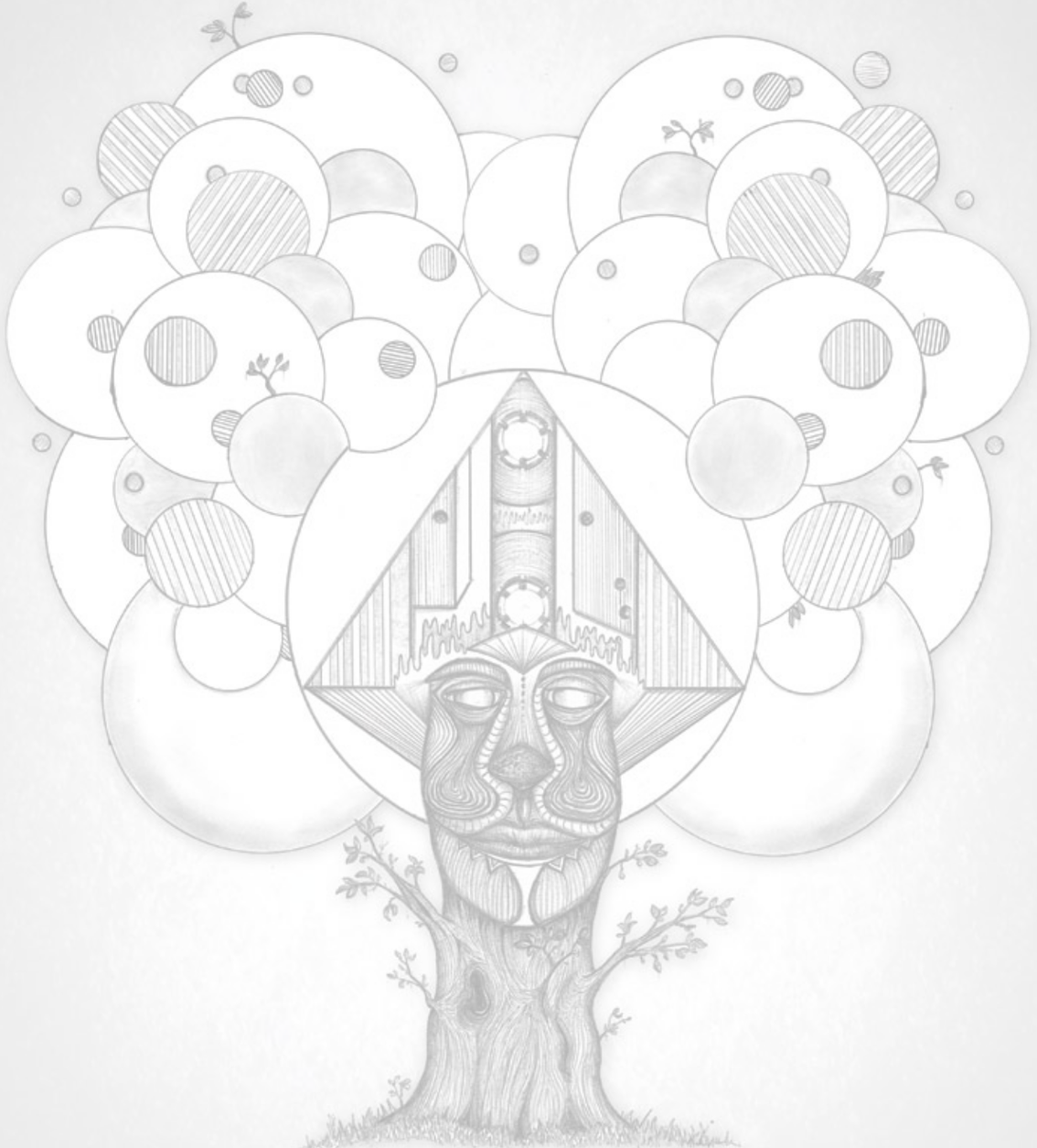
Cyclic Defrost



Cyclic *Defrost* Magazine

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Contents

Editorial

Superficially speaking, Cyclic Defrost 26 is dedicated entirely to Australian artists. The point feels moot though, because it'd be a stretch to flag any of the musicians contained within as archetypically Australian. In our domestic critical climate that almost invariably favours the imported over home grown, it is easy to forget how healthy our scenes are, and more difficult still to identify the (always present) national idiosyncrasies they contain.

Numerous pages in this issue are dedicated to a celebration of enduring visions and pursuits. Clan Analogue's refreshingly argumentative history is traced by Chris Downton, while Andrew Tuttle follows Room40 (and Cyclic Defrost contributor) founder Lawrence English through a history of that label. Elsewhere, Alyssa Critchley provides a snapshot of a struggling Sydney underground, while Jennifer Moses explores a positively healthy one in Brisbane.

Cyclic Defrost would also like to extend our condolences to the friends and family of Adam D Mills. Adam sadly passed away on May 21. He was a contributor to Cyclic Defrost and founder of the Sound&Fury label, an endeavour that focused strongly on Australian experimental music right until the end. He will be missed.

Finally, make sure you check out Cyclic Defrost online for a wealth of new reviews and exclusive coverage from Sonar Barcelona 2010, including photos and a web-only interview with Nosaj Thing. Enjoy.

Shaun, Lex, Matt
Editors
Cyclic Defrost

Gentleforce
Local
by Peter Hollo

A Sacred Space

Eli Murray seems bemused at the buzz around his work at the moment. He is initially self-effacing about the prospect of being the cover artist for *Cyclic Defrost*, but as the results show, his modesty belies a tremendous artistic confidence and creative spirit.

This confidence is also exhibited in his music as Gentleforce, which arrives in the form of *Sacred Spaces*, a fully-formed set of wide-screen electronic compositions, released on Feral Media in May. Prior to releasing this album, Eli was well-known in Sydney's music scene for his DJing and promoting in the drum'n'bass and dubstep worlds.

Eli is an acute listener, a quality which manifests in his highly thoughtful and evocative music. As a kid, Eli's parents observed his interest in musical instruments and tried him out on piano. But at that age, his reaction was one of boredom.

"I couldn't really see the beauty in it yet, it was a chore," he says, even if he was constantly listening to music throughout his school years. "It was all cassettes lent to me by older people. I got handed all kinds of stuff. I do recall around Year 7 or 8 was when I got rave tapes for the first time, and metal stuff, and some of my first hip-hop experiences were listening to the likes of Public Enemy. When I think about it now, all the stuff I listened to had to be extreme.

"My first 'club' experience was age 18 or 19," he continues. "I went to Sublime when it was in Pitt Street. It's funny talking about Sublime these days because it's such a commercial, mainstream club. [But] that opened the floodgates into dance culture and all that comes with it. I was making a lot of cassette and CD compilations, so I got into DJing with a passion for sharing music. It wasn't to play out in clubs or whatever, it was just enjoying that – just mixing at home. I bought decks, a mixer, closed the door and learnt to beat match for a few months. Then I played house parties for a few years which was good because it got me a lot of experience playing different systems, and having idiots shout at you, 'Play this, play that!'. When I finally got to a club it was a nice system and easy to hear, but still nerve wracking. I do remember going, 'Wow, this is so much easier than some shitty house party with a hundred kids screaming at you!'"

> "When you start to worry too much about production, all the magic of making music kinda leaves, becomes [too] analytical."

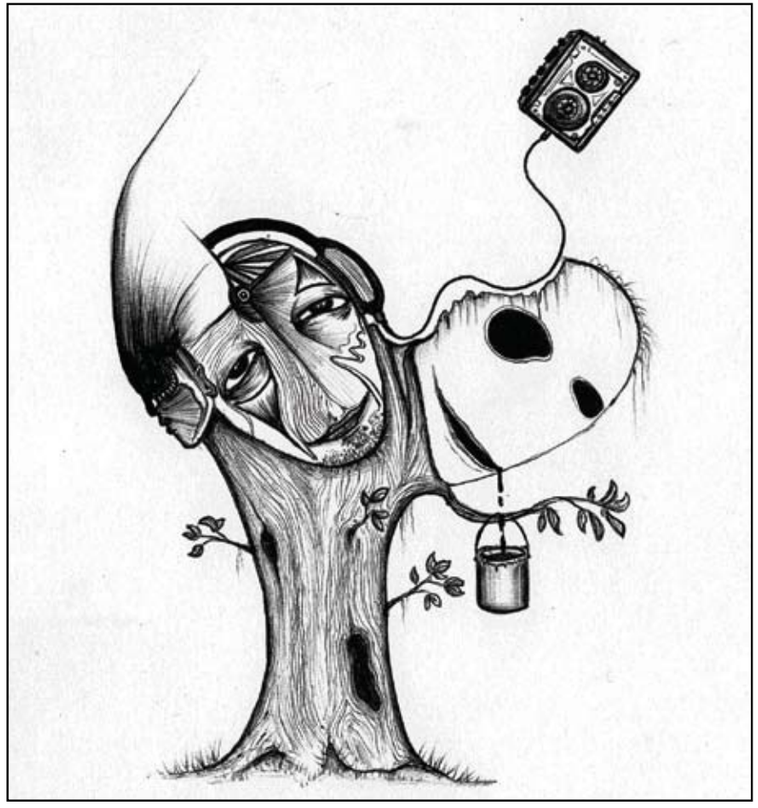
Eli was also attracted to the creative aspect of DJing. "At first I just learnt to mix house and drum'n'bass, and that was easy to learn to beat-match, but I realised with the slower tempos it's a lot harder to mix. Then I got some mixes by Coldcut, DJ /Rupture and DJ Spooky, who were doing these vast, eclectic mixes, and that blew me away."

As a professional DJ, Eli's early years were spent in the club – making his name doing drum'n'bass sets. It was, as he puts it, "a good, friendly scene". But on the side he was being invited to do more eclectic sets – his real passion.

"I was into too many styles, so I spent way too much money on vinyl. I lost interest about five years ago in buying drum'n'bass. I was playing other styles, and I got into dubstep around then – Tempa, Horsepower etc. I had a small group of friends who were into it, particularly my friend Scott (aka Kodama), and he was online every week buying everything. Most of the early stuff on Ghost and Tempa was only vinyl, and limited runs, but Scott would get all these and put on little parties and play the stuff out."

Their passion for dubstep led to them putting on a night called Submerged at the Abercrombie Hotel in Chippendale, as the Southern Steppas crew. Starting in December 2005, these culminated with a show in March 2007 at which dubstep legend Mala (from Digital Mystikz) played.

"That happened because of a few crews; the VOID guys and Farj & Paul Fraser who run Garage Pressure. It was huge and really positive. We were really pushing dubstep and other bass music.



We'd still play Planet μ and other weird electronic stuff, and for the early sets we'd get a friend to play straight-up dub, to give it a kind of 'This is where it's from, this is where it's at now' dynamic. They were low-key Thursday nights. There would just be 50 people, but they'd be loving it, and we would be too.

"Not long after the Mala show, I kind of burnt out – because it was free, I was putting money in just to hire the system, and I couldn't really pay the DJs much, but it was still fun."

Eli hails from Sydney's Northern Beaches; an area that lacked a live music scene in 2003 when he and his friends first wanted to put on gigs. "There were a few decent clubs that we could hire, so we used to put on a night called Rebellion (rebelling against the mainstream of surf-rock there).

We had a good group of friends, including the Underlapper guys who were into electronic music as well, so we'd still get a decent turnout."

Rebellion ran for a year or so, and they began playing dubstep during that time.

"When I pulled out, Damien from VOID had just come back from overseas, and the scene was just exploding – now with VOID they just pack those nights out. I hardly ever go there any more because – it's good, you know, great sound system, dark room – but it's just bangin' all night."

Eli is more likely to be found at Index, a sister night to VOID, at which his preferred strain of techno and deeper dubstep gets to be played. "I've gotten to support all my favourite producers in that scene like 2562 and Scuba and Headhunter."

Eli's approach to his own music is clearly influenced by his journey through different genres.

"With drum'n'bass in particular everyone is focused on production, production, production – it's all about the latest gear, how clean and big your sound can be and how much compression and all that. I think maybe what was appealing to me about dubstep was, here's this bunch of guys just making bass music again, making it simple, making this stuff that was kinda lo-fi, but keeping it simple. It was nice and refreshing to just hear a few elements – bassline, kick drum, a woodblock and a sample. There's all this space again, and it's warm, and not focusing on production as much.

"Now of course it's become like that as well (big aggressive production), but that's what has that special place for me, those earlier years, those 12-inches and all those producers like Mala & DMZ and Skream and Benga."

Following this discussion of clubs and DJing, it's rather interesting to hear that the Gentleforce album came out of a desire to never hear club music at home. "Coming home was just wanting to hear nice stuff – not just electronic music, I'm into experimental electronic and downbeat stuff, but I'm also really getting into folk and blues and a lot of rock stuff. Stuff like Pan American, stuff on Kranky.

"When I started to take writing music a bit more seriously, it was [after realising] I wanted to play music you'd want to hear at home. And that wasn't going to be club music, it was definitely going to be something more beautiful, something warmer. So there are a few beats on the album, but I didn't ever want them to be the focus – those things are hidden, or sit in the background.

"I always like the idea of beats being something that just carries the song rather than being the focus. But saying that, I'm starting to think I'd like to make some stuff that people could still dance to."

In fact, recently Eli collaborated on a work with dancer Robyn Wilson.

"The track's called 'New Ground', and was kind of a breakthrough for me (hence the name). I wrote the track in one day, and I got lost in it – it goes for 10 minutes or so. One thing for me: I write in the morning. I love getting up as the sun's coming up, having some breakfast and coffee. I feel inspired then. I started at 7 in the morning and finished at 5, I hadn't eaten or anything. It was one of the first tracks I'd done as a collaboration, and that's one thing I really want to get into – whether it be a live performance or film and soundtrack stuff. I've done a few short pieces for documentaries and short films for friends, and I'd love to do more of that in the future." (A special free download of this track can be found with the online version of this interview.)

> "A pop song's really nice, but then you hear a piece that really moves you, and it's almost like you can't describe it; it's something special, divine or sacred, almost a spiritual experience."

Despite a long-term love affair with music, and much experience playing other people's music, it was with a spirit of independence that Eli embarked upon writing his own music. "I've always been afraid of being too influenced by other people's production or music making, or wanting to make it sound like this, or the EQing or production side to sound like that."

Starting with the software Reason, Eli moved on to Ableton Live after winning it in a raffle when Robert Henke (aka Monolake, one of the main developers of the software) made an in-store appearance in Australia.

"I've picked up a few mags and read about compression and EQing, but really it was just me learning how to use Ableton. The hardest part of making this album was the mixing, though. That was the most unenjoyable part. When you start to worry too much about production, all the magic of making music kinda leaves, becomes [too] analytical.

