

From Dave Hartl:
2000's Best CDs

Here we go again with the 3rd Annual Best CD list exchange. As always, please feel free to participate, the more opinions I hear the more good music I get to check out, mostly things that would skate past otherwise. These are CD releases, not necessarily released in 2000, but those that I got in 2000 that spent the most time on the disc player and had the biggest influence on me as a musician in the past year:

Compared to last year, it seems like pretty slim pickings for new releases...and as I go down the list there's no one particular CD that stands out like last year's Complete Duke Ellington on RCA Victor. Rather, here's the top 10 in no particular order:

Peggy's Blue Skylight Andy Summers
Ex-Police guitarist finds jazz, collaborates with Deborah Harry, Kronos Quartet, and others in redefining some of Mingus's best works. One of the best of these kind of projects.

Spirit Song Kenny Barron
The uptight jazz record label decides to let one of their flock stretch a little, with uncommonly good results. This guy's a great pianist, but this shows he's got other talents as well.

Monterey Jazz Festival: 40 Legendary Years Various Artists
Clint Eastwood helps produce an overview of the best of Monterey festival highlights that catches the best of both old and new.

The Complete Columbia... Miles Davis and John Coltrane
Columbia keeps releasing these great little box sets spanning various parts of Miles's career. This one is, like all the others, great.

The Illinois Concert Eric Dolphy
Eric Dolphy does a college concert in the early '60's with Herbie on the piano. Must've scared the hell out of them. One of the only reed players that can still inspire fisticuffs among his fellow reedmen.

The ProjeKcts King Crimson sub-groups
A boxed set of four different guerilla touring units cobbled together from the great King Crimson, each group has a different angle and is a fascinating look at how musicians change as their interplay partners varies. So how come when the real Crimson got together after this it was so predictable? Maybe they used all their juice right here with this set.

The Joy of Molybdenum Trey Gunn Band
One of the participants in Crimson, this seems to be a completely different band. I checked it out as a Stick player, and Trey Gunn's Warr Guitar approach is definitely that of a Stick player, but the CD turned out to be a burner in its own right.

(Untitled)/(Unissued) The Byrds
They got it right. Sure it's an old album, but they did a great job in remastering, then added another whole CDs worth of tracks from the same sessions and time. If there's any doubt why we should remember Clarence White and Gram Parsons, here's Exhibit A.

Introducing... Rubén Gonzalez

90+ year-old Cuban pianist who helped found son, he's been revitalized by circumstance (the easing US embargo on his country) and good fortune (the success of Buena Vista Social Club two years ago). There's some tricks in music only old age can provide, it seems.

Volume One, Powerhouse Raymond Scott Project

I listen to this and say, "How did we ever miss this guy?"

Composer of tunes with titles like "Dinner Music for a Pack of Hungry Cannibals", this guy had success in the '30's, had his catalogue sold to Warner Brothers, where it became grist for Carl Stalling's cartoon scorings and from where we know these tunes like our own names but never knew who wrote them.

Scott in later years led the Lucky Strike Hit Parade Orchestra and got heavy into electronic music, influencing Robert Moog and many others. This CD catches his 6-piece quintet (don't ask) in full flight playing impossible charts.

And then we have the runners-up, CDs that I spent extra time with for one reason or another:

Tales of Heaven and Hell Wendy Carlos

This isn't up to the standard of Beauty In the Beast, but even 2nd-shelf Wendy Carlos is better than most new stuff out there.

Skies of America Ornette Coleman

At last, this album comes to CD to take the place of my crackling, hissy vinyl copies! There's no explaining, you either dig it or you don't. I think it's beautiful stuff, mournful and keening. But I leave the analytical cap off my head, which is good sometimes.

Caravan Kronos Quartet

Kronos continues with a new cellist, encouraging musicians around the world to write pieces for string quartet plus (?). No surprises, but still an interesting journey in progress.

Hotcakes and Outtakes

Little Feat

A box set of the best of Little Feat plus outtakes and tunes that didn't survive, arranged by age so the Lowell George freaks don't have to search around. If there was one band with this groove today, it would be a whole different scene on the pop charts.

An American Diary: The Dreamings Mike Mainieri

Mainieri seems to be forging a new uncategorizable sound in his post-Steps Ahead days. The first volume of Diary had great versions of things like Copland's Piano Concerto, and this one seems to be concentrating more on world music influences. Music that demands attention to be heard, but worth it.

