**Special Mention: The Glitch Mob – *Crush Mode***

Hindsight being 20-20, it’s easy to say The Glitch Mob were an odd Fit as Low End Theory affiliates: too frat and hippy friendly, too ready to emphasize the riffs and electronicsover the beats and soul. edIT handing over his resident spot to D-Styles both emphasized the night’s Hip-Hop bonafides and drew a line in the sand between the LA Beat scene and the Californian Dubsteppers who’d later birth contemporary EDM. It was a win-win decision, and everyone involved has gone on to see significant success, but let’s not forget why Glitch Mob were involved with Low End Theory in the first place: mixtapes like Crush Mode BANGED and sounded like nothing else out there in 2008.

Taking advantage of then cutting-edge technology like Ableton Live and a new generation of Midi controllers, the group twisted LFO riffs, gnarly sub bass and rolling California beats into new shapes, an approach mirroring their improvisational live show. This dedication to live performance and new technologies, a significant break from previously established vinyl-centric DJ culture, has gone on to become a defining trait of LA’s electronic scene, and <em>Crush Mode</em> still serves as a great example of how to do it right. What the harsh digital synths lack in subtlety, they make for in immediacy, an immediacy that permeates the scene’s live performances to this day.

Anyone who’s gone to a Low End affiliated tour only to be surprised by how energetic the performances were compared to the stoned out tripiness of the records can attest that the Glitch Mob’s party-starting antics are an essential, if sometimes dormant aspect of the Beat Scene’s DNA. Sure, their sound was copied and pumped full of steroids by Americans white-washing Dubstep, and the “glitch” half of their name has aged about as well as Acid Jazz and Trip Hop, but The Glitch Mob played a key role in helping Los Angeles’ beatmakers figure out what they wanted to sound like and potential paths to avoid. – Son Raw

**20. TOKiMonsta – LA Series 8 [All City, 2011]**

With just three tracks on half of a split release, TOKiMONSTA’s contribution to the eighth LA Series installment probably doesn’t seem like the obvious choice to make this list. She’s got plenty of EPs and full-lengths under her belt, not to mention her work with Suzi Analogue, so why start here? First off, omitting the All-City LA Series from a list about the LA beat scene would be a mistake in and of itself. It’s kind of hard to believe that an Irish label brought us so many incredible cuts from the likes of Diaba$e, Teebs, DâM-FunK, Ras\_G and others, but there you have it.

The LA native born Jennifer Lee splits the difference between dusty crate digging and space age synths, “Last Night’s Blurry Memories” pretty much says it all in the title, recreating the still-messed-up-from-the-night-before vibe that we’ve all experienced once or twice. Or a few hundred times. You may have lived a better life than I. It’s drugged and sluggish, but in the best possible way. Don’t even get me started on “Park Walks,” not only my favorite track by TOKi, but one of my favorite beat tracks of all time. The percolating breaths in the background provide room for the indecipherable vocals, all on top of one hell of a funky drum sequence. It amounts to an all-too-brief blur that you can't forget no matter how much haze you inhale. - Chris Daly

**19. Kutmah – Cities to Mountaintops Mix [Dublab/Hit & Run, 2008]**

Before there was the Low End Theory, there was Sketchbook, a sparsely attended beat congregation that gathered weekly at the Little Temple. This was before gentrification sacked the outpost on southern fringe of Silver Lake and turned it into a bar where you can order something called the "Thrilla in Vanilla" that matches the clientele there most nights. But if you ever drove north on Virgil during the middle of the last decade, you could've seen a young Flying Lotus, Ras G, Samiyam, Diabia$e, and Kutmah getting blunted under the billboard. Inside, they played each other the latest Promethean heists they'd created from the ashes of older gods.

