HIGHLIFE RECORDS: CDS & VINYL

Excellent cross-border travel, without the bag searches.

FRAZEY FORD

Indian Ocean
Canada

Highlife's album of the year is from an artist who resides in our East Van 'hood.

Former Be Good Tanyas lead vocalist Frazey Ford jumped at the opportunity to record with the Hi Rhythm section (Al Green's band) in Memphis.

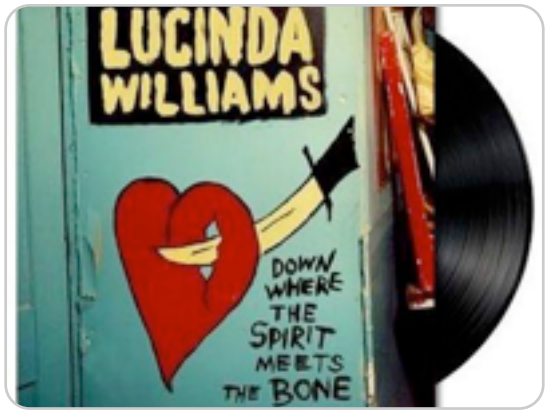
The meeting of her amazing voice and the laid back soul grooves is a match made in musical heaven. Simply divine!

JOE DRISCOLL / SEKOU KOUYATE

Faya
USA/Guinea

The unlikely meeting of a folkie hip-hopper from upstate New York and a kora dynamo from Guinea is one electrifying collaboration.

Driscoll's guitar, beat boxing and rapping make a great foil for Kouyate's rapid-fire amped up kora workouts, as these two musical explorers from disparate cultures find common ground on this hugely entertaining album.



LUCINDA WILLIAMS

Down Where The Spirit Meets The Bone
USA

On her first album on her own label, Lucinda Williams delivers one of her strongest recordings yet.

Whether fighting her demons or railing against injustice, her poignant tunes sung in her best southern drawl and backed by guitar wizards like Bill Frisell and Greg Leisz add up to a double album full of essential performances.

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ORLANDO JULIUS with THE HELIOCENTRICS

Jaiyede Afro
Nigeria/UK

Nigerian saxophonist Orlando Julius, whose 60's afro -soul recordings influenced a young Fela Kuti, teams up with London jazz-funksters The Helio-centrics.

These analog recordings have an undeni-able immediacy, as guitars, keyboards, horns and electronic effects create a new chapter in the evolving afrobeat story.

BECK

Morning Phase
USA

Trading in an irony-laden hip hop sensibility for optimistic, sun-drenched folk rock, Beck once again demonstrates his genius for re-defining himself and exploring new musical horizons.

Leaving behind the guitar solos and dance beats, he presents a tapestry of reverb drenched ballads and acoustic guitar melodies. Evocative and soulful.

BUDOS BAND

Burnt Offering
USA

Somehow we never thought of a meeting of Fela Kuti and Black Sabbath (well maybe Raul did), but these N.Y. instrumental Afrobeaters apparently are Sabbath fans, so here it is.

Fuzzed out psych guitar riffs and the aggressively foreboding aura point to an unexpected detour on the Afrobeat highway.

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LEONARD COHEN

Popular Problems

Canada

Many dream of being not only alive, but creative and vital at the age of 80. Canada's pre-eminent poet-songwriter turns the trick with this surprisingly sprightly recording.

With his wry humour fully intact, Cohen tackles themes of conflict both personal and political with undiminished insight and eloquence.

CUMBIA ALL STARS

Tigres En Fuga

Peru

Cumbia, originally from Colombia, may not be as well known in North America as salsa, but in Latin America it has a huge and devoted following.

Here is a great new recording of Peruvian cumbia, complete with scorching guitars and blistering horns.

An instant party!

LEE FIELDS

Emma Jean

USA

If you, like us, just can't get enough of that classic soul sound, look no further than the irrepressible and undeniable master Lee Fields.

Having found his perfect match with his Brooklyn-based Expressions band, Fields once again delivers a winning selection of deep soul nuggets.

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THE GLOAMING

Ireland/USA

This Irish-American supergroup of sorts, led by fiddler extraordinaire Martin Hayes and long-time collaborator, guitarist Dennis Cahill, offers an album that ingeniously updates a rich musical tradition.

Adding the drone of the hardanger fiddle, the distinctive vocals of Iarla O Lionaird and the voicings of pianist Thomas Bartlett are a few of the elements that make this an album full of unearthly delights.

KEITH JARRETT & CHARLIE HADEN

Last Dance

USA

Recorded at the same sessions that produced their lovely 'Jasmine' album, this recording stands as an appropriately elegant farewell from recently departed bassist Charlie Haden.

These duets offer understated and eloquent takes on jazz standards by Monk, Bud Powell and Cole Porter, among others. Simply beautiful music.

RAY LAMONTAGNE

Supernova

USA

This left turn in singer-songwriter Ray Lamontagne's musical evolution navigates a landscape of 60's era psych folk and country rock.

Producer extraordinaire Dan Auerbach (Black Keys guitar maestro) conjures an impressive variety of retro sounds, including distorted guitars, spacey synths and feedback, presenting this gifted vocalist in a whole new setting.

