

Last Update: 14/4/13 – Changes & additions since the December 2010 version highlighted thusly

1936 1937	Robert Johnson	<i>The Complete Recordings</i> By universal acknowledgment, the greatest of the Old Masters of acoustic blues. It's said that Eric Clapton wouldn't even talk to you in the 1960s if you were not <i>au fait</i> with Robert Johnson. This is one of the exceptions in which I've allowed a "best of" compilation. I just had to in this case. There weren't any albums in the 30s.
1959	Miles Davis	<i>Kind Of Blue</i> He could play the trumpet a bit. This is arguably the best known full-on jazz album of all time. It had just enjoyed its 40 <sup>th</sup> anniversary on first compilation of this list. I'm not qualified to write about Miles Davis, but this I know. Despite his tetchy character, especially in defence of blacks against the white establishment (understandably), he did not come from a typical poor black background. His family were quite affluent and middle class, in as far as it was possible for blacks to be middle class in the US at that time.
1964	John Coltrane	<i>A Love Supreme</i> He could play the sax a bit. The album was the result of Coltrane's sudden religious awakening in 1957. Brilliant – apart from the embarrassing vocals. You're getting jazz and old-time blues up to '64 because The Great Musical Reinvention had not yet happened - but it was just around the corner...
1965	Jackson C Frank	<i>Jackson C Frank</i> Aficionados know that this is the best folk album of all time. OK he wasn't the best of guitarists, but the songs are great. Poor old JCF had a crap time before recording this, and a crap time afterwards too. This was his moment of glory. He helped spark the folk revival in England in the mid-60s.
1965	Bob Dylan	<i>Bringing It All Back Home</i> Dylan was so darn prolific. He put out 17 studio albums in the 15 years from 1962 to 1976, and at least 11 of them are classics. It's hard to believe that most people thought he couldn't sing. In those days you either sung like a Victorian Sunday school teacher, or you weren't singing at all. We've come a long way. Now, when you see a video of Dylan and Joan Baez, it's Joan you want to shut up. Dylan really was touched by genius in those days. How did he write Maggie's Farm 14 years before Thatcher? It was so appropriate. Hey, Mr. Tambourine Man, sing a song for me.
1965	Bob Dylan	<i>Highway 61 Revisited</i> This would be my No.1 Dylan album. There's something going on here but you don't know what it is, do you, Mr. Jones?
1967	The Who	<i>The Who Sell Out</i> Arthouse rock is nothing new. Townsend was at it from the start. Today this would be called a 'concept album', but the phrase didn't exist then. Roger Daltry sitting in a bath full of baked beans was utterly beyond the ken of Mr and Mrs normal. Are those ads real? There's no way a deodorant manufacturer would be upset about his product featuring on a cred rock record these days – but then? Boy, they were dim. But most surprisingly, the music is quite wonderful. One of their most underestimated albums, I think.

1967	Jimi Hendrix	<p><i>Are You Experienced</i></p> <p>When people bang on about The Beatles' <i>Sgt. Pepper</i> being revolutionary, remember that <i>Are You Experienced</i> was released a month earlier. The album exploded onto the music scene, as did the man himself, and nothing was ever the same again. Who are The Beatles anyway? (Also, just look at what else was coming out in the magical year of 1968).</p>
1968	Jimi Hendrix	<p><i>Electric Ladyland</i></p> <p>I have been a major Hendrix obsessive since I was about 3 (well, 15) but I only acquired any of the three pre-death studio albums quite recently. Strange. However, I did play someone else's copy of <i>Electric Ladyland</i> every day for several years at university. The point is that there are so many live recordings of Hendrix that the studio albums seemed unnecessary, especially since his blues pieces were mostly live only. Utterly brilliant though <i>Are You Experienced</i> &amp; <i>Axis Bold As Love</i> are, <i>Electric Ladyland</i> is something else. This is not pop, or blues or even rock as it was then known. It was recorded in an apparently haphazard manner, with an uncontrolled number of guesting musicians, generally in the middle of the night, but also with fanatical attention to detail leading to endlessly repeated re-takes. It's unique. The combination of Hendrix and Steve Winwood on organ on <i>Voodoo Chile</i> is one of the best things that's ever been recorded. A merman I should turn to be...given the chance. I wouldn't like to have to choose my No.1 album of all time, but this would be in the very-short-list.</p>
1968	The Small Faces	<p><i>Ogden's Nut Gone Flake</i></p> <p>Absolute classic. It was performed live just once. Before this the Small Faces were a mod pop group. Afterwards they had real 1968 cred. But the album exploded the band because they couldn't top it. (Don't anyone dare mention Rod Stewart).</p>
1968	Van Morrison	<p><i>Astral Weeks</i></p> <p>Recorded in two days. Utterly brilliant. This would be in my top few. People are reputed to have gone mad trying to figure out what the words mean. I think they were just up to no good at Madame George's myself. It's Madame Joy, actually. That's a hint.</p>
1968	John Renbourn	<p><i>Sir John Alot of Merry Englandes Musyk Thyng and ye Grene Knyghte</i></p> <p>It's rare that anyone uses the full title – you can see why. Usually it's just <i>Sir John</i>, or <i>Sir John Alot of</i>. This is sacrilege, I know, and probably a sign of poor taste, but I always preferred Renbourn's guitar playing to Bert Jansch's. This is a lovely piece in which other instruments, principally the flute, are given equal prominence. It's been much plundered as background music. I only realised very recently that <i>The Earle of Salisbury</i> is by William Byrd.</p>
1968	Quicksilver Messenger Service	<p><i>Quicksilver Messenger Service</i></p> <p>QMS were spearheading the West Coast sound long before The Eagles, The Doobie Brothers, Litta Feat, etc., and were contemporaneous with The Grateful Dead, though their first recording was much later. They were quintessentially a live, jamming band, and part of the San Francisco psychedelic scene. Most people would probably choose 1969's <i>Happy Trails</i>, but I've always had a soft spot for the eponymous first album. I might take <i>The Fool</i> with me to that Desert Island.</p>

