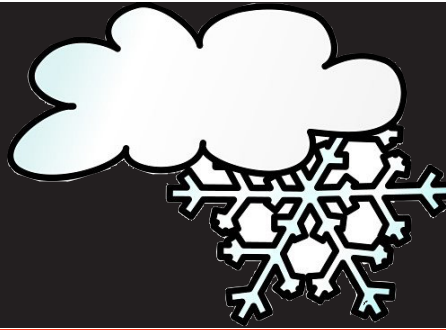




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West Word Web Exclusives



Reviewers offer 2009's best in music and gameplaying

Lady Gaga leads list

by Hillary Lindwall
Managing Editor



A new year has begun, and that means that means more outstanding titles for both the music and video game industry. However, the new year also provides an opportunity to look back at some of the most memorable titles of the past year, thus *West Word* has compiled a list of the top five albums and the top ten video games of 2009.

5. Owl City—*Ocean Eyes*

Many may remember “Fireflies,” the surprising single from this album. Many may not remember, however, how truly good the rest of *Ocean Eyes* is. The sophomore album from Owl City, a one-man-band consisting of Adam Young, *Ocean Eyes* is made up of a series of synthpop songs. The soothing voice of Young, along with his synthesized beats and notes, make this album truly unique, earning it a spot in the list of the top five albums of 2009.

4. Train—*Save Me, San Francisco*

Although many may only know Train because of their most famous song “Jupiter,” their newest single “Hey Soul Sister” from their album *Save Me, San Francisco* could give “Jupiter” a run for its money. After hearing “Hey Soul Sister,” this reviewer wanted to hear what other surprises were awaiting discovery from Pat Monahan and the gang. *Save Me, San Francisco* is an album that is soothing yet exciting. Every song sounds different and is very catchy, making *Save Me, San Francisco* number four on the countdown.

3. Phoenix—*Wolfgang Amadeus Phoenix*

Listening to the fourth studio album from the French rock band Phoenix, it becomes clear that the band members know what they are doing. From interesting song titles that make references to classical music, it is clear that Phoenix is well versed in music history. Additionally, their alternative flair, interesting lyrics and catchy beats have combined on each song on *Wolfgang Amadeus Phoenix*, causing Phoenix’s latest album to place highly on the countdown.

2. Passion Pit—*Manners*

Much like Owl City’s *Ocean Eyes*, Passion Pit’s *Manners* is a synthpop album, consisting only of vocals and computer-generated beats and notes. However, it is also very different from Owl City’s album in that its music seems much more mature. Also, there are differences in style. For example, the song “Sleepyhead” is sung in a falsetto voice, changing the tone of the song. Overall, *Manners* is a very different album, to say the least. Seemingly worthy of its own genre, Passion Pit’s music is well developed and catchy, making it number two on the countdown.

1. Lady Gaga—*The Fame Monster*

Although naming Lady Gaga’s album *The Fame Monster* the best album of 2009 may seem unexpected to some, trite to others. Many of those who share those beliefs probably have not listened to the album in its entirety. *The Fame Monster* is the best album of 2009 because every song on the album is different from the previous one, they are all catchy, and each seems to have its own identity. Additionally, Lady Gaga’s vocals and fun, catchy, playful lyrics add another dimension to her music. These elements combined make Lady Gaga’s album great and also make it an obvious choice for the number one album of 2009.

Gamers answer *Call of Duty*

by Rexly Penafiora II
Editor in Chief



10. *Forza Motorsport 3* (Xbox 360™)—This is by far the most fun and accurate racing simulator of the year. *Need for Speed: Shift* set the bar for racing games with its release a few months ago, but *Forza Motorsport 3* easily beats that standard by including over 400 customizable cars and 100 track variations. *Forza* is the Xbox 360’s version of the Playstation 3 racing series *Gran Turismo*. With *Gran Turismo 5* coming out around the beginning of next year, *Forza Motorsport 3* currently reigns supreme among driving simulation games and is a must-have for the new year.

9. *DJ Hero* (multiple systems)—With so many rhythm-based games in the market, *DJ Hero* is a new approach to an old concept. Instead of using a guitar or a full band set, the game uses a turntable with three buttons on the pad that are pressed when prompted. The game features a lot of original club music, but also creates mash-ups of popular songs such as Eminem’s “My Name Is” and Jay-Z’s “Encore.” For those who seek the satisfaction of mixing songs but not the embarrassment of failing to scratch at the right time, *DJ Hero* is the perfect game.

8. *Tekken 6* (multiple systems)- The latest in the *Tekken* fighting series, this new installment features eight new characters which makes it the *Tekken* game with the highest amount of characters. If that is not to entice players, the game also features two new combat perks. The rage system in the game occurs when the player’s life points reach below a certain level and it allows players to have more damage per hit. The bound perk gives players a very stylish combo. While the enemy is in the air, the players can jump up and force the enemy to the ground to create another combo. With new fighting styles and more characters than ever before, *Tekken 6* is bound to delight fans of fighting games.

