

[Newsletters](#)[Follow us](#)[Mobile](#)[Log in / Create Account](#)Search 

123

11

0

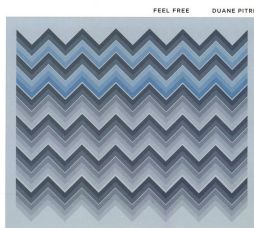
« [A neglected Chicago filmmaker gets...](#) | [Can the torture scenes in Zero Dark...](#) »

FRIDAY, JANUARY 18, 2013

[YEAR IN REVIEW](#) / [MUSIC](#) / [POST NO BILLS](#)

My favorite albums of 2012, numbers ten through one

Posted by Peter Margasak on 01.18.13 at 08:32 AM



Read numbers 40 through 31, 30 through 21, and 20 through 11.

The final installment of the year-end countdown of my favorite albums from 2012.

10. Duane Pitre, *Feel Free* (Important) New Orleans composer Duane Pitre created a system/composition using a computer algorithm. At root, the computer holds various recordings of harmonic patterns played on guitars tuned in just

intonation; the program randomly plays back various little snatches, which overlap and resonate in ever-changing combinations. The piece can function in that sparse mode, but it becomes more interesting when other players join in, as on this lovely recording with violinist Jim Altieri, hammer dulcimer player Shannon Fields, bassist James Ilgenfritz, cellist Jessie Marino, and harpist Jesse Sparhawk. Participants are free to play what they want, although Pitre established rules to prevent performances from veering into chaos or overload. These collaborators nail it, making it the most beautiful, gently accruing piece of strings vibrations I've heard all year.

9. Josephine Foster, *Blood Rushing* (Fire) Former Chicagoan Josephine Foster probably has the greatest raw talent of any singer loosely affiliated with new modes of folk music, and over the years she's applied her singular voice to all kinds of settings—naked bass and voice sounds with Born Heller, blammo psychedelia, and flamenco-driven settings for the poetry of Lorca, among others—but I think she found her sweet spot on *Blood Rushing*. She composed all of the music, surrounding some of her strongest, most indelible melodies with gorgeous, conversational arrangements played by a band that includes her husband, guitarist Victor Herrero, and A Hawk and a Hacksaw violinist Heather Trost. The approach and writing are rooted in folk formalism, but the melodies are so warm and memorable that the music hits with the concision and immediacy of pop.

8. Frank Ocean, *Channel Orange* (Island/Def Jam) The first time I heard this consensus pick for 2012's album of the year I could only shrug, unimpressed and totally baffled by the fuss. But I came back to it and it suddenly sunk in. I don't think I find it is as interesting or groundbreaking as my colleagues, but the melodies are irresistible and Ocean's low-key delivery is charming. Plus, the intimacy of his lyric writing—sometimes hilarious, sometimes brutally honest—make even the slightest,

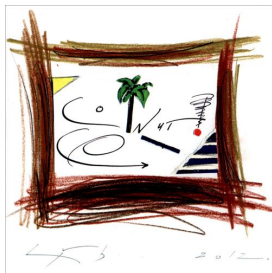
dumbest lines compelling. I'm not passing final judgment until I hear the next record, but this one brought loads of ongoing pleasure.

7. Billy Hart, *All Our Reasons* (ECM) Over the decades Billy Hart has rarely been a bandleader, though he's worked with a who's who of postbop giants—Stan Getz, Herbie Hancock, Wes Montgomery, Miles Davis, Pharoah Sanders—and brought an inimitable lilt and improvisational heft to just about everything he touches. He's cut two albums with this dream band, which includes some of the most influential voices of jazz's younger generation: Bad Plus pianist Ethan Iverson, Fly saxophonist Mark Turner, and bassist Ben Street. *All Our Reasons* is one of the year's most gratifying jazz releases, with tunes that hollow out and rebuild standards such as Coltrane's "Giant Steps" and Sonny Rollins's "Airegin," and originals that expertly toy with form and harmony.



6. Streifenjunkt, *Sval Torv* (Sofa) On its second album this stunning Norwegian improvising duo—trumpeter Eivind Lønning and saxophonist Espen Reinersten—continue to create breathy, slippery beauty from the barest of materials. For most of these tracks they keep the volume and attack on the quiet and gentle side, playing remarkably delicate, intuitive lines that glide, slide, sputter, and dip like a seasoned pair of dancers, except every move here is spontaneous. On the surface this stuff is unapologetically abstract, but there's a piercing beauty at work, reveling in the fragility of human breath and the way different instruments can find so many ways to fit together and play off one another in shared purpose.

