

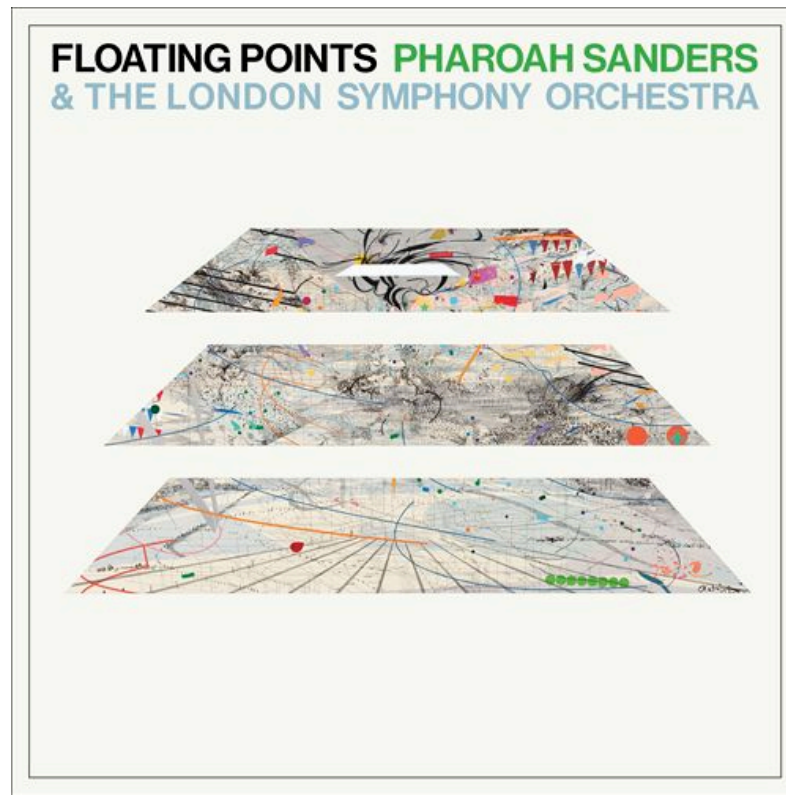
Dave Hartl's 2021 Top Ten (Or So) Most Influential Albums

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 all the 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 your thoughts, please write to 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, Don Knabb and Chico Huff responded and shared their own opinions of what was hot for them, and I got alerted to some really good music from them. Please respond, I don't like streaming (it's basically the biz's latest way to rip off the musicians) and don't listen to the nonsense of corporate radio, so this is really the only way I find out about the Good Stuff you stumble upon.

Floating Points, Pharoah Sanders, & the London Symphony Orchestra – “Promises”



This became my favorite discovery of 2021. It's not a Pharoah Sanders album, really. The main force is a keyboardist/ composer/ producer known as Floating Points, AKA Sam Shepherd. He had Sanders play to his tracks and then added sessions with the strings of the LSO. It's a long suite with Pharoah interjecting ideas throughout (and making an early exit). Dreamlike, evocative, and beautiful, I don't know of any other music quite like this. I can't guarantee its staying power, but it soothed my jangled nerves throughout the extended pandemic of 2021, and stimulated my imagination.

Stick Men, featuring Gary Husband – “Owari”

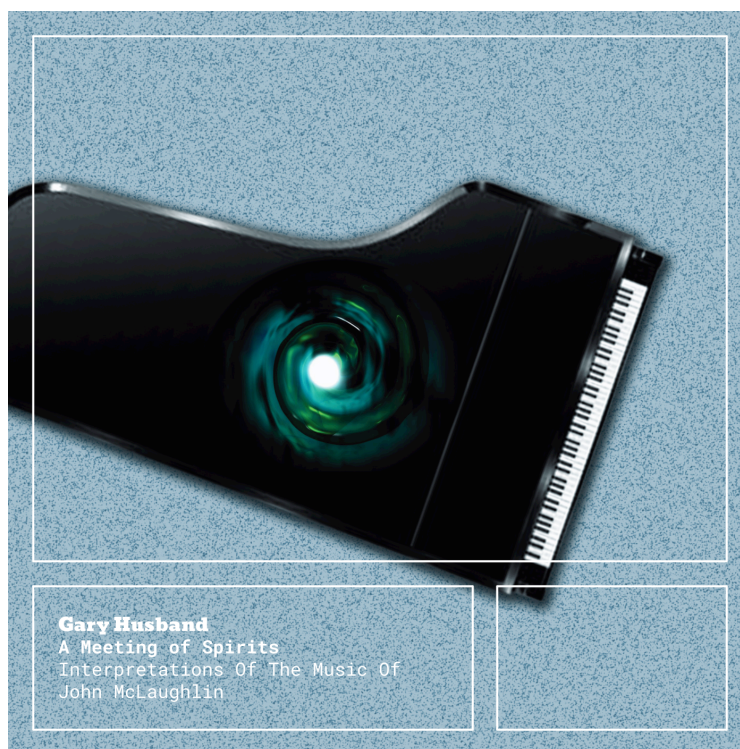


Stick Men is a group consisting of the King Crimson rhythm section members Tony Levin and Pat Mastelotto, with Markus Reuter on touch guitar and Stick, their name derived, of course, from their orchestrated use of multiple Chapman Sticks, an instrument that has frustrated me for decades. They set up an Asian tour for which they added the amazing keyboard player Gary Husband, a veteran of John McLaughlin's band and the late Allan Holdsworth's. Political unrest in Hong Kong postponed the tour, and they managed to do one show in Nagoya, Japan before COVID shut them down, and it was over. And this is the recording of that show.

