

SCOTT MORRIS

20. Converge - Axe to Fall. Some mutual music geeks and myself are doing a top 20 albums of 2009. One per day until the end of the year, and then we tally them all up and see if we get into dork heaven. My 20th pick is definitely not an album for all ears. Reigning from what I think is the best hardcore metal band of the aughts, Converge, "Axe to Fall" is a blistering record filled with the band's signature breakneck riffs and indecipherable vocals. But if you find that sort of thing exhilarating from time to time this one is absolutely fantastic. Sort of like being kicked in the head, except instead of giving you the headache it's kind of knocking one out for you.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EwkpZh0mSYM>

19. Circulatory System - Signal Morning. Going from metalcore to weird, poppy psychedelia is not that strange of a shift for me, and "Signal Morning" was definitely my sunshine trip fix of 2009. Circulatory System is the brainchild of musician/painter Will Cullen Hart, who some may know as being in the similar inventive 90's band Olivia Tremor Control, but most won't know him at all. This is their first record in eight years, after their great eponymous album, and the wait paid off. Through 17 tracks -- still clocking in at a brief 45 minutes -- this album bursts with Hart's twisted version of 60's pop and fractured melodies. A real winner for a man who takes his time to piece together each musical vision that pops into his head. And there's an added bonus for Neutral Milk Hotel fans, which would include me: Jeff Mangum was one of the musicians that took part in the creation of this album. And any Mangum sighting is a good sighting.

<http://downloads.pitchforkmedia.com/Circulatory%20System%20-%20Overload.mp3>

18. Sunn O))) - Monoliths & Dimensions. To describe the music of Sunn O))) as "avant-garde metal" is probably still a bit of an understatement. Their music has always been nothing less than polarizing even among the most ardent heavy metal fans, and "Monoliths and Dimensions" is no exception. Working with Mayhem vocalist, Attila Csihar, the two founding members of this drone band have created their greatest artistic achievement to date. This record has the familiar spacious drones and heavy guitars, but also new elements such as horns, harp, flute and a full Viennese woman's choir. Once again, this isn't the type of music you'll hear someone whistling in the halls or happen to catch on a car commercial, but if you're even slightly interested in music as art and just how far the boundaries can be pushed, then you owe it to yourself to give this album an open-minded listen. Brilliant stuff.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1HEiQJEmBg&feature=related>

17. Japandroids - Post-Nothing. After the current borrowing, plundering and general raping of the 80's that is happening in music and fashion these days it's kind of refreshing listening to a new band so steeped in mid-90's indie rock. Japandroids are another duo rock team hailing from Vancouver BC that aren't exactly making the most original music, but they are making some of the most fun, sloppy, loud tunes you can currently wrap your ears around. Songs like "Young Hearts Spark Fire" and "Wet Hair" will surely have you missing the days of "Superchunk" and "Jawbox," while never feeling there's blatant thievery going on either. "Post-Nothing" stands on its own as a fresh album, not just some rehash of a band everyone admired fifteen years ago. It's pretty vital music for a genre that so long ago seemed put down.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bnJn2Rh3ki8&feature=related>

16. The Antlers - Hospice. Conceptual albums can really be a hit-or-miss affair with me, especially if the music itself seems to have taken a back seat to the epic story the artist is trying to tell. The Antlers' "Hospice" does not fall into that category. This is one of the more haunting and gut-wrenching records I've listened to in a while, largely due to the tragic lyrics but also to the stark, sonic experimentation in the music itself. The album revolves around the true experience the founder and vocalist Peter Silberman went through when a loved one slowly died from bone cancer. Obviously, not a very happy record, but when listening to it as a whole there's a kinetic energy in the instrumentation that ultimately feels like hope, not despair. This could have easily been an overly sentimental ride, but instead Silberman and company chose to infuse an ample amount of vivacity. This really helps carry the listener through all the heartache and makes it quite a beautiful album. This will be one to keep going back to for years to come.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PxFwAmYuYds&feature=related>

15. Flaming Lips - Embryonic. After the fairly accessible "Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots" and the underwhelming "At War With the Mystics" I was beginning to wonder if we had lost our beloved, weird, twisted Flaming Lips. Fortunately, their last album "Embryonic" crushed all my pessimism. This is their first double album since beginning as a band in the mid-80's

and I think it ranks up there with their best. The weird is back and everything but the kitchen sink is thrown in to the eighteen song monster, along with guest vocal sounds--yes sounds--by Karen O. This is the Flaming Lips being experiment and sounding unlike anything they've done before. What more can we ask for?

<http://vimeo.com/7359892>

14. Fever Ray - s/t. On one of the best songs off of the self-titled Fever Ray album, Karin Dreijer Andersson begins by belting out, "when I grow up/I want to be a forester/run on the moss in high heels/that's what I'll do/throwing out a boomerang/waiting for it to come back to me." These are the simple, childlike lyrics we've come to love from Karin. I mean really, shouldn't that still be our dream even in adulthood? Well, I could do without the high heels but you catch my drift. This is Andersson's first solo outing, her other project being the equally amazing The Knife with her brother, and she somehow manages to be even a little darker than on previous work. There's still the haunting synths, ambient electronica, and dark, wistful vocals, all channeling 80's goth-pop acts like The Cure. Yet the overall pull to the album is its expansive feel and all around patience. Her songs really take their time to soak into your bloodstream, which is a rare quality in music these days. This album also gets best cover art in 2009.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4F-CpE73o2M>

13. Antony and the Johnsons - The Crying Light. It's become common knowledge in the indie music world that anything Antony and company put out is going to be beautiful. Even their singles and EP's get gobbled up and lavishly praised by musicphiles all over the world. It's under debate as to which is their better album: their last, "I Am a Bird Now," or the new "The Crying Light," but the simple fact is... it doesn't matter, because it's Antony Hegarty composing and singing all the songs and therefore it's phenomenal. "The Crying Light" may still lack a show-stopper like "Hope There's Someone," but with so many other gorgeous songs such as "Epilepsy Is Dancing," "Aeon" and "Another World," there really can't be any call for complaint. Hegarty could easily be a superstar in the world of God-awful reality competitions, but thankfully he's much more of a serious musician, and there's a selected part of the population that benefits greatly from that.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zazvt9zusDs&feature=related>

12. The xx - s/t. So what's the lure to "The xx?" They've become the biggest buzz band in 2009 and it literally seemed to have happened overnight. And what exactly makes them so intriguing? Is it the sensual vibe of their songs? Or maybe the fact they always seem to be speaking about sex? Is it the incredibly lush, stripped down sound of their music? I think it comes from the sense of mystery that oozes out of the speakers whenever this record is played. I've never experienced an album that feels as if I'm eavesdropping as much as I have with this one. This is music about lovers, but we really don't know who these two lovers are. Are they actually the two vocalists of the band or are they just telling stories about a fictional couple? Are they even lovers or just friends with benefits? They sit around watching the VCR, but we're not even clued into what they're watching, although we each have our own ideas. It all just adds to the maddening intimacy and flirtation of the album.

Romy Madley Croft whispers in the song "Shelter": "maybe I had said/something that was wrong/can I make it better/with the lights turned on," and even though it's an obvious allusion to pillow talk gone horribly wrong, it also feels as if she's speaking directly to the listener, because we also feel like we're in the dark, and at some point the light is going to come on and we will finally get to see who these lovers are. But isn't it far sexier to keep the lights off and use our imagination?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pib8eYDSFEI>

11. HEALTH - Get Color. So, the band that brought the first taste of accessibility into the noise scene back in 2007 with their self-titled album, "HEALTH", now brings their second helping of harsh, pounding, funky bedlam-rock to the table. And how does it get received? Rather lukewarm actually. So why didn't "Get Color" appeal to the hipster masses as it did with their first record? There were still dance club moments like with the incredible single "Die Slow," the punishing drumming by Benjamin Miller, and the synthetic beats accompanied by whispering vocals. The aggression and mechanical structure of their sound even seemed to be turned up a notch. The disconnect must somehow be laid in the laps of the fans who were expecting an album that would change the way we look at noise rock entirely. An unfair bar to set, if you ask me. Maybe "Get Color" was more of a side-stepping motion than the forward leap that so many had hoped for, but I still see it as a continuation of challenging music meant to heighten all your senses. And I'm fine with them taking their time to change the world -- it should be a fun ride.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJqZOGK4CL8>

10. Micachu & the Shapes - Jewellery. Mica Levi is a petite 22-year-old from the UK who creates some of the most quirky pop music you're likely to hear these days. She goes by her stage name of "Micachu" and rounds the band out with a couple more musicians that also look fresh out of high school and call themselves "The Shapes." Mica is known for her array of eclectic instruments she uses for recording and performing her songs, many of which are homemade. Someone once said watching her perform live was like having an 8-year-old walk on stage and yell a bunch of profanity toward you, and after seeing her play a few months back I couldn't agree more. The songs not only are quick and catchy, but they also seem to have been thought up on the spot, and I mean that in a good way. There's a certain grouping on the album -- "Eat Your Heart," "Curly Teeth," and "Golden Phone" -- that I think is one of the best song clusters of recent memory. "Jewellery" is one of the most original and best debuts to come out of 2009.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8TRkZpFgJcl>

