

Jones

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(*West Beirut*) is set in a dilapidated Paris suburb, where a quiet, gifted Moroccan teenager (Mohammed Khouas) is drawn into a secret romance with a white neighbor (Vahina Giocante). Her exquisite beauty and sexual boldness make her a walking powder keg in the poor, largely Arab community, and a conflict involving the hero's leering buddies leads both lovers to the brink of tragedy—and to genuine love.

4. Grizzly Man. German master Werner Herzog finds a uniquely American focus for his career-long fascination with man and nature: Timothy Treadwell, a self-invented grizzly-bear expert who became a media personality before a grizzly devoured him in Alaska in 2003. Working with more than 100 hours of video footage Treadwell left behind, Herzog fashions an unnerving portrait of a troubled man whose congress with the grizzlies was both religion and death wish.

5. Me and You and Everyone We Know. Miranda July made an auspicious feature debut with this canny combination of reas-

suring formula and startling subject matter. The main story is a sweet screwball romance between a lonely performance artist (July) and a hapless shoe salesman (John Hawkes), but woven into this conventional fare are subplots that boldly explore the narrowing sexual divide between children and adults. July handles this taboo material with a disarming frankness and simplicity, absorbing it into her main concern—the joy of discovery, be it sexual, romantic, or creative.

6. Palindromes. Todd Solondz dives headfirst into the abortion controversy with this heartbreaking moral comedy about a young girl who is forced to have an abortion, runs away from home, and falls in with a born-again family of deformed children. Dividing the main character among eight actors, each chosen for her innocence, was commercial suicide, but it was also typical of a filmmaker who acts more from pure feeling than common sense.

7. My Summer of Love. A homely orphan in rural West Yorkshire (Nathalie Press) is drawn into a steamy affair with a posh bird

visiting from the city (Emily Blunt), much to the displeasure of the country girl's older brother (Paddy Considine), who's returned from prison a sanctimonious evangelical Christian. This small-scale British drama by Pawel Pawlikowski was promoted for its lesbian romance, but despite all the idyllic afternoons on rolling hills, it's a story of brutality and betrayal.

8. A History of Violence. In David Cronenberg's harrowing crime drama, some people are born to kill, others are born to be killed, and at the end a small-town family gathers at the dinner table, united and stained by this awful knowledge. This was adapted from a hard-boiled graphic novel, and Cronenberg, despite his own history of Grand Guignol, honors the form with a remarkably spare narrative.

9. The Best of Youth. This six-hour family saga by Marco Tullio Giordana traces a middle-class Italian clan from 1966 through the end of the century, as two brothers are united by their affection for a mentally ill young woman and then divided by poli-

tics. The film is well-paced and has an impressive historical sweep, though Giordana generalizes that broad perspective through intimate observation of the many characters' everyday lives. The film was produced as a TV miniseries but rejected by the Italian state network and ultimately released in theaters, where it screened in two three-hour segments; a DVD release is scheduled for February 7.

10. The Devil's Rejects. Who'd have thought that Rob Zombie, the freaky-looking dude who once fronted the metal band White Zombie, would conjure up the most frightening movie since *The Blair Witch Project*? Moving like a bat out of hell, this tale of a murderous family on the run from a vengeful sheriff taps into the same fear of backwoods crazies that's powered the genre since *Two Thousand Maniacs!* and the original *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*.

Best noirs: *The Ice Harvest*, *A Tout de Suite*.

Best comedies: *Wedding Crashers*, *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, *Sarah Silverman: Jesus Is Magic*.

Best animated: *Howl's Moving Castle*, *Corpse Bride*, *Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit*.

Best general-interest docs: *March of the Penguins*, *Murderball*, *Tell Them Who You Are*, *Up for Grabs*.

Best music docs: *Fallen Angel: Gram Parsons*, *Moog*, *The Nomi Song*, *Rock School*, *We Jam Econo: The Story of the Minutemen*.

Best political docs: *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room*, *The Future of Food*, *The Protocols of Zion*, *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price*.

Best movies I couldn't jam into any of the above categories: *The Ballad of Jack and Rose*, *The Beautiful Country*, *Breakfast on Pluto*, *Brokeback Mountain*, *Capote*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Crash*, *The Constant Gardener*, *Good Night, and Good Luck*, *Kontroll*, *Lager Cake*, *Millions*, *Munich*, *Nine Lives*, *Purple Butterfly*, *Separate Lies*, *The Squid and the Whale*, *Thumbsucker*, *Tony Takitani*, *Walk the Line*, *Yes*. **A**

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The Best Music of 2005

Our Section 3 regulars have made their lists. Even though some of them don't believe in lists, man.

Liz Armstrong

I was positively, wholeheartedly obsessed with everything on this list at some point in the year, either for months or just for a few hours. I've put the entries in alphabetical order, because arranging them according to the amount of time I fixated on them would be silly.

AIDS WOLF
"We Multiply," "Opposing Walls," "Fuck You McLean," "Panty Mind Extended" | MP3s on MySpace

A tangled orgy of wall-to-wall shrieking in a paradise full of dirty naked people.



COCOROSIE

Noah's Ark | Touch and Go
Stripped bare but still lush, heart-wrenching but kind of creepy—like the songs a Jean Genet novel would sing.

DELIA GONZALEZ & GAVIN RUSSOM
The Days of Mars | DFA/Astralwerks

Instrumental electronic art-gallery music that's like the deeply revelatory moment in the denouement of some trippy, gritty, long-lost 70s film set in a wintry New York, stretched out to last a whole hour.

HARRY MERRY

Well . . . Here's Another Nice Mess You've Got Me Into! | Tocado

Keyboard chaos and arrhythmic percussion, simultaneously giddy and desperate—the music a hamster might hear in its head as it tries to navigate the most elaborate Habitrail ever.

