

Jani Ojala

The Top 100 Albums of the 2010s

"Quest for AOTD"

My favorite albums released between 2010 and 2019

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- #29. William Tyler - *Modern Country***
- #28. Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds - *Push the Sky Away***
- #27. Casualties of Cool - *Casualties of Cool***
- #26. Seattle Symphony / Ludovic Morlot - *Become Ocean***
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- #24. Kendrick Lamar - *good kid, m.A.A.d city***
- #23. Gidge - *Autumn Bells***
- #22. Dead When I Found Her - *Eyes on Backwards***

#21. The Necks - *Mindset*

TOP TWENTY

#20. Adrian Younge - *Something About April*

#19. Danny Brown - *Atrocity Exhibition*

#18. Woods of Desolation - *Torn Beyond Reason*

#17. The Roots - *undun*

#16. Beach House - *Teen Dream*

#15. Yosvany Terry - *Today's Opinion*

#14. The Radio Dept. - *Clinging to a Scheme*

#13. Vektor - *Terminal Redux*

#12. Scott DuBois - *Autumn Wind*

#11. Tim Hecker - *Anoyo*

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#10. Daft Punk

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#7. Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds

#6. Swans

TOP FIVE

#5. Kendrick Lamar

#4. Kanye West

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#3. Fleet Foxes

#2. Jon Hopkins

#1. Ludovico Einaudi

OPENING WORDS

These opening words, as well as all the album-reviews, were written in the last four months of 2019.

It was the most significant decade of my life. I became an author, writing my first novel at age sixteen (2013), formed (2016) and ran a Facebook music-group for three years, went through puberty, collected over 350 (and counting) CDs, gained (2010), lost (2011), gained again (2014) and lost again (2018) weight in noticeable amounts, made all my best friendships (2010-2013), lost my virginity (2012), learned about love and family and myself, survived severe depression after years (2014-2017) of struggling. Smoked for the first time (2010), drank for the first time (2010), had my first kiss (2011).

The older I get the more poetic the ring is in the words that fate chose for my first words in this decade "*voi vittu*" ("*Oh fuck*"). Throughout the years and the changes, the losses and wins, the opportunities and misfortunes... to start it all with "oh fuck" originally felt regretful. Not because I was 13 and my parents didn't like me cursing. Just, wished I'd planned the words better.

Wanna know why those were the words I instinctively uttered in that moment? Because I'd just looked at the clock, and it was two minutes past midnight. I had plans in my mind, to do *or say* something extravagant, something super meaningful that night when the 2000's turned into the 2010's. I hadn't gotten around to finishing those plans before the moment arrived.

I don't know how much of that fact served a poetic purpose in the coming ten years. That stagnation. But *eh*.

But just... I didn't know how these ten years would turn out. Of course. I got no idea where I'll be in 2030 *now*, so it makes sense. But I knew I was gonna get a lot **older** in these ten years, in calendar-years, at the very least. As the ten years passed, the words "oh fuck" turned out to be *just* the words to say at the dawn of such an unpredictable, satisfying but also painful decade.

I remember every situation, setting and scenery I was in when a year has turned during this decade. The in-the-moment-ness of accidentally cursing at the fact a new decade had begun, cannot and should not get understated as the launching pad for that process of enjoying a NYE. It has turned into my favorite day of the year. Themes of *ending the old and beginning the new* hit me at every contemplative moment in any given December. It's an amazing opportunity for reflection, a good time to look back on things you have accomplished, as well as things you want to do better, and wish would *turn out better*, come new year. I'm a believer in that the energies, the mindsets and things you do on the last night of the year, is what defines the next year of your life in some ways, at least symbolic ones. There's big and small magics going around on a NYE. And this is the third New Decade's Eve I'll experience in my life. It's my favorite holiday of the year, a time of reflecting on the past and what went right or wrong - as I mentioned earlier - but above all, a time for looking forward, finding that security that life has certain beginnings and endings, even if your life doesn't start anew because of just one magical tic of the clock. This infatuation with New Year's Eve has even gone as far as to inspire my entire view of life. What is life, but a story?