1968 1969	Soft Machine	<i>Soft Machine Volumes One &amp; Two</i> I'm cheating and getting two for the price of one because I bought this as a double vinyl. Absolutely unique. Avant-garde jazz? Hippy period psychedelia? Progressive rock? Robert Wyatt claims they were just trying to do pop songs and this is how it came out. One for the short list, but I'm a Softie.
1969	It's A Beautiful Day	<i>It's A Beautiful Day</i> Another from the epicentre of hippydom. Really tremendous record, but a one-off from this band. Or I thought it was. But there was a second album! Viz <i>Marrying Maiden</i> . Apparently this was unknown to all but "the most ardent fans of folk-psychedelia" (i.e., massively sad old farts) of whose number I am now proud to announce myself a member. This is one of <i>those</i> bands. An unknown 2 <sup>nd</sup> album is an essential acquisition even if it turns out to be made of nail pairings and snot. Well I have it now and it's certainly not that bad - but, unsurprisingly, it does not live up to the brilliance of the first.
1969	Nick Drake	<i>Five Leaves Left</i> Any of the three studio albums could have been chosen really, but I've opted for the debut album. Nick Drake was quite a phenomenon. Few people had heard of him while he was alive. I knew of him through a single track on a 1970 sampler album from Island Records. Then suddenly, sometime after 2000, he was all over the place. I now realise it was due to a TV ad. I'll not attempt a biography, but it was a sad business. Three albums released between the ages of 20 and 23, and dead at 26. Drug overdose? Yes, but of prescription anti-depressants. He did do a lot of dope, though ( <i>Hazy Jane</i> - you <i>did</i> realise?). Drake was the subject of John Martyn's <i>Solid Air</i> .
1969	Blodwyn Pig	<i>Ahead Rings Out</i> You'd think it should be <i>A Head Rings Out</i> wouldn't you? But it ain't. This was Jethro Tull escapee Mick Abraham's band's first album. Not a common sight anymore. I've no longer got it myself, it seems..... I have now, on CD (release 2006). And my memory was accurate, it really is very good. I must also acquire 1970's <i>Getting to This</i> , and perhaps invest in some later stuff I missed 40 years ago.
1969	King Crimson	<i>In the Court of the Crimson King</i> Some albums are more equal than others. This one is very, very equal indeed. Get it. 40 years later <i>21<sup>st</sup> Century Schizoid Man</i> still makes the spine tingle. Way, way ahead of its time.
1969	Captain Beefheart and His Magic Band	<i>Trout Mask Replica</i> Totally unclassifiable. Free-form bluesy jazzy crack pot psychedelia. Featuring, along with the Captain, Zoot Horn Rollo, Antennae Jimmy Semens, The Mascara Snake, Rockette Morton and Drumbo. Were they on drugs? Yes, they certainly were. But then, a squid eating dough in a polyethylene bag sure is vast and bulbous (that's right). Since then, other weirdos have just been amateurs. [R.I.P. The Captain – died yesterday of MS (18/12/10). He wasn't a very nice bloke, but then neither were Newton or Pauli. I didn't mention the 1974 gig in Cambridge. One of those very memorable ones. But the tension between the Captain and his band showed. He really should have paid them].

1969	The Band	<i>The Band</i> It takes some chutzpah to just call yourself "The Band". But if you were Dylan's band, then it came naturally. One or two tracks on this album might not be immediately recognisable classics, but I wouldn't bet on it.
1969	The Grateful Dead	<i>Live/Dead</i> The Dead were the definitive San Francisco psychedelic band. <i>Live/Dead</i> was recorded live, as the title implies, in several locations. Not to be confused with <i>Europe '72</i> , recorded live in Europe three years later – though that's just as fine an album. <i>Live/Dead</i> includes <i>Dark Star</i> , which I played daily at university and which continues to stand up well today. Jerry Garcia was a noted banjo virtuoso before joining the Dead in '65. As a boy he had a wood chopping accident in which he lost most of the middle finger on his right hand, and so joins Django Reinhardt and Tony Iommi of Black Sabbath as guitarists of note with maimed hands. Know any others?
1969	Pink Floyd	<i>Ummagumma</i> Not, I suspect, their best known work. You must understand that in 1969 even those hairies into 'underground' music thought the Floyd too weird to bother with. Hence their great appeal. I've chosen this for the live recordings (you can ditch the studio disc). The four live pieces show what the Floyd were all about at that time. In those days you could turn up at the Free Trade Hall in M/c and buy a ticket at the door just before the gig started. Then came <i>Dark Side of the Moon</i> in 1973 and ruined everything. The Floyd became a huge commercial success, for which I struggle to forgive them.
1969	Led Zeppelin	<i>Led Zeppelin II</i> Ah, the album that launched a trillion imitators. I could have picked LZ III or IV in terms of the music, but this was the first and hence special. The impact of the more bluesy LZ 1 was not so great. But <i>The Lemon Song</i> and <i>Whole Lotta Love</i> went straight to the centre of every right minded school boy's psyche in 1969. Just look at the list for 1969! It just goes to show what a special year 1968 was - it lasted for two years!
1970	Simon and Garfunkel	<i>Bridge Over Troubled Water</i> Just an amazing collection of songs and brilliant production. Who was it said that they deserved an award just for the timing of the introduction of the orchestration on <i>Bridge Over Troubled Water</i> (the track)? What sort of album does it take to beat 1966's <i>Sounds of Silence</i> and 1968's <i>Bookends</i> ? Buy them all. Bye the way, who stole my original vinyl copy?
1970	Free	<i>Fire and Water</i> Free's third album: they had been around since 1968 without commercial success. It was <i>Tons of Sobs</i> we listened to most back then. They hit the big time with this, as intended. Everyone thinks of Paul Kossoff, perhaps because of his early death. But really it's Paul Rodgers' voice which is special.
1970	Deep Purple	<i>Deep Purple In Rock</i> We're talking classics here. This was one of the albums which defined what hard rock was. They can sound like a cliché, but it wasn't a cliché when no one had done it before. The wild abandon of the intro to <i>Speed King</i> still sounds great to me. But then I never grew up.

1970	The Who	<p><i>Live at Leeds</i></p> <p>The original 1970 recordings were re-released in 1995 and 2001. I recommend the latter because the Tommy tracks have been gathered together in order on a separate CD, hence getting an almost (not quite) complete live version of Tommy in addition to the other material. It was a wrench to leave <i>Who's Next</i> out, though.</p>
1971	Caravan	<p><i>In the Land of Grey and Pink</i></p> <p>One of my favourites. Caravan were from the Canterbury scene of the late 60s which also spawned Soft Machine and Hatfield &amp; The North. If you've never heard this album, go get it right now. It's one of those albums everyone should have. But watch out for the nasty grumbly grimbles – they're crawling down your chimneys, they're trying to get in.</p>
1971	Emerson, Lake & Palmer	<p><i>Pictures at an Exhibition</i></p> <p>This is a cover/interpretation of Mussorgsky's modern classical piano suite, a showpiece for virtuoso pianists. I didn't include ELP originally, despite being a big fan in my teens and seeing them live more than once. I became rather embarrassed by their prog rock excesses. And their own compositions do not shine particularly. <i>Pictures</i> is still good to listen to, though I suspect this is more down to Mussorgsky than ELP. (There are also various orchestral versions of <i>Pictures</i>, e.g. one by Ravel, I think). I got some stick from my brother for leaving ELP out originally and saying nasty things about them. However the real clincher that made me decide to include ELP was recalling just how livid the Americans were with Keith Emerson when <i>The Nice</i> (pre-ELP) recorded Leonard Bernstein's "America". They seemed to think it was anti-American. Yes, it was. And it's remarkable how such a sentiment can be conveyed by a purely instrumental piece! Old Keith was about as popular with the Americans then as Julian Assange is today. So – ELP goes in, right enough.</p>
1971	The Rolling Stones	<p><i>Sticky Fingers</i></p> <p>Needs no introduction, surely. They were just called <i>The Stones</i>, then, of course, by the cool cats. You could opt for <i>Beggars Banquet</i> or <i>Let It Bleed</i> instead, but those late 60s/early 70s albums were their heyday.</p>
1971	The Allman Brothers	<p><i>Live at the Fillmore East</i></p> <p>Remember when guitar solos lasted 20 minutes? And you enjoyed every minute? And could play it over and over again. Welcome back. In my ignorance I always thought of the Allman Brothers as West Coast. Actually they hail from the southern state of Georgia. This was the last recording before Duane Allman died in a motorbike accident.</p>
1971	Jethro Tull	<p><i>Aqualung</i></p> <p>One tends to think that all those bands that suddenly popped up in 1968 did so from nowhere. But Tull had had a long six year apprenticeship, under various names, before their first album in '68. And neither that nor their second or third albums would have made it to this list – though the third, <i>Benefit</i>, is a close miss and included the wonderful <i>Nothing to Say</i>. But <i>Aqualung</i> is up a gear. I saw it performed live in M/c in '71, when Tull did a double set, the one I saw starting at midnight, unheard of then (and which necessitated a 10 mile walk home, there being no buses at that time of night). Richard Dawkins would approve of the anti-religious sentiment. This was the album that turned Tull from Alternative to commercial success. And well</p>