INDIAN JEWELRY

Invasive Exotics | Girlgang
Shamanic badasses wield shadowy guitars and sinister



Clockwise from left: Bettye LaVette, Spoon, Crooked Fingers, M.I.A.

analog synths to summon a vision of crows flying into a dark eternity.

SAM FLAX KEENER
"Backwards Fire" | MP3 at mindmilk.com

A transmission from Marc Bolan's ghost channeled by a blond, feather-haired New Age twink.



M.I.A.

Arular | XL/Interscope
Dangerous dance music that's equal parts jump-rope taunt,

hood grit, antifashion fashion, and *National Geographic*.

NEON BLONDE
Chandeliers in the Savannah | Dim Mak

Two of the Blood Brothers set jazzy, ass-ripping screeching to rollicking cabaret piano, spiny guitar, and hectic beats.

OCS

3 & 4: Songs About Death and Dying Vol. 3 and Get Stoved | Narnack

Like a lazy summer evening on the porch, tipping back warm whiskey with friends while some weird dusty troubadour guy no one really knows sings and plays guitar.

SSION

"World's Worth" | Sound Virus
Sleazy Robitussin party jams fist-fucking outrageous Vivienne Westwood punk.

Kabir Hamid



1. EDAN

Beauty and the Beat | Lewis

Edan spins a dense, claustrophobic matrix of 60s psychedelic rock samples around his deeply weird lyrics, which he delivers in an authoritative, scissor-tongued style. The hip-hop equivalent of a Salvador Dali painting.

2. THE GAME

The Documentary | Aftermath
Single-handedly rehabilitates

west-coast gangsta rap. The Game is so hardcore I bet all the muscles he uses to smile have atrophied right off his face.

3. BLACKALICIOUS

The Craft | Anti-
Not even their best, but still head and shoulders above almost all the other hip-hop this year—Gift of Gab's inexhaustible flow defies belief, and Chief Xcel packs ideas into his tracks like a guy who knows he won't run out.

4. COMMON

Be | GOOD/Geffen
Chicago's native son resurrects himself after the flop that was *Electric Circus*: his love songs to the ladies are great, and his love songs to the street corner are even better.

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Best Music



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5. CAGE

Hell's Winter | Definitive Jux

One of indie hip-hop's most notorious nutcases grows up and decides to share: openly autobiographical stories from his incredibly messed-up life go toe-to-toe with some apocalyptic Def Jux beats.

6. KANYE WEST

Late Registration | Roc-a-Fella

Whether Kanye's lyrics are charming or just cutesy is open to debate, but there's no arguing with the richness and maturity of his almost orchestral beats.

7. DANGERDOOM

The Mouse and the Mask | Epitaph

Doom. Danger Mouse. The Cartoon Network. Together they cut an irreverent fart in the general direction of all that's self-serious in hip-hop.

8. ASAMOV

And Now... | 6 Hole

The debut from this four-man Florida posse is the album Little Brother wish they'd made this year. Laid-back, infectious grooves with fun, feel-good rhymes.

9. ONE.BE.LO

S.O.N.O.G.R.A.M. | Fat Beats

Former Binary Star member rhymes his ass off over a warm, jazzy soundscape.

10. ATMOSPHERE

You Can't Imagine How Much Fun We're Having | Rhymesayers

Solid all around, and the closer, "Little Man"—where Slug reads letters he's written to his son, his father, and himself—is one of the most self-aware hip-hop tracks I've heard in a long time.

Keith Harris



1. ART BRUT

Bang Bang Rock & Roll | Fierce Panda

Wire-weaned English lads use faux-Fall two-and-a-half-chord barrages to set up Eddie Argos's punch lines about forming a band, failing in the sack, and freaking out in art museums.

2. GOGOL BORDELLO

Gypsy Punks: Underdog World Strike | Side One Dummy

Lyric-spitting madman Eugene Hutz and his merry band throw a spastic Gypsy dance party for marginalized mongrels everywhere.

3. M.I.A.

Arular | XL/Interscope

This displaced Sri Lankan art student has more than earned every overthought review with her politically ambiguous agit-pop—and her dancehall-tinged Brit-hop beats are so good they render all that verbiage irrelevant.

4. THE HOLD STEADY

Separation Sunday | Frenchkiss

These Brooklyn boys now confidently inhabit the bar-band idiom they once merely imitated, which helps Craig Finn's caustic lyrics jell—you don't have to be a four-eyed lapsed Catholic from the upper midwest to appreciate his fractured urban legends.



5. KANYE WEST

Late Registration | Roc-a-Fella

Kanye demands the best in collaborators, and when that won't work he samples them—top-tier pop producer Jon Brion adds his grandiose arrangements, and the voices of Ray Charles and Otis Redding root the whole project in the soul tradition.

6. SLEATER-KINNEY

The Woods | Sub Pop

All the Led Zep comparisons obscured another obvious reference point—this is what Heart could've been if they'd interrogated the power of boy rock as expertly as they harnessed it.

7. THIONE SECK

Orientation | Stern's Africa

Youssou N'Dour's 2004 release *Egypt* untangled the Arabic and Middle Eastern roots of West Africa's musical culture, and this disc from Dakar's perpetual number two attraction undertakes something similar—though it's sweeter and earthier, and reaches even further east to spice the music with Bollywood fillips.

8. MOUNTAIN GOATS

The Sunset Tree | 4AD

A longtime enemy of the autobiographical lyric, John Darnielle crafts these acerbic songs about his own adolescence with the same artistic distance that makes his third-person narratives so powerful.

9. MINOTAUR SHOCK

Maritime | 4AD

David Edwards undercuts the whimsy in his intricate laptop pop with wistfulness, as if to ask, "Yes, you got the high score, but was it really worth it?"

