

My Favorite Music of 2017

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Spotify playlist at: <https://goo.gl/4WzJPw>

2017 was another terrific year for music for me, and continued trends from recent years: less of an emphasis on new releases, and more digging into records and subgenres I passed up earlier; less of my traditional loves of alternative/indie rock and Americana, and more jazz, world, and instrumental music. The new angle this year was having my listening influenced by my being a drummer again – I sought out more records that challenged or intrigued me rhythmically.

I hope you find something new to dig. Here goes...

Favorite 2017 releases

1. Hurray For The Riff Raff – The Navigator

I didn't fall completely in love with a 2017 release until I discovered this via an NPR playlist from my good friend, Danny Korman. Man, did I fall hard. Outside of Christmas music, it's the only thing I've listened to over the last several days.

I loved Alynda Lee Segarra's voice when I first heard her several years ago, but her songs were straight-up folk, which doesn't move me these days. The Navigator is a bold turn from that: inspired by Ziggy Stardust, she created the titular character to explore and reconnect with the Puerto Rican heritage that she had left behind. The result is a confident concept album about identity, meaning, and place that blends indie rock, Americana, and Latinx sounds. "Hungry Ghost" is my indie song of the year, "Living In The City" is the best street song Lou Reed never wrote, and "Pa'lante" – the name of a 1970s activist Puerto Rican newspaper, it means "onwards, go forwards" in Spanish – is my anthem for the new year.

2. Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds – Who Built the Moon

Just as I get into Noel's solo work – see below for more on that – he departs from his classic sound to collaborate with Belfast electronica producer David Holmes on a record that blends the psychedelic grooves of the Madchester scene and Damon Albarn's side of the Britpop war with his classic guitar anthems. It's a fun record.

3. Paul Weller – A Kind Revolution

Unlike most of Weller's post-Jam releases, there are no standout singles on this one. But, I so dig his "IDGAF because I'm The Modfather" blend of everything he loves into a style that sounds like no one else. See #5 below for his surprise EP...

4. Mark Guiliana Jazz Quartet – Jersey

Mark came to my attention as the drummer in Donny McCaslin's band that collaborated with David Bowie on *Blackstar*. That record was a game-changer for me as it was the last of three musical happenings that made me want to drum again. While Guiliana is well-established as the one of the

hottest drummers in the world – as a London publication wrote, Guiliana is “what happens when you add hard bop drum masters Elvin Jones and Art Blakey to a 1980s Roland 808 drum machine, divide the result by J Dilla and then multiply to the power of Squarepusher” – *Jersey* demonstrates how he is coming into his own as a composer as well. With spare, melodic originals and a meditative take on Bowie’s “Where Are We Now?,” this is my jazz record of the year.

5. A trio of EPs (it’s not cheating because they add up to one album in length):

*** Aloysius 3 – s/t**

Members of Norah Jones band who doubled as her opening act at Taft Theater. Think Ry Cooder with a wicked B3 player.

*** Paul Weller – Mother Ethiopia**

Just weeks after *A Kind Revolution* came out, Weller released this three-song EP that pays homage to the Ethiopian artists he adores. (See the great *Ethiopiquest* compilations for more.) Did I mention that he DGAF about what people expect?

*** Man on the Moon – Moore’s Law**

Proggy instrumentals driven by master drummer/educator, Mike Johnston.

6. The National – Sleep Well Beast

This is my least-favorite National record since they came into their own with *Alligator*, and I’m not interested in Matt Berninger’s marital/mid-life-crisis issues, but the high points – “The System Only Dreams in Total Darkness,” “Day I Die,” and “Turtleneck” – are still better than most anything else out there. And I love the musical beds that the Dessner and Devendorf brothers construct.

7. New Sincerity Works – Wonder Lust

Disclosure: NSW chief Mike Tittel is a friend and fellow drummer-turned-singer/songwriter, but that’s not why I love this record. Rather, it’s the thoughtful blend of influences (1980s college rock, literate Freedy Johnston-style pop, the not-dull side of Americana) and creative production that makes me dig it. *Wonder Lust* features Mike’s best batch of songs, the third in a trilogy that began with the post-divorce wreckage of 2014’s *44*, and played by some of the most talented and inspired musicians in the Queen City. I’m a fan.

