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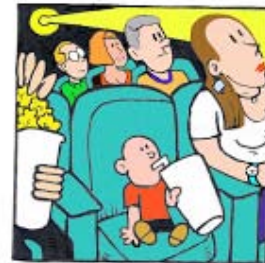
MICHAEL GILTZ AT WORK

MUSIC: The Best Albums Of 2018 or How Everything Old Is New Again

Every year I make a list of my favorite albums. Of course, I put my favoritest albums near the top, but any album on the list is worthy of your time. If you like the artist or the genre, give it a listen. But my #1 pick? Clearly that's a statement: here's the BEST album of the year and if you want to pretend you're hip or cool or care about music, well you better lay down some vinyl, drop a needle and give it a listen! And how do I choose the best album of the year? Easy: which new album have I played the most? This year, however, I struggled. Was it this album or that album or the other album? And why don't kids listen to albums anymore? They'll binge-watch an entire season of a TV show from start to finish in two days -- in ORDER -- but they'd rather die than listen to an album from an artist they love? What gives? Do they pick up a book, read chapter seven and then chapter two and then chapter sixteen and then move on to another book?

Ok, forget the kids. Suddenly, I realized my problem and why I was struggling with naming my favorite album of the year. I was too focused on the *new*. Yes, I am talking about the best albums of 2018 but streaming has permanently changed my listening habits. The latest albums bump up against a sudden desperate need to check out Andy Gibb or the entire catalog of The Temptations from start to finish or Buffalo Springfield (for the first time!) or The Carpenters. And if I'm being honest, the music I listened to the most in 2018, the music I couldn't stop talking about and recommending, the musical career I became mildly obsessed over was found on the boxed set *The Girl From Chickasaw County: The Complete Capitol Masters by Bobbie Gentry*.

I knew the name. Bobbie Gentry was a classic one-hit wonder (I thought), the voice behind the enigmatic, unforgettable single "Ode To Billie Joe." I'd never heard an album of hers or even another song by



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BLOG ARCHIVE

▼ 2019 (7)

▼ February (1)

[MUSIC: The Best Albums Of](#)

her. And I don't think I'd ever heard anyone extolling her as an unappreciated talent. But here's the boxed set containing all sorts of live cuts and b-sides -- the usual boxed set material. It was compiled by Andrew Batt, the guy who did similar work on the solo albums of Sandy Denny. And just as his boxed set of Denny brought renewed attention to that singer, he is hoping the same will happen for Gentry. ([Here's an excellent interview with Batt about the project.](#)) And scattered in that boxed set are all the songs from seven studio albums (and one unreleased album of standards). I had to create playlists for each one just so I could listen to them from start to finish without any distractions. And what did I discover? One of the best albums of 1967...and 1968...and 1971...and 2018.

THE 40 (ish) BEST ALBUMS OF 2018

1-10

BOBBIE GENTRY -- The Girl From Chickasaw County: The Complete Capitol Masters
JANELLE MONÁE -- Dirty Computer
KAMASI WASHINGTON -- Heaven and Earth
ANGELIQUE KIDJO -- Remain In Light
PANIC! AT THE DISCO -- Pray For The Wicked
BRANDI CARLILE -- By The Way, I Forgive You
THE JOHN SALLY RIDE -- Nothing Doing
NELLIE MCKAY -- Sister Orchid
BETA RADIO -- Transition
VARIOUS ARTISTS -- Black Panther

11-20

CÉCILE MCLORIN SALVANT -- The Window
ARCTIC MONKEYS -- Tranquility Base Hotel and Casino
KASEY CHAMBERS -- Campfire
BENJAMIN JAFFE -- Oh, Wild Ocean Of Love
VARIOUS ARTISTS -- African Scream Contest 2
SHAKEY GRAVES -- Can't Wake Up
ESPERANZA SPALDING -- 12 Little Spells
ELVIS COSTELLO -- Look Now
COURTNEY BARNETT -- Tell Me How You Really Feel
NAS -- Nasir

21-30

TONY BENNETT AND DIANA KRALL -- Love Is Here To Stay
BIRCH PEREIRA -- Western Soul
TRACEY THORN -- Record
SCOTT MATTHEWS -- The Great Untold
MACY GRAY -- Ruby
JASON ALDEAN -- Rearview Town
MADELEINE PEYROUX -- Anthem
DRAKE -- Scorpion
JAMES HUNTER -- Whatever It Takes
TROYE SIVAN -- Bloom

2018 or How Everything O...

