

Musical Gems 2008

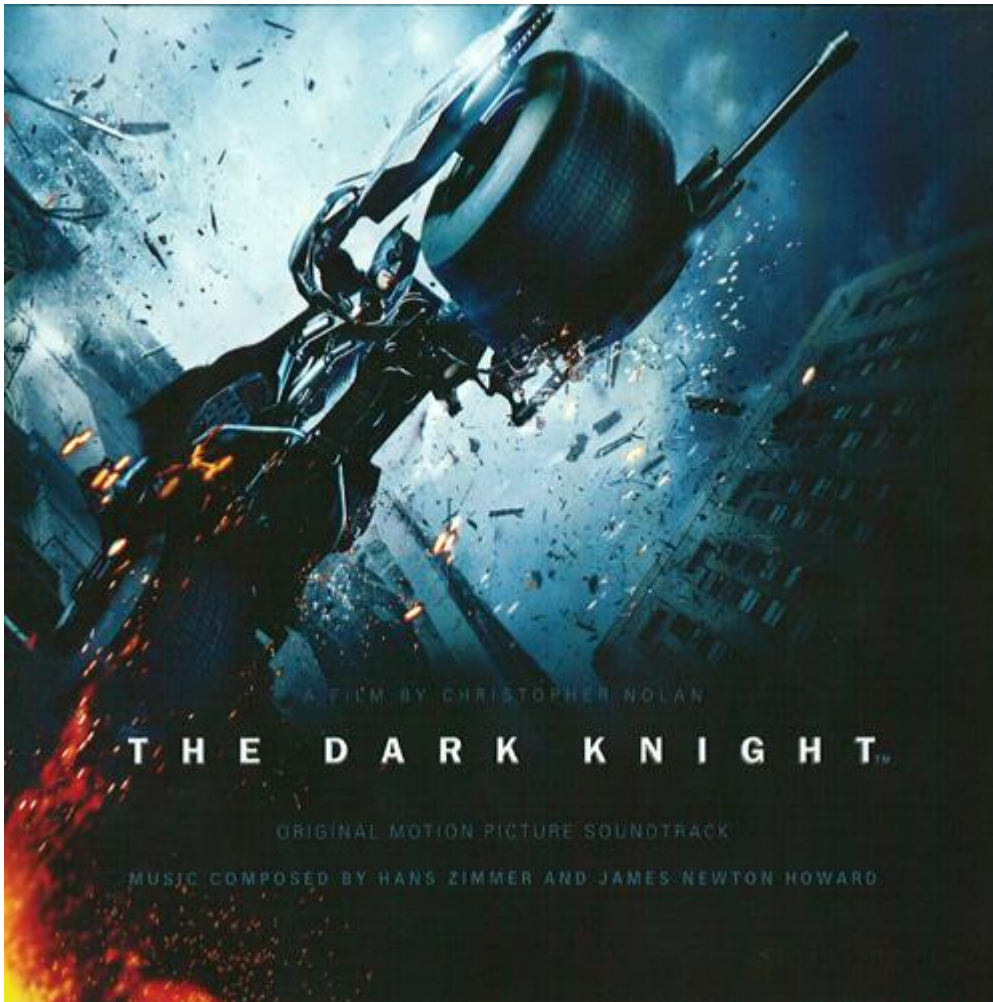


Artist: Shelby Lynne
Album: *Just A Little Lovin'*
Year: 2008

While this is primarily a Dusty Springfield covers album, The major difference between Springfield and Lynne is in the delivery, while most of what Springfield does on record is almost a heartbreaking, soulful coo. Lynne's voice is powerfully strong. Songs such as "You Don't Have to Say You Love Me," with its acappella, slightly echoed, opening, tricks the ear as if it's going to break out into the loud ripping rendition that it always gets. But Lynne plays it down, turns up regret and conviction in her voice and it's now a country torch ballad.

The title cut "Little Bit Of Lovin' " I have been using for the past year as a demo track. The electric bass on the big Vivid *Giya* is remarkable and really shows what a high end system is capable of. The bass positively growls ! The decay at the end of the notes seems to linger in the room forever.

