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Cyclic *Defrost* Magazine

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Editor-in-Chief

Sebastian Chan

Editors

Shaun Prescott | Alexandra Savvides

Art Director

Thommy Tran

Advertising

Sebastian Chan

Advertising Rates

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Adam Bell and Sebastian Chan

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Cover Design

Cameron Baird

Issue 29 Contributors

Adrian Elmer, Alexandra Savvides, Alyssa Critchley, Benedict Moleta, Bob Baker Fish, Chris Downton, innersitysound, James Horsfall, Joshua Meggitt, Lyndon Pike, Nick Giles, Oliver Laing, Peter Hollo, Shaun Prescott, Suneel Jethani, Thommy Tran, Tom Hall, Wayne Stronell, Wyatt Lawton-Masi, Yifeng Ni

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Editorial

From Estonia to the streets of Marrickville in Sydney, this issue of Cyclic Defrost covers some very diverse sonic ground. Alyssa Critchley takes a look inside the burgeoning Sydney DIY scene and in particular the events around Decolonise festival. Following the devastating earthquake and tsunami in Japan earlier this year, Suneel Jethani takes a look at its effect on Home Normal, the label run out of Saitama, Japan and the UK. Our photo feature in the centre of the magazine features the work of Tom Hall, who documented his tour around Australia earlier this year as AXXONN. Donny Benet provides an eclectic and very entertaining take on Cyclic Selects later on in the issue.

Don't forget cyclicdefrost.com which has all the content found in this issue, as well as additional bonus material including an interview with Seun Kuti and a profile of Melbourne beat-maker Electric Sea Spider.

Thanks for reading,

Shaun and Lex

Editors

CAMERON BAIRD

Cameron Baird
Local
by Alexandra Savvides

It's edging towards the end of winter as the inky blue sky above Sydney's Camperdown ushers in that promising interim between dusk and evening proper. The colour almost perfectly brings to mind the imagery that Cameron Baird creates for a number of album and EP designs on The Frequency Lab imprint. Images of the cosmos spliced delicately with archival photos all seem to link back to this one colour that's permeating the night sky, like a real-life recreation of one of his recent covers: Jonny Faith's *Blue Sky On Mars*.

"I think I'm extremely interested in collage," he says, as we sit down to chat in the corner of the warehouse space that houses his design consultancy Sensory Creative. "As a small boy I pretty much wallpapered my bedroom entirely with magazine scraps, the majority of them were women and sports stars, it was a bit of a hilarious sight at the time. That process of the found object being cut out and applied in a mash to an overall landscape is something I was extremely fond of doing at that age."

Designs for releases like the Fictitious Seven series of "digital vinyl" (two tracks on either 'side' imitating the ethos of 7-inch singles) certainly seem to echo this neo-decoupage aesthetic that Baird favours so highly. The visual environment is made up of textures, photographic elements and typography all overlaid in response to the music contained within the sleeve. "A lot of the Fictitious Seven stuff has been very much based on the organic, the earth, the

“It’s lovely to be trusted to do your job”

land... I think it’s trying to build on a theme but at the same time a lot of the music has dictated that that’s the design idea.”

This complementary relationship between the visuals and music can be traced back to Baird’s love affair with the saxophone, which he played for 12 years. ”In a way jazz, which became such a thorough part to my practice, was a real genre of collage. It was a mix-match of learning different styles of that instrument, but it was also in itself quite varied in its execution.” This infatuation has slowly evolved into Baird’s ever-growing collection of CDs and digital releases that now name-checks artists on the Fat City, Stones Throw and !K7 labels (just to scratch the surface) and “everything you can nod to. Although over the last few years I have become more and more unhappy with certain styles of dance music which I think are generally quite bad on the ears.

“I have the pleasure of torturing all members of our studio space with my music, I pretty much dominate the library,” he says, his voice echoing around the now-empty room. It’s now clear as to how important being the music controller really is, given the expansive space before us. “I buy music every day of my life, pretty much, whether it be one of the many downloads that I find through any newsletters that I’m reading or monthly subscriptions of music that I have, and I’ve always wished I had more of a vehicle to play it.”

On top of designing, Baird also runs the SoundNotSeen arts and music blog with Huw Ellis, Rob Somatik and Thomas Studdy. It’s “a long overdue music dump” according to its about page, and acts as a vehicle for all involved to “bang heads” about their music loves. “My main interest at the moment is a bit hard to pigeonhole. I’m finding a lot of time for acts like Letherette, and that’s in a real fused kind of beat-scape, the latest EP is really flexible, lots of up and down tempos. That kind of instrumental hip-hop is really my flavour.”

Out of all the music-related design work, Baird’s relationship with The Frequency Lab seems to produce the output he’s most fond of. I ask how the collaboration began. “It’s a good memory to try and recount,” he says. “I first got to know Chris [Hancock, aka Monk Fly and label head] through Jonny Faith and through the Headroom project that the guys were working on. I had been working with Lorna [Clarkson] doing CDR and knew Lorna through graphic design work from her previous days at Floating Point. Lorna was a really good friend and she decided she was going to do more than just label work, she was going to do CDR and wanted me to be involved in that. I’m a big fan of the whole CDR process so I got involved from the branding all the way up but at the same time was such a music enthusiast that I loved the idea.

“Chris was involved in taking his music down to CDR and so too was Jonny, so they saw my stuff and got in touch and said ‘we’re going to be doing a Headroom gig, we want to know if you want to be on board’. I thought the music that those guys were pushing was really forward thinking. I was really passionate about the fact that it was quite eclectic and on a hip-hop tip, which is a bit of a pet love of mine. But to be brutally honest, just meeting the guys, they are extremely lovely guys, with good spirit and heart for showing people new music. It became pretty basic that I would be involved. I would much rather do it for the involvement than for the personal benefit, and that’s evident by the fact that those guys really run on a shoestring to get things done.

“What made it easier was that I enjoyed the music so much. I think what they were doing was really unique, pushing the boundaries, not necessarily calling everyone to a dancefloor, making everyone really have a think about what they were listening to and to be able to design for the music around that was a bit of a fun thing. I get an open brief for them too which is a real pleasure, it’s lovely to be trusted to do your job.”

Imbued within Baird’s work for Chris and Jonny is an overarching sense of nostalgia, which comes from using archival footage. It’s an interesting juxtaposition, from a visual and ideological standpoint, considering the music he is designing for is far from a throw-back to the near past. Future music, future beats, forward-thinking tunes, Baird explains, isn’t as separated from this vintage imagery as you might first think. “I’ve always been fond of just the style, colour and design of things like landscapes and the cosmos... it’s

“I have the pleasure of torturing all members of our studio space with my music, I pretty much dominate the library”

something that gives you a lot of fodder for texture and is something fun to work with. I also like to think that a huge part of all their musical sounds harks back to older sounds. There’s not one of those guys who’s not trying to find an old synth or an old filter that can be reworked into one of their tracks to try and create nostalgia of some form.

“It’s really interesting to know how you can play with different periods of time. It’s nice to know you can still run in cycles. In essence it’s a way to try and create something different to what’s currently too modern about other things.“

Apart from designing visuals for The Frequency Lab, Baird is also involved with creating tour work for Niche Productions, and has done artwork for Mad Racket and Future Classic events. There’s a definitely a difference between the commercial successes of Niche with, say, CDR, which Baird recognises. “Although I love the process dearly for the history that we’ve had and I respect how successful James [Browning] and Niche have been I do struggle with the fact that I’m limited to the chances and risks [they’re] prepared to take on my artwork.”

Commercial viability is something that clearly affects what appears on the page before us, on a tour poster or on the front of a physical release. But how do you know what will sell your tour or product in a design sense?

“It would be fair for me to say I’m not the greatest designer in the world, I mean, I often want to be better than I am and I think I often look at a lot of people out there and I see them as being truly great designers,” Baird offers. “Locally there are tons of really talented people doing similar, doing better work to me and I look at what they’re doing as being far more commercially viable because it’s just better.

“But I think the disappointing thing about Sydney perhaps is that I think far too much of what’s being produced is just the same. Yeah you’re inspired by what you digest out there but too many promoters are far too safe and too many people expect to see stuff they’ve already seen and therefore they’re not giving the designer any of that ‘you’re the designer’ creative freedom that you want.

