

Dave Hartl's 2011 Top Ten Most Influential Albums

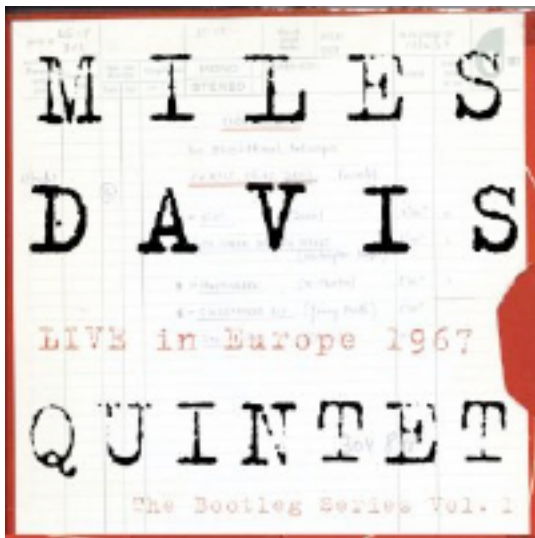


1.) Tom Waits: Bad As Me

Waits has survived his '70's roots and multiple personas, growing more influential with age and becoming a cultural icon capable of suing corporations for using voice-alikes in their ads and winning, mainly due to his voice being so instantly recognizable and idiomatic. Here's his first new album of new material since 2004's Real Gone and it represents a return to his songwriting roots complete with multiple personas and voices, different ones for whatever point of view he needs.

Some feel that his voice is a wreck, destroyed by way too many nights on stage with Old Gold cigarettes and half-drunk cans of Pabst Blue Ribbon carried in his skid-row jacket. But what he does with this

diminished tool is awesome in the true sense of the word. If I had the skills and imagination of Waits on how to use what you got, I would even sing as well (my friends are grateful for my limited concept). This album sits at the top of my list this year because no matter how often I throw it on the player I still smile every time. It's really that good.



2.) Miles Davis: Live in Europe 1967: The Bootleg Series, Vol. 1

3 CDs and a DVD of the greatest, most imaginative and creative quintet in the history of jazz. Touring Europe in 1967, the continental media appreciated what the American media didn't and obsessively recorded and filmed them in the moment this music was created. And now we get to reap the benefits.

Bob Dylan has gotten this treatment from Columbia Legacy in the past, resulting in the greatest releases he's gotten out in the last 10 years.

It's a good sign to see Miles get this same release treatment, and leads me to hope that there will be more volumes in this Bootleg Series. They played basically the same set every night, but every night is radically different and a revelation in the possibilities each song offers. No other group has ever lived In the Moment as deeply as these five did. Absolutely amazing.

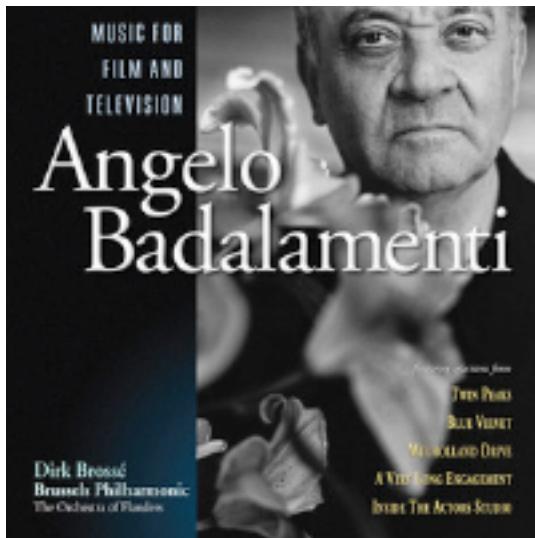


3.) Thomas Dolby: A Map of the Floating City

Dolby has always been a huge favorite of mine. Being a synth geek, I love what he's done in the past just in a textural way. To this day, Waldorf is my favorite synth manufacturer; their history goes back to the PPG system Dolby premiered with when he was an MTV darling in the early '80's. He's always remained on the cutting edge of technology. This gave unexpected benefits when a doohickey he patented for content on cell phones became an industry standard, allowing him to amass a shitpile of money and declaring himself free of the recording industry, or what's left of it. He sold the company and hit

