

cyberlive defrost

issue 10

free in australia

RECENT RELEASES

FM06 Miell Version

"Fluttering and beautifully intricate, this is shimmering minimal electronics with a deep dub pulse that will delight fans of the likes of Pole, Václav Dělaj and Mike Plateaux. I also can't really sign off without mentioning the gorgeous sleeve art by local design stars Sopp Collective that perfectly rounds off this sweet package. Highly recommended."
www.inthemix.com.au (Nov 2004)



FM07 The SBS Whatever Sessions 2

"This collection of independent music unearths the kind of gems you find only by stepping outside of the mainstream . . . this is an inspiring collection that shows what Australia has to offer."
 Hit, Herald Sun. (Dec 2004)



FM08 David Elliott Incigneri I Sat On The Corner Of A Page Of The Novel Of My Mind

"Feral Media are one of those record labels I just love 'cause you have no idea what something's gonna sound like till you hear it... this, awesome, Flaming Lips, Ween, Mercury Rev are the first 3 bands to come to mind."
<http://www.cumbersome.net/> (Nov 2004)



FM09 Comatone E-50

Receiving airplay on Triple J, FBI, 2SER, Triple R, 3PBS.

"The execution is exceptional" Metro, The Sydney Morning Herald



Coming up in 2005:

Barrage
 Alpen
 Plankton
 Undertapper
 Sparrow Hill
 The Emergency
 The Rich

Also available:

FM01 Plankton EP
 FM03 Comatone One Into One Out
 FM04 Plankton The Undertone
 FM05 Catnip Pink & Blue & Green





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Mathieu, O.Lamm, Christian Marclay, Justin
Bennett & Toshiya Tsunoda, The Delgados,
New Buffalo, Pita, Hunt & Barnum, Sinbiotik,
Oz Fritz, Hardman, Mustfuzz, Augustus
Pablo, Fat Jon the Ample Soul Physician,
Secret Masters and more.

MORE DVD REVIEWS EXTENDED ARTICLES MP3 DOWNLOADS

EDITORIAL

Summer brings BBQs, cricket on the telly, and if you live in one of the major capital cities, endless festivals. In Sydney we're rather unlucky because all the festivals seem to run up against the end of each other meaning a lot of pain on your wallet. Every year a new festival pops up to enter the fray, this year there are two already – the Ken West-funded part of What Is Music called Onathon, and the Cockatoo Island Festival that takes over an enormous old industrial site in the middle of Sydney Harbour for the first time. If you are in Sydney, come visit the Cyclic Defrost/Frigid stage at the Cockatoo festival. If you haven't spent up on festival tickets, your wallets are no doubt just recovering from the vast number of musical releases that emerged late last year, and by late February the indies will all be pushing out their first big records of 2005.

This issue of *Cyclic* is our tenth and it calls for a bit of a celebration. We've decided to do another wrap around cover and generally have a bit of redesign and expand the amount of text in this issue. There's also a few articles that were missing from the last issue that have surfaced for this one – so it's a bumper read. Video artist and designer Superlight has provided the cover design, and we have long interviews with dj/Rupture, Smayze, plus Bob Baker Fish explores the techniques of some field recording specialists. There are shorter interviews with Melbourne's Winterville, Sydney's Inge Liljestrom, Bec Paton and Chasm, Adelaide's Inch-time, and Brisbane's Ponyloaf. And Carmel Toh revisits some of the best moments of our dearly departed Degrassi.

For our next ten issues we're exploring some new initiatives and *Cyclic Defrost* is looking at expanding into some new areas. If you'd like to join our list of contributors then get in touch with us; likewise we are looking out for someone to re-imagine our website.

And, if you are looking for some new music, then consider our Cyclic Music Club. It is a three monthly subscription service that gets you either three or six full-length CDs chosen by us for your musical enjoyment. More info on our website.

Sebastian Chan & Dale Harrison, Editors

STOCKISTS

NSW: Victory Music, Bloody Fist, Plum Music, Market Music, Troy Horse Rock Shop, Hi Fidelity Lounge, Salamander Sound, Spot Music, Redback, Spank, Music @ Byron, Hum on King, Hum on Miller, Hum on Oxford, Leading Edge Warriewood, 360 Sound, Leading Edge Penrith, Mall Music, Electric Monkeys, Fish – Newtown, Fish – Glebe Music, Bizarre, Euphoria, Freestyle, MCA, Metropolis, Recycled, Explore Music, Disc, Reefer, Record Store NSW, So Music, Red Eye

VICTORIA: Licorice Pie, Slap, Readings Carlton, Northside, Kent St, CC Geelong, Recycled, Missing Link, JF Porters, Boston Sound, Voyager Port Melbourne, Record Collectors Corner, Second Spin Tech, Voyager Ivanhoe, Greville, Sister Ray, Polyester, Synaesthesia, Central Station Melbourne, Substrata, Gaslight, Raouls, Kriskay

ACT: Impact, Landspeed

QUEENSLAND: Skinny's, Rockinghorse, Butter Beats, Sunflower, Toombul Music, Alleyway, Cosmic Music, Leading Edge, Music Scene

WESTERN AUSTRALIA: Dada's, Mills, Central Station Perth, Planet Video, Chinatown Records

SOUTH AUSTRALIA: Muses, Big Star, B Sharp, Chatterbox, Uni Records

TASMANIA: CD Centre, Ruffcutt, Wills Music, Aroma

NT: Casuarina

If your store doesn't carry *Cyclic Defrost* then get them to order it from Inertia Distribution



A New Audiences project, assisted by the Australia Council, the Federal Government's art funding and advisory body, through its Audience and Market Development Division.

Cover Designer: Superlight
Interview with Richard Byers
by Sebastian Chan

SUPERLIGHT MY FIRE

THIS ISSUE'S COVER COMES FROM RICHARD BYERS, A SYDNEY-BASED DESIGNER AND VJ. DURING THE DAY HE WORKS AS A CONCEPT STYLIST, WHERE HE 'SKETCHES AND PRODUCES 3D COMPUTER MODELS' OF VARIOUS CONSUMER AND MEDICAL PRODUCTS. IF YOU'VE USED AN EFTPOS TERMINAL AT A SHOPPING CENTRE THEN MAYBE YOU'VE HELD ONE OF HIS DESIGNS IN YOUR HANDS.

I first met Byers when he and his partner, Camela Cheng, were sitting in the corner of the Dendy cinema in Sydney furiously consuming cake and drawing sketches in their little notepads. This was at Frigid back in 1997. Since then, Byers has become a fixture at all special events put on by Frigid, doing live video mixes under his pseudonym Superlight. Unlike a lot of other VJs in Australia, Byers is much less interested in technology, and more concerned with traditional aesthetics, narratives and form.

'Sketching was a great part of my early Frigid days; I filled up quite a few sketchbooks with all kinds of strange drawings. Abstract blobs and characters and animals were the most prominent,' he says. 'I found the space at Dendy (Martin Place) and the Frigid environment

perfect for letting my mind wander. Camela and I moved up from Canberra after finishing degrees in product design at university. We didn't know many people but one Sydney friend suggested going to Frigid. We went along mostly for the films back then, as films had been a big part of uni life for me. As a member of the uni film club I saw four or more a week – current releases and old classics. Back then Frigid played an old film and followed that with DJs playing while another film played with the sound muted. Some nights they fed the movie dialogue through the DJ mixer allowing them control of the film's audio as well, which was, at the time, a fascinating manipulation of media to me.'

Byers' introduction to video came through uni. 'During uni I had a good friend, Derek, who ran a local community video editing and production facility, and it was there that I got my first intro to video editing. It wasn't until years later that I got a video camera myself and the technology became affordable enough that I began experimenting with video and then video performance. At first it was all trial and error, I wasn't sure what I was doing as I didn't have any type of training with video software. I knew I was trying to combine different skills – photography, illustration, video, animation – into something new, something different from what I had seen at parties over the years. In early

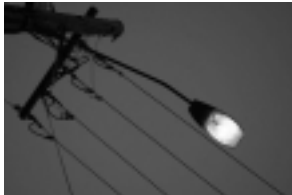
2002, I was involved with the Video Combustion event run by [Sydney-based] Justin Maynard and Cindi Drennan from Tesseract. I was new to video art and the basis of the event was around collaboration with other video artists, musicians and dancers, which was very stimulating. This year I was a part of a video forum at Electrofringe festival with three other artists from Melbourne, USA and Norway. We each had a different approach to how we performed, ranging from highly prepared video clips to real-time improvised video art. I sit about mid-way along that spectrum. I prepare short video samples, which then play in an improvised manner. This allows me to have both the responsive aspect from improvisation combined with design/cinematic driven elements that come from preparing beforehand.'

Superlight currently uses two laptops and a vision mixer, but unlike a lot of his colleagues the software he runs on each laptop is very simple. 'The current software I use is Japanese and very basic in principle. You assign video files to keys on the keyboard, and you press a key and that video clip plays. I can hold multiple keys and multiple video clips play layered on top of each other, blending together to create a new motion composition, and if I don't actively play clips the composition remains the same. The software is unique in the way it allows you to play as many

clips as you wish. The problem I find with a lot of [out of the box] VJ software is that they are modelled on the old methods – imitating two VCRs and a two-channel vision mixer. But why should you be limited by the old ways?

The whole point of software is that it's not constrained by the hardware limitations; VJ software should allow artists to present their visual ideas in an immediate and unrestricted method. The other extreme is the programmatic types of VJ software, which are seemingly unrestricted but often lack a robust performance interface or require the artist to learn relatively complex codes to achieve a relatively simple outcome. There are visual artists who are quite comfortable with code and will learn this type of software quickly but I don't happen to be one of them. I like simple, interface driven software that lets me concentrate on the performance and getting my ideas up onto the big screen quickly, which is essential if I'm trying to create live visuals for live music.'

In winter 2004, Superlight travelled to Japan to perform with the Couchblip Records showcase featuring Robokoneko and Disjunction Reunion from Sydney and Himuro from Fukuoka. Richard explains, 'The tour came about after Couchblip released Himuro's *Clear Without Items* in early 2004. With this release Himuro invited us all to play a show in Tokyo and one in Fukuoka, his home city. Another friend in Tokyo who runs a club night in Shibuya similar to Frigid offered us a show there. We had three shows spaced only a few days apart, so we met Himuro at the first show in Tokyo, an 'instore' at [the best electronic/experimental record shop in Tokyo] Warzawa Records, then on to the Butterfly Club in Fukuoka City then back to Tokyo for the show in Shibuya. Cam and I had been to Japan several times before but it was Luke (Disjunction Reunion) and Melinda's (Robokoneko) first time so we showed them a few of our favourite spots and discovered some new ones with them; Melinda found a cat playhouse in a shopping mall – 45 cats in a 'house' built for them and people paid money to just go in and sit and play and watch cats play! The neon, the people,



'THE NEON, THE PEOPLE, THE CITY, THE LIGHTS AND MOVEMENT; COMPARED WITH TOKYO, SYDNEY IS STATIC, MOTIONLESS... AND CANBERRA, WELL THERE'S NO COMPARISON REALLY.'

the city, the lights and movement; compared with Tokyo, Sydney is static, motionless... and Canberra, well there's no comparison really.

'For the tour I made a short DVD EP which featured a live audio/visual recording from the last show in Sydney that all three of us had done together. It was a promotional release but the idea of DVD EPs recorded from shows – like a snapshot of an event – is something that I hope to be able to do more of in the future. However if (or when) mobile phones develop and offer the audience the ability to record, in high quality video and audio, their own experience of an event, this may all be irrelevant. The show in Fukuoka offered an opportunity to check out some of the Japanese VJs who were also playing that night. Their work was similar to mine in some ways – use of back masks to break away from the 4:3 ratio box (which is very often projected without thought by many VJs), however they also had some very unique, 'painted-looking' elements to their work: video footage of ink and paint moving combined with abstract but recognisable 3D forms.

Performing with Himuro for the first time was quite an experience in improvisation. Himuro uses an audio effects unit that works by holding your hand, or any object, over a metal pad [a bit like a theremin]. The closer your hand is to the pad the more it effects the music. However Himuro uses it in a unique way – he holds the effects unit in his hand and pushes it towards objects instead. During the



Clockwise from top left:

*A selection of Richard Byer's photography;
a sketch of Sub Bass Snarl playing at Frigid;
a selection of sketchbook monsters*



HOOD
outside closer

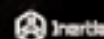
*'This is the music that
can change everything'*
– Inpress Magazine

The brand new album features
The Lost You and *The Negatives*
and eight other beautiful and
affecting songs by Hood.

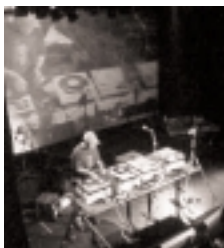
END OF ONE
TRAIN
WORKING

END OF ONE
TRAIN
WORKING

Also available by Hood via Sensory Projects:
Cold House (SRPOOH)
Singles Compiled (MM 101)
Compilations 1995–2002 (MM 102)
www.cave.literary.com/sensory-projects



SENSORY PROJECTS



*Clockwise from far left:
Kid Koala at The Gaelic
club; Club night Speakeasy;
DJ /Rupture at the Sydney
Festival; Kevin Purdy backed
by visuals at the @Newtown*



first show he indicated to me to hold out my hand and he would then use me as the object [trigger]! All the while I continued to perform the visuals. By the second show I knew what he was on about and so started to work with this. I effected the visuals in sync with Himuro pushing this effects unit towards my outstretched hand, and the audience really appreciated this simple improvised connection between the music and the visuals. At this point, the merging together of audio equipment with video equipment from companies like Roland (with their v-Link) and Pioneer (DVD turntable) hasn't offered any true new possibilities in my opinion; the electronic linking of the audio and video doesn't offer much over just the audio and video artists working as a team and using their own senses to make the audiovisual a synchronised experience for the audience. It can even be the imperfect synchronisation between the two mediums that can result in unique and very interesting accidental outcomes.'

THE CYCLIC DEFROST COVER

'I have done a few print pieces over the years: flyers and posters for dance parties in my uni days, and a few corporate brochures for the company I work for. I haven't had complete creative control over many like I have with this cover. I wanted to do a cover that was simple in theme yet intricate – simple in colour but with intricate texture – and something that was bold and would draw the reader's attention. I was inspired by a photo I took recently of a plant: spiky fine branches, soft flowers with a backdrop of the blue sky. It was taken as I walked to lunch one day. The cover then evolved in Photoshop over about a week: one image, one set of black graphics copied from my library of motion graphics, manipulated and duplicated onto numerous layers, trying to discover the right combination and composition. I manipulated the Gothic-styled words by grafting on parts of the motion graphics. The cut-up lines were the last elements I messed around with – the composition needed them; it was looking too nice, and needed a few cuts, breaks and scratches to make it right.'



FAVOURITE COLLABORATIONS

Amnesty International Freedom 04

September 18, 2004
Metro Theatre

I was asked by the organisers of the Amnesty International Freedom Festival to provide a live video performance that mixed live cameras of the music acts with imagery that put across the message about asylum seekers and their mandatory detention.

Purdy album launch

April 29, 2004
@Newtown

This show was a magic night. It was fantastic to see Purdy's face the first time I showed him some of the animations I had done, derived from the album artwork: flying in towards castles and goats flying out of the castle windows, silhouettes of girls morphing into flying goats and then into musical notes. All this was then mixed with various samples from a large selection of Purdy's video collection: Indian goddesses dancing and Japanese monster movies, wacky English movies from the '60s and '70s. It was an amazing selection of stuff and on the night it all worked wonderfully with the atmosphere created by Purdy and his band.

Meem

August 23, 2003
Gaelic Club

Meem gave me a CD full of hand-drawn line art of strange characters he had done. I animated them in Flash and they danced and ran around larger than life behind Meem as he played.

DJ/Rupture

January 19, 2002
Sydney Festival

DJ/Rupture's music was all the inspiration I needed for this show: heavily cutup r'n'b and pop tracks mixed with unusual ethnic music from various countries. The challenge for me was to cutup the video clips of these well-known artists and mix them with landscapes of the countries live while Rupture did the same with the music. If he dropped a Missy Elliott track I tried to respond with fractured loops of the latest Missy video clip ripped from the streaming download from her website the week before! It was madness.



Interview with Ponyloaf by Angela Stengel

PONYLOAF: RIDE THE WHITE HORSE

TAKE THREE GUYS WHO BETWEEN THEM HAVE AN OBSESSION FOR COMPUTERS, A LOVE FOR EPIC '70S MUSIC AND A PENCHANT FOR JUMPING AROUND ON STAGE AND YOU'VE GOT PONYLOAF. TO MAKE IT A LITTLE MORE ECLECTIC, THE BRISBANE BAND RECENTLY ADDED A ROCK DRUMMER, NICOLA, TO THE MIX. TIME IN THE STUDIO HAS SEEN THEM EMERGE WITH THEIR FIRST ALBUM *O COMPLEX*, WHILE PLAYING LIVE HAS LEFT THEM BEING HECKLED BY KID 606 FANS AND PLAYING A GIG TO A ROOMFUL OF PEOPLE WEARING HEADPHONES.

'The headphone gig was to protest the liquor licensing act in Brisbane which had clamped down on live music in the Valley and threatened to close down Ric's Café – a kind of seminal bar that's been supporting live music for ten to fifteen years,' says Damian from Ponyloaf. 'They got issued an infringement notice in August and we were scheduled to play in October. Liquor licensing said that Ric's wasn't allowed to have music over 95db and no guitar amps were allowed, and they couldn't mic drums kits.'

Ponyloaf's solution to the noise restriction problem was to play a live gig broadcast over a short range FM transmitter with the audience listening through headphones on their walkmans. 'It was a great night,' adds Dan. 'Everyone was standing around with headphones on in silence and there were bands jumping around so it was kinda funny. There were people yelling out "Turn it up" and I think that was the whole point of it, so the idea translated well. We got a lot of attention for it – not as a band, as a concept – and brought a lot more awareness to the issue.'

Ponyloaf started around three years ago. In 2002 they released their debut EP *Epic Travels*, and *O Complex* is the first release since then. Dan, one of the founding members, describes the start-up: 'About three and a half years ago Shane and I talked about getting something started. He bought himself a computer and we started writing stuff together. Damian came along a few months after that and showed me a few things he'd been doing as well. We decided we should all work together and within maybe three or four months we started playing gigs.' Damian, being obsessed by anything computerised, easily fitted into the band. 'I did multimedia and stuff like that at uni. I started making electronic music and started getting involved and then we became Ponyloaf.'

It's clear that they all bring a different sound to the band, or at least that they all agree not to make music that clearly fits into well-defined genres. Their recorded sound is well-produced, with smooth synths that become jutting orchestral hits and the occasional spot of robot-like vocals. But just when you think you understand what they're about, they throw in a track with a lonely gentle synth and carefully placed light percussion.

'I was lucky enough to have a dad that listened to heaps of different stuff,' says Dan. 'I grew up listening to Pink Floyd and Santana – epic '70s music. That's the type of stuff I really loved growing up, but the thing that most influences us is the stuff that we listened to in the '90s, in high school. Bands like Faith No More and Soundgarden, Ministry, Nine Inch Nails and Pop Will Eat Itself. The keyboards were unashamedly keyboard sounding and the samples were just looped one after the other.'

Ponyloaf's music comes across as a confusion of electronic and rock music, especially live. They perform like a rock band, but the sounds emerging from the speaker stack suggest otherwise. The band has noted that they face the problem of slipping between the cracks of the two broad genres. 'It was weird for us because we were an electronic band at first – just the three of us with no drums. We kind of had this problem where we didn't fit into the electronic scene because we didn't make dance floor music; we wanted to make this kind of song-structured music that was more gentle and textured. We'd get asked to play lots of rock shows and people would have mixed reactions to that. Some people would be like "It's not rock. There's no guitar. You electronic poofers",' laughs Damian.

They've recently been touring with Regurgitator, another band that slides between the electronic and rock fields, for their Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane shows.

From touring they've noticed what makes Brisbane a different place to start up a band. 'The thing that makes Brisbane unique is that it's just all the one area. It's not like in Sydney or Melbourne where there are all sorts of areas where people play. In Brisbane everyone knows each other, which can be its downfall but it's also a good thing,' says Shane.

Nicola, the new drummer in the band, had been playing in rock bands around Brisbane for some time. 'I think music is going back underground in Brisbane. People have started to organise their own shows because they're sick of having to deal with the venues. They're getting proactive and going out and hiring their own spaces because the venues that exist can be too hard to get gigs at. You have to be well connected to get a gig, so young bands starting out don't have a chance. It's really good to just see people out there doing stuff.'

For Ponyloaf, 'getting out there and doing their stuff' is what they're all about. They put a lot of energy into their live shows because they see them as an important aside to releasing a studio album. 'The live thing is very important if you're trying to get your message across. Sometimes it's hard for people on laptops because they can only stand there. Kid 606 was awesome because he was just one guy with a laptop but he went crazy. We enjoy being up there and jumping around and stuff so it's a fine line between concentrating on what you're doing and jumping around,' says Dan.

'Unless you can actually do a live show no one is going to pay any attention to you in Australia,' adds Damian. 'We can't just release records and make money and think everything will be okay with that. It's part of the promotion thing that you have to play shows. The way we approach that is sort of by reverse engineering what we

wrote on the computer. I reckon it's really different. We treat it as almost two completely separate projects. Working in the studio with your headphones on is great because you've got unlimited possibilities to write music on your computer; you can do whatever you want.'

'Other people's ideas can influence you to do something else. You can take it in a new direction instead of how you were originally planning,' says Shane. 'We just get confused explaining it to each other, but if we do it ourselves it ends up beautifully.'

It seems that while Ponyloaf are comfortable performing their electronic music like a rock show, not everyone is convinced. 'The Kid 606 support in Sydney was probably one of our worst shows. The electronic scene turned up to

see the pioneer of this kind of mashed-up music, and here was fucked-up Ponyloaf doing something weird and twisted and different. They didn't get it and yelled at us and stuff like that. That was the only time we've ever been heckled and it was just because we were entering that inner sanctum of eclectic electronicness,' says Damian.

Shane pipes up to add that while he's not paying out the genre – because they love it – he does find it to be difficult to break into. 'There is an elitist sort of thing about it but I guess that's the same with any form of music. We're just a bunch of people making music and if people like it, cool, and if they hate it then we can't do anything about it. If you don't approach it in a certain way then you don't fit that mould.'

Damian puts a different spin on it. 'I think that's what makes us happy – that we're able to just do this thing. If we annoy people then that's kind of funny. But then there are a lot of people who really enjoy us and that's beautiful too. And it's kind of good being like that. We can't be anything else.'

'If you're annoying people then at least you're affecting them,' laughs Nicola.



Ponyloaf's *O Complex* is out now on Valve/MGM. See www.ponyloaf.com.au for more info.



Interview with Stefan Panczak by Peter Hollo

INCH-TIME: IMPERIAL MEASURES

HAILING FROM ADELAIDE, A BREEDING GROUND FOR A LARGE PROPORTION OF AUSTRALIA'S TOP ELECTRONIC ARTISTS, STEFAN PANCZAK HAS RECENTLY RELEASED A MINI-ALBUM, ANY COLOUR YOU LIKE, AS WELL AS A BEAUTIFULLY PACKAGED ONE-TRACK BUSINESS CARD CD CALLED ROOT DRINKING IN THE DARK. HIS MUSIC TAKES SAMPLED ACOUSTIC INSTRUMENTS AND SEQUENCES THEM WITH ELECTRONIC BEATS, BUT WHAT SETS INCH-TIME APART IS THE DEPTH OF FEELING THAT'S PRODUCED BY HIS TRACKS. GAMELAN INSTRUMENTS AND WARM DOUBLE BASS COMBINE WITH BEAUTIFUL STRING ARRANGEMENTS TO CREATE SOMETHING VERY SPECIAL.

