that I was born"), as if each syllable were a step back down to earth. It's crazy. You can't help but smile even as the tears trickle down your trembling cheeks. (XXXIV-3)

—Stephen Mejias

YELLOWBIRDS: THE COLOR

The Royal Potato Family RPF 1102 (LP/CD). 2011. Sam Cohen, prod.: Travis Harrison, eng. ADA/ADD. TT: 31:46

Cutting his teeth in Apollo Sunshine, a critically acclaimed indie band based in Boston, Sam Cohen, the brain behind Yellowbirds, stepped into the spotlight for *The Color*, an album of bewitchingly catchy and sublime melodies that transcend time, sounding mightily contemporary while harking back to the lushness of great bands from the Beatles to Crowded House. Cohen writes tight, irresistible melodies that get more delicious with each listen. The lovely opening, "The Rest of My Life," sounds like a distant cousin of something from *Surf's Up*, and the title track reminded a

smitten friend of the young Leonard Cohen. Many of the basic sessions for *The Color* were recorded in just two days and several tracks were done entirely at home, adding to the back-porch feel of these songs, which are simultaneously intimate and cinematic. To say that *The Color*, barely half an hour long, is my favorite album of the past two years would be an understatement.

—David Sokol

YIM YAMES: TRIBUTE TO (GEORGE HARRISON)

ATO 8 80882 16672 4 (CD). 2009. No prod. or eng. listed. AAD?. TT: 26:35

I just recently stumbled on My Morning Jacket's frontman Yim Yames's heartfelt EP, *Tribute To*: covers of six George Harrison songs recorded in 2001, just days after Harrison passed away. When Yames sings "A lifetime is so short," from "Love You To," it's impossible to hold back the tears. Recorded on Yames's cousin's analog Fostex eight-track reel-to-reel machine, *Tribute To*'s feel is blissfully free of Pro Tools, and the stripped-down acoustic arrangements provide a new opportunity to appreciate Harrison's exquisite songcraft. The "quiet" Beatle indeed.—Steve Guttenberg

NEIL YOUNG & CRAZY HORSE: RAGGED GLORY

Reprise 26315-2 (CD). 1990. David Briggs, Neil Young, prods.: John Hanlon, eng.: Tim Mulligan, digital eng. DDD. TT: 62:42

It's been a remarkable run from "Cinnamon Girl" to "Let's Impeach the President," but Neil Young has constantly reinvented himself, from starry-eyed folkie to propagator of defiant metal machine music. But it's his electric, electrifying work with the band Crazy Horse that shines the brightest, and *Ragged Glory*

couldn't be more appropriately named. Scorching guitars and cymbals crashing first in one channel, then the other, abound. And he's always saying something. "Love and Only Love" is a jubilant +10-minute ode to what matters most; "F*!#in' Up," not to be played for impressionable young ears, is a self-effacing song from the era of Bush I that could be speaking to 43's presidency if only that one could have admitted to having made a mistake once in a while. Notable is how seamlessly this set flows from track to track, with well-placed feedback screech providing some apt transitions. The only non-original, a cover of the lighter-weight garage-rock staple "Farmer John," breaks the spell, but only briefly. The bottom line: Young Neil (he was an ultra-youthful 45 when this was released) never loses his sense of melody and urgency, and this hopeful, beautiful noise refuses to age. (XIV-2)

—David Sokol

NEIL YOUNG & CRAZY HORSE: RAGGED GLORY

Reprise 26315-2 (CD). 1990. Neil Young, David Briggs, prods.: John Hanlon, eng.: Tim Mulligan, digital eng. DDD. TT: 62:42

It took a lifetime to make this the unlikely choice for my favorite Neil Young album, but if I had to choose only one to take with me to that desert island, it would be this grunge-era masterpiece of rustic metal music. Crazy Horse was locked in behind Young's guitar eruptions and emotive singing throughout these 10 songs, and Young was dealing characteristic observations about skewed life on planet Earth, from the anthemic cry "F*!#in' Up" to the utopian fantasy of "Mansion on the Hill," the raging intensity of "Love to Burn," and the pastoral hymn

"Mother Earth." Neil himself showed his preference for this set by including so many of these songs in the set lists for what was probably his final tour with Crazy Horse, two years ago. (XIV-2, XVII-2, XXXII-2)—John Swenson

YOUNG MARBLE GIANTS: COLOSSAL YOUTH

Domino DNO 135 (3 CDs). 1980/2007. Young Marble Giants, prods.: Dave Anderson, prod., eng. AAD. TT: 111:37

Released by Rough Trade in February 1980, the debut from Young Marble Giants—winsome, airy chanteuse Alison Statton plus brothers Stuart and Phil Moxham—was deeply seductive in its melodic, jazz-tinged minimalism, and powered by skittery guitars and the occasional keyboard drone, but no drums, it was right in step with the anything-goes climate of post-punk Britain. Last year Domino reissued it as a 3-CD set to include sundry singles (not to miss: the 1:39 nuclear fantasy "Final Day") and posthumous material, plus a 1980 John Peel session. It's a sharp career summation, but the original LP alone is worth its weight in pop gold.—Fred Mills

YOUNG@HEART CHORUS: NOW

youngatheartchorus.com, UPC 700261364421 (CD). 2012. Ken Maiuri, Bob Cilman, prods.: Mark Alan Miller, Jeff Lipton, engs. DDD. TT: 51:26

Late last year, the Young@Heart Chorus played three concerts at the stately Academy of Music theater in their hometown of Northampton, Massachusetts. To put it mildly, this aggregation of nearly 30 singers—all 73 years old or older, many well into their 80s—and their much-younger band left me feeling more up and, yes, happy

than any concert in recent memory. Not necessarily journeyman performers by trade, the Y@H singers are full of life and enthusiasm at a time when many of their friends, if they're fortunate enough, are passing their days in rocking chairs.

On Now, which includes full-bodied studio versions of many of the songs from those live performances, singer Helen Boston sings "I'm an old woman," the line that begins "Angel from Montgomery," and turns it into a goose-bump moment that songwriter John Prine could never have fully anticipated. The obscure Tom Waits gem "I Don't Wanna Grow Up" gets a complete facelift from singer Gordon Tripp and the Chorus's slightly ironic but hardly gloomy reading. The selection of material is stellar and oh so smart, including songs by Mose Allison, Peter Wolf, Nick Lowe, Neil Young, David Byrne, and Arcade Fire (!). Sung by Y@H, these wonderful songs are reinvented, sometimes bittersweetly, sometimes downright jubilantly—and in each case, new life is breathed into them. Y@H have toured the world, made an acclaimed full-length movie, and have had the Rhino imprint grace *Mostly Live* (2008). Now may be unusual and an acquired taste, but at its heart it's musically miraculous.

—David Sokol

DAN ZANES: COOL DOWN TIME

Private Music 0100582133-2 (CD). 1995. Tchad Blake, prod., eng. AAD. TT: 40:11

Zanes headed the nervous, shaky Del Fuegos back in the days before *alternative* was a marketing term, but you'd never know it from this disarming, low-key affair, which loosely documents his alcoholic crash landing, recovery, transition back to the real world, and,

finally, a second career as a children's entertainer. The sound of this stripped-down trio of Zanes, Mitchell Froom, and Jerry Marotta evokes glimmers of everyone from Booker T and the MG's to the Band. The soulful, bluesy grooves are solid, and Zanes handles admittedly difficult subject matter with humor ("Tested," "Rough Spot") and poignancy ("If You Live," "No Sky," "Carefully").

—Leland Rucker

FRANK ZAPPA: APOSTROPHE (!)

Zappa ZR 3851-1 (LP). 1974/2014. Frank Zappa, prod.: Steve Desper, Terry Dunavan, Barry Keene, Bob Hughes, Kerry McNabb, engs. Mastered directly from the original 1/4" analog master tapes. ADA. TT: 32:02

Evidence suggests that what Frank Zappa feared most was to create music that might be classified as easy listening. No surprise, then, that *Apostrophe (!)*, a straight-ahead rock record by Zappa standards, became his biggest-selling US release. This doesn't mean it's watered-down Zappa; to quote his son Dweezil, *Apostrophe (!)* has "everything you could ever want. It's got the rock, jazz, funk, the attitude and the humor, all at once." The music is still elaborately arranged and composed, but you can tap your foot to a lot of it. Still avant-garde, 40 years after its release. (X-8)

—Robert Schryer

WARREN ZEVON: WARREN ZEVON

Asylum 7E-1060 (LP). 1976. Jackson Browne, prod.: Fritz Richmond, Kent Nebergall, John Haeny, engs. AAA. TT: 38:21

One night last week, I spent three hours looking for Warren Zevon. "Carmelita," "Mohammed's Radio," and "Poor Poor Pitiful Me" were stuck in my head, along with a conviction that it was one of the best, and

best-sounding, rock records of all time. It wasn't in its place or in any of the other likely spots, so I was reduced to randomly thumbing through LPs. I eventually found it, and not only was it as good as I'd remembered, but hearing it soothed some inner ache I didn't even know I'd had. It's definitely an R2D4, and now, adorned with a fluorescent yellow tab, never out of sight.

—Brian Damkroger

Collections

VARIOUS ARTISTS: THE CLASSIC SIXTIES COLLECTION

Universal B0007444-49; 7468-70 (10 CDs). 1964-70/2007. Ira Pittelman, Gene Zacharewicz, prods.; Jeff Zaraya, remastering. ADD. TT: 7:36:03 (www.theclassic60s.com)

I couldn't resist the late-night TV pitch of Peter Noone ("Herman" of Herman's Hermits) for this 10-CD collection of hit singles from 1964 to 1970. The set focuses on one-hit wonders from Motown and the British Invasion, presumably because those artists who remain stars today would be unlikely to license their recordings to such an offering. But there isn't a single tune here that's a clunker, and the remastering is almost uniformly exquisite—which will be a shock to boomers used to hearing these tunes on AM car radios or Seeburg jukeboxes.—Robert J. Reina

VARIOUS ARTISTS: HEARTWORN HIGHWAYS

Guy Clark, David Allan Coe, Rodney Crowell, Steve Earle, John Hiatt, Townes Van Zandt, Steve Young HackTone DK37457 (CD). 1976/2006. David Gorman, Michael Nieves, prods.; Alvar Stugard, Alan Silverman, engs. AAD. TT: 79:29

This CD is a compilation of recordings made over 20 days in 1975-76, initially and primarily for a documentary film of the

THE ZOMBIES: THE SINGLES COLLECTION: AS & BS 1964-1969

Big Beat/Ace CDWIKD 200 (mono CD). 2000. Various, orig. prods.; Nick Robbins, mastering. AAD? TT: 71:22

Although they had only three Top 10 hits in the US and none in their homeland, the Zombies are rightfully regarded as one of the most inventive British Invasion bands of the mid-

and late 1960s. "She's Not There," "Tell Her No," and "Time of the Season" stand the test of time, but it's their lesser hits and deeper cuts that make this collection such timeless fun. Blessed with golden-throated singer Colin Blunstone, classical- and jazz-influenced keyboard whiz Rod Argent, and bassist Chris White (individually, Argent and White wrote most of the songs), the Zombies were masters

of pop melody and romantic angst. White's "I Love You," a big hit for San Jose band People in 1968, is full of delicious lovelorn drama, as is his masterful B-side "Leave Me Be." Arranged chronologically, the 28 tracks of *The Singles Collection*, in original punchy mono, take us from 1964 to 1969, with all the hits, shoulda-been hits, and misses. From start to finish, these Zombies nuggets are to die for.—David Sokol

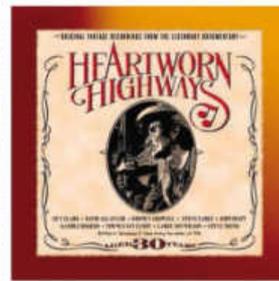


same title that highlighted the emergence of a number of bright new country singer-songwriter talents. I don't normally like compilation albums by "various artists," nor am I any great fan of country music, but this outstanding album captures future stars such as Guy Clark, Townes Van Zandt, and Steve Earle by simply visiting their homes and mixing performances straight to a Nagra—a sure recipe for top-quality live recordings (check out Jerry Garcia's bluegrass outing, *Old and In the Way*). The original recordings have been painstakingly remastered using Rupert Neve's analog Legendary Audio Masterpiece process. The notes appositely conclude: "Warning: after hearing the naturalness and honesty of the performances . . . listening to modern recordings may be difficult." (XXIX-9)

—Paul Messenger

VARIOUS ARTISTS: THE LOUIE LOUIE FILES

Ace CDCHD 844 (CD). 2002. Alec Palao, prod.; Nick Robbins, mastering. AAD. TT: 72:34



Of the several "Louie Louie" collections that have been released—including Rhino's out-of-print, two-volume *Best of Louie Louie* set, and the hard-to-find *First Louie Louie Spanish Compilation*, from Madrid—this is easily the finest. Besides relatively familiar renditions of the 1960s party anthem by the Beach Boys, the Kinks, and Toots and the Maytals, it includes obscure but entertaining takes by the Sandpipers, Travis Wammack, and Sounds Orchestral. But the album's real value is in tracing the song's evolution from Richard Berry's 1957 R&B original through a succession of garage-rock covers by bands from the Pacific Northwest, among them Rockin' Robin Roberts and the Wailers, Paul Revere & the Raiders, the Sonics, and, of course, the Kingsmen, whose salaciously slurred 1963 version became the chart-topping standard against which all others are measured. Also included are such precursors as René Touzet's "El Loco Cha Cha," which furnished the distinc-



tive "Louie" chord progression, and Chuck Berry's "Havana Moon," which inspired Richard Berry's patois-style lyrics.—Larry Birnbaum

VARIOUS ARTISTS: PHILLY SUPER SOUL HITS

Epic/Legacy EK 85937 (CD). Kenny Gamble, Leon Huff, prods.; various engs. AAD. TT: 76:05

I had dinner recently with a fellow journalist. In typical music-geek fashion, we discussed great soul music. I posited that the music from Stax in the late 1960s (Otis Redding, Booker T., etc.) was the best and purest form of American music. (The wine was flowing.) He agreed, but thought that in terms of melody, hooks, and round rhythms, the Philly sound of the '70s, known in some circles as T.S.O.P., trumped Stax hands down. "When Will I See You Again," "Love Train," "Bad Luck," "Me and Mrs. Jones"—his argument was tight and convincing. And the songs spoke for themselves. I was speechless. We refilled our glasses and toasted Philadelphia.—Bob Gulla

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JAZZ ON RECORD

By ROBERT BAIRD

Jazz has always been intimately connected to recording. In fact, the title of “first jazz band” was bestowed on The Original Dixieland Jass Band only after they’d recorded their version of “Livery Stable Blues” for Victor, in 1917. The record reportedly sold over a million copies, and served as a launching point for jazz as a new popular music. Jazz records became a chief American cultural export, and their proliferation created sudden demand for personal appearances by the musicians who’d recorded them.

Despite this success, many jazz musicians shunned recording, fearing that other musicians would use them to steal their solos or emulate their styles. Others felt the opposite—that they could learn from each other via records, and no longer had to go on the road with someone to learn from him or her. Even on those earliest 78rpm discs, one principle became immediately apparent: The improvisatory nature of jazz would have to be trimmed and tamed to fit whatever physical format it was released on, from 78s to LPs to CDs. The fact that spontaneity, as opposed to overdubbing, is more or less the definition of jazz did not make the recording of it any easier, whether live or in the studio. Like classical musicians, jazz players complain that their solos sound frozen on record—yet recordings can also document their greatness by capturing some version of their soloing genius.

In his wonderful book *The Recording Angel*,¹ Evan Eisenberg says, “Any new art, but especially one that is also a new medium, relying on technology to bridge distances in space and time, needs icons.” In jazz, that honor goes



to Louis Armstrong, whose Hot Five and Hot Seven recordings for Okeh (eg, “Potato Head Blues,” “West End Blues”), all recorded acoustically from 1925 to 1928 and released on 78s, became best sellers, and made him—and jazz—household names. By 1929, jazz was even in the title of the first talkie,

Many jazz musicians shunned recording, fearing that other musicians would use them to steal their solos or emulate their styles.

Al Jolson’s *The Jazz Singer*. Most early jazz recordings were intended to accompany and encourage dancing, a trend that exploded with the advent of the hot and sweet big bands of the 1930s and ’40s, led by Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller, and Count Basie. Older generations saw the music as decadent and dangerous, a pattern later repeated with the rise of rock’n’roll—nonetheless, by 1939, recordings of swing jazz accounted for 85% of total record sales.

Big-band jazz was also the first music to connect directly with a younger generation—coinciding with the spread of jukeboxes, it came with its own lexicon, hairstyles, and fashion sense. That trend only expanded when, after WWII, beboppers began making what are today considered the classic jazz records. For the first but not the last time in the history of the American record business, the

market was dominated by independent labels: Savoy, Verve, Blue Note, Dial, etc. Listeners adapted to a new calculus, realizing and reveling in the fact that recordings of jazz, whether live or in the studio, were snapshots, warts and all, of single improvised performances of ever-changing work.

“Jazz people love and hate records,” Eisenberg says. “Like anglers, they talk about the ones that got away—the legendary players like Buddy Bolden, the glory days (‘Joe Oliver’s best days are not on records,’ said Armstrong), the sudden numinous solos that were not caught.”

And yet, the aural snapshots captured have formed the canon of recorded jazz. In 1977, Denon recorded and released Archie Shepp’s *On Green Dolphin Street*, making it world’s first released digitally recorded commercial album. Recorded in NYC on November 28, 1977, it was first released by Nippon Columbia in Japan in May 1978.

“In jazz the record is the work,” Eisenberg continues; “records are the conservatory of jazz, its school, its treasure-house and thesaurus, its way of husbanding resources.” —Robert Baird

 Robert Baird has been writing about music for 30 years, the last 20 of which as Music Editor of Stereophile. Having also served as Editor-in-Chief of CD Review and Music Editor of New Times in Phoenix, AZ, he’s also written for a variety of publications including Rolling Stone, USA Today, Magnet, and No Depression.

¹ *The Recording Angel: Explorations in Phonography*, first edition, McGraw-Hill, 1986; second edition, Yale University Press, 2005.

AMBROSE AKINMUSIRE: WHEN THE HEART EMERGES GLISTENING

Ambrose Akinmusire, trumpet; Walter Smith III, tenor saxophone; Gerald Clayton, piano; Harish Raghavan, bass; Justin Brown, drums; with Jason Moran, Fender Rhodes

Blue Note 70619 2 (CD). 2011. Ambrose Akinmusire, Jason Moran, prods.; Dave Darlington, eng. DDD? TT: 53:43

Ⓛ Although Ambrose Akinmusire is the most important artist to enter jazz in the new millennium. This is the record that started the buzz, recorded when he was 28. The opening track, "Confessions to My Unborn Daughter," demonstrates trumpet chops in the general vicinity of Clifford Brown. But Akinmusire's technique enables his wild imagination. His song forms and solos honor the jazz tradition by exploding it with shattering free ascents, juxtaposed jagged shapes, cryptic mid-narrative digressions, ecstatic cadenzas, misshapen notes, and apocalyptic codas. Ballads like "Hanya" burn even hotter than the screamers. And everyone in the band is a badass.—Thomas Conrad

BEN ALLISON & MAN SIZE SAFE: LITTLE THINGS RUN THE WORLD

Ben Allison, bass, acoustic guitar; Michael Blake, tenor & soprano saxophones; Ron Horton, trumpet, flugelhorn; Steve Cardenas, electric guitar; Michael Sarin, drums
Palmetto PM 2131 (CD). 2008. Ben Allison, prod.; Matt Balitsaris, prod., eng. DDD. TT: 53:21

Ⓛ Hands down, *Little Things Run the World* stands as bassist-composer Ben Allison's most adventurous CD, and is in the top echelon of 2008's jazz albums. It's lyrical, colorful, edgy, and teems with exuberance. Conceived with careful architectural attention, grounded in the tradition of alchemic improvisation, and infused

with a richly textured myriad of styles—rock, pop, African, Americana, Latin—Allison's music has all the earmarks of jazz in motion toward a higher evolutionary plateau. Key to its success is Allison's new band, Man Size Safe, named after diabolical VP Dick Cheney's secret White House vault. The interplay of trumpeter Ron Horton and electric guitarist Steve Cardenas stands out, especially in their unison wails in the grooved opener, "Respiration." Highlights include Cardenas' melodic gem, "Language of Love," Allison's intriguing "Four Folk Songs," and a salient cover of John Lennon's "Jealous Guy."

—Dan Ouellette

REID ANDERSON: THE VASTNESS OF SPACE

Reid Anderson, bass; Andrew D'Angelo, alto saxophone; Bill McHenry, tenor saxophone; Ben Monder, guitar; Marlon Browden, drums

Fresh Sound New Talent FSNT 096 (CD). 2000. Reid Anderson, prod.; James Farber, eng. DDD? TT: 64:35

Ⓛ Before he rose to jazz renown as bassist of the Bad Plus, Reid Anderson put out two keeper Fresh Sound albums and then this, a quintet session that should rank as a classic of turn-of-the-millennium New York jazz. Two tracks, "Prehensile Dream" and "Silence Is the Question," became Bad Plus numbers. Others—"Foxy," "The Enthusiast," "The Owl"—are rock-inflected anthems with a direct and inescapable lyricism, but also an element of raw free jazz. Anderson wrote in his liner note: "I find that having a tune called 'Foxy' is good for the image of this band." Too bad this band has been forgotten.—David R. Adler

AREA: CAUTION RADIATION AREA

Demetrio Stratos, vocals, organ,

clavicembalo, steel drums, percussion; Patrizio Fariselli, electric piano, piano, clarinet, synthesizer; Ares Tavolazzi, bass, trombone; Giampaolo Tofani, guitar, synthesizer, flute; Giulio Capiozzo, drums, percussion
Cramps CRSCP 5102 (Italian LP). 1974. Area, prods.; Piero Bravin, Ambrogio Ferrario, engs. AAA. TT: 32:29

Ⓛ Although I was a big fan of 1970s jazz-rock fusion, most of the stuff I listened to then sounds clichéd today. Not so Area, an Italian "International Popular Group." This, their second, was the best of the six albums they released in the '70s before the death of their founder and lead singer, Demetrio Stratos. Here are Area's usual frenetic improvisations, angular melodies, and odd time signatures. But you'll also find a tremendous use of space and dynamic swells, an enticing blend of acoustic and electronic instruments, and unusual textures from primitive synthesizers. Best of all is Stratos' dramatic vocalization of his political lyrics, in an operatic tenor that recalls, to me, a blend of Sergio Franchi and Greg Lake.—Robert J. Reina

HORACEE ARNOLD: TALES OF THE EXONERATED FLEA

Horacee Arnold, drums; Art Webb, flute; Sonny Fortune, saxophone; John Abercrombie, Ralph Towner, guitar; Jan Hammer, keyboards; David Friedman, vibes; Clint Houston, Rick Laird, George Mraz, bass; Dom Um Romao, percussion
Columbia KC 32869 (LP; 2 CD reissues also available). 1974. Horacee Arnold, prod.; Buddy Graham, Frank Laico, Stan Tonkel, engs. AAA. TT: 44:43

Ⓛ I was a jazz-rock fanatic in the 1970s; for me, the genre was the gateway to study other forms of jazz. Today, much of what I listened to then sounds dated and clichéd, with the notable exceptions of the entire Weather Report catalog and this, the second album

by composer-drummer Horacee Arnold. Here Arnold layers his angular modal melodies over a bedrock of churning, syncopated, Latin-tinged rhythms. It sounds as fresh today as it did in 1974. Now check out who's in the band.—Robert J. Reina

THE BAD PLUS: THESE ARE THE VISTAS

Ethan Iverson, piano; Reid Anderson, bass; David King, drums
Columbia CK 87040 (CD). 2003. Tchad Blake, prod., eng.; The Bad Plus, prods.; Bob Ludwig, eng. DDD. TT: 52:35

Ⓛ In an unassuming manner, the Bad Plus fully arrived on the scene in 2003 with their crunch-to-swing debut Columbia CD, *These Are the Vistas*, produced by Tchad Blake, and set off the most vigorous jazz debate in recent memory. Everyone, it seemed, held a strong opinion on the power trio that improvises while undergirding its tunes with a rock-solid beat. Detractors called them poseurs: three white Midwestern rockers in their 30s pretending to play jazz. The naysayers didn't know what they were missing: a grace-to-thunder exuberant jazz excursion of quirkily titled originals and compelling deconstructions of contemporary pop tunes, including Blondie's "Heart of Glass," Aphex Twin's "Flim," and Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit." (XXVI-10)

—Dan Ouellette

CHET BAKER: THE TOUCH OF YOUR LIPS

Chet Baker, trumpet, vocal; Doug Raney, guitar; Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen, bass
SteepleChase SCCD-31122 (CD). 1979/1986. Nils Winther, prod.; Freddy Hansson, eng. AAD? TT: 42:56

Ⓛ Chet Baker made lots of records. With his drug habit, he had no choice. From his vast, uneven discography comes this

little-known album, a jewel in his tarnished, battered crown. (Had Baker really owned a crown, he would have pawned it.) It is a low-key session recorded in Copenhagen, doubtless with minimal preparation, in 1979. There are only two sidemen: Jimmy Raney's son on luminous guitar, and one of the great bass players in jazz history. In 1979, Baker still had the chops to support his existential knowledge of the darkness within the human soul. With his spare, rapt trumpet lines, he could touch feelings you never knew you had until he played them.—**Thomas Conrad**

BILLY BANG: VIETNAM: THE AFTERMATH

Billy Bang, violin; Sonny Fortune, flute; Frank Lowe, tenor saxophone; Ted Daniel, trumpet; John Hicks, piano; Curtis Lundy, bass; Michael Carvin, drums; Ron Brown, percussion; Butch Morris, conductor ("TET Offensive")

Justin Time JUST 165-2 (CD). 2001. Billy Bang, Jean-Pierre Leduc, prods.; Jim Anderson, eng. DDD? TT: 71:21

 We lost Billy Bang in 2011. He died of cancer at 63 after a difficult, highly creative life. Most of the difficulty came because he was drafted into the US Army out of high school and was thrown into jungle combat two days after landing in Vietnam. He was haunted all his life by his war experience, but he turned it into his one masterpiece, this album. In Bang's hands, a violin could scrape and keen and shriek, or sweetly sing, or weep. His dirge for his fallen We lost Billy Bang in 2011. He died of cancer at 63 after a difficult, highly creative life. comrades, "Moments for the KIAMIA," is like a bayonet through your heart. (XXV-9)—**Thomas Conrad**

ART BLAKEY & THE JAZZ MESSENGERS: A NIGHT IN TUNISIA

Art Blakey, drums; Wayne Shorter, tenor saxophone; Lee Morgan, trumpet; Bobby Timmons, piano; Jymie Merritt, bass
Blue Note/Music Matters MMBST 84049 (2 stereo LPs, 45rpm, 180gm). 1960/2008. Alfred Lion, prod.; Rudy Van Gelder, eng.; Kevin Gray, Steve Hoffman, remastering. AAA. TT: ca 40:00

 Art Blakey's furious, almost violent polyrhythmic skin pounding, Bobby Timmons' ivory attacks, and Jymie Merritt's explosive bass plucks anchor Lee Morgan and Wayne Shorter's dizzying, melodic machine-gun fire on the Gillespie opener that dominates this classic session—and the rest ain't exactly filler. Tape-box forensics prove that most of the Holy Grail mono Blue Note masters were simply downmixes from stereo made by original engineer Rudy Van Gelder. Comparing this stupendous-sounding, ultradynamic reissue to the "deep groove" original I bought for \$3.09 in 1961, at the age of 14, at Sam Goody, proves that RVG compressed and bleached his original cut, and that nothing can help his boxy piano miking. (XVII-10)

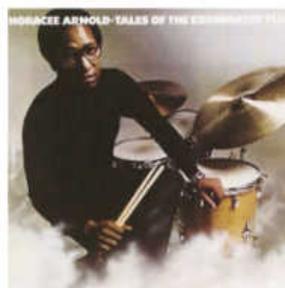
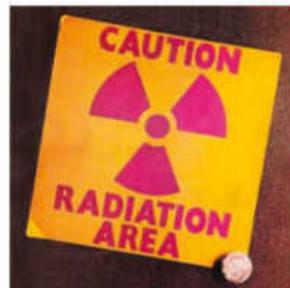
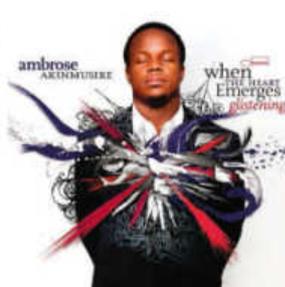
—**Michael Fremer**

CARLA BLEY: THE LOST CHORDS FIND PAOLO FRESU

Carla Bley, piano; Andy Sheppard, soprano & tenor saxophones; Paolo Fresu, trumpet, flugelhorn; Steve Swallow, bass; Billy Drummond, drums

WATT 34 (CD). 2007. Carla Bley, Steve Swallow, prods.; Gérard de Haro, Nicolas Baillard, engs. DDD. TT: 55:53

 My own hard, fast rule about "Records To Die For" resembles those of the Baseball Hall of Fame: After a record is released, there must be a five-year waiting period. To hell with it. Carla Bley is our greatest living active jazz composer. Her band, with its brilliant individual voices, functions as a single, constantly evolving organism. The addition of Paolo Fresu is bold and



inspired—his passionate Italian romanticism newly illuminates Bley's austere, ambiguous musical contexts. There is a piece for Christopher Reeve, "Death of Superman," that is so stark and pure in its poignance it will just mess you up.

—**Thomas Conrad**

ARTHUR BLYTHE: LENOX AVENUE BREAKDOWN

Arthur Blythe, alto sax; James Newton, flute; Bob Stewart, tuba; James "Blood" Ulmer, guitar; Cecil McBee, bass; Jack DeJohnette, drums; Guillermo Franco, percussion

Koch Jazz KOC-CD-7871 (CD). 1979. Bob Thiele, prod.; Doug Epstein, eng. AAD? TT: 41:58

 To my mind, the late 1970s to early 1980s was a remarkable peak in jazz, with Miles Davis, Ornette Coleman, the Art Ensemble of Chicago, and a plethora of young players

pushing the envelope in ways original yet standing on the shoulders of the giants who came before them. Nearly 30 years after it was released, this disc still delivers the booty-shaking Caribbean groove, darkly propulsive currents, and dangerous energy it held for me the first day I peeled off the shrink-wrap. This was Blythe's "mainstream" debut, backed by a band of the greatest improvisers of the day. But there's nothing about the compositions or their performances that's watered-down. *Lenox Avenue Breakdown* is both a memorable time capsule and a timeless classic every jazz collection requires. (XVIII-2)—**Daniel Buckley**

STEFANO BOLLANI, JESPER BODILSEN, MORTON LUND: GLEDA

Stefano Bollani, piano; Jesper Bodilsen, bass; Morton Lund, drums
Stunt STUCD 05012 (CD). 2005. Jesper Bodilsen, prod.; Hans Nielsen, eng. DDD? TT: 57:05

 The single best way to hear Stefano Bollani, one of the world's great piano players, is in what he calls his Danish trio. *Gleda* comes from 2004, only two years into their association. The program of traditional and popular songs from Scandinavia spans 100 years, and is rich in melodies only Scandinavians will have heard before. The songs were also new to Bollani of Italy, and the way he respectfully renders them, then expands and transforms and ascends from them, is extraordinary. They provoke him to ecstasy. Secure within one of the tightest piano trios on the planet, he takes audacious, brilliant liberties.

—Thomas Conrad

PETER BRÖTZMANN OCTET: MACHINE GUN

Peter Brötzmann, tenor & baritone saxophone; Willem Brueker, Evan Parker, tenor saxophone; Fred Van Hove, piano; Peter Kowald, Buschi Niebergali, bass; Han Bennik, Sven Johansson, drums

Free Music Production FMP0090 (LP). 1968/1972. Peter Brötzmann, prod. AAA. TT: 37:05

 A manic, frenzied, frenetic, and explosive record from an octet that's so loose they're not afraid to be tight. When I first heard *Machine Gun*, in the 1980s, I couldn't believe it was recorded in the '60s. *Machine Gun* sounded as fresh as anything I was listening to at the time, which included *Einstürzende Neubauten* and *:zoviet*france:*. The fury begins with the first notes and doesn't abate until the last. This is improvisation at its most inspired, and music at its most primal.

—Michael Lavorgna

DONALD BYRD: PLACES AND SPACES

Blue Note BN-LA549-G (LP). 1975. Larry Mizell, Fonce Mizell, prods.; Jim Nipar, Steve Maslow, Val Garay, engs.; Jeff Hawks, asst. eng.; David Hassinger, remix. AAA. TT: 32:81

 While it was made by a jazz artist (albeit one who'd strayed into R&B/fusion) and released on Blue Note, Donald Byrd's *Places and Spaces* is also funk, but of a more polished and polite variety. For the jazz police, this record and several others made by Byrd and producer Larry Mizell in this period, particularly *Black Byrd* (1973), are nothing short of heresy. And while it may have also been one of the gateway records to that horribly banal strain of jazz that forever poisoned the musical sense of the word smooth, this is a Blaxploitation soundtrack taken to new heights. The modus operandi is simple: raise up a groove, repeat a line or two of vocals here and there, and provide lots of space underneath for Byrd to burble away on flugelhorn. "Wind Parade" and "Night Whistler" (love the titles!) hone this formula to a fine edge. Well recorded and as yet unremastered, *Places and Spaces* is short and joyous and so much fun!—Robert Baird

BRIAN CARPENTER'S GHOST TRAIN ORCHESTRA: HOT HOUSE STOMP: THE MUSIC OF 1920S CHICAGO AND HARLEM

Brian Carpenter, trumpet, harmonica, voice; Dennis Lichtman, clarinet; Andy Laster, alto saxophone; Matt Bauder, alto & tenor saxophone, clarinet; Curtis Hasselbring, trombone; Ron Caswell, tuba; Brandon Seabrook, banjo; Mazz Swift, violin, vocals; Jordan Voelker, viola; Rob Garcia, drums

Accurate 5062 (CD). 2011. Danny Blume, eng., mix. DDD? TT: 38:46

 It's great to hear pre-swing big-band charts done up in high fidelity. But Boston-based trumpeter Brian Carpenter takes liber-

ties with music by Charlie Johnson, Fess Williams, Tiny Parham, and McKinney's Cotton Pickers, setting his Ghost Train Orchestra apart from your typical trad-jazz repertory group. Several GTO members have avant-garde pedigrees, which accounts for the freewheeling spirit (and occasional modern improv) on these tracks. Carpenter's erudite liner notes bring to life the history of the period. And his song choices—dig "Stop Kidding," by the startlingly innovative John Nesbitt—shed light on long-forgotten areas of jazz's past.—David R. Adler

BETTY CARTER: INSIDE BETTY CARTER

Betty Carter, vocals; Kenny Burrell, guitar; Harold Mabern, piano; Bob Cranshaw, bass; Roy McCurdy, drums; unknown piano, bass, drums on previously unissued tracks

Capitol CDP 7-88702-2 (CD). 1964, 1965/1993. Alan Douglas, prod.; Michael Cuscuna, reissue prod.; Bill Schwartz, Bob Lifton, engs. AAD. TT: 45:43

 Betty Carter, who manipulated her lush, acrobatic voice with a gymnast's skill, joined Lionel Hampton's band in 1948, the year she turned 19. She was a lifelong jazz purist, a true disciple whose uncompromising style kept her on a thorny career path, and even led her to record exclusively on her own label for two decades. Carter won recognition, and Verve reissued some of her 1970s and '80s BetCar albums, but she's among the top handful of jazz singers, and deserves more. Here she tears through the lyrics of "My Favorite Things" the way a 10-year-old rips wrapping off Christmas gifts, and when she fills with ecstasy each phrase of "This Is Always," I know my passion for her isn't, to borrow from that song, "a passing glow, a moment's gladness." No, "it's love." Betty Carter has "tied

a string around my heart." (XXIII-2)—David Lander

RON CARTER: BLUES FARM

Ron Carter, bass, piccolo bass; Hubert Laws, flute; Richard Tee, Bob James, piano, keyboards; Sam Brown, Gene Bertocini, electric guitar; Billy Cobham, drums; Ralph McDonald, percussion

Epic/Legacy//CTI 5127862 (CD). 1973/2003. Creed Taylor, prod.; Rudy Van Gelder, eng. AAD. TT: 36:35

 A couple of years after he left Miles Davis' employ, when the trumpeter's classic jazz quintet of the 1960s had run its course, bassist Ron Carter signed on to producer Creed Taylor's CTI label, where he essentially became the low-end anchor of electric sessions by the likes of Freddie Hubbard and Stanley Turrentine. Three years into his CTI association, Carter recorded his label debut as a leader. That largely electric session, *Blues Farm*, serves as a masterwork of how the jazz bass can not only undergird but soar as a frontline instrument. On the funky title track, Carter's fat grooves and bluesy glissando lines on acoustic bass sound as if he's playing electric as he takes the lyrical lead, then converses with flutist Hubert Laws. Carter places himself in a variety of settings in which his bass takes prominence, including: his sublime slow composition, "A Soul Ballad," with pianist Bob James and drummer Billy Cobham; the churchy "A Hymn for Him," teeming with bass soul and Laws' floating flute lines; and the festive finale, the Latin-flavored "R2 M1."—Dan Ouellette

DAVID CHESKY: JAZZ IN THE NEW HARMONIC

David Chesky, piano; Javon Jackson, tenor saxophone; Jeremy Pelt, trumpet; Peter Washington, bass; Billy Drummond, drums
 Chesky JD358 (CD). 2013. David Chesky, prod.; Norman Chesky,

exec prod.: Nicholas Prout, prod., eng. DDD? TT: 69:15

 David Chesky has written and recorded music in a wide variety of genres, and I've followed them all. I even have his first recording, *Rush Hour*, a big-band jazz-rock outing he recorded for Columbia when in his teens. My favorite is his Violin Concerto, but this jazz-quintet session is quite a departure from the light Latin jazz recordings he released early in his career. The original tunes have dark, angular, modal melodies and bass lines with infectious grooves, plenty of space, and room for first-rate solos by his band members. It reminds me of an amalgam of soundtrack music from 1950s film noirs, early-'60s Miles Davis, and late-'00s Liam Sillery. The airy, bloomy sound, captured in Brooklyn's Hirsch Center, envelops you like a down comforter covered in silk. Chesky continues to turn on a dime and switch genres with each release; this recording further affirms that he's capable of writing anything. (XXXVI-9)

—Robert J. Reina

STANLEY CLARKE, AL DI MEOLA, JEAN-LUC PONTY: THE RITE OF STRINGS

Jean-Luc Ponty, violin; Al Di Meola, guitar; Stanley Clarke, bass

Gai Saber 7243 8 34167 2 1 (CD). 1995. Stanley Clarke, Al Di Meola, Jean-Luc Ponty, prods.; Dennis Mac Kay, Jeff Graham, engs. DDD? TT: 55:35

 A gathering of virtuosos can often result in a barrage of wanking that will drive away any listener interested in the art of expression. But when the masters put their egos aside and focus on the composition, the results can be marvelous, as can be heard in *The Rite of Strings*. Having seen Stanley Clarke multiple times live, I can attest that the man loves to solo, but his bowed

and plucked bass playing on *RoS* is selfless and pondering. Al Di Meola, resident jazz shredder, shines as a rhythm guitarist with his fast, flamenco-like jabs and mellow inversions. Jean-Luc Ponty is a master of both the blues scale and hair-raising textures on his wailing violin. As a unit, their timing is deft, their harmonies ecstatic or mournful. —Ariel Bitran

GERALD CLEAVER: ADJUST

Gerald Cleaver, drums; Andrew Bishop, clarinet, soprano & tenor saxophone; Mat Maneri, viola; Ben Monder, guitar; Craig Taborn, organ, keyboards; Reid Anderson, electric & acoustic bass

Fresh Sound New Talent 112 (CD). 2001. Gerald Cleaver, prod.; Danny Blume, eng. DDD. TT: 55:03

 The Detroit drummer-composer was transitioning to New York when he debuted with *Adjust*, which seemed (along with other records) to reflect a period of extraordinary creative ferment in the jazz scene. Its combination of players and sounds is still fresh today. There's something almost psychedelic—Mahavishnu or Lifetime-esque—about the fuzzed-out microtonal viola, soaring guitar, and insinuating organ at the heart of this session. But Cleaver's aesthetic is more "out" than fusion. His subtle chamber elements, complex harmony, and bold sonics make *Adjust* a contemporary gem, setting a tone for the next decade and counting. —David R. Adler

ANAT COHEN: POETICA

Anat Cohen, clarinet; Jason Lindner, piano; Omer Avital, bass; Daniel Freedman, drums, percussion; Gilad, percussion. With: Antoine Silvermann, Belinda Whitney, violin; David Creswell, viola; Danny Miller, cello.

Anzic 1301 (CD). 2007. Anat Cohen, Omer Avital, prods.; Leon Dorsey, eng. DDD? TT: 65:13

 This recording is jazz saxophonist Anat Cohen's first outing on her

original instrument, the clarinet. And, oh, what an original voice that is! I have never heard a clarinetist whose articulation, phrasing, and use of dynamics and portamento more closely resemble those of the human voice. Cohen's sense of melodic shaping flows like a narrative, hence the album's title. Her chamber ensemble, augmented by a string quartet, covers a wide range of Cohen originals, Brazilian and Israeli folk songs, and even a Coltrane tune. —Robert J. Reina

NAT KING COLE: AFTER MIDNIGHT

Nat King Cole, piano, vocals; John Collins, guitar; Charlie Harris, Lee Young, drums. With: Willie Smith, alto saxophone; Harry "Sweets" Edison, trumpet; Juan Tizol, valve trombone; Stuff Smith, violin; Jack Costanzo, congas, bongos
Capitol Jazz 20087 (CD). 1957/1999. Lee Gillette, prod.; Michael Cuscuna, reissue prod. DDD. TT: 63:42

 Cole was a piano master in the small-group swing idiom, but he gained far greater fame as an Eckstine-style crooner. *After Midnight* finds him straddling both worlds, and in some ways this makes it the ultimate Cole disc. It's got heartbreakers like "Blame It On My Youth" and "You're Looking at Me," but no syrupy production here: Cole's core trio and high-profile guests provide snap and crackle, whether on ballads or cookers ("Just You, Just Me," "It's Only a Paper Moon"). You could practically learn to play jazz by studying this record. Or you could just bathe in its easygoing magic. —David R. Adler

NAT KING COLE: HIT THAT JIVE: 1936–1946

Nat "King" Cole, piano, vocals; Oscar Moore, guitar; Wesley Prince, Johnny Miller, bass; Lee Young, Jack "the Bear" Parker, drums. Track 1 only: Tommy Thompson, Bill Wright, saxophones; Kenneth Roane, trumpet; Eddie Cole, bass;

Jimmy Adams, drums.

Jazz Legends JAZ 2006 (CD). 2004. William D. Tennant, exec. prod.; Scott Yanow, compiler; Steve Pringle, remastering. AAD? TT: 60:21

 Everybody knows Nat "King" Cole, the suave balladeer who recorded duets from beyond the grave with his daughter Natalie. But few are familiar with the King Cole Trio, the group Cole rode to fame in the 1940s as a stride pianist and singer of jive songs. This is about as good as any single-disc collection of the trio's music, tracking them from their first retail session in 1940 (they had previously recorded transcription discs for radio play) to the 1946 date that yielded Cole's evergreen version of Mel Tormé's "The Christmas Song." (There's also a tune from Cole's 1936 studio debut, with his brother Eddie's band.) Cole flaunts his hepcat credentials on "I Like to Riff," "Hit That Jive, Jack," and his breakthrough hit, "Straighten Up and Fly Right," not to mention his definitive "Route 66." On standards such as "Sweet Lorraine" and "Honeysuckle Rose," he anticipates the bebop piano harmonies of Bud Powell, complemented by the trio's brilliant guitarist, Oscar Moore. —Larry Birnbaum

NAT KING COLE: THE NAT KING COLE STORY

Capitol/Analog Productions APP-SWCL 1613 (8 45rpm 180gm LPs, 2 SACD/CDs). 1961/2009. Lee Gillette, prod.; Kevin Gray, Steve Hoffman, remastering. AAA/AAD. TT: ca 90:00

 Nat King Cole's record sales built the Capitol Tower in L.A. In 1961, Capitol repaid the pop/jazz icon and his fans with interest by meticulously re-recording in stereo his greatest hits, many of which were originally issued in mono on 78rpm shellacs. Capitol

packaged the set in a deluxe, cloth-covered, perfectbound three-LP edition, annotated by Leonard Feather, Ralph J. Gleason, and George T. Simon, that fans treasure to this day. This eight-LP, two-SACD set mastered from the original three-track work tapes is a sonic spectacular that outdoes the original by a wide margin—as does its packaging. The SACDs include three-channel and two-channel mixes. A major reissue.—**Michael Fremer**

ORNETTE COLEMAN QUARTET: THE SHAPE OF JAZZ TO COME

Ornette Coleman, alto saxophone; Don Cherry, cornet; Charlie Haden, bass; Billy Higgins, drums
Atlantic SD-1317 (LP). 1959. Nesuhi Ertegun, prod.; Dayton Burr
"Bones" Howe, eng. AAA. TT: 37:59

Music is but one strand woven into the complex fabric of Fred Kaplan's 1959: *The Year Everything Changed*, his fascinating book about that pivotal year, but he pays particular attention to Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue* and this album by Ornette Coleman. Both were breakthrough records of music that didn't rely on chords for their structural underpinnings. The best-selling Davis album was built on modal scales that produced a calming, bluesy feel. The pianoless *The Shape of Jazz to Come* pulled the floor out from under the listener's feet. It's still punk. Engineered by the great Bones Howe at Radio Recorders, it sounds fantastic on the original LP. The CD is drab. (XIX-2)—**Michael Fremer**

ORNETTE COLEMAN QUARTET: THE SHAPE OF JAZZ TO COME

Ornette Coleman, alto saxophone; Don Cherry, pocket trumpet; Charlie Haden, bass; Billy Higgins, drums
Atlantic/Rhino SD 1317 (LP).

1959/2010. Nesuhi Ertegun, prod.; Bones Howe, eng. AAD. TT: 38:14

A revolutionary album (its title proved truly prophetic), forever fresh and bracing, it's also melodic (a point widely missed back in 1959)—even sometimes romantic, and rivetingly so. The news here is that Rhino's LP sounds so much better than not only the CD (whew) but the original Atlantic pressing: wider dynamics, pluckier bass, brassier trumpet, an airier alto sax. It's not the best-sounding jazz album or the best-sounding Ornette, but it's one of the best jazz albums, and it's now worthy of a high-end stereo. That's worth celebrating. (XIX-2, XXXIV-2)—**Fred Kaplan**

JOHN COLTRANE: ONE DOWN, ONE UP: LIVE AT THE HALF NOTE

John Coltrane, tenor sax; McCoy Tyner, piano; Jimmy Garrison, bass; Elvin Jones, drums
Impulse! 238002 (2 CDs). 2005. Allan Tucker, mastering eng. AAD. TT: 85:37

Jazz fans, 'fess up: Who among us wouldn't take a time machine back to hear the Coltrane Quartet live at the height of its career? *One Down, One Up* transports us to March and May of 1965. In a perfect world, we'd sit in for the entire sets—"A Love Supreme" begins during Jimmy Garrison's solo 35 minutes into the song, before giving us 28 minutes of 'Trane playing hard. Of course we want it all, but what we get is pretty special. The band is on for both sessions, especially Tyner, and other than a few dropouts, the sound is very good.—**Wes Phillips**

LARS DANIELSSON: LIBERA ME

Lars Danielsson, acoustic bass, cello, piano, guitar, samples, arr.; David Liebman, soprano saxophone; Nils Petter Molvaer, trumpet; Carsten Dahl, piano; Tobias Sjögren, guitar; Jon Christensen, drums, percussion;

Xavier Desandre-Navarre, percussion; Anders Kjellberg, cymbals; Jan Bang, samples; Cécilie Norby, vocals; DR Danish Radio Concert Orchestra, Frans Rasmussen, conductor
ACT 9800-2 (multichannel SACD/CD). 2004. Lars Danielsson, prod., eng.; Jan Erik Kongshaug, Peter Juul Kristensen, Lars Nilsson, Jonas Sandwall, Suzanne Desandre-Navarre, engs. DDD? TT: 64:18

One of the great things about "Records To Die For" is that the lunatics run the asylum. Writers are unsupervised, free to vent their most quixotic, peculiar obsessions. When I tell my editors I want to review records by unknown Swedish bass players recorded by six engineers in 5.1-channel SACD on obscure German labels, they roll their eyes. (I communicate with my editors by e-mail and phone, but I feel them rolling their eyes.) *Libera Me* is both rarefied musical discourse and ear candy of the highest order. Lars Danielsson's bass is a dark light of lyricism infiltrating deep, mysterious clouds of sound that seamlessly wrap all around the listener. I'm not crazy.—**Thomas Conrad**

LOWELL DAVIDSON: LOWELL DAVIDSON TRIO

Lowell Davidson, piano; Gary Peacock, bass; Milford Graves, percussion
ESP 1012 (CD). 1965/2008. Tom Abbs, prod. manager; Steven Walcott, tape transfer, remastering; Art Crist, eng. AAD? TT: 44:08

This is Lowell Davidson's only recording, and what a beautiful piece of music it is. Davidson studied pianoforte at age 4, composition at 8, harmony at 12, organ and then piano at 15. He graduated from Harvard on a full scholarship with a degree in biochemistry. Davidson's playing is not familiar in a directly referential way, yet it's melodically and harmonically rich and generous and inviting. I've never

heard Milford Graves's fury sound so enmeshed, and Gary Peacock is stunning. This is a strange amalgam of musical stuff that adds up to one musically magical experience. "It's about evolution," said Davidson.
—**Michael Lavorgna**

MILES DAVIS: THE COMPLETE COLUMBIA ALBUM COLLECTION

Miles Davis, trumpet; many, many sidemen
Columbia/Legacy 88697524922 (71 CDs). 1947-85/2009. Daniel Baumgarten, Richard Seidel, reissue prods.; Mark Wilder, Maria Triana, mastering. ADD. TT: ca 60 hours

Call me a cheat. I'm asked to pull two albums out of the fire, and I grab 52—every album that Miles Davis recorded for Columbia Records, collected in a 71-CD boxed set? Well, look—it's a compact package that fits easily under your arm. And since Miles transformed the music four or five times in the course of almost half a century, *The Complete Columbia Album Collection* stands in for an entire history of postwar jazz, at least up to the mid-1980s. And such a stand-in: romantic, garrulous, intense, and always adventurous. The sound is usually excellent, too.—**Fred Kaplan**

MILES DAVIS: THE COMPLETE COLUMBIA STUDIO RECORDINGS, 1965- 1968

Miles Davis, trumpet; Wayne Shorter, tenor saxophone; Herbie Hancock, piano; Ron Carter, bass; Tony Williams, drums
Mosaic MQ10-177 (10 LPs). 1965-68/1998. Irving Townsend, Howard A. Roberts, Teo Macero, orig. prods.; Frank Laico, Fred Plaut, Stan Tonkel, orig. engs.; Michael Cuscuna, Bob Belden, reissue prods.; Mark Wilder, remix. AAD. TT: 7:21:52

All the great albums, plus extras, by Miles'

greatest quintet—*E.S.P.*, *Miles Smiles*, *Nefertiti*, *Filles de Kilimanjaro*, etc.—recorded in a time of exuberant experimentation, embracing free-jazz cadences and harmonies but constraining them in song structures. The tension is riveting, the lyricism sublime. Columbia's original pressings were compressed and EQ'd, but these vinyl reissues, from the original tapes, are superb. (XXI-5, XXVIII-2)—**Fred Kaplan**

MILES DAVIS: KIND OF BLUE

Miles Davis, trumpet; Cannonball Adderley, alto sax; John Coltrane, tenor sax; Bill Evans, Wynton Kelly, piano; Paul Chambers, bass; Jimmy Cobb, drums

Columbia CS 8163 (original "six-eye" or "360 Sound" LP), Columbia/Classic CS 8163 "45 series" (two 45rpm LPs). 1959/1997. Teo Maceo, prod.; Fred Plaut, eng.. AAA. TT: 45:53

BILL EVANS: WALTZ FOR DEBBY

Bill Evans, piano; Scott LaFaro, bass; Paul Motian, drums

Riverside 9399 (original LP), Analogue Productions APJ-009 (LP). 1961/1997. Orrin Keepnews, prod.; David Jones, eng.; Doug Sax, remastering. AAA.

Ⓜ Yes, I know—what a cliché! The two most roasted chestnuts in the genre, so effortlessly crowd-pleasing that one of them, *Kind of Blue*, remains among the best-selling jazz albums 47 years after its release—and so impervious to saturation among high-end audio denizens that the boutique reissue houses have stamped out as many different pressings of each as the vinylphile imagination can conjure: 33rpm, 45rpm, 180gm, 200gm, one disc, two discs, four discs... Well, to quote the title of Miles' first track, "So what?" One thing about clichés: sometimes they're true.

Both albums are that rare thing in art: revolutionary breakthroughs that are

completely accessible. With *Kind of Blue*, recorded at Columbia's 30th Street studio in 1959, Miles Davis broke away from the chord-based structures that were the foundation of postwar jazz, supplanted it with church modes, and laid them out on melodic lines and blues improvisations. On *Waltz for Debby*, recorded live at the Village Vanguard in 1961, Bill Evans perfected the jazz trio: all three parts equal, yet integrated into song forms.

The sound quality is near-perfect. And what great combos! There has never been a more synchronized sextet than on *Kind of Blue*, or a more seamless piano trio than on *Waltz for Debby*. Other great jazz albums, I'm more or less in the mood to hear. These two work on so many levels, and are at once so relaxing yet so provocative, that it's hard to imagine tiring of either. (*Kind of Blue*: XV-2, XIX-2, XX-2, XX-7, XXV-3. *Waltz for Debby*: XVII-9, XVIII-2, XXIII-9.) —**Fred Kaplan**

BLOSSOM DEARIE: BLOSSOM DEARIE

Blossom Dearie, vocals, piano; Bobby Jaspar, flute; Herb Ellis, Mundell Lowe, Kenny Burrell, guitar; Ray Brown, bass; Jo Jones, Ed Thigpen, drums; Russ Garcia's orchestra

Verve Jazz Masters 51 (CD). 1956–1960/1996. Norman Granz, prod.; Ben Young, restoration; Steve Fallone, mastering. AAD. TT: 53:39

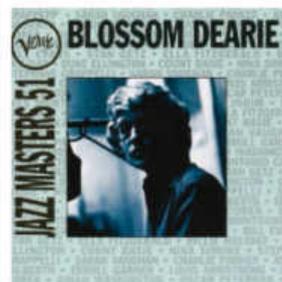
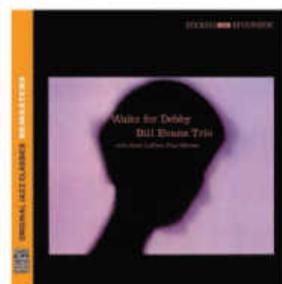
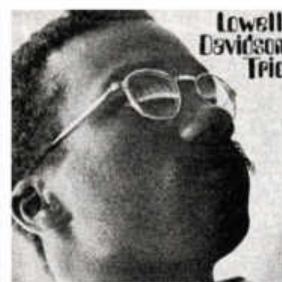
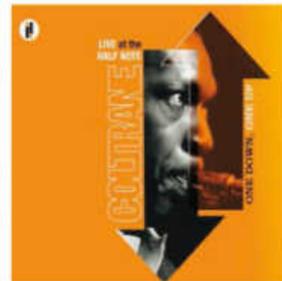
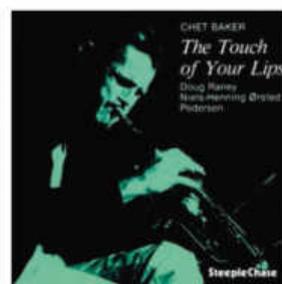
Ⓜ Blossom Dearie, who died in February 2009 at the age of 82, sustained a half-century-long cabaret career with a distinctive, delicate voice that was enhanced by her pianism and musical taste. Raised about two hours north of Manhattan, she moved there in the 1940s, and in the '50s relocated to Paris, where the savvy jazz promoter Norman Granz heard her and signed her to a multi-album contract. The 16 selections on this compilation, all from their Verve LPs, make a fine

introduction to a one-of-a-kind artist. My favorite is "Manhattan," the Rodgers & Hart standard, here redolent with yearning. Intentionally or not, Dearie's rendition lets us glimpse the real Larry Hart—"the American Toulouse-Lautrec," as one theatrical colleague called the troubled, alcoholic lyricist. When Dearie sings "We'll turn Manhattan into an isle of joy," her slow, ever-so-wistful interpretation turns a familiar romantic asserion into an unattainable dream.—**David Lander**

BLOSSOM DEARIE: VERVE JAZZ MASTERS 51

Blossom Dearie, voice, piano; Ray Brown, bass; Kenny Burrell, Herb Ellis, guitar; Jo Jones, drums; others
Verve 529 906-2 (CD). 1956–1960/1996. Norman Granz, orig. prod.; Michael Lang, compilation supervisor; Steve Fallone, remastering. A?D. TT: 52:45

Ⓜ Blossom Dearie plays piano on all but one track of this survey of her early US recordings for Norman Granz's Verve Records. (She had previously recorded for Michel Legrand in France, where her roommate had been Annie Ross, later of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross.) Her touch is light, but her playing is quietly convincing. She effortlessly meshes with Oscar Peterson's rhythm section of the time, augmented by Count Basie's drummer of the time. I point out those peer connections to show that Dearie is seriously underrated as a musician. Dearie's airy voice is one of a kind, and her approach to a song could be a bit cerebral or gently ironic in ways Julie London was not. And that's her given name, not a stage name. Her surname is a variant of the Scots name "Deery." A charming introduction to a unique interpreter, at a bargain price. (XXXIV-2)—**John Marks**



PAUL DESMOND: DESMOND BLUE

Paul Desmond, alto sax; Jim Hall, guitar; strings arranged & conducted by Bob Prince
Classic Compact Discs LSPCD 2438 (24-K gold CD). 1961/1997. George Avakian, prod.; Ray Hall, eng. A?D. TT: 37:21

Bluebird/RCA 63898-2 (CD with bonus tracks). 1961/2002. A?D. TT: 66:00

 In *Concierto*, Jim Hall's celebrated 1970s CTI excursion, the master of understated guitar lyricism traded heartfelt solos with Paul Desmond and Chet Baker. Here's a forerunner to *Concierto*, from the previous decade: Paul Desmond fronting a string section, with Hall featured in a supporting role. Fortunately, Desmond and Hall managed to rise above the cash-in concept. (Gee, is there another jazz record from around that time with "Blue" in its title?) Desmond and Hall's music succeeds despite, rather than because of, Bob Prince's culturally striving string arrangements, which include such nonessentials as a mock-Elizabethan intro to "My Funny Valentine." And the liner notes are just for rueful chuckles. Still, *Desmond Blue* contains lots of great playing that has stood the test of time. The budget reissue adds alternate tracks and tunes.—**John Marks**

PAUL DESMOND & GERRY MULLIGAN: QUARTET

Paul Desmond, alto saxophone; Gerry Mulligan, baritone saxophone; Joe Benjamin, bass; Dave Bailey, drums

Verve 314-519-850-2 (CD). 1957/1993. Norman Granz, prod. AAD. TT: 71:29

Paul Desmond: *Easy Living*

Paul Desmond, alto saxophone; Jim Hall, guitar; Eugene Wright, Eugene Chericco, Percy Heath, bass; Connie Kay, drums

RCA Bluebird 2306-2-RB (CD). 1963-1965/1990. George Avakian, prod.; Joe Lopes, eng. ADD. TT: 59:54

 For much of Paul Desmond's career, an alliance with Dave Brubeck tied the alto saxophonist's playing to his prominent colleague's pianism, and after Desmond's death, at age 52 in 1977, a bequest linked him to a string of other pianists.