“Chris was always really fond of me as a person which I think helps. Relationships are hugely important but at the same time, the boys came to be because they saw something that I did that they liked, and it was a job that I did that I liked. It would be great to see commercial viability bestowed to the designer because it’s something that they like, and I think there’s so much creative juice in Sydney where it should be let go of, it should be given its reigns to go. I have beat ups in this office space all the time over what looks good and what looks bad and whether or not a designer knows. But I think on average, a seasoned designer knows when something looks better and when something doesn’t... and then be trusted to take that direction and risk for the client. Commercially viable design work is sometimes extremely limited.”

Currently, Baird is taking inspiration from conceptual artist John Baldessari (who was most recently behind the Your Name In Lights project at this year’s Sydney Festival) and modern collage artists such as Mario Wagner, Hugo & Marie, La Boca and Red Design who are heavily graphic in their method of splicing images, text and the found object. The mixed media aspect is particularly appealing for him, and for this issue’s cover reflects that in many ways. “I guess I’ve been extremely fond of archive libraries... and the shapes and the lines that appear within that and building that into an almost tongue-in-cheek landscape where individuals either change their identity, cut their head off, or I give them a new position. This one was a computer company’s archive library that I pulled apart and wanted to generate it in a way that at least referenced cycles, hence Cyclic, but it was more in the way that there was a symmetry to the design and there was an industry parallel with music and there were gadgets, knobs, sounds, general play involved with individuals that were from this found library.”

Cameron Baird is a director of Sensory Creative. His portfolio can be viewed at www.cambaird.com or www.sensorycreative.com.au

Live and Let DIY

Deep-red walls covered in posters from shows old and new and long shadows cast on the ceiling. A black-clad crowd starts towards the back of the room with head-nodding solitude, here where I am standing on a fold-up chair near the curtain that divides us from fluorescent light and the highway. Closer to the band, the audience becomes silhouettes raising longnecks in brown paper and hair whipping back-and-forth; bodies bumping and pushing and twisting and stomping.

She is at the mic stand. She probably twists it towards her lips. In a loud voice Lena recognises the indigenous owners of the land and stresses this point: sovereignty was never ceded. She repeats it. And regarding the name of this festival, Decolonise, on the first night of the Queen's Birthday long weekend 2011, she raises this point: perhaps a festival whose name, inadvertently or not, references the struggles of the first people of Australia should address these very struggles. Or not. We could find another name and simply enjoy a punk festival full of punk music. Someone makes a friendly remark I don't quite catch, but I hear a patter of applause and some more banter and then the band, Lena's band, Tangle, begin playing. I think of how easy it would be to say that DIY happens for one reason, and these autonomous, independently organised festivals have similar aims, but the truth is that the reasons are varied — a 'tangle' — and the people who make up these communities often have different agendas. There should be no 'shoulds' in what autonomous performance achieves, but Lena's words trigger the question: what are the various aims of autonomous performance? To brutally simplify: why DIY? In a record shop along the stretch of road that is said to have once been a pathway for local Aboriginal communities prior to colonisation, the first night of the festival rambles on and when the bands lug gear away, the festival moves on to liberate an ex-squat above a shop on a main artery in the Inner West.

The Decolonise (Decol) festival, came off the back of Alex's idea (another festival with the same name, largely organised by Alex Szorka),

Live and Let DIY
Local
by Alyssa Critchley
Photographs by Yifeng Ni

of building a festival around independent spaces, says Jason who sits on a drooping lounge in the living room of his Inner West squat. On the walls and along the staircase, clippings of dewy-eyed seals and seascapes are tacked up — the decorations vestiges of this space's time as a marine science office. Nearby sits housemate Fez, whose Native American features are accompanied by clusters of earrings. A bullring that is a delicate silver curve through her nostrils glints as she leans forward, elbows in her lap. She crafts her arguments with the cornerstones of Marxist and anarchist rhetoric and Jason disagrees with her on almost every point. It is not DIY/punk lifestyle as a response to the waste in society, as oppositional, or as a means to escape capitalism that the two agree upon. Instead, their DIY punk festival is an opportunity for people to come together under a space or to impose an ethos on a site — a paddock, a warehouse, an alley way in the industrial area. An autonomous festival is living to the fullest potential. Sunk into the couch and sitting beside me, Jason refers to the festival as a 'spot of fun', a chance to bring friends from all over Australia to show that Sydney does have something to offer. That first night at Blackwire, Fez says, between those deep red walls and the reminders of a long DIY punk legacy in the form of hand-drawn posters on the wall, she characterises the festival's first night as like "a family reunion". It is the festival as opposed to the standalone punk/DIY show that is an invitation that draws interstaters and out-of-towners together again. On this winter's night, the conversation moves onwards as Fez presents neat answers, articulate and clear in her aims, while Jason resists, tugging at the torn elbow of a black hoodie. His answers are frayed at the edges in comparison to his housemate — almost non-committal and he apologises for this from the get go — but he speaks more directly of plans for next year's festival. I am surprised by his conviction. It will happen. It is happening. I'm hoping it'll be more centred on one space; this year's festival felt like renters coming in on another space, though it is not about the space, as such, but bringing the ethics and ideas to the space, he thinks and Fez adds. Like the Such Is Life festival, Fez mentions, where the organisers hired out a paddock — some patch of land on the stretch between Melbourne and Geelong — and the paddock becomes everyone's and the festival builds to be something 'magical', with over 300 people converging on a site away from the wails of sirens or the orange haze of pollution that appears as the sunlight fades, the streetlights brighten and the city's night creeps in — 'it creates an intensity you don't see anywhere else,' Jason says. Then the conversation settles at the point it always would, on the contention over the name that I can't quite shake the memory of. Of their friend, Lena's voice, amplified and popping in the mic as though close and fizzing in my ear and the question posed, as I saw it, in not so many words: what do we as a community want to achieve? To this, Jason concedes he'd be interested in politicising the festival next year, and he and Fez mention another punk festival, a one-off event in Brisbane, Live and Let DIY, which featured a schedule of three days full of workshops. It is both festivals, one 'messy' and 'magical' and the other 'intense', 'powerful' and 'political' that are held up as inspirations.

There were all these venues springing up, Alex says when I finally speak with him about Decolonise, and he puts himself back in the context of January 2009. But it was a precarious situation, with the semi-legal venues getting in trouble with the council and a couple — Louie's and Cosmo's Rock Lounge — pulling out of hosting some of the festival's events which were planned to spread across the vibrant new "colony". There were articles in the Inner West Courier about 'raves' happening in the local area and the pieces published referred to the very streets some of these venues were located on. Living at Mgtvle at the time, a venue and residence for the DIY punk community in Sydney, Alex's Decolonise festival grew into a means to get a dialogue "happening between other venues in the Sydenham/Marrickville industrial area that were all, at one time, within walking distance from each other, down wide streets smothered in potholed asphalt, streets of utilitarian brick facades, an area that reeks with the sweetness of commercial bakeries and dim sum factories. Venues that catered to different scenes came together to share information and found out how to survive in a climate hostile to semi-legal operations.

Mgtvle was evicted sometime after the festival — photos on the internet showed a warehouse gutted of its personality, just a bare concrete floor — but in 2011, venues that are fiercely protected or somehow legitimised and utilised as venues allowed a second Decolonise festival to take place. Outside one such venue, Blackwire Records, huddled in the nook at the shopfront of a hi-fi systems retailer along the wind tunnel of Parramatta Road, I speak with Ben, a member of Thylacine, which will later play its final show on the final night of the festival. He tells me that this festival would not have existed without Midian, a space which caters to an "interesting intersection" of music cultures and communities. "Together with Blackwire it became a staple," he announces, a longneck balanced in the crook of his arm. "Decolonise I and II were intended to be celebrations of DIY spaces, a celebration that the community has enough venues, bands, people — resources to pool and be self sufficient. A celebration of what we've got and a call out for what we can do". Though the Sunday event was hastily moved to Midian due to bad weather, in someone's handwritten print, alongside a simplified map of the Inner West area demarcating bottle shops, venues and Lebanese pizza joint Manoosh, the festival's program had included a Punk Outside event, which is an ongoing affair Ben describes as "generally an afternoon event where people would come along, lay down and drink a few beers" with music taking place in a lane between warehouses. There was one particular show where two Irish brothers played songs, some about construction workers dying on sites back home, ferocious breath through tin whistle and the strum of an acoustic guitar. The sun had slipped behind the horizon and the cold had crept in to the brick and concrete laneway and the still body of murky storm water. It was freezing, he says, and people had to huddle in real close to hear.