'I started making music in my early teenage years – folkie angst-ridden acoustic guitar and vocals recorded onto four-track,' says Panczak. 'I also studied jazz saxophone at school and played in the school stage and concert bands – this actually put me off jazz music for a long time and it wasn't until I gave up saxophone at the end of school that I really started to appreciate it. However, it was still that study of jazz that helped me appreciate it. I remember travelling in Italy about eight years ago and hearing John Coltrane's *Live at the Village Vanguard*. I copied it onto my walkman and would listen to it frequently through my travels around Europe and Japan. It is still in my top five albums, especially the songs "India" and "Spiritual" – the combination of Coltrane's sax and Eric Dolphy's bass clarinet is incredible; One solo leads in to the next seamlessly.

'I developed an interest in electronic music after hearing two albums: Massive Attack's *Blue Lines* and DJ Shadow's *What does your soul look like?* With DJ Shadow

I really identified with the samples he was using – not so much the music ones but the samples from films such as *THX-1138*, *Jacob's Ladder* and *West World*. At about the same time the whole trip-hop explosion occurred and I got into the whole Mo Wax/Ninja Tune thing, especially Amon Tobin's *Bricolage*. This led into drum'n'bass. I am still in awe of the Metalheadz compilation *Platinum Breaks*.

'I started making electronic music about seven years ago, beginning with a mostly hardware-based setup: sampler, effects etc. Two years ago I bought my laptop and have been developing the Inch-time project ever since. I really just play my laptop at the moment. I also doodle a bit with a nylon string acoustic guitar (as on the song "Squeezebox") but I have never had any lessons. I no longer play sax – I sold it to buy a sampler. I do however sample a lot of live instruments into my computer such as bells, cymbals etc, and get friends to play on my tracks. For my album I mainly collaborated with Curtis Leaver (guitarist for Clue to Kalo).

Although there's an old mini-CD release listed on his website, there isn't any other old music floating around. 'The old mini CD was early versions of some songs I completed this year for the album. No other releases thus far, however I am about to start on a new album. I will hopefully be spending the next three months high in the Swiss Alps so will have plenty of space, time and inspiration. I only produce under the name Inch-time but in Switzerland will be DJing house music under the name Max Cherkoff.

'Before the Inch-time project began I was doing a lot of DJing and made music with a hardware sampler. I was never really happy with that music and was very limited by my equipment. It was similar in sound to what I am doing now but constrained by my equipment. I don't really have much unreleased music, just a few tracks that are not quite finished, made in the last 18 months. The songs on the Inch-time CDs took me over 18 months from start to finish. A lot of that time was spent learning my software. The stuff before Inch-time is all pretty crap and I would rather forget about it.

'I finished studying medicine three years ago and after doing my internship having been working as a doctor part-time since. It's good because I have been able to spend the rest of my time on music. My girlfriend is luring me to Europe – she has never been before and wants to work in the UK. Hopefully I can further develop my music in Europe and make some new contacts. I really want to try and get some work in film doing sound design/music.'

I was particularly excited by the strings on Inch-time's tracks – not only a full string quartet, but some great solo cello lines on some tracks too. One of my best friends is a cellist (Hilary Kleinig from the Zephyr String Quartet). The song "Kyoto (autumn leaves)" we did as part of a grant for a doco – a group of friends on a boat travelling through the Indonesian spice islands. Unfortunately one of the main people involved in the film side of

INCH-TIME'S CURRENT LISTENING:

M.Ward , Iron & Wine *Our Endless Numbered Days*, **Björk** *Medúlla*, **Aeroc** *Viscous Solid*, **Alice Coltrane**, **John Tejada** *Logic Memory Centre*, **Mara Carlyle** *The Lovely*, **Max de Wardener** *Where I Am Today*, **Mugison** *Lonely Mountain*, **Oren Ambarchi** *Grapes from the Estate*, **Triosk** *Moment Returns*, **The Necks** *Mosquito*.

things killed himself so it never got completed. However we still did a performance with some of the footage.

As mentioned, another notable sound on the album is that of the gamelan. 'I have always been very interested and love listening to "exotic" sounds and music from around the world. I find gamelan music very beautiful. I have travelled through Bali and Java several times and I used to study Silat Perisai-Diri, an Indonesian martial art. My teacher was a Buddhist, and through that I developed a deep interest in Buddhism. I always wanted to use gamelan sounds, and doing the music for the doco set in Indonesia gave me the excuse I needed to approach a local gamelan ensemble and ask them if I could sample their instruments – luckily they said yes! They also let me sit in for a few rehearsals – you have no idea how hard it is to play! For example, whilst playing most of the instruments, e.g. the metallophone, after hitting one note but before hitting the next you must dampen first note with your other hand – then continually follow, striking the hand whilst playing the new notes of the melody.

'The core program for my stuff up till now is Logic, with Peak to sample into and edit samples. My new setup uses Ableton Live 4, Logic and Kontakt. The software can definitely affect the type of music you make. It is very easy to be controlled by the software and not the other way around – look at Rebirth. However, once you get to know the software you can exploit it to make the music that is in your head come out of the computer.

'My live sets are getting more and more 'live'. I use Ableton Live that allows me to remix the tracks in real time. I also play with a MIDI keyboard so I can play virtual instruments at the same time. In

Adelaide I usually perform with Roy Ananda – he's a visual artist who draws or sculpts along to the music. I also often perform with Curtis Leaver – he plays guitar or turntables. When I play live I always like to be able to remix the tracks and improvise. If I can't do that with a particular song then I won't play that song live – otherwise you might as well just play your CD.'

Inch-time has contributed electronics to a couple of tracks on the Zephyr String Quartet album, and it's great to hear that further collaborations are planned: 'Warning – the songs I did with Zephyr for their album were done a long time ago, before I had my laptop. Therefore they have very primitive sounds and production. We did the songs together, one song where I gave them a track and Hilary Kleinig added strings to it, and the other a song of Hilary's that I added some beats to. Hilary has applied for a grant so hopefully we will be collaborating again next year, working on the combining of electronic sounds with strings – taking the strings out of their traditional context and into "modern music".'



Inch-time's *Any Colour You Like* is available now.
Also see a profile in the Sleeve Design section on p37.
www.inchtime.com

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CHASM: VALLEY OF THE DEEP BEATS

Interview with Chris Hamer-Smith by Dale Harrison

TOUCHED BY SOME DIVINE HAND OF FORTUNE, CHRIS HAMER-SMITH HAS MANAGED TO ACHIEVE, IN A RELATIVELY RELAXED FASHION, AN ENVIABLE DEGREE OF RECOGNITION FOR HIS VARIOUS MUSICAL PURSUITS OVER A SUSTAINED PERIOD OF TIME. NOT THAT HE DOESN'T DESERVE IT — HIS MUSICAL SENSIBILITIES ARE IMPECCABLE — IT'S JUST THAT HE SEEMS TO HAVE A HAPPY KNACK OF BEING IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME.

Along with the rest of his now-defunct, sprawling, post-rock band Ukiyo-E, he was plucked from obscurity to feature on the Fat Cat demo compilation *No Watches No Maps*. At the time, the band had a small profile locally and was part of a tiny scene of instrumental rock bands that included Prop and Pivot; the possibility of being released on the then essential and vital label seemed very slim. Buoyed by success they then released a critically acclaimed album and suddenly folded; as Chris recounts it, 'One fella had had enough, so we figured it wouldn't really work without him and called it a day.'

Faced with the realities of band politics, he let go of the rock and started to seriously consider taking the beat making that he'd been toying with to another level. This wasn't as difficult a transition as it may seem. 'Even though I was playing post-rock style music,' he explains, 'I was listening to loads of different stuff. Not just post-rock but old jazz, hip-hop, reggae and so forth, so it felt pretty natural to start mucking around with programming and sampling. We had a Moog and Akai S3000 sampler in Ukiyo-e, so that gave me an opportunity to realise further what can be done with a killer analogue synth and a sampler.'

Taking a title that serendipity provided (Chasm is an acronym of the first letters of each of his names) he proceeded to gradually accumulate a body of work and

perfect his craft over the next few years. Beginning as an instrumental affair, Hamer-Smith's horizons were soon altered through a combination of self-doubt and fortuitous hook-ups. 'I started off writing some instrumentals but I never really felt like they were interesting enough or fresh enough to release,' he says. The tracks on the CD were the songs I was happiest with from the first load of beats I made; it just happened that they were all rap tracks.'

Of course it wouldn't have been right if Chasm hadn't been blessed with good fortune. Before even releasing a track commercially he was on medium rotation on Triple J — his collaboration with the Herd's Ozi Batla ('Point a Pen Like a Torch to The Night Ahead') somehow managed to find itself in the right hands and formed part of the soundtrack to last summer on the youth broadcaster. Since then two other tracks with Ozi Batla ('Icarus' and 'Talk Your Wrist Off') have been added, with only the latter having been released at the time.

This first 'load of beats' formed the bulk of the eight-track self-titled EP/mini-album on Melbourne label Awakenings. Featuring a star-studded cast of guests including The Herd's Ozi Batla and Urthboy, Joellistics and Pasobionic of TZU and label mates Hykoo, Mantra and Wax Vandal, Chasm is a subtly crafted blend of

stoney beats and clouds of sound, and is surprisingly textured and multi-levelled in its construction. Far from distracting the MCs, this willingness to overstep MPC orthodoxy challenges them to strive for greater heights — and particularly Ozi Batla, Urthboy and Joellistics put in stellar performances. He explains his formula like this:

'I like to leave as much freedom as possible for an MC to write. I generally just play someone a bunch of beats, let them pick what they're feeling and take it away and write. It's dope when a MC comes back and has captured the mood of the track perfectly in what they spit.'

Apart from timbre, his rock background also seems to inform the respect that he has for doing things properly when it comes to recording and mixing down. The advent of the bedroom studio has brought a whole new level of freedom to music making, but it also has its pitfalls. To that end he works quite closely with Mike Burnham at Tardis studios in Marrickville. This is where most of the vocal recording, including the flu-addled nasal tones of Ozi Batla on 'Point a Pen...' and all of the mixing down was done. Mike has a wealth of experience, having worked as an engineer with labels like Mo'Wax, Output and Jazzman in the UK, and he manages to bring out the grainy textures that make the EP so enjoyable. As Chris explains, 'When I go down to the Tardis and mix tracks with Mike it's killer. He's been really good in giving me tips as far as beat making and production techniques as well, plus his Neve desk is fat!'



Chasm's self titled EP is out now on Awakenings through Inertia.



Inga Liljestrom
Interview with Inge Liljestrom
by Christine Piper

PHOENIX NIGHTS

INGA LILJESTROM. HER NAME ROLLS OFF YOUR TONGUE LIKE A MENTHOL IN YOUR MOUTH. AND ALTHOUGH IT MIGHT NOT BE FAMILIAR, CHANCES ARE YOU'VE HEARD HER VOICE BEFORE. SHE'S WORKED WITH A NUMBER OF DANCE AND ELECTRONIC LUMINARIES, FROM ITCH-E AND SCRATCH-E, D.I.G., PAUL MAC, AND FRIENDLY TO KEVIN PURDY, THE BAGGSMEN AND GERLING (HER VOCALS FEATURED ON THEIR RECENT HIT 'DUST ME SELECTA'). SINCE THE RELEASE OF HER ALBUM, *ELK* (GROOVESCOOTER, 2004), HER HYPERBOREAN SONGS HAVE BEEN SENDING SHIVERS ACROSS THE AIRWAVES, WITH ONE SINGLE, 'PHOENIX', NETTING A LOT OF AIRPLAY ON A FEW DIFFERENT NETWORKS.

This summer, as the mercury pushes forty, the bushfires roar and a sickening heatwave engulfs Australia, you might find a little cool respite on your stereo.

Drawing on her Scandinavian heritage, Sydney-based Liljestrom's *elk* will transport you to the frosty landscapes of the northern hemisphere. 'It's a fusion of everything I love in music, like putting all the ingredients in the pot and cooking it a little differently,' she explains. 'Morricone guitar, double bass, electronics, strings, samples. My ear tends to lean towards a slightly darker hue. Music to create an atmosphere and almost opiate mood. Not so much something to dance to.'

And indeed *elk* is a grand undertaking: dramatic compositions full of swooning strings, sampled beats and the rich twang of the contra-bass, *elk* maps a journey through distant lands

where Liljestrom's breathy, ragged vocals take centre stage. While the sparse beats, prominent bassline and the throatiness of Liljestrom's voice have drawn comparisons to trip-hop notables Lamb and Portishead, her music remains an exquisite excavation of the subconscious as it evokes mythic places, demonstrating the leaps of the imagination possible.

It seems ironic to find ourselves discussing the icy landscapes of the northern hemisphere on a blistering hot day, sitting in Newtown as the midday sun beats down. Liljestrom, all pale and delicate, long-limbed and dark-locked, reclines in the shade of a tree. She grew up in Bellingen, in the hinterlands of northern NSW. It's a place where dirt roads cleave through bubbling brooks, mist hangs thick in the mornings and lush vegetation abounds. As kids we were constantly surrounded by artists and musicians who would

encourage us to be unique in our expression. So I guess that's when the seed was first planted. Nearly all of the kids from that era are practising artists now,' she says.

'I was ten when my family joined a religious cult in nearby Mullumbimby. It was a Pentecostal community – a lot of people who'd lost their way in the hippie years. I started singing in the church with the rock band, and we'd put on concerts in Nimbin. I learnt to improvise at this age by helping to lead the singing in tongues – it was a way of making up your own little language with God, I guess. During that time [in the cult] our lifestyles were fairly censured, so from the age of ten to fifteen I had no idea of what was happening in pop music or popular culture.'

When she was fifteen the community dismantled itself, and she moved back to Bellingen with her mother. 'I started playing bass in the school rock band and we did relatively well. Lilly Dior was the singer. We supported people like the Eurogliders and The Radiators; we actually did covers of their songs when we supported them. They'd say afterwards how they enjoyed our rendition of their hits!'

Soon afterwards she began studying a bachelor of music at university in Lismore, majoring in jazz vocals. While at uni she formed a duo with her guitar lecturer Jim Kelly, formerly of the seventies jazz-fusion group, Crossfire. 'I discovered jazz and vocal improvisation and felt a natural affinity with singers such as Billie Holiday and Sarah Vaughan,' she says.

After completing her honours year, Liljestrom moved to Sydney at the age of 22, forming a group called Helgrind with Felicity Fox, a film composer. 'That's when I first started composing music, and it was a wonderful way to begin in retrospect, under the guidance of someone who had already cut her teeth in the industry, and who encouraged all my strange musical ideas,' she explains.

Describing Helgrind as 'a collision of Led Zeppelin and Tori Amos', she says their music used 'a ridiculous amount of time changes and tangled riffs – trying to be as complicated as we could to prove ourselves as women writers. It was loud and distorted and we sported '50s swimming costumes and wigs. It was lovely mayhem but a little trying on the ear. I wanted to try my hand at musical styles that explored dynamics in a more intimate way.'

Around this time she began discovering other artists coming out of Europe, such as Björk, Portishead, Lamb and Tricky. 'I was really attracted to their melding of electronica and samples and more organic forms of instrumentation. But I didn't really know anyone in Sydney who was writing in that style. So I basically taught myself how to program music. I used a very dated keyboard with clunky sounds: the Ensoniq TS10 sequencer. But really, anything can be used –



'I SPENT SO MUCH TIME ALONE CONJURING DIFFERENT MUSICAL LANDSCAPES, I ALMOST STARTED LIVING IN THAT DIFFERENT REALITY.'

sometimes the clunkier the better. It means you have to be more inventive.'

In 1996 she was awarded her first Australia Council grant, which she used to produce her first album, *Urchin*. An organic haunting album of brutal intimacy, *Urchin* showcases the emotional depth of Liljestrom's ethereal voice. 'I didn't release it commercially because it was more like my little experiment... It was a very atmospheric project, very raw – a lot of the vocals were left unaffected. For me, it felt a little too exposing,' she says.

Then in 2001 she received another Australia Council grant, this time to work on her second album, *elk*. While she entirely composed, arranged and produced *Urchin*, for *elk* the process was slightly different. 'I decided I didn't want to do the beats, because it's a huge job, and my attempts always sounded a little naive. I also wanted to focus more on the melodic side of the album. Finding Jacob Cook was a godsend. I'd describe what I wanted in a visual sense and he'd return with amazing ideas and beats that fitted perfectly.'

But the whole process of finetuning the album took a while – Liljestrom says she spent two years finalising *elk*. During those two years, she composed tracks in her home studio, and then invited musicians and friends to come in to put down basslines, guitar tracks – snippets to later cut up and use as samples.

'For *Urchin* I used an old version of Cubase, various keyboards, effects, and substituted synthesised string arrangements with real strings. *elk* was a further exploration of those classical sounds and the sparks they make when colliding with electronic beats. It's only recently I've upgraded to ProTools in my home studio.'

Working closely with everyone involved, she described her idea for the album in images, to create a certain landscape to hold on to. 'I ripped out a picture from one of the newspapers, it was very *Northern Exposure*: a solitary moose crossing a country road surrounded by mist. I guess climate is really important to

the whole thing. I wanted the music to transport the listener to those places. Half the album was set in that climate, and the other half was more film noir but with a desert like heat about it – a lusty feel.'

With a strong sense of storytelling in her music, it's no surprise that *elk* has been likened to a film soundtrack. Her music pays homage to some of her favourite directors: the whimsical artifice of Michel Gondry; the dark sensuality of David Lynch; and the rich, romantic symbolism of Spanish director Julio Medem (*Sex and Lucia/Lovers of the Arctic Circle*) – directors that penetrate and split open the human psyche with imaginative panache.

'When I was writing the music I was living in a really cold room in Sydney's inner-west. I'm talking disturbingly cold where people would put on coats and socks and complain bitterly in the middle of summer,' Liljestrom explains. 'I spent so much time alone conjuring different musical landscapes, I almost started living in that different reality. I was creating music that was there to transport me.'

Seeing her perform live with her band brings her music full circle. The live line-up is an impressive cross-section of musicians of different backgrounds: violinist Veronique Serret is a member of electronic/jazz group Coda, and has also played with the Australian Chamber Orchestra; guitarist and co-string arranger Haydn Walker was also a member of Meta Bass 'n Breath; Cameron Undy on double bass is a bit of a stalwart on the Australian jazz scene, having worked with Mike Nock and Dale Barlow among many others; trumpeter Sloth was previously with Meta Bass 'n Breath and Atomic HiFi; drummer Michael Iveson is a part of Upshot; and cellist Tim Hempton is a classically-trained Baroque cellist.

It's an overwhelmingly sensual experience to see Liljestrom on stage. All molten energy, a smouldering force contained within her elegant frame, she captures the primal intensity of 'Phoenix' before seamlessly reinventing herself for the hushed whispers of 'All of This'. Eyes closed, she looks completely absorbed in the music, as if the clink of glasses and hushed ambience of the bar space is just the rumble of snow avalanching in the distance.

Some dreamers have a hard time finding their place in the world. But Liljestrom seems to have it nailed. 'I've always had a really vivid imagination, since I was a kid I've always been a dreamer – it used to be a bit of a problem,' she admits. 'But now I'm using it to my advantage to create this music – that's my style.'



Inge Liljestrom's album *elk* is released locally on Groovescooter and distributed by Creative Vibes.



Winterville
Interview with Marcus Skinner
by Dan Rule

SICK STRINGS

WINTERVILLE, THE WORKING MONIKER FOR MELBOURNE AVANT-GUITARIST MARCUS SKINNER, FINDS ITS GROUNDING IN SPACIOUS DYNAMICS AND RICH, ORGANIC GUITAR SOUNDS. BUT WHILE CAUSING QUITE A STIR OVERSEAS — EARNING ‘STATELY’ AND ‘COMPELLING’ TAGS IN A REVIEW BY BRIAN COLLEY IN *THE WIRE* MAGAZINE — WHERE DOES WINTERVILLE FIT INTO THE ROCK-MAD MELBOURNE SCENE?

One thing you soon notice about Marcus Skinner is that while polite and amiable, he doesn't really talk much. We're in the kitchen of his Fitzroy flat in Melbourne's inner north. Joanna Newsom's *The Milk-Eyed Mender* drifts down the hall and the air clings with sweat and heat. Marcus shifts in his seat opposite me. It's well over 30 degrees, but he drinks coffee. 'I have problems with crowds and talking and people,' he explains with a nervous laugh. 'So that's why I'm drinking coffee at the moment. I'm like, "C'mon, you've got to speak!"' he says laughing.

It's a characteristic that's also present in his music — his sparse, pattern-driven guitar excursions — and immediately, one can't help but wonder how this softly-spoken man and his

softly-spoken music can survive in a city so currently obsessed with tight-jeaned, four-chord rock. 'Everyone goes mad about rock in Melbourne,' he says. 'I mean, I've played rock before — I love it in the right dose — but it's just the in-thing at the moment and I'm kind of sick of the Melbourne rock scene.'

What Skinner is achieving with Winterville couldn't be further removed. His purely instrumental compositions are anything but obvious, and linger with hints and clues of emotion and disposition. Richly textural baritone guitar resonates through minimal dynamics, evoking a sense of protracted tension and release. 'I guess I try and come up with a motif or something like that,' explains Skinner, swirling his coffee cup.

'It's all motif-based. I come up with like a main motif and just take it from there. I just start with basic ideas in my head and then let it take me here or there. I guess I get the reaction that my music is emotive from quite a few people, so I guess I'll go with that (laughs). It's a tough one, actually. It's just what comes out. I guess I do have certain ideas, but by the time it comes from the basic idea to putting on guitar, to writing a song with a motif or whatever, it comes from so many different directions.'

Forming as a quasi-group around half a decade ago, the idea behind Winterville has always been vehicular. While Skinner has been the protagonist and songwriter behind the project, Winterville has acted as a loose working



'I'VE PLAYED ROCK BEFORE – I LOVE IT IN THE RIGHT DOSE – BUT IT'S JUST THE IN-THING AT THE MOMENT AND I'M KIND OF SICK OF THE MELBOURNE ROCK SCENE.'

title for any number of musicians with whom he chooses to collaborate. But as he explains, while not a conscious decision, working solo is becoming a more and more practical way to go about making music. 'It started pretty slowly,' he remembers. 'It was just kind of a title I was using to get people together and play some gigs, or something like that. It was really hard to get a group together. I have troubles with that – working in a group. I've played with a few members, but it's kind of gotten more and more sparse. I don't ever want to focus too much on exactly what I'm doing. I want to try and keep the momentum going, but let it show me where it goes rather than the other way around. I guess Winterville's just like a format for me to make my own music. The last few shows I was doing completely solo for the first time, which was great.'

