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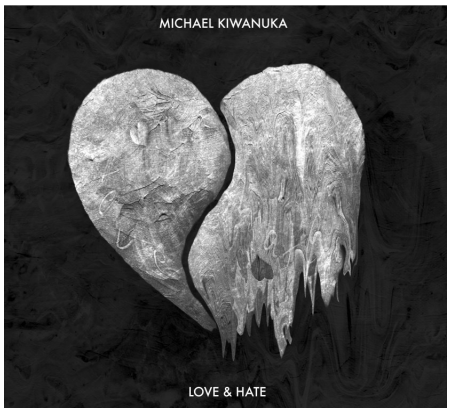
HIGHLIFE RECORDS ~ BEST OF 2016

Excellent cross-border travel, without the bag searches.



Michael Kiwanuka

Love And Hate

UK

A beautiful, much-loved, much-played recording by UK soul man Michael Kiwanuka, whose stellar arrangements and production (by Danger Mouse) bring a refreshing relevance and seriousness to the ongoing soul revival.

Radiohead

A Moon Shaped Pool

UK

The most coherent album of 2016, Radiohead's 9th studio album is a subtle, pleasing stunner of a record. Largely alt-orchestral, with stately piano phrases and a superb sense of pacing, A Moon Shaped Pool has never really left constant rotation on the Highlife playlist since its release in May of this year.

Quantic presents Flowering Inferno

1000 Watts

UK/Colombia

For several years now, Will Holland (the DJ/producer/musician who goes by the name Quantic) has been catching our ears with his Flowering Inferno projects, melding roots reggae, dub, cumbia and other Caribbean sounds into a highly pleasing and potent concoction of sound.

David Bowie

Blackstar

UK

Bowie's 25th studio album, released 2 days before his death early this year, is a delirious wave goodbye from one of our era's most revered pop icons. Jazzy and orchestral with a pulsing neo-noir energy, Bowie's swan song is a worthy final chapter in this artist's colossal body of work.

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Leonard Cohen

You Want It Darker

Canada

Another titan of popular song leaves us, and leaves his final thoughts with us as a parting gift. Cohen's importance to the Canadian psyche cannot be emphasized enough. His words, his ideas, his character, his entire being has accompanied us with great humour and honesty over the past half century. With integrity and great care, he observes the world from the end of life and makes his final offering.

St. Paul & The Broken Bones

Sea Of Noise

USA

St Paul (Paul Janeway) and his expanded band of Broken Bones lays down a full-throttle R&B workout on their sophomore release Sea Of Noise. Channelling many of the greats from the past (Prince, Otis Redding, Sly Stone) the eight piece powerhouse from Alabama brings renewed energy and excitement to an enduring tradition.

Frightnrs

Nothing More To Say

USA

With the death of lead singer Dan Klein from ALS before the release of the album, The Frightnrs debut recording on the Daptone label is marked with a deep sadness. What is left for us however, is one of the most exciting albums of the year, reworking and reimagining the sound of the rocksteady era, an exuberant Jamaican style from the 60s and early 70s. Klein pays tribute to some of the great Jamaican singers, including Alton Ellis and Junior Murvin, with his impassioned, entirely convincing vocals.

Bombino

Azel

Niger

Quite simply a powerhouse of desert music, a stunning mixture of rock, reggae and West African folk. Produced by the Dirty Projectors' Dave Longstreth, Azel continues Bombino's surge to the forefront of the Sahara blues movement. One of the most dynamic and dazzling albums of the year.

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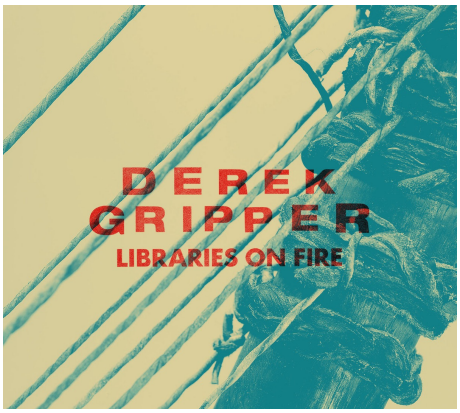


Derek Gripper

Libraries On Fire

South Africa

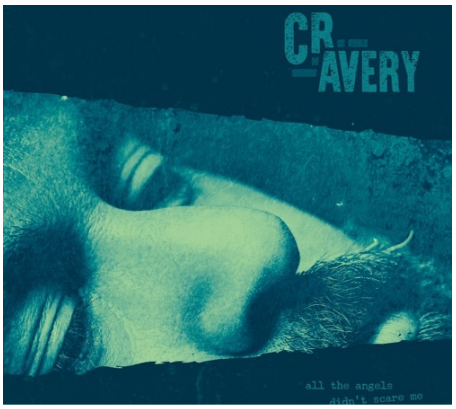
Having performed a short set in the store, and then a full concert at Presentation House in late October, we knew that Libraries On Fire was going to be a special treat. Gripper has transcribed the kora melodies of Toumani Diabate and other West African greats, playing them solo on nylon string guitar. The result is deliriously hypnotic and beautiful, a rare treat of an album, named one of the top 10 albums of the year by Songlines magazine, our most reliable source for new international sounds.

