CYCLIC *DEFROST* MAGAZINE

ISSUE 21 — CHANGE

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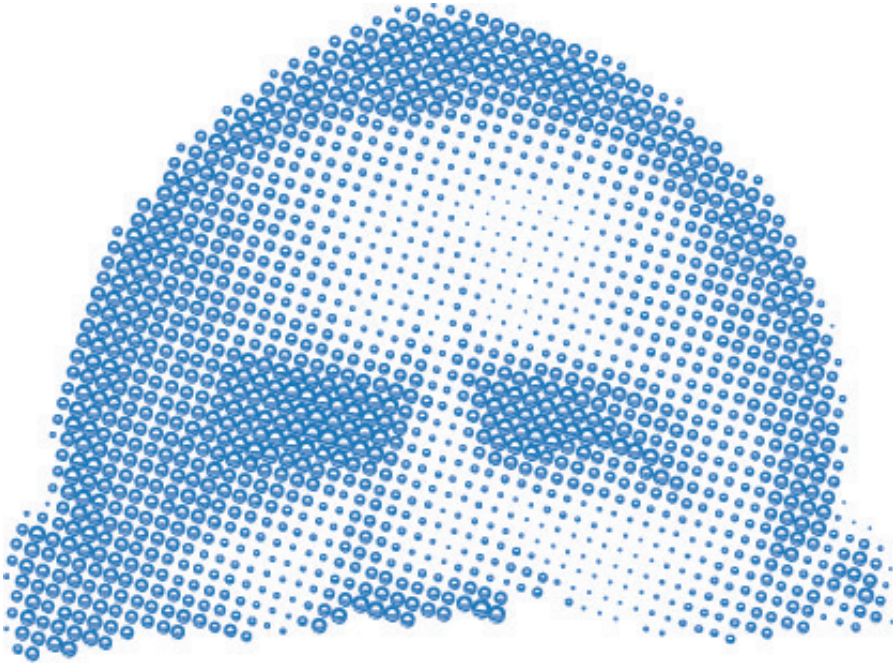

CYCLIC *DEFROST* MAGAZINE

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EDITORIAL

At the end of a long winter it can feel like it'll be cold forever. But it's funny how quickly everything can change. Things that looked locked in before, suddenly seem more flexible.

There's new life blossoming everywhere. Not least here at Cyclic Defrost, where we've welcomed three new members to the editorial team. Thommy Tran – he designed the cover and the magazine – is our new art director. Plus we've invited two 24-year-old music writers, Shaun Prescott and Alexandra Savvides, on board as our new deputy editors.

Alexandra's covered music and art for Cyclic Defrost, Oyster magazine and The Program. She also presents the three hour Saturday morning program on Sydney's FBI 94.5, which gives her plenty of opportunities to indulge her love of Australian electronic music and dubstep. An ace new addition to our Cyclic backend.

Shaun started writing about and playing music at 14. He's contributed to Mess+Noise magazine, Drum Media and Cyclic Defrost, and maintains a couple of music blogs. With a particular obsession for Australian independent music, especially the more eclectic and hidden regions of the Australian experimental scene, Shaun makes a valuable contribution to the Cyclic team.

The contents this issue are complemented by online stories, including interviews with Melbourne dubstep producer Spherix, whimsical Sydney duo Vincent Over The Sink, a new electronic three-piece from Sydney called Seekae, and Dan Friel, a Brooklynite who doubles with Parts & Labor. That's in addition to more than 150 reviews of new Australian and international music that you need to hear.

Matt, Seb, Shaun and Lex
Editors

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FABRICS OF CHANGE

Everything is changing. Shortly the United States – and by extension the world – will be presided over by an African-American president. At the same time an age of indomitable economic prosperity appears to have come to an end. It comes as a surprise to many, but these changes are affecting Australians. The world news section is threatening to enter our reality.

No less important is the change that has occurred here at Cyclic Defrost. Sydney designer Thommy Tran has taken the task of designing Cyclic Defrost, and to celebrate he has also designed the cover for this issue. You might have deduced already that the cover theme for this issue is change. It's a theme that resonates with Tran at the moment, the man responsible for the increasingly iconic Popfrenzy logo, and most of that Sydney label's graphic duties.

Despite being negatively affected by the dire economic times, Tran is quick to point out that some very positive changes have recently occurred, with recent changes in government in both Australia and the United States. It's apparent in his design for this issue's cover, which - despite recent negative impacts in his personal life (we'll get to it later) - reflects the widely felt optimism regarding the regime change in the US, in spite of everything. "This at least give a sense that something is going right," Thommy says.

Thommy Tran was born into a Malaysian refugee camp, before moving to Sydney two months later where his family settled in the inner west, where he has spent most his life. He studied a music based arts degree at Macquarie University, which is prescient considering much of his design work has been with music labels and publications.

It wasn't until during his degree that Tran harboured the notion of getting into design. "I enjoyed reading magazines and was way into music when I was at uni," Tran says of the change, "I saw Raygun, which was a music magazine based out of California designed by David Carson. It just made me think that anyone could do it. It broke all the rules of design and I liked that. It was abstract and creative. I saw that we had a chance to do that at uni in editing the uni magazine at the time. Then I discovered the perks that came with editing a magazine such as free CDs and door list spots to 'review' gigs. It kinda worked out quite well."

Tran has worked for a number of music orientated endeavours including a stint as chief editor for Passing Show magazine and assistant editor for Silverlimbo, as well as designing for Melbourne based promoting and touring company Penny Drop. His most prolific output has been with Popfrenzy, where in addition to designing the label's tour posters and some album sleeve designs he has acted as tour manager and helmed that label's short-lived music magazine Moss.

"I met Chris Wu (owner and operator of Popfrenzy) back in 2002 when there were Popfrenzy nights at the Teachers Club on Mary St" Thommy says of his relationship with Popfrenzy, "It was great. super cheap drinks, great music and a good venue. A friend asked if we could DJ at a night and that was where the association began."

For followers of independent music in Australia Popfrenzy's visual design has become an immediately recognisable fixture in the local music scene, with that label's jack-in-the-box logo gaining close to iconic status. Tran's designs have always captured the youthful zeal and colourful dynamism inherent in the Popfrenzy roster, a label that promotes anything from the empowered dance floor thrust of The Gossip through to the shy, Flying Nun pop of Songs. Tran has consistently captured the indie-pop visual zeitgeist through careful application of pastel colours, boldly defined and spacious fonts, colour contrasts that convey a message and never stray close to overt busyness, and an eye for crisp, unobtrusive textures.

When I ask Tran what the key principles are in his work, his short response is simply "Fun."

"Usually what intrigues me are quirky things I see and hear. I like to play with design and make people interact with it. I like tactility. I try to design things away from immediate influences such as the city."

"Good design makes you feel good." He posits, "It makes you optimistic. I had always been interested in architecture and the arts, but more so as a consumer and observer. I would look at crap which was badly designed and thought I could do it better. Then when it came to me trying to make it better I realised how difficult it actually was. There lay the challenge I guess, I always wanted to make my own music, hence the degree. But it seemed design just took over. It's worked out OK. I get to do both."

"Change has directly affected my life," Tran says of his theme, "I have recently been made redundant from my job. I would say that this is the first real financial event which has directly affected our generation as adults. The last major recession was in the 90s and we were just kids. This one has definitely affected us directly.

"I would usually read about these events in papers and think nothing of it," He continues, "but this time around people I know including myself have been directly affected by this financial shift. I have become that story in the paper."

Despite this, Tran is still celebrating change. When asked what the key motivating factor behind his design this issue was, he has just this to say.

"One word. Obama."

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NIGGLING *THOUGHTS* *of the* CARAPACE

"These are the sounds, approaches, emotions, memories of a specific time in our lives. We have since moved on, working our next exoskeleton, and left this CD behind – this carapace."

The transcendental essence of Children of the Wave's debut record *Carapace* does little to prepare you for the gloriously eccentric, wildly contrasting characters that are behind this recording.

Mark Rayner and Daniel Flynn are the duo responsible for the ethereal sounds emanating from *Carapace's* aural space. A reductive definition would label a carapace a shell – a term that suggests tender regions hidden beneath this exoskeleton. At the same time it also presents the possibility of a void, or an absence left by something that once lived within its hardened borders.

There is a mystique of sorts that surrounds this word, a concept that defines the album more than any individual song, any particular 'sound' that a critic might label this release with. There are a few clues, but not many, in the bands Rayner and Flynn are (or have been) involved in. Rayner's rockier Front of Van and Flynn's Sleeping Pilot and folk-pop Major Chord projects are relatively different to one another, making Children of the Wave all the more intriguing.

Usually the story goes something along the lines of band members meet, band members bond through common interests and influences, and finally, band members record debut album. Not so for Rayner and Flynn, a veritable odd couple from their own admission (yet as is usually the case, they share more in common than either of them could know).

Initiating our correspondence, Flynn forewarns me of his musical companion. "Mark is a compulsive liar and rather unstable mentally. All you have to do is listen to some of his Front of Van stuff and you'll understand. Having said this, his music intrigued me and although I found it very abrasive I was oddly compelled. I took him on initially because I felt sorry for him – and I was intrigued by his sad music."

It's a curious way to start our acquaintance, but nothing short of captivating. "Oh and he's not such a bad fellow to hang out with" he adds, as a small token of appreciation for his musical companion.

Rayner paints a prettier image of their humble beginnings. "Dan and I have known each other for years. I'd always enjoyed the soul of his music, a certain sweetness or sincerity. He was playing a folk, pop, country kind of thing with Sleeping Pilot whilst I was playing in a raucous experimental rock orientated project called Front of Van. We always spoke about having a jam together, yet it all seemed kind of ludicrous as our worlds were so different. Eventually, three or four years ago we did, we recorded it and Dan did some mixing and a few weeks later gave me this music that really surprised us."

They are determined to highlight their differences and point out each other's flaws, but such is the consistency of their record that none of these divides become apparent in their music. It's the bridge between pop sensibility and ambient, abstract noise that is most compelling, and given the pair's respective musical backgrounds, this successful combination shouldn't be too surprising at all.

Determined to outline his motivations, Flynn again turns to amusing put-downs and witty one-liners. "Mark is a very sad person. I made a decision to change him. To do this I had to make him believe we were going to 'blend' our styles of music together. The truth is, you listen to the album and you notice it has many melodies – it is mellow and intimate. I won. Yes, I converted Mark over to my side of the musical force."

This character was becoming harder and harder to read. So now to Rayner – his musical epiphany was not grounded in unmelodic elements as much as Flynn might think. In fact, it began in dislocation. Moving to Traralgon, two hours outside of Melbourne, he found the combination of a lacklustre radio service and few acquaintances provided the impetus to pick up various instruments. "I'd go into my spare room and just do these experiments with sound, feedback, a bit of toy keyboard and bass guitar and whatever sound making device I could find and put it down to 4-track. I knew it wasn't music but there were some musical elements."

"I'd play it to my friends who played in bands and they wouldn't get it. I had no idea there was this scene out there of experimental music, so it all seemed kind of worthless…I was too incompetent or lazy to learn to play music properly so I just dived into that and it's just evolved through Front of Van, who got one of my 4-track experiment tapes, and now into Children of the Wave."

The transformation from abstract noise to contemplative, otherworldly pop has much to do with the swathes of field recordings and ambient sounds that weave their way throughout the band's debut. Nestled deep within their compositions rather than sitting triumphantly on top of melodies, these sounds were mostly sourced from Rayner's month-long visit to Kakadu. "I had all these incredible recordings of bats, creeks, wild dogs, birds and the like. They seemed to fuse really well with Dan's melodic sensibility, his guitar loops, glockenspiel, Casio, etc. So we decided to continue on a very sporadic basis between our other bands, not really sure what we were doing, just enjoying the process."

The recording sessions were (according to Flynn) initiated and driven by Rayner. Again, the dissident voice speaks: "I was merely staring at him wondering if this was going to be a complete waste of time."

Fortunately, it wasn't. "When Mark went home, however, I found myself fiddling with these weird sounds and thinking 'well he's not here now, I can do whatever the hell I want!' So I began organising the sounds and mixing them (and adding to them) in a way that was kinda similar to how I produced my own 'pop' music. I think that's the interesting thing about Children of the Wave – Mark comes up with these strange ideas and I help translate them into something altogether more listenable!"

There are many sensations throughout their compositions, a result of intensive overdubbing and layering to give a particularly visceral texture. Banging heaters, whirring fans and thwacked bins could all produce disastrous sounds in the wrong hands, but not with these two at the helm. As Rayner recalls: "One of the first tracks was 'The Underwater Song', as was 'Happy Bats'. I would just arrive at his house bringing with me whatever stupid sound making device or musical obsession I was focussing on with Front of Van, lower the volume and intensity and without thinking just spit it out. Grabbing whatever's at hand in some kind of sound making, musical frenzy."

With their love of such a diverse set of instruments, from violin to kora and back through the harmonium, it would have been easy for their compositions to err on the side of cacophonous, a mash of sounds having a temper tantrum. The result is fortunately far from this, and Rayner credits his musical companion with subduing the "rubbish" and filtering out the more melodic elements. "A lot of the time however Dan would just have this wry pained smile on his face like I was tormenting his dog but didn't want to be so impolite as to tell me off."

This sound, then, owes much to the vivacity of Animal Collective, and the tenacity of far too many folk-pop troubadours to name, but for all these reference points, the duo share very few influences. Differing opinions are raised again when Rayner points out he and his musical companion have little common ground, musically at least. "When I look through his CD collection I struggle, it's full of boring folk dudes. The other day I gladly pulled out Nancy Sinatra and explained how amazing Lee Hazelwood was to him. Herbert, Squarepusher, Fela Kuti, Anthony Pateras, Qua, Merzbow; he's got no idea who these people are."

Neil Young appears to be the only point of reference that links these two together, at least within the aural space. But it seems to be the most serendipitous of influences on both of them – it's there in the breezy 'Something Good' that unfurls after a good two minutes into something as achingly pretty as one of Young's finer moments like 'Expecting to Fly'. Upon further contemplation, this curious segue in 'Something Good' that turns an ambient excursion into a fully fledged folk-pop number is totally and utterly reflective of the two men who created it. Their stop-start notions and mid-sentence cutaways are ideal templates for this musical palette.

Like any music lover who desires to share their most intimate moments in song, Rayner feels that there are more introductions that need to be made, but he is quick to hold off these suggestions on further thought. "I was trying to tell him today about Fennesz and how amazing *Endless Summer* is, so I'll bring it around next time. But I kind of don't want to turn him on to this stuff because he's approaching working with experimental techniques in such a sincere, melodic, earnest and idiosyncratic way that I don't want it sullied by outside influences." He readily admits that this wasn't all a selfless gesture; "I'm learning so much about melody and mixing."

Rayner also credits much of their distinctive sound to mastering engineer Byron Scullin, who has worked with All India Radio and Midnight Juggernauts. "He knows so much about technique, approach, plug-ins, computers…it makes your head spin. He's also a sick bastard and we share a very similar (read: juvenile) sense of humour."

"We both credit Byron with really elevating our music during the mastering process, strengthening the bottom end and both broadening and thickening the sound. We were very happy with the results. We really wanted someone who understood textures as well as more musical elements…he gave us credibility and made us sound more wide-screen, which I hope is now the Children of the Wave sound."

There is still the niggling thought of the carapace, the tentative shell left behind at some place in time which is now permanent. A mark on the landscape. They both think the other was responsible for this word – this phrase – that seems to bring them both together. "Dan says that I arrived one day muttering about it, you can actually hear me wailing it at one point on the album," Rayner continues. "But I swear it was he who raised it with me. When we were thinking of a title for the album we returned to it because it seemed like the perfect metaphor for what an album is. These are the sounds, approaches, emotions, memories of a specific time in our lives. We have since moved on, working our next exoskeleton and left this CD behind – this carapace."

Moving on is a recurrent theme for both of them. Flynn enacts a similar modus operandi when asked about this double meaning encapsulated in one word. "A carapace is essentially the evidence of life – frozen in almost exact form – but has now moved on. An album is a lot like that."