And what a monumental show it is. I've been a big fan of Gary Husband for years, and his addition to a group that had already blown me away at the Sellersville Theater years ago was a match made in heaven. "Owari" is the

Japanese term for “The End”. I can only hope this is not the end of this assemblage. If they reunite, do not miss them in concert!

Gary Husband – “A Meeting of Spirits: Interpretations of the Music of John McLaughlin”

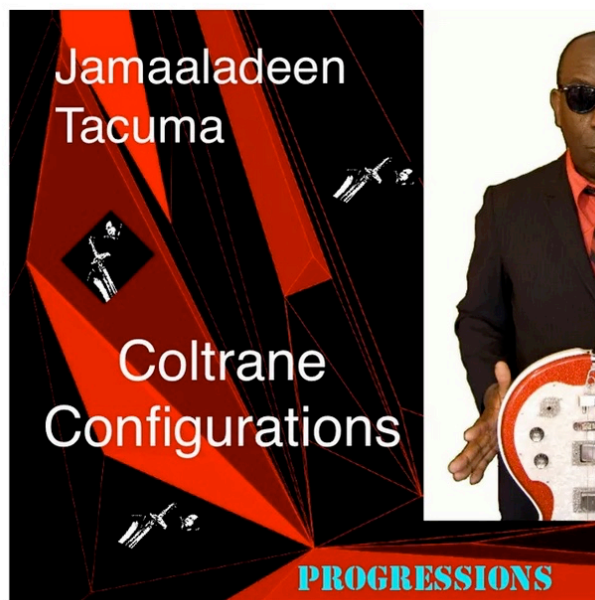


And while I'm mentioning Gary Husband... this little beauty came out on bandcamp.com this summer, an album of Gary Husband doing piano versions of some great tunes from John McLaughlin's extensive catalog of originals. Husband is an excellent drummer as well as imaginative pianist/ synthesis, and these interpretations are really in the moment, to the point that McLaughlin wasn't sure some of the material was his own compositions. This album and the previously mentioned one above cemented Gary Husband in my pantheon of artists to follow closely, although I suppose I've been doing this since seeing him playing a Roland V-Synth in concert with McLaughlin's 4th Dimension band back

around 2008, and immediately running out to find one for myself. Totally inspiring.

A side note: bandcamp.com has become my main source for imaginative music from independent artists. It's the site on which I post all my own albums, and they've been great to work with. It's a way for recording artists to totally bypass the record company/ streaming service overlords and put money directly into your pocket, and the company does a great job with statistics, letting you know who you're reaching, and with exposing your music to people who order things in your style. Please explore the sight and keep unusual music alive!

Jamaaladeen Tacuma – “Coltrane Configurations”



Jamaaladeen Tacuma is one of my favorite bassists of all time, and the fact that he's a local Philadelphian is just a real plus for me. On this album, a live set, he reimagines four classics of the John Coltrane catalog with a band including Tony Kofi on sax, Tim Hutson on drums, and Orrin Evans on keyboards. And they were on point the night this was recorded.

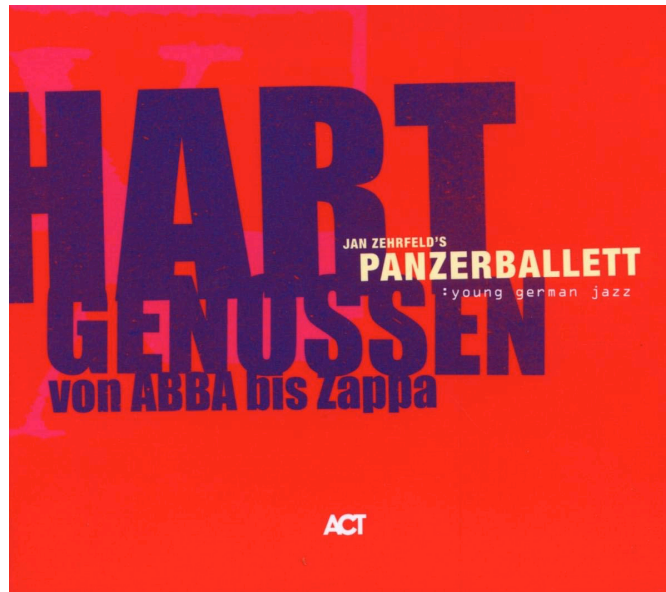
Sweetening my reception of this album, Jamaaladeen gave it away for free on Coltrane's birthday, which also happens to be mine. It was a great gift.

