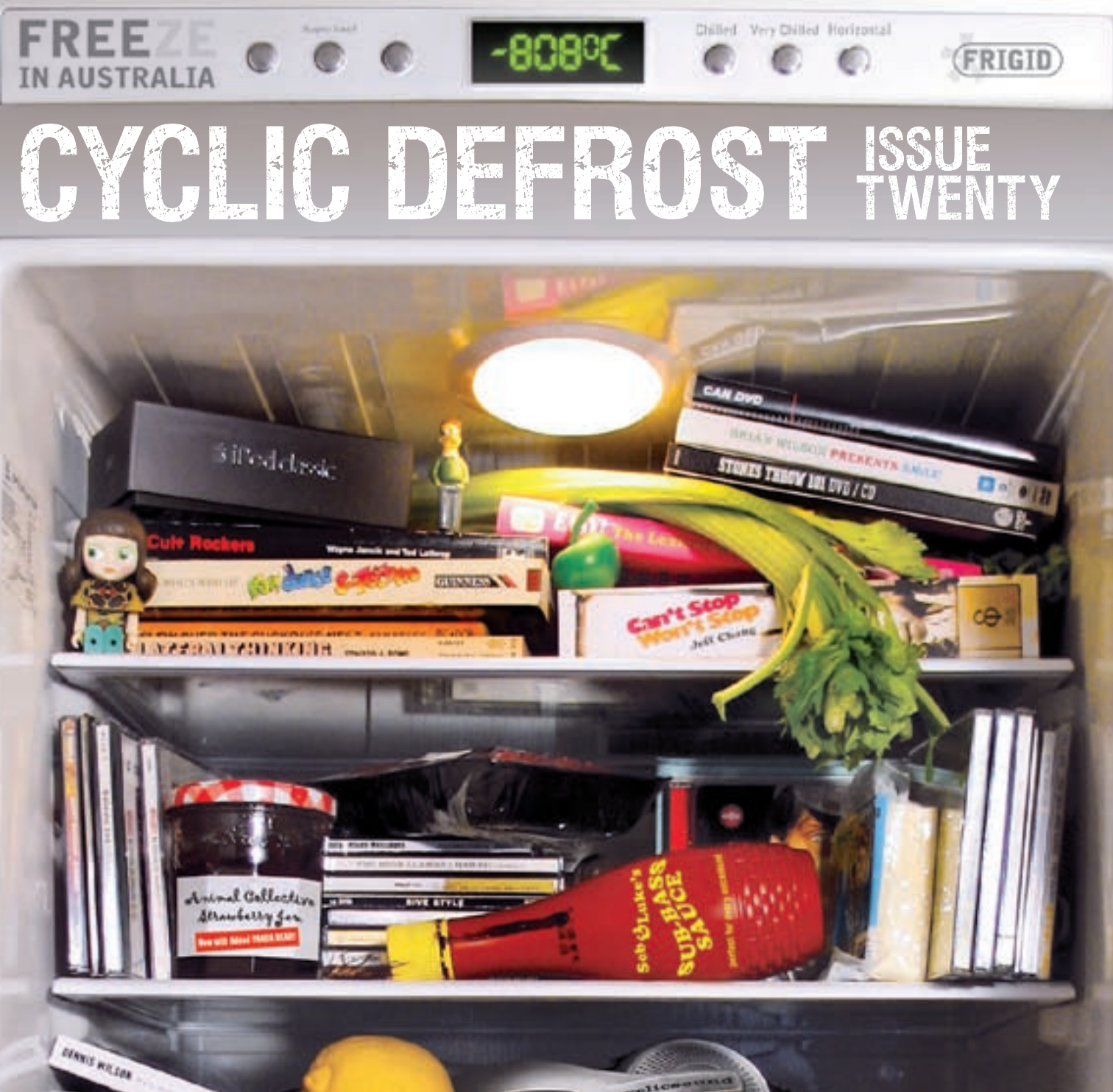

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EDITORIAL

Things have changed since Cyclic Defrost kicked off as a photocopy fold-out in 1998. But as a rapper once said, the more some things change, the more they stay the same. Issue 20 (or #35 if you count the 15 photocopy editions of the early Cyclic Defrost) is a tribute to the many writers, editors, photographers and designers to pass through our (virtual) office over the past decade. Especially Bim Ricketson, our ace art director since the double issue in 2006 (and a writer long before that), whose next step is fatherhood. We wish him well!

Tucked inside a rather frosty cover by long-time contributor Lyndon Pike, itself a tribute to Cyclic's origins in the Sydney club night Frigid, this issue explores some seriously cyclical behaviour in music. Maligned prog-rock influences seeping into modern music: check. DIY cassette pressings and CD burn labels inspired by '80s noise networks reappearing in regional Australian towns: double check. Iconic post-punks Tactics: they're here too.

We're also publishing an excerpt from club culture researcher Ed Montano's doctoral thesis on Sydney's 1990s DJ scene, and Ben Thompson from Sydney disco revivalists Paradise Lost digs through the record crates for his pivotal platters. Clinical psychologist and music maker David Newman (aka Autistici), Melbourne guitarist Tim Catlin and stateside duo Twine. There's also eccentric electronic pop (Leila, Lucky Dragons) and hip-hop (Anticon's Why?), and loads more online - including interviews with White Rainbow, the Sea and Cake, Kes Band, Burkhard and Suckafish P. Jones and well over 100 reviews.

We are pleased to announce that the Music Board of the Australia Council for the Arts has agreed to offer financial support to Cyclic Defrost for another three issues through to Issue 23. This support is essential for continuing the magazine and combined with your generous donations and selected advertising from independent labels helps keep us afloat. Think about donating and we'll make sure you get Cyclic Defrost sent directly to your door along with a surprise bonus in each issue!

Sebastian Chan and Matthew Levinson

CONTENTS

LYNDON PIKE

BY RENAE MASON

BIG TIME SHREDDER

AS LYNDON PIKE RECALLS HIS FORMATIVE YEARS IT'S CLEAR THAT MUSIC AND EVERYTHING THAT GOES ALONG WITH IT - THE FASHION, THE POP AESTHETICS, THE ENTICING UNDERGROUND SCENES - HAVE SHAPED HIS LIFE IN MEMORABLE WAYS. FANS OF SYDNEY'S FBI RADIO MAY KNOW LYNDON AS THE MAN BEHIND THE NOW RETIRED 'VERTIGO' SHOW OR HAVE SEEN HIM SPINNING RECORDS AROUND TOWN OVER THE YEARS. THESE DAYS HE'S BUSY IN HIS DAY JOB AS A GRAPHIC DESIGNER AND GETTING TO KNOW WHAT KINDS OF TUNES HIS NEWBORN BABY MILES IS DOWN WITH.

It's hard to imagine a time when computers weren't omnipresent in everyday life, but cast a delicate thought back to an era when the television was a humble box in the corner and hours were whiled away watching the naive and wondrous cartoons that came out of it. In those days the summers stretched on, each day was truly a new dawn and kids were free from the parental cotton wool wrap that cloaks most tightly today. Lyndon recalls that childhood life vividly.

"I grew up in two distinct environments. From the age of four to 12, I lived in Kiama on the New South Wales south coast and my memories of this time are very care free, filled with unsupervised adventures, riding my bike all around the place and walking across the road to spend time at Jones's Beach amongst the nature of the rock pools. My senses were turned on at the time by the fun of the '70s pop culture explosion, with TV shows and the related merchandise flooding my mind. Harry Butler's *In The Wild*, *Jaws*, *Star Wars*, *The Wonderful World Of Disney*, *Smokey The Bear*, *The Thunderbirds*, *H.R. Puffinstuff*, *Casper The Friendly Ghost*, *Darryl & Ozzie* and the *Saturday Super Funshow* with Marty & Emu on a weekend. Hanna-Barbera cartoons were a favourite of mine, particularly 'Wacky Races' (I even had the board game). It was a great time for kids, as the animation and art direction of all these shows were a by-product of the '60s counter culture, and so the imagery was wildly colourful and imaginative."

Of course, Lyndon's earliest memories of precious possessions comprise music-related paraphenalia, including a uniquely kitsch record player. "When I was about five or six, my parents gave me a portable Flintstones record player that was molded in the shape of a boulder with a bone for a handle. It featured Fred and Barney jiving away on the top beside a small speaker. I had a small collection of seven inch singles that I would play downstairs in the rumpus room (essential to any '70s home)." This humble beginning was to spurn a lifetime of obsessive music collecting, with Lyndon's eclectic tastes now spanning nearly every genre imaginable.

"In my mind, music was the ultimate and I spent time in class during primary school drawing the four faces of Kiss who became my first big music obsession. Following a brief flirtation with the pop group Racey, but the less said about that the better. The first album I purchased with my own money was the self-titled album by Kiss from a record bar located at the Warilla Grove shopping centre. Even as a kid, I felt it important to return to the very roots of a band's career and collect somewhat chronologically so I could map the progression of their sound. Not having any older siblings, I would usually discover the songs I liked via TV and radio.

"I remember liking the Queen song 'Crazy Little Thing Called Love' so much that I would sit with my finger on the pause button on my radio/cassette player and wait until it came on, committing it to tape over and over until I had filled an entire 45 minute side with the one song. I would then listen to it over and over and over again. No, it's not normal, but it's how I was at the age of eight."

"The second phase of my musical environment began in my teenage years when my family moved to Camden in Sydney's southwest. We moved into a house in Camden South and my neighbour across the road, Richard, had two older brothers who had a great collection of music. In particular, his oldest brother David was instrumental in turning me on to punk and 2-Tone ska. A style I would embrace in a big way, worshipping The Specials in particular, as well as The Selecter, Madness, The Beat and all those fantastically exciting UK bands that had made such an impact overseas and whose influence was felt all the way over here by the underground music community. My high school years were spent drawing black and white chequers on everything. Wearing Fred Perrys and flat top haircuts, much to the disgust of the flanelette and ugg boot brigade who were the nemesis of my small group of friends dedicated to the influence of UK fashion and music. Of course, looking back, we had it all wrong when compared to the streetwise city mods and rudies who had more of a community and a handle on the sub culture. I distinctly remember being ridiculed on the steps of Town Hall where everyone would hang on a Saturday morning, for my very uncool pleated pants that I was wearing with some borrowed Doc Martin cherry red boots, but I was learning."

"During this time, I was also listening to a wide variety of sounds from small Australian independent bands. The '80s was a decade when a musician could survive quite well on the dole, and give full attention to his or her art, thus creating a very fertile time in Australian live and recorded music. I would take regular Saturday morning trips into the city and explore Ashwoods, The Record Plant, Phantom, Metropolis, Lawson's and Red Eye, discovering all sorts of wonderful artefacts which I would take home and get so much pleasure from. I was also interested in reggae, '60s pop, rock and roll and electronic sounds such as New Order. I was like a kid in a candy store, with so much to choose from. This was long before ebay and the like, so there was so much great music on offer, especially if you put in the time and got down and dirty, scouring the lower racks in amongst the grime and dust for that undiscovered treasure."

All of this foraging paid off for both Lyndon and the punters at his regular gigs. As a somewhat permanent fixture on the evolving party scene he's witnessed entire sub-cultures crash and burn only to be resurrected again when the whims of fashion dictate that retro is somehow the next big thing, again. Lyndon jokes, "Yes, the scene did evolve over time, but then so did I, namely by getting older!"

"I have to say that I still feel very privileged to have been present at the start of rave culture in Australia, it was such a vibrant, innocent, hedonistic and carefree time. It lasted a for a good few years in its nascent state. It was a pretty small scene back then, run predominantly by visiting ex-pat Brits and savvy Aussie artist collectives and DJs. Most people knew each other, at least by sight, as it was a core group that would attend the parties and the emerging club nights. The most memorable parties for me were the ones that took you away from your daily existence and transported you to somewhere magical, surrounded by very like-minded souls. That sounds a bit like hippy dippy bullshit, and it probably is, and without wanting to sound elitist, you knew you were part of something that was truly underground and not known to the general public. Of course, that didn't last long and before you knew it techno music was finding its way on to TV commercials, and everyone in pop music was jumping on board courtesy of the club remix of their latest single. The scene changed as I did, and there came a time when we parted ways, but it was a lot of fun."

When asked if any one night stands out against all the others, Lyndon recalls the craziness of that one time... "It was a party held in Newcastle way out in the sand dunes several mates and I had been asked to DJ at. We drove up late evening and arrived to a rather cold Newcastle night in the middle of nowhere. We left our cars at a small parking area in the bush and then proceeded in the dark to navigate our way to the party, which wasn't particularly close by. Most of us were carrying a full crate of records over soft sand for what seemed like an eternity – now there's a way to get fit. Finally we arrived at our destination, and the sight was wonderful to behold. Standing atop the lip of a natural amphitheatre, looking down upon a gigantic Indian tee pee with several smaller tents and the decks set up in the middle, we knew this was worth the walk.

"Not due to play until later in the proceedings we ran about the dunes, sat and listened to the music and had a great time for an hour or so. However, out of nowhere a breeze picked up and a voluminous bank of black cloud was fast approaching. Suddenly, it was chaos. A howling wind and sheets of rain began heaping upon us in a matter of minutes and there was a mad scurry to get everything under cover – all the gear and 60 or more people. We managed to spread a giant tarpaulin over ourselves and this is where we stayed in the dark and in the rain for several hours. Once the rain had passed and we emerged it was obvious that the event was a total washout and that we had no choice but to gather our belongings, including the crates of vinyl, and trudge our way back to the cars, which is where we slept, or tried to, until morning when we promptly drove all the way back to Sydney. All that for an hour of fun!"

Finding less time to DJ now could actually be a blessing in disguise as it forces Lyndon (or Lance Link, his current DJ moniker) to choose gigs wisely. "Now I choose events that are unique or going to be entertaining for me, such as a recent photography exhibition opening night, a live experimental evening with Andrew Pekler and Marcus Schmikler from Germany and an upcoming '60s soul and mod night that will really satisfy my current pop obsession. I think after DJing for so long, it's important to challenge yourself and not just go through the motions of playing the same old venues and club scenarios."

His regular slot as host of 'Vertigo' on Sydney's FBI radio was similarly an opportunity to kick back and enjoy his collection without being compromised by unsanitary surrounds. "I absolutely loved doing Vertigo. It was three years of fun on a Sunday evening that allowed me to share my love of music with others. Way more satisfying for me at this age than playing in a pub or club with a shithouse sound system. I tried to present a show with no musical prejudice, the only rule being that every tune played had to be something I truly believed in. I figured, if I did that it would come across on the air and I like to think I achieved that."

Looking back on the success of the show, there are occasions when Lyndon misses his time in studio. But a new, exciting era of fatherhood calls, which means one thing at least: more mixes! This time, the music is for his son Miles. If you're at loss for what to play when the kids are around, Lyndon has some hot tips: "Melody is key. Reggae is good. Indie pop, swingin' jazz and anything with a lot of percussion, drums and catchy choruses. You'll learn over time that your kid knows what he or she likes, and children will let you know that your music doesn't agree with them on any given day."

"I WOULD SIT WITH MY FINGER ON THE PAUSE BUTTON ON MY RADIO/ CASSETTE PLAYER AND WAIT UNTIL IT CAME ON, COMMITTING IT TO TAPE OVER AND OVER UNTIL I HAD FILLED AN ENTIRE 45 MINUTE SIDE WITH THE ONE SONG."

The shift in focus that Miles' arrival has brought is also feeding into Lyndon's other creative pursuits. When he's not busy with his day job as a graphic designer for an advertising firm he's working on illustration projects for friends and family. Designing creations especially for Miles comes naturally. "It suits my drawing style, which has always had a cartoon-like quality to it, and it's something I'd like to take into a commercial arena in the future."

It appears certain that even if Miles doesn't choose to follow his father down a visual design path, he will grow to have a discerning knowledge of music. Or maybe he'll even share what appears to be almost every kid's childhood dream. You know the one where you're in the crowd at a concert and, as Lyndon explains it, "the band would announce that the lead guitarist was sick and could anyone possibly come up and play in his place? Of course, that person would be me and I'd have a spare plectrum in my pocket for exactly that occasion. I shredded big time, naturally."

LEFT FROM TOP: *INTERNATIONAL JETSET* – HAND CUT COLLAGE; *PIANO HANDS*; *DOLLY GIRLS*; AQUARIAN TRAIT PROPOSED CD COVER; *EARLY MORNING IN COBBITY*.
OVER PAGE LEFT FROM TOP: PURDY *FAIRYTALE INSURANCE* CD BOOKLET PANEL; ILLUSTRATION FOR *SUNDAY PLATOON* RADIO SHOW FEATURING LYNDON PIKE, RUSTY AND NEURAL ON RADIO DEX ILLUSTRATION; *MOD ROMANCE* ILLUSTRATION; *60'S GIRL* ILLUSTRATION

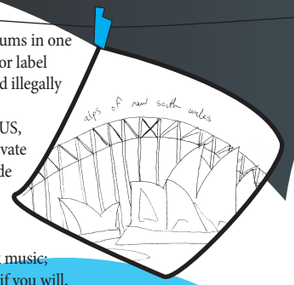
DOING IT YOURSELF

OPTIMISM IS A HARD NUT TO CRACK THIS DECADE. AS THE RECORD INDUSTRY IS FLAGELLATED BY THE INTERNET AND THE NOTIONS OF 'INDIE' AND 'INDEPENDENT' BECOME MORE OBSCURED AND DUBIOUS, IT'S UNDERSTANDABLE – IF IRRITATING – WHEN OLDER OBSERVERS POINT OUT THAT 'PUNK' IS DEAD. AFTER ALL, MAINSTREAM PUNK CULTURE THIS DECADE IS UNABASHEDLY NECROPHILIC, WITH MAJOR LABELS AND INDIE LABELS REPETITIVELY DRY HUMPING THE CORPSE IN AN AGE WHERE RAMONES AND NIRVANA SHIRTS ARE SOLD AT GENERAL PANTS.

This was my view not too long ago, when, shortly after a move from rural New South Wales to inner-city Sydney, a depression came over me during a visit to the local JB Hi-Fi. While flicking through the 'alternative' music section, the hastily shoved, shrink-wrapped jewel cases almost immediately lost their meaning to me. I noticed how garish the fluorescent sale stickers were, and how insensitively My Favourite Albums were priced, and how there'd be rows of the bloody things, each crystal case cracked and the CD rattling loosely in the cover; every single copy of *Sister* for $14.99. In rural Australia you might pay $30 for those discs, and the range in the store would be a quarter in terms of indie or alternative music, but when you found something you loved, you *cherished* it.

It's a rather boorish thing to complain about, but until then it had never really occurred to me that all my favourite records had been mass-produced in factories, sent in bulk to record stores and mishandled by apathetic and underpaid store clerks. Nor had it occurred to me before that the reason these discs exist, the reason I can buy them in record stores and the reason why record stores even stock them, is because someone wants to make money. They don't just want to break even: they want to make a profit. Which is fairly reasonable actually, but when decisions are made for you as a listener by corporations and retailers, when a record's place on the shelf is determined by sale statistics and popularity and profit, that, dear reader, is leaving rather too much out of the picture. You have the right to listen to music that, irrespective of commercial viability, has the right to be heard.

Doing It Yourself is by no means a new concept. It applies as equally to Rough Trade and Factory Records in '70s England as it does to SST and American hardcore in the '80s. It's a thoroughly punk ethic, and probably the most valuable one. Luckily for us, DIY is not dead. In fact, private press labels are almost out of hand at the moment. CD-Rs, lathe-cut vinyl, recycled cassettes – it may be an exaggeration, but nowadays it seems that for every run of 50 albums in one of these formats a major label artist's record is flogged illegally from the internet.



As is the case in the US, much of Australia's private press output this decade has come from a denser, coarser, more sonically challenging bastardisation of punk music; a natural progression, if you will, of the '80s and '90s output of New Zealand DIY acts like the Dead C (whose influence is still felt globally) and Alastair Galbraith. The murk-sonics of Philadelphia's Siltbreeze Records continues to be an influence on Australian labels and bands as well, but even these general references don't touch upon the variety of material documented here.

Outside capital

It might come as a surprise to some, but many of Australia's most prominent private press labels are based in rural or regional areas rather than the state capitals. Australia's best known DIY label Music Your Mind Will Love You began in the tiny Northern NSW township of Kyogle, a short drive from the Queensland border.

Founded in 2005, MYMWLY was birthed when label operator Michael Donnelly decided to release his first album as Brothers of the Occult Sisterhood, *Run From Your Honey Mind,* into the public domain. He contacted Campbell Kneale of New Zealand micro-label Celebrate Psi Phenomenon and Kneale agreed to release the album. Donnelly grew impatient waiting for Celebrate Psi Phenomenon to release it, however, and so in that interim he birthed MYMWLY, thus unscrewing one of the Australian underground's most effusive faucets.

A copy of *Run From Your Honey Mind* was heard by Digitalis and Foxglove founder Brad Rose, who was impressed enough by the record to contact Donnelly, which lead to some of MYMWLY's artists appearing on those imprints and being available (in limited runs) throughout America. Donnelly has also released albums for Rose, such as the North Sea's *Baby Blue Bones*, one of Rose's solo folk-orientated projects.

