

## Dave Hartl's 2018 Top Ten (Or So) Most Influential Albums

It's time once again to look back and do that annual tradition of picking out the 10 or so most influential albums I heard in the past year. Not the most popular, or even the best, but what made me think the most as a musician.

You can always go to <http://www.davehartl.com/top10.html> and look at other years' postings. The links there go all the way back to 1998, when I started this with George Tucker. It's a way of hearing about great music you might otherwise miss. If you want to contribute, please write to [dave@davehartl.com](mailto:dave@davehartl.com) with your own list and your contribution will be added to this document online for future downloads. This is why I do this! It always gives me some great recommendations for what to listen to that would be off my radar otherwise. So don't be shy! Last year, Brian Groder, Jack Loughhead, Dylan Taylor, Bob Kimmel, and Kaz Yoshihara gave me some great things to listen to.

## The Top 10, in no particular order:

### 1.) Soft Machine: Hidden Details



It is a lonely existence being a Soft Machine freak. I bought their third LP (curiously entitled “Third”) back around 1970, in high school, and lay down for a nap while listening to “Out-Bloody-Rageous”. And I woke up and understood them for the first time.

In 1974, they did a quick tour of the U.S. East Coast after releasing their seventh album (curiously entitled “Seven”), an album that I had put on permanent play at the time, prompting rooming-house neighbors to inquire, “Who IS that?” I caught them live at the Main Point Café, in Bryn Mawr one cold night and was surprised to see a

guitar on stage, an instrument notable for its absence in their recording output. It was the tool of Alan Holdsworth, who was just beginning his illustrious career, and they were devastating. This is an English group that cut its teeth touring with Jimi Hendrix and morphed into a jazz fusion juggernaut that rivalled American groups like the Mahavishnu Orchestra, Return to Forever, and Miles Davis's groups, but saddled with an English rock legacy that kept critics from fairly judging them.

I came away from that concert stunned and reeling. And in all that time since then, I have never been able to bond with another Soft Machine fan. They don't exist in Philadelphia, I swear. College friend Doug Bohrer had some mild interest, I recall, but that's it. Nada. It's so strange that this past October, when they toured the East Coast for the first time in 44 years, I had an extra ticket that I literally could not give away. I went alone to see them, and was devastated again. They played this album and some favorites from the past, and I managed to have a short conversation with bassist Roy Babbington, who was bemused to find someone saying they had waited 44 years to hear him again.

I have always loved this band and have been totally confused by the lack of shared enthusiasm. The release of this album, played by ancient wizened men with an electric gleam still in their eyes, staying true somehow to an aesthetic concept and vision that stays constant despite ever-changing personnel, equipment, and business changes,

was a cause of real celebration for me in 2018. This isn't a pale carbon copy of a vintage band, churning out nostalgic memories to an aging demographic. This is a rip-snorting, alive-and-well group firing on all cylinders, playing the familiar and the new in one seamless whole. Discover them now before it's too late.

## 2.) John Coltrane: Both Directions at Once: The Lost Album



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What can you say about an artist so much on fire that he can go into the studio, nail an amazing album, and take the masters home to sit in his closet, forgotten and passed over by his next projects and next developments which came so fast and furious that there was no time to ever look back before his death. That's apparently what happened here. John Coltrane recorded this album on March 6, 1963,

leaving several originals untitled and orphaned, moving on to his great ballads album with Johnny Hartman. A full description of the circumstances behind this album is here:

<https://tinyurl.com/y88qed6m>

No matter what, this album is great (be sure to get the 2-disc version) and deserved a better fate. That it arrives out of the blue 55 years after its creation is amazing, and marks an event that should not be missed.

