

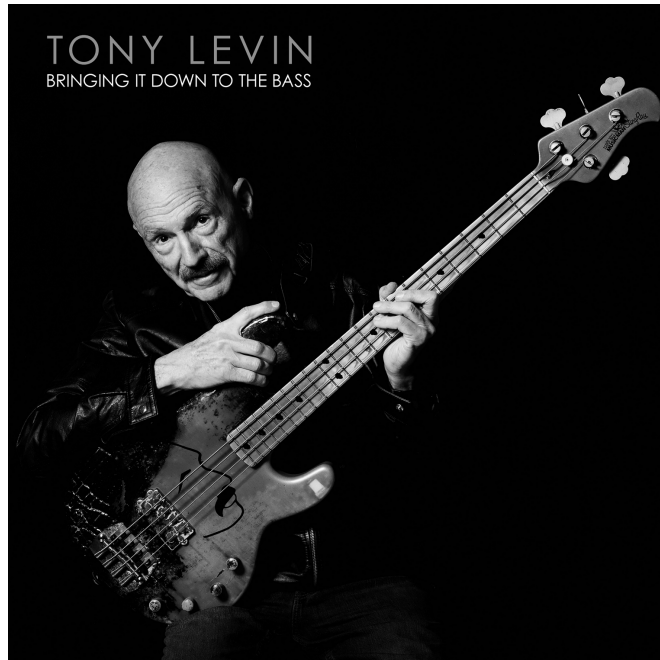
Dave Hartl's 2024 Top Ten Most Influential Albums

It's time once again 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.

You can always go to <http://www.davehartl.com/top10.html> and look at all the other years' postings. 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 your thoughts, please write to dave@davehartl.com with your own list and your contribution will be added to this document online for future downloads. This is why I do this! It always gives me some great recommendations for what to listen to that would be off my radar otherwise. So, don't be shy!

Last year, Bob Kimmel, Chico Huff, Mike Dotterer, Brian Groder, Jack Loughhead, and Don Knabb responded and shared their own opinions of what was hot for them, and I got alerted to some really good music from them. Please respond, I don't like streaming (it's basically the biz's latest way to rip off the musicians) and don't listen to the nonsense of corporate radio, so this is really the only way I find out about the Good Stuff you stumble upon.

Tony Levin – Bringing It Down to the Bass

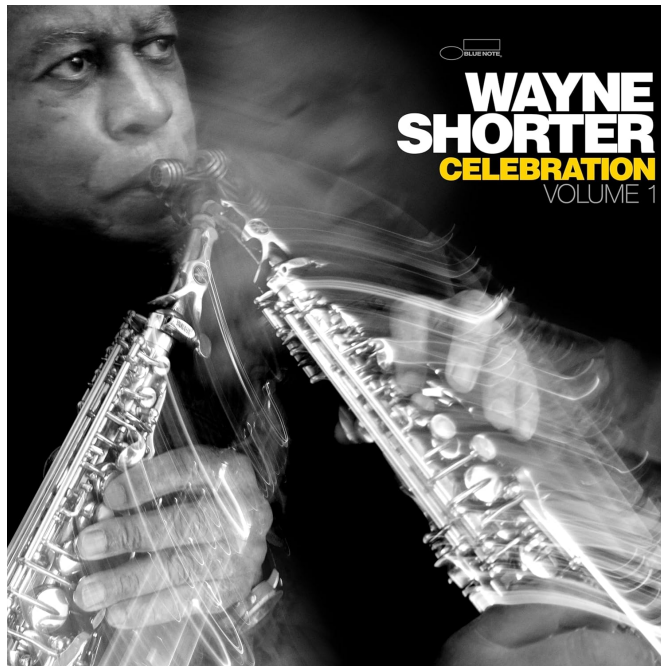


Okay, I'll admit it right up front: Tony Levin is the living musician I admire the most. Period. I caught him at the Main Point in Bryn Mawr, PA on June 1st, 1973 along with Steve Gadd, Gerry Niewood, and Chuck Mangione, and was struck by his bass playing then. I saw him next on the "Beat" tour with King Crimson in 1982 after hearing his Stick playing with Peter Gabriel; "I Don't Remember" completely knocked me out. And after seeing him with Crimson, six months later I was knocking on Emmett Chapman's front door in L.A., buying my first Stick.

