

# Best of 2015



The Best of 2015 as compiled by Tamara Harris and Uther Blakwhel:



## **THEESatisfaction *EarthEE***

The Seattle duo follow-up 2012's *AwE NaturalE* with ambient meditations on ancestry, post-Blackness and the destruction of planet earth.



[youtube id="H5zRKAoDHBc"]

## **Murs & 9th Wonder *Brighter Daze***

The collaborators reunite for their sixth project of relentless boom-bap soul and a brilliant Pharcyde cover.



## **Oddisee *The Good Fight***

The DMV rapper releases more self-reflective, head-nodding hip-hop and proves again why he belongs to the rare club of emcees who are also producers.



### **Kendrick Lamar *To Pimp A Butterfly***

A fiercely pro-culture jazz/rap/soul collection of songs about politics, love and colorism.



### **Thundercat *The Beyond/Where The Giants Roam***

The bassplayer/songwriter appeared on Kendrick Lamar's *To Pimp A Butterfly* and still completed a mini-album of buoyant George Duke-inspired fusion.



### **Talib Kweli *Fuck The Money***

Kweli criticizes capitalism and encourages listeners to pursue their dreams and gave the whole thing away for free.



### **Junglepussy *Pregnant With Success***

The New York rapper collaborates with producer Shy Guy again and has more candid raps about love and sexuality.



### **Green Velvet and Carl Craig's *Unity***

Chicago and Detroit dance music veterans make hard, classic techno/house for 2015.



## **The Alabama Shakes *Sound & Color***

Lead singer Brittany Howard channeled Etta James and Aretha Franklin to take her band into soulful rock territory and made an album that could bridge the gap between Black radio and rock radio.



## **Terri Lyne Carrington *The Mosaic Project Love and Soul***

The jazz drummer expands on the first Mosaic project with another stellar lineup of all-women Â vocalists. A modern cover of “Come Sunday” from Natalie Cole possibly her last collaborative appearance.



## **Maysa *Back2Love***

Maysa and Chris “Big Dog” Davis made a good summer album of uptempo and laidback R&B.



## **Tuxedo *Tuxedo***

Mayer Hawthorne and Jake One re-ignite '80's R&B as if they never left the era.



## **Van Hunt *The Fun Rises, The Fun Sets***

The low-key R&B artist quietly released one of the warmest albums of the genre that maintained the tradition while moving forward at the same time.



### **D'Angelo *Black Messiah***

One of the biggest comebacks ever touting love and revolution.



### **The Internet *Ego Death***

Their third studio album and magnum opus of honest love songs inside plush rhythms led by Syd The Kyd's soft alto.



### **Tunde Olaniran *Transgressor***

*Transgressor* is a new modern day Hip Hop/Electro classic that firmly cements Tunde as the long lost brother Santigold and M.I.A never knew they had and always wished for!



### **The Game *The Documentary 2.0***

*The Documentary 2.0* is dark, brutally honest and compelling as a sequel and autobiography to NWA and Compton's first born son The Game.



### **The Game *The Documentary 2.5***

*The Documentary 2.5* is the final conclusion and sequel that is a darker, yet self-reflective urban soundscape that actually reveals the history of the Bloods and Crips feud and the Game's struggle to keep his soul intact.



## **Ibeyi *Ibeyi***

World soul from the spiritual and pan-African travels of twin sistersÂ Lisa-KaïndÃ© Diaz and Naomi Diaz.



## **Blur *The Magic Whip***

A moody, melodic, vibrant and sonic Â masterpiece that interweaves through synth pop, hip-hop, and indie rock. This is a record that was worth waiting over 10 years for!



## **Death *N.E.W.*Â**

New by Proto-punk pioneers, Death is a poignant, philosophical, spiritually declarative yet reflective record that questions our state of being and actions we human beings have made while reminding us that change is inevitable and positive if we so chose!



## **The Dears *Times Infinity Volume One*Â**

*Times Infinity Volume One* by The Dears is a supremely written indie rock CD that Â opens up as a Â love letter that turns into a Dear John letter and finishes with a last will and testament.



