

**The Tip**  
**She Was Just 17 (if you know what I mean)**  
**Spring 2004**

Just when I think we've hit the bottom, the next trapdoor opens. And what's down there? The Gospel of Christ warped into a snuff film. Our national paranoia reborn as a desert Vietnam. More death, more blood, more rage, more porn, more product, more celebrities, more costumes for our anguish.

Thankfully, we remain alive and capable of taking measures.

Think of fear as a solitary confinement for your heart.

Think of love as the final cure for grievance.

Think of music as your solace in a dark age.

Most of all: think.

1. The Sleepy Jackson

Lovers

(Astralwerks, 2004)

The most innovative record released this year. Big yummy songlines, George Harrison leads, the T-Rex sexbeats, languid club grooves, a rewrite of the Song of Songs that will destroy you. Surrender to your pending addiction.

2. Jim Lauderdale

Headed for the Hills

(Dualtone, 2004)

After years of releasing serviceable countrified rock, Croondog Mange finally sticks his landing. This is hillbilly joy: fiddle, mando, dobro, harmonies from Gillian and Emmylou, and melodic whompspiration from the very much unDead Robert Hunter.

3. Jamie Cullum

Twenty Something

(Verve, 2004)

Ignore the Connick smack. This kid knows how to bang the piano into a luvly pulp. He leaps from Hendrix to Gershwin without missing a black key, and his originals are scrumdillyicious.

Guest Tip from the always-euphonious Camille Dungy:

Moroccan Spirit

Various Artists

(Higher Octave, 2002)

So good I started taking belly dancing classes just so I could listen to more of it. Haunting, funky, disturbingly sexy, amped up Moroccan grooves.

RetroTip

4. Phranc

I Enjoy Being a Girl  
(Island, 1989)

Lesbo folk ain't my normal lunch, but Phranc ain't normal. It's all up in y'all: tearjerkers, anti-fascist anthems, Rodeo parakeets, odes to Martina, and Rodgers and goddamn Hammerstein. The Indigo Gurls never sounded so pale.

5. Paul Kelly  
Ways & Means  
(Spinart 2003)

A double album of love songs from Australia's ugliest pretty boy. Gospel music for the corazon. "Forty Eight Angels" will make you forget the blood and the tracks.

Guest Tip from the perpetually righteous Elyssa Hagins  
Beth Gibbons & Rustin Man  
Out of Season  
(Sanctuary, 2003)

First solo record from Beth Gibbons (Portishead). Haven't been able to take the damn thing outta my stereo. Maybe if it'd stop raining and the record didn't sound so good rubbing up against the gray days of January... maybe, just maybe...I'd be able to take it out. Haunting.

6. Jimmy Ryan  
Lost Diamond Angel  
(Ambitious Records, 2002)  
Steve Mayone  
Bedroom Rockstar  
(Umver Records, 2003)  
Local rawk double shot!

Jimmy Ryan = the Hendrix of mandolin. After years of backing immortals, he's made a blue plate special, country fried steak, Appalachian stylee, with gravy from the boys of Morphine. The enchantingly ungroomed Mayone serves up a DIY masterpiece. The title track is the most refreshing dose of loser rock you'll never hear.

More salt from the vault:

7. Jellyfish  
Bellybutton  
(Charisma, 1989)

How I survived Shrub I (without actually killing anyone). Unabashedly luscious psychedelic soul: soaring harmonies, juicy keys, ecstatic melodies. "Baby's Coming Back" sounds like the Supremes crashing Abbey Road. File under: bubblegum with calories.

Guest Tip from Selene "Deffer Than Thou" Angier  
The Tyde

Twice

(Rough Trade)

Straight outta LA, these dudes are the brother band to the Beachwood Sparks. "Twice" is Lou Reed dropped in the big sandbox to hang with Brian Wilson. Summer grit like only LA knows. Big surfboards and bigger sunglasses, with more drug references than Lou can shake a dirty needle at.

8. Jet

Get Born

(EMI, 2003)

For those about to rawk, we po-llute you. Hooks the size of Cleveburg. Loud strats. Lots of shouting. Gratuitous use of the b-word. Twang, bang, thang you, ma'am.

9. One Ring Zero

As Smart As We Are

(Soft Skull, 2003)

Geek lit meets geek rock. Twenty writers handle the words, a couple of klezmatic songmeisters book the tunes. All very disheveled genius, all very Brooklyn. "Half & Half" is catchier than anything They Might Be Giants has ever done. True.

10. Bob Schneider

I'm Good Now

(Vanguard 2004)

Bob sells out. Fine. You heard it hear first. There's no earthly reason he should be name-checking Coors Light, but the title track still makes John Mayer sound like a smurf. I'll stop tipping him when he stops kicking my ass.

Afterwords:

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## **The Tip**

### **Sweet 16**

#### **Snowed in, 2003**

The other day, Paris and I were sitting around at the condo in Vail and I said to her, "Honeypetal, do you think maybe if people had better art to consume, like something deeper to connect to, they might not spend half their lives scouring the web for our Super Juicy Hardcore Sex Video?"

Paris grunted. She was working on a tricky cuticle situation.

"You know," I said, "Like if we could put together some kind of special holiday list, of cool albums or whatever."

The TV was on and something come on about Tara Reid's new piercing. My sweetie didn't look too happy about it.

"See, they could buy these discs and the music would sort of keep them company. And if they liked one, they could buy extra copies as Xmas gifts, like, you know, for the Special Hardcore Video Sex partners in their lives. Or even just, like, their super glamorous celebrity friends. Wouldn't that be sort of cool?"

Paris put down her tiny scissors and looked at me in that hot, emaciated way she has. "Shut up and cut me another me line," she said.

And I said, "Yes, master."

### 1. Hem

Rabbit Songs

(Dreamworks, 2002)

Every once in a great while, you hear a singer and think: Yes! Yes! At long last: the truth! The deep, shivering yesness of it all! Ladies and gennemen, Sally Ellyson and her amber waves of piano, her haunted fiddle. God touched this woman, very softly, right on the throat.

### 2. Stereophonics

You Gotta Go There to Come Back

(V2, 2003)

Yeah you do. Kelly Jones is a stone-cold whomp machine. The dude writes sultry R&B, sings like Rod Stewart on a Nyquil bender, and provides the odd clavinet solo. Don't get spooked by the hard stuff; the ballads on this disc will make you gooey.

### 3. Marisa Monte

Memorias, Cronicas e Declaracones de Amor

(EMI 2000)

Samba samba to a whole new level. The songs here are langorous, beguiling, highly suitable for the soft crash of human love. Her funky up cover of Jorge Ben's "15 Minutes" sounds like Lady Marmelade in space. Yum. (Big ups to Kirkus McGirkus, South American corresponsal del Tip, for the pimp.)

Guest Tip from Downtown Julie Hill Barton

TEITUR

POETRY AND AEROPLANES

(Universal Records, 2003)

Teitur is a guy, age 25, from Denmark's Faroe Islands. His first album is acoustic guitar with this textured fusion of violin and piano, not to mention Teitur's incredible, part soul/part Nick Drake/part out-of-nowhere voice. And the intimate lyrics earn the album's title. Listen to someone other than Steve for once and get this album.

#### 4. Boris McCutcheon

Mother Ditch

(Cactusman, 2001)

You know something's up when The Tip goes two in a row. Yuh-huh. The ten tracks on this debut are utterly sure of their mood and vision. It's a bit like picking up one of Dylan's early albums, back before the deviated septum. Boris turns "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" into a folklorico epiphany. Go to [www.borismccutcheon.com](http://www.borismccutcheon.com) for the love.

#### 5. Phil Cody

Big Slow Mover

(Tiny Head Records, 2000)

Cody's put more groove in his lube on this one and the results are drop dead: roots music with a languid, waltzy low-end. "Opposition Radio" is straight from the Warren Zevon playbook, and "Standing Invitation" is a registered melody bomb.

Guest Tip from the incomparably guilt-ridden Stephen Duesner

The Drive-By Truckers

Decoration Day

(New West, 2002)

Critics love 'em, but don't let that fool you: their fifth album is full of songs so intuitively lyrical and unfailingly candid that the last decade's worth of alt-country (that never-ending search for indie authenticity) sounds like a not-very-funny joke. The highlight here is Jason Isbell's ballad "Outfit," in which his daddy advises: "Don't call what you're wearing an outfit/Don't ever say your car is broke/Don't sing with a fake British accent/Don't act like your family's a joke."