He left his own piano, a Baldwin grand, to his friend Bradley Cunningham, who ran Bradley's, the Manhattan jazz bar, where numerous top-rank artists performed on it for years. Nevertheless, Desmond was by no means conjoined with the piano; his legacy includes some superb albums that exclude it.

One such disc documents a sprightly 1957 quartet session at which Desmond joined forces with the baritone sax player Gerry Mulligan. Trumpeter Chet Baker, Mulligan, and a bassist and drummer had already fashioned a distinctive sound with what became known as a pianoless quartet, and this West Coast Cool compilation echoes it. The two reed players breeze ahead with harmonic and contrapuntal prowess.

The writer Ted Gioia has compared the members of the Brubeck Quartet to the four classical elements: Desmond was air, and may have produced the most beautiful alto-saxophone sound in jazz. That pure, sweet tone permeates *Easy Living*, the last of five RCA titles that blended the lyrical finesse of Desmond with that of Jim Hall, the jazz-guitar master whose career continues to flourish after more than a half century. Their collaborators include two members of the Modern Jazz Quartet, Connie Kay and Percy Heath, who could play as impeccably as the MJQ dressed on stage. The irresistible opening selection, Robert Wells and Jack Segal's "When Johanna Loved Me," makes this album's appeal instantaneous—Tony Bennett has said that he named one of his daughters after the song.—**David Lander**

BILL DIXON ORCHESTRA: INTENTS AND PURPOSES

Bill Dixon, trumpet, flugelhorn;

George Marge, English horn, flute; Robin Kenyatta, alto saxophone; Byard Lancaster, alto saxophone, bass clarinet; Jimmy Cheatham, bass trombone; Catherine Norris, cello; Jimmy Garrison, Reggie Workman, bass; Robert Frank Pozar, drums; Marc Levin, percussion

International Photograph LSP-3844 (CD). 1967/2011. Jonathan Horwich, reissue prod. AAD? TT: 41:66

 Recorded in 1967, *Intents and Purposes* sounds like Debussy covering Miles transcribed by Webern for a small army of free-jazz improvisers. This music simmers and shimmers with voices, sounds and silences stepping in and out of time, and really doesn't sound like anything else except great art. To my way of thinking, anyone and everyone interested in music should own their very own copies of Bill Dixon's *Intents and Purposes*. It would make the world a more thoughtful place. "When I play, whether you like it or not, I mean it," Dixon said.—**Michael Lavorgna**

DOCTOR 3: DOCTOR 3

Danilo Rea, piano; Enzo Pietropaoli, bass; Fabrizio Sferra, drums

Jando MPR 59 CD (CD). 2014. Fondazione Musica per Roma, prods.; Massimo Aluzzi, eng. DDD? TT: 54:25

 Many jazz musicians now draw on popular culture for repertoire, but no one does it with the melodic grace of Danilo Rea. Sometimes he barely decorates a song, as in "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow." He hesitates over it, thoughtfully arrays it, and renders its question, its plea, its vulnerability, as universal to the human condition. "Hallelujah," Leonard Cohen's masterpiece, has received many fine interpretations. They now sound like the works of children—the adult version is Rea's. A hush falls over "Hallelujah." He marks out the song almost painfully, one necessary note at a time, as if finding it deep

in himself.—**Thomas Conrad**

ARNE DOMNERUS QUINTET: JAZZ AT THE PAWNSHOP, VOL. 1

Arne Domnerus, saxophone; Lars Erstrand, vibraphone; Bengt Hallberg, piano; George Ridell, bass; Egil Johanson, drums

Proprius PROP 7778-7779 (2 LPs), PROP 7778 (SACD/CD), 24-bit/88kHz FLAC files (HDtracks). 1977/2005. Jacob & Erland Boethius, prods.; Gert Palmcrantz, eng.; Andrew Lang, digital remastering. AAA/AAD? ADD. TT: 69:12

 *Jazz at the Pawnshop*, released by Proprius in the late 1970s on two LPs, also became an audiophile classic. It was recorded with two Nagra recorders in Stockholm at the Stampen Jazz Club in December 1976 by Gert Palmcrantz, who used two microphones to capture the five musicians. He also captured ambience cues, the musicians talking, audience movements and whispers, the clinking of cutlery—even the sounds of another music session taking place downstairs. The LP and the hi-res digital files best render the amazing sense of space Palmcrantz captured, as heard in "Limehouse Blues" and my favorite recording of solo vibraphone, "I'm Confessin'." Though now in its fourth decade, the album continues to sell over 4000 copies a year, and to be a standard test record for ambience, soundstaging, and upper-midrange values.—**Larry Greenhill**

DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA: MASTERPIECES BY ELLINGTON

Duke Ellington, piano; and big band Columbia Masterworks/Analogue Productions ML 4418 (180gm mono LP). 1950/2014. George Avakian, prod.; Fred Plaut, eng.; Ryan Smith, remastering. AAA. TT: 46:59

 Among the first recordings arranged and pro-

duced to take advantage of the LP's longer playing time, this album was released in 1950 on Columbia Records' classical imprint, Masterworks, with a whimsical cover by Stan Fraydas (author of *Hoppy, the Curious Kangaroo*) that's reproduced for this edition. (Columbia soon replaced it with an image more "modern" and more mundane.)

Freed from the 78rpm single's three-minute constraint, Ellington could score and record concert-length arrangements similar to those enjoyed by his concert audiences. Three of the four selections, including "Mood Indigo" and "Sophisticated Lady," are familiar Ellington classics stretched and elasticized to luxurious effect. The harmonically saturated, transparent mono sound is astonishing for any era of recording. It's sure to leave you swooning, and wondering how and why recorded sound has since gone so far south. (XXVII-9, XXXV-2)

—Michael Fremer

DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA: MASTERPIECES BY ELLINGTON

Duke Ellington, piano; and big band
Columbia/Legacy CK 87042 (CD). 1950/2004. Columbia Masterworks/Analogue Productions ML 4418 (180gm mono LP). 1950/2014. George Avakian, prod.; Fred Plaut, eng.; Ryan Smith, remastering. AAA. TT: 46:59

 The Duke stretched out some of his classics for his first LP, and the result is one of the most gorgeous jazz albums ever. The arrangements veer, within one song, from straight swing to Ravelian tone poems to Tin Pan Alley riffs with Sondheimian harmonic complexity. It was recorded in 1950 (by Fred Plaut, who later miked *Kind of Blue* and other Columbia classics), yet the dynamics, depth, and timbral accuracy are

astounding. Mark Wilder did the DSD remastering from the original analog tapes, but this is a conventional CD. Somebody, put this out on 24/96 digital or 180gm vinyl! (XXVII-9)—**Fred Kaplan**

I chose the CD reissue of this album as one of my R2D4s for 2012, but now from Chad Kassem's Analogue Productions comes this QRP LP, and it's an occasion for popping corks. Released in 1950, this was Ellington's first LP, and he used the new medium to stretch out four of his biggest hits. The arrangements are jaw-droppingly gorgeous and the sound just slightly less so. Recorded by Fred Plaut, it has the dynamics, depth, and in-your-face tonal realism of a modern (mono) audiophile thumper. Among the best jazz albums ever. How about a 45rpm pressing, Chad? (XXVII-9, XXXV-2)

—Fred Kaplan

BILL EVANS TRIO: EVERYBODY DIGS BILL EVANS

Bill Evans, piano; Sam Jones, bass; Philly Joe Jones, drums
Riverside 1129 (LP). 1958. Orrin Keepnews, prod.; Jack Higgins, eng. AAA.
JVC JVCXR-0020-2 (CD). 1997. Akira Taguchi, reissue prod.; Alan Yoshida, remastering. AAD. TT: 49:24

 Everybody digs Bill Evans—at least, everyone I know does. Evans is the quintessential jazz pianist: introspective, nuanced, technically brilliant but free of gratuitous showmanship, and the embodiment of cool. *Everybody Digs* displays these elements across a range of material, but it's the three unaccompanied tracks—"Lucky to Be Me," "Peace Piece," and "Epilogue"—that showcase his style and talent. JVC's XRCd sound and production are superb and true to the original in every way: delicate textures, realistic

dynamics, tape hiss, and all. Dim the lights, cue up "Oleo," and swirl the rocks in your scotch. Dig it? (XX-9)

—Brian Damkroger

GIL EVANS: GIL EVANS & TEN

Gil Evans, piano, arr.; Steve Lacy, soprano saxophone; Lee Konitz, alto saxophone; Dave Kurtzer, bassoon; Louis Mucci, Jake Koven, John Carisi ("Remember" only), trumpet; Willie Ruff, French horn; Jimmy Cleveland, trombone; Bart Varsalona, bass trombone; Paul Chambers, bass; Nick Stabulas, Jo Jones ("Remember" only), drums
Prestige PRSA-7120-6 (SACD/CD). 1957/2003. Bob Weinstock, prod.; Rudy Van Gelder, eng.; Joe Tarantino, remastering. ADD? TT: 33:35

 This all-but-forgotten masterwork—Gil Evans' first album under his own name—is a small vial containing strong magic. Only one arranger ever conjured these enveloping textures, these rich, complex colors, these long, curving arcs of elegant form. Solos by Jimmy Cleveland and Steve Lacy are set like bright jewels within the deep folds of the ensemble. It was the very first Prestige session recorded in stereo, but had been released only in mono until this 2003 reissue, in which the stereo session tapes, for decades presumed lost, are offered, quixotically and miraculously, on SACD.

—Thomas Conrad

GIL EVANS & THE MONDAY NIGHT ORCHESTRA:

LIVE AT SWEET BASIL VOLS. 1 & 2

Evidence ECD-22026 (2 CDs). 1992. Shigeyuki Kawashima, Horst Liepolt, prods.; Allan Tucker, Richard Romaniello, engs. DDD. TT: 2:26:13

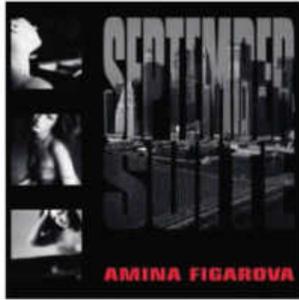
 For all of Gil Evans' immense contributions to music history, for my money his 1983–88 stand at New York's Sweet Basil was his greatest achievement. This was the summation of his life's work—he led the band

until two months before his death. The 14-piece orchestra had its stars—trumpeters Lew Soloff, Hannibal Marvin Peterson, and Miles Evans; George Adams and Chris Hunter on saxophones; Howard Johnson on tuba, baritone sax, and bass clarinet; Pete Levin on synths; and Adam Nussbaum on drums—but it was the combined sound of the band, guided by Evans' brilliant arrangements, that mattered. The symphonic reinvention of Wayne Shorter's "Parabola" that opens *Vol. 1* provides a perfect illustration of Evans' mastery of sonic imagery. The recordings, from August 1984, find the band in peak form, casting Evans' arrangement spell over a universe in which Thelonious Monk, Charlie Parker, Charles Mingus, and Jimi Hendrix occupied equal space. This is no longer a startling vision, but it was back then. Hendrix and Evans were collaborating before the guitarist's death, and these versions of "Voodoo Chile" and "Up from the Skies" (*Vol. 1*), and the "Stone Free" suite (*Vol. 2*), indicate where that partnership might have gone. Nearly two decades later, the New Orleans rock/brass band Bonerama would apply Evans' ideas to brass arrangements. —John Swenson

PIERRE FAVRE: SINGING DRUMS

Pierre Favre, drums, gongs, crotales, bowed cymbals; Paul Motian, drums, gongs, crotales, calebasses, rodbrushes; Fredy Studer, drums, gongs, log drums, bowed cymbals; Nana Vasconcelos, berimbau, timpani, conga, water pot, shakers, bells, voice
ECM 1274 (CD). 1984. Manfred Eicher, prod.; Martin Wieland, eng. AAD. TT: 41:14

 In an attempt to have an album featuring notable drumming or percussion for this year's picks, I narrowed it down to a handful of choices: Iron But-



terfly's *In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida* (sure, why not? the hater line forms to the right), Gamelan Pacifica, Marc Anderson, and this one on ECM. Instead of a frenzied, bombastic demo de force drum disc for audio shows, Favre assembled a team of able texturists who know how to weave acoustic sounds and beats into a dreamy, meandering path through a sonic forest brimming with exotic wildlife. As is typical for an ECM production, there's plenty of space around the instruments, and the recording is gorgeous and detailed.—**Jon Iverson**

AMINA FIGAROVA: SEPTEMBER SUITE

Amina Figarova, piano, composer, arranger; Bart Platteau, flute, B-flat flute, alto flute, bass flute; Nico Schepers, trumpet, flugelhorn; Kurt van Herck, tenor sax; Wiro Mahieu, bass; Chris Strik, drums
Munich 215-2021 (CD). 2005.
Amina Figarova, Bart Platteau, prods.; Paul Pouwer, eng. DDD? TT: 61:31

Of the many jazz responses to the events of 9/11, very few have the bare, quiet, devastating emotional impact of *September Suite*. Amina Figarova was born in Baku, Azerbaijan, lives in Rotterdam, and was visiting friends in Brooklyn on September 11, 2001. She finds in music a way to remember her experience of the unimaginable. Her compositions and her arrangements for only six instruments are a journey of mourning in subtle, nuanced gradations of somber color and breaths of melody. It all rings true, from the despair



of "Numb" to the small ray of lyricism whispered by Bart Platteau's flute in "Dawn," an unsentimental acknowledgment that life goes on.—**Thomas Conrad**

ELLA FITZGERALD: TWELVE NIGHTS IN HOLLYWOOD

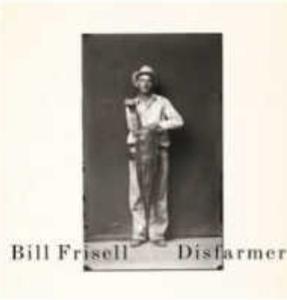
Verve 80012920-02 (4 CDs). 1961/2009. Norman Granz, orig. prod.; Richard Seidel, release prod.; Val Valentin, eng.; Seth Foster, mastering. AAD. TT: 4:10:56

Twelve Nights in Hollywood is a pure gem excavated from the vaults, its existence previously unknown: Ella Fitzgerald, in her prime, singing with her small group in a small club. It was taped not by some bootlegger dangling a wire from upstairs, but by the same Verve crew of topnotch professionals that laid down her big studio albums. It's every bit the marvel you never bothered to hope for, capturing the First Lady of Song with an intimacy unfound in any of her many other albums. The original, limited-edition boxed set is now available as two 2-CD packages.—**Fred Kaplan**

ELLA FITZGERALD & LOUIS ARMSTRONG: ELLA AND LOUIS

Ella Fitzgerald, vocal; Louis Armstrong, vocal, trumpet; Herb Ellis, guitar; Oscar Peterson, piano; Ray Brown, bass; Buddy Rich, drums

Verve MGJ-4003/Analogue Productions AVRJ-4003 (2 45rpm mono LPs). 1956/2011. Norman Granz, prod.; Val Valentin, eng.; George Marino, remastering. AAA. TT: 54:06



The most delightful jazz vocal recording of all time, now enshrined in 45rpm, 200gm vinyl from Chad Kassem's Quality Record Pressings, and it's a jaw-dropper. The piano sounds a little hooded, but Ella and Louis are 3D-palpable; they're in the room, or you're in their room. Ella breathes air; when Pops sings down low, your hair stands on end. A jazz-critic friend likened it to "an acid trip." It costs \$50: a bargain at twice the price. (XIX-3, XX-2, XXII-2, XXII-9)—**Fred Kaplan**

BILL FRISELL: ALL WE ARE SAYING . . .

Bill Frisell, guitar; Jenny Scheinman, violin; Greg Leisz, pedal steel guitar; Tony Scherr, bass; Kenny Wollesen, drums
Savoy Jazz SVY17836 (CD). 2011.
Lee Townsend, prod.; Adam Blomert, prod. asst.; Adam Munoz, eng.; Greg Calbi, mastering. AAD? TT: 68:12

I came late to Bill Frisell. It was only at the urging of *Stereophile's* self-proclaimed Web Monkey, Jon Iverson, that I began to pay attention to this extraordinarily inventive electric guitarist and his various bands. This, our December 2011 "Recording of the Month"—imaginative, beautifully recorded arrangements of songs by John Lennon—not only features Frisell's long-time rhythm section of Tony Scherr on double bass and Kenny Wollesen on drums, but continues the telepathic interplay between Frisell and pedal-steel player Greg Leisz heard on such earlier albums

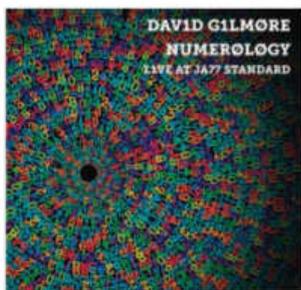


as *The Intercontinentals* and *Blues Dream*. Violinist Jenny Scheinman adds a fiddlish flavor, but her tone, lacking vibrato almost all of the time, is somewhat of an acquired taste, especially when the arrangement leaves it exposed, as in "No.9 Dream." Nevertheless, *All We Are Saying . . .* has been in regular rotation on the Mac mini the past year, Frisell and his band breathing new life into these chestnuts, and will continue to do so as I uncover new depths in their music making. (XXXIV-12)

BILL FRISELL: DISFARMER

Bill Frisell, electric & acoustic guitars, loops, music boxes; Greg Leisz, steel guitars, mandolin; Jenny Scheinman, violin; Viktor Krauss, bass
Nonesuch 478524-2 (CD). 2009.
Lee Townsend, prod.; Tucker Martine, eng. DDD? TT: 71:41

This is one of Bill Frisell's minor works. It gets under your skin like few of his major ones. Michael Disfarmer was a photographer in Heber Springs, Arkansas, who shot portraits of poor people in the Great Depression. His work was discovered many years after his death. Frisell's album of new songs and old country tunes was inspired by the silence of Disfarmer's photographs. Many tracks are under two minutes, miniatures blending American rural string-band traditions and jazz. The music is as stark and unexplained as the faces in Disfarmer's photographs.



Those faces look startled by how hard life is, yet undefeated.—**Thomas Conrad**

MIKE GARSON: JAZZ HAT

Mike Garson, piano; Eric Marienthal, alto sax; Brian Bromberg, acoustic bass; Ralph Humphrey, drums

Reference RR-114 (HDCD CD; also available as CD-quality AIF and FLAC files from www.hdtracks.com). 2008. J. Tambllyn Henderson, Marcia Martin, prods.; Keith O. Johnson, eng. DDD. TT: 74:48

Jazz Hat combines pianist Mike Garson's legendary 15-minute solo improvisation on Gershwin themes, released in 1994 as a "direct-to-CD" single (RR-54CD), and most of an earlier "Record To Die For," *The Oxnard Sessions, Volume Two* (RR-53CD). Garson's 1993 collection of standards and originals with a small group. (To make room for the Gershwin, Garson's "Rebirth" and the two bonus tracks on *Vol.2* from the 1990 sessions for *Vol.1* have been omitted; *Volume One* of this series was our "Recording of the Month" for June 1991.) Erstwhile David Bowie sideman Garson's extraordinary soaring reading of Leon Russell's "A Song for You" has long been a favorite demonstration track, but the highlights for me are Miles Davis' "All Blues," which features nonpareil bassist Brian Brom-



berg, and the breakneck reworking of Art Blakey's "A Night in Tunisia." Recorded in 1992 by Keith Johnson, the sound shows no audible sign of its vintage, offering superb clarity, luminously natural tone colors, and the sense of four musicians performing in a believable space, in this case the Civic Auditorium of Oxnard, California. A 75-minute master class in how to capture both the impact of and the space around a small jazz ensemble. (xvi-6, XIX-2)—**John Atkinson**

DAVID GILMORE: NUMEROLOGY: LIVE AT JAZZ STANDARD

David Gilmore, guitar; Claudia Acuña, voice; Miguel Zenón, alto saxophone; Luis Perdomo, piano; Christian McBride, bass; Jeff "Tain" Watts, drums; Mino Cinelu, percussion

Evolutionary Music EVMU001 (CD). 2012. David Gilmore, prod.; Tyler McDiarmid, Geoff Countryman, engs. DDD? TT: 56:24

David Gilmore's a busy and versatile cat, which could explain why he's recorded only three discs as a leader. This extended suite, presented in two multipart movements and inspired by the likes of Pythagoras and Einstein, was worth the wait. The rhythm section is unrivaled, and even the most complex material feels effortless. It's deeply funky, with Latin elements and a certain dark quality amid the buoyant polyrhythmic grooves. Zenón and Perdomo battle the leader for the title of most vicious soloist. Acuña sings all of Gilmore's trickiest written lines and

gives the music an aura of seductive soul.—**David R. Adler**

GRANT GREEN: GRANTSTAND

Grant Green, guitar; Yusef Lateef, flute, tenor saxophone; Jack McDuff, organ; Al Harewood, drums
Blue Note 46430 (CD). 1961/1987. Alfred Lion, Michael Cuscuna, prods.; Rudy Van Gelder, Ron McMaster, engs. ADD. TT: 42:21

Guitarist Grant Green's 1961 classic, his third album for Blue Note, epitomized the free-swinging creative spirit of early 1960s jazz. Though Green was not an avant-garde player, he'd absorbed the spirit of Charlie Parker's harmonic innovations into his own R&B-based sound, making him part of what would become known as the soul jazz movement. Green's guitar and Yusef Lateef's tenor and flute engage in a relaxed, conversational dialogue, nudged along by Jack McDuff's expressive organ work and the behind-the-beat propulsion of drummer Al Harewood. The title track is a terrific theme that provides plenty of solo space for Green, Lateef, and McDuff. The extremely soulful "Blues in Maude's Flat" would become a widely influential tune, recorded by, among others, the Atlanta Rhythm Section. Green's outstanding touch works well in the standards "My Funny Valentine" and "Old Folks." The funky "Green's Greenery" was not included on the original vinyl release.—**John Swenson**

JOHN HANDY & THE CONCERT ENSEMBLE: PROJECTIONS

John Handy, alto saxophone, saxello, flute; Michael White, violin; Mike Nock, piano; Bruce Cale, bass; Larry Hancock, drums, tambourine
Columbia CS 9689 (LP). 1968. John Hammond, prod.; Stan Tonkel, Martin Greenblatt, engs. AAA. TT: 44:38

We were hunting for lost treasures at the

Princeton Record Exchange. I pulled *Projections* from the heavy, crowded stacks. "Know anything about this?" I asked John. "Nope, but it looks cool," he replied. On the cover, John Handy stands alone, dead center, impeccably and flamboyantly dressed in a bright red shirt, red and black striped tie, light gray suit jacket, pink pocket square, black slacks, and pointed leather boots. His head is cocked ever so gently to the left, and his sax hangs from his neck to rest comfortably across his torso. His right hand is held at shoulder height, and between two fingers he balances a lit cigarette; his left hand is poised at his waist. Dude looks *satisfied*—as if his band has just got finished whipping your silly ass from New York to Japan to Brazil and right down to your own front porch, got you all curled up into a blissed-out ball of so much useless flesh with all their violent plucks and thunderous attacks, searing solos, seductive melodies, free-jazz explosions, and bossa nova sway, and left you dumb and wondering and begging: *Why the hell have I never heard of these guys before, and where, please, can I get some more—like now, fast?*—**Stephen Mejias**

CHARLIE HADEN LIBERATION MUSIC ORCHESTRA: NOT IN OUR NAME

Charlie Haden, bass; Carla Bley, piano, arr.; Miguel Zenon, alto saxophone; Chris Cheek, Tony Malaby, tenor saxophone; Michael Rodriguez, Seneca Black, trumpet; Ahnee Sharon Freeman, French horn; Curtis Fowlkes, trombone; Joe Daley, tuba; Steve Cardenas, guitar; Matt Wilson, drums
Verve B0004949-02 (CD). 2004. Charlie Haden, Carla Bley, Ruth Cameron, prods.; Gerard De Haro, eng. DDD. TT: 68:57

Thirty-six years after their first Liberation Music Orchestra recording,

Charlie Haden and Carla Bley again collaborated to strike one more cultural blow against the empire. From Vietnam to Iraq, one constant is that these musicians spoke out, and once again, they did so eloquently. The entire band played as if their lives hung in the balance. Bley's arrangement of the "America the Beautiful" suite, combining the original with Gary McFarland's interpretation, "Lift Every Voice and Sing," and Ornette Coleman's *Skies of America*, is one of the great moments in jazz history. Bley conducted, but Haden was, as ever, the human metronome, his bass swaying back and forth like a maestro's baton as he propelled the pulse of this music as only he can. This is the sound of heroism. (XXVIII-9)

—John Swenson

HERBIE HANCOCK: MAIDEN VOYAGE

Herbie Hancock, piano; Freddie Hubbard, trumpet; George Coleman, tenor saxophone; Ron Carter, bass; Anthony Williams, drums

Blue Note 4 95221 2 (CD). 1965. Alfred Lion, prod.; Rudy Van Gelder, eng. ADD. TT: 42:03

Hancock's fifth album as a leader (not his first, as its title implies) is a modern-jazz classic, three of whose five Hancock compositions—"Maiden Voyage," "The Eye of the Hurricane," and "Dolphin Dance"—have become standards. Featuring Miles Davis's band from 1963-64 with Freddie Hubbard in place of Davis, it scintillates with post-bop energy. Hubbard is brash, Coleman Coltrane-esque, Carter buoyant, Williams dazzling, and Hancock vividly impressionistic, dancing deftly over the keyboard with a light and luminous touch. Every tune is a winner, but the often-covered title track, a modal masterpiece built on four suspended chords, stands out. (XX-9)—Larry Birnbaum

JON HASSELL: LAST NIGHT THE MOON CAME DROPPING ITS CLOTHES IN THE STREET

Jon Hassell, trumpet, keyboard; Kheir Eddine M'Kachiche, violin; Eivind Aarset, Rick Cox, guitar; Jan Bang, Dino J.A. Deane, live sampling; Jamie Muhoberac, keyboard, drums; Peter Freeman, bass, percussion, guitar; Helge Norbakken, Pete Lockett, drums; Steve Shehan, percussion

ECM 2077 (CD). 2009. Manfred Eicher, Jon Hassell, prods.; Gerard de Haro, Nicholas Baillard, engs. DDD. TT: 63:55

This recording is the culmination of all the ambient music composer-trumpeter Jon Hassell has been writing over the last 25 years. Here, the foundations or "continuo" are the sampled acoustic and electronic textures that provide the tapestries that support Hassell's simple melodies for electronically altered trumpet. Kheir Eddine M'Kachiche's Indian-tinged violin provides counterpoint for that trumpet, and Peter Freeman's woofer-busting bass anchors it all. Nor is this recording mere studio trickery—in a stunning and dramatic performance of these works I recently heard at Carnegie Hall, the ensemble pretty much replicated this recording. (XXXII-4)

—Robert J. Reina

FRED HERSCH: AT MAYBECK

Fred Hersch, piano

Concord Jazz CCD-4596 (CD). 1994. Nick Phillips, prod.; Dave Luke, eng. DDD. TT: 67:32

Whoever (Elvis Costello? Frank Zappa?) said that writing about music is like dancing about architecture was right. And the defiantly subjective, shamelessly sentimental, megalomaniacal act of designating a "Record To Die For" is even more so. *At Maybeck*, Concord's series of beautifully recorded solo-piano concerts in Maybeck Recital

Hall in Berkeley, California, eventually reached 42 volumes. Almost all are now out of print, but as of this writing, Vol.31, by Fred Hersch, is available for \$8.98 through Concord's website. It contains rapturous interpretations of "Haunted Heart" and "If I Loved You," and you'd be an utter fool to not buy it. (XVII-10)—Thomas Conrad

FRANK HEWITT: FRESH FROM THE COOLER

Frank Hewitt, piano; Ari Roland, bass; Jimmy Lovelace, drums
Smalls SRCD-0016 (CD). 2006. Luke Kaven, prod., eng. DDD. TT: 64:03

Fresh from the Cooler is one of Frank Hewitt's four posthumous releases to date on the Smalls label. The title is a brutal reality check. In his final years, Hewitt often slept in a stripped-out walk-in refrigerator in the back of Smalls, the underground Greenwich Village club for which the label is named. He died unknown in 2002, but his four Smalls recordings prove that he was a major figure, a missing link in the history of jazz piano. His dark notes, like stabs of love and pain embedded in the air, make most jazz pianists sound like Sunday-school teachers.—Thomas Conrad

SHIRLEY HORN: HERE'S TO LIFE

Shirley Horn, vocal, piano; Johnny Mandel, arr.

Verve 314 511 879-2 (CD). 1992. Johnny Mandel, prod.; Al Schmitt, eng. AAD? TT: 62:00

Here's to Life has been a continual part of mine since its release, in 1992. Shirley Horn was a mature artist when this long-planned collaboration with composer and arranger Johnny Mandel finally came to fruition. It was a match made in heaven. Horn's deep mezzo is surrounded by exquisite arrangements and world-class orchestrations. The

sound is beautiful, thanks to Al Schmitt's brilliant engineering. Unfortunately, no LP version exists—I hope someone will rectify that. The music is gorgeous, heartbreaking, magical! Miles Davis thought so, too; he'd agreed to play on two tracks, but passed away before that was possible. *Here's to Life* is dedicated to him.—Sasha Matson

AHMAD JAMAL: CHAMBER MUSIC OF THE NEW JAZZ

Ahmad Jamal, piano; Ray Crawford, guitar; Israel Crosby, bass
Verve B0002682-02 (CD). 1955/2004. Dave Usher, orig. prod.; Bryan Koniarz, reissue prod.; Bob Irwin, Jayme Pieruzzi, remastering. AAD. TT: 36:09

Falling midway between his 1951-52 debut sessions for Okeh/Epic and his 1958 commercial breakthrough, *But Not for Me*, this 1955 album was Jamal's first release on Argo, a subsidiary label of Chess. The drummerless trio includes the formidable bassist Israel Crosby and the underrated guitarist Ray Crawford, who does his bongo-simulation schtick on "New Rumba" and "I Get a Kick Out of You." But it's Jamal's soft, deftly rhythmic touch on piano that gives the music the spacious feel that Miles Davis so admired and that still sounds modern today. The sound has all the clarity and presence of a contemporary production, plus a warmth that's now often missing.—Larry Birnbaum

KEITH JARRETT: THE CARNEGIE HALL CONCERT

Keith Jarrett, piano
ECM 1989/1990 (2 CDs). 2006. Keith Jarrett, Manfred Eicher, prods.; Martin Pearson, eng. DDD. TT: 110:23

The Carnegie Hall Concert was not only chosen by Richard Lehner as one of *Stereophile's* two

"Recordings of the Month" for October 2006, it was also highlighted in the "Arts & Entertainment" section of the *New York Times* on Sunday, September 24, 2006. RL found the album "warm and celebratory," and I agree. This extraordinary set entirely captures the intensity and precision of Jarrett's blues and jazz improvisations, as well as the ecstasy of the audience, whose applause takes up more time than on any other album I know of. Jarrett rewarded their clamor with five encores. He spoke about the "conversation between the audience and myself" that culminated in the evening's first encore, "The Good America," which Nate Chinen of the *Times* called hymn-like, "pastoral Americana," an "anthem to that imaginary land." Jarrett's encore performance of his lyrical ballad "My Song" is so sumptuous that it's become my favorite piece on this set. Jarrett reported that "The emotional color of the hall in New York was so accepting and prepared and willing to go through whatever process I was going through." I have to agree with the *Times* and the audience—this is an extraordinary recording that captures a magical concert. It was also the first album I downloaded from Napster.com, and was worth the time and the \$19.76. (xxix:10)

—Larry Greenhill

KEITH JARRETT: STAIRCASE

Keith Jarrett, piano
ECM 1090/91 (2 CDs). 1977.
Manfred Eicher, prod.; Roger Roche, eng. AAD. TT: 74:33

⏪ Keith Jarrett released a half-dozen or so albums per year through the latter half of the 1970s, so perhaps it's not strange that this 11-faceted gem of mostly introspective lyricism was lost in the shuffle. It shouldn't have been. With the monu-

mental *Sun Bear Concerts*, recorded less than a year before, these 11 tracks of studio improvisations comprise the other of Jarrett's many solo-piano releases that I most often turn to, and perhaps to none of its tracks more often than *Hourglass*, the second of *Staircase's* four suites. "Part 1" is a study in joy and surprise, all rhythmic wit and intervallic leaps; it has made me grin every one of the 100 or so times I've heard it. "Part 2" is a seemingly never-ending cadence of lingering farewell that does at last end, though I never want it to. But there's so much more here, it's not all lyrical—thorny patches abound, as do extremely still ones—and it looks forward to the shorter improvisations of which Jarrett now builds his solo-piano concerts. A wonder in flawless technique and sound.—Richard Lehnert

KEITH JARRETT: TESTAMENT: PARIS/ LONDON

Keith Jarrett, piano
ECM 2130-32 (3 CDs). 2009. Keith Jarrett, prod.; Martin Pearson, eng. DDD. TT: 2:42:33

⏪ Keith Jarrett continues to explore the shorter improvisations on solo piano that have replaced his long-form concerts of past decades. I recommend here the two discs recorded in London in late 2008 (the Paris concert, recorded five days earlier, seems in comparison mere warmup). The variety and capacity of Jarrett's powers of musical invention seem as undiluted by age (he's in his mid-60s) as does his phenomenal technique. By turns, the 12 improvisations of the London concert comprise austere meditation; a thorny syncopation seemingly unplayable by a mere two hands; languid gospel; relentless modulation; a winsome lullaby; the next chapter in Jarrett's continuing search for the deep,

churning ur-vamp of the blues; a seeming folk ballad in settings that vary from the pellucid to the florid; polytonal and densely polyrhythmic, adamant bop; every Great American Songbook ballad ever written turning slowly in a kaleidoscope of bittersweet chromaticism; and hard gospel so richly chorded in the left hand it's hard to believe Jarrett wasn't also playing organ. As in his long-form improvs, Jarrett is heard here inventing entire musical games and establishing their rules, even as he bends and breaks those rules to create new ones, all the while *playing*—in every sense of that word—as if the life of his heart depended on it. It did then, and now, differently, it does yet.

—Richard Lehnert

KEITH JARRETT & CHARLIE HADEN: JASMINE

Keith Jarrett, piano; Charlie Haden, bass
ECM 2165 (CD). 2010. Keith Jarrett, prod.; Martin Pearson, eng. DDD. TT: 62:30

⏪ A gorgeous set of standards, a salve for the soul, and the sound is vivid, intimate, transparent; every detail is etched in time. It's a low-key work, not as virtuosic as either master's best, but there's a warmth and an airiness that are transcendent. I have played this disc many times late at night, to set the world right, which it does on a level of Bill Evans's *Waltz for Debby*. And though my tone might suggest otherwise, it's not at all sentimental or corny. (XXXIII-8)—Fred Kaplan

KEITH JARRETT/ GARY PEACOCK/JACK DEJOHNETTE: MY FOOLISH HEART

Keith Jarrett, piano; Gary Peacock, bass; Jack DeJohnette, drums
ECM 2021/22 (2 CDs). 2007.
Manfred Eicher, prod.; Martin Pearson, eng. DDD. TT: 108:49

⏪ It's downright embarrassing to have to write yet another rave review of yet another release from Keith Jarrett's Standards trio, but goddammit if this isn't the most joyous, ebullient—in a word, lovely—piano-trio music I've ever heard. From the serenely liquid chiming of Jarrett's long, long lines in the fast tunes to his subtle reinventions of the harmonies of such ballads as the title track and "What's New," to the veritable potted history of jazz that is "Ain't Misbehavin'" with Gary Peacock's wittily nuanced bass solo and Jack DeJohnette's relaxed discipline—whoever thought drums could sound so slap-happy?—this album is the embodiment of light, delight, and grace, and the same goes for the warm, spacious sound. These three may have permanently sewn their foolish hearts on their sleeves, but without a stitch of sentimentality.

—Richard Lehnert

MANU KATCHÉ: NEIGHBOURHOOD

Manu Katché, drums; Jan Garbarek, tenor saxophone; Tomasz Stanko, trumpet; Marcin Wasilewski, piano; Sławomir Kurkiewicz, double bass
ECM 1896 (CD). 2005. Manfred Eicher, prod.; Jan Erik Kongshaug, eng. DDD. TT: 55:07

⏪ Manu Katché wrote all 10 of *Neighbourhood's* spare, muscular compositions, in addition to driving the band with his spare, muscular drumming. The melodies are dreamy, yet imbued with a physicality not always present in ECM jazz sessions—partially due to Garbarek's choice of tenor rather than his astringent alto saxophone. Kongshaug's engineering gives all six players lots of space, and the disc an uncompressed dynamic range that's startling in its intensity.—Wes Phillips

DAVID KIKOSKI: DAVE KIKOSKI

David Kikoski, piano; Essiet Essiet, bass; Al Foster, drums
 Sony Epicure EK 64441 (CD). 1994.
 David Kikoski, Michael Caplan, prods.; Jim Anderson, eng. DDD? TT: 60:19

 David Kikoski, piano demon and former Roy Haynes sideman, had a one-album fling with a major label while in his early 30s. The translucent light-green tint of the jewel case, the abstract graphic design, the crude handwriting of the booklet: all seemed to promise that the music would stand apart as well. It does. Playing mostly originals, as well as a heart-stopping "Giant Steps" and a poetic "Long Ago (And Far Away)," Kikoski soars to the skies, his inconceivable chops never obscuring his melodic subtlety. Al Foster swings like mad while supplying a funky lilt in "E," "B-flat Tune," and "The Shadow." (XVIII-2)

—David R. Adler

THE L.A. FOUR: GOING HOME

Bud Shank, flute, alto flute, alto saxophone; Laurindo Almeida, guitar; Ray Brown, bass; Shelly Manne, drums

Ai Music 32 JD-10043 (CD). 1977/1997. Tashinari Koruma, prod.; Lee Hirschberg, eng. AAD. TT: 32:30

 The L.A. Four recorded nine albums from 1974 to 1982, but it all began in 1954, when alto saxophonist and flutist Bud Shank paired up with Brazilian acoustic guitarist Laurindo Almeida to make an album called *Braziliance*. Twenty years later, they were joined by bassist Ray Brown and drummer Shelly Manne to form the L.A. Four. Their cool-toned bop showed influences of European classical music, bossa nova, and samba. In the photo on the cover, the musicians are spread out in a large arc: Almeida to the left, Brown at center, Shank to the right, and Manne at center rear. This remastered

Japanese edition creates precisely defined sonic holograms of the four musicians on a deep, wide, layered soundstage. (XIV-1)

—Larry Greenhill

THE L.A. 4: JUST FRIENDS

Bud Shank, alto saxophone; Laurindo Almeida, guitar; Ray Brown, double bass; Jeff Hamilton, drums

Concord CJD-1001(direct-to-disc LP). 1978. Carl E. Jefferson, prod.; Phil Edwards, eng.; Ken Perry, Gene Thompson, Jay Maynard, disc cutting. AAA. TT: 35:26

 Many direct-to-disc recordings achieve sonic greatness, but few do so musically because of the risks involved—one bad note blows the entire lacquer. Producers and musicians play it safe with both repertoire and performances. This bossa nova-infused direct-cut disc is anchored by superior musicianship and sophisticated arrangements; it sounds superb and is musically worthwhile. At my store appearances, even when I play a less-than-pristine copy (my mint copy stays home!), *Just Friends* never fails to amaze. A recent reissue on two 45rpm LPs from Groove Note, cut by Bernie Grundman from the backup tapes, sounds very good—until you hear this. —Michael Fremer

JULIAN LAGE: WORLD'S FAIR

Julian Lage, acoustic guitar

Modern Lore 99767 (CD). 2015.
 Julian Lage, Matt Munisteri, prods.; Armand Hirsch, eng. DDD. TT: 37:56

 At 26, Julian Lage sat down with his 1939 Martin 000-18 and mostly original compositions and delivered one of the great albums in the chronicles of solo guitar. From the speedy intricacy of "Peru," "Gardens," and "Missouri" to the contemplative beauty of "40's" and "Day and Age," Lage set the bar high for personal expression and unforced assimilation of

influences. Echoes of folk, country, and American roots, jazz early and modern: Lage rendered it all with a singing tone and fierce yet remarkably easygoing technique, creating moments "on the knife's edge of guitar mischief," to quote co-producer Matt Munisteri from the liner notes. —David R. Adler

MICHEL LEGRAND: LEGRAND JAZZ

Michel Legrand, arr., conductor; Herbie Mann, flute; Phil Woods, alto saxophone; John Coltrane, Ben Webster, tenor saxophone; Donald Byrd, Miles Davis, Art Farmer, trumpet; Bill Evans, piano; Paul Chambers, bass; others

Universal Music France 830 074-2 (CD). 1958/2003. No prod. or eng. listed; Alexis Frenkel, remastering. A?D. TT: 44:41

 This has to be the ultimate 1950s Phenomenal Jazz Sleeper Recording. Michel Legrand is usually thought of as the composer of syrupy movie music such as "The Windmills of Your Mind," from *The Thomas Crown Affair*. However, that's less than entirely fair. Legrand was always at least one rung above the level of a journeyman Tin Pan Alley songsmith. His score for *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* was a truly epochal achievement, in that there is no spoken dialogue in the entire film: it is all sung. Legrand also cowrote "What Are You Doing the Rest of Your Life" and "You Must Believe in Spring."

The total outlier in Legrand's discography is this oft-overlooked product of three 1958 sessions at Columbia's 30th Street studio in New York, where he didn't play piano and isn't credited as a composer. Instead, the 26-year-old Legrand shaped up the sessions, wrote the charts and conducted 11 standards by Armstrong, Basie, Beiderbecke, Ellington, Gillespie, Goodman, Monk, Reinhardt, among others—from "A Night in Tunisia" to "Round Midnight."

The earliest session is the attention magnet; it features Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Phil Woods, Bill Evans, and Paul Chambers. (Tracks from the three sessions are interleaved in the running order.) There's not much variability in the quality of the sessions, because Legrand's inventive arrangements are so engaging. Miss it at your peril.

(XIX-2)—John Marks

JOE LOCKE/DAVID HAZELTINE QUARTET: MUTUAL ADMIRATION SOCIETY

Joe Locke, vibraphone; David Hazeltine, piano; Essiet Essiet, bass; Billy Drummond, drums
 Sharp Nine CD 1015-2 (CD). 1999.
 Marc Edelman, prod.; Michael Marciano, eng. ADD. TT: 59:47

 True magic doesn't happen all that often, not even to labels with high artistic and sonic standards like Sharp Nine. But on a September day in 1998, the Muse spoke to everyone in Systems Two Studio in Brooklyn, starting with engineer Mike Marciano. His analog recording captures the complex sonorities of the vibraphone with an exactitude that has never been surpassed. Locke and Hazeltine play as if shot into this session from cannons. Their commingling of piano and vibes has orchestral sweep, harmonic density, crisp clarity, and merciless swing. Torrential creativity overwhelms and accelerates nominal ballads like "Spring Will Be a Little Late This Year" and "For All We Know." —Thomas Conrad

HENRY MANCINI: COMBO!

RCA LSP-2258 (LP). 1961. Dick Pierce, prod.; Al Schmidt, eng. AAA. TT: 36:47

 A combination of cool jazz and what's today referred to as "space-age bachelor pad music," this Mancini outing features top West Coast musicians

including Art Pepper on clarinet (!), Pete Candoli, Shelly Manne, Larry Bunker, and "Johnny" Williams (the John Williams of *Star Wars* fame) on piano and harpsichord. The harpsichord gimmick wears a bit thin, but Mancini's arrangements remain otherwise fresh and inventive. The opener, Bobby Timmons's "Moanin'," will floor you thanks to the astonishing Living Stereo sound, engineered by the still great Al Schmidt at RCA's Music Center of the World. Not one of Mancini's more commonly found RCAs, but well worth finding, even if you use it only as a demo disc to show your friends what CDs just can't do. —Michael Fremer

PAT METHENY GROUP: TRAVELS

Pat Metheny, guitars; Lyle Mays, piano, synthesizers, autoharp, organ, synclavier; Steve Rodby, basses; Dan Gottlieb, drums; Nana Vasconcelos, voice, percussion, berimbau

ECM 1252/53 (2 CDs). 1983. Pat Metheny, Manfred Eicher, prods.; Jan Erik Kongshaug, Randy Ezratty, Gary Geller, engs. AAD. TT: 96:26

Long ago, Pat Metheny went from whiz kid to master storyteller. This double album, a tour document from 1982, chronicles that process well. *Travels* is rapturous, hitting on all the reasons for Metheny's widespread appeal: emotional intensity, warmth, chops, melody after sublime melody. I've practically memorized the applause between these tracks. Something about the blend of joy and nostalgia in a piece like "The Fields, The Sky" always sends me. And the balance of moods here, from the yearning of "Goodbye" to the grooving determination of "Song for Bilbao," seems to hit on something essential about life itself. —David R. Adler

ROSCOE MITCHELL SEXTET:

SOUND

Roscoe Mitchell, alto saxophone, clarinet, recorder, etc.; Maurice McIntyre, tenor saxophone; Lester Bowie, trumpet, flugelhorn, harmonica; Lester Lashley, trombone, cello; Malachi Favors, bass; Alvin Fielder, drums

Delmark DE-408 (CD). 1966/1996. Bob Koester, prod.; Steve Wagner, eng. ADD. TT: 67:40

The first release by members of Chicago's Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), *Sound* is a seminal avant-jazz classic. What might seem on first hearing to be a random assortment of weird noises gradually reveals itself as a set of carefully ordered compositions and logical improvisations. The title track of the original LP, named for its unorthodox instrumental timbres, was spliced together from two takes, both of which are included on this CD. Comparing the two performances, the structure becomes clear, and one can easily distinguish the elegiac theme, played at a glacial tempo, from the squealing, squawking, chattering, whinnying solos, which remain thoughtful and expressive even at their most abstract.

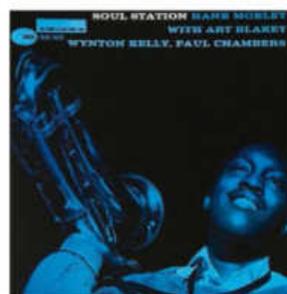
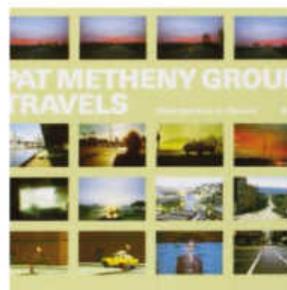
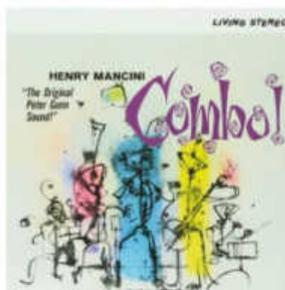
—Larry Birnbaum

HANK MOBLEY: SOUL STATION

Hank Mobley, tenor saxophone; Wynton Kelly, piano; Paul Chambers, bass; Art Blakey, drums

Audio Wave AWMXR-0001 (CD). 1960/2009. Alfred Lion, prod.; Rudy Van Gelder, eng.; Joe Harley, reissue prod.; Alan Yoshida, remastering. AAD. TT: 37:33

Leonard Feather once famously described Hank Mobley as "the middle-weight champion of the tenor saxophone." Middle-weights never get much respect. But before drugs and general dissipation got him, Mobley recorded some albums for Blue Note in the 1960s that make time stand still. *Soul Station* exemplifies the suave, flowing me-



lodicism and erotic rhythmic subtlety that made Mobley unique. With a rhythm section for the ages behind him, Mobley delivers profundities of soul and swing now gone from planet Earth. This Audio Wave reissue uses JVC's XRCD24 mastering and manufacturing technologies and gets you closest to Blue Note's master tapes. (xx-9, XXIX-2)—Thomas Conrad

HANK MOBLEY: SOUL STATION

Hank Mobley, tenor saxophone; Wynton Kelly, piano; Paul Chambers, bass; Art Blakey, drums
Blue Note ST-84031/AWMXR-0001 (XRCD). 1960/2009. Alfred Lion, orig. prod.; Rudy Van Gelder, orig. eng.; Joe Harley, reissue prod.; Alan Yoshida, reissue mastering; Robert Bantz, exec. prod. ADD. TT: 37:31

Rather than contemplate my exit from this mortal coil, and the marginally more cheerful subject of the records I'd

take with me, I decided to choose for this, my 20th R2D4, at least one of the records that, over the past 12 months, I spent the most time with and that spoke to me most often. While this choice will be ridiculously obvious to jazz fans, Hank Mobley's *Soul Station* has called my name all year long. To fans of bebop, the tenor saxophone, and the original Blue Note Records, the album is one of the most familiar milestones in jazz. In all his recordings, the man had/has the proverbial "instantly recognizable" tone. The loose blues of the title track, one of four originals here, shows how enjoyable he could be in a fun, relaxed mode. And his smooth, assured take on Irving Berlin's "Remember" is perhaps the most representative cut of his entire oeuvre. Neither a restless seeker like Coltrane

or Newk, nor a skronker like Ornette, nor a floater like Lester Young, Mobley had a tone and approach that occupied a very appealing middle ground in the history of that horn. Often underrated and overlooked because his records were accessible, Mobley lived at a time when groundbreaking tenor players abounded. But time has proven him to be his generation's quiet genius, with ideas that were fresh and inventive, and a tone that has become not only instantly recognizable but a classic of the bebop genre. Like all sessions engineered by Rudy Van Gelder, this recording is full of detail and presence. In this age of Internet auctions, Mobley's original Blue Note recordings routinely command astronomical prices. I listened to a French Blue Note LP reissue (1984), a set of 45rpm LPs from Music Matters (2008), a 24-bit Super Analog XRCD from Audio Wave Music (2009), and a new, \$19.95 vinyl reissue from Blue Note/Universal. I aspire to someday pull off a Lufthansa-level heist and spend all the loot on a mono pressing of this stone classic. (Vol.20 No.9, Vol.29 No.2, Vol.34 No.2)—**Robert Baird**

HANK MOBLEY: WORKOUT

Hank Mobley, tenor saxophone; Grant Green, guitar; Wynton Kelly, piano; Paul Chambers, bass; Philly Joe Jones, drums

Blue Note 3-37771-2 (CD). 1961/2006. Alfred Lion, orig. prod.; Michael Cuscuna, reissue prod.; Rudy van Gelder, orig. eng., remastering. AAD. TT: 46:13

 *Workout* is a Blue Note classic in every sense, from its recording by Rudy van Gelder to its cover photography by Francis Wolff. Label stalwarts Mobley and Grant Green, backed by an illustrious rhythm section, meld bebop and blues into pure hard bop, investing every note with soulful feeling. Only "Smokin'" and

"Greasin' Easy" are actual 12-bar blues, but even the standards "Three Coins in the Fountain" (not included on the original LP) and "The Best Things in Life Are Free" are steeped in bluesy spirit. Most effective are the extended 32-bar blowing vehicles "Uh Huh" and the title track, elegantly funky Mobley originals that allow the mellow-toned saxophonist and the mordant-toned guitarist to stretch out to the fullest.—**Larry Birnbaum**

THELONIOUS MONK: THE BEST OF THE BLUE NOTE YEARS

Thelonious Monk, piano; Sahib Shihab, alto saxophone; Billy Smith, tenor saxophone; George Taitt, trumpet; Robert Paige, bass; Art Blakey, drums; Milt Jackson, vibes; others

Blue Note EMI 956362 (CD). 1947–52/1991. Alfred Lion, prod.; various engs. AAD? TT: 50:10

 This is the music that changed the world. Monk's 1947–52 recordings for Blue Note are some of the most influential compositions in jazz history. My preferred way to listen to this material is the two-LP *Complete Genius* release of 1976, which collects everything Monk recorded for Blue Note as a leader. You have to buy an unwieldy four-disc set to get that same material on CD, but this collection touches all the highlights without breaking the bank. Monk's exotic harmonic shapes, unforgettable melodies, and unique hippy-hop rhythms were futuristic when originally recorded and are completely contemporary today, from the haunting dreamscape of "Round Midnight" through "In Walked Bud," "Monk's Mood," "Thelonious," "Evidence," "Epistrophy," "Straight, No Chaser," "Mysterioso," "Four in One," and "Criss Cross." Brilliant sidemen, particularly Art Blakey on drums and Milt Jackson on vibraphone, share Monk's future vision

of jazz with incandescent clairvoyance in these sessions.—**John Swenson**

THELONIOUS MONK: LIVE AT THE IT CLUB: COMPLETE

Thelonious Monk, piano; Charlie Rouse, tenor saxophone; Larry Gales, bass; Ben Riley, drums

Columbia/Legacy C2K 65288 (2 CDs). 1964/1998. Teo Macero, prod.; Orrin Keepnews, reissue prod.; Mark Wilder, remix, remastering. AAD. TT: 2:33:36

 If you love Monk, you enjoy him on his bad nights. On his great nights, he is continuous jolts of adrenalin. On October 31 and November 1, 1964, in a long-forgotten club in Los Angeles, Monk is beside himself. His wild, clanging solo in "Misterioso" comes out of some previously unvisited cranny of his unique psyche. In "Rhythm-a-ning," he adds a little explosion of notes to the first phrase of the melody. Charlie Rouse instantly picks up this unprecedented embellishment and solos on it. Some heroic, anonymous engineer gets it all: the quartet, the crowd, the electric night air. (XXI-7)

—**Thomas Conrad**

MOONDOG: THE VIKING OF SIXTH AVENUE

Honest Jon's Records HJRLP18 (2 UK LPs). 1949–1995/2006. Compilation by Mark Ainley, Edwin Pouncey, Howard Williams. ADA? TT: 72:44

 Louis Thomas Hardin, aka Moondog (1916–1999), is often compared to Sun Ra and Harry Partch. He was an artist whose eccentric wardrobe, edgy musical aesthetic, and dodgy relationship to the mainstream music industry were forged as poetic responses to the Great War, the Second War, the Cold War, the Vietnam War, and the British Invasion. Terry Cox, Pentangle's percussionist, wrote and performed a song about

him. High Water Sound's Jeffrey Catalano describes Moondog as "universal innocence." This world-famous blind street musician who dressed like a Viking was a gentle, worldly-wise poet whose every act—from making his own instruments and writing down each note of his compositions to publishing his own music and living in Central Park—was an act of love.—**Herb Reichert**

CHARLIE PARKER: THE COMPLETE SAVOY AND DIAL STUDIO RECORDINGS

Charlie Parker, alto saxophone; Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, trumpet; Bud Powell, Erroll Garner, piano; Max Roach, drums; many others

Savoy/Atlantic 92911-2 (8 CDs). 1944–48/2000. Teddy Reig, Ross Russell, prods.; Orrin Keepnews, reissue prod.; Paul Reid III, restoration. AAD. TT: 9:00:17

 Forty years ago, when I began listening to jazz, the first few dozen albums I bought were all by Charlie Parker. Later I branched out to discover the diverse wonders of the others. I don't listen to Bird as much as I used to, but when I do, I re-experience the ecstasy, the perfection—so intricate and heady, yet no less gorgeous and bluesy: there's nothing like it, and probably never will be. If I left this boxed set behind, at some point I would miss it horribly. The sound isn't great, but the engineers of this particular edition have cleaned it up as well as any. (XXIV-1)—**Fred Kaplan**

CHARLIE PARKER: NEW SOUNDS IN MODERN MUSIC, VOL.1

Charlie Parker, alto saxophone; Dizzy Gillespie, piano, trumpet; Miles Davis, trumpet; Curly Russell, bass; Argonne Thornton, piano; Max Roach, drums

Savoy MG 9000 (10" mono LP). 1950. Herman Lubinsky, exec. prod.; unknown eng. AAA. TT: 21:25

 For Miles Davis, the history of jazz could be

condensed into four words: "Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker." Of the second half of that observation, no greater evidence exists than this record. On November 26, 1945, alto saxophonist Parker entered the studio as a bandleader for the first time, with Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Curly Russell, Max Roach, and Argonne Thornton (aka Sadik Hakim). They recorded three complete songs and a couple of improvisations that day, including a version of "Now's the Time" that includes the young Davis's first solo on record. But the session is remembered for "Ko-Ko," an uptempo variation on "Cherokee" that came to epitomize both Parker's virtuosity and bebop itself. The first solo is Gillespie's, on trumpet—no-table because he was there to play piano—after which Parker burns phrase after memorable phrase into the listener's mind, with uncanny rhythmic flexibility and harmonic intuition. It's a jazz milestone, and one of the finest, most exciting examples of improvisational music ever committed to record.