"IT HAD NEVER REALLY OCCURRED TO ME THAT ALL MY FAVOURITE RECORDS HAD BEEN MASS-PRODUCED IN FACTORIES, SENT IN BULK TO RECORD STORES AND MISHANDLED BY APATHETIC AND UNDERPAID STORE CLERKS."

"I NEVER REALLY INTENDED TO RELEASE OTHER PEOPLE'S STUFF - THE LABEL WAS MORE JUST A WAY OF GETTING MY OWN STUFF OUT THERE. BUT WHEN I LISTENED TO THE DEMOS I THOUGHT WHY NOT?"

"Within a few months of the Celebrate Psi Phenomenon album being released I was getting demos sent from all over the place," Donnelly says of the response to *Run From Your Honey Mind*. "I never really intended to release other people's stuff - the label was more just a way of getting my own stuff out there. But when I listened to the demos I thought why not? And it gradually grew from there."

The MYMWLY sound is becoming increasingly difficult to pin down as the label becomes more prolific. Brothers of the Occult Sisterhood is the best reference point though: initially a two-piece featuring Donnelly and his sister Kristina, the group has morphed into a larger, ever-shifting ensemble, a long-form improvisation incorporating both acoustic and electric textures as well as found sounds and occult-like vocal contortions. Since Kristina left the group BotOS has become a fluid collective that is defined more by environment than a defined aesthetic or core ensemble.

"It's evolved," Donnelly says of the group. "Originally it was myself and my sister, but she pulled out of the process a year ago. So it's mainly me, but with other people that come and stay here. It centres on this location. It's the same people that often play in 6Majik9, (another MYMWLY group) but when they come here and we record in this setting, it comes out as BotOS."

"We live in a little village called Green Pigeon. It's a great spot because it has a really nice energy, and much of the music comes from the location. It's not so much about who plays but the fact that it's here, and the intent that we have when we play."

It's very simple music, completely unadulterated, which is why MYMWLY is so prolific: Donnelly's attitude is in favour of documentation rather than building a solid piece of aural architecture, a conventional album where a band might make a defined 'statement'. When you buy a MYMWLY album, you're plunging your wrists into a lucky dip.

Unusually, Music Your Mind Will Love You is insistent on keeping its records in print. If Donnelly is involved in the project the release will be hand crafted on demand. It's only in cases where he releases something for an overseas artist where limits need to be set for practical purposes.

Keeping albums in print isn't normally a priority for the private presses though, with most labels happy to do small runs of a record before leaving it permanently out of print. The Sunshine Coast's Trapdoor Tapes label is more archetypically private press in this sense. Started in 2005 by then 15-year-old Luke Holland and 16-year-old Sam Witek, Trapdoor Tapes releases are issued in runs of between five and 80 copies, often recorded onto recycled cassettes and CD-Rs.

The labels first release was a three inch CD-R by Witek's solo project, Emesis, closely followed by a split c10 cassette single between Emesis and MSHING (Luke Holland's solo project) which was limited to "around 10 or so" copies. Both outfits are fairly bare-knuckle explorations of harsh noise, though the label's overall output is more varied, taking in the fucked-up four-track pop of New Zealand's Armpit, the dynamic noise-pop of Newcastle's Crab Smasher and even the strangely alluring 'noise-dub' of New York's Arklight. Again, Trapdoor Tapes are influenced by the golden-era of New Zealand avant-garde and American noise labels such as American Tapes and Hanson Records, both operated by current and former members of US noise fraternity Wolf Eyes.

"A lot of our early catalogue was more noise based," Luke Holland says of the label's oeuvre. "But we've just released a demo CD-R for Septic Surge" - a crust/metal band featuring Holland and Witek - "and last year we released a CD-R by Apple In a Cathedral, which was 25 minutes of spoken word."

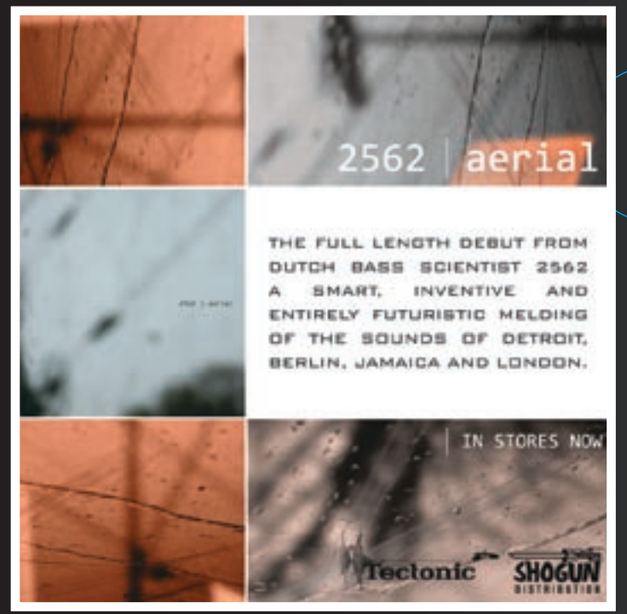
Trapdoor Tapes shares a lot in common with Breakdance the Dawn, another noise label started in Sydney, but now based in the Blue Mountains and run by Matt Earle, who also plays in Sun of the Seventh Sister and the recently Siltbreeze endorsed XNOBBQX. Both labels are defiantly lo-fi and specialise in markedly more abrasive textures than Music Your Mind Will Love You. Another quality that binds the two labels is their packaging aesthetic: whereas MYMWLY crafts impressively elaborate, sometimes hand-painted CD and record sleeves, Trapdoor

Tapes and Breakdance the Dawn are content with a Xeroxed cover slipped inside a plastic sleeve. So while a MYMWLY album might contain the aura of some benevolent hippy missive, Trapdoor Tapes and Breakdance the Dawn are pure, photocopied, dirt-under-the-nails punk DIY.

The first record on Breakdance the Dawn was by a band called the Minerals. "They were like if you imagined a bunch of people really trying to make pop music but just failing abysmally," Matt Earle says of the group, "failing because the technology is too logical or rigid, so there's that point of interaction with the technology and trying to create pop music, because pop music has all the technology. They failed terribly at it, and didn't have the musical ability, but they had the inspiration."

Breakdance the Dawn was birthed out of a frustration with the stifled nature of Sydney's experimental music scene earlier in the decade. "It was really hard to get a gig, and when there was [unusual] stuff happening like the NowNow and Impermanent Audio it was very rigid aesthetically. Something like the Minerals would be embarrassing to those guys because it didn't fit in at all. But I felt there was real value in it." NowNow and Impermanent Audio were experimental music evenings more likely to feature avant-garde jazz musicians and minimal electronics than they were a shambolic and squalling noise band.

Neither Breakdance the Dawn nor Trapdoor Tapes sell as much domestically as they do to overseas listeners. "I think there's a general apathy towards people who make stuff [in Australia]." Earle suggests, "It's part of our culture here, we have to work so hard just to get by and people really value their money and they think 'fuck you for sitting around and making music and shit'. That's what I've put it down to in Sydney anyway."



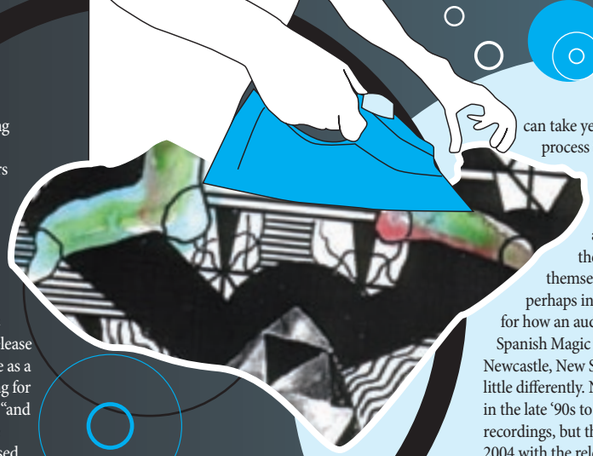
Yet there are still plenty of people making stuff. DIY labels normally find listeners through word of mouth but most operators insist that selling copies of records isn't really the point anyway; it's the process. It's about reclaiming music back from the world of commodity, producing without compromising, being an artist rather than just a musician.

Sean Bailey, the operator of Melbourne's Inverted Crux label, says his decision to release privately was as much an ideological move as a practical one. "Self sufficiency is a big thing for me and has been for a long time," he says, "and it just makes sense to do it yourself." Since starting the label in 2004, Bailey has released cassettes and CD-Rs for his own project, Lakes, as well as releases by Paeces, Spores of the Golden Beard, and Matthew Hopkins' Lamp Puffer project. Like Trapdoor Tapes, Inverted Crux utilises recycled cassettes and home-duplicated CDRs, sticks to limited runs and relies mostly on word of mouth and the internet to spread their wares.

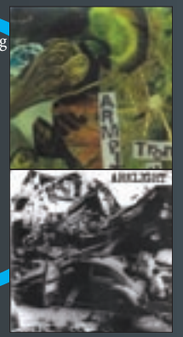
"When I started music - before I even knew about a DIY culture - it just made sense to release your own stuff without having to rely on anyone else," Bailey says. "I've always been really passionate about that. I think it allows you to have longevity and evolve. It just makes sense.

"It's really immediate. You just do it and get it out there. There are so many people around the world that I have an affinity with and that I know feel the same way, it's something you don't really get with majors or bigger indie labels. Majors are always trying to sell stuff, whereas with all the DIY labels I know everybody is really up for trading, sending each other stuff and keeping the network going. The immediacy of jamming and releasing a CD or tape is really appealing and something I feel strongly about."

The immediacy that Bailey talks about is integral to DIY. The music industry has popularised the notion that musicianship is a long and laboured over process, with initial song writing, studio recording, post-production and mastering being a step-by-step indispensable process that can take years. The necessity of this process is disproven by DIY: its ethos ensures that artists remain vitalised by the ever-shifting developments of their own artistic psyche. Importantly, the artists are doing it for themselves, their own benefit, and perhaps in some cases with little regard for how an audience may respond.



"MAJORS ARE ALWAYS TRYING TO SELL STUFF, WHEREAS WITH ALL THE DIY LABELS I KNOW EVERYBODY IS REALLY UP FOR TRADING, SENDING EACH OTHER STUFF AND KEEPING THE NETWORK GOING. THE IMMEDIACY OF JAMMING AND RELEASING A CD OR TAPE IS REALLY APPEALING AND SOMETHING I FEEL STRONGLY ABOUT."

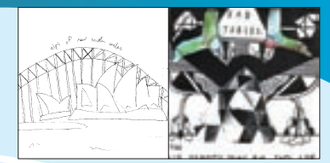


Spanish Magic is another label based in Newcastle, New South Wales, that operates a little differently. Nick Senger started the label in the late '90s to release his own solo cassette recordings, but the project really took off in 2004 with the release of Castings' debut CD-R *Electro Disco Weirdo*. Castings and Spanish Magic are literally one and the same, with the six members of the band (Senger, Shaun and Mark Leacy, Kane Ewin, Dale Rees and Sam Kenna) all being involved in varying capacities in its operation.

Senger was inspired by imprints like Touch and Go and SST, labels that share Spanish Magic's sense of quality control and work ethic, and while the DIY operative is obviously applicable to Spanish Magic, other factors separate them from their peers. In particular, Spanish Magic is not as prolific as most private press labels.

"*American Tapes* has a lot of crap on it, but it's an awesome label because it zeros in on the process," Senger says. "That's cool but it's not something Spanish Magic is interested in doing. We're about the end result and we don't subject the rest of the world to the process, which is why Castings don't put out that much stuff. You get to see the process [when we play] live and hopefully that's interesting."

While perhaps not stylistically too dissimilar to Brothers of the Occult Sisterhood or even some of the more ensemble-orientated Trapdoor Tapes releases, Castings have a reputation for being an improvisational rock band with more patience and attention to detail than most of their peers: they construct immaculately well-considered and well-crafted records, as opposed to the charmingly offhand missives one might find on more prolific labels.



This ethic seems to have a trickle-down effect for the guest artists on Spanish Magic: Bad Tables (another Matthew Hopkins side-project), Expansion Bay (Nathan Thompson of New Zealand's Sandoz Lab Technicians) and Sydney's immersive drone two-piece Moonmilk have all released some of their best work on the label. For a one-stop, beginners guide to Australian experimental DIY, look no further than Spanish Magic's 2005 compilation *It's Over We Don't Care*, which features contributions from BotOS, the Sydney incarnation of Garbage and the Flowers, and Hi God People, among others.

Outside closed doors

What has been documented here is only just scraping the surface of Australia's output. New labels pop up at an alarming rate: Newcastle's Monstera Deliciosa emerged earlier this year and already have four CD-Rs out, and Glacial Avatar Archives have been releasing gratingly loud power electronics at a slow but steady pace since 2006, recently picking up momentum with releases by Onani and Moonmilk. Then there are the other labels such as Shriek Sounds (run by Chris Hearn of Alps), Chooch-a-Bahn records, Diagnosis... Don't!, Sabbatical, Steady Cam, Dual Plover and too many more to mention.

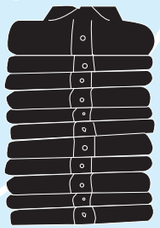
"*AMERICAN TAPES* HAS A LOT OF CRAP ON IT, BUT IT'S AN AWESOME LABEL BECAUSE IT ZEROS IN ON THE PROCESS."

The networking afforded by the internet is paramount to DIY musicians, but the opportunity to perform for an audience is also important. Depending on where in Australia you live, spaces where artists can perform are either in abundance or sadly lacking. Sydney's Chooch-a-Bahn was a remarkably rich contribution to the city's subterranean culture but when it ceased operation due to a venue closure much of the city's most exciting music was left with nowhere regular to call home. There's a fragility to DIY in Sydney: councils, police and real estate demands are always gnawing at the ankles. Currently, events such as Dual Plover's Consolador De Dos Caras and venues like Dirty Shirlows, Maggotsville and Hibernian House put on regular shows, though often word is spread clandestinely for fear of closure.

There are also plenty of artists self-releasing records without officially 'starting a label'. Lo-fi pop duo Vincent Over The Sink released their recent album *22 Coloured Bull Terriers* without a label, and Melbourne's Fulton Girls Club (who has since changed name to Cougar Flashy) released a number of hand sewn records, created on demand.

Excitingly, record stores are stocking this stuff. Tacked to the walls of Paint It Black in Newtown is a large variety of handmade records from Castings to Heil Spirits, and Missing Link in Melbourne accepts self-made recordings on consignment, as does Rocking Horse in Brisbane. Australian retail sites such as Half/Theory (www.halftheory.com) and Cloth Ear (clothear.blogspot.com) provide more exhaustive back catalogue and generally stock most of what any given label has to offer.

So it appears the most enduring punk ethos is far from dead in 2008, and indeed it's unlikely to abate anytime soon. But where to next? In the past, large labels have co-opted underground styles in order to pre-empt the mainstream zeitgeist a few months/years down the line. Punk, post-punk, hardcore and indie rock have all had their crossover stars, but this era of DIY is so doggedly anti-commercial that even in the permissive '70s and '80s they might not have stood a chance of commercial success. Is it a long and clear, wide and noisily uninterrupted road ahead? Only time will tell.



STRATEGIES FOR THE FUTURE

THE FIRST TACTICS ALBUM BEGINS WITH A WORD, *WORDS*, AS A CRY STRUNG UP BETWEEN TWO HOOKS OF PAIN AND EXULTANCY. IT'S HALF AN INTENSELY IRRITATED YELP, HALF ANTICIPATION OF THE TERRAIN AHEAD, LIKE A "WOOOO!" LET OUT AS YOU STRAP YOURSELF IN FOR A ROLLERCOASTER RIDE. IT FOREGROUNDS LANGUAGE, ITS COMPLICATIONS AND DANGERS; THE WAYS IN WHICH WORDS BOTH EXPLAIN AND EVADE THE WORLD. *'I'M NOT TALKING TO MYSELF ANYMORE!'* THE VOICE DECLARES, PLAGUED BY SENTENCES RUNNING CROSSWAYS AND CONTRARIWISE, AND DETERMINED, EVEN MOMENTARILY, TO GET THOSE WORDS UNDER CONTROL.

WOOOAAAARRRHHHDDSSS!

'No More Talking,' the song is called, and we know immediately that this is a band interested in structures and signifiers, and how such things might be broken down; the person voicing the voice would even, many years on, claim that Tactics were "a post-structuralist band before post-structuralism existed." You could certainly describe them as post-punk, in the best sense of that term: as a band moving beyond the primary, necessary nihilism of punk to a place where destruction gives way to the more subtle art of disruption. To pause, to take apart, to analyse and consider; and perhaps, to move on and rebuild in newer, odder shapes. It's all in the name, really.

The first Tactics album was called *My Houdini*, and like that skilled but ultimately luckless magician it might have vanished for good, forever rendered in the past tense, had not the Sydney-based Reverberation label chosen to re-release what amounts to almost the entire Tactics back catalogue over the past two years. As *The Sound Of Sound* Volumes 1 & 2, three Tactics LPs - *My Houdini* (1980), *Glebe* (1981) and *Blue & White Future Whale* (1984) are collected together alongside a welter of outtakes, live recordings and b-sides. To discover Tactics – or to rediscover them – is to stumble across a sound unique within the history of Sydney music, and to uncover a history of Sydney as a very different city from the one it currently is, or pretends to be: "Before it was a globalised city," comments David Studdert, Tactics' vocalist and core songwriter, "which is all style and no life." Before investment apartments, colour newspaper supplements, and bus shelters designed so they can't be slept in; before the Monorail, Darling Harbour, World Tower and even Centrepoint, Tactics moved through Sydney and wrote songs about what they saw.

"I just liked the whole vibe of the city then," states Studdert. "It felt very empty." In the liner notes to *The Sound Of Sound* Vol 1, he describes a number of spaces that were unpoliced and unregulated in a way that is difficult to imagine today. "It was so good it was like Wonderland," Studdert writes, recalling his favourite venue, Rags on Goulburn St. "Rags really felt like that," he tells me now. "I don't think in the whole time I was going there I actually met anyone who ran it. There were a lot of bands that played there during the week, on Tuesday and Wednesday nights. My favourite was Seems Twice. They had 30-second songs with titles like 'Andy Warhol' and 'Yasser Araffat'. Conceptually they were brilliant, though musically they weren't my cup of tea. Voigt 465 played there, and they were an incredible band too." Tuesday nights in town with conceptual art bands singing about Yasser Arrafat, or perhaps a stroll down Sussex St to Darling Harbour, then a dusty mess of disused railway yards, to watch Voigt 465 play an illegal, impromptu outdoor show propped up against the concrete pylons – what happened to this Sydney, and to a sense of what is possible here?

To ask these questions is not merely to invite nostalgia. The possibilities of space and of expression are deeply connected: when one is curtailed, so is the other, while the textures of each are shared. A neo-liberal Sydney of mirror-reflective high rise and anonymously chill "public" squares has left us with a vocabulary of matching slipperiness, so much so that it is necessary to put quote marks around certain words just to gain some traction in the glossy spill of PR land. Irony is barely a factor: when the language is so flattened and limp, it takes great effort just to haul it to its knees again, let alone to make it speak with the provocations and

contradictions that a post-punk band like Tactics were so fired by. Their Sydney was one of holes and corners, and hence their sound was an agitated stop-start, a stuttering mixture of rhythm guitar, saxophone, piano and vocals that recall the anxious, nasal intensity of Pere Ubu's David Thomas.

Tactics didn't begin in Sydney, forming initially in Canberra, where Studdert picked up a guitar in an attempt "to get as far away from the world of my father as possible." He learned to play from a rudimentary how-to guide in the *NME*, but thought carefully about his craft. "I was writing one song at a time until everything was very, very polished." Songs dating from the band's early days in Canberra include 'Buried Country,' which ended up on *My Houdini*, an extraordinary song for its time and still so today. It addresses Australia's legacy of colonial dispossession, but with a very different tone to the fists-in-the-air rhetoric of, say, Midnight Oil. On the surface it feels like a pop song, with an upbeat, energetic rhythm which holds traces of the reggae influence that would emerge more fully on the second Tactics LP, *Glebe*. Studdert's vocal runs over the top, not focused on delivering a narrative so much as offering up a heap of disconcerting lyrical fragments – a view of Canberra's hills through car headlights, '*memories of baited flour*'. "I don't have any problems with Australia, but I have big problems with white Australia," says Studdert, by which he means a colonial mentality that still pervades our thinking, a denial of what – and who – was here before white people arrived. It is a denial that returns over and again to unsettle the settlers, as a sense of awful violence buried within our collective memory, deep and unspeakable. "In some ways white Australia

"PEOPLE LIKE MIDNIGHT OIL WHO WRITE BIG ANTHEMS, I DON'T MEAN TO SOUND ARROGANT ABOUT IT, BUT THEY WEREN'T WRITING SONGS LIKE THAT BEFORE 'BURIED COUNTRY'."

sees itself fairly accurately: as a population perched on the edge of a vast space," Studdert comments. "After the white man came along huge parts of the country became uninhabited. The process of colonisation… it doesn't colonise, it de-populates." In 'Buried Country', Canberra is figured as an empty and almost alien space, its veneer of civilisation

vanishing away to leave a wound where lies '*black blood on frozen ground*'.