10. FIONA APPLE

Extraordinary Machine | Epic

These scaled-back rerecordings trump the intriguing but fussy demos leaked online, proving that a major-label intrusion into

the creative process can sometimes have a happy ending.

Jessica Hopper



1. SUFJAN STEVENS

Illinois | Asthmatic Kitty

Because Chicago is worth it!

2. SPOON

Gimme Fiction | Merge

Perfection in rock isn't interesting or compelling, except when it is. I can't help but surrender my breath to the sweet plodding of the piano and drums on this one.

3. MAKE BELIEVE

Shock of Being | Flameshovel

Tim Kinsella's been threatening to give us a real punk band since 1997—who knew his version would be this commie-situationist blitzkrieg combining the aesthetic of Pere Ubu with the attitude and ideals of Huggy Bear and Born Against.

4. LUNGFISH

Feral Hymns | Dischord

The only band worth owning 11 albums by. All Day I Dream About Dan Higgs's Beard.

5. MARY J. BLIGE

The Breakthrough | Geffen

I know it might sound sacrilegious given the exalted status of Blige's early records, but *The Breakthrough* is nuclear—it's her most consistent disc from song to song, the cameos are pure fire, and the production is fuck a brick. Mary's back.

6. JOHN DOE

Forever Hasn't Happened Yet | Yep Roc

It's such a relief when the new record from an aging punk hero doesn't make you wish he'd left well enough alone. There's still nobody who duets better with lady singers.

7. RIVER CITY TANLINES

River City Tanlines | Dirtnap

A bona fide icon with her own label, Alicja Trout is the Ian MacKaye of garage punk—and on top of that she solos like a fever. This is just a collection of singles, but it's sick, sick business.



8. ROD LEE

Vol. 5: The Official | Morpheus

Baltimore club is God's dance music: combining cold Detroit-

tech stasis, jackin' house, and the nasty boom of southern bounce, it meets all your needs in a single song. Asses are clapping in heaven.

9. PELICAN

The Fire in Our Throats Will Beckon the Thaw | Hydra Head

Lush instrumental metal that appeals equally to fans of Egg Hunt and Iron Maiden. Several songs here clock in at around 11 minutes, but they could all stand to be two or three days longer.



10. COMMON

Be | GOOD/Geffen

The musical counterpart to Bell Hooks's *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*—self-examination and a love ethic as an antidote to mainstream hip-hop's apocalyptic patriarchy.

Monica Kendrick

The notion of ranking my favorite music is incomprehensible to me. First I think, "Is this album of rootsy hillbilly blues better than this album of black-hole drone?" And then I think, "What the hell kind of question is that?" In alphabetical order, then:



CROOKED FINGERS

Dignity and Shame | Merge

This dark, quirky, and very comely singer-songwriter record had me at hello—or at the very least at the asking-for-directions part.

DALEK

Absence | Ipecac

Ever wondered how weird hip-hop could get if it were set free of the expectation that normal humans should be able to dance to it? Dalek shows us one possibility, wrapping skittery beats in searing, droning goth-industrial guitar.

DEAD MEADOW

Feathers | Matador

These D.C. psychonauts have a swoopy, sludgy sound thick enough to pour on pancakes, with rhythms like slow-swaying seaweed and lyrics that might as well be Robert Plant cutups—but unlike many other bands flourishing under the "stoner rock" grow lights, they hardly hint at post-1975 metal. Nor do they taint their lumbering riffs with a sur-

plus of aggression: they sound heavy, hammered, and happy.

MARIANNE FAITHFULL

Before the Poison | Anti-

Possibly her best since *Broken English* back in 1979. She's been working that singular voice—the jaded older woman with her wicked wisdom—since she was what, 19? And it sounds even better now that she's aged into it.

HIGH ON FIRE

Blessed Black Wings | Relapse

I didn't think dense, smart, unhyphenated metal needed anyone to defend its honor, but I'm still happy to watch these guys leave all the other would-be champions in the dust.



IRON & WINE

Woman King | Sub Pop

Every so often you hear a song so perfect it gives you goose bumps, like this EP's title track—eerie, hermetic folk that'd earn the disc a spot on my list even if the rest of it sucked.

MODEY LEMON

The Curious City | Birdman

This trippy, tribal, mannerist neogage, undoubtedly the product of ill-advised whackjob ambition, succeeds in spite of sounding like it's constantly falling apart—just like about 87 percent of my favorite rock records ever.

SUNN O)))

The Grimmrobe Demos | Southern Lord

Like being in the womb, only better. And louder. (No offense, mom.)

TRAVELING BELL

Scatter Ways | Secret Eye

On her drony, elegant solo debut, Kathleen Baird of Spires That in the Sunset Rise sounds steely and fierce—like a dryad in a spiked tree waiting for a lumberjack to make her day. Think Nico's *Desertshore* without the desperation.

WILLIAM ELLIOTT WHITMORE

Ashes to Dust | Southern

There are a lot of whippersnappers on Fat Possum who wish they were this guy—or if they don't, they should.

Peter Margasak

1. BETTYE LAVETTE

I've Got My Own Hell to Raise | Anti-

Would've been the comeback of the year if LaVette had ever gone away—perfect production, classic soul arrangements, and material by the likes of Aimee Mann, Fiona Apple, and Dolly Parton that sounds shockingly great in her hands.

2. AMADOU & MARIAM

Dimanche a Bamako | Nonesuch
Wunderkind producer Manu Chao keeps the swirling arrangements and hypnotizing beats small, letting the outside personalities of this blind Malian couple shine through.

