
ISSUE
22
CYCLIC
DEFROST

CYCLIC *DEFROST* MAGAZINE

ISSUE 22

april 2009 *www.cyclicdefrost.com*

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Sebastian Chan

EDITOR
Matthew Levinson

DEPUTY-EDITORS
Shaun Prescott
Alexandra Savvides

ART DIRECTOR
Thommy Tran

ADVERTISING
Sebastian Chan

ADVERTISING RATES
Download at cyclicdefrost.com

DISTRIBUTION
Inertia Distribution
(www.inertia-music.com)

PRINTING
Unik Graphics

WEBSITE
Scott Brown and Sebastian Chan

WEB HOSTING
Blueskyhost
(www.blueskyhost.com)

COVER DESIGN
We Buy Your Kids

ISSUE 22 CONTRIBUTORS
Adam D Mills, Adrian Elmer, Alexandra Savvides, Andrew Tuttle, Blake Thompson, Bob Baker Fish, Chris Downton, Eliza Sarlos, Emmy Hennings, Ewan Burke, Joe Barton, Joshua Meggitt, innerversitysound, Lawrence English, Marcus Whale, Matthew Levinson, Max Schaefer, Richard MacFarlane, Shaun Prescott, Wayne Stronell, We Buy Your Kids (Sonny Day & Biddy Maroney)

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A huge thank you to - Lina Patel, Scot McPhee, Kate Cumming, Alex Swarbrick, Mathew Wal-Smith, Morgan McKellar, Robert O'Farrell, Eve Klein, Brent Reid, Karen Hayward, Emma Davidson, Navin Doloswala, Matt Taylor, David Winterton, Alan Bamford, Alister Shew, Mark Sisterton, Keith Lo Bue, Kym Riley, Tiani Chillemi, Andrew Maxam, Richard Martin, and Helen McLean.

THANK YOU
All our donors both large and small, advertisers, writers, photographers and contributors. Thanks to Sonny and Biddy from We Buy Your Kids for their ace guest cover, and for rising to the new guest sleeve reviewer role. Christos Tsiolkas for a typically great contribution in Selects. We couldn't have run the Eugene Carchesio interview without digging into the collections of David Pestorius and Milani gallery - cheers. Andre, Henry, Mark, Nevenka, Mike, Justin and all at Inertia - especially the warehouse staff; Hugh at Unik Graphics; Chris Bell at Blueskyhost; and all our readers.

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This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

EDITORIAL

Recently, *The Daily Telegraph* berated NSW Premier Nathan Rees for opting to spend taxpayer money on a three-week music festival helmed by Brian Eno, rather than a three-day visit by star golfer Tiger Woods. Readers were asked whether they'd prefer Eno – with the snide tagline: "Nothin' packs 'em in better than the father of ambient music" or Woods (tagline: "how is this even a question?"). At the time of writing, Woods is at a strong lead with 562 votes, while Eno languishes with 181. At *Cyclic Defrost*, we have our fingers crossed for an Eno victory, though it looks unlikely. Teeth grind in anticipation.

It'd be easy to say this populist attitude hinders Australia's experimental music, but exploration still prospers on the fringes. In this issue, Queensland sound artist and painter Eugene Carchesio discusses the differences between his audio and visual art from his hometown, Brisbane, a city reputed for conservatism but also home to a burgeoning underground experimental scene, a community that fellow Brisbanite Anonymeye - also covered here - would be familiar with.

Ghosts lurk elsewhere: the spectres of early 20th Century ballroom jazz haunt V/VM's The Caretaker project, while Emmy Hennings speaks to Jim Jupp: co-founder of the Ghost Box label and brain behind Belbury Poly. Richard McFarlane looks at the sudden resurgence of the cassette and wonders why - in an age of unprecedented access to digital music - anyone would choose to disseminate music on an obsolete format. Issue 22 also includes a very special Selects by Melbourne author Christos Tsiolkas. Be sure to take a long hard look at this month's cover design by Sydney's fabulous We Buy Your Kids.

Matt, Seb, Shaun and Lexi

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COLLECTIVE ESCAPE

"We're not the kinds of illustrators who examine the everyday or comment on society – we are just about escapism."

Looking at the art work created by Sonny Day and Biddy Maroney under the nom de plume We Buy Your Kids is like entering a fantasy world. Theirs is a space filled with whimsy, where each piece is not only visually stunning but also jumps off the poster, page or screen at you. At the same time, their world seems to radiate fun - fragile but flawed creatures grace their illustrations like moths to a flame, unable to resist the ornate home that Day and Maroney create for them.

Their work will be instantly familiar to anyone who has even a passing interest in tour poster and record promotion design. Creating identities for a number of musicians - including Les Savy Fav, Xiu Xiu, Clue to Kalo and Youth Group - and exhibiting in London and Barcelona with a fake movie poster for horror film *Suspiria*, the pair are no strangers to the other sides of the creative spectrum. Working together from a hub on King Street in Sydney's Newtown, Day and Maroney started their partnership designing for the Popfrenzy label. Since then, their work has ventured beyond screen-printed posters to animation, album artwork and a plethora of other mediums.

Back to the beginning, then. They met seven years ago, after realising their work had been shown opposite each other at a group show at Firstdraft gallery, in Sydney. Maroney recalls one of their initial meetings. "I was so happy when he first came to my house and saw my drawings all over the walls. He seemed genuinely impressed. Maybe he's just a good actor, but he said they were really 'creepy' and it was like the best compliment I ever received."

As it turned out, they had both come from a creative background. Maroney was working in design and illustration, with the occasional group exhibition, whereas Day was working at Firstdraft as a director, drawing and exhibiting in that space. Collaboration was a mutual dream, even if it seemed a little far-fetched at the time.

It took a fortuitous intervention from Popfrenzy's Chris Wu to finally make their collaboration bear fruit. Initially, Wu chatted to Day specifically about some art posters for the burgeoning label. "[Sonny wanted] something different and individual that wasn't a press photo plus logo, or just the album cover. And that was something Chris had wanted to do as well. He was organising this massive tour that with Les Savy Fav, The Hold Steady, Pretty Girls Make Graves, The Gossip and others touring around Australia, so he asked us to do posters for that. That was like a dream come true, especially for Sonny since he is crazy for Les Savy Fav."

"We had a screen-printing carousel at home at the time because Sonny had been asked to print up some shirts for a friend. We had a bit of a test run on a poster for a Damo Suzuki show that was disastrous. There was a heatwave, the ink was drying in the screen and then there was a blackout and we were trying to lug this heavy machinery down alleyways to friends' houses to finish it. It was a terrible first go."

"All our personal work, the stuff we show is exhibitions is based on music, or movies. Those pieces are always named after songs too."

"The design for that doesn't really look like our stuff either - it looks a bit like any designer's work. But it was all good after that. We made more in our own style and Sonny got the printing thing working pretty good. And seeing our posters at the merch stand at the Les Savy Fav show gave us thrills. We also got to do more posters for Damo Suzuki shows, and I'm much happier with them than that original one."

When asked about the role that music plays in their work, the pair are unanimous, both loving the opportunity to work on predominantly music-based projects. "All our personal work, the stuff we show in exhibitions, is based on music, or movies. Those pieces are always named after songs too. That thrill we spoke of, of being at the Les Savy Fav show and looking over and seeing people walk away with our poster is just totally exciting. Being fans and then having this small involvement through the images you make - it's awesome."

Friendships also form the basis of a lot of their music-related commissions. "Biddy has a long history with artwork for Youth Group, and we just did another cover for the release of their last album in the US," Day says. "We've done a lot of posters for them too. That stuff is always our favourite because they are dream clients, maybe because they are friends too - they will come and discuss what they are thinking or what we are thinking and it's always fun to do."

"The style of the work we've done for them over the years has really evolved too. The band's evolved, and when you look at the covers Biddy has done, it's a good chart of how her work has changed over the years, culminating in being We Buy Your Kids stuff. Even if we never get to draw them another thing, we've had a dream run making them a stack of different images over the last few years."

It's typical WBYK style to see fantastical creatures pop up; a giant black cat, an owl with a naval hat perched on its head, an almost gothic male Medusa dancing with a maiden. There's ornamentation too, like their delicate patterns interspersed between more aggressive and bold elements. Maroney puts this down to escapism. "We're not the kinds of illustrators who examine the everyday or comment on society - we are just about escapism, and the escapism that comes through cult horror stylings in particular. It's entertaining and a way to deal with your anxieties - to make them kitsch and attractive. All the witches and stuff we draw are brightly coloured and really decorative, when in reality it's skulls and death and things that aren't pretty. But if you can make an imaginary world that looks appealing - it's like make-believe playing when you're a kid."

This month's cover is painted with the typically quirky WBYK brush. Decorative and almost tribal in its colouring and style, it's a defiant visual statement. "It's combining a few elements we use repeatedly, the way the facial features are drawn, but we wanted to make something that was compositionally very simple, but had a lot of detail and texture in there. I think it looks tribal too - which is good because it initially looked a bit metally, but we really like all the decoration that goes with voodoo and old witchcraft so we used a bit of that," Maroney says.

"The face is supposed to look very still, in the middle of something that is very loud and busy, a bit of a commotion. I think it looks like an orc, in that *Lord of the Rings* movie, where it pops its head up from all the killing. Maybe the face on the back is the same orc, later in the day, reflecting on why he's gotta be so bad, and feeling all emotional. Hah. If we had to name it, I'd call it *Everything's Alright When You're Down*, which is fitting because orcs are well-known to be Jesus and Mary Chain fans."

See more of We Buy Your Kids' work at webuyyourkids.com.

UNLEASHING OF THE TRIPPY GUITAR DUO

"Personally I think that Knitted Abyss has been an amazing musical platform… experience, journey and friendship."

"I think when we first started we wanted to make some real over the top psychedelic guitar duo thing. That was the idea," says Lucy Phelan – one half of Knitted Abyss.

"It's changed so much because when we started out, it was a little bit kind of folkie as well, and we had some sort of songs, and we've just really switched between songs and jams. Songs. Jams. And now we've introduced a virtual drummer," continues Anna John, the other half – introducing me to their drum machine, aka the honorary third member of Knitted Abyss.

Come this winter, it'll have been two years since their first show together, at Akemi, in the Blue Mountains, just outside Sydney. In that time, they've released two tapes (one on Lucy's label, Intense Nest, and then last year's *Winter Barn* cassette on Shawn Reed's Night People label in the US), played a bunch of shows and steadily developed, through improvisation, a sound unique to their recordings – a sound that Reed describes as "a real hazy, foggy, nocturnal set of sounds for a new mutant world." It's a description not entirely aligned with what the two-piece started out with, but they're happy to roll with it.

"Pretty much from the first jam, I remember thinking, 'Oh, this is really awesome,' and that it just worked. We talked about being a trippy guitar duo – we both just wanted to play guitar and have lots of pedals and stuff, and play around with them," Lucy recalls. "And primarily we've kind of kept with that psychedelic, improvised vibe."

Anna agrees: "That's exactly what it was: trippy guitar duo. Trippy guitar."

The past tense is apt. Their collective music making has found nuanced guitar sounds to develop, explore and expand within the boundaries dictated by two guitars, a tonne of pedals and the dynamic structure that a jam - intensely built - necessitates.

In terms of a creative genealogy, the two have a similar sonic path informing their styles. Both make music with other people (Lucy with experimental goth-pop duo Naked on the Vague, Anna with tropical/psych dance band Holy Balm). Each has a strong DIY aesthetic that flows through genre and form. They're both active members of a burgeoning outsider musical community. Lucy was a pivotal member of the Chooch-a-Bahn collective and curated nights as Intense Nest, as well as hosting short-lived, long-loved radio show 'Down the Drain' on FBI Radio in Sydney. Anna currently hosts a weekly celebration of lo-fi underground with 'The Modern Dance' on 2SER FM, also in Sydney, and spent a lot of the last few years circulating experimental and independent records through her online store Cloth Ear Music. On paper, the two seem made for musical collaboration. The reality has pretty much followed suit.

As we're talking, Anna remembers one show in particular, at Locksmith - a gallery space in the Sydney suburb of Redfern.

"When I looked up, we'd had this intense, heavy, and really quite spontaneous jam. We went on this complete tangent that we'd not really ever done before, and it was just perfect. And when we stopped we were both really really excited, because we, or I, hadn't gotten over the hump where I could fully, freely improv and with that one we really let go and it was awesome. It was completely synched up."

"That's the amazing thing with Knitted Abyss – I feel like we really synch up. We work really well together – it's just like cosmic alignment," Lucy agrees. It's hard to not smile at the perfect cheese and charm of the idea of a musical cosmic alignment.

"I think when we're playing one of us might start playing something that hints of something that we both like, and then I will respond to that, or Anna will respond to that – " Lucy starts.

In perfect cosmic alignment, Anna finishes Lucy's spoken sentences with as much perfection as her musical ones: "And you just know. Because it's from months, and nights out, or nights in, of just sitting around and listening to records. That all stocks up and I think maybe that's why we started a trippy guitar duo. Because we were listening to so many trippy guitar bands."

More pronounced than with most other bands, the way that Knitted Abyss's sound evolved has been an intriguing and involved sonic development. With both of them having other bands, this initially started as an addendum, and for that reason there's been an overriding reluctance to prescribe a sound or a style to what they do. Instead, the two have spent months jamming, and recording each jam. This process has resulted in countless tapes – two of which are now the aforementioned releases, one being slated for future release with revered UK cassette label Bum Tapes – and a review process that builds up a collective creative memory; or, in other words, a cosmic alignment that capitalises on like minds and like record collections. This, of course, has a flow on effect to their other projects.

"With Naked on the Vague, I constantly think I've got to keep them different. Last time we played, I brought along my guitar. When we had practice in the afternoon, I was playing my guitar and was thinking, 'Oh, this is sounding very Knitted Abyss now,' so I was kind of like – I don't know if you can box things off like that. I think that – also how I sing as well – I want to make it different. And it is very different," Lucy says.

"I experience that too with Holy Balm, with the way I play with my keyboard or whatever. But then you sort of think maybe this isn't me bringing Knitted Abyss, or Holy Balm to Knitted Abyss. Maybe this is actually just the way that I play, so I've developed a style. And that's a feat, right?" The self-awareness Anna suggests is impressive.

"Personally, I think Knitted Abyss has been an amazing musical platform, and – " Anna says, pausing, " - Experience. Journey. And like friendship for me, with Lucy, because for most of last year it was the only real band that I was working on and I feel I've learnt a lot about playing music and stuff. I don't know if Lucy feels the same way – but it's been a really fruitful learning experience. And that might explain, or something, not that it needs to be explained, but that's why our sound has developed heaps because it's always being reinvigorated."

The process of improvisation that so entirely defines the musical interaction these two craft has been core to their sound. It's this process that enables the Knitted Abyss level of experience for both punter and performer to be a great deal more appealing than any other self-defined "trippy guitar duo" with a *modus operandi* that could quickly develop into a poor pastiche of outdated psych-culture.

Anna says it's that lack of structure that creates an intimacy in communication. "You bring to a crowd something that you've been working on intimately, but I suppose – and maybe that's like with any improv-y bands – it's a lot more personal than a song that's been written and set. And even if you're working on that in an intimate setting in your home it's all kind of mapped out and planned out, and it's to communicate directly with people. Because it's like lyrics, and things. Whereas [with] a jam it's more sort of this thing that we're all going to go on together. So I guess it's still communicating that, or involving people into something you'd usually just do."

Lucy agrees: "It's almost a more intimate form of communication when you're not bound by the structure of the songs because then you're really feeling vibes. I always pick up on the vibes of the room – both Naked on the Vague and Knitted Abyss – the vibes of the room affect us so much. Sometimes there's just a feeling, where you can feel what people are thinking."

Anna returns to that show at Locksmith gallery, the one where their improvisations became a full and free communication between the two. Contradicting the affectation Lucy draws from the vibes in a room, Anna brings it back to the conversation between just the two of them.

"I remember looking up halfway through and seeing that there were pretty much just our friends sitting on the window sill and one or two people just standing there. And you could see through the window out to the street front, and I could see people I knew sitting on the bench talking, but that didn't upset the vibe for me at that point – I was just like, 'What the fuck are you doing?' And then got back into it."

"It's almost a more intimate form of communication when you're not bound by the structure of the songs. The vibes of the room affect us so much."

The 'What the fuck' isn't built on malice – far from it. Ultimately the process of jam-record-review, jam-record-review has built up a confidence in the way Lucy and Anna make music together. That shared experience translates into the confidence that their music had and continues to have; well worth the stage it's given. You'd be foolish to ignore it.

"You can only gauge your own success," Anna says. "If we're happy with jam XYZ and we're happy enough to put it out – that's got to do it."

***Winter Barn* is released through Night People.**

FADED GLORIES

Brisbane laptop musician Andrew Tuttle records as Anonymeye. He's known as something of an Australian equivalent to the much championed 'laptop folk' sub-section of experimental music. But where other mainly Western folk traditions have been appropriated or reconstructed into revisions of themselves, Tuttle, as Anonymeye, more often deconstructs, his steel-string acoustic guitar reduced to an often brutal digital decay. At other times, particularly in his beat-focused 2006 debut, *Anonymeye Motel*, Tuttle calls on his love of pop and the interesting end of '90s electronic music to prescribe new contexts again for these folk 'reconfigurations.'

With a second album to be released on Sound&Fury in April 2009, *The Disambiguation of Anonymeye*, Tuttle is converging and extending these influences, taking the guitar and its proponents in Anonymeye into a wider, darker catchment of manipulations.

"I'm inspired by the quirks of Australian culture, the humour, the spirit, and the faded glories of our coastal tourist strips."

Anonymeye's evolutions, however, have been unified by a curious fascination with the very regular and ordinary existence of 'middle' Australia. When I first picked up *Anonymeye Motel*, I was struck by its commitment to this aesthetic, from the cover art's framed picture of a post-War Australian motel, to the tacky font, liner notes disguised as an instruction worksheet and the tracklisting transformed into a room service menu, with complete descriptions of their ingredients. The CD itself came pouched in its own piece of motel memorabilia: green pool table felt.

