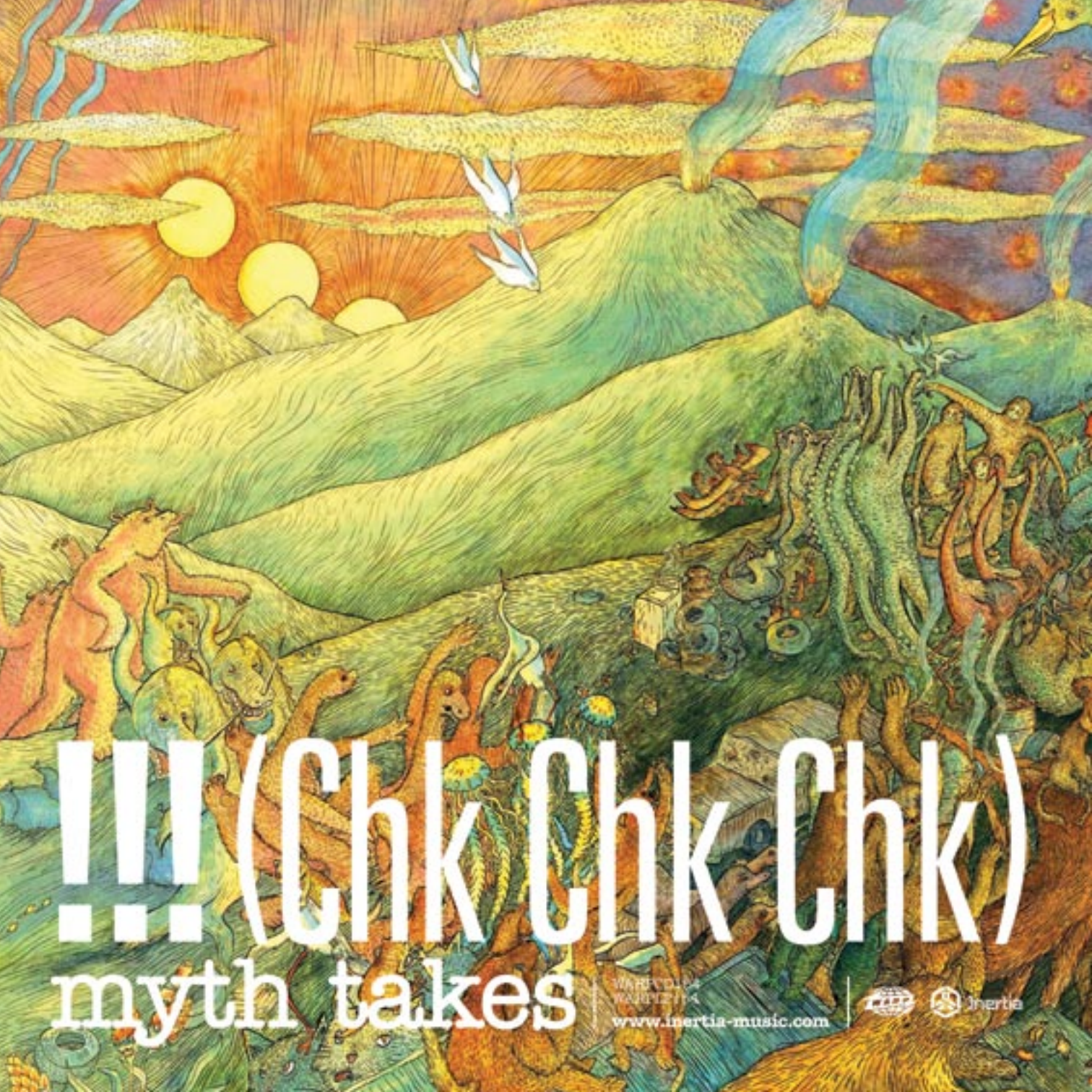


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Cyclic Defrost







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# CYCLIC DEFROST MAGAZINE

ISSUE 15 March 2007

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## EDITORIAL

Welcome to the sweet sixteenth issue of Cyclic Defrost. This bright yellow and red line-drawn new edition holds plenty of change. You've probably noticed the cover already - this issue's design comes courtesy of Build and it is on thicker paper. That's not all that's changed. Inside you will find a redesign of page layouts and content. The reviews are gone - not gone forever, but moved online where we think they will be easier to access and won't date the issue so quickly. Freeing up the space inside the magazine means you can read more articles and longer articles. We hope that this means that you will spend longer reading this and future issues, and that they are more likely to find a permanent, rather than temporary home, in your outhouse magazine rack, or your bookshelf.

Turn the page for interviews with Australians Because of Ghosts, Philip Samartzis, Triosk piano man Adrian Klumpes, the new Underground Lovers and Pretty Boy Crossover collaboration Mist and Sea, Mr Speed from Adelaide's New Pollutants, Melbourne's Kharkov and Mountains in the Sky.

Issue 16's Selects comes from the Sydney record spinner behind Club Kooky and Club Arak, DJ Gemma. Internationally, read on for interviews with about Pedro, Tim Hecker and Max Richter, plus full coverage of the Red Bull Music Academy, Melbourne, and our regular sleeve reviews.

And don't forget to go online for over all the reviews plus interviews with !!!, Jamie Lloyd, Curse Ov Dialect. Whilst you are there, consider donating to keep Cyclic Defrost running, and don't forget reviews for the next issue (#17 - July) will start being published online immediately.

We love your feedback. Contact us online.

**Sebastian Chan and Matthew Levinson**  
Editors

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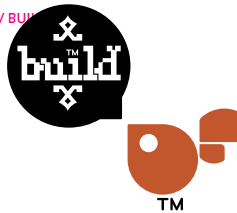
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## LATEST REVIEWS

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# BUILD: BRAIN-AIDED DESIGN

2

**POP WILL EAT ITSELF WAS NEVER A 'COOL' BAND TO BE INTO. DERIDED IN THE UK AS BEING A BAND LIKED BY 'STUDENTS', A BRIT-MUSIC-PRESS CODEWORD FOR A KIND OF ANTI-WORKING CLASS 'FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS', PWEI HAD A BIG FOLLOWING IN AUSTRALIA. THEY TOURED REGULARLY IN THE VERY EARLY 1990S, AND EVEN HAD AN AUSTRALIAN-ONLY BEST OF COMPILATION MADE FOR THEM.**

Of course, looking back, the most memorable thing about PWEI was their sleeve designs and merchandise. Sheffield's The Designers Republic (tDR) was behind all of PWEI's design and visual identity. Buying a PWEI product was about buying into their fictional 'corporation', complete with its own corporate identity. Detourned logos, self-referencing slogans, fake subsidiary companies, bold brash colours, vectors and cartoon figures all featured prominently, along with an emphasis on the presentation of useless technical data like CD player speeds, data bit-rates and the like. All of this was essential to the whole package, and complimented the sampled music well.

Michael Place joined tDR in 1992 and for the next ten years was instrumental in creating the overriding aesthetic of techno and electronica, creating the visual identities for seminal labels like Belgian stalwarts R&S and working on sleeves for Warp and others, as well as the Wipeout game for Sony. Whereas the design work for PWEI always seemed 'ahead' of the music, for labels like Warp and R&S, the highly technological-

oriented design work was a perfect fit for the highly technological music of the time. In 2000 Michael left tDR to travel and upon his return set up his own studio, Build with his wife Nicky and feline assistants Betty and Brockmann in 2001.

Michael begins, "when I saw the covers for 4AD by Vaughn Oliver, and the sleeves for Factory by Peter Saville, I was hooked. That's when I knew I wanted to be a sleeve designer, my college tutors just didn't accept that it was a profession that one could be successful in. The sleeves [by tDR] for Age of Chance and Pop Will Eat Itself also made a big impression on me. I remember some PWEI singles having about 9-10 different formats - people used to complain about the amount of formats, but personally as a consumer of music I used to love all that stuff. I failed my course, but got a job when I left college with Trevor Jackson at Bite It!, then at tDR, both designing predominantly for record sleeves".

"When I was a kid I used to sit and draw the Iron Maiden (*self titled*, 1980) cover. Looking at those Iron Maiden covers now, they are a really strong set, 'Eddie' by [British artist] Derek Riggs is such a strong character. I also used to paint peoples' leather jackets with various record cover art - mainly Heavy Metal acts/logos. I was fascinated by band logos, perhaps a precursor to my interest in typography. My all-time favourite is 'AC/DC' . . . I do think that people underestimate the role of the sleeve designer. It is different now, but ten years ago what sleeve designers were doing would generally filter down to the mainstream in about two years, they were seen as the pioneers in a lot of ways, stylistically I mean. The good thing now [in

the UK anyway] is that people are a lot more design-savvy, people tend to appreciate good design more."

With the shift to downloadable music across the board, it is hard to imagine sleeve design having such a broad social impact anymore. Michael explains, "It's very hard now to *just* do sleeve design, the budgets just aren't there anymore. The whole download thing is a little depressing, but people will always want to buy records/CDs. In terms of buying music there is no feeling like looking through the racks, looking at the covers, buying it, looking at it again while you are on the bus, the excitement of getting home, taking it out of the bag, putting it on, taking out the inner sleeves, the booklet and looking at all the detail, all the subtleties, there is nothing on this Earth that comes close to that in a downloadable format. Music isn't just about the music, it's about the complete package, music needs a visual voice. It's all those things. [In my sleeve designs] I always tried to give the person who ultimately buys that piece of music something to get enjoyment out of, make them smile, make them cross . . . [That said], I think [good sleeve design] will just get harder to produce, and in the end become prohibitively expensive. It all comes down to money - marketing departments see more value in advertising rather than fancy sleeves, sleeves are nowadays designed to be readable from a thumbnail on a screen, covers are dictated by where HMV will place their price sticker . . ."

"[Back in the mid 1990s] if I was designing a sleeve for a major label there tended to be some constraints, but generally for independents it was fine. 90 odd percent



was all about trying to interpret/react to the music, the attitude of an artist. For instance on Sun Electric's *Via Nostra* album all the type was 4.5pt Isonorm - not very readable from any distance! The label could get around that by sticking the front - not ideal, but I'd rather I could do what I want and then take the sticker off, and still have the cover as I wanted it. I tended to fight hammer & tongs for the integrity of the sleeve, and let them do what they wanted with the advertising. Nowadays though, I think the whole 'Thumbnail view' aesthetic is more scary than the download thing. We once worried that the 12" sleeve would disappear in favour of the CD, but I always designed to the format. Whilst some [lazy] people just shrank down the album art to the CD size, I used to love designing the sleeve differently for the CD."

One of Michael's last works for tDR was the Warp 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary series, and the 2D>3D book. Both of these, along with his work for Satoshi Tomiie illustrate a move into an interzone between real world images and composited graphics and vectors. In these the familiar logo, trademark and pseudo-corporate aesthetics and typography from earlier work now meshes with saturated photography of real objects - buildings around Sheffield for Warp, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia for the 2D>3D book, and photocopiers and strange office equipment for Tomiie. These themes carry through to some more recent work including Build's cover for the *London Electrics* compilation.

"One of the last things I did there was the 'Warp 10' campaign. I was really pleased how the whole set came out/looked. There were over 60 images, over all the formats, each with their own bit of 'Warp Purple' - I hated that colour by the end of that project. The

shots were taken over a week of wandering around Sheffield and Leeds taking shots of the city, wandering around university campuses, around car parks, up towerblocks, then spending 3 days with no sleep designing and compositing the images/sleeves."

"As a kid I used to love taking things like car radios and stereos to bits and really getting into trouble when I couldn't put them back together again! I used to then use the parts to make other things, which is where my fascination for deconstruction came from. What I love about technical manuals, apart from the diagrams of course is the wording, I love the language, the choice of words and its visual language - it's really fascinating to me... I think I always saw the instruction manual as a stepping stone, building Lego®, Airfix® model planes, Tamiya® tanks were some of my favourite logos/packages. But once you've followed the instructions, you've built the thing, you look at it, maybe hang it from the ceiling, put it on a shelf, then what? So, I started to make things from the leftover pieces, buying small kits and making other things out of them, taking the sequence out of step, thinking 'what else can I do with this thing? This piece of paper is telling me to 'do it this way, not that' - the language of ticks and crosses, glue here, press here, if you want the landing gear down, go here."

Perhaps surprisingly Michael is not a computer nerd - a reputation he says he shares with [London artist and seminal MoWax designer] Ben Drury, who also is not a 'techno-kid'. "As long as my computer works, I'm happy, if it doesn't, I'm knackered! The computer has always just been a tool to me, I'm not really interested in technology, I'm interested in what I can do with it. I couldn't do what I do without one, but it is just one link in the process -



"AS A KID I USED TO LOVE TAKING THINGS LIKE CAR RADIOS AND STEREOS TO BITS AND REALLY GETTING INTO TROUBLE WHEN I COULDN'T PUT THEM BACK TOGETHER AGAIN!"

The Process™ - Brain > Pen > Sketchbook > Brain > Computer > Print... Print, is my main love in design, it's what I've been doing now for 16 years, it's what I do best. It's a craft. It needs care and attention, it fascinates me, much more than design for screen will ever do. It boils down to this - 'Printing different coloured inks, in different orders, on paper, I love it. Making people think 'where the fuck did that come from?', 'How the fuck did he do that?'. There is a huge amount of technical knowledge to be learnt and needed to successfully design for print, to get the best out of it. I love the permanence of print, there is no 'command+z'. It's out there forever. Design is one part of the journey, it doesn't end when you hit 'print', that's when the return journey starts."

One of Build's most recent projects was a series of t-shirts for Blanka. "The Timecode" shirts are an extension of perception of music in the iTunes era. How I listen to music is very different even from 6 years ago. I wanted to express this, and thought of the idea of

"I BELIEVE WHOLEHEARTEDLY IN 'PERSONAL EXPRESSION' IN GRAPHIC DESIGN, I BELIEVE IN PUTTING A PART OF 'ME' IN MY WORK. CONVEYING EMOTION IS AS IMPORTANT AS PROBLEM SOLVING FOR ME, MORE IMPORTANT REALLY"

time stamps/run-times, the idea that those 4m27s of 'Voodoo Ray' [for instance] are so magical, so euphoric, marking that first time you heard that track, all the memories, I wanted to try and capture that. I am a self confessed music obsessive. I play music all day long, I couldn't live without my music. Mainly electronic, hip hop and dub. I buy so much music and according to iTunes, I like – *Scenes Of Someone Else* by I'm Not A Gun the most, followed closely by *Broken Home* by Burial, followed by *Lightning Storm* by Rhythm & Sound... It changes all the time. London's Type Records and US label Kranky are putting out some lovely stuff at the moment. I think Type is run by designers, isn't it? Factory/Saville. 4AD/Vaughn Oliver. Warp/tDR. It's no coincidence that these labels had such a consistently good look, and musical output seems to go hand in hand".

Build started in 2001 after a year-long break travelling and recharging. "I started thinking about Build whilst still at tDR, I always knew I wanted to set up my own studio at some point. It came to a head at tDR, I felt that the time was right, I didn't enjoy being in the studio as much as I used to, it was an amicable split, and I still talk to Ian & Nick sometimes. I was getting fed up

with the amount of hours I was doing, [and] felt I needed to get out before I burned out. I needed a break from design. [My wife] Nicky and I then took a year off travelling around the world. I left the world of design behind. I didn't think about it for nearly a year. I really need to get away from it - think about different things, experience different things, learn to smile again. [The period] from leaving college in 1990 to quitting tDR in 2000 I spent in a design studio working weekends/nights, generally living/breathing design. So I really needed to get away from it. I still live/breathe the design, but I'm more rounded a character, I have a social life now."

"We came back a year later, and set up Build, Nicky got a job again at Sony, I ran the 'office' [a laptop] from a table in the living room, and it took a while for me to get back into the whole world again, it was hard. Now, I love it. It's so rewarding. We've built it up from nothing, we didn't show any of my previous work to get work, I didn't want to be showing my old tDR work. It's been tough, but worth every second. Nicky has now left Sony and works full-time with me, we have just taken on a studio space which is very exciting, we have some great projects coming up, so we're very happy with ourselves".

"Each Build job has a special place in our hearts. We were really pleased with the exhibition we did in New York last year with Maxalot [Curators] & Commonwealth [Product Architects] called *On/Off (and everything in-between)*. The show consisted of ten pieces of design, each one contained in its own custom made CNC milled Corian frame. Essentially the design 'bled' out/continued into the frame, it was very special, and very new. Another favourite was the sleeve design for The London Electrics collective *LE:01* compilation. I designed the sleeve so that there were no vector elements, essentially everything was photographic including credits/track-listing. And an A1 screen printed poster, *Symbolism* for Blanka."

"I believe wholeheartedly in 'personal expression' in graphic design, I believe in putting a part of 'me' in my work. Conveying emotion is as important as problem solving

for me, more important really. There are enough people out there 'problem solving', it [graphic design] doesn't need another one. Don't get me wrong, I love problem solving in terms of design, but I also love design that is very self indulgent. Some of the best design is very self indulgent. I have a certain way of thinking, some people like that and commission [Build] on that basis, some like a certain 'look'. Some just want the 'problem solved'. Design for music is a completely different kettle of fish though. I think that's the one area in graphic design that it is wholly about personal expression, it's about throwing up questions rather than answering them, music is the most creative thing a person can do, I would love to be able to make music. The range of emotions that music can make you feel is a very powerful thing, design can come close sometimes, it's our job to try and visualise that music. I love doing that. Creating worlds. Giving it a voice . . . Machine made music. Machine made design. Design made using machines? I love information, I love consuming information, I love arranging information. I love the process of design. Like music, I think the best design is all about conveying emotion. I want to make people think when they look at my work, I want them to have some kind of an emotional response."