A time of new beginnings, and looking back, I've been giving it conscious effort to have 2019 culminate things in my life, as if it was a big NYE in and of itself. Turns out, many of the culminations I didn't even have to carry out myself:

- I published *Helicopters*, the final part on the *Oulunsalo Fictionbook* trilogy. This one has been building up since 2014. The first chapter of *Ice Road* was written in July of that year, along with sketching out the beginning of a story. Hurries regarding other books went aside finally in December, when one snowy, hazy morning I made the outlining of the main events of the whole book, leaving room for possible sequels. *Ice Road* was released in June 2016, *Talisman* in September 2017, and *Helicopters* April 2019. In October I released the collector's edition compiling the entirety of *Oulunsalo Fiction*, and in November released *The Oulunsalo Gallery*, a book detailing the creative process that happened over the course of five years.
- I got two jobs. This one has been building up since 2016, when I started culinary school. There were difficulties along the way. I hardly knew jack-shit about food when I went to school in the summer of that year, but 2,5 years, and seven apprenticeships later, I got the diploma. 100 Euro-scholarship as well (2018). Later, in Autumn 2019, I moved to Syöte which is a big skiing resort in Lapland, to work there as a chef.
- I moved out of my parents' house. This one's been building up since 2017, when I started actively wanting it... but being in school, I had to wait it out. Moving out to my first apartment alone was a big step in and of itself, but as I started working at Syöte, I of course had to move there as well...
- My brother got married. This was none of my doing, but it's been technically building up since 2012, when those

- two lovebirds got engaged.
- I got 4,000 ratings on RateYourMusic. Yeah, I know, not as big as the other ones, but I had to mention it, since the site is where I primarily post my lists. Back in 2016, when I was really dipping my feet into water with all these diverse genres and such, I came across a user on RYM. He's a friend of mine there, and a Norwegian native. He had 4,000 ratings. Now I dunno what it was, but looking at this number just instantly gave me an instinctive idea, that *this is a guy who knows about music*. It looked like an *accomplished number* in a sense. In the years following 2016, as my number of records I'd heard and rated, rapidly grew and I surpassed all my online-friends, the only time I really felt like the mission was complete, was reaching four thousand. And this January, I did it. I mean listening to music is just for fun, right? For me it's fun to set extravagant goals and then meet them.
 - I quit smoking. This time for good. I'd been doing it longer than my mother did when she was younger, which had to me been the absolute limit of how far down that road I'll ever go. This one had technically been building up since 2016, when I had a 6-month break from the shit but unfortunately ended up relapsing. On the last day of September this year, I finally put an end to it. I will never take one hit off of one cigarette again.
 - I started working on a new book that's to be called *Broken Shadows* (named after the archival Ornette Coleman album). A crossover project that sees characters from six of my earlier books, making appearances, as well as my first real step into the Fantasy and Dystopia-genres.

The making of this list has been an active goal for the last 2 years, and I base these 100 picks off the **2,000+ albums**

from 2010-2019 that I have heard.

Now this decade's just days away from ending. Welcome to my list of the greatest albums released in the last ten years.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Albums that almost made this list.

You *know* there's gonna be a bunch of these, with how extensive the research for this list was.

