

My Favorite Music of 2018

Dave Purcell

Spotify playlist at: <https://goo.gl/oz6Y7M>

Hi all,

Here's a shorter-than-usual version of my annual music list. I hope you find something new to dig. Best wishes for a peaceful, healthy, and music-filled 2019.

Favorite 2018 releases

1 (tie). Calexico – *The Thread That Keeps Us*

I've long been a casual Calexico fan. This is the first release of theirs I've loved from beginning to end. It helps that their show at Woodward Theater was one of my top shows of the year – a joyous blast with a multi-talented band and a deep catalog.

Angelique Kidjo – *Remain in Light*

There's a classic line from *The Wire* – “You come at the king, you best not miss” – that applies here. It takes a lot of courage to cover one of the greatest records of all time. Fortunately, Angelique Kidjo – a fierce artist with an earth-shaking voice, a native of Benin who developed Paris and NYC – is the right woman for the job. She took *Remain* back to Fela Kuti and the other African artists that David Byrne and Brian Eno used as inspiration. This was another top show of the year.

3. Donny McCaslin – *Blow*

I fell in love with McCaslin and his band after they collaborated with David Bowie on *Blackstar* (2016). Amy and I have seen them twice since – once at the venerable Village Vanguard – and they're now my favorite live act. On *Blow*, McCaslin followed Bowie's lead and changed up his usual approach. While it feels like a transitional record, it's still one of my faves of the year.

4. Alejandro Escovedo – *The Crossing*

Alejandro turns 68 in January and he still produces some of the most vital, soulful, and important music we have. Here, Alejandro draws on the experiences of his immigrant Latino family and of his collaborators, an Italian rock band called Don Antonio.

5. Snow Patrol – *Wildness*

On their first release in seven years, singer/songwriter Gary Lightbody rebounds from years of alcoholism-fueled depression to produce this gem. Many music critics have mostly hammered it; many music critics are full of crap.

6. John Coltrane – *Both Directions At Once: The Lost Album*

Newly discovered recordings from 1963 by Coltrane's classic quartet. A gift from the heavens.

7. Mark Brasington – *X*

X finds one of Cincinnati's best guitarists putting his ax aside for ten beautiful, piano-driven songs. Mark is one of my favorite, most inspiring artists (and not because he's a dear friend or because I had the good fortune to play two shows to support the release of *X*). Check out the video for [“The Next Song \(Stick Figures\)”](#) for a taste.

8. I Think Like Midnight – *This Land Is Your Mind + Kompromat EP*

You'll hear about my new all-instrumental band soon. Pell Mell was a main source of inspiration for it – and for I Think Like Midnight as well. While the band describe themselves as “longtime devotees of the lost art of the succinct rock instrumental,” reviewers think they sound like a cross between The Grateful Dead/ Television and The Pernice Brothers/Tortoise. I say that you'll hear shimmering guitars, warm keyboards, bits of Krautrock, and some wonderfully-written songs.

9. Get the Blessing – *Bristopia*

GtB is Portishead's rhythm section combined with sax and trumpet players steeped in jazz. Trippy, mysterious, simmering, and so good.

10. Richard Thompson – *13 Rivers*

Another classic from the master, and my favorite since 1999's *Mock Tudor*. His December show at the Southgate House Revival was one of my faves of the year – at 69, he is absolutely still at the top of his game.

Honorable mention

David Byrne – *American Utopia*

Glen Hansard – *Between Two Shores*

Sam Phillips – *World on Sticks*

Sly & Robbie Meet Nils Petter Molvær Feat. Eivind Aarset and Vladislav Delay – *Nordub*

Sorg & Napoleon Maddox – *Checkin Us*

Best reissues

David Bowie – *Loving The Alien (1983-1988)* box set

David Bowie – *Glastonbury 2000* (not really a reissue, but it's made of old songs, so I'm putting it here)

Joe Strummer – *Joe Strummer 001*

Favorite discoveries and rediscoveries outside of 2018 releases

* Continuing a trend from last year, I spent a lot of time with reggae, ska, and dub instrumentals: classic Bob Marley, Aswad, Toots & The Maytals, the Two-Tone groups, and late period Clash (yes, Virginia – there's a great record inside *Sandinista*).

* Continuing another trend from last year – one that had a major influence on my current playing and songwriting – I dug in deep to instrumental music that hovers between rock, jazz, and something else: artists like Bill Frisell, Floratone (Frisell with Matt Chamberlain, Viktor Krauss, and producer Tucker Martine), Mulatu Astatke, and The Comet Is Coming. My favorite discovery this year was Public Service Broadcasting, who combine Krautrock rhythms and cinematic instrumentals with voice clips from historical archives (mostly from the British Film Institute). While it might sound gimmicky, their storytelling is more compelling to me than most dudes with Dust Bowl outfits and acoustic guitars.