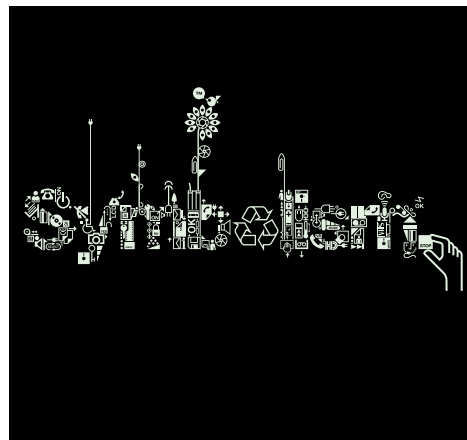
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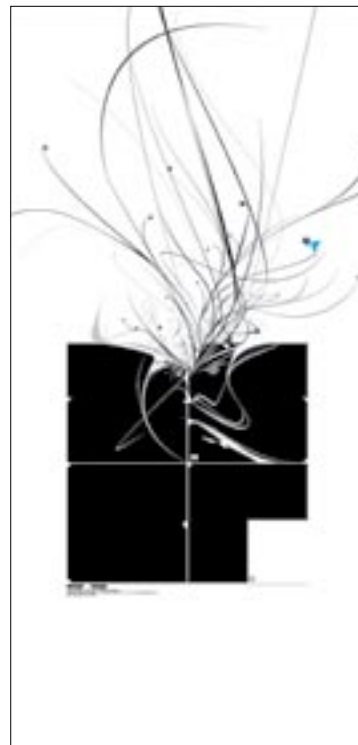
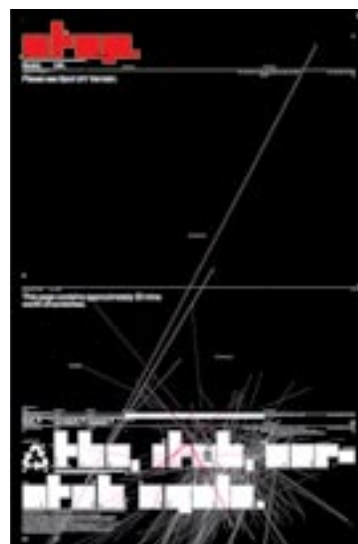
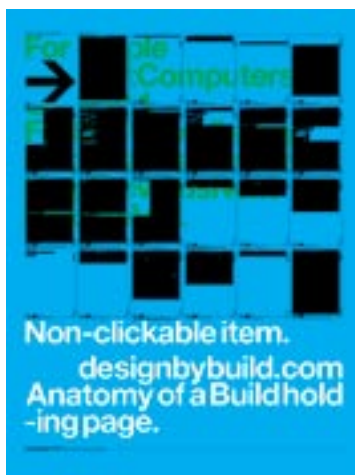
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DEAD FORMATS ON/OFF EXHIBITION PRINT;  
PEACE AND LOVE EXHIBITION PRINT;  
DETROIT UNDERGROUND SKATEBOARD DESIGN;  
'SYMBOLISM' SCREEN PRINT, FOR BLANKA;  
'SYMBOLISM' FOR BLANKA; LONDON ELECTRICS  
LE:01 CD SLEEVE DESIGN [INLAY]





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simple logo by bu





#### LEFT PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

FRIENDLY INTEGRATION CD BOOKLET SPREADS; WOODLAND CREATURE' SERIES BADGE SET; SIMPLE RECORDS CATALOGUE CD COVER; SIMPLE RECORDS 12" HOUSEBAG; '1 - AN EXHIBITION IN MONO' EXHIBITION POSTER

#### THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

HEAT SENSOR - TOUCH EP CD SLEEVE; 'ANATOMY OF A BUILD HOLDING PAGE' A1 POSTER; GRAPHIC MAGAZINE 'ASTHMA/ECZEMA' SPREAD; BUILD VS. CREATIVE REVIEW, 25TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE POSTER; B3 MEDIA LOGO; IDEA MAGAZINE COVER; VOODOO RAY TIME 'CODE' ADVERT

# OUT OF BODY



IT'S EARLY ON A HUMID SUMMER'S EVENING AND THE NEWTOWN THEATRE HAS YET TO OPEN ITS DOORS. SUNSET LIGHT THE COLOUR OF PEACH FILTERS IN THROUGH THE HIGH WINDOWS, ALONG WITH PASSING TRAFFIC NOISE. THERE'S A SCATTERING OF STAFF, PARTNERS AND FRIENDS IN THE FOYER, AS THE BECAUSE OF GHOSTS TRIO ARRANGE THEMSELVES IN A SEMI-CIRCLE AROUND A TEMPERAMENTAL DICTAPHONE.

To the left sits Domenic Stanton, bassplayer and eldest brother; to the right, guitarist Reuben Stanton, whose blue t-shirt proclaims him to be "Not anti-social. Just shy!", as if he were a spruiker for reticence. Opposite sits drummer Jacob Pearce, youngest of the three, who's constantly leaping out of his backwards-facing chair to answer telephone calls or fine-tune arrangements for tonight's gig.

Speaking of fine-tuning, support act Seth Rees (occasionally of the delicate, breathy

Melbourne duo I Want A Hovercraft) is in the middle of his soundcheck, unleashing guttural *skruumnks* and billowing *whooooshes* from his solo guitar. The sound echoes around the building; another impediment, along with the stop-start dictaphone to a clear transcript. Still, it seems appropriate somehow that what Because of Ghosts have to say is half-obscured by instrumentation. Instrumentation is what they specialise in, after all; when words make the mix, it's generally as snatched field recordings. I could probably release this interview tape as a high-concept, limited edition 12".

Tonight's low-key show marks the postscript to the band's

“... I THINK THAT WE’VE  
REACHED A POINT NOW  
WHERE WE’VE GOT A REAL  
DISTINCTIVE SOUND”

recent national tour, in support of their debut album, last year’s *The Tomorrow We Were Promised Yesterday*. The album has been a long time coming, and some time again in finding a place in people’s hearts. It’s a grower, and that’s not bad at all – it’s brave. Most bands strive to release albums that knock you over the head upon first listen, but deliver diminishing returns. Not so Because of Ghosts.

“It did take a while,” agrees Jacob. “We released the album in October, and there were hardly any reviews, and then in December we suddenly started getting all these great reviews. It’s been picking up a bit. We’ve already sold out one pressing and we’ve had to do a second one for these shows, because we didn’t have anything left to sell.”

“It was done as a package, thought through as a whole thing,” says Domenic of the band’s own approach, “so I expected that it might take a while [for people to get]... It’s taken us this long to record and release something that we’re - ”

“That we’re happy with,” says Jacob, finishing the sentence. “That we’re really happy with,” affirms Domenic.

“... That’s pretty substantial and that’s matured a bit,” continues Jacob. “One thing I’ve found listening to the newer stuff is that I think there’s a sound that travels the whole way through the new album, which is what I think of as Because of Ghosts. Whereas (with) the really early stuff, the different tracks really could have been different bands, sometimes. There were different influences coming in here and there. But I think that

we’ve reached a point now where we’ve got a real distinctive sound.”

The band is surprisingly critical of their pre-album recordings, which alone compromise a substantial body of work. There were two very early EPs: *No More Reason, No More Doubt* (2002) and *Because Of Ghosts* (2003) – the former released in an edition of 20, which is hardly fair. Then two more – still limited, but of slightly wider circulation: *Make Amends With Your Adversary Before Dawn* (2003) and *Your House Is Built On A Frozen Lake* (2004). There was also a live 12”, recorded at Sydney’s Hopetoun; a scattering of 7”s, split discs and compilation tracks; and highlights from the lot gathered together on last year’s *No More Reason, No More Doubt: Selected Recordings 2002 – 2004* collection.

These early releases have a particular intimacy, though nothing sounds roughshod or – dread the term – lo-fi. The music’s momentum, buoyed along by a carefully cross-hatched network of guitar loops and percussion that sound like the dislodged contents of a cutlery drawer, is at times extremely self-assured. At other times the pace slows, and ‘wander’ – as in ‘The Stars Did Wander’, becomes the operative term. You can hear it when a pair of drumsticks are picked up or put down again. Bum notes become a part of the mix. Listening, it sounds as if the band could be playing in the next room to you, as if you were overhearing a particularly good rehearsal. And as far as circumstances go, that was pretty much the case.

“Past recordings that we’ve done have always been put out straight away,” explains Reuben. “Everything in the past has been done over a weekend or two,” Jacob adds.

Explaining that the band has always taped their rehearsals, Domenic points to the limitations of their DIY recording technique as a factor in the band’s early sound, as much as any still-to-be-digested influence (perhaps, one could hazard a guess, Do Make Say Think chief among them).

“I think that the early stuff was heavily influenced by the time constraints that we had, and the money constraints that we had,” he says. “Leading up to the album I think that we learnt a lot more about the actual

recording process. Particularly working with Richard [Andrews, engineer] and the 2-inch tape machine, and seeing the absolute importance of getting sound right.”

Aside from the careful recording process – which took months, rather than days, what distinguishes *The Tomorrow We Were Promised Yesterday* from its predecessors is, as the band acknowledges, a clear sense of cohesion. It’s a cohesion that applies not only to the album itself, which is carefully and seamlessly sequenced, but also to the music, which has grown noticeably more supple. Like somebody learning to swim, Because of Ghosts have reached a point where every element – stroke-counting guitar, fingertip glockenspiel, frog-kick bass and foot-splashing cymbals – has come together. Now their sound cleaves through the water, pausing occasionally for a tumble-turn, or a breath that changes the pace.

“I think that it’s partly becoming familiar in playing with each other,” answers Reuben, in regard to this well-learned integration. “And so it doesn’t sound as much like a guitar and a bass and some drums. It sounds like a band. We play as one band. We know where it’s going and what kind of sound the other person is trying to get out of the music, and we work towards that together. There’s not so much fighting. Not that we were always fighting, but in terms of the sound – if that makes sense.”

“There are lots of things that we’ve learnt over the past few years,” says Jacob. “We used to have to sit down and say ‘Let’s listen to each other more’. Now we know the songs so well that we don’t rehearse much. We do maybe two, three songs and then say ‘Let’s save our energy for the live shows.’ And these are occasions where – as tonight will prove – all sorts of unexpected things might occur.

They must parcel up their forbearance along with their energy, for accidents happen at the Newtown Theatre that would sorely test the onstage patience of most other bands. First of all, there’s Reuben’s snapped guitar string – after only one song, which is so stubborn to the idea of removal that eventually, it has to be poked out with a kindly volunteered hairpin. Then there’s



the disintegrating kick-drum pedal, which sends Jacob under the kit in search of rogue bolts. It takes several minutes of careful reconstruction to get it working again, but nobody seems to mind. The small audience take the delays as good-humouredly as the band does, appreciative of the relaxedness which, when translated to the music, makes

for an instrumental sound that rolls with the current, sometimes head-down, occasionally sidelong, never sounding – though the band may know these songs by heart – as if it knows exactly what lies ahead. This is open water, and, as Reuben had been trying to explain, there is no fighting it.

Partners join them onstage for their one vocal number, 'Bright Things Come To Confusion' – an impromptu choir. They encourage more volunteers, but the audience proves bashful – not anti-social, just shy. As they leave the stage, Jacob exhorts people to join their mailing list: "We're trying not to use the street-press." It's all of a piece with their *modus operandi* of can-do self-reliance, which appears to extend from everything to their recording practices to the zip-lock bag of receipts they carry with them on tour. "We're always asking engineers 'Tell us what you're doing,' so that we can play an active



role in recording stuff," says Jacob. "We like to keep it in the family," smiles Jacob again, of his role as self-appointed group accountant.

"We'd much rather rely on word-of-mouth than put an ad in the press," says Domenic before the show of their approach to publicity. Indeed, affable as they are, it's clear that all three hold that (dis)honourable institution of the music press in very low regard. "Don't put us in quotes," warns Reuben, looking dubiously at the failing dictaphone. "I hate it when interviewers quote you but have actually not written down what you said. Or they say, 'Because of Ghosts have been doing this: "Quote – quote – quote"', says Jacob, signalling his disapproval of block-text.

I vow to avoid such writerly sins. The band are talking about where they're going next – "As soon as we're finished these shows we're going to start writing again," promises Jacob – and where they've come from to get here, with an album born from the groundswell of instrumental bands that has changed the texture of Australian independent music over the past half-dozen years, though already, Because of Ghosts sound like one of the last outfits standing. People compare them to The Dirty Three, long the great beacon of local leftfield instrumentalists. But The Dirty Three have become musically predictable, complacent – Because of Ghosts have not. These three brothers are a better band.

"This band's four, almost four and half years old," says Reuben. "So it took us a couple of years to get ourselves together and a few more to find where we..." He breaks off, shrugging, hand in his hair. "I'm not gonna give you the line," he says. "You know what I mean."

With an album that sounds like a warehouse, a city, a swimmer; that reveals new aspects upon every listen – soft and like a tapestry, loud and charging with bulldozer force – aware, alive, intelligent?

Yes, I think I do know what he means.

*The Tomorrow We Were Promised Yesterday* is out on Feral Media

"DON'T PUT US IN QUOTES, I HATE IT WHEN INTERVIEWERS QUOTE YOU BUT HAVE ACTUALLY NOT WRITTEN DOWN WHAT YOU SAID. OR THEY SAY, 'BECAUSE OF GHOSTS HAVE BEEN DOING THIS: "QUOTE – QUOTE – QUOTE"'"

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# PIANO MAN

**THE PIANO BEGINS TO WEAVE ITS GENTLE MELODIES, REPETITIONS OF CHORD PROGRESSIONS THAT ARE CAUGHT AND TRANSFORMED IN A LULL OF MECHANICAL SLICES. THE ATMOSPHERE RISES, HEAVY AND THICK IN THE DISTANCE. I'VE LOST MY OWN INTERNAL SENSE OF TIME AND PLACE, BUT FOUND THIS MOMENT - THIS SERIES OF MOMENTS COMPOSED TO CREATE A MULTIFACETED WHOLE THAT IS ADRIAN KLUMPES' FIRST SOLO EFFORT TITLED *BE STILL*.**



The pulse of the album extends onwards, weaving through foreign landscapes. There's so much space and intimacy here, but then I'm sharply transported back to the sounds of the inner-city streets as Adrian himself looms in front of me. I say 'looms' because I'm super short and he seems rather tall in my presence. I quickly do away with the headphones, introductions are made and we settle down with a beer in hand. It's a hot summer's day in Sydney, so beer seems more appropriate than coffee but Adrian jokingly teases about this being his last for the post-Christmas silly season hangover. It's time to get back to work, not that he ever really left it. For every ten minutes that we are here, there's probably another email flowing in regarding promotions and touring, not only for *Be Still*, but also for his main band Triosk. They're an improvisational jazz trio that Adrian plays keys and electronics for, his day job so to speak, and they're planning a European tour with Leaf labelmate Colleen, so there is much preparation to be done.

Still, at this point, there is no sense of

rush or flurry from Adrian. It's clear time is a precious essence that he utilises to the fullest as he explains the meaning behind the album's title. "Being 'still' itself can often mean if things are really hectic, then you actually need to give yourself time to be still. So rather than thinking, 'I am still', it's more like, 'I want to be still.' So this explains why the first track *Cornered* begins the album on quite a frantic note, capturing the tension of this ambiguous desire." Adrian continues, "You can be still and still be moving really fast, do you know what I mean?", answering his own question with a snippet of anecdotal memory, "I listened to a lot of music in the past, with the windows in the car shut up and ambient music on inside. Driving really fast or driving in traffic, or whatever, it becomes a montage of things going fast on the outside yet trying to be still on the inside at the same time."

Given this emotional context, anyone expecting a 'chillout' experience would be bitterly disappointed and for good reason. Even though there are many points of calm

and a natural sense of stillness that comes from the piano, Adrian doesn't write music to encourage a disengagement from it and he certainly wouldn't want it to be 'background muzak'. Rather, he's been playing the piano since the age of five and it's a love that's fuelled his desire for performance and creation, writing original music and taking chances even while he was learning to play *Fly Me to the Moon*.

Many of his early dreams came true through working with local Sydney bands like Triosk and post-rockers Pivot. He recounts how "in those first four years of Triosk everything felt so new all the time, it was really beautiful."

Yet, fulfilling his vision of "one day doing a solo piano album" has evoked the same kind of joy all over again. With *Be Still*, he truly embraces minimalism, balancing the energy of spontaneity and improvisation by composing the piano pieces within a space of three weeks and recording it all in merely half a day. The idea was to "create really simply" and extend the piano parts

in post production, transforming them through manipulation and sampling. In this sense the process is very different to what Adrian is accustomed to doing with Triosk. He explains how when Triosk go into the recording studio they are armed with ideas for songs that they have been improvising in front of live audiences for years, whereas *Be Still* is very much about the present.

On this note, I'm very curious as to how this material will translate as a live show but Adrian is, just now, very convinced that it will work. He recalls an ironic instance where a friend of his asked, "Are you going to play it live or keep recording?" To which he adamantly replied that *Be Still* was 'just' his recording project, maintaining that 'as fun as it is' he'd 'rather concentrate on doing live stuff for Triosk'. That very night he received an email from a festival organiser in Belgium requesting him to play his new solo material

in support to Triosk. "Is that possible?" "Of course it is!"