Sketchbook eventually folded because practically no one went, but Kutmah, nee Justin McNulty, the founder, became the unofficial fifth resident DJ at Low End Theory until his tragic deportation in 2010. If there is such thing as a BBC Essential Mix from the early years of Low End -- the inspirations that seeped into the cauldron to create a levitating mutant wing of instrumental hip-hop -- it would be Kutmah's Cities to Mountaintop mix. Originally released by Dublab in early 2008, the mix highlights not only the first wave of astral Beat Scene talents (Flying Lotus, Ras G, Take, Matthewdavid, Daedelus, Kutmah himself), but also the originators (Dilla, Mr Oizo, Dabrye, Slum Village, Shuggie Otis, etc.). If you play it in one seamless loop, it instills a gravity, history and tradition so important to the scene. None of this was an accident. They were cratediggers and seekers, futurists aware that the map of the heavens was originally drawn by the ancients. It's also a reminder of how important Kutmah was to the existence of this constellation and a reminder of how much he's missed. - Jeff Weiss

**18. Samiyam - Sam Baker’s Album [Brainfeeder, 2011]**

If you stumbled into Low End Theory between 2008 and 2012 and were lucky enough to catch Samiyam behind the decks, you might not remember exactly what you heard, but you remember how you felt. The bass hit you so hard that it felt like you had a razor blade in your throat. The Ann Arbor transplant twisted synths into shrapnel, drums sounded like imminent destruction, the effect was so pulverizing that someone probably called FEMA. He was the only regular playing Roc Marci and Danny Brown, all the new shit that made you want to stab someone's brain with their nose bone.

It's no surprise that he's Alchemist's favorite or that he's now released albums on the hat trick of essential 00s beat labels (Brainfeeder, Hyperdub, and Stones Throw). After a clutch of EP's, Sam Baker's album amassed all that velocity in one alternately gorgeous and gargoyle heavy instrumental suite. You can see the usual influences, Dilla, Madlib, Primo, Pete Rock, FlyLo, but it's innately infused with Samiyam's grit and filth. It's a matter of plucking diamonds from dirt, stars in soot, breathing artesian oxygen and then descending into a valley of smog. Yellow tape instead of a velvet rope to remind you that the Beat Scene was as far away from Hollywood as Hanoi. -- Jeff Weiss

**17. Dibiase - *Machines Hate Me* [Alpha Pup]**

By design, vintage Nintendo music was a sleek and orderly thing. Melodies fit into the grid like so many Tetris pieces, while rhythms pressed ever forward to add urgency to the player’s button-punching ways. In the ’80s, though, such streamlining wasn’t limited to virtual reality: The live entertainment of championship wrestlers like “Million Dollar Man” Ted DiBiase was also carefully plotted-out theater, to the point where DiBiase once breezed through a handful of pile-drivers and spent four days in the hospital just to win sympathy from his audience.

On Machines Hate Me, veteran L.A. beat-maker Dibiase looked back on those years, and then threw all the programming rules out the window. He forsook quantization in favor of soulful, Dilla-style MPC finger drums. He paired squelching dubstep and late-’60s soul with dirty beats and 8-bit synths. He turned the themes for Mike Tyson’s Punch-Out!! and The Price is Right into sonic Lego pieces, subjecting their familiar melodies to his whims.

Plenty of recent musicians mined the ’80s for artistic expression. Usually, it’s come across as an act of misplaced nostalgia—a way to bask in the silly stuff of another time and escape the current problems at hand. But Dibiase’s relationship to the ephemera of that time seems more complex: As a kid growing up in Watts, music and Nintendo weren’t just fun activities; they were the things he did while others turned to gang-banging. And for all of the whimsy on Machines Hate Me, there are moments that underscore this dark undercurrent: just listen to the way the 8-bit funk of “Dubwreck” descends into an anxious lurch.

Dibiase clearly has a love for his source material. But as he chopped it up and made it new, he offered a perspective that you won’t find from most -- it was giddy and playful, but also bittersweet. - Peter Holslin

**16. Jonwayne – *Bowser* [Alpha Pup, 2011]**

When I interviewed Jonwayne in 2013, he told me that the Nintendo DS game Animal Crossing gave him the only semblance of structure in his life. He cited a notoriously difficult dungeon crawler called Dark Souls as his favorite gamer. He used to work at Gamestop. Yet Bowser isn’t some concept album about the bad guy from Mario, as you might expect from someone with that background.

Sure, the album comes to us filtered through pixilated landscapes, but the real obsession that fuels Bowser is hip-hop, not video games. In fact, Jon told me the main reason the album sounds like a soundtrack to an NES game is that he had a “shitty ass laptop” that couldn’t run anything heftier than a prehistoric sound chip without crashing.

