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EDITORIAL

If our last issue was the dubstep special then *Cyclic Defrost* #19 (you're holding it in your hand) is a tribute to music's rich stew of sound. A Dylan-busking dubstep producer (Sydney's Westernsynthetics), a desert rock band who took two decades to release a record, but still stamped their influence across the abstract end of the rock spectrum (California's Yawning Man), a retrospective on a music academic, experimental record producer and indie pop empresario (Julian Knowles), and a former member of B(if)tek and now alt-country crooner (Melbourne's Nicole Skeltys).

Former *Cyclic Defrost* scribe Daniel Spencer gave up writing about music to make it with Brisbane psychedelic noiseniks Blank Realm. But while Jon Tjhia from ii is making more and more beautiful music, he also found time this issue to visit Francois Tetaz's Melbourne studio for a piece on the legendary Australian producer's recording environment.

Ghislain Poirier hangs out in the space between the head and the dancefloor. Same could be said for Greek-Australian beat maker Aluf, profiled this issue, whose crackly techno has been finding a worldwide listenership. Burnt Friedman's work confounds both expectations - the headfloor?

Things changed since issue #18. A new government, a long awaited apology to Australia's Stolen Generation. But things aren't black and white, despite our guest cover from Melbourne music/art duo Snawklor, and the coming year is the test.

Enjoy.

Sebastian Chan and Matthew Levinson
Editors

Australian Government | Australia Council for the Arts

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FANTASTIC ART
AND DISAPPEARING MOMENTS

SNAWKLOR'S DYLAN MARTORELL AND NATHAN GRAY ARE A WHOLE ARTISTIC PACKAGE ROLLED INTO THE ONE DUO. They do artwork for their own albums and they often create music to go with their visual art. They don't draw lines between creative experiences and instead their artistic endeavours are often a package of diverse elements. You could say that the boys like to think of new ways of doing old things, and so for this article they decided to interview each other as well as talking to me. "It's fun interviewing each other because we never talk about music," says Dylan.

"In the past you have described your installation work as a gift to the audience," says Dylan. "Is your music a 'gift' to the audience or are there more base motives being satisfied here?"

"Well I think I've mentioned previously that I feel our music is a bit more selfish," Nathan answers. "Like a present from your mum, it's what they feel you should have and not what you want. This is probably a belief in the power of music and the way it changes a lot, very quickly. You just can't dumb it down, can't make it digestible because people need time to get used to new music and when they do they value it more than something easy. Not that we are grating or even that challenging when you look at it. I think our sense of melody is what separates us from other experimental bands, every other musical convention can go out the window except that.

"In the 10 years we've been doing this sort of music we've seen a lot of changes... experimental music has become the most popular form amongst our friends and a lot of rock and roll has gotten more experimental. Shit's got weird but we still don't fit in somehow. No matter, really. We've also changed what we do numerous times from sculptural work to electronic then to acoustic instruments and now to this synth/guitar trip."

Dylan and Nathan both come from Perth but didn't meet until after Dylan had moved to Melbourne where they both now reside, says Dylan."I didn't know Nathan when I lived in Perth, I met him when I was visiting my family in Perth through a friend of ours who went to art school with Nathan. When Nathan moved to Melbourne he came to live at my house and we started playing music together. Before we were Snawklor we actually had another band with my brother for three or four years. It was called Fong and had two guitars and drums. I guess the closest reference to that would be that we kinda sounded a bit like Truman's Water."

"Snawklor came out of the tail end of playing in Fong and being dissatisfied with drums and guitar. We wanted to explore lots of different mediums and we wanted a platform where we could explore. Snawklor actually started out as a record label and when we started it Nathan and I were doing separate things, solo projects that we attached to the record label. We put on an exhibition two years in a row called *The Fifty Record Players* exhibition. We got 50 polycarbonate records pressed in NZ and everyone that put in a record would bring a record player along to the gig at the gallery space equipped with headphones and we just had a weekend of performances and you could buy the singles that you liked. I think we did like a run of 10 or 20 of each single. After that we started playing together as Snawklor the band when it quickly became evident that running a record label wasn't our forte, although it's a great way to make enemies and lose money.

"When we started Snawklor it was a gallery based project. We were using sound sculptures with record players, xylophone keys and using answering machine tape loops and percussion from water and things like that. Then we got into laptops. We got into computers when we could afford one, probably five years after everybody else could! The first computer I got I think I bought it for $150. I think it could make a 30 second or 1 minute loop or something like that before it crashed. So I would make loops and then record it onto tapes and play tape decks and stuff like that. It was pretty ridiculous. Then we started playing laptop music which is kinda what we are best known for but we don't use laptops anymore. The last laptop album we did was about five years ago. We stopped using laptops mainly because we were dissatisfied with the computer as a live instrument. We wanted the live format to be more interactive and more instantaneous and it's just a lot nicer moving around and playing instruments. Playing a laptop is really tension inducing. We've almost come full circle. The sets we're doing lately, it's just Nathan playing keyboard and me playing guitar through effects. It's really nice.

"What makes Snawklor what it is and where do you think you'd like to take it next?" Nathan asks.

"Well it's not a chess game," says Dylan, "and it's probably not a socio-political model. It's more like the garden in Dark Star; a set of ecological constructs moving through time and space. Melody is the manure and sometimes the ants are flying the ship when everyone's in hibernation.

"Not sure about stylistic changes but setting up our own small scale outdoor sound system felt like a big breakthrough.

"I know we had talked about it a lot, but when the environment you're playing in becomes the third member, both sonically and visually, the air-conditioning in the pub loses the race. I get the feeling that the environments we choose to play in will naturally dictate the music Snawklor will play in the future. Water music, cave music, tram music, garden music, zoo music, dog beach music, airport music, hospital music, graveyard music, sewerage plant music, wetlands music, kindergarten music."

They can already cross a few of environments off their list. Music in a field for bats? Done. Tram music? Done.

"Yeah, we did a show on a tram. We did a brief residency in Osaka last year where we did a collaborative sound and visual installation based on the tram and train systems of Melbourne and Osaka. We took part in a day of tram based performances on the one tram line in Osaka which is about seven or eight kilometres long. They had a bunch of Japanese performers. I think it was just us and some Japanese people and that was great. It was like a sister exhibition with West Space tying the tram culture of both cities together. The exhibition was housed in an old train station and all the pieces were based around the trams and the train lines. For the performance the trams were moving and you could get on at either end but it didn't actually stop for people. There was a table setup in the middle of the tram where everyone would play and it was really good.

"There was a tram in Melbourne, I'm not sure it exists anymore, but it was decorated by artists from Pakistan. It used to go around the city on Friday nights just playing Bhangra music, flashing lights and stuff and people would just get on and dance. There was a guy that curated a series of bands and spoken word people to go on the tram on Friday nights. Snawklor played on that as well. My other band, The Hi God People, were asked to play in that and when we played we had about 20 people playing the centenary bells and were backed by a couple of Pakistani musicians playing the harmonia and tabla and that was totally crazy and the tram was just so packed that it became hard to play and then the tram broke down half way and everyone had to get off.

"Do you remember the time we tried to start a three kilometre radius pirate radio station by hooking up – was it an amp and microphone? – to the pipes in the toilet?" Dylan asks. "This streak of blind optimism still rears its head occasionally, recently typified by the free gig and barbeque we put on a couple of weeks ago in front of 30000 flying foxes on the banks of the Yarra. Unbeknownst to me was the six months in jail and $5000 fine for 'disturbing' the bats. Of course nothing happened but good times, great memories and 30000 oblivious flying foxes.

"We always look out for interesting places to play and recently we got our own power setup with car batteries and a transducer so that we can actually put on shows ourselves. The show we put on at the bat colony was one of those and we're going to do another one on the banks of the Murray. When we got to the bat colony I was convinced that no one was going to turn up. We ended up playing to about 30 people which I was more than happy with. We got reports afterwards that people actually tried to go to the gig but couldn't find it. It wasn't the easiest place on Earth to find. I kinda like that idea that you make the effort to go somewhere special and it really was special.

"We did try to avoid playing in pubs for a while because a lot of the music at that stage was delicate musique concrete sound art. But now we've developed two sets: one that is based around hand made instruments, field recordings, trumpet and various percussive instruments, and then we've got a set that was designed pretty much to play in pubs or in venues where we can play really loud. That's the set where we play keyboards and guitars, but not at all like our older stuff."

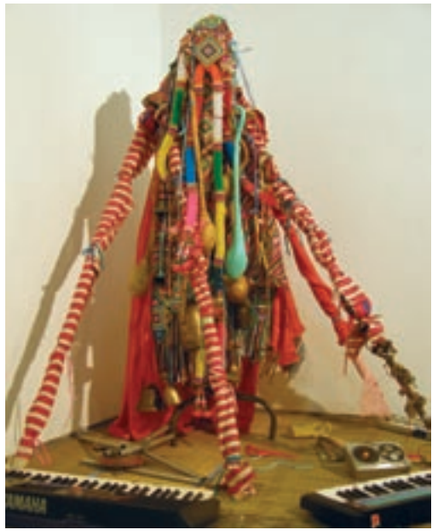
Right now both members of Snawklor are busy working away on pieces for an annual show at the Bus Gallery curated by Pat O'Brien. "It's a costume show. Nathan and I are both working towards putting pieces in that. I'm working on two costumes. One costume is already done and it's made of plant materials, mostly dried Victorian plant materials. It looks like a triffid from Oudah. Inside the head there's a 3D viewer. There's a 3D drawing that I worked on in collaboration with a friend of mine, Matt Voldman and there are speakers inside the costume as well playing the sound of the fibres being burned but slowed down so it's all crackly. The other one I'm doing is hard to describe. It's a four-armed figure playing tone clusters on various keyboards. It's supposed to be a street musician ,circa 2030 from Djemaa El Fna."

> "MELODY IS THE MANURE AND SOMETIMES THE ANTS ARE FLYING THE SHIP WHEN EVERYONE'S IN HIBERNATION."

The cover of this magazine combines the artwork of both Snawklor members. The pieces have been done as separate drawings and then combined in Photoshop. "I'm not sure how Nathan feels but I always find it quite difficult to collaborate visually. It's a totally different ball game from playing music. With the older albums we just took turns with the artwork. Somebody would do one and then someone would do the other. If Nathan's designing the artwork I just give him a free reign and he does the same to me and then we bring two or three different examples to the table and decide on the one that we both like the most. I think collaborating visually held up the album for about six months! It's actually a lot harder than just handing it over to each other," says Dylan.

"What do you value more in music," asks Dylan, "its ability to make time disappear or its ability to make you disappear?"

Snawklor's *Quick Be The Feet... That Run To Mischief* is available from Outer.
More information is available from www.snawklor.com.



LEFT PAGE FROM TOP:
PROPOSED FLYER FOR *MIRKA AT TOLARNO* HOTEL; *PURITY ACCURACY* AT UTOPIAN SLUMPS GALLERY.
THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
MULTI KULTI; *HINTEREDACT*; *UMBER BALLATS*; SNAWKLOR ALBUM COVER *QUICK BE THE FEET THAT RUN TO MISCHIEF*.

WESTERN SYNTHETICS

BY MATTHEW LEVINSON

BANG YOUR FIRE STICK

RHYECE O'NEILL IS AN INTENSE YOUNG MAN. A POLEMICAL FOLK SINGER, A PRODUCER OF BASS-HEAVY DANCE MUSIC, A PROTESTER, AND A DIGITAL MEDIA WORKER FOR A MAJOR RECORD LABEL. HE'S UNLIKE ANYONE ELSE IN AUSTRALIA'S DUBSTEP LANDSCAPE.

Growing up in the small farming community of Yarrawonga on the Murray River in Northeast Victoria – "Yorta Yorta country" – O'Neill says life was mostly great.

He played Aussie Rules football at state level for Victoria, and then New South Wales after moving across the border to Mulwala, before starting a punk band in year seven (Germ Warfare) that "eventually overtook the footy."

The son of a "Dylan tragic," O'Neill was raised on a diet of Pink Floyd, the Doors, Zappa and Beefheart. "Dad's LP collection had a pretty huge influence on me," he says.

"My earliest musical memory is lying awake at night listening to Bob Dylan's *Desire*. I memorised the lyrics to the whole album. Songs like 'Hurricane', 'Sara', 'Isis' and 'Black Coffee Blues' are still amongst my all time favourites.

"Not long after that I discovered the Doors and Hendrix. Hendrix's guitar solos gave me goose bumps every time, and still do," he laughs. He started on drums, but a shortage of singers in the area propelled him to the microphone stand.

O'Neill escaped the tiny Sacred Heart Catholic College when his family moved to Wangaratta, and wound up at the 10-times larger local high school. Local band Double Cross asked him to join and - aged around 14 or 15 - they quickly achieved a modicum of success. They played Festival Hall, the Rockalonga Festival with Jebediah and Dallas Crane, and even wound up on the Channel V music bus. But they weren't ready to play the game.

"We were very political and angry young men - we were vocal against the refugee detention centres and a few times I came into conflict with promoters and security for being too 'aggressive' on stage."

The rest of the band had a big influence on his thinking, especially in terms of politics, introducing him to Marx and Lenin. With the angry idealism of the young, his scatterfire critique took in Liberals and Labor, big money, and so on.

"We were teenagers, living in the bush, surrounded by racism and homophobia. Punk rock gave us a way to express our disgust with all of that.

"I think we are up on the wall at Wang' High, which is kind of weird because I had lots of run-ins with the principal," he says. Being a Wang' High black sheep put O'Neill in pretty good company – a 13 year-old Nick Cave was expelled from the school for trying to pull down a 16 year-old girl's pants.

By year 11, Double Cross was "basically a funk rock band" and O'Neill was bored. Listening to psychedelic rock, reggae and dub, high school finished and he headed for Melbourne. A local DJ, Heath Myers, had an immediate influence on the nascent producer.

"I had one foot in the electro scene and the other in the drum 'n' bass scene," he says. "So I tried my hand at both, but my d'n'b mates hated electro [and vice versa]." The warehouse scene captured O'Neill's imagination, and he cut his production teeth on drum'n'bass, dub and electro.

Those three sounds make excellent raw materials for a future dubstep producer, and on relocating to Sydney in late 2005, O'Neill threw himself into the sound.

"Around the time I discovered [dubstep] I was producing a lot of dub and jungle. [I was] also busking down at Newtown train station playing Dylan and Neil Young covers to get extra cash."

Re-christened as Westernsynthetics – "Things that are synthetic are also sometimes flimsy or vulnerable, much like global capital" – O'Neill quickly became a key member of the dubstep community, DJing and playing live at most events, and collaborating online.

"It re-ignited my enthusiasm for electronic music and sparked a rapid advancement of my skills as a producer. Having access to the production forum (dubstepforum.com) and the talented producers who hang out there took my engineering to another level."

This kind of group dynamic – where people work together on social networks, blogging communities or message boards, sharing information and understanding – is being described as a kind of "collective evolution" by biologists. Instead of survival of the fittest, message boards like dubstepforum foster altruistic behaviour.

By sharing their dubstep production knowledge, these bedroom producers bring the whole group to a shared level of understanding - a point where all parties can critically assess one another's sounds and advance the group's production. O'Neill says it has been crucial to his development.

"I guess guys like Flippo [Melbourne DJ, Dave Phillips] and Farj [Sydney DJ, Garage Pressure] are my 'producers,'" he says. "I send them new bits with the confidence they will be completely honest about what I have done. It's a kind of 'communal' quality control if you like.

"I do think that there is a distinct sound coming out of this part of the world. A lot of tracks have a very South-Pacific flavour and a lot of the dubstep producers in Australia and New Zealand are doing vastly different shit from what's coming out of London."

"WE WERE VERY POLITICAL AND ANGRY YOUNG MEN - WE WERE VOCAL AGAINST THE REFUGEE DETENTION CENTRES AND A FEW TIMES I CAME INTO CONFLICT WITH PROMOTERS AND SECURITY FOR BEING TOO 'AGGRESSIVE' ON STAGE."

The first Westernsynthetics I heard was when DJ Distance rewound O'Neill's song, 'New Fuse', on his UK Rinse FM show. O'Neill sent him the 320 kbps MP3 cold, via email, and along with a handful of other prominent UK DJs, Distance caned the digital file.

Listening to the the meditative waves of tumbling percussion on 'Revolution!', which brings to mind El B's work as Groove Chronicles, or the seething Asiatic pressure of 'New Fuse', it's clear his sound is among the country's most original.

"I have always considered most of what I do musically to be psychedelic in nature, a lot of it is spaced out and self indulgent, you could call it other-worldly, but when I make music sometimes I feel it's a form of escapism."

It's a sound defined by the tools he can afford. "I saved for six months to get Pro Tools," he says. "I have a Maton acoustic and an electric [guitar] and I try to use my own samples. I need a new computer, but that ain't going to happen unless I go into debt."

O'Neill collaborates prolifically, generally online, producing tracks with JD Bigfoot ('Burnin' Remould' – "a real homage to King Tubby in the dubstep style" – and a favourite on Rinse FM and Sub FM), and with Funk Ethics and Dynamix (all from Newcastle, UK).

"The thing I'm most excited about at the moment is my collaboration with Farj," he says of working with the veteran garage and dubstep DJ. Amen break filled, skank-out summer dance floor business is the way O'Neill describes it, laughing as he says that Farj could be the Rick Rubin of dubstep.

Dubstep has progressed at an unusually fast pace from people making music influenced by a wide range of sounds to people making music influenced by dubstep.

"It's evolving," he says, "some say evolving to the point of stagnation. Some people are influenced by a wide range of styles – you can hear it - and some are influenced mostly by dubstep. This is inevitable.

"I am interested in dubstep because there is a lot of scope for experimentation. I draw on all my influences when making this music. For example, I was listening to Bob Dylan's 'Highway 61 Revisited' the other day and it inspired me to pick up the guitar and write a kind of shuffle/dubby tune. Don't ask me why…"

As well as busking, O'Neill plays at folk festivals – he has another catalogue of folk/blues songs, for example, the song 'Yorta Yorta' about the Supreme Court dismissing the community's native title claim.

"With my guitar-based stuff I get to sing and express myself lyrically. I don't really fancy myself as an MC, but I enjoy doing the occasional spoken word with dubstep.

"Around 2002 and 2003 and especially when the war in Iraq broke out I was in a weird place. But out of that came books of poetry, most of which has not seen the light of day. I aim to pull the good bits out and do some spoken word with my dubstep productions."

"I HAVE ALWAYS CONSIDERED MOST OF WHAT I DO MUSICALLY TO BE PSYCHEDELIC IN NATURE, A LOT OF IT IS SPACED OUT AND SELF INDULGENT, YOU COULD CALL IT OTHER-WORLDLY, BUT WHEN I MAKE MUSIC SOMETIMES I FEEL IT'S A FORM OF ESCAPISM."

Dubstep is often described as "post-apocalyptic" or "dystopian," but although the mood of O'Neill's recordings is often dark, he is loathe to draw the bow too far. "It's a collage of sound reflecting my disposition at the time I was making it," he says, "not a concept album to paint an abstract vision of the future. It reflects the 'current climate' or material conditions that influence their development at the time of production."

Last time I caught up with O'Neill was days before the federal election. Since then, of course, there has been a change of government in Australia. O'Neill's latest recordings, such as the loping dub 'Engine no 999' circulated via Myspace and message board connections, hint at a newfound optimism. But any suggestion it's connected to the change of government is quickly squashed.

He's fiercely critical of the new prime minister's approach to East Timor, Afghanistan, indigenous Australians, privatisation of electrical utilities and a handful of other topics, and of what he sees as US and Australian imperialism.

