

Clive Product reflects on 2009: another untidy year

It's that time of year again and I find myself making lists of my favourite songs from the past 12 months or so. What a fantastic year it's been for music!

Anke Keitel - The Place To Be

If I had to pick just one track from this year, I'd be tempted to choose this one. Beautifully sung and with a positive feel, this just keeps going round and round in my head. Lyrically, it sums up pretty much where I was at. A perfect pop song!

Darrell Mitchell and the Occasional Orchestra - Sparrows

Darrell has written and recorded so many great new songs just recently, I don't know where to start. But why not with this excellent ballad from the 'Japeeza' album? Painfully melancholic in some ways and yet the way it builds just feels like the sun coming out on a cloudy day.

Darrell Mitchell and the Occasional Orchestra - Giants Hands

Because one track from Darrell is never enough. This one (to be included on the next Occasional Orchestra album) has already been posted at You Tube with a great video to boot. I love the fact that, in their photos, they truly look as if they were having a great time. A band with a thousand smiles!

Frank Bangay - Songs, Poems and Prayers

Frank also has so many great recordings it's impossible to pick just one or two. So I'm going for this collection. As the title suggests, it's a mixture of songs, poems and prayers, and every one a winner! Essential Frank!

Frank Bangay - On The Edge

One Frank Bangay CD is never enough so I have to include this demo disc which Frank sent early on in the year. To be included on a forthcoming album, this is huffin' and a-puffin' rail song, with Frank on harmonica, frightening the pigeons away. "Just like angels, they flew away."

Frank Bangay - Smile

Also included on the above CD. Inspired by and featuring Frank's friend Sophie Mirrell. Beautiful!

Occasionally David - Theme From Big Untidy

Recorded live at one of the Big Untidy Night Out gigs at the Rising Sun Arts Centre in Reading, this sees our good friend Clive Whitelock in top form, snarling magnificently over a distorted guitar, and with son Ashley on bass. Perfectly untidy and one of my absolute favourites of the year.

Telesushi - Endeavourle

It was a real pleasure to be on the same bill as Telesushi in the summer at our Fete de la Musique gig in Berlin. Shortly after that show, their debut CD found it's way to me and became an instant favourite. With echoes of early Blondie, this is timeless power pop with plenty of killer originals plus a couple of choice covers. Fabulous!

Mäkkelä & Orkesteri - Means Nothing In Hitchin

This surprisingly upbeat collection of 'break-up' songs served a purpose, acting not only as a suitable therapy for Martti personally, but propelling him into the realms of greatness and, better still, new love! The best Mäkkelä album ever!

Grae J Wall & The Jailbirds - Murder Ballads & Graveyard Blues

The Jailbirds (featuring Ruth Tidmarsh on bass and vocals, and Dave Morgan on drums) are simply one of Grae's best bands ever, as this fine 5 track EP easily proves. There'll be another tour of Germany in the spring - and hopefully a second volume of murder ballads and graveyard blues too.

Robert Coyne Band - Golden Dust

This is one of 7 tracks featured on the Berry Street demo CD and possibly my favourite of them all. What a brilliant band! They opened with this number when we played together at the Big Untidy Night Out gig in Reading in February. I was sitting right at the front next to my good pal Untidy Barry. When they crashed into this number, we just looked at each other and smiled the biggest smiles of all. They were everything we'd hope they'd be - and then some!

Robert Coyne - May I Be The First?

A track from the forthcoming solo acoustic Robert Coyne album (to be released by Meyer Records in January 2010). Also included on the 3 track promo disc released to coincide with his debut solo gig in Cologne. What a great night that was!

The Worms - My Father's Hands

Oh yes, The Worms...one of the great Untidy discoveries of the year. I like this band a lot! This is just one track from a whole bunch of great Worm songs. Science Park...Amphibia...A Berkshire Song...they're all excellent! They're really poems (or prose) put to music, and recorded in a glorious lo-fi sound, which adds to the overall effect.

Wenzel - Ahoi! Ahoi!