So now Adrian, and Triosk have committed to a six-week tour squeezing in at least 30 shows in that short space of time. I'm floored by the grueling schedule when I ask, "How do you do it?" At first he replies, "Well you can do that in Europe", but then realises I'm not referring to a matter of geography, but rather a point of physical possibility. "I don't know if I will survive personally or emotionally or physically, but to make things financially viable you have to work that hard", he responds. "Perhaps the greatest thing about touring is the balance it provides. While it doesn't necessarily translate into creative experience...(it) deepens the drive and motivation to come home and write."

Despite the international accolade, Adrian's future plans revolve around home. He reveals that he's started work on the

"MELODY AND HUMAN INVOLVEMENT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN BEATS OR ANYTHING"

next solo album and plans for its release in early 2008 on Leaf. He's also involved in a collaboration with Canberra-based label guy/guitarist Shoen Ahmad in a project they call HAPPOEL, with an album due later this year. It'll be something a little different, droney yet melodic and gentle. Adrian concludes with a serious air, "Melody and human involvement is more important than beats or anything" then cheekily proclaims, "At least that's how I feel about things today!" Which I think is fair enough. After all, if your goal is experimentation then you would never lock yourself into constraining beliefs that, at some point, may no longer suit your purposes. This is what's so exciting about Adrian Klumpes' *Be Still* – he's not defeated by limitations, but more interested in how to work within them, finding meaning and beauty in this transcendental approach.

Adrian Klumpes' *Be Still* is out now on Leaf / Inertia







# LISTEN CAREFULLY

**THE MUSIC OF MELBOURNE SOUND ARTIST AND ACADEMIC PHILLIP SAMARTZIS IS INCREDIBLY DIFFICULT TO CATEGORISE. POSSIBLY BECAUSE IT'S NOT NECESSARILY MUSIC AT ALL – AT LEAST THE WAY WE'VE BEEN TAUGHT TO UNDERSTAND IT.**

He is best known for crafting incredibly dynamic and expressive environmental sound pieces garnered through field recordings that are then juxtaposed, manipulated and altered, though his oeuvre also extends into experimental improvised new music ensembles, turntable manipulations, and even a cameo on Melbourne's favourite avant garde punk ensemble Buckettrider's last record.

So perhaps you can understand the dilemma. Words like austere, playful, adventurous, fragile, violent, rigorous, expressive, and singular do seem appropriate, yet they all seem to be antonyms, canceling each other out, which whilst not necessarily assisting in illumination, do convey a certain sense of complexity in his work.

One word stands out however. Despite a gap of about twenty odd years there's actually a

link between his initial attempts at turntable manipulation in Gum back in the late eighties to his strangely ill-fitting *Unheard Spaces* on his own Microphonics label last year, where with typical unconventional relish he splits the album with an improvised new music ensemble and the kind of subtle expressive field recordings from Venice that he is better known for. In fact the word hangs over these works and everything that he has done in between. He refuses to make concessions pursuing a vision that can at times be confronting, even isolating, yet more often than not incredibly rewarding. Yet it's something that is almost innate, that has been with him from an early age. That word? Uncompromising.

"I can't help but resist dominant modes of culture," he offers with a small chuckle. We are meeting in his office in the City campus of RMIT in Melbourne, a place where he began as a student and wound up head of the sound department. At the beginning of each year he takes the new students on an introductory journey through some of the most groundbreaking music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, everything from hiphop, through funk, industrial music, Krautrock and noise, however he saves a special mention for his passion for musique concrete. "Every since childhood I've always resisted the easy path in terms of 'you should like this'," he continues. "In my case it's always the Beatles. And I really dislike the Beatles and I really dislike Elvis. It's kind of irrational as well. They're only a drop in the ocean compared to all the other musics that have happened in the world, and not just in Australia and UK or USA, but (also) Albania and Brazil and who knows where else. You can talk about sonic experience and they kind've created a sense of resistance in me in terms of 'you guys can all listen to the same thing but I'm

"I CAME UPON  
MUSIQUE CONCRETE  
IN THE MID '80s AND  
IT HAD BEEN AROUND  
WELL OVER THIRTY  
YEARS THEN"

really interested in other things and other experiences. That stance was developed very early on and I was always interested in finding out about different kinds of artists and different kinds of music."

In fact Samartzis remembers always having a taste for the obscure, despite the fact that growing up in Preston afforded little opportunity to pursue any left of centre musical pursuits. "I was always drawn to abrasive sounds," he offers, "so I was never interested in music or musical sounds, so I wasn't interested in learning musical instruments in the normal sense of the word. I was very much interested in distortion and noise, mainly through certain music."

"I guess some obvious ones back then would have been heavy rock, heavy metal music like Black Sabbath. But Lou Reed's *Metal Machine Music* has always been an important landmark record for me because of its exploration of feedback distortion and noise. It kind of opened my ears, because here's a double album by a fairly well known artist that didn't have the conventional forms that you'd normally associate with music, regardless of the genre. It had no melody, it had rhythm of course, but it was a complicated rhythm, and it had harmony as well if you like with all the various feedback elements collecting to create this incredibly uplifting visceral noise. So it had those elements of course, but in a very abstract lateral sense of the world."

I found it exciting," he continues, "I found it mysterious as well. You're talking about someone who was 12 years old. I don't normally like to go back to my childhood, but

it has all informed and shaped the way that I think about music and sound in a sense."

And though he was interested in the visceral cacophony of noise inherent in Reed's work, the attraction went much deeper, tuning in for the first time to the daring disdain for traditional structures and perhaps more importantly the timbre of the sound. Whilst around the same time Kraftwerk's unexpected pop hit was blasting from transistor radios everywhere, prompting a greater interest in electronics, from here it was only a hop, skip and a jump through punk, post-punk, industrial, noise music, and most importantly a bunch of strange but dedicated boundary pushing Frenchmen.

Musique concrete was developed in the early fifties by Frenchman Pierre Schaeffer who utilised developments in technology, most notably the tape recorder and the microphone to facilitate a new form of music. Through these tools sounds could now be removed from their original source, recontextualised and manipulated to create new meanings and complex new compositions.

"I was attracted to musique concrete because of the way the tracks transformed the everyday into the hyperreal or into more expressionistic sorts of outcomes," Samartzis reveals. "I just remember hearing pieces by Francois Bayle in particular, *Le tren Lamonte*. 'Very soft vibration' is the English translation. I can't think of the exact title, but it's essentially metal balls that he was manipulating and I could hear that they were metal balls, but the process of transformation and metamorphosis really attracted my ear

and that led me to other musique concrete composers. Pierre Henry in particular was a source of fascination for a while and eventually Bernard Parmegiani as well. All of them were significant in terms of taking everyday sounds whether they were bird calls, door squeaks, fire, pink pong balls or whatever and doing remarkable things through tape manipulation or filtering or electronic processes. So that drew my ear in terms of a relationship between technology and the environment and the kind of music that can be created from there."

"It was all fairly scattered at the time," he continues, "I didn't really know the history of musique concrete. I knew that these French guys were doing these amazing things and had been doing amazing things over a period of time. I came upon musique concrete in the mid '80s and it had been around well over thirty years then. And that led me to think about the environment as a source of material. At the time I discovered musique concrete I had just started working with records and record players because I didn't really have access to sophisticated



"IT'S UNNATURAL OF COURSE, SO YOU'RE FEELING A LOT OF PRESSURE AND ALL OF A SUDDEN YOU'RE AWARE OF THE HIGH FREQUENCIES. COULD BE TINNITUS"

studio technology. So I was looking for other ways of producing sound."

These experiments formed the basis for Gum, a duo with Andrew Curtis that delved into locked grooves, woozy atmospheric and mechanical drones well before the likes of Philip Jeck or Thomas Brinkman flicked the needle onto the vinyl. In 2004 their entire output from 1987 – 1990 was compiled and released on 23Five, offering a sonic reinforcement of Samartzis' words. This is not dance music or DJ culture, rather this is two young guys experimenting and exploring the possibilities of their limited tools and having a ball with titles like *Testicle Stench*, *Arm Fuck* or *Involuntary Orgasms During The Cleaning of Automobiles*. Some seventeen years on these pieces still hold up incredibly well, so much so that his 2006 turntable duo with Brisbane sound artist Lawrence English, *One Plus One* (Room40) could almost sit alongside it as a more mature discerning cousin.

Aside from his brief dalliance last year, Samartzis left the turntable behind and entranced by musique concrete, started working with field recordings.

"I was always reminded of the excitement that I had when I first heard musique concrete," he reveals. "So it was always in the back of my mind that there was something there that I could draw upon and felt very comfortable with and I like the idea of tradition and history of becoming part of a trajectory of musical style."

His five subsequent solo releases, the final

two on his own Microphonics label, are explorations of this tradition, employing meticulously gathered field recordings and all manner of structural manipulations, treatments, devices and juxtapositions. 2004's *Soft and Loud* was comprised of field recordings gathered in Japan between 1999 and 2001, where he employed a cinematic approach of gathering multiple recordings of the same object from various distances and trajectories. Here he was focussing on various relationships of sound within everyday Japanese life. For 2006's *Unheard Spaces* he gathered field recordings in Venice to highlight some of its specific sonic characteristics in an attempt to redefine yet still capture the essence of such a distinctive yet overexposed city. In a typically baffling Samartzis move, the other half of the album is comprised of a series of unrelated improvised ensemble pieces first performed at the What Is Music Festival, featuring the likes of regular collaborators Dave Brown (Candlesnuffer) and Sean Baxter (Buckettrider) as well as former students Anthea Caddy and Thembi Soddell, highlighting Samartzis' more recent integration into Melbourne's increasingly vibrant experimental music culture.

Yet he hasn't always been as firmly embraced by this world.

"In the mid '90s, as soon as people found out that I was a lecturer in a university it divided them," he reveals. "Some people would have nothing to do with me, because they saw me as an academic and what I produce is academic music, but there was another part of the audience, the academy in fact, the highbrow audience who didn't think I belonged with them either, didn't think I was rigorous enough, or enough of an academic to belong with them. For a time in fact between '95 – '99, I couldn't find anywhere I belonged. I was split down the middle there."

"I think that's changed because of my collaborations with various respectable musicians," he laughs. "You just mention that you've played with KK Null and Keiji Haino and all of a sudden you've got some street credibility. It doesn't mean your music is any different, but people think 'oh yeah he's an

academic but he does some wild stuff."

In fact Samartzis seems particularly drawn to collaborations these days, having worked with the likes of Sachiko M, Gunter Muller, Voice Crack, Rasmus Lunding, and Koza Inada, the latter with whom he released a limited 3 inch disc on Room40 last year. He also records and performs as part of an improvisational trio with Sean Baxter and Dave Brown called Western Grey (Dr Jims) and regularly collaborates with Phillip Brophy as PH2 (Soundpunch), as well as a number of visual artists. Yet it's not solely field recordings in many of these projects. In the last ten years he has become increasingly been attracted to analogue synthesis and the purity of sine tones.

"I found a strong link when I was researcher in residence at IRCAM about six years ago," he offers. "We spent time in anechoic chambers just to test the Cage notion of this idea of silence, you know, you hear about Cage's experiences of hearing his own nervous system and blood circulating. That's what I heard as well. You feel the pressure. It's unnatural of course, so you're feeling a lot of pressure and all of a sudden you're aware of the high frequencies. It could be tinnitus."





“So conceptually I rationalise combining electronics with field recordings in that it is still a kind of organic relationship. I don’t feel like they don’t belong together, they feel very much part of the same fabric that I am interested in. So I continue working with the two, sometimes I favour one over the other and more recently I guess I’ve been working with instrumentalists, with acoustic instrumentation as well to extend the colours and add a different layer of sophistication and complexity to what I’m doing as well.”

at times even his influences for the project, the nature and complexity of his work can at times make interpretation difficult. Samartzis is clear though that he is not an entertainer, that each piece or performance is based on some kind of question he poses himself, whether that be thematic or even in terms of the process he follows to achieve his means.

many of my works, I also like naturalism as well and I often work between the two states, taking well-recorded natural environments and incorporating them into my pieces. “

*Unheard Spaces* is out on Microphonics.  
*One Plus One* with Lawrence English  
and *H()* with Kozo Inada are both out on  
Room40



# CONSCIOUS MIND SLEEPING BRAIN

MISTER BENJAMIN SPEED IS LIKELY TO BE A FAMILIAR FIGURE TO MANY LISTENERS OF AUSTRALIAN INDEPENDENT ELECTRONIC MUSIC, HAVING MADE A NAME AS THE VOCAL HALF OF ADELAIDE-BASED HIP-HOP/ELECTRO DUO THE NEW POLLUTANTS, WHO PERFORMED EXTENSIVELY AROUND THE COUNTRY AT EVENTS INCLUDING THE BIG DAY OUT AND THE ADELAIDE FRINGE FESTIVAL BEFORE THEIR RECENT AMICABLE DISSOLUTION.

In many senses, the New Pollutants's musical explorations stood distinctly apart from the work of many other artists and groups working with hip-hop in Australia, something that was as much the result of Ben Speed's distinctly unconventional lyrical style and vocal delivery, as it was collaborator DJ Trlp's murky, cinematic and aged-sounding beats and rhythmic backings.

With a lyrical focus eschewing the often macho and beer-drenched subject matter common to a lot of Aussie hip-hop, Speed's lyrics were more likely to resemble a stream-of-consciousness-like internal conversation. Their distinctly positive and constructive slant intriguingly offsetting the degree of ominous menace generated by the whispered, processed and then KAOS-padded scattered tones. Particularly apparent also was Speed's emphasis on cultivating an adept consciousness unclouded by intoxicants or self-negation, a theme that remains distinct in his more recent work.

While during their several years of operation the New Pollutants managed to record and release a fair amount of material, including 2002's independently released *Hygiene Atoms* album and a smattering of 12" and CDR-only releases, it seems like it's been a while since listeners heard from Ben.

But in reality he's kept feverishly busy, just not in the musical areas fans of the New Pollutants might have anticipated from him.

Since the New Pollutants's dissolution, Speed has continued to work as an acclaimed film composer (his 'day job') and music teacher, his efforts in these parallel fields being greeted with the St. Kilda Film Festival

'Best Original Score' and the South Australian Award for Excellence in Arts Education.

In many senses, Speed's been so immersed in these consuming activities that he describes the recent local release of his debut solo album *The Dreamer*, through Creative Vibes, as "Something that seems quite incidental."

While it may not exactly be the current dominant topic on Speed's mind, *The Dreamer* appears primed to take his compositions and productions to a broader audience than those previously familiar with his work.

Particularly apparent, upon even an initial listen, is the diversity of musical touchstones and influences that have gone into its creation, with everything from Central European folk instrumentation ('You Should Be Dancing') to 1950s-style rock 'n' roll ('Ready For Action'), skiffle and jazz-tinged dub ('Can't Get Home') rearing its head over the album's 14 track running length.

Also immediately noticeable is the newfound confidence and versatility inherent in Speed's vocal delivery – rather than obscuring his lyrics in a wash of digital effects, the tracks show him comfortably assuming much more of the spotlight for a collection that comes across as considerably more extrovert than his past explorations.

As a longtime New Pollutants listener, upon listening to *The Dreamer*, I was particularly keen to find out more about the sorts of thought processes and creative priorities that have gone into its making.

When I catch up with Ben via telephone, unseasonable summer rain is bucketing



down on both of our respective locations in Canberra and Sydney, and Speed's just made it home after a long day teaching students film composition at AFTRS.

Although he's clearly had a hefty working day, he is more than keen to discuss *The Dreamer* and pretty soon into our lengthy conversation, I'm struck by both his enthusiasm and general passion for life, things that seem to form a constant muse and source of inspiration for someone whose agile mind seemingly never stops moving.

**"I REALLY WANTED TO EMPHASISE THE IDEA OF 'ONENESS' AND I PARTICULARLY WANTED TO BE BOTH MUSICALLY AND LYRICALLY MORE POSITIVE"**

First up, I'm keen to discuss the fact that so much of the material contained on *The Dreamer* deviates greatly from the sorts of murky electro/hip-hop landscapes fans of the Pollutants might have previously associated with him, suggesting that its stylistic diversity must be the result of increased artistic confidence.

Indeed, much of the album itself doesn't appear to concern itself with what genre it's operating in as long as it's enjoying itself, much like Buck 65's more recent ramshackle category-flouting expeditions.

"I've been working on the album on and off over a period of several years, a period that's certainly incorporated lots of musical changes for me personally," responds Ben.

"I guess I compare it to the transformation from a caterpillar to a butterfly. My filmic background certainly plays into it. One thing that I was particularly conscious of was wanting to make an album that was not all one genre, and not necessarily 'hip-hop'. In

fact, the phrase I've been using to describe it to people has been '1950s laptop hip-pop.'"

It's particularly in regard to this last statement that I'm keen to find out whether Ben has given much thought or credence to the sorts of reactions *The Dreamer* might be met with by those accustomed to his past role in the New Pollutants, pointing towards the lyrics of track 'Art Is...', which appears to advocate personal freedom to diverge and experiment.

"Exactly," he agrees.