Since then, I've seen him many times, 7 times in all with Crimson, twice with Peter Gabriel, with the Stick Men, California Guitar Trio, Phil Kaegy, and more (including the absolutely incredible BEAT tour this year with Adrian Belew, Steve Vai, and Danny Carey). I had him autograph my Chapman Stick at the Sellersville Theater and have spoken to him several times over the years. And I am filled with admiration for the choices he's made, the music he's been a part of, and his total integrity as a touring musician. But I wasn't prepared for this album he released this year.

First of all, the cleverness of the writing and the execution of his vocals shows a side of him I never really credited him for. And his bass and Stick work is, of course, exemplary. Check this album out, even if you think you know what to expect I can guarantee you'll be surprised.

Wayne Shorter – Celebration, Vol. 1



We lost Wayne Shorter in March, 2023. He spent the last period of his life going through old recordings and picking out the best, commenting on them as he went. This recording just came out and features his last quartet with Brian Blade, John Patitucci, and Danilo Perez in a concert from October of 2014. If you want to hear abstract jazz exploration made accessible and joyful, this is it. This quartet worked right on the edge, exploring Wayne's incredible song catalog and reinterpreting it in ways I can't dream of. The "Vol. 1" in the title gives me hope that we may be finding more treasures in the future.

This isn't an album for casual listening, it's an album that requires contemplation and attention. But the rewards are enormous, and makes me miss Shorter all the more.

Maria Schneider Orchestra – Data Lords



The main reason I make these yearly Top 10 lists is a selfish one: it gives my friends a chance to respond with their choices, and I get alerted to music that would be off my radar otherwise. My friend Jack Loughhead has turned me on to some really great stuff, and this is one of his picks from last year.

This album was a Pulitzer Prize finalist, and definitely deserves it. Great playing, great compositions, and absolutely stunning arrangements that redefine the possibilities of big band playing for me. Thanks, Jack!

Maria Schneider has been carrying on the Big Band tradition of Gil Evans, and I'm always amazed anyone can pull off running a big band in these artistic financially inhospitable times. She has also been an advocate for standing up to

streaming, piracy, digital and musicians' rights, which is the underlying theme of this album. More power to this artist!

Oz Noy with Dennis Chambers and Jimmy Haslip – Triple Play



And here's a second choice of Jack Loughhead's from last year. He was right, this is badass. Oz Noy, guitarist, is joined by Jimmy Haslip and Dennis Chambers on drums and it's even better than I thought it might be. This is a live recording, no tricks, and it lives up to my memories of catching Oz Noy at the Sellersville Theater some years back. Check him out!

Quincy Jones – Q's Jook Joint



Sometimes these Top 10 choices inevitably reflect on those who we lost in a given year, and this is the case here. I find I've been listening to a lot of Quincy Jones since he passed this year, revisited some albums and discovering other ones. He may have found his greatest success in setting the stage for Michael Jackson, but people who think of him just in those terms are missing out on a lot of great music. This album popped out as a new find for me, and shows Quincy keeping up with the times and being his funky-ass self.