"Ko-Ko" and the seven other selections on this 10" LP have been anthologized numerous times, often with good liner notes and great outtakes, but never with better sound than this. The genius of Charlie Parker could transcend any format, but if you crave all the color, presence, and impact there is, seek out the vinyl (and a good mono cartridge).

—Art Dudley

JOE PASS: VIRTUOSO 4

Joe Pass, acoustic guitar
Pablo 2640-102 (2 LPs). 1983.
Norman Granz, prod.; Dennis
Sands, eng. AAA. TT: 82:92

 This was the first straight-ahead jazz I ever bought: a gatefold double album of unaccompanied guitar, songs

my parents knew called "standards." When I heard Pass's rubato meditation on "Lush Life," I wasn't sure it was jazz. In fact, it was Billy Strayhorn, whose thoroughly modern tonal palette I'd learn all about. But Pass, for me, was also Bebop 101, with the finest chord-melody conception and airtight walking bass lines, full of spontaneity and deep swing. I had all four *Virtuoso* albums, but wore this one out (never knowing it'd been recorded in 1973, 10 years prior to release).

—David R. Adler

ART PEPPER: BLUES FOR THE FISHERMAN: UNRELEASED ART, VOL. VI

Art Pepper, alto saxophone,
clarinet; Milcho Leviev, piano; Tony
Dumas, bass; Carl Burnett, drums
Widow's Taste APM 1101 (4 CDs).
1980/2011. Peter Bould, prod.,
eng.; Peter Ball, Graham Ward,
engs. ADD. TT: 4:46:00

 Laurie Pepper is Art Pepper's widow. There are now eight volumes in the *Unreleased Art* series on her label, *Widow's Taste*. They rescue lost music by a great jazz musician in danger of being forgotten. Most volumes have compromised sound because they are soundboard or audience tapes. *Vol. VI* is where to go first, because it was professionally recorded at Ronnie Scott's, in London, and because Pepper is beside himself. He does filthy, kicking, start-and-stop blues like the title track. He burns down "I'll Remember April," twice. He does ballads ("Goodbye," "What's New?") as if he's wrenching them from himself, two years from the end of his very hard life.

—Thomas Conrad

RALPH PETERSON'S UNITY PROJECT: OUTER REACHES

Ralph Peterson, drums; Jovan
Alexandre, tenor saxophone; Josh

Evans, trumpet; Pat Bianchi, organ;
David Fuczynski, guitar (tracks
10, 12)

Onyx Music (CD). 2011. Ralph
Peterson, Pat Bianchi, engs., mix.
DDD? TT: 78:47

 Drummer Ralph Peterson, thunderous yet supple, is just the guy to tackle Woody Shaw classics "The Moontrane," "Beyond All Limits," and "Katrina Ballerina." The former 1980s "young lion" is now mentoring serious new talent, represented here by Josh Evans and Jovan Alexandre in the front line. Their soloing is ferocious, their horn personalities uncommonly rich and warm (and beautifully captured). Pat Bianchi brings a Larry Young vibe, and "Fuze" adds McLaughlin-esque shredding on two cuts, but Peterson isn't after replication: his originals, dedicated to mom, dad, and wife, give a personal dimension to what is surely a highlight of 2011.

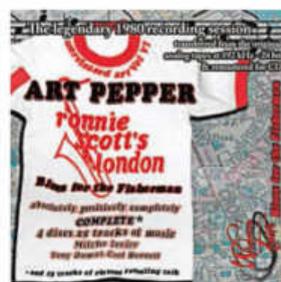
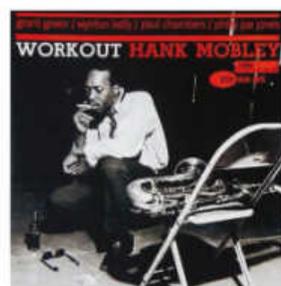
—David R. Adler

PRESERVATION HALL JAZZ BAND: THAT'S IT!

Charlie Gabriel, clarinet, tenor
saxophone; Clint Maedgen, tenor &
baritone saxophone; Mark Braud,
trumpet; Freddie Lonzo, trombone;
Ronnell Johnson, tuba, piano; Ben
Jaffe, tuba, string bass, banjo,
percussion; Rickie Monie, piano;
Joe Lastie Jr., drums

Columbia/Legacy 88883715212
(CD). 2013. Jim James, Ben Jaffe,
prods.; Kevin Ratterman, eng.; Bob
Ludwig, mastering. AAD? TT: 45:16

 The Preservation Hall Jazz Band has been around for five decades, but they come out swinging on *That's It!*, recorded in New Orleans' Preservation Hall over a few days in late November 2012. The tunes sound like standards honed for ages, but in fact are all freshly penned originals, and the performances stand comparison with any of the band's best. *Performances* is the right word for it—I doubt there's any sort of processing or [gasp] Auto Tune



going on here. PHJB play it like they mean it, and *That's It!* is the real deal.

—Steve Guttenberg

BUD POWELL: JAZZ GIANT

Bud Powell, piano; Ray Brown

(tracks 1–6), **Curly Russell** (tracks 7–13), **double bass**; **Max Roach**, drums

Verve 829 937-2 (CD). 1950/1998. Norman Granz, prod. AAD. TT: 40:16

 Psychopathology was endemic in the bebop world, and it particularly plagued the pianist Bud Powell, an immensely influential modern-jazz innovator with dazzling keyboard technique. In a *British Journal of Psychiatry* paper published in 2003, Geoffrey Wills, a clinical psychologist, suggested that Powell's abnormal behavior was the result of schizoaffective disorder, an affliction that can cause hallucinations, manic episodes, and depression. Powell was institutionalized for three-and-a-half years in all, and—amazingly—recorded much of this album during a 1949 leave from a New York psychiatric hospital that lasted mere hours. A nurse accompanied him to the gig, which yielded stellar performances of tunes that included four originals. Powell's fleet, often mind-spinning pianism is at a peak on this CD. If the music stems from torment, it nevertheless flowers, transcending pain.—**David Lander**

THE QUINTET OF THE HOT CLUB OF FRANCE: HOT JAZZ

Stéphane Grappelli, violin; **Django Reinhardt**, **Joseph Reinhardt**, **Roger Chaput**, guitar; **Louis Vola**, bass
RCA Victor HJ-6 (4 78rpm shellac records). 1936–37. Unknown prod., unknown eng. A. (Recorded and mastered, unedited, in one step.) TT: 22:45

 Timeless though their achievements appear—they invented a new type of jazz ensemble, set new standards for instrumental technique, and influenced countless younger musicians, from Wes Montgomery to Nickel Creek—the seminal work of guitarist Django Reinhardt and

violinist **Stéphane Grappelli** is forever associated with a certain era when dread and abandon mixed to make the craziest and most fetching music the modern West has known. That connection is made clearest by hearing their Quintet's primal recordings at their primal best: the original, unprocessed, direct-to-disc 78s, from which the astonishing force of every note is loosed as from nothing else.

And so it goes here: Most of these eight numbers—"Sweet Chorus," "Runnin' Wild," "Solitude," "Miss Annabelle Lee," Django's own "Mystery Pacific," and three others—are available on numberless LP and CD collections; I would no more send you in that direction than I'd advise you to try snuggling up with your computer to read downloaded versions of *The Faerie Queene* or *Black Elk Speaks*. Copies of 78rpm shellacs of this well-chosen collection are available in respectable condition, albeit at a price; the gear that'll unlock it is out there, too. It doesn't matter if you're old enough to remember the format, only that you remember what it's like when a work of art changes your point of view.

—**Art Dudley**

RACHEL'S: HANDWRITING

Quarterstick QS 30 (165gm LP). 1995. Rachel's, prods.: **Tony French**, **Bob Weston**, others, engs.; **John Loder**, mastering. AAA. TT: 44:00

 I can't remember if I've already R2D4'd this. It deserves a second go around if I did and I saw a copy at Amoeba recently so I bet it's still in print. Rachel's is a loose affiliation of young, classically trained musicians making eclectic, postmodern classical acoustic music. Here they also do jazz on one tune, wickedly crossing Astor Piazzolla and Angelo Badalamenti. The music is

extremely visual, and so is the minimally miked, analog recording, which is stunningly three-dimensional and harmonically rich. The packaging is special. The only thing wrong with this record is that it's not better known. Please do something about that.—**Michael Fremer**

RADIO I CHING: LAST KIND WORDS

Andy Haas, soprano & alto sax, fife, marsing, live electronics; **Don Fiorino**, guitar, lap steel, banjo, lotar; **Dee Pop**, drums, percussion
Resonantmusic 002 (CD). 2006. Radio I Ching, prods. DDD. TT: 58:48
Available from www.downtownmusicgallery.com and www.cdbaby.com.

 If done right, innovative arrangements of cover tunes can be more satisfying than original works, and the jazz trio Radio I Ching does it right. These virtuoso multi-instrumentalists attack a broad range of genres centered around a core of saxophone, guitar, and drums. Masters of impressionistic texture, they delicately morph their takes on tunes ranging from Duke Ellington to Dr. John to Charlie Haden to "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." The results are far from what the original composers intended but are quite accessible, regardless of your musical leanings. Full disclosure: I play in another band with Radio I Ching's guitarist, Don Fiorino.

—**Robert J. Reina**

SONNY ROLLINS: OUR MAN IN JAZZ

Sonny Rollins, tenor saxophone; **Don Cherry**, pocket trumpet; **Bob Cranshaw**, bass; **Billy Higgins**, drums
RCA LSP-2612 (LP). 1962. **George Avakian**, prod.; **Paul Goodman**, eng. AAA. TT: 48:55

 Recorded live at the Village Gate during Rollins' free-jazz phase (his quartet included **Ornette Coleman's** trumpeter and drummer), this is one of

the most thrilling albums ever: Rollins dashes through standards with hair-raising verve and depth, **Cherry** blows counterpoint, **Higgins** pushes everyone to new heights, and **Cranshaw** keeps it all anchored. The sound is staggeringly realistic; various vinyl reissues by Classic Records, especially a 45rpm set some years ago, are equally or more so. (XX-3)—**Fred Kaplan**

SONNY ROLLINS: ROAD SHOWS, VOL. 2

Sonny Rollins, tenor saxophone; **Roy Hargrove**, trumpet; **Christian McBride**, bass; seven others
Doxy B0015949-02 (CD). 2011. **Sonny Rollins**, prod.; **Richard Corsello**, prod., eng. DDD. TT: 66:14

 September 10, 2010. **Sonny Rollins's** sold-out 80th-birthday concert at the Beacon Theater in Manhattan. At 80, **Sonny** has only occasional great nights. This is one. Every time you think he's peaked, he kicks it higher and keeps waiting. There is a monstrous 15-minute annihilation of "They Say It's Wonderful." In "In a Sentimental Mood," guest **Jim Hall** breaks your heart. **Ornette Coleman** joins in a 22-minute "Sonnymoon for Two" for the ages. The Beacon Theater goes mad. It is the only meeting on record of the two greatest living saxophonists. Ever wonder why R2D4 was invented? This is why. (XXXIV-12)

—**Thomas Conrad**

KURT ROSENWINKEL STANDARDS TRIO: REFLECTIONS

Kurt Rosenwinkel, guitar; **Eric Revis**, bass; **Eric Harland**, drums
Wommusic WOM0002 (CD). 2009. **Kurt Rosenwinkel**, prod., mix; **Anders Chad Tidemann**, **Stephanie Chan-Tidemann**, exec. prods.; **Andy Taub**, eng.; **Ben Liscio**, asst. eng.; **Michael Perez-Cisneros**, mastering. DDD. TT: 50:52

 "Take these." Art, the friendly office mailroom manager at *Stereophile*, hands me three guitar CDs: one from Hendrix, another

from Mike Stern, and the third by Kurt Rosenwinkel. I listened to all extensively, yet I keep going back to one: Rosenwinkel's *Reflections*, on which his use of interweaving chord inversions, pushed along by chromatic bass lines and supported by leading tones on his top strings, provides pensive melodies surrounded by rich harmony, and exemplifies the full scope with which all of the electric guitar can be used for jazz music. In "East Coast Love Affair," an original composition, Rosenwinkel sweep-picks mellow arpeggios for tasteful nuggets of speed, piquing one's ears for just a moment, then descends the fretboard in gentle bursts of unresolved chords. This album provides endless tension and release, one expansive and subtle run after another. Eric Harland's kick-drum pattern in Miles Davis's "Fall" is hypnotic and groovy, an infectious beat that evolved from a jam on Q-Tip's hit single "Vivrant Thing." Sound-wise, that same kick drum has body and flesh, cymbals shimmer with each light splash, and the guitar's blunted yet crisp tone churns out with that heart-warming slight tube crackle. Rosenwinkel doesn't try to be off-the-wall or revolutionary with his technique—just cool through tone, inventive through his application of modern guitar techniques, and original with each thoughtful pick. He succeeds, wildly. —**Ariel Bitran**

JENNY SCHEINMAN: CROSSING THE FIELD

Jenny Scheinman, violin, piano; Doug Wieselmann, clarinets; Ron Miles, cornet; Bill Frisell, guitar; Jason Moran, piano; Tim Luntzel, bass; Kenny Wollesen, drums
Koch KOC-CD-4590 (CD, LP), 2008. Jenny Scheinman, prod.; Sascha Von Oertzen, prod., eng. DDD. TT: 59:47

2008 was a banner year for Jenny Scheinman. Although she'd already

released four albums as a leader, she was best known for her violin support of a range of artists, from Lucinda Williams to Bill Frisell. In 2008, however, she released two disparate albums: her fine, self-titled vocal debut, and this lyrical gem. *Crossing the Field* traverses an expanse of territory, from Copland-esque melodies and wistful lyricism to funk-inflected grooves and upbeat improvised excursions, highlighted by the rowdy swinger "I Heart Eye Patch" and the rhythm-popping dancer "Hard Sole Shoe." Her sidemen deliver the goods. Scheinman's band features Frisell, pianist Jason Moran (who consistently sparks the proceedings), and, on six tracks, 25 strings led by members of the string quartet Brooklyn Rider. The CD is a feast of music through-composed by Scheinman, and buoyed by the improvisational genius of the front line of violin, horns, guitar, and piano inspired by the crack rhythm section. —**Dan Ouellette**

MARIA SCHNEIDER ORCHESTRA: THE THOMPSON FIELDS

ArtistShare AS0137 (CD), 2015. Maria Schneider, Ryan Truesdell, prods.; Brian Montgomery, eng. DDD. TT: 77:25

Maria Schneider's *The Thompson Fields* marks a new peak for our era's top big-band composer, for both her musicians (many of whom have been with her for a decade or more) and contemporary big-band music in general: a mix of classic Americana, with lush harmonies, muscular rhythms, and orchestral voicings as complex yet as accessibly vibrant as anything around. And the sound is luscious and detailed. (XXVIII-9). —**Fred Kaplan**

JIMMY SMITH: COOL BLUES

Jimmy Smith, organ; Lou Donaldson, alto saxophone; Tina Brooks, tenor saxophone; Eddie McFadden, guitar; Art Blakey, Donald Bailey, drums

Blue Note RVG Edition 5 35587 2 (CD), 1958/2002. Alfred Lion, prod.; Rudy Van Gelder, eng., remastering. ADD. TT: 72:14

April 7, 1958. Just another convivial, relaxed, boozy Monday night at Small's Paradise, in Harlem. The sparse crowd, laughing and chatting, is into the music. But they don't know they are there for the best record Jimmy Smith will ever make. Certainly they don't know they are there for one of the few records the great, doomed tenor saxophonist Tina Brooks will ever make. Smith's Hammond B-3 shrieks maniacally and sings. Brooks's solos sound as if someone has opened a valve and released a natural source of subtle, graceful creativity that might flow forth forever. It was much less than forever, but at least we have *Cool Blues*.

—**Thomas Conrad**

ART TATUM: THE TATUM GROUP MASTERPIECES, VOLUME EIGHT

Art Tatum, piano; Ben Webster, tenor saxophone; Red Callender, bass; Bill Douglass, drums
Pablo PACD-2405-431-2 (CD), 1956/1990. Norman Granz, prod.; Val Valentin, eng. ADD. TT: 58:00

ART TATUM: THE TATUM GROUP MASTERPIECES, VOLUME SIX

Art Tatum, piano; Red Callender, bass; Jo Jones, drums
Pablo PACD-2405-429-2 (CD), 1956/1990. Norman Granz, prod.; Val Valentin, eng. ADD. TT: 46:00

Art Tatum's versions of Gershwin tunes irked their lyricist, who said the jazz pianist should be ticketed for speeding. Ira Gershwin may have resented the fact that such rapid-fire renditions left no room for words. Or maybe he felt—some did—that the intricate

musical lace only Tatum could loop, twist, and braid veiled the heart of a song: its melody.

Most listeners, though, loved Tatum's breathtaking technique and rococo style. His fingers raced like thoroughbreds, Triple Crown winners whipped around the keyboard by a mind every bit as quick. Fellow pianists of every stripe were fans, from the composing Gershwin brother, George, to the classical master Vladimir Horowitz. "God is in the house," Fats Waller announced one night, as Tatum entered a club where Waller was performing.

In the mid-1950s, not long before kidney failure killed him at age 47, two-thirds of the pianists surveyed by one major critic said they admired Tatum more than any other player. Three decades after his death, he topped a similar poll.

Producer Norman Granz taped two Tatum collections for his Pablo label in the 1950s, *The Solo Masterpieces* and *The Group Masterpieces*. Because I favor small-ensemble playing, and because tenor saxophonist Ben Webster brings consummate lyricism and a big, lush tone to the *Group* session preserved on *Volume Eight*, I'm partial to that set of standards. *Volume Six* stands out because Tatum performs with only a two-man rhythm section and occupies the spotlight throughout.

—**David Lander**

CLARK TERRY: DUKE WITH A DIFFERENCE

Clark Terry, trumpet, arr.; Johnny Hodges, alto saxophone; Paul Gonsalves, tenor saxophone; Britt Woodman, Quentin Jackson, trombone; Billy Strayhorn, piano; Luther Henderson, celeste; Tyree Glenn, vibes; Jimmy Woode, bass; Sam Woodyard, drums; Marian Bruce, vocals; Mercer Ellington, arr.
Riverside/OJC RLP-1108/OJC-229 (LP), 1957/1990. Orrin Keepnews, prod.; Jack Higgins, Jack

Matthews, engs. AAA. TT: 38:09

⏮ Practically a Duke Ellington record—eight Ellington tunes played by five Ellington horns, plus Duke's bassist and drummer, Strayhorn on piano, and several other musicians with connections to the orchestra—but with a twist. There's no shortage of small-group Ellington records, but here the style is a bit more modern (for 1957) and improvisational. There is, apparently, a very good-sounding mono version of this, but my OJC reissue is great-sounding stereo. The sound is woody, airy, blatty, and great. Good times.—**Jim Austin**

CAL TJADER & STAN GETZ: SEXTET

Stan Getz, tenor saxophone; Cal Tjader, vibraphone; Eddie Duran, guitar; Vince Guaraldi, piano; Scott LaFaro, bass; Billy Higgins, drums
OJC Remasters OJC-32690-02 (CD). 1958/2011. Sol Weiss, orig. prod.; Nick Phillips, reissue prod.; Joe Tarantino, remastering. AAD. TT: 42:47

⏮ This breezy-cool 1958 Fantasy date brought together Stan Getz with his then-unknown sidemen Billy Higgins and Scott LaFaro, and Cal Tjader with his sideman Vince Guaraldi and Guaraldi's own sideman (with his own trio), Eddie Duran. Although the group had never previously played together and didn't rehearse, they clearly clicked, and the session went down in one take. Getz is in especially good form, bopping smoothly in his best Lester-Young-meets-Charlie-Parker manner, but Tjader, in a straight-ahead setting rather than his usual Latin-jazz context, manages to keep up. The unheralded Duran and Guaraldi, belying his reputation for commercialism, are surprisingly solid, while Higgins and LaFaro are simply superb. Laid-back or up-tempo, every track is

strong, but Guaraldi's briskly swinging composition "Ginza Samba," foreshadowing Getz's bossa nova collaborations with Charlie Byrd and Joao Gilberto, is irresistible.

—**Larry Birnbaum**

LUCIANO TROJA: AT HOME WITH ZINDARS

Luciano Troja, piano
Luciano Troja 8 84502 34349 6 (CD). 2010. Luciano Troja, Valentina Prudente, prods.; M.P. Kuo, eng. DDD. TT: 64:25

⏮ Bill Evans fans know the name Earl Zindars because Evans recorded seven Zindars compositions during his life. But they usually know only the name. Luciano Troja, pianist and passionate Bill Evans fan, decided to investigate. He met Zindars' widow, visited the family home in San Francisco, and obtained many of Zindars' sophisticated, wistful compositions. The result is this fervent labor of love: 16 jewels strung together into a luminous arc of meditation. Troja does not so much play these great songs as allow them to slowly and deeply come upon him. There is also a 40-page booklet full of riches.—**Thomas Conrad**

MAL WALDRON WITH ERIC DOLPHY & BOOKER ERVIN: THE QUEST

Mal Waldron, piano; Eric Dolphy, alto saxophone, clarinet; Booker Ervin, tenor saxophone; Ron Carter, cello; Joe Benjamin, bass; Charles Persip, drums
New Jazz NJ-8269 (LP). 1961. Esmond Edwards, prod.; Rudy Van Gelder, eng. AAA. TT: 42:17

⏮ An early-1970s LP reissue of *The Quest* is labeled as an Eric Dolphy album—an understandable mistake, since it's Dolphy's adventurous alto-sax work that first grabs the listener's attention. Also in the front line are Mingus alum Booker Ervin on tenor sax and the great Ron Carter, appearing

here not as a bassist but as a soloist on cello (bowed and plucked). Waldron, whose piano is somewhat quieter in the mix than one would expect, almost seems to be in a supporting role—yet his exquisitely crafted, consistently understated solos stay with the listener. Waldron composed all of the music, the highlight of which is "Warm Canto," a plaintive yet oddly sunny melody that sounds resolutely French.

As I write this, Ron Carter and drummer Charles Persip are still very much with us. So, too, is *The Quest's* recording engineer, the legendary Rudy Van Gelder—but while the recording quality is good enough, those looking for one of Van Gelder's typically vivid, colorful-sounding sessions won't find it here. The sound of the eminently findable Original Jazz Classics LP reissue (OJC-082) is more than acceptable. (XXXVI-2)—**Art Dudley**

MAL WALDRON WITH ERIC DOLPHY & BOOKER ERVIN: THE QUEST

Mal Waldron, piano; Eric Dolphy, alto saxophone, clarinet; Booker Ervin, tenor saxophone; Ron Carter, cello; Joe Benjamin, bass; Charles Persip, drums
New Jazz NJLP 8269 (LP). 1961. Rudy Van Gelder, prod. AAA. TT: 41:28

⏮ A beautiful, quiet, composed, and introspective record from a sextet that's so tight they're not afraid to be loose. I discovered *The Quest* while browsing through the stacks at Other Music, a favorite NYC record shop. When I first played it, its sheer beauty amazed me. I shot off an e-mail to friends, and it turned out that *The Quest* was a favorite of theirs as well, which led me to start a blog where we would continue to share music. *The Quest* changed my life. Listen closely and it may change yours.

—**Michael Lavorgna**

WEATHER REPORT: FORECAST: TOMORROW

Columbia/Legacy 82876855702 (3 CDs, 1 DVD). 2006. Bob Belden, Joe Zawinul, Wayne Shorter, prods. (CD); Westdeutscher Rundfunk, prods.; various engs. (DVD). AAD. TT: 3:43:43

⏮ Joe Zawinul and Wayne Shorter's Weather Report was the longest-lived of the jazz fusion bands that spun off of Miles Davis' *Bitches Brew*. Although the band's sound evolved over its 15 years and many personnel changes, the quality of their output was consistently high, which can't be said of other, shorter-lived bands of Davis disciples that followed parallel tracks in the 1970s. This three-CD boxed set is a chronological "greatest hits" of the Weather Report oeuvre, plus some unreleased tracks and special surprises. Also included is a DVD of a concert filmed for German TV in 1978, during their strongest period of live performance. I'm amazed at how fresh and captivating this music sounds, 21 years after the band's breakup. —**Robert J. Reina**

WEATHER REPORT: WEATHER REPORT

Joe Zawinul, keyboards, piano, woodwind, percussion, voice; Wayne Shorter, tenor & soprano saxophones; Jaco Pastorius, electric bass, percussion, voice; Peter Erskine, drums, drum computer, claves; Robert Thomas Jr., percussion
Columbia FC 37616 (LP). 1982. Joe Zawinul, prod.; Brian Risner, eng. AAA. TT: 40:38

⏮ The final offering of the Pastorius-Erskine years isn't widely acknowledged as a stunner, but it is. Zawinul's composing is full of depth and surprise, and Shorter's single entry, "When It Was Now," is a marvel of harmonic weirdness and quasi-mechanical groove. The ballad "Speechless" treads

water a bit, but "Current Affairs" is timeless, undulating beauty, sandwiched between the ripping opener "Volcano for Hire" and the ambitious swing suite "N.Y.C." Pastorius used to knock Zawinul for "technological overkill," but dig those synth textures—they're still dynamically rich and otherworldly, without doubt rooted in a jazz aesthetic.—David R. Adler

BUGGE WESSELTOFT: SONGS

Bugge Wesseltoft, piano
Jazzland 279 173-3 (CD). 2011.
Bugge Wesseltoft, prod.; Atle Aamodt, eng. DDD. TT: 59:07

 *Songs* is a gathering of standards for solo piano. We eavesdrop on an artist's most private moments, as Wesseltoft searches through his life and uncovers memories inseparable from certain songs. The meditations proceed haltingly, as his hands come upon "Lament" or "Darn That Dream" and the sadness or love or both that each evokes. We could have expected "My Foolish Heart" to be piercing, but who knew that "How High the Moon" was a ballad, or that "Moon River" lurked in our collective subconscious like a tribal ritual? *Songs* should be hoarded, to be played only on special midnights. Available at www.jazzlandrec.com.—Thomas Conrad

RANDY WESTON: THE SPIRITS OF OUR ANCESTORS

Randy Weston, piano; Talib Kibwe, alto saxophone, alto flute; Dewey Redman, Billy Harper, Pharoah Sanders, tenor saxophone; Dizzy Gillespie, Idrees Sulieman, trumpet; Benny Powell, trombone, bass trombone; Alex Blake, Jamil Nasser, bass; Idris Muhammad, drums; Big Black, Azzedin Weston, percussion; Yassir Chadly, genbri, karkaba, clapping, vocals; Melba Liston, arr.

Antilles 314-511 896-2 (2 CDs). 1992. Randy Weston, Brian Bacchus, Jean-Philippe Allard, prods.; J. Newland, eng. TT: 106:37

 One of the high points of rhythm-oriented pianist Randy Weston's career, the vivacious *The Spirits of Our Ancestors* celebrates the African roots of jazz with indelible lyricism, charged percussion, and brilliant musicianship in adventurous, meter-shifting arrangements for 12-piece band by longtime Weston collaborator Melba Liston. Guests include Dizzy Gillespie and Pharoah Sanders, who join the likes of Dewey Redman and Idris Muhammad in expressing the beauty, joy, and mysticism of Weston's 10 originals. While the full band enralls during such epic tunes as the spirited "African Cookbook" and the Latin-sparked "African Sunrise," it's Weston's pianistic brilliance that carries the day, especially on the solo pieces that bookend these CDs: "African Village Bedford-Stuyvesant 1" and "A Prayer for Us All."

—Dan Ouellette

RANDY WESTON: THE SPIRITS OF OUR ANCESTORS

Randy Weston, piano; Talib Kibwe, alto flute, alto saxophone; Billy Harper, Dewey Redman, tenor saxophone; Pharoah Sanders, tenor saxophone, gaita; Dizzy Gillespie, Idrees Sulieman, trumpet; Benny Powell, trombone, bass trombone; Alex Blake, Jamil Nasser, bass; Idris Muhammad, drums; Big Black, Azzedin Weston, percussion; Yassir Chadly, genbri, karkaba, clapping, vocals; Melba Liston, arrangements

Verve 511 857-2 (2 CDs). 1992. Randy Weston, Jean-Philippe Allard, Brian Bacchus, prods.; Joe Lopes, J. Newland, engs. ADD. TT: 106:29

 The liner notes allude to a rough birth for *The Spirit of Our Ancestors*, but these two CDs of Moroccan-inspired jazz betray no such hardship. Instead, they highlight the "two peas in a pod" dynamic that occurs whenever Randy Weston and Melba Liston collaborate. Here, Liston's arrangements are as warm and open as the

African vistas they channel, infusing Weston's compositions with enough breathing room to allow such jazz stalwarts as Billy Harper, Dewey Redman, and guests Pharoah Sanders and Dizzy Gillespie, to shine unfettered. Weston himself is superb on piano, hitting notes that reverberate forever, like a thunderous reply to our ancestors. (xxx-2)

—Robert Schryer

MATT WILSON'S ARTS & CRAFTS: AN ATTITUDE FOR GRATITUDE

Matt Wilson, drums, recitation; Terell Stafford, trumpet, flugelhorn; Gary Versace, piano, organ, accordion; Martin Wind, bass

Palmetto PM 2154 (CD). 2012. Matt Balitsaris, prod., eng.; Matt Wilson, eng. DDD? TT: 59:36

 Put a killer hard-bop trumpeter like Terell Stafford next to an eclectic keyboard whiz like Gary Versace and great things happen. Find "Happy Days Are Here Again" (as a poignant ballad) on the same album as Jaco Pastorius's "Teen Town" and you know you're dealing with Matt Wilson, whose irreverence is always matched by an ironclad sense of purpose. From the ripping swing of Nat Adderley's "Little Boy with the Sad Eyes" to the piano-trio farewell of "Bridge Over Troubled Water," *An Attitude for Gratitude* defies boundaries and sings from deep in the soul.—David R. Adler

LARRY YOUNG: UNITY

Larry Young, organ; Woody Shaw, trumpet; Joe Henderson, tenor saxophone; Elvin Jones, drums

Blue Note/Music Matters MMBST-84221 (2 45rpm LPs). 1966/2010. Alfred Lion, prod.; Rudy Van Gelder, eng.; Kevin Gray, remastering eng. AAA. TT: 40:02

 All-star sessions don't guarantee great results. Here the group chemistry produced magic, aided by

inspired tune selection, particularly the three Shaw originals. Jones nails the snare opening of "Zoltan," based on the march from Kodaly's *Hary Janos Suite*. Young and Jones alone do a nifty "Monk's Dream," and the Henderson original "If" blows a hole in 12 bars. Young's playing is juicy and full but not overwhelming, giving everyone the necessary space to solo effectively, and charge full speed when appropriate. Rudy Van Gelder doesn't fail in one of his best recordings, especially of Jones's drums. Kevin Gray took advantage and mastered the hell out of the 45rpm lacquers.

—Michael Fremer

COLLECTIONS

DIAL RECORDS: THE COMPLETE DIAL MODERN JAZZ SESSIONS

Charlie Parker, alto saxophone; Wardell Gray, Dexter Gordon, tenor saxophone; Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, trumpet; Erroll Garner, Bud Powell, piano; Max Roach, drums; many more

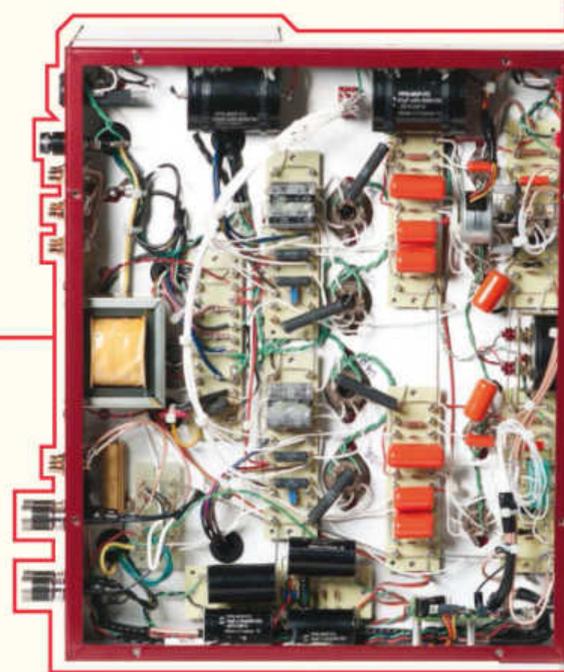
Mosaic 260 (9 CDs). 1946–47/2014. Ross Russell, prod.; Michael Cuscuna, reissue prod.; Steve Marlowe, remastering. ADD. TT: ca 10:12:00

Available only from www.mosaicrecords.com.

 This, too, is sort of a repeat—I cited a boxed set of much of this material in the 2009 R2D4—and another cause for celebration. Charlie Parker cut some of his best tracks in the studio for Dial Records in 1947. They're marvels of technique and improvisation, like no music made before or since. They've been reissued many times, from 78rpm shellacs. But this restoration, made using Bit Density Processing, removes the hiss, pops, and whoosh without removing any music. It's not audiophile quality, but it sounds way clearer; there's more bass, piano, drums, and the horns are more vivid than ever. A historic release.—Fred Kaplan

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CLASSICAL ORCHESTRAL & FILM SCORES ON RECORD

By ROBERT BAIRD

The story of recording orchestral classical music can rightly begin with Leopold Stokowski, who became a pop-culture icon in the 1930s and '40s, and popularized both classical music and, later, stereo recording. At a time when music was still being recorded acoustically, Stokowski began to experiment with orchestral seating arrangements, doubling parts, and even using baffles to get better recorded sound. Although often thought of as a master of bad taste in terms of repertoire, Stokowski, leading the Philadelphia Orchestra, was also the first conductor to record electronically, in 1925. Not compelled to follow what he called "black marks on white paper," he rearranged parts and reimagined what he believed were composers' original intentions, to get better recorded sound. In 1940, he was one of the first to record on three-track film, a process later refined by Robert and Wilma Cozart for their Mercury Living Presence series. In 1939, Stokowski collaborated with Walt Disney on the film *Fantasia*, conducting all the music, appearing onscreen, and at one point shaking hands with none other than Mickey Mouse. Active in the mixing as well as the recording process, Stokowski, according to composer Gunther Schuller, "gave the final product a kind of raw, animalistic excitement. He made the music bigger than life-sized." Fritz Reiner, leading the Chicago Symphony, made many influential mono and stereo recordings in Chicago's Orchestra Hall for RCA Victor from 1954 to 1963.

The invention of stereo recording was a huge boon for classical music recording, and was perhaps best exemplified by Mercury's Living Presence series. Although engineer Bob Fine, later assisted by Mercury VP Wilma Cozart (whom Fine eventually married), began making mono recordings with a single microphone, the process soon evolved into their famous three-mike array. While the center microphone was still paramount, and the source of the mono versions, the mikes hung at left and right added depth. In the early 1960s, the Fines also experimented with recording on 35mm magnetic film. The combination of minimal miking, controlled but rich tone, and great performances by such previously little-known performers as cellist János Starker and conductor Antal Doráti, has yet to be equaled.

Another pioneer of the days of early days of recording classical music in stereo was William Steinberg, then conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. In 1961, Steinberg teamed with violinist and engineer Enoch Light,

owner of Command Records, an early pioneer of stereo sound and the creator of the gatefold LP sleeve, to also record on 35mm magnetic film, for a wider frequency response.

While Leonard Bernstein is important for popularizing classical music, and was arguably its last great star conductor, his Columbia Masterworks recordings had severe sound problems early on—a screeching high end, and a very unsatisfying low end—many of which, happily, were later corrected with digital remixing and remastering.

In summer 1976, a digital recorder by Soundstream made a 16-bit/37.5kHz, two-channel recording of Virgil Thomson's opera *The Mother of Us All* (still unreleased), as performed by the Santa Fe Opera—former home of *Stereophile*. In 1978, US record label Telarc used Soundstream's PCM system, sampling at 50kHz, to record Frederick Fennell and his Eastman Wind Ensemble playing Gustav Holst's *Suites for Military Band* and Handel's *Music for the Royal Fireworks*—originally released on LP, this was the first orchestral classical music

digitally recorded in the US.

Audio mythology has long held that the physical size and storage capacity of the Compact Disc were increased at the last minute at the command of Sony's executive vice president, Norio Ohga, who wanted a single CD to be able to hold his wife's favorite classical recording, Wilhelm Furtwängler's 1951 Bayreuth recording of Beethoven's Symphony 9. Whatever the truth, the CD was initially thought of as a format for audiophiles, and that its 74-minute storage capacity would especially please classical-music fans—no more turning over LPs. When, in the late 1980s, CDs overwhelmed the marketplace, classical labels large and small began reissuing their catalogs and, as happened with recorded opera, rapidly began competing with themselves. Suddenly, every label had a complete cycle of Beethoven's symphonies on CD—or three or four. Even budget labels got in on the action, producing huge single-composer boxed sets for ridiculously low prices. It seemed that what conductor Herbert von Karajan said the first time he heard a digital recording—"All else is gaslight," suggesting that all earlier recording technologies were now obsolete—was true. Then came MP3s, piracy, the wholesale slashing of labels' back catalogs and the virtual end of exclusive recording contracts—as well as orchestras and opera companies founding their own record labels. The future remains unclear, but classical music, the first genre to embrace the CD, may yet be the last to give it up. —Robert Baird

 Robert Baird has been writing about music for 30 years, the last 20 of which as Music Editor of *Stereophile*. Having also served as Editor-in-Chief of *CD Review* and Music Editor of *New Times in Phoenix, AZ*, he's also written for a variety of publications including *Rolling Stone*, *USA Today*, *Magnet*, and *No Depression*.

ADAMS:**HARMONIELEHRE, SHORT RIDE IN A FAST MACHINE**

Michael Tilson Thomas, San Francisco Symphony
SFSmedia SFS 0053 (SACD/CD). 2012. Jack Vad, prod. DDD. TT: 47:09

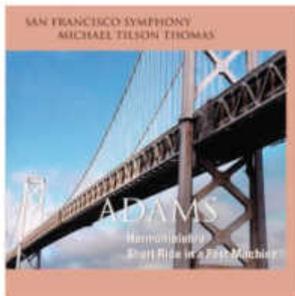
 John Adams's spacious symphonic work *Harmonielehre* was written in the mid-1980s, and was premiered by the SFSO under Edo de Waart in 1985. *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* was premiered by the SFSO, under Tilson Thomas, the following year. The orchestra seems to own these pieces, and that's all to the good—their commitment and virtuosity make this a triumphant recording. Adams's motoric motifs underlie the drama of *Harmonielehre* and, of course, drive *Fast Machine*. I have not been an easy sell for the minimalists, but Tilson Thomas has closed the deal by making both pieces vastly entertaining.

The sound is of the SFSO at home in Davies Auditorium, presented with clarity and impact. Add this to their other American Mavericks releases—of music by Ives-Brant and Copland (SFS 0038), and of Cowell, Harrison, and Varèse (SFS 0056)—and Tilson Thomas/SFSO's series of 20th-century musical monuments is becoming an apt and worthy successor to their magnificent Mahler cycle. —**Kalman Rubinson**

LEROY ANDERSON: ORCHESTRAL MUSIC, VOLS. 1-5

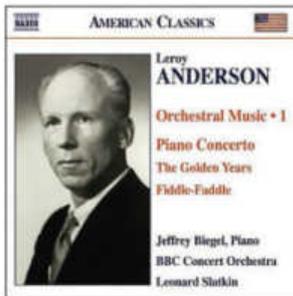
Leonard Slatkin, BBC Concert Orchestra. With: Jeffrey Biegel, piano; Kim Criswell, soprano; William Dazeley, baritone.

Naxos American Classics 8.559313, 8.559356, 8.559357, 8.559381, 8.559382 (5 CDs). 2008. Neil Varley, prod.; Marvin Ware, Neil Pemberton, Paul Watson, engs. DDD. TTs: 61:54, 54:51, 61:49, 60:26, 52:16 (4:51:16)



 When did Americans of a certain age imprint on the music of Leroy Anderson (1908–1975)? When they heard “The Syncopated Clock” at the beginning of CBS’s *The Late Show*? Played “The Phantom Regiment” in eighth-grade band, or “A Trumpeter’s Lullaby” in high school, or “The Typewriter” in college? The thousandth hearing, on any given Christmas, of “Sleigh Ride”? The first hearing of “Blue Tango,” “Serenata,” or “The Girl in Satin”—to certain 12-year-olds, the heights and depths of dark romantic mystery? I don’t know. All I know is that this stuff spouts from a vein of American music as deep and vital as any romanced by Greil Marcus in *Mystery Train*. A definition of *kitsch* is “something that appeals to popular or lowbrow taste and is often of poor quality.” Poor quality? Anderson composed and arranged with the meticulous care of a master craftsman. To say that he wrote light music with great tunes is like saying Wagner wrote long operas: obvious but irrelevant.

When he wasn’t writing hits for Arthur Fiedler and the Boston Pops beginning in the 1930s, Anderson worked as an orchestral arranger, and those skills are everywhere audible here. His four suites of Christmas carols, one each for strings, woodwinds, brass, and full orchestra, are a collective tour de force of the orchestrator’s art. And if sentimentality is unearned feeling, Anderson worked hard to



earn his sentiments, writing perfect countermelodies; in nearly every composition here, a haunting descant casts a darker shadow for the (usually) sunny main theme. His senses of rhythm, syncopation, counterpoint, contrary motion, orchestral voicing, and gentle musical wit are as impeccable as Gershwin’s, and as authentically American. Among the 60-odd works on these five discs are 10 world-premiere recordings, all worth hearing. The piano concerto will surprise you in its fluidity and tunefulness, even for Anderson, and pianist Jeffrey Biegel does not condescend to the work. All of Anderson’s arrangements for his single musical, *Goldilocks*, are here.

Anderson’s music has never been better conducted, played, or recorded. Leonard Slatkin lovingly sculpts each phrase as if it were the most evanescent Delius, the most graceful Mozart; the BBC Concert Orchestra are eager accomplices. The acoustic of The Colosseum, Town Hall, Watford is palpable in recordings miked at a distance that sounds . . . *respectful*. This music limns in sound the world that every character of *Mad Men*, and most of my and my parents’ generations, believed we were being prepared to take our roles in. It was not our or Anderson’s fault that that world was a lie, or no longer tenable, or never quite existed, or was fast vanishing even as Anderson so lovingly embodied in sound its ideal of perfectly



poised geniality. I’m glad his music is what remains.

—**Richard Lehnert**

ANTILL: CORROBOREE GINASTERA: PANAMBÉ

Eugene Goossens, London Symphony Orchestra

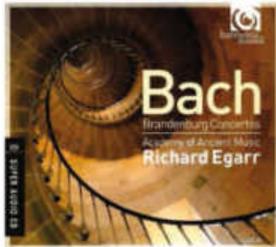
Everest/Classic SDBR-3003 (200gm LP). 1958/2007. Harry Belock, prod.; Bert Whyte, eng.; Bernie Grundman, remastering. AAA. TT: ca 40:00

 Completed in 1944 and based on an Australian aboriginal dance ceremony of the same name witnessed by the composer when he was a child, *Corroboroe* is a cinematic “world music” extravaganza written decades before the term was coined. Though it features a didjeridoo and a bull roarer (aka thunder stick), the orchestration relies primarily on standard European instruments, including conventional string and woodwind sections. The percussion lineup, though, includes a staggering array of noisemakers that have been captured with alarming verisimilitude on sprocketed 35mm tape. Don’t be fooled by the recording date of 1958: this musical and sonic thrill ride is not to be missed. (XXII-12)—**Michael Fremer**

J.S. BACH: BRANDENBURG CONCERTOS 1-6

Richard Egarr, dir., harpsichord continuo; Academy of Ancient Music

Harmonia Mundi HMU 807461.62 (multichannel SACD/CD). 2008. Robina G. Young, prod.; Brad Michel, eng., ed. DDD. TT: 96:20



🔊 One of the first classical LPs I bought as a teenager was of the 1959 modern-instruments performances, by Sir Yehudi Menuhin and the Bath Festival Orchestra, of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos. I literally wore that HMV album out; it left me with a love for what have been termed the greatest of all chamber-music works. As my tastes matured, I found myself increasingly attracted to "original instruments" versions such as Gustav Leonhardt's on Japanese RCA/Seon, the English Concert's on Arkiv, and Nikolaus Harnoncourt's on Teldec. But nothing had prepared me for the sonic assault and battery committed on these warhorses by the Academy of Ancient Music, led from the harpsichord by Richard Egarr. Not only do the musicians tune their instruments to A=392Hz—a whole step below the modern concert pitch of A=440, and equivalent to a modern G—but the valveless horns, in No.1 in particular, have a rustic, braying quality that is at first off-putting, then refreshing, and finally, with familiarity, essential. Also unusual is the use of a baroque guitar as an occasional continuo instrument, as well as the more familiar theorbo. Perhaps as a result of the low pitch, the balance between the treble recorder, oboe, valveless trumpet, and solo violin in No.2 is beautifully arranged. Overall, the sound (in two channels) is natural and unforced; the slow movement of No.6 is a delight in this respect. Yes, tempos are

sometimes on the stately side—the first movements of Nos.3 and 4 and the finale of No.6, for example—but this set has been in constant rotation since I acquired it. (XXXII-7)—**John Atkinson**

J.S. BACH:
BRANDENBURG
CONCERTOS 1–6

Nikolaus Harnoncourt, *Concentus Musicus Wien*

Telefunken Das Alte Werk SAWT 9459/60-A (2 LPs). 1964. Wolf Erichson, prod. AAA. TT: 105:00

🔊 This was the first recording of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos on original instruments—Nikolaus Harnoncourt's Baroque ensemble, *Concentus Musicus Wien*, pioneered the practice, to much controversy at the time—and it remains the most searing. Recorded in Vienna's Schönbrunn Palace, with just two mikes plugged straight into two-track analog, it's also the best sounding: lush, bracing, dynamic, swooning, heady. A plea to audiophile-reissue companies: Check out the Harnoncourt Telefunken—not just the Brandenburgs, but the cantatas and the overtures. They sound better than most RCAs and Mercurys; some 45rpm pressings would be amazing.

—Fred Kaplan

BARBER:
VIOLIN CONCERTO

HANSON:
SYMPHONY 2,
"ROMANTIC"

Elmar Oliveira, violin; Leonard Slatkin, *St. Louis Symphony Orchestra*

EMI CDC 7 47850 2 (CD). 1987. Marc Aubort, Joanna Nickrenz, prods.; Elite Recordings, engs. DDD. TT: 54:48

🔊 Hanson's "Romantic" symphony was commissioned for the Boston Symphony's 50th anniversary, in 1930. It achieved widespread popularity for a time, but then its fortunes

waned, perhaps because its "modernity" began to sound dated, or because its open-hearted accessibility worked against it. Perhaps, too, the fact that the producers of the film *Alien* used (reportedly without permission) an excerpt as closing-credits music might have made orchestral repertoire committees avoid programming the symphony. Which is a shame, as it is a lovely work in the Sibelius mold. The St. Louis Symphony's top-tier execution and silky-smooth sound should not be missed. The real attraction here, however, is violinist Elmar Oliveira's noble, passionate, classically proportioned performance of the Barber concerto, which easily withstands comparison to any other. This disc is out of print, but both performances are available in budget reissues, coupled with different works. (X-4)—**John Marks**

BARTÓK:
THE MIRACULOUS
MANDARIN

MUSSORGSKY:
NIGHT ON BALD
MOUNTAIN

STRAVINSKY:
LE SACRE DU
PRINTEMPS

Esa-Pekka Salonen, *Los Angeles Philharmonic*

Deutsche Grammophon 00289 477 5198 (multichannel SACD/CD). 2007. Valerie Gross, Sid McLauchlan, prods.; Fred Vogler, eng.; Rainer Maillard, surround mix. DDD/DSD. TT: 64:00

🔊 Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* has a thrilling, coarse energy, as evident in this bone-jarring live recording by the Los Angeles Philharmonic led by Esa-Pekka Salonen. The solo bassoon at the opening and the mixed winds that follow are blown asunder by the thunderous stomping of strings used as percussion. The pulsing tempo and



surging energy of *Rite* build through *Adoration of the Earth*, near the end of Part 1, then erupt into the explosive *Dance of the Earth*. Similar energy is found in the other tone poem on this SACD/CD, Mussorgsky's *Night on Bald Mountain*. This is not the pastiche of Mussorgsky themes glued together by Rimsky-Korsakov that is most often recorded, but Mussorgsky's original scoring. Finally, the vivid performance of Bartók's *The Miraculous Mandarin* gives an idea of why this pantomime "so enraged German authorities at its world premiere in 1926 that it had to be withdrawn" (from the liner note). As Allan Kozinn stated in his *New York Times* review of December 8, 2006, "If you want to know why the Los Angeles Philharmonic is so highly regarded, here is the place to begin." (xxx-9)

—Larry Greenhill

BARTÓK:
DIVERTIMENTO,
MUSIC FOR STRINGS,
PERCUSSION &
CELESTE

KODÁLY:
DANCES FROM
GALANTA

Sir Charles Mackerras, *Scottish Chamber Orchestra*
Linn CKD 234 (SACD/CD/Hi-Res Download). 2004. Tim Oldham, prod.; Philip Hobbs, Calum Malcolm, engs. DDD. TT: 72:56

MOZART:
REQUIEM (ED. LEVIN)
Sir Charles Mackerras, *Scottish Chamber Orchestra & Chorus*
Linn CKD 211 (SACD/CD/Hi-Res Download). 2002. Tim Oldham,

prod.; Philip Hobbs, eng. DDD. TT: 54:48

MOZART: SYMPHONIES 38–41

Sir Charles Mackerras, Scottish Chamber Orchestra
Linn CKD 308 (2 SACD/CDs/Hi-Rez Download). 2007. James Mallinson, prod.; Philip Hobbs, eng. DDD. TT: 2:19:18

With the passing of Sir Charles Mackerras in July 2010, I took some time to listen again to his recordings. There are many, but these three sets collect his most impressive and satisfying. On the one hand, he conducted the classics, especially Mozart, with the drama and flair of traditional performance practice, yet progressively incorporated the insights of modern scholarship. Heck, his Mozart *Requiem* is my favorite, and I don't expect to ever hear the late symphonies more perfectly performed than here. On the other side, Mackerras spent many years in Prague, where he immersed himself in the scores of the Czech and Hungarian masters of the 20th century, and later became principal guest conductor of the Czech Philharmonic. His series of recordings of Janáček's operas for Decca, and the Kodály-Bartók disc listed above, stand as monuments to his commitment.

—Kalman Rubinson

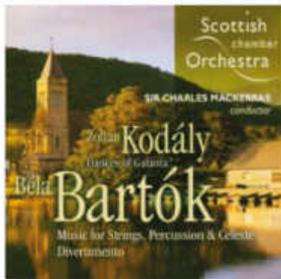
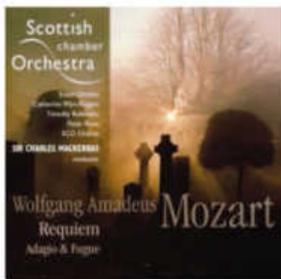
BEETHOVEN: SYMPHONY 3

Andrew Manze, Helsingborg Symphony
Harmonia Mundi 807470 (SACD/CD, 24-bit/88.2kHz FLAC files downloaded from HDtracks.com). 2008. Robina G. Young, prod.; Brad Michel, eng. DDD/DSD. TT: 50:24

Last year, Wes Phillips picked as his "Record To Die For" Chesky Records' HDtracks.com download service, because he'd found it so valuable a source of digital music files. Wes's observation that the site's files have no DRM or lossy compress-



Sir Charles Mackerras



sion was persuasive, so I purchased Andrew Manze's reading of Beethoven's "Eroica," with the 59-piece Helsingborg Orchestra, in the form of 24-bit/88.2kHz FLAC files. I was not disappointed. Harmonia Mundi's recording is balanced, warm, and nonfatiguing. The first movement is spellbinding—I hear subtle ambience cues I usually notice only at live performances, and the soundstage is wider and deeper than any I've experienced from the best "Red Book" CDs or SACDs. There is an enhanced sense of three-dimensionality, with more precise images of the instruments, more open highs, more detailed imaging, deeper soundstaging, and better-defined bass. All of this connects me to those

crucial elements of music: pace, rhythm, and emotion. These hi-rez downloads will show off your system's imaging and soundstaging. (XXXII-2)—Larry Greenhill

BEETHOVEN: SYMPHONY 7, LEONORE OVERTURE 3

Michael Tilson Thomas, San Francisco Symphony
SFS Media 54 (SACD/CD). 2012. Jack Vad, prod.; Marie Ebbing, Roni Jules, Hal Soogian, Jonathan Stevens, Une Willenbacher, engs. DDD. TT: 53:40

I downloaded this recording as a DSD64 file and played it through the superb onboard DAC of Mark Levinson's No.585 integrated amplifier, which I was reviewing. I'd heard Symphony 7 a few weeks before, at a concert in New York, with Edward Gardner conducting the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra. I was bowled over by the music's dynamics, and the timbre of each instrument was distinctly audible. The audience applauded "to the point of ecstasy" (as the concert's program notes described the reaction of the work's very first audience, on December 8, 1813). Listening to the Tilson Thomas/SFS recording at home, I was similarly engulfed by the orchestra and the ambience of the concert hall. I could distinguish many of the individual instruments, even within a sea of dynamic orchestral contrasts. Since then, it has become both a reference recording for my reviewing and something I listen to for pure pleasure.

—Larry Greenhill

BEETHOVEN: SYMPHONY 9

Pilar Lorengar, soprano; Yvonne Minton, mezzo-soprano; Stuart Burrows, tenor; Martti Talvela, bass; Chicago Symphony, Georg Solti
London/Decca CSP-8 (2 LPs). 1972. David Harvey, prod.; Kenneth Wilkinson, Gordon Parry, engs. AAA. TT: 76:10

I'm not a huge fan of Beethoven's Symphony 9, but the scale and, I'll admit it, the sound quality of this recording make it a frequent visitor to my turntable. The music needs no introduction; the recording was made in the Great Hall of the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, and engineered by the legendary team of Kenneth Wilkinson and Gordon Parry. Although the sound and flow of the music suffers a bit in the choral passages, it's excellent throughout, and the orchestral passages are nothing short of superb.

—Brian Damkroger

BEETHOVEN: SYMPHONY 9

June Anderson, soprano; Sara Walker, mezzo-soprano; Klaus König, tenor; Jan-Hendrick Rootering, bass; Children's Chorus of the Dresden Philharmonic; Bavarian Radio Symphony & Chorus, London Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Orchestra of Paris, Staatskapelle Dresden; Leonard Bernstein
Deutsche Grammophon 429861-2 (CD). 1990. DDD. TT: 74:03

2014 marks the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Germans began passing back and forth between East and West Berlin on November 9, 1989, at the Bornholmer Strasse crossing. In the following days, jubilant Berliners began to dismantle the wall and celebrate their new freedom. The historic liberation of Germany attracted musicians to commemorate the event. On Christmas Day, 1989, an ailing Leonard Bernstein conducted a gala performance of Beethoven's Symphony 9 in the Schauspielhaus of East Berlin, as played by five prominent multinational orchestras—the Bavarian Radio Orchestra, the Kirov Opera Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic, the London Symphony Orchestra,

and the Orchestra of Paris—and choirs and soloists from East and West. In the final, choral movement, Bernstein replaced the word *Freude* (joy) with *Freiheit* (freedom). Although Bernstein's tempos are slower than in other Ninths I've heard, the emotion and sense of occasion of this recording are tremendously moving. The separation of instruments, the passion of the soloists and choirs, and the spaciousness of the soundstage make this recording my favorite Ninth, for its choral qualities. Perhaps my infatuation comes from the concert's historical significance, but I don't care. An album to die for.