As for the song's own legacy, Studdert believes that it too has remained largely unacknowledged. "People like Midnight Oil who write big anthems, I don't mean to sound arrogant about it, but they weren't writing songs like that before 'Buried Country' came out," he says. Where Tactics differed from their peers was their interest in the quotidean: they never reached for either tragedy or heroics, and their songs were borne out of the fragmentary experiences of everyday urban living.

"I WAS LIVING ON BOURKE ST [IN REDFERN], AND I COULD LITERALLY LOOK OUT MY WINDOW AND SEE CENTREPOINT BEING BUILT."

"The ordinary stuff do to with just walking around, there's not that many [Australian] bands who have done that," Studdert reflects. "I mean at that point – and it wasn't just walking around the city – I was living on Bourke St [in Redfern], and I could literally look out my window and see Centrepoint being built. It was there everyday. And these are the things I was writing about… The best stuff always comes out of a specific locality," he summarises. "You can always find the general in the specific, and if you start out with a strong sense of locality then your work is much more grounded."

Certainly no other Australian band has ever called an album *Glebe* – or Fortitude Valley or Glenelg, for that matter. Named after the inner-Sydney suburb – then as now a mixed bag of housing commission renters, cashed-up owners of terraced Victorian mansions, students, Aboriginal residents, and wilful bohemians – *Glebe* is an album that succeeds in making the ordinary sound strange and often eerie, largely by virtue of its reverberant, disorientating sonic design.

The original master was compromised due to a lack of funds; the band was unhappy with it and critical reaction at the time was generally either indifferent or hostile. "People wanted *My Houdini* Mk 2," Studdert recalls, and instead they got a darker, slower sound, laced with voices that appeared and then disappeared at the edges of the mix.

"That's exactly where I wanted to locate it," confirms Studdert, of *Glebe*'s subconscious reverie. "At that time I was listening to a record called *Garvey's Ghost*, which was a dub record by Burning Spear. I'd listen to it all the time, just play it and play it. And I'm sure there's a lot of that on *Glebe*. That was the element which got lost originally, and which didn't come back in until we had the chance to remaster it."

Glebe shares with dub an instinct for how erasures – partial ones – can unbalance and disturb a sonic space, making it menacing, dread-full. There is nothing whole to hold on to, only impressions: fleeting voices and visions gleaned from televisions flickering in the corners of dark rooms, and building sites seen at a distance. Centrepoint is framed by that Bourke St bedroom window, the sky an "*overwhelming blue*" cut by cranes and clouds. The arrangements on *Glebe* swap the emphasis on reggae's ching-a-ching guitar that shaped *My Houdini* for dub's bottom-end focus: thick basslines and drums that follow "the rhythm and not the beat," as Studdert describes it.

Incidentally, Studdert's interest in rhythms, which don't simply "mark out the time", have led him over the years from dub to, as a long-term resident in London, the complexities of jungle. "Jungle is the form of dance music that I really love," he says. "The original jungle, before it became drum 'n' bass, had a very strong emotion to it. And the whole scene existed completely outside of the state" – the kind of scene where, as with punk, new communities formed in overlooked or derelict spaces, calling into question the values and hierarchies of the mainstream music industry. And Studdert firmly believes that Tactics were a part of something that was indeed a community. "Oh there was, there was one. And one of the things I say in the [re-release] liner notes is that I wish I'd been a bit more open to it at the time. I was rather closed off, and at the time I think I could have been more supportive of other bands. I think other people wanted that from me."

Was he ever tempted - alongside Australian post-punk's holy triumvirate of The Triffids, The Go-Betweens and The Birthday Party – to move to London in the early 1980s, and seek out a wider community for Tactics to speak to?

"Oh look, of course it crossed my mind, but the fact was I'd had enough trouble moving from Canberra [to Sydney]. I didn't have a whole lot of resources, but I also had a very strong feeling that what I wanted to say, I wanted to say to Australians. Somebody wrote in *Time Out* here in London, "Is there currently a person living in the backwaters of the Appalachian Mountains with a burning desire to write songs about living in Melbourne?" And that's Nick Cave. And I wanted nothing to do with that. What was driving me at the time was wanting to know who I was, and where I was, those basic philosophical questions. And the idea of getting on a plane and flying to the other side of the world, to a place where I knew that it was much harder to live, to get on stage in front of people who wouldn't understand the basics of what I was talking about – no. Not at all. I was aware when we were in Canberra that we needed to move to Sydney, and when we were in Sydney that we needed to move to London, if we had wanted to take it to that level."

With its lyrical references to "*doors open wide*" and "*bright lights*," 'Coat-Tails' – one of two singles recorded at EMI studios and released in 1984 – could be read as an embittered commentary upon the market demands that shape the music industry, and squeeze out the bands too stubborn to bow down. "People said to us at the time, 'Oh, you should try to sound more like Talking Heads,'" Studdert recalls. "But where do you go? There's probably 50 bands all over the world trying to sound like Talking Heads, and the industry's only got room for one Talking Heads. What happens to the other 49?" But as a whole, the song rides with a wonderful energy, looking back to the speed and deftness of *My Houdini* but with the rhythm more fluid and propulsive. It sounds like a band moving forward. "I hadn't heard 'Coat-Tails for so many years," says Studdert. "And when played it back again I just ran around the room."

Tactics never did follow those lights to London, instead staying in Sydney and, after a couple of years' hiatus and a few line-up changes, releasing their third album, *Blue and White Future Whale,* in 1985 (fourth if you count the live recording *The Bones of Barry Harrison*, which was released in 1982, partly due to the band's frustration with the sound of the original *Glebe* master.) More recordings would follow, intermittently, and in a way Tactics have never ceased to exist as a project that takes its best material from the life and textures of Australia's most populous city. Studdert, for his part, saw reasons both to celebrate and to despair upon a recent visit. "Right now everyone's so desperate, they're looking for something," he reflects. "It's like when we played at the Annandale [earlier this year] we nearly lifted the roof off, because the joint power of the audience and us was so great. And a friend said to me later, 'People probably haven't been talked to in that way for a long time'. And I think he was right." On the other hand, he mentions community radio station FBI and off-the-radar venues like the CAD Factory as signs of a possibly renewing spirit that drives the city's underground. "You know, those moments happen and then they go away, and then they happen again." Histories are buried, and then one day, perhaps completely unexpectedly, they re-emerge. How does Studdert feel about the renewed interest in Tactics, and a younger audience hearing his band for the first time? "The whole thing has been a real joy," he states, simply.

"THERE'S PROBABLY 50 BANDS ALL OVER THE WORLD TRYING TO SOUND LIKE TALKING HEADS, AND THE INDUSTRY'S ONLY GOT ROOM FOR ONE."

Tactics' *The Sound of the Sound* Vol 1 & 2 is available from Reverberation.

BUGGED OUT GUITARS

LAST YEAR, I WROTE A REVIEW FOR TIM CATLIN'S *RADIO GHOSTS. I USED WORDS LIKE 'PURITY,' 'BALANCE' AND 'STILLNESS' IN AN ATTEMPT TO CONVEY THE ESSENCE OF THIS MELBOURNE TABLETOP GUITARIST'S WORK.**

His almost stately drones and crisp textures possess the unique ability to shift the listener's perception without them even realising. It's a purity of tone that draws on spiritual associations for what could ultimately be reduced to experimental music or sound art. Terms that seem somehow misleading or inadequate for this form of music. The pieces were clearly manipulated, it seemed to me, via extensive post production and mixing.

Some 12 months later, curiosity got the better of me. I'm sitting with Catlin in his Brunswick lounge-room in an attempt to coax some answers about how it's all possible. And it turns out, well, that was wrong, something Catlin whispered quietly to me soon after, in a manner that seemed like he wished he had used post-production purely for my sake. He said he achieved this unique sonic expression via EQing, overdubs and the use of an e-bow. But on acoustic guitar? It still didn't seem possible.

I asked if he was surprised by my mistaken impressions. "In some ways, no," he concedes, "because it's so different to what a guitar sounds like. I guess I was so close to the project that I know it's not."

It's time to throw out all that baggage you're carrying around about guitarists because Catlin's music comes from a very different world.

In fact, so too does his route to this new world, seemingly missing those all too common stages for the experimental musician: the disenfranchisement with the standard 4/4 verse-chorus-verse, or the annoyance with band-mates that pushes them to exploring extended techniques with their instrument. "I was not so interested in the riff," says Catlin. "I was never in rock bands and I didn't come from that. I don't mind listening to examples of that, but I don't have any interest in doing it myself, because I probably wasn't very good at it, and there are so many others that do it. It didn't seem possible to come up with something interesting and reasonably original.

"Many guitarists seem to confine themselves to a narrow range of possibilities," he says. "Pick up any guitar magazine and they are full of articles on how to play like a particular guitarist or obtain a 'classic' guitar tone. For such a seemingly simple instrument, there's an amazing array of sonic possibilities. I'm interested in exploring and extending those possibilities."

Combine a thirst for exploration with a low boredom threshold and Catlin's direction became clear.

"When I discovered some of the techniques that I've ended up using, it just seemed really worth pursuing. At the time, I didn't realise there were other people that do this stuff so it all seemed new to me."

During the late '80s, while conducting sonic experiments in the safety of his lounge-room, he began investigating others who had developed unique and idiosyncratic perspectives on guitar. People like Robert Fripp or Adrian Belew, and, in particular, German improvisor Hans Reichel who Catlin first heard on a flexi-disc in *Guitar Player Magazine* (in 1997, the magazine named Reichel amongst the 30 most radical guitarists). "The first time I heard a recording of his, it did not sound in any way like a guitar," Catlin reminisces. "It had a beautiful sound and I was just intrigued about how he could possibly make that sound. It turns out, he has different bridges on his guitars and he's in a whole different area really. Aside from being a musician, he makes his own instruments and they're really beautiful, they're professional but they don't look like conventional guitars."

Despite not finding too much common ground with Slash or Jet, Catlin doesn't view his approach as all that unique in the world of guitar music. "There's a whole history of experiment and innovation in popular guitar music that you won't find in the 'experimental' racks of your music store. Les Paul, Link Wray and Neil Young are a few that come to mind. All highly innovative and experimental guitarists, although most people probably aren't aware of their experiments... Neil Young's *Arc* album of feedback and fragmented vocals is pure genius, as was Link Wray's decision to puncture his amp's speaker cones to get more distortion."

In 2003, Catlin released his first album on Dr Jim's, a (sadly defunct) local experimental label that was home to Bucketrider and Tony Buck's eclectic ensemble with Otomo Yoshihide, Peril. At four tracks, *Slow Twitch* was filled with gentle buzzes, rattles and crackles. These pure resonating drones, were an exploration of Catlin's extended guitar technique, the culmination of his early lounge-room experimentation, using all manner of beaters, fans, motors, magnets, coins, cardboard and pegs. Catlin alternated between electric and acoustic guitar, the acoustic being something that he hadn't previously heard heavily utilised in experimental music. "I thought they were very rich sounding, because they were acoustic, but they had an abrasive edge I liked," he says.

Slow Twitch has lots of similarities with Catlin's more recent *Radio Ghosts* in approach, technique and execution, though perhaps more importantly, it also signifies the introduction of the 'D' word to our discussion, a word that Catlin initially bristles at, yet comes to begrudgingly accept throughout the interview in lieu of a better description.

"I do like drone music," he acknowledges carefully. "It's a pretty wide field. I mean Phil Niblock could be considered drone music. People could listen to his music and think that nothing's happening because its so subtle, it's not modulating or changing into something else. A lot of the stuff on *Radio Ghosts*, certainly the way that it was mixed and my intention was that if you you're really listening to it, it's subtly changing and shifting. A lot of drone or pure drone stuff or minimalist music doesn't really change much at all. But perceptually, if you listen to it enough, you pick up on other details or your perception shifts.

"I would like to think that the best drone music or abstract field experiments would put you in a state that would alter the chemistry of your brain, though you could probably argue that listening to very loud metal music could also do so, though probably not in the same way.

"There's something about being absorbed into it," he says, "because it's also about duration, and if we're still using the 'D' word, you can't use a drone piece that goes for two minutes. I have done some pieces that are shorter than others, but generally there needs to be a bit of duration for their absorption."

For Catlin, it begins with process, the exploration of an approach that then informs, yet doesn't dictate some of the decisions down the track. On *Slow Twitch,* he had the luxury of regular access to an RMIT studio and with *Radio Ghosts* his own lounge-room. It's about trying things, making mistakes and using some of those mistakes to inform a new process. "It's not like I'm totally anal about the process," he says. "I set up different processes to see how they work, I have ideas but it's a starting point. The errors or when things start to break down or not work the way they should are often things that I'll emphasise in the recording. They may be the only interesting part of the track. "

But lets get back to *Radio Ghosts*, the purity of tone and music that doesn't sound like it came from guitars. Catlin is adamant that on both albums he didn't use effects or software processing. In fact, he still uses an old G4 and a digi 001 that restrict him to a maximum of 24 tracks. What he does do to transform the sound so dramatically is refreshingly simple, at times even reminiscent of Eno's generative music experiments.

"There's a number of different ways that you can change the sound of an acoustic guitar," he explains, "depending on where it's mic-ed up. If it's close to the sound hole, it's going to be much bassier, and if it's really close mic-ed, near the strings, its much harsher. The choice of microphones, the type of strings you use, and the methods of preparing the guitar and driving the strings are important."

"The track 'Zumbido,' which means buzzing in Spanish, that's built up from a lot of multi-tracked prepared guitar tracks, so the strings will rasp and buzz when they're being played. Yet in more conventional guitar technique, if the strings are buzzing it's because the action is too low, it's a bad thing. This was prepared with bits of cardboard and business cards, so I'm finally finding a use for business cards," he laughs. "There was a lot of trial and error in preparing which string and whereabouts on each string, then you build up all these buzzing sounds and it's a matter of how those sounds work together, EQing them or building a mass. It's all played with e-bows, totally hands free."

Whilst he has recently recorded a collaboration with fellow prepared guitarist Dave Brown (of Bucketrider and Candlesnuffer fame), which began with a series of improvised performances encompassing acoustic, processed and electronic sounds with additional post-production and editing from Brown, his solo experiments have thrown up something quite unique and unexpected.

Insects.

Catlin takes me into his music room, loads up his G4 and plays me the sounds of insects. The incredibly detailed chirping, buzzing and creaking of bugs reach my ears, and the effect is one of wonderment, of being offered a slice of nature that we're not normally afforded, of inspecting the sounds we often ignore. There's a vitality and body to the sound, all chirping at their own cadence, their calls intermingling and feeding off each other, creating this vast cacophony of insect sound. Except of course they're not really insects at all. It's Catlin's guitar - this time with processing. I'm listening to faux insects and it's remarkable. He solos the various tracks, offering me the individual ingredients to this marvelous tapestry of sound. "I should play people these sounds without telling them its a guitar," he says. "I find insects perhaps even musical, there's movement and rhythms. They're certainly in the right frequencies. I could push this further and layer it up and it could sound like a whole swarm of insects."

"I do genuinely love insect sounds," he says. "Some of my most profound listening experiences have involved insects. I remember in Thailand, what sounded like a giant orchestra of tropical insects, like a great piece of drone music. The more deeply I listened, the more I become attuned to these complex, unfolding layers of sound. **I was sitting on a hill overlooking the** sea at dusk and the calls of the insects were very loud and dense. Insects were calling at different intensities and frequencies. They seemed to be calling from all directions and heights. I realised it was possible to hear it as one mass of sound or as many layers of timbrally rich, subtly modulating sounds. It was a profound sonic experience that I still remember clearly.

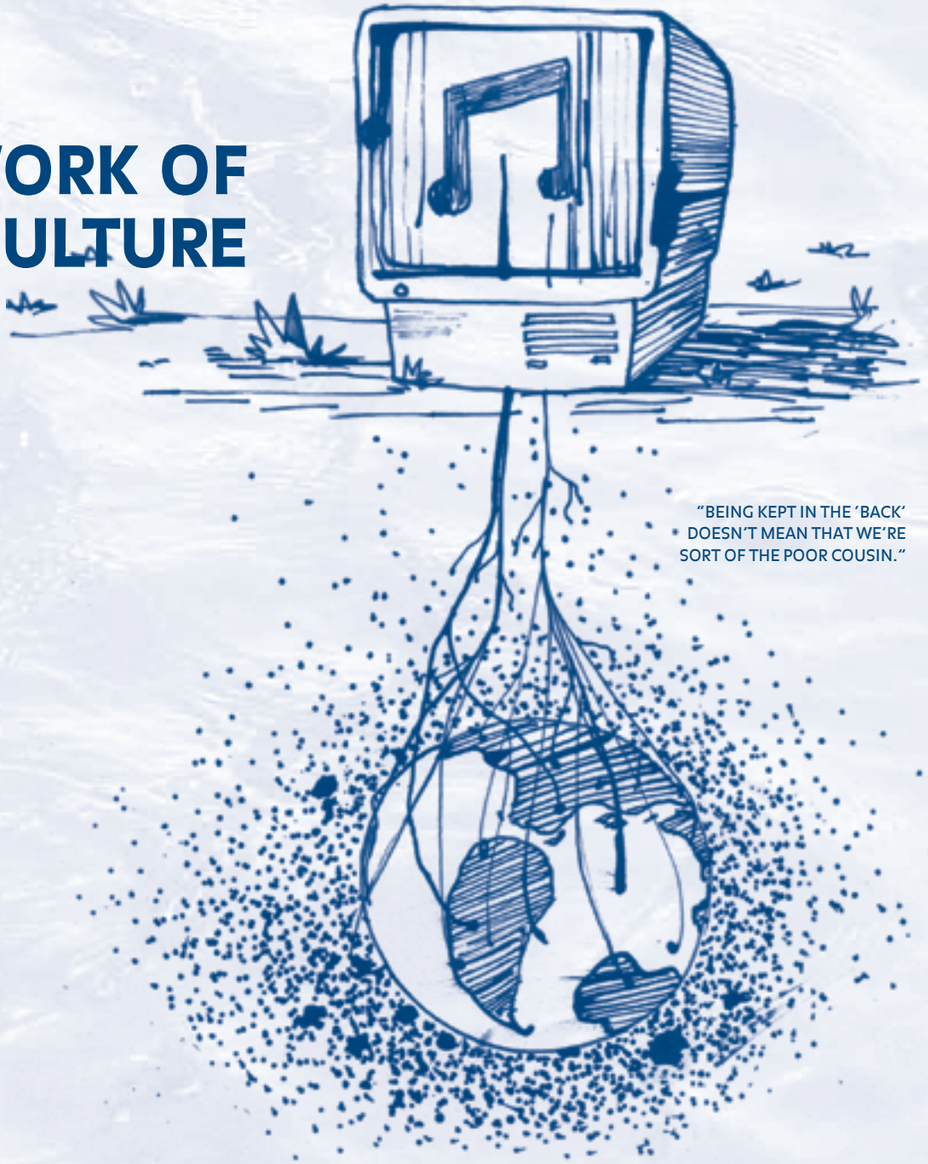
"If I could make a piece of music that is as compelling as these insects sound," he says, "if I was to aspire to something, it would be something as good as that, as opposed to copying some composer or something."

*Find it at cyclicdefrost.com/blog

Tim Catlin's *Radio Ghosts* is available from 23Five.

"IT'S TIME TO THROW OUT ALL THAT BAGGAGE YOU'RE CARRYING AROUND ABOUT GUITARISTS BECAUSE CATLIN'S MUSIC COMES FROM A VERY DIFFERENT WORLD."

SYDNEY
AND THE GLOBAL NETWORK OF CONTEMPORARY CLUB CULTURE



"BEING KEPT IN THE 'BACK' DOESN'T MEAN THAT WE'RE SORT OF THE POOR COUSIN."

The commercial dance music scene in Sydney has generated, and continues to generate, plenty of discussion in the weekly street press and on websites, but unlike scenes in the UK, the US, and to a lesser extent Europe, there has been little written material that has looked in detail at the history of the scene, the way it has developed, the ideologies that underpin it, and the tensions that ripple throughout it. With this in mind, in 2002 I commenced study for a PhD that had as its focus, club culture and dance music in Sydney. This article represents an attempt to briefly draw out some of the key points of this now completed thesis, in regard to the position of the Sydney dance music scene within the wider context of global club culture, and how this position is being affected by the development of technology.

My study and analysis was based mainly around interviews with a selection of DJs, promoters, media people and other music industry practitioners who work in Sydney, and was grounded in a commercial sensibility, that was itself infused with an international perspective that stems from me being English. Coming over from the UK in 2002 to commence my study meant getting to grips with the relatively unfamiliar terrain of Sydney's club culture in a rather short space of time, although I soon overcame this, in part through the 'education' and 'insider's perspective' I received during my work at (the old) Central Station Records on Oxford Street. At the same time, I would argue that my familiarity with dance music in the UK allowed me to engage more closely with the debates and issues surrounding transnationalism and the global appeal of contemporary dance music culture.

