



SQUAREPUSHER

HELLO EVERYTHING



THIS ALBUM CELEBRATES TOM JENKINSON'S (AKA SQUAREPUSHER) FIRST DECADE AS A PIONEERING MUSICIAN.

His music still skips freely across two-step, hardcore, rave, jungle, jazz fusion, funk, contemporary classical and more. But at its heart is non – conformity, a desire to stimulate and challenge the listener.

'...The most interesting and most enjoyable Squarepusher album in a long time...' Cyclic Defrost Magazine

AS THE COVER SUGGESTS – TOM PLAYS EVERYTHING!



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ISSUE 15 CONTENTS

- 4 BIM RICKETSON**
by Alec Crowfoot
- 8 DEEPCCHILD**
by Chris Downton
- 11 WINDUPTOYS**
by Dan Rule
- 14 POST**
by Simon Hampson
- 16 ASTRONOMY CLASS**
by Bec Paton
- 18 LISMORE DUBSTEP**
by Matthew Levinson
- 20 MATT WARREN**
by Scot Cotterell
- 21 RUNE GRAMMOFON**
by Oliver Laing
- 26 KID KOALA**
by Tim Colman
- 28 NICO MUHLY**
by Angela Stengel
- 31 MUSIC REVIEWS**
- 41 THE BIG CHILL**
by Ali Burge
- 43 SLEEVE REVIEWS**
- 45 SELECTS: SHANNON O'NEILL**

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to issue 15 - in full colour! The cover this time comes direct from Qatar in the Middle East - hence the title on the back. Bim Ricketson, our new art director is behind the lens and talks about his experiences in dusty and hot, fossil fuel rich Qatar whilst laying out the issue. This issue also features interviews with Sydney's Deepchild and Astronomy Class, Melbourne's Post and Winduptoys, Hobart's Matt Warren, Rebel MP from Lismore, and Shannon O'Neill guides us through his formative record experiences. On the international front we speak to Kid Koala, Nico Muhly and Rune Kristoffersen from Norwegian independent label Rune Grammofon. We have had to cut a stack of album reviews from this issue and those that missed out can be found on online.

If you haven't noticed, Cyclic Defrost has been running a small 'music club' a bit like a book club for the past 18 months. The music club is another extension of the magazine and aims to expose interested people to new music. To this end readers can subscribe to a 3 or 6 CD mail out and we will select music to send to you over a short period. If you can make it to Sydney then we also have a an occasional live performance and 'meet the artist' dinner. In the last year we have had live sets and discussions with Keith Fullerton Whitman, Deadbeat and Burnt Friedman, and some serious 'book club' style discussions. If this sounds like your thing check it out at www.cyclicdefrost.com/club and get in touch.

Since the last issue we welcome on board a new sub-editor, Chris Downton, as well as host of new contributors. If you dig what you are reading and think you'd like to contribute by writing for us then make contact.

Otherwise, enjoy the issue and consider making a donation (see page 47!)

Sebastian Chan & Matthew Levinson
Editors

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Australian Government



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Cover designer: Bim Ricketson

Interview by Alex Crowfoot

EAST WESTERNER

DESIGNER BIM RICKETSON WEARS SO MANY HATS HE COULD START A SHOP - FILM DIRECTOR, ANIMATOR, EXHIBITION DESIGNER, PACKAGING AND GRAPHIC DESIGNER AND - SINCE BEING COMMISSIONED TO CREATE THIS ISSUE'S COVER - CYCLIC DEFROST ART DIRECTOR. CURRENTLY EMBEDDED IN QATAR WORKING ON THE ASIAN GAMES, HE FILES THIS LONG-DISTANCE REPORT FROM THE WORLD OF SPARKLY 'I HEART SAUDI' STICKERS AND ARTIFICIAL REEFS MADE FROM TOILETS.



Bim's subject matter for the cover, commissioned before he became Cyclic's Art Director, is one that seems particularly popular for an Australian magazine - water.

"On the back is a series of photographs of the backs of water trucks and the type is a handwritten Arabic translation of the English," explains Ricketson. "The front is a collection of photos showing my 'graffiti' around Qatar, of the magazine cover text, written in water on dusty objects. I am living and working in Qatar at the moment, where it's extremely hot and dusty, water is a major concern and there is an abundance of fuel guzzling vehicles. I wanted to incorporate all of this into a concept related to the title of the mag, and stay away from the design tools I usually work in. These water trucks are the main source of drinking water for the country and you can't go anywhere without seeing them.

"I'm also a graffiti tragic, and I don't have the balls to do it myself, especially here, but the back cover shows a non-permanent version, so I get the thrill and the photo without the risk," he continues. "My intention was to spell out all the type of the cover on dusty windshields of abandoned vehicles (there are lots), but after a few weeks I ran out of time and couldn't

complete the set. I also got a bit freaked on a lone highway where I was 'tagging' cars and a car full of locals stopped and cursed me. I don't know what the punishment is for graffiti in this country, and I'm glad I didn't find out.

"Getting all the shots has probably been the highlight of my time here - I head out with my backpack, water and a paintbrush and wander around the streets taking photos and looking for abandoned vehicles, coming across all sorts of interesting stuff I would not have otherwise seen. To me the cover is a true reflection of design and culture here - it's design done by non-designers, with a loose set of rules, and whatever comes out is acceptable. This is not one of the countries in the region which holds onto its past with great vigour, and is in a state of rapid development. Some of it is just as 'wobbly' as the painting on the trucks."

The concept has taken several left turns during its development, however.

"The idea for the cover has been a long time germinating and taken all sorts of directions. I'm really into randomness in design, in the Dada style of 'cut a bunch of words out of the newspaper, put them different pockets of your clothes, then pull them out at random and you've got a poem' type thing. I like accidents



“I DON’T KNOW WHAT THE PUNISHMENT IS FOR GRAFFITI IN THIS COUNTRY, AND I’M GLAD I DIDN’T FIND OUT”

and being able to see the working behind the art. A lot of what I work on in design has to be very precise and accurate, so breaking out of this is a great relief and something I seek more and more now. I’m also very interested in film, so I wanted to make a cover that involved film in some way. I was hoping that I could have the cover as stills from a film that you could then jump on to the Cyclic site and watch in its entirety.”

“The other major angle I had wanted to incorporate, and this is fairly obvious given the title of this dear mag, is ice. My girlfriend has drawn a lot of inspiration from Andy Goldsworthy in her set design lately and I’ve become fascinated by his work. He’s an English environmental artist who makes sculptures/installations in nature from leaves, stones, twigs or ice etc. He often has photographs of the degeneration of his work, showing nature ‘reclaiming’ his creations. From these three ideas my concept was to go down to my Dad’s farm, create the letters that make up the title of the magazine and film their melting. I would do something interesting with time lapse and use stills from the film for the cover.”

“I moved to Qatar for work before I could execute this, and it’s developed further. In a practical sense, not having a video camera with me means it will be a series of photos rather than a film. And with the limited resources I have at my disposal I’m finding it quite difficult to create the ice ‘letters’ that I want.

Conceptually it has also started to become loaded with new meaning; as I mentioned, water is something at the front of your mind all the time in a place like this. It’s one of the hottest, driest countries in the world, you can easily suffer heat exhaustion after just a short time outside without water and everything is covered in a fine layer of dust. And on the one or two occasions in a year that it does rain, every roof leaks (no gutters) and every road floods (no drainage). It’s madness, the country is built for sun, not rain, and certainly not ice.

“The ice idea became water when I found I couldn’t get the ice out the door for more than a minute before it melted. And the canvas became anything interesting that was covered in dust, which is anything that’s been outside for a few hours.

“So there you have it – a series of photographs of water trucks and the letters of the magazine written in dust all the way from Doha, Qatar.”

Ricketson’s work across several disciplines had its genesis in his early training.

“I graduated from industrial design in 1999. I started the course as a sneaky way to move across to graphic design. But I loved industrial design and stayed on. You get a pretty good grounding in all sorts of design areas, so I’m glad I did stick with it. I moved to Perth just after graduating; having a wider range of skills was helpful in a small city. My first design job there was as a junior interior designer, and most of my other work was as

a graphic designer. In Sydney I worked as a toy and packaging designer, then as an exhibition designer for two years until I went freelance last year.

“Freelance is great because you have the freedom to take up the interesting opportunities that arise, like animation, this gig in Qatar, or using the downtime for personal projects. I’ve also taken over the directing mantle of the Reelife Short Film Festival for young Australian film makers with something to say about the issues that affect them. Promoting our local young talent is a huge thrill. Especially when our grand prize winner this year was a 15 year-old from Canberra!”

The variety in Ricketson’s work comes from being open to opportunity, he says, but this can also have its down side. “It’s a blessing and a curse – being able to turn your hand at lots of different things means you’re available for lots of work. Not being dedicated to one area probably means clients can’t pin you down in their mind as being the guy to go to for a particular task. I find working on 3D spaces more interesting than straight graphic design because you’ve got the added element of space. You might also be able consider lighting, sound and movement. Write and direct a film and you get all of those things, plus actors, a story, editing and most importantly, a strong emotional response. So film is where it’s at for me. It’s like design cubed. And I’m just a beginner, so I look forward to everything there is to learn about film making.



“VISUALLY THIS PLACE IS MORE EXCITING THAN ANYWHERE ELSE I’VE BEEN; THINGS ARE OFTEN APPROACHED FROM A DIRECTION I AM COMPLETELY UNFAMILIAR WITH”

“Much of my family are involved in film, but I didn’t want to head in that direction, probably just to buck the trend. A few years ago it dawned on a friend and I that we had everything around us to make a film and that we’d be mad not to. I wrote a little script and directed, she produced, and between our friends we got actors, editors, musicians, technicians and got it done. That film, *First Date*, played at a few festivals. It won some cash, which set us up for our next one – another short, shot on film, with a lot more ‘design’ and post production. It got into more festivals, including Montreal and Finland. The AFC funded me to attend the festival in Finland. It was pretty funny to fly all that way to see a four-minute film screened twice!”

“The transition to film presents a different perspective and a new set of challenges, although some design skills have turned out to be useful,” Ricketson explains.

“I tend to look at film as a breakdown of moments or tableaux, like a sketch or a render, which may or may not be a good thing. My design experience with building

crews and working with clients helps with the running of the film production and getting the look I want.

Working with actors is the area that is least like design and the hardest for a person used to working in visuals – you can’t design a performance, you actually have to communicate with a real person, and make them trust you enough to open up and bring their experience out for the camera. Tough, but exciting.”

For the moment however, film work is on hold. “When the opportunity came up to move to Qatar I jumped at the chance. It’s a part of the world you never expect to end up living in. But not just that, the project is fascinating from a design perspective. And with the scale of the project (read budget!) and the willingness of the minds behind it to push the envelope, there are all sorts of mind-boggling things being attempted that have never been done before. It’s all very exciting. For the months I was working on this in Sydney, I was Closing Ceremony Associate Designer. I was working with an amazing theatre and opera designer, Gabriela Tylesova turning her sketches into the first semblance of working drawings – how these elements might actually be built, lit, flown, set on fire, transported, painted, upholstered, danced on, projected on etc. Here in Doha I am one of four CAD designers, so I am mostly doing workshop drawings of the props and scenery elements, often the same things I sketched out months ago in Sydney.”

“I have just had my contract extended right up to the end of the Games, at which point I will have been living here for five and half months. Other than the work, I stayed because I enjoy living here – I find the country baffling, beautiful, exotic, mad.”

Part of its baffling nature comes from an off-kilter population demographic, says Ricketson. “Actual Qataris

are a small minority, the majority being guest workers, mostly South Asian men. Wikipedia tells me ‘Because the expatriates are overwhelmingly male, Qatar has the most heavily skewed sex ratio in the world, with 1.88 males per female!’ Apart from Westerners, you meet Iranians, Palestinians, Lebanese, Sudanese and so on from this region. Other than workmates, I mostly meet guest workers in the service industry – Filipino bus drivers, Nepalese doormen, Indian cab drivers, Bangladeshi chefs. I can think of only one Qatari that I have met – in the supermarket. The other problem is the climate. Everyone is inside. It’s so hot that you never walk anywhere. Running into someone on the street is unlikely. My position at work is not one that involves any interaction with locals. In fact, I think very few Qataris need to work at all. From my understanding, they pay no taxes, nor water or power bills, get free education and healthcare for life, and a generous yearly allowance from the Emir, as well as ownership of businesses run by guest workers. And yes, there is some irony in the Ceremonies showcasing Qatari culture and industry to the world when they are run almost entirely by ex-patriots.”

“Like everything else in Qatar, the beach culture

Previous page: photographs from Qatar. **This page from top left:** stills from *Live To Give* short film; stills from *Explode Magazine* TVC; *Reelife* Film Festival flyer



presents a striking contrast to an east coast Australian. A lovely little town just south of the city called Al Wakra has a nice sand beach and lagoon. It's a working fishing town, with ancient little mud mosques and a nice park just back from the beach. The Friday afternoon when I was there, the scene was somewhat different from home – a game of soccer being played by Asian men on their one afternoon off; five or six boys kneeling on the sand praying; a quad bike doing donuts; a couple of families paddling in the water, with the mothers sweating in their black head-to-toe abayas at the shore. There's also a seaside 'resort' called Sea Line, which is a popular weekend destination, with camel rides on the beach and an abundance of leopard print g-strings. There's also an artificial diving reef but, hilariously, it's made up of thousands of ceramic toilets, car, bike and boat chassis's, and so forth."

Local culture is surprising low-key, says Ricketson. "There's not much street life (due to the heat), there's little in the way of theatre and the arts, and very few museums. But it's all changing, they're building plenty of stuff now, like a large Islamic art and craft museum, designed by I. M. Pei, an impressive new library of Islamic literature and so on. One sort of 'clash' is the difference between the behaviour of the locals 'indoors' and in public. Most local women dress in head to toe black abaya when outdoors, but at home, or away from the public eye, they wear whatever they want. A stage manager friend here described a rehearsal with about 100 local women where they all removed their abayas to reveal midriff tops, bejeweled high heels and mini skirts!"

Ultimately, however, the lack of much visible tradition creates a fascinating alternative cultural space. "Visually

this place is more exciting than anywhere else I've been; things are often approached from a direction I am completely unfamiliar with," says Ricketson. "The most invigorating 'design experience' I have had in years is just walking around the suburb that I live in. The buildings are brutally free of ornament, a mix of 'modern', Arabic and Western, often painted stark white or crazy colours, and almost unreal in the bright sunlight. Islamic pattern details on fences, walls and gates. Persian feral cats sleeping on top of shiny Hummers. TV aerials fashioned into Eiffel Towers. And I've started a collection of funny translations. Personal favourites include: 'computer and rolex juices'; 'crashed garlic'; 'homos with meet'; 'viagra sandwiches'; and the explosive 'pomegrenade' juice! The Make Me A Virgin Again ointments and soaps are everyone's favourite send home souvenir."

"There are a lot of roundabouts in Doha and they are used as stages for some very interesting public art. There's Giant Clam Roundabout, Rubble Roundabout, Picnic Roundabout, Bird Flu Roundabout, Slope Roundabout (yes, this is what it's actually labeled as on the map). The TV is a good source of entertainment, but not in the usual sense. Most mail is 'censored' for profane material, yet there are about 30 phone sex TV stations, beamed in from Europe. A country that won't allow in Jews and confiscates Bibles at the border has a dozen US evangelical Christian stations, including my favourite JesusVeg TV, the vegetarian Christian channel. Love scenes are censored in films, often with hilarious results – they don't just cut the scene out, they'll fill the space with random footage from elsewhere in the film. Watching the English version of the Saudi news gives a unique perspective on the world. Many film clips of men with falcons."

With less than a million people, and most of them expats, a thriving music culture is also hard to find, says Ricketson. "The normal places you might see new bands and music are licensed premises like pubs and bars. I have had one fantastic musical experience. A favourite pastime of the Qatari is to go dune bashing in the desert nearby. A bunch of us from work went with a tour company in hotted up 4WDs with enormous sand tires. Our young Palestinian driver had a serious sound system in his vehicle and drove like a maniac. He played his own mix of contemporary Arabic and mainstream US hip-hop/RnB, which I normally wouldn't get into, but when played side by side with good Arabic tunes it rocked. Being scared shitless racing down five storey high sand dunes with excellent Arabic pop giving you ear bleeds was a total sensory experience that will stick with me for a long time. There was a 'rave' a few weeks ago too, at one of the big swish hotels. Some awful DJs claiming to be 'direct from the UK' entertained the crowd with fresh tunes from Black Box and Technotronic."

Being immersed in another culture has brought some personal surprises, however.

"I've turned into someone who enjoys shopping, which I normally loathe! Any little shop is stacked with dirt cheap gems that I can't stop buying. Who wouldn't want a sparkly I Heart Saudi sticker? Or a collection of postcards depicting Bollywood stars from the 1980s? An Arabic Scrabble set and Abaya Barbie? I have even got a growing collection of Arabic utility stickers – No Smoking, Arabic Speaking, Beware of the Dog, just because they look so damn cool. I don't know how I'm going to get it all home..."

Deepchild

Interview with Rick Bull

by Chris Downton

DANCEFLOOR DEEPNESS

SYDNEY-BASED (AT LEAST FOR NOW) PRODUCER RICK BULL (AKA DEEPCCHILD) IS SOMEONE LIKELY TO NEED LITTLE INTRODUCTION TO AUSTRALIAN CYCLIC READERS, HAVING MAINTAINED A DISTINCTIVE AND STEADY PRESENCE AMONGST THIS COUNTRY'S DOWNBEAT / DUB AND DANCE SCENES OVER THE LAST SIX YEARS.

Since the release of Bull's debut Deepchild album *Hymns From Babylon* back in 2000, distinct trends of development and change have been evident in his music, which has progressively shifted from the digi-dub atmospheres of his early Clan Analogue-affiliated releases towards a more dancefloor-oriented incarnation increasingly incorporating guest vocals and a distinct move upwards in BPM.

While the incorporation of pronounced house and soul influences evident in 2003's third Deepchild album *What's Going Wrong* received a mixed response from some quarters at the time of its release, it was perhaps most importantly a record that showed Bull following his internal creative compass, rather than paying attention to what fans and critics expected of him. In many ways however, viewed from a retrospective vantage point, *What's Going Wrong* feels perhaps now like a transition point that had to broken through before he could undergo the further considerable stylistic shifts characteristic of his latest fourth album, the recently released *Lifetime* – arguably his strongest effort yet. It's also conversely an album that couldn't have happened in the absence of the significant changes both creative and personal that have recently taken place in Bull's life – the influence of time spent in

Europe amongst peers such as Luomo and Akufen being particularly apparent. With a new album on a new label, in this case the Sydney-based Future Classic and potential relocation to Europe on the cards in the not-too distant future, it seemed like a perfect time to talk to Rick about all the change he's experienced recently.

One thing I'm particularly keen to ask him about is the particular appeal that draws him towards Europe and whether he really is planning to relocate there permanently. "At the moment, I'm in Berlin every year over (their) summer, but long-term I do indeed intend on settling down there, at least for a year or two," he replies, adding that; "I'm spending a lot of time particularly in Berlin. I like the fact that it's a culture constantly in a state of flux – the best and the worst of change. It doesn't pretend to be a place that it's not, because the scars of history and barbs of capitalism still stick out from street corners... it's an intellectually rich place that also has the dubious honours of being one of history's most derided political failures. Paradoxically, it's Germany's awareness of 'failure' that is its greatest strength."

I'm also keen to hear about Rick's experiences in terms of touring and performing in Europe, and suggest that his current link up with Get Physical / Playkula (the agency behind current

dance big names M.A.N.D.Y. and Booka Shade) certainly represents a more club-based focus than he's perhaps enjoyed previously in Australia. His response is one that's particularly revealing of his own perception of his current position within the Australian electronic / dance scene.

"The whole Get Physical connection is a really good example of the club divide between here and Europe. I mean, acts like Booka Shade are still on the fringes of popular dance culture here, yet are clearly the hipsters of the electro-dance scene across Europe at the moment. Here, I often feel like I'm a niche act that lies on a somewhat 'risky' faultline for promoters. I'm interested in risking failure as well as success in a performance sense. I found playing in Europe, there's more of a sense that risks are what make things more exciting... even going somewhere like Weekend club in Berlin and hearing Jurgen from Jazzanova go from hiphop to house to techno in three tracks was wonderful – you got the sense that he was doing this because his selections were important to him, not because he was trying to adhere to secondary restrictions of tempo or style."

While I don't doubt that Europe is certainly able to sustain many more divergent musical scenes simply perhaps through sheer population density, I wonder to a certain extent whether this

“FOR SEVERAL YEARS NOW I’VE BEEN INTENTLY FOCUSED ON MOVING MUSIC FROM AN ‘INTERNAL / CEREBRAL’ EXPERIENCE TO A SHARED / POPULAR ONE. I’VE REALLY FOUND THAT FOCUSING ON INTERNAL SPACE IS COUNTERPRODUCTIVE TO LIVING A LIFE THAT’S HELPFUL TO OTHERS – OR MAKING NON-SHIT MUSIC!”

acceptance is at least partly due to the increased ‘club friendliness’ of more recent Deepchild material. ‘Yes, I’d say that I’ve met things at somewhat of a halfway point,’ Rick responds. “My production tastes and realms of exploration continue to change subtly – for several years now I’ve been intently focused on moving music from an ‘internal / cerebral’ experience to a shared / popular one. I’ve really found that focusing on internal space is counterproductive to living a life that’s helpful to others – or making non-shit music! Despite what others might say, you can’t ‘dance on the inside’ to music. You just can’t. One of the joys of exercise / dancing / sex is that it intentionally subverts your rationalisation of the experience. In our culture, that’s a pretty neglected part of culture.”

Rick goes on to argue that, “I’ve found in Australia, a didactic and ridiculous polarity exists between notions of ‘underground’ and ‘overground’ or old / new school – these are false histories. Non-concepts. I’m drawn to places like Berlin because I feel a little more room and support to mess around with musical forms, and because there exists an undercurrent of ‘club culture’ that is interested in club experience as an evolving story. In Australia, I find that it’s often more a case of ‘what’s hip?’ than ‘what’s good, what’s challenging. More minimal music is also a little alien to our climate, whereas in Europe it’s an extension of the urban experience,” he concedes.

On that particular note, I’m curious to find out whether Rick has experienced any overarching differences in regards to social attitudes towards creative output and artistic exploration whilst working in both Europe and Australia. “I’ve felt that there’s a lot less hype about being an artist of any kind. It’s a more acceptable vocation in general, which makes for an environment that’s a lot more ‘straight up’ about artistic critique and progress. I feel a sense that my art grows in Europe, because there is a little less focus placed on the cult of celebrity, and a

more critical attitude towards art itself. This makes for more considered work, and a general attitude that’s more interested in ‘good electronic art’ as opposed to celebrity status. Of course, this is also a real generalisation,” he adds. “In Australia, there’s still the sense that artists need to adhere to some romanticised vocational vision – preferably poor or possessing some kind of addiction. We like to keep our ‘talent’ under control here, for the purpose of some sort of ‘safe’ vicarious experience. In Europe, I didn’t find (people had) so much time for this type of attitude. Art less as a luxury and more as a part of life.”

