

The *Post's* music writers select their must-have albums of the year

Music that's played for keeps

A

lbums by old favourites such as Eric Clapton and Jimi Hendrix made the top-10 lists of the *Post's* music writers – along with releases by younger faces including Arcade Fire and Kanye West. Here are their top picks for 2010:

ROBIN LYNAM

The Way of the World – Mose Allison: at 82 “the sage of Tippo” still has wisdom to impart. In addition to the cover tunes, six new Allison songs explore the themes of age and mortality, and on his first new studio album in 12 years he continues to play inspired jazz and blues piano. Vintage stuff.

Emotion & Commotion – Jeff Beck: Beck demonstrates again why he is the greatest living guitarist playing instrumental rock. Virtuoso, powerful and diverse, this set finds him bringing his unique touch and tone to tunes by Benjamin Britten and Puccini, standards and originals.

Clapton – Eric Clapton: the old blueser explores his jazzy side with a little help from, among others, Wynton Marsalis. Clapton's playing is tastefully restrained in the manner of a fine musician who years ago outgrew the “guitar hero” role, and the lived-in voice keeps getting better.

Don't Explain – Brigitte Mitchell: an impressive debut from a Hong Kong-based artist who has been delighting audiences here for some years. Superb playing from a strong cast of musicians, and soulful vocals in which Blossom Dearie meets Billie Holiday.

Dream Attic – Richard Thompson: one of Britain's most consistent singer-songwriters is now more than 40 years into his career and still at the top of his game. This set of all new songs was recorded live and the performances crackle with electricity. The lyrics display Thompson's usual barbed wit and the guitar work is as adventurous as ever.

Son of August – Peter Scherr: bassist and composer Scherr, with a group that includes his brother Tony on guitar and saxophonist Michael Blake, delivers a set that includes some of his most accessible work in recent years. Experimental modern jazz that packs a rock 'n' roll punch. Play loud.

The Imagine Project – Herbie Hancock: taking the John Lennon

song as its starting point, this project reflects the full diversity of Hancock's musical interests, with guest musicians from all over the world. A great 70th birthday present to himself – and to a wider world – in the year that Lennon would also have turned 70.

European Standard – Jan Lundgren Trio: the Swedish pianist and his trio breathe new life into familiar tunes. They also serve notice that Scandinavian jazz is still alive after the death two years ago of Esbjorn Svensson, whose *Pavane* is included here. An appropriate tribute.

Booker's Guitar – Eric Bibb: Booker White's battered old guitar inspired bluesman Eric Bibb to make a back-to-basics acoustic album, and to write a strong batch of songs. One of the strongest blues albums of the year, and a career high point for Bibb.

VOCABuLarieS – Bobby McFerrin: with help from his friends, McFerrin turns in a joyous, uplifting album of 21st-century choral world music. Perhaps his strongest album to date, and a project which involved more than 50 world-class singers. An ambitious and successful work from a versatile major talent.

JUSTIN SWEETING

Suburbs – Arcade Fire: an intelligent, rousing and evocative album focusing on the apocalyptic imagery of the everyday. Arcade Fire is the only band around that can produce exhilarating moments of grandeur yet still remain the coolest indie kids on the block.

Cosmogramma – Flying Lotus: the great-nephew of John Coltrane, FlyLo's third album is pure head music that is both perplexing and brilliant. Avant-garde jazz meets future soul, hip hop and electro craziness in one of the year's most challenging, inventive and rewarding albums.

I Speak Because I Can – Laura Marling: on the follow-up to her Mercury-nominated debut, the 20-year-old, darker and more sophisticated Marling develops further her twisted nu-folk. Melancholic and assured, the album is a chillingly moving listening experience.

The ArchAndroid – Janelle Monae: conceptually there isn't an album this year that comes close to this one. Covering a kaleidoscope of genres, the often pigeon-holed R&B star-in-waiting is more Bowie than Beyonce. Playful and ambitious, this soundtrack to an imaginary film is proof positive that – given the right skills and treatment – she who dares, wins.



Kanye West, Herbie Hancock, Jimi Hendrix and Arcade Fire all figure in the best of this year's albums. Photos: EPA, The New York Times, Reuters

Teen Dream – Beach House: the spellbinding beauty of Beach House is finally realised on their third album. Their heartbreaking brand of dream pop drips with reverb, nostalgia and illusory summers. What's more, in singer Victoria Legrand they have one of the special voices of the time.

How I Got Over – The Roots: taking their album title from a gospel standard, The Roots' ninth studio album oozes soul. Despite its often bleak commentary on modern-day America, a message of hope springs eternal across the 14 tracks of smooth hip hop sweetness.

High Violet – The National: the subtle colouring and understated charm of *High Violet* is slow to blossom but when it does, it's an exquisitely crafted album that lives with you long after it has stopped playing.

Total Life Forever – Foals: the Oxford quintet's sophomore album sees them expand their disco math rock sound while exploring greater space and depth without losing any of the intensity that makes them so genuinely thrilling.

I'm New Here – Gil Scott-Heron: it has been an age since his last studio effort, but with his unmistakable blend of spoken word, soul, blues and folk, Scott-Heron cements his place as godfather to new generations of roots lovers with this album.

Odd Blood – Yeasayer: infectious, weirdo tribal pop at its finest. Amid their multi-cultural soundscapes, ethnic rhythms and 80s references, at their core Yeasayer specialise in organic dance music with an alluring worldly warmth.

BEN SIN

My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy – Kanye West: with this album, West has again rewritten the rules of mainstream rap – and pop – music. From opener *Dark Fantasy's* brooding, opera-like symphonies to the fist-pumping anthem *Power* to the epic nine-minute confessional ballad *Runaway*, this is a masterful album filled with bravado and raw emotion. Then there's *All of the Lights* – which will certainly be one of the most popular singles of 2011 – and a harrowing closing number which samples the atmospheric Bon Iver track *Woods*. You can hate Kanye West the person, but you can't hate Kanye West the musician.

Brothers – The Black Keys: for the first half of 2010, everyone in Akron, Ohio, was worried LeBron James would leave for the bright lights of New York City. The Black Keys did it instead. Recorded in the Big Apple, *Brothers* is slicker and “more produced” than the duo's previous work, which – given the band's garage blues rock status – could have been bad. But it works.