"Am I optimistic?" he asks. "Yes, because there is visible resistance to Rudd's policies. This week I attended an Aboriginal Rights Council rally for the opening of parliament to protest the invasion of Northern Territory aboriginal communities.

"I heard story after story from elders and young aboriginal people from the NT speaking of the disgusting racist conditions they currently endure. One aboriginal speaker spoke of the ID cards they are forced to use - an aboriginal woman yelled from the crowd: 'The dog tags!'

"Basic services including stores and schools that the local people have built and maintained have been closed and requisitioned by the government. The state has taken possession of the land. It is effectively a state of martial law for blacks only. The military and cops are everywhere.

"The formal apology is a welcome gesture, but that's all it is from Rudd: a gesture with no substance. He is offering no compensation for the stolen generations and I say generations because as this intervention continues the genocide continues. Future generations of the indigenous peoples of this land will feel the long term effects of the racist land grab currently occurring in the NT and in five years we will need to apologise again.

"I'm not under any illusions that my music can do anything to actually change the world. It's just that I can't bring myself to write crappy love songs, so just about everything I write has a political message."

In any case, music is just a side project to the main game: helping "build a revolutionary organisation around Marxist politics that can base its roots in the working class." A Socialist Alternative member, he tries to convince his workmates to join the union, works on anti-war stalls and builds/attends rallies. "I guess that rubs off," he says, "when you constantly agitate politically on the side of the working class this can influence how you approach music and how people perceive it, regardless of the political content within the song itself."

"If people listen to propaganda I communicate then this can alert people to where I'm at. But music is not something that can have a fundamental impact on changing the world. A song can't go on strike or defeat fascism. I don't harbour any illusions that my music can challenge capitalism and awaken the masses.

"To think I can fundamentally challenge poverty through writing a sick beat or even putting on a fundraiser gig would be elitist. However, this doesn't prevent me from participating in fundraising events or supporting causes of the oppressed. All I'm saying is that fundamental change can only come about through the revolutionary action of workers challenging capital. John Lennon's 'Imagine' didn't spark the anti-war movement in the '60s, rather the song was written in response to it."

Like I said, not your average dubstep music maker.

Westernsynthetics' releases are available from Sub Continental Dub and via Myspace.

GOING BLANK AGAIN

THE BACK OF AN ORGANIC FOOD RESTAURANT IN BRISBANE'S WEST END PROVIDES A SURPRISINGLY GOOD SPACE TO HEAR SOME OF THE CITY'S MOST INTERESTING SOUNDS, EVEN IF IT DOES SMELL A WHOLE LOT LIKE ROTTEN VEGETABLES. THIS BARELY-LIT LOADING AREA SCATTERED WITH A FEW OLD COUCHES, LAMPS, AND YES, THOSE BINS OF VEGETABLES, HAS PROVIDED A FORUM FOR BLANK REALM, ONE OF THE ORIGINAL ARTISTS TO INITIATE THE AUDIOPOLLEN EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC NIGHTS. DANIEL SPENCER, ONE OF THE FOUR (THREE OF WHOM ARE SIBLINGS), UNDERSTANDS THAT IT HELPS TO MAKE YOUR OWN FUN IN BRISBANE.

"The Audiopollen thing hasn't been going that long but there are a lot of bands coming out of that scene. I think it's all getting a lot better, having that space to play and work in. We've played, like, 20 times last year. We never would've done that before, it's a nice no pressure environment where you can do anything. It's not like playing at Ric's in the Valley or anything. I can't really imagine us in that setting, so it's nice to have this really great environment to experiment."

It's all slightly under-the-radar though, because of the shitload of noise (of the 'experimental' sort – not everyone's cup of tea). There are occasions on which noise complaints get the better of the evening. The night I watched Blank Realm play was low-key (just a small crowd as it was the first night back after summer holidays), made particularly good thanks to that secret, undiscovered sort of vibe. You couldn't help but feel you were hearing something

special, especially when it sounds this great. Still, elements of Blank Realm's sound mean it really wouldn't be that strange to see them soon at some of Brisbane's more popular, trendy weekend hot spot sort of venues, like Ric's. It's not as if it isn't entirely unaccessible music; huge swirls of textural noise with emphasis on progression and natural, improvised build ups, creeping and drugged out, sounding at times somewhere between Neu! and Black Dice, to name a couple, of which Luke and the rest happen to be big fans.

I was half-daunted and half-excited after walking into the home of the three related members, (Luke Walsh lives around the corner from the others) their record collection jutting out of one corner of the room, weird lo-fi folky stuff drifting from the stereo. An excited conversation about Fursaxa and Paarvoharju and other unpronounceable and obscure stuff ensued and it was clear that these guys love music, or new sounds, as much as anyone can. These four very humbled and well-humoured 20-somethings are keen to push things forward.

"Music and other things you take in have got to come out somewhere," Spencer says. "There's so much stuff to draw from these days. I guess there are some artists that come out of the outsider thing where they don't listen to any other music really. I dunno, I've always listened to lots of music and it comes out in weird ways. It's something I can never stop doing."

It's always seemed strange to me that in some self-proclaimed 'experimental' music scenes or nights, there's really very little experimenting going on at all; instead, tapping into acceptable experimental modes of drones and textures or whatever the heck you can crank out of a laptop can lessen attempts at making things new. Blank Realm are self-consciously progressive, seeking new sounds and ways to make them. Theirs is definitely an organic process, always growing outwards.

"It can get a bit hippy when you're talking about it, but I think its true," Spencer says. "We've always felt like it was kind of something bigger than us in the sense that it's something we have control over but also kind of don't. Sometimes it feels like nothing happens, but we do practise a lot so it generally feels like something cool is going on."

"It's pretty much 100 per cent improvised. But we sometimes have ideas about how we're going to start but they're only ever skeletal. It never really pans out that way and if we try to reproduce something it never really happens that way, so we just kind of go with whatever now. But it's pretty typical for us to finish a set and kind of look at each other and be like 'what the fuck was that?' was that good, or…?"

"In a way, I think we all have defined roles, even if we've never really spoken about them; I think everyone brings a certain thing to the band and you can tell if it's missing. Sometimes we play shows without one of us because we have to work or something and it definitely feels like something's not there, even if a lot of the time it's hard to actually tell who's making what sound. It's quite democratic and ego-consuming in a way. I don't think any of us is the soloist or lead singer or whatever."

"We used to joke about it all the time," says Daniel's sister Sarah Spencer. "You'd be playing and making a sound and you'd think you know what you're doing but then realise it was actually someone else making the sound… but I think we've become better at working out our own sound and own roles within the band."

"It's pretty intuitive," the only non-sibling in the band, Luke Walsh, agrees, "but you do react to what someone else is doing. It's good when you get to a moment where it seems like what you're creating is leading everyone instead of forcing something."

"We go through phases and get bored pretty quickly," says Daniel. "It's good to have the freedom to do that because we don't have songs as such, we can change from set to set quite easily."

"IT'S MAINLY JUST BEEN US ENTERTAINING OURSELVES IN OUR BEDROOMS, AND WE'LL PROBABLY DO IT UNTIL WE DIE."

"It's sort of finding a particular sound and working that as much as we can then trying to move forward from it," says Sarah.

"It's probably a steady kind of progression, if you look at what we've done since we first started," Luke says.

"I guess when we first started we were really into Amon Duul and Can and things like that," says Daniel, "but we couldn't really play at all. So we sort of developed this way of playing noise and slowly learned to play a bit better, especially in relation to each other."

They're not just nerds about weird pedals and ancient synths, either, even if they have a penchant for both. They started out with pretty much nothing until Luke did a recording course at the University of Queensland. That gave them access to a strange, seemingly unused room, filled with old analog synthesizers and recording equipment, leading to a lot of very very late night jams and experiments. These days, though, Luke handily works at [music equipment shop] Allan's Music.

"There's a line between being obsessed with what a piece of equipment can do and what you can do with a piece of equipment. I see it especially at Allan's, people coming in and are like, 'yeah this is amazing, it sounds just like that synth from the '70s' or whatever. There's a strange thing these days where people are trying to track down some old sound and replicate it, whereas I find the original stuff way more interesting. I think there's a danger of everything sounding similar, with new software programs out there and you can just drop in loops and everyone's using the same sounds, even though there's so much out there. It can kind of take away from the equipment, I mean, sometimes if you have no equipment or you're really stuck because of poverty or something, when you make do with what you have, it can be a lot more interesting."

There have been plenty of releases from Blank Realm, but there's not a whole heap of self-promotion going on. Instead, they thought maybe it's better to actually work on making the music good and then eventually things will happen. It's reasonably hard to get your hands on these releases other than through messaging the band yourself but they like it this way. Soon though, there'll be a release on the Los Angeles label Not Not Fun, possibly on casette (like most of their releases).

The way they work is highly improvised, capturing the best bits to put onto tape or CD by recording pretty much every jam they do, and there are a lot of those. The previous evening, the four had been up late jamming at their parents' vacant house.

"It's strange in a live context, because we always feel like what we do there isn't as good as what we do in the rehearsal room," says Sarah, "but sometimes it is and when it is it's just the best thing. There are factors like being slightly less inhibited in a rehearsal room but also when we play live, the sound travels outwards, but in the rehearsal room it's so contained and loud and all consuming. I think that has a lot to do with it as well."

"We don't really play shows that have fold-back [speakers] or where people have time to sound check or anything," says Luke, "whereas in a rehearsal room you can tinker with that a bit. It's different when you've been given a 20 minute time slot to get everything ready."

No kidding; especially when you've got a plank of wood with a dozen or more pedals stuck to it, drum kit, keyboard and a whole bunch of other gear to somehow set up. When I watched them set up that evening at Audiopollen it was fairly frantic. But then, as the set started, it was a strangely measured sort of creation, growing steadily but not predictably, flourishes of different texture or a sudden drum freakout. It's music for the heart and the body, exploring unknown territories in an instinctive way.

They're pretty happy doing this in Brisbane right now, even if the scene is small.

There's definitely a network of like-minded noise makers in Australia. If Blank Realm fit into any particular niche it's from their DIY approach and appetite for real sounds and art. They're inspired by people like Xwave, Castings, Trapdoor Tapes records, those involved with Intense Nest in Sydney; all who make the unique sort of sounds in Australia that are growing and finding recognition overseas.

"I guess, well, we've lived here all our lives," says Daniel, "and you kind of get sick of a place when you've been here for so long. We always talk about moving to Melbourne or something like that. It's kind of good, in a way, to be so far off the map from everything. There are places where there is more of a scene and you get more swept up in that whereas here, if you ask people in Melbourne or Sydney if anything cool is going on in Brisbane, they'd probably say no. It's kind of cool; you can do things that maybe people wouldn't expect you to do."

"There are still lots of surprises, though," says Sarah. "All of a sudden we met all these people like Joel Stern and Lloyd Barrett; all these other people who were leading parallel lives to us in the same town, going to the same concerts, listening to similar records. It was like, oh, hi. We should've been friends before."

Luke says it's easy to romanticise experimental circles in the states but they don't mind Brisbane, even if Melbourne does have better food. After supporting Damo Suzuki in Melbourne, they'll be considering a move there (like everyone else in Brisbane). But for now, it's still a whole lot of fun.

"It's been going around four or five years," says Daniel, of the Brisbane scene. "It's mainly just been us entertaining ourselves in our bedrooms, and we'll probably do it until we die."

"Whether anyone's listening or not, we don't do it to be part of anything, we've never had any aspirations of making money, it's been more a thing to keep sane I guess. I remember getting sort of disillusioned once, saying something to Sarah like, what would happen if we just stopped it and didn't have a band anymore, and Sarah was just like, 'I think it'd be pretty boring.' And that's pretty much what it's like."

Blank Realm's *Blight Monument* MC is available from Barnacle Rodeo. Their *Free Time* CDR is available from MYMWLY.

SONIC REDUCER

HE MAY BE A VIRTUAL UNKNOWN IN THE WIDER AUSTRALIAN POPULACE, BUT OREN AMBARCHI CUTS A TRULY ICONIC FIGURE IN THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIMENTAL UNDERGROUND.

BY DAN RULE

Over the best part of two decades – not to mention almost 20 solo and collaborative releases – his increasingly reductive, near-alien guitar works have garnered the kind of the international attention and acclaim that most artists only dream of. Having played and swapped notes with the likes of John Zorn, Fred Frith, Ikue Mori, Mike Patton, sunn0))), Robbie Avenaim, Damo Suzuki and countless others, Ambarchi's rich, explicitly tonal sound has developed into one of the most recognisable and utterly unique in music. But with the release of his latest two projects – the frighteningly low-end frequencies of fourth official solo album *In the Pendulum's Embrace*, and the floating acoustic pop of *I'll Be the Same*, his second long-player as part of Sun, a duo with Sydney producer/musician Chris Townend – Ambarchi's aesthetic seems to be skewing in two very incongruous directions. Nonetheless, according to Australia's most celebrated sound artist, no matter the polarity of the means, his sonic explorations inhabit a singular and strikingly simple conceptual space.

The Earth is rupturing at its seams. Opaque, tectonic frequencies rumble and growl; subterranean tones protract and oscillate, swinging ominously back and forth. You can feel them. The notion of sound long gave out to this *feeling*.

There is a violence to this. It enters via the ear and chest and legs and bones; it moves structure and solid matter. Floorboards shudder and reverberate; empty wooden chairs gradually vibrate and move to the right and left; a glass shifts along a tabletop, drops, smashing to the ground. Another. Searing, screaming top-end shatters what is left.

There is a beauty to this; a swelling, arcing beauty. It is buried – slow, melodic, unfolding and unravelling – immersed under frequency and noise and moving air. The room feels it.

It is a temperate Sunday night in a small, inner city Melbourne venue, and in a rare Australian performance Oren Ambarchi has the crowd transfixed, enamoured, intoxicated in sound and moving air. It is the 38-year-old's way – he doesn't do things by half measures.

"I'm interested in stuff that draws you all the way in, you know, even if it's a movie or whatever," he says days later. "I love just going to a movie and feeling like you've been transported somewhere and drawn into the world of the director, and just losing yourself in that world. My favourite directors and musicians have that effect on me and I kind of want to get that feeling from what I do. When I get that feeling, I know that I'm on the right track and that I've got something to work with."

"That's why I don't really play solo that much in Australia," he offers. "I like to make it special and do it at the right time and right place."

Ambarchi in person – today hunched over a Malaysian meal in a tiny Melbourne restaurant – is far more accessible. He tells comfortably longwinded stories and drops hilarious anecdotes; he muses on recently becoming a father; philosophises on touring endlessly overseas. The mystique, the inscrutable abstraction, the utter immersion of his work seem a world away from his easy, relaxed manner.

"About four years ago, Stephen O'Malley from sunn0))) was DJing one of my songs – the first song on *Grapes From the Estate*, 'Corkscrew' – at a festival and the frequencies triggered the fire alarms," he giggles. "The fire sprinkler system rained out the whole place and the fire department had to come down and evacuate everyone."

"So the next day O'Malley called me and said, 'Oren, we need to work together," he laughs again. "That's how it all started with sunn0)))."

His take on his own music – the latest examples of which come to us in the form of stunning fourth solo album *In the Pendulum's Embrace* and the wonderfully arcane pop of second Sun record *I'll Be the Same* – is equally cursive. "A lot of it, in a way, is really connected to rock music, but it's almost like stripping it to the bones of what rock music is and what I like about rock music. It's still quite physical and it still has change, just like rock songs would, but it's all just done in a really minimal, stripped-back way, and not many people kind of get that. I don't really like to spell out what I do, you know."

It's a telling intimation. Over the course of his decade-long career as a solo recording artist, the Sydney-raised Melburnian has skirted both the most abstract of instrumental negotiations and the most reductive and seemingly simplistic of ambient musical motifs. And it's this transcendent quality that has come to define his craft. Working chiefly with guitar and series of pitch-shifters, delays and effects, Ambarchi's heavily tonal compositions have developed into some of the most distinctive in music, and seen him share disc and stage space with anyone from Keith Rowe, Fennesz, Martin Ng, Gunter Muller, John Zorn and aforementioned doom-smiths sunn0))) amongst countless others.

But according to Ambarchi, his art has garnered its unique sonic identity via eradication rather than arrangement as such. "A lot of it is actually the process of elimination, where I'll start off with an improvisation and build stuff around that improvisation, and then a lot of times I'll take away the original motif or whatever," he explains. "It's usually about taking stuff away and leaving the real essence. It's just sort of about things slowly unravelling."

Ambarchi's interest in music started in a very different context. Growing up in Sydney during the 70s, his early life was scored by impromptu vinyl and musical happenstance. "I was obsessed with music from a really, really young age," he recalls smilingly. "I had Beatles and Hendrix 7-inches before I could talk apparently, like, I was just way, way into it."

"My mother was really cool and she used to just buy me these records. There'd be a Beatles song playing in a shopping mall and she'd hear me imitating it and she'd go and buy it for me," he pauses. "She was really cool."

His grandfather, who owned a second-hand shop in Sydney, also played an important, if not random, role in his introduction to music. "I could just go to his pawnshop after school, and take any records I wanted, and lots of strange, kind of really fortuitous things started happening," explains Ambarchi. "I was about nine years old and I remember I took this one record home – I thought it was a Beatles record – and I put it on and it was a Yoko Ono record," he laughs. "I didn't even know the difference; I just thought it sounded great."

"I also remember taking an Iron Maiden record home, *The Number of the Beast*, and inside was a Miles Davis record, *Live-Evil*. You know, someone had put the wrong record in there. And you know, that just blew my mind. Because I was so young, I was just lapping it all up. It was all music and it was all great."

But his grandfather's shop had other treats in store for the young Ambarchi, who had also began dabbling in the drums at 10 or 11. "He had a lot of old electronic equipment, like effect pedals and reel-to-reel machines, and so I used to just take them home and play with them," he says.

It was something of a formative revelation for the young musician. "It was just amazing having access to all this stuff, so I sort of became intensely interested in electronics from a young age. Even though I was a drummer, I would kind of make these weird, crude, musique concrete tapes and stuff at home."

Ambarchi became increasingly involved in the Sydney jazz scene throughout his teen years, playing drums in several free jazz ensembles delving into the back catalogues of Coltrane and Davis. But it wasn't just music that had peaked the young man's interest. Ambarchi, who comes from a lineage of Sephardic Jews from Iraq, went back to his roots and began engaging with Jewish spirituality.

By the time he was finishing high school, he had decided to move abroad to study Jewish mysticism. "It was really my own vision," he says. "I was really into John Coltrane and all this really ecstatic spiritual jazz through my mid to late teens, and I started to read about a lot of Jewish mysticism and stuff like that, and it all kind of made sense and all kind of came together at that point in time."

After stints in several European countries, Ambarchi landed in New York in the late-80s, where he was to study at a Rabbinical College in Brooklyn. Suffice to say, it was a something of a turning point. "New York at that point was just amazing," he sighs. "I was living in what was a really dangerous part of Brooklyn, which now is totally cleaned up. It was around the Crown Heights area, which used to be known as Beirut because there were so many gunshots. I remember hearing gunshots and thinking they were fireworks, and I'd be sticking my head out the window going 'What's the celebration?' and it was like, 'No that's a gun," he laughs.

"I could study during the day and go to gigs at night, and being the late-80s I was seeing so much amazing stuff. It really shaped who I was, as a person and as a musician. I was probably 19 or 20 and it was just a perfect time to be thrown into that world."

The world he speaks of was one also inhabited by avant-garde jazz deity John Zorn, who took the young drummer under his wing at the turn of the 90s. Ambarchi still cites the meeting as one of the most important strands in his artistic lineage.