Sparse guitar and bass, occasional percussion and keyboards, and lots & lots of space. This is about the subtle strength of Shelby's sensuous, effortless singing, and the instruments support it, rather than overwhelm it. The LP unfortunately is noisy. Would love to hear this on 2 track master tape.

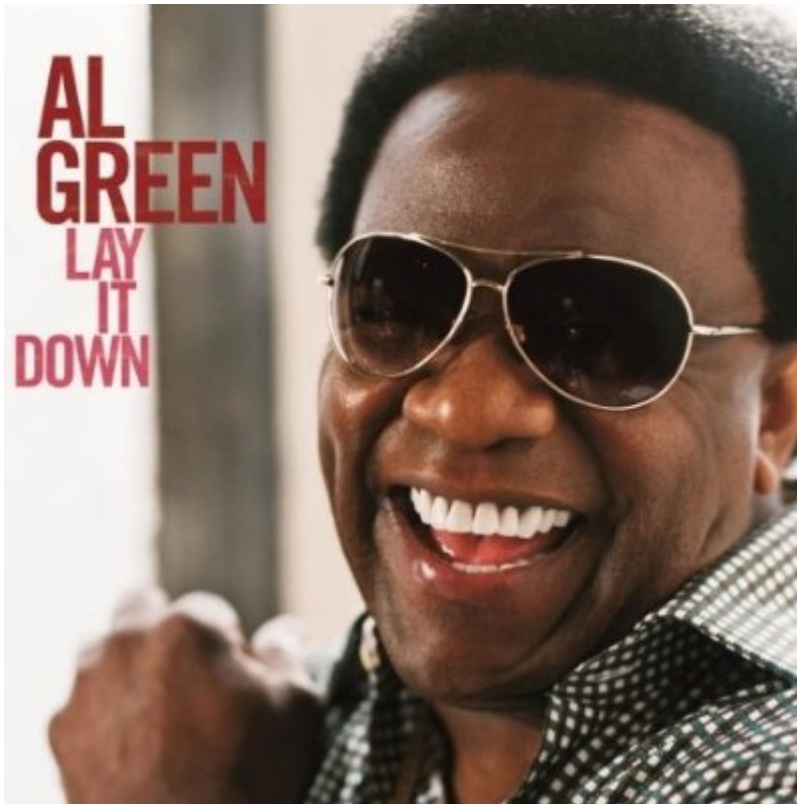


Artist: Hans Zimmer and James Newton Howard
Album: *The Dark Knight* (Soundtrack)
Year: 2008

Hans Zimmer and James Newton Howard's score for *The Dark Knight* is the most interesting soundtrack I've purchased in a while. The music is dark and moody but exciting enough to listen to without succumbing to depression. When I first got this, I played every night in its entirety.

This is what we put on the recent *Philip's Demo XI* compilation. # 2. *I'm Not a Hero* - spells the anguish and darkness that both Batman and his enemies seem to share. A powerful montage of moods which range from a surreal set of ominous strings until being finally eclipsed by an epic, almost chanting rhythm where we feel the defiance within Batman's soul.

My favourite track # 14. *A Dark Knight* at 16:15 was just too long to put on the compilation CD.- stands triumphantly alone, as the listener does not need a scene or story line to appreciate this outside the context of the movie. As with all of Hans Zimmer's work; it's well recorded, very dynamic & exciting. The LP is superb and well worth the extra \$\$.



Artist: Al Green
Album: Lay It Down
Year: 2008

This is Al Green's third album since he joined Blue Note; none of these albums have disappointed. For *Lay it Down* Al Green drafted in a superb backing band, which includes the *Dap Kings* horns (who feature on Amy Winehouse's "Back to Black"), the duo capture Green's familiar laid-back, orchestral groove, while also dropping hints towards "urban" modernism. This might lead you to think that this is an undignified musical hip transplant for the old master. The rhythms, the jazzy chord progressions, the aching falsetto and the love-infused subject matter of these songs have much in common with the stellar tracks Green cut in the first half of the Seventies.

