

## TD's Top Ten for 2018

My two favorite releases of this turbulent year are not likely to make any other "Best Of" lists, but they offer solace, joyful defiance and much-needed perspective in this dark time. Well-traveled Austin legend Malford Milligan and his Southern Aces have found an avid following in the Netherlands, where they recorded **Life Will Humble You** ([www.malfordmilliganmusic.com](http://www.malfordmilliganmusic.com)). Somewhat closer to home, husband and wife powerhouses Michael and Tanya Blount Trotter (performing as The War and Treaty) offer us up an essential **Healing Tide** ([www.thewarandtreaty.com](http://www.thewarandtreaty.com)). I invite you to experience their uplifting spiritual power! What follows are my other most-loved discs this year that may have flown beneath your radar, arranged in alpha order. Enjoy!

### **Ace of Cups** ([www.highnoonrecords.com](http://www.highnoonrecords.com))

Blink and we're back on the Panhandle and it's 1967 and these superbly-talented women are opening for Jimi Hendrix. Magically, they've reunited this year and have finally been able to record the album that was always inside them. Pure joy! What inspiration for those of us of a certain age....

### **Aja Pilina** ([www.ajakihoalu.com](http://www.ajakihoalu.com))

The title means "connection" in Hawaiian and this superb young artist accomplishes just that on her second collection of mostly original songs about dreams and love, demonstrating some excellent chops on the ukulele and Ki Ho'alu (Slack Key) guitar. Another can't miss Hawaiian release this year is from **Jerome Koko**, flamekeeper of the Makaha Sons tradition. Both are available from [www.mele.com](http://www.mele.com)

### **Kevin Burt** *Heartland & Soul* ([www.littlevillagefoundation.org](http://www.littlevillagefoundation.org))

An unheralded talent out of Coralville, IA, he was the big winner in the Blues Foundation's 34<sup>th</sup> International Blues Challenge this year, yet I doubt you've heard of him. Here's your chance to get "woke" to this amazing artist, courtesy of the estimable Little Village Foundation. Another unforgettable Blues release from an unexpected location just a bit further west (Hawaii!) is *Paradise Blues* from **John Akapo** ([www.johnakapo.com](http://www.johnakapo.com)).

### **Cha Wa** *Spyboy* ([www.chawaband.com](http://www.chawaband.com))

This is as close as most of us are likely to get to experiencing the joyful chaos of a NOLA Mardi Gras Indian celebration. Crank it up for full enjoyment. While we're in bayou country, you'll also want to check out *Puppet Show* from the up-and-coming **Ally Venable Band** ([www.allyvenableband.com](http://www.allyvenableband.com)). Never underestimate the healing power of a Fender Stratocaster in the right hands. Best enjoyed at maximum possible volume!

**Fara** *Times From Times Fall* ([www.faramusic.co.uk](http://www.faramusic.co.uk))

Here's something completely different. Thrill to the blend of fiddles and piano from this exceptional band of young women from the Orkney Islands. Exhilarating and timeless Celtic beauty. Does this stir a hunger for more transporting acoustic North Country (Irish/Scottish/Swedish) soul? Be sure to also check out *Between Wind and Water* from kindred spirits the **String Sisters** ([www.stringsisters.net](http://www.stringsisters.net)).

**Hawktail** *Unless* ([www.hawktailmusic.com](http://www.hawktailmusic.com))

Young Master acoustic musicians Haas, Kowert and Tice last year added Dom Leslie on mandolin and became Hawktail. We were lucky to see them on their first tour together and again just recently at the Freight in Berkeley. Breathtaking blended virtuosity that defies easy description. Best experienced live, but this is the next best thing. For those who might also yearn for a slightly more traditional bluegrass feel with vocals, take a listen to the debut release from Colorado hotshots **Meadow Mountain** ([www.meadowmountainmusic.com](http://www.meadowmountainmusic.com)) You'll be glad you did.