Some of the musicians to have graced Winterville's diffuse line-up include Tom Butt on double bass, Aaron Bool and Bruce McIntyre on percussion, Michelle Mansford on guitar and Declan Jones on trumpet. Interestingly, one of Skinner's main collaborators, Tom Butt, works in a completely different idiom outside of Winterville. 'I try and play with Tom as much as possible. I guess I've been playing with him for almost two years now, and I try to cling to him as much as I can, but all his time's taken up doing hip hop and stuff like that. He tries to keep it as a profession, so he plays quite a few days a week doing that. He plays double bass in True Live and Tangent and whatever else he can get his hands on. So that style is completely different to what we do – like it's straight Aussie hip-hop. It's really hard to find double bass players in Melbourne, or Australia, who are interested in playing sparse music, that's not hip hop or jazz.'

Butt, Bool and Mansford each feature on the Winterville 7-inch (released through Black Cross Recordings) that was reviewed so positively in *The Wire* earlier this year, and the split 7-inch recorded with Prettyboy Crossover (released through Steadycam) as part of the *Background Frequencies* series. While proud of both releases, Skinner is also realistic. 'I've always wanted to do vinyl,' he offers. 'But yeah, the quality really got lost on those recordings. The frequencies just shrunk (laughs). I'd like to do both CD and vinyl. I guess money was mainly an issue as well. I just wanted to get some music out there, and Cameron from Steadycam records was really keen to put something out.'

Skinner's Fender Baritone is central to the Winterville sound. The rare guitar's shimmering higher end and resonant depths draw sonic distinctions around Skinner's aesthetics. 'I'd just heard about them – I was in the US looking for guitars – and I'd just heard about these baritones with this pretty crazy sound. So I just looked into it, but I couldn't find over there. I found one over here actually, eight months later. I try to avoid electronic instruments. I just really like the sound of good, clean guitars, double basses and cellos, and things like that. That's something I've been quite conscious of. I've got a loop pedal and I bow stuff every now and again.'

Despite being a purist when it comes to live instruments, Skinner's mind isn't closed to the possibilities of digital technology. 'I've actually just started using field recordings,' he admits. 'So this could be my changeover point.' With a new album in the works, this should make for some intriguing listening, and by the sound the field recordings he's been taking, the addition will do nothing but amplify the quality of his output. 'I've got recordings of owls, and wind, and a lot of natural, organic kind of stuff. I spent Christmas last year

up in Eden and I got some wind there. We just grabbed some instruments and decided to get out of town – it was a crazy couple of weeks. It was just like, jump in the ocean, climb a mountain, play some music. So we recorded some things up there, like tried to record some crashing waves and things like that. That's pretty tough (laughs). It's like get close and then run. It was great.'

Citing Ennio Morricone, Mick Turner, Chris Smith and Oren Ambarchi as major inspirations, Skinner isn't bound to the one genre. While Joanna Newsom is still playing on the stereo, he also pulls out record by Quia and Argentinean ex-television presenter Juana Molina. Although he listens to a wide range of artists, interestingly, his extended history isn't in music. 'I've got pretty much an art background, I guess. I just wanted to draw when I was a kid. Drawing was my way of escape. When I turned about 17 I wanted to go to art school and stuff like that, but then I just started getting into music. So around then they (music and art) just changed hands, and music became my way of escaping.'

But despite his growing body of work under the Winterville name, and the respect he has gained in avant circles, what is the context in which Skinner's music can be accessed and truly appreciated? Indeed, in a national music scene traditionally typified by the pub gig, where is the sparse ambience and introspection of Winterville positioned? As with his recordings, Skinner is working this out as he goes. 'I'm trying to avoid the pub gigs,' he says. 'I was trying to do that a couple of years ago, but you'd just have these really bad shows. I guess you have to try and book your own shows at the right places, with the right line-ups.'

And perhaps he's found an outlet, in a recent series of shows at Melbourne's National Gallery of Victoria. 'Every Friday night they put on a kind of low-key event, featuring anything interesting in terms of experimental music. They don't really advertise it and they don't really push it, but they have funding for it, so it's great for all these small groups that aren't rock'n'roll enough for pubs, or aren't electronic enough for the electronic crowd, and there's just this tiny market. And yeah, it sounds great in there.'

According to Steady Cam's online shop, Winterville's split 7" with PBXO is still available.

See www.steadycamrecords.com.





Special Feature: Field Recordings
Lawrence English, Francisco Lopez, Alan Lamb
 by Bob Baker Fish

FIELD OF DREAMS

WE ARE CONSTANTLY SURROUNDED BY SOUND, AND YET IT'S VERY RARE FOR US TO BE AWARE OF THE RICH SONIC TAPESTRY THAT ACCOMPANIES OUR EVERY MINUTE. BUT FROM THE BLOOD PUMPING IN OUR EARS TO THE HUM OF FLUORO LIGHTS WE ARE IMMERSSED IN AUDIO CONSTANTLY. FIELD RECORDISTS DOCUMENT THESE SUBTLE BODIES OF NOISE, AND BY ALTERING THEIR CONTEXT REVEAL HIDDEN LAYERS OF MEANING AND YET FURTHER CONTEXT. IN FACT, THEY ARE AKIN TO ARCHAEOLOGISTS IN THEIR DUAL ROLE OF DOCUMENTATION AND DISCOVERY. THOUGH SIMILARLY INSPIRED TO CAPTURE THE EPHEMERAL NATURE OF RAW SOUND, EACH OF THE THREE ARTISTS IN THIS PROFILE APPROACH THE PROBLEM IN FUNDAMENTALLY DIFFERENT WAYS. LAWRENCE ENGLISH'S 'STRAIGHT' RECORDING OF OUTBACK TOWNS IS IN STARK CONTRAST TO BOTH FRANCISCO LOPEZ'S HEAVILY-MANIPULATED, IMMERSIVE COLLAGES OF FOUND SOUND, AND ALAN LAMB'S 'PLAYING' OF LENGTHS OF WIRE IN THE AUSTRALIAN DESERT. ALL INVOLVE SOME DEGREE OF RECONTEXTUALISATION BUT AT DIFFERENT POINTS IN THE PROCESS OF DOCUMENTATION, AND THIS ALSO INFORMS THE DIFFERING PERFORMATIVE ASPECTS OF THEIR WORK.

LAWRENCE ENGLISH

'For me, one of the real attractions with field recordings is simply having the opportunity to listen,' offers Brisbane-based sound artist, media artist and sonic manipulator Lawrence English. Over the last few years English has dabbled in an astounding array of worlds, utilising a variety of approaches and techniques; everything from prepared guitar, to free improvisation, sound art installations, to electronica, to all manner of music concrete and evocative field recordings.

'The human mind is a masterful piece of equipment and is able to block out so much information as a means of making sense of the environment in which it's placed,' he continues via email. 'As I sit here now, there's an air conditioner going (it is Queensland and summer) and a PA humming; if I sit and concentrate on typing for a few moments those sounds fade from my consciousness – this process of eliminating incidental sound and visual information from our conscious mind fascinates me, and when I go into the field, often those are the sounds and the awareness I'm looking to explore.'

English's most recent release 'Ghost Towns' (2004), on his own Room 40 label, is a highly conceptual 18-minute sonic exploration of abandoned settlements in far north Queensland. It merges wind and cicadas with his own presence, very audible footsteps that evolve into someone abstractly playing a strangely pitched, possibly stringed instrument, and bizarre scratching and scraping that possibly involved the dragging of the microphone. This human presence is also consistent with his piece "Summer Crush", an audio collage of a trip to Tokyo and New York that appears on the *Overland* compilation (Naturestrip 2004).

'Certainly those two pieces are very much about my personal encounter with a variety of environments. I think that's something that will persist in my approaches for a while, simply because it lends the work a focus in some respect.'



ALAN LAMB

One of the more unique and innovative pieces of field recording that Australia has ever produced was recorded deep in the Western Australian outback on an abandoned stretch of land populated only with scrub and disused power lines.

When he purchased the half-a-mile piece of land for the princely sum of \$10 in 1976, Edinburgh-born, Fremantle-based, biomedical researcher Alan Lamb knew exactly what he was doing. He had first heard the magical sounds of wire music on the side of a road in Scotland and was keen to pursue this wondrous symphony of natural sound in Australia, though was discouraged to find that power lines in Perth were coated to avoid rust and general wear and tear. The lines on his outback property had been stripped by Telecom and as a result were primed for experimentation, the results of which can be heard on the mesmerizing *Primal Image* (Dorobo, 1995), two dark, wind-swept pieces filled with an incredible depth of tone and texture, that sound much more like the work of abstract electronics, manipulating feedback and undulating tones than field recordings. Recorded and edited between 1981 and 1988, it's interesting to note that, with the exception of slight equalisation, Lamb used no processing, consciously attempting to document the all-encompassing experience of wire music, feeling it required no electronic trickery to make an impact.

Referring to the power lines as the Faraway Wind Organ, when he first began recording at the property, the lines and poles had already begun to decay and when he returned in 1984 to record *Night Passage* (Dorobo, 1998) they were in pretty bad shape. A subsequent visit revealed the wires vaporised by lightning and termites devouring the poles. As a result, *Night Passage* is his last recording of the Faraway Wind Organ. 'Each Wind Organ is unique,' he reveals in the liner notes. 'I feel an element of sadness in *Night Passage*. The creakings of the cross poles say it, as if to acknowledge the transience of the wind organ after 25 years of singing an infinity of music.'

'To my ear and soul it is the most wonderful of all music,' offers Lamb via email from his home in Fremantle. In various writings and interviews over the years, Lamb has repeatedly extolled the belief that wire music possesses an incredible depth and range, almost unparalleled for any musical instrument.

'The art of wire music operates on several different levels,' he suggests. 'The most fundamental is the action of the wind on the wires. That is all about the unpredictable nature of the wind and it is deeply attractive to me. Despite the simplicity – just wind on wire – the most amazing music can emerge and the repertoire, as far as

I can tell, is infinite, like a piano. The next level is the addition of a whole variety of "accessories" and devices for making sounds in the wires: percussive, whistling, fluting, resonating – all operated by chance, the sun, the wind, the temperature, birds, cattle and so on,' he continues. 'Then comes the human element: controlling the wire tensions, interacting with the accessories. Then there is singing with the wires through sounding boards, the playing of instruments. Place a dozen people scattered around a network of wires and listen to the music they make, in concert with the wind if the wind is blowing. This is improvisation and for me it's the most fun. We've had many a crazy late-night party under the moon at the Baldavis Wind Organ (a twelve acre instrument on a farm south of Perth). And finally there is the level of composing music from recordings made from all the above. That's a studio job and that's what gets heard on the CDs.'

Lamb reportedly records up to and above more than forty hours of wire music in a single location, which he then painstakingly catalogues, his final recordings often the result of an inordinate amount of time and patience. It's here that he regains control of the sound source, carefully piecing together the work.

'Composing (I don't call it editing) is long and difficult,' he reveals. 'It involves memorising and cataloguing all the recordings until one begins to hear valid connections. I rarely mix recordings and I never do pitch changes, it doesn't work. Most of my compositions go through a long period of change and maturation; it's sometimes years before I will let others hear them.'



Alan Lamb at the Wogarno Wire Installation

Lamb's recorded output is surprisingly limited, perhaps due to his belief that hearing music on CD pales in comparison when compared with physically experiencing wire music. As a result, aside from a few releases on Darrin Verhagen's Dorobo label, his recordings are few and far between and, for the most part, assorted tracks on various compilations.

'I'm afraid I'm rather tardy about getting my compositions published,' he offers. 'That part of it doesn't really interest me, though I am delighted when people get to hear my work. To tell the truth, I am more turned on by the real-time music of the wires and what people make of them than by composing,' he continues. 'I think there is much more joy in being there when the wires are singing and people are joining in than in putting something onto disk which, to me, can feel like sticking a pin through a dead butterfly for a museum. People have trouble with this attitude but that's the way things are!'

One of his more recent appearances was on the excellent *Motion* compilation (Preservation, 2004), a veritable who's who of abstract electronic music in Australia. Lamb's piece, 'Fragment of the Outback', is an incredible work: a series of drones that effectively manages to distil the sparse beauty of the landscape whilst operating with deeper, more subdued, bowel-rattling sonics.

'English composer Kaffe Matthews rang me out of the



'WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT AND LEAST APPRECIATED ABOUT THE OUTBACK [IS THAT] MOST THINGS HAPPEN ONLY RARELY AND WHEN THEY DO HAPPEN THEY SEEM MIRACULOUS.'

blue from New York in 1999 to tell me she was at a party where they were playing my wire music,' he remembers. 'She asked if I would take her to the outback so she could hear it for herself. A few months later it was organised. We camped out for four weeks and I built a most beautiful instrument. It was designed to be almost invisible so not to disturb the place and I used massive red granite boulders 700 metres apart as my fastening points. The wires were simply one pair in a single span from the top of a granite outcrop out onto the plain. I chose the site to be in the shadow of the prevailing winds so that it would only sing in unusual weather conditions. The intent was to compliment what is most important and least appreciated about the outback; most things happen only rarely and when they do happen they seem miraculous. Someone approaching the boulders when the wires are singing is first aware of a subliminal sound about ten metres away. As they approach they come into the music. It is only then that they see the wires. I composed "Fragment of the Outback" about two years later

from recordings taken at the time of its construction. I was trying to distil the "feel" of the place. My own voice towards the end is part of it: a human happened by.'

Rather than attempting to locate various sound locations by chance, in recent years Lamb has increasingly constructed his own wire experiments, the most recent being at the Wagga Space Festival. 'The brief was refreshingly open,' Lamb offers. 'I was simply asked if I would be interested in collaborating with an artist in Wagga Wagga to create any kind of work the pair of us should agree upon. Scott Baker, the other artist involved, was developing an interest in Aeolian sound/music. I thought it would be a wonderful opportunity to pass on my own knowledge in this sound-art form. Although I have been working with long wires for over twenty-five years, I have never before had the opportunity to teach how I do it. The Wagga project was the first time I have collaborated in the actual sitting and construction of a long wire instrument. I found Scott's input to the process inspiring: a different mind seeing things a different way, solving problems in new ways.'

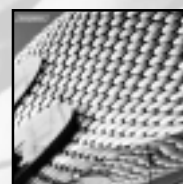
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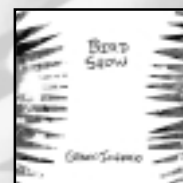
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This and similar constructions have allowed the opportunity for collaboration, something Lamb relishes. Whilst he views his work as public domain and doesn't actively pursue releases, he has combined his wire music with dancers, visual artists, singers, instrumentalists and other composers to, as he says, 'create additional dimensions to the music.' One additional dimension was provided by composer and multi-instrumentalist Sarah Hopkins on *Sky Song* (Vox Australis, 1989). Utilising cello, voice, handbells and plastic tubes that play harmonics when spiralled overhead, Hopkins provides a unique and beautiful counterpoint to Lamb's stark, ghostly world, adding further depth and warmth to his unpredictable drones.

Meanwhile, Dorobo passed Lamb's source material to an eclectic bunch of sonic sculptors, including the likes

of Thomas Koner, Lustmord, Ryoji Ikeda and Bernhard Gunter, to reinterpret his wire music. *Night Passage Demixed* is a dark and incredible piece of work, perhaps one of the stranger and more unique remix projects, with the artists subtly reworking the evocative source material with astounding breadth and patience.

Solo, Lamb continues to push to develop on his wire experiments, attempting new techniques and accessories such as sounding boards. 'I also experiment with different arrangements and "rules" of singing with the wires,' he says. 'Generally, I would say that each one of my composed works has its own unique flavours, partly as a result of these experiments. I have found rather surprisingly that the ideal sounding board, one that is equally sensitive for listening through as it is to sing into has been very difficult to achieve, and I still have not created a composition to my satisfaction using singers as a primary sound source. Alongside this work I have also experimented with many other sound making instruments, though little of them has been heard in public,' he continues. 'Perhaps the best has been what I

call "infinite music machines" which I have played "live to air" in various festivals. These are small analogue electronic devices, which use electric pulses to "strum" microwires such as hair-fine tantalum wires a few centimetres long. I usually build the electronics and wire supports, pickups, etc, in the form of sculptures suspended from the ceiling or standing on lengths of steel wire so that they sway at the slightest disturbance. The circuits are designed to produce a chaotic output in response to the surroundings, thus the sound is forever changing. My other favourite is the "great bow", which consists of a single or pair of 1.5-metre nylon strings attached from a wire on a long wire installation to the ground. I then use a bow made from bamboo and strung with the same length nylon and tuned to a pitch related by the Pythagorean ratios to the pitch(es) of the vertical nylon string(s). The effect is beautiful. The natural harmonics of the nylons can be picked out and played in any rhythm. In order to play the instrument one must dance because of its size, and it is a marvellous tool for meditation. An example can be heard on *Night Passage*.'

FRANCISCO LOPEZ

You are led into a room and handed a blindfold. Along with everyone else you willingly cover your eyes and wait apprehensively for the sounds to begin. In shutting off visual cues, Spanish sound artist Francisco Lopez allows the audience to fall deeper into his vivid and engrossing sounds, to focus more on the textures and interplay of the sonics he produces, freed from distraction. Gathering his palette exclusively from nature and treating his sources electronically, they're almost impossible to determine. It is Mother Nature intensified and reorganized according to Lopez's schema. Whilst he regularly performs around the world, he has also released his works, the majority of which are untitled, on over 60 labels including Mego, Alien 8 and Staalplaat. The following is an excerpt from a lecture he gave at Darwin University in early August 2004.



Representation

'When I'm recording a sound environment somewhere I'm not really interested in representing, in recalling, that place where I did the recording. I'm interested in what arises from this matter by itself when you do a recording. What you have in this recording can be conceived as an entity as itself regardless of the connection of this entity to the real world. The more you transform this entity into something people cannot recognise, the easier it is to see it as something that is something by itself. But you can do this exercise with any recorded sound. Any recorded sound can become a sound entity by itself; no connection necessarily with reality. This is a very strange exercise but when you do it you discover something really incredible because you are accessing a different world and it's a world of only sound. And it's a world with totally different possibilities.'

Filtering Reality

'Because my work is exclusively based on field recordings, the more I work with reality, the more difficult it becomes for me to say what is reality and how reality operates. So I'm really interested in this problem, in this question of dealing with reality, because what I do is basically a filtering of reality. I take all my materials from reality. I don't use any instruments, either traditional or electronic, and then I go through a process of transformation of mutation of this reality. Sometimes there is a little mutation and sometimes there is extreme

mutation. So the way I work with sound, coming always from this real world, has a lot to do with evolution. It's a controlled form of evolution. I do my selection. I do my process of mutation, the processing of sound, and then I make the decisions of what to select and how to select those things. I can create, as many other people can do today, an immense variety or an immense diversity over a single seed of sound. For example, I've been doing that in many different ways, but I concentrate on this idea in the last couple of years and I've been creating pieces that are 20 or 30 minutes long out of one fragment of sound. One second or one fragment of sound. I've taken this as a seed of sound and generated diversity, like evolution. The potential for doing this is accessible to a lot of people today and I find this very interesting as well, as the possibilities for mutation and diversity are really immense.'

Blindfolds for Active Listening

'For me the point of the experience has to be rich, has to be full. The person has to be fully focused on what is happening sound-wise. That's why I always give blindfolds to the audience to attain individual darkness. It really works to enhance the potential of sound to enhance certain layers of perception. It's not only sound for the sake of sound, it's sound as a gate to access certain parts of perception that is normally not accessible.'

Interview with Amon Tobin by Peter Hollo

AMON TOBIN: GAME ON

BY THE MID 1990S, VIDEO GAMES HAD BEGUN TO CHALLENGE BOTH FILMS AND POP MUSIC FOR THE ATTENTION (AND WALLET) OF TEENAGERS. AS VIDEO GAMES STARTED TO BE SUPPLIED ON CD IT STARTED TO MAKE SENSE FOR GAME COMPANIES TO RECRUIT BIG NAME MUSICIANS TO PROVIDE THEIR SOUNDTRACKS. STILL, IT TOOK UNTIL SONY'S *WIPEDOUT 2097* (PLAYSTATION, 1995) FEATURING TRACKS FROM CHEMICAL BROTHERS, PRODIGY, FLUKE ET AL, AND THE TRENT REZNOR (NIN) SCORED *QUAKE* (PC, 1996), FOR GAMES TO START TO BE MARKETED IN PART ON THEIR SOUNDTRACK STAR POWER. IN THIS LATEST EPISODE, UBISOFT HAVE COMMISSIONED AMON TOBIN TO SCORE *TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL 3: CHAOS THEORY*, A MOVE THAT COULD UP THE ANTE FOR GAMING SOUNDTRACKS.

These days, the release of a big title such as *Halo 2* (Xbox) or *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (PS2) will gross more in sales than a big budget Hollywood blockbuster. Video games are finally beginning to realise their initial promise as interactive fiction or movies, and a lot of musicians and labels are starting to experiment with this new income source for work. Ninja Tune artist Amon Tobin's latest project is the soundtrack to the Xbox game *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell 3: Chaos Theory*.

I used to play a lot when I was a teenager – there was a corner store near where I used to live and they'd rent games for the Commodore 64 for a pound each. They were on cassette so I'd just go home and tape them – my dad brought a Commodore home one day from work, you see. I used to play a lot then, and sometimes now on tour we play on the back of the bus. We've been playing a lot of *Halo* on tour. I always loved *Defender*; that was always a favourite – the sounds in *Defender* were always awesome – and I also used to like *Saboteur on the ZX Spectrum*, and *International Karate* (C64).

'These days video game soundtracks tend to be like a lot of film soundtracks: compilation albums of lots of rock stuff. You tend not to get stuff that's done all the way through by one person – it is the same with [big budget Hollywood] films as well. So when you do get a soundtrack by one artist, I think it's really cool – I'm a big collector of soundtracks and I've always liked the idea of somebody making a theme and having it recur through the film. I've had music used in films but I haven't ever scored a film, so for me *Splinter Cell* was just the chance to score something, whether a game or whatever, and I thought it would be a nice sort of parallel project to do while making an [traditional] album as well. I thought it would be a really interesting way to make music – it's completely interactive, so you have to think about the

music in a much more non-linear way. I think a lot of the time, when it comes to scoring for a film, it is obviously much more about a director having a vision, and then having somebody to help him seek that out. Then the music would often be something like "Oh, can you make it sound like this" – much more like work-for-hire than commissioning somebody for the style that they're known for. We're all keeping our fingers crossed to be honest – I think it's a very brave move by [the developers] Ubisoft because the fact is that my music isn't ever going to appeal to the majority of people, it's always going to be slightly off the margin. So considering that this game is going to get heard by an awful lot of people – they're obviously going for the widest possible demographic – I think it's cool that they were so open about using music that isn't obviously commercial or commercially-driven.'

When Amon began this soundtrack, an important part of the brief involved the technical limitations. 'The whole challenge of it was trying to make music that was split, so each section could be heard separately, but that could also work together. We had to be able to change between each section at any time. They were always really enthusiastic, even when I'd throw in a love song,' he says laughing. 'The whole way through, as the game testers were testing the game, they would send me QuickTime movies of them seeking out all the maps. They had to walk [the characters] around all these environments that they made and check that they don't fall off the edge of the pixel [world]. And while they were doing that, they would be recording it, so they could send me movies of different scenarios. Each map or level has lots of different things that can happen in it, but each level is set in a particular location with a particular mood in mind, so they'd send me those and then I'd import them into my sequencer and work from there.'



