

August 29, 2012

# HUFF POST ENTERTAINMENT

Edition: U.S. ▼



FRONT PAGE POLITICS BUSINESS MEDIA CELEBRITY TV COMEDY FOOD STYLE ARTS BOOKS LIVE | ALL SECTIONS

Entertainment · Celebrity TV Political Hollywood Features Hollywood Buzz Videos

HOT ON THE BLOG

Bill Moyers  
John Hillcoat

Dean Baker  
Bobby Bowden



Featuring fresh takes and real-time analysis from  
HuffPost's signature lineup of contributors

HuffPost Social Reading



**Michael Giltz**

Freelance writer

GET UPDATES FROM MICHAEL GILTZ

Like 102

## Grammy Preview: The Best Albums of 2011 From Top to Bottom

Posted: 02/10/2012 5:07 pm

React > Inspiring Funny Hot Scary Outrageous Amazing Weird Crazy

Follow > Grammy Awards , Video , Best Of 2011 , Grammy Award Predictions , Grammy Awards 2012 , Grammy Predictions 2012 , The Grammys , Entertainment News

SHARE THIS STORY

Get Entertainment Alerts

Sign Up

Submit this story

I've traveled to the future and can reassure you that Adele will have a fun night at the Grammys on Sunday. Her album is one of those inevitable triumphs at an awards show that feels right. Adele has dominated the charts and the radio and critics; if she'd been able to tour, we'd probably be saying how much better her songs sound in concert than they do on the album and realize she has room to grow. Her smash hit *21* is in every sense the album of the year.

So I was surprised in my recent trip down South to realize how few people actually own it. Five million copies is nothing to sneeze at in the North American market, but a lot more people should snap it up. If and when they do, here are some other albums you might want to consider purchasing as well. These days, you can check them out first on Spotify or MySpace so you won't have to take my word for it before spending your precious entertainment dollars. I have an embarrassing lack of classical music this year (I just wasn't exposed to much), but there's something for almost everyone -- pop, rock, country, jazz, gospel, world music, film scores, ambient, folk and more. If you've liked the artist before or enjoy the genre, I'll bet it's worth your time.

Now make sure you read the list and immediately chide me for not including so and so (Wilco! Jayhawks! Tuneyards!) or for foolishly including so and so (Panic! at the Disco? Really?) or for having one act too high (Glen Campbell in the Top 10?) or too low (Frank Ocean at the bottom?). Hey, it wouldn't be fun if we didn't argue. I'm especially looking forward to getting tips about any albums I haven't heard yet. Chances are if an act is on a lot of year-end lists that I probably already gave it a listen. But little known favorites of yours are very welcome comments indeed. That's certainly all I hope to achieve with my picks: point you in the direction of an album or two I think you'll love. And now, the list! Come back over the weekend and I promise to add in some comments explaining my choices.

### BEST ALBUMS OF 2011

1. **FLEET FOXES** *Helplessness Blues* (CSN rocks out)
2. **TOM WAITS** *Bad As Me* (bohemian troubadour in top form)

SPONSOR GENERATED POST



Help Us Write 'The Words'

Quick Read | Comments (27) | 08.20.2012

FOLLOW US

MOST POPULAR ON HUFFPOST

1 of 2



**Chipotle Busted For Cheating Customers Out Of Pennies**

Like 723



**Republican Attendees Thrown Out After Racist Attack On CNN Worker**

Like 9k



**MAP: Hurricane Isaac's Path Aims For Gulf Coast**

Recommend 268



**RPatz Agrees To Meet KStew But Is Selling Their Home**

Like 62



**Limbaugh's Wild Isaac Conspiracy**

Like 7k



**PHOTO: The Queen Rolls In A Range Rover Wearing A Hoodie**

Like 1k

3. **KING CREOSOTE & JON HOPKINS** *Diamond Mine* (quirky concept album, gorgeously done)
4. **GILLIAN WELCH** *The Harrow and the Harvest* (simple, straightforward, striking folk)
5. **TEDDY THOMPSON** *Bella* / **kd lang** *Sing It Loud* / **RON SEXSMITH** -- *Long Player, Late Bloomer* (pure pop by pure pros)
6. **WYNTON MARSALIS AND ERIC CLAPTON** *Play the Blues* / **BRANFORD MARSALIS AND JOEY CALDARAZZO** *Songs of Mirth and Melancholy* (trad jazz)
7. **GLEN CAMPBELL** *Ghost on the Canvas* (haunting country pop)
8. **BOMBINO** *Agadez* (Tuareg rocks!) / **BOUBACAR TRAORE** *Mali Denhou* (gentle African guitar) / **LADYSMITH BLACK MAMBAZO** *Songs From a Zulu Farm* (ecstatic and playful children's music)
9. **VARIOUS ARTISTS** *This May Be My Last Time Singing: Raw African American Gospel on 45 RPM (1957-1982)* (lo-fi, high flying gospel that's so good you'll convert)
10. **ADELE** *21* (unstoppable soul diva)
- \*\*\*
11. **GROUPLOVE** *Never Trust a Happy Song* (raucous LA pop-rock)
12. **PANIC! AT THE DISCO** *Vices & Virtues* (sterling but overlooked pop-rock)
13. **NICK LOWE** *The Old Magic* (vintage wine, vintage bottle)
14. **WILD FLAG** *Wild Flag* (giving super groups a good name)
15. **BRAD MEHLDAU** *Modern Music* (dependably adventurous jazz trio)/**COLIN VALLON** -- *Rruger* (bold EU trio following in Mehl dau's wake)
16. **JAY-Z AND KANYE WEST** *Watch the Throne* (braggadocio taken to new heights)
17. **BON IVER** *Bon Iver* (stares down success with quiet confidence)
18. **BALLAKE SISSOKO AND VINCENT SEGAL** *Chamber Music* (delicate instrumentals)
19. **PAUL SIMON** *So Beautiful or So What* (mortality, musically)
20. **BETH HART & JOE BONAMASSA** *Don't Explain* (the blues, thumpingly good)
- \*\*\*
21. **PRESERVATION HALL JAZZ BAND AND DEL MCCOURY BAND** *American Legacies* (an institution finds new life via collaboration)
22. **AMBROSE AKINMUSIRE** *When the Heart Emerges Glistening* (quietly probing jazz)
23. **JAMES BLAKE** *James Blake* (trippy pop)
24. **VARIOUS ARTISTS** *Live From the Old Town School* (folk's beating heart)
25. **GIRLS** *Father, Son, Holy Ghost* (interesting identity crisis)
26. **TINARIWEN** *Tassili* (bluesy, distinctive, campfire sing-alongs)
27. **JOY FORMIDABLE** *The Big Roar* (noisy pop)
28. **DARIO MARINELLI WITH JACK LIEBECK** *Jane Eyre soundtrack* (the year's best traditional score)/ **MATTHEW COOPER** *Some Days Are Better Than Others* (the year's best untraditional score)
29. **THE CORAL** *Butterfly House*/ **THE MAGIC NUMBERS** *Runaway* (pop, unimported, unrecognized)
30. **PISTOL ANNIES** *Pistol Annies* / **MIRANDA LAMBERT** *Four The Record* (country's top gal and friends)
- \*\*\*
31. **THE LOW ANTHEM** *Smart Flesh* (brainy Americana)
32. **CHARLIE HADEN AND QUARTET WEST** *Sophisticated Ladies* (female singers, jazz swingers)
33. **THE BLACK KEYS** *El Camino* (rock, no fuss)