Hailu Mergia

Tche Belew

Ethiopia

New to our ears, this vintage offering from organist/ arranger Hailu Mergia is a welcome addition to the canon of Ethiopian song. Ethio-jazz, Amharic R&B, call it what you will these smouldering instrumentals will grab you by the ears, with their brooding, triumphant swirl of analog organs, chiming guitars, charging horns and swinging rhythms. For fans of Mulatu Astatke and the Ethiopiques series.



CR Avery

All The Angels Didn't Scare Me

Canada

CR Avery (or C, as we affectionately call him around the shop) has produced a whopping 17 records during his 20 year career as East Van's very own underground man. Part street poet, part bluesman, part countrified beat-boxer, CR has always defied category, preferring to spread his influences far and wide. *All The Angels Didn't Scare Me* is an incredible offering, melding spoken word, social commentary and wide-eyed musical wonder with his team of talented collaborators.

Charlie Haden Liberation Music Orchestra

Time/Life

USA

Charlie Haden assembled and led this orchestra on special occasions over the course of 40 years. The last time was in 2011, at a festival in Belgium, where two of these five pieces were recorded. The others, made following his death in 2014, were scored by his favourite arranger, Carla Bley. Dignity, compassion and inspiration converge on this beautiful offering.

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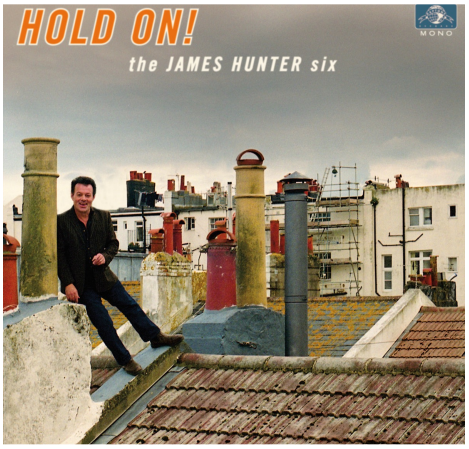
Joe Driscoll & Sekou Kouyate

Monistic Theory

USA/Senegal

The duo of Driscoll and Kouyate first caught our attention a few years back with an album called Faya. Their second album is a classy, easy-going affair, with Kouyate's exquisite kora work and fine, soulful vocals in the Susu language matched against an often laidback, funky backing and melodic English folk-pop balladry and rap from Driscoll.



James Hunter Six

Hold On

UK

With 'Hold On', his debut on Daptone Records, James Hunter has found his natural home. The brisk 30 minute, 10 song affair shimmies and sways like a set of out-takes from King records. Channelling the R&B greats of the late 50s/early 60s, the six piece force from Britain presents this year's more upbeat version of Leon Bridge's 'Coming Home' album from 2015. Great stuff, and fun fun fun!!!!

El Twanguero

Pachuco

Spain

Having performed a stunning duet in the store this fall with Paul Pigat, Diego Garcia (El Twanguero) most definitely has our attention. His rockabilly/mambo style is delivered with machine-gun speed and electrifying skill. Think Mickey Baker meets Manuel Galban on speed and you have an idea of Diego's dazzling style. Out in 2015 but new to our ears, and highly recommended.

Khari Wendell McClelland

Fleeting Is The Time

Canada

After several years of touring and recording with The Sojourners, the Detroit-born and Vancouver-based artist has released his first solo EP. With a firm base of harmony singing and a general framework of uplift, (imagine Michael Franti singing gospel) the songs presented on 'Fleeting Is The Time' are soulful, hopeful and steeped in the wisdom of inspiration and the pursuit of human dignity.

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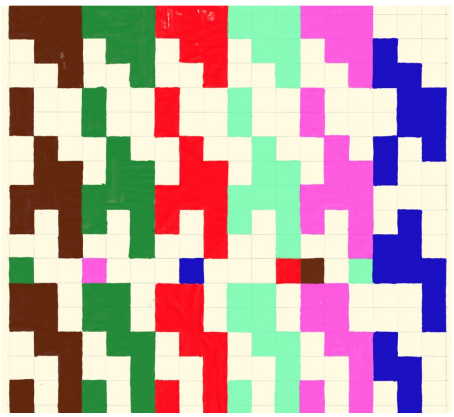