'I made each song as you hear it more or less, and then I split it into four different layers, so in the game, if you're creeping around you might just hear the strings and a little bit of bass, and as things get more tense – as the character does something – another element of the music will come in, and then eventually it'll build as you finally get into a full-on scrap. I was listening to a lot of dodgy prog-rock during the making of the game, and so there are lots of psychedelic influences, lots of reversed guitars. I really wanted to try and make it the opposite of what I associate with games, which is a hard, rocking out sound; something very electronic even if it's electronic guitars, with metal riffs and things. I wanted the *Splinter Cell* soundtrack to be really acoustic-sounding for the most part – obviously with lots of weird sub-bass and stuff going on. A lot of the drums are very organic-sounding, they're not drum machines, and because a lot of the game is set in Japan it was a great excuse to use loads of flutes and what-not.'



The soundtrack is out shortly on Ninja Tune, with the game due for release in the first quarter of the year.

Smaze
Interview with Smaze
by Dan Collins



RETURN OF THE BOOM BAPTIST

I AWOKE EARLY ONE MORNING TO DISCOVER A MESSAGE ON MY INTERNET CONSOLE: 'SMAZE = SHEVEKS MASADA'. THE SENDER WAS NO LONGER ONLINE. IT COULD ONLY HAVE BEEN A REFERENCE TO ONE OF THE MORE INTRIGUING FOLDERS IN MY SHARED DOWNLOAD DIRECTORY 'SMAZE PICKS'. SUPERB, MOODY, MELODIC, INSTRUMENTAL HIPHOP - THESE DOWNLOADS WERE WITHOUT ANY REFERENCE POINT, AND PREVIOUS SEARCHES OVER MANY MONTHS FOR WHOM OR WHAT THIS WAS HAD PROVIDED LITTLE. NO-ONE SEEMED TO KNOW ANYTHING MUCH ABOUT WHAT WAS SUCH A STANDOUT EFFORT. THE ONLY INFORMATION I COULD GATHER WAS THAT MAYBE SMAZE WAS PART OF BENEATH AUTUMN SKY, WHO HAD ALSO DISAPPEARED AFTER THE REMARKABLE DEBUT EP *ENKI-DU'S MONO* ON CHICAGO-BASED ELECTRONIC/JAZZ LABEL HEFTY RECORDS IN 2000. BESIDES A FEW REVIEWS HERE AND THERE, A SEARCH ON BENEATH AUTUMN SKY HAD ALSO YIELDED LITTLE.

A few days passed with no further contact. The recent clues were proving fruitless as well. After lots of waiting, the mystery user finally returned and dispatched me to the newly-formed label Abandon Building Records. A quick scan of the website revealed Sheveks Masada's *Hip Hop for Dishwashers, Scumballs, Upstarts* as the first release for this new label; Smaze was behind it, indeed alive and well, with those rumours about Beneath Autumn Sky also on the money.

After contacting the label they suggested that talking with Smaze was going to be no small feat as his access to the internet and technology was limited, and that he lived in a Mennonite community in rural Illinois. This did not sit well with my pre-conceived notions of a crazed beat technician, in a loud, big city; living a smoky, caffeinated and high-technology existence - the Mennonites are characterised by simplicity of life, pacifism and non-resistance; they object to the military and often shun technology.

As it turns out, Smaze lives in a modern Mennonite community, a farm down the road had the internet, and we got to talking. 'We chose the Mennonite community that we did for two reasons. One is that they come from an 'anti-tradition-tradition' of sorts (the Cathars and Anabaptists of the 13th to 18th centuries) which denounces manmade doctrines. Yet, the community we are with is modernised and open enough that I can continue to make beats, and work with other people in the world,' Smaze explains. 'There are no 'elders' as such, and we can choose to live as rustic, or as modern (outside of excess and waste, counter to the mission of living there) as we choose... It is a beautiful piece of land; half forested, half farmed. There are acres of blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, and grapes.'

[I was intrigued by how the Smaze I knew through mix tapes swapped on file sharing (P2P) networks, obviously written by someone

with a keen ear for hiphop and breakbeats, was created in such a setting. 'It affects me in a number of positive ways,' he says. 'I have a clear-head and the fresh air to make realistic measurements of what I am doing. Unlike in an urban setting, I do not have readily available distractions here that could prevent me from optimal focus. There is peace in my life here... that reflects in the ability to make tracks and write lyrics. At the same time I miss some of the aspects of urban living. Some of that ill busy reality also adds a certain touch to beat production. I will have to make do with visits.'

Smaze was originally born in Jacksonville, Florida, and while still under the parental wing, moved all over the country before finally settling in Los Angeles in 1984. 'That's where and when I fell in love with hiphop. I started b-boying and making pause-button mix tapes at age ten,' he remembers. Running away from home in 1988, he squatted and lived on the streets of

Hollywood for a year before moving north to Seattle with his 27-year-old girlfriend (he was 15).

In Seattle, Smaze became immersed in street culture and graffiti art, purchasing his first pair of Technics SL1200 turntables in 1991. The next three years were spent painting, scratching and making beats via the pause-button method with a 4-track and turntables. These lo-fi beat and mix tapes would end up being circulated nationally as part of a grass roots graffiti network. In 1994 Smaze had a series of personal and spiritual revelations. He sold off everything, hit the road, lived out of a backpack, hopping trains, hitchhiking; essentially squatting and camping between various cities and communities, right across the states. This was a time of thinking, reflecting, and much change – and it was musically void... besides, as Smaze says, 'occasionally banging on a dunbek.'

Smaze eventually found himself at a Russian/Eastern orthodox monastery called Saint Herman's Skete in South Carolina. Apparently, many of monks at the Skete were punks, squatters and anarchists before joining the order. They also put out zines called *Punks Turned Monks* and *Death To The World* – and Smaze 'found them to be wonderful brothers.'

In 1997 Smaze moved into a friend's cabin outside of town in Bloomington, Indiana. Containing little more than a woodstove and limited solar power, it was here, after a number of years on the road, that he began to make beats again. 'I made a tape called *Heart Breaks* at the cabin over a long, snowy winter. I used a 4-track, crappy turntable, Casio keyboard and a small crate of dusties,' he says. 'It's lo-fi as heck!' Taking a tattoo apprenticeship in Jacksonville, Florida in 1999, Smaze found himself living in the back of a used record store, amongst towers of old records – mountains of precious breaks.

Teaming up with his old mate Zane3 (from graf days), they undertook the ambitious task with dusty fingers, pulling together only the best for a five track EP under the guise Beneath Autumn Sky. This was the first time Smaze had used a computer for music production. 'I got a [Apple]

'WE CAN CHOOSE TO LIVE AS RUSTIC, OR AS MODERN (OUTSIDE OF EXCESS AND WASTE, COUNTER TO THE MISSION OF LIVING THERE) AS WE CHOOSE.'



G4, started rocking ProTools, and that changed everything,' he explains. 'It spurned a new era for his beat-making abilities. 'I've always had melodies running through my head, but I started chopping like mad at first,' he says. 'I have some stuff no-one has ever heard that is off the top with chopping. I=It's [DJ] Premier meets Squarepusher'. Before long they released *Enki-Du's Mono* in 2000, quickly picking up other work for the label including a remix of jazz musician Phil Ranelin [on 'Black Destiny']. Further work was to come on the Hefty *Immediate Action* series alongside other talent Daedelus, Manitoba, Prefuse 73 and label mates Telefon Tel Aviv and Slicker.

Beneath Autumn Sky became known for lo-fi, moody, melodic, instrumental hip-hop – beats for the head, tones for the soul – that says more than what is left after lyrics are removed. Beatheads will tell you that this type of sound has always been scarce; Smaze knew there was more than just sound at play.

The title of the album, meaning 'god-man's construct' is taken from the ideas contained in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* in Sumerian mythology. The tale goes like this: the gods bring Enki-Du, fashioned entirely from clay and product of an earthly evolution, into the world to provide a counterpoint to Gilgamesh (the Sumerian king, who is half god/half human. Enki-Du is Gilgamesh's soulmate, brother, equal, and also his conscience. Enki-Du begins his life as a wild man, raised by animals, crude and unrefined; a sojourner in the civilised world. Enki-Du is bolder than most men; he is also less pious than he should be, paying dearly for the disrespect he shows to the gods. The flipside to Enki-Du is that he is also instinctively chivalrous. He takes up arms to protect the shepherds, and he saves an oppressed people from their uncontrollable king Gilgamesh, eventually overcoming him with friendship rather than force.

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'IN HIPHOP THERE IS AN ELEMENT OF FOCUS AND INTENT ON CONSCIOUS AWARENESS. IN CRUNK THERE IS NONE OF THIS; IT'S TOTALLY NIHILISTIC AND APATHETIC – ALL BEING DONE IN THE NAME OF HIPHOP. I MUST PROTEST.'

A lot of these old stories are happening over and over again, in personal little ways everyday, and in big ways that affect our whole planet,' Smaze continues. It seems as if Smaze's inspiration for his art come from his travels thus far, while reflecting on the archetypal Enki-Du within. The album title and track names – 'Meditations', 'A Recollection', and 'Zealots Awaken' – suggest a deep spirituality lies close to the surface. 'I believe in eternity, and that time and matter are a sketch pad for the formation of eternity's art; that time and matter have a beginning and end, that the fruits from the sojourn into matter and time are endless,' he says.

Various differences meant Beneath Autumn Sky called it a day, and more thought required another hiatus from the beats, Smaze headed to Alaska to take up a guest spot in a tattoo shop for six months. This time, it wasn't too long before returning to the 'lower 48' [states] with his wife. Smaze now calls Plowcreek home, and apart from a short trip here or there has been living in the Mennonite community since returning from Alaska. 'The community provides an environment where my wife and I can be away from the imaginary expectations of the world and focus on reality-based patterns in the world of senses, and in the supra senses' says Smaze. Time is devoted to his personal studies of ancient mythologies and Gnostic traditions such as the Mandeans from Iran and Iraq (currently being persecuted since the US occupation). He also works with his Mennonite community, in the form of helping some of the others to gain a 'well rounded' education by imparting some of the knowledge he has gained from extensive travel and life experience. 'I used to write graf with a passion back in the day,' he says. 'So it is something that I have been able to 'turn on' in a lot of people who never saw it, who now see it for the amazing movement that it is.'

Though he isn't yet assisting others to learn programming or chop beats, he has some of the 'brothers' freestyling while others work the dunbek. 'Ancient boom bap is shared in the form of drum circles,' he explains. 'There is even a brother here who makes drums!'

Whilst participating fully in the community is part of

life at Plowcreek, he still allows for many hours spent under a new pseudonym – Conrad Newholmes – making beats.

The Conrad style follows on very closely from the sound originally forged by Beneath Autumn Sky, and has a few of the tracks found on the mix tape *Smaze Picks* that hit the internet in late 2003. It would seem to be homage to his beat digging and turntablist days. It's a swell of hiphop instrumentalism, all matter styles and breaks, with all the right checks and balances for those who appreciate DJ-friendly cuts and a quality pressing. 'I had originally made it with a full-length release in mind, and I was letting some heads hear it to get their opinion. Next thing I knew...I am hearing about this *Smaze Picks*. I was like, 'Awww, that's ill, one of these herbs put my beats up to try and sabotage me!' At first I was bummed, but, I have watched ill-intent transform into positive manifestation, time and time again in my life, and I suppose I will continue to watch it. Thank the great life, amen for *Smaze Picks*!'

Shunning formal distribution and the industry, the preferred method of distribution for Conrad Newholmes has been, as Smaze describes, 'Directly to heads via fate, synchronicity, or to those who hunted me down after hearing rumours about it. I had 500 records pressed with the finest manufacturer in North America. I never hired a publicist to push it, which is why you've never heard it!'

But some people did hear it, and Smaze was invited to put some work down for the new Abandon Building label under a fresh name, Sheveks Masada. Partly a compendium of work thus far, the beats are worthy of a long listen. It tends towards a more electronic sound than previously released, though the mood, and the beats, are still distinctly Smaze: the warm bustle of electronic percussion, and the ability to gently weave a few purposeful thoughts deep within the break are his trademark sound.

Smaze has also been devoting a deal of his recent energies to an MC project called Long Lungs. The focus for it is lyrical content oriented towards independent thought, or lack thereof, something that Smaze doesn't mind taking a swipe at. 'Dry, prosaic materialists who deny

purpose and spirit, and crazy insane dogmatic religious fundamentalists that are living in a construct – both are closer to each other than they think,' he says. 'The problem is that we live in a world where both of these extremes have the loudest voices!'

He is also concerned about the hijacking of the term hiphop by the new threat of crunk. 'There is at least an element of creative expression [in hiphop] for the love of creative expression, not just to exemplify egoism or as some strange mating bird call,' says Smaze. 'In hiphop there is an element of focus and intent on conscious awareness. In crunk there is none of this; it's totally nihilistic and apathetic – all being done in the name of hiphop. I must protest.' Whilst the term 'crunk' comes with many and varied definitions, Smaze is quick to point out that he's not against any particular type of noise. 'I like blippy beats, I don't want anyone to think that I am Mr. Anti-Blippy Beat guy,' he explains. He goes on to describe how his meaning has nothing to do with electronic music versus samples, or the any part of the sound as such, more so the 'lyrical content, the theme and the conscious intent of the words and what those words are painting in the mind. In that light, I see crunk as the antipode of hiphop'.

Unhappy with the change from the purposeful message that hiphop once stood for, Smaze doesn't rate the sexist and materialistic culture now major part of the musical landscape, taking aim at what he calls 'underground hiphop artists on stage promoting Sprite re-mix soda pop'. Other tracks on the include one about psychological warfare called 'Dare to Defend Your Mind', and another about living by intuitive faculties and critical analysis. Apart from the importance of the message, the beats sound just fine. 'It's nice ol' boom-bap style hiphop, with some modern touches,' he says. Always looking to keep the balance, there are a number of tracks that are still, as Smaze says, 'straight up goofy', which help to 'give the head a pillow after hard time dropping tracks', but in true Smaze style, 'they let the beat guide the spirit'.

'It is a project for heads really; I don't anticipate it to be embraced by the masses,' he explains. Considering previous attempts at contact, and Smaze's fateful methods of distribution, I'm not surprised. I have a suspicion that Smaze would be happiest knowing that he has been able to make a more direct connection with those that enjoy his music most.

Conrad Newholmes and Sheveks Masada are available through Couchblip in Australia.

**www.couchblip.com
or via www.abandonbuilding.com.**



DJ /Rupture
Interview with Jace Clayton
by Sebastian Chan

ORIENTALISM

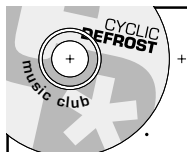
JACE CLAYTON, AKA DJ/RUPTURE FIRST CAME TO PROMINENCE WITH A DJ MIX POSTED ON THE INTERNET AND DISTRIBUTED AS A PROMO CD BACK IN 2000. TITLED *GOLD TEETH THIEF* IT WAS A GENRE-BENDING MIX OF TEMPOS, STYLES AND TIME SIGNATURES CUTTING RUTHLESSLY ACROSS GEOGRAPHIC AND STYLISTIC BORDERS — MASHING MOROCCO WITH NEW YORK, KINGSTON WITH BEIRUT — WITH A HEALTHY DOSE OF BREAKCORE, JUNGLE AND NOISE AESTHETICS. COMING AT A TIME WHEN TIMBALAND AND MANY JAMAICAN RIDDIM PRODUCERS WERE STARTING THEIR ORIENTALIST FIXATIONS WITH EASTERN MOTIFS, TABLAS, SITARS, RUPTURE'S MIX BROUGHT A NEW PERSPECTIVE UPSETTING THESE ORIENTALIST FANTASIES — A 'STRIKE AGAINST GEOGRAPHY' AS HE PUT IT. FOLLOWING THIS CAME *THE MINESWEEPER SUITE MIX* AND SEVERAL 7"s AND 12"s FOR HIS OWN SOOT LABEL AS WELL AS FOR BRØKLYN BEATS, TIGERBEAT6, AND TIGERBEAT'S INDUSTRIAL DANCEHALL SUB-LABEL SHOCKOUT.

Rupture started out in Boston where he grew up and went to college. 'I had a radio show for a few years on a great community station — the late-night shift, of course, but I had total freedom. Back then it was mostly just making transitions, talking about the music, bringing in local electronic musicians and DJs for live sets — but I myself wasn't a DJ. Hearing jungle for the first time at a rare after-hours club in Boston blew my mind. I wanted more. So after a few months of going out and dancing, I decided to become a "proper" DJ. At around the same time I was meeting and developing a community of like-minded DJs, visuals artists, listeners, and musicians. We were all frustrated by Boston's lack of spaces to meet and enjoy experimental electronics and also frustrated by the very close-minded hip-hop and dance music scenes. Inspired by this frustration, and by rumours of the cool Soundlab parties in New York (although none of us had attended any), we decided to start a collective dedicated to "experimental audio and visual adventures", staging events roughly every month in a different location each

time. From modest beginnings, it took off and grew. We spent tons of time on it, transforming each venue space through extensive installations, video, unusual sound configurations, inflatable rooms — it was a fun and dynamic time.

'At some point we heard [fellow Bostonian] Hrvatski's first *Attention: Cats* EP and as soon as we did, somebody invited him to come play at our next party. A typically atypical event was Junk — Jungle vs. Punk: half-hour sets alternating jungle/experimental DJs with local punk bands, free rice and beans, an all-ages daytime show in a church-turned-community centre. This type of sound-and-social clash was exactly what we were after, and it really made waves in Boston. When I had the radio show I would change my name every season, but soon after Toneburst (that was our crew name) got going, I finally settled on DJ /Rupture, so that's where I was born. Toneburst was truly important, not only because it was this really generous and hopeful example of collective, non-hierarchical action making a difference in the community, but also because we created a safe space where





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everyone was totally free to develop their artistic vision, and encouraged to explore and take it in new directions, talk about ideas, test out stuff, with no strangulatory rules. Nobody would book us at 'straight' jungle clubs or anywhere else, but we didn't care!

'I spent the summer of '96 in New York and went to all the weird lo-fi events, Soundlab and 'illbient' parties I could. It was a fantastic time: DJ Olive, Badawi, Toshio Kajiwar, DJ Firehorse, Cruz Missle, Mutamassik, Wally – all these dope experimental heads developing their sounds in a primarily supportive environment.' As the NYC scene faded from the media glare focussed intently around DJ Spooky in those early years, Rupture relocated to Barcelona. Now he is just back from a manic touring schedule. It's been a busy year. Still residing in Barcelona, he has been collaborating with local musicians as part of his Nettle project, as well as continuing to expand his DJ work.

'Some tour organisers first approached me last year with the idea of doing a tour that combined Arabic music with hiphop traditions. They wanted me, Nettle playing live, the French-Lebanese hiphopper Clotaire K, and a Middle East group I mixed on *Minesweeper Suite* - The Pearl Divers of Bahrain. Impressively, they had arts funding and were able to commission the formation of Nettle as a live project. It was something I'd wanted to put together for a while, but I lacked the time and money to get it up and running until this tour. Nettle came together as a three-piece. Abdel plays violin but then switches to oud [a string instrument a little like a mandolin] for a number of tracks. Filastine's main drums are two darboukas, but he also incorporates tarija, bendir, metal castanets, and some MIDI triggers around various songs, and I do beats, tweaking, dubbing; there's no vocals. Unfortunately The Pearl Divers fell through, and so they kept asking me for suggestions. Going out on limb, I told them about my favourite Moroccan group Nass El Ghiwane, their history, their context, and the fact that they still do tours occasionally. I'd also suggested a lot of other groups, and so I was overjoyed when this June they told me that Nass El Ghiwane had confirmed'.

As Jace explains on his website, Nass El Ghiwane are a legendary Afro-Moroccan rock band who have been around since the early '70s. To the surprise of many reviewers who assume they have a 'message', their politics aren't upfront, and instead 'a large part of it has to do with precisely their sound, their choice of instruments, why they sing things one way and not another, and how that relates to Morocco's massive polyglot musical heritage and the long shadows cast by Egyptian music'. Founding member Omar Sayyed explains 'I don't think the average listener thought of us

as a political group. The problem that we had was with the intellectuals and the critics; they're the ones who wanted us to talk about the deeper meanings of our songs. It's been like this for the past thirty years.'

Despite this live tour as Nettle, most of Rupture's recent tours have been of the a more 'traditional' DJ nature. 'I've just spent the past three weeks touring Europe with Japanese breakcore artist Ove-Naxx, doing full-on DJ/Rupture triple-turntable sets. Earlier this year I was back in Dubai [which is captured on the *Bidouin Sessions* mix on the Violent Turd label]. Dubai is unusual because it's so wealthy; it's a funny scene. There's no sub-culture or underground to speak of, and no traditional acoustic players either. Thirty years ago it was primarily sun-blasted desert, now it's SUVs with tinted windows and international financiers. My set went over well, and people definitely appreciated the type of mixing I'm trying to do. But what most kids there listen and dance to is determined more by their economic status (crazy rich) as opposed to cultural heritage or geographic location: house, mainstream hiphop, r'n'b. At the same time, it's a welcome change to drop Arabic tunes and vocals in a place where it's part of the musical landscape and folks understand the lyrics and so forth.'

In November his debut solo album was released on Tigerbeat6. *Special Gunpowder* is a crazy record. It skids from style to style, genre to genre. 'Something I was conscious of was that I was getting pigeonholed for my DJ-mixes, so I wanted to represent something completely different – all original tracks and productions. I don't like to repeat myself or simply do the thing that an audience or market segment would expect, or be most comfortable with. I like curveballs. [The album] grew organically over the course of about two years. Each song is its own world really, and I wanted it to be a chorus of voices. My only real guiding goals were to make an album that I could listen to from start to finish. Personally I think very few albums these days work from beginning to end – because of my DJ nature, and more generally because of the rise of MP3 culture. "The Album" is less and less how people experience music, but that also means that when you find a CD you can put on and just enjoy, it's a real pleasure. So I was after that sort of a record, and I wasn't afraid for certain songs to be quite different from each other as long as they all made sense as a whole. I got excited by the idea of producing an album that was broad but filled with lots of intimate textures and moments, rather than just cranking out different versions of the same basic song structure and genre like most artist albums. Some tracks evolved over the course of several months of sending tapes back-and-forth with a vocalist, and some like the closer, "Mole In The



Ground” happened rather spontaneously in a few days. I’m really slow at producing but I knew I wanted to hit certain emotional or dynamic points. I wanted to work with a bunch of differently talented musicians, so I just started approaching people whose work I really liked, and tried to let things just flow from there.’

In the end Rupture managed to track down quite an amazing array of guest vocalists for *Special Gunpowder*. Amongst the guests is none other than seminal Jamaican singer Sister Nancy best known for her ‘Bam Bam’ hit of 1979. Nancy is a firecracker! The long story made short is that some Rasta friends of mine in New York were talking about her, and I mentioned how much I liked her work, then they told me that they knew her. So I was like, “Well, hook me up.” Of course they were operating on Jamaican time, so about nine months and a bunch of emails and phone calls later, one of my boys finally got me her phone number. I just called up out of the blue and that’s how it began. In the beginning I sent her all these crazy beats and she was straight up about what she liked and what she didn’t. Over the process of that track we became friends, and she was even coming to me for legal advice about the rampant bootlegging of “Bam Bam”.

‘Sindhu [on “Mole In The Ground”] is another interesting story. A Norwegian friend of mine knew how much I love banjos, so one day she sent me an email saying an amazing friend of hers who plays the banjo was going to be in Barcelona for a few days. And so I met Sindhu. We spent one day talking about music and Boston (turns out we used to live near each other) and then spent two days in my studio recording “Mole In The Ground”. It was one of the last songs, a totally surprise occurrence. The day after we finished recording it, she went back to the States.

