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# Best of SXSW 2008

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I've been looking forward all year to writing this blog entry, even though I knew that it would take me two weeks and cost me hard cash.

See, here's a bitTorrent of every act on the SXSW lineup<sup>1</sup>: 765 bands, 46 hours. I of course had to listen to every track.

I did last year<sup>2</sup>, and it seems to have brought joy to many, including myself. To some extent, it dictated what I would listen to, and what albums I would buy, for the rest of the year.

So, here's a link to my favorite 2 hours<sup>3</sup>, and below are many notes on the process of listening to two days' worth of music.

- A Mr. PF has put up a review of all 763 tracks<sup>4</sup>. So if you want infinitely more detail and reviews of the one-star tracks, you know where to go.

Not surprisingly, most of the things to which I gave five stars got five stars from him as well. I was especially amused that his response to *Anthem* by Born in the Flood was exactly like mine: by all objective measures, this song really should suck, but it's somehow stuck in my head anyway. So that's the support for the argument that some tracks just have that mojo that works for every (estadounidense white male) brain. On the other hand, he gave one star to some of my faves, and seems to have a low-grade vendetta against anything that could be construed as girlfriend music.

- Green Day killed music. There's a whole thread of pop, headed by Green Day, but followed by lots of bands with numbers in their names, that don't really have anything particularly impressive about them. It may just be that this is what the New Rock Alternative stations are looking for, so you're getting a lot of bands that realize that the only way they're going to get played is by conforming to that sound. So it's not Green Day that killed music, but radio stations that decided that they want the Green Day sound.

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<sup>1</sup><http://hewgill.com/sxsw/>

<sup>2</sup><http://fluff.info/blog/arch/00000208.htm>

<sup>3</sup><https://docs.google.com/leaf?id=0Bz1dtsSwn2mRNzQyYmVjNzctMWZiYi00YmFlLTlhYWUtNjUyMmViNGQyMWUw&hl=en>

<sup>4</sup>[http://www.themorningnews.org/archives/reviews/sixword\\_reviews\\_of\\_763\\_sxsw\\_mp3s.php](http://www.themorningnews.org/archives/reviews/sixword_reviews_of_763_sxsw_mp3s.php)

- The city that got the most mentions was Los Angeles, including the Los Feliz mention below and a few songs in both Spanish and Japanese. The city that got the second most mentions was, of course, Baltimore. There was the classic Baltimore-as-sad-place in the Perpetrators' song entitled "Baltimore". The New Rock Alternative band You, Me, and Everyone We Know had a song about alcoholism: "Tonight I'll be a classic work/ like Edgar Allen Poe/ and I'll die on these streets of Baltimore/ like [incoherent yelling]" I can't tell if it's just observation bias on my part of whether Baltimore really has developed sufficient cachet as the Saddest Place on Earth, but I get the impression that the hipsters and goths are increasingly showing love for the town. After all, it's the only city in the USA with a goth-friendly major league football team.

I asked Ms AM of Baltimore, MD<sup>5</sup> about this after one of her shows. Her opinion of the Baltimore scene is that there are a few people working very hard and doing great things, and then that's it.

- Hip-hop became cinematic when I wasn't looking.
- I think many of these bands would be super-fun live. The things that we want from a live show are often different from the things that we want from headphone music. You'll see that the list below leans heavily toward headphones, because frankly, that's how you'll be listening to a big stack of MP3s.
- I will admit that I was somewhat self-conscious about genre in picking the list of recommendations that I put forth to you, the reader. If I weren't, you'd have two hours of nothing but whiny ambient stuff like the Sleepover Disaster, and none of us would be better off.
- Ever since offending Steaming Wolf Penis last year, I really wanted to have a metallic, jelly track here. I almost managed it, with a 48-second Spanish/Japanese track. If it were much longer, I'm not sure if I would have kept it.

**Clare & the Reasons: Pluto** In August 2006<sup>6</sup>, the International Astronomical Union took a vote and decided Pluto was too eccentric to be a real planet. If you're the sort of person who reads this blog, then I'm pretty sure that you can relate to that. The instrumentation is also both distinct and good; the album has a nifty French café/Jetsons version.