The packaging seemed oddly alien for something so distinctly Australian. So often, it seems that Australian musicians are attempting to escape their origins by engaging in an international sound aesthetic. Tuttle occupies a space that is both heavily contemporary and staunchly local – at one moment allowing country-esque open tuning improvisations, and in others ripping at the very fabric of the sound, coming across as a jilted take on the distortion-heavy processing of experimental luminaries Christian Fennesz and Greg Davis.

It is apt, then, that the beginning of the project, in a geographical sense, almost mirrors this duality. Tuttle explains, "I started working on Anonymeye in 2004 as a result of going on tour to Europe with some friends, Brisbane ex-pat noise duo Kunt, and wanting to have some of my own music so I wouldn't have as many moments of downtime. I'd played in various bands, but never anything solo. It was a fairly spontaneous beginning, and one that I'd only really started to think about after about half a dozen shows.

"The earliest Anonymeye material was quite sample-based, kind of a country 'glitch-hop' constructed around copyright-free or at least not too obviously copyrighted sounds and grabs from op shop records and online databases. I had wanted to combine my interest in country music and eccentric Australiana with cut-up electronic beats and my own vocals. Over time, I gradually phased out sampling in favour of a more organic approach, preferring to use the acoustic guitar as the primary sound source, with live sampling and looping of these sounds."

Certainly, this interest in "eccentric Australiana" is one that becomes probably the most distinctive extension of Andrew Tuttle's character into the music itself. I've always pictured an adolescent Tuttle in the 1990s, taking in the East Coast on a family holiday, packaging these little memories, artifacts of times and places that are more often regarded with distaste – Australia's reputation for being culturally (and otherwise) barren.

"The distinctive natural beauty of Australia is hard to ignore, with the long open stretches of highway and its beach culture. As well as this natural beauty, I'm also inspired by the quirks of Australian culture, the humour, the spirit, and the faded glories of many of our coastal tourist strips."

"I think there's a lack of pretension and an endearing camaraderie through the Australian underground creative community, which is probably both positively and negatively influenced by our geographical isolation.

"While my interest in Australia and Australiana is probably less obvious in Anonymeye's themes than it was around the time of *Anonymeye Motel*, I think it is hard for the location one lives and travels in not to inspire creatively."

The material produced after *Anonymeye Motel* almost entirely eschewed beat-based arrangements, and with it, went some of the focus on a suburban or semi-rural Australian aesthetic. It would probably be unfair to label this as a conscious choice of Tuttle's, as all three of his releases since the debut have been administered by external parties: Australian labels Sound&Fury, HellosQuare and Curt.

The packaging of the first of these, *Phase Two*, released on Sound&Fury, run by recently converted rural hermit Adam D. Mills, turned attention away from the human elements of the Australian landscape, taking on the kind of pastoral focus that is, by comparison, quite popular among Australia's experimental musicians. Encased in the regular wax-sealed, handmade envelope of the sound&fury CD-R series is a motion blurred photograph of a nondescript field, which, at a stretch, could be categorised as the movement from the 'motel' into the natural environment.

It is both opposite and parallel to the musical progression over the same time. *Phase Two*, and the split releases with ex-pat British electronic musician, Part Timer (HellosQuare) and Nottingham guitarist Cam Deas (Curt), saw more rhythmically piloted electronic processing give way to heavily eroded drones and free time, delay-based processing. This freedom was itself manifested by a shift in attitudes that Tuttle experienced.

"I have as much love for pop music and beat based music as I do for experimental and folk music, but since the release of *Anonymeye*

Motel I've found myself not wanting to be boxed in by a defined, rigid structure when composing and performing. When I first started Anonymeye, sound sources aside, there was structurally very little different from other music I had made up to that point."

"Since then, I've appreciated the difficulties and rewards of creating music, at least for Anonymeye, that has a slow but definite design.

"The tracks I recorded for the Sound&Fury, Curt and hellosQuare releases are three of my favourite longer form improvisations for acoustic guitar and signal processing, albeit edited down somewhat. These are similar to my live performances, in that the relationship between the guitar and the computer is total, with both elements equally important to the end sound.

"I've found that the Anonymeye studio albums have incorporated less of this one-take improvisatory relationship. Additionally, as I've performed and improvised more, I have felt much more comfortable with my processing abilities. It is a never ending journey full of change, comfort, inadequacy and inspiration, but it is proving worthwhile thus far."

His interaction with the process of making music seems to have as much to do with informing how he makes music as the actual, musical result of those processes.

"The particular processes I utilise to create music, both technological and intellectual, definitely influence the end result. Of course, this isn't entirely the case, and I wouldn't persist with these approaches if I wasn't happy with the end result; or at least confident of future paths I could explore."

One important aspect of this process is the primary instrument used for input, Tuttle's hefty steel string acoustic, which he says helped his musical tours around Europe on a holiday visa appear more legal in the eyes of Dutch customs workers. It has also been as readily identified as anything else, over the past three years, as the primary tool of Anonymeye.

"Though it's an instrument I still hold with some trepidation, mostly because of overly earnest semi-professional singer-songwriters, their busking counterparts, and *MTV Unplugged* style performances, the acoustic guitar has largely defined and influenced the music I have made as Anonymeye since around 2006."

Tuttle offers this with lightness, almost suggesting that the decision to use the instrument was more natural than by any artificial choice. "I was performing with an electric guitar, however, it was used only sparingly in live performance and on recordings, almost as an afterthought. Since then, most of my live performances and recordings as Anonymeye have been heavily reliant on the sounds created from this instrument.

"I use the acoustic guitar in two ways, one as a solo instrument to create structured compositions, and secondly as a sound source to be looped and manipulated through digital processing. The guitar I own has a wonderful tone, which is magnified when using complementary open tuning patterns."

It's these open tunings that seem to give most Anonymeye recordings this sense of earthiness, which, in the past, has worked as a strong grounding for other elements.

A notable counterpoint to the acoustic guitar, and this "earthiness" in much of Tuttle's music, particularly on the forthcoming album, *The Disambiguation of Anonymeye* is the use of square tones, saw tones and sine tones. The resolution of these two rather disparate elements is a fascinating process to watch unfold. The opening two pieces in the new album explore a more mechanical, confronting sound than has previously been seen from Anonymeye. Short, quickly decaying synth based pieces that immediately, shockingly give way to a third track, beginning with the measured, improvisatory guitar that has previously marked Anonymeye's style. This piece, and indeed, the rest of the album, sees a remarkable tension between these forces, which had been built up over the releases that separate Anonymeye Hotel and *The Disambiguation of Anonymeye*.

"I'm not sure that I have been able to completely manage a

"I love the possibilities of the studio environment, I don't have the patience to complete flawless opuses."

middle point between the guitar and synthesiser and processor yet, but the surprises the constant challenge continually brings I find incredibly rewarding, albeit occasionally frustrating."

"I have primarily used processed sounds and synthesised sounds as a bedding to the piece I'm working on, as these sounds provide a certain aural density that the acoustic guitar lacks. I've found though that I approach both sound sources in a fairly similar manner live, in that as a piece builds all the sounds contained continue to subtly influence each other, and as an extension my thoughts on where to progress from there."

The Disambiguation of Anonymeye was produced in a number of locations, as per Tuttle's tendency toward movement (having moved from Brisbane to Melbourne and back to Brisbane, as well as touring Europe twice in two years). One particularly notable home during this period of recording and editing was afforded by an invitation to record at the Centre for Electronic Muisc in Rotterdam for four days, sparking a number of joking comparisons to Rutger Zuydervelt, the enormously prolific sound designer behind Machinefabriek. While Tuttle did not end up releasing the full profits of this session as an album on its own, the contribution its facilities, housed within the WORM artist-run initiative, made to the shape of the album in its final form is undeniable.

"Before coming to WORM, I had endlessly internally debated how I would approach the session, but when I got there, I reasoned to myself that I would be able to find inspiration from what surrounded me. I had access to a mind boggling array of vintage modular and analogue synthesisers and other equipment. It had the potential to either fail or result in far too many hours of pointless jams, but I managed to recreate an approach of improvisation in a multi-track studio environment. I found myself tweaking with a synthesiser until I found a sound I liked, running to the other side of the room to tweak another synthesiser, run to my guitar, run back to another synthesiser, and so forth, all with the convenience of editing capabilities later on."

"I have as much of a love for pop music and beat-based music as experimental and folk music."

I first caught Anonymeye live quite late in the piece, at the launch of the first Pow Wow release on Sydney label Feral Media, in 2006. At the time, Tuttle was assisted by Jon Tjhia on keys and Alex Nosek on guitar, the two members of Melbourne group ii. It was a curious context to first experience him in action, but ultimately set me on the path of finding the Anonymeye that has its roots in improvisation and in this case, collaboration.

"I enjoy performing live as I get to play in front of a mix of friends and strangers, enjoy other sights and sounds and occasionally travel. The combinations of brief sound checks, bad sound, free drinks and time pressures leave me more prone to error than I would be in the home studio," he says, with welcome frankness.

"I work fairly similarly at home and playing live, it is just the output volume that ultimately differs."

The live realm has always been a difficult place for experimental musicians, particularly in this era of offline processing and computer dependent forms of production. Each copes or adapts differently to this environment, and Tuttle's own approach seems to follow, philosophically, the stylistic basis for the post-Anonymeye Hotel releases.

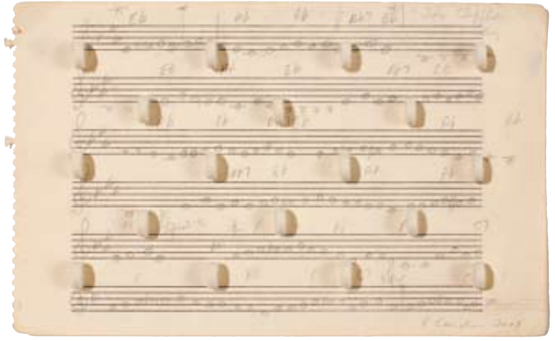
"Particularly when performing live, although it is wholly improvised, it does follow a kind of internal flowchart structure, in that I know I start at point A and finish within sight of point B, but everything else in between is not so easily defined."

"Although I love the possibilities of the studio environment, I don't particularly have the patience to complete flawless opuses and tweak every single sound for eternity." It seems that this is where the music ultimately springs from, where the "process", so to speak, finds its genesis. "For better or for worse, I think the risks of imperfection are outweighed by the inspiration I find from taking a risk."

Anonymye's *The Disambiguation of Anonymeye* is available from Sound&Fury.

SMALL SCALE SENSATION

"I always feel a warmth when a piece takes off – it's like a space of sound cocoons around us and all is well with the universe."



EUGENE CARCHESIO, *FOUND MUSIC 2008* (DETAIL), MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER 5 PARTS, 15 X 24 CM EACH

EUGENE CARCHESIO, *STROLL THROUGH THE CITY, PERFORMANCE*, ONE FLAT EXHIBIT, BRISBANE, 1983. PHOTO: PETER MACPHERSON. COURTESY DAVID PESTORIUS PROJECTS, BRISBANE.

For the last three decades, Eugene Carchesio, born in 1960, has produced a prolific output of art in the visual, aural and performance mediums, working alone and with a wide range of collaborators from his hometown of Brisbane, wider Australia and from international waters.

An idiosyncratic artist whose complete dedication to his craft results in a flurry of creative output, Carchesio's ethos is gleamed from the Fluxus, dada, impressionist, punk rock and DIY movements throughout the twentieth century as well as the sub-tropical surrounds of Brisbane. Carchesio's music and art is created with a utopian sensibility, straddling boundaries between impermanence and degrees of magnitude. Carchesio explains that the flexibility of creating small scale works allows for the ability to create an abundant output of art.

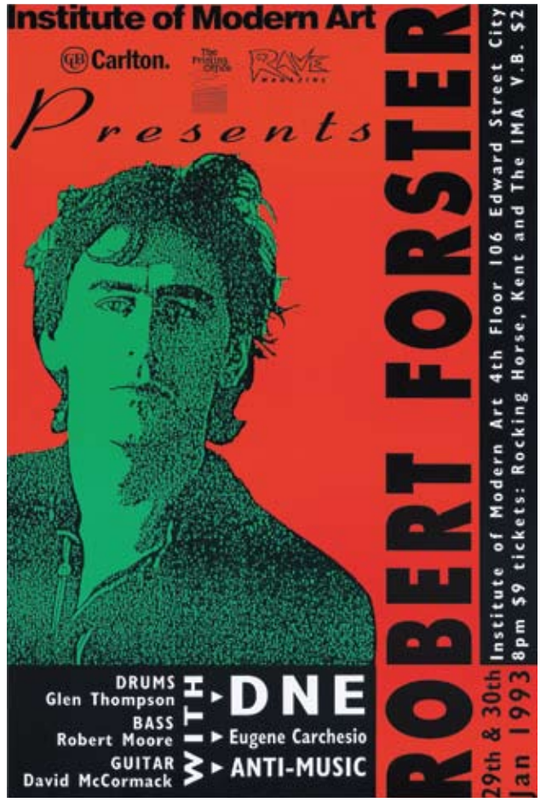
"I guess the mood dictates what happens day to day. I live in a unit [so] I don't play music at home, but if the mood takes me I might attempt sound works on the computer or I will wait until I get together with the band to do acoustic stuff. I work small scale so it is easy and more immediate to draw or paint every day."

Carchesio's visual art and music are both disseminated to the wider public through a series of limited editions that showcase his constant evolution and allow for more works to be published within a short period of time. Through such a prolific and carefully honed output, Carchesio has developed mutually rewarding relationships with the Bellas and Milani galleries in the art world, and with Kindling Records in the music world. Operated by his constant musical cohort Leighton Craig, Kindling provides a fertile conduit for Carchesio's various musical explorations.

Someone's Universe - a recently concluded career retrospective at the Queensland Art Gallery - featured hundreds of Carchesio's miniature watercolour paintings, geometric imageries and matchbox creations on a grand scale. A collection of works supplied by the gallery's own collection as well as those of the Milani and Bellas galleries and private owners, the austere surroundings of the gallery provided a fascinating counterpart to Carchesio's long standing interest in the concept of a 'Museum Of Silence'. Carchesio's artworks are beautiful yet undeniably experimental; with his ephemeral mediums reclaimed in the name of individualist art.

With such a large scale critical evaluation of one's work, it is reasonable to ponder the effect on an artist's work practices immediately after. Regarding this, Carchesio's viewpoint is typical of an actively practicing artist. "To be honest, I don't really know what to make of being presented with one's past," he says, "I suppose 'now' is the most important thing.

"I have just finished a volume of work consisting of hundreds of watercolours and drawings of animals and skulls. Now I am starting a project that requires 108 works based on a cycle of Buddhist prayer beads. [Also] recently I had the great opportunity to stay at Bundanon, in NSW, which was Arthur Boyd's property before he died. There was an upright piano in the studio and I recorded 51 improvised pieces."



MARK ROSS + DAVID PESTORIUS, POSTER FOR PERFORMANCES BY ROBERT FORSTER, DNE/EUGENE CARCHESIO AND ANTI-MUSIC, INSTITUTE OF MODERN ART, BRISBANE, 1993, COURTESY DAVID PESTORIUS PROJECTS, BRISBANE.

At a time when Carchesio's talents as a visual artist are deservedly recognised by a wider audience, both nationally and abroad, it is surprising that his active co-existence as a musician is not more widely appreciated on these shores. Although arguably more aesthetically discordant than his visual artworks, the processes linking Carchesio's visual, musical and performance arts are inextricably linked. A shared interest in minimalism, repetition and hypnotism abound in all of his art. Carchesio has been performing and releasing music since the '80s in a series of groups and projects ranging from the wilfully dissonant to those approaching an off-kilter sort of pop. A self-taught improvising musician, Carchesio's instruments of choice

Brisbane's unique tension between a deeply rooted conservatism and its inevitable rebellion has a strong influence on the work of local independent artists such as Carchesio.

EUGENE CARCHESIO, *CIRCULATION 2008*, COLOURED PENCIL AND CONSTRUCTION ON PAPER, 29.5 X 21CM, PRIVATE COLLECTION, BRISBANE.

include the saxophone and drum kit, in addition to - but not limited to - electronics, electric guitar, clarinet and voice.

Musically, Carchesio is probably most recognised as part of psych-blues via free jazz improv combo The Lost Domain. Formed in 1990 and known as The Invisible Empire until 1998, The Lost Domain has forged an outsider musical path that has developed parallel to contemporaries such as Jackie O Motherfucker and No-Neck Blues Band. Underappreciated until a few years ago, The Lost Domain has since released albums for international labels including Foxglove, Digitalis, Cook An Egg and Pseudo Arcana in addition to regular editions on the Shytone label.

Consisting of five mysterious souls of the netherworld with the stage names of Frank (Simon Ellaby), John Henry Calvinist (David MacKinnon), Mr. E (Eugene Carchesio), L-Tone (Leighton Craig) and Papa Lord God (Stuart Busby), The Lost Domain's "hit or miss" improvised performance combines shamanism, anti-gospel and the theatre of men possessed. At their peak, The Lost Domain's live performances are a transcendental experience. "I always feel a warmth when a piece takes off - it's like a space of sound cocoons around us and all is well with the universe."

Carchesio says, "The Lost Domain is essentially Simon and David as its spiritual core, [while] the rest of us help push the vehicle up and down and around the path." This may be a little self-effacing: although Ellaby and MacKinnon are the constants in a line-up that has shifted over the past two decades, Carchesio's contributions are an essential component of the group dynamic.

Cut from a similar improvisatory cloth is Carchesio's other primary musical vehicle, The Deadnotes. Featuring Carchesio on drums, clarinet, saxophone, guitar and voice alongside collaborators Craig and Busby, The Deadnotes are a decidedly more melodic combo than The Lost Domain, with bouts of freeform improvisation tempered with abstract pop sensibilities. In their relatively short existence, The Deadnotes has released two CD-Rs on Craig's Kindling label, with an LP forthcoming on Soft Abuse.