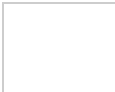
Deaf Boy Asked To Make Controversial Change (VIDEO)

Like 4k



Isaac Balloons Into A Hurricane, New Orleans Threatened

Recommend 686



GOP Approves Abortion Ban

Recommend 9k

#### DON'T MISS HUFFPOST BLOGGERS 1 of 5



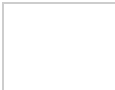
Bill Moyers  
[WATCH: Both Parties Give Invisible Americans the Silent Treatment](#)



Dean Baker  
[Poverty: The New Growth Industry in America](#)

#### TOP VIDEO PICKS 1 of 8

[Tom Hanks Solidifies Nice Guy Reputation Through Photos, Videos](#)



Why Bobby Brown Walked Out of Rehab



Holly Madison Is Pregnant

#### MOST DISCUSSED RIGHT NOW 1 of 2



13 Movies That Changed The Way We View Poverty



Slash Caught Fellow Rocker Naked With His Mom

#### HOT ON FACEBOOK 1 of 3



Madonna's Message For Americans: 'Don't Get Fat And Lazy'



WATCH: Raging Grannies Have Some Words For Todd Akin

34. **M83** *Hurry Up, We're Dreaming* (ambient pop)

35. **ALISON KRAUSS AND UNION STATION** *Paper Airplanes*/ **JOHN HIATT** *Dirty Jeans and Mudslide Hymns* (old dogs, old tricks, happily so)

36. **BEASTIE BOYS** *Hot Sauce Committee, Part Two* (feisty hip-hop from the old-timers)

37. **BEN HOWARD** *Every Kingdom* (gentle pop)/**MIKE BLOOM** *King Of Circles* (WARM singer-songwriter vibe for this solo debut)

38. **VINICIUS CANTUARIA AND BILL FRISELL** *Lagrimas Mexicanas* (two great guitars, one great voice equal haunting Latin music)/

39. **THE GOURDS** *Old Mad Joy* (rootsy celebration) / **MARC BROUSSARD** *Marc Broussard* (bluesy rock)

40. **SUZANNE VEGA** *Close-Up Volume 3: State Of Being* (acoustic songs, electric songwriting)

\*\*\*

41. **VARIOUS ARTISTS** *Those Shocking, Shaking Days: Indonesia Hard, Psychedelic, Progressive Rock and Funk (1970-1978)* (rock and roll knows no borders)

42. **VARIOUS ARTISTS** *The Book of Mormon Original Cast Album* (religiously funny)

43. **DRAKE** *Take Care* (emo-rap)/ **SHABAZZ PALACES** *Black Up*

44. **BRAD PAISLEY** *This Is Country Music* (yes it is) / **STEVE EARLE** *I'll Never Get Out Of This World Alive* (determined, focused country)

45. **MEGAFAUN** *Megafaun* ('70s-ish rock)

46. **FATOUmata DIAWARA** *Fatou* (Malian guitar talent combined with impeccable vocals)/  
**KHAIRA ARBY** *Timbukto Traab* (country to Diawara's city sound; not locale so much as the gritty, rawer feel)

47. **HOUSTON PERSON** *So Nice* (late period capper for understated jazz blower)

48. **REAL ESTATE** *Days --* (shimmering indie pop)

49. **EILEEN JEWELL** *Queen of the Minor Key* (sneakily impressive)

50. **FRANK OCEAN** *nostalgia/ultra* (backward/forward looking moody pop)

\*\*\*

#### EARLY 2012 FAVORITES

**RUMER** *Seasons of My Soul*

**CHARLIE HADEN AND HANK JONES** *Come Sunday*

**DAMIEN JURADO** *Marqopa*

**LEONARD COHEN** *Old Ideas*

**BEN KWELLER** *Go Fly a Kite*

**KATHLEEN EDWARDS** *Voyageur*

#### BEST ALBUMS OF 2011 -- THE EXPANDED LIST

1. **FLEET FOXES** *Helplessness Blues* (CSN rocks out) I really struggled with which album to put on top this year. Usually it's simply the album I played the most. But this year I was just crazy about all the album in my Top 5 (and Adele at #10 certainly didn't need more promotion from me). Finally, it was the pure sonic beauty of Fleet Foxes that sealed the deal. Every single time I put it on I got chills and the gorgeous vocals, stirring arrangements and wave of emotions they brought out in me. Are there albums just as good from 2011? Yes. But none were prettier.



