

TD's Top Ten of 2014

My favorite album of the year was Rosanne Cash's *The River & The Thread*, which I think stands with her very best work, and that's saying something. A musical high point of the year was seeing Rosanne and her fabulous band perform the entire album in order at SF Jazz. A truly magical evening! Another peak 2014 musical moment was witnessing the magnificent Sharon Jones and the Dap Kings set the stage on fire at the Mountain Winery. She also had a terrific new album out this year, but both these artists are now officially too well-known to make this list, which celebrates my favorite lower profile (but equally worthy) releases of the past year. Here they are, in alpha order:

Blackberry Smoke *Leave a Scar: Live North Carolina*. (3 Legged Records) www.blackberrysmoke.com

I have an enduring passion for Southern Stoner Rock, and these Alabama longhairs are worthy heirs to the lineage of the Allmans and Skynyrd. This live set captures them at their best. If you prefer your Southern cookin' a bit rawer and close to the bone, tune in *Deconstructed* by **Lee Bains and the Glory Fires** and crank up the volume for maximum therapeutic effect. www.thegloryfires.com

Reagan Boggs *Quicksand* (Reckless Bess Records). www.reaganboggs.com

She comes on all Trailer Trash on the album cover, but her third release is more in the vein of sensitive, tuneful country a la Kim Richey. Her excellent songwriting reflects her Virginia Appalachian Coal Country roots with tales of the heartbreak and yearning of small town life. Similarly, although she actually poses in the doorway of a trailer on the cover of *See the Sky About to Rain*, Vancouver songbird **Colleen Rennison** soulfully interprets tunes by a spectrum of songwriters. I was reminded of Bobbie Gentry and Tracy Nelson. Yet another noteworthy release from scrappy www.blackhenmusic.com

Riley Ethridge Jr. *The Straight and Narrow Way* (Two Bad Neighbors/Rock Ridge Music)

www.rileyethridge.com What's the fate of excellent artists like this who defy simply categorization in a playlist-driven world? Call it Americana, Blue-Eyed Soul, Singer/Songwriter, whatever, it's simply superb songwriting, understated delivery, backed by a crack group of players, including some inspired backup vocals from Sara Watkins. You'll find yourself humming these tunes long after your first listen. Did I mention he also ROCKS?

J.W. Jones *Belmont Boulevard*. (Blind Pig Records) www.jw-jones.com

I do love me some Honky Tonk, and this talented young guitar slinger from North of the Border (of all places) really heats up the room. His sound is rooted in blues and country but mainly you'll just want to crank up the volume on this baby and let it rip! Smokin!!! For more of a slow burn, you may also want to also give a listen to *Accumulator* by the **Greyhounds** www.greyhoundsmusic.com

Sonny Knight & His Fabulous Lakers *I'm Still Here* (Secret Stash Records) www.secretstashrecords.com

Fortuitous reemergence of a major Soul talent a la Wilson Pickett who has definitely lived the tales he sings about. It's been a long rough road from Jackson, MS to the Twin Cities, with many years spent as a truck driver when performing gigs dried up. Now he's hooked up with a cookin' big band that promises to give the Dap Tone boyz a run for their money. Let's Do the Cave Man! If you tend to favor an Al Green sound, try *You Can't Fight Love*, the solo debut by Tedeschi Trucks Band singer Mike Mattison www.landsliderecords.com

Oumar Konate *Addoh (Tears)* (Clermont Music) www.clermontmusic.com

The past few years in Mali have been a political nightmare, but fortunately the music is still alive and continuing to inspire the rest of the world. This is the international debut album from a young guitar prodigy that passionately captures the emotions and experiences of his fellow Malians. Truly moving, regardless of what language the lyrics are in. More hypnotic desert music (Moorish Griot style) from Mauritania in *Tzenni* from **Noura Mint Seymali** (www.glitterbeat.com).

LoCura *Dale de Comer* (self-released). www.locuramusica.com

From my home base of San Francisco comes this fiery fusion of ska, son, funk and nueva canción ... a style they call "Califas Flamenkito." You simply will not be able to sit still listening to this "party music for the revolution." To do our *Hermanos* from L.A. justice, it is also highly recommended that you give a listen to the irresistible Afro-Cuban percussion grooves of *Tropicoso* from **Jungle Fire** (www.junglefiremusic.com). La Cultura es Cura!

New Orleans Suspects *Ouroboros* (Louisiana Red Hot Records). www.neworleansuspects.com

I could easily do a Top Ten list each year just of music from NOLA. Among many excellent releases this year, this one is a particular favorite... Meters-style grooves from some master local musicians who know from funk. Another standout (but just nominated for a Grammy) is *Move Your Body* from the **Rebirth Brass Band** www.rebirthbrassband.com Need help gettin' that party started? Look no further!

Jeff Scroggins & Colorado *Western Branches* (self-released). www.jeffscrogginsandcolorado.com

Rocky Mountain Banjo Grand Master Jeff and his extended musical family burn down the barn with some high energy, unbelievable picking, sweet harmonies and High Country bluegrass soul. Recorded at the Kitchen Sink in Chupadero, NM. Need I say more? Aficionados of contemporary Bluegrass should also check out the sizzlin' Mountain Home Records debut of **Flatt Lonesome** (*Too*), a super-talented group of Robertson family youngsters and friends from Florida (www.flattlonesome.com).

Jarekus Singleton *Refuse to Lose* (Alligator Records) www.jarekus.com

This is essential listening for Blues fans or anyone who just loves music with deep soul. From Clinton, MS comes this charismatic young Bluesman. While you can hear the Juke Joint and Gospel influences, he's brought the Delta into the 21st Century. A worthy successor to his personal mentor, the late great Michael "Iron Man" Burks (Top Ten Alum). If that's not enough to satisfy you, another can't miss Urban Blues offering from this year's strong crop is *My Street* from **Ursula Ricks** www.severnrecords.com

Lagniappe

It seems particularly appropriate in these times of turmoil to offer up these extraordinary sources of balm for the soul and spirit that draw on gospel music in unique and powerful ways. These discs have been getting some heavy play on my car stereo at high volume. Bless these artists for sharing these gifts of hope and redemption and bless us one and all!

Glen David Andrews *Redemption* (Louisiana Red Hot Records). www.glendavidandrewsband.com

Mike Farris *Shine for all the People* (Compass Records). www.mikefarrismusic.com

Paul Thorn *Too Blessed to be Stressed* (Perpetual Obscurity Records) www.paulthorn.com