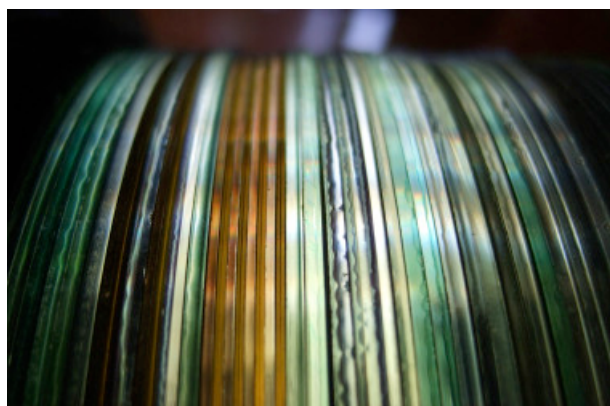


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## Favorite albums of 2009

by [Dean Christesen](#) December 10, 2009

I'm staying out of the "Best albums of the year" conversation that happens around this time each year; I haven't even come close to listening to every record that was released in 2009, so how could I be an authority on what was the "best"? And what does being on a list like that even mean for an album?

It could mean that it was a game changer, for one thing. If an artist really took creative risks and pulled them off successfully, it probably caused quite a stir in the music community and beyond. And if its influence on musicians and the community is immediately realizable, I'd say that makes for a pretty successful album. Also, consider an album released in January that people are still talking about in December; to rise above the massive ocean of new releases in quality and memorability for months at a time is a remarkable feat, one that surely will put an album in contention for "best of the year."

Critics are putting out their lists left and right, like NPR Take Five's [Top 10 Jazz Records Of 2009](#) and Howard Mandel's [Best beyond "jazz" CDs of 2009](#) (Howard notes that he reviewed over 1000 albums this year; I'd say he's qualified to make his picks for the "best"). I don't want this to become a list of lists, but check out some of the others by [Jazz Journalist Association writers](#). Like Howard, I've heard a lot of music this year, many by listening to submissions for airplay on [WRIR](#) jazz programming. Unlike Howard, I posit that the number of albums I've heard falls short of 1000.

My list of "favorites of 2009" contains a mix of albums: some that were talked about as soon as they were released as being possible best of the year albums and some that simply struck my fancy this year. Let's talk about that first one. Artists who are doing

### RVAJazz 2009 Year in Review: January

by [Dean Christesen](#) December 7, 2009 3

### Third Tuesdays belong to Brian Jones

by [Dean Christesen](#) November 16, 2009 2

### RVAJazz Week in Review

by [Dean Christesen](#) October 13, 2009 2

### The next wave of Brian Jones albums

by [Dean Christesen](#) September 12, 2009 0

### Announcing: Glenn Wilson Quartet performance in Richmond

by [Dean Christesen](#) September 9, 2009 0

RVAJazz: April: some people were weirded out by our review of the Rumble on Vine Street. We stand by it. <http://rvane.ws/23798>

<http://twitter.com/RVAJazz/statuses/6671578196>

RVAJazz: Two of my favorite Brian Jones groups play tomorrow night @thecamelrva. Check out some audio from past albums <http://rvane.ws/23892>

<http://twitter.com/RVAJazz/statuses/6664812316>

great things draw the attention of the jazz community (see Iyer, Zenón), and when they release an album that takes their artistic direction to a new level, it is almost immediately branded as a potential best album of the year (see Iyer, Zenón). That's not to say their albums make any lists by default; those musicians on top of the world right now just as easily could have made mediocre albums, or taken their ideas so far out that — even if it was brilliant in some way — few could grasp it.

But, quite simply, they didn't.

Vijay Iyer Trio's *Historicity* took an interesting approach to the jazz standard of reproducing the American Song Book or contemporary pop songs. "Each cover," Iyer writes in the CD's liner notes, "becomes a conversation between the original work and something else entirely; the best word for it is 'versioning.'" The trio's versions of pieces by M.I.A., Stevie Wonder, Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim, Julius Hemphill, and others, do just that; the three aren't bogged down and seem to float over the ideas of the originals. You won't be sorry if you pay 99 cents right now for their performance of West Side Story's "Somewhere," and "Galang [Trio Riot Version]" would get any club rowdy.

Like Iyer, MacArthur Genius Miguel Zenón's visibility on the scene certainly helps his cause, but so does his virtuosic playing and unique vision. NPR had an [exclusive first listen](#) of the album before its release (Hype before an album's release is a good omen for an album's success). With *Esta Plena*, Miguel Zenón combined influences of his native Puerto Rico's plena music and the improvisational spirit of jazz. The syncopations of the folk music are throughout these tunes that are mainly in common time. The juxtaposition of traditional vocals and modern chords and rhythm is slick, with Zenón playing the common thread.

Other not-so-expected albums were some favorites of mine this year as well. If I've mentioned them in the past, the link will take you to that. So, without further ado, my favorite jazz albums of 2009:

Tigran Hamasyan – *Red Hail* (Plus Loin) – [RVAJazz](#), [NPR Jazz Now](#)  
 Vijay Iyer Trio – *Historicity* (ACT Music)  
 Tyshawn Sorey – *Koan* (482 Music)  
 Ted Sirota's Rebel Souls – *Seize The Time* (Naim)  
 Steve Lehman Octet – *Travail, Transformation, And Flow* (Pi)  
 Miguel Zenón – *Esta Plena* (Marsalis Music)  
 Matt Wilson Quartet – *That's Gonna Leave A Mark* (Palmetto)  
 Chris Morrissey Quartet – *The Morning World* (Sunnyside) – [NPR Jazz Now](#)  
 Darius Jones – *Man'ish Boy (A Raw & Beautiful Thing)* (AUM Fidelity) – [RVAJazz](#)  
 Brian Jones (Guitar) Quartet – *Wool* (Slang Sanctuary) – [RVAJazz](#)