HOT ON TWITTER

1 of 2



**ricky\_martin**

Make Room for (the New) Daddy  
<http://t.co/Q6elDokm> via  
@huffingtonpost

Retweet



**feliciaday**

Think on it: Cambridge scientists say all mammals, birds, many others including octopi, have human-like consciousness.  
<http://t.co/aF6W2ZQh>

Retweet

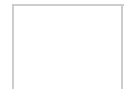
#### HUFFPOST'S BIG NEWS PAGES



Celebrity  
babies



Cultura Pop



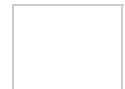
Abortion



Sleep



Republican  
Party



Mashups



Television



News Corp



Architecture

MORE BIG NEWS PAGES »

2. **KING CREOSOTE & JON HOPKINS** *Diamond Mine* (quirky concept album, gorgeously done)

Very few in the U.S. paid attention to this odd little album; in the U.K. it appeared on more lists but not with the fervor it deserves. It's a concept album about life in a fishing village, complete with muttered voices, people grabbing a bite in the local greasy spoon, various characters stepping forward to tell their story and so on. But what a gorgeous, fragile thing of beauty this is. It's just a little over half an hour long but the experience is so intense and enveloping, you'll feel like you've just sunk into another world and wake up slowly and reluctantly. I'm playing it again and feel tempted to put it on top all over again. People have heard of Fleet Foxes but this will surely be new to virtually everyone reading it. If you like Robert Wyatt (I don't know what else to compare this unique work to), jump. (Seriously, I've been writing this list while *Diamond Mine* plays and it's breaking my heart with the vulnerability and empathy on display. Great melodies. Simple but somehow perfect vocals with just the right sonic touches. A real keeper.)

3. **TOM WAITS** *Bad As Me* (bohemian troubadour in top form) Just one song kept the great Waits from the top. I've liked so much of what he's done over the years, including the industrial strength clamor of much of his work in the past decade. Here his sonics are more restrained so fans who haven't visited Waits in a long time should dive back in. This is one of his strongest works in years, from the typically clanging opener "Chicago" (it settles down soon enough) to the heart-breaking closer "New Year's Eve," the sort of drunken elegy Waits does so well we take it for granted. So what song spoiled it ever so slightly? "Last Leaf On The Tree," a fine little ditty that simply repeats itself to distraction. At two minutes this slight tune would go by quickly. At four minutes it's a bit of a distraction given the limited melody on display. Keep this in perspective: I was niggled by a few bars of one song on an otherwise marvelous work that shows Waits as deeply in command as ever. Like Neil Young and Bob Dylan and other greats, time is not dimming his talent in the least.

4. **GILLIAN WELCH** *The Harrow and the Harvest* (simple, straightforward, striking folk) Well, if Welch is gonna make us wait years and years for a new album, at least she delivers the goods and then some. This follow-up to *Soul Journey* is impeccable folk-rock. It could just as easily have been my Album of the Year.

5. **TEDDY THOMPSON** *Bella* / **kd lang** *Sing It Loud* / **RON SEXSMITH** -- *Long Player, Late Bloomer* (pure pop by pure pros) No, I'm not consistent. Sometimes I get annoyed when the music press genuflects in front of the latest offering from the Rolling Stones, Bruce Springsteen, et al in almost an unconscious reflex. On the other hand, when they ignore terrific new music by established acts that aren't at the superstar level, I want them to pay attention. Maybe these artists simply don't have heat. Teddy Thompson hasn't broken through commercially despite getting better and better with every album, so maybe the press has written him off as an act that can't sell magazines. kd lang hasn't come out in a while, so what new can you say about her? And we all know Sexsmith is an impeccable pop craftsman; didn't Elvis Costello tell us so for years? Nonetheless, all three have delivered absolutely top-notch pop albums. If you've ever been a fan, don't hesitate for a moment.

6. **WYNTON MARSALIS AND ERIC CLAPTON** *Play the Blues* / **BRANFORD MARSALIS AND JOEY CALDARAZZO** *Songs of Mirth And Melancholy* (trad jazz) Surely the Marsalis brothers hate having all their work linked. Oh well. Wynton has found new purpose and a sense of joy via collaborations with the likes of Willie Nelson and now Clapton. Their jam session brings out the best in both of them. (Who knew "Layla" would prove so malleable?) And does anyone in jazz have a more gorgeous tone than Branford? For sheer sonic beauty, it's the best since Getz. His album is also a collaboration and it leans more heavily on melancholy than mirth. Great stuff.

7. **GLEN CAMPBELL** *Ghost on the Canvas* (haunting country pop) I have no strong affection for Glen Campbell and won't try and retroactively make his career more important than it deserves. I think a strong greatest hits album sums him up very well, which is hardly something to sneer at. Many artists never get even that. So his illness and late period Cash-like recording don't tug at my heartstrings for any reason other than the music. But what music. Campbell's voice -- his greatest weapon -- isn't remotely as good as in his heyday but now we can appreciate what a terrific singer he always was. Like Elvis Presley's album *Elvis Country (I'm 10,000 Years Old)*, this combines terrific songs with spoken word passages to spooky, marvelous effect.

8. **BOMBINO** *Agadez* (Tuareg rocks!) / **BOUBACAR TRAORE** *Mali Denhou* (gentle African guitar) / **LADYSMITH BLACK MAMBAZO** *Songs From a Zulu Farm* (ecstatic and playful children's music)  
Bombino is a guitarist par excellence, a superstar in Africa who draws on traditional sounds along with rock and blues while delivering the seemingly endless pleas for peace and hope that Africa invariably needs but lacks. He surely acknowledges a debt to Traore, a fellow African who suffered not from

repression but by seeming linked to oppressors and being out of favor for years because of it. Happily, they can find common ground in their music. Then there's Ladysmith Black Mambazo, an act you know and -- if you've seen them in concert -- love. This album of children's songs they learned as kids growing up in rural South Africa is one of their lightest and most sheerly entertaining in their entire discography.