The Midnight Hour - *Luke Cage* (2016)

William Tyler - *Goes West* (2019)

Tycho - *Dive* (2015)

Gil Scott-Heron - *I'm New Here* (2010)

Sandwell District - *Sandwell District* (2011)

Jay-Z - *4:44* (2017)

Glue Trip - *Glue Trip* (2015)

Alex Sipiagin - *Destinations Unknown* (2011)

Andy Sheppard - *Romaria* (2018)

Tangerine Dream, Woody Jackson, The Alchemist, Oh No & DJ

Shadow - *The Music of Grand Theft Auto V: Volume 2 - The Score* (2013)

Forest Swords - *Engravings* (2013)

Lars Danielsson - *Liberetto II* (2014)

Flying Lotus - *Cosmogramma* (2010)

Slowdive - *Slowdive* (2017)

Teyana Taylor - *K.T.S.E.* (2018)

AtomA - *Skylight* (2012)

William Tyler - *Blue Ash Montgomery* (2014)

Wooden Shjips - *V.* (2018)

Jonny Greenwood - *Phantom Thread* (2018)

Madlib - *Madlib Medicine Show: No. 3 - Beat Konducta in Africa* (2010)

Insomnium - *Shadows of the Dying Sun* (2014)

Kiasmos - *Kiasmos* (2014)

Dead When I Found Her - *Rag Doll Blues* (2012)

Tiluland - *Axes of the Universe* (2010)
Jonny Greenwood - *The Master* (2012)
Wadada Leo Smith - *Ten Freedom Summers* (2012)
Glue Trip - *Glue Trip* (2015)
Pallbearer - *Foundations of Burden* (2014)
Vijay Iyer - *Far From Over* (2017)
Kendrick Lamar - *Section.80* (2011)
Steven Wilson - *Grace for Drowning* (2011)
Low - *Double Negative* (2018)
Janelle Monáe - *The Electric Lady* (2013)
Overkill - *Ironbound* (2010)
Milo - *Things That Happen at Day // Things That Happen at Night* (2013)
Nails - *Unsilent Death* (2010)
King Creosote & Jon Hopkins - *Diamond Mine* (2011)
Fire! Orchestra - *Enter* (2014)
Om - *Advaitic Songs* (2012)
DJ Rozwell - *None of This Is Real* (2014)
Anderson .Paak - *Ventura* (2019)
Deathspell Omega - *Paracletus* (2010)
Manu Delago - *Circadian* (2019)

AND WELCOME TO THE 2020s!

Top 100

#100.

Michael Arthur Holloway

Guilt Noir

(2016)

(Dark Jazz)

It is sheer coincidence that the most brutal-looking, (I'll say it) ugly cover-art out of the whole list is here first. The bulk of this cover-art is taken up by what I hope is not a dog or a similar animal's burnt bones, but a burnt doll. Random black markings around its' neck-area, a mouth that looks like the inside of a spoiled cantaloupe melon. Holes for eyes, and two perked-up ears, and some white lines that look as if the photoshop-process was unfinished. The background is just a wall of wooden planks, with a night-shaded sepia overlay.

It's the lowest-ranking entry on the list - not a small accomplishment in and of itself, given the extent of big names even on the "Honorable Mentions"-section - but also the one putting Michael Arthur Holloway/**Dead When I Found Her** in an *elite* grouping of **just three** artists that scored three entries on the list. I didn't want to be as selective as I had to be, when limiting down the albums I wanted to talk about, into just hundred. A lot of people I've seen, who make big lists like this, make it a necessity to have a "one album per artist" limit, and I just think that makes no sense.

The first and so far last Jazz venture by Holloway, this is really the first time the EBM-artist stretched his own artistic limits as far as this. And it was a successful venture. Granted, there's no denying the **Angelo Badalamenti**/*Twin Peaks* influences of the album, but that really comes with the territory when you're even conceiving of making a Dark Jazz album. The haunting, anxious snippets of dialogue that take these winding and slow-burning compositions into different planes of movement as easily as snapping a finger, are the most obvious thing setting *Guilt Noir* apart as just a thing of its' own, but I take the intentionally more exploration-driven, *winding* nature of the compositions, as well as the potency they carry in the difficult mission of not outstaying their welcome, into an even bigger account setting *Guilt Noir* apart from the game.

