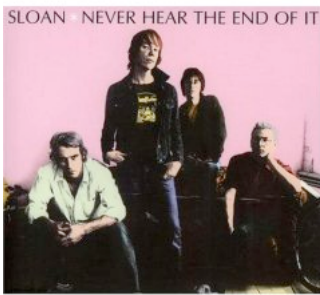


2007 CDs of the Year

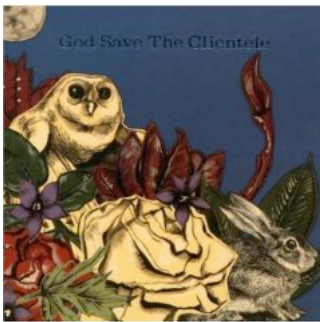
Well, kitten, we did it. We assembled the entire stinkin'™ editorial board together over pizza and oxycotin and cranked out a list. And what a list it is. 20 superlative releases of music that each represent the great spirit of hope that is Barack Obama. Wow. I can almost hear the respect of the rest of the world coming back to us as I type.



Arcade Fire: Neon Bible (Merge) â€“ While Hollywood spent the year making unentertaining polemics about the Iraq War, Win Butler and company took their anger and frustration about U.S. policies and turned them into high art. The secret weapon of this band is lead hurdy gurdy player Regine Chassagne. Her delightful kookiness seems genuine enough to balance Butler's earnestness. Standout songs include â€œNo Cars Go,â€ â€œKeep the Car Runningâ€ and â€œIntervention.â€



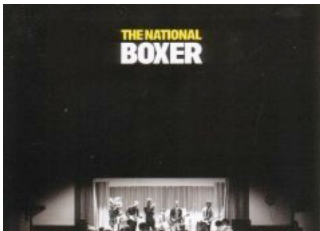
Sloan: Never Hear the End of It (Yep Roc) â€“ Canada's™ answer to Cheap Trick delivered the power pop record of the year with an immodest 30 tunes crammed into one disc. The amazing feat is that not one of the songs is filler, just all-joyful ear sugar. Will this finally give them the recognition they deserve in the lower 48? Probably not, but that shouldn't™ stop you from buying it. Personal faves include â€œCan't You Figure it Out?â€ â€œAna Luciaâ€ and â€œRight or Wrong.â€



The Clientele: God Save The Clientele (Merge) â€“ Hard to believe these Brits recorded this gorgeous collection in Nashville. Other than an occasional pedal steel guitar, the sound is pure Hollies meet Burt Bacharach. Fans of the â€œTweeâ€ sound should button up their cardigans and race to a used book shop to sell their Granddad's™ Kipling in order to afford this CD and a cuppa. Highlights are â€œBookstore Casanova,â€ â€œFrom Brighton Beach to Santa Monicaâ€ and â€œIsn't Life Strange.â€



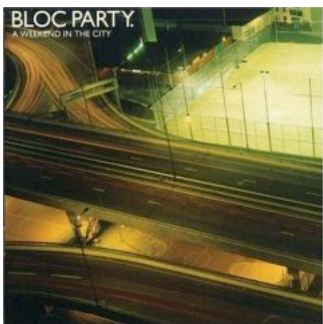
Okkervil River: The Stage Names (Jagjaguwar) â€“ Will Sheff has always had a flair for the dramatic but who knew he'd™ ruminate on the life of a performer through stories of stage and film. From the grand opening of â€œOur Life is Not a Movie or Maybeâ€ to the closing Beach Boys homage of â€œJohn Allyn Smith Sailsâ€, this is one great listen of first-rate storytelling. It helps that the music kicks ass, as well.