**9. VARIOUS ARTISTS** *This May Be My Last Time Singing: Raw African American Gospel on 45 RPM (1957-1982)* (lo-fi, high flying gospel that's so good you'll convert) This followup to the excellent compilation *Fire in My Bones* is another revelation. Filled with well-known tunes and obscure songs performed generally by acts only the most devoted gospel listener has heard of (no Kirk Franklin or Mahalia here), it's a delight from beginning to end. The so-so sound quality of many of these rarities actually works to the album's benefit. You feel like you're listening to them via a transistor radio catching a far-away station or maybe down the block from a house of worship. The performances are joyous, foreboding, ecstatic and majestic.



10. **ADELE** *21* (unstoppable soul diva) A great album with a string of singles that get better and better the more you hear them -- that's about as great as pop music gets. Beyonce and Lady Gaga had some great singles, but they couldn't come within a mile of the genuine artistic statement of this album. Here's hoping Adele stays healthy vocally and unhealthy in her choice of men. Yep, it's Mary J. Blige all over again -- do we really want to risk Adele writing about how content she is? Don't worry; we'll be there to comfort you.

11. **GROUPLOVE** *Never Trust a Happy Song* (raucous L.A. pop-rock) Why this L.A. band isn't the toast of the town simply escapes me. Terrific stuff.

12. **PANIC! AT THE DISCO** *Vices & Virtues* (sterling but overlooked pop-rock) Am I a sucker for pure pop? Panic! can add or drop the exclamation point as many times as they want as long as they keep

creating indelible melodies and stirring rock like they do here.

13. **NICK LOWE** *The Old Magic* (vintage wine, vintage bottle) I've never been deeply invested in Nick Lowe but boy is this a charmer. The only reason it isn't higher on my list is because I haven't listened to it enough yet. This video isn't from his current album. But it's recent and shows Lowe in excellent form.

14. **WILD FLAG** *Wild Flag* (giving super groups a good name) Sleater-Kinney lives in this new band composed of some of the talent from that group and their friends. Unruly fun.

15. **BRAD MEHLDAU** *Modern Music* (dependably adventurous jazz trio)/**COLIN VALLON** -- *Rruger* (bold EU trio following in Mehldau's wake) Mehldau is consistently great so the strength of his latest is no surprise. Now his influence is seeping out to the continent, not by the obvious tactic of covering unexpected pop songs but simply in their commitment to the piano-led jazz trio.

16. **JAY-Z AND KANYE WEST** *Watch the Throne* (braggadocio taken to new heights) Neither is quite my cup of tea but they've delivered great works before. West's last album was the first one I truly loved. Together they indulge in the usual hip-hop obnoxiousness of boasting and putting down bitches, but somehow they're in such good spirits here it kind of won me over.

17. **BON IVER** *Bon Iver* (stares down success with quiet confidence) Bon Iver's intense publicity surrounding his last album didn't corner him into repeating himself. This album gently expands his sonic palette. I thought maybe he was the flavor of the week, but who knows? He might just be in it for the long haul.

18. **BALLAKE SISSOKO AND VINCENT SEGAL** *Chamber Music* (delicate instrumentals) I could look up all sorts of facts about who they are, where they come from, their instruments and the like. But the simple fact is that their album is lovely.

19. **PAUL SIMON** *So Beautiful or So What* (mortality, musically) I can't remember the last time I put a Paul Simon album on my best of the year list. (Probably *Rhythm of the Saints*.) And I love the guy! As one of the all-time greats, I hold him to a higher standard. And he meets it here on this pop gem about

facing death with wit, resignation and some excellent melodies.

20. **BETH HART & JOE BONAMASSA** *Don't Explain* (the blues, thumpingly good) The blues make for a stomping good time when performed with such glee.

21. **PRESERVATION HALL JAZZ BAND AND DEL MCCOURY BAND** *American Legacies* (an institution finds new life via collaboration) PHJB is an institution and as such, much of its best work was probably behind it. Until 2010 when it collaborated with an all-star cast to celebrate some anniversary or another and the band produced one of its most enjoyable albums in years. One of those collaborators proved so successful, they went and recorded an entire album. The results do not disappoint.

22. **AMBROSE AKINMUSIRE** *When the Heart Emerges Glistening* (quietly probing jazz) A sterling Blue Note debut by one of jazz's best young trumpeters. A clutch of strong originals, a great young quintet, focus, vision -- this is very exciting indeed. For a live performance from his new album, [you must go to YouTube](#).

23. **JAMES BLAKE** *James Blake* (trippy pop) Not my thing usually, but Blake has enough snippets of emotion to keep me returning and every time I do it seems a little more cohesive and satisfying.

24. **VARIOUS ARTISTS** *Live From the Old Town School* (folk's beating heart) Sometimes you go out to track down history. Other times you can wait quietly and have it come to you. The Chicago center of folk Old Town School has seen countless legends pass through its doors. Apparently they knew it and recorded everyone who came to town. This 4 CD set contains a truckload of inspired performances from Taj Mahal and Mahalia Jackson to Jeff Tweedy and Peter Case. A fourth CD devoted to world music doesn't have quite the same impact but the overall level of quality and the mix of great and unexpected make this a genuine discovery. Here's a performance (not from the album) by Steve Dawson at the legendary venue.

25. **GIRLS** *Father, Son, Holy Ghost* (interesting identity crisis) I loved the first album by Girls but was slightly suspicious nonetheless. Now their proper followup has me even more nervous. Each song seems to come from an entirely different band. Do Girls even know what sort of sound they're going for, if any? It shouldn't work but the album holds together for me out of sheer perversity. You have no idea what to expect but it's all good. I hope they find more direction next time but for the moment the grab-bag approach is working just fine.

26. **TINARIWEN** *Tassili* (bluesy, distinctive, campfire sing-alongs) One of the strongest acts in world music for the past few years, Tinariwen don't disappoint with their latest. I always picture them performing around a campfire in the middle of the desert, the flames the only light for miles around? Am I romanticizing or fetishizing them? Maybe. But their music is bluesy and distinctive enough to travel around the globe so I'm sure it'll withstand my flight of fancy.

