



Larry Cummings

You should know that people describe my musical tastes as “quite broad”. My favorite kind of music is rock and anything I like I tend to think “it must *be* rock or why would I like it?” (This has gotten so ridiculous that I don’t even recognize alternative/punk as a genre and don’t even get me going on emo). Really though, I’m always trying to stay in the “if it sounds good it is good” camp. I am particularly fond of albums that show off great rhythm work. I do enjoy quiet introspective albums, but I get bored if they become too inwardly focused. I have a deep lifelong love of music and often ask people I’ve just met what music they’ve been listening too lately.

I have to tell you it’s a tough year to choose just 10 records. My first pass through 2009 releases clocked in at 32 albums I felt deserved to be included. I don’t say this to brag about how much I listen to music, I say it because there was a crapload of great music released in 2009. If you didn’t hear any of these albums, or don’t agree with my choices, well that doesn’t mean a thing. Having said that, I think these are really good ones or I wouldn’t have bothered writing up the list. As I’ve said I really like to hear what other people are listening to so let me know: Search for Lars30 on Twitter, that’s me.

I’ve put these in reverse order from “least mind blowingly great” to “best album evah”.

Top 10 Albums of 2009

10) The Wooden Birds - Magnolia - Barsuk Records

A lovely mellow record I recommended to just about everyone I know by the time I had listened to it twice. I really admire the sparse arrangements, the mellow but still toe-tapping rhythms, the vocal harmonies and the great flow to the whole record. Magnolia is so comfortable it feels natural and effortless, like a good dance partner.

9) Miniature Tigers - Tell it to the Volcano - Modern Art Records

Ok I'm a sucker for well crafted smart pop songs, something this album has in spades. To be perfectly frank, for the first couple weeks after I bought this I didn't even KNOW there was more than one song on it, I just kept playing Cannibal Queen over and over again. I'm glad I did eventually move past that song, as the whole album is dynamite.

8) Phoenix - Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart - Glass Note Records

This is an album that's been popping up on top ten lists for 2009 since it was released. I won't spill any more ink on explaining why here, just know that I agree and highly recommend this one, too.

7) Jim Gaffigan - King Baby - Comedy Central

I'd like to apologize to all the people that mentioned the word "comedy" in my presence this year and had to listen to me babble on and on about the genius of this album. I'd like to apologize but I can't. He's got almost 5 minutes of comedy about *bacon*. Yes that's right 5 minutes. It's solid gold stand up. I know it's not music, but so what, you don't like laughing?

6) We Were Promised Jetpacks - These Four Walls - Fat Cat Records

It's really quite a relief when you hear from a number of people how great an album is and then, when you listen to it, you agree. There's been a number of these "gotta hear this new sound" bands in the last few years and many of them have left me a bit flat after a few months. This album has actually become more and more enjoyable over the course of the year. I especially enjoyed the long instrumental sections near the end of this album.

5) Rx Bandits - Mandala - Sargant House

You should be aware that I have, as my friend Stefan says, "prog tendencies". This album fulfills those tendencies completely. It's a roller coaster of rhythms and transitions and all that other stuff people that write record reviews for a living are better at describing than I am. One thing you should know, you will want to listen to this album very loudly.

4) Lyle Lovett - Natural Forces - Universal Nashville

Sure, this is not "indie", I know that. In fact Lyle Lovett is very mainstream, and you know what, good for Lyle. Yet this album is much more a throwback to his earlier genre busting work, way better than the spate of rehashed live compilation albums he's been releasing of late. When I heard my 6 year old son walking around the house singing "I'm gonna choke that chicken..." I knew it wasn't just me, but that this was a special album from a great talent that doesn't care if you don't get it. If that's not indie, I don't want to know what is.

3) The Thermals - Now We Can See - Kill Rock Stars

How have I missed these guys all these years? I don't think there's a better single rock song this year than the the title track *Now We Can See*. They have a big, strong yet simple sound and a real knack for memorable hooks. I went a bit into their earlier records after becoming immersed in this one. What I learned was that, while I think this is the best single record they've put out yet, the amount of growth between each release has me really excited about how great these guys are going to become. This is solid, solid rock.

2) Wilco - Wilco (The Album) - Nonesuch

When Michael Stipe got sick of telling the college radio press what REM's much anticipated, but at the time unreleased, record *Fables of the Reconstruction* sounded like he sarcastically replied: "It sounds like two oranges being nailed together." I would offer that as a sufficient description to the 2009 Wilco release. Any Wilco release is much anticipated and it's notoriously hard to pin them down to any one direction, much less a sound. This is probably right up there with *Summer Teeth* in terms of accessibility for new fans, and there's even a bit more optimism than I think Wilco usually allows themselves. Despite my irrational love of the band, this record well exceeded my expectations, in ways that their last two releases did not.

1) Neko Case - Middle Cyclone - Anti Records

This record closes with 30 minutes of cricket sounds recorded "live" on a clear country night, which when you think about it, is pretentious and ridiculous. What I enjoy most about this record is that not only is it so good that it can pull off 30 minutes of cricket noise, but that it actually has the nerve to do it. This is an album absolutely committed to creating a specific mood and to invoking as wide a range of emotion as possible. A record that makes you stop what your doing and pay attention to yourself.

It really leans into a full range of emotions too. We're asked to experience excitement and loneliness, anger and joy, even isolation and envy. When, after the singing is over, you are so lost in thought, that you don't even realize how long you've been listening to the crickets, well, that's a great album. *People Got A Lotta Nerve* is an especially great track.

Honorable Mentions:

The Avett Brothers - I and Love and You - Sony

I am actually surprised this didn't make it on my list, but it's really a great record by a great band, even if it is their first major label offering.

Intuit - Ramona Falls - Barsuk Records

This is a really interesting moody album. I especially like the arrangements of the songs that work well. *I Say Fever* is one of my favorite singles of the year.

Dinosaur Jr. - Farm - Jagjaguwar

There are a handful of bands from my youth that I still enjoy for exactly the same reasons as I did then. This is one of those bands and Farm really drives home the point they started to make on their 2007 release *Beyond* that they still have a lot to say. It's one of the best records they've ever released.