

Top Ten Soul Albums of 1990

By Tim Little
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The year of the new decade is almost upon us, and as we look over the music that has come and gone, what can be said?

Well, it was all right.

Actually, the music was not that revolutionary as far as style goes, and it wasn't the most innovative thing in the world either. One can note different forms of music coming in and out: house and hip hop making hip house, reggae making a small comeback and black rock/hardcore groups coming on the scene.

But what were the best of this mixed up year? What stood out as the best creative, outspoken, stylish and sounding productions? Janet Jackson? Good, but that was 1989. M.C. Hammer, you say? Not quite.

Vanilla Ice? You're not getting any better, so let's go on to the list (no particular order):

Ice Cube — *AmeriKKKa's Most Wanted*

Yes, there are words of profane language and references to women as...well, you know, but music-wise Ice Cube makes a successful jump from N.W.A. to Public Enemy producer Hank Shocklee. Once one gets past those strong lyrics, he or she can

hear originality and style working in its best fashion. What makes this album one of the year's best is that it's a perfect example of a black man being able to say exactly what he wants to and say it how he wants to also. On *AmeriKKKa's*, Ice Cube makes a lot of rappers coming from the West Coast seem like the jokes they are. (No offense to West Coast rap lovers.)

Deee-Lite — *World Clique*

The trio from Global Village, N.Y., shocked the dance world this year with their sampling and styles reminiscent from the '60s and '70s. House grooves and disco/funk beats combined incredibly well, and standouts such as "Groove Is In The Heart" and "Good Beat" make Deee-Lite fans anxiously awaiting their second effort. This one should be in everyone's record collection.

Public Enemy — *Fear Of A Black Planet*

Remember this one? It seems as if this was out a loong time ago, but it just goes to show that music in 1990 has been trudging along. Chuck D., Flavor-Flav and the rest of the boys were in full effect—again. *It Takes A Nation of Millions To Hold Us Back* was better, but *Fear Of A Black Planet* is powerful, well-crafted and full of the best beats of the year. Some of the highlights of the album include "Welcome To The Terrordome," "911 Is A Joke," "Who Stole The Soul" and "Anti-Nigger Machine."

L.L. Cool J. — *Mama Said Knock You Out*

Like Public Enemy, this is not L.L.'s best, but it shows that he has outlasted most of the rappers that were out when he first got on the scene. *Mama...* shows that Uncle L. can maintain his style of rapping, use new types of beats and still be successful. "Around The Way Girl," "The Booming System" and "Mr. Goodbar" are some of the best takes, while oldies "To Da Break Of Dawn" and "Jingling Baby (Remixed but still jingling)" work, too.

Prince — *Graffiti Bridge* (soundtrack)

Prince surprised a lot of critics when this album turned out to be so good. After all, for a man who had 10 good albums in 10 years, a stopping point had to be coming soon. With a lot of help from friends such as Mavis Staples, George Clinton and The Time, Prince refunktified (is that a word?) his music for the '90s. Songs like "Love Machine," "Question Of You," "Joy In Repitition" and "Round and Round" make this one a joy no matter what mood you're in. Too bad the same can't be said about the movie.

Caron Wheeler — *UK Blak*

With the help of multi-cultural and multi-talented people, Wheeler has probably put together the most versatile effort of the year. Bouncing off reggae sounds, hip hop beats and jazz tones, *UK Blak* shines in the



Caron Wheeler, formerly with the British group Soul II Soul, tops the charts with one of the ten best soul albums of 1990.

midst of other dance and soul albums of the year. The former background singer for artists such as Elvis Costello and Talking Heads, and the former head singer of Soul II Soul songs "Back To Life" and "Keep On Movin'," Wheeler has definitely moved on. **A Tribe Called Quest — *People's Instinctive Travels and The Paths of Rhythm***

One of the most underrated rap albums of the year is also one of the year's best. Q-Tip and the rest of the tribe meander through varied beats while sampling works of jazz artists and funk masters. Although they are still in the shadows of De La Soul, the members of the Tribe are establishing their own fans through the sounds of such songs as "Go Ahead In The Rain," "Bonita Applebum" and "Footprints."

Jungle Brothers — *Done By The Forces Of Nature*

Like the Tribe, the Jungle Brothers aren't as well-known as De La, but overall might be better. *Done By The Forces Of Nature* is a far-stepping masterpiece that doesn't hit hard at first, but after a while becomes of the best rap albums ever made. "I'll House You" may have put the Brothers on the

map, but "We're Doin' Our Own Thang" and other standouts will carry them further down the road.

Loose Ends — *Look How Long*

One of the best unknown, unsung soul groups of the '80s looks like it will be hitting hard in the '90s. Eric McIntosh, the main man behind the Loose Ends name, has put together some new band members and a new jam right before the end of the year. The first single, "Don't Be A Fool," symbolizes the new sound of the group. By the way, go back and get the group's earlier effort, *Zagora*.

Soul II Soul — *Vol. II 1990: A New Decade*

A lot of the general public didn't like this one as much as the group's first one, but to be critically honest, this album is thorough. Between the masterful production of Jazzie B. and soul singing of various artists, the Soul II Soul sound system puts together a collection that actually might be an album that was made before its time. Look for more Soul II Soul imitators on the scene in the '90s.

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Short Takes By Tim Little

THE WINNERS

--L.L. Cool J

Mama Said Knock You Out

L.L.'s fourth LP makes a statement that he's going to keep going on strong for a few more years. Much better than last year's, *Walking With A Panther*, L.L. has taken new strides to stay on top of the rap industry. Highlights include "The Booming System," "Mr. Goodbar" and "To Tha Break Of Dawn." He also has a remixed version of "Jinglin' Baby." Good production work by Marley-Marl. Ratings: B+

--The Branford Marsalis Quartet

Mo' Better Blues (soundtrack)

Although the movie is old, the soundtrack has yet to hit hard on the charts. But don't be misled by that as Marsalis and friends make the jazz sound perfect with their masterful mixing of contemporary and traditional styles. The "Harlem Blues" remake and the title track highlight this one. Another bonus is "A Jazz Thing," a history lesson about jazz pioneers in a rap version by Gang-Starr. Ratings: A-

THE LOSERS:

--Mantronix

This Should Move Ya'

Yeah, move ya to put on something else. Ratings: D

--D-Nice

Crumbs On The Table

D-Weak. Ratings: D-