

Dave Hartl's 2016 Top Ten (or so) Most Influential Albums

2016 was a raging kidney stone of a year, maybe in the long run one of the worst years of our lives. We'll see. But within these 12 months I was listening to music, working with music, and thinking a lot about music. And now it's time to look back and do that annual tradition of picking out the 10 or so most influential albums I heard in the past year. Not the most popular, or even the best, but what made me think the most as a musician.

Last year, we got some great responses on this list from Miles Hartl, John Mullin, Kaz Yoshihara, Jim Ryan, & Jack Loughhead. If you missed their input, just go to <http://www.davehartl.com/top10.html> and scroll down to the 2015 link. The links there go all the way back to 1998, when I started this with George Tucker. It's a way of hearing about great music you might otherwise miss. If you want to contribute, please write to dave@davehartl.com and your contribution will be added to this document online for future downloads.

1.) Jack DeJohnette, Ravi Coltrane, & Matthew Garrison: In Movement



I've always had a soft spot for Jack DeJohnette since his days with Miles Davis. Seeing him play "Naima" on the piano at the Bijou Café many years ago confirmed to me the depth of this musicality. In this album, he collaborates with the sons of John Coltrane and Jimmy Garrison (men he personally watched grow up) and shows the depth of their talents as well. Stunningly well recorded (probably the most sensitive cymbal work I've ever heard) and musically intriguing, this release spent a lot of time in my car CD player and never failed to draw my attention and admiration. I love surprises, and this definitely brightened up my days with its endless invention.

2.) David Bowie: Blackstar



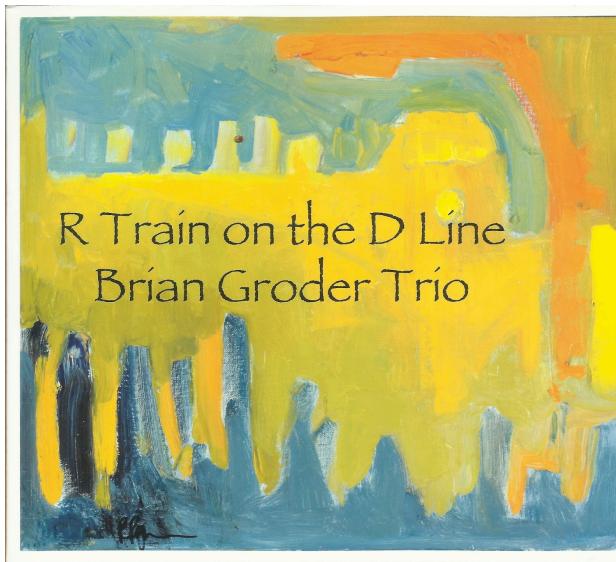
One Saturday, I went to my favorite local CD store (yes, they do exist, this one at the Quakertown Farmer's Market) and saw a new David Bowie disc had come out the day before. I hadn't bought a Bowie release in over 20 years, but something tingled on a subconscious level and I snagged it. On the way home, I was really surprised by the sound of this. Unlike any expectations I ever had, even for a shapeshifter like Bowie, and obviously heartfelt and mysterious – what's up with the black-on-black graphics you have to hold up to the light to read?

Monday morning the news came that Bowie had died from cancer, and this album suddenly came into focus. The thought of this endlessly inventive artist who moved rock away from its origins and into performance art (yes, I saw the Spiders from Mars tour and got it,

even though I wasn't totally enamored by it), dying of cancer and knowing it, but quietly assembling jazz people from outside his tradition and forming a final statement for his life was moving beyond words.

If this weren't such a great album, it still would have been a notable gesture. But the fact that this is music unlike anything I've ever heard makes David Bowie's choices in his last days the greatest final act that rock has produced. If you doubt it, go check out the video for "Lazarus." Truly genius.