—Larry Greenhill

BEETHOVEN: TRIPLE CONCERTO

BRAHMS: VIOLIN CONCERTO, DOUBLE CONCERTO

David Oistrakh, violin; Mstislav Rostropovich, cello; Sviatoslav Richter, piano; Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Herbert von Karajan (Beethoven); Cleveland Orchestra, George Szell (Brahms)

EMI Classics 9 55978 2 (2 SACD/CDs). 1969/2012. Peter Andry, orig. prod.; Allen Stagg, Carson Taylor, orig. engs.; Simon Gibson, Ian Jones, Andy Walter, Allan Ramsay, remastering. ADD. TT: 111:43

 A legendary violinist at the height of his powers (Oistrakh) plays one of the greatest concertos (Brahms) with a major US orchestra (Cleveland) during its glory days under a legendarily meticulous Hungarian conductor (Szell). Brahms's Concerto and Double Concerto were recorded in Cleveland in 1969, in luminous analog sound, and have now been transferred to SACD/CD at Abbey Road Studios and presented in classy hard-bound packaging. David Oistrakh made four commercial recordings of the Brahms concerto; his excursion to Cleveland has always struck me as the most successful.

His interpretation combines monumental architecture with human warmth of feeling, while his violin sound is best described as liquid gold. (XXII-9, XXXVIII-2)—John Marks

BERG: VIOLIN CONCERTO

STRAVINSKY: VIOLIN CONCERTO

Itzhak Perlman, violin; Seiji Ozawa, Boston Symphony

Deutsche Grammophon 2531 110 (LP). 1980. Rainer Brock, prod.; Klaus Hiemann, Hans-Peter Schweigmann, engs. AAA. TT: 47:14

 My house is on fire. Once I realize that I've left all my jazz in the blaze, I'll want to wallow in the *Weltschmerz* of Berg's Violin Concerto. Composed in 1935 to memorialize the death of the 18-year-old daughter of Alma Mahler-Werfel and Walter Gropius ("To the memory of an angel," Berg wrote in the dedication), it may be the most gorgeous piece of classical music written in the 20th century. Fusing 12-tone serialism with folk music and Bach-ian chorale, it's a rare work at once intellectually intricate and emotionally sublime. The musicians live up to the challenge, and DG's pre-digital sound is lush.

—Fred Kaplan

BRAHMS: PIANO CONCERTO 1

Clifford Curzon, piano; London Symphony Orchestra, George Szell
Decca/Speakers Corner SXL 6023 (LP). 1962. AAA. TT: 48:15 (Also available on CD: Decca 417 641-2, ADD.)

 Much has been made of how Brahms waited until age 44 to compose his first symphony, feeling as he did the force of Beethoven's legacy at his back. Yet an arguably greater influence came from Brahms's mentor and friend, Robert Schumann, who urged the aspiring composer to begin writing orchestral music in 1853, when Brahms was only

20. That was also the year Schumann re-orchestrated and published, as No.4, his own symphony in d, the score of which became one of Brahms's most prized possessions. Three years later, Schumann died in an insane asylum. D minor would also be the home key of Brahms's first large-scale work—a piano concerto rather than a symphony, introduced to the public in 1859. Whether or not the work's more harrowing moments stemmed from the young composer's anguish over Schumann's end is a matter of some debate; regardless, as with so much great art, most of the listening public simply wasn't ready for the concerto's violent trills and wild mood swings—and those who *did* fancy themselves the more adventurous concertgoers of the day threw in their lot with Wagner and his chromaticism, in a false and largely critic-driven wrangle that seems awfully silly today.

Modern music requires modern players, of which there was no shortage in postwar Europe and the Americas. But none have recorded Brahms' Piano Concerto 1 with the combination of skill and passion displayed by Englishman Clifford Curzon in this outing with George Szell and the London Symphony Orchestra. The music leaps from the grooves of this (mostly) well-made stereo recording, excelled by none other at putting across the sheer physical force of which Curzon was capable, as well as his supremely unself-conscious approach to the music. By comparison, Barenboim strikes me as calculated, and Rubinstein sounds just plain dull. (Leon Fleisher with Szell is interesting, too, but unnervingly sloppy in some passages.)

The Speakers Corner LP reissue of the Decca original

is superb: as good as this sort of thing gets. There's also a mid-1980s LP release on London Jubilee (411 579-1) that sounds surprisingly nice. I've never cared for the idea of using a handful of spectacular recordings to test the abilities of a playback system, but this wonderful LP comes closer than any other to changing my mind.—Art Dudley

BRAHMS: SYMPHONY 3

Wilhelm Furtwängler, Berlin Philharmonic

Electrola E 90 994 (LP). 1949. Unnamed prod., eng. AAA. TT: 38:35

 Good recordings of Brahms' Symphony 3, let alone great ones, are thin on the ground: Too often, the opening chords sound uncertain, even out of tune, and many conductors seem bent on making the *Allegretto* sound *Italian*. My favorite Brahms Third by far is this 1949 recording by Furtwängler and the Berlin Philharmonic, which avoids those mistakes and makes the four very different movements hold together as a single, dramatic statement. (Rudolf Kempe's 1976 recording, with the Munich Philharmonic, deserves an honorable mention in that regard.) I've no idea how many recordings Furtwängler made of this work, but of the ones I've heard, this has the most magic.—Art Dudley

BRUCKNER: SYMPHONIES 00–9

With: *Adagio* from String Quintet (arr. Skrowaczewski), *Overture in g*
Stanislaw Skrowaczewski, Saarbrücken Radio Symphony Orchestra

Oehms Classics OC 025 (12 CDs). 1991–2001. Thomas Reisig, prod., ed., mastering; Markus Brändle, prod. (6–8 only); Erich Heigold, eng. DDD. TT: 11:22:36

 More than a century after his death, the era of Bruckner's music seems finally to have arrived. A

steady and accelerating flow of performances and recordings of his symphonies by several generations of conductors seems to have at last got his music's measure, and perhaps the finest of these still living is the Polish-born Stanislaw Skrowaczewski, very active in his 93rd year. These recordings of Bruckner's 11 symphonies, made over a decade by the same forces in the same hall with the same crew, are remarkable for their leader's consistency of insight, freshness, grasp of orchestral balances, and sense of these immense works' overall arcs. The performances are as humble as they are powerful—never is there the sense of a conductor feeling the need to express himself or make a point. Rather, what is expressed is the music itself, and the points made are Bruckner's own.

What makes this set—available for under \$40—even more valuable is how much stature, dignity, and substance Skrowaczewski finds in the earliest symphonies: 00, 1, 0, and 2 (in order of composition). These works are not turned in as a completist's obligatory footnotes, but as being all of a piece with and in an unbroken continuum leading up to the colossi of the symphonic repertoire that Bruckner was later to compose. In fact, Skrowaczewski's recording of the underrated Symphony 1 may be, with Abbado's final recording of that work (Lucerne Festival Orchestra), one of the two very best. The breadth and depth of his readings expands with the subsequent symphonies—a stately Third, a joyous Fourth, a majestic and smiling Fifth, a crisply bracing Sixth, a Seventh of Alpine clarity, a monumentally precise Eighth, a searing Ninth—each in a performance of romantic ardor in precise balanced classical poise.

Add to this the bonuses of perhaps the finest recording of Bruckner's little-known Overture in G and Skrowaczewski's own sumptuous arrangement for string orchestra of the *Adagio* from Bruckner's String Quintet.

It is difficult to imagine an orchestra playing these works with greater intimacy or sensitivity or power than the Saarbrücken RSO: the strings are rich and astringent at once, and the brass—particularly the all-important horns, Wagner tubas, and trumpets—are miracles of lyric virtuosity. I don't know if the Kongresshalle Saarbrücken has particularly miraculous acoustics for a postwar hall, or if Skrowaczewski's engineers are remarkably gifted, or both, but the sound of this set is as perfectly consistent as it is consistently perfect—a sense of immense space commensurate with the size of orchestra and music, but never so much that a single note or resonance, or of Bruckner's lucidity of counterpoint or transparency of orchestral texture, is ever lost. Each symphony unfolds as if every note or phrase is a musical thought of crystal-line clarity that no one has thought before, exquisitely shaped as it emerges from primordial silence. If you want a single complete set of the Bruckner symphonies, end or begin your search here. I know of no other that does these easily misunderstood scores such ideally unsentimental justice.

—Richard Lehnert

BRUCKNER:
SYMPHONIES 3–9,
MASS 3 IN F, TE DEUM

Sergiu Celibidache, Münchner Philharmoniker. With (in Mass 3 & Te Deum): Margaret Price, soprano; Doris Soffel, alto; Christel Borchers, contralto; Peter Straka, Claes H. Ahnsjö, tenor; Karl Helm, Matthias Hölle, bass; Philharmonischer Chor München, Members of Münchener Bach-Chor; Josef Schmidhuber, chorus master;



Elmar Schloter, organ.

EMI 5 56688 2 (12 CDs). 1982–1995/1998. Marcus Herzog, prod., remastering; Hilmar Kerp, Hartwig Paulsen, remastering. ADD/DDD. TT: 11:53:59

Sergiu Celibidache felt that while, in the music of most composers, time is something that happens after the beginning, in Bruckner time is something that happens after the end. He did not make studio recordings, believing that any music is a unique concatenation of score, musicians, hearers, time, and place—and these live recordings made in the last decade or so of his life have just such a sense of palpable occasion. He takes the symphonies extremely slowly—Nos. 4 and 8 last 80 and 105 minutes, respectively—and this, in combination with his meticulous attention to every detail of each score and the heroic playing of the Münchner Philharmoniker, creates the effect of hearing the works as if through an auditory microscope. But while viewing a Vermeer from 3" away destroys proportion, shape, and any illusion of verisimilitude, in listening to these recordings I find myself transported from aural maps into the very territories of Bruckner's work, landscapes now revealed as so vast as to seem infinite; even as, again and again, I discover that familiar paths now lead to hitherto unseen vistas. Eventually, I realize that these works, indeed, are infinite. Visit me in 20 years, when I am pushing 80, and you may find my erstwhile wall of CDs bare, reduced to these dozen discs, whose depths I will,

even then, have yet to fully plumb.—Richard Lehnert

BRUCKNER:
SYMPHONY 9 (WITH
2012 SPCM FINALE)

Simon Rattle, Berlin Philharmonic
EMI Classics 9 52969 2 (CD). 2012.
Christoph Franke, prod., ed.; René
Möller, Tom Russbüldt, engs.;
Alexander Feucht, ed. DDD. TT:
82:10

I reviewed this recording in the October 2012 *Stereophile*, and wrote at length of the complexities and difficulties of the Ninth's unfinished *Finale* in the March 2010 issue. No further recordings have been made of this "Conclusive Revised Edition 2012" of the reconstruction and completion of the *Finale* developed over three decades by the Bruckner scholars Nicola Samale, John A. Phillips, Benjamin-Gunnar Cohrs, and Giuseppe Mazzuca (SPCM), which leaves this one, to my ears, still the most definitive performance of the most fully realized and most thoroughly researched attempt to reconstruct how Bruckner might have completed his final masterwork. But regardless of what one thinks of SPCM's interpolations and fleshings-out of Bruckner's surviving score and sketches, even the sections that are wholly and unarguably Bruckner's own are dauntingly powerful, original, and unlike anything else he ever wrote, even in the Ninth's preceding three movements. They are also harrowingly moving—often hellishly, sometimes joyously, always profoundly.

But if a *Finale* in any form is not for you, the first three movements of this recording comprise a fine "traditional" three-movement Ninth, Rattle and the almost superhumanly accomplished Berlin Philharmonic performing the almost impossible feat of making this work sound immensely monumental and

passionately felt and deeply intimate, a personal testament of loss and grief and terror and exaltation—not so much music to die for as music to die and be reborn to: the journey of Bruckner's soul, and of the soul of anyone who cares to follow down this long, dark tunnel to unexpected light. (XXXV-12)—**Richard Lehnert**

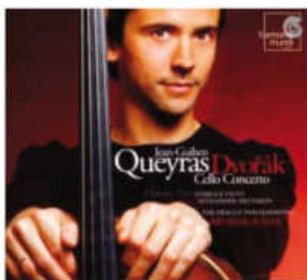
BURGON:
BRIDESHEAD
REVISITED: MUSIC
FROM THE ORIGINAL
SOUNDTRACK

Geoffrey Burgon, uncredited orchestra
Chrysalis CPCD 1367 (CD).
1981/1987. David Japp, exec. prod.;
The First Composers Company
Ltd., prods.; Alan Snelling, eng.
AAD. TT: 44:51

My two desert-island video picks would be Patrick McGoohan's *The Prisoner* and the 1981 Granada TV dramatization of Evelyn Waugh's WWII "Catholic" novel, *Brideshead Revisited*. (I'd have three desert-island video picks, but NBC's extraordinary 1970s adaptations of John O'Hara's *Gibbsville*, *PA* stories never made it to home video.) For my money, Granada's *Brideshead Revisited* is the greatest dramatic series achievement in television history. A good measure of that credit belongs to Geoffrey Burgon, whose chameleonic score (Haydn one moment, Britten the next) captures the essence of doomed love in a world bent on destroying itself. There's an old Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab edition on gold CD that I haven't heard, as it goes for money between crazy and insane.
—**John Marks**

DVORÁK:
CELLO CONCERTO,
PIANO TRIO 4
("DUMKY")

Jean-Guihen Queyras, cello;
Isabelle Faust, violin; Alexander



Melnikov, piano; Prague
Philharmonia, Jiri Belohlávek
Harmonia Mundi HMU 801867
(SACD). 2005. Martin Sauer, prod.;
Philipp Knop, eng. DDD. TT: 69:47

The classical music lover needs no introduction to these popular works, which represent Dvorák's Czech heritage at its peak. Each has enjoyed the attention of great performers and is well represented on my CD shelves, but this is the disc I pull out first. The performance of the Cello Concerto, while it cannot supplant the classic performances of Casals or Rostropovich, is in every way their equal, and offers a marvelous balance of warmth and brilliance. Queyras's playing is faultless and, along with his Prague supporters, he interprets with stirring élan. The "Dummy" piano trio is equally delightful; Melnikov and Faust, the latter fast becoming one of my favorite violinists, join Queyras in a performance that is charming, invigorating, and, ultimately, satisfying. The sound balances are nigh perfect in both the orchestral and chamber settings.

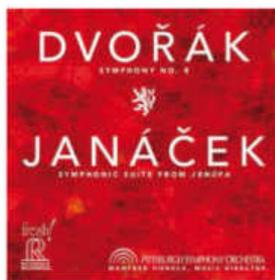
—**Kalman Rubinson**

DVORÁK:
SYMPHONY 8

JANÁČEK:
SYMPHONIC SUITE
FROM JENUFA

Manfred Honeck, Pittsburgh
Symphony Orchestra
Reference Fresh! FR-710SACD
(SACD/CD). 2014. Dirk Subotka,
prod.; Mark Donahue, Harold
Chambers, John Newton, engs.
DDD. TT: 62:04

In the 2014 R2D4, I ended my recommen-



dation for Manfred Honeck and the Pittsburghers' Reference Fresh! release of tone poems by Richard Strauss with: "This is a thrilling disc. I look forward to hearing more from this team, and its performers on both sides of the microphones." Well, this year they've trumped themselves with even more idiomatic performances and an even more naturally dynamic recording. I early imprinted on Bruno Walter's Columbia LP of Dvorák's Symphony 8, and have since expanded my favorites to include Kubelik, Kertész, and Iván Fischer. Honeck displaces them all. The realization and performance of the suite from Janáček's *Jenufa* (conceptualized by Honeck, realized by Tomáš Ille) is brilliant, and streets ahead of Peter Breiner's conducting of his own arrangement for Naxos. Conducted and played with appropriate style and verve and recorded in the best and most thrilling sound, this new disc immediately goes to the top of the list.

—**Kalman Rubinson**

ELGAR:
CELLO CONCERTO,
SEA PICTURES

Jacqueline du Pré, cello; Janet
Baker, mezzo-soprano; London
Symphony Orchestra, Sir John
Barbirolli
HMV ASD 655 (LP), EMI CDC
7 47329 2 (CD), 24-bit/96kHz
FLAC files from HDtracks. 1965.
Ronald Kinloch Anderson, prod.;
Christopher Parker, eng. AAA/AAD.
TT: 54:04

From the cello's musical declamation that opens Elgar's Cello Concerto to the soaring flights of

melody in the third movement and the contrasts between skittish optimism and contemplative melancholy in the finale, you are aware that this emotionally laden masterpiece, the last great work from the Edwardian English composer, was being performed by a mature master of the instrument. Yet when she made this recording in 1965, Jacqueline du Pré was a slightly built 20-year-old, musically wise beyond her years. I was fortunate enough to attend a master class she gave 10 years after she made this recording, when, crippled by multiple sclerosis and no longer able to play, she *talked* and *sang* the audience through the concerto's first movement; it was one of the most intensely musical performances I have experienced to this date.

The late Peter W. Mitchell named the CD reissue of this best-selling recording one of his 1991 "Records to Die For," but the reissue of the recently remastered version as a hi-rez download from HDtracks justifies its inclusion in this year's list. The sound of the 24/96 files is clear and open, but reveals some analog tape saturation in the orchestral climaxes. The coupling since the second issue on LP (the original coupling, on HMV ASD 2764, was the Delius Cello Concerto), Dame Janet Baker's reading of Elgar's five-song *Sea Pictures* cycle, is overshadowed by the concerto—but it, too, is sublime music making. (XIV-1)

—**John Atkinson**

ELGAR:
VIOLIN CONCERTO

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS:
THE LARK ASCENDING

Hilary Hahn, violin; Sir Colin Davis,
London Symphony Orchestra
Deutsche Grammophon 00289 474
8732 (SACD/CD). 2004. Thomas
Frost, prod.; Stephen Flock, Sam
O'Kell, engs. DDD. TT: 60:06

🔊 Elgar's later works were characterized by a heavier sadness (just eight years after this, his E Minor sonata seemed to mourn a rural England that had not survived the Great War), but his Violin Concerto of 1910 was more wistful and personal—and young Hilary Hahn gets every ounce of it. Her final cadenza stands with the finest on record, and Colin Davis works with Hahn to reach a conclusion that borders on the transcendent. With this, the first and second Menuhins, and the Heifetz of 1949, you've got what you need. Extra points for the wonderful photographs and liner notes.—**Art Dudley**

ELGAR:
VIOLIN CONCERTO

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS:
THE LARK ASCENDING

Hilary Hahn, violin; London Symphony Orchestra, Sir Colin Davis

Deutsche Grammophon 28947-48732-6 (multichannel SACD/CD). 2004. Martin Engstroem, Thomas Frost, prods.; Stephan Flock, balance eng., stereo & surround mixes; Sam O'Kell, eng. DDD. TT: 66:10

🔊 For the longest time I was sure I was going to nominate our May 2006 "Recording of the Month," Daniele Gatti's performance with the Royal Philharmonic of Tchaikovsky's Symphony 6 (SACD, Harmonia Mundi HMU 807394), for one of my 2008 "R2D4" slots. That recording has spent many hours in my Ayre player and has single-handedly forced me to redefine my decades-old opinion—formed with the arrogance of youth—of Tchaikovsky as a great orchestrator who could write great tunes but was no great shakes at symphonic development. But when I heard Hilary Hahn's hauntingly beautiful excursion through the Elgar Concerto, I had no choice but to change my choice.

If you know England's Sir Edward Elgar only from graduation memories of his "Pomp and Circumstance March No.1," you'll be surprised at the intensity, the passion, the intimacy of his Violin Concerto. Composed in 1910 for Fritz Kreisler, the concerto is actually an ode of unrequited love to Elgar's friend Alice Stuart-Wortley, and Hahn explores the depth of feeling expressed in the notes without descending into bathos or sentimentality. The coupling is Vaughan Williams' instrumental song of serenity, *The Lark Ascending*, and this account supplants my 1997 "R2D4" recommendation of Anne Akiko Meyers' performance on RCA. The sound, recorded in Abbey Road Studio No.1 in 24-bit/96kHz LPCM, is luminous, warm, and supportive of music that, in Hahn's words in the liner notes, "represents a time past / When music was quietly enhanced by words, / When gestures contained in the scribbled page / Came to life as vast statements." (xxx-2)

—**John Atkinson**

GÓRECKI:
SYMPHONY 3,
SYMPHONY OF
SORROWFUL SONGS

Zofia Kilanowicz, soprano; Henryk Górecki, National Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra

Polskie Radio SA PR SACD 1 (SACD/CD). 2003. Jan Popis, prod.; Andrew Lipinski, prod., eng. DDD. TT: 63:28

🔊 I first met recording engineer Andrew Lipinski when I reviewed his monitor loudspeaker, the Lipinski L-707, for the December 2005 edition of *Stereophile* (Vol.28 No.12). Three years later, at the 2008 CES, he handed me this SACD/CD. I first played it as background music for dinner guests, but Zofia Kilanowicz's sorrowful soprano was so good it stopped conversation. Later, this disc became my favorite



for lush orchestral sound—it made my solid-state electronics sound like 1970s-vintage tube gear. The long first movement opens with a slow, baleful dirge on the double basses that is entirely involving. The second and third movements highlight Kilanowicz's soprano, which get one's attention even when played at background levels. Lipinski's engineering talents have captured a totally addicting string tone and hall ambience that make me play this disc over and over.—**Larry Greenhill**

HAYDN:
VIOLIN CONCERTOS 1
& 4

MOZART:
SINFONIA
CONCERTANTE, K.364

Rachel Podger, violin; Pavlo Beznosiuk, viola; Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment

Channel Classics CCS SA 29309 (SACD/CD). 2009. Jonathan Freeman-Attwood, prod.; C. Jared Sacks, eng. DDD. TT: 67:43

🔊 Rachel Podger's recording of Vivaldi's *La Stravaganza* (Channel Classics CCS SA 19503), a wonderful union of great art and superb recording, was a revelation to many and a Baroque spectacle. Since then, Podger and engineer C. Jared Sacks have released a slow but steady stream of lovely recordings. This one, however, stands apart for its nearly perfect sound and superb music-making. As with the Vivaldi, Sacks has captured a small ensemble with exquisite detail and a judicious but satisfyingly

warm bass. Some reviewers have thought the bass excessive, but the bass is most prominent through the least of my systems, and perfectly balanced through the best. Podger and violist Pavlo Beznosiuk perform Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante as if conjoined souls, easily edging out, in delicacy and stylishness, the team of Julia Fischer and Gordan Nikolic (SACD/CD, Pentatone PTC 5186 098). And Podger's soloing—and conducting—in the Haydn concerti are models of style and charm. Just brilliant.—**Kalman Rubinson**

HERRMANN:
VERTIGO: ORIGINAL
SOUNDTRACK

Muir Mathieson, City of London Sinfonia

Varèse Sarabande VSD-5759 (CD). 1958/1996. Robert Townson, prod.; Onno Scholtze, mastering; Joel Gastwirt, Ramon Breton, remastering. ADD. TT: 64:10

🔊 Exhibit A of the power of great music combined with a great film is Bernard Herrmann's score for Alfred Hitchcock's 1958 masterpiece, *Vertigo*. Herrmann brings searing emotional life to Hitchcock's profoundly unnerving film. Herrmann was the first true musical minimalist; Philip Glass should be sending royalties to the Herrmann estate. This release dates from the restoration of 1996, in which the original stereo music tracks were used for the first time. If you get hooked on this, as so many have, at some point you'll want to play this CD in a green Jag while driving the hills of San Francisco.

—**Sasha Matson**

HORNER:
SNEAKERS (ORIGINAL
SOUNDTRACK)

Composed & conducted by James Horner; with Branford Marsalis, saxophone.

Columbia CK 53146 (CD). 1992. Burt Bernan, prod.; Dave Collins, eng.; Shawn Murphy, mix. AAD. TT: 48:29

 Fond of listening to subwoofers, I'm always on the lookout for CDs with well-recorded deep bass, and in 2004 I discovered a real keeper while reviewing Sumiko Audio's 205-lb REL-III Studio subwoofer. While setting up the REL-III in my listening room, Sumiko installers Patrick Butler and Allen Hager used the soft, dense, sullenly repetitive bass-drum beat from "Cosmos Old Friend" to optimize the sub's phase, level, low-pass, and crossover frequency settings, as well as its optimal distance from the back wall. This soft, pulsing background sound wasn't earthshaking, but it helped them attain the most natural and dense quality at this low frequency. As for drama, *Sneakers* doesn't disappoint. "The Hand Off" delivers one of the most dynamic piano scales I've encountered, exploding out of a dead-black silence. It never fails to send chills up and down my spine—when my subwoofers are well set up. (XVIII-2)—**Larry Greenhill**

HORNER:
SNEAKERS ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK

Columbia CK 53146 (CD), 1992. James Horner, prod.; Dave Collins, eng.; Shawn Murphy, mix. AAD TT: 72:31

 Those who've been following "Records to Die For" for the past 20 years or so, or have burrowed into *Stereophile's* online archives, may have noticed that I first recommended this recording in 1995. Why again? Simply because this review, and the one that follows, reflect the fact that, in 2015, we lost one of the most prominent film composers of the modern era: James Horner.

Sneakers was primarily distinguished for its cast (Robert Redford, Sidney Poitier, Dan Aykroyd, Ben Kingsley, River Phoenix), but its earnings barely covered

its costs. It was released on DVD in 2004, but came out on Blu-ray only last year. Horner embellished the relatively obscure film with a subtle, reflective score that is one of his most original efforts. Like many film composers, who work on exceptionally tight deadlines, he was often criticized for "borrowing" snippets and themes, though he seems to have lifted mostly from his own earlier work. Nevertheless, his scores were always exceptional. I could have chosen a dozen of them, but *Sneakers* remains one of my favorites, and its extended "Playtronics Break-In" sequence is still one of my go-to demo cuts. The superb recording is laid-back, with impressive ambience rather than sounding dry and in your face. It captures the orchestra, wordless chorus, and Branford Marsalis's clarinet contributions to near perfection. (XVIII-2, XXIV-2)

—**Thomas J. Norton**

HORNER:
APOLLO 13: ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK

James Horner, conductor
MCA Soundtracks MCAD-11241 (CD), 1995. James Horner, prod.; Shawn Murphy, mixer. AAD? TT: 72:21

 Unfortunately, an orchestral-score-only CD of the *Apollo 13* soundtrack was never released. Of this CD's 72 minutes, 31 are filled with the original recordings of the 1960s pop music used here and there in the film, along with brief snatches of dialogue—an arrangement that was likely a marketing hack's dream of a platinum album. Fortunately, there are also 41 minutes of key music from one of James Horner's best scores (tracks 1, 9, 13, 14, 17, 22, and 23—the CD tray card's numbering is totally out of whack). Like *Sneakers* (above), *Apollo 13* offers more than a trace of subtle, evocative music,

but offers plenty of more energetic cuts as well.

Like many soundtrack albums, Horner's often include one or more "tone poems"—extended suites that are thrilling and often moving, even when experienced apart from the film. There are at least three fine examples here: "All Systems Go—The Launch" (track 9) "End Titles" (23), and "Dark Side of the Moon" (17). The last—no resemblance to Pink Floyd!—borrows heavily from *Sneakers*, but definitely works here.

As with *Sneakers*, the recording quality is outstanding. Mix engineer Shawn Murphy is, in my judgment, unsurpassed in his ability to convincingly capture a full symphony orchestra in any genre, not just the one in which he's chosen to work. Audiophiles first became aware of this with his work for *Glory*, another film scored by Horner. In addition to Horner (with whom he worked up to and including *Titanic*, in 1997), Murphy records nearly all of the scores of John Williams, James Newton Howard, and many others. He did some of his best work, including these two, at the old Todd-AO scoring stage, now sadly converted to office space—or something. Reportedly the largest such facility in the US, it had superb acoustics that are evident on both of these recordings, and was able to accommodate an orchestra of over 100 musicians.—**Thomas J. Norton**

KORNGOLD:
SYMPHONY IN F-SHARP MAJOR, MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Marc Albrecht, Orchestra
Philharmonique de Strasbourg
Pentatone Classics PTC 5186 373 (SACD/CD), 2010. Wolfram Nehls, prod., eng.; Job Maarse, prod.; Philipp Knop, eng. DDD. TT: 67:41

 Korngold's only symphony, completed

in 1952 after his long and successful hiatus as a Hollywood film composer, shows us what might have happened to the centuries-long middle-European symphony tradition had not two world wars intervened and scattered that tradition to Russia and Scandinavia. Richly invested with colorful orchestrations and graceful shaping, this symphony is characterized by an apposition and reiteration of melodies reminiscent of the leitmotiv concept that informed Korngold's film music. This and the incidental music from *Much Ado About Nothing*, his first Hollywood success, are played with panache and precision by the Strasbourgers and are presented in a clear, deep soundstage that reveals all the details of Korngold's brilliant scoring.—**Kalman Rubinson**

LISZT:
PIANO CONCERTO 1

RACHMANINOFF:
PIANO CONCERTO 2

Artur Rubenstein, piano;
Alfred Wallenstein, RCA Victor
Symphony (Liszt); Fritz Reiner,
Chicago Symphony Orchestra
(Rachmaninoff)

RCA Living Stereo LSC-2068 (LP), 1962. John Pfeiffer, prod.; Lewis Layton, John Crawford, engs. AAA. TT: 49:38

 Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto 2 is one of my favorite piano works, and the Rubenstein-Reiner-Chicago reading is the one I'd grab if the house were burning down. Truth be told, I marginally prefer Vladimir Ashkenazy's performance with the Moscow Philharmonic (Decca/London), but the glorious, rich sound of this RCA Living Stereo carries the day. It may be a bit too romantic, with a too-vivid, larger-than-life piano, but for me, it pushes all the right buttons. Definitely a lights-off, sit-back-with-a-glass-of-wine-and-enjoy record. (XVI-6)—**Brian Damkroger**

MAHLER:
SYMPHONY 2

Lisa Milne, soprano; Birgit Remmert, alto; Hungarian Radio Choir, Kálmán Strausz, chorusmaster; Budapest Festival Orchestra, Iván Fischer
Channel Classics CCS SA 23506 (2 SACD/CDs). 2006. Hein Dekker, prod., eng.; C. Jared Sacks, eng. DSD. TT: 81:52

From the opening phrases of Mahler's sprawling "Resurrection" symphony, conductor Iván Fischer summons forth an arresting wealth of nuance to illuminate the composer's prototypical journey from darkest despair to heavenly transcendence. Complemented by superb engineering, the cellos, double basses, and timpani offer thunderous, often terrifying contrast to the chorus's climactic final transport from perdition to paradise. Although I wish soprano Lisa Milne didn't prematurely clip her vowels, her voice is as ideally radiant as alto Birgit Remmert's is rich. Leonard Bernstein may lead the most orgasmic burst through the pearly gates, but Fischer's profoundly colorful traversal is far better recorded (in multichannel, no less) and unquestionably less idiosyncratic.—**Jason Victor Serinus**

MAHLER:
SYMPHONY 4**DEBUSSY:**
PRÉLUDE L'ÀPRÈS-MIDI D'UN FAUNE

Trevor Pinnock, Royal Academy of Music Soloists Ensemble; Sonia Grané, soprano
Linn CKD438 (24/192, 26/96, 16/44.1 ALAC/FLAC files, SACD/CD). 2013. Jonathan Freeman-Attwood, prod.; Philip Hobbs, eng. DDD. TT: 64:38

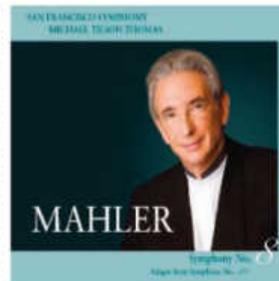
Although Gustav Mahler scored his symphonies for immense musical forces, much of the time his orchestration is of chamber-music scale. There isn't, therefore, the same cognitive dissonance

as there would be, say, for a Bruckner symphony, when you hear this version of his Symphony 4, arranged by Erwin Stein for 14 instruments and soprano and premiered in January 1921 at Arnold Schoenberg's Society for Private Musical Performances. Yes, the textures are leaner, but the clarity of line and the musical transparency, with piano and harmonium providing some of the Viennese-café flavoring, make the original version of this most intimate of Mahler's symphonies sound almost overblown. The delicacy, tinged with portamenti, with which the solo violin launches into its melody at the beginning and end of the first movement is addictive. The highlight is the third movement, with first solo cello, then solo violin, then solo oboe each drawing out the languorous line, underpinned by a gruffly plucked double bass, evoking memories of a vanished pre-World War society. Benno Sachs's reduction of the Debussy work, which takes on the sonority of Ravel's *Introduction and Allegro*, is not quite as convincing as the Mahler on first listen, but grows with familiarity. The recording quality is up to Philip Hobbs's usual standard, with a close perspective that doesn't cross the line into aggressiveness.—**John Atkinson**

MAHLER:
SYMPHONY 8, ADAGIO FROM SYMPHONY 10

Erin Wall, Elza Van den Heever, Laura Claycomb, sopranos; Katarina Karnéus, Yvonne Naef, mezzo-sopranos; Anthony Dean Griffey, tenor; Quinn Kelsey, baritone; James Morris, bass-baritone; San Francisco Symphony & Chorus, San Francisco Girls Chorus, Pacific Boychoir; Michael Tilson Thomas
San Francisco Symphony 821936-0021-2 (2 SACD/CDs). 2009. Andreas Neubronner, prod.; Peter Laenger, eng. DSD/DDD. TT: 83:35

With eight strong vocal soloists, three



large choruses, and a huge orchestra going full blast, live recordings of Mahler's Symphony 8 are an equal test for conductors, performers, engineers, and systems—just holding the whole thing together is quite a challenge. Michael Tilson Thomas does far more than that, communicating Mahler's oft-ecstatic heavenly affirmations with eloquent poetic force. His soloists, save for the growling James Morris, are astounding in their vocal beauty. After the exultation of Symphony 8, the cry of pain at the heart of the wrenching *Adagio* of the unfinished Symphony 10 opens another doorway into Mahler's epic swings between ecstasy and despair. A recording to live for.—**Jason Victor Serinus**

MAHLER:
SYMPHONY 9

Iván Fischer, Budapest Festival Orchestra
Channel Classics CCS SA 36115 (SACD/CD). 2015. Hein Dekker, prod., eng.; Jared Sacks, eng. DDD. TT: 75:55

What a musical and engineering triumph! Iván Fischer, far less indulgent than Leonard Bernstein, prefers a direct approach that allows Mahler's cries of pain and near-overwhelming sadness at the state of his health to pour over the listener. Fischer's fortes are things of wonder, horns piercing a huge soundstage in which the glowing colors of different instrumental groupings speak with an emotional directness and clarity too rarely encountered in recordings of such large forces. To

sit before a great system and play the entire symphony, from its first sighs to its last dying whispers, is a revelatory experience. (XXXVIII-9)

—**Jason Victor Serinus**

MAHLER:
DAS LIED VON DER ERDE

Christa Ludwig, mezzo-soprano; Fritz Wunderlich, tenor; New Philharmonia Orchestra, Otto Klemperer

EMI Classics 72435 66944 2 (CD). 1967/1998. Walter Legge, Peter Andry, prods.; Douglas Larter, Robert Gooch, engs.; Simon Gibson, digital remastering. ADD. TT: 64:07

Mahler's *Das Lied* is about nothing less than the Meaning of Life (say what you will), and this recording captures each aspect—expressed differently in each song—in a manner both deep and euphoric. The Oriental influences and expressionism are clear but never overwhelm the sheer Romanticism; Otto Klemperer, perhaps among the most thoughtful of all conductors on record, manages every dichotomy in both text and orchestral texture. Fritz Wunderlich's beautiful sound and intelligent way with the texts are not hampered by the outlandishly high tessitura; only in his 30s, and with a sound both clarion and tender, he's magnificent. And Christa Ludwig was a unique singer, with a rich, creamy sound, impeccable diction, warmth, and feeling—her soft entrance on F in "Der Einsame im Herbst" creates a true sense of yearning, springing from the watery introduction with great color and understanding. And nothing is overstated. As fine as many competing versions are, this one remains simply perfect. The 1998 remastering is gloriously true.

—**Robert Levine**

MESSIAEN:
TURANGALĪLA-SYMPHONIE

Garrick Ohlsson, piano; Jean Laurendeau, ondes martenot; Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra, Hans Vonk

ARCH PTC 5186320 (CD). 2007. Thomas Drake, prod.; Paul Hennerich, eng. DDD. TT: 74:49

Recorded live in Powell Symphony Hall on February 12–13, 1999, this sonic spectacular (the bass could have you evicted) has only now been released. For those of you who've always been puzzled by this supremely strange work—and who hasn't?—this recording won't solve those puzzles. It will, however, make you revel in them. The fact that it alternately sounds like a child's idea of being chased by monsters, or the soundtrack to a sci-fi movie, or a dance-hall on acid, or tender love music, does not really describe it. More than the sum of its parts—the ondes martenot, that weird, electronic, Theremin-like keyboard instrument, with its bizarrely piercing swoops and whooshes (*ondes* is French for waves, and that's what we hear); the glockenspiel and vibraphone that sometimes lull and sometimes alarm; the cruelly difficult solo-piano part, alternately gentle and maniacally pounding—the work offers up some of the most glorious colors the ear has ever seen. On some level, all performances of *Turangalila-symphonie* are thrilling; this one makes its kitchen-sinkness sound coherent. —Robert Levine

MESSIAEN:
TURANGALILA-
SYMPHONIE,
L'ASCENSION

François Weigel, piano; Thomas Bloch, Ondes Martenot; Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra, Antoni Wit
Naxos 8.554478-79 (2 CDs). 2000. Beata Jankowska, prod., eng.; Julita Emanuilow, eng. DDD. TT: 107:26

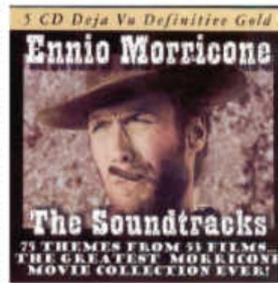
The *Turangalila-Symphonie* is an absolute

and stunning object lesson in symphonic overload, and a recording of it is a must for audiophiles, not to mention maximalists, and any lover of the orchestra and its multitudinous colorations. Messiaen's sound world is as odd as the spelling of his name; clusters of sound practically attack the listener. Thirteen brass instruments, 12 winds, solo piano, ondes martenots, 68 strings, and percussion—including tubular bells, wood blocks, three types of cymbals, tam tam, maracas, and more—keep the ear in a constant bath of wonderment. "It's a love song," the composer is rumored to have said at one point, and after the work's initial shock wears off and the "love theme" is recognized, there is staggering beauty. The ondes martenots surprise at their every appearance, their liquid, eerie, sensual electronic sound both integrated and outstanding. This two-CD set also includes the composer's *L'Ascension*, an earlier, prayerful, but no less fascinating work. I've heard *Turangalila* twice in concert; this recording sounds just as resonant, balanced, and multileveled. Quite an experience. —Robert Levine

MORRICONE:
THE SOUNDTRACKS:
75 THEMES FROM 53
FILMS

Déjà Vu Definitive Gold 5X031 (5 CDs). 2007. No recording details available. TT: 3:56:15

Everyone's music collection should include some Morricone. The music establishment might sniff at film soundtracks, but in my opinion they'll be remembered long after most "serious" modern music is forgotten and ignored. Ennio Morricone, especially when helping director Sergio Leone reinvent the Western, is a great innovator, adding wit, charm, and tension in his unusual use of voices,



whistling, and strange instrumentation. Although I bought an LP of the original soundtrack album of *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* back in the 1970s, finding a good collection proved difficult—until I discovered this Italian compilation, which, at \$20 for five CDs, is also a bargain. Hours of Googling have failed to find any provenance whatsoever, though the scores, different from the performances on my OST, have presumably been rerecorded—and to a very high standard. —Paul Messenger

MOZART:
SYMPHONIES 19, 20,
21, 26

Adám Fischer, Danish Radio Sinfonietta
DaCapo 6.220541 (SACD/CD). 2007. John Frandsen, Karl Bjerre Skibsted, prods.; Lars C. Bruun, eng. DDD. TT: 67:55

MOZART:
VIOLIN CONCERTOS 3,
4, 5

Marianne Thorsen, violin; Oyvind Grimse, Trondheime Solistene 2L 2L38SACD (SACD/CD twin pack). 2006. Morten Lindberg, prod., eng.; Hans Peter L'Orange, eng. DDD. TT: 79:40

In these phenomenally lovely and original performances of some of Mozart's middle-period symphonies and violin concertos, conductor Adám Fischer and the Danish Radio Sinfonietta emphasize the works' classical structures, while Oyvind Grimse and the Trondheime Solistene play with remarkable flexibility. Each reveals a truly Mozartean flare; playing them back to back, one feels that their indi-

vidual personalities serve the music with fidelity. Fischer gives each symphony its due without, like Harnoncourt's more generic presentations, overdramatizing them. Violinist Marianne Thorsen, going up against Julia Fischer's ongoing Pentatone series of the Mozart concertos (and directly in No.5), finds many subtle and delightful ways to make these familiar works voyages of discovery.

The sound is excellent in both sets, but subtly different. The symphonies sound as if recorded in a small concert hall with a warm but open acoustic, which allows the balance of the strings and brass to be simultaneously contrasted and consistent. Indeed, despite the small forces and classical scoring, the perceived dynamic range is great. The concertos, on the other hand, were recorded in a small church with a more close-up sound; the venue provides its warmth more in the ambience than in the direct instrumental sound. I'm addicted to both sets.

—Kalman Rubinson

MOZART:
VIOLIN CONCERTOS
3–5, K. 216, 218, 219

Andrew Manze, violin, conductor; The English Concert
Harmonia Mundi HMU 807835 (CD). 2006. Robina G. Young, prod.; Brad Michel, eng. DDD. TT: 75:45

Andrew Manze, like, totally rocks, dude; he has a stupendous ear for detail. Concerto 3 opens with an instantly catchy melody, and Manze tapers the end of it oddly but interestingly—he make you wonder what's next and softens its cocky attitude. His solo entry in the *Adagio* is exquisitely ghostly; he walks into the divine setting on tiptoe and keeps the mood of sweet sadness going. The lack of vibrato in the higher registers is haunting here and in the first movement of Concerto 5, where it

shows up with a whisper of an *Adagio* in the midst of a nicely jolly *Allegro*. And the facts that Manze's tone can be full and his attacks startlingly strong tell us that he's making a choice. Again, in Concerto 4's opening movement, Mozart keeps the orchestral register low and the solo violin very high-flying; he must have wanted just such a textural difference, and Manze is careful to make it clear. By the time we get to the rambunctious "Turkish" music in this concerto, with its bows bashing wildly into the strings, we realize that Mozart's love of contrasts, which he found funny, is being gloriously honored here.

The English Concert is more than adept: the horns and winds are just right, and the strings—16 of them—think and play as one. Manze composed all of the cadenzas, and they're as interesting and idiomatic as if Mozart himself had written them. The recording is ideally balanced; the soloist comes out of the orchestral fiber exactly as needed, and all balances are natural. (XXIX-4)—**Robert Levine**

PACHELBEL & FASCH: ORCHESTRAL WORKS

Pachelbel: Canon in D, Suites for Strings in B-flat and G.
Fasch: Trumpet Concerto in D, Symphonies for Strings in G and A.

Maurice André, trumpet; Pierre Pierlot, Jacques Chambon, oboes; Jean-François Paillard Chamber Orchestra, Jean-François Paillard
Musical Heritage Society MHS 1060 (LP), Erato 98475 (CD). 1968/1995. Michel Garcin, prod.; Guy Laporte, eng.; Ysabelle Van Wersch-Cot, mastering. AAA/ADD. TT: 53:15

Like everyone else, I got this album for something like a dollar by joining the Musical Heritage Society. I listened almost exclusively to rock back then, but Pachelbel's Canon in D started me down a path from which there was no turning back. I loved it,



and went on to be mesmerized by every work on this album. It quickly taught me that my taste leaned toward chamber music, and this recording remains my model for the genre to this day. As for the sound, it sounded great to my ears the first time I heard it, and even now, after decades and drastic changes in my expectations, it still sounds great.

—**Brian Damkroger**

ALONDRA DE LA PARRA: MI ALMA MEXICANA/ MY MEXICAN SOUL

Alondra De La Parra, Philharmonic Orchestra of the Americas; Daniel Andai, violin; Pablo Sáinz Villegas, guitar; Alex Brown, piano

Sony 8869775552 (2 CDs). 2010. Alondra De La Parra, exec. prod.; Adam Abeshouse, prod., eng. DDD. TT: 2:05:51

Sony wisely paired up with hotshot Mexican conductor Alondra De La Parra and her powerhouse Latino orchestra for this Mexican bicentennial sampler of chestnuts and worthy wildcards from the post-colonial world of Mexican classical music. The usual suspects (notably Moncayo's *Huapango* and Revueltas's *Sensemayá*) are peerlessly rendered with both idiomatic performances and pure sonic wallop, while such lesser-heard gems as Chávez's *El Trópico* (from the *H.P. Suite*), Chapela's *Inguesu*, and Huízar's *Imágenes* deservedly expand the recorded repertoire. From the lyrical and the romantic to modern works casting European models in

distinctly Mexican hues, De La Parra has opened a treasure chest for the world.

—**Daniel Buckley**

PÄRT: FRATRES, TABULA RASA, CANTUS

Gidon Kremer, Tatjana Grindenko, violin; Keith Jarrett, piano; Alfred Schnittke, prepared piano; 12 Cellists of the Berlin Philharmonic; Dennis Russell Davies, Staatsorchester Stuttgart; Saulus Sondeckis, Lithuanian Chamber Orchestra

ECM New Series 1275 (CD). 1984. Manfred Eicher, prod.; Heinz Wildhagen, Peter Laenger, Eberhard Sengpiel, Dieter Frobeen, engs. DDD. TT: 54:39

Think of "great classical performances" and one instinctively presupposes a vintage recording by a Heifetz, Casals, Caruso, or Callas. But this recording of Arvo Pärt's *Fratres*, played by Gidon Kremer and Keith Jarrett, captures a stunning realization of a piece that spans the gamut of human emotion, from excruciating sorrow to sublime ecstasy. While dozens of recordings of the same piano/violin arrangement have since been made, no other even remotely captures this one's exquisite intensity, scintillating color, and majestic emotional landscape. Add the equally vivid performances of two other 20th-century masterpieces, *Tabula Rasa* and *Cantus*, and you have what may be *the* must-have Arvo Pärt disc. (X-8)

—**Daniel Buckley**

PROKOFIEV: EXCEPTS FROM ROMEO AND JULIET

Erich Leinsdorf, Los Angeles Philharmonic
Sheffield Lab SL25-SL26 (direct-to-disc LP). 1977. Lincoln Mayorga, prod.; Doug Sax, prod., eng.; Bud Wyatt, eng. AAA. TT: 57:12

Direct-to-disc recordings were a revelation when they first appeared. I had never before heard such consistently rich and dif-

ferentiated musical timbres or dynamic range from an LP, and they became the main reference recordings for my earliest audio reviews. As with many audiophile releases then and now, direct recordings most often featured single artists or small ensembles. Sheffield Lab's releases of Erich Leinsdorf conducting the Los Angeles Philharmonic in works of Wagner and Prokofiev were early exceptions. Though I love both recordings, it is to the luxurious sound of the excerpts from Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* that I return again and again. The dynamics and orchestral color are incredibly moving, making it the most involving of Sheffield's direct-disc recordings.

—**Larry Greenhill**

RACHMANINOFF: PIANO CONCERTO 2; SIX MOMENTS MUSICAUX, OP.16

Dejan Lazic, piano; London Philharmonic Orchestra, Kirill Petrenko
Channel Classics CCS SA26308 (SACD/CD; DSD64, 24/192, 24/96, 24/44.1, MP3 downloads). 2008. Jared Sacks, prod., eng. DDD. TT: 64:15

I had always liked Rachmaninoff's music, but I fell in love with the Russian composer in February 2000. In a private recital hall in Santa Monica, I was recording Robert Silverman performing, on a Bösendorfer 290SE player piano, Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas. Our host had a file for the Bösendorfer, transcribed by Wayne Stahnke from a piano roll, of Rachmaninoff himself performing his transcription of Mendelssohn's *Spinning Song*. As I wrote in our January 2001 issue, "this was better than any hi-fi I had ever experienced—I actually had Sergei Rachmaninoff in the room, playing Mendelssohn just for me." Since that forma-

tive experience, I have been working—no, *playing* my way through his symphonies, sacred music, chamber music, music for piano, and the piano concertos, especially No.2. The DSD64 file of this live, award-winning performance by Dejan Lazic has been in constant rotation this past year. The Croatian pianist offers the perfect balance of passion, power, and lyricism, pointed by the occasional moment of hushed expectancy. He is supported by superb sound quality, with a rich, lush orchestral balance—and while the piano image is a little larger than life, it doesn't detract from the sweep of this lyrically sublime music.

—John Atkinson

RAMEAU: UNE SYMPHONIE IMAGINAIRE

Excerpts from *Zaïs*, *Castor et Pollux*, *Les Fêtes d'Hébé*, *Dardanus*, *La Temple de la Gloire*, *Les Boréades*, *La Naissance d'Osiris*, *Platée*, *Hippolyte et Aricie*, *Les Indes galantes*

Marc Minkowski, Les Musiciens du Louvre

Archiv B0004478-02 (CD). 2005. Marita Prohmann, prod.; Mark Buecker, Reinhard Lagermann, engs. DDD. TT: 56:25

It's a pity that Jean-Philippe Rameau never composed purely symphonic music, but conductor Marc Minkowski has come to the rescue: This CD contains 17 excerpts from the composer's operas (actually, 16, with one anonymous orchestration of a keyboard suite), most presented as composed, a couple with their vocal parts removed. Rameau is a really cool, really surprising composer—he'll toss in a chromatic line or introduce a suspension that disturbs momentarily and unexpectedly dazzles the ear. He uses woodwinds to tickle a sense, and his pageant of orchestral colors is vivid and bright. The performances are stunning, the sonics brilliant.

Perhaps this will sneak some unsuspecting listeners into examining Rameau's operas. (XXVIII-11)—Robert Levine

REVUELTAS: LA NOCHE DE LOS MAYAS, SENSEMAYÁ, LA CORONELLA

Enrique Barrios, Aguascalientes Symphony Orchestra Mexico
Naxos 8.555917 (CD). 2002. Bogdan Zawistowski, prod.; no eng. listed. DDD. TT: 61:38

Naxos's priceless *Latin-American Classics* series spawned a triumph with this disc of orchestral works by Mexican composing giant Silvestre Revueltas (1899–1940). Revueltas was a musical genius who went to extremes of both vision and alcoholism, and produced a powerful and singular body of work that seems to have swallowed Stravinsky whole, digested it along with all of Mexican folk music, and thrown in some personal demons. Revueltas's well-known *Sensemaya* is a dark, epic work of extraordinary orchestral color and taut suspense. Less often heard but no less potent are his film score for *La Noche de los Mayas* and the ballet *La Coronella*, both heard here in arrangements by other composers. The latter is a distillation of Revueltas's music for the revolution-themed films *Vámonos con Pancho Villa!* and *Los de Abajo*. The percussion- and brass-led finale of *Mayas* is some of the most brilliant orchestral writing of the 20th century. Barrios and his orchestra capture, as few on record have, this music's dark undercurrents and contrasts of playfulness and brutality, along with its distinctive traditional accents.—Daniel Buckley

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV: SCHEHERAZADE

RCA Living Stereo/Acoustic Sounds LSC-2445 (LP).

1960/2013. TT: Not noted

MUSSORGSKY-RAVEL: PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION

RCA Living Stereo/Acoustic Sounds LSC-2201 (LP). 1957/2013. TT: Not noted

Both: Fritz Reiner, Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Richard Mohr, prod.; Lewis Layton, eng. AAA.

All collectors of RCA Living Stereo LPs have their favorites, and these are mine. Reiner's reading of *Scheherazade* is the pinnacle of grace, precision, delicacy, and drama, and it's no wonder it commands the highest prices in the market for used shaded dogs. The late Harry Pearson once told me that he could learn anything he needed to know about an audio component by playing the final movement of this recording. I prefer the relatively less popular *Pictures*. The interpretation is lively, refined, and subtle, but bombastic when it needs to be. At times, Reiner could make the CSO swing. I hear wider dynamic contrasts, sense of drama, deeper bass, and more clearly delineated room sound in *Pictures* than in *Scheherazade*.

I'm talking about original shaded-dog pressings. I've been disappointed by all the reissues released over the last 20 years that have promised better sound than the originals but have fallen far short of that. I had much higher expectations of these new reissues, from Chad Kassem's Quality Record Pressings, having been very impressed by some of QRP's rock and jazz reissues. When I spun them, I was floored. After comparing them to early shaded-dog pressings of the same recordings, I felt the only area in which the originals were still superior was the subtle, additional layer of air and sparkle in the highs (master-tape age,

perhaps?). But the reissues' quality and extension of bass and high-level dynamic contrasts were superior. And the surfaces of the new pressings are so quiet they let each subtle midrange detail emerge from a "black" background. At times, the background is so silent I have to do a double take to verify that the needle is still in the groove and the platter is still turning.—Robert J. Reina

SAINT-SAËNS: ÉLAN: BALLET MUSIC FROM OPERAS

Excerpts from *Ascanio*, *Les Barbares*, *Etienne Marcel*, *Henry VIII*

Guillaume Tourniaire, Orchestra Victoria

Melba MR 301130 (SACD/CD). 2011. Maria Vandamme, Phil Rowlands, prods.; Richard Girvan, Alex Stinson, engs. DDD. TT: 73:04

Where has this music been all my life? Along with symphonies, it was ballet music that made me a music lover and audiophile—I was particularly seduced by the sparkle, color, and drama of dance scores by Delibes and Tchaikovsky. I knew Saint-Saëns from his symphonies, concertos, and *Danse macabre*, but his operas, aside from *Samson et Dalila* and its *Bacchanale*, eluded me—how could I know of such delicacies as these delightful and piquantly orchestral dances? The two short but charming excerpts from *Henry VIII* aside, these are all premiere recordings of excerpts from now-obscure operas, so it will all be as new to you as it was to me.

Tourniaire and the Orchestra Victoria turn in stylish and inflected performances, and Melba, a label with long experience in multichannel SACD, deliver it all on a big soundstage with great depth and an amiable tonal balance. This one belongs on your shelf next to that pristine pressing of Richard

Bonyng's recording of Minkus-Lanchberry's *La Bayadère* (Decca).

—Kalman Rubinson

SAINT-SAËNS: SYMPHONY 3, "ORGAN"

Charles Munch, Boston Symphony;
Berj Zamkochian, organ

RCA Living Stereo LSC-2341 (LP).
1959. Richard Mohr, prod.; Lewis
Layton, eng. AAA. TT: 52:33

 This 1959 recording remains one of my indispensable favorites for its ability to re-create in my listening room the massive power and deep-bass range of a pipe organ accompanied by a full orchestra. Designed by G. Donald Harrison and built by the Aeolian-Skinner Company, the great organ of Boston's Symphony Hall was installed just 10 years before this recording was made. The deepest pedal notes in Saint-Saëns's Symphony 3—the 36.7Hz low D-flats at the end of the first movement, and the 32.6Hz low C's at the end of the second—"provide the rock-solid foundations on which the whole towering [symphonic] structure is securely based," as R.D. Darrell says in his liner note. No other recording quite yields the sustained musical power or clearly delineates descending scales as this one does, making it easy to determine a subwoofer's pitch definition, and its ability to create "room lock" in my large listening room. (XVI-6)—Larry Greenhill

SHORE: THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE COMPLETE RECORDINGS

Howard Shore, London
Philharmonic, London Voices,
London Oratory School Schola;
with Enya, Renée Fleming, James
Galway, Annie Lennox, Mabel
Faleolu, Elizabeth Fraser, Edward
Ross, Ben Del Maestro, Miriam
Stockley, Hilary Summers, Emiliana
Torrini, Isabel Bayrakdarian, Sheila
Chandra, Sissel, others

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING

Reprise 49454-2 (3 CDs, 1 DVD-A).
2005. John Kurlander, mix. TT:
3:00:55

THE TWO TOWERS

Reprise 44376-2 (3 CDs, 1 DVD-A).
2006. Peter Cobbin, mix. TT:
3:08:42

THE RETURN OF THE KING

Reprise 162044-2 (4 CDs, 1 DVD-A).
2007. Peter Cobbin, mix. TT:
3:49:46

All: Howard Shore, prod.; John
Kurlander, eng. DDD. TT: 9:59:23

 Howard Shore labored for several years on his music for Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings*, and every minute's craft is audible in this 10 hours of music. Shore acknowledges having taken as his model that other epic tale of a cursed ring, Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, in composing interwoven families of leitmotifs to represent the various creatures, species, characters, tribes, peoples, places, and things of J.R.R. Tolkien's vast novel. In some cases Shore has outdone Wagner; his sinuous theme for the One Ring is far more convincing an embodiment of fatally unsatisfiable yearning than is Wagner's strangely pale motif for Alberich's ring; and Shore's theme for the equestrian Rohirrim is at least as dark, tragic, and noble as the one Wagner wrote for his Volsungs. Shore is also a sensitive and masterful conductor—throughout, the London Philharmonic heaves and sighs in the rhythms of breath, sounding like a huge restive beast.

Unlike most film composers, who are seldom given more than a few weeks to compose, rehearse, record, and edit, Shore had time to orchestrate these immense scores himself, and his close attention to details of color, texture, voicing, and inner harmonies is unprecedented for the genre. These are

perhaps the best-crafted film scores ever written, and have genuine musical substance; *The Return of the King's* "The Lighting of the Beacons" is the most inspiring marriage of music and film image I have ever heard and seen.