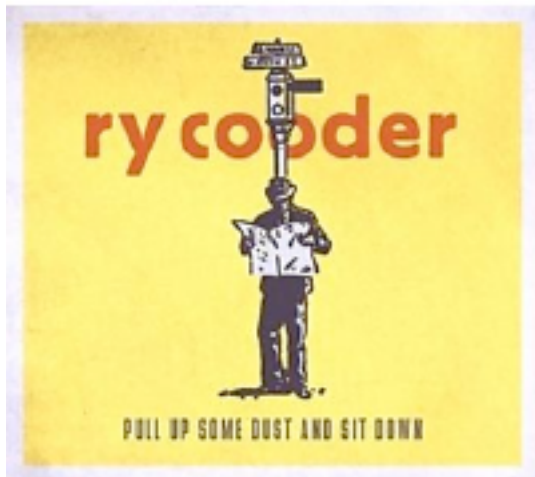
the road to reconnect with his fans, coming to Sellersville Theater several times with his “Solo Inhabitant” one-man show and a tour with the Mafia Horns, giving entertaining concerts and new insights in his repertoire but offering no new material.

Well, he finally made the step to new material. What’s interesting is how he promotes it as an independent entity with no major label promo. This CD came out piecemeal on his website in three chapters along the past year or so and was offered with a gimmick so complex I never could understand what to do to get the music and waited until he did a CD release like a normal person. I know it was some multi-tiered online game with navigating through the Floating World. Who knows? So how’s the music? Well... some of it is tremendous (“My Evil Twin Brother”, “Simone”) and some is downright annoying (the cuts that focus on his admiration of American roots music; there’s enough of that annoying country shit around without a white Brit putting in his two cents, IMHO). But Dolby’s albums always bear repeated listenings and open up with time. I don’t think he’ll ever top Golden Age of Wireless and The Flat Earth, but this will do very nicely for now. If he tours, don’t miss him. He hired our friend Terry Jackson back in the ‘80’s and still pays tribute to him when he introduces songs from that period, proving to me he’s a mensch. And one helluva pop musician.



4.) Angela Badalamenti: Music for Film and Television

I know Badalamenti from his work with David Lynch. If you ever listened to the zombie blues and surf-guitar-on-ludes feel of Twin Peaks, you'll think you know the man. But this CD is something else, orchestral in nature and gorgeous beyond words. Marianne Faithful sings one number to eerie effect. And his theme for the Olympics should be in every drum and bugle corps repertoire. This is a disc I put on and just let wash over me, it's transporting stuff.



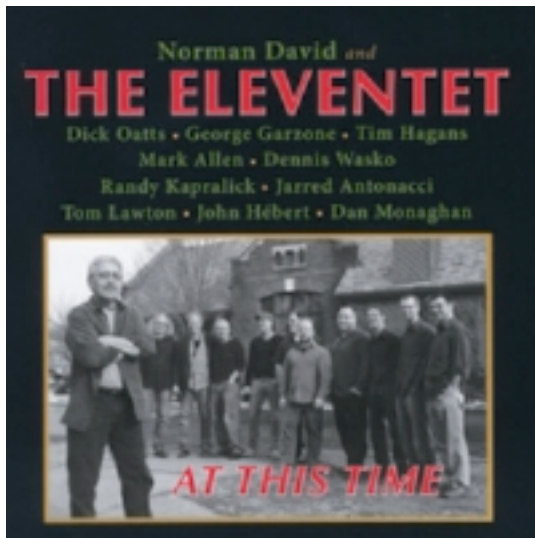
5.) Ry Cooder: Pull Up Some Dust and Sit Down

Ry Cooder's first albums, including Into the Purple Valley, Boomer's Story, and Paradise and Lunch, were scrapbooks of Depression-Era Americana, filled with the social consciousness of Woody Guthrie and other left-wing sympathizers. Starting with the '80's, Cooder got deep into ethnic musics, resulting in triumphs like the Buena Vista Social Club and its elderly members. He also became acclaimed for film scores that needed a Tex-Mex or roots flavor (Crossroads, Paris, Texas, Last Man Standing). But there were some old fans like me who had seen him back in the day playing at the Main Point with a guitar, dobro, mandolin, and bottle of tequila who always missed that particular incarnation of Cooder.

Here it is. He's come full circle, but informed by know with a huge vocabulary of flavors.

Throughout the Occupy movement this year I've waited for some tune to grab the zeitgeist of the day and galvanize people in the way "We Shall Overcome" hit the Civil Rights Movement and Dylan's early folk albums affected the Protest Movement. I submit for the summation of the Occupy movement in song form the first cut on this disc, "No Banker Left Behind". It's simple, catchy, and irresistible. If Cooder doesn't get his due on progressive causes and social justice from this disc, it's no fault of his own because he deserves it. And that's only the opening salvo.

