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30 September 2009
www.cyclicdefrost.com
ISSUE 23
Rooftop Bars
b-Castings
Cyclic Defrost
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For anyone familiar with Grant Hunter's work, any mention of cartoons in relation to the 26-year-old's drawings will probably come as no surprise. The Novocastrian noise-pop purveyor and erstwhile graphic artist seems to pointedly stretch everything he tries his hand at — whether it be music or art — into awkward, elongated and garishly captivating shapes, recalling the caricature of cartoon. As a central member in Newcastle group Crab Smasher, Hunter has managed to weave black humour and a technicolour freshness into a genre best known for its monochromatic sobriety. Grant Hunter also runs the Monstera Deliciosa label, for which he has designed album covers for both Crab Smasher and The Night Of Love — the latter a nomadic improvisation unit with no fixed line-up.

"Crab Smasher came out of a really specific scene that was going on [on the Central Coast],” Hunter recalls, “One Dollar Short, Something With Numbers, After The Fall - all those bands were all doing the exact same thing and it made [the coast] all the more boring because it seemed like every other band was emulating that sound, trying to be the next success story. We didn't know anything about noise music, we just wanted to be obnoxious and make a point of doing our own thing. It's evolved considerably since then, I'd like to think that we've matured over time and it's not so much about pissing people off.”

Cartoons, as well as other pop cultural phenomena, were formative influences for Hunter. He recalls drawing “Super Mario Mushroom Kingdom fantasies” as a child, and Terminator 2 — that apex of 1990s action/science fiction cinema — inspired him to obsessively draw scenes from that film. In a lot of ways Hunter's work seems to draw heavily from that decade, a period where the young artist's mind would have been at its most impressionable.

"I've been told by fine art educators that the figures and creatures in my work are intentionally confrontational and trying to be shocking, but I don't really agree with that."

superhero comic-books for a living,” he says, “but I never really dedicated myself to it and I skewed off in other directions, probably for the better.”

The result is a strange bastard form of psychedelic horror, or an inverted, poisonous twee blended with the bold simplicity of childhood illustrations. It seems that Hunter's work will inevitably elicit one of two strong reactions, with the more positive reaction probably stemming from a shared cultural experience (i.e. mainstream '90s pop culture). It's a period that Hunter seems to embrace unabashedly, with some of his music tastes reflecting his interest in dubious forms of 1990s cultural output (see his sleeve reviews on pp 41).

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shocking, but I don't really agree with that," Hunter says, "I'm not trying to shock people, I'm just more interested in ugly things. They're cartoonish for sure, but that's what I was raised on. I've never been influenced by realism and any attempts on my part to work in that realm have proven largely unsuccessful. This is just what comes naturally and I'm much happier playing to my strengths. I love to experiment but generally when I'm going for something outside my comfort zone it's really forced and I feel like a bit of a fraud."

Hunter believes that his drawings paralleled his work in Crab Smasher in the way they challenge traditional attitudes towards authenticity, as well as the great divide between high and lowbrow art. "I've been studying a uni degree for the last few years and I've found that there's this real opposition to new and contemporary art by a lot of the old dinosaurs within the institution," he says, "Particularly if it is influenced by lowbrow things like comics or cartoons. And I think that occurs with Crab Smasher too. We definitely do have that novelty aesthetic, and we do encounter a bit of resistance to that from some other people we play with, I guess because they can't really nail us down. Anything fun or funny in 'experimental music' seems to be off-limits, and so if we record some pop song that has more in common with Gwen Stefani than John Cage, it's like it devalues some of our more arty and boring noise things or whatever. But polarising people is kind of what makes it fun for us.

"So really I'm just inspired by everything. I watch lots of movies and I'm slowly putting together a series of works inspired by Back To The Future II. I listen to lots of bad music. But what really inspires me is just being around other people that are making and doing their own things in their own way, and that enthusiasm kind of rubs off on me."

This issue's Cyclic Defrost cover is something of an anomaly for Hunter; more restrained in its use of colours, though still in keeping with his signature melding of the ugly and hilarious. Perhaps the opportunity to work away from the field of album artwork has produced something distinct from his earlier work.

"I've really been jazzed on digital painting lately," he says of the cover. "I bought a graphics tablet about a year ago, and it's really another set of skills that I've had to learn. It's kind of less experimental in some ways but also much more forgiving, particularly with the work I do. It will never replace traditional tools for me, but I really like playing with it."

"With this specific work I was hoping to incorporate a variety of different media, such as handmade drawings, paintings, photography, and digital work, but ended up completing it 100% on the computer." He continues: "I tend not to think things out too much with my works, generally I just start with a blank page and something comes out of it, often just through roughing out some shapes and hoping that an image or idea starts to take shape. I tend to overwork a lot of the things that I do, and I really wanted this to be simple and kind of just pop out.

"I don't know how I came to work the rabbits into it, but they tend to pop up in a lot of my drawings and paintings. I wanted a strong figure and I think the main rabbit is just really hairy, in ways that many of my characters often aren't. I completed the work over a night or two with Corel Painter and some final tweaking in Adobe Photoshop. My laptop is a little bit slow and it was having all kinds of meltdowns but I got there in the end. This was really challenging for me, I've always loved the idea of guest artists on Cyclic Defrost and honestly never thought I would have the opportunity to do it, so I hope I haven't messed up and bombed completely I hope people like it."

See more of Grant Hunter's work at http://granthunter.daportfolio.com/
Paul Gough’s wearing the same brown, short-sleeves and collared shirt as his press shots from five years ago. It’s a favourite or the man has a limited wardrobe, and he doesn’t strike me as the sort to finish off clothing. He hoards music; he’s fixated on sound; he is obsessed by too much else.

He looks up from his coffee and jumps to his feet, extending a hand in greeting: “I found this place on a blog,” he says. Gough was reluctant to meet at his place, and suggested this little Glebe café instead, “They’ve got good coffee.” He Googled me before the interview, he admits, and, reaching into his bag, hands over three DVDs: “Just a few things you might like,” he says. Full of deleted free jazz albums, and odd pop 7” singles, they’re rich for exploration. That’s typical Paul Gough: private, but friendly and eager to please; colleagues say he’s easy to work with and genuinely into music. The latter is evident in his weekly radio programs for the ABC’s Radio National (‘Quiet Space’) and Sydney’s FBi Radio (‘Paul’s Playlunch’). The former, in the high regard he’s held by all workmates I speak with for this story.

At 44-years-old, Gough might be better known (at least internationally) for making music as Pimmon. But, unlikely as it may seem, he learnt his craft making countless hours of radio among the big egos and flashy microphones of Sydney’s commercial stations. “I managed to wrangle my first job at 2UE just by showing up,” he says.

“You make some assumptions about big radio stations. But the reality was we were using some pretty basic equipment. There was no tutoring in the technical theory of radio.”

“It just had to sound right.”

Gough was, and still is, ‘PG’ for many of the people at 2UE. One of the first broadcasters he worked with at the station was talkback host, Alan Jones, soon after the man started in radio. Two years later, he left and worked in Melbourne before returning to work with another heavyweight of talkback radio, John Laws, for a decade. “These people are incredibly complex,” Gough says, reluctant to talk about Laws or Jones. “There are things about them that I like, and things that I find incredibly frustrating.” Sometimes he joined Laws – ‘the golden tonsils’ – on air, using a little voice synthesizer to distort and pitch-shift his own voice. Every week, he noted good calls, jokes and anything that went down well, and then patched them together as a half-hour best of. Alastair Reynolds, the station’s chief engineer, says it was mostly so Laws could get away at 11:30am on a Friday to get up the coast to his farm before the rush. “PG often worked ‘til quarter past 11 on a Friday, ready to race upstairs and play it out at 11:30,” Reynolds recalls.

Reynolds says Gough was one of the great producers to come through the station. “He was just comfortable in the environment, and that’s a good word for it: ‘comfort.’ I don’t know if you’d call it a gut level instinct or feeling, but some people just get radio. PG got it.”