Though hardly examples of audiophile engineering—the number of microphones probably ran into the high two digits—these are also some of the most vivid, well-balanced, three-dimensional, full-bodied orchestral recordings I have heard. The senses of space and orchestral texture (the cymbals! the low strings!) in the 24-bit/48kHz hi-res versions of all 10 hours of music on the included DVD-Audio discs are not subtle in their differences from the sound on the CDs, which sound plenty good themselves. The sumptuous and meticulously antiqued packaging matches the aural richness and the music's own high seriousness. Shore's deep generosity in his work here is audible and humbling.

—Richard Lehnert

RICHARD STRAUSS: EINE ALPENSINFONIE, MACBETH

Marek Janowski, Pittsburgh
Symphony Orchestra.

Pentatone PTC 5186 339 (SACD/
CD). 2009. Job Maarse, prod.; Mark
Donahue, Dirk Sobotka, Ray Clover,
engs. DDD. TT: 69:13

 Strauss's orchestrations of his tone poems are often massive, but their internal precision requires the performers to carefully balance the inner voices in order that the resulting sound be delicately tempered. A similar burden falls on the shoulders of the recording team, who must capture a huge dynamic range while sacrificing none of the fine-grained detail. Here's how it's done. The Pittsburghers play better than I've ever heard them on

recordings (where their legacy is impressive). Janowski balances the forward thrust of the narrative while paying careful attention to the jewels he uncovers along the way. The recording team has captured a live performance in Heinz Hall without confining the dynamics or losing any of the luscious instrumental tone of *Eine Alpensinfonie*. This has been a go-to composition for generations of audiophiles, and this recording takes the cake for ours.—Kalman Rubinson

RICHARD STRAUSS: DON JUAN, EINE ALPENSINFONIE

Mariss Jansons, Royal
Concertgebouw Orchestra
RCO Live 08006 (SACD/CD). 2008.
Everett Porter, prod., eng., ed.;
Matthijs Ruijter, Peter Cerbin, asst.
engs. DSD 5.0 Surround. TT: 70:22

 Richard Strauss's *Alpine Symphony* is, I suppose, a guilty pleasure. For some, the +100-piece orchestra and 16 offstage brass, along with cowbells, a wind machine, and a holy organ at the summit, are all too much to be taken seriously. But this 53-minute tone poem, intended as a nature-worshipping exercise in moral purification and a repudiation of Christianity, overflows with lush scoring, thrilling climaxes, and a surfeit of romantic excess. I love it. Even in two-channel CD, the extra resolution afforded by DSD trumps recent efforts from Thielemann and Wit. The symphony is paired with a heroic, sensual *Don Juan* that rivals Fritz Reiner's. This SACD will highlight every system's glories and shortcomings.

—Jason Victor Serinus

RICHARD STRAUSS: DON JUAN, DEATH AND TRANSFIGURATION, TILL EULENSPIEGEL'S MERRY PRANKS

Manfred Honeck, Pittsburgh
Symphony Orchestra

Reference fresh! FR-707SACD (SACD/CD). 2013. Dirk Subotka, prod.; Mark Donahue, Ray Clover, John Newton, engs. DDD. TT: 59:26

 Audiophiles need no reminder of the many wonderful Reference Recordings, but this release is offered, quite aptly, on their new *fresh!* series. The recording team from Sound-Mirror offers us a new view of the Pittsburgh Symphony in their hall, one familiar from recordings by Command Classics, Everest, Telarc, and Exton. From the first note, one hears an immediate and direct instrumental sound, with instruments on a wide, deep soundstage that begins at the speaker plane and extends deeply. The ambience is enveloping, but less lush than what RR's Prof. Keith O. Johnson offered in his first multichannel releases. I find this startlingly close to a real concert experience, where the hall acoustics have a more subtle influence and don't intrude on the main event. The dynamics are as impressive. The low end, especially of the double basses, is as granitic as organ-pedal tones, and the bass drum, if not quite like Telarc's, has huge impact.

The performances are spectacular but not flashy. One hears the brilliance of Strauss's scoring not only in the power of the tuttis but also in the inner details. *Don Juan* soars and sings. *Tod und Verklärung* swells and writhes. And for all the bumptious wit of *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche* (1894), I hear intimations of the sadness and cynicism of Stravinsky's *Pétrouchka* (1911). This is a thrilling disc. I look forward to hearing more from this team, and its performers on both sides of the microphones.

—Kalman Rubinson

Collections

ARCHIV PRODUKTION
1947–2013

Early Music from Anonymous (Gregorian Chant) through Bach to Beethoven Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Nikolas Harnoncourt, Ralph Kirkpatrick, Sir Charles Mackerras, David Munrow, Trevor Pinnock, Karl Richter, Helmut Walcha, many others

Archiv Produktion 529 906-2 (55 CDs). 1947–2012/2013. Various orig. prods., engs. ADD/DDD. TT: 59:26:48

 A wag once quipped that lavish boxed sets of reissues on CD are the illuminated manuscripts of the 21st century. If so, this 55-CD, 59-hour brick must be the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*. Archiv Produktion, aka the Early Music Studio of Deutsche Grammophon, was set up in 1947. Projects by the likes of Trevor Pinnock and John Eliot Gardiner established Archiv as the pre-eminent early-music label of the 1950s through the 1980s, with a rich back catalog to celebrate. There's no better way to acquire 800 years of music history in one fell swoop. A limited-edition set of selections on five 180gm LPs—which sound fabulous—may still be available. No downloads of any sort are offered.—John Marks

L'OISEAU-LYRE RECORDS:

THE BAROQUE ERA

Music from Monteverdi (1641) to C.P.E. Bach (1773)

Catherine Bott, Libby Crabtree, Michael George, Christopher Hogwood, Emma Kirkby, Philip Pickett, Joshua Rifkin, Christophe Rousset, many others; Academy of Ancient Music, New London Consort Orchestra, Westminster Abbey School Choristers Choir, others

L'Oiseau-Lyre/Decca 002072902 (50 CDs). 1973–2009. Various orig. prods, engs. ADD/DDD. TT: 48:07:59

 I recommended this set in the Holiday Gift Guide included in my December 2014 "Fifth Element" column. Between the writing of that column and its appearance in print, Christopher Hogwood died. That

more than half of these 50 CDs feature him makes this set an even more compelling release.

There are contrasts between this set and one of my other R2D4s, DG's *Arkiv Produktion 1947–2012* (55 CDs). At the risk of overemphasizing subtleties, I'm tempted to say that the Arkiv set is a bit more musicologically oriented, while the L'Oiseau-Lyre box tends slightly more toward entertainment. DG's sound is a little crisper, Decca's a bit warmer. If you liked that one, you should love this one. At about \$150, a genuine bargain. (XXXVII-12)—John Marks

MERCURY LIVING PRESENCE: THE COLLECTOR'S EDITION

Mercury Living Presence/Decca 001653302 (51 CDs). 1951–2009/2012. Wilma Cozart Fine, prod.; Robert Fine, eng. ADD. TT: 57:11:03

 Decca has released a boxed set of 51 CDs comprising the "heart" of Mercury Living Presence's orchestral catalog. It includes all of the Mercury recordings made by Antal Dorati, János Starker, Gina Bachauer, Byron Janis, and Henryk Szeryng, as well as an interview with producer Wilma Cozart Fine and a 64-page glossy booklet about the artists and the label's history. The street price is around \$100, and as most of the CDs include the material of two original Mercury LPs, that comes to about a buck a record. As I listened through several of these CDs, I noted that the top two octaves had more air and delicacy than the CDs Mercury released in the early 1990s: same Wilma Cozart Fine remastering, different pressing plant (this one is in Germany). So I compared the recording of my favorite Mercury, of Dorati leading the London Symphony in a reading of

Stravinsky's *The Firebird*, to the vinyl, of which I have multiple copies of the original pressing and most of the reissues. I thought my "FR-1" original pressing had slightly more relaxed high frequencies in the highly modulated passages, but that the new CD had much wider dynamic range, and tighter, deeper bass. Overall, I prefer the sound of the new CD. And here comes Fremer with a straitjacket . . .—Robert J. Reina

KLAUS TENNSTEDT: THE GREAT EMI RECORDINGS

Music of Beethoven, Brahms, Bruckner, Dvorák, Kodály, Mahler, Mendelssohn, Mussorgsky, Prokofiev, Schubert, Schumann, R. Strauss, Wagner

Klaus Tennstedt, Berlin Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, London Philharmonic & Choir, BBC Chorus

EMI Classics 94433 (14 CDs). 1978–91/2011. Various prods., engs. ADD/DDD. TT: 15:54:44

 I think no one said it better than Norman Lebrecht in *The Maestro Myth*: "Perhaps this was [Tennstedt's] secret, the sensation that each performance could be his last. Each event was both an undreamed privilege and an act of desperation, the fulfillment of a lifelong ambition and a confrontation with naked fear." If I had to sum up Tennstedt's approach to conducting in one phrase, it would have to be "monumental architecture full of luscious sound and self-evident sincerity." Standouts here include a disciplined but charming Dvorák Symphony 9, a deliberate and very dynamic Brahms *German Requiem*—and, with the Chicago Symphony, an electrifying, majestic live performance of Mahler's Symphony 1 that is more matter-of-fact than numinous. As good an introduction to the "big" classics as many boxed sets and better than most, and therefore a great gift.—John Marks

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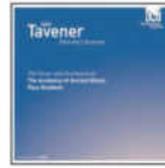
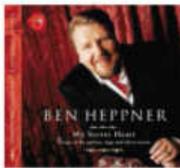
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OPERA, CHORAL & VOCAL ON RECORD

By ROBERT BAIRD



In the history of sound recording, opera holds a very special place. Not only is the very first opera ever composed still regularly performed—Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*, composed in 1607, while Shakespeare was still writing plays—but in 1880, listeners connected by early telephones turned opera into the first electronic home entertainment. The great marketer Thomas Edison indicated, in his 1888 patent caveat, that the purpose of movies would be the delivery of opera. Edison also made the first known recording of music: of George Frideric Handel's *Israel in Egypt*, cut into a cylinder of yellow paraffin at London's Crystal Palace, in 1888. From 1951 through 1974, US commercial networks showed live opera on television. Today, opera continues to push media technology, projecting 3D computer graphics onstage. And live opera in HD, with multi-language subtitles, is now shown in movie theaters worldwide.

Arguably the first recording star—and the first classical singer to make non-operatic vocal recordings—was the great Italian tenor Enrico Caruso, whose 290 recordings made both him and the phonograph famous. Before (and even after) Caruso, singers were suspicious of recording machines—most didn't fancy standing in front of a horn or, later,

a microphone, and frequently could not believe what recordings of their voices sounded like. The first complete opera ever recorded was Verdi's *Ernani*, captured by HMV in 1903 and issued on 40 single-sided 78 rpm discs. The most fascinating examples of early opera recording are the Mapleson Cylinders. Discovered in the 1920s, it is a collection of more than 100 cylinders recorded live at the Metropolitan Opera from 1901

Arguably the first recording star was the great Italian tenor Enrico Caruso.

through 1904, by Met employee Lionel Mapleson.

The world of modern opera recording began in 1958, when Georg Solti, fulfilling a longtime dream of opera conductors and audiences alike, began recording, in stereo, Richard Wagner's entire four-opera cycle, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. The project, not completed until 1965, was overseen by famed Decca producer John Culshaw, who became hugely influential in the studio recording of opera. While opera singers did eventually take comfort in the fact that studio recordings allowed them to fix mistakes—as well as record all of the opera roles that they had mastered—

they also found that, when performing live, they were competed, often not favorably, with their own "perfect" studio recordings.

Nevertheless, with the conclusion of Solti's *Ring*, opera recordings entered a golden era. Major labels like Decca and EMI recorded all the standard repertoire, with such star sopranos as Maria Callas, Renata Tebaldi, Leontyne Price, Joan Sutherland, Montserrat Caballé, Kirsten Flagstad, Renée Fleming, Angela Gheorghiu, and Anna Netrebko. Tenors included Franco Corelli, Nicolai Gedda, Fritz Wunderlich, Luciano Pavarotti, Plácido Domingo, and Jonas Kaufmann.

The invention of the Compact Disc, initially seen as a blessing for fans of all kinds of classical music, later became a hindrance when major record labels began digitally reissuing their entire catalogs, saturated the market, and began competing with themselves. Late in the last century, the advent of opera performances on DVD and BD significantly reenergized the opera market, for a while.—Robert Baird

 Robert Baird has been writing about music for 30 years, the last 20 of which as Music Editor of *Stereophile*. Having also served as Editor-in-Chief of *CD Review* and Music Editor of *New Times* in Phoenix, AZ, he's also written for a variety of publications including *Rolling Stone*, *USA Today*, *Magnet*, and *No Depression*.

J.S. BACH: CANTATAS BWV 82 & 199

Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, mezzo-soprano; Craig Smith, Orchestra of Emmanuel Music

Nonesuch 79692-2 (CD). 2003. Martin Sauer, prod.; Philipp Nedel, Marc Donahue, engs. DDD. TT: 50:42

“Records To Die For”? So let’s talk about death. There may be no more sorrowful Bach cantata than BWV 82, “Ich habe genug” (I have enough), and no more grippingly sorrowful rendition than this. Lieberson recorded it knowing that she was dying of cancer, and though this deepens the poignancy, it’s her performance that rivets. She sings with a modern vibrato that I usually don’t like in Bach, but her voice is so angelic, and the emotion so vivid, that I’m won over; it really does send chills down my spine. The Boston-based chamber orchestra is superb, as is the lush, detailed sound.

—Fred Kaplan

J.S. BACH: ST. MATTHEW PASSION, BWV 244 (LAST PERFORMING VERSION, CA 1742)

Nicholas Mulroy, Evangelist; Matthew Brook, Jesus; Susan Hamilton, Cecilia Osmond, sopranos; Clare Wilkinson, Annie Gill, altos; Malcolm Bennett, tenor; Brian Bannatyne-Scott, bass; Dunedin Consort & Players; John Butt, dir., harpsichord continuo
Linn CKD 313 (multichannel/2-channel SACD/HDCD CD). 2008. Also available as 88.2kHz/24-bit “Studio Master” (WMA, FLAC), 44.1/16 “CD Quality” (WMA, FLAC), and 320kbps MP3 files. Philip Hobbs, prod., eng.; Julia Thomas at Finespice Ltd., post-prod. DDD. TT: 2:41:00

From the stately dotted *ostinato* of the opening chorale and its dark-hued baroque oboes, which sets the stage for almost three hours of music, this performance of the Christian Passion story grips you by the ears. The use of eight solo

voices rather than a conventional double choir emphasizes the drama of the narrative, sacrificing lushness for clarity of line—an admirable tradeoff, in my opinion. Recorded by Linn’s longtime *tonmeister* Philip Hobbs at Greyfriars Kirk in Edinburgh, the sound is immediate without being bright, rich without being muddy, close but with a dome of ambience readily discernible around and behind the singers. I list the disc catalog numbers in the heading, but I entered the 21st century by actually downloading this recording as high-resolution, two-channel, FLAC-encoded files—a purchase triggered by my earlier downloading of the Dunedin’s highly lauded performance of Handel’s “Dublin” *Messiah* (Linn CKD 285). Here’s to a hi-rez B-minor Mass from the same forces!—John Atkinson

BANTOCK: OMAR KHAYYĀM

Catherine Wyn-Rogers, mezzo-soprano; Toby Spence, tenor; Roderick Williams, bass; BBC Symphony Chorus, Stephen Jackson, choirmaster; BBC Symphony Orchestra; Vernon Handley, conductor

Chandos CHSA 5051 (3 multichannel SACD/CDs). 2007. Brian Couzens, prod.; Ralph Couzens, eng. DDD. TT: 2:51:31

Orientalism always exercised a tremendous pull on the British imagination, and here are nearly three hours of settings—as lush and suggestive as an Alma-Tadema nude—for vocal soloists, chorus, and orchestra, of verses by a medieval Persian poet. Granville Bantock’s *Omar Khayyām* (1906–09) is contemporary with Schönberg’s *Gurrelieder* and Debussy’s *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien*, and it displays the same late-Romantic, fin-de-siècle, overripe opulence. But comparisons to late Elgar, early Strauss, and even Mahler are not out of line either.

The scale and scope are such that at times I looked up, expecting to see a David Lean film. I mean that as praise. Plaudits to Chandos for pulling off such a gigantic undertaking as this world-premiere recording—and on SACD, no less.—John Marks

BARTÓK: BLUEBEARD’S CASTLE

Tatiana Troyanos, Judith; Siegmund Nimsgern, Bluebeard; Pierre Boulez, BBC Symphony

Sony Classical SMK 64110 (CD). 1976. Paul Myers, prod.; Andreas Strange, eng. ADD. TT: 61:14

Bartók wrote the perfect opera in *Bluebeard’s Castle*. It’s short (just an hour), cast for two singers (no messy choruses or fussy side characters), written in a grandly romantic style, and orchestrated with cinematic impact. The story is simple: When Duke Bluebeard brings his new wife home, she wants to know what’s behind the locked doors of his house. He says no, but Judith insists, so one by one he opens the doors to reveal opulent but creepy contents (a room full of blood-soaked jewels, a lake of tears—you get the picture). There are many recordings of *Bluebeard*, but none can match the combination of Tatiana Troyanos, Siegmund Nimsgern, Pierre Boulez, and the BBC Symphony, who together make an electrifying opera even more so. (XVIII-9)

—Daniel Buckley

BIBER: BAROQUE SPLENDOR: MISSA SALISBURGENSIS

With: Sonata for 8 Trumpets and Timpani, *Plaudite Tympana*, *Battaglia à 10*

Jordi Savall, La Capella Reial de Catalunya, Hespèrion XXI, Le Concert des Nations

Alia Vox AVSA9912 (SACD/CD). 2015. Manuel Mohina, Nicolas Bartholomé, engs., mastering. DDD. TT: 71:40

It’s always Biber time around here, for the

passion that bursts from all his music. From the ecstatic but personal *Mystery* or *Rosary* sonatas (of which there are three marvelous new recordings this year alone) to this glorious *Missa Salisburgensis*, Biber’s music never fails to communicate. Recorded in La Collégiale du Château de Cardona, this multichannel recording finds just the right balance of spacious, reverberant acoustic with clarity and coherence for the singers and players. This and Jordi Savall’s magisterial pace reveal the rich complexity of Biber’s 53-part scoring as no competing recording does. The additional works lead and prepare the listener for the thrilling experience.

—Kalman Rubinson

BRITTEN: PETER GRIMES

Jon Vickers, Peter Grimes; Heather Harper, Ellen Orford; Jonathan Summers, Captain Balstrode; Patricia Payne, Mrs. Sedley; others; Royal Opera House Chorus & Orchestra, Sir Colin Davis

Philips 462 847 (2 CDs). 1978. No prod., eng. credit. ADD. TT: 2:26:18

A great performance of a great opera. When *Peter Grimes* premiered in 1945, it was arguably the first great English opera since Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas*. Peter Pears sang Grimes in the premiere and owned the role for many years thereafter. Then came Wagnerian tenor Jon Vickers with a new take: His Grimes was no longer merely a misfit/dreamer (the homosexual undertone so important to Pears and Britten was of little interest to Vickers), but angry, brutal, and eventually unhinged, invariably attempting to keep his rage in check. His performance is almost visual, his mad scene both terrifying and pathetic. Heather Harper sings Ellen Orford with beauty of tone, and a strong will not quite strong enough for Grimes’s

madness. Jonathan Sumners's *Balstrode* is both tough and understanding. Sir Colin Davis's leadership can be amazingly tender and nuanced, but he contrasts those traits with the unfor-givable nastiness and cruelty of the chorus of villagers. The *Sea Interludes* have rarely been better played. A huge and terrifying performance, superbly recorded.

—Robert Levine

BROOKS: YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN

Music & lyrics by Mel Brooks
Decca 80010374-2 (CD). 2007.
Doug Besterman, prod.; Frank
Filipetti, eng. DDD. TT: 67:01

 Mel Brooks's musical version of his film *Young Frankenstein* received mixed reviews when on Broadway, being often unfavorably compared to his previous musical-from-film, *The Producers*. However, the show received just about every Broadway.com Audience Award, and has been hugely successful in regional theaters. I'm with the audience; I think *Young Frankenstein* is not only very funny, but has a more melodic score than almost all musicals of recent years (and certainly better than that of the much-hyped *Book of Mormon*). Brooks has a knack for writing tunes that at first sound familiar but then go their own way. The score is eclectic, with dramatic scenes, ballads, vaudeville, Kurt Weill, and even Gilbert & Sullivan thrown into the mix. The cast, led by Roger Bart, is topnotch, and the recording has a lively "Broadway" sound.—Robert Deutsch

DEBUSSY: PELLÉAS ET MÉLISANDE

Victoria de los Angeles, Mélisande; Jacques Jansen, Pelléas; Gérard Souzay, Golaud; Pierre Froumenty, Arkel; Jeannine Collard, Genevieve; others; Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion Fran_aise, André

Cluytens

Testament SBT3051 (3 CDs).
1958/1995. René Challon, prod.;
Walter Ruhlmann, eng. ADD. TT:
2:41:13

 If this opera were any stranger, it would be behind bars. No arias or ensembles, only about 15 minutes of music marked *forte* or above; lengthy conversations held at an intimate whisper, and a heroine who may be constantly lying or completely out of her mind. But the listener, once smitten, is soon haunted by this work, and though a dozen decent recordings of it are available, this is the one that sticks in the mind. In fine mono sound—in its original release the orchestra was too far back, and while it still takes somewhat of a back seat to the singers, it has been remastered—it captures the opera's wispiness and puzzling moral center like no other. Gérard Souzay's Golaud, such a mellow gent at the start, is driven utterly mad by his strange bride. This is Souzay's only opera recording—he was one of the greatest Lieder singers ever. And she, Mélisande, in the person of Victoria de los Angeles, sings with a cool tone that she imbues with a visceral tremble when needed. The Pelléas, Jacques Jansen, sounds properly innocent and infatuated with the little woman found in the forest. Cluytens leads as if the whole opera were an hallucination, which it might just be.—Robert Levine

ESEVALDS: PASSION AND RESURRECTION

Carolyn Sampson, soprano;
Polyphony, Britten Sinfonia,
Stephen Layton
Hyperion CDA67796 (CD). Adrian
Peacock, prod.; David Hinitt, eng.
DDD. TT: 64:09

 Fresh voices in classical music are few and far between. While many composers are able to

make a splash by overusing a certain musical texture, chord structure, or precious mood, very few are able to sound uniquely themselves while still expressing the full range of human emotions. In the last 20 years, no writer of choral music has shown as much range as Eriks Esenvalds, a young composer hailing from the musically rich country of Latvia. Esenvalds has been widely recorded and performed, but to date, the album most representative of his work is this one by the English ensemble Polyphony, which includes Esenvalds' first long-form work for choir, *Passion and Resurrection*. Though the singing and sound are a bit steely, the music is utterly sublime. It is my steadfast hope that Esenvalds continues to grow as a composer and push his musical voice into new waters, resisting the temptation to stagnate or parody himself in the way other big-name choral composers have done.

—Erick Lichte

FAURÉ: REQUIEM, CANTIQUE DE JEAN RACINE, SUPER FLUMINA BABYLONS, PAVANE, ÉLÉGIE

Chien Reiss, soprano; Matthias
Goerne, baritone; Eric Picard, cello;
l'Orchestra de Paris et Choeur,
Paavo Järvi
EuroArts 2058874 (BD). 2012.
Isabelle Soulard, prod.; Aurelie
Messonnier, eng. DDD. TT: 72:00

 From the day the disc slipped from its cel-lophane wrap, this lovely, evocative, thrilling concert of Fauré's music has never left my "on deck" stack of recordings. Beginning with the graceful *Pavane*, in the composer's orchestral version with optional chorus, and the heartfelt *Élégie* for cello and orchestra, we hear and see Fauré's major works for chorus and orchestra in performances that equal and/or

exceed any I have heard. The sound is balanced and spacious in great concordance with the visual presentation. While these performances are also available on SACD/CD (which I haven't heard), this Blu-ray is one of the few concert discs for which I rarely turn off the video display, even though the music alone more than suffices. What a great concert! I turn to it often, when I want to be transported to another world in which lyrical music and beautiful sounds shut out the cares of the day.

—Kalman Rubinson

GOLIJOV: OCEANA,¹ TENEBRAE,² THREE SONGS³

Dawn Upshaw,³ soprano; Luciana
Souza,¹ vocals; Soloists,¹ Gwinnet
Young Singers;¹ Kronos Quartet &
guests;² Robert Spano,^{1, 3} Atlanta
Symphony^{1, 3} & Chorus¹
Deutsche Grammophon
B0009069-02 (CD). 2007. Sid
McLauchlan,^{1, 3} Judith Sherman,²
prods.; Stephan Flock,^{1, 3} Judith
Sherman,² engs. DDD. TT: 60:42

GOLIJOV: AINADAMAR

Dawn Upshaw, soprano; Kelley
O'Connor, mezzo-soprano; Jessica
Rivera, soprano; Robert Spano,
Atlanta Symphony, Women of the
Atlanta Symphony Chorus
Deutsche Grammophon B0006429
(CD). 2006. Valerie Gross, Sid
McLauchlan, prods.; Stephan Flock,
Wolf-Dieter Karwatky, engs. DDD.
TT: 80:15

 The music of Osvaldo Golijov is a great discovery for me. The recent origins of these works, all but one composed in the last decade, should not be off-putting—Golijov is a thoroughly romantic and mostly tonal composer. His tremendous lyrical talent is clearly voiced in his works for the female voice, and expressed in styles ranging from the tango to the Yiddish lament (*Three Songs*). Add to that his talent at integrating emotionally communicative sound effects into the music, as most strikingly demonstrated by the use of a rifle

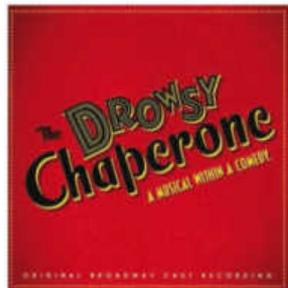
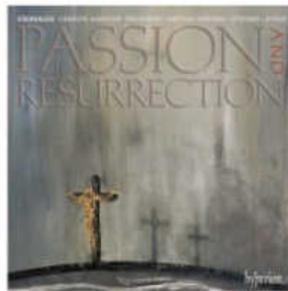
barrage as rhythmic underpinning for the execution scene in *Ainadamar*. Even in his strictly instrumental music, such as the *Tenebrae* for strings, Golijov's melodies have a vocal quality. Beyond all such analysis, Golijov tells stories with a wide array of voices and instruments, and with the syncopation of the tango and the Latin flavor of the guitar, whether explicit or implied. This is marvelous stuff.

The sound is good but not outstanding—not in the class of what Telarc gets from the Atlanta Symphony on their SACDs. Nonetheless, the all-important voices are beautifully rendered, and there's sufficient impact from the varied percussion instruments to support the drama.—**Kalman Rubinson**

HANDEL: MESSIAH (1751 VERSION)

David Blackadder, Robert Brooks, Otta Jones, Henry Jenkinson, boy singers; Iestyn Davies, countertenor; Toby Spence, tenor; Eamonn Dougan, bass; Choir of New College Oxford, Academy of Ancient Music, Edward Higginbottom
Naxos 8.570131-32 (2 CDs). 2006. Adrian Hunter, prod.; Jonathan Stokes, eng. DDD. TT: 2:22:19

As *Messiah*-heads will tell you, there are many different versions of the work; Handel kept revising it for various occasions. This recording offers a rarity—a re-creation of performances in London in 1751 using all boys and men, even for the arias. The New College Oxford Choir is a blessing for the lack of hootiness of its trebles; there is a warmth of tone and delivery that delights, and the solo boys are remarkable. Countertenor Iestyn Davies has a gentle way with the alto arias; tenor Toby Spence is fearless and long of breath; bass Eamonn Dougan has a wonderful cello-like timbre. Higginbottom allows some



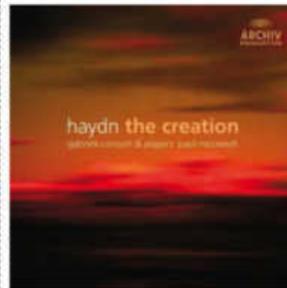
discreet embellishments to the vocal line, and his tempos are natural—he isn't out to catch a train, nor does he ever lag. A terrific show that Handel would have recognized and loved. (xxx-1)

—**Robert Levine**

HAYDN: THE CREATION

Sandrine Piau, Miah Persson, sopranos; Mark Padmore, tenor; Peter Harvey, baritone; Neal Davies, bass; Chetham's Chamber Choir, Gabrieli Consort of Players, Paul McCreesh
Archiv 477 7361 (2 CDs). 2008. Nicholas Parker, prod.; Jonathan Stokes, eng. DDD. TT: 108:56

Sung in English, this spotless recording uses the forces Haydn led at a 1799 performance—200 players and singers—and the effect is epic: the world *is* being created. The massed brasses and winds, along with the huge choir, remind the listener of nothing short of a Technicolor, Cecil B. De Mille spectacular, except that there's no kitsch and the details are never blurred—the use of period instruments assures clarity, with flutes like birds, timpani like God's wake-up calls, and the gut strings alternately mellow and fiercely attacked for emphasis. McCreesh goes



for color and expressiveness without being Romantic, and the recording is resonant, bright, and roomy, capturing everything from the gigantic finales of choruses to the softest solo soprano pianissimo without fidgeting. The soloists are superb as well. Put it on and sit back. (xxx-7)—**Robert Levine**

HAYDN: THE SEASONS

Marlis Petersen, soprano; Werner Gura, tenor; Dietrich Henschel, baritone; RIAS Kammerchor Freiburger Barockorchester, René Jacobs

Harmonia Mundi 901829.30 (2 CDs). 2004. Alan Blyth, prod.; Martin Sauer, eng. DDD. TT: 2:05:00

As music descriptive of nature, Haydn's *Die Jahrzeiten* has probably never been bettered (sorry, Vivaldi): we get sunrises, storms, birds, bees, the grim approach of winter, and the hunt, complete with horns that make you want to get on your horse and race after a fox. Scored for the usual strings as well as double winds, a double-bassoon, four horns, piccolo, three trumpets, three trombones, timpani, triangle, tambourine, and fortepiano continuo, the colors are

brilliant. And this, Jacobs' first recording of the work (and *not* to be confused with his more recent recording), has top-drawer playing and singing; the latter simple storytelling rather than operatic turns. It's a positively exhilarating experience, gorgeously recorded, with ideal balances. It's like a walk in the countryside. (xxviii-4)

—**Robert Levine**

ISLANDSMOEN: REQUIEM, OP.42

Hilde Haraldsen Sveen, soprano; Marianne Beate Kielland, alto; Ulf Oien, tenor; Trond Halstein Moe, bass; Norwegian Soloists' Choir, Kristiansand Symphony Orchestra; Terje Boye Hansen

2-L 2L36SACD (multichannel SACD/CD). 2006. Wolfgang Plagge, prod.; Hans Peter L'Orange, Stale Hebek Ødegården, engs. DDD. TT: 50:56

Sigurd Islandsmoen (1881–1964) wrote his *Requiem*, Op.42, in 1935–36. The work had its premiere in 1943 and was briefly popular in Europe in the post-WWII period, but by 1960 it had vanished. Although the melodic material comes from Norwegian folk songs, the *Prelude* sounds like vintage orchestral Elgar. Islandsmoen, who studied with Reger, handles his materials and forms deftly. This requiem is more energetic than down in the dumps; the choral sections with organ fills (Islandsmoen was an organist) are particularly rewarding. Norway's own 2L label provides world-class sound in this world-premiere recording; the multichannel program is said to place the chorus behind you. A wonderful rediscovery.

—**John Marks**

LAMBERT & MORRISON: THE DROWSY CHAPERONE: ORIGINAL BROADWAY CAST

Music & Lyrics by Lisa Lambert & Greg Morrison

Phil Reno, conductor

Ghostlight 7915584411-2 (CD). 2006. Joel Moss, prod., eng.; Kurt Deutsch, prod. DDD. TT: 53:19

 The concept is clever: a musical-theater fan—identified as “Man in Chair”—plays for us the cast album of his favorite 1930s musical, the fictitious *The Drowsy Chaperone*. As he does, the show comes to life on stage. The result—the real *The Drowsy Chaperone*—won five Tony Awards in 2006, including for its book and score. The show is delightful—and, at the end, surprisingly touching—and makes for a nearly complete experience on record. Man in Chair provides a suitably droll introduction for each number, in the process undercutting any possible criticism: “This one has a beautiful tune, but try to ignore the lyrics; they’re not the best.” Lisa Lambert and Greg Morrison’s unfailingly tuneful score resembles, more than anything else, one of Jerome Kern’s Princess Theater musicals, such as *Very Good Eddie*, and it’s performed with total commitment by a top-notch cast led by Bob Martin, co-author of the book, as Man in Chair. The sound is like one of those beloved Columbia cast albums of the 1960s: just right for this material.

—Robert Deutsch

LANE: FINIAN’S RAINBOW: NEW BROADWAY CAST RECORDING

Music by Burton Lane, lyrics by Yip Harburg

PS Classics PS-1088 (CD). 2009. Tommy Krasker, prod.; Bart Migal, eng. DDD. TT: 64:10

 *Finian’s Rainbow* is a true classic of the American musical theater, with songs that include “Old Devil Moon,” “How Are Things in Glocca Morra,” and “Look to the Rainbow.” The show has had several recordings—including one of the 1960 revival, of which

I’m quite fond—but none to equal this one. Based on the 2009 Broadway revival, it has everything: outstanding singing from the leads (Cheyenne Jackson as Woody and Kate Baldwin as Sharon, both Tony Award nominees), the original orchestrations spruced up by Larry Moore, virtually all the music in the score (including dance numbers), and a recording that maintains an ideal balance between soloists, chorus, and orchestra. The booklet has many pictures of the production, all the lyrics, and an insightful critical appreciation by *The New Yorker’s* John Lahr. A classy job all around.

—Robert Deutsch

LAURIDSEN: NOCTURNES

Mid-Winter Songs; Les chansons des roses; I will lift up mine eyes; O come, let us sing unto the Lord; Ave, dulcissima Maria; Nocturnes Stephen Layton, Polyphony, Britten Sinfonia (Mid-Winter Songs); Andrew Lumsden, organ (O come, let us sing unto the Lord); Morten Lauridsen, piano (Les chansons des roses, Nocturnes), finger cymbals (Ave, dulcissima Maria)

Hyperion CDA67580 (CD). 2007. Adrian Peacock, prod.; Simon Eadon, eng. DDD. TT: 67:15

 I hold these truths to be self-evident: 1) Rainer Maria Rilke was a genius. 2) Morten Lauridsen is a genius. 3) Lauridsen’s a cappella setting of Rilke’s “Contre Qui, Rose” is one of the most singularly beautiful pieces of vocal music in the history of Western Civilization. 4) Polyphony’s new Hyperion recording of “Contre Qui, Rose” is a Record To Die For. (The rest of the disc isn’t too shabby, either.)—John Marks

LEHÁR: DIE LUSTIGE WITWE (THE MERRY WIDOW)

Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Hanna Eberhard Wächter, Danilo; Hanny Steffek, Valencienne; Nicolai Gedda, Camille; Philharmonia Orchestra, Lovro von Matacic

EMI CDS 7 47178 8 (2 CDs). 1963/1990. ADD. TT: 79:28

 When opera companies develop financial difficulties because of dwindling audiences, there’s one tried-and-true way of increasing the size of audiences: put on an operetta. Which operetta? Why, *The Merry Widow*! It’s fun, and has some great music. Mind you, performing an operetta like this is not just a matter of playing and singing the notes as written in the score. There is the matter of style. And if the conductor and cast are insufficiently familiar with Viennese operetta style, they could not do better than to listen to this classic recording. Schwarzkopf is the most seductive of all widows, and Wächter is a blustery Danilo, with Gedda easily tossing off a high C in the pavilion aria. This 1963 recording made good use of what was then the new stereo technology.

—Robert Deutsch

MONTEVERDI: L’ORFEO

Monica Piccinini, Anna Simboli, sopranos; Sara Mingardo, contralto; Furio Zanasi, Luca Dordolo, tenors; Sergio Foresti, Antonio Abete, basses; Concerto Italiano, Rinaldo Alessandrini

Naäve OP30439 (2 CDs). 2007. Jean-Pierre Loasil, prod.; Laure Casenave-Päre, eng. DDD. TT: 103:00

 There are now a dozen or so recordings of this once-rare, “first” (1607) opera, at least a half dozen of which are excellent. But this one is different: It rocks. It is, noticeably, the sole recording sung only by native speakers of Italian, and conductor Rinaldo Alessandrini relies heavily on changing rhythms to emphasize aspects of song as speech—which is the gimmick in opera, right? And while he favors quick tempos, it is the accents and the emotional temperature of the situations that drive the performance rather than the speeds themselves. In the happy passages, you can

almost see arms waving, and the tragic moments are personal rather than melodramatic: Hell is terrifying in a very still sort of way. The singing is stunning: Tenor Furio Zanasi (he’s billed as a baritone on other recordings and that’s what he sounds like) sings Orfeo with dignity and amazing fluidity; he doesn’t overly emote the character’s joy or his grief, and his understatement makes you feel both all the more. Sara Mingardo sings the Messenger with such darkness that she correctly stops the opera in its tracks. The Concerto Italiano play with zeal, accuracy, and a sense of the “new,” as if opera had just been invented. Which it had.—Robert Levine

MOZART: LA CLEMENZA DI TITO

Mark Padmore, Tito; Alexandra Pendatchanska, Vitellia; Sunhae Im, Servilia; Bernarda Fink, Sesto; Marie-Claude Chappuis, Annio; Sergio Foresti, Publio; RIAS Kammerchor, Freiburger Barockorchester; René Jacobs

Harmonia Mundi 801923.24 (2 CDs). 2006. Dr. Richard Lorber, prod.; René Möller, eng. DDD. TT: 2:15:00

 If you had asked me 20 years ago whether or not a recording of this opera would be indispensable to anyone’s collection, I might have replied in the negative. Granted, it contains some of Mozart’s most wonderful writing for instruments and voices, but the opera *seria* plot and format always seemed archaic, a fine late-Mozart curiosity. Then along came this recording, and suddenly the opera was a dramatic entity, a story of love and forgiveness, with noble aims. The characters of Sesto and Vitellia are filled with passion, friendship, jealousy, hatred, and near-insanity; their arias are complex, and invariably accompanied by obligato instruments that weave and comment and keep the tex-

tures fascinating. The other characters' music is merely gorgeous. Jacobs and his orchestra and singers are thoroughly involved, and perform with an edge that takes the work out of the museum. It makes Tito a viable theater work, alive and vibrant.

This recent recording of *Clemenza* beats all the competition for sheer drama alone—it almost makes you care about what's going on. Arias, duets, ensembles, and even the recitatives are dramatically delivered, the pianoforte improvising like a commentator beneath them. Jacobs—his period-instrument Freiburg Baroque Orchestra playing with snap, energy, beautiful wind tone, thwapping timpani, fine brass, and crisp strings—finds just the right tempos (mostly quick) for each piece, and allows the singers plenty of room for embellishments. Mark Padmore's Tito is fluent and well-accented; he makes the most of the Emperor's quandary. Alexandra Pendatchanska is a spectacular Vitellia, taking the role's $2\frac{1}{3}$ -octave range in stride, and singing with a Slavic edge to the voice that underlines the jealousy and looniness of her more outlandish moments. She delivers "Non piu dei fiori" gently and with lovely *legato*. Bernarda Fink brings great passion—and superb coloratura—to Sesto; she doesn't sound quite manly enough, but she makes the character strong enough with her intelligently inflected singing. The others in the cast are fine artists one and all, and the soundstage is broad and realistic. This is the *Clemenza* to die for. (XXIX-8, XXX-2)

—Robert Levine

MOZART: REQUIEM (ED. LEVIN)

Sir Charles Mackerras, Scottish Chamber Orchestra & Chorus
Linn CKD 211 (SACD/CD/Hi-Rez Download). 2002. Tim Oldham,

prod.; Philip Hobbs, eng. DDD. TT: 54:48

 Sir Charles Mackerras conducted the classics, especially Mozart, with the drama and flair of traditional performance practice, yet progressively incorporated the insights of modern scholarship. His Mozart *Requiem* is my favorite.

—Kalman Rubinson

PENDERECKI: CREDO

Harasimowicz-Haas, Pasiecznik, sopranos; Rehlis, alto; Zdunikowski, tenor; Tesarowicz, bass; Polish Radio & National Philharmonic Choirs, Cracow Philharmonic Boys Choir, National Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Krzysztof Penderecki

Polskie Radio PR SACD 1 (SACD). 2006. Andresej Lipinski, eng. DDD. TT: 49:51

Available from
www.lipinskirecords.com.

 This is a major recent work written and conducted by a living master. It is dramatic and engaging, with a mix of tonalities and melody that is both modern yet immediately comprehensible. Even though the two-channel tracks are excellent, they cannot adequately approach the demonstration quality of the phenomenal multichannel mix. This landmark recording captures with stunning clarity and presence one orchestra, three choirs, five soloists, and "a band playing on a distant back balcony," all performing in a large, reverberant monastery church. The dynamic range is extremely wide, the ambience is pervasive but never masks the details, and the performance is simply inspired. It's a great and nearly overwhelming experience every time I play it. —Kalman Rubinson

SCHOENBERG: GURELIEDER

Yvonne Naef, Robert Dean Smith, Gerhard Siegel, Ralf Lukas, Melanie Diener, Andreas Schmidt, soloists; Chor des Bayerischen Rundfunks,

MDR Rundfunkchor Leipzig, SWR Symphony of Baden-Baden and Freiburg; Michael Gielen, conductor
Hänssler Classics 93.198 (2 SACDs). 2007. Helmut Hanusch, prod.; Norbert Vossen, eng. DDD. TT: 2:01:56

 Schoenberg's massive, thrilling, post-Romantic oratorio is a series of emotionally charged scenes of beauty, love, and loss. Ranging from intimate scenes to huge orchestral tableaux, it seems to demand the immersive clarity of modern multichannel recording, and this, the first on SACD, is an outstanding performance in every way. It was recorded as part of a tour on the occasion of conductor Michael Gielen's 80th birthday, and I can think of no more appropriate celebration for this master of 20th-century orchestral music. The soloists are outstanding (although those on Chailly's Decca CDs may have the edge), but it is Gielen's focused and insightful direction that carries the day. The recording has all the requisite transparency, detail, and power to sweep the listener into Schoenberg's tragic and magical world.

—Kalman Rubinson

SCHWARTZ: CHILDREN OF EDEN: AMERICAN PREMIERE RECORDING

Stephen Schwartz, music, lyrics; Danny Kosarin, cond.

RCA 63165-2 (2 CDs). 1998.

Stephen Schwartz, Danny Kosarin, prods.; Glen Marchese, eng. DDD. TT: 97:51

 *Children of Eden* had a short run in London's West End in 1991, and the planned transfer to Broadway did not materialize. However, the show has been acquiring a considerable following among musical-theater fans, and this recording, based on a major production mounted at New Jersey's Paper Mill Playhouse, shows why. It's really a wonderful piece: richly melodic, and

written in a variety of musical styles that include pop, rock, jazz, gospel, and mainstream musical theater. The opener, "Let There Be," has pre-echoes of Schwartz's *Wicked*, and I was at times reminded of Leonard Bernstein's *Mass*, for which Schwartz wrote some of the lyrics. Several songs deserve to be musical-theater standards, including "Stranger to the Rain," "In Whatever Time We Have," "The Hardest Part of Love," and the very moving title song. The show is almost completely through-sung, and Schwartz's flair for melodic invention prevents this device from becoming tiresome. Very fine performances, led by Stephanie Mills, and no complaints about the sound.

—Robert Deutsch

SIBELIUS: KULLERVO

Monica Groop, mezzo-soprano; Peter Mattei, baritone; London Symphony Orchestra & Chorus, Sir Colin Davis

LSO Live LSO074 (CD). 2006. James Mallinson, prod., Jonathan Stokes, eng. DDD. TT: 72:00

 A tale of incest, murder, and suicide, Sibelius's *Kullervo* symphony has such anguish and darkness at its heart that it must be treated with care. It's a tale of fate and, as such, attains a higher goal; Kullervo himself is a sacrifice. Davis has recorded it before, but this performance, taped live at two concerts at London's Barbican, is much the finer. The opening sets up the work's grand heroic scope, and the second movement tells us all we need about Kullervo's loneliness; the entry of the chorus and soloists for *Kullervo and his Sister* has spectacular drive, tension, and, finally, lamentation. The Battle is grand, and Kullervo's death and funeral march are stunning—myth come to life. The singers are superb, the LSO brass sound

huge, and the final movement's violins sound ghostly. The sound is warm and forward in two-channel; one can only assume it's even more so on the multichannel SACD (LSO Live LSO0574). A special work in a remarkable performance.—**Robert Levine**

SONDHEIM: FOLLIES: NEW BROADWAY CAST RECORDING

Music & Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim

PS Classics PS-1105 (2 CDs). 2011. Tommy Krasker, Philip Chaffin, prods.; Bart Migal, eng. DDD. TT: 106:57

 PS Classics have outdone themselves with this release. Following in the tradition of the great Columbia cast recordings made under the supervision of Goddard Lieberson, the PS recording of *Follies* has captured the brilliance of Sondheim's score and of the performances in the current Broadway revival. The recording includes snippets of dialogue that provide settings for the numbers where needed, so you really get a feeling that you're at a stage performance. This is also the most complete recording of the score, which will please musical-theater fans who were disappointed with the abridged presentation of the Original Broadway Cast recording.

Follies is a complex work, with some numbers that are pure pastiche and others that are "book" songs, advancing the plot and establishing character. They're done to perfection by the large cast, led by Bernadette Peters, Ron Raines, Jan Maxwell, and Danny Burstein as the older couples. Peters's rendition of "Losing My Mind" is simply heartbreaking. The sound quality is excellent, with an ideal balance of singers and orchestra. For lovers of musical theater, this has to be the

Recording of the Year.

—**Robert Deutsch**

STOCKHAUSEN: STIMMUNG

Paul Hillier, Theatre of Voices

Harmonia Mundi HMU 897408 (SACD/CD). 2007. Robina G. Young, Paul Hillier, prods.; Brad Michel, eng., ed. DDD. TT: 78:02

 How to describe *Stimmung*? Composed in 1968, it comprises 51 "models" for six unaccompanied voices. The models range in length from 38 seconds to 5 minutes, but I experience them as 78 minutes of almost unbroken immersion, surrounded by conversations in varying intonations and meters. Gradually, I am subsumed enough to feel the urge to join in. Of course, a relaxed mood, aided in any way you choose, will help you to connect with what seems superficially to be early minimalism, but a listener in the right frame of mind will be very much inside the music. Mesmerizing.

—**Kalman Rubinson**

JOHANN STRAUSS JR.: DIE FLEDERMAUS: GALA PERFORMANCE

Waldemar Kmentt, Hilde Gueden, Erika Köth, Walter Berry, Eberhard Wächter, Giuseppe Zampieri, Regina Resnik; Vienna Philharmonic, Vienna State Opera Chorus; Herbert von Karajan

London 421 046-2 (2 CDs). 1960/1987. John Culshaw, Christopher Raeburn, prods.; Gordon Parry, James Brown, engs. ADD. TT: 2:29:09

 Why, you may ask, having in 1991 already designated as an R2D4 a recording of *Die Fledermaus*, would I bestow the same honor on another recording of it?

The answer is simple: Each is a great recording, and, for an operetta fan like me, both are indispensable. Here is the lush sound of the Vienna Philharmonic, conducted by von Karajan, and a cast that's as strong as the one led by Willi Bos-

kovsky (Angel). But what distinguishes the present recording is the so-called Gala sequence. Decca/London assembled the greatest stars of their opera recordings — Tebaldi, Nilsson, del Monaco, Berganza, Sutherland, Björling — and gave them a chance to sing their party pieces. You ain't heard nothin' till you've heard Birgit Nilsson sing "I Could Have Danced All Night."

—**Robert Deutsch**

SZYMANOWSKI: SONGS OF A FAIRY- TALE PRINCESS, HARNASIE, LOVE SONGS OF HAFIZ

Iwona Sobotka, soprano; Katerina Karnéus, mezzo-soprano; Timothy Robinson, tenor; City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra & Chorus, Sir Simon Rattle

EMI Classics 44352 2 (CD). 2006. Stephen Johns, prod.; Mike Clements, eng. DDD. TT: 65:13

 The two song cycles recorded here are more than tinged with Orientalisms, the East filtered through French pastels. The first, *Songs of a Fairy-Tale Princess*, consists of just three songs, each a coloratura gem that sometimes lapses into sheer vocalise, the texts left behind. Bird-like soprano Iwona Sobotka sings them splendidly. *Love Songs of Hafiz* is based on translations of 14th-century Persian poetry; their late-Romantic textures, the use of percussion both high and low, and their expressive honesty are warm and tempting. Szymanowski wisely uses a darker, mezzo-soprano voice to express the intermingling images of nature and desire, and Katarina Karnéus caresses each languorously. Sandwiched between the cycles is a ballet, *Harnasie*, peculiarly scored for tenor, chorus, and orchestra. This is forwardly propulsive, rhythmically jerky, occasionally Stravinsky-like music that perfectly

suits the subject of a bride being willingly abducted on her wedding night by bandits in the Carpathian Mountains.

The textures are on a grander scale here, still strangely ethereal at times, but intercut with more earthbound sounds: blocks and, possibly, a whip enter the soundscape, and the xylophone goes wild. All of the music is gripping and thrilling, filled with harmonic and orchestral surprises, and Sir Simon Rattle and the City of Birmingham Orchestra and Chorus obviously feel passionately about it. The performances and sonics are exemplary.—**Robert Levine**

JOHN TAVENER: ETERNITY'S SUNRISE

Paul Goodwin, Choir & Orchestra of the Academy of Ancient Music
Harmonia Mundi HMU 907231 (CD). 1998. Robin G. Young, prod.; Mike Hatch, Floating Earth, engs. DDD. TT: 65:03

 For me, whether it's Son House, J.S. Bach, or John Tavener, music is always church. This transcendental work for two sopranos, baritone, and violin, commissioned to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Academy of Ancient Music, is best described by St. Isaac the Syrian: "When we reach love, we have reached God; our road is ended and we have crossed to the Island which is beyond the world." (XXII-4)—**Herb Reichert**

VERDI: SIMON BOCCANEGRRA

Piero Cappuccilli, Simon Boccanegra; Mirella Freni, Amelia; José Carreras, Gabriele; Nicolai Ghiaurov, Fiesco; José van Dam, Paolo; Milan Teatro alla Scala Orchestra & Chorus, Claudio Abbado

Deutsche Grammophon 289 449 752-2 (2 CDs). 1977/1998. Rainer Brock, prod.; Günter Hermanns, eng. ADD. TT: 2:16:30

 In addition to being my favorite recording of this somewhat troublesome opera, this remains the

standard by which others must be judged. In 1977, the 42-year-old Mirella Freni was vocally at her most juicy and lovely, José Carreras had the most beautiful tenor voice in the world, Nicolai Ghiaurov's dark, rolling bass was at its most expressive and handsome, and Piero Cappuccilli, in the title role, was using his grand sound with authority and utter security. Van Dam, in the small but pivotal role of Paolo, is simply luxurious. Claudio Abbado's firm but loving control of the superb La Scala forces—were they ever better?—brings out the pathos and grandeur of this dark-tinged score. Perfect Verdi singing and playing.

—Robert Levine

WAGNER: PARSIFAL

Jonas Kaufmann, Parsifal; Katarina Dalayman, Kundry; Peter Mattei, Amfortas; René Pape, Gurnemanz; Evgeny Nikitin, Klingsor; Metropolitan Opera Orchestra & Chorus, Daniele Gatti

Sony Classical 88883725589 (2 DVDs: LPCM 2.0, Dolby Digital 5.1 Surround). 2013/2014. Jay David Saks, Louisa Briccetti, Victoria Warivonchik, prods. DDD. TT: 4:20:42

Productions of Richard Wagner's barely stageable final work, *Parsifal*, seem to take one of two equally unsatisfactory paths: to follow Wagner's stage directions as literally as possible in telling a medieval, incense-infused romance of the Grail; or to ignore those directions to pursue other ends, sociopolitical or intellectual, in pointed opposition to such interpretations. But for this Metropolitan Opera production of 2013, producer François Girard found a direct way in to what seems to me to be the heart and soul of a deeply spiritual work usually mistaken for a religious one.

Michael Levine's set design has been called "post-apocalyptic"; if so, it is an outer manifestation of

the inner ruin created when any psyche is set at war with itself: the soul tyrannized by the ego, the masculine and feminine principles present in all of us fighting a war each can only lose—apocalypse enough for anyone. As such, it is the story of Everyman and Everywoman, in a mystery play for the 12th, the 19th, or the 21st century, in which each character and object and place, theme and chord and word, is an aspect of a single soul—Parsifal's or Wagner's, yours or mine. *Parsifal* is Jung before Jung: a variant of the one great human story. That understanding of the work seems to have been where Girard began, and this is the best production of any opera by any composer I have ever seen.

Sometimes, everything comes together. This *Parsifal* is sung by perhaps the finest cast ever assembled. Jonas Kaufmann, our reigning heldentenor, powerfully and committedly acts and voices Parsifal, a character confused, perplexed, almost entirely ignorant of himself. Kaufmann's dark-toned voice never falters, and neither does that of René Pape, whose Gurnemanz is one for the ages: troubled, rock solid, precisely intelligent, deeply compassionate. Katarina Dalayman's Kundry is a brave performance by a fine, intelligent singer with a warm, expressive voice. Most moving—agonizing, really—is Peter Mattei as the Grail King, Amfortas, who suffers a mortal wound that will not grant his deepest desire, for death. The opera is as much his story as Parsifal's, and never more than in this staging. The role has never been sung this well. Carolyn Choa has given the Met chorus incisive, dramatically pointed choreography that singers can actually dance, especially in the astonishing Flower Maidens scenes of

Act II.

The conducting of Daniele Gatti often seems not like conducting at all; the music is simply presented, as if emerging from a place where it has always been and is always going on. Of course, Gatti has "interpreted" the score, but the result—by turns glowing, stately, overpowering, bleak, loving, impersonal, light, dark, diaphanous, thick, transparent, delicate—sounds inevitable. Which is how the best interpretations of the greatest music always sound. And the sound is gorgeous. I have several other recordings of *Parsifal* that I sometimes think I prefer—but never when listening to this one.—Richard Lehnert

WAGNER: DER RING DES NIBELUNGEN

Juha Uusitalo, John Daszak, Anna Larsson, Stephen Milling, Peter Seiffert, Petra Maria Schnitzer, Jennifer Wilson, Catherine Wyn-Rogers, Gerhard Siegel, Lance Ryan, Ralf Lukas, Franz-Josef Kapellmann, Matti Salminen, Elisabete Matos, others; Comunitat València Community Orchestra, València Regional Government Choir; Zubin Mehta C-Major 703904 (4 BDs). 2010. Friedemann Engelbrecht, prod.; Philipp Knop, surround mix, balance eng. PCM Stereo, DTS HD MA 7.1. TT: 15:52:00

Between the recordings by Furtwängler (Rome 1953), Keilberth (Bayreuth 1955), and the Solti-Culshaw stereo blockbuster (Vienna 1958–1964) and the first decade of the 21st century, there has been a long gap in great performances of Wagner's *Ring*. And while there are two well-performed and well-recorded *Rings* on SACD (Fisch/Adelaide on Melba and Haenchen/Netherlands on Et'Cetera), we've been awaiting the trifecta of a first-rate cast and conductor, cutting-edge sound, and this immortal music. We wait no longer.

The València production

by Carlus Padrissa is absolutely spectacular in translating the passion and flavor of the traditional through the lens of space-age engineering. The entire cast is excellent, but I must single out Juha Uusitalo's impressive Wotan, Jennifer Wilson's brilliant Brünnhilde, Anna Larsson's formidable Fricka, and the marvelous Matti Salminen as Fasolt, Hunding, and Hagen. In *Die Walküre*, Petra Maria Schnitzer's Sieglinde deserves special mention for her singing and her convincing human/wolf characterization. Zubin Mehta is an old hand at this, binding and whipping the orchestra into a truly through-performed presentation. This crew doesn't displace those of the classic recordings listed above, but they concede little.

It is this set's technical aspects that vault it to fore. Aided by superb camera-work, the Blu-ray video is spectacular and gripping, even when Wagner has his singers stand and review the history of the world as they see it. The multichannel sound is superbly balanced, the orchestra depicted in excellent detail and, when needed, massive power. The singers' voices are presented so clearly that some have wondered if they were wearing microphones. (They weren't.)

The individual operas are available separately, and there is a disc of highlights. But if you have any interest in opera, and/or specifically in Wagner, you should not hesitate. This is a release of historic proportions.

—Kalman Rubinson

WHITACRE: LIGHT & GOLD: CHORAL MUSIC

Eric Whitacre, Eric Whitacre Singers. With: Grace Davidson, soprano; Stephen Kennedy, baritone; Laudibus; The King's Singers; Pávao Quartet; Hila Plitmann, narrator; Christopher

Glynn, piano.