5. Stefan Prins, *Fremdkörper* (Sub Rosa) No recording spun my head around like this two-disc survey of work by the young Belgian composer Stefan Prins (now pursuing a PhD at Harvard under the great Israeli composer Chaya Czernowin). Few folks have so rigorously and daringly collided acoustic instruments with electronics and computers like this guy, who earned a degree in engineering before devoting himself to music. He makes great use of technology in his work, often commenting on its invasive, ubiquitous role in contemporary life. On his vicious piece *Infiltrationen* (2009), for example, four electric guitarists sit in front of computer screens following a score produced in real time; they're able to exert some influence on that score using certain keys, but it proceeds whether they like it or not. The musicians are also required to remember and replicate certain passages, mere supplicants to the computer. When any of them stops playing, the computer program produces electronic sounds to fill the space, addressing the scarcity of silence in today's world.



4. Eric Boeren Quartet, *Coconut* (Platenbakkerij) Dutch trumpeter Eric Boeren has never been shy about his love for the music of Ornette Coleman's classic quartet—which featured Don Cherry—and since forming his own quartet in the late 90s he's largely followed Coleman's model in terms of instrumentation, sound, and approach. But as this killer album makes abundantly clear, he's got his own thing going on, combining the wonderful loosey-goosey aesthetic of the Dutch free jazz scene, where the musicians play fast and loose with

every possible formal element: a freewheeling approach to set lists, calling new tunes in midperformance, or just bleeding one piece into the next. He, drummer Han Bennink, bassist Wilbert de Joode, and reedist Michael Moore engage in rigorous improvisation and sophisticated group interplay, while transmitting an undeniably joyful sound.

3. Giovanna Pessi and Susanna Wallumrød, *If Grief Could Wait* (ECM) Few albums haunted me like this collaboration by the stunning Norwegian singer Susanna Wallumrød and the Swiss baroque harpist Giovanna Pessi. The album combines classic songs by the great 17th-century British composer Henry Purcell with modern pieces written by Leonard Cohen, Nick Drake, and the singer herself, finding an unexpected common thread through the durable history of British folk music. Pessi's baroque harp meshes transparently with Marco Ambrosini's nyckelharp (a Swedish keyed fiddle) and Jane Achtman's viola da gamba, but those early-music instruments don't tie the music to a particular era: Wallumrød's gorgeous singing keeps the focus on the timeless melodies.

2. Vijay Iyer Trio, *Accelerando* (ACT) Each member of pianist Vijay Iyer's trio—with bassist Stephan Crump and drummer Marcus Gilmore—accelerates and decelerates

and pushes and pulls against various pulses. But the impression they create together is of a single whole rather than individual polyrhythms and melodic fragments. Iyer solos rhapsodically, in the measured, elegant, and determined fashion of his hero Andrew Hill, and the patient, unforced development of his improvisations squares perfectly with the way his bandmates translate time. The material on *Accelerando* includes sturdy Iyer originals and varied takes on music by Michael Jackson ("Human Nature"), Flying Lotus ("Mmmhmmm"), Herbie Nichols ("Wildflower"), and Henry Threadgill ("Little Pocket Size Demons"), among others—and the group transforms it rather than simply performs it. The band's inexorable rhythmic drive is an exhilarating ride, and despite the rush of velocity all the stunning technical details register as they fly by, whether you can pick them out or not.

1. David Virelles, *Continuum* (Pi) It's the recordings that confound and challenge me that usually keep me coming back for more, and this knockout effort by the New York-based Cuban pianist David Virelles did that more than anything else in 2012. His playing is spare and considered—in fact, he often complements his piano with tremulous long tones played on harmonium and pump organ—and most of the dozen pieces are short. There's little question that Virelles is just as skilled as the next Cuban musician—he just doesn't need to show it off. He's joined by Cyrille, bassist Ben Street, and the Cuban hand percussionist and poet Román Díaz, and the band clearly has a strong connection—the results are charged by a potent interactive vibe. Additionally, Virelles infuses his work with heady conceptual conceits, from interacting with the visual art that graces the cover to the visceral use of spoken word and Afro-Cuban religion. Months later I'm still finding my way.



Today's playlist:

Hirose Junji, *The Elements: Tenor Saxophone Solos* (Doubt Music)
 Various artists, *Sufis at the Cinema: 50 Years of Bollywood Qawwali & Sufi Song 1958–2007* (Times Square)
 Lotus Plaza, *Spooky Action at a Distance* (Kranky)
 Terry Riley, *Shri Camel* (CBS)
 DuH, *In Just* (Red Toucan)

Tags: Duane Pitre, Josephine Foster, Frank Ocean, Billy Hart, Streifenjunko, Stefan Prins, Eric Boeren, Giovanna Pessi, Susanna Wallumrød, Vijay Iyer, David Virelles, favorite records of 2012, Year in Review 2012, Variations on a Theme

RELATED STORIES

An overlooked Cairo Gang recording gets another chance

Twyxt Word, an obscure chapter in the story of Emmett Kelly's group, is uncovered for wider consumption.

by Peter Margasak

My favorite albums of 2012, numbers 20 through 11

Part three of my favorite albums of 2012 countdown

by Peter Margasak