#### 6. Medusa

Annie Lennox

(1995)

So I'm going soft in my dotage. Big shocker. This disc is nothing but lush arrangements of soul and pop standards, with a few delicious ringers. Lennox turns "Train in Vain" into a gospel lament, and manages to make "Don't Let It Bring You Down" appropriate for necking. Bless her.

#### 7. Smoking Popes – A Tribute

Various Artists

(Double Zero, 2003)

None of you punks listened when I told you about these guys way back when (#2) so I'm gonna try again: the Popes were the first, best, and maybe only true emo-punk outfit on earth. These covers come from obscure Chicago area punk bands, who manage to capture the crystalline beauty of the originals. They ain't dead till we say so.

#### 8. Bob Schneider

The Galaxy Kings  
(Shockorama, 2002)

Nobody's making as much sonic joy per annum as Schneider. This one is full of big, luscious keyboard fills and gratuitous references to candy. Soul music for the sugar obsessed.

Double-dip guest tip from Keith Morris, author of the *The Greyhound God*, a new novel you should buy, at once:

My Morning Jacket  
*At Dawn*;

Thanks to their recent major label release, the My Morning Jacket bandwagon is filling up fast. But their best is *At Dawn*, on independent label Darla. This is forlorn stuff--think clinking whiskey bottle, a whiff of cannabis, and Kentucky boys howling at the moon. What Jay Farrar would be up to if he still resembled Jay Farrar.

Destroyer  
*Thief*

Frontman Daniel Bejar is best known for his ensemble work with New Pornographers, but Destroyer is the better band. Listen to the first five tracks on *Thief* and you'll think you've discovered the missing link between David Bowie's *Hunky Dory* and *Ziggy Stardust* albums. This guy just *hears* the world better than the rest of us do. *Streethawks* is also well worth your time.

9. Jimmy LaFave  
Texoma  
(Bohemia Beat, 2001)

Jimmy's new one has all the necessary mojo: odes to red dirt and Woody, scorching solos, Texas swang, the necessary Godfunk, and that dark edge that makes Toby Keith sound so much like a wind-up toy. "Love Will Find Its Own Way" is a masterpiece in three minutes flat.

10. Madison Smart Bell & Wyn Cooper  
Forty Words For Fear  
(Gaff, 2003)

Bell's got a mordant, quavering voice. Cooper provides the darker lyrical shadings. Mitch Easter plays guitar. Don Dixon rides the boards. Plus: accordion, ukulele, a tuba solo. "Blue Nun" sounds like the Everly Brothers with a giant, thoughtful hangover.

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**The Tip**  
**August, 2003**  
**#15**

Just to catch you up: America still leads the known universe in senseless murder and French Fries. Cheney continues to con anyone who'll listen. And California is set to elect a glamorous Nazi. It's enough to drive any of us from the dimming orchards of consideration, into the fat teary bosom of country music, which is where I've been hiding out all these damp langorous months.

Been singing along, too, one of those good old Jew yodels that sounds sorta like the sexy guy on the cross. You ain't heard me?

Listen.

No, I mean it:

Listen.

1. Boris McCutcheon  
When We Were Big  
(Cactus, 2003)

The finest slab of Americana released this millenium. The melodies are big and luscious and the rockers charge ahead on roadhouse adrenalin. The ballads will break your heart in a couple of places and heal it up, too. "Santa Rosa Plums" is what the Band would have sounded like with Sam Cooke on lead vocals.

2. Joe Henry  
Tiny Voices  
(2003, ANTI)

Every single person who's heard this album (it ain't available till September) has gone apeshit with love. Henry lets his eight-piece band create astonishing sonic landscapes that meld jazz, blues, soul, and gospel. Please: stop fighting me on this. I beg you. Make your life happier.

3. Patrick Park  
Loneliness Knows My Name  
(Hollywood Records)

Park sounds like Elliot Smith channeling Lynard Skynard. (The fragile tenor, the sinuous geetars, the blessed pump organ.) His songs are joyful odes to the hurting kind, tales that unfurl with such sly assurance you'll forget, briefly, that Ryan Adams exists.

4. Guest Tip from the insatiably luscious Erin Fizzle:  
Princess Superstar  
Is  
(2001)

She's been called the female Eminem and the white Lil' Kim, but if you *must* pigeonhole her, Princess would rather be called the black Shirley Temple. The single "Wet, Wet, Wet" got major pimp in the Six Feet Under season finale, but "Bad

Babysitter” is the true nasty. With guest vocals from Beth Orton and Kool Keith, who sounds ready to bone. That’s the point, yo.

5. Quarashi

Quarashi

(Grand Royal, 2002)

Imagine that the Beastie Boys had grown up in Iceland and then gone to see Rage Against the Machine in concert, and then, on their way home, listened to Peter & the Wolf and Clair De Lune. Then they made this record.

6. 3 Pound Thrill (nee Uncle Green)

Rycopia, Volume One

So I head down to Hotlanta, to kick a little lit shite in the Dirty Dirty South and who should I meet but Pete, drummer for the late, great Uncle Green. He tells me the Unc actually made a double disc, never released, then he sends me both. I’m tipping numero uno, which has enough jangly radio-friendly hits to torch Matchbox Twenty’s entire oeuvre. How did this shit not get released? (To order copies, contact Pete himself at peterjmc33@hotmail.com.)

7. Nathan Larson

Jealous God

(Artemis, 2001)

Shoutouts to NY Julie for putting me onto Larson, who performs blue-eyed soul of the Elvis Costello genus. The ballads are a bit weepy, but when Larson puts the funk in his junk (“U Got Me Dyin’ Out Here”) the results are whomp-a-riffic.

8. Grant McLennan

Horsebreaker Star

(Beggars Banquet, 1993)

This is what happens when Australia’s most brilliant popsmith comes to Nashville to record an album. There are 19 songs here, all of them shimmering with longing and regret. Not sure what to call this stuff (which is always a good sign) but it spent about a year on my CD player, back during Clinton I.

9. Neko Case

Blacklisted

(Bloodshot, 2003)

More absolute torch and bang from Tacoma’s favorite new pornographer. The songs here dark, stark, and ready to spark.

10. New Amsterdams

Worse for the Wear

(Vagrant Records, 2003)

Melodic sensitive country rock from straight outta Kansas; how very Midwestern ghetto. Lotsa lap steel on this one, plaintive strumming, yummy melodies. "Hanging on For Hope" is the year's finest rock anthem playing hard to get.

Basta.

Now get out there and awaken your heart,  
sa

P.S. – For back issues of The Tip, check [www.stevenalmond.com](http://www.stevenalmond.com).

P.P.S. – Summer's not over till we say it is.

**The Tip**  
**Cinco de Mayo, 2003**  
**The WASP remix (aka Issue 14)**

So I punched my boombox. This is not an altogether unprecedented event, though, in this case, I hadn't been drinking. It was a pretty clean shot and (long story short) the CD mechanism broke. This meant I was launched backwards, into the era of the cassette tape. This will explain the odd vintage of some of the Tips below. Thankfully, there's no statute of limitations on whomp.

You will also note the proliferation of Guest Tips. The power returns to the people, if they rise up and pimp.

I continue to love all of you, each day, beyond reason.

1. World Party  
Goodbye Jumbo  
(Geffen, 1989)

The best pop record made in the Eighties.  
Okay, that was a mulligan. Let me try again.

What if John Lennon and Mick Jagger did a bunch of drugs and then had sex and then did a bunch more drugs and then decided to record some tunes. But then they got into a contract dispute and Yoko started calling Mick a fascist and they never even released the album.

But they did.

2. Chip Taylor & Carrie Rodriguez  
Let's Leave This Town  
(Lonestar Records, 2002)

Shoutout to Big Daddy Bruce Machart for tipping me to this gorgeous hunka hunka Tex-ass luv. These are waltzes and do-whoop diddies performed by an old dude with a gorgeously wrecked baritone and a young hottie who plays fiddle and sings like an angel. Their voices in concert are uncut soul Viagra.

Guest Tip from the thoroughly tune-besotted and minorly crazy Deebo:

Ted Hawkins

*The Next Hundred Years*

(Geffen, 1994)

Hawkins was a drifter, a street performer, a convict for years, releasing albums on Rounder and other labels before he brought out *The Next Hundred Years*. He died on New Year's 1995. Soul music and blues finally meet (maybe where Otis Redding was going with "Dock of the Bay") and his voice makes you believe.