Several times when I’ve chatted to Rick informally at live shows and interviewed him, he’s been more than forthcoming about his love of hip-hop, particularly West Coast g-funk and crunk, and I’m curious to find out whether the US holds any of the same appeal for him as Europe, in terms of creative opportunities. I also point out that while he’s certainly worked with a diverse range of vocalists, he hasn’t tackled a track with an MC yet. “I’ve actually just finished a rework of a track featuring The Real Fake MC – best known for his work with Stereotyp,” he replies. “I like the elasticity of vocals in a hip-hop context and I’m fascinated, in particular by a lot of West Coast hip-hop. As theatre, as social commentary, as a form that is so immediate and danceable. A lot of the new stuff on Raw Fusion like Up Hygh and The Boom Lucy is stunning – raw, bold, exciting. For some time now, I’ve really felt like the production advances in electronic music have been springing from hip-hop – producers like Madlib, J. Dilla, Dangermouse. The fact that so much of this music sits so firmly in the popular music domain is really exciting for me. To be honest, I’m a little intimidated by the idea of working in the US, though I’ve been invited there for some shows early next year. I admit to having a whole heap of preconceptions about the place and its people, which I’d love to have challenged.”



Over the last several years, Rick has also emerged as one of the comparatively few local dance-affiliated artists to incorporate distinct political commentary and imagery into both his musical productions and their accompanying videos. This synergy recently resulted in the well-publicised censorship of the *What's Going Wrong* video by RAGE for its 'political content', simply because of the presence of several 'offending' lines of text during its closing frames; an outcome that Bull confesses still stuns him to this day. "The censoring of *What's Going Wrong* still surprises me, and in many ways has changed me – built me stronger and sobered me up," he explains. "To think the national broadcaster can censor written comments at the end of a clip that was, to say that least, rather didactic, almost clichéd, is incredible. I'd say the whole debacle was definitely positive on the whole. It was a ridiculous move on the ABC's behalf, but also indicative of the pressure they face to treat the editorial party line. Hopefully an indication that we can't take our non-commercial media for granted, as much as anything else. It definitely stirred up a groundswell of righteous anger, at least for a while."

"I admit to feeling a little scared too, because of the fear that the event might be construed as a deliberate attempt on my behalf to stir up publicity...and then I just felt really sad," Rick adds. "I suppose that my 'media tactic' from then on was to remain somewhat understated – to just try to allow the event to stir up its own inevitable debate. The last thing you want is to suddenly become your own political soapbox, filled with righteous anger. It's not me who is detained here, after all. The important thing as far as I was concerned was to try to steer the debate away from issues of my personal artistic freedom or importance, which were secondary. I was one of many."

"It's interesting the way that the 'reputation' you're talking about has emerged and evolved over the years. I wouldn't say that I'm in any way more socially conscious than the next person, but for me, the process of engaging in the social space of the dancefloor or the communal space of a party is an innately political one. There's a crossover between the personal and the corporate, a suspension of certain social mores and a physical engagement that lends itself to the exploration of certain questions of community and identity. Dancing is immediate, it's a social leveler. Dance music has its roots in black music, slave music, voodoo, gospel, gay music, struggle, hedonism – the narratives of these musics offer me histories and stories that I learn a lot from. I'm not interested so much in 'music as product', as I am in music as a narrative / re-imagining to my own life, and the lives of those around me."

"I'M NOT INTERESTED SO MUCH IN 'MUSIC AS PRODUCT', AS I AM IN MUSIC AS A NARRATIVE / RE-IMAGINING TO MY OWN LIFE, AND THE LIVES OF THOSE AROUND ME"

While Rick confesses that this sort of 'persona' perhaps hasn't accumulated around him in Europe chiefly because his profile over there is something of a blank slate beyond the 'recorded' realm, I'm curious to find out whether his experiences of performing in Australia have changed distinctly over the years. "The recent Australian tour was a real mixed bag, to be honest," he explains. "We played some massive shows to punters demanding odd DJ requests under threat of violence, and some smaller shows that were quite sublime. I find touring in Australia rather humbling – in some places you are a superstar, but frequently an oddity or distraction. The polarities of response force me to find confidence in other areas. Either that or madness. The predominant assumption in Australian clubs is that the performer is merely a service provider – it's always a challenge to suggest otherwise, but it's an attitude that's not helpful to moralise too much about. Touring still feels like more of a privilege than a burden."

In closing, I suggest that I'm keen to touch on the considerable changes that have exerted an effect recently on Rick's life, personal outlook and his music, an overarching theme that runs centrally throughout the various issues we've discussed so far. I ask whether in many senses, the present represents a time of new beginnings, both creative and personal, in his life history. The response is that that's distinctly affirmative. "Absolutely. I had a shit twenties, all up. Too much time spent looking inwards. I'm 30 now, and a degree of increased simplicity and directness is what I want for my life now. Perhaps that's why my tunes have become more 'direct' – the subtleties existing more now in the details, which I like. It's a time where I feel like I'm letting go of a few defences – opening myself up to engagement and criticism. Letting down musical defences and as always finding both praise and harsh critique on both sides of the head / body music divides. At the end of the day, it's just music, and people attach their own flesh to the frame you offer up. I want to trust people with that, rather than seek to control it too heavily."

Deepchild's *Lifetime* is out now through Future Classic



Winduptoys

Interview with Robert Boehm and Jeremy Smith

by Dan Rule

STEP BACK IN TIME

ACCIDENTS HAPPEN, RIGHT? WELL, YEAH. BUT FEW PEOPLE – LET ALONE MUSICIANS, PRODUCERS OR SOUND ENGINEERS – EMBRACE THE ODD MISTAKE OR SLIP-UP WITH THE SAME ENTHUSIASM AS RICHARD BOEHM AND JEREMY SMITH.

The enigmatic creative pairing behind Melbourne's Winduptoys, Boehm and Smith have built a reputation for dealing in analogue oddities, aural artefacts and downright stuff-ups – cooking up a pungent blend of dub-laced, first-generation electronics and experimental sound craft in the process. After a protracted half-decade-long union, they've finally put laser to plastic with brooding debut *Double Exposure* (released in June through Clan Analogue). But in the context of rapidly developing software and computer equipment – and increased compositional and recording precision – has the electronic music world left their analogue wonderland in the dust?

One thing that Jeremy Smith makes clear from the start is that he takes no issue with the idea of using computers to make music. "I think they can be a wonderful tool," he offers earnestly. "I just think you use whatever you've got, and a lot of kids these days have great computer equipment at their disposal. The only reason I personally don't use computers is because I don't know how to use them," he laughs. "I never seemed to find the time to learn."

Richard Boehm agrees, but admits that he and Smith do have a certain penchant for

older equipment. "I mean, some people get the impression that we're a bit elitist in the way we approach stuff," he says. "But it's more a case of these being the toys that we like playing with."

"We certainly don't knock people who make music just using computers; there's a lot of interesting stuff you can do with them... I think they're really useful for mastering, because you've got a visual representation of what you've done. But as for actually making music with computers, I find it really hard staring at a screen and playing with a mouse. I'm much more interested in using knobs and faders and old school gear."

It's a point made expressly clear on entering their Clifton Hill home (in Melbourne's inner northern suburbs). Their front room is nothing short of a labyrinth of leads, synths, mixing desks, samplers, records and miscellaneous musical clutter. "You should see my room then," chuckles Boehm.

But it's not just a mess; the throngs of various equipments say a lot about the way in which Winduptoys do business. Their record, *Double Exposure*, is brimming with a plethora of different sounds and sound sources – from raw electronic phrases and accents, and dark rhythmic and melodic motifs, to effect-laden



**"I'VE ALWAYS REALLY BEEN INTO COLLECTING SOUNDS...
JUST WITH OUR ALBUM, THERE'S SIX CDS WORTH OF
OUTTAKES OF JUST SOUNDS, WHICH WE CAN PROBABLY GO
BACK TO AND JUST PULL OUT AT A LATER TIME"**

vocals and instrumentation, and wildly skewed beats. Indeed, the album traverses signatures as diverse as nineties IDM, menacing electro dub and lilting Eastern flavours.

"I've always really been into collecting sounds," says Boehm. "Just with our album, there's six CDs worth of outtakes of just sounds, which we can probably go back to and just pull out at a later time. A lot of our beats come from the sound of a door slamming or something like that, and we'll use the groove boxes – which are traditionally used for the beats – to trigger rubbery effects sounds or something like that."

Indeed, it's these unconventional and often unintentional sound sources that make Winduptoys' recorded material so interesting. "Like, we might use the sound of frying chips or something like that as our synth sound. One of our basslines is the sound of the

ocean slowed right down – like slowed right down so it's really bassy, like the sound of a truck idling – and with our hard disk recorders you've got these joggle things, like video editing machines, and so just by changing that you actually get a bassline."

Outright mistakes, too, are a huge part of the duo's creative process. Says Boehm: "You're constantly looking for the artefacts and the mistakes, because when you get that stuff it's like getting a new piece of equipment. It's like, 'Nobody else is going to get that sound because it was a really stupid way how we got it'"

Adds Smith, "If we have a rehearsal, which we barely ever have, it usually ends up being a recording. And we record absolutely everything. Like, there've been a couple of times when I've been fiddling inside something, like a delay unit – trying to fix it or something – and Bo's been recording it. Even live, a

lot of the time we don't know what the other is doing. We'll just look at each other, like, 'Who made that noise?' So there's that mystery as well, which is fun."

It's little surprise that Smith and Boehm became so fascinated by experimental music and sound. They both have extensive and diverse musical histories. Boehm spent much of the late 70s playing surf instrumentals and covers in garage bands before discovering local independent radio broadcasters Triple R and PBS, where he eventually met Smith. Suffice to say, his first experience of community radio was an incredible learning experience. "It just changed my world completely," he gushes. "Hearing all this different music was just mind-blowing."

Diving headlong into sixties psychedelia and post-punk – he later played in bands such as Too Much Air For The BBC and Clowns Smiling Backwards – Boehm



“FOR ME IT’S A BALANCE OF LIKING THE MYSTERY OF HOW THINGS WORK – I’VE ALWAYS SORT OF LIKED THE SCIENCE FICTION SIDE OF THINGS – BUT NOT KNOWING EVERYTHING ABOUT IT.”

also began acquainting himself with early electronic music. “Some of the earliest electronic stuff I was listening to – because I’m from Germany originally – was some early seventies German stuff,” he says.

But as you might have already come to expect, his pathway into electronic music didn’t lay itself out via conventional means. “It was totally by fluke because my brother, when he was young and reckless, broke into a school and stole these three German records,” he laughs. “One was *Time Wind* by Klaus Schultz, one was Neu!’s second album, and the other was a Tangerine Dream single. I loved the Neu! album

so much – it was just before I’d heard Kraftwerk’s *Autobahn* – and it was one of the first electronic things I’d heard. It’s still in my top half-a-dozen albums of all time.”

Smith, who grew up in the London, spent his twenties travelling between the UK and Australia, learning the ropes as a producer and live mixer, between bass playing stints in The Killjoys amongst other bands (and more recently in The Fergs and Tugboat). Yet, it was always behind the mixing desk that he felt most comfortable.

“I started learning about recording with Leslie Miller from the Laughing

Clowns, who was living in London at the time,” he recalls. “So I spent the early part of the eighties hanging out with him, and he worked in a studio, so we’d sneak in after hours and record all night. A couple of albums came out of those sessions, actually. They really taught me a lot.”

The idea of mixing and producing sound proved enthralling for a young Boehm as well. “When I got into college in ’77 and was seeing bands every lunchtime, I’d see the person up the back at the mixing desk and be like, ‘What’s that? It’s got lots of knobs!’ Then eventually I figured out what he was actually doing and why he was doing it, and I knew it was the sort of thing that I’d be into. You didn’t necessarily have to understand how the equipment ticked, but it was just like an extension of your hi-fi at home.”

It’s this sensibility – this push and pull between understanding and mystery – that informs Winduptoys so much. “Between the two of us it’s a good balance,” says Boehm. “For me it’s a balance of liking the mystery of how things work – I’ve always sort of liked the science fiction side of things – but not knowing everything about it. Whereas Jeremy’s a bit more about getting in the guts and fixing things, you know. Electronic music is a whole new language all the time; things are being superseded all the time. So there’s always that battle of knowing the equipment that you use, and not knowing.”

But surely, if Winduptoys were to utilise contemporary software and computers, they’d be able to

make things a hell of a lot easier for themselves? Well, perhaps that’s not the point. According to Boehm, the kind of precision afforded by such technologies isn’t what they’re trying to achieve.

“It sort of ties in with the spontaneity involved. We kind of like the idea that some of our backing loops aren’t necessarily perfect loops,” he states. “It’s a bit like Tricky actually, you know how he has slightly wonky loops and skips? You know, it’s like ‘Hang on, something’s not quite right’”

“We use really basic equipment, you know, because it’s more about collecting really interesting sounds. If you start off with interesting source material then you don’t have to do too much to it... And there’s a lot of chaos in older technologies; I think things are getting a bit too precise and human beings aren’t precise.”

Smith agrees. “If you’re doing a mix and you’ve got a desk with knobs, one thing I like is that you can go on a different tangent. You can change a setting and then you can never quite get it back to where it was, because it’s not like a computer set-up where you can save that mix and save this mix. You have to do it on the spot.”

And the idea that they might be getting left in the past really doesn’t bother them. “It was funny,” chuckles Smith. “I bought myself a synthesiser the other day and I was really proud of myself, and our friend Nick was like, ‘Oh Jeremy, you’re finally stepping into the eighties now, two decades too late.’”

Double Exposure is out through Clan Analogue



Post

Interview with James Wilkinson

by Simon Hampson

GONE POSTAL

FOR JAMES WILKINSON HIS NEW PROJECT POST MARKS A DISTINCT BREAK WITH THE PAST. "I WAS HAPPY FOR MANY YEARS PLAYING THE TROMBONE AND COLLABORATING WITH MY FRIENDS, BUT ONCE THE SOCIAL SCENE MOVES ON AND YOUR FRIENDS FIND SOMETHING ELSE TO DO WITH THEIR EVENINGS IT'S VERY HARD NOT TO ASK YOURSELF, 'WHAT AM I DOING?'," HE EXPLAINS. "I HAD ALWAYS COLLABORATED AND THOUGHT NOW IT WAS TIME TO TRY AND COMPOSE MY OWN MUSIC, ON MY OWN."

"I was happy for many years playing the trombone and collaborating with my friends, but once the social scene moves on and your friends find something else to do with their evenings it's very hard not to ask yourself, 'What am I doing?'," he explains. "I had always collaborated and thought now it was time to try and compose my own music, on my own."

Wilkinson has been a regular feature of Melbourne's music scene since the early to mid nineties. He first came to my attention through the live dub stylings of High Pass Filter, but I quickly found him popping up in a variety of places - from his musical partnership with Peter Humble in Snuff Puppets, an outfit where he continues to combine live theatre and music, the band Buckettrider, where he pushes the envelope, giving audiences a run for their money, through to his many improvisational settings outside those groups. Wilkinson's musical output is as varied as it is frequent.

Post marks a new start. "It has several meanings, firstly as a reference to being post- a particular period of music making, then as a way of describing the music as a creation which comes in the wake of its many influences, and finally, the fact that my wife just started working at the post office this year," Wilkinson explains.

It is this straightforward, no-nonsense attitude

that infuses Post, the long journey that Wilkinson started three years ago. "I spent many months learning how to use my computer as nobody says 'you need to know how to use a computer to write music on it' when you're handing over your cash! Then I wrote a few tracks for fun and therapy before deciding to make an album. This all took about a year. I then wrote more and asked my different friends to be involved. I think of it really as a grand bedroom project that has much more light and shade added by other people's input. It was a process that depended on the track, and asking people to play and then going from there, depending on their ideas and enthusiasm. Some tracks are now completely different from the original idea because of somebody else's creative input."

Kate Neal contributed the string arrangements and arranged musicians to play them. Other friends on the record include Anthony Pateras, Robin Fox and Steve Law. Their contributions create a heady sonic brew.

"Once the live instruments were recorded the sessions were now too big for my computer to handle," says Wilkinson, "so I had to hire a larger rig to edit and start mixing the tracks. From that stage on I wasn't able to work in such an ad hoc bedroom fashion as I really needed to get the job done, and it cost money. Francois Tetaz was



"THE MUSIC'S POLITICAL, RADICAL, VIRTUOSIC. IT HAS HUMOUR AND SADNESS. IT HAS GOT IT ALL AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED"

generous enough to let me finish the tracks at Moose Mastering in the studio's down time. He has these huge Duntec Sovereigns (speakers) that are very dynamic and transparent, so mixing in his room changed the sound of the record considerably."

There is a real drive to the first, self-titled Post record (out through Sydney label Preservation). It contains a certain electronic playfulness, reminiscent of German group Mouse On Mars, but crosses it with the live instrumentation of a rock band.

Wilkinson continues, "I used to listen to a lot of jazz, European improv., metal, American folk and electronic music. Mouse On Mars are a big influence, as they are able to weave so many layers of melody and rhythm in to their tracks that always defies the dance music convention of bass, beat, melody and the frustrating formality of composing music within your computer. I reckon they're the best at it really, although the latest influence for the last six years, and probably my greatest has really been Brazilian music in all its forms. MPB, hip-hop, funk, samba, forró - I love it all."

"MPB in its early years had this great crossing over between folk traditions and popular music and I wanted to do something of the same with this record. If you listen to Jorge Ben, Tom Ze,

Caetano Veloso or Os Mutantes it's all there; the past, the future, their cultural musical history amalgamated into a new form of music that is distinctively their own. The music's political, radical, virtuosic. It has humour and sadness. It has got it all as far as I'm concerned."

These influences and contributions weave a complex sonic tapestry. Wilkinson explains; "I approached things from a compositional perspective. The starting point was to try and write music coming from the pop music form of verse, chorus, verse etc. as I'd never done that before. Then to blend that form with other influences like improvisation."

"I wanted to create an instrumental record that didn't appear to have a distinct cultural flavour. I know that sounds like arty crap, but I wanted a record of diverse sounds without lyrics, no dominant language. That way listeners can create their own sense of the world and where this music came from. The tunes themselves were intended to be three and a half minutes long, and a lot of them were trying to imitate popular styles like dub and rnb, but I got sidetracked along the way!"

So how will Post translate live? "I would love to tour, but I am in the process of making the music "tour-able" and also busy with other projects. The idea is to have a launch round the end of



November in Sydney and Melbourne," Wilkinson replies.

Considering the wide variety of his output I wonder whether Wilkinson sees Post as an ongoing project. "I'm going to do it again, although more along the lines of beats and strings. I've got lots of ideas, but there's a lot of different things that take up my time and occupy the different parts of my brain, so it's hard to focus on just the Post project."

It is this constant need for movement and freshness that makes Post so magnetic.

Post is out now through Preservation.

Astronomy Class

by Bec Paton

TELESCOPIC VISION

ASTRONOMY CLASS IS THE RESULT OF FRIENDS SHARING THEIR DREAMS, THEIR EXPERIENCES BRUSHING UP AGAINST AND BOUNCING OFF EACH OTHER AND MUSIC AS A WAY OF LIFE. SOUNDS HEARD, COLLECTED AND WHISKED TO A JAM SESSION INTERACT AND MAKE SOMETHING INCREDIBLY HUMAN.



Astronomy Class is the result of friends sharing their dreams, their experiences brushing up against and bouncing off each other and music as a way of life. Sounds heard, collected and whisked to a jam session interact and make something incredibly human. The debut album, *Exit Strategy*, is the result of three talented musicians and mates coming together and making the reggae-laden hip hop that they love.

The three lads who make up Astronomy Class are a stellar swathe of Aussie musicians. Chasm and *Frigid's* Sir Robbo have both released their fair share of tubby hip hop. Sir Robbo is also a member of the prog, downtempo and Krautrock band Tooth, (whose album, *Mudlarking*, he was working on at the same time as writing for *Exit Strategy*). Add to this Ozi Batla, one of Australia's premier verbal mechanics as well as a member of The Herd, and you can see the potential of the alliance.

Elefant Traks' newest release is smattered with samples that hark back to sixties/seventies roots reggae and Motown amongst other things. As Sir Robbo explains, "Obviously we all dig old soul, funk, reggae, ska and dub music—that's a thread common to all of us. I guess contemporary things that inspire us would be some UK hip hop artists, Rodney P, Lotek—obviously! Skinnyman,

Task Force, Jehst, Roots Manuva, etc., plus the odd US hip hop release. We all love still Wu Tang Clan and its many spin-offs very much, and some dancehall and contemporary reggae (not all reggae coming from JA is 'dancehall'—that's a common misconception). People like Bounty Killer, Beenie Man, Tanya Stephens, Anthony B, Sizzla, Ward 21, Vybez Kartel as MCs, (or 'DJs' as they're confusingly called in JA), then producers like Dave Kelly, Sly and Robbie who are still the dons of riddim after all these years. From there, our personal tastes just go everywhere, but they would be the kinds of sounds that inspire Astronomy Class as a whole."

It was a mutual love of hip hop, dub, funk and reggae that brought the three together— independent of past projects and groups. The album began to form from hanging out, making music and the thrill of sharing an appreciation of dope tunes. As Ozi explains, "Sir Robbo and I had a psychic, astral moment at the same time, on the same night. We both dreamed of an ark, like Noah's one, escaping through an inky blue sky from a dead or dying red planet. In the foreground, we saw a baby spinning off into space, attached to the ark by an umbilical cord! We turned up at the studio for a session, and were finishing each other's sentences as we described the dream!"

“THERE’S A STRONG SCI-FI, COMIC BOOK THREAD RUNNING THROUGH A LOT OF THE LYRICS, AND IT’S ALL JAM PACKED WITH REFERENCES TO LATE EIGHTIES/EARLY NINETIES HIP HOP”

This gave way to the quirky album art designed by KTC, which is somewhat like Tintin on a moon adventure. The dream also helped to lock in the band name, which had been kicked around for a while and finally stuck. The space theme doesn’t stop there, with Ozi traversing polar coordinate tangents, daydreams, astro adventures and a slightly stream-of-conscious approach to the lyrics.