"I've got one or two projects coming along, but one is trying to write music without worrying about the mixing thing. There's this whole cassette culture coming along now, and I think that's really nice: not worrying about the production, just being creative and then letting it go – whereas this album was being creative and having fun, but getting to a point where it's 'Oh, I've got to worry about how it's going to sound now'."

So in the future from Gentleforce we can expect "sound pieces, drone and ambient pieces, tracks that can go for half an hour. I want to do that, as well as doing shorter versions – the next album as Gentleforce could be songs for radio, and my other stuff could be sort of half hour pieces."

The album's title points to something central about the way Eli went about creating the tracks.

"The name was a reference to many things, but particularly the specialness of music and the sacredness of it. Everyone's experienced music in that way – a pop song's really nice, but then you hear a piece that really moves you, and it's almost like you can't describe it; it's something special, divine or sacred, almost a spiritual experience.

So it's referring to my intimacy and specialness in writing music, and spaces being physical spaces I've actually been to – but also spaces that might not exist, beyond the physical, creative spaces.

"That was the reference with *Sacred Spaces* for me – each of the songs on the album were really intimate parts of experiences I've had, trying to capture an emotion or a feeling and putting it in a song.

"With this album I've wanted to make an album where when you listen to it it's kind of a positive thing. I found that really challenging because there's a lot of dark music out there, and it's kind of easier to make dark music than to make people uplifted without being too cheesy."

Art has gone hand-in-hand with music his entire life, through drawing with mates in high school back to cartoons and comic books in primary school.

"I remember going to the newsagent on a weekly basis to buy comics, and cartoons like Ren & Stimpy and Akira had a profound effect on me at the time. In high school my art teacher introduced me to Surrealist painters like Salvador Dali and James Gleeson, this opened my

mind up to new ways of approaching my art as well as using my imagination as the canvas. Musically at the time I was hungry for new sounds and I had a few older friends who introduced me to a lot of great music. I would often meet up with my friend Jonothan, who was in the year above me at school. I would go over to his house and he would always be playing music I had not heard: albums like Pink Floyd's *Piper At The Gates Of Dawn* and Miles Davis' *Bitches Brew* were heard for the first time there and just blew me away! We would often put on music and just draw for hours, not saying a word. I feel now, stronger than ever, that music is a big factor in the way I create art.

"I think I have always been into line drawing as it's a style of art that can be very instantaneous and direct. I use pen all the time and this can be a blessing and a curse as sometimes I find myself hesitant to commit to a image as it is permanent and cannot be erased once drawn. Although I dig nothing more than just zoning out and not thinking about what to draw, I let my mind just wander. That is when I feel I draw the best."

In 2009, Sydney post-rock back Underlapper came up with the idea of releasing their next album in a limited vinyl edition evenly split between 5 different artists. Knowing some of Eli's artwork, they asked him to contribute.

"It was only recently that I've wanted to [start drawing to music] again, particularly with the line drawing, because it takes hours. But I love it – it's a real meditative thing, and for me my favourite thing in art in general is when you're not thinking about it and just letting it come out. So I started practising that again in the last year, and Greg (Stone, from Underlapper) asked me to do a cover. I was just blown away – people like the Sopp Collective were involved, and I was just, 'I just draw!'.

"It felt a bit funny, but when I met everyone it was just such a lovely bunch of people.

It worked out well because there wasn't a lot of colour – everyone just used black, white grey, and I don't use a lot of colour in my art.

"I said to Greg, 'Give me a copy, because I only want to draw to your album' – I really wanted to capture that on the page. I love faces, and what I'm trying to do with the Underlapper cover is trying to capture a person's face and what's going on there – an emotion or some aspect of that person – and trying to capture that by drawing on them and around them. The drawing on the Underlapper is of a friend of mine, James de la Cruz (who used to be in the Avalanches). I took a whole lot of photos of him when there was a rainbow out, and I got him to stand with his mouth open – to have something coming out of him. The cover extends that, to show him, but also all this stuff coming out of him."

"In terms of influences at the moment my biggest influences would be David Ellis, Brendan Monroe, Meredith Dittmar and Australian artists Dylan Martorell and Cailan Burns. I'm also really influenced by band poster art from the '60s, '70s, when it was all drawn – lots of lines and shapes, I just get lost in that kind of art. I really love the whole hand created approach to art they were doing then. Painting, drawing and collage art was really prominent and there were many super gifted artists that did so much cool line drawing and paintings. I'm into '60s & '70s rock, obvious bands like Pink Floyd, and then a whole lot of other psychedelic pop bands. I briefly looked at that before I did the Underlapper, and I thought I really want to draw the font for this!"

The cover for this issue of Cyclic also features a hand-drawn font and a face, if rather less identifiable than James de la Cruz. While not exactly collage, the background is created from photographed layers of textured paper, pieced together on computer. Many Cyclic readers will be taken by the cassette and its invocation of youthful mixtape swaps.

"I am definitely fond of mixtapes. Creating and receiving mixtapes is really special; the fact that someone has put time into making it. I find the idea of mixtapes a bit nostalgic personally. I also love analogue sound. There's a warmth to tapes that I can't resist! That tape hiss! Analogue equipment features in a lot of my artwork.

"When I look at Cyclic Defrost I think of vinyl, and it's such a hands-on thing. I still think vinyl artwork is the best way of viewing music and art – CD is so small! I think I'll always buy vinyl because of that. I have this ongoing idea of building a massive collection; I know we're going to have kids one day, and I'd love to be able to play music to a child still in such a physical way. To go, 'oh, here's music', and it's not just an mp3 that they've never touched. Hopefully that physical aspect of listening for other people won't die."

Gentleforce's *Sacred Spaces* is available from Feral Media. **CD**

Horrorshow /Spit Syndicate
Local
by James D'Apice

One Dayers Crew

Take a group of close friends: rap music types. Two are signed to Melbourne label Obese Records, and two to Sydney's Elefant Traks. Add a fifth guy, sit down for a chat, and try to figure out how five men who share a love of graffiti and Sydney's Inner West came to be at the forefront of a movement.

They all arrived lovably late, the whole 1day crew. The swoon-inducing Nick Lupi followed by his Spit Syndicate colleague Jimmy Nice. Man-mountain DJ Joyride beamed a wide, welcoming smile as he approached the table, with Horrorshow wunderkinder Solo and Adit close behind. We were at the Sultan's Table in Enmore and about to chat about anything and everything. What fun. Or so I hoped.

Things began clumsily. "I'll record this whole interview on my phone", I announced. "Don't worry about me missing anything when I'm typing. Everything you say will be a data file soon enough. We good?"

The response was hesitant, and it came from Adit, a man known for his beat making expertise and keen ear: "are you sure that's going to be able to record everything, man? This is a pretty loud restaurant."

The four other faces stared back at me; all made the same polite enquiry.

Strike one. At this rate I had to hope they were going to like the double-sided question sheets I'd printed out for each of them.

A few minutes in and we're cooking with gas. I made a joke about my profession that went down with Joyride almost as well as it did in my head. Adit and Solo were consideration incarnate. And Jimmy Nice ripped on Nick Lupi for being "ethnic" because he offered our photographer the plate of dips.

It's quickly becoming apparent that the appeal of getting these five together goes beyond the social. Unsurprisingly, they all came off as intelligent. The shock was just how reflective they all were; and how much thought they managed to give to questions asked seconds beforehand.

The first question of the night was pretty easy: is rapping about getting girls a self-fulfilling prophecy? Not for the last time that night, knowing laughter filled the air.

> "We're doing what kids all over the country are doing: writing songs in our bedrooms and recording it at home in the closet… It's nothing unique."

"The myth has to start somewhere – chicken and egg. I find myself saying this all the time, actually. Maybe I need to rap about it more, though", added Solo. "Yeah, you don't rap about girls enough", chirped Nice.

The laughs were unanimous and immediate but – interestingly – Solo wrested back control of the situation and returned to the question, trying to make sure I left with something substantial. It's a classy move, the move of a gentleman. Solo's concerned that this interview was in danger of developing into a boozy school reunion.

Solo put an old quote of Nick Lupi's to him and asked for his response. When it arrived, it was eloquent and intriguing. It concluded simply, "girls occupy a lot of time in my head."

What's everyone's pick of the dips, then?

"Hummus", for Joyride.

"Carrot", for the Elefant Traks signed Horrorshow duo.

"Way too early to call. I haven't even done combos yet", says Jimmy.

"Shit. I wasn't even thinking about that. Combos is advanced", says Solo, more than a little awestruck.

"Don't overdo it. But explore."

Laughter again.

Preparing for this interview, I had been into the idea that Spit Syndicate, Horrorshow, Made In Japan, Sarah Corry, DJ Joyride, The Accidents and anyone else who could be tarred with the 1dayers brush were a part of *something*. I'd spent the better part of the time between entrée (assorted dips) and main (assorted pide) throwing the word "zeitgeist" out there and no one was biting. This was partly because I defined it badly ("it means time ghost") but chiefly because those 1dayers present saw themselves as part of something broader.

Adit explained. "We're doing what kids all over the country are doing: writing songs in our bedrooms and recording it at home in the closet… It's nothing unique. We're doing what kids everywhere have been doing for years", he said.

Solo clarified, "there are two levels to what you are talking about… We are making our contribution to music and hip-hop as people who have been fans and interested in it in a long time. With us specifically and our grass roots thing going on, it's all on the back of this large network of people in Sydney and particularly the inner west; kids connected through schools and friendship circles and we have come up in that.

"That groundswell of support has given us the platform to take it on a national level and get involved in labels and that sort of thing. I don't know about a zeitgeist, though."

The pide arrived. Nick Lupi looked up as the rest of us had started eating, "we'll know about

> "Girls occupy a lot of time in my head."

that zeitgeist in ten years, man. Too early to call shit a zeitgeist."

As Lupi and friends have become more well known, those of us who've looked on have begun to get a sense of who's who in the 1day world. Just as Raphael is cool but rude, and Michaelangelo is a party dude; so is Solo the emotional ladies' man, and DJ Joyride the funnest person there has ever been. I was intrigued to find out whether the men ever got a sense that they were being pre-judged in this way and, if so, whether having a stereotype precede you was evidence of increased popularity – to be no longer a person, but an idea.

The suggestion was met with less than universal acclaim.

Changing tack, I put a specific question to Jimmy Nice. Jimmy is sometimes quiet but never shy, he raps about James Dean, and exudes cool. He's also particularly warm and friendly in person. Only one line of inquiry would do.

Jimmy, how many times have you lost your phone?

Laughter, and wry smile from our hero.

"Yeah… Every six months I have lost a phone."

"Was this your iPhone in the pool?" asked Adit.

"Yeah, I was there when he jumped in. Funny shit", Solo corroborated.

"I haven't lost something since Australia Day. Something important. I haven't lost any of the big three since Australia Day: wallet, keys, phone."

With genuine, tangible warmth Solo consoles his colleague. "James can be hard to get a hold of. The way I like to think about it is that he does his own thing and he does it like a boss. Whether it's getting him to wake up on tour…"

"He's a maverick", Lupi interrupts.

"Maverick. Mel Gibson over here," pipes up Joyride, fairly silent through the night. Of course, laughter follows.

The chuckles are unsurprising for Solo: "I've never met anyone who's met Joyride and didn't think he was the maddest guy ever." "And he's complex", adds Adit. "I'm complex", confirms the big man.

"If you were stranded on a desert island with no board games or coconuts to eat, Dixy [Joyride] would be great. But he can't drink", says Jimmy.

Dixy hits back, "this coming from James 'what is this lighter fluid?' every time I pour you a drink? You're saying I can't drink?"

"He's a lightweight", says Jim.

"I'm not a lightweight. You can put in the article that I'm versatile", he says looking over at me.

The fact I'm writing an article for a magazine hangs in the air. I've got the back of a computer screen pointed at my five subjects and a photographer is searching for the right shot behind me. I'm tapping on the keyboard as I go, iPhone voice memos proving themselves entirely useless. As hard as I had hoped to just wind up our heroes and watch them go, the "question/answer" formula has ensconced itself.

Clearly, we needed a topic switch. A few weeks ago, Solo had been the subject of a "just for laughs" rap celebrity dating program on Sydney radio station FBi. It seemed appropriate – he raps about girls, they dream about him.

His take is different, though, and the only time Solo rankles is when I put to him that he's a sex symbol. He rejected it, just as he rejected "alternative" sex symbol and even my trump card: "reluctant" sex symbol.

"I don't see the correlation between being emotional and being a sex symbol. I look at the girls in the crowd and I think maybe it's refreshing or intriguing to some girls, maybe something they don't hear all the time in other rap music, maybe that's why there are girls at our shows. That doesn't equate with being a sex symbol. Prince was a sex symbol. I'm not Prince. I'm not Sting."

"Sting!? Prince!?", Adit is shocked. Once more, laughter.

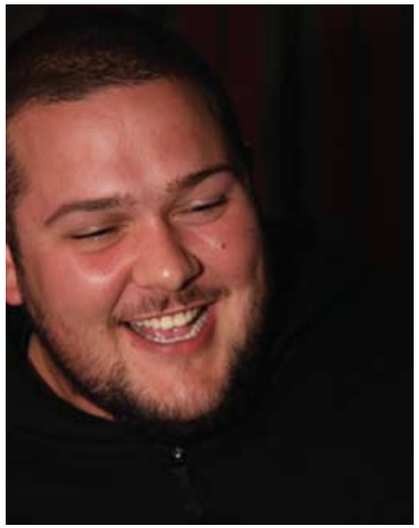
"Who's a sex symbol then, you fuckers?! Sting has pulled more bitches than you could ever hope to."

Lupi is too quick: "Robbie Williams."

"There you go", Solo concedes with a hint of frustration.

It's no lasting irritation. The bunch of convoluted, creative, lasting, joyous friendships across the table were not the type to hold a grudge or misinterpret a bit of playful mockery. If the term wasn't such a messy palimpsest, then the group could be a "Band of Brothers"; all looking ahead, trying to get something done. Together.

"If we couldn't do what we're doing, we'd find some other medium", explains Jimmy. "We haven't even reached where we want to reach.



"Some things have paid off, some things we have to work harder at. At the moment, we're just trying to help each other do well. There is enough room in what we're doing for everyone to do well. We're on to something good I think, as long as we can stay on track. We're moving forward."

No laughter at that one. **CD**

Solo: "Graffiti played a big part in the growing up of a lot of kids in my area… in a lot of ways what we do now with our music is an extension of that. There is a reason graffiti and rapping and hip-hop are part of the same thing. There are a lot parrallels in terms of getting up – as a graff writer your challenge is to get in front of as many people's eyes as possible. I sometimes look as music as a different way of getting up. Instead of holding down your neighbourhood with tags, it's a medium that can go anywhere without you having to be there to put up… It's like a big inside joke. I find that the same way in rap; on a sampling level and with quotes. If you work hard and pay attention and listen, you get to be a part of it; it's rewarding."

