

TD's Top Ten for 2006

My two favorite albums of the year come from two distinctly different worlds. Salif Keita's **M'Bemba** (Decca/Universal France) is a lyrical and enthralling evocation of African music at its peak; the Wailin' Jennys' second album, **Firecracker** (Red House Records), is an alt.country masterpiece from the Canadian plains, with spinetingling three-part harmonies. Other highlights of the year for me included the continued revival of Classic Soul, including outstanding "comeback" albums from personal heroes Sam Moore (**Overnight Sensation**), Candi Staton (**His Hands**) and Irma Thomas (**After the Rain**). All are highly recommended, but I suspect they'll likely receive lots of mainstream attention at Grammy time compared to some of the other offerings on this list. As always, it includes some of my somewhat more obscure favorites from the past year, listed in alpha order.

Tony Allen **Lagos No Shaking** (Honest Jon's Records/EMI Records)
Powerful, relentless grooves from this Nigerian percussion master, augmented by an all-star supporting cast. You want high energy? Got it right here. As they say in one of the most memorable numbers... "Don't morose your face!"

Angela Desveaux **Wandering Eyes** (Thrill Jockey Records) www.thrilljockey.com
More alt.country/contemporary folk from Canada from a talented young singer/songwriter whose passion and voice is reminiscent of Lucinda Williams.

Nasio Fontaine **Universal Cry** (Greensleeves Records) www.nasioreggae.com
Wondering where to look for melodic, politically inspiring reggae in the post Bob, Toots and Tosh era? Look no further. This stuff is tight! (See also Michael Franti and Spearhead's **Yell Fire!** on Boo Boo Wax/Anti-).

Paula Fugo **Lilikoi** (Pakipika Productions)
My favorite Hawaiian album of the year is the debut of an extraordinary young talent. Her songs are straight from the heart and her delivery totally knocks you out. She also plays nose flute! (See also ukulele wizard Jake Shimabukuro's **Gently Weeps** (Hitchhike Records) www.jakeshimabukuro.com We saw him perform live on Maui early this year and it was a truly transcendent experience).

Hot Buttered Rum **Well-Oiled Machine** (Harmonized Records)
www.HotButteredRum.net From California, one of the most engaging newer groups on the acoustic newgrass/jamband scene. Tasty musicianship, good songs and higher consciousness. The title tune is an ode to their tour bus which runs on recycled vegetable oil! (See also Hit& Run Bluegrass **Without Maps or Charts**).

James Hunter **People Gonna Talk** (Go Records/Rounder Records)
www.jameshuntermusic.com Is it possible that Sam Cooke has been reincarnated in the body of a white guy from England? This stuff sounds like it's straight out of 1963. Classic R & B with a hipster/lounge sensibility. You'll find yourself playing this one over and over.

Papa Grows Funk **Live at the Leaf** (Funky Krewe Records) www.papagrowsfunk.com
We're talking the legendary Maple Leaf Bar in New Orleans, and this dynamite ensemble puts you right smack dab in the steamy funkiness of it all. This stuff is a pure delight that deserves repeated play at maximum volume. (Also recommended is Eric Lindell's **Change in the Weather** (Alligator Records)).

Karine Polwart **Scribbled in Chalk** (Spit & Polish/Shoeshine Records/Hegri Music) www.karinepolwart.com From Scotland (her burr is charmingly audible at times) comes this intelligent, poetic contemporary folk offering. Reminds me at times of early Shawn Colvin and/or Mary Black.

Grace Potter and the Nocturnals **Nothing But The Water** (Ragged Company Records) www.gracepotter.com Recorded live in Plainfield, Vermont at Goddard College's Haybarn Theatre. What a voice! At times I hear echoes of Bonnie Raitt, at other times Janis. Keep your eye on this one!

Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars **Living Like a Refugee** (Anti/Epitaph)
This is the real deal. All the pain of war and displacement and the hope and joy of resiliency and survival captured in the voices of refugees from Sierra Leone's brutal civil war. Their music will move and transport you. See www.ninemillion.org

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Long-time readers of this list will be surprised to find a hip hop recommendation, but I'm pleased to steer you to: The Coup **Pick A Bigger Weapon** (Anti/Epitaph) www.thecoupmusic.net Pointed political commentary but wicked satirical humor to boot.

Another late entrant: Brett Dennen **So Much More** (Dualtone) www.brettdennen.com
Imagine a combination of Dylan, Paul Simon, Steve Forbert and Tracy Chapman all rolled into an impressive debut effort. Nuf said.

Also, for some alternative Christmas music, check out Putumayo's new **New Orleans Christmas** compilation. www.putumayo.com Traditional and contemporary jazz arrangements of standards and some New Orleans-specific material. And a portion of the proceeds goes to the Musicians' Village project.

Let me remind you once again about the Louisiana Music Factory, a fabulous independent record store in New Orleans that is struggling to survive. They do mail order, and you can find this Christmas title as well as the Papa Grows Funk, Eric Lindell and Irma Thomas discs on their website www.louisianamusicfactory.com . You'll be glad you did.

Best wishes for a great 2007!

Tom David