

Best of SXSW 2010

Eric Blair

2 April 2010

I was pretty pessimistic as I went through this year's list. As we all expected, I deleted roughly half of the > 1,000 tracks before I even got to their end. I kept thinking, none of these people are Wye Oak, so why am I listening to them?

But eventually, I got around to sitting down to listening to what was left among the three-star or more choices, and it turns out that there's an hour or two of it that's pretty darn good.

Here are some notes because I felt I should write something. But really, you're just going to download the songs here and form your own opinions.

Balmorhea: Bowspirit; Michael Feinberg: Evil genius; Yppah: They know what ghosts know When I was feeling pessimistic, I thought I'd just give you a few hours of instrumental music. Though it's awkward that that's a category. The range of what's out there in the no-lyrics world, from jazz sextet inspired stuff to Godspeed You! inspired stuff to trancey stuff to dancey stuff is immense.

Bobby Bare, Jr: The heart bionic This was a track from last year that I didn't post, but here we are a year later and it's still fun. *If you liked this track, you might also like Heartless Bastards.*

The Bleu Edmonson: Resurrection Barroom music is a huge percentage of the submissions, and yet it's hard to do really well.

Bonjay: Gimme gimme I'm pretty sure this isn't actually a language, which makes it funner. [Gasp.]

Bliss N Eso: The sea is rising Are you tired of me classing everything? This is the hip-hop protest song.

Damaged Good\$: Salt Shaker An affectionate character study.

Dan Mangan: Road regrets; Los Planetas: Romance de Juan de Osuna Los Planetas was a fave band of mine when I lived in Spain in the early 90s, and do they ever sound like a Spanish band from the early 90s. Their *Anuncio para coches* (*ad for cars*) really stuck in my head, though I was only semiliterate and had trouble understanding the words. I thought it was a breakup song, about how you broke my heart but I don't give an egg anymore, because I'll be driving far away, in my brand new suit of still stronger armor. I finally found the lyrics in print, and it turns out it was about nuclear disarmament.

Dig: Trash Talk Many of the tracks involve a lead who is yelling. Many. This one stood out as postable because it's 48 seconds.

Low Line Caller: Lose I think it's mostly that the lead has a good voice. It is a persistent gender double-standard that female leads are expected to have actually pleasing voices, while male leads are allowed to have as much nasal whine and audible strain as they want. Also serves as a notice to those bands that use a drum machine: yes, we can tell (I read that LLC has even two drummers live).

Sylvia Patricia: Lagrimas e Vodka; Diplomats of Solid Sound: Get out of the way A colleague who worked on NASA-related stuff once told me that if the USA wanted to go to the moon again, they'd have to re-invent a ton of technology. In the sixties, computing hardware was solid state with an emphasis on solid, and exposing it to direct solar radiation was just an annoyance. Now that everything is nanoscale, send your PC processor into space, and you'll have a lump of junk in no time. I don't know if it's all true or not, but I do sometimes worry that there are technologies that are truly lost. These recently-recorded tracks show us that bossa nova (*the new beat*) and funk technology remain viable in the modern day.

Anita Tijoux: 1977 The 70s have taken over pop. Since my childhood in the 80s, I thought that the pop sensibilities of the 70s were smarmy and generally unpleasant. Just a bunch of songs about trying to get into somebody's pants. And it's back, with a stream of glam disco trax. This is as close to the 70s as I'm willing to post.

The Trews: Sing your heart out I love songs about music. I've had in the back of my head that I should make a mix tape of such songs for a while. 'The music that we make/ will heal all our mistakes./ The music that we hear/ is always standing near...' There are also endless movies about making movies, but they somehow lack the charm of songs about music. Maybe it's that those movies are inevitably about business and competition, not about the emotions we feel. '...Drivin' down the FDR/ playin' the microphone star/ deep in your car/... strollin' down the boulevard with your headphones on/take 'em off for a sec/ you still feel gone./ You're pressing rewind/ many many times...'

Gin Wigmore: Too late for lovers There are worse things than sounding like Macy Gray.