"You learn so much when you're in those situations," he says. "A lot of those gigs you'd be standing there and Zorn would look at you and go 'Oren and whoever, go and do a duo' and you'd just have to do it. It'd be a full house and you'd just go 'Shit, I have to make this work', and you would, you know. I was just learning on my feet."

> "IT'S ALMOST LIKE STRIPPING IT TO THE BONES OF WHAT ROCK MUSIC IS AND WHAT I LIKE ABOUT ROCK MUSIC."

But it was another artist, legendary Japanese noise guitarist Keiji Haino, who really turned Ambarchi's creative world on its head. "I was playing drums and seeing a lot of amazing music and seeing a lot of drummers that I really admired," he recounts. "But one night at the old Knitting Factory in Houston Street I saw Keiji play, and I had no idea who he was, but it just completely blew me away. It was like this big epiphany, because I think after seeing so many great New York musicians, I was seeing someone who didn't really have a technique. He wasn't technical at all, but he had so much personality – the personality was so strong – that I just thought to myself, 'I want to do this! I can do this!'"

"The first thing I did when I got home to Australia was buy myself a guitar and book a gig. I got a drummer and he thought I was crazy, and everyone thought I was crazy," he laughs. "But from that point on I always played guitar."

His early noise-based guitar experiments such as Phlegm, a duo with fellow Sydneysider Robbie Avenaim – with whom Ambarchi went on to form the long running What is Music? Festival – seem a world away from the whirring, subterranean tones and protractedly melodic overtures of latest solo long-player *In the Pendulum's Embrace*. Over three extended tracks, the album navigates some of Ambarchi's deepest sonics and frequencies to date. Utilising whispers of strings, glass harmonica, bells, piano, percussion, and, of course, his richly tonal guitar sound, he minimises his already economical compositional structures to reach a languidly narcotic and introspective extreme.

The somnolent guitar motif, subtly snaking percussion and stunning piano intonations of 18-minute opener 'Fever, a Warm Poison' sets the precedent, only to be joined by the loose melodic clusters and gaunt, arcing strings of 'Inamorata.' Final track 'Trailing Moss in Mystic Glow' only adds to the album's considerable effect, pitching stunning acoustic guitar infections and ghostly, abstracted vocal fragments against an underlay or shuddering drones. While darker than its predecessors – the abrasive, fragmentary electronics of 1999's *Insulation*, the delicate, lowercase textures of 2001's *Suspension*, and 2004's wondrously melodic *Grapes from the Estate – Pendulum* proves equally, if not more, unusually visceral and emotive; its ideas further focused, reduced and rationalised.

Ambarchi certainly understands *Pendulum* – despite its differences – as part of a lineage. "*Suspension* was when I first started using melodic things," he says. "It was the first time I wasn't afraid to use melodics, and *Grapes* was really an extension of that, but I brought in other instruments. I kind of think that

In the Pendulum's Embrace is just a continuation of *Grapes* in a way. I try not think too much when I do stuff – I try and be a bit more intuitive about it – but I guess I have my signature sound that I work with."

"I don't know, I hate looking at something too much after the fact, but maybe this one is a little bit darker, which might be the result of me working with sunn0))). The tones are definitely lower than usual. I just love bass frequencies and I really love somehow juggling really powerful pure tones with really fragile acoustic stuff, you know, somehow making them work together, which is actually really hard."

He has a point. While the end result is perhaps his most concurrent yet, the process behind *Pendulum* was far less harmonious. "I didn't realise until I was mastering just how difficult it was to balance those pure tones with the acoustics. This record was mastered three or four times and a few people just gave up. Chris Townend gave up on it because he knew what I was trying to do and he couldn't quite get the balance. If you put in too much bass then you'd lose all the sparkly acoustic stuff, but then if you went too far with the acoustic stuff it would sound too, well, not new age, but you know," he laughs. "I just wanted to have this balance of really super-powerful, wall-shaking frequencies with totally fragile stuff that can just fall apart. I'm really into that coexistence."

"It's funny because a lot of the records sound like what they are – very relaxed and very slow-moving – but a lot of the conditions in which the records were made were actually quite the opposite," he continues. "Like, often I'll only have the budget to go into the studio for a day or two and I'll be manically trying to get all this stuff done really quickly. And it's kind of this weird juxtaposition of really stressful working methods in recording studios, but the music sounding really relaxed and slow-moving."

On several plains, Ambarchi's work with Chris Townend as Sun couldn't be further removed from his solo explorations. Existing in the realms of breezy, arcane pop, both their 2004 self-titled debut and late 2007's *I'll Be the Same* (through Sydney label Preservation) represent a huge dynamic shift, with the pair merging lilting acoustic guitars with curiously pitched and layered falsetto vocals and crisp, percussion scored rhythms.

Suffice to say, the project surprised Ambarchi as much as it did the rest of the experimental community. "We didn't have anywhere to release it," he laughs of the debut release. "I don't even know if we were really even thinking of releasing it, and then Andrew Khedoori from Preservation was just like, 'Let me put it out, I'll start a label,' you know. So it was just like, 'Okay, this seems a fun thing to do.' It was almost like a challenge to see if Chris and I could actually make really light kind of pop music, you know, the opposite of what we were doing at that point in every other project."

"It was quite a difficult thing to do in the beginning; to put ourselves in that head space. And a lot of things that came out were like 'Oh my god, this is really bad.' Chris was like, 'I don't know about this,' but then we just went with it."

It's a good thing, for *I'll Be the Same* is something of a watershed for the pair. Rippling with the entwined guitars of 'Mosquito', genuinely affecting melodies of 'Help Yerself' and blues-hued inflections of 'Soul Pusha' the record proves a stunning inclusion to the Ambarchi catalogue. And despite its divergence from his solo work, he sees it as innately linked.

"I think the two are really connected for sure," he says. "When I was doing *Grapes*, the Sun project really made me realise that, hey, I'm a drummer and there's drums here and there's keyboards here and why not play them? Up until that point, it was like all guitar, blah, blah, blah. But after that point it was just, well, making music with whatever's at hand. If it suits it, try it. That was definitely from working with Chris in Sun."

If we're to take the swathes of attention and respect on the part of the international experimental community as a guide, then he's navigating the right course. Indeed, although based in Melbourne, realistically Ambarchi's career is situated in the more extensive avant-garde communities of the northern hemisphere. Having partaken in six separate overseas tours in 2007 – not to mention a trip to Europe already this year – Ambarchi's life is well and truly split. "It's a strange situation," he sighs, leaning back in his chair. "I had this weird thing a couple of years ago when I realised I was making all my money overseas spending all this time over there, but paying all my bills in Australia," he laughs. "It kind of became quite frustrating."

"Relocating always crosses my mind, but then I kind of think, 'Oh, maybe I won't get any work because the exotic, Australian thing will wear off'," he laughs again. "And I actually really like making music in Australia and recording here and being in my own little environment. But I'm pretty spoilt, you know, being able to tour and see the world all the time too. I don't know what I'd do without that."

But when it comes down to it, there's only one thing that really drives Ambarchi. It's an essence, a feeling, a reductive sense of clarity, and it finds itself at the heart of his music

"Doing something really personal, you know, that's the most important thing to me," he offers, gazing intently out the restaurant window. "It doesn't matter what it is, you know, all the people who I love – songwriters, instrumentalists, whatever – I love the fact that I can recognise and relate to something specific in their work. Ultimately, that's what I had in mind when I started with guitar. I was just fortunate that I already had experience as a musician playing drums, which meant I could kind of look at it intellectually, but I didn't actually know anything about what I was actually doing on my instrument."

"The most depressing thing is to walk into a guitar shop and listen to what people are doing in there," he laughs disbelievingly. "It's shocking!"

"All I knew is that I didn't want to do that. I've never been interested in learning scales or chords, because there are a million people doing that already," he pauses, smiling. "We don't need another one, you know."

In the Pendulum's Embrace is available from Touch/Southern Lord/Stomp. *I'll Be the Same* is available from Preservation. Photography by Daniel Mahon.

"I HAD THIS WEIRD THING A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO WHEN I REALISED I WAS MAKING ALL MY MONEY OVERSEAS SPENDING ALL THIS TIME OVER THERE, BUT PAYING ALL MY BILLS IN AUSTRALIA."

INVOLVED POP

IN 2004 THE BAND II SUBTLY WAVED A WELCOME SIGN UNDER MY NOSE, AS THEIR TRACK 'LITTLE PAPER BODY,' A PART OF THE SBS *WHATEVER SESSIONS 2* COMPILE, LULLED ITS WAY INTO MY CONSCIOUSNESS.

Close to four years later that same band has released their debut full length recording, and with it a number of melodies that will maunder into your memory, but only just. Through sonic developments and harmonic progressions ii deliver *Landlakes*, and it's not a moment too soon.

With one handset and a bad line I have ii on the phone. Choosing who to ask which question is a difficult task, since the two seem indecipherable on record. Jon Tjhia, one half of the self described sound/noise/ambient/instrumental pop two-piece agrees.

"I know that when listening back to things often it's hard to tell who's done what and that, to me, is a really good sign because it means that we're both on the same page and we're not just ploughing away with our own distinctive motifs and sounds. And it also means that hopefully we've got enough varied methods that our own creations aren't instantly recognisable and therefore a bit predictable."

Having worked together in various outfits over the last seven years, ii seems to be the one that fits for Jon and Alex Nosek, the other half of one of Melbourne's most understated acts. Through soundscapes the two piece together melodies and intrigue with arrangements, hinting at so many genres but failing to fall into any of them. Their debut record, *Landlakes,* captures that perfectly, in a tight finished package of just under 40 minutes. To get it to that point took a little longer.

"We probably started recording it, or bits and pieces that appeared on it, over the last two years. And we did it all in various studio arrangements in the last two houses I've lived in. We pretty much did it all ourselves, besides a bit of help from Danny [Jumpertz, Alpen/Plankton, and co-runs Feral Media, home to ii and *Landlakes*]. Danny came down to Melbourne once and recorded us with his stuff, and that kind of just freed us up to use my computer as a processing thing in a live situation rather than doing it later on. But it was just basically putting it together for a long time, and being pretty meticulous about all the details, working very carefully through it all."

The process surprises me a little. Even though I have ears, and a listen to *Landlakes* makes it quite obvious it's not a record that could be done, live, by two people, I've always thought of ii as an improvisational group, and have come to expect an improv-like evolution in the way their songs develop. The evolution might be appropriately ascribed, but it seems I'm mildly off point with the rest.

"I don't really think of us as strictly improvisational [in approach]," Alex suggests. "I think we do whatever to get to something we're happy with. Whether that's really meticulous arrangements in the studio, or – I think a lot of the things on there were just random takes that I think at the time we weren't even contemplating would end up on the record.

"I guess, you know, I think studios – using the studio as an instrument was a big part of the record, and if we did have sections that we weren't happy with amongst sections that we were happy with, then we would cut and paste amongst it… [There was] a lot of reviewing, kind of knowing where something deliberate might fit nicely with something that's improvised. That kind of sounds like cheating…

"I think that a lot of the things that we come up with in improvisation, if they don't end up in their pure form on the record – which a lot of things did – they kind of prompt us in a certain direction or hint at an idea that we can develop, so in that sense…" Jon adds, "the whole idea of improvisation isn't contained to doing one take in real time, it might be that we sort of have something, and we think it needs something else, so we'll go and improvise in that direction and see what that can produce in terms of recordings, and see where the two meet – see where things fit together. It might be that one sound comes from one piece, and we might think that it fits better in another piece so we'll bring it over."

The two explain that this can be as specific as lifting one of their sounds and relocating it in a different context, so essentially taking improvisation as a sound source where the end point is as much the product of the way sounds are arranged and interact with each other as the actual sounds that are used.

"It's really flexible," Jon continues. "I guess in addition to what Alex was saying before about the way we approached recording, and how he said it felt like cheating a bit to go back and edit things that we didn't like from improv – my personal view is that when you have a five piece band or a ten piece band versus having a two piece band it's pretty unfair in terms of what you can produce live, and there's a huge gap between what two people can do in front of an audience and what ten people can do, and it's not to say one's better, it's just a different range of capabilities, but I think the studio's a pretty good thing to have in terms of creating a level playing field. To me there's not really such a thing as cheating because people don't listen to records because - well some

"WHEN YOU'RE USING WORDS LIKE TETRIS TO DESCRIBE YOUR FREE TIME YOU KNOW THAT YOU'RE RUNNING ON PASSION, AND OBSESSION AS ITS NATURAL DERIVATIVE."

people listen to records because they want to record people playing in a room but for us that's not really the underlying philosophy – the studio's there as part of the process to making a disc that has, you know, however many elements of music on it which we like and which we want to show people."

So duos aren't the least common band formation, right? But with ii it seems less default, more a defining feature. Quite simply, it's literally there in the band name, but beyond that their music plays out like an intimate and involved conversation between two minds, rather than a restricted movement towards a finishing point.

"I think it's a lot easier to be decisive [in a two piece], and you can kind of – I find with a bigger group of people if you're not the loudest one, or the loudest three, it's quite easy to let your ideas just slip by because people have already added so many things you feel like, you know, too many cooks and maybe you should just let things go the direction they're going," Jon states as an informed opinion, rather than a comment laced with malice.

"I think we're pretty good at communicating what sort of direction we want to go in and also what we like and don't like about certain things. For better or worse the filtering process is pretty brutal because if one of us doesn't like something, if one of us really doesn't like something, that's 50% of the vote against and that means that hopefully the stuff we do keep is – I don't know about better – but it's more agreeable to both of us so we can get behind it fully.

"I don't think we could have had five people in a room obsessing over things with more detail than which we did, the two of us."

And that's what it comes down to. Even though they're Jon's words, they reflect the driving force of ii as a democratic collaboration: obsession. Jon spends his spare time writing songs as Scissors for Sparrow and drumming in Aleks and the Ramps, while Alex is a contributor to both Scissors for Sparrow and Oblako Lodka, which are projects they work on after tetrising all their other commitments (like full time work) together and finding the gaps in between. When you're using words like tetris to describe your free time you know that you're running on passion, and obsession as its natural derivative.

"We don't talk about what we're going to do before we start playing so there's an extra little thrill when something great happens and we both like it," Jon buzzes down the line. "Sometimes you're sitting there with a guitar or a keyboard under your fingers and your mind pauses for a second and realises that all this stuff that you're hearing wasn't really planned in any way and it just kind of came out of the musical conversation with somebody."

Throw two music nerds in a room together with instruments with a seemingly endless recording process and similarly endless musical conversation – condensing the hours upon hours of tape to something that's not going to soundtrack the rest of your year is going to require some obsession.

The result?

"I think Jon's really creative in the studio and he probably thinks about sound in a different way to the way I think about it. Particularly adding little bits and pieces that skirt around the outside of the core idea," Alex suggests, when trying to isolate what it is that makes ii ii, and what each i brings to the collective.

And for Alex? "Texture in the sound is really important to me and even though we are often making music that's quite ambient I'm really into building momentum, but quite gradually. I don't want it to sound like we're into these big crescendos or whatever, like a lot of bands are, but kind of like there is movement, that it's not all this vague wafty background sound, but that there actually is movement and transition. I guess even in straight up pop songs I think when there is a transition between a chorus or a verse that's what I like about music in general. I [also] think melody is really crucial." In the notes I made for myself going into this interview I had "choose your own adventure" scrawled in my page's margin. A little embarrassed to admit it now, but throughout my first and second rotation of *Landlakes* my mind would pick up motifs, different ones on each occasion, and almost create a different listening experience, nae, different records through that shifting focus. Obviously I was as important in making *Landlakes* as Jon and Alex were. No. Not really.

While we're talking about ambitious listeners, where Alex cites the importance of melody in what is a predominantly texturally focused record, he plays his part in the super couple and passes over the handset while suggesting Jon might have something to say on the topic of melody.

"Like Alex said, it's really important even though a lot of the music is quite noisy, to keep an element of melody in there – definitely for me." For the sake of full disclosure I know this – on Jon's (music social networking site) last.fm page he clocks up a massive 2,384 listens of Broadcast, the epitome of noise pop.

"I listen to a lot of noisy music, maybe a little earlier on; I don't listen to that much pure noisy music now. [Our sound] kind of comes a lot from our influences as well – at least definitely for me – I listen to a lot of girly music." He clarifies that by that he means Broadcast, but I think the gendering is unnecessary, and that involved pop is really what he means.

"I feel like [Broadcast's] whole schtick is to kind of create melodic pop songs with interesting sonic things going on, and introducing noisy things to that kind of paradigm. Whereas for us it's not always like this but in some ways it's kind of the opposite, a lot of the things that we put together in the studio especially try to kind of add a pop music element to this music that would otherwise be kind of inaccessible… I can't say that it's always a conscious thing. I guess personally speaking pieces don't tend to feel complete unless they've got the things we like to listen to in them."

ii: perfectly fulfilling the adage of making music for the right reasons, and comfortably co-opting pieces of your heart, your brain and your smiles along the way.

ii's *Landlakes* is available from Feral Media/Fuse.
Photographs by Jodi Shannon.

IT'S GETTING HOT IN HERE

WHILE LAST YEAR'S LIMITED-RUN *SAD SUN* EP ON SABBATICAL SHOWED THE DUO SUCCESSFULLY CAPTURING THE ENVELOPING AND FREQUENTLY JARRING/CONFRONTATIONAL ENERGY OF THEIR LIVE SHOWS TO DISC, THEIR DEBUT ALBUM *BLOOD PRESSURE SESSIONS* SEES THEM APPLYING THEIR ENERGIES TO A CONSIDERABLY BROADER CANVAS, WITH ARGUABLY MORE FINELY HONED AND DEVELOPED RESULTS.

While Naked on the Vague's (NOTV) established penchant for noise-based elements and industrial atmospheres is certainly apparent amidst the churning Throbbing Gristle-esque nauseous synths of tracks such as opener 'Old Leader', merely tagging them as a noise/no wave act does them a considerable disservice, with the presence of elements unmistakeably drawn from both pop and psychedelia amongst the album's nine tracks hinting at a far broader aesthetic at work.

When I get the opportunity to chat with NOTV's Lucy Phelan, I'm particularly keen to find out more about the events that led her and Matthew Hopkins to first start working on music together, and that would eventually lead to the formation of the Naked On The Vague partnership. From Lucy's description of events, it certainly appears that happy accidents played just as much of a role as any premeditated concerns in this specific instance.

"We never planned to start a band together, but a series of events led to the birth of NOTV," Lucy explains. "I had just come back from overseas and moved into a big house with room to store my friend's drum kit, found an organ on the street, and then some jams started happening between Matthew, me and some other friends. Matthew already had a band called Vincent Over The Sink with his friend Chris, and they were asked to tour to Brisbane with Kiosk and the Grey Daturas, and it so happened Chris couldn't make it to Brisbane, so Matthew decided to teach me the drums to some Vincent songs so Brisbane would still happen…but being a crap drummer I could only remember a few songs, so I decided to bring some keyboard songs I'd been working on into the mix. So we went to Brisbane as an unnamed band, a ramshackle mix of drums, bass and keys. It was fun. We decided to become a band, and Naked On The Vague was born from a Vincent Over The Sink lyric."

I mention to Lucy that one of the first things that particularly struck me upon listening to *Blood Pressure Sessions* and indeed the band's preceding *Sad Sun* EP, was the fact that I was continually picking out traces of different musical influences in there with each listen; some parts coming from more aggressive noise/industrial backgrounds, and at other times more unexpectedly gentle and almost veering towards twisted psychedelic pop structures. I also suggest that NOTV have deftly sidestepped the trap often inherent amongst the noise genre – that of numbing the listener with unrelenting harshness and textural aggression.

