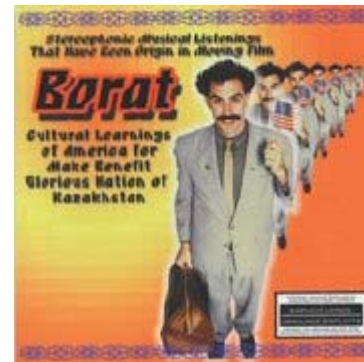


Speaking of Buena Vista Social Club, still-breathing members Ibrahim Ferrer and Omara Portuondo join the likes of Sting, Coldplay, Dido, Arctic Monkeys and Jack Johnson for Rhythms del Mundo: Cuba, a Latin-flavoured fundraiser CD to fight global warming. That's right, a son-style "Clocks" and a spiel from Al Gore, what fun!

Less in the news of late, but certainly not to be ignored, is the continuing struggle of the city and citizens of New Orleans, post-Katrina. Bush, "Brownie" and the bunch weren't much help, but you can be, by giving the gift of great music that comes with a charitable earmark. A guaranteed winner in that respect is Our New Orleans, a Nonesuch compilation boasting not only Allen Toussaint and the Dirty Dozen Brass Band, but Randy Newman, Wild Magnolias, Dr. John, Irma Thomas, Buckwheat Zydeco and more. There's also The River in Reverse, a collab between Elvis Costello and Toussaint (who were here to present the material live at the Jazz Fest this past summer), and the Dirty Dozen's legendary adaptation of Marvin Gaye's equally legendary album What's Going On, which features vocal cameos by Chuck D, G. Love, Guru and Ivan Neville.



From a similarly soulful place comes Forever Young, Gifted & Black: Songs of Freedom and Spirit, an impressive anthology of music from the great Nina Simone, who also saw a Remixed & Reimagined compilation this year, featuring Coldcut, Tony Humphries, François K., DJ Logic and more. On a funkier note, check out the impressively packaged What It Is!: Funky Soul & Rare Grooves four-disc box set, boasting 90-odd tracks from the decade between '67 and '77. Big hits like the Bar-Kays' "Soul Finger" rub up against cool rarities and forgotten gems.



On the reggae tip, a couple of sweet ones—the ultra-obscure, self-titled 1979 album by Noel Ellis, son of Jamaican legend Alton Ellis, at last saw wide CD release this year, and the reputation that preceded it is entirely merited. There's also the Trojan label's Let Me Tell You Boy: Soulful Sounds from Reggae's Greatest Female Talents, featuring sweetness from Phyllis Dillon, Marcia Griffiths, Dawn Penn and more. Tragically, another legend of Jamaican soul, Desmond Dekker, the guy who did "007 (Shanty Town)" and "Israelites," passed away this year. His final recordings are out as ...In Memoriam 1941–2006.

Love isn't all you need

The juggernaut release of the 2006 holiday season is Love, the spectacular revisiting of the Beatles' catalogue that accompanies the Cirque du Soleil show installed in Las Vegas. It's not just that the parade of hits drawn from across the Fab Four's career has never sounded better—gorgeously remastered and presented on both CD and DVD Audio disc, with a big, fat, informative booklet. It's that they've been artfully rearranged, edited and