Live at the Village Vanguard

Wynton Marsalis Septet

I got it dirt cheap in a CD club, was prepared to hate it, but actually had a good time listening to it. 9 years of different rhythm sections, all recorded in the Vanguard and EQed so it sounds like one concert. Now if Wynton could just shut up and play the trumpet...

Let My Children Hear Music

Charles Mingus

East Coasting

Charles Mingus

Two intense Mingus LPs. The first one is the first Mingus album I ever bought (back in 1979) and long unheard by me. Listening to it on CD (and transcribing The Shoes of the Fisherman's Wife Are Some Jive-Ass Slippers) made me realize I never really heard it at all. The second CD is Bill Evans's only date with Mingus, and filled with a different kind of Mingus than the first one, a jazz-club Mingus instead of a concert Mingus. Both incredible.

Both Sides Now

Joni Mitchell

OK, I'm prejudiced, I first heard this album being played by a 70-piece orchestra all around me while I sat idly on the piano bench. So it will always be intermingled with memories for me. Vince Mendoza may be a turd wrapped in skin, but he writes an undeniably great chart.

The All-Seeing Eye

Wayne Shorter

Shorter's most massive date for Blue Note, remastered by Rudy Van Gelder himself and including great notes and photos. This is probably the closest Wayne went towards Coltrane's Big Cosmos territory in composition. Listen to it and wonder how they ever put it together at all.

Two Against Nature

Steely Dan

OK, it's been a long wait, and Ted Baker (ex-local keyboardist) is on it, and they're always good on some level, but...I never said I had to really LIKE these selections here, it's just what made me think the most in 2000. Whether or not I actively like this album is still questionable to me. Maybe it was finally getting to SEE them play this stuff on video that changed it, but Fagan looks like a member of a lineup of child molesters, giving tunes like Hey Nineteen and Cousin Dupree extra poignancy. Maybe the most dissapointing thing about this CD to me was the fact that I didn't hear any surprises, which is what made Steely Dan great in the first place. Oh well.

Smile

Ed Vezihno/Jim Ward Big Band

A plug for the local music scene. Jim and Ed are South Jersey horn men, and their big band CD (available on Amazon.com) is well-played, well-recorded, and well-arranged. A really good big band CD, a rarity in itself.

Grow Fins

Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band

Band

A 5-CD box set of Beefheart that doesn't try to be complete or anything. It's just a heap of very strange stuff, live things, undeveloped demos, even CD-ROM Quicktime

movies of some length of live Magic Band concerts, 3 of them. There is, to be polite, a lot of filler here; but somehow I'm glad to hear it and have it as I pick apart what makes this mad music tick. The packaging is stunning, filled with liner notes by Jon French the drummer, exposing what it was like to be a Magic Band member. Never has a box set been so ambivalent toward its subject. It sure as hell won't win any converts, but the people into Beefheart are going to hear him in a whole new light after this. Where ARE these bands these days???

That's it. I gotta admit when I look at this list that a lot of what I'm hearing that I like is stuff that I find myself missing in recent new releases, the usual stuff like a slippery or subtle groove sense, explorations of new grooves, a whole attitude toward playing. Send along your lists, we need ever more input!

From Steve Carl:

Hey guys. I don't know how many cds I bought last year, but I'm sure it was over 100, and all but about 10 were classical. As my energies have been directed towards classical guitar, the majority of what I bought fell into that category. I've also been listening to a lot of early music (baroque and before).

Here's my list:

Antonio Lauro: Venezuelan Waltzes for Guitar. Adam Holzman, guitar. I have

over 200 classical guitar cds in my collection, but this has become my absolute favorite. It's on the Naxos label, so it was only about \$5.00!

The Prince's Toys: Koshkin Plays Koshkin. Nikita Koshkin writes some awesome music for the classical guitar. Piece with Clocks is something you'll have to hear to believe.

Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, violin, Sergio and Odair Assad, guitar. This collection of pieces inspired by or written by Gypsies is fantastic. Django Reinhardt's Nuages is one of the pieces.

Bach Unaccompanied Cello Suites performed on Double Bass, Edgar Meyer, bass. Meyer is a great bass player, who often plays with Yo-Yo Ma, Bela Fleck, and variety of others in jazz, classical and bluegrass contexts. This solo cd is simply amazing.

Johann Sebastian Bach: New Transcriptions for Guitar. Philip Hii, guitar. I never thought I'd hear someone pull off the Tocatta and Fugue on solo guitar!