"Yes, I think you are spot on with your interpretation about our genre influences," Lucy confirms. "We both listen to a lot of music... and I think it all has an influence on what we are doing. That said, I've read a few reviews, which reference us to bands I haven't heard… I think the music of some of our peers such as Lakes, Castings and Fabulous Diamonds has influenced early Naked On The Vague, just as much as say Swans, Joy Division, or Brian Eno. Would you be surprised if we said that the Flying Lizards are a major influence?

"I guess we never set out to be a noise band, and that element of aural harshness isn't something we specifically aspire to", she continues. "We did want a changing dynamic on the album, and didn't want it to be all 'same, same, same', like an adventure through a dark psychedelic underworld. We were keen to break up the darkness, with the pop elements in the music, which also helps to avoid the 'noise' trap. Even some of the improv/live-recorded material gets a good going over, often extra vocal and percussion parts are added to give something like a rhythm. Also sections of the structured songs that descend into textural aggression and harshness are planned, and allowed for, often repeated and re-recorded if they don't fit with the other more 'traditional' elements of the song."

When I enquire about the duo's priorities when approaching the recording sessions for *Blood Pressure Sessions*, Lucy's explanation gives the strong impression of a band increasingly honing its creative focus as time goes on.

"We went into recording *Blood Pressure*… with a really clear idea of what we wanted, which was an album that really reflected both our 'pop' oriented live 'songs', and the psych/noise recording experiments we were just beginning to work with," Lucy replies. "Doing a recording of just the song-based material, or something that was only improv/noise jams or whatever, did not seem to make sense. Older 'pop song' structured tracks such as 'Horse He's Sick', 'Lonely Boys', and 'All Aboard', tracks that we have always worked around live, had never been documented. So the focus was to get them down, then spend time adding the other psych/jam style element.

"*Sad Sun* did influence *Blood Pressure*… in the sense that recording *Sad Sun* was presented to us as an opportunity by the Sabbatical label, to record some new and more experimental material. We wrote all of the songs on *Sad Sun* exclusively for that recording. It was great, because I think Matthew and I had both felt a bit daunted by recording an album, and *Sad Sun* kind of liberated us a bit to feel more free about

"ENTERING INTO A PRACTICE IS ALWAYS LOOSE, CONFUSING AND FULL OF BLOOD PRESSURE BOILING FRUSTRATION!"

recording an album of our older stuff, and also renewed some faith in studio recording - something we'd been suspicious of previously. That said, we did end up recording much of *Blood Pressure*… ourselves."

I'm also curious to find out whether Lucy personally detects any particular lyrical themes recurring as touchstones throughout *Blood Pressure*'s nine tracks, given that somewhat loaded titles such as 'Old Leader' rear their heads amongst the tracklisting.

"Yes, we definitely get influenced by ideas and moods, which we channel into our music," she confirms. "'Old Leader' is pretty much a protest song about leaders (political, religious, other bullshit artists, etc), so that 'protest' vibe led to us taking out the guitar and drums. Also, other songs are much less literal or political and are more concerned with a general mood, for example, 'Horse He's Sick' is a song about modern day malaise, the swamp of apathy which we are caught in, the sickness, the swirling headache, the nausea… I guess at the time of recording there seemed to be, and still is, so much mounting pressure in the world. Much violent threat on a global scale. This, mixed with a kind of tongue-in-cheek nihilism about our own frustrations and failures as artists is the definite mood."

When I ask Lucy whether much of NOTV's writing process for songs is based around improvisation during recording/rehearsal sessions, or alternately, the duo entering the studio with clearly preconceived ideas already in mind, Lucy indicates that both creative approaches in fact play complementary roles in the gestation of NOTV's music.

"It's definitely a bit of both. Sometimes songs just appear to us like magic, through jamming, and then others we really work on, and bring different parts together to form a song. The 'Brown Sun/Sydney Lane Road' song was an entirely improvised jam, which I don't think we could repeat if we tried. Also, rather than practising and recording a song, then performing it live, we seem to do the opposite and figure out its final form by playing it live for a while, then going in to record it, where it always changes, then appears live again entirely different.

"The only definite is either a strong bass part, keyboard part, or lyric that one of us has invented. Entering into a practice is always loose, confusing and full of blood pressure boiling frustration! We have both tried to work hard separately on an entire structured idea for a song, then bring that to practice, but it never seems to work, Naked On The Vague seems to be some sort of vehicle for tormented spirits or something. The work of something else…

"I think in our live performances we always change what we are doing slightly; as that's the way we finalise songs, so there is always that element of improvisation there," Lucy continues. "It's essential. In the recordings we have layered the sounds much more than is possible when playing live, we just don't have enough hands to make possible what is happening in the recording, which we have come to realise is perhaps the challenge. We have only done one show in support of the album so far, and by the time this has gone to print we will have done another in Melbourne. The Sydney album launch went well, despite the sound being a bit off at that particular venue. I was surprised by just how many people came out to support us. We're heading to the USA on a big tour in March, April and May to support the release of this album, playing loads of shows, driving in a big loop around most of the country."

As our conversation turns towards more localised themes involving various venues, I suggest to Lucy that being a Sydney-based band, NOTV are certainly operating in something of a thriving epicentre of fellow-minded experimental and improvisation-based bands – does this sort of creative situation have both its advantages and disadvantages?

"Yes, there are so many good bands/artists coming out of Sydney at the moment! I only wish there were some more solid venues for bands like ours to play in. That is the main disadvantage – no long-running venues that house experimental/non-rock type stuff. This is also a disadvantage, as it eliminates the ability for great Australian artists to exchange with interstate and international acts. After both of us spending some time overseas, seeing lots of music, it is obvious that what is happening currently musically in Sydney, is world class, but this suffers severely due to establishment problems.

"No one else would even consider us at the time Dual Plover released our 7". As a label, Dual Plover seem to share similar concerns with us in the way seemingly opposites can be bundled up together, and work. I think the fact that a band like us, can tour reasonably successfully with someone like Kevin Blechdom, slams faith into Dual Plover's relentless, chaotic pursuit of diversity in art."

In closing, I return to Lucy's earlier remarks about NOTV's planned upcoming US tour, particularly in regard to the Stateside vinyl release of *Blood Pressure Sessions* through US independent label Siltbreeze during March. Is this a listening audience that she and Matthew are increasingly keen to concentrate on in the near future?

"This will be a great way to spread it out amongst the listening audience there. Most of the interest we have had so far has been from America, and much of the music we are both listening to at the moment exists over in the 'land of the brave and free'. We are particularly keen to try our hands in the USA rather than say, Europe. We are very excited about being able to play in parts of America other than just the major cities. If you're from America reading this, and are interested, invite us to your town!"

Naked On The Vague's *Blood Pressure Sessions* is available now through Dual Plover.

ALUF

HIGH & MIGHTY

BY MATTHEW LEVINSON

"CLUB AND BAR AUDIENCES FIND MY MUSIC 'DOWNBEAT' AND 'SOFT'. AUDIENCES WITH A MORE EXPERIMENTAL APPROACH FIND IT TOO 'UPLIFTING' OR STRUCTURED," SAYS DIMITRI PAPADIMITRIOU. "I THINK THAT'S WHY I DON'T GET MANY GIGS." OR IT COULD BE BECAUSE YOU'RE NEW, DIMITRI, AND WHAT YOU'VE ACHIEVED IN THE PAST YEAR IS QUITE REMARKABLE.

Dimitri Papadimitriou's music is pretty funny. That's not your first response, of course. After all, the microsampled, granulated and textural grooves he records as Aluf are wrapped in mournful and modulating washes of sound. There are no big bass drops or catchy hooks. The samples offer questions not answers. It's techno crossed with IDM - music genres not known for their humour - but there is something quite absurd about the cornucopia of sounds, and song titles such as 'Japanese Burgers' and 'Marinated Rizlas' or, even better, 'What's For Breakfast?' just amplify the absurdity.

Dimitri was born in Athens in 1984 to a Greek dad and an Australian mum. "Family-wise I had a great time while I was growing up," he says, "but my adolescence was boring and pretty empty - I still hold the fact that they decided to raise me in that god forsaken place against them." He moved to Sydney to study biology at Macquarie University in 2003, which took care of a few years, but like so many young music makers, the music his "rock record collector" dad bought ('90s favourites like Massive Attack, the Chemical Brothers, the Fugees, Nirvana and Radiohead) stuck with him.

Two things changed for Dimitri in 2004 that shifted his direction. First, he discovered "the wonderful world of jazz," and, second, the Boogizm crew.

"I was getting kinda tired of the whole techno scene, and electronica in general," Dimitri recalls. He was given a CD featuring tracks from Boogizm artists such as Fym, dB and Paradroid, and a longer live set from Sutekh. It was *the* moment. "Instantly, my favourite genres, jazz and electronica, were blended so finely, and what had reached my ears was just so rejuvenating."

"These four artists became, and still are, my biggest influences. Their music has been described as glitch, micro-house, minimal, IDM, techno and what have you ... it made me realise that one can always expand the boundaries of a certain genre, and even go beyond them, as long as one does what feels right, and not try to produce a piece of music that will fall under a specific category and will be heard by a specific audience."

While those artists produce a tougher, techier sound than Aluf, tracks like Fym's 'Moonshine Dolphin' from 2003 share an obvious aesthetic link. What I find remarkable is how quickly Dimitri has gone from starstruck fan to trusted collaborator, and I think it has something to do with his genuine enthusiasm for their (and his) music.

The first time I heard his work as Aluf was a Post-It note labelled demo CDR midway through 2007. I got in touch immediately. Seth Horvitz (Sutekh) had already heard his music via Myspace, and said he wanted to hear more - "I could not get over his email for three days!" Dimitri exclaimed at the time - and Jeff Milligan of Montreal's Revolver Records had asked for properly mastered versions. In retrospect, while those first tracks referenced deep house, techno and glitch, the grooves felt unfinished and a little aimless. Dimitri agrees: "My first CD was really [just] fiddling around with different software and learning how everything works. Once I got the grasp of things and was technically equipped, I could focus on the sound I really wanted to get out."

"Paradroid had only listened to my demo CD and his immediate response was: 'We have to do a record together.' As you can probably imagine, whenever one of these guys contacted me, I was amazed. Not because of their status; because they were always such a big influence on me and I could relate to their music on an extremely personal level. I [thought] guys like Sutekh, Jeff and Paradroid would be in cliques - way over my head - where they are artistically, but it amazed me that all of them are very keen on discovering new artists and are extremely friendly and supportive."

Max Wending (Paradroid) contacted Dimitri to license a track for Wending's Spontan Musik label. Soon after, he invited Dimitri to his home in Mainz, Germany, to make music together. "Of course I went and boy was I in for a surprise. Not only did we make music that we are both very happy about, but we formed a great relationship since he is as big a movie fan as I am. We are working on the arrangements of our first four tracks, each track to be remixed by a different artist."

Andy Vaz from Background and Achim Szepanski from Mille Plateaux have shown interest in the project, Move.E, which Dimitri hopes to have released as a double LP soon. And Sutekh, Dave Miller, dB and Fym are lined up to do the remixes. Dimitri is also working with Sydney producer and *Cyclic Defrost* contributor Tom Smith (Cleptoclectics) with a view to getting a laptop duo working. And he has an MP3 album set for release on Revolver this month.

He's learning drums and wants to learn the double bass. He watches movies obsessively and wants to study film composition at film school. It's been a long year since the first demo came out, as years tend to be when you're 23, and a pivotal one, with a lot packed into such a short time. He returned to Greece to be with his girlfriend soon after recording the first demo. "I was there for a year," he says, "and it was pretty miserable. I had to work night shifts at a mini-market in order to buy decent equipment. It was something like eight hours work, eight hours sleep and eight hours producing music. And the occasional movie."

Dimitri recently distributed another demo, this time an album. He's back from Athens (with his girlfriend). *LNE*, the new demo, represents a significant progression, building on the potential of his first recordings, but also tightening up the objectives. It can't hurt that Twerk (Merck, Context) was involved in mastering the final release.

"I have been trying really hard actually," he laughs. "Twerk and I worked closely during the whole process in order to get the job done. I've actually been so focused on producing these last couple of years that I haven't had much time to listen to music as much as I used to." Listening to music has played a crucial part, however, and a great deal of the musical raw materials came from other people's final materials.

"I use several techniques [for sampling]," he says. "Matthew Herbert's cut and paste and Akufen's microsampling and granular synthesis... but mostly I'm fascinated by dB's (Daniel Bemberger, Vienna) sample arrangements and, if I had to pick, I'd say my method is nearest to his.

"I start a new track by collecting samples I like and that includes mostly jazz recordings, basslines and strings. I chop them up and try to fit all the pieces together like in a puzzle. I always make sure the harmony and pitch of a series of samples are as similar as possible and thus build up a structure that will result into a melody of my choice. I then use all kinds of short sounds, mostly naturally recorded or extracted from films, and build up the groove on the melody.

"I include a lot of samples. But I usually manipulate them a lot and use them more as sound generators, like a synth," he says. It's a time-consuming process building up these textural soundscapes from finely chopped samples, but the basslines and other main elements are sampled too. Mostly from old jazz records.

"IT WAS PRETTY MISERABLE. I HAD TO WORK NIGHT SHIFTS AT A MINI-MARKET IN ORDER TO BUY DECENT EQUIPMENT."

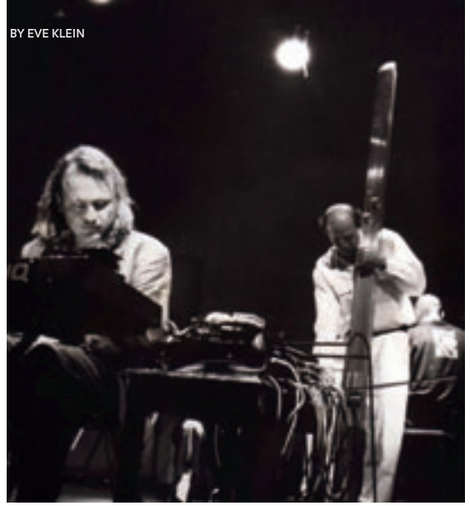
"I get some jazz recordings from CDs and records, but mostly I spend my time researching on the internet and download them. It's just like going on an expedition trip through the Amazon. I especially like the older styles: ragtime, classical, New Orleans, boogie woogie, swing and early bebop, and, in my humble opinion, I think artists representing these styles, like Jelly Roll Morton, AJ Piron, Will Marion Cook, Kid Ory, Bix Beiderbecke, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, early Armstrong, Dave Brubeck, Art Tatum, Django Reinhardt (the list is just endless) are the most groundbreaking musicians and composers ever to exist!

"Mingus, Davis, Coltrane and Coleman took things a step further," he says, "but the newer styles just don't sound as good to my ear. Don't get me wrong, I enjoy fusion and new jazz from time to time, but in general jazz made from the mid '60s onwards just hasn't got the same personality and warmth." It's another four decades before Dimitri is prepared to reconnect with the sound - through groups like Strings of Consciousness, Kammerflimmer Kollektief, Computer Soup and Triosk - although it's debatable whether those sounds are still jazz. The music Dimitri makes is a long way from jazz, that's for sure.

"People from the downbeat area call it minimal techno and techno heads call it experimental. I don't think it's either actually. I like to move people with my music, but whether that takes place in a club or at home doesn't really matter to me. Audiences around the world tend to associate kinds of music with places and I think that's a bit pointless. I'd like to have the opportunity to listen to different kinds of music in different places depending on my mood but I can't do that because it's all so stereotyped. I mean, where does it say you can't spin micro-house records at a hip-hop gig or vice versa?"

POST GENRE WORLD

BY EVE KLEIN



JULIAN KNOWLES'S MUSIC CAREER SEEMS TO DEFY CATEGORIES. A MEMBER OF INDIE GROUPS THE SHRINKING VIOLETS AND EVEN AS WE SPEAK, AND EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIO GROUP SOCIAL INTERIORS.

He has composed for theatre, dance, film and television, with his recent solo work moving between experimental music, sound design and IDM, and incorporating the rhythms, structures and textures from pop and rock traditions. Julian established the music technology program at the University of Western Sydney where he headed the School of Contemporary Arts, and subsequently led the School of Music and Drama at the University of Wollongong. He is now Professor of Music and Portfolio Director in the Creative Industries faculty at Queensland's University of Technology.

Given the fluidity of his musical career, as composer, musician, producer and music educator, it's not surprising our conversation began with a discussion of musical hybridity.

"I've got this theory we're moving into a post-genre world," says Julian, "where instead of thinking about music in terms of genres we're starting to think about music in terms of key-words or in tags – all of that Web 2.0 stuff. Things like folk-electronic-New-Weird-America, whatever it is; you assemble a set of connections to different musical ideas, concepts, styles and forms. But they can be freely aggregated or combined in any way and that is where arriving at now… It's like the 'other' section of the record store just got bigger and bigger until the 'other' part of the record store became the record store. That's what's exciting. And I think we've arrived at a climate, a zeitgeist, where people are quite happy for things to be intensely hybridised."

Julian is my PhD supervisor, overseeing a project that merges opera with ambient electronica. My understanding of his work comes from this context: sending off samples of music, arguing over structures and trying to work out where the hell my compositions fit into the broader sonic soup.

Over a cup of tea at his home in Bondi, Julian says his work is changing direction to focus on the use of popular music structures in experimental contexts, and after a pause for consideration he offers the 'tags' - ambient, electronic, indie, down-tempo and post-digital. As our conversation focused on a notion of what music can be (or, perhaps, can't be), I've decided to focus this article on Julian's music composition and performance career at the expense of his academic work, which has similarly questioned the hotly contested barriers between research and creative practice. In any case, Julian attributes a large part of his musical 'education' to playing in indie rock bands.

"My first professional gig was when I was 14 and I played in a band at the Sussex Hotel in Sydney. That would have been about 1980 and I was playing sixties power pop. There was a punk venue up the road called the Civic Hotel, so there was a punk venue and mod venue, and the mod venue had scooters out the front and people with eyeliner… We played three or four times, lying about our age to get in."

Beyond his own performances, Julian paints a vibrant picture of the Australian indie rock scene in the early 1980s, with bands like the Birthday Party and the Go-Betweens.

"My parents were English, so I used to go to the UK every two years to visit the relatives and, of course, I used to buy records and clothes from indie stores in London. I had been listening to Joy Division, early New Order, early Siouxsie And The Banshees, the first two or three Cure records, all the Factory records… and Public Image Ltd, when I heard *The Flowers of Romance* it blew my mind! That was one of the most radical records, I felt, that had ever been made…. But at the same time I was listening to the Yardbirds, Jimmy Cliff, a little bit of early ska like Desmond Dekker, a real mixture."

These records, especially the Factory releases produced by Martin Hannett, sparked Julian's interest in music production because they were distinctive both in terms of recording and sound processing techniques. Laughingly, he recounts messing around with recording on cassette decks and his parents' hi-fi before getting a Tascam 244 Portastudio.

"It was more owning gear and playing in bands that got me started. I did go to university and got an honours degree in music, but electronic music was only a subject within a conservatorium-like course. I used to hang out a lot in the studio and find excuses to use the gear. Ian Fredericks, the electro-acoustic music audiophile who was running it at the time, was very kind and he used to let me mix records for my bands in the studio.

"He walked in on me one day while mixing - I had re-patched the studio with all this outboard gear I had borrowed - Ian freaked and said, 'What's all this rock and roll gear doing in my studio!?'

