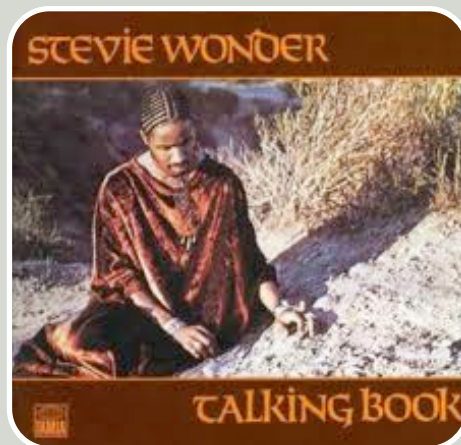


POP'S BLOGZ

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5 ESSENTIAL ALBUMS - THE TEEN YEARS

Growing up in my native Trinidad was a unique experience due to the many cultures that find a home there. The island is an amazing melting pot of East Indian, African, Asian and European cultural and musical influences, and its close proximity to South America made for an even richer brew of musical styles evident everywhere you went. My mother worked at one of the two radio stations operating at the time, and by the time I was a teenager, music was a fiercely dominant force in my life. I had access to the music library where she worked, and would spend countless hours in a tiny listening booth while waiting for her after school. By thirteen, I formed my first band, and was always an avid listener of all styles. Today, I want to share 5 of the most influential "albums" (Vinyl.....before CDs and Mp3s) of my early teen years. (If you do the math now, you'll see that I was a classmate of Moses)



This just blew me away. I was in love with "Music Of My Mind" and was just coming to terms with the idea of Stevie performing all the parts on the record when this hit. The list of hits was tremendous. "Superstition", "You Are The Sunshine Of My Life", "You Got It Bad Girl", "You And I" and the funky "Maybe Your Baby" and "Tuesday Heartbreak" all bore testament to the genius of Stevie. Every song here was incredible to me. This album saw Stevie showcasing his amazing clavinet and Moog bass work, along with astonishing songwriting and sophisticated arrangements. It shot him to #1 and opened up new audiences everywhere, becoming his first smash hit LP. This was commercial music that was artistically pure.



Sly and the Family Stone brought "psychedelic soul" to the world with such force that many musicians and producers had to change their sound completely. A deft blend of wah-wah guitars, slap and fuzz bass, gospel-styled organ and funky horn riffs was the backdrop for decidedly gospel-influenced vocal arrangements. The band also borrowed liberally from rock music and their costuming was outlandish and really delivered the psychedelic edge. Larry Graham's slap bass technique would change the face of funk forever, and Sly's brilliant songwriting stands today as a cornerstone of the future soul and hip-hop artists for generations. This record lists "Everyday People", "Sing A Simple Song", "I Want To Take You Higher", "Stand", "You Can Make It If You Try" among its tracks, and is a great listen to this day.



This is Chicago III, their third record. It was a double album of extended jams and well crafted pop songs. I was drawn to this band from their first record, the overall musicianship and James Pankow's great horn arrangements, Robert Lamm's lyrics and Terry Kath's killer guitar work and vocals. A heady blend of pop/rock and jazz, this album for me had several standouts. "Free", "Lowdown", "Sing A Mean Tune Kid", "What Else Can I Say", "I Don't Want Your Money", "Travel Suite" are all monster pieces. This was a huge influence on me musically and I remember memorizing almost all the parts to every song here, I had listened to the album so many times.



This album remains to this day one of the quintessential live dates ever recorded. I remember my cousin and I dropping the needle when we first brought this home, and for several minutes being unable to move. It was that intense. Then, as if we were somehow subliminally directed, we were dancing with the biggest grins on our faces. This is JB at his finest, with arguably his best band ever, pouring raw, funky soul and bringing pure energy. With much of today's music being offensively pointless and bland, you would do well to take this for a spin. This is a record for the ages, all ages, any color. It brought decades of black music to one blinding point and can shake a dancefloor today as well as it did when it was released. The grooves are monstrous, the guitar lines are razor sharp and the horns are a disease unto themselves. I would list tracks, but that would be of no use. From beginning to end, this is classic.



By the time I heard this album, Herbie Hancock already had enjoyed much career success as a member of Miles Davis' classic 60's quintet and as part of the exploratory and innovative electric period of the late 60's and early 70's, also with Miles. Herbie would go on to mirror some of these directions as a leader with outstanding recordings, both acoustic and electric. This album saw the pioneer move to a funk-oriented rhythm section. (Harvey Mason, Bill Summers and Paul Jackson) Bennie Maupin was the only horn, covering the reeds. This is my life-changer, charged with funk and jazz and mesmerizing performances. The standouts, "Chameleon" and "Watermelon Man" opened the floodgates to what would eventually be called "smooth jazz". This, however, was not so much "smooth" as it was breathtaking. Hancock played no acoustic piano on this, but brought the Fender Rhodes forward as a bona-fide improvisational voice. I listen to this still and always marvel at the brilliance and mastery.