"Their DIY punk festival is an opportunity for people to come together under a space or to impose an ethos on a site"

“Venues that catered to different scenes came together to share information and found out how to survive in a climate hostile to semi-legal operations”

I think of the Punk *Inside* event held on the last night of the long weekend and I am disappointed that the streets were slick with a June drizzle and that I wasn’t part of a huddle in a laneway surrounded by empty buildings and long weeds, watching bands perform as sensor lights flickered. It is on this final night of the festival, next to the screen printing section, that I speak to Lena, beside freshly printed patches of the bands that had performed over the three days and nights, and in Midian, an autonomous space made available to the punk community but not quite their own. Around us and amongst the festival-goers in black hoodies are the venue’s organisers: a man in a leather jacket and greying pony tail ensures patrons leave and enter discreetly, a women serves snacks and beverages, another man with a leather wrist cuff sits at the sound desk and another member rushes about wearing a bowlers cap and patchwork denim pants. Lena’s voice is in my ear again, “In 2009 there were discussions, workshops, film screenings – it was much more about the varied communities and the spaces involved,” she says. “This year, from what I observed being an interstate contingent and someone asked to be involved with contacting bands, it was very much focused on having a DIY punk fest in DIY spaces … DIY punk enthusiasm.” Near us, the severed head of HR Pufnstuf is propped up and leering from the corner. “I don’t think there’s anything wrong with having a DIY punk fest for the sake of having a DIY punk fest,” she continues. Later, when I ask for comments on her vision for DIY spaces and communities she sends me an email clarifying what she said that night, an almost stream-of-conscious chunk of paragraphs in lower case lettering ending with this: “I think DIY and all ages spaces are so important and we need to take care of them. people need to be challenged so that we can progress in our communities and in our lives. staying stagnant is not punk, being apolitical in these communities doesn’t work. we can’t have community that is just about looking at stuff and getting drunk and not talking to each other or taking care of each other when we think we’re wrong. we’ve got to grow up together.”

And I think of the night I spoke with Jason and Fez and the conviction they had in the need for autonomous spaces, especially to make these festivals happen. EBL, the ex-squat which was liberated that first night of Decolonise, will become a non-residential, after hours space, they had revealed. And spaces are already set up, serving various communities, hosting art and bands and zine fairs. There is Carrier, a venue in Rozelle which takes its name from the bold lettering on the roof – the name of a company that vacated the building years ago. I’ve seen photos of the space and the buildings surrounding it, surrendered to the inevitable decay. An office building turned greenhouse, chlorophyll green blooming from dull grey carpet and mildew flourishing across walls. There is Midian, there is Shirlows … And now in my memory I am speaking with Alex over the phone in my lunch break after a morning of sorting through press releases for tours and upcoming festivals, speaking with syrupy PR girls and hovering on promoters’ websites – the slick machinery behind productions, especially the various Australian music festival that have proliferated, fresh in my mind. He speaks on DIY, on organising an independent festival, on supporting all-ages spaces that are not as “stifling” as pub venues, as the winter sunshine streams down. Above the sound of children playing in the park around me he agrees that the DIY festival is inherently political. “It’s really empowering to know that you don’t need someone to validate you to do the things you want, even if it’s just putting on shows,” he says. “I think it’s an important thing to know and I think for a lot of people it’s not that obvious”.

CD

Benedict Moleta

Local
By Joshua Meggitt

“I wasn’t mad into music in high school – skateboarding was really my whole world.”

Perth is a funny old place. The most isolated city in the world. This fact – among many – contributes to the bizarre socio-cultural makeup of the Western Australian capital. Because – or in spite - of this, Perth has a unique and thriving art and music scene, one largely (although decreasingly) divorced from happenings in other parts of the world, fostering close relationships from practitioners, strong domestic niche pursuits, and the creation of personal, original work.

This city is a subject close to musician, artist and Perth native Benedict Moleta’s heart and work. Growing up in the beachside suburb of Swanborne, Perth icons – both breathing and geographic – populate his songs, and he remains a stalwart performer on Perth stages, long after many of his friends and bandmates have left.

“Perth has undergone some queer developments in the past five years, thanks to the latest mineral boom. There’s a lot of money around, and a lot of brash frontier type behaviour. Nevertheless I like living here. Some of my friends have left over the years, but a lot of my friends are still here, and there are always new friends to be made. There are lots of unusual places to go for walks on the weekend. I find all this inspiring.”

I met Benedict when we were both skating, in the deeply unpopular ‘skater faggot’ days of the early nineties. As a scrawny kid three years younger than me I was impressed with his dedication to creative practice, the youngest ‘zine producer and clothing manufacturer that I’ve ever known. I wonder whether this period influenced his later music?

“I definitely heard a lot of cool things on skating video soundtracks. That’s how I first heard The Supremes, Steve Miller, Al Green and The Mamas and the Papas, and lots of great early nineties hip-hop. But it's really the skating itself that’s influenced my music - odd as this may sound. In those weird teenage years, when I guess a lot of people are discovering rock ‘n’ roll and partying, I was spending my weekends getting buses out to the suburbs to go skating at primary schools and shopping centres, usually with a bunch of older skaters, who were finished with high school and were keen on smoking the weed etc. Come five pm, the other dudes would continue their adventures, ending up crowding into someone’s hatchback and fogging up the windows while listening to some dope hip-hop. But I had to get home before dark like a good boy. Those train trips coming home alone, with scabby shins, Suzanne Vega on the Walkman, and school looming the next day are big memories for me. Since I got into taking photos a few years ago, I often go walking around these kinds of places on Sunday afternoons, taking photos of the buildings and the streets.”

Among these older skaters was Daniel Erickson of slowcore group Bluetile Lounge and later Mukaizake. Did these bands, and the myriad musicians in their circle, make much of an impact then?

“I spent some time living with Dan and his family over the summer of ’91-’92. Through Dan I heard a lot of early nineties indie bands like Uncle Tupelo, Sonic Youth, American Music Club,Teenage Fanclub, Red House Painters, Slint, Palace Brothers etc. Dan’s younger brother Tim was mad into Billy Bragg, whose album *Don’t Try* This at Home had just been released. Some of these things have stayed with me over the years. But I was only 13 at the time, and I didn’t start writing songs, or really getting into music until eight or nine years later, after school and after university. As far as early musical influences are concerned, the Traveling Wilburys album was a big hitter for me. That’s the first album I bought, I guess when I was 12. The first time I heard *Handle with Care*, I knew that there was some kind of magic going on. Also the soundtrack to Stand By Me – I watched that movie lots of times when I was growing up, and Buddy Holly’s Everyday always sounded like perfect music to me.”

Given these unusual starting points, I wonder what prompted the move to start making music?

“Started pretty late I guess. I wasn’t mad into music in high school – skateboarding was really my whole world. I was also into art, and after university I had a crack at being an artist, setting up a studio at home and exhibiting a few times. I only started writing songs and playing guitar when I was about 20 or 21. Several of my friends told me I should keep at it, and gradually it took over the artwork. I started playing shows in 2001, and released my first EP in 2002.”

Moleta’s music is an interesting blend of slow, confessional acoustic balladry and more dynamic group interplay. The Benedict Moleta Band is now his favoured avenue, providing a more varied sonic palette - he lists seventies American AOR artists like Tom Petty, Heart, Bob Seger and Bonnie Raitt among his influences. Unlike them, however, there’s a measured austerity to the band; an almost intellectual restraint, even in their livelier moments, that vaguely recalls classical lieder.

