

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

Don't hate me for this, but I thought *Lemonade* by **Beyonce** was a bit shit! I know that most »taste makers« raved about it in their end of year *Best Of* lists, declaring it a work of Godlike genius. Yet, somehow, the overproduced pop on offer left me a little cold. Perhaps it's just me, but the whims of a multi-millionaire pop star just didn't resonate. By **JOHN BITTLES**

There were far better albums out there which received nowhere near the critical acclaim they deserved. From the ghostly electronica of **Pye Corner Audio** and the groove-laden house of **Hollis Parker**, to the swamp rock dirges of **Psychic Ills**, 2016 gave us all manner of sonic thrills. This week we belatedly celebrate some of the very best with a round-up of 20 of my favourite releases of the year.

Marissa Nadler - Strangers (Bella Union)



If there was one album which stayed with me through the solitary nights and wistful days of 2016 it was the latest Gothic folk masterpiece from Boston artist **Marissa Nadler**.

Gorgeously melancholic from beginning to end, Marissa's vocals sit centre stage in an album which is so beautiful it hurts. Evoking images of lonesome landscapes, line-etched faces, and cold, empty rooms, this is the type of music which makes the perfect companion anytime you are feeling forgotten and alone. If songs such as *Hungry Is The Ghost*, *Strangers* and *Janie In Love* don't touch you in strange yet wonderful ways then I must congratulate you on being so lucky in love!

Key Track: *Janie In Love*

Pye Corner Audio - Stasis (Ghost Box)



Deep, heady and fantastically woozy, **Pye Corner Audio's** latest album *Stasis* is electronic music so good you never want it to end.

Following up the majestic electronica of previous LP *Sleep Games* must have seemed a daunting proposition at first. Yet, the loose, almost disco bassline on *Lost Ways*, the creepy soundscapes of *Autonomization*, the **John Carpenter** synths on *At The Heart Of Stasis*, and the soundtrack inspired *Vorsicht*, means that *Stasis* is every bit as good. Seriously, if you only listen to one electronic album from 2016 this would be the smart person's choice.

Key track: *Lost Ways*

Moscoman - A Shot In The Light (ESP Institute).



After a succession of successful 12inches which delighted both hearts and floors, **Moscoman** took a huge leap forward last year with the playful house of his debut long-player, *A Shot In The Light*.

Containing ten tracks over two slabs of vinyl, this is house music tailor made for inciting spontaneous acts of smiling and hugging on the dance floor. Just listen to the uplifting warmth of lead single *Mexican Cola Bottle Baby* to hear exactly what I mean. Soft and gentle, it conjures images of beautiful people lounging on summer beaches, yet still sounds wonderful in a darkened room.

Key Track: *Mexican Cola Bottle Baby*

Psychic Ills - Inner Journey Out (Sacred Bones)



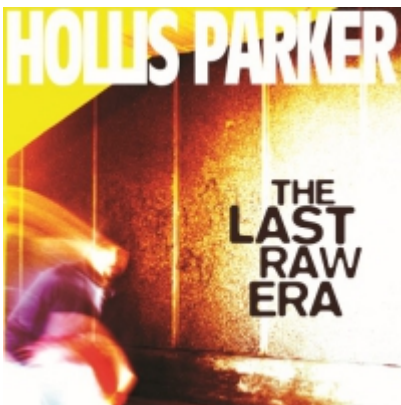
You know an album is a bit special if three separate people ask you what is playing when you have it on in the background of your local bookstore.

Such is the case with **Tres Warren** and **Elizabeth Hart's** latest rock opus. Sounding immaculately stoned, the album's fourteen, largely downbeat, tracks somehow muster the energy to create a surly drawl which both mesmerises and thrills to the core.

Moving further away from the noisy psychedelia with which they made their name, towards quieter, more intimate waters, **Psychic Ills'** latest LP sees the New York band reach the type of creative high most bands can only dream of.

Key Track: *I Don't Mind*

Hollis Parker - The Last Raw Era (SoSure Music)



This is the type of house music which is so rare these days you want to keep it somewhere safe and only take it out on special occasions.

Soulful, deep, thoughtful, and (whisper it) spiritual, the album's groove laden tracks go beyond the boundaries of beats and rhythms to speak directly to your soul.

Make no mistake, this is music made for dancing, and makes the very act of moving your limbs in time seem like the most profound experience of your life. In a year full of excellent house records, this debut LP from the up and coming Londoner is so special you'll feel duty bound to tell the world.

Key track: *What You've Done*

2814 - Rain Temple (Dream Catalogue)



Rain-soaked ambiance and dystopian atmospherics feature heavily on core *Dream Catalogue* duo **2814's** sublime follow-up to their *Birth Of A New Day* LP.

Vaporwave icons **HKE** and **Telepath** produce music which pulses with emotional resonance and electronic warmth. Conjuring images of ghostly alleyways, lonesome highways, and the phantasmal remnants of future worlds, this is a record which exists in its own vividly realised plane.

In a fabulous year for the label, *Rain Temple* epitomises all that is great about downbeat electronic music in the modern era.

