

Music | Bittles' Magazine: The music column from the end of the world

The year 2015 was a strange time for music. Huge albums by the likes of **Blur**, **The Libertines**, **Foals**, **The Chemical Brothers**, **Leftfield** and **Grimes** failed to sparkle as, in the mainstream at least, there seemed to be very few stand-out LPs. The year appeared to lack that one unifying album which would woo pundits, pop fans, clubbers, indie kids and hip hop heads alike. There was no *Blue Lines*, *Dummy*, *Whatever People Say I Am, Nevermind*, or *LP1*. By **JOHN BITTLES**

That's not to say that there was no great music released in 2015. In fact, if you cared to seek them out, there were many aural gems to be found. From angry hip hop, growling techno, luscious house and mesmerising ambiance, there were plenty of essential LPs. The 20 albums listed below are a selection of what I consider to be the highlights of the year. Some you may be aware of, others you may have only heard of through overhearing hushed conversations in the dark. You may not agree with some of them. You may not agree with all! Yet, in my opinion at least, each and every one of these records are essential listening that will fully enrich your life should you be brave enough to give them a go. I think that's what we call a dare!

1. *Closing Ice* by **Senking**.



For me, this year's stand-out album could only be this deep, dark, menacing trip into the very heart of the groove. I spent many hours and days in 2015 playing this on repeat. And, I have to admit that at times I almost convinced myself that *Closing Ice* by **Senking** was my one and only friend. The record's nine mid-paced tracks throb with an eerie sense of threatening design, sounding as if they are about to reach out through the speakers to steal your very soul. Yet there are also many moments of startling aural beauty to be discovered here, which helps lend the record a rich, textured feel. After a two year absence *Closing Ice* was a confident statement of intent from **Senking**. It's bass heavy soundscapes working in perfect tandem with sublime techno pulses and atmospheric ambiance to create an album which transports the listener to a whole different universe from the very moment they hit play. In a perfect world this would have been huge!

2. *Dream_III* by **Nmesh & t e l e p a t h .**



Dream III isn't so much an album as a way of life! It is a deeply immersive and stimulating split LP of futuristic ambiance and twilight electronica from two of electronic music's rising stars. Those who have previously found themselves mesmerised by the desolate cityscapes of *Blade Runner* or the dense audio emissions of **Biosphere** will find much that will enrapture here. London label *Dream Catalogue* have long excelled in releasing this type of nostalgia-draped electronica which seems to have a pulse all of its own. In short, it is a wonderful example of that much maligned hipster baiting genre known as vaporwave. In fact, *Dream III* may just be the most gorgeous and fully-realised example of this style of music I have heard so far. With over an hour apiece both **Nmesh and t e l e p a t h** deliver a string of bewitching sonic caresses which are almost too beautiful to behold.

3. *Foreign Parts* by **Seb Wildblood**.



In a fantastic year for house music it was the glorious rhythms and deep house textures on *Church* co-founder and deep house disciple **Seb Wildblood's** debut LP, *Foreign Parts* which singled it out as one of the best. Full of sumptuous melodies, goose-bump inducing grooves, and spacious beats to enrich the soul, the record marks Seb out as a very special producer indeed. Even though I have had the record on almost constant rotation since its release over five months ago I have never once found myself getting tired or bored. The simple reason for this is that tracks such as *Moöir*, *Sønday* and *Systir* are the type of gloriously deep house which would make the likes of **Mateo & Matos**, **Idjut Boys** or **Moodymann blush**. This is house music which feels classic to the core, and which seems to get better after each and every play. So good that even the most devoted hater will struggle to resist.

4. *American Intelligence* by **Theo Parrish**.



Taking the legacy of Chicago and Detroit to new and unexpected places, *American Intelligence* is composed almost entirely of experimental, yet 'proper' house music from one of the genre's most respected and gifted stars. Released way back in January on his own *Sound Signature* label, the bumper LP saw the producer deliver a heady, tranquil and funky double CD/triple LP of smoky house jams. Many of the tracks stretch towards the ten minute mark which helps give the record a relaxed, unhurried feel. Yet, songs such as the opener *Drive*, *Life Spice*, *Thug Irony* and *Footwork* remember the demands of the club to give us some of the most devastating moments heard on any dance floor this year. **Echoes of Prince, Larry Heard, Drexciya** and more can be found in what is a wonderful work of art created by one of the more talented sound designers of our time.

