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Steve Greenlee's top jazz albums for 2009

Globe critics name their top 10 list (and a surprise)

By [Steve Greenlee](#)

Globe Staff / December 20, 2009

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HEAVEN ON EARTH "Heaven on Earth" An all-star collective led by saxophonist James Carter, organist John Medeski, and bassist Christian McBride, Heaven on Earth has out-Soulied Soulive with a batch of long, grooving jams.

JERRY BERGONZI "Simply Put" The Boston-based saxophonist and educator has made an album of sophisticated perfection, perhaps the finest release of his career, with an in-the-pocket rhythm section.

JD ALLEN "Shine!" The tenor saxophonist's sensibility comes out of bop's heyday, but his pianoless trio's approach feels thoroughly fresh, and he emphasizes economy; songs run two to five minutes, a blink of an eye in jazz these days.

WADADA LEO SMITH "Spiritual Dimensions" The 68-year-old trumpeter throws down the gauntlet with a double-CD set of material from two very different groups: a quintet with two drummers and an electric group with three guitarists.

KAT EDMONSON "Take to the Sky" With a distinctive voice, inventive style, and inspired mix of standards and pop songs, the Texas-based jazz singer has made the year's most stunning debut.

GRETCHEN PARLATO "In a Dream" Whispering and breathing where other singers belt, Parlato - the first vocalist ever admitted to the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz - nearly creates her own subgenre of jazz vocals.

VIJAY IYER "Historicity" The most buzzed-about pianist in jazz has finally released his first trio session (after several albums in other configurations), and it sparkles with ingenuity. What fun he has with M.I.A.'s "Galang."

DARIUS JONES TRIO "Man'ish Boy" The young saxophonist plays both raucously and sweetly, and he puts every genre at his disposal, from blues to swing to free improvisation.

CHRIS POTTER UNDERGROUND "Ultrahang" The veteran saxophonist is in a groove with the very modern jazz-rock sound of his band Underground - and his best album to date.

RUDDER "Matorning" Funk riffs, tough beats, and brainy improvisation



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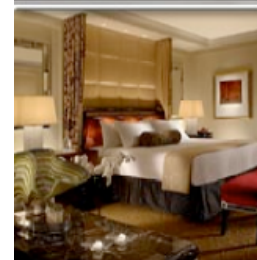


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interlock on the year's most invigorating post-post-jazz-rock release.

BIGGEST SURPRISE

FLAMING LIPS "Embryonic" The psychedelic rock band from outer space sounds more like Sun Ra here than the band that made "Do You Realize??" and "She Don't Use Jelly." The Lips trade melodic pop-rock for distorted rhythms, bombastic bass lines, and assorted random noises. Most of these tracks were conceived as freewheeling jams. ■

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