

PLAYLIST | Jon Caramanica

Honoring Inspirations From Life and Beyond It

Travis Porter

This is how it works now: a few rambunctious teenage goofballs, a blatantly triumphalist beat, a big catchphrase hook. Add it up and get an impending hip-hop phenomenon. "All The Way Turnt Up" is the latest in a string of such blunt-force bursts by the Atlanta rap group Travis Porter — Ali, Strap and Quez. (The song also features Roscoe Dash and YT.) From the group's summer mixtape "I'm a Differenter 2," it's juvenile and joyous, starring kids thoroughly pleased with themselves, but still young enough to be charming, not irritating. And they seem to grasp their own ridiculousness: the photos on the group's MySpace page, of the members dressed in golfing outfits and varsity jackets, are hilarious. (Another of Travis Porter's hits is the comic "Black Boy White Boy," over which the group had a slight tussle with Young Dro, an older Atlanta rapper with similar fixations.)

Dig back a couple of months on the group's MySpace blog and find a download link for a zip file of 104 songs by the group — "Every Travis Porter song ever recorded!" — a ramshackle but often thrilling set. This is how it works now: how's your bandwidth?

Ariana Delawari

Ariana Delawari's debut album, "Lion of Panjshir" (David Lynch MC), begins, more or less, in California; the first song is called "San Francisco," and it evokes the rugged, swinging country music of Bakersfield. But Ms. Delawari, an intense, nasal Los Angeles singer with a sense of urgency underpinning her

words, isn't content to stay there.

She traveled to the Delawari family home in Kabul to record significant parts of this album, whose title comes from the nickname of the Afghan resistance leader Ahmed Shah Massoud, killed in 2001. (She previously released music under his epithet, including a terrific, haunting cover of Madonna's "Crazy for You.") The best songs on this impressive album are those that blend Ms. Delawari's two locales. At times she sings in Dari; the tablas on "Sing Wind" crackle; and she's almost outmaneuvered by the nervous dilruba on "Be Gone Taliban," a ferocious and visceral piece of agit-pop.

Roc Raida

Most of the tributes to the tremendously innovative D.J. Roc Raida, who died last month of a heart attack connected with his training in the Israeli martial art Krav Maga, have been musical. A member of the X-Men D.J. crew (later the X-Ecutions), Roc Raida won the DMC World Champion D.J. title in 1995, and was widely regarded as one of the most significant D.J.'s of the 1990s. Unkut.com rounded up

tribute mixes by DJ Premier and DJ Eclipse, and RocktheDub.com collected links to several of his mixtapes; abundant performance clips on YouTube survive him, though they often only barely suggest his skill. But the most moving remembrance came from Á-Trak, a student of Roc Raida's and later DMC champion, who wrote a generous, raw tribute to Roc Raida's talent and humanity at djatrak.com. ("My mom loved him right away," he wrote, recalling their first, chaperoned meeting when he was just 15.)

A-Trak will be one of several

D.J.'s celebrating Roc Raida on Thursday at B. B. King's Blues Bar & Grill: a class reunion of the great turntablists of the last two decades, brought together too soon.

J Moss

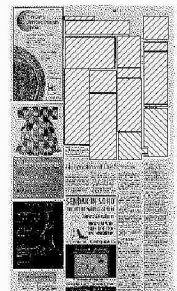
On "Anointing," from his third album, "Just James" (Pajam/GospoCentric/Verity), J Moss tries out smooth talk from the Cole Porter school. "Books try to explain/Movies try to portray," he sighs over jazz piano. "Novelties dress it up/Documentaries mess it up." That ineffable thing is God's love: Mr. Moss — James to his parents — is one of the most mellifluous vocalists in modern gospel (and, as part of the Pajam production collective, one of the genre's great modernizers). Later in the song he abandons sly hints for muscle, singing full-throated background harmonies: "Endow me with your anointing/Douse me." That range helps make this album seamless and convincing. On "So Into U" he gets lost in conversation with himself. "I'm so into you," he sings, takes a breath and adds, in an almost muffled voice, "It's my



love song" — as if it weren't clear.

James Hand

"Shadow on the Ground"

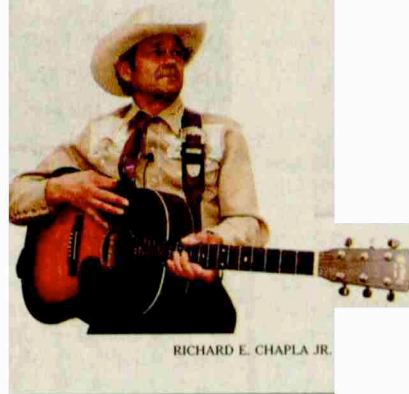


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(Rounder) is James Hand's second nationally distributed album in a 40-year career. The first, "The Truth Will Set You Free," was released just three years ago. So what's taken this Texas singer so long? He hasn't been learning new tricks, that's for sure. Produced by the durable team of Lloyd Maines and Ray Benson, "Shadow on the Ground" is an old-fashioned charmer of an album, matching Hank Williams's rigor with the slightest touch of outlaw bluster. Mr. Hand's voice is uncertain in moments, but for his lyrics, in which his don't-care almost always gets in the way of his know-better, it's an asset. "Don't Depend on Me" is a slyly biting warning, and "Floor to Crawl" is all wry humor. On "Don't Want Me Too" he's feverishly coming apart. "I go to the places where we used to go/I see the people that we once knew," he yips. "And everybody there tells me 'I told you so/That woman would never be true.'"

'Silky Soul Music'

Great cover songs are driven as much by ego as love, and there's an impressive amount of both on "Silky Soul Music . . . An All-Star Tribute to Maze Featuring Frankie Beverly" (Brantera). Mr. Beverly has never been a heavy engine of a vocalist, getting his point across through nudging insistence. Unfortunately he influenced a generation of soft soul singers who mainlined his ease but not his thrust. No more: Joe's "Can't Get Over You" is a velvety surprise, and Kevon Edmonds's "Never Let You Down" is breathlessly desperate. Most revelatory is Kem, one of the most revered adult-contemporary soul singers of recent years, core dullness notwithstanding. But his version of "Golden Time of Day," a song that even Mr. Beverly never fully energized, is riveting, like the shedding of an old, constrictive skin.



SARA BRITTANY SOMERSET

Clockwise from above, the D.J. Roc Raida, who recently died of a heart attack and is the focus of a tribute show Thursday at B. B. King's; Ariana Delawari, whose debut album is named after an Afghan resistance leader; and James Hand.