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Some of our favorite things.

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TEN THINGS WE LIKED ABOUT 2002

Eminem's the Man Once Again, but the Stones, Jonathan Franzen, Jonathan Safran Foer, Conor Oberst, Beck and Flaming Lips Also Helped Pass the Time

December 5, 2002

2002 was not the best of years, nor was it the worst. The world of pop culture spent much of the last 12 months reeling in a post-9/11 environment of doom, gloom and a plummeting stock market. But that's not to say there weren't any bread and circuses to distract us from a world run amok, where quality was dismissed in favor of quantity, *Fear Factor* and *The Bachelor* ruled, and the bottom line became the only accepted barometer of success in show biz.

1. Eminem as America's Newest Sweetheart: Charles Barkley put it best, "What kind of world is it where the best golfer is black and the best rapper white?" Marshall Mathers aka Slim Shady dominated the pop music world with a #1 album, #1 movie and a restored public image that endeared him to mothers and daughters across the U.S.A. Not even a battle with **Triumph the Insult Comic Dog** at the **MTV Awards** could turn the public against him, but where does he go after *8 Mile*? Now that he's matured, can he continue to keep up in a world of hip-hop that worships street cred and, as in the movie, casts a wary eye at anyone with a private-school education?

2. The Stones Keep on Rolling: Between the amazing **ABKCO** reissues, the two-CD *Forty Licks*, their still-incredible live shows, **Bill Wyman's** coffee table tome and **Stephen Davis'** remarkable 40-year history, the World's Greatest Rock & Roll Band proved their legacy will be a tough one to top. May they return every couple of years until we're all too old to care.

3. The Return of the Modern-Day Troubadour: The emergence of **Norah Jones** and **John Mayer** has been well-documented, but the movement really took off with

Bright Eyes' **Conor Oberst**, the first new **Dylan** in a while to live up to the burden of that title. **Beck's** *Sea Change* was a stunning change of pace for the alternarock idol, who abandoned irony to dig deep into his pain like a modern-day **Hank Williams** and whose great shows with **Flaming Lips** recalled a post-psychedelic Bobby Z with **The Band**. Other standout tunesmiths who put out impressive albums include **Ryan Adams**, **Howie Day**, **Rhett Miller** and **Ben Folds**, and keep an eye out for **Mackenzie BC**. Young **Avril Lavigne**, certainly the new artist mainstream breakthrough of the year, bears watching, too, as to whether she can be that rare teen artist who brings her audience along with her.

4. **Geezer Gods Do Good**: Some of the most stirring moments of the year occurred during concerts by **Paul McCartney** (his gracious Staples show was the next best thing to the **Beatles** show we'll never see), **the Who** (their Hollywood Bowl performance turned into an emotionally cathartic tribute to the late **John Entwistle**) and **Bruce Springsteen** (his Forum show combined the inspiration of a secular church with the blue collar humility of a guy just doing his job). Another former Fab Four member, **George Harrison's** post-humous *Brainwashed* was some of his most compelling music in years, highlighted by a variety of instrumental stylings that underscored how underrated a rock guitarist he was. Also representing the Boomers during the year: **Elvis Costello**, **Joey Ramone**, **Paul Westerberg**, **Johnny Cash**, **Red Hot Chili Peppers**, **Tom Petty**, **David Bowie**, **Warren Zevon**, **Soft Boys**, **Bryan Ferry**, **Robert Plant**, **Van Morrison**, **Sonic Youth**, **Los Lobos**, **The Breeders** and **Neil Young**. And with perhaps the most powerful post-9/11 album of the year, the grand old men of technoclash, **Suicide**.

5. **Garage-Rock Revival**: Swedish revivalists **The Hives** managed to evoke both the early British invasion and the '70s punk-rock renaissance, and their local show at the Roxy was as pulsating a set as I experienced all year. **The Strokes** and the **White Stripes** put on two of the best live shows of 2002 at the Hollywood Palace and the El Rey, respectively. All eyes will be on their next efforts, as well as promising newcomers **the Raveonettes** from Denmark and Aussies **The Vines** (charismatic frontman **Craig Nicholls'** cover of **OutKast's** "Ms. Jackson" at the Roxy was one of the year's live highlights) to see if they can grab the rock & roll torch and carry it into the 21st century. Here's hoping they can.