“There’s a strong sci-fi, comic book thread running through a lot of the lyrics, and it’s all jam packed with references to late eighties/early nineties hip hop, so there’s a bit of fun for the trainspotters. I’ve tried to load every phrase as much as possible, to layer meanings and references and similes to the point of saturation—so it’s really impossible to take it all in during one listen, and hopefully each repeated listen will reveal another angle. There’s some of my usual pinko politics, but I’ve tried to avoid theming whole songs, (apart from *Fight Club* and perhaps *Brink of War pt. III*), around a political issue. Lyrics include my thoughts on the music industry, the planet, the universe, parenthood, adolescence, rude people from Bondi, bouncers, hip hop, industrial relations, you name it!”

The studio sessions for these guys are like a swap meet, with ideas jammed, collaged and filtered between group members. The set up is fairly minimal, with an Akai MPC 1000, turntables, Pro Tools and in true astronaut style, a Space Echo delay unit. The deep, thick dubbiness is explained by the way they master their music, as Chasm explains. “We take our sessions down to Tardis Studio in Marrickville and mix the tracks with Mike Burnham down there. He has an old seventies analogue Neve desk and some quality analogue outboard gear, which we run our beats through. It makes such a difference to take the production away from digital and hit it with some analogue fatness!”

Extra breadth was added to the album by the impressive range of guests including Lotek (Big Dada), Hau (Koolism), Urthboy and Jane Tyrrell (The Herd), BVA (Mnemonic Ascent), Ben Ezra (ESL), Gina Mitchell (FBI’s Basslines) and DJ Skoob. Due to short attention spans, the cameos were included by the trio to make

the album more diverse and breathe life into it, as each guest brought their own twists. One experience stands out to Ozi in particular, “I don’t think he would find it funny, but due to my chronic lateness, Ben Ezra had to hang around at Marrickville Metro before his session. This put him in a very bad mood that finally translated into the hottest verse on the album. Sorry man, but it sounds sick!”

Even though Astronomy Class started out chilling in the lounge room, *Exit Strategy* is set to be one of the soundtracks this summer, already on high rotation on Triple J, FBI and 2SER. It’s a no-brainer as far as Ozi is concerned. “Well, obviously (I hope) it makes

people smile while they’re driving up the coast with the windows down, and heaps of people make sweet, sweet love to it. Apart from that, we think the reggae flavour and overall package could do well OS, particularly in the UK and NZ, so we’ll send a few out there and see what happens. We’ll be touring the album through November and ideally it will get banged on radio until you are sick of it. Some major label will [then] offer us a \$1 million publishing deal and the mothership will arrive to take us to the planet made of buds!”

Exit Strategy is out now on Elefant Traks.



Interview with Julian Macpherson
by Matthew Levinson

REBEL MP: LISMORE DUBSTEP

LISMORE IS ABOUT AS FAR FROM EAST LONDON'S
TOWERING INNER CITY TENEMENTS AS YOU CAN GET,
BUT THE NORTHERN NSW TOWN IS JUST AS GRIMY,
ACCORDING TO LOCAL PRODUCER JULIAN MACPHERSON.

Dubstep is one of the murkier sub-genres in a world of obscure music. The sound's difficult to find records were slow to take hold in Australia, but in the past year the bottom end sound has shifted into gear. First and foremost, dubstep is an instrumental music. It is thick pulsating rhythms and repetitive rifle-shot sharp snares that weigh down the air with overbearing pressure, while Jamaican, Chinese and Middle Eastern samples offer texture, but little respite. Each snippet of sound is cut away from its source, stripped of meaning, layered with sparse riddims and tonal calls to arm such as a siren's industrial wail or a woman's howl of pain. Like the development of dub itself, dubstep strips prior forms back to their basics, empowering the producer to stress alternate elements in the studio mix.

Like techno, dubstep makes most sense in the long form of a DJ set rather than the sketched minimalism of individual tracks. The pressure never lets up. At least that's the way it felt from the start, but the mood has begun to change. Martin Clark wrote in Pitchfork recently that the sound is dying – to funky house, no less – but at pretty much the same time dubstep has begun to take hold on Australian dance floors. To many of these

DJs, playing to packed houses in Sydney and Brisbane, it's the next step from breaks, house and drum'n'bass, or even hip hop. It's just good dance music. Although in many cases their practical aesthetic is quite removed from the roots of the sound, original music has started to emerge from the local scene; club music with ups and downs, and it's shifting away from the original coterie of UK beat makers.

Julian Macpherson, 26, works at Music Bizarre, the only record shop in Lismore stocking dance music. He's worked at the shop since arriving in the Byron area from Melbourne seven years ago. However, it was the booming soundtrack of jungle and drum'n'bass at huge dockside parties like Global Village and Every Picture Tells a Story that set him on the road to a life involved in music. Macpherson had always tinkered with computers. In late high school he worked on developing a radio modem and, in 1999, he completed a TAFE diploma in electronics and computer systems. Before leaving Melbourne he hung out with Roland 808 and 909 disciples Live Funk Organism, taking advantage of their studio at every opportunity.

"I made little tunes every time they walked out of the room and learned the gear through

pure trial and error," he says.

Macpherson moved to Mullumbimby in the middle of 1999 after he and his partner (and their new child) were offered a free house site. They moved north and built on the site, before being told the property was on the market – "It seemed too good to be true, and it was" – they ripped down the house and moved to Lismore, where Macpherson set his mind to mastering a CD of ripped applications.

"By its nature, Lismore is a grimy town – it floods annually - I started making new styles influenced by my surrounds here," he says. "The sound seems to resonate with the vibe of the area, making it a good base to produce from. There is a good electronic music scene here, with lots of underground warehouse and bush parties."



“BY ITS NATURE, LISMORE IS A GRIMY TOWN – IT FLOODS ANNUALLY - I STARTED MAKING NEW STYLES INFLUENCED BY MY SURROUNDS HERE”

Macpherson and collaborator Shannon Madison, 25, stumbled across dubstep and grime while producing breaks and drum'n'bass but shelved most of what they heard. Later, through DJing and the record shop, they wised up to labels like Tempa, DMZ and Hyperdub, and eventually started representing the sound locally. “I have a residency at the Winsome in Lismore, but I can't really play dubstep and grime all night here, so I mainly play tribal breaks and house and the odd tune of my own,” he said. “People were a bit scared originally, but by slipping bits in here and there the education process is happening.”

“We were both pretty protective of our sound to begin with,” Macpherson said, “but recently we started sharing everything. We've exchanged all our old tracks with free

reign to remix, and there are some fat tunes on the way as a result. We are working on transferring to Ableton Live with a hand drum rig, midi drum pads and other control surfaces so we can both play out live instead of me having to DJ everything... It's getting there slowly.” For the moment, Macpherson DJs regularly, and scored a fortnightly residency at Byron's Play nightclub following a well-received set of UK and local dubstep. “There are a lot of producers and top quality musos around here, in the hills. Not many are making dubstep yet, but the sound definitely interests them,” he said. “Lots of mates have bought studios recently, and started making beats, so I expect a massive influx of material when the label is up and running.”

The label in question is Quiver Operative, run by

Macpherson (producing under the aliases Rebel MP, Morphonik and M-Phonik) and Madison (recording as Dubmestix, Lofly and Chop Robot). The prolific pair have as many as 200 tracks ready; they plan to release CDs, and possibly limited edition vinyl, but that is very much in the future - the web site doesn't even exist yet.

“We are kind of lo-fi,” he says. Macpherson plays bass and guitar, but most of his loops are constructed using a series of ripped applications and a sample library put together over the past four years. “We don't need much more than an idea to get to a finished product. I would love a studio full of gear, but I'm happy with what I make so why change it? Getting an idea down quickly is most important to me, so I need to feel comfortable in my working environment.”

Quiver Operative's first release was a 17 track promotional outing compiled for Cyclic Defrost. The disc included a Morphonik-reworked dubstep tribute to Sheriff Lindo's *Dub for the Masses* compilation, along with selections from the duo's extensive range of alter egos. On the whole, these tend to be sketches, minimal rhythms, sparse samples, simple vocals. At times the Lismore duo are struggling to find an original take on the imported sound, but at best, the music coming out of Lismore is snarling insidious dance music, the best kind.

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ga dAdA **CYCLOTRON**

Interview with Matt Warren by Scot Cotterell

BROKEN TINY

I HAD BEEN AWARE OF MATT WARREN'S QUIET BUT PROLIFIC PRESENCE AMONGST HOBART'S SMALL BUT ACTIVE ALTERNATIVE MUSIC/ART SCENE FOR A FEW YEARS NOW. MATT MAKES MUSIC IN A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT PROJECTS THAT RANGE FROM KRAUTROCK THROUGH TO DARK DRUM AND BASS AND CREATES SOUND, VIDEO AND INSTALLATION WORK WITH A DISTINCTIVE PERSONAL STYLE.

My conversation with Matt begins with some background on his cross-discipline art practice. "Around year 12 growing up in Burnie, I began to take art-making pretty seriously, painting and taking photographs in a cheap surrealist knock-off kind of way. I got to see Dali's *Un Chien Andalou* and realised that the moving image need not be strictly narrative and could be closer to painting, perhaps even more abstract. I made my first short videos on a VHS camera, editing on two domestic VCRs. I'm an ex-painter that likes to paint with light and sound now. I'm also a musician in a more traditional/pop sense, in that I've played in bands as a drummer, guitarist and vocalist."

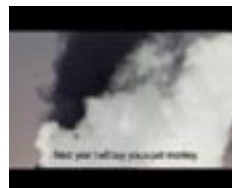
In 1991, Matt undertook a BFA at the University of Tasmania, followed by a Graduate Diploma of Art Craft and Design. He muses that, "The big change came after my mother passed away. I conceived 'The absence project.' That gave my work focus and a personal, somewhat cathartic standpoint that I think others could relate to. For a long time I've been interested in the concepts of memory, the beyond and the paranormal. I like to make works that are informed by these ideas in some way. I'm always trying to present an environment with the work that allows the viewer or listener to have an experience that might be considered profound, as pretentious as that sounds. I like the idea that my work could give an audience member an opportunity to muse on incorporeal subjects, perhaps question

their own sense of reality. It's not really a political motivation, but I do feel that too many people are ready and willing to accept 'this is good', 'this is bad', 'this is right', 'this is wrong' type attitudes."

"Very often, these kinds of absolutes lead to fundamentally blinkered attitudes that can lead to conflicts, small or large. On the other hand there are a lot of superficial, wishy washy attitudes, very cursory 'pop video' ways of living which can lead to a life where again, nothing is questioned or wondered about, deeper subjects don't even come up. Trying to be non-didactic about what I do, I hope is a way of achieving this environment in my work. Maybe conjuring up more questions than presenting answers is what I like to do with my work, because I'd rather the audience be moved emotionally and wonder why they are moved, than be told why. In 1999 I received a Samstag Scholarship allowing me to study my MFA at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada where they encourage and expect you to cross over media and disciplines during your study, as well as encouraging collaborative practices."

Since his return to Hobart in 2001 Matt has continued to exhibit throughout Australia and New Zealand, has travelled to Germany to research Krautrock and German expressionist cinema, and is now undertaking a PhD at the University of Tasmania.

Matt's audio practice began taking shape in Hobart in 1993 in punk/metal



trio *Bodies Drawn Backwards*. After this came solo project *TIMEOFFICE*, initially a metal-tinged industrial music project with Matt on guitar and backing tape, which became a trio with fellow artist Felix Ratcliff on guitar and keyboards, Matt's brother Nick on bass and Matt overseeing drums, programming and vocals. *TIMEOFFICE* later went on to become a duo format with Felix Ratcliff and became predominantly a studio project.

"Both *Bodies* and *TIMEOFFICE* existed pretty separately from my visual/media arts practice. More closely related, I've made sound work for headphones and CDs under my own name, performed live soundscape work alongside Sydney-based video artist Sean Bacon as *Caffeine Broadcast*, as well as one-off self-published recording projects *Zero Point Zero* and a collaboration with Art Writer Edward Colless called *Project Airsheet* making exotica/exploitation soundtrack works.

Locking onto two main audio projects; *TIMEOFFICE* and *Broken Tiny* I attempt to dissect these a bit. "*TimeOffice* was initially a kind of industrial metal project when it was solo, when we became a trio it became more rock, but it eventually became more ambient/post rock, a label I really hate, using loops and drones along with vocals and the odd hard-edged guitar. Both Felix and I are Hawkwind fans so it's kinda 'spacerock' at times. I listen to a lot of Krautrock and the repetition/loopy/minimalist approach has

been very inspiring to my art practice in general. My soundscape work and the work with *Caffeine Broadcast* and new collaborative project *D Group* are generally informed by a theme or concept, depending on the piece at hand, but I love playing with deep sub-bass, ambient drones and sampled voices."

Influential artists to Matt's sound practice are Brian Eno, Mick Harris (Lull), Jean-Yves Theriault (*Faux Pas/Holy Body Tattoo/Voivod*), Mark Spybey (*Dead Voices on Air*) and Justin Broadrick (*Final/Techno Animal/Godflesh*). *Broken Tiny* is Matt's solo electronic music project informed by psychedelia, drones, electro-acoustics and beats. "I started in 1998 with an ancient two track reel-to-reel machine. I would use a cheap mic inside an acoustic guitar, overdrive it and record at high speed so it would play back as a deep drone. Over time, it has become more beat driven and electro influenced. I love deep sub sound, though I'm not real keen on techno or doof, there's not enough space. When rhythm comes into play, I like to have abstract/minimal beats with a touch of dubby delay, influenced by Mick Harris's *Scorn* and *Quoit* projects."

Matt first performed *Broken Tiny* works at the Moonah Arts Centre in 2003 and recently for the closing party of CESTA in Czech Republic.

When quizzed about the very recent past and the future, Matt responds; "I just returned from Europe, presenting a work with *D Group*, 'BUG' at CESTA; the Cultural Exchange Station in Tabor. I was fortunate enough to meet and interview a personal musical hero, Mick Harris, for an upcoming radio documentary. There's also been recent exhibitions at Devonport Regional Gallery, The Long Gallery, part two of a collaboration with Deborah Pollard at Inflight in November, more *Broken Tiny* and *TIMEOFFICE* performances and then there's the PhD!"

Broken Tiny has a small discography of made-to-order CDRs that can be obtained through Matt's site: <http://matt.vkool.com>.

Rune Grammofon
Interview with Rune Kristoffersen
by Oliver Laing

FJORD FOCUS

RUNE KRISTOFFERSEN SPENT THE EIGHTIES PLAYING BASS IN NORWEGIAN POP OUTFIT FRA LIPPO LIPPI, SIGNED TO VIRGIN AND HAD AN ALBUM PRODUCED BY WALTER BECKER FROM STEELY DAN IN L.A. AS FRA LIPPO LIPPI'S POPULARITY WANED IN THE NINETIES, HE RETURNED TO NORWAY TO TEACH PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN, BEFORE EMBARKING ON A CAREER AS A LABEL OWNER WITH A PURITY OF VISION. WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF RUNE GRAMMOFON.



In the transient world of the independent record label, how does a small-scale enterprise that at its inception may have been pessimistically envisaged to last as long as the summer flowers of the arctic tundra, become an institution? An independent music enthusiast's record collection would certainly contain a percentage of releases from labels that showed great potential, but were ultimately short-lived. Likewise, some of the bastions of the independent, such as 4AD, Drag City, Mille Plateaux and Touch would be represented in the same collection. Labels that started out on a hope and a prayer and through a heady concoction of inspiration, hard work and good luck have gone on to become almost greater than the sum of their releases.

In the eight years since its inception, Norway's Rune Grammofon label has managed to metamorphose into an institution. I hijacked label boss Rune Kristoffersen Rune Kristoffersen's lunchtime in Oslo to fire off some questions about one of the most vital and eclectic labels for contemporary music to emerge in the last decade.

The label's debut releases in January 1998 were, in retrospect, a perfect way to introduce Rune Grammofon to the wider world. Supersilent

1-3 and Arne Nordheim's *Electric* were almost transmissions from another galaxy. I had been in thrall to electronic music emanating mostly from the UK, Germany and the US. In 1998, other than Motorpsycho, I would have been hard pressed to name a Norwegian band. Dense improvised jazz (and I use that term loosely) and reissues of electronic compositions by Norway's greatest living composer seemed to be coming even further out of leftfield than I was used to.

These first two releases seemed to be a statement of intent. Supersilent 1-3 was so new and foreign, almost as if it was erasing all that had come before. Arne Nordheim's work, sounding vaguely reminiscent of early Nurse With Wound to these ears, had a more recognisable frame of reference. The tension between disparate elements has been employed by Rune Kristoffersen to amass a substantial body of work.

'We didn't have a very long term plan at all. There was sort of a hope that I would be able to actually produce a substantial catalogue, but if you start out with marginal, experimental music from a small country like Norway, you don't really have any idea that it can last and what it can amount to. I felt I'd had a really good start with the first two releases, really strong releases.

There wasn't any more planning than taking it from there and trying to have a consistent profile and a good output. Well, now we are pushing sixty releases, so I'm really happy about that.'

Rune Kristoffersen was working for Grappa, Norway's oldest independent record company, as label manager for the iconic German Jazz label ECM.

I could draw parallels between ECM's visual identity, and that of Rune Grammofon. Some of ECM's music has a similar Nordic melancholy to certain releases on Rune Grammofon. Kristoffersen responds; 'That's absolutely true, but I've been more influenced by labels like 4AD, Factory, Impulse! and Rough Trade. But of course ECM, definitely. At least when it comes to having a consistent design profile.'

Rune first met Helge Sten (Deathprod) through audio engineer Audun Strype, a mutual acquaintance. Helge mentioned that he had discussed forming a band with Veslefrekk, an improvised jazz trio with a line-up of Arve Henriksen on trumpet, keyboardist Ståle Storlokken and Jarle Vespestad on drums. Rune replied that he was planning to start up a label and; '... that seems like a perfectly natural idea for some really exciting music. If you want to record, I'm happy to release it'. That's how it started.

To Rune, free jazz was an intriguing proposition, the idea of playing music devoid of a codified set of pre-conditions. But ultimately, it was the concept, more than the reality that appealed to him. 'I had seen Veslefrekk at the London Jazz Festival. I'd previously not been very into free improvised music, but they sort of knocked over the prejudices I had against free music. They were not really what I would have considered a free jazz group'.

Around the same time, Rune was trying to find some of Arne Nordheim's electronic works on CD in Oslo's supposedly better-stocked record stores. 'Suddenly realising that his electronic stuff wasn't actually available on CD. I had a couple of old vinyl albums and I thought that it was strange that some of the important works from arguably the greatest living Norwegian composer weren't readily available, which I thought was a scandal.'

'So I basically just approached Nordheim and told him how I felt about it. He was concerned that his electronic music would be forgotten if it was not documented in a proper way, and he was very happy about the idea.'

Veslefrekk and Deathprod's new outfit, Supersilent had been extremely busy in the studio in the interim. They insisted that their debut album was to be released as a triple CD. Rune Kristoffersen suddenly had two iconic

releases to debut his new enterprise with.

One of the great joys of any Rune Grammofon release is the sleeve design of Kim Hiorthøy. The aesthetics of the label have been very shaped by Rune's association with Kim, who had previously designed Motorpsycho's sleeves. I find the continuity between Rune Grammofon releases is a really compelling part of the label. Despite the fact that Kim tends to work with different mediums, effects and feels, they always have a specifically Rune Grammofon feel to them.

'The thing about Kim is that he has actually done all of the design from the first release (onwards), which I think is quite special. At least, with a label that has an output of over fifty releases. There are certain house designers, but I can't think of any label with that many releases where the one designer has done absolutely all of the releases. From the start it was a very conscious decision to have a strong profile with the design. I think we have succeeded very well, I got Kim onboard, and he was my first choice. We like the same sort of music and we hit it off straight away. He was very keen on doing that sort of work for one label. I think that it has been really important for Rune Grammofon.'

Kim Hiorthøy is something of a renaissance man,



Previous page: Alog live in Moscow; from left: Monolight, Arve Henriksen by Ellen Ane Eggen

**“I WOULD SAY THAT ARTISTS ON RUNE GRAMMOFON HAVE
A LOT OF ARTISTIC FREEDOM. BUT OF COURSE, I HAVE
AGREED TO RELEASE THEM BEFOREHAND,
SO I KNOW WHAT THEY DO”**

finding time to paint, write, make movies and also produce his own music, which has been released predominantly on Smalltown Supersound, another Norwegian label. I have often wondered why Rune Grammofon has not released an album of his electronic inventiveness. ‘Kim is friendly with the owner of Smalltown Supersound; he presented him with music before we started working. It was natural for him to stay with that label. Since we have this close relation with the sleeves, it might be wrong to do the music as well. Having said that, if he came to me and asked me to release his music, I would definitely do it, because I really like his music.’

‘I would say that artists on Rune Grammofon have a lot of artistic freedom. But of course, I have agreed to release them beforehand, so I know what they do.’ It’s a fait accompli in a way, Rune has asked them to record, he wouldn’t have asked them if they were a death metal band. ‘Well, at least not until I know what they are about musically, that would never happen. Because I need to work with people that I like musically, that’s the first thing that needs to be in place. That’s how a small independent record company works anyway.’

‘Sometimes I will have a dialogue with them regarding

a couple of songs, I will ask them if they have something else. If they push strongly, then they will be able to keep them; it has happened only a couple of times. But of course, some of the artists, like Supersilent, I will trust them to come up with the goods and basically, what they say is the finished album is the finished album. I’ve never had any problem with that. With others, if I know them well and we have worked together before, they will pretty much have artistic freedom to deliver the album they want. Sometimes if the artist needs to be in the studio, it’s happened that I have been there with them. I have been with Scorch Trio both times, also with Moha!, I’ve been twice in the studio with In the Country, they pretty much do what they want, I will only come with minor suggestions.’

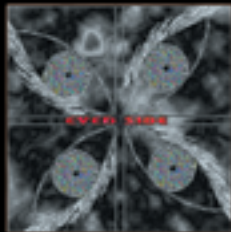
Things really started to fall into place in August 1999 with the release of *Love Comes Shining Over The Mountains*, the label’s first compilation. Rune wanted to document the momentum of the burgeoning experimental electronica/improvised music scenes in Norway. Rune Grammofon is a label that celebrates extravagantly; with the book/album *Money Will Ruin Everything* commemorating thirty releases and the 10” Box Set ‘Until Human Voices Wake Us and We Drown’ for

the half-century.

‘It’s essential for a label such as Rune Grammofon to do these things. We want to reach the record-buying public that is really into the physical product, as well as the music,’ says Kristoffersen. ‘We want to fight a bit against the whole download issue. That’s because I like records myself, I like vinyl and I like good packages. Economically it doesn’t always make sense, but it’s strange how expensive, non-format things can sometimes grab the attention of people. It’s obvious that there are a lot of people out there that are interested in the same things and when they get a chance to get their hands on something that is outside the norm and a bit special and beautifully made, then they will grab it.’

