

Spring Mix

May 8, 2014

The salad days. Too cold or hot or wet for much of anything this time of year, and rereading E. P. Thompson, Howard Zinn, or David Harvey can get tiresome. Here's a few tracks for the indoor season, good for stealing time at work, when jammed into a reduced-service bus, or just sitting around building a 15now chapter.

Like movies and literature and art, pop music is an immediate reflection of the tensions and promise of the social movements of the day, a historical record of the creativity and emotion of community, a guide to the ideas centering social forces then and now. From Ellington to Common, it reinforces the waged-labor nature of musicianship and entertainment, placing performers at the fulcrum of the daily humdrum of leisure work, subjects of market forces, sometimes at the memorable apex of crises and societal change, always on our stereos and bluetooths as motivators or enunciators of political practice. Crucially, the art of pop music is collective, its creation, performance, and consumption are experienced socially and passionately, a sharp and exhilarating harmony against which destructive individualism is defenseless, an aural transit system we ride elbow to elbow, where we get on and especially off together.

Surprise: strikers, dreamers, indignados, occupiers have their own rhythm, their own dance. Time to collectivize the earbuds - join the mixtape struggle by posting to the comment section.

El Général - *Rais Ibled (Head of State)*

The underground hip-hop cut that panicked the Tunisian regime in 2010. El Général was jailed. A change in season soon followed.

Queen Latifah - *U.N.I.T.Y.*

Who you callin' a bitch?

Heaven 17 - *(We Don't Need This) Fascist Groove Thang*

Watch out for those hard right turns.

Cab Calloway Orchestra - *Doing the Reactionary*

All the best dictators do it, millionaires keep stepping to it.

Ken Boothe - *Is It Because I'm Black*

Syl Johnson's blue-smooth lament turned inside out. The Trojan Record's house band is the prototype stepping razor, Boothe is spitting mad.

Charlie Parker - *Ko Ko*

The class tensions that were World War II America produced social movements electric with promise, urgency, resolve, creativity. Here they all are, in three astonishing breathless minutes.

Neko Case - *Prison Girls*

Most of the time, incarceration is not an exercise in political economy or race studies.

Flaco Jimenez - *Mujer Casada*

If all accordion players were this incendiary, we would have won long ago.

Magic Sam - *All of Your Love*

No self-respecting Chicagoan goes without a copy of *West Side Soul*, a definitive slice of mid-century community.

Archie Shepp - *Blues For Brother George Jackson*

The books-on-tape version of how far audacity can take us.

Sonny Boy Williamson - *Help Me*

To be alone is to be powerless.

Curtis Mayfield - *Ghetto Child (demo version of Little Child Runnin' Wild)*

Minus the top-40 cushioning, *Little Child* as a real kid right here in the kitchen.

Rahsaan Roland Kirk - *Walk On By*

Burt Bacharach's polite ditty hammered into an exploding stomp, appropriate for the next CTU march.

Buddy Guy - *\$100 Bill*

The irony of this classic is forever lost to the one-percenters. Never mind. The horns swagger, Guy grins: Asked my baby for an automobile, she flipped me keys to a Coupe de Ville.

James Brown - *Papa's Got a Brand New Bag*

Released in June '65 and riveted to the top of the R&B charts during the Watts revolt, the first hit exercise in funk is an unsung anthem of the civil rights era.

Larry Young - *If*

Recorded just after Watts, a vortex that even remade the 12-bar blues.

JBs - *Blessed Blackness*

Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation, it is so far itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word.

Artie Shaw Orchestra - *Nightmare*

Shaw's signature tune was so slow and gloomy his record label made him change to something snappier. It was a massive hit anyway, written in 1936 and finally recorded towards the end of the second downturn in '38, giving wordless expression to how Great the Depression really was.

Staple Singers - *Uncloudy Day*

Liberation theology never sounded this good.

Golden Gate Jubilee Quartet - *Golden Gate Gospel Train*

Spoke too soon.

Common featuring Cee Lo - *A Song for Assata*

"I'll be honest with you. I know a whole lot more about what freedom isn't, than about what it is."

Joe Williams - *Every Night*

A velvet for the Great Recession survivors, working overtime to support families/partners/spouses.

Mavis Staples - *99 and 1/2 (Just Won't Do)*

Way more than a reminder. "It's not 99% versus 1%," Vijay Prashad said at Occupy Boston, "this is 100% wrong."

Duke Ellington Orchestra - *Stompy Jones (1934)*

Prohibition jammed politics, art, booze, work, gender, race, sex, lit, ethnicity, recreational drugs, and music into a tiny noisy smoky illegal bar. Sounded like this.

Bob Marley and The Wailers - *Get Up Stand Up/No More Trouble/War (Live)*

The 23-minute argument against Marley as just a multikulti Carnival Criuse t-shirt.

Gang of Four - *Natural's Not In It*

Impossible to even leave the house without a tune about the colonization of desire.

Augustus Pablo - *King Tubby Meets Rockers Uptown*

Ignore the nonsense about how musically influential these two and a half minutes were, in 1975 and since. Pablo and Tubby instead welcome the post-'73 apocalypse with equal force, structural erudition, and plenty of space to readjust to a planet of slums.

Mulatu Astatke - *Fire In The Zoo*

There's always one somewhere.

Air - *King Porter Stomp*

Air's startling, surging reboot of the King Oliver/Jelly Roll Morton 1924 ragtime exercise is more than a commemoration of the emancipatory practice of improvised music.

The Golden Palominos - *Ride*

In bed or in court, everybody gets off.

Antibalas - *Indictment*

Now that I think about it.

Mac Roach Quintet with Abbey Lincoln - *Love For Sale*

Cole Porter kicked hard in the head. Lincoln is as much as responsible for propelling the second wave into a tsunami as anyone.

Joe Bataan - *Aftershower Funk*

Here's hoping that the class traitors at the Chicago Board of Trade who dumped McDonald's job applications on the LaSalle Street Occupiers never get laid.

Jazz Passengers - *Ring The Bell (featuring Bob Dorough)*

Buy low, sell high.

Gil Scott Heron - *Winter In America*

For the day when this song is no longer relevant.

La Excelencia - *Salsa Dura*

Ditch the earbuds, get a crowd over to the apartment, vent about everything in particular, and turn it up.

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