

OK, let's try it again! Back in 1998, Tucker and I started a correspondence at this time of year in which we expressed what 10 CDs held sway over our heads in that year. They didn't have to be released in that year, it was just a diary of what influenced us the most in that year. It turned into an email thing where Steve Carl and others chimed in.

That was the idea!! C'mon people, Tucker's gone and last year not one other person bothered compiling a list. You gotta participate to help us all out. There's so much trash out there and radio sucks, where you gonna learn about what's hip and quality if your friends don't tell you? So think it over, look at your CD rack and jot down what you dug this year. I use these lists to discover new stuff to listen to and keep growing, so keep it going!

Here's my **Top 10 Most Influential CDs of 2004**, in rough order of importance:

Wayne Shorter Quartet Live At Verizon Hall, Philadelphia - January 16, 2004

Yeah, guilty as charged, I snuck a DAT recorder into Kimmel Hall and nailed this night. I'm not marketing it, just reliving an amazing night of music; I truly believe that every night of music by this crew that isn't captured for posterity is a crime against jazz history. A couple other bootleg concerts by this group (Wayne Shorter, John Patatucci, Danilo Perez, and Brian Blade) have convinced me: this is the most amazing group in jazz today, something that really gives me faith and reassurance that it's still a living, breathing art form that's moving into the future when allowed. Wayne is still amazing and finally has a crew worthy of his talents. Go!!

Miles Davis Seven Steps: The Complete Columbia Recordings of Miles Davis 1963-1964

The latest Columbia box set chronicling Miles Davis's output covers the period just before his classic '60's quintet gelled, and it's another killer. Herbie comes on board early and plays like he doesn't anymore, there's an incredible concert recording with Sam Rivers on sax, and throughout is the sound of one of jazz's greatest chameleons changing colors before your ears.

Tom Waits Real Gone

I've always been a sucker for Tom Waits from the '70's and seeing him at the Main Point back then is a concert I'll never forget. But, like a lot of his fans, I never made the transition with him from '50's Beat Generation poet to Kurt Weill Berlin Wino and lost track completely with what he's been up to. I heard this was good, heard "Make It Rain" on the radio late one Saturday night, and bought it on impulse the next day. Pure magic. You might listen to it and say (like Lorraine) that it sounds like he's hitting a machine and his voice hasn't mellowed out either. The magic lies in the fact that I can't figure out why I like this as much as I do, but I do like it. I find the tunes on it have real strong identities and if you listen carefully you start to realize that the...er, eccentric production techniques that seem at first like digital distortion and bad mic-ing is actually designed to complement the twisted mood he's setting up. I really thought something was wrong with my CD player or headphones when I first heard this. This mystery is what made rock great back in the day (I'm thinking of the first time I heard I Am the Walrus), and here's a taste of that, an independent production that defies the accepted big-money LA sound. Hah!

Muddy Waters: The Chess Box & Howlin' Wolf: The Chess Box
While playing Mamma Mia last year, Al Slutsky was reading Robert Gordon's Can't Get Satisfied, a biography of Muddy

Waters and raving about it. I read it this year and got interested. Here was another major blues guy that I had really ignored and didn't know any of this music. So when a guy on eBay put these two sets up for sale, I got them for a song. The Howlin' Wolf set (along with a great video that's been on cable lately, The Howlin' Wolf Story) continues my appreciation for this musician big time, but the Muddy Waters set is a revelation. The blues were big when we were in school and learning our craft, and I got tired of them. I feel like I had to get older to really get them and appreciate them in the spirit they were offered. There's some BIG honesty on these tracks, and I never knew Muddy could play slide like he does. Killing.

