Black History Month is nice, but how about Black New Month? A year ago we compiled a guide to "10 Essential Black Minnesota Musicians" — a look back at the state's all-time greats, and at least one of the world's (Prince) — but we felt there was something missing: It left out many of the current Black musicians who are shaping and igniting the sounds coming out of the Twin Cities and beyond. So that's our mission here. Of course, this list is even more arguable, since these 10 music makers, along with all the others we considered, are still carving out their art and careers. But they, too, are making history.
Jovonta Patton

A gospel wunderkind, he started singing at Berean Missionary Baptist Church in north Minneapolis at age 4, writing songs at 6, directing the church choir as a middle-schooler and forming his group DFY (Delivery for Youth) at 12. Now 31, he made a splash in 2016 when his album “Finally Living” topped Billboard’s gospel chart — the first independent release to do so. He’s revisited No. 1 three times. An activist and ordained minister, he and his wife, Symone, lead a pop-up church, the Wave.

Strengths: Whether accompanied by a choir or his three daughters, Patton delivers spirited modern pop-gospel that soars for the Lord.

Listen to: “I Can,” a soulful piano song of determination, and “My Hands Are Lifted Up,” a surging ballad about seeking blessings from above.

Up next: “Patton University,” his film about a fictional Black college, will premiere Feb. 28 at AMC Southdale. And he’ll do a live recording at 7 p.m. March 9 at Living Word Christian Center in Brooklyn Park.

Online: jovonta.com
Dua Saleh

The title of Saleh’s latest EP, “Crossover,” is as ambiguous yet poignant as their lyrics. It could refer to the singer’s innovative mixing of rhythmic musical genres, blurring of gender lines, blending of multiple artistic forms, or surprising push into mainstream media. Born in Sudan and raised in St. Paul, they turned poetry performances as an Augsburg University student into the nocturnally hypnotic 2019 debut EP, “Nur,” which generated notices from Rolling Stone and Pitchfork. That exposure led to a role on the hit Netflix series “Sex Education” as Cal, whose nonbinary identity Saleh shares in real life. More lines blurred, in good ways.

**Strengths:** Saleh channels a wild, worldly backdrop of beats to produce songs that poke, punch or soothe listeners with evocative lyrics.

**Listen to:** The tick-tocking “Sugar Mama” and Afro-electro-beaten “Fitt.”

**Up next:** Saleh hopes to return to the stage by midyear after “Sex Ed” filming wraps in Wales.

**Online:** hey.duasaleh.com
Annie Mack

After studying Christian theology at Minnesota Bible College, the north Minneapolis native settled in Rochester. Since taking up singing a decade ago, she has grown into one of the state’s most vital voices, living in the confluence of blues, gospel and Americana. She dropped her debut album, “Baptized by the Blues,” in 2013, and followed with two EPs, including 2021’s potent “Testify.” A regular performer at clubs and festivals, the 43-year-old mother of three also works as a death doula.

**Strengths:** Like Minnesota’s answer to Mavis Staples, she sings blues, R&B and Americana with a liberating, deep-voiced gospel fervor.

**Listen to:** The empowering Southern soul of “Shadows of a Kingdom” and the spiritually tinged “Closer,” about faith, forgiveness and death.

**Up next:** Concerts April 14 at Reif Center in Grand Rapids and April 23 at Phipps Center in Hudson, Wis.

**Online:** anniemackmusic.com
Allan Kingdom

Seychew-born rapper Shabazz Mullins brought his hit R&B track "All Day" to the stage at the star-studded 2022 NBA All-Star Weekend. Mullins, 25, is one of many musicians who have made a name for themselves in the hip-hop and R&B genres.

**Strengths:** Mullins' smooth vocals, infectious beats, and powerful lyrics have earned him a dedicated fan base. His stage presence is electrifying.

*Listen to the 2020 track "Kaleidoscope" and 2015's hit single "Thunder."*

*Yours: Hip-hop. His: The Motown and R&B sound of Allan Kingdom.*

*Online: Follow Allan on Instagram and Twitter*

Account: 19814 (3949)
PaviElle French

Since discovering her voice at Mississippi Creative Arts Magnet, the St. Paulite has developed into a triple threat — singer, composer and actress — while winning awards (a regional Emmy, a Sage) and fellowships (a McKnight, a Jerome Hill). French, 36, is about speaking her truth, as evidenced on her activist-inspired 2021 album, “Sovereign.” Her career turned when she cold-emailed the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and wound up writing a chamber symphony in memory of her mother, “A Requiem for Zula.” She has since appeared with orchestras in San Francisco and Miami, and will premiere a new piece, “Sands of Time,” with the SPCO June 9-12.

Strengths: Her deeply soulful voice simmers as she shares her empowering messages.

Listen to: “A Requiem for Zula” and “Self-Care,” a spoken-word choral piece about being mindful.

Up next: A collaborative work with students of Walker West Music Academy, which she will debut in concert May 22 at the Fitzgerald Theater.