**Amy Cook: Coming Home** Oh, Ms. AL of SF, CA, and Mr. DRC of Indianapolis, IN, those days in Los Feliz have come to an end. She may be speaking metaphorically: *Los Feliz* is Spanish for *the happy*, but I get the impression that she actually lived there in her mid-20s and went to House of Pies all the time.

<sup>5</sup><http://www.myspace.com/abbymottmusic>

<sup>6</sup><http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/25/science/space/25pluto.html>

**Bitter:Sweet: Dirty Laundry; Restleslist: Butlin Breaks** I still can't work out what it is about spy movie music that makes it spy movie music. But Portishead knew how to do it; Lalo Schiffrin had no problem with it. Anyway, these are some funny valentines, spy movie style.

**Born in the Flood: Anthem** The most clearly labelled song in the bunch.

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DRAFT ADDITIONS FEBRUARY 2003

A popular song with rousing, emotive, qualities, often one identified with a particular subculture, social group, or cause. Chiefly with distinguishing word, denoting either the associated cause or subculture or simply the genre of music, as football anthem, rock anthem, etc. Sometimes mildly derogatory.

The singer's lack of diction only shows how hard he's emoting. Also, this is a really good demonstration of why we have verses and choruses.

**Chocolate Horse: The Carribean** Maybe I should learn to play a horn. Didn't this song change your mood by the end of the first horn riff?

**Foot Patrol: Footography** "... the only foot fetish funk band in existence. FEET=FUNK. Can't have one without the other." The *Turning Japanese* riff gives them many bonus points.

**Little Jackie: The world should revolve around me** Macy Gray's album (*On how life is*) was one of those albums that is clearly pop, as acceptable to the hipsters as Coldplay, and I loved it anyway.

**Eagle Seagull: I'm sorry but I'm beginning to hate your face** I can't put my finger on what makes this so 80s. Was this the opening to a sitcom?

**Emmy the Great: Easter Parade** Just so you don't think musical quality is just about having the whole of Polyphonic Spree on stage. I think she could have done this entirely *a capella* and sounded good.

**Gougers: Everybody knows** Does this count as a Leonard Cohen cover?

**Hard Lessons: See and be scene** This song is just a chorus. That's it. Something about boys in girls' clothes. Further, even I can tell that its production heavily involved software with a cut and paste feature. But it's still darn catchy. I had to recover a deleted copy because it refused to leave my head. This will someday be a jingle for the cable network CNBC.

**Jens Leckman** I just didn't like the track Jens Leckman submitted; you won't find it among my picks. But maybe go listen to this song<sup>7</sup>. No, nothing happens in the video, so just put it on in the background.

**Low Line Caller: Over the counter kids** Dear Low Line Caller: Ever since hearing your track last year, I have wanted to give you money, but my attempt or two to find an album or EP have failed. Please get something together so we can exchange in commerce.

**Rebekah Higgs: Parables** The lyrics are incoherent; don't worry about them. It just sounds good, primarily because of Ms Higgs's voice.

**Sleepover disaster: Cathedral** These guys like the same bands I do! It's a Smashing Pumpkins/My Bloody Valentine jam. On the lyrical side, I'm really not sure what to make of the central (NSFW) metaphor. I feel like it doesn't mesh with the no-humor air of the instrumentation.

**Chingo Bling: Do it; Tech N9ne: Caribou Lou** People sometimes forget how much humor goes into hip hop.

**Mr. Mike: No More War** This is the first war protest song that I could picture being listened to by members of the military.

**Peelander Z: Me Gusta Lucha Libre** This is the above-mentioned 48-second jelly track half in Spanish and half in Japanese.

**Sabatons: Primo Victproa** This is the finest historical Metallica-wannabe track I've ever heard. It makes me wish my entire high school history class was like this.

**Sxip Shirey: My Own Dirge** These guys should be happy to be listened to by anybody: there's about 40 seconds of semisilence before they actually get around to playing actual music. However, the actual music in question is a harmonica/beatboxing duet, which makes up for a lot of radio silence.

**White Ghost Shivers: Everyone's Got'em** These guys were on my list last year too. They offer a simple and consistent (and fun) product.

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<sup>7</sup><http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1C2jTrC4ezI>