Reading about music

- *Playing Changes: Jazz for the New Century* - Nate Chinen. A fantastic book.
- I went down a rabbit hole with The Clash:
 - *We Are The Clash: Reagan, Thatcher, and the Last Stand of a Band That Mattered* - Mark Andersen
 - *Passion Is a Fashion: The Real Story of the Clash* - Pat Gilbert
 - *Redemption Song: The Ballad of Joe Strummer* - Chris Salewicz
- *Broken Music* - Sting
- *Reggae Explosion: The Story of Jamaican Music* - Chris Salewicz. This one is just ok, but it has some fantastic photos.
- *Creative Quest* – Questlove. Also just ok.
- Currently reading -- *Memphis Rent Party: The Blues, Rock & Soul in Music's Hometown* - Robert Gordon

A great year of shows (in chronological order)

- Los Lobos – Memorial Hall, 01.25
- Van Morrison – Knight Center (Miami, FL), 02.08
- GroundUp Music Festival with Mark Guiliana/Jojo Mayer, Joshua Redman (with Lionel Loueke, Larnell Lewis, and Michael League, Snarky Puppy, Jojo Mayer & Nerve – North Beach Bandshell (Miami, FL), 02.10
- Calexico – Woodward Theater, 04.26
- U2 – Bridgestone Arena (Nashville), 05.26
- Spoon – PNC Pavilion, 06.25
- Steely Dan w/ Doobie Brothers – Riverbend, 06.27
- Radiohead – US Bank Arena, 07.25
- Angelique Kidjo w/ Femi Kuti -- Ravinia Festival Pavilion (Chicago), 08.06
- A mariachi band – The Malecon (Chapala, Mexico), 08.26
- David Byrne – PNC Pavilion, 08.12
- Mark Guiliana & Space Heroes – Music Resource Center, 11.16
- Psychodots (last show) – Woodward Theater, 11.23
- Richard Thompson Electric Trio – Southgate House Revival, 12.06

Favorite musician moments

Pike 27 at Woodward Theater with New Sincerity Works and Young Colt. Sharing stages with Wake The Bear, Plastic Ants, The Amprays, Endive, and 500 MTM. Having the good fortune to drum for Mark Brasington, The Graveblankets, Copper, Justin Lynch & The New Usuals, and Jeff Roberson.

Most plays by artist (via Last.FM)

- 1 - Calexico - 859
- 2 - David Bowie - 745
- 3 - U2 - 658
- 4 - Los Lobos - 452
- 5 - Sting - 407
- 6 - Latin Playboys - 399

- 7 - The Police - 382
- 8 - Van Morrison - 373
- 9 - Joe Strummer - 370
- 10 - R.E.M. - 361
- 11 - Floratone - 341
- 12 - The Clash - 302
- 13 - Bill Frisell - 288
- 14 - Public Service Broadcasting - 284
- 15 - John Coltrane - 277
- 16 - Paul Weller - 263
- 17 - GoGo Penguin - 254
 - Mulatu Astatke
- 19 - Miles Davis - 252
- 20 - Snow Patrol - 250
- 21 - Talking Heads - 241
- 22 - Bob Marley & The Wailers - 230
- 23 - Donny McCaslin - 228
 - Pell Mell
- 25 - Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds – 188
- 26 - Elvis Costello - 171
- 27 - Thievery Corporation - 170
- 28 - Chris Whitley - 169
- 29 - The Church - 164
- 30 - Spoon - 159
- 31 - David Byrne - 150
- 32 - Angélique Kidjo - 146
- 33 - Thelonious Monk - 142
- 34 - Tony Allen - 131
- 35 - Sonny Clark - 125
- 36 - Sly & Robbie - 122
- 37 - Dire Straits - 119
- 38 - Get the Blessing - 116
- 39 - Norah Jones - 113
 - The Psychedelic Furs - 113
- 41 - Horace Silver - 112
 - I Think Like Midnight - 112
 - King Tubby - 112
- 44 - Alejandro Escovedo - 109
- 45 - Richard Thompson - 107
- 46 - Mark Guiliana - 102
- 47 - Brian Blade & The Fellowship Band - 101
 - The Meters - 101
- 49 - Buena Vista Social Club - 100
 - Glen Hansard - 100