

MICHAEL GILTZ

The best of the decade? Any list like this is too idiosyncratic to be truly representative of the last 10 years. Besides, I was 13 years old when the '80s began and trying to figure out which Beatles album to buy first. So there has been a lot of ground to cover. Instead of thinking of this as a definitive list — and then, naturally, dismissing it when your favorite artist doesn't appear — consider this merely recommended listening.

1. Richard and Linda Thompson/*Shoot Out The Lights* — Eight bitter songs of love gone awry, this '82 folk-rock album has grown in reputation and power with each passing year. Richard is an unparalleled guitarist and Linda has a pure, deep voice that is both strong and vulnerable. From the shattering title track to the haunting "Did She Jump Or Was She Pushed," this album never missteps. Emotionally satisfying.

2. Prince/*1999* and *Purple Rain* — This is the greatest one-two punch in rock since the Beatles released *Rubber Soul* and then *Revolver*. *1999* is the apocalyptic dance classic that established Prince as a major artist; *Purple Rain* is the across-the-board smash that signaled he was the one to watch. He spawned the Minneapolis Sound, directly worked with a slew of artists and influenced countless more. No one else has been even remotely as prolific or provocative.

3. R.E.M./*Murmur* — As fresh and vital as the day it was released. One might regret the hordes of jangly guitars and mumbled vocals it inspired, but nothing can detract from the power of this intelligent, beautiful album.

4. Roxy Music/*Avalon* — Sets a quiet, elegiac mood and sustains it wonderfully throughout. "More Than This" and "To Turn You On" are two of the best songs Bryan Ferry has ever written. But the real accomplishment here is how *Avalon* is such a seamless piece; each track flows effortlessly into the next to create a near-perfect whole. Note: This is also the quintessential '80s "make-out" album. If you're on a date and the person you're with slaps this on, you can be certain they have only one thing on their mind.

5. The Clash/*London Calling* — The opposite of *Avalon* in every way. Loud, abrasive and eminently catchy, *London Calling* pile-drives through 19 songs and every musical style from rock to reggae to pop to punk with unflagging wit, insight and angry passion.

6. Various Artists/*The Indestructible Beat of Soweto* — The pervasive influence of music from around the world was the best trend of the '80s, and nothing was as propulsive or exciting as the wave of releases from Africa. *Indestructible* compiles some of the greatest examples of township into an album that is irresistibly danceable. Anyone who enjoyed Paul Simon's

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Graceland would do well to rush out and buy this. Pure fun.

7. Bruce Springsteen/*Nebraska* — His best album since *Born To Run*. Springsteen's other albums of the '80s all have one or two songs not up to his standards and, honestly, it's hard to love something as pervasive and overplayed as *Born In The U.S.A.*, even if most of it is great. *Nebraska* is intimate, ragged and an appealing risk after the mainstream success of *The River*. It's also the strongest set of songs he's written, and pushes him to record some of his most affecting vocals.

8. Prefab Sprout/*Two Wheels Good* — A witty, low-key pop gem widely recognized in Europe as a masterpiece. Singer/songwriter Paddy McAloon owes as much to Cole Porter as the Beatles, and his lyrics are unflaggingly sophisticated and urbane. Romantic and cool.

9. Eurythmics/*Sweet Dreams Are Made Of This* — Synthesizer heaven. Annie Lennox's singing is soulful and assured. Dave Stewart's instrumentation is quirky and inventive and their songs dig in and never let go. They haven't been this good since and probably never will be again.

10. Talking Heads/*Stop Making Sense* — This group is second only to Prince in experimentation and magnitude. One could easily have selected *Remain In Light*, *Speaking In Tongues*, *Little Creatures* or *Naked* without anyone looking askance. Why this one? It's simply the album I've listened to the most. Truly the band of the '80s.

11. Jennifer Warnes/*Famous Blue Raincoat* — Warnes' only commercial success has been with drive like "(I've Had) The Time Of My Life" from *Dirty Dancing*. But this performance of the songs of Leonard Cohen was a life-long dream that brought out the best in her singing. Warnes assembled stellar musicians and poured her heart into every number. It shows.

12. Michael Jackson/*Thriller* — A commercial and artistic thunderbolt. Except for the spoken exchange between Michael and Paul McCartney, this is a great collection of pop songs. He revitalized the moribund music industry and broke down the color barrier erected around bland, Top 40 radio once and for all. Bobby Brown and Janet Jackson would not be at the top of the charts today if it weren't for this album. And you can dance to it.

13. U2/*War* — This album crystallized U2 in the minds of many as important artists. It looked at the troubles of Northern Ireland and had the courage to condemn violence on all sides. The music is fiery and moving and the songs are anthems that live on. Their best work is ahead.

14. John Lennon and Yoko Ono/*Double Fantasy* and Paul McCartney/*Tug Of War* — Lennon delivered unabashed pop tunes and Yoko stood toe to toe with the best in the business and held her own. They trade songs back and forth, turning *Double Fantasy* into an extended duet that's gripping in its intimacy. It's certainly Lennon's best album since his solo debut, the classic *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band*. Spurred on by John's death, Paul teamed up with George Martin and musicians like Stevie Wonder and Carl Perkins to deliver his best album since the landmark *Band On The Run*.

15. Barbra Streisand/*The Broadway Album* — Anyone who knows Streisand only as the middling pop singer she's been for most of the '80s would be surprised at this remarkable album. It's a return to form, for she originally made her mark recording Broadway tunes in the '60s. But this succeeds through her thrilling voice, and because she is also a gifted actress: Streisand performs these classics with verve and intelligence.