### 3.) Elvis Costello & The Imposters: Look Now

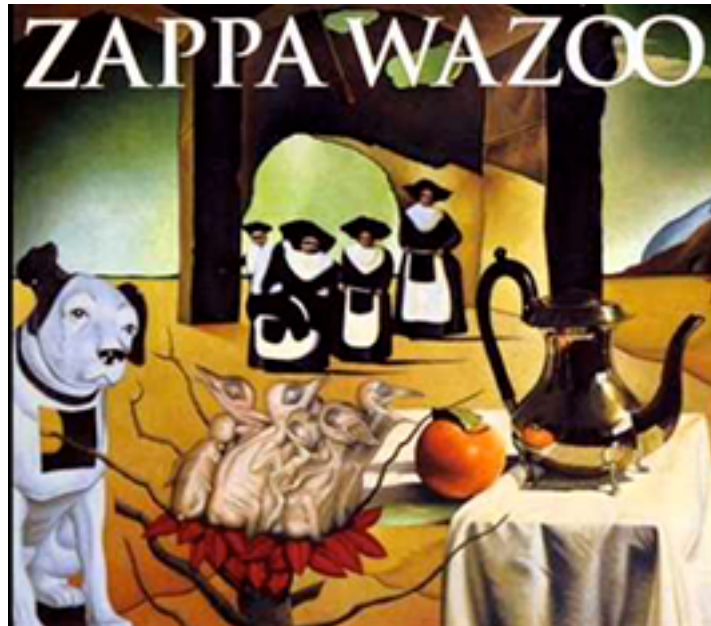


I had the good fortune to catch Elvis Costello live twice in one year, playing a tour with the Imposters that returned to the album “Imperial Bedroom” as its inspiration. Both concerts were deeply

satisfying, with moments that were incandescent. Then came the frightening news that Elvis had cancer, a rare and virulent one that caused him to cancel some dates and inject worry and concern into his huge fan base. Then... reports of incredible live concerts with him once again in full voice, storming the barricades again. I picked up this new album, not expecting anything really huge, but holy crap! This is a pop album that reveals new secrets every time you play it. Along with his own remarkable songs, there's collaborations with Carole King and Burt Bacharach that stand out. My current fave is "Suspect My Tears", but come back in a week and they'll probably be another one that bumped it.

Perhaps the cancer episode made him dig in deep and produce some real gems here, but this is a remarkable collection of incredible tunes, written by one of the world's greatest song writers and performed with passion and precision. If you've ever enjoyed any of this man's work, this is not to be missed.

#### 4.) Frank Zappa: Wazoo



Following an attack by a fan in London in December, 1971, Frank Zappa was confined to a wheelchair and healing from severe injuries. Workaholic that he was, he wrote and recorded “The Grand Wazoo” and “Waka/Jawaka” in the following year. This album is a document of a live concert he played on September 24, 1972 with the ensemble that realized these albums. It’s a big band with horns, but it’s not like any big band that ever existed before. The whole experiment was short-lived, and Zappa moved on into his most popular phase shortly thereafter, grafting gross-out lyrics onto rock group formats. I listened to this posthumous release and wish that the whole Wazoo project would have lasted much longer. It’s unique in the

annals of music, and jaw-dropping in its execution. If you're a fan of FZ and haven't heard it, you're missing a major chunk of what made this man tick.

## 5.) Dave Hartl: Brian Groder Compositions



Ok, this may seem a bit self-serving, but if I'm being honest about albums that influenced me the most in 2018, this one has to be included for me. Brian Groder is a New York City-based trumpeter who has found success on the local scene and acknowledgement of a unique conception at work. He handed me a sheaf of compositions that he wanted to make into solo piano renditions, just to post on his website as a means to sell his tunes to other jazz musicians looking for material.



I put these tunes on my piano and lived with them for about six months, playing them as I passed by. They were overwhelming, and extremely difficult in their non-standard harmonic approach and angularity of melody. They were lyrical, but I had to really go places I'm never asked to go to produce the singing quality that they had, coming from a master melodist. The week before the sessions came down, I called Brian and begged to cancel, feeling I couldn't give him what he needed. He scoffed and insisted. I kept working.

