

## Dave Hartl's 2010 Top Ten (or so) Most Influential Albums



### 1.) Devo: Something for Everybody

The surprise of the year for me. A gimmicky '80's synth band coming back with material that addresses contemporary concerns in a way that uses the latest synth technologies and software, makes a connection to the plasticity of their original sound, and rocks harder and longer than anything else I heard this year. I got interested when I found an article in Electronic Musician magazine in which Mark Mothersbaugh, the main Devo-tee mentioned that one of his favorite current synths was the impOscar, a virtual synth that I own and am particularly keen on myself. I had seen Devo on the Freedom of Choice tour back in the day and knew that Mothersbaugh and friends had been spending the

last couple decades doing cartoon music and commercials. So I figured at least his creative chops are up, I'll check it out.

This has been in constant rotation in my car changer ever since. Great driving music. The tunes are infectious, and the lyrics gradually worm their way into your head as you listen. The title cut's a concise economic summary from Obama's point of view, and the album seems to be about the expectations of America in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century without ever getting heavy, just funny and biting. If they tour, I'll definitely be there. I'm putting this album at #1 because it got more play from me and provided more pleasure than anything else in 2010.



## 2.) Prince: 20TEN

As I write this, I'm still in the afterglow of a live concert by Prince at the Izod center two weeks ago where I finally understood the breadth of this man's talent. For two weeks I've been replaying the images from

that night in my head and marveling at the sheer scale and creativity of the production, and the fact that the show included the spontaneous with the carefully programmed, simultaneously.

This album is unavailable in America; it came to me through a Dutch record seller on eBay. The reason is that Prince refuses to be under the thumb of any record company and does it his way or not at all. So you get a new release given away with a Daily Mirror newspaper one day, and that's it. You get a tour that is massive in its production scope, but plays 6 nights in two locales in NYC, and that's it. His last concert was in London for several weeks, for which he had them contractually commit to build him a home on the premises of the gig. His way or not at all.

How's the music? Funky and brilliant. State of the art production meets music that's casual and slick, thrown off by a man who could do it in his sleep, but cares too much to do that. If music making was this easy everyone would do it, but they don't. Prince has made it so you have to seek him out to hear him, but seems to have defined a new economic model for an established artist to follow. The music is key, but of no monetary value; it's the live show and tee shirt sales that really count. Is this a bad thing? And for this idea alone this CD appears on my radar in this post-record company reality.



### 3.) Stick Men: Soup

Tony Levin has always been the guy to watch as I learned and played the Chapman Stick. He plays with Peter Gabriel and King Crimson, in between filling in his idle hours with projects he wants to do, from duets in caves to touring with the California Guitar Trio. What he wanted to do this past summer was get together with his King Crimson bandmate/ drummer/ sequencer Pat Mastelotto and an even more technically accomplished Stick player (Michael Bernier) to form an electronic trio with pretty large sonic ambitions. They finished their tour at the humble Sellersville Theater near me and it was a state-of-the-art guerilla raid performance culminating in an unbelievable rendition of Stravinsky's "Firebird." No kidding. If you hear this CD, try to picture three guys making that much music because there's no overdubs, they do this live! Unapologetic and ambitious electronic music, doomed to commercial obscurity. But when I want a snapshot of what the technological reality of music making in 2010 was like, I'll look here.



#### 4.) The Firesign Theatre's Box of Danger

Anyone in their 50s or 60s that had any contact with the non-Nixonite side of things in the late '60's and '70's will remember the Firesigns and their first couple of records. The second release had a side-long radio episode of a twisted detective named Nick Danger. To this day, saying the first half of a line from that in the presence of the right crowd will produce the second half from a number of surrounding people, along with a sidewise half-grin and a sparkle in the eye – voila, instant friendship with kindred souls. They knew the secret handshake.

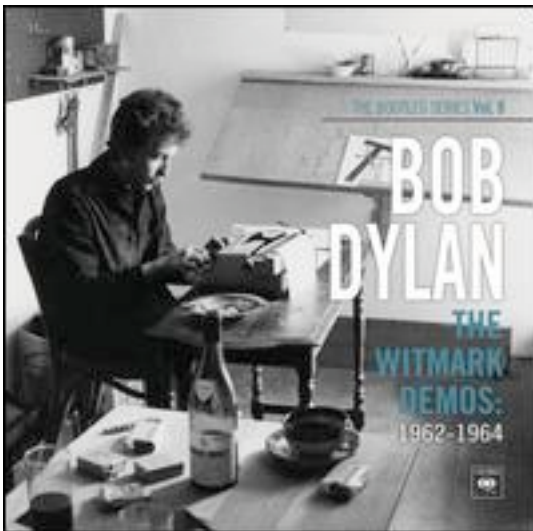
What this is is a 4-disc box of every Nick Danger recording the group did over the last 35 years or so. A bunch got released on Rhino records along the way, or aired on satellite radio in its infancy, but most of this was out of print and unavailable. This has it all, including a concert in the 1990's at the Keswick Theater in Glenside, PA, where I finally got to see them do this live. No, we weren't that stoned back then, they really *were* that funny!