“My late mother was a pianist and piano teacher, and my dad has always been involved in organising classical music events. My three sisters all learned instruments, and my eldest sister Sophie is a songwriter who has released a bunch of albums. I grew up with Catholic parents, and sang in school and church choirs, plus Christmas carols at home. So there was a lot of music around, but as a kid really I was more interested in drawing and painting than music.

“As far as classical music influencing the actual style of my songs, I know it’s easy to draw fanciful comparisons in retrospect, but check this out. My dad sang in a plain chant choir when I was growing up, and I heard them rehearsing and singing week after week throughout my high school years. I guess one of the most striking things about plain chant is the monophonic vibe it has – one melody line. I’ve always been attracted to singers with very straight singing styles, like Neil Tennant or Tracey Thorn, and my songs usually have lots of words, with the syllables fitting into the beat in a very straight, sometimes repetitive way. This style of singing might be related to hearing a lot of plain chant when I was growing up. Probably also why I find hip-hop so appealing. The way the words fit into the rhythms in my songs also probably has something to do with the fact that I mostly make up the songs singing to myself in my head, while walking to work, or going for a walk on the weekend. The

“It’s nice to play music for people in an interesting old building - it feels like in this kind of environment exciting and surprising things might happen.”

songs tend to have a walky-talky kind of vibe.”

Beyond these interesting linkages, the influence of classical performance has clearly influenced the way in which he chooses to perform live.

“There was a lot of classical music in my upbringing, and I’ve worked in a classical CD shop since 2003. Of course these things have some kind of long-term effect, but I don’t listen to much classical music at home, and don't really go to concerts. I do organise shows outside the pub scene, which have more of a concert vibe than a gig vibe. A lot of my music is pretty quiet, and suits a low-noise environment. So I’ve been putting on shows in town halls, yacht clubs, art galleries and that sort of thing since my first album launch in 2005. I guess you could say this style of show owes a lot to growing up around seated, silent listening environments. I’m not into cultivating an atmosphere of phony reverence around the music, but it’s a lot of fun putting on a show in a yacht club by the river. The environment is beautiful, you can start early so that people of all ages can come along, the acoustics of the room are naturally good, so setting up the PA is easy, etc etc. Likewise it’s fun to hire a hall in a country town and driving out there with the band, having an adventure, meeting new people out there – all sorts of different people, and not just the ones who would normally go to shows in established city venues.

“It also means the night can start at 7:30pm instead of 9 or 10. So by 9 or 9:30 the music is over, and there’s an opportunity to hang out together properly - not being hustled out the door by security, not dealing with pub carparks at midnight etc etc etc. The shows are BYO, so there’s no booze money factor – people just bring eskies and snacks. There tends to be a more social, easy vibe. It seems to open the shows to a lot of different people who, for whatever reason, aren’t really keen on going to pub shows.

Having attended a number of these I can attest to the dedication and commitment that goes into their staging, and it’s a far better environment for seeing music, such as Benedict’s, concerned with detailed sound and lyric content. But Perth’s pub scene remains vital for emerging and established bands to perform - how is the music scene in Perth today? And what of the future for standard pub rock shows, and the types of events Moleta like to stage?

“I was keen on normal pub shows in the first couple of years of playing (2002-2003). Being new to the music scene, I was stoked on seeing people play, and making friends with people who wanted to hang out every night having a good time. But 10 years later I haven’t exactly gathered a big regular following at normal pub shows, and my music sometimes fights a losing battle against noise from the bar etc. Of course there are exceptions – there have been great pub shows over the years, and there are a few venues in Perth at the moment which are definitely developing a listening environment for a broad range of music. But I gotta say, all the shows I’ve put on outside the normal venues since 2005 have been 100 per cent satisfying. A small regular following for these shows has developed over the years, and when new people come along, it’s good to be able to hang with them in a fairly neutral environment. It’s nice to play music for people in an interesting old building - it feels like in this kind of environment exciting and surprising things might happen. Don’t get me wrong – I still like doing normal gigs, but doing it this other way often feels more straightforward and effective in presenting the songs to all sorts of different people.

“This year I’ve started take these shows out of the metro area, hiring halls in interesting towns and localities outside Perth. I’ve been enjoying the process of corresponding with the local newspapers and radio stations in advance, and meeting lots of new people along the way. I’ve got a few of these shows booked this year, with the band, on my own, and with a bunch of other collaborators. Of course once you’ve made the effort to go to some small locality and put on a show, and a few people have come along and liked it, the best thing you can do is to go back there six months later, so you gradually develop something real with the people there. I find all this exciting and satisfying, and I want to do more of it as time goes on.”

Benedict Moleta’s *Timesheet* is available now through iTunes.

Part Time In Reel

Part Timer
Local
by Bob Baker Fish

"There's nothing like people with damaged frontal lobes to make interactions interesting"

Part Timer is the self-deprecating nom de plume for John McCaffrey, a Northern Englander now residing in Melbourne, Australia. To some extent it's an accurate name, his musical time limited as a father of two and occupational therapist who works with people with brain injuries. "There's nothing like people with damaged frontal lobes to make interactions interesting," he offers. "You get such great experiences that you just can't replicate in any other setting." Yet McCaffrey views his other life - his music - as a reaction, an escape from his daily life. "It's a way to lose yourself from all that shit to be honest," McCaffrey laughs. "I guess making music is a lot scarcer in my life, a lot more of a rare activity these days. When I get the opportunity to do it it's a bit more valued because of that."

Given his remarkably prolific output it may come as some surprise that these days it's about putting the kids to bed and grabbing every opportunity to retreat to the 'man cave.' "I'm not a wood worker, I don't do any of those kinds of things. It's my little seal-off, to get in there and get in my own head. Get into the music work." When he does strap himself into the cave his sounds don't betray any of the stressors of his other life. What inevitably comes out is pure, gentle and highly balanced. There's a stillness to the music of Part Timer, compositions crafted via a series of often-tentative gestures that all conspire together to resonate with melancholia and emotion.

"I think that comes from the way it's made to be honest," McCaffrey suggests. "It's just a sedentary paralysis, just sitting in front of the computer. I don't really understand how people can make upbeat electronic stuff that's pounding club friendly when you're essentially in your spare room tapping away on your keyboard. It makes a lot more sense for me to make something a lot more sedate."

McCaffrey began making music in the UK as part of the duo Clickits who had the honour of having their debut EP released as the first in the catalogue of the influential (though now-defunct) UK label Moteer. Ultimately McCaffrey believes that it was all about geography. Growing up in Accrington "a very small village part of a small northern town, there wasn't a whole lot going on there," he offers, "so even if you're remotely like-minded you gravitate towards one another." The one person he gravitated to was Johnny Russell, with a shared love of the fractured electronica released on the Warp label. "Andrew Johnston lived very close to Johnny and Andrew Johnston is the Remote Viewer. We would drink at the same pub and we would chat with him. And he and Craig [Tattersall] would talk about starting up the Moteer label. I don't think they had any concrete plans, but me and Johnny thought 'why don't we get something together and give them to Andrew', which we did over a couple of months. They liked it, and it became the first release on Moteer. It was a 12-inch. A little-heard EP. Then there was the Many Fingers release which was the first proper release, I think we were just a bit of a test."

"We were both really excited about it," he continues. "Johnny's an intense little guy. It came out just after I moved to Australia within the first couple of months of me being here. I received second-hand stories that in a fit of peak and artistic anguish over this release he actually went into the distributors and asked for all the remaining copies so he could burn them. I don't know why. He's just a bit of a lunatic."

These days McCaffrey is a little circumspect about Clickits, suggesting that it wears its Morr Music/City Centre Offices influences on its sleeve. In 2005 they would release *Express Gifts*, a full-length album despite McCaffrey's relocation to Australia, with each of the duo creating five tracks separately. It was during this time that the seeds of Part Timer were planted; inspired to some extent by the musical culture shock that was Melbourne.

"It was hugely different," he reflects. "When we first got here I was quite blown away, especially in Melbourne by the indie twee, rocky, very guitar-based kind of music. In those days I was very electronically inclined in my listening. And I found it quite strange to come somewhere that it was a rarity to get an electronic gig, and exceptionally rare for an international electronic act, especially one of the obscure ones. I think in some ways, moving here kind of influenced the music I was making because of the guitar influence that was happening here. I was still very much in an electronic headspace in the first couple of years of being here. In that time we made the Clickits album then slowly but surely got into the guitar."