"I like thinking about this concept when I think of Children of the Wave. Mark and I spent three years making this album and it was a side project for both of us. Children of the Wave quietly (and sometimes not so quietly) existed on the outskirts of our lives during that time."

"When I listen to Children of the Wave now I have a strong sense that I was never in control of it – that it came about in its own way. I believe that about music. Some music is very controlled and other music evolves almost like it has an agenda of its own. I imagine that's how the next project will emerge."

Flynn interjects with another thought on his own approach to music. "I want to create a world for people while they listen to the music. I want to transmit a piece of my experience, via the speakers, to other people so they can perhaps create something new or think of a new idea or daydream about something or trip out...anything."

Rayner jumps in here. "I view music as an expression of self. I've found it really difficult and challenging with Children of the Wave because it represents a side of my personality that I'm not altogether comfortable with offering up to people so easily. So releasing the album with its elements of vulnerability, melancholy and sincerity has been a little difficult. That said I was looking to move away from the noisier bombast of some of my other projects, so in a sense it was entirely the reason I wanted to work with Dan in the first place."

"I think I was thinking more about process initially. I thought we could create some gentle atmospheric music that maintains experimental elements yet also melodic ones, without one completely eclipsing the other. I'd given no thought to the emotional investment, however in the process of creation and possibly more so now, I've realised it is unavoidable."

The emotion within this remnant is paramount. Rayner admits he was confronted by the feelings stirred up and captured on the record for posterity. It's not necessarily to do with the style of music they laid down, or the events surrounding the recording at the time. "It's not necessarily catharsis – that was probably in my noisier projects. I think Tom Waits said 'it's not always about making a fist, sometimes it's about opening your hand.' *Carapace* is the opening of our hand."

On *Carapace*, the shell is not so much the absence of something that once was, but something you take with you – this curious, joyous, playful journey that lives on wherever you take it – unless it takes you there first.

Carapace *is released through Sensory Projects/Inertia.*

"Mark is a very sad person. I made a decision to change him. To do this I had to make him believe we were going to 'blend' our styles of music together. The truth is, you listen to the album and you notice it has many melodies — it is mellow and intimate. I won."

COLLECTIVE *clarity*

The artistic journeys of Melbourne's Cornel Wilczek (aka Qua) and John Lee (of Mountains in the Sky) couldn't be further removed. Nonetheless, the two artists have come to develop a rare creative dialogue.

Released simultaneously by the same label, their new records – Qua's masterfully chaotic fourth album *Q&A* and Mountains in the Sky's stunning third release *Electron Suite* – mark a new chapter in the pair's artistic relationship. Over the last two years they've found each other deeply involved in one another's records: conceptualising, counselling, troubleshooting, breaking down, mixing, even playing live. In the following dialogue, they speak to one another about inspiration, process and the importance of exchange.

"[we're] both into such a huge array of music and we really love so many different sorts of music that we sometimes get stuck trying to fit too much into one record," says Lee.

On paper, Cornel Wilczek and John Lee are the classic odd-couple. They hail from polar musical pedigrees, employ entirely different methodologies and craft strikingly singular sounds.

Since crafting the shimmering ambient landscapes that comprised his debut as Qua, 2002's stunning *Forgetabout*, 34-year-old Wilczek has created an electronic musical syntax unto itself. Crossing genre and stylistic orientation at will, the classically trained composer and instrumentalist's hyper-fragmented, mind-bendingly intricate and densely melodic sound worlds utilise customised software patches, live instrumentation and an increasingly refined range of interfaces to render their strange beauty.

Conversely, the self-taught Lee came from a background in rock bands to plot a curious line through psychedelia and hip-hop, the 33-year-old's sample-rich, beat-heavy instrumentals capturing both electronic intricacies and very human, band-like dynamics.

In person, too, they seem at opposite ends of the scale. Wilczek is already waiting at our meeting place – in the inner Melbourne suburb of Collingwood – when I arrive ahead time. Lee, meanwhile, rolls in half an hour late, a guilty smile on his dial. Even as today's dialogue begins, it becomes apparent that the two engage in contrasting ways. Lee meanders through the conversation, taking his time to consider his explanations and posing as many questions as he responds to. Wilczek, on the other hand, speaks at a hundred miles an hour, his rapid-fire articulations both elaborate and definitive.

Nonetheless, over the last few years the pair have been charting an ever-closer course. Whilst contrasting heavily in terms of sound sources, methodologies and individual aesthetics, their two new records – the crazily crowded electronic pop of Qua's *Q&A* and the vivid, colour-soaked landscapes of Mountains in the Sky's *Electron Suite* – engender parallel, almost sibling-like qualities.

Indeed, as Lee goes on to posit, the records' co-release on Love+Mercy in October signalled something far deeper than mere label convenience. "I think why the two records have come together so much is because during the last year it's become this kind of joint obsession," he offers. "We were both really thinking about what our next record was going to be and always communicating with each other about what we feel is important and all that kind of stuff, so they have ended up really informing each other."

"Yeah, that's true," responds Wiczek. "I think both of these albums were very conscious albums in terms of what we wanted, and the amount of discussion we had before we even started, well, I think we talked about it for as long as we actually did it."

"Which is weird for me because I'd never done that before," says Lee. "I'd never really had the opportunity to talk about it like that with other people."

"I think it's really important to have peers in your life as an artist," Wilczek continues. "If you don't have peers in your life, it means you can't discuss the most important things in your life at the time of creating something like this, which is writing the album. Six months ago, our conversations were based entirely around certain songs on our albums that we were struggling with, or certain elements, and it's really important to talk about your creative process and the fruits of it and trying to work out how it can be better. We'd literally be writing a track and sending it to one another."

"Just the slightest little comment can have a huge impact on a whole track," says Lee. "When you're sharing stuff with other people, it's almost like you don't even need their comments; you just need a fresh pair of ears. As soon as you sit down and listen to something with someone, you notice all these things that you didn't notice when you were by yourself. It makes you more of a listener rather than a creator."

Lee's approach to music has always been intuitive. He grew up in the satellite city of Geelong and his first real musical break came with indie-pop band Honeysuckle, but it wasn't until he moved to Melbourne and began hanging around with the guys from The Avalanches – before they had formed the group – that he really began to explore music. For Lee, the turning point was hip-hop.

"It changed everything," he recalls. "I had really moved away from music, but this notion of sampling just opened up a whole new world. I started buying records from op-shops that I never would have listened to, and I started seeing the value and the worth in all this great stuff that people were just throwing away. It was no longer about technique, but kind of about listening and learning, you know, and that's when I started getting into experimental music."

"I kind of love that thing of playing any instrument – keyboards, drums – that I haven't really learned, because I have a naïve approach to it and naivety – this sense of discovery – in music is really important."

His debut record as Mountains, 2005's *Celestial Son*, echoed with such wide-eyed sensibilities. Filled with lush samples, farm animal grabs and flourishing orchestral dynamics, it proved as pretty as it was melancholic – its loose, flowing instrumentals weaving through a stunning array of minor key atmospheres and introspections. The more expansive, psyche-riddled tropes of *Accipio* arrived in 2006.

Wilkczek couldn't have come from a more different backdrop. Hailing from Adelaide, he learned the classical guitar from early childhood and went onto play as a session musician in his early 20s. "I really took it quite seriously for a while and I made my living doing session work, but I really began to miss the compositional side."

The Qua project began to take shape when he moved to Melbourne. "I'd never had a computer until I was 23 and then bought one and was just blown away," he smiles. "I just started really thinking about myself as a composer – what I wanted to do and what I could do that no one else did – and it was at that point that I found these old four-track sets that I'd had when I was 13 or 14. So I started listening to them and I was kind of blown away with how

articulate some of these were and how I hadn't heard anything quite like it and then used that as a starting point for the first album."

"So I had my Mac Classic Plus, my guitar, my sampler and my Nord Mini Modular and I started creating all this stuff," he continues. "It was based around recording performances and then cutting them up and restructuring them, then using synthesis to tie it all together. It's really about performance cut up and abstracted and turned into something else."

While *Forgetabout* fluttered and pealed with ambient texture and clicking rhythms, 2004's masterpiece *Painting Monsters on Clouds* saw him merge more angular compositions and chaotic shudders of melodic and percussive material into a still largely ambient underlay. The record was celebrated throughout the experimental community and saw Wilczek sign to renowned LA experimental label Mush, who went onto re-release his first two records internationally.

Wilczek and Lee's musical worlds began to align on *Accipio*, for which Lee wired Wilczek as a mix engineer. He ended up playing synth and guitar on the record and helping Lee and live-collaborator Stu MacFarlane perform the songs in a live context. "Mixing is a really cool way to learn something," says Wilczek. "It's like suddenly you know it inside out."

The pair began to discuss their future projects and directions only to find that their plans were all but parallel. The binding conduit was pop.

"Cornel and I are both into such a huge array of music and we really love so many different sorts of music that we sometimes get stuck trying to fit too much into one record," says Lee. "We spoke a lot about the fact that we're going to be making records for a long time and there's a lot more time for making ambient music, like when we're 80 and running marathons."

"The big change in my album was when you were saying exactly that," says Wilczek. "You said, 'We're not going to be young forever. Right now we've got a lot of energy so lets do pop-based albums and give it that youthful energy while you've got it'. That really turned everything around, because at one stage there were some tracks that I was going to throw away and I continued with them.

"I was thinking about touring around and playing live, and you know, it's not something that I necessarily want to do forever," continues Lee. "So when it came to focussing my attention on what sort of music I wanted to make, I just thought that while I can still tour and travel around, it might as well be fun and be something I want to play live to people."

Both records certainly fit this bill, both utilising an array of live instrumentation to expound their electronic accompaniments. From its opening volley of pulsing, psychedelic collages (the wondrous harp embellishments and driving grooves of 'Synaptic Cleft' and arcing synth wig-out of 'Soundsistors'), *Electron Suite* resounds with compositional vitality and vision. Over 11 cuts, Lee and his band of collaborators – MacFarlane, ex-Sodastream bass

"A few years ago I made a decision to not listen to music that was depressing and it had a huge influence on my life. Not listening to Nico first thing in the morning made a big difference to my day."

and saw extraordinaire Pete Cohen, Wilczek (who again mixed the record) and others – weave a tapestry of driving rhythm and ornate instrumentation, with layered analogue and sample-splashed colour offering different hues and punctuations.

For Lee, it's been a huge educational curve. "I'm learning a lot more about sound," he says. "The previous two records were sample-based and I didn't know too much about how to adjust them or what to do with them. Plus I really liked that whole organic thing and I wanted to get a whole bunch of organic sounds and mash them together and do something entirely different."

"Cornel has been a huge influence, not just musically but in terms of technology and learning how to use the tools that I'm using, which is really important, because if you don't feel confident with the tools that you're using, you don't necessarily push them as far as they can go and you don't know where they can go."

"I'm your technology pusher," giggles Wilczek.

"I knew that I wanted to make an upbeat record that was positive, and I thought that was what was important for me," continues Lee. "A few years ago I made a decision to not listen to music that was depressing and it had a huge influence on my life. Not listening to Nico first thing in the morning made a big difference to my day," he laughs. "So the idea was to inject something like that back into the world and not have such a negative and sombre influence."

Q&A is similarly upbeat. The spiralling, top-end cacophony and thundering new-wave beat of manic opener 'Lapsang Souchong' segues into a torrent of high-velocity pop playfulness – early 80s proto-computer contours and gleaming instrumentation trading nuances and phrases at will. The recorder loop-turned explosions of 'Goodmorning Sun' and 'Dance of the Three Fours', and Laurence Pike's extraverted drum assault on 'The Lion's Flying Dream' make for thrilling flashes, while the robo-break of 'The Magnificent Mister 'is one of the record's most outwardly joyous moments. It's hard to believe that it's the same composer who in August released flowing improvisational mini-album *Silver Red*, let alone the comparative reticence of *Forgetabout* and *Painting Monsters on Clouds*.

"It was pretty much the simplest conceptual basis I'd ever come up with," he says, "which was making the record really fun and really colourful. And I don't want to sound vacuous but I didn't want too much to be read into it. I just wanted to just exist and be fun. I really needed not just the music to be fun, but the writing and production stages of it to be really fun and really instinctive and free of all the stuff that I'd worked with in the past, which was quite laboured and quite emotionally draining."

"This was really pleasurable to do and essence of these songs just happened so quickly. It literally happened in hours and I think by letting go of the shackles and trying not to do anything too deep, opened this very instinctive, very colourful world up."

This sense of haste was something that informed both records. "One thing that we discussed a lot was working on our own the whole time and spending so much time isolated in the studio," says Lee. "For me, using samples that are so labour intensive and Cornel's processing being so labour intensive, it was really important for both of us that we just knocked the records out. I was feeling very isolated, just being alone for hours at a time in a little room."

"I think that informed the records that we ended up making. I think the stuff we've done before has maybe allowed people to enter their own sort of space, but these seem to invite people in."

Wilczek agrees. "Both these albums sound like albums that you would listen to on speakers, whereas our last few albums sounded more like headphone albums. Both have amazing qualities, but yeah, I actually wrote these songs without headphones and wrote them quite loud and mixed them quite loud and it was all about space and vibration."

"I think the other interesting thing is that both of us did a lot of the writing standing up," adds Lee. "Cornel read this interview with Brian Eno, which was discussing that whole notion that if you stand up you write more positive and energetic music than if you sit down."

"Instead of looking at that linear playback head move across a screen," says Wilczek, "you're focussing on an instrument and focussing on the sounds that you're making."

But that's not to say that the process of creating pop music was without its troubles. "What I found about writing this music that was really upbeat and happy and fun and not too vacuous was that it's actually really hard," laughs Lee. "I think there's a fine line between what we do, which is writing a pop song to try and facilitate good vibes and writing a meaningless pop song to try and make money."

"It became a really valid challenge," urges Wilczek. "It offers a different focal point to the music you know. Everybody has that desire to hear something resolved in three or four chords."

"I just found that so unbelievably liberating," he says. "We all know the effect that good pop music can have on you – it can change your life."

"All that said," offers Lee, a cheeky smile creeping across his face. "A great deal of pop music just makes me want to vomit and doesn't allow me to think of anything except how much I hate it."

Q&A *is out through Mush/Love+Mercy/Shock*

Electron Suite *is out through Love+Mercy/Shock*

MIXED METALS

"'I really feel like if I was writing my songs somewhere else, like in Sydney or Melbourne, they wouldn't be the same."

It begins like the fade-out at the end of a song. Barely sputtering guitar. A throbbing hum, a splatter of percussion. Way back in the mix, Shoeb Ahmad's voice shouts with the bleak futility of a preacher in Hyde Park. His pent up monologue dimly echoes the likes of Ian Curtis or Vini Reilly. There's no relief in the drums either. Just as the track seems primed to explode, Evan Dorrian's utilitarian march locks. 'Sunstrokes', the second song on Spartak's debut, *Tales From The Colony Room*, sticks in your mind.

In just a few short years, Shoeb Ahmad has been dizzyingly involved in music. Running the HelloSquare label from his bedroom in Scullin, a few kilometres west of Belconnen in the nation's capital, Canberra, he's released new music from Canyons, John Chantler and Leafcutter John. He's staged gigs for Christopher Willitts and the Tenniscoats. Amongst it all, he's found time to release music with Spartak, on his own and with various other collaborators on a string of labels including Sound & Fury, Wilting Flower, Cook An Egg and Low Point.

"When I write my melodies I always think of Canberra," he says, with a heavy, peculiarly Canberran emphasis on the 'a' in Canberra. "I really feel like if I was writing my songs somewhere else, like in Sydney or Melbourne, they wouldn't be the same. Living in the 'burbs in Canberra is still living pretty, you know, leafy. It's not just like surburbia, at least where I live."

This Canberra, where Shoeb's lived since his parents relocated from Parramatta 18 years ago, is different. Instead of institutions and parliament and big buildings, this is parties in scout halls, semi-rural suburban life, collaborations via the internet.

I know what you're thinking, though. He said at the top the song's bleak and now he's talking about melodies? To understand Shoeb you have to know a bit more.