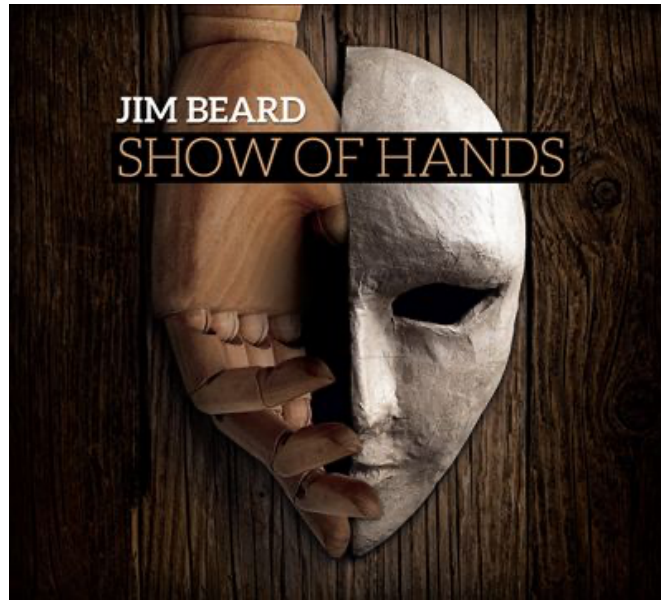
Elvis Costello & the Metropole Orkest – My Flame Burns Blue



How did I miss this album? The Metropole Orkest came to my attention first on a Jim Beard disc with human flotsam Vince Mendoza conducting, and I was prejudiced against it because of that association. Then I heard them with a Snarky Puppy spinoff called Bokanté, and loved that album. Now here comes an Elvis Costello project with them that redefines his song catalog, gives him a chance for some truly awesome vocals, and brings a smile to my face every time one of the numbers pops up in my eternal shuffle mode.

The Metropole Orkest is apparently a project based in the Netherlands and is about the hippest classical group I've heard outside of the Ensemble Modern and Kronos Quartet. It's a large orchestra and has some great arrangements, in this case serving a great collection of songs and a great performance by one of my favorite singer/ songwriters. They mix in jazz, pop, classical, and world music and are unique to my experience. I love seeing Classical musicians loosening up!

Jim Beard – Show of Hands



Like the aforementioned Wayne Shorter and Quincy Jones, we lost the NYC-based keyboardist Jim Beard recently. I always found his albums quirky, refreshing, and coming from a different angle. He worked with John McLaughlin, Mike Stern, Bob Berg, Randy Brecker, John Scofield, and Wayne Shorter and toured with Steely Dan while maintaining a solo career for decades.

This album is featuring him as a solo artist, and I have to really admire what he's done here as a pianist. In addition to a large selection of his originals, he plays My One and Only Love, Woody 'n You, Honeysuckle Rose, and others, and succeeds in bringing something new to each.

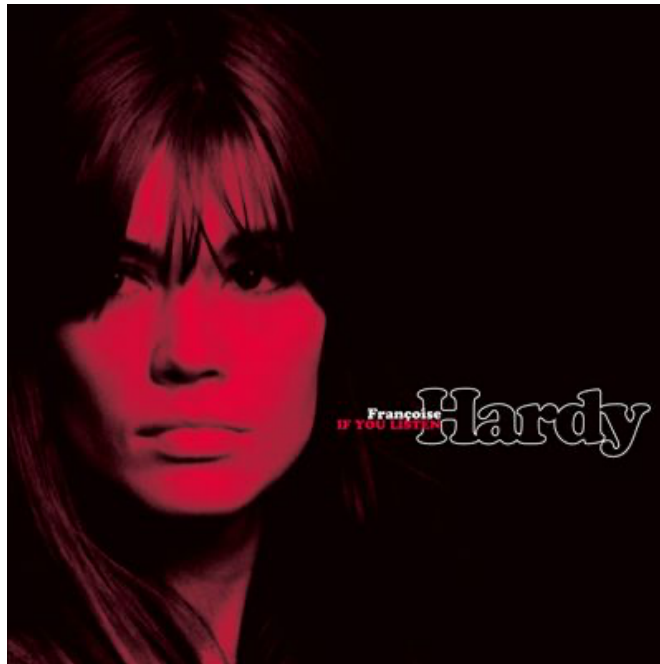
This guy was a little too young to have slipped away, and I'll be rechecking his discography out over the next year to see what I may have missed.

