



# That Nashville Sound

country music cd reviews • news & observations

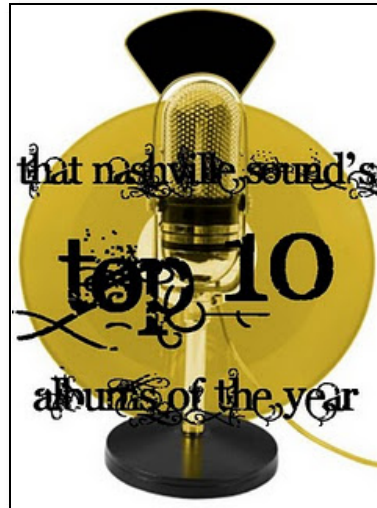


WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 28, 2011

## That Nashville Sound's Top Ten Albums of 2011

That Nashville Sound is looking back on the year behind us and thrilled to death that we live in a generation that has a near-limitless amount of music to choose from. Our favorite 2007 album was the **Alison Krauss & Robert Plant** album *Raising Sand*, the top spot on our 2008 list went to **Lee Ann Womack's** *Call Me Crazy*, 2009 went to **Eric Church's** *Carolina* and last year **Zac Brown Band's** *You Get What You Give* took home the top prize.

But 2011 had some terrific albums as well that will go down as some of my big music collection's favorites. The ten albums are a wide variety of country genres from more contemporary country to traditional country. We present to you... That Nashville Sound's Top Ten Albums of 2011...



### 10. **Jimmy Rankin** - *Forget About the World*

Rankin's solo career comes after winning awards galore in his native Canada as a member of the incredibly talented Rankin Family band. On this album, he tackles matters of seriousness and heartache with a seriousness that makes it a powerful collection. "The Hurtin' Part" shows off the diverse range of his sincere voice and is as vulnerable a lyrical delivery as any performance this year. With great musicianship as a companion, the compositions probe matters of the heart with subtle effectiveness.

### 9. **David Nail** - *Sound of a Million Dreams*

As I wrote in *Engine 145* earlier this year, the title track of Nail's brand new album, is reminiscent of the best of those memorable 1980's Billy Joel piano ballads. It's no wonder that it was co-penned by country piano man Phil Vassar. The song utilizes terrific personal imagery to illustrate how songs make a powerful tie to the memories of our life. Nail links classics by Seger, Springsteen and Haggard to specific life experiences and then wishes aloud that his voice might do the same. The rest of the album does the same. As it was on his first album, Nail goes about the building of his albums in a personal and autobiographical way that allows us to see and hear his heart.

### 8. **Stoney LaRue** - *Velvet*

Each song is given an instrumentation treatment that makes it a unique experience for the ears. Whether it is the card shuffling percussion on "Travelin' Kind," the terrific harmonica on "Sharecropper," the mariachi influence on "Te Amo Mas Que Va Vida" (I Love You More Than Life), the piccolo-ish whistle on "Wiregrass," or the drowned out CB vocal opening and blazing fiddles on "Sirens," each track is truly unique unto itself while still tying into a whole. The fact that Lee Ann Womack brings her heavenly vocals onto "Travelin' Kind" is like the cherry on top. It is the title track that steals the show on the album, however. "Velvet" closes the curtain with a lush, warm, and sensual slow number that is not overly sexual, but one of those songs that is just perfect to hold your girl to. Sarah Buxton chiming in on background vocals just adds to the heat.

### 7. **Justin Haigh** - *People Like Me*

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With a voice that consistently reminds of Tracy Lawrence, Justin Haigh's *People Like Me* delivers up an incredible collection of 12 exceptional neo-traditional songs that make it easily one of the top ten albums thus far this year. With a collection of writers on board that any artist would cross deserts for- Randy Houser, Jerrod Niemann, Bobby Pinson, Kelley Lovelace, Erv Woolsey (George Strait's manager), Mary Gauthier, and Jamey Johnson- the tracks worth mentioning are almost too many. "Monahans" and "In Jail" are detailed evocatively with a just enough humor to be stars. "All My Best Friends (Are Behind Bars), is solid country jukebox gold. Indie Texas music isn't supposed to be this good.