Online: facebook.com/pavielle.french
Mankwe Ndosi

As hard to categorize as she is easy to fascinate and charm, this Minneapolis-raised, Harvard-educated vocalist and composer has made her mark in the jazz scene but has also fallen in with classical, hip-hop, African, avant-garde — you name it. Last year’s album “Felt/Not Said” explored often wordless vocal stylings that let the emotions do the talking. She has also ventured a wide range of collaborations, such as Great Black Mondays at Icehouse, her New Age-y quartet Body MemOri, and her work with Chicago’s Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians.

**Strengths:** Per the late, great Pamela Espeland for MinnPost, Ndosi has been “been surprising, beguiling and challenging audiences for years.” We would add “educating” and “soothing,” too.

**Listen to:** The voice-shredding, mind-blowing, 10-minute “backmouthfindingpulse.”

**Up next:** A Carnegie Hall concert Thursday with Nicole Mitchell’s Black Earth Ensemble and a March 24 Schubert Club gig with a cappella improv group Give Get Sistet.

**Online:** auspicienow.bandcamp.com
Nur-D

Raised in Rosemount on comics and video games, Matt Allen, 3l, turned his nerdy obsessions into a flourishing hip-hop career in 2018. He won radio contests and City Pages awards, with raps that are, by turns, playful, topical and rocking. During the George Floyd protests, he helped provide first-aid care, and later released pointed commentaries on two albums, “38th” and “Chicago Avenue,” released in the fall of 2020.

**Strengths:** He can be family-friendly enough to crush it at a yard concert or provocative enough to light up social media, commanding the stage with a cartoonish personality that is somehow both cuddly and crucial.

**Listen to:** “Band Aid,” a fiery salvo about racism and the police, and “Ninjadoh,” a sweet puppy love song for geeky gamers.

**Up next:** An appearance at First Avenue’s Wrestlepalooza on March 27.

**Online:** nurrocks.com
Ondara

Ever since discovering as a teenager in Kenya that Guns N' Roses didn't actually write “Knockin' on Heaven's Door,” this passionate, 29-year-old acoustic strummer has gone through many twists of fate. His love of Bob Dylan brought him to Minnesota, where he learned to play guitar and landed a hit on 89.3 the Current. That led to the 2019 LP “Tales of America,” which led to a Grammy nomination and gigs opening for Neil Young and Lindsey Buckingham. Fate struck again, though. Lockdown led to a batch of stark home recordings, “Folk N' Roll, Vol. 1: Tales of Isolation,” one of the earliest and most acclaimed albums born of quarantine.

**Strengths:** His deep but tender voice can handle any emotion that his earnest, poetic lyrics throw at him.

**Listen to:** The raw, romantic “Lockdown on Date Night Tuesday” or dramatic “Saying Goodbye.”

**Up next:** A new album with more brand-name collaborators.

**Online:** spanishvillager.com
L.A. Buckner

A God-loving Black man, proud of his church roots and his north Minneapolis community, the percussionist/educator tops his deep, thoughtful music as revolutionary, mixing jazz, rock, funk, gospel and hip-hop. In 2020, his self-released album "Big Moonie" surprisingly topped iTunes jazz chart the week it was released. L.A. — it stands for Little Arthur — is known as cohost of the Webbby-winning PBS music-education series "Sound Field" and a teacher at MacPhail Center for Music in Minneapolis. In addition to founding his own group, the versatile Buckner, 39, also has performed with rapper Dem Atlas, funk band Pho and gospel artists Darnell Davis and Jowonta Patton.

**Strengths:** With his uncompromising personality, ferocious drumming and lead, intense jazzy fusion, Buckner makes irresistibly powerful statements.

**Listen to:** The African-influenced "Ddbiim" and the building, hard-grooving 2018 single "Not Today Karen... Not Today."

**Up next:** A new album, "Live at the Iochhouse."

**Online:** @TLCtraxNY on Twitter, @theartbarb on Instagram

Lady Midnight

Her mother has been a singer, dancer and social worker, her Haitian father a dance-band drummer. Adriana Rampil has taken her family’s multi-ethnic/multidisciplinary approach to create music that both heals and grooves. Her alluring chill-debut album Lady Midnight, 2019’s "Death Before Mourning," used electronic-pop and neo-soul influences to mend her broken heart after a string of funerals. Before that, she sang traditional Afro-Caribbean and samba songs with local band Malamanya and appeared on albums by rappers Brother Ali and T.I.

**Strengths:** Her emotively soulful singing voice is mesmerizing and wide-ranging, and under the Lady Midnight persona she’s crafting a bold sonic approach.

**Listen to:** "Ode To A Burning Building," a haunting centerpiece of her "Mourning" album.

**Up next:** A new album with hip-hop producers Lazerbeak (Dizzee Rascal, Doomtree) and J Hof, and a monthlong Thursday-night residency at the Iochhouse in Minneapolis in April.

**Online:** ladymidnight.bandcamp.com

AND 30 MORE

See and hear the Black musicians who helped lay the groundwork for today's scene — including some, like Sounds of Blackness and Chastity Brown, who are as vital now as ever. startthefuse.com/essentialblackmusic

To hear samples of these artists’ work, go to startthefuse.com/blackmusicnow

**Additional photo:** Dakota Atian Landis — Star Tribune

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