Jimmy Nice: "It's a different medium to music but the structure is the same. The act of doing graffiti when you're young and what came with it – what you were wearing, where you went, what you said – everything it represents outside of actually writing on something is fundamental… these days I can't go on a bus or train and not write. Music is not like that for me. I can go days without writing a rhyme. I can't go a day without putting up or thinking about the method of writing."

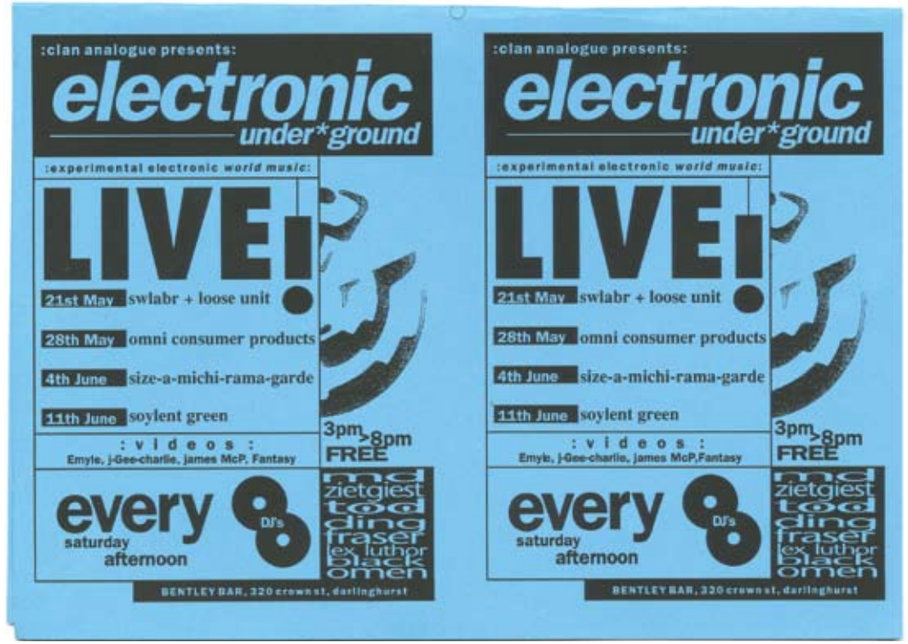
Analogue Soul: Clan Analogue Soul: Clan Analogue

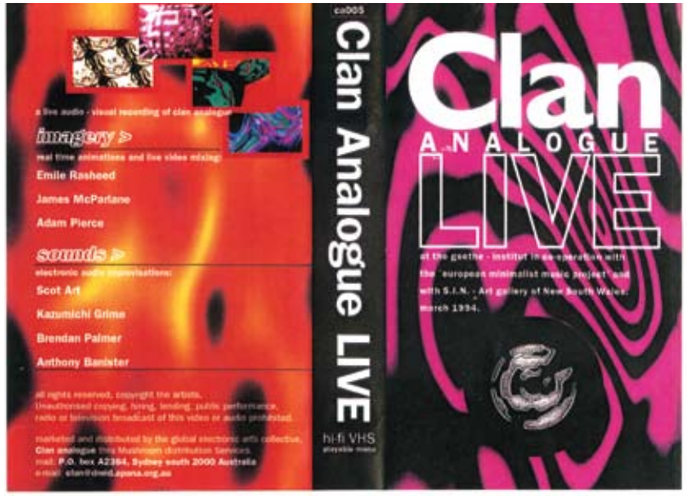
Clan Analogue retrospective
Local
by Chris Downton

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the Clan Analogue collective grew from its early beginnings in a Sydney apartment into Australia's largest independent electronic artist network, as well as a significant record label in its own right, with around ten albums and eight compilations in its back catalogue to date. At a time when local live electronic performers were still struggling to find switched-on venues, Clan Analogue provided an alternative to isolationist studio noodling, as well as a forum to exchange ideas, techniques and opinions that was previously missing amongst the then rock-dominated entertainment landscape. What started with a group of like-minded studio subversives in 1992 soon became a thriving, ever-growing nationwide collective by the end of that decade, with chapters in almost all major Australian capital cities and several Clan-affiliated acts such as B(if)tek, Disco Stu and Deepchild all enjoying considerable airplay on Triple J and RAGE. While new releases from the Clan Analogue label have been relatively sparse over the last few years, the arrival of Clan's long-promised *Re: Cognition* 2CD /DVD retrospective set sees the gears whirring back into action, as well as providing a fittingly extensive document of the collective's history to date. As well as two CDs respectively featuring a selection of classic Clan tracks and a collection of new remixes, *Re: Cognition* accompanying DVD presents a previously unseen documentary, the majority of the collective's videos to date and early footage recovered from the long-deleted 'Live At The Goethe Institut' VHS.

When approaching a history of the Clan Analogue collective, one of the first obvious ports of call is founder Brendan Palmer, responsible for conceiving the collective back in Sydney in 1992 with a few other people, and now responsible for running Melbourne's acclaimed Uber Lingua collective. In particular, I'm keen to find out whether he had specific priorities in mind for Clan Analogue from the outset.

"I had been building an analogue studio inspired by the studios in Europe and the USA by the artists (whose music) I was Djing at the time," Brendan explains. "In my teens, I'd caught the back of the acid house movement of the mid / late eighties, so was researching a number of those artists and finding many of the instruments very cheaply in Australia as the neo-analogue boom hadn't hit yet. For instance, my first 303s cost me an average of $75. Through this process I met many synth collectors of all ages, alongside vintage organ collectors, keyboardists in bands, an ex-submariner who kept lizards and snakes and composed mega-synthy goth music with his atonal singing wife, Pete from Newtown's music market. As I met more and more people I began to hear more and more music by people who weren't getting the exposure they deserved. I met Toby Kazumichi Grime, who I eventually formed the band Telharmoneom with on a train station because he had a Casio keyboard under his arm, and I walked up and said hello. Toby ended up being the most supportive person helping me get





Clan Analogue up and going, he did all the graphic design that pretty much defined Clan Analogue's image. I notice that much of the imagery featured on the *Re: Cognition* disc is from this pre-1995 period, even though most of the music featured on the compilation is (from) after then."

"About 20 people came to the first 'gathering', as they were eventually called and some of these formed the original membership of the Clan. I think only one person at that original meeting (Toby) is still involved in Clan Analogue, as the group evolved pretty rapidly over the next twelve months and other personalities started to dominate, as I started advertising in street papers and distributing posters and flyers promoting the monthly gatherings I was hosting in various places around Sydney. I worked in the UNSW Law School printing room at the time (encouraged to change the world by resident fellow, now East Timor president Jose Ramos Horta) and printed the Kronic Oscillator newsletter after hours when the head of the school wasn't watching."

"People power was the Clan's greatest resource, with most of the Sydney electronic music scene who weren't on the Volition label getting involved on some level," Brendan continues. "Clan Canberra started within a couple of months of the Sydney chapter, then the shortlived Brisbane crew. The Wollongong group was so small it ended up becoming the act Infusion. Melbourne started about three years in and grew into the dominant posse over the next decade. We even absorbed a copy-cat crew calling themselves The Collective, made up of mainly post-industrial bands. Clan had an 'anyone can join' philosophy, meaning everyone from the extremes of lefty punky electronic noise acts, and very polished and happier house music producers, to the New Romantic acts with guitars too (eek!) were in the group. Anyone who loved analogue keyboards and drum machines etc, basically. This set it up for some pretty full-on growing pains."

Founding Clan Analogue member Toby Kazumichi Grime remembers the early nineties in Australia being a particularly difficult time for homegrown electronic producers desperate to find live avenues, when most local venues were more receptive to rock bands, or perhaps, at a stretch – a DJ playing dance music.

"That period in time was especially interesting," he recollects. "The eighties had come and gone and we were in this odd crossover of post-80s EBM, late eighties Detroit techno and pre-rave era. I'd purchased and enjoyed tapes from the Cosmic Conspiracy label with bands like Distant Locust on them, but this was very much part of the avant garde underground for want of a better classification. I'd gone to many dance parties in the 1988-1990 period at places like the Hordern Pavillion and really enjoyed the atmosphere and energy. What was lacking was the live presence of electronic music – it was all about the DJ mostly and there was very little exposure of live electronic music to the masses in Australia. The perception of electronic music in Australia and particularly electronic music made by Australians was quite a grey area – it wasn't established in any way really. It had graced us in the mainstream on occasions, but as far as a reputable electronic alternative, there wasn't one really."

"Some of this attitude was compounded by the whole issue of identity in Australia, being that we prefer at times cultural influences from overseas, including music. Magazines like The Face were cultural bibles for the trendy sectors of Australian culture to namedrop one such observation, and I think we weren't so good at accepting homegrown creativity so much. Most venues thought it quite odd, the concept of 'live' techno / electronic music, and (their perception of it was) almost novel, and at worst ignorant. To many, it was either DJs, rock music or pokies. The battle at this time being the rise of the DJ as 'rock star' and showing audiences that there was a body of people who wanted to perform techno and electronic sounds live in a club context. I remember odd conversations with people who had no idea of where 'techno music' came from... they'd see a bunch of us with an overzealous amount of gear and be rather confused, asking if this was how 'DJ music' was made."

"I'd found DJs like Jacqui-O inspiring," Toby continues. "He'd been running a wonderful night at SITE nightclub called Sensoria that focused on not so much DJ music, but music by 'bands' that I knew. His playlist would be littered with Nitzer Ebb, Cabaret Voltaire and many other bands that I found groundbreaking at the time. This is kind of where Clan Analogue fitted in my headspace, and me having a chance meeting with Brendan at a railway station whilst I was carrying a Casio CZ101 synth was great – it all just seemed natural. I was studying photography and sound at art school and always wanted to make music of some kind. He conjured up this wonderful concept of a collective, so as we were starting to make music together, it all just flowed from there. This all started to make a framework on which these ideas of live music to an audience could take place. I'd wanted Clan to be obviously fringe and alternative with its vision and aims, which it was really."

One early Clan Analogue member who vividly remembers the atypical nature of live electronic performance in Australia at that time is former B(if)tek member Nicole Skeltys, now based in Pittsburgh. "Somehow I found out about a Clan Analogue gig at the Australian National University, and people from Sydney like Atone and Loose Unit came down, along with local (Canberran) noodlers," she recalls. "It was my first exposure to 100% live electronica and I was completely blown away. One of those all too rare epiphany moments in your life where you suddenly know what your calling is, what you want to devote your life to. This was my tribe. I joined the collective when I was still with Area 51 (Skeltys' first indie-electronic crossover band), and later met Kate Crawford at one of the many little illegal forest parties that were happening at the time and we formed B(if)tek."

"I was attracted by the talent of the artists, and I also dug the collective vibe – the sense of people wanting to help each other out as well as themselves. It felt like an artistic movement, not just lone egos howling for their own recognition, but promoting an aesthetic and a co-operative philosophy that I believed in. But yes, labels wouldn't touch Australian electronica then, nor could you even get a gig anywhere. So, the fact that Clan put out vinyl and tapes, then CDs and also ran our own events so artists could perform anywhere, that was a great motivator to be involved."

The idea of co-operative creative enterprise as strength is something that's also echoed by Toby Grime. "The core ideal that really made Clan Analogue a fascinating collective was the way Brendan and other members were able to pool like minded people together locally and from around the country. The network of people that had started to get involved really made the whole 'collective' tag a reality that worked. It kept it going and kept it fresh and full of ideas. The music releases, live events etc were really just the physical aspect of those friendships and energy."

"One major feature was the manner in which a collective identity was capable of attracting interest across the generations. The age differences between members was quite extreme. There would be 18 year olds and 50 year olds all centering their focus on electronic music in all its forms of process, from production to live performance and recording. They all had this common interest that brought them face to face at meetings and events. This to me was a huge success, like a spinoff of the collective being able to bridge age differences, and with that bringing different generations of music making techniques and styles. This all added great depth to the network of people and culture of the collective. This is something you couldn't achieve through the DJ world, which is very much an age based focus."

> "[Clan Analogue] was a naïve construct of a middle-class North Shore kid, an apolitical united front liberating electronic sound and vision of all kinds"

While the growing membership of Clan Analogue proved to be a central source of the collective's strengths, the rapid increase in membership also brought with it other side-effects, namely the 'growing pains' mentioned by Brendan Palmer earlier on. "Lefty electro-punks and the semi-commercial house music producers were not being happy bedfellows," Brendan explains. "In the early days there were many more electro-experimental acts involved like The Family, who featured on the *Deep Three* EP. Lucas Abela, who started the Dual Plover record label came to one of the meetings and argued his way onto a Big Day Out lineup. My overly socialist 'anyone can join' approach ironically led to Sony Music-signed Southend (famous for being sued for sampling Juan Antonio Samaranch) getting on the fourth and final EP. I remember the guy from Southend being appalled that he had to pay to be on the EP (the EPs were artist funded). This pissed off people like The Family. I remember Scot from that act saying that "it's all about the love", as if featuring an artist signed to a major label undermined that love. He was probably right."

"Clan had no lefty agenda or deep desire to be commercially accepted," Brendan emphasises. "It was a naïve construct of a middle-class North Shore kid, an apolitical united front liberating electronic sound and vision of all kinds. Turns out there were humans involved too, which brought the dream crashing down to reality, leaving its committed core elements, mostly IT professionals with music as a hobby. Clan Analogue became known to the freaks in the Vibe Tribe as 'The Boffins.' As time went on, the demands on Clan were greater, with many opportunities on the table. Gatherings were less about randomly jamming on piles of synths, drinking beer and smoking weed, and more about forming an association with committees, etc. This did more to drive out the more artistically inclined, which I guess was inevitable. The Canberra crew were one by one moving to Sydney and gaining more strength with their in-built political nous."

Palmer would himself leave Clan Analogue in 1996 to found his own separate Zonar label, with his successor Gordon Finlayson going on to substantially reorganise the Clan's chaotic operations, to the point where the collective began to resemble a commercially viable record label more closely. During this period several Clan members such as B(if)tek and Disco Stu also began to receive substantial airplay on Triple J, resulting in greater mainstream attention being drawn to the collective's activities.

"I'd spent almost four years pushing this greater community motivated project and I guess even when you are young that can be quite taxing," explains Brendan regarding his departure. "I'd

intentionally created a bit of a monster and in the past I've referred to the experience as being like daddy to over a hundred children. I needed to take this ambition of reflecting the Australian electronic music scene on another level, so I decided to leave the Clan to its own devices. I started Zonar Recordings to focus on a group of selected artists from all over Australia who I felt were uniquely representing what was going on here, including artists from Adelaide (where Clan was never established) and Brisbane (where Clan had effectively collapsed). Unfortunately I had a near-fatal car accident that undermined the development of this new business, however in the time it was running Zonar Recordings released seven CDs and the Ali Omar 12" vinyl. All excellent quality productions."