Fifteen years ago, the actor Jonathan Harris was booked for an interview on the program. Harris played Dr Smith in Lost In Space, and there was nothing in the music library but a cheap remake of the television show’s theme. The production team was in a spin, but Gough loved the show as a kid, and he remembered recording episodes on his mum’s reel-to-reel recorder. He found one of them in a box of tapes in his garage.

“It had to work on the recording a bit,” he says.

“It was basically a microphone in front of an old television speaker. I edited up some dialogue – particularly where Smith would say things like, ‘You jangling junk heap!’ – and I actually had the original theme somewhere on vinyl.”

Harris beamed as he walked into the studio with this montage playing. Looking in from behind the producer’s window, Gough got shivers. “I was eight when I recorded this,” he remembers thinking.

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Paul Gough's interest in sound goes right back to his earliest memories hearing a song on the radio when he was four years old, using his mum's reel-to-reel recorder at 108 degrees in the name Yelpey Drummers (Yelpey is old English for known, so known as makers of sound). He was a fan with a cam and a leapfrog budgetry cluttering in the background, it was a screaming homage to the Birthday Party.

“Most stuff was really bad,” says Gough. “I don’t think I’ve ever spoken about it to anybody in an interview,” he says, admitting he recently sent the songs anonymously to the archival blog Memet’s Sounds (memet-sounds.blogspot.com).

It was a pivotal at the time, however, as sending that music off to SMBJ, a community radio station, was his first radio show on another Sydney community station, 2MBS. It was low-tech and low-rent, no improvement on the staff for a good decade he stopped releasing music. “I’m a bit like a bower bird,” he says. “I collect all the snippets of sound, just putting themaside and forgetting them.”

In the mid-90s, 2UE invested in an expensive Mac-based system. A clanetor says Gough, an avowed PC user. He started searching the internet for software to edit the program, and to his surprise, found much more: software that let him really play around with sound. But at work he felt creatively stifled. He was desperate to get out. Sitting over his coffee, he leans back in his chair, visibly shocked when I remind him of former colleagues, many of whom he has not spoken to since leaving the station. In retrospect, it’s this need for a creative outlet that really triggered the birth of Pimmon.

“I tend to do most of my work on individual sounds,” he says. “Editing, just listening to one sound over and over again.” He gets back over I find something I like.”

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“It was like someone finding in the dark,” he says. “Some of the staff members knew about my music, but I didn’t go on about it. They weren’t even listening to anything vaguely electronic, let alone something so abstract.”

Steve Turner, an ABC reporter who worked with Gough at 2UE, says they were all fascinated by Gough’s other life.

“The music intrigued by this outsider who lived in Greystanes, in the suburbs of western Sydney, had a family and a domestic situation that was so far from the usual inner city electron music scene. Julian Cribb, who was teaching at the University of Western Sydney when he first came across Pimmon’s music, says Gough was almost as if you could imagine from the rest of the electronic music community.

“Being out of the city meant he didn’t do much of his business over internet connections,” says Knowles, now a professor at Queensland University. “He's remarried and now happily working at Radio National, producing for Phillip Adams; he’s won a joint Walkley award with the team for a report on the Solomon Islands in 2004, and plays music shows on the ABC’s KFbi Radio.

Gough’s first album in five years, Smudge Another Yesterday, is bleak, and at times brutal. And although Gough had used vocals for texture in the past, he says this is the time he’s really expressed himself with his voice. Still abstract, and mostly textual, it helped him deal with what he calls 10 years of turmoil.

“It was like when someone needs to say something to someone who has died, for example, and they write a letter, then bury it. I didn’t want to write these things down in a public way. But I could release an emotion through the album, and it stays private because it’s buried in the music.”

“People have said that my music was dark in the past, but this time it really has come from a fairly dark place,” he looks tired, but relieved. “I wonder what they’ll make of it.”

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Shitty jobs, breakdowns, illness, deaths, girlfriends, Ataris, rehearsal spaces and lack thereof, stereos, music, Roman car parks, cassette tapes, alcohol & hallucinogens, breathing, eating, shitting, fucking and all the other (in)significant moments in between.

Topher’s influences, from their MySpace

Approaching Sydney’s Central Station from the CBD, Hibernian House is an imposing old building – a crumbling remnant of Surry Hills’ industrial past. The dull green exterior is rotting away and the panoramic windows are fogged with years of rain and dirt. Across the road a towering dental hospital pitches a perpetual shade over the street and a grandly developed dive bar cum multilevel entertainment complex buzzes just over the way inside Hibernian, pokey graffitied stairwells lead to cavernous, fluorescently lit hallways; dubious suspension bridges hover over a treacherous central pit, surrounded by slopes and residences. Somewhere in the maze is Yvonne Ruve: a small room with a gutted piano, some couches, ashtrays, leering posters, audio refuse.

For the six members of Castings, this is their home away from home. For most of this decade, Castings have hosted shows and rehearsed here, with most of its members commuting from Newcastle. Yvonne Ruve is, in my mind, the seventh member of Castings: the derelict decor, the bad lighting and the gracefully fetid surrounds are a perfect fit for a band whose experimentation is too urgent - too instinctual, pent-up, reactionary - to be relegated to elevated stages, stuffy music halls or grog-branded rock venues. They are the best band Australia has coughed up unwillingly in living memory.

Interviewing Castings is a long time coming: the members seem at ease whenever I bring the topic up over a six-month period, whether intermittently via email or at a Castings show. For longer than that the group has been preparing their forthcoming Lexicon Devil-released album, due for release later in 2009. I finally arrange to meet them at Yvonne Ruve, but we end up - over the Queen’s birthday weekend - at a pub nearby, where mid long-weekend inebriation is in full swing. Seeing the group outside their natural habitat reminds me of how tentative they look on stage: several members of the group will quizzically manipulate their instruments, presumably unaware of what kind of maelstrom they might trigger while scaling their treacherous and fragile form of improvisation.

Amidst the furrowed-brows is the always shirtless Nick Senger, lurching, hollering and occasionally beating his drums.

When we finally fit ourselves onto a table on the street it soon becomes clear that some members of the band still aren’t entirely comfortable being interviewed while others, as I’ve come to expect, are disarmingly open and given to cheerful banter. They’re a friendly bunch – among the most friendly and likable interview subjects this writer has ever encountered – but the preliminary shit talk over a couple of beers is peppered with faint warnings: we can’t explain this; don’t ask us about that; we talk shit; this whole thing is stupid. Despite this, the most vocal of the Castings unit express an undying belief in what they do.

They proudly insist on their integrity both in navigating the machinations of the cottage industry they inhabit and their musical vision, but are also sceptical of how they’re perceived, whether in fact anyone actually likes them. More than any other band I’ve encountered, Castings truly do seem to be doing it for themselves, and no one else. They formed in 1999 as a three piece, out of the ashes of previous bands. Kane Ewin and brothers Sean and Mark Leacy hail from the rural NSW township of Young. Sam Kenna is a Tamworth fellow, while Nick Senger – born in Sydney - has lived in Melbourne but now resides with the bulk of the group in Newcastle. Dale Rees, the quietest, least demonstrative

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The preliminary shit talk over a couple of beers is peppered with faint warnings: we can’t explain this; don’t ask us about that; we talk shit; this whole thing is stupid.”

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of the group, was born in New Zealand and has spent time living in the United States. The group was originally a three-piece made up of Senger, Rees and Ewin, with the group culminating in a six-piece in 2004. Ironically, Ewin and Senger met at TAFE while studying Music Business, a tenure they both describe as useless and soul-sapping. Most members played in other bands prior to Castings – Ewin, Shaun Leacy and Senger in Ex-Pat, and Rees in a group called Zodakahn. Music, it seems, has always been the focal point of each member's lives.