► [January](#) (6)

► [2018](#) (34)

► [2017](#) (6)

► [2016](#) (2)

► [2015](#) (14)

► [2014](#) (2)

► [2013](#) (5)

► [2012](#) (18)

► [2011](#) (15)

► [2010](#) (10)

► [2009](#) (43)

► [2008](#) (86)

► [2007](#) (781)

► [2006](#) (2412)

► [2005](#) (5)

31-42

RICK SPRINGFIELD -- The Snake King

LINDA THOMPSON -- My Mother Doesn't Know I'm On The Stage

FALL OUT BOY -- Mania

ROSEANNE CASH -- She Remembers Everything

BUDDY GUY -- The Blues Is Alive And Well

GORILLAZ -- The Now Now

MANDY PATINKIN -- Diary: January 27, 2018/ April, May 2018

JOSH ROUSE -- Love In The Modern Age

THE VINES -- In Miracle Land

JEFF TWEEDY -- Warm

BOZ SCAGGS -- Out Of The Blues

ELLA FITZGERALD/ LOUIS ARMSTRONG -- Cheek To Cheek: The Complete Duet Recordings

1. **BOBBIE GENTRY** -- *The Girl From Chickasaw County: The Complete Capitol Masters*

...and what did I discover? One of the best albums of 1967...and 1968...and 1971. I discovered a debut album suffused with southern grit and sass and a marvelous sense of place, an album so confident it saved the brilliant single "Ode To Billie Joe" for the final cut. That's nerve. Then came a second album served up as a song cycle, one tune flowing into the next. If anything, it's even better. And then the crazy, dismissive, sexist music industry takes over, both praising Gentry's albums and dismissing her as a cute little thing at the same time. Bizarrely, despite her debut selling millions and topping the charts and Gentry winning Grammys (including Best New Artist) and the second album delivering artistically and being right in the wheelhouse of her debut, it disappeared. I don't mean it didn't sell that well; it *barely charted* on the Billboard 200, only reaching #132. Her third album didn't even CHART. So Gentry played the game and recorded a duets album with Glen Campbell, one of the hottest acts around. It's her least interesting album by a country mile but it sold tons and went straight to the top of the charts. Her fifth album, clearly ready to capitalize on a revitalized Gentry with commercial appeal? It peaked at #164. Even curiouser was her songwriting. Gentry wrote most of the songs on her debut and second album, but each release after that included fewer and fewer originals, as if she'd run out of things to say. Gentry has excellent taste in music so her covers are well chosen. But given the outstanding quality of her writing, it's sad to see just one original track by Gentry on her fifth and sixth studio albums. Eventually, the label just ignored her completely. Gentry's very good seventh album -- which includes standards like "God Bless The Child" and "Feelin' Good" -- wasn't released at all. Then out of nowhere she recorded one final work. Gentry's eighth and final release (to date) contains all originals. Like many of the previous albums, she arranged and produced the entire affair, even painting the album cover. It's a work of Americana very much in the spirit of Randy Newman and

Harry Nilsson and every bit the equal of their best work (and hers). It's a triumphant capper and when it too sank without a trace I picture Gentry making a hand gesture at the music world and heading out the door. Somewhere in there she did TV specials and then accepted a huge paycheck from Las Vegas, where she directed and choreographed and even designed the costumes for a hugely popular stage show, starring in it for several years. Artistic control and more money than she ever saw from the record biz must have been sweet. Gentry married and divorced three times (always her own woman), wisely invested and profited from the Phoenix Suns basketball team and hasn't even glanced at the music biz since 1981. Reba McEntire includes Gentry's song "Fancy" in most every concert she does and surely Gentry's determination to do it all and do it her way has been an inspiration to countless acts over the years. But what really matters is the music and four of her eight albums are very good to stunning. Start with the debut and thank me later. I've never named a reissue as my favorite album before. Typically, I would just go back and insert the album onto the list for the year it originally came out. But that's the beauty of streaming. You can listen to so much great music from every era right now. If you're suddenly discovering classic Hollywood, maybe your favorite movie of 2018 was 1944's *The Miracle Of Morgan's Creek*. Maybe the TV show you obsessed over was *Firefly* from 2002. Maybe the book you couldn't stop sharing with friends was *Stoner* by John Williams. Hey, diving into some classic stuff is a hell of a lot better than just watching some dumb new movie because you remember seeing the trailer a few weeks ago. (Kevin Hart is pretty funny; how bad can it be?) So my favorite album of 2018 is 1967's *Ode To Billie Joe*. Just like Gentry, I guess there's a little rebel in me. Today, [Mercury Rev is releasing a tribute to Gentry](#) that covers her sensational second album with an all-star guest list of singers ranging from Norah Jones to Lucinda Williams. Of course, they toss in "Ode To Billie Joe" at the end, because how can't you? I'm looking forward to checking it out and hope it keeps the Bobbie Gentry comeback a-rolling. But do check out the original albums first.