**Lucibela** *Laco umbilical* ([www.lucibela.com](http://www.lucibela.com)) ([www.lusafrica.com](http://www.lusafrica.com))

What is it about Cape Verde? It's clearly a place where multiple musical crosscurrents converge. Several of my favorite albums over the years have come from this tiny place, and it's my pleasure to introduce you to another exceptional emerging talent in the tradition of the late great Cesaria Evora, although she's very much her own woman. Magical. Healing. Essential.

**Mariachi Reyna De Los Angeles** ([www.folkways.si.edu](http://www.folkways.si.edu))

In need of a little adrenalin jolt to help you get up and do what needs to be done? Look no further than these amazing women. Local L.A. legends since their debut in 1994, it's been a long, steep uphill climb for respect within the *muy macho* world of mariachi. One hopes this Smithsonian Folkways release will bring them the broader crossover attention they so richly deserve. If you're visualizing the typical Mexican restaurant combo, prepare to be schooled! While we're in a Latin frame of mind, you might also want to experience Austin faves **Superfonicos'** sizzlin' EP *Suelta* ([www.superfonicosmusic.com](http://www.superfonicosmusic.com)).

**The Reputations** *Electric Power* (Nine Mile Records)

If the Stones and the B52s had a musical love child, it might just sound something like this. Good Time Rock n' Roll! Perfect party soundtrack. How could you resist a band whose zaftig lead singer is identified on the album as RockyAnne Bullwinkel? Another recent retro delight is *Karma for Cheap* from **Aaron Lee Tasjan** ([www.aaronleetasjan.com](http://www.aaronleetasjan.com)), which at times sounds like outtakes from *Revolver*.

**Les Tambours de Brazza** *Kongo* ([www.maitemusic.com](http://www.maitemusic.com))

From the lower cascades of the Congo River by way of Paris. Don't miss this one! Exhilarating percussive grooves with ethereal guitar high notes and heavenly harmonies overlay messages of destruction and healing, diaspora and separation, and fierce determination and resistance. If you care to extend your African trip by way of Mali, be sure to check out the mind-blowing artistry of **Sidi Touré** and his amazing band on their latest release *Toubalbero* ([www.thrilljockey.com](http://www.thrilljockey.com)).



## Lagniappe

Well, that's the official list, but as in New Orleans, we have an annual tradition of offering up some musical *lagniappe* (something extra at no extra cost). This year, I'd like to suggest three releases from some soulful Southern gentlemen who know their way around a guitar. They're all so fine, I honestly couldn't choose among them. So, have all three, with my blessing.

**Mike Farris** *Silver & Stone* ([www.mikefarrismusic.com](http://www.mikefarrismusic.com)) Notably endorses Hattie B's fried chicken in Nashville as part of his album package....

**Marcus King Band** *Carolina Confessions* ([www.marcuskingband.com](http://www.marcuskingband.com)) A real leap forward in sophistication from this talented young guitar slinger from Greenville, SC....

**Scott Sharrard** *Saving Grace* ([www.scottsharrard.com](http://www.scottsharrard.com)) Long-time lead guitarist for Gregg Allman steps up big time. Recorded at Fame Studios in Muscle Shoals, AL

## Explanatory Note

If someone has thoughtfully forwarded you this list, you may be wondering, WTF??? This is my annual holiday gift to my friends and acquaintances. It features artists that are unlikely to show up on any of the widely-circulated critics' "Best Of" list, but I believe are equally worthy of your attention as the big names. I make no attempt to cover the musical waterfront. What you see here reflects my eclectic personal listening habits, for better or worse. This isn't all I listen to, by any means. For example, I loved the Hot Rize 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Bash album, but figured it is likely to receive plenty of mainstream attention, so doesn't need my help. If you'd like to see previous year's lists, visit my website [www.tdavid.net](http://www.tdavid.net) and click on the Music tab.

As always, I encourage you to purchase music either directly from the artists themselves or from your local independent record store. Several of this year's list were discovered at the venerable Waterloo Records in Austin or at Amoeba in San Francisco or Hollywood.

Keep on Rockin' in the Free World!

*Tom David*