John Coltrane – “A Love Supreme Live in Seattle”



And while I'm speaking of John Coltrane... here's a highly anticipated release that came out and totally lived up to its hype. Flutist Joe Brazil had this sitting on a shelf for 55 years until a family friend discovered it after his passing. Only the 2nd live performance of this seminal work ever discovered, it features the classic quartet augmented by bassist Donald Garrett and saxophonist Pharoah Sanders, along with Carlos Ward sitting in on alto. It's even more evidence of Coltrane's constant moving forward and reimagining the possibilities in the music he made. Not to be missed.

Panzerballett – “Hart Genossen von Abba bis Zappa”



Germans. Prog Heavy Metal. And friggin' unbelievable. Kaleidoscopic assembling of Frank Zappa, Danny Elfman, ABBA, and God knows what else. Classicly trained guitarist Jan Zehrfeld channels his anger into some of the most attention-grabbing music I've ever heard. I can't describe it, just seek it out and be ready to be astonished.

Terence Blanchard – “Flow”



Terence Blanchard recently appeared on a Sunday morning news show, being interviewed about an opera he's written entitled "Fire Shut Up in My Bones", a season opener for the Met (<https://tinyurl.com/zsyktsuz>). I only hope his efforts at opera don't diminish his contributions to jazz. His work with Spike Lee for Lee's "When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts" was the most emotionally connected and evocative tribute anyone came up with concerning the New Orleans tragedy of Katrina. This man has concepts aplenty, an incredible trumpet tone, and imagination to realize it all in unique ways. This album corkscrewed its way into my mind over time, which usually means it's going to stay in my mind for a long, long time to come. And I don't mind.

Jean-Michel Jarre – “Amazonia”

ΔMAZÔNIAΔ
JEAN-MICHEL JARRE



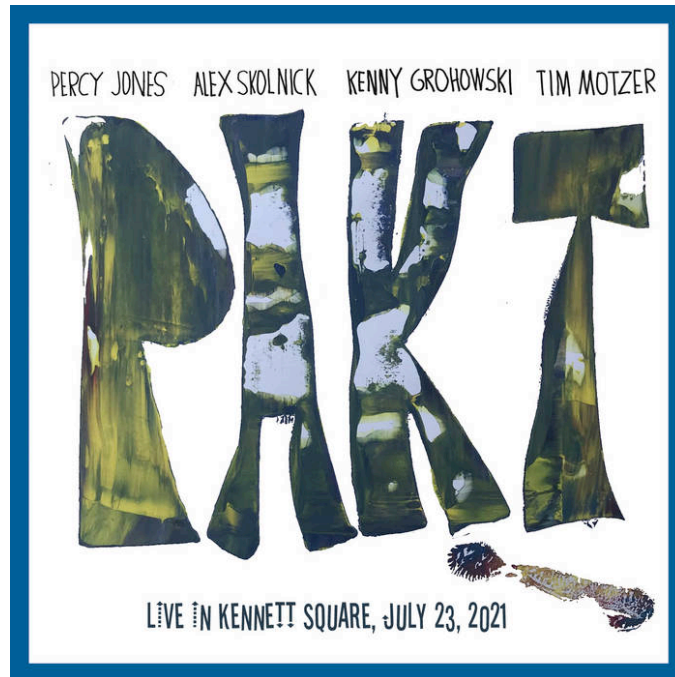
Several years ago, I went to see Jean-Michel Jarre in concert. I was never a huge fan, but I was pleasantly amazed by his show, and find I like his music a lot more ever since. This album is music to accompany a photo exhibition that showed up in various metropoli in 2021, the subject matter being the Amazon Forest. This kind of album is an A&R man's nightmare, stylistically impossible to pigeonhole and a blend of so many elements they become obscure. This man is a master composer by this point, and an electronic instrument genius.

John McLaughlin – “Liberation Time”



Ever since I saw the original Mahavishnu Orchestra play in a college fieldhouse in 1972, I have been in awe of John McLaughlin. His career is a mind-boggling celebration of jazz (the kind Wynton never, ever acknowledges) and Indian music. His long-time current ensemble, the 4th Dimension, has been together about 15 years, and it shows. However, with this release, McLaughlin does something rare: he features several kinds of ensembles, even playing ruminative solo piano on some parts. The fire is still there, there is Nobody that can play extended melodic machine-gun leads like he can, and his chordal work is an exemplar of taste.