3.) Brian Groder Trio: R Train On the D Line



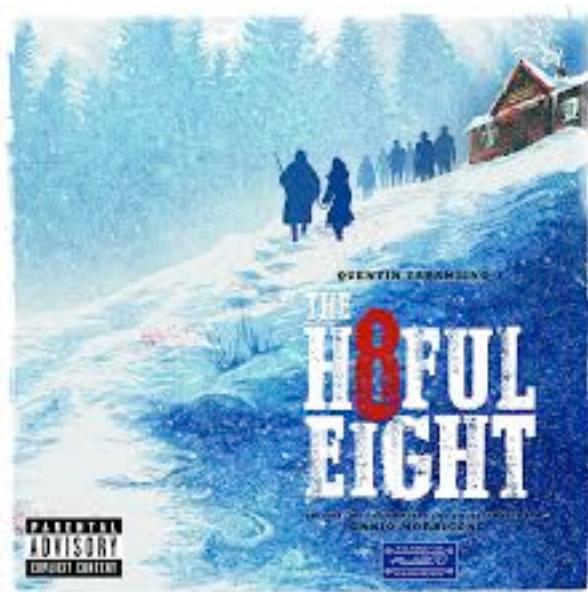
Full disclosure: Brian Groder is an old school mate from college days with whom I got reacquainted on an Ed Palermo gig at a NYC club in the late '80's. We've hung out whenever possible since then and I've followed his career as a composer, trumpeter, and creative

force with great interest in these decades. We've collaborated on several things (including my own latest CD), but I've known that Brian is more into free jazz and really has his own territory that is not on my radar for a large part.

And along comes this disc, a trio of trumpet/bass/drums. And I feel like I finally fully get Brian's art. Normally, being a pianist at heart, I would miss the absence of a chordal instrument; but here I hear how it frees Brian's harmonic concepts up in the best Ornette tradition. And his trumpet playing! No matter how rapid the notes, he plays clean with impeccable intonation and total freedom.

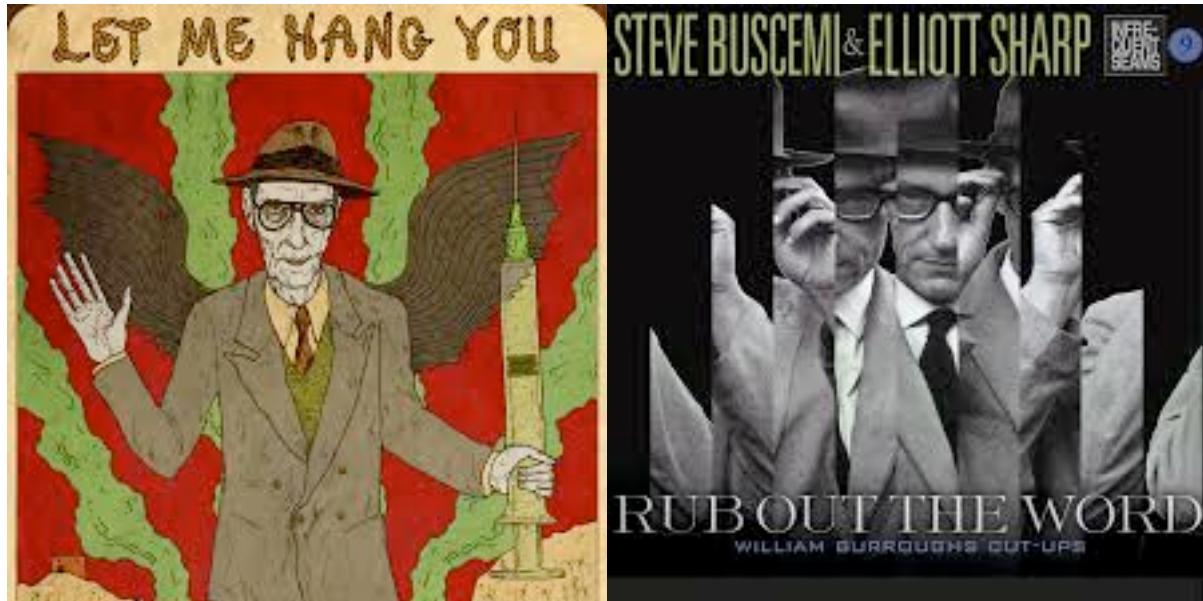
I am really proud to call this man a friend. Check out his latest disc and find out why.

4.) Ennio Morricone: Quentin Tarantino's The H8ful Eight



From his spaghetti western soundtracks in the ‘60’s on, I’ve loved Ennio Morricone’s movie work. He always uses ear-grabbing unusual instruments and combinations and his sense of drama is unmatched. When I went to see Quentin Tarantino’s latest film in 70mm over the Christmas week last year, I was amazed by the opening credits and the music I was hearing. When I saw the credit for Morricone, I said “Of course!” and got the soundtrack as soon as I could. It’s some of the maestro’s greatest work and a textbook case of how to infuse movies with drama and emotion.