27. **JOY FORMIDABLE** *The Big Roar* (noisy pop) A child of Nirvana, they have its gift for making an unholy racket but keeping it reined in with a very strong pop sense. Very good stuff.

28. **DARIO MARINELLI WITH JACK LIEBECK** *Jane Eyre* soundtrack (the year's best traditional score)/ **MATTHEW COOPER** *Some Days Are Better Than Others* (the year's best untraditional score) The score for the fine remake of *Jane Eyre* is the best orchestral score of the year. I haven't even seen the indie film *Some Days Are Better Than Others*, but the pop instrumental score by Matthew Cooper is so stirring and lovely it certainly makes me want to right away.



29. **THE CORAL** *Butterfly House* / **THE MAGIC NUMBERS** *Runaway* (pop, unimported, unrecognized) I kept waiting for both of these albums to be released in the U.S. but they never were. Both bands are more appreciated in the U.K. than they are here. The Coral live for nuggets-style garage rock while Magic Numbers savor the gorgeous vocals of Laurel Canyon. Multiple tracks should be big radio hits.

30. **PISTOL ANNIES** *Pistol Annies* / **MIRANDA LAMBERT** *Four The Record* (country's top gal and friends) Miranda Lambert -- the SECOND runner-up on the late, lamented (by me) talent show Nashville Star, just keeps growing. Her latest solo album isn't quite as good as her last. But it's good. And then she turns around and forms Pistol Annies with some friends to fill the gaping hole where the Dixie Chicks

used to be. Combine her best work on both of these album and you've got a great work indeed.

31. **THE LOW ANTHEM** *Smart Flesh* (brainy Americana) Still waiting to break through to a wider audience a la Avett Brothers and Mumford & Sons. That good.

32. **CHARLIE HADEN AND QUARTET WEST** *Sophisticated Ladies* (female singers, jazz swingers) A great lover of classic jazz singers pairs with some of today's best vocalists and hits some standards out of the park. Melody Gardot, Cassandra Wilson and Diana Krall are along for the ride.

33. **THE BLACK KEYS** *El Camino* (rock, no fuss) I respected and admired and appreciated The Black Keys but never quite dug them until last week when I was walking down Fifth Avenue (one of the least Black Keys-appropriate streets in NYC) when it just clicked and I could groove on their music. Sometimes it just takes the right frame of (an open) mind.

34. **M83** *Hurry Up, We're Dreaming* (ambient pop) Another act where I need the right setting. In their case, it usually involves a late night, an open highway and the perfect number, like "Raconte, Moi Une Historie."

35. **ALISON KRAUSS AND UNION STATION** *Paper Airplanes*/ **JOHN HIATT** *Dirty Jeans and Mudslide Hymns* (old dogs, old tricks, happily so) Two veterans who stepped it up. I didn't appreciate the Krauss for a while because the CD came "burdened" with bonus tracks that made the CD too long and kept me from appreciating the album proper for quite a while. It took my friend [Sal at Burning Wood](#) to nudge me into giving the Hiatt a second chance and realizing he's strung together one of his best since that miracle heyday around *Bring the Family*.

36. **BEASTIE BOYS** *Hot Sauce Committee, Part Two* (feisty hip-hop from the old-timers) They've still got life in them yet.

37. **BEN HOWARD** *Every Kingdom* (gentle pop)/**MIKE BLOOM** *King Of Circles* (WARM singer-songwriter vibe for this solo debut) Two quiet works of solid tunes that get better with each listen.

38. **VINICIUS CANTUARIA AND BILL FRISELL** *Lgrimas Mexicanas* (two great guitars, one great voice equal haunting Latin music) A playful, delightful collaboration between the always adventurous Frisell and the Brazilian singer and instrumentalist Cantuaria. Really charming.

39. **THE GOURDS** *Old Mad Joy* (rootsy celebration) / **MARC BROUSSARD** *Marc Broussard* (bluesy

rock) Americana from the front porch, for then Gourds, and from the juke joint for Broussard, who has it all to be a star except the touring and radio that once upon a time would have championed him.

40. **SUZANNE VEGA** *Close-Up Volume 3: State Of Being* (acoustic songs, electric songwriting) Vega has been recording her catalog over again so she can own the masters to these new versions and profit from them at least a little (is that asking so much for an artist?). Out of necessity has come fresh proof about her exceptional catalog of songs and Vega's gifts as a performer. After her debut, Vega quickly proved she was no folkie, thanks to an adventurous gift for sonic experimentation and great pop sense. But here she is stripping her songs down again mainly to a voice and a guitar. The results are gripping, mixing older and fresher tunes side by side till all you can see is the impressive breadth of her career. Plus each volume works beautifully on its own terms.

41. **VARIOUS ARTISTS** *Those Shocking, Shaking Days: Indonesia Hard, Psychedelic, Progressive Rock and Funk (1970-1978)* (rock and roll knows no borders) Truly, rock and roll is everywhere and always has been. If there's a better example of world music than Indonesian acts pounding out these thumping originals back in the 1970s while singing lyrics like "I like the Rolling Stones," well I don't know it. Is there no end to the riches produced around the world we're barely aware of much less listened to? Apparently not.

42. **VARIOUS ARTISTS** *The Book of Mormon Original Cast Album* (religiously funny) I believe it's more fun to see the show in person and some of the weaker comic numbers truly do need the context of the show to work best. But the best numbers like "Hello," "Turn It Off" and "I Believe" are a blast to sing any time. (What a great moment for Andrew Rannells on the Tonys. He and the original cast is with [The Book Of Mormon](#) for another year so get to it if you can.)

43. **DRAKE** *Take Care* (emo-rap)/ **SHABAZZ PALACES** *Black Up* Not a banner year for me and hip-hop. But Drake kept compelling me to listen in to his thoughts whereas Shabazz seemed to be pushing me away. Of course, nothing piques interest in feeling like you're not wanted.

