



audiophile

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Odds and ends of 2010

Overall, it was a down year for music, but I found enough bright spots to get me through with a minimum of complaints. Here's a rundown of 10 things that kept me listening throughout 2010.

"The ArchAndroid" — Janell Monae. Without question this is the album of the year for me. I heard no other release in 2010 that was as musically bold, went in as many directions or was as consistently brilliant as this conceptual masterpiece. The songs were experimental, but remained accessible. The lyrics were spacey science fiction — futuristic androids struggling against totalitarian oppression is pretty far removed from moon-june-spoon territory — but they were memorable rather than eye-roll inducing. Perhaps best of all, the melodies were immediate and sophisticated.

Even before I'd finished my first listen I was expecting "The ArchAndroid" to be a critical darling (it was), a commercial hit (it wasn't) and the title to beat for Album of the Year at the upcoming Grammys (it isn't even nominated in the category). I've been disheartened by the lackluster reception — but what can you really expect in an era when Justin Bieber is a commercial juggernaut and Katy Perry's fluffy "Teenage Dream" album is competing for music's highest honor.

In the end none of these slights will matter because "The ArchAndroid" will continually grow in reputation and be discovered again and again by music lovers. Monae will undoubtedly have the last laugh as she watches her amazing creation — to borrow a common sci-fi phrase — live long and prosper.

"2010" — Prince. This album wasn't commercially available in America. In fact, it wasn't commercially available anywhere. It was distributed as a covermount on a handful of daily newspapers and music magazines in Europe to promote Prince's summer concert series there. You might think a free promo album wouldn't be up to snuff, but that isn't the case with "2010," a funky rock-n-soul collection that boasts my favorite song of the

year, "Sticky Like Glue." Since it doesn't appear that "2010" is going to see these shores in a legitimate release, do what you need to do to get hold of it.

"Night Work" — Scissor Sisters. The gayest band going released their gayest album yet. This awesome collection of floor-shakin' club-quakin' proto-disco tracks was the dance party platter of the year.

"Aphrodite" — Kylie Minogue. Australian pop princess Minogue came back strong after the relative disappointment of her previous album. "Aphrodite" absolutely revels in its peppy pop perfection, just as it should.

"Soldier Of Love" — Sade. One of my favorite acts, Sade had been away from the scene since 2000. I was on the verge of giving up all hope when they finally returned this year with this low-key gem.

"Plastic Beach" — Gorillaz. One of the year's quirkiest and most addictive releases was this hip (hop) trip. "Plastic" boasts a slew of great guests including fab collabo's with rap superstar Snoop and R&B legend Bobby Womack.

"New Amerykah Part II (Return Of The Ankh)" — Erykah Badu. You can practically smell incense burning while playing Badu's latest new age R&B epic. But, thankfully, the funk never falters.

"Hands All Over" — Maroon 5. Superproducer Robert John "Mutt" Lange polishes the band to the brink of gloss, but the level of absolute craftsmanship outweighs any complaints about the lack of grit.

"I Love My Lady" — Johnny Mathis. This isn't a studio release, but a shelved project from 1981 that leaked onto the internet this past fall. Mathis fans had been begging to hear this material for nearly 30 years because it was produced by Nile Rodgers and Bernard Edwards of Chic. The label thought the pair's post-disco sound would alienate blue hairs so they refused to release it.

Lady Gaga Concert. This stage spectacle was easily one of the most fun musical experiences I've had in a long time. Between the queer quotient of the audience and Gaga's non-stop stumping for gay rights during her stage banter, it felt like a supercool singalong gay Pride. ::

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MA

FOR MATURE AUDIENCES ONLY

Phallus 'n Wonderland

I'm standing in the middle of a dim hotel ballroom scanning the sights. Across the way, I notice a woman sitting cross-legged on the floor. From the pleather bag beside her she retrieves a disposable diaper, a pack of wet wipes and a shaker bottle of powder. She's obviously preparing to change the baby lying on the carpeted floor in front of her.

"C'mon," I say to my life partner, already turning on my heel. "Let's go over there. I wanna see this."

We stop a respectful distance away — 10, 15 feet — and watch intently. The woman, who my older female relatives would describe as "heavyset with a pretty face," undoes the snaps between the baby's legs and peels back

a sky blue bodysuit to reveal an overstuffed diaper.

"Did you pee-pee?," the woman asks sweetly. The baby grins and nods affirmatively. "Alright, did you boom-boom?" He shakes his head no. "Do you need to boom-boom now?" "Oh, shit!," I think, without a trace of irony. The baby shakes his head again and relief washes over me.

After loosening a pair of tape tabs the woman strips off the soggy diaper. The baby is sporting a-fully-engorged, cat-couldn't-scratch-it erection. The scene has me completely transfixed, but the spell lasts mere moments because my attention is almost

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