## 5.) Shutter Island: Music from the Motion Picture

Martin Scorsese has always been one of my favorite directors (along with David Lynch, Stanley Kubrick, and Clint Eastwood). This year added the great Shutter Island to his output, which I saw twice in the theaters, a true rarity these days. On the second viewing, I was struck by the intensity with which the score added to the mood. Mostly, thank Robbie Robertson, guitarist from The Band, former coke-buddy to

Scorsese, and longtime musical contributor to his films. He picked some very dark and troubling 20<sup>th</sup>-Century pieces and mixed them with jarring contrasts to complement a very dark and troubling film. This 2-disc set is not for the happy music crowd, but it's as good as it gets for the dark-side lovers.



## 6.) Bob Dylan: The Witmark Demos: 1962-1964 (The Bootleg Series, Vol. 9)

New to the scene in the Village and still heavily in the thrall of Woody Guthrie, Dylan wrote furiously in one of the most amazing and enviable outpourings of creativity in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. What he wrote completely changed the music business and allowed rock to find a unique and relevant voice for its aesthetic, one that said that honesty trumps vocal pleasantness. His influence is so great that everyone just assumes it

was inevitable that things happened as they did. It wasn't. This man was instrumental in making it happen that way.

And here is the audio document of him at that creative peak, trying to do rough recordings of his tunes for other singers to cover, trying to pick up some cash out of the business money flow as it was in the early '60's. This music is bare and raw and sends shivers down my spine the same way that Robert Johnson connects with me. And it's about time it got a cleanup and major release.

One further note: this is Volume 9 of the bootleg series. Every one of these discs is worth having for the reasons above.

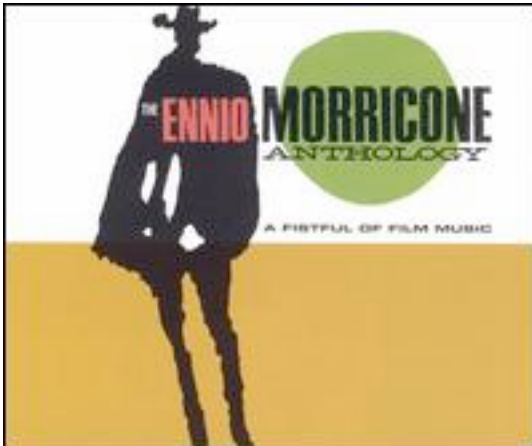


## 7.) John McLaughlin & the 4th Dimension: To the One

I'm glad McLaughlin has reconnected with his fusion background at this late date. He still plays in flurries of gnat notes, but age has



brought a subtlety and warmth that comes out of the music with repeated listenings. If he tours near you, see him. He's one of a kind.



## 8.) The Ennio Morricone Anthology: A Fistful of Film Music

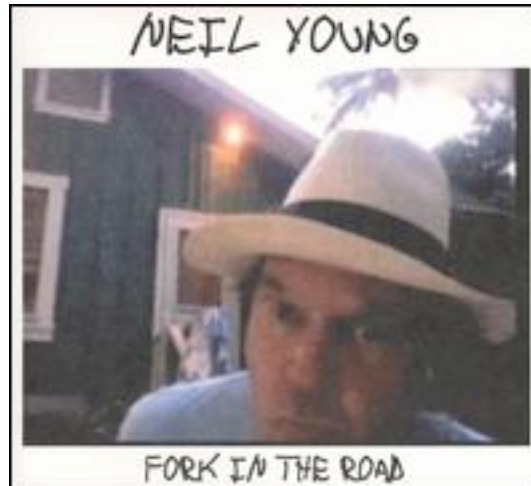
As I put the Night Café Trio repertoire together with Al Slutsky, we've been exploring film music possibilities from Jerry Goldsmith to Bernard Herrmann. To that end, I grabbed this disc at Princeton Record Exchange and was amazed at how much I missed by never noticing (for the most part) Morricone's scores. Some of the most eccentric instrumental choices in film reside in this music, giving it a personal stamp that eludes a lot of scorers. Here's another musician whose influence has been so pervasive that it's become overlooked as inevitable. Isolate it away from the filmed image by playing this disc and it becomes something else entirely. Brilliant stuff.



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## Brian Wilson: Reimagines Gershwin

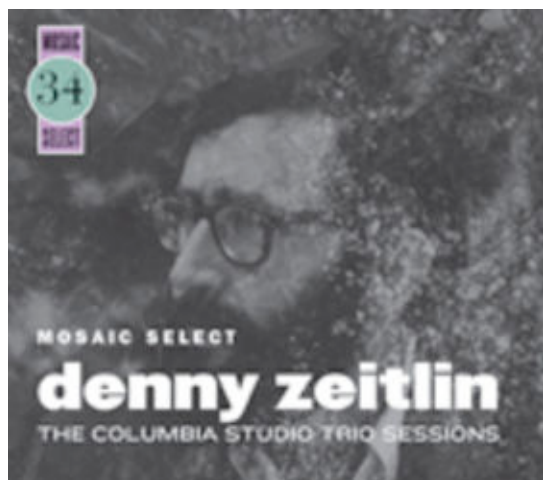
So here's the genius behind the Beach Boys, written off as brain-dead from the 1970's onward, alive, well, and creative long after "healthy" brothers Dennis and Carl Wilson passed away before him. Who would have ever guessed? Here's also a bunch of tunes, popular ditties by Gershwin, that have passed into the "heard too many times to count" category for me, squeezed dry and hard with nothing new to offer. But wait! What's that? From the opening notes of the a capella intro to "Rhapsody in Blue", Brian comes through and makes me hear new possibilities and ideas I never suspected in these old chestnuts. The title is completely accurate. He doesn't "sing" Gershwin or "play" him, he really does reimagine the possibilities within the familiar. Maybe brain damage has its upside after all.