#### 6. **The Dirt Drifters** – *This Is My Blood*

The blue collar themes are many across the album and they're not always championed- they're celebrated and lamented equally. It creates a more believable and realistic set of lyrics- and more personable because of it. On "Hurt Somebody," the band contrast beautiful ballad harmonies with the lyrics of self-destructive love. "You use your red lipstick like a loaded gun," are indicative of the great storytelling on this and other tracks. Gunsmoke, cheap perfume and gold bands on nightstands are the props on the outstanding story-song "Married Men and Hotel Rooms." It's a fantastic tale of lust, deception and the danger of a woman scorned. The great blue-collar champion himself, Willie Nelson, makes a delicious guest star on "I'll Shut Up Now" which then leads into the killer blue collar themed "Name On My Shirt." The song opens with the belief that a name sewn on a shirt is the trigger for a cursed life filled with dirt, grease and unfulfilled dreams. As the protagonist grows older, he realizes it as a badge of honor fulfilling a family legacy through a lifestyle and employment choice. It's beautifully well-written, smart and doesn't gloss over the hardships of rural living in its storytelling.

#### 5. **Vince Gill** – *Guitar Slinger*

There are three truly phenomenal tracks on this album that will certainly go down as some of the best of the year. "Bread And Water" is the story of a homeless man—loosely based on Gill's brother—who finds a kind place to eat and more importantly, a place to save his soul. The combination of death, forgiveness, salvation and redemption is stuff Gill does so incredibly well and this song delivers big time. (Anyone who argues with this just needs to listen to "Go Rest High on That Mountain" just one time.) "Old Lucky Diamond Hotel," a delicious slice of Americana, was inspired by the razing of several classic Route 66 landmarks. It's wrapped up in great, gritty 70s country themes like losing your virginity to a sweet Spanish stripper, filtered Pall Malls, pool shooting, and raising hell as a teenager. Gill gives the hotel more admiring description in four minutes than do most newspaper stories. At the end of the song, it's hard not to lament that they're demolishing a fictional location with such character. The last song in an outstanding trio of powerhouse tunes is the first song released to radio, "Threaten Me with Heaven." This sure-fire ICM award-nominee was written by his wife Amy Grant, Dylan O'Brien, Will Owsley and Gill. Tragically, Owsley took his own life shortly thereafter and the power and emotional strength behind this song hints at something bigger at work if you're so spiritually inclined. For Gill, the delivery of this song is extremely personal and it comes through in sound.

#### 4. **Miranda Lambert** – *Four the Record*

Choosing just one favorite track off of Lambert's outstanding new *Four the Record* album is a difficult task. No one does heartbreak kiss-offs quite like her, but up until "Dear Diamond," those tracks were generally reserved for up-tempo rockers. She slows things way down here and laments to the ring on her hand that she's chosen the wrong man: "You cost more than he wanted to lose / And with this ring I said I do / Promise to never do what I've done / I've lied to someone / Dear diamond." The great twist—similar to the one she threw in at the end of "White Liar"—is that she'll swallow this bitter truth and keep it a secret between only her and the diamond. (*From Engine 145*)

#### 3. **Lori McKenna** – *Lorraine*

There may not be an I in team, but there sure is in songwriter. And therein lies the strength of Lori McKenna's new album, *Lorraine*. It's a highly introspective collection told from a powerful and personal place. She has woven a patchwork of life moments- mostly relationship-oriented ones- that are hypnotically autobiographical. McKenna has channeled her own experiences into song and brought with them all of her own hopes and dreams. The songs bathe themselves in insecurities, vulnerabilities and celebrations of life. It results in an emotional history that a listener can actually feel and hear in sound.

#### 2. **Chris Young** – *Neon*

This, Young's third album, makes up the best the second-best mainstream release of the year. "Tomorrow," "Flashlight," and "Neon" are one-word studs in song- terrifically written tracks that



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Trigger-finger syndrome or just plain nasty? Get your facts straight before you post. If you have been reading/listening to so many of her interviews, she does school online, and this is about her duet...

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##### [Anonymous wrote...](#)

Love this duet and have played it many times! Lauren is a great role model and a very smart and talented girl. She is actually a straight-A student who has said she would be a pediatrician if she...