This is an album by a man who is first and foremost a hip-hop aficionado, who evinced his crate-digging bonafides by exalting criminally overlooked Pasadena crew Mad Kap in an interview with FACT. He’s a devout follower of the cult of Busta. “Trilla G” samples an iconic Nate Dogg hook.

But even if the primary motivation is hip-hop, it’s remarkable how nicely Jonwayne’s two obsessions dovetailed. The Exorcist descending keyboards of “Bowser I (Sigma Head)” evoke a King Koopa rampaging like Ice Cube’s dad in “Down for Whatever,” drunk and threatening to turn the party out. “Beady Bablo”’s woozy, chiptune interpolation of “Freek-A-Leek” proves that Petey Pablo could have a second career stealing princesses from castles. - Jordan Pederson

**15. Captain Murphy – *Duality*[Brainfeeder, 2012]**

You may not recall it, but Captain Murphy hit the scene in a purposefully dense cloud of weed smoke so thick it was intended to obscure his true identity. It didn't take long until Steve Ellison, also known as Flying Lotus, dropped the charade at a Low End Theory event in what had become one of the worst kept secrets in hip hop at the time to reveal his foray into Quasimoto territory, stepping away from the computers and samplers to pick up the mic. Sure, the man can produce beat joints with the best of them, but could he rap?

"Duality" offered a definitive yes to that question, but perhaps more importantly still, the album proved that in this new persona, Ellison knew how to have fun. With production and lyrical assistance from seemingly everyone on the Brainfeeder label and its compatriots, including Earl Sweatshirt, SAMIYAM, Teebs and Jeremiah Jae, this family affair was a reminder that hip hop doesn't need to be hard to be enjoyable.

With track titles like "Hovercrafts and Cows" and "Mighty Morphin Foreskin," it's easy to see where Ellison's head was on this one, and comic book fans noticed the nod towards the genre on "The Killing Joke." Hell, the name Captain Murphy comes from old episodes of "Sealab 2021." With innumerable weed punchlines and big dick boasts, this album was meant to be enjoyed between blunts. Public Enemy this ain’t, which seemed to be the point in the largely joyless world of rap at the time. The fact that the mixtape opens and closes with a sample hyping the joy of cult hood only goes to show how tongue-in-cheek the whole project is. This is stoner rap, not in the vein of Cypress Hill, but clearly sharing a bowl with the likes of Madlib, DOOM and Kool Keith. Puff, puff, given. - Chris Daly

**14. Mono/Poly -- *The George Machine* [Faces, 2010]**

Stomp. Rumble. Wobble. As the decade of EDM rolled on, the bourgeoisie recoiled in horror at the mere mention of low end and atonal synths, finding certainty in softness or stability in the mid-range attack of rebore punk. While it’s easy to take pleasure in their discomfort - a generation whose musical highlights include Devandra Banhart and Animal Collective must pay for their sins in blood – the humble wobble used to be far more than a tool for trolling aging hipsters.In the hands of Mono/Poly it was a call for revolution.

If you’ve never experienced the Airliner’s sound system, it’s impossible to understate how important bassweight is to the Low End Theory experience. Any show, given enough money and space, can be loud but Wednesday nights in Los Angeles are heavy. The booming system is what separated LeT from Sketchbook and other predecessors, and it’s the key ingredient that made the night such a hospitable environment for Croydon’s brand of bass music.

Acts like Mono/Poly didn't make Dubstep, but they certainly drew from the same ideas, with a few adjustments. Substitute Cali-tempo shuffle for England’s slow-fast dynamic, glitchy electronica for transmuted Garage swing and software for dubplates and The George Machine is a particularly creative Coki record. As is, the all too brief EP might be the high point of America’s sudden infatuation with Bass culture. "Beatles Bitch" is the highlight, as disrespectful to old musical culture in form as it is in name. Like a well organized platoon of Sentinels with a mission to piss on your older brother’s record collection, the beat is J Dilla on a bad trip, Flying Lotus gone rogue. "MS-14" is even more reliant on the sub, marrying ancestral G-Funk squeals to scratched CD LFOs, while the title track makes clear which George they’re referring to (Clinton).