Remember Shakti (the believer. Live recording from the latest incarnation of

one of my favorite groups. The lack of a closing parenthesis is on purpose, I presume.

Live in Paris. John McLaughlin and The Heart of Things. What can I say?
Johnny Mac can still wail.

Blood on the Floor. Marc-Anthony Turnage. John Scofield, Peter Erskine, Martin Robinson (sax & bass clarinet), Ensemble Modern, Peter Rundel, conductor. Turnage wrote these pieces in response to his brother's death from a drug overdose. This is a very interesting combination of classical music and jazz. Turnage composed all of the harmonies with Scofield's chord work in mind.

Espanoleta. Chatham Baroque. Early baroque music from Spain, played on violin, Viola de Gamba, Theorbo, Baroque Guitar, harp and percussion. Ever since I heard Rodrigo's Fantasia para un Gentilhombre, I've loved the music of Gaspar Sanz (whose themes were used by Rodrigo). Plenty of Sanz and his contemporaries here.

Bagpipes from Hell. Vittorio Ghielmi, Viola de Gamba and Lyra-Viol, Luca Pianca, Liuto and Ceterone. (note the lack of bagpipes). I love the title of

this cd! The foldout of part of Bosch's Garden of Earthly Delights just adds to the ambiance. Lot's of Marais, Sainte-Colombe, and the ever popular Anonymous.

Honorable Mention:

The Jimi Hendrix Experience Box Set. The unaccompanied version of Electric Ladyland alone is worth the effort.

Whisper Not. Keith Jarrett, Gary Peacock, Jack DeJohnette. I can see Dave retching now.

Trio 99->00. Pat Metheny, Larry Grenadier, Bill Stewart. (now George is retching!) I actually listened to this quite a bit, until I saw them live. I won't be listening to Metheny for a couple years after that tedious experience.

Bach Sonatas. Michala Petrie, recorder, Keith Jarrett, Harpsichord. I bought a new tenor recorder this year, and have started to buy a lot of recorder cds. This one, and the Handel one they did, is great.

Well, that's where my head's been. I know this list won't interest you guys too much, but do check out the Turnage if you can.

Later,

Steve

From George Tucker:
Faves of 2000

Red Dirt Girl, Emmylou Harris.

I must be genetically predisposed to respond to Emmylou's voice. I love this record.

Illinois Concert, Eric Dolphy.

If heaven exists, there is a special place in it for Eric Dolphy. He is a true seeker.

A Fine Line-Arias & Lieder, Don Byron.

A clarinet player with a unique take on things. From Puccini to Ornette to Holland/Dozier/Holland to Chopin and almost everything in between. A fun recording.

Kristina Pruitt.

Krissy pulled a Rundgren. She plays all the instruments save for an occasional bass, guitar, or violin; sings all the voices; wrote all the tunes except for one; engineered the recording; and mastered the disc herself. The best pop record I heard in the past year or so.

Primordial Lovers MM, Essra Mohawk.

A Rhino reissue of both 1970's Primordial Lovers and 1974's Essra

Mohawk on one disc. I don't hear this kind of passion anymore in pop music. They'd never let these records be made today.

Riverrun-Waterways, Toru Takemitsu. The London Sinfonietta
Something about this guy's writing really gets to me. I find it captivating in any setting.

Spirit Song, Kenny Barron.
This is a fun record. Great playing, beautiful writing. I'm amazed that Verve let him make this.

Salonen, Bernard Herrman-The Film Scores. Los Angeles Philharmonic.
This is real mastery of a genre.

Charles Ives Symphonies Nos. 1 & 4, Chicago Symphony & Chorus
It's really No. 4 that does it for me. Just got the Sony Classical 20-bit CD.

Bartók, The 3 Piano Concertos; Stephen Bishop Kovacevich and the London Symphony Orchestra (Nos 1, 3) The BBC Symphony Orchestra (No. 2).
Our boy Béla was a bad motherfucker in any setting, but this piano stuff is fucking thrilling.

Biggest disappointments:

Both Sides Now, Joni Mitchell.

She should have stayed home and painted. I wasn't sitting in the midst of the orchestra, just in front of the speakers. Too tepid for me.

Two Against Nature, Steely Dan.

Like Hartl said, no surprises. We've heard it all before. These guys have had moments but neither has made a great record since Fagen's "Nightfly."

Wasp Star: Apple Venus Volume 2, XTC.

Sounds like leftovers from volume 1. I've come to expect more from these guys.