Follow me on Spotify! Or just go here to check out my playlists for the albums. I've got all eight on my playlists but here are the three best:

[Ode To Billie Joe](#)

[The Delta Sweete](#)

[Patchwork](#)

2. JANELLE MONÁE -- *Dirty Computer*

The craziest, sexiest, coolest album of the year. Monáe covers the waterfront stylistically, from Prince to Madonna to Marvin Gaye to Nina Simone and she does it on an album bursting with great songs that is also one of the boldest political statements in years. I've been in love with her talent for ages and this was the moment it all came

together. She threatened to explode commercially -- certainly the media coverage said this was Her Moment. But it didn't happen, at least not on the charts. Unquestionably her reach in pop culture is strong, from her video album to her savvy use of ad endorsements to keep that profile high. But the streaming success she deserves has not arrived. Yet. She'll just have to settle for being a terrific artist.

3. **KAMASI WASHINGTON** -- *Heaven and Earth*

Kamasi Washington gave a shot in the arm to jazz and re-awakened my love for the genre as a source of new music. (Jazz is always in the mix for me when it comes to icons like Miles Davis and Louis Armstrong.) And if I have one huge complaint about streaming it's the piss-poor selection of jazz and classical and world music. This year it seemed like all the new jazz I could hear let me down...when I could find them at all. But Washington delivered with an album just as sprawling, messy, vibrant and alive as his breakthrough work a few years ago. I'll keep searching for the latest jazz releases, but Spotify and Apple need to step it up.

4. **ANGELIQUE KIDJO** -- *Remain In Light*

What a trip! What a great way to appreciate again both Kidjo and Talking Heads. She tackled their entire album *Remain in Light* and it's a trippy revelation. It's hard to know what's more exciting: her singing and how she makes this eccentric, seemingly un-coverable album her own or the greatness that was Talking Heads.

5. **PANIC! AT THE DISCO** -- *Pray For The Wicked*

I may not care that Janelle Mon  e didn't break commercially. (She doesn't need it.) But I am THRILLED that Panic! At the Disco has a monster single with "High Hopes," their first Top 10 hit since 2006. This is a band that deserves, needs, nay *demands* pop glory and now they've got it. You liked *Bohemian Rhapsody*? Well, what the heck are you waiting for? They're not Queen (no one is); they are their own band. But they are definitely in that lane: melodramatic pop-rock, surging melodies, over the top vocals and roll-down-the-windows turn-up-the-volume choruses. I've loved them for years and have puzzled over why critics didn't go gaga for them. But I was even more confused as to why their radio-crushing singles weren't crushing radio. Well, now they are.

6. **BRANDI CARLILE** -- *By The Way, I Forgive You*

Speaking of melodrama, Brandi Carlile has a gift for it in a shameless, stirring way that would make Roy Orbison nod his head in appreciation. Carlile is in a country rock vein, not the pop opera of Mr Orbison. But that heart on her sleeve emotion combined with a maturity in her outlook and empathy (after all, she forgives you) make this so perfect for the lovelorn that her backing band should be called

the Heartbreakers.