Julian's interest in music technology was twofold, and he became involved in both producing experimental electronic compositions under the guidance of Martin Wesley-Smith as part of the university associated new-music scene, and recording music for his indie rock band the Shrinking Violets.

"In the '80s I was producing records for my own band - initially out of necessity because we had no money. By '86, I'd bought an eight-track, half-inch tape machine, and had a home studio. I couldn't afford a mixing desk, so I would hire microphones and a mixing desk when we recorded and connect them up to my half-inch. We had a half-inch eight-track at uni, so I could record at home and mix at uni."

"The first releases with Shrinking Violets started off as demos. We recorded four songs at home on the eight-track. I mixed them and we made some cassettes and we sent them round to the independent record labels. Jules Normington [Phantom Records] contacted us and said, 'I want to put it out'. I said, 'It's only a demo', and he said, 'No, no I want to put it out. What is on that tape, we're going to put it out.' They put out the demo recordings as a 7-inch record on coloured vinyl, which was very cool."

Other bands heard the Shrinking Violets releases, and by the late 1980s were asking Julian to produce their records. This led Julian to working with indie pop band Even As We Speak. Initially, as producer, but in his words, "It got so hands on that I just had to join the band."

"They were a really quirky indie pop band that was a bit shambolic but had a fantastic songwriter, Matthew Love, who would write these amazing pop songs. He was a three or four chord guitarist and it was beautiful songs played by people who could hardly play, which is cool."

Even As We Speak was already enjoying success in the UK, and had been receiving regular airplay on John Peel's BBC Radio 1 show for their cover of New Order's 'Bizarre Love Triangle'. This was around 1989, and through this airplay, Even As We Speak was signed to English independent Sarah Records, which Julian describes as a home for "wistful, very light, twee indie pop."

"They [asked me to] produce the records for the next release. I did, and those records charted on the NME and Melody Maker charts. I can't remember the exact numbers but they went top 10," he says.

"Everyone talks about how scared they were of the NME and Melody Maker, because they were so powerful as taste makers in the UK. If you got panned then that was it, you were finished. They were notoriously style conscious, so if you weren't styled right, if you didn't have the right haircut or didn't look how they wanted you to look, then you were in trouble. Australian indie bands were pretty slack compared to English indie bands. But for whatever reason, they liked us a lot so we got great press reception and good radio play."

Even As We Speak was invited to perform the live recording segment on John Peel's program, the famous Peel Sessions. Julian describes this as a "big deal" because Even As We Speak joined a short and prestigious list of Australian bands to perform on the show including the Birthday Party, the Triffids and the Go-Betweens.

"Peel Sessions were amazingly powerful. The thing you did for Peel was to record unreleased material and then it was like an exclusive for him, and you were always thinking about later, when you could release the *Peel Sessions* record. You would record something for Peel, he would then play it on his show, and the next gig that you played, if you played those songs, you'd look out in the audience and people would all be mouthing the words to songs that hadn't been released… Everyone who was interested in independent music was listening to his show, so when you were played, you were played to the entire potential record buying public for indie music in the UK."

This warm reception contrasted starkly with indifference from the Australian media. Julian describes this as a "chronic problem" and part of the plight of Australian bands in general from that period.

"Triple J had just gone national and you couldn't get on their playlist. But later, when I was in the band, we were filmed for SBS television. Nomad came over and did a story on us while we were at the BBC doing our third Peel Session. SBS were interested enough to be there in the UK, and I remember saying in the interview that Triple J was a lost cause because you could be charting in the UK, and you couldn't get local radio support. In a way this convinced us we'd done the right thing, at that time in Australia on Triple J all they would play were endless repeats of The Cruel Sea – it was an Oz Rock monoculture."

Despite the band having label support they were given only $3000 to produce their first full-length album, *Feral Pop Frenzy* (1993, Sarah Records).

As the band's producer, it was up to Julian to work out the logistics. His solution was to create a record where each track was produced in a different way, recorded in different contexts and studios. Julian says the band "Picked two or three of the most accessible pop tracks and recorded them in high end 24 track studios with SSL consoles and they sounded really schmick." This contrasted with very low-end, DIY production for tracks like 'Anybody Anyway', recorded with a stereo-pair in the drummer's kitchen.

"He was living in a semi in Pyrmont out near what used to be the CSR factory, so I just put the band in front of me and put the vocal out the front and had a listen through the cans and said, 'Not enough vocal, Mary

"I'VE GOT THIS THEORY WE'RE MOVING INTO A POST-GENRE WORLD, WHERE INSTEAD OF THINKING ABOUT MUSIC IN TERMS OF GENRES WE'RE STARTING TO THINK ABOUT MUSIC IN TERMS OF KEY-WORDS

can you step forward. Banjo's too loud, Matthew can you step back one pace."

They rolled tape for several hours and at the end listened to it back, and chose the best take for the album, which was then minimally mastered and sweetened. This was "Zero dollar" recording, according to Julian, with his own DAT machine and borrowed mics. His home studio half-inch eight track was even dusted off for the recording. The main challenge was to develop a production aesthetic that would allow recordings with different production aesthetics to cohere as an album.

"I didn't know it at the time, but this was the beginning of my interest with wild hybridisations of genre. We did everything from text sound pieces to poetry to hillbilly banjo tracks to country and western tracks, to rock tracks and programmed electronics. They were all on that same album. So when you listen to it you went, 'What the hell is this?' but there was a consistency through the song-writing."

The album was a success and Julian notes that his "gamble" went to plan, with the high-end tracks getting rotation airplay on Radio 1.

"It's hilarious when you look at the critical response. It was just the most bizarre record they'd ever heard in their lives. But because the songs were really beautiful pop songs, people could tolerate things that in classic production school you would never tolerate, like wildly eclectic and differing approaches to tracks recorded in different studios. I don't even think we could afford to have it professionally mastered. The only way we mastered it was through a friend who was working at the ABC and we got them to sequence the tracks in order and that was it. We did a bit of EQ on the way over and that's what happened.

"But what it said to me, was that you could make a record for $3000 if you apply yourself to that as a creative problem to solve. It's about the context you put everything in."

At this point, Even As We Speak moved to England to tour, playing "endlessly," six shows a week, all across the UK. *Feral* was licensed for sale in Spain and Japan. The band did "as well as an indie band could do," according to Julian, coming from a boutique label without much financial backing for promotion, and he attributes the success of the album to word of mouth coming from their live performance.

"IT GOT SO HANDS ON THAT I JUST HAD TO JOIN THE BAND."

After a year of all five band members living together in a Brighton flat, on top of constant touring, the band was feeling the effects of being so far away from home. They approached the major labels, hoping to attract a contract via their regular radio play. After talks with seven or eight different labels they found there was only interest if the band could permanently relocate the UK.

"This highlighted the fact that major labels in the world don't talk to each other between offices. You would think that if you signed to Polygram in London, you could just move back and deal with their office in Sydney, but no… We thought we couldn't just move our lives to the UK indefinitely. In retrospect some people might say that was a mistake, but I think at the time that if you've played, say, 150 gigs in a year and driven around the UK in a van, living off next to nothing, in the pockets of the other band members, it's not an unreasonable position to come to. So the band came back to Australia, to indifference, and we just let it go."

Interestingly, their recordings are trading vigorously on peer-to-peer networks, and Julian has noticed that most of the bands listeners on Last.fm are under the age of 25. Listening to *Feral* now, out of context, as a 20-something, I really love it. It's kooky and strangely infectious. Songs like 'Beautiful Day' would glide easily into the contemporary mainstream pop consciousness, except for the breakdown into a very off-pitch rendition of a 'there once was a man' limerick, and added lo-fi ambient noise.

"We were never seriously trying to be a country and western band… [we] always stood aside from genre in that hard way. There was an unreleased recording that was this strange sci-fi concept thing. I don't know what we were thinking or what we were doing," he says. "It had these ultra modern *Bladerunner* interludes, and then this broken, single voice guitar-vocal song, so it was ultra hi-tech and broken-down low-tech juxtaposed…. We sent that to the record label at one point and they turned around and said basically, 'What the fuck are you guys doing?'"

Even As We Speak separated after *Feral Pop Frenzy*, and Julian established a music technology program at the University of Western Sydney. Around the same time, he met tape collagist Rik Rue, who opened Julian up to experimental music cassette networking channels. This fired Julian's pre-existing interest in environmental audio, which had continued to develop post-university by working in sound for film and television during the 1980s. Rik was working with Shane Fahey, co-founder of Megaphon Studios, and a member of the band Makers Of The Dead Travel Fast. Julian joined their group Social Interiors, and appeared as a guest artist on their album *The World Behind You* (1995, Extreme).

He joined properly for *Traces Of Mercury* (1997, Extreme).

Traces included sounds from satellite signals, seawater lakes, metal and timber wharves, which were recorded with a variety of microphones and then heavily processed. Following up from Traces, Extreme asked them to participate in a double CD marking the label's tenth anniversary called *Untitled (ten)* (1998, Extreme). *Untitled* featured one disc of new tracks from the label's artists and a second disc of remixes provided by Social Interiors who cut-up and re-assembled material from Extreme's back catalogue.

Julian describes the transition into remixing as a "reinvention" of the group. As part of this reinvention, the group worked on tracks individually and Julian began to experiment with hand-calculated rhythmic granulation effects.

Despite his background as a producer, Untitled was Julian's first remix project. He attributes this to his absence from the emerging Australian electronic music scene before returning from the UK in 1994. He did, however, program and mix for some of Darling Harbour's infamous Sweatbox dance parties and played in an off-the-wall collaboration at the Phoenician Club. Master-minded by drummer and multi-instrumentalist Louis Burdett, the changing line-up included figures like Tex Perkins, African rapper Mr Razzleman, jazz singer Lily Dior and bass player Cameron Undy (Kidzen) playing largely improvised sets to crowds at the Apotheosis Now dance parties.

By the late 1990s Julian became interested in the post-digital movement and he entered an extended correspondence with Kim Cascone, author of *The Aesthetics of Failure*.

"There was a whole wave of practice around the late '90s onwards that was problematising the notion of digital being a clean space, a hi-fi space, and thinking about it in terms of exploring the idiosyncrasies of digital - the click, the glitch, the CD skip, all of those sorts of sounds which only really come from digital environments. From about 2000 my work started to draw upon those sound worlds.

"Like a lot of people, I've moved from high-end, very clean digital environments, to actually embracing lo-fi and desktop environments and, beyond that, to developing experimental approaches to software where the unexpected happens - finding ways of using software with unusual outcomes."

Rather than working towards a minimalist-inspired microsound aesthetic, Julian drew upon the ideas of glitch but tried to incorporate a "dense and fuller set of musical structures," likening his work to that of Paul Gough (Pimmon).

"Even As We Speak was quite experimental, and perhaps if I hadn't been interested and involved with experimental music then maybe we wouldn't have adopted that very weird production aesthetic and angle. So there are points when you can see it before, but in the early 2000s it was really about solo work to bring all that together."

Julian began to develop his own video for projects around the same time.

"I'd become obsessed with the idea of time delimited pieces, setting myself constraints and forcing myself to work within those constraints. *One Day* was a 12 hour drive and the objective was to gather the materials and create something out of that… A few different versions were created. The first one was in collaboration with a couple of other artists at a performance art festival in Korea. The next was a solo version, which I took to Experimental Intermedia in New York as a one hour performance with three video screens and live electronics."

"WE DID EVERYTHING FROM TEXT SOUND PIECES TO POETRY TO HILLBILLY BANJO TRACKS TO COUNTRY AND WESTERN TRACKS, TO ROCK TRACKS AND PROGRAMMED ELECTRONICS."

A great response in New York led to Australian performances and in 2005 Roger Richards from Extreme Records gave it to the Melbourne Film Festival. It was programmed in the Australian features section alongside Cate Blanchett in *Little Fish* (2005, Dirty Films). This time, rather than being a live performance, Julian had created a single screen cinema version, which Extreme Records plans to release to DVD.

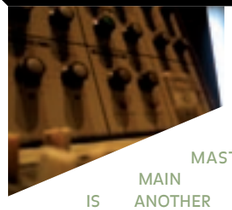
"This was a 65 minute experimental music video - manipulated field recordings and video. I was freaked out by that kind of work being put in front of those kinds of audiences. The Australian feature film industry is notoriously conservative, and totally narrative-based, and realist, and here was a very abstract thing."

Since the mid-1990s, Julian's solo work has travelled widely: the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's survey of Australian experimental music and sound work, *Variable Resistance: 10 Hours of Sound from Australia* (2002), curated by Philip Samartzis, the UNESCO Digi-Arts Knowledge Portal and the Australian Sound Design Project databases, the compilation *Motion: Movement in Australian Sound* (2003, Preservation), and locally, performances at Impermanent Audio and Electrofringe. Interestingly, it is the emphasis on live performance that Julian has found invigorating.

It has given Julian time to consider future avenues for accessing and distributing experimental music.

"It's not to say that I'm against releasing CDs but I think it's a good time to question whether physical CDs are the way of the future. Perhaps there are other ways of engaging with your audience? I'm a huge Last.fm user. You can put up free content and attract a pretty significant audience through those networks. So one way of thinking about it is to work in social media spaces and make a fair amount of work available for free, build audiences and then tour. Connect with your audiences on that level. It's an interesting pause point, and everyone is in that space thinking, 'Well, what next?'"

STORM THE STUDIO: FRANCOIS TÉTAZ



MOOSE MASTERING'S MAIN ROOM IS ANOTHER WORLD; ISOLATED, SURREAL. NARROW BLOCKS OF WHITE LIGHT PUNCTUATE THE SPACES BETWEEN SPEAKER TOWERS AND A LARGE TELEVISION SCREEN ON THE FRONT WALL; TILTED COLUMNS SEEM TO EMERGE FROM AND DISAPPEAR INTO THE BLACK WALLS. AT THE REAR, A SQUARE BLUE COUCH SITS ACROSS VERTICAL STRIPS RESEMBLING AN ORGAN'S PIPES, FACING ONTO A DESK, A COUPLE OF COMPUTER SCREENS, AND A PAIR OF MINIMAL-LOOKING MIXING CONSOLES.

The effect is not an accident. The room is intended to remove its occupants from the outside world and its associated distractions. The only nod to life beyond the studio is the natural light filtering in through the slices in the front wall – otherwise, the aim here is to create a clean slate. Acoustically designed by Chris Morton and styled by Martin Gill, the room was intended to be as neutral as possible.

Franc Tétaz, who created Moose a decade ago from the shell of an old chocolate factory, elaborates: "What I was after in a studio was to have it as a thing that, when you're working there on a day to day level, you actually don't notice anything else around you. So you don't get distracted by your surroundings. It should have quite a kind of meditative sense, so when you're working there's just the feeling of the music and there's nothing else around you. I didn't want something where you'd walk in and you'd say, 'Wow! Feels like a country studio! Wow! Feels like a commercial studio! Or a metal studio.' I'm into heaps of different music so I wanted something flexible – I just wanted to minimise distraction – that's it."

Tétaz occupies a unique position in the Australian musical landscape. His career includes time spent in 1990s ambient/industrial outfit Shinjuku Thief, a growing list of iconic feature film scores, compositions for theatre, dance and installation, countless mastering credits, and meticulous production work on some of the country's finest albums of recent years. In conversation, Tétaz comes across as both methodical and intuitive in his approach to projects – but beyond this, his great strength is flexibility. It's a quality which runs through everything he's involved in, from the construction of his studio to the work he does within it. A phrase which every so often bubbles to the surface of our conversation is 'different for different projects', and it resonates with the modular nature of Tétaz's knowledge and equipment.

Rather than studying music at university, Tétaz studied with individual teachers. Initially a percussionist and violinist, he extended his musical and technical knowledge step-by-step in the directions he wished to develop – which, it turns out, would lead him to having his own studio.

"When I was in my early twenties, I realised the sort of thing I was wanting to do meant that I needed to have skills in the studio – I'd need to understand the studio inside out. That's when I spent a lot of time learning that stuff. I got to the stage where I needed to have really good mix skills. I was working with a couple of people remixing stuff, and then from there I decided that if I really wanted to do what I wanted to do, I needed to not be working in other peoples' studios; I needed my own studio, so what's when I started Moose." The studio has been in the same location – the inner-Melbourne suburb of Richmond – since its inception.

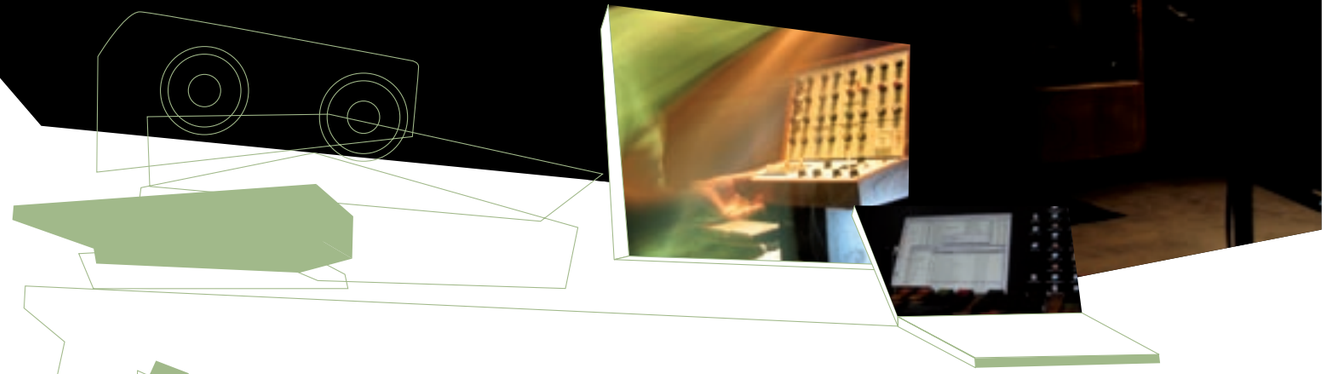
Throughout this time, Tétaz honed his compositional skills alongside his production knowledge – a combination which now affords him great advantage as a soundtrack composer and record producer – two roles he finds very similar to one another.

"I use all those skills when I'm composing. Working as a producer, a lot of it's arranging, so it means you're using a lot of compositional skills. It's like an improvisational composition session when I'm producing. Then you have all the skills of recording and production that go along with it. So when I'm composing it makes it a lot easier to render the idea that I have. I don't have to take it to somebody else and translate that – it's one thing that I know is very frustrating for a lot of composers when they're recording."

Indeed, Tétaz's most recent soundtracks – for Australian director Greg McLean's films *Wolf Creek* and *Rogue* – are filled with a telling level of texture and finesse. *Wolf Creek*'s final 35 minutes are entirely devoid of dialogue, adding weight to the moody pull of Tétaz's compositions. For some pieces, he drew upon the unique, evocative harmonics of Alan Lamb's 'wire music', capturing the sound created by long stretches of telephone wire in the West Australian desert. At other times, deep, almost majestic rumblings underpin pensive strings and prepared piano. *Rogue*, he explains, is "more full on" and "much lusher" – utilising brighter, more explicit sounds. On both films, Tétaz has also headed up the sound team, working with a sound designer to create a cohesive sonic environment. The broad scope he's given suggests that McLean has a lot of faith in Tétaz's ability – a point which Tétaz confirms.

"As long as you're working with people who you have a really strong creative link with, then you sort of have that freedom. I'm starting on a film in a couple of weeks with Nash Edgerton, his first feature film *The Square*. Ben Lee's written a bunch of songs inspired by the film and I'm doing the score for it. Nash's whole take in terms of what I'm doing is that he likes my work and he's really happy for me to bring to the film what I think the film needs." It's clear that trust is an essential ingredient to a productive relationship with Tétaz, and it's also something upon which he truly thrives: "We discuss it along the way, but that's my brief – 'Come on, what can you do? Thrill us! Do something that's amazing that makes my film come alive!' Any project you're on that's like that is a really great project. It's great for the audience because everyone's trying to do something that has a real *thing* about it."