Kamasi Washington – Fearless Movement



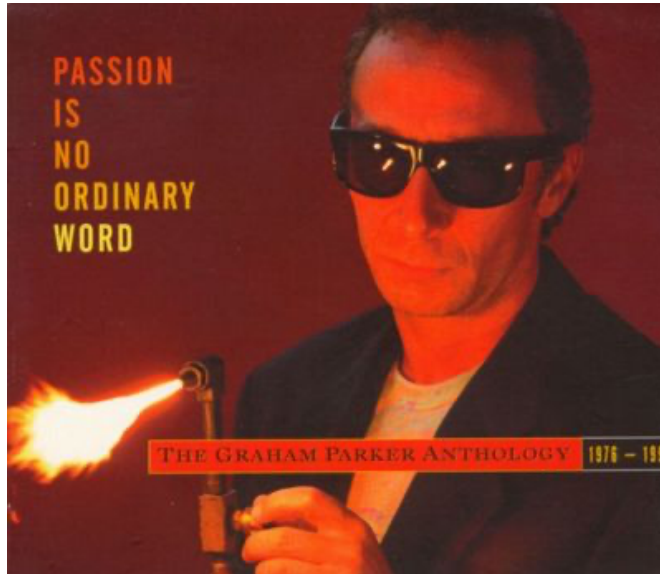
His album “Harmony of Difference” made my Top 10 list last year, coming out of nowhere to impress me with a new concept in jazz composition. This one came out this year and doesn’t disappoint. Kamasi Washington is in his early 40’s and seems to be spearheading a new interest in jazz in some circles. Anything that lets us move on from the ultraconservative Wynton years works for me, so I’ll be tracking this man’s progress and enjoying every step along the way, apparently.

Françoise Hardy – If You Listen



Another artist who we recently lost. I have to admit, I was totally unaware of her although she's had a huge career in France for decades. When I read the death notices, I checked out a few of her albums and found that I really like them. This is right-brain music for me, I don't analyze it or process it, I just let it ride, and Françoise Hardy really is a songstress that works for me. A beautiful voice and tasteful, laid back pieces... what's not to like?

Graham Parker – Passion Is No Ordinary Word: The Graham Parker Anthology 1976-1991



Yeah, I've enjoyed this guy since he first popped up in the late '70's. His first half-dozen albums with The Rumour were all great. He could write intense tunes that benefited from the powerful band he put together, and "Don't Ask Me Questions" still remains one of my all-time favorites. This is a 2-disc career retrospective that really captures his best moments, even through albums I missed over the years.

Back in 2022 I caught him at the Sellersville Theater and enjoyed him as a solo act, although I really, really missed these tunes played with a proper band. But I could see how Mr. Parker held his own over the years with his commanding presence.

This space reserved for YOUR picks...

Seriously, this only works if you are motivated and share your own thoughts about what music rocked you this year. I miss having friends recommend good music, and I deeply resent the corporate

skills making suggested playlists “just for me” filled with whatever swill and copycat crap they want to make a buck from.

Send me your thoughts and I’ll add them right here!!

Jack Loughhead

Well, it's still January (barely!), and the guy down the street still has his Christmas lights up, so I guess this isn't too late. Here's my top ten listens for 2024.

1. Omar Sosa - Omar Sosa's 88 Well-Tuned Drums. This one really carries me away. It's actually the soundtrack for a documentary by Soren Sorensen (which I really need to see) about Sosa's life and music. As I understand it, the music is a retrospective of his career, and it definitely cuts a wide swath. Some incredible musicians with him on it. Well worth checking out.
2. Steven Wilson - The Harmony Codex. Yea, every year he's on my list and this one was actually on my list from last year, but I probably listen to his music more than that of any other artist. Something about it just grabs me in a big way. "Rock Bottom" is a particular favorite, featuring the incredible voice of Ninet Tayeb. I also listened to his autobiography this year, and he has indeed led an interesting life. I never knew that Porcupine Tree began as a joke that more or less went viral. He has a new album coming out in a few weeks, and I'm ready!
3. Julian Lage - Speak to Me. Saw him at the Ardmore Music Hall last year, and he is damned impressive. A prodigy (discovered by Gary Burton at 12 years old), he describes himself as a "music nerd", and it fits when you watch him play. But man, is he ever a master of both the acoustic and electric guitar. His songwriting appeals to me as well. The album is all over the place in terms of genres, but it hangs together.