7. **THE JOHN SALLY RIDE** -- *Nothing Doing*

Wait, WTF? My friend Sal recorded an album as a member of The John Sally Ride last year. Their debut was -- I thought -- a happy accident, an alignment of the planets that allowed veteran musicians to record and release the album of their careers, power pop rock performed with the sheer joy of kids but with the insight only adults could deliver. It was, well -- not a *fluke*. I mean, they're talented. But surely it was something to cherish and maybe in the back of my mind I thought it would never happen again. How often does lightning strike? I wasn't even sure the band was a going concern. And then out of nowhere comes their second album. And it's...better than the first! It contains more power pop, which is one way of describing rock n roll with killer hooks recorded by people with a few miles on them. From its default sad sack perspective to hilarious one-liners and melodies that sink in and won't let go, this in every respect builds on everything that was good from their first album. I hate to reduce them to humor, but it's a big initial part of the appeal, until you recognize the pain and sadness and regret that underlie all the laughs. But laugh you will, from the first track "Embarrassingly Single" to "I Won't Let Failure Go To My Head" to "I Usually Eat Alone" (are they stalking me?) and the kiss-off "Don't Flatter Yourself." Holy shit, they've got a band. And a discography. And a career!

8. **NELLIE MCKAY** -- *Sister Orchid*

Nellie McKay is such a talent, such a *bouquet* of talent that people can't pin her down. If I were in charge, she'd already have her own variety show on TV somewhere, along with a blank check to do whatever she wanted on her days off. She's already done it all, from Broadway to pop albums to one-woman bio-musicals about important female figures in history to leading the Resistance with sly humor and smarts. Oh and she records albums. Her latest is a gem and McKay's best since her tribute to Doris Day. For such a talented songwriter, she's really shown a commitment to the classics, whether doing covers of 60s pop to that Doris Day album to this new collection of standards. She recorded it entirely on her own, a la Prince, if Prince were suddenly to discover a talent for the Great American Songbook. It's a quiet, turn off the lights and sit in the dark sort of album. Think Frank Sinatra's *In The Wee Small Hours* or Ella Fitzgerald's *The Intimate Ella*. From the opening track "My Romance" (which makes canny, subtle use of over-dubbing) to a droll "Lazybones" and a vulnerable "Where Or When," McKay creates a real spell here. She does a lot without ever showing off, like the sound effects that create a piano bar mood on one tune that will make you laugh without ever being jokey. Or the marvelous arrangement that tops off "In A Sentimental Mood." Or the fact that she covers "Georgia On My Mind" when I thought we'd never need another cover of "Georgia On My Mind" pretty much ever, but damned if she doesn't pull it off. I especially enjoy how she

allows her vocals to be naked and vulnerable at just the right lyrical moment. Anyone who appreciates Broadway or the classic albums of the 1950s by Ella and Anita O'Day and Dinah Washington, anyone who loves cabaret? They simply must get this now. In a word, exquisite.

9. **BETA RADIO** -- *Transition*

The label I want for this music isn't Americana. Maybe the Band comes close to what I'm thinking, the feel you get when you're hearing music that seems to be created right this very moment but has always existed. You see glimmers of it in Mumford & Sons (sort of) but more so in the likes of Fleet Foxes and Midlake. And you hear it in Beta Radio. One year, after doing my annual story about my favorite music, someone did what I love: they made a recommendation. Hey, check out Beta Radio, they said. I did and was immediately besotted. I think this is the third album for the North Carolina duo. In 2010 they put out *Seven Sisters*. In 2014 it was *Colony of Bees* and now in 2018 *Transition*. Which means, I assume, we can look forward to another album in 2022. Quiet but restless, wise but confused, the lyrics of Beta Radio are rooted in the everyday and the need for more. They'll stop you dead in your tracks, if you know what I mean. I'm playing a few tracks as I write this and suddenly I'm finding it hard to move on to the next album I want to talk about. If you're still waiting for Tim Smith to release his solo album (take your time, Tim!), don't wait to check this out. The real deal.

10. **VARIOUS ARTISTS** -- *Black Panther*

A de facto Kendrick Lamar album with a whole lot of guests, this was more immediately accessible to me than *Damn*. Like the film, it's expansive and positive and conflicted and determined to be true to itself. Given his track record on TV appearances, Lamar's duet with SZA at the Oscars when they perform "All The Stars" will give Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper a run for their money. Don't get me wrong: "Shallow" will win the Oscar. But who knows? *Black Panther* could come out of nowhere and win the Oscar for Best Picture or the Grammy for Best Album. It's got the music this project deserves.