## **A Tribe Called Quest *People's Instinctive Travels And The Paths Of Rhythm* 25th Anniversary Edition**

A foundation of the Native Tongue movement with new mixes from Pharrell, J.Cole and Cee-Lo Green.



### **Illa J Â *Illa J***

Illa J's self titled solo debut CD delivers as a diary of a young man who has a firm grip on his musical career but still struggles with matters of the heart, lust, and loss. Illa J takes you on a majestic, sonic Hip-Hop ride through outer space fueled with superb bass and soul production by the Potatohead People!

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## **Maysa & Phil Perry-Last Chance For Love Official Video**

[youtube id="ATkBg-SV\_sw"]

Maysa and Phil Perry's official video for "Last Chance For Love" is taken from their live show blended with footage of their backstage experience. Maysa's [Back 2 Love](#) is out now.

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# Maysa Goes Back 2 Love (Interview)



Maysa Leak's soothing yet lush alto has been one of the core voices of traditional R&B since her emergence with UK jazz/funk band Incognito in the early '90s. Her solo career began a few years after being with Incognito and she has recorded 12 albums including 2013's *Blue Velvet Soul*, which garnered her first Grammy nomination. In her 20-plus years in the music business she has endured through trends, industry beauty norms and the marginalizing of non-commercial R&B to establish a following that keeps her touring most of the year. The Baltimore native just released *Back 2 Love*, which she calls her summer album. In the following interview she talks about *Back 2 Love*, Baltimore and how music is much more than just a profession for her.

*"I see myself as a musical servant"*

**You say it's your summer album and I noticed you open it with the uptempo "Back 2 Love" how were you feeling when you recorded this album?**

Just happy, you know not being in love or falling out of love I was just happy with myself. This is how I feel in general I'm happy with myself. I have problems like everyone else but I just want to make more money to pay my bills. Everything else I'm extremely happy. Part of me wants to meet someone part of me doesn't care. I think I'm content and I want to make some changes in my life.

**Last year was a big year for you with *Blue Velvet Soul* which**

**you got the nomination for, what did it feel like to get that recognition?**

It was surreal. When people say Grammy-nominated and they say my name I burst out laughing because it took so long. I know my mother had something to do with it because it happened right after she died. I know in my heart. She told me because I remember when I got to the first round and I didn't get to the second round with the last I did, *Motions Of Love* and she said "Damn, that damn thing I'll just get some damn gold and melt it down and make my own Grammy." That's how she was and she would make me laugh and forget the pain. My mother was amazing because she helped me do 20 years of my career because I was really struggling a lot and she would just say things when people would treat me terribly even when I was small, when I was real little they would tell me I was too big and they would tell me my boobs were too big. I was a size 12 and I was like wow. They told me I wasn't light-skinned enough and I wasn't this there was so much of that going on in the early '90s. I don't want to throw people under the bus but they never did a video for "Deep Waters" because they didn't think I was the video type-looking singer.

[youtube id="UCL4HxS\_uNI"]

**That's always been the weird part of the industry because I don't know that people are really supporting people strictly because of what they look like.**

You know the industry part of it is weird that was back in the '90s. When that came out it was during the time of the C&C Music Factory thing. Everybody had to be a model and have a belly button ring. On my first album cover they wanted me to do this nose ring and if you look at my first album cover I was so evil they made me put a nose ring in I look like a bull! But that was the style and thank god the camera is small you can barely see the nose ring. Even in my first pictures I



was really small I remember my mother and my cousin went with me to this video shoot for "What About Our Love." If I can only tell you how they were acting they had me feeling so self-conscious. They covered me up and I was crying.

**In all the years I've been aware of your music I've never heard people comment on your appearance it was always your voice.**

I think that my weight opened doors in a way because if I had been some kind of superstar vixen people may not have taken me as seriously and then bypassed my voice. It's not an excuse for not taking better care of myself but, I think because I look like everybody's cousin people let their guard down around me and embraced me a little differently because I'm just like everyone else. I get a lot of interest from guys but that's what I'm referring to I think my weight has softened people to me. I struggle with the same things. I'm making music to help us get through everything that's all I care about. It's not about selling your soul so you can make a million dollars so you can be the most beautiful girl on the cover. There are a lot of singers who can straddle both worlds they can be a supermodel and sing at the same time. A lot of artists get lost and really think it's all about them and that's the funniest thing to me. It's not, it's about who you're helping, being a servant in a sense and that's how I see myself as A musical servant. I'm trying to help people through their lives.