"With Spartak, we wanted it to be busted up, retarded, god knows what, just messy," Shoeb says. "If you listen to 'Sunstrokes,' I'm just barking, just shouting. But a lot of the time I'm writing what could be seen as... love songs."

"There's a lot of sweetness in the melodies I write on the guitar. Like, I've been doing double tracked vocals, which is a big step for me because I'm not the world's greatest vocalist, but I just want to have harmonies running in individual ears because I think that sounds sweeter."

Shoeb's musical education started with a tape deck. He was in primary school, and a boarder who had been staying with the family left it behind.

"Crowded House broke up that year," he recalls. "They were getting a lot of airplay, because they were breaking up, and I just thought their songs were really cool. Just really beautiful songs. I fell in love with Neil Finn's songwriting."

Later on, U2 - Shoeb describes *Zooropa* as an "early record" by the band - the Go Betweens and the Triffids all made impressions on the nascent musician. And although his music tastes are broader now, he still finds space for pop. He stepped off the plane from a recent New Zealand tour with a bag of Flying Nun records.

"They're simple and pure, but they can make you feel so much. Writing the perfect melody is still my biggest goal. Even if I do something that starts out really miniscule and crackly; something that just kills the moment - in a good way - is to drop in a beautiful chord or a nice little phrase."

"A lot of people forget that when it comes to sound art or drone or electro-acoustic, you can still be very musical. You can try and find something that's beautiful, it doesn't have to be just tone and clinical."

Shoeb says he never learnt to play his instruments properly. But listen carefully and you will hear field recordings, toy instruments, keyboards, and electric, acoustic and prepared electric guitar. It's all processed and recorded on a laptop. He also learnt tabla and trombone for a time, and spent a year in Wollongong studying composition.

"When I went to Wollongong, they asked what my ideas were for study. I said I wanted to do notation scores - at the end of college, I thought I wouldn't mind delving into scores and getting my theory up - but, really, I do like the idea of not knowing what you're playing, just sitting there and having to remember and plot it out yourself. Not being restrained by scales."

He returned to Canberra and Lawrence English booked him to play with DJ Olive at a Room40 gig.

"Did you know DJ Olive grew up in Canberra? His brother lives out in Queanbeyan - they went to Telopea Park High - but when Olive's parents sent him back [to the USA], his brother stayed on. So Olive comes out every year for Christmas, he loves Australia."

At the gig, Shoeb met Tarquin Manek, an artist/music maker now playing with Bum Creek. Until then, Shoeb had been playing guitar with a couple of delay pedals and an effects unit, as he puts it, "getting a washy drone." With Tarquin on board for a while, his sound shifted. He had been listening to Fennesz and My Bloody Valentine, and it started to come through. Surprisingly - or not,

considering his background - their first proper show was supporting indie pop outfit Gersey at the cavernous ANU Bar.

He enrolled with Alistair Riddell's group at the ANU's Centre for New Media Arts, but quickly left, saying: "I guess academia's not my thing."

"It was out of nowhere that I got into music. I have to explain it to mum, but even though she might not understand, she's still behind me pretty much 100 per cent."

"I've got an idea in my head of what I want to do and where I want to go, and I think it's just playing with people I find rewarding, and having people appreciate it."

"When I was in school, I didn't think there were people in Canberra doing this stuff. The people I looked up to were... people a lot of people looked up to, I guess," he laughs. "So I just went out on a limb, and thought, there's no harm in writing to them."

Peter Hollo, cellist and contributor to *Cyclic Defrost*, remembers getting a message out of the blue from Shoeb.

"He got in touch with me on LiveJournal, I think," says Peter, "after seeing me play with Purdy at the Tortoise gig, and roped me into doing a live improv gig with him at The NowNow, before we'd even met."

One of the cool things about Shoeb, according to Peter, is he's a fan as well as a hard-working and inspired musician. "He's quite literally done the hard slog," Peter says, "and networked like crazy, purely out of enthusiasm for the music he loves."

Shoeb says he'd been chatting to John Chantler, noticed Peter was a friend of John's on the website, and saw Peter was always online. "I dropped him a message and we just started talking, we just geeked out on records. It's always a good place to start with musos," he says.

The internet is pretty central to Shoeb's operation; in fact, when I press him for dates or other details, he opens his myspace to check (I even hear the music start up over the phone line). He started HelloSquare, the label, to help a friend with fundraising for diabetes. Shoeb suggested a compilation, and tapped out messages to Clue To Kalo, Function Ensemble, John Chantler and Lawrence English. The web's been vital ever since, allowing Shoeb to link up with guys like Matt Rosner, Lawrence and Peter, and keep in touch. It's become a critical jumping off point for collaboration.

"In reality, I am literally a bedroom musician and the label's a bedroom label. Our aesthetic is very DIY. But with collabs, you have to look at it differently. Especially with improvising, you have to examine yourself on the spot."

The aim, as obsessed soccer fan Shoeb sees it, is a champion team not a team of champions.

He met Peter Hollo for the first time (in person) an hour before the NowNow show.

"Knowing his musical background is completely different to mine, and just being there at the same time, and having to fill in each others gaps. Play with each other, not just be two separate people playing."

"I was on prepared guitar doing a lot of textural stuff," he says. "But when you have Peter playing with you and he's playing cello, and you know he can play beautifully, you've gotta make sure, if he's doing something, then you don't fuck it up."

He's worked with Wendi Graham and Noah Norton from Radarmaker on a few projects, while myspace was the locus for another collaboration, Klumpes-Ahmad, which is due to release a debut album in 2009.

Adrian Klumpes, pianist from Triosk/3ofmillions, says they first met in the "early days" of myspace: "You know, when people actually clicked to see another person's profile from a friend request." They met in person when Triosk toured Canberra.

The duo's first gig was at 1/4" in Wollongong, supporting Richard Chartier. According to Shoeb, it was "very considered" as the pair found their bearings. They spent the better part of a year and a half playing together, working on their sound and seeing what happened.

"The more we've played, the more we really just struck out and improvised," Shoeb says. "By the end of last year, we were so comfortable with playing together that we didn't have to be so methodical about it or think about it in advance"

They generally kicked off recording sessions for the new album with Brian Lara Cricket on an old Sega videogame. Shoeb rarely changed out of his pyjamas, according to Adrian, justifying the album's working title, *In Bed We Trust*.

Time at home is obviously important to the 22-year-old, who is engaged to be married next year. But even though his mum used to sing around the house, he says his family's not particularly musical.

"It's weird," he explains, "coming from a Bengali family, we didn't have a lot of music growing up. We'd always have music on, but we didn't play music or anything. It was out of nowhere that I got into music. I have to explain it to mum, but even though she might not understand, she's still behind me pretty much 100 per cent."

She would prefer to hear 'songs,' but Shoeb says the generation gap is actually bridged by some of his drone and electro-acoustic recordings. "Look, mum," he tells her, "there's a relation between North Indian classical music and what I'm doing."

"Listening to Oren Ambarchi and even John Cale's solo stuff," he says, "you can hear a lineage between pure drone and ragas. Listen to Cul-De-Sac and Glenn Jones and John Fahey and they're always doing raga-esque type things. They'll acknowledge the influence." Spartak's 'In This Light, These Children Of Men...' appeared on a split 3" CD with music from John Chantler earlier this year. The nine-minute piece built around loops from hardcore band Ohana, achieves a celestial/transcendent quality that brings to mind Alice Coltrane's reading of Indian influences.

"I learnt tabla for a few years, which was really great, because I've started listening to jazz, and learning about off-rhythms and off-time and unusual things like that. In ragas, you've got a whole set of various rhythmic patterns like sevens and nines as well as fours and threes, and when you have whole pieces that you can just base around these rhythmic patterns."

"But I'm coming from another angle, I'm totally indebted to people like John Cale, and being exposed to that long droning sound of the viola, because it helped me look into my own cultural background."

When Spartak first got together, Shoeb and drummer Evan Dorrian were in seventh grade. They bonded over Korn and the Deftones - "real high school junk," says Shoeb, although, "we're still into the Deftones, because they're at the better end of that" - he got into Slint, and they started doing a hybrid of indie rock and what he calls more "spindly" guitar stuff.

"As we've played together, and just thought about our ideas even more, you know we're just using what we love about music. One of those things is having that celestial quality, just taking it somewhere very beautiful and expressive, and that's what i love about what Alice Coltrane does, and I guess what Luc Ferrari does with his musique concrete work."

"It's capturing time, capturing the little things that happen," he says. But how you actually operate, in the moment, improvising, is something Shoeb still finds challenging.

Tales From The Colony Room appeared in September, in a sleeve by Perth designer Traianos Pakioufakis (of Meupe). The duo headed out on tour, which kicked off at Bohemian Grove, in Surry Hills, Sydney.

"It was a shocker," says Shoeb. "I was making a loop on the guitar, but it was really choppy, and we got sucked into the trap that we've been sucked into many times. It got craptacular."

They've toured Malaysia and Singapore, playing dates with noise bands, and toured within Australia with hardcore bands like My Disco and Off Minor. Constant playing on the rock circuit pays off. But it has unexpected effects. The duo, who came together over a shared love of nu-metal, find themselves rocking out, and it's not something they're altogether pleased with.

"It gets weird. It's not what we want to do, but somehow we do rock out and maybe it's a bit more..." he pauses for thought, "... metal? It might just be because we've grown up playing like that. After the show, we'll be like, 'Oh, that was shit, what did we do, why did we cop out like that?'"

"We both love explosive free jazz," he says, "but we always think, well why can't we become explosive?" It sounds like a real question for the band. "Why can't we be really busted up like we said when we first started playing?"

Spartak's Tales From The Colony Room *is available from HelloSquare.*

BLØDLINES

When it first fell into my postbox earlier this year, Sydney-based electronic composer/producer Wade Clarke's independently released debut as Aeriae, *Hold R1*, became one of the more distinctive IDM-oriented offerings in my record collection, and easily one of the most memorable local angles on the well-explored genre in recent times.

While tracks such as the dark yet delicate 'Amay' revealed the influence of figureheads like Autechre and Aphex Twin, lurking beneath was a refined, highly-arranged sensibility more reminiscent of classical piano music. It's a surprise then to discover Wade grew up playing the piano from an early age, and that his grandfather was an engineer as well as a classical pianist who almost made it to concert performance level – two aspects that have certainly influenced *Hold R1's* creation. While Wade's university years saw him moving away from music in favour of short films and web comics (the infamous *Ocular Trauma*), it was an encounter with Aphex Twin's *Drukqs* album that convinced him to reconnect with purely electronic music, leading to the beginnings of Aeriae.

It's a well-known fact that kids made to learn a classical instrument from an early age will at some point bust out something that's distinctly 'off the repertoire'; invariably infuriating the music teacher who's meant to be teaching them chromatic scales or Chopin. In Wade's household, that was certainly no different. In this case, however, the initial creative impetus came from a slightly less obvious source – early 8-bit computer games.

"I'd made music my whole life at the piano, but recorded none of it in any form," Wade explains. "Everything was in my head. The few exceptions were electronic pieces I made on the Apple II or Mac and which were recorded in software formats. After we got to the net age and I heard some remixed videogame soundtracks online, I wanted to try that myself. In a way, it was the kind of thing I'd been doing all along just for my own entertainment. Stuff that a lot of folk would consider bizarre or useless, like playing music from Diablo or Commando on the piano, I'd always really enjoyed. Gaming music was half my repertoire! So my first videogame remix was for a game called *Terminal Velocity*, and I made it with an original Playstation console and

"I sent my 'August' remix to [Catcall] without warning. Her response was 'OMG amazing I love it!' but then she never spoke to me again."

Music 2000 software. When that went down well at OCRemix, I wanted to do more and also have it sound better, so almost with each remix, I moved on to a new piece of software. I eventually forked out for Logic Pro and started injecting Aphex Twin and Autechre-like content into these remixes. This wasn't going down well at OCRemix, but I was liking what I was doing more and more. So I ditched the remixing, started on all original material and voila, I realised I was becoming one of those producer entities."

"I definitely liked what my grandfather played, which I later learned was mostly Chopin and Beethoven. My favourite music as a kid was from film scores, especially John Williams' *Star Wars* and *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*, which are of course modern permutations of classical music," he says. "Then there were all those other fantasy films I loved, like *Krull*, *Red Sonja*, *Dune*, all with great orchestral music, and my parents would buy me the soundtrack LPs. Though I dropped *Dune* and scratched it. I would try to pick these pieces out note for note on the piano, and when you do this, you discover and come to understand the patterns that create their effects at a very elemental level. Musically, this is something I have a bit of a mania about, the precision of choices a person makes at that one-note-after-another level. To me, that is where you reveal their musical identity. It's like looking at their DNA."

It's precisely this sort of 'DNA' that's evident throughout *Hold R1's* complex, detailed and sweepingly emotive tracks. The 11 songs in many ways capture Wade's production-learning process as it occurred.

"I think my broadest goal was to try to make sure I would have a wide enough variety to choose amongst, style-wise, when it came to deciding what would go on the CD," Wade says. "I was still learning and exploring Logic at breakneck pace as I went along, composing all through 2006 and then for part of 2007. When I made what I pronounced to be the first Aeriae track, I'd really only produced a handful of finished tracks in Logic beforehand. 'Clique' was only the second Aeriae track, and that ended up kicking off the record."

"My production set-up is 100 per cent software. My home is in Logic Pro on a Mac G5 Desktop. I do all the composition, sound design and mixing in there, render it and then take the file to be mastered. A lot of older school folk have favourite hardware synths, like the 303 or the Prophet. I'm starting to get favourite software synths, like Logic's ES2. It has this plucky, blossoming crystalline sound. I play some riffs and ideas in with a midi keyboard when composing, but the core of it is just getting in there and manipulating midi events one at a time with a mouse, going down to the 1/192nd of a note level at times. I also have Ableton Live, which I mostly use for doing remixes, but I did make 'AMay' with Live. That was the only non-Logic album track. Maybe that's why it's also the poppiest."

Having read about Wade's ongoing (and apparently difficult) efforts to translate Aeriae to the live performance domain, I enquire whether he's been able to make much headway in that direction.

"I'd have to say it's travelling steadily," he confirms. "Sometimes I feel like it's crazy or a disaster, but these assessments can't really stand up to scrutiny anymore. Mostly, I can't believe how much work is involved! My primary goal is to avoid being stuck behind a laptop being inscrutable. I've seen Aphex Twin and Luke Vibert do that, and I'm not crazy about it. I use a Novation controller to cue, mix and play everything, and a midi keyboard, so I hope people will be able to mostly suss out what I'm doing. The real work is in engineering versions of tracks so that they can be manipulated in real time."

"A lot of what I love most about this music genre is that it's not limited to what any one human can conceive of or play in real time," he says. "By definition, a live performance of it is a compromise, but it just has to be a satisfying compromise. I break the tracks up into more macroscopic chunks that I can cue and loop, and I have lots of smart knob effects, and occasionally I play the keyboard badly. Moldover has called this approach 'controllerism', and I'm happy to use that label. I saw his video on controllerism earlier this year, and that was the moment I suddenly thought, 'Here's a way I can do this that would satisfy me.' I'd never been convinced before I saw that video. But I've only got four tracks in the rig so far, so there's lots more work to do."

With Wade having done a few remixes now for other artists, including Catcall and Chain Gang, I'm keen to find out more about these link-ups came about and, particularly, whether remixing is something that he's interested in exploring further in the future.

"They came about when I forced myself on these poor individuals," he says, wryly. "It always starts out that I either like the band or song. Remixing them and suddenly presenting them with the remix is my way of trying to be involved with other local artists. Plus, in life, I enjoy surprising people with something I've made and seeing their reaction. Catcall was the first one. I sent my 'August' remix to her without warning. Her response was 'OMG amazing I love it!' but then she never spoke to me again. I sent several of my typically over-polite emails asking, 'Could I have your permission to 'do' something with this remix?', but she said nothing. And I know she's there, her MySpace light is on all the time. So that was kind of annoying, actually! So I just started disseminating the remix under my own steam. With Chain Gang, I went mad for them after hearing them on FBi early this year. Months later, some chap named Blaze Tripp gazumped me on being the first to remix them, by a week. I think you can hear my pissed-off-ness about this in my remix of 'Get Off My Stage'. Which, by the way, I hope Chain Gang will plug on their site, a la Blaze Tripp."