Toby Kazumichi Grime also remembers Brendan Palmer's departure from Clan Analogue as representing one of the most significant turning points in the collective's lifespan so far. "When Gordon Finlayson took on a label managing role, it shifted more to a traditional record label ideal, so there were more releases and more of a catalogue of work. This was a good time for artists to get their music out. In some ways, things got more business-like with Finlayson and his organising. It was like the second stage of Clan in a way."

Given that the various former and current Clan Analogue members are now scattered all over the world, I can imagine that tracking them all down to obtain tracks for the *Re: Cognition* compilation must have been a formidable logistical exercise. When I catch up with compiler and current Clan label manager Nick Wilson via email however, I'm surprised to find out that it was exactly the opposite. "It actually wasn't that hard," Nick counters. "I put a request out to the Clan members' email list for everyone to nominate their favourite track from the back catalogue. Then I got a selection of trusted people to listen to the shortlist and vote for what they thought were the best. Then I had a final listening session around at my place with a few reliable buddies to get the selection finalised. Because we already had all the music on earlier releases, we didn't have to do much chasing up of people, other than for the remixes."

"I wanted to ensure that a wide cross-section of Clan Analogue's history was represented, in terms of different eras and different musical styles. I also wanted every single Clan release to be represented somewhere, whether as a track on the compilation, one of the remixed tracks, a filmclip on the DVD, or something on the download-only 'rarities' collection. I also wanted to focus with the first disc on acts that had gone on to make a name for themselves beyond their involvement with Clan Analogue and also on those tracks that had substantial radio airplay on first release. It's a 'Greatest Hits' compilation, after all."

"The idea of a Clan Analogue DVD had been discussed for quite a few years," Nick elaborates. "We were discussing releasing a *Re: Cognition* DVD, originally intended as a separate companion release. Martin K of Koshowko volunteered for the job of producing the DVD as he'd gained access to DVD authoring software through his work. He also had access to lots of nice camera equipment and contacts with film-makers, so he volunteered to put together a team of people to produce the doco."

Given that the *Re: Cognition* retrospective set represents the first physical release from Clan Analogue for a few years, I'm also keen to find out more about the reasons behind the collective's comparative absence from record store shelves in recent times. "Gordon Finlayson was keen to release a retrospective album in 2002 to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Clan Analogue," Nick responds. "However, there was some resistance at the time from board members who wanted to focus on releasing new music, so the idea went on the backburner for a bit. Someone suggested that we incorporate new remixes so that the release included new tracks as well as the old classics, so I revived the idea and tried to get it happening for the 15th anniversary of Clan Analogue in 2007. Unfortunately, we missed that deadline due to a few reasons such as distributors closing down and various other logistical problems. But now, it's finally out!"

"This is the first (Clan Analogue) release after a

> "If there's anything I think is missing in modern day Clan Analogue it is its previous motivations to aggressively find new members and forge new territory"

three year break, largely due to distributors closing down, which is probably related to the move away from physical releases in the wider music industry. We'll keep doing physical releases as long as the economics work. We see this release as a nicely packaged 'collectible' item in a 'box set' kind of way. Physical releases also give a certain sense of legitimacy to a release, elevating it above the level of demos uploaded to Myspace. They are also very effective for promotion. It is harder to sell physical product these days, but the CDs have also become cheaper to produce. We are certainly not neglecting the market for non-physical format releases, either."

With the second CD packaged in the *Re: Cognition* set centred around remixes of classic Clan moments by a cast of producers comparatively newer to the collective, I'm keen to ask Nick whether this was a deliberate, conscious attempt to bridge together the past and present of Clan Analogue. "Yes, as noted before, there had been some sensitivity about putting out a purely nostalgic release, so it was important that new artists could get involved and produce something for the release," Nick explains. "Several of the remixers on the second disc have not released anything previously with Clan, so it's great to get some new people involved. It's also a more idiosyncratic selection of tracks because it's based on the personal choice of the remixers. The B(if)tek track 'We Think You're Dishy' was requested for remixing by quite a few people, so we made that a competition where Nicole and Kate from B(if)tek chose the final selection. The runner-up remix by Bleepin' J Squawkins was released as an extra track on the EP we put out just before the album came out."

With a view to to this newer cast of Clan Analogue members, I'm keen to get Nick's thoughts about the future of the Collective. With many of the original conditions that acted as an impetus for Clan's creation back in 1992 now substantially altered with the internet and the crossing over to the mainstream of Australian electronic music, does he see the collective's ongoing role as having shifted along with the surrounding cultural landscape?

"There have certainly been a lot of changes since 1992," responds Nick. "However, there are some cycles that seem to recur, for example in the early 2000s the pendulum swung back towards rock, away from electronic music, at least in the mainstream. The collective functions as a means for people interested in electronic music to come together and collaborate on projects and discuss ideas. The umbrella of 'electronic music' is broad enough to enable a diverse cross-section of artists to become involved. There are also aspects of electronic music which are unique in the sense that there is an ongoing and rapid development of new music technologies and ways of working. The collective is therefore a valuable way to exchange knowledge, particularly between experienced artists and people just starting out."

Speaking from Pittsburgh, Nicole Skeltys also sees Clan Analogue's ongoing role amidst the Australian musical landscape as continuing to be a relevant one, even if her own direct involvement in the collective has lessened in recent years. "Well, we never made any profits from our releases, it was always more a series of art projects and trying to cover costs, so unlike other indie labels which have been going under because of the massive devaluing of recorded music and rampant download piracy, Clan can still chug along with its original vision of supporting and encouraging artistic innovation and beautiful bleeps. That said, I hope the 'Analogue' never leaves the Clan, meaning I hope the spirit of using the old machines live and for recording does not go away, given that so many bands now just use pre-fab soft instruments and programs and laptops to produce music. The effect is often pretty but empty – the analogue machines have souls."

Finally, it's left to founder Brendan Palmer to offer the last word on where the future perhaps lies for Clan Collective, eighteen years from its formation in his Sydney flat. "I think the Melbourne crew who do most of the administrative tasks of running Clan Analogue nowadays have done a good job of keeping the quality levels at a high standard," he suggests. "I'd like to see them do a release with all new members. However much, I know and am friends with most of the people featured on *Re: Cognition*. If there's anything I think is missing in modern day Clan Analogue it is its previous motivations to aggressively find new members and forge new territory. I guess that's the early 1990s me speaking. Without them actively recruiting new members and trying to push the boundaries of their environment they are simply a label, an avenue to release music under a moniker that has a credible reputation forged on being progressive and active in the past. It's their right to do that seeing they are the people who've stuck by what is nowadays a 'brand' and kept it alive. Clan is still greater than the sum of its parts."

Clan Analogue's *Re: Cognition* 2CD/DVD set is available now through Clan Analogue / MGM

10 Years Later: The Room40 Story

Room 40 Retrospective
Local
by Andrew Tuttle

Since 2000, Brisbane sound collective ROOM40 has released over seventy recordings, curated and programmed over a hundred events in Brisbane, Australia and internationally, and has made the occasional excursion into visual art and large-scale commissions. From small beginnings as an outlet for releasing works by label operators Lawrence English and John Chantler, ROOM40 has since become recognised for an innovative and genre-expanding catalogue, with defining works from Brisbane and Australian artists including Robbie Avenaim, Robin Fox, Lloyd Barrett, Chris Abrahams, Leighton Craig, and Erik Griswold seamlessly nestling with those internationals including Taylor Deupree, Tujiko Noriko, Luc Ferrari, Marina Rosenfeld, Tim Hecker and Keith Fullerton Whitman.

ROOM40's catalogue is one that reflects careful curatorial consideration by English and Chantler, with a broad focus on innovative and challenging (English: "A lot of the ROOM40 records are challenging to some degree, depending on where you come from") sounds that take in drone, minimalism, abstract electronics and glacial melody. One of the primary elements of the label's oeuvre is a dedication to the ROOM40 aesthetic, which has a constant base in deep listening and minimal design, whilst encompassing a broad church of minimalist and drone based parameters.

Reflecting over the past ten years, English's stated belief in the primacy of a clear linear path for ROOM40 as a label is quite evident, with a specific aim to make it "like a catalogue or an archive, so that when you see everything up on a shelf it all makes sense together.

"All of my favourite labels and publishers and magazines, the sum of their parts contributes to a great body of work," English says. "Ideally, you could also come back to something later and it then makes sense. It's the whole vision of the label that it's not just singular, there's a weight about it. When you look at other labels like Touch as a model, they've been doing it for twenty six years now and there's something that ties it all together, and that's important as you could listen to something on Touch from fifteen years ago and it'd probably still be interesting. At the end of the day its curation - the best labels are curated labels, and the labels that I love feel very curated to me."

> "I see ROOM40 as some kind of feeding, somewhere between low-key artist run (initiatives) and those that operate above it, with everything cycling around together."

A sense of timelessness and of mutual respect is another important factor for ROOM40, with English explaining that "every record we put out I have a love for, and a respect for the artist as well. Some of the early ROOM40 recordings, for example the Erik Griswold record or the first DJ Olive ambient record, I can put them on now, and while its been almost ten years I can still be totally into it and transported by it in the way that I was the first time I listened to it. The Buoy record still sounds as relevant as the most recent one, the Triage record, the better part of eight years later.

"I've always said ROOM40 is a friends and

family label, for people whose work I genuinely love and respect, and I want to see them do well. Someone like Robin Fox, for example, I have the utmost admiration for this very confident and considered artist, a very nice guy, and an amazing scope of work. I want to see him become as internationally recognised as he should be - and its the same for a lot of the others who I strongly like. With Ben Frost, I'm really happy to see him getting the attention he's getting for his records. Steelwound is a record of his from the early days, and I put it on recently (as we're going to do a vinyl version of it late this year) and it's still amazing. I still feel that feeling I did when I first heard it. I'm very conscious of supporting people that I really believe in, and that's actually one of the main reasons I started the label: to have a platform to present this work and to get people excited about it."

Like the vast majority of record labels, from the tiniest short-run bedroom cassette label to a multinational conglomerate, ROOM40 has had to negotiate the rapidly changing realities of how listeners engage with and approach recorded music. "We've got to come up with interesting ways to present music," Chantler believes, "in ways that show the love for it and celebrate the idea of giving it some time. In the interim that will probably mean some lovely vinyl editions."

Rather than taking a hardline approach against downloading, English accepts that whilst there's something lost with the ubiquity of digital music, those who are interested in smaller labels such as ROOM40 may have a better understanding of the context of the original intended product - even if the reality of the absorption of the music doesn't necessarily correlate with this.

"I think it is a challenging thing, and the way ROOM40 is approaching it is that there's two audiences. There's an audience that wants to listen to the music, and some of them will decide to buy it. At some point there's a give and a take. I think that there's a lot to be said for music getting out there. You've got a digital audience, but at the same time you've got your artefact audience that loves the tactility and the design and the art object. Increasingly ROOM40's moving towards producing things like that, whether multiples or editions that are different."

Whilst still having a financial bottom line affected by the continuing trend towards accessing music for free (whether legitimately or otherwise) ROOM40 has outlasted other labels of a similar stature by developing a strong 'brand': by gaining the trust of their target audience along the way. English reiterates that the ongoing movement of the label; the creative freedom given to its recording artists; its positive working relationships, specific visual aesthetics and an understanding of the working methods of sound artists all contribute to the continued sustainability of ROOM40.

"What's interesting is that the strength of the work and artists carries much further, and we're lucky to have been doing it long enough and to be interested enough to find ways that work for audiences. What we want is that the records are going to be interesting in ten years time. Each album tends to have a concept or a theme or a quality which separates it from releases someone else does. The records we've done have tended to be the more esoteric albums, a chance for experimentation or reconsideration."

Over the past decade, running in lockstep with ROOM40's recorded catalogue has been approximately one hundred various live presentations. Primarily presented in Brisbane,

but with additional forays into other Australian cities as well as in the United Kingdom and Japan, ROOM40 events are complementary to the label catalogue, whilst having creative license to showcase a broader spectrum of genres and forms of music.

Perhaps the most recognisable ROOM40 presentation series to date has been Fabrique, a semi-regular event encompassing 40 performances in various spaces of the Brisbane Powerhouse between 2001 and 2009. Fabrique was arguably ROOM40's initial footing in gaining the attention of Brisbane audiences, bringing together international artists Keith Fullerton Whitman, Tujiko Noriko, Greg Davis, Fourcolour, Ulrich Krieger, DJ Olive and national and local artists such as Seaworthy, Oren Ambarchi, Robin Fox and Leighton Craig in a series that maintained a dedication to the exploration and advocacy of unusual and perhaps hitherto unknown sounds within an accessible environment.

A former art deco power station turned disused squat turned revitalised flagship arts centre, the Brisbane Powerhouse proved to be a most appropriate conduit for these formative ROOM40 events. The peculiar nature of the complex, with its black box theatre spaces, cavernous open spaces and various intimate rooms, hasn't always coalesced neatly with the broad spectrum of sounds presented by ROOM40, particularly in early on when both ROOM40 and the Powerhouse were still finding their feet.

Early performances were held in the Spark Bar, where potentially transcendental sounds were overpowered by the chatterings of the influx of the well heeled nouveau rich residents of the suddenly trendy precinct. Elsewhere in the complex is the Visy Theatre, a more formal seated environment which English describes as "a great venue for concerts with 150 people in them, [but] not great for any kind of intimacy". Whilst these spaces are still occasionally utilised for ROOM40 events, in the middle of the last decade ROOM40's interactions with the Powerhouse have been placed in more sympathetic spaces - encouraging careful listening with a parallel democratisation of sound art through inclusive, and largely free events. English believes that "the physical change of space has made a big difference" to the dynamic of ROOM40's events at the Powerhouse, and also other venues such as the Judith Wright Centre for Contemporary Arts and the Institute of Modern Art, both in Brisbane's Fortitude Valley.

The physical change that English speaks of is one of preferencing spaces with a flexibility - to bypass the 'standard' conventions and didactics of both institutional and 'rock' performance venues. "I'm very lucky to have these spaces. The spaces in a lot of ways speak to the music. They're not formal spaces, and once it broke out of the formal spaces something began to shift. When you sit people down in chairs in rows, it's a different vibe."

The final Fabrique event in February 2009 encapsulated the evolving approach to presentation by ROOM40. A lineup consisting of a Japanese free-twee husband and wife duo (Tenniscoats), a German post-punk icon (Gudrun Gut) and a rag-tag mariachi band (The Deadnotes) would be too incongruous, in most spaces, to obtain a sense of cohesiveness. But stripped of the austerity of academia and the dearth of subtlety at a pub gig, Fabrique embraced a rare middle ground – an engaging format that rewards careful listening and viewing whilst embracing the varying perspectives of a wider audience.