This album invites you into a dizzying, haunted, foggy and unclear landscape with a style of music whose potency is still kind of underexplored by other artists in the medium of Jazz - making it even more of a curious irony that an Electronic artist could pull it off so well. The only kind of closure this album does achieve is being at rest (at last), like the final cut says. The closer is a perfect contrast-drawing cap-off for such a brutishly thought-provoking journey, in just how traditionally bluesy, short and apt, and generally peaceful it is in laying this nightmare-marred hour into its' rest. It's also not long enough to really take anything away from the rest of the album - which is like day and night from it tonally... but for something even deeper than that, I think it illustrates in the deepest way, how this record was *and is* a homage to the genre of Jazz in general, not just the Badalamentis of the world.

#99.

Anna von Hausswolff

Dead Magic

(2018)

(Experimental Rock; Neoclassical Darkwave)

Just a facial shot of a tortured-looking female figure with hair blown back *by something, drowned* in a sharp color-scheme of dark-red and the darkest of black... this album's cover art is not only an invitation to the musical experience, it is a statement in and of itself.

Released to wide acclaim - even getting the musical multitalent that is Anna, to conduct for the Nobel prize ceremony almost a year later - *Dead Magic* felt like a masterwork from the very first time listening to it. Its staggeringly electrifying performances, the seriousness like a dark confession, and amazing seamless progressions present in every track, cement that observation as truth.

Distant organs and crackling open things up for us. Things stay like this for the first full minute, after which *The Truth*, *The Glow*, *The Fall's* opening vocals immediately immerse the listener. From the jump Anna reveals all her cards as a songwriter, keeping a firm mysterious sensibility to every lyric - even when more descriptive and less poetic. The way this 12-minute track uses repetitions of musical phrases in the instrumentation, even pounding them *percussion-first* until they've reached their atmospheric maximum, is very reminiscent of a 2010s **Swans**-album. Later on, as the final

act of the song sets in, you get an amazing vocal flex from Anna, who's going in by the throat, sounding like that red disturbed spirit of a lady in the cover and, in a way, *really introducing* us to the album just at that time. If the first half of the song showed us what *Dead Magic is*, the ending showed us where it's gonna **go**.

Following, *The Mysterious Vanishing of Electra* (whose title comes from one of Anna's middle names) lyrically tackles some sort of crisis within one's own identity/self. With an opening riff straight - if you count out the strings that welcome in the song - out of a **Swans** textbook, and some of the finest displays of vocal range by any female vocalist I encountered through my travels in 2018, the track easily carries you through its' runtime and keeps you hanging on every moment. The opening riff takes the song two thirds in and progressively gets more encapsulating as it pounds on. The switch between lead riffs is sudden but feels like such a vivid, *real* part of the track's overall stream-of-consciousness. Anna's vocals get higher by a pitch or two and menacingly throw closure at a song so desperate that *resolve* was never in the plans for it.

Closing side 1, the 16-minute piece *Ugly and Vengeful* takes things higher and further down at the same time, because by this time the "dark confession at an old abandoned church" vibe has come to its' climax, but while the atmosphere is intense and haunting, a noticeably big opening stretch is toned-down and generally slower... until it isn't. The progression 'round the 6-minute mark is quite possibly the most beautiful moment of this record, as the incrementally building churchaesthetic really escapes the track, blowing up into this well-arranged and infectious organ riff. When it breaks up and yet another electrifying performance by Anna kicks in, followed by pounding kickdrums, *Ugly and Vengeful's* lunacy comes full circle. This song is at the center of the tracklist for a reason. It is for all intents and purposes, its' centerpiece.

Starting off Side B, the strictly-instrumental piece *The Marble Eye* brings back the organ for an expansive, pounding lead riff, which via subtle work at the lower register keeps elevating until the almost (at least by this album's standard) "relaxing" track guides the way to the closer.

Källans återuppståndelse is the single most haunting, beaten-down form of ambiance I've heard. All that pain and struggle expressed through the monumental vocal performances and consistent darkness in the beginning, seems to have taken its' toll on the entire narrative of the album, and the cool, yet heartstring-pulling organ riff and fragile but melodic backing track give way to Anna's likely most heartfelt verse, accompanied by strings that just elevate everything a tier higher; to the altitude in which this album — *potently* — finishes.

