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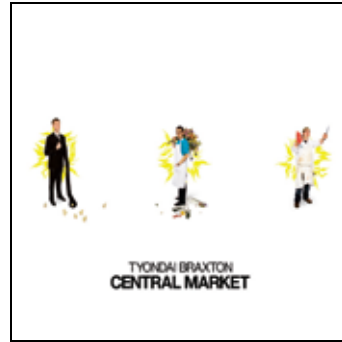
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EDITORIAL

This issue of Cyclic Defrost balances on the cusp of the big time.

Heath Killen, an active part of the Renew Newcastle scheme, has designed a vibrant cover for us that hints at bigger things to come.

Inside we've profiled artists who are about to break through; dubstep is covered by Perth's Kito and Melbourne duo Editor, while dance and disco get a look in with a profile of Guillaume Sorge of Dirty Sound System.

The Soul Jazz record label has released an amazing insight into the oft-forgotten Blaxploitation films (and their soundtracks) and Kurt Iveson chats to Stuart Baker about rarities, controversies, and why now was the right time to release the compilation.

Closer to home you'll also find profiles of Ghoul and Holy Balm, Alps and Seaworthy, all artists who continue to push the boundaries. Ideas aplenty.

There's even more on our website, including reviews and web-exclusive features.

Enjoy,
Shaun, Lex, Matt
Editors
Cyclic Defrost

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SOCIETY GENTLEMAN

There's a curious presence at work in this issue's cover of *Cyclic Defrost*. Freelance graphic artist and designer Heath Killen is the gentleman behind its swirling, frenzied lines, wrapping around from front to back. It's a cover that makes you want to pick it up, flip it around, get lost in the repeating, textured shapes, even if you've never encountered an issue of the magazine before. If that's you - welcome.



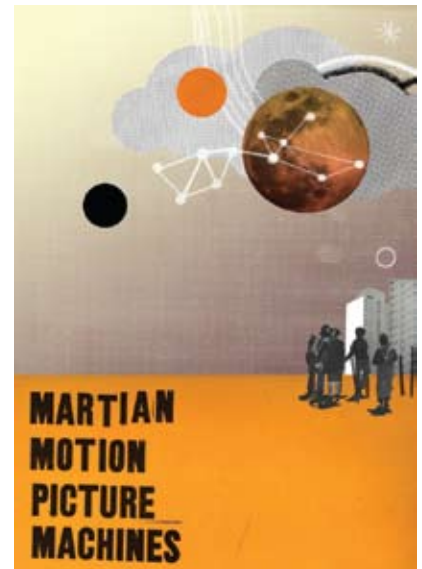
Killen's interest in design was piqued from an early age when he would look through his father's collection of vinyl and VHS artwork. "I was always very intrigued by strong and unusual imagery. I would say my earliest and longest lasting influence is Storm Thorgerson, the man behind all the Pink Floyd covers. I actually emailed Storm a few years back when I decided to become a graphic designer, and he was very kind and encouraging."

Newcastle is Killen's home, and like so many creative forces in and around the city, he's an active participant in Marcus Westbury's Renew Newcastle scheme. His space is housed within a former surgery known as The Clinic, and while most of the surgical tools have been removed, he's kept the odd accoutrement or two like the eye-chart letterbox in his room from which he took inspiration for The Clinic's logo. His city is, in his eyes, "a place with so much potential but it just hasn't been moving forward, so I'm very happy to be involved in something that's trying to change that. I think that it really demonstrates the power of a grass roots movement, and that you don't need a lot of money or power to make something important happen. Ultimately it is going to require the support of government and business to completely restore the place, but Renew Newcastle has definitely helped speed things up, and it's drawn attention to just how bad things have gotten."

It's not just wide-ranging projects that appeal to Killen though; he's got a number of other personal endeavours on the boil apart from ongoing freelance work. His zine, *Field Recordings*, is one, a collection of "orphaned ideas and experiments," tied together thematically from the time in which it was created. "I intend to make each edition remarkably different from the last, and ideally each one will contain a theme or a mood from the block of time that it's produced. I was in New York last month, so I'd say some of the first issue will reflect my experiences there. I suppose it's sort of like a document of my ongoing process, and hopefully it will be compelling and entertaining for people. I plan on providing a free digital download from my site, and a published copy for a small fee."

The other is Killen's "fairly big top secret" project, The Society For The Preservation of Australian Secret Histories. "Basically the idea is that there's this fictitious group of researchers who go around uncovering censored or lost events in Australian history, and bring them to light. All the uncovered historical events will have some component of art or design, which I will make and sell on the website.

“REGARD FOR THE IMPORTANCE OF DESIGN FOR MUSIC HAS BEEN DIMINISHED. MOST PEOPLE EXPERIENCE ALBUM ART THESE DAYS AS A LITTLE SQUARE JPG ON THEIR COMPUTER, SO WE’VE GONE FROM HAVING A BIG GATEFOLD VINYL SLEEVE, TO A CD, TO A BUNCH OF PIXELS.”



“For example, the first event [for SPASH] that I intend to launch is about this desert dwelling, filmmaking cult from the 70s. On the site I will be selling 13 posters from the films they made. These posters will be actual designs by me, but credited to someone else as historical artifacts in the context of the website.”

An undulating, Pop Art-esque frenzy of exploding colour and free-flowing lines defines this issue’s cover, with one of Killen’s signature hooks – his seamless use of typography. It’s used as illustration, he says, “functional, but it’s also decorative. It’s never an afterthought or something that needs to be added over the top, it’s always a consideration from the beginning, so the graphics and type are always designed to work together.

“I wanted to make something fun, something with a lot of energy and movement, and something quite psychedelic. As there’s not really a brief for the project, nor do I know what content’s going in, it’s really just about trying to make something that’s going to catch your eye and make you want to pick it up.”

Looking through a range of Killen’s previous work, texture plays a fairly large role in the design process, and the more obscure the source the better. “Lately I’ve become really attracted to blowing

up 72dpi images and playing with all the ghostly artefacts that this process creates. A few years ago I would have been horrified of this idea because I liked my collages to be clean and precise. Now I try and work distorted pixels and digital grit into everything. I suppose it’s a reaction to all the spotless minimalist design that’s so common in the industry.”

You’d also be hard pressed to separate the role of music in Killen’s design practice; for him the two seem completely entwined, whether that’s through obsessively listening to an artist or album whilst creating a work, or basing a series around the relationship between sound and art. “Because I do a lot of my work at night, most of my playlists tend to be a mix of jazz and downtempo electronica. Lots of Underworld, Skapel, Morphine, Depeche Mode and Miles Davis as well as stuff like Devastations and Pivot. Lately I’ve been listening to a lot of Nick Cave. I’ll kick things off with *Abattoir Blues* and then wind down with *The Boatman’s Call*. Music really affects my mood, and this in turn affects my work. It’s very important.”

The ‘Modernist Edition’ series of illustrations takes this link between music and design further, in an almost reductionist sense by distilling album covers to their bare essentials according to title.





Neutral Milk Hotel's *In the Aeroplane over the Sea* becomes a jet plane over swirling seas, drawn in simple line art set against a lime green background, while Mogwai's *Happy Songs For Happy People* becomes a smiling face offset against yellow. "I have felt as though regard for the importance of design for music has been diminished. Most people (myself included) experience album art these days as a little square JPG on their computer, so we've gone from having a big gatefold vinyl sleeve, to a CD, to a bunch of pixels. The thing is, once you shrink down an artwork that's been designed for a record sleeve to something that can fit on an iPod, it loses a lot of its impact. It becomes more of a tool for identification than a piece of art in its own right."

The key to these pieces is that they are completely scalable. Killen comments, "the artwork itself essentially takes the album title and distills it down to a pictogram, a single and simple icon that can represent the album... It's all just a bit of fun really - I think it would be a great way to do a re-issue series though."

When it comes to designing cover art, Killen counts himself very lucky with the freedom he's been given. "I think that trust comes from me really immersing myself in the project, and wanting to create something that everyone involved can be proud of. As with any project

"MY EARLIEST AND LONGEST LASTING INFLUENCE IS STORM THORGERSON, THE MAN BEHIND ALL THE PINK FLOYD COVERS."

I work on, I get a number of ideas quite quickly, and throw them all into the mix. From there it's a process of refinement, subtracting all the elements that are superfluous or just don't work. Usually the best and strongest idea will start to emerge, and then it's all about refining that idea until I start looking for things to add - at which point it's time to stop! Like with most of my work, I really try to avoid anything too literal. I'm much more interested in finding a strong image, and trying to evoke a mood rather than is just a literal translation of album."

He cites the ongoing collaboration between Stanley Donwood and Radiohead as one example of the organic development of album art and a visual representation of a band, and hopes to be involved in a long-term project like this in the future. "Design critic John O'Reilly talks about how cover art isn't a translation, it's more like a mask, and that musicians inhabit the visual imagery in the artwork. I really like this idea. I think album artwork is a very powerful tool - there are so many times I've been seduced by album artwork." **CD**

More of Heath Killen's work can be seen on his website, Made By Heath Killen (<http://madebyhk.com>). The SPASH can be found at <http://thespash.com>

CHART- ING THE DEPTH



“WHEN YOU’RE ON TOUR YOU PLAY FOR 20 TO 40 MINUTES MAX PER NIGHT AND THE REST IS MADE UP ENTIRELY OF WAITING: WAITING FOR A BUS, WAITING FOR A SOUND CHECK, WAITING FOR THE BANDS TO PLAY BEFORE YOU, WAITING FOR THE SHOW TO FINISH AND THEN WAITING FOR THE VENUE TO CLOSE.”

Newcastle’s Croatian Club is the most accommodating venue in the city, perhaps in the state. After a day of unrelenting noise music at said venue, Chris Hearn turns up about an hour before his six o’clock set, nursing a hangover and a ‘special’ coffee, with his wife and recently born son Wolfgang along to watch. The night before was big for Hearn because it’s the weekend of the This Is Not Art festival, an event that has long put an otherwise artist-unfriendly city on the arts map. All throughout the evening friends are complaining of being accosted throughout the day by drunks in the city’s streets; being called ‘faggot’; being told ‘you must be from the city’ (you faggot), or to ‘get a haircut’ (you faggot). It’s always a strange weekend here, with the binary opposite revellers often clashing. Barely anyone ever leaves without a story.

This is where Alps’ base has been for nearly 10 years now, which is impressive for an artist whose music might best be described by a certain portion of the locals as ‘faggot music’. Tonight is one of the first times Hearn has played a set on guitar, putting him further at odds with the other acts on the bill. Alps, it turns out, was always going to be a “guitar act,” though Hearn’s hereditary arthritis and subsequent carpal tunnel syndrome meant that he had to find alternatives. The alternatives have come to define him: vintage synths and organs

drowned in the hiss of tape and reverb, haunted by his subaquatic monotone vocals, efficiently resolving into blissfully down pop songs. Up until now, loving Alps’ music is loving these sounds, so seeing him play a guitar through a small amp to a jolly-drunk audience is a bit enervating – probably not the best first impression. When I tell him later that, given the circumstances, it didn’t quite work – he’s not visibly bothered by it at all. Rather, it seems I’ll just need to get used to it.

Because since he released his third full-length album *Alps of New South Wales*, Hearn is excited about the opportunities that lie ahead. Having shed an album long in gestation, his enthusiasm for something different, for possible new directions, is intoxicating. The next morning, I arrive at Hearn’s Novacastrian townhouse with a bottle of requested dishwashing detergent. Inside the sparse, meticulously tidy home, Hearn has Severed Heads on the turntable. A novel by controversial Norwegian writer Knut Hamsun is sitting on the kitchen bench, and his record collection sits in a store shelf scored from a recently closed Newcastle retailer. Hearn promised breakfast, and throughout the interview he chops up sweet potato and pumpkin into cubes. It’s unclear, for the duration of the interview, exactly what he intends to cook.

It's funny meeting with Hearn in a domestic home, considering his reputation for being a sharply on the poverty line do-it-yourself artist. With the exception of a \$2500 grant from the Arts Council for his last American tour, Hearn has twice embarked on lengthy international tours on his own; booking his own shows, bunking with friendly locals and staying just above the poverty line selling his albums and only just breaking even. He's set to tour America again in 2010 in support of the new album, but the national launch for *Alps of New South Wales* has been quite different to before.

"For the tour that I've just completed everything was entirely weekends," he says slowly and thoughtfully, in a way that wouldn't come as a surprise to those familiar with his resigned vocals on Alps records. "I took one day off so I could do a three day New Zealand tour. I'm just flying to a different city in Australia every weekend and working full time Monday to Friday. That's been a necessity because I have the family to support now - I have to work around having a stable source of income and it's ridiculous to expect that coming from playing music. I'm also really tired.

"It's actually less of a chore than before," he continues, "being able to sleep in my own bed is really great, and cook food at home. I eat what I want when I want. You really miss those simple parts of life when you're away from home for so long, and it becomes a chore just waiting. It seems like when you're on tour you play for 20 to 40 minutes max per night and the rest of being on tour is made up entirely of waiting: waiting for a bus, waiting for a sound check, waiting for the bands to play before you, waiting for the show to finish and then waiting for the venue to close, then waiting for someone to pay you before you can leave, and then waiting for people who are letting you stay at their house to have their last drinks, and then getting up the next day and doing it all again."

For Hearn, travelling must come easier than for most people. Born in Tamworth, his family moved to Orange in the central west of New South Wales when he was still an infant, where he lived until he was eight-years-old. He then moved to Ballarat and then, shortly after, to New Guinea with his missionary parents. "In New Guinea it was difficult to make friends with the local kids," he recalls, "we were the only ex-pats around where we were living.

"Well, not the only ex-pats," he continues, "there were other missionaries around, as well as Chinese families. But there weren't any kids around the same age as me that I could relate to. I played a lot of sport with [the local kids] everyday but you couldn't have them around your house because they'd steal your stuff. It got really uncomfortable and it was a guilty, weird sort of thing. I'd have all this stuff and they'd have nothing. You'd want to play with them and hang out but they'd say 'can I have that?' I was like 'I'm sorry you don't have that', but I had to say 'no, you can't' [have that]. It was awful and strange."

"I REJECTED RELIGION IN 2001 AND IT TOOK ME A LONG TIME TO COME TO TERMS WITH THAT. I WAS RAISED BY MISSIONARY PARENTS AND RELIGION WAS THE BIG THING."

Hearn spent four years in New Guinea before moving back to Tamworth for the rest of his teenage years. When he hit 16, he left home and moved to Newcastle. After the obligatory budding musicians' stint in a TAFE music business course ("everything they told me I've had to actively reject") and work as a sound engineer, Alps came into being in 2005 with his self-titled, self-issued debut EP. At the time, Newcastle wasn't as musically fertile as it has been in the late half of the decade, with Hearn pointedly refusing to play Alps shows in the city for a time due to volatile responses from the audience. His first show was in Newcastle however - in the comparatively welcoming environment of the This Is Not Art festival. Once he hooked up with fellow Central Coast artists like Castings and Crab Smasher, the atmosphere became more accommodating.

"I had been playing in some really obnoxious bands [up until Alps]," Hearn says of the early days, "we were trying to be mathematic, experimental, punk and political. Basically, Alps was supposed to reject all that. The idea was to make pop songs that were as simple as absolutely possible, using maybe two or three notes, a flat four/four and no vocal melodies. There was to be no verse/chorus/verse structure. They weren't even really pop songs, just repetitions of one slight idea.

"Which was kinda obnoxious of me now I think of it," Hearn reflects with a grin, "it was the absolute opposite of what I'd be doing for a long time and it felt refreshing. But it only felt refreshing for about six months so I started developing the sound pretty early on, and incorporating different instruments, ideas, concepts. I think from everything after the first EP I've started to tread different ground and find a way to really express myself."