> "We're trying to get people interested in work that was previously thought to be inaccessible."

Since the conclusion of Fabrique other intermittent one-off events, festivals and curated series' have become ROOM40's primary focus. The Syncretism series, hosted at the Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Arts, and Mono, a long-running collaboration with the Institute of Modern Art, have become integral events within the Brisbane sound art and abstract music calendars. These events likewise feature a combination of international and up and coming and under recognised Australian and Brisbane performers, with a focus towards cerebral and close listening sounds of a wide variety.

On a superficial and possibly paradoxical level, Frankly!, a large scale collaborative project between ROOM40, Brisbane Festival and Someone Good, is possibly the label's boldest and riskiest move to date. Frankly!, with a tag line of 'It's a Pop Festival', reached for a far wider audience than previous ROOM40 events, the lineup melding label associates Tenniscoats, Qua, and Heinz Riegler, alongside artists the casual observer might not otherwise link with ROOM40 including a Peaches DJ set, Jamie Stewart (Xiu Xiu) and I Heart Hiroshima. The melodic sensibilities of Someone Good, the ROOM40 partner label English operates in conjunction with his wife Rebecca, were evident in the programming of Frankly!.

Someone Good came about organically out of an interest in championing recordings that didn't necessarily fit with the ROOM40 label ethos, but could be linked on a secondary aural level. "It wasn't anything premeditated. It came from hearing records we loved that didn't make sense for ROOM40 and responding to that. Bec was the driving force behind it."

While sharing recent musical discoveries with English over breakfast on a crisp Brisbane winter morning, his passion for music and sound of all stripes shines through. Whilst the ROOM40 label necessarily employs a more specific curatorial sonic approach to releases, the ROOM40 events provide an outlet for the broad spectrum of sounds influencing English to be linked. "I think it's about listening. What I like about some of the acts at Frankly! - Nikasaya for example - is that for me it doesn't feel disposable. I can listen to Nika's voice and be completely transfixed in the same way that I can find a field recording of a seal in Antarctica to be transfixing. There's a quality in the act of listening that really takes you somewhere."

ROOM40's trajectory since 2000 has at many stages neatly dovetailed with the evolution of sound art and music within Brisbane. The past decade has seen Brisbane emerge as one of Australia's leading communities for creating, facilitating and attending sound art and experimental music. A broad scene has flourished, driven by promoters and collectives including ROOM40, OtherFilm, Audiopollen, Consume,

and Making Hey! in conjunction with interstate groups such as Heathen Skulls, dualpLOVER and What Is Music?. The limited options available to Brisbane audiences at various points over time, caused by external mitigating factors including governance and available spaces, has produced a community which is quite open to experience and experimentation when opportunities arise.

Reflecting the growth of South-East Queensland, state and local governments have intermittently poured money into Brisbane's creative communities over the past decade, with the development of several major sites including the Gallery of Modern Art (2006), Brisbane Powerhouse (2000) and the Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Arts (2001). ROOM40 has tapped into these resources and created ongoing relationships. "Brisbane still feels like its growing," English reflects. "Even at a major institutional level cultural institutions (such as GoMA) are popping up on the map here. That's exciting, and a major change. I look at what's happened at the Powerhouse, and it's quite the same."

Despite initial best intentions, the programming in Brisbane's 'cultural' and 'entertainment' precincts has become increasingly middle of the road as it has become more recognised. Increased rents and competition has marginalised smaller commercial and not-for-profit establishments in Fortitude Valley, West End and the CBD, whilst funded venues seemingly prefer commercial ventures and 'box ticking' programming rather than their riskier stated aims. Official support for Artist Run Initiatives is rarely sustained beyond an official launch, and strict Liquor Licensing regulations and a bureaucratic push towards emphasising specific 'precincts' for live performance result in commercial enterprises and nightclubs thriving, at the expense of spaces cultivating creative, non-mainstream methodologies and practices. The reaction to this reflects a distinctly Brisbane-esque cultural insurgency, with Artist-Run Initiatives continuing to promote world-class art whilst drawing a strong base of attendees to reclaimed spaces.

Part of the importance of ROOM40 in Brisbane in 2010, English feels, is as a conduit to remove boundaries between established organisations and underground arts. "I see ROOM40 as some kind of feeding, somewhere between low-key artist run (initiatives) and those that operate above it, with everything cycling around together. Hopefully we provide an opportunity to play quality shows, and for people to interact with internationals that they might not get to otherwise interact with."

> "It's the whole vision of the label that it's not just singular, there's a weight about it."

As the largest growing capital city in Australia, Brisbane's status as both a thriving metropolis and an incidental location of transit benefits its sound art scene, in that artists have further scope

to present their work in a relatively inexpensive city. The passion and motivation of curators such as ROOM40 has transformed Brisbane into a cultural hot spot where 'high' and 'low' art, genre and audience have developed as a discerning unit, largely uninhibited by external and ephemeral trends. English concurs. "Brisbane in the past has been really good in terms of opportunities. In terms of performances it's a great place and there are lots of really good venues here that are very supportive, and we've been very lucky to have them on board. I think what Brisbane has afforded me and also ROOM40 is time to work on it, which I may not have had in another place."

As a Brisbane ex-pat living in London for the last several years, it is fascinating to gain Chantler's perspective on the growth of the city from an external perspective, as well as the wider Australian experimental music and sound art communities. Chantler's recognition of the innovative and idiosyncratic artists that Australia lays claim to is interesting to note, because indeed, through labels like Editions Mego, 12k and ROOM40, prolific Australian sound artists are often more likely to be more recognised for their work internationally rather than at home.

"There are some really fantastic artists coming out of Australia: Robin Fox, Oren Ambarchi, Chris Abrahams - each of them has something going on that is so distinct, so personal that it just seems a bit crass to lump them together in any kind of scene. My outsider view is that ROOM40 seems to provide a pretty crucial nexus in bringing good folks to Australia to play and has done a great job of creating a listening culture - in Brisbane certainly - [and] for some Aussie folks, we provide a platform to help get their sounds out into the world."

One facet of ROOM40's success in Australia and internationally is the increasingly central role that Chantler plays as the head of ROOM40's European operations. The Open Frame festival has expanded in the last few years to incorporate events in Brisbane and London. In an interesting parallel development to ROOM40's genesis in Brisbane, in London the label and touring organisation was influenced by appropriate performance spaces as much as any location specific sound, with London's Cafe OTO only recently emerging as a primary base of performances for ROOM40 in the United Kingdom. "In London the difference is that it is a much older city," English says, "but it's a much bigger one too - there's a huge population base there. To be honest the UK hasn't been one of Room 40's priorities at all until recently, until Cafe Oto (opened), and John having more time to actually put on events."

While discussing the established ROOM40 bases in Brisbane and London, the experimental

music and sound art communities in Australia's Oceanic and Asian neighbours both existing (Japan, New Zealand) and emerging (Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, China) are regularly mentioned by English as resonating with Australian abstract musics. In addition to ROOM40's engagement with the Asia-Pacific, one-off projects such as Lucas Abela's Rice Corpse trio with Chinese experimental musicians, and regular tours from Shoeb Ahmad of the Canberran label hellosQuare are consolidating creative relationships between Australia's closest geographic neighbours.

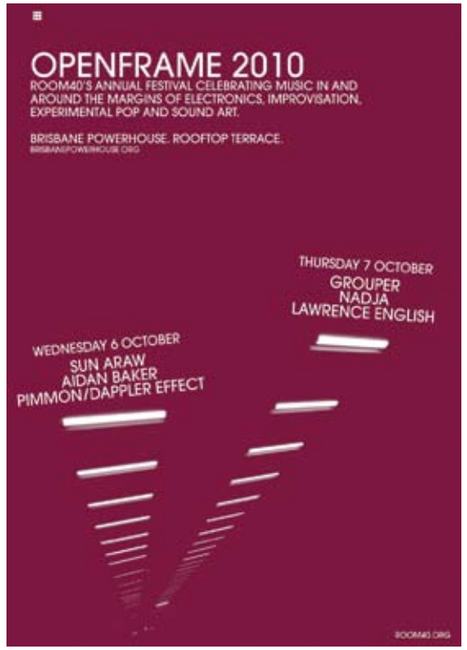
Some of the most enduring ROOM40 creative relationships occur between Australia and Japan, including musical collaborations between English, Chantler and members of Tenniscoats, as well as a trio project with Tujiko Noriko that has resulted in two successful albums and a series of touring performances. ROOM40's annual ninehoursnorth event is another reflection of English's interest in Japanese sound culture, with musicians including Noriko, Haco and Lullatone some of the acts performing to date. English's passion for Japanese sounds is obvious, with a list of recent interests including "the more experimental work that was circling around the 'Onkyo' movement, through to Otomo's Jazz groups and then of course people like Tenniscoats, Tujiko Noriko, Minamo, Akira Kosemura and the artists I've had the pleasure to work with - I think these guys each have very unique and appealing musical qualities."

The sense of a strong mutual admiration between Japanese audiences and ROOM40 as a collective is also highlighted in a practical sense for label operations, with English explaining that "when ROOM40 started, Japan was in fact the first place [internationally] we sold CDs - before anywhere else we had a home there, and I guess that may well have helped form the initial stages of the relationship we have now."

This early impetus is also reflected in ROOM40's Japanese sojourns, with the genuine and ongoing creative and personal understanding resulting in a constant performance aesthetic that ties together operations in Australia, the United Kingdom and Japan. English stresses the importance of ROOM40's 'friends and family' ethos in these situations. "It's really good having local partners as it makes such a big difference to articulate the message to the audience - particularly in Japan with the language barrier."

The visual design and packaging of ROOM40's recorded output and curated performance events has consolidated over the past decade to be an important signifier, with a monochromatic colour scheme, and sharp fonts creating a brand identity which aesthetically unites ROOM40's varied projects. Chantler and English both have a strong interest in visual art and graphic design, and create the majority of ROOM40 artworks. Chantler also describes the flexibility. Tthe level of input Lawrence and I have on individual releases varies," He explains. "There is a pretty tight specification as far as the font type and size, and the one-colour rule, but beyond that we're pretty flexible. Some of the folks we release - like say Ralph Steinbrüchel and Richard Chartier - are pretty fantastic designers as well as making great sounds."

Although tenth anniversary year celebrations, events and editions currently comprise much of Room40's happenings in 2010, both English and Chantler have taken the opportunity to reflect on the past whilst expanding the organisation to continue its relevance over the coming years. Chantler's ongoing interest in diversifying the



label to incorporate further British and European operations is obvious, as is following through on a passion for releasing ROOM40 editions on vinyl. "We're planning on a stack of vinyl to begin with. We're both fans of the format, its been a logistical problem up until now. Postage to and from Australia is a killer, but we've put in place the infrastructure for download-with-purchase to make it easier for people to get into, which means we can put effort into making a pretty deluxe release - HQ pressing, silk-screen sleeves etc - without having to worry about crazy shipping fees driving the cost sky high."

Later this year, ROOM40 is diversifying into the world of print publishing with Site Listening, a guided tour through a series of everyday sounds across Brisbane that allows the participant to engage with an environment through fresh perspectives. An avid acoustic ecologist, listener and field recordist, English says of the genesis of Site Listening that "it came about because I am constantly struck by how little people listen. I walk around most parts of the world and am just dumbstruck by the dynamic nature of everyday (and not so everyday) sound and I think if you tune in the ears there's a wealth of inspiration, beauty and oddness that can be experienced."

"In terms of Brisbane, I remember shortly after I met John Chantler we were making some recordings and I stepped out on his porch in Highgate Hill and it was quite late. You could literally hear the city like a choir - hundreds and thousands of little voices all uniting to make this epic drone. Air conditioners close and distant, trucks on the freeway, distant winds across tree tops...it was just such a compelling experience. Since then I've really paid attention to Brisbane's sounds and sought to find and document some of the more interesting sounds."

English's stated visions for the future tend to drift between specific plans and also an awareness that ROOM40's success to date has come out of flexibility as much as through set intentions. "I think what's been good about it so far, and that I hope will remain, is that it's been quite organic. I'd imagine that in the next ten years - if it continues as it hopefully will - things will naturally present themselves. At the same time though, I am relatively strategic about what I want ROOM40 to do because I realise that we're not funded in any ongoing way, there's not loads of money driving it, it really is based on each project contributes to the next, and there's a collective good that comes out of doing all the different things. Someone's tour may not break even but the album that comes out two years later breaks even from that. For the next few years the mission will be to play to our strengths, and also to start tapping into other things like accessing and engaging audiences. We're trying to get people interested in work that was previously thought to be inaccessible." Chantler concurs, stating that "the other thing [we continue to aim for] is bringing people out of their homes and giving them reasons to find the time to stop and listen."

For more information on Room40, visit http://www.room40.org/

Cattle and Cane?

"Filling venues is increasingly less of a problem. It wasn't always that way. In fact when we started doing shows and projects, 40 people was a good turn out."

Brisbane experimental music scene
Local
by Jennifer Moses

It seems Brisbane's experimental music scene may be flourishing again. Peaks and troughs, ebbs and flows are common not just to Brisbane's music scene but to its very demographic. Census data tells us that huge swathes of 'young people' leave Brisbane yearly to live, work and study abroad. The entertainment sector presents us with film titles like 'All my Friends Are Leaving Brisbane' and local band nights called 'God Hates Brisbane'. As an outsider looking in you have to wonder how Brisbane's creative side feels about itself. The creative arts have had, historically, an uneasy relationship with Brisbane's conservative and rural minded heritage. So, when it comes to an experimental music scene, one has to wipe the dust from the laminex table, put the kettle on and butter up the pumpkin scones in order to scratch under the surface of the city that has always been referred to as a 'growing city' by locals or a 'big country town' by its visitors. Undeniably, the ground is fertile in Queensland and as the tentacles of experimental music's vines intertwine and weave through different genres. Cyclic Defrost asks the question; what is feeding the soil in Cattle and Cane country?

“There’s a really healthy cross-pollination of ideas and philosophies”

Brisbane City Council is just about to officially open a new bridge, ‘The Go Between’, with a live concert featuring mostly interstate bands and a guest appearance by Robert Forster. The bridge was named by public vote and it links South Brisbane to Milton; or from near the Brisbane Theatre Company to Suncorp Stadium, the city’s main sports venue. Another public vote is trying to get the name changed to ‘The Go-Betweens’ bridge.