		deserved. Tull were always very professional (despite the hair) and noted as hardworking. Ian Anderson ruled as absolute dictator. Tony Iommi, after a brief stint, couldn't stick the discipline and fled back to Black Sabbath. Ditto Mick Abrahams (to Blodwyn Pig).
1971	Tir Na Nog	<i>Tir Na Nog</i> That's the land of eternal youth for those whose Irish Gaelic is not too strong. Isn't the internet wonderful, now? I've been wondering for 38 years why this duo never produced more such material. It appears they did – and have been performing again in recent years. I've had a soft spot for this album all that time. It's Irish and it's folk music, but not strictly Irish folk music. Distinctly bucolic, though. I saw these guys as a support act in 1971 (to whom, I wonder, perhaps ELP - how incongruous) and immediately bought the album. I recent acquired the other two studio albums. Lamentably I must report that the 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> albums disappointed. There are a couple of tracks that get close to recapturing the magic of the first, but that's all.
1968-1970	Fleetwood Mac	<i>Greatest Hits (1972) The Best of Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac (2002)</i> The second named is an updated version of the first, remastered and with extra tracks. We are talking here, of course, of the Peter Green era of Fleetwood Mac. Let us say nothing of what happened after he left the band in May 1970. Poor man. Poor band. But Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac were a pinnacle of electric guitar blues. The <i>Green Manalishi</i> still sends shivers down my spine. The night is so black that the darkness cooks.
1972	Focus	<i>Focus III</i> Strange how some top bands fade from the collective memory. Focus did some silly stuff, especially vocally. But they were fantastically gifted musicians, outclassing most of their contemporaries so markedly that they can be classed as 'classical' rather than 'rock'. Perhaps Yes is a similar case. But Yes were a mess, whereas Focus were always well crafted. Focus III is virtually devoid of lyrics, and all the better for it.
1972	Rory Gallagher	<i>Rory Gallagher – Live in Europe</i> I can't believe I missed Rory out on the first pass. What was I thinking of? Why did no one complain? Apart from anything else I missed the opportunity to say that I saw Taste live (in M/c, just before the split in 1970). Were they the first decent band I saw live? Or had I already seen the Floyd? (I'm not counting Status Quo, obviously – hey, I'm not even admitting I've ever seen them, is that clear?). Unfortunately I was too stupid to appreciate what I was hearing at the time. I saw the solo Gallagher a couple of times thereafter, at Lincoln festival in 1972 for one. The album I've nominated here is the only one I actually own (vinyl, obviously). But don't bother buying any. Instead trawl YouTube. There's a really good Whistle Test session, some very ropey but atmospheric (and strangely familiar) Marquee sessions (was I there?), and much more. Note that bashed-up looking stratocaster, bought second-hand for £100 and took 4 years to pay off the debt. How's that for blues credentials? Also check out the brilliant acoustic slide on <i>Too Much Alcohol</i> - which brings me to his death. Given that he was an Irish blues singer-guitarist and died following a liver transplant at 47 you might leap, understandably, to the conclusion that he drank a little too much. Apparently not, though, see " <i>Gallagher, Marriott, Derringer &amp; Trower: Their Lives And Music</i> " by Dan Muisse.

1972	Eric Clapton	<p><i>History of Eric Clapton</i></p> <p>The first of what was to be a great many compilations. This covers Slowhand's golden age from the Yardbirds, The Bluesbreakers and Cream through Blind Faith, Delaney &amp; Bonnie and Derek &amp; the Dominos. I considered <i>Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs</i> but this has <i>Layla</i> on it anyway (but check out the <i>Other Assorted Love Songs</i> too, e.g., <i>Have You Ever Loved A Woman</i>, which is about the same woman as <i>Layla</i> actually). <i>History</i> also has some live Cream, with their archetypal long solos. A good balance of material from 1964 to 1971. I saw Derek &amp; the Dominos in M/c in 1971. This was at the height of Clapton's heroin period, and he was clearly smashed. Didn't interfere with his playing, but his famous motionlessness was emphatic. This was Clapton's only record release in 1972 and contained material only up to 1971. I guess the record label was thinking he was all washed up. But then Pete Townsend organised his comeback Rainbow Concert in 1973. The rest is (more) history.</p>
1972	Jethro Tull	<p><i>Thick As A Brick</i></p> <p>I never understood the "Little Milton" business. Apparently it was Ian Anderson's reaction to the critics. It was the concept album equivalent of "nah, that's not a knife, mate, <i>this</i> is a knife". I just listened to <i>Thick As A Brick</i> again for the first time in decades, and it doesn't sound dated at all to me. Still stands up brilliantly. It's so darned <i>musical</i>. It's funny but I cannot recall anyone using the term "prog rock" in the early 70s. We did use "progressive rock" briefly, for example to refer to Pink Floyd in the <i>Saucerful of Secrets</i> era. But that was just pretentious grammar school boys describing the pseudo-avante-garde. The term "prog rock" was exclusively derogatory, and was used only later – deservedly so in the case of the excesses of Emerson, Lake &amp; Palmer or Yes. But I dislike the term immensely.</p>
1972	Fairport Convention	<p><i>The History of Fairport Convention</i></p> <p><i>Liege &amp; Lief</i> has a big reputation amongst folkies, but I thought I'd go for this, their first compilation, since it also has <i>Fotheringay</i> and <i>Meet on the Ledge</i>, from the earlier album <i>What We Did On Our Holidays</i>, which I couldn't do without. It's a pity I couldn't smuggle in Sandy Denny's <i>The Sea</i> also, but since she recorded that with Fotheringay not Fairport Convention that would be stretching it a bit. Fairport are the only band I can think of who have had more past members than King Crimson. [Correction: Both are very easily beaten by Gong].</p>
1973	Pink Floyd	<p><i>Dark Side of the Moon</i></p> <p>Yes, yes, it's got to go in. It <i>is</i> brilliant. And I did listen to it constantly in '73. But I still resent the hoi polloi stealing my secret band. So cut up was I at this, that I never bought a copy. Try the <i>Dub Side of the Moon</i> by the Easy Star All-Stars (2003) as an alternative. (OK, OK, I'm sorry)</p>
1973	Wishbone Ash	<p><i>Live Dates</i></p> <p>This is a live double album featuring most of the best tracks from the early albums which featured both Ted Turner and Andy Powell on lead guitars. The unique Wishbone Ash sound was the result of this twin lead guitar harmony – the subject of many attempts to replicate by schoolboy bands of the era. Whilst clearly a rock band, Wishbone Ash always sounded like they had folk roots. (The name results from random word selection and means nothing).</p>