## 10.) Neil Young: Le Noise Fork In the Road

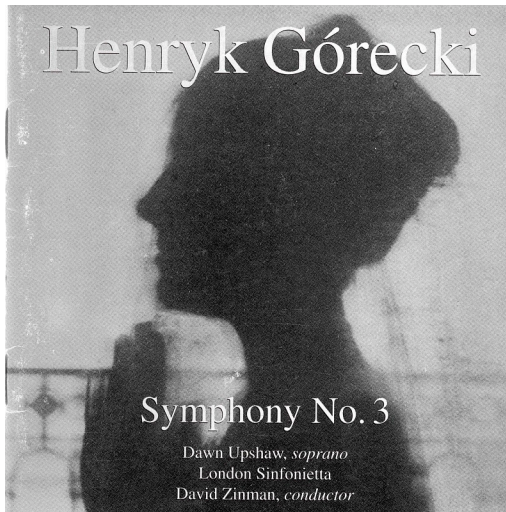
A two-fer choice here at #10, Neil's most recent release and the one before it. These got a lot of airplay at my place this year. Le Noise is Neil and his guitar, altered and processed by a producer who knew what he was doing. Spooky, a companion piece to Neil's soundtrack work on Dead Man. Fork In the Road is a celebration of American cars and driving. It's just... Neil. You either get this or you don't. I can't explain it, I don't even understand it, I just submit to it. I find the artists I enjoy the most are those artists that also produce some projects I don't like at all: Zappa, Todd Rundgren, Tom Waits, Prince, with Neil leading the pack, following his muse and giving you the occasional nadir along with the amazing peaks. Freedom comes at a price, and Neil's freedom to release whatever he wants can be hot or cold. Check these out, he's on a roll right now.

## Honorable Mention:



### Denny Zeitlin Mosaic Select #34: Denny Zeitlin: The Columbia Studio Trio Sessions

One of the Mosaic label's re-releases of great neglected jazz, this triple disc set shows a pianistic imagination that is heavily influenced by Bill Evans but unique in itself. Zeitlin is a well-known and respected psychiatrist who played for kicks as he wound through medical school, and these discs are the result. If he wasn't tied up with a busy medical career since the '60's, what would he have done in music? As I listen to this stuff, I want to grab manuscript paper and start transcribing the music so I can steal the tsunami of ideas flowing out of the speakers. Some guys are just smarter than I can ever hope to be, thank Bog!



## London Sinfonietta Gorecki: Symphony #3

The night after Gorecki died in 2010, I performed this work with the Southeast Pennsylvania Symphony and really will never forget it. It is, to me, one of the greatest mysteries of modern classical music. This recording has sold millions of copies in spite of the fact that it's an hour-long minor-key slow-tempo evolving-texture work with a soprano singing a libretto based on very downbeat and depressing stuff. But give it a listen late some night with the lights off and a few candles lit, and it isn't a mystery at all. One of the most purely beautiful things I've ever heard, anywhere, anytime.

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That's it, the most influential music in my life for 2010. As I look at the list, I realize how every selection really is gut-level, nothing else. Most of what I included I don't even know why I like. But there it is.

One other thing: goodbye, Don Van Vliet. I only regret that you never came back to music after Ice Cream for Crow.

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## Brian Groder

I purchased far less music this year for whatever reasons, but from what I did, these were thoroughly & repeatably enjoyed (in no particular order):

- Tom Harrell, Roman Nights
- San Newsome, Blue Soliloquy
- Rudresh Mahanthappa & Bunky Green, Apex
- Michael Musillami, Old Tea
- Dave Holland & Pepe Habichuela, Hands

These all represented outstanding musicianship, compositional form, album balance and story telling.

peace,

b

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## Rick Zayas

I've been so busy that I haven't even listened to 10 albums this year. I did get turned on to a Cuban pianist and composer by the name of Jose Maria Vitier. He's got all the goods. He's got tremendous

classical technique, plays Jazz like a beast, all the while keeping his Cuban flavor. He's composed quite a few film scores as well. The cd I heard is called. "Cuba Dentro de un Piano" which means Cuba Inside a Piano. He does the whole montuno thing but is so pianistic that he steers away from it considerably. Out of all the Cuban pianists that I've ever heard, this guy has all the components of a total pianist. Peace.

Rick

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