But McCaffrey isn't your typical guitarist. He's much more interested in mood and texture than technique. In fact, true to form he may also be the most self-deprecating guitarist you'll ever come across. "I think I've probably always harboured a secret desire to be an axe master, and rock it out Yngwie Malmsteen style," he laughs before continuing more seriously. "I think there's a certain mood to the acoustic guitar, there's a certain feel to those kinds of sounds. I think after subjecting myself to a lot of electronic music for a good number of years I started to want to return to some more natural sounds and incorporate that with the more electronic sounds." His playing is often quite repetitive, subtle, restrained, simple lines, free from any excessive flourishes.

"That's because I'm not very good at it," he laughs. "I could not play you a tune from start to finish. Even if it was the same riff over and over. I'm awful. My process is to record quite a bit and then stitch it together on the computer. There's no way I could play a coherent tune for anyone. Even after several years of making guitar-based music."

It's this combination of brutal honesty and self-deprecation that makes a conversation with McCaffrey so refreshing. "I'm happy to tell people that," he reveals. "I think that what happens with the Part Timer music is that secretly it's electronic music. I know it has an acoustic feel to it, but it's all stitched together and modified on the computer, that's where I do my work on it."

"That's the beautiful thing about working with computers isn't it?" He continues. "It gives you the opportunity if you're prepared to spend the time to put anything together. I certainly wouldn't be able to make music without the computer; it's a tool an organiser, and a contributing factor. I consider the stuff I make to be computer music."

Part Timer's first LP appeared on Moteer in 2006; continuing his ridiculously prolific reputation his second album *Blue* appeared just a year later as Japanese label Flau's second ever release. "I seem to release a lot of stuff early on in label catalogues," he reflects, "it's like 'oh we need some artists,' it's the only way they accept me. I'm a kick-start a label kind of artist."

As for Blue, McCaffrey has some reservations. "It's a weird one for me," he offers, "there's lots of bits and pieces chucked together. I don't think it's as coherent as *Real To Reel.*" But you can't listen to McCaffrey; Boomkat described it as "treading that fine line between lonesome acoustic composition and delicate electronic tampering," whilst the Silent Ballet called it "a buffet of tracks that are as confident as they are fragile, calling upon folk and electronic experimentalists to create something intimate and sincere."

Yet it's his most recent work, again with a new label, this time USA's Lost Tribe Sound, which McCaffrey views as his most accomplished. "Real to Reel is the sound I envisaged for Part Timer," he explains. "It took shape over a few years. I compiled it down from my favourite tracks over the last few years. I'm the happiest with that one. I think it hangs well together." It's a lush album, with gentle acoustic guitar lines and those ever present Part Timer dusty soundscapes over which Nicola Hodgkinson (The Empress/ Hood) and his wife Danielle sing. In fact it's an album that features more vocals than ever.

"I'd love to work with vocalists a little more when I get some time and just do entirely a song-based kind of album. I've always liked music with vocalists. I don't necessarily trust myself a lot to commit my own vocals all that frequently to record."

recording it really quite simply and having the feel of the tracks, and I just totally obliterated that and made Part Timer with piano. I think I hit a creative down at that time and it was a real burst of inspiration to make music again I guess. She didn't want to stand in the way so more power

a few remixes as Upward Arrows too, as I quite like the process of stretching sounds and sticking big reverby washes over everything." Speaking of remixes he's created something of a niche for himself as a remixer of choice for your dreamy pastoral indie folk music, everyone from The

"When we first got here I was quite blown away, especially in Melbourne by the indie twee, rocky, very guitar-based kind of music"

Part Timer isn't McCaffrey's only nom de plume. He can also be found as Upwards Arrows and Scissors and Sellotape. In fact he has an imminent release for Scissor and Sellotape on the Fracture label. It began as a request from frequent collaborator, Melbourne multi-instrumentalist Heidi Elva, to record her playing piano in a church. "Heidi had befriended the vicar. His piano was out of tune, she got him a piano tuner and she asked if she could come and record some piano, he said yeah so we went in there, sat there for three hours and played, recorded some bits and pieces from around the place, and it was a huge sample library from one three hour sitting, and it forms the basis for all the tracks."

"Okay. I'm an absolute asshole," offers McCaffrey electing to come clean. "The idea was to go in there and record Heidi playing some fairly straight simple piano melodies and then afterwards I'd go in and add a bit of ambience to them and edit out some duff notes and add a little bit of pixie dust." But it didn't go entirely according to plan.

"I got the recordings home and I just couldn't help myself, just chopping it stretching it, totally re-arranging phrases," he laughs. Within the space of two days I had three tracks. So I sent them to Heidi and she was like 'No that's not what I wanted at all.'"

"She was all about the ambience of the church, to her, but she never did get her clean recordings."

Scissors and Sellotape began on Craig from Moteer's craft label Cotton Goods, as a limited edition of 100 EPs made out of hardback books and other curious materials with a real handmade aesthetic. "It was a bunch of field recordings taken on honeymoon and I just chopped little loops out of it and stuck it all together. It wasn't a composed process I suppose. I didn't play a guitar line seventeen times and choose the best one. I just got the field recordings and chopped those into loops and stuck them together in different ways."

Yet this isn't the end of his musical personalities, it seems the more you scratch the surface with McCaffrey the more projects appear. When he is contacted a couple of days after our initial discussion he jokes that's why they call him the onion. "Not because I have so many layers, but because I smell and make people cry."

Upward Arrows is less melodic and more drone-based, a pseudo-classical and experimental side to his personality. It's something that he has hinted at more recently in his Part Timer guise, yet it's fully explored under his other moniker. The project emerged after being offered a release from the Under the Spire label, which at the time was more drone focused.

"I'd been listening to a lot of modern classical/droney stuff," he offers and I fancied giving it a go, so made those tracks. Since that I've done

Declining Winter to Tokyo Bloodworm, Children of the Wave, Underlapper, even US cellist Aaron Martin, whose remix turned into an ongoing collaboration.

"The two releases with Aaron Martin are essentially remixes that got out of hand," he reveals. "On both occasions Aaron sent me stems for a number of his tracks to see if I wanted to remix one. Then I just got busy and remixed everything he sent." The first release was a limited double 3-inch CD on Mobeer called *Seed Collection*. One disc contained Martin's originals, the other McCaffrey's remixes. The second release was on Under the Spire.

"Aaron had released an EP called *Grass Wounds* - then he sent me the stems. I remixed them and the label released the remix EP as *Grass Rewound* (my terrible pun of a title)."

So why all these different guises?

"It's when I don't want to knock out another 'folktronic lay back and cry to yourself thing,'" he laughs. "That's when things don't fit into that Part Timer sound I guess so I stick it under different artist names," he pauses for a second seeming to reflect on this before adding, "my break core stuff is very little known but trust me it's groundbreaking."

Part Timer's Real to Reel is released through Lost Tribe Sound. CD

To Build a Home

Home Normal label retrospective
International
by Suneel Jethani

"Music is essentially built upon primitive memory structures"
- Morton Feldman

Since its first release in 2008, the Home Normal label and stable mates Tokyo Droning and Nomadic Kids Republic have kept up an impressive schedule of releases. Their back-catalogues contain works of cinematic electronica, loosely minimal organic folk and stunning drones, all with a distinct purity of spirit both musically and in the handmade principles applied to design and packaging. Label boss, curator and creative engine behind the Home Normal stable, Ian Hawgood has consistently assessed, adjusted and reinvented the wheel in his own creative output including that under the monikers Apocomeno, Koen Park, Oh No Nuno! and that of his labels in order to bring together his vision of music and image, grounded, normalised and integrated as a whole. Ian and I caught up online to talk about the labels, creative control, his busy schedule and post-quake Japan. Although we've never met in person, in his responses to my questions Hawgood is reflexive and has a deep sense of respect for his craft. This subtlety and honesty is consistent between his music, label output and our emails.