I’ve listened to a lot of electronica, and it’s something that if it’s done moderately, it can annoy me (melodic electronica/IDM rage, anyone?). If an artist is putting together sounds in a way that is truly their own, rather than aping what others are doing, it wouldn’t matter what palette of sounds were being used. Definitely falling into the later category is Alog.

‘I contacted Espen, who is Phonophani, because I knew that he had released his first album on Biophon. I have recently re-released this album. Espen said that he



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“IF YOU PRESENT THINGS IN A CHEAP WAY, THEN IT APPEARS TO BE CHEAP. WE WANT TO TRY AND GO THE OTHER WAY, IT’S BETTER TO SPEND MONEY AND MAKE IT GOOD QUALITY”

had just started this duo called Alog and they were looking for somebody to release it. I really liked it straight away. A very important band for me, I think that they have had a really good development. *Miniatures* was excellent, but all their three albums are really good. I think that they are very special, very unique?

Unique would be a term that would also describe the album *Hermetic* by Furuholmen, Bjerkestrand & Wadling; ‘That was a one-off project. Furuholmen is the one called ‘Mags’ in A-ha, the Norwegian pop group. He’s been doing some film music on the side. He had done some film music previously that had been released on BMG and all of a sudden, he was keen on me releasing it! We did one hundred hand-made versions, where it was made with a lead cover that he actually cut out and processed, even the labels are hand painted. The music program is varied so that none of those albums are the same. We got a lot of attention for that in Norway. These hundred copies sold at five hundred Norwegian Kroner each and they were sold out immediately. They will no doubt become collector’s items.’

When I first listened to *Fevergreens* by Jono El Grande, it didn’t sit too well with me—the Residents meet the Muppet band in Oslo, or something similar. It’s an album that has grown on me immensely, now I listen to it and I know every change and every passage.

I think the interesting thing about Jono El Grande is his compositions. He’s also a special figure in Norway. He has a lot of press, not in the music

press, but in the normal press, so to speak. He’s a quite close friend with members of the Royal family. A very interesting composer who’s doing absolutely fantastic live shows, because he is a bit of a comedian as well. He has an excellent way of timing, his concerts are always very funny, they get people in a really good mood. Although, he is extremely serious about the music itself. It’s definitely a very different sort of a concert. Now he is working on new material. Hopefully we will be able to record another album. The problem is he needs musicians, he needs studio time, both things are expensive.’

If I was to put on one Rune Grammofon album for people who don’t like the sort of music I listen to and they may be able to get into it—it would have to be either *Fevergreens* or *Susanna and the Magical Orchestra*. Susanna’s new album *Melody Mountain* recently reached into the upper echelons of the Norwegian charts.

One release I would feel confident to say didn’t make an impact on the charts was the Deathprod Box Set. The black case, the four blacker-than-black CD’s—it was definitely a statement. ‘That was Helge’s suggestion’, explains Kristoffersen ‘We hadn’t talked about any Deathprod releases at all, as he was very occupied with Supersilent. He’s also been busy producing other artists. He’s not been very happy about how his previous output has been released. There had been problems with other labels; the releases had been very limited. He felt that it was time to collect everything that he was happy with from the very beginning. I really liked the

idea about how to package it.’

‘Again, I think we did a really good job, we haven’t saved money on anything; it was the full six-page digipack with a thirty-two-page book. The box itself is really thick, not the sloppy ones you get in many box sets. I think people appreciate the effort. With the record business, people find ways to do things cheaply all the time. If you present things in a cheap way, then it appears to be cheap. We want to try and go the other way, it’s better to spend money and make it good quality. I think that people actually appreciate that, or at least the people that we want to reach. Even major record labels are starting to see that, because now they want to give people value with their physical product, although maybe not in the same way that I want to. The Deathprod Box Set is a good way to show that you can do this marginal, very experimental music

in a proper way and still be able to sell it to people. It will pay off in the long run. If not necessarily in money, then in other ways.’

It certainly has paid off for Rune Grammofon, but maybe not in terms of unlimited financial success. It’s paying off in more intangible ways, with artistic integrity, a breadth of vision and a commitment to releasing the product that Rune would like to see available to the record buying public. In the last two years, he has been able to devote all his time to running the label, although I doubt he’s earned enough for a new Maserati. Look forward to a second album from In the Country and the debut from Huntsville, ‘which is sort of something between drone music and instrumental country, if that makes any sense.’ In the world of Rune Grammofon, it makes perfect sense.



Kid Koala

Interview with Eric San

by Tim Colman

YOU CALYPSO GOOD

KID KOALA'S ARTISTIC ENDEAVOURS HAVE ALWAYS INVOLVED SOME ENDEARINGLY NUTTY IDEAS. HIS RECORDED WORK IS OFTEN ACCOMPANIED BY SELF-PENNED COMICS DETAILING THE TRAGIC LOVE LIVES OF ROBOTS, HE'S BEEN KNOWN TO STOP SHOWS MIDWAY THROUGH TO HOST A GAME OF BINGO, HE'S REWORKED A LIVE RENDITION OF MOON RIVER FOR HIS MUM AND HE'S DEVELOPING A TURNTABLE-PUPPET THEATRE SHOW.



Also known as Eric San, the Montreal turntablist, producer and illustrator obviously doesn't take his art particularly seriously. Which would explain his latest idea.

"I'm not sure I'm going to do this in Australia, but on the North American leg I'm pitching a new show for the Canadian Food Network," says San. "I'm actually doing this thing where the two worlds of DJ culture and cooking and culinary culture are actually coming together. They're both similar, it's all about timing and fresh ingredients and flavour by the end of it. Basically it's a couple of routines where I have to bake something or prepare something to be baked while I'm mixing. There'll be a little toaster oven or mixing bowl, something like that and we're going to see how it goes. It'll be like the DMCs meets the Iron Chef."

It's a pity you won't be cutting vinyl and ingredients locally, it could start a new DJ/chef movement, I respond. "It's the Canadian Food Network so they want to see how a North American audience would react," replies San. "We have to test it at the shows. Maybe Australians would like it. Is that a good gauge? If something's hot in Australia

is it going to be hot in Canada? Probably. For instance, Fosters lager."

Well no one actually drinks that in Australia, I reply. "Yeah I heard, which is funny. Oddly enough, I'm actually named after a drink, *Koala Springs*, that was supposedly from Australia but no one there has ever heard of it. People are like 'what are you talking about?' There was a little picture of the country and everything. I didn't really read the fine print, maybe it didn't say 'from Australia.' It had the shape of the continent though."

While he may have been inspired early on by Australian fauna, it was the UK that first picked up on Kid Koala's enigmatic and innovative turntable style. In 1995 San became the first North American artist signed to the iconic Ninja Tune label after Coldcut's Jon More heard his cassette only mix, *Scratchcratchratchatch*. After touring extensively and remixing for the label, he dropped the highly anticipated *Carpel Tunnel Syndrome* in 2000. Musically it set the eccentric tone for ensuing San releases; warped jazz and blues melodies sit beside drunken horns over wobbly hip hop breaks with obscure vocal snippets.

YOUR MOM'S FAVORITE DJ DEFTLY MOVES BETWEEN DIXIELAND, JAZZY BREAKS, WITTY ONELINERS AND EVEN METAL GUITARS. IT'S CLEAR SAN FOUND THE RECORDING PROCESS LIBERATING, A LOT LIKE A ROMANTIC SPRING FLING

He further fleshed out his quirky jazz arrangements in 2003 with his second album, *Some of My Best Friends are DJs*. Covering *Basin Street Blues*, the jazz classic made famous by Louis Armstrong, the album was created via a time consuming, painstakingly assembled sample process. Not wishing to banish himself to the studio again, his latest release, this year's *Your Mom's Favorite DJ*, is a much simpler affair. "The actual recording process was relatively short and painless, it took about three weeks," says San. "Which is great, because if you think about my last album (*Some of my Best Friends are DJs*), *Basin Street Blues* alone took six weeks. The album before that, *Carpel Tunnel Syndrome*, took four years, mind you I had to do five tours in between. This is definitely one of the pedal to the metal full gas let's just do this kind of thing. It was a very kind of inspired studio session; it all came together quickly."

Not specifically looking for a quicker creative process, it was thrust upon him thanks to a glut of previous 'silly' recordings and a new reel to reel machine. "All my silly records that were orphans and couldn't find a home, were getting to that critical mass kind of thing," says San. "They were screaming 'We need to go somewhere, make me!' because things were busting at the seams. The second thing that happened was I bought this 24-track reel to reel machine and I wanted to try it out. The album was the first thing actually recorded on it. The thing with the reel to reel is, once I'd spooled up the tape I realised you only had 15 minutes worth of tape. To some people that might be annoying, but to me it was kind of familiar because that's how I used to work on my old four track."

Is this why the album is only two 15 or so minute long seemingly stream of conscious tracks? "Exactly, that's exactly it. I didn't make a bunch of separate tracks and try to sequence it into an album afterwards. I literally started rolling on a reel to reel tape and the first thing you hear is the first thing I recorded. It just kind of fell into place like that."

Harking back to his seminal *Scratchcratchratchatch* release, *Your Mom's Favorite DJ* deftly moves between Dixieland, jazzy breaks, witty oneliners and even metal guitars. It's clear San found the recording process liberating, a lot like a romantic Spring fling. "It's kind of like one of those really turbulent Spring romances," says San. "It's a good analogy. *Carpel Tunnel Syndrome* was one of those things where I had to keep leaving town and coming back. Just like a relationship, I had to get reacquainted, but you've kind of changed because you've been on a trip, then you have to get back in the headzone but you're different and all of sudden you have to make something coherent. It's kind of a headache. This way it was like we have all this stuff, 30 minutes of tape, let's go."

Romance, specifically the tragic kind, has been a recurring theme in San's work, especially in the comics. He's lamented in a previous interview that the impetus to master the turntables at age 14 was to get invited to parties and meet girls. The tragedy being that it never actually turned that way. New Year's Eve gigs are still a lighthearted bone of contention. "Everyone thinks it's so romantic, you get to fly somewhere and DJ. But you're there and it's the stroke of midnight, everyone is hugging, kissing and tinkling champagne glasses and you're just behind your turntables like you always are. It's kind of tragic, but in a funny way, I always look at it in a funny way."

The problem he's found is it's a lot more difficult to express these sentiments on turntables then say with a guitar. "I was actually talking to Win [Butler] from The Arcade Fire, who's a phenomenal

songwriter," says San. "We were talking about this DJ, a friend we both knew, who hadn't left his house, he'd just broken up with his girlfriend, he hadn't left his in two years actually because he was working on these drums. No one's heard it, he won't play it to anyone. It got to this point when we were discussing it. I was like, 'You know sometimes I wish I could sing and play the guitar, because when girls break up with you, you can just write this poem, get all your feelings out, get the chords to fit and belt it out. If you're a scratch DJ, you've got to lock yourself in a room, listen to 8,000 spoken word records and then try and get that off your chest. It's a really masochistic way of expressing yourself.'"



Even in a positive frame of mind, San has found that just capturing a particular sound or style is not an easy task. "Back on the last album I wanted to do a ska track," he says. "That was something that took like several weeks to find all the notes and then bend them into the harmonies I was hearing. Then I realised, 'You know what, you can just get a reggae band and do that in one afternoon.' So let me just put it this way, it's the most tedious way of working

“I TRIED PLAYING GUITAR, BUT THAT’S DIFFICULT. I FIND IT EASIER TO JUGGLE FOUR TURNTABLES”

ever. The only more tedious craft would be animated film. Sometimes I’ll go and see some guy who just plays a wine glass for his show and then I’m just green with envy.” So why put yourself through this torturous style of production? “We’re hoping the ends justifies the means but who knows? At the end of the day if that’s the craft you chose, that’s the craft you chose. I could easily have chosen a guitar at 13, but I opted for the mixers for some reason.”

Are you regretting not picking up the guitar? Heavy guitar moments are scattered throughout *Your Mom’s Favorite DJ*. “This is true, but all of those have been cut up on vinyl,” says San. “I tried playing guitar, but that’s difficult. I find it

easier to juggle four turntables. There’s something about turning your fingers to lock those chords. Guitar players tell me they’ve tried scratching and can’t figure it out. But again, some people have tendencies to certain skills.”

Anyone who has witnessed San perform with three or four decks would not dispute his turntable skills. His twisted rendition of *Moon River* is a particular crowd favourite and a track he regularly dedicates to “all the mothers out there”. Was the title of his new release an attempt to reach an untapped market or just Kid Koala’s warped humour? “It was very trendy to say you’re your favourite DJ’s favourite DJ - a nice sort of hip hop braggadocio

thing to do,” says San. “I realised that title was already taken by other DJs. So I was like, what other titles haven’t they gone for? You know what, no one’s gone for your mum’s favourite DJ title. No one’s done the survey yet.”

In its infancy, San is currently conducting just such a survey, although he may need to widen his sample frame. The results though are promising. “So far I think there’s about six to eight and they’re all Canadian mums, actually one’s in Scotland. They have officially gone on the record and said I am indeed their favourite DJ.”

Is your mother one of those? “I’m actually not my mum’s favourite DJ, that would be my brother.”

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Interview with Nico Muhly
by Angela Stengel

I HEART EN WHY

NICO MUHLY SHOULD BE A POP STAR. THE 25 YEAR OLD NEW YORKER STARTED HAVING PIANO LESSONS WHEN HE WAS THIRTEEN, IS FRIENDS WITH PEOPLE IN GRIZZLY BEAR AND HAS WORKED ON FILMS AND WITH INTERNATIONAL ROCK STARS.

But he's actually a contemporary classical composer, already with a long list of achievements to his name. He has played piano on Björk's album *Medúlla*, performed and collaborated with Antony of Antony and the Johnsons, orchestrated The Manchurian Candidate for Rachel Portman and has for many years worked with composer Philip Glass. His latest achievement is releasing his own album, *Speaks Volumes*, which was produced by Valgeir Sigurdsson, whom he met while working on *Medúlla*.

"Because I'm sort of naïve about the ways of the world, I never actually had any studio recordings," says Nico. "I only had pieces recorded with one minidisc in the back of the hall with someone holding it and a student orchestra playing 50 yards away. The quality of the recordings was really poor. When Sigurdsson had asked to hear how my stuff sounded he said, 'This is insane. The quality of the material is good, but these recordings are just unacceptable.' He basically said, 'Why don't you just come to my house in Iceland and record it?' I was like, 'Oh, ok, that sounds like a pretty good idea.' We emailed back and forth and we worked on this project through the mail. It wasn't that long a process. It was a huge success for both of us as musicians

and it was really fun to work on. I wouldn't say we have similar working styles but we have very mutually agreeable working styles."

Speaks Volumes would be considered contemporary classical over any other genre, but its recording style, among other things, draws more from popular music than classical music. There are moments where you can imagine it with delicate beats clicking away underneath, and others where you feel it's going to take off into a groovy Plaid-like track of a few years back, or something more recent and folktronic. However, it always comes back to its classical roots, often in painfully beautiful ways.

Despite working closely with Valgeir during the recording and other projects, Nico is unsure of his musical background. "I think everyone in Iceland has the same background, which is that they were in a thrash band," he says seriously for added effect. "I think as a nation they have a really good, informal musicianship. There's something very DIY about their musicianship. There's a fetish of the unpolished. Valgeir's production is based on all of these noises and intimate details of sound. I think he just had a lot of experience working with Björk and, before that, with a lot of different bands. He's wonderful and he's also completely unassuming and very

sweet and quiet in a good way – for instance, I'm not quiet. The two of us working together is generally me insanely jabbering on and him listening and nodding and culling that into something beautiful, leaving the rest as kinda just decoration."

Born in Vermont and raised in Providence, Rhode Island, Nico has spent a fair amount of time in interesting places. At thirteen he moved to Rome with his mother, a painter, and his father, an academic. It was here that his knowledge and love of music really grew. He had a studio mostly to himself and took lessons from a great pianist. While his first trips to Iceland were to work on other people's projects, he returned there for six weeks (in two separate stints) to record his own album.

"First of all, it looks like the moon," he says of Iceland. "It really does look like outer space, but I'm told that the outback is similarly desolate. There's a sense of desolation there which is quite severe. As is the case in desolate places, there is a cosy 'small town' warmth to it. To be there for music is to be there for the right reasons. Everyone is like, 'What are you doing here? Are you touring?' 'Oh no I'm working on some music,' and they're like 'Who are you working with? Where are you doing it?' and you tell them and

they're like, 'Oh I know that kid, he's my cousin's dentist's girlfriend's brother.' There's a tiny, tiny little scene. It's just amazing. The other thing is that they have a very serious drinking culture that is very conducive to studio life. They have beer, but they also have this gross shit which is made out of liquorice. It's really quite dreadful, but they do also drink a lot of beer."

Recording the album in Iceland made for quite a unique experience. "The day consisted of waking up by nine maybe and then you'd sit over a cup or two of coffee and talk about the plan for the day. It would always start at the municipal baths, where you'd go and take a steam bath and a sauna and a little dip and just hang out. Then you'd come back and work the brunt of the afternoon until maybe seven or when you're so hungry that you're going to pass out. Then you make a plan for dinner and after that you drive downtown and drink incredibly heavily and regale everyone with stories from your day and they tell you stories from their day. It feels like the small town world that, certainly as Americans, we tend to forget about."

Back in the US Nico regularly works for Philip Glass, where his tasks include making demos of compositions Glass has written for films. Nico will enter the compositions into the computer and then play them back to Glass and the crew. "That can take a couple of hours, but when he's in full-on crazy mode it can eat up the day very quickly," he says. More recently he worked on Matthew Barney's film *Drawing Restraint 9*. "Working on the film basically consisted of taking instruction from Björk about how she wanted something to sound – a big, baleine wash of creamy brass, or something – and then figuring out how to translate that into something achievable in the studio with standard orchestral instruments."

He squeezes his own composing in around this and other jobs. "I've never been lucky enough to have two weeks of nothing to do where all I'm doing is writing. Since I've been a composer I've always just squeezed it in between the cracks. There's a period of time immediately after Thanksgiving, which is in November, and occasionally it happens that you have a week free. I find it really intimidating and really difficult to get work done then. I find it easier to take a day off or a morning off or three hours off."

Nico is surrounded by musicians and was brought up around many interesting people. He first studied piano with a Latvian teacher who he describes as "very relaxed, very wonderful," with whom he played lots of Russian music and Bach. He then sang in a boys choir whose repertoire included renaissance and Tudor period English choral music. "Simultaneously, a friend

of my mother's, a jazz musician and composer called Kevin Sullivan, was teaching me sort of esoterica about music – weird improvisational techniques, listening to any obscure thing he could get his hands on. Out of this, I developed a pretty fierce passion for music – writing, singing, playing – that eventually focused itself over the next two or three years onto writing music pretty exclusively. I took piano lessons with a man called Dale Munsch who was a Beethoven freak and he had me play a million sonatas."

Living in New York provides him with many opportunities to be exposed to varied music and art forms. He can appreciate this after spending time teaching at a high school in Colorado last year. "It's definitely not a sophisticated place," he says solemnly of Colorado. "One of the things I wondered was would it have been possible for me to have grown up here and felt knowledgeable and felt able to produce anything?" He decides that his artistic knowledge and passion is partially due to his parents' eclectic taste. "My dad is like a semi-serious academic and my mother's a painter. They have incredibly diverse friends – they're slightly older than hippies – there's the crazy cartoonist and there's the comic book historian and the weird state senator; there's a million different people who are involved in their community. I think my diversity of influences is due mainly to that. More so than where I physically grew up."

Nico studied music at the Juilliard School for composition, a prestigious New York arts school, and he also completed an English literature degree from Columbia University. He's not professionally involved with literature, but does draw on it for inspiration in his music. "For me it feels necessary to be engaged in thinking about words, if that makes any sense. I like the input in my work to be not just musical. There's a sense with composers that there's this, not incestuous but, it's like a cat chasing its own tail a lot with classical music. It's like what goes in, the same thing comes out. I've always tried to have a slightly more diversified set of inputs."

Speaks Volumes comes with extensive liner notes, written by his friend Daniel Johnson, detailing each piece much in the way a classical album would, except in a far more approachable way that provides a personal insight into the creation of the album. "I thought of Danny because he's not actually a musician. He's a 25 year old who works in a CD store in New Haven. His fluency in the language is amazing, but also his ability to write convincing, non-pretentious and accessible program notes. Classical music has some bad program notes. In my days as a student composer I'm sure I have

"I'VE NEVER BEEN LUCKY ENOUGH TO HAVE TWO WEEKS OF NOTHING TO DO WHERE ALL I'M DOING IS WRITING"



written bad program notes. If you go to composers' websites you can find some really crazy stuff like 'This is a piece of music that's based on the Freudian thesis of development,' and you're thinking, 'Oh god, I should certainly hope it's not.' People say things like 'I discovered this Taiwanese pop song...' There's a really gross kind of self-exposure that happens in program notes that I was trying to avoid. The notes contextualise the album in a way I wouldn't be able to do myself."

Nico comes across as a composer who thinks through all aspects of the music he creates. Obviously the instrumentation and the style, but also the recording techniques, the musicians, the audience and the circumstances in which the music will be listened to – whether that be a live performance or a recording. "There's a sense that thinking about your audience is actually really gauche – that's what entertainment

is for and you shouldn't be doing it because music isn't entertainment. Well I think that is basically bullshit. I think that considering the circumstances in which you want your work heard is totally legitimate."

"I think in electronic music the pressure to perform is most acutely felt. There's so much work done on these little details that any real acoustics get completely eaten up. That said, there are a lot of artists who very seamlessly make it happen. Björk actually, is a great example. To see her live is to receive a very spirited performance of songs you know that sound as awesome as they did on the album. They end up sounding pretty close to the album versions too. I think she's someone who's willing to spend the time to figure out how to make it work live."

"I did ask her for advice during the recording (of *Speaks Volumes*),

especially about the sequencing of songs. She's very wise about her albums being made up of individual compositions each with their own agenda, but also participating effortlessly in a greater structure. She also came to a bunch of the first performances of *Keep in Touch*, and Valgeir and I asked her for advice in trimming down the vocal. I think Björk understands that in a studio situation, composition, such as it is, does not end on paper, but rather, in a technical way inside the studio itself. She understands that technology is a tool that needs to be harnessed and made a part of the process of writing – more like farm equipment"

Interestingly, for a musician who had always focused on the composition and performance of his music, the recording of *Speaks Volumes* has an attention to detail more in common with electronic producers. There is something new to discover with each listen – the tapping of an instrument that should be bowed, the crackle of electronic equipment, the reason for a certain change in mood, a delicate pan – and every sound is well thought out and perfectly placed to appear as though it was haphazardly thrown together.