Robert Forster, singer-songwriter of legendary Brisbane band The Go-Betweens performed a solo set at The Sydney Theatre Company recently as part of the Sydney Writers’ festival. For anyone who grew up in Brisbane and has always been motivated by music, but left found wanting in that town, it was an enlightening performance. The room wasn’t quite full, on what was a rainy and windy night and Forster postured that had he had his stroke of genius weeks before, not hours before, to do ‘15 songs about Sydney’ the room would’ve been packed. Sydney is a city that loves to celebrate itself and if you get on to the press quick enough that an out-of-town musician wants to sing your praises, at the Sydney Theatre Company as part of The Sydney Writers’ Festival, there’d have been calls for a second show. Forster peppered this more intimate performance, with tales of the band’s formation in Brisbane in 1978 and having to live in London and Sydney for extended periods to record and perform for The Go-Betweens. ‘The business’ of making music not being as viable in Brisbane at the time. He recounted anecdotes between tracks of travelling and performing and the business of making music. One memorable tale was of a road trip he took to Sydney with Grant McLennan in order to put pressure on the vinyl pressing plant that was late in delivering their self funded first single, the 1978 release ‘Lee Remick’. Forster had the crowd guffawing at the image he painted of a young McLennan running out of the first service station they found after crossing the New South Wales border waving a Playboy magazine excitedly at Forster waiting behind the wheel of an idling Falcon. The latest copy of Playboy magazine, banned in Queensland, had a lengthy article and exclusive interview with Bob Dylan, which McLennan read aloud to Forster the rest of the way down to Sydney.

Queensland Government records show Brisbane’s population at just over one million in 1978; the year ‘Lee Remick’ was released and a year with a major spike in police arrests. The government had banned street protesting, which accounted for some arrests, and it also set up a special ‘Task Force’ to deal with the strange increase in ‘drunken & disordly’ behaviour and ‘hooliganism’ that same year. While The Go-Betweens were getting out of town and pursuing an indie-pop path, a large portion of Brisbane’s music scene was revelling in anarchistic punk. A major contributing factor to spikes in arrests of 1978 can be traced back to, well, ironically ‘The Saints’. Joh Bjelke-Peterson, a part-time farmer and full-time right-wing conservative was ‘running’ Queensland as the head of the National Party and frankly punk music wasn’t really his thing. Neither was it then-Police Commissioner Terry Lewis’s gig. The disgraced Police Commissioner ended up in jail some years later for corruption and you can’t help but wonder if The Saints’ ‘(I’m) Stranded’ resonated for him later in life.

Nevertheless, an underground punk scene that had caught worldwide attention thanks to The Saints being signed by EMI in London on the strength of the single ‘(I’m) Stranded’, flourished. The UK magazine, Sounds declared it the independently recorded debut “Single of this and every week”. The fact that the world was listening to a band from Brisbane that pre-dated even The Sex Pistols did wonders for morale in experimental music. The Saints’ sudden worldwide popularity helped create a structure that would support the experimental music scene in that city. Local radio station 4ZZZ started broadcasting from the University of Queensland in 1975 and was an important catalyst for sowing the seeds that would see Brisbane’s music scene builds a cohesive foundation. Being brave enough to broadcast local punk music that no other station would touch helped swell the crowds at local gigs. This swell of support then attracted police attention and

the special Queensland Police 'Task Force' was established to combat 'hooliganism and unruly behaviour'. Another influential band at the time, Razar, released a 7"single in '78 called 'Stamp Out Disco'. The b-side 'Task Force' became an anthem of the punk cause. 4ZZZ didn't escape controversy for its support and was officially shut down by a Young Nationals student union executive at UQ. The station went on to broadcast from premises in Toowong until it secured a loan in 1992 to purchase the former headquarters of the Communist Party of Australia in Fortitude Valley where their signal beams from today.

4ZZZ still plays an important role in promoting Brisbane's underground and experimental music by playing local music and supporting local gigs, yet a DIY culture still dominates. Once you start digging you start to see the vines weaving in and out and find clear posts in people supporting the structure of the current scene.

Ian Rogers is a musician, academic, writer and occasional music promoter whose interest in the experimental music scene is multi-layered. Rogers has been playing music in a variety of guises in Brisbane for years using different bands to explore different genres. He's explored indie-pop with Iron On and then metal/drone with No Anchor, things turn electronic with Tom Hall in AxxOnn and evolve to the experimentation of Ambrose Chapel. A keen advocate for live performance as a way to experience music, he has also taken up the DIY culture that has sustained Brisbane's experimental scene for decades. The latest gig he's putting on is called 'God Hates Brisbane #1'. Rogers explains the gig's title. "It's a joke. There's been this weird vibe about Brisbane lately and I don't know exactly where it's coming from but suddenly there's this misperception that the city is some sort of fucked up culturally oppressive shit-hole. It's not."

Musicians support each other by swapping members between bands, which deepens the level of respect and camaraderie, although finding venues to play in can be a challenge. Rogers says that while there was a shortage of venues over the last 18 months, Brisbane's musicians took advantage of their enviable weather and planted the scene in backyards. "Tom Hall's regular house party series, Sonic Boom, of last year seemed to be dictated entirely by the idea that good sound is good sound so let's all get drunk in the back yard. He had everyone from Luke Henery from Violent Soho play his first noise show through to Mystic Eyes from Perth do an improvised soundtrack at that thing," says Rogers. He sees the experimental scene in Brisbane as incredibly supportive and explains that through his music career he's "had people like Lawrence English floating around (see our Room40 retrospective in this issue) and he's such a good example of what a sound artist is to my mind. He makes and releases beautiful ambient music, mixes and masters my ugly sludge doom band and produces my next door neighbour's pop band."

> "The backyard parties Sonic Boom seemed to be dictated entirely by the idea that good sound is good sound so let's all get drunk in the back yard"

Lawrence English is a name that crops up time and time again in association with Brisbane's experimental and art scene and rightly so. English is a prolific artist and is well known in experimental circles globally. His record label Room40 is well recognised for releasing international artists plus his own material. English echoes the camaraderie amongst locals expressed by Rogers. "I think one thing that has always made Brisbane work is the fact there's good networks of people out there working to create opportunities for more people than simply themselves. There's a really healthy cross-pollination of ideas and philosophies so in that regard there's an opportunity for everyone."

English's ties to the art scene have helped him secure art spaces for performances and curate shows that may otherwise not find venues. "I've been lucky to have the chance to present series like Fabrique, Syncretism and most recently MONO at the IMA." English is also involved in curating the 11th annual Liquid Architecture Festival of Sound Arts that has become one of Australia's premier sound festivals. Liquid Architecture Festival runs for four weeks and goes to seven cities across Australia; in Brisbane the festival will be performed at the Brisbane Powerhouse. Finding venues for the experimental music scene seems to have definitive art-based leanings, but does that resonate with getting people through the doors?

"Filling venues is increasingly less of a problem. It wasn't always that way. In fact when we started doing shows and projects, 40 people was a good turn out."

But where the experimental music scene may find easier access to art houses and backyards for its sound exploration than traditional music venues, English has taken the whole damn thing to the street.

'Consider it Inhabited', a ROOM40 initiative, sprouted up in laneways through Brisbane in June.

With four events scattered around the city the people of Brisbane were treated to new laser work by Robin Fox and sound installations from Leighton Craig, DJ Olive and Janek Schaefer. An 'urban jungle' was even built for the exhibition, a temporary oasis of tropical green in the centre of Brisbane down Eagle Lane in the City. With laser shows and experimental sound performances springing up in laneways it certainly sounds like the Brisbane experimental scene is blooming, but how much has it grown?

Ken Weston, the Lowdown half of the Strictly&Lowdown team has been performing as a VJ based in Brisbane for nearly 15 years. Strictly&Lowdown built their visual careers working within the music industry designing live visual, stage concepts and video content to complement the performing artists. Their first gigs were with local artists like Soma Rasa and The Resin Dogs. From there they went on to score gigs with touring experimental musicians like Scanner, I/03, Stereolab and DJ Spooky. Strictly&Lowdown have worked with Lawrence English on some of those same gigs and Weston notes that English has been a major influence on the scene. After starting out with small experimental shows collaborating with musicians, these VJs now regularly perform at a number of high profile Australian Music Festivals like Splendour In The Grass, Future Music Festival, Parklife and Good Vibrations.

Weston and his business partner, Rachel Johnston have "developed a great national network where traveling interstate for gigs is normal". So how does Brisbane's scene compare to other capital cities? "I would say Brisbane definitely has less attendance compared to other cities. I notice this is starting to affect promoters choice to bring experimental acts to Brisbane."

Ian Rogers has a slightly different opinion; "As for filling venues, it doesn't seem to be easy to fill venues anywhere in Australia unless they're small. In Brisbane, if you can get a hundred people to your show then you're doing really well...but I've played shows in Sydney and Melbourne that Brisbane people would lose their pants over in terms of the quality of the music booked and still it's about a hundred people."

What gets Weston's goat is that Brisbane promoters are less likely to pick up experimental touring acts and bring them to Brisbane. He cites the recent Autechre tour as a classic example. "Autechre are experimental electronic music royalty and they can't land a show in Brisbane. They had shows in Perth, Melbourne and Sydney. Brisbane can be so hit and miss and promoters just don't want to take the financial risk." Bringing high-profile experimental acts to Brisbane would surely encourage the scene to grow further, but of course the support needs to be there.

Frith La Vin Lloyd, a music enthusiast and Brisbane local in her 20's is someone who seeks out experimental music. She relishes the opportunity to see live experimental music after moving from a country town west of Brisbane to the city four years ago. Frith feels that there is a consistent level of artists experimenting in Brisbane. "It seems to be a fairly close knit community and therefore there is a level of mutual support between the artists so you've got the built in crowd of peers."

Although the lack of diversity in venues to see artists is frustrating she says "there is a far greater level of adventurousness amongst the punters - you'll get a lot more people checking out something they've not seen before, on the off-chance, than you would at say, an indie gig." She says her favourite experimental artists are Lawrence English and Tom Hall and would love to see them fill a traditional music venue.

Frith is one of the nearly 1000 people who have signed up to change the name of The Go Between Bridge to 'The Go-Betweens Bridge' but aside from seeing Robert Forster perform, isn't that interested in attending the Brisbane City Council's concert. Perhaps if there was more support at a government level where music venues were supported and experimental musicians celebrated, Brisbane's scene would gain further momentum. It seems the 'growing city' or 'big country town' tag persists. Will it always? We hear government proclamations of Brisbane being the 'fastest growing city' every year but it doesn't seem to be experimental artists pushing up the population. Those young creative people who haven't left seemed to have built a tight, supportive network amongst themselves and the seeds of experimentation in music have continued to blow around the city.

"I think I like unpopular music, I'm pretty sure that's the problem." Ian Rogers **CD**

Sydney's underground punk venues
Local
by Alyssa Critchley
Photos by Mikey Hamer and Lucien Alperstein

Pushing Up Daisies

The death of well-known venues around Sydney does not mean the death of independent music. It never has. Instead, a culture adept at adaptation, and by very definition one which makes its own opportunities, has found refuge in places legitimised—galleries, record stores and organisation headquarters—and in places you'd perhaps never have imagined.

If there's one moment, one shard of memory that has come to define the zeitgeist of 2009 for independent venues in Sydney it is this. We're parked on Illawarra Road, Marrickville, and he gets a call. He answers and I can hear the overflow of voice from the phone speaker clearly audible in the bubble of the car interior. Dirty Shirlows has been shut down. The show cancelled. Limited Express, the Japanese punk band set to arrive in Sydney for two aborted shows need your help. Can you find us a venue? We'd thrown around names of places that night in a kind of frenzy fuelled by the shock of the loss of a few venues in quick succession. As I sat at the kitchen bench and listened to him enquire about Cosmo's Rock Lounge, the Humanist Society and finally Jura Books, I had remembered clearly sitting upstairs in the only building in the industrial area lit with warm light, a warehouse that took its name from the crooked sign, a street that is a thick spread of asphalt. Brooke of Dirty Shirlows had spoken about the shock of Maggotville's eviction, how shows had been shifted to different venues, most of them to the space out the back, the room that looks over the Sydenham reservoir. And now it too had been shut down.

It's not quite yet a year on when I speak to Brooke again, this time on the phone. We're going fine, she says. We're doing a couple of shows a month, we've spaced the shows out and kept them very low profile. True to what she had promised following the threat on Shirlows last year, when she had replied to my email of condolence following the news of their demise with a defiant guarantee—we will be back up and running by February—the venue has slowly gained momentum again after a period of hush. Her voice eases her words, it is not panicked or harried, sliced with anxiety like I had remembered from last year. We're just coasting, she will reiterate later in our conversation. We cancelled shows and it was a really quiet time of year anyway. So we had a break and a change of flatmates and slowly it started picking up from there. We had an incident recently, she says, and she relays the story—the knock at the front door in the bitter of early morning, the wasted 'patron' and the cops all at their front door, sniffer dogs straining on taut leashes. The police said 'We know you have parties here' but it seems weird, maybe that things are slightly more relaxed around us. She contemplates the climate for warehouse spaces in Sydney before she qualifies the statement, "I'm not sure if you heard St Petersberg got shut down a couple of weeks ago."

> "The knock at the front door in the bitter of early morning, the wasted 'patron' and the cops all at their front door, sniffer dogs straining on taut leashes."

Though Shirlows seems to be tolerated, the space is currently no longer serving the diverse communities it once did. She misses the punk shows that would happen on the concrete slab in the back room, they don't happen anymore. We're not the only place in the world, she knows this. Experimental music is happening in galleries and the punk shows must be someplace else. Though Brooke is happy to chat I'm aware that answers are at times prefaced with "you probably shouldn't write about this" and information is given with a disclaimer. People are wary. Caution is exercised lest fledgling venues are 'ratted out' or exposed too hastily before they even have a chance to become established. I understand that. Shirlows hasn't had too many problems with Council or the police, probably because it's clear they don't make a profit out of it, and they're not really visible. "at least I hope not", Brooke adds.

As far as other new venues, there are plans for a hip hop venue, she says, and before she finishes our conversation she asks to double check the article before it goes to print. It is palpable this vigilance, a wariness that is shy of hostility but is prudent with the information it discloses. "We keep a very low profile now," this is a reiteration. Though, recently, Brooke has seen their unlicensed venue in glossy magazine ads, in popular radio broadcasts. "The lucky trilogy" she jokes—Vice magazine, Time Out magazine and Channel V's gig guide. It's pretty funny, she says. Surreal, I imagine, and slightly unnerving. I try to decipher the tone she takes.

I miss the punk shows at Shirlows, too. The nights when, between sets, people would slip through the back door to a narrow space where the night would be lit with the pinpricks of burning cigarettes and the lights from warehouses on the opposite bank, dancing on the surface on the reservoir. Afternoons when we'd wander through the desolate landscape, the ugly utilitarianism somehow brightened with the amplified strum of a sound-check and the rap of drumsticks against skins pulled taut, a spur to return to the show… quickly. I miss the wide open space where people would nab a seat on the mismatched collection of furniture arranged in the corners or stand with a longneck in hand while Ella the white pup would bound through the space with a punctured soccer ball. But even without Maggotville and without shows at Shirlows, without Louies and without 22 or Paint It Black, punk shows are not extinct and the punk community has not shrivelled.