3. Faces

Best of the Faces: Good Boys ... When They're Asleep

(Rhino, 1999)

I don't care how much semen he swallowed, Rod Stewart can flat out soul sing. And his mates (including the wee Ronnies, Wood and Lane) provide him a backdrop of incandescently rowdy white boy soul. Half the songs on this disc should be arrested for crimes against my attention span.

4. Harry Manx & Kevin Breit

Jubilee

(Northernblues, 2003)

Traditional Canadian blues, which do, in fact exist. The platter in question features a coupla low-key aficionados plucking on mandocellos, banjolins, cavaquinhos, and whatever else they can find. Their cover of the Doobie's "Taking It to the Streets" may be the most satisfying cover since Etta James went nuclear on "Take It to the Limit."

5. The Black Keys

Freakthickness

(Fat Possum, 2003)

Loaned this one out to Huggypbear and have yet to see it again. Surprise surprise. This is blues of the single, gut-bucket riff variety, minus bass, minus studio effects, minus bridge, from a coupla dirty Akron white boyz. Let me say it like so: the White Stripes brought a knife to this gun fight.

6. Amadou & Miriam

Wati

(Circular Moves, 2002)

They're blind, they're from Mali, and gosh darn it, they rock! This is, technically, world music, but the kind awakens the spirit of the river, the stone, and the gluteus.

7. Spencer Bohren

Born in a Biscayne

(1984)

Blues by way of the Delta, by which I mean Nawlins, by which I mean swampy, thick with mood, and joyous in the face of life's abundant hardships. Bohren has the kind

of a baritone that makes me want to take cough medicine on his behalf. Until I heard “In Between Friends” I didn’t really get that music was supposed to tell a story to your heart.

Special Guest Tip from Marshall “Hambone” Boswell

Brendan Benson  
Lapalco  
(Star Time, 2002)

Made at home, one instrument at a time, on an analog 8-track. LAPALCO is pure power pop, circa 1976-1979, with weird but welcome nods to early XTC and Cars, Shoes, plus McCartney and Todd Rundgren echoes. What Matthew Sweet sort of promised but decided not to deliver. Benson also plays everything on the record, including this great-sounding retro Moog Synth.

8. Daniel Barrett  
Shadows  
(Lovebang 2002)

So I’m taking the T into downtown Bahstahn to go see Sox ruin my summah and there’s this scruffy busker dude playing. I hear a grand total of one song, which kicks my ass sideways, so I buy this disc, which does same. A surprising melange of folk-pop, southern balladry, and Jewish soul. (On a personal note, Daniel and I are engaged to be married and expecting our first baby in December.)

Guest Tips from the incomparable Joe Henry  
Clifford Brown  
Clifford With Strings  
(Verve 1955, reissued 1998)

After Bird was dissed for doing it, many jazz titans played catch up, blowing moody bebop abstractions against lush orchestration. But nobody (save Bird) made more of it than Clifford. He treats the orchestra not with distant reverence, but with conspiracy. Darkly romantic and deep.

Caetano Veloso  
Federico e Giulietta  
(Nonesuch, 1999)

Brazil's master singer-songwriter delivers a "live" performance in tribute to the maestro Federico Fellini and his actress/wife. Sung in both Portugese and Italian, the music goes by like a film, and i think the languages barrier (for those of us who speak neither) add to hallucinatory feel. Like many sensory pleasures, you know without knowing.

I’ll second that emotion.

For back issues of The Tip, check into [www.stevenalmond.com](http://www.stevenalmond.com).

Building the brand, not moving the product,

sa

**The Tip**  
**Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>**  
**Xmas 2002**

Look: I've missed you.

But I promised myself when I got this sonic pipeline cranked up that I would never let you down. So I waited (and waited) till I had ten albums that rocked my tush off. And they are yours now, in this blessed season of Kwaanza, and I hope you will do the sensible thing and dance naked to them, either on your own or with a partner of your choosing.

A few rules for the newmeat:

- 1) Forward The Tip to the peeps who care about such things
- 2) Show me the love by Tipping back
- 3) If at all possible, give art for the Holidays

1. Solomon Burke, "Don't Give Up on Me" (Fat Possum, 2002)

It should be enough that Joe Henry produced this album, that Tom Waits, Bob Dylan and Elvis Costello wrote the songs, and that Burke has the most majestic baritone this side of God Almighty. If that's still not enough, consider the Blind Boys of Alabama, whose backing vocals on "None of Us Are Free" will make you shiver. This is soul music so persuasive even my dustballs are hooked.

2. Nicolai Dunger "Soul Rush" (Virgin Sweden, 2002)

Van Morrison is actually Swedish. Who knew? Bottom line: Dunger writes beautiful, moody songs and sings them with passionate grace. The arrangements are lush and earthy and the mood is dusk with a warm bit of rain.

3. Toploader "Onka Big Moka" (Epic, 2000)

Five Brits who make big gorgeously funkalicious pop songs that are not the least bit angry and due cause for rutting. I realize this is terrible unfashionable, but there you go. Check out their cover of "Dancing in the Moonlight." If they put that shit on radio, people would try to eat the buttons.

4. Twilight Singers "Twilight as Played by The Twilight Singers" (Sony, 2000)

Relentlessly cool melodic noodling from Greg Dulli (Afghan Wigs' chief narcissist) and a coupla of big name ambient producers. This is one of those discs that sneaks up on you, then puts the whack on your sacrophiliac.

5. Ian Brown "Golden Greats" (Interscope, 2000)

The Stone Roses are good and dead and all their fanatics are in that bitter state of bereavement endemic to the species. I'm happy to report that Brown, who sang for the Roses, has made an album that is consistently delightful, full of beeg meaty hooks and beats worthy of sustained ass-wagging.

6. Orchestra Boabab "Specialist in All Styles" (Nonesuch, 2002)

I have no idea what to call this stuff. It's Cuban music as performed by a bunch of Senegalese musical Gods. This means you can either dance to the shit, or swim through it.

Special Double Shot Guest Tip from the Original Old School Young Bull Matty Patt:

Luna "Live"

Dean Wareham of Galaxie 500 fame fronts this band with the hottest bass player on Earth, Britta Phillips. Live includes a cover of Serge Gainsbourg's "Bonnie and Clyde." They've also covered G&R's "Sweet Child O' Mine." Any Velvet Underground-influenced band that covers heavy metal champs has to appeal well-read handbangers.

Built to Spill "Live In Heaven"

Hendrix was riffing with St. Peter on leftie Fender Strats. He suggested that the music scene needed another insane guitar player. God created Doug Martsch. This album has a 20 minute cover of Neil Young's "Cortez the Killer." Case closed.

7. Coldplay "A Rush of Blood to the Head" (Capitol, 2002)

That first disc we tipped back in issue #10 was no fluke. These guys have the goods. They make the kind of songs – dreamy, haunting, elegiac – that Radiohead might have, if they still used instruments.

8. David Gray, "Flesh" (Virgin, 1994)

David Gray gets pissed! Yes, you read that right. The king of the sensitivo folk-rockers actually makes luvly growling noises with his voicepart. And he plays guitar. Like, electric guitar. For all you bandwagon jumpers, this is Gray's boner-fide masterpiece.

9. The Soundtrack of Our Lives "Behind the Music" (Universal, 2002)

Six Swedish guys who make kinda sorta hard rock and roll, with arrangements that range from Beatles power ballads to Pink Floyd space jams. Yeah, I know. Swedes and rock and roll. Not exactly a legacy of trust. But these guys deliver the meat and the balls.

10. Sondre Lerche "Faces Down" (Astralwerks, 2002)

Can we just collectively admit that Beck's new album sucks? God, what a boring musical document. Fortunately, Leche is picking up the slack in the lazy-rock arena. True, he's Norwegian and about twelve years old. But he seems to realize that pop music is supposed to have some pop.

All right my pretties, this one's in the ditches.

For back issues of The Tip, attach naked photos of self. Or check out [stevenalmond.com](http://stevenalmond.com).

Hate the game, not the player,

sa

**The Tip**  
**The Dirty Dozenth**  
**July 4, 2002**

Yeah, yeah, I'm a raging pinko. Does this mean I can't luv America? Listen: this is greatest country on earth because it affords its citizens the right to be raging pinkos, sexfreaks, Godfreaks, cashfreaks, freakfreaks. We are some lucky sumbitches. This time around, tho, how bout if we let Patriotism stand for an intolerance to human suffering. And how bout if we include all humans in that vow? And how bout if we allow the fires of compassion to bank our souls?