Given Wade's self-stated fandom for Delta Goodrem, I also can't resist asking if he knows whether Delta's actually heard the unofficial Aeriae remix of 'Believe Again.'

"I don't know if she has. Though since it's a totally unofficial remix and she's biggish of fame, I've been plagued by vague nightmares that if her people knew about it, they might sue or something. But I have confidence she'll get to hear it at some point. I'm going to her concert in January, so maybe I'll take a copy with me and wave it at her while crying out, 'Delta! Oh Delta!' I wonder what she'd make of it. It's kind of a dark take on one of the most blatantly inspirational songs of all time."

Taking into account that Wade's Fantavision-based 8-bit animated clip for 'AMay' was a recent entrant in the Portable Music Awards, you'd also be easily forgiven for thinking that animated visuals were an avenue he'd perhaps like to explore further on other album tracks. From the sounds of it, though, it's the actual logistics involved that prove to be the most problematic factor.

"Hmm, actually they're not," he says. "In terms of video clips, they would be if I had the time and resources myself, or access to people who'd do something extraordinary for me on the cheap, but I don't. The thing about 'AMay' is that it was something almost only I could do. It takes intimate knowledge of the Apple II hardware, and how it operates under emulation, and of the software Fantavision, just as the starting point. This is a very particular collection of knowledge that barely exists anywhere on the planet in one person, and then that person then needs to have animation and directorial skills. In that sense, I was the only candidate!"

"But if you drop me in a far more typical modern context, like with some 3D software I barely know, and Final Cut Pro or something, I'm suddenly less empowered and skilled than the zillion people who work in these mediums day in, day out, producing ads or movie effects or whatever. I'd love to get more unique clips happening in the future, but I can't do it myself, and I barely have anyone to help for now. Or the money to pay skilled strangers."

Knowing that Wade has a university background working on short films and as web comic artist (perhaps most notably on *Ocular Trauma*, itself an infamous cultural meme of its own), and his love of film scores, I ask whether it's a direction he's interested in exploring with Aeriae in the future.

"Maybe you can't be big if you write comics about necrophilia and people having sex with trains."

"I wanted to be a director of feature films, but ended up abandoning that road for many reasons," he explains. "During uni I helped on tons of shorts, rarely enjoying it. This probably isn't surprising as I don't even like to watch short films, only features. But uni was where I got my hands on Pro Tools and was introduced to digital sound editing. I loved doing soundtracks, I just disliked being on set, especially doing the boring sound recording."

"Comics were something I had drawn all my life. In high school I turned *Macbeth* into a gory comedy, and surprisingly they printed that in the annual. I think I wish I had created *Peanuts*, but failing that, I did want to publish a long-running comic, and the net age made it possible. So I cranked out 200+ issues of *Ocular Trauma*. I still sell the spin-off mugs and t-shirts. I don't know if anyone ever forwarded you the comic *Find X* in an email, but I made that, it was part of *Ocular Trauma*. People don't believe me when I say I made it, they think it's too famous or a part of folklore that must have always existed or something, but I made it. I had hoped for *Ocular Trauma* to catch on in the web comics boom and get a big audience, but it didn't. Maybe you can't be big if you write comics about necrophilia and people having sex with trains. In retrospect, I'm pleased I ended it when I did, because if it hadn't, I wouldn't have gone on to do Aeriae."

"A lot of what I love most about this music genre is that it's not limited to what any one human can conceive of or play in real time."

"I would like to score a film, but I don't think the style I'm most amenable to is very 'in' these days," he says. "In the seventies or eighties, there were lots of scores that were more obviously mantra-like, built out of hypnotic structures that kept coming back. Everything John Carpenter did, plus Goblin's work in *Dario Argento* films. Lots of horror films in general. That's a lot of what I grew up on and which influenced me, and the kind of thing I think I'd be suited for. Even in indie films now, the scores are becoming entirely dynamic to the action. I think the style I like gets more of an outing in video games these days. I love the Resident Evils, the Silent Hills. I'd love to work on something like that."

Alongside his ongoing efforts to successfully translate Aeriae's highly-detailed textures to the live arena, I'm also curious to find out if Wade has started making the follow-up to *Hold R1* - something that he confirms is continuing apace.

"At the moment I'm alternating working on tracks for album number two with working on my live rig. I also joined Clan Analogue recently, and there are a couple of things happening there, like a Severed Heads tribute album in the works which I've done a track for. The Clan seems to be getting on a bit, though. I mean I'm in my thirties and still get ribs like 'YOUNG PERSON ALERT' when I say some stuff. Plus they communicate by mailing list, not message board. If I was as whippersnappery as they say I am, I'd say it's all a bit early nineties."

Aeriae's Hold R1 *is self released at aeriae.com.*

SLEEPING PILLS

Having contributed to the Australian electronic landscape in countless forms and contexts, Jason Sweeney has now revisited and re-imagined a decade's worth of solo ambient material.

It is a glacier in the night. A mountainous shadow, drifting and transmuting so languidly that it appears all but still. Moments come and go; shapes can be made out before losing themselves to the atmosphere and the ice. Echoes of piano call and resonate – partial melodies form – only to be swallowed, submerged, blunted in darkness and ambience and texture and drone.

There is an almost quixotic tranquility to this vista, but an ominousness too. Beauty and sadness and fears and memories intermingle and integrate and coalesce. It is lulling and alluring and narcotic; it is the instant before a dream. Buried neural activity at half sleep.

Let the Darkness at You – the stunning debut collection for Panoptique Electrical, solo ambient guise for Adelaide composer and electronic musician Jason Sweeney – finds its bearing in a nocturnal place, in the wanderings of the subconscious. Its title is no mistake.

"I wanted it to be a kind of sleeping pill in a way. I wanted this album to be something that could help insomniacs like myself."

"I wanted it to be a kind of sleeping pill in a way," he says in his relaxed manner. "I wanted this album to be something that could help insomniacs like myself."

According to Sweeney, who is best known for his roles in electronic duos Pretty Boy Crossover and School of Two – as well as his collaboration with former Underground Lovers front man Vince Giarrusso in Mist & Sea – the record's direction began to refine itself in the non-waking hours. "I was living in a basement apartment in the middle of Melbourne and was suffering very bad insomnia and having to work a day-job in an office, and was going a little bit loopy in the process," he recounts.

"At the same time I was working on this record and it was pure joy to visit it every couple of days and just put the headphones on and lose myself in it. When it came time to sequence the record I was still having terrible sleepless nights and having to wake up at 7am to go to work, so I decided to create the track list early on and one that was very intentionally driven to put me to sleep."

It's quite a shift for the 37-year-old. While Sweeney's work has always harboured an atmospheric leaning, Panoptique Electrical represents a far deeper and more thorough engagement. Over 19 tracks and 78 minutes, *Let the Darkness at You* shimmers with an enveloping palette of opaque, non-rhythmic atmosphere and beauteously melodic guitar, piano and computer-generated ambience.

"There's no moment on the record where something pops up and seems weird," he says, today chatting over the phone from his home in the South Australian capital. "I think I naturally always want to do something different, like, 'Oh, we've had 10 minutes of that kind of feel, why don't we throw something different in there'. I think there are definitely ebbs and flows, but I didn't suddenly want to bring in something with a beat just for the sake of change of pace."

He puts the record's aesthetic down to restraint. "It was almost like a kind of disciplinary approach; making myself work on the entire album with a particular feel in mind and not deviating from that. So it was kind of an approach of gathering a collection of this material, reworking it and then going to sleep every night with it on and seeing if it had that feeling that I wanted... The moment that I found myself being jarred into waking again I would make a mental note and re-visit, or take off, that track the next day."

The source material at the heart of the Panoptique project has roots that extend far beyond Sweeney's sleepless nights in Melbourne. Oddly for such a cogent body of work, the majority of the pieces that comprise *Let the Darkness at You* span a whole decade's worth of separate projects and purpose-composed vignettes, originally commissioned for a string of individual performance pieces, installations and short films throughout Australia, North America and Europe.

But the collection represents anything but a passive retrospective. "All of the pieces of the album were chosen for their very specific feel or mood or type of composition," he says. "It was a kind of rigorous selection process."

"I spent a lot of time with different pieces that I'd written or had begun years before and set about the task of re-working or remixing them. Then I approached the album as a very individual project, something that could be built from scratch and be listened to as a whole, rather than a selection of various work. None of the material on the record is in its original form – as made for the dance, film or theatre productions – as a lot of this material was raw or very stripped back. It was like I had all of these starting points to work musically and then I could add, layer or subtract ideas as I went along."

"It's the most personal collection of music that I've ever done and it does feel a bit vulnerable to put it out there."

He prefers to think of it as new material. "Although I've really made the point that this comes from old material, in many way it's actually really new because no one's heard it before," he says. "It's only been heard in the context of a theatre performance or a dance piece or a short film, and usually it's kind of hidden; it's just sort of buried in the mix as a texture that's not really all that upfront."

"So I really wanted to bring all this stuff into the foreground and that's exactly how I made the record – as a listener – as opposed to creating it from scratch. I could just listen to all this stuff and work out whether it would engage with someone as a record rather than as part of a live performance."

Sweeney's fascination with music stretches back to his childhood in Adelaide. He recalls hearing The Cure's 1985 opus *The Head on the Door* as a pivotal moment. "I remember listening to that album over and over," he laughs, "and thinking that I wanted to play the guitar properly."

He began experimenting with various keyboards and guitars and began recording his meanderings to tape. He tracked his first demo as a 17-year-old in 1988 and remembers a lively Adelaide community radio environment as having a formative influence on his decision to pursue music. "With Three D radio in Adelaide, you could just submit demos and they would just play any old thing," he says. "If you'd give them something, they'd play it on radio, so that was really quite motivating for musicians in Adelaide, especially in the early 90s."

"You could make stuff and they'd play it and you'd just go 'Wow!'" he laughs. "It was actually like this sort of strange training in itself for becoming a musician, because there was this validation to doing this stuff. I think a lot of Adelaide bands go through that. They might be really shy or something, but then their stuff gets played on Three D and their ego gets a much-needed massage and it's like 'I can do this!'"

Nonetheless, Sweeney went on to study theatre and performance, with his music filling the role of welcomed artistic aside. "Funnily enough, when I made my own theatre and performance stuff, I never made my own sound for it," he muses with a chuckle.

It wasn't long before music became the chief focus, and Sweeney's rambling discography confirms as much. He has partaken in innumerable projects and collaborations over the years, including late 90s flirtations with Karl Melvin and Louey Hart in Sweet William, as Madeline's Wreath with Louey Hart, as God Burning System with Rebecca Johnston, and in the early 00s with Janiece Pope as Par Avion.

Long-running projects like Other People's Children with Nicole Lowry, solo pop project Sympatico and Pretty Boy Crossover have spawned nine full-length albums – including Pretty Boy Crossover's luminous 2007 record *A Different Handwriting* – upwards of 20 EPs, splits, singles and cassettes, and countless compilation appearances. Recent work as School of Two (with Harry Whizkid), Luxury

Gap (again with Lowry) and Mist & Sea (with Burns and Vince Giarrusso) has seen another full length – Mist & Sea's stunning 2007 record *Unless* – and two more EPs.

Despite his prolificacy on wax, it's been Sweeney's soundtrack and score work – which forms the basis of Panoptique Electrical – that has perhaps been his most enduring focus. During the last decade he has worked on films and performances in locales as sprawling as Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Wagga Wagga, Glasgow, Brussels and Los Angeles, whilst also completing an artist-in-residence at the Banff Centre for the Arts in Canada.

"It's probably what I do most, and that's been increasing over the last five years," he explains. "I am pretty fortunate in that most people I work with – film or theatre directors, choreographers – give me free reign over what I can make. I usually get a kind of idea of what sort of music they'd like or, as with film, you get to see the rushes or edits and know (or at least think I know) what sort of music is needed to either enhance a mood or provide an unsettling feeling."

"Sometimes, however, I am asked to make specific types of music for productions and to be honest, this music didn't make it to this album because the instruction was 'can you make a kind queer dance club track' which I did but it was part of the job of soundtracking and not necessarily something I was passionate about making. I think I've been doing scores and sound designs long enough now that people who approach me to make music for their works know the kind of sounds or style that I make so they don't ask for rock anthems."

"Oddly for such a cogent body of work, the majority of the pieces that comprise Let the Darkness at You *span a whole decade's worth of separate projects and purpose-composed vignettes."*

Indeed, the fact that the skeleton of the compositions that comprise *Let the Darkness at You* were originally commissioned for someone else seems irrelevant when listening to the record. In actual fact, the collection's introspective qualities are such that it's hard to believe the works rose from anything but Sweeney's very personal musings.

"I guess everything on this album was probably the closest to me and had the most resonance for me out of all the stuff I had made for other people," he says. "It's the most personal collection of music that I've ever done and it does feel a bit vulnerable to put it out there. I'm not from a classically trained background, yet this record felt like I was undertaking a massive exercise in composition and pushing myself harder in terms of the way I would structure music and the listening experience. If this album was to say anything about me then it would be a kind of personal plea for stillness and reflection – to quieten things down."

"Also, while a lot of the pieces were written for other people, at the same time I felt that they weren't used to the fullest capacity they could have been. So you know, it was an opportunity for me to say, 'I really loved this piece of music that I wrote for someone'… I mean, some of the piano pieces on the record were mostly written for short film and the filmmakers ended up using maybe two notes from that piece. The composer obviously wants all his or her music in the foreground," he laughs. "And I love soundtrack composers whose music is used by the filmmaker in such a way that really does, not necessarily impose an emotion, but provide some other feeling that maybe wasn't in the film beforehand. So it was definitely an opportunity to pull out the whole feeling of a piece."

It's a quality that's written all over the album, which gently oscillates between moments of introspection and outright emotive beauty. The stunning piano arrangement and subtly fuzzed textures of 'It Rains Today (for Tanja Leidtke)', the arcing, spectral motif and gently idling underbelly of 'Tingling Cheeks are Love' and title track 'Let the Darkness at You' are some of the most charming sketches. The shimmering dynamics of 'Glacier Show I', 'The Paws Before Entering' and 'Falling Snow'; the gently reverbed piano atmosphere of 'Albury-Wodonga, May 2006' and the haunting opacity of 'Glacier Show II' make for further highlights.

One of the most striking qualities is Sweeney's ability to render genuine, definable sonic dynamics into such pointedly minimalist compositions. "I think that comes from having a low boredom threshold," he laughs. "It's interesting because one of my favourite kind of drone acts is Stars of the Lid. The music – even though it's kind of relentlessly or uncompromisingly minimal and somnambulistic and really kind of sleepy – there's just so much going on. And because of the slowness of it and the pace, the variation in their music astounds me."

"I like the fact that you can have something really minimal but have a lot going on. It doesn't have to be upfront but can kind of come in and out of the mix. I guess it's kind of an orchestration in a sense."

Indeed, the classical world also played a role in fashioning Sweeney's aesthetic. "I've been listening to a lot of early music by a composer Thomas Tallis, who did a lot of sort of vocal chant stuff," he says. "I was just kind of listening to the different dynamics within, say, a 14-minute piece he'd written for 20 voices or whatever, and I started thinking that it would be really interesting to apply that to drone music or stuff that's a bit more experimental. I kind of wanted to treat the album as if it was going through several different movements."

The process behind the recording points to a much more deconstructive, contemporary patois. While most of the pieces grew from the piano, Sweeney fed the untreated motifs through various processes, adding delays, static and distortion and various abstracted field recordings, often creating another syntax entirely.

"A lot of the material is very raw piano phrases recorded in a shed in Albury or country SA," he admits. "Some of it is re-processed string parts. Some of it is samples of machines or static or weird things I've collected from underground carparks and so on, and then set about the task of 'tuning' these sounds into musical material."