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##### [Anonymous wrote...](#)

She is a straight "A" student, doing her class work online through her hometown school. She just happens to be a very good singer, song writer, church going, pretty, funny, and...

[Continue >>](#)

##### [Anonymous wrote...](#)

That is correct! She is doing her school online! Please get the facts before you start judging others! Lauren is the perfect role model for people of all ages! We love you Lala! Way to rock out...

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##### [Anonymous wrote...](#)

You obviously don't know anything about her :) She didn't drop out of school, she's doing her schooling online. She's pretty smart too.

##### [Kim Grant wrote...](#)

Thanks for recognizing some of the great independent releases that are out there!

##### [Anonymous wrote...](#)

Love this. Michael Grimm is amazing.

##### [rc136561 wrote...](#)

Good thing she can sing because dropping out of school won't get her a college degree.

##### [jovanb77 wrote...](#)

Simply amazing. I love it.

##### [Nashville Carpet Cleaners wrote...](#)


We lost so many great musicians this year. But their music still lives on.

#### ABOUT ME

are perfect for his voice. He's co-written seven of the tracks and the album reveals how truly gifted he is as a songwriter. Young's vocals are rich, distinctive and powerful and impart just enough emotion to rope in the listener. His deep voice combines with a production that's traditional enough to command respect from the guys and with enough vulnerability to make the ladies... well let's just say, my wife has a crush.

### 1. **Pistol Annies** – *Hell on Heels*

*Hell on Heels* is a set of ten songs that are rich in poor-redneck-women-power-empowerment that on the surface might seem like an urban vs. rural comparison that is currently cluttering up the radio airwaves right now. It's so much richer. "Beige" is the color of the bride's shotgun wedding dress and it is tender, innocent and oozes the naivety of the protagonist. "Lemon Drop" is the favorite of the album and compares the sucky early part of life where dreams and money are at opposite ends of the spectrum to the candy where you have to get through the sour part to get to the sweet. The ladies southern are phenomenal. Their sass and spitfire on "Bad Example" and "Takin' Pills" are charming as can be. And the great writing and southern charm bleeds through any redneck reservations on "Trailer For Rent" and the post-mortem free-for-all of momma's things in "Family Feud." Song after song shine with topics told from fascinatingly flawed characters. They've taken subjects that are typically associated with backwoods mentality and told stories with wit and grit that are smart as hell.

Posted by That Nashville Sound at 6:00 AM 

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Labels: Chris Young, David Nail, Jimmy Rankin, Justin Haigh, Lori McKenna, Miranda Lambert, Pistol Annies, Stoney LaRue, The Dirt Drifters, The Rankin Family, The Top Tens, Vince Gill, Year End List

## 5 comments:

### Anonymous said...

Thanks for your list and insight. As usual your taste is impeccable. I would include George Strait's album on that list as well. Just a personal opinion.

December 28, 2011 7:05 AM

### Blake said...

Great list. We only share 4/10, but most if not all of these albums would be in my Top 20. I think Chris Young is going to be an important part of country music for a long time, but I wish I liked the album a little more. Still one of the better mainstream releases of the year.

December 28, 2011 7:10 AM



### That Nashville Sound said...

Blake, you and I have always had very similar tastes in music. I always track down ones you give thumbs up to if I don't already have them.

December 28, 2011 8:52 AM

### Blake said...

Should probably send you a list of ones I changed my mind on then. Ha.

December 28, 2011 11:39 AM

### vjjasper said...

I love Chris Young's Album Neon. Anyone that doesn't is well.....nuts! Certifiable! He could sing the phone book and make it sound good!

December 28, 2011 2:42 PM

## Post a Comment



### That Nashville Sound

My name is Ken Morton, Jr and a passion about country music and its culture

is what this site is all about. Artists and PR agencies interested in providing music to be reviewed can send press releases and CD's to:

That Nashville Sound  
2727 Genesee Drive  
Rocklin, CA 95765  
or thatnashvillesound @  
hotmail.com. A friend once told me that "country music is an entire novel written in three minutes. It's a Broadway show in three minutes. It's an entire lifetime in three minutes. A great country song can be a guiding post for someone's life." Thus, it has been for me.

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