A minimalist encapsulation of artists as diverse as soundtrack composer Ennio Morricone, Australian post-punk legends The Laughing Clowns and alternative tex-mex band Calexico, Carchesio notes that The Deadnotes have quite a different working method than any of their other groups, with the result a form of "structured improv, almost pop at times - but we are not afraid of that."

Carchesio's increased profile of late has also seen an overdue resurgence of interest in his solo musical project, DNE. Perhaps most directly encapsulating the lineage between his visual art, performance and musical output, Carchesio's *modus operandi* as DNE was to create a prolific series of miniature audio vignettes, which have been released on dozens of cassettes and CD-Rs over the past two decades. To coincide with *Someone's Universe*, Lawrence English's Room 40 label has re-released DNE's hard to find 1987 album *47 Songs Humans Shouldn't Sing* on CD. With most songs on this album capping at less than a minute in length, *47 Songs* is a succinct delight, with free jazz, alt-pop, improv and no-wave sounds darting in and out of the listener's ear. Ever modest, Carchesio simply says of the re-release of *47 Songs*, "I have Leighton Craig to thank for that. He convinced Lawrence to put it out - but I don't really know if there is any interest."

Co-existing simultaneously with DNE in the late eighties was legendary art-punk trio The Holy Ghosts, featuring Carchesio alongside - at various stages - Ian Wadley (Bird Blobs, Small World Experience, St. Helens, Minimum Chips, solo), Clare McKenna (The Go-Betweens, Xero) and Pat Ridgewell (Small World Experience, Minimum Chips). A versatile improviser, Carchesio also regularly performs in other ad-hoc combinations, with past and present collaborators including Ed Kuepper, Robert Forster, Lawrence English and with his Lost Domain compatriots in various duo and trio formats.

It is also important to mention the influence of Brisbane as a city on Carchesio's art. Brisbane's unique tension between a deeply rooted conservatism and its inevitable rebellion has a strong influence on the work of local independent artists such as Carchesio. Whilst not necessarily an easy place to showcase one's artistic pursuits in public, Brisbane does provide a fertile atmosphere to create unconventional cross-platform art. "I guess living in Brisbane gives one time to think," Carchesio reflects.

Throughout much of Eugene's artistic career, his work has developed and struggled in sync with Brisbane's highs and lows as a cultural city. After many difficulties gaining appreciation, a burgeoning experimental music scene has emerged in the last decade with a broad spectrum of multi-platform independent arts promoters and organisations, in addition to publicly funded organisations such as the Gallery of Modern Art and the Brisbane Powerhouse. Regular formal and informal presentations from Room40 events and the Dadaist cousin collectives Audiopollen Social Club and OtherFilm are supplemented by ad-hoc events from an increasing array of creative provocateurs in galleries, clubs, houses, squats and other found spaces.

"If there was an experimental improv music scene in the late seventies early eighties, I didn't know about it. There was the punk and new wave thing happening where you would see a band in a pub or a hall. [In the] early to mid eighties there were artist run spaces happening where there was a bit of a cross over but no real audience for alternative sound and music. Now of course it's a different story."

DNE's *47 Songs Humans Shouldn't Sing* is available from Room40. The Deadnotes is available from Kindling Records.

REMEMBER TOMORROW: BELBURY POLY PLAYS TIME LORDS

It sounds like the kind of music that young groovers living in a Brutalist apartment tower might have swung their hips to circa 1978.

'The Hidden Door,' an early track on the new Belbury Poly album, *From An Ancient Star*, sounds like the opening credits to a long-lost television show from the 1970s: one that promised answers to the cosmic mysteries of UFOs and distant, inhabited galaxies. A queasy melody leads us out into the unexplored blackness of outer space. Arpeggio synthesisers suggest a phalanx of stars streaming past on either side, like a point-of-view shot constructed to make the viewer feel as if they are plunging headlong through the television screen into another universe.

Television itself can be the hidden door into other worlds: this premise lies at the centre of British musician Jim Jupp's work, and of Ghost Box, the record label he co-founded in 2004. Each artist on Ghost Box – two of them, Belbury Poly and Eric Zann, are Jupp's pseudonyms – creates music that more or less explicitly derives its sounds from a lost world of 1960s and '70s British television: sci-fi and pulp horror serials; well-meant yet nevertheless threatening public information programs.

"Part of a theme that's ongoing in all the Belbury Poly records, and I think all of the Ghost Box records," explains Jupp, "is a tradition of British science fiction, where you've got on the one hand the setting of a very traditional background, with very ancient things, but you've got this weird, cosmic stuff happening [at the same time]. A lot of old British sci-fi books –

John Wyndham, for instance – have these really mundane, quaint little village settings, but all of a sudden something really freaky and cosmic appears in the middle of it."

What is freakish is not necessarily overt – a nuclear war, or a sudden landing of carnivorous aliens – but a more subtle, unsettling sensation that the ordinary world is lying side-by-side with any number of other, stranger ones. It might only take turning a street corner at the right (or wrong) moment; opening a door that you'd never noticed before; switching on the television in time to catch a sinister glitch in the broadcast: any momentary gap in the border between here and elsewhere might thrust you into a new – or an old – reality. *From An Ancient Star* explores this very British pop-cultural collision between the modern and the folkloric, with reference to the 1970s: "ancient astronauts and Chariot of the Gods stuff, and programs on telly about UFOs, with Leonard Nimoy doing the voiceover," as Jupp remembers it.

These programs "seemed to dovetail with the sci-fi disco that was going on in clubs at the time," he continues. Sci-fi disco is an accurate description of a Belbury Poly track such as 'The All At Once Club', where bubbling, rocket ship FX noises and a thin metallic beat meet a jaunty synthesiser tune. It sounds like the kind of music that young groovers living in a Brutalist apartment tower might have swung their hips to circa 1978.

"Two composers who were around at that time in Britain and doing a lot of TV work were a couple of fellas called Denton and Cooke," says Jupp, "and they did theme tunes for a couple of British TV programs. There was a disco style to them, but it was a clunky, British, not very funky disco, and I was trying to tap into that. A slightly quirky, slightly wrong Britishness, even though there's clearly a disco sound."

Along with disco, there is a hint of glam to the album, a faint trace of Roxy Music's strange glitter. Previous Belbury Poly records have focused less on song structures than on creating genteel but eerie musical interludes. More than any other Ghost Box release so far, *From An Ancient Star* sounds like it could be a pop album.

"It's partly accident, but I think it's probably one of the more accessible Ghost Box records," Jupp agrees. "I didn't set out to do that and it doesn't mean it's a new direction for Belbury Poly or the other Ghost Box artists. It was more of a focused sound for the whole album, and a focused set of references. I'm really happy with the way it came out because it's more coherent for me than the other albums, they kind of jump around a bit… [But] it's not supposed to be from any particular point in time," he emphasises. "Like all the Ghost Box stuff, it's an imaginary past. But given that, it's from the late-70s of this imaginary past, if that makes sense?"

Unlike the slavish retro-worship and tiresome recycling that characterises so many contemporary musical artists – stuck in a past they can't get out of – the artists on Ghost Box hold firmly to the notion that the past is irrecoverable and, for that reason, all the more interesting. It must be re-imagined, rather than copied. This impulse is, as Jupp describes it, "a nostalgia for nostalgia". The ghosts that haunt this music are not bed-sheet spooks but the trace, folded into a past that never quite was, of a common future that never came to be. The matrix of Ghost Box influences – television soundtracks and library records, science fiction, British folklore, Penguin Books and public service announcements on the BBC – all share a certain utopian impulse, whether that lies in the belief that "all the ancient places in Britain, like Stonehenge" might be capable of transporting you to another world, or in the civilising, modernist influence of

"Little films, bits of copy that we write for the records, and even titles: they all spin off these conversations about where Belbury is and what it is. I like the idea of little models that might map out this territory."

"these very worthy organisations and public bodies that were set up in the post-World War II period to educate people." That utopias fail is part of what drives people to re-imagine them, even as that effort might be – perhaps inevitably – headed for its own failure. After all, a utopia ultimately exists nowhere.

The freedom to create a new world – Jupp also works as an architect, perhaps not entirely coincidentally – has lead in turn to the other long-running Ghost Box conceit: the imaginary town. Belbury is this town. "Hidden away in border country, the ancient market town of Belbury has much to recommend it," states *Field Guides to British Towns and Villages: Volume 7*, a concocted tourist pamphlet reproduced on the Ghost Box website. Although "badly damaged by an opportune air raid" in 1940, Belbury still boasts "a Neolithic stone circle", "a picturesque 11th century church", and "some notable modernist architecture, including the Polytechnic College."

"It's a setting for a lot that happens in the Ghost Box world - I talk about it with the other artists," Jupp elaborates. Each Ghost Box release adds a few more details to Belbury's existence, without ever quite revealing its entirety. "Little films, bits of copy that we write for the records, and even titles: they all spin off these conversations about where Belbury is," he continues, "and what it is. I like the idea of little models that might map out this territory. It's not like it's *The Lord Of The Rings*, and we're going to give you a map and a big book. But as we talk about it more, it makes more sense and we can drop more hints. It's slowly developing into a fleshed-out world. For us at least," he laughs.

From An Ancient Star evokes spaces that are simultaneously larger and smaller in scope than Belbury itself: a title like 'Clockwork Horoscope' perfectly captures the enjambment of miniature and galactic scales on the album. The preceding Belbury Poly records *The Willows* (2004) and *The Owl's Map* (2006) functioned more explicitly as guides to the town, with the design work of Julian House, who records as The Focus Group and is co-founder of the Ghost Box label, playing a crucial role. "You think, 'There's more to this than just a weird collage'," says Jupp of House's designs. "Maybe there are references to something that was on another record. There are a lot of cross-references and that's how we like to develop this world, with little hints and tiny bits of imagery."

House – who has also designed notable sleeves for Broadcast and Stereolab – uses the austere template of early Penguin paperbacks as his model for each Ghost Box release, though some, including *From An Ancient Star*, are allowed to go more 'off the grid' than others. With its stone circle and purple sky, the sleeve of *From An Ancient Star* is deliberately lurid, like the cover of a dog-eared and long out-of-print sci-fi novel tucked away on an overlooked shelf at the local Salvation Army store. The redundancy a pop cultural artefact still faintly transmitting ideas from a dead era is part of its curious appeal. The "little hints" that make up a Ghost Box sleeve are akin, in Jupp's description, "to the kind of thing you might find in a charity shop or a second-hand record shop: you've got this weird old record, and it might not have any photos of the artist on the cover, but there are weird bits of writing and maybe a weird image on the cover, and you think 'What the hell is this? I want to know more about it.' But all you've got to go on is little clues and little bits of copy on the back."

For Jupp, an avid collector of both outré vinyl records and vintage electronic instruments, the most interesting charity-shop finds were always "library records, certainly, because they were so damn peculiar. Especially in that era just before people started to realise that there was interesting stuff there, and they became incredibly valuable and hard to get hold of. There was something very, very mysterious about them. A lot of old jazz records had very abstract artwork, no pictures of the artists, and some intriguing sleeve notes that might be quite arch about a performance that some guy had once seen… A lot of '80s stuff, like Factory Records – I think Julian would certainly say that kind of austerity is part of the design."

Library records, wildly obscure private press jazz, and post-punk albums are all eminently collectable today, as indeed are the Ghost Box releases themselves, with their deliberate appeal to exactly the sort of person who might enjoy trawling sleeve notes or sci-fi serials for a trail of clues that leads to a hidden door. To cultivate such a coterie obsession is also to be convinced, on some level, that if you gather enough evidence together then this world will either reassemble itself, or let you through to another, much more interesting one. In the digital era, however, the clues are becoming easier to put together. The undeniably romantic notion of tunnelling through to another universe via the dusty artefacts of the second-hand shop is vanishing: a musical mystery can be solved with a quick Google search; half-remembered television footage can be viewed again, and almost inevitably disappoints. What does Jupp make of the internet's ever-expanding archive, given that a complete verisimilitude between memory and document runs entirely counter to the Ghost Box aesthetic?

"It's necessary and it's great, but it's also a bit sad," he answers, "… because once all that stuff is uploaded, then that's it, really, there'll be nothing left to find or cross-reference. There'll be no more mystery. That's the ultimate, bleak, sci-fi outcome of it all."

But he's also excited by the amount of interesting material that is being put back into circulation. "There are some great reissue labels," he says enthusiastically. "Every week you can hear old psychedelic bands from the '60s that never had a career, records that nobody's ever heard, old library records. There's loads of great stuff out there being rediscovered."

A wealth of material to draw upon means that small but interesting shifts are taking place in in Jupp's musical approach. *From An Ancient Star* is notable for its bizarre vocal samples, not an element that has intruded far into the Belbury Poly universe before now. 'Timescale' interlaces a calm female voice instructing us to "Feel time. Feel it now. Burst the seconds between your fingers" with a plummy, professorial man lamenting "Time, cruel time". Tabla-like rhythms and synthesised, Oriental flute noises float in the background. The effect is akin to splicing together a metaphysical fitness lesson with an opiated parlour conversation circa 1897. It's callisthenics meets H.G. Wells.

The instructional tone – though the instructions might be preposterous – inevitably brings to mind the sort of health and safety announcements that many of us absorbed as children, snuck in as they were between cartoons, or sometimes – more sneakily – disguised as cartoons. Stranger Danger. Fit For Life. Get Down Low and Go, Go, Go. "With hindsight we all look back on those fondly," remarks Jupp, "but there's also something slightly sinister about them, and I think these days we would resent public education films telling us how to drive and what to eat. Do you know what I mean? There's something a bit sinister and controlling about them."

"Although badly damaged by an opportune air raid in 1940, Belbury still boasts a Neolithic stone circle, a picturesque 11th century church, and some notable modernist architecture, including the Polytechnic College."

It is easy, in this markedly more commercial era, to become nostalgic about these little films, a product of post-WWII democracies that invested equally in social welfare and public television broadcasting. Australian broadcasting might never have reached the Cold War paranoia of *Protect And Survive: British Nuclear War Civil Defense*, but as any Australian who was spooked as child by the infamous Grim Reaper ads – a response to the AIDS crisis – into genuinely fearing for their life might reflect, it is still passing strange to have the government list for you all the nasty ways in which you might die. The threatening television is "a particular strain of the Ghost Box stuff that Julian is particularly interested in," Jupp says. "The Focus Group record We Are All Pan's People – I don't think that anybody's ever really pieced it together, but that's what's going on there: it's a popular cultural event that's being broadcast, but something has gone horribly wrong with it, and it's having weird results."

The question remains, however, just how far these references can travel outside of Britain – or outside of the Anglosphere, more accurately: those countries where a significant measure of British cultural influence has been absorbed. "I wonder about it myself," says Jupp, "why our music would even make sense to American audiences. I think we've sold fairly well over there: people have heard of us and a couple of stores carry our records. So we've got an American audience and that's great, and hopefully it means that we're more than just a very parochial set of British influences. Maybe there's something more archetypal that people recognise," he ponders, "or a stereotype: the British boffin working away at something in the garden shed,"

Right now, Jupp and House are working away together on a new collaborative project, along with John Brooks of The Advisory Circle, whose 2008 album Other Channels has been the most explicit attempt on Ghost Box so far to create a wholly plausible, yet horrible, television broadcast. Their new alias is The Elsewhere Quartet. As Jupp explains, it will be "slightly new territory for Ghost Box but we think it will also really fit in… It's got a lot of early '60s electronic sounds and jazz elements, so it will be a bit like Joe Meek, and John Baker's stuff for the BBC, electronic jazz. A sound palette from a world that could be about 1962." Don't expect them to be cracking out the tenor saxophones any time soon, though. "None of us are jazz musicians, so we won't get in over our depths with that,"

Jupp advises. "We'll put a toe in the waters. But it's electronic music and we're not pretending it's anything else."

2009 will be busy year for Ghost Box, with an album release by either The Elsewhere Quartet or The Advisory Circle, "whichever is finished first." There's also a forthcoming album by Roj, aka Richard Stevens, a former member of Broadcast, furthering the tangled connections between Ghost Box and the Birmingham outfit that go back to Jim and Julian's days together at school. Add to this the recent label sampler Ritual and Education, and the ambitious Belbury Youth Club Night, featuring DJ sets by Jupp, House, Jonny Trunk of the estimable reissue label Trunk Records, and prominent blogger/record collector/musician Woebot; screenings of "rare, unsettling and forgotten TV drama and public information", plus live and improvised electronics courtesy of Broadcast's Trish Keenan and James Cargill. It's exactly this kind of total, public event that makes sense for a label engaged in building its own imaginary – yet weirdly familiar – universe.

Having steadily grown in prominence over the past five years thanks to the word-of-mouth recommendations of music bloggers – evidence of the positive role that the internet does play in piecing together clues, and connecting otherwise lone aficionados – Ghost Box has begun to gain attention, even from The Sunday Times. The more Jupp and his cohorts drop hints to strange artefacts of the past, the more the label's fans scramble to uncover them, in a sort of archival arms race. Can Jupp see a time when the Ghost Box and Belbury Poly projects will exhaust their purpose?

"No," he answers. "At the moment it's open-ended. There's a lot of stuff that we haven't mined yet, that I think we can: other types of music and other time frames." He remains "pleased and surprised" by the growing audience. One could envisage Jupp as programming director of a slightly paternalistic public access television station, one with good pedagogical intentions but bent on oddities: a kind of Open University for those "ancient astronauts" that roamed across bygone screens. "I guess that we could be accused us of foisting this stuff onto people and saying 'Aren't we clever?'" he muses. "But that's not really what why we're doing it." Philosophic intentions and fictional town planning aside, the beautifully crafted musical miniatures of *From An Ancient Star* have a charm that is difficult to resist. But wait. Could this charm be a front for a sinister mind-control plot? Stay tuned…

Belbury Poly's *From An Ancient Star* is available from Ghost Box.

SURFING THE BLOGOSPHERE

While talking over the phone to Nathan Williams, the 21 year old San Diegan behind Wavves, it becomes ridiculously evident just how much the internet has opened up the opportunity to have your music heard. It's easy to picture Nathan - all flannel, upturned cap and chilled vibage - experimenting and working on his lo-fi punk behind a garage door warmed by Californian sun. I know 'that garage thing' is nothing new, but considering the sudden interest of an absurd amount of labels in Wavves, and the eruption of blog adorations that has followed, it's kind of staggering.