Alps' next public foray was the 2006 8" single *Origin of the Species*, released on Hearn's own Shriek Sounds imprint. As the title suggests, the release grapples with Hearn's reaction to Darwin's theory of evolution - a concept that naturally clashed with his missionary upbringing. "I rejected religion in 2001," he explains, "and it took me a long time to come to terms with that. I was raised by missionary parents and religion was the big thing. It really was what we lived for. I was scared of hell and really attached to religion for a long time. Once I came to terms with it I got quite depressed and nihilistic because I was thinking there's no reason for anyone to be here or anything existing."

Mostly all of Alps music is autobiographical. "They're either about me or about what I'm directly involved with at the time," He says. "A lot of my songs discuss ideas based on things that I've been reading, or seeing. So I suppose in some ways yes [they are autobiographical]. I definitely wouldn't say that I agree with everything that I said earlier on."

If *Origin of the Species* was the result of a young man's existential falling out with god, its follow up LP *Alps of New South Wales* was markedly less grand in theme, though arguably his most downcast and unmistakably 'depressed' album to date. With lyrics as bluntly resigned



“PEOPLE AREN’T LOOKING FOR MUSIC TO RELATE TO, THEY’RE LOOKING FOR ENTERTAINMENT.”

as “I’m not living for anything worth dying for,” *Alps of New South Wales* was pure un-distilled youth drama, fomented in a broth of fuzzy muzak transmissions, all cheap porta-tone and reverb obscured vocals. It was a sound that predated the current zeitgeist of lo-fi electronic pop by a number of years. For all its meritorious honesty, though, it’s a remarkably difficult album to listen to in a sitting, but like all uncompromisingly bleak music it resonates companionably when listened to in a similarly unhappy frame of mind. “I was having a really fucked up time in my life at that stage,” he says. “I’d found myself almost thrown back into my childhood.”

He goes on to explain. “I’d gotten myself into a bit of trouble, and a bit of debt, kind of overnight I guess, and was forced to move back to Tamworth with my dad and just work for him for nine months. I didn’t see any friends. Newcastle is rough but Tamworth is so much rougher. I got really depressed and got caught up in a work and no social life situation. I’ve always had troubles with my family, and I started reliving the isolation that I was feeling in New Guinea. It was a similar lack of connection.”

“It’s really hard to listen to, it’s just way too depressed,” Hearn admits. “Every now and again people come up to me and say that they can relate to it, and that’s really nice, I’m glad that they can do that, but I think it’s hard in this day and age [for that to happen]. People aren’t looking for music to relate to, they’re looking for entertainment. And I guess I’m guilty of that as well, if you look at my record collection.” I glance over to the record stand and a copy of Swans’ *Children of God* stares back.

Alps’ newest record is less startlingly sad, though perhaps the name – *Alps of New South Whales* – offsets any perceived profundity. It is,

after all, a bad pun. Never someone to let go of a theme, Hearn named each song on the album after a different whale: the Blue Whale, White Whale and Minke Whale all get the opportunity to shine here. The theme resonates on a purely musical level. Hearn is reluctant, in fact refuses, to elaborate on the lyrical content, and regrets having ever included a lyric sheet with his album, as he did with *Alps of New South Wales*. “I just think the lyrics that I’m writing now, as a person with a lot of appreciation for writing, cannot be separated from the context of the song and appreciated in a written form.” He explains, “they lose all their meaning when they’re separated from the song. I don’t want to be read, I want to be listened to. When I feel like I want to be read I’ll publish something.”

“It started off as a pun,” he admits, explaining the whale theme that ties together his newest album. “It comes out of my really bad sense of humour, and some people might pick up on some of the jokes, like one for instance – there’s a song on the album called ‘Narwhal’, which is a whale with a big thing sticking out of its face, and at the end of that song there’s a big “nah nah nah” moment.

“‘Blue Whale’ is a very blue song, not in a synaesthetic sense – it’s probably more red – but lyrically it’s kind of a depressed track. There’s a similar link between the titles and the lyrical content to the musical textures that relate to the whales that I’ve chosen. I was thinking a lot about Brian Eno’s ambient series, and the idea of making a music that can be listened to actively or left in the background. I really wanted to do that with this album.

“There’s a Makers of the Dead Travel Fast track [‘Tael of the Seaghors’] where they have a fish tank, which inspired me,” He continues, “as well as a lot of other things. I was watching this television series called *Metalocalypse* where they record an album underwater because they think it will be more brutal.” He laughs.

After the interview, Chris catches a lift with me to an afternoon gig he’s playing in Newcastle as part of the New Weird Australia showcase. He’s playing in a church in Newcastle’s central business district alongside Moonmilk and Kyü, and the rain – as it’s known to do over the This Is Not Art long weekend – is pouring. On his way out, he hugs his infant son before gathering a handful of *Alps of New South Whales* for the merch stand, along with his guitar, an amp and a projector. As we negotiate the wide arteries of Newcastle into the old town Hearn is business-like: not particularly nervous or excited, just calm and not perceptibly fazed.

It’s funny, witnessing the mundane preparations that occur before an artist like Alps performs: these otherworldly emanations, reflective and emotionally vigorous, don’t sound like they could be rooted in routine but rather something more intangible, like the caustic frequencies that invade provincial AM stations on rainy nights. They just are. In reality it’s difficult to romanticise, but as he wanders into the church with a guitar and none of his signature organs, it’s tempting to simplify. He’s off to express himself, fulfilling that primal urge that inhabits some people. There is the sense nowadays Hearn is living for something worth dying for. **CD**

Alps’ *Alps of New South Whales* is released through Beat is Murder.

QUEEN OF DUBSTEP

It just doesn't seem like the day to be making dubstep. To me, it's a musical style birthed from rainy, dark, bleak UK days stuck indoors, rather than interminably bright afternoons in Perth. I might be wrong, but surely it's always sunny in Perth, so it seems strange that this would be the locale where Kito creates her undulating, serpentine dubstep tunes, with throbbing bass drops and shattered beats. "I went to the shops to get some milk so I could have a coffee and I was like, 'Oh it's such a nice day, what am I doing inside?'," she says, rounding it off with a breathy giggle that often punctuates her speech.

Maaiké Kito Lepping is on the phone from her apartment in Claremont, a suburb about 20 minutes west of Perth. It's a quiet part of the world: with no neighbours flanking her abode, it means the young producer can "make as much noise as I want during the day, or the evening, or whenever." It's three in the afternoon, and Kito's spent the day working with Perth singer Reija Lee. The two aren't strangers to collaborating together: Lee's discombobulated and effected vocals feature on one of Kito's strongest tracks to date, 'LFO'. Along with Kito, Lee is another link in Perth's tight dubstep and drum 'n' bass clique. Her voice has appeared on 'Polygon' by her DnB-producing brother Karl Thomas, also known as ShockOne, as well as Shazam's reinterpretation of Muscles' narcissistic anthem 'Sweaty'.

It's surprising, then, to find out that Lee doesn't have a natural predilection for the genre. "We're all like, 'Hey Reija, sing on this' and she's like, 'I don't know what I'm meant to sound like,'" giggles Kito. "But she picks it up so well. We just show her a few difference examples," such as Uffie, Kid Sister, Peaches, Santogold and "things that [are] just dripping with attitude.

"Dripping with attitude" could also be an apt descriptor for the music itself. The 22-year-old Perth producer has only been visible on the Australian music landscape for around two years, but already one upstart journalist has labelled her with the sobriquet The First Lady of Dubstep. Kito laughs (well, more breathily giggles) the title off, but it's hard to deny that the music of Kito belongs in the same

league as international female dubstep counterparts like Vaccine and Ikonika. Gender aside, Kito's forays into the genre are world class, a trait recognised by the doyen of dubstep Skream, who signed her to his label Disfigured Dubz after hearing some of her work on MySpace.

But why Perth? This was the question I wanted answered. Of all the places in Australia, why is it that Perth – sunny, bright, warm – has become a scene of drum 'n' bass revivalism, with artists such as ShockOne and Phetsta at its apex, while Kito and fellow producer J. Nitrous lead the dubstep charge. Kito proffers a response: "I think because there have been a few successes in Perth, it's a motivation for other people to give it a go. But I'm not sure. A lot of people I know that are into it have been living in the UK for a bit and have come back home. And it's kind of infectious as well: when there's a few people who are really, really into it and pushing it, then it kind of trickles down and other people get onto it."

The answer hints at her own dubstep genesis. Growing up in the tiny coastal town of Denmark in Western Australia, Kito moved to Perth at the age of 17 to study fashion "and then quit that after a month," she laughs, "and started working in a record store and I studied music for a year as well at TAFE." Around the same time Kito began DJing at local Perth nightclubs and experimenting with her own beats at home. In 2006, a 19-year-old Kito travelled to Europe for a year, and "that's when I really got into dubstep," she explains. "I first started listening to it before I left Perth just because I was on the internet all the time looking for new music and then when I left that's what was kind of on my iPod. So when I was travelling around that's what I was listening to. I got to London and I started listening to all the different radio stations and that's when I started getting into it more."

Burial would have been the soundtrack for most of Kito's European sojourn. "[He] was my biggest influence at the beginning," she recalls. "And there were other producers like Luke Envy and Vaccine from America." But the nocturnal undulations and apocalyptic grandeur of Untrue are, at best, a subliminal influence on Kito's music. Tracks like 'Don't Want To Lose You' and 'What If' certainly share a similar disembodied vocal style, and 'Cold' conjures up the same snow-laden,

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post-rapture desolation as Cormac McCarthy does in his novel *The Road*. But much like Vaccine, Kito’s skill in the dubstep field is weaving a strong thread of melody around the wobbly bass and 2-step drum beats. Take a listen to her collaboration with Reija Lee, ‘LFO’: it’s ostensibly a dubstep tune, but the sassy electro artists that Kito played to inspire Lee – Uffie *et al.* – are as much an influence on Kito herself as they are on the singer.

But it’s dubstep that’s been Kito’s musical penchant from the beginning. “I just started a few different things but that’s what I was listening to at the time,” she explains. “I just kind of felt like that was the easiest thing to do when I started writing music. It must have been because I was listening to it so much.

“I mucked around for a few years when I was living in Perth, before I went away, and I wasn’t very good,” she continues. “Karl [Thomas, ShockOne] used to show me a few things, and same with Phetsta, but I wasn’t really that confident with it. But after I travelled, when I got back that’s when I really got serious about it and decided, ‘I have to do it!’ So I had no social life when I got back to Perth. So that was about two, two-and-a-half years ago.”

It’s amazing that in such a short space of time Kito’s been able to make a significant impact on the Australian dubstep scene. Sure, her gender, young age and Nordic beauty certainly help, but above all

else it’s her assured music that’s opened up the ears of the dubstep fraternity both here and abroad. She’s helping to expand the still-undefined boundaries of this nascent genre even further. “It’s not like you’re kind of stuck in one style,” Kito says of dubstep. “There’s just so much room for experimentation and there is so much out there.”

What makes her impact more astounding is Kito’s distinct lack of physical releases. Aside from a 12” single, she has no albums or EPs out, though a 7” vinyl featuring three of her tracks and a remix of a Vaccine tune is slated for release towards the end of 2009 through her UK label Disfigured Dubz. She’s also hoping to release an EP of her work with Reija Lee that’ll be more of a radio-friendly, “electro-poppy thing” with two dubstep tunes included.

Kito’s looking to build on her musical momentum in 2010, when she’ll be leaving the sunny horizon of Perth for the spiritual home of dubstep and the grey skyline of London. She’s applied for the Red Bull Music Academy, an annual, travelling school for producers and musicians. It’s being held in the Motherland next year, and Kito is one of what I suspect are thousands of musicians vying for the coveted 60 spots. “I find out at the end of February if I get in,” explains Kito. “So if I get in that’s when I’ll move, and if I don’t then I’ll probably leave it another two months and go over. I’m going to get my two year

working visa and spend quite a bit of time over there and see how it goes. Put everything into it.”

It’s obvious that Australia’s appetite for dubstep, regardless of its blog hype and international stature as a genre, doesn’t exist above an underground level. It’s also a sad indictment of the music scene in this country that an artist as talented as Maaiko Kito Lepping has to travel to the other side of the world in order to get her music out to a wider audience. But it’s an issue that Australian musicians have always faced – from The Go-Betweens in the eighties right up until Pivot now – that in order for the world to hear your music, you have to take your music to the world.

Kito’s acutely aware of the quandary, and admits she needs to go to London to make a career out of music. “I think, especially with what I want to do, it is [a necessity],” she concludes. “I’m sure I could do things here if I stayed [but] my label’s in London and [so is] my agency. I think if I want to make a living from it and just go for it, there’s so many more opportunities over there. I think I’d be silly not to go at this point and work with different people. I think it’s going to be fun. I can’t wait.” **CD**

Kito’s 12” release *What If/Cold* is available through Disfigured Dubz



"We're very much about trying to make a different sound that hasn't been done before," Ghoul bassist/rhythmist Pavlé says. He is immediately howled down by cries of "all the clichés!!" from his band mates. Considering Ghoul is one of the few current Sydney bands who might actually be doing that, it's interesting that the members are wary of such claims.

The members of Ghoul have a long history, in spite of the relatively short life of the band so far. Pavlé and guitarist Anthony were friends in primary school. Singer/guitarist/synth player Ivan is Pavlé's older brother by about a year. "I have memories of putting Anthony in a garbage bin sometime around Year eight," Ivan remembers. "We absolutely hated each other. I was horrible. We were both bullied quite a bit and, you know how it is, you just pass that shit down the line. When I met his parents everything changed. They were so warm and they knew who I was because of Pavlé. Anyway, I just felt ashamed of how I had been treating him. From that point on we became friends." Later, when Ivan was kicked out of another band all three were in, tight loyalties were honoured and the other two quickly followed to form Ghoul. Drummer Andrew had met Ivan at a party in Year 11, and the two had got to know each other in the following years. In need of a drummer, Andrew – the only drummer they knew – was invited and subsequently joined.

That was about two years ago.

My first encounter with Ghoul came one night a year later. Driving home, I caught the tail end of an hour slot they'd spent guest programming and being interviewed on Sydney's FBi Radio. I only got to hear one of their own tracks, the now near-ubiquitous 'Swimming Pool', but that song, combined with their selection of other Sydney bands for whom I have quite a fondness, meant that I needed to check them out as soon as I got home. I did, ending up sending them a MySpace message and downloading their EP, *A Mouthful Of Gold*. The next day I had a reply message thanking me for the note and asking if I wanted them to send me a free CD of the EP.

Since then, I've downloaded 22 tracks plus the aforementioned radio show, all directly from Ghoul's own websites. Following the initial EP, a bunch of improvisations, outtakes and works in progress were released as *Abandoned/Afternoon/Ambient*. There's been a couple of other e-singles and remixes sent out into the ether as well. Why the generosity, I wondered? "From our experiences of going around to gigs, we didn't have enough money to pay for drinks or anything after we got the door charge, so we just didn't want people to have to fork out the extra money for an EP we were happy with at the time," offers Pavlé. "We just didn't think we'd reach enough people if we were selling EPs." The idea worked and reach people it did. Google *A Mouthful Of Gold* and most of the important Australian music based blogs will top the list with their various reviews, all of them glowing.