PAKT – “Live in Kennett Square”



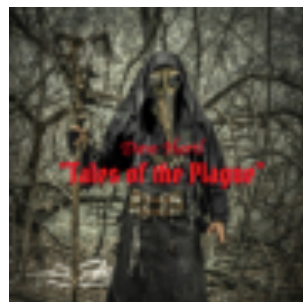
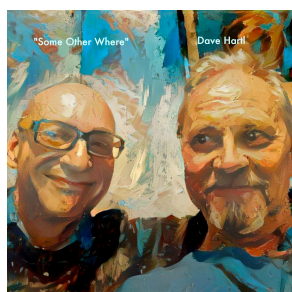
Percy Jones, bassist for the English prog jazz group Brand X, tours the country these days with Alex Akolnick, Kenny Grohowski, and Tim Motzer, playing a kind of off-the-cuff fusion jazz that seems to come out of thin air. They came down to the Mushroom Capital, Kennett Square, on July 23, 2021, and played on the roof of the Kennett Flash, recording the results and releasing this on Bandcamp days later. And I promise I will NOT miss them the next time they come around. Apparently they had some traffic concerns coming down Rt. 95 from New York City (Shocked, I'm Shocked I tell you!), and it ended up being expressed in their performance that night.

Yeah, check them out. This is the unknown jam band and I hope they can maintain this seat-of-the-pants existence for as long as they want.

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Runners-up. A couple more albums that made me think in 2021

Yeah, it's always hard to trim this down to 10 albums in a year that seemed really hot for new music. First of all, this was the first year I've EVER completed two full albums, so they influenced me a LOT, actually ate up more of my time than all the above albums put together. "Some Other Where" is a solo piano album of me playing compositions of Brian Groder, and "Tales of the Plague" is a wide-ranging pile of tunes I did during the pandemic.



Then, there's these four gems that have to be mentioned.

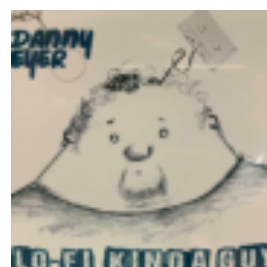
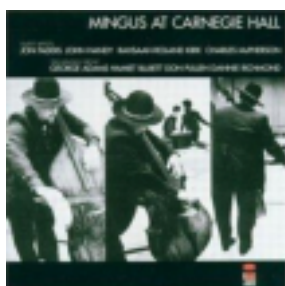
First up, Mingus did a concert at Carnegie Hall that was only ever half-released. This year they finally released the entire concert, in order, and it's amazing. "**Mingus at Carnegie Hall**" must be heard to be believed.

Second, "**The Complete Joe Henderson Blue Note Studio Sessions**" is another great Mosaic records rollout with their usual encyclopedic notes and info, wondrous photos, and impeccable audio quality. This is a treasure chest of good stuff.

Third, we lost Hal Willner in 2021. This was a producer who threw caution to the winds, and I loved his previous albums. His death motivated me to fill in my knowledge of his output by seeking out some of his non-anthology projects, and this album by Marianne Faithful became a favorite. She's got a voice I would

normally hate, I believe, but I've grown to love its world-weary appeal. "**Strange Weather**" is an album that features standards, most of them more obscure and not so overplayed, and she pulls them off really well.

And last, I have to give a shout out to Danny Eyer, rock guitarist, writer, and vocalist, who I had heard of for years and introduced myself to him only once. I really admire this cat, playing at the Jersey Shore in just about every bar that exists with music, and recording in that driven way I've shown admiration for above. His self-released album "**Lo-Fi Kinda Guy**" is brimming over with catchy tunes and heartfelt singing and playing, and I'm really happy to know him, even slightly. His album is available here: <https://www.ebay.com/p/28048605479>



This space reserved for YOUR picks...

Seriously, this only works if you are motivated and share your own thoughts about what music rocked you this year. I miss having friends recommend good music, and I deeply resent the corporate shills making suggested playlists "just for me" filled with whatever swill and copycat crap they want to make a buck from.

Send me your thoughts and I'll add them here!!

And here's some of the responses we got!

Michael Dotterer:

I appreciate your lists. They're always a chance to check some stuff out. As I mentioned, what gets me through a lot is funky horns, trombones, interesting writing and music that my friends have made.

Tower of Power 50 Years of Funk and Soul - The ultimate for a horn band listening addict. Sure, after a bit it does kind of all sound the same, but damn it's good. It's like pizza. And, it's not just the horns. The lock of the bass and drums is always fantastic, sometimes the organ solos, and nobody's voice sounds like Emilio's.

You - I really dug your Night Cafe rerelease and the Tales of the Plague. On a good day without medication, I could listen to one after the other!

Jon Batiste - We Are - I felt this was filled with such emotion and positivity. After listening to an interview with him on Fresh Air, I enjoyed it even more.

Matt Cappy - Tales of the Tape - I can't be objective at all listening to Matt. I've known him since he was in Jr. High. I remember him not wanting to consider UArts because of the lack of sports programs. What a fantastic presentation of music he offers on this album.

Fanfare Ciocarlia - I discovered them because of their Baltic Brass version of Just The Two Of Us that played during the credits of the second Borat movie. Super interesting writing, articulations, use of different instruments, kind of sloppy but great.

George Harrison's All Things Must Pass - I can't believe I wasn't familiar with this record until the rerelease of it this year.

Cory Wong - Anything really. The collaboration he did with Dirty Loops this year is just grooving horn funk pornography.