“We’d all had experience with music, structure, performing, but we all got sick of it,” Senger says, describing the birth of Castings. “It was a communal thing: we’d all hang around, get fucken loaded, and play with a four-track. We realised one day that it was more fun than practising the same songs over and over again and performing them. So we just changed.”

Castings’ formative years were spent rehearsing in a dilapidated squat and a muffler shop in Newcastle. Their first gig was at the Hunter on Hunter in that town. Gradually the group grew into a five-piece, producing an unreleased debut and their first public offering: 2003’s Electro Disco Weirdo. Spanish Magic – the label that Senger birthed in the late ‘90s to release some of his home recordings – was revived for the release, and is now overseen by each member of the band.

When you ask any given member of Castings what an album represents, or what the motivating factors for said albums were, they invariably insist that it was “a moment in time,” a culmination of the unit’s lives interacting, clashing, communicating through music. They strive to challenge themselves and their audience, but rather than concoct elaborate or difficult methods to do so, the group are largely driven, they say, by instinct. Castings play what they do because they’re trying to find a sound they want that they’ve never heard before: “The question you’re asking, the idea of the process – this whole thing is awkward. The idea is, we put an album out and it’s good music. It has to be a masterpiece. That’s our piece of art, and we put it out for whatever reason and that’s it.”

Unlike a lot of the improvisational groups that Castings are frequently lumped amongst, the processes of performing and recording an album are very distinct. Castings don’t document their development through regular missives but instead painstakingly piece together their output, improving for long stretches of time and later

“We play what we want to hear. We do our best. We’re humans and we fuck it up.”

* Cyclic Defrost Magazine

By Shaun Prescott

Feature: Local

Castings
They proudly insist on their integrity...but are head."

They think Castings is driven by the fact that we have six people that are friends, and that know each other, and who are willing to share their lives and music with each other.

"They are friends, and that love each other, and who are willing to share their lives and music with each other."

"We're embarrassingly honest," Kenna adds. For anyone who has ever witnessed and felt moved by Castings, the sense that real human beings inhabit these aural emissions - that real anger, joy, frustration and catharsis are embedded within these hardly chromatic sound worlds - will strike as the most blatant of truths. The group's 2014 album 'All Holby sound like 35 years of punk rock stripped of its declamatory tendencies. All the bittersweet and functional aspects of rock music are fighting on their last breath beneath a frozen pond of reverberating, decaying hubris. It's one of the most disconcertingly claustrophobic but ultimately affirming albums I've ever heard: the conjunction of at times contrary inclinations, moods and tendencies is what makes the six-piece's music so colourful, but as ambiguous, familiar lines blurred by the malfunction of its means.

"Why does anyone want to start a band?" Senger asks. "I figure people start a band because they want to play something they can't hear. We play what we want to hear. We do our best. We're humans and we fuck it up."

"I initially thought the utopia of something like SoundNoSound doesn't like it. "I hate playing live," he declares. "I don't understand the process, so I'd never do it. I wouldn't do it. But other people in the band think differently. They love the release and the idea of it. But I find it completely uncomfortable. It becomes such an aesthetic thing. For me the whole idea of it being analysed in such a public way seems ridiculous."

"It's just a different energy," Ewin adds diplomatically. "That's what I like about it. It's the energy of being put on the spot. Sometimes it works 100 per cent, sometimes you finish wanting to kill yourself. There are so many elements and reasons why it can go either way."

But when asked if Castings would prefer to be a 'studio' project, Senger claims, "not in the slightest." Other members of the group, Kenna in particular, vehemently disagree. Senger believes that "to be able to lose ourselves" in the performance is important, and Kenna concides to that at least. "The last gig [at Yvonne Ruve] was good because the lights were out, and it worked because there was no focus on the person and it was just the music," he says. "Everyone was in this hot sweaty room and all they could hear was there. There was no 'oh that's what guy doing,' they were like, 'oh I actually have to listen to this shit.'"

"Playing live is difficult simply because we didn't see ourselves that way," Senger says. "We didn't see ourselves as people that could do that. A lot of us thought that was stuff for people who weren't like us. So it's awkward, but it doesn't mean that it isn't appreciated."

"People like us" is a phrase that arises frequently during the conversation. Castings see themselves as separate from any music community or scene - whether imagined or otherwise - in Sydney or the country. "We try to challenge ourselves and the way we play," Ewin offers. "We're not going to give you a clique because we've always seen that as extremely redundant. To go and see a punk gig, or a rock gig, is absolutely ridiculous. It comes back to the question of what music do you listen to? Holy shit, what kind of a question is that?"

"We don't want to align ourselves with anyone," Senger continues. "We play with people who are going to challenge us and challenge the audience. We want to play with someone who's going to teach us something. I want to learn from the people we play with. And we can't learn from one genre, we have to hear everything. So yeah we are a punk punk band, punk as fuck for sure. But Maggotsville [the Marrickville punk warehouse] wouldn't have a bar of us, they laughed their fucken arses off at us. But they're wrong." Again, Kenna disagrees, stating that he doesn't think there's anything to learn from other bands. "This is the one band I've ever discovered," he says. "When you're playing with other bands you're in this world where everyone is meant to be sympathetic [towards one another]. But there's no difference between me being a chef and working in a kitchen with a bunch of careerist f**king chefs and being amongst careerist musicians."

"They're all the same fucking people."
* Cyclic Defrost Magazine 018

** Castings **

By Shaun Prescott

great, we’ll create our own world,” then I realised that most people have an agenda. I can’t go to the pub with any of these people and talk about something normal. I have no need to be a part of anything like that. I don’t want to hang out with musicians or bands, or people who think they’re doing something.”

To the members of Castings, producers, artists collaborating due to mutual aesthetic backgrounds or pursuits, is not just a way to produce music; it is a way to question and reflect on their own experiences. In their latest release, titled “Memories of a Different Map,” Castings presents a collection of songs that explore the complexities of life and the passage of time, reframing these moments through a lens of personal reflection and artistic expression.

All Ben theeful and functional aspects of rock music are on their last breath beneath a frozen pond of reverberating, decaying hubris.

for them. “We’re definitely trying to extingush the redundant, the comfortable,” Kane says. But what is comfortable? “Something that is routine. Something that we end up relying on it somehow blocking out those emotional patterns of up and down and in and out,” he explains. “It’s easy to create a safe haven but the fact is that life goes in and out. Being friends for so long and not being ashamed of any of that means what we do is honest.” No matter what the outcome – whether indie rock or power electronics – dwindling in circles among a group of self-congratulatory peers would be the death of Castings.

Instead, in Nick’s words, Castings see themselves as “pop music created by people using a different map.” The notion that Castings is an upright experimental group of the noise variety frustrates the group. “There’s more to us than that. CD-Rs are disposable,” he says, regarding the constant onslaught of output by noise musicians in that format. “We’re not disposable. We mean it.”

This point was amply proved on the group’s last release, 2007’s Punk Rock Is Bunk Squawk. Ironically, the album speaks with one of the most aggressive and ‘noisy’ sounds Castings has ever created – a move the group say was calculated as a (rather deadpan) response to the most aggressive and ‘noisy’ sounds Castings has ever created – a Punk Rock Is Bunk Squawk.

There’s a quote floating around the internet that paints Swoop Sweep (formerly known as Streaky Jake, actually Sean Gorman) as a bit of a ‘laid back’ man. In it, he proclaims that he started playing guitar after his friend Lucas Mc McCain strummed ‘Under the Bridge’ at their primary school assembly, causing the knees of many a girl to quiver. An impressionability young Gorman professed that he wanted to make said girls weak at the knees too.

Right now though, he’s laughing: “I was just joking. Lucas was always trying to get someone to play the 12 bar blues with him so then he could just do face melters over the top of it.” As for the girl? “He’s a very tall, handsome chap so I shouldn’t have hung around him. I was always in the shadows.”

