HIGHLIFE WORLD MUSIC

BEST OF 2013 – OUR FAVOURITE ALBUMS OF THE YEAR

1317 Commercial Drive Vancouver, BC **tel:** 604-251-6964
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BEST OF 2013!

TAMIKREST ***Chatma*** Mali

Tinariwen may have led the way with its potent mixture of Tuareg music and rock, but Tamikrest ups the ante on this powerful tribute to Tuareg women. Ringing blues guitars bring a searing immediacy to these stirring songs on what sounds like the ultimate desert blues album.

THE NATIONAL ***Trouble Will Find Me*** USA

This triumphant sixth album by Brooklyn-based indie-rock stalwarts The National still finds Matt Berninger wrestling with his demons in his distinctive baritone while the Dessner brothers offset the brass & string arrangements with their atmospheric guitars. In the end, it's the sheer brilliance of the songwriting that elevates this album into the realm of 'instant classic'.

NICOLAS REPAC ***Black Box*** France

Guitarist, composer, producer and DJ Nicolas Repac has created a haunting tapestry with his re-workings of classic blues tracks, from chain gang songs to Bo Diddley. Rounded out with recent recordings of African legends Bonga and Cheikh Lo, this is a unique and subtly surprising recording.

STEVE EARLE ***The Low Highway*** USA

Doing what he does best, Steve Earle paints poignant portraits of his fractured land, back by pedal steel, mandolin, accordion and some stinging electric guitar. A couple of New Orleans tinged pieces he wrote for the HBO 'Treme' series that he appeared in round out a mighty impressive recording.

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ARCADE FIRE ***Reflektor*** Canada

Montreal's indie-rock success story changes tack on their latest double album. Inspired by a trip to Haiti, they team up with producer James Murphy of LCD Soundsystem, as their sound morphs into a post-modern dance cycle, with echoes of Talking Heads, Bowie and Caribbean discos. This is a whole new Arcade Fire.

JILL BARBER ***Chansons*** Canada

Who could guess that an Anglophone raised in Toronto could tackle the classic French and Quebecois songbook so convincingly and beautifully? Backed by a stripped down chamber-jazz group, Jill Barber offers this enchanting album of songs associated with Piaf, Aznavour and Gainsbourg, among others, demonstrating (as Linda Ronstadt did on 'Canciones De Mi Padre') that sometimes an artist from another culture can bring a new perspective to an old tradition.

BILLIE JOE & NORAH ***Foreverly*** USA

After Billie Joe Armstrong got hooked on the Everly Brothers 1958 album of 1930's era covers 'Songs our Daddy Taught Us', he decided they might sound good sung with Norah Jones. Listening to these wonderful versions with their stellar harmonies, we wholeheartedly concur. Early Americana hasn't sounded this good since Robert Plant & Alison Krauss recorded 'Raising Sand'.

BOMBINO ***Nomad*** Niger

Black Keys guitarist Dan Auerbach, having been as impressed with Bombino's previous album 'Agadez' as we were, invited him and his band to his Nashville studio. Desert blues meets Hendrix on this rollicking album, as Bombino's Saharan roots-rock combo finds itself in the company of pedal steel, keyboards and some scorching guitar from Auerbach himself.

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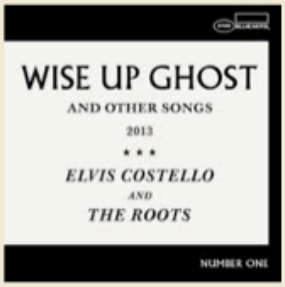
CHARLES BRADLEY ***Victim Of Love*** USA
One of the all-time great soul singers, up there with Otis and Marvin, who waited until he was 62 to release his first album, is back with an equally strong set backed by the superb Menahan Street Band. As he has demonstrated on some strong performances here, as well as in the impressive 'Soul Of America' film (now out on DVD), he is the real deal.

NICK CAVE ***Push The Sky Away*** Australia
The heavy riffs and brimstone of much of Cave's earlier work is replaced with eerily atmospheric music under-pinned by 'ominous rumbling bass lines, twitchy rhythmic tics and hushed-voice intimations' (Stuart Berman, Pitchfork). The musical palette makes a wonderful bed for the stream of consciousness lyrics, a sort of fever dream by a very fertile imagination.



ELVIS COSTELLO & THE ROOTS
Wise Up Ghost UK/USA
Though Mr. Costello & ?uestlove of The Roots have each been involved in countless collaborations and guest spots, it's safe to say neither has been involved in a project like this. Not only do The Roots sound like the perfect backing band for these acerbic tales, but Costello's voice and songwriting sound re-invigorated. A triumphant collaboration!

DESTROYER ***Five Spanish Songs*** Canada
Vancouver's Dan Bejar, apparently tired of singing in English, decided to record an EP of songs by Spanish group Sr. Chinarro, all written by Antonio Luque. As Bejar had been singing along to the group's music for years and Spanish is his second language, the recording sounds completely natural. A welcome surprise.

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BOB DYLAN ***Another Self Portrait***

Vol. 10 of the 'Bootleg Series' of unreleased recordings focuses on the circa 1970 days of pastoral mellowness and folk revivalism, as Dylan re-defined himself once again. The unembellished productions on these 35 songs stand in contrast to the often over-produced albums originally released at that time.

FANFARA TIRANA meets TRANSGLOBAL UNDERGROUND

Kabatronics Albania/UK

Multi-cultural London based music collective Transglobal Underground, known for their collaborations with Natacha Atlas and many others, here hook up with Albania's Fanfara Tirana. On this happily surprising mash-up, the Balkan Brass band party is invaded by Indian dhol percussion and Jamaican style rapping, while brass and sitar duke it out. One of the year's great party albums!