5 & 6.) William S. Burroughs: Let Me Hang You; Steve Buscemi & Elliott Sharp: Rub Out the Word



William S. Burroughs, Beat Generation writer of renown, spent his twilight years involved with forward-looking younger musical artists like Laurie Anderson and Kurt Cobain. Hal Willner's Spare-Ass Annie and Other Tales and Dead City Radio were two of my favorite '90's albums. Material did a couple of albums using Burrough's stuff as well. His recitations of his writings, flavored with a Midwestern twang, have a built-in weirdness factor which lends itself well to musical augmentation.

2016 brought along two further sonic landscapes featuring Burroughs. Let Me Hang You is a bit of a continuation by Hal Willner featuring NYC artists like Bill Frisell and Wayne Horvitz. Very enjoyable, but nothing shockingly different. It's in the second album, Rub Out the Word, that new ground is broken. Steve Buscemi is the perfect replacement for Burroughs in these live recitations, and Elliott Sharp's sonic textures on guitar are minimalistic but effective.

Twisted textures for twisted narratives, delivered with a casualness that belies their outrageousness, these albums show that Burroughs is still capable of pissing people off.

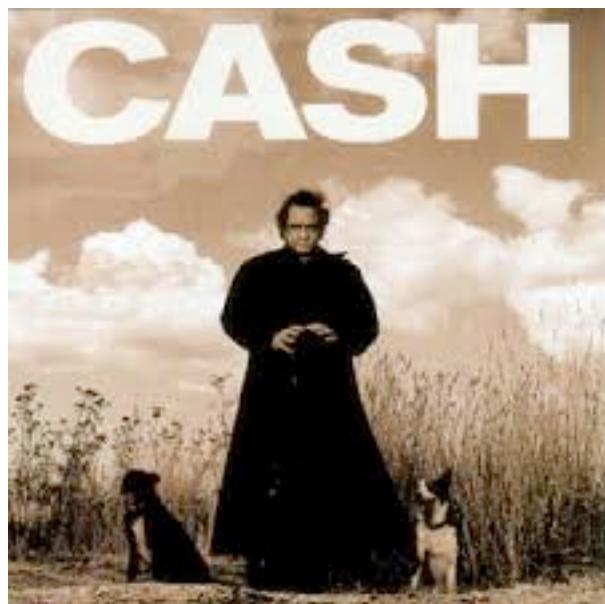
7.) Elvis Costello & Steve Nieve: Costello & Nieve



I finally got to see a full Elvis Costello concert in person this year and was thoroughly blown away, not only by Elvis's deep songbook, unexpectedly great guitar work, and powerful vocals, but by his band. Steve Nieve has been with Costello from the start and knows the gig like no one else ever could. This 5-disc box set contains material from a 1996 blitz through America, 5 different cities in 8 days, and featuring (for the most part) only Elvis and his pianist. There's staples of the repertoire here but also some surprises. Nieve is a master class of energetic but sympathetic accompaniment, and as I move through Costello's huge back catalog, getting familiar with his songs along the way, this set is a touchpoint for the basics of each tune covered.

And after I've had enough duo work, I've been putting on the classic Live at Hollywood High to get the full band impact of Elvis and the Attractions as they started out. Don't miss this.

8.) Johnny Cash: American Recordings

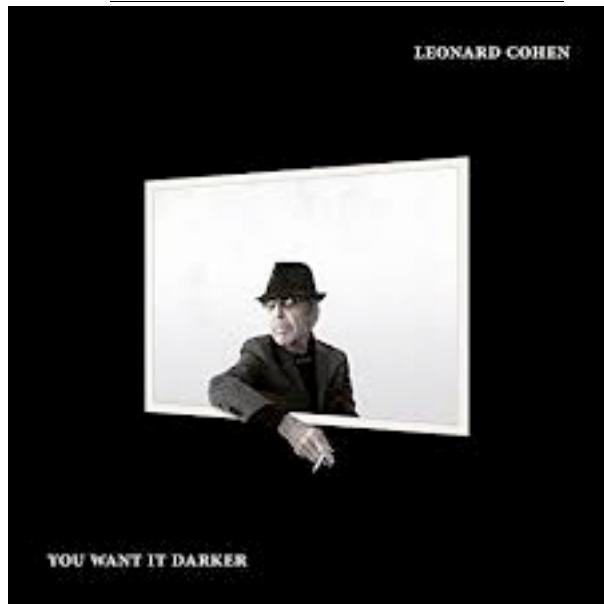


Johnny Cash, broken in health and in his eighties, teamed up with hip-hop producer Rick Rubin for 6 albums before his passing. This is the first in the series. Some of them went on to feature Cash with Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, but on this one it's just Cash, his guitar, and his voice.