Woody Guthrie's guitar famously was inscribed with the motto "This machine kills fascists". Cooder better buy a wood-burning tool and get to work on his ax with a release like this. And just to show he's a total class act, the CD ends with a tune that shows that politics don't have to be totally divisive. "No Hard Feelings" shows a generosity of spirit and magnanimous forgiveness to the opposition, pointing how we really can all come together and improve our dire problems. My question is, why is it always the Progressives that exhibit this and the Faux News crowd only mans the barricades?



6.) Norman David and the Eleventet: At This Time

Full disclosure time: I'm partial to this album because Norm is a friend, colleague, and fellow musician. But this is the real thing. Norm's been using me in his rehearsals and one of the joys in my life this past year has been playing his charts, both the ones on this CD and many others that flow from his prolific pen. His pieces combine the structured with total openness for soloists, who he features prominently and lovingly. Philly's best are lined up to play with him, and he knows how to bring ringers in on high-profile gigs to polish it even further.

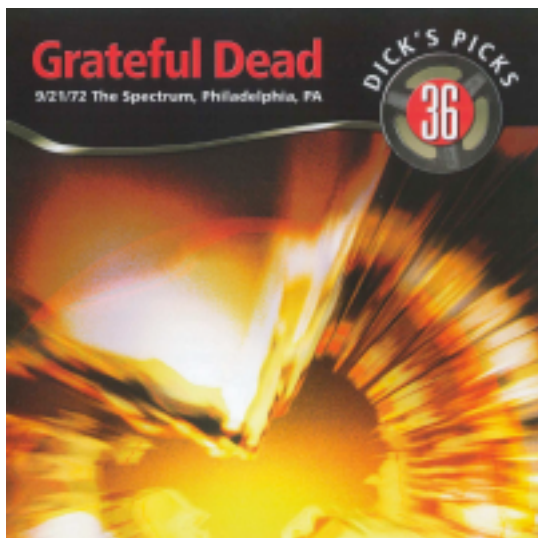
Suffice it to say that after one listen I made it abundantly clear to Norm that I was available if he needed a pianist/ synthesist/ Chapman Stickist/ thereminist whatever... I'm grateful he took me up on my offer, and look forward to more. In the meantime, check out this disc, it shows a new major voice on the Philly scene and one that you should check out live as soon as possible.



7.) Todd Rundgren: Todd Rundgren's Johnson

Todd Rundgren? At the Sellersville Theater?

Yep, and what a show it was. Rundgren isn't paying tribute to Robert Johnson here as much as the British blues bands of the '60's that released electric versions of Johnson's tunes. The concert had Kasim Sulton and Prairie Prince in the rhythm section and featured little-done favorites from Todd's past (Be Nice to Me, Hamburger Hell in a version so spontaneous that Kasim was energetically cuing the extra beats in the chorus to Prairie so he wouldn't turn the beat around) and the best guitar playing I've ever heard Todd do. He's on a roll, he's burning, and this disc is a souvenir of one of the most interesting rock shows I've seen this decade.



8.) Grateful Dead Dick's Picks, Vol. 36: The Spectrum, Philadelphia, PA, 9/21/72 (and other concerts)

Oh no. You friggin' old hippy you.

Let me say right now that I saw the Dead numerous times in the '70's, this concert included. Yes, I was there sitting next to a seriously mescaline-damaged friend who flamed out a year later, watching and listening to the Dead construct what's on this disc in real time. And I became a believer that night. As Bill Graham put it, the Dead aren't the best at what they do, they're the ONLY ones that do what they do. I can put up with the pseudo country/ cowboy tunes from Weir/ Bill Monroe picking from Garcia; but what keeps me listening to them is the Group Mind when they launch from a well-known tune into space. Their communication and spontaneity at their best is on a par with the aforementioned Miles Davis Quintet but in a very different style and level of execution.

In addition to this particular disc, there's great moments in a lot of the Dick's Picks series of Dead concerts and the endless supply you find online. The Grateful Dead Listening Guide at

<http://www.deadlistening.com/2009/03/listening-trail-1980s-grateful-dead.html>

is a great place to weed the best concerts from the mediocre, and the site <http://www.archive.org/details/GratefulDead> will provide the live concert you seek in most cases, either in streaming mode or as a download. It's a huge resource for Dead music, free of charge thanks to generations of Deadhead Tapers, and guaranteed to keep your Dead concert desires (their real forte, they never were studio guys really) satisfied forever.



