

# BEST ALBUMS OF 2015

★★★★★  
**MASTERPIECES**



**TONY BENNETT & BILL CHARLAP**  
*The Silver Lining: The Songs Of Jerome Kern*  
 RPM/Columbia Records.....Dec.

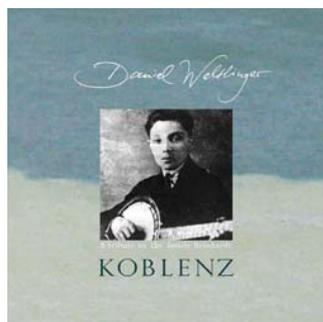
Pianist Bill Charlap and vocal legend Tony Bennett unite for a moving tribute to an icon of the Great American Songbook. Charlap's fabulous playing and Bennett's profound voice are supported by three exceptional musicians: pianist Renee Rosnes, bassist Peter Washington and drummer Kenny Washington. The resulting album is sublime.

**CURREN\$Y**  
*Pilot Talk III*  
 Jet Life .....July

This album is the third and perhaps best installment of an ongoing series of colorful and charmingly funky albums that feature instrumentals from producer Ski Beatz. Curren\$y is the main draw, a playful rapper who is hip-hop's Thelonious Monk.

**DYLAN HOWE**  
*Subterranean*  
 Motorik .....April

Dylan Howe's *Subterranean* embraces sizzling electronics and moody, time-chopping drums. The beautiful, shape-shifting album is colorful and consistently surprising, leading listeners on a journey where the destination is no more important than the ride itself. Stunning, essential.



**DANIEL WELTLINGER**  
*Koblentz*  
 Toca .....Aug.

*Koblentz* makes the case that Django Reinhardt's gypsy jazz is a close relative to klezmer. The songs on this album are an irresistible grouping of Sinti and Roma melodies, flamenco rhythms, New Orleans grooves and Eastern European flourishes. Violinist Daniel Weltlinger is a classically trained musician, but this music transcends boundaries.

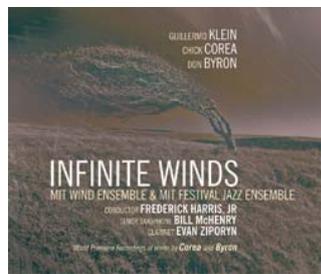
**TOM HARRELL**  
*First Impressions*  
 HighNote.....Dec.

*First Impressions* is replete with the kind of detailed and challenging ensemble writing that one usually associates with Third Stream. But trumpeter Tom Harrell has a jazzman's understanding of grooves, and his handling of texture and structure is a balm throughout this program, which reimagines themes by Debussy and Ravel.



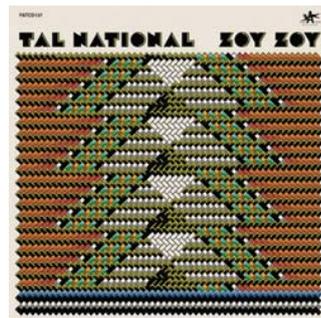
**KENDRICK LAMAR**  
*To Pimp A Butterfly*  
 Top Dawg .....July

A political commentary on racism and capitalism in America filtered through 21st-century black countercultural music, *To Pimp A Butterfly* is more prescient and ambitious than almost anything else out there. The album's massive length complements the weight of its achievement.



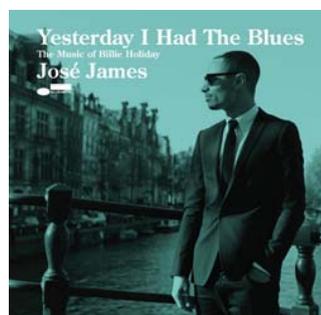
**MIT WIND ENSEMBLE & MIT FESTIVAL JAZZ ENSEMBLE**  
*Ininite Winds*  
 Sunnyside .....June

Two MIT ensembles perform with poise and conviction on demanding suites by Guillermo Klein, Chick Corea and Don Byron. The entire celebratory undertaking—world premieres, MIT's debut commercial jazz venture, exemplary playing—merits serious recognition.



**TAL NATIONAL**  
*Zoy Zoy*  
 Fat Cat .....June

Niger's Tal National is an Afrobeat institution in its homeland. *Zoy Zoy*, the band's second international release, is brilliant in its rhythmic complexity. The way this band locks together is uncommon anywhere. It takes a tremendous amount of practice and discipline for musicians to hear each other like this.



**JOSÉ JAMES**  
*Yesterday I Had The Blues: The Music Of Billie Holiday*  
 Blue Note .....May

Marking the centennial of Billie Holiday's birth, *Yesterday I Had The Blues* finds José James embodying the range of human emotions related to love, loss and desire. The smooth-toned vocalist succeeds beyond creating great music; he truly captures the essence of Holiday's spirit.

**VIJAY IYER TRIO**  
*Break Stuff*  
 ECM .....March

Critical to the success of this album is the fact that the Vijay Iyer Trio is, at its core, a working band. Positioning, flow, calibration, order—each is keenly considered here, making *Break Stuff* the trio's most compelling date so far.