

There were probably more good to excellent rock albums in 1978 than at any other time in this decade, even though the year was not filled with startling new developments.

For the first time New Wave music began reaching a mass American audience, as was seen with the commercial successes of Patti Smith and Elvis Costello. And such ancients as the Rolling Stones, the Kinks, and the Who brought out strong albums, showing that they were neither too old nor "in the way," as had been charged by some of the young rock rebels.

1977's most popular groups—Fleetwood Mac and the Eagles—both abdicated, neither releasing a new album this year. In their place came an enterprising multi-media mogul, Robert Stigwood, who successfully packaged dubiously artistic sound-track albums of popular movies like *Saturday Night Fever*, *Grease*, and *Sergeant Pepper*.

In reggae music, the trend was toward greater sophistication in both production techniques and the addition of musical elements from rock, jazz, and soul. Roots reggae is still being played in Jamaica, but it isn't getting released in the U.S. As a result, *Two Sevens Clash* by Culture, perhaps the best reggae album I've heard all year, is available only as an import in this country.

Business was worse than usual from the consumer standpoint. At the end of the year list prices for some records reached an outrageous \$8.93, the second \$1.00 price rise in about a year. Fans were given the "opportunity" to plunk down as much as \$16.00 for colored records, featuring photographs or other art work instead of the ordinary black vinyl. Journalistic independence reached a new low when *Rolling Stone* magazine publisher Jann Wenner publicly chastised his own critics for telling the truth about a putrid Bob Dylan album and a mediocre Rolling Stones concert. Lastly, despite strong sales by peripheral punks like Elvis Costello, timid American record companies continued to be slow releasing albums and 45s by most British New Wave bands.

A few words about the critical criteria used for the following 1978 Ten-Best list. These, in no particular order, are my favorite rock and reggae albums, the ones I enjoy the most; they are not necessarily the most innovative records, or the ones featuring the greatest musicians. Some excellent bands have yet to capture the brilliance of their live performances on records—and they don't show up in the top ten. Imports were excluded, as were live albums made up largely of songs released in previous years.

Elvis Costello: his year to be pissed off and paid for it.



Bruce Dancis'

10 BEST 1978 ROCK N' REGGAE

Finally, I have had to invoke the *Patti Smith Rule* on occasion. The rule applies to generally excellent albums, where it isn't simply a matter of just *not playing* the record. The Smith rule calls for severe penalties against an album if it featured any song that was so excruciatingly awful that I had to get up to skip over the accursed track every time the record was playing. As a result, even "Because the Night" on Patti Smith's *Easter* can't make up for "Bab-e-logue."

Misfits

The Kinks

Arista

Wonderfully funny, challenging, and reflective music by one of the all-time great bands. Ray Davies has been a marvelously iconoclastic thinker for well over a decade, and this has never been clearer than on "A Rock'n'Roll Fantasy."

This Year's Model

Elvis Costello
Columbia

The combination of Costello's vengeful lyrics and a sparse instrumental backing with his punky Buddy Holly appearance and pissed-off demeanor created its own sub-genre—outcast rock. This is an angry album by perhaps the most lyrical New Wave rocker.

Haile I Hymn (Chapter 1)

1 Jah Man
Mango

An ironic mixture of very modern, rock-influenced reggae with a fervent, all-consuming, religious testament. 1 Jah Man's daring debut features four lengthy cuts, backed by some of Jamaica's finest musicians.

Road to Ruin

The Ramones

Sire

The best album to date by America's foremost New Wave



The Clash breaks into the second team.

band. The pace has been slowed down a bit, so it's a little more accessible than previous albums, but the Ramones never stray too far from a splendid minimalism.

Hearts of Stone

Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes

Epic

Stunning melodies, the best and most complementary horn section in rock since the Mar-Keys, and Southside Johnny Lyon's strong, clear voice make a near-perfect expression of pure rock and R&B.

Bloody Tourists

10 CC

Polydor

A British band so impeccably polished in its arrangements, harmonies, and production that it is often knocked as being "too commercial." What's wrong with being commercial, if you're good?

Some Girls

The Rolling Stones
Rolling Stones

As long as Mick Jagger is in the band, the Stones will probably flirt with decadence and sexism. As long as Keith Richards is around, they will more than likely be a great rock band.

Dire Straits

Dire Straits
Warner Bros.

