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Global Music With a New York Edge

The 50 Best Albums of 2017

by delarue

Scroll down for links to stream each of the albums here...except for the very newest one, which happens to be #1.

The best and most relevant album of 2017 was Fukushima, by the [Satoko Fujii](#) Orchestra New York. This haunting, epic five-part suite is not a narrative of the grim events of March 11, 2011, but rather the Tokyo-born pianist/bandleader's reflection on personal terror and horror in the wake of the worst nuclear disaster in world history.

Fujii's stock in trade is not political music. Her vast catalog – over eighty albums as a leader or co-leader since the 90s – encompasses everything from epic improvisational soundscapes, to dark, acerbic piano compositions, rainy-day Japanese-flavored jazz-folk and collaborations with a global cast of artists. This may be her greatest achievement to date, as lush and sweeping as it is anthemically tuneful. And as a response to greed-fueled attempts to cover up the deadly environmental damage caused by the meltdowns, it's as savage as Shostakovich's greatest symphonies or Charles Mingus' political broadsides.

It's not streaming anywhere at present (end of December 2017), but it's just out and available from Fujii's [Libra Records](#). Watch this space for a link!

Vast research and triage went into the rest of this list. If you count multitasking as listening, an extremely ambitious listener can digest maybe three new albums a day. That's about 1200 albums a year. An extremely ambitious music blogger can sample several thousand and then attempt to make sense of the very best. As in previous years, these albums are listed in rough chronological order considering when they were received here, rather than in any kind of hierarchical ranking. Which would be absurd, anyway – if an album's one of the year's fifty best, it's got to be pretty damn good.

[Ran Blake](#) & [Dominique Eade](#) – Town & Country

Protest jazz, icy Messiaenic miniatures and luminous nocturnes from the noir piano icon and his brilliant longtime singer collaborator. Listen at [Spotify](#)

[Ward White](#) – As Consolation

The best rock record of 2017 is a surreal, twistedly psychedelic, ferociously literary masterpiece, from the guy who also put out the album ranked #1 here in 2013. Listen at [Bandcamp](#)

The [Dream Syndicate](#) – How Did I Find Myself Here

Iconic noir songwriter [Steve Wynn](#) regrouped his legendary, influential 80s band, who picked up like they never left off with a mix of psychedelia, dreampop and volcanic jams. Listen at [youtube](#)

Amir ElSaffar's Rivers of Sound – Not Two

The paradigm-shifting trumpeter/santoorist/singer's latest large-ensemble recording, blending elements of Middle Eastern, Indian music and jazz is an album for our time: turbulent, restless and packed with poignant solos from a global lineup. Listen at [New Amsterdam Records](#)

Son of Skooshny – Matchless Gifts

Wickedly lyrical songwriter Mark Breyer, longtime leader of powerpop cult favorites [Skooshny](#), carries on with this richly jangly magnum opus, which collects his best songs of the last ten years or so. Listen at [Bandcamp](#)

Phil Ochs – Live in Montreal 10/22/66

What's the iconic 1960s political firebrand doing on a list devoted to new music? This is new – a never-before-released set of many of his most shattering songs. It's probably the definitive solo acoustic Ochs album. Listen at [Spotify](#)

Charming Disaster – Cautionary Tales

The New York noir supergroup – led by Jeff Morris of lavish, dark, latin-flavored rockers [Kotorino](#) and Elia Bisker of parlor pop existentialists [Sweet Soubrette](#) – expand their palette from murder ballads to apocalyptic anthems, spy themes and a novelty song that had to be written. Listen at [Bandcamp](#)

Alice Lee – The Wheel

The long-awaited new album by one of the most brilliantly lyrical, sardonically insightful, captivating soul singers and songwriters to emerge from this city in this century. Listen at [Bandcamp](#)

Changing Modes – Goodbye Theodora

Postapocalyptic art-rock, noir surf and snarling dreampop are just the tip of the iceberg on the keyboard-driven, female-fronted cult favorite New York band's seventh album. Listen at [Spotify](#)

The Mehmet Polat Trio – Ask Your Heart

Serpentine, uneasily picturesque, dynamic Middle Eastern, African and Balkan themes from the virtuoso oud player and his eclectic group. Listen at [Spotify](#)

NO ICE – Come On Feel the NO ICE

The Brooklyn What's Jamie Frey continues as part of this careeningly diverse group, arguably the best band to come out of Brooklyn in the past five years. Fearless soul-rock, unhinged post new wave and loud, enigmatic anthems with a killer, spot-on sense of humor. Listen at [Bandcamp](#)

Aimee Mann – Mental Illness

Morose, muted, characteristically slashing acoustic waltzes and orchestral pop from the perennially relevant psychopathologist. Listen at [Spotify](#)

The New Pornographers – Whiteout Conditions

Sardonic, bitingly insightful new wave for an age of greed and narcissism from this era's preeminent powerpop supergroup. Listen at [Spotify](#)

Orkesta Mendoza – ¡Vamos A Guarachar!