6. **The Rise of Prog- and Hebe-Hop**: With the bling-bling of gangsta rap sputtering post-Sept. 11, a new generation of organic hip-hoppers have shown a promising future direction for the genre. Standout albums were produced by L.A. coalition **Jurassic 5**, Cockney rapper **The Streets**, Philly rap/soul collective **The Roots** and up-and-coming suburban grrrl group **Northern State**. Meanwhile, highbrow wordslinger **MC Paul Barman**, the "original Jewish rapper" **Etan G** (actually closer to a semitic **Prince**) and Latin he-bros **Hip-Hop Hoodios** expanded the notion of ethnic flava originally essayed by the likes of the **Beastie Boys** and **M.O.T.** in one of the more

promising rap offshoots in years.

7. Will the Next Pink Floyd Please Stand Up? Art-rockers continued to push the limits of sound and pop structure, though this generation of space cadets pays extra attention to melody and beat. **Coldplay** was this year's **Radiohead** lite, but the likes of **Flaming Lips**, **Doves**, **Clinic**, **Wilco**, **DJ Shadow**, **Sigur Ros** (whose Wiltern Theater show was spellbinding) and the amazing **Suicide** also brought new meaning to the never-ending clash of avant-garde and commerce. Special mention goes to a pair of bands expanding the canvas of heavy mettle in **Queens of the Stone Age**, one of the smartest hard rock groups out there, and ...**Trail of Dead**, who bring a pop sensibility to the thrash genre.

8. The Rise of the Indie Flick: **Alfonso Cuarón's** *Y Tu Mama Tambien* was quite possibly the best movie of the year, with **George Hickenlooper's** *The Man From Elysian Fields*, **Paul Thomas Anderson's** *Punch-Drunk Love*, **Burr Steers' Igby Goes Down**, **Steven Shainberg's Secretary**, **Bill Paxton's Frailty**, **Claude Chabrol's Merci Pour Le Chocolat**, **Charles Herman-Wurmfeld's Kissing Jessica Stein**, **Sam Jones' I Am Trying To Break Your Heart** and **Mark Romanek's One Hour Photo** all better than anything mainstream Hollywood produced. I'm sure I'm going to love **Spike Jonze** and **Charlie Kaufman's Adaptation** as well as **Alexander Payne's About Schmidt**. I'm real intrigued by what I've seen of **Martin Scorsese's Gangs of New York**, though my wife is curious if they really dressed like that back then. I got scared off **Sam Mendes' The Road to Perdition** and **Paul Schrader's Auto Focus** by the word of mouth, but I most certainly will see them on video. Best Hollywood movie of the year: the **Weitz' About a Boy**. Most Intriguing, But Ultimately Unsuccessful Hitchcock Homages: **Brian De Palma's Femme Fatale**, **David Fincher's Panic Room**.

9. Making Book: **Jonathan Franzen's The Corrections** and **Jonathan Safran Foer's Everything Is Illuminated** were the two most dazzling American novels of the year, beautifully written, with a wide-screen scope that encompassed page-turning narratives as well as the requisite post-modern flourish, followed closely by **Michael Chabon's** sprawling *The Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*. **Richard Ford's A Multitude of Sins** was the year's headiest collection of short stories, with **Jimmy McDonough's Neil Young** biography *Shakey* and **Stephen Davis' 40-year odyssey of the Stones, Old Gods Almost Dead**, the top non-fiction.

10. The Tube Passes the Litmus Test: Nothing beat **HBO's** 90-minute blast of *The Sopranos* followed by **Larry David's Curb Your Enthusiasm**, with the incredible *Six Feet Under* not far behind. The only show worth watching on network TV, aside from *The Simpsons*, naturally, is *24*, which this year is more outlandish than ever, but minute-for-minute, takes the concept of cliffhanger to new, post-9/11 heights. Single **Most Watched Program of the Year:** ESPN Sportscenter. **Best New Show:** *Pardon the Interruption*. **Most Overrated:** *The Osbournes, West Wing, Friends. Guilty*

Pleasure: *Blind Date*.

Honorable Mention: **Pink** (live and on video),
Spielberg's *Minority Report*, **Ellis Amburn's** *The Sexiest*
Man Alive: A Biography of Warren Beatty, **Howard**
Stern, Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man*.

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