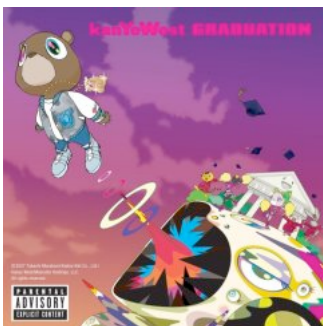
The National: Boxer (Beggars Banquet) â€“ Arguable the greatest live band still playing the beer halls, The Nats took a detour from big guitar rock to focus on a softer, gentler piece that succeeds in spades. Relying more on Matt Berninger's™ sultry baritone and literate lyrics, Boxer is a winner (which is more than a â€œcontenderâ€, idiot music critics). Speaking of idiots, I'm™ the guy who kept yelling â€œIn a Big Countryâ€ at their Rex Theatre show. Oops. Top songs include



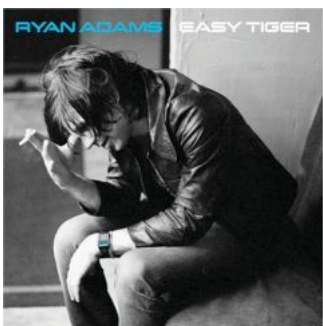
â€œMistaken For Strangers,â€ â€œAdaâ€ and â€œSqualor Victoria.â€



Bloc Party: A Weekend in the City (Vice Records) â€œ Easily the best Bowie record since Scary Monsters, Bloc Party, lead by Nigerian-born singer Kele Okereke, chose a darker and more ambitious record than their post-punk debut. A thematic record that seems to center on a Ray Milland weekend full of pain, anguish and booze, this CD holds the single of the year in â€œI Still Remember.â€ Other standout tracks include â€œThe Prayerâ€ and â€œWhere is Home?â€



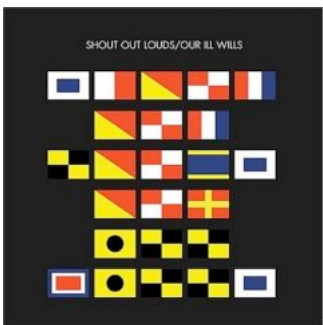
Kanye West: Graduation (Roc-A-Fella) â€œ What separates West from the rest of hip hop is his willingness to be a pop star. Heâ€™s more George Martin than Bomb Squad, and that pays huge dividends in infectious hits like â€œStrongerâ€ with Daft Punk, â€œGood Lifeâ€ with John Legend and â€œHomecomingâ€, his collaboration with Coldplayâ€™s Chris Paltrow, er, Martin. Plus what other urban artist would sample Steely Dan to sing about their obsession with Italian fashion designers?



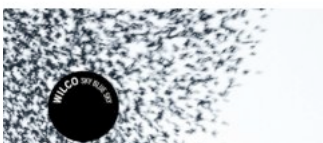
Ryan Adams: Easy Tiger (Lost Highway) â€œ Easily his best record since â€œHeartbreaker,â€ this was poised to be my CD of the Year until I saw his live act. 3 hours of guys dicking around on guitars? Warn me advance next time and Iâ€™ll drink a bottle of Tussin. Still, the songs are the thing, and with beautiful tracks like â€œTwo,â€ â€œTwo Heartsâ€ and â€œI Taught Myself to Grow Oldâ€ this is the alt-country CD of the decade. Dig out your denim jacket, itâ€™s okay.



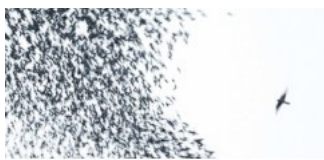
Jens Lekman: Night Falls Over Kortedala (Secretly Canadian) â€œ 2007 was a great year for Swedish pop, and no one stood out as more original than quirky crooner, Jens. From the over the top swelling drama of opening track â€œAnd I Remember Every Kissâ€ to the playful frivolity of closer â€œFriday Night at the Drive-In Bingoâ€, every track has little something to offer. Best track has to be â€œA Postcard to Ninaâ€ which tells the story of a character named Jens Lekman who is the beard for his lesbian friend Nina, who lives with her repressive Catholic father in Berlin, who happens to be a big Jens Lekman fan. As good as pop music gets.