I got along to see Wenzel in concert three times this year: twice in Berlin, and once in Kamp (at his annual summer 'harbour' gig). A genius, of sorts, constantly switching from guitar to accordion then to piano throughout his shows. Clever lyrics and hummable tunes. This one is a sea shanty of sorts.

Wenzel - Kamper Trinklied

Written, I believe, especially for those devoted fans who make the long journey to Kamp each year to be part of the magical 'harbour' gig. I was impressed just how many songs he played at this years show. Not just song after song, but set after set... he certainly gives good value for money. Great bloke, I believe!

Saffer & The Jukes - Most Hated Man In Town

I contacted Stefan Saffer after seeing a link to his profile at Steve Earle's My Space site. I liked what I heard, got along to his next Berlin gig and, well, it was as if we'd been pals for years! This is my favourite Saffer track...one of many from his fine 'Nothing In Our Bellies...' album.

Steve Earle - Brand New Companion

Talkin' of Steve Earle...I just love this track from his Townes Van Zandt covers album. No-one does Townes like Townes did himself, but Steve Earle comes closer than anyone else. He really gets into the soul of the songs, making them his own, and lets the music of Townes live again in the here and now.

Richard Bargel - Lazy

Robert Coyne and I were introduced to the legendary blues meister, Richard Bargel, at our recent Cologne gig. In fact, he introduced us! Promoter of that gig, Werner, gave me a copy of Richard's 'Bones' album (from 2006) and I've been enjoying it ever since. It also includes great versions of 'John The Revelator' and 'In The Pines'.

J.J. Cale - Cherry Street

Cale makes everything sound so effortless. This is my favourite track from his recent 'Roll On' album.

Arri - Casiokeyboardcat

Lasting all of 48 seconds and, if I'm not mistaken, a cover of an advert jingle, this is just one of many fine electronic experiments from the mysterious Arri.

The Pikes - No-Name Street

Last but by no means least...the fabulous Pikes! Like Telesushi, we met at the Fete de la Musique gig back in the summer. I have enjoyed their gigs at Schokoladen and in Cafe Zapata (where it was my great pleasure to be their support act). To be honest, the actual physical copy of this great record has yet to find it's way to my stereo...but that's just days away now. The songs I already know from their My Space site, and the gigs, of course. Part-Jam, part-Clash, part-Who...but also 100% The Pikes! I can't wait!

That's about it! There were plenty of other great records I've enjoyed from the past year. Just recently I've been playing the new live album from X-Ray Spex ('Live at the Roundhouse, London, 2008'). I was half-expecting it to be a big disappointment. In fact, it's a real buzz from start to finish, reminding us of just what a fantastic band they were. Phew!!

Musically speaking, **2009** has been one of my busiest and best years ever. I did around 20 gigs and released a new album, fitting all that around my job and music therapy studies. 20 gigs? To be honest, that sounds way too few. When Untidy Barry mentioned that the **Occasional Orchestra** had played some 40 shows or more...I had to smile. I love the fact that Untidy Barry has somehow become the busiest of all Big Untidy-related artists. And Darrell's comeback with the magnificent Occasional Orchestra is such a pleasure to see unfurl. Great voice, great songs, great band!

My first gig of the year, as it was as well in 2008, was supporting **Branded**. They're a great Berlin-based outfit and feature my old pal Volker Gebert on bass (he used to be in my first ever band here). Our gig at Cafe Morgenrot in Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg was the only gig of the year where I played my trusty Hagstrom electric guitar. It was also the only 'standing' gig I played this year. For all the gigs which followed, I was seated and played acoustic guitar. I don't know, it just made sense to play sitting down. It certainly suited the new songs, and added a sense of intimacy. It's nice to know, the first gig I have lined up in 2010 will also be with Branded.

In February, I played the **Big Untidy Night Out** in Reading alongside Los Chicos Muertos, Bidgie Reef, and the Robert Coyne Band. A fantastic night as always. I was joined at the end of my solo set by my good buddies Grae J Wall (guitar), Darrell Mitchell (guitar) and Untidy Barry (drums) for a beautifully shambolic version of Roy Orbison's Ooby Dooby. A night to remember! As was my gig a week or so later at the Nil Klub in Potsdam, supporting **Jowe Head and the Demi-Monde** and Valerie and her Week of Wonders. Snow, snow, snow, taxis which didn't arrive, and more snow. It all seemed such an adventure at the time.