1973	Mahavishnu Orchestra	<i>Birds of Fire</i> Virtuoso funk jazz rock featuring John McLaughlin and Jerry Goodman. The earlier <i>Inner Mounting Flame</i> and the subsequent <i>Visions of the Emerald Beyond</i> are well worth acquiring also. These are what I wasted my time to at university (when it wasn't West Coast or Hendrix).
1968-1974	Tim Buckley	<i>Once I Was</i> This is a posthumous compilation of live recordings actually released in 1999. Mostly BBC recordings (e.g. off the John Peel Show). He was known as "The Voice". I'm not sure I don't prefer his son, Jeff (born posthumously).
1974	Wishbone Ash	<i>There's The Rub</i> Another fine collection of guitar driven tunes.
1974	The Grateful Dead	<i>(Ugly Rumors) From the Mars Hotel</i> The official title is <i>Grateful Dead from the Mars Hotel</i> , but when held upside down and viewed in a mirror, the original vinyl LP cover graphic displays " <i>Ugly Rumors</i> ", which is how most people refer to this album. (It inspired the name of Tony Blair's band, but hey, that's not The Dead's fault). There is an embarrassment of riches in choosing Dead albums. I like this one for the sheer melodiousness of most of the songs. It's a nice complement to Live/Dead which displays the band's live <i>ad lib</i> abilities.
1974	Eric Clapton	<i>461 Ocean Boulevard</i> What Eric did next. He went all pop. Staggeringly, despite having been God's alter ego for so many years, <i>I Shot The Sheriff</i> was Clapton's first No.1 single. But then, cred people didn't <i>do</i> singles, man. I recall the shock experienced by many old time fans of Clapton-of-the-Cream. "What is Clapton doing playing <i>that</i> rubbish?" I think we can be more grown up about it now.
1975	Bob Dylan	<i>Blood On The Tracks</i> This was Dylan's best album for 10 years and a return to form big time. I couldn't leave this out, so it's a rare 3 <sup>rd</sup> album by one artist. This and <i>Desire</i> are the only Dylan albums after the 1960s (and perhaps <i>The Basement Tapes</i> ) which are really first rate, imho. He goes on churning them out, though. Are we up to 35 studio albums now? I have <i>Time Out of Mind</i> and <i>Together Through Life</i> yet (really crap title) - I've tried, Bob, but I'm afraid the magic has gone.
1975	Renaissance	<i>Scheherazade and other stories</i> Sort of folk-classical with the excellent voice of Annie Haslam. I saw this live at the time. I bet she was nervous about that last note. The previous year's <i>Turn of the Cards</i> is also recommended. A tip as regards looking after vinyl: don't leave it on your car's parcel shelf during hot weather. I haven't been able to play TotC for the last 30 years. Anyone got a copy?
1975	Neil Young & Crazy Horse	<i>Zuma</i> Neil Young comes in two flavours: acoustic and electric. The electric version is most often with Crazy Horse. I prefer the electric version, but it's all good. NY presents a major problem of choice. It says it all that I'm forced to omit <i>Harvest</i> , <i>After The Gold Rush</i> , <i>Harvest Moon</i> and <i>Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere</i> . I decided on <i>Zuma</i> because the title track is so brilliant.

1975	Soft Machine	<p><i>Bundles</i></p> <p>This is the one with Alan Holdsworth on guitar. He can play a bit. I was so knocked out by the gig in '75 in Cambridge that I caught the same tour again in Manchester a few weeks later. This is another for the short, short list. My favourite Softs album, and that's saying a great deal. If you hate jazz then this is not for you, but trad it ain't. [2010: Now re-released for the first time on CD – buy it! But don't blame me if it's just too <i>cool</i> for you, man]</p>
1976	Frank Zappa	<p><i>Zoot Allures</i></p> <p>Morally suspect to a high degree, but a hoot. <i>Apostrophe</i> is fun too, and perhaps others, but I don't claim encyclopaedic knowledge of Zappa. The lyrics are the appeal, e.g., "He's the best, of course, of all the worst. Some bad bin done, he done it first". The CD of live jazz guitar solos is to be avoided at all costs, though – unless you're the sort of person who likes Vogon poetry.</p>
1981	King Crimson	<p><i>Discipline</i></p> <p>Frippertronics rules! Finally something emerged from the post-1976 punk-induced doldrums which wasn't afraid of being cerebral. This was the first King Crimson album since they disbanded in 1974. Re-staffed more often than MacDonalds, the band has had 21 different full time members. Not bad for a 5-piece. All you need to join is to be a brilliant musician and agree with Robert Fripp's "way of doing things".</p>
1989	The Stone Roses	<p><i>The Stone Roses</i></p> <p>Ah, now! The Stone Roses. I could kiss their little bottoms. After the long dreadful drought of the 1980s, I woke up one day to find that music had not died after all. People could still play the guitar. It was all happening in Madchester. Absolutely brilliant album. It's gotta be adored.</p>
1983-1990	Stevie Ray Vaughan	<p><i>The Essential Stevie Ray Vaughan and Double Trouble</i></p> <p>The album is a posthumous 2002 compilation, drawing on studio and live recordings over the period from 1983 to SRV's death in 1990. SRV is the only guitarist that I've ever confused with Hendrix. But he had more styles than just a Hendrix-soundalike. SRV lived the classic rock star lifestyle, though he wasn't that well known outside the US during his life. Understandable since his music was profoundly out of fashion in the 1980s. The fashion was, of course, keyboard-synth-new-romantic trash, which is now thankfully much more dead than SRV, whose music lives on. File under "Essential".</p>
1990	Neil Young & Crazy Horse	<p><i>Ragged Glory</i></p> <p>The title is very appropriate. This is the distortion-heavy electric guitar version of Neil Young. There are a couple of duff tracks on the album, but the rest more than compensate. Play <i>Over And Over</i> over and over. And the rest. Why hasn't the Green movement adopted <i>Mother Earth (Natural Anthem)</i>? Wimps.</p>
1991	Pearl Jam	<p><i>Ten</i></p> <p>Pearl Jam's identification with the grunge era was just an accident of timing. They're a good old fashioned rock band. The early criticism of being commercial sell-outs now appears equally inaccurate.</p>