Dance music has a central role not just in the culture of Sydney, but also socially and economically, and on a wider geographical scale. Given the increasingly global and corporate nature of the dance music scene, there is a sense that the music and culture are becoming less 'local' and more 'international', with this global movement affecting the identity and development of local scenes, the understandings and practices of those who are involved with these scenes, and the very definition of a 'scene' itself.

While I wish to avoid any suggestion that dance music is somehow becoming a global product of the music industry, there is certainly a degree of similarity between the scenes in Europe, America and Australia, if only in the sense of the music itself, and there is nothing intrinsic in the Sydney scene that specifically promotes Australian national identity. Indeed, with the global flow of the music, and the global touring of the DJs that play this music, there is a sense of the eradication of the diversity of local and national scenes and culture.

Despite the fact that dance music history can be traced through specific geographical locations, such as the development of house music in Chicago, techno in Detroit, acid house in Britain, trance in Goa, and the Ibiza scene, the existence of any contemporary dance scene is not reliant on specific local characteristics. Yet that does not mean there is some kind of homogenised and shared global dance music culture, and that specific scenes do not have their own distinctive features, although it remains the case that Australian dance music culture draws extensively on the sounds and styles of Europe and America. Apart from the music itself being foreign in origin, much of the surrounding culture and fashion of the Australian dance music scene is also drawn from overseas. The fact that Australian dance culture has its origins in an imported version acts as the basis of any discussion of the contemporary dance scene in Sydney.

The Sydney scene exists around music imported from overseas, which, three or four years ago, could be seen, in part, as a result of the decline in vinyl production in Australia. Today, with the increasing use of the Internet as the source from which DJs obtain most of their music, whether in the form of physical product (most likely to be CDs, as opposed to vinyl) or as digital downloads, it is becoming far easier to access music from all corners of the globe, which obviously has a direct impact upon the musical content of the scene in Sydney. In previous years, when DJs relied solely on vinyl, the time it took for this vinyl to reach Australia meant that the notion of the Australian dance music scene as being 'behind' its counterparts in the northern hemisphere was very much a part of the discourse that surrounded the scene. Yet this has now been almost entirely eradicated, given the immediacy in obtaining music that new technology facilitates.

Obviously, the commercial availability, and indeed unavailability, of this music will impact upon the shape of the local scene. In this sense, it can be argued that the Sydney dance music scene is shaped and defined, in part, by the music that is imported into the city from abroad, and thus the decisions of record store owners and DJs in selecting this music have a direct impact upon the music that participants in the scene are exposed to. Yet there is an apparent lack of concern for the geographical origins of most dance music. While DJs and clubbers may be aware of these origins, they do not, on the whole, base their value judgements regarding the music on them. As such, the central tenets and ideologies of dance culture do not reside in notions of tensions between local product and imported product, but rather in unique and specifically local interpretations and articulations of a wider global dance culture.

The previously held perception of the Australian dance scene as being 'behind' is somewhat unsupportable, given the rapid facilities and channels that now exist for the worldwide distribution of music through the development of the Internet and digital download technology. It is in this sense that dance culture is becoming more 'international', with geographically disparate scenes being closer in their stages of musical development than ever before. As DJs rely less on the physical commodity of vinyl, and make increasing use of digital media, the international interconnectedness of dance culture will become even more developed. Sydney DJ (and Cyclic Defrost co-editor) Seb Chan explains how certain practices intrinsic to DJ culture and the use of vinyl are being carried over into the use of digital forms, such as the notion of the 'dubplate', in the process breaking down the stylistic boundaries and markers that used to divide scenes in different geographical locations: "I know lots and lots of DJs who are getting MP3 dubplates, effectively, via peer-to-peer, officially from artists, directly to play out at parties. It is totally bypassing borders, as such, because it is possible now. So it is hard to say now that these scenes have boundaries. They don't have national borders nowadays, but they certainly did before the ability to transmit music became so easy." (Interview, 2005)

This idea of a 'global network' of dance scenes is reinforced by the increasing use of the Internet, as opposed to the more traditional form of the retail record store, as the source from which most DJs purchase their music. Several of the DJs I interviewed explained how they are now bypassing the traditional 'bricks and mortar' local record store in favour of both websites of overseas physical stores and digital download websites, in order to obtain the freshest and newest tracks. Furthermore, with the increasing audio quality of digital downloads, it is making more financial sense to avoid paying for imported 12-inch vinyl, which typically retails in Australia for approximately $20, and which would probably get you the original track and three

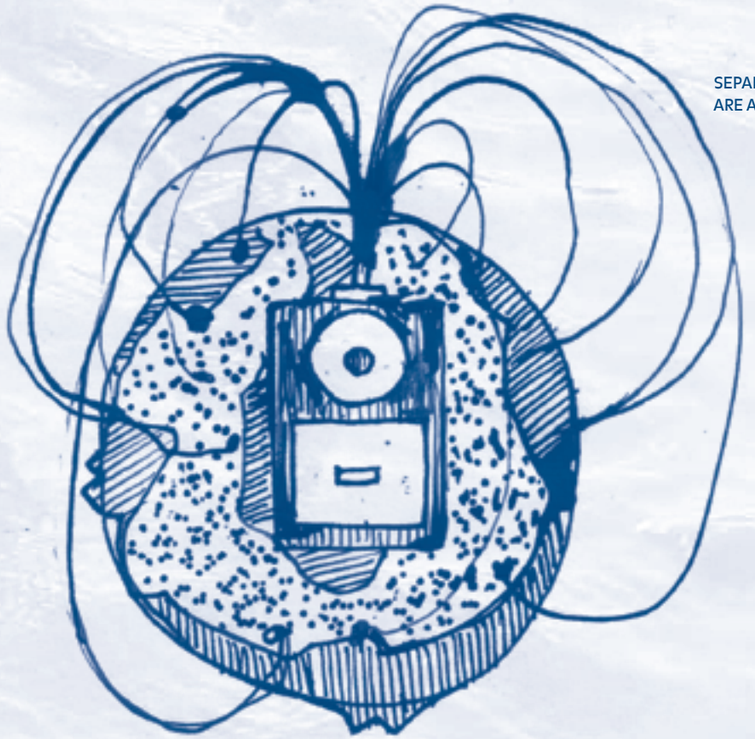
remixes, and instead make use of the Internet. As Sydney DJ Paul Goodyear highlights: "In the last couple of weeks I've just started downloading stuff from websites such as beatport.com, where you pay US$1.49 and you're able to access [a particular] track. This site [features] a lot of new producers who put their music up on the site, and it won't be released for probably a couple of months. So for less than two Australian dollars per track, you've got something that's way ahead of release, the quality is fantastic, and it's much cheaper than spending 20 bucks on a piece of vinyl." (Interview, 2005)

The development of the Internet has thus created a 'global distribution network' within dance music culture, making it easier to buy music from different countries and easier for music to be distributed around the world. Yet for all this discussion of how technology is bringing geographically separate scenes closer together and eroding the sense that Australian dance music culture 'lags behind' British and American scenes, we cannot simply take the perspective that there is a unified global dance music culture that transcends national boundaries and divisions. There is a certain unrealistic idealism contained within such a perception, and also a demonstrative lack of understanding of the way locality and identity serve to create place-specific dance scenes that have unique operational practices and infrastructures. Describing local dance culture as simply imported does, in turn, provide an overly simplistic and narrow interpretation of the specifically local developments and progressions in Sydney's dance scene. Discussing what it is that makes the Sydney scene unique and different from other scenes elsewhere in Australia and around the world, Seb Chan suggests that it is not so much directly related to the preferences clubbers have for particular types of music, but rather the laws, geographical factors, and meteorological factors that shape the city and the lifestyle of its inhabitants: "It is the geographic specificities of the city [that give the dance scene its unique shape]. Why is Sydney different to Melbourne? Licensing laws, geography, no beaches in Melbourne, shittier weather in Melbourne, or perceived shittier weather in Melbourne, venue spaces, people, demographics, cultural things… Why did a techno scene spring up in Melbourne and die out in Sydney? Why are there more art galleries in Melbourne than in Sydney? Why are there more beachside cafes in Sydney rather than Melbourne? Why does lemon gelato sell more in Sydney than in Melbourne? Sydney is different because it's got the beach and it's got the bush close by. People go out more to those kinds of things. They invest less of their time in indoor cultures, like music, art, and books. That would be my blanket statement, which is probably unfounded in many cases, but generally, I would say that Melbourne is an artier city, because there's not much else to do there. The weather is shit so you've got to go out in any case, and you'll go out when it's raining. You try putting a club on here and it's raining, no one comes. Just really simple things like that [make a scene unique]." (Interview, 2005)

While there may be certain qualities and features that are unique to the Sydney dance scene, one has to argue that dance culture is very much a culture grounded in an 'international' sensibility, with scant regard shown for the geographical origins of particular tracks or DJs, whereas in rock music, place is often tied to the cultural authenticity and credibility of a particular artist or style of music, with, for example, Seattle and its association with early-1990s grunge, Liverpool and 1960s beat groups, and Manchester and late-1980s indie.

This is not to deny the importance and relevance of such places as Detroit, Chicago and Ibiza in the historical development of dance music, yet whereas certain bands that operate within, and certain styles that are a part of, rock music culture may be tied to a particular place, dance music largely transcends national borders and the so called 'tyranny of distance' to reach a broad, international listening base.

Given that contemporary dance culture is very much a global concern, I would suggest that, while there remains a number of disparate and contrasting styles and genres under the collective term 'dance music', there has actually been a formation of global networks of cultural information flow and exchange that have connected and drawn together local scenes into a larger, more international scene that operates according to certain shared principles and ideologies, so that participants in dance culture interact in a truly global sense. Urban dance scenes may be physically separated by significant distances, but they are also brought together through shared music, ideologies and practices. In other words, through a sharing of internationally disseminated media and associated discourse, a clubber in Sydney can explore the dance music of Detroit without leaving their home city, or, through the benefits of Internet technology, a producer in London can create a track for a DJ in Sydney to include in their set on the same day. Dance scenes do not operate within the confines of a singular bounded territory, but rather



"URBAN DANCE SCENES MAY BE PHYSICALLY SEPARATED BY SIGNIFICANT DISTANCES, BUT THEY ARE ALSO BROUGHT TOGETHER THROUGH SHARED MUSIC, IDEOLOGIES AND PRACTICES."

are drawn into an operative framework that is global in its breadth and scope, and that transcends the specificity of geographical location. It is in this sense that the term 'transnational' most accurately conveys the idea of dance culture as not being contained within specifically local articulations.

The description of a 'transnational dance scene' accommodates the fluidity of club culture, with its constantly changing and shifting shape and formation, and 'transnational' acknowledges both the lack of specific boundaries and divisions between geographically separate dance scenes, and the cultural interaction that takes place between these scenes. I would suggest that such an interpretation can be made of dance scenes in any particular locality. Dance culture is very much a culture that is understood, articulated and explored on an international level, and thus every scene is part of the international flow of information and music, yet at the same time, a scene such as the one in Sydney can be said to be less self-reliant and less self-sustaining than, for example, the dance scene in London, in that Sydney relies much more on the international traffic of DJs and music to give shape and definition to its dance scene, due to its relative marginality in the production of dance music. There is a definite sense, and acceptance on the part of DJs, that the Sydney scene is very much an imported version of dance culture in the UK, the US and Europe. Sydney DJ Trent Rackus explains how the scene in Sydney, "… is completely influenced by other territories. It's all because we don't have enough people producing music down here to create individual sounds. You don't hear of Australian trance or Australian garage or Australian breaks… there are Australian artists making breakbeat music, but it is music that's heavily influenced from other territories… anything that gets spat from a producer's studio from Australia, all the elements and the ingredients are imported from overseas." (Interview, 2004)

This lack of producers thus dictates that the scene relies heavily on imported music, although this has not constrained the growth of the scene in the city. For Sydney DJ Stephen Allkins, Sydney definitely has its own unique dance scene, and as he explains, the way the city was isolated from British and American dance scenes, at least during the initial stages of the development of dance music, actually served to enhance this uniqueness as the scene progressed and developed: "Every city in the world has a distinct scene. Even if I travelled from Sydney to Brisbane or Sydney to Melbourne, let alone to an international city, it's different, because every city in the world has a personality, and I don't think music is any different. Yes, definitely, Sydney has a personality, but so does London, and so does Paris, and they are not the same. As far as us adopting and all that sort of bullshit, we were… Infusion, Itch-E and Scratch-E, Robert Racic… we were doing stuff in the 1980s. We didn't wave flags, and just got on and did it, and it was incredibly ahead of its time. If you listen to early Itch-E and Scratch-E albums now, producers weren't doing it in England, they were still doing piano-based house, whereas in Australia, because we were so isolated, we didn't need references… Being kept in the 'back' doesn't mean that we're the poor cousin." (Interview, 2005)

Despite the unique features and characteristics of the dance scene in Sydney, it remains my argument that the concept of 'transnational' most adequately accommodates the exchange and flow of music, styles and fashions that occurs between different dance scenes around the world. Clearly there are certain distinguishing features of dance culture in Sydney, yet these features arise out of a fusion of local understandings and interpretations with global culture and ideologies. The current global pervasiveness of club culture makes it difficult to theorise scenes as bounded entities that have their own unique set of practices, and thus, the operational logics that underpin contemporary dance culture need to be analysed from an international perspective, rather than from the confines of a specific geographical context, in order to make apparent the global flows of dance music that tie together geographically disparate scenes into an internationally consumed and experienced culture. It is obvious from the increasing use of digital technology by DJs that the issues of time and distance can no longer be seen as influencing factors in the formation of differences and contrasts between scenes, and with this immediate global availability of dance music comes a sense that local scenes are perhaps becoming less unique and more homogenised.

Yet such a simplistic argument fails to take account not only of the complex, multi-directional flows of culture between countries that occur through migration and travel, but also of the way local scenes assimilate and interpret this culture in unique and specific ways. Tracing the historical development of the Sydney dance scene from gay culture, through rave culture, and on to club culture, it becomes apparent that, while the influence of British dance culture has played, and continues to play, a significant role in this development, it is through the work of DJs and promoters that the Sydney scene has taken on its own identity. While contemporary dance music culture is most certainly a global culture, it does not follow that it is consumed and experienced in a globally shared manner. The Sydney scene, and indeed Australian dance culture as a whole, has traditionally struggled with its apparent secondary position below the dance scenes of the UK, Europe and America, in part a result of its reliance on imported vinyl, and the lack of a sizeable and supportive dance music industry infrastructure. Dance music and DJs from the northern hemisphere still exert a certain influence over the Sydney scene, yet rather than impose on the scene a sense that it suffers from a degree of cultural imperialism, this influence would seem to be simply a part of the intrinsically global nature of contemporary dance culture. As such, with its preferences for specific sub-genres, its DJs, its media, and its clubs, all counterbalanced by international DJs, international music, and international club tours, the dance scene in Sydney would seem to be most accurately described through the concept of 'transnational'. Indeed, if we are to suggest that dance music transcends national boundaries and is truly international in its appeal, then 'transnational' describes not only the scene in Sydney, but also scenes elsewhere in the world.

NO MASTHEADS, NO VISUAL IDENTITIES:
20 ISSUES OF CYCLIC DEFROST

Cyclic Defrost actually began back in 1998 when a group of us (Luke Dearnley, Shane Roberts and Sebastian Chan) were running a Sydney weekly club night called Frigid. Dale Harrison and Seb had been mates at university and worked together on the university newspaper. Our regular flyer designer, Bernard de Broglio (Head Shots, Firehouse) had taken a break and three years into Frigid we decided that we'd do a survey of our punters. A survey meant producing a little photocopied booklet. Dale designed up a simple 4 pager and we collectively called it Cyclic Defrost - a riff on both Frigid, and the irregular series of island ambient parties we were doing at the time called Cryogenesis. Smuggling it through our the university photocopiers in large quantities, Cyclic Defrost was born.

We ended up producing 15 issues of the photocopy version through to February 2000. Each issue got fatter and fatter peaking at around 24 pages with a photocopy run of 700 copies. They worked very well as a flyer for Frigid for not only could they cover the lineups in more detail they featured a lot of writing from the punters who attended the club, reviews, recipes, humour, and think pieces - many of which were (and still are) hilarious. Dale did all the design and layout on a old Mac in his unit in Bronte. After 15 issues none of the core Frigid team was working close to high speed bulk photocopiers anymore so Cyclic Defrost was put on ice, even if Frigid as a club continued to its tenth anniversary in July 2006.

In early 2002 Seb was working with Marcus Westbury on the This Is Not Art and Sound Summit festivals when Marcus alerted him to the final year of an innovative Australia Council for the Arts grant scheme called 'New Audiences'. Marcus was thinking about putting in a bid to start up a non-profit street paper in Newcastle, and Seb and Dale decided to put in an application to restart Cyclic Defrost as a promotional strategy for Frigid and for electronic music in Sydney in general. Marcus never finished his application, but we did.

The new Cyclic Defrost was born in August 2002. We had promised, far too ambitiously, to deliver 6 issues in the first year - we managed 5. But now sporting a colour cover (full colour throughout the magazine didn't happen until issue 15), we invited designers who worked in electronic music to design up a cover for us. There were no real restrictions other than financial - no masthead, no visual identity to obey, no requirement to list the contents of the magazine on the cover, and no celebrity faces to feature.
Sebastian Chan

Here is an overview of our covers so far.

Issue 1 - Tom Phillipson, Dumphuck
Issue 2 - Steve Alexander, Rinzen
Issue 3 - Sopp Collective (first 1000 copies came in a custom 7"-style sleeve)
Issue 4 - Shehab Tariq (Curse ov Dialect/TZU)
Issue 5 - Alex Crowfoot (Ollo)
Issue 6 - Techa Noble (The Kingpins)
Issue 7 - Steven Scott (Telemetry Orchestra)
Issue 8 - Mark Gowing, Mark Gowing Design
Issue 9 - Macross Matrix
Issue 10 - Richard Byers, Superlight
Issue 11 - Sober (Lakelustre)
Issue 12 - Umeric
Issue 13/14 - Traianos Pakioufakis (Meupe) / James Hancock
Issue 15 - Bim Ricketson
Issue 16 - Michael C Place, Build
Issue 17 - Jeremy Dower
Issue 18 - Cailan Burns (Pretty Boy Crossover)
Issue 19 - Snawklor
Issue 20 - Lyndon Pike

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BY ALEXANDRA SAVVIDES

METTLE DETECTOR

IT'S A CRUNCHING, ALMOST HYPNOTIC AFFAIR CALLED 'METTLE' IN THE MIDDLE OF LEILA'S BLOOD, LOOMS AND BLOOMS THAT STICKS OUT ON FIRST LISTEN, AND ACROSS 55 ODD MINUTES OF UNDULATING BEATS THAT WEAVE IN AND OUT OF ONE SINGLE DEFINITION, IT'S THE ONE THAT IS THE ALBUM'S VORTEX.

You can imagine it's the sort of cut she might have dropped during her support slots for Björk's recent UK shows. Fans and journalists began to stream in their reports of the much-anticipated shows online. When it came to Leila though, many were confused: some newly won-over by her chaotic set, and others chose not to mention her altogether. It's the bottles thrown onstage and the booing from the audience that intrigues me most. Leila Arab is on the phone, her London accent laughing at this remark.

"That's only because I'd sworn at them!" she says with a chuckle. "But no no, what happened was that they didn't throw bottles, I mean, that's slightly exaggerated, but what was funny was I devised this strange DJing set that is really pretty fucking difficult, using CDs and records and effect units and the mixing desk, so the potential for noise is insane. I did this kind of freaky DJ thing. I mean, it is kinda difficult but it's funny - well I mean, I find it funny."

Not quite the "handbag house" that Leila thinks some Björk fans expect the songstress to listen to, then. "I'll play classical music then I'll play some fucking hardcore breakbeat then I'll suddenly play some Marcel Duchamp spoken word art dialogue. I mean, it's proper carnage." Another chuckle.

Blood, Looms and Blooms is not so much carnage as the product of a creative mind on overdrive; and on hearing the eclectic nature of her sets, the album takes on yet another dimension. In 'Molie,' there's the staccato beat pulsating along to melodic fuzz, in 'Young Ones' a piano and cello arrangement echo the classical throwbacks, cascading into a rapturous applause at the end. Things begin to sound different with each turn.

Opposing sounds compete for attention, but it's remarkably coherent. "For me an album is almost like one of those patchwork quilts... so, weirdly enough, there's patches, tracks I thought were really good, but I didn't put on the album because they didn't work within this particular quilt... I think this idea that, you know, you do a couple of singles and a shit album is fucking ridiculous. I think an album should be an album, and for me my biggest thrill is that everyone likes different tracks, nothing makes me happier than that."

A happiness that took a long while to resurface perhaps, as the transition from 2000's *Courtesy of Choice to Blood, Looms and Blooms* was an eight year gap in which she lost both of her parents. "I'm an Aquarian, so I do live in my head. In a way, the trauma of losing my parents has grounded me and connected me to the real world more than ever before. Because it was such a real thing, and so much of my life is in my head that it's not really real anyway. Which is probably why I make music, because you're making it up aren't you?"