"That specific track talks about what art is to me and everyone else, and how that reflects society as a whole. "[With regard to the album] I love the idea that someone will love it and someone will hate it, but that's freedom of thought."

It's this focus on freedom of individual thought that seems to manifest itself in a sense of compassion and respect that leaks through in the lyrical content of most of *The Dreamer's* 14 tracks, and indeed even the title itself seems to allude to an optimistic hope for a more forgiving society.

When I ask whether these sorts of social concerns were a conscious priority during its making, Ben's response is distinctly affirmative.

"On the technical side, a lot of the music in New Pollutants was a lot darker – I don't mean seriously dark stuff, but perhaps a bit darker than I wanted things to be," he explains.

"I was in a bit of a philosophical conundrum; at one point I was involved in an environmental science degree and determined to save the world... I don't know if that gives some sort of indication as to my sorts of motivations. I wanted to get the part of people that changed the way they thought about themselves and their environment – that's why I chose music and it wasn't exactly what I could do with New Pollutants. I really wanted to emphasise the idea of 'oneness' and I particularly wanted to be both musically and lyrically more positive."

When I ask whether this sense of positive lyrical focus is in any way a response to the sorts of aggressive stances sometimes in evidence amongst sections of the

contemporary Australian hip-hop scene, Ben responds in a manner that shows that it's not really a central concern of his.

"In regard to the more aggressive side of hip-hop... it doesn't really help things. I don't really want to reinforce those sorts of attitudes and perceptions, but I don't think that my music is really a reaction to that. For me, it's really fun to see a person just be happy and enjoy who they are – if people draw something from my lyrics that they can use, it's great to be a part of that."

On that note, I mention album track 'Repressive Society,' which appears to deal with the idea that the modern consumerist world represents a source of deprivation of human emotion, material wealth in place of meaningful connection, if you will.

"I wrote that track as a result of someone I knew telling me about a friend of hers who was working in a job that he hated," Ben explains, "basically for the money, and that made me feel kind of sad. I worry about people who are simply bill-payers..."



everyday should be an opportunity to live your life to the full."

If that seems like an idealistic and somewhat utopian hope, it's one borne from the proven adage that nothing comes to those who simply wait, as Ben's hectic work schedule clearly indicates.

He's certainly amongst the lucky (perhaps) few who've managed to end up in a job that's



"IN MANY SENSES, I'VE BEEN DOING SO MUCH FILM MUSIC THAT THIS ALBUM HAS BEEN QUITE INCIDENTAL TO ME"

both creatively and spiritually fulfilling, but it's come as the result of years of hard work and artistic dedication.

In particular, I'm keen to touch on Ben's film scoring work and find out more about the events that led his creative efforts to be recognised with a coveted St. Kilda Film Festival Award.

"That was with a collective named the Peoples Animation Republic. I'd previously scored a film for them, *Errorism*. It was the second one I'd done with them, *Carnivore Reflux*, that won the St. Kilda Film Festival Award," Ben says.

"I'm also working on their new film, a third one, which I've finished all of the music for and in my opinion, this one rains down on the previous one", he enthuses. "It's some of the best stuff I've ever done."

When I enquire about the sort of creative process he follows when preparing a film score, the answer is straightforward and perhaps also a pragmatic one.

"I don't so much score like Neil Young in *Dead Man*, you know, like sitting in front of the film jamming on a guitar and writing music... partially because I'm 'electronic.' No, it's more a case of watching the film, having ideas come to me and then going away to work on them further in the studio"

Given his relaxed manner, I get the impression that Ben's time-consuming parallel activities in the fields of film scoring and music education are one of the main reasons why the release of his debut solo album hasn't been the stressful experience that it often is for many other artists in

his position - post- dissolution of the New Pollutants. It's an impression he validates with his answer.

"In many senses, I've been doing so much film music that this album has been quite incidental to me," he explains. "It wasn't even like I went out of my way to get signed or set up a distribution deal. Creative Vibes simply found tracks on my myspace.com page and approached me, asking whether I was interested in putting something out. They seem to be quite excited about the album and think it might do things," he says, a statement I meet with the suggestion that my impression is of his music moving to a considerably broader audience of listeners, at the very least.

When I ask Ben about his plans for touring behind *The Dreamer* and launching the album, his thoughts about live presentation come across as undecided at time of writing.

"I have no major touring plan as of yet, and

I guess there are also questions as to how to perform it live. The predictable obvious thing would be to do a one-man show with a mic and everything coming off of the laptop, I suppose. But at the same time, I've also thought of some crazy ideas, like getting friends to dress up crazy and act as backing dancers, so that people would have something to look at."

It's his next statement though, that offers a revealing glimpse into the sort of ambition that lurks in the heart of this outwardly non-ego fuelled figure as well as the degree of flow between his myriad different projects.

"Actually, what I'd really love is specific visual elements for each different album track..." With a bit of luck, we'll get the opportunity to find out what Ben's finally settled on when and if he tours *The Dreamer* later this year.

*The Dreamer* is out on Creative Vibes



THE MAN BEHIND MOUNTAINS IN THE SKY IS ONE JOHN LEE, A DOWN TO EARTH MELBOURNITE WITH SOME INTERESTING IDEAS ABOUT MUSIC. THOSE IDEAS AND HOURS OF STUDIO HIBERNATION ARE DISTILLED INTO AN EMOTIVE SET OF SOUNDS SPREAD OVER HIS TWO RELEASES FOR TRIFEKTA - THE 2004 DEBUT ENTITLED *CELESTIAL SON*, AND 2006's *ACCIPIO*.

# PSYCHEDELIC MOUNTAINEER

Lee's music incorporates so many reference points that it's difficult to avoid using adjectives like eclectic or syncretic. The most obvious comparison is to seminal instrumental hip-hop, (DJ Krush is an acknowledged influence) but it's much broader in its scope and ambition than that comparison might suggest. There are moments that call to mind the recent trend for evocative processed guitar pop, moments of free jazz drumming ecstasy, blasts of distortion, odd samples languidly placed between sections of beautifully produced drums, and painstakingly layered loops and samples. All of this subtly building from melancholy breakdowns into a sophisticated form of reverie - at once cool and controlled, but suggesting something else.

Speaking with John, it became apparent that my interpretation of his music was close to the mark. He told me at one point when we were discussing our mutual fascination with the oft-namechecked Sun Ra, that "*Celestial Son* is pretty much about him, in a lot of ways." Things fall into place for me at this point; even though the music doesn't make it obvious through literal references, it is infused with the same principles as avant jazz of the sixties and early seventies - those of unmitigated personal expression. Though John confesses to not actually listening to a lot of jazz, he says; "it's more just that those guys and their music existed, it's amazing, just that they did what they did... it sounds really corny, but *Celestial Son* was about being able to make the choice to be whatever you want to be."

On close listening, this slightly disarming

honesty reveals itself in the music. Both records, to slightly varying degrees, fit into a certain category of introspective, idiosyncratic, personal musical expression. It's the type of music that seems to be almost the exclusive domain of solo producers - individuals working in relative isolation to produce a certain reality. On that note John tells me, "when I started off with *Celestial Son* I had no idea anyone would ever hear it, so I was doing it basically for myself."

I ask him about this tension, between the studio and playing out; "I find I can't really do both at the same time, it's always one or the other... *Accipio* is more beat driven", he responds. "I just wanted to create some songs I'd enjoy playing live, when I started I didn't think I'd be interested, but it's a lot of fun."

I ask him about this transition and whether it's inevitable, particularly in Australia given that it's difficult to release a record and not back it up with a live show. "I like to believe if it's a really great record it'll do well no matter what, though certainly in Australia I don't know of any acts that can really do that," John explains. "But you should be able to make a record that can't be played live, and you shouldn't be expected to try to if it doesn't fit in with what you're trying to do in the studio."

It's this slightly iconoclastic outlook, an almost complete lack of artifice, and a faintly idealistic tone that attracts me to the music. The arrangements are imbued with these qualities; "A lot of people hear something and try to replicate it in the studio, I can't do that, if I like something I'll just put on that record. A lot of my inspiration to make music comes

from not being able to find anything out there that I like, or that I can really connect with. I'm not saying what I'm doing is any better than what's out there, but I'm definitely trying to do something a little different."


The arrangements, particularly on *Accipio* reflect this. They sprawl and develop unexpectedly - the songs spread and morph into seemingly indeterminate structures. "It's instrumental, so if I wanna get a story across, I have to elaborate a little more, have intros and spread it out and make it longer to put that initial idea in context. I don't have an understanding of music really. I just play around. There's a lot of trial and error until I come up with something I like. I don't really know what I'm doing, it's not really conscious, but I think that's maybe what makes it a little different. I think naivety is really good in music... although now I'm talking about it, I guess structurally it was a conscious thing with *Accipio*. I started off with a single and had a whole bunch of other songs tacked on the end, but it didn't mean anything to me. If anyone bothered to buy it I hope they get that feeling, that it's more than just a few tracks somebody felt were worth releasing."

*Accipio* is an interesting release for this aspect alone - it's almost like a comment on the ADD culture of the iPod and the download. Perhaps arrangement could provide a way of subverting inattentiveness, by creating something that must be understood in its entirety.

For sequenced music, it's a very human experience. I ask John about how and why he's married synths and live instruments with







sampled material. “A lot of the human element comes from doing the percussion live, there’s a lot of tambourines, bells, and shakers and things which I play, but I deliberately don’t play them very well. But as far as keys and stuff goes, it’s really about getting more of myself in there, and the fact that open bass lines are very hard to get on records. You shouldn’t be totally reliant on what you can find on records. But the reverse is also true, with sampling it’s like having a whole bunch of other people to produce with. If I did it all myself it would be boring, like, ‘of course, this goes there and that does that.’ When it gets all too obvious I find a sample and I think wow... I would never have thought of that, it makes things much more interesting.”

Things get much more interesting when we start discussing people’s interpretations, and the elements of nostalgia and sentimentality that are undeniably pivotal to the sound. “It’s pretty obvious to me that anything that comes out is gonna have references to something else. I think my music is quite nostalgic in a lot of ways, not necessarily because it sounds old or references things, but something about it does feel nostalgic. But to put it bluntly, I don’t really care what people think about it ... (laughs) there’s no point in caring really, I’m not doing it for other people.”

I feel like this is an attempted conversation-stopper, but on the contrary, from here things pick up a little; “Nostalgia and sentimentality are quite related, they’re closely linked, it’s interesting how in your questions you’ve raised things that are really exactly what *Celestial Son* and *Accipio* are about,” he suggests. “*Accipio* for me was predominantly about trying to be less

sentimental about things, not holding onto things, not living in the past and accepting change, whereas with *Celestial Son* I kind of indulged in all those things. I think this is the first time anyone’s really picked up on these things in the music and let me know, so thanks for putting so much thought into it...”

“No worries,” I reply. He continues, “The reason I got into it is because of its poignancy, it doesn’t rely on cognition, or fitting into a style, or historical cues or whatever for its effect. It speaks on some other emotive level, which I’m into in music.”

This is really the crux of the whole conversation for me, alluding to the type of purely aural communication that gives me the biggest musical kick of all. John has, at least to these ears, imparted a complex message entirely through auditory alchemy. This might seem like some sort of highfalutin’ claptrap to some, but it’s certainly working for me. Finally John adds: “You know, I’m kind of trapped between the two extremes of being really naïve about things, and being really interested in the perception of music and how people receive it - what it all means. Once upon a time I really had no interest in pop culture, but it seems like now I’m a part of it, and I wondered with *Accipio* at points whether I was being true to myself by making a really beat driven record. As soon as you put out your first record and people hear it, all of a sudden there’s a whole load of other meanings to what you’re doing, it can become very conscious, which I really don’t like.”

“For sure” I agree, “it’s very difficult to be in a critically and theoretically aware headspace and make honest music at the same time. Music can be reduced to a

vehicle for mobilising conscious ideas, it’s a tough balance I think.”

“Definitely,” John concurs. “I have a similar problem with DJing, I find it really debilitating because it seems it’s (designed) for one mode, and that’s partying, which is not what my records are about. You know, it’s kind of my dream to play in an opium den or something, you could just fill the space for hours, and not have to worry about a dance floor and all that.”

John then tells me about his fascination with Mike Oldfield’s *Tubular Bells*: “You know it’s fucking amazing, it’s a forty five minute piece of music with no vocals, it’s the first ever Virgin release, and it went to number one, how the hell did that happen? It’s like, when the whole world loved Shaggy’s *It Wasn’t Me* or that *Hey Ya* song, or that Lilly Allen song or whatever – I don’t think these are coincidences.”

I get the feeling maybe John thinks there’s a code to crack, some point at which the reality of the day combines with certain elements in the music to create a feedback loop of production and reception in which people respond to a representation of themselves - that speaks to them. How does it happen? Who knows? I know it happened for me when I heard *Mountains in the Sky* play live a couple of months ago. With Stuart McFarlane on drums, the show brought the records to life in a way that didn’t seem forced, not like a crass, rocked out recital – but more like a beautifully rendered, energized version.

*Mountains in the Sky’s Celestial Sky* is out now on Trifekta

“I THINK MY MUSIC IS QUITE NOSTALGIC IN A LOT OF WAYS, NOT NECESSARILY BECAUSE IT SOUNDS OLD OR REFERENCES THINGS, BUT SOMETHING ABOUT IT DOES FEEL NOSTALGIC”



# KEEP IT CORPOREAL

JOHN BARTLEY RELEASED HIS DEBUT RECORDING ON MELBOURNE'S BROTHERSISTER RECORDS IN LATE 2006. ALTHOUGH IT WAS BADGED WITH THE NOM DE PLUME KHARKOV, BARTLEY GREW UP FAR FROM THAT UKRAINIAN CITY, IN THE DANDENONGS ON THE EASTERN EDGE OF MELBOURNE.

His childhood was coloured by big trees and wide-open spaces. It's an experience you can see reflected in the young sound artist's expansive debut, *Something Tangible*. Bartley still heads up to the Dandenongs on weekends to see his folks, but nowadays he's based in South Yarra, close to Melbourne's Royal Botanic Gardens.

"I've been making music for a long time, but a couple of years ago I got interested in electronic music," says Bartley, 24, who credits Reich, O'Rourke, Fennesz, Eno and Colleen as formative influences. All too often producers in this sphere – drone, musique concrete, minimalism, ambience – can be far more interesting on paper; all clinical concept, not enough emotional resonance.

Bartley's record, on the other hand, takes an inventive approach to sampling that's built on dub, glitch and musique concrete. It's poetic. You see, Bartley samples old and discarded classical records – the ones littering second hand shops and garage sales everywhere. Where so much about classical recordings aims to achieve an extremely high fidelity sound, Bartley zooms in on the skips and pops caused

by lifetimes of poor treatment. It's a romantic, fascinating take.

"I've always been interested in classical music" he says, "and I suppose notions of beauty that are often associated with classical. I'd listen to those old records and they'd skip or I'd hear some crackling or distortion in the background, and I actually quite liked that. I suppose the starting point for me was wanting to extend those degraded records into some kind of new song."

Although Bartley's working in post-techno/dub music, a sphere that tends to attract gear freaks and technically advanced producers, when it comes to new software and equipment he claims neither status.

"I'm not really a tech-head as such," he says. "It can be frustrating some of the time because I feel I have a lot of ideas, but realising them with the software you have can be rather a challenge. But if you find a set up that works, that can really liberate you to some degree. It's taken me a long time, but I've been using the same programs for quite a while now."

Brothersister was inspired by another Melbourne label, Pocketclock, and both have been instrumental in supporting the growth of another 'little bands' scene. Each imprint works almost as a self-contained unit, with intermingled band membership, and multi-tasked design, publicity, label-management, promotion and performance.

For example, after finishing his art photography degree at Deakin University, Bartley joined labelmates Royce Ng and Rowan McNaught to contribute to Mechanical Kingdoms, a photographic show at the Narrows Gallery, Melbourne.



Bartley's part of another band on the label, Emperors of Blefuscus, along with Ng, which has a CD out soon, and he plays with Inquiet and Anonymeye from time to time. Some of those connections show up on a new Brothersister compilation called *A Fifty Gallon Drum of Savage Customs, Fresh Flesh and Random Pop*. As with the rest of the label's CD catalogue, the new compilation will be available at shows and by mail order, but surprisingly it also runs as a free download net-label.

"THE ELECTRONIC EXPERIMENTAL SCENE IN MELBOURNE IS THRIVING AT THE MOMENT. THERE ARE LOTS OF GREAT THINGS GOING ON. I'VE BEEN CHECKING OUT A LOT OF GIGS OVER THE PAST COUPLE OF YEARS, IT'S EXCITING TO BE IN A CITY WITH SO MUCH GREAT MUSIC BEING MADE AND EXPERTLY PLAYED"

"We just wanted as many people to listen to all the releases as possible," says Sam Szoke-Burke, Brothersister co-founder along with Ng. "We like reading about people who have been 'free-loading' from our site, passing it on to friends, and so on. And some of our releases have been played on Canadian and Aussie radio as a result of them being freely available, which is cool."

Bartley agrees: "At the end of the day you want people to listen to what you do, particularly when you're starting out. I've gained far more from my music being available on the site than I could have ever bought from the meager money I would have made from CD sales."

Getting together for extended label shows gave the label and its individual artists a profile boost, and connected them up with fans and like-minded performers including Muscles and Always.

"The electronic experimental scene in Melbourne is thriving at the moment," Bartley says, "there are lots of great things going on.