"I almost thought I'd bitten off more than I could chew at first." Nathan says, "All these labels that were asking me to do stuff were ones that I'd regularly buy from by mail order when I have a couple of dollars. So for me to say no would've been ridiculous, I just thought 'whatever, I can do another record'. But then it was nine or ten records on as many different labels and I thought maybe I should stop and think things through."

"I do once in a while get on and read those sites [blogs]. I think blogs and the internet totally changed the way music is recorded and produced. It's so much easier and so much more accessible now. You can really just be some shithead kid in a room but as long as you can put it on the internet - which almost everyone can - and even if you don't have the internet yourself, a friend of yours might. It's cool in a lot of ways, but at the same time there are so many bands that you kind of have to look at a bit more closely, because I think anyone can do it now. There's a lot more possibility for people that otherwise might never have had a chance to get it heard."

You could probably pin some of Wavves' success on last year's breakthrough of No Age. Like Juan Velaquez of close LA contemporaries Abe Vigoda said in an interview last year, No Age playing on MTV is "fucking crazy", and he's pretty much right. While it's not surprising these days for bands of such an unlikely aesthetic to cross over into the "mainstream" (according to more indie audiences), it's not exactly a mean feat. Although the first self-titled Wavves cassette features similar forays into free noise/ambient as No Age's Nouns does, but Nathan Williams is pushing lo-fi even further. Tape fuzz is his homeboy, and of course, all his gear is mostly broken.

"You can really just be some shithead kid in a room but as long as you can put it on the internet – which almost everyone can – and even if you don't have the internet yourself, a friend of yours might."

"I was just fucking around, really. I was in this other band called Fantastic Magic, and we weren't really doing very much at the time. The other two guys in the band both had girlfriends and there wasn't so much concentration on what we were doing as a band. So because I was bored and I wanted to play music I just started recording my own stuff. I really had no intention of doing anything with it until another friend of mine listening to it urged me to send it around to some labels just to see what they'd say. So I sent out three or four demos and basically got three or four people that wrote back and said 'yeah let's do a record'. So it just filled up my time, I just started recording and doing it all and it got lots of good feedback and snowballed from there I guess."

I've gotta say, listening to a track like 'To The Dregs' - with its Dookie nostalgic rush and skewed Brian Wilson "oooohh ooohhh" chorus - is certainly exhilarating, though it's over way too soon at just 1:56. Wavves' music sounds like distinct excitement mixed through pop/punk fragments. It feels like getting drunk and staring up at the sun in the daytime, a fitting type of imagery considering many have dubbed Nathan's stuff "beach punk". It's pretty apt, really; it sounds just like those blurry skateboarding pictures on his releases, and also like Williams' own pre-imagined ideas of San Diego.

"I lived in Virginia before I moved here, where I had this idea that it's sunny all the time and there are beautiful girls dressed in next to nothing, dudes skateboarding around, and everyone is getting high, just sitting on the beach and stuff. [I had] that slacker beach town kind of idea for sure. I got here on my freshman year of high school and I kind hated it at first. It was a total culture shock, being from Virginia, which is a much smaller place. My parents had made me go

"I'm angsty at 22. Something is really wrong with me."

to Christian school when I was younger and I finally got kicked out of that and moved to San Diego, going from having 120 people in a school to having 5000 people and not knowing a single fucking one.

"It was kind of weird at first, being the mega awkward kid. The first friends I made were just from skateboarding and hanging out. In my head though, the place was a lot different. And that's kind of what the music I make is about; trying to convince myself that at one point in California's history there was this incredible time and everything was like the pictures I put up on my wall."

In terms of both West Coast DIY music and wider pop culture it's definitely easy to romanticise a beach town like that: all palm trees and babes in bikinis, dudes smoking weed and just "having a chill time y'all". What's it really like these days, though?

"San Diego is a really Republican beach town. It has the second biggest army base in the US, and overall there's a jock mentality throughout all of San Diego. Maybe six years ago there were places where you could go and play shows but now you have to play bars and they're not really very friendly for music. People generally seem like they don't give a shit, but this is very general what I'm saying. There is a group of kids who go out and party and go to shows and stuff. I think a lot of people who dress the part, or are down for it, just wanna go out, get fucked up and pick up a girl, rather than [go out for] just for the music or art or whatever."

Wavves' aesthetic combines all those faded photos and half-real nostalgias with a gritty escapism purveyed via killer punk riffs and blissed out harmonies. Even if his recording style and general approach can be pretty lax (hang out/record a punk track/have a drink/have a smoke/record a noise track), those short recording sessions are surprisingly cohesive in terms of his overall vision.

"I always thought it was really cool when a band's aesthetic is more than just their music, it's this whole statement, a sound and feel. It kind of all comes together somehow. In the beginning I didn't set out thinking 'oh, I'm going to write beach punk' and I don't even know why people started saying that I coined that term. I've never said that in my entire life. But it does make sense, I'm from the beach playing this punk-ish music, so, you know."

"That's kind of what the music I make is about; trying to convince myself that at one point in California's history there was this incredible time and everything was like the pictures I put up on my wall."

Nathan listens mostly to hip-hop, and even if it's sonically quite far from his own music, it's an obvious informant of a certain rebellious type of scruffy pop. Wu-Tang informs his art probably just as much as old Wipers or Misfits cassettes. I guess both punk and rap both, as Nathan says, "fuck you" in various ways.

"I think there are a lot of similarities, I think about it quite a lot. People probably don't think about it that much but the general idea is basically the same: a couple of people who are tired of taking it so they say 'fuck you' in whatever way that is. It's probably at opposite ends of the spectrum the way they actually say 'fuck you', but it's still a basic rebellion. Rap is just as punk as punk is a lot of the time. That's probably why I like both of them so much. But yeah, I'm angsty at 22. Something is really wrong with me."

Not that Wavves sounds that angsty, but there's a nihilism to it that's not uncommon within no-wave/DIY circles. It's also balanced with a battered sweetness, or – at a little more of a stretch – a very grubby sort of grandeur. Nathan doesn't seem quite as much the slacker as the media has made out though. Even with that upturned cap, the grin and the skateboard underarm, it seems like there's at least a hint of irony to fill out these San Diegan ballads.

"It's funny, every publication that I've been in so far has been like 'loser king making music' and 'slacker idiot', it's like I'm king of the losers or something," He laughs. "I think it is one of those things where your surroundings seep in. I didn't set out to do anything other than what I thought in my head sounded cool at the time. And once I'd recorded a couple of songs, I sat down and realized that every single song I'd written so far was all about the sun, or just about being a loser."

"My surroundings just kind of seeped into the music. Once I'd done it a couple of times I felt I'd found a niche, for sure. I set out to work on that for the rest of the record. I like the general idea of everything so far."

***Wavves* is available through Woodsist Records.**

ADMIRING A BLACK SEA

It appears as though music is clouded in a frenzied storm of overactivity right now.

Ease of access to creation and distribution has brought about a plethora of action at varying levels of competency and curiosity. The result of this gust of creativity is a decreased ability by critics, historians and other interested parties to reconcile contemporary music in any kind of meaningful way. Questions abound as to what albums will maintain interest and fascination 10 or more years from now. Which musicians will hold a place in the history of their given field? What is significant, what is merely a mirage?

In 20 years or at some future point, when the storm clouds surrounding music have settled (or shifted to another turbulent phase), hindsight will create hierarchies of relevance and influence, and amongst the musicians whose work is sure to have thrived and assumed greater relevance is Christian Fennesz. The Vienna-based musician unwittingly placed himself at the very heart of the laptop-based electronic music world in 2001 with the release of possibly the most significant record of its time, *Endless Summer*.

Endless Summer not only summarised the sketches of live processed laptop music that had dotted performance spaces and label release schedules since the mid-nineties, it also transformed what had for the most part been disparate noisy explorations into something unexpected. Not only did this new laptop-based music feature precise arrangement and melodic colour, but it also had a sense of play that transformed the material from 'difficult' into something wholly welcoming, even hummable.

Now, the better part of a decade later, Fennesz offers his latest vision of electronic drenched composition – Black Sea. It's a markedly different affair from previous undertakings – where *Endless Summer* and *Venice* were punctuated with short bursts of song, Black Sea takes a decidedly long form and is perhaps the first record that fits together as an extended composition.

"It's been good that there's so much interest in the record," Fennesz comments from his studio space, "To be honest I was a little bit worried this time because it's a little bit different, but people seem to be excited about it. I've never really been one to compose longer pieces – the tracks are generally shorter on my records and I think with this one, there's this sense that maybe the whole record could be heard as one long track. It could be heard as one as one big composition, sure you can hear pieces that function as single tracks, but for me it's like this one large composition."

So how then did this long form work come about?

"This process unfolded very naturally whilst I was making the record," he explains, "I've been working on a great many ideas – a lot of them I'd work on for a while and then they'd just exhaust themselves and I'd throw them all away and start over. I did try to go in a song-oriented direction for this record initially, but honestly it was just not satisfying at all. I don't know, maybe it wasn't the right time for it, but I moved away from those ideas and what you hear on Black Sea is what I came to after that searching. I just let things go, I let some of the sounds extend which was great and also I allowed for silences to be in there."

When listening to Black Sea, the sense of exploration is ever-present. Though not radical in any way, the record plots out a considered path through territories that are unquestionably Fennesz, both in terms of aesthetics and harmony, but do suggest a more lateral approach to composition and arrangement.

"I have to try new ideas," he explains, of the process behind the record. "There has to be some challenge to the work, I mean I could do another *Venice* or *Endless Summer* all the time, but really why would I want to do that. It might not be as good as the originals, but it'd be easy to copy those ideas and make a record. But there's nothing in that for me. Each time I try something for a record, I want it to be new, I want it to point in some direction that I hadn't explored before. Of course, I have my limitations, the records always sound like me, but I am looking for that new terrain.

"Actually some people have said that this record sounds very mature - maybe that's just a nice way of saying 'the guy's getting old.' But I do think there's a certain harmonic, tonal world that I always use and that I'm in. There's some chord progressions on this album that are the essence of many other things I've done before."

One of key elements that marks *Black Sea* as separate from previous Fennesz efforts is its juxtaposition of live instruments and processed/created instruments. Whereas these two elements have co-existed on other records previously, on *Black Sea* the relationship is re-considered. Acoustic instruments and physical spaces are offset against physically modelled environments and generated instruments. The results are both compelling and confounding, as the listener is drawn into uncertain states of listening – trying to hear the 'real' and the 'artificial'.

"For this one I was really interested in making recordings of acoustic instruments in these beautiful rooms. At the same time I was - I think for the first time - using physical modelling synthesis and that really fascinated me. So that was something I wanted to bring out in this new album. I was trying to build artificial instruments, I guess you could say, and trying to set them up with the other acoustic instruments so you get a sense of the two working for and against each other.

"In 'Grey Scale' for example there's one of these instruments I built using this synthesis technique and then the acoustic instrument as well. So combining that with the real room reverbs and the simulated rooms I was building with the modelling meant that there were so many possibilities, I didn't tire of it at all. You never know what is real and what is artificial. So the effect is there's more space in these recordings.

"This interest for me came from a few different experiences I had recently – one of them was in preparing a piece for the Vienna Concert Hall with a string quartet. It suddenly struck me that these instruments sound just so incredible in these old classical performance spaces that I wanted to investigate this relationship within my own music and I found out so much about what I do – simple things like microphone placement kept me reading and studying all the way through the record."

Another source for this inspiration springs forth from recent collaborations with the likes of Ryuichi Sakamoto.

"The work with Ryuichi has been influencing me this regard also - especially the *Cendre* sessions. When we recorded the piano for those sessions - Fernando Aponte, who has been Ryuichi's sound engineer for many years, had amazing ideas about ways to mic the piano and other instruments."

Collaboration serves more than just a technical interest for Fennesz though. Like many electronic musicians, there's a social aspect that is central to the ways in which collaborations unfold.

"It's tough, I live in this studio sometimes – I'm in here day after day, week after week, and it's as though I have no social life anymore. So for me the process of collaboration is really a pleasure – it's a chance to meet and work with people. I think as well as that I am a player, I love to play music and to do that there's something about playing with other people that's really enjoyable. I have to keep this player alive, it's important for me to communicate by improvising with other people, that just gives me such energy. I think working with people in a completely different field is a great process, it pushes you into areas you otherwise might not explore. You can learn so much and I think it's always difficult to explain to journalists about this thing of playing with someone like Ryuichi or Keith Rowe, but for us, the musicians, it's totally natural – it makes sense and we enjoy doing it, even if we play completely different music, we feel connected and we want to work together and learn from each other."

As enjoyable as collaboration may be, it is perhaps ultimately a blessing and a curse. After all it does bear a toll on the creation of new solo work. An example of this can be seen in the lead up to

"It's tough, I live in this studio sometimes – I'm in here day after day, week after week, and it's as though I have no social life anymore."

Black Sea. Some four years after the release of the previous solo from Fennesz, *c*, this latest LP's completion stuttered due to a severe lack of consolidated time in the studio.

"I've been working on so many smaller projects in the past few years – film works, collaborations and other things – that really there wasn't that much time to work on the album. There was simply not enough time to sit in the studio for three or four months and work on something new. That was part of the reason things took a while this time. Also I have to admit another factor was that I really like doing smaller projects and executing smaller ideas. For example, I really like the single format – the A/B format is something I really like to work with.

"Partly as well I didn't have this feeling like I wanted to make a record. I mean there's so much stuff out there – really so much, that I didn't feel I had something to contribute to that mass of music. So I have to be confident enough to release an album and this time it took four years."

But even with the lost time, Fennesz is quick to point out that it would be unlikely for him to be creating more than he presently is. Partly due to this sense of 'glut' in the music being released.

"It's crazy," he sighs, "I just can't follow new music, I have completely lost track. I need someone to filter things for me and present just a selection of things for me. I don't have the time to go through all this stuff, there's so much electronic music. I keep on listening to my friend's music, because that's all that I can follow. So I think that now sometimes is on my mind when I am writing. There's always got to be value in the music, something there that can hold people when they come across it."

Fennesz' *Black Sea* is available through Touch.

COULD'VE MO VED...

To tell the story of Brooklyn duo Mountains, we must return to a time when Brendon Anderegg and Koen Holtkamp were just young'uns. The pair first met when they were both attending middle school in Connecticut, where they bonded (as kids will) over "skateboarding and stuff like that." Though they remained friends throughout high school, it wasn't until the late 1990s when they both found themselves studying at the Art Institute of Chicago – where Brendon went to study painting, Koen film and video – that their working relationship began to develop.

"When we were in high school, we didn't live in the same town," explains Brendon. "We didn't see each other all the time, so we kind of hung out with different people and stuff. But when we went to the Art Institute we started having the same friends and going to shows together."

Slowly, both Brendon and Koen began to gravitate away from their original areas of study towards the sound department. "It's a very open school, so we didn't technically have majors or anything like that," says Koen. "So I ended up doing predominantly sound."

"I painted a lot when I was growing up and I went to school as a painter and eventually gravitated more towards the sound department also," Brendon adds.

Mountains was originally conceived as a vehicle for collaborative live performances while Brendon and Koen were still studying. The success of this endeavour eventually led to the duo's eponymous debut album, which they released via their own label Apestaartje in 2005. Featuring just four tracks spread over the course of an hour, it was an exercise in subtlety and nuance. *Mountains* earned the pair many favourable comparisons to artists like Fennesz, for its blend of fluttering electronics, field recordings and acoustic instrumentation, as well as seeming to owe a debt to the John Fahey school of Appalachian folk.

The following year, Mountains released *Sewn*, which was written and recorded over an intense period of several weeks in 2006. Structurally, *Sewn* was quite a step away from its predecessor, featuring twice as many songs yet clocking in at a good 12 minutes shorter. "We wanted to try something different to what we did on the first record," says Brendon, of the change. "The shorter tracks were more of a conscious decision."

"We rarely play pieces after we record them. We won't play anything off Choral *for the upcoming shows, it's all going to be new material."*

Brendon describes recording *Sewn* as "challenging" due to the concentrated nature of the sessions. So when it came to recording the follow-up, the pair took a much more relaxed approach. *Choral*, Mountains' third album and first for Thrill Jockey (Apestaartje is on

an extended and possibly permanent hiatus) was carefully crafted during the northern winter and spring of 2008, mostly within the comfort of Brendon's loungeroom.

Unlike *Sewn*, *Choral* was recorded with no preconceptions in mind. As such, the final result sits somewhere between the long form explorations of the debut and the shorter, more focused pieces of *Sewn*.

"The approach with this one was a lot more open," says Koen. "We let it develop more naturally, whereas like Brendon said, the second record was a conscious decision to try something different."

A natural extension of Mountains' birth as a live project is that *Choral* was recorded as much as possible without the use of overdubs. "It depends on the track," says Brendon. "The title track for example, there's a lot of stuff layered on the top of that. The backbone of it was something we did live, and then we just layered a lot of instrumentation to give it a fuller, thicker sound. But there are a lot of tracks on the album that are almost completely live. The only one that's made through a studio process is the second track ['Map Table']. I recorded the guitar and then we added other stuff on top of it. But the rest of the record, we played everything together and then we'd do overdubs at the same time. We were trying to play it the whole time, rather than just doing one track and then another and then another."

"It allows for more surprises to happen, because we're reacting to each other in real time," adds Koen.

"I feel like you wouldn't get the interaction that's very important to our music, given that it's very detailed," Brendon continues. "And also a lot of it is somewhat subtle, so it's nice to be able to key in to these interactions between the sounds that I don't think you'd really get as naturally if you were doing it one track at a time."