I do believe this music will help.

1. Ike Reilly, "Salesmen & Racists" (Universal, 2002)

I bought this one for Huggybear down in Memph-ass and he's been taking the junk intravenously ever since. Reilly is one of those rare talents who can rock a phat melody with the proper punk brutality. "Commie Drives a Nova" is six times cooler than anything Lou Reed ever wrote. Pissed off? Good. Go buy the record.

2. Chuck Prophet, "No Other Love" (New West, 2002)

Prophet makes music so sly and beautiful that women tend to undress under his influence. Men too. (This is true. I have seen this.) Just a natural response to the atmosphere, which is drunk with pleasures -- bluesy Strat, wurlitzer, lap steel, strings, patient rhythms. Give this one to that foxy neighbor and keep the binoculars handy. Hey, it's a Summertime Thing.

3. Citizen Cope, "Citizen Cope" (Dreamworks, 2002)

I like that this guy Cope never seems to be in any kind of hurry. In fact, he sings like he might be medicated, which I like even more. His songs are hypnotic soul ballads goosed up with hip hop beats. They are more than appropriate for copulation, though entirely pleasureable in a solo context.

4. Phantom Planet, "The Guest" (Epic, 2002)

If you're finally over the whole Strokes mishagoss, you might could check out this disc, which is packed with hyper pop gems and haunting ballads. The band members look to be all of 15 years old, but they write pure songs in the Beatles mold. (Starfucker bonus points: the kid from Rushmore, Jason Schwartzman, bangs the skins.)

5. David Baerwald, "Here Comes the Folk Underground" (Lost Highway, 2002)

A dozen years back, Baerwald turned out "Bedtime Stories" one of the great rock albums of the Eighties. Thanks to the fucknuts in corporateville, that disc is nigh impossible to find. But the new one is full of joyous sounds, the clang of guitars, the hoot of hammonds, and Baerwald's sweet raspy voice. Out July 16.

6. Frank Black & the Catholics, "Black Letter Days" (Spinart, 2002)

Lowdown dirty folkblues from the most talented ex-punker alive. There's 18 tracks here and they're all solid. The mood is exuberant and dour, by turns, but always rich with harmony. Plus: the guy covers the same Tom Waits song, twice. Balls. (Black's other new disc, "Devil's Workshop," also rocks.) Both out in August.

7. Special Guest Tip from Howie "Chicken Fat" Cohen:  
The Pernice Brothers, "Overcome By Happiness" (SubPop, 1998)  
& "The World Won't End" (Ashmont, 2001)

Came cross this band completely by accident and can't stop listening to them. Truly inebriating pop music behind some of the most bummed-out lyrics you've come across since those ones you wrote in high school about whatshername. (Told ya you'd forget her.) Joe Pernice's gorgeous melodies and breathy vocals hit you square in the ear.

8. Telsa, "Five Man Acoustical Jam" (Geffen, 1990)

Stop laughing. Tesla might have been dumb as toast, but they forged an entirely new genre: roots metal. No other way to explain the chugging chord progression of "Comin' Atcha Live," which breaks down into a honky tonk cover of "Truckin.'" Nor the lengthy, shivering piano intro to "Paradise," which sounds like a Brahms minuet. If you took Bon Jovi and multiplied them by Wilco, this disc would still wipe the floor with whatever resulted.

9. V-Roys, "All About Town" (Sugar Hill, 1997)

Guaranteed to cure any lingering cases of hick deficit. Scott Miller leads his posse on a joyous little Appalachian hayride, with detours into pop and southern-fried folk. "Ariane" has the purtiest three-part harmony since the Von Trapps serenaded the Alps.

10. Special Guest Tip from the soon-to-be-newlywelded Petey Keats:  
Mofro, "Blackwater" (Fog City Records, 2001)

The Big Ruskie weighs in heavy on dis disk. Whatup? Rock and roll, boys and girls. Smoky piano, plenty of lectric guitar, and thumpy bass. Bring your superboombox to the beach, crank it up and watch the crowds gather round. Check the Grease-quotient on Florida -- "It's like watchin' someone you know die slow, yeah, they're killin' her one piece at a time." Right on.

Alright peeps, I done my thang, you do yours.  
R&RWSYL,  
sa

For back issues of the Tip, check [www.stevenalmond.com](http://www.stevenalmond.com)

## **The Tip**

**11**

**2/2002**

So then she goes: Where's the Tip? Did it just stop or something?

And I'm all like: No.

So she goes: Cuz people are all like saying you just bagged out on it.

And I'm all like: Do you even understand what kind of pressure I'm under here?

There's millions of people out there listening to Creed every day, mama. Russell Crowe's ass cheeks just got nominated for another Oscar. And we're one Cheez-It away from the King of the Bongo Bong seizing the keys to the Nukes. So if you want me to find the cure, it's going to take some time, okay? You think I just pull these discs outta my ass?

So she goes: Isn't that what you usually do?

### **1. Danya Kurtz**

Postcards from Downtown

(Kismet 2001)

Absolute torch and croon. Missus Kurtz makes big, beautiful tunes soaked in accordian and Sinatra. This is music for the deep latitudes of sex and woe. As for the vocce -- she don't got pipes, she's got a hookah. (Bonus points for bringing Richie Havens back from the dead.)

### **2. Nikka Costa**

Everybody Got Their Something

(Virgin 2001)

While it is true that Ms. Costa displays her lovely little boobies in the CD booklet ... and while it is further true that this somewhat predisposes me toward a favorable response to her album ... it must also be said that even without said boobies, I would want to hump this woman's leg. Don't blame me. She's the one shaking the steak.

### **3. Neko Case & Her Boyfriend**

Furnace Room Lullabye

(Bloodshot 2001)

The most lethally gorgeous alto in the whole alt-country barnyard, plus a posse of twangcore homeys keepin it real. I'm considering getting into a long, disastrous relationship (okay: ANOTHER long, disastrous relationship) just so I can listen to this LP when it all goes to shit.

### **4. Doughty**

Skittish

(Must order this disc at [www.com](http://www.com))

Ever wonder what Soul Coughing woulda sounded like without all the jazz low-end and fancy schmancy samples? They woulda sounded like this: melodic, literate, hypnotic. Doughty covers the hell outta Mary J. Blige's "Real Love." How's that for stoness?

5. The Scabs

Freebird

(Shockarama)

Don't be so stingy with your pingy. Those wise enough to have purchased the Bob Schneider joint "Lonelyland," (Tip 10) will want this fattie, too. The Scabs are a nine-piece funk-nortena crew, with Schneider doing his belt-and-coo upfront, making all the girls go creamy.

6. Gil Scott-Heron

Greatest Hits

(Arista 1984)

Alright: Take Public Enemy and make them lots smarter. Add a big ole dollop of Sly Stone in riot gear. Sprinkle in the incandescent trill of Brian Jackson's flute, severe polyrhythms, and a big shiny spoonful of clavinet. Shake. Serve cool. This is the smartest music ever to make you shake like that. "Winter in America" is the most beautiful musical document ever to tell the whole truth about our country.

7. Scapegoatwax

Okeeblow

(Grand Royal 2001)

Straight Outta Chico. Melodic hip hop with serious soul overtones from some dewd named Marty James. He's not afraid to write big, sappy pop songs. Nor to mix them in such a way that they one feels inspired to star in one's own dance video. I go girl.

8. The La's

The La's

(1990 Go! London)

What the hell ever happened to these blokes? They produced, like, twelve of the finest brit pop jingles in the history of the Empire. The musical equivalent of a master safe cracker: two and a half minutes and they're in. Don't go back to Doledrum.

9. Rikki Lee Jones

Live at Red Rocks

(Island 2001)

Lady babies in the house (wha-wha)! Yeah, I know. But since you already own the debut and Pirates, check out the live jammy. All the old hits nicely jacked up and grooved down, plus a nine-minute cover of "Love Will Bring You Back Alive," with Lyle Lovett. Yes it will.

10. Nextmen

Amongst the Madness

(Ark75 2000)

Been some lean days for the hip hop nation. I know cuz I'm out there listening to the caca. Everyday. So check this out: big hooks, luscious key fills, smooth flow, and the necessary dampbampbamp. And yes, regrettably ... check the cheapie bins.

\*Remember to Tip those you love, by forwarding to those who care.

\*Show me the love by sending Guest Tips

\*If'n you want details on the book, the tour, or the pending obscenity charges, check out [stevenalmond.com](http://stevenalmond.com). (Please stop laughing).