Ignore the obnoxious brostep in their wake and listen to The George Machine again. As a brief, punchy guide to ripping up conventions and embracing the shock of the new, nothing comes close. After all, music that doesn’t offend can only be inoffensive. - Son Raw

**13. Baths – *Cerulean* [Anticon, 2010]**

Some beat records hit you in the chest, while others move your feet or feed your brain. *Cerulean* plays to your heart, catching you off guard with the sincerity of its songwriting and the delicacy of its construction. Baths’ Will Weisenfeld is something of an oddity in this list, a musician with 8 years classical training who only began thinking of himself as a producer shortly before making this record. In 2010 he told me that he’d make a terrible DJ having never spun a record in his life, and yet he was an artist newly signed to Anticon (via an introduction from Daedelus) who was booked to play a month long live residency at Low End Theory.

*Cerulean* was released at a time when the LA scene had already been popping for some time – Baths was a fan, but not a copyist. The songs on the album are fidgety, awkward things with names like ‘Indoorsy’ and ‘Apologetic Shoulderblades’, beats clicking in and out of place with melody as their anchor. It feels introverted to a point - riddled with glitches and imperfections - but is never difficult to love. It’s a patchwork of a record and Weisenfeld arranges all of the elements beautifully, whether it’s a carefully chosen YouTube sample or the rain outside his bedroom window. Even at its most intricate, you’re never far away from a moment of clarity.

If you've followed Baths post-*Cerulean* you will have seen much of this fussiness stripped away – the songs confident and purposeful. By contrast, *Cerulean* is a head rush more likely to take you somewhere unexpected. It's rare for an album driven by beats to feel quite so human, imbued with all our contradictions - cheerful and bittersweet, gloomy and optimistic, restless but perfectly formed. -[*Kyle Ellison*](https://twitter.com/KyleEllison)

12. Ras G – Brotha From Anotha Planet [Brainfeeder, 2009]

Ras G is the beat scene’s answer to Sun Ra. His music is an attempt to commune with the constellations. It is the Afrocentric direct from Alpha Centauri.

Sonically, Ras G pulls equally from the electronic and the analogue. The album’s interstellar chill is balanced by a persistent warm hiss pulled from deep crates. “Earthly Matters” finds an otherwise swirling, contemplative suite interrupted by spacey, MPC crafted boom-bap. “Astrohood” is equal parts reggae/dub and simplistic keyboard chords. “Come Down (2 Earth)” is a soulful and ethereal Dilla homage, complete with horn samples and crisp, banging drums. And “Alkebulan” is free jazz freaked, accompanied by thumping percussion and sounds syphoned from the Millennium Falcon motherboard.

Overall, *Brotha From Another Planet* lends itself less to Low End Theory shows and more to headphone listening, a solitary exploration of the soul in twilight hours. Ras G’s willingness to pull back between banging beats, to tie everything together with these oddly comforting intergalactic sound collages, is brilliant. It’s in these moments that we reflect, remind ourselves of their visceral impact, and attempt to find our place in the universe. - Max Bell

Bad Vibes is like a haunted house I can’t help but live in. Everything about the album, starting with the title, warns against paying a visit. The tracklist is lined with messages of desperation (“Anywhere But Here”), ambivalence (“It Was Whatever”), juvenile hostility (“Your Stupid Face”) and outright terror (“Trapped in a Burning House”). The toxicity is so thick that I have to wonder if Shlohmo actually wants me here at all. But no matter how much I hesitate before pressing play, I always find Bad Vibes’ cobwebby guitars and ghostly murmurs to be nothing if not welcoming.

11. Shlohmo – Bad Vibes [ Friends of Friends, 2011]

Henry Laufer has a gift for building tension between wonder and terror. This is probably most clear on his gloriously fucked up 2011 remix of Montell Jordan’s classic party anthem “This is How We Do It,” in which Laufer salvages Jordan’s vocal tracks but replaces everything else with a surge of heart-palpitating Halloween synths. Shlohmo’s intentions seem fairly obvious on that cut, but not so much on the songs that make up Bad Vibes. The album’s intricate, skeletal rhythms invite close inspection, and the natural sounds and white noise textures have all the warmth of a down comforter. But how safe is this world, really? The booby-trapped funk of “Just Us”—opening on a thread of light, blurpy synths and then boiling over in a wash of phantom electronics—makes you question what you’re stepping into.