King Crimson Live In Philadelphia, PA, July 30, 1982

Discipline Global Mobile has been churning out the King Crimson Collector's Club editions for years now, and 2004 brought one I was hoping for. This is the concert to which I took the whole group I was in, Real People; Rosemary Benson claimed she had nightmares for two weeks after this, a standing ovation if I ever heard one. King Crimson was reveling in the peak of satisfaction with the quartet lineup, touring behind the Beat album. There's recordings in here of tunes like "Neurotica" which they never played again, and Belew was having a really hot night. This was a life-altering concert for me and hearing it again after all these years shows me my faith wasn't misplaced, they really were that good.

Brian Wilson Smile

This is the legendary album that Brian never got to finish and release. The Beach Boys wanted to get laid, not rewrite rock history, so Brian lost out. Here we are in the next century and Brian gets to record his original dream version with a smoking touring band he's been working with. Let's see, all the others are dead and Brian, last seen waving veg-like to the

uncomprehending audiences is the man who not only lasts longer but remains artistically relevant? There's a Hollywood blockbuster waiting to be made here...

Raw Deal Raw Deal

Here's the setup on this: Rob Brosh teaches at my school with me. Back in late winter he asked me to come over to his house for a recording jam. I went, not knowing what to expect. We recorded six tunes that first day and took photos. At last, a talented band with a real guerilla music attitude! This is a jam band/ Meters-influenced Nawleans kind of groove thing. We've been playing some Fridays at Ludwig's Garden in Philly, and the gigs are a total gas. These guys let me play whatever comes into my twisted head and seem to have total faith in me, the fools. So this earns a place in my list for influence: I've rediscovered the joy of playing to a live audience again after years of drudgery. It's a shame the gigs are the \$50 bar gig type, but hey...stop by and smell the sauerkraut.

Ornette Coleman Ornette Coleman Live at the Kimmel Center, September 17, 2004

Have DAT, will travel. Yeah, I did it again and captured Ornette's latest quartet, 2 bassists, his son on drums, and Ornette himself. Can't say I understood it all, but it sure felt good. Why is it that most of the greatest concerts I've attended have a third of the audience leaving after the first 15 minutes? That's right, in his '70's and still pissing people off, Hooray for Ornette!!

Baltimore Symphony Orchestra/ David Zinman Daugherty: Metropolis Symphony

What's the influence here? We went to a concert of the North Penn Symphony Orchestra. They played a program you'd never expect from a local symphony: Holst's The Planets, Ravel's

Bolero, and “The Red Cape Tango” from this piece. This is a really happening symphony that’s based on the Superman mythology, and it’s great in a movie-score/ berzerk John Adams kind of way. I was impressed enough to audition and be accepted as pianist/celestist for the NPSO, so this piece had its influence on me and this is the only recording of it.

Bob Dylan Bob Dylan Live 1964: The Bootleg Series, Vol. 6
My musician friends can never believe that I really like early Dylan and all I can say is that it’s not about the music or his singing, it’s about the scene he encapsulated at that time and the power of his words. Screw the Beatles, Dylan and the Firesign Theater wrote a new kind of poetry that rewrote the rules of what was possible and was loaded with memorable phrases and images. Dylan put it to music so it was easier to remember, that’s all. Well, this year I read Positively Fourth Street, a history of the folk scene specifically focusing on Dylan, Joan Baez, Mimi Farina, and Richard Farina. While I was reading it this old concert was released and it just clicked and made the book come alive. This captures Dylan as he begins to get fed up with the folk scene and the protest scene and pours his energy into a rock style and serves as a summation of his first years. It’s good stuff, timeless stuff. I even listen to the duets with Joan.

Looking over this list, I realize something: everything except the Brian Wilson is music played and recorded in real time, avoiding the usual studio production. I think it keeps breaking down to what you can do LIVE and the importance this assumes in a musician, as well as a general search for the aforementioned honesty in music.

Once again, let’s have some feedback. What’s good out there?, get off your duffs and write! Chico, how about it? Yo

Hayden, put down the Steinberger and write! I need input!
Webb, you got an opinion about everything else, ya livin' in a vacuum or wot?