I've been checking out a lot of gigs over the past couple of years, it's exciting to be in a city with so much great music being made and expertly played. I've really had only minimal contact with the experimental scene as an artist and it's something I really hope to change this year through playing more gigs."

In the live domain, Kharkov uses a laptop, keyboard, and a couple of delay units to massage the sounds live, melding the whole lot into one long piece. The sound is complemented by live visuals, which Bartley says are likely to show up on a DVD with his second EP, due later in the year. Taking *Something Tangible's* bucolic influences full circle, Bartley's second EP will be a remixed set of improvisations recorded at the Botanic Gardens and the Dandenongs.

*Something Tangible* is out now on Brother Sister Records



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# ICE CAPS MELT

**MIST AND SEA, THE PAIRING OF UNDERGROUND LOVERS VETERAN VINCENT GIARRUSO AND PRETTY BOY CROSSOVER PAIR JASON SWEENEY AND CAILAN BURNS, ALONG WITH BASSIST (AND SOUND DESIGNER) EMMA BORTIGNON, GUITARIST JED PALMER AND PHIL COLLINGS, SEEMS SUCH A GOOD FIT IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE IT TOOK SO LONG TO HAPPEN.**



The Underground Lovers hung on a long time. Long after the flash of success, after the band left its prickly major label deal, even after they seemed to have lost the passion for each other, the band kept dropping records on their own Mainstream Records label.

It's no wonder; hanging onto a melody like a hand reaching down from above a gaping crevasse, the Underground Lovers were never afraid to put everything on the line for their songs. Each one seemed breathlessly intimate, building layer upon layer of sound until they were ripe to spill.

Their second album *Leaves Me Blind* is still spellbinding. At the time of its release, 15 years ago, the Underground Lovers was the hottest band in Melbourne, if not the world. They won the 1992 Best New Artist ARIA, and when released in the UK, on 4AD imprint Guernica, *Melody Maker* called *Leaves Me Blind* a contender for album of the year.

Mood, atmosphere and sound coalesced into hypnotic songs that bridged the gap between late '90s 'shoegazer' bands like My Bloody Valentine and Ride, and Manchester's New Order. Truth be told, their defining musical influences were more likely to be found further afield and closer to home: Can, Galaxie 500, the Go Betweens and Essendon Airport.

"Before forming Underground Lovers, I remember seeing Essendon Airport at Melbourne Uni and being blown away by their drummer, who was wild, and a picture of poetic chaos in motion," says Vince Giarruso, former singer with the Underground Lovers.

"But I always thought their guitar styling was more funk-driven, hence their progression to I'm Talking [which launched pop chanteuse Kate Ceberano's career]. So I never really got the influence... except they were cool indie uni types, and we were trying hard as all hell to be that."

"The catalyst [for our music] was complex; a mix of looking at the past, and then what was going on at the time around us, and then projecting into the future. So there was always this sense of progression in the work. And always this notion of structuring sound, songs and lyrics, so that if you wanted, you could listen to an Undies record and be taken from one place to another. I know for me it was always about writing and structure and how to put together a set of ideas and songs into a structure that was coherent and atmospheric. Cinema and the feelings evoked by the experience of cinema is obviously a big part of that - still is - as was the indie music scene at the time, especially English stuff like Primal Scream, My Bloody Valentine and the Happy Mondays."

Giarruso and guitarist Glenn Bennie met in high school and bonded over music and drama classes at university. Hence the band's moniker, taken from the Italian surrealist play of the same name. Their first record, a 7" single as Blast, came out in 1988, but within two years the band had changed names and played their first show, at the Corner Hotel, Melbourne. Although they quickly signed on with up and coming manager Craig Kamber, the band had paid to record and release the *Nice EP* and a self-titled debut album.

Reality, for want of a better word, played a big part in the band's story. With their epochal second album due to hit shelves, Kamber, who went on to double as the band's A&R man at the RooArt label (read Craig Mathieson's *The Sell In* for the story), shopped the band to the majors behind their backs.

"I guess the behaviour and choices made back then were pretty much stock standard in a 'professional' set up. It happens to a lot of bands. It's what happens when business meets creativity. I've been reading Adorno's *The Culture Industry*, which, besides being hilarious, is also very insightful



in regards to getting a handle on the corporate handling of art, artists and 'culture'."

"It was weird 'cause I remember we just got on with doing what we loved doing, which was touring and making records. We never really got into the media buzz stuff 'cause... well it's kinda embarrassing and stupid really. I had two daughters under the age of two when all that happened, so I had to balance home life with it. All the legal hassles we had and then being sued for lots of money when you are struggling on the dole with two young children was pretty shitful, but we got through."

Until then, Giarruso also had a "full-on" day job as a social worker with under-privileged and abused teenagers – "The experiences from that time are always with me," he says – it provided the inspiration for his first film, *Mallboy*.

"I guess working in that environment gives you insight into the lowest places human interaction can take you, but then it was tempered by the enormous potential and joy of being a teenager. It was an uneasy job to have and I wasn't very good at it. Having said that, and with the knowledge of hindsight, I can say there are similarities between the social service industry and the film/music industries – both industries have a tendency to reduce people to client/consumers with a total disregard and misunderstanding of process and outcome."

*Dream It Down*, produced by David Chesworth and Robert Goodge (Essendon Airport), was produced around the same time. It spawned the Triple J favourite 'Losin' It', along with a clear, warmer sound that replaced its predecessor's alienated detachment with a lethargic, world-weariness that although superficially similar, reflected a world of change.

"Part of me really wishes I had got out around 1994 after *Dream It Down*, but I lacked confidence, and I had to see a few things through, which culminated in making *Mallboy* in 2000. Things just kinda happened so fast and you kinda don't know what to make of it until later..."

"Industry is what industry is. It's there to make profits for the shareholders. So as an artist not to be cautious of the industry is kinda naive and dangerous. I love being 'indie' in the truest sense of the word, beholden to no-one or trends... but it's kinda living in a bubble too, which has its own pitfalls. But you know the few times I did industry stuff, like awards nights and festivals, it was kinda fun and funny. If you're a keen observer of human behaviour at its most vacuous and strangely complex, then they are the places to be."

The band swapped their Polygram deal for self-sufficiency; releasing a string of increasingly electronic-sounding records through their Mainstream label (via lawyer David Vodicka's Rubber Records), before eventually splitting. Glenn Bennie stripped down to an acronym, GB3, and went on to collaborate with Steve Kilbey, Angie Hart and the late Grant McLennan. Vocalist Phillipa Nihill recorded several solo releases and has

recently reappeared with Irish-influenced ambient duo Saoi. Giarruso made films and books, and is now studying and teaching at Swinburne University.

Three years ago, Giarruso met Jason Sweeney. Along with Sweeney's Pretty Boy Crossover counterpart Cailan Burns and a handful of others, they began making music. Although they were all in Melbourne when the band got together, a quick diaspora left Burns in Osaka, Sweeney in Adelaide, Giarruso overseas for a spell and then in Sydney, and other members in Melbourne. Understandably, the recording and mixing process was long and convoluted.

"We had been getting together writing bits and pieces since 2004. I think we got the grant in 2004. I was in Sydney and Jason texted to say we got it. I forgot we had even applied. We recorded and mixed the bulk of the album in June 2005 and did the final mix and compilation around October 2006."

In an interview with *AMO.org.au* around the time the band got together, Burns and Sweeney were asked which Australian performer they would most like to work with.

"Funnily enough," said Sweeney, "we're starting to work with the very person we've been wanting to do stuff with for a long time: Vincent Giarruso. Both us are big Underground Lovers fans. So there's always been discussion around the Pretty Boy Crossover studios about collaborating or making music with him. And now the sonic wheels are almost in motion. It helped that both of us moved to Melbourne and that the meeting of Sweeney and Giarruso happened almost within months... that now there is a possibility of something tangible on the way, if only conceptually for now."

In the same interview, Sweeney nominated *Leaves Me Blind* as his 'most-played' Australian release: "One of those records that seems to creep into the speakers at just the right moments. [It's] probably the unifying record that aligns both of our sonic palettes. A kind of seamless soundtrack to post-adolescent days."

"I was a very early fan of the Undies right back to their first 7" in 1990," Sweeney says now.

**"CAILAN AND I HADN'T MET WHEN THAT RECORD CAME OUT, SO WE WERE PROBABLY BOTH HANGING OUT IN OUR BEDROOMS IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE STATE JUST GETTING BLISSFULLY INTO IT – AND I WASN'T EVEN ON DRUGS!"**



**"I THINK OF WHAT I DID WITH THE SOUNDS AS  
'DE-SLICKING' THEM! IRONICALLY, GETTING A MORE  
BEDROOM RECORDING QUALITY TO SOME VERY  
HIGH-QUALITY SOUNDS"**

"And 'cause their first LP had a very lo-fi sound, the surprise and delight of the expansive, cinematic and rather epic sound of *Leaves Me Blind* was like a revelation – Cailan and I hadn't met when that record came out, so we were probably both hanging out in our bedrooms in different parts of the state just getting blissfully into it – and I wasn't even on drugs."

Giarruso says the dreaminess helped him "articulate some complex emotions and situations." But there was a dark, edgy undercurrent to the dreaminess – an alienation or detachedness that contrasted, and rather than undermining, actually heightened the beauty of the songs.

Its richness was reflected in Pretty Boy

Crossover's music; despite the differences – Pretty Boy's is more abstracted, whereas the Lovers had pop hooks and real songs – the real thrust seemed to be in 'movements,' brooding across songs, across albums. But for all the focus on the pairing, all concerned are keen to point out the band is broader than just Giarruso, Sweeney and Burns.

"It also involved the amazing talents of Emma Bortignon, Jed Palmer and Phil Collings," says Sweeney, "so it was a six person collaboration. The record was written in rehearsals and everybody contributed ideas. So this first album is very much a band project – which I ended up remixing to make it sound the way it ended up... and I really went to town on getting a hazier, dreamier sound. Believe me, we never intended to go so much down the rock band path – it just happened without anyone knowing really – and the following records will be different again."

"To be honest, the process of recording was very unusual for me," he says. "Both of us are very much passionately interested in home or self-made studio recordings. And for this Mist and Sea record we went into the massive confines of the Sing Sing studios in Melbourne with a very limited time to record an entire LP. Mind you, we also had a little more luxury by doing overdubs at Chris Scallan's fantastic Soft Centre studios too."

"So, we had all of these great 'sounding' recordings of the instruments," Sweeney explains, "but the significant moments for me were then taking all of the recordings and reworking them in my own studio, Panoptiqué Electrical. Because I then had no constraints of time or money – I got to experiment and complete the picture on a pair of headphones. I think of what I did with the sounds as 'de-slicking' them! Ironically, getting a more bedroom recording quality to some very high-quality sounds."

Giarruso's songs clearly distinguish the project from Sweeney's other indie/electro groups (Simpatico and Other People's Children).

"Like a Vampire' and 'Gestapo' are songs that push buttons for me," says Giarruso, "because structurally they are very different. The words are some of the first lyrics I wrote post-Undies and they fulfil my criteria for song lyrics in that they are ironic, funny – I think anyhow – deeply personal and tell small stories all at the same time. The album as a whole is very different structurally, which I think is exciting... it's kinda broken into four sections, like four mini EPs, which resolve within themselves and as a whole."

"Golden," says Sweeney, "is probably the 'special' track for me. It just has that expansive feel I love in pop music. But the whole album I treat as a complete thing and try to listen to it that way, rather than skipping or isolating songs. And at a precise 35 minutes, it is an album that is suitable for busy people!"

"Cailan and I have always been drawn to the minor chord end of music making and enjoy immersing ourselves in all things melancholy," he says. "I actually find this Mist and Sea record a very 'up' record in many ways, which is something I thought I'd never be part of. So, when it came to me doing the final mixes, I was really working towards drawing out the emotional content of the songs, trying to create a sort of journey for the listener. I always loved that about the way Underground Lovers released recordings – they were always very filmic and like soundtracks in themselves. It never surprised me that Vince went on to make films."

The name Pretty Boy Crossover was taken from a Pat Cadigan short story: "I've always loved it because, in a very straight male oriented music industry, I like to challenge the blokes a bit. [It's] funny because a lot of guys I know often resist saying the full name and end up just using the 'PBXO' tag."

Getting a band name from a book is just another parallel between the collaborators. Add that to prolific, borderline promiscuous collaboration, and an interest in artistic creation that traverses techniques and artistic endeavours and you have the makings of a fascinating long-term meeting of minds.

"I'm a generally nervous and anxious person, so I get pent up even meeting with people I know very well," says Sweeney. "So when I met Vince for the first time it was definitely just like meeting anyone else I didn't know – sorry Vince! – but I must add that we'd also had lots of email contact before that, so we weren't complete strangers. To be honest, I just really had an intuition that maybe Vince and I could work on something together. We both seem to have a similar sense of dry nonsensical humour, so that helps a lot. Like with most things I do, there was never a grand strategy. Mind you, there were/are some fairly big ideas floating around."

Mist and Sea's *Unless* is out on Popfrenzy



# OVER STIMULATION AND RED FOOD COLOURING

## THE OUTSIDER'S VIEW

**LIKE ALMOST EVERYTHING IN MELBOURNE, MANY OF THE WAREHOUSES AROUND RICHMOND HAVE BEEN CONVERTED INTO APARTMENTS. YET ONE SEEMINGLY DESERTED AND RATHER BLEAK RED BRICK WAREHOUSE OVERLOOKING RICHMOND STATION CAME TO LIFE LATE LAST YEAR WHEN THE ESTEEMED RED BULL MUSIC ACADEMY MOVED IN, MAKING IT THE FOCUS OF INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION.**

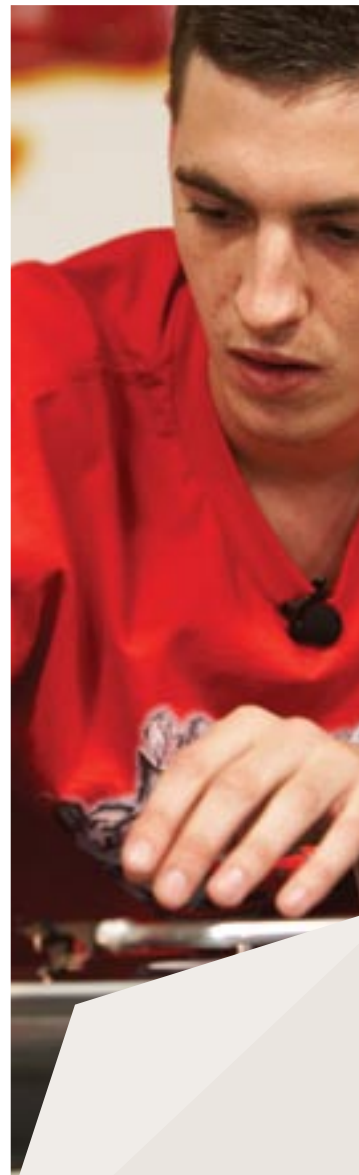
The trio of Germans comprised of one time DJ and promoter Many Ameri, music journalist Torsten Schmidt and filmmaker Christopher Romberg who dreamt up the RBMA concept were on hand to roll out the red carpet for the sixty lucky participants, hand picked from two and a half thousand applicants, that would attend one of the Academy's two terms.

Beary eyed on a Monday morning after a series of RBMA allnighters, I wondered what the Academy would have in store over the next couple of days. The RBMA had put Melbourne on blast over the weekend with gigs that included memorable sets from Skream who slammed it to us hard, Joe Bataan who mixed it up with the Bamboos, Alex Smoke and of course Patrick Pulsinger who plugged it out with Marco Passarini in the early hours of Sunday morning. As I wandered about the complex taking in the state of the art facilities and some of the beautiful wall murals created by some of Melbourne's premiere street artists, the RBMA seemed like a textbook example of a large multinational buying into underground

cool, in the nicest possible way. While the drink is banned in France where the government refuses to approve the sale of so-called vitamin enhanced foods, Red Bull remains one of the world's most popular energy drinks.

"We were approached by Red Bull to set up the RBMA. The RBMA is Red Bull's way of giving something back to club culture and the clubbers who have helped popularise this drink," explains Many Ameri with a certain earnestness. Although the buzz about the building could have been attributed to the large quantities of Red Bull freely available in bar fridges around the venue, there's no doubting that the thirty participants who choose to attend the second term of the RBMA were all genuinely excited about just being there. The Academy brings together like-minded people who are passionate about music and making music, providing them with a unique opportunity to hone their musicianship, learn from leaders in their field and network with people attempting to do similar things from all over the world. In the enthusiastic sparkle of the participants' eyes one would like to imagine that they are seeing the potential leaders of a new generation of electronic musicians. Although Ameri is somewhat effacing when it comes to talking about the Academy's success stories, he describes the typical applicant as "somewhat confused about their personal goals and career ambitions" and sees the Academy as a place that gives them some focus and helps to sort them out.

While gulping down a coffee and munching on a muffin before the first lecture of the





day, a rather suave Aloe Blacc walked up to me with a welcoming grin to find out if I was another participant who had joined the second term late. Ironically I had been listening to the Stones Throw compilation *Chrome Children* all weekend and had come to the conclusion that Blacc's contribution What Now was one of the compilation's stand out tracks. My eyes widened slightly when I realised who I was talking to, but I was puzzled that Blacc was attending as a participant and not a tutor at the Academy. After all, he had only just released his rather brilliant debut album entitled *Shine Through* on Stones Throw. Torsten Schmidt later explained to me that because of the calibre of the applicants this year the RBMA was seeing a blurring of that distinction which is usually made between the role of the tutor and the participants in the class.