9. Fuck Buttons - Tarot Sport. Given their name there's no doubt Fuck Buttons will never go mainstream, or even want to, so it's also no surprise that they happen to be in a collective of noise purveyors bringing some clout to the genre. Andrew Hung and Benjamin John Power formed Fuck Buttons five years ago in Bristol, England. They immediately struck a chord with their two 7" singles, "Bright Tomorrow" and "Colours Move," which were each immediately popular. Their proper debut came out the following year and was on many "best of" lists for 2008. However, some of the more abrasive songs on "Street Horrrsing" turned some people off, and they no longer seemed to be moving toward the huge success that everyone predicted. A year and one album later, the Buttons are back on top. This more accessible sound brings on the adrenaline rush by way of stunning electro turbulence, yet still manages to keep the faint of heart sticking around for more. It's debatable whether "Tarot Sport" or "Street Horrrsing" is the better album -- I'm undecided myself -- but either album elicits the kind of electrical jolt that only Frankenstein's monster has experienced and lived to mumble about, so shut up already and turn it up.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hQXSsbQCMs>

8. Neon Indian - Psychic Chasms. 2009 will be the year that invented "glo-fi", or at least put a name on the sound that is now referred to as "glo-fi." Some descriptions of this movement would include: electronic beats, warbly synths, dreaming ambient, offbeat trance and maybe romantic voice manipulation. Another name for this style of music is "hipstergogic pop," an even goofier name than "glo-fi." Whatever you want to call it, this upbeat and addictive sound can almost make me get out on the dance floor--which is near impossible unless I'm highly inebriated--and for my money the best album to come out from this genre is Neon Indian's "Psychic Chasm." This is the current moniker for composer Alan Palomo and has garnered his best reviews yet. It's really a wonderful mesh of so many different styles of music and they all make you feel like one of the cool kids. I haven't heard the 80's sound this vital in quite a while, or at least not since the last Cut Copy album anyway.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISeaLAJT6yU>

7. Wild Beasts - Two Dancers. I am still in awe of Wild Beasts' Hayden Thorpe's falsetto voice. When first hearing this album I would have sworn it was a male and female sharing singing duties. But not so, they're two men in their early 20's with vocal ranges completely opposite of one another and the results are stunning. The next most compelling aspect of Wild Beasts are some of the images evoked by the songs, replete with tales about gang rape, bones in teeth, babies starving and ungrown, women as birthing machines, drinking binges leading to sexual debauchery, and general human suffering. Wild Beasts indeed.

Still, disturbing imagery aside, the music of "Two Dancers" is still nothing short of fantastic, with sweeping choruses and lilting guitars their music really earns the right to be called "majestic." This is another audacious, masterful record hailing from the youth of the England and it's not to be ignored.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwHoh2vNdiA>

6. Grizzly Bear - Veckatimest. It seems to me that "Veckatimest" was the most anticipated album of the year, even more so than the one by this band called Animal Collective. Whereas the Animal Collective record was already assumed to be great, nobody really knew what to expect from the next Grizzly Bear LP. It could have wound up being brilliant--even a step up from "Yellow House"--or it could have been a self-indulgent failure. What we got was something just as great as their prior outing and possibly the step up everyone hoped for.

The greatest moments on "Veckatimest" may be the one-two punch of the opening songs: "Southern Point" and "Two Weeks." The psychedelic romp of "Southern Point" immediately captivates the listener with tons of vocal harmonies,

acoustic guitars and swishing drums. This is followed by what may be in the top five cuts of the year. "Two Weeks" is an instant classic shrouded by a simple piano chord overlapped by Edward Droste's gorgeous voice crooning out lyrics such as, "Would you always? Maybe sometime? Make it easy?" There's much more to be digested within this cornucopia of sounds and styles throughout the entire twelve tracks, and one would be remiss to not put in the time and effort to hear them out.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQ4jZeGUFzI&feature=related>

5. Phoenix - Wolfgang Amadeus Phoenix. For someone who grew up listening to nothing much other than 80's metal I'm as shocked as anyone else that I now love an upbeat, radio-friendly, pop record, and "Wolfgang Amadeus Phoenix" is a near flawless one. I'm too busy these days to really go into discussion about this one, but I will say it doesn't have a bad song on it. "Listomania" and "1901" have been their huge hits from this album, and they are fantastic (especially "1901"), but sometimes I think I prefer the slow burner of "Fences" or the incredibly hooky "Lasso." Just a superb work from start to finish from this always reliable French band.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=weoqE_thalk&feature=related

4. Girls - Album. By now we all know the story of Christopher Owens. Oh, you don't? Guess you must have a life. Since I don't, I'll fill you in. As a teen, Owens was forced by his family to be a member of the cult "Children of God." And we all know that nothing but good things come out of being in a cult, right? I'm mean ask anyone who was in the "Peoples Temple" led by Jim Jones. Oh, that's right, it's a little difficult to ask those people anything at all anymore. Owens' brother died at an early age because the cult refused to give him medical attention when he needed it (more great stuff coming from religious minds). Anyway, Christopher eventually escaped from the cult and lived on the streets of Texas for a while and then in San Francisco for many years. Eventually, he met a cat named Chet "JR" White, formed the band "Girls," and after ingesting many psychedelic drugs, created the album properly titled, "Album."

Okay, so not exactly the most common story about creating a band, but a pretty effective one nonetheless. "Album" is a wonderful, psychedelic, sun-drenched ride, harnessing the sounds of the likes of Brian Wilson, Elvis Costello and Buddy Holly. "Laura" is about as simple and touching of a love song as you can hear, while "Hellhole Rattrace" is the epitome of repetition creating emotional obsession. It's a very hypnotic song about a potentially very sad person. The entire scuzzed-out sound of the record only adds to its authenticity about a young, down-n-out teenager. These songs sound as earnest as anything I've heard this year, and it only adds that they're so damn addictive. A few listens through and you won't be able to put it away for quite a while.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcqwFKagH4>

3. Dirty Projectors - Bitte Orca. Trying to explain Dirty Projectors' sound is quite the conundrum. Any genre you use to describe them tends to work but at the same time doesn't. Here are some words I could use to illustrate their music and they would be accurate at least at some point in their latest album: whimsical, indie pop, R&B, avant-garde prog, electronic, doo-wop, funky, chamber pop, and experimental rock. Yes, they all work but you couldn't use just one to explain what they sound like, it would only be the tip of the iceberg.

"Stillness Is the Move" is definitely the record's highlight and what kind of shot them into indie stardom. But with other fantastic gems like "Temecula Sunrise" and the gorgeous "Two Doves" it's far from a one-hit LP. The mastermind of the Dirty Projectors, David Longstreth, may have made the most accessible album so far in his career, but it's also the most artistically creative and endlessly fascinating.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qtXtgHGrL9E&feature=related>

2. Dan Deacon - Bromst. Dan Deacon has matured tenfold since his first commercially released album, "Spiderman of the Rings." And not that *Rings* didn't have some choice cuts, but ultimately it was a little more goofy than it needed to be and I found myself skipping to certain tracks. On his next album, Deacon has upped the craftsmanship and possibly made his masterpiece. This isn't to say that "Bromst" is for everyone... it's not. Electronica is only loved to a certain degree anyway, but when you throw in computerized vocals that wind up sounding like a small child that has just inhaled helium then you can really get people running for the exits.

The record starts out with the slow build of a looped voice, followed by a distant chant of Deacon himself and then a ragtime piano repetitively pounding out chords to the backdrop of staccato horns. It becomes an exercise in repetitive minimalism and produces an upbeat tempo that is downright intoxicating. The song is titled "Build Voice" and it's a great opener to let all those involved know what they're in for and if they need to bail then now is a good time.

The true genius of the piece comes in the song "Snookered," which left me breathless after hearing it. The first three minutes are very calm, beginning with what sounds like a triangle being played, then followed by a rather maudlin yet soothing arrangement of instruments, including a drum beat that slowly builds to a vicious circle, and eventually leading to the greatest cacophony of broken vocal samples being brutally hiccupped for nearly a minute without any other accompaniment. It's literally my favorite musical moment in 2009 and the overall song is only tied with "My Girls" by Animal Collective as the best of the year.

Obviously, I could go on and on about this album and it's wonderful imagination, but I'm hankering for a cocktail and to go put this on the turntable. I only heard a few musical works this year that I would classify as great art and this was one of them.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HeeHGCPcVdM&feature=related>

1. Animal Collective - *Merriweather Post Pavilion*. So what more can be said about an album that is already being hailed as a contemporary classic? Since around this time last year, the hype generated by this record has been deafening. Early leaked copies from late 2008 already had people hailing *Merriweather* as the best album of the year that hadn't been born yet. The real question is, Does the material hold up to the lavish praise? My personal answer would be: in aces.

It can safely be said that Animal Collective is at least the most influential band of the aughts, and possibly the best. Of their eight studio albums released since 2000, at least five have been great and the others fairly interesting, if not equally successful.

Their latest is their most accessible yet. "My Girls" will go down as one of the most quintessential pop songs of the decade. It's a dizzying array of psychedelia, melody, sampling, and blissed-out vocals; a pure sonic experience. While many others such as "Summertime Clothes"--which offers a hypnotic techno beat and a rhythmic foundation paired with soaring singing--will remind listeners of just how stuffed the album is with perfectly pitched songwriting. The record's coda, "Brothersport," is equally mesmerizing with its Latin-tinged sound, then finishes with a trance-inducing game of vocal harmonies. It's a wonderful way to cap the amalgam of tunes meticulously placed next to each other in a telling whole.

