

Wrap it up for 2008

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floor smashes "Stamp Your Feet" and "I'm A Fire," making Summer the only artist to have a #1 dance hit in each of the past four decades.

Leona Lewis - "Spirit" (J): With the 2008 ascension of Leona Lewis, it looks like we have a new diva on the block.

Lewis has certainly got all the ingredients — a wonderful voice, stunning beauty and a career that's being guided by a pair of the industry's heaviest hitters: "American Idol" judge Simon Cowell and J Records chief Clive Davis. With her debut album and its hit lead single, "Bleeding Love," Lewis accomplished two impressive feats. "Spirit" landed atop the album chart in its first week, making the singer the first British artist to reach that position with a debut album. Not to be outdone, "Bleeding Love" became the first track by a U.K. female to hit #1 since 1987.

Mariah Carey - "E=MC²" (Island):

The eagerly anticipated follow-up to "The Emancipation Of Mimi" failed to match that musical juggernaut in terms of either quality or commercial success. The album picked up where its predecessor left off — meaning it was also a mid-tempo showcase for Carey's voice and the beats of an army of top urban producers. The best tracks were the ones where the star changed things up, like the disco-fied "I'm That Chick" (which perfectly re-uses a line from Michael Jackson's "Off The Wall") and the gospel-fueled piano ballad "I Wish You Well."

Linda Eder - "Greatest Hits" (Rhino/Atlantic): Linda Eder might be the best-loved Broadway belter of this generation. It's easy to understand why after listening to this stirring set that culls 15 tracks from

four albums (and nine musicals, including "Funny Girl," "Man Of La Mancha," "Gypsy," "La Cage Aux Folles" and her star-making vehicle "Jekyll & Hyde"). Also included is Eder's reading of "Over The Rainbow," the song she watched Judy Garland sing in a TV broadcast of "The Wizard Of Oz" that turned her eight-year-old world upside-down.

Dame Shirley Bassey - "Get The Party Started" (Decca): You wouldn't expect a song from a 70-year-old artist to rip up the club but that's exactly what

Bassey's #1 dance hit did every time it was played. Moreover, the song was the title track for a fabulous new collection of Bassey remixes (with one new song, "The Living Tree") by a cadre of knob-twirlers including NorthxNWest, Bugz In The Attic, Phil Asher and Mark de Clive-Lowe. The reinterpreted tunes included "I Who Have Nothing," "This Is My Life," "I Will Survive," Lionel Richie's "Hello" and the James Bond theme "You Only Live Twice," originally recorded by Nancy Sinatra for the 1967 film.

George Michael - "Twenty-Five" (Epic): After performing 80 shows in 12 European countries for a staggering 1.3 million fans in 2007,

Michael brought his smash 25 LIVE tour to the U.S. this summer. The gay superstar's first American tour in 17 years supported a career retrospective, "Twenty-Five." The 29-song, 2-CD set spans from Michael's earliest hits with Wham! to his smash solo career to new duets with Paul McCartney and Mary J. Blige.

The B-52s - "Funplex"

(Astralwerks): After a 16-year break between studio albums, the killer Bs returned with this appropriately titled collection. It was a relief to hear that Kate Pierson, Fred Schneider, Keith Strickland and Cindy Wilson hadn't lost any of their quirky gusto during the long layoff. In fact, Strickland nailed it when he described the 11-track album as "loud, sexy rock and roll, with the beat pumped up to hot pink."

Erykah Badu - "New Amerykah, Pt. 1: 4th World War" (UniversalMotown):

The list of urban/soul/R&B artists who push the artistic envelop is lamentably short, but Badu is unquestionably among them. After a five-year break from record bins, she made up for lost time with this hypnotic release. Striking soundscapes, turn-on-a-dime arrangements and confessional, stream-of-consciousness lyrics made "New Amerykah" my top headphones album of 2008.

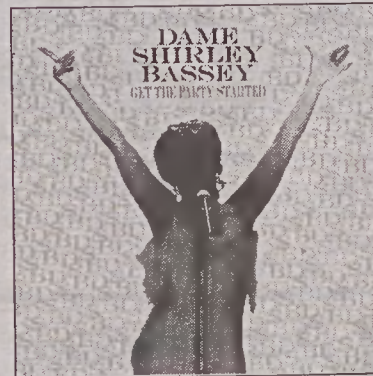
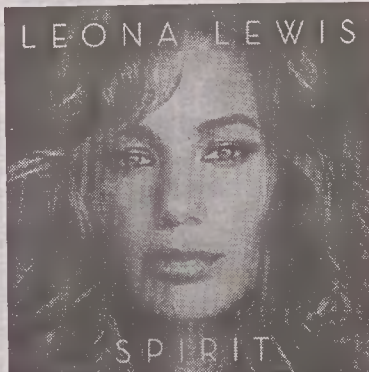
Moby - "Last Night"

(Mute): After a detour into the singer/songwriter realm, the electronic auteur returned to the familiar territory of the dancefloor on his sixth studio album. Encompassing smiley-faced rave anthems, euro-disco, hip-hop (both old skool and underground) and downtempo, "Last Night" is a pulsating romp through Moby's N.Y. club kid roots. ▶

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