Decca B0014850-02 (CD). 2010. Raphaël Mouterde, prod.; Andrew Mellor, eng. DDD. TT: 71:16

 This, the only CD to feature Eric Whitacre conducting his own, hand-picked choir in his own music, is a revelation. Umpteen versions of the title work, *Lux Aurumque* (Light & Gold), may be available, not least of which are renditions by Polyphony (justly praised by John Marks), Cantus (the all-male choir spectacularly recorded by John Atkinson in 2008), and the YouTube/Whitacre Virtual Choir (a multi-million-hit worldwide sensation), but none offers the host of accents, volume gradations, and shadings that Whitacre and his singers lavish on this transcendently beautiful work. The textures in every track are so personal, the quiet passages so intimate, and the silences so profane, that it's as if we've been invited into Whitacre's inner sanctum. To hear his *Five Hebrew Love Songs* narrated by the poet herself (Whitacre's wife, Hila Plitmann), or *The Stolen Child* performed by its dedicatees (The King's Singers), is icing on the cake.

—Jason Victor Serinus

Collections

ELLY AMELING: THE ARTISTRY OF ELLY AMELING

Opera, oratorio, lieder by J.S. Bach, Brahms, Debussy, Ellington, Gershwin, Fauré, Hahn, Handel, Haydn, Kern, Porter, Satie, Schubert, Schumann, Vivaldi, Wolf, others

Elly Ameling, soprano; various pianists, ensembles, conductors, orchestras

Philips 473 451-2 (5 CDs). 1964–84/2003. Various prods., engs. ADD/DDD. TT: 395:55

 I first learned of Dutch soprano Elly Ameling's foray into art song while browsing Tower Records in West Hollywood in the late 1960s. After overhearing one man tell another that her

new Schubert LP was to die for, this youthful vocal queen grabbed a copy. Soon I was transported by Ameling's extraordinary radiance. At the time of her unanimous win at the 1956 's-Hertogenbosch International Vocalists' Competition, few sensed that Ameling would mature into one of her era's most brilliant and unmannered interpreters of art song. These five CDs, mostly recorded in her prime, offer priceless performances of some of the most beautiful vocal music ever written.—Jason Victor Serinus

CHRISTINE ANDREAS: HERE'S TO THE LADIES

PS Classics PS-208 (CD). 2002. Martin Silvestri, prod.; Gary Thomas, eng. DDD. TT: 51:25

 Christine Andreas made her Broadway debut in 1976, in the 20th-anniversary Broadway revival of *My Fair Lady*, the recording of which I prefer (heresy!), in some ways, to the original Broadway cast recording with Julie Andrews and Rex Harrison. (She's a more gutsy Eliza than Andrews, and I like the fact that Ian Richardson actually does some singing rather than just talking his way through the songs.) Andreas's distinctive voice encompasses the belt as well as the soprano range, with a strong vibrato that I find very attractive. Best of all, she's a real singing actress who tells a story with each song. The concept is a tribute to the great female stars of the musical theater—Martin, Merman, Lawrence, Cook, Streisand, Lansbury, Andrews—but Andreas wisely makes no attempt to sound like any of these ladies, and in the process makes each song sound as if it were written for her. She gets sympathetic support from an orchestra conducted by Lee Musiker, and the recording has a suitable "pop" balance, with the voice up front, so

we don't miss the slightest inflection.—Robert Deutsch

ARLEEN AUGÉR: LOVE SONGS

Arleen Augér, soprano; Dalton Baldwin, piano

Delos DE 3029 (CD). 1988. Amelia S. Haygood, Carol Rosenberger, prods.; Adam Stern, Bejun Mehta, coprods.; John M. Earle, eng.; Andrew Dawson, asst. eng. DDD. TT: 68:26

 The unforgettable American soprano Arleen Augér (1939–1993) launched her career in 1967 as Mozart's Queen of the Night at the Vienna State Opera. By 1988, her incomparably iridescent high soprano had matured into a creamy, heart-tugging instrument. Recorded at her absolute peak of womanhood, five years before her death from a massive brain tumor, this disc comprises Augér's interpretations of 25 love songs, including gems by Obradors, Copland, Britten, and Loewe. They blossom with breathtaking beauty. Rarely are such absolute poise, self-assurance, and wisdom married to a voice so exquisite. Singing with an art that conceals art, Augér's slightest vocal gesture speaks volumes. (XII)—Jason Victor Serinus

MEASHA BRÜGGERGOSMAN: SURPRISE

Music by Bolcom, Satie, Schoenberg

Measha Brüggergosman, soprano; William Bolcom, piano; BBC Symphony Orchestra, David Robertson

Deutsche Grammophon 4776589 (CD). 2007. Sid McLaughlan, prod.; Neil Pemberton, Rainer Maillard, engs. DDD. TT: 60:22

 With a striking stage presence and a voice of great natural beauty allied to a keen musical intelligence, the young Canadian soprano Measha Brüggergosman seems on the verge of joining the world of superstar divas. Her upcoming appearances

include concerts at Carnegie Hall, the Barbican Centre, and the Concertgebouw, and she has been signed to an exclusive recording contract with Deutsche Grammophon. The repertoire on *Surprise*, her debut recording on this label (she made two earlier discs for CBC Records), consists of classical cabaret songs by Bolcom, Satie, and Schoenberg. Whatever the song, Measha (as she's known to her fans) has the ability to make it sound as if it's her song, not just something she's learned to sing. The Bolcom songs are a bit too angular for my taste, but I can't fault the singing. My favorites are the romantic songs by Satie—on "Je te veux," music, words, and singer come together gloriously. If you're like me, as soon as you've heard it you'll want to play it again.

—Robert Deutsch

MONTSERRAT CABALLÉ: THE ORIGINAL JACKET COLLECTION

CD transfers of 15 early LPs, including music by Bellini, Donizetti, Granados, Rossini, Strauss, Verdi

Montserrat Caballé, soprano; various conductors, orchestras

Sony BMG Masterworks 88697270722 (10 CDs). 1964–1972/2008. Charles Gerhardt, Richard Mohr, others, prods.; Kenneth Wilkinson, Edwin Begley, Anthony Salvatore, Robert Auger, others, engs. ADD. TT: 12:04:00

 Here she is in her glorious prime, the exquisite soprano with the angelically floated high notes to die for. This surfeit of riches includes Caballé's debut recital on RCA; even earlier albums of Zarzuela arias and songs by Granados and Strauss; the duet LPs with Shirley Verrett and Bernabé Marti; the Donizetti, Verdi, and Rossini "rarities" discs; and complete recordings of Norma and Salome (without translations). There's only one major dud: Caballé's

Strauss lieder often misfires, her voice and phrasing horribly unidiomatic, though her Salome is marvelously accented. Otherwise, this counts as one of the great vocal collections of the latter half of the 20th century.

—Jason Victor Serinus

LIZ CALLAWAY: PASSAGE OF TIME

PS Classics PS-984 (CD). 2009. Tommy Krasker, prod.; Bart Migal, eng. DDD. TT: 55:02

Specializing in recordings of Broadway musicals and in solo albums by musical-theater performers, PS Classics—founded in 2000 by Tommy Krasker and Philip Chaffin—is making recordings of the sort that were produced by Columbia and RCA in the old days, and doing a great job of it. Both of my R2D4 picks this year are PS Classics—and if editorial policy allowed listing more than two, they wouldn't have been the only ones. (I'll sneak in just one more: their recording of *Kitty's Kisses*, a charming, all-but-forgotten 1926 musical.)

Liz Callaway is an amazing singer. Her voice has a pristine clarity, with no seams between the belt, mix, and soprano ranges, it's apparently effortless at any volume, and it always sounds natural, never "produced" or artificial. More than that, she has the ability to reach the listener at an emotional level. I remember tears streaming down my face the first time I heard her sing "The Story Goes On," on the Broadway Cast recording of *Baby*. This experience was repeated several times when I listened to this, her latest recording.

The material here is wide-ranging, including songs by Rodgers & Hammerstein, Maltby & Shire, Stephen Sondheim, Andrew Lloyd Webber, Flaherty & Ahrens, Stephen Schwartz, Lennon & McCartney, and James Taylor. There are some clever

pairings, such as "Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head" with "Singin' in the Rain." Callaway makes each song sound as if it had been written for her, all the while adhering scrupulously to the music as written. Sensitive musical direction by Alex Rybeck, and very good sound quality. A lovely record.

—Robert Deutsch

JOSEPH CALLEJA: BE MY LOVE: A TRIBUTE TO MARIO LANZA

Joseph Calleja, tenor; BBC Concert Orchestra, Steven Mercurio Decca 478 3531 (CD). 2012. Daniel Zalay, prod.; Philip Siney, eng. DDD. TT: 56:43

I bought Joseph Calleja's debut recording, *Tenor Arias*, in 2004, and though I admired much about his singing, the voice had a fast vibrato that was not to my taste. Listening to the recently released *Be My Love*, I was delighted to find that Calleja has conquered the problem with his vibrato—it's now much less intense—and the voice has acquired some additional weight and greater freedom on top. In this tribute to Mario Lanza—whose singing inspired him to become an opera singer—Calleja performs songs made popular by Lanza, including "Be My Love" (capped by a glorious high C), "Arrivederci, Roma," and the "Serenade" from *The Student Prince*, as well as opera arias that Lanza sang but that could be part of any tenor recital, such as Puccini's "Nessun dorma!" No, Calleja doesn't sound like Lanza—who does?—but his singing has some of the same fervor, and the voice, now sans excessive vibrato, is really quite beautiful. He's aided by orchestral arrangements that match the style of Lanza's original recordings.—Robert Deutsch

CANTUS:

WHILE YOU ARE ALIVE

Works for a cappella male chorus by Bosch, Gawthrop, Hill, Nelson, Sametz, Takach, Tormis, Vasks, Whitacre

Cantus

Cantus CTS-1208 (CD). 2008. Erick Lichte, prod.; John Atkinson, eng. DDD. TT: 73:29

Nominating a project engineered by my boss looks like apple-polishing, but dayum, Cantus's *While You Are Alive* is some good, as we say down south. Highlights include Edie Hill's fabulous *A Sound Like This*, Tim Takach's *Things I Didn't Know I Loved*, and Veljo Tormis's *Kolm mul oli kaunist sõna*—music you definitely don't already have. The sound is simply astonishing—aural teleportation. I know what Cantus sounds like in Goshen College's Sauder Hall, and WYAA reconstructs that unique acoustic in my listening room any time I want to go there. Magic is what Erick Lichte, John Atkinson, and Cantus do; music is how they do it.—Wes Phillips

CANTUS: WHILE YOU ARE ALIVE

Works for a cappella male chorus by Bosch, Gawthrop, Hill, Nelson, Sametz, Takach, Tormis, Vasks, Whitacre

Cantus

Cantus CTS-1208 (CD). 2008. Erick Lichte, prod.; John Atkinson, eng. DDD. TT: 73:29

This latest recording from the nine-voice male vocal ensemble from Minneapolis features works by composers Eric Whitacre (*Lux Aurumque*), Peteris Vasks, and Veljo Tormis, as well as several new works commissioned by Cantus. On this CD, the versatile group is equally skilled at navigating dense harmonic textures or melting into the blooming glow of a low-register major triad. This diverse body of work highlights the ensemble's greatest strengths: a seamless sense

of integrated phrasing and an uncompromised control of pitch and timbre. The recording's closely miked perspective results in an arresting sound that is at once captivating and intoxicating. Musically and sonically, this is my favorite John Atkinson recording. (Full disclosure: John Atkinson is the editor of *Stereophile*.)—Robert J. Reina

JOHNNY CASH: AMERICAN RECORDINGS

American 45520-2 (CD). 1994. Rick Rubin, prod.; Jim Scott, eng. AAD? TT: 41:54

In hindsight, it seems so obvious that an artist like Johnny Cash would make a recording in which he's musically stripped bare. But in the mid-'90s, Rick Rubin's minimalist recording of Cash singing classic cowboy ballads alongside Leonard Cohen standards and new songs by Glen Danzig seemed fresh and daring. Almost 20 years later, Cash's *American Recordings* sounds as vital and authentic as anything that's been put on tape. Reduced solely to Cash's voice and guitar, *American Recordings* has a depth of sound and soul that few albums ever achieve. The exquisitely chosen songs orbit around the gravity of Cash's bass-baritone voice, re-creating and perpetuating the American myth of Johnny Cash as priestly assassin and loving loner, an evil beast trying to be good and a man of God reveling in his own sins. (XVII-7, XVIII-2)

—Erick Lichte

JOYCE DIDONATO: STELLA DI NAPOLI

Joyce DiDonato, mezzo-soprano; Orchestra & Chorus of the National Opera of Lyon, Riccardo Minasi

Erato 463656 2 (CD). 2014. Alain Lanceron, Daniel Zalay, prods.; Hugues Deschaux, eng. DDD. TT: 72:15

Corn-fed in Kansas and impeccably schooled in

bel canto technique, mezzo Joyce DiDonato was at her absolute peak when, in October 2013, she recorded this recital of 10 operatic arias from early 19th-century Naples. While some of the music is of top quality—prime examples are “Io vi rivedo alfin,” from Donizetti’s *Maria Stuarda*, and “Tu sola, o mia Giulietta,” from Bellini’s *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*—some lesser-known works are best received as high camp. These include the premiere recording of “Lasciami . . . ad ogni sguardo,” from Carlo Valentini’s *Il sonnambulo*, whose melody and lyrics seem worlds apart—and even “Par che me dica ancora,” from Donizetti’s *Elisabetta al castello di Kenilworth*, whose wild, keyboard-played glass harmonica and joyful melody seem distinctly out of sync with the drama’s suffering. What matter most, however, are DiDonato’s beauty of voice, sincerity of approach, and melding of astounding coloratura technique with a plethora of nuance that gifts every track with consummate artistry. Other artists may be capable of greater emotional range or have a more distinctive sound, but when all is said and sung, DiDonato’s phenomenal gifts (enjoyable in hi-res from HDtracks) are to die for. When she gets going in “Riedi al soglio,” from Rossini’s *Zelmira*, prepare to capitulate.

—Jason Victor Serinus

**KATHLEEN FERRIER:
CENTENARY EDITION:
KATHLEEN FERRIER:
BACH, HANDEL**

Kathleen Ferrier, contralto; London Philharmonic Orchestra, Sir Adrian Boult

London 433-474-2 (mono CD). 1952. AAD. TT: 48:07

 The English contralto Kathleen Ferrier, whose voice was memorable for its depth and poignancy, made



THE COMPLETE DECCA RECORDINGS

Music of Bach, Brahms, Britten, Chausson, Ferguson, Gluck, Handel, Mahler, Parry, Purcell, Rubbra, Schubert, Schumann, Stanford, Vaughan Williams, Wolf, Wordsworth, others

Kathleen Ferrier, contralto; various conductors & pianists, including Barbirolli, Boult, Britten, Klemperer, Krauss, Newmark, Sargent, Spurr, Stiedry, Van Beinum, Walter

Decca 478 3589 DC14 (14 mono CDs, 1 DVD). 2012. Philip Siney, remastering, assisted by Finespice, Ian Watson, Jenni Whiteside. ADD. TT: 14:40:35

 In the lineage of great contraltos and mezzo-sopranos, British contralto Kathleen Ferrier (1912–1953) stands out for recordings best described as “spiritual,” “hallowed,” and “holy.” Ferrier quickly became a favorite of Bruno Walter, who used her to spearhead the mid-century Mahler revival; and of Benjamin Britten, who composed *The Rape of Lucretia* for her pitiable tones. Her ability to tap into universal reservoirs of pain and longing, and to speak from her heart to ours with a voice of unforgettable beauty and emotional resonance, remain unrivaled 60 years after her death. Often intentionally recorded up close, to bring out every luscious element of her warm voice, the tracks on this expertly remastered set comprise all of her Decca recordings, including Mahler’s unforgettable *Das Lied von der Erde*. —Jason Victor Serinus

a late professional debut at a village church when she was 25, then rose from that humble stage on angel’s wings. Benjamin Britten composed for her. Bruno Walter conducted when she sang Mahler—separate Decca and EMI sets marking the 2012 centenary of her birth include their collaborations—and noted that his greatest musical experiences were knowing Ferrier and Mahler, “in that order.”

Britten said, after hearing her perform Handel’s *Messiah* in Westminster Abbey, “The music sailed across vast spaces with a confidence and beauty that I think I’d never heard before.” On this CD, the selections from that popular oratorio resound with her power and her glory. One aria alone, “He was despised,” explains why she was idolized in England by the time cancer took her in 1953, when she was just

41.—David Lander

**KATHLEEN FERRIER:
KATHLEEN FERRIER
EDITION**

Opera, oratorio, lieder by J.S. Bach, Brahms, Britten, Chausson, Gluck, Handel, Mahler, Mendelssohn, Pergolesi, Schubert, Schumann, others; folk songs

Kathleen Ferrier, contralto; various pianists, conductors, orchestras Decca 475 6060 (10 CDs). 1946–53/1992. Various prods., engs. ADD. TT: 622:34

 After snaring first prize at a regional singing competition she entered on a dare, it was not many years before contralto Kathleen Ferrier had been championed by the likes of John Barbirolli, Adrian Boult, and Malcolm Sargent. Soon Benjamin Britten and Lennox Berkeley had composed music for her, and Bruno Walter had found his ideal Mahler interpreter. Ferrier’s voice had uncommon depth and color that made her singing, like that of Janet Baker and Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, indescribably holy. Ferrier was only 41 when she succumbed to metastasized breast cancer, but her artistry remains unsurpassed for its poise, spiritual reverence, and gravitas. Decca’s smaller two-CD set, *Kathleen Ferrier: A Tribute*, features 24-bit/96kHz remasterings of her core repertoire.

—Jason Victor Serinus

**ELLA FITZGERALD:
TWELVE NIGHTS IN
HOLLYWOOD**

Verve 80012920-02 (4 CDs). 1961/2009. Norman Granz, orig. prod.; Richard Seidel, release prod.; Val Valentin, eng.; Seth Foster, mastering. AAD. TT: 4:10:56

 *Twelve Nights in Hollywood* is a pure gem excavated from the vaults, its existence previously unknown: Ella Fitzgerald, in her prime, singing with her small group in a small club. It was taped not by some bootlegger dangling a wire

from upstairs, but by the same Verve crew of topnotch professionals that laid down her big studio albums. It's every bit the marvel you never bothered to hope for, capturing the First Lady of Song with an intimacy unbound in any of her many other albums. The original, limited-edition boxed set is now available as two 2-CD packages.—**Fred Kaplan**

**ELLA FITZGERALD:
SINGS SONGS FROM
THE SOUNDTRACK OF
"LET NO MAN WRITE
MY EPITAPH"**

Ella Fitzgerald, vocals; Paul Smith, piano

Verve/Analogue Productions AVRJ 4043-45 (2 45rpm LPs), CVRJ 4043 SA (SACD/CD), 1960/2013. George Marino, remastering. AAA/ADD. TT: 43:00

⏻ Since 1997, I've treasured Bernie Grundman's Classic Compact Disc remastering (out of print) of this great collection, initially recorded for the soundtrack of the film *Let No Man Write My Epitaph* (1960). Now that Chad Kassem's Analogue Productions has augmented the late George Marino's 45rpm remastering, made with the George Massenburg GML 20-bit A/D, with a stereo SACD/CD edition (not available at press time), silver-disc lovers can again enjoy the brilliance of Ella Fitzgerald in her prime, singing 13 great classics. Surprisingly, for a collection that includes Dorothy Fields and Jimmy McHugh's "I Can't Give You Anything But Love (Baby)," and Maxwell Anderson and Kurt Weill's "September Song," every close-miked, impeccably voiced performance catches Fitzgerald in a mellow mood. In the face of such great singing, arguments about the depth of her interpretations seem tantamount to Grinches bickering about how best to steal Christmas. (XX-2)—**Jason Victor Serinus**

**JOEL FREDERIKSEN &
ENSEMBLE PHOENIX
MUNICH:
REQUIEM FOR A
PINK MOON: AN
ELIZABETHAN TRIBUTE
TO NICK DRAKE**

Music by Nick Drake, Anonymous, Campion, Cavendish, Dowland, Frederiksen

Harmonia Mundi HMC 902111 (CD), 2012. Markus Heiland, prod., eng. DDD. TT: 65:53

⏻ *Requiem for a Pink Moon* has become one of those special albums I make a point not to listen to too frequently—I don't want to lose the sense of magic. Joel Frederiksen's previous work had not prepared me for such a reaction, for which I can think of two possible reasons: First, it must have been liberating for an early-music specialist to make a concept album that, by its nature, would be immune from picky academic criticism. Second, Frederiksen's personal engagement with Nick Drake, as an artist and as a person, brought a passionate intensity to the creative process and a forthright fearlessness to the execution. This is the most singular album I have encountered in decades, and a magnificent recording job, too. (XXXV-12)—**John Marks**

**ROD GILFRY:
MY HEART IS SO FULL
OF YOU**

Rod Gilfry, baritone; Christopher Denny, piano

Narratus 07 (CD), 2006. No prod. or eng. listed. DDD. TT: 69:57

⏻ With a repertoire that extends from the baroque to contemporary opera, Rod Gilfry must be about the most versatile baritone around. He has also shown an affinity for performing in musicals—he was great last summer as Frank Butler in *Annie Get Your Gun*, at the Glimmerglass Festival. This live recording of Gilfry's one-man cabaret show includes some well-known musical-

theater showpieces for baritone ("Some Enchanted Evening," "If Ever I Would Leave You," "Joey, Joey, Joey"), all performed with impeccable musicianship and emotional involvement. There's an unusual—and very moving—combination of Thad Jones's "A Child Is Born" and "Oh What a Beautiful Morning." Christopher Denny provides sensitive piano accompaniment throughout.

My favorite track is "Wrestling," which recounts the story of how Gilfry was teased by his high school wrestling coach for missing a match to "sing with the sissies" of the choir, goading him to sing "Mary Had a Little Lamb" to demonstrate his singing prowess. The results? Well, you have to listen for yourself, but I can tell you that this track brought tears to my eyes. For a live pickup, the recording quality is fine, with just the occasional microphone pop.—**Robert Deutsch**

**BEN HEPNER:
MY SECRET HEART**

Ben Heppner, tenor; London Philharmonic Orchestra, Jonathan Tunick

BMG 63508-2 (CD), 1999. Jay David Saks, prod.; Arne Akselberg, eng. DDD. TT: 54:12

⏻ "Extraordinary how potent cheap music is," says Amanda in Noël Coward's *Private Lives*, and that could be applied to the music on this CD by tenor Ben Heppner, which includes songs by, among others, Coward, Friml, Novello, and Romberg. Heppner is best known for singing Wagner, but he scales down his sound beautifully for these "songs of the parlor, stage, and silver screen." Like Joseph Calleja, Heppner admits to having been inspired by the singing of Mario Lanza, and although he doesn't sound like Lanza, either, he shares with Lanza and Calleja total involvement in the material. I found his

singing particularly touching in songs with a tinge of melancholy, such as "We'll Gather Lilacs" and "Roses of Picardy." He gets idiomatic support from Jonathan Tunick and the London Philharmonic.—**Robert Deutsch**

**HANS HOTTER:
THE GREAT
BASS-BARITONE**

Music of Bach, Brahms, Loewe, Schubert, Schuman, Strauss, Wagner, Wolf

Hans Hotter, bass-baritone; Gerald Moore, piano; many other accompanists

Icon/EMI 2 64901 2 (6 mono/stereo CDs), 1947-58/2009. Walter Legge, Walter Jellinek, prods.; various engs. ADD. TT: 7:23:05

⏻ The undisputed Wotan of the electrical era, Hans Hotter's fame rests on far more than Wagner. For more than 50 years, he wielded his magnificently resonant bass-baritone with eloquence. Equally famed for his grandiose pronouncements as for the lightness he could bring to intimate lieder, Hotter's capacity to convey wisdom, compassion, and suffering transcended the vocal limitations that grew more pronounced with age. These performances of Bach, Brahms, Loewe, Schubert (including the famed 1954 *Winterreise* with Moore), Schumann, Strauss, Wagner, and Wolf, recorded between 1947 and 1958, magnificently convey Hotter's ability to speak from his heart to yours. No translations, damn it, not even on the Web.

—**Jason Victor Serinus**

**VALERIE JOYCE:
NEW YORK BLUE**

Valerie Joyce, vocals; Lawrence Feldman, alto & tenor saxophone; Andy Ezrin, piano, arr.; Tim Lefevre, Jan Herbert, bass; Gene Jackson, drums

Chesky JD316 (CD; 24-bit/96kHz FLAC files downloaded from HDtracks.com), 2006. Norman Chesky, exec. prod.; David Chesky, prod.; Nicholas Prout, eng., ed., mastering. DDD/DSD. TT: 54:07

 I first heard Valerie Joyce in hi-def sound when I downloaded a 24-bit/96kHz FLAC file of her cover of Jimi Hendrix's "Little Wing" from Chesky's HDTracks.com. The image of Joyce's almost-whispering soprano was the most three-dimensional and palpable I'd ever heard in my listening room, and was enveloped in a 360° space that extended well behind and in front of her. The most realistic soundstaging image I'd ever heard there, it pulled me into the music, made Joyce's tone and phrasings come alive, and compelled me to download the entire album. For those seeking a sonic standard for female jazz vocals, look no further than *New York Blue*.

—Larry Greenhill

JONAS KAUFMANN: NESSUN DORMA: THE PUCCINI ALBUM

Jonas Kaufmann, tenor; Santa Cecilia Academy Rome Chorus & Orchestra, Antonio Pappano
Sony Classical 88875092492 (CD). 2015. Philipp Nedel, prod.; Giacamo de Caterini, eng. DDD. TT: 60:52

 I first heard Jonas Kaufmann on a recording (alas, I haven't heard him in person), singing "Che gelida manina." First impression: beautiful voice, with a dark, almost baritone timbre—not the kind of voice that copes well with this aria's exposed high C, which some tenors sing a semitone lower. But no problem for Kaufmann, who seemed to find an extra register in his voice: the C rang freely, with the proper *ping*.

In this latest recording of Puccini favorites, Kaufmann sings with great passion as well as sensitivity. One of the selections is a duet from *La Bohème*, "O soave fanciulla," in which he's joined by soprano Kristine Opolais. As scored, at the end of piece the soprano goes up to a C and the tenor down to an E,

but most tenors today go up to the C with the soprano, the effect often being "Anything you can sing I can sing louder." Kaufmann resists this temptation, sings the scored E, and the effect is ultimately much more moving. He gets idiomatic support from conductor Antonio Pappano, and the sound is excellent.—Robert Deutsch

JONAS KAUFMANN: WAGNER

Wesendonck-Lieder, plus scenes and arias from: *Rienzi*, *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*
Jonas Kaufmann, tenor; Orchestra of the German Opera Berlin, Donald Runnicles

Decca 478 5189 (CD). 2013. David Groves, prod.; Philip Siney, eng. DDD. TT: 74:21

 It's no surprise that this all-Wagner CD from the most versatile tenor of the decade has received multiple accolades, including from my colleagues Robert Levine and Richard Lehnert. Released to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Wagner's birth, it confirms that Kaufmann is indeed the heroic Wagnerian tenor of our generation. What is most amazing about his artistry is that his gleaming, metallic sound is allied to a personality that eschews macho posturing. A case in point is the sensitivity that distinguishes his gorgeous rendition of the five *Wesendonck-Lieder*. In songs customarily performed by sopranos and mezzo-sopranos, Kaufmann lightens and sweetens his voice to reveal the tenderness and longing at the heart of these great compositions. This is a great disc. (XXXVI-5)

—Jason Victor Serinus

BEATRICE KAY: THE NAUGHTY NINETIES

Columbia/Master Classics CL 868 (mono CD). 1940/1950/2011. No prod., eng. listed. A-D. TT: 44:11

 I've loved Beatrice Kay since I was five or six,

and have wanted to list *The Naughty Nineties* ever since I compiled the very first "R2D4," for the January 1991 issue of *Stereophile*. Originally released in two albums of Columbia 78rpm shellacs in 1940, reissued on LP in 1950, and then out of print for well over half a century, the 16 tracks are finally available again. Brooklyn-born Kay (1907–1986) came up through vaudeville, musicals, and touring stock companies, and had minor careers in radio, films, and TV. She specialized in music-hall songs and parlor ballads of the turn of the century, first at Billy Rose's Diamond Horseshoe and then in these recordings. Here are "Heaven Will Protect the Working Girl," "What You Gonna Do When the Rent Comes 'Round," "Oceana Roll," "My Mother Was a Lady," "Waiting for the Robert E. Lee," "A Bird in a Gilded Cage," "Don't Go in the Lion's Cage Tonight," and many more, half of them written by Albert Von Tilzer (who wrote "Take Me Out to the Ball Game"). Kay twists the originally earnest sentimentality of some of these songs in ways unimagined by their composers, the intentionally funny ones have never been more so, and for better or worse, the burnt cork of minstrel shows is always at hand. She was an absolute master of comic timing and musical phrasing—I've listened to this record hundreds of times over the last 60 years, and am still hearing nuances never noted before.

Kay sang in a uniquely thick, creamy, powerful belt with perfect control of dynamics and pitch; the joy she took in sending up these old songs is palpable in every track. And the accompaniment by the Elm City Four (a barbershop quartet) and "an orchestra under the direction of Ray Bloch," who I presume wrote the arrange-

ments, are period perfection. The album is available only through Amazon.com as a made-to-order CD. The album sounds better than it ever has, with caveats: It was clearly burned from a somewhat worn LP that was itself transcribed from 78s in 1950. No information is supplied other than a list of song titles, but contact me at stletters@sorc.com; I'll send you a pdf of everything I have, including the anonymous but elegantly amusing original liner note. *The Naughty Nineties* has given me more fun and delight than any other album I have ever owned.—Richard Lehnert

MARIO LANZA: LIVE FROM LONDON

Mario Lanza, tenor; Constantine Collinicos, piano

RCA Victor 61884-2 (CD). 1958/1994. Chick Crumpacker, remastering prod.; Dick Baxter, remastering eng. AAD. TT: 55:22

 Mario Lanza was not the most disciplined of singers. He avoided the serious study that would have been required for an operatic career, and did not take good care of his body—but boy, what a voice! Maria Callas said that Lanza's was the most beautiful tenor voice she'd ever heard, and listening to this CD of a concert recorded in Royal Albert Hall in 1958, you might just feel the same. The pieces include operatic arias, songs from his movies, American operetta (a genre in which, in my opinion, he has not been equaled), and Neapolitan songs, delivered with his trademark intensity that some have criticized as being over the top—but it's never boring. Singing with great beauty and power, Lanza sounds as if he's having the time of his life, and the audience obviously loves him. The sound has the characteristics of a live recording, with occasional unexplained thumps, but it all just adds



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to the reality of the experience.—**Robert Deutsch**

MARIE-NICOLE LEMIEUX:
OPERA ARIAS: *GLUCK, HAYDN, MOZART*

Marie-Nicole Lemieux, contralto; Les Violons du Roy, Bernard Labadie

Naïve V2564 (CD). 2012. Jean-Pierre Loisil, prod.; Pierre-Antoine Signoret, eng. DDD. TT: 69:50

Ⓜ Mostly unusual repertoire sung by a most unusual voice—a true contralto. French-Canadian Lemieux is not a belter and not a show-off; her dark-chocolate timbre, however, can be seductive, tender, yearning, and furious by turns. In addition to a couple of familiar works by Mozart and Gluck, we get a wild “Venga pur,” from Mozart’s *Mitridate*, *rè di Ponto*, that has runs, trills, and temperament galore; an aria from Haydn’s *Il ritorno di Tobia* that plumbs vocal depths; and a vivid, vicious scene from Gluck’s *Iphigénie en Aulide*. Her tone manages to be both dark and brilliant at once. She’s a great singing actress, with style to burn.

—**Robert Levine**

GEORGE LONDON:
SPIRITUALS

George London, bass-baritone; Carl Michaelski, Orchestra of the Bavarian State Radio; Singgemeinschaft Rudolf Lamy; Eugen Cymbalistij, chorusmaster

Deutsche Grammophon 00289 477 6193 (CD). 2006. Heinz Wildhagen, eng. AAD. TT: 40:14

Ⓜ George London had one of the greatest bass-baritone voices of the 20th century—a voice of uniquely beautiful timbre, on the bass end of the spectrum in weight, but with the easy, powerful top of a Verdi baritone. This recording of spirituals was made in 1963, but was not released at that time because London was not entirely happy with the arrangements, and

would have preferred to do these songs with simple piano accompaniment. Deutsche Grammophon’s justification for releasing it in 2006, nearly 20 years after London’s death, is that it is “an important document, the only surviving record of London’s close engagement with this archetypal form of American music.”

I had initial reservations about the ethics of a record company going against the express wishes of an artist, but, having listened to the CD, I had to agree that this recording needs to be heard. London is in fabulous voice, and sings with great musicality and emotional involvement. I can’t imagine anyone listening to him sing “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” without being moved. And while the arrangements are indeed a bit hokey—with a chorus sometimes going “Oooh” and “Aaah” in the background—this is not enough to interfere with London’s artistry. A nice, spacious sound, with good focus on the voice.—**Robert Deutsch**

JULIE LONDON:
TIME FOR LOVE: THE BEST OF JULIE LONDON

Julie London, vocals; Barney Kessel, guitar; Ray Leatherwood, bass; others

Rhino R2 70737 (CD). 1955–67/1991. James Austin, reissue prod.; Bill Inglot, Ken Perry, reissue engs. A?D. TT: 71:54

Ⓜ Julie London was a former B-movie actress and the ex-wife of *Dragnet* star Jack Webb when “(Get Your Kicks on) Route 66” composer Bobby Troup became smitten with her. Troup eventually persuaded her to sing in public, and the rest is history.

The song London brought to worldwide attention, “Cry Me a River,” has a fascinating backstory. It was originally written for an Ella Fitzgerald movie part, and the film’s producer told the songwriter

to change the word *plebeian*, because audiences would not credit a black woman with using such a word. God bless him, Arthur Hamilton refused, and withdrew the song. When Hamilton later learned that his former high-school classmate Julie London was looking for material, he took “Cry Me a River” out of his desk drawer. Well done.—**John Marks**

OSCAR’S MOTET CHOIR:
CANTATE DOMINO

Works by Adam, Berlin, Bossi, Gruber, Handel, Olsson, Reger, Rutter, Vogler, Walthier

Marianne Mellnäs, soprano; Alf Linder, organ; Torsten Nilsson, Oscar’s Motet Choir

Proprius 7762 (LP), SACD 7762 (SACD/CD). 1976/2005. Jacob Boethius, prod.; Bertil Alving, eng.; Torbjorn Samuelsson, remastering. AAA/ADD. TT: 51:37

Ⓜ In the early 1980s, a series of LPs produced by the Swedish label Proprius quickly became standards for testing new equipment among the New York audiophile community. Bossi’s *Cantate Domino*, for choir, trumpets, trombones, and organ, opens the album, followed by Swedish folk songs and music by Handel, Olsson, and others. One friend began calling the second track, “O Helga Natt” (“Oh Holy Night”), “the audiophile anthem.” No wonder—it’s an astounding recording. Marianne Mellnäs’s startlingly clear and lovely soprano, suspended in a huge space, is confronted by a powerful chorus and a thunderous organ. Although my LP has been played to death and now has prominent ticks and pops, its dynamic range—between the crystal-clear Mellnäs, the powerful chorus, and the solid organ notes—still tests the limits of my system.—**Larry Greenhill**

LUCIANO PAVAROTTI:
IN CONCERT

Arias by Bononcini, Handel,

Scarlatti, others

Luciano Pavarotti, tenor; Richard Bonyngue, Orchestra del Teatro Comunale di Bologna

London/Decca OS-226391 (LP). 1974. Ray Minshull, prod.; Colin Moorfoot, eng. AAA. TT: 47:35

Ⓜ I first heard Luciano Pavarotti live in 1973, at a concert at Toronto’s Massey Hall. He was touted as an up-and-coming operatic tenor, but when I saw the list of pieces on that night’s program I was disappointed. Rather than the opera arias that I was expecting, he was singing the *Arie Antiche*—Italian songs often assigned to young singers by their voice teachers, pieces considered relatively undemanding vocally. I’d sung some of these myself, and had heard them performed by fellow voice students. What was the big deal?

Then Pavarotti sang. It was “Già il sole dal Gange,” with which I was very familiar. Hmm. So *that’s* what it’s supposed to sound like! This was no singing exercise but a beautiful song, and I could tell that this singer was fully “inside” it, meaning every word. And there was the voice itself, agile, with a uniquely beautiful timbre, and, while not particularly powerful, able to penetrate the farthest reaches of the hall (I was in the upper balcony) even when singing softly.

This recording (it’s also available on CD) is of that repertoire, and captures the freshness and beauty of Pavarotti’s voice as well as his artistry.—**Robert Deutsch**

PORTLAND STATE CHAMBER CHOIR:
INTO UNKNOWN WORLDS

Ethan Sperry, dir.; Erick Lichte, asst dir.

CD Baby 888295153546 (CD). 2014. Erick Lichte, prod.; John Atkinson, eng. DDD. TT: 46:43

Ⓜ This marvelously recorded compen-

dium of "modern choral music from the far reaches of the globe" rises to the top thanks to the quality of its music and singing and to its captivating sense of space. Perhaps taking their cue from the album's title's implied "to boldly go where no man has gone before," *Stereophile's* John Atkinson (engineer) and Erick Lichte (producer) exploited the reverberant acoustic of Portland, Oregon's St. Stephen's Catholic Church to frame the Portland State Chamber Choir in wondrous warmth and light. While all will have their favorite selections—JA is especially captivated by the surprising modern harmonies of Purcell's 400-year-old "Hear my Prayer, O Lord"—I keep returning to the music from Eriks Esenvalds, Latvia's answer to Eric Whitacre and Morten Lauridsen. To balance the choir with the radiant sound of the glockenspiel that emerges near the end of Esenvalds's *Northern Lights*, Atkinson positioned the instrument at the very rear of the church. The results are magical.

I'm equally entranced by the sweet innocence of Genna McAllister, the young soprano soloist in "Amazing Grace," whose voice helps soothe the pain of words intended to save a wretch like me or you. Although the choir's execution of Sperry's arrangement of the Indian raga *Desh* suggests that none of these singers has ever heard someone speak with an Indian accent, the music's upbeat rhythms and energetic outbursts make a fitting conclusion to a wonderful musical journey. I've been spoiled by JA's superb 24/88.2k master mixes, which he occasionally plays at audio shows; here's hoping that he and EL can find a way to make them available for all to enjoy.

—Jason Victor Serinus

KATE ROYAL: KATE ROYAL

Music by Canteloube, Debussy, Delibes, Granados, Ravel, Rodrigo, R. Strauss, Stravinsky; folk songs
Kate Royal, soprano; Edward Gardner, Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields
EMI Classics 9463 94419 2 (CD). 2007. John Fraser, prod.; Arne Akselberg, eng.; Simon Kiln, ed. DDD. TT: 65:14

The UK's Kate Royal—slim, elegant, and under 30—is blessed with an extremely beautiful, womanly lyric soprano that conveys an aura of unpretentious aristocracy. Not since Arleen Augér's *Love Songs* recital have I encountered modern singing infused with such sincerity and wisdom. Performing three favorites from Canteloube's irresistible *Songs of the Auvergne*, Royal delivers a "Bäläro" to rival the best, and the most heart-stopping "La delässádo" (The Forsaken Girl) I can recall. No one at RMAF 2007 could resist her gorgeous rendition of the folk song "The Sprig of Thyme," and nothing short of the apocalypse would have prevented me from attending Royal's debut recital in Berkeley.

—Jason Victor Serinus

CAROLYN SAMPSON: FLEURS

Songs by Boulanger, Britten, Chabrier, Debussy, Fauré, Gounod, Hahn, Poulenc, Purcell, Quilter, Schubert, Schumann, Strauss
Carolyn Sampson, soprano; Joseph Middleton, piano
BIS 2102 (SACD/CD). 2015. Jens Braun, prod., eng. DDD. TT: 68:50

Not for several decades has anyone brought such a fresh voice to art song. Treasured as an early-music specialist, Carolyn Sampson waited until she was almost 40 before recording this delightful anthology of songs about flowers. While Sampson may not yet radiate her predecessor Elly Ameling's exquisite refinement, Victoria de los Angeles's incomparable charm, or Arleen

Augér's emotional depth, her tone is so pearly fresh, her innocence so compelling, that *Fleurs* demands to be heard. The piano is occasionally too dominant, but the beauty of the singing and the sound's hi-rez clarity deserve a major recommendation.

—Jason Victor Serinus

ELISABETH SCHUMANN: SILVER THREAD OF SONG

Songs and arias by Beethoven, Brahms, Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, Schumann, R. Strauss, Wolf, others
Elisabeth Schumann, soprano; various pianists, conductors
EMI Classics ICON 9 18480 2 (6 mono CDs). 2011. Tony Locantro, compilation prod. ADD. TT: 7:26:59

Revered for her Mozart and Schubert and adored by Richard Strauss, who toured the US accompanying her and begged her (unsuccessfully) to sing the title role of *Salome*, lyric soprano Elisabeth Schumann (1888–1952) possessed, at the top of her range, a virtually indescribable sweetness that glowed like golden light. She used her idiosyncratic voice as one would a violin, caressing phrases, altering vibrato, and plumbing words and sounds for the heart beneath them. Schumann's joy, charm, unpretentious honesty, brilliant insight, and seemingly spontaneous expression remain unequalled. This bargain set may lack lyrics and translations, but it compensates with a host of priceless tracks never before available on CD.

—Jason Victor Serinus

JIMMY SCOTT: ALL THE WAY

Jimmy Scott, vocals; David "Fathead" Newman, tenor saxophone; John Pisano, guitar; Kenny Barron, piano; Ron Carter, bass; Grady Tate, drums
Blue Horizon/Sire/Warner Bros. 26955-2 (CD, 24/192 download). 1992/2011. Tommy LiPuma, prod.; David Reitzas, eng.; Al Schmitt, eng., mix; Doug Sax, mastering. ADD? TT: 47:03

Jimmy Scott passed away in June 2014, but in 1992, *All the Way* was his comeback album. Scott came back from neglect, the record industry's apathy toward his music, and general bad luck. *All the Way* is a triumph, a vocal tour de force—if you're not moved by Scott's ways with such classic ballads as "Every Time We Say Goodbye," "Angel Eyes," and "My Foolish Heart," you should sell your stereo and start over. (XVI-1, XX-2)—Michael Lavorgna

BOBBY SHORT: CELEBRATES RODGERS & HART

Bobby Short, vocals, piano; Beverly Peer, bass; Richard Sheridan, drums, percussion
Atlantic 81320-2 (CD). 1975. Lew Hahn, prod.; George Piro, mastering. AAD. TT: 76:05

Short left home to begin his career at age 12 in 1936. The dapper Short dished out tunes at Manhattan's posh Café Carlyle for more than three decades after his star was lit by a 1968 concert with Mabel Mercer, the patron saint of cabarets. If you care to sample the cabaret music menu, begin with this recording or another showcasing Short's sizzling selections from the American popular songbook. Prior to his death in 2005, Short became the darling of supper-club society by interpreting its creators with irrepressible ebullience, from Harold Arlen, Irving Berlin, and Cole Porter through Vernon Duke and Vincent Youmans. His singing was as heady as the atmosphere at his Christie's estate auction, where photocopies of the lavish commemorative catalog were needed to meet demand, and Short's Bechstein piano fetched \$132,000.—David Lander

FRANK SINATRA: COME FLY WITH ME

Billy May, Nelson Riddle, conductors

Capitol CDP 7 48469 2 (CD). 1957/1987. Voyle Gilmore, prod.; Larry Walsh, remastering. ADD? TT: 46:16

Recorded in October 1957, with three travel-themed tracks recorded in the same decade added for the CD edition, this is Sinatra at his best: supremely confident, every song telling a story, the voice intimate or soaring as needed. And the songs—"Around the World," "April in Paris," "Come Fly With Me," "On the Road to Mandalay"—well, they don't write them like that any more. The recording quality is variable, with the sound of the orchestra at times a bit harsh, but the voice has a presence that is sometimes startling. —Robert Deutsch

FRANK SINATRA: SINATRA AND SEXTET: LIVE IN PARIS

Reprise 45487-2 (CD). 1962/1994. Joe McEwen, James Isaacs, A&R; Molly-Reeve Morrison, project coordination; Lee Hirschberg, digital editing, mastering. AAD? TT: 74:04

For Chairman of the Board beginners, let me set the scene: the booze-and-broads and, in hindsight, weirdly low-rent Las Vegas cultural phenomenon that was the Rat Pack, is at the height of its swagger. Sinatra's a huge star, yet he's just been snubbed by JFK, whom he allegedly helped elect through his ties to the mob, which the Kennedys allegedly used to great effect in the election of 1960—but that's another story. Set on tarting up his image—so say the liner notes to this live set—Francis Albert Sinatra, at the tender age of 46, travels to Paris in June 1962 to play his first-ever gig in the French capital, one that will benefit "children's charities." The sound here is markedly better than bootlegs, yet less expansive and balanced than that of his Capitol and Reprise studio records.

The list of what goes right here, or is extremely unexpected and interesting, is long and unprecedented. First, Sinatra is singing in front of a small combo instead of the usual larger orchestra or just piano accompanist. From his stumbles and throat clearings, it's obvious that he's nervous. Paris done got Mr. Cool a little buffaloed—which alone makes this set worth hearing. Finally, the two salient sides of the towering Sinatra persona are raw and on full display in this unedited tape. There's the cretin who can't help attributing "Ol' Man River" to "Sammy Davis's people." But then that melted-butter voice and incredible gift for phrasing easily create—absolutely off-the-cuff and in the moment—definitive versions of "At Long Last Love," "Moonlight in Vermont," "Day In—Day Out," and an "I've Got You Under My Skin" that literally takes your breath away. Few others have ever had Sinatra's gift of impromptu genius—what he called being "a saloon singer." This is that infuriating, stupefyingly gifted man at his peak. —Robert Baird

FRANK SINATRA: ULTIMATE SINATRA

Various orchestras & conductors
Universal B00224360-02 (4 CDs). 1939–1994/2015. Charles Pignone, compilation prod.; Robert Vosgen, mastering. AAD/DDD. TT: 5:18:33

Timed to coincide with a documentary about Frank Sinatra shown on PBS, this 4-CD set—each disc is nearly 80 minutes long—takes you from Sinatra the big-band singer (1939–1942), through the Columbia years (1943–1952), the Capitol years (1953–1962, 1993–1994), and the Reprise years (1960–1988). My favorites are the songs from the early Capitol years, but, putting aside age-related changes in his voice, Sinatra's singing is remarkably consistent

throughout. The set as a whole represents lessons in the interpretation of songs of the Great American Songbook. Whatever your taste in music, it's a must-have. The transfers are outstandingly good, especially considering the dates of many of these recordings. —Robert Deutsch

JOAN SUTHERLAND: THE ART OF THE PRIMA DONNA

Arias by Arne, Bellini, Delibes, Gounod, Handel, Meyerbeer, Mozart, Rossini, Thomas, Verdi
Joan Sutherland, soprano;
Francesco Molinari-Pradelli,
Orchestra & Chorus of the Royal
Opera House, Covent Garden
Decca 289 467 115-2 (2 CDs). 1960.
James Walker, prod.; Kenneth
Wilkinson, eng.; Andrew Wedman,
Thorsten Weigelt, remastering
engs. ADD. TT: 108:32

It takes a lot of words to introduce this 24-bit/96kHz transfer of one of the finest opera recitals ever committed to LP. Recorded in August 1960, when Decca's engineers excelled at capturing the natural sound of a glorious voice, chorus, and orchestra resounding in a large acoustic, this album finds the late coloratura soprano Joan Sutherland in breathtaking form. Heard on a system as fine as the dCS-VTL-Wilson-Transparent rig displayed at the 2010 Rocky Mountain Audio Fest, La Stupenda's ravishing high range glows like no other. The ease of Sutherland's runs, the sureness of her technical accomplishments, and the brilliance of her sound are as stupendous as the recording itself. Each time I listen to Sutherland's Golden Age vocalism, I can't help but exclaim in amazement.

—Jason Victor Serinus

TRIO MEDIAEVAL: FOLK SONGS

Anna Maria Friman, Linn Andrea Fuglseth, Torunn Østrem Osum, vocalists; Birger Misteregg, percussion, Jew's harp
ECM New Series 2003 (CD). 2007.

Manfred Eicher, prod.; Peter Laenger, eng. DDD. TT: 61:35

In my opinion, Trio Mediaeval have redefined the art of ensemble singing. With their amazing match of voices, fearless singing, and peerless taste in music, Anna Maria Friman, Torun Østrem Osum, and Linn Andrea Fuglseth are the greatest girl group ever. Among their many great albums helmed by ECM's Manfred Eicher, my favorite is *Folk Songs*, a collection of ancient Norwegian songs that brings out all of the group's vocal beauty, humor, and pathos. Lightly accompanied by percussionist and Jew's-harp player Birger Misteregg, this album is at turns searing, icy, sensual, and stoic. Each song bears witness to the group's ability to make music as a triune organism that thinks, feels, breathes, and sings as one. The sound quality is among the best I've heard.

—Erick Lichte

THE YALE CELLOS OF ALDO PARISOT: BACH BACHIANAS

Music by J.S. Bach, Heitor Villa-Lobos

Aldo Parisot, The Yale Cellos;
Arleen Augér, soprano

Delos DE 3041 (CD). 1988. Thomas Frost prod.; Eugene Kimball, eng. DDD. TT: 72:10

As a young singer and cellist, no album spoke to me as clearly as did this one, of the Yale Cellos of Aldo Parisot playing with soprano Arleen Augér. When I bought this album as a high school sophomore, I had no idea I was getting the definitive reading of Villa-Lobos' *Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5*. The performance is at turns luminous and earthy, ethereal and lusty. In a program rounded out with transcriptions of Bach works for cello choir, the Yale Cellos play with fire and freedom under Aldo Parisot's sage baton. Augér's singing is without peer. —Erick Lichte

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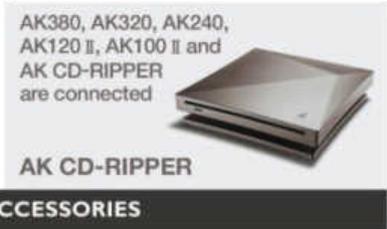


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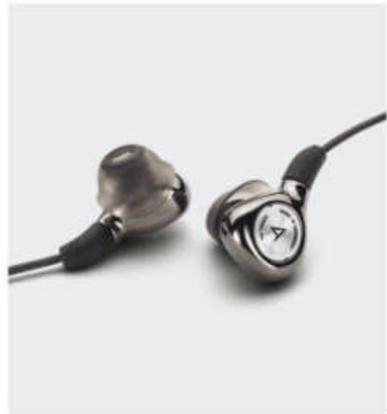
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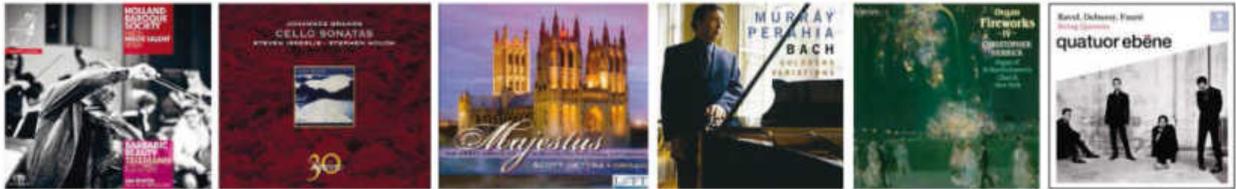


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While the beginnings of the string quartet remain murky, if not entirely lost to history, it's thought that a cross-pollination of Italian and German music in the 17th century is responsible for the ensemble's beginning, though often with a keyboard instead of a viola. By

the early 18th century, the trio sonata was being adapted into the *sonata a quattro* (Italy) and *sonates en quator* (France). Through the compositions of C.P.E. Bach and Franz Joseph Haydn, the ensemble reached new heights of musical sophistication and popularity. Ever since, Haydn's mastery in balancing four instrumental voices has been emulated. His formula of four movements—fast, slow, minuet with trio, and fast finale—established a form for the string quartet that is often still followed today. A mentor and friend to Mozart, who himself would go on to write 23 string quartets, Haydn wrote some 70 string quartets and also briefly taught Beethoven, whose 16 quartets are thought by many to be the finest expressions of the form. Modern exponents include Arnold Schönberg, Béla Bartók, and Dmitri Shostakovich—and today, such well-known string-based chamber music works as Johann Pachelbel's Canon in D and Antonio Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* are considered among classical music's greatest hits. In terms of recordings, Germany's Busch Quartet, Italy's Quartetto Italiano, the Czech Talich Quartet, the American Kronos Quartet, Hungary's Tákacs Quartet and younger ensembles like the Angeles Quartet, the Lafayette Quartet and the St. Lawrence Quartet have made and continue to make fabulous recordings,

On December 2, 1889, a recordist working for Thomas Edison recorded Johannes Brahms performing two piano pieces.

and breathe new life into the string-quartet tradition.

Even older than the string quartet is the tradition of the soloist in classical music, with or without accompaniment—concertos and sonatas were features of classical music as far back as the baroque era. Mozart and Beethoven were both renowned as accomplished

piano soloists before they won fame as composers. Recordings of solo piano and violin have been a part of sound recording since the technology's earliest years, in no small part because it was far easier, back then, to make an effective or even coherent recording of a solo instrument than of an orchestra. On December 2, 1889, a recordist working for Thomas Edison recorded Johannes Brahms performing two piano pieces. The following year, the speaking voice of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky was recorded. Modern orchestras regularly include soloists, usually pianists or violin players, in both recordings and performance. Famous pianists of the modern era include Polish-born Artur Schnabel; Russia's Vladimir Horowitz, Emil Gilels, and Sviatoslav Richter; Alfred Brendel, from the former Czechoslovakia; Argentineans Martha Argerich and Daniel Barenboim; and American Murray Perahia. Modern stars of the violin include Lithuanian Jascha Heifetz (Lithuania), Fritz Kreisler (Austria), Itzhak Perlman (Israel), Gidon Kremer (Latvia), and Yehudi Menuhin and Joshua Bell (US).—Robert Baird

 Robert Baird has been writing about music for 30 years, the last 20 of which as Music Editor of *Stereophile*. Having also served as Editor-in-Chief of *CD Review* and Music Editor of *New Times in Phoenix, AZ*, he's also written for a variety of publications including *Rolling Stone*, *USA Today*, *Magnet*, and *No Depression*.

APHEX TWIN:
COMPUTER
CONTROLLED
ACOUSTIC
INSTRUMENTS PT.2

Warp WAP375CD (CD). 2015.
Richard D. James, prod., eng.;
Beau Thomas, mastering, DDD?
TT: 27:56

 This is an inspired mish-mash of sampled acoustic instruments, mixed and deposited in a dizzying array of instrumentals. Strummed prepared piano, tricky wood/metal percussion and drum patterns, distant children's voices, and CinemaScope soundstaging all coexist without clashing. "Computer Controlled" my ass—Richard D. James had his hands on the knobs, sculpting the sounds and textures of these electro-acoustic pasteups to mind-warping effect. Every time you play this CD you hear more: Try it first through speakers, then with a decent pair of headphones—each track will reveal completely different aspects of the mix.—**Steve Guttenberg**

J.S. BACH:
SUITES 1–6 FOR SOLO
CELLO, VIOLA DA
GAMBA SONATAS 1 & 2

János Starker, cello; György Sebok,
piano

Mercury Living Presence 432
756-2 (2 CDs). 1963–66/1991.
Harold Lawrence, recording dir.; C.
Robert Fine, Robert Eberenz, engs.;
3/2-channel conversion, Wilma
Cozart Fine. ADD. TT: 2:19:42

 János Starker was a cello prodigy born in 1924 in Hungary, to Jewish parents. Germany's Nazi cluster was already vomiting infection, but he managed to evade the pandemic that ensued. After World War II, Starker moved to the US, where he taught at Indiana University for more than 50 years while winning global acclaim as a soloist—one critic called his style "aloof, sober, controlled." With his bald pate, carved features,

and piercing gaze, Starker resembled a Yul Brynner film character, though he reportedly seemed more like *The Magnificent Seven's* stern gunfighter than the gushing symphonic conductor in *Once More, With Feeling!*. While he recorded Bach's six solo cello suites five times, these performances from 1963 and 1965 benefit from Robert Fine's fabled three-microphone technique and the care lavished on the CD conversion by his widow, Wilma Cozart Fine. Also available on SACD. (Vol.28 No.2)—**David Lander**

J.S. BACH:
THE CELLO SUITES

Steven Isserlis, cello
Hyperion CDA67541/2 (2 CDs).
2006. Andrew Keener, prod.; Simon
Pery, exec. prod.; Simon Eadon,
eng. DDD. TT: 2:17:08

 Combining consummate instrumental command, scholarliness, and passion, this must be one of the best recordings of these monumental works. In his notes, Isserlis points out that the Cello Suites become increasingly complex, profound, and intense; drawing on recent research, he feels that they are connected to certain Christian festivals: the heart-breaking Suite 5 depicts the Crucifixion, the triumphant Suite 6 the Resurrection. All this comes out in his playing. With incredible rhythmic control, he makes the dance movements flexible but stable, and gives his phrasing a spoken quality. Refined and austere, his tone is bright in the joyous suites, somber in the sorrowful ones.—**Edith Eisler**

J.S. BACH:
GOLDBERG
VARIATIONS

Murray Perahia, piano
Sony Classical SK 89243 (CD) SS
89243 (SACD). 2000. Andreas
Neubronner, prod.; Markus Heiland,
eng.; Andrew Grainger, asst eng.;
Matthew Cocker, ed.; Jen Wyler,
DSD authoring eng. DDD. TT: 73:28

 With all the fuss that is currently and justifiably being made about the late Glenn Gould's two historically important readings of the *Goldberg Variations*—it was Gould who rescued the work from the museum—it is easy to forget that other pianists can breathe life into them. Since his recovery from a hand injury, Murray Perahia has been exploring Bach's keyboard works, to critical and commercial acclaim. No, this set of 30 imaginative variations on the "Fundamental Bass" of the *Aria* that bookends them was not written for the piano, but Perahia's delicacy of touch, subtle use of dynamic shadings, clarity of line in the canons and *Fughetta*, and effortless virtuosity demonstrate that the anachronistic instrument doesn't have to overpower the music within the notes. The sound is close, with the sound of Perahia's fingernails on the Steinway's keys occasionally clatteringly clear, but the music is not the worse for it. The SACD, which appears to be mastered from a 24-bit original, sounds simply better.—**John Atkinson**

J.S. BACH:
GOLDBERG
VARIATIONS

Rosalyn Tureck, piano
Deutsche Grammophon 289 459
599-2 (2 CDs). 1999. Helmut Burk,
prod.; Stefan Flock, eng. DDD. TT:
91:10

 2003 was a big year for Bach in R2D4, with no fewer than five mentions. Three of those were for various recordings of the *Goldberg Variations*, including Glenn Gould's three-disc set, *A State of Wonder*. The title of that set is taken from a quotation: "The purpose of art," Gould said, "is not the release of a momentary ejection of adrenaline but rather the gradual, lifelong construction of a state of wonder and serenity."