Further to this, many of the pieces on *Choral* had evolved over a long period of time as part of the duo's live sets. "They mutate a little over time," says Koen. "We start with a structure, and we'll play that. We have certain feelings about it afterwards, like, 'What if we extended this part a little bit?' or 'What if we did this thing differently?' and then over time as we play it in different spaces and environments it changes. Then we reach a point where it's 'finished', and that's when we record it. We rarely play pieces after we record them. We won't play anything off *Choral* for the upcoming shows, it's all going to be new material."

"We're really picky about the quality of the sound and the post-production side of it," says Brendon. "With music like this I feel like it has to sound really nice and detailed, otherwise you don't get the nuance. So once we've put all the time into making it sound good, and once we've listened to it so many times, it's almost like it would be hard to go back and keep playing those tracks over and over again."

Prior to coming together as Mountains, both Brendon and Koen were well established as solo artists, with Brendon performing under his surname and Koen as Aero. These days, however, such pursuits take a backseat to Mountains. Koen did manage to record *Field Rituals* (released under his own name last October by UK label Type), and Brendon composed the music for Meg McLagan and Daria Sommers's film *Lioness*, but that looks to be the only solo output from either of them for quite some time to come.

"In Chicago it felt like there was more of a specific scene. One of the great things about New York and a good reason to be here is that there's always something to see, there's always something going on."

"I've been working on stuff here and there, but really I feel like Mountains is more of an extension of what I was doing before than what I would be doing on my own," says Brendon. "I had a band for a while [Charter Oak] which was more singer-songwriter stuff and put out a limited EP, but other than that I haven't put out anything on my own in a while."

"I try to go back and forth," Koen says. "A lot of [*Field Rituals*] was done when Brendon went back to school for a little while and moved to Arizona. I wanted to continue doing work and performing, and that record kind of came out of that. I do plan on doing more solo stuff in the future, but the focus shifts from one to the other. Mountains is the focus right now."

Part of the reason for this shifting focus is the mutual desire not to allow their solo work to filter too much into Mountains, and to maintain at least some nominal form of separation between the two.

"I think they definitely influence each other, but I feel like they're too close to do at the same time," says Koen.

"I feel like that too," adds Brendon. "You just get into a mindset working on certain things and doing things a certain way when we're practicing a lot and it's best to just use that material for us, for Mountains."

"I feel like our music forms more internally than externally in terms of what's going on around us. Where we are I don't think is a major factor in what we make."

"Also, when I work on solo stuff that's more like the ambient, melodic experimental stuff, a lot of the time it sounds to me like it's one half of Mountains without the rest of the tracks on it," he laughs.

All of the music Brendon and Koen have recorded together as Mountains dates from the period after they both moved to Brooklyn. But you won't hear any influence of the city in *Choral* or either of its predecessors – in fact, the gentle, pastoral tones of Mountains seem to be the very antithesis of the bustle of New York.

While Brendon agrees that their music is not at all urban, he denies that this is in any way reactionary. "I feel like our music forms more internally than externally in terms of what's going on around us," he says. "I'm sure there is some influence, but we've been trying to evolve our own music in a direction that we want to go. Where we are I don't think is a major factor in what we make."

Brendon and Koen both speak very highly of their current living situation. Besides the convenience of being no more than two blocks from one another, the pair have found innumerable advantages to being immersed in an environment as creatively fertile as New York City. Koen does, however, reject the notion that Mountains are part of any particular scene.

"We have a lot of friends who play in bands and are involved in music projects, but it's not necessarily one kind of music," he says. "It's not like all the people I know play stuff similar to what we do; I've got friends who do more singer-songwriter stuff, friends who do more experimental improv things. In Chicago it felt like there was more of a specific scene. I don't get that feeling here. In terms of activity, one of the great things about New York and a good reason to be here is that there's always something to see, there's always something going on. I think that's pretty inspiring. Whether it's art shows or music stuff, or just exploring the city. It never gets boring."

"I agree," adds Brendon. "I lived in Portland, Oregon for a year and a half after I moved from Chicago, just because I didn't want to be in a big city for a bit. But I felt like the music scene there was so small that every time you went to a show it was the same people there. It seemed a little bit too small, especially for the kind of stuff I was doing, so I felt like I had to move. Koen had just moved here, so it felt like I should move here. Also, my family was in Connecticut, which is like 50 miles away from New York City. So it made sense to move here. Since I've been here I feel like generally speaking the people are really open to different kinds of music, and are generally positive and open to different musical ideas. It varies enough that there's always someone who's interested in someone's work."

However, time spent away from their regular environment does have its place in Mountains' creative process. *Sewn*, for example, features field recordings captured by the duo during a hiking trip in upstate New York. "That's something we really enjoyed doing, just capturing different elements of an environment," says Koen of the experience.

And absence, as they say, makes the heart grow fonder. "It makes you appreciate being here more when you have the chance to escape," offers Koen. "I don't know if escape's the right word, but just to get away. Then coming back being in this environment is more tolerable. But I think in the long run, I don't want to grow old in the city. I would like in the next few years to move upstate somewhere that's a little quieter."

Brendon, however, isn't so sure. "I went to Arizona for nine months and I didn't know anyone," he says. "I met some people there, but none of my friends were there and I didn't know people that well, and I just studied the whole time. But it was really hard, because I didn't have time to come back here at all, so I had to stay there the entire time. I missed it a lot, just knowing that everyone was here doing what they were doing, and I just felt completely isolated. So it really made me appreciate being here, even though I complain about the amount of people and how hectic it is. It's hard to be away from it for too long."

Mountains' new album *Choral* is available from Thrill Jockey.

HAUNTED BALLROOMS

Despite a baffling work rate which has seen V/VM release more material over 12 years than any listener could reasonably be expected to digest in a lifetime, James Kirby is surprised and faintly miffed by the resurgent interest in his output thanks to The Caretaker. Ironically, it was the release of The Caretaker's 2008 album *Persistent Repetition of Phrases* which attracted the most acclaim Kirby has experienced for years, yet it was also one of the few works he has created that was outsourced to a label other than the one he helms himself, V/VM Test.

"The label (US based label Installsound) only pressed 500 and we didn't do any promo whatsoever, so I have no idea why so many people enjoyed that." Kirby is speaking from his home in Berlin, where he moved to from Stockport – near Manchester – two and a half years ago. "The album was getting in all these lists at the end of the year like *Wire* magazine. It's very strange, because *Wire* hasn't reviewed V/VM in a long time."

V/VM Test has hosted a vast palette of musical styles, ranging from Belgian New Beat tributes to skewed appropriations of MOR rock (miraculously only once resulting in legal action), but Kirby's music has always been overshadowed by his notoriety. In a climate where sage intellectualism dominates most experimental electronic music, Kirby is perhaps just too weird. Artistically speaking, Kirby is fearless, often to the detriment of his work being taken seriously. The music can be horribly technicoloured and garish as on V/VM's 2000 album *Sick Love* – which siphoned any feeling of 'love' from popular love songs - or minimal, multi-faceted and melancholic, as with his The Caretaker and The Stranger projects. To detail every crest and trough of Kirby's output here would be impossible. But so prolific is he that for listeners and critics who dip their toes into a particularly arcane spot in his oeuvre, they'll often be scared away from another project that might be more palatable to their tastes.

One of Kirby's most ambitious projects was the V/VM 365 project, which saw him release one track for each day of 2006, released daily as a free download on the V/VM website and accompanied by a short description of his day, often resulting in some hilariously candid tales of touring, recording and excessive drinking. Kirby ended up recording 602 tracks over that period despite a year-long flu, a move from England to Berlin, a world tour and a dislocated knee thanks to one of his famously demented V/VM live shows. "I was rolling around this venue and ended up rolling down a flight of stairs and dislocating my knee, which was quite painful," Kirby recalls. "I had to bang the knee back into place and carry on with the show. I had a friend playing with me and he sliced his hand open at the same show. It was a real mess. A great, great show."

"The shows were anti 'we're-gonna-stand-behind-this-laptop-and-be-really-intricate,'" he says of the V/VM live shows. "It gets so boring. I remember being at the Sonar festival in Barcelona and that year [1999] was when playing a laptop was really going off. But the V/VM show involved miming songs and jumping around, and it made an impact. Up to that point it was just guys in front of laptops staring at the screen."

Sifting through various free downloads and physical V/VM releases, it's understandable why Kirby has always been on the periphery of critical acceptance. There's a belligerence towards expectations, a defiance of how 'real' music should be packaged and consumed, and again, an inscrutable freakishness that is difficult to critically navigate. Kirby has always worked in earnest, producing works at such a rate that an observer barely has a chance to deconstruct one and discover its real purpose before another release arrives to contradict it.

But since January this year, V/VM Test is over. Much of its output will stay available on the internet, where it has been amassing over the course of a decade. "I don't think there's much need for record labels these days," Kirby says of the closure. "They've served their purpose. We're in a different time now, you can create things without it being labelled. As a vehicle it reached its end destination and it's time to try something else." Kirby will continue to release material independently, though the success of last year's Caretaker album *Persistent Repetition of Phrases* was more successful, he believes, because it wasn't released on V/VM Test. "I think people just misunderstood a lot of things [related to V/VM Test]. They get a general idea from one thing that's done. A lot of the stuff that I released just disappeared, it just got missed. Whereas other things got a lot of attention and some things got heaps."

"I was rolling around this venue and ended up down a flight of stairs, dislocating my knee. I had a friend playing with me and he sliced his hand open at the same show. It was a real mess. A great, great show."

"It's huge. Even for me it's crazy. I was looking at [the V/VM output] the other day and I thought 'what can I do with this'. It's too big. It's gotten really confusing for people. To re-focus people on some new things it's necessary to put that whole thing in the background as some kind of archive. And just work on some new things and see what happens from there."

The Caretaker is currently Kirby's most popular project, partially thanks to recent discourse triggered by critics Mark Fisher (aka K-Punk) and Simon Reynolds, who count The Caretaker among a handful of key artists and labels who fit into the concept of 'hauntology' as it relates to music. The word, originally coined by Jacques Derrida to describe the spectral persistence of revolutionary ideals in the wake of the 'end of history' (post 1989, post Cold War), applies to music that borrows from the past; styles that - like The Caretaker's comatose and reverb-drenched ballroom appropriations

- project a sense of being haunted by past ideals. In a musical climate where real revolutions in style and performance seem impossible, the concept follows that artists of The Caretaker's ilk align themselves aesthetically with sonic worlds long considered past their used by date, styles that embody a particular era and were quickly usurped or forgotten. There's also a sense of unfinished business: of finding the real potential in these largely forgotten ideas and breathing new life into them.

The Caretaker was birthed by Kirby's fascination with the ballroom scene in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*. During the scene, Jack Nicholson's character – in an anger-fuelled malaise - enters an empty ballroom which suddenly becomes populated by ghostly dancers revelling to the sound of 1920s-1930s ballroom music.

"I don't think there's much need for record labels these days. They've served their purpose. We're in a different time now, you can create things without it being labelled."

While Kirby traces his fascination with the style further back than his first experience with *The Shining*, that scene was integral to The Caretaker mode of operation, which sees him plundering old ballroom 78s, drenching them in reverb, slowing them down, looping vital melodic motifs and bringing the crackle and decay of the vinyl to the forefront of the mix.

"If you listen to the source material without it being affected it has these really strange moods." Kirby says. "[This music] was popular between the two world wars, and there's a lot of loss in these songs. A lot of people went to war and never came back and so a lot of the songs and lyrics are very dark from this time, and it comes through in the music. As soon as you start messing around with it you get these feelings just from the tracks themselves [before manipulation]."

"It was a strange time in Europe back then, so a lot of the music I've used is European. Of course there's a lot of American stuff from the same time but it doesn't seem to have this ghostly theme. If you listen to a lot of the lyrics there's a lot about ghosts - they talk a lot about loss and ghosts, it's a constant theme in this music."

Kirby cites Albert Allick Bowlly, a South African born British jazz singer of the era as one of his favourite artists in the canon. Al Bowlly sang the song 'Midnight The Stars In You', which scored the final scene in *The Shining*. "He's great," Kirby enthuses, "[His stuff is] easy to find and cheap. He was the best singer of that whole era but he died in the Blitz in London, a bomb landed on his doorstep. They reckon he would have been bigger than Bing Crosby because he had the best voice."

"He had a very haunting voice," he continues. "He's the guy that sang in the last scene in *The Shining*, the one that finishes the film. That was a very difficult record to find for a long time because Kubrick bought the rights to that song and it disappeared. I managed to find it on a 78 and I was very lucky. It was very cheap too, a two pounds purchase in mint condition."

Kirby released three albums of disorientating, melancholic ballroom mutations concerned with memory before changing tact with 2006's *Theoretically Pure Anterograde Amnesia*. This six CD set - still available for free download but also packaged in a limited boxset - uses the mental illness of *Anterograde Amnesia* as its theme: a form of amnesia where the sufferer retains all memories previous to procuring the ailment, but nothing thereafter.

Sonically, *...Anterograde Amnesia* consists of hardly audible, oblique smudges of sound and ambience, infrequently blossoming into discernible melody. The purpose of the album is to emulate the disorientation of memory loss. Describing the mechanics of the project, Kirby says the release is "confusing because the tracks aren't numbered, but are all of a similar [short] length." Due to the length and rarity of sonic 'events', the listener is unable to make sense of the ebb and flow of sound; repeated listens will not offer coherence. Instead, the album is a gigantic swath of nigh silent darkness punctured by irregular 'events', moments - or memories - floating in an otherwise murky and disconnected fug of barely present consciousness.

This release – according to Kirby – was a highlight in The Caretaker's output, a work that rung up 50,000 (free) downloads and put V/VM back on the critical radar. Since then he's released outtakes from that project and a vinyl release entitled *Deleted Scenes / Forgotten Dreams*. But it was his 2008 release *Persistent Repetition of Phrases* that has attracted the most interest. As much as a Caretaker release can be regarded as 'accessible', this latest release would be it. Opening with the bruised and shrouded strains of 'Lacunar Amnesia', the album keeps Kirby's source material just within audible reach so that the mournful, looped melodic refrains lodge themselves in the listener's consciousness. Like *...Anterograde Amnesia*, this latest album is conceptually cemented in mental illness. 'Lacunar Amnesia' references the complete loss of recollection of one particular moment – or scene – in one's life, while the track title 'Past Life Regression' describes a technique used by hypnotists to conjure in their subjects memories of a past life.

Rather than take a complete track and manipulate it in real time, Kirby says *Persistent Repetition of Phrases* is built around small melodic moments taken from complete ballroom compositions. "On the last album there's lots of really short samples [that run for] five or six seconds. Then I take it somewhere else, completely slow it down or make it a lot longer." Kirby took a similar tact with his 'Death of Rave' project. Made available for free through the V/VM Test microsite Vukzid, Kirby manipulated old rave tracks until they resembled a distant emanation from some warehouse many highways and overpasses away, referencing the golden age of UK rave culture that still resonates globally but is buried inaccessible in the past.

While *Persistent Repetition of Phrases* is Kirby's most famous work of 2008, he also released an album under the name The Stranger, a monochrome-hued exploration of drowsy electronic textures and stilted, militant beats unyielding to movement or grace. Entitled *Bleaklow*, and released on V/VM, it's inspired by an area near his native Stockport. "It's [based on] these dark hills that surround Manchester." He says of the location, "I just tried to capture that atmosphere somehow, that damp drizzle. It always rains there, even on sunny days its grey."

"The name itself [Bleaklow], I don't know where it comes from, but it's very bleak up there. The peak district outside of Manchester is about a 30 minute drive out of town. It's one of the only areas I miss being over here in Berlin, because I don't miss much about being in England. That area is really nice, it's quite inspiring.

"For me *Bleaklow* is a lot stronger than The Caretaker one. It suffers from being on V/VM rather than another label. If it was another label maybe there'd be more reviews. It's very similar to Caretaker in places but just a little darker."

It is darker. Unlike The Caretaker, which bears an inherent lightness of touch thanks to the warm, welcoming glow of melancholy - of misplaced nostalgia with no plausible reference point - *Bleaklow* is unrepentantly captivating; furtive and enervating. This music demands everything of your senses and staunchly refuses to be disposed of into the periphery. 'Something To Do With Death' starts the album with an apparitional drone that quickly morphs into a burrowing, cyclical melody, before harsh static and noise presses against the speaker, rising to a monolithic peak. Inside this morass you could identify any number of probably-not-there-sounds. It's like navigating a dark hall of cobwebs, or trying to find steady ground in darkness thickened with fog.

Fittingly, *Bleaklow* is essentially the last release for V/VM Test, which shut up shop on the 31st of December, 2008. Forthcoming is a massive 7CD retrospective of the label, which is still in the planning stages. The closure isn't a death knell for any of Kirby's current projects however, which will continue being released through other avenues, both independently and through other labels. A new Caretaker album is slated for late 2009/early 2010, but his current project – which will be released under the name Leyland James Kirby, will see the light of day in 2009.

"It's about life, that track," Kirby says, of the first work to be released under the name, which isn't publicly available yet but can be found online under the name 'When We Parted My Heart Wanted To Die'. Like selections from *Bleaklow*, the track is accompanied by obscured video footage in its online incarnation, and the project is more introspective than most detractors would believe is possible of Kirby. "It's personal. Sometimes it's good to get personal, get some more feeling into things." He says in an offhand fashion. "The people who have seen it had an emotional response to it. The video is an endless walk through Berlin streets, and [the viewer] sees these ghost like figures sometimes that appear and disappear out of view."

While it's the end of an era for Kirby, he appears well equipped with ideas to usher in a new one. V/VM Test, afterall, seems to have achieved its purpose. The method of appropriation that V/VM has always ideologically rooted for, the manipulation of existing cultural texts in order to rebirth them in a different light, is not only artistically acceptable now but immensely popular for a new generation native to post-modernist sample wrangling and accessible (and cheap) tools to do so. Even the act of giving music away seems fairly commonplace nowadays.

Kirby is treading a different philosophical path now, and while stylistically it may veer through key elements of popular V/VM tropes, even forthcoming works – not yet put to tape – focus on the loss of an optimistic future, the loss of a time when speculating over the future offered any semblance of excitement or hope.

"I've actually been working on an EP," Kirby says in closing, "you're going to love the title." He ruffles briefly through a notebook on the other end of the line before announcing: "Sadly the future is no longer what it was."