Hawgood tells me that his inspiration has always come from the close interaction with friends and musicians whom he respects personally. Hawgood is based in Saitama (a couple of hours from Tokyo) and maintains daily contact with Ben Jones in the UK who handles the printing and distribution. He also serves as Ian's sounding board for creative decisions relating to the label. Hawgood also works closely with web designer Christian Roth and Antony

Harrison (aka. Konntinent), who works on the label's live events. I ask about Home Normal's team dynamic and recent expansion and in particular the issue of maintaining creative control. "Yes I control the evolution of the label and I'm not sure how I should relinquish control," Hawgood says. "I wish I could but often it takes the obsessive behaviour of one to run these things in a pure way. Saying that I have actually relinquished control to demanding artists and it's not something I have come to be particularly happy with, so call me a control freak, but it's quite the opposite. I am in the process of regaining the spirit of the label back."

That spirit relates to principles that are both visual and aural, and Hawgood strongly differentiates between Home Normal, Tokyo Droning and Nomadic Kids Republic. For Home Normal he says that "the only theme I really had was to present work in a very simple design, with the focus being on photography. This came about through access to my very good friend, Jeremy Bible's work, as well as going through images I had taken over the years. These were to be

"Call me a control freak, but … I am in the process of regaining the spirit of the label back"

the faces of the work I felt was heartfelt and personal as too often the art and music are very disparate". Although I learn that maintaining purity in aesthetic principles has been one of the challenging aspects of running the label "... artists sometimes are far too rigid in the presentation of their work in my opinion. This has affected the overall art of the label in terms of how it appears as a complete series, or whole rather. Musically however, I have kept to the ideals by crossing styles and forms, focusing on music which I think has a unique voice and genuine spirit, and have never accepted a position within 'the scene' when it may have been easier to do so."

"Presentation is far more important to me now than before, when I had much more of a pure belief that the music was all that mattered. It's how I feel and have always felt but sadly, most artists are not of the same mindset. The artists who are of the same mindset are close friends of mine, and often people who have been around the block a few times before. So personal taste has become more enveloping I suppose, not only to be taste in the music but in the person presenting the work. When Ben and I talked about the schedule for Home Normal we said we would pair up one 'larger' release with a lesser-known artist's work. By this means we felt that it would give attention and help support new or emerging artists. However, as time has gone on, I have gotten a little weary of working with people I don't know on a personal level for a variety of important reasons. As such now, the 'whole' of each release is important – for example, the work itself, the artist's personality and intentions or attitude, their approach to the 'industry' side of things and a bunch of other stuff."

The Tokyo Droning imprint began as a sister project to Home Normal that ended up becoming quite distinct. Each release consists of a series of six works, the next due sometime between August and September 2011. Hawgood says it's focused on his own 'geekiness' and his rules for governing it are that the base materials must be brought from within a ten minute cycle ride of anywhere he has lived in Japan. Each release is handmade using old hardback books where every part of the original book is recycled, spines are reconstructed using locally sourced materials and the inserts are made of rice paper from a shop in his old neighbourhood. Each release has a different stamp and photo/negative/Polaroid/Kodachrome that is not copied and thus totally unique, and packaging is pure origami, which means no glue or tape is used - only folding.

Nomadic Kids Republic covers some of the usual Home Normal ground but is more open to electronic works. The releases focus on over-exposed or very purely lit images. Hawgood tells me "the aim being to present the overall series as a collection of wild Polaroid style shots. In particular the photography is focused on quite stark images in ways, very simple but which say far more under the surface, as [is] the Japanese way I guess. It's an aesthetic that failed in three or four of the releases due to my own weakness in not being stubborn enough with certain artists, and one I have remedied (bar one release) on Nomadic Kids Republic. Minimalism is very much a Japanese aesthetic, but so is a vibrancy and range of culture it absorbs into itself whilst keeping its identity. I think musically we have the latter and in design the former."

Almost compulsively creative, Hawgood works hard running Home Normal, holding down a day job as a high school teacher and doing studio work when he can. This allows him to fund the labels and he's thankful to have developed enough skills and connections to always have options to work both professionally and creatively. He tells me that a typical day looks something like: "Get up a bit before 5am, leave for work at 5:40am. Catch 6:03am train, take out iPad or laptop, catch up on email, work on some design or go through previous days' photography and work, or listen and make headphone notes on a mastering job or music. Get to work (school) about 8am and teach until 3pm depending on the day. Leave school and take 2-hour commute home, again responding to the day's emails and all of the above. My wife and I will walk our dog for about 30 minutes to an hour between 5pm and 6pm, after which we will cook up dinner. After dinner I will either get shop orders ready,

"If a great director came along and asked me to soundtrack their film, that would be all my dreams realised"

do mastering work, work on music, do label, design, or exhibition work until about 2am, sometimes 1am at the earliest or 3am at the latest and then go to bed. That's a typical weekday, and weekends are replaced with a bit more downtime or studio based work rather than going to school."

The Home Normal HQ was badly damaged in the recent quake disaster and on reflection Hawgood says: "we were out luckily and our house was pretty badly trashed as we had just moved. Things hadn't been placed properly and that week I had ordered a bunch of gear after saving up for a while and it was poorly positioned. My studio was trashed; drives, computers, outboard gear, instruments, and our lounge was badly hit. Thankfully we found our pets, scared beyond belief, surrounded by shelves, CDs, glass etc, but alive and safe. On a personal level it's been hard. I'll just say that insurance companies on the whole seem to lack any morals and leave it loosely at that, but needless to say we have been hit badly by it. Nonetheless we were so lucky and I am lucky in that I have been able to take on board extra studio-based work to support the labels and ourselves. Our community is doing OK but we live in an agricultural area, lots of old style houses where many of the roofs were damaged and the repairs are taking a long time. I think people need to be far more aware of helping in direct ways, small ways that show they truly care. This heals the spirit and I know there are many doing that. The healing of the spirit really is key which is something I had never truly understood on a communal level before this all happened."

As a child Hawgood suffered severe bouts of hearing loss caused by recurrent ear infections which weren't fully treated until he was ten years old. It is perhaps from these experiences of long periods of silence and associations of sound-memory to motion and visual cues that has allowed Hawgood to nurture the strong visual aspect to his creative process. "It may well be an influencing factor," he says as if my suggestion has surprised him. "You might be interested to know that Ben Jones (who runs Home Normal with me) continues to have quite severe hearing issues now ... hence he can only listen to very low volume ambient music and it's one of the reasons why we started making minimal music without having any point of reference together at university."

Continuing with the visuals theme, I'd read an interview with Hawgood where he'd been quoted as saying his work is like a "soundtrack to a film in my head which will never get made" and pressed him further on how images and the imaginary feature in his work and if he has any aspirations to soundtrack a film. "I have very strong impressions while I am making my music, sometimes before, and these dictate the direction I go in. 'Wolfskin' for example, was based on a series of dreams I had which I wrote about and then worked on the music the following day. 'Snow Roads' was about a constant image I had of a man walking down a road, everything dead in winter around him, gripped by isolation, but intense determination to keep down that path. In terms of other [people's] work, it's very much the same too. For example, as soon as I listened to bvdub's release *Tribes at the Temple of Silence*, I instantly had a vision of this kind of lost world and proceeded to go through photography I had done on Zamami Island, quite a deserted place a couple of hours by boat from Okinawa, during a typhoon. It was exactly where Brock's head was for the release and visually this was very significant of course. I've written the soundtracks to a couple of short films already, as well as making music for some pretty big TV advertisements, exhibition pieces and websites, so this is not new to me really. However, my dream since I was at university was to write the music for some crazy Hong Kong martial arts films. That has changed of course, but yes, ideally I would love to just make music for film, and its still a dream I hold onto. If a great director came along and asked me to soundtrack their film, that would be all my dreams realised and I would have to go about making new dreams and ambitions. It's not a bad place to be".

And for the future?

"I want Home Normal to regain its identity and purity fully, but this takes time. Have the promotional machine become self-aware and allow me to be exempt from even having to think about it for a second. To be allowed to take my time with each release without constant pressure, and for artists to really understand they are part of something collaborative and we are not just a money tree/workhorse for them alone. The latter is easy and in the process as I cut things up to work with people I know more. The second is impossible right now and the first, well, it will over time in relation to the latter and perhaps if the second came true then my attention to the former would be clearer."