**What are your feelings about what's been happening in your hometown of Baltimore?**

It started off with a few people who really wanted to riot and do something but then it turned into can I get on Instagram, Snapchat or CNN. It's been years since we've had that many deaths in Baltimore at one time. I just want people to be happy. We've got to start helping people with mental problems. We've got to teach morals and some kind of decorum

again to these kids. If you have kids growing up on Snapchat getting into arguments with people they don't know and people want to fight you in the street because of something you said on the phone it's amazing to me. It's like these kids don't have a chance.

**How old were you when you discovered you had a voice?**

My high school teacher his name was John McLaughlin he really told me "Maysa you're gonna be somebody and I want you to keep going." I sang as a kid I started at 6 my mother told me I sang at 3. Whoever would come to the door, the milkman, the mailman whoever came to the door I would get on the coffee table and dance and sing. And she would stop me but that's how it started. My mother took me to see Melba Moore in Purlie when I was six and when I saw those lights and the costumes and the dancing when Melba Moore opened her mouth I felt like my heart grew out of my chest. I'll never forget that sensation at 6-years old even now 42 years later. And I knew at that moment I wanted to make people feel that way.

**A lot of people don't know you started working with Stevie Wonder really early.**

Yes, I was at Morgan State and my best friend Kim Burrell was already singing with Stevie and he was looking for an alto voice. I was already planning on moving to California anyway but she asked him if I could audition. I had one year left of school and I was like Stevie can I finish this degree and I'll come up there and all my friends were like "Are you crazy Stevie Wonder just said come work for him and you told him to wait." I spent seven years in school because I failed business. My mother sold her wedding ring for me to go to college and I said I'm never going to let them down. I finished my degree and my girlfriend called Stevie and he said yeah come on out now. I went to California and he was working on the Jungle Fever soundtrack and we toured with Spike Lee and performed on shows like Oprah and David Letterman and

Johnny Carson's last year.

### **What's it been like being in Incognito?**

It was hard work trying to navigate me and my best friend Sarah Brown were the only two females dealing with a bunch of guys. They were like brothers they were incredible. Like I'm writing my memoirs right now and I'm trying to tell these stories and I know these people aren't going to like this but I'm going to tell it because it affected my life. The guys were crazy and the women calling our room for the guys especially my son's father. This was the time of "Deep Waters" this is when I first joined the band. He was the first man who really pursued me. He was really good. I was 24 and I was really sheltered as a kid but this man he was a little bit older than me very strong, very smart he had been around the world spoke seven languages very impressive. That's why we went back and forth because he was a young, sexy man and he wasn't trying to be in a relationship and I thought it was going to be the love of my life type thing. That's why Bluey wrote "Deep Waters" because we went through it. And "Still A Friend Of Mine" because one day we were friends the next day I hated him.

### **It didn't work out but you two have a son.**

Yes and that was eight years after we started we had broken up and I went back to do a world tour with Incognito and I got pregnant.

[youtube id="SFP0zimrEB4"]

### **"Last Chance For Love" is a duet with Phil Perry, why did you say it's your last chance?**

It's pretty much when I told Phil what I wanted it to be about I had written a chorus and I told him the song is pretty much I'm getting older now and I hope the next time I do meet somebody hopefully this is my shot I've been

dreaming about my whole life. This is my last chance to really experience that youthful kind of giddy love I hope. I don't have a lot of energy to keep trying over and over again. You never know in life but as a person that's getting older you feel you don't have as many chances.