4. Moby - Always Centered at Night. I have always been a Moby fan, and this one was on my playlist a good bit for '24. It features a lot of vocalists with different styles. Maybe nothing very groundbreaking, but one of my faves as background music that set a mood.

5. Jenny Scheinman - All Species Parade. I have followed her for some years due to her collaborations with Bill Frisell, but I liked this album a lot. Frisell is on it, along with some other luminaries like Julian Lage and Nels Cline. She says it's "nature worship music", and I think that's accurate - a lot of chordal textures that evoke "the complex understory of a forest." Looking forward to seeing her in March at the Savannah Music Festival.

6. Mike Stern - Echoes and Other Songs. Always sounds like Mike, but it sure sounds good! It's amazing how he has bounced back from what could have been a career ending injury. This work features an amazing lineup. Part of it is with Chris Potter, Christian McBride, Antonio Sanchez, and Arto Tuncboyacian. Then it's Richard Bona, Dennis Chambers, and Bob Franceschini. Wow!

7. John Beasley - Returning to Forever. I'm not usually much into tribute bands, but here I have to make an exception. I loved the music when it originally came out, but Beasley really has brought it back for me in a big way. Incorporating the Frankfurt Radio Big Band was a stroke of genius, and boy do they kick it! Some amazing musicians and fantastic arrangements, IMHO.

8. Tears for Fears - Songs for a Nervous Planet. This is mainly a live recording of a 2023 concert, but there are some a few new studio tunes as well. The latter haven't really impressed me (at least yet), but I really enjoyed the live show by a duo that has always done it for me.

9. The Messathetics and James Brandon Lewis - Some crazy punk meets jazz grooves. Saxophonist Lewis teams up with the trio (which features the former rhythm section from Fugazi) for some great stuff. Wonderful guitar work by Anthony Pirog.

10. Miles Davis - '54: The Prestige Recordings. I have been missing playing jazz, and listening to this filled that void a bit. A ton of the greatest music and musicians ever, remastered for the 70th (?!) anniversary of the sessions. Need I say more . . .

Don Knabb

Here goes, from early in the year to the end of 2024 -

1. Waves of Now by Steve Roach and Robert Rich - a live recording of a reunion of space music legends Steve Roach and Robert Rich with solo work and playing together.
2. Simple Music for Difficult People Vol. 4 by Fabio Mittino - Mittino is an amazing guitar player, I think he sat in with the California Guitar Trio. We saw him live in Kennett Square with Bert Lams.
3. You and I and Every Sky, Ommia - both by Larkenlyre which is mostly Matthew Labarge. I would call it ambient chamber music.
4. When the Light Gets in - by Runa. One of my favs of the year, a wonderful modern Celtic album.
5. Coming Home by Limina - I don't know if it is modern classical or ambient chamber music, but this is one of my favorites of the year. It is playing as I write this.
6. As we Speak - Bela Fleck, Edgar Meyer, Zakir Hussain - we saw this played live at Longwood Gardens and loved the show.
7. Seven Conversations - Jeff Oster, Vin Downes, Tom Eaton - more ambient chamber music

8. Watercolor Sky - Michael Whalen, Mark Isham, Michael Manring, Nancy Rumble, Will Ackerman, Charlie Bisharat - a bit of a reunion album by some Windham Hill artists.
9. Winterlude - David Arkenstone - an wonderful collection of tunes for cold weather, ambient chamber music.
10. Winter Tidings: An Appalachian Christmas - Al Petteway and Amy White - not a new album but newly discovered by me, an excellent holiday album.

That's it for 2024!