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One thing many of these reviews share is an inability to pin the band's sound down. To my ears, there are shadows of Radiohead in the mix of electronics and traditional guitar/bass/drums alongside a very distinctive singing voice. There are traces of rock technologists like Battles. Other reviewers have heard shades of Animal Collective (*Cyclic Defrost*), Frank Sinatra playing sloppy highschool punk (*Polaroids of Androids*), Antony & The Johnsons (*Mess+Noise*) or Bauhaus (*Joe Blog*). But none of that really describes them. The EP itself came early in the band's life, and they were keen to simply find their feet. "It wasn't something we were working extremely hard towards refining. We were trying to find a sound of some kind and develop it," explains Pavlé. To complicate things more for the critics, the band sound completely different on stage, though some of the hooks are still discernible. "We couldn't recreate what we'd recorded. It was too difficult to get an energy out of something that was very minimal," says Pavlé. So why does the recording sound the way it does? Ivan explains, "I was terrible at recording. I was like, 'I can't record bass guitar for shit so let's make this on synth' or 'the guitar sounds bad, let's put that on synth'. The EP was done entirely in my bedroom."

While the band deny it, there is a current groundswell of artists doing some similar things to Ghoul. It's not a modernist scene defined by aesthetics (as punk, or techno, or grunge might have been), but a post-modern 'scene' in the sense that, while none of the bands necessarily sound alike, all are appropriating from similar places – the shreds of hook-based pop music framed in the clashes between traditional rock and electronic sounds. Their Sydney peers are people they've shared stages with – Seekae, Sherlock's Daughter, Megastick Fanfare – but there are clear links spreading out to bands like the aforementioned Animal Collective, Grizzly Bear, Atlas Sound or more rock orientated strands like Tame Impala and Parts And Labor or even LCD Soundsystem and Battles. The links are not in similarities of sound, but in similar ideas. The past is used, but never forces the sounds into a retro corner. Traditions are used as signposts to direct the audiences, but none of the artists can really be accused of sounding 'like' anyone or any past

"IF YOU'VE GOT SOMETHING THAT ONLY GOES FOR A MINUTE AND A HALF OR TWO MINUTES, THEY'RE LIKE, 'ALL THESE THINGS ARE HAPPENING AND THEN IT'S OVER', AND THEN THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO."

movement in any specific manner. Technology is not the be all and end all, but neither is reactionary guitar traditionalism. Both are used as needed.

In Ghoul's case, there's a great sense of rhythmic intricacy. Andrew's drumming is syncopation based and is often reinforced by Pavlé on his own floor tom or drum synth. Hi-hats are often traded in for drum rims, creating a rawer, less 'rock' feel. Time signatures shift seamlessly around and the two guitarists lay their colour over the foundations. Often playing in unison and often sitting on single chords rhythmically, they help enhance the polyrhythmic pulse. Synths and sequencing accent

these foundations, but the sound can turn from gentle propulsion to immersive, beautiful noise in an instant, as a battery of guitar pedals kick in and shoegazing buzz is manically deployed. The music is tightly rehearsed but retains an appealing edginess. And then they slip into pure ambient backwash with plaintive singing.

With such reliance on ideas instead of stock sounds, one resulting feature of Ghoul's recorded tracks is their brevity. "It wasn't really getting bored with it. It was more like...we didn't...we don't...we don't really know how to write songs properly!" guitarist Anthony explains. "I think we were over-worried that we'd let a song go longer than the idea was worth," adds Pavlé. On stage, the tracks extend outwards, with minimalism often making way for euphoric percussion interludes and guitar freakouts. Ivan suggests, "if you play something for two minutes, you're not really rewarding an audience for listening at all. For a person to grasp an idea, it takes [them] a while to understand they're hearing a four on the floor kick (for example), so it takes 16 bars then it's, 'Alright, this is the mood'. If you've got something that only goes for a minute and a half or two minutes, they're like, 'All these things are happening and then it's over', and then they don't know what to do."

"But that wasn't originally why we did it," counters Pavlé. "Originally it was because we just couldn't get it to sound right live, and then we just fleshed it out." Conversely, as the band members have collected gear – synths, midi controllers, an Akai MPC – some of those recorded sounds have made their way into the live set, so there is quite a range of timbres now. This tension between the different



faces of Ghoul seem to be resolving as the band settles into its skin. The *Abandoned/Afternoon/Ambient* release demonstrates a closer integration between the music the four members make as a band and the studio experiments that initially propelled them. The band say this is also reflected in new recordings for their debut album. This time, the tracks have often been written and played out live before being committed to hard disc.

Discuss Ghoul and it's virtually impossible not to address the issue of Ivan's presence. Live, he often commands half the stage, the rest of the band a tight unit stage right. From here he jerks his tall figure in rhythm, picks at his instruments and sings with pained smiles and closed eyes. He is captivating to watch, even more so when contrasted with Andrew, Anthony and Pavlé, who lock eyes and rhythms with each other, creating the alternating calms and maelstroms as Ivan engages the audience. The other factor that pulls him and Ghoul above the crowd is that voice.

"When I started singing, like really trying to develop my voice, I listened to a lot of [Jeff] Buckley. Day in, day out I would just listen to Buckley. Singing along to him in the car is really where my voice came about. Listening to the way he phrased things, or emphasised things, where he breathed... I just listened and copied and listened and copied. Stuff like vibrato was totally unconsciously absorbed. Now when people say 'turn down the croon,' I can't. Fuck it, I croon. I can't stop it, it just happens." As with the music, these foundations don't result in copyist tendencies. He doesn't sound like Jeff Buckley to my ears, nor have I noticed any other reviewers picking up a similarity. But, when highlighted, the connections can be seen. Ivan's voice has become one of the band's calling cards, one of the things that sets them apart. Not because it sounds like anything else, but entirely because of its disjunction from other singers, as well as the ease with which it sits into the flow of Ghoul's music.

"If you listen to Buckley, a lot of the actual words he sings are

pretty lame, but it's the way he sings them," Ivan says when I ask about the lyrics. On another occasion he confesses, "Lyrics aren't really my forté, but they're heartfelt. My favourite lyricist is Morrissey, and he's great with wordplay and connotations. I've been trying to get some of that in my writing. Just funny associations or things people will hear and go, 'What?' David Byrne is great too. And Dave Longstreth - he's got great phrasing. It's also really interesting to take on a character or persona, like Nick Cave does. I've been trying some of that as well. Writing is really where I need to be focusing right now."

That Ghoul have appeared with such a distinct personality at such a young age is fairly remarkable, seeming to have leapfrogged the stage of development where most bands pastiche their idols. Their stated aims are modest, but they want to be the best they can be (the recording of our main interview begins with fierce discussion about how to fit second and third days of regular rehearsals in between their university study schedules - "Nine to 12! That's only three hours! Not enough!"). Ultimately, the band is showing the exploration of the borders between electronic and traditional instrumentation is no longer of interest in itself. The resulting music can be exciting in it's own light. Typically, Ivan prefers to understate things - "It's really funny, I remember everyone saying we're an electronica band, or glitch-pop, but I think we're just a guitar band who like to fiddle with stuff." **CD**

Ghoul's *A Mouthful of Gold* is available for free download from the band's MySpace.

THE *ENDLESS* DANCE- FLOOR

“If there’s stuff that I’m listening to – for example the last couple of years I’ve just really liked dance music or dub – where it’s really sculptural, I want to pilfer those ideas for Holy Balm specifically. I’m always trying to replicate the elements of that music that I think would suit Holy Balm, or the scenario of Holy Balm.”

Says Emma Ramsay, one third of psychedelic dance jam Holy Balm, with more self-reflection than you’d find in even the most established band. It’s a few weeks on from a mind blowing performance at Newcastle’s This Is Not Art festival and Emma sits humbly on the couch in the house her band mates Jonathan Hochman and Anna John both inhabit. Jonathan (Yoni to mates) joins her on the couch while Anna is holed up someplace working on her honours project.

Both Emma and Yoni seem oblivious to the superlatives floating around the Internet in reference to their band. “*HOLY BALM - The best band in the whole World?*” is the title of a thread on one Australian music message board. After said mind blowing performance in Newcastle I’m inclined to ask the same question.

Having started making music together in early 2006 when all members were sharing a house in the Sydney suburb of Newtown, Holy Balm have a sound that has evolved or, rather, revolved over the last four years.

“Constantly building on wherever we’re at,” is how Emma describes it. Yoni agrees; “I feel like we kind of do a version of what we did at our first show – we still kind of play that exact same thing now. It’s sort of different; it’s slightly different but still the same set of notes, the same

sort of tempo. Like some things come and go but it’s still the same.”

“Like ditties. Like a collection of ditties,” Emma offers.

Ditties built around the rhythms of a drum machine, the sonic embellishments of Emma’s percussion and – for want of a better term – “lead” guitar, as well as the textured ditties/droned melodies that come through the alternate channels of Yoni and Anna’s synths. The result is something difficult to describe without the words psych/noise/jam/dance being morphed into an awkward neologism. Other attempts have included noise dance punk, blown out funk, slop rave or

“indie kids who just discovered house music.” None of these are accurate in terms of sound, nor exhaustive of influence.

Yoni: “I think in a way the biggest influence is just actually playing – If I can think of a way to get two drum machines to synchronise together and play a certain kind of rhythm that I might like then that’s as big an influence as anything I might hear on a record... and maybe the biggest influence is whoever designed my synthesizer, or, like, technology? These sounds that you can get from your instrument, that’s a big part of what it is. So what do you say? Do you say Robert Moog is a big influence?”

Emma: “Or maybe that also translated in the way that artists that you like all have a similar relationship to sound, across styles and genres. Like lots of really great disco, really vintage disco that has a really amazing relationship with – like it keeps people on the dancefloor, and there can still be really jarring things happening there even though it’s still disco. That’s interesting, and a big influence, because you can see that you can do all these things, you can have something really abstract

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come in on the vocal, but only for two bars, it doesn't have to be trashy. Or like dubstep or something, where it's really sculptural and there's so much sound, that's kind of an influence. Not necessarily a certain song or something."

Yoni: "I'm always thinking about the sounds of my instrument, and the way that the synthesizer works, and the sounds I can get from the synthesizer and the kinds of things you can do with a drum machine. It's interesting what you can do with just a simple thing like changing the tone or the depth of a drum sound, how things can build in a trance-like way, in a repetitive way, rather than something that's so heavily structured. I think we're all really interested in that manipulation, and that kind of tonal stuff."

The approach that Holy Balm takes to music making is, in many

ways, their strongest defining feature. All three members have energies going into other projects – Anna is one half of trippy guitar duo Knitted Abyss, Yoni makes music in Hochman & Hopkins and as Pagan Dawn and Emma has recently started working on sound-based projects and a solo project that magically weaves voice, fortune telling and more – and in many ways it is because of these alternate projects that Holy Balm is such a distinct being. While Emma's focus is on the way that dance music can be sculpted into sound, Yoni is very much about the sound. It's that attention to tone and that intent in rhythm that defines Holy Balm, setting them apart from both contemporaries and classics. The interaction perfectly sums up Holy Balm.

Adamant that they're not an improv group, Holy Balm create a frame of reference that facilitates a loose and open ended performance.



One of the most important elements of that frame of reference is the stuff that happens outside of Holy Balm, essentially a group of friends that dates back to before their initial jams together.

In recalling their gestation period Emma remembers how she and Anna approached Yoni about being a band; “I think Yoni had records set up and was always playing records and I think we wanted to be a

that you get gratification in the final product, but you still really enjoy getting that live reaction and performing and doing it live because there’s all these elements of chance and potential for mistake and failure, which I think is actually a really big part of how we move into different territories anyway, just when we’re playing together. The certain directions that we’ve gone [have happened] through certain

“MAYBE THE BIGGEST INFLUENCE IS WHOEVER DESIGNED MY SYNTHESIZER.”

kind of record club too.” That element still stands strong with Holy Balm, especially at a time where they’ve been playing “venue to venue” with no time for rehearsals, and where the group develops musically through building upon the last show rather than prescribing a direction to head in.

“I think we know how to support each other musically,” Yoni says with an air of certainty.

Emma continues; “I think it’s something that... Having the textures down pat, like having a trick bag of textures and tones and little rhythms, and I think we’re just constructing from that – loosely knowing and coming out of that.”

Within days of forming, the three-piece were invited to perform at the very first Chooch-A-Bahn, a now defunct collective that revived and reshaped DIY culture in music from Sydney and beyond. Through parties curated around ethos rather than a particular aesthetic, style or genre, Chooch-A-Bahn gave a name, a place and a home to exist outside of a stifled Sydney venue circuit.

“It wasn’t something you do because you couldn’t get a show at the traditional venues, it was actually an appealing preference,” Yoni says.

In many ways Holy Balm exemplify what Chooch-A-Bahn was – a parallel universe that was rethinking, reworking and reimagining standards. The standard reimagined with Holy Balm is dance music.

“We can all be quite tonal and minimal and there’s still something to dance to,” Yoni says. “I think about the idea of playing at two or three in the morning so people actually want to dance – that other scenario of the night club.” Both Yoni and Emma reference New York disco and Krautrock as influences, pointing to their own music as another example of long form dance. I particularly revel in Yoni’s suggestion of an “endless dancefloor.”

Having released only a split CDR (with Sydney’s Vincent over the Sink) and a split cassette (with Melbourne’s Bum Creek, available through Spanish Magic), Holy Balm are predominantly a live band.

One reading is they haven’t gotten around to recording something more. This is, in part, true, but I prefer to take an alternate reading: the endless dancefloor. Or, more precisely, the conversation that Holy Balm builds with their audience and the positioning of that conversation as being as important and influential as anything else they’d cite.

“When people start reacting to things you can really tell... you get an instant reaction to what you’re doing and it’s interesting how much people actually respond to really minor tonal changes,” Yoni offers.

Emma continues, “Exploring all the things – how to get that instant reaction, is kind of like – exploring that in a studio is fine in the sense

things going wrong live, through actually experimenting.”

“You learn a lot that way,” Yoni agrees. “I think a really big part of it is that it is the three of us, and we’re in a space together, and we’re playing and feeding off each other. It’s not necessarily improvised – I wouldn’t say that – but that does come into it and I think we play things differently every time, and I think that’s got a lot to do with a mood or a space.”

And I’m back to wanting to call Holy Balm situationists, ignoring any historical inaccuracy. Yoni and Emma both put forward the abovementioned show in Newcastle as the best example of how a scenario can feed into a sound. A show where Melbourne vocal artists Gugg, the hugely transcendental Bum Creek and visual comedian/renowned faliare [sic] embracer John Kilduff joined Holy Balm on stage for the closest thing to religion I’ve experienced since Catholic schoolgirl days.

“We didn’t plan that,” Emma says, with smiling bewilderment.

Yoni agrees. “That could never happen if you just worked in the studio behind closed doors. Some of my instruments actually failed to work and we couldn’t do a set that we would have normally done, and that sort of tends to happen – something might not work or you might not like the sound of something or you might get onto a particular sort of rhythm or note or whatever that you kind of want to keep going with.”

“It’s almost like a scenario based band, and it’s kind of like all these different elements coming in to play, like when we play live the other bands that we’ve played with on that bill, how far we’ve tested the idea or we’ve just tried something incredibly new that day, these are all these things that contribute – just like anyone else playing live, I guess, but we’re also really happy for there to be a lot of room for things to spill out.”

Spilling out all over the place, tonaldronepsychbeatjam never sounded quite as good until Holy Balm existed. **CD**

Holy Balm’s split cassette with Bum Creek is now available through Spanish Magic.



Your spaceship has just crashlanded. You're on a strange world; strange, yet eerily familiar. As you step out and leave the wreckage behind, you're unlikely to be thinking, "What is the perfect soundtrack for this experience?" It's not a question many have asked before, but it is one considered by Richmond Lamarr and Mip Fumo of Clingtone. A cinematic, paranoid 23 minutes of quirky, synthy, introspective head nodding; *Mary Had A Little Lamp* is *Planet of the Apes* translated by a couple of guys who spent an intense four days in the Victorian outback.