The story behind Gorman’s evolution, as Streaky Jake at least, is just as intriguing as the tales of the young Lucas Mc Cain. It all began in September 2005 when an unmarked demo arrived for review here at Cyclic Defrost Alex Crossfoot (Olle) reviewed the record ‘What’s Wrong? Nothing’, with its hand-etched sleeve, for issue 12. As OCeaniC eMissiOns he invited the musician to contact him to mix and master the record. What’s Wrong? Nothing, with its hand-etched sleeve, for issue 12. As OCeaniC eMissiOns he invited the musician to contact him to mix and master the record. What’s Wrong? Nothing, with its hand-etched sleeve, for issue 12.

There’s no one phrase to pin down the aesthetic. Instead, there are influences, sounds, and fragments. I love Bob Dylan,” Gorman says. “I remember listening to ‘Don’t Think Twice, It’s Alright’ once and that really affected me, the sound and everything about it. I was into the blues for a long time, not so much anymore.”

Harmorous Beach Boys pop also gets a look in too, alongside a childhood fixation with punk. “When I was in high school I listened to Dead Kennedys, American punk bands, but then I kind of got over that. I used to play a lot of punk with Lucas but it wasn’t very good.”

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Later, when we’re forced back to Yvonne Rave after last drinks, we listen to Ensenon Airport’s Anne Creona songs, Senger waxes spoofishly about The Smallest, and the group admit to Nick Cain’s legendary Opprobrium being a massive influence in their collective ‘moment in time’, though what marks these moments is something the group are either reluctant or unable to define. “I think this album is a bit more of a slow burner,” Senger admits, adding that it won’t be as reclusively diverse as Punk Rock: “It’s probably a bit more avant garde,” Rees adds, “a bit more restrained and a bit more trance like.”

There is one moment I manage to wrest from the group though, a tiny portrait, something – at least – that might go some way in showing the kind of miniatures of life that presumably influence Castings’ output. Kenna explains how, before a show Castings played at the Mandarin Club in 2015, he saw a dishevelled man bring angrily accused by his partner on the side; both were being quickly, probably homeless. After a few moments of the woman’s tirade, having had a gutful the man swung around quickly and spat “Well I buy food and I fix you don’t I?”

In addition to “shitty jobs, breakdowns, illness, deaths, friendships, art,” etc, the group кредлиsted into Castings’ work. “That influenced my performance that night,” Kenna says rather solemnly. “These are the types of things that influence me.”

All those (in)significant moments in between CD Castings releases are available from Spanish Magic.

There’s a quote floating around the internet that paints Swoop Sweep (formerly known as Streaky Jake, actually Sean Gorman) as a bit of a ‘laid back’ man. In it, he proclaims that he started playing guitar after his friend Lucas Mc McCain strummed ‘Under the Bridge’ at their primary school assembly, causing the knees of many a girl to quiver. An impressionability young Gorman professed that he wanted to make said girls weak at the knees too.

Right now though, he’s laughing: “I was just joking. Lucas was always trying to get someone to play the 12 bar blues with him so then he could just do face melters over the top of it.” As for the girl? “He’s a very tall, handsome chap so I shouldn’t have hung around him. I was always in the shadows.”

Somewhere in the Shadows is the first album to be released under Gorman’s Swoop Sweep alias. On Sean Hocking’s now Hong Kong-based label Metal Postcard. Filled with delicious, subtle touches on acoustic guitar and minor forays into electronic elements, there’s no one phrase to pin down the aesthetic. Instead, there are influences, sounds, and fragments. “I love Bob Dylan,” Gorman says. “I remember listening to ‘Don’t Think Twice, It’s Alright’ once and that really affected me, the sound and everything about it. I was into the blues for a long time, not so much anymore.”

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Somewhere in the Shadows

Shifting between Strakye and Swoop Swoop seemed necessary given Gorman’s desire to change tack with subject matter. “The Swoop Swoop album was more a collection of songs about place,” he says, adding that the Streaky Jake alias was for his character-driven songs. “I just thought there’s no point in being fixated on the one idea and it’s just not working, so you just need to move on.”

"Gorman's songs, even if he's adamant that most of his compositions are written during the process, has a communal and constructed character. It’s this concept of place that proves most interesting in the new album.

The Swoop Swoop methodology takes the listener on an excursion between recollection and lyrical fragments of memories. It’s a testament to the songs that this mood can be carried over, given that the recording experience was anything but relaxing. In March, Gorman and Hocking had to convince Gorman (cajole him, even) to take the songs on the road. The tour, which began in July, will take in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney. It’s a veritable one man band, with Gorman packing everything into a van, driving and sleeping in it along the way. Even though he’d played live before - there were instances in the US - the band is again reflective. “I guess it just happened that way. A part of that was having Alex there because he actually knows what he’s doing as opposed to me when I’m recording on four track; it’s very haphazard. We were actually able to do a lot more so I guess it just happened. In the week that we had to do it we just nailed it out. There wasn’t that much time to think too deeply at the time when we were recording the tracks. We did record lots of tracks and we picked anything. As a result of that short period of time there were a lot of forced, quick decisions. Having said that, Alex took that and worked on it for a long time, and I think maybe that’s where a lot more of the grandiose, elaborate parts came in."

"There was even talk of getting Swoop Swoop performing in a backyard, though the idea that did come to fruition was a date in a Melbourne record store.”

"Alex had that idea, he thought that might be cool. Although not many of them actually went to see it. I’m not really known and I don’t really perform so quite possibly I would suck,” he laughs, “drive people out of the shop.”

There’s definitely no precedent, but there was one particular incident when Gorman went over to play a few gigs in Williamsburg and New York, in 2006, that he knows will provide the perfect fodder for a music journalist to end on. "I played in a record shop in Williamsburg when I went to stay with Sean and we did a gig in a construction site and they had this big industrial drill. And there was a horse outside, walking past, just quite weird. I think it was a pony actually I got mistaken, but you don’t see a horse walk past your window every day."

"It’s pretty much just going to see what happens. I’ve already got my van so I’ll just chock my surfboard in the back.”

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Somewhere in the Shadows is released through Metal Postcard/Vitamin.
OF STERNER STUFF

“The improvisation/composition dynamic is pretty blurred for most artists working in experimental or exploratory ways. It’s not one or the other, but usually both.”

In many ways, Joel Stern is a product of the synergetic world we inhabit. The past two decades have borne witness to the gradual hybridisation and intermingling of various media formats. Visual art philosophy has bled into the creative approaches of pop stars like Lady Gaga, while rock musicians like Nick Cave and Sonic Youth have been exerting influence throughout the worlds of art and literature. The advent of technologies like the internet, iPhones and mp3 players, meanwhile, has physically embodied the very hybridity musicians and artists have attempted to touch upon since the middle of the twentieth century.

The work of Joel Stern, while greatly removed from the popular territories of such innovations, is very much representative of the world that has arisen in their wake. A multimedia artist, curator, musician and academic, Stern’s work is an exploration into the abstract, fluid nature of sound and imagery, as well as the individual idiosyncrasies and characteristics of specific sounds and concepts. His studio work encompasses vast, detailed sonic territories comprised of everything from abstract found sounds and office stationery to off-key instrumentation and soothing textures. Meanwhile, his live performances easily augment these constructions with improvisation, avant garde film footage and other media.

“It depends on context and how I feel,” Stern says, of his performance approaches.

“Live performance is really different from what I do in the studio. There’s always freedom to improvise with the materials I use and I like to incorporate a lot of chance and indeterminacy into my shows. I think with solo performances it’s important to feel prepared and ready, and have something fairly clear to express. I think the improvisation/composition dynamic is pretty blurred for most artists working in experimental or exploratory ways. It’s not one or the other, but usually both. You sort of have to accept and celebrate both.”

“My attitude to media is that we are in a moment now where we can apply contemporary approaches and techniques and attitudes—but choose from the history of media and technologies for materials that have distinguishing attributes, fidelity and malleability,” the composer explains.