It's the making it up that is pivotal - and it was a part of the album's creation as a whole, including the distinctive artwork surrounding the release. Michael England was the man responsible for bringing Leila's vision to life. "I basically made him move into my house for three months for us get it done. Poor man. He literally fucking aged! But I think it's worth it. I think art has the right to be fantastical, you know? And I've never done press shots before or anything... unless it's something to do with my work or my music, it's incredibly uncomfortable for me. I'm not asking to be liked, you know?"

"I knew what the album was called way before anything else, funnily enough. So when I found the artwork I explained to him what I wanted on the cover. Looms has two meanings, because obviously it means loom as in something that's hanging over you, but also when you bunch a load of equipment leads like phono leads together, they're also called looms. So the meaning for me is first of all, it was me losing my parents, obviously it has a big thing for me in the past few years - it's blood, so the blood you're born into and it hangs over you, and you have to bloom beyond that. And the other meaning is the things that mean a lot to me, as in my blood like my crew, looms like the electricity looms, and blooms, because I do have a little soft spot for plants. But you do shit like that when you're a hermit."

A hermit perhaps, but not so much as to stop her working with Björk across several albums and on many occasions as her live collaborator. There's a video that shows them working together on 'Enjoy' - "rubbish," as Leila puts it, but she's over that now. "I have 16, 20, 24 elements, and depending on how I arrange them the track can mean a different thing every night, so that's the way I tend to work with her. Every night it could sound different depending on whether I brought the beats in a lot or just kept it to a distorted organ... so what's exciting for her is that she knows the elements but she doesn't really know what mood I'm in and what configuration I've set them up in."

'Storm,' off Björk's soundtrack to Matthew Barney's film *Drawing Restraint 9* is more indicative of their live work together - "organised improvisation, organised chaos." It's a bit like the entirety of *Blood, Looms and Blooms*, except the latter has far more competing ideas clawing for attention, each crafted with the sort of care you could imagine her plants receive.

The album is no exception to the Leila rule of vocal collaborators, as on her previous releases. Terry Hall of The Specials and Martina Topley Bird of Tricky fame are the two that will be the most well known, but it's Luca Santucci and Roya Arab (Leila's sister) who threaten to steal the spotlight. The clanging of 'Mettle' begins to ring in my ears again - Andy Cox and Justin Percival on guitar making it feel like the sound of the here and now, as well as the yesterday and tomorrow.

Back in 1998 when Leila's first album *Like Weather* came out on Rephlex, many were quick to pigeonhole her multifaceted sound in with the trip-hop scene when in fact her influences and sound were far more diverse. "For me, where I'm kind of lucky - or some people might say unlucky - is I have no allegiance to any scene, clan, gang of artists or whatever... my allegiance is to each track, so for me each track should be honoured for what it wants to be. When I'm mixing, I work for noise. I am working for the sound, it's not an idea representing me or some shit like that. To me each track, you have to honour it as an individual thing.

"What shocked me when I made my first album... people were in one camp or the other. You either get an album with just shitloads of singing or just instrumentals, and I thought this was ridiculous. Why can't you have both, and both of them done seriously? So not just instrumentals as silly interludes, but both of them are convincing and have conviction, and they mean it."

We toy with the idea of short attention spans, and that's a part of the album, a part of why Leila likes live mixing so much. "You're totally just enthralled by noise, you bring up some effects and suddenly they'll do something you're not expecting and I have to respond in that instant. But that's why it can also go really wrong, because if I'm in a bad mood it's just a fucking disaster. Then again, it's worth the risk."

"I only started making music when I ran out of tracks that fitted the moods I was in, to be honest. When I was young, I played the piano and used to listen to records, but I was the kind of person, if I was playing the piano and someone walked in, I'd stop playing. I'm a very reluctant performer." She's a witty woman even if she is convinced her on-stage persona is more introvert than extrovert. "The mystery is all in the art - I'm not for sale. I try to be really generous with my work, because it's not like I'm not going to do any of the other shit that's involved - it's not my nature", she says, when I ask about this further.

One review of her recent solo live show was more intent on describing her (lack of) interaction with the audience. It even prompted Leila to write to the author in question, asking him to explain his reasons for concentrating on her attitude rather than the music she was making.

"People get shocked that I take these things personally - but it's fucking personal! When you get [reviewers] trying to be funny... it's like 'Are you a comedian?' I don't mind if people don't like what I do. The whole point is no one likes all my output, but when it's snide, then I take it personally. Either have the courage to be a stand-up or learn to write a review." Leila explains further. "I'm really quite busy while I'm performing... if you wanna see that, go see, I dunno, some Girls Aloud or some shit. To be fair, Girls Aloud aren't actually shit. But that's not what I do."

"For me it's really basic. When I've got something to say, I'll say it, and when I haven't, I'll just get on with my plants and mooching about at home."

Leila's *Blood, Looms and Blooms* is released through Warp/Inertia.

KEEPING IT PERSONAL

At the turn of the millennium, Yoni Wolf (aka Why?) was playing one of the key roles in reshaping perceptions about hip-hop's orientation in the cultural ether. As a crucial player in San Francisco Bay Area experimental clique Anticon, and more importantly, one third of iconoclastic rap ensemble cLOUDDEAD (along with Adam 'Doseone' Drucker and David 'Odd Nosdam' Madson), Wolf help put a hyper-intelligent, highly abstracted twist on a genre dominated by four-four beats and realist street story. But since going out on his own, Wolf's giddying lyrical traversals have found themselves framed by an increasingly melodic and candidly personal indie-rock couture. Stunningly detailed third album *Alopecia* seems to signal a shift or perhaps even a completion of Why?'s metamorphosis. Recorded in a professional studio with a full band, it is his darkest, but most fully realised record to date.

"Sucking dick for drink tickets at the free bar at my cousin's Bat Mitzvah," mumbles Yoni Wolf beneath the stark, guitar-strung break of 'Good Friday.' "Cutting the punch line and it ain't no joke."

There are very few places that that the man better known as Why? won't go on new album *Alopecia*.

"In Berlin I saw two men fuck in a dark corner of a basketball court," he croons on 'The Hollows.' "Just the slight jingle of pocket change pulsing."

Whether it's admitting to stalking a friend he has crush on, or getting horny by reading a lost love's handwriting, the bizarre brilliance of Wolf's art is its ability to wrangle both deadpan humour and strikingly evocative, intensely personalised vistas.

During an artistic passage that has spanned five albums – 2001's self-titled debut and 2004's *Ten* (with cLOUDDEAD), and 2003's *Oaklandazulasylum*, 2005's *Elephant Eyelash* and this year's *Alopecia* – and the best part of a decade, the 28-year-old has become a savant of the taboo. His patched-together lyrical snapshots deal in such internal, awkward daily happenstance and detail that they seem both immediately risqué and fundamentally, positively everyday. Indeed, if there's one particular sensibility that echoes throughout Wolf's work, it is casual, unabashed frankness, whatever the subject matter.

"Sending sexy SMSs to my ex's new man / because I can."

Wolf's conversation, too – tonight, dispersed amongst cell phone static in a tour van in Montana – resonates with such a charming sense of candour. He extends the warmest greetings; he offers rambling explanations on cue; his twangy accent gives away his Ohio roots. "So much of my writing is kind of using these snapshots," he says. "Just noticing things around me and feeling like I should remember them, you know."

"Like on 'The Hollows' – that whole bridge, about seeing those guys at the basketball court and about being duped in Berlin by the guy with the walnut shells and the marble - that whole set of scenes I wrote separately while I was in Berlin. I was just taking notes on my life and things that I felt were poignant, you know."

However rudimentary, the notion speaks volumes about the assimilation between Wolf's life and art. "It's a totally necessary thing," he says. "It's my way of sitting quietly and meditating in a way, you know; it's my form of meditation and sinking into my life and what I'm doing here."

"Whenever I achieve a small scrap of what I consider to be truth, on a very small level, that's what the writing is a documentation of. It's my inner life and my inner thoughts and, I don't know, my categorising of things and working things out. It's just me being present in this life, you know."

The present that Wolf lives today in the Bay Area is a world away from his upbringing in Cincinnati. Raised as part of the Messianic Jewish community, his childhood was steeped in religion. "Messianic Judaism, it has a tinge of a kind of charismatic feel," he says. "There's a lot of singing and dancing and clapping of the hands, and you know, some pretty eccentric – for most people – prayer techniques, like speaking in tongues and stuff like that."

"So we were around that kind of stuff a lot, but also, I feel like music was a real centrepiece to all that, at least for me and Josiah (Wolf's elder brother, who plays as part of Why?). We were really steered away from secular music and whatnot – secular anything really, you know, TV or anything else that could sort of infiltrate our brains – and guided towards the more religious alternatives to these things."

"We would watch like *Gospel Bill* or *Davey and Goliath* or whatever on the Christian network," he laughs. "And we'd listen to Petra and Stryper. At the time, when I was like nine or 10, hair metal was like the thing and these were the alternatives."

It wasn't until the Wolf boys' mid-teens that they started to forge their own secular identities. "I don't think I ever really liked that religious stuff, but I thought I did, you know. It wasn't really until I was about 14 or 15 that I decided that the religion stuff wasn't really for me. I mean, I had listened to some secular music before in dribs and drabs."

While the pair began playing in bands during the latter stages of high school, it was visual art that really piqued Yoni's interest, and with his family's full support he enrolled in the University of Cincinnati art program. "I mean, people assume that because you come from a religious background, you had a bit of a hard time, but both of our parents have always been pretty supportive of whatever us kids wanted to do. They were never the kind of parents who would be like, 'You've got to go to business school' or 'You've got to be a lawyer' or something," he laughs.

"SO MUCH OF MY WRITING IS KIND OF USING THESE SNAPSHOTS, JUST NOTICING THINGS AROUND ME AND FEELING LIKE I SHOULD REMEMBER THEM, YOU KNOW."

"We all did pretty well academically and kind of did what we wanted to do. I always had this very internal sense of wanting to do well or something."

It wasn't until sharing a subject with Adam Drucker (aka Doseone) – a then voracious battle-rapper – that Wolf found himself drawn back towards music and into an underground clique that would go onto to become the Anticon collective. After forming Greenthink with Drucker in 1999, they went onto establish the critically lauded cLOUDDEAD ensemble with fellow visual artist David Madson later that same year, relocating from the Midwest to the Bay Area.

Over five years and two albums, the group went onto to become the signpost artists for experimental hip-hop's new wave. Whether it was Wolf and Drucker's angular lyrical abstractions, or Madson's artefact-riddled ambience and low-bit-rate sonic crunch, cLOUDDEAD were making music that fore ran anything of its ilk. After stunning the underground with their self-titled debut, the group's second and (what would turn out to be) final opus *Ten* saw them at the height of their powers. Pendulum-like cuts such as 'Pop Song,' 'Dead Dogs Two' and 'The Teen Keen Skip' were wildly offset by ambient noise explosions like 'Son of a Gun' and the Boards of Canada collaboration '3 Twenty.' The drone-drawled intensity of 'Rifle Eyes' still stands up as one of the memorable cuts to come out of the mid-00s.

But while their cultural currency was higher than ever, the group's three players were already in the grips of an irreparable creative schism. With a debut solo album already under his arm, 2003's *Oaklandazulasylum*, Wolf walked away.

Few solid details have emerged about the split, and while Wolf is relatively equivocal on the matter during our dialogue – instead choosing to discuss the change and development of his lyrical direction when the topic is broached – he chose to speak about it at more length in a 2005 interview with US website PopMatters. According to Wolf, the group's differences were of both a personal and artistic bent.

"We were all kind of not getting along," he said. "There was some tension underneath, and on the surface too sometimes. I mean, I get along with the two guys now; I don't know that they get along too well. I made the decision in Sweden – I was in Stockholm, and I called Mush Records and I told them we weren't gonna tour. I know we could have blown up if we would have gone on tour, but would I have been happy? You can't think of success in terms of popularity. You've just got to follow your arrow toward the target."

"I don't like to use the word abstract," he continued, "but that stuff was a little more removed from the reality of our lives… Adam and I were kind of playing with each other, which was fun, but it's wasn't exorcising demons in me. I couldn't stand on the stage and sing that stuff and feel it every night."

You didn't need any more evidence of Wolf's directional shift than Why?'s 2005 'solo' follow-up *Elephant Eyelash*. Drawing on players such as Josiah, Doug McDiarmid and Matt Meldon, the record saw the younger Wolf ply a swathe of highly-confessional lyrical meanderings to a tapestry of bedroom-cut, psyche-inflected indie-rock tropes, becoming one of the most talked about and widely celebrated crossover records that year.

"IT WAS QUITE A DIFFERENT EXPERIENCE AND I WONDERED IF WHAT WE WERE GETTING WAS TOO TYPICAL-SOUNDING OR NOT UNIQUE ENOUGH OR SOMETHING."

But, according to Wolf, *Alopecia* – which features Fog's Adam Broder and Mark Erickson in the place of Matt Meldon – represented a much larger step. "*Elephant Eyelash* was essentially recorded just like the stuff that I used to do by myself, just with more people involved," he explains. "I was still recording it in my bedroom and what not, and just bringing guys in to record the parts and stuff, but still doing it one layer at a time. But this time, on *Alopecia*, it was all recorded in a studio and pretty much all at once."

"I made demos for every song and then we learned the songs in a rehearsal situation, then we went in and tracked it. So it's definitely more of a band record."

For someone used to recording in a domestic setting, working in a studio wasn't always a necessarily comfortable experience. "To tell you the truth, it scared me," he says. "It was quite a different experience and I wondered if what we were getting was too typical-sounding or not unique enough or something."

He worried that the artefacts and happenstance that recording on imperfect home equipment had garnered in the past might be lost to a more generic studio sound. "When you're doing it in your bedroom you can do all these things to make each sound come across okay, like, recording through a bunch of different devices because you can't get the right cable to work and it gives you some weird sound."

"Whereas in this case everything was perfect and it was the best, you know, top-of-the-line equipment you could ever use, and I just didn't know if what we were getting was right. It really only came together in my mind in the mixing process. I just suddenly realised that what we had was great and it was working really well. We recorded 20 songs in that studio in Minneapolis, and once we plucked out the songs that were right and sat together well, the album started to shape up and I started to realise that we did actually have a good album on our hands."

He's right. Over 14 tracks, *Alopecia* glows with a much fuller, more melodic and layered sonic palette, shimmering with angular guitars, dense tiers of keys and droned ambience, stark drums and skittering electronic percussion. But it's Wolf's ever-maturing poetics that really set this record apart.

There's a darker personal dynamic to the record. Where *Elephant Eyelash* spent much of its time revisiting the fragments of a fading relationship, *Alopecia* deals with wider ideas of self and mortality. "I think it has the sense of a rebirth or of tearing oneself down to the absolute bare, like bare skin, a blank canvas or whatever," he says. "I would say that this is a lot more of a lonesome record. This is about being alone, whereas *Elephant Eyelash* was about trying to maintain or salvage some sense of connectedness. This album is an acceptance of disconnection in a way."

It results in a poignant, often foreboding feel. "Never in the night, when the knot grows tighter than fingers can untie," he raps on the stunningly ominous 'Gnashville.' "And all the last half-dammed rivers have gone dry." Where on final track 'Exegesis,' Wolf speaks of being "hung hight from a telephone wire / with no poor boy's pile of books underfoot… to lessen the pressure of the phone cord choking my neck."

But while Wolf is willing to admit to admit to the record's disquiet, he's quick to put it in context. "Sure, I think it's darker but I think it's funnier too," he says. "I mean, it's definitely darker and, in a way, more hopeless or something like that. But it doesn't take itself as seriously as *Elephant Eyelash* did."

"Like, with 'Exegesis,' if you really listen to that song, in a way it tells you to disregard everything I've said on the whole record. It says 'If I really meant it…' and I haven't hung myself high from a telephone wire."

He has a point. The record's darkness is tempered by humoristic undertones at nearly every turn. "I sleep on my back 'cause it's good for the spine," he sings on 'Fatalist Palmistry,' "and coffin rehearsal."

"I mean, on *Alopecia*, I feel that I'm kind of using my life as a starting point and going from there," he says. "In the past I was perhaps a little more documentary-like.

"I've got a little more into the craft of song writing. Even if I'm not writing directly about my life – maybe it'll be a metaphor for something I'm going through or maybe just some fantasy that I had or whatever – but you know, it does relate to me on a personal level."

Indeed, as Wolf admits, sometimes there's no denying his songs' referential foundations. "People do tend to notice when something's about them," he laughs, "I've had a couple of negative reactions, but most of the time it's pretty positive, even when I'm worried about something or how somebody's going to react."

"For instance, with song 12 on *Alopecia* ('Simeon's Dilemma,' the song about the stalker guy), I gave the record to the girl who that song is pretty much about – the person I wrote it for – and I was really worried about what she would think about that one. But she listened to the record and called me and was like, 'Yoni, you've done it again. This is a beautiful record, especially song 12," he laughs. "Man, that was a relief."

"And you know, on *Elephant Eyelash* there's a song about my dad and I was really worried about how he would feel about that. But he's all proud of it, you know."

"Whenever we play a live show and he's there, he's like, 'Play the one about me, play the one about me!'," he laughs. "It's pretty cool. I don't have any ill intentions about these songs, even if they seem dark or dramatic or violent in a way. I think people realise I'm a good-intentioned person."

Alopecia is out through Anticon/Stomp

STRINGS OF LIFE: FROM PROG ROCK TO CHAMBER ELECTRONIC

CLASSICAL MUSIC IS AS SELF-CONTAINED AND SELF-SUSTAINING A GENRE AS ONE COULD IMAGINE, AN OMNIPRESENT SONIC REALM THAT HARDLY NEEDS TO EXTEND ITS GAZE BEYOND ITSELF FOR LIFE-SUPPORT. In spite of that, its influence has seeped into multiple strands of contemporary music-making, and nowhere is that more evident than in the chamber-electronic field, and the works of Slow Six, Sylvain Chauveau, Max Richter and Mico Nonet. But how did this recent development come about? Certainly the evolution of prog-rock had something to do with it (even if indirectly), so any appreciation of this new trend must contend with prog's rise and fall during the 1970s, and its subsequent banishment to the hinterlands, and resurrection in the post-rock and chamber-electronic genres.

Because classical's influence has been so pervasive and widespread, any hope of cataloguing its impact upon other genres, in one article, is doomed from the outset; the road is dotted with so much detail and so many artists, only something book-length could do the topic justice. Consequently, though its influence has been felt in jazz, for example, with Duke Ellington nudging his music in that direction with *Black, Brown and Beige*, Miles's *Sketches of Spain* featuring the trumpeter's rendition of the Adagio from Joaquín Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez*, and full-fledged forays into the classical repertoire by Wynton Marsalis (*Hummel, Haydn, Mozart: Trumpet Concertos* is one example) and Keith Jarrett (Bach's *Goldberg Variations* and Shostakovich's *24 Preludes And Fugues* are just two of many), this article will limit its focus to the connections between classical music and the prog, classical-rock, and electronic music idioms. The humble goal, then, is to offer a personalised history borne out of a sometimes immersive and sometimes tangential involvement with the genres, with the understanding duly recognised that every listener with a comparable background would compose a different 'history.'

Regardless, right away we're tripped up by nomenclature and the degree to which terms overlap or diverge. Though classical-rock and prog aren't necessarily synonymous - a band's style could be classified as the former minus stereotypical characteristics of the latter (fantasy-based lyrics, 20-minute song lengths and so on) - the two terms are often used interchangeably and to keep things simple we'll continue the practice here. Having that laid to rest, is there another word in the contemporary music lexicon more tainted than prog? One utters the four-letter word at considerable risk to one's critical reputation (and social standing) despite the seemingly ineradicable form's tendency to perennially re-surface.

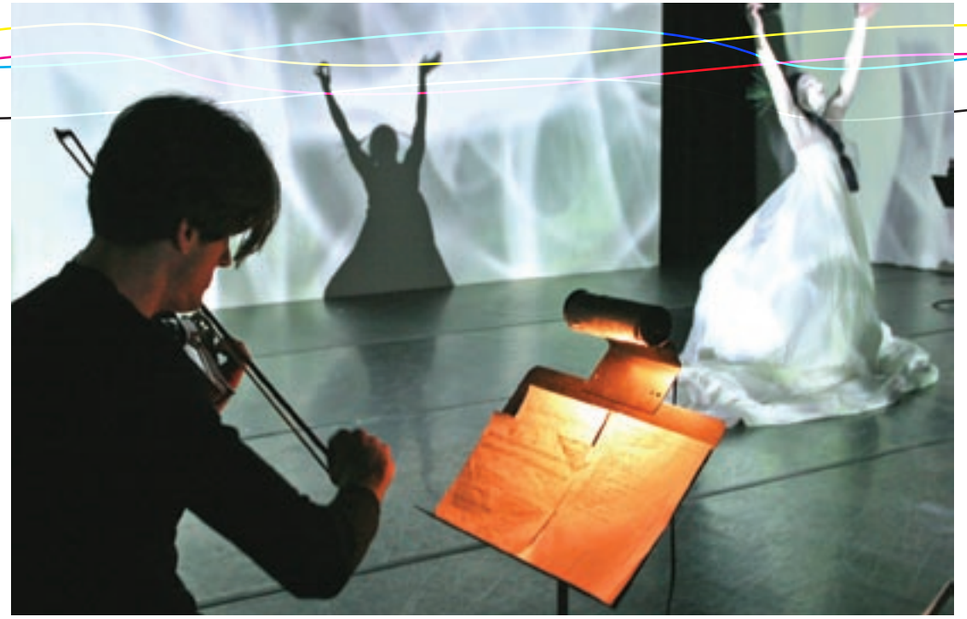
Classical and rock have always been uneasy bedfellows. For decades, classical's influence has emerged within its more popular counterpart in myriad ways: sometimes it's the inevitable result of a musician's classical training threading its way into the material's compositional form, sometimes it's a consequence of the artist's lofty aspirations borne out of a desire to give the music in question greater artistic credibility, the implication being that the one form is more lasting and profound - more important, put simply - than the other.