Rosalyn Tureck took a similar view: "I don't play this work as a tour de force," she wrote. "I play it as a life experience." But while Gould died young, Tureck lived and recorded well into her 80s—she died in July 2002, at 88—and her last recording of the *Goldbergs* suggests that she managed to attain the "life-long construction of a state of wonder and serenity" that Gould aspired to.—**Jim Austin**

J.S. BACH:
SIX KEYBOARD
PARTITAS, BWV
825–830

Trevor Pinnock, harpsichord
Hänssler Edition Bachakademie
92.115 (2 CDs). 2000. Michele
Gaggia, recording supervisor. DDD.
TT: 2:29:04

 We all have skeletons in our closets. One of mine is that it was in 1963 that the Swingle Singers' arrangement of the *Sinfonia* from the second of Bach's keyboard Partitas (CD reissue, Philips 824 703-2) simultaneously turned me on to Bach and had me wishing my parent's stereo console could produce better sound. Majestic minor-key chords lead into a swinging, twisting, climbing vocal line that is supported by a walking bass line from double bassist Pierre Michelot. This sounds so much like the small-group jazz that I was also then becoming aware of that it came as a surprise to learn, when I looked at the score, that every note (other than some necessary octave substitutions in the bass) was as Bach had written 250 years earlier.

Since that formative experience, I've been looking for a recording of the work that captures the sense of unfettered musicmaking embodied in these six sets of short works. This recent album from English early-music champion Trevor Pinnock does so in spades. This is not dry, academic score-reading,

but spirited musicmaking that reminds you that no matter how complex the web woven by the musical development, every movement still stems from the dance. The recorded sound is also excellent. If you speak while touching the case of a good harpsichord, you can feel it tremble, as if it were eager to sing. The sound of this set captures that feeling, being rich, warm, and resonant, without emphasizing the plucked attacks of the instrument (a 1983 re-creation by David Way of a Hemsch original). The occasional low bass notes have delicious weight, without booming, and when Pinnock uses a damped stop, the cascading notes illuminate the recording space in a most pleasing manner. —**John Atkinson**

J.S. BACH: SONATAS & PARTITAS FOR SOLO VIOLIN

John Holloway, baroque violin
ECM New Series 1909/1910 (2 CDs). 2006. Manfred Eicher, prod.; Stephan Schellmann, eng. DDD. TT: 2:12:40

Ⓜ Although my active love affair with music began when I learned violin as a child, I was an indifferent player, content to scrub away in the second violins in the school orchestra. Then, in what would have been my freshman year at the English equivalent of high school, our modest orchestra was given a shot in the arm by a new student, who immediately became its concertmaster. It was obvious back then that John Holloway was destined for greatness as a violinist, but he took what appeared to be a sideways step, career-wise, when he fell in with the original-instruments crowd in the 1970s, after an encounter with Sigiswald Kuijken (whose own performance of these Bach works, on Deutsche Harmonia Mundi 77043-2-REG, has long been a favorite

of mine).

This new set of Bach's masterworks, however, demonstrates that he chose the right path. With gut strings, a baroque bow, and a sympathetic recorded ambience, Holloway adds flesh to the skeletal notes of the autograph scores to create convincingly harmonically complete experiences. This is not safe music, and Holloway doesn't play it safe. And his performance of the Everest of this Himalayas of the violin repertoire, the 13-minute *Chaconne* from Partita 2, totally convinces this listener that if Pinchas Zukerman's dismissal of the original-instruments movement as "idiot historians who have taken a few music lessons [playing] cigar boxes" once contained a grain of truth, it is now just violinic Col. Blimpishness.

—**John Atkinson**

J.S. BACH: SONATAS & PARTITAS FOR SOLO VIOLIN

Nathan Milstein, violin
EMI CDM 5 66869 2 (mono CD). 1957/1959/2001. Richard Jones, prod.; Frank Abbey, eng.; Wayne Hileman, 2001 remastering. ADD. TT: 57:12

Ⓜ I have Nathan Milstein's recordings of Bach's Sonatas for Unaccompanied Violin, along with the Partitas, on a 2001 CD and on a Capitol LP (PCR 8370) that apparently would be valuable if it were in better condition. Take note: These are Milstein's late-1950s recordings, in mono, not the widely distributed 1970s stereo versions on Deutsche Grammophon. Getting old may not be exactly fun, but it has its consolations.

—**Jim Austin**

J.S. BACH: SONATAS & PARTITAS FOR SOLO VIOLIN, VOLS. 1-3

Johanna Martzy, violin
EMI/Electric Recording Company



33CX 1286/1287/1288 (3 mono LPs). 1954/2013. Pete Hutchison, reissue prod.; Sean Davies, reissue eng. AAA.

Ⓜ We know he loved coffee, married twice, fathered loads of children, and once threw his wig at a bassoonist. But we know nothing—at least from the man himself—of the artistic motivation behind his greatest instrumental works. Did Johann Sebastian Bach's three sonatas and three partitas for solo violin comprise a numerological riddle? A loving tribute to his recently deceased first wife? Or were they simply the work of a 35-year-old man with a new job—one in which he was free, for perhaps the first time in his adult life, to compose secular music for his own satisfaction?

Likewise, modern listeners can only guess which of the many extant recordings of the sonatas and partitas come closest to expressing the intent of this most egoless of all Western composers. We can but love the ones that work the best—and Johanna Martzy's eerily intense performances, captured in EMI's richly present mono sound of the mid-1950s, do the job for me. Never mind the bollocks.

These three reissue LPs, by the London-based Electric Recording Company, present the music as it ought to be heard at home: tactile, dramatic, colorful, and altogether unignorable. I have yet to hear every iteration of Martzy's historic Bach, but it's difficult, if not impossible, for me to imagine these 2013 releases being surpassed, ever: They are the first three records I would snatch from a burning house. (XXXVI-7)

—**Art Dudley**

J.S. BACH: THE WELL-TEMPERED CLAVIER, BOOKS 1 & 2

Angela Hewitt, piano
Hyperion CDA67301/2 & CDA67303/4 (4 CDs). 1998, 1999. Ludger Böckenhoff, prod.; no eng. listed. DDD. TT: 4:24:11

Ⓜ Johann Sebastian Bach's keyboard works have inspired illustrious disciples. Rosalyn Tureck spent most of her 88 years exploring their contrapuntal intricacies, and in 1955 Glenn Gould all but set fire to Columbia's 30th Street studio while blazing through the *Goldberg Variations*, for which he was lionized. Now we have Angela Hewitt, who, in 11 years ending in 2005, recorded all of Bach's major keyboard works for Hyperion Records. Then, after a 14-month world tour largely devoted to performances of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, she re-recorded that masterpiece for the same label. I don't know which of these artists comes closest to playing Bach as the eminent 20th-century harpsichordist Wanda Landowska claimed she did—"his way"—or which recorded version of a specific work by any one of them should be considered a benchmark, but I love the way Hewitt plumbs these preludes and fugues for joy. The Chairman of the Baroque dances under her spell. (XX-12)—**David Lander**

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BEETHOVEN:
COMPLETE SONATAS
& VARIATIONS FOR
CELLO & FORTEPIANO

Matt Haimovitz, cello; Christopher O'Riley, fortepiano

Oxingale/Pentatone PTC 5186 475 (2 SACD/CDs). 2015. David Frost, prod.; Richard King, eng., mix, mastering. DDD. TT: 2:20:00

 The boutique label Oxingale has formed a relationship with Pentatone; this is a tasty fruit of their efforts. Haimovitz and O'Riley bring fresh exuberance to their comprehensive survey of Beethoven's works for cello and piano. Rarely have I felt such a consistent sense of discovery from seasoned virtuosos. The feeling of novelty is enhanced by the use of period instruments, whose sounds intrigue the ears and engage the mind. All is captured in immediate and transparent multichannel sound that lets me savor the players' intensity and the subtle decays of their instruments' overtones. (Note: On disc 1, tracks 4 and 8 are swapped in the listings on the jacket and in the booklet.) —**Kalman Rubinson**

BEETHOVEN:
THE LATE STRING
QUARTETS, VOL.1

Yale String Quartet: Broadus Erle, Yoko Matsuda, violin; David Schwartz, viola; Aldo Parisot, cello
Artemis/Vanguard Classics 1205 (2 CDs). 1971/2003. , no prod., or eng. Listed. ADD.? TT: 99:00

BEETHOVEN:
THE LATE STRING
QUARTETS, VOL.2

Yale String Quartet: Broadus Erle, Yoko Matsuda, violin; David Schwartz, violin, viola; Walter Trampler, viola; Aldo Parisot, cello
Artemis/Vanguard Classics 1206 (2 CDs). 2004., no prod. or eng. Listed. DDD.? TT: 108:00

 Though I've tried, I find it nearly impossible to identify what aspects of a performance cause it to speak more clearly than another. I don't know what makes the Yale String

Quartet's recordings of Beethoven's late quartets so affecting. Nothing about these performances stands out, except perhaps the quality of the sound, and maybe that's the point: the Yale performers play it relatively straight and let the music speak for itself.

On the original four-LP boxed set (Vanguard Cardinal Series VCS 10101/4) I bought for \$5 at Enterprise Records in Portland, Maine, the sound is superb: plenty of wood and rosin and a hint of ambience, just the way I like it. Those LPs are long out of print, but let us all praise used-vinyl stores and the amazing independent label Artemis, home of such acts as Better Than Ezra, Al Franken, The Baha Men, Steve Earle, Yoga Chant-Master Krishna Das, the North Mississippi All-Stars, and—thanks to Artemis's reissue of big chunks of the Vanguard catalog—the Yale String Quartet. —**Jim Austin**

BEETHOVEN:
STRING QUARTETS 12–16, GROSSE FUGE, OPP. 127, 130–133, 135

Orion String Quartet: Daniel Phillips, Todd Phillips, violin; Steven Tenenbom, viola; Timothy Eddy, cello
Koch International Classics KIC-CD-7683 (3 CDs). 2007. Adam Abeshouse, prod., eng. DDD. TT: 3:15:14

 Virtually every great string quartet, past and present, has recorded the Beethoven quartet cycle, that pinnacle of the literature and ultimate challenge to performers and listeners. The late quartets, born of Beethoven's compositional, emotional, and spiritual maturity, seem to transcend all earthly things in a quest for sublime beauty and perfection. The Orion Quartet, one of my favorite groups, admired and beloved worldwide, has lived with them for many years; having conquered all technical dif-



iculties, the players are free to enter into and communicate Beethoven's thoughts, feelings, and changing moods, from gentle and quirky humor to sorrow, conflict, joy, and serenity.

—**Edith Eisler**

BEETHOVEN:
VARIATIONS

33 Variations on a Waltz by Diabelli in C, Op.120; 32 Variations on an Original Theme in c, WoO 80

Robert Silverman, piano
Stereophile STPH017-2 (CD). 2006. Robert Silverman, prod.; John Atkinson, prod., eng., digital editing, mastering; Graemme Brown, Ray Kimber, Brett Terry, engs. DDD. TT: 68:03

 Any new recording by Robert Silverman is an event worth celebrating, but his traversals of Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* and 32 Variations on an Original Theme are worthy of a national holiday. Boldly assertive, Silverman's playing seems to echo the prickly composer's voice in his Heiligenstadt testament: "I am bound to be misunderstood; for me there can be no relaxation with my fellow men, no refined conversations, no mutual exchange of ideas. I must live almost alone, like one who has been banished." Despite some HF nasties audible at extreme volume levels, the sound lives up to the playing. (xxix-5) —**Wes Phillips**

BEETHOVEN:
VIOLIN SONATA 10 IN
G, OP.96

ENESCU:
VIOLIN SONATA 3,



OP.25 (IN ROMANIAN
STYLE)

David Abel, violin; Julie Steinberg, piano

Wilson Audiophile W-8315 (LP, 24/88.2 or 24/176 download, FLAC, ALAC, AIFF, WAV [hi-rez], MP3 [16/44.1 only]). 1983/2013. David Wilson, prod., eng.; Bruce Leek, LP mastering; Bruce Brown, digital remastering. AAA/AAD. TT: 52:43

 I mentioned this recording in our very first "Records To Die For" feature, in January 1991. The LP, recorded by Wilson Audio Specialties' founder and president, David Wilson, using a modified ReVox A77 tape deck and a pair of Schoeps omnidirectional microphones, has been in heavy rotation chez moi ever since. Its reappearance in late 2013 as a hi-rez download triggered its inclusion in this year's listing. In his February 1984 review, J. Gordon Holt described this recording as "an audiophile recording of real music that isn't bombastic, overblown, or high-powered," offering "sound so completely and disarmingly natural that after 30 seconds you're unaware it's reproduced." I don't have much to add—both David Abel's 1719 Guarneri violin and Julie Steinberg's Hamburg Steinway have been captured with superbly natural tone colors, enveloped in and supported by the warmly intimate ambience of the Mills College Concert Hall. And the performances are definitive; the interplay between violin and piano at the start of the Beethoven as they toss a melodic fragment to one

another is almost telepathic in its shared intensity. (VII-2)

—John Atkinson

BRAHMS: CELLO SONATAS 1 & 2, OPP. 38 & 99

With: Dvorák: *Waldesruhe*, Op.68 No.5; Rondo, Op.95. Suk: *Ballade & Serenade*, Op.3 Nos. 1 & 2.

Steven Isserlis, cello; Stephen Hough, piano

Hyperion CDA67529 (CD). 2005. Simon Perry, exec. prod.; Philip Traugott, prod.; Ben Connellan, eng. DDD. TT: 73:49

Steven Isserlis is a masterful cellist with a beautiful, expressive tone, but his playing is most remarkable for his complete immersion in the music: one feels he is creating it again and letting it flow directly to the listener. His discography covers all styles; this CD features two works by each of three great romantic composers, each pairing showing opposite sides of its composer's musical personality. Brahms's Sonata 1 is austere melancholy, Sonata 2 exuberantly triumphant; Dvorák's *Waldesruhe* breathes calm serenity, while his Rondo is all elfin lightness; Suk's *Ballade* projects dramatic passion, his *Serenade* ingratiating charm. The players capture all these moods, from poetic lyricism to ecstatic ardor, with total identification. —Edith Eisler

CRUMB: MUSIC FOR A SUMMER EVENING (MAKROKOSMOS III)

Gilbert Kalish, James Freeman, pianos; Raymond Des Roches, Richard Fitz, percussion

Nonesuch H-71311 (LP). 1975. Teresa Stearne, prod.; Marc Aubort, Joanna Nickrenz, engs. AAA. TT: 40:19

The five-movement *Music for a Summer Evening* (*Makrokosmos III*), for two amplified pianos (not for distortion, according to Crumb, but to give a piano the dynamic range

of a full orchestra) and two percussionists, features all of the trademarks of Crumb's best chamber works: space and ambience, shocking transients, unusual textures, and infectious melodic earworms. In addition to traditional percussion (marimbas, gongs, bass drums), Des Roches and Fitz run the full gamut of the percussion instruments Crumb favored (bowed cymbals, the jawbone of an ass). Although every one of the recordings Teresa Sterne produced for Nonesuch in the 1970s features chillingly spectacular sound (I own them all), this one has the widest dynamic range. If I could convince someone like Analogue Productions' Chad Kassem to reissue this on virgin vinyl, I'd place an order in a heartbeat for several dozen copies. (Also available, paired with Crumb's *Ancient Voices of Children*, on CD: Nonesuch 79149.) —Robert J. Reina

DAWN OF MIDI: DYSNOMIA

Amino Belyamani, piano; Aakash Israni, bass; Qasim Naqvi, drums
Thirsty Ear THI 57206 2 (CD). 2013. Prod. unknown; Henry Hirsch, eng.; Simon Davey, mastering. AAD. TT: 46:54

Dysnomia is a jazz piano-trio recording like no other. The three players lay down deceptively simple lines that sound like tape loops, but Dawn of Midi played the entire, 47-minute long piece (divided into nine tracks) in one take, live to two-track, 2" analog tape. No samples or digital effects were used, but the band's shape-shifting harmonics and mesmerizing rhythms can at times sound electronically enhanced. Pianist Amino Belyamani played the keys with his right hand; his left was on the strings, partially muting them. The three players' lines orbit each other, creating dense patterns. I can't get enough

of this CD. —Steve Guttenberg

DEBUSSY, FAURÉ, RAVEL: STRING QUARTETS

Quatour Ebène: Pierre Colombet, Gabriel Le Magadure, violin; Mathieu Herzog, viola; Raphaël Merlin, cello

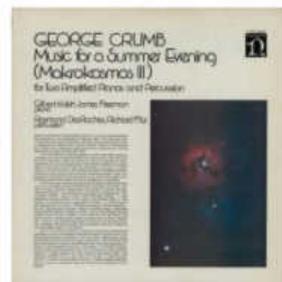
Virgin Classics 519045 2 (CD). 2008. Etienne Collard, prod.; Michel Pierre, Victor Laugier, engs. DDD. TT: 80:24

The string quartets of Ravel and Debussy are the Cav and Pag of the chamber-music world—one is seldom recorded without the other. They are tremendously if not uniquely accessible—in places, actually jazzy—so if you want to get your feet wet in string quartets, Rav and Deb are the way to go. Unlike many “accessible” works that lose their charm on repeated hearings (Ravel's own *Boléro* comes to mind), the quartets of Ravel and Debussy have real staying power, and have always been very well served on disc. Into this crowded marketplace leaps Quatour Ebène. This is not teacup-with-lifted-pinkie playing. Recorded in Limousin, in a magnificent former granary a century old, this is a close-in, ultravivid document of intense performances that turn on *dix centimes* from propulsive rhythms to stock-still harmonies that hang in mid-air. Yes, you can hear the players breathing, but that's because they're blowing the dust off these works. The bonus Fauré quartet pushes the total time past 80 minutes, making this offering competitive with even budget reissues. —John Marks

GLASS: SOLO PIANO

Sony Masterworks MK 45576 (CD). 1989. Philip Glass, Rory Johnston, prods.; Miles Green, eng. DDD. TT: 50:20

If you don't “get” minimalism, no amount of praise from me



will convince you. For me, Philip Glass's *Solo Piano*, along with Glass's score for the film *Koyaanisqatsi*, is an essential musical fix that I find myself returning to regularly long after I've stopped playing many of his operas (some of which haven't aged all that well). Soothing, calming, liberating music. The sound is a bit dry and bright but suits the music well. —Markus Sauer

SOPHIE HUTCHINGS: BECALMED

Preservation PRE030 (CD). 2010. Sophie Hutchings, prod.; Tony Dupe, Tim Whitten, prods., engs.; Roger Seibel, eng. ADD? TT: 43:44

With this enchanting debut, young Australian composer Sophie Hutchings offers a collection of exquisite piano pieces that soothe as much as they stir. “Seventeen,” named for the age at which Hutchings composed the piece, is 11 minutes of sweetness and stress. It opens as delicately as a dream, with sparse notes played softly, almost cautiously, until, somewhere around the four-minute mark, Hutchings begins to weave florid rings around herself and instrument and listener, building, through repetition and volume and speed, a sort of delirious tension that's almost too much to bear. When it ends with a gentle, steady run up the keys, we are spent. And beg for more. —Stephen Mejias

MESSIAEN: VISIONS DE L'AMEN

Marilyn Nonken, piano I; Sarah Rothenberg, piano II



Bridge 9324 (CD). 2010. Judith Sherman, prod.; Andrew Bradley, eng. DDD. TT: 48:53

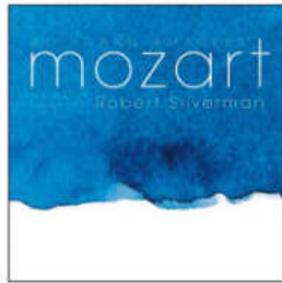
P Olivier Messiaen, born in France in 1908, studied ancient Greek and Hindu rhythms, medieval plainchant, even birdsong, while devising a unique style that won him a place in the 20th century's modernist pantheon. His *Visions de l'Amen*, written for two pianos in 1943 and imbued with the composer's Catholic mysticism, is born in near silence, slowly crescendoes into being, and ultimately reaches a breathtaking extended conclusion that Messiaen characterized as "a carillon of light." Premiered in wartime Paris by the composer and Yvonne Loriod, a gifted pupil who became his wife, it was the only piece performed in that concert. It's also the sole selection on this fine-sounding CD, which features two authoritative interpreters of the modern repertoire, one of whom studied with Loriod. Given its jarring, emotion-sapping intensity, letting it stand alone makes sense. Replete with rhythmic intricacies and daring keyboard-register contrasts, these vividly colored *Visions* burst with power throughout.

—David Lander

MOZART: THE PIANO SONATAS

Piano Sonatas 1-18; Fantasia in c, K. 457.

Robert Silverman, Steinway D piano
IsoMike 726441-55602-8 (7 "fully loaded" SACD/CDs, 4- and 2-channel DSD). 2010. Ellen Silverman, prod.; Graemme Brown, chief eng.; Ray Kimber, Aaron



Hubbard, CJ Johnson, Nathan Call, engs. DDD. TT: 6:47:00. Available from www.isomike.com/silverman_mozart.html, amazon.com.

P When, in 2004, I produced Stereophile's recording of Robert Silverman's performance of Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations*, recording it with Ray Kimber's IsoMike, the Canadian pianist mentioned that he was soon to perform a complete cycle of Mozart's piano sonatas, and that he felt this should be his next recording project. The demands made on my time by the magazine unfortunately didn't allow me to be involved, but I followed from afar Bob's recording of the sonatas for Ray Kimber. Although the IsoMike baffle array was used for both recordings, Graemme Brown had used a matched quartet of Neumann M150 omni microphones for the *Diabellis*; for the Mozart he used DPA 3529As. So far I have listened to only the two-channel versions on the SACD layer (the discs also include four-channel SACD and two-channel CD versions), but even in stereo, this is one of the finest-sounding piano recordings I have heard. Appropriately intimate without diminishing the instrument's dynamics, close without becoming overpowering, the sound allows Silverman's performances to speak freely. And what performances! Having grown familiar with Bob's playing in the bigger-boned repertoire of Beethoven, Brahms, Liszt, Rachmaninoff, and Schumann, I



wasn't sure what to expect from the more delicately nuanced Mozart works, which demand a different approach from the player, with more left unsaid but, conversely, nowhere for any departure from perfection to hide. But he succeeds in spades. Silverman offers such superb clarity of line, as in the melodic passages between the "cycle of fourths" modulations in the *Allegro* of Sonata 12 in F, K. 332, that you have to force yourself to remember that the piano is a percussion instrument as he sings, even dances, at the keys. Mozartean magic!

—John Atkinson

PÄRT: ALINA

Spiegel im Spiegel, Für Alina
Vladimir Spivakov, violin; Dietmar Schwalke, cello; Sergej Bezrodny, Alexander Malter, piano
ECM New Series 1591 (CD). 1999. Manfred Eicher, prod.; Markus Heiland, eng. DDD. TT: 51:24

P If by minimalism in music one means the most feeling and meaning wrung from the fewest notes, then Reich, Glass, Adams, and Riley do not come close to qualifying. Arvo Pärt does, and never so poignantly as in *Alina*, in which spareness and austerity approach disappearance. *Spiegel im Spiegel* (Mirror in Mirror) appears here in three duo arrangements: two for violin and piano, one for cello and piano. *Für Alina* is performed twice, both times on solo piano. Each repetition of composition itself comprises repetitions of the simplest, sparest themes and rhyth-

mic patterns, exquisitely extended and suspended, performed with a delicacy and nuance that seem superhuman or otherworldly or downright alien. Each time a composition, or a repeated passage within a composition, comes round again, it seems that this, at last, is the iteration most true. One comes away from *Alina* with a heart as comforted as it is troubled: *I didn't know a human endeavor could be so subtle. I don't know why we can't treat each other with as much tenderness.* Which is why we make art. Here is some of the best of it. (XXIV-2)—Richard Lehnert

PÄRT: FÜR ANNA MARIA: COMPLETE PIANO MUSIC

Jeroen van Veen, Sandra van Veen, pianos
Brilliant Classics 94775 (2 CDs). Jeroen van Veen, prod.; Pianomania, eng. DDD. TT: 1:59:22

P This exquisite, gentle two hours of music hit me like a ton of bricks. Wrong image, perhaps, but this set of Arvo Pärt's piano music—some from his pre-tintinnabular days (the 1950s), most from after he became the "holy minimalist" we now know—are, quite simply, to die for. The early works—four easy pieces for children's dance theater, and two sonatinas and a partita that are more "modern" and challengingly busy—are fascinating in and of themselves. But most of these two CDs are taken up with Pärt's later music: quiet, almost hypnotically repetitive, and boring only if you're not listening. If you don't know what to expect, think Satie's *Gymnopédies* but with depth and subtext: not exercises, but experiences. Jeroen van Veen plays four versions of *Für Alina*, two short and two long—while sticking to the two-page score, he plays the notes

in different registers of the piano. A two-piano arrangement of Pärt's most famous work, *Fratres* (it exists in at least a dozen arrangements), is deep, dark, and meditative. A little waltz is adorable. The tiny *Für Anna Maria* is played twice, one performance slightly faster than the other. In a world going by all too quickly, Pärt makes us slow down. This set is for listening, contemplating, adoring—you'll want to ingest it. —Robert Levine

RACHMANINOFF: RACHMANINOFF PLAYS RACHMANINOFF

Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op.3 No.2; *Moments Musicaux*, Op.16 No.2; *Etudes Tableaux* in C and E-flat major, Op.33 Nos. 2 & 7; *Daisies*, Op.38 No.3; plus arrangements for piano of works by Bach, Kreisler, Mendelssohn, Rimsky-Korsakov, Tchaikovsky.

Sergei Rachmaninoff, 1909 Steinway D SE piano, as realized by Zenph Studios

RCA Red Seal 748971 (CD). 1921-1942/2009. John Q. Walker, exec. prod.; Steven Epstein, prod.; Richard King, eng.; Anatoly Larkin, Zenph consultant; Marc Wienert, piano tech.; Richard Shepherd, designer of SE reproducing mechanism. DDD. TT: 78:24

From the opening phrase of Sergei Rachmaninoff's arrangement of Fritz Kreisler's *Liebesleid*, originally recorded in New York City on October 25, 1921, and presented on this CD in stunningly good, if fairly close, modern piano sound (the engineer was the widely respected Richard King), this Zenph CD takes your breath away. It follows in the footsteps of Zenph Studios' first two SACD/CDs of "re-performances": Glenn Gould's 1955 *Goldberg Variations*, which I made our "Recording of the Month" for September 2007; and Art Tatum's *Piano Starts Here*, reviewed by John Swenson in September 2008. In all three, a computer was used to analyze the original recording and then, with painstaking

ing massaging of the data by Zenph's Dr. Anatoly Larkin, to produce an enhanced MIDI file capable of controlling a Yamaha Synclavier or, in this case, a beautifully restored 1909 Steinway D fitted with a development by Richard Shepherd of Wayne Stahnke's SE reproducing mechanism. The program is presented twice: once from the perspective of an audience in the Kenan Recital Hall at Peace College, Raleigh, North Carolina, recorded with three DPA omnimikes; and once from the perspective of a performer, using a Neumann dummy-head binaural mike. The motive may be commercial, in that Zenph's "re-performances" of great historical recordings establishes a new copyright for the record company, but the musical results are impressive. As Robert Silverman once corrected me when I referred to Rachmaninoff as a "pianist," "If he were just a *pianist*, then they'll have to come up with another word for those of us who play the piano!" —John Atkinson

SCHUBERT: COMPLETE WORKS FOR VIOLIN & PIANO

Arnold Steinhardt, violin; Seymour Lipkin, piano

Newport Classics NCD 60174/2 (2 CDs). 2006. Eric Wen, prod.; Da-Hong Seetoo, eng. DDD. TT: 112:57

Covering 11 years, these six works trace the development of Schubert's genius from his earliest to his late great compositions. True duos for equal partners, they demand combinations of simplicity and sophistication, inwardness and exuberance, soloistic virtuosity and ensemble intimacy. Steinhardt and Lipkin project a patrician expansiveness that allows them to bring out every tonal and expressive nuance. Their phrasing is elegant, their rhythm flexible but steady, their liberties poised and



balanced; every note has vibrant life. Steinhardt's tone is warm, pure, beautiful, and constantly expressive; Lipkin matches it perfectly. It is hard to imagine a finer performance of this wonderful music. —Edith Eisler

VALGEIR SIGURDSSON: THE ARCHITECTURE OF LOSS

Bedroom Community HVALUR 013 (LP). 2012. Valgeir Sigurdsson, prod., eng. DDD? TT: 38:01

Every time I see High Water Sounds' Jeffrey Catalano, he introduces me to another outstanding piece of music that I need to own *immediately*. At the 2012 Rocky Mountain Audio Fest, that was *The Architecture of Loss*, the third album by Valgeir Sigurdsson, the Icelandic composer and founder of the excellent Bedroom Community label. Originally composed for Stephen Petronio's dance company, this sweetly sorrowful, trembling music has been performed live by Sigurdsson, acclaimed violist Nadia Sirota, gifted keyboardist Nico Muhly, and multi-instrumentalist extraordinaire Shahzad Ismaili. I missed the recent performance here in NYC, but I've fallen in love with the LP. Its sumptuous sound, spacious, detailed, and pure, impressed everyone in Catalano's room—and should do the same for you in yours. —Stephen Mejias

MAGDA TAGLIAFERRO: D'OMBRE ET DE LUMIÈRE . .



Music of Albéniz, Falla, Granados, Villa-Lobos

Magda Tagliaferro, piano

Ducretet-Thomson/EMI/Electric Recording Company ERC012 (180gm LP). 1960/2015. N/A, prod., eng.; Pete Hutchison, remastering. AAA. TT: 53:01

Risking your life for a piece of vinyl? Why not make it a rare and valuable one like this 1960 recital of fiery Spanish music, stunningly performed by Brazilian pianist Magda Tagliaferro, and regularly selling for \$500 on the used market? The Electric Recording Company's reissue of this Ducretet-Thomson Records release was made from the original master tapes using ERC's lovingly restored, all-tube Ortofon-Lyrec cutting system. It's limited to 300 copies, each costing around \$450. ERC reproduces every aspect of the original—including old-school letterpress printing of the jacket—to make their reissues look and feel authentic. The spacious, stereo sound is positively spectacular.

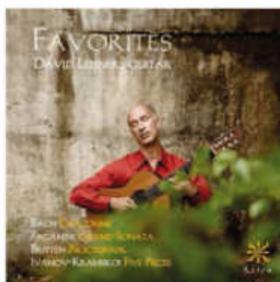
—Michael Fremer

WILLIAM WINANT: FIVE AMERICAN PERCUSSION PIECES

William Winant, percussion

Poon Village PV007LP (LP). 1976-2013/2013. Kristin Anderson, prod.; William Winant, eng.; Bhub Rainey, mastering. AAA? TT: 35:18

Those familiar with Winant's work may be surprised to learn that this is the first album released under his own name. Those unfamiliar with his name are nevertheless likely to have heard Winant's music. He's a



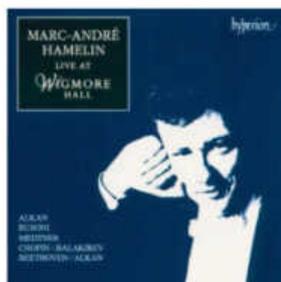
percussionist who's worked with the Kronos String Quartet, Sonic Youth, Oingo Boingo, Keith Jarrett, John Zorn, Yo-Yo Ma, and film directors Tim Burton and Werner Herzog, among others. *Five American Percussion Pieces* plays like a snapshot of Winant's life and career, the recordings taking place in various locations and spanning nearly 40 years: Michael Byron's *Trackings I* was recorded in 1976 at Toronto's York University, where Winant studied under James Tenney and later met John Cage; Lou Harrison's *Song of Quetzalcoatl and Solo to Anthony Cirone* were respectively recorded at Bay Records (1993) and at Harrison's home in Aptos, California (2002); Alvin Curran's *Bang Zoom* was recorded in 1995 at Mills College, in Oakland, where Winant currently teaches; and James Tenney's *Having Never Written a Note for Percussion*, the album's quietest and noisiest piece, was recorded this year, by Maggi Payne, also at Mills. The music is by turns bracing, startling, and hypnotic, always heartfelt, and always performed with equal measures of precision and soul. The limited-edition LP is packaged in a handmade, screen-printed jacket with a mitered-corner wood spine—a perfect match for this special music.

—Stephen Mejias

COLLECTIONS

BALLAKÉ SISSOKO & VINCENT SEGAL: CHAMBER MUSIC

Ballaké Sissoko, kora; Vincent



Segal, cello

Six Degrees 657036117219 (CD). 2009. Laurent Bizot, prod.; Favien Girard, eng. DDD. TT: 54:01

⏻ There I was, driving through Belgium and Germany in the middle of the night, interrupting a short holiday for a professional commitment the next morning, when the car radio played the most beautiful music I'd heard in a long time. It was a radio program about Vincent Segal, a French cellist whose musical interests run wide and deep, including: classical music with the French National Orchestra; Bumcello, a down-tempo electronic duo; and playing on Sting's *If on a Winter's Night* . . . The music that so confounded me was a 2009 collaboration with Malian kora player Ballaké Sissoko, recorded in Salif Keita's studio in Bamako. Rhythmically inventive, superbly melodic, soothing, uplifting, and exhilarating.

—Markus Sauer

SCOTT DETTRA: MAJESTUS

Music by Barber, Bingham, Copland, Dupré, Franck, Howells, Walton, Willan

Scott Dettra, Great Organ of Washington National Cathedral Loft LRC-1114 (CD). 2009. Roger W. Sherman, prod., eng., mastering. DDD. TT: 65:15

⏻ Scott Dettra's program of "large-pipe organ" favorites was the final recording made of the Washington National Cathedral's Great Organ before it was replaced. Installed in 1938 and upgraded in 1975, the instrument had four manu-



als and 189 ranks. The pedal rank consisted of 37 pipes, including one 64', four 32', and eight 11' pipes. The liner notes detail the engineer's use of "proprietary 24-bit" technology, and the absence of any transformers in the signal path that might have produced upper-bass boom when reproducing the deep-est pedal chords. *Majestus* has the widest dynamic range of any pipe-organ CD in my collection, justifying its warning label: "can damage your equipment if played too loudly." That warning should be heeded: Track 1, Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man*, features two 8' pedal ranks and explosive bass-drum whacks. Thunderous pedal chords engaged the full power of a Revel Rhythm2 subwoofer, producing terrific room lock and a sense of massive pressure—as I also heard with Dupré's *Prelude and Fugue in B, Op.7 No.1*, and Walton's *Coronation March: Crown Imperial*. The power, dynamic range, and great deep-bass extension of *Majestus* make it my reference recording for deep-bass pipe-organ music. —Larry Greenhill

MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN: LIVE AT WIGMORE HALL

Works by Alkan, Beethoven-Alkan, Busoni, Chopin-Balakirev, Medtner Hyperion CDA66765 (CD). 1995. Ates Orga, prod.; Ken Blair, eng. DDD. TT: 71:56

⏻ One reason I like this recording is that I owned it for years before I was able to sort it out aurally,

and it was a better system that made that possible. In that sense, it played a part in my discovery of good sound. Another reason I like it so much: It's one of the most realistic renderings of a back-of-the-theater perspective that I've heard. Musically, it's a purist's nightmare: a movement of Beethoven's Piano Concerto 3 and part of Chopin's Concerto 1, both arranged for solo piano. Several pieces—including Alkan's *Trois Grandes Etudes*, one each for left, right, and both hands—are intended for showing off. I love it anyway. —Jim Austin

FELIX HELL: ORGAN SENSATION

Felix Hell, organ

Reference Recordings RR-101CD (HDCD). 2003. J. Tambllyn Henderson, prod.; Keith O. Johnson, eng. DDD. TT: 59:52

⏻ Despite his unconventional name, Felix Hell has suddenly become one of my favorite organists. This recording was made in 2002, when Hell was 17 years old. By then, he had completed almost nine years of recitals, tours, and recordings. Born in Frankenthal/Pfalz, Germany, the seven-year-old Felix startled his parents by playing J.S. Bach's *Prelude in C Major*, from Book I of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, after seeing another pianist play it. Piano lessons, organ lessons, and recitals soon followed. His extraordinary artistic sensibility swept me off my feet on first hearing his rendition of Rheinberger's *Abendfriede* (Evening Peace) on this disc. His playing brings out the work's delicacy, grace, and lyricism, drawing me into the recording with its silences, pianissimo sections, and polyphony. Keith Johnson's recording skills capture the full frequency range, mixing subterranean pedal chords with the upper registers, so that my room resonated,

even at low volumes. Hell's technique reminded me of Glenn Gould's ability to articulate each note so that it stood clearly on its own, regardless of the tempo. Liszt's Prelude and Fugue on B-A-C-H allows Hell to reveal the rich palette of orchestral color and warmth of the Schoenstein organ of the First Plymouth Congregational Church, UCC, in Lincoln, Nebraska. He also shows a profound understanding of the organ literature, and an ability to communicate lyricism through the massive instrument. —Larry Greenhill

CHRISTOPHER HERRICK: ORGAN FIREWORKS IV

Music by Batiste, Bonnet, Bourgeois, Buck, Johnson, Handel, Lefébure-Wély, Lemare, Shostakovich, Vierne, Whitlock, Widor

Christopher Herrick, Organ of St. Bartholomew's Church, New York
Hyperion CDA66605 (CD). 1992.
Paul Spicer, prod.; Christopher Greenleaf, eng. DDD. TT: 75:00

 A fellow pipe-organ and subwoofer devotee and Stereophile reader clued me in to Christopher Herrick's 11 volumes of *Organ Fireworks*: recordings of 19th- and 20th-century organ music. Vol. IV features Herrick playing the 1918 Skinner/Hutchings pipe organ of St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church, in New York City. Revised in 1971 by Aeolian-Skinner, it comprises 168 stops and 225 ranks. The recording captures the power and massiveness of the deep bass pedal chords, particularly in the *Allegro* of Widor's Organ Symphony 6. The clarity of the instrument's flute, orchestral reed, and brassy trumpet stops is startlingly evident in Dudley Buck's rousing Concert Variations on "The Star-Spangled Banner." The explosive, fortissimo ending of Shostakovich's *Passacaglia* will test the limits of

any woofer, and makes this a recording I can't forget. No other recording quite yields the organ's sustained musical power or so clearly delineates its descending scales, or makes it so easy to determine a subwoofer's pitch definition or eases its ability to create "room lock" in my large listening area.

—Larry Greenhill

HOLLAND BAROQUE SOCIETY WITH MILOS VALENT: BARBARIC BEAUTY: TELEMANN & 18TH-CENTURY DANCE TRANSCRIPTIONS

Arrangements by Milos Valent & Tineke Steenbrink of works by Telemann and reconstructions of contemporary dance music.

Milos Valent, leader, violin, voice; Jan Rokyta, flutes, cimbalom; Holland Baroque Society

Channel Classics CCA SA 31911 (SACD/CD). 2011. Jared Sachs, prod., eng. DDD. TT: 77:32

 This marvelous disc, drawn from several archives, presents dance music from the Eastern Europe of present-day Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary that Telemann would be likely to have known. Each track is a suite of dances that includes related pieces by Telemann. One offers Hungarian themes familiar to us from the works of Liszt and Bartók; another is a basketful of traditional Jewish melodies of the time. All are ingratiating, melodic, and colorful. Relating them to the interdigitated Telemann is fascinating, but musically aside, this disc is arranged, played, and recorded with such flavor and zest that it's a thoroughly delightful experience for the music lover and audiophile.

—Kalman Rubinson

KRONOS QUARTET: 25 YEARS

Music of Adams, Ali-Zade, Benschhof, Crumb, Feldman, Glass, Golijov, Córceki, Gubaidulina, Pärt, Phan, Piazzolla, Reich, Riley, Schnittke, Sculthorpe, Volans
David Harrington, John Sherba,

violin; Hank Dutt, viola; Joan Jeanrenaud, cello
Nonesuch 7559-79504-2 (10 CDs). 1987-1997/1998. Bob Hutzitz, prod.; various engs. DDD. TT: 10:32:47

 This boxed retrospective by Kronos Quartet was released for the 25th anniversary of their formation, though these 10 discs cover a cross-section of only the last 10 years of that period, when they began to record for Nonesuch. That decade preceded their more recent excursions into MultiCultiLand, but here are some of the most adventurous pieces of contemporary classical music—by John Adams, Arvo Pärt, Hemyk Górecki, Philip Glass, Osvaldo Golijov, Terry Riley, and many more—most of them commissioned by Kronos, who play with rigor, vigor, and finesse throughout. Alternately—and sometimes simultaneously—bracing, soothing, and jarring, and always satisfying. The sound quality is usually quite good. —Fred Kaplan

DAVID LEISNER: FAVORITES

Music of J.S. Bach, Britten, Ivanov-Kramskoi, Leisner, Paganini
David Leisner, guitar
Azica ACD-71268 (CD). 2011. David Leisner, Alan Bise, prods.; Bruce Egre, eng. DDD. TT: 66:32

 I fear that the title *Favorites* fails to do justice to the gravitas of this rather astonishing solo-guitar recital. However, that might be because I've seen too many albums of violin encores whose titles include "Favorites." In that context, the word is almost certain to guarantee "thoroughly innocuous Kreislerian exercises in charm-laden circularity."

The two granitic foundation stones of this CD are Britten's dark, mysterious *Nocturnal* and, in Leisner's own guitaristic and respectful transcription, the somber and multifaceted *Ciaccone*

of J.S. Bach's Sonata 3 for Unaccompanied Violin. Piped-in classical-guitar music at your local brass-rail-and-fern bar these are not. A weighty and entirely musical CD. Miss it at your peril. —John Marks

ANTÔNIO MENESES & MARIA-JOÃO PIRES: THE WIGMORE HALL RECITAL

Schubert: Arpeggione Sonata, D.821. Brahms: 3 Intermezzi, Op.117; Cello Sonata 1, Op.38. Mendelssohn: Song Without Words, Op.109. J.S. Bach: Aria from Pastorale in F, BWV590.

Antônio Meneses, cello; Maria-João Pires, piano

Deutsche Grammophon 4790965 (CD). 2013. Matthias Spindler, exec. prod.; Renaud Loranger, prod.; John Fraser, recording prod.; Daniel Kemper, Andrew Mellor, engs. DDD. TT: 76:36

 It has been more than 25 years since I last heard a performance in London's Wigmore Hall, but this recital, recorded in concert there and recommended by Sam Tellig, transported me back to one of my favorite venues for listening to chamber music when I lived in the UK. Sam described the Schubert "as one of the finest performances ever released of the Sonata for Arpeggione," and yes, it is. Antônio Meneses, cellist with the Beaux Arts Trio from 1998 to 2008, rejoices in the melodic richness of Schubert's writing for the arpeggione, a fretted, six-string instrument similar to a viola da gamba but tuned like a guitar that was briefly in vogue in the early 19th century. Meneses plays an arrangement for cello, of course, and also turns in a soul-stirring reading of the Brahms E-minor sonata for that instrument. But the highlight on this album, for me, is Meneses's accompanist, Maria-João Pires, whose performance of the three Brahms Intermezzi, Op.117, has displaced in my

affections my own recording, *Intermezzo*, of Robert Silverman performing these delicate piano works (CD, Stereophile STPH003-2). I have been a fan of Pires since her early digitally mastered Mozart recordings for Denon in the 1980s; she exposes the emotional depths in these superficially simple works.—**John Atkinson**

AMY X NEUBURG & THE CELLO CHIXTET: THE SECRET LANGUAGE OF SUBWAYS

Amy X Neuburg, vocals, electronics, drums; Elizabeth Vandervennet, Elaine Kreston, Jessica Ivry, cellos

MinMax Music MM 017 (CD), 2009. Amy X Neuburg, prod.; Bruce Kapham, prod., eng. DDD. TT: 61:19

Ⓜ If there is a talent to watch in the modern classical world, it is Amy X Neuburg. A dazzling classically trained singer, a wizard at live electronics, a bodacious percussionist, and a songwriting master with a crisp grasp of language, irony, and the capriciousness of modern life, Neuburg is also a genuinely original composer who seems to have swallowed everything from madrigals to the avant-garde, and now spits it out in her own quirky, appealing way. The Cello Chixtet is her perfect foil, harmonically caressing her voice and/or underscoring her sonic tales with mercurial twists of color and weight, at times percussive and bombastic, at others lyrical, impish, or warm. Track this down, buy it, and put some amazement back in your life.—**Daniel Buckley**

MARY PRESTON: ORGAN ODYSSEY

Works for solo organ by Ives, Karg-Elert, La Montaine, Mendelssohn, Messiaen, Vierne, Widor

Mary Preston, Lay Family Fisk (Op.100) Concert Organ, Meyerson Symphony Center, Dallas, Texas
Reference RR-113 (24-bit HDCD), 2007. J. Tamblin Henderson, Jr.,

prod.; Keith O. Johnson, eng. DDD. TT: 57:14

Ⓜ I learned long ago to take seriously any e-mail announcement by Janice Mancuso of Reference Recordings. This past year I got very excited when she notified me that Keith O. Johnson, the label's recording engineer, had recorded a solo pipe organ in the same hall in which he'd recorded my favorite choral work, John Rutter's *Requiem* (an earlier R2D4 of mine). I was not disappointed. While Johnson reproduces the instrument's deep-bass pedal notes, it's the midrange and treble that captivate me. Mendelssohn's *Organ Sonata 1* captures what I hear in live organ recitals but very rarely from recordings: the mixture of brightness and color, with none of that hard, edgy, irritating quality. When I crank up the volume, the music becomes more dynamic without becoming harsh. Although La Montaine's *Even Song* is played quietly, the final low-pedal note shakes my room. The disc ends with the ever-popular *Toccatà* from Widor's *Organ Symphony 5*, played with a mixture of joy, enthusiasm, brightness, and superb technical skill that is breathtaking.—**Larry Greenhill**

DAVID STAROBIN: FAVORITE TRACKS, VOL.1

Works for guitar by Giuliani, Paganini, Regondi, Sor
David Starobin, Oren Fader, guitar; Pina Carmirelli, violin
Bridge 9272 (CD), 2008. David Starobin, Michael Calvert, William Anderson, prods.; David Hancock, Paul Zinman, Ben Rizzi, engs.; Adam Abeshouse, mastering. ADD/DDD. TT: 61:01

Ⓜ As I write this in mid-November 2008, the world desperately needs champions. So meet David and Becky Starobin, who own Bridge Records and have been clear-sighted and nimble enough to

outmaneuver their blinkered, big-footed rivals. For over a quarter century the Starobins have, like knights, jostled on behalf of the contemporary composers their label spotlights, and more than 350 new classical-guitar compositions have been written especially for David, who is a heralded virtuoso. He has recorded several of those pieces on other Bridge CDs, but he devotes this one—which he credits his better half with conceiving—to 19th-century works culled from recordings he made between 1979 and 1994. It's a hugely gratifying hour of music by Giuliani, Paganini, Regondi, and Sor, newly remastered for better sound, and an excellent choice for all classical-guitar enthusiasts as well as those who still tend to underrate the instrument.—**David Lander**

VARIOUS: PIPES RHODE ISLAND

Organ music by Alain, J.S. Bach, Bossi, Buxtehude, Cook, Dunstable, Durufé, Franck, Galuska, Howells, Messiaen, Parry, Sobaje, Widor, Wright
Patrick Aiken, James Busby, Andrew Galuska, Peter Karsinsky, Stephen Martorella, Martha Sobaje, Mark Steinbach, organ
RIAGO 101 (CD), 2007. John Marks, prod., eng. DDD. TT: 74:46

Ⓜ Call it conflict of interest, but I'm happiest to discover a Record To Die For that has been recorded by the talented people who write for this magazine. I was delighted last spring when, at the 2007 Home Entertainment Show, John Marks, who writes the column "The Fifth Element" for *Stereophile*, played selections from this, his recording of 11 significant Rhode Island pipe organs, released by the Rhode Island Chapter of the American Guild of Organists (RIAGO). I was so captivated by the ultradeep, window-rattling, sustained organ-pedal chords I heard at the end of Howells' *Master*

Tallis's Testament that I've since used this selection in every one of my equipment reviews. As JM describes in various installments of his column (Vol.29 Nos.8 & 10, Vol.30 No.6), he recorded the Howells using a Pearl TL-44 dual-capsule, rectangular-diaphragm condenser microphone to match the specific layout of St. Stephan's church in Providence. The sonic impact of this CD is tremendous: crushing, thunderous, tight deep-bass notes shudder the air and rattle loose objects. In fact, when played too loud, the sustained pedal notes blow the circuit breakers in my house. This jewel of a CD is available only at www.arkivmusic.com. Additional MP3 tracks and photos of the historic organs are available at www.2007ri-ago.org/bonustracks.

—**Larry Greenhill**

JAN VOGLER: MY TUNES

Works for cello by J.S. Bach, Bloch, Bruch, Davidoff, Dvorák, Elgar, Mancini, Tchaikovsky, Wagner
Jan Vogler, cello; Helmut Branny, Dresdner Kapellsolisten
Sony BMG 713065 (CD), 2007. Andreas Neibrunner, prod.; Stephan Schellmann, eng. DDD. TT: 57:09

Ⓜ Jan Vogler is a rising star among European cellists. For this CD he has recorded some of his favorite pieces, including the opener, Elgar's *Salut d'amour*, Op.12; the Tchaikovsky *Nocturne*; and works by Bloch, Davidoff, Wagner, Bruch, Bach, and Henry Mancini—the album closes with "Moon River." Vogler gets a wonderful tone from his instrument and has obvious technical abilities, but these remain subservient to the music. My favorite piece is probably Bloch's *Prayer*, but Bruch's *Kol Nidrei* deserves special mention, too. The sound is clean and clear and allows the music to shine.—**Markus Sauer**

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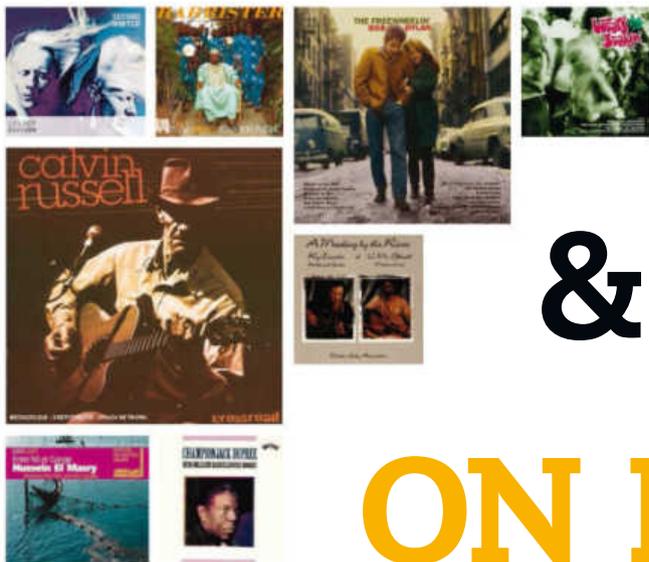
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FOLK, BLUES, & WORLD MUSIC ON RECORD

By ROBERT BAIRD

What is now collectively known as the blues—the most elemental and uniquely American of all folk musical forms—began in the deep South as a fusion of traditional African rhythms and European folk music, played on instruments from both traditions. The most common form of the blues is a repeating progression of chords in 4/4 time in a basic 12-bar framework that eventually works itself into a groove. Like jazz, blues performances are improvisatory, and had to be trimmed to fit onto records. Evolving from acoustic guitar players like Robert Johnson, Son House, and Skip James, who practiced their art in the Mississippi Delta, the blues spread to Texas, Louisiana, and the Carolinas before moving north after WWII. During this migration blues performers also adopted electric guitars, and bullet microphones for voices and harmonicas, which gave the music a much louder, more danceable edge.

The blues has taken many forms—from singers like Bessie Smith, boogie-woogie pianists like Albert Ammons, and New Orleans pianists like Professor Longhair, to the great electric Chicago Blues players Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf and the big-band jump blues of Louis Jordan. While the blues tradition has declined, as performers like the late B.B. King have passed from the scene, there has been at least one late-era blues hero: the brilliant Texas guitarist Stevie Ray Vaughan. In some ways, of course, the blues will never die—it served as the basis for what later, in the hands of Chuck Berry and others, became rock 'n' roll.

Outside the blues, the recording of folk music in this country began in earnest in 1933, when John Lomax and his son Alan acquired an aluminum disc recorder that weighed over 300 lbs. They immediately put it to use record-

The recording of folk music in this country began in earnest in 1933.

ing a prisoner in Louisiana's notorious Angola prison: one Huddie Ledbetter, better known as Lead Belly.

The Lomaxes worked over the next 30 years—in the South, along the Mexican border, in 33 states, as well as in Haiti, the West Indies, and the Bahamas—to build up the *Archive of American Folk Song* at the Library of Congress. Their recordings gained newfound relevance in the 1960s with the so-called folk revival, a movement kick-started in 1952 when eccentric folk-music collector Harry Smith, who'd amassed a large collection of 78rpm discs of jazz, blues, country, Cajun, and other traditional

American folk forms, assembled his now-landmark collection, *Anthology of American Folk Music*. Featuring 84 songs by traditional music artists, the anthology made the music of The Carter Family, Charlie Patton, Dock Boggs, and many others easily accessible to younger listeners.

During the folk revival, labels like Moses Asch's New York City-based Folkways Records, often recording in mono with a single microphone, released albums of folk music in German, Spanish, Italian, French, Yiddish, and Russian. At this time, the so-called Celtic traditional music of Ireland and Scotland also became popular in the US. All of this energy led to slates of new performers, including Pete Seeger, the Weavers, Dave Van Ronk, Joan Baez, Peter, Paul & Mary, and, finally, Bob Dylan—and serving as spiritual godfather to all of them was Woody Guthrie. The spirit of that revival lives on today, thanks to a raft of performers including Hozier, James Bay, and Joanna Newsom, Gillian Welch as well as the ongoing releases in Bob Dylan's *Bootleg Series*, two of which are included in this collection. —Robert Baird

 Robert Baird has been writing about music for 30 years, the last 20 of which as Music Editor of *Stereophile*. Having also served as Editor-in-Chief of *CD Review* and Music Editor of *New Times* in Phoenix, AZ, he's also written for a variety of publications including *Rolling Stone*, *USA Today*, *Magnet*, and *No Depression*.