“That’s why you see artists returning to or sticking with celluloid, cassettes, vinyl, analogue synths. Medium specificity is a tool for artists to use. I like the artist Dick Higgins who, in his 1965 statement on intermedia, said a composer should compose for all mediums.”

It is somewhat inaccurate, however, to describe Stern’s work as a mere product of the zeitgeist. The composer has developed his philosophies and practices from a myriad of approaches and investigations over the past decade—working within a number of experimental communities (Melbourne, London and Brisbane), lecturing at universities and collaborating across a variety of disparate projects.

A number of Brisbane bands (Impromptuons, No Guru) count Stern as a member, while his work in Brisbane-based multimedia ensembles OtherFilm and Abject Leader has been instrumental in expanding Brisbane’s growing reputation as a creative hub.

“I think Brisbane’s getting better every year for artists,” he says.

“The rest of Australia is looking to Brisbane with curiosity and interest, just as we are looking around for inspiration from them. Brisbane’s been good to me. It has nurtured me.”

“It’s important for me to immerse yourself in music, to listen with open ears, to seek out new and challenging ideas and sounds, and to have the skills to reflect on your own work contextually, and know how to develop and evolve it. Experimental strategies followed by reflection and application, that’s the evolution of music. The internet has accelerated everything involved with art apart from the making of it, which still does and should take time.”

CD

Joel Stern’s Objects Masks Props is now available from Naturestrip Records.
Feature: Local Mata & Must

By James d’Apice

It’s easy to feel like the only way of making hip hop is to either create ironic, self-reflexive pastiche or to pretend it’s 1994. To feel like the only subject to rap about is rap. I mean, if Jay Z can flip everyone out with ‘Death of Autotune,’ imagine if he did a song about the death of a phenomenon that meant something.

So, if no one can do anything relevant, what is there for it but for today’s mic-wielders to either hide behind video game nostalgia and pop culture references, faux-gangsta posturing, or under-conceived political nonsense?

Somehow this madness has passed by Mata and Must. A shining beacon – like an inner city pub that’s yet to be renovated, or a chef prepared to cook with water and not stock to keep it white – Mata and Must have managed to hang onto relevance, despite not giving a shit about it. They’ve managed it by simply immersing themselves in their own music, being earnest about it, and making sure it’s good. It’s a fairly simple formula, it’s just surprising that something so simple (and, occasionally, simplistic) has managed to get a foothold.

In a genre where ‘believing in things’ has become such a convoluted, clumsy, bulking palimpsest, Mata and Must’s earnestness is refreshing. So how do you bring a genre back to life, then? Time to phone Melbourne to find out.

A minute passes and then two bright, keen, friendly, young voices materialise.

“Sorry, that was my dad,” says Must.

It turns out that both Mata and Must live at home with their respective parents. It doesn’t bother either of them. It’s a pretty accurate microcosm of the life they lead: unconcerned by much of the world outside the studio – living in a cool suburb, getting away from Mum and Dad, partying – their life besides music isn’t worth fretting about.

Mata and Must work at the same place, share a car trip there and back, listen to community station RRR or PBS, and talk music. Music, music, music.

This lifestyle makes the first question obvious. A close friendship, a common workplace, and an obsession with the music they make; how many hours a day are the boys in the lab?
"I feel like we’re making a good contribution by putting music out there."

Raucous laughter, then Mata explains, “It depends, you know when you’re your own boss it could be anything from 16 to one. We’d go to five days a week and then sometimes on the weekend.”

So they’re living the dream? “It’s the reality! We are doing it all the time. We might not see each other on Sunday but chances are we both made a beat or were involved in music – playing a gig or going to a gig – so we’re so immersed in thinking music that it’s hard to remove ourselves anyway.”

To business, then. The boys have completed their new album Paradox of Minds, six years after their first, and it’s stunning. “We wanted to write an album about opposites...this inverted sort of reflection of each other. We’re pretty different, but we’re real close. We’ve known each other since about ’96. And we have spent a hell of a lot of time together and we’re similar in the things that we like to write about as well.”

“Paradoxical, indeed.”

“There’s a lot of paradox,” says Mata. “We’re not doing this for the money, but on the other hand, we want to do it to the point where we can make money for it. We run a label and we’re artists on that label, you know?”

The cover art for Paradox of Minds is striking. Black and white photographs of a studio filled with recording stuff and two men in their 20s managing it all. Inside the cover a list of the equipment and computer programs that the boys used in putting Paradox of Minds together.

“I guess that’s about how we like to do everything ourselves from start to finish. We save up for the new equipment and then end up writing about that. We make music for, you know, really enthusiastic hip-hop heads. This is sort of an emcee’s album or producer’s album. All the people we hang out with that make music or run labels; they’re the ones we think will get the most out of it.”

“We wanted to write an album about opposites...this inverted sort of reflection of each other. We’re pretty different, but we’re real close.” says Must.

“That list is just the sort of list we would appreciate in an album,” Mata says. “I find it interesting to learn how something was made.”

“Much of Paradox of Minds is spent reflecting on the state of the industry, and manufacturing a way forward in a market struggling to deal with the new media. Mata and Must are also label heads of Pang Productions. Surely, as both artists and label runners, they’ll have a fair bit to say about the commercial realities of music making. They’re reflected on it at a knifing, and Must says, the way we consume music is changing.”

“At the end of the day those 10 people who’ve downloaded might spread it to another 10 who might purchase. Are we making music to make money or to influence people’s lives?” A paradox (of minds), apparently.

Mata adds, “when you had the CD sales fall, you had the prices of tickets and the actual sales of tickets go up so there was this parallel between them. If you have more people downloading your music, that’s just more exposure so other income avenues should go up.”

“But the main reason I make music is the need to create something. At the end of the day – and this is also through running the label – I feel like we’re making a good contribution by putting music out there.”

But (and these paradoxes keep piling up) if Mata and Must were all about getting their music to the greatest number as easily as possible, why charge for the album? Why feed the beast?

Mata and Must considered putting the album up for free download.

“We weighed up the advantages,” Must says. “If we did it as a free thing, maybe we could get it to a lot more people and maybe sell out larger shows.”

“But I have a thing about value and how you value your product. Some people will have a product that they sell on the street for five dollars when it’s really worth 20. The value you put on your product transfers to the listener. If we worked one hour for 20 bucks and I can go out and buy four albums in comparison to one, I will value each of those four albums less than the more expensive one.”

So a free album is only worth as much as it costs.

“We’re selling this as a product, and that’s why we spent so much time on mixing and mastering...Churning it out is just not our style. We’re always trying to make the highest quality product that they sell on the street for five dollars when it’s really worth 20.”

“They’re selling it as a product. They’re selling it as a product. They’re label bosses. They’re artists. They object to the industry. They’re a part of the industry. They want their music to be heard by as many people as possible. They won’t give it away free. Paradoxical, indeed.”

Paradox of Minds is available through Pang Productions.
The post-Dilla era heralds a new chapter in the evolution of left field beats: much of the art form’s innovation is occurring upon an aesthetic platform that is being termed, somewhat problematically, as ‘wonky’. And while Dilla struck equipoise in terms of the human machine balances with those slightly off kilter drum patterns, the aesthetic that he helped materialise has become, somewhat restrictively, a motif and rhetoric frame within which much of the work of forward thinking producers is being contextualised.

Jay Dilla’s free form programming style has inspired producers to disturb the fixity of traditional kick-snare matrices, explore polyphonic and compound times and develop their own enunciations of machinic humanity that made Dilla joints so charming.

Now I’m sorry, but hip-hop is hip-hop, a beat is a beat and despite much of the web discourse on the topic, ‘wonky’ alone does not constitute a sub-genre although the term is sonically accurate. It’s easy to think of much experimental hip-hop as a genre exercise and the work of many producers may be deemed Dilla copies, clever to the point of counter intuitiveness or simply interchangeable, but is that really a fair judgement to make just because loose drum programming seems to be the solid ground that innovative beat makers are territorialising?