1992	The Cranberries	<i>Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We?</i> Irish girly love songs. What do you mean, “yuk”? Don't be so unromantic. This debut had a freshness that was missing from the later efforts. (Though <i>Zombie</i> on the second album was a classic). Crap name for a band, though.
1992	Rage Against The Machine	<i>Rage Against The Machine</i> Rap & riff rock. Naïve politics, and rather basic music, but I like it. Possibly 1999's <i>The Battle Of Los Angeles</i> might have the edge on this first album, but all their albums are similar, let's face it. [Oh yes, people power! I too paid 39p, or whatever it was, to download <i>Killing in the Name</i> to keep the X Factor winner from the UK Christmas No.1 spot in 2009 – despite already owning it on CD. And it worked, people! Yes, I know the capitalist music establishment just made even more money, but it was one in the eye for the evil Cowell and so was worth it. But why didn't we keep Wagner in, guys? (If only he could have squeezed the Ring Cycle into 2 minutes he'd have walked it)].
1992	R.E.M.	<i>Automatic For The People</i> A lot of people have it in for REM. Don't know why. Hey, I even like <i>Shiny Happy People</i> - not that it's on this album. Pity that <i>Loosing My Religion</i> isn't on it either, which is my favourite track. But this is probably the best all round album.
1994	Jeff Buckley	<i>Grace</i> Son of the equally famous, and equally dead, Tim Buckley. Both had great voices. Both seemed fated and died young. Jeff died accidentally by drowning. Tim died accidentally of a heroin overdose.
1994	Jimi Hendrix (posthumous)	<i>Blues</i> 11 live blues pieces. There are so many live recordings from that all too brief period 1967 to 1970. This is a nice collection of blistering blues numbers, some of which I've not heard on any other album. There may be better compilations, I haven't heard them all, but this is a flag for what Hendrix live was all about. (Not that I ever saw him live, damn it).
1995	Jenkins, Ratledge & Stockley	<i>Adiemus: Songs of Sanctuary</i> I thought that the artist was Karl Jenkins, as composer, but I note that the CD sleeve has no artist mentioned. Mike Ratledge was Jenkins' long time collaborator in Soft Machine and assisted with the arrangements. However, neither of them play on this. This honour goes to the London Philharmonic, with the vocals by Miriam Stockley. I've probably been a bit naughty putting this in – it's very close to being classical. I would have had no excuse for Jenkins' 2008 <i>Stabat Mater</i> which I was very tempted to include. <i>Adiemus</i> was very successful, largely due to being adopted by some TV programmes, and was soon followed by <i>Adiemus II</i> and <i>III</i> . The lyrics are meaningless, by the way.
1995	Oasis	<i>(What's the Story) Morning Glory?</i> I was a bit reluctant to put an Oasis album in, basically because the Gallaghers are so objectionable. Also, Oasis is such a crap name for a band. Why not Ribena? But, fair dos, this is a classic. I came in for a lot of stick from my brother for including Oasis. But it stays. Yes, its derivative – but almost everything is.

1995	Radiohead	<i>The Bends</i> Here's one for the short list. I know that full-time Radiohead freaks like all their albums comparably, but I don't get it. To me, <i>The Bends</i> and <i>OK Computer</i> are just in a different league from all the others. It's not for lack of trying, either. Though I have to say the later albums come over extremely well live, especially <i>In Rainbows</i> . But nothing compares to <i>Fake Plastic Trees</i> , <i>Street Spirit</i> , <i>Black Star</i> , etc.
1997	Radiohead	<i>OK Computer</i> The first few times I listened to this, it seemed like a single piece of music rather than separate tracks. Actually it still does. Thom York's (other) finest hour. Top of the class.
1997	Jackson Browne	<i>The Next Voice You Hear</i> It's a compilation. Fantastic song writer. I bet he'd be hell to live with.
1997	Stereophonics	<i>Words Gets Around</i> Kelly Jones' voice seemed strikingly rasping back in 1997, though less so now. Perhaps we've just got used to it, like Dylan? I rather went off the Stereophonics with each subsequent album, but this one has some really good songs, which sound all the better for being rough-cut.
1997	The Seahorses	<i>Do It Yourself</i> ...or what John Squire did after the Stone Roses imploded, for a bit anyway. Given that Chris Helme's voice is much better than Ian Brown's, why does this miss the edge of The Stone Roses? It's a very good album, though. Squire follows his tendency evident in the second Roses album, <i>Second Coming</i> , with big fat guitar solos. I think he's suffered riff-death now and gone back to being an artist. [Let's not mention the Stone Roses reunion, shall we?].
1997	The Verve	<i>Urban Hymns</i> This was a smash hit, and deservedly so. Check out <i>A Northern Soul</i> as well though. The drugs don't work, they just make you worse.
1996 1998	Eva Cassidy	<i>Songbird</i> Strictly this is a compilation, but what the heck. Incredible voice. I decided to put this one in the list when I realised I was actually enjoying her version of <i>Over the Rainbow</i> (impossible, surely?). But <i>Fields of Gold</i> and <i>Autumn Leaves</i> would have been enough by themselves.
1998	Manic Street Preachers	<i>This Is My Truth, Tell Me Yours</i> Remember when bands were political? "If you tolerate this, then your children will be next...". Think ID cards. Protest and survive!
1998	Gov't Mule	<i>Dose</i> I needed to include something to recognise the existence of Warren Haynes. Having played lead with The Allman Brothers and The Dead makes a pretty impressive CV without Haynes' myriad of other involvements. He can play anything. The Mule stand at the rockier end of the blues spectrum. Haynes launched a new band in December '10 (The Warren Haynes Band) which I think means the end of Gov't Mule. I previously included the live <i>Mulennium</i> monster triple CD, recorded at a turn-of-the-millennium gig but only released in full in 2010, marking the Mule's demise I suppose. But its sound reproduction is poor so I've replaced it with this studio album. There some great classics on this one, e.g., <i>Thorazine Shuffle</i> and <i>Towering Fool</i> . Good old fashioned rock.