"That same role in composition I think is very similar in production. It's exactly the same; you really need that trust." It must be said that from the enthusiasm with which he discusses his projects – and his intimate conceptual understanding of each – it would be very difficult *not* to allow him the freedom to explore his ideas fully.



"IT SOUNDS A LITTLE LIKE TÉTAZ SETS HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS – BUT IN A SENSE, WHAT BETTER WAY TO IMMERSE ARTISTS IN THE RECORDING?"

Of course, as a producer, it's not only his ideas which demand attention, and it's something he's very aware of. In this capacity, Tétaz eagerly admits to being very "hands on," encouraging a strong dialogue between artist and producer. It's a style which has reaped rewards for artists such as the ARIA-nominated Lior, with whom Tétaz produced and co-wrote the recently released *Corner of an Endless Road*. That particular project saw Tétaz arranging Lior's songs for different instruments and voices, and tweaking arrangements. On the whole, it was harmonious, though he happily confesses that occasionally the role makes him temporarily unpopular: "There are lots of times on recordings where you hear people swearing at me, because you make them play so many things over and over again. It's all about motivating and getting people to do that, but it's really hard work – rather than going 'Yeah, that's fine, that'll do – cool.'" He considers himself a facilitator, as somebody there to help to evaluate and develop ideas. "You need to know and understand what the song's about and what they're trying to do with it, so your vision of it doesn't take away from that," he adds.

When producing records, Tétaz approaches recording from a number of angles. Generally, for a band, he'll hire out a studio for the initial tracking. Beyond this, it varies – for some projects, he'll record overdubs at Moose, which he tries to limit to parts best suited to the space. But rather than ignoring the huge shifts toward home recording, Tétaz capitalises on the extra scope this can afford some projects, particularly when the artists themselves are suitably au fait with the technology: "If you're on a project for months and months and months, it costs a huge amount of money, so it's good to be able to use those skills on the things that the music really benefits from. It doesn't have to cost a

lot of money to do that," he says, adding that it also means band members become more responsible for their performances, and can spend more time in a relaxed environment honing them. It sounds a little like Tétaz sets homework assignments – but in a sense, what better way to immerse artists in the recording?

If it seems unusual for a discussion about Moose to bear so little focus on equipment, it's because Tétaz repeatedly steers away from the topic. It's not that he isn't interested.

"I ACTUALLY FIND ALMOST EVERY PIECE OF EQUIPMENT I WORK WITH INCREDIBLY FRUSTRATING."

"I don't have any favourite equipment. I really like particular microphones for particular sources that I find work really well; otherwise I don't have any favourites. I actually find almost every piece of equipment I work with incredibly frustrating. Almost every designed piece of gear is really dumb! There's virtually no piece of equipment that I really like. They have things that are good about them, but then the whole logic of how they work is built on the idea of audio from the 1930s."

One thing he will say is that he enjoys working in digital audio – particularly given the budgetary constraints of both his studio and his projects. (Moose runs on a trio of Apple G5 Power Macs loaded with Pro Tools, alongside Digidesign Command 8 consoles.) "When you have a system that you can pull up a session and turn it off again, it enables a greater amount of flexibility which enables me to work in the way I like to work. I may be working on a track for two hours, and I'm actually bored of it, you know? I'm not listening to it musically any more, so I want to work on something else for a while."

As somebody so tied up with sound, it's refreshing that Tétaz distances himself from the tired old 'analogue vs digital' debate; instead, his primary concern is how far he can take the music given the resources available to him. "When you're working in an analogue studio and you've got a whole lot of stuff patched in, you don't really have the choice of going, 'well, I'm just going to change tracks now.' That takes hours, so you don't do it. I think that sometimes that can be detrimental to your working process. It's not bad if you're in the same studio all the time and you know it like the back of your hand, but not for the way I work."

"With that time that you're able to put into it, it doesn't mean you're going over the same thing; it means that I'm able to get to a point in a track that I would never be able to get to if I had to do it in the one session. That's a very powerful tool if you use it like that in an efficient way. It enables you to take more risks, basically. It's not that I'm actually against analogue studios in any way; I actually love them. And ideally, I'd love working in an environment where I have both those things together. But from a practical point of view – I'm talking about music, you know what I mean? Not so much the flavour of some compressor, although you could define that as being musical. I find that if I worked like that, I'd actually be compromising the creative potential of the music."

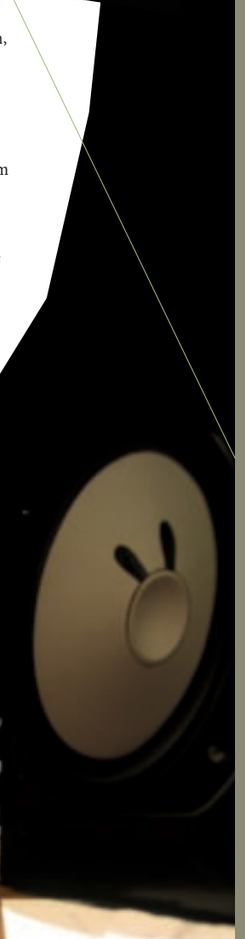
Another benefit of Moose's digital focus is the great flexibility available to Tétaz and fellow engineer Lachlan Carrick (a man known for unlocking the secrets of mastering floor-shaking doom, and who produces music with electronica outfit Velure). In creating a second, more casual production space (in the front section of the space), the pair have devised a way to optimise their workflow: "[The front room] is linked so you can do the same things – it's got exactly the same setup as the main room, and it's on a network, so you can pull up all the same sessions. It works well; Lachlan could be working at the same time as me and we don't step on each other's toes that way."

With his attention freed from equipment fetishisation, what is it that ultimately makes Moose an ideal and unique working space for Tétaz and his multitude of exploits? It may seem a little too uncomplicated, but much rests on the room itself. "It doesn't sound like most studios," he admits. "It's acoustically very accurate, but it's quite reverberant. What I wanted was something that was acoustically flat, so things would translate well outside the room, but it doesn't take all the space away from it. It's really great for translation into spaces. A lot of the time when you hear music, it's actually not in headphones; a lot of it's in an ambient setting, or there are a lot of other noises around it. The amount of air in a room affects the amount of separation you have between things when you mix, so I would define things more, which means when you got into another environment, you would be able to hear the music a lot more clearly."

Evidently, hearing music clearly isn't a problem for Tétaz – a statement affirmed by his concurrent role as A&R director for Rubber Records. If you think he multi-tasks relentlessly, you may be right – but in his typical style, he sees things much more simply.

"I go between doing soundtracks and making records – that's my thing."

More information is available from www.moosemastering.com



DESERT KNOWLEDGE

YAWNING MAN IS A PRODUCT OF 1980s CALIFORNIA. FOUR GUYS IN THEIR LATE TEENS SHACKED UP IN A HOUSE IN LA QUINTA, A DESERT TOWN TUCKED IN THE COACHELLA VALLEY AT THE SOUTHERN END OF THE STATE, ABOUT AN HOUR-AND-A-HALF FROM THE MEXICAN BORDER. THEY WERE ALFREDO HERNANDEZ, A JAZZ-TRAINED DRUMMER; MARIO LALLI, BASS PLAYER AND HOUSE KEEPER; LARRY LALLI ON GUITAR AND GARY ARCE, THE PRINCIPLE DESIGNER BEHIND YAWNING MAN'S LANGUID, ELEMENTAL, TEMPESTUOUS ROCK MUSIC.

This is where desert rock began, and by extension stoner rock, a certain melancholy inflected psychedelica borne from sweltering, lethargic desert towns in the south east of the United States. The music of Yawning Man is cinematic, suffused with American outsider dreams, grand in scale but uniformly focused.

Yawning Man's sound was birthed in the sweaty, unemployed and beery daze of Arce, heretofore untrained at his guitar, and an already proficient Hernandez on his kit. Speaking on the phone from La Quinta, Arce describes the setting in their home circa 1985.

"Mario's parents owned this house in the desert and we all lived there, crashed there, partied, did whatever," Arce recalls. "Me and Alfredo didn't have jobs, so during the day when Mario was at work we'd wake up in the morning, start drinking beer and start jamming. I really didn't know how to write songs, I just self-taught myself on Mario's guitar when he was at work. We started coming up with music, a sound."

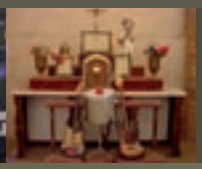
Musicians often purport to have 'a sound', but very few can claim to have emphatically created one, an aesthetic previously unknown and subsequently rendered in varying degrees of authenticity throughout the subsequent history of rock music. Although Yawning Man took 17 years to record their proper debut album *Rock Formations*, the band created a thundering, vagrant form of psychedelic rock, the aural equivalent of wandering parched through the infinite yellow. It's remarkable how gentle and empathising Arce's sustained, reverberated guitar notes sound as they ring high on the fret board, or how Hernandez's kit can wander in and out of focus so precisely – intricate and bereft of showmanship. These young guys, who recorded a few low-key demos but otherwise stayed clear of the commercial realms for the bulk of their career, are owed debts from bands like Kyuss and Queens of the Stone Age, among others.

Back then punk was the modus operandi of young rebel Californians. Greg Ginn's SST records spawned bands such as Black Flag, the Descendents and the Minutemen, who were all either functioning or in the process of disbanding while Yawning Man were sharing their La Quinta home. The band used to drive to LA to see shows, which is where they met Dave Travis, a teacher, filmmaker and musician who introduced the members to the idea of holding concerts, *parties*, in the desert.

Arce says that although there were bands playing live shows in the desert throughout the 70s, it started for Yawning Man when "Travis came to the desert one weekend with a truck full of friends and a generator."

"He turned us onto the whole thing with the generator parties. He'd come down every weekend and we'd load all of our equipment into his truck, and get everyone around. Sometimes the parties would get really huge. Sometimes we'd get 500 people out there! There'd be moonlight and live music until five in the morning. Just people taking acid and drinking beer."

At first, the Iron Door was the meeting spot for desert revellers. It was a location tucked away from the view of police and prudes, and the location for some of Yawning Man's first shows, played to blissed-out onlookers, lazing in the sand or leaning against their vehicles.



"TRAVIS CAME TO THE DESERT ONE WEEKEND WITH A TRUCK FULL OF FRIENDS AND A GENERATOR."

But the Iron Door was not to be forever. "Eventually the cops started showing up there, and it started getting pretty bad for a while," says Arce. "A lot of the people would be drunk, and bottles would start flying at parked cars. Eventually it came to an end, and we found another spot called Edom Hill."

"Edom Hill was a big mountain out here in the desert owned by the city. There was a gate that was open on the weekends, so we'd tell everybody to meet up at Edom Hill on Saturday nights."

"THE BAND CREATED A THUNDERING, VAGRANT FORM OF PSYCHEDELIC ROCK, THE AURAL EQUIVALENT OF WANDERING PARCHED THROUGH THE INFINITE YELLOW."

One particularly windy night at Edom Hill, Arce and co set up their gear on the hill and embarked on one of their marathon jams. It became so windy that onlookers were forced into their cars at the foot of the hill, to watch from the cockpit of their vehicles, headlights ablaze to illuminate the desert ensemble while they endured the tumult of sand and storm. When the band finally reconvened in 2002 after a long hiatus for the release of *Rock Formations* and the subsequent *Pot Head* EP (both originally released on Spanish label Alone records, now re-released together as *Vista Point* on Australia's Lexicon Devil Records), those romantic moments were nearly two decades vintage. Yawning Man are no longer a group of teenagers spending hot days in hammocks wrapping their heads around new instruments and new sounds.

Yawning Man turned into A Sort Of Quartet when the members started implementing elements of bebop into their sound. Alfredo Hernandez went on to guest in Kyuss and Queens of the Stone Age, the Lalli cousins founded Fatso Jetson, while Gary Arce has joined Ten East and started his own project Dark Tooth Encounter, which follows a darker, more caustic energy while still maintaining Arce's flair for immersion. Yawning Man have plans to record a new album slated for release late in 2008.

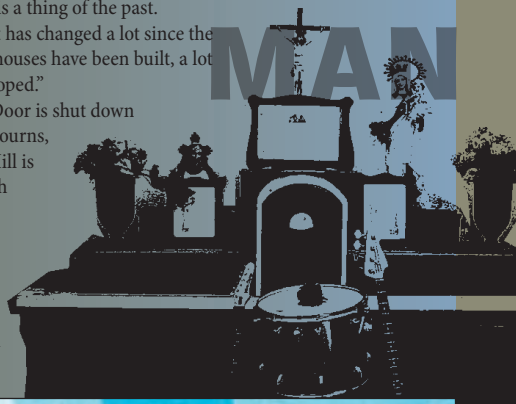
For now, Gary Arce is living in the same La Quinta house that birthed Yawning Man, having bought it from the Lalli family. He lives there with his family, has a job, and the desert scene is a thing of the past.

"The desert has changed a lot since the 80s. A lot of houses have been built, a lot of land developed."

"The Iron Door is shut down now." Arce mourns, "and Edom Hill is now a rubbish dump."

Yawning Man's *Vista Point* is available from Lexicon Devil/Fuse.

YAWNING MAN



MELT DOWN SOUND

THE OBSESSION WITH BASS IN MUSIC NOW CAN SEEMINGLY GO NO FURTHER. WHOLE STYLES ARE BUILDING THEIR FOUNDATIONS AROUND RHYTHMIC BASS LINES THAT STUTTER AND FLY AROUND PERCUSSIVE ARCS. BASS WEIGHT IS SPOKEN OF IN REVERED TONES AND IT SEEMS TO HAVE A PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT ON LISTENERS.

But if bass seems prominent in some commercial styles of recent times, you only have to dig a slight way underground to find its source. In many circles bass is revered for its body affecting, mind provoking, and sheer foot moving power. Instead of a bed or foundation to articulate a musical style, whole genres have built up around the bassline. As club systems get larger and more expressive, these styles are breaking out and finding new audiences. Enter Montreal native Ghislain Poirier.

Since earlier this decade Poirier has been an alchemist with bass. He has specialised in melting a whole host of styles down, mixing them and producing some of the most addictive bass-heavy riddims around. Poirier brings the world to his listeners in a distinctively Montreal way. It's local in feel but global in scope. From the soca of Trinidad and Tobago, to ragga from Guadeloupe; Créole rap from Haïti and over to African hip-hop. It's all there, fighting for position and melding in unpredictable ways.

Poirer's sixth full length record, *No Ground Under*, is his first for the Ninja Tune label, a relationship that, he tells me, "Just happened naturally." On the line from his home in Montreal, he says, "Ninja Tune have an office in Montreal (I signed with the Montreal office, by the way) and we saw each other at gigs and concerts. They liked my stuff and even before I signed with them, they invited me to play at a Ninja Tune party."

It's a timely move. Having released two records for Chicago label Chocolate Industries, Ninja Tune feels like the right place for Poirier's sound and progression. They are well placed to push his music across new boundaries and support him in moving even further around the globe.

No Ground Under is much more urgent than its predecessors. Poirier is succinct about his approach: "I walked around it, looked at it and finally kicked its ass really far. Conclusion : I just wanted to see how it would be with more uptempo riddims."

And more uptempo they are - having kicked things off with the first single in late 2007. 'Blazin' features Jamaican-born, Montreal-based Face-T who brings the perfect ragga flavour to Poirier's beats. On the single the original plus the riddim is joined by two slamming remixes by DJ C and The Bug. DJ C brings a typically mobile synth remix and The Bug grimes things up.

Poirier is still adamant that nothing has changed in his approach. "Ideas are still the best plug-ins ever made. And my ears are better instruments now than when I started," he says. He is reflective on how people see and describe his music (variously as abstract hip-hop). "People can talk as much as they want about naming music. It's like philosophy, it's fun to talk about, but nobody has the truth."

The variety of guest vocalists on *No Ground Under* is astounding. As if the music itself wasn't enough of a melting pot, we find Zulu from Chicago doing a ragga track, Omnikron bringing French vibes on their track, Nik Myo singing Creole, Abdominal from Toronto on a more traditional hip-hop vibe, and Face-T setting things on fire on his track.

"I give the MCs a loop without a song structure," says Poirier about working with different vocalists, "and then they're free to shape the verses, choruses and bridges however they like. It's rare that I suggest a theme to the MC, but I do give them some direction in terms of what I want in the vocal delivery, my idea behind the beat and how they can contribute to the track.

"Once I have the vocals, I work a lot on the beat to make it fit perfectly and if the rapper is really hot, I won't hesitate to make breaks in the track to let them shine. This process requires a lot of trust from the vocalists and so far they've always been happily surprised by the result."

It's all an interesting result for an artist who started out in the ambient domain. Poirier's first release was for Taylor Deupree's respected New York label 12K in 2001. It was actually my first sample of his work, and it was a few years until I heard his beats (when his second record, *Breakupdown*, came out on Chocolate Industries).

"It was a public change but not a personal change," he says. "In fact, the first track I was supposed to release, before the 12k album in 2001, was a big fat distorted hip-hop beat, but the compilation that it was included on was never released.

"I've always done my beat and ambient stuff at the same time, but I was interested in starting out with a full album of the more ambient stuff. It took a couple of years for me to be satisfied enough with my beats to release them, and *Beats as Politics* was the first big move in that direction. Now, I'm really into exploring all kinds of riddims at any BPM and the common link is bass."

Ghislain Poirier's *No Ground Under* is available from Ninja Tunes/Inertia.

AUTECHRE, MY AUTECHRE

THE LONG PATH TO *QUARISTICE*

IN 1994, MY 20-YEARS-YOUNG SELF WAS SAT ON A PLANE AT HEATHROW ON A STOP-OVER BEFORE HEADING HOME FROM A YOUTH ORCHESTRA TOUR WHEN ONTO THE PLANE BOUNDED MY VIOLA PLAYING FRIEND NICK, WHO HAD JUST DASHED INTO SOHO AND BACK. IN HIS HANDS WAS A CD THAT HE INSISTED I HAD TO LISTEN TO THAT VERY MINUTE. I LISTENED, AND MY MIND WAS DULY BLOWN.

The CD that Nick Wales (shortly to form Coda) had pressed on me was the *Anti* EP by Autechre, and track three's incredible non-repetitive programming was unlike anything I'd heard before. It would be a few more months, though, before I became aware of the real depth of this group. I was obsessed at the time with the sampled beats and atmospheres of Future Sound of London, and the Warp label's (comparatively) ascetic ambience took a while to sink in.

By 1995, when the *Garbage* EP and then the incredible *Anvil Vapre* EP came out, IDM was in full stride, and I was beginning to be able to put this music into some kind of context. Working back through the prettiness of *Amber* and *Incunabula*, it's possible to see why the crunchy beats and distortions they began introducing here were Autechre's first Dylan-goes-electric moment – and there are still those for whom "Autechre-like" means *Amber*, or nothing later than *Tri Repetae*. Further down the track there would be "Where have the melodies gone?", "You call these beats?" and "This is just random noise!", but one thing that's guaranteed with Autechre is that the more you persevere, the more their music reveals. Follow them deep enough, and your perceptions are permanently changed.