Merriweather may prove to be Animal Collective's crowning achievement, and also one of the greatest ways to sign off on the first ten years of the 21st century.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GxhaRgJUMI8>

KASEY LAWSON

20. Jonsi & Alex-Riceboy Sleeps

Sigur Rós frontman Jónsi Birgisson has long been adept at creating eery and epic ambient rock. With side project 'Riceboy Speaks' he and partner Alex Somers have turned the rock down and the ambient way up. The album plays less like an indie LP and more like an uninterrupted symphonic opus. A great Sunday afternoon meditation.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vZEokp-Q00>

19. ASIWFYFA-And So I Watch You From Afar // Rock, my friends, is most certainly not dead. Not if these Belfast natives have anything to say about it. There is so much that seems tongue-in-cheek with this band. From their Dali inspired cover art, metal names (Bone Crusher, Gut Slurper), to their orotund song titles (Set Guitars to Kill). But believe me, these Northern Irelanders are not fucking around. ASIWFA combines lusciously aggressive guitar melody with syncopation so tight and accurate it seems to be set by an atomic clock.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7EOi91-Ge6c>

18. Camera Obscura-My Maudlin Career // Tracyanne Campbell's group of Glaswegian minstrels have taken an interesting musical journey over the last eight years and four LP's. From lo-fi indie melancholy machines to fully produced nostalgia designers. They've survived early and incessant comparisons to fellow Scots Belle and Sebastian to fully 'cross the pond' artistically. "My Maudlin Career" transports the listener to Detroit circa 1959, with all the doo-wop vocals and absurd string arrangements intact.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3CkfvYMCWM>

17. Atlas Sound-Logos //2009 has been the year of the side project, and Deerhunter's Bradford James Cox is no exception. With his second undertaking as Atlas Sound, Cox has gone all hip-hop on us and invited several guest artists to join in on his epic musical dreamscape. These collaborations(Animal Collective's Noah Lennox and Stereolab's Laetitia Sadier) also happen to be the crests on this fantastic sonic wave. And to boot Cox pulls double duty, playing model on what has to be the creepiest cover art of the year.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FnEy3XDNxE>

16. Mos Def-Ecstatic //Finally! Mos Def has given his insatiable need to make shitty movies a rest and gone back to something he can do quite well, produce quality hip-hop records. Imbuing his latest album with the same kind of autobiographical fervor for his native 'bed-stuy' while simultaneously jet-setting the listener around the world with samples that catch your ear, take it to dinner and call it the next day. Similar to his magnum opus, 'Black on Both Sides', Mr. Def achieves this with the help of a cavalcade of international producers. When it comes to Mos-Def, the more the better I guess. Its too bad that also applies to his other artistic ventures.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UT-hYXqTN38>

15. Bill Callahan-Sometimes I Wish We Were An Eagle //A late addition to my list, and I'm sure if I had another month this album would climb even higher. The strange thing is...I have no idea why.

At first listen Mr. Callahan's striking baritone vocals seem odd, clumsy and even puerile. Yet as one gets deeper into the album(and with multiple listenings), they begin to soothe and comfort, even when literal nonsense is being spurted out. (You'd be amazed how satisfying it is to sing along with "Zupoven del ba, Mertepy ven seinur") Its as if he is singing about a you that is similarly struggling through life, yet in another dimension. "You fly all night to sleep on stone. The heartless rest that in the morn will be gone." And from his perspective your troubles are so simple, and he'd like to share his eternal wisdom. "If you could only stop your heart beat for one heart beat."

With a sparse production that hints of his early days of homemade tapes, and an assortment of orchestral peppering 'Sometimes' feels like a modern day Nick Drake record, haunting and quizzical.

Hopefully another contributor will be able to wax more poetically on this little gem that has taken me on such a peculiar journey.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_weCYvN5KU

14. AC Newman-Get Guilty // AC Newman, the driving force behind Vancouver super group The New Pornographers, has had little critical acclaim for his solo recordings. The main criticism being that without the artistic prowess of bandmates Neko Case and Dan Bejar, Newman's solo recordings are simply rehashed and stale. 'New Pornographers lite' they say. Now granted, New Pornographers proves the idiom that a group is more than the sum of its parts, but when one of those parts, namely Newman, happens to be one the most original and exciting songwriters of the last decade, the sum of the individual is still great.

On 'Get Guilty' Newman solidifies his mastery of the power pop record. Melding curious hooks with farcical lyrics all while the band attacks each off beat in unison. On the B-side things take a post-punk turn towards a more Flaming Lips type of approach. Starting hard and smoothing it out along the way. Newmans typical modus operandi.

The refrain on the opening song, 'There Are Maybe Ten or Twelve' says it all when it comes to 'Get Guilty' and Newman in general, "Make of That What You Will". Is Newman without his friends like a cake without icing? Sure. But it's still a pretty damn satisfying cake by itself.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jlwdMyYryPM>

13. Starfucker-Jupiter // The princes of PDX pop are striking while the iron is hot with their second release in as many years and their last under their controversial epithet. It was rumored that a major label was wooing them if only they would change their name, so after an exhaustive search and resulting fan contest they came up with...PYRAMIDDD(caps and all). I know, lame. But they didn't like my idea of 'Taint Patrø!' so fuck them.

'Jupiter' is the lavishly bubble gum epitome of a guilty pleasure without a hint of shame whatsoever. An orgasm of rainbows and faggotry that culminates in what else, but a cover of Cyndi Lauper's, 'Girls Just Want to Have Fun'. So just put your Bauhaus records away, don your tightest brightest neon shirt and dance you elitist hipster asshole.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfJWkfqN97E>

12. Telefon Tel Aviv-Immolate Yourself // Tragedy followed the January 20th release of 'Immolate Yourself' by less than 48 hours when spotty news reports stated that Telefon Tel Aviv's Charles Cooper's body had been found dead of an apparent suicide. A claim that was quickly denied by remaining member Joshua Eustis who said Cooper's death was an accidental and lethal mix of alcohol and sleeping pills.

Regardless of the extenuating circumstances of Mr. Cooper's death, the Chicago based electronica duo which he and Mr. Eustis had formed almost a decade before was for all intents and purposes, no more. A fact that colors the dark industrial timbre of their 3rd full-length.

From the opening track, 'The Birds' TTA places the listener in a desolate environment of synth and rhythm haunted by an unintelligible vocalist whose repetitions show him to be stuck on a singular idea. But the beauty of TTA was their ability to take that tedious, inanimate, electronic idea and suffuse it with emotion and sentiment.

It is a shame to lose an artist who was able to put vibrant life into the music of our technological society. 'Immolate Yourself' is a fitting denouement.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_O0tkdJuqHw

11. Phosphorescent-To Willie // Back in 2007 I went to a show which Matthew Houck, aka Phosphorescent, was headlining. Unfortunately for Mr. Houck, Bon Iver, who at the time was fully into his meteoric rise to indie stardom, was opening. So as Bon Iver finished his set I would say that almost 80% of the audience left. Once on stage, alone without his band, Mr. Houck told of the horrendous day which he had just experienced. On their drive north from San Francisco the band's touring van had literally caught on fire on I-5 and was incapable of going any further. The band had decided that Matthew would go on alone and he hitch-hiked to Sacramento where he would catch a last minute flight to Portland. The airline subsequently lost his guitar. When it rains it pours.

There he was. On stage at the Holocene with a borrowed guitar playing to a handful of slightly interested people. So early this year when he released 'To Willie', a tribute album to the iconic woe is me country legend Willie Nelson, it seemed a perfect fit.

With all due respect, Phosphorescent's shallow, crackling, almost pathetic voice matches the spirit of these songs perfectly. On "Too sick to pray" his pleas to the Lord for comfort and consolation are heartbreakingly unaffected and sincere. Particularly to myself, in a year that has been trying to say the least.

Like any good country album things get a bit rowdy in the middle and the band doesn't miss a beat, particularly on "Pick up the Tempo" where Nelson's penchant for honky-tonk is given a great treatment.

But this tomfoolery doesn't last long as the mood plummets into the pseudo a cappella 'Can I Sleep in Your Arms Tonight Lady'. A hymn to rock-bottom in 6/8 and the unparalleled highlight of the album.

In the vein of Mark Kozelek's 'What's Next to the Moon', an AC/DC tribute album, Phosphorescent has taken classics and re-interpreted them honestly while simultaneously honoring the original.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1O_mnuYkGUo

10. Harlem Shakes-Technicolor Health // Sometimes life can collapse upon you in an instant, and in those moments music is a particularly useful tool of catharsis. By submerging yourself deep within the pain you maintain a hope of absolving yourself of it. It doesn't really work but it's a great excuse to bust out The Magnetic Fields' '69 Love Songs' and just wallow in your own pathetic ache. (It doesn't hurt to smoke clove cigarettes and read Camus either) But sooner or later you have to get up, wash your face, put on some sneakers, go for a run and get the fuck over yourself.

'Technicolor Health' is that perfect transitional album. Full of energy and sensible optimism that leaves a little wiggle room for the cynic you truly are. Early on, 'Strictly Game' plays out like a postscript to The Mountain Goats', 'This Year' promising better things to come. "Make a little money, take a lotta shit, feel real bad and get over it...This will be a better year". Lets hope that's prophetic. The snarky 'Niagara Falls' shows that optimism does not imply naivete, "I don't even know what I'm in the game for. I don't even get your t-shirt's pun."

'Sunlight' is the apex of the album, exploding like a indie-pop street riot. A sonic stream of consciousness anchoring the entire album together. "We just let go of the night now slowly. We won't dance, we wont sing, we wont talk. We just gonna watch how it bends."