5. *Night Of Visions* by **Ancestral Voices**.



Over the previous few years the label *Samurai Horo* has released some of the most interesting and experimental drum n' bass to be heard. So much so in fact, that many would claim that they left genre limitations far behind a long time ago. This November saw the imprint release its magnum opus in the magnificent *Night Of Visions*, the debut LP from **Liam Blackburn's Ancestral Voices** guise. The album is composed of rumbling bass infused soundscapes which sit at the point where ambient, techno and dubstep collide. It is this lack of respect for genre restrictions, and what has gone before, which helps make *Night Of Visions* one of the most beguiling and bewitching releases of the year. Eerie and sinister, there is a darkness at the heart of tracks such as *Ritual Terre* and *Invocations* which creates a thrilling sense of unease. Seemingly created by a mad scientist with ominous designs, this is an all consuming record which sounds

uncanny when played alone in the dark.

6. *Bleeds* by **Roots Manuva**.



After taking a much needed break from the music world Britain's own **Roots Manuva** made a welcome return this year with the angry, unsettling, yet strangely mournful hip hop of *Bleeds*. Ever since the release of his excellent *Brand New Second Hand* LP back in 1999, maestro **Rodney Smith** has created some of the most individual and inspiring rap music to be heard. His new album finds the musical maverick in truly sparkling form! Utilizing the production talents of the likes of **Adrian Sherwood** and **Four Tet** the beat-based accompaniment to **Mr. Smith's** rhymes are forward-thinking and brain-snaringly deep. Yet, as always, it is the gloriously impassioned South Londoner's marijuana-infused drawl which is the true star of the show. From the bitter diatribe against the selfishness of modern society on *Hard Bastards* to the bitter-sweet *Don't Breathe Out* this is the only rap LP in 2015 which constantly kept the listener on the edge of their seat.

7. *Grind* by **DJ Richard**.



After a couple of celebrated releases on his own New York imprint *White Material* the producer made the leap into the long-player format with the gorgeously atmospheric deep house of *Grind*. I have to admit though, that when I first heard this **DJ Richard** was a new name to me. Released on Hamburg institution *Dial Records* the album merges dance floor drive with heady ambiance to winning effect. Whether revelling within the beatless soundscapes of tracks like *No Balance* and *Waiting For The Green Flash*,

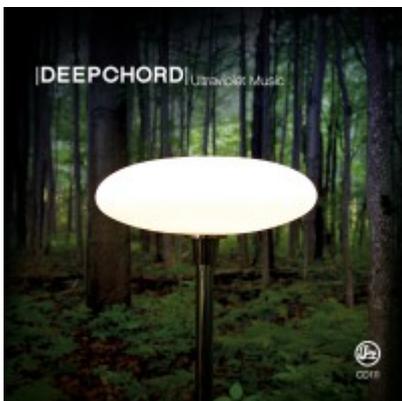
or the warm house thump of *Savage Coast*, *Screes Of Gray Craig*, or *Bane* the album never once deviates from the sublime. In a set packed full of highlights, **DJ Richard** leaves the best for last with the wonderfully evocative *Vampire Dub* ending the record in majestic style. Fans of the output of labels such as *Kompakt*, *Ki Records* or *Dumpoet Community* will find themselves in heaven as soon as the needle hits the groove.

8. *Atarashī Nin Ntso No Tanjō* by **2814**.



Originally released on *Dream Catalogue* at the beginning of the year, it was through the welcome reissue by **Amanda Brown's** respected LA label *Not Not Fun* in August that I first discovered this album's vivid and picturesque world. A collaboration between long-time *Dream Catalogue* disciples **Telepath** and **Hong Kong Express** the record is a wonderfully hazy listening experience, where the police sirens, and sounds from the outside world are transformed into moments of complete and utter bliss. Unbelievably stirring, the album imagines a heavily romanticised future world which can, it seems, never be. Tinged with just the right amount of both hope and regret, this is one downtempo album which packs a mighty punch and which will linger long in the mind.

