

TD's Top Ten for 2005

In times such as these, the soul cries out for sustenance. Two of the year's top releases help to answer that call: **Leela James'** [A Change is Gonna Come](#) (Warner Brothers); and **Amos Lee's** self-titled debut on Blue Note. Both are highly recommended, but they're likely to receive too much end-of-year critical attention to warrant formal inclusion in this list, which celebrates my favorite, slightly more obscure releases of the past year. They're arranged below in alpha order.

Freddy Fender & Flaco Jimenez [Dos Amigos](#) (Back Porch Records) www.backporchrecords.com I have a special fondness for Border Music, whether you call it Tejano, Conjunto or Tex-Mex. This disc reunites two of the Masters of the genre for a session of special intimacy that is brimming with authentic San Antonio Soul.

Tracy Grammer [Flower of Avalon](#) (Signature Sounds) www.tracygrammer.com
A stunningly beautiful collection of contemporary yet timeless folk tunes penned by Tracy's late musical partner Dave Carter. She steps into her own here as a solo artist.

The Greencards [Weather and Water](#) (Dualtone) www.dualtone.com
If you enjoy contemporary acoustic music that blends elements of folk, bluegrass and gospel, then this one is not to be missed. Tight harmonies and superb musicianship, with backing from flatpicking ace Bryan Sutton. (see also [The Duhks](#) on Sugar Hill Records)

Hanna & McEuen (DreamWorks Records Nashville) www.hannamceuen.com
I don't usually feature major label acts in this list, but these young guys deserve a listen because they're swimming upstream in today's country music world. Great Everly Brothers-type harmonies and twangy, up-tempo numbers on classic country themes.

Sonny Landreth [Grant Street](#) (Sugar Hill) www.sugarhillrecords.com
A smokin' live set that displays this Louisiana slide guitar king's artistry to maximum advantage. If you can sit still while listening to this, it's time to review your medication. To be played at maximum volume.

Lura [di korpu ku alma](#) (Lusafrica/Escondida Music) www.escondidamusic.com
Need some sunshine on a cloudy day? How about a trip to Cape Verde, where the currents of African, Caribbean and Latin music converge for maximum delight? This fabulous young vocalist may not sing in English, but it's immaterial. Joy on plastic!

Orishas [El Kilo](#) (Surco/Universal Music Latino) www.emidigitalmedia.com/orishas
Long time readers of this list know that I don't often feature hip hop, but this young group of Cuban expats (living in France) lays down an intoxicating, melodic mix of hip hop and Latin rhythms. Give your subwoofer the workout that it's been asking for with this one!

Poncho Sanchez [Do It!](#) (Concord Picante) www.ponchosanchez.com
The latest stellar outing from one of LA's most beloved musical ambassadors. Even if you don't often groove to jazz, this one is not to be missed. His infectious rhythms are complemented by guests such as Hugh Masekela and the Tower of Power horns.

(more below)

Laura Veirs [Year of Meteors](#) (Nonesuch) www.lauraveirs.com

An engaging release from a Seattle-area favorite. Genre bending, arty, and poetically obscure in places, but quite listenable. Think early Suzanne Vega or Sean Colvin with a twist....

Yerba Buena [Island Life](#) (Razor & Tie) www.yerbabuenamusic.com

High energy hip hop Latin fusion from Nuevo York. Yes, the cover is gratuitously sexist, but don't let that stop you from becoming acquainted with this dynamite ensemble. They've invited a number of celebrity guest artists to this party and it's not to be missed.

Lagniappe

That's ten, but as they do in New Orleans, we offer you a couple of extras at no cost: Here are two offbeat releases that came out last year but I didn't have a chance to hear them in time to include in my list.

The Gourds [Blood of the Ram](#) (Eleven Thirty Records) www.thegourds.com

Definitely not for everyone, but I find them strangely irresistible. Think of a ragged but right combination of The Band, Waylon Jennings and The Subdudes...although that doesn't really do them justice. They're Austin legends for good reason. Some tasty social satire mixed in e.g. "Escalade."

Mahala Rai Banda (Crammed Discs) www.crammed.be

The title translates as "noble band from the ghetto" and we're talking here about the Gypsy Ghettos around Bucharest, Romania. This is some wild stuff! Swirling melodies and charging tempos combining violins, accordions and a horn section consisting of army brass band veterans from Moldavia (reminiscent of New Orleans Brass Bands). This import includes a bonus video of a live performance at a christening party.

Speaking of New Orleans, long-time readers of this list know that I'm a big fan of the music (and food) of that splendid place and we have all empathized with the suffering of its residents in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. One concrete way to be of help is to order music from one of my favorite independent record stores, which is now back in business and struggling to stay afloat. Check out the website for The Louisiana Music Factory www.louisianamusicfactory.com. You'll be glad you did.

Best wishes for a great 2006!

Tom David