Unfortunately for these 'sunny proselytizers', as one reviewer deemed them, this album full of 'clear-eyed optimism' will be their first and last full-length. (It was reported in September that the band had broken up) As for this cynic, who needed a kick in the ass that looked like a rainbow, I'm doing my best not to see the bitter irony in that.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIAQJ2NkUZI>

9. Dan Deacon-Bromst // It's official, Dan Deacon has grown up. Don't worry kids, you'll still see him at shows 30 pounds overweight, t-shirt two sizes too small with a broken arm from a "sampling" accident placing his equipment in the middle of the room so all the sweaty weird scrawny kids with t-shirts two sizes too large can girate nearer to him.

Maybe its better to say his music has grown up. On his early records, 'Silly Hat Vs. Eagle Hat' and 'Meetle Mice' Mr. Deacon often sounded like a paranoid M.I.T. student on a terrible acid trip. The random and the arbitrary reigned. 2007's 'Spiderman of the Rings' was an electronica masterpiece which sported two clear classics but also the obligatory five minute freak out session every so often.

'Bromst' is a clear step forward. More controlled and succinct without sacrificing the spontaneity and insanity. The freak out sessions are still there but they seem to have purpose and a place to go. In fact the entire album seems to be a 65-minute exploration of how to get from here to there. One extended neo-classical movement. No real 'hits' per se, but no filler either.

If I was wandering in the woods surrounding Baltimore and happened upon the magical pup tent displayed on the cover I would be delighted to go hear what else he had to say. But I will not be girating.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-CkUEXHctfk>

8. Grizzly Bear-Veckatimest // Music should be about substance. Artists coming together for a pilgrimage of mutual trust. Throwing concern for intangibles aside and investing in the work. But it doesn't hurt to have really cool aesthetics involved either. 'Veckatimest' is truly satisfying on both of these accounts.

Brooklyn-based Grizzly Bear traveled north to conceive, write and record the follow-up to their critically acclaimed debut, 'Yellow House'. First to upstate New York and then on to band member Edward Droste's grandmother's home off Cape Cod. Photographer Hisham Bharoocha accompanied the band during these sessions. A series of his photos of the group and entourage relaxing and exploring are included in the LP of 'Veckatimest' making it easily the most pleasing tactile and visual packaging of the year.

The video for 'Two Weeks' is another aesthetic wonder. A visualization of what Pitchfork described as Grizzly Bear's democratic leanings. Four equal partners side by side. The destructive force that subtly occurs is hard to determine as malignant or benign, ecstasy or misery. But their lush Brian Wilson-esque vocals and sanctuary setting give the song/video a rapturous feel. The undisputed high water mark of the entire album.

'Veckatimest' is certainly substantial but it does ebb and flow, which is strangely a relief at times. There are three or four songs that have such weight it tends to bring the adjoining songs down with them, giving the listener a respite to reflect. These four boys seem so open to the creative process and also patient enough to take the time to dial things in. I can't help but highly anticipate the next album.

I can't
get out
of what I'm in
to with you

7. Bon Iver-Blood Bank(EP) // It's interesting to witness how fast Bon Iver, aka Justin Vernon, has gone from 'random failed musician from Wisconsin' to 'mythic folk icon/isolationist/modern-day Thoreau' to 're-hashed auto-tune blasphemmer' in the matter of 18 months. After the phenomenal critical acclaim and success of 2007's 'For Emma, Forever Ago', Vernon was knighted by the music establishment along with fellow bearded 20-somethings Fleet Foxes as the new direction in indie-rock. But after the January release of his EP, those who knighted him were just as quick to knock him down a peg with accusations that 'Blood Bank' was simply the left-overs from 'Emma' and that the folk artist had tarnished that which is sacrosanct by using auto-tune on his song 'Woods'.

Much ado about nothing I must say. True, the skeleton of the title track was recorded during the 'For Emma' sessions, but the rest of the EP was recorded over the span of 18 months in four different locations with the talents of additional musicians.(Vernon was the only performer on 'Emma') I would say that is the sign of an artist who is attempting to evolve

and grow, not stand pat and satisfy the needs of his label for a quick payday. And when it comes to the liberal use of auto-tune on 'Woods' it's not as if he's correcting a lack of skill ala T-Pain. On the contrary, Vernon's crystal clear falsetto stands alone strikingly well. In an interview Vernon himself stated that after hearing Imogen Heap's use of auto-tune on her track 'Hide and Seek' he was intrigued by the possibilities of multiple layers of his own voice stripped of their humanity and replaced by the cold accuracy of modern technology. A stirring counterpoint to the image laid out in the sparse lyrics of 'Woods'.

The four tracks on 'Blood Bank' play like a modern Americana version of Vivaldi's Four Seasons. We find ourselves in the frigid confines of a car in winter watching the exhalation of our lover fog up the windows:

"That secret that you know, that you don't know how to tell
It fucks with your honor and it teases your head."

'Beach Baby's placid lap steel solo welcomes spring's first warmth with Vernon's whimsical ramblings:

"Don't you lock when your fleeing
I'd like not to hear keys."

The aggressive piano syncopation of 'Baby's' underpinning the narrators sarcastic skepticism of young adults' need for parenthood in the heat of summer:

"I'll probably start a fleet with no apologies
But my woman and I know what we're for."

And finally, like Sinatra we come to autumn and the 'september of our years' with regret and nostalgia hoping that an escape into the wilderness will give meaning to what we've experienced:

"I'm building a still to slow down the time."

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBh-0oHm9Ak>

some auto-tune reverie

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8xAeBOAC8U>

6. Dark Was The Night (compilation)-Various Artists // Bryce and Aaron Dessner of The National produced the proverbial slam-dunk comp. album of 2009. A charity compilation benefitting the Red Hot Organization, an institution that has been battling HIV and AIDS with the help of the music industry since 1990.

Normally compilations are the epitome of hit-and-miss. In the days before online downloading ones library was often stocked with the random smattering of movie soundtracks which consist of 3/4 shite and a few gems. Those little guilty pleasures where your favorite band covers your other favorite bands b-side rarity. So like any other respectable obsessive audiophile, you had to have it. 2 hours and 3 LP's into this one it's easy to distinguish it as something different.

The artists involved are a family portrait of the independent music scene from the first ten years of the new century. From the not so old school standard bearers: The Decemberists, Spoon, Cat Power and Iron and Wine, to the new blood: Bon Iver, Feist and The Dirty Projectors. From track 1 to 31 it has the look of a Coachella lineup on steroids.

But what makes this album stand apart is not the lineup, but the high quality and creativity of the songs those artists have submitted.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5-fdmezMgA>

5. Harmonic 313-When Machines Exceed Human Intelligence //

For someone who was a toddler during the infancy of Atari and the Speak and Spell, it is impossible not to be intoxicated by the familiar beeps and digital squeals that pervade this electronic opus, the latest in a long line of monikers/projects from Aussie Mark Pritchard.

Full of fat squawking bass lines and seismic drum breaks 'When Machines' is constructed around an opening pair of freakishly compelling tracks, 'Dirtbox' and 'Cyclotron'. Each crammed full of 'Logan's Run' style synths marching forward like a robot horde.

These early digital, childhood sounds are not used as a gimmick, nor are they utilized to sound playful. They sound like the vocalizations of some infantile artificial intelligence which has been given voice by Moog. This anemic being has announced

that "music is a thing of the past", and has offered a substitute. Or more likely, insists upon a substitute. This indoctrination is given a brief respite during the track 'Battlestar' which offers some sick, and very human rhymes from Phat Kat and Elzhi.

It's a bit of a stretch to call 'When Machines' a dubstep concept album. (If such a thing is possible with limited lyrics) Yet it is clear that Mr. Pritchard is using the sonic landscape of the near past to express a subtle message that pervades the entire album as a not so tongue in cheek warning for a possible future of mechanical rebellion. So beware that Speak and Spell. It may very well be the forefather of your demise.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E00c-T9EquE>

4. Phoenix-Wolfgang Amadeus Phoenix // When the palace of Versailles was built in the late 17th century it was a country estate 10 miles outside the city limits of Paris. Three centuries, one revolution, countless Louis' and five republics later Paris has slowly crept out to its doorstep. Now a relatively wealthy suburb, Versailles can also claim to be the epicenter of modern French popular music.

In the early nineties eight young men from Versailles were attending school and playing in various bands, all members seemingly interchangeable and equally imaginative. After several failed groupings and countless demo's two groups of pairs emerged to make their mark; Air and Daft Punk. Innovators of electronica, house and ambient music.

Left behind were Thomas Mars(who recorded with Air under the pseudonym Gordon Tracks), Deck D'Arcy, Christian Mazzalai and Laurent Brankowicz(whose short lived band, 'Darlin' included both members of Daft Punk). And in 2000 the pop-rock quartet released, with a tepid reception, their debut album 'Untied' under the name Phoenix(which also happens to be the name of a song on Daft Punk's 1997 release, 'Homework').

Phoenix spent the majority of the 'oughts as a working-man's touring band with several studio LP's, a live album and a small yet devoted following. 2006's 'It's Never Been Like That' was a slick rock jaunt and a sign of the future.

In February when the single '1901' was released, with its Daft Punk(insert Justice here as well, another Paris pair)inspired vitality and luscious hook, it showed that Phoenix was ready to take a huge step towards international pop stardom. And in May when the album dropped our expectations were confirmed and then some. On the second single 'Lisztomania', named for the 1975 Franz Liszt bio-farce starring Roger Daltrey, hipsters are given an anthem for the decade to come. A song that would make even the most bitter record store owner trip the light fantastic. The entire album has a 'best of' feel to it. One hit and catchy hook after another all spilling out with a European exuberance and Parisian je ne sais quois.