Barramunga is a tiny bushland settlement about 150 kilometres south west of Melbourne. Not far as the crow flies, or the car drives, but far enough for the our heroes to bunker down, adopt a siege mentality and emerge with – well, emerge with what they emerged with. Lamarr explains, "We each brought a collection of sounds, ideas, beats, fears, samples, melodies, snacks, half finished tracks and whatever. We didn't know if we'd finish one cohesive track or a hundred little pieces of crap. And we didn't care as long as it was fun."

To an outsider, it doesn't seem like the experience would have been especially fun. That something like *Mary Had A Little Lamp* could have come from a warm experience is counter-intuitive. The ticking time bomb 'With My Heart Throbbing' could hardly have been joyful. Nor the psycho-sexual mini-narrative of 'Serenade, Fuck'.

If not from the subject matter, then, the 'fun' of *Mary Had A Little Lamp* came from the process. Unlike most hip-hop and chin-rubbing

electronica, this album was not the result of continual refining and perfectionism, it was a drop, chop and go affair. If magic was made, it was kept, unaltered. Dross, abandoned. So says Lamarr, "We worked on one idea at a time and tried to find sounds that fitted together. When we did we added more to it spontaneously with little reflection or revising. There was a belief that whatever came out in that moment was how it was meant to be; not something reworked or too considered. If it sounded a bit off, then great. It was recorded music as a snapshot of a moment."

**"WE DIDN'T KNOW
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Fumo explains the logistics of the slapdash recording process. "We set up all our equipment on the dining table in the middle of the lounge and peered at each other. Straight away we were into it. We were racing against time right from the beginning. It was concentrated but stoned."

A little alchemy but not a lot of sleep: "Sleep wasn't a concern to us. We needed to rest but it didn't happen often. To me some tracks sound restless and sleep-deprived. Mostly the ones I don't remember making..."

Despite the assertion that *Mary Had A Little Lamp* is one for the tin foil hat brigade, Fumo steers away from the paranoia interpretation. For him the sound of the album is very much a product of the atmosphere it was recorded in. "I wouldn't say paranoid. I think we were motivated by the process of creation. The fact that we both lead extremely busy lives: I work and study, have two young kids. So, to get away for a short intensive spell of recording, I suppose, culminates in

an exorcism of sorts. We burnt our fingers.”

For Lamarr, there was “an intensity inherent in this approach and the time limits we had. I hope that comes across in the music, and that the ‘imperfections’ make it more interesting to some people.”

If this album was, in essence, its recording process, then could it have been made in a city? Is it so remote, so outback that it could not be conceived among buildings, and people, and noise? The boys are unanimous, “Yes... but it wouldn’t have been the same.”

So... No, then?

No response.

Interviewers are lucky to get answers even this straight from Clington. Their press reads like a J. R. R. Tolkien riddle. When asked whether they were poets, fascinated by a world of lyrical beauty and prosaic passion, their response was – perhaps predictably – a poem. And, judged by the high standards set by the few lyrical grabs we get on the album, not a very good one.

“Poet poet deep inside,

What secrets do u hyde

Shhhhhh

Hush

Puppies

K9s, dogs, Alsatians,

Alsatian wagon

why do birds fly

they should walk instead.”

Similarly elusive is the tale of the two musicians coming together. Both lead busy lives and struggle to find time for music, but have managed to put together a Trans-Tasman collaboration recorded in country Victoria. How? What was the occasion? Did their passions intertwine immediately? All issues worth considering. None of them addressed, though. Instead, more poetic riddles:

Lamarr: We met on a windowsill. I was alone among hundreds of revellers in a large ballroom on the outskirts of the city. The buffet was huge and I had just decided to move from savoury to sweet. The éclairs were amazing and fragments of pastry and chocolate flew through the air as I demolished one after another.

Fumo: I was rolling down a hill. When I finished I took my helmet off and I noticed there were bits of mince pie all over it. I immediately thought ‘pastry party’. I looked around to see where it was, I wasn’t going to miss out. I rode down on my bum.

Lamarr: I lingered by a large open window with a view of the hills. My eyes darted left and right, hoping no one would discover my guilty, gluttonous secret. Years of hiding in corners, self doubt, anti-vanity. I heard a commotion outside and turned to look through the window. It was the first time I’d seen Fumo but I knew it wouldn’t be the last.

Fumo: He caught my eye, when it was ripped out of its socket by the guy I was fighting. I don’t normally get into bar brawls, but at a

pastry party you have to be prepared for anything.

For a couple keen to be deliberately obtuse, *Mary Had A Little Lamp* begins uncontroversially. ‘Lover’s Rasp’ is rap banger as IDM. But if it’s the track played as the credits roll, ‘With My Heart Throbbing’ is where the film begins in earnest. A prison escapee scrambles free, looks around, and sees no sign of any Martian. It’s an evocative image, particularly in a time when the Australian East Coast is occasionally haunted by clouds of South Australian dust.

After four tracks of chop/change excitement, we discover the Fumo is a rapper. With a hint of his New Zealand drawl, he takes us through the looking glass and – oddly – provides a more than passing likeness

to straight up and down ozhopper Yuin Huzami, a rapper from Brisbane’s Coalition Crew.

‘Toffee Apple’ wouldn’t sound out of place on a mid-90s Rebirth of Cool compilation. The trip back in time to Bonds raglan t-shirts, Reality Bites and cargo pants was not a deliberate one, though, explains Fumo, “we did two three minute recordings of us pissing about on the melodica. The first one I would puff into it while Lamarr played around with the keys trying to get a melody. On the second take we reversed roles. It was an awkward hybrid, playing a one person instrument with two minds. We just re-listened to it back and picked out the best bits. There were not many.”

The overwhelming intention in making this tasting plate record was that there would be no post-production or refinement. On first listen, that impulse doesn’t gel with the album’s title track. Elusive initially (this is Clington, after all: they don’t want to make it too easy), it is the closest the album comes to a single. It even has a bit you can hum. Lamarr explains, “there are only really three elements to this track. The long filtered synth noise and the beatboxing were things we both already had, separately, and brought to the table. They fitted together ok and we put a delay on the beatboxing. The pop mini-melody was spontaneous and was recorded once and left as it was. This process really summarises our whole approach for this album.”

Barramunga is outback, but not really outback; people can walk there from Melbourne with several bottles of Gatorade, comfortable shoes and a great playlist. It’s escape within boundaries, then pure country, right near the city. No over-commitment. As a microcosm for *Mary Had A Little Lamp*, Barramunga’s location is eloquent. Just as this album strains at its leash and threatens to wander too far into the world of the obtuse and unintelligible, something familiar jumps out and grounds the experience all over again. **CD**

Clington’s *Mary Had A Little Lamp* is released independently.

OUT OF STEP

Arriving amidst comparatively minimal fanfare earlier this year on Jim ‘Spoonbill’ Moynihan’s Omelette label, *Interview Techniques* – the debut album from Melbourne duo Richard Burns and Thomas ‘Soup’ Campbell (aka Editor) – easily represented one of 2009’s more interesting local dubstep-centric releases. With the sheer breadth of styles and influences that rear their heads throughout the tracklisting, ranging from chipcore sounds on ‘Got Game Boy’, to the dark-humoured *Dr. Strangelove*-esque sampling of ‘Fat Scoops, Humes And Death’, in many senses it seems carelessly reductionist to simply tag Editor as just another dubstep duo. Given the myriad sounds and styles swirling in *Interview Techniques*’ brew, one of the first things I’m keen to find out when I catch up with Richard Burns concerns the sorts of musical paths he and Campbell had pursued separately before coming together as Editor.

“Before working together as Editor, Soup and I had musical backgrounds in a variety of different styles,” Richard explains. “I was just coming out of a degree in classical trumpet, although during this time I was focusing on playing as many jazz/reggae/dub gigs as possible and avoiding tutorials. Soup was just finishing a degree in audio engineering and during this time was also honing skills on the guitar and playing in different bands. He was also involved in live mixing and beat production with a band he started called Miso. They came on tour with a band I was playing with called The Red Eyes and we started talking about collaborating on a project. When Miso was temporarily put on hold and I left The Red Eyes to pursue different music, we began Editor.”

“At the beginning, it was a quartet and we had a violin player and

“I HAD NEVER PROGRAMMED BEATS OR MUSIC BEFORE WE BEGAN THIS PROJECT AND I HAVE LEARNT QUITE QUICKLY THROUGH SOUP AND THE HUNDREDS OF HOURS WE HAVE SPENT IN THE STUDIO.”

keys,” continues Richard. “The direction of the music was leaning towards downbeat trip-hop/dub, although Soup and I had previously explored these styles in a variety of contexts and the more we worked on tracks, the more we found we were tired of the sound we were creating. It was predominantly the two of us composing material and



what we were doing was sounding alright, although we had already explored it in various forms. We still had the capacity to play in these styles in other projects and wanted to do something new. Around this time, we started listening to lots of dubstep and moved in that direction as a duo.”

While I can certainly see why many listeners would simply tag *Interview Techniques* as part of the swelling dubstep scene, for me the overall tag doesn’t sit completely comfortably, with far more divergent influences such as 8-bit gamecore and wonky sounds filtering their way into the tracklisting. It’s something that Richard agrees with. “I think due to the nature of our musical backgrounds, the music we create doesn’t reflect a traditional dubstep format, if there is such a thing. A lot of the tunes have themes and ideas that may only appear once, and the tracks often end up in opposite directions to where



they start. This stems from our backgrounds playing in bands, and also working as a duo and never having a shortage of ideas. As a result, we have to be careful that our compositions don't become too busy.

"In a lot of dubstep that I hear it seems the producers are content with merely a strong bass line and beat. After a few variations they repeat the form exactly the same and then release it. I tend to find this model of track writing uninteresting, although this is merely an opinion. We never made a strong commitment to writing only dubstep, and we approach our sound with an open mind and never have a specific outcome for the direction of our tracks. Our skills as producers have improved dramatically over the period of writing *Interview Techniques*, and the tracks we are writing at the moment are getting more wild although still remain true to our roots in reggae and hip-hop."

"I THINK DUE TO THE NATURE OF OUR MUSICAL BACKGROUNDS, THE MUSIC WE CREATE DOESN'T REFLECT A TRADITIONAL DUBSTEP FORMAT."

Richard's also keen to emphasise the creative advantages of operating as a duo. "We definitely contribute quite differently in the material we bring forward, although we share a common aim with the music. The tracks often take a strange journey due to one of us having an idea that the other would never have thought of. We have many different ways of working on tracks ranging from one of us bringing something into a session, jamming on synths together, starting a track from the most intense point and working backwards, working separately and more.

"Soup is extremely fast using Ableton, so more often than not he is driving and I'll usually be messing around with synths and giving orders. I had never programmed beats or music before we began this project and I have learnt quite quickly through Soup and the hundreds of hours we have spent in the studio. It has definitely helped having a strong understanding of music and a clear idea of how a track should sound."

Knowing that Jim 'Spoonbill' Moynihan pretty much signed them to his Omelette label on the strength of their live gigs, I'm keen to find out how they manage to translate the intricate detail of their studio productions to the stage. "When we play live we predominantly mess around with dubs, samples and forms of tunes," explains Richard. "Soup always brings something new he is working with such as computer joysticks, drumpads, Casio keyboards, bits and pieces from hard rubbish and the tip shop, using them to a variety of effects. I play some trumpet, keys, mess around with some synths and dub samples. Soup manipulates what I am playing live.

"At the moment we are trying lots of different things and keeping it musically interesting. Currently there is a strong emphasis on getting more variation and content into our live visual set-up. We don't take ourselves too seriously in ideas we throw around and [our] visuals reference anything from vintage video games, Japanese sci-fi, psychedelic animation, evolution and anything we think will mess with punters or give them a laugh.

"We are starting to free up more time for local shows and touring, and can expect to be doing some festivals over summer and into next year," he continues. "We are well open to invitations to come and play interstate anytime...(hint hint). The album has had the most positive response on the west coast of America, so we are also looking into options exploring the idea of going over there or Europe to play at some stage next year. We are constantly writing new material and we expect to have another full length album by around April next year. We have a few local shows and festivals and will be beating the heat in the studio as much as we can over summer. We are genuinely excited about the direction our music is taking right now and can't wait to unleash it on a decent system." **CD**

Editor's *Interview Techniques* is out now through Omelette/Amphead.

HIDDEN HAUNTS

"I QUITE LIKE THE CHALLENGE OF PLAYING THE KIND OF MUSIC THAT'S UNFAMILIAR TO THE REGULAR ROCK CROWD."



It's past midday at the river-end of the idyllic rolling hills and endless railways of Sydney's Newington Armory. I've been trailing Seaworthy's Cameron Webb through the dens and trenches that permeate this converted military base. The landscape here, away from the roads and cars that have recently snaked through the property, is pre-World War I. There's a functional efficiency here that contrasts with modern Sydney, with the bunkers, mounds and concrete slabs making the Armory seem like a museum. One expects these functional designs to be surrounded by people, but the premises are totally barren today.

It's difficult to ignore the nearby café and the small portion of preserved mangroves extending out into Parramatta River. Webb has done field work here in his role as an environmental scientist, primarily in the study of mosquitoes. The Armory is an apt setting for the interview because of the contrasts in the nearby environments. As Seaworthy, Webb – with the assistance of Sam Shinazzi (an indie folk songwriter) and Greg Bird – directly references both urban and natural environments, with wetland field recordings often providing a base for the sweet guitar progressions and laptop processing that usually forms

the centre of live performances and some Seaworthy recordings.

Recently, Webb's methodology has expanded to include the history of the environment itself, specifically this very locale. Seaworthy's lauded third album *1897* was recorded in a decommissioned munitions bunker here in the Newington Armory, summoning the ghosts of workers accidentally killed by explosions. Standing in the thin, metres-tall gutter behind the bunker, Webb imparts the Armory's ghost legend. It's fitting, because the cold starkness of the recordings in *1897*'s opening track 'Inside' sounds like a seance.

1897 places Seaworthy's recording output in an entirely unfamiliar place. Previous releases, particularly the second full-length album *Map In Hand*, presented a sun-dappled daylight sound, largely encouraged by Webb's warm rubato guitarwork. *1897* progresses like a frigid winter night enclosed in barren rooms, only truly emerging from the dark during the final track, 'Outside'. The field recordings so common throughout previous Seaworthy releases are reserved for this luminous, cathartic conclusion – birdcalls in a morning sun shower.

Seaworthy's first album – *It's Humbling When Two Saints Meet* – is

an important starting point when considering the processes that have laid the foundations for the sound associated with Seaworthy today. The beginning of Seaworthy's career overlapped with the demise of Sydney indie pop group, Twelve24, for whom Webb played guitar.

"I think the project had run its course," says Webb. "We were all doing high level Uni degrees [and] didn't really have the time to do big tours, which at the time you really needed to do to break through. It was the time to end.

"I'd started playing around with some home recordings, [which were] different to what we were doing in the band at the time. Here we were creating this quieter, atmospheric, ambient sort of stuff and, I guess, like a lot of these projects you fluke it with a couple of good recordings. Next thing you know, people are asking you to do shows and other releases.

"I started off making music that was like the music I listened to," Webb continues "but I maintain that the music I make resembles what I always wanted to hear when I bought a CD, but never quite got." Webb's attitude to the music he makes now, in response to the music he listens to, provides insight into the way this shift from the indie rock of Twelve24 occurred.

"I might be wanting something ambient and slow moving, but the stuff I was buying was more erratic - chopping and changing, or too testosterone driven. I wanted something quiet."