In an attempt to broaden my definitional horizons, I decided to engage in some analytical listening, hoping to distill some aesthetic and effectual dimensions that better characterise the grand narrative of hip-hop innovation post-Dilla. After pulling out every record on my shelf that I’d define as wonky, and conversations with two producers I have much respect for, UK based Charlie Dark (Attica Blues, Blacktronica) and Tadd Mullinix (Dabrye), I set out to formulate my thoughts on ‘wonky’.

Firstly, there are the drums (and the drum machines), by scattering kicks and snares loosely intuitive frames of reference are disturbed. This is achieved by either switching off the drum machine’s quantize function (which results in shifting of beats just a fraction off the point where they should be) or experimenting with polyrhythmic structures and compound times.

Beat maker Charlie Dark warns against the temptation of aesthetic extremism when it comes to unquantized drums, the connection between producer and listener can be lost. “I have this theory that a good beat should be like a breath or a heart beat with a beginning and an end,” he says. “The problem I have with a lot of the dubstep/broken/Dilla copycats is that the theory of being able to follow the beat has been lost somewhat. Some producers are suffering from being too clever for their own good. We’ve all done crazy things at points in our careers, but at the end of the day I don’t care how good your tune is. If my dancefloor can’t dance to it or my listeners can’t listen to it, then I’m not playing it. Dilla messed around with quantize and timing but he came from a DJ aesthetic and at the end of the day his stuff was always danceable whereas a lot of the clone
Dilla’s stuff was always danceable whereas a lot of the clone Dilla stuff is simply un-listenable. A microkorg and an MPC do not make you Dilla but rather a sad biter!”

Manipulation of a sound’s envelope, such as the attack (the speed at which a note reaches a peak) and decay (time it takes to fade to silence) also allows producers to achieve a wonky orientation of sounds. Hudson Mohawke’s ‘Pickleback Blues’ uses undulating attack and decay which makes synths sound like they start and end a little behind or in front of where they should despite being triggered in phase with the drum loop resulting in an asymmetrical range over a relatively solid foundation. The third and final element characteristic of this sound is the approach to sampling. Digitality liberates sounds of material confines and this fractor of form and content creates both great opportunities and constraints for artists working with appropriated material. Digitality not only allows access to a greater range of sounds, it allows for a greater flexibility for artists to manipulate or rearrange sounds to more complex, digital art’s yet entirely compatible with the way copyright law restricts artists, forcing them to over-flip samples which takes something away from the essence of hip-hop. But flipping is a high art. It can be subtle in order to bring new light to an older piece and give respect to older forms of music. Or a sample can be drastically flipped in order to suspend the moments that are cherished of the source material. Sampling can be used as a protest to sampling laws. And I sometimes find that interesting too. I agree, the sample-epiphanies of my future are likely to be more along the lines of ‘How’d they do that?’ as opposed to ‘They used to.’ And that is set to radically alter the nature of the relationships between original and derivative works in the future. As a style, ‘wonky’ is at this point in time intrinsically linked to the future directions of hip-hop of a lot has to do with Dilla and his legacy and though it’s perhaps a little unfair to label much of the hip-hop dialectic, there will always be a boom-bip even if there’s sometimes serve as a creative engine and it’s an important phase in the hip-hop narrative. [Dilla]’s stuff was always danceable whereas a lot of the clone Dilla stuff is simply un-listenable. A microkorg and an MPC do not make you Dilla but rather a sad biter!”

Caspa is one of the UK’s brightest and meet in demand names in dubstep. But he’s a real ‘one to watch’ and the mainstream has finally got the restless of the dubstep underground. ‘He’s a name that wasn’t done become as big as it has in the last few years, it’s been the tipping point in the year, Abingdon Rural Speed, Benga and Rusko. Caspa is a key part of the first move of UK dubstep stores. *CD

But there is a threshold when it comes to drum programming. “I try to achieve a looseness in the programming in order add a bit of the looseness of the drum snares to a drum programming in order add a bit of the looseness of the drum snares to a

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Cyclic Defrost Magazine 030

Cyclic Defrost Magazine 031
Tim Shaw started making drum’n’bass tunes in 2000, for labels such as John B’s Beta Recordings and Moving Shadow. His first Planet µ release in 2005 brought a thrilling combination of breakcore and experimental aspects to his sound, but 2009’s Living Tree has added a surprising pop sensibility into the mix.

He is on tour in Japan. Unfortunately almost as soon as we start talking, he has to get the volume turned up on his phone, which happens to be a borrowed phone with everything written in Japanese. No small task. I ask him how the touring is going.

“It’s good! Kind of exciting and tiring – it’s been the most intensive and sustained touring that I’ve done in my life so far. I think when I started touring this album in September I had a completely new live show, and I was quite surprised at how long it took to really feel comfortable with it – and also, you know, singing,’ coz I’ve never sung on stage before. So that took a bit of time – longer than I’d planned really. Because before that I’d had the live show, and different machines I’d programmed, and I guess I underestimated just how accustomed to my old setup I’d become, and I didn’t know long it’d take to get used the new setup.”

In his youth, Shaw learned violin and played in choirs. He recently relocated to Berlin, which seems (to an outsider at least) to be an exciting, vibrant place for developments in electronica and experimental sounds, not to mention other artistic endeavours. It’s artist-friendly, he says, with opportunity for collaboration and plenty of space to work with. “It’s not really competitive, in the same way that London can be. There’s kind of enough to go around for everyone, and people aren’t under the crazy financial pressure that they often are in England. So that made sense to me, as I wanted a

“...
I’d never listened to any Depeche Mode, or Cabaret Voltaire or Human League or any of those that the style of songwriting is being compared to now!”

“I used a patch that I programmed, which consisted of samples of players and loop players, taking live loops and playing with those. All those sounds might be triggered in real time, so it was pretty much like ‘from scratch’ live. I would sometimes also drop in samples of pre-made tracks, quick loops that you could mashups between, and there were lots of keyboard-triggered effects and processors that I’d use to re-order stuff with my fingers.”

“While it is true that Listening Tree is a radical departure, Tim Exile has kept much of the essentials of his sound, from heavy baselines to frequent digitally-effected freak-outs. Nevertheless, the songs on Listening Tree are full-fledged songs, with intriguing lyrics and fun harmonic progressions. Reviewers seem to agree of pop, or Cabaret Voltaire or Human League or any of those that the style of songwriting is being compared to now!”

“When I was playing songs from the album, I have a song-player thing that’s integrated into the patch, and I basically play the backing loops but I also put the backing through effects and re-loop and re-order it as well. So I’d do a bit of an improv, start off with some beats and a little bit of bass, mix in some vocals and build up to have a bit of a play around, and when the time feels right I’d drop in one of the tracks – and it’s all synced to tempo, so I just need to mix it in, and re-order it and then play the track. And then I can put different effects on my voice, do differential looping over that and so on as well.”

“I’ve built another machine, that still has all the possibilities of the last one – probably more possibilities for improvising now,” he says. “I’ve made something with a lot more instantaneous and fluid use that somehow,” he says, “and gives the funny compromise between my more conventional approach of just getting money to live and so on, I figured the best way to make it work and have time to really focus on what I wanted to focus on was to do this thing as a full-time project. I have spent most of my time actually just doing what I wanted to do...”

I felt this so-called IDIM thing really reached a kind of a cul-de-sac, and there seemed to be a kind of post-Aphex style, really reflective and backwards-looking in a way.”

80s electro-pop, the ska of Madness’ ‘The Process of reproducing the songs on Listening Tree for his live show is particularly interesting. “I’ve built another machine, that still has all the possibilities of the last one – probably more possibilities for improvising now,” he says. “I’ve made something with a lot more instantaneous and fluid use that somehow,” he says, “and gives the funny compromise between my more conventional approach of just getting money to live and so on, I figured the best way to make it work and have time to really focus on what I wanted to focus on was to do this thing as a full-time project. I have spent most of my time actually just doing what I wanted to do...”