Laufer said that he was going through a rough patch when making this album, yet Bad Vibes seemed to traverse deeper, more ingrained burdens. Some people get so consumed by their pains, fears, insecurities, etc., that they can’t think about anything else. But here, Shlohmo took control of all that nasty stuff and molded it into something beautiful. – Peter Holslin

10. Austin Peralta – Endless Planets [Brainfeeder, 2011]

The influence of jazz on the LA Beat Scene, Brainfeeder specifically, is undeniable; it is all but a foregone conclusion. Yet that influence is often an intangible or a partial presence, located more in the aesthetical spirit than in the flesh of the music, or as just one component in a varied mix of ingredients. Before Kamasi Washington who came much later and orbited on the periphery, the scene produced only one artist whose work specifically explored jazz itself – the young piano prodigy Austin Peralta.

Peralta had a great reputation for live performances, which occasionally involved luminaries like Flying Lotus and Thundercat, as well as other notable musicians. Since his untimely tragic passing, recordings of these performances have taken on a nearly mythical dimension. The music they contain is full of exuberance and wonder, every note enthusiastically sounded and relished by the players as it escaped the instrument, every chord a possibility for a new avenue of sound to follow. This infatuation with musicality and willingness to push boundaries are the very same qualities that define the Beat Scene, and they are the badge that marks Peralta as belonging to it.

But for an innovator to be successful in his experiments, he absolutely must be proficient in the fundamentals. Therein lays the importance of *Endless Planets,* Peralta’s most significant studio album. While his live sets reached out to the farther edges of jazz, Endless Planets is almost conservative at heart. The music is still fervent, but noticeably more grounded. Piano and rhythm section do the bulk of the work, staying comfortably in the pocket of the genre. Only a sparse smattering of electronics and a few ambient production flourishes reveal the album’s modernity and the author’s affiliation with a progressive musical movement. This relatively reserved approach on Endless Planets serves as a touchstone for Peralta’s exploits elsewhere, the prototypical mold from which further mutations are derived. The album reveals the classicist behind the innovator, and on a wider scope a tangible link between the Beat Scene and the larger historical tradition which spiritually informs it. – Alex Piyevsky

**9. Daedelus – Live at Low End Theory [Alpha Pup, 2008]**

8**. Flash Bang Grenada – 10 Haters [Hellfyre Club, 2011]**

Can you teleport to the Slauson swap meet to save on socks? Nocando can. Do you have a horn section for bronchial tubes? Busdriver does. Together, they were Flash Bang Grenada.

If that reads like the poster for an indie spoof of a superhero blockbuster, that’s because Flash Bang Grenada’s 10 Haters is that and more. A blend of absurd braggadocio combined with superhuman rhymes, it’s as hilarious as it is intelligent, one of the best rap albums born out of the beat scene.

Produced by a coterie of Low End Theory regulars, the beats are built to fry JBL circuitry and splinter Airliner floorboards. On “Good Cop, Bad Cop” Dibiase turns ‘80s arcade game buttons into MPC pads. Shlohmo’s “Hyperbolic” renders sparse percussion crafted from pots and pans menacing with plinking keys that would make Mustard green. And the Mono/Poly produced “In a Perfect World” is post-Def Jux industrial funk made fun for the head nodding. The rest of the production lends itself to more description that, like the above, doesn’t adequately convey the complexity therein.