"There is actually no guitar used on the record even though I think it's been mentioned that there is. All that stuff is piano put through vast amounts of distortion and echo boxes… I usually obsessively record a lot of piano phrases whenever I can get my hands on one, which has either been on artist residencies or in a CWA (Country Women's Association) hall on the road to somewhere. I just take a small WAV recorder and put it on top the piano and record stuff for hours, sometimes just drone variations on a couple of notes or chords, or repeated motifs. Then I have hours and hours of small pieces that just wait to be treated. There's a few tracks on the record that are pretty much the piano piece only put through a slight amount of delay, but retain their original form. And then there are more expansive tracks that are re-worked in Ableton Live and lose their identity as a piano altogether."

Panoptique Electrical extends far beyond the purely sonic realm. Sweeney speaks of the project – and it's visual and thematic identity – in terms of collaboration. As he goes onto explain, the involvement of Sensory Projects label boss Steve Phillips was far greater and more personal than that of mere logistics.

"He'd intimated to me a few times that he had this collection of paintings and work that he'd done, but we'd never really talked about it at any great length until we were sort of thinking about this record," recounts Sweeney. "Steve must have showed me some sketchbooks or something and everything he had done was strangely perfect. The artwork came from older material and, a bit like the music, he had gone back and revisited and reworked it for the purposes of the album."

The same went for the song and album titles. "I'm usually a control freak and titles come before anything," he laughs. "These songs originally had these really dry titles based on what they were made for, like Sequence One or whatever. But Steve had a whole lot of titles based on either things he'd responded to in the music or titles he'd just had sitting around in his notebooks, including the name of the album. So that became part of the collaboration on this record as well."

"It just felt really nice to have that stronger connection to the label, rather than just one as Steve being the guy who puts out the records and does all that other stuff, but instead on a deeper, artistic level. It's always been a friendship-based relationship rather than a business one. I kind of see Steve as a core collaborator in Panoptique Electrical – I kind of see this potential for even installation work with Steve."

Despite its palette, Panoptique Electrical's artistic objectives are nonetheless humble. "It has been incredibly heartening to hear of others who have said the album has helped them drift into a deep sleep," muses Sweeney.

"I recently gave a close friend of mine the album who has been very ill the past half year and is on a very aggressive drug which causes chronic insomnia. She told me only last week that the album has been the one thing that has truly helped her with resting and sleeping and is now helping her through her treatment," he says.

"So, for me, the album has succeeded."

Let the Darkness at You *is out through Sensory Projects/Inertia.*

Additional reporting by Bob Baket Fish

little whispers

It begins with a dull thud, like the sound of a cassette recorder grinding into action. There's a tiny moment of silence and then the tape hiss rapidly flowers into a high-frequency whale call; a sub-marinal wail that glides over the sonic mess and lazily woos distant organ notes into focus. The sparse elements gradually mesh together and push against the speakers until a gravelly dissonance subsumes every feature, though occasionally elements - notes and oscillations - come together like a solemn note in a strange, dream-like song. In time the colliding sonics become one colossal, blissful nether region.

The song is 'Airfish' and it appears on Moonmilk's 2007 Soviet Records release *The Winter Sun Has Teeth*. It's one of their most azure forays into drone: an 18 minute expedition (yep, expedition is the best word for their work) that sounds sodden - nay, submerged - in the deepest waters in the Pacific. This isn't delicate music - there's no intelligent design at work here. Instead, it's more like the big bang: the Moonmilk duo trigger these multifaceted sound worlds and prod them along, but in doing so they become more than human. They're also elemental.

Sydneysiders Kell Derrig-Hall and Lia Tsamaglou started Moonmilk in 2004, when Lia bought a sequential synthesizer. This purchase, as well as contact with the then-current experimental scene in Sydney, gave focus to their collective tendencies. "We'd been going to the Frequency Lab to see some NowNow shows, which we really liked initially," Lia remembers, "around that time we'd started jamming together, putting effects through the keyboard and recording it through a four track."

Kell had experimented with field recordings in the past. "Before Lia got the synth I'd been doing recordings during the night and early morning from out of my bedroom window at my mum's house," he says, "then I'd run the recordings through the guitar pedals. Lia had heard that stuff and was interested in it, so the synth came as a good way of combining what we were both doing separately."

"The World Creaks freaked me out when I listened back to it… when we stopped, we thought it was the most amazing thing ever. It seemed like it came from nowhere."

The couple played their first show at the Frequency Lab, on a bill with Chris Abrahams of The Necks. Later, on Easter day 2005, they witnessed Newcastle experimental six-piece Castings at the Lansdowne Hotel, during one of the SoundNoSound events that members of Castings were instrumental in organising. "We said to Castings that we really liked their music and we'd never seen anyone do something similar to what we do," Lia recalls, "Nick [Senger, of Castings] was really keen to swap email addresses. So we sent SoundNoSound a demo of songs we had recorded and they really liked it, so we ended up playing a Castings support."

At around the same time Kell and Lia were regular attendees at a short-lived performance space in Pyrmont called Iraq, which was situated in a condemned building and only lasted a few months. During that period the space hosted Kell's pre-Moonmilk experimental rock group Piano Get Small as well as Castings, The Thaw, Pure Evil Trio, Alps of New South Wales and even The Hard Ons, among other groups. "Moonmilk was meant to play there once," Lia says, "but we couldn't because it was Greek Easter."

"Around that time there was a big group of people who were all into the same thing," Lia remembers, "Sound & Fury had opened, Iraq was going on, Yvonne Ruve at Hibernian House was starting. By that stage SoundNoSound had stopped doing as many shows but there was still a collective. It helped broaden our minds to other forms of music."

"Iraq brought all these different groups together," Lia says. "But now everyone does their separate things. There are different factions."

The culmination of Sound & Fury's arrival in Sydney – with the store's focus on experimental music and private press labels – as well as the accommodating spaces in which to play, brought a legitimacy to the type of pop-experimental music that groups like Moonmilk aspire towards: a musically abstract form that strives to affect emotionally and imaginatively as much as it questions preconceived notions of music. It was an idyllic middle ground between the harsh noise and detached, exploratory laptop music they had witnessed previously.

"Castings were one of the first great experimental bands I'd ever seen," Kell remembers, "and when we saw them it was amazing. They had a more spacious approach. It wasn't really aggressive and it wasn't clinical. Meeting other people with personalised approaches to that was great too, because often it was either super academic or very macho. Seeing Castings was a way of realising that people were taking such an approach to this style of music. It was different to the 'press this and bang' approach, all the screeching stuff. There was lots of laptop experimentation as well," Kell makes a clicking sound, "it was very quiet stuff, very academic."

"Sound & Fury, as well as the accommodating spaces in which to play, brought a legitimacy to the type of pop-experimental music that groups like Moonmilk aspire towards."

The duo released three recordings in 2006: a cassette entitled *Willow Song/ Live In Newcastle*, a split cassette with UK based artist Quetzolcoatl, and a Soviet Records live recording of a show the duo played at the Lansdowne Hotel, a performance that saw the band heckled severely by the notoriously rowdy (and rawk-orientated) Lansdowne clientele. These releases culminated in what the duo regard as their first 'proper' release, *The World Creaks* on Spanish Magic.

"'The World Creaks' [the title track to the album] freaked me out when I listened back to it," Lia says of the song, "even though we were using the same instruments and the same combinations. We were jamming to prepare for a show we had that night. When we stopped, we thought it was the most amazing thing ever. It seemed like it came from nowhere."

The World Creaks is something of an anomaly in the Moonmilk canon for the inclusion of 'Light Limbs': a track the group claim to have 'composed' to a greater degree than anything else they've committed to tape. It also features Lia's eerily disconnected vocals: a wordless, sighing presence that climbs up and down notes in a hauntingly off-key manner – like a siren's vocals on a near exhausted vinyl record. It's one of the most chilling moments they've committed to tape. When the duo play live their setup normally consists of two synthesizers and a diverse array of effects pedals. Lia often kicks off the proceedings and Kell adds elements while overlaying effects until the two separate constituents meld together into a blissful, immersive whole.

The couple don't often 'compose' like they did with 'Light Limbs', and their parts in the construction of Moonmilk's sound worlds are fairly cemented. "We've sort of fallen into roles," Lia says, "normally Kell starts and I'll form a loop, and then we'll continue to layer."

"Lia doesn't like to start," Kell adds. "That's because I'm scared you won't find my note, so I find yours," Lia explains.

In 2007, the pair played two collaborative sets with Sydney outfit Rand and Holland, a meeting that saw the solemn intensity of the latter gel transcendentally with the former. They also spent much of that year playing shows in licensed venues – supporting more widely palatable groups that appreciated what they were doing – and having a crisis of confidence as a result, Moonmilk hinted at a hiatus early in 2008.

Thankfully the hiatus didn't eventuate: the group have played a number of shows throughout the year, visited Melbourne, and recorded a split 7-inch with Italian duo My Cat Is An Alien, due out on the Sound & Fury label any day now. A split cassette with US duo Eyes has just been released, and UK label Recollections of Knulp is set to reissue *The World Creaks*.

2008 and the duo are focusing more on their respective solo projects. Kell has his Tired Hands project, which sees him shifting into a more pastoral, singer-songwriter direction, while Lia writes as Melodie Nelson, a project that also leans towards songwriting and lyricism more than Moonmilk's material could ever have hinted at. The duo have also released what may go down as one of their darkest moments in the form of 'A Strange House', their contribution to a split CD-R with power electronics outfit Heil Spirits. All in all, it turns out Moonmilk have been busier this year than ever.

"Both of us have seen colours when we've played," Kell says, reflecting on the pleasures of creating Moonmilk's sound worlds, "We're both pretty aware of sounds in everyday life. If we hear something interesting we both prick our ears."

Is it spiritual? "There may be a spiritual aspect to sharing sound experiences with an audience of other people in that environment." Kell reflects, "We have planes flying above us all the time, it sounds like you could jump and touch them here. There's always extreme sounds around us all the time, in the inner west."

"When we record something and then play it back we often tell each other what it reminds us of, visually or otherwise," Lia says.

She adds quietly, as if imparting a secret, "Sometimes we agree, sometimes it's the same thing."

The World Creaks *is re-released through Recollections of Knulp.*

TOWOISE

It all starts with a melody, cascading from somewhere above you like droplets of water falling from towering trees in a tropical rainforest. From here this song called 'Sweet Love For Planet Earth' exquisitely and purposefully reveals itself over a near 10-minute passage of music, as if you're watching a flower open through time-lapse photography. What begins with a crystalline synthesiser line eventually becomes subsumed by wave upon wave of impenetrably thick and murky fuzz. Halfway through the song, the muck starts to pulsate and then... that voice. It's as if you've received a phone call from someone who's being repeatedly stabbed on the other end of the line. They're screaming; a guttural, physical wail like something out of an Aphex Twin song. It kind of freaks the hell out of me.

Welcome to the rabbit hole that is Fuck Buttons. 'Sweet Love For Planet Earth' introduces the outfit's debut record *Street Horrrsing*, one whose raison d'etre is to not merely be an auxiliary component in your life, but to confront and challenge you, both physically and emotionally. To call it sonic nihilism would be doing Fuck Buttons a grave injustice. Even in its most impervious moments, when the layers of distorted synthesiser resemble the density of asphalt, a paradoxical delicacy is clearly evident. It isn't wanton noise, there's specific reasoning behind the towering sound. Actually, now I think about it, Fuck Buttons is a paradox. Here's two English musicians on the fringes of electronic music, creating sonic juggernauts that are simultaneously intricate and overwhelming, all with the use of modified children's toys. For what is ostensibly serious music, there's a playful heart beating underneath. Even the band's name suggests it. 2008 will be remembered for many things, one of which may or may not be the rise of the 'Fuck' band. Fucked Up and Holy Fuck, along with Fuck Buttons, form this triumvirate of 'Fuck'. The monikers might even be offensive if there weren't so many of them. "I'm quite happy that there's a lot of 'Fuck' bands around so we don't have to fly the 'Fuck' flag," laughs Andrew Hung.

Along with Ben Power, Hung rounds out the pair of musicians collectively known as Fuck Buttons. For most of their lives, Hung and Power lived in Bristol, a port town around two hours west of London. While other English cities like Manchester and Liverpool forged a musical identity through guitars, Bristol's claim to fame is that it's the birthplace of trip-hop; they call it the 'Bristol Sound'. Acts like Massive Attack, Tricky and Portishead call it home, alongside drum and bass heroes Roni Size and DJ Krush. The two met at Bristol Arts School in 2004, when Hung was looking for someone to score an avant-garde film he was creating for his fine art degree. Power, who was studying illustration at the time, heeded the call. Later that year, Fuck Buttons was born, peddling a sound like nothing Bristol had ever heard.

These days the band is based out of London, and Hung is on the phone from his apartment in the North-West of the city. He's home earlier than expected, too. Fuck Buttons has just come off an aborted tour with Scottish post-rock auteurs Mogwai which was cut short because of some problems with drummer Martin Bulloch's pacemaker. The tour dates coincided with a stop-off at the My Bloody Valentine-curated All Tomorrow's Parties festival in upstate New York, where Fuck Buttons shared the bill with the likes of Shellac, Low, Thee Silver Mount Zion Orchestra and Tortoise. In 2009, Fuck Buttons will make another appearance on an All Tomorrow's Parties lineup, this time at the inaugural Australian concert being held in Sydney during January.

Coincidentally, the band is signed to ATP Recordings, the label helmed by festival founder Barry Hogan. "It was at the end of March last year when I put on a show," Hung begins, "which is, like, the first and only ever time I've ever put on a show. A friend of ours at the time - who we hadn't met then - came to our show and he started raving on about our band and really liking us and he said he was going to tell Barry at ATP first thing in the morning, which I didn't really think much about, until the next morning [when] we got an email from Barry saying a good friend of his reckons he should put our record out, and he came to our show a week later, and that's when he was adamant he did want to put our record out. Yeah, it was amazing."

At the time, music was just a hobby for the pair. Power was working as an illustrator and Hung was a video editor. They were creating noise music, abrasive and droning. Power was bringing his hardcore background into the music, while Hung had a love of electronica. In the confluence, the music of Fuck Buttons was found. "I think our musical paths convened at the same point and I think that was very much why we started the band in the first place," Hung says. "Electronic music was going towards heavy stuff, and the music [Power] was listening to at the time was going towards heavy, and it just became noisier and noisier and then we started liking the same bands at that point. Music was a very big part of our lives at the time. We were both constantly turning up at the same shows independently.

"We like the envelopment aspect of sound and loudness," explains Hung. "I guess it's one step away from annihilation..."

"Ben's really talented at making music," he continues, "so at the first idea of us getting together to make music, I jumped at the chance. Before that, he played in quite a few bands I'd seen before. I think he's very talented at playing instruments and coming up with ideas. A band needs one talented musician."

Hung recalls the outfit's third show at a pub in Worcester: "We got turned off because the land lady of the pub we were playing in came through the audience and just started saying, 'I'm sorry, that's just not music'." He adds with a laugh, "Which I'd be inclined to agree with right now. We were just playing half an hour drone pieces devoid of any kind of structure or dynamic. It was very, very different to what we play now."

How to describe the music that Fuck Buttons play, particularly that which is found on their debut *Street Horrrsing*, is somewhat of a difficult task. Tracks like 'Race You To Your Bedroom - Spirit Rise' and the bludgeoning album closer 'Colours Move' would lead you to (incorrectly) believe Fuck Buttons were nothing more than a bunch of noisy punks. But then there's the psych wig-out of 'Ribs Out' and the skittering 'Bright Tomorrow', a song I'm sure LCD Soundsystem wish they'd written. Taking *Street Horrrsing* as a single entity, it's the subtle moments on the record that make the chaos so affecting. "We like the envelopment aspect of sound and loudness," explains Hung. "I guess it's one step away from annihilation [laughs]. It's not like muddy sound, it's very much, like, crafted noise. That's what we're interested in. I guess with the melodic elements we're able to feed into that and possibly add an interesting dynamic juxtaposition as well."

This juxtaposition, which makes

the soft seem softer and loud almost suffocating, lends *Street Horrrsing* a decidedly visceral element. "That's something that definitely interests me about the music that we make," considers Hung. "I'm interested in the way that it interacts with us physically." The same philosophy holds for their more raucous passages of sound. "For instance, Mogwai and My Bloody Valentine have used noise to envelope their listeners and pummel them into submission - in a good way," he says, laughing. "So we're very much interested in that element of it and exploring that."

