

TD's Top Ten for 2004

In times like these, it's essential to bring the funk My favorite two albums of the year are Walkin' In the Shadow of Life by the **Neville Brothers** (Back Porch/Virgin) and Street Signs by **Ozomatli** (Concord). Both give us ample reasons to keep on ... but they're also likely to receive too much attention from critics to be included in this list, which celebrates my other favorite sounds from the year that are less likely to show up on anyone else's top ten list. They're presented in alpha order. Enjoy!

Antibalas Who is this America? (Ropeadope). www.ropeadope.com

Spiky political commentary overlays brassy, insistent, irresistible grooves, a la Fela Kuti.

Amp Fiddler Waltz of a Ghetto Fly (Genuine) www.ampfiddler.com

Chillin' debut provides an alternative contemporary soul sound track for an evening's cruise in your pimped up ride. See also Van Hunt. Two superb first discs.

Maria de Barros nha mundo: Music of Cape Verde (Narada World) www.narada.com

Joyful, captivating, delightful island sensibility that belies the gravity of the lyrics that poignantly address poverty, sexism and colonialism (albeit in Portuguese). If you've been holding off on "world music" not in English, give this one a try! You'll love it!

Cosmic Rough Riders Too Close to Be Far (429 Records) www.429records.com

Despite the rather tacky name, this trio from Glasgow offers up some intelligent, melodic, jangly, pop-rock. Nice harmonies. Bears repeated listening.

Gov't Mule Deja Voodoo (ATO/BMG) www.mule.net

Southern stoner rock at its finest. Surly redneck attitude melded with Led Zep thunder. Cause... some times you just gotta rock!

The Holmes Brothers Simple Truths (Alligator) www.alligator.com

If you've not been exposed to the delight that is the Holmes Brothers, this is a good place to start. They energetically inhabit the crossroads where the blues, R&B and gospel come together. The place to be!

Kekele Congo Life (Stern's Music/Next Music)

Need a little joy and energy on a drab winter's day? This ensemble of Zairean superstars update classic *rumba congolaise* tunes for the 21st century. Not to be missed!

Los Amigos Invisibles The Venezuelan Zinga Son Vol. 1 (Luaka Bop)

www.luakabop.com

It's 2 a.m. in a steamy disco in Caracas. Green lasers pierce the smoke and angle off the mirrors. This is the music pulsing from the speakers. Try to sit still.

Railroad Earth The Good Life (Sugar Hill) www.sugarhillrecords.com

A wonderfully uncategorizable mix of newgrass/contemporary folk/acoustic music that probably wouldn't fit any commercial radio playlist unless you're lucky enough to get satellite radio. Nice melodies and tasty musicianship. Livin' the good life, indeed.

The Wailin' Jennys 40 Days (Red House/Manitoba) www.redhouserecords.com

As you might surmise from their puckish sense of humor, they're from Canada. A lovely contemporary folk debut from a trio of stunning voices that combine on originals, traditionals and covers by the likes of Neil Young and John Hiatt.

Lagniappe (something extra)

That's ten, but as they do in New Orleans, we offer you a couple of additional items at no extra cost... a wonderful cultural tradition.

First, a late entry for 2003. I didn't find out about it in time to include it in last year's list, but it's definitely worthy... Check out Squeeze Box Sabroso by **Conjunto Coyote**, a self-released gem by a group of Bay Area community activist/musicians that is bursting with joy and soul. This has been one of my most frequently played discs of the past year, and I never get tired of it. You owe it to yourself to check this out! To order: conjuntocoyote@aol.com

For younger folks who don't remember **Jackson Browne** and still wonder what, if anything might have been special about the 70's, I highly recommend The Very Best of Jackson Browne (Rhino/Elektra), a two-disc set that shows why he was and still is one of the most vital American popular artists of the past 30 years. Songwriters like this don't come along very often.

Have a wonderful Holiday season and a great 2005!

Tom David