That Nocando and Busdriver excel in rapping over forward-thinking production of this caliber is a feat of which few rappers are capable of today, let alone six years ago. And the hooks here aree also some of the catchiest in the Hellfyre Club canon (see “Good Cop, Bad Cop” or “Moisturizer”). Their verbal dexterity is complemented by their self-awareness and effortless comedic sensibilities. This is art rap with infinite swag, the funniest Hellfyre Club album ever recorded, and definitely the most fun to listen to. – Max Bell

**7. Teebs – Ardour [Brainfeeder, 2010]**

The haziness of marijuana permeates most beat scene releases, but none reached the sheer billowiness of Teebs’ Ardour, an album seemingly recorded out of clouds and harp samples. Using J Dilla’s sampledelia and Flying Lotus’ left-of-center electronic jazz as starting points before super-charging both into the stratosphere, Teebs’ debut is as soft focus as instrumental Hip-Hop gets – there’s no molly-enabling digital synthesis here and played out of a tinny radio, you might be able to pass it off as a star child’s tape experiments. On a properly tuned system like Airliner’s however, the gut wrenching sub frequencies provide a 10-ton counterweight to the astral traveler melodies. Yes, this is an incredibly pretty album, but it’s also a deceptively robust one.

Teebs’ balancing act between sample and sub, boom and beauty, physical and spiritual not only serves as Ardour’s MO, it’s as good as mission statement for the beat scene as any. While early Los Angeles electro used the sparseness of drum machines to rock the party and DJ Shadow pushed crate digging to its first extremes, Teebs pulls both traditions towards the center on Ardour, reinforcing the psychedelic tradition with an immediacy that works hand in hand with the high-mindedness. It’s hard to disassociate this dream-state inducing contrast between weight and weightlessness from New Yorker Teebs’ adopted sunshine state. Rick Rubin’s beats were born of boomboxes on trains, Detroit Techno’s future jazz filled the mechanical void left by shut down factories and Ardour was brought to you by dispensary-bought weed cookies and 90BPM Hip-Hop records.

True, more substantial records have emerged from Los Angeles bedrooms – Ardour’s been criticized as ephemeral and those looking for fully formed ideas might do well to avoid a record that relishes so fully in its own sketchiness. It’s this same meditative, almost friendly, aesthetic that makes Ardour such an attractive proposition however. Hip-Hop has been more intense, nihilistic, commercial, and political, but never so sensory. – Son Raw

6. The Gaslamp Killer – Breakthrough [Brainfeeder, 2012]

To see The Gaslamp Killer is to believe in The Gaslamp Killer. Each of the Low End Theory co-founder/resident DJ’s wide-ranging sets is ever on the brink of chaos. Hip-hop, rock, electronic – name the genre (or subgenre), he mixes it in. They are indicative of the breadth of the beat scene, and his 2012 BBC mix is my pick for that year’s most essential.

On stage, he’s the waving inflatable arm man outside of the car dealership made real, limbs akimbo and Muppet mane trying to keep pace. Yet the rhythmic flailing of his wiry frame isn’t artificial, his substitute for pyrotechnics or pre-planned drops. It’s genuine, deeply rooted, beyond the bass. He connects without a shred of self-consciousness, guiding audiences with shamanistic conviction.

2009’s My Troubled Mind and 2010’s Death Gate EP were only glimpses of Gaslamp’s recorded potential. Spaced out and punishingly percussive, they were essential but foundational. With his debut Brainfeeder LP, 2012’s Breakthrough, he captures the intimate, heartfelt lunacy of his live show. Decidedly dark in tone, it is the circadian compressed, shuttling you at break neck speed from the psychedelic midnight to the lucid dawn.

With help from his beat scene compatriots, Gaslamp deftly combines his diverse influences. “Holy Mt. Washington” (with Computer Jay) tempers eviscerating low-end bounce with the buoyant whistling reminiscent of an Ennio Morricone score. “Peasants, Cripples, and Retards” (with SAMIYAM) moves from industrial, intergalactic funk to Jamaican dub. The emotive plucking of the yiali tambur by Jogger’s Amir Yaghmai on “Nissim” is backed by Gaslamp’s break-beat barrage. It remains the standout, a reminder that not every song from the beat scene needs to rattle your body in order to touch your soul.

The inherent spontaneity of Gaslamp’s live sets is the only thing lost in translation here. But in synthesizing his seemingly disparate influences he found another way to create the chaotic flirtation that impulsiveness evokes, another way to connect. – Max Bell

5. Open Mike Eagle – Dark Comedy

4 **Thundercat – Apocalypse [Brainfeeder, 2013]**

They say every generation gets a genre of horror that echoes their collective anxieties. We had 9/11 and the financial equivalent of the end times, so visions of apocalypse dance across our TV screens.