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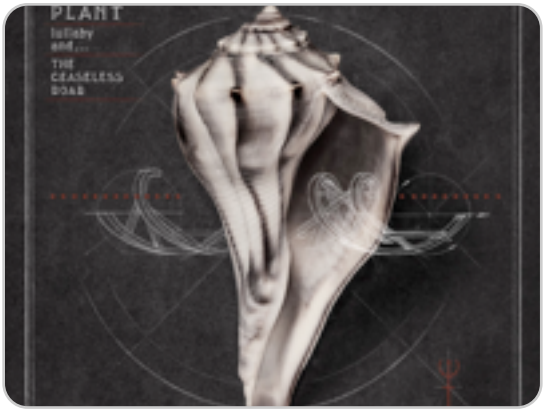
ORKESTAR ŠLIVOVICA

Sa!
Canada

The East Van balkan brass powerhouse is back with a bigger, more awe-inspiring and table-shaking album full of leg-vibrating and body-contorting tunes.

Sa! Indeed!



ROBERT PLANT

Lullaby And...The Ceaseless Roar
UK

Given the choice of cranking out old hits with Led Zeppelin or exploring new musical territory, this rock legend wisely opted for the latter course. After a couple of wonderful albums of 'Americana', Plant this time offers an album of border-crossing beats intersecting with trip hop and roots rock.

Tinariwen associate Justin Adams and west african instrumentalist Juldeh Camara bring a desert blues sensibility, while the grizzled maestro's still resonant vocals bring it all home.

PRINCE FATTY meets NOSTALGIA 77

In the Kingdom of Dub
UK

Benedic 'Nostalgia 77' Lambin and Mike 'Prince Fatty' Pelanconi, who have collaborated since 2005, deliver their first full length album together.

Taking Nostalgia 77's jazz-funk as a starting point, Prince Fatty gives the music his unique dubwise treatment on this alluringly atmospheric recording.

An instant classic!

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SUDANDA

Tomorrow's Dream
Sudan/Canada

Led by Sudanese born vocalist and oud player Alaaeldin Abdalla, Vancouver based Sudanda successfully updates a rich musical tradition on their debut album.

The oud finds sympathetic company among guitars, accordion, horns and percussion on this exciting recording.

SUN RA AND HIS ARKESTRA

In The Orbit Of Ra
USA

Marshall Allen, Arkestra bandleader, compiles this essential 20 track collection of the legendary other-worldly jazz group.

Led by the supremely strange and gifted Mr. Ra, the Arkestra traverses a vast galaxy of sounds, from effervescent swing to synthesized space noise and chants. The cult of the Ra seems to be on the ascendancy.

TOURÉ-RAICHEL COLLECTIVE

The Paris Session
Mali/Israel

This second recording session, following the shimmering set captured on 'The Tel-Aviv Session', sees the Malian guitarist Vieux Farka Toure and Israeli pianist Idan Raichel recapturing the magic they discovered on their first collaboration.

This time around, West African bassist Daby Toure is aboard, Raichel adds a few moog flourishes and they add vocals to a few tracks. Another triumph for this unique and innovative partnership.

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HIGHLIFER'S TOP PICKS

DENNIS NELLA

1. Frazey Ford - *Indian Ocean*
2. Beck - *Morning Phase*
3. Lucinda Williams - *Down Where...*
4. Robert Plant - *Lullaby and...*
5. Prince Fatty - *In The Kingdom Of Dub*
6. Joe Driscoll/Sekou Kouyate - *Faya*
7. Ray Lamontagne - *Supernova*
8. Leonard Cohen - *Popular Problems*
9. Lee Fields - *Emma Jean*
10. Keith Jarrett & Charlie Haden

KEVIN FINSETH

1. Frazey Ford - *Indian Ocean*
2. Joe Driscoll/Sekou Kouyate - *Faya*
3. Prince Fatty - *In The Kingdom Of Dub*
4. Lee Fields - *Emma Jean*
5. Orlando Julius - *Jaiyede Afro*
6. Toure-Raichel Collective - *Paris Session*
7. Neelamjit Dhillon Quartet *Komagata...*
8. Cumbia All Stars - *Tigres En Fuga*
9. Beck - *Morning Phase*
10. Robert Plant - *Lullaby and...*

NILS VON HAHN

1. Beck - *Morning Phase*
2. Frazey Ford - *Indian Ocean*
3. Lee Fields - *Emma Jean*
4. Orlando Julius - *Jaiyede Afro*
5. Budos Band - *Burnt Offering*
6. Orkestar Slivovica - *Sa!*
7. Joe Driscoll/Sekou Kouyate - *Faya*
8. Prince Fatty - *In The Kingdom Of Dub*
9. Sudanda - *Tomorrow's Dream*
10. Toumani & Sidiki

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HIGHLIFER'S TOP PICKS

RAUL ESPINOZA

1. Cumbia All Stars - *Tigres En Fuga*
2. Budos Band - *Burnt Offering*
3. Aphex Twin - *Syro*
4. Tricky - *Adrian Tricky Thaws*
5. The Roots - *...And Then You Shoot...*
6. Prince Fatty - *In The Kingdom Of Dub*
7. Lee Fields - *Emma Jean*
8. FKA Twigs - *LP1*
9. DJ Vadim - *Dubcatcher*
10. Odesza - *In Return*

ANDY WARREN

1. Joe Driscoll/Sekou Kouyate - *Faya*
2. Coldplay - *Ghost Stories*
3. Damon Albarn - *Everyday Robots*
4. Toure-Raichel Collective - *Paris Session*
5. *a)* Kandace Springs - *EP*
   b) Erik Hassle - *Somebody's Party EP*
6. Orlando Julius - *Jaiyede Afro*
7. Prince Fatty - *In The Kingdom Of Dub*
8. Sharon Jones - *Give The People...*
9. St. Paul & The Broken Bones - *Half...*
10. Frazey Ford - *Indian Ocean*

YOU!

What are your favourite records of 2014?
Please send them to us via Facebook or email.
We appreciate your opinion!

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