It's been a long time coming for these thirty-somethings who spent the last decade watching their mates create and thrive. Versailles should be quite proud of it's native sons.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SrnhxOiVAdk>

3. The Pains of Being Pure at Heart-s/t // For the past few years the independent music scene has had a decidedly international flair. The U.K., France, Malawi, Ireland, Canada, and Iceland all were represented with work present on this list and lists of my fellow contributors. Yet on the domestic front one city seems to have a noticeably large concentration of unique and talented musicians doing exceptional work. That being the borough of Brooklyn. TV on the Radio, Animal Collective, Grizzly Bear, Clap Your Hands and Say Yeah, MGMT, Yeasayer(the list could on and on) all hail from the land of Ebbets Field on Flatbush Avenue. Now granted, most of these artists are transplants(Portland sure knows how that goes)but regardless there is more imagination per square mile in Brooklyn than anywhere else on the planet. Out of this inventive primordial goo in 2009 came The Pains of Being Pure at Heart with their 'fuzzy guitar jangling' self-titled debut.

Simply put, this is a fun album. These kids are not trying to re-write music history or challenge your identity with soul searching anthems. They're crafting three minute pop songs that turn your pessimism upside down and make you wish The Smiths would get back together. It's clear, on the album and in live performance, that they enjoy what they're doing and are taken aback by the opportunity to do what they dig.

Similar to last years debut from Vampire Weekend, 'Pains' cleanses the palate with a fresh interpretation of the new pop soundscape. Even their name expresses an intention to embrace and nullify melancholy simultaneously.

It's all too likely this is a one and done effort and if so, that's fine. This album has served its mood-altering purpose and will continue to do so on further listening. Besides, we have to make room for the dozen or so bands that will come out of Brooklyn in 2010.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4itzHRpltQ>

2. Animal Collective-Merriweather Post Pavillion // Named after an outdoor venue designed by the architect Frank Gehry in the bands native Maryland, Merriweather Post Pavillion is by far the most exciting, groundbreaking, and innovative release of 2009. Released in January after a storm of confusion and leaked copies, the Collective's 8th LP has become an overwhelmingly critical, and strangely enough, popular success. One critic deeming it "a joyful transcendent record somehow reminiscent of kids let loose in a musical sandpit". 'MPP' feels like something we'll be listening to a decade from now. Arguably one of the finest albums of this young century.

A poignant example of the idiom 'less is more', the album is rooted in guitarist Josh Dibb's decision to leave the band. The remaining three members chose to base their songwriting around electronic instrumentation, drum machines and samplers, which gave the album it's distinct timbre. 'MPP' displays a virtuosic use of this technology allowing the band to jump seamlessly between multiple time signatures and modal tonalities with ease.

The lyrics present an entirely alternate yet equal proficiency. A series of orations regarding fathers, daughters, brothers and lovers. Fear, need, ambition and desire.

Will it be just like I'm dreaming? I just want four walls and adobe slabs for my girls. Will I want them to be who they will be, or to be more like their dad? My friend and I were having laughs in a living room full of arts and crafts. When the sun goes down we'll go out again. I want to walk around with you, getting lost in your curls. I know I shouldn't say so but when you claw me like a cat, I'm beaming. It's what I hope for. No more runnin'. This wilderness up in my head needs to get right out of my clothes and get into my bedroom. If I could just purge all the urges I have and keep them for you. Let's leave the sound of the heat for the sound of the rain. Am I really all the things that are outside of me? I know it sucks that daddy's done but try to think of what you want. You gotta get rid of the mourning, sort out the habits of your mind. Are you also frightened!?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zol2MJf6XNE>

1. The Antlers-Hospice // It seems impossible to objectively review an album which has transfixed me so intensely from the instant it caught my ear on an unseasonably warm evening in October after a long day at the hospital. An album that makes me alternately go limp in awe and bury my face in my hands in sorrow. Touching a nerve that is so new, raw and unknown. A twelve-step program in ten acts documenting a story so specific, yet open to varied interpretation.

The Antlers are the brainchild of Jonathan Silberman, who after a personal tragedy had moved to New York, intentionally isolating himself from friends and family. In his seclusion he began to write a series of individual songs woven together to tell the story of a hospice nurse caring for a patient with bone cancer whose death is imminent. The first person confessional account of this intimate relationship is laid out in a frank and unabashed manor. The couple's love is fully fleshed out, expressed as devotion and commitment but also bitterness and hopelessness. In the end, what remains is Silberman's depressingly evocative character study of the caregiver's/lover's sublime nature. Simply there, regardless of the inevitable. "I'm bound to your bedside, your eulogy singer. I'd happily take all those bullets inside you and put them inside of myself."

Within the larger story are placed two songs which are unrelated, yet still integral to the larger motif. 'Sylvia' is an homage to the tragic life and eventual suicide of Silberman's muse, the American poet Sylvia Plath, whose confessional writing style is evident as a major influence on the Antlers' frontman. (on a quick distressing side note, Nicholas Hughes, the son of Plath and her former estranged husband, poet Ted Hughes, hung himself this year after a long battle with depression) In 'Bear' the narrator is transformed into a Greenwich Village bohemian whose girlfriends' abortion and the couples subsequent disintegration is presented within a beautiful pop hymn with an unforgettable chorus and lyrics that cut to the quick, "And all the while I'll know were fucked and not getting unfucked soon."

To say that I relate to the work of an artist who in the midst of a journey of isolation intimately examines, through music, a cancer that is killing a loved one is an understatement. A fellow contributor asked me if my personal experience skewed my high regard for this album. Of course. But regardless of personal bias 'Hospice' stands out as a compelling personal revelation.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvxBhzBHMUM>

KIERSTEN LAWSON

No. 20: "Hymn to the Immortal Wind," by Mono, Japan's post-rock heavyweights, incorporates a 30-piece chamber orchestra to build a lush and dynamic sound that takes the listener on a beautiful and intense journey. It will forever remind me of turning around outside Boise on I-84 and heading all the way back home as the sun was setting. The music was so large, and I felt so small.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bAUK-aoqt8&feature=fvw>

No. 19: "Wolfgang Amadeus Phoenix," by Phoenix. This luminescent 80's pop album beat out other indie rock pleasures in my year's regular rotation -- such as Phantom Band and Twilight Sad -- to steal a spot on my best-of list. I'm always looking to promote great Scottish bands (and I'm no bashin "Checkmate Savage" and "Forget the Night Ahead"), but the consistently tight songcraft and vibrant melodies that buoy every song on "Wolfgang" gave the French a leg up in this case. Like a phoenix, the fourth album by these Paris-based indie rockers flames and rises, both beautiful and sad. "True and everlasting didn't last that long," but the blighted bliss induced by these 10 songs is not fleeting.

Just how 80's is "Wolfgang Amadeus Phoenix"? Let John Hughes show you:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qtRQsCgYmtc&feature=related>

No. 18: Neon Indian, "Psychic Chasms"-- Pitchfork compared the dreamily lo-fi psychedelic sound of this album to a "collaboration between the Tough Alliance and Atlas Sound." Aptly put; if someone slipped TA a tab of acid, everything almost nauseatingly upbeat about their sound might dissolve into the kind of shimmering chillwave atmosphere that frontman Alan Paloma glides through on "Chasms."

Neon Indian is the third musical incarnation in fewer years of 21-year-old Paloma. He's not mucking about, this kid from Austin, his creative motivation perhaps inspired by his father's success as a Mexican pop musician back in the day. The band's live performance I saw at Mississippi Studios was more groovy disco than synth-based sampling, another indication that there are many innovative twists on pop music waiting to spill from Paloma's young head. With or without the tracers, sign me up.

(Speaking of hallucinogens, a couple months ago My Old Kentucky Blog posted this hilarious unofficial video for the song "I Should Have Taken Acid With You":

<http://myoldkyhome.blogspot.com/2009/10/new-unofficial-video-neon-indian-should.html>)

No. 17: Harlem Shakes, "Technicolor Health" -- The first full-length album by this jadedly ebullient Brooklyn band appears also, sadly, to be their last -- even though the group formed only recently, in 2006, and was still most beloved in their home borough. I don't know the full story of their breakup, but I can't help but suspect the splintering of these young musicians will lead to new, worthy, projects (Todd Goldstein already has a solo album ready to go under the name ARMS). This album wasn't supposed to make my list. I thought of it more as a guilty pleasure, but during my "rank the list and make the mix" week of listening, I realized that these songs remain sing-out-loud vibrant and smart no matter how often I've heard them; they take bold, ranging journeys in short periods of time, and never fail to make me feel better, without feeling tricked. In a year when it became hard to believe "this will be a better year," Lexy Benaim and crew somehow left me feeling simultaneously upbeat and purged.