Scott Reeves - The Alchemist - The writing, the playing, oh my! Bonus for odd instrument choices.

Steven Bernstein - again, almost anything finds his way to my listening moods, but his release last year of Tinctures in Time was quite enjoyable. Raw slide trumpets sounds with some effects? Who wouldn't enjoy that.

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Chico Huff:

Hey Folks!

A quick 10 picks for me this time with minimal descriptions cause I've gotten a bit lazier in my old age! As always, these aren't necessarily 2021 releases, just music I'm discovering. Hopefully no repeats!

The Lickerish Quartet - Any Album. New project by members of one of my all-time fave bands "Jellyfish" (def check them out if you haven't!). For The Lickerish Quartet start with the tune "Lighthouse Spaceship". If possible, play it LOUD! :-)

Mark Turner - "Dharma Days". Brilliant stuff. Turner with Kurt Rosenwinkel, Reid Anderson and Nasheel Watts. Challenging compositions played effortlessly and creatively.

Aimee Mann - "Queens of the Summer Hotel" A collection of short, perfect songs. Been digging Mann for years, great to hear she's still making great music! Lovely stuff

Michael Mayo - "Bones". Man, this album!! Vocalist Mayo really brings something new to the table. I first discovered him on Nate Smith's "Kinfolk 2: See The Birds" album (another wonderful album) and searched out his own stuff. Richly harmonized vocals, creative writing, just great.

Virgil Donati - "Ruinination" Prog metal fusion at it's very best. Another album best played loud this album is a frequent go to for me. Check out the tune "Ruinination" to get an idea. Some insane guitar playing on this album as well. Only thought, sometimes the vocals, while well done, can come off slightly Jack Black Tenacious D-ish. Haha!

Julie Fowlis - "Alterum" Another beautiful album from Scottish vocalist Julie Fowlis. Much of it in Scots Gaelic. A gentle, soothing album of soothing Celtic music. The tune "Fear a' Bhrochain/Dhòmhnaill Binn" is an example of Scottish Mouth Music which mimics the cadence of instruments. Fowlis often sing this style on her albums.

Plini - "Impulse Voices" Another metal prog type album from guitar phenom Plini (Plini Roessler-Holgate). Great stuff! 2021 was the year I started kind of discovering stuff like this. I'm sure there's other people doing this type stuff but I've really been drawn to this style.

Michael Pipoquinha - "LUA" Brazilian bassist Pipoquinha has been killing it since he was way too young to be playing that good! ;-) Effortless mastery all around on this one. Living and breathing music and groove!

Pino Palladino & Blake Mills - "Notes With Attachments" Definitely this album!! Just when you thought there wasn't anything new under the sun this comes along. Really a fresh and refreshing approach on composition, texture, moods. Lovely

Pedro Martins - "Vox" Truly interesting and genre bending album from guitarist and vocalist Martins. Absolutely worth a listen! Beautiful and surprising long form compositions. Features Chris Potter among others. Echoes of Nascimento.

Here's to the new year!!!

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George Torella:

This one:



Mirror Mirror
Eliane Elias, Chick Corea & Chucho Valdés

JAZZ · 2021

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Chris Aschman:

Of the recent releases:

Alain Perez "ADN"

Mononeon "Supermane"

Genesis Owusu "Smiling With No Teeth"

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Randy Bishop

Some really excellent and thought-provoking choices, Dave. Like you, I get so tired of the mainstream, corporate music. This year, my favorite album was the Keb

Mo Christmas album which I dragged out of storage to listen to again during the holidays. It was actually released in 2019. It's called Moonlight Mistletoe and You. I have to give the guy super kudos for being able to write Christmas songs that are so freakin' clever. You would think that in that genre there is nothing new to be said, but somehow Keb figures it out. Not only that, but it is full of incredibly infectious hooks. I don't know how he does it, but I always enjoy his work. His other album, Oklahoma, that was released the same year is also excellent. Some of the songs are so prolific. Some make you laugh. Some make you cry, and some just make you tap your foot. 🎵

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Don Knabb

Here's my list for last year, in no particular order:

Shimmer - Kevin Keller - just plain nice music, varied tunes, developed during lock down with fan feedback

Catching Moments in Time - Haythem Mahbouli - cinematic modern classical

Waves - Avawaves - stunningly beautiful strings and keyboards

Meridian - Ian Boddy and Eric Wollo - English and Norwegian space musicians mixing it up

In Autumn - Jeff Pearce - Chapman stick artist

Ludvig Cimbrelus - Illuviation - hard to categorize, but wonderful stuff

Michael Manring - Small Moments - amazing bass guitarist

Robert Rich - Soundquest 2021 live virtual concert recording

Sachi Kobayashi - beautiful space/ambient music from Japan

Steve Roach - As It Is - more from the master of all things space and ambient and 2 extras:

Cloudform - zarr - intoxicating space/ambient music

Amethystium – Aphelio - Heard it on Echoes internet radio, found several albums in Amazon Prime Music for free. Impossible to put in a category.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amethystium#Discography>