Put my money on a longshot and came out smelling like a dog,  
sa

**The Tip**  
**Issue 10**  
**Rocktober, 2001**

A tough time for the heart, these days of woe and hatred. Let us remember then, as the rhetoric of war abounds, that actual people dying is nothing but grief. Grief and more grief.

As to these new songs, let them be a balm...

1. Bob Schneider  
"Lonelyland"  
(Universal 2001)

It ain't easy being this greasy. This is the most exciting record I've heard in about, oh, ever. Roots rock with slinky beats, ripping chords, and a whole load yummy of vintage keyboards. You cross breed Tom Waits, Springsteen and Sly Stone and this is what you get. No lie. Get high.

2. Scott Miller  
"And Thus Always to Tyrants"  
(Sugar Hill 2001)

An absolute drop-dead gorgeous disc. Miller does the Confederate jigs, southern power pops, and religious hymns with equally sure footing. He's got a tenor that'll make you weep for all them shoeless boys lost at Vicksburg.

3. Angelique Kidjo  
"Keep on Moving, The Best of..."  
(Columbia 2001)

Luscious afro-pop from the queen of the scene. Kidjo knows how to weave the incandescence of African harmonies with the low-down thump of hip hop. Her cover of "Voodoo Chile, Slight Return" is pure sexual jujitsu.

4. Marc Ribot Y Los Cubanitos  
Muy Divertido!

(Atlantic, 2000)

Latin jazz with just enough soul to keep the hips oiled. Ribot played gee-tar for Tom Waits for years, so he knows how to rip off the notes, when called upon. This ain't exactly Santana crashing the Buena Vista Social Club. But it ain't exactly not that, either.

5. Marah

Kids in Philly

(E Squared, 2000)

Big fuzzy white-boy R&B from a randy bunch of Philtown Catholics. Think early Stones, minus the Brit tude. Any band that namechecks Rocky Balboa and Reet Petite in the same song deserves your money.

6. David Garza

Overdub

(Atlantic 2001)

Atmospheric power pop for the devoted cross-cultural wimp.

Guilty as charged, officer.

Now can I dance?

7. Ben Folds

“Rockin the Suburbs”

(Epic 2001)

As a devoted key-whore, I been wanting to pimp Mr. Folds fer years. (His first two discs are essentials). Now that he's flying solo, there's no doubt. The man is the slacker Liberace. Kiss his ring.

Special Guest Tip from Mr. Pat Flood:

Floodie swears by Ryan Adam's new platter “Gold.” His cult members have been expecting big thangs from the former Whiskeytown frontman. With this mix of countrified rockers and ballads, they are no longer waiting.

8. Lilac Time

Lilac 6

(2001)

Sweet mersy pop from a long-admired, but rarely seen trio. These are songs for the David Gray set: quiet, tinkling, hypnotic in their own quiet way. There's also some strange and luvly instrumentals floating about.

9. Manu Chao

Esperanza

(Ark 21, 2001)

Yeah, I know, it's almost the same album as last time out. That's why it's on here. Gyp-hop rulz.

10. Tom Waits

“The Heart of Saturday Night”

(Yes, it’s been that long)

Let’s put a new coat of paint on this tired old town. Set up, we’ll be knocking em down. You wear a dress, babe, and I’ll wear a tie. We’ll laugh at that old bloodshot moon in that burgundy sky.

Just add piano.

\*Remember to Tip those you love by forwarding selectively.

\*For back issues of The Tip, attach naked photos of self.

\*And yes, The Tip is still on the air, Thursdays, 3-5 pm (WMFO 91.5). You can tune in at [www.wmfo.org](http://www.wmfo.org).

Still Serving as My Own Private Dancer,

S

### **The Tip**

**Number 9, Number 9, Number 9**

**June, 2001**

Summer has come. Run naked. Escape.

1. Geggy Tah -- Into the Oh

(Luaka Bop, 2001)

God Bless the wimpy and the rhythmic. God bless the drumloop and the natural tenor. God bless the soulful melody and the dreamy lyric. God Bless Geggy Tah.

2. Rehab -- Southern Discomfort

(Epic, 2000)

Hank Williams in the hood. Mad country songlines with phat beats and hilariously idiotic lyrics, from the world’s stupidest geniuses. I play this disc for my peeps and they go: wuh? In a good way. Rehab makes Kid Rock sound like gravel.

3. The Bicycle Thief -- You Come and Go Like a Pop Song

(Artemis Records, 2001)

What Pavement might sound like if they actually gave a shit. Gorgeous, melodic power pop from the dude who used to front Thelonious Monster. I don’t even know who Thelonious Monster is. But I can tell you this: you won’t find a lovelier pure rock record this year.

4. The Murder Ballads

(Reprise, 1996)

The most beautiful disgusting record on earth. Cave’s got the voice of a murderer, dank and bottomless, and the arrangements are haunting -- tinkling piano and syncopated

percussion. The new Cave platter is gorgeous, as well. But for those with the stomach, this is his masterpiece.

5. Papa Mali -- Thunder Chicken  
(Fog City Records, 1999)

Louisiana hoo-doo swamp funk. Big Papa likes to drink and likes to eat and makes joyous, ass-shaking, and (somehow) mellow sounds on his gee-tar. Chunky keys. Extra crispy drumsticks. Electronically stereotized. Yum yum.

6. Joe Henry -- Scar  
(Mammoth, 2001)

The most compelling musician in America today. Period. They don't even have a name for what Henry does. The songs are dense, moody, groove-driven and utterly hypnotic. The supporting cast includes Marc Ribot, Me'shell Ndegeocello and Ornette Coleman. I rest my case.

Special Guest Tip from Mr. Lad Tobin:  
Galactic -- Late for the Future

"Four improbably funky young white guys and one middle-aged black lead singer right out of the 60s soul scene. (Their first two CDs are also in my top ten.)"

7. Abra Moore -- Strangest Places  
(Arista, 1997)

Good-time alt-country pop from an Austin homegirl. The cool thing about Moore is that she knows how to load the sonic deck: lots of tasty steel guitar, hurdy gurdy organ, washboard, harmonica, timbales, melodeon. (Timbales?)

8. Geoffrey Oryema -- Exile  
(Real World, 1990)

Oryema is a Ugandan exile who plays something called the thumb piano. I don't know what a thumb piano is. But I do know that his songs make me feel like I'm standing behind a waterfall. Brian Eno lends a hand on the boards and Peter Gabriel sings backup vocals.

9. Jon Cleary -- Moonburn  
(Pointblank, 1999)

A grizzled New Orleans piano player whose songs woogie right down the fault-line between soul and R&B. Cleary's voice is thick and gnarled. He could be a poster boy for the American Cancer Association. That's a compliment.

10. Fela Kuti -- The Best of the Best of Fela Kuti  
(Shanachie, 1997)

Go get your drink on and your smoke on and go find someone to poke on. Then put this sick record on. Or no -- wait a minute. Reverse that. Kuti plays 18 minute afro-space-rock jams. He is the new God of my bedroom.

The Tip is now broadcasting Wednesday 3-5 pm, on WMFO (91.5, Medford). If you want a show dedicated to your own sexy self just ask.

For back issues of The Tip, attach naked photos of self.

**The Tip  
(Is You Ate)  
March, 2001**

Greed is back. He who dies with the most toys wins. And soon, Praise Be, those toys will be handed down tax-free. How very fuedal. How very pre-Enlightenment. Jesus, one suspects, would be proud.

Still: there is music, music in its twirling gowns of mercy. And, for all the frigid discontent of this winter, the harvest has been exceptional. So these are them, the Tunes of Wrath. If all goes as planned, they will flush your body with hope and a need to love that can't be handed down or taken away.

1. Hobex -- Back in the 90s  
(Slash, 1999)

Outrageously yummy spunk (soul/pop/funk) from a North Carolina trio. Most discs take a few listens to hit home. This one is insta-joy. Just Add Ass. Warning: two friends have already tried to steal my loaner copy.

2. The Gabe Dixon Band -- More Than It Would Seem  
(Self-released, 2000)

What happens when someone hits Billy Joel with a funky stick? Gabe Dixon happens. This music is half-cool Ben Folds piano mayhem and half high-octane Piano Man pleasure. Piano. Sax. Bass. Drums. (Alto sax, yet.) I am loathe to use the word irrepressible, which is best reserved for the blurbwhores, but this guy Dixon, I mean, he's ... unstoppable.