The last of our email exchanges finds Hawgood about to jet off to Bali for a delayed honeymoon plus sneaking in a week of gamelan lessons - the results of which I'm looking forward to hearing on a forthcoming release. **CD**

Drawn to Life

Plaid
International
by Chris Downton

While they're easily one of the flagship acts to emerge from the Warp Records roster over the last two decades, London-based electronic duo Plaid have eschewed the high-profile maverick status of label-mates Squarepusher and Aphex Twin (no MTV-poised Chris Cunningham music videos for them) in favour of spending the last twenty years amassing a solid body of work. Despite this comparatively lower profile, since their split from their former incarnation The Black Dog alongside Keith Downie in the early 1990s, they've had their share of flirtations with the mainstream in the intervening years, remixing tracks from Björk's 1995 album *Post*, as well as joining the live line-up for her subsequent world tour. Despite this aforementioned venture, Plaid (real names Andrew Turner and Ed Handley) have never quite managed to mount a solo Australian tour under their own name, a situation that's about to change with their live appearance at the Sydney Opera House as part of this year's Graphic Festival. In this case the occasion involves them performing their score live to *Tekkonkinkreet*, the acclaimed 2006 anime movie directed by Michael Arias (the first US director to head up Japanese anime productions and acclaimed animation house Studio 4°C), itself based on the seminal 'Black & White' manga by Taiyo Matsumoto. In fact, Australian audiences are in for something of an exclusive treat, as this marks the first and so far only time Plaid have recreated their film score live, with the added instrumental input of local outfits FourPlay and Synergy.

When I call Ed Handley at his London home it's 9AM local time and he's just gotten up, apologising in advance if he comes across as slightly 'boring' due to his lack of sleep. He spent the entire night in the studio. “Actually, you're very precise – I can hear the bell ringing outside,” he opens, before going on to explain that he's probably going to go straight back to bed following our interview. Having established that I haven't woken him up with my phone call, one of the first things I'm keen to find out about is what initially drew both him and Andy to working on the *Tekkonkinkreet* score, and whether they'd been particularly interested in the anime genre prior to the project.

“We certainly weren't specialists, and anime is a fairly specialist thing,” Ed replies. “For us, the first love was really always music, and so we never really had time to explore it properly. We'd seen well-known films like *Akira* and *Ghost In The Shell,* and a few others through friends who were into it.” As it turns out, the seeds that led to their collaboration with Michael Arias on *Tekkonkinkreet* were the result of a purely chance event, rather than any real conscious design. “We played a gig in Tokyo; I think it might have been the late 1990s or early 2000s and Michael Arias was at the show,” explains Ed. “I think he was working his way up to directing films at the time and graphics for anime in Japan. A few years later when he was doing *Tekkonkinkreet* he remembered us and got in touch. It was something that all resulted from a completely random event.”

That initial creative contact has gone on to forge an ongoing collaborative relationship, with

Plaid - *Double Figure* (Warp, 2001)

Their third album for Warp, and also perhaps one of the most consistent fan-favourites to be found amongst Plaid's discography. While *Double Figure* showcased some of the duo's most ambitious work to date, it's also notable for its deft balance of more energetic dance rhythms with intricately delicate headphone landscapes. Indeed, the breadth of emotional territory covered between 'Eyen's feathery acoustic guitar plucks and 'Squance's acid-techno flex remains nothing short of astonishing.

Plaid – *Plaid Remixes (Parts In The Post)* (Peacefrog, 2003)

Given that a fair chunk of Plaid's remix discography is deleted or difficult to find, this extensive two CD set represents the ideal place to start for those not lucky enough to own the original vinyl. This collection also manages to highlight the sheer stylistic diversity of the artists who've requested the duo's remix skills, ranging from Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five and early Plaid associate Nicolette through to the likes of Björk, UNKLE and Goldfrapp. While it's impossible to take in the duo's entire remix back catalogue over just two (admittedly packed) discs, this set does a pretty good job of documenting some of their biggest highlights.

Plaid/Bob Jaroc – *Greedy Baby* (Warp, 2006)

On the heels of their live collaborations with video artist Bob Jaroc, this CD/DVD set saw Plaid's nine tracks being designed to work alongside accompanying visual material from Jaroc. There's certainly a wide range of moods explored here, ranging from 'The Return Of Super Barrio's more cartoonish (but still politically barbed) styles, through to 'I Citizen The Loathsome's nightmarish race through the back streets of London at night. While some commented on the slight lack of depth compared to preceding Plaid albums, *Greedy Baby* represents an important step in the duo's move towards film soundtracks.

***Tekkonkinkreet Remix Tekkinkonkreet* (鉄コン筋クリート Remix: 鉄筋コンクリート) (Aniplex Inc., 2007)**

Generally, remix albums tend to be a patchy affair. While there's the occasional inspired collection that manages to throw a genuinely fresh take on the originals, many tend to be excuses for the marketing guys to simply take a second bite of the cherry. In the case of this remix collection, the results prove to be both consistently excellent and diverse, with the likes of Derrick May, Vex'd, Atom Heart and Prefuse 73 all tapped for reworkings. Well worth paying the hefty import price from Japan for.

Plaid following their work on *Tekkonkinkreet* with a second score for Arias' 2009 film *Heaven's Door* and a soundtrack to his surreal short film Hope, which apparently centres around a struggling animator stuck in an elevator overnight. When I mention this work though, Ed prefers to avoid comparisons with the duo's *Tekkonkinkreet* score. "It's hard to relate the soundtrack we did for *Heaven's Door* to the one that we did for *Tekkonkinkreet* because *Heaven's Door* was really aimed a lot more towards a Japanese audience," he offers. "It's hard to really compare the two."

One thing that's always struck me is just how well the rhythmic flow of both the imagery and the soundtrack syncs up throughout *Tekkonkinkreet*. As Ed explains however, the duo didn't exactly have the luxury of being able to compose their accompanying score to finished visuals, having to make do instead with the creative inspiration drawn from initial concept art. "We were brought into the project at a very early stage," explains Ed. "We worked to storyboards and animatics, as well as short clips and stills. We read the original (manga) books; luckily there were translated versions," he laughs. "One thing that really helped was that Michael did all of his backgrounds first; the really detailed background art. This really established the atmosphere and emotional tone of the film, even if we didn't completely understand where the scene would eventually be placed in the film, or its context. We were also able to see the main character designs and their poses, which really helped establish what the movie was about."

While there's always been a highly cinematic quality to Plaid's music, the marriage of their compositions to visuals first emerged with their 2006 *Greedy Baby* collaborative CD/DVD set with filmmaker Bob Jaroc, something that in retrospect struck me as an initial step towards working with the moving image. Was working on cinematic scores something that they were always consciously moving towards? "*Greedy Baby* got us used to doing music to pictures, as well as the degree of contrast you need to have between the two," replies Ed. "Especially with the emotional parts; if you don't get that contrast, it just gets very predictable." When I suggest that working in a film soundtrack realm in many senses must free them up from the sorts of bpm-based constraints inherent in dancefloor tracks, he's inclined to agree. "We've always been between the two worlds; dance music and non-dance music. It's difficult to DJ our tracks too. They're mixed differently and in some cases perhaps there's a bit too much going on," he laughs. "You do still hear a few tracks out though, here and there."

With the knowledge that Plaid recently employed the services of a gamelan percussion group for live shows in the UK, I'm keen to find out what sorts of things they have planned for their upcoming live *Tekkonkinkreet* score performance at the Sydney Opera House. Have they ever done this sort of live performance before? "This is the first time we've ever done a live score to a film," Ed explains. "We did an art thing in France a few years back with Bunuel films showing, which is probably the closest we've come (prior to this). Performing live to *Tekkonkinkreet* also gives us an opportunity to 'touch up' bits of the score. We'll be performing live with FourPlay and a percussion group called Synergy; so far the guy who's doing the arrangements has sent some stuff back and forth which we've seen."

