

Michael Giltz

I was raised on musicals — both Broadway and the movies — so unlike, say, Tom Nordlie, I have a particular weakness for melodies and discernable lyrics. Paul is my favorite Beatle, I'd like to think punk was a horrible, horrible dream and below are my choices for the best albums of a very good year.

1. *I'm Your Man* Leonard Cohen — With his subterranean voice and pithy lyrics, this Canadian songwriter has delivered the wittiest, most compelling and mature album of the year.

2. *Shadowland* k.d. lang — Country bright light lang delivers a flawless performance, but it is the exquisite musical settings crafted by producer Owen Bradley (the mastermind behind Patsy Cline and Kitty Wells, among many others) that makes this a shimmering delight.

3. *Stay Awake* Various Artists — A collection of Disney tunes reinterpreted by the likes of Los Lobos, Buster Poindexter and Yma Sumac. As fun as it gets.

4. *Naked Talking Heads* — Even if

they didn't tour, this is still one of the best bands around and their latest is equal to their finest.

5. *Journey of Dreams* Ladysmith Black Mambazo/*Thunder Before Dawn* Various Artists — More excellent music from Africa. Mambazo was featured on Paul Simon's *Grace-land* and their solo record is peerless and unique. *Thunder* is an infectious overview of their contemporaries.

6. *Rattle and Hum* U2 — The world's most serious band loosens up on this rambunctious, loose-limbed journey through American roots music. Their best effort since *War*.

7. *Slow Turning* John Hiatt — Last year's *Bring The Family* was widely hailed and this is every bit its equal. A mature and insightful effort.

8. *Tracy Chapman / Union* Toni Childs / *People* Hothouse Flowers — The best debuts of the year. You've all heard of Chapman, but Childs' album is better and more personal. Hothouse Flowers is gospel-tinged rock and soul. They'll all be around for years to come.

9. *Green* R.E.M. — Those looking for mumbled lyrics and jangly guitars should search elsewhere. Those looking for enigmatic songs and passionate but playful performances can stop right here. *Document* was a stumble, but they've hit their stride again.

10. *From Langley Park To Memphis*

Prefab Sprout — Like *Two Wheels Good*, this seemed painfully commercial on the first listen. But the weirdness creeps through in their songs about soup kitchens, nightingales and a gentle jab at Springs-teen. Romantic and enchanting.