44. **BRAD PAISLEY** *This Is Country Music* (yes it is) / **STEVE EARLE** *I'll Never Get Out of This World Alive* (determined, focused country) Paisley does an amazing thing on his new album. The first track details all the things you shouldn't do in a country song (like say the word "cancer") in a song that's wonderfully catchy and a heartland statement of purpose. Then he spends the rest of the album doing a song about each and every "forbidden" scenario he mentioned. It's a quiet tour de force of songwriting, delivered with Paisley's typical understated charm. Earle, meanwhile, just pounds 'em out with righteous focus and energy, a modern day Woody Guthrie.



45. **MEGAFAUN** *Megafaun* ('70s-ish rock) Dreadful name and dreadful (truly dreadful) album cover make this exceptionally quirky album look like some anonymous Boston rip-off. They start boldly early on with a Seventies slice of AM radio heaven called "Get Right" that goes on for eight minutes. Before and after is a lot of great stuff that is anything but anonymous. You'd never know it from the packaging or that stupid name.

46. **FATOUMATA DIAWARA** *Fatou* (Malian guitar talent combined with impeccable vocals)/  
**KHAIRA ARBY** *Timbukto Traab* (country to Diawara's city sound) I have no idea about the actual provenance of either act or the musical pedigree. But to my Western ear, Diawara's music sounds uptown and sweet whereas Arby's call and response feels more downtown or rather out of town in some rural area. Both are striking albums any fan of world music would do well to catch.

47. **HOUSTON PERSON** *So Nice* (late period capper for understated jazz blower) I trust Person isn't going anywhere, but this feels like a valedictory for a journeyman player given a chance to shine one more time and delivering in spades. Here's a recent performance in New York City featuring a standard not on his album.

48. **REAL ESTATE** *Days* -- (shimmering indie pop) Jersey lads delivering the pop goods with just a dash of fading beauty.

49. **EILEEN JEWELL** *Queen of the Minor Key* (sneakily impressive) Americana with a nod to 50s rock and torch songs that grow on you.

50. **FRANK OCEAN** *nostalgia/ultra* (backward/forward looking moody pop) A trendy, hyped act that then slipped from view for many. Like many I'm wary of hype but each dip into the water with this album was intriguing. The really positive sign is when you return to an album months later and the first track sounds exceptionally familiar, as if you've been playing it for weeks on end when in fact you haven't played a note. That's the sign of an album that could continue to deepen and reveal itself over time. Ocean seems like a patient artist, so we should be too in listening to his music before passing judgment.

Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the cohost of [Showbiz Sandbox](#), a weekly pop culture podcast that reveals the industry take on entertainment news of the day and features top journalists and opinion makers as guests. It's [available](#) for free on iTunes. Visit Michael Giltz at his [website](#) and his [daily blog](#). Download his podcast of celebrity interviews and his radio show, also called Popsurfing and also [available](#) for free on iTunes. Link to him on Netflix and [gain](#) access to thousands of ratings and reviews.

Follow Michael Giltz on Twitter: [www.twitter.com/michaelgiltz](http://www.twitter.com/michaelgiltz)

Related News On Huffington Post:

#### Around the Web:

[Grammy Predictions 2012: Billboard.com Picks The Winners ...](#)

[2012 Grammy Awards Predictions: Adele, Bon Iver, Foo Fighters ...](#)

[2012 Grammy Predictions and Proclamations :: Blogs :: List of the ...](#)

[Five Rock-Solid Grammy Predictions \(Hint: Adele\) - Red Carpet | E ...](#)

[More in Entertainment...](#)

Samuel L. Jackson:  
'Unfair' Hurricane  
Isaac Avoid...

Guns N' Roses  
Slash Once Caught  
David...

Robin Williams As  
Dwight D.  
Eisenhower In...

'2016: Obama's  
America' Fact-  
Check

## Comments

67

Pending Comments 0

[View FAQ](#)

Comments are closed for this entry

View All

Favorites

Recency | Popularity

Page: [1](#) [2](#) [Next >](#) [Last >>](#) (2 total)

[jordanmichaelyoung](#)

0 Fans

10:34 AM on 02/13/2012

very interesting list, its alwasly nice to hear a different variety of "best of" records... obviously there were plenty of my favorites not represented (Wilco! like you said at the start...thought it was one of their best) i was glad to see Real Estate in there but i loved the albums by: Ryan Adams (Lucky Now is one of the prettiest songs in years), The Decemberists put out one of their most complete records, MY Morning Jacket's Circutal is diverse and stunning,and lets not forget The Civil Wars, one of the best sounding live acts around... and yes Radioheads album is a slow burn but i came to love it as much as all their others in time(minus perhaps Pablo Honey:)

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

[Hastings](#)

216 Fans

08:08 AM on 02/13/2012

Thanks for the list. Having a blast listening. Please ask the HP to keep it om line for a few more days so I can enjoy the whole list. Thanks again and keep the tunes comin'.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

[Susan of Wales](#)

72 Fans

01:56 PM on 02/12/2012

A shout out to Marla Lewis, songwriter/performer on the Grammy Nominated [Best Children's Album] compilation CD "All About Bullies -- Big and Small" for her song Leap of Faith...  
<http://marlawe.com/listen>

If you have a minute, at the same website also listen to "We All Laugh in the Same Language".

More on the Best Children's Album category...  
<http://www.grammy365.com/news/exploring-childrens-field-nominees>

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

---

**Rmuntz**  
**0 Fans**

12:45 AM on 02/12/2012

On the eve of the grammy's, a "best of" for 2012.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

---

**HUFFPOST SUPER USER**

**Lateef Murdock**

*Liberal, because it's the Christian way .*

**117 Fans**

12:14 AM on 02/12/2012

Two glaring omissions.