1997's *Envane* EP and the following album *Chiastic Slide* took Autechre further into the crunchy, distorted territory indicated by tracks from *Anvil Vapre*. The hip-hop and electro-influenced beats combined with pastoral melodies in a way that was deliciously disorienting. As the beats fade out in 'draun quarter' and the interlocking melodies lie exposed for nearly three more minutes, there's a nostalgic beauty equalled only by Boards of Canada. Months later, with *Chiastic Slide*, all the elements from the EP were already extended and mutated with a technical prowess that would be merely impressive, except that it's integrated with an equal musicality that is evocative of alien landscapes, emotions and narratives. OK, being a science fiction fan might have helped, but listening to the aforementioned 'draun quarter' puts me on a train heading out of some northern England industrial city, as it gives way to ancient rainy countryside.

Listening through this period I was struck by how organic and improvisatory Autechre's music was beginning to sound. Here was meticulously programmed electronic music with humanity infused throughout. The *Cichlisuite* EP later that year seemed to draw back on the crunchiness, and appeared backwards-looking except for 'Krib's glass-on-glass rhythm. By 1998 we can see it's a stepping-stone for the rhythmic complexity and further-buried melodies of *LP5*. The duo's restlessness and musical talent shine through, with harmonic patterns increasingly divorced from convention, and 'fold4,wrap5' manages lasting value of a gimmick, in which differently-paced melodies and beats knit together as the tempo inexorably slows, creating a state of simultaneous stasis and change.

And so it is with Autechre, as the listener is increasingly encouraged (or forced) to find beauty in more abrasive sounds, more deeply-hidden melodies, more abstracted rhythms. Part of the pleasure of Autechre is the challenge it brings to the listener. The reward of studying a musical work that initially seems nonsensical or unpleasant, to the point of understanding and unlocking its secrets, is much like discovering a whole new region of the colour spectrum. Getting into early-'90s jungle involved realising *how to listen to it* – how to feel the flow of the basslines versus the frenetic beats; clicking with the Pixies, Beefheart or Ornette Coleman requires a similar flash of understanding, reconfiguring your ears. Autechre seem to do that to us with almost every release.

In the 10 years since the sequence I described above, we've had *EP7*'s album-length amalgamation of *LP7*'s melodies, *Chiastic Slide*'s crunch, and an expanded sound-palette including elements like a randomised MC and sampled kettle drums. Then in 2001, *Confield*'s eschewing of much in the way of head-noddable regular rhythm seemed to confound a lot of the fan-base, despite containing gems such as the Necks-like 'VI scose poise', the bubbling mud-flats of 'uviol'. *Gantz Graf* switched back to buried melodies, with tumbling scatter-shot beats that could be overly relentless when not offset by diaphanous melodies. *Draft 7.30* dropped the intensity somewhat but was no less challenging and chaotic, making the headnoddery of 'V-proc' a surprising gift near the end. It also brought a strange thinness of production in places. 2005's *Untilted* brought it all back to the beats, its hallmark being long tracks that shifted gears in the middle so that one's favourite section was often the second half of something else.

And so, confounding expectations is such a hallmark of Autechre's modus operandi that the expectation confounded with the release of *Quaristice* is that it will once again represent a move into new territories. Instead we get an accomplished blend of sounds from the length of their career, from beautiful ambient melodies to abrasive beats. But following them through the years as we've done here, we shouldn't be surprised if we've been paying attention. Autechre have always built their latest edifices out of (perhaps repurposed) materials they've used before, adding new ingredients as they come to hand.

That's not to say there isn't anything new to be found on *Quaristice*. It's the atmospheric tracks that offer up the most, like 'paralel Suns' with its synthesised electric storm and deep echo-laden chords – although actually it could almost come from a *Doctor Who* score by the BBC Radiophonic Workshop. The context's the thing, as always: an Autechre album is a cohesive unit, even if the glue that holds it together is harder to identify here, among the comparatively short tracks on offer, than it was with *Untilted*'s multifaceted odysseys.

So the *EP7*-era chaos of the aptly-named 'Steels' flows out of 'paralel Suns' via the booming kick drums and digital detritus that make up its beat, and the low-end reverb continues through the mid-tempo acid of 'Tankakern', and 'rale' begins with the reverb tail from this sub-bass, only to drop its own thumping down-tempo beat moments later. There's really a bit of everything on offer here, which has the disadvantage that there are probably bits you won't like, but let the album take you where it wants to go, and before you know it the tuneless synth line has given way to something that could be an acoustic guitar. Certainly you can't complain at the destination: 'chenc9' is the last track with beats, initially abrasive, giving way to a familiarly recessed melodic fragment and then to the last two ambient pieces. That the beat-less compositions are the heart of this album is indubitable, and one can only wonder where they'll go next.

Autechre's *Quarastice* is available through Warp/Inertia.

AT A TIME WHEN EVERYONE WAS REACHING FOR THE LAPTOP, FOR ELECTRONIC DEVICES ALL CONNECTED BY A COMPLICATED MESS OF PATCH LEADS, WHEN A LIVE SHOW MORE OFTEN THAN NOT CONSISTED OF WATCHING SOMEONE TOGGLE A MOUSE OR TWIDDLE THEIR KNOBS, THERE WAS SOMETHING REFRESHING ABOUT GERMAN ARTIST BURNT FRIEDMAN'S APPROACH TO THE LIVE ARENA.

BY BOB BAKER FISH

PSEUDO NATURAL

We're in a stupidly cool inner Melbourne bar strategically hidden down a narrow laneway. It's close to full even though it's a Wednesday night, and, oh, it's about six or seven years ago. Slightly elevated, Friedman presides over a busy dance floor. He in turn is surrounded by a curious bunch of sound nerds, all straining to understand the secret to these lush jazz, dub, electronic, organic sounds. The looks on their faces are that of confused bewilderment, like they know they are being offered the keys to the kingdom but for the life of them can't find the door.

Pushing through, suddenly I understand why. Friedman is set up with five conventional mini-disc players, mini-discs sprawled casually around him, periodically stopping one, replacing the disc, pressing play and the music just continues seamlessly, this jaunty jazzy electronic groove where everything seems to have been reconfigured, yet still makes an inordinate amount of sense within its own universe. It's a mystery to most of us how he could be able to do this with such ease, or why he'd be trying in the first place. Where's the mass of leads, where's the gear that we can fetishise over, purchase and feel better about own art practice? Instead we've got something accessible to everyone that you can pick up for $50 from your local Cash Converters. And the music is incredible, whilst seemingly improvised there are also snippets of recognisable tunes from the recently released Con Ritmo and even, it turns out, some of his later recordings.

"I started using pre-recorded sounds and sequences on mini disc players as reaction to DJ turntable beat-mixing and entitled it Mix Your Own, because it contained self-made sequences," he says, suggesting that some of the limitations to the format were actually what attracted him – even ultimately influencing his compositional process.

"On stage, I played back 10 separate tracks (left and right are recorded separately), sometimes at once. Mini disc players do not allow synchronisation. In order to keep the timing I produced sequences with one determined tempo and pressed play whenever I felt that a sequence ran in sync to the previous one. As a side-effect, the cue-points of the sequences varied, and I realised that this was a benefit. These sequences became the blueprints for the records Secret Rhythms and Con Ritmo. They are still audible as percussive backdrop or rhythmic textures/noises."

2000's Con Ritmo is an intriguing release. Gorgeous swells of dubbed up, improvised electronic cocktail jazz, which were, according to the liner notes, culled from an incident-filled two week tour of South America. With fluttering vibraphone, high energy hi hat work, hand percussion and, of course, 'Humphrey X-34,' their 'bass-bot', which reportedly offered a future of the man/machine intersection far beyond midi, it's an album that demonstrates some of Friedman's key concerns.

"It's the case that with studio productions you create an artificial world that has nothing in common with the 'live on stage' situation. It's almost logical to play about with the realities you've constructed," he explains. "I was trying to simulate a dub band on Just Landed and a jazzy Latin ensemble on Con Ritmo, and I was sure I'd installed enough attributes such as extravagant liner notes or unplayable breaks, to make it clear it was my own fabrication."

Yet with a live sounding gruff voiced introduction, crowd noise and a loose improvised feel, some of the subtleties were lost on people anxious to believe. To understand why he'd be interested in this kind of subterfuge, you have to go back 10 or even 15 years. Back when he was working as Drome and as Nonplace Urban Field, he was utilising programmed computer music and coming to grips with some of its benefits as well as limitations.

"As you can imagine programmed music sounds static, un-dynamic in expression and monochrome regarding the instrument's nuances. During the '90s I was trying to break that cliché as much as possible by investing time into these parameters, turning irony into simulation with the purpose to confuse prejudices concerning synthetic (cold) music. As a matter of fact, I quickly realised the limits of the pseudo natural sound. The range of expression remained limited to some extent, of course, but I also grew fond of the benefits. I was finally able to create quite monotonous patterns that sounded played."

For Friedman, the fabrication in Con Ritmo is the logical extension of the recording process, which is evidenced most obviously in the post production of everything from an acoustic folk album, Jamaican dub or even your standard rock band. By way of explanation Friedman offers part of a piece he originally wrote in German in 1990 and had translated, wryly noting that concerns about authenticity and fabrication in music only seem to occur when sequencers are involved.

"Music is artificial in its reproduced form as soon as acoustic instruments are engaged for a sound recording. And the more so, the more appurtenances intercept the vibratory source (larynx and vocal chords, or the sounding box and strings of a guitar) and the vibratory receptors (membrane in the human ear) to paradoxically satisfy the desire for authenticity and natural playback.

"The consequence of this desire is the accumulation of technological materials with the intention of making the sound of the instrument identical with its copy (sampling machines/high-end equipment). The degree of technical free play in the recording techniques of music studios permits the engineer and composer an abundance of quality enhancements (dynamics/virtuosity through speeding up tempo/rhythmic precision through cut and paste), which do not necessarily correspond to the ability of the musician, but rather to the performance of electrical instruments (harmoniser/auto-tune/multi-tracking, and so on). In the event of such a trick's application, the end product as a sound recording is no longer distinguishable from the assiduity of the soloist. To sound naturally reproduced, the use of electronic instruments whose sounds are from the start perceived only through the vibration of a loudspeaker membrane, is unavoidable. The technology is its most proximate field.

"These recordings may help discern the fictional aspect of reality itself," he continues, back in the present day. "Listeners seem to be scared by hyper-reality, a concept where the fiction-reality is no longer distinguishable from the reality. I believe the machine concept is in our heads. Once I played an acoustic drum kit in a speed metal band and got told I sounded like a robot. They wouldn't have said 'robot' if they didn't want me to play wild and uncontrolled. As you may understand, they simply wanted a different kind of robot."

Friedman though is one of those rare artists who has the potential to be various forms of robot. Charting his evolution over time demonstrates an artist who has increasingly refined his approach according to situational, technological and artistic parameters. In the late seventies, he was using the rubber-band guitar and toy instruments before moving to drums in 1982 shortly before the first rhythm machines came out. At the time he was influenced by the post punk/new wave scenes, Gary Numan, Throbbing Gristle, Gang of Four and Section 25, though also the early German avant rock scene like Tangerine Dream and Ammon Düül. In 1984 he enrolled in art school in Kassel, finding numerous like-minded performers.

"It was a friendships music collective incorporating the first cheap electronic machines, all kinds of found instruments, treating them with little knowledge about music. I believe these post punk pop groups had a precise vision about the stance, the philosophy and the final product of the music, [rather] than having an idea about a musical language, which is a prerequisite for ethnic music. To me, ethnic music was a big influence around that time and I believe it was a major influence to the English industrial scene, too – for it being an intense, ritual experience, teasing one's perception beyond questions of taste. I remember very well the public music events that took place in our rehearsal room in Kassel, my hometown, in '82 when we would have 40 to 60 people invited to witness sessions that included total improvisation on electronic instruments, amplified guitars and voices, drums, but also screening and performance.

"We once were improvising to Kurt Kren´s 'Mama and Papa' short cut up film depicting Otto Mühl´s radical material events from the late sixties, known as the Viennese Actionism. Such an evening was totally open, anything could happen. Maybe everyone would start making sounds or one would play solo alone for half an hour, acting out somehow. There was a possibility of surprises and new experiences that provided us the magic and pleasure of that very creative, unintentional phase of music making."

Eventually those these collectives disbanded, the kit disappeared and Friedman's interest in production grew, devoting himself almost exclusively to multi tracking, sequencing and sampling, retaining his improvisatory and spontaneous approach though confining it to routing signals through the desk.

"'Dub' is what I call this method, since I use it on existing signals and rhythms etc. and it allows me to obtain constantly different results on the basis of the same material. The more pronounced the level of improvisation during the mix, the more the raw material, the original, is forced into the background and sometimes even maltreated to the point of being unrecognisable."

"I WAS TRYING TO BREAK THAT CLICHÉ AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE… TURNING IRONY INTO SIMULATION WITH THE PURPOSE TO CONFUSE PREJUDICES CONCERNING SYNTHETIC (COLD) MUSIC."

"The procedure allows you to highlight certain musical features of a song while wholly ignoring other ingredients – most likely foreground components such as vocals or instrumental solos. The resultant 'numbers' [pieces of music] come closer to my own perspective: they're de-cored, to put it figuratively, no longer have a centre."

Up until 1989, Friedman was not seriously seeking label interest, though upon a move to Cologne in 1992 interest in his work grew. First, Some More Crime was a duo that replaced lyrics by text samples, mainly cut from underground movies, news and interviews concerning the problem of violence in the US, then, two years later, with Drome and Nonplace Urban Field, the music emerged on international channels.

Whilst only recording three albums for the Incoming label between 1993 and 1996 as Nonplace Urban Field, the concept of the 'Nonplace' continues to remain important for Friedman to this day, choosing it as the name of his label, feeling that it is broad enough to encompass on a philosophical and emotional level much of what he and his collaborators are attempting to achieve musically. It's a term Friedman has borrowed from American architectural and social planners, referring to the city of the future, the gentrification of cities, the urban sprawl and the movement from a common understanding and identity into something else, a new unexplained form. To Friedman it's this new indefinable terrain that provides the most interest.

"To me nonplaces are so to speak 'grey areas', the superfluous space that's been neglected before they built containers, single family homes and so on, to speak visually. But what I mean is psychological. A primary state of enjoyment that isn't integrated to social life, not conveyable to a public. It's some kind of psychic automatism, because there are no categories for it. It is like children playing a game, but the term game is incorrect as it implies rules. What I mean is a game that is improvised, once the rules are found the game is probably becoming competitive and predictable."

"The geographic aspects don't matter so much," he continues. "It's the music that contains too much diverse intercultural, universal or abstract ethnic components to be contained under a genre. Look, once jazz symbolized freedom, for individual musicians. It got to accommodate unpredictable artistic utterances that were mostly identifiable by the artist's personal name. Now, even jazz calls a stylistic palette and is not appropriate anymore for new developments, although these developments still take place. Unfortunately this progress isn't perceived under the term jazz anymore, simply because the ingredients that made jazz have been clarified (the rules to the game) by communication, media, marketing. Jazz can now also be appropriated easily by meaningless virtuosos. I mean, by knowing what jazz offers, that primary enjoyment of something new, that radical, experimental grey area has vanished with the immersion of commodities and the affirmative learning of Jazz by wannabees and sound-a-likes.

"To me as a dilettante, Nonplace is a free-formula. Sometimes I deliberately use significant clichés to ridicule their content (see: just landed- hyperreal dub band), but my interest is to overcome such clichés. This may have a bitter taste because the label releases also soothing and entertaining music. However, I know that it makes the marketing of nonplace products more complicated to save the music from one determination."

In 1996, Friedman met Uwe Schmidt (Atom Heart/Senor Coconut) at a festival in Cologne. Later in Chile they decided to create, in Freidman's words, "A cybernetic venture, a jazz trio, limited to the instruments, bass, Rhodes piano and drums, that should sound like future jazz templates, blurring borders that existed between real and programmed music in sound and structure."

Recording under the name Flanger, the resulting work Templates, released on Ninja Tune, did just that. Clearly electronic, it moved beyond dance or electronic formulas, tapping into the spirit of exploration that characterised jazz during the '60s.

"Our rule was to program four minutes of unrepetative – improvised – music per day," he continues. "We have never looked back and edited something - we only kept recording from one step to another until day seven. I believe this is something you cannot repeat very easily, so we moved on, but also could have ended Flanger after the first release."

Since then they have released four albums, the first two created side by side in Chile, though for Inner/Outer Space the guide tracks were outlined separately yet finalised together and for 2005's Spirituals, the biggest change of pace thus far, they did the opposite outlining the tunes together and producing them separately.

"I always opt for a physical presence and know that every musician thinks that way, but sometimes it is just not possible. Besides, I quite like the effects of chance, when I am able to combine takes from different origin and time. In the end, it's all following the same core structure, so if played well they re likely to be compatible to each other."

Since spending the nineties holed up behind a computer in recent times Friedman has increasingly returned to collaboration, particularly with his most recent release, 2007's First Night Forever, which features his trademark arrangements over which various vocalists, including Steve Spacek.

"To me it seems like a logical development, from learning to understand the basics of rhythms and harmony to widening the productions up for real instrumentation, improvisation."

Thus he regularly works with a number of familiar faces who pop on successive releases, yet he has also sought out collaborative projects with the likes of ex-Japan vocalist David Sylvian under the guise of the much lauded Nine Horses and former Can drummer Jaki Liebezeit for their Secret Rhythms series in which they explore odd time signatures. In particular, Friedman is drawn to Liebezeit's cyclic repetitive and quite minimal approach, seeing links with his own electronic work. New Zealand ex-pat saxophonist/woodwind player Hayden Chisholm, who for a while seemed to be Friedman's right hand man, appearing on Flanger's Spirituals, Nine Horses, Secret Rhythms with Jaki Liebezeit, and also Root 70, has also increasingly become a driving force for his own projects, becoming a musical director in his own right. In fact, the most recent Nonplace release is Chisholm's Embassadors, a multinational collective with a Kenyan singer that taps into elements of reggae, bossa, and jazz and charts much of Chisholm's musical travels over the years. Friedman reports that for this release Chisholm came up with this quote that he believes fits firmly within the nonplace approach.

"You must take all these concepts that I use as substitutes and in each case resort to feelings," he says. "Basically you can sum it up as it sweeps the intellectual heat away from the head."

"ONCE I PLAYED AN ACOUSTIC DRUM KIT IN A SPEED METAL BAND AND GOT TOLD I SOUNDED LIKE A ROBOT"

HAPPY MISTAKES

'APPLE ORCHARD' WAS AN IMPORTANT SONG FOR BEACH HOUSE.

Its loveliness seduced listeners all over the world, when it made it onto Pitchfork's Infinite Mixtape #34, and when it was rated as the website's eighth best song for 2006. Multi-instrumentalist Alex Scully, and Victoria Legrand, singer, songwriter and organ mistress extraordinaire, explain this was the moment of their first break, when international recognition began.

The duo are based in Baltimore, USA, a small-scale town that's got a lot going for it. Prices are low, venues are small, gigs are intimate and the crowd is welcoming. Now that crowd is growing. A quick look around on the internet reveals some very interesting commentary from fans and critics alike. One listener obviously can't get enough, describing their experience of 'Apple Orchard' with eccentric colour: "It's like eating a sunbeam with your ears, it's like having honey drip over your internal organs, this song is so great." Victoria is instantly taken aback as I read her this touching tribute. "I've never heard anything like that before! That's really neat, it means that the words are having an effect on people's imagination. That's just going to breed more weird stuff!" she says with a chuckle. "Our Myspace page says, 'visual/visual/visual.' That's not a joke, it's very real. We want our music to feel intense like syrup, very visceral."