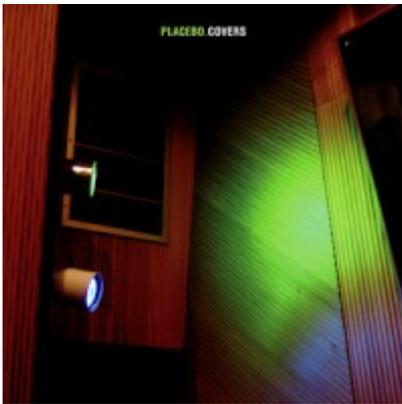
9. *Ultraviolet Music* by **Deepchord**.



While dub techno may, at first glance, appear to be one of the more limited of musical genres, over the last decade or so it is this label which has been applied to many of electronica's stand-out LPs. **Deepchord's** twin CD opus *Ultraviolet Music* is the perfect example of this! By slowing down techno's usually frantic and overly aggressive beats and grooves until they resemble no more than a drawn-

out, echoing pulse **Deepchord's Rod Modell** has crafted a series of pieces which inspire both devotion and awe. With his dub-infused grooves unfairly labelled by some as 'heroin house', the music on this album is a lot more varied than this lazy definition may suggest. In fact, the music morphs from sublime ambiance to clanking bangers with aplomb. You would even get away with playing one or two of these tracks in a club (maybe not in your local *Oceana* though!). Vividly realised and hypnotic in the extreme, this is an album to enrich both minds and ears.

10. Covers by **Placebo**.



Every year in music there is a curveball, an album that you think you should hate, but unreservedly love. In 2015 that honour fell to those talented indie goths **Placebo** with, of all things, a covers LP. Versions of *Running Up That Hill* by **Kate Bush**, *Where Is My Mind?* by **The Pixies**, *Bigmouth Strikes Again* by **The Smiths**, *I Feel You* by **Depeche Mode** and more both honoured the much praised originals yet still managed to inject them with something new. Surprisingly restrained and emotional, this is a record which, from its release at the very beginning of the year, has very rarely left my side. In a year full of over-production, bland platitudes, funky-lite and complicated beat patterns *Covers* was a succinct example of how, to create great music, you only need a few instruments, talent and soul.

The next ten...

11. *Body Pill* by **Anthony Naples** - Short but sweet set of raw, fractured house which is perfect for those seeking a bit of adventure within their 4/4 beats.

12. *Morning/Evening* by **Four Tet** - Made-up of two twenty minute long tracks this is one of the most beguiling and heart-warming albums you will ever hear.

13. *My Love Is Cool* by **Wolf Alice** - In a very poor year for indie music the slacker rock, folk and grunge stylings of this four-piece stood head and shoulders above the rest.

14. *The Acrobat* by **Grant** - Classic deep house grooves brimming with heart and soul from this mysterious producer whose work completely transcends the dance floor.

15. *Key Markets* by **Sleaford Mods** - Angry, spiteful, yet hilarious dissection of modern society from two angry old punks who sound perfectly at home with a series of funky basslines and a hip hop beats.

16. *Imagine The Future* by **ASC** - Sonically thrilling album of dense electronica which sounds like nothing else around.

17. *Dilate* by **Vessels** - Rock and techno collide to devastating effect in a record made up almost entirely of long, lingering grooves.

18. *All Yours* by **Widowspeak** - Gorgeously hazy reflections abound on this pastoral LP which recalls the stoned majesty of the likes of Mazzy Star.

19. *Modern Nature* by **The Charlatans** - A life-affirming return to form for the indie veterans. Born of tragedy, Tim Burgess and co haven't sounded this energised and vital in years.

20. *Warm Glow* by **Luca Sigurtà** - Ambient, trip hop and all manner of crazy shit combine in an album which, since the very first play, I haven't been able to get out of my head.

| [JOHN BITTLES](#)