<http://vids.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=vids.channel&ContributorID=4657944>

No. 16, Antony and the Johnsons: "The Crying Light." It's as though Culture Club had a soul. Antony Hegarty sings for everyman -- every cruelly neglected man, woman and child -- and is at the same time supremely stylish and erudite in his artistic influences and references. (His album covers alone tell distinct and fascinating stories.) His voice is angelic and searing, his music operatic and traditionally orchestrated, yet delicately new. Antony plays with more than two dozen musicians on this record, but still the sound is eerily stripped bare, and beautifully piercing. Songs built of this much yearning will clearly affect you the first time you experience them, but their complexity grows with multiple listenings, like coming to understand a complicated friend. "The Crying Light" may be sparer than his last release, "I Am a Bird Now," but it is not a rehash; these musical vignettes "cut you in quadrants" but ultimately leave you dancing.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ontj8Wyd6fY&feature=video_response

No. 15, Akron/Family: "Set 'em Wild, Set 'em Free" Freak folk evolves into Zen folk ("the way of the future, the way of the future") before our open eyes through the music of this Williamsburg, Brooklyn-originated band, which has changed members but never stopped demonstrating the improvisational synchronicity between now and when.

On "Set 'em Wild..." remaining "Family" members Seth Olinsky, Miles Seaton and Dana Janssen prove that you don't have to change a sound to delve deeper into its core. They, after all, instruct us that "things that are still sometimes appear to move." What more would you expect from a group who never ceased three-part-harmonizing as original member Ryan Vanderhoof ascended from the group's searching melodies to a Buddhist Dharma center in Michigan? I know this album isn't an upward move from 2007's reassuringly sage "Love Is Simple," or their breakout eponymous album in 2005, but this isn't a band striving for ever-increasing accomplishment and fame, or even one that acknowledges "forward" as the best

form of motion - that's what I identify with so much about them.

And in a tumultuous year, "Wild" was always there to remind me that entropy is as much a salve as a concern. "It comes together just to fall apart. Start again, start over." What better understanding could we hope for from family?

<http://vimeo.com/7466446> (You tell me, but isn't that Haystack Rock and Mt. Hood?)

No. 14: The XX, "xx" -- These four young Londoners have released one of the most underrated debut albums of the year, notable for making standard R&B-influenced pop music that is mysteriously mesmerizing. It's a slow, lingering burn, fueled by the "come closer" voice of singer-guitarist Romy Madley Croft and her syncopated lyrical slow dance with Oliver Sim and his thrumming bass. Every song drips with sex and the tussle of early relationships. "So don't think that I'm pushing you away, when you're the one that I've kept closest. Go slow." They made the album themselves, in a garage at night, and the intimacy of the space and their sound (and their personal goings-on?) is palpable. It's an album that makes you 20-something, brawn-bothered and brain-sexy, even though it only lasts about an hour. Maybe that's why I kept returning to this murmuring album all year, to relive that seductive feeling time and time again.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHZVGqqf3gg>

No. 13: Pink Mountaintops, "Outside Love" -- Vancouver, B.C.'s Stephen McBean splits his time between two colorful bands: Black Mountain is the harder psychedelic cousin, Pink Mountaintops the not-so-pastel, so-called-experimental, sibling. On both fronts he is making some of the most inspiring weird songs you can belt out in unison. This album wasn't a forgone conclusion to my list, but its alt-country-meets-goth-choir tenor crept into my consciousness over the year like a vampire glamors his way to your tender neck.

On this third "Mountaintops" album, McBean sidles up to an impressive cast of indie rock mavens, including fellow Canook Sophie Trudeau of Godspeed You! Black Emperor. Many of the tracks develop as slowly as granite, then erupt in moments of harmoniously enlightened grandeur. Others -- like "The Gayest of Sunbeams," "Holiday" and "Execution" -- jangle and rock outright; either way, I found myself, during long drives, singing atop my lungs at too many moments to sideline this eclectic achievement from my best-of list.

Most compelling to me, Pink Mountaintops' off-kilter musical invention is matched by such true sentiments: "Everyone I love deserves a holiday in the sun, almost everyday, til the lions are off of their backs!" I blurt out a harmonica Amen to that!

(Even James Whale might agree): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2EK2JHnN34Q>

No. 12: Woods, "Songs of Shame" -- "Back into those things you wish to undo." These lyrics come close to describing what makes this Brooklyn-based experimental lo-fi band so captivating to me. They weave a uniquely loose and wavering sound by juxtaposing noisy folk jams with earnestly distorted indie rock gems, punctuated by accents hand-spun by "cassette tape-effects technician" G. Lucas Crane, and never lacking a murky honesty that may sound like disaffection to some, but rings through as refreshingly candid confusion to me. "Songs of Shame" is haunting yet comforting, puzzling and reassuring, scruffy despite the humble solidity of its songcraft. Woods reminded me on every listen that "it feels like it should today" and "oh how the days will rain on you." They provided the gravitas to moments that deserved it, and gave shape since summer 2009 to "those haunting life lessons that you cannot rest," which will always, for me, resonate through these songs.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2FZN3ngRinU>

No. 11: Jay Reatard, "Watch Me Fall" -- Like the madly driven Jack Torrance shambling through a snow-obscured hedge maze -- who he models on the album cover -- Jay Reatard makes it clear with this record that there's no telling what to expect from him next and it may take supernatural force to slow him down. (Of course it may take no more than dulled wits or bad timing to shatter his crazed plans, which he seems to self-deprecatingly acknowledge through the year's second coolest "Shining" homage (after my and Scott's Christmas card, of course :))

In 15 years of recording, this garage punk adventurer has tumbled through more than 10 musical incarnations and side projects, and he doesn't even turn 30 until May. (That's right, he was born the year Kubrick's film terrified and amazed this 10-year-old.) This is his first full-length album since Reatard (nee Jimmy Lee Lindsey) signed with Matador and watched two collections of noisily catchy singles grab the widespread attention of critics and punks alike. I bet he lost as many fans as he gained on this record. He himself said he wanted the songs to be more about the melodies. "I think I stripped away a layer of

the fuzz; I might have been challenging people before to find them, and this time I might be making them a little bit more obvious."

Continuing a tireless evolution as a young musician or selling out? I say the former. He's come a long way from banging buckets for percussion, but his sardonic and unruly songwriting edge remains sharp no matter how far he shambles toward accessibility on "Watch Me Fall." He is most certainly not "a dull boy."

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dG65eqfg6bc>

And for those of you who want to enjoy the climactic hedge maze chase in "The Shining" one more time, here's that too:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WgxAkocAPmg>

No. 10: Bill Callahan, "Sometimes I Wish We Were an Eagle" -- This second album unadorned by Callahan's moniker Smog is as elusively evocative as its title. One pronoun change and it would be a cliché, but instead you stop and ponder how multiple entities could become a single soaring creature. (Plus he correctly uses the subjunctive verb form "were"; appreciation for proper grammar lives on!)

As a singer-songwriter, Callahan needn't wish -- he is soaring here. He continues to scoff at the fact that verse-chorus-verse rules the roost, instead relying on succinctly poetic wordcraft and canny repetition to draw the listener in. And the arrangements, like the subjects of the songs, aren't as simple as they seem. Strings, horns and female vocals accompany Callahan's contemplative guitar and impassively resonant baritone voice like ripples of water caressing "a branch from a tender willow tree." Yeah, and who else can write a seductive and celebratory song about some wood floating down a stream?

It's not all soft lighting and twig-fucking, don't get me wrong. It took me until about the third listen to "Eid Ma Clack Shaw" to realize the genius of the song was the profound black humor at its core. (The narrator finally crafts the perfect song, in a dream, but when he reviews what he'd scribbled down upon waking, it's "gibberish" -- still he sings the non-words as though they hold all the answers.) But, Callahan may be challenging us, is something really gibberish if it feels like "hands laid on"? In "Too Many Birds" he takes so gorgeously long to utter the line "if you could only stop your heartbeat for one heartbeat" (starting with "if" and adding only one word each pass through the melody) that it becomes a comic cosmic lesson taught through cadence. It's impossible for me not to get ahead of the song when I listen. I cannot stop, not even for one heartbeat. Maybe you have to be a huge word nerd like me to find that so brilliant, but each time I savor this album, Callahan ensures that "sweet desires and soft thoughts return to me."

Apparently Callahan likes words and music more than official videos (surprise), but here's one of my favorite tracks accompanied by the album art: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ghP3DD2t6s>

And speaking of his humor, here's a corny, funny and vaguely anti-religious and dirty joke he told at a show:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a27CQ-l1ddo>

No. 9: HEALTH, "Get Color" -- Imagine if Beach House or Mew were subjected to the doctor's horrible experiment (see Jean Renoir, circa Dr. Jekyll). But the doctor is Angus Andrew, lead freak from the band Liars. This album might be the result. Atonal layered harmonies are beset by tribal drumming, occasional electronic chaos and screaming guitars. Indecipherable vocals melodiously float among the art-noise madness like an impassive ghost who can't keep from dancing his fool ass off.

The band describe "Get Color's" syncopated amalgam of noise and harmonic drone as the monstrous outcome of their desire for "vocals to have an even, unaffected feel. A softness, like a Zombies melody, or even a Gregorian chant." This is precisely what sets the album apart for me, the way the musical cacophony provides the emotion they purposefully withhold from the lyrics. Usually I'm a sucker for the words; this album makes me feel like I know the words even when I can't parse them. That's (not) saying something!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8KqDIVV-7Ao>

No. 8: Grizzly Bear, "Veckatimest" -- Here's the point in the countdown when I remind my fair readers (all two of you) that this list ranks my *favorite* albums of the year, not necessary the best in music-critic order. In my first draft this album was higher, and based on technical musicianship it should be, but it just doesn't get me as fired up as the 7 albums that ultimately cut ahead in list line.