Amongst bridal boutiques and empty shopfronts I search for the newly set up Black Wire to Common Ground on Parramatta Road. This is the reincarnation of Paint It Black, a record store which used to occupy two different spaces on Enmore Road, just up from the hub of Newtown. The site of the former store, where once racks of vinyl and CDs were lined up against walls plastered with gig posters, is now a stark convenience outlet selling stuff like energy drinks and condoms.

I wander past these wholesale stores and factory outlets on Parramatta Road and it seems fitting for Black Wire to now inhabit this stretch. The independent music scene has always found venues at the fringes, in places not yet comfortable for anyone but the brave to inhabit. It takes me a good twenty minutes to find the small doorway, each allocated shop space demarcated by the spatters of pigeon shit under awning supports that gives the impression of a Jackson Pollock. An overhead sign has not yet been painted and so the space is virtually unmarked, just a number on this stretch along the highway. Black Wire is a decent sized space. Black curtains hang in the window, but behind them I can see people who've turned up for the show scheduled to start soon sitting around a coffee table. Upon burgundy walls are gig posters I remember from Paint It Black, shows I remember seeing, shows advertised for places that appear as simple names on the paper—22, Mgtvle, Louies.

A couple of bands play that afternoon, and in the space heads rock forward in unison. I stick around for a bit and am told that there are plans for the space, some sort of development beyond just a record store. Indeed, this store is not an HMV, like warehouses spaces—Mgtvle or Shirlows—people live here. It serves a purpose beyond making sales. At the desk by the doorway is a pile of photocopied papers, old notes from a pharmacy text book on one side, the other side detailing upcoming punk shows. I notice Black Wire listed as a venue; a house show in Newtown; familiar venues like Jura Books and pubs that have continually hosted music or used to host music years ago, like the newly renovated Sandringham Hotel, or the Town and Country. Toward the end of the listings for June I come across a venue that is simply a street. The author of the guide is standing near the front door organising the gear for the bands and I point at the listing and question whether this is a new venue. You know where Shirlows is? The footpath there where the graffiti is…? And I imagine the concrete path that snakes away from the street, through long grass. A show is being put on in the open there, he tells me.

As I am about to leave, I find myself speaking to Luke, a member of the Jura collective, the bookstore and HQ of the anarchist community in Sydney, which is literally a minute's walk down the road from here. We crouch in an alcove, the entrance to an empty shop front. It's a highlight of 2009, he says, that Limited Express show. Eight bands in four hours. Limited Express, Ni

Hao, Holy Samolly, To The North and Hira Hira had been crammed onto an existing Juraccoustics night that had morphed from a few soothing ballads of voice mingling with strumming, into the upstairs library heaving with an audience craning over heads and shoulders to watch pint sized vocalists scream into tightly grasped microphones. That was when I first noticed it, he says—and he means Jura's compensation for the lack of autonomous venues for independent music shows.

"That's when it first really started, when Mgtvle stopped having regular shows and when Shirlows was on a break and before the Red Rattler really began". Twice a month since that time, windows on the narrow two storey Jura building will remain lit into the night. Peering inside from the highway where cars and buses stream past, figures can be seen reading the titles stacked along the walls, or slowly moving around the tables in the middle of the downstairs room running fingers over book covers or leafing through the crisp pages. There will be someone at the desk near the small set of steps who will accept a donation, there will be people moving between the lower level, the narrow staircase that twists up to the kitchen and library upstairs and out to the back carpark—a swathe of concrete, steps and low brick walls. Once they had a show out back, the space that backs onto the quieter streets that are buffered from the constant cycles of traffic. Some people got angry and threatened to call the police and we just wrapped up the show. We try to limit the shows to two a month and always try to finish shows at 10.30 because there are people living next door. A lot of other groups use Jura, not just people playing music or punks, we want to make sure those people don't get disadvantaged by us making too much noise or whatnot. He is generous with his thoughts, a smile stretches his lips wide, his hair matted into dreads is tied back. He speaks with a voice seemingly

"These places that host independent music are more than their host buildings. It is always and will always be about the people involved."

“The upstairs library [was] heaving with an audience craning over heads and shoulders to watch pint sized vocalists scream into tightly grasped microphones.”

buoyed by laughter or excitement rising in his throat. I’m not really sure why we haven’t got the unwanted attention of whatever. We always tell people not to hang out the front – that seemed to be one of the main problems with warehouse places. Luke points to another downfall – the propensity of warehouse venues to cluster and proliferate in seemingly fertile enclaves (Hibernian House and Marrickville). Places like Shirlows and Louie’s are all in the one area, so once one was found it drew attention to the others. What the independent music community has found in Jura is a legitimised refuge—a building owned, no landlords, with a legitimate business running within it. Performance inside can be seen as an addition to an already legal operation.

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Experimental music seems to be happening in galleries, Brooke had said. An observation that resonates when I think of Serial Space and now as I see the bold signage for Hardware Gallery from up the street. And I think of the shows advertised here at this commercial gallery in a stretch that seems an afterthought of Enmore Road—a tattoo parlour, bike shop and a purveyor of vintage wares scattered across the way. From inside the slick interior, sitting at a small coffee bar, looking out onto Enmore Road, I speak with Lew about the monthly experimental music nights—Sound Series—that have filled the white walled space with noise and chatter and movement and young people. From a manilla folder Lew produces the black and white photocopied flyers, names like Collarbones and Justice Yeldham—who had left the floor strewn with blood and glass—upon them in a typewriter font. There are dates booked every month for the rest of the year and it was mid last year that the first music performance took place. It was less setting the gallery up as a venue and more an evolution of the space and the gallery’s events. When a wall from the room downstairs was removed the space revealed itself as one which could host performance. It was then after the demise of venues that Romy, an artist who works with Lew, proposed the monthly nights of musicians and artists. A night that Romy says is easier to operate because it takes place in an established gallery and, in that sense, has security of tenure. Though most spaces are fleeting, there seems to be something going on—spaces like Serial Space, Jura Books and Red Rattler look well-placed for longevity, she thinks. My friend is in negotiations with a local council about securing a new space in the Inner West to use as a community/arts centre for a year while the owner is pushing development plans through council. Negotiations with a mayor sympathetic to the anarchist community, who has been seen amongst the press of bodies between the anarchist titles in Jura Books. A project that requires wading through bureaucracy, that is not yet ready for publicity.

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Last year, the independent music community farewelled a space in Hibernian House. Yvonne Ruve was left in order to pursue a space named Vox Cyclops in Newcastle as part of the Renew Newcastle project. Where in Sydney, independent music and the people who live in and run the venues inhabit the hollows of buildings haunted by the ghosts of industry, in the spaces in between, at the margins, in Newcastle spaces are provided for art to invigorate a ghost town. Where, in Sydney, venues cluster like the myriad of spaces with Hibernian House, some still hosting shows, others failed, Newcastle’s sparseness distributes spaces along the stretch of Hunter Street. Zine stores, record stores, art galleries are dotted between vacant shops, boarded up shops fronts, surf shops and dour office buildings.

When I speak to Grant about Newcastle, about independent music and the secure spaces that are provided as repositories for a cultural injection, he acknowledge the help. It has definitely become a lot more supportive, he says. But prior to Renew Newcastle similar things were happening, there just weren’t spaces for it. Grant had made a home and venue of a warehouse on Annie Street, where once every two months they would have interstate bands play and which after around two years was reclaimed by the landlord. In years gone by, music has happened in a now defunct ARI named Sushi and Cigarettes, in a small bowling club where old Croatian dudes go, The Croatian Wickham Sports Club. Stuff’s always going to be happening under the radar, he says. What Renew Newcastle has done is provide independent endeavours with security, legitimacy, legality. It acts as an umbrella organisation where places like Vox Cyclops and ARThive are covered—legal stuff and insurance not even a worry. Though, it seems that Sydney sits down the coast as some sort of shimmering mirage, somehow more appealing and I must always remind myself that these places that host independent music are more than their host buildings. It is always and will always be about the people involved. With people involved, there’s always something that is going to open up. This is something Grant has not forgotten: that at the very core independent music, musicians and those who run these venues, have to do things themselves.

CD

Sleeve Reviews

by Eli Murray of Gentleforce

Aphex Twin – *Selected Ambient Works Vol 2.*

For me, this album is definitely one of Aphex Twin’s heaviest and most beautiful pieces of music. I bought this album whilst still at high school, after having recently discovered *Volume 1*. While *Volume 1* was like the sound of ecstasy in a forest, *Volume 2* was more terrifyingly sad but strangely comforting, like when you were a kid and you had a bad dream and woke up to find you were at a cousin’s house. The music has a real strong sense of isolation and feels like it was made on another planet. The sounds on it are just so otherworldly, cold and thick with haunted atmospheres. Apparently Richard (Aphex Twin) claims that he wrote a lot of the music after having very strong lucid dreams in his studio. Once he awoke, he would try to re-create the music he was making in his dream.

The cover features a photo of a rustic/faded looking Aphex Twin symbol. I’m assuming Richard designed it himself and I have always been intrigued with what the Aphex symbols meaning is. It looks like a key or symbol to unlocking some mythical civilisation. When listening to the album and staring at the cover, I use to imagine that this photo was taken thousands of years in the future, by someone or something. The intense brown and earthy colours in the photo seem to saturate themselves into the music and I find myself having synesthesia moments where I see intense browns when listening to certain songs. If you want to know what listening to music on Mars sounds like this is the closest you’ll get!

Jan Hammer – *The First Seven Days*

I discovered this album through my Dad when I was still only a child. I remember he put it on

the record player and turned it up nice and loud, handing me the cover to look at while the music played. The opening notes of ‘Darkness/Earth In Search Of Sun’ totally freaked my mind out, I found it quite overwhelming to listen to at first. The music on the album is full of synthesizers and prog guitar workouts and Jan, who plays all the music himself, attempts to create a soundtrack to the first seven days of creation. The cover, by Milton Glaser, features a lovely abstract watercolour painting of the earth, sun and moon with images of plants, insects and a snake in the foreground. The art, although colourful, has a cold feeling to it as well as a sense of stillness. I use to imagine stepping into the painting when listening to the music. I would go on these little journeys, always wondering what was beyond the horizon. You don’t see art like this on record sleeves anymore, and that’s why this cover is so unique to me.

Skull Disco – *Vol 6*
In terms of sound and art, Skull Disco has to be one of the most original dubstep labels. Between 2005 and 2008, Shackleton and Appleblim released nine 12 inch records on the label, as well as an EP and 2 CD compilations. I first discovered

their music through Kodama aka Scott Brown who had set up strong relationships with key members in the dubstep scene through his (now defunct) site Southern Steppa. Among them was Sam Shackleton. Sam used to send Scott promo in the mail and I remember being at Scott's house and listening to his records whilst looking at the cover art. It was like nothing else! The music was deep, really deep. Full of cross cultural percussion samples, sub sonic bass drones and ritualistic vibes, this music pulled you in to a very specific sonic landscape. A landscape that was made up of dense jungles and barren deserts, that was full of dance, ritual and sacred gatherings.
Visually, the artwork was much the same. Zeke Clough's artistic vision of what the music looked like was frighteningly spot-on. The illustrations had a real d.i.y. punk vibe to them (in the sense of black and white illustrations and hand made lettering) but with egyptian symbols and ancient ritualistic paintings included. I've read that Shackleton named the label Skull Disco after reading a book about a tribe in Cameroon that had dug up the remains of their ancestors so that they too could enjoy the festivities whilst the living members played music and danced. Its hard to pick a favourite cover when looking back on this label but Vol. 6 is a real standout to me. It was when both artists (Shackleton & Zeke) went up a level into a new dimension of creativity!

Boards Of Canada – *Music Has The Right To Children*
Good old Boards Of Canada. Over the years they have carved out their own unique sound and art design, from their detuned and hazy beats to their washed out imagery and simplistic font design. I bought *Music Has The Right...* several years ago after the cover jumped out at me in a record store. Over the years I have often picked up and bought music just because of it's beautiful cover design. Sometimes an album will just be glowing in a store and the image will be beckoning me to pick it up and listen to it. It's a magical experience, and something that doesn't happen as often as it used to, as I don't frequent record stores as much (note to self: continue to support independent record shops).

The first thing you notice with the cover image is the colour. Its saturated in that very distinct turquoise green/blue. This colour IS Boards of Canada. Just like Coca Cola has their trademark red, Boards have their turquoise thing going on. The faded image on the cover - of a family, maybe

on holiday - will always stick in my mind. The imagery is just like Boards of Canada's music: faded, nostalgic and magical. The adults and kids have their faces smudged out, and that's a riddle that is unsolved, or maybe a key to some deeper meaning.

Mum – *Finally We Are No One*
Mum... what happened to them? They used to be great! I think after creating an album like *Finally*

We Are No One there isn't much a band can to do to improve on it. Also, Kria Brekkan, one of the key members, left the band and seemed to take the magic with her. Discovering this album was another instance of me walking into a record store and being impressed it's cover art. The image of a book cover, worn and faded, is the first thing that strikes the eye. It instantly reminds me of books that I had read when I was a child. The cover makes you wonder what exists through the small torn hole. The kid-like image of a little rocket ship floating above a grassy hill can be seen. What is this rocket ship actually doing? Is it landing? Or, is it saying goodbye? I like to think that the ship contains the members of Mum, leaving earth for somewhere else. Somewhere quiet. The music on this album is so fragile and achingly beautiful. Sounds for a funeral or a picnic. To me this is definitely the Mum album everyone should own. Their last great album. Goodbye Mum.

Neil Young – *Harvest*
Neil Young. You either love him or hate him. Many of the people that have been involved in his life actually hate him. I however, haven't and am probably better off for it. I owe my Dad all the credit for introducing me to Neil's music. This

album is definitely not his greatest but it was one of the first images I can remember as a child. This album cover is a near-perfect example of hand written lettering from the golden era of music. The words have such a delicious flow to them and sit lovely over the top of a orange sun. The cover has a wash of cream over its entirety to give it that aged look. Even on the day this album was released it would have looked perfectly aged already. A timeless feel for a timeless artist.

Pink Floyd – *Ummagumma*
Pink Floyd has probably been one of the strongest influences on my art and music. Visually all of their album covers have always been striking in colour and design. I dig the earlier album covers the most. Ummagumma is a double album: one disc is made up of live recordings from their shows, long pieces of psych rock exploration. The second disc is split into four sections with each band member recording solo parts. The music on this is really varied and there are moments of gold. The cover has a photo of all four members of the band, sitting and standing in various positions. On the wall there is a picture frame, which, if you look at it closely, features the same cover image, except the band members have switched positions. The image keeps repeating itself within

the frame, a technique known as the Droste Effect.

