

TD's Top Ten for 2016

Despite it all, this has been an exceptional year for music, thank goodness! My two favorite discs of 2016 are from legendary artists who are personal musical heroes.... **William Bell** (*This is Where I Live*) and the incandescent **Bonnie Raitt** (*Dig in Deep*). A personal highlight of the year was seeing Bonnie and her burnin' band along with Bruce Hornsby at the Greek in Berkeley. The year also featured extraordinary releases from emerging roots stars – e.g. **Elizabeth Cook, Dori Freeman, Margaret Glaspy, Lydia Loveless, Margo Price** – but all of them have (appropriately) received a bit too much critical and media attention to qualify for this list, which celebrates my slightly more obscure faves of the year, arranged in alpha order.

Kimi Djabaté *Kanamalu*. Red Orange Recordings www.red-orange.co.uk

From Guinea-Bissau, a place that has experienced much suffering, comes this vibrant, joyous music of resistance and resilience. For those who don't listen to a lot of African music, this is a great entrée to the rich *griot* Mandingo tradition of West Africa. Or... how about a creative confluence of African and Cuban musical crosscurrents? If that sounds appealing, be sure to check out **Richard Bona and Mandekan Cubano's** *Heritage* on Qwest/Membran: www.richard-bona.com

Corey Henry *Lapeitah*. Louisiana Red Hot Records www.corey-henry.com

Long-time readers of this list know it couldn't be complete without a visit to NOLA, definitely *the* funkier spot in all the USA. Start with this "Treme cultural dance" featuring the trombone and soulful vocals of Galactic ace Mr. Henry in association with an amazing array of his musical homies. Once you've worked up a good sweat, then let's amble down to Abbeville for some *hot* creole cookin' with **Roddie Romero and the Hub City All-Stars** on *Gulfstream* (Octavia Records) www.RoddieRomero.com

Frontera Bugalú *Alma de Jaguar* self-released www.fronterabugalu.bandcamp.com

If you like La Santa Cecilia, tune in to these cats from El Paso. They mine the musical traditions of the border with soul and style and infectious rhythms ... Guaranteed to get everyone dancing! Also from TX, a special favorite of mine is the initial EP release from San Antonio's **The Last Bandoleros**. If your papa was *Tejano* legend Emilio Navaira, Sr. and you also grew up grooving to the Beatles, perhaps you may have come up with this delightful mix as well. Looking for something upbeat? *Not to be missed!* Instant Joy! www.thelastbandoleros.com

Lakou Mizik *Wa Di Yo*. Cumbancha Discovery. www.cumbancha.com www.lakomizik.com

I couldn't say it better than their liner notes: Lakou Mizik is a multigenerational collective of Haitian musicians formed in the aftermath of the devastating 2010 earthquake. The group includes elder legends and rising young talents, united in a mission to honor the healing spirit of their collective culture and communicate a message of pride, strength and hope to the world. *You're gonna love this!*

The Lonely Heartstring Band *Deep Waters*. Rounder Records. www.lonelyheartstringband.com

Contemporary string band music (part bluegrass, part folk, part roots) has become an increasingly crowded genre, much to my delight. These Berklee College of Music products not only have amazing instrumental chops, they'll delight you with their songwriting and harmonies.

Chinky Māhoe *Kalapawai Ku'u 'Āina Kaulana*. Kailua Beach Productions. www.mele.com

Howell "Chinky" Māhoe, Jr. is a legendary hula *kumu* and regular presence at the Merrie Monarch Festival with his Men of Waimāpuna. This is only his second release (the first was in 2001), comprised of songs and chants relating to his *'āina hanau* in Kalapawai. *Deeply soulful*. Another special treat from Hawaii this year was the lovely *Ku'u Pua Sakura* from **Hōku Zuttermeister**. Perfect for sunset listening.

The Motet *Totem*. self-released. www.themotet.com

Can a bunch of white folks from Colorado truly *bring the funk*? Well, you be the judge. I just dare you to sit still while you're makin' up your mind. Another contender for funkier (multiethnic) ensemble of the year... actually more Soul/R&B than Funk ... check out **The Suffers'** eponymous release. www.TheSuffers.com *Both these selections are to be enjoyed at maximum possible volume.*

T Sisters *T Sisters*. Three-Headed Sounds. www.tsisters.com

Heavenly three-part sister harmonies from these Bay Area local faves, the fabulous Tietjen sisters. For those of us who have followed their development, this is the coming-of-age work we knew was coming. Did I mention that they also bring a distinctly delightful, sassy point of view to their songwriting? Joy!

Mike Wheeler Band *Turn Up!!* Delmark Records www.delmark.com

The Chicago Blues tradition is in good hands with Mr. Wheeler and his colleagues. He skillfully blends together a number of musical influences (e.g. Memphis Soul; funk) and the result "explodes with affirmation." If you favor a bit more Dallas/Gospel roots in your Blues, treat yourself to the gnarly, gravelly vibe of the legendary **Relatives'** *Goodbye World* www.ubiquityrecords.com

Yarn *This is the Year*. Redbush Records www.yarnmusic.net

Amazing melodic roots country from New York City? You could have fooled me. Among the heartfelt harmonic tributes to Carolina and Dolly Parton, the giveaway is in their tongue-in-cheek lyric: "Oh, It's a long way to Texas and I don't know if they'll even let us in." For fans of the Gram Parsons school of country, this one's for you. Superb!

Well, that's 10 (plus) but a favorite New Orleans tradition that I try to honor as often as possible is that of **Lagniappe** (a little more at no extra cost...like an extra donut added to your dozen). Here's this year's:

Rising Songbirds

They've apparently flown under the radar of most musical cool-hunters and tastemakers, but these emerging roots/country/folk songwriting talents have the TD Seal of Approval, and are definitely worth your attention:

The Honeycutters *On the Ropes*. www.honeycutters.com www.Organic-Records.com

Michaela Anne *Bright Lights and the Fame*. Kingswood Records. www.michaelaanne.com

Elizabeth Wills *Every Little Star*. www.elizabethwills.com (you might be reminded of classic Joni

And for those seeking something completely different, I can't resist adding one more recommendation from a singular Bay Area artist/auteur:

Fantastic Negrito *The Last Days of Oakland*. Self-released. www.fantasticnegrito.com

In addition to being a distinctive listening experience, definitely the coolest artwork/packaging of any CD I've seen this year.... *Talkin' about a Revolution.....*

I would be remiss if I didn't spend a moment remembering the great **Sharon Jones**, a long-time favorite and inspiration. We lost her too soon to cancer this year, but she kept performing with tremendous spirit and energy in the last year of her life. We were honored to see her in a dynamite concert with the Tedeschi-Trucks Band at the Greek in Berkeley earlier this year. A truly stellar evening! Bless You Sharon for all you gave to your audiences and to this world!

Keep on rockin' in the Free World!

Tom David

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