3. DAVE DOUGLAS

Keystone | Greenleaf
The trumpeter crafts his best electroacoustic jams yet—as sound tracks for some of Fatty Arbuckle's forgotten silent films.

**4. DEERHOOF**

The Runners Four | Kill Rock Stars/5RC

Deerhoof fuses twee pop and noise rock organically, with a thousand delicate connections—and though this album is the band's most immediate and streamlined, that carefully balanced yin and yang hasn't lost a bit of its bushy-tailed energy.

5. SEU JORGE

Cru | Wrasse
The David Bowie songs he sang on-screen in *The Life Aquatic* made him a celebrity, but these strikingly original, stripped-down sambas will make him a star.

6. M.I.A.

Arular | XL/Interscope
Maya Arulpragasam's charisma transforms this composite of familiar forms—hip-hop, electro, bhangra, grime, favela funk—into something fresh and irresistible.

7. CAMILLE

Le Fil | Virgin
This French chanteuse, better known as one of the singers from the Nouvelle Vague project, uses multi-tracked vocals—from melodies to mouth percussion—to create a sly pop masterpiece that flirts with chanson, funk, and doo-wop.

8. ATOMIC

The Bikini Tapes | Jazzland
Five of Scandinavia's finest improvisers, captured here on a



Clockwise from top: Sleater-Kinney, Sufjan Stevens, Common, Edan

three-disc live set, bring the intensity and adventurousness of free jazz to carefully composed postpop tunes—even the searing solos are controlled and concise.

9. DOMENICO GUACCERO

Da Cantare | Die Schachtel
This Italian composer wrote these mind-blowing vocal works between 1951 and 1983. Some of the material sounds like insane-asylum opera; elsewhere Guaccero abandons all pretensions to genre, layering weird, blocky percussion atop harmonically berserk choral singing.



10. MARCUS SCHMICKLER & JOHN TILBURY
Variety | A-Musik
German laptop wizard

Marcus Schmickler alternately caresses and dices the minimalist figures of AMM pianist John Tilbury in this serene but startling improvised set.

Bob Mehr

There's a dead heat for the number one spot, so my 2005 list actually goes to eleven.

**1. RICHARD HAWLEY**

Coles Corner | Mute
Former Pulp guitarist captures the late-night magic of Frank Sinatra, Lee Hazlewood, and Scott Walker on this set of nostalgic pop numbers.

DAN PENN & SPOONER OLDHAM

Moments From This Theatre | Proper American
Two of music's greatest storytellers—and one of its greatest songwriting teams—run through their back catalogs in front of an awestruck Dublin audience. *Moments* has been available as an import since 1999, but was finally released in the U.S. this year.

**2. EDGAR "JONES" JONES**

Soothing Music for Stray Cats | Viper
Cheeky, brilliant pop from the former leader of the Liverpool band the Stairs, combining sounds from jazz, doo-wop, and classic R & B—and recorded almost entirely on a digital eight-track in his home.

3. EDDIE HINTON

Beautiful Dream: Sessions Vol. 3 | Zane
A collection of unreleased gems from the late lamented southern soul man and session ace.

4. CAST KING

Saw Mill Man | Locust
This recently rediscovered country songsmith and onetime Sun Records prospect released his astonishing debut album at the ripe young age of 79.

5. REIGNING SOUND

Home for Orphans | Sympathy for the Record Industry
Greg Cartwright and his garage-rock gang retrofit a clutch of their favorite tunes as glorious Memphis country-soul.

6. OUTRAGEOUS CHERRY

Our Love Will Change the World | Rainbow Quartz
On its seventh full-length, Matthew Smith's Detroit combo toughens up its jangly 60s fuzz pop with barbed lyrics and lean arrangements.
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Best Music

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7. PHANTOM BUFFALO Shishimumu | Rough Trade

The year's most offbeat and inventive psych-pop record was originally pressed in a tiny run in 2003, back when this group from Portland, Maine, was still calling itself the Ponys. Rough Trade gave it a widespread release last winter.

8. VARIOUS ARTISTS Cult Cargo: Belize City Boil Up | Numero Group

Anthology of reggae, R & B, and pop produced by artists from the tiny Central American nation in the 1960s and '70s.

9. BETTYE LAVETTE I've Got My Own Hell to Raise | Anti-

Producer Joe Henry helmed this excellent studio comeback from the old-school R & B diva.

10. SHARON JONES & THE DAP-KINGS Naturally | Daptone

On their second disc, Jones and her nimble band plunge into soul so deep you can't see the bottom.

Bill Meyer



1. VARIOUS ARTISTS American Primitive Volume 2 | Revenant

Before he died, John Fahey plucked these 50 gloriously eccentric obscurities from 78s made at the dawn of American recorded music.

2. JACK ROSE Kensington Blues | VHF

The best of the new generation of American Primitive guitarists infuses his lyrical rags, blues, and ragas with remorseless rock heaviness.

3. THE FALL The Complete Peel Sessions 1978-2004 | Castle

A six-CD set that's both a trove of rarities and an invaluable condensed history of this cantankerous English postpunk institution.

4. ROGER SMITH & LOUIS MOHOLO-MOHOLO The Butterfly and the Bee | Emanem

The title is a play on the phrase "insect music," long used to describe (or dismiss) English free improvisation, but it doubles as a metaphor for this duo's unusual sound: Smith's light, prickling acoustic guitar adroitly balances the much heavier tones of Moholo-Moholo's percussion.

5. HOOD Outside Closer | Domino

Lyrical, lo-fi indie rock, treated to hip-hop-inspired production and expressing a deeply English rural melancholy.

6. KONONO NO. 1 Congotronics | Crammed Discs

This Congolese dance band uses a sound system built from junk, auto parts, and repurposed megaphones to amplify thumb-piano grooves past the point of disintegration.