A week later, I was in a tiny room somewhere in Brooklyn, squeezing into a seat by what seemed like a modest piano, but which recorded like the finest Bøsendorfer. And I played these tunes as best I could. I've been listening to the results ever since. This doesn't sound like what I normally do as a musician, and if I'm playing them with a lot of other material in Shuffle Mode, I can even be fooled into not recognizing them at all, and not realizing that it's me at the piano until well into the composition.

Brian, you took me into brand new territory here. You made me find things in myself that I didn't think I could do. I am in your debt. Your tunes are incredible, and I'm proud to have been part of your output here. Note that this album was not released as an album. If you're interested, here's all the tunes: <https://soundcloud.com/brian-groder>

## 6.) Pharoah Sanders: The Creator Has a Master Plan



In April of this year, I went to New York with my son Miles and found our way down into the depths of the Village to a club with a line around the block. Inside was a modest venue, no seats, elbow your neighbor for position, then wait an hour for the warm up band to start, and finally, the old master arrived and played for a long set. And I finally got what I had been missing.

That night is the closest I'll ever get to being in the Village Vanguard listening to Coltrane's classic quartet blow down the walls of jazz. Pharoah was part of that scene and is one of the last living links to it; McCoy Tyner is still with us, but age has dulled his ferocious attack somewhat.

This particular album may not be Pharoah Sanders' best one, I really don't know. I'm digging my way through his output, and I'm using this one as a place marker since it has some of his best compositions. If you get the chance to see this man play, grab it, time is short.

## 7.) Oscar Peterson: Tracks



This is a rare thing, Oscar playing an entire album of solo piano. I saw him do exactly this back around 1974 and it was one of the most galvanizing musical moments of my life, shattering my assumptions and leaving me with tears running down my face.

Put on the first track, a simple trifle called "Give Me the Simple Life". Ain't nothing simple about this. Jeezis. Oscar was the total virtuoso, steeped deeply in the blues. He sounds like three men

playing simultaneously. This album was a German recording, dashed off on a European tour with little preparation and a casual demeanor that makes its heights even more amazing.

## 8.) Eddie Palmieri: Unfinished Masterpiece



Here's another album that stands as a place marker. It's a really good one, make no mind, but I haven't heard a bad Palmieri one yet. I achieved a bucket list item when I went to see Eddie Palmieri play. Age is affecting him as well, and he played few solos that night, but I got to see an amazing band leader with one of the greatest salsa bands I can imagine. He might not play anymore with the feeling that his piano is about to be driven into the earth, shattered beyond repair; but his harmonic sense and love of dissonance combined with the

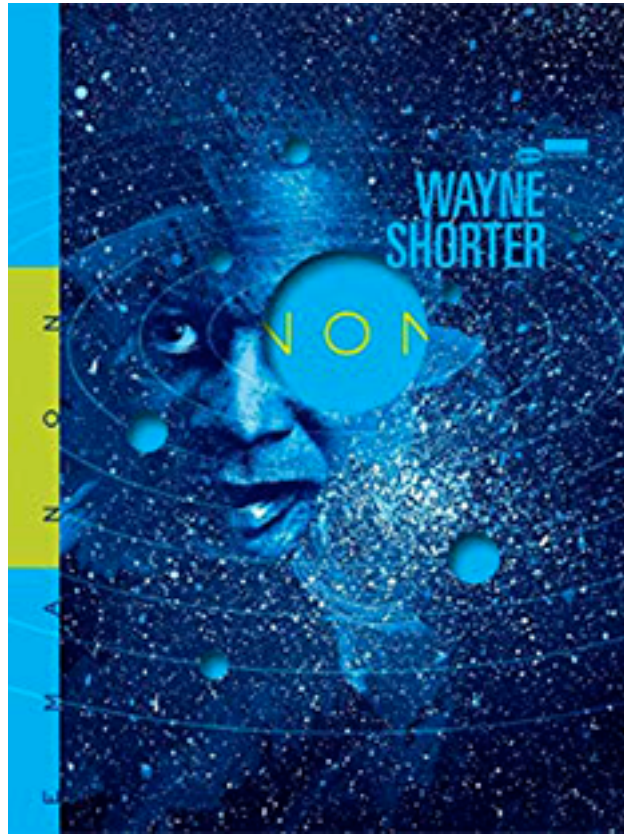
incredible rhythm sense that is the heart of his art is still awesome to behold.

