

Geoff Leopard

BEST OF 2010



2010

If there was any distinguishing characteristic for the world's pop music in the last year, it was almost surely the complete lack of any single distinguishing genre. The fragmentation of the pop scene continues unabated, and it's possible to have an astoundingly diverse library of music that includes very little, if any, of your friends' astoundingly diverse library. Genres are born, inspire sub-genres, begin to suck, then flame out faster than a plane full of 1950's rock stars.

Take dub-step. We've watched as it has taken over the sound of club music over the last couple of years, but even more fascinating has been watching the sub-genre speedily gain popularity, peak, then slowly implode. To be sure, from the outset, dub seemed destined to be short-lived, but to see its trajectory veer from strange and new to outright self-parody is nothing less than sad. But also funny.

I don't really think I need to mention the even shorter lived & less rewarding chill-wave and it's various something-wave brethren. How about the sudden inexplicable resurgence of shoegaze and the something-gaze pretenders? Unfortunately they all seemed to lack the same things: inspiration, melody and energy. Luckily each of these seem to have already disappeared from my in-box.

For those fortunate enough to have the time to search it out however, there was plenty of innovation and melody to be had elsewhere in 2010. Though this year's list is shorter it's only for trying be more disciplined about it. I tried very hard to whittled away everything besides the absolute musts.

Please enjoy, and let me know what you think.

Geoff

46 **History (Grum mix)** by Groove Armada

Grum was just one of this year's most prolific mixers. His style verges on disco, but his hallmark is his ability to tease out the pop in just about any track.

45 **Just a Friend (Something A La Mode mix)** by Zoot Woman

Zoot Woman's immaculate melodies are not easily resisted, and they're still some of the best electro out there.

44 **Dance in the Rain** by Ira Atari & Rampue

This will not be the only time on this list that a seductively cheesy melody won over my ears.

43 **Navy Light** by Labyrinth Ear

Labyrinth Ear are as yet unsigned, which seems unlikely considering their very polished, very accessible sound.

42 **Dancing On My Own** by Robyn

Every nerd's favorite pop princess outdid herself this year with more than 20 new songs, many heavily influenced by Giorgio Moroder and her frequent collaborators, Royksopp.

41 **Self Machine (Chew Fu mix)** by I Blame Coco

When I was a child listening to The Police, learning every word, every inflection of Sting's songs, I would have never dreamed that I'd be listening to his as-yet unborn daughter's songs in 2010.

40 **I Am Not a Robot (Starsmith mix)** by Marina & The Diamonds
Strangely enough, this may have been a bit of sub-genre itself this year, songs about possibly being robots. Or feeling robotic. Or something.

39 **Swallow (The Slips mix)** by Crystal Fighters
This may be where dub-step veers into parodic territory, but it's still good, taking a short little punk sketch and crafting a big stompy anthem out of it.

38 **Hear The Music (Mylo mix)** by The Glass
These guys strike me as more of a Swedish or Australian band, not quite American sounding. Maybe it's the white jeans.

37 **Holiday Romance** by Detachments
One of my favorite discoveries of 2010, the Detachments are from London, and I suspect they'll be huge one day. Gorgeous, big synths straight out of 1974 will sucker you in.

36 **These New Knights (Tiesto mix)** by Ou Est Le Swimming Pool
What is it with rock stars making cliches of themselves by committing suicide?

35 **Sex and Violence** by Scissor Sisters
One of the most unexpected consequences of the new economics in music distribution along with the worldwide Great Recession is that bands like Scissor Sisters are being forced to cancel their tours from lack of resources. Freaky, right?

34 **Peter Pan (The Horrors mix)** by Teenagers in Tokyo
It's funny how even goth does not appear to be immune from the influence of the great Giorgio.

33 **Closer** by Kylie Minogue

Yes, I know she's mainstream, but I cannot resist, she's also awesome.

32 **USA Boys (MF MB mix)** by HEALTH

These guys have tightened up their song writing to the point that their songs actually sound like songs now rather than their usual epic soundscape thing. Not that they're songs aren't still soundscape-y and epic-y.

31 **She Said (16Bit mix)** by Plan B

Plan B appears to have wanted to take a page out of Eminem's book by fabricating himself an alter-ego with whom to create a nice fat concept album. Though the attempt was not quite successful, several awesome remixes resulted from his efforts including this sick dub-step treatment of She Said.

30 **Suddenly (Cicada Mix)** by BT

The intro to this sounds so generic, I almost left it off the list entirely, but it's lucky I didn't because this is one of the year's best vocal performances.

29 **Colouring Of Pigeons (dAi mix)** by The Knife

I guess the only way The Knife could get any crazier would be for them to throw an opera into the works.

28 **The Most Certain Sure** by !!!

Live, !!! single-handedly resurrects the sadly dead specter of dance punk. Unfortunately their jam-style approach has difficulty translating onto their records, though they succeed stunningly with this effort, which sounds worthy of 1982 vintage Gang of Four.

27 **Ego Death (Figo mix)** by A Place To Bury Strangers

Straight up, heavy punk here, maybe with a bit of goth thrown in. Loud, groovy and danceable, just like I like. Even if I don't dance.

26 **Come Back To Mine** by Florrie ft. Moguai

Speaking of Giorgio, how about Florrie's year? A protege of the great disco god, Fred Falke, Florrie seems to have taken all of Fred's disco leanings and focused them into rock-hard pop diamonds.