8. Filthy Friends – Invitation

Invitation is exactly what you would expect from members of R.E.M., Sleater-Kinney, and other beloved 80s-90s bands. Fortunately, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. I want to be in a musical gang like this.

9. Jay Som – Everybody Works

Good friend Patrick Helmes turned me on to this record after a beery night of discussing how no one sounds like The Police. Patrick rightfully suggested that I might dig this based on the very Police-like

“One More Time, Please.” It’s mind-boggling that Melina Duterte played and recorded this entire record by herself in her bedroom.

10. U2 – Songs of Experience

I’ve been listening to U2 since I heard “Gloria” on MTV in fall 1981 – they are firmly entrenched as my favorite band of all time. Sadly, this record is only here because it is the best of the rest of this year’s releases, and because I gave it so much airtime trying to love it. There are some lovely moments: “The Little Things That Give You Away” is the best song they’ve written since “Beautiful Day,” “Love Is All We Have Left” is a surprise *Zooropa*-like opener, and “Book Of Year Heart” shows how they would sound if they stopped trying to imitate Coldplay and OneRepublic. Unfortunately, the record is marred by some of Bono’s worst lyrics and a production style that shoots for mainstream radio instead of citizenship in IDGAF-landia with Paul Weller and Radiohead. If you’re interested, ask me for my ten-song, 40-minute edit which makes for a better record.

[While you’re here, you should buy a copy of my band’s record, Pike 27’s *The Long Fight* at [Bandcamp](#), [iTunes](#), [Amazon](#), or [Google Play](#). Now back to the program...]

Honorable mention

Curtis Harding – Face Your Fear

Depeche Mode – Spirit

Harry Styles – Harry Styles

Hudson – Hudson

Jessica Hernandez & The Deltas – Telefono

Kamasi Washington – Harmony Of Difference

LCD Soundsystem – american dream

Matthew Ryan – Hustle Up Starlings

Preservation Hall Jazz Band – So It Is

Ted Leo – The Hanged Man

The Dream Syndicate – How Did I Find Myself Here

Tim Rogers – An Actor Repairs

Tony Allen – The Source

Van Morrison – Roll With The Punches and Versatile (yes, dude released two records at age 72)

Disappointing or wasn’t inspired to pay much attention to:

Foo Fighters – Concrete and Gold

Gizmodrome – Gizmodrome

Ray Davies – Americana

Favorite discoveries and rediscoveries outside of 2017 records

* I fell back in love with **reggae and ska**, which I listened to a lot in college and was a drummer the first time around. I dug deep into Bob Marley's catalog – *Live at The Roxy*, recorded in 1976 on the *Rastaman Vibration* tour is stunningly good – and got reacquainted with my old loves, the English Beat and the soundtrack for *The Harder They Come*.

* I'd never paid much attention to **Norah Jones**, thinking she was talented but too Starbucks-y for me. I checked out 2016's *Day Breaks* because Brian Blade, one of my three favorite drummers, played on it, and dug it. That led to our seeing an incredible show at Taft Theater in March, which led to my checking out the records after she broke away from the style of her debut/breakout; *Little Broken Hearts*, *The Fall*, and *Not Too Late* are really good.

* I didn't pay much attention to **Britpop and Trip Hop** in the mid-90s because I was deep into learning about roots music and trying to become a better songwriter. Inspired by seeing Noel Gallagher open for U2 in Dublin this summer, I dug into his solo work and then Oasis; they're both full of corks, as our laddish friends at the Dublin show would say. (I ran into some work difficulties in the fall. Singing "Champagne Supernova" and "Don't Look Back In Anger" every single day on the way home of a stupid commute was a great release.) I went back to trip hop while trying to make sense of ideas in my head that don't fit Pike 27. Lots of Portishead, Morcheeba, Tricky, and Massive Attack followed.