7. WIRE The Scottish Play: 2004 | Pink Flag

These legendary art punks prove that angry young men don't always mellow out with the passage of time.

8. LAU NAU Kuutarha | Locust

Rough-hewn, rustic Finnish acid folk.



9. THELONIOUS MONK QUARTET WITH JOHN COLTRANE At Carnegie Hall | Blue Note

This 1957 concert recording, lost for nearly half a century, turns out to be the most complete portrait of the brief but momentous association between these two jazz giants.

10. LOW The Great Destroyer | Sub Pop

The quietest band in rock turns it up—way up.

Brian Nemtusak



1. MEAT BEAT MANIFESTO At the Center | Thirsty Ear

Electro-dub-industrial trailblazer Jack Dangers charts a bold new course on this elegantly jazzed-up outing. A shotgun blast of antivenin for today's poisoned brains.

2. BROADCAST Tender Buttons | Warp

Addition by subtraction: James Cargill and Trish Keenan drop their supporting cast and produce their most delicate and gripping album to date. A wild, fluttering rush, like a clockwork wax-wing crashing through windowpane after windowpane.



Clockwise from top: Vijay Iyer, Iron & Wine, Hold Steady, Cocorosie, Low

3. PONYS Celebration Castle | In the Red

Jered Gummere and company soar to desperate new heights, alighting on the aerie where Sonic Youth and Joy Division are reimagined as one another.

4. EPOXIES Stop the Future | Fat Wreck Chords

Even better than the Rezillian fare on their breezy and blistering debut. Everyone from the Faint to Gwen Stefani could learn a thing or two from these guys about how this neo-new-wave thing oughta be done.

5. CARIBOU The Milk of Human Kindness | Domino

Dan Snaith, served with cease-and-desist from Handsome Dick regarding the Manitoba moniker, finally works off his debt to Boards of Canada with his first full-length as Caribou. Psychedelimitorik excursions to the subarctic reaches of the glitchtronica frontier.

6. LADYTRON Witching Hour | Rykodisc

This disturbed dance music could be the sound track for a lost Deodato film—it pulses with a palpable, delicious unease that's like a photo negative of 604's synthetic euphoria.

7. GORILLAZ Demon Days | Virgin

I like a few tracks on the first album better than anything here, but *Demon Days* is a more cohesive

effort—it's even impossible to hate the song from that iPod commercial.

8. FRANZ FERDINAND You Could Have It So Much Better | Domino

For my money, still the best (and most likable) of the post-Strokes boy bands. On their second disc, tongue-in-cheek art-rock dandy Alex Kapranos and crew simply dish up more of the same Roxy rock—but when it's this good, who cares?

9. AMON TOBIN Chaos Theory | Ninja Tune

The reigning lord of the other-worldly soundscape—whose basalt plateaus team with metallized insectoid legions, marching in the glare of exploding stars—does the sound track for a first-person shooter, Tom Clancy's *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*. Can you say "duh"?



10. KAISER CHIEFS Employment | Universal

I was initially pretty dismissive of this album, but it's grown on me like all hell. Even the less juiced-

up songs, which at first seemed like above-average filler, now feel as strong as the hits—I guess false modesty is as classically diffident a Britpop pose as any.

J. Niimi

1. M.I.A. Arular | XL/Interscope

Shriekin' Sri Lankan makes post-terrorism dance pop from Atari glossolalia, talking toy machine guns, and a whole lot of dance-hall hustle. With a militant Tamil separatist for a dad, she's so authentic she makes Ice Cube look like Jello Biafra.



2. LCD SOUNDSYSTEM LCD Soundsystem | DFA/Capitol

Affectless dance-floor electronica gets a snarky sense of humor. Irony will free your mind, and your ironic ass will follow.

3. ELECTRELANE Axes | Too Pure

Programmatic post-rock with heart and balls as well as the req-

uisite brains, wringing suspense and drama out of its sonic plot arc like a good film noir.

4. DANGERDOOM

The Mouse and the Mask | Epitaph
The Shel Silverstein of rap joins forces with the *Grey Album*'s furry rabble-rouser and realizes that the decline of narrative in hip-hop frees him up to talk about stuff besides nines, Escalades, and pussy.

5. THE FALL

The Complete Peel Sessions 1978-2004 | Castle

A fitting tribute to both the Fall and the late great John Peel. The world would be a noticeably crappier place had neither of them existed.



6. JENS LEKMAN

Oh You're So Silent Jens | Secretly Canadian

Sensitive Swede nominates himself to be the Scott Walker of indie pop. Warm, lonely music for bus stations at 3 AM—like "Midnight Train to Georgia," except from the point of view of the guy who's pawned all his hopes for a ticket to a simpler place and time.

7. COMET GAIN

City Fallen Leaves | Kill Rock Stars
These Brits lean hard on the canonical C86 sound, especially the way domesticated amp clatter catalyzes the ugly beauty of confessional cockney speak-song.

8. WILDERNESS

Wilderness | Jagjaguwar

Baltimore boys show up late to the early-aughts postpunk yard sale and get stuck with the part of PiL nobody wanted: the vocals. They make lemonade.

9. BASEMENT JAXX

The Singles | XL

Pixelated dance-pop outfit swallows club-culture flotsam—styles, singers, samples, timbres—like it's some sort of magical food that makes you hungrier the more you eat.



10. KELLEY POLAR

Love Songs of the Hanging Gardens | Environ

Croatian violin prodigy gets expelled from Juilliard for what his label claims was a "riot" during his master's recital, then becomes a postmashup club star,

fusing pop melodies played on classical instruments to anabolic disco beats.