The pairing of classical and electronic music, on the other hand, seems a more natural fit. The embrace of electronics by Karlheinz Stockhausen and Philip Glass, and incorporation into their works helped electronics gain legitimacy within 'higher' musical circles, and today's classical composers use digital tools and methods when performing and composing as a matter of course. In short, the lines separating the genres have never been less clearly drawn than they are today, and occasionally collapse altogether, Glass's orchestrated versions of Bowie's *Low* and *Heroes* are two examples, and the earlier John Cale & Terry Riley collaboration, *The Church of Anthrax*, is another. But before looking at chamber-electronic music in its current incarnation, we must consider the circuitous trajectory that led up to it.

I was, like many, a card-carrying member of the prog fraternity, and squeezed into my ever-expanding collection albums by The Moody Blues, Pink Floyd, Genesis, Jethro Tull, Yes, King Crimson, Caravan, Renaissance, Gentle Giant, and Emerson, Lake, and Palmer (ELP). Supplementing those predominantly UK artists' albums were recordings from Holland (Focus, Ekseption), Germany (Triumvirat), France (Gong), Italy (PFM), and the US (Utopia). A true fanatic, I longed for news about the latest Yes tour and Genesis release, and not only devoured *Yessongs* and made that *Journey to the Center of the Earth* but was the proud owner of Chris Squire's *Fish Out of Water*, Patrick Moraz's *Story of I*, and - yes, I confess - volumes one *and* two of ELP's *Works*. Not satisfied with the three-album colossus *Welcome Back My Friends To the Show That Never Ends* (truer words never spoken), I hunted down whatever Triumvirat albums I could find, and when *Photos of Ghosts* by PFM (Premiata Forneria Marconi) made its way to Western shores in 1973, my young legs couldn't carry me fast enough to the local shop, money in hand and a helpless look in my eyes. But that's all ancient history and whatever serious connection I had to the genre faded long ago - depending, that is, on how one defines prog. Let's first enumerate some of the key characteristics that define the genre.

For starters, prog artists, aspiring to transcend the limitations of the verse-chorus structures of the standard pop song, struck out for more ambitious territory, the presumption being that accomplishing said goal would provide a more transformative experience for both artist and listener. The prototypical composition was episodic, long, instrumental, often one part of a larger conceptual whole; prog devotees salivated at the prospect of suite-styled opuses that occupy 20-minute album sides. Bored by prosaic, real-world topics, prog lyricists gorged themselves on Tolkien-like fantasy, mythology, and ancient folk-lore - Renaissance even devoting an entire album side to Scheherazade - to invest their lyrics with 'literary' quality - the lyrics of ELP's 'Jerusalem' by William Blake and Gentle Giant's 'Knots' inspired by the writings of R.D. Laing, are two instances of many.

Not content with rock's traditional guitar-bass-drums set-up, prog bands exploited their music's orchestral and sonorous potential by incorporating woodwinds (Ian Anderson's flute), strings (David Cross's viola), and - most fundamental to the genre - electronic keyboards, especially synthesizers, of which the Moog became the one most emblematic, with the Mellotron not far behind (Keith Emerson for the former and *Starless and Bible Black*-era King Crimson the latter). Nothing as straightforward as 4/4 could hold the prog virtuoso's interest for long, and the more unusual the time signature - 15/8, 9/4 - the better. There was often an elaborate visual dimension too: the monstrous Slipperman costume Peter Gabriel donned during *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* show exemplifies the kind of theatrics for which prog bands became famous, and it's impossible to mention stage visuals and not think of Pink Floyd's floating pig (*Animals*). Sometimes groups literally incorporated classical elements into their music, Procol Harum's 'A Whiter Shade of Pale' with its Bach-inspired organ melody a familiar case, Ekseption's treatments of Beethoven's 'Fifth' and Khachaturian's 'Sabre Dance' less well-known.



"ANYONE IN A RICH COUNTRY CAN OWN EQUIPMENT THAT IS MAYBE 50 TIMES MORE POWERFUL THAN WHAT BRIAN ENO HAD IN 1980."

Though *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* is oft cited as a critical moment in prog's evolution, The Beatles had already moved into progressive territory with *Revolver*'s 'Tomorrow Never Knows' and by incorporating Eastern influences into their music, though, of course, the pairing of McCartney's vocal with strings in 'Yesterday' preceded those developments too. Obviously 'Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds,' 'Strawberry Fields Forever,' and 'A Day in the Life' exerted a profound influence on The Beatles' contemporaries and the next wave of progressive rock artists. Brian Wilson famously moved on from writing three-minute odes to surfer girls to composing *Pet Sounds*' and *Smile*'s mini-symphonies, and The Who's 'rock operas' *Tommy* and *Quadrophenia* were light years removed - at least in terms of ambition - from 'I Can't Explain.' That Pink Floyd issued its own two-disc opus *The Wall* doesn't seem as much of a leap, considering that the group had already indulged in long-form pieces on *Ummugumma* and *Meddle*.

And so it was that ELP devoted an entire album to Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, covered Alberto Ginastera on *Brain Salad Surgery* ('Toccata'), and - courting the tsunami of critical disdain sure to come - issued *Works Volume 1*, a two-album collection of solo pieces (and one group side), among them a piano concerto by Keith Emerson and a Prokofiev cover ('The Enemy God Dances With The Black Spirits' from *The Scythian Suite*) by Carl Palmer. Dutch group Focus stumbled in giving an otherwise decent album (and the side-long suite therein) the regrettable title *Hamburger Concerto*, and, after garnering justifiable acclaim for *Fragile* and *Close to the Edge*, Yes plunged into (the less charitable would say drowned in) four side-long *Tales from Topographic Oceans*. In similar manner, Jethro Tull decided that *Aqualung*'s concise song structures no longer suited its needs and turned to the 45 minute epics *Thick as a Brick* and *Passion Play*.

And what of the music itself? Often bloated, overly-complex, structurally unwieldy, and melodically wanting, these groups' ambitious efforts more often than not ended up impressing far less than their level-headed earlier efforts. Interestingly, Yes and Jethro Tull realised a nadir of sorts had been reached with *Tales from Topographic Oceans* and *Passion Play* and gradually retreated from such grandiosity for a comparatively modest song-based format, in Yes's case *Going for the One* (though not without first releasing *Relayer* and its side-long 'The Gates of Delirium') and in Tull's *War Child*. Prog can even be blamed for pulling Todd Rundgren away from producing pop classics like 'It Wouldn't Have Made Any Difference' and 'I Saw the Light' to fashion 'A Treatise on Cosmic Fire' (whose 36 minutes holds side two of *Initiation* hostage) and the indulgent musings of Utopia.

Unfortunately the sour aftertaste of those missteps tends to prompt a hyperbolic dismissal of the genre as a whole, which overlooks the fact that a fair number of great recordings were released that still hold up today. Critics winced when David Hemmings helmed the narrator's chair in Rick Wakeman's *Journey to the Center of the Earth* and groaned at the ice-production extravagance of *The Myths and Legends of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table*. But one shouldn't forget that Wakeman's earlier *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* features a credible set of shorter keyboard compositions. When Renaissance followed the enchanting *Turn of the Cards* with *Scheherazade and Other Stories* and its side-long titular epic, fans might have braced themselves for the worst, but in fact the more ambitious album offered just as many musical pleasures as its predecessor. To a large degree, the prog albums that hold up best are those where rawness remains a key factor - King Crimson's *Red*, *Starless and Bible Black*, and *The Great Deceiver* (the definitive in-concert document of the Cross-Wetton-Fripp-Bruford incarnation) come to mind, as does *Close to the Edge* ('I Get Up I Get Down,' the title piece's third part, still sounds lovely). Crimson's 'Fracture' is as monumental today as it was in 1972, as is 'Red' whose metallic roar could pass as a blueprint for any number of instrumental metal outfits.

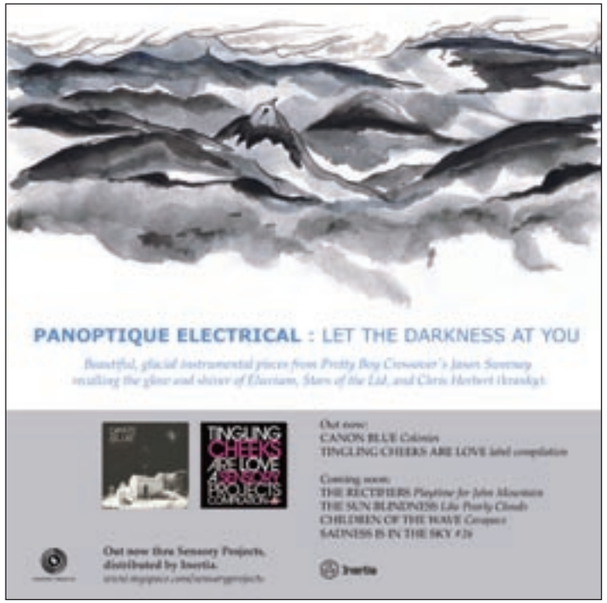
By the mid-'70s, the artists' penchant for overkill coupled with the rise of punk sounded prog's rapid demise. Some bands abandoned ship before the hammer fell: following Peter Gabriel's departure, *The Trick of the Tail* found Genesis reincarnated as a song-based act, and, with guitarist Trevor Rabin on board, Yes scored a hit single in 1983 with *90125*'s 'Owner of a Lonely Heart.' Though regularly derided and ridiculed, prog remains as difficult to exterminate as a cockroach, and current bands like The Mars Volta and Tool have openly acknowledged its influence (the latter even had King Crimson open for the band on a 2001 tour).

So when did the resurrection occur and how did it come about? Though there may be others, two watershed moments in particular helped make prog acceptable again, even if no one dared utter the word itself: the 1997 LP release of *F#A#∞* (the CD version followed a year later) by Godspeed You! Black Emperor (known at that time as Godspeed You Black Emperor!) and the 1996 release of Tortoise's *Millions Now Living Will Never Die* and in particular its side-long, 20-minute 'Djed.' Post-rock enabled prog to surreptitiously re-surface minus the baggage that had accumulated during a quarter-century of existence.

Godspeed You! Black Emperor would likely spurn any association with the prog label, and post-rock too for that matter. Categorised more safely as instrumental rock, the Quebec collective - in essence, a neo-chamber group featuring string players alongside the conventional set-up of bass, drums, and guitars - created long-form, multi-movement suites of immense dynamic range, and the release of 2000's *Lift Your Skinny Fists Like Antennas to Heaven* (also known as *Levez Vos Skinny Fists Comme Antennas to Heaven*) - each of its four sides a 20-minute composition - only makes the association with prog all the harder to deny. Certain things about the group allowed it to disassociate itself from pretentious prog outfits of years past: Godspeed rejected the fantastical or ethereal and instead oriented itself around relevant real-world issues such as poverty, politics, and corporate greed. The group reinvigorated the genre by stripping away the classical pretense, contrivance, and complexity-for-complexity's-sake ethos and grounded its music in an emotional rawness that felt honest and natural (currently inactive, the band has been on hiatus since 2003).

It's important to note that, though today's chamber-electronic artists aren't necessarily stylistic descendants of Godspeed and Tortoise, such groups wiped the progressive slate clean, so to speak, and helped reconfigure the mindsets of artists, critics and listeners so that the simple idea of ambitious music-making (of the kind currently practised by chamber-electronic artists) could be regarded once again as palatable. Max Richter makes a similar point in his own comment: "The flowering of post-rock in the '80s and '90s led to a 'classical' interest in timbre and structure while at the same time 'classical' musicians were looking to the visceral dynamics of these bands." Asked whether prog's classical-rock fusion seems like a less natural fit compared to today's classical-electronic model, Richter agrees: "The music of that time was really not about a concentrated vision of its content, which is what I try to do, but rather about building large and imposing structures with borrowed materials, which somehow never fitted properly. Think of, say, Rick Wakeman's *Six Wives of Henry the VIII* or Deep Purple's *Concerto for Group and Orchestra*; it just seems a little weird really."

Though he concedes that prog was never a part of his background ("I have listened to only one or two King Crimson records"), Sylvain Chauveau, on the other hand, sees little connection between '70s prog and today's chamber-electronic music: "It sounds to me like prog was about changing rhythms and chords every minute, while the new 'classical' - I hate this word - is much more about stasis and quietness." His aversion to the label has merit; after all, not all of the music we might call chamber-electronic fits the label, including some of his own. His recent *Nuage*, for example, which features 19 romantic miniatures performed by a small



ensemble of viola, violin, piano and electric guitar, is certainly chamber-like but there's nary an electronic sound heard throughout the collection.

Christopher Tignor, the leader of the Brooklyn-based chamber outfit Slow Six, echoes Chauveau's sentiments: "Prog is really a dirty word for those of us in my segment of the generation. My values really come from the lineage of punk rock which arrived to kick dirt at the pretensions of prog and glam metal, arena rock and so on. The electronics used in prog - which in my understanding were basically just different kinds of synthesizers used to make showy intergalactic-type sounds - seem very effective in expressing what the music seems to be about. It's the aesthetic goals themselves that rub so many of us the wrong way."

Concurrent with the rise of Tortoise and Godspeed were equally ambitious outfits such as Mogwai, Explosions In The Sky and Mono, while exciting changes also occurred in the classical field with the emergence of Michael Torke, Steve Martland, Graham Fitkin and Mark-Antony Turnage. Certain classical composers had long embraced the idea of fusing traditional orchestral instrumentation with electronics: Messiaen's incorporation of *ondes martinot* into his *Turangalila Symphony* was a critical move, and Glass's *Einstein On the Beach*, Ingram Marshall's *Fog Tropes* and Steve Reich's *Different Trains* must be acknowledged as key moments in their deployment of electronics and sampling.

Which brings us to today's chamber-electronic artists and their highly individual approaches to the fusing of classical and electronic forms. In one corner, there's the influential Gas, which finds Wolfgang Voigt combining amorphous orchestral samples and muffled techno beats, smothering them in gauze, and then letting them unspool in grandiose 10-minute doses to work their magic on the spellbound listener. In another, there's Cécile Schott's Colleen project which has moved from a sample-based approach (*Everyone Alive Wants Answers*) to one intent on exploring the sonorous potential of acoustic instruments (music boxes on *Colleen et les boîtes à musique* EP and viola da gamba, spinet, clarinet, and acoustic guitar on *Les ondes silencieuses)*. Schott's recent material sounds more natural than ever before, with whatever electronic enhancements deployed in its construction verging on inaudible (Schott has described her music as "minimal acoustic"). Similarly, while computer technology may have contributed to the assembly of Richter's *The Blue Notebooks*, its exquisite material, reminiscent at times of the music of Arvo Pärt and Michael Nyman, is performed by Richter on piano accompanied by five string players and Tilda Swinton's reading of Kafka and Milosz texts. Richter's subsequent *Songs From Before* largely perpetuates the elegiac style and overall approach of its predecessor, though this time Robert Wyatt recites passages by Haruki Murakami and the electronic dimension is more noticeable in the sound design. More conspicuously

"I FIND THE PROCESS BOTH EXHILARATING AND CATHARTIC."

electronic in style is Fernando Corona's Murcof material, which merges classical samples with minimal tech-house rhythms and subtle electronic treatments. The tracks on his debut album, 2002's *Martes,* draw on the works of Arvo Pärt, Henryck Górecki and Giya Kancheli, while its follow-up *Remembranza* weaves traditional sounds of piano, harp, and strings recorded especially for the album into funereal settings. Others producing work of note in the chamber-electronic field include Marsen Jules (*Herbstlaub*, *Les Fleurs*) and Eluvium (*Copia*), but, in truth, the number of artists is large and ever-growing.

Each contemporary chamber-electronic practitioner offers a decidedly different take on the genre and its development. Mico Nonet, merges electronics with strings, French horn, and oboe, and offers a quietly intoxicating ambient-classical fusion on *The Marmalade Balloon*. The group's leader, synthesizer player and producer Joshua Lee Kramer, describes the genre as "a mash-up and mash-apart that flowed from many sources: late '60s and '70s music that's equal parts ambient, classical minimalist, rock and film soundtrack, and '90s music that's both post-rock and electronic." Richter mentions "the increasing availability of music via file sharing" as one reason for the development, but cites the computer's rise as the most important. "Once the sounds are in the machine, they're all available for re-configuration in exactly the same way," he says, "so all sorts of music have become 'available' as raw material for new work, including 'classical' music." (Richter's subsequent comment "I'm using all these inverted commas because I regard these genre terms as really obsolete!" is in itself telling as it acknowledges the degree to which the boundaries between categories once regarded as distinct have evaporated.)

Reinforcing Richter's observations, Chauveau says, "I see two reasons for this upsurge: one technical, one cultural. The technical is the incredible development of computers, which, since the '90s, has granted users access to a huge range of instrument sounds and programming software at home for a cheap price. Now, anyone in a rich country can own equipment that is maybe 50 times more powerful than what Brian Eno had in 1980. The cultural reason," he continues, "is that the second half of the '90s witnessed the triumph of pure electronic music and an eclipse of electric and acoustic instruments. In experimental music, all of the exciting things came out of electronica - Pan Sonic, Fennesz, Oval, Scanner, Pita, Ikeda, Autechre, Aphex Twin - but the beauty of abstraction has limits and, as I expected it would, the need for 'real' instruments returned in the 2000s after several years of banishment. Neo-classical electronic music emerged as a way to challenge the tyranny of the beat, and to bring back a sense of melody in the abstract sounds of the experimental scene."

Clearly the computer's liberating impact is instantiated by the compositional approach used to produce the songs on *The Marmalade Balloon*. ("I'm not classically trained," Kramer admits, "so in Mico Nonet you have the interaction of one self-taught indie musician improvising with orchestra musicians.") The process involved having the four orchestral players (violist Carrie Dennis, cellist Efe Baltacigil, French horn player Paul Lafollette and oboist Katherine Needleman) individually improvise over a long synth track Kramer created for a given piece and also over whatever other orchestral parts he'd already edited, a process that allowed him to "chop things up and slide them around," he says. "So the process was derived from electronic recording and production techniques, and not through traditional classical composing methodology."

Richter cites minimal and post-minimal composers (on a spectrum from Glass to Pärt) as key artists influencing the development of the chamber-electronic genre, while Kramer lists Erik Satie, Otto Luening and Vladimir Ussachevsky (1960's *Concerted Piece for Tape Recorder and Orchestra*), John Pfeiffer (the track 'Reflection of a String' on the 1968 album *Electronomusic-9 Images*), Morton Subotnick (his 'ghost score' technique), Cluster, Eno, Harold Budd and Pärt. Tignor credits the amplified energy of minimalists Young, Glass and Conrad and also stresses the impact of experimental rock musicians like Tortoise and Aerial M. Though he acknowledges the influence of Gorecki, Giya and Pärt on the chamber-electronic scene, Chauveau gives one group in particular its due: "Rachel's are the forgotten heroes. When they appeared, playing their classical compositions in rock venues in the mid-'90s, it was like nineteenth-century music that seemed brand new because it was played with a modern sensibility, mixed with a post-rock touch and presented to a younger audience."

In fact, Rachel's *Music for Egon Schiele* proved to be more than just a revelatory listen for Chauveau. "At the time, I was trying to devise strategies to get out of the rock idiom," he says, "and this record gave me the courage to use piano, viola, and cello which I did a few months later and for the next 10 years. With Rachel's, for the first time, I could hear an American band imitating French music. And so I decided: I would no longer follow English and American music but take inspiration from my own country's composers and learn from the past: goodbye indie-rock! Hello Debussy, Satie, Ravel, and Fauré!"

"I'M INTERESTED IN NOT JUST WHAT SOUND IS BUT WHAT SOUND DOES."

Of all the outfits operating today, Slow Six offers one of the most successfully-realised integrations of classical and electronic music; certainly its polished full-lengths *Private Times in Public Places* and the slightly harder-edged *Nor'easter attest to the group's seamless melding of the forms.* Tignor and company generally eschew the systems-based repetitiveness one finds in some minimalism works for a more organic style that emphasises lyricism. Strings alternately serenade the listener and agitatedly swoop heavenward, all the while augmented by electric guitar, keyboards and subtle electronic textures. Occasional echoes of Debussy, Bartok and Schoenberg may resonate within the group's material but the end result sounds like Slow Six alone.

