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BEST CDS OF 2008

WNYC's Genre Mix: Top 10 Albums Of 2008

By John Schaefer



WNYC, *December 18, 2008* - This is a list for the Age of the iPod Shuffle, as more people listen to more types of music than ever before. For me, music has always been like food: No matter how much I like pizza, I still want to have sushi, or tandoori, or coq au vin. So, yes, my iPod may be an insane musical smorgasbord, but that's not so unusual these days. My "Recently Added" folder includes these Top 10 gems from 2008.

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WNYC'S GENRE MIX: TOP 10 ALBUMS OF 2008



1. The Bairns

Artist: Rachel Unthank
Song: Blackbird

A quietly extraordinary album from a well that you'd think would have run dry by now. Rachel and Becky Unthank and their friends resurrect old English and Scottish folk songs, and extend the tradition with some surprising new ones. The arrangements are largely acoustic and spare, but still full of mystery and/or excitement. And the sisters' harmonies are just beautiful.

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2. Angles

Artist: Dan Le Sac vs Scroobius Pip
Album: Angles
Song: Thou Shalt Always Kill

Finally, a full-length album from London's bearded poet/rapper/spoken-word artist and his slightly less bearded musical mate. Dan Le Sac creates his own beats and provides the musical backing and whatever singing is required, but it's all about Pip's wordplay, which can be funny, angry and emotionally true, all at the same time. Pip's first single, "Thou Shalt Always Kill," set the bar high, but he's gone from strength to strength, and all of his buzz-building songs are here.

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3. Santogold

Artist: Santogold
Song: L.E.S. Artistes

Don't dismiss her as a poor man's M.I.A. -- that might arguably apply to one or two songs on her debut, but the impressive thing about this album is the absolute confidence with which Santogold handles indie-rock, electronica and global hip-hop sounds.

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4. In Rainbows

Artist: Radiohead
Album: In Rainbows
Song: Nude

Yeah, I know: It seems as if this record has been around for years. But its official release date in the U.S. was Jan. 1, 2008, so it qualifies. It also qualifies as an instant classic -- accessible but still edgy, it satisfied the band's rabid fan base and reached listeners who'd once found some of the band's work to be cumulatively tiresome.

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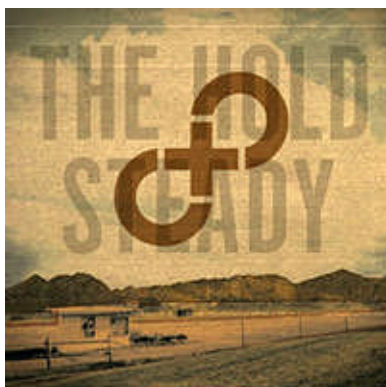


5. A Larum

Artist: Johnny Flynn
Album: A Larum
Song: The Box

Another dip into the vault of English folk, this time from a Southerner who writes his own, very contemporary folk songs. Johnny Flynn is a gifted multi-instrumentalist and singer who likes to sing surrounded by company; there's a certain back-of-the-pub quality here, despite the professional arrangements, and a bit of an echo of American country and blues, too.

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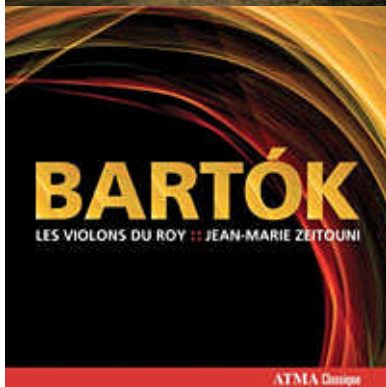


6. Stay Positive

Artist: The Hold Steady
Album: Stay Positive
Song: Constructive Summer

Craig Finn has taken some singing lessons, so the new Hold Steady record has a new sound. Rather than back Finn's quixotic speech-song with Springsteen-inflected indie-rock, the Brooklyn band scatters genuine singalong moments throughout its latest.

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8. Bartók: Les Violons du Roy

Artist: Various
Song: Music for Strings, Percussion & Celesta: IV

Hungarian composer Bela Bartok was at his best when writing in the style he called "Night Music" -- dark, moody pieces built around sound rather than traditional classical forms. Parts of MPSC are the darkest and moodiest of his Night Music. Still, there are plenty of great recordings of this work. The surprise here is how convincing this Quebecois ensemble, best known for its classy, sparkling interpretations of Baroque and early classical music, sounds in this 20th-century work.

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7. Glass Box

Artist: Philip Glass
Album: Glass Box
Song: Koyaanisqatsi, film score

Nothing new here, but what a terrific, comprehensive overview of one of the most influential and controversial composers of our time. From the genuine Minimalism of the early works to the landmark operas to the lush



symphonic and cinematic scores, this 10-CD extravaganza also sports portraits, photos and essays that add to the appeal.

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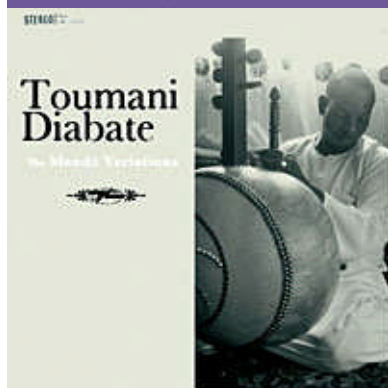


9. Not For Piano

Artist: Francesco Tristano
Song: Two Minds One Sound

A Luxembourgian classical pianist hangs out in Barcelona clubs, hears ambient electronica and wonders, "Why can't I play that?" He answers his own question with a piano, piano-and-electronics and two-piano collection of original works, covers and improvisations. It could've been a mess, but it works.

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10. Toumani Diabate: The Mande Variations

Artist: Toumani Diabate
Song: Elyne Road

The master of the West African kora (the traditional lute-harp of the royal court musicians of the Malian courts) goes solo, for the first time in almost 20 years. These exquisite compositions use the traditional but highly sophisticated tuning and interplay of the instrument's dual sets of strings to masterful effect.

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Recent First



S C (Skywarp) wrote:

"In Rainbows" doesn't, in fact, qualify. Although the CD format version of the album was released in January, 2008, the first, official release of the album was October 10, 2007. It was sanctioned by the band,

so that makes it a 2007 release. If we as a culture wish to legitimize a different model of distributing and consuming music free of the outmoded record label scheme, then we need to treat cutting-edge methods of distribution as such.

Friday, December 19, 2008 4:16:58 PM

Recommend (0)

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Ian Maynard (lanM) wrote:

I was referring to Toumani Diabate's Elyne Road

Thursday, December 18, 2008 5:12:47 PM

Recommend (4)

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Ian Maynard (lanM) wrote:

Absolutely Glorious! Soothing, mello, yet magical. Well worth the time.

Thursday, December 18, 2008 5:10:15 PM

Recommend (1)

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