Webb politely mentions throughout the interview that a lot of his success - signing to New York label 12k in particular - is a matter of luck. Certainly, some of the experimental and lo-fi approaches Seaworthy has executed have involved trial and error. *It's Humbling*... has a very personal, bedroom quality: more intimate than later releases because of the happy imperfections that came as a result of this dynamic.

"*It's Humbling When Two Saints Meet* was recorded for 20 dollars on an old four track tape deck," Webb explains. "It was mixed live to a CD burner because we couldn't really afford to go into a studio at the time. It's another example of how a record won't sound the same if you go into a studio."

In an interview with *Godsend Online* conducted shortly after the release of *It's Humbling*..., Greg Bird confirmed this notion, describing Seaworthy before and after joining Webb in the lineup.

"The early... Seaworthy was these remarkable songs about love and the ocean. When I heard the first single ('Tide In Knots') it sounded like a fisherman who lived in his shack on the beach recording guitar songs to four track ... I think the music comes from our love of warm music and comforting sounds and that other-worldly feeling you get from listening to other bands. Trying to produce that 'feeling' and getting it onto four track, listening back and realising you captured the way you felt at that moment is a lot of fun. Hopefully people will get that 'feeling'."

Webb agrees. "One of the reasons I like doing Seaworthy is the

lo-fi recording, and how the recording process becomes a part of the creative process. I've been in studios to record and you have to have one eye on the clock. It's expensive and not really a good environment for the creative process.

"[Recording constraints] affect the recording on different levels. The cheapness allows for trial and error [while] recording on dodgy old tape, or with a cheap microphone, adds another sonic flavour. Sometimes it's out of your control, but it can add a grittiness, a different type of sound you can't make with pristine equipment.

"I've become marginally less frustrated with my inability to have a technical knowledge of the equipment," Webb continues. "But everything's a learning process. As you learn more, you tend to get a hold of your stuff. Something as simple as knowing a different place to put the microphone to record, through to using different types of tape or other recording media. It's constantly changing, maybe the stuff I used earlier on I've forgotten about, and have to re-learn."

The latest developments in this process are evidenced in *1897* and contributions to a split 3 inch CD-R release with laptop musician M. Rösner. The exploration of laptop processing has produced entirely new elements within the Seaworthy sound. Webb has produced an increasing amount of Seaworthy's output himself, with Bird moving overseas and Shinazzi increasingly occupied with his work and solo output, leaving Webb to sculpt

Seaworthy alone.

Many solo ambient musicians use a laptop as their primary tool due to its flexibility in building thicker textures, which suggests a pragmatism in Webb's shift. Certainly, musical pragmatism has been a part of Webb's use of the computer.

"In some ways I use the computer the same way as I use a four track, it's just another process. For me the computer might be a practical tool to record, but at the same time it might be a real, genuine musical instrument. If I play guitar for instance, I might use a pick, an e-bow, fingers, a bit of metal or anything. You're using the same instrument, but you're changing the sound. In the same way the computer allows you to use a pre-recorded sound or some sort of synth sound, or a computer generated tone. [Overall] you're adding that extra texture that might make it sound good. I don't know why it should make the process different from buying a four track machine or even a new guitar pick."

Webb's recent interactions with laptop musicians such as Taylor Deupree and Philip Jeck appear to have had a more profound effect on him personally, rather than musically.

"I'm probably more influenced by having the opportunity to hang out and talk with people like Taylor Deupree and Philip Jeck. That has as much to do with being influenced by these kinds of artists as

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listening to them. Sometimes you can be influenced in an almost unmusical way.”

Webb cites everyone from Dirty Three’s Mick Turner to New Zealand drone musician Birchville Cat Motel to Australian sound artists Oren Ambarchi and Lawrence English as influences on his work. It is important, when tracking the general trajectory of Seaworthy since its inception 10 years ago, to consider the enormous cross-sections that characterise its sound.

Stylistically, Seaworthy’s static, guitar-based compositions seem to hark at a delicious midpoint between broad indie rock paradigms and the comparatively highbrow world of ambient sound art, via a field recording-focused sound design, and increasingly deconstructed laptop processing.

Occupying this Venn diagram for Seaworthy hasn’t involved unfocused mediocrity, but precisely the opposite. Seaworthy places itself in a very specific musical space, whether it be the recurring sentimental chord progressions scattered densely through releases between 2004 and 2006, or the harsher drone pieces and field recordings that often frame both. There’s snatches of John Fahey’s timeless solo guitar sensibility, but contextualised by an entirely foreign design. In a 2007 *Mess+Noise* interview Webb talks openly about the stillness in Seaworthy’s music – “People say ‘your songs go nowhere’ ... [but] that’s the point; we’re not taking you somewhere, we’re showing you this one place.”

Today, this attitude continues to endure. “The thing that unifies Seaworthy is its slow moving nature,” Webb relates. “Whether it’s the very minute layering of notes on one guitar or the glacial changes of the drones, it’s these subtle shifts that give them a ‘Seaworthy’ sound.”

In fact most of Seaworthy’s output, rather than being meandering, is utterly precise – there’s an intellectual focus in the design of many Seaworthy releases which frames the more intuitive, spontaneous and emotional forms of musical production. Webb spent over a year tortuously editing hours of recordings for *1897*, resulting in a meticulous sound design and a progressive arc that envelops the entire work.

“It’s extremely difficult to cut down that quantity of stuff,” says Webb, regarding the process of pruning three hours worth of material recorded for *1897*. “I could have made life easier for myself if I had pre-planned some structure, but that’s the price you pay for having the time to improvise – there’s more time spent on editing after.”

Beyond the intellectual processes that lie behind the polish of some releases, there’s something deeply personal about the loving way many of Seaworthy’s short run CD-R releases have been packaged. Sold out editions of 2006’s *Distant Hills Burn Bright* – with its paint-dipped recycled card sleeve – and the sewn sleeve of *Kiola* are prized artifacts, constructed like elaborate love letters.

“PEOPLE SAY ‘YOUR SONGS GO NOWHERE’ BUT THAT’S THE POINT; WE’RE NOT TAKING YOU SOMEWHERE, WE’RE SHOWING YOU THIS ONE PLACE.”

One such handmade CD-R release is 2005’s *Map In Hand*, the album that brought Seaworthy to wider attention via its re-release on the universally renowned 12k label in 2006. “*Map In Hand*’s first pressing was just 100 CD-Rs simply to sell at an upcoming Melbourne tour or Sydney show,” says Webb of the experience. “It was sent to 12k simply as a sort of ‘hey, I’ve been buying your records for a little while, here’s something to say thanks’. Taylor just happened to like it and wanted to release it and it’s gone from there.”

In Sydney, Seaworthy has gained a reputation for frequently supporting a diverse range of acts, from the post-hardcore of Ohana; the sentimental indie rock of Charge Group; ambient noise groups such as Moonmilk and Castings, and the experimental sound art of Lawrence English. Additionally 2009 has seen a full-length album in collaboration with sound artist Fabio Orsi, Near And Faraway and live improvisations with guitar dronescapist Seth Rees and free jazz deconstructors Spartak among numerous others.

It’s this ability and desire to transcend genre divisions that makes Seaworthy’s position in Sydney’s live music world an enviable one.

Webb explains, “I don’t want to stick to playing warehouse shows or gallery shows, and I don’t necessarily want to play venues that Seaworthy might be expected to play.

“Musically, a lot of the bands I play with might differ from Seaworthy and I quite like the challenge of playing the kind of music that’s unfamiliar to the regular rock crowd.” Webb says that some of the most unlikely crowds he’s played to are the ones who offer the best feedback. Over the several occasions

I’ve seen Seaworthy play the opening set at Sydney’s (now closed) indie rock haunt Hopetoun Hotel, an initially chatty, disinterested crowd was transformed as the punters move from the bar, taking seat on the floor, blanketed by the delicate, enveloping bed of sounds that characterises the group’s live performances.

For Seaworthy, the link is between realising live improvisations and recordings is almost arbitrary, since both recordings and performances are drawn from improvisations – each performance, for whichever purpose has its own quality.

“It’s a little different in that people don’t come to shows to hear track three off the new record,” Webb explains. “I like to think people come as much for the experience of watching the process of creation – what piece of technology I may be using or how I play the guitar, or even something unusual I might do in one show that’s impossible to recreate in the next.

“Sometimes it’s just that interaction with the audience and the space – scenarios in which you’re able to play more quietly for a quiet audience, or perhaps louder in a pub environment.”

Even past the e-bow drone that characterises some live performances and releases, this louder, more abrasive sound Webb mentions is present on releases such as *Serrata*, released on Campbell Kneale’s Celebrate Psi Phenomenon label in 2006. Recent live shows have featured



abrasive dictaphone recordings of electronically realised sounds being fed through distortion pedals into a guitar amp.

“In the grand scheme of things, I don’t get all that loud,” Webb says. “As a musician, you want to play differently [sometimes], whether it’s a different mood or feel for the audience or the other bands on the bill for that matter. I certainly don’t mind playing louder or more abrasive sometimes. It’s still Seaworthy.”

Some of these performances have incorporated field recordings that hark back to that counterpoint between the natural and urban. Indeed, as Webb and I are sitting along the Parramatta River, it occurs to me just how evident this is along the overdeveloped Sydney harbour foreshore. Does this counterpoint resonate very strongly with Seaworthy?

“I think so,” replies Webb. “In my line of work I spend a lot of time, not just in Sydney, but in some pretty remote areas on the coast. I’ve spent many years surfing, travelling up and down the coast, to some pretty beautiful places, places that have strong links to memory. These all pile up in my creative resources.”

“That doesn’t mean that the grittiness of urban Sydney or the inner west doesn’t have just as equal place. I think, even from an aesthetic point of view, it doesn’t have to be the coast or the mountains, there’s a certain beauty in the city as well. It might be urban decay, or for that matter, it might be a modern skyline at night. People can take some aesthetic beauty out of almost every landscape in a way and Seaworthy sort of mashes them together.”

“Something Seaworthy makes might be recorded in a century old

ammunitions bunker, but if someone’s listening to it driving up the coast through green hills, they’re going to have a lot of extra memory from where they hear it, or where they’re used to hearing it,” suggests Webb. “Sometimes, a barren concrete space is going to be the furthest from their mind.”

I suggest my own association with Seaworthy is more akin to the “barren concrete space,” since those are the spaces Seaworthy generally plays.

“You know, I think if Seaworthy played outside, we’d probably be blown away, but it’s a shame there aren’t more opportunities to play outside in Sydney,” Webb contends. “Maybe that’s why I try to use visual projections; they’re usually of outdoor mountains, grasslands and wetlands, which is a counterpoint to the places the music’s played in.”

It’s this counterpoint – this occupying of a number of spaces at once – that makes Seaworthy so intimately appealing; there’s a striking depth to the way Seaworthy channels such contrasting environments. From the mechanised to the organic, the abrasive to the sweet, the intellectual to the emotional, Seaworthy occupies the mid-point yet traverses the extremes of either end. The walk from the café, past the bunkers, and to the mangroves is a short distance, each space holding distinctive characteristics. Like the Armory, it’s these intersections, these collisions which keep letting you unfold Seaworthy’s interior.

CD

Seaworthy’s *1897* is available from 12k.

Matt Rösner *repeat*

After a three year hiatus, Australian sound artist Matt Rösner returns with *repeat*, a limited edition 12" vinyl LP on UK imprint Miatera.

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TOUCHING THE MONOLITH

It's an established fact that those who most pride themselves on being open-minded can often be found nursing the most bigoted of attitudes. Take, for example, one recent contributor to the letters page of avant/experimental bible *The Wire* (which, for all its high-brow bluster can at times be as bitchy and petulant as the news.com.au comments section).

This fellow took particular issue with the magazine's recent championing of "Doom, Black and new 'avant' Metal, and [their] grim attempt to make this genre appear as a new form of experimental music (I admit I was truly annihilated when I saw the idiot posers known as Sunn O))) on your cover). Thankfully, as a 57 year old music lover, I know exactly what this is all about – it is no more than a mere commercial trend."

The writer of that acerbic barb (who then went on to hurl lavish

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– one might even say gushing – praise in the direction of Italian space-noodlers My Cat is an Alien) obviously hasn't listened to *Monoliths & Dimensions*, the seventh Sunn O))) opus and their most earth-shaking recorded work yet. To write them off as "a mere commercial trend" is laughable: yes, they're part of a movement that has, in recent times, enjoyed a massive upswing in popularity, but that doesn't negate the artistic value of their music.

The group's core duo's roots may lie in metal (Greg Anderson could once be found playing guitar in doomlords Goatsnake, while Stephen O'Malley was a member of the paradigm-shifting mindfuck that was Burning Witch) but Sunn O)))'s heart has always lain with the avant-garde. Since drafting in Japanese noise kingpin Merzbow to add an extra layer of disruption to their third album *Flight of the Behemoth*, they've worked with a veritable who's who of modern experimental and outsider music, from raconteur Julian Cope and audio terrorist John Wiese to black metal misanthropes Malefic and Wrest (of Xasthur and Leviathan, respectively).

And so it is with *Monoliths & Dimensions*, which features no less than

31 additional musicians, including a Parisian women's choir, brass and wind ensembles, trombonists Steve Moore, Julian Priester and Stuart Dempster, as well as contributions from longtime Sunn O))) alumni Oren Ambarchi, Attila Csihar, Rex Ritter and Joe Preston.

Orchestrating this enormous cast of collaborators was composer Eyvind Kang, who in the past has worked alongside the likes of John Zorn, Bill Frisell, Marc Ribot and Mike Patton. Kang's involvement in the album came about as a result of his relationship with engineers Randall Dunn, who works with Sunn O))) as their live engineer.

"He was perfect for what we were looking for," says Anderson of Kang. "[It was] how he wanted to approach this that really clicked with us. He is definitely likeminded, and was coming at it from more of an abstract or avant-garde angle. We didn't want it to sound tacked on or cheesy, like Metallica jamming with the San Francisco symphony or whatever. We wanted to expand the sound, and we wanted it to complement the sound in an appropriate way that wasn't tacky."

They succeeded. *Monoliths & Dimensions* comes off as a near-perfect distillation of Sunn O)))'s volume junkie tendencies and their long-held but heretofore unexplored interests in modern classical and jazz: the supermassive chords of 'Aghartha' are given grim resonance by the addition of a stately horn section; 'Big Church' is haunted by a ghostly choir led by Persian vocal savant Jessica Kenney; 'Hunting & Gathering (Cydonia)' slows the blackest of metal to a crawl, over which Csihar again proves why he's one of the most well-regarded vocalists in the world of extreme music; and closer 'Alice' (dedicated to the late, great Alice Coltrane) is a symphonic movement that nods to both the micropolyphony of György Ligeti and the spectralism of Iancu Dumitrescu and Gérard Grisey.

"I think the music is a fusion of a lot of different styles, and different theories and concepts," comments Anderson. "To me, the record is really rich; it's not just Sunn O)))'s modern classical record, it's not Sunn O)))'s jazz fusion record. It's hard for me to comment on how to classify or pin down what the sound really is, because... I think it defies and goes beyond any standard or orthodox classification. But yeah, we are interested in modern classical, and we are interested in spectral music, and those concepts definitely were an inspiration on the record. There are a lot of different inspirations for the record – we're just as much into Celtic Frost and Entombed as we are Dumitrescu and Grisey, or Miles Davis.