1998	Brandtson	<p><i>Letterbox</i></p> <p>I listened to nothing but Brandtson in 2004. This debut album is all power chords and very different from 1999s <i>Fallen Star Collection</i> which is firmly in the soft emo category. I like all their albums &amp; EPs though. They are Christians, but it's not in your face. Strongly recommended, but I'm biased. They broke up sometime after 2006. Must check out Swarm of Bats sometime.</p>
1999	Silverchair	<p><i>Neon Ballroom</i></p> <p>The previous two albums from this Aussie band were rather basic grunge rock affairs, but they <i>were</i> still at school between the first and the second. <i>Neon Ballroom</i> is far more interesting, though still rather reminiscent of Nirvana era grunge in parts. I'm currently still getting familiar with the next album, <i>Diorama</i>, which is more poppy and orchestral. [Hmm...no, I think Neon Ballroom was their zenith].</p>
1999	Incubus	<p><i>Make Yourself</i></p> <p>It was either this or 2001's <i>Morning View</i>. After that the original bassist, Alex Katunich (aka Dirk Lance) was replaced and the band went off my radar screen. Excellent M/c university gig in 2000. They didn't carry Wembley Arena so well, though (2002?).</p>
2000	Queens of the Stone Age	<p><i>Rated R</i></p> <p>They are <i>very</i> naught boys! If you did all that stuff in track 1, you'd have monsters in your parasol by track 6.</p>
2000	Bowling For Soup	<p><i>Let's Do It For Johnny</i></p> <p>My favourite new wave punk album. Bristol gig circa 2004.</p>
2000	Deftones	<p><i>White Pony</i></p> <p>It took me a long time to appreciate this album. It's rather disturbing, and in a more insidious manner than other nu-metal of the era. Best band at Reading in 2000 imho. If you like melodious songs about birds and flowers and romantic love, this is not for you (see Eva Cassidy instead).</p>
2000	Linkin Park	<p><i>Hybrid Theory</i></p> <p>Linkin Park rather suffered from coming to prominence just as nu-metal was becoming <i>passé</i> (OK, so it's rap-metal). Around here they were popular for about a week and then became <i>persona non grata</i>. However that doesn't alter the fact that Hybrid Theory really is a fine album. And it didn't stop its sales topping 29 million and being the best selling debut album of all time either.</p>
2000	The Offspring	<p><i>Conspiracy Of One</i></p> <p>Californian new-wave punk. Pretty tricky choosing an Offspring album. I prefer my own compilation of favourite tracks from <i>Ignition</i>, <i>Smash</i>, <i>ixnay</i>, <i>Americana &amp; CoO</i>. But <i>CoO</i> will do. Excellent Wembley Arena gig circa 2001/2 doing this stuff.</p>
2000	Less Than Jake	<p><i>Borders and Boundaries</i></p> <p>Well, there had to be a ska punk album. <i>Look What Happened</i> is my favourite track. Bristol gig circa 2004.</p>
2000	The Juliana Theory	<p><i>Emotion Is Dead</i></p> <p>US emo band. Never really took off commercially, but this is a really good album imho. Were they announcing the demise of emo? It seems to be lingering.</p>

2000	Green Day	<i>Warning</i> This was the last album before Green Day became teeny bopper fodder with <i>American Idiot</i> . Previously one of the stalwarts of the new wave punk scene. This can stand in for the whole genre (together with Bad Religion and Bowling For Soup). Simple songs, simply presented.
2000	Birth	<i>Gotten Bold</i> Birth is not really a band so much as a working name for the mysterious D.L. and whoever guests with him at the time. <i>Gotten Bold</i> is pretty much straight pop, but of the best kind. (DL is Dawm Lanten, by the way).
2001	Tool	<i>Lateralus</i> Progressive-art-house-metal. The number of syllables in successive lines of the lyrics of the title track form an ascending, then descending, Fibonacci series. But it's really not that cerebral to listen to. Love it. Also it has the best CD graphics in my collection.
2001	My Vitriol	<i>Finelines</i> Now here's an under-rated album. Welcome to the Shoegazing wall of sound. File under 'alternative' or 'nu gaze'. Perhaps rather more melodic than many of this genre. Don't be put off by the band's name. They're not nu metal or anything like. Apparently most of the band attended my <i>alma mater</i> , UCL. Godless Students of Gower Street, then. Oddly, despite the fact that the band were gigging fairly regularly in the early 2000s, there has been no other studio album. Rumour has it that the band will play their first gig in many years next May (2013) in London.
2002	Finch	<i>What It Is To Burn</i> This one snuck up on me gradually. I now play it a lot. It sounds like nu-metal, but actually much of it is emo played loud. Inspired by Deftones, to good effect. Strongly recommended. The band didn't survive long after the traditionally tricky second album, but did reform to work on a third which was never completed. They have reformed again, if only temporarily, to do a <i>What It Is To Burn</i> anniversary tour in 2013. In Brm in March, I'll try to get there. (I did - it did not disappoint. The place was full of hard core Finch fans who knew all the lyrics and sang along. Odd, most of 'em could only have been kiddies when the album came out. And this despite the band are actually no more. Anyhows, a good night).
2002	Nguyen Le	<i>Purple</i> Nguyen is a French jazz guitarist of Vietnamese extraction. Purple is a compilation of Jimi Hendrix pieces, but radically reinterpreted in a Vietnamese-jazz idiom. Can't imagine that, eh? The guy can play, that's the important thing. This stands in stark contrast to, say, Stevie Ray Vaughan's virtually note-perfect regurgitation of Hendrix. (Not that there's anything wrong with that).
2003	This Beautiful Mess	<i>Temper the Wind to the Shorn Lamb</i> I vacillated over including this one at the last pass. Perhaps I was put off too much by the evident Christian influence (note the title). But the sure sign of quality music is that you can bear to listen to it over and over again without apparent limit. This passes the test - I've just re-checked. Also, there aren't many Dutch bands in this list (just one other - and, no, it's <i>not</i> the one that follows). Firmly in the soft emo category this one. Slow paced, but some nice strong themes.

2003	New Amsterdams	<p><i>Worse for the Wear</i></p> <p>I quote from a reviewer on Amazon, with whom I thoroughly agree: “You found it! It's a joy. It's a discovery. It's a gem. A consistent catchy collection of true Indie songs delivered with above average professionalism and musicianship. Withstands the listen-five-times test - I've heard this over 12 times and just want more. Controlled vocals and varied instrumentation and tempo. There is not one song on this album that I'm inclined to skip. No, the artist did not pay me to write this review. Quality like this deserves comment.” Quite so. Check out <i>Hanging on for Hope</i>. The New Amsterdams started as a side-project for Matt Pryor, lead singer of emo-punk band The Get Up Kids, but became his major vehicle when the latter broke up. Both bands are now active again, at least intermittently.</p>
2004	Brandtson	<p><i>Send Us A Signal</i></p> <p>You get <i>Blindspot</i> on this one too, but re-recorded with less distortion. The last album before the original bassist left the band. Their sound was different thereafter (<i>Hello Control</i>).</p>
2004	Bad Religion	<p><i>The Empire Strikes First</i></p> <p>I had to have a Bad Religion album, but favourite tracks are scattered all over their 14 albums to date. <i>Empire</i> will do. Having <i>Los Angeles Is Burning</i> on it is a big plus. It's an anti-George Bush album, and anti-Iraq war. Bad Religion were in the vanguard of the new wave punk revival circa 1981 so have excellent credentials. Bristol gig 2010 did not disappoint, except for the absence of Brett Gurewitz which meant that the guitar solos were a bit of a joke.</p>
2004	Joanna Newsom	<p><i>The Milk-Eyed Mender</i></p> <p>She plays the harp and has a voice like Marge Simpson. Not a recipe for success? No, but she has something: originality and some sort of off-centre genius. Fascinating to watch on video. Clearly committed to her art. Doesn't mind looking weird. She'll do for me. The 2006 album <i>Ys</i> received a lot of attention, but I like the songs on the first album better. Her third offering was a rather daunting triple-CD box set (2010) with the odd title, <i>Have One On Me</i>. I have so far found it very difficult to penetrate.</p>
2005	Coheed and Cambria	<p><i>Good Apollo, I'm Burning Star IV, Volume One: From Fear Through the Eyes of Madness</i></p> <p>Progressive-rock, guitar driven but thoughtful and sometimes rather disturbing. The band is not at all like Rush. This is a mistake based on the high-pitched vocals. The album tells a story set in the band's own fictional world. There is a Volume Two, and two earlier albums, and also a prequel.</p>
2006	Rodrigo y Gabriela	<p><i>Rodrigo y Gabriela</i></p> <p>Cracking good Mexican guitarists, playing latin/flamenco style on Spanish/classical acoustic guitars. They claim a raft of heavy metal influences, which is really weird since heavy metal could hardly be further from what they do (despite Led Zeppelin and Metallica numbers featuring on this album). Strongly recommended.</p> <p>The 2009 CD <i>11:11</i> is also well worth getting, though I actually prefer the eponymous album. See my review of <i>11:11</i> performed live on this site.</p>