The world's darkest and slinkiest southwestern gothic psychedelic cumbia noir mambo band. Listen at [Bandcamp](#)

Los Wemblers – Ikaro Del Amor

That a four-song ep could make this list testifies to how genuinely incredible, and improbable it is. Legendary in their native Peru, where they started almost fifty years ago, this psychedelic cumbia family band jam as eerily and otherworldly as they did when they first emerged from the jungle. Listen at [Spotify](#)

The Uzelli Psychedelic Anadolu compilation

Spanning from 1975 to 1984, this collection of kinetic Turkish psychedelic rock and funk seems even more current in this era of surreal cross-cultural mashups, comprising songs by artists including Erkin Koray, Asik Emrah, Ali Ayhan, Deniz Ustu Kopurur and others. Listen at [Spotify](#)

[The Sadies](#) – Northern Passages

The moodily jangly Canadian gothic cult favorites' hardest-rocking and most psychedelic album. Listen at [Bandcamp](#)

[Morricone Youth](#) – Mad Max

The iconic New York noir cinephiles' first release of the year – one of a planned fifty recordings of scores for films they've played live to over the years – is far darker and more southwestern gothic-oriented than the road warrior film's plot. With a [Karla Rose](#) vocal cameo, too. Listen at [Spotify](#)

[James Williamson](#) and [Deniz Tek](#) – Acoustic K.O.

Two iconic guitarists who largely defined the uncompromising Detroit proto-punk sound of the 1970s flip the script with an acoustic ep of lushly orchestrated Stooges classics. Listen at [Spotify](#)

[Andina: Huayno, Carnaval and Cumbia – The Sound of the Peruvian Andes 1968-1978](#)

Seventeen trebly, reverby, even rarer tracks than the psychedelic cumbia unearthed by Barbes Records on the iconic [Roots of Chicha compilations](#). Los Walker's are the best-known group here; Los Compadres del Ande, Los Jelwees and Huiro y su Conjunto, among others, are also included. This isn't just chicha, either: there are horn bands and cha-cha groups here too. Listen at [Bandcamp](#)

[Melange](#) – Viento Bravo

The Spanish Nektar jangle and swirl and spiral through one brooding, psychedelic art-rock mini-epic after another. Listen at [Bandcamp](#)

The [Legendary Shack Shakers](#) – After You've Gone

Unstoppable after twenty years on the road, the iconic ghoulabilly/noir Americana band dive deeper into their twisted, swampy roots. Guitarist Rod Hamdallah makes a furiously triumphant return. Listen at [Spotify](#)

[Mames Babegenush](#) – Mames Babegenush With Strings

Dynamic, lush, soaring, swooping brass-and-reed-fueled original klezmer dance numbers and anthems from this powerhouse Copenhagen unit. Listen at [Spotify](#)

[Briga](#) – Femme

The Montreal-based violinist's eclectic, incisive mix of Romany, Balkan and klezmer sounds, with a little psychedelic and hip-hop flavor. Listen at [Bandcamp](#)

[Saffron](#) – Will You

Magical singer Katayoun Goudarzi and sitarist Shujaat Khan team up with Rolling Stones saxophonist Tim Ries, pianist Kevin Hays and others for this hypnotic, otherworldly reinvention of centuries-old Indian carnatic themes. Listen at [Rockpaperscissors](#)

[Sweet As Broken Dates: Lost Somali Tapes from the Horn of Africa](#)

Newly digitized, rare, otherworldly 1970s and 80s Somali psychedelic rock, funk and Afrobeat from cassettes and master tapes buried to hide them from bombing raids. Amazing stuff. Listen at [Bandcamp](#)

Arthur Lee & Love – Coming Through to You: The Live Recordings 1970-2004

Four sprawling discs comprising most of this psychedelic rock legend's best songs, which he rocks the hell out of in concert. Most of this stuff is previously unreleased, and further proof that Lee's career was far from over by the time he was done with Forever Changes. Listen at [Spotify](#)

[Steelism](#) – Ism

Friends of Dean Martinez meets [Morricone Youth](#) in this surreal, catchy mix of keening steel guitar-driven instrumentals. Powerhouse soulstress Ruby Amanfu guests on a track. Listen at [Spotify](#)

[Neotolia](#) – Neotolian Song

Pianist Utar Artun's acerbic, moodily cinematic, sometimes jazz-inspired Turkish ensemble with the great Jussi Reijonen on guitar and oud. Listen at [Soundcloud](#)

[Dalava](#) – The Book of Transfigurations

Slashingly eclectic ex-Lou Reed guitarist Aram Bajakian and his singer wife Julia Ulehla join forces and reinvent haunting, often harrowing Moravian folk songs with a psychedelic edge. Listen at [Bandcamp](#)