## 9.) Joshua Redman Elastic Band: Momentum



This album is influential this year for me because my saxophonist friend, Carl Cox, came to me in the summer with a proposal to form a new project, using the jazz elements and funky grooves personified in this recording as a suggested model (along with other touchstones we discussed). As of this writing, we've composed an album worth of tunes and begin rehearsals next week to put the group together. Momentum was the spark that lit our fire, and I anxiously await where we take these ideas in 2019.

## 10.) Wayne Shorter: Emanon



The 85-year-old musical miracle that is Wayne Shorter keeps charging along with his amazing quartet, picking up Kennedy Center Honors and other accolades along the way. This deluxe edition of his new album includes a sci-fi graphic novel that he wrote and 3 CDs of music, an almost overwhelming amount of material. The first CD is a four-part suite for chamber orchestra and his quartet with the Orpheus Chamber Ensemble, and the other 2 CDs are 2016 performances with the quartet. Shorter has been deconstructing and reimagining his



compositions with this unit for quite a while now, and the interaction is on a scary, telepathic level. Not for everybody, but absolutely stunning to those with ears to hear.

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## Honorable Mentions

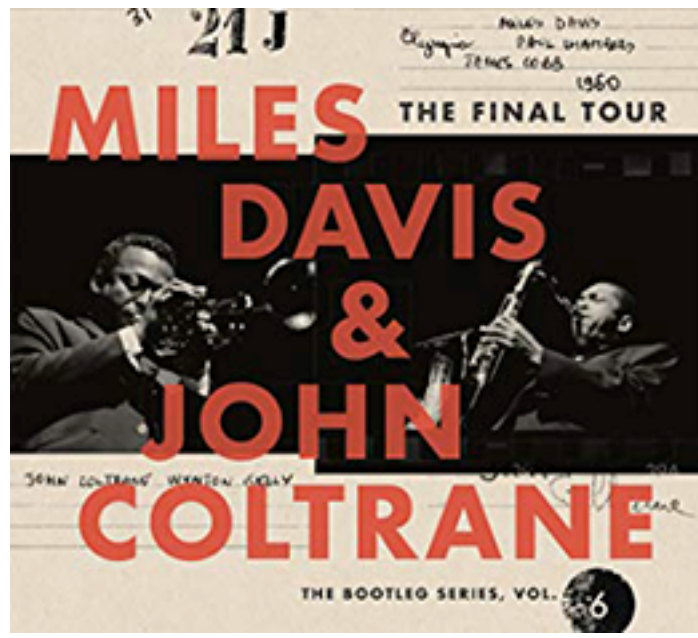
### 1 .) Michael McDonald: Wide Open



A guilty pleasure. I was never a huge fan, admiring more than digging McDonald for decades, since he showed up on Katy Lied by Steely Dan and followed through with huge success in the Doobie Brothers. But this disc sure did spend a lot of time on the players this

year. Like buying a pair of shoes and finding to your delight how utterly comfortable they are. This became a go-to favorite when I wanted music that wasn't too intrusive, but it burrowed in to stay anyway.

## 2.) Miles Davis & John Coltrane: The Final Tour: The Bootleg Series, Vol. 6



Coltrane was ready to move on to his classic quartet and Miles coerced him into a final tour of Europe. Here's the results, and thank Bog for European sound engineers and media heads who understood that jazz was much more important than it was felt to be in its homeland, the USA. They preserved this. You can hear Coltrane stretching into new territory as they audience screams insults and