This is a fine product from a singer whose capacity to dazzle has barely waned in 40 years. Jewels arrive most noticeably via a trio of guest vocalists, Anthony Hamilton, John Legend and Corinne Bailey Rae, who each wisely choose to complement, rather than attempt to outgun, their host. Conceived as a way of uniting Green with a new generation of soul and R&B singers, "*Lay It Down*" might have been an embarrassing attempt to modernise an old star. Instead, the producer Ahmir Thompson of the hip-hop band *Roots* has gone the other way. The younger musicians have to fit in with Green's laid-back, slow-burning sound, in contrast to the excessive slickness of modern R&B. And while Corinne Bailey Rae sings with jazzy sophistication on "*Take Your Time*" and Anthony Hamilton shows how classic R&B can be updated on "*You've Got the Love I Need*", it's Al Green's voice, so full of humour and joy, that stands out. The album proves that great soul music need not come at the cost of life itself. The LP is a lot warmer and soulful sounding than the CD. Heartily Recommended.

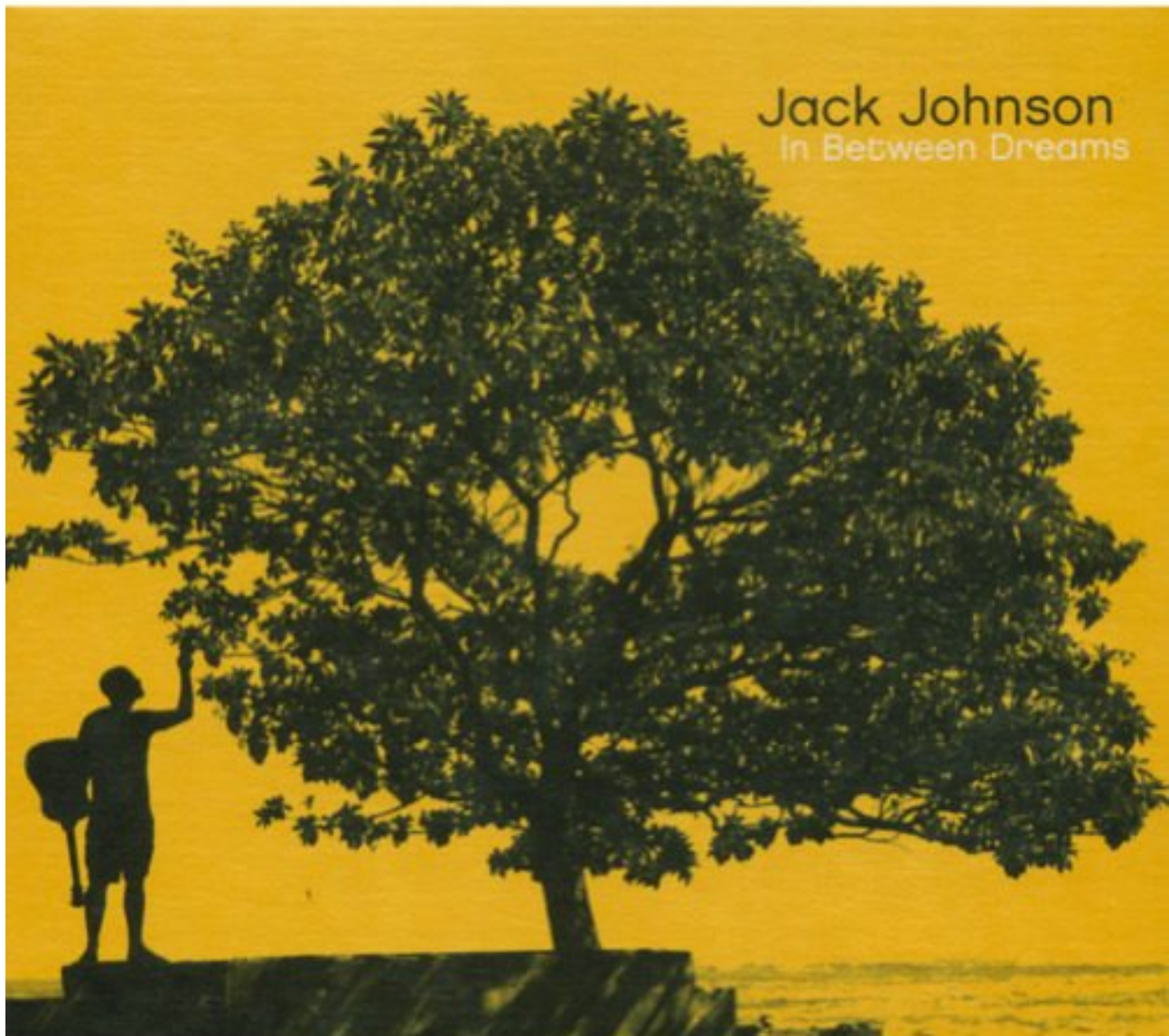


Artist: Amadou & Mariam
Album: Welcome To Mali
Year: 2008

Damon Albarn pops up as guest producer on this remarkable set by the blind couple Bagayoko and Mariam Doumbia, who have brought the music of their homeland not only to the world, but into the 21st century mainstream. Beautiful melodies abound on an album where the couple's guitar and vocals are underscored by everything from Europop synth to string quartet and gentle electronica and from French hip-hop to Somali-Canadian rappers.

One of the highlights is the standout "*Sabali*", in which Albarn adds an electronic backdrop. Amadou's guttural singing in French and raw-toned guitar animate the surging, Hammond organ-powered "*Compagnon de la Vie*" while Mariam's disarmingly simple delivery takes on an incantatory quality on the more traditional "*Djuru*", with tingling kora from Toumani Diabaté, and showcasing Amadou's guitar chimes.

But when it works, when the album catches light like on the aforementioned tracks and on "*Masiteladi*" and "*Djama*", there's an underlying earthy integrity to their music which will not fail to capture new aficionados. We are not talking here about 'world music', but about the product of an authentically global pop phenomenon. It is well worth a listen, before they become too commercial and popular.



Artist: Jack Johnson
Album: *In Between Dreams*
Year: 2008