75 Dollar Bill

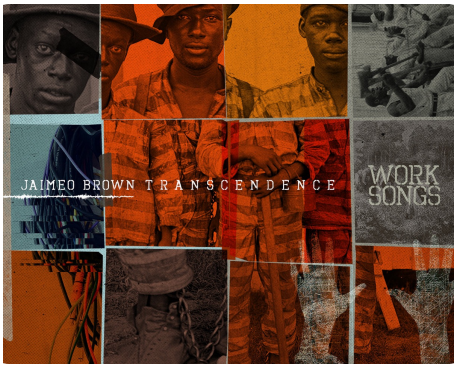
Wood/Metal/Plastic/Pattern/Rhythm/Rock
USA

The duo of percussionist Rick Brown and electric guitarist Che Chen, called 75 Dollar Bill, is an intriguing blend of trancy garage psychedelics, Saharan blues riffs and Fillmore West-era excess. It is delightfully repetitive and soulful, with odd time signatures galore and a general feeling of inspired abandon.

Drive-By Truckers

American Band
USA

On this record, their 14th and most political album to date, the Truckers continue to challenge stereotypes with their literate, driving, muscular tunes. The struggles of humanity for justice in modern America – complete with its history of guns, immigration, racism, blood, and individual weakness – remain the focus of songwriters Patterson Hood and Mike Cooley. They refuse to look away.



Jaimeo Brown Transcendence

Work Songs
USA

This exciting record has few musical precedents, and sonically grounds modern jazz (Sax – Guitar – Drums) in the social history of the last century. The jazz improvisations of this soulful trio are laid over a wide range of samples of field recordings (of prison songs, farmers, masons and miners) from Alan Lomax and others. The result is a breathtaking jump cut collage of blues, jazz and hip-hop that both reaches back and looks forward, and in the process finds that special space - both familiar and fresh – where most of our favourite records live.

Oxford American Magazine

USA

This December, for the first time, Highlife will be carrying print copies of Oxford American's 18th annual music issue (and accompanying CD). The mission of this nonprofit publication is to provide readers and listeners with a carefully curated document celebrating the complexity and cultural vitality of the American South.

As always, OA contains thoughtful essays exploring both the eccentric and the widely celebrated, and this year's focus on the Blues promises more of the same.

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KEVIN FINSETH

1. Radiohead - *A Moon Shaped Pool*
2. Frightnrs - *Nothing More To Say*
3. Leonard Cohen - *You Want It Darker*
4. Derek Gripper - *Libraries On Fire*
5. Michael Kiwanuka - *Love & Hate*
6. Hailu Mergia - *Tche Belew*
7. David Bowie - *Blackstar*
8. Bombino - *Azel*
9. Khari Wendell McClelland - *Fleeting is the Time*
10. CR Avery - *All The Angels Didn't Scare Me*

RAUL ESPINOZA

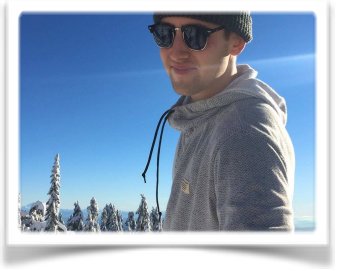
1. A Tribe Called Quest - *We Got it From Here…*
2. DJ Shadow - *The Mountain Will Fall*
3. Common - *Black America Again*
4. Metallica - *Hardwired…*
5. The Claypool Lennon Delirium - *Monolith…*
6. Frightnrs - *Nothing More To Say*
7. Tanya Tagaq - *Retribution*
8. CR Avery - *All The Angels Didn't Scare Me*
9. Railtown Sound System
10. Khari Wendell McClelland - *Fleeting is the Time*

ANDY WARREN

1. Jamie Lidell – *Building a Beginning*
2. Rachael Yamagata – *Tightrope Walker*
3. Joe Driscoll & Sekou Kouyate – *Monistic Theory*
4. Jaimeo Brown Transcendence - *Work Songs*
5. St Paul and The Broken Bones - *Sea of Noise*
6. Doyle Bramhall II – *Rich Man*
7. Radiohead - *A Moon Shaped Pool*
8. David Bowie – *Blackstar*
9. Marin Patenaude & The Follow Through
10. James Hunter Six – *Hold On*

BILL HOOD

1. Drive By Truckers - *American Band*
2. JD Allen - *Americana*
3. Common - *Black America Again*
4. Throttle Elevator Music - *IV*
5. Fantastic Negrito - *Last Days of Oakland*
6. Michael Kiwanuka - *Love and Hate*
7. Hayes Carll - *Lovers and Leavers*
8. Jack Garton - *Move the Mess Around*
9. Liberation Music Orchestra - *Time / Life*
10. Jaimeo Brown Transcendence - *Work Songs*



THEO FINSETH

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7. The James Hunter Six - *Hold On*
8. Quantic - *Flowering Inferno*
9. St Paul and The Broken Bones - *Sea of Noise*
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