3. Will Hoge -- Carousel  
(Self-released, 2000)

Took me three spins for the melodies to take up residence in my brainpan. Hoge just out and out rocks. He rocks like Springsteen rocks: straight-ahead, hard, and from the heart. "Rock and Roll Star" makes me bang my head, many times, in quick succession. God, that feels good.

4. Ilya Kuriyaki and the Valdarramas -- Leche  
(Universal, 1999)

The money shot album of the year. Argentinian pimp funk produced by Bootsy Collins. That bad news is that this platter is a suitable soundtrack for a pornographic film. That's also the good news.

5. Tim Easton -- The Truth About Us  
(New West Records, 2000)

How good is Tim Easton? Put it this way: Wilco is his backing band. The fare runs from gentle rootsy anthems to power-waltzes to quiet little numbers that make the chest go *ungabungabunga*. Special shout-out to Princeheads. Easton worships him and it shows.

6. Shelby Lynne -- I Am Shelby Lynne  
(Island, 1999)

It sounds sappy at first, like Dusty Springfield with a Nashville facelift. But what it is, actually, is music thick with the old moods of love and booze. Strings, horns, organs. Big weepy charts. When Shelby starts crooning about Alabama in her french patois, I want to climb in her mouth and live there.

7. Manu Chao -- Clandestino  
(Ark21, 1998)

Bona-fide whacked out Gyp Hop. Spanish gee-tar, tri-lingual raps, phat beats and weird traffic sounds, all mixed into these little swirling three-minute gems. Dick Cheney listens to "King of the Bongo Bong" every single night.

8. Shawn Mullins -- Beneath the Velvet Sun  
(SMG, 2000)

A little squinty-eyed dude with a gravelly monotone and a whole fleet of tasty licks. He works a vibe that manages to leach the treacle off Nashville and suck the rust off Hotlanta. Lotsa mandolin and Hammond B-3. Plus, as a special bonus, a duet with Shelby Lynne that will put shivers on yer shingles.

9. Various Artists, The Best of International Hip-Hop  
(Hip-O, 2000)

It's quite scary to hear Austrians rapping. But this kind of thing is bound to happen. The Tip tracks here are way cooler than anything on U.S. airwaves. A bunch of Japanese homeys calling themselves K-Dub Shine completely slay me, as do the Romanian collective Parazitii. As for Nuuk Posse: they rap Greenland-stylee, including samples of whales and throat-singing. How's that for keeping it real?

10. Shuggie Otis -- Inspiration Information  
(Luaka Bop, 2001)

Tripped out R&B jams that sound miles ahead of anything released in the past ten years, though the Shugster recorded this disc in 1974. Shades of Marvin and Curtis in the sexy soul vibe, but with a much broader sonic palette. "Aht Uh Mi Hed" should win the Nobel Prize in Whomp.

R U Nu to The Tip? Do you want the Master Tip (that's all eight back issues -- plus the veggie dicer -- for the price of none). Just ask.

Remember to Tip those you love by forwarding ... selectively.

Yes, The Tip is still on the air, Wednesdays from 12:30 to 2 pm (WMFO 91.5). You can tune in at [www.wmfo.org](http://www.wmfo.org).

Go forth and rise to the occasion of your own hearts,  
s

### **The Tip #7 December, 2000**

Hollywood pimped the Grinch. Fratboy Shrub stoled the White House. And here in Somerville, the Santa lights are soon to paint the snow in tinsel. Yep, time to crank up that gift-giving voodoo that we do so well.

The angry little Tip Elf recommends:

1. Martin Sexton  
"Wonder Bar"  
(Atlantic)

What happens when the voice of angel meets the devil's backbeat? Sexton rocks "Purple Rain" as his encore in concert. And he makes Prince sound like Wayne Newton. Ow.

2. R.L. Burnside  
Wish I Was in Heaven Sitting Down  
(Fat Possum)

Like going clubbing in a warehouse of truth. Burnside sings about very bad shit in a voice made weary by same. The melodies whiz 'n groove. "Bad Luck City" is the single most beautiful piece of art I've heard this year. When RL soars into falsetto, I want to kiss him on the mouth.

3. Pocketsize  
"100% Human"  
(Atlantic)

Forget the Eurothymics, okay? The chick singer here has a voice like Stevie Nicks, minus the witchy aftertaste. The dood supplies luscious melodies and what the kids are calling "mad loops." This is what happens when the Mersey sound aims bouyant rather than self-pitying.

4. Everlast

Eat at Whitey's  
(Tommy Boy)

Stop calling him a rapper. Cuz he ain't. He's made this strange and wonderful leap into -- geez, what to call it? Blues hop, maybe. Rhythm & Funk. Genuine musical artistry. Chicken scratch gettar. Boom-chicka-thump. Gospel washes. "Black Coffee" sounds like Sam Cooke, for God's sake.

5. Crowded House  
Live in New York '87  
(Livestorm)

Some Italian company recorded Australia's finest in their prime. The result is eighteen songs including a cover of "Anarchy in the UK." I shit you not. Find it.

6. Coldplay  
Parachutes  
(Parlaphone)

Depressed lead singer. Crystalline tenor. Hypnotic, swirling songlines. A certain fragile religiousity. This is where Radiohead was trying to get to with their latest disc.

7. David Wilcox  
What You Whispered  
(Vanguard)

Forget all those earnest sensitivos singing about birch fires. This is the kind of folk with drum loops and creepy, paranoid insights. If you're going to buy a single folk album this, um, lifetime, make it this sucker.

8. Marvin Gaye  
Every Great Motown Hit of Marvin Gaye  
(Let me guess ... Motown?)

The other night, the Big Ruskie noted one consistency across the Tip pantheon: "All the albums you recommend are fuck music." Yes, well, glad you caught up with the program, Rusk. Next.

9. Beth Hart  
Screaming for My Supper  
(Lava/Atlantic)

She sure is. And loud. This chick is what Sheryl Crow would sound like if she quit hitting the steroids so hard. Nice, rowdy chick-belted with a dash of the urban blues. She hates LA, bless her.

10. Fastball  
The Harsh Light of Day  
(Hollywood)

Pop goes the weasel cuz the weasel goes pop. You know me. Sucker for those three-part harmonies and bubbling hooks. Besides, Billy Preston plays on this disc. "Whatever Gets You On" is the official national anthem of my bedroom.

The Tip is now broadcasting Tuesdays, 2-4 pm, on WMFO (91.5, Medford). I am given to understand that, for the technologically inclined, the station streams live on the Internet.

So multi-media it's sick,  
s

For back issues of The Tip, attach naked photos of self.

**The Tip**  
**Issue #6**  
**September, 2000**

Lookit: Seasonal Affect Disorder is coming down the pike. Don't be a victim. Arm yourself.

1) Jeb Loy Nichols  
"Lover's Knot"  
(Capitol)

I postively cannot believe I hain't dropped the tip on this disc earlier. Big oversight. Nichols writes songs that completely defy gridification. I can only say that they are extraordinarily beautiful and melliflous and feel sort of southern, I guess, but in the way of Georgia peaches or sweet corn, not hick gothicism or racial guilt.

2) Kevin Gordon  
"Down to the Well"  
(Shanachie)

Take Steve Earle's last three records, add up all your favorite songs, and they still don't equal this sucker. Gordon is that good. His cover of Earl King Johnson's "Time for the Sun to Rise" makes me want to go to church and testify. Yikes.

3) Roy Ayers  
"Evolution"  
(Polydor)

The man played vibes and wore silk pajamas in concert. Can you rock it like that? If we could have maybe just gotten Ronald Reagan stoned and forced him to listen to "The Spirit of Doo Doo" we wouldn't have wound up running guns to the Contras. I'm serious.

4) Charles Mingus

“Blues and Roots”

(Atlantic)

There’s no earthly reason why you should listen to me when it comes to jazz, but I’d be remiss if I didn’t plug this wax. It’s one of the few jazz records that doesn’t make me feel like a dolt ... and that, more to the point, doesn’t make me want to howl “Louie Louie” at the top of my lungs.

5) Everclear

“Scenes From an American Movie...”

(Capitol)

Yeah, I know, they only play three chords. The lead singer’s a tool with a bad dye job. And so on. But this platter is some kind of freakish quantum leap. The songs are big, bright, poppy, and totally unstoppable. Like Motown hopped up on nitro. You’re just going to hafta trust me on this one.