11. **CÉCILE MCLORIN SALVANT** -- *The Window*

The most exciting jazz singer around does it again. Indeed, "more of the same" is a very high compliment for an artist who has been on fire in the past few years and delivered my favorite album of 2017. The heir to Cassandra Wilson, Salvant draws on a wide range of influences. But she establishes her own magnetic identity as an artist with piercing insight into the lyrics, tremendous humor and a voice that can do anything but knows not to, at least not all the time. Thrilling.

12. **ARCTIC MONKEYS** -- *Tranquility Base Hotel and Casino*

Nope, nope, nope, nope, nope...oh wait, actually I *do* like the new Arctic Monkeys album. At first, it sounded more like a project for the Alex Turner offshoot The Last Shadow Puppets. But what's in a name? The band has wowed me from the start and so have most of their albums. So when you respect an act that much, you're willing to live with a new album that takes a left-turn and come back to it and let it grow on you. This one did.

13. KASEY CHAMBERS -- *Campfire*

What kind of a jerk wishes a marriage hadn't ended just because he enjoyed the albums that now-divorced couple produced? I keep wondering what she would do next with her ex Shane Nichols when Kasey Chambers has delivered one sprawling, exciting solo album after another. This one is dead simple, a real campfire sing-along of an album. A treat.

14. BENJAMIN JAFFE -- *Oh, Wild Ocean Of Love*

State of the art neo-soul for those waiting for the next Maxwell. Deeply impressive and the debut of the year.

15. VARIOUS ARTISTS -- *African Scream Contest 2*

Somehow I missed the apparently landmark compilation *African Scream Contest*. Its sequel brought me back to those glory days of the late 1980s and early 1990s when African pop was exploding and with each new compilation I found about a dozen new artists worth exploring. Like so many compilations, this may not be something you dive back into again and again -- it's a primer. But it's exciting and generous and opens your mind. Streaming really does drop the ball when it comes to world music (and jazz and classical) and I fear for the gaps in my musical knowledge that this is creating. *African Scream Contest 2* helps to fill in the gaps.

16. SHAKEY GRAVES -- *Can't Wake Up*

A terrific Americana act, Shakey Graves opened as a busker for Mumford & Sons, which gives you an idea of his wheelhouse. He definitely gave off a street-corner vibe on earlier albums, though each one has proven a little bolder in its instrumentation and arrangements. Every time I put him on, I think "Why aren't I listening to this more often?"

17. ESPERANZA SPALDING -- *12 Little Spells*

Esperanza Spalding's talent is so expansive it can get away from her. Like Norah Jones, her ability to make most anything seem magnetic in the moment allows her to sometime drift over ideas rather than dig deeper. Here she digs deeper and delivers the melodies to anchor her

always impressive vocals and playing. A return to form.

18. ELVIS COSTELLO -- *Look Now*

A veteran with fire in his belly. Costello has delivered impressive albums in all sorts of styles, rarely going a few years without delivering a knock out punch artistically. Here he reunites with the Imposters and reminds us he can still rock out too. To anyone who's been paying attention, it's no surprise at all.

19. COURTNEY BARNETT -- *Tell Me How You Really Feel*

A smidge less fun than most of her albums, which have a dry wit rivaling Bob Dylan, this more serious album is...more serious. Her guitar work and deadpan vocals and rambling melodies remain a treat and I'm sure I'm just being a kvetch who complained she was repeating herself and now that she's moved ever so slightly to the left, I'm complaining that she's not doing what she did before. Critics!

20. NAS -- *Nasir*

Lately, I find I have NO patience for hip-hop that even remotely leans toward the glorification of violence or dismissive attitudes towards women. I just don't want to hear it. But Nas remains an artist who can document violence or his own complicated past without ever giving it nodding approval. Like Costello, he still has fire in his belly and anyone who has been paying attention won't be surprised in the least by this vital album.

21. TONY BENNETT AND DIANA KRALL -- *Love Is Here To Stay*

It's been a terrific year for albums of standards and this one is right up there. Bennett's voice has been reduced to a whisper of its former self, but like Willie Nelson he has such command and swing of the little vocals left to him that it still works wonders. He and Krall are an awesome pairing with chemistry to spare. A treat.