Honorable mention:

Fred Hersch Pocket Orchestra – *Live at Jazz Standard* (Sunnyside)  
 Led Bib – *Sensible Shoes* (Cuneiform)  
 J.D. Allen Trio – *Shine!* (Sunnyside)  
 Amanda Tosoff – *Wait and See* (Cellar Live)

What are yours?

photo by [indi.ca](#)

December 10, 2009

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11 Responses to "Favorite albums of 2009"

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RVAJazz: Year in Review: Our saga continues with April. Adam Caine gets a strange request. Matana Roberts set to visit. <http://rvane.ws/23798>

<http://twitter.com/RVAJazz/statuses/6662115295>

RVAJazz: Butterbean Jazz Quarter right now @ Bottoms Up Pizza #rvajazz <http://twitpic.com/tfulf>

<http://twitter.com/RVAJazz/statuses/6648715459>

RVAJazz: @glowsinthedark Wow, when does that air? I seriously hope that group blows up big.

<http://twitter.com/RVAJazz/statuses/6616742329>

RVAJazz: @JeffKelleyRVA Some sweet funk/soul called Chicken & Corn will be going on at Bogart's, probably around 10.

<http://twitter.com/RVAJazz/statuses/6615757900>

RVAJazz: @beenswank Killer one last night w/ @nobsbrass. Not sure of any "parties" as of now but watch the calendar <http://rvanews.com/jazz/events>

<http://twitter.com/RVAJazz/statuses/6602316370>

RVAJazz: @bollbach Oh yes. I'm posting about it soon. It's going to be 2 of my favorite Jones groups: Double Quartet and Wurlitzer Trio.

<http://twitter.com/RVAJazz/statuses/6602264268>

RVAJazz: @bollbach You got the livetweet updates from @exit265c right? If not, go back and read them.

<http://twitter.com/RVAJazz/statuses/6592285988>

RVAJazz: Wow, @nobsbrass is playing "This Christmas" as the soundtrack to my exit. Wish I could stay!

<http://twitter.com/RVAJazz/statuses/6591813094>

1. [Scott Burton](#) says:

Favorite Albums of '09?

I liked these a lot:

Koan by Tyshawn Sorey (482 Music)  
Toeachizown by Dam-Funk (Stones Throw)  
Gastonia Gallop – Various (Old Hat Records)  
Born Like This by MF Doom (Lex Records)  
Echo Party by Edan (Stones Throw)  
Travail, Transformation, and Flow by Steve Lehman Octet (Pi Recordings)

This doesn't include sweet local releases by Ilad, No BS, and Ombak which I listen to at least as much as the non local stack.

on December 10th, 2009 at 6:52 pm

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2. [..](#) says:

I love to see all these favorites lists that only briefly overlap. So much great music.

I'd add

Von Freeman Vonski Speaks (nessa)  
Josh Berman Old Ideas (delmark)  
Jason Adasiewicz Varnint (cuneiform)  
Harris Eisenstadt Canada Day (clean feed)  
Ombak Framing The Void (self)  
Ilad here//there (syjip)

among my favorites this year.

I've read very good things about \*some of the recent MMW output as well as the tyshon sorry and look forward to blasting them in the car sometime soon.

Oddly enough, Talibam! Released an album this year on ESP that I found particularly inspiring, though not a favorite. That kind of thing.

on December 10th, 2009 at 7:01 pm

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3. [Larri Branch](#) says:

Favorite album of 2009.

Sean Jones – The Search Within

on December 10th, 2009 at 8:08 pm

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4. [Pace In Yo Face](#) says:

Favorite Albums of 2009  
Sean Jones – the Search Within  
Ilad – Here There  
Born like This – MF DOOM  
Reveerb Beats Vol 2(?) - Devonne Harris

Alive in Richmond- NO BS! BRASS (for real...I like this CD)....(I'm a jerk)

on December 11th, 2009 at 2:08 am

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5. Dean Christesen says:

Sean Jones is on my to-listen list. Will get to it soon now, for sure.

on December 11th, 2009 at 9:08 am

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6. Michael says:

Robert Glasper – Double Booked  
Terence Blanchard- Choices  
Kat Edmonson- Take To The Sky

on December 11th, 2009 at 2:10 pm

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7. Dean Christesen says:

I also really enjoyed Double Booked. Checking out Kat Edmonson right now.

on December 11th, 2009 at 2:59 pm

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8. .. says:

Fly | Sky & Country (ecm) made a lot of favorite lists. Anyone heard this album yet? I've never been a huge Mehltau listener, but when I have listened, I've always been struck by Grenadier's playing. And always been impressed when I've seen Ballard play the few times up in New England. Not too familiar with Mark Turner, but I might be game for this disc.

I ought to check it out on lala... The Sean Jones too probably.

on December 11th, 2009 at 5:52 pm

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9. .. says:

Listened to the Sean Jones for about five tracks. Not my thing. I'd imagine it kills live though. Something about that Mack Avenue sound that is too slick for my taste.

on December 11th, 2009 at 6:22 pm

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10. Dean Christesen says:

I'm surprised about Sky & Country. I didn't dig it very much at all. I really wanted to hear something more aggressive like their first, self-titled album from 2004. Jeff Ballard is one of my favorite (of many) drummers today, so this group has a lot of potential to strike a chord with me. I guess I'll wait to hear the next one.

on December 12th, 2009 at 10:14 am

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11. Liberty says:

none

on December 13th, 2009 at 1:17 pm

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