"The one thing that really unites all of us as individuals is we're all huge music fans," he continues. "We're really geeks for music, and we're constantly interested in discovering new music or discovering artists from different eras. Getting turned onto those different musicians and artists, and also turning each other onto it. It's almost like there's a continual record exchange happening at our sessions, Oren wanting to turn us onto something that he's really into, or me wanting to turn Stephen and Oren or Attila onto something, or whatever. And I think that definitely is bleeding through into the music. I think that's potentially why a lot of people are saying that this is the most listenable

Sunn O))) record. Some people have described it as 'accessible' – I prefer to hear it called listenable, personally. And it's because it's not only embracing different styles of music, but there's a lot more depth emotionally to this record."

Surprisingly, Anderson says that he and O'Malley had only the vaguest idea about the album they wanted to make when they initially set about recording *Monoliths & Dimensions*. "We just had some ideas of things that we wanted to try and challenges that we wanted to undertake," he says. "We sat down and talked about a couple of things. For example, we wanted to work with more acoustic instrumentation – brass, choirs, woodwinds. And the other concept that we had was to try to attempt to capture some of the live stuff we've done in the last couple of years. We'd had some really unique and special performances

and some really great music had come out of those and we were hoping that we could capture some of that on tape.

"That, to me, is part of the joy of playing in this group: a lot of times the sound that comes out on the other end is a lot of times completely different from what you think it might be. I really like that element of surprise. It really keeps things fresh and also makes it so that you stay on your toes."

Monoliths & Dimensions took longer to complete than any Sunn O))) record to date – much, much longer. Two whole years were dedicated to the careful crafting of the album; time that Anderson says (and anyone who hears the record will likely agree) was well spent.

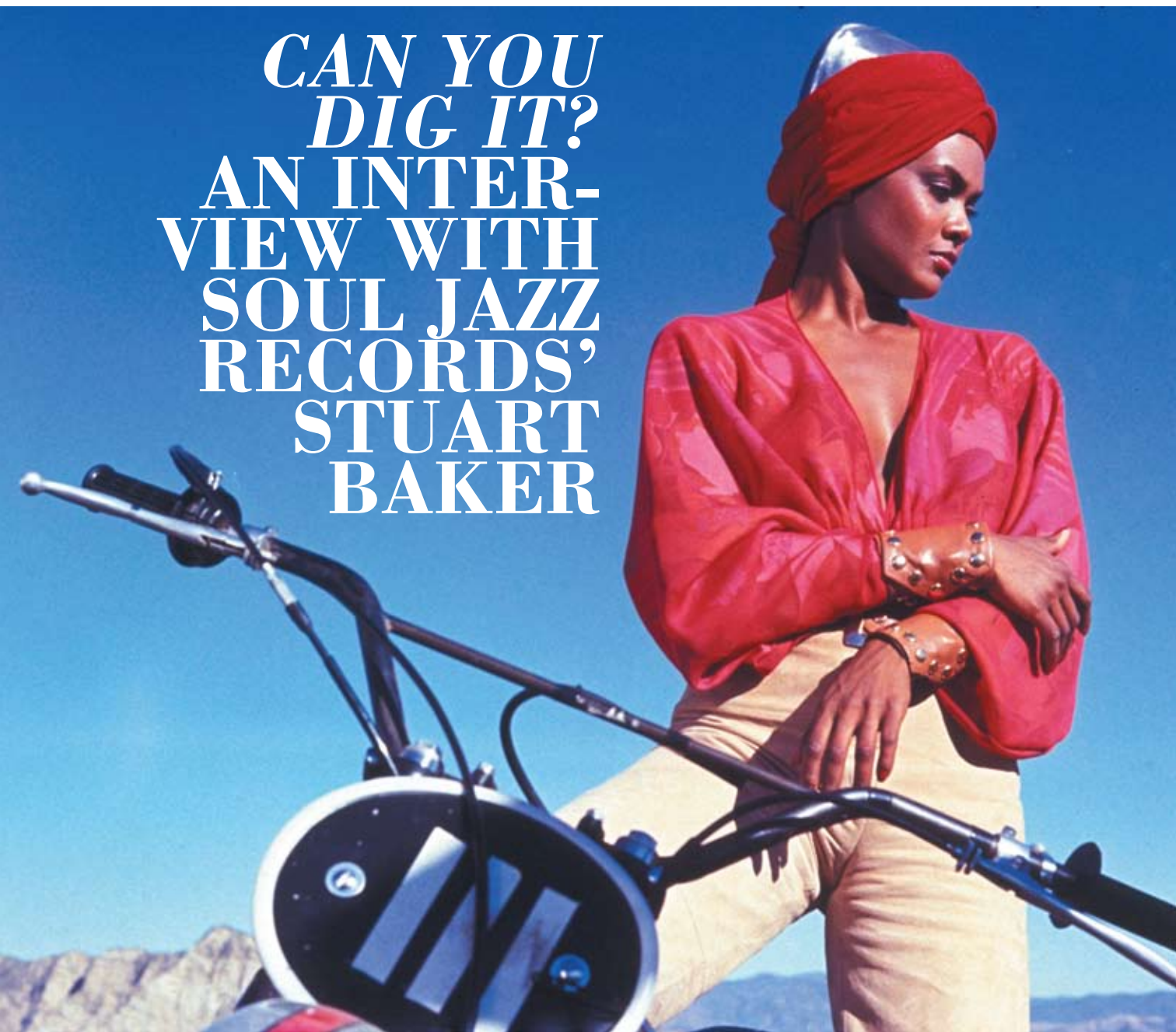
"We really took our time because we wanted it to be fleshed out completely, and we wanted to be 100 per cent satisfied with it," he says. "With some of our other records though, there hasn't been a time crunch on it, it has been a lot more in the moment. Like, 'Let's get this out while it's feeling fresh.' Whereas this one we felt needed more time to breathe and to develop. We felt some of the pieces needed more layers and more textures added to them to make it so that we felt that the piece was finished."

An additional challenge to the making of the album was thrown up by the project's scale, and the reality of working with so many additional layers. "A lot of the challenge was in the mixing, trying to get the strings and guitars to blend and sound natural, rather than make it sound tacked on or cheesy," Anderson explains. "That was the real challenge. To me, the tracking of all the extra instrumentation was really an enjoyable process. It was really exciting to think about how it would turn out later. But basically we'd save all the hard work for later, when you're actually putting it together. One of the problems that happened with this record was that there was so much amazing stuff tracked – hours and hours of great material – and then trying to pick the best moments and come up with an album that sounds cohesive and concise amongst all this tracking." **CD**

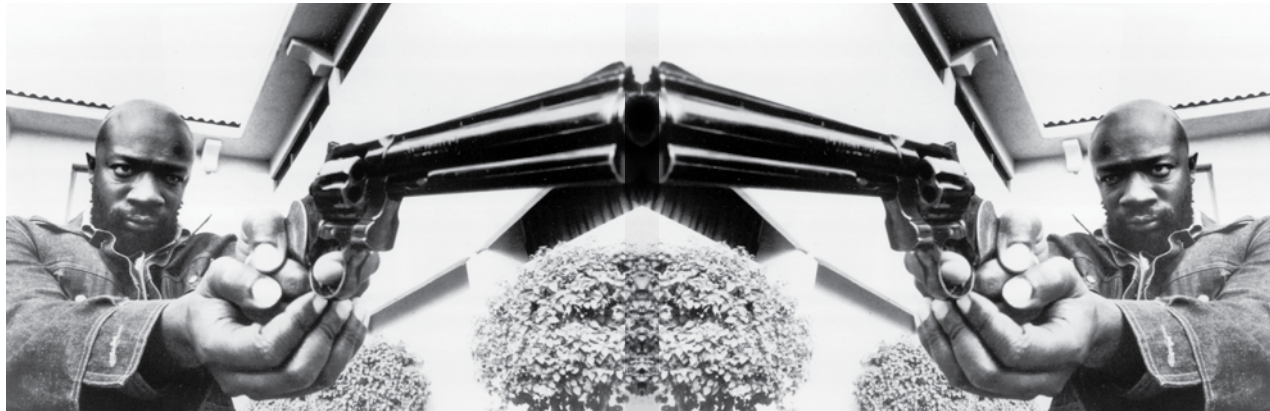
Sunn O)))'s *Monoliths & Dimensions* is on Southern Lord Records

**"A LOT OF TIMES THE
SOUND THAT COMES
OUT ON THE OTHER
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DIFFERENT FROM
WHAT YOU THINK IT
MIGHT BE."**

CAN YOU DIG IT? AN INTER- VIEW WITH SOUL JAZZ RECORDS' STUART BAKER



“ISAAC HAYES WAS ALLOWED TO GO INTO THE STUDIO WITH A HUGE ORCHESTRA, THAT HE WOULDN’T NORMALLY HAVE HAD ACCESS TO, AND ARRANGE IT IN A WAY THAT NO FUNK AND SOUL ARTIST HAD EVER DONE BEFORE. CONSEQUENTLY, YOU GOT A NEW STYLE OF MUSIC.”



For years now, London-based Soul Jazz Records have been issuing essential compilations documenting a variety of musical scenes, from reggae and roots, through Nuyorican soul, independent jazz, New Orleans funk, dubstep and many more. Their latest release is *Can You Dig It?*, a two disc/four platter compilation of music documenting the music and politics of black action films released between 1968 and 1975.

For a Soul Jazz release, *Can You Dig It?* contains few musical rarities. Some of the soundtracks represented here (like Isaac Hayes’ *Shaft* and Curtis Mayfield’s *Superfly*), were chart-toppers in their day. Most of the tracks are taken from soundtracks that have been re-issued in recent years.

Even so, the package adds up to more than the sum of its parts. The quality of the music is universally excellent, and even the most familiar tracks sound fresh in this context. In bringing these songs together in one place, the compilation conveys a strong sense of how important soundtracks were in expanding the musical palette of soul, funk and jazz music during the period. And just as importantly, the package itself is beautifully put together. The music is accompanied by a 100-page booklet, which provides a history of black action films written by label owner Stuart Baker, along with synopses and details of the films whose soundtracks have been compiled here, and illustrations from movie posters and stills.

To coincide with the release, I had a chance to chat with Stuart Baker, to discuss the compilation and the films which inspired it.

So, where did the idea for the compilation come from? And was the selection driven by the songs, or was it that you

wanted to have certain movies represented?

Stuart Baker: It was driven by the songs, which I had known for a long time. And then I started seeing a few of the films, and I thought “Fuck me, these are some amazing films!” And then the more I saw of the films, I realised that they were much better than people had ever told me they were. And that’s how it came about.

Were there particular films that really stood out for you?

Yeah, *Coffy* and *Cotton Comes to Harlem*. *Coffy* was just an amazingly over-the-top film. It starts with Pam Grier’s character pretending to be a prostitute junkie, injecting herself with heroin, so that she can get taken to a drug dealer. She then blows his head off as revenge for her sister, who has become a junkie because of him. And that’s just in the space of one minute. It’s the most powerful woman I’d seen on film ever, practically, and I just thought “I’ve never seen a film like this before.” *Cotton Comes to Harlem* – I’d never really known about it, I watched it, it’s made in 1969, and I couldn’t quite understand how America... you know, there were no black actors or actresses in any films up until the late ‘60s, save for Sidney Poitier, Bill Cosby and a couple of others, and suddenly this film had a whole cast of hundreds of black actors and actresses, all incredibly good actors. It has an incredibly tight story line, which I didn’t realise was written by Chester Himes, who was an African-American novelist, and it was directed by an African-American, and I thought, “what’s going on?” I’d been told that blaxploitation films were about white people exploiting black themes in stereotypical ways, and yet this film was amazing. And that’s what started it off, really.

You make a point in the liner notes about this word, ‘blaxploitation,’ being used to describe this set of movies.

You've deliberately avoided using the word in the title of the compilation. Can you talk a bit more about that, and why you think it's important to steer clear of it?

Well, everyone understands to an extent what is meant by that word, you know, you know what films people are talking about. But in a sense, I don't like the mixture of 'exploitation' and 'black', because I don't think that's reflected in the films, I don't think they are exploitative. They might be genre films, they might be a horror film or a cowboy film, but that's not exploitative, that's a genre. It also dismisses... I mean, it's a whole industry of African-American films from the tacky horror to the amazingly life-reinforcing humanist films, that 'blaxploitation' doesn't explain. It's a dismissive word for a group of films that ultimately I think are very powerful.

One of things you mention in passing there, and which you bring out in the liner notes, is that the controversy over these movies at the time focused on those issues of representation – whether it was good for black people to be on screen as pimps, and drug dealers, and vigilantes, and so on. But directors like Gordon Parks Sr were making counter-arguments that these movies involved a different production model, as well as the different representations that were on the screen...



Yeah, I mean while I understand where the criticism within the community about what they saw as bad representation, the actual bigger picture is about the production model that was built. It was extremely radical, in the sense that it was African-American

empowerment that didn't exist in that industry before. I think that it's a shame that ultimately it got dismantled, partly through this criticism.

Some of the big studios started to get on board with this particular style of movie, to tap into an African American market that they hadn't really tapped into previously. But how did this work? Do you know much about the cinema infrastructure in inner city America at the time? What role did the cinema infrastructure itself play in the rise, and the decline, of this style of movie?

Well, most of the cinemas were owned by majors, and in the late '50s, this company called American International Pictures, which was an independent, went into the cities to try to break down the distribution network. Basically, the distribution network was locked up with major films. So, you wouldn't get African American films from the major studios, therefore you couldn't see them. So, American International came in and said, we're going to go out to the drive-in movies, because

they're not owned by the majors, and we're going to show films in these drive-ins rather than in the cinema complexes. And they managed to break down the distribution network, and they did this by showing teenage films, hot rod films, beach party films, anything that was like a micro-genre that children or kids were

picking up on. And they found their way into the market. And they were the first to pick up on the fact that there was a market of young African-Americans that wasn't being catered for.

So, after you had *Shaft*, which was made by a major, American International Pictures came in very quickly with films like *Coffy*, *Foxy Brown*, and *Black Caesar*, and it opened up the cinemas to what you could call 'minority' films. And the reason they could do that was because the majors were having trouble, they were in a bit of an economic crisis because of television, so the majors were happy to try minority films as well.

But then in the mid-70s, they had *Star Wars*, and they had *Jaws*, these blockbuster films that completely saved the industry, they were huge hits. And it meant that they didn't need to focus on what they would count as 'minority' films any more, so they stopped.

Somehow, the idea that we can blame Luke Skywalker helping to kill off this thing just about fits...

Yeah, with his light-sabre!

Exactly! And with the business model of these movies, apart from the way they tapped into this audience, the compilation also draws attention to the use of music in selling the films, and the use of the films in selling the music. Now, we're really familiar with big action films having soundtracks with major pop artists, the tie-ins. Is that something that these movies pioneered at the time, or had that business model already been established?

Well, you always had soundtracks to go with films, but you never



“[PAM GRIER WAS] THE MOST POWERFUL WOMAN I’D SEEN ON FILM EVER, PRACTICALLY, AND I JUST THOUGHT ‘I’VE NEVER SEEN A FILM LIKE THIS BEFORE.”

had funk or jazz or soul artists because there were no black films. So, when these black action films came out, they were the first time that soundtracks had black artists. So, one of the reasons the *Shaft* soundtrack was so successful, was that these funk and soul artists like Isaac Hayes were given more exposure by making films. Isaac Hayes was allowed to go into the studio with a huge orchestra, that he wouldn’t normally have had access to, and arrange it in a way that no funk and soul artist had ever done before. Consequently, you got a new style of music.

Yeah, ‘Shaft’ is one of those tracks that, if you are into this kind of music, you’ve probably heard it lots of times and take it for granted. But putting it on again today before we talked, having not listened to it for ages, it’s just epic, it’s huge...