Shout Out Louds: Our Ill Wills (Merge) â€œ Another Swedish entry that might be the best 80s record since the Cureâ€™s â€œDisintegration.â€ Produced by Bjorn of Peter, Bjorn and John, this record is an up tempo emotionally drenched paean to classic keyboard bands of the 2nd British Invasion variety. Adam Olenius sings in an urgent and passionate heavily accented voice that makes you long for a dance floor where youâ€™re about to be showered by confetti. Songs to download include â€œNormandie,â€ â€œImpossibleâ€ and â€œTonight I Have To Leave It.â€



Wilco: Sky Blue Sky (Nonesuch) â€œ Each new Wilco album has been a departure from their previous work and this is no exception. Owing mostly to a new lineup that includes guitar god, Nels Cline, Jeff Tweedy put together a full-throttle homage to big sounding 70s bands complete with extended guitar solos. This is the best Wings



album since *Over America*. Somewhere Jay Bennett is spinning in the grave in his head. Standout songs are *You Are my Face*, *Hate it Here* and the incomparable *Impossible Germany*.



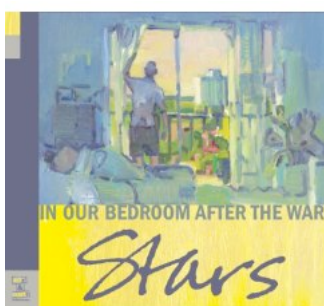
New Pornographers: *Challengers* (Matador) “Who could have imagined 4 records out of this collective? Carl Newman and company never fail to disappoint with their desire to make perfect pop gems. While *Challengers* is a bit more brooding in places than previous records, it stills hits all the right chords and perfect harmonies. They even added a fourth lead vocalist in Kathryn Calder. Best songs are the Dan Bejar sung *Myriad Harbor*, Newman’s *My Rights Versus Yours* and the Neko Case sung *Challengers*.”



Maximo Park: *Our Earthly Pleasures* (Warp Records) “They make more than beer in Newcastle, as these hyper literate lads can prove. Paul Smith tosses off more polysyllabic rhymes in one song than most bands do in their entire careers. Most of his songs revolve around girls and literature, and not necessarily in that order. Nothing quite compares to the perfect opener *Girls Who Play Guitars*, but tracks like *Books from Boxes* and *Your Urge* come close.



Radiohead: *In Rainbows* (ATO) “Give me a free CD, please. Who was the bonehead that thought up that sales promotion? (Full disclosure: Ettouffee paid 6 pounds for this record as a download. Amazon sells it cheaper.) On the bright side, Thom Yorke has finally stopped trying to piss off his fans. This is their least pretentious sounding record in several tries. Hell, there’s even a love ballad. Best of the bunch include *Bodysnatchers*, *Weird Fishes*, *Arpeggio* and *Jigsaw Falling into Place*.”



Stars: *In Our Bedroom After the War* (Arts & Crafts) “Torquil Campbell and Amy Millan have channeled all of their hatred of all things Bush and put it into a strangely hypnotic, theatrical CD that entices rather than pontificates. With elements of funk and trip-hop, this record succeeds in putting the songs above the polemics. Every song is a gem, but standouts include *Take Me to the Riot*, *The Night Starts Here* and the title track



Josh Ritter: *The Historical Conquests of Josh Ritter* (Sony) “It’s going to be hard to shed those Dylan comparisons with a song like *Temptation of Adam* about finding love in a missile silo. On his 4th proper CD, Ritter adds more to the acoustic mix including horns and reverb, however, he’s still a singer/songwriter at heart. And there aren’t any better wordsmiths working today. Check out *Real Long Distance* and *To the Dogs or Whoever* to hear what all the fuss is about.



M.I.A.: *Kala* (Interscope) “Maya Arulpragasam is the best thing to come out of Sri Lanka since Michael Ondjaate. On her second record of trip-hop rhythms, third