Positive proof that blues-rock isn't solely in the hands of tasteless show-offs. Mark Knopfler's strong guitar work and brutally honest stories of urban life make this the year's finest debut album.

Bush Doctor

Peter Tosh

Rolling Stones

In a major departure for this original Wailer, Tosh successfully fuses calypso, rock, and Motown sounds to standout reggae. His songwriting seems more assured than previously, though his concerns are less political than before. Superb accompaniment is provided by reggae rhythm stalwarts Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespeare.

David Johansen

David Johansen

Blue Sky

A dynamic, hard rock album by the former lead singer of the New York Dolls. Johansen has always been a gifted vocalist; he now has consistently fine songs and instrumental backing as well.

BECAUSE OF THE HIGH level of rock music this year, the following honorable mention list is more than merely perfunctory. In most previous years during the '70s, almost any one of these albums could have made a Ten-Best list.

Give 'em Enough Rope

The Clash

Epic

More Songs About Buildings and Food

Talking Heads

Sire

Who Are You

The Who

MCA

Darkness on the Edge of Town

Bruce Springsteen

Columbia

Q: Are We Not Men?

A: We Are Devo

Devo

Warner Bros.

The Bride Stripped Bare

Bryan Ferry

Atlantic

Stranger in Town

Bob Seger and the Silver Bullet Band

Capitol



Bob Seger: close but no cigar.

Heaven Tonight

Cheap Trick

Epic

Wavelength

Van Morrison

Warner Bros.

Lastly, here are a few awards for some of the worst albums of the year. Obvious losers aren't even considered—these are for albums that aimed high and hit bottom.

Sophomore slump award—*Return to Magenta*, Mink DeVille (Capitol).

Too much weed award—*Kaya*, Bob Marley and the Wailers (Island).

Most unnecessary comeback award—*Reunion*, Peter, Paul & Mary (Warner Bros.).

Garbage is garbage even if it comes out of his can award—*Street Legal*, Bob Dylan (Columbia).

CULTURE SHOCK

SO THERE

Dusan Makavejev, whose native Yugoslavia has censored his quixotic films, *WR: Mysteries of the Organism* and *Sweet Movie*, reported at a

Spanish film festival two weeks ago that Yugoslavia is "100 percent Marxist—50 percent Karl, 50 percent Groucho."

UH HUH

Head of the Italian

film firm producing *The Guyana Massacre* assured reporters last week, "You can be sure of one thing... we're not in it just for exploitation."

SO RELAX AND ENJOY IT



Esquire titled its December cover feature, "The Year of the Lusty Woman: It's All Right to be a Sex Object Again."

Santa Claus goes south with his Visa card



Tom Greenfelder

I can see them even now:

short men in foreign, wooly red suits and matching caps, mopping swarthy brows above the unfamiliar fluffy white substance that enveloped the lower half of their faces. To a child in Mexico in the late 1940s, they looked most peculiar.

As one of those children, I didn't know that the Santas foreshadowed a dramatic shift in Mexico's Christmas customs and heralded the beginnings of economic change. Upon their first appearances on the street, they simply presented an odd contrast to those around them—people dressed in the lightweight clothing typical of Mexico City's mild winter climate. Indeed, the Santas seemed more like strange novelties than the harbingers they, in fact, were.

Today, little is left of the Christmases of my childhood, but when I recently heard a reminiscence about Christmas as a religious holiday, I recalled the contrast the typical North American Christmas presented when it was first exported to Mexico.

The earliest Santa I remember was a mechanical giant that twirled on a metal

By Mercedes
Lynn de Uriarte

Three decades ago, Santa was a shocking sight. Now Mexico imports turkeys and pine trees for a gringo-style holiday.

disc, doubled over in laughter, one arm raised in greeting. The time was early December of 1947, and as Santa turned from side to side in the display window of Sears Roebuck in Mexico City, his recorded laughter bellowed through loudspeakers, terrifying the few children who had congregated. But as the days passed, the crowd at the window grew larger. Barefoot street vendors and uniformed *nanas* holding immaculate children, as well as *rebozo*-wrapped women and babies—all peered at the stranger who bobbed in the window. Bewilderment that day, exactly 30 years ago, knew no class barriers.

Posadas, not Santas.

For those of us who were Mexican, Santa held little significance at the time. We were waiting for the 15th of December when the first *posadas* would begin, ushering in the Christmas season.