Conscious of the fact that my muffin was rather embarrassingly sending crumbs flying in all directions, Blacc and myself headed for the lecture theatre where the Mizell brothers were warming with some irresistible funk and soul grooves on the P.A. The word 'lecture' might bring to mind some incredibly boring hours spent at University, but at the RBMA lectures are highly informative and entertaining sessions in which highly respected producers have the opportunity to discuss their art. Over two days the lectures

swung from examining seventies rare groove to the latest developments in dubstep, whilst contemplating electro punk and Chicago house and Detroit tech along the way. Since its inception in 1998 the RBMA seems to have revolved around these lectures, which are expertly conducted by highly experienced journalists and media types. Anyone remotely interested in this kind of music would have found these sessions absolutely fascinating. Weirdly, this year seems to be something of a turning point for the RBMA with many of the participants seeming more interested in producing their own tracks than examining historical aspects of dance music. Many Ameri suggests that the affordability of recording software has created a generation of laptop producers who are more interested in attempting to express their ideas through this software than anything else. Indeed it was laptop-a-go-go as the participants started to fill up the lecture theatre and I felt distinctly old-school breaking out a clipboard to jot down my impressions of the lectures.

In full flight the Mizell brothers were unstoppable, dealing a potted history of their achievements via Powerpoint presentation. The Mizell brothers may not be household names, but it seems that they spent most of the seventies in the studio producing a magical string of hits for the likes of the Jackson 5, Donald Byrd, the Blackbyrds,

"IT WAS LAPTOP-A-GO-GO AS THE PARTICIPANTS STARTED TO FILL UP THE LECTURE THEATRE AND I FELT DISTINCTLY OLD-SCHOOL BREAKING OUT A CLIPBOARD TO JOT DOWN MY IMPRESSIONS OF THE LECTURES"





"I FELT AS THOUGH AS I WAS ENTERING SOME KIND OF ALTERNATIVE UNIVERSE AS SKREAM TALKED ABOUT LONDON'S DUBSTEP SCENE AND HIS EXPERIENCES AT PIRATE RADIO STATION RINSE FM"

Bobbi Humphrey, Rance Allen, and A Taste of Honey. Music flows freely through the Mizell bloodline with brothers Larry, Fonce and Ron being related to Andy Razaf who wrote Ain't Misbehavin', Jam Master Jay, Don Mizell and of course The Ronettes. In between the photos, family videos and sound clips Larry slipped in an unreleased song called Woman Of the World, which the Mizells wrote for what was intended to be Marvin Gaye's follow up to What's Goin' On. Marvin Gaye's voice reverberated through the room to devastating effect, producing a moment that was simply magical.

Lunch was served on the rooftop, which afforded breathtaking panoramic views of the city. Aloe Blacc confided that his friend Georgia Anne Muldrow's musical ability intimidated him while Greg Wilson talked about electro at the other end of the table. Demo CDs were traded like business cards. Russian DJ princess Nina Kraviz brought us up to speed about the scene in Moscow while Aloe Blacc reflected on the state of things in L.A. The vibe was distinctly international. When I complained about the lack of Australian tutors Many Ameri could have accused me of being parochial, but instead he politely reminded me that the RBMA had come to Melbourne with its own agenda and was not necessarily here to sing praises of the local scene.

After lunch Emma Warren guided an extremely nervous Skream (yeah the dude was really sweating this interview) through a fascinating excursion into London's dubstep scene. Barely out of his teens, Skream developed a wild fascination for music at the tender age of fourteen. It was El-B's garage classic Buck-N-Bury that inspired Skream to get busy with Fruity Loops and start producing his own tracks. Hatcha, who worked at Big Apple Records saw Skream's potential and it was not long before Skream was providing Hatcha with exclusive dubplates for his DJ sets. I felt as though as I was entering some kind of alternative universe as Skream talked about London's dubstep scene and his experiences at pirate radio station Rinse FM. In this era of downloadable music, as we all become

part of the iPod nation where music is fast becoming a personal soundtrack that is played across our ears on headphones, it was refreshing to see dubstep wilfully rebel against this aesthetic with music that is primarily intended to be played in clubs with big soundsystems and enjoyed as a shared experience. As Skream played Check It, his collaboration with Warrior Queen and the infamous Midnight Request Line I wondered if any original kind of aggressive urban sounds could ever evolve from our own inner city sprawl. Emma Warren and indeed maverick BBC radio presenter Mary Anne Hobbs seems to think that it's just a matter of time before someone lights the match that will ignite the popularity of dubstep. Perhaps then we will have a legion of local dubstep imitators.

Marshmello Blackbird, who's sitting next to me looks amused. I get the impression that dubstep isn't really her thing. "Me mom lives up the street from Skream," she laughs in a thick inner London accent. "He will get a surprise to see me here." Marshmello invites me back to the studio where she is collaborating on a track with Fred Cherry from Perth. After the days lectures participants inevitably move upstairs into state of the art break-out studios, working late into the night on their creative endeavours. Curiously, Marshmello becomes very self-conscious while singing some very saucy lyrics for the track she is working on and asks me to leave but not before she's handed me a mix from her radio show on Rinse FM which features her hilariously titled track Wash Ya Butt. As I'm leaving I bump into Chez Damier who with a wink and a smile says, "Have a chocolate sweetie" while holding a box of assorted goodies under my nose. The studios are a hive of activity and the RBMA students are lapping up all the studio knowhow Steve Spacek, Patrick Pulsinger, Marco Passarini and Skream have to offer. Later that night the Mizell brothers returned with legendary keyboard player Wally Badarou and the Bamboo's Lance Ferguson to pump out some gloriously funky vibes. A joyous end to what was an intense but hugely enjoyable day at the RBMA. **Guido Farnell**

## THE INSIDER'S VIEW

I'M HAVING A HARD TIME AVOIDING CLICHÉS WHEN TRYING TO COME TO WRITE THIS. I SUPPOSE THE BEST WAY TO BEGIN IS TO TRY AND DESCRIBE WHAT THE ACADEMY IS, AND THE FIRST WORD WHICH SPRINGS TO MIND IS 'LOOSE.'

Things seemed quite haphazard and coincidental - the only real framework we had was a rough timetable of the lectures which soon got thrown out the window as the constant late nights started catching up with folk. As we arrived at the Academy building for the first time, it became apparent that they hadn't actually finished building parts of it yet. Rumours flew around that some of the lecturers for week two hadn't even been booked yet. And nobody seemed to work out what had happened to the missing Logic Pro dongle.

Of course, this looseness was quite wonderful, as it allowed you as a participant to pretty much do whatever you wanted. Sheryar, our Pakistani counterpart, chose to spend most of his days asleep or in the park, making beats, and would wander endlessly around the Melbourne streets during the night. Oddisee from Philadelphia could perhaps be located at the other end of whatever spectrum we might be employing here; he had one of the studios on lockdown from the word dot, even forsaking our plush hotel for good once he discovered there were showers in the Academy building. At the end of the two weeks he'd finished something in the region of 20 tracks by his reckoning. The seven I have are fantastic.

So what, then, is the Academy? I'm sure it wouldn't be difficult to poll a wealth of different answers to this question. First and foremost, it survives by being a marketing exercise. The whole operation would be totally unsustainable without a sizeable cash injection from Red Bull (massively sizeable - all 60 participants were put up in four-star serviced apartments for two weeks, flights paid, giant building in Richmond rented for months, big-shot music folk brought in to do stuff, boxes of Intel iMacs lying around, Nine Studios, full-time media crew of about 40 and so on) and so the first loyalty, if you like, lies to them, and it is honoured in the form of content. Loads of it. A 24-hour radio station, masses of online video from the lectures, tracks made by participants, millions upon millions of photos (we were constantly trailed by two full-time photographers and a video crew) and that's just the content that's generated in-house, so to speak. The buzz generated from the operation spreads all over the world - for example, each lecture behaves as a viral ad targeted at a very specific market (genre-specific message boards across the world light up whenever a lecture from one of their particular luminaries appears online), each junketed journo returning to their hip publication to enthuse about the coolness they'd just witnessed.

Besides the marketing stuff, the Academy is essentially a big geekfest, where people come together to get all nerdy for a couple of weeks, maybe make a tune or two, swap some stories, go to some parties, buy some records, make new friends and generally have a good old laugh at someone else's expense. What prevents this from being utterly superficial, however, is the degree of passion involved in it. Everybody's



really crazy for their music - and open to everybody else's. No egos, no idiots - only open, warm, respectful people. You could sit down and have a conversation with anybody, even the famous people - who seemed to be as enchanted by the environment as us mere mortals were. To illustrate this with a rather fabulous bit of namedropping, I'd like to tell you about the time I was sitting next to Derrick May at the internet terminals. I was checking my emails and he was looking at hot chicks on Myspace. We started talking about the 909 they had up on the studio floor; his eyes lit up and he started raving about the machine and how it had been over ten years since he last had a play on one. A couple of later, I went down to the dining room and there he was in the corner with a pair of headphones on, sequencing away at the Roland.

Of course, it's not all just music geeking in the studio for two weeks. There were lots of parties to go and music geek at as well. Every lecturer got to give a show and some of them were quite memorable - *µ-ziq* at the Corner was one of the standouts, his junglist bass making my eyes vibrate on the meaty rig they had in there. Another





highlight was Kode 9 nailing it DMZ-style with all the lights out save for a little red one in the corner. The room was heaving, the Melbourne dubstep faithful down the front, delightfully confused hipsters unable and unwilling to escape the pressure. In the middle of the week we seemed to occupy Honkytonks, which was handy as it was a block away from our hotel. These shows were really outstanding, as the lack of demanding weekend punters meant that things could be a little looser (there's that word again) and impromptu jam sessions abounded as the magic weaved in the studio continued to flow into the night and an ever-changing band took to the stage for hours at a time. And - of course - we mustn't forget the wonderment of Todd Osbourne aka Soundmurderer's mighty set of booty techno in the ladies' toilets.

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# MAGIC IN SHADOWS

THERE IS AN ELUSIVE QUALITY TO THE MUSIC OF MAX RICHTER. SINCE THE RELEASE OF HIS FIRST SOLO ALBUM *MEMORYHOUSE* IN 2002, ON THE BBC AFFILIATED LATE ROOM LABEL, HIS MUSIC HAS BEEN CHARACTERISED AS EMOTIVE, NOSTALGIC, IMAGINARY, CINEMATIC AND EVEN 'POST-CLASSICAL'. RECORDED FOR FAT CAT, HIS MOST RECENT ALBUMS, *THE BLUE NOTEBOOKS* FROM 2004 AND LAST YEAR'S *SONGS FROM BEFORE* TAKE PASSAGES FROM THE WRITING OF KAFKA AND MURAKAMI RESPECTIVELY, WEAVING SPOKEN WORD EXCERPTS THROUGH ACHING ORCHESTRAL INSTRUMENTATION, PIANO AND AMBIENT RECORDINGS.



These descriptions may suggest some kind of kitsch sentimentalism to the cynical reader but Richter's music disarms any such assumptions; it's hard not to be transported by his thoughtful and immaculately crafted sound-worlds.

Born in Germany and raised in Britain, Richter's diverse career has seen him perform as part of the acclaimed piano sextet Piano Circus, collaborate with artists like The Future Sound of London, Roni Size, and Vashti Bunyan, as well as work on film scores, installation and gallery works. This diverse career was anchored with formal training as a composer and pianist, having studied at the University of Edinburgh, the Royal Academy of Music, and with Italian composer Luciano Berio. I caught up with Max in his home in Edinburgh to discuss his latest album, his compositional process and his current listening tastes...

An intriguing aspect of *Songs From Before* is that it contains plenty of threads from *The Blue Notebooks*. It feels like quite a different album, but it utilises a similar approach, with spoken word fragments of text (this time from Murakami as opposed to Kafka). In terms of tone, *Songs From Before* is a different beast, altogether grainier and somewhat incongruously, for the music contained within, more punk than its predecessor. Max takes up the commentary on these big issues; "I was definitely looking for that 'grain' in this record. I guess I think of the records as being joined up, a body of work. They are, to some extent, an arbitrary slice, because the way I work is to just keep writing and recording all the time. It's like

taking a collection of concepts and sketches that are floating around at that moment and condensing it into a record."

"I'm fascinated by Murakami; I think he's a really interesting writer, he has a magical way of dealing with very ordinary things. You think you're reading about something very ordinary, but there's something very affecting and serious going on underneath. I'm fascinated by this ability to capture the nature of things without directly addressing the 'big issues'. One of the things with the new album is how the pieces came to be made. With *Memoryhouse* and *The Blue Notebooks*, I was aiming for very perfect, finished pieces. In *Songs From Before* I was looking for something a little rougher maybe. Something where the pieces themselves weren't so perfect that they kind of kept you out a little bit. I wanted the edges to show a little more – so I guess it's a punkier kind of record."

The fragments of narrative that pepper the last two albums have enthralled me. On Herr Richter's latest, Robert Wyatt's inscrutable vocalisations transform Murakami. Actress Tilda Swinton's readings of Kafka and Czesław Miłosz augment *The Blue Notebooks*. They're not describing things or events; they're more like reflections, or capturing moments. It's almost as if they capture something fragile, a fragment—it seems to fit so well with the way that I interpret Max's work. "We all have moments in our daily life, instances of a kind of magic, in an ordinary way, which I believe is special. I'm really interested in the poetry of those moments and how they come about in a slightly random kind of a way. Musically, I'm

"I MAKE A FRAGMENT OR A SKETCH IN THE COMPUTER, OR PLAY SOMETHING ON THE PIANO AND THEN IT'S A QUESTION OF FINDING OUT HOW THAT CAN STAND UP AS A SOUND"



interested in those things that have a narrative, a storytelling quality and some sort of pure magical musicality—hunting those down and trying to present them."

Richter's work has been described as 'emotional modernism' or an 'imaginary soundtrack'. It seems as if these descriptions fit with how the composer himself describes the feeling of his work. I was curious to discover Max's reaction to having these kinds of labels attached to his work; "I don't really mind what people say about it honestly. One aspect of making music, or creating anything really, is in making it, you're trying to find out what it is. It's kind of interesting for me to hear what people say about it because I'm not really the best person to judge it. I make this stuff, but I'm so close to it that I can't have a birds-eye view. In a way, people who are coming to it fresh have more interesting things to say about it than I do! If that makes any sense..."

"I don't believe that critical observations on my work have changed the way that I perceive my music. Like everyone who makes things, who does music or any kind of creative stuff, it's an outcrop of an obsessive compulsion, so it's not like I have any choice about it, really. At the same time, it's almost like I'm a butterfly collector; I find these sounds and then I try to capture them. Even though I try to plan everything meticulously and I entertain all kinds of schemes in my head, it's a bit more random than that. In a way I feel that I partly come at it from an outside perspective; I'm really just following the material. I make a fragment or a sketch in the computer, or play something on the piano and then it's a question of finding out how that can stand up as a sound, as a piece of music, as an environment. I do use improvisation. But to be honest, I use everything I can get my hands on, whether that be found sounds or recordings, the properties of a particular bit of kit, or playing at the piano, even just wandering around staring out the window. I use anything that I can lay my hands on to make pieces."

So, despite Richter's background in classically trained composition and performance, his working methods differ little from the bedroom auteur embarking upon his or her first recordings. Most bedroom musicians in the new millennium start on electronic equipment of one type or another, and I was

interested to know when Max began to utilise electronic equipment to mediate his creative process. "I've come full circle with it really. In my teens I was building analogue synths, so I had an interest in early electronic music. I gravitated from there into electronic music with a more academic bent, Stockhausen and people like that. Then I went down the whole academic music route, with the degree

and postgraduate stuff, composition studies and I was also working as a performing contemporary music pianist in Piano Circus."

Max's tenure in Piano Circus, which he co-founded as an outlet to play Steve Reich's 'Six Pianos' was where, inexorably, over a decade, the skeleton of the Richter sound that has been captured on his solo albums, started to take shape. "With Piano Circus we started to





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incorporate live electronics. Our staples were things like the American minimalists, but we were playing Brian Eno, Future Sound of London, and things like that live as well. Then it all started to join up, but in a way those two cultures have always run in parallel for me."

Richter has also undertaken numerous audio collaborations in differing roles, as a performer, composer and producer. One of his earlier collaborations was with The Future Sound of London on their 1996 album *Dead Cities*. "*Dead Cities* is a really interesting record. That was at the beginning of my time with Future Sound and initially on *Dead Cities*, I just jammed a bunch of stuff together one night. They just pressed 'record' for a couple of hours and I played the piano, it was as simple as that. The track 'Max' was the outcome of that. It's interesting because there are two strands of improvisation in that track, one of them is my piano part and the other is the sax. These are actually two completely independently recorded performances on different days, put down without hearing one another's performances. Gary and Brian just sliced and diced them until they fitted together. On their next record (2002's *The Isness*), it was a rather chaotic three year period, I got much more involved on the production side, working together with them in a whole variety of ways. The interesting thing was that I spent a lot of the time on the phone to Gary, who was in India at this stage. It was a weird, collaborating over the telephone line, where he was literally sending mixes down the wire. That record took a strange, chaotic shape over a long period, it was a wild ride."