Yeah, it’s amazing! There’s a *Shaft* DVD, and there’s a 10 minute extra which is a little documentary about Isaac Hayes in the studio making

the track, with the director Gordon Parks talking to him. They’re in a little tiny room with a band, guitars and drums, and they play it, without the orchestra arrangement, but it’s unbelievable, it sounds like nothing else on earth. It’s amazing seeing it being created, and as you say, it makes you listen to it in a fresh way.

With all the different artists that you’ve got on the compilation, some of them – like Isaac Hayes and Curtis Mayfield – were already really big names before they got into soundtracks. But did some of these artists catch a break by getting into this soundtrack business? Like, would Roy Ayers have been known widely outside of jazz circles before he did *Coffy*?

Well, most of them were well known before – you know, the reason they got asked was because the film producers wanted to get the biggest audience possible. Roy Ayers is possibly slightly different, because as you say, he was a jazz artist, and he was starting to make cross-over records, but possibly *Coffy* presented him as a funk and soul artist, whereas before he was a jazz artist, so maybe in that instance, it benefited him more than someone like Curtis Mayfield who was already famous.

There are some interesting gender issues here too. One of the points that you make in the liner notes is that with some of the Pam Grier and Tamara Dobson characters, there’s a real sense of seeing women presented on screen here in a way that black women in particular hadn’t really been represented before. But then as you look down the track list, there are no female artists that did any of the big soundtracks. In retrospect, it feels like a bit of a shame...

Yeah, I don’t really know why that is. I mean, Aretha Franklin did one soundtrack, for *Sparkle*, but it is more males making the music.

But I mean Pam Grier and Tamara Dobson, they were pretty unique, and it’s not like every film has a Pam Grier character. I think if there is any criticism of the films, it’s that there should be more empowered women. But those two are so powerful that they almost make up for the other films, because they are just unbelievable.

Yeah, imagine if Betty Davis had had a chance to do one of these movies, it would have been pretty crazy.

Sure, that would have been amazing...

Thinking about the legacy of these movies and their music, is there a particular reason that you thought now is a good time to bring out a compilation? Is there a particular aspect of this scene you are hoping to draw out?

I’m not sure that there is. Some of the records we put out, they fit in with current fashions or whatever. But I just thought, we are in a position at this point that we can present any different period



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in history, and present it in a way that people will hopefully respond positively. But it doesn't need to coincide with a particular current fashion, or whatever. I mean, what do you think?

I'm not really sure either! I guess one of the things I like about the way you guys have done this is about the package, with the extended notes. Angela Davis has talked about the fact that the only thing that survives of this period in black politics is the iconography – that people think of the Afros and the crazy outfits, and forget about the politics of it. And I guess it's nice having those notes to bring out some of those other issues about the production, and the representation, it's good to be reminded of that aspect of what was going on.

Yeah, I think that that is what it's trying to do. And there's really good, interesting stuff going on in this area, and people should look at it, it shouldn't be dismissed in the way that it has been.

Are you guys selling the DVDs through your shop? Are most of these movies now re-issued, and relatively easy to get on DVD?

Well, here you can get some of them, but in America you can get all of them. And that was one of the reasons I thought I could do it now, was because 10 years ago you couldn't see anything really. Now, if you've got a region-free DVD player, you can pretty much get any of these films, so I was able to see them in a way that I wasn't before. CD

Can You Dig It? The Music and Politics of Black Action Films 1969-75 is available through Soul Jazz Records.

Dirty Sound System have forged a reputation around the globe as music selectors extraordinaire, but have nonetheless remained under the radar in Australia. Guillaume Sorge is a man who cannot rest: as we exchange extended emails in a sporadic fashion while he is undertaking another new project in his home country France, it becomes obvious.

It's apparent from the start that Guillaume Sorge much prefers being involved in music rather than talking about it. He responds to numerous emails with succinct replies, no useless banter and straight to the point. Then days went by without a reply, sometimes a week or more. The picture slowly builds of how busy the one half of Dirty Sound System is: torn between gigs, party promotion, compilation projects and work as a sound designer.

Guillaume, with Clovis Goux, started the Dirty Sound System prior to 2001. "We were working together as music journalists, writing for several music magazines in France. We were also curating a website, with a lot of interviews and music mixes." They started to play DJ gigs around their home country in 2001 as music selectors rather than DJs, bringing an eclectic approach with the music they played. The pair adopted the name Dirty Sound System, with the "dirty" derived from a Georges Bataille book called *Le Bleu Du Ciel*, and not any other connotation you may have imagined, even as you are changing

compilation was just a way to do what we've done for years in a proper way, it was also a way to start getting involved in the music business with a will for creating a music label later," Guillaume explains. "We have no particular philosophy, we just listen to music everyday from various sources, and when we feel we have something new or different to contribute to the music community, we release a compilation. The first *Dirty Diamonds* series was more an eclectic and post modernist

"MUSIC, CINEMA, COOKING, ART... WE ARE NOT SPECIALISTS, WE'RE JUST ENTHUSIASTS, AND WE GET EXCITED WHEN WE DISCOVER SOMETHING NEW."

statement, and the new ones are more focused on particular themes."

There is no room for elitism though, as most of the tracks selected for the compilations are still widely available. They do try to shine their spotlight on underrated and forgotten tracks though. Using music that is still available on other releases does produce an inherent problem: licensing. Guillaume explains there will always be issues with the licensing of some songs. "It's always a struggle to clear the tracks

DIAMOND SELECTOR

your internet security settings on your computer to view their website (www.d-i-r-t-y.com).

They can never be pinned down to one style, spinning everything from house, electro, and free jazz to spacey disco, acid house, krautrock, sunshine pop, folk, rhythm 'n' blues, and music soundtracks. They perform at numerous venues, clubs, private parties, festivals and after shows from Miami to Copenhagen, Spain, Sweden, Portugal, Germany and even deep in the French countryside. "We basically try to mix instantly danceable music and more obscure stuff, we also try to avoid 'big bangers', but there's no rules, DJ mixing is really about living the moment." Guillaume adds they've played at Club Transmediale in Berlin, Basel Miami, Sonar Festival in Barcelona, Blogger's Delight in London, Club2Club in Torino, Edgar in Istanbul, the Astropolis Festival in France, and their bi-monthly residency at Social Club in Paris, earning much respect for their DJ sets, making them an in demand DJ crew around the world. It's this eclecticism that has filtered through as a common thread in everything they do, and has led them to expand their ideas more as musicologists and music historians.

This led to their first compilation release in 2003, *Dirty Diamonds*, followed by a further volume on *Diamondtraxx*/Discograph, showcasing a mix of old music, obscure dancefloor tracks and rare pop un-classics with no style, genre, or era distinction. "Releasing a

we want to tracklist on our compilations," He admits. "We start with around 35 tracks and end up with less than 20. Making a coherent tracklist can become a real nightmare as we pay a lot of attention to the order of the tracks and the space between them." This hasn't gone unnoticed, as the artists contained on the compilations seem to like what they do. "We have received some great feedback from the involved artists so far, and the new compilation has been easier to assemble, as people in France tend to know more about the way we work now."

This leads us to the recently released fourth compilation for Dirty Sound System, hot on the heels of *Dirty Space Disco*, released on Tigersushi. *Dirty French Psychedelics* is released on their own label Dirty in conjunction with Discograph, and on first viewing the cover artwork it's obvious a lot more love went into this release. It just looks right, part classic '70s psychedelic art, part Salvador Dali. It's obvious Clovis and Guillaume think about the presentation of their compilations excessively, from the luscious artwork, the common musical thread weaving through the compilation, to the sequencing; everything has to flow, everything has to be just right. They have killed the misnomer that the French have never released innovative, original music, and with this compilation they have shared a collection of songs that have a rich musical tapestry, that sets a mood, not necessarily

**“WHEN WE FEEL WE HAVE SOMETHING
NEW OR DIFFERENT TO CONTRIBUTE TO
THE MUSIC COMMUNITY, WE RELEASE
A COMPILATION.”**





genre specific psychedelia.

As Guillaume explains, it's more about a feeling the music evokes, not a set sound standard. Some people may not believe Brigitte Fontaine to be psychedelic, but listen more closely to 'Il Pleut,' and you might agree. This is the effect the duo is trying to achieve. Their compilations are a jumping-off point to a whole new world of musical experiences for the listener, introducing artists such as Dashiell Hedayat, Nino Ferrer, Jeanne-Marie Sens, Alain Kane, Francois de Roubaix, Jean Jacques Dexter, Bernard Lavilliers, Cheval Fou, Ilous Et Decuyper and Karl Heinz Schaefer.

With all of this musical archeology, it seemed to be a natural transition to the series of *Dirty Edits*, their very limited 12" vinyl

gained a much wider release, through the notoriety of being affiliated with a large name such as Adidas.

Guillaume and an ever expanding crew of co-workers, collaborators and friends now contribute to their blog, *Alain Finkelkrautrock*, offering its readers a cultural snapshot of the contributor's interests and passions, covering topics from a broad range of subjects and influences. The common thread of musicologist/historian/culture vulture returns, emanating through everything they do. It seems so effortless and natural, almost like a kind of blueprint they have consciously developed, but I wondered if this was the case, or something that has naturally developed over time. "It's totally unconscious, it's just the way we approach things that interests us. Music, cinema, cooking,

"WE BASICALLY TRY TO MIX INSTANTLY DANCEABLE MUSIC AND MORE OBSCURE STUFF, WE ALSO TRY TO AVOID "BIG BANGERS", BUT THERE'S NO RULES, DJ MIXING IS REALLY ABOUT LIVING THE MOMENT."

releases featuring some of their favourite tracks re-edited for the dancefloor and snapped up around the globe by discerning DJs and music fans. Such was the demand, that you blink and they're sold out. Being a totally underground project, only small numbers were pressed up - usually 1000 copies - with only a couple of the series having an additional 500 repressed.

The project managed to stay under the radar of most music press, as Guillaume explains. "The edits series was more an undercover thing." While recently searching for Volume 5 of the series - containing the best re-edit of the series in my opinion, 'Kismet' by Amon Duul II - it turned up for around \$80, and that was before postage! It won't last long either, even at that price. That is the level of demand for these rather special records. Luckily for the music consumer, they have kindly released two compilations of the best tracks from the 12 volumes pressed to vinyl, but even the CD compilations have become sought after as only limited numbers were ever released.

A friend of Dirty Sound System, Pilooski, was asked to produce the re-edits. "He's a friend and a talented producer close to us," Jorge explains, "When we decided to re-release some tracks on vinyl, we asked for his support, and asked him to edit them, as we're not producers. We chose the tracks and validated them before he did the edit work." Pilooski has been involved in the project ever since, and Guillaume adds, "Pilooski is also a member of the duo Discodeine, who are on our label (www.myspace.com/discodeine), they fit nicely into the Dirty Sound System family."

The re-edits haven't totally gone unnoticed by the mainstream though; Adidas contacted them with enquiries on the re-edit of a particular song. I asked Guillaume how this unlikely event came about. "We released this edit of 'Beggin' by Frankie Valli & The Four Seasons, Warner have the rights on it, they [Adidas] loved it, so we decided to release on a larger scale. When Adidas decided to use it for their advertisement they didn't have the separate parts of the edit, so they called Pilooski to rework it for their video." Subsequently the single

art... we are not specialists, we're just enthusiasts, and we get excited when we discover something new. The blog is a way for us to share with the world."

Share they do, and since the end of 2006 when the blog was first established, they have happily shared their mad love for b movies (or as Guillaume adds "z movies") and obscure music, with the assistance of close friends Cosmo Vitelli, Charles Hagelsteen, Pilooski, Emmanuel Plane, Laurent Fetis, Midnight Mike, Marco Dos Santos, Krikor, Eva Revox, Elisabeth Arkhipoff, Gwen Jamois and the Divine Carole. The blog has also become the natural home for the Dirty Sound System archives, containing previous interviews and mixes and a wealth of other information.

As we draw to the end of our email exchanges, it all becomes blindingly obvious when at the 11th hour, Guillaume fires off the final email simply saying "I have a new project: www.12mail.fr", and that's it, that's all I'm left with. Some research later shows that it is indeed a new project, and one that has obviously been consuming much of his time. A gallery space, 12mail is situated in Rue Du Mail, Paris. Curated by Guillaume, he has been busy making waves on the streets of the city showcasing the astounding work of past editions of Sang Bleu magazine, beautiful photography, mesmerising tattoos, and art worth seeing hung on a wall.

As usual though, Guillaume doesn't seem to be content with just that - there's the after party he has arranged for the launch, and an exclusive CD for the guests. Guillaume makes an event out of everything he's involved with, and this is what makes it special: from the compilations, the reissued gems of forgotten music history, through to the art and use of DJ culture to cement everything as an event worth attending. So much thought and passion is injected into all these things, and we should all sit up and take notice. **CD**

Dirty Sound System's *Dirty French Psychedelics* is available now on Dirty, or on vinyl from Born Bad Records.

SLEEVE REVIEWS

HEATH KILLEN

I THOUGHT I'D DO SOMETHING A LITTLE DIFFERENT AND LIST MY TOP TEN AUSTRALIAN ALBUM COVERS. I DON'T THINK THE DESIGN WORK IN THIS COUNTRY GETS ENOUGH RECOGNITION - WE'VE PRODUCED SOME REALLY INCREDIBLE SLEEVE ART, AND THIS IS MY TRIBUTE TO JUST A FEW OF MY FAVOURITES.

THE PRESETS
BEAMS
(JONATHAN ZAWADA)

This is one of my favourite sleeves of all time. It's just brilliant and is obviously the result of one of those great creative unions where the band and designer are completely in sync. *Beams* is a pretty great album, but the artwork really takes it to the next level. Jonathan Zawada is absurdly talented. When I first saw this cover I was struck by how fresh and original it seemed. From the the hair-metal inspired typography to all the strange, ornamental artefacts - there's this otherworldliness to it that's so appealing. Conceptually it's weird and unexpected, and somehow it's perfect for the band. I love the subtle references to earlier EPs and singles too - like the skull and the Mexican wrestler. Very clever. The cover for the album's evil twin *Apocalypse* is pretty great too, keeping almost the same composition but trading white for black, and antiques for occult paraphernalia.



CROWDED HOUSE
WOODFACE
(NICK SEYMOR)

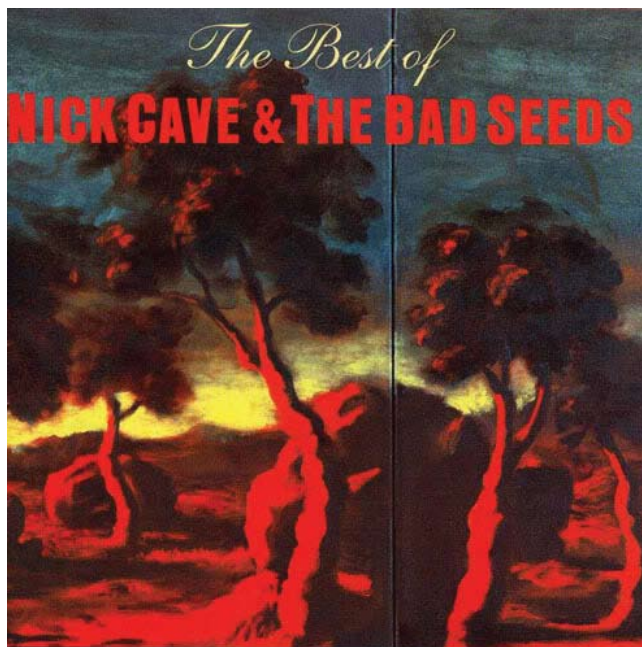
All of Crowded House's studio albums are illustrated and designed by bassist Nick Seymour. I find that many artists who venture into design don't really have great typographic or layout skills, but Seymour has it all down. His handmade titles are one of the things I love most about Crowded House sleeves. I chose this cover because it's just so strong and iconic - a literal 'woodface' perfectly designed to fit into the square album



format. Behind the face is a night sky, and there's a lovely contrast of texture and colour between the two. Also it looks a little bit like Chewbacca.