Miles Raymer



1. SPOON

Gimme Fiction | Merge

The long wait for Britt Daniel to stop making merely good albums and put out something great is over—this tense, creepy postpunk pop sounds like a 70s AM radio signal bounced off a lonely satellite.



2. HOLD STEADY

Separation Sunday | Frenchkiss

Possibly the year's best work of literature, and you know no one in the *New York Review of Books* sounds like the E Street Band gone feral.

3. KONONO NO. 1

Congotronics | Crammed Discs

The world's best street musicians make Powerbooks and sequencers look bad by banging out the year's densest, ass-shakingest dance record on homemade thumb pianos.

4. MAKE BELIEVE

Shock of Being | Flameshovel

Lyrical, it's probably the most relevant record of the year, and probably still will be when everyone else catches up to Make Believe's next-level tweakcore style sometime around 2011.

5. COMMON

Be | GOOD/Geffen

With a little push from Kanye, Common dropped the record-geek navel gazing and got back to writing raps that shout out feminism as fiercely as other MCs rep their clothing lines. On "Go" he even got folks to dance to John Mayer.

6. CELEBRATION

Celebration | 4AD

Gothic and vaudevillian and steeped in slapback, this album makes me picture one of those cartoon bands of skeletons who play music on their own bones—except it's actually scary.

7. M83

Before the Dawn Heals Us | Mute

Epic in its scope and sadness and impossible to box into

just one genre. Like the sound track to the dystopian sci-fi movie that 2005 sometimes seemed to be.

8. BLOC PARTY

Silent Alarm Remixed | Vice

Underground dance-floor tastemakers rip apart an OK Britpop record and stitch it back together into something that lives up to the hype.

9. DAVID BANNER

Certified | SRC/Universal

One part conscious rapper and two parts strip-club hedonist, Banner makes Dirty South bangers with a pissed-off political bite to match their tear-up-the-club rowditude.

10. VARIOUS ARTISTS

The Sexual Life of the Savages: Underground Post-Punk from Sao Paulo, Brasil | Soul Jazz

Sao Paulo's early-80s postpunks injected hot blood into the genre's ironic poses—further proof that Brazilians can make any style of music exponentially funkier.

Ann Sterzinger



1. MOMUS

Otto Spooky | American Patchwork

Sometimes I think Nick Currie is one of them real live genius things, but what do I know?

2. MARGOT & THE NUCLEAR SO & SO'S

The Dust of Retreat | Standard Recording Company

You could call these self-described "scarf rockers" precious, or you could quit resisting their wistful, wintry tunes and let your tears wash the crud from your soul.



3. DMBQ

The Essential Sounds From the Far East | Estrus

This vortex of wild, psych-drenched blues-punk would've made my list even without the compassion points I awarded the band after the death of their brilliant drummer in a van crash. China Mana, R.I.P.

4. INVISIBLE BALET

Escaping Light | Nilaihah

I usually have to track down synth-pop records and order

them myself, since the labels that release this stuff aren't making enough money to send promo copies to folks like me. I'm sure I've overlooked a few worthy contenders as a result, but Lin Chen's silky, sinewy, soulful voice makes this the best example I found all year.

5. DEADLY SNAKES

Porcella | In the Red

Nick Cave has the Beatles over for a barbecue and serves them . . . to Satan.

6. ANTONY & THE JOHNSONS

I Am a Bird Now | Secretly Canadian

If Antony's androgynous cabaret doesn't make you weepy, you need an empathy transplant.



7. EPOXIES

Stop the Future | Fat Wreck Chords

If you don't fall in love with new-wave goddess Roxy Epoxy, you might want to check your libido for leaks.

8. LAST TARGET

One Shot, One Kill | BYO Records

Has there ever been a bad year for Japanese punk? Not since I hit puberty at least.

9. VAZ

The Lie That Matches the Furniture | Narnack

Just when you're getting jaded in the indie-metal haunted house, a real live loup-garou pops out from behind a giant foam-rubber tombstone and gives you the BJ of your life.

10. TENEMENT HALLS

Knitting Needles & Bicycle Bells | Merge

Chris Lopez, of the dearly departed Rock*a*Teens, multi-tracked this almost-solo disc of raw but delicate garage—reminiscent of the Thrills, if they sounded less canned and tidy.

Neil Tesser



1. VIJAY IYER

Reimagining | Savoy

The clearest statement yet of the pianist's Indian-American fusion: he stitches mathematical theories and ancestral modes into jagged, powerfully lyrical music that excites both head and heart.

2. MESHELL NDEGEOCELLO

The Spirit Music Jamia: Dance of the Infidel | Shanachie

The superb bassist opens up to jazz both past and present—the arrangements recall electric Miles, and the guest musicians include Don Byron, Neal Evans, and Wallace Roney—and in the process points to a fertile possible future.

3. KEITH JARRETT

Radiance | ECM

Solo piano, but a lot more cutting than the pastoral stuff you expect from Jarrett. Two Japanese concerts recorded three days apart and combined into one kaleidoscopic, 17-part treatise.



4. DAVE DOUGLAS

Keystone | Greenleaf

In case you just can't believe that the silent films of the long-discredited Fatty Arbuckle could've inspired the year's best fusion disc, this release includes a DVD where Douglas's music provides an obliquely complementary sound track to the on-screen chicanery.



5. JOHN HOLLENBECK

LARGE ENSEMBLE

A Blessing | OmniTone

Having recently revitalized chamber jazz with his Claudia Quintet, the drummer and composer reinvents the jazz orchestra, nodding to Charles Mingus, Aaron Copland, Thad Jones, and Steve Reich.

6. THELONIOUS MONK QUARTET WITH JOHN COLTRANE

At Carnegie Hall | Blue Note

This technically superior recording of an artistically superior 1957 concert provides the most valuable window yet into the short-lived Monk-Coltrane partnership—and its discovery was jazz's feel-good story of the year.