Anna said once in an interview, that she wishes this album would cause listeners to accept mystery and ambiguity in an "extremely materialistic society where everything needs to be explained." That's a great sentiment to live and be inspired by, for someone who's an artist myself. Anna achieves her vision beautifully with her fourth album. Nothing is given to you straight here, but *Dead Magic* proves that just a consistent atmosphere and even a central mood can be the proper foundation anyone needs to make an album that will go down in the fan-community's collective consciousness, as one of the key albums of its' entire year.

#98.

Ka

Honor Killed the Samurai
(2016)

(East Coast Hip Hop; Abstract Hip Hop)

The plainest pairing of black and white colors on this album, this cover-art jumped out immediately for the anime-like texture it achieved with nothing but a tombstone in the middle, titles written in black-on-white and white-on-black. A simple and effective image.

Ka's discography is ten years deep, and with each subsequent release, seems to garner more attention. With this album - his easily-most noted and well-received - there were some controversies regarding his personal *former* work. Ka's own response to the backlash was pretty quiet, minimal... but the whole instance showed me something about Hip Hop, and something about music in-general, that's still as true as ever. **It's all entertainment.** You can have the most resonant, expertly world-building bodies of work - something said about Ka plenty times by fans - and not actually be a character in any of your stories, in real life. I've been a fan of **Kool G Rap** for years, and one of the main points he always makes in interviews, when people asked his very explicitly criminal raps, going into a very vivid dimension when the 90s rolled around, is that *Hip Hop is entertainment*. Words are there to paint images. If you're captivated by the story, and the story rewards your

attention, does it really matter if the writer didn't live every single beat of the story?

Of course it doesn't.

Ka has had a stellar discography so far. *Grief Pedigree* (2012) was stellar and would've been on this list if it was a top 200. Subsequently to *Honor Killed the Samurai* being Ka's most popular album, it's also the most complete as a larger image of smaller snapshots.

A writer's writer in the current era of New York rap, Ka adopts a protagonist-perspective so well, that moving from a revenge-plotting song to a song of conflict within one's conscience, and then to a song of memories from childhood, all plays out seamlessly. The outlining, larger theme here is - as stated in the title - the dichotomy between street warriors and the historical precedent of the Samurai. Living an outlaw-lifestyle, forces one to make up their own rules and moral codes, to which the street-dweller holds on like the Samurai did to the code of honor instilled in them. It's a good juxtaposition, between two worlds that are quite different on many fundamental levels, but similar in that one holds on to the code ingrained in them. They live and die with it. And when it's life and death... the difference isn't that huge after all.

What's gonna strike people first here on this album is the slow pace of the rapping and the beats, as well as Ka's speech-like delivery. It's an acquired taste, sure, but I find it gives the narrator - a role Ka adopts as well as he does that of a story-subject - more liberty, to use the tone of his voice for expression along with the lyrics. The amount of quotable lines on *Honor Killed the Samurai* is higher than that of any previous Ka records, and that attention to detail is heightened by how well these instrumentals play a background-part. They borrow the few musical elements

from the soundscapes of the East, to which Ka, as well as the female-voice narrator allude to just as actively, giving the album a conceptual continuity that's more rewarding with every replay.

#97.
Hammock
Mysterium
(2017)

(Ambient)

A very blurry image, of a grey wall, which has a white stripe near its' bottom. This cover art is really easy to picture in your head.