ICEHOUSE
 MAN OF COLOURS
 (IVA DAVIES & ROBERT KRETSCHMER)

This was my favourite record as a kid. I owned it on tape, vinyl and CD. The cover features a very simple illustration of a man holding three coloured flowers. Besides the band name in the top left, and the album name in the bottom right – that's all there is to it. I think they've used Futura for the band name and the album title is handwritten. Minimalism is a hard thing to get right but this is right on the money. A great album and an iconic design – which translated beautifully into all three formats.



NICK CAVE & THE BAD SEEDS
 THE BEST OF NICK CAVE
 & THE BAD SEEDS
 (TONY CLARK)

My favourite Australian band. This cover is taken from a series of paintings called Myriorama by Tony Clark. It's a stunning depiction of the Australian landscape – the blood red trees, the stormy sky behind them. It's perfect way to represent the band's career at that point with its combination of danger and beauty. Typography is nice too. I came very close to using *Abattoir Blues* for this one, which is an amazing record with an exceptionally beautiful cover. The painting on this one is just exquisite though.

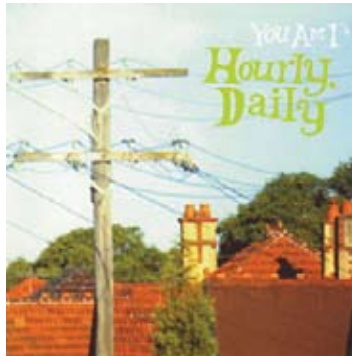
GRAND SALVO
THE TEMPORAL WHEEL
(MARK GOWING)



Mark Gowing is one of the best designers in the country. He's in a class of his own. Mark runs the label Preservation with Andrew Khedoori from 2SER, which is where this Grand Salvo album comes from. Gowing does all the photography, artwork and design for the releases. This one in particular is quite stunning. The custom typography, the obscure little objects – just beautiful. The cover features a shuttlecock, a rabbit foot, a little twig and what may or may not be a small block of hash. They look like objects you might find at an musty old antique store and it suits the album perfectly – very pastoral, very light, and very pretty. I urge everyone to check out the label because it's full of gems like this one.

YOU AM I
HOURLY, DAILY
(SIMON ALDERSON)

I haven't really listened to this band since high school, but their first three albums were definitely on high rotation back in the day. I believe *Hourly, Daily* is a concept album, taking you from early morning till late in the evening on an average day in suburban Australia. The cover illustrates this perfectly, depicting a common scene from Australian life: a

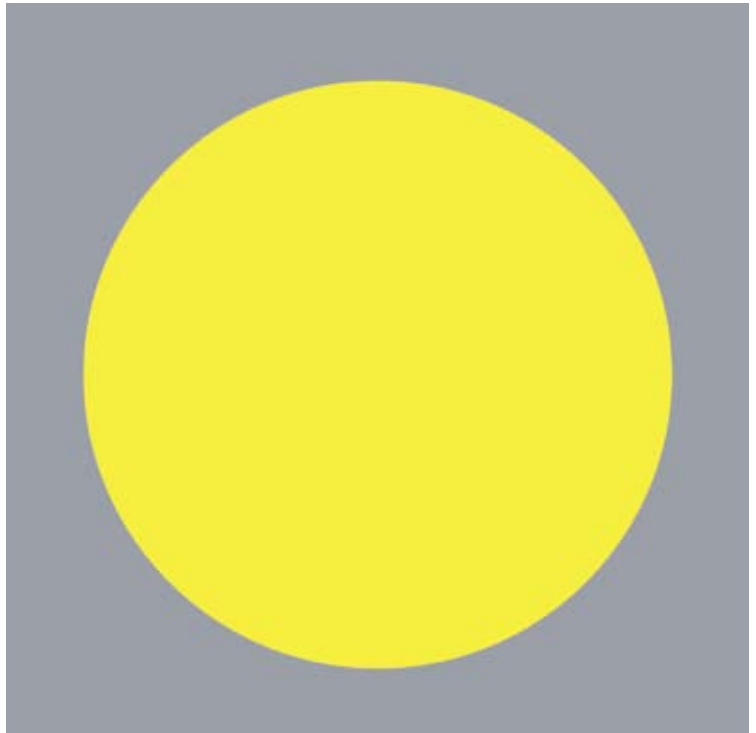


weather-worn telegraph pole sanding before an endless sea of red roof tiles. I think the Love Police do most of You Am I's design work now, but Simon Alderson produced some brilliant work for the band. His retro type work in the top right corner is perfection. All the covers that Alderson designed for

You Am I have a strong blue note/jazz influence – this one in particular reminds me, at least typographically, of *Lush Life* by John Coltrane. The cover was changed for the US/International release which I think is a real shame. While the international cover is nice, this album is about the Australian experience and this cover reflects that so beautifully.

REGURGITATOR
UNIT
(THE SHITS)

I think this cover won an ARIA for best artwork. It's a bright yellow circle on a silver background. Perfect. The cover was designed by a short-lived outfit called The Shits, which was Quan and Ben from Regurgitator and Janet from Spiderbait. I'm pretty sure Janet does all





the Japanese cartoon inspired artwork for Spiderbait too. Anyway it's a great cover, perfect for this '80s synth-pop inspired album and its cynical title. There's a touch of Peter Saville about it too.

THE AUSTRALIAN JAZZ QUARTET
(BURT GOLDBLATT)



This is quite an old record, but it's one that's only come to my attention in recent months. Designed by the late great Burt

Goldblatt, it's got that indescribable jazz sleeve feel to it. So much of design for jazz is about pure form and in this case we have the repeated motif of a herd of kangaroos bounding across some invisible landscape. I love that it's so uniquely Australian, but that it's done in such an abstract way that it's not jingoistic or cheesy. The almost entirely black and white design is punctuated by the band name, set in a chunky red slab serif. Delicious.

BIG HEAVY STUFF
DEAR FRIENDS AND ENEMIES
(MARK GOWING)

Big Heavy Stuff pretty much disappeared after this – which was released back in 2004. It's another Mark Gowing cover and it features a very simple and very striking use of Akzidenz in all capitals, with pink ink printed onto cardboard. Design-wise it's quite utilitarian and looks like it could have been pumped out by a machine on a factory line, but the choice of colour and stock make



it look and feel handmade. This is one of the things I love most about design – it's all about the choices you make, such as the choice of colour and stock. These might seem like small matters but these are the things that can make the difference between great and ordinary work.

THE AVALANCHES
SINCE I LEFT YOU
(BOBBY DAZZLER)

When this album came out, it created a commotion like no other Australian album had for a long time. I think these guys can take a huge amount of credit for expanding our profile on the international music scene. The cover, which features two over-full lifeboats braving unfriendly seas, expands out to reveal more boats, more ocean, and the sinking ship that they have presumably come from. It's an incredibly strange choice for this album, but this choice adds yet another level of mystery to the already enigmatic Avalanches. Placed quite perfectly in the bottom centre of the cover is the band name and album title, all set in the lovely and incredibly rare Tasmin Bold. And of course the wait for that elusive 2nd album continues.

CD

CYCLIC SELECTS

TIM RITCHIE

TIM RITCHIE WAS A SCHOOL BOY WHEN DOUBLE JAY STARTED (THE EARLY, AM BAND VERSION OF TRIPLE J). HE WAS THE ONLY ONE HE KNEW WHO LISTENED TO DOUBLE JAY. IT WAS AN ESCAPE FROM TOP 40 RADIO AND AN ENTREE INTO THE WORLD OF NON-COMMERCIAL MUSIC. HE LOVED IT AND USED TO LISTEN TO THE RADIO AS MUCH AS HE COULD. THEN WHEN HIS FAVOURITE PRESENTER WASN'T THERE ANYMORE, AND HE WAS RUNNING EARLY FOR THE SCHOOL BUS, RITCHIE RANG THE STATION TO TELL THEM HOW TO DO BETTER. THE NEXT DAY HE PRESENTED THE DOUBLE JAY BREAKFAST PROGRAM AND HAS BEEN SEARCHING OUT NEW MUSIC FOR RADIO EVER SINCE.



THE POP GROUP Y (1979)



I had enjoyed the mayhem of the punk scene, but musically, it wasn't that deep or ultimately challenging. Then I heard Y. It was a sonic assault different from anything that I'd ever heard. The label of post-punk avant jazz was slapped on it, but it was production as an instrument that caught my ear. Intentional distortion, over the top effects and reggae rhythms along with Mark Stewart's lyrics and vocal style spun me on my ear. Reggae legend, Dennis Bovell produced this gem for 400 pounds (after a 4000 pound advance from EMI), and it was rumoured

that On U Sound master, Adrian Sherwood sat in on the recordings – I asked him about it and he just gave me a smile. It was a life changing moment – seriously, my life changed and I found that my ears opened to jazz and improv in a way that they previously hadn't. No one bought the record, but many claim to have owned it. Seek it out!

THE GANG OF FOUR ENTERTAINMENT (1979)



1979 did see more than its fair share of stunning debuts, but the Gang Of Four's *Entertainment* hit just at the right time to appeal to any of those who wanted some pretty solid rock, those who were

into the punk/funk sound and the disenfranchised youth who thought that Thatcher was a fuck (the latter found much to cheer about in the egalitarian statements in most tracks on this album). And it sounds so good, still does. And when I hear solid drumming and heavy bass with a distorted guitar from a new act, I'd love to tell them to have a listen to the tightest rock act I've ever heard.

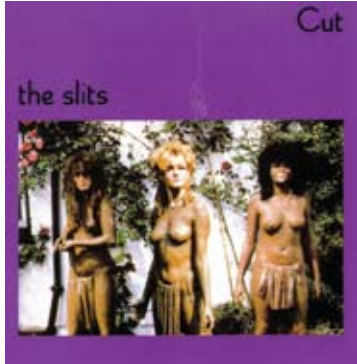
KRAFTWERK THE MAN MACHINE (1978)

There's nothing I can say about Kraftwerk that hasn't been said. This, their seventh album, is the perfect summation of their work ethic, their sound and their philosophy of music. Beautiful simple melodies with the message being in that simplicity of sound and lyric making for a timeless comment on perfection. Kraftwerk are the fathers of hip hop and electro and will always be referenced as a pivotal act for contemporary music and production.



THE SLITS
CUT (1979)

Yes, back to 1979, and there were many more great albums from that year,



but girl bands of the 70s did not have anything on the Slits, sure Siouxsie was great, but she wasn't a girl band, same

with Polly Styrene from XRay Specs. And the reggae influence mixed with the post punk sound and a really great hand at making street pop music has this album as a killer. Great harmonies from girls that couldn't really sing and a sense of the moment that may not carry 30 years into the future, but I'm listening to this album as I type with an idiot grin from immense aural satisfaction. I'm sure it is still a killer!

SEVERED HEADS
SINCE THE ACCIDENT (1983)

Google Severed Heads for a history of the band, I just want to say that this album moved them (really just Tom Ellard by this time) from a noisy difficult thing to a noisy intelligible thing. The harsh loops are still there, but there are soft synth lines as well. Ellard vacillated between claims that Severed Heads was a joke to a smirk indicating he thought



that it was great music. This album is the critical point from when the sound went from inaccessible to the all too familiar trait of trying to get a larger audience through adopting a more accessible sound. This album straddles the fence and delivers something that is a standout in music generally and an indication that Australian players are equal to the world's best.

B A L M O R H E A

ALL IS WILD, ALL IS SILENT

"GORGEOUS, DYNAMIC AND EMOTIVE"
 — PITCHFORK

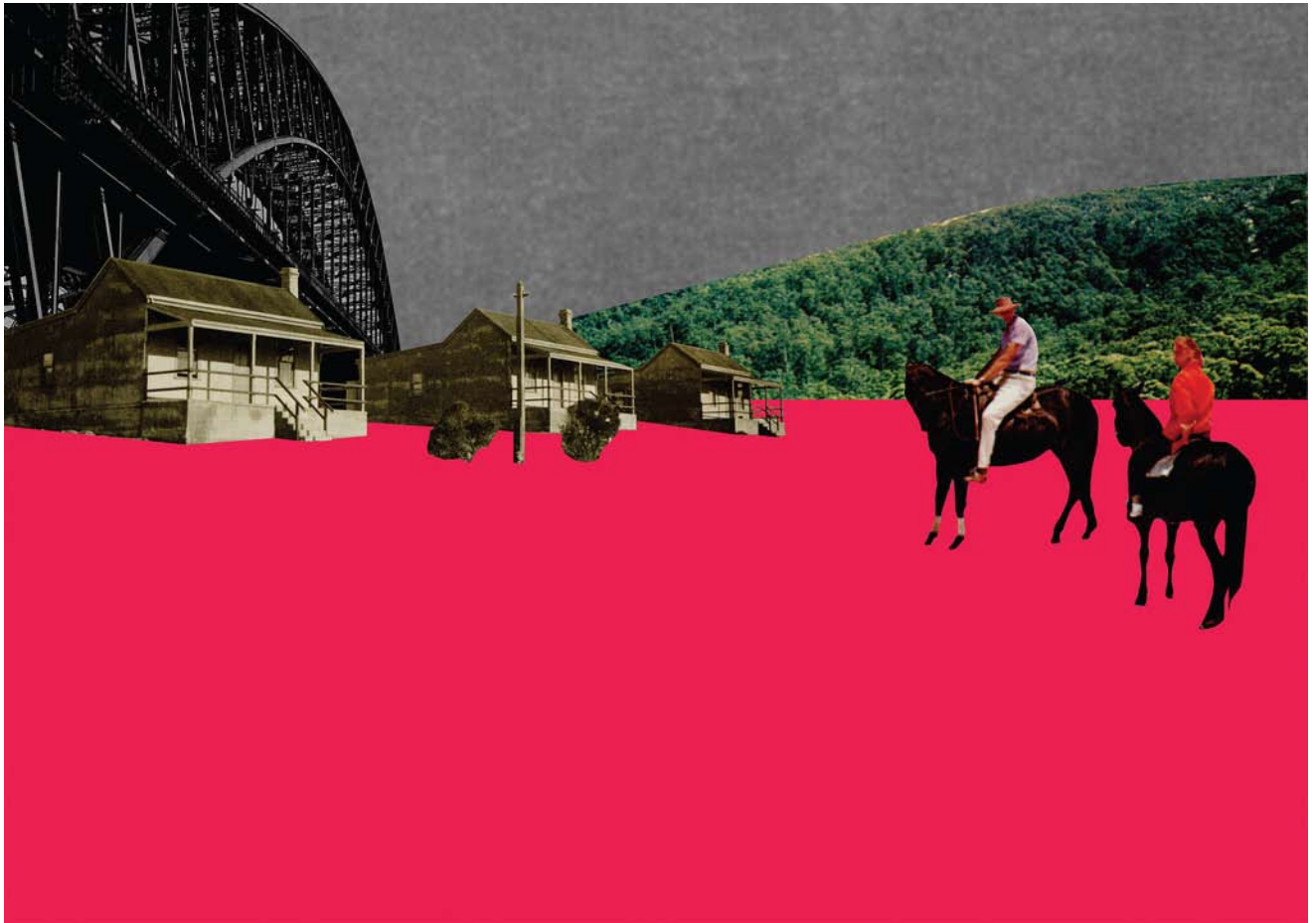
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