

Upcoming albums I'm dying to hear now

Annual Music Issue

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In the '80s, LL Cool J said, "I can't live without my radio." At the time I was in complete agreement. Now...not so much. I still catch snippets here and there and on occasion hear something that piques my interest and compels me to investigate further, but in general I'm an album guy. I love to sift through the new releases looking for those gems that demand to be played over and over until you know every note of the music, every breath the vocalist draws.

Recently, I've been stuck on new releases from Heart ("Red Velvet Car"), Lady Gaga ("The Remix"), Kylie Minogue ("Aphrodite"), Janelle Monae ("The ArchAndroid," my choice for Album of the Year, thus far), Katy Perry ("Teenage Dream") and Scissor Sisters ("Night Work," a crisco disco frenzy that rivals their stunning debut).

Looking ahead, I can't wait to get my hands on the following releases...

Bilal — "Airtight's Revenge" (Plug Research).

One of the most talented and adventurous R&B artists of the current generation releases his third album, "a mix of jazz, hip-hop, soul, blues and experimental free music," the Grammy-nominated singer explains. If you love artists who take musical risks and can really *saang*, give Bilal a good, long look.

Brandon Flowers — "Flamingo" (Island).

The lead singer of New Wave rockers The Killers goes it alone this time. The collection is named for a street in Flower's glitzy hometown, Las Vegas, but the material isn't glossy like that might suggest. Produced mainly by Madonna knobtwirler Stuart Price, "Flamingo" gets as much mileage from pedal steel as it does synths.

Michael Jackson — Title not revealed (Sony).

Continuing the parallel campaigns of reforming Jackson's public image (which is all but done now: MJ has practically been sainted in the year since his death) and exploiting his image and music (which is just getting started), November brings the release of a 10-track album of previously unissued material. Manager Frank DiLeo says Michael left behind around 100 completed recordings, many of them from his '80s heyday. This release begins a 10-project, seven-year deal between Sony and the superstar's estate.

Maroon 5 — "Hands All Over" (A&M/Octone).

The recording sessions stretched into a year due to the legendary perfectionism of producer Robert John "Mutt" Lange (Shania Twain, Def Leppard, AC/DC, Foreigner), but the band says it was all worth it in the end. I can't wait to hear what Lange's super-polish has brought out of this motley crew. Plus, a new album equals new videos starring

super-sexy frontman Adam Levine. A definite win-win.

George Michael — "Faith" (Sony).

One of the greatest pop/blue-eyed soul albums of all time gets a deluxe two-CD reissue with remastered sound. In 1988, "Faith" was *the* soundtrack to popular culture. With six Top 5 singles, the songs were inescapable and the videos ruled MTV. George's five o'clock shadow and denim-covered ass might have held the rapt attention of girls and boys around the globe but the music more than held it's own. "Faith" was rightly recognized with an Album of the Year Grammy.

Of Montreal - "False Priest" (Polyvinyl).

Openly bisexual frontman Kevin Barnes says this Jon Brion-produced release is avant-pop collective Of Montreal's masterpiece. The album is promised to be speaker rattling on the low-end and feature appearances by Janelle Monae and Solange Knowles (Bey's younger sister). After hearing Barnes' quirky collab with Monae on her stellar album, it'll be interesting to hear what they've cooked up for this release.

OMD — "History of Modern" (Bright Antenna/ILG).

In the mainstream, OMD is best known for

their Top 10 hit "If You Leave" (from John Hughes' teen classic "Pretty In Pink"), but these U.K. synth-pop pioneers have a deep catalog that deserves greater recognition. After 14 years away, they're set to return with this new 14-track album that (*rubs hands together greedily*) includes a guest turn from Queen of Soul Aretha Franklin.

Robyn — "Body Talk Pt. 2" (Cherrytree/Interscope).

Swedish electro-pop star Robyn returns with the second installment of her planned 2010 trilogy. The first chapter received great reviews and fans loved it. Soundwise, I'm anticipating more of the same from Pt. 2, and that's not a complaint. Rapper Snoop Dogg adds his distinctive laconic flow to "U Should Know Better."

Mavis Staples — "You Are Not Alone" (Anti).

Fellow Chicagoan Jeff Tweedy (the auteur behind Wilco) produces 71-year-old soul music legend Staples ("I'll Take You There," "When Will We Be Paid") on this collection of 13 gospel and socially conscious tunes. The material is a mix of traditional spirituals and covers of songs by an eclectic roster that includes Randy Newman, Allan Toussaint, John Fogerty and Little Milton. If you want to know what it sounds like when a woman truly sings from her soul, listen to Mavis Staples. ::

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