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Bob Kimmel

I've contributed my own Top 10 list to Dave for some previous years but I have missed the last one or two (or maybe three) - just lazy I guess. But I always intend to send my list and then sometimes life gets in the way. But this year I'm in, 6 artists and 10 albums. Most of these are not new albums from this past year but they are albums that I became aware of in the last year and listened to quite a bit over the last 12 months or so. So here ya' go, in no particular order:

BILL CHAMPLIN - LIVIN' FOR LOVE. I have been a huge fan of Bill Champlin since the early 70s. I loved his band from back then called The Sons Of Champlin and I played a lot of those tunes in a band I was in back in those days called

Hurricane Alley. Then when he became a solo artist I played his solo records to death, especially is very first one titled "Single." So many great tunes on that album. Of course most people that are aware of him only got to know him when he joined Chicago in the mid 80s. He wrote and sang some really great stuff for them during his tenure in that band but he left Chicago in 2009. Since then he's done a lot of different things including some more solo recordings and a bunch of live dates with a new reorganized version of his Sons Of Champlin band. But last year he released his latest solo effort titled Livin' For Love and it was well worth the wait. Some great R&B and soulful rock songs that are reminiscent of his early work with the Sons and his early solo stuff. Just really great tunes and as always he sings his ass off throughout.

FRED - 3 albums - (self titled FRED, LIVE AT THE BITTER END & NOTES ON A PICNIC. Fred was a band that I knew back in the late 60s and early 70s. I was in a band from 1969 to 1974 called Shanghai from Harrisburg, PA, the band FRED was a bunch of guys who met in college at Bucknell University and they were booked by the same agency that my band Shanghai was booked by, so we ended up playing a bunch of gigs together and crossing paths at gigs throughout Pennsylvania and up and down the east coast. They were a prog rock band that started by doing covers of Jethro Tull and various other artists in that vein and then they started writing and playing their own stuff that was way ahead of its time. They featured a great front man named David Rose who also played electric violin. They were really fun to see and hear and we became friends with them. They broke up the same year we did in 1974 and I never knew about their albums but just last year I saw that their three albums that they made during the early 70s had been remastered and released on CDs. I bought those things right away. Now I will admit that some of the recordings, production and even some of the performances sound a bit dated and I'm not sure how much interest there would be in these guys unless you were around during their heyday and have a connection to the band, but I loved all three of these albums. They took me right back to those days when there were no rules, just go for it. They did some whacky stuff in some very odd time signatures and kind of bizarre chord structures and melodies but it was cool then and it's cool to hear it all again now.

OLE BØRUD - 3 albums - KEEP MOVIN', SHAKIN' THE GROUND & STEPPIN' UP. This guy is from Norway and there is a real R&B thing going on in some of those Scandinavian countries. They seem to have a real love for that soul, groove based pop music that came out of southern California in the 70s and early 80s and they're still making those kinds of records now. None of these albums (or the other 5 that he has out) are new. Keep Movin' is from 2011, Shakin' The Ground was released in 2008 and Steppin' Up came out in 2014 but I only discovered him in this past year. All the songs on these albums (and his other 5 that I've sampled a bit) are what might be considered "Yacht Rock." That form of music that is basically easy listening pop with R&B grooves and jazz influences and great soulful vocals. It gets a bad rap

sometimes but there's some really great stuff in that genre and on these albums in particular. Some killer players and amazing vocal performances and I highly recommend checking this guy out if you're not already familiar with him. He also released a single that was a cover of the Chaka Kahn tune "Through The Fire" that is wonderful.

TOMI MALM - WALKIN' ON AIR. Here we go again - another Scandinavian artist, this time from Finland. This is another great R&B/Pop/Groove/Jazz hybrid album that is highly influenced by the sound of the music from southern California in the 70s and early 80s. And again, this is not a new album, it was released in 2017 but I was just turned onto it last year. This guy is a writer/producer/guitar player/keyboard player/singer - all around major talent and this album grooves big time. He is usually not the lead singer on each song, for that he has enlisted the talents of some great singers like Zosia Karbowiak, Clif Magness, Ashton Moran, Jeff Pescetto, Jason Scheff (former bassist and singer from Chicago), Julian Thomas, Shem VonSchroeck (another great bass player and singer), Warren Wiebe and Zosia. He also assembled some amazing players, some from his country of Finland and many serious cats from here in the US. He had Vinnie Colaiuta, John "J.R." Robinson and Simon Phillips on drums among others. Jason Scheff, Neil Stubenhaus both contributed bass tracks and Robbie Buchanan played some keyboards. Luis Conte did some percussion stuff and there's a whole bunch of other great players on this thing. Some wonderful songs and killer grooves and vocal performances. Another one I highly recommend if you're not already familiar with this guy.