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“Hm, it’s been very marmite. Do you know what I mean?”

“Footnotes: a new perspective anyway.”

“Much of the commentary on Listening Tree has drawn comparisons to the electro-pop of the 1980’s, such as Depeche Mode – perhaps due to the glut of genuinely backward-looking music on the scene at the moment.

“Well the thing is I’d never listened to any Depeche Mode, or Cabaret Voltaire, or Human League or any of those that the style of songwriting is being compared to now!”

“Those other things... he’s talking about could have led Shaw down a completely different path. He completed a degree in philosophy which prompted the inevitable self-questioning thoughts about getting a ‘real job’ about music. Fortunately the inspiration from this educating experience was enough to keep him on his trajectory. “In reality,” he says, “and given the fancy compromise between my more conventional approach of just getting money to live and so on, I figured the best way to make it work and have time to really focus on what I wanted to focus on was to do this thing as a full-time project. I have spent most of my time actually just doing what I wanted to do...”

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and drank beer and went onto play guitar in a high school metal covers band. By the time he had reached university, his interests were beginning to crystallise: Having started exploring minimal and ambient textures, he followed these lineages back to Kraftwerk, Krautrock and ambient music. It was only at that point that he began his compositional pursuits. “I bought a Macintosh computer when I was 23, so that I could compose in matters of electronic music,” he recalls.

That said, electronic music was never a comfortable field for Hatakeyama, who rues his own lack of rhythm. “I don’t have a good sense of rhythm, so it was never going to work,” he says. “I think it’s a big factor as my style today, being without rhythm.”

Interestingly, he attributes much of his stylistic inclination to Japanese modern literature from the Meiji (1868–1912) and Showa periods (1926–1989). “I feel influenced by stuff from writers such as Soseki Natsume, Ryounosuke Akutagawa, Ango Sakaguchi, Junichiro Tanizaki and Osamu Dazai,” he says.

It was around this point that his musical career began to manifest, forming Opitope with Tomoyoshi Date and developing his own techniques of processing and reprocessing acoustic guitars and pianos through a laptop. Field recordings also proved an early focus: “I started doing field recordings around 2003,” he explains. “I was basically using a tape recorder to record the sounds of the city and to place those sounds into my own works.”

But when Hatakeyama began recording the sounds of nature, his understanding started to shift. Rather than merely inserting field recordings into his works as markers or signifiers of place, he became more aware of his compositions’ symbiotic relationship with their environments. “I began to think about the relationship the sound that I had inside these environments,” he says.

He went onto release his tranquil, stunningly elemental debut solo album, Saunter, in 2008 via Chicago imprint Moodo in 2006 via Chicago imprint Kranky before following up with Opitope’s wonderful Hau (Spektr) in 2007 and his own current output. As a teen, he found himself enamoured by hardcore rock, thrash metal and went on to play guitar in a high school metal covers band. By the time he had reached university, his interests were beginning to crystallise: Having started exploring minimal and ambient textures, he followed these lineages back to Kraftwerk, Krautrock and ambient music. It was only at that point that he began his compositional pursu...
“We wrote that record with this in mind; you flip from side A to side B and you’re in a new world with the same story but in a new town.”

It’s pretty easy to pile desert or wilderness mythologies onto Peaking Lights’ tracks as they are tape like mirages, all Zabriskie Point-style landscapes and skewed American histories. They come in the form of pop songs, I suppose; stretched out into free noise structures with a distinctly vague retrograde. The wizardly and skewed mythos of recent album Imaginary Falcons are not entirely manufactured; Aaron Coyes and Indra Dunis and live in the woods outside of Spring Green, Wisconsin, in a house that sounds like it reflects this aesthetic way too well.

“Their tapes warble like mirages, all Zabriskie Point-style landscapes and skewed American histories.”

* Cyclic Defrost Magazine

“it’s in an area called the Driftless Region,” says Aaron, “which has the oldest hills that used to be mountains in the US, maybe even North America. It’s really beautiful green, lush and muggy in the summer, and in the Winter white, dead and freezing. Our house is part of a complex in which there are two other houses and a mausoleum that used to be functioning barn before it was converted to an arts/resident centre in the 70s. It lay dormant and literally filled up with animal shit for 30 years until we moved in we cleaned it out last year for our wedding and have been using it since for recording and other things too. There is also a huge concrete silo/personal reverb tank attached to that barn. Our house was built attached to a second barn which we use as an art/music studio in the Summer, and in the Winter white, dead and freezing. Our house is half of a complex in which there are two other houses and a mausoleum that used to be functioning barn before it was converted to an arts/resident centre in the 70s. It lay dormant and literally filled up with animal shit for 30 years until we moved in we cleaned it out last year for our wedding and have been using it since for recording and other things too.”

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For Indra, it’s a little more linear: “I think of images a lot while writing music, rather than say, words. Imagery with mood attached...like the sun rays falling on baby rabbits jumping around in the dark green grass and then comes a shadow and whom! A crack of thunder! I guess I think about dark and light a lot, and their interrelation, there is a constant battle between the two.”

This type of interplay constantly rises and flows through tracks that are very much of a circular feel; they’re often long, but it’s the stoned methodical way they drift that sees the beginning and end blur in a haze of ‘70s grounded, open space feelings built with reverberated keyboards, wayward vocal echoes and understated guitar experiments. The delirious and numerous wanderings are easy to get lost in, but when they decide to kick it epic-ballad-style at the very start of Side B on Imaginary Falcons, they attaine a level of emotiveness often avoided by their DIY peers. All The Good Songs Have Been Written is the most concisely structured jam on there and it just lets go, a total burnt out Neil Young-style lament. With releases on labels like the ultra-dark Night People or scuffed up Fuck It Tapes, it feels almost startlingly emotive in the wider context of that lo-fi and DIY ambience, where it’s true that maybe weird songs are favoured over strong sentiments. Indra, whose vocals here peak particularly heartfeel, has a “real love of catchy pop tunes and raw garage-y music.”

“It was an attempt to write something with some pop structure. It’s fun and challenging to write different types of songs, depending on how you feel at the moment. It creates a more interesting journey while listening to the record.”

“We tried to approach writing Imaginary Falcons in a similar way that I think a lot of older groups did,” says Indra, “which is to tie it together somehow, someway, somewhere. Like old 45s there’s the A-side and the B-side, the A-side is usually a hit song and the B-side is the weirder stuff that may not have made it on record but the limitation of the media dictates the songs to be three minutes or so mostly, so whatever you do in that time better totally slay! We wrote that record with this in mind; you flip from side A to side B and you’re in a new world with the same story but in a new town. It’s generally on my mind when we write stuff as how it will fit on a release how the flow will work, beyond just writing a song for a song’s sake. I’m way more into the idea of the whole Beach Boys Smile record than I am into that one A-Ha song.”

Green that many of the cassettes and LPs out on those aforementioned labels feature deliciously off-the-cuff recording approaches with one-take jams often characterised by a distinct interrelation. there is a constant battle between the two.”
I think of images a lot while writing music... Pet Sounds a lot of spacial and environmental microphone placement to get... style approaches of that Californian DIY lineage of which they're... just strips all that subtlety away".

this to you now, you can hear the rustle of trees and cars drive by in... frequency. You're dealing with ones and zeroes in a square so as I say... into a bunch of money somehow I think maybe in small ways our... goes a long way in the moods and textures of their songs.

immediacy. Peaking Lights' recording setup. Apparently it's... the rustle of trees and cars drive by in... delirious feeling that runs through them too.

world, with all the crazy lush plants and flowers and trees and waking up to insane birdie symphonies and finding mousebabies living in my... keyboard! We used to sit on our porch and watch the hundreds of... See, as Oak Mot... as his films aren't available... in common. I was so happy when he... His left hand is... brandishing a hammer in his right... on it. It's really nice. It

This album packaging is really nice. It comes in a... beautiful duck. I'm really not... smudges, perhaps indicating something... so WE are drowning in... and giving some impression of depth... and giving some impression of depth... are a number of tiny little lights on the... It's a series of illustrations continuing along this theme, and I particularly...