The laid back acoustic sound appeals to me, although some added emphasis on memorable bass lines would have spiced it for me. Johnson's voice is pleasant and touches on gentle emotions. The weakest part of his work is his sense of melody that isn't distinctive and tends to make one track bleed into the next.

This is one of those albums you listen to when no one else is around. It's late at night, you want something to calm you down right before you go to sleep... Let this album seep into your brain for an hour and slip into pure zen. This is such a beautifully written and soothing rhythmic album that it should not be missed. For as quiet as the album is, it never gets dull or boring. Every song is a well conceived idea full of emotion.

It is meticulously well recorded on a Studer analogue tape recorder; LP is well worth seeking out for a fuller, richer midrange & greater sense of dynamics,



Artist	Hilary Hahn (violin) Esa-Pekka Salonen (conductor)
Album	Schoenberg and Sibelius Violin Concertos
Year	2008

Schoenberg is feared, his music "unapproachable, sterile, mathematical." I say no. I've been an active Schoenberg fan for nearly 20 years. I love Bach, I love Beethoven. Schoenberg in many regards is following in that tradition, his music an extension or continuation of what they and Brahms and Wagner were doing with chromatic harmony and the formal structure of their music. Schoenberg simply took it one step further. I think the difficulty listeners find when approaching Schoenberg is following the melodic line. It takes an effort for the listener to get used to how Hahn manages to draw a discernible melody out of the dissonance but the reward is a world of sound not available in tonal music.

The Schoenberg violin concerto is widely admired and widely studied, but it isn't much played, and it's never been much loved. This is partly because of the huge technical hurdles it presents fiddlers, but also because it isn't especially easy to bring off musically; in this regard it is unlike the piano concerto, say, which is far more accessible, and which offers up at least some of its beauties simply by being played accurately.

Hilary Hahn's recent recording of the Sibelius violin concerto, is nothing less than gorgeous. Her tones are pure, and she extends the slow parts, squeezing every last bit of emotion out of them. Salonen and the orchestra offer commendable support. In contrast, the violinists I've heard before this seemed to be interested more in just hitting all the notes perfectly. Hahn opened a new door for me.