Key track: *Eyes Of The Temple*

Diiv - Is The Is Are (Captured Tracks)



(Captured Tracks). With main man **Zachary Cole Smith** suffering a year's worth of writer's block, and being arrested for heroin possession, the prospect of a sprawling double album follow-up to 2012's *Oshin* LP didn't raise expectations all that high.

Yet, in *Is the Is Are* he crafted a record whose very pretentiousness and overindulgence somehow worked as its greatest assets. Druggy, shoegaze inspired epics mix majestically with life-affirming guitar pop to create one of the most rewarding albums to grace a stereo in 2016. Those bemoaning the death of guitars should make a point of tracking this down.

Key track: *Blue Boredom*

Ishmael - Sometime In Space (Church).



Sometimes you can get a little sick of house music; its tired rhythms, over reliance on 4/4 beats, and repetitive programming all becoming a bit of a bore.

It takes records such as *Sometime In Space* to come along every once in a while to remind us just why we fell in love with this genre in the first place. Released back in March on London label *Church*, *Sometime In Space* is the perfect soundtrack to a night lost on the town. Synths soar, strings get drenched in emotion, while the beats keep everything funky and sound. In other words, this jazz soaked opus is manna for the soul.

Key track: *Salt Spring Falls*

Moodymann - DJ Kicks (!K7 Records).



Sets by **Jackmaster**, **Dam-Funk** and **Marcel Dettmann** saw !K7's esteemed *DJ Kicks* series on fine form throughout 2016.

Pick of the bunch though was Detroit house icon **Kenny Dixon Jr.'s** soul-infused mix. Featuring **Dopehead**, **Shawn Lee**, **Flying Lotus**, **Nightmares On Wax** and any number of exclusive edits the album takes in jazz, trip hop, techno, soul, funk and more in a spine-tingling 80 minute set.

Mostly downbeat in nature, **Moodymann** injects warmth and personality into the tired sounds of the DJ mix. In doing so he compiles what is easily one of the most fully realised and enjoyable listening experiences of the year.

<https://open.spotify.com/embed/album/26ko9KvGa0mKqByhi74nsn>

Key Track: *Guttah Guattah* by **Dopehead**

Conduct - Borderlands (Blu Mar Ten Music).



The last few years have seen that much-maligned of genres, drum n' bass steadily reinvent itself to become one of the most thrilling creative outlets around.

The reason for this are the enthralling beatscapes to be found on albums such as **Conduct's** *Borderlands*.

Dark, ominous and visceral, this is music which speaks to the gut, the head and the feet. Full of angular beats, strange left turns and frantic rhythms, *Borderlands* is a record which grabs the listener from the off and, over almost 60 minutes of music, refuses to let go.

Key Track: *Borderlands*

The next ten

V/A - *My Love Is Underground Vol. 2.*

Jeremy Underground made a very welcome return in February with a wonderful collection of smooth house delights.

The Pattern Forms - *Peel Away The Ivy (Ghost Box).*

Two thirds of indie dance stars **Friendly Fires** team up with **Jon Brooks** of **The Advisory Circle** for a leftfield pop gem.

Tee Mango - *Imperfections Vol. 1*

The alter ego of *Millionhands'* founder **Tom Mangan**, in *Imperfections Vol. 1*, **Tee Mango** created a deep house masterpiece full of killer grooves.

Jessy Lanza - *Oh No (Hyperdub).*

Sultry, sexy, and deeply electronic, the electronica/R&B vocalist returned in 2016 with this oddball pop gem. Richly textured production merges seamlessly with Jessy's versatile vocals on a record which shows that pop music need never be dull or staid.

Diamondstein - *The Ridges (Dream Catalogue).*

Darkened electronica and Gothic hues combine majestically on an album which adds a welcome dose of urban menace to *Dream Catalogue's* usual wistful sounds.

ISAN - *Glass Bird Movement (Morr Music).*

For a while now the duo of **Robin Saville** and **Antony Ryan** have been releasing some of the finest electronica known to man. The glacial atmospheric and emotion rich ambiance of *Glass Bird Movement* may just be the best thing they have ever done.

De La Soul - *and the Anonymous Nobody (AOI).*

We Aren't Strangers No More: 2016's Albums Of The Year.

Several years in the making, with the hip hop legends recording over 300 hours of live recordings to get over restrictive sample issues, *and the Anonymous Nobody* sees the group make a stunning return to form.

Romare - *Love Songs: Part Two (Ninja Tune)*.

The producer also known as **Archie Fairhurst** graced turntables the world over late 2016 with the funk laden house of his second LP. One listen to the low slung groove of *All Night* should be more than enough to make any beat disciple realise that *Love Songs: Part Two* is aural gold.

Kim Brown - *Wisdom Is A Dancer (Just Another Beat)*.

The duo of **Ji-Hun Kim** and **Julian Braun** make dance music full of warmth and soul. Full of the type of deep house which is usually only spoken of in whispered discussions in the coolest of record shops, wisdom isn't just a dancer, it's bloody great.

Julia Jacklin - *Don't Let The Kids Win (Transgressive)*.

With a voice full of longing and a guitar made for gentle strumming, the languid, melancholy of the Australian artist's debut LP help make it one of the most emotionally affecting records of the year.

| [JOHN BITTLES](#)