7. ERNEST DAWKINS'S CHICAGO 12

Misconceptions of a Delusion

Shades of a Charade | Dawk

Written by local saxist Ernest Dawkins to commemorate the 35th anniversary of the Chicago Seven conspiracy trial, this piece captures much of the lively burlesque (both intended and not) of that time and place, with its anger, pathos, and helter-skelter anarchy.

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Best Music

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8. RICHARD GALLIANO

NEW YORK TRIO

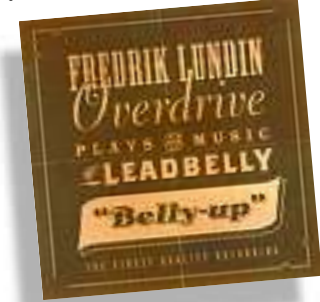
Ruby, My Dear | Dreyfus

Galliano plays accordion, and it speaks to his virtuosity and musicality that you won't be tempted into a single Lawrence Welk joke.

9. ANTHONY BROWN'S ORCHESTRA

Rhapsodies | Water Baby

Brown has already transformed the music of Ellington and Monk, and to complete the triptych he's rescored, reharmonized, and restructured Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, incorporating Asian influences and instruments and a touch of Latin flavor. Scandalous, heretical!—until you hear it.



10. FREDRIK LUNDIN OVERDRIVE

"Belly-Up": The Music of Leadbelly | Stunt

This Danish saxist leads his band in an inventive tribute to the American folk-blues icon—and doubles the ante by dedicating each arrangement, in spirit as well as in name, to an American jazz great, from Charles Mingus to Gil Evans.

EUGENE "HIDEAWAY" BRIDGES

Coming Home | Armadillo

Buoyant but tasteful guitar blues, technically flawless and deeply soulful—even the most exuberant good-timey tunes sound refreshingly adult.

GOSPEL KEYBOARD TRIO

Heavenly Keys | The Sirens

Chicago keyboardists Willie Jones, Leonard Maddox, and Dwayne Mason proclaim their faith in a set of churchy hymns, up-tempo shouters, and stately spiritual songs, both solo and as a trio—it's virtuosity infused with an uplifting earnestness and joy.

BUDDY GUY

Bring 'Em In | Silvertone

Lately this Chicago blues legend has developed a distressing tendency toward overwrought performances, especially in full-band settings, but he imbues the updated 60s soul tunes here (and the occasional pop number, like Dylan's "Lay Lady Lay") with emotional depth and good taste.

HERMON HITSON

You Are Too Much for the Human Heart | Soul-Tay-Shus

A compilation showcasing this almost forgotten 60s soul singer from Atlanta. Hitson was hampered by second-rate production for most of his career, but at his best he packed an emotional wallop to rival James Brown's or Otis Redding's.

DENISE LASALLE

Wanted | Ecko

Odes to womanly prowess, both in and out of bed, from a veteran soul-blues stylist, laced with her trademark take-no-prisoners raunch and leavened with good humor.



BETTYE LAVETTE

I've Got My Own Hell to Raise | Anti-

LaVette can extract more feeling from a single phrase than most soul singers get from an entire set. You may need to lie down after this one.

AARON NEVILLE

Tell It Like It Is | Empire Musicwerks

When this angelic crooner unfurls his quavering falsetto on a ballad like this set's classic title tune, hearts melt for miles around—but he can also sharpen his voice to match the streetsy signifying on jumpy R & B numbers like "A Hard Nut to Crack" and "Space Man."

DAN PENN & SPOONER OLDHAM

Moments From This Theatre | Proper American

It takes a hell of a singer to pull off a line like "Go back home, see the old folks / They've all had heart attacks and light strokes," but blue-eyed soul brother Dan Penn is a hell of a singer. He and Spooner Oldham, who wrote and produced some of the most memorable R & B of the 60s, reprise some of their best tunes in gritty, graceful country-folk versions.

BOBBY RUSH

Night Fishin' | Deep Rush

This time Rush mixes his usual tales of backdoor shenanigans with songs like "We Had Love," a thoughtful meditation on a childhood enriched by old-fashioned family values—a welcome glimpse of the serious-minded

philosopher behind his trickster's mask.

JAMES BLOOD ULMER

Birthright | Hyena

Aided by producer Vernon Reid, Ulmer creates the feel of a barren, haunted landscape on this ferocious solo acoustic record. His adventurous playing and naked lyrics—about sex, race, and religion—both invoke and transcend the deepest roots of the blues.

5. SUFJAN STEVENS

Illinois | Asthmatic Kitty

It's not just his songs, as smart and tender as they are—it's those ravishing arrangements.

6. JUDEE SILL

Dreams Come True | Water

This hopeful anticipation of the apocalypse, recorded in 1974, would've been the singer-songwriter's third album if she'd lived to see it finished; it was finally mixed and released this year.



7. SLEATER-KINNEY

The Woods | Sub Pop

Veteran Portland trio cranks up the amps to "pulverize" and barrels off into terra incognita.

8. THE MOUNTAIN GOATS

Come, Come to the Sunset Tree | self-released

The LP-only edition of John Darnielle's taut, compassionate valediction to an abusive stepfather, with home-recorded versions of the songs on the CD.

9. SHARON JONES & THE DAP-KINGS

Naturally | Daptone

As far as this joyful funk band is concerned, it's 1971 and they're glued to the top of the R & B charts.

10. PRINCESS SUPERSTAR

My Machine | !K7

A science-fiction hip-hop opera in which motormouthed Concetta Kirschner turns all other celebrities into "duplicants" of herself.