‘I hadn’t ever read Elizabeth Alexander’s poetry [on the opening track ‘Watermelon City’] until I was assigned to review [her collection] by *The Washington Post* a few years back. I was totally impressed. A year or so later I mentioned to a mutual friend that I’d like to compose some music for Elizabeth, and without my knowing it, my friend told Elizabeth, and she got in contact with me directly. I recorded her reading several of her poems

‘MY ONLY REAL GUIDING GOALS WERE TO MAKE AN ALBUM THAT I COULD LISTEN TO FROM START TO FINISH.’

about a year before I built the music around them. Elizabeth is great because she’s a ‘proper’ poet, not an MC, slam or performance poet, yet her delivery is incredibly powerful.’

With so many guests, ‘touring’ the album is a difficult proposition. ‘I’m still looking into ways to transform the tunes on the new album into something more live, but at the end of the day, it is still much more interesting for me and the audience to do an intense DJ set, so that’s what it’s been so far. Any presentation of the album would squeeze out a bit of the album’s diversity and I’m really into this idea of lots of voices, so just one MC or vocalist wouldn’t quite carry it live.’

Unlike a lot of his DJ sets, *Special Gunpowder* does not include much in the way of breakcore. Whilst there are the tracks with Sister Nancy and Wayne Lonesome, the brutalist mashing of white noise breakbeats with ragga, quite common in Rupture’s DJ sets, is missing from the record – no doubt to the annoyance of breakcore enthusiasts. Rupture has an antipathetic relationship with the breakcore scene at the moment – and the continuing revival of ragga sampling leaves him nonplussed. ‘A lot of breakcore artists are infatuated with dancehall in a really suspect and shallow way: making their ‘hardcore’ tracks sound more aggressive by using a capellas of deep, macho, black Jamaican voices – relying on and reinforcing tired old stereotypes of the virile violent black man. I really don’t like that. There was virtually zero crossover


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'THE OTHER HOTTEST MUSIC AREA THIS YEAR WAS CRUNK ... LOTS OF GOOFY THUG LYRICS, GORGEOUS SONG CHORUSES AND REFRAINS, SYRUPY BASS.'

with the first wave of jungle, and there's certainly no breakcore bootlegs making their way to Jamaican ears now. I was talking to [seminal jungle producer] Remarc about the sudden strange popularity of ragga jungle rewinds and jungle-breakcore and he was just bemused by it all. He said something to the effect of "We were doing Amen-cut-up breaks ten years ago, so I don't really understand why kids are still so excited about it." But for him, it means more gigs and a newfound fan base in places like the midwestern UK and Japan. Remarc told me that one of the main reasons UK jungle slowly stopped using reggae elements was that as jungle skyrocketed in popularity, a lot of Jamaicans in the UK started complaining about how they were being ripped off and weren't getting the cash, so it just got easier to leave the reggae samples behind, [thus] the reason I work with labels such as Shockout is that they actually deal with and pay the vocalists. That's important. Dancehall is a very exciting music right now – there are a lot of very original, very strange productions coming out of Jamaica. It's an exuberant, chaotic, bass-heavy culture, and in the quest for hit singles, the producers make some stunning, surprising music. That's why I like it, I like all reggae, and to me one of the best things about reggae is the speed with which it evolves. It is quite easy to draw a narrative line connecting the conscious melodic roots reggae of the '70s up through to the weird, atonal, gangster synthetics of current ragga. The culture of versioning makes it wonderful for DJs too: if you find a riddim you like, then you get to select the vocalists who are giving the most interesting performance on that riddim to play out live.

'This year I've gotten pretty deep into East London grime. Not the wishy-washy Rephlex [label] dubstep and Forward [club] stuff that calls itself 'grime' as a marketing term, but the grimey weirdo electronics being made predominantly by black East Londoners, strange spacious PlayStation music with raw MCing over the top and some of the most gorgeous and alien and relentless bass architecture I've ever heard. Mostly I just listen to cassette tapes of London pirate radio – it's like the UK's first indigenous hip-hop, and when it is hot it is truly mind melting. The style is still adamantly young and unrefined; the hottest grime you can't purchase (yet) – it comes out over live jams on the radio, with guarded dubplates and exclusives being activated by MCs going bananas on top. The Silverdollarcircle blog pointed out

the funny paradox of these inner city grime kids who won't release their vocals on vinyl because they're waiting to be signed to a huge label – it's either free pirate radio performances or six-figure signing deals; so unrealistic you can't help but be impressed!

'The other hottest music area this year was crunk – [the name for a variant of] southern US hip-hop like Lil Jon. I've been into the synth-driven Dirty South hip-hop for years and years, but in 2004 it hit the mainstream big time and the productions are as hot as ever – totally electronic [and synthetic], with not a nostalgic DJ Premier-type sample of an acoustic instrument in earshot, just lots of goofy thug lyrics, gorgeous sung choruses and refrains, syrupy bass. [The rapid global spread of crunk is] fascinating. I was driving in Belgium and they were playing this filthy track from Lil Jon's *Crunk Juice*, but it was totally uncensored, unlike hearing on US radio. The big labels see it as major pop with major revenues, so they go about marketing it worldwide while, perhaps lots of [cool indie/underground middle class] kids still feel it is too Black or too 'foreign' or too whatever, and can only relate to it via the crutch of irony. Pop music has always been about fantasy. This [underground/ironic problem] infects a lot of music criticism too; I'm so tired of critics who fetishise 'street' music like crunk and grime and invent this dichotomy between the "naïve" native genius (this is "real"), its the "voice of the ghetto" and more "intellectual", less populist, less "real" music. It's laughable, using their own dull prejudices to divide, categorise, and cut up a world of sound!'

Whereas once music was filtered by music magazines, radio shows, older siblings and the like, music now is a pretty much open field with MP3s and file sharing. Checking out new micro-genres like crunk and grime is just a click away. But with this opening of access has come a devaluing of music – everything is reduced to interchangeable data. In Sydney at least, this culture has started to affect community (and commercial) radio – as listeners buy iPods and portable music players, they switch off, preferring their own playlists – music consumption becomes individualised. Rupture concurs; 'MP3 consumption really does favour soundbyte style indulgence, and MP3s in general circulate without a lot of the very context that helps music have meaning: artwork, liner notes, the record shop, concert or friend's house you had to go to get it, all that stuff. I learnt so

much about music by listening to Boston's college stations when I was a kid. They wouldn't just play a song; the hosts would often have a lot to say, explaining this or that, or just putting certain music alongside similar stuff. The radio DJs had great collections and wanted to share. I wish there was some [similar radio scene] in Barcelona. But I still do frequent mixes for radio, special radio shows, that sort of thing. I'm always down to keep the airwaves interesting. My mixtapes have a similar function of presenting people with a lot of the sonic dirt and disarray that they might otherwise not have in their listening. There are real-world, specific things one can do to keep public radio alive in their communities, just ask around. Unfortunately, it's too late in Barcelona. I'm actually thinking of pitching a radio play somewhere, I've been really inspired by Gregory Whitehead's work and Chris Morris (Blue Jam, Brasseys).

'People don't often talk about radio as public space, but that's what it is, and these days, like so many other forms of public space, it is being increasingly patrolled and privatised. At the same time, the listeners are themselves happily withdrawing into the iPod's offer of sonic seclusion – moving out to the audio suburbs if you will – apart from the dirt and disarray and unwanted interactions of public space. It sucks! Not only do MP3s crack music out of its necessary cultural exoskeleton, they promote fast-food style eating: people like whatever sounds good 'on first listen'. I remember when I was a kid, I'd save up to buy a cassette and would listen to it over and over again for weeks, trying to understand it and approach the music on its own terms. I had enough time to really focus and see what the music was trying to do. Much music (except pop) isn't designed to hit you on first listen, a lot of styles require time and attention and repeat listens before they reveal their gems. In the post-MP3 landscape with its intolerant attention spans, you just click on the next tune in WinAmp or iTunes or whatever, or go searching for another tune that fits better in the default consumer mode of instant gratification. I like a lot of difficult music like musique concrète, noise and more ambient drone-y music like Dead C and Main, but if I was first presented with those sounds as MP3s, I probably wouldn't have been able to give them the necessary attention. I mean, is popular music nowadays just music that is good to write emails to?'



DJ/Rupture's debut album *Special Gunpowder* is out on Tigerbeat6. His Nettle project is available on theAgriculture. He runs a blog and his early mixes are still downloadable from his website www.negrophonic.com.



MUSIC REVIEWS

We recently had a request from one of our readers asking that the reviews be divided into genres. We thought it was a can of worms – but if it makes the endless reams of text seem less daunting then it's probably worth it.

GAIN:

Chronic electronics: including every imaginable software-based permutation from electro to clicks and cuts.

HIGHS:

Culture, dahling, culture: Sound art, contemporary classical, jazz, improv and otherwise.

MIDS:

Strummed, stunned & shunned: From post-rock swankery to metal-solo wankery; from folk to farked, it's rock in all its forms.

LOWS:

Rumbling and mumbling: Hip-hop, drum'n'bass, reggae and the odd broken beat and/or leg.

MUTE:

Silence and the absence of it: Ambience, field recordings, outsider, and everything that's unclassifiable.

Chronic electronics:

GAIN

Andrew Coleman

Demons

(Tripel Records)

One of the early record labels to start putting out drill'n'bass in the mid-'90s was Cambridge-based Bovinyl, setup by a number of artists including Vert (Adam Butler) and Animals on Wheels (Andrew Coleman). Both of these have gradually moved on from the skittering jungle rhythms into the strange liminal territories between acoustic and electronic. And while I'm fairly sure Andy Coleman hasn't left the beats entirely behind, his latest release – the second for new Cambridge label Tripel Records – is a mysterious object created almost entirely from the processed sounds of acoustic guitar, along with some field recordings and piano. One of the loveliest aspects of this five-track CD is the way that the sounds are used as-is, so that what sounds like the creaking of a wooden chair is caught up and warped digitally along with the guitar strings. That's not to say that it's unmusical; you just have to listen the right way. 'Fight or Flight' begins with percussion sounds, but grounds itself in a rhythmic motif EQ'd to have almost no attack at all; instead, found-sound clunks, guitars and piano serve to create a 3D audio environment. *Demons* is so quiet that it could easily slip by in the background, but rewards close listening. **Peter Hollo**

Comatone

E-50

(Feral Media)

Awesome electronica can spring up from the strangest of places. I'm not talking about Sydney (hey, local pride!), although Feral Media is a Sydney-based label. But in the outer reaches of this metropolis are the Blue Mountains, and although they're considered a city in

their own right, they actually feature some beautiful portions of rainforest, waterfalls and bush just outside the big city. From there hails Greg Seiler, a sound engineer at Blue Mountain Sound. In 2003 Comatone released his first album, *One Into One Out*. It was a very fine first effort, with intricately-programmed idm beats – well done, but not that distinctive. The production was good, but I suspect it won't hold up after listening to this sophomore release, such is the progress. The first track, 'Stillpoint Coma', is a case in point. It's quite unlike anything else Comatone's done, seeming quite minimal at first, with clicks and heavily EQ'd scratches driving forward over a cold, looping synth line. Gradually it picks up, the clicky beats becoming more intricate and the backing changing beautifully. There are plenty of excellent beat-driven pieces on *E-50* (usually featuring delicate melodies and clanging percussion), as well as some delightful more ambient works, with deep immersive production. Nevertheless 'Not For Years' is equal winner with 'Stillpoint Coma' for coolest track because of the insanely squelchy acid keyboard line that chops and changes along with beats.

Peter Hollo

Department

The Turncoat Sessions

(Laboratory)

By collecting together their entire released output onto two CDs (one of which features the newly recorded *Repercussions* album), Melbourne band Department's musical development can be charted. We hear a duo of anonymous individuals who preoccupy themselves with creating richly-potent clouds of riddims and atmosphere. Reminiscent at times of the earlier works of Porter Ricks and other Mille Plateaux acts, there's a

sense of freeform approach to this group – a willingness to just see what happens when various sounds are combined together. There's also often a real tension to the sounds on this disc, like a machine slowly running out of batteries but trying to push on at any cost. Amplifying this tension is their poignant choice to create a vast array of dynamic changes both across the releases and within the songs themselves. If you loved things like early Techno Animal and the less distorted and processed end of Alec Empire's Digital Hardcore (DHR) label this may well appeal. **Lawrence English**

Jimmy Edgar

Bounce, Make, Model

(Warp/Inertia)

With his first release for Warp earlier this year – a stinging, four-track 12" that went by the name of *Access Rhythm* – 19-year-old Motor City kid Jimmy Edgar became the latest Detroit native to challenge, subvert and generally fuck with the electro landscape. And with his sophomore six-track EP – *Bounce, Make, Model* – he's set to do it all again. Wielding glitched, stuttered, razor-sharp beats and chopped-up, fragmented basslines and sonics, Edgar creates something as dark, sinister and heavy as it is clean, incisive and bounce-laden. Morphing hip-hop sensibilities with his own native take on techno, he allows deep dub and r'n'b moments to infuse tracks like 'Lb1b Detroit', while letting his crystalline production and impressive awareness of melody shine through on 'Uniform' and 'Sheer, Make, Serve'. For a guy who is yet to turn 20, *Bounce, Make, Model* is quite an achievement. Brimming with tense, flickering rhythms and distant, washed-out synth layers, Edgar's work is that of raw ideas and precision beat-craft. It is a clinical, but wonderfully odd assessment of multiple genres – a record that makes this kid one to keep a keen eye on.

Dan Rule

Mira Calix

3 Commissions
(Warp/Inertia)

Though resolutely out of left field, electronic manipulator Mira Calix returns with a mini album that is one of the more concept-driven releases of the year. In August 2002 she received about 150 sounds of almost every insect imaginable from Geneva's Museum d'Histoire Naturelle, which she subsequently turned into a 30-minute piece 'Nunu', a 13-minute excerpt of which appears on this disc. Her work here isn't about creating an evocative field recording; rather 'Nunu' is about the creation of music from unlikely sources, and in Calix's hands the insects are gorgeous melodic entities, creating droning, repetitive chirps and buzzes that are vibrant and full of life. Then, as part of the Etger Festival at the Royal Festival Hall in London, Calix teamed up with the London Sinfonietta to perform a reinterpreted version of 'Nunu' live with a classical orchestra and real insects live on stage. It's a jilting, jarring work as the Sinfonietta verbalise their instruments as if they were insects, crafting together a strange tension between insects trying to be musicians and musicians trying to be insects. The third piece was a commission from a retrospective of the work of Helen Chadwick at Barbican's Gallery. Running on a continuous loop and hidden beneath plants in the gallery, the eleven and a half minute piece begins with crisp shuddering insects and electronic wisps, though descends into minimal melancholic keys, strings, and xylophone all echoing and shadowing a gentle five-note run, with the occasional insect or bird brought up in the mix. Whilst perhaps the most electronic or clearly-manipulated-by-humans piece on the disc, it's also an opportunity for Calix to actively bring her own musical obsessions to bear with the insects. The results are nothing short of remarkable, with the album as a whole demonstrating the infinite possibilities of forging music from nature. **Bob Baker Fish**

Ra

Raoul Loves You
(Coredump/Couchblip)

It comes as something of a surprise that the debut work of French illustrator and animator turned musician, Raoul Sinier (aka Ra) could be so imaginatively in a world of its own. Sure his artwork is best known for having adorned several Planet Mu covers, and though you suspect he delved into some of the sounds and became inspired, his music is operating on a whole other level. The music on *Raoul Loves You* really doesn't belong anywhere except by itself, with a surreal blend of careful emotive structures and chaotic experimentalism. It's such an assured debut, with Sinier possessing the confidence to create such a distinctive vision and more importantly such a strange twisted brew. Whilst creating a series of bastardised stomps, melding organic instruments with more computer based techniques it's clear Ra delights in having the needle firmly imbedded in the red – without fail at least one element of each track pumped to the edge of distortion. In fact it's almost his signature, alongside techniques such as manipulating interference from a mobile phone, creating digital scratches in his sounds and all manner of seemingly destructive methods that somehow never prevent the beauty and genius of each cut to shine through. The joy is that you never really know where Ra is going to take you next, at one moment drawing upon melancholic Boards of Canada-esque wisps with cute synth lines, the next fracturing the same tune into digital chaos. Inspired and original, there is not one false step on *Raoul Loves You*.

Bob Baker Fish

Alexander Rishaug

Possible Landscapes
(Asphodel)

Possible Landscapes is a remarkably fitting title for this passage through the sound universe of Norwegian musician Alexander Rishaug. Each of the pieces on this recently re-issued album (originally

this was released by Smalltown Supersound) has a strong narrative element to it – the melodies herald a sense of emotion and the abstract percussive elements tend to create textures rather than grooves. This alignment of uncharacteristic elements into the same sound space creates a vastly pleasurable environment for the ears. 'Room Tone' for instance floats quite gently with occasional electronic bursts pushing into the mix creating both distraction and at the same time a sense of refocus as you're called to concentrate on the floating ambience once the courser sounds are removed. Equally 'Tatlic' with its echoed sound files and pulsing cut-up feel is a strong listen, holding attention and retaining a sense of space even though the track is quite dense. **Lawrence English**

The Soft Pink Truth

Do You Want New Wave or The Soft Pink Truth?

(Soundlike/Inertia)

The latest Soft Pink Truth album catches Drew Daniel somewhat nostalgically reviewing the punk and hardcore music he listened to in his youth. Daniel uses the opportunity to strip away the distorted guitars and rock bravado to insert songs from legendary underground punk acts like Crass, Die Kreuzen, The Angry Samoans and Rudimentary Peni into a glittery explosion of trashy electro pop. The socially-defiant stance and the angst and nihilism once espoused by these bands are subverted for our amusement. Daniel takes the Angry Samoans offensively homophobic 'Homo-Sexual' and renders it harmless by turning it into a rainbow-loving, barnstorming would-be Mardi Gras anthem. Similarly the blasphemy of Nervous Gender's 'Confession' is twisted into something perversely kinky as a vocodered MC Schmidt sleazily sings, 'Jesus was just like me! A homosexual nymphomaniac.' While Daniel looks to bands from the late seventies and eighties for inspiration his arrangements are forward-thinking, embracing the jittery

snap, crackle and pop of glitchy laptop production. Thankfully it's an approach that avoids the clichés and well-worn templates that makes so much new electro sound as though it was recorded twenty years ago. It seems that in retrospect Daniel has glimpsed the naivety underscoring the originals. Years ago he may have been a fervently anarchic punk but these days he's laughing at it all whilst showing us a good time. Arguably the best electro album of 2004.

Guido Farnell

Thembi Soddell

Intimacy
(Cajid)

The debut release from Melbourne label Cajid is a puzzling work that appears to draw upon some of the darker elements of human relations. Entitled *Intimacy*, a quick scan of track titles reveals violation, withdrawal, mistrust, discomfort, repulsion and expectation – hardly some of the rosier aspects of relationships. The sounds, seemingly garnered from field recordings, spend much of the time barely perceivable, operating on the edge of listening before they will gradually grow from a faint hiss into dull rumbling, before becoming vaguely comprehensible, often crescendo-ing into noise before everything is abruptly taken back to the edge of listening again. It's a strange jarring and uncomfortable world, then again so are the actions and emotions they depict. Soddell seems to favor the elements; the sounds of wind and rain to flesh out her minimal though emotionally volatile landscape and there's no denying the dark feel of this complex and disquieting work. **Bob Baker Fish**

Tree Wave

Cabana
(Made Up Records)

Usually you can spot 8-bit video game music a mile away – those cheesy thin synth melodies and the mesh drums – but Dallas duo Tree Wave have managed to coax something very different from their banks of old computers and game

consoles. A Commodore 64, Atari 2600, an 286 and a dot matrix printer provide the backing for Lauren Grey's vocals delivering a proto-digital haze that is part Broadcast or My Bloody Valentine and part Super Mario Bros. It's even better than those melodies that C64 legends Martin Galway and Rob Hubbard used to compose. For those of you who still have an old C64 in the garage at your parents' house there is a special track that when dumped to audio cassette can be loaded into the C64, revealing a fully working pattern-based synth program written by Tree Wave! **Sebastian Chan**

Various Artists

Semikazi 2

(Ostik)

Referring to the state of experimental, active or underground, Semikazi's latest compilation that documents the electronic murmurings of Western Australia delivers some interesting listening material. The use of the term 'experimental' here refers for the most part in the way these tracks have been composed. Drifting from stilted beatscapes (hear Manoeuvre's 'High Life' which has a skeleton-like feel of beats coloured with only the slightest amount of bass and tones) to the trance like sentiments of Lo-Key Fu (complete with cheesy vocals), this disc is both diverse and encompassing of the themes hinted at by the title. There's both high and low points to be heard here – Pablo Dali's Kit Clayton inspired movements on 'Strange Current' impress early on, as does the gentle flow of Mere's essentially low-tech 'Soya source' (although we could do without the pads perhaps?). It seems that for the most part this compilation is about inclusion over quality – a way of documenting what's out there for posterity rather than listening highlights – arguably a worthwhile task. **Lawrence English**

Zorn

All We Can Do Is Enjoy The Ride

(Lux Nigra)

It's hardly surprising that Michael Zorn's *The City's Collapsing (But Not Tonight)* is Lux Nigra's best selling title to date, given its remarkably accomplished sound. The only problem is that, having issued such a definitive collection, Zorn now must devise an equally impressive follow-up. The forty-five minute *All We Can Do Is Enjoy The Ride*, while inarguably a delicious exemplar of digital sound sculpting, largely perpetuates the first album's sound without advancing radically beyond it. Like before, Zorn methodically constructs intricate tracks by adding layers in systematic manner; he eschews gradual fades in place of dynamics that accrue in steps. Zorn's gift for skewering one's sense of time remains: what one presumes to be a given song's downbeat eventually folds inside out as rhythm structures come into gradually clearer focus. Consider the dub-techno opener 'Cold & Cuddly' as a representative example. It starts rather unassumingly with tiny electronic quirks laid over a repeating chord and then more layers gradually appear: swizzling hi-hats, dub accents, and gliss and glimmers. It takes mere seconds for one to recognize it as a Zorn track—and that's good and bad: good in that it indicates a clearly-defined personality; bad because it indicates that this new work hews closely to his established sound. There's no disputing the quality of Zorn's *All We Can Do Is Enjoy The Ride*, but its occasional habit of recycling an admittedly high-quality past is a little disappointing. **Ron Schepper**

Culture, dahling, culture:

HIGHS

Guthrie/Bellenger/Miho

Leave Me Bitter

(DT-BS)

After 12 months in France, Melbourne-born percussionist Will Guthrie breezed through town recently playing some shows and dropping off this incredibly frenetic, highly-textural and improvised CDR, perhaps as evidence he hasn't just been guzzling wine and learning to conjugate his verbs during his stay. Always adept at improvised collaboration, utilizing amplified percussion, minidisk and radio in real time without any edits, he teams up with Alexandre Bellenger on turntables and Miho on samplers for *Leave Me Bitter*, a haphazard, highly electrical and staticy assortment of sounds. Guthrie's percussion is all rattling and clanging, anything but rhythmic, whilst the others offer high-pitched tones, snatches of white noise, feedback and all manner of strange electrical beeps and pulses. With four cuts, the shortest coming in at eight minutes and the longest at twenty one, the trio have plenty of time to stretch out and bounce off one another, which they do quite energetically, creating an almost attention-deficit wash of improvised chaos. **Bob Baker Fish**

Kreidler

Eve Future Recall

(Wonder)

Anyone expecting the post-rock Kreidler of *Weekend* may be startled by the chamber-music stylings of *Eve Future Recall*. While it might purport to be classical chamber-music, it's more akin to soundtrack music in search of a film it might accompany. It's 'classical-lite', in other words, audience-friendly material much like the kind of music composed by John Williams than Penderecki; 'Cervantes'; for example, is tailor-made to accompany footage of an advancing army of soldiers

and horses. As a result, the recording sometimes flirts with an off-putting banality, a case in point the tympani and snare elements in 'The Park' which verge on overstatement. But weak moments are rare on an album that consistently charms with pretty melodies and lush arrangements. 'Vive la Vie' opens the album with a pensive, lilting interweave of strings, harp plucks and vibes that are lovely, as is 'Schwanentöter' with its brooding harp plucks and deep string tones. Reverberant glockenspiels and vibes distinguish 'Whom The Bell Tolls,' merely one instance of many that emphasises Kreidler's predilection for mallet percussion. Judged on its own terms, *Eve Future Recall* is an undeniably lovely collection, even if one that bears little resemblance to the Kreidler of old.

