

Top Ten CDs For The Year That Was (2008)

JEEZ, IT WAS SOME kinda year, huh? Continuing wars, economic chicanery, good TV shows get the axe, Britney Spears mounted a “comeback,” and a history-making Presidential election. There was some good music released, too, both old and new. In no particular order:

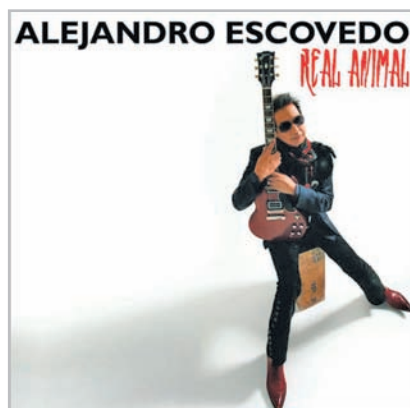
Various Artists, *Love Train: The Sound of Philadelphia* (Sony Legacy) One American “hit machine” that rivals those of Motown, Bacharach/David, and pre-indictment Phil Spector was Philly’s own Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff. The four-disc *Love Train* collects much of the coolest, classiest, most enduring American R&B/soul music of the late 1960’s and ‘70’s — hits by Dusty Springfield, the O’Jays, Jerry Butler, and Harold Melvin and The Blue Notes. A damn near perfect collection, this is.

Saxophone Summit, *Seraphic Light* (Telarc) Three of the (arguably) finest American jazz tenor sax guys alive — Joe Lovano, Dave Liebman, and Ravi Coltrane—pay alternately joyous and elegaic tribute to fallen comrade Michael Brecker. These hepcats know when to wail, when to rein it in, and most importantly, to play as a unit, as a true band.



Augustus Pablo, *The Rockers Story: The Mystic World of Augustus Pablo* (Shanachie) Though he seemingly shunned the limelight in his lifetime, multi-instrumentalist/producer was one of the most influential figures in reggae history ever, and consequently impacted punk rock, electronica, etc. The four-CD plus DVD set is, obviously, not for the novice, but for the smitten, the explorer, the eclectic, it is crucial.

Alejandro Escovedo, *Real Animal* (Manhattan Records) For anyone thinking rock ‘n’ roll is solely the province of the young and/or you can’t/shouldn’t rock-out past age 50, listen to this album. Mature rock ‘n’ roll is not an oxymoron, and Escovedo’s music is (consistently) — harrowing as it is — life-affirming. (You gotta see him live, you just gotta!)

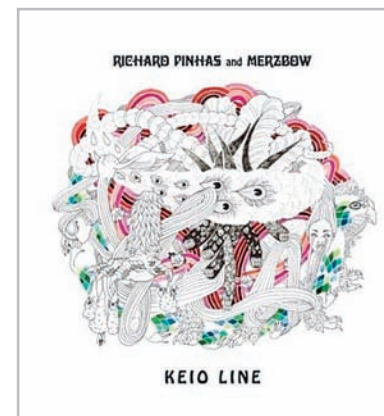


Richard Pinhas/Merzbow, *Keio Line* (Cuneiform) Two guys, one a French progressive rock pioneer (the band Heldon), the other a Japanese fellow that’s made his mark conjuring the most extreme and confrontational noise imaginable. Together they weave two disks’ worth of electronic bliss-out that nonetheless has (a dark) soul and a heartfelt vehemence that’s virtually cathartic.

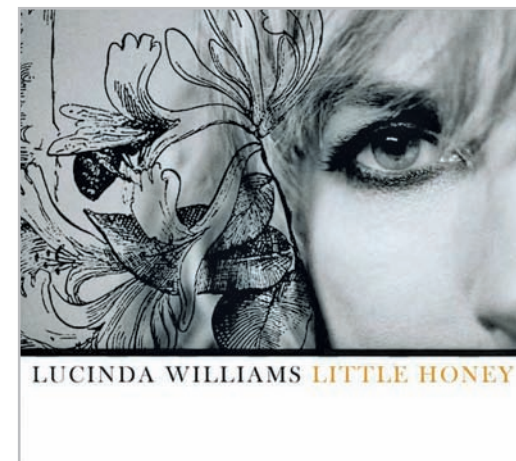
Ted Nash, *The Mancini Project* (Palmetto Records) An top-shelf up-and-coming tenor saxophonist in the NYC jazz scene pays a inspired homage to Henry Mancini, who’s always looked Squaresville but composed some of the COOLEST music for film (*Break-*

fast At Tiffany’s) and TV (*Peter Gunn*). Accompanied by kick-ass pianist Frank Kimbrough, bass ace Rufus Reid, and drum-dynamo Matt Wilson, mainstream/post-bop jazz scarcely gets better than this.

Lucinda Williams, *Little Honey* Ms. Williams bounces back from her West disc (something of a major letdown for many) with a smoldering set of emotional, ragged yet focused roots-rock (an amalgam of rock ‘n’ roll, country, blues, folk, etc.) — passionate, sexy, mature, and (best of all) rollicking fun.



Silver Jews, *Lookout Mountain, Lookout Sea* (Drag City) Darkly funny ‘n’ wise existential mood-pop rich with old-school country twang —perfect rainy-day, (s)he-done-gone-and-left-me music, a la Lee Hazlewood, Jimmy Webb, Elvis Costello, Richard Harvey, Randy Newman, and Loudon Wainwright III.



Charlie Pickett, *Bar Band Americanus: The Best of Charlie Pickett* (Bloodshot Records) Don’t feel left out if you’ve not heard of roots-rocker Charlie Pickett — not nearly enough folks have. In the ‘80’s (when hair and Reagan were big, greed was good, and human life was cheap), Pickett was crisscrossing the country playing bars and lean, gritty rock ‘n’ roll in the tradition(s) of Creedence Clearwater Revival, the Rolling Stones (before they choked on megastardom), the Beat Farmers, David Johansen, the BoDeans, and (early) J. Geils Band — but it wasn’t his fault that he had the right sound at the wrong time. Don’t miss out this time.

Bill Cunliffe, *The Blues and the Abstract Truth, Take 2* (Resonance Records) Jazz pianist/arranger Bill Cunliffe re-makes/re-models the classic 1961 Oliver Nelson album *Blues and the Abstract Truth* (plus two originals). Wisely, Cunliffe & company don’t try to “top” the original (which featured Bill Evans, Freddie Hubbard, and Eric Dolphy), just play it their way — convivially, but with pointed soloing (from Terrell Stafford and Bob Sheppard), and, oh, those Nelson melodies.

Happy New Year (let’s hope). ■

[ed. these CDs were reviewed in last issue, but information was inadvertently omitted.)
Jimmy Amadio, *The Philadelphia Story* ★★★★★ (TP Recordings)
The John Hicks Legacy Band, *Mind Wine – The Music of John Hicks* ★★★ (Savant)

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