"Veckatimest" is a remarkable record. Awash amid its strongest moments, my jaw drops in wonder at how these four men from Brooklyn (boy, it sure is the year of Brooklyn in indie music) continue to painstakingly craft such flat-out beautiful chamber pop. And on the little empty island that inspired them (and the title) on this effort, they completed the transition from being Ed Droste's band to a complete unit with unhurried interlocking musical parts. The video (linked below) for the album's best song, "Two Weeks," is a visual metaphor for the band's sound: Not much appears to be happening other than four guys impassively singing, but slowly it dawns on you that their faces are slowly transmogrifying, and eventually they become fallen-angelic conduits of baroque bliss. If this feeling remained throughout the entire album, instead of blasting through mainly on three or four stunning standouts, "Veckatimest" would surely be among my top five.

So time will tell if this subspecies of bear (now being introduced to real fame) can continue to evolve or if it will enter a terminal mid-tempo hibernation. For now I remain slack-jawed and impressed.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjecYugTbIQ>

No. 7: Sunset Rubdown, "Dragonslayer"-- Remember how cool dragons were when you first read "The Hobbit" or watched the 1981 Peter MacNicol movie "Dragonslayer" at the drive-in? Or when you were reminded how much you dug dragons when you enjoyed the 2002 Christian Bale/Matthew McConaughey movie "Reign of Fire" way more than was warranted? That's how this album can make you feel, even though it's not much about dragons.

Having named his various bands Frog Eyes, Wolf Parade, Swan Lake, Moonface and Sunset Rubdown, British Columbia's musical wizard Spencer Krug seems to really dig animals and atmosphere. He clearly loves -- virtually leaks -- epic indie art rock songs teeming with keyboards, drums, clever bridges and obtuse yet incendiary lyrics. Sunset Rubdown is considered the side project to Krug's and Dan Boeckner's band Wolf Parade, and Boeckner has the prettier voice and the more conventional songwriting chops. Most people I know prefer his WP songs over Krug's. That's all good and fine, this weirdo says, but bring on the 6-minute head-scratching ass-shaker, the journey of a song with two or three musical climaxes and Krug's voice warbling with private meaning.

Boeckner also released an album this year, under his Handsome Furs mantle; the kickass opening track made my fave songs mix, but the album as a whole lost my interest. Krug has my full attention, and not just when his chewtoy thighs bounce time beneath a keyboard he's pounding the soul out of at live shows. This third Sunset Rubdown album never stopped absorbing me; after countless listens I still find myself untangling the cryptic lyrics and being swept away in the tight restless grandeur of the roving sound. Even a Golem would love it.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcLtto4vOII> (from Black Cab Sessions, where musicians perform in the back of a cab driving through London: One Song, One Take, One Cab)

No. 6: Micachu & the Shapes, "Jewellery" --East London-born Mica Levi, stage name Micachu, is a classically trained musician and composer who has performed with the London Philharmonic at Royal Festival Hall, and also "played" a vacuum cleaner and an earload of homemade instruments to create one of the freshest, oddest pop records of the year.

"My feelings are slightly misshaped," she croons on "Floor," and I both believe her and want to stand her a pint to thank her for it. Along with "Shapes" Raisa Khan (keys) and Marc Pell (drums), Micachu showed us that 22 is the new, er, 22 when it comes to daring new directions in music. Dissonant, yes. Intentional, see. Topped by jangly gems "Calculator" and "Golden Phone," "Jewellery" goes from jarring to catchy in very few moves, and sticks. When the record failed to win a prominent British music award, Micachu said she never expected it to be nominated and claimed, "I'm not totally behind that record." She may have quipped that as a young woman skilled at protecting herself from external expectations, but if she's *not* fully behind this stunning debut album, I can't wait to hear what fascinating amalgam of sounds she'll half-ass get behind next.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Y-HXXyfu4Y>

(also, check out Ellen Page dancing to "Vulture" -- and making a cunilingus gesture:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ds2qmtJnb7Q&NR=1>)

No. 5: Girls, "Album"-- Another daring debut tops my list, this one from a couple of San Francisco transplants brashly reappropriating rock and roll through the prism of every untouchable icon from Elvis Costello and Roy Orbison to Buddy Holly and Brian Wilson. This is a kind of California beach album that drowns "those summer nights" of "Grease" in a breakdown-defying sneer.

Young frontman Christopher Owens has seen a lot of life -- lurid and lusty and just plain rough stuff -- and his simple yet secret songs are deftly enhanced through the production of co-Girl Chet "JR" White. Their live performance I saw in November perfectly demonstrated what I find to be so unique about this band and this album. They started out playing their cleverly catchy short tunes note for note, Owens even wearing a letterman's jacket draped over his shoulders as though he were waiting to be asked to dance at the sock-hop. Most of the audience, perhaps drawn as much by Owen's traumatic history as by the music, quickly lost attention and started chatting. Gradually -- nearly infinitesimally-- the songs and performance grew in intensity, and by the time they finished the 7-minute-long album highlight "Hellhole Ratrice" the crowd was mesmerized by the slow rhythmic cacophony of the music expressing the spirit of Owens' lyrics: "But I don't want to cry my whole life through. I wanna do some dancin' too, so come on come on come on, come on and dance with me."

There is something hauntingly optimistic about Girls' sound, and I can't wait to hear what is pulled next from the store of hunger and talent and adventurousness that is all but bursting from this rambunctious new band.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5Oa6ih0kgA&feature=related>

No. 4: Dirty Projectors, "Bitte Orca"-- A whole lot of music lovers have written about this album, Dave Longstreth's breakthrough from coldly calculated art rock to undeniably transcendent pop bliss, but I think I'm the first to call him out for stealing the title from Portland's M. Ward. Ward sings in "Sad Sad Song" (off the great album "Transfiguration of Vincent") "I went to the whale, I said **killer whale please**, what do you do when your true love leaves?" Borrowed sentiment or not, I don't think it would be too off base to subtitle this widely acclaimed album "Transformation of Longstreth."

Brooklyn-based (this is the 5th Brooklyn band on my list; madness) Dirty Projectors are masterminded by Longstreth, but Amber Coffman (vocals, guitar), Angel Deradoorian (vocals, keyboard, samples, guitar, bass), Brian McOmber (drums), Nat Baldwin (bass) and Haley Dekle (vocals) have the unenviable job of performing Longstreth's jaw-droppingly complex compositions. The big story about this album is that Longstreth finally turned the corner toward accessible pop/R&B/rock - however you would choose to categorize this genre-defying sound, it's the most listener-embracing stuff Longstreth's done. His evolution as a musician seems to be telegraphed through the lyrics of "Stillness Is the Move," one of the album's most amazing songs: "On top of every mountain there was a great longing for another even higher mountain." Not only has he climbed it, he's acting as sherpa for the faint of heart.

Virtuoso arrangements and Longstreth's unusual voice are warmed by the siren-like and syncopated vocals of Coffman, Deradoorian and Dekle. Unconventional song structures are rooted not by simplicity and repetition (a la Bill Callahan), but instead - somehow - by more unconventionality, such as off-kilter time signatures and a dizzying array of overlapping instrumentation and parts.

Listening to this album is a bit like watching the documentary film "Man on Wire." It's a feat of skill and daring that you can't comprehend, yet find graceful and lovely and downright celebratory in its grandeur. And you aren't likely to experience something like it again.

The only reason "Bitte Orca" is so (comparatively) low on my list is because I still feel a slight chill roving through the fascinating passageways of Longstreth's compositions; there's an arms-length quality that my top 3 don't possess. That said, I'm a pretty arms-length kind of girl, and this is one remarkably pretty record.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMPF6lpM0XM> (speaking of sherpas)

No. 3: Wild Beasts, "Two Dancers"-- Brooklyn = 5. England = 4. New Yorkers may have produced the most music I love this year, but the Brits aren't far behind. And this young Lake District foursome's bookishly erotic and fanciful musical history lesson surpasses them all.

In the band's previous form as a duo called Fauve (French for Wild Beasts), their most striking weapon was the eccentric falsetto wail of lead singer Hayden Thorpe. "Two Dancers" succeeds so wildly due in large part to the addition of bassist Tom Fleming's gorgeous baritone, with which he takes the lead on nearly half the album's tracks. The two voices stroke and gyrate against one another so cleverly (one reviewer said "It's like listening to Ted Hughes read poetry in the drawing room while Maria Callas has a breakdown in the kitchen"), and the music is so audacious in its inventive poppiness, it takes a while to realize how much social commentary may be disguised by the buoyantly jaunty affair.

The two-part title track, for instance, recounts a violent attack that could be set anywhere from medieval to modern times. It is unclear who the protagonist is or where our sympathies should lie, a feeling encouraged by the plaintive tone of the lyrics and the excited driving build of drums and guitars. I'm left feeling the intent is less a simple deploration (or celebration) of mysogyny and more an earnest exploration of what we are (and always have been) capable of as humans. Throughout all these compelling and intelligent songs, these wee British bairn seem to be questioning how far we have evolved from wild beasts after all. And the sound is sheer rejoicing. They're keeping my brain working and my hips swaying -- it's a thrilling combination and one of the most original and exuberant albums I heard all year.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4sxh5zMbNAo&feature=related>

No. 2: Animal Collective, "Merriwether Post Pavilion" -- Behold the masters of the immersive loop universe. This definitive pop opus downright bathes the listener, with water sounds, shimmering instrumentation and even an optical illusion on the album art that undulates like waves. Brian Wilson meets Jules Verne.