1. The Original 7ven (formally The Time), "Condensate."
2. Patrick Stump, "Soul Punk."

Two of the funkiest, hottest albums of 2011. Period.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

---

**HUFFPOST BLOGGER**

**Michael Giltz**

*freelance writer*

**127 Fans**

12:33 AM on 02/12/2012

A friend of mine just saw Morris Day at the Super Bowl. I'll be sure to check both out.  
Thanks for the tips.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

---

**niko73**

*Dem belly full but we hungry*

**220 Fans**

10:36 PM on 02/11/2012

I don't buy a lot of new albums. I download a lot of singles, though. But I have heard some of these.

I've been sending my friends that Bombino video for months now. He totally jams. The MC in the hat is classic. Same thing goes for Tinariwen's "Tenere Taqhim Tossam." Truly amazing song. I'd urge everyone to listen to those two songs and everything else from these two acts.

Old Mad Joy continued my slight disappointment in recent Gourds efforts. It's one of their weaker albums. I'm still waiting for them to regain that rare form on their earlier albums and Cow Fish Fowl Or Pig. I'd have settled for something as good as Heavy Ornamentals, but instead got another Haymaker.

Most this is too, ah, soft for my tastes. "El Camino" is one of the harder albums on this list. I love it. Other harder stuff that kicks bootie include Chevelle's "Hats Off To The Bull," In Flame's "Sounds of a Playground Fading," and Red Fang's "Murder the Mountains."

I miss good hip-hop. Loved Damian Marley and Nas' effort Distant Relatives in 2010. Anybody know of anything that quality out since then? I'd like to try it.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

---

**HUFFPOST BLOGGER**

**Michael Giltz**

*freelance writer*

**127 Fans**

12:35 AM on 02/12/2012

I know, I know, my music is def softer, but I've always favored melody over rhythm, even as a kid. So it's not me getting old, just me being a fuddy duddy at heart. I'm late to the Gourd, so don't feel the same disappointment that you and others express. It was not a vintage year for hip-hop so hopefully someone will offer some good suggestions for us.  
Thanks for commenting.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

---

**Bandini**  
**119 Fans**

06:35 PM on 02/11/2012

the grammys are a joke. Instead of giving the awards to the "artists" they should give them to the publicists.

They are the opposite of the oscars. The oscars award artistic merit. The grammys are just a popularity contest. This is all you need to know about the grammys: Brittany Spears has been nominated 8 times(she won once).

It would be like academy awards going to Snakes on a Plane.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

---

**Ellen Lyons**  
**9 Fans**

06:29 PM on 02/11/2012

I would also like to add here that Tinariwen has been nominated for a Grammy. It's too bad they cannot attend the ceremonies but for a very good reason. They have all fled the fighting in Northern Mali that is related to the current Kel Tamashek/Taureg unrest. There is a long history to this conflict but suffice it to say that like Omara Moctar Bombino, they are Kel Tamashek and have fled the ethnic cleansing that has been going on in southern Mali since January 17, 2012.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

---

**HUFFPOST BLOGGER**  
**Michael Giltz**  
*freelance writer*  
**127 Fans**

12:37 AM on 02/12/2012

Thanks for the update. Very sad news in a perennially troubled region.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

---

**Bebop210**  
**28 Fans**

This user has chosen to opt out of the Badges program

04:24 PM on 02/11/2012

Hmm.. No Bjork, Ladytron, The Howling Hex, Cults, Evangelista, L'il B, PJ Harvey, Radiohead? You need to get out of the woods more.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

---

**Bandini**  
**119 Fans**

06:36 PM on 02/11/2012

Bebop,

thats your personal taste. But what makes you think I should enjoy that stuff also?

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

---

**Bebop210**  
**28 Fans**

This user has chosen to opt out of the Badges program

10:01 AM on 02/12/2012

I'm just saying a lot a lot alot of these albums are from people who hang out in the woods and look like Abraham Lincoln... Or worse, consider John Denver the most influential rocker ever, The inclusion of one of the bands I mentioned (or gasp skinny puppy) would have gone a long way to show a bit of diversity, never a bad thing...

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

---

**HUFFPOST BLOGGER**  
**Michael Giltz**  
*freelance writer*  
**127 Fans**

12:40 AM on 02/12/2012

I really haven't been crazy about PJ Harvey since her awe-inspiring To Bring You My Love. I keep trying but don't feel it, though obviously many many others agree with you about her new album which topped some British polls. Radiohead was, to me, good not great, but like

all of their more abstract work it might just take some time to sink in. I'm def an OK Computer v Kid A sort of guy. Bjork frankly I heard the music but felt it wasn't fair to judge outside the whole app per song thingie and just didn't get a chance to experience it properly. Heard all the rest except for Lil B, which I'll put on my to-do list. Thanks for commenting.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

---

**Bebop210**  
**28 Fans**

This user has chosen to opt out of the Badges program

09:55 AM on 02/12/2012

That's interesting about pj because i feel this album has far more to latch on to hook wise than to bring you my love (also one of my fave albums ever). I suggest giving it and the bjork another listen preferably in vinyl. The apps thing was red herring, a pr misadventure at best...

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

There are More Comments on this Thread. [Click Here To See them All](#)

---

**HUFFPOST SUPER USER**

**Lee Harvey**

*Grab a slice of Crazy. Don't cost nothin'.*

**140 Fans**

04:16 PM on 02/11/2012

Having heard very few of these, I can't compare, but two of the releases on this list that I did enjoy are "So Beautiful or So What" by Paul Simon and "El Camino" by The Black Keys.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

---

**HUFFPOST BLOGGER**

**Michael Giltz**

*freelance writer*

**127 Fans**

12:40 AM on 02/12/2012

Thanks for commenting. If you like those, I'm pretty sure you might discover some other albums worth checking out. Hope you sample the videos and discover something good.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

---

**davidaltieri**

**31 Fans**

02:06 PM on 02/11/2012

At first I thought "there's going to be no mention of Barbra Streisand and the nominations she received because her category is not even televised (contemporary vocal) or some such thing. So even though she has more Grammys than all of the above and, I might add, more talent, I thought it was understandable that she not be mentioned..but then after reading about these random albums and songs that I have never heard of, I'm like ..o.k another Streisand hater ..or Another person who doesn't think that Miss Streisand is relevant ..sorry but in my honest opinion she is more relevant than all mentioned in this article!