Douglas Wolk

1. LCD SOUNDSYSTEM

LCD Soundsystem | DFA/Capitol

James Murphy is the best dance producer in America, and he makes a pretty great rock star too.

2. THE NEW PORNOGRAPHERS

Twin Cinema | Matador

The Canadian power-pop legion sets a new world record for hooks per unit time.

3. VARIOUS ARTISTS

One Kiss Can Lead to Another: Girl Group Sounds Lost & Found | Rhino

Five hours of magnificent 150-second epics from the 60s, packaged in a hat box. A *hat box*, people.



4. THE FALL

The Complete Peel Sessions

1978-2004 | Castle

Twenty-seven years of status reports from a marble-mouthed avant-garde poet and his riff-crazy backup bands.

David Whiteis

Given the range of subgenres and styles represented, I haven't ranked these—consider each the best of its kind that I encountered in 2005.

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Music

VARIOUS ARTISTS ONE KISS CAN LEAD TO ANOTHER: GIRL GROUP SOUNDS LOST AND FOUND (RHINO)
EVIE SANDS ANY WAY THAT YOU WANT ME (REV-OLA)

Girls, Girls, Girls

And you thought “women in rock” had it rough.

By Jessica Hopper

The first time I stole a record it was because I wanted to be in a girl group. It was easy. I went to the library, picked up a copy of *25 Years of Motown*, cut out the magnetic alarm strip with a razor, slipped the five-album set into my large schoolbag with the spray-painted peace sign on it, and headed home to listen to “Reflections” by the Supremes a few dozen times in a row. I was obsessed with Diana Ross, Mary Wilson, and Florence Ballard and desperately wanted to be them all. That wasn’t the norm amongst 11-year-old Minnesota girls in 1988, but my fandom was immutable. Much as their harmonies killed me, what I really loved was their aesthetic: Mary had the better voice and bouffier hair, but Diana was my favorite because she always seemed to be wearing twice as much eyeliner. They were the most majestic representation of young womanhood I knew, so princesslike, and I bought into the dream of it completely.

The four-disc genre retrospective *One Kiss Can Lead to Another: Girl Group Sounds Lost and Found* (Rhino) is a monument to that dream: the romantic fever dream of teenage-girl narratives written by adult songwriters. In the pre-Beatles days of the early 1960s girl groups came to dominate the charts, supposedly due to the vacuum left by the overseas deployment of Elvis and the deaths of Eddie Cochran, Ritchie Valens, and Buddy Holly. Trios and quartets of high school- and college-age women, many of them black, supplanted slick-haired boys on the radio and got a chance to tell their



side of the story—sort of.

Crooning and cooing about the triumphs and travails of young love (and little else), wagging gloved fingers in time to their honey-sweet three-part *no no nos*, the girl groups proffered the inverse of the thrusty rebellion and innuendo that had been codified by men: the ultra-chaste longings of a bunch of purported virgins in satiny evening gowns.

Looking back, girl groups seem the epitome of the gender prescription of the time: that women and girls should be guileless and pure, doting and servile, never fully women unless validated by the love of a man. In song after song, the promise of romance and the redemption it brings is

strong: “Please find it in your heart / To make all my dreams come true / Let me get close to you,” sings country star Skeeter Davis on her girl-pop turn “Let Me Get Close to You.” Over a snare crack that sounds like a cannon shot and a bed of perfectly harmonized *bum-she-bum-ooo-eee-ooo-aaa*, the Chiffons’ Judy Craig booms with pride, “I have a boyfriend / Met him a week ago / He’s mine forever / Last night he told me so,” on “I Have a Boyfriend.” Then, so we don’t think she’s some good-night-kissing hussy, she adds, “Someday we’ll walk down the aisle / So in love.” Their physical desires can be safely expressed only through double entendre, and when they stray—as with “bad girl” groups

like the Shangri-Las—things end in tragedy.

The girls are never true aggressors; rather, they are t-r-u l-u-v hopefuls, keeping the heart flames alive somewhere beneath their bullet bras. For these girls there’s just one kind of boy—the One and Only—and their love, it’s Forever and Always. As for their love objects, they’re bad boys, other girls’ boys, ex-boys, and next boys, and they’re all elusive. Whether he’s a commitmentphobic cad, a cheater, an abuser, or a dude with a drag-race death wish, she wants only to make him happy—and all he can do is disappear. She can *shoop shoop shoop* all night long, but he ain’t coming back. In the end she’s left with noth-

ing but a tear-stained pillow and poetic metaphors: “All I can see on the beach / Is a piece of driftwood / And it somehow reminds me / Of the twisted memories / Left in my mind” goes the dramatic spoken interlude of the Bitter Sweet’s “What a Lonely Way to Start the Summer.”

But *One Kiss Can Lead to Another* is more than just an exhaustive tribute to broken hearts and high-tease hairdos: it’s a chronicle of how the girl-group sound impacted rock ‘n’ roll. Many of the girls came from gospel backgrounds and brought along the soul-holler and hand claps. Phil Spector’s production for the Ronettes not only created the template for the girl-group sound—forceful vocals cut with gunshot snares, pizzicato string stabs, and reverb by the metric ton—but upped the ante for other producers who sought to compete: Brian Wilson, Spector arranger Jack Nitzsche, future Bread founder David Gates, and Motown’s resident genius team Holland-Dozier-Holland. They made symphonic pop and made it loud as hell, a cavernous cavalcade of harps, timpani, and orchestra-size string sections with occasional tracks of audible sobbing. The sound is as timeless as the sentiments of lovelorn teens and still holds up decades after the genre’s final years, represented here by the Lovelites’ 1969 teen-pregnancy classic, “How Can I Tell My Mom and Dad?”

Much as the sound of pop may have changed, the subject matter—love and how to suffer it—is still intrinsic to the soul-
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