The inspiration for what the band calls their "best-recorded album" was a group vision of them performing at the titular landmark amphitheatre, only submerged in a lagoon. Oh and they wanted the vocals to sound like "they were in a frying pan." You've got to hand it to these barely-30-year-olds -- they may be facing down real fame as a result of this phenomenal record, but they still dance, or float, to their own singular tune.

And what a hypnotic tune it is. This album was produced by Ben Allen, an engineer with roots in hip-hop and R&B who helped perfect the warm, accessible sound of "Pavilion." Another differentiator is the fact that the guitarist, Deacon, sat this record out, leaving an empty sonic space which Panda Bear, Avey Tare and Geologist filled with spiraling textures flowing with glistening vocal reverb, pulsing percussion and unusually intimate lyrics. Simple statements like "I want to walk around with you" or "open up your throat" become dizzily gleeful mantras double-daring you not to sing them at the top of your lungs.

It's fitting that the band which most influenced indie music in the aughts closes out the decade with such a towering achievement. There is a lot of debate now over what is next for the band. Will they dissolve into Panda Bear's and other solo projects, splinter, get totally electronic and weird on us again? Personally I hope for A and C, but regardless, we'll always have the lagoon.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zol2MJf6XNE>

No. 1: Antlers, "Hospice" -- It takes a remarkable album to nudge Animal Collective from my top spot, and this is it. Haunting, anthemic, intimate, raucous, tender, heart-rending, unmatched in its ability to captivate and comfort and purge, "Hospice" is the defining musical journey of this year for me.

It isn't an easy crossing. The story is familiar and sad. Vocalist Peter Silberman wrote the album during a long period of holing up after the loss of a loved one to cancer. The songs recount the gutting, hopeful, desperate, angry, loving story of the relationship between a hospice nurse and a young woman dying of bone cancer. And though Pitchfork was dead-on when praising the album for its "power to emotionally destroy listeners," there is far more than pain and sorrow here. That is to say there is the full range of emotions recumbent in sorrow, including deeply happy and sweet ones.

The songcraft is surgical. Silberman speaks volumes through restrained lyrical puzzles that are evocatively specific and yet blossom with meaning over repeated listens. All along the way the - by turns - whispering, soaring, fluttering and sweeping instrumentation sings out the unsayable. Found sounds in the apartment he recorded in are also incorporated, enriching the sense of intimacy. Not since Neutral Milk Hotel's "In the Aeroplane Over the Sea" have words and music painted in my mind such an indelible musical landscape. (Also like "Aeroplane," "Hospice" has a stripped-bare closer fleshed out by nothing more than spine-tingling vocals and a sole acoustic guitar.)

The album was clearly created as a personal expression of survival and self-exploration, then self-released and only brought to mainstream attention thanks to astute critical recognition. Like Bon Iver's paean to solitude and love, "For Emma Forever Ago," Antlers may never match this achievement, or like Neutral Milk Hotel's Jeff Mangum, Silberman may maddeningly recede from indie music. No matter what, "Hospice" will remain the best album I initially turned off. Sometimes the most significant things are the most difficult to embrace.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZsXKa97J6pM>

My Favorite Concerts of 2009 (Bonus!)

Sure, I'm old enough to remember seeing shows at EJ's and La Luna (and Starry Night and Pine Street Theater), but experiences like the 10 below keep me in the live music game. And the variety of venues on my list shows just how much great music is playing all over Portland (we kick Seattle's ass in this area!):

10. Junior Boys and Max Tundra (Doug Fir, 14Apr) -- Although Max Tundra may even be older than I am, he showed the kiddies what 80s synth was all about, even using a musician's baton and hilarious sweeping arm movements to "conduct" the electronica. His sense of humor and awesome music was such a hoot to me, I barely remember the headliners.

9. Holy Fuck (Doug Fir, 4Jun) -- This tight-like-a-tiger Toronto band plays electronica live, without electronica equipment. They were arranged in a circle and played their asses off using actual instruments and non-instruments (including a 35 mm film synchronizer, toy keyboards and toy phaser guns). It was one of those underattended shows where I was able to be right up front to absorb every moment of mayhem. Bliss!

8. Dan Deacon (Wonder Ballroom, 24Apr) -- After the "human tunnel" show at Holocene, where Deacon played on the floor and the audience rose to the stage, but Scott stayed on the floor and got mixed up in the insane audience-participation antics while Kasey and I laughed our asses off, we decided to ride the rail upstairs at Wonder for this show. It was the perfect spot to take in the ecstatic extravaganza. If you like Deacon and haven't yet seen him live, GO.

7. Neon Indian (Mississippi Studios, 17Nov) -- A fabulous first experience at this venue. Upstairs we found a little sanctuary front and center on the rail, a perfect spot to soak up the strobing groovy pop-psychedelia.

6. Califone (Mission Theater, 5Dec) -- Seeing the band play a live score to a film they made to accompany the album was marvelous, and the movie, "All My Friends Are Funeral Singers," was pretty damn good too. Then they ordered some tequila shots and stuck around to play more of the album live, and just seem like really cool cats.

5. Girls (Doug Fir, 18Nov) -- The night after Neon Indian, packed at Doug Fir, but I found the perfect between-set moment to secure my spot on the stairs in front of the sound board. From there I could see perfectly as most of the crowd chatted like assholes while the band slowly built from their catchy 50s sock-hop rock 'n roll to tightly instrumented noisy cacophony. That shut everyone up. Unlike any concert I've seen before.

4. Micachu & the Shapes (Doug Fir, 23July) -- Also sparsely enough attended for me to be right at Mica's feet. These three youngsters just had such fun playing together, the handmade instruments were amazing, and the quirky power of the songs live was equally devastating and exhilarating.

3. Woods (Bebatis, 1Sep) -- I'd heard on XMU how amazing these guys were live so I planted front and center early enough to have a front row view. Their energy and passion was thrilling, lead singer-guitarist Jeremy Earl skilled and absorbing, and I couldn't stop watching "tape-effects technician" G. Lucas Crane sampling from hand-painted cassette tapes shoved into a tape player nailed to a board, while head-back wailing backup vocals into a mic stuffed into his mouth. It was exactly the kind of earnest abandon I needed to escape from worrying about my just-hospitalized mom for a while. Had a nice chat with the uber-young bassist selling their vinyl at the merch table too, who handled a total prick so politely and confidently, I was very impressed.

2. Bill Callahan (Aladdin, 28Jun) -- My favorite birthday present. I did not expect these mellow songs performed at a sit-down venue to wow me, but Callahan and band blew me away; it was like they were in a friend's living room, they were so at ease with the music - hell, he was even barefoot. And they played many of the most amazing Smog songs. I'll never forget the little side-to-side bounce-hopping "dance" he would break into occasionally. Completely in the moment.

1. Sunset Rubdown (Doug Fir, 26Jun) -- Spencer Spencer Spencer. Even Scott acknowledges him as the sexiest thing to play a keyboard he may have ever seen. And it's not just his big guns and time-keeping chewtoy thighs that thrilled me (though it is odd, and not unpleasant, to see an indie musician in such fit shape). The grandeur of the songs and the brilliantly tight performance of the full band was magnificent. Great stair spot in a packed room, utterly swept away by the experience. Grin from ear to ear -- this is the vibrating bliss that can only come from seeing amazing live music. Let's see if 2010 can beat it!

SCOTT MEDDOCK:

1. Junior Boys – Begone Dull Care
2. Monsters of Folk – S/T
3. Richard Swift – Atlantic Ocean
4. White Rabbits – It's Frightening
5. Blakroc – Blakroc
6. Starfucker – Jupiter
7. Them Crooked Vultures – S/T
8. Surfer Blood – Astro Coast
9. Devendra Banhart – What Will We Be
10. Lou Barlow – Goodnight Unknown
11. Animal Collective – Merriweather Post Pavilion
12. Brendan Benson – My Old, Familiar Friend
13. Avett Brothers – I, and Love, and You
14. Dirty Projectors – Bitte Orca
15. Flaming Lips – Embryonic
16. Men Without Pants – Naturally
17. Built to Spill – There Is No Enemy
18. Girls – S/T
19. Cornershop – Judy Sucks Lemon For Breakfast
20. Deastro – Keeper's

IZZY:

- 1 Andrew Bird--Noble Beast
- 2 AA Bondy--When the Devil's Loose
- 3 BTS--There is No Enemy
- 4 Blakroc--S/T
- 5 MF Doom--Unexpected Guests
- 6 We Were Promised Jetpacks--These Four Walls
- 7 Telekinesis--Telekinesis!
- 8 Richard Swift--Atlantic Ocean
- 9 Richmond Fontaine--We Used to Think the Freeway Sounded Like a River
- 10 Cotton Jones--Paranoid Cocoon
- 11 Boston Spaceships--Zero to 99
- 12 Polvo--In Prism
- 13 Taken by Trees--East of Eden
- 14 Yo La Tengo--Popular Songs
- 15 Camera Obscura--My Maudlin Career
- 16 Thao--Know Better Learn Faster
- 17 Atlas Sound--Logos
- 18 Dead Man's Bones--S/T
- 19/20 Dark Was the Night Comp.

ERIC: (Short and in no particular order ... or is it???)

Animal Collective, "Merriweather Post Pavilion"
The XX, "xx"
Bon Iver, "Blood Bank EP"
Passion Pit, "Manners"
Grizzly Bear, "Veckatimest"
Phoenix, "Wolfgang Amadeus Phoenix"
The Flaming Lips, "Embryonic"