Nico talks of the dilemma of getting people to understand his music so that it can be both satisfying and marketable. "If my music were marketed by a classical music label, I can imagine exactly the names and addresses of the 75 people

"...TECHNOLOGY IS A TOOL THAT NEEDS TO BE HARNESSSED AND MADE A PART OF THE PROCESS OF WRITING – MORE LIKE FARM EQUIPMENT"

who would buy it. I know it's everyone's dilemma, the 'If you just market this right then everyone will buy it and it'll be awesome, thing.' He is shocked at how explicit the marketing of music can be. "People would say, for example, 'What we need to do is get a review in such-and-such a magazine.' The great narcissistic urge is to say, 'Mine is a project that has no precedent,' but any effort you make is going to fall in the footsteps of other things. The question is what footsteps and who understands it the best to give it a good chance. That said, Valgeir, is a non-classical musician who heard what I was doing and was interested in it."

Luckily Nico has found the perfect way of releasing *Speak Volumes* so it has a chance to reach more than 75 people. It is the first release on the Bedroom Community label set up by Valgeir and Australia's Ben Frost. "The Bedroom Community label essentially is the tiniest boutique-y recording situation where it's just music that Ben and Valgeir like and that they want to have a stake in; music that comes from specific traditions but points towards others, if that makes any sense, rather than coming from a tradition and beckoning others to come. I think there's a lot of rock music which is proudly made for consumers of rock music and that's awesome. Then there's other music that's a little more trampy with its affections and it wants more people to come and love it. I think we're aiming for that."





MUSIC REVIEWS

Looking for the new zydeco bluegrass-micro house crossover reviews? In the interests of avoiding infinite micro-genres we've created our own classification. Here's your guide:

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, world and elsewhere.

MIDS

Strummed, stunned & shunned: From post-rock swankery to metal-solo wankery; from folk to farked, it's pop n 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, noise, and everything that's unclassifiable.

Chronic Electronics:

GAIN

Automotive

The Digil Parker Project
(Couchclip)

Automotive are an incredibly prolific Dutch duo who also operate under a bunch of other names (Funckarma/Quench/Cane) in other styles, though here are intent on existing somewhere in the dreamy ether that separates jazz and electronics. Drawing upon ambient jazz, post rock, and soundtrack influences the duo craft some incredibly atmospheric tunes, dark drifting evocative sonic worlds - music that effectively creeps, albeit in a heavily reverbed manner, under the radar. Utilising saxophone, clarinet and electric bass alongside some very tastefully (read sparingly) used downtempo electronic beats, the music feels quite loose, possibly partly improvised and as such seems to possess a certain elongated sense of freedom. It's the kind of music that you can put on and forget you're listening to music. That's not to say however that their purpose is solely to appease. Whilst their palette and mood do manage to achieve this, structurally it's all quite bold, often remarkably experimental. And it's this unique ability to marry these two worlds that proves fascinating. In fact much of the Digil Parker Project is about merging seemingly disparate worlds, such as the analogue and the electronic or the atmospheric and the electro funk. Recorded over the space of three years the music is deceptively simple, yet it reveals itself over time and is one of those obscure finds that you'll find yourself continually drawn back to.

Bob Baker Fish

Bola

Shapes
(Skam/Inertia)

Darrell Fitton's earliest work appeared on Warp's venerable Artificial Intelligence II compilation from 1994, and Shapes was recalls this era in electronic listening music. Originally released anonymously

as a ridiculously limited edition vinyl triple pack in 2000 after his highly regarded album *Soup* on Skam, the tracks on *Shapes* date back to 1996. Now on CD, with three bonus tracks, and with a proper release for the first time, Shapes is like stepping into a time machine - back to a sound world that pre-dates the mass popularisation of glitch and the countless difficult algorithmic music that dominated electronic music at the end of the 90s. Influenced instead by the futuristic visions of Detroit techno and the space-age synthesiser music of the 70s, *Shapes* is rich with astral pulses, warm string pads, and bustling electro rhythms. Fonk (Flower), the opener, could almost be mistaken for a track on *Artificial Intelligence II*, whilst the dystopian synths on Zephyr (Pentagon) recall those radiant twin sun sunrises over an abandoned alien city you find on garish 70s science fiction bookcovers. Cobalt (Scope), one of the bonus tracks has a similar atmosphere, punctuated by laser bursts and with a skittering beetle rhythm that breaks down into a lovely floating melodic synth. Shapes is a timely reminder of the quaint futuristic impulses of post-Detroit electronic listening music, and in comparison the tired predictability that the more recent post-glitch and post-Boards of Canada 'IDM' has sunken into. Recommended. **Sebastian Chan**

Clark

Body Riddle
(Warp/Inertia)

The first thing you notice about Chris Clark's third album, *Body Riddle*, is that it is loud. On the very edge of distortion, Clark manages to craft some amazingly spacious tracks around sampled live drums and overwhelming rushes of bass. At its best in a good set of headphones, Chris Clark has moved in a new direction, filling the collection of eleven tracks (and three bonus free downloads from his ThrottledClark site) with lush string arrangements, 70s jazz breaks, and intricately programmed electronics that lurk in the background. Whilst Herzog is vintage electronic Warp, it is tracks like the opener Herr Bar, Matthew Unburdened and Vengeance Drolks that offer the more exciting vision of Clark's highly electrified beat science lurking beneath sweeping

strings and dusty drums. Elsewhere Night Knuckles is a frenetic music box which dissolves into the distorted fuzz ambience of The Autumnal Crash. Everything that has been initially recorded live and resampled is so produced it risks falling in a heap but with every sound so carefully, obsessively, worked on (and no doubt reworked to the nth degree), it is a amazing that it manages to come together with so much life left intact. Superb.

Sebastian Chan

Severed Heads

Viva! Heads!

(LTM Publishing/Inertia)

UK-based label LTM were recently responsible for reissuing Severed Heads' 1989 commercial sales high-watermark album *Rotund For Success*, and this Roxy Music-punningly monikered collection *Viva! Heads!* acts as a live retrospective of various festivals, shows and radio sessions recorded from 1998-2005. Except it's not exactly a 'live' album per se; in this case the 13 tracks here are in fact the rehearsal recordings for events such as What Is Music?, Electrofringe and Antwerp's 2005 Bimfest, meaning that you're not exactly going to get the sounds of baying crowds and thrown beer leaking through here. While crowd-pleasing favourites Dead Eyes Opened and Greater Reward certainly make appearances, the tracklisting takes in a diverse cross-section of Ellard's post-major label output, meaning that *Viva! Heads!* represents the perfect primer compilation for anyone unaware that Sevs continued to release albums post-*Gigapus*. As well as featuring tracks from *Haul Ass* and *Op 1.2* (both released independently through Ellard's www.sevcom.com website in 1998 and 2001 respectively), the tracklisting also manages to pack in a suitably twisted remix of Your Kidneys from last year's *Illustrated Family Doctor* soundtrack and even a handful of tracks previously released under Ellard's Cok*La*Coma alias. You'll also get to hear a prominent retailer of electrical appliances get digitally mashed up over buzzing electro-house rhythms thanks to Go, recorded at last year's Electrofringe, a moment sure to prick up the ears of Australian viewers of commercial television. In many ways Ellard's openly-expressed ambivalence towards

his commercially successful early nineties electro-pop period comes across as curious in the light of the fact that it's clearly left an indelible imprint upon his later work – as this retrospective collection neatly illustrates. **Chris Downton**

Snog

The Kings of Hate

(Psy Harmonics)

Whilst local outfit Snog are creating controversy with their lyrical finger pointing and politically charged video clips they are also working at a freakish rate. Their album of a few months back *Snog Vs The Faecal Juggernaut of Mass Culture* featured 10 or so alternate versions of tracks on MP3 and this 20 track offering is their second single. Of course there's a number of remixes of The King of Hate including Ipecac recording artists End who bizarrely go big band Louisiana swing which is pretty unexpected, whilst Thrussell's dark tech outing Black Lung take it to a tense yet surprisingly jaunty area and the Spyweirdos mix feels like the track is trying to break through faulty equipment and a demented programmer to impose itself though a dark ambient piece – offering probably the most experimental piece on the disc. There are two new tracks: Shopping Man an electro synth work out, and the suggestive Sedition is lust collaboration with Italian Industrial outfit Pankhow that earnestly harks back to the 1980's. With 20 tracks there's plenty of ground covered, with the remainder made up of mixes of tracks originally on the album. It's quite overwhelming, perhaps Snog are attempting to bludgeon the listener into submission by the sheer volume of their output. They need to do something pretty dramatic to face up against the Faecal Juggernaut of Mass Culture as they claim to be doing. Yet it's not hard going at all. Snog have chosen their remixers with diversity in mind and hearing six different versions of King of Hate is actually quite fascinating. Hearing how the artists have attempted to rap Thrussell's distinctive lyrics around their vision is also pretty damn funny. Dr Tooth's Re-Invention highlights this superbly, where the King of Hate has become a smooth jazzy cabaret number, where Thrussell takes on the role of the entertainer, indulging in a spot of show-

PAGE 32 CYCLIC DEFROST ISSUE 15 [11.2006]

biz hatemongering during some of the instrumental moments. It's classic classy stuff. **Bob Baker Fish**

Squarepusher

Hello Everything

(Warp/Inertia)

Except for Squarepusher's debut *Feed Me Weird Things* (Rephlex) his albums have been ultimately disappointing. Of course each album has had some amazing tracks and his EPs have been consistently reliable but with such a strong and genre-breaking debut reaching that early height again would be difficult. So, now, a decade later comes another album, the eighth - *Hello Everything*. *Hello Everything* has a bit of everything old - chopped beats, virtuoso bass - but the overall mood, this time is different. Previous albums have swayed from ADHD manic-ness to depressive noise, but on *Hello Everything* these moods are tempered by an overall brightness. Unfortunately it opens with the weakest track - the pseudo rave-y retroism *Hello Meow* which sets up a false impression of the rest. Planetarium is full of chopped amens but rather than being a nutty pisstake evolves into a lovely panoramic and melodic jungle track recalling Aphex Twin's Polynomial-C (from 1992's *Xylem Tube* EP). Circlewave 2 is close to the most exquisite Squarepusher track yet even with its noodly jazz jam in the latter third, bumping Iambic 5 Poetry from *Budakhan Mindphone* of its perch. Rotate Electrolyte is more amen junglism meeting reminiscent Detroit techno, and then there are two 1960s academic avant-electronic-styled experiments - Vacuum Garden and Orient Orange. Vacuum Garden is a disturbing droning ambient piece that sounds like a dark void of a black hole from some science fiction movie. Orient Orange starts of as musique concrete but slowly melodic chords enter the frame before fading to tones. Although seemingly awkwardly sequenced, the eclectic mish mash of styles works well together. Skip the opener and this is a the most interesting and most enjoyable Squarepusher album in a long time. **Sebastian Chan**

Tujiko Noriko

Shojo Toshi

(Mego)

Blurred In my mirror saw Tujiko Noriko mucking it up in the grimy material realms of dub and house, two realms which tantalized the senses with a barrage of ragged arpeggios, grinding, persistent techno beats and Noriko's sly vocal quips. Initially released in 2002, *Shojo Toshi* is more loosely structured and pretty, opting for a fluidity of mood and dynamic range over the inclination of the latter towards all things rhythmic and disorienting. Endless End floats breezily, its brittle programming and sensuous keyboard tones ensnared only slightly by the metal coil of the tightly sequenced drum patterns. In fact, numerous pieces display a frail brightness. Beginning with a prelude of dizzily syncopated synth stabs set against a bank of murmuring flutes, compositions grow lighter and ascend into plodding pulses and stately rhythms - all the while, Noriko's vocal coo reaches for the heights as well, adding another shimmering layer to the subdued and whimsical proceedings. Still, pieces do shift focus. Tokyo may start with clusters of light vibraphone and deep clicks and bass tones, but the track still spills over into a turbid atmosphere of alien effects and a bitter disharmony that illuminates the underlying melody. Similarly, when the deformed beats and slinky bursts of static that dominate Bebe follow the joyful rhythm, droning horns and wafting bell tones of White Film, their appearance is easy and surprising. At times, such as on I Love You and Girl Meets Boy, these airy cooings float a bit too free and waft their way right into a fey sentimentalism that is not altogether becoming. In a sense, then, Noriko is most enticing when she floats somewhere in between the worldly and otherworldly, and on this work her various trips and entanglements prove quite stirring.

Max Schaefer

Various Artists

Pikadon Nights

(Datum)

Perhaps I'm just out of the loop, but I had no idea that there was such quality coming out of the Brisbane electronic underground. Compiled and curated by digital

all-sort Sean Taylor (aka Mute-til-late aka Prince Nod) for Datum Contemporary Arts and Research Society, the *Pikadon Nights* compilation was released as part of this year's Straight Out Of Brisbane festival, and represents something of a coup for the Brisbane's small but diverse IDM, electronic and experimental hip hop community. A fascinating showcase of our northern neighbour's underground, *Pikadon Nights* taps into a wealth of raw and rugged instrumental hip hop, abrasive electro and razor-sharp IDM. Taylor kicks off proceedings himself – in the guise of alter ego Prince Nod – with the eerie, hard-hitting hip hop of A Fair Appraisal; blending Eastern-influenced inflections with rock-hard beats and film-noir dynamics. The heavily textured beats and rhythms of sQwurm's aLteR.nate-oR make it an early highlight, while the crunching beats and almost playful, Plaid-esque melody of Xanpha's Peru are another strong point. The record winds down with quieter, more organic efforts from Dempefka, Sweet Sweet Lo-Fi and Aubyn, which are brilliant, contemplative points of conclusion. This is surprisingly solid and aesthetically cohesive collection, which works flawlessly as a record. While it's a credit to Sean Taylor's curatorial work, it also says a lot about the quality of the artists. At only eight tracks and 39 minutes, *Pikadon Nights* is compact and succinct, and no track is wasted. I may be out of it, but I'll tell you what, the Brisbane electronic underground is one loop I want to be part of. **Dan Rule**

Various Artists

Refashioned 007 - The James Bond

Themes Go Undercover

(Groovescooter)

The Groovescooter HQ is at it again. They've summoned the musical family together to refashion a theme and this time it's all about espionage as classic James Bond tracks go 'undercover'. Each artist received a top secret brief with the instructions, "You each have a licence to kill! Liquidate if necessary, but remember, these were some of the biggest pop songs of their day." Indeed. The result? An intriguing mix of interpretations from local and international musicians fusing electro, beats, jazzy dub and dangerous liaison. It's impossible to decide on

who the best assassin is on this album as they've all done their research. Don Meers has revived the James Bond Theme, Gotye's vocal lashings force the listener to Surrender while Fatt Dex has his back with the beats, Inga Liljestrom summons an arctic chill with a melancholy rendition of 'From Russia With Love' whilst Tina Harrod bravely tackles 'Goldfinger'. Most of you would agree, I am sure, that it takes balls to tango with that tune and she executes it rather convincingly. Mothloop's version of Drax's Gambut is dripping with the smell of cold sweat whereas the Ollo boys increase the heat with Peta Morris (of Paul Mac). As they 'dance into the fire' you can hear the seductive flames flicker all around. Finally, just when you thought you couldn't handle another remix of Burt Bacharach's famous, The Look of Love along come Lake Lustre and Dorit Chrysler to tar this old classic with a refreshing gloss of interest. Mission accomplished? I think it's safe to say there's something here for everyone, but it will definitely have a greater appeal to dub fans, James Bond devotees or just those looking to hear more from some of Australia's understated musical talents.

Renae Mason

Various Artists

The Condition of Muzak 2
(Expanding Records)

Expanding Records – London's purveyors of spectral, minimalist electronica – have certainly nurtured a distinctive sound throughout their 30-plus-release history. Releasing a high-quality body of work from a growing roster of artists, they've crafted a sonic aesthetic that oscillates between spare, ambient electronics and discreet, instrumental hip hop. When it came to label comps such as their new, self-deprecatingly titled *The Condition of Muzak 2*, such relative stylistic consistency works both for and against them. While it would be unjust to equate Expanding's approach with label pragmatism – surely no one who releases ostensibly obscure, ambient electronic music can afford to be overly pragmatic – you do tend to get a feel for what you're getting yourself into after just a couple of tracks. This latest comp – the second instalment in a serious that collates work from a bunch of limited 7"

singles the label released between 2003 and 2005 – more or less, runs this course. The stripped back, melody-embellished groove of Flotel's Bowd sets the scene, and New York's Praveen further solidifies the comp's direction with the stark beats, washy synths and subtle melodic inflections of Circle Song. Holkhams's Samphire throws a slightly different light on things at the halfway point with its dark, opaque bass lines and brooding undertones, as does Vs._Price's Birthday 026, which also treads a lightly more abrasive path. Yet, both tracks make for a refreshing change of pace – shifting the paradigm a touch, without bending the record out of shape. The dense bottom-end and crisp break beat of Monocero's Bells make for one of the record's strongest cuts, as does Maps + Diagrams' Impte Datae, while the tripped up polyrhythm of AM/PM's The Ends remix – where he literally uses the end of each 7" in the series to craft a strong, multi-layered cut – proves a brilliant moment of asymmetry, and one of the record's best tracks. When it comes down to it, you can apply a couple of different schools of thought to *The Condition of Muzak 2*. While you certainly know what you're getting – the record does feel like it's perhaps lacking a certain dynamism – the consistency gives the collection more of an album-like strength than most label comps. And this fact on its own makes *The Condition of Muzak 2* all the more enjoyable. **Dan Rule**

Culture, dahling, culture:

HIGHS

Amanda Handel & G.L. Seiler

Ghosts And Angels
(Feral Media/Fuse Music Group)
Greg Seiler is certainly already well-known for his solo electronic explorations as Comatone, but *Ghosts And Angels* shows him collaborating with classical composer Amanda Handel to create an evocative and frequently cinematic collection of tracks that veers far away from the glitchy electronics of his previous albums *One Into One Out* and *E-50*. With its starting point apparently being field

recordings made by Handel while visiting Spain, the creative collaboration that lead to *Ghosts And Angels* began in earnest with Seiler sampling and manipulating the recordings and the pair working together to introduce textural elements that would enhance Handel's original compositions. The result is certainly one of the most enveloping and frequently disorienting collections that I've heard amongst the 'contemporary classical' sphere, with apt comparison points being Coil, Murcof and the sweeping Middle Eastern atmospheres of Peter Gabriel's *Passion* as much as any immediate figures from the 'classical' arena. Throughout, it's the extraordinary sense of complimentary balance between Seiler's electronic elements and Handel's compositions that makes a particular impact here. Opening track 'Bewitchment' certainly sends chills up the spine from its very beginning, with ominous piano notes descending into a yawning void as eerie metallic bell tones trace a path akin to a medieval cathedral and disembodied-sounding Spanish vocal samples flit through. 'The Passing' meanwhile conjures up sweeping Middle Eastern atmosphere, with the distant sounds of a military band emerging from a fog of treated crowd samples, a melancholy lone trumpet adding an underlying sense of almost wounded weariness. Stunningly executed and realised, *Ghosts And Angels* represents one of the most inspired collaborations of its type to emerge for a long time; it's also an album that rewards beautifully upon repeat listening. **Chris Downton**

Anonymeye

Anonymeye Motel
(Half Theory)

Late last year I was sitting in an apartment in Berlin. My friend had put on a record picked from our host's vast collection. A series of spindling guitar tones sprang from the stereo, creating an endlessly rolling, a kind of drone-meets-blues effect. At the end of the first side I discovered that we'd just been listening to John Fahey. Fahey is the kind of musician that you read about in *The Wire* Magazine and file away for a time when you chance upon an album in a specialist record store and actually take a listen - a kind of 'canonical realisa-

tion moment'. Queenslander Andrew Tuttle's debut album as Anonymeye on Scott Sinclair's Half Theory label is a fascinating first album. Based around a rough concept of a roadside motel - the CD packaging design is based on a roadside diner menu - *Anonymeye Motel* is a thoughtful exploration of wide open spaces and the open road. Although it opens with the weakest track, Suburban Shopping Centre Carpark which suffers from its dull rhythmic backing and beat production, it soon hits its stride with a series of Fahey-inspired guitar processed pieces that transform into intricate fuzz in the vein of Fennesz. *Life In Suburbia* revolves around around a ribbon-like guitar loops that unfurls underneath layers of field recordings. Pacific Highway, 3pm is the most Fahey-like piece employing lovely guitar work that becomes heavily processed on its sister track Pacific Highway, 3am. The closer, Reception, is another heavily processed guitar piece which dissolves into drones. On another track Tuttle introduces his own vocals and there is a clear sense that he is experimenting with several genres at once and there is a pop musician lurking somewhere beneath. Although referencing its influences very directly, there is plenty of interest and those who enjoy Greg Davis, Keith Whitman and Fennesz will appreciate the skewed pop take. **Sebastian Chan**

Gail Priest

Imaginary Conversations In Reverberant Rooms
(Metal Bitch)

Gail Priest's work over the past five years has covered some fairly divergent territory. As if seeking out key areas of interest for her sonic pursuits, each of her performances and recording projects in recent times have marked out a potential field for further exploration and eventual development into a full blown presentation. In some respects the debut release from Priest continues this modus operandi. Teaming up with a number of producers from Sydney, Priest weaves her ethereal vocal deconstructions (crystalised most clearly in 'Dreamwinch') and textural sonic works into a shifting range of sound fields from essential IDM rhythms to more static states of tone

and aural intricacy. It's perhaps Julian Knowles' production that lends the majority of shape to this record – partly through the sheer number of pieces he's involved in and also through his unique reconstitution of Priest's aesthetic. Jasper Streit's pieces lend a sharper edge to the record with slow burning fuses of digital electronics and reverberant spaces, whilst Peter Blamey's coda production finishes the record with a wonderfully provocative slow blur of melody and broken hums. Perhaps the title of this record reveals something of the process, and indeed the results. These 'imagined conversations' speak to a kind of collaborative process perhaps – one that reflects on the nature of production in the digital age, the passing of files back and forth and the meta-conversation that take place at the creative level. If this release acts the end of an initial state of exploration for Priest or in fact the beginning of a lifetime of shifting contrasts in sound the end result is the same – a fine example of considered sound states that are offered,

received and enjoyed. **Lawrence English**

Grundik Kasyansky

Light and Roundchair

(Creative Sound Recordings)

Grundik Kasyansky is a sound artist composer and sound designer who apparently divides time between Moscow Tel Aviv and New York City. In 1995 he formed Grundik and Slava with Slava Smelovsky in Israel. Their 2005 concept album *Frogs* was the most compelling example of electro acoustic avant garde electronica that this writer encountered last year for his solo project however Grundik has stripped things right back. To the extent that he is working with delicate pitches, fragile textures of static and sharp pin pricks of sine tones, forming these almost intolerable micro symphonies of sound. His main instrument is feedback synthesizer, though he's also working with radios in which he mines the gold barely off channel, computer and theremin. There are subtle skips, clips, tiny flutters of static as the radios and the digitalia

bubble and pop aimlessly. Though generated via feedback these are quiet sounds requiring active listening, possibly best with headphones to block out any extraneous environmental sounds, as otherwise it would be easy to lose some of the subtlety in Grundik's composition.