7. *The Beatles RockBand* (multiple systems)- This game is great when it is played with the family, especially if the parents are Beatles fans. Forty-five songs from 12 albums are included in the game and while it is the same type of game play as the regular *RockBand* series, it provides a very unique experience. Players can purchase either songs or full albums through the Internet if they want to play more songs.

6. *New Super Mario Bros. Wii* (Wii™)- The classic Nintendo game has received a massive upgrade. The game has all of the elements of the very first *Super Mario Bros.* game but it also carries the new additions that were introduced in the numerous sequels after the first game was released in 1985. It has a new look in terms of graphics, but it still retains the platform element of the game. *Mario Bros. Wii* will certainly lure both die-hard fans of the franchise and new fans alike.

5. *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* (Playstation 3™)—For those who loved the Indiana Jones films, *Uncharted 2* is the game that will have thrill-seekers and adventure lovers on the edge of their seats. The game play and cut scenes flow smoothly that the game does not even feel like a game at all but rather as a movie. Wide-open areas, challenging puzzles, jaw-dropping structures and a deep storyline will have gamers playing this game for hours. Recently, *Uncharted 2* was awarded the prize of Video Game of the Year at Spike TV’s *Video Game Awards*. It is no surprise that this game deserves the award due to its numerous accomplishments.

4. *Left 4 Dead 2* (Xbox 360™)—In this action-packed sequel to the hit game *Left 4 Dead*, players can now choose from four new characters in a new environment: the southern United States, specifically the states of Georgia and Louisiana. The storyline is the same as the first game: four people are trying to escape via helicopter from humans who have been infected and are now zombies. The group must fight their way through countless hordes of zombies to reach certain safe houses until they reach an extraction point where they will be evacuated. While the story might be similar to the game, the game play has definitely changed. The zombies are much more smarter in the game and will try to flank you. Also, new special zombies are added to the game. An example is the Charger, a zombie that has a large arm that knocks players off their feet. If the bayou, infected humans or just the thought of survival interests anyone, then *Left 4 Dead 2* is the perfect game.

3. *Dragon Age: Origins* (multiple systems)- If gamers want to play a really good role-playing game (RPG) without a monthly subscription, this game is highly recommended. *Dragon Age: Origins* features a very deep storyline with a high chance of replaying the game. Players can choose from six different characters: a Human Noble, Human/Elf Mage, Dalish Elf, City Elf, Dwarf Commoner and Dwarf Noble. If that is not enough, after picking a character, the player must also choose one of three base classes. To make the game even more interesting, each class has two specialized classes beneath it. Obviously, variety is the main element of the game. Every conversation that the player has with a character in the game will have a set of options that will determine the attitude of the player towards certain people. Prepare to set aside a huge amount of time for completing this game, because like any good RPG, it will take a long time to finish the game. Nevertheless, *Dragon Age: Origins* will keep players hooked with its variety of storyline and character progression.

2. *Assassin’s Creed 2* (multiple systems)- In *Assassin’s Creed*, players were heavily disappointed about how the missions were extremely repetitive and provided little to no challenges for the players to encounter. *Assassin’s Creed 2* fixes those problems and then some. The sequel provides a number of missions that eclipse those of the first game. No longer is the game play repetitive, and players are given many different possibilities to assassinate their targets. In addition, the setting of Renaissance Italy provides a great backdrop for the story. Each landmark in Florence and Venice looks exactly like its real-life counterpart. There are different types of enemies, and each one challenges the player to think on his/her feet while in combat. Speaking of combat, the number of weapons in that game have also increased. The hallmark of this being that instead of one hidden blade, which is the signature weapon of the Assassin, there are now two blades, one on each arm. The addition of smoke bombs multiple swords and a mini-gun all live up to the hype that *Assassin’s Creed 2* received and this gamer was not disappointed.

1. *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (multiple systems)—Of all of the games listed, this is the game that is at the top of the most wanted games for 2009. The most anticipated sequel of the year features more weapons, more missions and a multiplayer section that has set the standard even higher for online gaming. The weapons in this game are too many to count. From the standard M4 assault rifle to the AT4 rocket launcher, to the double Desert Eagle (a Desert Eagle pistol on both hands), players will be amazed at the armory that this game has to offer and indeed, there is a level where a player has a whole armory at their disposal. While the campaign-based missions are terrific, there is also a new addition to *Modern Warfare 2: Special Ops*. This mode enables the player to team up with a friend and play through certain modified missions from the storyline that will challenge the duo to work together as a team. An example of this is the mission “Overwatch” where one player is aboard an AC-130 airplane and he/she has to provide support to their friend who is on the ground and attempting to reach a certain destination. However, the hallmark of the game is the multiplayer. Players can go online and play against people around the world like never before. Character progression is easy since there are many challenges that grants players a lot of points towards earning the next rank. Also, gamers can modify their kill streak perks. For example, after defeating a certain number of enemies, players have the option of blinding the enemy’s radar or using a Predator missile to take out an number of enemies. The multiplayer is the staple of the franchise and it will be the model for all future online games. *Modern Warfare 2* stuns gamers the way that its predecessor did when it was released. Development team Infinity Ward has raised the bar with this game, and if players do not have this game already, it should be number one on their wish list.