

# Chicago Tribune

Jazz

By Howard Reich  
Tribune arts critic  
Published December 12, 2004

That so many of this year's best jazz recordings have been produced by independent labels, or by the artists themselves, says a great deal about where the major labels have been heading -- into irrelevance.

And though it's doubtful that many of the recordings listed below have turned much of a profit for the artists in question, the quality, stylistic range and originality of the music are beyond dispute. What follows are one listener's choices of the best jazz CDs of the year, a list that could have been three times as long, if space permitted.

Jean-Michel Pilc, "Follow Me" (Dreyfus Jazz) Few jazz pianists command the technical prowess of this French virtuoso, but on this all-solo CD, Pilc convinces listeners that there's more to his art than the speed, precision and power of his 10 phenomenal fingers. The sheer subtlety of his sense of color on his "Follow Me," the bittersweet sensibility he brings to the jazz waltz "Les Amants d'un Jour" and the whimsical ways in which he reinvents W.C. Handy's "St. Louis Blues" point to the first-rate intellect behind the formidable technique. Yet Pilc devotees who still yearn for fireworks will marvel at the Tatumesque virtuosity he shows on Sonny Rollins' "Oleo" and the symphonic dimensions he suggests in his homage to John Coltrane in "My Favorite Things"