Tignor's perspective on the classical-electronic topic proves both informed and insightful. After acknowledging that electronics and classical music have been bedfellows for the better part of the twentieth century (Edgard Varese cited as a representative example), he emphasises working with electronics often means working in a way that's different from creating a classical score. "Either the expressive nature of the sound falls outside the black-and-white pitch and rhythm layout of this device (for example, filter-sweeps) or the electronics are too unpredictable or aleatoric to have much performance control (for example, most interactive music)," he says. "I can't stress strongly enough that the difficult fit here has always been the cult(ure) surrounding the classical score object. All that Western classical composers have learned and what they hope to offer is found in the score. That's the promise they've been given and, obviously, those elements that don't lend themselves to this mechanism threaten that promise.

"It's not a matter of electronics playing a role in art-music, it's really a matter of how they're being used and why they're being embraced more now, which I think are related topics. Basically, there is a shift in values happening. For the first time, I think the assumption that art-music is somehow qualitatively better than popular music is getting worn out. It doesn't make much sense for the popular music you love to not play an active role in your creational process. Popular musicians are not bound to the score mentality. They're used to dealing with sound first and foremost and are not trapped within a maze of modernist ideas either. They're pragmatists who are more often letting their ears and not rhetoric inform how they work."

Slow Six's distinctive fusing of genres developed naturally too. "I'm really an interloper in this classical tradition," Tignor says. "As a young lad, the only way I understood how to make original music was to form a band and start playing shows. I think this is true of most musicians that haven't been exposed to the culture of classical professionalism that music school provides - that is, making scores to hand off to paid professionals. When I discovered what you could do with interactive electronics while messing around on my own at school, my first instinct was to form a band where I could do that live and make that my instrument in a meaningful way. But along with that came envisioning the music and composition arrived as a necessity to realise the detailed vision of these songs.

"When most other composers add electronic elements into their instrumental work it often feels like an addendum to me, as if mixed in after the fact—a kind of window dressing for colour. All the sounds in my own work are created live, whether through instrumental playing or live reprocessing of the sound, and I eschew the use of pre-recorded samples and believe wholeheartedly in the power of the live moment and instrumentalism as an ideology. The classical world's use of live electronics is really still in its infancy," he concludes, "and things will no doubt become more interesting as composers get more experience working with acoustic and electronic elements naturally. It's only in the classical world that people seem so hyper-sensitive about these 'cross-cultural' issues. Everyone else is excited to make music wherever they can find it without feeling the need to constantly be double-checking their musical sources."

DAVE NEWMAN

BY KATE CARR

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

DAVID NEWMAN IS CARVING OUT A ROLE FOR HIMSELF IN A NICHE WHERE LESS IS DECIDEDLY MORE.

He founded the well regarded Audiobulb label, and recently released work on North American minimalist powerhouse 12k. It should come as little surprise that Newman, a clinical psychologist by day, chose the name Autistici to reference his obsessive interest in sound.

"I work with people who have learning disabilities who require support due to issues of mental health, risk or challenging behaviour," says Newman.

Through his work, Newman says, he has come into contact with many sufferers of autism spectrum disorder**, a condition that** inspired him to take the name Autistici.

"**Theirs is a unique life view that should be** valued," he says.

"**It… challenges us to stop, re-evaluate, and** come to terms with the fact that people can experience the same world very differently."

According to Newman, his obsessive interest in sound mirrors some aspects of the disorder.

"**Akin to someone who has ASD, I have my** own disorders including a hypersensitivity to noise and an intense special interest in the interplay between sound and silence.

"**Perhaps the name Autistici embodies my own 'disorder' and** the channel I have developed for its expression."

Long fascinated by background sounds and the limits of perception, Newman's 12k album *Volume Objects* is a study in controlled expression, with tracks like 'Heated Dust On Sunlit Window' and 'Broken Guitar Discarded Violin' presenting an undulating meditation on silence, perception and the listening environment.

"**I am fascinated by the fact that the same sound can bring** confusion to one person and clarity to another," Newman explains, noting that the way sounds act on the listener is one of his primary interests.

"**I'm interested in not just what sound is but what sound** does," he says.

"**For me, sound has the power to provoke strong internal** states such as wonderment, anxiety, joy or peacefulness.

"**I guess I enjoy evoking and playing with these states.**"

The album, which has been well received by critics, came out of a show 12k boss Richard Chartier did in Newman's home town of Sheffield.

"**He had been playing a set of beautiful minimal tones in** an old warehouse building in the centre of Sheffield," explains Newman.

"**I gave him a copy of my music and asked** him to listen and give me feedback."

The rest as they say is history, with Newman contributing to a 12k compilation *Blueprints* shortly after.

"**The compilation was well received and** gave [12k] and myself a platform to discuss a full release," he says.

Although not as minimal as Chartier's work, Newman maintains a strong focus on the importance of listening.

"**I have always been fascinated by the role** of human perception," he states.

"**Each track [on** *Volume Objects*] represents a honed narrative developed through the placement of sound, silence, and dynamic interaction.

"**It started with me obsessing on an audio** element of interest, weighing up its form, function, and impact on my psyche."

In his work, Newman claims to explore both the development and destruction of sound, an approach well illustrated by the nine-minute long 'Wire Cage For Tiny Birds,' which leisurely makes its way through many repetitions of the same series of piano notes before dissolving into a light sprinkling of electrical rain.

"**I am interested in the manner in** which material is conceived, gestated and developed, as well as the manner in which it disintegrates and decomposes," Newman says.

Quiet sounds are crucial to such an emphasis and *Volume Objects* is replete with tracks that slowly swell, only to drain away to near silence.

"**In my view it is the listener who occupies** the position of the final 'active element' in a track," Newman says, noting everything from the listener's psychological state to the dynamics of the listening environment can impact on the final 'meaning' of any audio piece.

"**It is people beyond computers who** determine what is 'heard,' he declares, expressing his fascination for our ability to tune out certain noises while isolating others.

"…**what is filtered in or out, the external** environment in which [the listener] listens all contribute to the perception of the material."

"**I am aware that different people will make** sense of the same experience in different ways. Furthermore, the same person may make sense of the same material presented at different times in different ways."

When performing live, Newman say he pays particular attention to both the audience and the listening space.

"**I try to understand the mood of the** room.".

"…**in a live context, the audience is part** of the set; their noises, their talking, their drinking glasses become part of the audio field.

"**Sometimes I like to fade in a mic input** that is recording the audience.

"**By increasing the volume to the point** where the output from the PA is amplifying the audience, a meta-performance with feedback from the field takes place, and the boundary between performer and audience is blurred."

This is an approach well suited to 12k/Line, where Chartier has long made clear his admiration for the work of the minimalist visual artists of the 1960s, with their insistence on perception and the importance of subjectivity in the production of meaning.

With releases, Newman's included, which are heavily skewed towards the edges of our perceptual range, 12k has presented an ongoing meditation on the agency of the listener in relation to audio work, in a way which exemplifies Barthes' insistence that meaning is "eternally written here and now."

Even from an early age, Newman said he has been preoccupied with noise and music.

"**I have always been fascinated by sound** - listening to music, learning the piano, and recording the birds in the garden.

"**My first recordings took place when I was** 12-years-old, before I had encountered four-track recorders. I would spend hours playing recorded sounds through the home hi-fi whilst mic-ing up an instrument to record a new layer of sound on to tape.

"**At that age, I had no reference to** musicians working with abstract sound. All I knew was that I found the process and outcome compelling."

Recording has remained a central part of Newman's sonic practice, although these days he has swapped the tape player for a mini disc.

"I use microphones and digital recorders to capture field recordings, acoustic instruments and concrete objects," he explains."I also work with a number of hardware and software synths."

Despite the use of hardware and audio material gathered from the field, Newman says the computer has remained critical to his practice.

"**Much of my work is done on a computer.** It's a place where I organise, archive, develop, arrange and transform sounds," he says.

"**The computer is a wonderful tool. It** enables someone like me to focus in on a tiny element of audio, to accentuate it, amplify it, and change it through pitch, time, effects, compression dynamics, and stereo field.

"**Once you have mastered how to** manipulate sound through these tools, there is no sound or near silence that is beyond creation."

Given his preference for small sounds, and subtle effects, it should come as no surprise Newman favours the microfocus offered by editing program Soundforge, arranging the final results with **Cubase SX.**

Throughout the creative process, Newman

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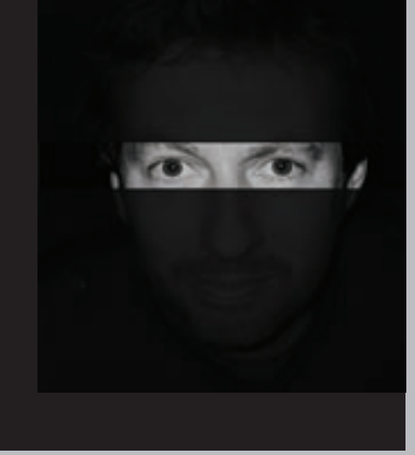
"…IN A LIVE CONTEXT, THE AUDIENCE IS PART OF THE SET; THEIR NOISES, THEIR TALKING, THEIR DRINKING GLASSES BECOME PART OF THE AUDIO FIELD."



"I FIND THE PROCESS BOTH EXHILARATING AND CATHARTIC."

says he returns again and again to the idea of play.

"That is the key activity," he says.

"Like a child with paint or clay – you start with nothing and you become focussed on a colour, a form and tool of sculpture.

"It starts with a sound, its form and function laid bare.

"I let it play repeatedly and respond to the emotions it conjures within me. You wonder what it can do, where it can be taken."

By immersing himself in the material, Newman says he is searching for a moment of resolution.

"I find the process both exhilarating and cathartic," he says.

"There is a sense that something is being resolved within me as I manipulate the sounds to form a cohesive narrative."

Newman brings this emphasis on careful listening and cohesion to his own label Audiobulb.

"There is a lot of diversity within Audiobulb, including the MP3 and CD releases, the open access projects such as Root of Sine and Endless Endless, the random image galleries and the development of bespoke VSTis and audio hardware units."

"Audiobulb is a place where people come to actively get involved, as well as to listen, buy and interact with our material."

Launched in 2003, the label slowly built a strong reputation, with releases by Ultre, Newman and the *Favourite Places* compilation generating positive reviews.

"The core motivation for starting the label came from my desire to support, promote and develop new music," Newman explains.

"I have always been an avid music fan and had spent several years discovering new music via the internet, moving from established labels to community websites to little known artist sites.

"I found myself listening and returning to certain artists' work again and again. I found myself wondering why they had not been picked up, released and nurtured by a label.

"At that stage, I was listening to works by Henry Leo Duclos (Gulo Gulo), He Can Jog, Diagram of Suburban Chaos and Disastro.

"Through listening and contacting the artists, it was clear to me that each artist was spending hours and days crafting their sound and sculpting detailed, beautiful and personally meaningful music."

Autistici's *Volume Objects* is available from 12k.

OVERLAPPING UTOPIAS

THE SPRAWLING, CROSS-CULTURAL SOUND PLAYS OF LOS ANGELES DUO LUCKY DRAGONS COALESCE ARTIST AND AUDIENCE, CREATION AND COMMUNITY.

Luke Fischbeck and Sarah Rara seem to possess an innate, almost telepathic understanding of each other's thoughts. The pair – better known as the curatorial heart of amorphous LA sonic phenomenon Lucky Dragons – eagerly expand on each other's musings; they break off on rambling tangents; they finish each other's sentences.

It's a telling intimation of their strangely beautiful art. If there is one space neither of them could be accused of inhabiting, it's that of creative isolationism.

"I think that's the biggest rule we impose on ourselves," muses Fischbeck. "The whole idea is to make things open to interaction and interpretation."

He's not kidding. The rare level of exchange between the pair represents only the starting point for their music's intensively discursive course. Indeed, Fischbeck and Rara tread an artistic path entwined not in their own individualised creative processes, but in notions of ritual, interaction and personal and community interface.

Over the course of eight years and an incredible 19 releases under the Lucky Dragons nom-de-plume – the latest of which is the wondrously quixotic and surreal *Dream Island Laughing Language*, through Melbourne imprint Mistletone – 30-year-old Fischbeck has worked to reconfigure, if not totally reinvent, the correlation between artist and audience.

For he and Rara, who joined as a collaborative partner in 2005, Lucky Dragons' oddly ornate electro-acoustic syntax is grounded in fashioning a context for artistic and communal expansion, rather than delivering a completed product. According to Fischbeck, who has a background in independent film, their music finds its bearing in "openness"; in its ability to foster exchange.

"It's what drew me to making music and putting music out in the first place," he says. "I mean, I used to do a lot of filmmaking and I soon realised that once you had a film, there wasn't really anything you could do with it. It wasn't something you could easily transfer or share; there wasn't any real way of distributing it."

"Music was something that was very easy to share," he continues. "Like, it's always been very easy to share – you can just play music with your friends or something. There's been so many different ways of entering it and addressing it, especially coming from a punk background. There's a resistance and there's an alternative and these sort of multiple entrances to it that don't really exist in other kind of creative expressions."

Rara, who along with Fischbeck is chatting on speakerphone from their home in the central LA neighbourhood of Echo Park, articulates the sentiment in more practical terms.

"Shows have been five dollars since I can remember," says the 25-year-old, who entered music via visual art. "And there's something very democratic about that and very universally available."

"When we play live shows, we try and play in really diverse places," she continues, running with the theme. "We play everywhere from the local punk club to house shows to museums, and we try and bring people from each of those worlds to each new place, like bring them along with us."

"I really hope, not for a specific community to hear the music, but for communities to overlap when they hear the music and for the end result to be all ages and all kinds of people and totally open," she continues. "I guess the dream for it is to be something that can link communities which otherwise seem really different and really separate. It's almost impossible to achieve that in the art world."

This sensibility translates to Lucky Dragons' recording process as equally as it does their routes of dissemination. The duo track their records on-location, utilising whomever and whatever is at hand – crowds, passers-by, friends, whistles, flutes, sticks, rocks, voices, toys, percussion and more conventional instrumentation.

"I like getting into musical situations where you don't know what it sounds like until you try it," says Rara. "I much prefer that game or that playing aspect, and just not knowing from the beginning where it's going to go. But part of the game is that when you improvise music, every sound you make should always generate another sound and have something that follows it; something that forces a continuation or development."

Fischbeck elaborates: "Usually our intentions are setting up a situation and then we can sort of play around in it and see what

happens, and then we have something that comes out of it and we can look at that and it shows us a lot more than we ever could have imagined to begin with."

"And other people's reaction to that teaches us even more about what we were doing, and I think it just all expands outwards."

The duo's sonic palette is vast, both ethnographically and stylistically. *Dream Island Laughing Language* echoes with dynamics and intonations as disparate as Kabuki-esque Japanese folk, fragmented west coast psychedelia, minimalism, ambience and lithe, micro-rhythmic and melodic electronica. The effect is remarkable. The album's 22 fleeting sketches oscillate between vastness and intimacy, synthesis and organics.

Whilst the pair acknowledge the influence of Japanese Kabuki and Noh theatre, they frame *Dream Island Laughing Language* in more figurative terms. "I see the record as a metaphor for a kind of turning point, where some sort of latent public sentiment becomes externalised," says Fischbeck.

"The title is kind of two different titles squished together. In terms of the band name, Lucky Dragons, there's sort of a legend that we're using. It was a fishing boat that sailed into the hydrogen bomb test at Bikini Atoll in the '50s, and was called the Lucky Dragon. It got immersed in radiation and everyone on board got radiation sickness. It eventually went back to Japan, where it came from, and the ship got cleaned up and renamed the Dark Falcon, which served out its life for about another 10 or 15 years. It was eventually destroyed and put onto a garbage island in Tokyo Harbour called Dream Island, and so this is sort of the continuation of that legend."

"Up until the Lucky Dragon incident there was no real anti-nuclear movement; for 10 years after the end of WWII there was no real outcry about the use of atomic weapons. But then the Lucky Dragon, and these poor victims of radiation sickness, became like a rallying point for the world and anti-nuclear sentiment. It became a metaphor for a much wider idea."

The second part of the title – *Laughing Language* – on the other hand, refers

"I GUESS WHEN WE MAKE THINGS, WE THINK ABOUT THE FUTURE AND THE PAST, AND I GUESS WE WANT TO OCCUPY A TIME THAT HAS THE CONDITIONS FOR LIVING THAT WE DESIRE."

to an investigation into the possibilities of language. "It's sort of a longstanding discussion that Sarah and I have had about language and about what language is, where it comes from, where it's going, what is inside it and whether it is everything."

"Or whether perfect communication is possible," adds Rara. "Like directly transferring an idea from one person's mind to another, or whether it always gets translated somehow. We constantly have agreements and disagreements about that. Also, it kind of refers to the idea of a language without words; a language of spontaneous sounds."

"It all has a lot to do with the idea of spontaneous transmission and group awareness and stuff," says Fischbeck. "Some things can be known and expressed by a group instantaneously."

At the same time, the hazy, abstracted nature of *Dream Island Laughing Language*'s instrumentation and syntax make for anything but a prescriptive listen. Despite the fact that it stands as their fist 'non-communal' recording thus far – aside from a couple of fleeting guests, Fischbeck and Rara are the lone performers – they see it as their most unguarded work to date.

"We were trying to make something that was a little bit simpler," explains Fischbeck. "I'd been kind of thinking about the record as a kind of minimalist thing, but it's not always so much like that. It's more about making something that people can put their own interpretations into, more than being a kind of didactic thing. It's about, as much as possible, leaving some of the sounds up to interpretation and keeping these sort of ambiguous sources of sound."

"With some of the past records we've made, we've tried to create a world that people can kind of enter into when they listen to it, and try to account for every element of that world. And this one was much more, like, we wanted it to enter into people's worlds and be part of the outside world, rather than the other way around."

Nonetheless, there is still an intoxicating sense of escapism – of dream-like immersion – to the record. But for Lucky Dragons, their sound worlds transcend mere imagination. "I think we would call it utopian," offers Fischbeck, before Rara chimes in, as if on cue: "I guess when we make things, we think about the future and the past, and I guess we want to occupy a time that has the conditions for living that we desire," she says." So maybe it's less about escaping the world and more about trying our best to occupy a world that agrees with us, and hopefully that extends to other people."

"It's like an idea of overlapping utopias, where everyone we're striving to live with wanted to live and lived how they wanted to live. I think people's ideas of that wouldn't ever be identical, but I think just that spirit, that approach; instead of looking to the future or looking back, just occupying the present as if it's the way you want it to be already, like the future has arrived."

"That's maybe where I start playing music," she pauses. "I start having that mindset."

Lucky Dragons' *Dream Island Laughing Language* is out through Mistlestone/Fuse.

Photography by Claire Evans, Michael Demeo and Lucky Dragons

WHEN TWINE'S EPONYMOUS ALBUM APPEARED ON GHOSTLY IN 2003, IT WAS MET WITH A JUSTIFIABLY RAPTUROUS RESPONSE BY LISTENERS AND CRITICS ALIKE. PAINSTAKINGLY ASSEMBLING THE RELEASE'S MATERIAL THROUGH FILE-SHARING FROM THEIR RESPECTIVE HOME BASES IN BALTIMORE, MARYLAND, AND BOULDER, COLORADO, GREG MALCOLM AND CHAD MOSSHOLDER GAVE BIRTH TO ONE OF THE YEAR'S MOST HAUNTING RELEASES, A COLLECTION OF HALLUCINATORY SOUND-SCAPES TEEMING WITH PHONE CONVERSATIONS AND ETHEREAL VOCALS.

NEAR DARK

But it would be disingenuous to begin any article on Twine's new full-length, *Violets*, without first addressing why it took five years for it to surface, especially when the duo had it ready long before Ghostly decided to issue it. Responding via e-mail, Malcolm cites profound transformational changes within the music industry as one reason, and the label's desire to release it "in the right environment at the right time" as a second—a conundrum of sorts, however, given that perpetual transformation can prevent that "right time" from ever happening. "After four years," he says, "I felt personally hopeless about the release and lost faith basically in the entire indie-electronic music business." Venting his frustration online and wanting to update puzzled Twine devotees, Malcolm posted to the IDM list and his personal e-mail list the reasons why the release was taking so long to appear. Perhaps that helped accelerate the process because soon thereafter Ghostly decided that the time for its release had arrived. In Malcolm's own words, the release process is, in general, one that's "unclear, subjective, and drawn out."

Mossholder is less despairing and more diplomatic in his explanation. He stresses the band and label's mutual desire to "release something special for the listener," refers to the time and love the duo put into the album, and concedes that "it's a complicated time for artists and labels." He even charitably credits Ghostly for sticking with the group and helping it see the record to fruition, especially when "other labels may have seen the Twine album as too much of a niche market and dropped it." If there's an upside, it's that, even though the pair worked most intensively on *Violets*' material during the 2003-04 period, Malcolm and Mossholder were able to continually edit and update the tracks and their proposed sequencing while they awaited the release date.