Bob Baker Fish

Ian Cho

The Waking Woods

(Tovian Records)

If a forest could sing, what would it sound like? This is the question that Ian Cho, a 20-year old composer/animator from Queensland set out to resolve. With just a guitar, piano and quirky keyboard effects he has managed to bend traditional sounds to a state beyond recognition. The soundscape is populated with flutters, tweeters, pops, hisses, clicks, whizzes and extended piano loop melodies. It's playful, resonating with a heightened childlike sense of wonder about the magical life of the forest and its inhabitants. Imagine shells as 'horns of the ocean,' songs about

water with 'almost circus-like frenzies,' the splash splash of pebbles in fishponds and my personal favourite, Ian's description of the *The Waking Woods* as "trees singing at night, stars falling into a green ocean." There's even a track called 'Dragon' that seeks to emulate the sound of giant wings slicing through the air in flight. Yes I am a big kid at heart and I'm really enjoying Ian's delightfully humble and wondrous aesthetic. The inclusion of an animated film-clip for 'Flying Fish' adds further insight, allowing his ideas to soar in the synthesis of sound and image, creating something truly fantastical. Visit Tovian Records to view some of his animations and read more about the album.

Renae Mason

Lawrence English & Phillip Samartzis

One Plus One

(Room40)

It's huge, this giant mechanical, pulsating, booming repetitive, skipping electronic beast that blunders along gathering speed, wheezing, spurting, moaning before



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fading out into flecks of static. Vinyl static. Melbourne sound artist Philip Samartzis has previously worked with turntables in his duo Gum that existed in the late eighties. So perhaps for a trip down memory lane he hooks up with Brisbane based Lawrence English for *One Plus One* (Room40). Of course you know already that Q-Bert is definitely not in the house, the development is gradual, almost hypnotic as the duo are interested in exploring and building textural repetition, and perhaps even more specifically drawing from the likes of Christian Marclay and Philip Jeck and focussing on the mechanics of turntablism where the surface noise of vinyl and cyclical rhythmic repetition are utilised create some quite gentle and engaging pieces. It's quite dense work. There is a myriad of activity, particularly texturally throughout the four tracks on offer here as the duo build a bed of sound and then gradually add or subtract. Interestingly their more rhythmic work is the most effective, where they are actually focussing less on their mechanical gestures and more on warping their vinyl such as the nostalgic noise fest *Goin Home*. **Bob Baker Fish**

Lloyd Barrett

Mise En Scene

(Room40)

There is a certain sense of aggression or violence implied in the filmic *Mise En Scene* from Brisbane sound artist Lloyd Barrett. Its starting point was apparently in film theory and more particularly in the writings of renowned theorist Michel Chion though there are also definite links to Chion's sonic work. Barrett's work draws upon music concrete traditions with vivid vibrant processed sounds, crafting an incredibly assured electro acoustic language that is quite dense yet highly controlled. His use of drones, abrupt ruptures, vivid at times quite delicate textures, subtle volume shifts and vast and careful layering draw links with film sound design approaches albeit with some very experimental and exhilarating. **Bob Baker Fish**

London Sinfonietta

Warp Works & Twentieth Century Masters (Warp/Inertia)

When Aphex Twin released *Selected*

Ambient Works Vol 2 back in the early 90s the press were making references to the apparent influence of Cage and Stockhausen - in part to canon-ise and 'approve'. Aphex later had a brief collaboration with Phillip Glass, and last year New York's *Alarm Will Sound* released an album of orchestral 'covers' of Aphex Twin's more recent work. In 2003 and 2004 the London Sinfonietta played a trilogy of concerts in which they reinterpreted several Aphex Twin and Squarepusher tracks and performed them alongside modern compositions from Cage, Reich, Stockhausen, Varese, Ligeti, and others. These composers were working with many of the sonic ideas popularised in the 90s through 'electronica' many many decades earlier. The Sinfonietta is already known for their support of 'difficult' 20th century classical works - critical as so many orchestras continue to trot out the well known 'classics' from centuries long gone - ignoring the more difficult, dissonant and often abstract works from more recent times, and in so doing lending weight to the destructive argument that orchestras are outdated and outmoded. This double cd recording cherry-picks the three concerts and presents a selection of fantastically rich live recordings. Up against the 'heavyweights' the Aphex and Squarepusher pieces don't always hold their own, although Kenneth Hesketh's arrangement of Polygon Window is a suitably rousing closer. Indeed, this double album is best as a great introduction to the often hard to enter world of 20th century classical music. Highly recommended. **Sebastian Chan**

Midori Hirano

LushRush

(Noble)

Noble's abilities to uncover the more interesting end of post-pop electronica from Japan's various urban centres has placed them firmly on the radar of labels and musicians outside Japan alike. Their latest discovery is Midori Hirano, a trained player who has converted a love for piano into an album of soaring melodic pastures, folk-like vocalisations, placid field recordings and pulsing rhythmic passages. The majority of this issue are more welcoming than other artists working with the same ingredients. In fact there's a highly consumable edge

to this record, a familiarity, but yet an oblique blur to the conventions of song and sound produced here. 'Inori', with its buried and breathy vocal brings to mind some of the more American and European free-folk acts - the prominent violin offering a centre for the flickering percussive bursts and gusts of white noise. Collaborating closely with Tico Moon member Toshiko Kageyama and Atsuko Hatano (who plays the cellos and violins featured on the disc), this document is one that will appeal to anyone who has enjoyed the sounds from Noble thus far. It's a welcome debut release that shows potential for a future riddled with more complicated interplays between acoustic and digital sources.

Lawrence English

Phillip Samartzis

Unheard Spaces

(Microphonics)

Melbourne sound artist and academic Phil Samartzis has built a career on his uncompromising approach to working with sound. In the main he utilises field recordings as the raw material to layer, shape, recontextualise and craft a whole new sonic world. *Unheard Spaces* is the second release on his own Microphonics label. His first, *Soft and Loud*, rigorously detailed the Japanese soundscape and arranged the disparate elements into a vivid and dynamic work. With *Unheard Spaces* Samartzis turns his attention to Venice, utilising field recordings first gathered over a three-week period in 2000. Here Samartzis attempts to portray the specific sonic characteristics of the city, the sounds and the spaces that make the city so unique. Whilst keeping their character Samartzis performs a unique form of alchemy in the arrangement, it's quite subtle, very different to *Soft and Loud*, the tambour of the sounds, particularly the trickling of water sounds remarkably recorded, up close incredibly vivid. You feel like you can touch it - almost taste it before it delicately fades into clanging bells and the sounds of a paddle snaking through the water on a Gondola no doubt. Yet Samartzis doesn't have an acoustic ecology bent, there are mechanics here, horns, possibly boats, passing trucks, yet it's still firmly entrenched in the sounds of water, feeling

like a sonic postcard that has been subtly tampered with. It's hard to know how much has been layered and how much has been recorded faithfully on the one site. Human voices merge with bird calls, heels on pavement, a strange banging and a steady mechanical hum. The water is omnipresent. Everything just flows. The beginning of this disc highlights a very different side to Samartzis' approach to sound and improvisation. And it's a strange fit. Titled *Absence and Presence* it stems from a live improvised performance (from *What Is Music* from memory) with Samartzis setting the parameters. With Samartzis utilising field recordings and electronics he 'performs' alongside Sean Baxter on percussion, Dave Brown electroacoustic guitar Anthea Caddy Cello and Thembi Soddell on field recordings and sampler Michael Vorfeld was involved later to improvise over certain sections. The results are strange, the music sounds coiled into a series of moments of bluster then restrained near silence. In fact silence is used repeatedly providing a dramatic tension that is often subtly punctuated by a gradually perceptible high-pitched sine tone. It's edgy at times violent and (yep that word again) uncompromising stuff. **Bob Baker Fish**

Phillip Samartzis & Kozo Inada

h()

(Room40)

The first collaboration between Samartzis and Japanese minimalist composer Kozo Inada is a tense almost austere episode of music concrete. Beginning with a steady warm electronic drone complete with crackles it gently builds in intensity before it abruptly crescendos out and ruptures into some decidedly low-key field recordings. Quickly it begins to build again, close mic'd the sound of fire is almost intolerable under a strange tactile movement of metal and that rupture again. The duo deftly moves through multiple sound worlds, uniting electronics and field recordings. The drones in particular are warm but menacing, becoming all encompassing, making *Eraserhead* seem positively passive in comparison. Over the drones things rattle, a tin is hit repeatedly and its abrupt nature finishes this episode. It feels like an exercise in assemblage, the

sounds seeming to posses little relation with each other, apart from their placement in the mix, suggesting that the duo are more focussed on their ability to utilise disparate innovative compositional techniques to move between disparate worlds. Electronics are skittered through, though the strangest moment comes where a pure high-pitched electronic drone is melded with a warbling crow that whilst it sounds electronically treated probably isn't. Later the crow returns again untreated amidst a wall of cicadas and field recordings under which we hear people walking on a path. It's surreal and slightly terrifying like much of this 20-minute piece that has been expertly crafted to unsettle. **Bob Baker Fish**

Richard Chartier & Taylor Dupree
Specification Fifteen
(Line)

Both Chartier and Dupree have earned reputations for various excursions into the realms of digital minimalism – Chartier through sound field and Dupree via his restrained compositional approach. United on this edition to create a soundtrack for the photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto, whose Seascapes series is identifiably an influence on both musicians, Chartier and Dupree are clearly willing to spare no detail in the preparation of this score of sorts. The opening 7 minutes of the piece establishes a strong statement of intent – a readiness to allow the audio fields to establish themselves in a most organic way. As the digitally processed elements come in to focus you can almost picture Sugimoto's works, the lower etched electronics shifting away, bringing to mind oceanic tidal movements, whilst the upper tones and iridescent textures seem to evoke a light sea mist, which clears intermittently to reveal other floating sonic elements. As their composition unfolds, the density of this work remains quite solid, surprisingly so in fact. Not until the end of the work does the piece shift dynamically, and perhaps this is the point of the exercise. There's a real sense of dynamic stasis in Sugimoto's Seascapes portrait work and here this visual cue is managed well, with an array of purring textures existing for the greater part of the work. It's in the upper register and much of the processed electronics

that the fine features of the work are revealed, again perhaps a reference to the Sugimoto aesthetics captured in the inspirational series for this edition. **Lawrence English**

Strummed, stunned and shunned:

MIDS

All India Radio

Echo Other
(Inevitable Records/MGM)
Don't you think it's lovely to have waking dreams whilst listening to music that inspires colours and shapes? If your answer to this question is 'yes' then perhaps you will find some space in your imagination for All India Radio's *Echo Other*. The cover (designed by the band's founding member Martin Kennedy) depicts control towers free floating through vector art interpretations of a warm, outer-space landscape. The music reflects this theme of interplanetary communication with a call-and-response effect of frequency tones travelling the static airwaves, where voices and instruments are encoded and decoded periodically. With production handed over to the capable hands of Bryon Scullin (Biftek, David Bridie, *Wolf Creek* soundtrack) each track is seamlessly stitched to form an expanding sense of other-world-ness that remains consistent throughout. 'Mexicola' is one of my favourite tracks with its subtle traces of the cowboy epic (stemming from the lazy rhythmic pace of the piece and the resounding Ennio Morricone-like bass notes). 'The Quiet Ambient' provides a gentle kick with live drums underscoring the ambience and guitars, building with a cameo of strings before drifting into 'Song C', one of the bigger sounding tracks on this album with many layers of instrumentation taking place. My only disappointment comes at the very beginning of the album with track 'Four Three'. Here an ethereal voice sings, "Welcome, to my world...stay, you are not alone", encapsulating a chill-out genre cliché that the album could easily do without. The subtle poetics of the music itself are enough to tell that story.

With its surrounding embrace you just know that you have entered their world and yes, it's an entrancing place.

Renae Mason

Balun

Something Comes Our Way
(Brilliant)

For a band based in Puerto Rico, Balun are a world apart from the popular sounds of reggaeton, Ricky Martin and salsa. Instead they have developed a cult following with their distinctive electro-acoustic pop sound. Yes, pop. But this kind of loose classification does not really encapsulate the beautifully crafted, intricate whole that is the Balun sound. They deliver sweet harmonies, reminiscent of the rich textural landscape chartered by bands like Mum and Sigur Ros with the occasional dash of up-beat melodies. While it's only been a few years in the making, *Something Comes Our Way* is a mature full-length debut. 'Opening the Box' sets the pace for the album with a gentle tweetering glitch aesthetic. Ethereal cries and childlike vocal cut-ups further haunt the track. Melodica and guitar ride a breeze of synth sounds in 'The Surprise' as it slowly builds with violin strings and sampled soft beats. The mood continues with 'People', a bouncy track where Balun's extra secret weapon is revealed – Angelica Negron's vocals. As the album progresses, it becomes evident that Angelica, along with fellow band members Jose Olivares and Andres Fontanez, are accomplished multi-instrumentalists. Since meeting in 2001 while studying music at the Conservatory they've been experimenting with keyboard, violin, harp, accordion, melodica, guitars and a slew of samplers, cd players and turntables. As a result, they've managed to craft a sound that makes pop seem more sensitive and down-tempo electronica less stern – a joy to listen to.

Renae Mason

Broadcast

The Future Crayon
(Warp/Inertia)

For many music snobs, pop is sugar coated candy – devoid of class or staying power: disposable, throwaway. But what if you're making pop music, it's not sugar-coated candy, and you're not

in the pop charts? Broadcast are using their own definition of pop music, and challenging the music snobs along the way. "When we started the band, it was based on the idea to produce pop songs, but to colour them differently," says Broadcast founding member James Cargill. "To try to create more interest in the sound around them," he continues. "Like the United States of America did, who were our favourite band when we started. That goal is still what we try to do today." (The United States of America were a guitar-less experimental rock band active for two years in the late '60s.) At the end of 2005, Broadcast arrived with the soulfully mechanistic *Tender Buttons* full-length album as a two piece (consisting of vocalist Trish Keenan and multi-instrumentalist Cargill). A career highlight, *Tender Buttons* is the complete package. It's evolved and otherworldly - a sonic document of cohesiveness from a band at a very interesting destination. *The Future Crayon* documents their long journey as an evolving studio band up to that point. *The Future Crayon*, a collection of non-album tracks from EPs, flip sides and compilation albums is probably their strangest album to date. These are the tracks that, for whatever reason, didn't make any of their three full length studio albums. Trish Keenan's bewitching croon always hits the spot. Broadcast create a modern and even futuristic racket, their '60s influences providing a starting point and not a destination. The key to Broadcast's music is the palate of tones and textures they colour their sounds with. Broadcast consistently make bold choices in the studio – and make them work. Hazy drony organs, bursts of flaring static, wide open spaces dripping with atmosphere, Broadcast are studio conjurers, and while perfection isn't their goal they often come close. Most tracks on *Future Crayon* feature acoustic drums and Broadcast's satisfyingly bent take on pop music. A strange and wonderful (slightly sugary) trip. **Daniel Jumpertz**

Feathers

Synchromy
(Home Tapes)

Eddie Alonzo, Matt Crum, and Eric Rasco make a wondrous melodic noise as the Miami based trio, Feathers. Self

described as “two Cubans and a drunken redneck”; Feathers are a tight little unit specialising in instrumental tunes with roots in Krautrock, French electronic pop, and the sound of 1960’s US West Coast psychedelia (with some dub sensibilities thrown in for good measure). The opening track *Skara Brain*, contains a hypnotic keyboard line that’s aglow with the sound of Ray Manzarek’s snaking runs on the organ when he played for The Doors. The tune moves dreamily along before breaking off into a darker prog rock crescendo, revealing the real beauty of this band and their ability to take a tune and change it’s mood several times within one 3 minute space, even when the basis of the track is a solid motorik groove. Anyone familiar with the work of defunct Sub Pop outfit 5ive Style will recognise these ploys, as will fans of Stereolab, Silver Apples, Can and even Sean O’Hagan’s instrumental passages with The High Llamas. All referencing aside, one cannot ignore the ingredients brought to the table by the ep’s co-producer, mixer and engineer, John McEntire (he of Tortoise, The Sea & Cake and countless others). I’m sure this is why the ep struck an immediate chord with me. It sounds like all my favourite Chicago bands rolled into one, and definitely has McEntire’s masterly signatures all over it. The instrumentation is as varied as the sounds within: marimba, viola, cello, guitars, processed drums and wonderful vintage synth washes courtesy of McEntire and the EMS keyboard. Nothing is overplayed, there are subtle shifts within the build of each tune. The EP’s highlight, *Ap(arent)he synthesis*, travels like a rhythmic, running robot in a style that Kraftwerk or Neu would be most proud of. Ending with piano and strings, the ep delivers the listener full circle, but with the overwhelming urge to hit play once again from the top to take the ride all over again. It’s really very good.

Lydon Pike

First Nation

First Nation
(Paw Tracks)

This weirdo folksy tribal poppy beast is a three piece from New York that seem to exist in a similar kind of world to the likes of Animal Collective and Gang Gang Dance (who are mentioned in the liner

notes) yet are probably a little more low key. They’re also a little more straight up, offering an off kilter yet endearing approach to melody. They utilise electric guitar to anchor many of their tunes however it’s their vocals, the kind of care-less sounding yet carefully placed waiting that really makes First Nation something interesting. If the Boredoms were an all female folk band then they might be First Nation. Their instrumentation is strange, a prominent guitar, flutes, odd percussion. It sounds sloppy, carelessly, almost haphazardly put together and when the strange singing stops they often drift into these amazing little jams that seem as influenced by Arabic music as any of their cooler than thou New York contemporaries. This is the girls debut album, released on the Animal Collective’s Paw Tracks label and whilst they do seem to take some time out to howl abstractly at the moon, many of the tunes despite their experimental instrumentation, feeling of fragility and off kilter oddness are not only song based but really quite infectious, and that’s without making the slightest commercial concession. You’ll be atonally waiting along in no time. **Bob Baker Fish**

Grizzly Bear

Yellow House
(Warp/Inertia)

“She came to New York City to be a singer in the 1930s, failed, and drank herself to death in the 1940s,” recounts Edward Droste about his great aunt Marla. Her aura radiates seventy years later – a song she recorded was discovered by Edward and appears on Grizzly Bear’s second album. Aside from Marla’s self-titled track, there is a historical, old school charm to *Yellow House* – but it’s not a dated sound. Banjos, woodwinds, metallophone (tuned metal bars) and finger-pickin’ acoustic textures combine to create ambient and other-worldly textures – the different elements are mixed effortlessly. The songs retain strong sonic dynamics, from whispered introductions to soaring electric guitars and toms. *Yellow House* is a subtle and warm album, more accomplished, polished and expansive than their debut *Horn Of Plenty*. Where *Horn Of Plenty* is almost a solo album – it’s origins centre around Edward’s intimate bed-sit recordings circa 2002 – *Yellow House* is

a powerful four-piece ensemble performance, that maintains a warm and seductive presence. With ten tracks over fifty minutes, there is a pleasing symmetry to the album. And it’s a grower too, requiring a focused listen in order to reveal its many layers. Recorded over a month during a sweltering Cape Cod summer in Edward’s mother’s Victorian (yellow) house – “you could go lay on the couch or go to the refrigerator and grab lemonade” recalls Daniel Rossen, the band’s second songwriter, the album exudes a casual collective intimacy. “We had a cocktail hour religiously every evening out on the back porch. It was sweet, listening to cicadas, looking at the trees as the sun was setting, holding a cocktail. That was always something to look forward to,” Rossen continues. Marla would have approved. **Daniel Jumpertz**

Ollo

The If If

(Groovescooter/Vitamin)

The palindromically titled pair behind Sydney group Ollo have finally released a follow up to their 2002 debut *Sleeper*. That album was a shifting instrumental soundscape generally influenced by producers like Matthew Herbert. But things change. Two years ago, they recorded a cover of Fun Boy Three’s *The Lunatics (Have Taken Over The Asylum)* with Alex Crowfoot singing. It was the first suggestion Ollo would (or could) make a leap sideways, and up, to pop, albeit off-kilter pop. The reaction to that song encouraged Alex to step out into the anti-gravity of writing his own songs, and singing them. His vulnerability is there in every lyric on this new album, in the restraint of his delivery, mouth right up near the microphone, his whispering voice spread across the speaker output. That’s how the album starts, with the awkward insights of *Trouble Is*: “I really should eat more bananas and get more exercise / fend off this downward spiral.” That vignette leads into *Shaky Flaky*, a tough drum break and organ-led Krautrock groove touched by Alex’s relationship with Sydney band Tooth. A minute or two in and Alex starts singing, “Wakey wakey / hands off snakey,” sounding just like Jarvis Cocker singing over a Barry Adamson number. *The If If* is an ambitious album. It doesn’t always

work, for example, Inga Liljestrom’s vocal histrionics seem outrageously out of place on *Gordian Knotted*. But at almost an hour, including hidden tracks, the album focusses on Ollo’s intimate and affecting songs, rather than the guests, making Alex’s decision to bare his soul more sound investment than risky gamble.