Submission through hypnotism, perhaps? I suggest to Hung that the repetitive nature of Fuck Buttons engenders a hypnotic state. "Yeah, definitely," he says brightly. "I love the feeling of it. Repetition has the power to hypnotise as you said and I think that's very much an interest of ours."

With such opaque foundations as repetition and juxtaposition, it would be quite easy to let the music take the reigns, and in the process lose any sort of self-restraint during the writing process. So how does the band know when a song is done? "The first thing we do is enjoy the thing we're making," he describes, "and after we've kind of structured it so we know what to play and when to play it, at that point I'm able to listen to it as like an audience and I guess at that point that's when I get some kind of imagery and it's really exciting at that point. We wrote a new song the other day, last Thursday. I remember at that point when I was listening to it whilst being able to play it, I got quite strong imagery."

Another interest of Fuck Buttons lies in what Hung calls "new sound"; their arsenal consists of a handful of synthesisers and a lot of children's toys. While the latter may have been added purely out of pragmatism ("Initially, buying these children's toys were simply to do with finances and economics," says Hung, "i.e. we were very poor") it's opened up a whole new sonic spectrum for Fuck Buttons to, err, play with. "We very much collect anything that produces sound. Like, my living room is chock full of crap," he says with a laugh.

"Loads of toy keyboards, a Gameboy on stage, a Fisher-Price karaoke machine, pedals and synthesisers."

A checklist of the band's instruments reveals "loads of toy keyboards, a Gameboy on stage, a Fisher-Price karaoke machine, pedals and synthesisers". So how do they know what will work in the context of their music? "We don't," Hung exclaims. "We just get together and play with the stuff. We just bring these things along and if they serve a purpose then we use them. It's kind of mercinary in that way." Just like the karaoke machine used by Power to create that voice, the one that conjures up images of bloody murder and those mutated kids in the 'Come To Daddy' film clip.

Fuck Buttons utilised the skills of Mogwai guitarist John Cummings to produce *Street Horrrsing*, which was recorded in a small studio in the South-East of London. Hung recounts, "We lived and slept and worked on this album for a week in the studio. It was very much a kind of physical bubble that we were in." He adds with a smile, "It was one of the best times of my life really."

Having just recently returned from their truncated trip with the Scottish quintet, I instinctively ask him what the audience reaction was like, not because I expected it to be negative, but because they're a band that fans of post rock mightn't initially find appealing. "I thought about it during and before going on tour," he answers pensively. "I thought they was very receptive, the audiences, and I wasn't sure they would be because Mogwai have been around for ages and they're purveyors of that kind of music, so I was very happy that we were welcomed by a lot of their fans. I mean, there were a few people who didn't like our music who were a bit precious about who Mogwai brought on tour with them, understandably so. But generally and mostly it was very receptive."

When your modus operandi is noise, it's perhaps not the ideal genre to be precious about the reaction you might receive. If there was ever music that could polarise people, regardless of the accolades and plaudits showered upon it, it would be that of Fuck Buttons. "We generally do tend to polarise people," Hung considers, "not in terms of 50-50, people like us, people don't. I'd find it almost insulting if they all thought they were alright [laughs]. So we do tend to polarise people. People either hate us, or people tend to love us, which I think is fine with me. That's my perfect scenario."

Fuck Buttons' Street Horrrsing *is available from ATP/Remote Control.*

NOT QUITE • jazz

Ben Lamdin's Nostalgia 77 project has produced seven LPs in just four years, each one introducing new elements to his self-proclaimed 'jazz jihad'.

After releasing a couple of hip hop 45s on Tru Thoughts, Nostalgia 77's sound started moving towards jazz with modest experiments in sampling live instruments. First, Lamdin hooked up with trumpet player Tom Allan. Allan then introduced him to bass player Riaan Vosloo, and so on it went, until he found himself plugged into an extended network of jazz instrumentalists.

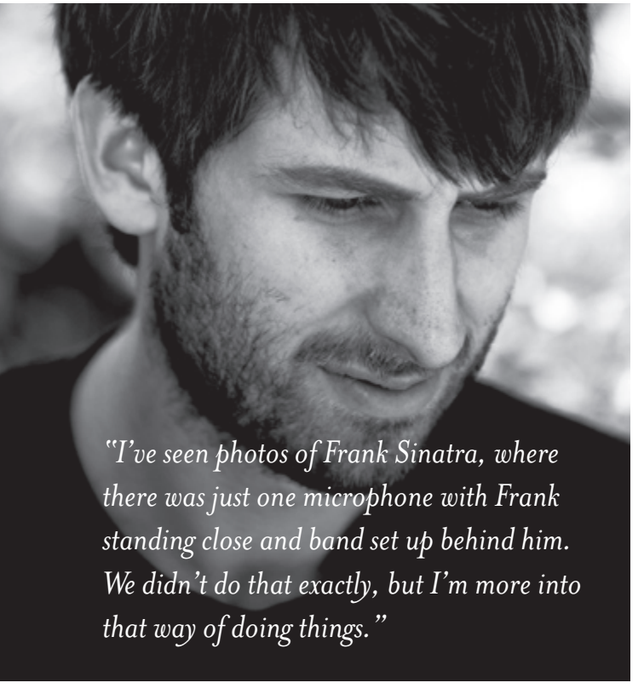
The resulting albums, 2004's *Songs for My Funeral* and 2005's *The Garden*, were put together on Lamdin's computer. While these albums established a jazzier sound and mood than Lamdin's earlier hip hop 45s, the production approach was still rooted in his formative hip hop aesthetic.

As Nostalgia 77 built a following through these two albums and Lamdin's DJ appearances, he decided to try performing the material from his album live. This experiment had a profound impact on Lamdin and his sense of Nostalgia 77's possibilities. Gathering a full eight-piece band, he described the experience of hearing his songs performed by a live band as revelatory – "I thought, 'wow, this is what it can sound like?'". From that point, he had no doubt that he wanted to record the band as a group.

The first release from the newly-formed Nostalgia 77 Octet was *Sevens and Eights* (2006), a recording of a live performance at the Jazz Café in London. The live versions of songs from *The Garden* are illustrative of the kinds of transformations which so excited Lamdin when he put the band together. Certainly, some key dimensions of the originals are lost, but the band's interpretations bring out other dimensions – in particular, they achieve moments of emotional intensity that are the product of live interaction between the musicians.

The original version of 'Green Blades of Grass', for instance, is built on a rugged and stilted groove, with drums, bass and guitar snapping away in a seriously bent jazz beat that gives a nod to J Dilla's trademark production aesthetic. In performance, the band sound a lot less 'amateur', if you like – where the sample-based version had been deliberately and deliciously out, the live rhythm section is far more in sync with each other. But harmonically, the horn melodies in the live interpretation are more sophisticated, and the rhythm section loosens up underneath the solos. In particular, the track achieves a new dramatic intensity thanks to Ross Stanley's piano excursions, which push the band to take the track to new places. The band's performance of 'The Hunger', by contrast, adds rhythmic complexity to the studio original. The overlapping horn melodies of the studio version are now underpinned by much freer drumming, which lend the track a kind of New Orleans funeral march feel. Then the initial restraint of the horns gives way to a furious and unexpected synth solo mid way through the track.

In his liner notes to *Sevens and Eights*, Tru Thoughts Label Manager Rob Luis sought to position the performance in this way:



"I've seen photos of Frank Sinatra, where there was just one microphone with Frank standing close and band set up behind him. We didn't do that exactly, but I'm more into that way of doing things."

"In a musical culture still dominated by the sampler and the DJ, this group unapologetically insists on the continued relevance of musicianship and live performance, and proves that good players can perform for the club kids and old school jazz heads alike, without leaving either short-changed....Their music looks to the future with the same conviction that it refuses to throw away the past. This is 21st Century Jazz."

Of course, it is the job of liner notes to be effusive. But Luis has a point in alluding to a tension that Lamdin and the musicians involved in his projects have had to negotiate.

In exploring this tension between the worlds of the 'club kids' and 'old school jazz heads', and the possibility for its negotiation, I asked Lamdin whether he and his musicians shared an outlook and approach to making music. He told me that there were some important differences: "They're great musicians, and they've devoted a long time to learning their instrument, so they tend to value and focus on virtuosity. But for me, I'm more interested in the sounds, the atmosphere a track evokes."

To some extent, this difference reflects the fact Lamdin and his musicians are likely to look to different parts of the jazz cannon for inspiration. The jazz artists whose work has been recovered through hip hop and sampling are not necessarily those artists whose musicianship tends to make its way onto the curricula of jazz students. Nonetheless, they did establish some common ground: "There are some artists who I love who have also forged different styles of jazz which the musicians continue to admire – John Coltrane, for instance, or Duke Ellington. Or Mingus – everyone seems to agree on how fantastic his music is."

But even here, these same artists might be valued for different reasons. Where a jazz musician might appreciate them for their improvisational and compositional approach, Lamdin also hears a production aesthetic which influences his approach. "There's a kind of 'amateurishness' to some of those recordings – I don't mean in terms of the playing, just that there's a kind of roughness that I really like."

What's interesting here is that while the skills and virtuosity of a group of jazz musicians have become necessary ingredients for Lamdin to create the quality of music that he is reaching for, he is not necessarily aiming to produce a 'jazz album' which is a showcase for these skills and virtuosity. The atmospheres and moods, the sounds that the instruments and band produce, the emotional qualities of the songs and their fit with a hip hop-influenced appreciation of certain styles and periods of jazz, are his priorities. This doesn't preclude virtuosity, but it doesn't prioritise it either.

Perhaps where Lamdin's approach does engage more directly with jazz traditions relates to the role of the producer. While he plays a bit of guitar and piano and takes part in Octet performances and in the studio, Lamdin is quick to tell me that he's not really a musician in the sense that his players are. Rather, he sees himself as a producer, trying to make good records by bringing together the right musical and technical elements. As such, he modestly located his efforts alongside the jazz producers of the 60s and 70s who inspired him, not just the artists – as he points out, "in that period, there was a strong role for the producer in jazz, with certain producers recording and producing work by a lot of different artists."

Lamdin's production skills have had to keep expanding to keep pace with his vision for the Nostalgia 77 project. After the success of the initial live performances, he wanted to record the band in a studio setting. Through the girlfriend of a band member, the Octet found a cottage in Wales with a barn, which was converted into a recording studio for a week-long session to write and record new songs as a band. This week produced two Nostalgia 77 Octet releases – the limited vinyl-only LP *Impossible Equation*, and *Borderlands* (both 2006). Band members contributed compositions to these LPs, while Lamdin was forced to learn a thing or two about how to record and produce a full band. In keeping with the production aesthetic he had established in early recordings, he kept things low-tech. Drawing inspiration from his favourite jazz records, he rejected close microphones and strict track separation in favour of techniques which kept the room in the recording: "I've seen photos even of Frank Sinatra in the studio, where there was just one microphone at the front of the room, with Frank standing close and band set up behind him. We didn't do that exactly, but I'm more into that way of doing things."

"There are some artists who I love who have also forged different styles of jazz which the musicians continue to admire – John Coltrane, for instance."

In 2007, with the release of the Nostalgia 77 album *Everything Under the Sun*, Lamdin shifted back to a process of studio assemblage. Different tracks featured different combinations of musicians, and vocalists Lizzy Parks (whose first solo album Lamdin has just produced for Tru Thoughts) and Beth Rowley were added to the mix. The vocal songs add a further layer of accessibility to tracks like "Wild Flower" and "Quiet Dawn". Vocals were also included in some tracks on the N77 Octet's latest release, *Weapons of Jazz Destruction* (2007).

Maintaining both the Nostalgia 77 and Octet vehicles for his productions seems to allow Lamdin the best of both worlds, such that he's not forced to choose between sampling and band productions. Along with bass player Riaan Vosloo, he has also established the Impossible Ark label, which has so far released albums by jazz instrumentalists and fellow travellers like Australian saxophonist Max Grunhard.

Lamdin's success with Nostalgia 77 says something about the fractured legacies and futures of 'jazz'. With the full support and distribution networks of the Tru Thoughts label, Nostalgia 77's albums are reaching musical scenes where jazz circulates as an ingredient or influence. In these scenes, the albums are often identified and appreciated as 'jazz' – *Weapons of Jazz Destruction*, for instance, was voted 'jazz album of year' in BBC1 DJ Gilles Peterson's 2007 audience poll. But whether or not these albums are also reaching a more conventional jazz audience is far from certain. Luis' optimism that the band is reaching both the 'club kids' and the 'jazz heads' notwithstanding, the extent to which the different aesthetics and distribution networks of the club and jazz scenes can be bridged remains an open question. Certainly, it would certainly be interesting to talk more to Lamdin's musicians about how they fit their work with Nostalgia 77 into their efforts to build careers as jazz instrumentalists. Even as jazz musicians themselves are crossing different musical scenes through the efforts of producers like Lamdin, are they bringing jazz audiences with them?

Ultimately, though, the 'jazz' question is not uppermost in Lamdin's own thinking. His main concern, he says, is to produce good music – and Lamdin's optimistic outlook that good music will find its own audience seems to have been confirmed as Nostalgia 77's following has grown. As we wrapped up our conversation, Lamdin wanted me to know how genuinely thrilled and grateful he was that his music has found such a supportive home and enthusiastic audience.

Nostalgia 77's One-offs, Remixes and B-sides *is available from Tru Thoughts/Creative Vibes.*

REAL POLLY TICKS

"Music doesn't have to pretend to be about something. It doesn't have to evoke something, it can actually be that thing. What I'm trying to do on this record is to try and use that as the basis or the supporting framework for the rest of it."

Matthew Herbert is one of those rare artists who transcends his discipline and actively taps into the larger social milieu.

He initially developed a reputation based on his idiosyncratic and seductive electronic house infused music, though he has begun to move away from the safe confines of the genre and incorporate unique, experimental and unpalatable techniques into his music. Of late, he has focused quite heavily on field recordings - using the environment rather than synthesizers and drum machines as ingredients in his music - though in parallel he has also begun exploring big band jazz in a project that marries all of his primary concerns: equal parts brass, electronics and discordant sound objects that wind up sounding suspiciously like show tunes.

Midway through our conversation, I confess to Herbert that I'd actually contributed to his 2004 *Plat Du Jour* album, a concept album exploring the politics of food. It was about five years ago when during a DJ set at an inner city Melbourne club Herbert had produced a box of apples and asked everyone to take a bite on the count of three. I did and the apple tasted terrible. Herbert begins to laugh, "thanks so much,' he says, "the album wouldn't have been the same without you."

I confess to him that I was a little disappointed that the sound of a club full of Herbert devotees all chomping down at the same time was actually as bland as the apple tasted, and figured there'd be no way that he'd actually ever use it on his album. He did.

"I had no idea what it was going to sound like before I did it," he says. "I love the sound of the apple in this experiment. It actually typifies why I like to work with sound. I had this idea of getting 365 people to eat an apple, which was supposed to be an apple a day, but then it spiraled into 3,555 and then over time it ended up being 10,000 people. I thought it would be the world's biggest sound, I thought it would be huge. But the point is when you eat an apple, you have this incredibly loud crunch inside your head and it's a very crisp and satisfying noise. But when you listen to someone else eat an apple it is quite small sounding, just the smack of wet lips.

"It's a fantastic way to learn one of the basic lessons of life," he explains, "something that seems very important or special and unique to you can be a very temporary and fairly unimpressive moment if you're looking from the outside. I loved it. It's a way of learning about life: the anticipation of thinking something is going to be huge, but is actually part of a much bigger thing and it's not that important in the grand scheme of things."

Which leads us back to his approach. His most recent album from his big band, *There's Me and There's You*, is filled with these kinds of experiments, 70 condoms being scraped across the floor of the British Museum, 100 nails being hammered into a coffin, 100 credit cards being cut up, a sound collage of 100 people saying 'yes,' even ex-Prime Minister John Major and field recordings (including gunshots) from Palestine.

