

Album Reviews

I've written over 150 album reviews as a volunteer for CHIRPRadio.org. Here are some examples, in alphabetical order:

Caetano Veloso

Caetano Veloso (A Little More Blue)

Polygram / 1971

Brazilian Caetano Veloso's third self-titled album was recorded in England while in exile after being branded 'subversive' by the Brazilian government. Under colorful plumes of psychedelic folk, these songs are cryptic stories of an outsider and traveller, recalling both the wonder of new lands and the oppressiveness of the old. The whole album is recommended, but gems include the autobiographical "A Little More Blue" with its Brazilian jazz acoustic guitar, the airy flute and warm chorus of "London, London" and the somber Baroque folk of "In the Hot Sun of a Christmas Day" tells the story of tragedy told with jazzy baroque undertones of "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen."

The Clash

London Calling

Epic / 1979

London Calling, considered one of the greatest rock & roll albums ever recorded, is far from a straightforward: punk, reggae, ska, R&B and rockabilly all have tickets to this show of force that's both pop and revolutionary. The title track opens with a blistering rallying cry of ska guitar and apocalypse. The post-disco "Clampdown" is a template for the next decade, a perfect mix of gloss and message. "The Guns of Brixton" is reggae-punk in that order, with rocksteady riffs and rock drums creating an intense portrait of defiance. "Train in Vain" is a harmonica puffing, Top 40 gem that stands at the crossroads of punk and rock n' roll.

The Darcys **Warring**

Arts & Crafts / 2013

The haunting opening track "Close To Me" takes forever to materialize from silence, but it's worth it: it's the musical equivalent of summer blockbuster: dramatic action propelling a hero's somber transition from desolation to hope. Track after track, the energy is ever-strong, shape shifting from urgent to acclaiming to sunken. In "Hunting," Jason Couse's angelic voice stalks through a dark forest of synth and drums. "The River" draws a quiet storm of rat-a-tats and guitar raindrops. The epic finale of "Lost Dogfights" brings back the fiery Phoenix of synth and guitars breaking into empty hall piano and full-mood bass held together by a soprano's darkly-veiled song.

David Daniell & Douglas McCombs **Sycamore**

Thrill Jockey / 2009

Chicago's own David Daniell (San Agustin, Rhys Chatham) and Douglas McCombs (Tortoise, Eleventh Dream Day, Pullman) paint a night sky full of twinkling soundscapes, black holes and slow-turning musical asteroids of textured improvisation and sonic passages. These four tracks were culled from seven hours of source recordings to produce four moody and dense instrumental works, each building moods into a night sky light show.

Electric Light Orchestra **Face The Music**

Jet / 1975

English progressive rockers ELO continue exploring the age old question, "What if Beatles had stayed together and hired an orchestra?" The answer is possibly the best intro to any album, "Fire on High" which introduces every conceivable instrument, painstakingly building up for five epic minutes as the perfect start to any show. "Evil Woman" is the album's eternal hit, but lesser tracks still pack a punch—"Nightrider" whips up a mid-seventies tornado of strings and

piano, while "Strange Magic" drops you into a sighing toadstool of trippy phaser violins that underscores the dramatic, almost Broadway delivery that makes ELO so easy to tune into, drop out and enjoy.

John Berberian and the Rock East Ensemble **Middle Eastern Rock**

Rev-Ola / 1969

Before there as "World Music", there was New York City. John Berberian channeled his community's traditional Armenian music into a melting pot with American folk, rock and jazz using his mastery of the oud, a African/Middle Eastern pear-shaped stringed instrument. Every song is an interesting mix of music styles, bound by late-sixties sensibilities: The psychedelic freakout of "The Oud and The Fuzz," the building, swirling jazz of "Tranquility," the surf rocking "Iron Maiden," and the lively jam, "The Magic Ground."

Mahmoud Ahmed **Éthiopiennes, Vol. 19: Alemye**

Buda Musique / 2004

Ethiopian vocalist Mahmoud Ahmed recorded this album as "Alèmyé" in 1974 during a turbulent period in the country that saw a death of an emperor and the suspension of musical nightlife under the new military government. Underscoring the mood are songs like "Tezeta" a 12 minute long dirge, damp with ice cold sax and hauntingly soulful vocals. "Belaya Belaya" has a hard driving beat (think Budos Band) with shrill vocals soaring over the thundering drums. "Etugela" starts like a bizarro twist on the Munsters Theme: a blended jam of horns, guitar and complex percussion-by-committee.

Marvin Gaye **Trouble Man**

Tamla / 1972

After recording his classic "What's Going On," Gaye acted in two movies before composing and producing this mostly instrumental "blaxploitation" soundtrack, Trouble Man. Though the film was created

solely as a vehicle for the soundtrack, the soundtrack itself takes a life of its own—a mix funk, soul, orchestral, and synths into a moody, dark atmosphere. Songs like “T Plays it Cool” plays like a breakbeat, mixing horns, soft and hard synths into the perfect Library Music. The swinging “Trouble Man” features Gaye on vocals with swells of horns, drum, guitar and piano. “Don’t mess with Mister ‘T’” pairs prickly synths with a riding rhythm that makes you want to walk the streets, looking for trouble.

Public Nuisance

Gotta Survive

Frantic / 2002

In the late 60’s, a Sacramento, California, psychedelic band adopted an aggressive power pop/proto-punk sound, recorded twice, wasn’t published, and disappeared. This two-disc is of those two recordings and are a true masterpiece thunderclap of British rock, heavy psych, and power pop. The producer of the first disc session wanted a British sound so bad, you can hear the fake British accent on the vocals. No matter how long these recordings had been lost, the album is an amazing experience from a band that deserved to survive.

The Temptations

Gettin’ Ready

Gordy / 1966

If The Temptations were the Soul equivalent of the Beatles, then Gettin’ Ready is the Detroit vocal group’s Rubber Soul. The album marks a passing of the band’s producing torch from Smokey Robinson to Norman Whitfield, who penned the hand clapping, horn-soaring, and gospel piano of “Ain’t Too Proud to Beg” to win Berry Gordie’s challenge of beating the Robinson-produced, orchestral-backed stomp of “Get Ready” in the Billboard charts. Both tracks appear on the album, whose best songs appear on the first half of the record, alongside Robinson’s thunder drums and angelic strings of “Little Miss Sweetness.”

Twinkranes

Spektrumtheatresnakes

Twisted Nerve / 2009

Dubliners Twinkranes (pronounced "Twin Cranes") sound like a psychedelic trance outfit trapped in time with psychedelic Krautrock gear. The drums are real. The pace is electronic, but their meditations are human-flawed and spiritual. If you like electronica, the instrumental "The Charmer," is the Airwolf theme on a spirit quest. "Witch Hunt" adds meditative vocals to a high velocity, synth-driven frenzy. If you love both electronica and psyche, open the pod bay doors with "Put Up a Light," that proves loud can also be very, very personal.

Various Artists

Good God! A Gospel Funk Hymnal

Numero Group / 2006

If gospel is a key ingredient in soul music, then this compilation explores that evolution full circle. Full of soul, R&B, funk, these gospel tracks are compelled by the passion at the heart of everything great about those other genres. "Jesus Rhapsody Part I" is Curtis Mayfield meets Jesus Christ Superstar, while "Oh Yes My Lord" is a choir chatting over what has to be the hardest, best drum beat this side of the pearly gates. Speaking of "Superstar," the cover of "Heaven On Their Minds" is slow and seriously soulful, it sounds like a personal account. "Those Were The Days" is a bizarre account of the devil missing the days when hell was full of sinners, signed with a funky quill dipped in hilarity.