But is it that simple? Do we really dream about own proper demise – with the burning and the horses and the hey-hey-hey – so often that we can’t help but watch it on TV? I don’t think so.

We all have our own apocalypses. Financial, personal, geographic: sometimes everything in our lives just blows up.

Thundercat went through one such apocalypse when he lost his friend Austin Peralta back in 2012. When he sings, “I know I’ll see you again/in another life/thank you for sharing your light with the world,” you appreciate why he named his album Apocalypse: this was truly an end of days for Stephen Bruner.  
Elsewhere, the upheavals are less cataclysmic. He laments a lost love on the breezy “Without You.” He gets catastrophically high on “Oh Sheit It’s X,” treating us to a delectable Prince-style pop confection in the process.

Sure, it’s fun to ponder what might happen when the sky falls or the oceans boil. But the apocalypse is a compelling concept not because it might happen sometime, but because it does happen all the time. Thundercat doesn’t fear the end of times. He just knows they’re real. – Jordan Pederson

**3. Gonjasufi - A Sufi and a Killer [Warp, 2010]**

Gonjasufi has the voice of a man who’s been through the gutter and back. An ancient, rusted-out croon, it’s by turns manic and tender, evoking of many days lost in the wilderness, and many more spent realigning the chakras. If you listen to some of Sufi’s older music, you’ll get a taste of these hard times. In one track he released back in 2007, he rapped about being laid out on a sofa on the streets of downtown San Diego, having schizophrenic moments and starving for a single loaf of bread. But nowadays, he’s living in Las Vegas with his family, teaching yoga and making music for an esteemed record label. A Sufi and a Killer stands as Sufi’s testament to just how strange and remarkable some journeys through life can be.

The album itself feels like an epic trek, as producers Gaslamp Killer, Mainframe and Flying Lotus sample a global list of artists—Isaac Hayes, Spirit, Turkish rocker Erkin Koray, Bollywood singers Asha Bhosle and Suresh Wadkar—to forge soulful, tripped-out beats. The vibe is decidedly dirty, and the thunder and rain that comes in at the tail end of “Love of Reign” makes the voyage that much more unnerving: When I listened recently, I had to pull off my headphones to make sure I wasn’t getting caught in a storm. Still, Sufi navigates the landscape with confidence, unleashing his aspirations and desires with crisp poetry, and laying his contradictions bare in an allegorical track about a lion that wishes he were a sheep. When the wizened singer finally finds redemption in “Made”—the album’s closing track, whose lyrics strike a parallel between the coming of spring and the arrival of a paycheck—his voice is feather-light and full of relief. I can almost imagine him shedding a tear in the recording booth.

Listening to A Sufi and a Killer, I’m always struck by how alien yet familiar the music sounds. At times, Gonjasufi resembles an astronaut, beaming his messages from a lonely space station 600 light-years away. But as I’ve listened to this album over the years, I’ve realized Sufi is completely down to Earth—it’s just that he knows the bitter soil more than most. – Peter Holslin

**2. Nosaj Thing – Drift [Alpha Pup, 2009]**

The full-length debut album by Nosaj Thing is a cavernous affair, i suppose making it the perfect soundtrack for all your spelunking needs. The beats are deep, dark and exploratory, and to completely misquote Jack Black, they place the listener in the precarious position of constantly choosing between holding on tight and getting poked in a private place.

The artist known to his parents as Jason Chung was a hip-hop head growing up, copping such stations as Cali's own Power 106 by way of his bus driver growing up, which I suppose makes it all the more appropriate that he ended up producing for such artists as Busdriver, Kendrick Lamar and Nocando.

Nosaj was one of the earliest members of the then burgeoning LA beat scene as it exploded. The one thing this loosely affiliated crew would have in common, other than mutual respect and a tendency to play the same venues, would be an insistence on staying true to one's own sound as opposed to chasing whatever happened to be en vogue that week. e.