6) Silvia Torres

“Silvia Torres”

(Bati Macumba)

So I’m in Tower Records the other day, doing my retail therapy, and this song comes on, some kind of ridiculously catchy lilting Brazilian thang, with those little *shiki shiki* egg shakers and a bajo sexto to beat the band and this chick whose voice just makes me want to rub myself against a counter. So, I mean, you figger it out.

7) Morphine

“The Night”

(Rykodisc)

Lead singer and songwriter Mark Sandman up and died (onstage, no less ... his heart attacked him) subsequent to recording this dish. It’s the band’s finest since “Cure for Pain,” which, if there’s any justice, you already own. Deeply, darkly, truly, madly sexy music. Two-string Bass. Drums. Sax. Sandman has -- or, uh, okay, had -- a rumbler like Leonard Cohen and a thing for hypnotic riffs.

8) Willard Grant Conspiracy

Mojave

Slow River

If you’re going to buy one vaguely depressing country/roots disc this year... make it “Mojave”! How’s that for a blurb? But cereal, dudes, this is a a wonderfully low-key lamentation kind of vibe. It’s music to lick wounds by, though I find the laconic arrangements strangely comforting. Like spacing out after a long, somewhat perilous hike.

9) Serge Gainsbourg

Comic Strip

(Mercury)

Shoutouts to Shane Dubowsky, of Chicago, who utzed me into buying this joint. Gainsbourg is an extremely ugly French man (makes sense, no?) who recorded about 7000 records in the late Sixties, full of sly dirty little pop songs with hooks to beat your brains in. Bonus points: he gets Bridget Bardot to make strange, hiccupy sounds in the background. Vive la weird.

10) Mark Curry  
“It’s Only Time”  
Virgin

I still don’t know how Mark Curry get lost. He makes smart bluesy rock in the Chris Whitley vein and has a band that’s capable of dispensing the necessary ass-stomping when called on. Available, sadly, in the cheapie bins.

There’s been some apparent confusion among you all as to how best use the Tip. Here’s my advice for busy people:

- 1) Print the Tip
- 2) Go to a big chain record store with a good return policy. Buy all the discs that sound interesting.
- 3) Go home and listen to each record THREE TIMES. Not once. Not twice. Three times.
- 4) Return the ones that don’t float your boat.
- 5) Note to the poor/frugal: most of these records are available (and cheaper) at used disc stores. So you can also use your friendly corporate chain as a de facto listening station.

Okey dokey folkies. Go forth and dance.

- Don’t forget to Tip your friends. Forward at your discretion.
- For back issues of the Tip, attach naked photo of self.

**The Tip**  
**Issue #5**  
**Around May, 2000**

There were some rumblings as to the effect that my Tips have become too mainstream, veering in the unfortunate direction of the commercial. So, just to make sure that all you weasely elitists out there are still with me, I’m recommending albums so obscure, so completely *off the grid* that they can only be found with the aid of a purchasing agent fluent in Ladino.

Forward only to the most weasely of your elitist friends.

1. **Kazik**

12 Groszy  
(SP Records)

Polish hip hop interspersed with folksongs. Cool groove and, not only that, it *rocks*. Recorded in some underground bunker in Warsaw. Kazik is a genius. And anyone who can track this record down should consider themselves the next coming of Lester Bangs.

## 2. **Wasis Diop**

No Sant  
(Mercury France)

I don't even know where Diop is from. Senegal, I think. He makes beautiful, moody music with a ridiculous array of instruments (bagpipes, Chinese opera vocals, rappers, kora, talking drum and so on).

## 3. **Virginia Rodrigues**

Sol Negro  
(Hannibal)

A Brazillian diva who can just flatout sing. A lot of this is balladeering you just shouldn't listen to, at all, if your anywhere close to heartbreak.

## 4. **Slim Gilliard**

Laughing in Rhythm: Best of the Verve Years  
(Verve)

Okay, just very silly and wonderful music. Funny jazz. (Funny jazz?) A wonderful respite from the self-serious bleatings of bebop et al. Gilliard created his own language. Boip! Boip! Floy floy. Babalu Orooney. He makes me want to dance in circles and make chicken noises.

## 5. **The Origin**

The Origin  
(Virgin)

My favorite album for the entire year of 1990. Shimmering pop in the latter day Beatles mode. Lots of highly infectious organ riffs and harmonies. (Note to hipsters: this one is going to be near impossible to find, I suspect, but worth the hunt. Promise.)

## 6. **Dean Fraser**

Big Up  
(Island Jazz)

Reggae? I really don't like reggae that much. So how to explain my infatuation with this record? Dunno. The songs are all, like, eight minutes long. Fraser is this big fat dude who plays tenor and alto sax. The songs just sort of noodle around and get themselves stuck in my brainpan.

## 7. **Goat's Head Soup**

Rolling Stones

(More Money Than God)  
The best record the Stones ever recorded.  
What?  
You don't have it?  
I'm positively shocked. I thought you were so ... hip.

#### **8. Acoustic Junction**

Live  
(Planet Records)

At their best, a melding of Van Morrison, the Waterboys, and the Dead. There's a bit of earnest, folksy excess on this disc, a bit of jam band noodling. But mostly, swell instrumentation and lush melodies.

#### **9. James McMurtry**

It Had to Happen  
(Sugar Hill)

One of the great, unsung songwriters of our age. His tracks are gorgeous portraits of life just a beat behind happiness. If you like any of those Texas songwriters, or Prine, you should pick this up.

#### **10. The The**

Dusk  
(Epic)

Some very wonderful copulation music. (What tip would be complete without it?) Lusty and atmospheric and lush and Johnny Mar plays on the damn thing so just go buy it.

For back issues of the tip, attach naked photos of self.

**The Tip**  
**(What's Your) Issue #4**  
**Februaryish, 2000**

Settle down. Nobody's forgotten anyone.

Music is still the food of life, though a good many of you seem to be tearing through your lives on half-empty stomachs. Saylavee.

Considered a cheeseball Valentine's Day issue. But all music is love, right? Or do I have that backwards?

1. Chuck Prophet ("The Hurting Business" Hightone)

More of this urban groove meets roots stuff. The soulful melodies don't grab you till the second time through or so; then they don't let go. Can't get this one off my crapass CD player.

2. Robert Bradley and the Blackwater Surprise ("Time to Discover" RCA)

Brought an advance copy of this sucker (out in March) to my poker game. It was appropriated. Brought a second copy. Appropriated. This is just one of those discs that people, um, appropriate. Relaxed, sexy music.

3. Sekou Sundiata ("Longstoryshort" Righteous Babe)

The guy who taught Ani DiFranco and M. Doughty (of Soul Coughing) how to write poetry. Another one of those spoken word joints, but with enough gorgeous music to sell me. Bubblings blues riffs, afro-pop, jazz. Hip hop with a brain.

4. Paul Kelly ("Deeper Water" Vanguard)

Kelly is so ugly he's beautiful. He writes gorgeous songs about fucking and getting fucked over. "Deeper Water" is his masterpiece. This is another one of those discs that I don't loan out anymore.

5. David Gray ("A Century Ends" Caroline)

My pal, Tom Finkel, his lovely wife Karen heard one song by this guy on the radio, once, and went out and got all his records. That's how I got on to him. He makes extremely purty folk music that somehow rocks.

6. Special Guest Tip (From Mr. Pat Flood)

Floody says D'Angelo's new platter is sticky icky icky. Some Marvin. Some Jimi. Some Jammy. After eight years of swappin tips with the dood, I trust the Flood.

7. William Topley ("Black River" Mercury)

Big, soulful songs with a sly island lilt. Topley's gotta a cannon of a voice. (You can find this one in the cheapie bins. Proof positive that Americans, like, really dumb.)

8. Tragically Hip ("Road Apples" MCA)

This is the best hard rock album I know. Bluesy, lousy with hooks, amped, hysterical, beguiling. In that order. If the Rolling Stones still had any, they'd be making this kind of stuff.

9. Tommy Womack ("Stubborn" Sideburn Records)

Steve Earle with a sense of humor. Rough hewn and weird and cool. Sort country, sorta rock and roll. Got some clunkers, but the good stuff is gold.

10. Patty Griffin ("Living With Ghosts" A&M)

This woman just takes the idea of chick music and tears it a new asshole. It's just her and a guitar, and anything more would be superflous. Man she can sing. Man.

Wanna offer a guest tip? That's cool.

In fact, you know, that's what it's all about.