This is the Beach House open invitation, a musical mise-en-scene waiting to happen every time you hit play. A quick gaze at the cover art speaks volumes about what to expect from the disc inside. For their introductory album, it's a close-up of what could easily be your grandmother's jewelry box, bursting forth precious pearls, giant cubic zirconias and age-tarnished chains, all from another era when keepsakes were not just disposable commodities, but something precious to be handed down for all time. It's not surprising then that it's Victoria's set of vintage organs, keys and pianos that create the starting point for songs. They are integral to the grain of the music, carrying the weight of her heavy-hearted dulcet tones, on the back of dense, textural-tinged melodies, with that special warmth of character that is unique to old analogue instruments.

As she sings (occasionally Alex does too), Victoria summons fragments of old memories blended with the new beginnings of tales not yet told. The inspiration comes "from the music itself," she says. "From the chords that ring in the ears and a lot of visuals… I'm not sure exactly where they are coming from!" she admits. It's almost like a special talent for synaesthesia. These are personal stories, accessible to all who care to bring their own imaginings to the songs, to make of them what they will.

This process of dialogue between the original intent of the songs and how listeners perceive them is something of great joy to them. A listener once heard, "I want to picture the nature" instead of "I want your picture but not your words" in the song 'Master of None." Victoria recalls. It's "a happy mistake," she says, that sometimes when you think you are hearing something correctly (even though you're not) this can be when you hear it best. To this effect, she gives a comic Manfred Man rendition: "Blinded by the light! Revved up like a deeeeuce!!!" I mean, what's a deuce? Or is it a douche (as it is often, and absurdly, heard). Mondegreens [mishearings of song lyrics] are funny and Victoria is now chuckling down the phone. I get the impression that as long as the words have some positive meaning to Beach House listeners then that's really all that matters to them

There are other things Victoria is less light-hearted about, though, such as the fundamental assumptions that have been made about how Beach House create their beats. Most critics assume it's the work of a drum machine and have reported this in their reviews. It upsets Victoria, as drum machines are not something she's into. "I've been in bands that use drum machines before. It's so different, very synthetic." Beach House is not into precise, complex programming of beats but choose instead to work with the beats that are available on their organs and Yamaha keyboard. Sounds that are much more compatible with their warm, handmade aesthetic. For Beach House, the drum sounds certainly have their place but are far from elaborate. Instead it's more like a subtle heartbeat that propels the song forward.

"IT'S LIKE EATING A SUNBEAM WITH YOUR EARS, IT'S LIKE HAVING HONEY DRIP OVER YOUR INTERNAL ORGANS."

There's also another good reason for the choices they make - there are only two pairs of hands in the band and this has a great influence on their style. It encourages processes to remain simple but harmonious and allows them to get away with doing things like recording the entire first album in their basement. Going on tour does present some challenges, however, like how to travel with an organ from 1973. This is circumnavigated, mainly, by taking along the keyboard instead in some instances, and making do with a minimal set of musical props at best. With the release of their new album *Devotion*, this is about to change. They are looking forward to a bigger performance with a guest percussionist joining to help create the little accents that will allow for something a little closer to their studio sound. The tour will take the band through the US, Canada, Europe and possibly Japan if all goes well.

Beach House are expected to grace our Australian shores in August this year, and Alex in particular, is really looking forward to this visit as it will indulge his other great passion - rocks. When asked what he likes to do in his spare time, he self-deprecatingly replies, "Mostly just reading books and watching movies…oh, and collecting rocks in a kinda pathetic way." He explains further, "I studied a geology major at university, because who would think you can make pop music for a living?" The conversation then turns to the inevitable, one of the biggest rocks in the world. There's a bashful and dare I say almost loving tone to Alex's voice as he describes the stripes down the side of Uluru, the mammoth rock that demarcates Australia's central heartland.

As the interview is winding up it's a relief to note that, despite their growing recognition, Alex and Victoria seem very relaxed and are a pleasure to talk to. There's not even a faint trace of rock star airs. I decide to sneak in one last question about something that has fascinated me about the letters that spell out the name of the band and the title of the album on the cover for *Devotion*. They're laid out on a table at which Alex and Victoria are seated, facing each other with empty plates and what looks like a one-tiered wedding cake in the middle. "Are the letters made of dough?" Because that would be really neat. Victoria laughs, "No, no... They're actually made of wood, but I should tell everyone that the entire table is made out of cake!" The conversation ends with Victoria admitting she'd be the chocolate mousse, or maybe even, no most definitely, the fruit cake.

Beach House's *Devotion* is available from Carpark/Mistletone.

SLEEVE REVIEWS

THE GREAT THING ABOUT A DIE-CUT IS THAT YOU PAY ONLY ONCE, SO IF YOU DO A RUN OF 50 IT'S PRETTY DEAR PER UNIT, BUT FOR RUNS IN THE THOUSANDS, IT'S BARELY NOTICEABLE.

Artist: James Brown vs. Little Willie John
Title: *Soul Fever 1955–56*
Label: Saga
Format: CD
Designer: Element-S

This compilation forms part of the *All Star Series* from London's budget label Saga Records, with the likes of Edith Piaf, Ray Charles, Fred Astaire and Fats Domino alongside it in the series. Historically, Saga had a reputation for cheap and nasty sounding releases, mainly because their record pressings used scrap vinyl from the Phillips record pressing plant, enabling them to sell wax at such low prices. Thankfully in the wonderful digital age, this isn't so and the budget prices now result from clever licensing and economies of scale — something that the packaging happily benefits from too.

The great thing about a die-cut is that you pay only once, so if you do a run of 50 it's pretty dear per unit, but for runs in the thousands, it's barely noticeable. This sleeve is die-cut so that it folds out to look like a vintage gig poster, except rather than concert dates and details, it has the track information itemised. The outside of the packaging has a gloss finish on stiff, crisp, white artboard, and on the inside, only a varnish has been used to set the ink, giving it an authentic '60s feel. On the outside, a sticker for the album details has been simulated with a matte finish on top of the gloss of the sleeve photo. This would have been cheaper than actually applying a sticker, but is barely noticeable as being any different — plus it won't deteriorate and get all dog-eared like a sticker would.

The cropping on a photo can really make or break a design and despite the photos of James Brown and Little Willy John being very different in quality, with vastly different lighting, they are cropped really effectively. When the CD is closed up, the two artists sit front and back of the package and you can only see them from their noses down — sing, sing, sing! When opened up, you cop the full shot of each of them and they are placed such that they almost look to interact with each other, having a jam.

The limited colour palette really makes the packaging punchy and gives it a credible time-stamp with black and white photography and then yellow, indigo and red inks used for the labelling. The choice of typefaces helps the vintage release look beautiful, although some of the kerning, (relative letter spacing), on the type is inconsistent and made my poor little eyeballs jump around like someone in grave need of an exorcism.

So if you have a decent run release, think of playing with the format of a die-cut to make it distinctive. To make a design punchier, limit the colour palette and consider high contrast imagery and of course, make a statement with your image cropping — sometimes what's omitted is much more effective than showing the lot.

Artist: Various
Title: *Harry Smith's Anthology of American Folk Music, Volume Four*
Label: Revcnant
Format: CD
Designer: Susan Archie

Beautifully crafted and immaculately detailed, this piece is an absolute adventure to experience. It is essentially a 96-page,exquisitely bound hardcover book with black CD pockets to hold the discs as the end papers.The CDs themselves seem the least thought out element, simply printed yellow on a white ink coverage — almost an afterthought to the sleeve and book design. The cover is thick, uncoated, black card with a 'touch-me-more' tactile quality. It has been simply printed with Harry's handwritten monogram in the bottom right corner and the label logo on the back in gold ink — simple, elegant and so very classic.

The pages of the booklet are unbleached, tan, uncoated paper stock that has been printed only with black, gold and white inks. White ink is such a treat because it has such a divine opaque quality but also it seems crazy because it is at odds with the additive nature of the way we usually print ink. The images throughout the compendium are either duotone photographs, (black and white, gold and white or black and gold), or highly detailed metal plate etchings. As lovely as these are, they have more of a medieval feel rather than a folk aesthetic, which is strange although not entirely unpleasant.

The imagery has been handled in thoughtful and provocative ways. For example there's a photo of Harry Smith pouring a glass of milk for himself and it's a black and gold duotone except for the milk and reflections in his glasses, which have been overprinted in white. Another image of 'Brain Drawings' has been cropped so that the person's head seemingly exudes the illustrative eruct.

Oooh, the type is scrummy! In keeping with the printer-like feel of the uncoated, etched approach, the type all looks to be hand-cut from either wood or metal and set in the racks of old. (It hasn't been but seems to have been which shows a level of care that makes you feel spoilt). Despite the arts and crafts approach, it is all incredibly readable and has a clear and helpful hierarchy of text design. The only thing that lets the typography down is a few rivers in the text here and there due to the forced justification of the body text, which is set in a reasonably narrow,two-column grid. Lovingly punctuated with quizzical dinkuses, effective ornamental borders and rules, the piece is distinctive, varied and definitely a collectible keepsake.

Artist: Various
Title: *Swing for Modern Clubbing*
Label: G-Swing
Format: CD
Designer: Unknown

This saucy little number really does a great job of being obviously of our time by reinterpreting art deco elements in a fresh and considered way. For those unfamiliar with G-Swing, this label was responsible for taking swinging jazz numbers and clubbifying them with jacking house and Baltimore beats in an infectious, fun and playful manner — I like to call it swing-core but I never managed to get anyone else to…

Printed in gold, black and red on white with a matte laminate finish, the background is patterned with a deco wallpaper style in a percentage of the gold ink, (which really needed to have a bit less ink-weight for some of the smaller type to be legible). A charismatic, flapper-style lady's face peeks through the G-Swing grille of type, and her features frame the tracklisting on the back. This repetition of the same image adds impact, rather than appearing lazy, mainly because of the scale and extreme cropping of the back cover version.

The CD cover is a three-panel number that roll-folds closed. Here each song has its title in a red, faux deco font and then all of the details in black, modern sans serif type. There's a solid silhouette of a double bass player and trumpet wailer as an ornament, which is quite sweet too.

A standout element is the way the graphic on the CD, (which is part of the G-Swing brand identity), interacts with the graphic on the panel behind the clear CD holder. It is basically an extension of the image, which is diagonal and has a great sense of movement. When the two graphics are aligned properly, (which is the first thing you want to do), it has brilliant visual impact, and the interaction of the graphic over the two spaces is so satisfying.

It would be hard to dislike this sleeve, simply because its character is such that it's cheeky, chic and keeps you looking in case someone lifts up their skirt and you catch a flash of frilly fun.

Artist: The Neurotransmitters
Title: *Untitled EP*
Label: Autumn Recordings
Format: CD
Designer: Gwendellyn&Sebastian.com

Mwah! This one is a great example of 'keep-it-simple, stupid' or the K.I.S.S. principle. This package uses the ever-popular digipack format but has been a bit more thought out in that it has an arch removed from the CD pocket to make it easier to remove and replace the plate. It never ceases to amaze me the number of packages that make getting the CD out a real trial, often resulting in damage to the disc. People are all thumbs, so provide a place to let the digits get a decent hold and much frustration can be avoided — plus you do want them to listen to your music, right? (Or don't you…)

This is a sweet package that uses its two colours of olive and black effectively. I have to question the black colour choice though — yes we're used to black type but that's because it's the default. If you are bothering to do a two-colour job, think about something different that will pop with the second colour. A rusty brown or bluish charcoal would have really made this design a bit more next level and would have helped the design elements advance rather than recede.

The cover has the band's name reversed from the olive background in a light, italic, sans serif typeface. The band's logo is a hummingbird silhouette and this has been treated as a simple spot UV and given that it's really all about shape for this image, is a perfectly subtle and effective way to produce the form. The negative spaces around the image and type on each panel of the sleeve are generous and dynamic. I hope this was done to complement the fact that much of the music does the same. The idea of a design using the same approach or aesthetic as the music is hugely powerful for a sleeve design, as the two senses reinforce and support each other, heightening the awareness of that particular element.

The type on the inside cover of the sleeve is framed by 45 degree parallel lines. Given that the majority of the type is capitalised and italic, there's a strange pull between the diagonal lines and the angled extenders of the actual type. I can't help but be curious about how the overall dynamism could have been accentuated by changing the angle of the lines to either be parallel with either the extenders or the arms of the type.

Despite some potentially lost opportunities with respect to the colour and type, the package is quite lovely.

SELECTS:
NICOLE SKELTYS

It's been a long ride since Nicole Skeltys and her band Area 51 were asked to play a Clan Analogue party in the early 1990s. Forming B(if)tek with Kate Crawford soon after, the duo recorded three albums, several EPs and a sparkling cover of the pop hit 'Wired for Sound', as well as setting up the WINK Awards to recognise imaginative electronic art (*Cyclic Defrost*, September 2003). Along the way, Nicole turned out a series of self-released 12 inch singles as Artificial that merged psychedelic artwork, sexy filtered house grooves and a defiantly lo-fi aesthetic (second album, *Libraries Are Fun*, got an extra push from libraries in Melbourne and Brisbane), and each record came with a copy of her comic *Pigeon Coup*.

Although less visible in recent years, Nicole has been writing music for theatre, film and television projects, including a Lonely Planet soundtrack with Byron Scullin as The Experts, and a commissioned piece for the Next Wave festival's aerial dance show Colony. Nicole has steered away from electronic music in recent times, playing a folk-country hybrid with Melbourne five-piece Dust, and, now, as The Jilted Brides with Tanya Andrea Stadelmann. The Jilted Brides head to the states in May for an extended tour, where Nicole plans to make a web TV doco on pioneering women in the psychedelic and electronic music community. Here are her records for the road.

Windy and Carl - *Consciousness*
(Kranky, 2001)

This Deerborn Michigan couple produce music that a friend of mind once described as "the sound of love." Genre descriptions such as 'ambient guitar soundscape', 'wall of sound' and 'drone' fail miserably to capture the astonishing, magical emotional beauty of their pieces. Some folk see these guys as the king and queen of the new psychedelia, and Tanya and I are among them. Windy and Carl have released many albums, including through their own label Blue Flea, all of it marvellous. Consciousness is probably their most finely crafted album. They will be playing at Terrastock (Kentucky, June) where the Jilted Brides are playing too. We anticipate their performance will be one of our life highlights.

Linda Perhacs - *Parallelograms*
(1970, re-released 2003 on Wild Places)

In 1970, a dental technician working in California was persuaded by one of her clients, producer Leonard Rosenbam, to record some of her songs in his studio. This resulting album fell straight to obscurity, known only to devotees of underground folk/psychedelia, and Linda did not produce another album.

Three decades later, the album has been re-released and people are rediscovering this masterpiece, which features breathtakingly delicate vocals, intricate song writing and beautiful manipulation of sounds with tape loops. Linda is now rightfully taking her place as one of the most influential creatrixes in the new folk/psych folk revival, feted by people like Devendara Banhart (but don't let that put you off). We will be visiting Linda to pay our respects when we get to LA.

Dark Network - *Late Set*
(Creative Vibes, 2003)

This duo (Tim O'Loghlin and Bo Daley) emerged from the murky depths of Canberra's forest party scene at the same time as B(if)tek. We played a lot with them and considered them our 'brother band'. This is their only release. Without doubt, this is one of the most original, deep and infectious electronica releases ever. Listen to the hypnotic thrums, grooves and sighs of the sexiest analogue menagerie ever assembled, realise it was all done live - and weep all you 'laptop artists'. If anyone ever does a *Classic Electronic Album* TV series, I'd like to see these boys recreating those inspired slider moves, knob twiddles and Camberwell carrot sessions!

Laurie Spiegel - *Unseen Worlds*
(Aesthetic Engineering, 1994)

This is a collection of pieces produced between 1987 and 1994 by one the most influential female electronic music pioneers. Her electronic aesthetic is overtly spiritual in nature, deeply feminine and brings great stirrings to the soul. I can't do better than Terry Riley's description of her work: "Amazing heartfelt molecular inner-happening soundscape soul journeys."

Her opus also includes a realisation of Johannes Kepler's vision of the motions of the planets made audible as music part of which was included on the Voyager Spacecraft

"I FELT SPECIAL BECAUSE I HAD JUST DISCOVERED THE GENRE OF 'GOTHIC COUNTRY' AND I HAD FOUND *THE* CLASSIC ALBUM IN THE GENRE."

record. She created her realisation of Kepler's 'Harmony of the World' at Bell Telephone Labs in 1977, and I have a translucent blue vinyl copy of that which is one of my most precious possessions. The Jilted Brides are catching up with Laurie in New York.

The Handsome Family - *Twilight* (Carrot Top, 2001)

OK, everyone knows these guys now, but when this album first came out, I felt special because I had just discovered the genre of 'gothic country' and I had found *the* classic album in the genre, which I preached about to everyone. Dark, funny, tragic, literary, spooky, unique. Live, this New Mexico husband and wife duo come across a bit like an Americana version of Adam and Morticia, with a guitar, banjo, laptop and great little yarns about living with mental illness and the end of the world. Can't wait to get to Albuquerque!

Neil Young - *Decade* (Reprise, 1977)

This three album vinyl release collected together Neil's greatest hits up to that point, as well as memorable album tracks. Neil is justifiably recognised one of the greatest song writers of all time, and he is one of my great personal inspirations. I grew up listening to my older brother's record collection of which Neil formed a pretty big part and Neil's guitar sound is as warmly nostalgic and emotionally charged for me as an oversized old blue flannel checked shirt I used to wear all the time as a gawky adolescent. My folk-rock band Dust tried to recreate some of that early '70s Neil Young/Crazy Horse sound in our debut album, *Songs*, released last year, we at least partially succeeded.

Lucinda Williams - *World Without Tears* (Lost Highway, 2003)

Here is an example of a woman whose powers of musical and vocal expression are exponentially growing with intensity the older she gets. This CD, and her latest one, *West*, are almost too emotionally powerful to listen to. Lucinda tells it exactly how it is with raw alt country tunes, tenderly arranged, sung with fire and longing. She sometimes slurs a bit, which is just tremendous. The very best heartbreak ballads and social commentary, tear-streaked but a gun not far away.

Jan and Lorraine - *Gypsy People* (first released 1969, re-released on Fallout 2006)

The liner notes describe this as "Acid-tinged folk and pop, widely acclaimed as one of the best female psychedelic albums of the late '60s." I'd agree with that - with the major rider that this is one of the best psychedelic albums *ever*, put out by female, male or anything in-between. This is my most recent discovery, I was put onto it this year by a Santa Monica friend who said the the Jilted Brides' sound reminded him of this album. I was blown away when I tracked it down.

Bursting with energy and ideas, each track is unique and explores new sonic territory. Throughout there are the classic reverb soaked psychedelic girl harmonies, intricate almost progressive rock type arrangements, atmospheric strings, out of tune pianos, crazy sitar-like guitar solos, intelligent, honest lyrics. Jan has sadly passed away now, but Tanya and I are definitely going to try and track down Lorraine (who lives in California) to pay our respects.

Julee Cruise - *Floating Into The Night* (Warner, 1990).

B(if)tek met Julee Cruise when we went to New York to shoot the filmclip for 'Wired For Sound'. She commented at the time that *Floating Into the Night* was one of those rare creations - a "Perfect album." I agree with her – it is perfect in concept, perfect in creating a whole 'world unto itself' atmosphere of decayed '50s satin frocks and empty clubs, perfect hooks, perfect in vocal styling, Badalamenti at his cinematic best. Julee took the Phil Spector dreamy girl group vocals and forged a whole new genre of saccharine-sinister whisper-vocals which has influenced countless singers since, and still gives me goosebumps. And who can listen to 'Falling' without happy memories of hours lost inside Twin Peaks episodes, perched in front of the TV with friends, coffee and donuts!