The Stranger's *Bleaklow*, as well as the V/VM archives, can be found at www.brainwashed.com/vvm

PLASTIC NOSTALGIA

Even if I did grow up around tapes and LPs, I only made it to about 11-years-old before CDs took over completely. Those first tapes that I had at that tender age - I'm not afraid to admit - were mostly Queen and The Beatles. So rather than tripping down some mis-exploration of cassette history, it makes more sense to explore here a few uses of cassettes as a medium today. It's not, of course, just needless revivalism that makes tapes relevant in the blog age: many musicians are exploring these fuzzy plastic artifacts in new and wide-eyed ways. It feels particularly relevant to me, having missed the time when a Talking Heads tape might circulate the whole block before making its way out of your boom box speakers.

There are many new cassettes by DIY artists who work to re-imagine this sort of missed memory. New Jersey's Matthew Mondanile plays as Ducktails, a pop project which is mostly all cassette-released and drenched in a warm, analogue drone. There is an amazingly realized aesthetic running through this stuff with all its plastic nostalgia reminiscent of Ninja Turtles pizza, fake palm trees and sugary cereal. There's a lo-fi tape fuzz and reassuring quality here that also permeates his other projects, Predator Vision, Real Estate and Dreams In Vision Field.

These home recordings have some of the comfiest feelings you'll find, reminiscent of Ariel Pink but with an explorative nudge that is hard to pin down. That odd and slightly skewed element of the homely is something that interests Matthew, describing his own music in an interview as having a "real fake sort of nostalgia". His songs have a weird plasticy sort of nostalgia, like something you'd get from watching The Wonder Years; half-real memories creeping through.

"It's like trying to imagine that [past] through the music, but not actually being there, so it's like making an imaginary place." Mondanile says, "That's kind of what I'm trying to do because I really like the idea of feel good music. But at the same time it's not really real - it's synthetic or fake - a fake recreation of something. That's kind of convoluted but I'm glad that you understand [about the] fake nostalgia, because that's exactly where I'm coming from. And I don't try to do that so consciously, I try to have a more unconscious action to what I'm doing, like not really focusing on it that much, a pretty easy going kind of thing."

The innocent melodies and sense of comfort that comes through Ducktails' tunes is certainly amplified by the medium of cassette. He's released plenty of them now, all of which are available through his own label Future Sound which has a visual aesthetic that crosses over with his music, filled as it is with Echo The Dolphin aquas, blues and washy imagery. Buried between tape fuzz, creaks of his parent's basement and outdoor sounds (he records outside sometimes too), are pop songs unfolding from drone pieces, the latter of which is very much his background.

"I only record on cassette. Ducktails started with a cassette because I was listening to a lot of music on cassette. I was living in Berlin and I became friends with James Ferraro from Skaters. I would hang out with them and they were constantly working on cassettes and putting them out almost daily. It seemed like they were doing it so fast. I was really into the production aspect of it, and they were telling me not to wait for anyone else to put out your music, and that it's better just to do it yourself. So as soon as I got back to America I literally just recorded all this stuff in a day and that's how the first Ducktails release came about. I put it out the next day after dubbing it to some cassettes.

"It was so simple because I didn't have to deal with a computer or anything," He continues, "All I had to do was use cassette dubbers.

"The cassette is a really easy way to help me get my music out there and it's also more of an object than a CD – I don't think people necessarily always listen to cassettes but I do think that people will always want them."

It was a real awakening for me because I like the idea of everything being as raw sounding as possible with nothing covering up the sound. The only thing covering [the sound] might be the quality of the recording. The cassette is a really easy way to help me get my music out there and it's also more of an object than a CD - I don't think people necessarily always listen to cassettes but I do think that people will always want them."

Tapes are infinitely richer objects of cultural capital nowadays but it's pretty perverse to see a Wavves tape going for $77USD (and rising!) on eBay, or any obscure noise cassette featuring Thurston Moore or Kevin Shields going for a huge amount. It's certainly not just the music that those bidders will be in pursuit of (though that fifteen minutes of trebly free-noise courtesy of Shields may be worth checking out) it's more the combined rarity, obscurity and general awesomeness of their physicality. It's a media that suits the margins of musical culture with its anti-industry baggage and guerilla ways of distributing culture, though it's also at odds with that sort of crazed eBay completism, which seems to displace the original – and more important – goal of sustaining oblique and alternative ideas.

This mystique can increase the general appeal of sounds, especially those found in the usually fifteen-minute improv efforts of many musicians. Cleveland three-piece Emeralds, one of the biggest drone bands in the US right now (building up a huge reputation with last year's Solar Bridge LP and their gigantic underdog performance at No Fun fest in New York) have amassed a massive tapeography as well as dozens of solo releases. Talking to guitarist Mark McGuire (who I'd chatted to on the phone for an interview a few weeks prior) after the show, I remember it felt almost odd when he handed me one of his solo cassettes: it felt really nice, a very human, very real, and very physical gesture. That might sound a little overwrought but it was a rare gesture, which is part of why getting an actual mixtape in the mail tends to feel more substantial.

Gathering from the material on that solo tape, listening to Emeralds' other releases, talking to Emeralds fans and speaking to the members of the group, it becomes clear that the main way people hear this stuff is through a computer. What I hadn't thought about with this already much altered context, is that often the mp3s will be copies of copies of copies and thus will have lost a lot of quality. Mark gets slightly peeved about that factor, though does enjoy that altered context and its possibilities.

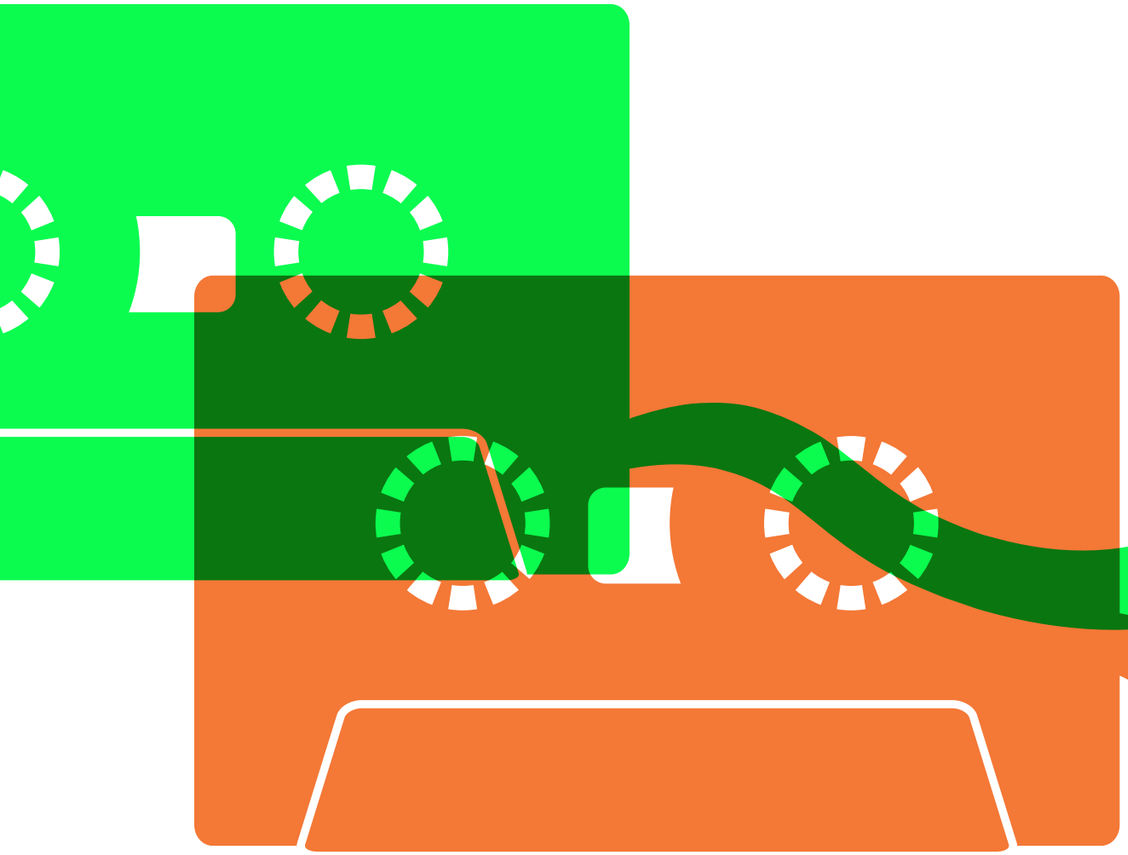
"Especially with the way a lot of our stuff sounds, even through different tape decks it can kind of vary the experience of listening to the music a lot. It's pretty cool. The only time I really mind is if someone hasn't heard the original recording and they hear this rip that's not as good quality, then maybe they'll think we really suck or something like that." He laughs. "But yeah, I love the ambience of tape hiss and having our stuff on a format that is gonna have that [quality] no matter what, unless we get them professionally dubbed or mastered or whatever. It's a lot of fun to work with. When you can set aside something purely as a tape, I think they can be more powerful than even a full length LP because of the way it's given out and the way it's conceived by the artist, and how tapes are normally more a brief glimpse at a time and place of an artist."

I believed that cassettes were more easily damaged than CDRs or actual albums, but I'm mostly basing that on the hugely sunburned Broken Social Scene tape that I had dubbed via my computer and was forced to listen to in my car over and over, or the old Roxy Music *Best Of* that belonged to my Mum that made Bryan Ferry sound like a mutant from another planet, or as if his voice was immersed in a pond. Perhaps cassettes are more durable and heavy duty in their old world clunkiness though, or at least age better than CDs which, if scratched, become massively annoying rather than becoming filled with weird sonic tics. It's a process of decay that definitely lends itself to the grandeur of Emeralds.

"I love the ambience of tape hiss and having our stuff on a format that is gonna have that [quality] no matter what."

"I feel like they're really durable. When CD-Rs came out I would burn lots of stuff to CD but when you get one small scratch on it, it's history - you can't even listen to it. But with cassettes, if the tape messes up for a split second and something fades out and comes back in, it's still how the tape sounds itself, it sounds a lot cooler."

French philosopher Jacques Derrida, as understood by theorist Richard Rorty, is useful in discerning the accidental from the deliberate in terms of musicians' use of the cassette medium. How aware are these musicians of the malleability of those bits of plastic? Quite a bit, it seems: Emeralds are certainly masters at it. If, as Rorty says, the term "'deconstruction' refers in the first instance to the way in which the 'accidental' features of a text can be seen as betraying, subverting, its purportedly 'essential' message", recording



to tape fits here in many ways. Those accidental features of a tape – fuzz, blending, scratching, portability, sharing, mass duplication, sun damage – give this music a quality not always intentionally constructed by the creator, though the very act of recording on to a tape suggests an inherent knowledge of these features. Is a tape more personal if it has travelled with you across the desert, if you leave it out in the sun and it still plays? What if it has accidentally captured the taste of the dust and the feeling of dry heat on the arm that you lean out the window when driving? Of course it does, and luckily, many artists are capturing that feeling right onto cassettes.

That dusty mysteriousness is probably even better discovered in the works of James Ferraro of US improv/drone band Skaters, whose

"I think tapes can be more powerful than even a full length LP because of the way it's given out and the way its conceived by the artist … tapes are normally more of a brief glimpse at a time and place of an artist."

cassette catalogue is staggering in size. What's more amazing still about his stuff is the fact that all his new age soundscapes and purple, semi-opaque textures are all crafted from scratch. The only samples Ferraro uses are the odd Beavis and Butthead ones swiped from TV; all others come naturally and they frequently blow the mind with their unknown and mythical origins. Check Last American Hero/ Adrenaline's End, which sounds almost like Ferraro has found an unmarked tape at the bottom of a thrift store bin and looped it for 15 minutes, building a blissed and imaginary piece of harsh drone that genuinely changes the feel of a room. It's littered with mutant chunks of American culture. They're the sort of sounds that strive for a weird and distinct kind of transcendence that feel innately distant enough already, without the tape being warped and worn.

Apologies for the pop culture theorem, but another studier of Derrida, J Hillis Miller, provides some colour to the idea of tapes as a deconstructed medium/media: "Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text," he says, "but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself. Its apparently solid ground is not rock but thin air."

If deconstructionism is a declaration that meaning is finally indeterminate and the "logo" is indefinable, then the culture of releasing craploads of tapes ala Ferraro fits into the ambiguity of meaning and identity in a significant way. The ambiguity of a back catalogue of tapes which are by nature transitory defines the lack of a permanent structure of meaning and definite identity combated by Derrida and other deconstructionists. They are subversive, for sure, and definitely anti-music industry, at least by major label standards.

I'm possibly (okay, definitely) guilty of this, but if the cassette is today a medium that is the antithesis of the computer, it's interesting that the easiest way to hear and find out about the most tape-fuzzy of musicians is still through MySpace and blogs. Almost all the 'cassettes' I've heard/possess are coming out of my shiny white MacBook. It's problematic, like Emeralds said earlier in this piece, but in terms of recording I was under the impression that these days it was much easier to lay down tunes to a computer and share them via the internet. Anyone can download a pirated version of Ableton, Reason or Logic, as was demonstrated when Portland electronic musician Yacht was recently criticised for admitting his copies of said programs were "stolen" from the internet.

Computers do not suit a lot of musical visions, but at the same time you can virtually replicate, to an extent, any analogue sounds with programs like those. Ducktails' Matthew Mondanile records straight to tape out of both ease and aesthetics but it's probably fair to lay some criticism down to the use of lo-fi and the cassette as something of an excuse for lazy vision or a lack of musicality.

Not that this is always a bad thing, but there is a common attitude that this trend of 'no-wave/no-fi' artists are, despite their scruffy textures and cool aesthetics, more one-dimensional than genuinely experimental, that the cassette is more a tool of grey noise than a useful musical character or instrument. Analogue vibes are nice, it's true, and it seems like a lot of these are coming out of Los Angeles right now, particularly from the label Not Not Fun, who has recently put out particularly hot sauce from Abe Vigoda (owning tropical-punk hit Skeleton on tape? Yes please!), mutated 70s funk from Vibes, dark and mysterious tape drone by Robedoor and also Brisbane's Blank Realm.

In terms of computers though, the parallels between blogs and cassette tapes are interesting in that they're both ways of sharing, and both offer varying degrees of instant gratification. Both also sit in the margins of culture; the music blogger now surpasses that of the perpetually unimpressed record store dude.

I guess that's how the tape is important: in re-instilling the need for the 'object' in music (as if it ever went away). There's some backlash against the significance of this: some people argue that the cassette is truly dead and currently used purely for the sake of 'cool'. But I guess that makes it even more important as an artifact that is 'dead' to the commercial music industry.

Overall, it's an essential and generally nice way for noise/drone musicians who work on an improvised basis to document small and monumental steps they're making each time they jam. I'm infinitely glad to be able to hear those short bursts of improvised inspiration, whether it's secondhand via MacBook, burnt by sun in the car, or even brand new through the stereo.

Ducktails' cassettes are available through Future Sound. Emeralds new album *What Happened* is available through No Fun Records.

"I'm tired of people looking to Berlin or London, hoping to find a music community that is inclusive and supportive. This idea that Australian music is somehow not as worthy on the international stage is complete bollocks."

SYDNEY UNDER-GROUND

IN SEARCH OF THE SYDNEY UNDERGROUND

As we trundle ever further into an age where musicians, consumers, and the industry are being forced to redefine notions of music creation and distribution, there seems to be little in the way of a traditional scene that holds creators of particular types of music together.

The notion of a 'scene' has been particularly sullied over the past few years, especially in relation to the more electronic pockets of music in Sydney and surrounds. The proliferation of the so-called "fluoro crowd" and its associated performers has done much to distance many artists and fans alike from using the term scene to describe their shared experiences.

So, the terminology itself presents a problem; it seems to separate its creators from their audience, while the term's use in its vernacular form is a particularly derogatory remark - they don't call them scenesters for nothing. For all intents and purposes, the term as outlined by Peterson and Bennett in their work *Music Scenes* seems to provide the least loaded definition: a situation or location where the production, performance and reception of popular music is constructed.

If we take the next step forward, this situation is not so much created through choice, but rather the lack of choice; the neo-electronic space in Sydney has emerged because of what doesn't exist as much as what does. This is not a scene in the manner which we're used to seeing it, from literature and from our own experiences - no raves in Sydney Park for starters. There is no set uniform, no collective experience for those who were only just scraping together their record collections in the mid-1990s, when the Sydney scene was arguably most active.

Currently, even the type of music that these artists are creating, ostensibly in the same style, shares little in common apart from the geographical location in which it was created. Gathering spaces are few and far between. Since the demise of the Frigid club night in 2006 (the birthplace of this very magazine), only a couple of regular nights have popped up with a loyal following - CDR, Headroom, and Void at various locations.

Venues are a little more plentiful, such as Serial Space, St Petersburg and Bohemian Grove, but by their very nature they are home to a diverse assortment of performances, not exclusively electronic music variants. There are so many sounds being created that it is impossible to cover all genres, all versions of what really should be included in this discussion. Just as an example, there are incredibly important pockets of dubstep, particularly in Sydney, that deserve another article entirely dedicated to them.

Of all those nights previously mentioned, CDR, held at Hermann's Bar on Sydney University's Newtown campus, is the most interesting, designed to be a collaborative experience for producers and listeners alike. The format has changed little since its inception in Sydney in 2006. The first hour consists of a talk by an influential producer, followed by a showcase of songs from international producers, and then finally, local music makers are invited to drop in a CD of their latest work, whether finished or still in production, for playback on the sound system. It's a situation where producers can bypass the usually restrictive policies of getting their music played in clubs, and where they can actually meet other musicians and creative people they may have only heard about. Plus, there's the all-important self-criticism and self-praise, when, as the night progresses, they have the chance to hear their own sounds on rumbling speakers with the bass turned up. Over the relatively short period of time between 2006 and now, the participants at CDR have steadily grown - be they audience or producer - and influential speakers from around the country and abroad have congregated on the evening.