"Until the sampler was invented, if you wanted to write a piece of music about the Australian countryside you had to evoke it through timbre and texture and pitch," he says, "whereas now you can take a microphone out and go and record sounds out there and then make the piece out of that. It's revolutionary in the sense that music doesn't have to pretend to be about something. It doesn't have to evoke something, it can actually be that thing. What I'm trying to do on this record is to try and use that as the basis or the supporting framework for the rest of it."

There's something more immediate, more tactile in actually using the object. With Herbert, it's more often than not a tactile real world metaphor. Given some of the lofty political overtones to much of his more recent work, the act of going out and making field recordings or conducting sonic experiments almost becomes a compositional tool, an opportunity to fully immerse himself in that world.

"For me it's about the idea that instead of music having to just be an abstraction or fictional or emotional response it can actually contain within it the thing itself. Instead of having to write lyrics about the houses of parliament I can actually go in there and record the sounds and actually use that themselves. I find that it gives weight and support to the position that you take."

To hear Herbert speak like this, you get the sense that for a long time he has been frustrated about his inability to get as tactile he wished. It wasn't an issue with process, however; it was content, and when the technology became

available everything changed.

"I think I was frustrated certainly at the beginning of my career, because I hadn't really worked out how my music could be political," he says. "The narratives that were most important to me always seemed to touch upon the political. I made a record a few years ago which I gave away for free called the *Mechanics of Destruction* which was made of Big Mac burgers and Starbucks, Disney and Coca Cola and all these brands. It wasn't until I made this record that I realised that everything bad in the world also made a sound as well. Because up until this point i just recorded my friends, interesting places I'd been, just these special and unique sounds. Looking back, what I was missing, and what was staring me in the face, was [the fact] that everything that was polluting and what I thought was semi-disastrous for the planet also made a noise.

"I think there was an earlier frustration that I hadn't found a way to discover a viable political voice in my music," Herbert continues, "and it's very much this technique that has allowed me to look again at the world, to auralise everything, to bring everything to life through sound or to use sound as a starting point to look at something. For example there's a track on the album called 'One Life', where one bleep represents 100 people killed in Iraq and that bleep goes very fast for six minutes through the piece. That bleep represents something, because it's the bleep of a life support system, but then it's abstracted again into a musical form. It brings with it layers of meaning, which I found very useful when putting this together."

The sound from the life support system actually came from his son's incubator, who was born premature. Equating this extremely personal sound to the death of 100 Iraqis may initially seem a far fetched link to make, possibly sensationalistic, and at the very least cold. It is, rather, Herbert's attempt to reconcile the value system of a government that can keep his son alive whilst waging war and being accountable for the deaths of thousands of others.

"It's very easy to make a point that war is bad," he says. "It's much harder to personalise it. In my case, I'm the one paying for it financially, rather than through the loss of my friends life or my life. My son was born early - he was born eight weeks premature - and my government spent about half a million pounds keeping my boy alive, and at the same time it was involved in a war spending a similar amount of money on killing people. So I thought, wait a second, how do we get into a position where we decide that my son's life life is worth 100 Iraqi lives?"

"Instead of having to write lyrics about the houses of parliament I can actually go in there and record the sounds and actually use that themselves. I find that it gives weight and support to the position that you take."

"You can then amplify it into something like bottled water, which appears at the beginning of the start of 'Breathe'. There's supposed to be 100 people because everything's a measure of 100 on this record but only 70 showed up in the true spirit of democracy. It was supposed to be 100 people blowing over empty plastic water bottles. I can go into my corner shop and buy five different types of water bottles, despite the fact that the water that comes out of my tap is perfectly acceptable, and yet there's 122 million in India that don't even have access to a toilet, let alone clean drinking water. That discrepancy in the world, between the haves and the have nots, has got to the point where it's intolerable.

"One of the tracks that didn't make it contains the sounds of Bling H2O, which is the world's most expensive bottled water. It's $40 a bottle. How can we have water at $40 a bottle? And that $40 will probably buy clean water for someone for a year somewhere else. It seems to me there's something very out of whack with the world when we can have such vast discrepancies, and there are people in our society that know about it and don't seem to care or don't seem to do anything about it. Perhaps I'm thinking about the music industry, which seems so happy to just pretend that everything's okay."

Herbert is determined not to pretend. He is constantly agitating whether it's through the content of his music, the experimental techniques he uses, or his outspoken opinions in interviews. In fact, the cover to *There's Me and There's You* is a petition dated September 5, 2008. "We the undersigned," it states, "believe that music can still be a political force of note and not just a soundtrack to over consumption." Herbert's is the first signature, followed by the rest of the band. It's sad that in this day and age such a statement reads more like a message of hope than anything else. Herbert laughs when I say that.

"I think it's part of an optimism that music can and should regain some of its political self. Look at the sixties, when protest music existed and music was seen to be part of a counter-cultural perspective where the idea of selling out existed still. Even in the '80s we had Margaret Thatcher and we had a great deal of anti-Thatcher music and we had punk. We had dance music and house music that was political to begin with, and it was outlawed by the government. So music has, in living memory, been a political force. It just seems now to be happy to be the soundtrack to advertising on TV, or in airports, and doesn't seem to wish to engage. In the last five years, there's been a war going on that has been the most defining event of our generation, as well as climate change. Both those things are entirely absent from the music. If you're an alien listening back in 50 years time - listening back to the body of music that has occurred in the last 50 years - there'd be virtually no sign of it. It's a very strange place to have got ourselves into."

"...music has, in living memory, been a political force. It just seems nowadays to be happy as the soundtrack to advertising on TV, or in airports. It doesn't seem to wish to engage."

For Herbert, the big band is a huge undertaking. It's the second big band album recorded at Abbey Road, a curious mix of his sonic experiments and meticulously arranged orchestrations. It's music that draws on show tunes and musical theatre, as well as those large 'Live at the Hollywood Bowl' golden era smooth swing concerts. It's funny, camp, silly, mischievous and at times a little bit sad. Yet woven throughout are the bizarre sonic detritus, the outcomes of his experiments, his metaphors, his agitation. It's a peculiarly dichotomous relationship, yet somehow it manages to work. Not only did the research for the record take about a year - as well as six months for the arranging and big band harmony work - it also took six months to actually record all the sounds, the choir and his aforementioned orchestra of 70 people making noises. But, seriously, a big band, in this day and age. Is he mad?

"I like the metaphor of the positive organisation of the community," he explains. "It's the largest ensemble I know of in the western canon, where each instrument is playing something different. For example, in an orchestra you might have 32 violins playing the same lines. But in a big band, each trumpet player plays a different part. So you end up with 18 or 19 people playing their individual part. There's no doubling up, it might be for a bar here and there, but it's basically playing their own thing. I feel that's how life should be, that everyone can express themselves in their own little way, but we have to pull together for some common cause, otherwise we're all going off in different directions and creating some kind of sprawling mess. So I like the metaphor of it. I like the visceral quality of it as well. It has such a physical impact that is a great foil or counter to the more heady preparation of the noises or the thoughtful attention to detail in how it's put together."

But none of this explains why he would he would undertake such a huge project that would take two years out of his life.

"It's easy to be critical of things," he says. "It's much harder to be positive and come up with positive responses to things. So I feel it's important I try and take things to their logical extremes. So why not get 100 people instead of me just blowing on a water bottle? Why not on the next record get 1000? It's the idea that music can still be a valid expression of community, which is something that seems to have got distracted by the ego. Like so many aspects of art, media and literature, it's so distracted by itself that it's forgotten what it's like to be part of a community."

There's Me and There's You *is out on !K7/Inertia.*

SLEEVE REVIEWS

Bec Paton

Photos — David Cooper

1 ARTIST: QUA
TITLE: Q&A
LABEL: LOVE + MERCY
FORMAT: CD
ILLUSTRATOR: JEREMY DOWER

You may remember meeting Jeremy Dower from when he designed the cover for the seventeenth issue of *Cyclic Defrost*; the one with the little ghosts. He's a prolific illustrator, with his work appearing to be very digital, luminous and whimsical. Most of his work is character-based but for this project he has taken a typo/graphic approach. This is quite possibly due to the sexy synergy between the album title, *Q&A*, and the artist's name, Qua.

A huge, white, one-point perspective capital 'A' sits sculpted on the front cover, seemingly cross-lit in red and green. The bevelled, chiselled faces are rendered powerfully to give real depth perception and have a rich glow from the lighting effect. It is strange that the 'A' was chosen for the front cover, as it would make more sense to be sequential with respect to the title and the 'Q' would symbolise Qua better. This puts forward a confident feel though, and maybe it denotes that answers are offered, rather than questions asked.

On the back, a thick, white furry capital 'Q' sits in the same perspective, with the same red and green cross-lighting treatment as for the 'A' on the front cover. The soft fuzz covering the letter form is beautifully realised and has a delicious tactile quality. Inside, there is an illustration of three-dimensional intestine-like squiggles, which overlap the CD perfectly, adding a lovely interactive element where you are drawn to rotate the CD to complete the picture.

The typeface is Helvetica Neue, small and cleanly set with the only really distinctive feature being the colours of red and green to integrate the typography with the imagery. One lovely touch is that the track listing on the inside cover is variegated through the light gradient set up on the illustrated letter forms, adding to the luminous effect. This a standard CD case, however, the design is beautifully refined and powerful, and precludes the need for bells and whistles in the finishing of the package.

2 ARTIST: SKIPPING GIRL VINEGAR
TITLE: *SIFT THE NOISE*
LABEL: SECRET FOX
FORMAT: CD
DESIGNER: MARK LANG

Admittedly, the CD single sleeve design was reviewed a couple of issues ago but the full album's design is just too spectacular to pass up. Continuing with the library theme, the album comes in a 'library bag' and there's a gorgeous owl screen printed on it.

The case itself is styled like an old library book with the call number on the spine, library card inside and meticulous attention to detail like grimy edges and faux linen endpapers. The cover is a warm, muted scarlet with the album name debossed into the front and track titles debossed too on the back cover. The barcode, spine label and band name are overprinted in white with a spot lacquer to contrast them from the uncoated heavy cover stock.

The package C-folds open and the CD is cutely rendered as a 7" record. Within the side flap pockets there are two cute little booklets; one for the song lyrics and the other for band photography and credits. All of the typesetting is beautifully refined and the lyrics especially are delightful. They are set in a typewriter face and appear to almost be the lyricists working notes – parts crossed out, revised and scrawled on. Stamps punctuate the layout and even if you're not a big indie fan, I recommend this for the sleeve design alone.

3 ARTIST: MR HAYDAY
TITLE: *MR HAYDAY EP*
LABEL: SELF-RELEASED
FORMAT: CD
DESIGNER: ROBIN CHARLES

This little number proves you can still have fun with a basic jewel case CD. On the front, there's an army of little hamsters, paws folded and pensive. They've been folded out of paper and have cute, bugged-out detailing printed onto their paper bodies in yellow, pink and black. On the back, is a hero shot of one of the folded hamsters – all this is cute and fun, but the really great bit is revealed when you take out the liner notes.

The CD insert is a three-panel, concertina fold wonder, which has on the spare two panels a template to make your own folded hamster! That's right, things to make and do.

For those feeling uncomfortable with cutting up their CD packaging, there's a note in friendly yellow type telling you to grab another hamster online at www.mrhayday.com. This is such a memorable and loving approach to giving that extra bit more to your audience. Although the design is simple, it's fresh and the concept is playful and desirable.

4 ARTIST: SLEEPS IN OYSTERS
TITLE: *WE KEPT THE MEMORIES LOCKED AWAY IN MATCHBOXES LIKE THE BEETLES OF OUR CHILDHOOD, OR, HOW TO APPRECIATE SOMEONE WHO'S ALWAYS AROUND*
LABEL: SEED RECORDS
FORMAT: CD
DESIGNER: UNKNOWN

What a bundle of joy! A fabric pocket has been sewn from floral, cheery fabric that even includes bees and two different buttons seal the deal. 'Sleeps In Oysters' has been embroidered onto a label and sewn on too, in soft golden thread. One can't help but wonder if different fabrics were used across the limited edition run of 240 CDs?

Inside are two brown paper packages, sealed with wax and the oblong one lovingly tied with brown string. The type and logos have been stamped onto these, probably with some sort of stamp kit except for the logo, which would have been custom made. In the square package is the CD with a cute collage and track names printed on – the only digital element so far. In the oblong package is a collection of five picture cards with intriguing quotes stamped onto the back of them like: "From the stump of a fallen oak tree."

The cards all feature nicely printed photographs of a young woman in someone's backyard holding an umbrella and interacting with insects; bugs, worms, bees, beetles and caterpillars. They are strange images and invite contemplation on what kind of context or metaphor you would like to think of them with.

All of the hand generated elements come together beautifully and the feel of opening the packages makes the whole experience seem secret and worth treasuring. A great deal of care has gone into this piece and it has definitely paid off, creating a haunting, contemplative and engaging artifact.

CYCLIC SELECTS

Adam D Mills

ADAM MILLS RUNS THE ONLINE LABEL SOUND & FURY OUT OF HIS HOUSE IN NIMMITABEL, A SMALL RURAL TOWN OF 300 ON THE WAY TO THE SNOWY MOUNTAINS, IN NEW SOUTH WALES. IT'S A FAR CRY FROM THE SHOP'S PREVIOUS LOCATION – A SPRAWLING SPACE ON BOURKE STREET IN INNER CITY SYDNEY – BUT WHILE THE PO BOX HAS CHANGED, THE FOCUS REMAINS: SHORT-RUN, CD-R, DIY AND PRIVATE PRESSED MUSIC; LOVINGLY HAND PRINTED, EXPERIMENTAL INDIE FETISHES. THINK SEAWORTHY, MOONMILK AND SHOEB AHMAD (PROFILED ELSEWHERE IN THIS ISSUE), AND ALPS OF NEW SOUTH WALES, AMONG OTHERS. ADAM THREW HIS HAT BACK INTO THE RETAIL GAME AGAIN RECENTLY, PUTTING THE CALL OUT FOR LIKE MINDED ARTISTS AND LABELS INTERESTED IN AUSTRALIAN DISTRIBUTION THROUGH THE ONLINE OUTLET. FOR ISSUE 21, WE ASKED ADAM TO TAKE THE CYCLIC SELECTS CHALLENGE.

CASTINGS – *'ALLO HICKORY* (CD-R, SPANISH MAGIC, 2005)

Newcastle sextet Castings should be much, much bigger than they are. But for some reason – or combination of reasons – they've never achieved the widespread attention they so greatly deserve. Why is it that Wolf Eyes can grace the cover of *The Wire*, get signed to Sub Pop and perform on broadcast television in the States while Castings continue to toil in relative obscurity? It doesn't seem right.

Too scuzzy to fit in amongst the more intellectual elements of Australia's experimental community and too cerebral for the devil-may-care noise set, Castings have spent five or so years inhabiting their own no man's land of foggy drone, deconstructed rock and pounding, industrialised rhythm. Less improvisational now than they once were, Castings have gradually shifted towards a more structured, visceral sound, as evidenced on their latest missive *Punk Rock is Bunk Squawk*. But it's their second album *'Allo Hickory*, that I hold most dear.

Part of the reason for that is just a time and place thing: *'Allo Hickory* dates from the period when I first discovered Castings and was drawn into their world of under-the-radar gigs in decrepit Sydney warehouses. They were one of the first groups to throw their support behind sound&fury when it was an actual shop, accepting our humble invitation to play an instore with grace, and then allowing us to record it and put it out it as live at sound&fury, the label's first release. Actually, it's probably fair to say that without Castings, there wouldn't be a label. So, thanks guys!

THE NORTH SEA – *CRUSADES* (CS, DIGITALIS LTD, 2008)

Last year, Brad Rose laid his iconic CD-R imprint Foxglove to rest. The news of this left me feeling a strange combination of sadness and relief. It was a disappointing to see a label I'd followed so closely for so long close down; but at the same time, Foxglove's prodigiously prolific release schedule had made keeping up with its discography an exceptionally taxing task, and the idea of a reprieve from that wasn't entirely unwelcome.