Matthew Levinson

Pit Er Pat

Pyramids

(Thrill Jockey/Inertia)

Pit Er Pat is yet another interesting three-piece to emerge from Chicago’s art fuelled post-indie rocker scene. Now signed to the Thrill Jockey label, vocalist-keyboardist Fay Davis-Jeffers, drummer Butchy Fuego and bassist Rob Doran have just completed their second album, *Pyramids*. Recorded in only eleven days with Tortoise’s John McEntire it’s a vivid treatise that references sounds in surprising combinations. The overall mood is a giant fairytale populated with monsters, ghoulish souls, long dark nights, glimmers of light and many moments of sweetness. Davis-Jeffers has one of those delightfully girly pop voices that wouldn’t sit awry in bands like Broadcast, The Concretes or even Stars. Yet in combination with the melancholy lyrics, ominous creepy-crawling bass, haunting organ melodies and soft-textural synth effects she’s right at home as she tells her stories, “I like the dark, ‘cause it’s like I don’t exist, I’m part of the air, just like snowfall, shadow passing slipping through the air unnoticed, out here, hidden away from all the tremendous fear down there (from the track, *Baby’s Fist*).” The naive renditions are simply charming in a similar way that lyrics by The Knife or Balun make you feel you can unlock the imagination of the inner child as all sorts of delights spill forth. On other tracks such as *No Money=No Friend* she motions, “follow me, we are going to burn everything” as psychedelic key changes create a musical whirlpool around her. In many ways Pit Er Pat’s style is a very gentle and restrained jazz jam, as illustrated by tracks like *Swamp*. Even when they rock out, there’s still a soft sea of pitter-pattering steel brush strings and gentle driving guitar riffs as birds sing softly in the distance. Overall there is a

strong sense of mastery at work here. The band is conscious of the boundaries they seek to cross, voicing a unique perspective with an air of (seemingly) effortless refinement. **Renaë Mason**

Telemetry Orchestra

Empire

(Silent Recordings/Undercover Music) Telemetry Orchestra worked their sound up from a palette of post-Stereolab and Clan Analogue electronics. Following a string of compilation contributions, the group released an ambitious debut, *Live Better Electrically*, eight years ago. *Children Stay Free* followed in 2003, polishing their efforts into a wonderfully matured sound, and marking significant between album growth. Which brings us to today. It's 2006 and the three piece, which splits its time between London and Sydney, has released a third album, the provocatively titled *Empire*. Although never as inventive as Stereolab, the group works in a similar musical sphere to another British group, Broadcast. But where Broadcast keeps making beautiful records from their equally limited colour sheet (even their b-sides compilation is great), Telemetry Orchestra's ambitions seem to have stalled with album number three. That is underlined by a media release for *Empire* that dwells on sales results rather than the music. However, the album itself continues smoothing Telemetry's sound: the individual elements of French chanson, Krautrock or the trip hop and electronic undertow are less noticeable, and, although musically less interesting, the songs are stronger.

Matthew Levinson

Rumbling and mumbling:

LOWS

Blue Sky Black Death

A Heap Of Broken Images

(Mush Records/Stomp)

San Francisco-based producer Kingston has cultivated a considerable reputation over the past couple of years with his work on albums by Boston's Virtuoso, Jus Allah and Chief Kamanchi and *A Heap Of*

Broken Images represents his first release alongside fellow Bay Area native Young God as Blue Sky Black Death. This debut release comes across more as two albums in one, the first disc devoted entirely to brooding instrumental hip-hop in the vein of DJ Shadow and Blockhead, while the second represents the MC-led half of the equation, with Gang Starr's Guru, Rob Sonic and Freestyle Fellowship's Mikah-9 making appearances amongst a stellar lyrical cast. From the moment the first instrumental disc unfurls with the pen- sive spoken samples and rolling downbeat groove of 'Skies Open', lush strings uncoiling into the distance as majestic jazz horns and slow snares trail through space, there are bound to more than a few comparisons made with the likes of 'Downtown Science'-period Blockhead and a certain Mr. Josh Davis. In this case however, the level of meticulous attention to detail and a tenacious grasp of the bigger emotional picture result in an evocative collection that easily stands on its own, regardless of the reference points. With elements veering from slowburning post-rock and Southern-tinged blues often rearing their heads amidst hip-hop production on the same track (as in the case of the swooning 'Days Are Years'); there's certainly a huge instrumental palette on display here, but one that consistently comes across as heartfelt and never forced. In truth, the first disc alone would on its own easily make my albums of the year list, but the second MC-dominated half provides the perfect flipside of the coin, matching its sibling's deep introspection with braggadocious flows and a deft grasp of the boom-bap. Inspired is the word here. **Chris Downton**

Count Bass D

Act Your Waist Size

(Fatbeats/Shogun)

Another promo CD spoilt by a voice-over on every track. Each one kicks off with Nashville rapper and musician Count Bass D reading the album title and asking listeners not to burn the CD – "Please don't copy, seriously, we need every sale" - which is kind of funny, but what's the difference between this copy sent out to music writers and the ones in the shop next week? Can't they be burnt just as easily? More to the point, don't labels

realise they're aiming a gun at their own feet. Like most other writers, I'm also making radio, DJing, and I can't play this CD in any of those avenues. Fortunately, *Act Your Waist Size* is a good listen, despite the intermittent distractions. You might know the MC from 1995's 'Pre-Live Crisis' or his MF Doom-esque 2002 record *Dwight Spitz*, he actually guested on Doom's *Mmm...Food*. Those sketches justified comparisons to Doom projects like that and Madvillain and attracted widespread critical acclaim. While Doom has humour and lyrical rhythm, the Count has more soul, and at times he approaches the warmth of Aloe Blacc's recent record or Steve Spacek. But *Act Your Waist Size* is missing the songs, and although it might just be my experience with this tainted promo, it barely lives up to the potential of his earlier work.

Matthew Levinson

Def Wish Cast

The Legacy Continues...

(Hydrofunk/Shogun)

In the 14 years since Def Wish Cast released their *Mad Hatter* EP, the western Sydney trio has collected a lot of trophies: first full length album, first hip hop group to tour nationally, one of an initially taunted minority who spurned fake US accents and rapped the way they spoke, and it was their video for A.U.S.T. (which accompanied first album *Knights of the Underground Table*) that first gave Australian hip hop a face. Put simply, hip hop in this country would be very different without Die C, Sereck and Def Wish. That was 13 years ago. *The Legacy Continues...* is underlined by the nostalgic power of Roland's TR-808 drum machine (the album title's legacy, according to Sereck) and references to Miami bass, graffiti and electro. The album immediately attracted breathless reviews from hip hop critics – primarily, I assumed, because people want to like the music these eminent heads produce – but despite obsessively old school production and MCing, and a pervading sense that Australian hip hop owes them something, this is a great record. A string of guests including Bonez, Murda1, DCE, Sing, Katch, Paul Johannesen, Jeremy Glover and Blunted Stylus rarely undermine its cohesion, a striking vision that comes

into sharp relief in the contrast between two of the best songs: the knife-sharp 808 snare and lush Rhodes sampling Complete, and Street Bombin, a stripped down electro paean to the delights of graffiti. In the time that Ice T's gone from cop killer to cop actor, and music has moved from local scenes subtly filtering global trends into one big feeding unit that cannibalises the same handful of magazines and blogs, Def Wish Cast have stuck to their guns - there's no crunk or baile funk here, but there is plenty of hot, jagged, hardcore hip hop. By indulging their love of early hip hop culture, Def Wish Cast has crafted a gripping set of songs that are anything but retro. **Matthew Levinson**

Dr Who Dat

Beat Journey

(Lex/Inertia)

Dr. Who Dat is the latest signing to Lex records, and its lush instrumentals all the way. The beats are nice and loose, there's plenty of gratuitous panning, lazy cuts, thick dubby bass, lots of reverb, warm compression, lush atmospheric backdrops, aphoristic vocal samples, and just enough grit to keep it all from sounding to much like muzak. Its familiar territory, but it works, like DJ Cam in his finer moments, or a more dense Pete Rock. Its hard to pick out highlights, because its so consistent, but Follow is brilliant; lovely swinging drums with a degraded snare and a multitude of plucked string samples had me nodding relentlessly. The bugged out rhythms of Kelly Drive were another, like the Beat Junkies on valium with a Hammond and some shakers, apparently the keys on this are from a session with Count Bass D which was recorded only on a video camera and later sampled from the tape, fitting the low fi aesthetic like a glove. Its an album you could put on anywhere, fill the room with, and not feel like a populist hack for doing so - The Myspace blurb reads "This is the perfect album for dat dreamy summer on your super-yacht", which is pretty spot on, but it's just as good for those with less glamorous transport. There are no cutting-edge pretensions here, and its obvious he thoroughly enjoyed making this album, which I think a lot of people will enjoy hearing. **Tom Smith**

Drop The Lime

We Never Sleep

(Tigerbeat6/Valve)

NYC native Drop The Lime (real name Luca Venezia) has certainly become the toast of that city's breakcore scene since the release of his debut album *This Means Forever* on Tigerbeat6 last year, and this highly anticipated follow-up comes across as slightly less furious than its predecessor (though that's a term being used relatively here). Swinging between electro-cabaret pop and furious hard-edged club bangers, *We Never Sleep* certainly seems infused with same sort of visceral rave atmospheres recently paid tribute to by compatriot Kid606, but in this case there's a level of attention to catchy hooks that ensures repeat listening well after the clubs have closed. While the incorporation of some of the grime elements comes across as slightly unwieldy and self-consciously cool, some of the biggest thrills come towards the middle section of this disc, where Venezia really loses himself in the hedonistic pleasures of the dancefloor – as in the case of the rattling, conga-laden Hot Sauce Grillz. There will undoubtedly be some out there disappointed that Venezia's slightly mellowed his tone on this second album, but in this case the increased variety of exploration has certainly resulted in a more interesting 'whole album' listen.

Chris Downton

Jack's Son

Everyone Has A Kid Inside

(Abolipop)

Wow! Where the hell did this spring from? Literally from Mexico - metaphorically from the cavernous dub station on the fringe of hip hop, soul and glitched out funk riding high with a mescalin milkshake and a touch of sunstroke. Diego Martinez started recording as Lumenlab and then in 2005, he became Jack's Son, a purveyor of hip hop cut ups, skittering vocal samples and flourishes of drum and bass, funk and soul. The comparison to the work of Scott Herron's Prefuse 73 cannot be ignored, so I'll dispense with it now. However, whereas Prefuse lost the beautiful (seemingly) simplicity and warmth of his earlier work on later albums, Jack's Son takes the mantle of Herron's *Uprock Narrative* sound

and gives it a very unique twist. Utilising the talents of Mexico's most recognised MC, Boca Floja, as well as MCs Dimitri Pollok, Bookless, Vektor, Broadband Star, the Colombian singer/producer Lucrecia and minimal techno producer Fax, Martinez creates the most sonically dense and warm tunes, heavy on the dub echo and never straying into predictable territory. Glitches sit along side disjointed drums, synth pads and warm washes, with the vocals treated as an extension of the instrumental colourings, rather than sitting inside of the groove in a sensible fashion. Martinez really bends your mind in sections and becomes very cerebrally kinetic, forcing the listener to disconnect the normal listening structures and to allow each small sound to exist in the moment rather than trying to pin down each noise in a logical sense. It confuses at times sure, but all the while this album grooves and moves constantly. Even on this giddy ride, it's no abstract pony – it's got the funk through and through. The surprises keep coming when the female vocals make an appearance midway through the album, delivering yet another side to this already diverse producer's sound. Taking us from a stoned dub setting to a gorgeous soul tune and into drum and bass seems effortless for this super talented young Mexican producer. Seek it down and you'll be thoroughly rewarded. **Lyndon Pike**

Various Artists

Chrome Children

(Stones Throw/Basement Digs/Adult Swim)

Stones Throw have teamed up with cartoon network Adult Swim for the release of this compilation. It contains 19 tracks from all the label's stalwarts, a few lesser known signings, and a re-issue of Pure Essence's Third Rock, from 1976. Stones Throw have been around for almost exactly 10 years, steadily growing in strength and diversity, always maintaining sincerity and integrity in what they do. This release reflects that, and has the tone of a well deserved homage. The DVD feature produced by Adult Swim is a nice little addition - the very short interview with Madlib is as trippy and entertaining as his incredible music, due to his odd distracted manner, and clever

zooming in and out as he constantly moves and glances about whilst delivering his dialogue. Peanut Butter Wolf also gives a wrap up of the label's history, and the ethic which he's employed in getting where he is. Included is a show at South by Southwest in Texas headlined by Madvillain. The Madlib solo set is interesting if only to see how such a multifarious character handles himself on stage, and the Madvillain set raises the roof. It's unfortunate, and a little mystifying that Georgia Anne Muldrow is omitted from the DVD, given she's a recent signing, and her music is brilliant. The Koushik tune is lovely - his sugary vocals floating over huge swinging drums. The Madvillain tune is excellent - it's been popping, cracking and bouncing between my synapses for days now, and the Georgia Anne Muldrow tune is like a little teaser, a small taste of her slightly awkward, stilted neo-soul, which is strangely affecting. J Dilla shines posthumously, with his beautiful vocal cut Nothing Like This, and Percee P and Quasimoto add a touch of practiced braggadocio with Raw Heat. It's a great intro to the label for newcomers, and there's plenty of brand new exclusives for long time fans. If you like quality music, check out Stones Throw. **Tom Smith**

Various Artists

The Roots Of Dubstep

(Tempa)

Dubstep has suddenly become huge. Maybe not massive, but big enough for the average subcultural junkie to know what you are talking about when you use it as shorthand for a sound. It is even starting to appear with regularity on flyers and gig posters, and demo CDs from local Australia producers are starting to land in my letterbox. So, this little compilation from the seminal Tempa label is most welcome especially as back in 2001/2, when some of us started hearing about a new kind of garage sound, deeper, darker and more dub-oriented, we'd have to order in, almost blind, 12's from mail order services in the UK (I've since realised I'm sitting on an eBay goldmine of almost mint vinyl!). Much of the best material was released on tiny labels in even smaller pressing runs. There is also an interest in these early years because of the enormous success of Burial's self titled

debut on the Hyperdub label, that mines the rhythmic ticks and syncopation of these early garage/dubstep hybrid years especially the production of El-B. Martin Blackdown who has been responsible for sorting out the digital distribution of many current dubstep labels through Bleep.com is behind what is hopefully just the first in an ongoing series of compilations re-releasing some of the most important and, for newcomers, unheard key tracks. Martin has made some great choices, opening with a trilogy of absolutely essential tracks - Steve Gurley's Hoyboys, and El-B's Express and Buck & Bury. These three tracks capture a sound at its birth - the jittery, itchy syncopation of 2-step being pulled and stretched and drained of light by darker atmospheres. On Buck & Bury the beat is so hurried that it almost feels as if it skipping, chased by the dark. Horsepower Productions delivers their finest moment with Gorgon Sound, a long time favourite, and some of the other early vinyl-only Tempa releases also feature, introducing the 'tribal' period of dubstep with Highland Spring and Sholay. Menta follows with his super stripped back Snake Charmer, an example of orientalist tendencies which probably can be traced back to Timbaland's early production work which impacted virtually every urban style for years. Artwork's Red, a long lost classic on Big Apple Records (of the now defunct South Croydon record store) finally gets reborn - a track that crossed briefly into breaks circles; and other lost Big Apple productions from Digital Mystikz, Benga and Skream demonstrate just how long these key figures have been putting out music. Although some of this music has dated - particularly the tribal-influenced tracks - this compilation reveals much of the innovation that occurred under everyone's noses and laid the foundations for what is now a sound and style on the rise. Interestingly it also shows just how under-explored a lot of the rhythmic impulses of 2-step still are - and how the secrets of beat producers like El-B still remain unknown, and offer potentially fertile ground for future music.

Sebastian Chan

Silence and the absence of it:

MUTE

FM3 & Dou Wei

Hou Guan Yin
(Lona)

In the way a faint tinkling note can bring out the silence of a landscape, the slight permanences of *Hou Guan Yin* bring out change. The changes are seen through long-held organ chords, the smallest of clicks swaying alongside a current of short-wave hum or a single scale descending over and over again. There isn't much going on in these pieces, but like a still pond, many manage to clearly reflect a variety of images and influences. For one, this album sees Christiaan Virant and Zhang Jian - who are responsible for that little ditty the Buddha Machine which so many people, including Brian Eno, seem to fancy - collaborate with renowned Chinese rock musician Dou Wei. Throughout tracks three and four, the scattershot rhythms and crafty shifts in tempo of the latter works to heighten the music's momentum, while also fleshing out the buoyant melodies packed within the snowy ambiance of Virant and Jian. During these moments, these two poles engage in a duel antagonistic exchange - one offers a sacrifice, which prompts the other to sacrifice in return, producing soundscapes that flow into and through one another. As though craving a fully fledged integration, though, the majority of tracks settle into a dull pattering - a slow pulsing whirr that is best pushed to the background. Woozy chords, a slow procession of chimes and pixillated fuzz all try to act like analogue's bringing forth the presence of mountainsides shrouded in early morning mist or cheery tree's caught from a distance, but the simple, seamless transitions of these works needs to find some punctuation before such images can truly stand out and be recognized. **Max Schaefer**

Greg Davis & Jeph Jerman

Ku
(Room40)

PAGE 40 CYCLIC DEFOST ISSUE 15 [11.2006]

Utilising found objects the sounds of this perplexing duo are a series of squelches, bangs, taps, creaks, rumbles and scratches. Their approach lead you to consider the sheer physicality of the objects they utilise as they appear to be paying little heed to any form of musicality or compositional structures. Or if they are it's based on density of sound or highlighting textures. This is sound that you can feel, it's almost prickly. Yet there's very little (if any) reprocessing, just the delicate accumulation of texture. Even the previously taboo sound of wind on the microphone is utilised. Ku is an example of two people shifting the frame of composition and focussing almost exclusively on areas that are rarely tackled with any sense of rigour. Yet despite this it all feels haphazardly assembled, almost like humans didn't have a hand in it. With *Ku*, the act of Listening is itself a very strange sensation. **Bob Baker Fish**

Seaworthy

Serrata

(Celebrate Psi Phenomenon)

Seaworthy might just be Sydney's top purveyors of polite music. When the trio aren't making tunes to set your boat gently (post)rocking by the pier, they're dabbling in considered drones, looped swells, and other such textural delights. Indeed, the tranquility of this outfit is hard matched, the stuff of siesta dreams. *Serrata*, on the other hand, is a fine example of why collaborations between unfamiliar artists and labels remain important in the dot-comatose world of rampant, Myspaced-out self-promo: labels lend a healthy chunk of context to a project, as much for the artist as for the listener. Great labels stimulate and provoke artists to branch out and try new things. Some credit may thus be due to Campbell Kneale's Celebrate Psi Phenomenon label, then, for nudging Seaworthy toward harsher boroughs. Contrary to their usual penchant for short sonic vignettes of supreme pleasure and the like, *Serrata* sees the group weaving a single, 38 minute piece that's built around a guitar string which drones in a sharper manner than their usual fare. It's the knotted tones that catch the ear, bubbling around and flirting with the drone, seem-

ingly arising from and returning to its consistency. There are sounds which are probably effected guitars, but the benefit of the long, single-piece format is that instruments lose their significance as slow shifts in texture and timbre direct the mind elsewhere. *Serrata*, though boasting a harsher edge, is still polite music - but it has the sonic character and slow metamorphosis that will lend itself to avant-gardists perhaps more than other more melodic Seaworthy releases. And though the cover this time was out of guitarist (and part-time cd cover craftsman) Cameron Webb's hands, the CD-R nonetheless comes packaged in a fine looking wallpaper sleeve - a nice touch from a band who evidently pride themselves on the fine art of packaging. It works better at some times than others, but generally the shift in sound and composition feels comfortable, and the texture bright and enveloping; one suspects that with future releases of this nature, Seaworthy will truly wrangle the minimal influences at play. In the meantime, *Serrata* will make for a fine soundtrack as summer breaks upon our hemisphere; the ferns curling and uncurling, birds softly chattering, and the rustle of wind blowing through treetops as life hums and whirrs along beneath it all. **Jon Tjhia**

Tim Hecker

Harmony In Ultraviolet

(Kranky/Inertia)

Canadian Tim Hecker (not to be confused with Mego's Florian Hecker) was responsible for one of the best albums to come out of the final years of the seminal Mille Plateaux label - Radio Amor in 2003. Hecker's sound is that of decaying electronic ambience and guitar drone, merging the bleak distortion and fuzz of fellow Canadians Godspeed You Black Emperor with the open tonal ambient expanses of artists like Biosphere. The latest album *Harmony In Ultraviolet* continues the development of this sound and it is loud. Stags, Aircraft, Kings and Secretaries, Spring Heeled Jack Flies Tonight, and Radio Spiricom roar with distortion but without rhythmic backing or drums they hang heavy in the air like haze. This serves to make more prominent the album's quieter moments - the

four parts of Harmony In Blue and the epic Whitecaps of White Noise through which a subtle piano melody emerges. Best listened to at full volume Tim Hecker's sound is a storm, a riot, and a lullaby. **Lovely. Sebastian Chan**

Tod Dockstader

Aerial #3

(Sub Rosa)

The invariant, ill-omened drones and ghostly striations which flit across this, Tod Dockstader's third and final edition to his *Aerial* series, seem always to be overflowing, always exhausting themselves in reaching toward some masked Other. With its deep, graceful unfolding, tasteful and imaginative tone-mangling, and poetic approach to breath, one would not be far in off in insisting that this album, though thoroughly modern in approach, is belied by hues of romanticism and its emphasis on the fragment. In this light, Dockstader does not so much excavate sounds from his short-wave radio as he performs an exorcism on its ailing body, shapes it into a real versatile instrument, and makes its spirits writhe at his feet. After the more upfront, abrasive excursions found in the second volume, Dockstader canvasses this effort with more cinematic forms. Every composition consists of a particle wrested from a whole, panned, delayed and layered into harmonic densities that are brimming with small, contrasting details that nevertheless manage to find a spontaneous unity. The drones - drifting and evocative - are also more measured this time out. Their cool, vaporous progression often acts like a searchlight exposing a wealth of deformed, quivering frequencies and darting shafts of static. On account of these yawning drones, moreover, a real sense of motion is prevalent, even when pieces are at their most skeletal. On tracks like 'Descent', wiry anti-harmonies and haunting electronic tones glide drearily across hissing undercurrents, while on others patches of micro-sound frequencies and icicle-like timbres penetrate a body of pulsating drones like a sharp blade. A fitting farewell to what has been a most endearing project, *Aerial #3* conjures the otherworldly through calm communication. **Max Schaefer**

Reviewed by Ali Burge

BIG CHILL 2006

THE BRITISH FESTIVAL-GOING EXPERIENCE IS STEEPED IN TALES OF HORROR; FROM GLASTONBURY'S (IN)FAMOUS MUD TO READING'S BURNING PORTALOOS, THE IMAGES THAT HAVE COME TO CHARACTERISE OUTDOOR MUSIC IN THE UK ARE ALMOST ALWAYS NEGATIVE.

In stark contrast, you have the perceptions of major international festivals like Sónar, which instantly conjures up images of sophisticated music lovers enjoying the bleeding edge of contemporary aural art, possibly while sporting a mullet. The organisers of the Big Chill have clearly learnt from the mistakes of their UK-based rivals - the weekend of the festival is traditionally one of the hottest of the year, there were ample toilets on site (and I'm pleased to report that none of them were in flames) and they even had masses of showers in each campsite.

Set in the beautiful countryside of the Malvern Hills, the Big Chill locates itself in a deer park in the grounds of Eastnor Castle. Thankfully the deer all take a holiday while the festival is in full swing, leaving behind their lush surroundings to make way for 30,000 revelers. The Big Chill's nine stages take in a diverse range of music that should satisfy those of a chilled nature. Those expecting five hours of pounding hardcore each night will be left sorely disappointed, but that's not to say that the harder side of the musical spectrum is ignored - Funkywormhole (aka the reggae tent) included a fair bit of jungle and, as expected, the Club tent bore witness to some pretty full-on beats.