25 **Zebra** by Fran Healy

Beach House may have had a great year, but this cover of Zebra, which replaces Victoria Legrand's Wayne Newtonesque falsetto with the crystalline dulcet pipes of Franny Healy, makes the original seem quaint where this is transcendent.

24 **Credit Card Babie\$ (Stereogamous mix)** by MEN

A paean to child birth in the age of same sex marriage? I think so.

23 **Salvation (Dan Sena mix)** by Scanners

These guys have a distressing tendency toward melodrama, which in rock can be a serious detriment, but in dance music can work deliciously.

22 **Baby I'm Yours (Aeroplane mix)** by Breakbot ft. Irfane

You'll be hard pressed to find another song that was simultaneously this epic and cheesy. And awesome. Maybe something from Journey.

21 **Not In Love** by Crystal Castles ft. Robert Smith

Who would have guessed we'd still be listening to Robert Smith in 2010?

20 **Five Trees (The Horrors mix)** by Chapel Club

Another great new English band, another year.

19 **One (Your Name)** by Foals

Foals may have put out a disappointing record this year, but it was only because of the insane expectations created by their debut. This radio rip of a cover of Swedish House Mafia's summer club hit transforms the somewhat horrifying, downright dumb original into highly enjoyable rock.

18 **Indestructible** by Robyn

The elfin, sugar-coated, albino Robyn can do little wrong.

17 **Love In Darkness** by Ali Love

Harkening back to early '80's electro-soul, Ali Love not only sells it, but he believes it. This is the real deal.

16 **Give Me Your Love** by Florrie

A pop goddess from her first record, it's difficult to resist overpraising the precocious Florrie. Her talented combination of lyric, melody and vocal execution is now matched only by folks like Robyn, Sneaky Soundsystem & Róisín Murphy.

15 **One Day** by Sharon Van Etten

I have to admit that Sharon nearly found herself on my most overrated list of the year. But this song was just too seductive; a gorgeous alt-countrysque ditty you'll find yourself humming, with a painfully sweet guitar and a terrific vocal, reminiscent of late '80's Aimee Mann, perhaps, without the penchant for odd metaphors.

14 **Friend of Mine (Filthstift mix)** by Lily Allen

Speaking of irresistible, how could we possibly omit this dubby take on one of Lily's best songs?

13 **Die On the Dancefloor** by Tyson

Disco, pure and simple, with a perfect combination of balls and falsetto required of the best classic dancefloor jams.

12 **Tron Legacy** by Daft Punk ft. The Hair Kid

And ode to Daft Punk, quickly reviewing their records, featuring references to Star Trek Voyager and Blade Runner and beseeching us to "learn the art of the subtle?" Wow.

11 **Telepaths** by Cygnets

This song could have been lifted straight out of 1983, and I would not know the difference. It's impressive that they managed to so perfectly mimic the aura of an entire era of pop without specifically sounding like any of its bands.

10 **Moon Theory** by Miami Horror

With a name like Miami Horror, you can imagine that Benjamin Plant would avoid any generic denomination, and indeed, Moon Theory is pop in the way that only the best music has been pop since the advent of radio. Classic, but just innovative enough to convince you its brand new.

9 **Crooked** by Evil Nine (ft. Aesop Rock)

A dark and dense fusion of electro and hip-hop, Crooked makes me feel like I've just discovered a new species in a foreign jungle.

8 **I Look To You** by Miami Horror ft. Kimbra

I think all of us in the business would refer to this as a real head-nodder.

7 **The Recluse (Nero mix)** by Plan B

In spite of leaving its melody and essence intact, Nero transforms this into a dub-step OCD anthem, leading me to think that Plan B may be a nascent Michael Jackson still looking for his Quincy Jones.

6 **I Feel Better (Den Haan mix)** by Hot Chip

Hot Chip released their first disappointing record of their career this year, but this mix makes up for the whole thing. Joe Goddard, is, for me, the voice of Hot Chip, it's warm fuzzy center, as opposed to Alexis Taylor's cold mewl. This disco mix, further pushing their tendency toward Bryan Ferry style romanticism is everything I ask for in Hot Chip: Soul, disco and virtuosity.

5 **Hustle (Bloc Party mix)** by Tunng

Nearly trumping the Knife for most bizarre pop song of the year, this may be the most unexpected entry on this list, not only by a band that I usually find dull and pretentious, but featuring an inexplicably new female vocal and a mix by Bloc Party of all people. Up is down.

4 **Left Too Late** by Florrie

I can't think of a more sweet combination of melody and lyric since last year's list topping Girl and the Robot.

3 **Hollywood (Monarchy Gliese mix)** by Marina and the Diamonds
Combining equal parts Freddy Mercury-style operatics and a country-mouse narrative, Marina gave birth to a horrifying stray thought: Maybe showtunes aren't that bad?

2 **Love Harder** by Ali Love
Channeling just a bit of Kool and the Gang and injecting it with a large amount of trip-hoppy disco, Ali Love reminds us that r&b doesn't have to be painfully cheesy and embarrassing. At least not at the same time.

1 **Spanish Sahara** by Foals
Well, when you make a song this great, this addictive, this utterly brilliant, you're entitled to a mediocre record. After their brilliant debut I fully expected their album this year to be nothing less, but instead it appears that Spanish Sahara may have exhausted all of Foals' creative energies for the entire record.

I thought I might have had some idea of what the song was about, but I just listened to it while I was writing this and realized I have no idea. Sometimes the greatest pop songs are little more than vague, remotely evocative lyrics, building tempo and maybe a guitar solo. When a song can wax poetic about the "choir of furies in your head," though, it's probably something special.