So, of course, my feelings about Foxglove's successor, the Digitalis Limited label, are similarly complex. That Rose has moved from CD-Rs to cassettes appeals to me greatly, given my stubborn, Luddite-esque refusal to accept the tape's obsolescence. But by decreasing the edition sizes, he's made it even harder for me to get my hands on a lot of these releases.

Crusades is the first Digitalis Limited tape from Rose's solo project The North Sea. Previously a vehicle for his explorations of Appalachian folk music, Rose recently introduced The North Sea's new guise as a noise/drone beast with the release of Mud Dragons (incidentally the last Foxglove release). The gritty, lo-fi tones, rumbling drones and oscillating electronics of *Crusades* perfectly suit the cassette format, embracing and absorbing the iconic hiss of the tape as another layer of noise.

It's easy to romanticise the humble cassette; years spent making mixtapes as an adolescent have lent a hazy, nostalgic gauze to my thoughts on the format. I'm the first to admit that they're far from perfect – each time I pop one into the stereo, a wave of fear washes over me as I imagine disentangling the tape's mangled innards from the machine – but there's something about the physicality of them that, for me, will always trump CD-Rs. I say that even as someone who runs a label that primarily releases CD-Rs, too.

Without wanting to seem like I'm jumping on some sort of bandwagon (because there has been an upswing in cassette releases over the last 18 months or so), I've actually given thought recently to switching from CD-Rs to tapes. In the early days of the label, CD-Rs were easy to produce and cheap as chips. They still are, but looking at something like *Crusades*, with its simple, hand-decorated J-card and clean, elegant black tape, makes me yearn for the format I grew up with. The jury's still out on that one, for now. But don't be surprised to see sound&fury tapes in the near future.

TARENTEL – *WE MOVE THROUGH WEATHER* (CD, TEMPORARY RESIDENCE, 2004)

I've always been amazed at how Tarentel's growth as a band has mirrored the continual expansion of my musical tastes. When I first discovered them in the early days of this decade, they fell very much under the post-rock umbrella: long songs, loud/quiet dynamics, nods to Steve Reich and Glenn Branca. As someone who was just discovering the likes of Mogwai and Godspeed You! Black Emperor, you can see how this would have appealed to me.

As I was growing weary of those sounds (not that I don't still have time for the likes of Explosions in the Sky or Mono), so too were Tarentel, apparently. Their second album *The Order of Things* saw them moving away from long, slow build-ups and glittering

arpeggios and letting elements of drone and shoegazey psych bleed into the mix. By the time *We Move Through Weather* arrived in 2004 – at which time I was fully immersed in the worlds of noise, drone and improv. – this transformation was pretty much complete.
Most of the eight tracks on this album are too abstract to really be called songs. While there's a strong rhythmic element to the record (thanks to Jim Redd's at times This Heat-esque drum patterns), and there are shards of melody scattered throughout, *We Move Through Weather* sounds more like an edited down collection of free improvisations. Which, for the most part, it is.
A slew of EPs released in *We Move Through Weather's* wake have seen the band continue along their trajectory away from songwriting and structure. *Paper White* and *Big Black Square* collected the catchiest and darkest leftovers from the *Weather* sessions, respectively, while *Home Ruckus* sounds exactly how its title suggests. *Ghetto Beats on the Surface of the Sun*, a series of four 12"s released by The Music Fellowship and later collated across two sprawling CDs by Temporary Residence, is the most expansive representation of this; in a double-blind test, you'd be hard-pressed to pick it as being by the same band that recorded *From Bone to Satellite* in 1999. Which is a very good thing, of course.

ZELIENOPLE – *STONE ACADEMY* (LP, ROOT STRATA, 2005)
To stick with Tarentel for a moment, the only reason I heard them in the first place was because *The Order of Things* came out on Neurot Recordings, the label owned and operated by the members of San Franciscan post-metal juggernaut Neurosis. Having put all my trust into the group's collective taste, I would buy any and every release the label put out, a policy which introduced me to the likes of Isis, Oxbow and KK Null, among others.
How this relates to Zelienople is that the only reason I heard them is because I adopted the same approach to Root Strata, a label started in 2005 by Tarentel's Jefre Cantu-Ledesma, as I had Neurot. Root Strata's initial triumvirate of Tarentel satellite projects – The Alps, The Holy See and Ledesma's first solo release under his own name – were all fantastic, and with Ledesma's taste in music having been proven to closely shadow my own over the past four years or so, I determined to follow him anywhere he chose to go.
Stone Academy, released in a limited run of 300 hand-numbered LPs, wasn't actually the first time I heard Zelienople. I'd given their CD-R *Ghost Ship/Mary Celeste* a cursory listen earlier that year but (shamefully) written it off as just another drone release. So when *Stone Academy* came out, I wasn't all that excited. I still bought it, though, based on the logic that if Ledesma liked these guys, maybe I should give them another go.
Imagine my surprise, then, when I put the record on and found that it wasn't another collection of submarine drones but of actual songs, with words and tunes and choruses and everything. Well, actually, it's a bit of both, but what immediately stood out to me was tracks like 'More Mess' and 'Fuck Everything', foggy, reverb-drenched pop songs with memorable hooks and laconic, distant-sounding vocals. So my loyalty to the label paid off. Actually, it's paid off several times over, having introduced me to Starving Weirdos, Bonus and John Davis as well. It's an at times financially crippling enterprise, buying everything a label puts out even if you've never heard of the artist, but I've found it to be an investment that pays massive dividends in the long run.

GROUPER – *DRAGGING A DEAD DEER UP A HILL* (LP, TYPE, 2008)
Grouper is Liz Harris, a Portland-based artist who crafts hauntingly intimate pop songs onto which she pours layers and layers of hiss and reverb, obfuscating the melodies to the point where they're nothing but a faint glimmer beneath the fog.
That is, until *Dragging a Dead Deer up a Hill* came along. Stripping back the noise that had always been an integral factor to Grouper's sound, Harris recast herself as a wistful folk singer. Though her enchanting mezzo soprano voice is still drenched in echo (like she refused to come within two feet of the microphone when recording her vocals), it's right up front in the mix alongside breezily strummed acoustic guitars and tinkling pianos. It's a far cry from the stormy sound of 2005's *Way Their Crept*, but it's a welcome development.
A conversation I had around the time of this album's release ended with me wondering if Harris might continue to 'clean up' her sound, and in doing so end up sounding like Cat Power or something.
It's possible, and quite strange to consider. The songwriting nous is there, as is the uniquely affecting voice; but the idea of Liz Harris supporting Nick Cave or getting signed to Matador leaves me feeling slightly uncomfortable.
It's a common reaction. When we discover an artist through 'grassroots' means, we tend to feel a stronger connection to them. We come to think of them as 'ours', in a sense. So naturally, the idea that they might be on the verge of achieving a higher level of fame diminishes that feeling somewhat. In a weird way, it's almost like they're cheating on you. Silly, yes, but still common.
I couldn't possibly explore the complexities of this notion in less than 400 words. Suffice to say, if Grouper's next album is Liz Harris's Moon Pix, I'll on one hand feel proud that she's getting her incredible music out to a greater number of people – this stuff deserves to be heard, and shouldn't be so jealously guarded by the underground/experimental elite – but can't say I won't miss the specialness of feeling that something – an artist, an album, a song – belongs almost exclusively to me.

BROTHERS OF THE OCCULT SISTERHOOD – *ANIMAL SPEAK* (CD-R, MUSICYOURMINDWILLLOVEYOU, 2004)
I couldn't make this list without giving a nod to Michael Donnelly and the musicyourmindwillloveyou collective. Based in the Northern Rivers town of Kyogle, their immense output of hand-packaged CD-Rs has had an immeasurable impact on the development of the psychedelic free-folk scene.
You might say that Brothers of the Occult Sisterhood is the flagship band of MYMWLY. Initially a duo consisting of Michael Donnelly with his sister Kristina, BOTOS has since metamorphosised into a sprawling ensemble with no fixed membership.
Animal Speak was the first recorded document of the duo's activities to be released. Its combination of improvised cello and acoustic guitar, free-form percussive clatter and ritualistic vocals make listening to it feel akin to eavesdropping on some kind of private ceremony. There's a magical, mystical element to BOTOS's early music, and it's at its most potent on Animal Speak.
Animal Speak also finds BOTOS at their most melodic and structured – these are the closest things to actual songs to be found in their sizable discography (15 releases and counting). Where recent offerings such as *The World is at War* and *Statues from Space* cultivated a much more abstract sound, tracks like 'Om Agar' and 'Quetzacoatl's Return' sound at least semi-composed (or improvised in a much more lucid state than the hallucinogenic jams of, say, *Chimes Against Reality*).
Donnelly recently announced the closure of MYMWLY. His overflowing creativity will instead be poured into Pacific Soma, which promises CD releases in larger editions as well as limited vinyl releases. As long as some kind of ruckus continues to emanate from New South Wales's far north (and wherever else Donnelly and his cohorts spread their tentacles), my ears will remain wide open.

LASSE MARHAUG – *SPAGHETTI WESTERN RAINBOW* (CD-R, UTECH RECORDS, 2005)
Milwaukee label Utech Records' impressive catalogue of improv. and noise discs was a huge inspiration in starting my own label. I could have quite easily chosen another of the first wave of CD-Rs – maybe Pipes and Bones, an incendiary drums/organ duo from Paal Nilssen-Love and Nils Henrick Asheim, or perhaps Steve Hubback's solo percussion marathon Trees, Rocks and Ravens – but it's Norwegian noise kingpin Lasse Marhaug's tribute to Ennio Morricone's *Spaghetti Western Rainbow* that I find myself reaching for more often than anything else.
Utech's visual aesthetic makes clear the distinction between 'handmade' and 'homemade'. Not to disparage DIY culture's love affair with photocopiers and bond white paper, but there's definitely something to be said for the simplistic elegance with which Keith Utech packages his releases. The first 20 or so CD-Rs on the label came housed in generic chipboard jackets, around the spine of which was glued a slip of coloured paper. The front of these slips of paper had a simply-designed artist/title motif and the relevant recording and copyright info; on the back was some kind of old-timey illustration (a bear, a straight razor, a tattooed man; on *Spaghetti Western Rainbow*, it's a revolver). So professional does all of it seem that the only way to tell these aren't pro-pressed CDs is to turn the discs themselves over to see the greenish tinge of the dye.
My other favourite thing about Utech's packaging is its consistency, which has the effect of simultaneously making Utech's catalogue a collector's dream as well as a complete nightmare. Lined up on the shelf together, the matching spines look highly impressive. But, of course, that impressiveness requires unwavering fealty to the label. Sure, I mightn't listen to Matt Lavelle's *Making Eye Contact with God* with any great frequency, but I couldn't very well have a gap between UR006 and UR008, could I? No, no I could not.

SUNN O))) – *ØØ VOID* (CD, HYDRAHEAD, 2000)
Most albums on this list feature some element of drone. That's not by design, it's just that 'the drone' crops up with an almost alarming regularity within my listening habits. It's there in the ragas and sagas of the Jewelled Antler Collective's glistening free-folk; it's there in the eerie field recordings on minimal modern classical stuff like Library Tapes and Deaf Center. Even the hisses and hums that underpin glitch and the constant open string in Johnny Cash's finger picking are varieties of drone.
But few groups in the past decade have embraced the drone like Sunn O))). This Seattle duo took the drone-metal template established by fellow Seattle-ites Earth in the early '90s – basically Black Sabbath riffs slowed to a prehistoric crawl and drowned in a tar pit of distortion and delay – and delivered it to the (relative) masses.
ØØ Void is the group's purest statement. Where in later years they took an increasingly experimental approach to their drones (particularly on the iconic *White1* and *White2*), this album is just riffs, reverb and endless delay. On the back of this record, Stephen O'Malley and Greg Anderson became drone's willing poster children, simultaneously courting both the chin-stroking avant-garde set (who relished in drawing tenuous connections between the group's slo-mo sludge and The Theater of Eternal Music) and the metal crowd (who just wanted to drift away on the band's ocean of feedback). Their preference for high theatrics – stages wreathed in dense fog, a 'uniform' of monkish cloaks known as GrimmRobes – and their ability to collaborate effectively with a notably broad spectrum of artists (from black metal vocalist Attila Csihar and noise provocateur John Wiese to author/musician/occultist Julian Cope) ensured a great deal of public and media interest in the group. That the band's live performances were usually preceded by a shock wave of rumour suggesting spontaneous regurgitation caused by their unbearable volume didn't harm their profile either.
Sunn O))) haven't maintained their greatness – to my ears, they peaked with this record and have since struggled to regain its intensity. But their role in fostering a widespread interest in the drone – and in turning me onto a tonne of incredible music, from Indian ragas to Boris – isn't to be underestimated.

EARTH – *HEX; OR PRINTING IN THE INFERNAL METHOD* (CD, SOUTHERN LORD, 2006)
By the end of 2005, the whole drone-metal thing was in serious danger of stagnating. Sunn O))) seemed to be releasing a new limited edition this or that every other week, and save for a few notable exceptions (their Peel Session 12", for example), it was all beginning to sound like static to my ears.
So while Stephen O'Malley and Greg Anderson fed into (or, more cynically, off) the growing popularity of American black metal by hooking up with misanthropes like Wrest and Malefic and fell to cheap gimmicks like recording vocal takes from inside a coffin (I kid you not), Dylan Carlson – the man without whom there would be no Sunn O))) – was quietly retooling Earth and preparing to launch a whole new phase in the band's career.

Hex is a drone record, but not in the lumbering, mono-chordal way *Earth 2* was. Its links to Carlsson's early inspirations such as Black Sabbath and La Monte Young are minimal; rather, if *Hex* has anything in common with other artists, it's Neil Young and Ry Cooder (in particular, their soundtracks to *Dead Man* and *Paris, Texas* respectively). On *Hex*, Carlson casts his own bleak vision of Americana; a sepia-toned collage of religious iconography and blood-stained superstition. Here, the drone inherent in Johnny Cash's finger picking (as mentioned above) is writ large, the vastness of America's colonial landscape captured in the long, shimmering decay of Carlson's lonesome, bent notes. There's a laidback ease to *Hex* (as well as its successors, *Hibernaculum* and *The Bees Made Honey in the Lion's Skull*) that makes it a more satisfying listen than anything produced by the legions of slavering acolytes that follow in his wake, and re-establishes Carlson as America's reigning master of the drone.

SKULLFLOWER – *EXQUISITE FUCKING BOREDOM*
(CD, TUMULT, 2002)

Exquisite Fucking Boredom was a last minute addition to this list. When I sat down this morning to attempt to assemble my pages and pages of scrawled notes and ideas into something vaguely coherent, I pulled this CD from its box almost at random. I haven't listened to it in months, perhaps years; had you asked me to hum the riff from 'Celestial Highway' (the epic four-part track that forms the bulk of the record) it would have been a struggle. It's not an album that's ever really received high rotation in my stereo; usually, I'll listen to it once or twice and then forget it for months on end.

But having spent the last hour or so listening to it, I'm beginning to notice how much *Exquisite Fucking Boredom* prefigures a lot of my current tastes in music. I first heard Skullflower in – I think – 2003, after noticing that their name cropped up with alarming regularity in reviews for groups like Neurosis, Isis and Old Man Gloom. Intrigued by its title, I chose this album as my jumping-in point. And I hated it. The first 45 minutes are all based around the same loping, '70s-style riff, and the last three tracks (collectively clocking in at around half an hour) were too abstract and spacey to really be called songs.

How anybody could draw any sort of connection between this and something like Neurosis was beyond me. Boredom indeed.

But over time, as I every now and then gave the album the benefit of the doubt and listened to it again, *Exquisite Fucking Boredom* slowly grew on me. To the point where listening to it right now (it only just finished, after 75 minutes of kicking my skull – no pun intended – in), I'm tempted to label it an all-time classic. Its influence on the evolution of my musical tastes was never direct – I didn't pay it nearly enough attention for that to be the case. But given my current (and admittedly recent) love of all things psych, prog, kraut, drone and noise, this album was there first. Now, I'm wondering if all the people raving (rightly so) about Wooden Shjips, Om and the like have heard this – if not, they really need to. Now. Because – yep, I've made up my mind on this – it's an absolute classic.

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