2008	Fleet Foxes	<p><i>Fleet Foxes</i></p> <p>American folk, but sounding eerily English. Even the band name has an English resonance. They have been described as purveyors of baroque harmonies. That might be pushing it a bit. In my mind they suffered from becoming too popular too quickly, thanks to the internet. Not always a blessing. [I'm not sufficiently familiar with the, traditionally difficult, second album (2011's <i>Helplessness Blues</i>) to comment. However on first hearing it sounds to be more of the same - not necessarily a bad thing, but variation and progression will be needed by No.3. I'll report back when that's out].</p>
2008	Ry Cooder	<p><i>The Ry Cooder Anthology: The UFO Has Landed</i></p> <p>Ry Cooder has played with just everyone, from Beefheart and The Stones through Ali Farka Toure and The Chieftains. His output has been staggering: some 26 CDs including collaborations, plus no less than 14 film sound tracks. Often noted for his slide work, that's rather like noting van Gogh for the colour yellow - hardly the whole picture. Blues is definitely the unifying theme, but there's great dollops of gospel in there too. I once had a theory that albums with the worst art work had the best music. It certainly applies here – the art work on the CD is dreadful. I don't get the title either.</p>
2008	Shinedown	<p><i>Sound of Madness</i></p> <p>Quality rock. OK, they're pretty commercial and I do feel slightly guilty about this inclusion. Hey, they're better than Oasis! They can sometimes sound like The Offspring (<i>Devour</i> and the title track), sometimes like rockers such as Nickelback (<i>Second Chance, What a Shame</i>), and can out-Skynyrd Lynyrd with their version of <i>Simple Man</i> (though that's not on this CD). Their strength is probably mostly the fine rock singing of Brent Smith. I know us cred people don't even recognise that singles exist, but quite why <i>Call Me</i> hasn't been released as a single is a mystery to me. If I were their producer, I'd cash in, frankly.</p>
2009	Joe Bonamassa	<p><i>The Ballad of John Henry</i></p> <p>This guy could play blistering blues solos when he was 12. Check him out on YouTube. Everyone a gem on this 2009 album. The title track is on a traditional theme. I've heard Woody Guthrie sing a John Henry song, but not sounding like this! There is an American legend of John Henry, a steel driving railroad worker and hero of the left. His historical existence is perhaps comparable with that of Robin Hood. [I continue to recommend this CD over 2010's <i>Black Rock</i> which disappointed rather. 2011's <i>Dust Bowl</i> was a return to form, though. I'm not sufficiently familiar with 2012's <i>Driving Towards the Daylight</i> to comment. If you don't have any and want to buy just one I'd go for <i>Ballad of John Henry</i> or <i>Live from the Royal Albert Hall</i> (2009)]. I don't think I poured nearly enough praise on big Joe at the last pass. Do trawl YouTube and Spotify. There were eight excellent albums before <i>Ballad</i> and a lot of live soloing on YouTube. I especially recommend his version of Zeppelin's <i>Tea for One</i>.</p>

2009	Turin Brakes	<p><i>Bottled at Source – The Best of the Source Years</i></p> <p>Turin Brakes are basically a duo act with acoustic guitars. Having seen them live in Bristol in 2009 I can tell you that they carry a highly polished band around with them on tour. They get labeled as ‘modern folk’, whatever that is supposed to be. They have no relation at all to traditional folk music. ‘Quality pop’ may be a better description, but despite the qualifier that will deter many people, unjustly. What you get is this: really excellent, emotionally driven song writing and the matching superb singing of Olly Knights, ably accompanied by Gale Paridjanian (that’s Gale, not Gail, hence a bloke, btw). I’ve entirely given up on my original banning of compilations. This 2009 CD is the ‘best of’ the first 5 albums, from 2001 to 2007. You get 17 album tracks plus a second disc with another 17 tracks, some of which are different versions of the same songs, but many of which are different. So excellent value. I’m not yet familiar with the latest (2010) album, <i>Outbursts</i>, but watch out for this entering the list as well in future.</p>
2010	Engineers	<p><i>In Praise of More</i></p> <p>I’ve finally fallen for the charms of Engineers. (You can shut up now, Simon). I’ve been rather too immersed in guitar-god blues recently. Engineers’ ambient wall of sound is a good antidote. In terms of genre they are definitely of the shoe-gazing fraternity (nu-gazing, I guess we should now say). So, as Amazon might have it, people who enjoyed Engineers would also enjoy My Vitriol or Mogwai. Are these guys intellectuals? Isn’t <i>In Praise of More</i> a famous essay by Erasmus which presaged the protestant reformation, the “<i>More</i>” in question being Sir Thomas More? And isn’t an alternative title for this famous work <i>In Praise of Folly</i>, and wasn’t Engineers’ first CD an EP called <i>Folly</i>? Am I reading too much into this? Almost certainly.</p> <p>This album is the first with a new line-up. I may replace this choice with the 2005 eponymous debut album when I’ve got it – I suspect that may be the best to date.</p>
2010	Mogwai	<p><i>Special Moves</i></p> <p>Having mentioned Mogwai above made me wonder why they were not in the list. They are now. This is their 2010 live offering. If Engineers have a wall of sound, these guys produce a variable civil structure: sometimes masquerading as a titchy little garden fence it suddenly explodes into the Troll Wall and blows your head off. Vaguely reminiscent of early Floyd to some degree: simple refrains repeated and modulated to good effect. Vocals are notable for their scarcity, and live tracks often top 10 minutes. I’m not sure that “<i>I love you, I’m going to blow up your school</i>” is strictly proper, though.</p>
2010	Kenny Wayne Shepherd	<p><i>Live! in Chicago</i></p> <p>Is that Hendrix I hear? Is it SRV? No, its Kenny Wayne Shepherd carrying on the great tradition. Once the <i>enfant terrible</i> of blues guitar, he’s now no longer <i>un enfant</i> and most certainly is not terrible. Quite <i>au contraire</i>, I assure you. Five studio albums in 15 years is not a great output, though. This latest offering is a set of live recordings of the most performed tracks of those albums. The choice includes both some of the more rocky KWS Band numbers but also a selection of traditional blues pieces with guest singers, both with plenty of Kenny’s live soloing. Unlike so many almost-great blues guitarists, KWS actually takes the trouble to get the phrasing right, every time.</p>