The main changes to the musical programming of this year's event were the introduction of a dedicated folk stage and the return of jazz to the festival. With folk having achieved critical mass in British consciousness of late, the Village Green stage provided the likes of Tunng, Martha Wainwright and Adem with a low key, relaxed venue for their music, conveniently situated next to the Strongbow cider tent. Tunng got off to a rocky start, struggling to get their electronic elements in harmony with the remainder of their acoustic arsenal. They sadly never recovered from

this misstep, failing to convince many new to the band that all those plaudits were justified. Stretching the folk classification slightly, Mexican flamenco guitar pairing Rodrigo y Gabriela wowed the crowds, undoubtedly buoyed in number by the late cancellation of flamenco and scratching act Ochos de Brujo.

Perhaps the one notable omission from the Village Green was Vashti Bunyan who, presumably because of her popularity, appeared to rapturous applause on one of the major stages. Looking terrified at the size of the crowd staring expectantly at her, the situation was not helped by persistent feedback from her acoustic guitar. At times confirming most preconceived ideas you might have about folk artists by introducing songs with epithets like "I wrote this song sitting in a field that was once owned by my grandfather," she nonetheless played a blinding set that convinced all but the most stubborn of her talent. Bunyan was not the only folkie to go AWOL from the Village Green though, with Lamb's Lou Rhodes appearing a few hours beforehand. Rhodes' solo project is a long way from the drum n bass origins of Lamb, with her stunning voice now able to explore a different musical terrain. She knows her audience though and had pretty much everyone on their feet for one of the most heartfelt performances of Lamb's standout track Gabriel I've heard.

The lack of jazz was one of the major bugbears of last year's festival, but all was forgiven this year with the appearance of the Esbjorn Svensson Trio and Hanne Hukkelberg. EST put in one of the performances of the festival, wowing a sadly rather small crowd on the main stage as the sun set. The double bass of Dan Bergland at times managed to steal the limelight from the titular Svensson's piano, overwhelming the crowd with the



ingenious use of the bow creating a sound not unlike Sigur Rós. Svensson himself had a few tricks up his sleeve though, using what I can only describe as a slide inside the piano while simultaneously playing. The crowd lapped up every moment, with new track Tuesday Wonderland (which is also the title of their new album) getting a fantastic reception. Hanne Hukkleberg at least confounded my expectations by not having a perm and, like EST, Hukkleberg's lo-fi jazz sound overwhelmed the audience at the secluded Sanctuary stage, prompting two encores!

The traditional electronic element of the festival was not left to one side and provided some of the best sets of the weekend. Echasketch kicked off the electronic revolution, proving that the Sanctuary stage is the perfect space for intimate, innovative sounds. At times veering into the realm of minimal techno, they proved the perfect antidote to the bland beats of X-Press 2, who were performing on the main stage at the same time. Coldcut saw out Friday with an A/V mix set that left the crowd hungry for more. Along with staple tracks like the ZeroDB remix of Everything's Under Control they did some fantastic things with, amongst others, Disney films and Tony Blair's political speeches. The most innovative event at the festival was provided by Coldcut; their set was being recorded and put on sale the very next day in CD form! London-based Concert Live hauled a lorry filled with CD writers on site and seemingly spent all night burning off the 2006 CD copies made available.

New Australian resident Mark Pritchard (aka Troubleman amongst other aliases) opened Sunday with the perfect hangover cure in the form of chilled psychedelia on Saturday. What was perhaps surprising about the day was that several solid acts turned in disappointing performances – Bugz in the Attic just didn't seem to click with the crowd that had assembled, while Nightmares on Wax Sound System's incredibly chilled set somehow misread the mood of an audience ready for some dancing. Steve Reid and Kieran Hebden



(the latter of Four Tet fame) were similarly misplaced, producing what can only be described as pseudo-Reichian rubbish. Hebden had clearly picked up on the pretentiousness of Tom Middleton's Amber project earlier in the day. Middleton either has the world's driest sense of humour or is the world's biggest arsehole. Introducing tracks with words like "these songs are about feelings and emotions" prompted a collective sigh of 'no shit' from those before him. Perhaps Middleton has taken a leaf out of Matthew Herbert's Big Band persona, thinking that making admittedly listenable noodly ambient music qualifies as high art all of a sudden. Looking like a cunt in a plastic peaked cap, Middleton really didn't deserve to be there, or indeed to be making music at all.

The Big Chill's traditional musical variation was well catered for with acts like Amadou & Miriam and Shri, who proved at times alternately extremely talented and a bit scary. Perhaps all this air of sonic art had an effect on what those playing at the lesser tents performed, which would explain Strictly Kev and DK's fantastically cheesy pop and beats set at the close of Sunday. Perhaps what is nicest about the Big Chill though is that the organisers really have thought of everything – this is not just a gigantic field with a load of stages and musicians positioned across it. Sporting some of the best food of any festival, or indeed takeaway food stalls in general, that I've ever been to, the Big Chill is a real culinary delight. And of course,

there's those showers and the toilets where the phrase 'tower of shit' is rarely uttered. It may seem like a bit much to travel literally half way around the world to attend a festival, but the combination of great music and fantastic amenities creates an atmosphere that puts pretty much every other outdoor music event to shame. Yes, even Sónar.

Previous page: Shri, Tom Middleton; above from left: Coldcut, Esti

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SLEEVE REVIEWS

By Bec Paton

Post

Post

(Preservation)

Format: CD

Designer: Mark Gowing

Do you remember tangrams—the ancient Chinese moving puzzle game where you can create silhouettes and patterns? The new Post album is half tangrams meets light play, plus Post is a poster too!

On a white background, tangram-like geometric shapes in deliciously soft and harmonious lolly gradients of pink, lemon, aqua, turquoise and indigo are laid out so that they slightly overlap. Where they overlap, they are multiplied so that it seems they are film cells on a light box, interacting in both colour and form. The interplay of shape, colour and negative space gives the graphics their dynamism. This is perfect for *Post*, because the graphics are as smart and fresh as the eclectic electronica within.

The type is clean, small and simple. It's set in a font somewhat like Interstate in cyan for the CD specific information and charcoal for the label details. The title is still small and is rotated 90 degrees in black type. I would have liked to see it in the charcoal, as it seems a little odd to default to black type for such a delicate and fresh design.

The paper is bright white and uncoated, which seems to be a refreshing new trend for album packaging at the moment. The CD itself is naked, but for a yellow triangle.

The poster is the size of six CD covers, three by two panels, and folds to enclose the CD in its semi-transparent sleeve. The whole package is protected by a clear cellophane envelope, which combined with the candy colour palette, makes it all seem very much like a treat! This package is somewhat flimsy, however, and I would be concerned about how long it would last without being treated with extreme care. It's almost like it is assumed that the poster will be hung up and the CD relegated to a CD wallet. Nevertheless, the piece is delightful and makes you feel that you've scored something quite precious.

Fujiya Miyagi

Transparent Things

(Tirk Recordings)

Format: CD

Designer: Richard Robinson

If you printed the word 'clean' in white ink on white paper, you'd be close to achieving the minimalism of *Transparent Things*' design. There's nothing printed on the front, inside or back of the jewel case inserts and they're all simply brilliant white uncoated card. The CD itself is printed with matte white ink, except for three thin concentric circles of bright purple, cyan and fluoro red at the centre of the CD. That's not to say it's nothing—it's really something!

The front insert has two thick and thirsty sheets of card with a die cut in the centre, about the size of the clear section of a CD. These can slip and shuffle relative to each other and reveal the coloured rings which are printed on the CD. Eyeball jumping and an entirely pleasant brain glitch ensue because a strange depth perception of the rings of card with the rings of colour is perceived. This is super-doooper fantastic for a pop meets krautrock album but this is also one of those covers that will be seen first in a shop and picked up in most cases because people are none too bright and are attracted to negative space. Also, few can resist something so punchy, simple yet trippy! (A CD in the hand is worth... maybe a sale?)

One can't help but wonder if the concentric circles don't reference Loony Tunes even a little bit too...

The tracklisting, copyright hoo-ha, barcode and recording details are therefore relegated to the spines and are set in microscopic, lightweight capitalised type, (something like Bernard light). This is awesome in its irreverence but pretty much ensures you'll never bother to learn the song names unless you must for some specific reason—way too much of a struggle! The back cover could have been used for this and the design would not have lost its power.





Various

The World is Gone

(XL Recordings)

Format: LP

Designer: Various

Tottering precariously along the fine line between the Art Nouveau illustrations of Aubrey Beardsley and soft porn, the stilettos artwork for *The World is Gone* is simultaneously titillating and beautiful. The opulent gatefold package is thick, white and raw—cum as you are!

The illustrations are all predominantly of dark, sexy women interacting with animal beasts in suggestive ways, for example: there's a pouting, semi-naked beauty balanced atop of a reindeer's horns, holding two pieces of antler that she's broken off... a bird ogles... Drawings of a fat mag wheel, anchor and creepily cute lamb adorn the actual record labels.

I doubt very much that many would be offended by the imagery, because it is tastefully done and is suggestive rather than explicit. Additionally, the women are powerful and are depicted as dangerous vixens having their needs met, rather than being passive sex objects.

The illustrations are done in black pencil and ink in an exquisitely stylised manner, with pink, washed-out fade details that are obviously created post-production. One of the most delicious things about them is the beautiful mark making and obvious evidence of the hand.

All of the text is hand lettered and capitalised, (for real and is not just a handwriting font), and features extra ticks at the x-height of letters and simulated slab serifs. This gives it a slight gothic feel, although it is still very readable. A heavier hand than that of the illustrator must have produced the text and whoever did it celebrated this fact by making a feature of crossed out bits, stray marker marks and general wonkiness.

All of this comes together to create a smouldering, fascinating and dangerous package that represents the music of Various beautifully.



Various Artists

Art Groupie

(da dada [Groovescooter])

Format: CD

Designer: G. Zuzak

Art Groupie was an exhibition of art by music makers held at Melt Gallery in July this year. Artists featured included ollo, Saddleback, Don Meers, Deepchild and All India Radio. Each of the artists contributed a track to a limited edition hand crafted CD that was sold at the show for ten bucks.

A black envelope with randomly wrapped rust, yellow and white cotton thread is enclosed in a drafting paper pocket. The draft film is machine stitched along either side with white thread to close it and press studs are popped through each of the four corners to lock the black envelope in. The title and label were printed on white paper that is torn and stuck onto the black envelope, askew. On the rear, the da dAdA label logo is inkily stamped below the point of the envelope flap.

This packaging is so lovingly made, with several processes going into its manufacture. Sadly, the drafting paper is a little too opaque for the yarn underneath to have its full impact, however, the treatment of the title really works with this level of transparency. The press-studs are a smart and original way to hold the whole thing together—ah, the absence of glue!

The CD itself is a sexy piece of arse, with its bottom being black and the clear sections usually seen on top showing through this black. The da dAdA stamp is utilised here again in black ink.

The concept is smart given the nature of the exhibition because there is a definite sense of creation and making conveyed by the piece. It's refreshing to see a vernacular approach to CD design and it reeks of friendship and care, especially if you imagine these pockets of joy being assembled, no doubt over a beer by a group of pals.

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SELECTS: SHANNON O'NEILL

SHANNON O'NEILL HAS ALWAYS BEEN FASCINATED BY OUTSIDER MUSIC AND ART, SAMPLING AND THE FRICTION BETWEEN ART AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY. I FIRST MET HIM AT HIGH SCHOOL, HE WAS ALWAYS INTO DIFFERENT THINGS AND WAS AMONGST A GROUP OF FOLK WHO, THROUGH PERHAPS BEING IN THE WRONG SCHOOL AT THE RIGHT TIME, BUILT UP A FIERCELY INDIVIDUAL CHARACTER AS A RESISTANCE TO THE HEGEMONY OF THE SCHOOL. FOR THE LAST 15 YEARS HE HAS EXPLORED AND EXPANDED THE POSSIBILITIES OF RADIO WITH HIS OWN SEMINAL SYDNEY BROADCASTS, FIRST ON RADIO SKID ROW AND LATER FOR 2MBS-FM – A STATION KNOWN MAINLY FOR ITS Highbrow CLASSICAL PROGRAMMING.

Also intimately involved with the experimental music community in Sydney, he has been a director of Electrofringe and has contributed much to the development of genuinely new music in Australia. He also set up Alias Frequencies, an independent label which allowed Shannon to release some of the amazing music he and his friends discovered. Recently Alias Frequencies has become a netlabel, giving away its music and acting as a hub for likeminded folk. He is currently writing a PhD on experimental music in Australia, works at the University of Technology, Sydney as a lecturer, and organises the Sydney leg of the Liquid Architecture festival. Over to Shannon
Sebastian Chan

Brian Eno & David Byrne – *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*
(E.G. Records, 1981)

Growing up in the seventies and eighties, radio was a doorway into infinite realms of the unknown. I never knew what I was going to hear, but with a turn of the dial there would always be something interesting. Double J was in its prime and there was lots of great community radio, but I was also fascinated by shortwave radio; those strange drifting sounds coming from the other side of the world. Brian Eno & David Byrne were also inspired by these sounds, many of them from religious and political broadcasts, and made a musical collage of them over avant-funk and African-inspired beats. *My Life...* changed my life when I heard it. It was the music I'd been waiting for, and it still sounds both futuristic and timeless.

Severed Heads – *Since the Accident with tracks from Blubberknife*
(Nettwerk, 1989)

This is a re-release of Sevs' 1983 album, adding some tracks from its predecessor. To me it's their quintessential album, as it includes a wide range of styles and contributions from the three key early members: Richard Fielding, Tom Ellard and Garry Bradbury – all of them creative visionaries. Sevs were often categorized as industrial, but despite some superficial similarities, such as a fondness for distorted drum machines, synthesizers and tape loops, they're very different. Severed Heads celebrate absurdity, and are often hilarious. It's obvious on this album, with titles such as *Brassiere*, *In Rome*, *Adolf a Carrot?* and *Exploring the Secrets of Treating Deaf Mutes*. But they're also capable of

sublimely beautiful and unique music, such as *A Million Angels*, with its signature looped choirs. It's impossible to imagine Australian electronic music without Severed Heads, and their influence goes well beyond these shores.

Negativland – *Escape from Noise*
(SST, 1987)

In this era of digital mashups it's hard to imagine that sound collage once seemed like such a radical idea. No one did it better than Negativland. They're perhaps best known these days as advocates of copyright reform, in the wake of their unfortunate encounter with U2 and the litigious corporate music world. But it's their 80s recordings that I love the most. They invented their own universe populated with characters such as The Weatherman and Pastor Dick, while exploring the

psychogeography and mediascape of their Bay Area environment, and they did it with a wide-eyed, nerdy enthusiasm that was irresistible. *Escape from Noise* was the first Negativland album that I heard, and is probably the best introduction to their work, since it's made of short, easily digested pieces. Plus it includes their classic song *Christianity is Stupid*. Negativland also has a radio show on KPFA called *Over the Edge* which, with its live to air improvisation, using the radio studio as an instrument, has been a major influence on my radio work.

Mind/Body/Split – *If Its Not On Its Not On*
(Split Records, 1989)

A supergroup of local experimental musicians, Mind/Body/Split sounded like nothing else I've heard before or since. The lineup gives some indication of what they were doing: Sherre Delys on vocals and text, Jim Denley on wind instruments, the late Jamie Fielding on electronic keyboards, Kim Rue on tape manipulations and Kimmo Vennonen on electronic manipulations. Each track is a brilliant conceptual piece, whether dealing with gender politics (*Mr Man, In a Certain Position*), religion (*Save You'll Save*), language (*Poetry Full of Holes*) or the paranoid politics of the day (*The Walls Have Ears, Particles*). For experimental music, it's also very accessible, with a playful sense of adventure and fun, such as on the track *Intermission*, which features a cheesy organ playing while glasses are smashed. This album is a great introduction to the local experimental music scene of the time. When Adrian Bertram and I had to find a name for our experimental radio show (in a timeslot that we inherited from Seb Chan) in 1991, we chose the title of a track on this album: *Wake Up and Listen*.

John Watermann – *Ambiguity*
(Nightshift Records, 1990)

As a radio junkie in the eighties constantly searching for the strangest sounds around, I soon discovered that the weirdest of all were to be found late at night on the Sydney community station 2MBS-FM. A classical music station by day, its Contemporary Music Collective would take over after midnight, featuring programs with names such as *Stalking the Nightmare* and *Bend Sinister*. Several of these programs would play recordings by someone called John Watermann, and it was these sounds that messed with my mind more than anything I've ever heard. Watermann took voices from radio and television and twisted them into disturbing new shapes and patterns. It was like a transmission from a parallel universe, or a communication from an unfathomable alien intelligence. I soon became obsessed with this artist and learned that he was a mysterious German expat living in Brisbane. Fortunately he was prolific, releasing many recordings on his own *Nightshift* label. Unfortunately many of these recordings were on cassette and hard to find, but over the years I managed to track down most of them, beginning with his CD release *Ambiguity*, or *A Sudden Flow of Air in More or Less Rapid Natural Motion on Her Bare Chest*. When the World Wide Web came along a few years later, he created the amazingly surreal web zine *Lean Yellow Supporting* and we started corresponding by email. We got along well, and he became a sort of mentor figure to me. When he died of cancer in 2002 I promised that I would make available online at *Alias Frequencies* as much of his work as possible.

My Bloody Valentine – *Loveless*
(Creation Records, 1991)

Some of the most gorgeous sounds of the late eighties and early nineties came from the dreampop and shoegazer genres. Bands were deconstructing rock music

by emphasizing texture and atmosphere, from Cocteau Twins' gothic 'cathedrals of sound', to A.R. Kane and Seefeel's spacey dub-pop, to My Bloody Valentine's whispering roar. MBV made a few killer albums and EPs, but it's *Loveless* that I keep returning to. The whole album has a consistently woozy, narcotic feeling, as well as containing some great songs, such as *Soon* - one of the most interesting examples of the dance/rock crossover that was happening at the time. I don't usually go for superlatives, but *Loveless* has to be a contender for best produced rock album ever (along with the Pixies' *Surfer Rosa*, for very different reasons).

African Head Charge – *Great Vintage Volume 2*
(On-U Sound, 1989)

By the end of high school I'd started making music using tape recorders and found sounds. I decided to defer starting my philosophy degree for a year in order to concentrate on music and radio, and enrolled in a twelve month sound engineering course at SAE to improve my technical skills. I was probably the only person there who wanted to use their state of the art 24 track studio to explore aleatory improvised sound collage, but I had a great time. One of the instructors, Michael Pollard, would lend me lots of *On-U Sound* recordings. I was already familiar with *TACK>>HEAD* and Gary Clail, but soon became a fan of Dub Syndicate, Mark Stewart and the Mafia and especially African Head Charge, whose music was like a spooky dub version of *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*. Adrian Sherwood, the incredible producer behind *On-U Sound's* sound became my musical role model for many years.

The Necks – *Aquatic*
(Fish of Milk, 1994)

Sydney had a wonderfully vibrant contemporary jazz scene in the mid-90s. I used to go to the Strawberry Hills Hotel two or three times a week to see the gigs put on by the Sydney Improvised Music

Association (SIMA) featuring bands such as Clarion Fracture Zone, Chelate Compound and The Necks, who were all pushing the envelope. Several of these musicians became regular guests on *Wake Up and Listen*, jamming with us live to air, including Lloyd Swanton, bass player for CFZ and The Necks. Knowing that Lloyd was a fan of reggae and dub, I could hear that influence in his playing, but it's on The Necks' third album, *Aquatic*, that he really explores that territory, using both acoustic and electric bass. It's still my favourite recording of theirs - minimalist underwater jazz dub.

Various – *Dislocations*
(Zonar Recordings, 1998)

I know this is indulgent, cos I'm on it, but this is my favourite compilation of Australian electronic music. It really captures a moment that felt unique and exciting. I joined Clan Analogue in late 1994, attracted by the involvement of some of my heroes, such as Gary Bradbury and Ian Andrews, but I was also introduced to a new generation of artists and music. Clan founder Brendan Palmer eventually left to form *Zonar*, and attracted many of the edgier and more experimental artists from that scene. *Dislocations* was an album of 'incestuous electronic remixing' across two CDs. It's a great survey of some of the most interesting artists of the time, such as Mute Freak, Fluxx, Hypnoblob, atone, Minit, Size, Kazumichi Grime and Severed Heads. I contributed a psychedelic electro-dub remix of Size's *1000 Bambis*, and Wake Up and Listen contributed the track *White Spine*, in which Grandmaster Flash meets the Three Stooges. This is probably the high point of that era of my music. Shortly afterwards I switched from using a sampler and synths, to a PC running AudioMulch and my sound changed substantially. *Zonar* was also associated with the club EAR, whose residency upstairs at the Bentley Bar in the late 90s was the stuff of legend. I'll never forget Sweden's performance in a bath full of baked beans!

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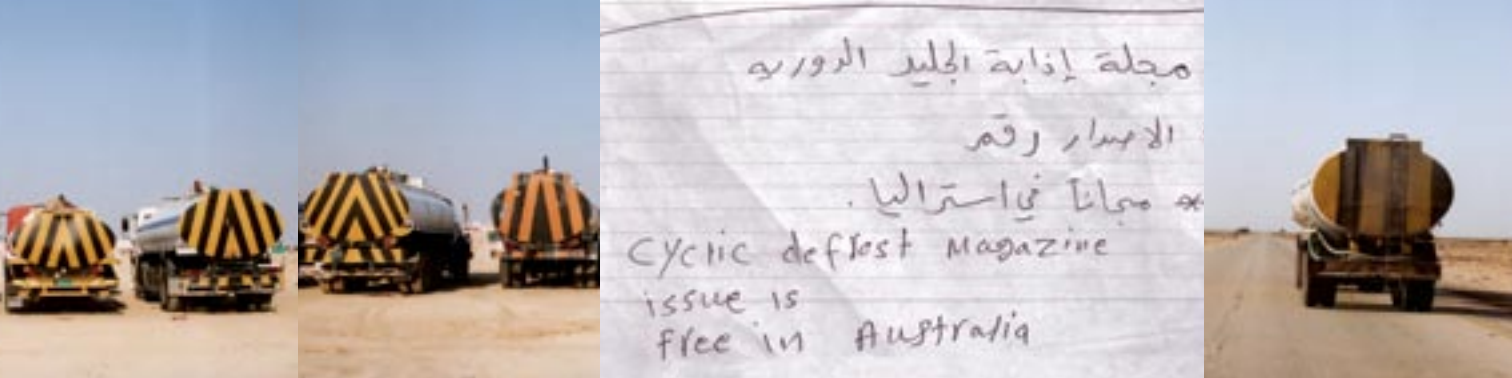
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