Lorna Clarkson, along with Mark Pritchard, Simon Hindle and Sofie Loizou, established the Sydney CDR night after the example set in London by original creators Tony Nwachukwu (Attica Blues) and Gavin Alexander. Clarkson sought to create a place for producers and music lovers to meet and listen to new work in a supportive setting, yet sees her role as merely facilitating CDR's audience. "I had long been aware that there existed a disconnection between the music makers that I knew. There were lots of people making music but I rarely heard that music on radio or in clubs. Also, no-one was aware of what each other were doing. I saw CDR as a way to bridge some of these gaps."

Intriguingly, over the course of the past few years CDR has seen a convergence of sounds - most certainly more dubstep and beats oriented - which Clarkson puts down to the nature of the evening. "Obviously, we are not out to shape or influence anyone directly but the night, by its nature, is a sharing of ideas so I am sure that some of the regulars have been influenced in some way - if not stylistically, then by different production techniques and sounds used by the other artists."

"We have noticed a lot of electronica and dubstep coming through, but we are keen to not have the night become genre specific. It's difficult to know how to encourage music makers and fans of other styles to come along, but one way is through our invited guests. I have always found inspiration in hearing other people's stories, so, when appropriate, I invite a respected artist or industry person down to CDR to be interviewed so that they can impart specific knowledge and share their experience and perspective with the rest. No matter what genre of music these guests are involved with, there is always someone who comes up to me afterwards saying, 'I don't usually listen to that sort of music but...' and goes on to relate that they got something important out of listening to his/her story."

"There are hundreds of young kids that lap up all that Pitchfork/Stereogum hype of US experimental acts, when they could just look in their backyard and find exactly the same stuff. The same scene that they dig over there is thriving under their noses."

In conjunction with physical meetings like CDR, the intervention of the internet has had a lot to do with collaboration, in acquiring contacts and securing live dates. Adrian Elmer, from local group Telafonica, and a music reviewer for *Cyclic Defrost*, likes how the internet has bridged many of the gaps he had experienced in finding gigs and like-minded musicians in the 1990s. "In terms of working with other bands, all of our favourite gigs so far have been ones where we've put the line-ups together ourselves. This has generally been through finding people on MySpace that we like the sound of, and asking them if they'd like to play. All of those, so far, have been great and we've got to know them in real life as a result. But, without the internet, most of those would not have happened."

So, this concept of a 'scene' - at least in the traditional sense - appears to be redundant. Many musicians interviewed for this article

mentioned the emergence of a new method of music making as an impetus for this change. Indeed, Telafonica's experiences ring true for a number of other artists. "There is a larger scene of bands mixing electronics, and more regular rock styles," says Elmer. "While we are probably at the electronic end of that spectrum, having that live aspect has meant we've played lots of gigs alongside bands like Underlapper, Seekae, Parades, Karoshi, and The Dead Sea, and have felt like we fit in there. Maybe it's because we're not purely electronic/dance oriented so we haven't looked for the scene that is, but for us, we feel like the scene mixing electronics and more traditional modes is more exciting and where we are at."

"We have had Theo Parrish and Flying Lotus playing their beats alongside Monk Fly and Lauren Horton."

Ivan Vizintin from the group Ghoul expresses a similar sentiment. "There's a big DIY electronica/noise scene in Sydney that doesn't get enough attention. Bands like Castings, Moonmilk, Alps of New South Wales, Naked on the Vague... all great bands that are a bit too left-of-field for some people. It's a shame, because there are hundreds of young kids that lap up all that Pitchfork/Stereogum hype of US experimental acts, when they could just look in their backyard and find exactly the same stuff. The same scene that they dig over there is thriving under their noses."

This brings up yet another issue pertinent to any discussion of a geographically based scene, particularly in Australia - the worth of local producers and local musicians when compared to what is coming out of the rest of the world. Clarkson is adamant about this particular point, and sees CDR as breaking down some of the issues relating to the cultural cringe. "I hope more than anything that CDR is a place of encouraging new ideas and new sounds. I'm tired of people looking to Berlin or London, hoping to find a music community that is inclusive and supportive. This idea that Australian music is somehow not as worthy on the international stage is complete bollocks, but until people start getting behind each other it will remain this way. For me the great thing about CDR is that it is a level playing field and everyone there has their ears wide open."

Martyn Palmer, who records under the name Broken Chip, is located on the periphery, producing music from his home in the Blue Mountains. He says that regardless of the internet and radio, information still takes time to trickle down to him. Like many others, Palmer's notion of the 'scene' seems to be still entrenched in the mid-90s aesthetic. "I really don't know how strong it is at the moment and what's going on everyday and where it's headed... as for locations and venues, I'm not really sure where they are. I know of one place up in Medlow Bath called Akemi that has had a number of experimental performers play shows, and I've played in a great venue in St Peters called St Petersburg."

Amidst the fracas between space, performance and collaboration, the humble bedroom producer might feel slightly ill at ease. The distinction between programmed (electronic) elements and live performance is an entire discussion in itself - so where does that leave producers and bands without a physical space to congregate? Palmer comments, "I've not really collaborated with many people. If you count doing remixing as a collaboration then it's been word of mouth I guess. I've done three remixes so far and they have all been for local Sydney groups: Underlapper, Comatone and Telafonica. I have been approached by all of them in person. The remixes are done then uploaded to a server or posted back to them."

Closer to the city's centre, Ghoul's methodology is similar to the way in which other electronic musicians and bands are forging collaborative relationships. Though most of the interchange occurs online, via e-mail and exchanging files, Vizintin hints that there is still the opportunity for meeting at shared gigs and through word-of-mouth. "Sometimes we get lucky and are asked to play at a show or jam with our friends, which is always a great deal of fun. Seekae are very good friends and jamming in the same room with them is a real treat. Completely different and refreshing dynamic. They're very open to throwing ideas around and we all love sharing. They're our first port of call if something needs to be critiqued."

Like Ghoul, Telafonica have had collaborative experiences with people whose music they found online. "[We've] asked if they'd like to exchange remixes with us. They've mostly been more than happy to and we've had some excellent music come from all around the world as a result."

So while the 'scene', in the way it has been shaped by preconception or collective memory, is all but gone, this new wave of music makers have created something new. It's a neo-electronic collection of artists who have a traceable history (though they may not be aware of it), and as a result have evolved into a different form. It is collaborative; reduced to ones and zeros floating around the internet; forged through handshakes; nurtured by listening to music over speakers in a bar and it can even be strengthened through sitting in bedrooms tapping out melodies on equipment old and new with no company apart from the birds sitting outside the window.

It seems then, that there is at least one commonality shared by these producers, musicians, performers and facilitators: the love of what they do. Clarkson sums it up perfectly: "We have had Theo Parrish and Flying Lotus playing their beats alongside Monk Fly and Lauren Horton - house next to hip hop next to electronic dub next to folk. It is this broad appreciation and openness that keeps me going as a non-producing music lover. While the music geekiness exists at CDR, this night is for people into music. Without us - what would be the point?"

SLEEVE REVIEWS

We Buy Your Kids

WE DECIDED WE SHOULD ONLY WRITE ABOUT ALBUM COVERS WE ACTUALLY OWN. THE IDEA WAS TO MAKE IT EASIER FOR US TO CHOOSE, BUT WE FOUND THAT WE ACTUALLY OWN A LARGE AMOUNT OF CDS WITH WHAT WE CONSIDER PRETTY BAD COVER ART, AND REALLY NOTHING IN THE WAY OF INTERESTING PACKAGING DESIGN. SO THE LIST IN THE END CONTAINS 10 COVERS FOR ALBUMS WHICH ARE WELL KNOWN. THERE'S NOTHING OBSCURE IN THERE, BUT AS A COLLECTION THEY DEFINITELY DESCRIBE OUR OWN TASTES FOR ALBUM ART. THIS IS ALSO A LIST OF FAVOURITES BY WE BUY YOUR KIDS AND COVERS THAT INFLUENCE WHAT WE DO TOGETHER. INDIVIDUALLY WE WOULD HAVE WRITTEN DIFFERENT LISTS, BUT THESE COVERS ARE THE COMMON GROUND WE GET EXCITED ABOUT.
NEARLY ALL ARE ILLUSTRATED AND ALL HAVE INFLUENCED US MASSIVELY IN OUR OWN ALBUM ART CREATION. THERE'S NOT MUCH IN THE WAY OF DEVIATION FROM THE FORMULA JEWEL-CASE LAYOUT. WE HAVE WRITTEN MORE ABOUT COVER IMAGERY THAT BLOWS OUR BRAINS OUT THAN ANY FANCY PACKAGING TRICKERY. WE ARE REALLY ALL ABOUT THE PRETTY PICTURES. WE'VE NOTICED THERE'S NOTHING AT ALL PARTICULARLY INVOLVED OR CEREBRAL ABOUT OUR CHOICES - ALL ARE COVER IMAGES WE RESPONDED TO IMMEDIATELY WHEN WE FIRST SAW THEM. TWO HAVE BOOBS ON THEM. FOUR HAVE SKULLS. OUR TASTES ARE FOR THOSE COVERS THAT JUST NAIL IT STRAIGHT AWAY. OUR OWN EFFORTS AT CREATING MUSIC-RELATED ART ARE DONE AT BREAK-NECK SPEED AND ARE USUALLY FAIRLY SPONTANEOUS. INTELLECTUAL DISCOURSE 'AINT WHAT WE'RE ABOUT, SO HERE'S A BUNCH OF ALBUMS THAT WE THINK FEEL LIKE A NICE WARM PUNCH IN THE FACE.

GARY NUMAN
THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

This is the oldest and also the only completely photographic cover we decided to write about. So many themes that appear in our work come from this amazingly cold and robotic album cover. Sonny has redrawn the front and back images so many times, changing up the heads, but there is something about the incredibly staged, precise and creepy pose that draws you right in.

To us, this album seems a perfect example of less being more and how mysterious the placement of a couple of out of context images can be. We constantly reuse geometric symbols in our own work (teeth, keys etc) laid over figures to suggest a hidden mysticism, hoping the viewer will make up the story. That's what the magic is with these images.

Before Sonny ever heard the music he would always pick this record up wondering what the hell was in the pyramid. Now, Gary Numan is one of his idols. But it's the feeling you get from this cover with no supplementary information about its meaning that's the great quality about it for us. We also love the slightly uncomfortably placed hand-drawn type.

There's more crazy pyramid potraiture on the back and a group shot with small electro men melting into a glowing pink goopy pyramid inside. But the cover image is definitely the winner. Biddy thinks Gary works in an office in The Future and the pyramid is just his phone - he's wondering whether to pick up or let it go to Messagebank.

TOM GABEL
HEART BURNS

We have been lucky enough in our internet travels to meet some amazing people and equally amazing artists. Steak Mountain is both of those. His art and design have so much life, vibrancy and impact that it's impossible not to be floored by the sheer weight of all the ideas that overflow from his mind volcano.

And his skills. The man has mad drawing skills - he constantly comes up with these perfectly balanced and beautiful illustrations - each ones seems so effortless and loose and haphazardly textured, but they are all pulled together with what is just a great skill of draftsmanship and design. This one is a favourite (we did have trouble choosing from the Steak Mountain cover art archive).

The album itself is housed in a simple cardboard digipack - this on the front and then white type on the back and inside. Steak has hand-drawn all the song titles and there's some photocopier-on-the-run texture on the inside. The lyrics are just simply typeset in white caps and that is it. It is so perfectly reserved and leaving that

cover illustration as the only image just emphasises its fluro drippy grossout impact. We have stared and stared at the textures and detail of that cover image, at how it is so perfectly detailed and not simple at all. This lady's head exploded and another face busted out from her brain and its sliding around her forehead and its all a throbbing hot pink catastrophe. We love its eyeballs out.

THE BLOOD BROTHERS
YOUNG MACHETES

We are eternally divided over the music of The Blood Brothers. One of us loves them, one of us would like them but she can't really get with the screaming. And one of us ended up in a neck-brace after a Blood Brothers show at the Gaelic Club, when an over-enthusastic under-ager jumped feet first from the balcony and straight onto his head.

But we both totally love the vandalised photos throughout the CD booklet for this one. This is easily the best of their covers in our minds, so simple but so fitting for the music they make. The cover is unapolgetically hasty and unrefined and incredibly striking... then quite repulsive the longer you look at it. (Maybe its the visual equivalent of all that screaming.) The scratchy bit on her neck just looks wrong, which is why it all seems right, it hasn't been laboured over or fixed up. It's something that looks like it's very

easy to do but we think it's actually quite easy to screw up this effect, but each band-member portrait inside the booklet is awesomely scratched and illustrated. They look kinda shit and haphazard, but there are some nice simple symbols and compositions going on there. The last two look like they are vomiting or choking on long black hair. The overall effect kinda reminds us of the cover for Peter Gabriel 2, which is in fact possibly Sonny's favourite album cover image, but we don't actually own a copy so we disqualified it from this list.

The restrained type is perfect and that runs right through the packaging. The booklet layout is equally as simple - text on the right page of a spread, and a full-page artwork on the left. No mucking about.

HOT SNAKES
SUICIDE INVOICE

It's always a double-bonus when a member of the band is responsible for the album's graphic direction (and that direction is amazing).

Rick Froberg is a ridiculously talented illustrator; actually, a mind-blowing illustrator. The comparisons to Raymond Pettibon are probably the first thing you notice (the Automatic Midnight cover being a more direct nod to Mr. P.). But Suicide Invoice shows how he takes that style and blasts it off in new directions. We are big fans of his gaudy colour choices. We

don't know if these designs get screen-printed but he's done a lot of 2 or 3 colour illustrations which we are sure would look amazing as screen-prints. He's also a master of hand-drawn type. And has a recurring telephone motif. Which we appreciate as much as the recurring references to Diabetes in their song titles.

The packaging for Suicide Invoice is again pretty basic, like they didn't even try. The cover is in fact just a slip. Not even a booklet. And nothing to really write home about. The type is big and clunky and looks like it was set in the days before computers with some good ole' cut and paste. The tray is solid black. No-one does solid black trays anymore. Everyone prints under the tray. Everyone.

Again, this one is all about the images. It's just a great pop collage-style illustration. We don't know why the guy on the back's nose is a twig. It's the guy from the front but his nose has grown into a branch and he's grown Mr. Spock eyebrows for some reason. It doesn't matter, it just looks good.

DANZIG
DANZIG

We think this is a total success when it comes to an album cover - a logo and illustration that is just made for teenage fans to redraw on desks and folders and backpacks and pencil cases. Straight away you know what you are going to get here - straight up metal about

demons and witches and evil things. It's blunt and nuggety just like the man himself. It's succinct and kitch and classic and tacky... just like the music. The packaging is nice and standard, the cover folds out to reveal the entire skull over the front and back cover of the booklet. Inside the lyrics are set in the most basic bare-bones manor. (The first line of lyrics on this album is "Ooh." The last is "Feed it to me". And there are a few "Yeah"s and "Wo-oh"s in between.) And the centrefold is a majestically pouty band portrait. Glenn Danzig is our spirtual guide. It seems our spirits enjoy a few adolescent thrills. The cover for this album could just be photocopied and shoved in the jewel case and it would be just as awesome. We like that it can be so crude and work like diamonds. There's not a lot more you can say about it.

PIG DESTROYER
PHANTOM LIMB

This is another album Sonny loves, but maybe he loves the cover ever more. The artist goes by the name of John Dyer Baizly and is in the band Baroness. He has done some amazing metal covers over the last few years and is seemingly quite in demand at the moment. When you first see his work it really looks so much like Pushead, and it can take a while to get past that.

But although their work is quite similar in execution we think JDB has a beautifully romantic style.

There are skulls and maggots and decay and horror just like Pushead's work, but there's also an amazing feminine beauty. Those maggots are falling on rose petals. There's a boob! It's all lavender blue and lemon yellow. JDB makes metal cliches look like they could be a yardage print from some upper-crust fashion house. The furry drop shadow under the logo is a bit off-putting but we can move past that.

PAVEMENT
BRIGHTEN THE CORNERS

Biddy has pulled this CD off the shelves a few times lately when we've been starting new projects. Somehow this is always a reference for what we have in mind. We have no idea why though, as it looks absolutely nothing like what we do. But - we think its another example of a style that can go horribly horribly wrong done perfectly.

We like pretty much all the Steve Malkmus covers, but when this one came out it seemed so bold and certain compared to the more scratchy Slanted and Enchanted or the completely confusing Westing (by Musket & Sextant) covers. Crooked Rain started to have that confidence to it - it's got a really strong basis to that "hasty-pasty" aesthetic. Let us not speak of the cover for Wowee Zowee. And then... this one! No comment on the album's musical ranking amongst Pavement records, but the cover is super confident and dynamic.

The image on the back is unusually simple for a Pavement album - there's no crazy scribbles, just what looks like someone in Ancient Greece pleading to the gods. Drawn by a 15 year old. We don't know if they are zombie cats floating in space on the CD label, or maybe on an elevator, or having robot sex. The booklet folds out to the lyrics set inside a clunky ink version of some old art-deco book-plate. The skeleton dancing with the lady in the bottom right of the cover is another ye olde favourite - something Biddy has redrawn and reworked many times. It's just so good that something so messy that looks like it took two minutes to make can get it right and be so striking.

ELECTRIC WIZARD
WITCHCULT TODAY

We LOVE Electric Wizard, we dont have enough words allocated to us to do this stoned out sludge sloth behemoth justice. If there is one band whose visual style across print and promo has influenced us it is this one. And Sonny listens to them all the time. You can tell, even though he mostly has headphones on, because his head nods up and down reeeeeaaaaaly slooooowly.

They have had some hit and miss covers but this one for their "comeback album" is amazing. The band's creative force is a man called Jus Osborn, responsible for most of the imagery on and inside the covers, as well as

the band's vocals, guitar and sitar. He's a fan of cult horror movies, girly magazines, smoking weed and must have an extensive collection of occult magazines. He also uses these movie references in his songs - the film The Dunwich Horror (itself based on an H.P. Lovecraft story) has a song based around it on this album and a sound bite is used as the intro for the song "We Hate You" on their album Dopethrone.