2010	Zander Zon	<p><i>Sonorous</i></p> <p>Now this is really different. This is an album of solo electric piccolo bass pieces, written and performed by Zander (who plays a Zon bass, so that's highly unlikely to be his real surname). It would be tempting to assign the unique sound he conjures from his bass to the piccolo strings and the non-standard tunings. Alternatively you could reasonably point to the liberal, but tasteful, use of tapping and harmonics. And certainly he uses a great deal of reverb and echo (and tape loops). But the real answer is that Zander's first instrument is the classical cello, and this has been translated into a peculiar mastery of the electric bass. And his compositions are so elegant. 'Sonorous' is a rare treat in the (under)world of solo bass guitar performance: a solo bass album that can be enjoyed by everyone, not just bass players. But you needn't take my word for it. All but one of these pieces (and many others) are available on YouTube. Check it out. He has a second album out now if you're interested - I've not heard it yet.</p>
2011	Alison Krauss & Union Station	<p><i>Paper Airplane</i></p> <p>You're on a safe bet with Alison Krauss and her band, Union Station. I can't claim any great knowledge of bluegrass, but their musicianship is indisputable. Krauss plays fiddle as well as singing. And the singing is shared equally with the male band members, especially Dan Tyminski. In fact I think I like his tracks more (<i>dust bowl children, outside looking in, bonita and bill butler</i>). Krauss makes a particularly good job of Jackson Browne's <i>My Opening Farewell</i>, which is becoming my favourite track in the face of the more obvious attractions of the other material. This is the Jackson Brown magic, I suspect. I didn't include Krauss's 2007 album with Robert Plant, <i>Raising Sand</i>, but could easily have done so. I believe they were working on a follow-up, but it folded. I wonder who got fed up of whom. I can't imagine Plant's ego is easy to live with, but then Krauss is known to be an ultra-purist in regard to bluegrass, which can't be easy for a neophyte in the genre.</p>
2011	John Renbourn	<p><i>Palermo Snow</i></p> <p>Having attended a Renbourn gig recently (2012, see reviews on this site) I have just acquired a bunch of his recordings which I've meant to get for some time - mostly stuff from the 60s and 70s. However, Palermo Snow is his latest and is quite wonderful (I listen to it as I write). Renbourn's solo work is virtually defined by mixing of genres. He invented medieval-blues fusion in the 60s. Rather than me wittering on, here are the great man's own words. "<i>These pieces all share a touch of romantic harmony. Nothing too extreme - just more than I have been accustomed to. Why that should have surfaced or where it came from I'm not too sure. This selection is an unlikely looking assembly, but that is only on the surface. Deeper down the common bond of harmony should be enough to bring them all together.</i>" An unlikely looking assembly indeed, with Bach's cello suite No.1 being followed by <i>Weebles Wobble</i>. But they are united by more than harmony. They are united by fantastic virtuosity. Of course it never snows in Palermo - apart from that once when Renbourn was there.</p>

2012	Richard Hawley	<p><i>Standing at the Sky's Edge</i>  Strongly recommended. When this album was brought to my attention I checked out Hawley's back catalogue. He's been around for a long time (having been in Pulp for a while, and had associations with Elbow and the Arctic Monkeys). But his earlier solo albums were all soft focus neo-hippy crooning. Sky's Edge is a major departure, the emphasis being on wild distorted guitar work - but always used to decorate decent songs. Did someone buy him a new amp and a set of pedals for his birthday? Like many of his previous album/track titles, Sky's Edge is a reference to a district of Hawley's native Sheffield. There's no doubt regarding at which end of the political spectrum his sympathies lie. I may get to the Feb'13 gig at the Colston Hall - though being just 3 days before Richard Thompson, and the day after Deftones / Three Trapped Tigers, feels a bit greedy.</p>
2012	Three Trapped Tigers	<p><i>Numbers 1 to 13</i>  Well now - an antidote to my recent diet of classical and folk music. Ah, blessed cacophony! The interweb classifies them as noise-rock, the label used when the idiot reviewer is confused. It's quite clear. They are ambient-experimental-classical-progressive-dance-jazz-rock-electronica...stuff. Got that? Not very useful, labels, are they? There's dance/trance in there - but I don't like that, but I do like TTT, so that won't do. Also, we mustn't call it IDM*, which is a shame because "intelligent" is, actually, the best adjective here. Besides, with that guy smashing the skins like intermittent machine gun fire, it's far too rhythmic and syncopated. The drummer (Adam Betts) is now officially in the unfuckingbelievable category (I quote from our NME correspondent). So back to the failure to describe... imagine Aphex Twin re-interpreted via conventional instruments (well, partly). No, that's not too close either, but it's better. After about a minute of listening to these guys it's clear that there is a classical-boy-gone-bad in there somewhere. And there is. (It's the keyboards, Tom Rogerson). Smash, bash, crash, wail, boom, boom, screech...wait up, was that a melody. Heck, it was. Oh no, it's gone all quiet and solo piano and harmonic. Don't they know this is supposed to be my antidote to melodic stuff! Hold on - it's OK, it's back to smashing things up again. Phew! Oops, no - back to the ambient space-fill - is that a mellotron? What is this, the 70s prog scene? No, its breaking up into a dying spiral whistle now - and now an electronic drum solo - followed by a Floyd-a-like theme. I give up. You'll just have to buy it. Actually they only have one album - and it's not this - it's 2011's <i>Route One or Die</i>. <i>Numbers 1 to 13</i> is a compilation of the three EPs they released between 2008 and 2010. Hailing from London, TTT have been around a long time and are clearly content to mature slowly - a good sign. They are touring as support to Deftones in 2013. I'd like to go - but with Deftones heading it may be difficult to get tickets. (It was, so I have yet to see TTT live). See my special <a href="http://rickbradford.co.uk/ThreeTrappedTigers.html">http://rickbradford.co.uk/ThreeTrappedTigers.html</a>.</p> <p><i>*(Standing instructions if you find yourself becoming a fan of IDM: 'phone your mum, tell her you love her, and kill yourself immediately before you can contaminate anyone else).</i></p>

2013	Mallory Knox	<p><i>Signals</i></p> <p>This was an accidental discovery. Mallory Knox were supporting Finch in March'13, so I invested in their first, and only, full length album. What a pleasant surprise. I was taken by the album on first listening, which is often a bad sign. Catchiness tends to work against longevity. But this has survived the listen-ten-times test fine. Yes, they have a commercial sound. You'll get no cred points adopting this band. Like as not they're going to be chart toppers (oh dear). But there are no dud songs on this album. Amid the driving rock there a couple of really good, thoughtful ballads (<i>Bury Your Head</i> and <i>1949</i>). There's some genuine emotional intensity here, and not a little chutzpah given the subject matter of <i>1949</i>. All the tracks are well put together. But it is Mikey Chapman's powerful vocals which make this album a winner. This album won't push you into new musical territory. You'll just enjoy listening to it.</p>
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