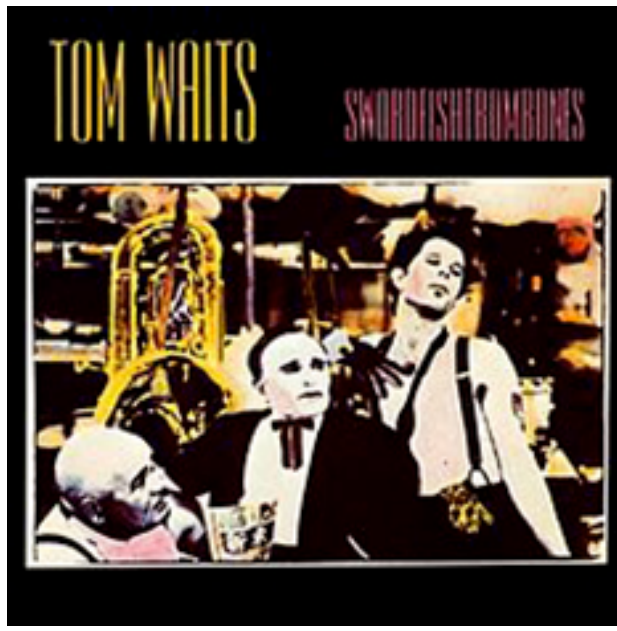
confusion reigns. He didn't want to be there, so he did exactly what he wanted. And the results at this far distance are priceless.

### 3.) Stevie Ray Vaughan: SRV (box set)



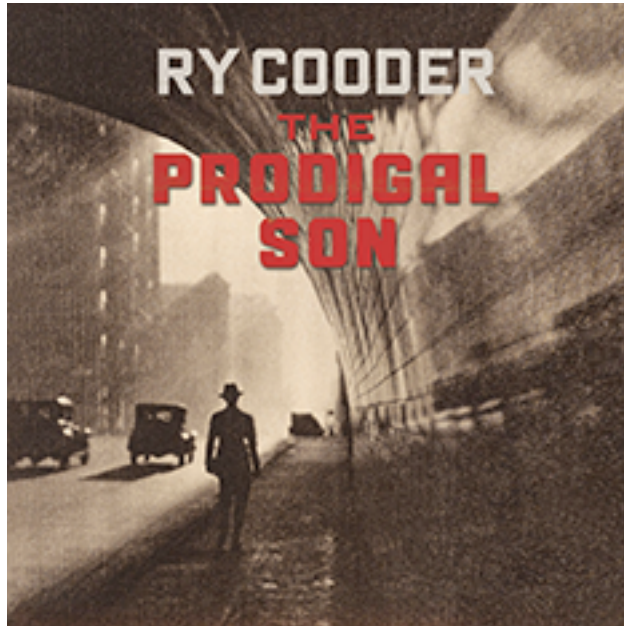
I didn't appreciate this guy enough when he was alive. This box set delivers the goods and became a favorite car listen. Not a "greatest hits" anthology, this set gives up some amazing live performances by one of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century's blues guitar giants.

#### 4.) Tom Waits: Swordfishtrombones



I read an overview of Tom Waits' career with in-depth reviews of his albums, and then went back and listened to them all. I didn't get what he was doing when he made the transition from Beat Poet in the All-Night Diner to bizarro Berlin-era circus music with werewolf vocals. And this is the album where he staked his claim to it. Suddenly it makes sense...

## 5.) Ry Cooder: The Prodigal Son



Ry Cooder is a perennial favorite of mine, and I'll always check out what he does. But I still don't know what to make of this one. Religious music done with panache and style. Is he sincere, cramming for his finals? Is he cataloging another underserved genre of music? Who knows? Whatever is going on, this music is great.

## 6.) Chicago: Chicago II (Steven Wilson Remix)



Former Porcupine Tree leader Steven Wilson spends about 20% of his time re-mixing favorite classic albums. At this point, he's covered most of the important Jethro Tull albums, a bunch of Gentle Giant and Yes, and some XTC among others. I tracked this one down. He is doing noble work. This album, which really hit me hard in 1970, was always marred by mediocre production. Listening to this is like hearing it for the first time. It's not great music, but it's great nostalgia and sounds crystal clear for the first time ever.

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