It's great when collaboration is given time and space, or perhaps distance to develop in its own way. Max recently produced Vashti Bunyan's 'comeback' album *Lookaftering*. I was a big fan of her debut album from 1970 *Just Another Diamond Day*, produced by the fabled Joe Boyd. Upon initially hearing *Lookaftering*, the difference in tone was startling. Vashti commented in an interview that she credits Richter with the overall feel of her second album. "As a producer, it's like being a midwife, facilitating the birthing role, and its kind of, whatever that takes. Sometimes it's 'push-the-faders', and that can be all right; in the case of Vashti's record it was certainly more organic than that. The process for *Lookaftering* was the best part of a year, it was a weekly session in my studio where we would just shuffle around ideas and try sounds and sketch out stuff, and really get inside the material. The arrangements and the way that the music was presented evolved continuously. By the time we were recording for real, pretty much every single note had been decided and thought about very carefully between the two of us."

*Lookaftering* sounds so much more spontaneous than Max describes, particularly on the sublime 'Here Before', with its washed loop sound setting the overall tone of the album. "That's an intervention of mine that I made quite late on, that was a bit of a liberty really. I love that track... We were nearly finished and we'd done all the vocals and everything. I just wanted to really do something with her voice, because it has such storytelling power. Why are there no backing vocals on the record? Why haven't we done something

with it? There are the five Vashtis on that track, there is the main vocal and two either side, singing in a round, a traditional folk structure. The lyric talks about looking backwards, so everything, all those dubs, are going backwards. I just thought, let's try and push it a little further than just this acoustic sound. I was slightly nervous of playing it to her actually, because we had presented the rest of the material more simply and plainly. She was thrilled when she heard it, which was a relief, because it was a unilateral move on my part, which I was ready to have thrown away."

The cliché of the 'imaginary soundtrack' has a long pedigree in the instrumental diaspora. It's almost insouciant journalistic shorthand, a signifier for certain traits that may be discernable, if only the listener ascribes specific meaning to the music. But describing Max Richter's work as having a visual element is not just poetic license. His collaborations have often crossed into the realm of related artistic disciplines. "The Derek Jarman project; it isn't really a soundtrack. I received a commission to write some music for film to be played live. I was scratching my head thinking about an existing film that I'd like to work on and I couldn't immediately think of anything that really grabbed me. A friend of mine happened to know of the existence of these amazing Super 8 films made by Derek Jarman during the 1970s. Some of them are diary pieces, some of them are home movies, some of them are sketches for his later feature films, there are even art pieces for display in a gallery. It was an incredible experience to go through that collection containing hundreds of films, and make an assembly that made sense as a performance. I composed music that would stand alongside those, so it's not really a film score, but a piece of music and film where sometimes, for example, the screen is blank and the music is just playing and sometimes it's just the film. The music is all live; it has been really good fun to do it, a lovely project, Jarman's films are incredible. People are amazed by the film and have been responding really positively to the piece. There is a kind of alchemy that happens on stage where the music and the film are really speaking to one another."

"I'd like to release the Jarman score, I'm very pleased with how it's turned out. Apart from that, I'm working with a fine

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artist called Darren Almond, on another image and sound piece that will be coming out by the end of the year. I'm doing a film at the moment, an animated documentary for cinema made by an Israeli director. I've just collaborated on what is really the first American film to look at the Iraq war. It stars John Cusack and is called *Grace is Gone*; it's been a real pleasure to be involved with that. There is a concert I'm playing at during February in Holland or Belgium, where we have a filmmaker called Matt Hulse, who made a full-length film for *The Blue Notebooks*. Again, it is Super 8 film, which we do in a live setting. More traditionally, I have done some film scoring work over the last couple of years - that's a different kind of discipline, because music within a feature film context has very specific kinds of functions."

Knowing that Max spends most of his time in the studio, and that many of our readers are technically-minded, I felt obliged to enquire about the Richter studio set-up. "I have a Mac running Logic with the VSL orchestral library and thousands of plug-ins, that's the recording side, although I use it really only as a sketchpad, the actual recording for the albums, I always do on tape. I have a couple of studios where they have what I like; a two-inch 16-track and an old MCI desk. It's a warmth thing; I'm trying to make records that sound like records, so therefore I only use real instrumentation in the studio. I think our idea of what a record sounds like was shaped way back, so I use that equipment which makes that sound. It's quite simple really, it's not really a technical question for me, it's simply a question of feel. I love all that wonderful stuff you get for free when you're mixing off tape, like the natural compression. It's just so much easier and more fun."

Always curious to discover what fires-up the creative juices of an 'emotional modernist' in these musically cross-pollinated days, I had to know what had been getting a caning on the Richter stereo. "I listen to a lot of classical music, going way back, I always listen to Purcell and Bach. I've got Sufjan Stevens, Burial, Skream, Beirut; you know the *Gulag Orkestar* thing. There's Joni Mitchell lying there, lots of Mozart, Dutch composer Louis Andriessen, all kinds of stuff. There's The Go! Team,

the original Go! Team album, before they replaced all the samples."

I purchased *Songs From Before* at the same time as Jóhann Jóhannsson's *IBM 1401: A User's Manual*, and it had happened previously with *The Blue Notebooks* and Englabörn. I just had to know if Max had any of Jóhannsson's work; "I do, in the car I've got

Virðulegu Forsetar which is a great record, the brass one you know? Amazing. I think we're tracking each other; it's weird isn't it? We always seem to release records at the same time. There's something going on..."

*Songs From Before* is out now on 130701 through Inertia

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# THIS ALBUM IS A MESS

**LET'S GET THIS STRAIGHT FROM THE BEGINNING. PEDRO IS THE NAME JAMES RUTLEDGE GOES BY WHEN HE MAKES HIS SOLO MUSIC. JAMES MAKES THE MUSIC ON HIS OWN FROM HIS HOME IN LONDON. HE USES HIS OLD COMPUTER, A SYNTH AND A RECORD PLAYER. "SOMETIMES PEOPLE SAY SOMETHING LIKE 'THIS IS JAMES FROM PEDRO,' AND YOU CAN KINDA TELL THAT THEY THINK YOU PLAY IN A BAND.**

When I sent this album to a few labels they said; 'We really like it, it's great, except for the free jazz stuff. Can you get your saxophonist to...?' and I think, 'I don't have a saxophonist! It's just a record!' But I'm pleased, because that's really what I wanted it to sound like," says Rutledge.

It's understandable that there can be confusion. Pedro's latest album, *You, Me & Everyone*, samples live instruments and there is a sporadic placement of drums that sounds like it could only be a straight live recording. "I really dislike that coffee table-type music where you can really hear a loop. It's badly done and it irritates me unless there's a real musical point like there is in hip-hop, or if it's done really well. It always gets to me because I know it's relatively easy. I think it's kinda laziness or lack of imagination," he laughs.

"I try not to do too much anal editing

because it just sounds rigid and I like those accidental sounds. Green Apples is the track that people often say sounds like it's live. Someone said 'Did you get a drummer to play on that?' which I found really kinda flattering. It's put together with samples really, nothing live you could say."

*You, Me & Everyone*, his first album in a few years, is anything but coffee table music. There are beats without a time signature, moments of free jazz, and hip-hop loops with delicate xylophone melodies. It's a clear shift from the sounds on his first album, which was held up as a fine example of folktronica. "I really dislike the folktronica tag and it's funny, because when my first album came out I remember meeting up with Dan who is Caribou and Manitoba, and Kieran who is Four Tet. I think we were at a Prefuse 73 gig and we were joking – it was just when this genre was coming out – that if this venue blew up, then folktronica would go down," he says with a huge laugh. "I remember it was just a few journalists in the UK who came up with the term and all of a sudden everyone was using it. The weird thing is when you read a really clueless journalist review of some rock band and it says 'Yeah, this is folktronica' just because it has an acoustic guitar in it. It's kinda ridiculous."

"I found being labelled as folktronic to be really irritating. I have folk records but the number of jazz and classical and hip-hop and dance and whatever records far, far outnumber those. It was kinda never an intentional thing."

The influence of his eclectic record collection comes through on the album and there's hardly a whiff of folktronic acoustic guitar. "I wanted it to sound like it was falling apart, or like it was being played by a ham-fisted school orchestra or something like that. Most of it is made with samples and what I normally do is just have a real solid rock for the track. On Green Apples I just had a drum beat and then a key it was going to be in. I'd then start playing stuff in off my record player over the top. It's just a Technics turntable that you can alter the pitch on. So I started playing loads of records over the top – like weird free-jazz records or anything really – then I'd alter the pitch so it's in tune with the music. Sooner or later you hit something nice and you record it in and it's chaotic, but it's also like catching accidents. Once you've got it in you can move it around."

Rutledge makes it sound easy but it hasn't always been this carefree for him. The production of his first self-titled album was 'a disaster' as far as he was concerned, with the wrong version of the music being pressed and the wrong artwork being printed, yet he does acknowledge that it received good reviews and sold well.

Not long after making this album his friend and fellow member of band Dakota Oak Trio (DOT) went missing while on holidays and his remains were not found until two years later. During this time Rutledge became disillusioned and stopped making music. "It's funny because on the





"WHEN I ACTUALLY MADE THIS ALBUM IT WAS RELATIVELY EASY TO MAKE. IT CAME QUITE QUICKLY ONCE IT CAME, BUT BEFORE I STARTED IT I THOUGHT 'I'M GIVING UP MUSIC. I DON'T WANT TO DO IT AGAIN. IT'S TOO PAINFUL'"

one hand you look at music making as being really fun – I don't like to sit and take it too seriously. When I actually made this album it was relatively easy to make. It came quite quickly once it came, but before I started it I thought 'I'm giving up music. I don't want to do it again. It's too painful,' says Rutledge, somewhat lightheartedly in retrospect. "But at the moment I'm not disillusioned at all. At the moment I'm having so much fun doing it all and I'm doing a ridiculous amount of music as well. I've got like 10 things coming out this year. I'm really happy about it at the moment. Thankfully."

This year Rutledge is making up for his time away from music production by immersing himself in musical projects. As well as the release of *You, Me & Everyone* he has produced an album for British band Goldrush which will come out this year and he has also recorded an EP as Chapters with some old friends. He's already able to cross off 'remix album' from his list of things to do after releasing *Fear & Resilience* in 2004 which included tracks from some big names such as Danger Mouse and Four Tet.

"Most of the people on that album I know on a personal level, but still I really admire their music. I don't really consider the fact that my music is out there and people buy it and people actually like it, or even the fact that I might influence people. I just find it incredible and bizarre, and so when you're being remixed by these people that you really respect and you have their albums then you kinda revere them to an extent. It's

a really surreal process! I really wanted to do a good remix album and I chose all the people and asked them personally and they got virtually no money for it, so it was done in a really nice way rather than it just being a promotional gimmick or a marketing tool."

"In the US it came out packaged with the original album and people gave it really good reviews despite it being four years old. Naturally, I am quite an underground person and to get the sort of exposure of having Danger Mouse, Prefuse, Four Tet and people like that remixing, it does help, because sadly people won't often pay attention to what you're doing unless you have names like that attached."

While he knows some of the big names in his scene, he can also claim to be widely read in many musical areas due to his compulsion to discover new music, particularly through reading *Wire* magazine. "I get it every month religiously and I love it and hate it at the same time. They're really good at picking up on stuff really early on. If I'm reading a review of something or if I'm reading an article I'm often attracted to words like 'chaotic'. If they ever say 'this album's a mess' or 'it's got loads of influences' then I always pick up on things like that."

"It's such an obvious thing to say that you should just listen to as many different things as possible, especially if you're a musician, because that's where you can get ideas from. Such an obvious thing to say but I'm always alarmed at how many people don't do it or will just start listening to something as soon as it becomes fashionable."

"To find new music you just start cross-referencing stuff. Say I just got into Jim O'Rourke – he's a really good example – you get into someone like him and he's done so many different projects and he produces so much and then you start to reading interviews with him and he mentions a few artists – he's definitely one of those sorts of people who can like all sorts of different music. After reading an interview with him you've got a list of twenty things to check out and it goes on and branches out from there. That's how I always try to get into new music. If I ever feel like I'm missing something, then I just go online and type in the name of whoever I'm listening to at the moment and then you'll get an interview up and from there you've probably got 50 possibilities of things to listen to."

Rutledge's MySpace page unfashionably proclaims he's 'never been reviewed by Pitchfork'. It mightn't be the case for much longer, especially seeing some have referred to him as the 'pioneer of folktronica'.

"I meet some people and they say 'oh your early stuff really influenced us' and I find it really flattering, but I'm still quite alarmed that anyone would refer to me as the pioneer of anything. I wish it was something else though and not folktronica."

Pedro's *You, Me & Everyone* is out now on Rogue through Inertia.

# THE EYE OF THE STORM

TIM HECKER REFUSES TO BE BOXED IN BY ANY NOTIONS OF ELECTRONIC OR ROCK MUSIC. HE JOINED SIMON HAMPSON ON THE PHONE FROM CANADA TO TALK ABOUT HIS NEW RELEASE ON KRANKY, *HARMONY IN ULTRAVIOLET*.

Try to pin Tim Hecker down on many aspects of his art and he will resist with a surprising level of frustration. Here is someone who has seen laptop music production mature and come of age. He started in the mid nineties as Jetone, in the incredibly fashionable world of minimal techno, releasing music through Force Inc/ Mille Plateaux, amongst others, who were then at the height of cool.

But in 2001 he flipped everything upside down. That year he released his first album under his own name, *Haunt Me, Haunt Me, Do It Again*. Issued by the Canadian label Alien8 (through their Substracif imprint), it introduced the world to a new Hecker aesthetic. Here was a clean, ambient soundscape of unimaginable calm, and Hecker was combining chaotic elements to create a feeling of being at the eye of the storm. Flick to five years later and the journey has culminated in *Harmony In Ultraviolet*, Hecker's sixth album and his

first for top notch Chicago imprint Kranky.

Kranky is a natural home for Tim's sonic experimentation. "It's hard thinking about the right label - mostly because I'm not that well-versed in contemporary music, in the sense that I am aware of every label and what they are doing," Hecker says from his home in Montreal. "But Kranky has been a label that I have been fond of for a while - going back ten to twelve years now. So it's really cool that worked out and I'm definitely open to that in the future. Alien8 is also a label that I have worked with over the years and it's nice having a couple of output areas that are supportive. That's a joy to have for sure."

"Kranky are really cool and open to doing different kinds of music. They have a sensibility that has been somewhat consistent throughout the years, even though there have been different approaches in terms of form and structure. Like a certain mindspace that a music brings can come through different types of instrumentation arrangements or compositional processes."

On *Harmony In Ultraviolet* Hecker drags us deeper into the sonic fog. His sound has evolved and he perfects his great oscillation between destruction and melody. Waves of processed guitar soar through the mix and set your mind swimming on the introductory *Rainbow Blood* and through *Stags, Aircraft, Kings and Secretaries*. They fade into the tonal starkness of *Palimpsest 1* (a Palimpsest was a manuscript page that had been erased to write on again) which acts as a mediation between the opening tracks and the lumbering, looping tones of *Chimeras* (perhaps my favourite piece on the album). *Dungeoneering* sets your heart beating faster; wondering what is to come, and unfolding into a helicopter-like swirl. The second *Palimpsest* movement ushers in the digital static and processing again. Whereby we move into the extended *Harmony In Blue* piece (literally the 'eye of the storm' here). *Radio Spiricom* brings us back to the interference and static, until we come full circle with *Blood Rainbow* - a loop, if you will.



"I WAS GETTING INTO MORE TRANSFORMATIVE STRUCTURES OF MUSIC, AS OPPOSED TO TRADITIONAL ROCK STRUCTURES. AND NOW I'M DEEP IN THE FOG OF ABSTRACTION!"

As computer production and digital aesthetics seemingly become more blasé, Tim Hecker continues to innovate and develop a unique sonic palette. "I just like imploding and rebuilding from the fragments of things that have been kind of pummeled. Playing with those ideas in structure, form, content and melody."

He sits on an interesting line between genres and musical styles. "It's not so much that I bring unity to them," Hecker says, "But I just want to challenge these notions and suggest another possible space of composition. I mean, not that I'm bridging some new genre or something, but my interests fall in between all these things. And that's kind of where I like to work and find it fruitful. Why be pigeonholed into a particular ghetto, you know? It's much more interesting to challenge that and travel with an indie rock band, or do some dance composition, or work with some black metal outfit. It's what life is all about, or should be, at least for me."

*Harmony In Ultraviolet* breaks forth from a litany of sources. "I have a hard drive full of mutated and morphed things that may have come from my own sources like piano and guitar, and other things that may have been pilfered romantic pianists or 1980s rock bands. And a whole other fog of sound samples and sources that I draw on, and constantly change and use all the time."

"I had a really typical, for what is a North American, suburban childhood. I was exposed to stuff like MTV and I listened to my dad's Meat Loaf and Fleetwood Mac eight-track tapes and stuff like that, you know. I wasn't really educated in like John Cage and Xenakis or Stockhausen. Not to say that I wear that like a badge, but that just happened to be my background."

From this average childhood, Hecker's curiosity got the better of him. "I guess my music generally came from being turned on by stuff like Autechre and Aphex Twin from Warp records and other labels of the early/mid nineties. And I was also interested in that stuff at the same time as rock music. I'm essentially a product of failed bands, in the sense that I bought a sampler to emulate my drummer who wouldn't show up to the practice space. So I played drum beats and looped it to continue playing music. And coupled with my growing interest, I hooked that sampler up to a computer and made compositions on 4 track with drum machines and played guitar over that. Before you know it, I was getting into more transformative structures of music, as opposed to traditional rock structures. And now I'm deep in the fog of abstraction!"