Other factors intervened too. "Life in general interceded as my personal life went from stability, to chaos, and then back to something approaching normal," Malcolm says, "and both Chad and I delved into our careers and personal lives when it started to become apparent that the album's release would be delayed indefinitely." Mossholder turned his attention to orchestral composition and became heavily involved in writing music and creating sound design for the video game industry. "I've been collaborating with multi-media artist and author Mark Amerika and am currently scoring his latest feature-length film," he says. "It's quite an amazing piece of work. Mark's imagery is highly unique and provocative, and the score is very much like Twine music. The end result is an hallucinatory audio-visual experience which will be travelling through museums around the world and film festivals; I expect a DVD release will follow." The pull of domestic life entered the picture too, with Mossholder marrying, having a daughter, and relocating to Austin, Texas while Malcolm also moved to a new region, took on a new career, and settled down. "We're both 35 years of age," he muses, "and we were 25 when we started Twine. So much has changed in the last 10 years, but I'm thankful that Chad and I are still best of friends."

Their friendship began in high school when shared musical tastes (Skinny Puppy, Sonic Youth, Fripp and Eno, Warp, Underground Resistance) sparked initial forays into music-making. After forming Twine, the two issued music on Hefty (2000's *Immediate Action #3*), Komplott (2001's *Circulation*), and Bip-Hop (2002's *Recorder*) prior to the Ghostly move (Twine also released—a bit under the radar, by its own admission—*At Land* on the MP3 label Rope Swing Cities in 2006). While influences on their music include John Cage, Stockhausen, Autechre, My Bloody Valentine, Slowdive, Joy Division, A Silver Mt Zion, Cranes, Cocteau Twins, film composers Howard Shore and Danny Elfman, Black Sabbath, and even Fellini (Twine's 'Asa Nisa Masa' references *8 ½*: it's the magic chant the young Guido Anselmi believes has the power to make the eyes in a portrait come to life). Twine's sound is uniquely its own, something clearly heard on *Violets*, a fully-realised statement whose cumulative impact is intensified by its immersive, dream-like flow.

A so-called "requiem for the new dark age," the album deftly bridges micro- and macroscopic levels and largely strips Twine's sound of the IDM-associated traces that sometimes colour its previous output. Certainly the new material's psychedelic ambiance and tremolo guitars suggest the group now has more in common these days with Set Fire To Flames than Autechre. The album's pronounced guitar focus asserts itself in the title song, where the listener is slowly drawn into an undertow that grows progressively more disorienting. On 'Small,' one imagines a lonely guitarist on a backwoods porch pulling the song's graceful themes from the air while rain plummets from the skies. And speaking of Cranes, the group's Alison Shaw drapes her fragile voice around hypnotic guitar figures in 'Endormie,' while Gail Schadt's lovely voice becomes a beacon of light emanating from the dark centre of 'From Memory.'

The album's thematic preoccupation with voice communication emerges when a truck driver's prosaic CB musings are paired with epic instrumental shudder in 'Longsided,' and even more dramatically during 'In Through the Devices,' when the listener bears witness to a phone conversation between an older man, an uncle perhaps, and a desperate teenage girl intent on leaving home. While disembodied communication can be

"...SUCH PRIVATE MOMENTS CAN BECOME VOYEURISTIC FODDER FOR PUBLIC EXAMINATION..."

alienating, it also focuses concentration and heightens sensitivity; certainly the devastating exchange within this song attests to that. Malcolm agrees, noting that the song's phone conversation illustrates the degree to which powerful emotion can seep through sterile devices, much as it does in Twine's own music; that such private moments can become voyeuristic fodder for public examination feeds into the paranoiac dimension of the band's sound too. "Technology can bring us together, and Greg and I couldn't work on our music without it," says Mossholder. "That being said, I agree that a lot can be lost in translation when communicating via new technology, and that meaning, tone, and emotions can get scrambled and misinterpreted." Both also acknowledge the price that comes with living far apart and collaborating via file-sharing. Malcolm, for example, concedes that closer proximity would have allowed the band's sound to have evolved in "a more focused manner" and that Twine consequently "would be much further along."

Having essentially completed the album so long ago, they continued producing new material while waiting for the album's release and consequently now have a significant stockpile. Malcolm quips, "Chad and I need to start the process of compiling all of this material and forming it into something coherent, maybe release a *Twine: The Lost Years* album or something like that." They've also been discussing the idea of forming a live band (guitar, bass, keyboards) with a female front singer and doing a DVD release. A few special dates in support of the album are in the works, and the pair would love to play in Europe given that Twine's fan base is larger overseas than at home.

The two are anything but precious when it comes to *Violets*' "meaning," with both happy to let listeners write their own narratives to the album's songs. "Once we give birth to our art and let it out into the world, what we intended in part becomes irrelevant," says Malcolm, "which is not to say that it doesn't represent an artistic vision emanating from the mind of the artist, but more that people will create their own narratives and find connections we never even thought about." Mossholder concurs: "Music is narrative whether you intend it to be or not. Our intentions, of course, for *Violets* were for the entire work to be a narrative. But if one doesn't find it to be that way, that's fine also." Still, he says, "I hope everyone will find the album to be more like an intense film than a music album." Malcolm admits that the two often embed clues into their music and are thrilled when fans "figure" them out, but they're often more impressed when presented with different interpretations of what listeners have heard. When I propose a narrative trajectory that moves from modest hope ('Small') to desperation ('In Through the Devices') and eventual rebirth ('Something Like Eternity'), they're accepting of the interpretation but stress it's merely one of many. "The themes that you're picking up on are themes we like to delve into and have explored in the past," says Mossholder. "There is something about the current state of the world that's both beautiful and alienating. It's the constant push and pull between the mundane moments in life and our dramas and dreams that keeps us going. I find that even the most commonplace event can take on meaning when viewed out of context."

Pressed to elaborate on *Violets*' presumed themes (for example, the music business, politics, culture and technology), Mossholder refuses to commit himself one way or the other. "I don't like to impose meaning on things," he says. "*Violets* is how you perceive it. I personally wouldn't say that anything on the album is overtly political, cultural-social, technological or music business-related. And if it is, it's all an illusion. And if it isn't maybe you missed it." Malcolm, on the other hand, is more direct: "The album was not created in a vacuum; I was personally affected by what I saw in the run up to the war in Iraq, and everything that I'd learned from a more classical background in history and international politics was offended. How this literally carried over into the material was through field recordings of anti-war marches and rallies and debates I had with people who had this war fever."

When asked whether the turmoil associated with life in the post-2000 Bush era influenced the album's sometimes bleak tone, Mossholder says, "It's bound to come out in the things we create, our actions, and everyday conversations. I think the situation has affected the disembodied voices that drift throughout the album more than us." Malcolm doesn't equivocate in his assessment: "The last seven years have been a disaster for the United States: conservative governance (and lack of it) has damaged the country, economically, politically, spiritually, and by almost any other indicator." He pointedly characterises the present administration as one of "incompetence, authoritarian impulse, manipulation, and arrogance." Mossholder's careful to note, however, that, even if the country's political climate were different, *Violets* would still feel much the same, given how emblematic the work is of Twine's sound: "It's who we are," he says, "it's the sounds we choose to use — are, in fact, drawn to. I very much believe in Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, especially with regards to creating art. Oftentimes, we channel things into our art and don't realise it until the work is complete. It operates on a sort of surrealist level for me: the concept of convulsive beauty," he says. "We are all Maldoror" - a reference to *Les Chants de Maldoror*, the 19th-century prose poem written by the Comte de Lautreamont that served as a key inspiration to Surrealism-associated figures like Dalí, Artaud, Duchamp, Ray, and Ernst, and to current experimental music artists such as Current 93 and cellist Erik Friedlander.

Ultimately, for Malcolm at least, "The story of the album's release was a lesson in the limits and sometimes expansion of commercial art and expectations, personal relationships, informal information, distance, movement, change, success and failure … and rebirth."

Twine's *Violets* is available from Ghostly International/Inertia.

SLEEVE REVIEWS

Artist: Autechre
Title: *Quaristice*
Label: Warp
Format: CD
Designer: The Designers Republic

"One must destroy syntax and scatter nouns at random. One must abolish the adjective, abolish the adverb. One should deliberately confound the object with the image that it evokes… Abolish even punctuation." (F. T. Marinetti – leader of the Futurists).

This is one of those designs that I suspect a whole bunch of graphic designers will love and the general public will hate. It's minimal and almost purely experimental typography.

It is almost as unreadable as many find Autechre unlistenable, and so the representation is perfect. In the most fastidious and meticulous manner, the type appears shattered, much like Autechre's beats. The surgical manipulation with type size, extremely irregular kerning (the spacing between pairs of letters) is distressing when you try to read it or look closely, but quite beautiful and unique when you glaze your eyes, defocus and let it wash over you - again, just like the music.

The only helpful device is the use of underlines to link the scattered letters belonging to each track name. It's then up to you to decipher how those randomly spaced letters should come together, but the grouping at least makes it a little easier to read than the album details! I can't help but wonder if the unreadability is designed to force you to the website…

The CD has the same typographic approach except the type is wrapped around concentric circles and the track numbers have been included, which helps deciphering the track names, but makes me wonder why they were dropped from the cover.

The limited colour palette of bright blue, black and white makes the interaction between spatially textured typography, clean layout and starkness more powerful. It's cool that the record details and track names *are* the artwork and that they didn't go all flowery on the back, but simply placed mismatching-sized squares to continue the colour scheme. This is designerly obnoxiousness at its best. But it is all the more wonderful because that's Autechre to a tee. To me, the concept and execution are perfect and brave.

Artist: Mr Johnson's Marching Boys
Title: *Marching Boys*
Label: Self-released
Format: CD
Designer: Uncredited (printing by Chris Lego)

"While you are listening, the marching boys are feeding their hobby horse." About right for this self-released CD from Mr Razzle Dazzle and Some Freak, the Marching Boys. And thankfully, its simple tastes allowed for a bit of a splurge on the packaging for this CD.

Fashioned from a neat die-cut of unbleached card, this self-released item feels great to touch and its specks, flecks and impurities give the package grit, while maintaining the look and feel of a quality object. It's hardy too, and I would love to think that it's made from recycled material.

All graphics and text have been screen-printed in navy and scarlet, and the main image on the front has a cool, subtle gradient effect due to slight muddling of inks - nicely gooey and dirty. In this picture, Mr Razzle Dazzle, with his megaphone and possibly a dildo, stomps along ahead of Some Freak, saucily twiddling knobs as he keeps in step. The image maker has done a good job posterising the image to make an effective print, and the typeface holds up well in the medium.

It is a faux typewriter font, which is a slightly odd choice, given it is screen-printed rather than pressed on with ink in some way. But it works harmoniously with the overall look and feel. Chances are that it was a fetish-based choice, and given the twisted, x-rated nature of the music, keep at it boys.

They've used a smart and cool approach to get text onto the CD by using a letter stamp set and plonked it on a plain white disc in red ink. The inkiness unifies it with the main packaging and allows for a way to get the album name onto the spine.

The inside cover has abstract, grass-like shapes in cherry red with a slightly jagged edge in places - quite suited to the warm, glitch-tinged sounds.

Artist: Meem
Title: *The Bumpy EP*
Label: Non-label
Format: CD
Designer: Meem

It was an absolute pleasure to cop No. 58 of a limited edition run of 400 CDs created for this EP. Meem always does a charming, hand-generated, limited run for each of his releases - *The Big Hoo-Hah* used cotton, felt and buttons and *Yum Yum and Miffy* was made from wood, felt, velcro, paper and hot stamp insignia. He keeps the dream alive with this little number.

The case is made from layers of fawn-coloured vinyl, stitched with brown thread and uses press-studs to pop shut. It's floppy and playful, but sturdy enough to function well at protecting and delivering the CD. The press-studs sit exactly over the label logo and slightly over some of the liner notes, but you can still read and understand those details.

Screen-printed in chocolate brown on the front and the back is a shadow puppet face from the show *Minkhead and the Monster* (online at www.meem.org). This gives it a sense of coming and going - of a visit to Meem's world, a world that is inclusive and warm.

The liner notes and track names are set in a rounded sans serif typeface (perhaps VAG Rounded or Arial Rounded, it's hard to say because the screen-print on a textured surface obscures details), and the type is sufficiently large and weighty enough to handle being screen-printed. Sadly, the EP title, which reverses out of a solid speech bubble in a lightweight typeface, fills in with the ink and recedes almost into oblivion. Nevertheless, it's all very cute and cared for - just like Meem and his music.

Photos by David Cooper

SELECTS: PARADISE LOST

WITH MUSIC, CONTEXT MATTERS.

And rarely more so than with disco. High gloss, debt-laden aspiration, Stonewall, loft parties, bath houses, drink and drugs, poor and rich; disco's never made sense in the over-priced bars you find playing those records in Australia. But when everyone's equal on the dancefloor, when the simple optimism of those songs gels with the all pervading mood; when the moment's right, disco makes a lot of sense. Sydney collective Paradise Lost are making those moments pretty regularly. In forgotten corners of the city, the six-strong collective play soaring disco, jacking house and Italo amid a welcoming (and wildly hedonistic) atmosphere. Paradise indeed.

Their debut release is *The Paradise Lost Edits*, a series of extended edits, well and truly tested on the dancefloor. Paradise Lost founder, After Thought records label boss and SBS Alchemy DJ, Ben Thompson - DJ Brut 33 - took the Cyclic Selects challenge. *Matthew Levinson*

Curtis Mayfield - *There's No Place Like America Today* (Curtom Records, 1975)

I found this relatively recently but I feel like I have known it for all time. Excluding *Superfly*, Curtis didn't grab the limelight to the same degree as the Motown heavy hitters. For someone whom I personally think as one of the most exciting and interesting composers to come from the soul era, he's been mostly overlooked. *America Today* is the full house of records. Each track is an ace and comes with a few jokers just for good measure. He is capable of the most exquisite tenderness one moment and pure gutter funk the next. If any record was to show off your sophisticated emotional side as a man; and get you ass – this is it. It is far from all roses though: the cover is a clear parody of advertising of the '40s and '50s, playing up the racial divide, and Curtis was always an outspoken songwriter with a message. 'Billy Jack' is an early example of a song about gun violence with a horn line that could pierce lead. It is the space within the music that most appeals to me of his personal work on Curtom. He moulds the music around you, inside you – it speaks to me on a very personal level. 'So In Love' is possibly the most gorgeous love song of all time and, for me, a bridal waltz to boot.

NWA - *Straight Outta Compton* (Priority, 1988)

As an 11-year-old, I could have told you this would be in my top five of all time. Twenty years on and I can't think of a record that hit me with as much force or left such a lasting impression on me than *Straight Outta Compton*. From the get go, I was floored with the energy and raw power that roared out of the speakers. Putting the lyrics to one side, if you can; the music, a hostile creeping menace, opened my mind to the beat and the sample, even though I wouldn't know the full impact of that 'til years later. My first copy was ripped onto cassette and I carried it everywhere. I had to get everyone to listen to it, I remember getting into a bit of trouble from my cousin who was a cop for that reason. Even with the disintegration of one half of the tape's casing I still managed to get a few more years life out of it. This album entranced me as aural cinema, with all the subtlety of a Hollywood action flick. I'm still picking up samples off this album and dropping them on dancefloors. I hope my tape it still out there somewhere.

Musique - *In The Bush*/*Keep On Jumpin* 12" (Prelude, 1978)

If I was to ever kill a person with a record, I wouldn't use this. This particular pressing, the François Kevorkian mix, is too potent. The collateral damage would be unacceptable for the one-shot one-kill type approach. 'In The Bush' and 'Keep On Jumpin,' both in their seven-plus minute battle dress, is like a stick of dynamite for a sand castle, a sledgehammer on a slug. I think I drove some friends mad with the number of times I have played this, but I say, if it makes you move you can't lose. Musique is Patrick Adams, the King Midas of the disco world and Prelude is his kingdom. I measure all other dancefloor oriented music against this record, and, I'm sorry, virtually nothing past the mid-'80s stacks up. There is something about a François K. mix. The bottom end has this amazing punch - so tight - and he's pulled the midrange in front of the music somehow, and lets those feverish congas run wild. I'm no engineer, but this is the hottest sounding record I have ever heard in terms of volume, colour and warmth. All the key audio-descriptors, this has them. This is what house thinks it is, and what techno should be.

Macho - *I'm A Man* (EMI, 1978)

Another record I inherited, an Australian pressing of the Italian disco group Macho. Marzio Vincenti, a vocalist from Bologna, and Mauro Malavasi were the prime instigators for this sound, a kind of rock/disco blend. Within the wider white Australia at the time, though, I can't help but think that this was taken as a nuisance, as some shitty gay wog music. This was the time of *Kingswood Country* remember. Macho is brazen and brutish, overtly masculine, flamboyant and gay. It was my breakout record as a DJ, helping me find my feet style-wise and start playing disco at parties that didn't do disco. The people around me at the time saw this and other tracks like Paul Parker's 'Right On Target' and Gino Soccio's 'Dancer' as mere curios and some novel batty house skit and would smile to humour me. At over 17 minutes, this is a song where you can drop the needle in at least three separate sections and the uninitiated will find it difficult

to pick the track. The midway breakdown into call-and-response between synth and horns resets the marching beat for wayward feet.

Tenderness - *Gotta Keep On Trying* 12" (RCA Victor, 1978)

The sharing of music is important to me. Mixes by tape, CD or otherwise have been the single largest catalyst in my musical education, not to mention the sheer enjoyment and delight I get hearing new and exciting sounds. This record was given to me by a friend who saw the record as more in-tune with my personal tastes than his, and was enthusiastic in making sure I took it and shared with others. I was touched by the sentiment, not least because until he handed it over I had not heard this, but on hearing I could see what he meant. This song, its sound, its feel, the unrestrained power that 'Gotta Keep On Trying' has, makes it one of the songs of my internal soundtrack. Tenderness was produced and arranged by James Purdie, and written by him and Skip Mahoney. That is the sum total of information I have been able to find out about it. No idea who is in the band, who the band is, where it was recorded or who the vocalists were. To imagine that those involved were a flash in the pan beggar's belief. The information available on Skip Mahoney is a bit more fruitful, being a key part of the Casuals, but again, not a direct mention of him being part of Tenderness or anything substantial. That is the way it was for many from that time, uncredited session musicians, twelves cut solely for the dancefloor.

MSFB : Love Is The Message (Cuco edit) (Rated "X" Records)

People wax lyrical and entire books have been written on the disco scene in New York. Larry Levan and the Paradise Garage, David Mancuso with the Loft, Sanctuary, West End Records, Prelude, Kenton Nix, Walter Gibbons, Arthur Russell. This pick could have been one of many influential records for any number of reasons. I chose this one because it's a bootleg by Danny Krivit, and a leading light for me having just released our boot. Danny grew up in NYC in the mid-'70s, going from a music lover and dancer to DJ and edit-man. 'Love Is The Message' has been called Brooklyn's national anthem and is the seminal club track, and chances are if you are to hear it on a dancefloor now it is almost certainly not the original but a Krivit edit. This is a slice of smooth perfection with the groove extended out to 11 minutes and, if your feet don't, your soul certainly can soar on the rich orchestration that mixes in and out before those solos... Woohooo! This is a ride across the globe, across time. When I'm old, I'll be rocking out to this still and calling in radio requests on the AM dial. It is as suited to the easy listening grannies as a dark and sweaty dancefloor. Heed the message, love is it.

Madvillain - *Madvillainy* (Stones Throw, 2004)

Going through numerous boxes of records of my flatmate's when he returned from living in Chicago first exposed me to this collaboration between Madlib and MF Doom. The metal-faced menace on the cover could in no way convey the imagination-busting compositions of the LP. It sounds new on each of my many listens. As an amateur beatsmith, I can't begin to think where you start putting together anything sounding remotely like this. Though forgetting everything you've learnt or heard in relation to structure and formula and smoking a pound of weed might be a start. It is the association between way out beats and how Doom matches sound, flow, phrase. 'Fancy Clown' flipping a ZZ Hill sample makes for the craziest anti-love song I've heard. There is a feeling of apparent spontaneity to this album as if it was put together not five minutes ago in my lounge-room, It is the apparent ease in which the mighty is made meek that floors me. The ability for the vocal to twist in and out, to roll around in it, around whatever it is, the organ solo that is 'Great Day,' leaves me thinking if only navigating the hurdles and changes of day to day living was so easy. People will be pulling this apart for years to come.

Various Artists : *Groove Armada – Back To Mine* (DMC, 2000)

I permanently borrowed this from a friend just after he got this, so it's no surprise I got my just desserts when the same was done in return by someone else, leaving just the case and sleeve notes for me to cry over. This is the only release of the Back To Mine series I've ever listened too and it opened my eyes to 'The Sound Of Music' by Dayton, which puts the vocoder to some amazing use, not to mention Sir Raymond Mang's 'No 1,' a rejig of a Radiance track of the same name, and something that I'm still yet to pick up. During the time I had this CD, I listened countless times on repeat. It is an excellent example of what a DJ selects mix can be. Whenever I go to someone's house I am quick to peruse their music collection and how it is organised, taking particular notice of those things near to hand or pushed randomly into a bookshelf rather than filed away neatly in a corner with their Jive Bunny's and other clearly well-listened to volumes. I have picked up on a few treasures that way, such as *IG Culture Presents: Inspirations*. I have never bothered to find out who IG Culture is or what they have done, but I can't speak more highly about that particular compilation. I know I am cheating by combining two albums under the one title but hopefully you'll thank me for it on listening. Can you burn me a copy?

The *Paradise Lost Edits* 12" is available from Paradiselost.net.au