[youtube id="SR99IdnKf2I"]

**You work really well with Chris "Big Dog" Davis, what is the chemistry like in the studio with him?**

It's like magic. We will sit and I will listen to music he has written then all of a sudden we'll go through it song by song. Like the song "Unforgettable" from the new album he sent me several songs a couple I wasn't sure of. Sometimes the energy will come straight to me and sometimes it takes a minute and when he sent that to me at 10 o'clock in the morning I saw the email from him and I opened it up and put my headphones on and I didn't go to sleep until 9. I listened to that music I was consumed with it. I didn't know what to write to it and I saw this sexy man and how he made me feel when I saw him and that was my only thought to it. But it took me weeks to get that song written because I was overwhelmed and intimidated by the music. I knew what I wanted to say but I just couldn't find the right words. It came out of nowhere and I knew men would love that song it should make me them feel confidence.

[youtube id="535rj81nTts"]

**What about "Heavenly Voices"?**

That's hard to talk about because both of my parents are in heaven now. I used to have a recurring dream starting around age six. I remember waking up having this bad dream cause my parents' gravestones were under this big black tree and it was storming with big black clouds. And when I woke-up I would always be crying. It just scared me because I never wanted to lose my parents. My whole life was about making them happy making them laugh. I just wanted my parents to be happy and I

wanted to do everything I could for them because one day they wouldn't be here. One night I was trying to go to sleep and I was missing them real bad like my parents gave me everything. They taught me the value of a dollar and hard work. They taught me my work ethics and the value of money but they still spoiled us. I knew that my Barbie dolls came from the fact that my father came home every night he was a mechanic and had to wash the oil off his hands with a special soap and I knew that's where my dolls came from that meant something to me. Those memories were coming back one night and I just thought about how I wanted to make someone's life better and that when it's time for me to go I just want them to come for me so I can know that I will be with them. And as I was writing that I was in the studio and Big Dog he sent me that music and he said he wanted it to be called "Heavenly Voices" and it's amazing how I had already written that the melody came to me as we were recording. I had the words I didn't know what the melody was going to be but I had my lyrics and I knew the title.

### **How does it feel to be a solo artist now for 20 years?**

It's amazing. Kids today are like "20 years!" but to me it's part of my life journey. It's a good thing that I'm still here. I'm still in the game after 20 years still working and a lot of people can't say that I'm grateful.

*"To know that you've been through this industry without sacrificing your morals and who you are"*

### **You've done a lot of jingles too?**

Yes, I did the original Hot Pockets commercial. And I did a jingle for Bill Cosby's show that ran for seven years the people said was just a demo and they never really paid me for it. I lost a lot of money with that I can't go back and get

that it's just gone. I've done commercials for Amtrak and recently I just did Frank Ski's jingle for his radio show at WHUR.

### **How did you start writing your memoirs?**

Yes I went out and brought a typewriter, I took it back. I always said I was going to do it and I just thought if I sit down and just type with my fingers and hear that noise it will inspire me to keep on because I tend to lose my focus on stuff like that. But I know it's important for me to write that story just get it out there for history's sake for my son's sake. To know that you've been through this industry without sacrificing your morals and who you are you can still survive it and navigate it without all these things they're telling you you have to do. I want to put it out on my 25th anniversary in the business, which will be next year.

### **There is a Back 2 Love Fragrance?**

Yes we're working on it and I hope it smells the way I want it to if it doesn't I'll just have 300 bottles of perfume in my garage. I just always wanted to do a perfume. I found a company that was able to do a smaller order. It was a fun process.

### **What's next?**

I want to do a little bit of theatre. I want to portray Sarah Vaughn she is really the person I pattern my voice after for phrasing for everything. Her and Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughn mostly. She's like my hero and so I just want to do her life story in a small thing. I did a lot of theatre in college but I want to get back to that a little bit. A friend of mine we're writing the story.

**Follow Maysa on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and her [official site](#)**

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# Maysa - Keep It Movin' Featuring Stokley Official Video

[youtube id="Z0fSb2WJHYY"]

Maysa and Stokley Williams of Mint Condition portray a couple who don't see eye to eye and then go their separate ways in Maysa's video for "Keep It Movin.'" Her 11th studio album, *Back2Love* is out now.