"It's just a question of being curious about the world right. Like you find out something like Aphex Twin, and then look for the guy who influenced him. It's sort of like reading the breadcrumbs on a trail and gives us a reason to be curious and keep an interest about music. It's the same for anything - painting, whatever."

This cross-cultural pollination is evident in *Harmony In Ultraviolet*. "It was kind of a reference to Matisse's painting *Harmony In Red*. I like that immateriality of ultraviolet in the sense that it is undetectable. It was just something that made sense at the time. A bit of poetic license." But when pushed further, Hecker's frustration with any more detail is evident.

"I really have problems with an interpretive narrative. I did it in the beginning to give context to the work - like poetic license. But it isn't to be taken seriously. It's not such a singular, conscious thing. It's more generative and evolves over the process of making work itself. For me."

"I mean some people really peg down a singular concept and then strive to achieve that. I don't really work that way. It's really iterative and keeps evolving over time as the studio practice evolves. Waking up every day and listening back, thinking about things and trying out things and seeing what works,

what doesn't. That's like the evolution of my aesthetic result. It's from that probing and just, I don't know. It sounds really traditional and not mysterious, but I find that it's really hard work."

"I'm kind of saying that it's not that complicated. You know, 'the magic mountain on some Jamaican island.'" And there it is. This is a guy who just wants life to be simple. "But having said that, there is great joy in explaining a work in a form of poetic license like song titles and artwork. But that is in many ways second to it. It's also seen as a way to leverage or couple with the power of music."

*Harmony In Ultraviolet* is, "really a story of waking up. I got up pretty early this time as opposed to composing stuff at night. Just waking up every day and spending time alone in the study. Editing, processing and working on pieces - moulding, shaping, bending, stretching, reversing, compressing, reverbing. And working every day for two to three months until I had a record I was happy with. And that's pretty much it in a nutshell."

"I've given up my day job now and I'm pursuing studies as my substitute for my day job. Which is a much more palatable combination. Although I am doing more work now outside music than I was with my day job! Because, you know, doing reading and writing is a job that almost never ends. It's a balance that you just have to make sense of after a while. I mean, everyone has to find a way to make ends meet. The starving artist paradigm doesn't really interest me much anymore."

"It's a better life, I think. It's funny how easily your brain loses its function if you're not using it all the time. During a day job I would shut off my mind for hours at a time. Just kind of in the internet haze of like meaningless data. And after 8 hours a day of reading and seminars, and articulation, it is amazing the difference that it has on your mind."

Tim Hecker's *Harmony In Ultraviolet* is out now on Kranky through Inertia



# SLEEVE REVIEWS

## WITH BEC PATON

**Artist:** Boy Brightlulb  
**Title:** *Is This a Desert?*  
**Label:** Independent

**Format:** CD

**Designer:** Josh Santospirito & Nadine Kessler

This album gives the privileged feeling of having just been handed someone's flights of fancy in the form of a personal travel journal—a gift to thumb through at leisure. Sonically, you're taken on adventures through memory saturated landscapes and shown quirky thumbnail sketches of people encountered along the way. Visually, the piece is somewhat clumsily handmade, scrawled and dog-eared, which is just how such a personal offering should be presented.

The cover is two thick pieces of board, the front piece being covered in coarse, mottled, tea-coloured fabric. It has been screen printed in brown with an image of a stylised Boab tree, sitting tubby and quenched in the top left third of the space. The Boab has also been stamped onto the CD, which is otherwise unadorned. The spine is wrapped in a hand-chopped piece of chocolate-y leather, which serves to hold the two boards together.

Inside, a roughly cut, 10pp, hand stitched booklet is pasted onto the boards to form the endpapers. The verso endpaper has a sketch of a ragged wanderer - with hands on the belly and flies on the brain. The recto one has a black strip of art paper pasted onto it, which is where the CD slips in. A similar styled sketch of a Boab resides opposite this.

The pages in between are the real beauty. A redolent soliloquy is scrawled across four pages in a hand given to curls and movement. This has been reproduced by photocopying, so there is the slightest level of noise added. The next two pages are the wittily written credits and track listing. For the finale Joshua signs off with the words, "Search for the

colossal adjective." The design of his cover shows he's having a bloody good crack at this approach to life!

**Artist:** Various

**Title:** *Pop Songs for Edith Metzger*

**Label:** 4-4-2 Music

**Format:** CD

**Designer:** 4-4-2 Music

One night in August 1956, the action painter, Jackson Pollock, was drunkenly hooning home from a party in his silver Cadillac. With him in the car, screaming for him to slow down were his mistress, Ruth Kligman and her friend Edith Metzger. Nearing his Long Island home, Pollock wrestled with a bend and lost, being killed instantly as the car careered into a ditch and a tree. Ruth was badly injured, but Edith Metzger was also killed. Destined to be a footnote in a star's story, this CD was compiled in remembrance of her, but also to acknowledge the many others who remain in the shadows of those deemed history-worthy.

The outer packaging is a calico pocket which has been machine stitched and action painted in ruby, sapphire, emerald and topaz coloured fabric paint. Stamped onto the flap is the title and print number—a lovely approach to add to the overall inkiness. The packaging stands out due to the art-object nature of the piece and also serves to give a hefty hint that Edith was linked to Pollock. The really exciting thing about the painting is the sense of movement conveyed by the application of paint—quite a splash!

Inside is a manila pocket with the title and an inset image of the action painting from the outer pocket on the front. The tracklisting and album details are on the back. All of the type is set in the free *Help Us Giambattista* typeface, (a personal favourite of mine). The typesetting is obviously desktop published -

large type, proportionally not enough leading and a bulleted list that is obviously done with heavy use of a space bar. It is a pity, as the type really makes the piece seem a little amateur, whereas the handmade beauty of the pocket is eye-catching and a delight. It would have been more effective to carry through the stamp approach to the type, or even do some hand lettering to continue with the unique object approach. Still, everyone who's visited has noticed it on the bench, so they're onto something wonderful!

**Artist:** Mordant Music

**Title:** *Dead Air*

**Label:** Mordant Music

**Format:** CD

**Designer:** Baron Mordant and Admiral Greyscale

*Dead Air* churns and curdles disintegrated and forgotten broadcasts which spore amongst pulsating electronica, while Philip Elsmore eerily narrates anecdotes from his years as a presenter along with Mordant Music slogans. The concept behind this surprising juxtaposition of timbres is that there are superb creative possibilities arising from mutation and decay. The idea is carried through to the sleeve design, which utilises form, texture, and colour to convey this.

The most remarkable design element is the shape of the package and the way in which it unfolds. The deformed 'd' shape opens to give a mirrored reflection of itself and happily opens asymmetrically on each panel again—our first hint to the beauty of mutation. With the feel of a pop-up book gone wrong, its lateral approach allows the package to be slick and wonky at the same time, making it so very desirable.

A yellow, rusted concrete cancer texture wraps around the front and back covers, contrasting with the tight, punchy 'd' logo

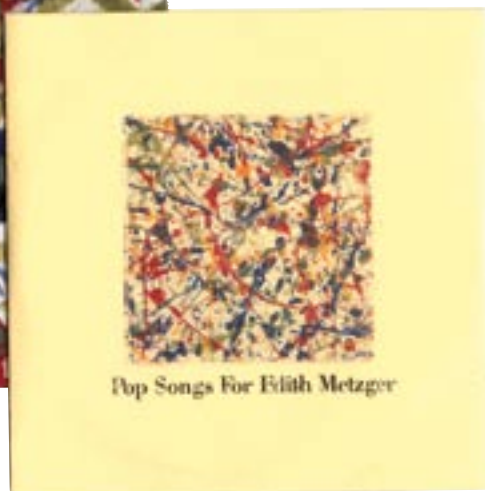


on the front. The second two panels are reminiscent of '60s wallpaper, the left in pink harmonies and the right in warm greys. At first I thought these out of place and to be mere ornament, but then the idea of archiving and the sense of fading joy that comes with consumer culture slipped into the periphery. Aha!

The internal panels are the weak point, with posterised images reminiscent of a 'blah' '90s club flyer and layout of the same ilk. At least the designer used the colours from the front with yellow mustard and black elements on these panels. The typeface chosen is a slab serif which looks modern and fresh without defaulting to a sans serif typeface and once again, adds to the concept in a fresh way, (it would have been so easy to have chosen a grunge typeface, especially given the cover texture). This sleeve demonstrates a thoughtful and fresh approach to a design that could have so easily been clichéd.



**Above:** Various -  
*Pop Songs for Edith Metzger*  
**Below:** Boy Brightclub -  
*Is This a Desert?*



**Artist:** Automotive  
**Title:** *The Digil Parker Project*  
**Label:** Couchblip  
**Format:** CD  
**Designer:** Unknown

Much like the music it wraps, the yummiest way to experience *The Digil Parker Project's* artwork is to let it wash over you, then zoom in. On a macro level, there's beauty in the negative space, textural interaction and languid lines. On a micro level, noisy grit sparks from the environmental textures, which have been caressed by hand mark-making at some point in the graphic creation process.

Organic recordings of soprano sax, clarinet, bass and guitar swish and sputter against electronic sparks and manipulation in the newest offering from the Funcken brothers. Rather than 'monkey see, monkey do,' this is more a case of 'monkey hear, monkey make,' as the sleeve design for the album echoes the approach to the music making process in its design methodology. Analog imagery has been augmented and ornamented with digital manipulation. Whether the original source for the graphics was scans, photography or scrawl, the post digital production result is something entirely unique.

Applause for using chocolate darkness and berry stained ink for the type instead of the black default... Claps too for the typeface choice, a faux old typewriter face, Fluoxetine, with smacked out degeneration—echoing the graphic fallout. The ragged, freeform layout of the tracklisting is indicative of the linear graphic forms, once again default deflection. Perhaps this could have been continued with the album detail information, (also perhaps the designers could get a credit!).

It's cute that the Couchblip logo squirms from underneath the glue for the CD holder in the digipack. It's also lovely that a lacquer rather than a celloglaze was chosen to protect, yet not reflect from the design.



**Above:** Mordant Music - *Dead Air*

**Below:** Automotive - *The Digil Parker Project*





# SELECTS: DJ GEMMA



DJ GEMMA HAS BEEN ONE OF THE STALWARTS OF THE SYDNEY UNDERGROUND. SINCE THE 80s SHE HAS CONTINUALLY PUSHED BOUNDARIES IN PURSUIT OF "DARK, EDGY, UNACCEPTABLE" MUSIC AND A DRIVE TO INTRODUCE THIS MUSIC TO OTHERS.

Most Cyclic Defrost readers will be most familiar with her role alongside Seymour Butz in Club Kooky, a long running weekly Sydney institution that began in 1995. Club Kooky was a welcome alternative to 'mainstream gay culture' and became a haven for queers who didn't fit with the Darlinghurst stereotypes. Kooky was as much about community as music, and over its long run it offered space for performance artists and emerging electronic acts, some of whom are collected on the five Club Kooky compilations (so far!)

Here she talks about some of her favourite music.

**Nina Hagen** - *Nunsexmonkrock* (Columbia)

The very first time I laid eyes on Nina Hagen I knew it was going to change my life. It was the early 80s and there was an amazing new wave night on Thursdays at a lezzo bar called Ruby's. They used to play everything from Bowie to Nina Hagen and the Thursday nights became a place for a real underground lezzo music and performance community to thrive in. Hagen was a massive rebel and had no fear in expressing herself - so much so she was kicked out of East Germany. She quickly became my revolution.

**Diamanda Galas** - *La Serpenta Canta* (Mute)

No other artist has ever made me so scared and in complete awe at the same time. Diamanda is possessed and in turn I become possessed by her. Her stubborn refusal to live inside the music industry and still keep producing music is inspiring and it is this along with her musical output that has been a huge influence on my musical journey right from the start.

**The Orb** - *A Huge Pulsating Brain That Rules From The Centre Of The Ultraworld* (Big Life)

In the late 80s I was working at Disco City in their sound and lighting hire store. This was when the record store was in Pitt Street, before it moved to Crown Street in the early 90s. I became really familiar with most of the clubs and venues around the inner city, setting up and fixing systems for them - which built strong connections for the next decade. At the time I was in the Oxford St gay scene, the dance party scene was disintegrating because of the impact of HIV/AIDS on the community and changes in venues. Local electronic music was pretty much represented by the Volition label (Boxcar, Single Gun Theory, Severed Heads) - and it was then that I heard The Orb. I used to play this album a lot on Pluto Beat, my radio show on 2SER and I'd always get callers ringing up to find out what it was. It was around this time I realised that the non-gay music scene offered more edge and

it was through exploring this. I got involved in Jellyheads, an anarcho-punk collective and warehouse project in Chippendale where I met a lot of new people and then when it dissolved into the Vibe Tribe I got invited to play at those amazing free parties in Sydney Park.

**Biftek** - *Sub Vocal Theme Park* (Geekgirl)

Biftek have a very special place in my heart. I'm their biggest fan and they are my heroes - they've been with me since the inception of Club Kooky in 1995 and Kooky hosted many of their live shows over the years. They, along with Clan Analogue demonstrated that electronic music and 'warmth' could live side by side with technology - along with a great live show.

**Laurie Anderson** - *Big Science* (Warners)

For the past 30 years Laurie Anderson has been one of the quiet achievers in the electronic/pop music world. I've always been fascinated with her sound inventions and it is important to understand that Kraftwerk weren't the only ones inventing electronic instruments. Her famous 'O Superman' is still so apt today - it could be the September 11 theme song.

"NO OTHER ARTIST HAS EVER MADE ME SO SCARED AND IN COMPLETE AWE AT THE SAME TIME. DIAMANDA IS POSSESSED AND IN TURN I BECOME POSSESSED BY HER"

"PERHAPS BEST DESCRIBED AS 'ARABIC JAZZ', FAIRUZ REMINDS ME THAT MUSIC NEED NOT BE DISCARDED AFTER A FEW LISTENS LIKE IT IS IN THE WEST"

#### Fairuz - Fairuz (EMI)

This legendary singer from Lebanon has been in my life since I was a baby. Her voice became like an AM radio in the background while I was growing up and it became the backing soundtrack to my and many others lives. Perhaps best described as 'Arabic jazz', Fairuz reminds me that music need not be discarded after a few listens like it is in the West - I've been listening to the same songs of hers for decades and each time make the connection to my roots even stronger. I ended up sampling her voice on the Club Arak album/mix which meant a lot to me. Run by three women, more by chance than

design, Club Arak has grown so much in the last four years from 300 people to well over 1000. There have been ten parties in this time and I think Arak is the kind of event that couldn't happen anywhere else but Australia - despite playing only Arabic music. Club Arak is a very positive and inclusive party and its about sharing the beautiful parts of a culture from a very queer point of view - creating a space where both Arabic and queer culture could come together in a safe environment, especially after September 11. It has taken a lot from Club Kooky in attitude (but not in sound or style) - we also have queer Arab performances and film.



#### SEAWORTHY MAP IN HAND

"compact but exquisitely honed pieces of music that veer between abstract tonal drones and eerily resonating guitar melodies." *the wire.*

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## creative VIBES! HOT VIBES 2007

MISTER SPEED makes thinking music for popcorn people and popcorn music for thinking people. This debut album, THE DREAMER, is 1950's laptop hip-pop churned up in dreamland and served up by a philosophical mathematician - and if none of that makes sense then just get ready to dance! "A ridiculously fun ride... Think pancakes!" ... 8/10 - MAG



### MISTER SPEED

www.myspace.com/mrbenjaminspeed

WINTERPARK are ready to drop their debut album, ONE NIGHT ALONE. Eleven tracks featuring a mix of retro-tinged indie-electronics and sonic ambience. This is the sound of contrasting extremes, set in a musical interzone somewhere between synth pop and Sigur Ros. "a delightful debut offering" ... 7/10 - 3D World

### WINTERPARK

www.myspace.com/winterpark

This eight-track self-titled debut mini album from MICROSLEEP is a killer - so keep your eyes and ears open - and we dare you to try and get these songs out of your head! A little bit electronic, indie, pop, and alternative it comes with the message that sometimes you just need to let the voices in your head have a singalong! Includes the track MY ERROR as heard on TRIPLE J and UNEARTHED! "let the music speak for itself" ... The Sunday Telegraph

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### MICROSLEEP

www.myspace.com/microsleep



# OUT NOW

**Because Of Ghosts** - The Tomorrow We Were Promised Yesterday FM27

\*\*\*\* (4 stars) The Age

"You can forget most modern touchstones - these guys stand alone." [fasterlouder.com.au](http://fasterlouder.com.au)

"... an impressive rendering of difficult terrain. God knows what they're yet capable of." Mess + Noise  
Distributed by Inertia.

**Underlapper** - Remixes Plus Three FM32

"Underlapper have certainly succeeded in finding a fusion that is definitely their own." [inthemix.com.au](http://inthemix.com.au)

Featuring genre-defying remixes and rarities.

Available instore at Red Eye, King St, Sydney ([redeye.com.au](http://redeye.com.au)), Title Music, 499 Crown St, Surry Hills & [feralmedia.com](http://feralmedia.com)

**Various** - Super Shiny Sydney FM31

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# COMING UP

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