Ron Schepper

Ulrich Krieger

Early American Minimalism: Walls of Sound II (Sub Rosa)

Krieger's second Walls of Sound release features five 1960s 'pattern music' works by seminal American composers Philip Glass, Steve Reich, and Terry Riley, all of whom were determined during that time to break free of perceived musical 'dead ends' like Serialism. Given their pronounced conceptual focus, these earlier works are more 'academic' than the composers' more audience-friendly current material (Glass's symphonies, for example) yet Krieger's album provides a thoroughly engrossing listen and serves a valuable historical purpose in exposing important music of this era to new listeners. Three pieces are arranged exclusively for sax, with two others conceptual works. Sounding very much like an instrumental excerpt from *Einstein On The Beach*, the six saxophones in Glass's 'Music In Fifths'

(1969) maintain a constant eighth-note pulse throughout using circular breathing techniques. As with much of Glass's music during this period, the tempo and volume remain constant, making it a good example of what Krieger calls 'static music,' music whose slowly mutating patterns eschew conventional narrative or development. Terry Riley's 1964 'Dorian Reeds' overlays patterns of Krieger's soprano sax swirls using a delay technique to potent and hypnotic effect. On Reich's economical 'Reed Phase,' Krieger plays a single pattern throughout using two soprano saxophones, with a slight tempo difference between them producing the gradual shifts. In the conceptual pieces, blurred eruptions open Reich's 'Pendulum Music' (1968) where microphones (eight in this case) swing slowly out of phase above loudspeakers to generate feedback tones. Unison sounds gradually mutate into call-and-response patterns and finally, when the pendulum slows, a hallucinatory gnawing drone. '1 + 1' (1968) is Glass's 'Pendulum' counterpart, as percussive patterns are played on a tabletop amplified with a microphone; while of interest conceptually, it's the least compelling piece here. It's disconcerting to find these once-revolutionary works now presented as canonical 'museum pieces,' especially when they were once considered radical and even scandalous. **Ron Schepper**

Toshimaru Nakamura/Brett Lerner

After School Activity
(Impermanent)

It's got a soft Zen-like cover, however those familiar with the work of Japanese no-input-mixing-board artist Toshimaru Nakamura would have their brain clenching in anticipation. Nakamura is renowned for building his feedback/sine wave manipulations up from silence and that's exactly what occurs on his collaboration with Koto player Brett Lerner. Nakamura's sine waves, whilst quite minimal, are impossibly high pitched, almost unbearably so at times, with Lerner very reservedly plucking at his Koto occasionally. Nakamura exists in the

outer limits of music and sound art, creating quite incredibly pure sounds and manipulations, though without doubt requiring intense concentration and much patience of the listener. Here the silence is as important as the sounds, on a collaboration that is simultaneously restrained and intense, a concept that until now seemed mutually exclusive.

Bob Baker Fish

Various Artists

Construction Sonor – Eine Klangreise unter die Alpen

(Pro Helvetia)

Commissioned by the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia, Zurich musician and composer Bernd Schurer recorded the sounds of two big tunnel construction sites in central Switzerland. These field recordings can be found here on CD A. They formed the basis for the second stage of the project – remix CD B. Thirteen sound artists, some living along the train tracks, others representing cities to be linked by the new rail connections and nationalities at work on the construction projects, were given Schurer's field recordings, to interpret according to their own perspective and inspiration. The resulting tracks show great variety, with some artists choosing to add the field recordings into the patchwork of their own songs, others working exclusively with the original material. Boris Blank's atmospheric piece reminds me of classic Manaus lounge Yello, Drumpet from Uri play a cocktail of smooth industrial jazz and there are contributions from Seelenluft, Fennesz and Monolake. This release forms part of umbrella art venture Gallerie 57/34.6 km, the whole raison d'être of which is to explore the questions of connectivity and mobility raised by this gigantic Alpine transit infrastructure project. It successfully bridges the gap between the purity of field recordings – admittedly not your standard commercial proposition – and structured electronic and electro-acoustic music. **Lars ollo**

Strummed, stunned & shunned:

MIDS

Capillary Action

Fragments

(Pangaea)

Having recently reacquainted myself with my metal youth, the arrival of Capillary Action's debut album came as a rather welcome surprise. Although somewhat scattered in realisation, its ambitious nature and the fact that it manages to jump between so many of guitar music's signposts makes it an experience that never fails to surprise, upset or just plain confuse. It wasn't until my second or third listen that I noticed the twin guitar solo that rounds out the second track 'Ticking Ghosts Pt 2' – like Proust's tea cakes the Iron Maiden-esque double solo transported me back to being a pimply-faced teen headbanger studying album covers for hidden meanings, memorising lyrics and practising band logos on my pencil case. Not that Capillary Action is at all a journey in sentimentality or a blase retrospective, in fact it's quite the opposite – it's like some mythical tome containing tabs of all the great guitar moments has been shredded, tossed in the air and replayed as it falls to the ground. The mastermind behind all this nonsense is guitarist and Ohio native Jonathon Pfeffer, possessed of an ease of touch and a maturity beyond his years (he looks about 17 on the back cover). He easily strides between shredding off-kilter metal riffs and exquisite strumming – 'Constant Steady Collapse' goes from an exercise in Stereolab-ish timbres only to switch moments before the track ends into a crescendo of distorted guitar and tub-thumping drums, and 'Driving through Twilight' is a twee country lite piece that nevertheless charms. Elsewhere the stand-out track 'Architecture Will Fall' starts off sounding like tech-metallars Voivod covering a Judas Priest track from memory, and then proceeds

through a number of movements including one of finger-tapping excess, only to end in a Godspeed-like crescendo and whimpering finale. Although there are many 'quiet' moments on *Fragments* it's the willingness to go into the harder areas that most 'post-rock' eschews in its pursuit of tasteful abandon that distinguishes Capillary Action and makes this such an entertaining set of tracks. **DH**

Destructo Swarmbots

The Mountain EP

(Public Guilt)

When Justin Broadrick released Final's *First Millionth of A Second* it was with the intention of capturing the deathly silent noise of the sound of a nuclear devastation moments after the flash. Destructo Swarmbots' *The Mountain* is like a companion piece dedicated to the long period of nuclear winter – radioactive clouds creak and groan under the pressure of a million lost souls, watchful of survivors slowly picking through wreckage in the knowledge that the sickness will eventually claim them too. It's hard not to imagine apocalyptic scenes as the slowly unfolding scree of soft noise swells menacingly – and though the three tracks on this lovely jewel-cased 3" are composed almost entirely of guitar feedback it's always in control and, for want of a better term, composed. Drones can easily become exercises in style and gesture – the elegance of swirling motes of sound is sometimes taken for primitive simplicity – but thankfully Destructo Swarmbots seem well versed in how to pace and structure pieces no matter how barely they move nor how ill-defined their edges. **DH**

Ariel Pink

Haunted Grafitti 2 – The Doldrums
(Paw Tracks)

The world of Ariel Pink is skewed heart-felt saccharine weirdness. It's demented AM radio, twisted tunes twisted further, warped by the sun and pitch shifted into a teenage roller-rink abyss. The story is that during one of the Animal Collective's cross country jaunts they happened upon the work of the uncomfortable semi-tragic Ariel and were engrossed/seduced/curious enough to release it on their own label. This may be because Ariel feels it. You can tell because he wails and humps like a demented chipmunk, all lo fi soulful funk, so uncomfortably tragic it's almost sinister. Recorded on 8-track cassette, there is a murky almost worn feel to the music that makes it seem to come from some other unworldly place. This place is Ariel's soul. It's littered with heartbreak, angst and a desire to kick out the cobwebs like a pimply faced teenager rebelling for the first time. **Bob Baker Fish**

Tunng

Mother's Daughter and Other Songs
(Static Caravan)

Professional visitors to Barcelona's Sónar Festival in 2004 were not only treated to the prodigious amounts of live music on offer, but also received a British label sampler CD, on which could be found the A-side of British duo Tunng's debut 7", 'Tale From Black'. The track is a slow-growing dark English folk tune, with electronic beats, glitches and weird vinyl samples eventually overlaid on top. It was irresistible, but who were these people? A couple of months later a second lathe-cut 7" followed, which only served to increase the mystique. One side featured a demented version of the 'Maypole Song' from the *Wicker Man* soundtrack, while 'Surprise Me 44' (like 'Tale From Black', also found on this album) is a perfect electronic folk pop gem. These 7"s being in short supply, it's wonderful that their album is finally out in January 2005. The first track, 'Mother's Daughter', is something of a statement of intent,

with the word 'stay' sung by a female voice and digitally stretched to insane lengths while clicky beats pick up over acoustic guitars; eventually these elements coalesce into a melodic folk tune. Sam Genders sings in a flat English folk way (possible comparison would be the Beta Band), while Mike Lindsay's electronics are like a more accessible Four Tet or Matmos, and the closest match to their musical aesthetic would be The Books. It's a very English sound, very restrained even when a vocal gets caught in a loop and degrades into static – the song could go into full-on Underworld techno mode, but instead it stops, and then restarts as before. Oh – and 'Codebreaker' features one of the cutest lyrics ever. This is pastoral yet technical, repetitive yet melodic and surprising. The first near-perfect album of 2005.

Peter Hollo

Various Artists

Song Of The Silent Land
(Constellation/Inertia)

Originally intended to coincide with the European Constellation Roadshow Tour early in 2004, *Song of the Silent Land* is a collection of the roster's one-offs, rarities, remixes and previously unreleased efforts. And from the lovely foil-pressed card packaging, to the vast range of musical material sought, it would seem that no expense has been spared in the production of this compilation. Highlighting every band to grace their current catalogue, *Song of the Silent Land* hints that there is more to the label than the loudcore post-prog-avant-whatever rock smarts of Godspeed, Do Make Say Think and co. Elizabeth Anka Vajagic kicks off proceedings with a gentle, stripped-back version of 'The Sky Lay Still'; its distant, echoing guitar swaying loosely amongst her stark vocals. Do Make Say Think get all tough with some headline sound-immersion tactics on a five minute remix of 'Winter Hymn Winter Hymn', before Exhaust belt out 'Wool Fever Dub' – an angular, early Fugazi-esque track lifted from a rare,

1996 cassette release. After a folk diversion – through Black Ox Orkestar and Sackville – Silver Mt. Zion let loose with the previously unreleased 'Iron Bridge to Thunder Bay'. One of the key tracks on the compilation, it swells with slamming bass and drums, screaming feedback and brain-cracking noise. While HangedUp, Sofa, Re., Fly Pan Am, I-Speed Bike and Frankie Sparo all make contributions, and Godspeed sign-off magnificently with a live version of 'Outro', it is Polmo Polpo who take the late-in-the-record cake with a remix construction of previ-

ous work. 'Dreaming (Again)' is wonderfully contemplative and warm, its chugging rhythms and yearning slide guitar acting as one of the record's true stylistic and dispositional departures. As with many label comps, *Song of the Silent Land* isn't the most easily listenable record. Like being massaged and slapped in face at the same time, this record isn't about continuity or flow. And for precisely this reason, it is nothing short of a fascinating exploration of Constellation's forgotten and previously disregarded flotsam and jetsam. **Dan Rule**

Rumbling and mumbling:

LOWS

Beans

Shock City Maverick
(Warp/Inertia)

With a lineage that skirts both the New York slam poetry scene and, of course, one of the most progressive hip-hop crews of recent times – the legendary, and now sadly defunct, Antipop Consortium – a new record by NYC hip-hop all-sort Beans is something of an event. And from the deep, whispered groove of intro 'Light of the Damned', to the Mark Pritchard-produced finale 'Diamond Halo Grenade', his latest outing *Shock City Maverick* certainly does grab your attention. With enunciation and delivery that echoes '80s pioneers, and the kind of production complexity that you expect from someone from Warp's prestigious roster, Beans is one of the sharpest and most quick-witted in the game. The production energy and searing vocal flow of 'Papercut', title track 'Shock City Maverick', single 'Down By Law' and the blistering 'Death By Sophistication' do more than vouch for this. But expectation often prompts disappointment – fair or otherwise. With such impressive calling cards, even a slight flat spot can come across – perhaps unjustly – as a letdown. The fat,

low-end bass groove of 'City Hawk' is a prime example. While a great party track, the vocals are little more than chest-puffed boasts, and we've come to expect a little more from the Antipop hero. Luckily for us, more often than not Beans complements his fine production with the brilliant brain-twisting metaphor and electro-psyche wordplay for which we've come to hold him in such high regard. **Dan Rule**

Bizzy B

Science EP Vol 3
(Planet Mµ)

Being quite the fan of the early jungle sound it often pains me to dig out a few dusty records only to find that for one reason or another, they haven't quite survived the test of time. A recent spate of roughneck jungle releases, coupled with modern production and a fresh pressing puts paid to this particular problem. Another legend unearthed, Planet Mµ follow up the blistering Remarc set with this ace 10" double pack from Bizzy B (Brain/Joker/Sub Base/Whitehouse) – a pioneer of junglist raves and hardcore pirate radio. *The Science EP Vol.3* features all new material from Bizzy B, and follows up Volumes 1 and 2 that came

out in '93 and '94 respectively. What you get is some killer, bass-heavy, amen break-driven, darkcore tumblin' without a moment's pause for breath. Rather than being uncompromisingly experimental the EP just goes to show how floor-friendly such roughneck break chopping can be. Included is a rigorous rework of the classic '16 Track Ting', as well as 'Darkside' – currently getting quite a run from today's jungle/drum'n'bass aficionados. **Dan Collins**

Black Moth Super Rainbow

Start A People

(70s Gymnastics)

Welcome to queasy listening... The intriguingly monikered Black Moth Super Rainbow manage to evoke the giddy sound of some imagined childhood, bathed in golden sunlight – spinning in circles until tumbling to the ground, eyes flickering back and forth in dizzy fits. It's a feeling that's part nausea and part euphoria, and is imbued with such manic optimism that it's hard to resist the temptation to bliss out in its presence. 'Seeds' is probably the most obvious example of *Start A People's* naive brilliance – its woozy glory is prototypical of the BMSR sound: a slightly green-gilled organ melody is joined by a swirling analogue synth and a beat that threatens to tip over any minute. However the kicker is the way that the track slows down mid-phrase like a momentarily-switched-off turntable (or as if someone has touched one of the spools of the master tapes). It's all so gloriously disconcerting. Elsewhere vocoder and serpentine synth court each other like shy lovers in 'I Think it's Beautiful that you are 256 Colours Too' and 'Early '70s Gymnastics' evokes the classic Leonard Nimoy TV show *In Search Of*; heady with spooky tales and Nimoy's campy serious eyebrows. To seal the deal it's packaged in a cool coated box board slipcase, all the better to smudge while finger painting in afternoon sunlight. **DH**

Hykoo & Osinaka

Rap Songs Meow

(Awakenings/Inertia)

Rap Songs Meow is the latest from Awakenings Records, brainchild of Melbourne MCs Hykoo and Nick Sweepah. The album builds on the strength and momentum of the label's first release *Pigeon Whole Hearted* and serves as a 'split album', doubling as the debut solo release for both Hykoo and Osinaka. The album is well-rounded: solid beats and diverse instrumentation underpin clever lyrical content and smooth delivery by all MCs. 19 tracks allow for much diversity of subject, with deep introspection, social commentary and dark musings on life and love all getting a run. For me, the track 'Writers Blockade' is a highlight. Hats off to Osinaka, responsible for the production of the album, providing a haunting and rugged landscape for the moody and sometimes dark and pessimistic word-play. With instrumental snippets throughout, the track 'Erased' is a stand-out, and serves as a measure of his skills. All in all, a dark shadowy release with powerful beats and rhymes. **Dan Collins**

Iswhat?!

You Figure It Out

(Hyena/Didgeridoo)

Jazz is the teacher. Apparently. Though mostly it's only a sampled horn peal or break to most producers of 'jazz hip-hop'. But there are a few hip-hop heads that approach the sound with a bit more. Current faves like Madlib are only the tip of an iceberg that stretches back through bands like the Dream Warriors, Gangstarr and Digable Planets, even right back to the Last Poets and Sun Ra. Described by media in their home of Cincinnati as 'one of the most creative acts to ever erect a bridge between jazz and hip-hop', the cumbersomely badged Iswhat?! are the latest in a dynasty of artists melding the two with panache. *You Figure It Out* is the debut album from the trio, which is comprised of MC Napoleon Maddox, Matt Anderson on

upright bass and Jack Walker on saxophone and flute. They wear the baggy signatures of hip-hop with pride: graf cover art, MCing, beatboxing and turntablism. But the cool style of jazz is equally important; you can see it in the stunning Charles Mingus reworkings, and the intelligent, if scattered lyrics. Described by beatboxing guru Rahzel (The Roots) as 'All about what's happenin' that a lot of people ain't even hip to yet', the band defies easy labelling. But somehow, despite the group's simplicity, they manage to hit the heart of what hip-hop's about. **Matt Levinson**

Lateduster

Easy Pieces

(Merck/Couchblip)

Lateduster only enjoyed a four-year existence, breaking up in 2002, so of course the question two years later is what makes this quartet important enough to have the unpredictable and imaginative Merck label (home to Machine Drum) eagerly compile some of their original and remastered recordings? Whilst the music is quite interesting, definitively innovative for its time, mesmerising and quite beautiful in an energetic, post-rock kind of way (and spookily similar to the landscape that Tortoise have found themselves in this year on *It's All Around You* – though perhaps lacking the numerous changes and complexity of structure), the interest comes from the amazing personnel. Since the band's demise, members of Lateduster have since splintered into more high-profile indie hip-hop orientated projects such as Fog, Hymie's Basement, Dosh and Neotropic. The music on Lateduster however gives little hint of these future directions. Whilst there are glimpses of Andrew Broder's (Fog) ever-present scratching, the majority of the instrumental tracks are constructed via iron-clad jazz beats, searching, melancholic (at times reassuring) guitar, strange noodling keys and off-kilter overdubs. The pace is predominantly gentle, the guitar work

alternating between gentle strumming and sheets of distortion buried low in the mix. Whilst definitely driven by the guitar, even incorporating some relaxed duelling between two guitar parts, it never feels overdone, rather *Easy Pieces* is tasteful, imaginative and emotionally affecting, making you wonder what heights they'd have reached by now if they had only remained together. **Bob Baker Fish**

Machine Drum

Bidnezz

(Merck/Couchblip)

Many would know of Machine Drum from when he visited our shores last year as a guest of the annual Sound Summit in Newcastle. Taking over two years to craft, *Bidnezz* is filled with the kind of jittery, chopped-up rhythms and fragments of sound we've come to expect from this eccentric sonic manipulator. Whilst it exists firmly within the reconstructed laptop fraternity and utilises elements of glitch, static and discarded audio fragments, Machine Drum (aka Travis Stewart) manages to distinguish himself via his ability to integrate an urban groove into what had previously been a cold sterile environment. Whilst he flirts with elements of drum'n'bass, instrumental hip-hop, r'n'b, electro and even house, he approaches these genres in such an eccentric way that they are distorted and deconstructed until they are barely shreds of what we have previously known. On *Bidnezz*, Machine Drum is obsessed with an impossible haltering beat, making the music almost sound scratched and damaged, and this is the base from which he builds his amazing highly funky tunes. *Bidnezz* is the sound of urban expression shredded through digital synthesis; hip-hop that has been processed and reprocessed until it has become a strange new electronic beast. **Bob Baker Fish**

Muph & Plutonic

Hunger Pains

(Obese)

Downsyde

When The Dust Settles

(Obese)

The success story of Oz hip-hop, Obese has gone from releasing the music of mates and acquaintances to establishing an Australia-wide catalogue of varied hip-hop releases in a very short time. The difficulties in this transition from bedroom sensibilities to corporate realities is indicated no more clearly than in their most recent pair of releases. Muph & Plutonic and Downsyde are disparate entities – not least of which is their geographical separation. The former are Melbourne (and Obese) stalwarts both; Muphin's lyrical introspection and honesty is sometimes a little close to the bone but always insightful, and Plutonic has an unparalleled respect as a beat-maker. Perth's Downsyde on the other hand are unashamedly a party band – three MCs backed by a DJ and rhythm section. Though Downsyde's lyrics approach some level of social conscience, they mostly revolve around rooting and getting rowdy (and the regret of the next day), and the productions and composition, appropriately enough, are all writ large: big choruses, huge hooks and all the trappings you'd expect of polished live performers. But somehow the album doesn't ever attain the greatness that perhaps the well-crafted parts would suggest. It also feels a little contrived or constricted – as though the bogieman of commercial viability was ever present during its conception, it also suffers a little of obesity at almost 80 minutes. *Hunger Pains* on the other hand is much leaner, and far more enjoyable for the fact that it doesn't court attention, but swaggers with a self-assured gait that never seems arrogant. Though it contains its fair share of tracks that work live ('Heaps Good' being the standout) they tend to bang for far more subtle, and less formulaic, reasons. There's also plenty of space for Muphin to stretch out

lyrically with Plutonic's deftly constructed and lushly orchestrated beats acting as a perfect foil. Though it verges on the serious at times, Muphin's never far from a self-deprecating couplet, and there's rarely a moment of miserable self-indulgence. *Hunger Pains* delivers on a multitude of levels and reveals more with each listen in its subtle shading, especially contrasted to Downsyde's primary colours. Though both well-constructed releases, they seem to differ in their purpose and goals, and this hints at a potential schism in Oz hip-hop between bending to commercial viability and remaining faithful to the form. **DH**

Pedro

Fear & Resistance

(Melodic)

The idea of following an eponymously-titled full-length in 2003 with a mini-album filled with remixes of a single song might at first seem a too-limiting prospect, but the remixes gathered here dispel that notion in short order. The horns and acoustic guitar elements of Pedro's (James Rutledge) 'Fear & Resilience' electronic original do surface on occasion, but in general the five contributing artists elastically transform Pedro's material in provocative and usually successful manner. And considering the caliber of the participants – Prefuse 73, Danger Mouse, Cherrystones, Fourtet, and Home Skillet – it shouldn't surprise that the album teems with ideas. Very much in his *One Word Extinguisher* mode and just as strong, Scott Herren's first up with a dense Prefuse 73 remix that's chock-full of slamming beats, violins and horns, all glitchily sliced and diced. Excellent too is the version from British hip-hop producer Cherrystones, which oozes a deeply addictive trip-hop vibe of twanging guitars, frothy beats, and backwards phasing effects. Fresh from his attention-grabbing *Grey Album*, Danger Mouse's mellower take emphasizes the warm pluck of the acoustic bass before kicking into heavier, head-nodding territory,

while Pedro's own rework sounds like a companion track to Herren's, even if Rutledge eases up on the stuttering skitter. Four minutes into Kieran Hebden's epic overhaul, aggressive beats join the clatter of orchestral noise and electronics before the mix moves into a melt-down of furious free-jazz blowing that recalls the interstellar explorations of Coltrane's final recordings. Thankfully, the intensity soon subsides, making way for a slightly less harrowing idyll of croaks and shuffles that Hebden stretches out for another ten minutes. The only clear misstep in the bunch is Home Skillet's treatment, that might just as well have been titled 'Shredded Cacophony Mix'; it's ultimately an experiment one won't likely want to hear more than once. A strong collection overall, even if Pedro willingly takes a back seat to his guests. **Ron Schepper**

Sheveks Masada

Hip Hop for Dishwashers Scumballs

(Abandon Building/CouchBlip!)

