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REVOLVER

By Cris o. Ramos

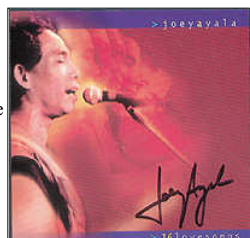
The 25 Best Local Albums of 2003



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1). Joey Ayala, 16 Love Songs (Bagong Lumad). The universality of love illustrated by an extremely talented and poetic man who recovered from a struggle searching for purpose and realizing that music was his. Lyrical and musical constipation that's as organic as fertilizer, as nourishing as vegetables and as tight as shit.

2). The Purplechickens, Here's Plan B (self-produced). Songs for the loveless of the world who have just seen a fancy girl, for those struggling because there's been a plague in their rooms lately feeling a common cold and for those trying to keep themselves from smiling the smile of the forgetful.



3). Urbandub, Influence (Lighter). Influence is not only a trip down memory lane for the band but for their listeners as well. It's about the things that make growing up a fun process: the youthful abandon, the urge of running away from the normal cycle of life, the puppy loves, the LQ's, experiencing the pangs of loss ("Gone") and everything else in between.

4). Ciudad, Is That Ciudad? Yes, Son, It's Me (Bootie Boot). Funny, irreverent, delightfully geeky and poppy. Whether it's singing about how sweet it is to walk with her or how that guy from Nirvana is now with the Foo Fighters, this will leave you with a smile across your face.

5). Squid 9, Kraken Modular (self-produced). With it's new full band set-up, this album underlines Squid 9's original agenda of making drama n' bass—rock that fuses house, trip-hop and drum n' bass - while remembering electronica's not-so-distant cousin, hip-hop. An extremely atmospheric and crunkstatic release.

6). Sound, bossaManila (self-produced). Listening to bossaManila, you'd get the sense that they're influenced in equal parts by The Beatles, Rivermaya and early Jamiroquai. Musical pathologists would find gene splices of the Eraserheads, Brand New Heavies, Sergio Mendes and Jamiroquai's Return of the Space Cowboy CD in their DNA.

7). Smooth Friction, D 2nd Coming (Tiki). To paraphrase SPIN's year-end assessment of ODB's N***a Please, the listening experience is like having your cousins from mental escape and gatecrash your afternoon barbecue party. They bake spiked brownies, sing "Laklak," Eddie Peregrina and "My Way" with equal flair and your sister's panties on their heads and pickpocket enough money to rent a limo back to the asylum after pinching every attractive butt that they could find. Strangely, everyone is sad to see them go.

8). DJ Arbie Won Presents...United Freestyles V2.0 (Upbound/XAX). "Isang kater-bang MC's/isang DJ ang may pakana." The former Urban Flow DJ has matured into a demon on the wheels of steel. Arbie sets the soundscape for all the talented rappers in this collection to roam wildly on. Yo Arbie, you left some mad science in my bowl of lugaw!

9). Acid 42, Mutatis Mutandis (self-produced). A versatile release that captures the different textures and nuances of electronic music. Proof that you can load up all the software and the hardware you can find, but in electronica and any other musical genre, the most state-of-the-art musical gadget is the human brain.

10). Sugar Free, Sa Wakas! (EMI). Melodic, inspired and witty, Sugar Free pulls off a heist and turns the rug on the record label they were supposed to be signed to by appealing to pinoy senti sensibilities without the mushy goo. Ebe Dancel's voice is something that you can't resist singing along to.

11). Kyla, I Will Be There (EMI). Kyla was the best pop solo performer of 2003, coming up with something full of dynamic, world-class R & B. Running the gamut from Timbaland/Neptunes style R & B/hip-hop to soaring gospel-flavored romps with some pop ballads thrown in, Kyla was there all right.

12). Lampano Alley, Songs from the Alley (N/A). On "Major Fool" Lampano recounts some "lessons passed on by father" "You've Got a Hold on Me" is both

suave and tender, and is the textbook example of the album's mission to explain why the "B" in "R & B" stands for "blues." More than blues? Definitely (rock!)