KEVIN FINSETH *The Wounded Quartet featuring Peggy Lee* Canada

Two of East Van's finest (Peggy Lee on cello and Highlife's own Kevin Finseth on piano & bass balalaika) join forces on this sublime instrumental EP. These three instruments in their four hands are able to weave musical reveries of undeniable resonance and gravity.

JIM JAMES

Regions Of Light And Sound Of God USA

My Morning Jacket frontman Jim James steps out with this impressive solo debut. Soul and spirituality are the underpinnings of some remarkable tunes, not surprising as he claims they were inspired by Marvin Gaye's classic 'What's Going On' album. This is a work full of subtle beauty and masterful songwriting.

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KOBO TOWN ***Jumble In The Jukebox***

Ex-pat Trinidadian Drew Gonsalves, now based in Toronto, revives the classic calypso sound of artists like The Mighty Sparrow and Lord Kitchener. Social commentary, one of Calypso's greatest strengths, is front and centre on these songs that cast a skeptical eye on some political and social trends.

BASSEKOU KOUYATE ***Jama Ko*** Mali

Recorded in Bamako in the middle of a coup and as war spread through northern Mali, this sublime new album by the man responsible for the ngoni revival in his country affirms the central role of music to offer sustenance in troubled times. Produced by Canadian (and Arcade Fire associate) Howard Bilerman, Bassekou Kouyate's latest celebrates some 'freedom fighters' from Malian history who stood up to fundamentalist oppression.

POKEY LAFARGE USA

The St. Louis 'Riverboat Soul' singer, now on Jack White's Third Man label, delivers a tasty concoction of thoroughly retro 20's and 30's style tunes. With a flatbed full of acoustic instruments from arch-top guitar and upright bass to clarinet and cornet, his band creates a colourful aural canvas on this old-fashioned charmer.

SIGUR ROS ***Kveikur*** Iceland

One of our young century's true musical wonders, Sigur Ros once again re-shuffle their sound as they lean towards a more intense, visceral soundscape. The early-Floyd psychedelia, always a part of their sonic kit, comes to the fore on this triumphant recording.

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TANGA ***HavanaElectro*** Canada/Cuba

East Van meets West Havana on this exhilarating exploration of Afro-Cuban roots and branches. Produced by East Van trumpeter Malcolm Aiken, who brought in legendary salsa trombonist Jimmy Bosch, as well as the one and only C.R. Avery, these Havana sessions with a hand-picked group of Cuban talent ensure that the roots are always front and centre.

VIEUX FARKA TOURE ***Mon Pays*** Mali

In a great year for 'desert blues' (see Tamikrest and Bombino), Vieux Farka Toure, whose father Ali pioneered the mixture of Saharan roots & blues, pays homage to his late dad on his cover of Ali's 'Safare' and returns to acoustic roots on this rewarding new album. Featuring some delightful guitar and kora interplay (courtesy of Sidiki Diabate, whose father Toumani made two brilliant albums with Ali) it's obvious that this rich musical tradition is in skilled hands.

ROKIA TRAORE ***Beautiful Africa*** Mali

One of Africa's most consistently innovative artists takes another stride forward on her rocking new album. Rokia Traore brings in producer/guitarist John Parish (known for his work with P.J. Harvey), and what we get is a more intense sound, with angular guitars offsetting some lovely ngoni playing, as she sings songs of celebration and suffering.

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HIGHLIFERS TOP PICKS

DENNIS NELLA

1. **The National** *Trouble Will Find Me*
2. **Nicolas Repac** *Black Box*
3. **Nick Cave** *Push The Sky Away*
4. **Jim James** *Regions of Light...*
5. **Steve Earle** *The Low Highway*
6. **Tamikrest** *Chatma*
7. **Fanfara Tirana** *Kabatronics*
8. **Arcade Fire** *Reflektor*
9. **Destroyer** *Five Spanish Songs*
10. **Billie Joe & Norah** *Foreverly*

KEVIN FINSETH

1. **The National** *Trouble Will Find Me*
2. **Sigur Ros** *Kveikur*
3. **Nicolas Repac** *Black Box*
4. **Bombino** *Nomad*
5. **Steve Earle** *The Low Highway*
6. **Tamikrest** *Chatma*
7. **Pokey Lafarge**
8. **Nick Cave** *Push The Sky Away*
9. **Vieux Farka Toure** *Mons Pays*
10. **Jim James** *Regions of Light...*

NILS VON HAHN

1. **Bassekou Kouyate** *Jama Ko*
2. **Nick Cave** *Push The Sky Away*
3. **Jim James** *Regions of Light...*
4. **Charles Bradley** *Victim Of Love*
5. **Bombino** *Nomad*
6. **Beats Antique** *A Thousand Faces*
7. **Rokia Traore** *Beautiful Africa*
8. **Alucidination** *Aural Architecture*
9. **Steve Earle** *The Low Highway*
10. **Garifuna Collective** *Ayo*

RAUL ESPINOZA

1. **Tamikrest** *Chatma*
2. **Nicolas Repac** *Black Box*
3. **Jim James** *Regions of Light...*
4. **Sigur Ros** *Kveikur*
5. **Meridian Brothers** *Desesperanza*
6. **Kid Koala** *12 Bit Blues*
7. **Tricky** *False Idols*
8. **Owiny Sigoma Band** *Power Punch*
9. **Nine Inch Nails** *Hesitation Marks*
10. **Elvis Costello & The Roots**