Hip Hop for Dishwashers Scumballs and

Upstarts is the long awaited follow up

from Smaze, half the duo behind *Enki Dus Mono* released in mid-2000 on Hefty Records, under the Beneath Autumn Sky moniker. For those who had given up waiting for further BAS offerings in the years since 2000, this release is highly anticipated and long overdue. This time it is Smaze himself, under the new name Sheveks Masada, presenting the first release on the newly-formed Abandon Building label. A vinyl only pressing with four distinctly different offerings over 27 minutes, it is an instrumental and lo-fi beat mural – moody, and melodic. The breaks are deeply woven through a meditative landscape, dotted with samples tinged with paranoia from sci-fi movies of old. Differing from previous work – but still resisting being pinned to a particular style – it is Smaze's special talent to work within a beat-driven framework, across all forms of jazz and electronica, which makes the sound truly his own. **HC11**

Statler and Waldorf

Collusions

(Freefall/MRA Entertainment)

The first track on this EP will be a hit by the time you read this. Remarkably it's from Brisbane – not because of any cultural cringe but because it's impossible to locate. A bouncy fusion of house and hip-hop with Jamaican style vocals from Blue MC, it's an infectious singalong crossover that is poppy without being twee, clubby yet radio friendly, edgy without being annoying. And it will fill the floor every time. Follower 'So Fine' is a gentler summer track (vs. Paul Kelly, whatever than means), solid but not as outstanding. 'City' finds Miss Brown singing of the joys of getting ready to go out tonight, but the blocky chugger behind it is so dark it's quite a mismatch – it doesn't sound like there's a lot of fun to be had where they're off to. Sweet vocals though, with shades of Shara Nelson. 'Byrne', featuring Miss Brown again with Sanyasa, is a pacy, soft breaks/d'n'b late night; a contrast of moody ambience and frantic activity. By the time we get to 'Andronovavirus' it's late at night and the drugs have kicked in, with sub-303 bleeps and an altogether more old skool sound. It's good to hear diversity but for me it's 'Bass Buffer' all the way, which incidentally has no bassline. If they get it hooked up for release next European summer they'll be able to live off their music for a while. **Alex ollo**

Subtle

A New White

(Lex/Inertia)

After the phenomenal bolt out of the blue that was Cloudead, Themselves, or the slightly self-conscious, pretentiously verbose and abstract experimental diss to (and embrace of hip-hop) in general that is Anticon, one wondered how many more tricks they had up their sleeves. How many more streams of conscious mumbling? How many more highly-educated-white-boy pop cultural verbal rampages? How much more tripped-out

soundscape doses of tomfoolery before they become, at best, hollow parodies of themselves, at worst predictably weird or just damn boring? Then a few of them formed a band. A real band: a six-piece with real drums, real bass, guitars and keys. And of course the unmistakably shambolic stream of consciousness vocals of one Doseone. So of course it was never going to be a traditional band per se, arriving somewhere between the lush, loose experimentalism of Hood and the abstract strangeness of Clouddead. Yet it has revitalised their approach and is an inspired meld of hip-hop-meets-rock-meets-pop-meets-soundscape-meets-crazy-Anticon-hybrid. There are also some real hooks here amongst Doseone's obtuse subconscious mutterings, which elevates his work beyond the outer reaches of hip-hop into something unmistakably new and almost accessible. So along with cohorts including Jel and Themselves' touring keyboardist Dax Pierson, in *New White*, Doseone has continued to open up new sonic worlds, this time holding up much more than just the freak card. **Bob Baker Fish**

Various Artists

Roots of Dub Funk 4: Rise of the Electric Dread
(Tantý)

For all my love of dub, I still can't get my head around the particularly bad aesthetic visual sensibilities that dubheads almost always have. Though those kooky, hand-drawn Scientist releases can be passed off as kitsch or as examples of parochial design, latter day dub comps are invariably stuck in the nexus between bad Photoshop and fetishised photos of big speakers, dreadlocks and smoke clouds. This compilation is no exception: Photoshop bevelled text (yellow on blue...hrrrrhr) with a big dread fella that kinda looks like Big Youth in tennis shorts on the cover. It begs the question of why a genre so possessed of casual sartorial sonic elegance has to dress in rhinestones and peacock feathers to go to the ball. The tunes inside

range from the standard digi-dub fare of keyboard skank and rhythm ad infinitum to the sublime outer reaches of the form; Social Living Sounds' midtempo stepper 'Light and Strength' combines plaintive melodica and a casually insistent bass line; and DJ Perch's 'Dub the Border' features lovely scattered horns, slowly morphing beat and righteous vocal snatches. Elsewhere some fine vocal performances (and dubbed effects) contribute the highlights, and though most tracks stick faithfully to the digidub formula there is enough variation both within and across the tracks to provide for a satisfying listening experience. Although occasional tracks fall a little short, the fact that the set features a number of little known artists picked across Europe and the US (by compiler and label head Kelvin Richards) and yet maintains such decent standards sonically and artistically, makes this a fine compilation, despite any misgivings the artwork may provide. **DH**

Various Artists

Bongo Flava: Rap in Tanzania
(Out Here)

More than any other genre, hip-hop has travelled relatively intact to most areas of the world. Like soccer, its means are very simple and its rules are easily learnt and applied, and like soccer the game's masters are possessed of a mix of natural talent and hard-won wisdom. Tanzanian hip-hop, if this compilation is anything to go by, is relatively mature and has found a unique voice that extends beyond merely rhyming in Swahili (though in itself a powerful statement) to a particular emphasis on vocal techniques above and beyond rhyming in sixteen bar lots. Opening with the arpeggiated guitar and rolling break of 'Umoja Wa Tanzania' by Juma Nature, what immediately strikes as interesting is the fact that it sounds so recognisably like hip-hop, and yet there's something about the lightness of the production, the rhythmically complex but relaxed flows of the MCs and the

strong melodic sensibilities, especially in relation to choruses, that marks it as other – especially in comparison to its American forebears. X-Plataz's 'Dunia Dudumizi' is a case in point – the chorus features a three-part counterpoint between the MCs' chanted chorus, the ullulations of a vocalist and a background rhythm of guttural expirations that can only be described as a series of 'unghs'. Although each of the tracks features different MCs, the beats are handled by a handful of producers (with P-Funk taking the majority) and this

lends the compilation relative cohesion. Another interesting thing that gradually appears is that there's no scratching or cuts, or for that matter, samples – the realities of poverty in Dar es Salaam obviously forbid such resource-hungry pursuits as crate digging, and make turntables a needless expense. There's nary a dud across the fourteen tracks of *Bongo Flava*, and coupled with extensive and informative liner notes, it's an excellent entry point to a crucial scene that few even realise exists. **DH**

Silence and the absence of it:

MUTE

Autodigest

A Compressed History of Everything Ever Recorded Vol 2
(Ash)

Like an eviscerated live performance with its innards trailing in the dust, *A Compressed History of Everything Ever Recorded Vol 2* captures the sounds of applause post-performance, and extends them into a veritable orgy of hand-to-hand combat. Or so it seems after 50 minutes of non-stop clapping, cheering, whooping, and at some stages cries of either pain or ecstasy, it's hard to tell. Far from the typical 'clap your hands everybody' shouts of a live experience, Autodigest have overlaid ovations from what could be innumerable performances, it's hard to tell, as over the fifty minutes of clapping the energy never lets up; it's like one big encore. Though it's pretty much a one-trick pony; the joke of the endless applause can wear thin pretty quickly – but like an incessant car alarm, as one's ears become attenuated to the relentless barrage, new textures, structures and timbres appear, and the excitement that a hyped crowd elicits ebbs and flows. It's a strange but satisfyingly quirky release, that ultimately poses quite serious questions regarding the

nature of crowds, the human condition, the infectious nature of applause, and even the very notion of music in what seems like an inane exercise. **DH**

DJ Olive

Buoy
(::Room40::)

Put most simply, *Buoy* is a becalmed ambient piece by Gregor Asch (DJ Olive) but that description hardly does justice to the activity that unfurls over the course of its hour-long duration. In the liner notes Asch cites the piece's 'metaphorical' dimension; he notes that a buoy acts as 'an anchored marker that maps the passing waves,' an idea that finds its musical analogue in the central thread of murmuring bumbles, piano chords, and synth ripples that glacially morphs throughout. The piece's 'environmental' dimension alludes to the mercurial stream of field samples that surfaces throughout and constellates around that central core, faint sounds that include soft clanks, garbled chatter, footsteps, a cuckoo clock, door creaks, and even what sounds like Yoko Ono speaking. Finally, there's a literal dimension to the title, as sounds of lapping waves and creaking boats intermittently

arise. Strangely, in its final moments the piece shifts its focus to a wholly different sonic lexicon (eating and swallowing noises, laughter, guitars) before ending with bird and wind sounds.

What *Buoy* most simulates is that state of consciousness where sensations blurrily pulsate within a state of semi-consciousness and the usual lines of demarcation between activity within and without temporarily collapse; those gentle wave sounds, for example, might just as easily be seeping in through an open window as emerging within a fleeting memory trace. Don't expect, though, anything as conventional as a climactic resolution as *Buoy* maintains a consistently even dynamic throughout. Still, it's an unusual work that, in its own quietly subversive way, is provocative, even bold. **Ron Schepper**

Grundik & Slava

For Electronics and Birds
(Stateart)

Igor 'Grundik' Kasyansky and Slava Smelovsky are Russian Jews based in Israel, and have three previous releases on Israeli labels, but this is their first to have international distribution. It's perhaps a little surprising to discover that this album's title means what it says: the pretty ambient electronics produced by its creators do accompany sampled birdsong on many of the tracks. The album starts with pretty xylophone sounds and the occasional muted beats under birdsong, with synthesised sounds and occasional glitches adding to the mix. Things turn around on track three, where the wailing vocals of Victoria Hanna are added to the mix. For some listeners the ambient nature of the music will be too uneventful, but there are some gems if one's patient (such as the panned bells on 'Music Box'). Meanwhile, at the beginning of 'Pianka Do Golenia' one wonders if ambience has suddenly given way to cheesy background music, but the synthesised accordion and violin are fragmented in a bizarre and charming

way. It's hard to know what to make of this album, but in the end the beautiful passages outweigh the weird bits of burping farm animals. **Peter Hollo**

Norah Keyes

Songs To Cry By For The Golden Age of Nothing
(Dual Plover)

Norah Keyes is blessed with a fingers-down-the-chalkboard wail; a fragile, cackling cry that brings up connections with witches and the dark arts, as in full flight she sounds suspiciously like a wizened old hag who possibly communicates with evil spirits. Her songs are sparse and morose, primarily accompanied only by organ; they are flat, spooky, haunted-house folk songs with an edge. It all sounds like it was recorded a hundred years ago, possibly in a tomb. Her cover of Jimmy Rogers 'Old Pal', with its ghostly cries and Ms Keyes' off-kilter yodelling is particularly off-putting, whilst her incessant cackling and theatrical delivery on 'Small Apart' are enough to produce a form of nervous hysteria in the listener. A true eccentric, Norah Keyes' debut album is very very strange, even by Dual Plover's standards.

Bob Baker Fish

Rainstick Orchestra

The Floating Glass Key in the Sky
(Ninja Tune)

If it wasn't on Ninja Tune I would expect this title and artist to be a half-baked, new-age hippy concept album about how, like, all the answers are in the clouds. So much so that it sounds like a pisstake. But it is on Ninja. And they are from Japan. It's described as a delicate "systems music" that gives a nod to the minimalism of Cage and Reich' which is certainly true on 'Electric Counterpoint Fast'. There's a well-oaked maturity to this gently insistent album of instrumental, looping organic electronics. It has a very live feel, with piano and real-sounding drums and percussion, occasional flute, guitar fragments, violin. I am pretty sure most of it is sampled

but the programming and sounds are naturalistic so it's hard to tell sometimes. Electronic sounds are still present in keyboard melodies and pads and some occasional cousins of glitch. *The Floating Glass Key in the Sky* is harmless, modest and soothing without being fluffy or lightweight, something it has in common with Susumu Yokota's sweeter moments - but not as fractured. It even threatens to be cute at points, but while it may bat its eyelashes occasionally it never looks up with a pout. I'm no Yellow Magic Orchestra freak but I think I can hear the influence brought by one member of this duo who used to be in a YMO covers band. This gently seductive album is solid Sunday fare, whether that means comedown or not. A description just occurred to me... but does the world really need the phrase 'intelligent chill out'? No it doesn't, and Rainstick Orchestra are better than that implies.

Alex ollo

Savath & Savalas

Manana

(Warp/Inertia)

Word has it that the collaboration behind the wonderful Savath & Savalas - the production nous of Scott Herren (aka Prefuse 73) and the honey-like vocals of Eva Puyeuolo Muns - has ground to somewhat of a disharmonious halt. According to web-wide rumours, by the time the acclaimed *Apropa't* hit the shelves, the pair's working relationship was on the verge of disintegration. Luckily for us, they were able to bear one more musical offering: the heat-riddled Spanish folk-psychedelia of *Manana*. As with *Apropa't*, you can forget Herren's wider musical objectives, as the result of the Savath & Savalas collaboration couldn't be further from the hip-hop/funk freak-outs that inhabit his Prefuse persona. *Manana* exists, instead, in the realm of delicately-hushed vocals and beautifully-crafted, dreamlike loops and layers. 'Sota L'Aigua' and 'Dema Vindra' pulse with temperance and restraint, holding you at arms length. 'No Puedo

De Cidir' is a diversion of sorts, its Tortoise-like structural bass and percussion arrangements eventually breaking into beat-driven melody. But the record grows in emotive resonance, gaining ground with the dark denseness of 'Sense Pressa' and the genuinely beautiful finale, 'Equipatge De Flors Seques'. After its slow, suggestive start, *Manana* flowers into something quite beautiful. The overall result is a collection of mellow Spanish folk lullabies, informed by a distinctly modern and advanced production context - where densely layered rhythms and melodies drift and flow, and sumptuous vocals slink and climb and entwine. **Dan Rule**

Zane Trow

For Those Who Hear Actual Voices
(::Room40::)

Zane Trow's gorgeous work is quite mesmerizing in it's drifting tranquility. Recorded utilising echoes, delay, loops and live audio mulch via laptop, its execution is much closer to the Eno definition of 'ambient' than most of what receives the tag, consisting of almost formless washes of warmth that envelop a room, altering its mood almost imperceptibly. Queensland-based Trow however seems to approach this idea with a pop mentality, with relatively short three- or four-minute pieces that could easily be extended for fifty odd minutes without any complaints. Most are a series of gentle drones, with the development coming from internal narcotic pulses or restrained feedback, with the results warm, hypnotic and almost purifying on an incredible and quite meditative release. **Bob Baker Fish**



If nine pages ain't enough
there's a crazy amount
of reviews still to be read
at www.cyclicdefrost.com.



DVD REVIEWS

Funkstörung

Isolated

(K7/Creative Vibes)

Funkstörung's *Isolated: Funkstörung Triple Media* is a book/DVD combo that presents the results of a visual remix competition conducted by the group after the release of their album *Disconnected*. With 32 videos this is quite a collection – complete with high points that break new ground and a couple of not-so-successful points. Many contain a simple idea, like Pfadfinderei's amusing take on 'Play Pause', they range from the complex and involved to simple-to-the-point-of-boredom, from live action to CGI, and repeats of songs mean there's contrasting visual approaches to the same audio material. The first video – Zeitguised's interpretation of 'The Zoo' – uses some of the photos uploaded for a design remix project in the book that accompanies this DVD. But they serve as simple backgrounds for the most mind-boggling sequence of images: a 4WD morphs, deconstructs, dismantles and assembles itself at blinding speed before the back end of an old mini joins it. It would take me the whole review to describe the rest but let's just say it also involves mutating fluoro-orange lunar landers, airliners, ships and steam trains, all doing things you have never seen before, somehow creating a poetic coun-

terpoint to the music. And it's just as amazing on slo-mo. Elsewhere S. Pohlfepp and I Schmidt create an anti-video as the last piece, taking five-and-a-half minutes for a woman to turn 360 degrees. In most cases there is ample evidence of the advantages of working digitally when interpreting music through being able to interpret every tiny sound and rhythmic movement in perfect sync. As the DVD rolls on you start to realise that several videomakers have the same software and it may be shaping their ideas a little. From mere assemblies of 'cool stuff' to highly creative and inventive ideas, *Isolated* is a mixed bag but ultimately highly recommended.

Alex Crowfoot

Robin Fox

Backscatter

(Synaesthesia)

Perhaps one of the more truly different and cutting edge DVDs in recent times comes from Melbourne sound artist and laptop performer Robin Fox. Whilst Fox, a former percussionist, is known for aviator sunglasses and fractured synthetic manipulations of sound, often performing as a duo with local composer Anthony Pateras (Coagulate), his debut release takes his approach to a whole new level. Sending audio data as an electrical current into a Cathode Ray Oscilloscope (CRO), he creates real time visual representations of his sounds, with the images and sounds fed in together at the same time. Beginning with a luminous green dot in the centre of the screen, Fox's strange digital squeaks, rumbling and glitches trigger all manner of peculiar and mesmerising geometric shapes, squiggles and blotches, which can appear and change shape quite frenetically. The result is quite overwhelming, and also quite challenging, with no images of Fox himself, or context provided. In fact over the course of ten pieces the CRO manages to take on a hypnotic quality, the images and patterns on screen almost feeling like they are attached to a greater significance or

higher purpose. It also serves to demonstrate the diversity in Fox's approach to sound and structure, in that the terrain always feels like it's changing. Whilst Fox has been performing around town for years, a debut this bold and self-assured can't be experienced as anything but a bolt out of the blue. It's eccentric, and probably not all that commercial (though you'd think stoners would go nuts over this), yet it's also genius and to my knowledge completely unlike anything else you're ever likely to encounter.

Bob Baker Fish

Laibach

s/t

(Mute)

Film and video have long been used as complementary tools to compound the impact of Slovenian group Laibach's musical and theoretical statements. This is the first in a new Laibach DVD series on Mute Records (future releases are to include footage from their 1994/1995 'Occupied Europe NATO' tour, among others). Timed to coincide with the release of their 'Anthems' double-CD compilation of singles and remixes it features 13 videos, mostly promotional, as well as a documentary about their most recent full-length release *WAT*. The high point of the collection is opener 'Drzava', filmed in high-contrast black and white, from Laibach's 1986 collaboration with British avant-choreographer/dancer Michael Clark. We then follow the visual progression from early trademark images of Laibach's wholesome mountain Heimat – hearty hikes over rugged terrain and the ever-ubiquitous stags to accompany their Queen, Beatles and Rolling Stones cover versions – to the futuristic and the virtual for the group's more electronic and dance-oriented sounds in the early '90s – sleek, silver-painted working drones as cogs in a *Metropolis*-like factory in 'Wirtschaft ist tot' and a completely computer-generated world for the 'NATO' videos. Laibach's return to the totalitarian formula over the last three clips – marching boots and a rather ham-fisted shopping trip in full

military regalia (!) – suggests a creative drought, but the provocatively self-aggrandising historical recontextualisation of the group's output as predicting the fall of both Yugoslav unity and the Manhattan twin towers in the closing 47-minute short film raises hope that the tongue is still firmly in cheek. Or is it...?

Lars ollo

Berlin Digital

(Leiblingslied/Inertia)

For a long time I was fascinated by the reasons subcultures and art communities emerge in some places and not others, how their internal politics function, and the interaction between geography, circumstance and social networks. A lot of what happens in scenes disappears undocumented except through the recordings (CDs, 12"s) and temporary media (specialist magazines, radio shows), and so a lot of the social networks and politics remain invisible. *Berlin Digital* is a three-hour long insight into the Berlin electronic music scene presented through a series of twenty interviews with labels, artists and venues. Generally running with subtitles, the DVD captures, in their own language, the vitality of Berlin at the present time – a city that is inexpensive and a haven for electronic and digital artists. Although edited, each interviewee is presented with no commentary, telling their own story. Sit in a café with T.Raumschmiere and Apparat from Shitkatapult; enter the offices of Berlin's electronic music newspaper *De:bug*; visit Tresor and Oceanclub; or the record store/promotions department Dense; check out software developers Ableton and Native Instruments; or hang out with Berlin refugees Kevin Blechdom and Jamie Lidell; there are many options. Unable to be watched in one sitting, this release is best dipped into from time to time, but for every mundane moment there are plenty of fascinating insights to be had. Plus, there's a good record store primer for anyone travelling to Berlin.

Sebastian Chan

SLEEVE REVIEWS

with Alex Crowfoot



Inch-Time

Any Colour You Like

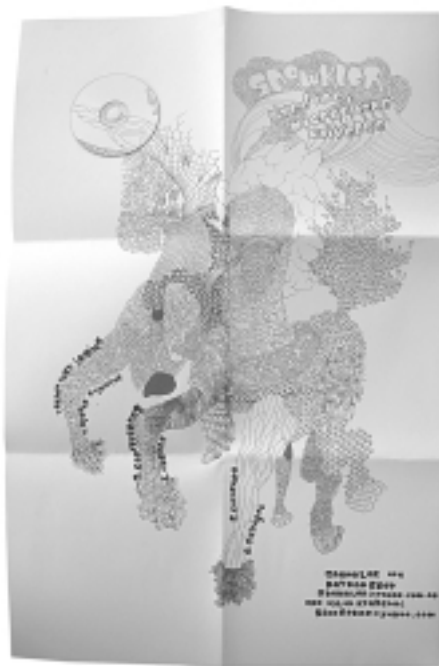
(Inch-time 2004)

Format: CD

Designer: Roy Ananda

Previous CDs from Inch-time have been miniature works of art in credit-card format, the art in question coming from Roy Ananda. For this conventional jewel-cased release Mr Ananda once again does the honours. Viewed in the context of today's frequent over-design, he has achieved a kind of organic minimalism. The cover is a woodblock print that folds out into a three-panel illustration of two naively drawn, silhouetted men carrying

a huge bundle of branches on their heads. It's not a style I would normally be drawn to but there is something about its straightforwardness that is very appealing. There is no relationship to graphic design trends, and that's refreshing too. With no type, it is all about simplicity and texture. White ink struggles to coat the thick parcel-brown card that holds it, leaving traces of a fine wood grain. It begs to be framed – it's signed and numbered on the back too. The track listing is printed on a separate card – I'm not sure how, but there's no 'plate-free ooh-ah the technology is amazing but the results underwhelming' nonsense going on here. Screen printing would be my guess. The inlay card uses the same process, again on light brown card, with the album title appearing in the spine. The CD simply houses an Inch-time logo – name plus a tree – and this also appears on the inlay card. The back is blank except for Stefan Panczak's initials and the edition number. It's in a limited edition of 100, so get your hands on one if you can, and listen to some of the most wonderful music coming out of this country at the moment. Check www.inchtime.com for details.