22. BIRCH PEREIRA -- *Western Soul*

As fun as his album may be, what I really want to do is grab a cold beer and catch Birch and his band in a dive bar somewhere. Then I'll be a fan for life.

23. TRACEY THORN -- *Record*

One of the great voices in pop, Tracey Thorn has delivered enough solo gems now that -- as a body of work -- it's beginning to rival the music she recorded with Everything But The Girl. And that's very high praise. Toss in the fact that I suddenly realized she was writing columns for New Statesman and now I can enjoy her witty, insightful writing all the time and not just when she published a book or

recorded a new album and 2018 was a banner year for this fan of Thorn. ([Here's her latest column.](#)) One of those acts you spend a lifetime appreciating and they keep rewarding your loyalty in unexpected and delightful ways.

24. SCOTT MATTHEWS -- *The Great Untold*

How did I miss Scott Matthews? He hits my sweet spot, seems to have been critically acclaimed for years with reviews that name check other acts I respect (John Prine, et al) and yet I've been shamefully unaware of him till now. Well, *The Great Untold* wowed me, with its hushed vocals and plaintive melodies and singer-songwriter vibe. Now I'm gingerly exploring his earlier work, wondering what I'll find. For the moment, he's my favorite new old friend.

25. MACY GRAY -- *Ruby*

Saucy, smart, ribald and fun. But above all, that gravely, distinctive, memorable can't confuse her with anyone else voice.

26. JASON ALDEAN -- *Rearview Town*

More solid country, from the left side of the tracks.

27. MADELEINE PEYROUX -- *Anthem*

Well, hey there! It's been a while. Peyroux has always been a little hit or miss for me. But boy when she hits, she's a treasure. Here, she hits and if I knew why this worked and some other albums of hers didn't, well I'd be Rick Rubin, wouldn't I? If you fell hard for *Careless Love*, like I did, you'll enjoy this one too.

28. DRAKE -- *Scorpion*

Not that anyone cares about greatest hits albums anymore, but boy is Drake going to have a killer one. The three big singles from this huge double album are tremendous fun. The real surprise for me is how it all holds together. Artists are shoving tons of tracks onto their albums for all the wrong reasons (manipulating the charts, etc.). So I assumed the 25 tracks of *Scorpion* would be about 10 tracks too many. But no...the bigness of it and the quality won out. If people still put out greatest hits albums he could put one out now that would rival Elton John's *Greatest Hits Vol. One* for sheer pop dominance.

29. JAMES HUNTER -- *Whatever It Takes*

Damn, James Hunter is consistent. He delivers blue-eyed soul circa London and he's always good. And then sometimes he's really really good. Like here. One of his best, though it's so sneakily great you'll be enjoying yourself too much the first few times you play it to actually realize that.

30. **TROYE SIVAN** -- *Bloom*

Sexy enough to make me blush, from the Grindr experience opener "Seventeen" to the closing "Animal" I don't think he's blushing though, which is a key to the album's strength. A great leap forward from his debut. Tag on the Queen cover "Somebody To Love" and this is a very queer, very exciting album. What's next?

31. **RICK SPRINGFIELD** -- *The Snake King*

That's right, I said Rick Springfield! I really can't be too adamant, as if I know we should all be surprised. I've always appreciated his clutch of terrific singles but somehow never listened to an album other than a greatest hits set I plunked down for. Now, thanks to streaming and an intriguing review, I checked out his apparently atypical latest release. It is, I kid you not, a crazily good combination of blues guitar and lyrics akin to Bob Dylan circa *Highway 61 Revisited*. It's defiantly bawdy, atheistic, ballsy, righteous, angry, God-mocking, political, funny and just plain mind-blowing. I'm almost afraid to play it, worried the spell it cast on me during a road trip won't be repeated. But oh my god it blew my mind and made me laugh and just plain *rocked*! I want to have a drink with Rick Springfield and I don't even drink.

32. **LINDA THOMPSON** -- *My Mother Doesn't Know I'm On The Stage*

This is really an evening of music hall entertainment hosted by Linda Thomson, with everyone from Martha Wainwright to Colin Firth (!) to son Teddy Thompson delivering humorous and sad songs of a vintage sort to an appreciative audience. An offbeat pleasure.