The whole packaging is just silver and black (except the scary band portrait). The inside booklet is filled with various pictures of witch ceremonies. There are a lot of naked ladies and black candles and fantastic diagrams and images in the background. The type is all completely 1960s styled. Biddy had always hated metal and the visual style that went with it. Electric Wizard and their visual identity was a revelation to her as she didn't know metal came with a character as stylish as this. If you go to the Electric Wizard MySpace page you will find a list of movies we are aiming to get through watching some day - this aesthetic is what we base so much of our own work on. It is all in that great faded 1960s psych-out style. It's that world where we both collide with our individual tastes - things like Rosemary's Baby and kitsch paperback covers from the 1970s. B-grade before that involved naked chicks with fake boobs.

This particular cover of theirs is again amazingly dynamic and graphic, with a demon emerging from the abyss holding his nubile young lass sacrifice in his arms. We also love the way the type is treated, wavy letters radiating out of the top and bottom of this abyss the demon has just left. Sonny has a love of balance and symmetry, that you will pick up on if you look through enough of our posters. So this ticks that box too. Plus that widened eye - that's another thing that we keep drawing over and over - the bugged out eyes in the dark. It's all been done a million times before - devils and popping eyeballs and skulls and horns, but thats what makes it so amazing and satisfying when it's done so well. It's the big bad world of rock cliches, and its a great thing when someone can do it without hesitation or irony and create something beautiful.

SONIC YOUTH
GOO

We recently had the pleasure of having dinner with Biddy's dad. He asked what we'd been working on lately and we told him about a few album covers we were working on. He said how he's always loved what Biddy did for that Sonic Youth album, how he tells everyone when he sees it in the shops how his daughter did it. It took us a minute to realise, as Sonny dropped his fork and his jaw, that he wasn't joking - he actually thought she drew it. And was telling people.

He was very confused. We thought it was hilarious, and extremely embarrassing.

For Biddy this album and its cover is one of life's best teenage memories. It's another logo and image that was easy to draw on school folders, pencil cases and anywhere else. And she drew it everywhere a lot. There's that scene on the Sonic Youth DVD where some young 14 year old girl in Texas is painting this on her bedroom wall and we know exactly how that girl feels. Raymond Pettibon is of course a god and Biddy is constantly accused of drawing just like him. Which is true, it's hard to draw in ink with a brush and not like him, but he is her biggest influence, so it's true.

This album has got to be on best-of album covers lists everywhere. It's an icon, and its a bit pointless us trying to write about it. We didn't know for years what the photographic reference for the cover shot was. Biddy remembers the lightning bolt that shot through her as she walked through the MCA's Art>Music exhibition in 2001. Lee Ranaldo had an installation of a huge, crazy room filled with hundreds of pieces of Sonic Youth ephemera. It was totally overwhelming and kind of up high on one of the walls, nearly covered by other posters and ticket stubs, was an old Dinosaur Jnr. flyer that had the photo of the couple in the car on it. It was jolting.

It looks a still from some old mod movie and that's what we thought it was. We didn't find out till years later, sitting in bed watching some late-night crime documentary, that its the sister of Moors murderer Myra Hindley and her boyfriend. They are being whisked away by the cops to give evidence, and there's a black and white newspaper photo of this scene, which initially looks so posed. See these days you would just Google that, but there's something whimsical and nostalgic about accidental discovery and how hard it was to find information on bands as a teenage fan in a country town, before blogs and fan sites.

DR. OCTAGON
ECOLOGIST

This album has two covers and both rule, and it would be a crime for them not to, when it's an album about a dimension-jumping gynaecologist from outer space.

The British version came out on Mo'Wax and was designed by Ben Drury and Will Bankhead. Sonny has long been a fan of Mo'Wax, who made some amazing album covers and the packaging for their release was quite special for the time as well. He bought loads of Mo'Wax stuff just for the sleeves - Drury's logo work is tops and the stuff he works on theses days is completely different but still miles ahead.

The British version of this has a slip case with a presciption sticker on the back, the tiny little booklet references a medicinal information sheet, there are various images of Jupiter, monkeys, third eyes and these amazing medical cross sections. Apparently the cross sections are those of that serial killer who had instructed his body be donated to science after his execution. You know - that one every magazine ran pictures of at the time. They cut him up with a laser and the cross section of his right hand is the front cover.

Sonny then went on a mad search to find the US version of the album as it was done by Pushead, and Pushead is great. He has for many years made amazing artwork for a wide range of bands, originally making a name for himself creating graphics for a Texan skateboard company in the eighties called Zorlac. These graphics were a bit controversial at the time for their dark content. But it caught the attention of a young Metallica and the rest is history as he went on to create some of their most memorable imagery although only one actual cover, for St. Anger in 2005.

For Sonny, Pushead's artwork for Metallica really upped the ante on what metal imagery should be; dark, explovsive, and psychological. Which is why this cover works so well with Dr. Octagon, the story of a time traveling alien gynaecologist who has come to earth from Jupiter to perform surgery with his microphone. A dark horror movie illustration-based cover like this for a hip hop album was very rare but helped to give a little more flavour to an already unique album.

CYCLIC SELECTS

Christos Tsiolkas

BILLED AS GRUNGE FICTION, CHRISTOS TSIOLKAS'S FIRST NOVEL LOADED WAS PACKED WITH SEX, DRUGS AND MUSIC. HE'S WRITTEN ANOTHER FIVE BOOKS SINCE, INCLUDING HIS MOST RECENT THE SLAP, BUT CHRISTOS AND MUSIC GO DEEPER THAN LOW-FI ROCK'N'ROLL. "BEING AN ADOLESCENT AT THE MOMENT OF PUNK AND POST-PUNK MUSIC, SUCCUMBING TO THE AGGRESSIVENESS, REVOLT AND ATONALITY OF THE MUSIC, INFLUENCED THE RHYTHMS AND TONES AND EXPRESSION OF WHAT I WANTED TO WRITE," HE SAID, AT LAST YEAR'S SYDNEY WRITERS FESTIVAL. SIX NOVELS, SIX PLAYS, A COUPLE OF SCREENPLAYS. THIS IS CHRISTOS'S BACKSTORY, TOLD THROUGH DISCO, HOUSE, ART ROCK AND POP, FOLK AND BEATS.

DONNA SUMMER
'I FEEL LOVE'/'STATE OF INDEPENDENCE'

I had an older cousin who used to DJ in the seventies and who had the first collection of 12 inch singles I ever encountered. I do remember him playing us little kids the almost 20 minute long version of 'I Love to Love You Baby,' which had us all sniggering and jumping up and down in delight as it reached what can only be called its climax. We may not have known what an orgasm was, but we sure as fuck now knew what it sounded like. I'm not sure of exactly when I first heard 'I Feel Love': I do know I thought it sounded sinister, that as it kept building and building and getting more and more underneath my skin it sounded like the most evil and delicious thing I had ever heard. It used to come on the radio and I'd tremble with delight. Giorgio Moroder produced 'I Feel Love' and it was all about the body and the machine. In the early eighties, Summer recorded a version of Jon and Vangelis's 'State of Independence,' which was all about the soul and the machine. By then the disco era was kicked up the arse by punk (to emerge even harder-better-faster-stronger in the clubs of Detroit and Chicago), a generation was being wiped away by a big disease with a little name and everyone was telling me Donna Summer was a homophobe. I didn't much care. I had the seven inch of 'State of Independence' and it felt like all the promise of redemption, and of the sacred, was contained within the grooves of that single. It was the best song to play after a long day's journey into night: with the emerging new dawn, it always seemed to make everything right. The monotheistic tradition that separates the soul and the body is cruel and insane. The perfect double A-side single would be 'I Feel Love' on one side and 'State of Independence' on the flip. The body and the heart would both be satisfied.

JOHN CORIGLIANO
ALTERED STATES (ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK)

William Hurt is a mad scientist who experiments with peyote and LSD and becomes convinced that through hallucinagenics he can unlock the mysteries of DNA and become one with the Collective Unconscience. Directed by Ken Russell and literally one of the most bonkers things I have ever seen, Altered States the movie made a big impression on me when I was 15, but has since seemed progressively sillier every time I watch it. But I bought the soundtrack by John Corigliano and in contrast it becomes

better and better every time I put it on. Atonal, sometimes symphonic and at other times purely electronic, sometimes a cacophony of noise, it proves genuinely unsettling on every listen. So why do I keep returning to it? I think there are experiences I want to take from music that are not just about joy. I want to be made to pace the room, to move beyond myself and to kick down walls and open doors and stare into danger. Which is what is the most exciting aspect of the movie, Altered States – the idea that there are substances and experiences that can lead you away from the safety and complacency of the normal and the everyday. The movie doesn't have the courage of its convictions (or rather the director's convictions and those of the scriptwriter were at odds) and so in the end a compromised Hollywood resolution brings the Mad Doctor back to Pleasantville, USA. Just say no to drugs. But there's no compromise in Corigliano's score which even at the end leaves you anxious, wired, driven. It makes you want more.

TALKING HEADS
REMAIN IN LIGHT

This is how I remember it. It is a Saturday afternoon and I've just had a huge fight with mum and dad, about something stupid, but it is one of those vile bilious arguments, full of rage and I walk out of the house and go to a friend's place. She's got some speed and we take it and talk and talk for hours and she tells me she is going to a party at her boyfriend's place and I don't want to go because his friends always give me a hard time about being a poofter so I take the train into the city instead and walk around for an hour until I pass a Victorian terrace close to the city and I hear this music pumping out of the house that sounds like dance music but isn't a dance music I have ever heard before, it sounds all jangly and agitated, a mutant bass that is inviting me into the house and I walk down the corridor into a lounge room where a group of people are dancing in a circle. They're all a bit older than me but I don't care and they are all smiles and they invite me in and I just jump into the circle and I'm dancing. And the heat goes on, the heat goes on. I dance to the next song and to the song after that and when 'Once in a Lifetime' comes on – which I know, which I've heard on the radio – I am the happiest I can ever recall being. The music seems to be at odds with itself, chemical and organic, from all over the globe and pure distilled American energy - but it works. In the end I crash on the couch and next morning one of the women who lives there makes me coffee and while she is making the coffee she plays me 'Listening Wind.' We drink, we chat, in the end I say thank you, I should go, and she says maybe you should call your mum. I walk into the city and buy the album at Brashs and take it home with me and mum and dad shout at me a little bit more but I don't answer back. I just put the record on the turntable and play it again and again and again. This is how I remember it, how I discovered another world.

HEAVEN 17
PENTHOUSE AND PAVEMENT

I used to not want to be a wog and part of not wanting to be a wog was turning my back on disco and dance music which was what the wogs in Australia were into. It was a classic case of double-think, of lying to oneself, as the reality was that I used to love disco as a child and that even when denying that history to myself I would still find my feet itching to move every time I heard Nile Rodgers' guitar or a shimmer of Giorgio Moroder synths. I wore black, I refused to see the sun and I immersed myself in the dark guitars and funereal tones of post-punk and goth. But thank the gods that post-punk and goth got their groove back and that through them I got back to music that was as much about the body as it was about the head. I recall the thrill of abandoning myself to New Order – to 'Temptation' and 'Blue Monday' – and I remember Penthouse and Pavement by Heaven 17. The whole album is like English people learning to dance, the hesitant first steps of a toddler. It was all machine, even the vocals sounded mechanical, and I don't think it is funk, not really, but it certainly wasn't rock and roll. Listening to it now the synthesisers sound ancient, tinny and crude; not from last century but the century before that. But '(We Don't Need) This Fascist Groove Thang' still makes me laugh, in a good way, and the title track is pure R'n'B heaven: listening to it, getting off on it, I was glad I was a wog.

VARIOUS ARTISTS
THE HOUSE SOUND OF CHICAGO VOLUME III

There are two genres of music that when I listen to them I really feel the lack of my musical experience, where I am struck by the fact I am a fan, not a practitioner. The first is jazz. I don't know why I am seduced by the music, I don't know how it works, can't decipher the logic of it at all. I can only listen and be caught up in it when for whatever inexplicable reason it makes me start nodding my head, tapping my feet, start experiencing the small rush of joy that comes from trying to follow where the notes are heading, trying to catch the sound as it falls. Some jazz leaves me cold. Nothing stirs and I can't even pretend an appreciation of the technical skills involved. When I don't get it, I don't get it and it might as well be any white noise around me. House music is the same. I wish I knew exactly how it worked, how a beat, a rhythm, a repetition and a sound so monochromatic can be part of some of the music I love best. When house music works for me, when all I want to do is dance, or turn the Walkman or MP3 up to its loudest and feel those rhythms course through me, then I think I am the happiest man alive. But when it doesn't work – and because I'm not a muso, I can't explain why – then it does just sound like blips and beeps, doof doof doof doof. My favourite house music was acid house because I loved the soar of a vocal sample across the sea of swirls and waves of sound. I wanted to hear a vocalist of talent and soul and range be equal to the music. That happens on Sterling Void's 'It's Alright,' a track on this compilation, which is house and gospel and protest anthem. It's sublime, that's what it is. My vinyl copy of this compilation is scratched to buggery but I can't let myself part with it. It reminds me too much of when I heard a music that for the first and only time sounded like I was right on time for it. I wasn't too young, I wasn't too old, I was right smack bang of the middle of it. I don't know how it works but when house is good, just like jazz, wherever you are listening to it you feel like you are right smack bang in the middle of it.

TIM BUCKLEY
GREETINGS FROM LA

The first time I hear of Tim Buckley it is because of the This Mortal Coil version of 'Song to the Siren.' I hunt out the original and initially I am disappointed. Buckley's vocal sounds

broken, sparse next to the otherworldly beauty of Liz Fraser's voice. Sometime soon after I am in my room, listening to late night radio and a song begins to slip into the room, to invade, it makes me stop whatever I'm doing and just listen. Just stop. Listen. It is like a command. I turn up the volume and lay on the floor and the music slowly slowly is filling, seeping under my skin and coursing in my bloodstream, it is taking possession of me. I'm not even sure what the vocalist is singing, but the voice sounds pure, uncontaminated, manages something exquisite – to sound masculine and gentle all at once. The song comes to an end, but an end that seems to take an infinity to reach its conclusion, and I don't want it to end. But it does. That was Tim Buckley's 'Sweet Surrender,' the DJ announces, and I scramble to my feet and scrawl the title down on a piece of paper. She also adds that it comes from an album called *Greetings from LA*. Listening to it is still like listening to the best sex you've ever had.

SPIRITUALIZED
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN WE ARE FLOATING IN SPACE

There are perfect days, there are perfect dreams, there are perfect loves and perfect lives. There are also perfect books, F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, say, and perfect films. I'd stake that claim for Godard's Contempt or Tourneur's Out of the Past. A perfect album is Ladies and Gentlemen We are Floating in Space. Here's why: the brilliantly uncluttered cover design, which replicates a pharmaceutical packet and indicates something of the intoxicating experience awaiting one's first listen; the hushed female voice announcing the title track; the rock and roll swerve and swagger of 'Come Together,' the desperate sleazy R'n'B of 'I Think I'm in Love,' the sweet electro hush of 'Stay With Me' and 'Broken Heart' and the frenzy of 'Electricity.' The sparse design makes sense because even at its most explosive or uncontained there is a cool determination guiding this collection of tracks, which means the album never falls apart, never disappoints. I've put individual tracks on mixtapes I have made for friends but the best thing to do is always to give them the full album. I first heard it late one cold winter evening in London, in an HMV or a Virgin or something like that and a bored girl behind the counter put it on and I couldn't leave the shop and I wandered around and around till it had finished and then asked, What was that? and she had a smile so big and wide and expressive on her face because I had obviously loved an album she loved and she told me and I bought it and I thought in another life she and I could have fallen in love across that counter and one day I want to write the story or the book or the film of that falling in love.

TRICKY
MAXINQUAYE

There is a moment in the sluggish music documentary Live Forever, about nineteen-nineties Britpop, where there is a cut away from Blur and Oasis to the Bristol night and on the soundtrack we hear a tease of Portishead and I wanted the movie to ditch the lads and lager of London and remain in the Bristol shadows, with the Portishead of Dummy, the Massive Attack of Blue Lines and the Tricky of Maxinquaye. These three albums are sly and elusive – they enact a kind of alchemy that remains resistant to description or summation. It is probably impossible to convey what they once meant, how crucial they seemed, because their sound has become ubiquitous, a genre of consumer muzak called "chill-out" or "trip-hop" that sells all matter of shit and lifestyles and holidays on the Mediterranean. But at one point they sounded like the sweetest siren songs imaginable. Blue Lines is the most classical and endearing, Dummy is the most evocative and haunting, but it is Maxinquaye that is still closest to my heart. It is a druggy slow-burn of an album that can manage to undercut the macho fury of Public Enemy's 'Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos' and claim it for a queerer, more feminine planet, while at the same time remaining at all times sinister, strange and seductive. 'Ponderosa' might just be the greatest drug song after the Velvet Underground's 'Heroin.' Bold and beautiful is one of the most difficult combinations to achieve in art and I think this album does it.

A CERTAIN RATIO
'27 FOREVER (TESTIMONIAL MIX)'

I have a friend Rob who is one of the best DJs in the world. He loves music and like so many people who love music passionately his taste can be scary. His lip curls in a sneer if I dare admit to liking something he thinks crap or overrated or just plain mediocre. He left for London years ago and before he left he gave away heaps of his old vinyl. This is one I grabbed off him. It is a 12 inch, just a plain white jacket and a plain white label. I'm not sure I can defend why I love it so much. In many ways it is a standard Manchester meat-and-three-veg house track. It takes an age for the incessant beat to build and then there is a moment when the vocal sample comes in and that's the moment that always makes me wish it was 2am and that I was on a dance floor and that the beat could just go on and on and on. I guess it reminds me of Rob, it reminds me of dancing and laughing and being with friends. I guess it reminds me that people can be passionate about music. I guess I don't have to defend it. It is part of the soundtrack of my life and this is why it is here.

Christos Tsiolkas's novel *The Slap* is available from Allen & Unwin.