[Vigen Hovsepian](#) – Echoes: Revived Armenian Folk Music

The evocative singer/guitarist's brooding, eclectic ballads and anthems from decades past, featuring the great oudist Ara Dinkjian. Listen at [Spotify](#)

[Money Chicha](#) – Echo in Mexico

This is psychedelic south-of-the-border funk band [Grupo Fantasma](#) proving how deeply they can go into heavy psychedelic cumbias. Listen at [Soundcloud](#)

[Castle Black](#) – Trapped Under All You Know

Layers of reverb guitars flickering and roaring through the shadows, Leigh Celent's power trio put out the best short rock album of 2017. Listen at [youtube](#)

The [Sweetback Sisters](#) – King of Killing Time

Hard country, early 50s style from the eclectic, purist, badass duo of Emily Miller and Zara Bode with a great band behind them. Listen at [Bandcamp](#)

[Clint Mansell](#) – Loving Vincent soundtrack

A classic 21st century horror film score. It's not a horror film per se, but you can see the madness coming a mile away. Listen at [Spotify](#)

[Ella Atlas](#) – The Road to Now

Enigmatic, allusively torchy singer Tarrah Maria's band put out one of the most Lynchian releases of the year, joining forces with [Lost Patrol](#) guitar mastermind Stephen Masucci. Listen at [Bandcamp](#)

[Kelly Moran](#) – Bloodroot

Enigmatically glistening, baroque-tinged multi-keyboard instrumentals inspired by many species of woodland greenery. Listen at [Bandcamp](#)

[King Gizzard and the Lizard Wizard](#) – Flying Microtonal Banana

On which the well-loved Aussie psychedelic band took their initial leap into eerie, Middle Eastern-tinged microtonal music. Listen at [Bandcamp](#)

[Nina Diaz](#) – The Beat Is Dead

The [Girl in a Coma](#) bandleader gets ornate and cinematic with this dark, 80s new wave-style collection. Listen at [Spotify](#)

[Funkrust Brass Band](#) – Dark City

High-voltage, rat-a-tat original Balkan brass anthems from this huge Brooklyn ensemble fronted by [Charming Disaster](#)'s Ellia Bisker. Listen at [Bandcamp](#)

The [Warlocks](#) – Songs from the Pale Eclipse

Jangly, punchy, catchy 60s Laurel Canyon-style psychedelic rock – in lieu of a new album by the Allah-Las, this one will do fine. Listen at [Bandcamp](#)

[Galanos](#) – Deceiver Receiver

With a gutter blues influence, some Thee Oh Sees dark garage-psych and some Black Angels ambience, this group are sort of the X of creepy 21st century rock. Listen at

[Bandcamp](#)

[Chicano Batman](#) – Freedom Is Free

Organist Bardo Martinez and his shapeshifting band swing kaleidoscopically between latin soul, Zombies-style psych-pop, hard funk and Isaac Hayes-style epics. Listen at [Bandcamp](#)

[Bridget Kearney](#) – Won't Let You Down

One of the year's catchiest albums features Lake Street Dive's killer bassist playing most of the instruments, through a mix of powerpop and new wave-flavored sounds. Listen at [Bandcamp](#)

[Algiers](#) – The Underside of Power

Politically-fueled punk soul meets postrock meets postapocalyptic film score in gritty singer Franklin James Fisher's ominously smoky narratives. Listen at [Spotify](#)

[Eric Ambel](#) – Roscoe Live Vol. 1

One of the most distinctively brilliant, entertaining rock guitarists of the last couple of decades at the top of his game at an upstate outdoor festival with a killer band. Listen at [Bandcamp](#)

[Red Baraat](#) – Bhangra Pirates

Wave after wave of undulating, crescendoing, cinematic, insanely danceable original brass-fueled live bhangra jams. Listen at [Spotify](#)

[Olcaý Bayir](#) – Neva/Harmony

Quietly intense new versions of ancient Turkish ballads and Balkan songs from the nuanced Turkish singer's debut album. Listen at [Spotify](#)

[Gogol Bordello](#) – Seekers & Finders

Amazing how fresh and energetic the original Eastern Bloc punks sound after all these years. Tight, catchy, never boring. Listen at [Spotify](#)

[Ihtimanska](#) – Yuz Yuze

A low-key but bouncy duo album of biting, minor-key Turkish and Bulgarian tunes from the duo of reedwoman Ariane Morin and accordionist Yoni Kaston. Listen at [Bandcamp](#)

[Daniel Ruiz](#) – Purple Bird and Other Strange Songs

A haunting mix of of Doors and Nick Cave-influenced dark psychedelic rock and pop from this Spanish songwriter. Listen at [Bandcamp](#)

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The 100 Best Songs of 2017 | New York Music Daily

December 25, 2017 at 9:34 pm

says:

[...] order of when they were either received or witnessed onstage. Rather than regurgitating the Best Albums of 2017 list, this one has a lot of songs that either haven't been officially released, or were just [...]

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