AMADOU & MARIAM: 1990-1995: LE MEILLEUR DES ANNÉES MALIENNES

Mariam, vocals; Amadou, guitar
Because 3106072 (CD). 2006. Aliyu
Adamu Maikano, prod.; Wilfrid
Harpaille, eng. ADD? TT: 77:11

Amadou & Mariam are a blind husband-and-wife guitar-and-voice team from Mali, a country that has come to prominence as the home of some of the best and most accessible music to emerge from the African continent (cf the collaborations by Ry Cooder and Ali Farka Toure). This CD, a compilation of early recordings, contains beautiful, touching music ranging from blues to happy dance tunes. The sound quality is very variable, the original productions having been distributed on cassette, but offers a directness that I find much more appealing than the overproduced and over-compressed sound of their recent collaboration with Manu Chao, for example. (If you're looking for this on Amazon.com, they list it as "1990-1995: The Best of the African Years.")—**Markus Sauer**

MARCIA BALL, LOU ANN BARTON, ANGELA STREHLI: DREAMS COME TRUE

Antone's ANT0014 (CD). 1990.
Clifford Antone, exec prod.; Mac
Rebennack, prod.; Stuart Sullivan,
eng.; Joe Gracey, Larry Soyer,
Spencer Starnes, asst. engs. ADD?
TT: 40:22

No one but Clifford Antone could have cajoled along a project like *Dreams Come True* for five long years and still have come out of it with this kind of record: Angela Strehli, Marcia Ball, and Lou Ann Barton, three Austin blues divas of the same vintage, sharing the spotlight on one 12-cut album? Ouch! The ego babysitting that went on must have totaled in the thousands of hours. Besides

Antone's coddling, the key was bringing in Mac Rebennack, Dr. John, as producer, who had the musical weight to keep a lid on the proceedings. With a rock-solid, all-star Austin band of Sarah Brown (bass), Derek O'Brien (guitar), and George Rains (drums), and guests like saxman David "Fathead" Newman and guitarist Jimmie Vaughan, this session, while perhaps not the blockbuster everyone hoped for, still packs a pretty steady wallop. Two Ike Turner tunes—beginning with the opener, "A Fool in Love"—as well as three Ball originals and Etta James' "Something's Got a Hold on Me," make this dream pairing the highpoint of Clifford Antone's career as a label mogul. Clifford may be gone, but thanks to records like these, his mojo is workin'.—**Robert Baird**

BARRISTER: NEW FUJI GARBAGE

GlobeStyle CDORBD 067 (CD).
1991. GlobeStyle, prods.; David
Young, eng. AAD? TT: 57:13

Despite the late Sikuru Ayinde Barrister's announcement here that "I'm taking my sound to European countries / I'm taking my sound to America," fuji, the style that he originated in the late 1960s and that has since become the most popular musical genre in his native Nigeria, has yet to catch on in the West. Combining his Islam-inflected singing with keyboards, steel guitar, and some dozen percussion instruments, Barrister fashions hypnotic grooves from multilayered Yoruba rhythms. The first of his albums made expressly for CD, this one revisits Barrister's multiply recorded anthem, "Fuji Garbage," adding a steel-guitar quote from Jimmy Cliff's "Rivers of Babylon."—**Larry Birnbaum**

DOCK BOGGS: COUNTRY BLUES



Revenant 205 (CD). 1997. John
Fahey, prod.; Dave Glasser, Charlie
Pilzer, remastering. Mono. AAD.
TT: 69:03

The death-haunted blues ballads that the Virginia coal miner and banjo player Dock Boggs recorded in the late 1920s are among the most chilling in the old-time country repertoire. This CD contains all 12 sides Boggs cut prior to his rediscovery in the 1960s, plus five alternate takes, as well as four outstanding if unrelated tracks by the brothers Hayes and Bill Shepherd. Best are the eight titles from Boggs' 1927 debut session for Brunswick, including the ominously jangling "Sugar Baby" and the doom-laden "Country Blues," both of which appeared on the landmark 1952 Folkways compilation *Anthology of American Folk Music*. On "Down South Blues," Boggs transforms a 1923 recording by the classic blues singer Clara Smith into a hillbilly song, while on "Pretty Polly," he turns an 18th-century British murder ballad into a blood-curdling blues.—**Larry Birnbaum**

BOMBA ESTÉREO: BLOW UP

Nacional 18122 02809 (CD). 2009.
Simón Mejía, prod.; Julián Salazar,
prod., eng.; Felipe Alvarez, eng.
DDD. TT: 44:54

Colombia's Bomba Estéreo knocked it out of the park with *Blow Up*, one of the trippiest, most infectious dance records of 2009. A swirling, rocking mix of cumbia rhythms, hip-hop, and electronics propelled by



singer-rapper Li Saumet's seductive and explosive vocals and Simón Mejía's surreal guitar, bass, loops and electronics, this 12-song CD leaves no doubt that Colombia is now exporting some of the fiercest music on the planet. Break out "Fuego" and "La Niña Rica" at your next party and turn it into a throbbing sweat fest!—**Daniel Buckley**

CONJURE: MUSIC FOR THE TEXTS OF ISHMAEL REED

Ishmael Reed, voice; Taj Mahal, vocals, guitar; Allen Toussaint, piano, organ; David Murray, tenor saxophone; Lester Bowie, Olu Dara, trumpet; Jean-Paul Bourelly, guitar; Carla Bley, Kenny Kirkland, piano; Steve Swallow, bass, piano; Jamaaladeen Tacuma, bass; Billy Hart, drums; Frisner Augustin, Puntilla, Milton Cardona, Olufemi Claudette Mitchell, Elysee Pyronneau, Jack Bruce, Arto Lindsay, percussion; Ejay Tracey, vocals
HDtracks 24-bit/88.2kHz download. 1983/2009. Kip Hanrahan, prod.; Frank Rodriguez, eng. AAD? TT: 45:43

Kip Hanrahan put together a supergroup for the ages in his 1983 *Conjure Project*, a collection of song settings and "inspirations" that is tremendously fun to listen to, while remaining true to Ishmael Reed's outlaw spirit. Highlights include "Skydiving" (conclusion: "learn how to fall"), as well as "Jes Grew"'s reduction of Reed's +200-page 1972 magnum opus, *Mumbo Jumbo*, to 4:04. I'm also rather partial to the hokum-inspired line "Betty touched his organ / Made his cathedral rock," from "Betty Ball's

Blues." The original American Clave LP featured spectacular sound, the Sting-financed Pangaea CD slightly less so—but this hi-rez download is a revelation.—**Wes Phillips**

**RY COODER
& V.M. BHATT:**
**A MEETING BY THE
RIVER**

Water Lily Acoustics WLA-CS-29-CD (CD). 1993. Kavichandran Alexander, prod., eng.; Jayant Shah, co-prod. AAD. TT: 39:48

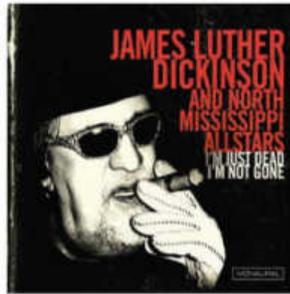
⏪ Long before *Buena Vista Social Club* made Ry Cooder a household name (at least among some fairly discerning households), he attempted to bridge musical cultures on either side of a deeper divide: the American folk, blues, and gospel sounds he specialized in, and the daunting classical music of India. His partner in this enterprise was Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, whose instrument, the *Mohan vina*—a kind of cross between a sitar and a slide guitar—is of his own design. Astonishingly, the four conversational yet adventurous tracks captured on *A Meeting by the River* were unrehearsed jams between the two masters, who had met only minutes before the session. The lesson is that Cooder and Bhatt not only knew how to play, but how to listen. (xvi-4)

—**Daniel Durchholz**

MERCAN DEDE:
800

Doublemoon DMO42 (CD). 2008. Mercan Dede, prod.; Serkan Alkan, eng. DDD? TT: 72:08

⏪ Something new: After 15 years of creating music, Turkish-born Mercan Dede has declared this his last album, and he's going out at his peak. Dede's instruments are primarily the ney, bendir, and "electronics," and here he's joined by acoustic musicians and singers from around the planet. Hypnotic and rich, the compositions blend ancient



and modern while staying firmly rooted in the Middle East, though the dubby bass lines might give traditionalists a little pause. Recording quality is excellent, with a deep bottom end and an expansive soundstage, held back in spots by some digititis. Beautifully packaged, this disc also qualifies as my Cover 2 Die 4 of the last several years.—**Jon Iverson**

**JAMES LUTHER
DICKINSON AND
NORTH MISSISSIPPI
ALLSTARS:**
**I'M JUST DEAD
I'M NOT GONE**

Merless/Memphis International 228 (CD, download). David Less, prod.; Kevin Houston, eng., mix; Brad Blackwood, mastering. ADD? TT: 42:44

⏪ Listening to *I'm Just Dead I'm Not Gone*, I'm reminded of the studio work Johnny Cash did with Rick Rubin near the end of his life. Dickinson's fiery baritone is evocative, his ear for material finely tuned, and the production skills impeccable on this tour of arcane music of the 20th century: Sleepy John Estes's "Ax Sweet Mama," Mack Rice's "Money Talks," Buffy St. Marie's harrowing "Codine," J.B. Lenoir's "Down in Mississippi," Bob Frank's "Red Neck, Blue Collar," and many more. Chris Chew and Cody Dickinson are rhythmically in lock-step, and Luther Dickinson does the rest. (xxxv-10)

—**Leland Rucker**

**CHAMPION
JACK DUPREE:**

**NEW ORLEANS
BARRELHOUSE BOOGIE**

Columbia/Legacy CK 52834 (CD). 1940–41/1993. Lester Melrose, prod.; David Mitson, remastering. A–D. TT: 68:19

⏪ These first recordings by the great singer and pianist Champion Jack Dupree were made in Chicago for Okeh records, but they carry the history of New Orleans barrelhouse piano, as taught to the then–30-year-old Dupree by Willie "Drive 'Em Down" Hall. Dupree's forceful, two-handed style and tales of gambling, doping, womanizing, and Mardi Gras revelry are all over this set, which includes previously unreleased and alternate tracks, including a terrific version of "Oh, Red!" The classic is the ancient lament "Junker Blues," which inspired everybody from Professor Longhair to Dr. John, launched Fats Domino's career in its reimagined version, "The Fat Man," and continues its peripatetic journey through the music of contemporary New Orleans.—**John Swenson**

BOB DYLAN:
THE FREEWHEELIN'
BOB DYLAN

Columbia CL 1986 (mono LP). 1963. John Hammond, prod. AAA. TT: 50:06

⏪ I was just 14 years old when this disc first appeared, so it's hardly surprising that it slipped through my net. The other day I saw the man himself perform live at the Royal Albert Hall—he played a wonderful version of "Blowin' in the Wind" that

was quite different from the standout track on this album. Although I've long been chary of vinyl reissues, which usually lack the dynamic impact of my originals, I can say only that my recent purchase of this mono LP of *Freewheelin'* is very much the exception. It sounds just wonderful, it's well crammed with classic tracks—and it's back in print, including a hi-rez download version from PonoMusic.—**Paul Messenger**

**ÉTHIOPIQUES 10:
TEZETA—ETHIOPIAN
BLUES AND BALLADS**

Buda Musique 82222-2 (CD). 2002. Francis Falceto, series prod.; Wilfrid Harpailié, remastering. ADD. TT: 74:38

CALVIN RUSSELL:
CROSSROADS

Last Call 3064132 (CD). 2000. Patrick Mathé, prod.; Daniel Laurent, eng. DDD? TT: 68:21

⏪ Two faces of the blues for this year's "R2D4," two records from artists with a French connection. Calvin Russell hails from Texas and spent much of his life as a rather shady character, if stories can be believed. Around the age of 40 (he's now 60) he took up music. It's easy to hear where his roots are—there's a deep feeling of the blues in his music, but there's also a lot of country and rock'n'roll. Russell isn't well known in America, it seems, but was discovered by a French producer and regularly tours in France. *Crossroads* documents an "unplugged" tour, just a man and his guitar. In the liner notes, Russell says he once read one should "Always decorate construction, never construct decoration," and that on this CD the listener can have a look at the construction without decoration and hopefully will find it solid. Solid it most certainly is; an honest record that rewards repeated listening on the strength of both music and lyrics.

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The story behind the second CD, Vol.10 in the ongoing *éthiopiennes* series, merits a longer article. Briefly, Frenchman Francis Falceto hears Ethiopian music from the 1970s and tries to contact the musicians, but learns that the music he likes was stifled by the Ethiopian regime. He then discovers Amha Eshèté, the label owner who produced most of the music he likes so much, in exile in Washington. They go to Greece to salvage the master tapes, and are now putting out a series of compilations to international acclaim, while treating the musicians fairly (à la *Buena Vista Social Club*). This volume collects tracks recorded between 1970 and 1974. The music is accessible to ears that haven't heard much African music; the musicians clearly have listened to a lot of American blues and jazz (John Coltrane would have been proud of some of the sax solos). Fantastic.

—Markus Sauer

HENRY FIOI: FE, ESPERANZA Y CARIDAD

Henry Fiol, lead vocal; Alfredo "Chocolate" Armenteros, Lionel Sanchez, trumpets; Charlie Rodriguez, tres; Alfredo Valdes, piano; Guillermo Edghill, contrabass; Alberto Valdes, conga; Johnny Rodriguez, bongos; Roberto Torres, maracas, guiro, clave; Yayo El Indio, Ramon Rodriguez, Roberto Torres, chorus

SAR SCD-1012 (CD). 1979/1990. Roberto Torres, prod.; Jon Fausty, eng. AAD? TT: 46:49

🔊 *Fe, Esperanza y Caridad* (Faith, Hope and Charity) is so beautifully penetrating, so heavy with warmth and passion and soul, that it's nearly painful. Henry Fiol's voice—at times childlike, leaping with energy and fire, and at times seemingly on the verge of tears, bearing the weight of so many tired lives—is matched by delicate piano, regal trumpet, bold tres guitar, and hypnotic percus-



sion. Fiol's unique timbre and vocal delivery work to transcend the limitations of language, precisely communicating deep and personal emotion, while the all-star band perfectly complements his every gentle quaver and broken word, building a memorial to Cuban country music, *son montuno*, and the life from which it springs.

Jon Fausty is responsible for the fantastic sound. The overall presentation is slightly dark, with superb dynamics and sense of space. There's a human quality to it—like the music it has captured, the recording breathes and pulses with vitality. I want to memorize these sounds and share these songs with everyone I love. Very simply, *Fe, Esperanza y Caridad* has changed my life. I wouldn't want to live without it. It is an absolutely devastating piece of art.

—Stephen Mejias

JOÃO GILBERTO: THE LEGENDARY JOÃO GILBERTO

João Gilberto, vocals, guitar; Antonio Carlos Jobim, piano; others

World Pacific CDP 7 93891 2 (CD). 1990. Aloysio de Oliveira, Ismael Corrêa, orig. prods.; Ron McMaster, remastering. AAD. TT: 75:50

🔊 It's been called the Holy Grail of bossa nova: Gilberto's first three Brazilian LPs from 1959, 1960, and 1961, plus a couple of tracks from an EP of songs from the movie *Black Orpheus*, all jumbled together on one hard-to-find CD. Here are the striking Antonio Carlos



Jobim compositions that started it all—"Chega de Saudade," "Desafinado," "Samba de Una Nota Só" ("One Note Samba")—delivered in Gilberto's insidiously cool voice, accompanied by his subversively rhythmic guitar. Here also are "Bim Bom" and "Hô-Ba-La-Lá," the pioneering Gilberto compositions that introduced the bossa beat. More or less tasteful instrumental accompaniments occasionally intrude, but Gilberto's solo artistry shines through.

—Larry Birnbaum

THE GOLDEN EAGLES FEATURING MONK BOUDREAU: LIGHTNING AND THUNDER

Rounder 2073 (CD). 1988. Ron Levy, prod.; Mark Bingham, eng. DDD. TT: 46:53

🔊 The chants and dances of the Mardi Gras Indians are now fairly well known, especially after the Black Indians were used as one of the main story lines of David Simon's epic HBO series *Treme*, about the recovery of culture in New Orleans after the flood that followed hurricane Katrina in 2005. But only a few years before, the Black Indians were still virtually secret societies whose Sunday "practices" at various New Orleans locations were hermetic undertakings attended only by the initiated. In 1987, this historic recording took us inside one of these practices for the first time, when engineer Mark Bingham, who would later open the studio Pietry

Street Recording, in New Orleans, recorded for posterity Big Chief Monk Boudreaux and his gang, the Golden Eagles. Accompanied only by voices and percussion, Monk is more than just a storyteller in these tracks as he sings "Two-Way-Pak-E-Way," "Shallow Water, Oh Mama," "Shotgun Joe," "Indian Red," and "Sew-Sew-Sew." Monk is a conjurer, a celebrant at a profoundly spiritual event, and the reverie that built at this service must be heard to be believed.—John Swenson

GRUPO FOLKLORICO Y EXPERIMENTAL NUEVAYORQUINO: CONCEPTS IN UNITY

Salsoul SAL 2-400 (LP). 1975. Rene Lopez, Andy Kaufman, prods.; John Laico, Don Puluse, Lou Waxman, engs. AAA. TT: 60:17

🔊 I remember the day my uncle Edwin introduced me to these guys. I was in the middle of a deep, deep obsession with New York City salsa, and thought I had a pretty good grasp on things. I'd become familiar with the rhythms and the progressions, I knew the percussionists and the brass sections and the *soneros*. But then I heard "Anabocoa," and everything I thought I knew about salsa was obliterated. In Grupo Folklórico, a collection of New York City's most versatile and accomplished Latin jazz musicians come together to explore the roots of salsa, and to honor the traditional musical forms of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Africa. In "Anabocoa," bassist Andy Gonzalez enters with a slow and simple four-note riff. He plays it just twice before the song suddenly erupts into a furious and maddening groove. About three minutes in, Manny Oquendo fashions what might be the most powerful timbale solo ever captured on tape—it's the sound of Puerto Rico, Cuba, Africa, New York City, the oceans,

the mountains, and the whole damn world coming together to celebrate life. Everything there is to know about everything is banged out in those perfect strokes. Musical genres and cultural boundaries are erased, leaving only concepts in unity. (XXI-2)—**Stephen Mejias**

YASMINE HAMDAN: YA NASS

Crammed Discs Cram 210 (CD, 2013). Marc Collin, prod., eng.; Yasmine Hamdan, eng. DDD? TT: 62:59

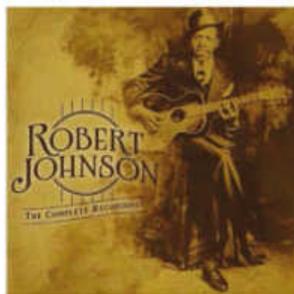
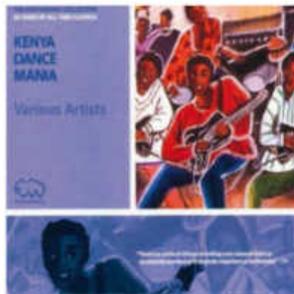
My second selection comes from another Paris-based artist, Lebanon-born singer Yasmine Hamdan. After founding Soapkills, the only electro-pop duo in the Arab world, she ended up in France, where she eventually teamed up with Marc Collin, of Nouvelle Vague fame, who produced and cowrote much of this album.

Ya Nass is a rewarding mixture of cultures that marries Arabic elements—though fluent in English and French, Hamdan sings entirely in various Arabic dialects, and takes some melodies from such classic Arabic singers as Oum Kalthoum—to Western song structures, rhythms, and instrumentation (including a host of old analog synths from Collin's collection, such as a Roland Jupiter 8 and a Chroma Polaris). This is very much music for grown-ups: reflective, seductive, generally mid-tempo or slower, and dominated by Hamdan's fairly deep, hugely expressive voice. Wonderful.—**Markus Sauer**

HAZMAT MODINE: BAHAMUT

Wade Schuman, Randy Weinstein, vocals & harmonica; Steve Elson, saxophone; Pamela Fleming, trumpet; Joseph Daly, tuba; Pete Smith, Michael Gomez, guitar; Richard Huntley, drums; Huun-Huur-Tu throat singers

Barbès BR0014 (CD). Wade Schuman, prod., Scott Lehrner, prod., eng. Jan Rosenberg, Peter



Karl, engs. DDD? TT: 67:57

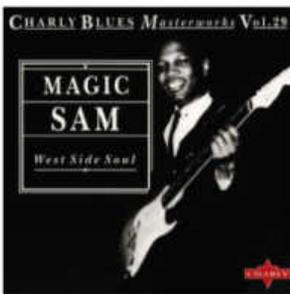
Hazmat Modine (the first part of the name is a contraction of *hazardous materials*, the latter a brand of radiator) is the kind of group that makes you consider moving to New York City just so you can hear it regularly. Led by harmonica player extraordinaire Wayne Schurman, the band has a sound that's unique, robust, and warm (not least thanks to its bass lines being provided by a tuba). The music is based on the blues, but adds any number of elements from around the world, including Klezmer, Hawaiian guitar, a cimbalom, and the Tuvan throat singers Huun-Huur-Tu. It sounds strange on paper, but it works fantastically well, and is by far my most-played album this year.—**Markus Sauer**

HUSSEIN EL MASRY: BETWEEN THE NILE AND THE GANGES

Hussein El Masry, lute; Narendra Bataju, sitar; Adel Shams El-Din, Hanif Khan, percussion

Institut du Monde Arabe 321021 (CD). No prods., engs., listed. 2000. DDD. TT: 53:53

One of my favorite discs at the moment, this



collaboration is a musical meeting of two of the world's great musical traditions, the Arabian and the Indian. A single work that runs the entire length of the CD takes you on a slow journey. The interplay is cautious, maybe even tentative at first, but gains confidence and pace as it develops. The perfect antidote to designed-by-number, overproduced, three-minute pop-chart trash. The sound fits the music: not too compressed, good clarity, and unexciting—in the most positive sense possible.—**Markus Sauer**

THE INCREDIBLE STRING BAND: WEE TAM & THE BIG HUGE

Hannibal HNCD 4802 (2 CDs). 1968/1994. Joe Boyd, prod.; John Wood, eng. AAD. TT: 87:49

Almost 40 years ago, I knew a young woman who lived out of her battered VW bug and owned only six records, every one an Incredible String Band album: two of them were *Wee Tam and The Big Huge*. If I had to pare my own collection down to a hundred or so, these would be among them. This is the ISB—Robin Williamson and Mike Heron—at their height

of late-'60s hippie inspiration, when the Everything that then seemed just around the corner sometimes actually occurred. Making "world music" long before it was called that, the two mixed vocal styles from India and their native Glasgow with Jamaican rhythms, Irish harp, fiddle, organ, sitar, pennywhistle, skiffle, and old-timey string-band music to create a sound that has never been imitated, not that anyone ever tried. It all supported the timelessly Blakean lyrics of Williamson, whose sole rival as a master imagist was Bob Dylan, and then only briefly: "In time her hair grew long and swept the ground / And seven blackbirds carried it out behind / It bore the holy imprint of her mind / As green-foot slow she moved among the seasons." The sound is legendary producer Joe Boyd's clear, pristine best. (XVII-12)—**Richard Lehnert**

JAH WOBBLE: MOLAM DUB

30 Hertz HZCD12 (CD). 2000. Jah Wobble, prod., mix. ADD? TT: 68 ecstatic minutes

Pull up a seat and watch two musical universes collide. Jah Wobble has created a series of Asian Dub discs, each focused on a different region. They're all good, but this is my favorite. Wobble craftily assembles a stack of tracks capturing 1000-year-old Southern Laotian folk styles, then melts them down with 1000-foot-tall dubby bass lines. On the Laotian side are beguiling male and female singers and the insistent reedy sound of the *khene*, a Laotian bamboo mouth organ. On the Wobble side are his circular subterranean bass lines, guitar, and mashed percussion. The result is possibly the best East Meets West collaboration ever. If you buy only one Laotian Dub record this year, this should be it.—**Jon Iverson**

ROBERT JOHNSON:
THE COMPLETE
RECORDINGS:
THE CENTENNIAL
COLLECTION

Columbia/Legacy 88697-85907-2 (2 CDs). 1936–37/2011. Stephen C. LaVere, prod.: Steve Berkowitz, A&R supervision; Seth Winner, mastering. TT: 111:16

 Robert Johnson had some success as an itinerant musician before dying at age 27 in 1938. He later achieved prominence via 1961 and 1970 reissues of his recordings that fed the era's appetite for authentic acoustic blues. Eric Clapton, Bob Dylan, Keith Richards, and a host of others are Johnson disciples, but many listeners have yet to hearken to his message. If you still doubt the power of Delta blues, consider this album of all 29 songs the master recorded. It's chapter and verse, replicated from newly obtained originals, and it could convert you. (XXXIV-7)

—David Lander

KENYA DANCE
MANIA:
VARIOUS ARTISTS

Earthworks 3-1024-2 (CD). 1991. Trevor Herman, prod.: Frank Arkwright, mastering. AAD. TT: 72:05

 The Kenyan benga style blends Congolese, Zimbabwian, and South African dance-pop with the music of the Luo people of southwestern Kenya. This collection includes killer benga hits of the 1970s and '80s—tightly meshed confections of sweet, slightly melancholy singing (mainly in Swahili or Luo), rhythmically twining guitars, hard-punching horns, throbbing bass lines, and clipped, thumping drums. Among the artists are Gabriel Omolo, whose "Lunch Time" went gold in 1973; H.O. Kabaselleh, whose career was interrupted by a prison term for sedition; Les Wanyika, a spin-off from the mostly Tanzanian group

Simba Wanyika; and Wanyika Super Les Les, a spin-off from Les Wanyika. Most compelling, however, is the military band Maroon Comandos, whose stately 1976 smash, "Charonyi Ni Wasi," is surpassed only by their stomping 1989 hit, "Mawakaribishwa Na Maroon."

—Larry Birnbaum

JULIAN LAGE:
WORLD'S FAIR

Julian Lage, acoustic guitar

Modern Lore 99767 (CD). 2015. Julian Lage, Matt Munisteri, prods.: Armand Hirsch, eng. DDD. TT: 37:56

 At 26, Julian Lage sat down with his 1939 Martin 000-18 and mostly original compositions and delivered one of the great albums in the chronicles of solo guitar. From the speedy intricacy of "Peru," "Gardens," and "Missouri" to the contemplative beauty of "40's" and "Day and Age," Lage set the bar high for personal expression and unforced assimilation of influences. Echoes of folk, country, and American roots, jazz early and modern: Lage rendered it all with a singing tone and fierce yet remarkably easygoing technique, creating moments "on the knife's edge of guitar mischief," to quote co-producer Matt Munisteri from the liner notes.—David R. Adler

LOS CAMPEROS
DE VALLES:
LA PASIÓN

Heliodoro Copado, violin; Marcos Hernández, voice, huapanguera; Gregorio Solano, voice, jarana
Corason CO162 (CD). 2004. Eduardo Llerenas, prod.: Salvador Tecero, eng. DDD. TT: 55:05

 The *sones huastecas* are a chunk of Mexican roots music unlike anything else on the planet. Propelled by the crisp, galloping, layered rhythms of the *huapanguera* and *jarana*, the singers sing in falsetto, vaulting the words up to the edge of space in alternating,

interlocking stanzas of song. Between verses the violinist plies his art in unpredictable bursts of impossible speed and unlikely direction. It is a sound of extraordinary vitality—a music that defies the laws of physics as it lifts hearts and feet. Producer Eduardo Llerenas scoured Mexico for its greatest practitioners of *sones*, and found in Los Camperos de Valles arguably the truest, most acrobatic players of *huastecas*. Limber of voice, driving in their rhythmic underpinnings, and without parallel in violinistic invention, this trio possesses not only the virtuosity of this incredible regional style, but also its heart and soul.

—Daniel Buckley

LOS JAIVAS:
ALTURAS DE MACHU
PICCHU

CBS LIL-0003 (LP). 1981. Los Jaivas, prods.: Daniel Michel, Dominique Strabach, Rolf Hanekamp, Luciano Piccinno, Jan Twilley, Jon Schroeder, engs. AAA? TT: 37:26

 *Alturas de Machu Picchu*, the magnum opus of Chilean prog-folk band Los Jaivas, is the ultimate concept album. With lyrics by Pablo Neruda (cribbed from his *Canto General*), Los Jaivas meld Incan instruments with wailing guitars to transfer the listener to a lost city high in the mountains. The music reflects on legends of unified peoples, unknown aspects of the ancient past, and synthesized hints of the existence of extraterrestrials. As a band, Los Jaivas personified the struggle between the Westernized nation Chile was to become and the native roots it clung to before and during the dictatorship of Pinochet. The forlorn but aggressive tone of *Alturas* funnels that struggle through the story of the lost Incan nation.

—Ariel Bitran

MAGIC SAM:
WEST SIDE SOUL

Delmark DD-615 (CD). 1967/1993. Bob Koester, prod.: Stu Black, eng. AAD. TT: 45:52

 The Chicago bluesman Magic Sam, who died in 1969 at the age of 32, had cut a number of singles before he recorded this, his first album, in 1967. It established his reputation internationally and still stands as a modern blues classic, showcasing his powerful, pellucid singing and molten-metal guitar playing. Like Robert Johnson, Sam had an uncanny ability to make other artists' material his own. He wrote only three of the 11 songs here, but his covers of records by B.B. King, Bobby Bland, Little Junior Parker, Jimmy McCracklin, and J.B. Lenoir surpass the originals. He even outdoes Johnson himself on "Sweet Home Chicago," although Sam's version is based on Junior Parker's.—Larry Birnbaum

MEMPHIS
COUNTRY BLUES:
GREATEST HITS VOL. 1

Will Batts, Cannon's Jug Stompers, Sleepy John Estes and Hammie Nixon, Hattie Hart, Jim Jackson and Tampa Red, Furry Lewis, Noah Lewis, Memphis Jug Band, Memphis Minnie, Hambone Willie Newbern, Frank Stokes, Will Weldon, Bukka White, Robert Wilkins, others
Memphis Archives MA7001 (CD). 1994. Richard James Hite, prod.: Eddie Dattel, exec. prod.: Rick Caughron, eng. ADD. TT: 50:44

 Eddie Dattel, bred and based in Memphis, champions hometown contemporaries on his Inside Sounds label, but reserves his Memphis Archives imprint for classics like this anthology. It comprises selections by early blues performers associated with the traditionally musical city, and Dattel credits its producer, the late Richard Hite, who was also Canned Heat's bassist, for choosing archival jewels that cast their glow

beyond the boundaries of purist circles. When Hite selected these 17 performances from 78rpm discs pressed in the 1920s and '30s, he might have been stringing firecrackers—there's not a dud among them. Hite and engineer Rick Caughron transferred the material meticulously, using just enough filtering to minimize artifacts while preserving the music and its vintage character. Some of these artists were rediscovered decades later and wreathed with laurel, while others vanished, yet all deliver compelling performances here. Vocals are vibrant, ensemble playing is superb, and the spirit that inspired Bob Dylan, the Rolling Stones, and other latter-day apostles of the blues is evident throughout.

—David Lander

SERGIO MENDOZA Y LA ORKESTA: MAMBO MEXICANO!

Cosmica (CD). 2012. Sergio Mendoza, Joey Burns, prods.; various engs. ADD? TT: 39:12

 Indie-rock group Calexico has a reputation for bringing the best of Tucson, Arizona, out on the road with them around the globe, but no band has created the international buzz that Sergio Mendoza y La Orkesta has. A BIG band in every sense, this horn-and-percussion-driven group brings back the mambo and celebrates the best of classic popular Latin music with campy wit, strong vocals, and fierce solo and ensemble firepower. It's the live band to beat in our time, and shows no sign of relinquishing the top spot.

This debut album, produced by Mendoza and Calexico's Joey Burns, presents somewhat abbreviated but no less superbly arranged versions of Mendoza's idiomatic and idiosyncratic originals—some tongue-in-cheek, some irrepressibly grabbing.

But for fans of the group's live shows, hearing these tunes in the drapery of effects and the sonic possibilities of the studio shines new light on some of the most original music to come out in decades.—Daniel Buckley

AMOS MILBURN: BOOZE, BABES, BLUES & BOOGIE: THE ESSENTIAL AMOS MILBURN

Indigo IGODCD 2506 (2 CDs). 2002. Neil Slaven, compiler; Sound Recording Technology, remastering. Mono. AAD. TT: 2:15:31

 Nearly forgotten today, Amos Milburn helped pave the way for rock'n'roll with stomping boogie-woogies and rhythmic ballads, and bridged the gap between blues crooner Charles Brown and Fats Domino.

This two-CD set begins with Milburn's first recordings for Aladdin in 1946 and leaves off in 1951, in the middle of his string of drinking songs (omitting "One Scotch, One Bourbon, One Beer," revived by John Lee Hooker as "One Bourbon, One Scotch, One Beer"). Nearly all of Milburn's hits are here, from the rollicking "Chicken Shack Boogie" to the rueful "Bad, Bad Whiskey," but the hardest rocker is his non-hit version of the Will Bradley Trio's "Down the Road a Piece," a white-boogie takeoff that Milburn reclaims as an African-American anthem.

—Larry Birnbaum

MISSISSIPPI JOHN HURT: AVALON BLUES: THE COMPLETE 1928 OKEH RECORDINGS

Columbia/Legacy CK 64986 (CD). 1996. Lawrence Cohn, prod.; David Mitson, mastering. AAD. TT: 38:17

 Rediscovered in 1963, Mississippi John Hurt enjoyed three years of fame on the folk circuit before his death at the age of 74. He recorded a few albums

during his comeback years, but his reputation still rests on these 13 tracks, which he cut for Okeh in 1928. A self-taught musician who never traveled far from his home in Avalon, Mississippi, Hurt developed a gently rolling finger-picking technique that's closer to old-time banjo playing than to the harsh bottleneck style of his fellow Delta guitarists. He performed blues and spiritual songs, but drew heavily on a repertoire of topical ballads that date from the ragtime era. His sweet singing and smooth picking lend an eerie air of innocence to murder ballads like "Stack O'Lee" and "Frankie" (his riveting transformation of "Frankie and Johnny"), and he gives vivid poignancy to the John Henry legend on "Spike Driver Blues."

—Larry Birnbaum

TSHALA MUANA: SOUKOUS SIREN

Shanachie 64031 (CD). 1991. Tshala Muana, Lou Deprijck, prods.; Robert Vosgien, remastering. AAD? TT: 49:38

 Despite her album's title, this Congolese pop diva specializes in the *mutuashi* rhythm of the Luba people—not, strictly speaking, *soukous*. Of course, the traditional *mutuashi* beat has been thoroughly slicked up here, mostly by guitarist-arranger Souzy Kasseya, who practically deserves equal billing, even though Muana wrote most of the catchy-as-Velcro songs. Muana's buoyant African melodies—in "Tshibola" and "Lwa-Touye," for example—ride Kasseya's hypnotically twining guitar as the musicians lock in to compelling dance grooves. Every track is a winner, but the first and longest, the joint Muana-Kasseya composition "Ndeka Ya Samuel," stands out, grinding ineluctably to an exhilarating climax.

—Larry Birnbaum

NITTY GRITTY DIRT BAND: WILL THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN

EMI America GFX-2071-3 (3 LPs), E2-46589 (2 CDs). 1972/1985. William E. McEuen, prod.; Derio Zappas, eng.; Rick Horton, Rex Collier, engs., mix; Doug Sax, mastering. AAA/AAD. TT: 119:30

 I've owned this on vinyl for many years, but only recently have come to appreciate its exceptional virtues—finding one's way around six sides is tough. But these three LPs are well worth extended exploration, and arguably comprise the definitive tribute to what many consider the classic era of Nashville country music. Besides featuring a guest list that includes a plethora of country standards and stars—Vassar Clements, Merle Travis, Maybelle Carter, Earl Scruggs, Roy Acuff, Doc Watson—the recordings themselves have a delightful freshness and immediacy that are all too rarely found in current recordings. The phrase "live in the studio" springs to mind. (XXIII-2, XXXVI-7)—Paul Messenger

NIYAZ: SUMUD

Six Degrees 657036-1187-2 (CD). 2012. Azam Ali, Carmen Rizzo, Loga Ramin Torkian, prods., engs. DDD? TT: 46:22

 Built on a strong rhythmic foundation, Niyaz's music is an electronica version of Dead Can Dance's Middle Eastern tendencies. Unfortunately, the sound is short of audiophile ecstasy due to some aggressive processing, but the album still follows my favorite precept: modern realizations of ancient textures and forms. The musicianship is topnotch, while Azam Ali's singing, mostly in Persian (as well as Turkish and Arabic), beguiles as her voice weaves in and out of the shifting beats. These are timely songs of cultural struggle and

endurance—*Sumud* means “steadfastness”—but even without the deeper meanings encoded in the lyrics, there’s plenty to enjoy.—**Jon Iverson**

ODETTA AND LARRY: THE TIN ANGEL

Fantasy Original Blues Classics
OBCCD-565-2 (CD). 1953/1993.
Peggy Tolk-Watkins, prod.; C.L.
Stevens, eng. AAD. TT: 50:32

 The rank and file of folk fans thinned considerably after the 1960s, but Odetta soldiered on. Until shortly before her death, in December 2008, at age 77, she was meeting the demands of a travel and performance schedule that would have derailed others afflicted by her health problems. This CD is a flashback to the singer in her early 20s. Convinced that prejudice would make an operatic career impossible, she had turned to folk music and was working at The Tin Angel, a San Francisco saloon that recorded most of its performers. There’s no gratuitous producer-added padding here, just a collaborator, Larry Mohr, playing a banjo, and the sturdy young star-to-be with a guitar and her voluminous contralto. That voice proved as mighty as the trumpet of a biblical priest. Odetta, a point woman for civil rights, used it to make her troops shout; when they did, walls tumbled.—**David Lander**

ORQUESTA LA CONSPIRACION: ERNIE’S CONSPIRACY

Ernie Agosto, George Gentile, trumpets; Nelson Sanchez, piano; Willie Cintron, contrabass; Benito Gomez, timbales; Israel “Sabu” Martinez, bongos; Gene Golden, congas, percussion; Miguel Quintana, lead vocal; Justo Betancourt, Adalberto Santiago, chorus

Vaya/Fania FANI 7731301242 (CD). 1972/2006. Willie Colón, prod.; Jon Fausty, eng. AAD? TT: 38:49

 *Ernie’s Conspiracy* rises before you’re ready,

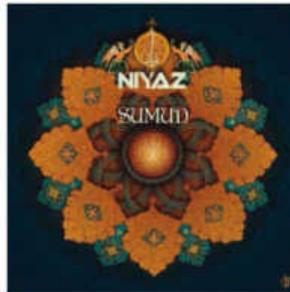


launching you into the face of Ernie Agosto’s burning, rollicking trumpet solo, all brass and jazz and infectious swing. Playful piano and precise percussion lock hands, twist, and twirl. The groove is irrepressible; the momentum must be maintained lest all hell break loose. Miguel Quintana strides in with such confidence, such subtle swagger, his gravelly voice evoking some marvelous combination of composure and ferocity—you’ll want to sing along, even if you don’t understand the words.

The adventurous arrangements were constructed by bandleader Agosto and pianist Nelson Sanchez, with production credit going to the revolutionary Willie Colón. Together they seamlessly fuse elements of rumba, samba, salsa, and soul to create an unpredictable, timeless whole. Engineer Jon Fausty does an exceptional job of preserving the integrity of the individual instruments, providing a realistic sense of scale and space. The remastering has been done lovingly, and the new packaging recalls a time when *albums* were meant to be caressed. Single songs can’t be called out; the entire work is an absolute killer determined to inspire spontaneous, unbridled celebration.—**Stephen Mejias**

EDDIE PALMIERI: AZUCAR PA’ TI (SUGAR FOR YOU)

Eddie Palmieri, piano; George Castro, flute; Barry Rogers, José Rodrigues, trombone; Dave Perez,



bass; Manny Oquendo, timbales, bongos; Tommy Lopez, congas; Ismael Quintana, lead vocals

Fania/Emusica 773 130 198-2 (CD). 1965/2007. Teddy Reig, orig. prod. AAD. TT: 35:59

 Eddie Palmieri was not the first to substitute trombones for the customary trumpets in a Cuban-style band, but it was he who brought the format to its acme with his aptly named 1960s ensemble La Perfecta. Highlights of this album, perhaps the group’s finest, include Barry Rogers’ expressive trombone in the opening bolero, “Solo Pensar en Ti,” and Manny Oquendo’s urgent timbales solo in “Los Cueros Me Lllaman.” But nothing can touch the album’s tour de force title track, a hypnotic nine-minute jam in which Palmieri’s piano rides a fierce groove to a dazzling climax. “Mambo!” shouts singer Ismael Quintana, but the music is pure salsa.—**Larry Birnbaum**

PATATO & TOTICO: PATATO & TOTICO

Eugenio “Totico” Arango, vocals; Carlos “Patato” Valdéz, percussion; Arsenio Rodríguez, tres; Israel “Cachao” López, bass; Mario Muñoz “Papaíto” Salazar, Francisco “Panchín” Valdéz, percussion; Hector Cadavieco, Mario Cadavieco, Juan “Curba” Dreke, Virgilio Martí, Tony Mayari, vocals
Verve 86244 (CD). 1968/2004. Teddy Reig, Pete Spargo, prods.; Val Valentin, eng. ADD? TT: 36:19

 Unlike the pure vocal-and-percussion folk rumbas of resident Cuban troupes such as Los Muñequitos, these expatriate street rumbas are accom-

panied by the tres guitar of Arsenio Rodríguez and the bass of Israel “Cachao” López, two of Cuba’s musical legends. Still, the album’s main draw is the blazingly intense conga drumming of Patato Valdéz, along with the trenchant lead singing of Totico Arango. Among the highlights are a transformation into a rumba of Jorge Ben Jor’s Brazilian samba “Mas Que Nada,” and the irresistibly throbbing “En el Callejón,” whose scattered pop-culture references include the chorus “Llegó Superman, bailando rock’n’roll” (Superman came dancing rock’n’roll).—**Larry Birnbaum**

ASTOR PIAZZOLLA Y SU QUINTETO TANGO NUEVO: TRISTEZAS DE UN DOBLE A

Astor Piazzolla, bandoneón; Fernando Suarez Paz, violin; Horacio Malvicino, guitar; Pablo Ziegler, piano; Hector Console, bass

Messidor 15970 (CD). 1987. Götz A. Wörner, prod.; Gregor Hornacek, eng. DDD. TT: 46:59

 The bandoneón, a member of the concertina family, was developed in Germany for the chordal accompaniment of hymn singing, and as a solo instrument presents several difficulties: the left and right buttonboards are different, and each button plays one note on the push and another on the pull. Astor Piazzolla (1921–1992) used the bandoneón to drag the tango—sometimes kicking and screaming—into the 20th century. He was uniquely suited to the task, having studied composition under fellow Argentinean Alberto Ginastera, as well as with Nadia Boulanger, in Paris. This exceptional live recording, made in Vienna by Austrian Broadcasting, documents Piazzolla and his second quintet at the height of their powers. The

title track is a master class in improvisation, while the encore, "Tangata," crackles with electricity. Now out of print, and used copies don't go for peanuts—but they're very much worth it. (There's a studio album with the same title on the Personality label, but this live recording is the one you want.)—**John Marks**

RODRIGO Y GABRIELA: LIVE MANCHESTER AND DUBLIN

Rubyworks RWXCD12 (CD). 2004. Rodrigo y Gabriela, prods.: Graham Higgins, Ciaran Hopkins, engs. DDD. TT: 36:56

 File under Jazz. No, make that Heavy Metal. Or perhaps even Folk. Rodrigo y Gabriela come from Mexico City, where Rodrigo was in a heavy-metal band that used to practice in Gabriela's mother's house. The pair started playing acoustic instruments together and traveled to Europe, where they busked, jammed, and eventually broke through into the festival-and-concert circuit.

I love live recordings, even those recorded on MiniDisc players, as this one was (!)—the complete absence of any onstage or studio signal processing gives this disc brilliant realism and dramatic dynamics. The two play their acoustic guitars with great communication, verve, expression, and enthusiasm, liberally using the guitar bodies to add percussion. Of the eight tracks—mostly compositions by themselves or Metallica—the four from Manchester feature just the two guitars; the Irish concert adds violins and voices for some welcome variety.

—**Paul Messenger**

JIMMY ROGERS: LUDELLA

Antone's ANTO012 (CD) 1990. Clifford Antone, exec. prod.: Kim Wilson, prod.: Derek O'Brien, asst. prod. No engs. listed. ADD ? TT: 52:27

 Despite the lawyerly, bean-counting, and often despicable thing it has become, the music business was once a different place, populated by genuine characters, and few were as rare and generous and full-throated devoted to music as Clifford Jamal Antone. In 1975, he opened the first Antone's club in Austin, Texas, with a show by Clifton Chenier. Although it moved locations several times, Antone's became a routine stop for road shows and the nexus for Austin's once-vaunted blues scene, cultivating such local talent as the Fabulous Thunderbirds, Stevie Ray Vaughan, and the great Lou Ann Barton, whose 1989 album, *Read My Lips*, on the Antone's Records label, is a stone classic. Though he lost control of the club thanks to brushes with the law in 1984 and 1996, Antone remained active in booking it, and also in the larger Austin music scene. This past spring, following a South By Southwest at which he was energized and ebullient, Antone died unexpectedly on May 23 in Austin at the age of 56. As anyone who ever heard one of his rhapsodic stage introductions knows, there will never be another like him. I dedicate this "R2D4" entry to this bear of a man, who, while he may have had some smarmy sides—he was a club owner, after all—was also a blues nut of the first order: what Austin writer John T. Davis called "as much an evangelist as an entrepreneur."

Released at what was arguably the peak of his now-dormant but still-in-print label, this pair of albums represents the work of some of Clifford's favorite musicians. Jimmy Rogers' *Ludella*, recorded half in the studio and half live at the club, is electric Chicago blues at its best. The proceedings are enlivened by players

like pianist Pinetop Perkins (who's now 92, and was in Austin being looked after by Antone when he died), harp player Kim Wilson, and, on the live cuts, guitarist Hubert Sumlin. Rogers standards like "Rock This House" and "Chicago Bound" have never sounded better. And you gotta love the unreadable black-on-dark-blue cover art.—**Robert Baird**

NITIN SAWHNEY: BEYOND SKIN

Outcaste CASTE9CD (CD). 1999. Nitin Sawhney, prod., eng.: Tony Ekononmedes, eng. DDD. TT: 58:28

 Though born in Britain, Nitin Sawhney is spiritually and ancestrally from India, and fuses the two cultural influences together in an utterly magical way to create a unique blend of trip-hop/drums 'n' bass electronic pop interleaved with classic Indian forms, voices, and instruments. *Beyond Skin* is the middle of his seven albums, and the best in my limited experience, in terms of both music and its superb recording quality. The album is bound together by the theme of an atomic bomb; each track has a short intro, mostly captured from radio newscasts. The intros can become tedious after repeated hearings, but in every other respect this is a splendid album. The elaborate and complex instrumentation is underpinned by sensation-ally powerful and imaginative bass lines, yet also includes strings, tablas, and decidedly Indian voices in a richly seductive tapestry.

—**Paul Messenger**

VINCENT SEGAL: T-BONE GUARNERIUS

Vincent Segal, electric & acoustic cello; Magic Malik, flute, vocals; Glenn Ferris, trombone; Gilles Coronado, Seb Martel, guitar; Piers Faccini, guitar, vocals; Vic Mona, mandolin; Pascal Palisco, accordion; Mama Chandja, vocals
Label Bleu LBLC 6646 (CD). 2003. Pierre Walfisz, prod.: Philippe

Teissier Du Cros, eng. ADD? TT: 66:06

 Hot on the heels of my selection for R2D4 2014 of *Chamber Music*, his collaboration with Ballaké Sissoko, let me introduce you to another Vincent Segal album. *T-Bone Guarnerius* is a collection of solo and duo tracks that showcase Segal's extremely wide horizon, including a bare-bones reworking of the Rolling Stones' "Under My Thumb," two tracks with American trombonist Glenn Ferris, and collaborations with Afro-French musician Mama Chandja. One critic labeled the album "transcultural zapping," and yes, you get a series of glimpses into different musical universes, but *zapping* may imply a certain superficiality or arbitrariness, and there's none of that. Each track stands up to scrutiny, and all are informed by Segal's sheer genius; I mean, what other musician would even dare to make an interesting piece of music out of the most irritating sound known to mankind: the bleeps of a pocket alarm (in "Mercurial Gramofon," partly recorded on the Paris Périphérique at 4am)? Every time I listen to this album, I find new beauty in it.

The tracks were recorded on a portable Nagra at various inspirational places in France, including a very small chapel on St. Michel Island, the woods of St. Germain, a flat in Marseille, and the courtyard of Segal's Paris home. The sound is honest, with a no-nonsense simplicity that I find very appealing.—**Markus Sauer**

MAGDA TAGLIAFERRO: D'OMBRE ET DE LUMIÈRE . . .

Music of Albéniz, Falla, Granados, Villa-Lobos
Magda Tagliaferro, piano
Ducretet-Thomson/EMI/Electric Recording Company ERC012

(180gm LP). 1960/2015. N/A. prod., eng.: Pete Hutchison, remastering. AAA. TT: 53:01

⚡ Risking your life for a piece of vinyl? Why not make it a rare and valuable one like this 1960 recital of fiery Spanish music, stunningly performed by Brazilian pianist Magda Tagliaferro, and regularly selling for \$500 on the used market? The Electric Recording Company's reissue of this Ducretet-Thomson Records release was made from the original master tapes using ERC's lovingly restored, all-tube Ortofon-Lyrec cutting system. It's limited to 300 copies, each costing around \$450. ERC reproduces every aspect of the original—including old-school letterpress printing of the jacket—to make their reissues look and feel authentic. The spacious, stereo sound is positively spectacular.

—Michael Fremer

CHRIS THILE & MICHAEL DAVES: SLEEP WITH ONE EYE OPEN

Nonesuch 527603-2 (CD). 2011. Chris Thile, Michael Daves, prods.; Vance Powell, Joshua Vance Smith, Mark Petaccia, engs. DDD. TT: 49:17

⚡ A man walks into a bar, orders a beer, and starts a conversation. Nothing earthshaking there—except the man in this story was mandolin virtuoso Chris Thile, the bar was the Baggot Inn in Brooklyn (home to the highest-power bluegrass jams in the Northeast), and the conversation was of the musical variety, with guitarist-singer Michael Daves, a Georgia-born bluegrass musician whose whip-crack style is best described as *high-strung and lonesome*. The classically trained Thile and the raw-energy Daves hit it off in a big way, and the result was *Sleep With One Eye Open*: two voices, two acoustic instruments, and 16



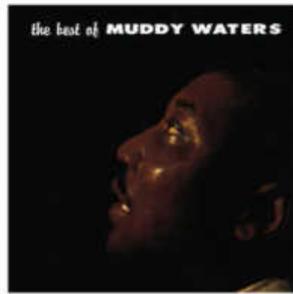
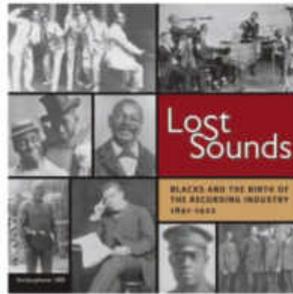
well-worn country numbers, no fewer than three of which were written by the late, great Lester Flatt. Pure magic. —Art Dudley

TINARIWEN: TASSILI

Anti- 87148-2 (CD). 2011. Jean Paul Romann, prod., eng.; Ian Brennan, prod.; Andris Balins, Jake Eckert, Tom Schick, Mark Wheaton, engs. DDD. TT: 53:54

⚡ Tinariwen is a Touareg group. Their music is traditional Arab desert, tempered with a strong awareness of Western traditions, especially those Western traditions that take their roots from Africa; eg, the blues. This latest record—the first to be partially sung in English—was recorded in a tent in South Algeria, with just a few overdubs and the addition of the Dirty Dozen Brass band on one track. The feeling is relaxed, confident, positive: the perfect antidote to stress, and a wonderful record to come home to. The sound is fairly dry, which I like, and lucid. —Markus Sauer

VARIOUS ARTISTS: LOST SOUNDS: BLACKS AND THE BIRTH OF THE RECORDING INDUSTRY 1891-1922



Archeophone ARCH 1005 (2 mono CDs). 1891-1922/2005. Richard Martin, prod., remastering; Meagan Hennessey, remastering. AAD. TT: 2:34:06

⚡ This companion to Tim Brooks's book of virtually the same title exposes a musical era that has been almost forgotten, perhaps because it was rife with racial stereotypes. Of the double album's four sections, one focuses primarily on the first black recording artist, the whistling and laughing singer George W. Johnson, while another includes classical music and earnest speeches. A third section consists mainly of lively ragtime and blues tunes played by once-renowned figures such as Wilbur Sweatman, Ford Dabney, and James Reese Europe. It's all fascinating, but most satisfying is the section on harmony singing, with radiant tracks such as "Little David Play on Your Harp/Shout All Over God's Heaven," by the Fisk University Jubilee Quartet.

—Larry Birnbaum

VARIOUS ARTISTS: WHAT'S SHAKIN'

The Butterfield Blues Band, Al Kooper, Eric Clapton & The Powerhouse, The Lovin' Spoonful,

Tom Rush

Collectors' Choice Music WWSUN151671 (CD). 1966/2005. Gordon Anderson, prod.; no eng. listed. ADD. TT: 38:33

⚡ Elektra Records' reissue series offers a fresh listen to this delightful compilation of obscure material by some of the most interesting musicians around in 1966. The Lovin' Spoonful delivers the self-descriptive "Good Time Music" and a couple of early rock'n'roll covers, "Almost Grown" and "Searchin'." The Butterfield Blues Band is snappy and soulful on "Spoonful," "Lovin' Cup," "Good Morning Little Schoolgirl," "Off the Wall," and "One More Mile." Al Kooper offers a prototype of the Blues Project staple "I Can't Keep from Crying Sometimes," and Tom Rush delivers "I'm in Love Again." Three tracks credited to Eric Clapton & The Powerhouse are from a one-off supergroup combining Clapton and Jack Bruce (pre-Cream) with Steve Winwood and drummer Pete York (both from the Spencer Davis Group). —John Swenson

MUDDY WATERS: THE BEST OF MUDDY WATERS

Chess/MCA CHD-31268 (CD). 1958/1987. Leonard Chess, prod.; Bill Putnam (?), eng. AAD? TT: 35:40

⚡ One of the first best-of albums by a blues artist, this one, despite many subsequent Waters collections, remains a landmark. Containing virtually all his early Chess hits, it captures Waters as he morphs the Delta blues of his native Mississippi into the electric blues of his adopted Chicago. Brilliantly assisted by harmonica ace Little Walter and others, Waters brings bottomless depth of feeling to material such as "Long Distance Call," "Louisiana Blues," and "Hoochie Coochie Man." But he's just as profound when accom-

panied only by his guitar and Big Crawford's bass in "I Can't Be Satisfied," his debut hit, and "Rollin' Stone," the song that gave that English rock band their name. (XX-7)

—Larry Birnbaum

**ERIC WEISSBERG
& MARSHALL
BRICKMAN:
NEW DIMENSIONS
IN BANJO AND
BLUEGRASS**

Eric Weissberg, banjo, mandolin; Marshall Brickman, banjo, guitar; Clarence White, guitar; Gordon Terry, fiddle; Jimmy Bond, bass

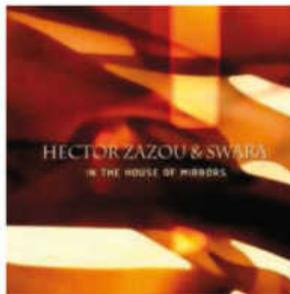
Elektra EKL 238 (mono LP). 1963. Jac Holzman, exec. prod.; Dino Lappas, eng. AAA. TT: 33:50

⏻ Shortly before the musicians of the so-called British Invasion began teaching Americans a thing or two about rock'n'roll, a similar movement took place in folk clubs and coffeehouses throughout the Northeast: Kids from New York and Massachusetts and Maine and New Jersey started playing bluegrass. Some of them—people like Bill Keith, Peter Rowan, Tony Trischka, Russ Barenberg, Clarence White, Roland White, Pete Wernick, and David Grisman—brought to the music so much talent, and so deep



an affinity for the stylings of Bill Monroe, Earl Scruggs, and other rural Southerners, that these Yankees soon put their own stamp on an entire genre.

Another such artist is Eric Weissberg, the dazzling banjoist behind the *Deliverance* soundtrack, who first made his mark in this collaboration with the multi-instrumentalist (and, later, *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan* screenwriter) Marshall Brickman. More than just another Scruggs imitator, Weissberg was noted for exploring, in his own way, the melodicism pioneered by Bill Keith. This LP, which can be found in stereo or mono—the former is fine, but the latter kicks its ass—also features on guitar the late Clarence White, who had yet to record under his own name, yet whose



groundbreaking syncopated style was already in place.

—Art Dudley

**JOHNNY WINTER:
SECOND WINTER:
LEGACY EDITION**

Columbia/Legacy C2K 85735 (2 CDs). 1969/2004. Johnny Winter, prod.; Jerry Rappaport, reissue prod. ADD. TT: 2:07:23

⏻ It originally emerged in 1969 as the world's only three-sided LP set—side 4 was literally blank. But the plethora of licks Winter had laid down on the LP's first three sides more than made up for the lack of a fourth. While his stiff but promising debut, *Johnny Winter*, emerged to critical acclaim, the fair-haired blues behemoth came out positively screamin' on *Second Winter*, blending traditional Texas blues with the power-trio variety plied by Cream and

the Jimi Hendrix Experience. Disc 2 of this *Legacy Edition* offers a crisp 1970 date at the Royal Albert Hall and a punchy, synthless rendition of brother Edgar Winter's hit "Frankenstein." (XXII-12)

—Bob Gulla

**HECTOR ZAZOU:
IN THE HOUSE OF
MIRRORS**

Hector Zazou, guitar, percussion, percussion programming, sound treatments; Ronu Majumdar, flute; Nils Petter Molvaer, trumpet; Zoltán Lantos, violin; Diego Amador, piano; Bill Rieflin, cymbals, gong

Crammed Discs Craw 47 (CD). 2009. Hector Zazou, prod., eng. DDD. TT: 63:58

⏻ For *In the House of Mirrors*, master Indian musicians were recorded in Mumbai, the tapes then minimally processed and "reflected" by Hector Zazou, who thus created a gorgeous musical mutation. I would love to have heard Zazou apply this approach to other styles of music, but he died just after this album's release. Not quite ambient but certainly not beat-driven, this music is what John Lennon might have imagined when he sang, "relax, turn off your mind, and float downstream." —Jon Iverson

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