I love everything about the photo on this cover. The physical words Pink Floyd being placed on the floor. The vinyl copy of the Gigi soundtrack leaning against the wall (a complete mystery). The faded colours and natural light being used. The dreaminess of it. Just like hanging out at your mate's house, in the backyard on a Sunday afternoon. Oh, and a word of warning: its probably not a good idea to play Roger Waters' song 'Several Species of Small Furry Animals Gathered Together in a Cave and Grooving with a Pict' at a social gathering... you might break someones mind in half.

Gentleforce's *Sacred Spaces* is out now on Feral Media. See an interview with Gentleforce in this issue.

by Ozi Batla

Cyclic Selects ☞

Shannon Kennedy, aka Ozi Batla, is a formative member of Australian hip-hop collective The Herd, as well as one third of fellow Elefant Traks signees Astronomy Class. An influential MC in domestic hip-hop for most of the past decade, his rhymes manage to transcend many of local hip-hop's most common conceits, while maintaining his signatory brand of humour and eclecticism. To celebrate the release of his eagerly anticipated debut album *Wild Colonial*, which is out now on Elefant Traks, Cyclic Defrost demanded of Batla that he list and discuss some of his favourite records. The results are surprising.

Laurie Anderson – *Big Science*

I'm not sure why the kids are so keen to do the 80s again. My overwhelming memories of the early 1980s were of Ronald Raygun, WWIII, Chernobyl and the Rainbow Warrior. Perhaps I was a morbid kid. But I did have an obsession with nuclear war. I can't remember when I first heard 'O Superman (For Massenet)'. I know my dad played it a lot after he bought Big Science. I was lucky, there's heaps of records I think of fondly from my dad's collection. I do remember being struck by the naïve yet disturbing imagery in that song, the vocoder and the ambient sounds. I found the rest of the album a complete trip. "Jump out of the plane. There is no pilot." The exhilarating and sickening inertia of the modern world. Big Science still sounds really organic, almost folksy at times, despite the fact that Anderson was using some cutting edge drum machines, samplers and effects. Mixed with the glorious weirdness of her prose, it was the tale of a cold, Reaganist future, Bladerunner meets American Psycho.

Anderson's vocal is the human warmth you cling to throughout the story, but she begins to seem so normal, so cheerily immune to it all. I began to question how human she actually was. She's like a clone of something real, but missing a key component. There's no warmth, just platitudes, polite conversation and etiquette. As the civility is slowly stripped away, the sinister architecture is revealed. "You were born, and so you're free. So happy birthday."

Midnight Oil – *Diesel and Dust*

These days I'm not sure it would rate as my favourite Oils album - that's a toss-up between *10...1* and *Red Sails in The Sunset*, but I was a bit too young to get into those when they came out. *Diesel and Dust* was a huge record at the time. It's hard to imagine these days how big the Oils were at the peak of their fame. It's also hard to imagine a band as political as the Oils being that big now. I think it's reflective of the environmental and social conscience of the 80s. It doesn't really feel like people give a shit as much now. Think of the Exxon Valdez, the Oils out the front of the New York HQ. Is there a globally famous band outside of the BP headquarters right now? This album has some classic Oils stompers: 'The Dead Heart' is one of my favourite songs from any album. In the same way that Chuck D opened doors to US history, the Oils led me to question Australian history. "We don't serve your country, don't serve your king." I didn't get out to the desert until much later, but the influence of it's people and music is obvious on this album - the uniquely driving rhythm of desert rock/reggae is the spinal column of this political animal. 'Dreamworld' is a perfect dismissal of the Aussie Sprawl, kit-home paradise, while 'Sometimes' riffs on the Oil's central theme: "I know that the sunset empire shudders and shakes." I'd say it's still kicking - ask the people of the Western Desert or Louisiana.

NWA – *Straight Outta Compton*

Far out, writing this is making me feel old! I was thinking the other day that we used to pass around tapes in class the way kids exchange obscene photos or fight videos via Bluetooth now. Cranky old bastard I am turn down your phone on the bus no one wants to listen to a shitty Rihanna MP3 through a tiny mono speaker. In high school, the most perverse, illicit thing we could pass around the classroom without fear of detention was a cassette of rap music. I can still remember the look on the face of the mate who hooked me up with Ice T when I played him The Geto Boy's *Gangsta of Love*. I've been listening back to some of the early gangsta shit, and although yes, I'm desensitised from years of rap, computer games and American TV, I still think it's more raw than the modern equivalent. To be fair, when I got the tape of *Straight Outta Compton* I scoured the liner notes and photos on the sleeve, because that was probably all the information I would be able to glean. These days, someone like Ice Cube has his life all over TV and the Internet. We all know he didn't really run up in the party and take 'em out with the furious buckshot.

This album flipped my wig as I'm sure it did many a wig. Other notables are Ice T's *The Iceberg/Freedom of Speech* and *OG*, *The Geto Boys*, *Eazy Duz It*, *AmeriKKKa's Most Wanted*, *Life is...Too Short*. For some reason West Coast shit was always way more popular where I grew up - maybe it's because I was always hanging out with Steve B from Brisbane and Brisbane is built on West Coast hip hop.

Public Enemy – *Fear of a Black Planet*

I was one of those kids that got knocked for being a "try-hard" American. I don't know why I was obsessed with American culture. I would prefer to watch the Oakland Raiders over the Eastern Suburbs Roosters, Michael Jordan over Allan Border, Fresh Prince of Bell-Air over Hey, Dad! It was the same with music. I think because of my parent's influence, I've always had a sense of social justice (a careers councillor told me so). When this blended with my growing interest in Afro-American culture it lead me inevitably to Public Enemy.

I saw a photo of my teenage bedroom recently: there's a massive PE logo up on the wall, next to a Magic Johnson poster. I photocopied it from the record and then enlarged it a dozen times until it was big and very blurry. For sure, I was into movies like *Colors* and *Boyz in the Hood*, but it was *Do The Right Thing* that really captured my imagination. Between them, Spike Lee and Chuck D led me to a greater interest in the American civil rights movement and American history in general. I constantly get into arguments about *Takes a Nation of Millions*... I appreciate that it was groundbreaking and seminal and raw as hell. But *Fear of a Black Planet* has it all. It is littered with samples and cultural references. It casts a critical eye over the whole landscape, black and white America alike. Mixed race relationships, Hollywood bullshit, musical politics, some crazy conspiracy theories, life in the hood, a civil rights anthem. The Bomb Squad brought beats as diverse as the subject matter. Plus it's got Kane and Cube on the same track. Leave this off your fuckin' charts.

Smashing Pumpkins – *Siamese Dream*

The year after high school, I did an exchange program for a year in Argentina. One of the cool aspects of this was the lead-up. There were camps and get togethers for months beforehand, and there were obviously quite a few girls at these events. One of these girls was the coolest chick I had ever met - not that I had met many. She was from Balmain and used to drink at the Cricketer's with other cool Sydney High kids. Like most of my Inner West friends growing up, she knew a lot more about good indie and punk music than I did. I think most people at my school were still stuck on Use Your Illusion. I greedily sought out her recommendations. Massappeal, Tumbleweed, Spy vs Spy, The Hard Ons. In '93 while I was in Argentina, she posted me a tape with *Siamese Dream* on one side and *Gish* on the other. I listened to it to death, chopped and sticky-taped it a dozen times. The hazy intensity of this album really spoke to me at the time - off on adventures and full of bravado and teen angst. That, and the fact that it was a gift from a girl I had a crush on, I suppose, means that this album sparks a lot of exciting memories. Before they disappeared up Billy Corgan's arse I think they were one of the best bands of the Seattle era - their Selina's gig in '94 was sick. *Siamese Dream* is densely layered, trickily arranged and beautifully played. I listened to this, *Superunknown*, Alice in Chain's *Jar of Flies* and the Rollins Band *End of Silence* so much while I was over there. For the record, I'm not very familiar with much after 'Spaceboy', because it was only a 90 minute tape.

Massive Attack – *Blue Lines*

When I got back from a year away it felt like I'd missed a whole lot of big things. I'd drifted away from hip hop - I was in Ramones-ville for the duration of 1993, which I also regard as the best year of rap records ever. I was still craving breaks and rhymes but wasn't relating so much to the stuff I used to like. In fact, I wasn't relating to much at the all. I spent a lot of '94 smoking weed and making beats in my bedroom. On the weekends I was going to raves and nightclubs, getting mashed and dancing to hardcore/breakbeat and jungle. Every Monday night I was tuning into a Jungle Massive Australia show on Bondi FM. If anyone remembers who was hosting it, let me know! When the programming finished each night, they played either Portishead's *Dummy*, Neneh Cherry's *Homebrews* or *Blue Lines* on a loop. It was exactly what I needed to hear at the time, blunted and in a solitary place. Coming from a background of listening to rap at high school, and looking for something more relevant, this era of UK music showed me a way I could absorb hip hop into my life. There's an assumed knowledge of hip hop and reggae on *Blue Lines*, and they are incorporated it in a really natural way. Hearing raps in English accents was a big deal for me as

well. This album led me towards UK music over the next few years: Tricky, Mo Wax, Tru Playaz, Rodney P, Task Force, Blak Twang, Roots Manuva and anything with an Amen or Apache break. I made an odd detour though UK beats and jungle back to hip hop. I guess that's where my love for melodic vocals and breaks comes from.

Björk – *Post*
I remember seeing Björk at the Big Day Out in 1994. It was just after 'Human Behaviour' had come out, and she was billed between Soundgarden and the Smashing Pumpkins, which might have been why I saw her. The crowd was vaguely hostile, she was skittish and reluctant, but somehow managed to channel that into her performance. It was electrifying. I don't think anyone guessed at the transformation she would make on the next album. The whole thing is so poised, despite the highwire act it performs to traverse styles. It was the moment that I realised all sorts of people worldwide were being influenced by the same varieties of music. I guess I was trying to figure out what to do with the MC inside me, with such a strange journey through electronica, rock, rap and jungle. It was refreshing to hear it didn't have to be one way or the other - not even for the duration of a single record. Post is ostensibly a pop record, but it definitely had enough to keep my underground-attuned ears listening. I've always been a fan of Björk's writing. She has an economy of words that contrasts so well with her daring vocal swoops. The lyrics to 'Hyperballad' are so shockingly visual and visceral it's hard to believe it was a big single. "I imagine what my body would sound like slamming against those rocks / And when I land, will my eyes be closed or open?" Gosh. The Dobie remix of 'I Miss You' (with a verse from Rodney P) is one of my favourite hip-hop tracks of the time.

Gangstarr – *Moment of Truth*
I made the second big trip of my life in 1999. I went to visit an old mate in Los Angeles and spent a while in Cali. It was an eye-opening experience. The US is such an incredibly diverse place, and California was a real buzz. On that trip I managed to see KRS-ONE giving a lecture on "Knowledge of Self" at an Oakland high school - no joke. I remember getting blunted at Hermosa Beach Backpacker's and listening to *Moment of Truth* the whole way through for the first time. 'You Know My Steez' was already an Ozi Batla & DJ ALF favourite, but I hadn't heard the rest. I was struggling to deal with the contrast in Los Angeles. Just across the road from the holiday-vibed Hermosa Beach was Crenshaw. We were driving with a friend on the freeway one day and I asked him the name of the suburb - he had no idea. For me, *Moment of Truth* is the album on which Guru best expresses his thoughts on this social divide. Plus Premier always saved his best shit for Gangstarr, and the beats on this album are sublime. Tracks like 'Robbin Hood Theory' and 'JFK to LAX' felt like the perfect soundtrack as I got around LA. I was talking to a good mate the other day about how deeply I was affected by Guru's passing. I hadn't been sleeping on his legacy - Gangstarr are, in my mind, one of the most important rap groups of all time. It's just that I didn't realise how much I cherished these songs and the man who voiced them. I really hope that in the future, all the lies and negativity that clouded his death clear away, and we're left with a view of his influence and talent. 'Next Time' is one of the best Primo beats ever and Guru was on point as always.

Manu Chao – *Clandestino*
From LA, a few of my best mates from home joined me as we drove a 1984 Volkswagen van south to Costa Rica. We spent 6 months on the road through Mexico and Central America. It was one of the dopest things I've ever done and probably always will be. About two months in, we were in a cassette market in Mexico City, and picked up bootlegs of Control Machete's Artillería Pesada and Clandestino. I knew Manu Chao already from Mano Negra, who I got into when I was in Argentina, but this album was different. Recurring musical themes, toy dub sirens and heaps of samples, mixed with mariachi, cumbia and french pop. It was really a soundtrack to what we were seeing every day.

The title track always reminds of a border between El Salvador and Honduras. The border itself is a river in a deep valley; the border crossing is a bridge high above it. We were without the ownership papers for our van, and as such accustomed to the intricate dance of bribery that occurred every time we crossed a border. The place was full of spaced-out kids hoping to act as "guides" through this bureaucratic minefield. Our van hidden behind a wall of semi-trailers, Toe-Fu pulled out the guitar and we played the Clandestino for a group of guides and truckies. They had never heard it, but the lyrics told the story of their lives. It was fucking surreal. In Guatemala, we formed a "band" - us and some local friends - to play for beer or pizza. We would play a few tunes from this album. This trip was the first time I really jammed with Toe-Fu, who would become an integral part of The Herd. Clandestino is the album that brought us together. 'Mentira' is one of my favourite tunes para siempre.

Madvillain – *Madvillainy*
I was definitely right into the Stones Throw label for a good portion of the 2000s. For me, post Rawkus, they were the best and most consistent hip-hop label. I spent a long time when I got back from overseas rolling with my man DJ ALF and the flurpers. We were doing a residency with the Sonic Fiction d'n'b crew in the Cross every Saturday night. We'd go until about six in the morning and then move on for a hazy day at someone's pad. This usually involved the most tweaked and blunted breaks the fellas could get their hands on. Stones Throw was always in the mix. Soundpieces: Da Antidote and Declaime (later Dudley Perkins) were the start of it, Lord Quas - in fact any record that Madlib had anything to do with. He was really breaking down hip-hop into tiny pieces and then fucking with those pieces in dope ways. He kept it out of the lush studios that polish the soul out of it, and, of course, the grit and the crackle were exactly what our fried ears needed. Doom would get flipped a lot, too. The way he messes with the vernacular and his cartoon imagery worked wonders. It was almost inevitable that Madvillainy would be ill. It caught Madlib at his peak - I don't really think he has produced another full album of the same quality since. And Doom was on fire. 'Shadows of Tomorrow' is one of the tunes of the decade. "Doom nominated for the best rolled L's / And they wondered how he dealt with stress so well". Pass to left.

Ozi Batla's *Wild Colonial* is out now on Elefant Traks.