

# The High Notes of 2006

'Tis the season for year-end lists and last-minute holiday gifts. Below is a highly opinionated guide to the year's most interesting CDs—and concert DVDs worthy of note.

BY PAUL ROBICHEAU

## CDs



**Bob Dylan, *Modern Times* (Columbia).** The ageless wonder boy caps a comeback trifecta, settling into a warm, accessible roots groove with his well-worn voice oozing wit and wile.



**Arctic Monkeys, *Whatever People Say I Am, That's What I'm Not* (Domino).** Not one of the greatest British albums ever as hyped, but certainly a bracing standout for 2006. These Monkeys swing and bite with post-punk savvy, propelled by Alex Turner's pithy portrayals of Midlands malaise.



**Neko Case, *Fox Confessor Brings the Flood* (Anti).** The alt-country siren explores new waters, casting her resonant voice in atmospheric songs of mythology and romance, with Calexico and the Band's Garth Hudson in kindred support.



**TV on the Radio, *Return to Cookie Mountain* (Interscope).** Brooklyn's sonic explorers scale new heights on a major-label debut that mixes samples and loops, distortion and melody, rock and doo-wop, to forge evocative collages.



**Cat Power, *The Greatest* (Matador).** Indie diva Chan Marshall finds grace and confidence for her fragile soul in Memphis, refreshing her melancholy with help from Al Green sidemen.



**Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars, *Living Like a Refugee* (Anti).** Born of flight from violent civil war, but alive with hope, this African collective evokes the buoyant sound and social justice of Bob Marley in its infectious songs.



**Cassandra Wilson, *Thunderbird* (Blue Note).** Producer T-Bone Burnett helps the singer sharpen her lush blend of jazz and Delta blues with crisp, subtle shades of hip-hop and funk.



**Rosanne Cash, *Black Cadillac* (Capitol).** Far from a simple tribute to her late father, Johnny, this somewhat dark, metaphor-rich disc burrows into memories and meditations on loved ones who pass through this world and stay in touch.



**The Hold Steady, *Boys and Girls in America* (Vagrant).** Indie-lectual goes classic rock. If one can get past the '70s Springsteen-meets-Thin Lizzy trappings, there's sure ballast in Craig Finn's tart tales of youthful confusion.



**Tom Waits, *Orphans* (Anti).** A three-disc set of rarities and new songs, covering the range of the raw singer's eccentric Americana, split between his bluesy "brawlers," poignant "bawlers" and bizarre "bastards" (including monologues).

## Concert DVDs



**My Morning Jacket, *Okonokos* (ATO/RCA).** Kentucky's finest bring their epic, reverb-tinged rock to the stage with a spooky forest backdrop—and superimposed animal fantasy for bookends.



**Coachella (Golden Voice/Anti).** America's first answer to Europe's mega-festivals, held in the California desert. Rock to rave to rap, with songs from Radiohead, the Flaming Lips (Wayne Coyne crowd-surfing in a bubble), the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Björk, the White Stripes and the Mars Volta.

**The Black Crowes, *Freak 'n' Roll* (Eagle Vision).** Before this year's personnel changes for the refried Southern rockers, the classic lineup is captured in its glory at a 2005 show complete with an acoustic miniset and horns.



**Kiss, *Kissology Vol. 1* (VHI Classic).** Four concerts from a hard-rock phenomenon in mid-'70s prime (before the circus-like cliché got old) are way too much for guilty-pleasure curiosity. But mainstream TV interviews and a clip on the group's 1975 visit to a Michigan small town are a hoot.



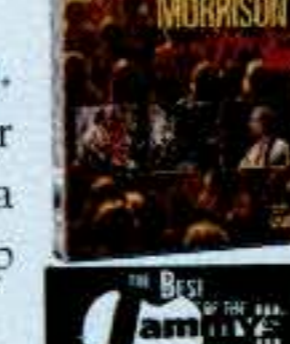
**Leonard Cohen, *I'm Your Man* (Lion's Gate).** Nick Cave, Beth Orton, Rufus Wainwright and others pay homage to the great poet-singer at an Australian concert spliced with interview reflections and one mesmerizing Cohen performance with U2.



**Keith Jarrett, *Tokyo Live* (ECM).** A novel abstraction: a virtuoso at one piano. Luckily, aside from close-ups of hands, face and feet, there's improvisational prowess in the air, particularly in a transcendent "Old Man River."



**Van Morrison, *Live at Montreux 1980/1974* (Eagle Vision).** Vintage Van, back when he had wavy hair (and bold-print shirts in 1974) and punchy bands (showcasing Pee Wee Ellis and Mark Isham on horns in 1980). And oh, that voice!



**The Best of the Jammys, Vol. 1 (Relix).** An award show where everyone jams in intriguing combinations, including country star Travis Tritt with the Disco Biscuits, bluesman Buddy Guy with Phil Lesh and John Mayer, Blue Oyster Cult with Moe., and Peter Frampton with Guster and Martin Sexton.



**Pixies, *Live at the Paradise in Boston* (Eagle Vision).** These alt-rock pioneers documented their reunion in spades. This intimate 2005 hometown bash (plus fuzzy 1986 bonus footage from T.T. the Bear's) is their second DVD showcase. Or try Acoustic Live at Newport, a scenic folk-fest alternative.



**Mission of Burma, *Not a Photograph* (MVD Visual).** Fine documentary on the return of Boston's avant-punk icons after 19 years is sweetened with live bonus tracks both archival and recent (including a 2002 New York encore with Sonic Youth members and Moby). The story isn't over: Burma evolves on *The Obliterati*, the best local release of 2006. **IB**

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