Whereas his contemporaries tend to produce more fleshed out sounds, often with a heavy hip-hop influence, NT is about creating a canvas as equally shaded by silence as it is by noise. Tracks like "Quest" and "Fog" perfectly embody this aesthetic, as much echo as they are ghostly synths. The album progresses, adding layers until the mid-way point and the aptly named (for my metaphor, at least), "Caves." From the subdued opening, each track has a bit more meat to it, from disembodied vocals to more aggressive percussion, the wave builds in intensity as the track count increases. "1685/Bach" is about as banger as Chung gets here, and the release is a welcome one after such a predominantly ethereal affair to that point. The album seemingly resets itself on the latter half. Starting with "Light #1," the album's earlier, quieter vibe resumes. It's all set-up, however, before ending on the high note of the almost symphonic, "Lords." Filled with manipulated vocals, the choral effect achieved takes the vibe from cave to cathedral in one fell swoop.

While he couldn't have known it at the time, Nosaj Thing's Drift has a lot in common with "the drift" of Guillermo del Toro's "Pacific Rim." In both instances, the drift is a process by which two active participants bond over synchronized brain waves to form a more perfect whole. While del Toro had a specific, mechanical process in mind, Chung found a far more organic approach that works just as well, if not better. Nosaj Thing realized that Drift isn't about moving away from the source, it's about moving towards a new one.

**1. Flying Lotus – Los Angeles [Warp, 2008]**

I’ve been to Los Angeles exactly twice. The first was a family vacation not worth detailing, and the second was at the invitation of this site’s editor. This second trip involved, among other hijinks, a telepathic conversation with Madlib, a European model who couldn’t fit a Katz’ pastrami sandwich in her mouth and enough high end Cannabis to convince me that attending a yoga class was a sensible activity. It also involved several nocturnal freeway excursions down dimly lit highways, past LA’s signature Cambodian donut shops, to destinations far removed from Hollywood’s stereotypical glitz, excursions that I will always associate with Flying Lotus’ *Los Angeles.*

Nearly 10 years removed from Los Angeles’ release, even in the wake of the Kendrick collaborations, Captain Murphy and Japanese style body horror films, the album still feels like an anomaly. Most LA music evokes sunshine - even at its most menacing the city’s gangsta rap promised hoorides in good weather – but here Flylo used techno, bass music, jazz and Stones Throw’s blueprint to paint a picture of stoned weirdoes marauding through the city’s endless expanse by moonlight. Listening to its African percussion collide with IDM sub-frequencies and moog licks bounce off record static conjures up strange shamanistic imagery and it’s unsurprising that Warp Records was able to parlay its Afrofuturist grit into full throated endorsements from the electronic music press. The ‘Black Aphex Twin’ bylines wrote themselves and Los Angeles was perfectly timed to dovetail with the hipster rediscovery of electronic music after a decade of mediocre guitar bands writing love songs about their coke addictions. If we’d known EDM was right around the corner, maybe we’d have appreciated the moment more.

And yet despite its electronic bonafides, Los Angeles is Hip Hop to the core, even if Hip Hop didn’t know it at the time. Released during a half decade death spiral for whatever was left of rap’s 90s generation and during the South’s ringtone rap powered party phase, Los Angeles quite simply didn’t fit in. What it did however is inspire misfits both global and local. Odd Future fronted like ignorant enfants terribles but their beat science pointed directly to Los Angeles. Dubstep refugee Kode9 took notes ahead of his label’s second phase and helped introduce Flying Lotus’ music to London right as the city’s production community was undergoing a similar experimental phase. Detroit’s Danny Brown considered what it’d take to rap over music this weird and soon an entire scene of blunted beatmakers sprung up both around Low End Theory, Lotus’ performance space of choice, and the Internet where his music was consumed. We’re a decade removed from cloud rap, half a decade from Yeezus and two years from Future’s DS2 and while we don’t know for sure if Clams Casino, Kanye and Future heard Los Angeles (definitely, surely, and probably not ,respectively), I guarantee you it was the butterfly whose wings indirectly started the rap hurricane that made harsh electronic production an acceptable canvas over which to brag about sexcapades and Gucci brand footwear.

So Los Angeles is both a capsule – the crystallization of a moment in time where old ideas exhausted themselves so new ones could come together – and an inspiration for countless records to come. Above all however, it stands, at least to my touristy ears, as the perfect soundtrack to a night driving in LA. Preferably stoned, laughing and eating a donut. – Son Raw