

TD's Top Ten for 2019

My two favorite albums of the year feature Masters of the Hammond B-3 who deliver the deeply soulful vibes we all need to sustain us in these troubled times. Legendary session keyboards ace **Reese Wynans** teamed up with Joe Bonamassa and an all-star crew of friends to produce his first solo album in his 50-year career, *Sweet Release* (www.reesewynans.com). Seattle's **Delvon Lamarr Organ Trio** provides stirring Booker T. – style sustenance on their debut LP *Close But No Cigar* (Coalmine Records). What follows are my other favorite releases of the year from artists that have so far largely (and undeservedly) escaped mainstream attention in alpha order. Enjoy!

AKA Trio *Joy* (www.bendigeg.org; www.aka-trio.com)

It's hard to describe the astonishing, beguiling, transporting confluence of these three Senegalese (Kora), Brazilian (percussion) and Italian (guitar) virtuosos. Transcendent beauty for a dark time.

Alvorada *First Light* (www.alvoradamusic.com)

All-instrumental debut from a London-based *choro* quintet whose seductive, slinky melodies incorporate elements of samba and Brazilian funk. A captivating blend of flute, clarinet, alto sax and percussion that is, in turn, playful, bittersweet, joyous and yearning. See also **Rio Mira's** *Marimba del Pacifico*, which brings together marimba masters Larry Preciado and Esteban Copete with Ecuadorian Karla Kanna and an incredible ensemble of Afro Latino folkloric musicians from Ecuador and Colombia. (www.ayarecords.net)

Eabhal *This is How the Ladies Dance* (www.eabhal.com)

Originally from the Outer Hebrides, this young, attractive Glasgow-based quintet will put a smile on your face and a spring in your step. A combination of traditional and original Scottish/Gaelic tunes with soulful vocals from Kaitlin Rose and tight, fresh ensemble playing from her instrumental colleagues.

Grupo Fantasma *American Music Vol. VII* (Blue Corn Music; www.grupofantasma.com)

Struttin'... Smokin'... Burnin'.... These Austin faves have been together for 19 years, and this is a signature release with a topical political edge. To be played at maximum possible volume! While we've got you up and dancing, give a listen to their trippy Peruvian Godfathers, **Los Wembler's de Iquitos**, who have reunited after many a year to release *Vision del Ayahuasca* (www.barbesrecords.com). They call their sound "cumbia amazonica." You'll feel an irresistible urge to join in....

Nate Kana'e Tradition (www.mele.com)

“Uncle Nate” hails originally from Maui, was brought up in Nanakuli, and these days makes his home in Northern California, where he still performs on a regular basis. His distinctive gravelly voice reminds me of the legendary Gabby Pahinui. Also recommended: *Lei Nāhonoapi'ilani Songs of West Maui*, a lovely compendium that seeks to recover and reawaken traditional *mele* performed by local artists for the North Beach-West Maui Benefit Fund (also available from mele.com).

Mdou Moctor *ILANA The Creator* (www.sahilsounds.com)

Mahamadou Souleymane (aka Mdou Moctor) grew up in a small village in central Niger in a remote region steeped in religious tradition. His first guitar was a handmade concoction of wood scraps and bicycle parts. Now they call him the “Hendrix of the Sahara” and his guitar is a left-handed Strat. Mindblowing artistry. Imagine having *him* for your wedding band (something he regularly does)! While we're in Africa, looking for something a little less trance-y and a bit more dance-y? Check out *Obiaa!*, the latest from legendary Ghanaian Highlife Master **Pat Thomas and the Kwashibu Area Band**. Pure joy!

Old Salt Union *Where the Dogs Don't Bite* (www.oldsaltunion.com; www.compassrecords.com)

From Belleville, IL, they were the 2015 winners of the Fresh Grass Band contest, and they just continue to get better and tighter as an ensemble. This disc was produced by the legendary Alison Brown, who refers to them as “post modern bluegrassers.” They're a great young string band with rock n' roll energy, combining musical craftsmanship with infectious energy.

Upstate *Healing* (Royal Potato Family)

Long-time readers of this list know I'm a big fan of delicious three-part harmonies, intelligent lyrics and sophisticated arrangements. That's what you'll find here. From New York's Hudson Valley, this is the second album from these super talented young folks. You'll hear elements of folk, jazz, gospel, R&B and rock. In a similar vein, check out New England trio **Lulu Wiles'** *What Will We Do* (Smithsonian Folkways).

Way Down Wanderers *Illusions* (www.thewaydownwanderers.com)

Second full-length LP from this young up-and-coming band from Peoria, IL. Their sound features elements of bluegrass, newgrass and American roots rock. They project an un-upbeat, energetic, distinctly family vibe, with nice multi-part harmonies and intelligent lyrics.

Jontavious Willis *Spectacular Class* (Kind of Blue Music; www.jontaviouswillis.com)

Much-anticipated second release from a gifted 22 year-old multi-instrumentalist and old soul Bluesman that no less than the immortal Taj Mahal calls “the Wunderkind.” Funkalicious! Turn it up! Also, be sure not to miss the debut of another young Blues avatar, **Christone “Kingfish” Ingram** on Alligator Records. We had the distinct pleasure of witnessing his scorchin’ guitar heroics burn up the stage at this year’s Monterey Jazz Festival. Grammy has taken notice. He’s been nominated for Best New Artist. Ordinarily that would disqualify him from this list, but I just can’t omit him!

Lagniappe

That’s 10, but as they do in New Orleans, we like to leave you with a little extra special something.

Four fantastic Singer-Songwriters with a country blues edge also issued noteworthy releases this year that got a lot of airplay at my house and in my car and are worthy of your attention:

Liz Brasher *Painted Image* (Fat Possum Records) www.fatpossum.com

Caroline Spence *Mint Condition* (Rounder Records) www.carolinespencemusic.com

Kelsey Waldon *White Noise/White Lines* (Oh Boy Records/Thirty Tigers) www.kelseywaldon.com

Alice Wallace *Into the Blue* (Rebelle Road Records) www.alicewallacemusic.com

Explanatory Note

If someone has forwarded you this list for the first time, you may be wondering what’s up.

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 Lizzo as much as you do, but *she* doesn’t need my help selling her 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

Keep on Rockin’ in the Free World!!

Tom David