Y'know, it was hard. Choosing the Hammock album that'd be most suitable for this list. *Chasing After Shadows... Living With the Ghosts* (2010) was my favorite piece by them for the longest, but what I've discovered, upon further inspection and listening to *Mysterium* and the 2010 record separately, is that *Mysterium* - which originally had a lower rating from me - just strikes a special kind of tone that never outstays its' welcome, even with a runtime of over an hour. Revisiting this album doesn't make certain moments feel less deserving, just more necessary than before

The peppered tracks with vocals on them, outline the emotional narrative of *Mysterium* in a super concrete way. Lyrics here are sparse, and each word you hear, over 58 minutes of music, could fit within one page of a CD booklet with ease, but it is the statement of those lyrics that seal the deal. The *sentiment*.

Hammock started out as a Post-Rock band, but have, on more occasions than one, ditched percussion in quest for

ambiance that would better tell whatever story is intended on every which album. Although the arrangements of the strings and tonal guitars very much *remember* the Post-Rock roots, things have changed and that's just somehow even more context to support this album's claim as perhaps the greatest thing ever put out by the Nashville-based Post-Rock duo.

Mysterium has great dramatic effect. Theatrical, even. With its' subdued progression and minimalist arrangement making sure to follow through a linear path of *string-stroking* high-sentiment beauty, it rewards that focus, that *moment* one has to take out of his day to hear this. The choral singing, really brings it home. To make a huge generalization, that's something that's not put in such good use with modern alternative music, traditionally. Here, **Marc** and **Andrew** use just as much of it as is necessary, and the more I listen to the album, the more I realize it's one of the purest realizations of a very abstract pre-planned vision of an album. There was clearly something very solid and rock-hard in the department of *Mysterium's* concept.

Confirming that belief even further, is the fact that this is a tribute album to **Clark Kern**, a "son-like figure to Marc Byrd", as said on their Bandcamp page, "who died in 2016 from the tumor strain NF2" .

I can't find the exact quote where it is said, but there's a distinct memory I have from 2017, of someone saying this album was made to be a musical image of **death**. While I'm not sure how enamored the band was with visions of death, how obsessed with their own visions of it, the album sure does ceaselessly *take you places* without ever really stopping anywhere, in a way that feels... *final*...

#96.
Beach House
Bloom
(2012)

(Indie Pop; Dream Pop)

This record's cover-art is just pure eye-candy. White dots scattered on top of a black canvas, in a way that resembles just, like, a casino-floor's roof or some other light-spectacle of the sort. This light-spectacle looks daunting yet distantly inviting when stripped of the *rainbow of colors* it must've possessed.

I'd like to start this writeup by saying that *Myth* is the **strongest** opening track of any Beach House record. Most of my online-friends from music groups are big Beach House fans, and so a statement like that might create controversy in our group-chat; therefore I am putting my foot down with this statement. The song is their most popular one, according to statistics from Spotify and Last.fm, and even though popular opinion should only give a music-explorer an idea of where to start rangin', I - someone who already loved *Teen Dream* (2010) and *Devotion* (2008) beyond description - looked into the song more, finding out that the almost-universally-agreed-upon magnum work of Beach House is the opener to my third-favorite record of theirs. Just this year I fell in love with *Myth*, really. And while it's not my favorite song of theirs - that accolade goes to *Space Song* - the best way for me to sum the song up, is that *I love it because Beach House sounds the most Beach House*

on it. Devotion came out two years before this decade, so I won't be able to access the list unfortunately. However I have written a review for it before on RYM (RateYourMusic), and in that review I stated that this is "a moment when a band finds itself, its' own sound: one that would go on to inspire a lot of their peers".

The Beach House sound was good. It was so good it birthed the two arguably most influential Dream Pop records of the early 2010s. This and *Teen Dream* (which will be in the top 20 of this list). *Myth* however... I dunno, I keep coming back to it. It has an aptly *mythical* way of sounding like the most pure and complete manifestation of that sound.

