

December 21, 2008

Standouts in Rap, Jazz and Country

By [NATE CHINEN](#)

1. [LIL WAYNE](#) "Tha Carter III" (Cash Money/Universal Motown). The mixtape ubiquity of this impish New Orleans rapper raised doubts as well as expectations: could he sustain the fever pitch throughout a full-length release? "Tha Carter III," his definitive answer, enlists more than a dozen producers but feels stubbornly cohesive. More than just another platform for his coarsely clever wordplay, it was the year's most audacious pop album.
2. GUILLERMO KLEIN Y LOS GUACHOS "Filtros" (Sunnyside). This is a large-group jazz record with a spirit gracious and ingenious, thanks to the worldly vision of Mr. Klein, an Argentine pianist-composer who also sings. Every solo flash is bright and judicious, and yet it's the sound of the ensemble that makes an impact, suggesting a sort of folkloric futurism.
3. BON IVER "For Emma, Forever Ago" (Jagjaguwar). This gemlike debut from Bon Iver, a project of the singer-songwriter Justin Vernon, won hearts online before its official release this year. It still sounds secretive, haunted and utterly gorgeous.
4. LIONEL LOUEKE "Karibu" (Blue Note). The West African jazz guitarist Lionel Loueke brings distinct perspective to his music, which feels effortlessly modern. [Herbie Hancock](#) and [Wayne Shorter](#) make high-grade cameos, and Mr. Loueke's trio meets them at their level.
5. JAMEY JOHNSON "That Lonesome Song" (Mercury Nashville). This half-bitter, half-remorseful album may owe its urgency to a bad divorce, but Mr. Johnson, an outlaw-country classicist, is also honoring traditions. The voice is deep, the songs are sturdy and the blariness is timeless.
6. MARY HALVORSON TRIO "Dragon's Head" (Firehouse 12). The restless young guitarist Mary Halvorson made her first album a labyrinth of knotty phrases, slippery pulses and blasts of dissonant heat. Noise-rock tumult meets post-bop evasiveness, and the results are casually gripping.
7. TV ON THE RADIO "Dear Science" (DGC/Interscope). Having outfoxed the apocalypse, this sonically intrepid Brooklyn indie-rock band turns to perfectly rational pursuits: dancing, seduction, more dancing. "Move your body; you've got all you need," Tunde Adebimpe sings on "Golden Age," the emblematic track.
8. NO AGE "Nouns" (Sub Pop). This heralded art-punk duo normalizes the din on its sophomore album, but in a way that reeks of ambition rather than compromise. The songs, often concise and sometimes startlingly coherent, give the impression of sunlight beating through a haze.
9. DAVID SÁNCHEZ "Cultural Survival" (Concord Picante) This commanding Puerto Rican saxophonist reaffirms his focus on social history. The album, featuring an extremely nimble combo, concludes with a billowing suite inspired by events that produced the Caribbean diaspora.

10. AL GREEN “Lay It Down” (Blue Note). Entrusting his production to a pair of neo-soul architects, the great Reverend Green somehow made an album pathologically attuned to his old sound. Had the songwriting received as much love as the style, it might have been an instant classic instead of an immediate relic.

Top Songs

[RANDY NEWMAN](#) “Losing You” (Nonesuch)

RIHANNA “Disturbia” (SRP/Def Jam)

[METALLICA](#) “The End of the Line” ([Warner Brothers](#))

RAPHAEL SAADIQ “100 Yard Dash” (Sony BMG)

DEPARTMENT OF EAGLES “Phantom Other” (4AD)

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