A *posada*—it literally means "inn" in Spanish—celebrates the journey of Mary and Joseph. Everyone looked forward to *posadas*, even in the poorest neighborhoods where only the churches sponsored them.

These traditional Christmas parties get under way with the guests separating into two groups. One remains indoors and the other goes outside to reenact the couple's search for shelter. As the group outside sings its pleas for admission at each window, the one inside carols back its refusal. Finally, when the house has been circled, the groups meet again at the front door. Then the door is thrown open and a welcome is extended, whereupon the rest of the evening is passed in holiday merry-making. Traditionally, the party ends when the *pinata* is shattered by a blindfolded guest wielding a broomstick—an act that showers gifts far and wide.

Throughout the Christmases of my childhood, the focal point in every home was a prominently displayed nativity scene. Decorating the manger was such an important family activity that for weeks before, vendors walked along the streets selling Spanish moss to cover and line Jesus' resting place.

That was Christmas—mine, my parents', my grandparents', my great-grandparents'. It opened with ten days of celebration emphasizing the occasion's religious significance. The 25th itself began with midnight mass, followed by family gatherings where we consumed *noche buena* salad (a mixture of fruits and vegetables) and sweet *tamales* made with raisins.

Although some presents might be exchanged on the 25th, children looked forward to the big day—Jan. 6, *Día de los Reyes*, Kings' Day. As they had done for

several centuries, children scampered out of bed to find their shoes full of surprises and gifts from "the kings."

For most of this century, *Día de los Reyes* has been kicked off the day before by the president's wife. Standing on a platform in a polo field near the presidential residence, the first lady distributes clothing along with small toys for children. I remember how lines would encircle the field the night before—thousands of *sarape*-clad men waiting with their wives and children as campfires flickered to the slap of hand-made tortillas.

Then on Kings' Day itself doorbells rang as poor children stood at the massive gates of elegant residences hoping to receive discarded toys that had been conveniently replaced in wealthy homes by new ones from generous "kings."

Later that day, family and friends gathered to share a *rosca*, which was a large ring-shaped cake with a small porcelain replica of the Christ child baked inside. The person whose slice contained the replica was responsible for gathering the same group together later in the year for a party. As I recall, the holiday season ended as it began, with an emphasis on religion and a sense of community—and a touch of *noblesse oblige*.

Jelly-bellied foreigner.

Then, 31 years ago this month, a jelly-bellied foreigner with the incredible name of Santa Claus strode into that orchestrated reverence trailing the trappings of Christmas, North American style.

Naturally, Santa's first fans were North American expatriots who shared familiarity with Dasher and Dancer and other Christmas lore, including stockings hung by the chimney with care. Soon, however, Mexican merchants realized that Santa was so great for business that other Santas appeared.

For a good while, Sears held a clear edge on the market because along with Santa, the department store had introduced an equally important feature of the North American Christmas: easy credit. Other businessmen called it "crazy," but Sears disproved their diagnosis by making a Christmas mint.

Since then, as the middle class has grown, other businesses have joyfully followed suit. A spokesman for Sears' international division maintains that the store has encountered fewer deadbeats in Mexico—thanks, no doubt, to the Hispanic code of honor than it has north of the border.

The ultimate in credit concepts was introduced in 1969 when Bancomer, the Mexican counterpart of BankAmericard, produced its blue, orange and white plastic charge card. By 1974, when I took my own children south to visit their grandparents for Christmas, billboards urged people to "use su Bancomer como dinero" ("use your Bancomer like money").

Inspired by all the spending, businessmen began to import still other signposts of Christmas. Since 1950, imported U.S. turkeys have graced Mexican dinner tables and the demand for Christmas tree has become so great that the Mexican government, fearful for its forests, insisted that they too must be imported.

Hanging on many a front door are wreaths dusted with a white powder that represents a certain wet substance never seen by most Mexicans. "White Christmas" sung in translation by "El Bingo," evokes scenes seldom experienced. Today, sociologists write scholarly articles analyzing the duality of Mexico—the sense of loss, the acculturation, the sense of something gained—and their theories spin like that first Santa in Sears' window.

As for me—well Christmas rituals in Mexico lost much of their enchantment when I was a teen-ager. Many years have passed since I put out my shoes for *Día de los Reyes*, but should my children ever feel like doing so, I trust they won't place a Visa card inside as advance payment. ■

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