BOB SABELLICO - INFLUENCE. Local boy does good. Of course this local boy did good a long time ago and just continues to do better. I only ever met Bob once briefly and he probably wouldn't even remember that but he's from Philadelphia and has gone on to record and play with some pretty heavy hitters along the way. This most recent album of his is smokin' and features some great players in addition to Bob's excellent guitar and keyboard tracks. Just the drummers alone on this album give you an idea of how serious this thing is - Dennis Chambers, Will Kennedy & Todd Sucherman for starters. This album burns with some great jazz tunes and amazing performances. Bob's guitar work and synth tracks are stand out sounds and focal points and his guest artists turn in some amazing tracks.

TEARS FOR FEARS - THE TIPPING POINT. Actually this album isn't even released yet, it comes out on February 25, 2022 but I've heard advanced releases and this thing is great! I've been a big fan of their music for a long time and their last album "Everybody Loves A Happy Ending" was released in 2004, 18 years ago so this has been a long wait for their new one. Apparently this one almost didn't happen because Curt Smith (one half of the duo) walked away about half way through making it because of creative differences. But he finally returned and they finished the album and although I've heard a bunch of the advance releases I can't

wait for the whole albums release in a few weeks. These guys have always had problems in their working relationship and there's lots of stories about their in fighting and differences but somehow their differences always seem to coalesce into really great albums so I hope they keep fighting and writing and recording. Unless Covid screws them their tour is scheduled to start in May of 2022 and I'm hoping to see them in Philly on June 21st.

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Jack Loughhead

Hello Dave, and Happy New Year! I know I put a list together last year, but I guess I never got around to pulling the trigger. So at least one resolution for '22 is to follow through better. So, here goes. First off, I'd note that the Pharoah Sanders and McLaughlin albums would have to be on my list as well. Both, even though in their 7th or 8th decades, continue to put out astoundingly good music.

For my other pics, I go with:

Robben Ford - Pure. I saw him last year in a virtual concert at City Winery, and he really rocked. He's pushing blues out there to new territory.

Joey DeFrancesco - More Music. I thought this was a great album on the first listen, and had to check in to see who was playing tenor on one track. Lo and behold, it was the man himself! And that's not to mention him playing trumpet and singing as well - just not fair to have that much talent!

Omar Sosa and Sekou Keita - Suba. Sosa has been one of my all time favorite keyboard artists, and I love his link ups with African musicians. There's something very peaceful and comforting about the album - it carries me away.

David Bowie - Brilliant Adventure. I started listening to this on Amazon Prime (shame on me), and couldn't figure out why I'd get to doing something and come back much later and it was still playing. Only then did I notice that this compilation album (or maybe I should say set of albums - I think there actually are 9 albums in it, including the legendary "Toy") is actually over 10 hours long. As could be expected, it is somewhat inconsistent in spanning the whole era of the 90s, but it was so great to hear some "new" Bowie again.

Will Vinson, Gilad Hekselman and Antonio Sanchez - Trio Grande. I probably listened more to the prior album from these guys, Vinson's "It's Allright with Three" than this one, since it only recently came out, but they are both great records, IMHO. Sanchez is probably my favorite percussionist, and the other two take no back seat to him. Fantastic compositions and execution.

Steven Wilson - Future Bites. Can't help it; I'm a prog junkie, and I just love this guy's stuff. This one kind of dribbled out slowly a song at a time over the year, and isn't his greatest ever, but it still does something for me.

Marillion - With Friends at St. Davids. While I'm in the prog mode, this is a band that has always held my attention. This album is a live version of a number of their songs over the years, performed with an orchestra. At least to me, they have really used the orchestra to enhance their tunes, as compared with other rock bands who ended up creating elevator music by bringing in the strings.

Lastly, I listened a good bit to Mic Fleetwood's Celebrate the Music of Peter Green (and watched the concert). Yeah, it's a tribute with lots of rock' n roll royalty, but what great music Green wrote! It had me going back to pre-1970 Fleetwood Mac, and being hit again with the magnitude of the impact this guy had on popular music.

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Willhem Echevarria

I always approach music with the exact same routine: Does this touch me? Does this move me emotionally? Does it move me physically? Later I listen again and get involved intellectually, analyzing in more depth. There is another element--very subjective I confess--always present in most of the music I like: it sounds like something I would have liked to write. You may call it good envy.

These are the sounds that moved me the most during 2021:

1. **Maguda Shamsutdinova, Symphony No. 3 “Gengis Khan”**—This is the music that I wish I had been exposed to when I began to seriously study music at middle school in Puerto Rico. Why was everything Beethoven, Brahms, Shumann, etc? It is not until many years later that I discover, on my own, composers who brilliantly incorporate into their language and style folkloric traditions unknown to me. Maguda is a Tartar composer with lyricism and melodic angularity that sound fresh and beautiful.
2. **Eddie Daniels, Breakthrough**—This is a recording from the 1980s that I recently discovered while looking for arrangements and compositions by Jorge Calandrelli. I have always greatly admired his mastery in orchestrating and here he does all the arrangements for Daniels and the London Philharmonia Orchestra. I've admired Calandrelli ever since I found out he wrote the strings for a Cheo Feliciano bolero album that I love.
3. **Miguel Zenón/Luis Perdomo, El Arte del Bolero**—Speaking of boleros, Zenon and Perdomo take several classics of the Latin American genre and achieve a great combination of lyricism and harmonic invention while

maintaining a cadence that can still be danced to, which is the original intention of this musical style.