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

---

**HUFFPOST BLOGGER**

**Michael Giltz**

*freelance writer*

**127 Fans**

12:46 AM on 02/12/2012

Well, I wasn't going over the Grammy categories and talking about performances and who should win and the such, but simply going over my favorite albums of the year. Streisand is indeed an exceptionally gifted singer and artist who towers over most everyone, not just the people on this list. I don't truly think she's scaled the peaks since The Broadway Album (at least, not in the studio, though the last decades have been more about live performances, I think). But I've still got more Streisand CDs than you can shake a stick at. Her latest didn't make my list this year, but that shouldn't brand me a hater. Glad to know her fans are as passionate as ever.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

---

**Survival Suit Rock**

**5 Fans**

01:34 PM on 02/11/2012

As a huge fan of Tom Waits, I'm happy to see that you included his latest release on your Grammy Preview.

However, I'm a bit perplexed that Mr. Waits loses points on your list for a song that I don't even think is on the album. You refer to a song called "Last Year". I'm guessing you mean "Last Leaf on the Tree"? If so, I agree that it's not quite as strong as the rest of the album.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

---

HUFFPOST BLOGGER

**Michael Giltz**

*freelance writer*

**127 Fans**

12:49 AM on 02/12/2012

Thanks for pointing that out. In condensing it down my review, I must have messed up somewhere. He consistently delivers some of the best albums of the year, again and again but this one is even more special than most. A real late peak. Thanks for commenting.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

---

HUFFPOST SUPER USER

**Shauni Waterdragon**

*Speak now or forever hold your peas.*

**392 Fans**

12:04 PM on 02/11/2012

I just recently activated my Amazon Cloud Player and uploaded all my old music. I've been jonezing for new material however, but other than the popular music on telly and radio (of course I own Adele's "21" and I would also include Amy Wineheart's "Back to Black" to a list of great albums) I had no clue where to start. THANK YOU, am so happy to enjoy your blog this morning playing gorgeous stuff from kd Lang, Clapton, Paul Simon, more favorites from the Black Keyes, and mostly, a bunch of neat stuff from artists I am not familiar with! The old gospel songs knocked me out. Saving your blog so I can check each song out at length, and will be added several to my collection. Thank you again, I appreciate your expertise and the time you took to compile this information - I will also be passing it along to other music lovers I know. Music is love. Nasmaste.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

---

HUFFPOST BLOGGER

**Michael Giltz**

*freelance writer*

**127 Fans**

01:15 PM on 02/11/2012

Shauni, if I can turn you on to one act or album you'll love, then all the time and energy is worth it. Thanks for commenting!

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

---

**MaliCrisis**

**3 Fans**

11:46 AM on 02/11/2012

Hello Mr. Giltz. In reference to #26, Tinariwen. Do you know that they are in the middle of a devastating refugee crisis in Northern Mali right NOW???? In the past week over 60,000 civilians have been displaced according to Reuters. Here is a msg from their facebook page. "Hi everyone. Soon after the uprising broke out last week, people started leaving the centre of our home villages, to avoid any fighting between the rebels and the Malian army. We've been out here in the bush, for quite a few days, with many women, children and old people. Some of us are suffering from hunger and the terrible cold. It's really very very cold at night around this time of year. Things are tough for sure, but everyone is holding up. Thanks to everyone for their thoughts and prayers for us. Keeping sending them. We really hope that everything is going to be ok. Thanks, Tinariwen."

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

---

**BDinJoburg**

**130 Fans**

This user has chosen to opt out of the Badges program

03:02 PM on 02/11/2012

Normally I would be inclined to say that your post is off-topic and unfair to the author and not indulge you further.

But music (and the arts in general) allow us to connect beyond the limitations of self-identity and I feel it is appropriate to care for the strangers with whom we connect emotionally. I am not a religious person so I cannot offer my prayers. I offer my best wishes, my attention and a little information:



The situation is not only one of conflict but of food shortage that is expected to get worse. Oxfam and the International Red Cross have programmes in place in the region.

You would do better to post at <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/huff-wires/20120211/af-mali-refugees/> where the issue you address is the thread topic.

Whilst I understand that your comment was meant in good faith I think you place an unfair burden on Michael Giltz.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

---

**awol1949**

**0 Fans**

11:25 AM on 02/11/2012

as a 62yr old who still tries to keep up with new music and new artists i am not one to say bad thhings about anyones list but how one can get to 50 artists without mentioning wild beasts Smother or kate bush's 50 words for snow and Weeknd's house of balloons is beond my comprehension.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

---

**HUFFPOST BLOGGER**

**Michael Giltz**

*freelance writer*

**127 Fans**

12:10 PM on 02/11/2012

Thanks for sharing some of your favorites from the year not on this list. The Weeknd was obviously on a lot of lists. I liked it but haven't fallen in love yet but def will keep listening. I'm crazy for Kate Bush and enjoyed the typically quirky songs of 50 Words For Snow. But again, for me it was a three star album out of four. I've certainly had many of her albums on my lists over the years. I saw Wild Beasts on some UK lists but didn't catch up with it before the end of the year. I'll definitely check it out so thanks for the tip. With 10,000+ albums out a year, there's always more to listen to.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)

Page: [1](#) [2](#) [Next >](#) [Last »](#) (2 total)

[Advertise](#) | [Make HuffPost your Home Page](#) | [RSS](#) | [Careers](#) | [FAQ](#)

[User Agreement](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Comment Policy](#) | [About Us](#) | [About Our Ads](#) | [Contact Us](#)

Copyright © 2012 TheHuffingtonPost.com, Inc. | "The Huffington Post" is a registered trademark of TheHuffingtonPost.com, Inc. All rights reserved.

Part of **AOL-HuffPost Entertainment**