It seemed fitting to be supporting Jowe in 2009. It was thirty years ago this year I played my first ever gig (with my first band, The Mysterons). Back then, in 1979, I was a big fan of **Swell Maps**. I'll never forget going up to the Nashville in London with Chip (Mysterons singer) to see them, missing our train home, and getting beaten up by skinheads on Oxford Street at 6am the next morning. We got a song out of it, of course! And, despite having our money, watches, and jackets stolen, we somehow managed to keep hidden the drumsticks given to us by Epic Soundtracks. Hurrah!

It was at the gig with Jowe Head where **Stephan Zehle** suggested recording some solo acoustic tracks at his home studio. So, in March, we got together for a couple of days and recorded what became my new album, Like The Tide Coming In. I am truly grateful to Stephan for not only doing all this for free, but for his friendship. The sessions were relaxed and good spirited. Having had something of a shit year last year, getting these songs out of my system did me the world of good. It's quite possibly the best album I've made.

Talking of Stephan, one of the highlights of the year for me was our short tour of **England** at the end of October/beginning of November. Three gigs and a poetry afternoon in three days! Stephan and I have know each other about 10 years now but on this tour we

really started to understand each other (musically and personally). Having another musician on stage with me was a real joy. I love Stephan's guitar style. It was especially nice to be able to play the songs from the new album with him for those gigs. It made that trip all the more special. We may have found ourselves in Oxford more times than we actually wanted to (without even having a gig there), but oh what fun we had!

One of the gigs in England was at **Chalfont St Giles Memorial Hall**. I was born in St Giles, and it's where my Mum still lives. She was so disappointed to miss this show. A week before, she fell over, breaking her hip in the process. It was a great night out. Sadly, I arrived too late to see Occasionally David play. But Julian Smith's Unfortunate Bongo 5 were excellent as always. They surprised me by playing a fantastic version of one of my old songs, Falling Up The Stairs. Jason Smart together with Untidy Barry performed a wonderfully untidy Kings Of The Wild Front Ear set. But the highlight of the night was **Darrel Mitchell and the Occasional Orchestra** (with special guest appearances from Robert Coyne on guitar, and Stephan Zehle on bass, on Lonesome Valley, a song covered way back when on Kevin Coyne's Marjory Razorblade album in the early 70s).

Following the dates in England, I teamed up with **Grae J Wall and Dez Paradise** for a couple of great shows in Germany. We played Dilemma in Berlin-Neukölln with our good friend Clark Nova before heading south to Bernhausen and one of our favourite venues, Anker. A week or so later, I was supporting **The Pikes** in Berlin at Cafe Zapata. As regular readers to my blogs will know, I'm a big fan of The Pikes! We first appeared together back in June at the Fete de la Musique gig at the Rat Pack Lounge in Berlin, organized by Olaf Schumacher of The Groovy Cellar. Also appearing at that event were the wonderful **Telesushi**. It's been such a thrill to play alongside these great bands.

There were also gigs with Mäkkelä's Trash Lounge, Grae J & the Jailbirds, Der Dritte Mann, The Wars, Loom, and others. Enjoyable gigs, all of them. But one of the most memorable shows of all was the one in November at the Theater der Kellar, Cologne, supporting **Robert Coyne**. I love Robert's new songs a lot. His band gigs have always been such great nights out. The new solo material reveals another, more personal side to Robert's writing. It was a joy to spend more time with him and his wife, Wendy. Once again, a big thank-you to Werner Meyer and Petra for putting us on and looking after us so well.

With my recent album, **Like The Tide Coming In**, I was able to shake away the ghosts of last year. At least half the songs were included in my live sets throughout the year. Some of them, especially Dissolved and A Heart Full Of Hope, are among the best songs I've ever written. I've really enjoyed playing live this year, possibly more than ever before. And, best of all, it's great to have so many good friends to share all this with. Thanks everyone!

Here's to the new year and all our possible futures...

Tea, anyone?

Clive x