

TD's Top Ten for 2023

One of the special pleasures of living on the Monterey Peninsula is the vibrant local live music scene. I first encountered several of this year's Top Ten in concert here and it's always fun to purchase music directly from the artists themselves. My two favorite releases of the year were from Grand Masters of their Craft **Tommy Emmanuel's** *Accomplice Two* and NOLA legend **Ivan Neville's** *Touch My Soul*. Both will give you hours of listening pleasure. However, they're both too likely to receive other end-of-year attention to officially make *this* list, which celebrates my favorite releases from artists you're less likely to have heard of but are equally deserving of your attention. They are listed below in alpha order.

Duane Betts *Wild & Precious Life* (Royal Potato Family) www.duanebetts.com

The Allman Brothers left us an indelible legacy that never gets old in my book. Their spirit ably continues in the music of Dharma Heir Duane Betts (son of Dickie). Uplifting, Rockin' great driving music!

Daimh *Sula* (Goat Island Music) www.daimh.net

The Monterey Bay Celtic Society regularly brings top Irish and Scottish musicians from across the pond to town for intimate concerts at a local church. One of the highlights of this year was the astonishing Scottish ensemble Daimh. This new recording does a great job of conveying the energy, virtuosity and deep soul of their live performance. For more inspired fiddling (this time from Denmark) accompanied by accordion and nyckelharpa, check out **Henriette Flach's** *Skylokke* www.gofolk.dk

Noah Gundersen *If This is the End* (Soundly Music) www.noahgundersen.com

From Seattle, a clear, kind voice sharing his struggles in the search for equanimity in troubled times. Among the endless list of individual singer songwriters, I keep returning to this one for repeat listening, along with **Jeff Plankenhorn's** *Alone at Sea*. (*Spike Steel Music/Blue Corn Music*) www.bluecornmusic.com

D.K. Harrell *The Right Man* (Little Village) www.littlevillagefoundation.org

Stellar recording debut of a 25-year-old blues avatar from a small town in Northern Louisiana. Is this BB reincarnated? You be the judge. To be played at maximum possible volume. While we're on the blues side of town, be sure to check out the **Blackburn Brothers' Soul Funkin' Blues** from North of the Border. www.blackburnbrothersmusic.com. Healing, Transformative music that will require you to get up and dance.

Sona Jobareth *Badinyaa Kumoo* (African Guild Records) www.sonajobareth.com

Kuumbwa Jazz in Santa Cruz regularly brings leading African artists to town. An indelible high point of this past season was a mind-blowing performance by this celebrated kora master and her energetic ensemble. They brought the crowd to its feet and left us breathless and transfixed. Don't miss this one!

Chris Jones & the Night Drivers *Pages in Your Hand* (Mountain Home Music) www.chrisjonesgrass.com

We had the good fortune to see them live at our local bluegrass showcase, the Otter Opry. Exceptional songwriting, musicianship, and vocals. Uplifting! Another highly recommended bluegrass release that brings together the members of the California Bluegrass Reunion is **Bill Evans'** *Things Are Simple* (Native and Fine Records) www.billevansbanjo.com

La Marisoul and Los Texmaniacs *Corazones and Canciones* (Smithsonian Folkways) www.folkways.si.edu

Inspired pairing of two personal favorite artists (and former Top Ten listers) who join forces for a spirited collection that personifies the joy, pathos, heart, and soul of *Conjunto*. Just try to sit still while listening to this gem!

Acantha Lang *Beautiful Dreams* (Magnolia Blue Records) www.acanthalang.com

An exceptionally soulful songwriter and vocalist born in New Orleans but now based in London. She knows from funk. She should be a rising star to be sure, but she's an independent artist with no big label backing. A Go Fund Me success story so far, but she faces a tough road ahead to reach a mainstream U.S. audience. Spread the word!

Matteo Mancuso *The Journey* (Players Club) www.mascotlabelgroup.com

Guitar nuts, if you're not already on this bandwagon, prepare to have your minds blown. This young man from Sicily (of all places) does things with his instrument that I can't cognitively process and that simply defy description. Check out some of his videos on You Tube, sit back and enjoy the journey!

Jalen Ngonda *Come Around and Love Me* (Daptone Records) <https://jngonda.com>

If, like me, you believe it never got better than Marvin Gaye at his creative peak, you're going to be pleasantly surprised by this outstanding debut. Food for the Soul!

Well, that's 10 plus a few bonus picks, but as they do in New Orleans, we have a tradition of **Lagnaippe**... a little something extra for free. Just for fun, you might also enjoy the following:

Some rockin' Cowboy magic:

Jesse Daniel *My Kind of Country: Live at the Catalyst* (Die True Records) Boot scootin' fun.

The Shootouts *Stampede* (Soundly Music) www.shootoutsmusic.com

And I would be remiss if I didn't also mention the latest from one of my long-time favorites:

Tracy Nelson *Life Don't Miss Nobody* (BMG) She's traveled a long hard road from her SF days in Mother Earth and she has earned the right to sing the blues with feeling. <https://tracynelsonmusic.com>

I don't have to tell you that times are tough for most musicians in this country. That's why I don't stream. I now try to purchase all my music directly from the artists themselves or via Bandcamp or our remaining independent record stores which also deserve all the support you can give them.

Keep on Rockin' in the Free World!

Tom David

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