Snawklor

?

(Snawklor Records 2004)

Format: CD and illustrated book

Designer: Dylan M

This 16-page book features a three-colour screen printed cover on cream stock. The screen print gives it a wonderful tactile feel. In burgundy ink, a strange log-beast with a tree growing from its belly overlays a family of pink owl-like creatures. The inside cover reveals more owls in red. The remainder of the book is more intricate hand-drawn trippiness, in black print only. Some pages appear to be posters for Snawklor live events and others accompany particular tracks. The book is stitched together with cotton and the CD is held – just – on the last page with a foam dot which is also screen printed. It's hand-made nature is highly appealing and the illustrations show enough artistry to be compelling. There's an almost '60s feel to this piece and once again it's in a limited edition of 100 so hurry if you are interested (shinsound@yahoo.com).

Snawklor

Dived in a Microphone Universe

(Snawklor Records 2004)

Format: CD and illustrated poster

Designer: Dylan M

There aren't many records where you get artwork you can frame and this issue we have two (Inchtime being the other). Again a sixties psychedelic impression is made by this poster-as-CD-cover from Snawklor. This time Dylan's line work creates a beautiful galloping horse in a teal screen print, with a hand-lettered track listing hugging its legs. On second look it may be a unicorn, whose horn spears the CD which, like the book, is attached with a single foam dot. This would be my pick of the two releases. A great overall concept. It's really quite spectacular.



Mouse on Mars

Radical Connector

(Rogue 2004)

Format: CD

Designer: Frieda Luczak, Hartmut Welsch

I don't normally do this but after scaling sublime heights – such as with 1998's *Idiocracy* sleeve, for example – what were they thinking?! I thought the days of 'I've got a Photoshop plugin and I'm gonna use it' were long gone, but no. It recalls the days of vomit-inducing rave flyers where everything in sight had to be bevelled or solarised or ripped or twirled or



embossed or trace contoured or find edges-ised or extruded or texturised or chromed or all of the above and more. Multi-hued synthetic 3D type snakes around the sleeve looking generally ugly and cheap. Then it gets repeated on the inlay card *and* the CD. The images in the booklet are more promising but the typography is clunky, and obscures them. The type on the back cover, spine and CD is DIN but the type in the booklet isn't, so I wonder if something got lost in translation. But with a cover like that who cares? And now I am getting the guilts about being so very very rude so I'll say no more. It's only design, anyway. Great album though. Buy it! Buy it to atone my sins!



Funkstörung

Isolated

(K7 2004)

Format: DVD and hardback book

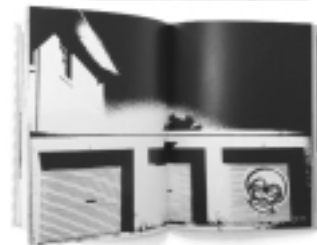
Designer: Hendrik

Hellige/Inkunstruction/Various

I'm just going to talk about the book and CD design, so check the DVD review page to read about the content. At first glance this book/DVD comes across as a directory of 'cool' graphics. So far so 'ho hum do we really need another one?' But it's much more than that. Photographs by Australian Mark McPherson were made available on the band's website, and designers and artists were invited to download and 'remix' any of these photos for the book – with a free book and inclusion of their contact details as payment if their work was accepted. They would also get, of course, 95 million Cool Points. There was quite a response because this hardcover book comes in at 150 pages. As a package it's really impressive; but the results are mixed. Some of the work is the expected union of photography and rainbow-hued vector graphics, some artists replacing parts of the photo with a solid area of colour, of which we've seen an awful lot in the last few years. A few pieces appear to have very little thought put into them, other than to make some eye candy: sexy babe plus graphic chaos, bits of buildings plus graphic chaos – nothing you'd return to for a second look.



But thankfully elsewhere there are some fine illustrators at work, some really fresh imagery, a bit of entertainment, and one or two pieces that even stimulate thought. I like the way Alex One populates a shot of a good old Aussie corner shop with a fantasy world of cartoon phreaks, but repeating the same figure on a motorbike three times lets it down. Peter Himpel's fractured figure in a corn field raises questions of identity in a technological world (how many websites, mailing lists, employers, and government agencies hold bits of information about you?). Yok goes lo-fi with some photocopying and heavy-lidded cartoon faces. Benjamin Jessop simply shreds the photo to create something of new beauty. Perhaps my favourite image is by Robert Kjettrup, who turns a typical ugly '70s apartment block into a sublime sculpture – shame it's not real. It's difficult to say who has and who hasn't taken 'Isolation' as a theme for their work. As for the book as a whole, the images are really well ordered. You can see the designer has tried to include white space, but with so much to include there's not enough to let the work really breathe. So it's best dipped into a few



pages at a time. A few pages of handwritten lyrics also offer some visual respite too. The final pages offer a one-per-page summary of the video work that's included on the disc, with a single still from each. The DVD is inserted into the back cover, so it can be seen through the plastic disc that protects it. Inkunstruction's cover design is continued here, the type using a slightly distressed Helvetica. But the real story is on the DVD and makes me wonder if video artists have the lead in interesting work.



Alex will be back with more design oddities in the next issue. Colour pictures, as well as a review of Coil's *ANS*, appear at www.cyclicdefrost.com.



SELECTS: BEC PATON

Interview with Bec Paton
by Matt Levinson

THIS ISSUE'S SELECTS COMES FROM SOMEWHERE BETWEEN CANBERRA AND SYDNEY, AND A BIT OF CHRISTMAS ISLAND TOO. BEC PATON IS ONE OF THE FEW DJS WHO CAN DO MORE THAN STRING TOGETHER AN HOUR'S WORTH OF GOOD TRACKS. SHE APPROACHES DJING LIKE A MUSICIAN APPROACHES AN INSTRUMENT, OR AN ARTIST WHOSE COLOURS ARE CAUGHT IN THE IRRESISTIBLE GROOVES OF HER RECORD COLLECTION. BASED IN CANBERRA UNTIL RECENTLY, HER STYLE CAUSED A STIR AT SYDNEY'S FRIGID AND NEWCASTLE'S THIS IS NOT ART FESTIVAL, AS WELL AS JUST ABOUT EVERY CANBERRA PARTY OF NOTE. SINCE GRADUATING IN GRAPHIC DESIGN — AND WINNING CANBERRA UNIVERSITY'S MOST CREATIVE DESIGNER AWARD — SHE'S MOVED TO SYDNEY TO PURSUE A CAREER. WHILE HOUSESITTING A NEWTOWN TERRACE, BEC RIFLED THROUGH RECORD CRATES AND TALKED UP SOME FAVOURITES.

Nine Inch Nails

Downward Spiral
(Nothing Records, 1994)

This is really primal, sexual music for me – it actually physically arouses me in some way. So maybe we won't put that one in, because that just makes me look like a tart! I can remember being in Year Nine when "Closer" came on the radio when I was in the bathroom. I was dirty dancing in front of the mirror, and it was probably one of the first times I actually felt like a woman. It still wells up a full-on animal emotion in me. I've gotta watch where I hear it. I still listen to it, but only with certain people!

Various Artists

Endlessnessism
(Dot, 1998)

I found this while nerding out at Gorman House Markets [in Canberra]. It is the musical equivalent of Chinese whispers or a relay race, where one track is taken as a starting point and it's remixed by each artist in succession until all of the artists have completed their tracks. It's quite cool seeing how an element is taken and the way it progresses through the album. It really does vary, which is kind of cool. You get a really beautiful understanding of how music is written just from hearing how these people have done this. It features artists such as Quant, Bedouin Ascent and The Bowling Green, and ranges from really slow trip-hop stuff to quite beautiful drum'n'bass.

Luke Vibert

YosePH
(Warp, 2003)

I hate the sound of the 303, but he's taken it somewhere else and it's just so bloody creative. You kind of get that aesthetic just because of the machines, but the way he puts sounds together and the ideas in that album are just brilliant. It had such an overwhelming effect of 'Oh my god, this is fucking brilliant' on me that it made my heart beat faster. 'Slow Faster' just bends my mind; I love it. He's basically shifting tempos: it's a fast, chaotic thing that you're hearing, but then all of a sudden your mind bends and it's this half-speed thing, but nothing's actually changed. It's some of the best music I've ever heard. Just pure love, love at first sight!

Pink Floyd

Dark Side of the Moon
(Capitol/EMI, 1973)

I grew up listening to this with my dad. We were living on Christmas Island and there wasn't any TV; we just had videos and this was one of them. Dad used to be a surfer and while listening to this he taught me about how he picked up on riding the waves, the signals of the waves and how he felt about surfing. I think that was a big album for him when he was surfing. So I have these full-on visuals of Dad and I surfing tidal waves every time I hear it. When I'm excited about what's happening in my life I'll have dreams where Dad and I are surfing to Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon*. It's pretty weird too, because even though Dad's now handicapped it doesn't affect these dreams, we can still surf tidal waves together.

7-Hurtz

Electroleum
(Output, 2003) and
Massive Attack

'Unfinished Sympathy' (from the album *Blue Lines*)
(Virgin Records, 1991)

What's it called when you hear music, you see stuff? Synaesthesia. I actually had a synaesthesia experience with this album. I first came across it when I heard the CD at Matt Levinson's apartment. I hunted it down straight away on the net. When I first got my beautiful white vinyl package I put it on and just lay on the ground and had a bit of a weep. Not because I was being a sappy bitch, just because I was struck by the beauty of it. I don't cry every time I hear it now, but my heart still wells up every time. Another one that'll make me cry is 'Unfinished Sympathy' by Massive Attack. That's a sure thing.

Jethro Tull

Thick as a Brick
(Chrysalis Records 1972)

Jethro Tull kind of sounds like psychedelic folk music, and this is a really kooky, joyful album that's full of storytelling. The head guy's a minstrel – he sings and plays the flute and he dances around like an elf. As a child growing up, it just captured our imaginations. We actually had a game called Jethro Tull, which was acting out these stories. We built a boat out of bark and finger-knitted string. The tree trunk was the mast of this boat and we made a pulley-system so that we could get lollies and other supplies up to the lookout, which was at the top of the tree.



'THERE'S NOTHING MORE FUN THAN BEING IN THE SHOWER AND BELTING OUT SHOW TUNES AT THE TOP OF YOUR VOICE...'

Mr Bungle

Disco Volanté
(Warner Brothers, 1995)

When I first heard this I thought I was listening to a child's nightmare. It's really creative music making, they've got coconuts on their feet while they're doing all this other stuff. It actually has disco elements in it, but crossed with people pulling teeth out of someone's head. It's pure madness and I love how chaotic it is. I like being a little bit frightened by it too – it's got that sinister dark side of human nature that is always fascinating. I love the roughness; it is an incredibly violent album and that's disturbing. I don't ever want to experience that first hand really, but at the same time it's fascinating to hear madness like that. It's almost like a fetish.

DJ Shadow

Entroducing
(MoWax, 1996)

Even though I think *Private Press* is a better album, *Entroducing* was the first time I heard abstract hip-hop beats. I was smoking pot at a mate's house in [Canberra suburb] Campbell and they chucked it on. I had to find out instantly what it was. Before that I was a total band snob, but it opened up a whole new world for me. It's one of those things you can listen to, hear all the layering, and let it sift across your brain on a number of levels. You can just capture the sentiment, or you can break apart all the sounds and get caught up in the textures. There are different levels and that was the first time I'd really heard that with electronic music.

Sergei Prokofiev (Australian Ballet Orchestra)
Romeo and Juliet
(1934)

I really love moving to music and communicating a story. It's a very primal thing, which is why people love to go dancing, because we are animals and it is something we have in our blood. And this music is so powerful and so rich. Prokofiev is a fairly modern kind of classical composer, so it's quite cerebral too. I was a ballet dancer, although I was more caught up in the art side than how high my leg was in the air. I actually know every single step from John Cranko's choreography of this piece. Even now, I could have a phrase in my head and I'll end up pirouetting down the supermarket aisle, much to my mother's disgust: 'Stop your bloody poncing!' she'll say.

Primus

Sailing the Seas of Cheese
(Atlantic, 1991)

I love the way Les Claypool plays the bass – it's really rhythmic – he plays real slap bass. A band that can make songs that sound that complete, are so charming and really great to dance to, just out of a bass and drums, is really impressive. I listen to this every couple of months because it reminds me of being a grungy girl in high school. It's such a cheeky, skanky album. I love that kind of personality, that's part of my personality! I'm like 'Yes! I'm going to skank around and be cheeky and make dodgy calls and that kind of thing.'

Frank Sinatra

Duets
(Capitol Records/EMI, 1993)

This is a shower deal. There's nothing more fun than being in the shower and belting out show tunes at the top of your voice... well salon tunes or whatever they are. When you move your feet in the shower you can actually make really good tap dancing noises. So you can tap dance along and sing, and I love it! I love it so much. I've got a pretty deep voice for a girl, so I can generally do most of the guys as well; I chorus the parts too, though it always comes back to Sinatra's duet with Bono on 'Under My Skin'. One time I was having a fantastic session in the shower and, thinking I was at home alone, came twirling out naked straight into my flatmate's brother's arms. I'm butt naked shrieking out this dance tune doing a spectacular twirl and he was so upset. His face went white; it must have been so confronting!

DEAR DEGRASSI: A LIFE REMEMBERED

Article by Carmel Toh

GOT AN ITCHING NEED TO KNOW WHAT BECAME OF AN OBSCURE ACTOR YOU ONCE SAW FIFTEEN YEARS AGO ON TELEVISION AND HAVE HARBOURED A CRUSH ON EVER SINCE? DEGRASSI HAS ALWAYS HAD THE ANSWERS. NOW, PREPARE TO SAY GOODBYE TO YOUR DIET OF EIGHTIES TRIVIA, AS SHE CALLS IT A DAY. BUT NOT BEFORE WE REDISCOVER THE HIGHS, THE LOWS — AND THE BIZARRE IN BETWEEN — OF HER ILLUSTRIOUS CAREER.

There once was a time when soap actors, child stars or eighties rappers with criminal convictions could quietly retire to booze, bulimia or bankruptcy. But all that changed with the advent of 'A.D.', or 'After Degrassi'. With about twenty columns under her belt, Degrassi's writing has graced the pages of *Cyclic Defrost* since its pre-teen, photocopied zine days. Referencing important cultural milestones and figures as diverse as Ronald Reagan's 'Just Say No' anti-drugs campaign, *The A-Team*, *Miami Vice*, David Hasslehoff, *21 Jump Street*, Guru Josh, *Solid Gold* and *Fame*, Degrassi's lengthy analyses were a result of a somewhat abnormal and long-festering admiration for all manner of screen dreams, wayward teens and drug-abused schemes.

But that era of hedonism is now over. While her self-confessed purpose in life is 'to impart her vast (and relatively useless) knowledge of bygone pop culture', Degrassi has decided to hang up her party cap. 'Cos she's found a new drug on which to get high: detox. Yes, that's right: no longer an angry writer who avidly mines our cultural past, her new mistress is called Mother Nature, as she soaks up only the good things in life.

The catalyst to her change in career came in the form of a disturbing dream fuelled by a powerful detox she was undergoing. It involved her coming to terms with the pathos of Corey Feldman, and a 'sudden attack of conscience': 'I found myself watching a documentary about Corey Feldman and I learnt of how he had to emancipate himself from his parents because they squandered all the millions he made, to the point where he only had \$40K left and was sleeping on his dad's couch in some dodgy LA apartment. And then his father took him to court and sued him for his last \$40K because he said that he'd put

his own business interests on hold to manage Corey's career and now he wanted compensation for the time he'd devoted to it. Then a friend told me they saw an ad on a wall for a bar in some American city that was advertising 99c Buffalo Wings and The Corey Feldman Band... It just made me so sad that I decided I just couldn't go on doing what I was doing, which was essentially deriving entertainment from these poor people's lives... It was unbalancing my chakras too much.'

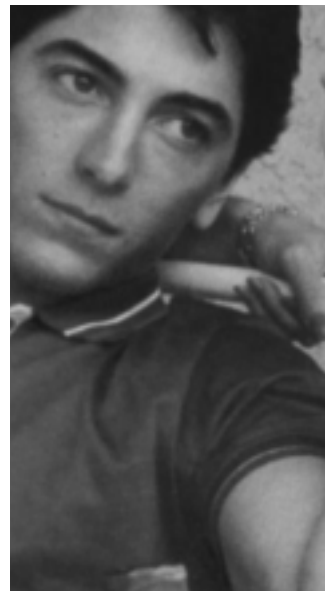
As a vital part of our cultural heritage, Degrassi's retirement won't go unnoticed — she's actually next in line to be immortalised in bronze and placed on the Queen Victoria Building forecourt with a talking dog voiced by John Laws to broadcast her prized opinions. So now it's her turn to go under the spotlight, as I pick over the very best, and bizarrest, moments of her six-year career.

THE GOOD:

Scott Baio (October 2002):

One of Degrassi's more brilliant moments occurred when she proudly proclaimed: 'Scott Baio is a washed-up has-been and worthy figure of fun.' Well said.

From his years as Chachi on *Happy Days*, to his appearance in the rare 1979 roller-disco flick *Skatetown, USA*, Degrassi paints a colourful picture of this now-vanished boy wonder: '[Scott] made three educational sex videos under the working title: *The Facts, Feelings and Wonder of Life*. As the website cautions, "Don't let your children learn the Facts of Life on the street. Today it's just too dangerous!" That's right, you need someone with the qualifications and empathy of Scott Baio to tell your kids what's right and what's... dirty! Kids of today never



Scott lost in thoughts of cleavage

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An all time high for Dana's career in film

had it so good!' More importantly, in this seminal piece of writing, Degrassi points out the uncanny parallels between the lives of Scott Baio and Motley Crüe rocker Tommy Lee: 'What do Scott Baio and Tommy Lee have in common? If you answered Heather Locklear, you'd only be half right. The correct answer would also have to include: Pamela Anderson! Yes sirree, Baio has also been lost in the cleavage of a VIP, and he got pretty serious about it too, asking Pammy to tie the knot. I don't know why, but the union never went ahead, and leaves us pondering, 'What on earth does Scott Baio do to women that causes them to marry Tommy Lee?'

SPUNKS OF THE MONTH:

While the short-lived 'Spunk of the Month' sections in the Dear Degrassi column (Aug to Dec 1999) brought to light some little-known but luscious actors such as Anson Williams (Potsie from *Happy Days*) and Christopher Atkins (*Blue Lagoon*), baby-faced Corey Feldman has to take the cake as the pin-up boy of the month. But, as Degrassi tells it, life wasn't always so peachy for this teen heart throb: 'Corey had his own little coke snorting entourage that consisted of Ricky Schroeder, Alfonso Ribero and Corey Haim. Feldman could see that they were beginning to get out of control, so he prescribed them all the 'Marijuana Maintenance Diet', which worked for only a few weeks... Corey found

love with a stripper/actress/Playboy model who cheated on him with Charlie Sheen. To dull that pain, Corey started using heroin. By this stage, movie offers had pretty much dried up... After a near-fatal car accident, Corey booked himself in for rehab, but was back on heroin after only three days. He was arrested twice for possession and once for attempted break and enter, and was sentenced to more rehab, which he again failed. In 1994 however, he had an impromptu moment of clarity, booked himself into rehab and successfully completed it. He has been attending NA meetings ever since.'

And then, there's THE BAD:

Prisoner (May 1999):

The Degrassi pages have always been strewn with badass bratpack drug fiends, but the baddest characters on the Degrassi small screen are from the Australian TV series *Prisoner*, a drama about the lives of female inmates. *Prisoner* screened from 1979 to 1986, and was so popular it became a cult show in countries as distant as Germany. As Degrassi reminisces, 'As a small child I had something of a complex that led me to believe that I would one day end up in jail. The more I watched the show, the more I wanted to wind up in jail – those women could get away with almost anything, including the most criminal of haircuts, uniform modifications and Australian stereotypes!... The Freak [Maggie Kirkpatrick] was to *Prisoner* what Brenda was to *90210*! She terrorised the women as the fearsome warden who interpreted the prison rules as she saw fit.'

Dana Plato (June 1999):

From fictional baddies to real-life celebrity crims (and we're not talking Winona), Degrassi visits some familiar ground: that of the child-star-turned-druggie-tragedy. In the wake of the death Dana Plato, who played Kimberley Drummond in *Diff'rent Strokes*, Degrassi pays tribute to one of her favourite kiddie-celeb-turned-wayward citizens: 'May 8th was a dark day for many people, including me, when it was revealed that Dana Plato had died of what was at first thought to be an accidental drug overdose. We would all remember her as Kimberley Drummond, the rich, adoptive, white sister of Arnold and Willis in *Diff'rent Strokes*, which she starred in from 1978

to 1984. Dana was written out of the show when she was 18 after falling pregnant with her son Tyler (now 14).

'Dana's was not a happy life. She struggled for years with alcoholism and addiction to pain killers, which landed her a total of ten years probation, one month in jail and possibly sex with Vegas showman Wayne Newton. Dana performed possibly the most famous petty crime of all time, robbing a Las Vegas video store for a total of \$164 because she could not pay her rent. A year later she spent a month at the state's expense for forging Valium prescriptions.

'[Her fiancé/manager Robert Menchaca organised] an on-air interview for Dana on the Howard Stern radio show so that she could formally respond to allegations made by a former flatmate. She bravely faced being called an "ex-druggie, ex-con lesbian with mental health problems", but was reduced to tears when two fans rang up to support her... This was all too much for Dana who took a fatal dose of painkillers and muscle relaxants... the following day. She was found by her fiancé in their mobile home, which was parked out the front of his parents' house.' Never a simple tale of depression and suicide, Degrassi remains convinced it's a conspiracy: 'I believe her fiancé was taking advantage of the poor woman and trying to cash in on her any way he could... He is believed to have taken photographs of Dana while she was snoring. It was revealed later that this sound was actually her lungs filling up with fluid. That's just plain creepy. He has also attempted to contest her will, which left the mobile home to her son Tyler.'

The mind boggles. Why did her lungs fill with fluid? What's Tyler doing now? And how, in all hell, did Degrassi find out about these outlandish events?

So there you have it, folks – the crème de la crème of the champagne of agony aunts (and it's been no slim pickings).

And if Degrassi had one last word of advice? 'Remember – television is your Friend!'



To relive the glory days of 'Dear Degrassi' go online to www.cyclicdefrost.com.

NB. Our very own Degrassi can't really claim full rights to her name (international copyright laws notwithstanding) till she's seen *Degrassi: The Next Generation* (2001). If there's anyone out there with a copy of the *Degrassi High* movie, and who wouldn't mind lending it for a viewing, please email me at agent99@tokyo.com. I promise to keep your precious video as close to my heart as Joey Jeremiah kept his hat to his balls during his naked walk through the school canteen.

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