13). Various Artists, Adobo Jazz: A Portrait of the Filipino as a Jazz Artist Vol. 1 (Indira)/Various Artists, Uniberso: New Pinoy Poets Calling (NCCA/Avant-Pop/Littlebrownindie). Two collections that highlight two neglected art forms that most Filipinos forgot that they can excel in: jazz music and genuine, asteege poetry.

14). The Mongols, Buddha's Pest (Criminal/Neo). Jesus "Dizzy" Ventura, The Artist Formerly Known as Ely Buendia claims that The Mongols' sound was the sound that he was aiming to attain all these years. If so, then he loves to frame his abstract poetics to a Smashing Pumpkins' type wall of electric guitar feedback.

15). Razorback, Razorback (self-produced). The sweet, long climb to the peak of creativity finally yielded great returns. This deserves the self-titled status it gets because this album gives off the impression of how Razorback really wanted to sound like all along. Razorback's sound has never been as razor sharp as this one.

16). Juan Isip, Juan Isip (Cowdung/Caldo)/Throw, Throw (Throw). Two OG's of the 80's Manila punk music scene resurface in contrasting fashion: The Wuds' Bobby Balingit goes off a totally opposite tangent and clutches an acoustic guitar with a couple of expat friends to bring a thought-provoking theatrical release while Dead Ends' Al Dimalanta goes his trademark route forming a ferocious new band showing what punk/hardcore really means.

17). Barbie's Cradle, Playing in the Fields (Warner). A superbly produced album that sounds distinct and soothing despite the fact that this album is Barbie and co. at their heaviest. And when I say heavy I mean musically and thematically as Barbie injects her religious musings amid songs of fun and love.

18). Various Artists, Metropop 2003: Smile That Closes The Gap (GMA/Musiko). The "smile" theme that the toothpaste sponsor kinda' imposed was an initial turn-off, but for some reason this year's final entries are more consistent as a whole and has less duds than the previous Metropop stagings had.

19). Noel Cabangon, Medjas (Jesuit Communications). Cabangon injects jazz, gospel and soul to his folksy lyrical odes to everyday life and makes his most accessible record to date. Proof once again that there's more to the man than "Kanlungan" (which was being played by only one radio station during the 90's).

20). Wolfmann, Breaking the Beat Project (Wolfmann). Wolfmann rides on the principle of organized chaos and cool, calculated aggression. This album is an impressive bombardment of elaborated multi-layered sounds that reeks of high adrenaline apt for both rave dancing and headbanging. Watch out for 2004's Diner!

21). Orange & Lemons, Love in the Time of Rubber Shoes and Dirty Ice Cream (Terno). Melodically delightful and catchy, this quartet from Bulacan straddles the thin line between indiepop and new wave and comes up with a British-influenced album that still comes across with Filipino sensibilities.

22). Rivermaya, Beneath the Stars and the Waves (Vacation/Viva). This album is Rivermaya laying all their cards down the table and making testimonials to their musical influences old and new. A good gauge in guessing what the members of Maya have been listening to lately. Now, that's what you call "revivals."

23). Kapatid, Kapatid (self-produced). Not as funky as P.O.T. but Karl Roy stages a comeback attempt with brothers-in-music Nathan Azarcon, Jun Balbuena, Ira Cruz and Chico Molina with an album that's impressively diverse containing jazz, funk and electronic influences that strangely manages to evoke reggae music's brotherly vibe.

24). Gloc 9, Gloc 9 (Star). The fastest mouth in pinoy rap finally puts out an album of his own. Gloc 9 manages to rap his way to the pop hybrid love song stuff, while putting out some impressive daily diatribes.

25). Happy Days, Hello! Hello? Girl! (Independent Culture)/Marty McFly, Marty McFly (Heavy Metal)/Plane Divides the Sky, Plane Divides the Sky (). The two sides of emo music: the happy geeky side as exemplified by walking Weezer testimonials Happy Days (from Cebu) and Marty McFly and the ferocious, angst-ridden side as exemplified by PDTs.♦

For contact numbers regarding the indie releases, please e-mail this writer at kid_amesiac45@hotmail.com and he'll e-mail all the info back to you.

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