I'm not sure what their... so I ordered it off Amazon... or any of... incredible new music (very slowly) on... couldn't believe that I could get all this... and not nearly... I believe represents the big problem... from his left hand to a box containing... hand, with long red tendrils snaking from his left hand to a box surrounding a... floating red question mark which I... the big problem

I really enjoy this section of Cyclic Defrost... The design was by this guy Martin Kvamme, who really isn't a very... much of a design geek, but I've loved pretty much everything I've seen of his, so it's ok I guess.

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world, with all the crazy lush plants and flowers and trees and waking up to insane birdie symphonies and finding mousebabies living in my... keyboard! We used to sit on our porch and watch the hundreds of... See, as Oak Mot... as his films aren't available... in common. I was so happy when he... His left hand is... brandishing a hammer in his right... on it. It's really nice. It

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like the nose of what I gather is a woman’s face. It depicts a mean looking zombie skate foxal’s best work, but it’s still awesome. The Locust are so great! They’re like a musical equivalent of a chiropractor to the face. I love their album features an illustrated city in ruins, likely the result of the zombie plague that appears to have infected in

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Neural Milk, hotel in the aeroplane over the sea

It struck me that this might seem like an obvious choice, but I couldn’t think of anything that resonates so well with me. This album rules. It has the most simple songs, but is incredibly powerful and overwhelming as an album. I’m sure everyone has a cop you don’t go up to in school and you never talk to until you’re out of college. All of the art that comes with the album is the work of European gypsy carved sort of influence which is present in the music too, but the cover is not beautiful. It’s just full of strange figures drifting about in the ocean, their boat wrecked. The figures vance their arms presumably warning people down the aeroplane referred to in the title. The music is very unique, full of all sorts of strange samples like a little girl floating in air over the sea.

The Locust Plague Soundscapes

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Cyclo Selects

Tim Koch

PHIL METZ (b. 1979)

Phil began as a shambling and skeletal framework of a band that was always my childhood band. Thanks to Lydon’s previous associations, the guitar he made by wanting to repossess and refuse to come before was an admirably one. I grew more committed and a dual dose of cheeky laddishness and unpretentious experimentation resulted in a landmark album in May (The second Edition), nestled between two equally ‘album’ in experimentation resulted in a landmark album. Thanks to Lydon’s previous associations, the guitar he made by wanting to repossess and refuse to come before was an admirably one. I grew more committed and a dual dose of cheeky laddishness and unpretentious experimentation resulted in a landmark album. The stark emotion and honesty of Harold Budd’s playing creeps to the surface plays its role. Talk Band is the culmination of perhaps music as this. I learnt alto- sax for around five years throughout high school, but have subsequently lost the distinct calm that used to exist. The stark emotion and honesty of Harold Budd’s playing creeps to the surface plays its role. Talk Band is the culmination of perhaps music as this. I learnt alto-sax for around five years throughout high school, but have subsequently lost the distinct calm that used to exist.

TALK TALK - LAUGHING STOCK (1991)

A father of a friend at primary school passed on a special extra clumps long-playing tape with both Ambient 1&2 dubbed from vinyl, and at the time the other-worldliness of both Ambient 1&2 was deeply affecting, and the most vivid memory I have of childhood is long car trips listening to Eno and Steve Reich’s Music for 18 Musicians, Electric Counterpoint, building bizarre daydream fantasy constructs of colour, movement and depth of field. My father’s cigarette smoke wafting into the back seat, the faint noises of winding South Australian coastal roads, the distinct cales that used to exist with the lack of electronic phones and devices, are all deeply ingrained in my love for the avant-garde. It’s an unerringly bound to the stark ambience of Music for Airports. The underlying tape his way deep into the sonic tapestry of phasing, pitch-altered and sampled segments, resonating vibraphones and other incidental instruments (1-Part1). Eno’s method of creation also fascinated me, making use of tape loops to create phase- compositions that created interplay and counter-dynamics; this was sampling and automation before the concepts even existed. The generous tendencies of Roger Noakes and his willingness to dub his vinyl collection on tape for friends got me on a path in later life to discovery and then explore Eno’s back catalogue as well as those of Robert Wyatt (played on Ambient2) and Harold Budd (Ambient3). The stark emotion and honesty of Harold Budd’s playing is perhaps music as this. I learnt alto-sax for around five years throughout high school, but have subsequently lost the distinct calm that used to exist. 


Similarly, Bark Psychosis took the single-handed birth a new genre. Noakes and his willingness to dub his vinyl collection on tape for friends got me on a path in later life to discovery and then explore Eno’s back catalogue as well as those of Robert Wyatt (played on Ambient2) and Harold Budd (Ambient3). The stark emotion and honesty of Harold Budd’s playing is perhaps music as this. I learnt alto-sax for around five years throughout high school, but have subsequently lost the distinct calm that used to exist.
baton, strangely enough with Lee Harris from Talk Talk joining the band (which was subsequently snatched by the likes of Radiohead, amongst so many other more recent bands). The one characteristic of any band (and logically it is usually only one album that refines and distills this quality) that is immortalised in releasing a stunning album, is that they employ multiple levels of dynamics, and create whole slabs of space between instruments and arrangements. A song such as ‘Street Scene’ from Hex has tension, deep melancholic harmonies, bashed vocal that sway in and out of focus, horn parts, muted snare drums, a Hawaiian-themed slide guitar run, and a seren outro that is a song in itself. Hex is infamously the album that Simon Reynolds used to coin the term ‘post-rock’. Laughing Stock and its logical progression in the form of lead singer Mark Hollis’ self titled solo album, both exude a production aesthetic of over-analysis, of far too many hours spent tweaking mixes that most would leave untweaked, but Talk Talk (in their post synthpop reincarnation) and Mark Hollis are two entities that strive to better the concept of what an album should be as an audio document. The precision and fastidiousness of production are so apparent, that repeated listens only reinforce the strength and depth of feeling within the songs, rather than the unfurling of the magic within an album that often occurs form over-exposure. The abandonment of sequencing and over-programmed phrasing with my own music at the moment is a direct consequence of my love of these albums.

Just blow me away. The caviar as a replacement to rhythm guitar, the vocals with a beer bottle on ‘Watermelon Man’, and Herbie’s use of unconventional synth gear all blew my mind.

Picked this up from a Central Station for five bucks probably 15 years ago, and have managed to play the vinyl to the point of complete top-end decimation. This live set to me is a stellar example of a structured performance that still has mistakes and flat-spots, yet manages to remain graceful and dynamic. Something about the evolving and pulsing sequences encapsulates all that I remember about ‘90s ambient-techno and electronic music, yet the album has near to no beats. This is such a sensual album (particularly ‘An Atom of All Sun’), and it represents to me an audio abbreviation of very good sex, possibly why this album never quite moved into the periphery for me and always crept onto every new music device, music library on a new computer, CD in a car, the top of every stack of random vinyl having moved to a new house.

Postcards from Sónar 2009 Barcelona

by Richard Byers

Roland Olibeter, Jon Hopkins (DE), Fliastine (US), Ryoichi Kurokawa (JP), Bonh Squad (US) Quayola (UK), Nikki (US), Grace Jones (JM), Mary Anne Hobbs (UK), Joker (UK)

Richie Hawtin (CA), Ben Frost (AU/IS), SND (UK), Byetone (DE), Alva Noto (DE), Atom tm (DE)

Orbital (UK) & Modular (DE) & more

18,19,20 June 2009