

TD's Top Ten for 2017

Sweet Home Alabama, it's been quite a year. Fortunately, we have great music in abundance to salve our souls and keep us keepin' on. My favorite release of the year was a redemptive comeback for a legendary Memphis Soul Survivor, **Don Bryant**. What more important message could there be for these times than "Don't Give Up on Love?" (www.fatpossum.com) Old timers like me might remember Mr. Bryant as a lead songwriter and house band member for Willie Mitchell at legendary Hi Records or the signature piece "I Can't Stand the Rain" that he composed for his beloved wife Ann Peebles. He's now 75 and still bringin' it full force. What follows are my other favorite releases of the year from artists that have largely (and undeservedly) escaped mainstream attention (and sales). Please support their art!



Chastity Brown *Silhouette of Sirens* www.redhouserecords.com

There will probably never be another Joni, but we seem to be witnessing a blooming of sophisticated Singer Songwriters whose lyrics and artistry genuinely warrant repeated listen. Also, worthy of your attention: *Shanti's Shadow* from **Phoebe Hunt & The Gatherers** (www.phoebehuntmusic.com)

Las Cafeteras *Tastes Like L.A.* www.lascaferas.com

And it does! Exhilarating, political, spicy hot, captivating and full of fun! Just try to sit still. I don't know what our putative President and his pals are afraid of. The rest of the country needs *more* of this, not less! From the same fertile cultural soil springs another distinct musical lifeform, the trippy (yet endearing) phenomenon that is **Chicano Batman**. Check out their latest: *Freedom is Free* (ATO Records).

Sean Chambers *Trouble & Whiskey* www.americanshowplacemusic.com

Sweaty Southern Blues rock from SW Florida. The Strat firestorm unleashed by this one-time Hubert Sumlin acolyte demands your full attention. *To be played at maximum possible volume!*

Curtis Harding *Face Your Fear* www.curtisharding.com

From CeeLo Green's posse out of Atlanta, you'll hear references to another Curtis (Mayfield) and to the immortal Marvin Gaye, but this emerging voice brings his own unique style of soul to this take on what's currently goin' on. Also, worthy of a listen, the dynamic **Bette Smith's** *Jetlagger* on the creatively named www.biglegalmessrecords.com. *Yet another reminder of why we need physical albums ...* the cover photo of her magnificent 'fro and steamy attitude is truly priceless!

Kacy & Clayton *The Siren's Song* (New West Records) www.newwestrecords.com

This could be an undiscovered treasure circa 1970. These two young cousins from Saskatchewan certainly channel the vibe of an early Sandy Denny, if she were accompanied by a young John Cipollina from Quicksilver. Sweet listening. While we're in a retro mood, you're bound to also groove to *Under The Lights* from Bay Area faves **Midnight North** www.midnightnorth.com. Yes, you are hearing echoes of the Dead at their most melodic, as one the leads is none other than Grahame Lesh. Sweet harmonies.

Margo Price *All American Made* www.thirdmanrecords.com

Socially-conscious Woke Nashville that also rocks and brings down the house. The first two tracks in particular will get you up and boot skootin'. Hungry for some more country cookin'? Check out **Whitney Rose's Rule 62** www.whitneyrosemusic.com from Prince Edward Island, Canada by way of Austin. *You'll be glad you did!*

Queen Ifrica *Climb* (www.vprerecords.com)

Roots reggae has long been pretty much a Boyz club. Here's a sterling exception, wrapped in a gorgeous (CD) package. They call her "Fyuh Muma," for addressing women's power within the larger issues of violence and exploitation affecting disenfranchised communities. And...what more welcome response could there be to these times than a righteous skankin' groove? Can't get enough Jamaica? Try **Jesse Royal's** buoyant *Lily of Da Valley* (www.easystar.com)

El Septeto Santiaguero *Raiz* (www.elseptetosantiaguero.com)

A highlight of our live musical year was hearing these legendary Cuban *son/rumba* Maestros burn up the stage at the Freight and Salvage in Berkeley. They got *everyone* on their feet and smiling and dancing ... as they will you!

Shinyribs *I Got Your Medicine* www.shinyribs.org

Well, we didn't make it to either Austin or NOLA this year, but this is the aural equivalent of a funky late-night session in one of their steamy local dive bars, reminiscent of the late Levon Helm and The Band. Produced by Jimbo Mathus and maestro Kevin Russell at SugarHill Recording Studios in Houston. Swings so fine! On into the wee hours with **King James & the Special Men's** don't miss *Act Like You Know* (www.specialmanindustries.com) Go ahead... get *your* groove on!

Molly Tuttle *Rise* www.mollytuttlemusic.com

Solo debut from a local Bay Area prodigy and rising star who was this year the first woman ever voted Guitar Player of the Year by the IBMA. She nicely showcases her considerable vocal and songwriting

chops, but leaves us hungry for just a *bit* more of her super fine tasty pickin'. This year's release from yet another mindblowing multi-instrumentalist **Billy Strings** (*Turmoil and Tinfoil*) will leave you literally breathless on that score. You can get acquainted with him at www.billystrings.com

Lagniappe

Let's end this year on a high note. Where better to turn for musical inspiration, uplift and joyous defiance? Why, Mother Africa of course. There were simply too many great releases to choose from this year. Here are three favorites that will most definitely raise your roof:

*from Nigeria by way of the UK: **Ibibio Sound Machine** Uyai www.Mergerecords.com*

*from Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo: **Jupiter & Okwess** Kin Sonic www.jupiterandokwess.com www.glitterbeat.com*

*from Harare, Zimbabwe: **Mokoomba** Luyando www.outhere.de*

Please keep patronizing your independent record stores wherever they still exist and whenever possible, purchase your music directly from the artists themselves. Obviously, I'm not a fan of streaming for the simple reason that I believe artists should be fairly compensated for the work that brings all of us so much joy.

Keep on Rockin' in the Free World!

TD

Explanatory Note:

If someone has forwarded you this list for the first time, you may be wondering "WTF?"

As my annual Holiday present, I compile a list of my favorite releases of the past year ... but only of superb artists that are obscure enough or outside the mainstream of critical attention that they deserve a special boost. I love Bruno just like you do, but *he* doesn't need my help selling his records. I hope that you'll find a new favorite artist or two among this list. If you'd like to see some of the lists from past years, click on the Music tab at my website www.tdavid.net

Cheers!