4. **David Sandford, A Prayer for Lester Bowie**—Here we have an arranger/composer using the jazz big band as a palette where the line between jazz and other styles is blurred. I confess it took me several times listening to the whole thing to finally grasp where this music is going. I am really intrigued by the way he uses the tuba when writing soli for both the trombone and the sax sections.
5. **Emilio Solla Tango Jazz Orchestra, Puertos: Music from International Waters**—Another recording that fascinates me because of the way the composer/arranger combines the sounds of jazz big band. Solla is Argentine and here makes use of the bandoneon not only as a soloist but integrated into the orchestra's sound palette. The album is a conceptual one: each track is a visit to a different port in the Americas, each visit having a historical meaning: the slave trade, immigration, European influence...but Solla writes in such a way as to never fall into pastiche.
6. **Roy Hargrove/Mulgrew Miller, In Harmony**—A double CD of live recordings where these two titans go head to head covering jazz standards. Both Hargrove and Miller passed away not long ago and I am really grateful that their interactions on stage were documented. I can put this CD every Sunday at home and just enjoy the ride.
7. **Dom La Nena, Tempo**—Dom La Nena is a young Brazilian cellist and singer. She accompanies herself using a looping device to obtain multiple sounds simultaneously. She also sings, if I counted correctly, in four languages: English, Spanish, Portuguese, and French. She is one of the reasons I keep being optimistic about the state of Latin music: she sounds sophisticated, deep, and complex while also being accessible. Just listen to the way she incorporates canons, passacaglias, and other Baroque devices in her writing. It does not sound contrived; it sounds awesome.
8. **Alfonso Fuentes, Plena**—Plena is one of the afro-folkloric rhythm of Puerto Rico. It is performed with three hand-held drums, you may call them tambourines but we Boricuas call them “tambores de plena”. Alfonso Fuentes is a Puerto Rican composer, pianist, and poet; he writes music for solo, chamber ensembles and symphony orchestras. He is also a professor at the Conservatory of Music in San Juan. In this recording, Fuentes uses the “plena” as the springboard to go on improvisational piano solos that go from one minute snippets to Cecil Taylor-like explorations lasting several minutes.
9. **Xiomara Fortuna, Viendoaver**—Xiomara is from the Dominican Republic and has been for several years releasing recordings blending folklore with different sounds: from electronic to rap to reggae to Afro Caribbean religious music. She makes heavy use of the tango-congo rhythm, a rhythmic cell originated in Haiti that has influenced everything from danza and habanera (yes, that particular rhythmic feature in Bizet’s Carmen) to raggaeton (where

most performers are not even aware that the rhythm comes from Haiti). Listen to the track *Como la marea* and compare it to Bad Bunny or any other hit in Latin radio and wonder why commercial radio does not play this. Or listen to Elegua-San Antonio (any of the two versions in the CD, one of them with guest Vaquero) to witness a direct link from 19th century Yoruba Africa to the streets of the Dominican Republic. And for those who thinks that Rita Indiana is the best thing to happen to Dominican urban music: I'll never understand why you would listen to that when you have Xiomara!

10. **Margaret Bonds, The Ballad of the Brown King**—Bonds is an African-American composer that studied with Florence Price and Roy Harris, among others. She was also an educator; Ned Rorem was a piano student at some point. This *Ballad* is an oratorio-like work for chorus, orchestra, and soloists written in 1954. This is such a beautiful composition! I have listened to it several times and always reach the same conclusion: why do we keep enduring performances of Handel's Messiah when we have this?

Honorable mentions:

These are not albums; these are tracks that I found in media: YouTube, Facebook, radio, etc.

- **Mima, El Arca de Mima**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2_p2HoO6eZ4
Incredible singer from Puerto Rico singing about the disappearance of native fruits. Is she making a metaphor of all things that we Boricuas have destroyed?
- **Barry Harris, The Bird of Red and Gold**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slvNQ7meNrl>
Barry Harris singing his own composition. What else can I say?
- **Silvana Estrada, Tiny Desk concert**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S52_XxBwbJg
A young Mexican singer with a fully developed style of her own.
- **Germaine Tailleferre, Arabesque for Clarinet and Piano**
I heard this on WRTI while driving and fell in love with her writing. I have to confess that even though I've always being a fan of Poulenc, Honegger, Debussy, Satie, Milhaud, and other French composers, the music of Tailleferre was not known to me.
- **Barrileras de 8M, Canción sin miedo**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XplHH_jShcl

I found this through Facebook because a friend of mine sent it to me realizing it was filmed in the town where I grew up. Although I started watching for that reason, I soon realized this is bomba music (Puerto Rico's oldest African derived music genre) with a powerful message: a song to protest domestic violence sung from the female perspective.

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