I went for many years with no real appreciation for Cash, I will admit. Reading the biography Cash by Robert Hilburn this year changed all that. Somehow this album, acoustic and intimate, has

more power and energy than the most heavily distorted metal release of the year. I now get it: Johnny Cash was the Real Deal. If you haven't dialed in to that fact, start here, then go back and catch him at San Quentin and Folsom Prison.

9.) Leonard Cohen: You Want It Darker



OK, another artist who died in 2016. Sometimes it takes a loss to know what you're missing. I bought my first Leonard Cohen album around 1971. And never bought another. I liked him, but it wasn't my favorite stuff. Then, this year, I'm Your Man grabbed me and led me to this, Cohen's final album. It's good, another final statement from a long-standing artist. I'm just glad Leonard had a resurgence in the home stretch, too many artists die before they get that final payoff.

10.) King Crimson: Radical Action (To Unseat the Hold of Monkey Mind)



This absolutely has to be here, I loved it and listened to it a lot, but I feel like I'm preaching to the choir. King Crimson gathered its resources for an amazing tour in 2015. This is the payoff. 3 CDs and a glorious DVD of the live concert experience. This edition of Crimson went back into its catalog for things from the '60's and '70's, staying faithful to the originals but leaving room to rip the roof off. Robert Fripp, Crimson gatekeeper, is joined by a 3-man drumming team, Mel Collins on winds (a veteran from those halcyon days), the ever-great Tony Levin, and Jakko Jakszyk, who plays guitar parts originally covered by Fripp and sings like John Wetton and Greg Lake.

The concerts they gave will never be forgotten by me. Especially with this document there to remind me that greatness can come at any stage of a group's life.

Included to be honest: Dave Hartl: Busman's Holiday



In the interest of being totally honest and also trying not to be egocentric, I'll just mention this, my latest disc. Yes, it is definitely one of the most influential albums of the year for me: you don't spend the hundreds of hours I spent listening to these tracks while assembling, mixing, and mastering without becoming intimately familiar with every tiny detail. But the time spent was enjoyable thanks to the efforts of the other players. I mentioned Brian Groder above on his own album; he's

just as amazing here on my own project. I'm releasing this on New Year's Day, 2017, and welcome you to check it out. That is all.

Brian Groder

DH!

Always a pleasure to read your yearly acoustical recommendations & musings...

And to throw my two cents into the ring...

as always, I'm never sure if this music was released this year or I just caught up with it these last 12 months.

With no particular order:

-Larry Young In Paris-The ORTF Recordings / Resonance Records.

What brilliant compositions and arrangements played with energetic & progressive solos.

A young Woody Shaw shines, anticipating the wonderous career to follow.

-Bobby Hutcherson Live Montreux / Blue Note Japan

More creative compositions, arrangements & solos with an all-star ensemble including Woody Shaw.

Found myself returning to this record again and again, especially after the passing of Mr. H.

-El Tiempo, Bley-Sheppard-Swallow / ECM Records

One of my favorite trios still getting together and creating new music. They truly develop each other's creative threads melodically and harmonically.

-Songs for Quintet, Kenny Wheeler / ECM Records

After hearing of Kenny sailing on, I finally went out and purchased this after hearing some cuts on the radio.

He had an individualistic compositional sense and spun beautiful melodic lines over some very hip changes. I've always made it a point of studying his compositions and borrowing some of the ideas/as we all do...

-Streams, Sam Rivers Live at Montreux / Impulse

As always with Sam, hang on for a wild and very creative ride! As he told me and lived, "always bring everything you got and then twist & explore it, Yeeeow!"

-In Movement, Ravi Coltrane, Matt Garrison & Jack DeJohnette Trio / ECM Records

Unfortunately, I missed this trio performing live nearby at Matt's performance space/club, ShapeShifter Lab.

This music takes a wonderful & adverterous musical journey.