Out like a dot.com without a media budget,

sa

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**December 5, 1999**

**The Tip – Isyou #3:**

November fell by the side, a pageant of cloud and gluttony. But I'm not one to fuck with the spirit of Kwanza. Here they are, the next big somethings, the new models, the happy stupid glorious notes and beats. And here's to the hope that love, that dumb longshot of the heart, might still become a revolutionary force.

1. Bap Kennedy -- "Domestic Blues" (1998)

Everybody I've lent this album won't give it back. Bap is Ireland's Steve Earle. Earle himself manned the boards, co-wrote, plays some. Whiskey. Gravel.

2. Dag "Apartment 635" (1998)

One of the great, overlooked funk discs of the era is Dag's 1996 debut, "Righteous." This second platter is even more funkalicious. Such joy as will be yours by track three.

3. Shivaree -- "I Oughtta Shot You in the Head For Making Me Live in This Dump" (1999)

Torch songs and bossa novas for those of us who enjoy Tom Waits and Rikki Lake. Spooky and beautiful in the way of carnivals. Joe Henry produced most of these songs in his backyard.

4. Leonard Cohen -- "More Best of" (1997)

This is not old school Cohen, mired in the earnest gloom of melody. This is new whizbanged stuff. It throbs and bubbles. It suits the act of love. Cohen's rumble has grown only more arresting.

5. A-2 "Exile on Cold Harbour Lane" (1997)

Country techno? Can such a genre exist? What happens to blues-roots when they get looped through a rave? The musical equivalent of Ecstasy.

6. Chris Whitley "Living with the Law" (1991)

Those of you who know Mr. Chris will be saying: Yes, you ninny, what took you sooo long? What indeed? Whitley's compositions are all haze and sinew. His voice is something along the spectrum of truth.

7. Van Morrison "The Philosopher's Stone" (1998)

Sure, he's a dwarfish pock-faced paranoid. But he left more masterpieces on the studio floor than most decades ever produce. Whether you're just starting out, or deep into the slipstream, this 150-minute gig is rich gravy.

8. The Clash "From Here to Eternity" (1999)

Probably this is on here because I'm starting to feel a little soft around the giblets. Those of you on the Clashtip already have "Sandinista" (the official masterpieca). This new live disc sports some luvly rude bits and puts most of the alt-era screamers to predictable shame. Punkers who could play, who thought about the world intelligently ... imagine that.

9. Phil Cody "The Sons of Intemperance Offering" (1996)

My vote for finest cover of a Clash song ever: Cody's haunting roots take on "Straight to Hell." The rest of the platter will prickle your arm hair.

10. Beth Orton "Central Reservation"

Sometimes it drifts past and sometimes it sticks. Either way: snow.

Recently caught one of you fuckers complaining about a selection.

"How many times you listened to the record?" I said.

"Um, once."

Go listen twice more, three times to make sure.

The ear will grow supple if you let it.

All about quality control,  
sa

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**The Tip**  
**Rocktober, 1999**  
**(Issue #2)**

Well. I told you. Or I tried to tell you. That's all we can do in these days of cultural balkan. Forget kissin. Stick with tellin.

Re: the vintage of recs ... let's just clear up that little burpfest before someone gets hurt. The Tip is attempting to establish what the buzz managers call a "collateral filtering" scenario. Less wonkishly: an aesthetic vibe. You're supposed to have listened to some of the recommended albums. That's ... the ... point. See, that way you'll realize that if The Tip likes records I already like ... then maybe the rest of the music on The Tip that I don't know ... maybe that music is worth ...

Indulge me.

Two more pointlets.

-- Listen to an album three times before making any judgments. Your ears don't hear it until then. Umkay?

-- Yes, by all means, forward The Tip. But use some common sense.

Your feedback is not only welcome. It's required.

S

1. Macy Gray "On How Life Is" (1999)

You like to have sex?

Yeah, me too.

2. Ozomatli Self-titled (1999)

Friskiest thang East LA's produced since Los Lobos. Nortena goes gangsta. Los Tigres Del Norte cross-checked by NWA. I know it sounds weird. Your ass will figure it out.

3. Joe Henry "Fuse" (1998)

The only person on earth with the good sense to merge roots with urban groove. Understand: the man built the songs from the drum loop up. By the fourth listen you'll be trying to take this record intravenously.

4. Jim White "Wrong-Eyed Jesus" (1996)

If Flannery O'Connor made music -- which I'm not saying she didn't, because, like, we've all read her music -- but if she, like, decided to head into the studio to record, this is what she would sound like. Intensely sad and strange and beautiful.

5. Elliot Smith "XO" (1998)

Sometimes you just don't want the noise, you know? You want that delicious pansy whiplash. A voice sort of burred at the edges, George Harrison's guitar. Lennon's voice. That thing.

6. Air "Moon Safari"(1998)

You know, I hate electronica. And, by and large, I hate the French. (Good bread, bad attitude). That's two strikes against this band right off. What can I say? Sometimes cotton candy tastes good.

7. Smoking Popes "Destination Failure" (1997)

Songs for the lovesick and furious. Punk croon. A cover of Anthony Newley's "Imagination." Not saying anything more.

8. Santana "Supernatural"

Yeah yeah. Forget "Oye Como Va" for a sec. Smoke some chronic. Play. Rinse. Repeat.

9. Ben Harper "Welcome to the Cruel World" (1994)

What Lenny Kravitz would be if he had a fame-scrape. Harper's voice is sad and sweet. His songlines are soulful and sure. This is a quieter effort than his subsequent albums, more purely concerned with beauty.

10. Scott Merritt "Violet and Black" (1991)

Another one from the cheapie bins. His songs say everything about the surreal loneliness of small town life. A gorgeous tremolo and the lone high whistle of the unsteady heart.

Out like an original thought on MTV,

## **ISSUE #1:**

**September 9, 99**

Dearest Homeys ...

Herein, the inaugural issue of The Tip, an extremely occasional and ridiculously elite e-mail zine in which I spill bean on the primo tunes.

Buy these discs and I can damn near guarantee that your body is going to be inspired in a manner so as to rock the party.

1. Carl Hancock Rux -- Rux Review (Sony 550, '99)

Evidence to the contrary, Gil-Scot Heron is not dead. Mensa and hip hop need no longer be antonyms. Scorching, rhapsodic, unstoppable. Hendrix. War. Barry White. What can't he do?

2. Robert Bradley and the Blackwater Surprise -- Self-Titled

You like Ray Charles? You like Stevie Wonder? You like hot fudge? His voice, like, from the Burning Bush. (Buy the RCA debut, 1997. Purchasable, sadly, from the cheapie bins).

3. Nil Lara -- Self-titled debut (Metro Blue, '96)

Big ole blast of afro-Cuban funk. Simple: Melody, rhythm, incandescence. Where has he been all your life?

4. Martin Sexton -- The American (Atlantic 1998)

What the hell is Americana, anyway? One of those new-fangled genres that don't stack to a hillobeans. Aw shaddup. It's all here: the stomp, the chomp and da whomp. Like having the Band back together, younger and less Canadian. The voice alone will floor you.

5. R.L. Burnside -- Come On In (Fat Possum '98)

He's an old drunk with no teeth! They're a pair of crazy hepcat techno producers! Together, they're doing the nasty in the kitchen with Dinah! And Dinah's getting kinda, you know, lathered. Phat as da old school gets. It'll make your thangs stand up.

6. Greg Brown -- The Live One (Red House Records, 95)

Save yourself a lot of time and money. This be the disc. Don't think of it as folk, think of it as one guy with a guitar kicking your ass sideways.

7. Soul Coughing -- Irresistible Bliss (Slash, 1996)

From the file: Musicians cleverer and funkier than you. These guys could put out bed pan and I'd buy it.

8. Robert Earl Keen -- No. 2 Live Dinner (Sugar Hill, 1996)

No, he's not Lyle Lovett. Lyle Lovett would have to get a lot better. Then he'd be Lyle Lovett. Come hang with Texas. It's a big old prairie full of story. And some sick fiddling.

9. Cafe Tacuba -- Re (WEA Latina, 1994)

The white album. Only brown. God bless Mexico.

10. Dan Bern -- Fifty Eggs (Work, 1998)

Get maaaaad at them damn eggies! And get anything by this guy. He's Lenny Bruce, only, he can't quite sing as well as Lenny Bruce. He's also uneven and obnoxious. Remember: he's maaaaad.

Numbre uno in the ditches. I've done my job. You do yours.

And all the little childrens sayeth: If music be the food of life, rock on rock on rock on...

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