33. **FALL OUT BOY** -- *Mania*

Like Panic! At The Disco, they know how to deliver the pop goods.

34. **ROSEANNE CASH** -- *She Remembers Everything*

Just when she seemed to be edging into a respectable, elder stateswoman, Cash delivers a terrific new album of depth and passion. No, she's not done yet.

35. **BUDDY GUY** -- *The Blues Is Alive And Well*

Oh god no, please. A new album from a legend, filled with celebrity guests? I know how this turns out...except here Biddy Guy is really on fire, the celebrity guests stay out of the way and it's just a blast. Don't be wary. The blues really is alive and well here.

36. **GORILLAZ** -- *The Now Now*

Is Gorillaz more important now than Blur? Is Damon Albarn one of the sneakiest geniuses at disguising his impressive talent by donning one mask after another? Does it matter? The music, as always, is very good.

37. MANDY PATINKIN -- *Diary: January 27, 2018/ April, May 2018*

Yet another impressive album of covers. Patinkin began his recording career with a string of very good solo albums but lost his way just a little. Here's he found an excellent collaborator in Doveman, aka Thomas Bartlett. They bounce song ideas off one another and then record almost spontaneously. The result are what Patinkin charmingly calls diaries. The first, from January of 2018, was strong but the second one had an even better mix of songs and a deeper connection between the two artists. The off the cuff nature keeps Patinkin from perhaps getting in his own way vocally (like Streisand, he can overthink in the studio). And the intimacy of the recording is a treat, letting you feel like you're eavesdropping in on a conversation. I sure as hell didn't expect a cover of Dylan's "Lily, Rosemary and the Jack Of Hearts" -- I would have said it wasn't a song anyone should cover until Patinkin proved me wrong. It's just the most unexpected of many treats on what I assume and hope will be more diaries to come.

38. THE VINES -- *In Miracle Land*

A wonderful, Beatles-esque talent that exploded in their debut, got bogged down in personal travails and is back showing the gift for melodies and hooks and sheer pop genius that made you go nuts for them in the first place. Welcome back.

39. JOSH ROUSE -- *Love In The Modern Age*

Sometimes you feel guilty when you love an album by an artist and then don't keep touting them in the years to come, even as others hear something you don't. So yes, I was crazy about Josh Rouse's time travel of an album *1972* and -- while I really liked one or two others -- I drifted away. Now he's tackling the 1980s on *Love In The Modern Age* and here I am again, cheering. I suppose I'll return to the fold when he tackles the 1950s. But as with *1972*, he both captures the musical vibe of an era yet never falls into mimicry. Great fun.

40. JEFF TWEEDY -- *Warm/ BOZ SCAGGS* -- *Out Of the Blues*

Two veterans delivering. It hasn't happened a while for Tweedy, who gives ragged charm to a clutch of originals that remind you what a hell of a songwriter he can be. Scaggs has been consistently excellent for a long time now. He does it again on this gem, which slips by with his usual elegance -- it's sleek, smart, sophisticated and sneakily moving.

42. **ELLA FITZGERALD/ LOUIS ARMSTRONG** -- *Cheek To Cheek: The Complete Duet Recordings*

I started with a boxed set so I might as well end with one. It simply doesn't get better than Ella and Louis duetting. Any fool can enjoy it and you'd be a fool if you didn't lend an ear. Two giants who brought out the best in each other. Actually, it's hard to say who is the better duet partner since they both brought out the best in so many others. Here you have a late career peak for two artists who enjoyed so many. It's a joy from start to finish.

*Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the creator of **BookFilter**, a book lover's best friend. It's a website that lets you browse for books online the way you do in a physical bookstore, provides comprehensive info on new releases every week in every category and offers passionate personal recommendations every step of the way. He's also the cohost of **Showbiz Sandbox**, a weekly pop culture podcast that reveals the industry take on entertainment news of the day with top journalists and opinion makers as guests. It's available for free on iTunes. Visit Michael Giltz at his website. Download his podcast of celebrity interviews and his radio show, also called **Popsurfing** and also available for free on iTunes.*

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