Jack Loughhead

Mr. MD: Thanks once again for keeping this great tradition going - every year it gets me pointed down some roads I wouldn't otherwise have taken. It also causes me to reflect annually on how the way I am listening to music changes. Like everyone (or most everyone), I went through the format changes from LP to cassette to CD and then digital (never did buy an 8 track!), but up until this year I stuck pretty firmly to listening to albums instead of going with the trend towards individual songs. I also, quite frankly, spent a lot of money on buying recorded music. I realized how that had changed when I started putting this note together, since my past practice had been to begin by going back over the year's purchases and see which ones had the biggest impact (while also trying to keep in mind that this isn't supposed to just be a "new music" review). At any rate, I realized I haven't bought much for a while since I now stream most of my listening through Apple or Amazon music. I also have gotten into using those services in "Pandora" fashion, taking a favorite group or artist and letting them build a radio station of similar music. That has sometimes led me to artists I haven't heard before. All that said, there certainly are some standouts through the year, so in no particular order:

1. Bowie - Black Star - You had it on your list too, but I have to put it on mine. Dark, but the man definitely didn't lose the ability to grab your head and bore into it. I listened to the disc quite a bit before I ever saw the video, and I'd have to say it freaked me out a bit. It took me a while before I wanted to get back to the album again. I also spent a couple of weeks going back through every recording of his I could lay my hands on - what an incredible influence this man had on a lot of genres! I hadn't listened to the Leonard Cohen album before seeing it on your list, but I get some of the same feeling from it - sure wish I could leave an epitaph like these two did. Kind of weird too to have what arguably were the three most influential gender bending artists (Bowie, Prince, and George Michael) all go in the same year.
2. Snarky Puppy - Culcha Vulcha - I think I had this group on my list last year, but they are still doing it for me. Big instrumental funky groove oriented fusion, with a bunch of world influences. These guys put out a lot of albums, but I think this was the first one in a while that wasn't either live or featuring a lot of big name cameos.

3. Donny McCaslin - Beyond Now - I read about this album somewhere, and really liked it. I didn't realize for quite a while, though, that McCaslin and his band actually were behind Bowie on Black Star, and a couple of the tracks on this album are Bowie covers. Also one of my favorite bassists, Tim Lefebvre.
4. Sturgill Simpson - A Sailor's Guide to Earth - My daughter turned me on to this guy over the summer, with his rendition of Nirvana's "In Bloom". I couldn't get the song out of my head for weeks. The album touches on a variety of styles, but I guess overall I'd think of it as psychedelic country.
5. Oz Noy - Who Gives a Funk - I have liked this Israeli guitarist for a long time, but this album spun a lot over the year. The disc reminded me of one of my favorite bands from years ago, The Hermanators. Star studded lineup, including John Medeski, Dweezil Zappa, Chris Potter, Robin Ford, Randy Brecker and others.
6. BFG - Perfectamundo - No, not big friendly giant, but Billy Gibbons from ZZ Top. I can't remember how I stumbled onto this, since I was never a big ZZ fan, but apparently Billy has quite a thing for latin music, and this album mixes up his signature style with some Puente'esque grooves. I particularly liked his rendition of Roy Head's "Treat Her Right."
7. Logan Richardson – Shift - I know you aren't a big Metheny fan, but I really liked his playing on the album from this young horn player. Also, Jason Moran isn't too shabby on the keys!
8. Radiohead – A Moon Shaped Pool - Obviously they've been around for a long time and are a big name, but I never really dug into them all that much. Maybe too much angst. This disc resonated with me though.
9. Theo Croker - Escape Velocity - Some really cool stuff - grandpa Doc Cheatham should be proud. Excellent jazz from a young trumpeter out of FL by way of Shanghai.
10. Julian Lage - Arclight - My brother gave me a Lage album a few years back, and I liked it, but it didn't really hold my attention. This disc did - Lage is one hell of a guitarist, and brings a beautiful feel to some old classics. Maybe it was his decision to switch on this album from a jazzbox to a Tele - I love the sound. Great trio too with Scott Colley and Kenny Wollesen.

Hasta la vista – Jack

Kaz Yoshihara

Here is my top 10 list from 2016. Nothing unusual like any other year. B. Bombaim & P. Brotzmann album is probably the most listened album of the year. Then, JD Allen and Bill Evans's newly discovered unbelievable session album. Oh, Vijay Iyer is the most exciting keyboard player right now.

1. Black Bombaim and Peter Brotzmann
2. JD Allen - Americana
3. Bill Evans - Some Other Time
4. Tomasz Stanko - Jazz Message from Poland
5. Tomasz Stanko - Tomasz Stank and Adam Makowiec Unit
6. King Crimson - Radical Action
7. King Crimson - Live in Toronto
8. Vijay Iyer - A Cosmic Rhythm with Each Stroke
9. Steve Lehman - Selebeyone
10. Donny McCaslin - Beyond Now

Kaz
