

2004 was a very good year

By **ROBERT KINSLER**
SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER

As difficult as it was sitting down and spending the past several weeks revisiting the countless new releases I received in 2004, it only speaks to a wonderful and thriving O.C. music scene. Selecting the 10 best releases of the year was just short of impossible.

1. John Hoskinson, "Miscellaneous Heathen" (independent)

With the possible exception of the latest titles by U2 and Snow Patrol, no other 2004 release has enjoyed as much time in my player this year as the debut of John Hoskinson.



John Hoskinson

Armed with a voice that draws natural comparisons

to Neil Finn, Hoskinson has a knack for writing instantly memorable songs and finding the right mix of supporting players to render those tunes perfectly.

Information: www.johnhoskinson.com.

You might like if you enjoy: Crowded House, Finn Brothers, the Beatles

2. Topeka, "Land Rush" (Lopie Records) – Fletcher Harrington is among the most talented and original artists to ever call Orange County home. Harrington's latest project, Topeka, has teamed the Tustin artist's vocal and songwriting skills with the angelic voice of Tanya Livingstone (Blind Ruby) and handiwork of guitarist-keyboardist Brit Collins (Moonhead) to create a sound blending Americana roots and electronic shadings. The results are glorious. Information: www.lopie.com.

You might like if you enjoy: Gram Parsons, Wilco, Zero 7

3. Michael Ubaldini, "Avenue of Ten Cent Hearts" (Blackwater Records) – Ubaldini has increasingly been able to bring a growing number of authentic influences into his American roots sound, with his latest album blending rock, folk, country, blues, jazz and gospel around remarkable songs. Information: www.rocknrollpoet.com.



WINNERS: Fit 2-B Tied, left, defied the cliché of modern country. 9 Ball, below, waxed melodic and modern.



ORANGE POP

You might like if you enjoy: Peter Case, John Mellencamp

4. Kenny Howes, "Lady Friend" (YEAH! Records) – A dozen power-pop ditties adorned with Chuck Berry guitar licks, early Joe Jackson-styled propulsive rhythms and real-world lyrical tales. Information: www.kennyhowes.com.

You might like if you enjoy: Cheap Trick, Slade, the Who

5. 9 Ball, "Upside Down" (independent) – Melodic and modern, singer-songwriter-guitarist Tim Nienhuis, bassist Dev Torres and drummer Danny Gamboa crafted one of the most pleasing rock

albums of the year. Information: www.9ballmusic.com.

You might like if you enjoy: David Gray, Pete Yorn, Badly Drawn Boy

6. Bodie, "Terrors of the Deep" (Arthropoda Records) – The debut of Bodie is filled with songs that benefit from stirring and eclectic production. Whether fusing wonderfully somber rock with blues ("Twilights") or traditional folk ("Blood of the Goat and Black Cat Bones"), there is a powerful focus at the heart of Bodie's "Terrors of the Deep" that is far more tantalizing than terrifying. Information: www.arthropodarecords.com.

You might like if you enjoy: Radiohead, Toad the Wet Sprocket, Peter Gabriel,

MORE ONLINE

To hear samples from Robert Kinsler's choices for the top 10 local albums of 2004, go to www.ocregister.com/entertainment.

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7. Fit 2-B Tied, "Where the Rubber Meets the Road" (independent) – Mixing traditional country with rock and blues, Fit 2-B Tied defies the cliché of modern country across its captivating sophomore effort. Information: www.fit2-btied.com.

You might like if you enjoy: Pirates of the Mississippi, the Flying Burrito Brothers

8. Joe Ongie, "Critical Darling" (A Granny Vegas Record) – Anchored by clever rockers such as "Critical Darling" and "Sleepwalking World," this epic, 16-song collection was the first great CD I heard this year. Information: www.joeongie.com.

You might like if you enjoy: Elvis Costello, the Beatles' "White Album," Stan Ridgway

9. Andrewesley, "Strength"

(Marathon Records) – Shining guitar work, emotive vocals and strong songwriting are used in combination to paint an intelligent and provoking release from one-time Goforth guitarist Andrewesley on his solo debut. Information: www.marathonrecords.com.

You might like if you enjoy: Toad the Wet Sprocket, Tears for Fears, Train

10. Ball Madden, "Samsara's Grip" (Madmuse) – This is a release that recalls a number of wonderful singer-songwriters, ranging from John Lennon to Joe Strummer, who were not afraid to blend world affairs with affairs of the heart. Madden crafts songs that challenge the listener, with his "Om Tat Sat" especially in tune with today's troubled times. Information: www.billmadden.com.

You might like if you enjoy: solo John Lennon, the Replacements, the Clash

Freelancer Robert Kinsler has covered pop music for the Register since 1992.

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