9.) Various Artists: Can You Dig It? The Music and Politics of Black Action Films 1968-75

It doesn't take exposure to Quentin Tarentino's films to get you to like this collection. But it can't hurt. Just like the title says, this is the music from the early 70's blaxploitation flicks. You might not think you've missed the musical highlights from "Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song", "Black Caesar", and "Hell Up in Harlem", but give them a listen and you'll be back again. Marvin Gaye, Isaac Hayes, Grant Green, Booker T, Edwin Starr, Quincy Jones, Dennis Coffey, Solomon Burke and many others are scattered on this imported 2-disc set. Just the thing for cruising down Broad Street with the windows open on a hot summer night.



10.) Traffic: John Barleycorn Must Die (Deluxe Edition)

Finally, a brilliantly remastered and augmented release of what may be my idea of the best rock album of the early days, much better than the Beatles to me and more soulful than anything else out there at the

time. Steve Winwood has the greatest blue-eyed soul voice ever, and he was young and full of piss on this album. It started as a solo Winwood album after Traffic called it quits; Winwood called his old mates in as he went and before you knew it, Traffic was back as a studio trio and working as a quartet by adding Rick Grech from Family when they played live. Side One of the original release of this on vinyl is, to me, the most perfect, mysterious, and unexplainable display of songwriting and vocal performance ever put down in rock.

This release features a crystal-clear remix of the original album and then follows it up with great outtakes and a live concert from the period that has to be heard. I try not to wallow in nostalgia, but this disc was given to me for my birthday and I've been completely floored by it all over again. It defies intellectualization. It exists in a perfect gestalt. Stevie Winwood is a genius.

Honorable Mention:



Various Artists: 20th Century Fox: 75 Years of Great Film Music

Just a great multidisc overview of the studio's greatest, most iconic soundtracks. Lush, emotional, and the true classical music of the 20th Century, Webern be damned.



Charlie Musselwhite: Sanctuary

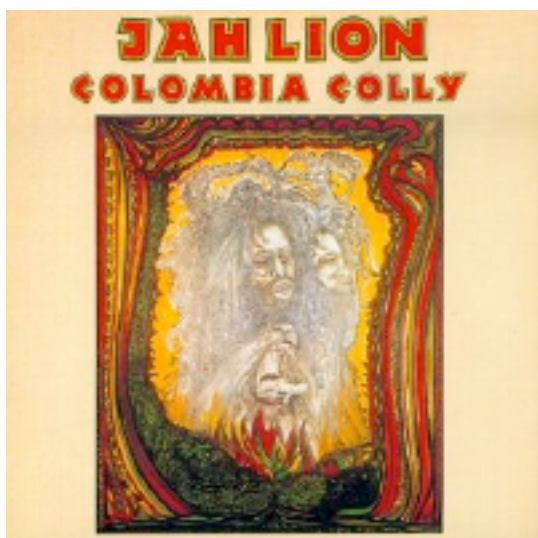
I just love this man's mix of electric blues and harmonica. This is as gutsy as the Real World label gets. And like everything else on this list, it bears up to many repeated listenings.



The Jazz Crusaders: The Pacific Jazz Quintet Studio Sessions

Mosaic Records does it again, this one featuring a group with a guy who really influenced me without my realizing it, Joe Sample.

Combining great chops with soulful grooves and sophisticated writing and harmonies, there's real pleasure in these tunes. I was surprised how much of this set I had heard in passing over the years. A really unappreciated group, bearing little resemblance to the cheesy radio-friendly group they became, this set captures them when they were young, ambitious, and daring.



Jah Lion: Columbia Colly

An extremely hard to find reggae CD, part of the Mango collection. Jah Lion was a Jamaican DJ corralled into the studio like so many others by Lee Perry, performing a pre-rap style of semi-spoken performance over recorded grooves, sometimes borrowing from other great reggae tunes like Junior Murvin's Police and Thieves. Why is this better than the rest like it? I can't even say. All I know is that my click and pop-

riddled vinyl copy of this had to go, replaced by a digital CD copy I finally bought from a Brit on eBay after months of searching, it's that rare. And worth every moment just to hear "Heeeey, Fat Mon, won't cha slide down yuh trap door" or whatever the hell he's singing. It don't matter, it's *right!*