A friend of mine from that group-chat (what up, Jay) said in his review of *Teen Dream*, that the album's weakness is in its' track-listing, stacking the first half full of such memorable songs, that the latter half - in his opinion - pales in comparison to. And while the latter half of this album's tracks are more subdued, *Take Care* from the predecessor is considered among many fans to have "let the ball down" from the huge momentum that tracks 1-6 (or 1-8 in some interpretations) had built. In the summer of 2018 I was obsessed with *Teen Dream*, and *Take Care* is one of my favorite tracks from the record. *New Year* is also one of my favorite tracks from this one, as is *On the Sea*. It doesn't skew the momentum in any ways, in my opinion, but rather takes it somewhere unexpected. Now, subversion can be an all-out bad thing to a lot of music-listeners and art-*appreciators* of the like. To me it can be good. It's like they added a *The Bends* track to close off *OK Computer*. A lot of people can and will find it to be out of place, but to me it adds a level of character to the overall record.

I actually wouldn't mind *Street Spirit* or *My Iron Lung* ending *OK Computer*, now that I think about it...

But that's another conversation. I don't fault people, for feeling like it's out-of-character for a band that... *characteristically* bathes their music in rich instrumental aesthetics. It makes perfect sense. But just, at least for me, Beach House does a very graceful job of dimming the lights down a little bit before they shut them off

#95.
The Midnight Hour
The Midnight Hour
(2018)

(Neo-Soul)

This album's cover-art is a midnight-blue-shaded collage of people at their craft or throwing pondersome looks outside. A very deliberate Jazz-tribute that's also a visual Jazz experience.

Even aside from my love of Adrian Younge's music - *especially* the collaborative stuff with **A Tribe Called Quest's** Ali - the first thing I should mention here is that I owe my sincerest gratitude to *The Midnight Hour* for introducing me to **Eryn Allen Kane**. One of the most amazing vocalists I've heard this whole decade, period. She's got a small body of work, as of the time of me writing this, but even with that being noted, she's demonstrated in an impressively short time that she can juggle any kind of a track and make it sound like hers, make it sound like the ultimate combustion of heart and talent. Just marvelous.

Not even a grudge, but *a tick* in some listeners' minds could be the fact that this album - the duo's first full-length studio album that's not a soundtrack - seems to use all of its' heaviest guns early. The threesong stretch around the start, from *It's You*, to *Questions* to *So Amazing* was a strong contender for the strongest three-song streak of 2018. With amazing songwriting, well-laid performances by legendary

soul singers (respectively **Raphael Saadiq**, **Cee Lo Green** and **Luther Vandross**), and traditionally structured soul songs only in smaller doses for the remaining 13 numbers of the tracklist, *The Midnight Hour* seems to set itself up. But it doesn't. Right from the first instrumental piece following this three-strike combo (*Gate 54*), it's put into perspective what is the force really morphing *The Midnight Hour* into the experience it is, before our ears. It's the full musical acknowledgment of influences from Jazz and Neo-Soul, by the execproducer powerhouse that masterminds Ali and Adrian form into, that elevated even the contemporary Soul numbers into what they came out as. The live aesthetic and in-the-moment feel on this record are never lost, their foundation is impenetrable. It's a stunning and consistent job throughout. Even the more out-there lead vocal contribution by **Bilal** on the track *Do It Together* battles the lounge-evoking instrumental - some brilliantly embellished strings here on this track, as well - for a spot in the forefront. *Redneph in B Minor* follows these loungeaspirations, and is also "the most Adrian Younge" this album gets. With drums leading the mix of the instrumental piece, and guitar swerving round and 'bout in its' second half, the track manages in less than 3 minutes to both be progressive, and show all the depth, colors of its' ingredients. Closing the first half, *Better Endeavor*, another instrumental piece exactly as long as the previous, takes its' drumming into a more Hip Hop breaks-direction á la Ali, with extremely lyrical strings on top of a bass *narration*, which the track later breaks down into. These two instrumental pieces here, together, show the best of both worlds in terms of this unlikely but natural collaboration. These creative minds' musical backgrounds they have the most proficiency in, might vary, but w all shades of modern-age Neo-Soul, the direction of the record is kept strong for the second half's setup.