

Bittles' Magazine | The albums of the year

2014 was the year when I finally decided that when I grow up I want to be **Taylor Swift**. Either that or a Fireman! I really can't choose. With neither of these dreams looking likely to be realised though, I have been very happily immersing myself in the wealth of fantastic music that has come out over these last twelve months. By **JOHN BITTLES**

There were so many fabulous new albums that whittling the list down to a mere twenty almost drove me to the depths of despair. It is no easy task making these types of lists. Especially when you are as changeable and erratic as me. In fact, so upset was I at some of the omissions I had to make, that I decided to cheat a little and increase the scope to thirty. But with records this good it's the more the merrier, I say.

1. **Gidge** - *Autumn Bells*.



In a year of great house music albums, one found itself with a very special place in my heart. That record was the electronic majesty of the stunningly beautiful *Autumn Bells* by **Gidge**. Out on **Applescal's** ever wonderful *Atomnation*, the record contains nine long, mid-paced tracks that suck you in with their warmth and their guile. Gorgeously deep soundscapes combine with a stunning use of melody to form an album which sits nicely between the realms of ambience and house. Largely instrumental, the LP sees the Swedish duo conjure up the type of lush dream-states for which imaginations were made. If you are untouched by this record then I can never be your friend!

2. **FKA twigs** - *LP1*.



LP1 is a dark, twisted and sensual pop masterpiece of a record that is mentally all-consuming from the very first moment that you press play. The album is the aural representation of one woman's exploration of her inner psyche, demons and desires. Some of these tracks feel like an open

confession, yet things never get too gloomy due to the fact that they are set to some luscious electronica and kick-ass beats. Tahliah Barnett's haunting and vulnerable vocals mix perfectly with the gorgeously dense sonics to create a bewitchingly beautiful and poignant world. Exquisitely realised, *LP1* is the first step towards the creation of a star.

3. **The War On Drugs** - *Lost In The Dream*.



Those who had succumbed to the stoner mentality of 2011's wondrous *Slave Ambient* had a bit of a shock this year when the Philadelphia band followed it up with the **Bruce Springsteen** alike *Lost In The Dream*. Yet, all sense of unease at the group's progression quickly evaporated only a few minutes into the very first song. You see, this was an album made up of huge, blue-collar rock, done with both heart and soul. *Under The Pressure* soared into the stratosphere with its sense of yearning, *Red Eyes* was one big, long swoon, while *An Ocean Between The Waves* looked towards somewhere far, far away. For those who said guitars were irrelevant (i.e. me) in 2014 this was a sharp slap to the face.

4. **The Micronaut** - *Panorama*.



I have the lovely staff at the *Kompakt* store in Cologne to thank for recommending and leading me to discover this gorgeous, yet overlooked album of warm, trance-tinged house. Described by *Resident Advisor* as »A one-man orchestra«, *Panorama* sees **Micronaut** create thirteen tracks which contain more spine-tingling moments of serene beauty than a trip around the world. *Widelens* opens the set with a stilted piece of ambience that is full of yearning, *Modulation Transfer Function* shows that just because it's dance floor doesn't mean it can't have heart, while *Exposure* recalls the glory days of **Paul Van Dyk**. Simply stunning, if you like house music with warmth, depth and soul then this should be a must-have in your life.

5. **Kate Tempest** - *Everybody Down*.



If, at the beginning of the year someone had claimed that the stand-out rap album of 2014 would be released by a poet, from a middle-class English background most of us would have had them locked up as insane (sorry Tom. Honest mistake!). Yet *Everybody Down* by **Kate Tempest** took the hip hop template, turned it on its head and gave us something personal, meaningful and even profound. Tracks like *Marshall Law*, *Lonely Daze* and *To The Victor The Spoils* say more about modern Britain than the endless bragging, posturing and vulgarity that makes up 98% of the rap world. There is some extremely fabulous production work on here, too.

6. **6th Borough Project** - *Borough 2 Borough*.



Borough 2 Borough is the exceedingly fine follow-up to the fab disco house of 2011's *One Night In The Borough*. While their debut saw the Scottish duo explore a world of cheeky samples and low-slung bass, their second LP saw them take this template and raise their game. Thus, we get a lush, house collection that is the aural equivalent to a long, warm hug. Whether on a late-night dance floor, sharing headphones on a train, or simply sitting on the sofa feeling sorry for yourself, there was very little music this year that sounded anywhere near as good. Just have a listen to the funky-assed bass on *U Know U* to discover what it is to love.

7. **Blonde Redhead** - *Barragán*.



In a very poor year for guitar-based records it was left to veterans **Blonde Redhead** to show the young pretenders how to make-vital sounding music in 2014. *Barragán* was the band's ninth album and saw them move further away from their noise-rock beginnings to explore a softer, folkier side. Introducing the subtle use of electronics the album is made-up of the type of hazy, laidback indie music that makes the very idea of picking up a guitar and being in a band seem unbelievably cool.

8. **Recondite** - *Iffy*.



If you are a fan of slow, emotional techno or subdued acid textures then the name **Recondite** is guaranteed to bring a bit of excitement to your life. This year saw the Bavarian producer investigate a world of subtle house tones with his debut LP for the Berlin-based *Innervisions* label. The record contains ten tracks that are so beautifully deep that they, almost literally, take the breath away. From the very first synth tones of opener *Baro* the listener is treated to the type of warm, emotional house music that will stay with you for a very long time.

9. **Various** - *Five Years Lost: Ritter Butzke Studio*.



Released in November, this compilation of tracks from the *Ritter Butzke Studio* label was, quite simply, one of the most gorgeously groove-laden albums of the year. Tracks by the likes of **Marc Poppcke**, **Daniel Solar**, **Patryk Molinari** and **Wasted Ruffians** are the type of tunes that you would gladly torture and maim innocent bystanders to hear in a club. Seriously, if there turns out to be a hot and sweaty basement club in heaven then this is the type of music you would expect them to play.

10. **Jungle** - *Jungle*.



Hailing from London **Jungle** took the modern soul template and injected it with hints of nostalgia together with some much needed fun. Also a rather fabulous live band, their self-titled debut saw the duo move from blog darlings, to almost taking over the world. One listen to the joyous choruses on the likes of *Julia*, *Busy Earnin'* or *Lucky I Got What I Want* are all it takes to raise a smile on even the most joyless of music fan. Criticized by some as overly retro, and calculated, I can't help feel that these people have somewhat missed the point.

And, if that's not enough, here are twenty more great albums of 2014.

11. **Clark** - *Clark*.

12. **Craig Bratley** - *Buy The Ticket, Take The Ride*.

13. **Session Victim** - *See You When You Get There*.

14. **18+** - *Trust*.

15. **Ø** - *Konstellatio*.

16. **The Pains Of Being Pure At Heart** - *Days Of Abandon*.
17. **Optimo** - *Dark Was The Night*.
18. **Kyle Bobby Dunn** - *And The Infinite Sadness*.
19. **Banks** - *Banks*.
20. **Christian Loffler** - *Young Alaska*.
21. **Glitterbug** - *Dust*.
22. **Grouper** - *Ruins*.
23. **Francis Harris** - *Minutes Of Sleep*.
24. **Sleaford Mods** - *Divide & Exit*.
25. **Efdemin** - *Decay*.
26. **The Smoke Clears** - *Listen*.
27. **Kassem Mosse** - *Workshop 19*.
28. **Warpaint** - *Warpaint*.
29. **Call Super** - *Suzi Ecto*.
30. **Reagenz** - *The Periodic Table*.

| [JOHN BITTLES](#)