* Following trip hop and my song ideas that don't have a home at the moment, I found some great **instrumental music that blurs the boundaries of trip hop, jazz, and movie soundtracks**: Aloysius 3 (see above), GoGo Penguin (described as the midpoint between The Bad Plus and Aphex Twin), Get The Blessing (Portishead's rhythm section with a sax player), Floratone (Bill Frisell and monster drummer Matt Chamberlain), and Mark Guiliana's Beat Music.

* **Divine Weeks - See *Those Landing Lights* and *33 Days*, a book by Bill See**

Neal Weiss, an old friend and fellow songwriter/music fanatic from LA, turned me on to Divine Weeks, a great band from the late 1980s who deserved to be bigger than they were. As I was reading *33 Days*, bandleader Bill See's inspiring, heartfelt memoir of their first tour (think *Our Band Could Be Your Life*), I checked out *See Those Landing Lights*, a 2016 comeback record inspired by the book. They're both fantastic. If anyone asks me why I still play music at this age, I may just hand them *See Those Landing Lights*. Music saved me and made me a better person – I suspect that Neal and Bill would say the same about themselves.

* **African music**

More rhythm-inspired music! I got even deeper into the legendary Fela Kuti and Tony Allen. Saw Seun Kuti & Egypt 80 put on a blistering, too-short set at Midpoint. Got into Femi Kuti, William Onyeabor, the Rough Guides to Mali and Ethiopia, the Éthiopiennes series, and *In The Name of Love: Africa Celebrates U2*, which features remarkable reinterpretations of U2 songs by artists like Angelique Kidjo, Vieux Farka Toure, Tony Allen, and Sierra Leone's Refugee All-Stars.

* **Joe Jackson and Steely Dan**

Inspired by terrific concerts by Joe Jackson and Donald Fagen, as well as Walter Becker's death, I spent a lot of time rediscovering the deep cuts of both.

A great year of shows (in chronological order)

- Norah Jones w/ Aloysius - Taft Theater, 03.16
- Joshua Redman w/ Brian Blade, Ron Miles, & Scott Colley - Wexner Center (Columbus), 03.29
- Dave Douglas & Frank Woeste - Wexner Center (Columbus), 04.11
- Donny McCaslin Band - Wexner Center (Columbus), 04.19
- Christian McBride - Xavier University, 04.28
- The Revolution - Bogart's, 05.16
- Tommy Stinson/Bash & Pop - Barracuda (Austin), 05.27
- Joe Jackson - Taft Theater, 06.13
- Alejandro Escovedo - Ludlow Garage, 06.14
- U2 - Papa John's Stadium (Louisville), 06.16
- U2 - First Energy Stadium (Cleveland), 07.01
- U2 - Croke Park (Dublin), 07.22
- Chick Corea's Elektric Band w/ Bela Fleck & The Flecktones - Riverbend PNC Pavilion, 08.13
- Donald Fagen - Taft Theater, 08.23
- Filthy Friends, Broken Social Scene, Frightened Rabbit, Pile, Seun Kuti & Egypt 80, Walk The Moon, Badbadnotgood, Dan Deacon, Charly Bliss - Midpoint Music Festival, 09.23-23
- Hudson (Jack DeJohnette, John Scofield, John Medeski, Larry Grenadier) - SCPA, 10.12
- Psychodots w/ Baoku - Woodward Theater, 11.24

Favorite gig

Pike 27 record release party with Tittel/Landis/Bray from New Sincerity Works – York Street Café, 11.11

Most plays by artist (via Last.FM)

1. U2
2. David Bowie
3. The Police
4. Paul Weller
5. R.E.M.
6. Van Morrison
7. GoGo Penguin
8. Norah Jones
9. Mark Guiliana
10. Donny McCaslin
11. Bob Marley & The Wailers
12. Latin Playboys
13. Radiohead
14. Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds
15. Miles Davis
16. Dave Douglas
17. Spoon
18. Joe Jackson
19. Tony Allen
20. Brian Eno
21. The National
22. Floratone
23. Get the Blessing
24. Thievery Corporation
25. Ted Leo and the Pharmacists