Despite being a fan of Plaid's work dating back to their days as part of The Black Dog, I can't recall them ever visiting Australia before, apart from some initial tour rumours around the time of their 2003 album Spokes. "We've never toured Australia as Plaid before," confirms Ed, "although Andy came and DJed in Melbourne with Mark Pritchard a few years ago. We haven't really been asked to tour Australia before, so I'm assuming that there hasn't been that much of a demand," he laughs. "We had the opportunity to see a few of the major Australian cities back in the mid-90s when we toured with Björk, which as you can imagine is a rather nice way to travel." When I mention that I'd forgotten about their involvement with that particular Björk tour and actually attended it, he laughs slightly as though it's an association Plaid constantly get asked about. "I'd actually love to see more of Australia. We thought about doing a larger Australian tour, but we have to keep the Sydney Opera House show exclusive. I can't see us touring Australia again after this in the immediately foreseeable future."

Finally, with the knowledge that Plaid have been hard at work on their upcoming *Scintilli* album for the last couple of years, I can't resist probing Ed for a few hints of where the duo are headed next with their music. Are they still continuing their long-running relationship with Warp Records?

"I can't say too much; the time for all of that will come a bit later," is Ed's slightly guarded response. "The new album should be out at the end of September. It is different; perhaps a little less beaty. I have to be careful what I say here, but it shows us doing quite a few things that we haven't really done before. Perhaps I'm saying too much here already," he muses. "We've re-signed with Warp; our original contract with them finished last year and we re-signed. It's a case of mutual satisfaction; they like us and we like they way they've handled our stuff. For them to survive (through the whole label collapse) is a big thing, and for a label of their comparative size they continue to support smaller artists, especially in the case of Warp Films, which has put out some incredible stuff already. I can't really imagine working with another label." **CD**

> "We've always been between the two worlds; dance music and non-dance music"

Maria Minerva

Maria Minerva
International
by Lyndon Pike

"Tallinn is the capital of Estonia. It is by the sea. Population 400 000 - 20% of it Russian. It gets very cold in October and the snow usually disappears in April. The climate is really, really bad - endless winter. We have a beautiful medieval old town but also crazy commie blocks in the outskirts – all concrete residential areas built during the Soviet period." Maria Minerva describes to me her native home of Tallinn, Estonia, the Baltic region which according to some sources has the highest level of internet freedom in the world.

Perhaps it is this freedom and environment along with a family upbringing full of deep musical riches (her father is a respected music critic) that lead Maria to her current life as an art student in London and as a burgeoning musician, gaining respect and responses on many websites and several recording labels worldwide.

To date, she has released a cassette, 'Tallinn At Dawn' on Britt & Amanda 'Pochahaunted' Brown's Not Not Fun label ("songs about Tallinn, the strange things in my room, California and 10 rock chicks listening to Neu!", according to Maria) and the Noble Savages 12" on Brown's 'disco' label 100% Silk. She has collaborated with several others and put her hand to remixing bands such as Keep Shelley In Athens.

Coming across as smart, savvy and with a self-effacing attitude, all the while maintaining an underlying confidence that is common in many Europeans, I spoke to Maria Minerva (real name Maria Juur) about many subjects in a somewhat non-linear manner. Listening to her music - a mix of '80s VHS ghostly longing and defensive cool, coupled with disco beats hidden behind a gauze of sounds and washes - it's evident her trajectory is definitely on the rise.

Some reviewers like to latch onto the perceived sexual energy within Maria's music. Her could-have-been-a-model looks and cool demeanor no doubt add to the myth that it's all about what goes on between the sheets. However, it's music that's more important than sex for the performer.

"WAY more important. I think the people who focus on that need to deal with their own underlying sexual energies! I'm not saying that it is not there, but I do not think it is the most important thing. Plus, there is a huge amount of like, "camp", or "quotation" in it.

"It's not me moaning, it is the distant Donna Summer. Or when I tag my track on YouTube as "slutwave" it is because it was an inside joke between me and a friend, not because I think that I produce slutwave. What is that anyway? Ha."

I was more curious about what the 23-year-old felt was the soundtrack of romance and the sound of heartbreak.

"When it comes to romance, people tend to have soundtracks for the beginnings and endings, the high and low points. I am getting old and more interested in the possibility of a boring daily co-existence.

"I'd prefer listening to music with someone I love instead of thinking about our relationship in terms of songs. Although once I broke up with a guy and forced myself to listen to Dionne Warwick's 'Heartbreaker' - it helped because it made my problems and myself appear as a total cliché, even my tongue-in-cheek approach to this song ended up being a cliché about a cliché ".

How exactly does somebody feel old at the glorious age of 23?

"I've always felt old. Being a teen was cool, but the twenties suck, especially in a big city like London. You can see how everyone is struggling so hard to find their way and I sense this panic in the air all the time, people thinking in terms of networking, people being forced to work for free and so on. Very competitive.

"I think the biggest thing one has to figure out

is what they're actually good at. I don't know that many people in their twenties who would say that they are happy, but I know middle-aged people, who seem cool. I cannot wait to finally chill out!"

For someone still so young, Maria is seemingly wise beyond her years. She is very well versed in art, literature and especially music. Her tastes range from deep Detroit techno, to the drones of William Basinski, to throwaway dance pop and beyond.

"Wise beyond my years? Maybe I used to be, not anymore. I was probably just a bit more pretentious and curious about the world than the average teenager. I do not think that I'm that smart anymore... but I'm still curious. I think it comes from my parents, they are both smart people.

"I also went to a good school. Some folks have accused me of being a prep school kid. Well, what can I say? All education is free in Estonia and I ended up there. But I really look up to those of my friends who have discovered the world of avant-garde or alternative culture without coming from a good family or school, somehow this seems much more interesting to me."

Maria's music has sense of humour about it that sometimes can be misconstrued as pastiche. She explains:

"Sometimes I have a huge problem with the pastiche-element in my own music, sometimes I namely want to ape. I think in music, many things come down to personal obsessions. I am obsessed with both high art and cheap pastiche."

Producing all of her music so far in the bedroom, I queried the potential risk of sending out a creation with today's technological simplicities and ease that may have previously remained under lock and key. "I think the whole idea of 'releasing' has changed. Instead of releasing one album a year or every two years, young musicians (me included) are releasing everything all the time. I just 'released' a completely random Bee Gees cover last week via Soundcloud. It was dedicated to my friend, and yes, it was made very quickly, as result of hard-core procrastination.

"At the same time, I have a whole album out now (*Cabaret Cixous* on Not Not Fun). I have a different sense of every track I have made. Some have taken so much time, others are just random bastard babies. The interesting thing is that the audiences do not know about these things. And I might end up giving a wrong impression of my 'artistic programme'. But confusion is sex, innit."

How many songs DON'T you release?

"I have an external hard drive full of crap that I do not want anyone to hear. Sometimes I try to recycle this stuff but usually fail. What's doomed remains doomed. Mind you, I just recycled a tiny bit of something for a Maria Minerva and L.A. Vampires collaboration and it sounded really cool - an exception to the rule."

Maria states that the Maria Minerva persona is the idealistic part of herself.

"It doesn't bleed into my day to day existence at all - I wish! On the streets of London, I'm less than nobody. Pop star fantasies remain satisfied online."

With that in mind, I questioned Maria if attention from fans or writers was important to her, or was praise a byproduct of a craft that was created to satisfy her own artistic urges?

"Feedback is so, so important and I'm blown away by the fact that someone is actually listening to this stuff. When it comes to writers or bloggers, sometimes I wish they'd surprise me more, but I'm always flattered by the attention. It is also making me very curious – I want to imagine the situations, the people, everything. Initially, making music was just my way of letting out some steam and dealing with my obsessions. However, there were no expectations that it would be released."

Have you had any bad reviews? If so how did they make you feel?

"Of course there have been some reviews by individual bloggers that were not that enthusiastic. They made me a bit sad, but at the same time, c'mon, music is universal but it is not THAT universal. Everyone is not into the same stuff.

"Some comments have been really funny, they have not even been about the music but rather about my looks or something irrelevant. At Altered Zones, someone commenting on my Cali Scheming video and said I looked like Anthony Kiedis from Red Hot Chilli Peppers... or when someone says I'm a "fucking hipster" or says I'm Finnish and represent the 'Finnish post-structuralist rave-scene'. I have a well-developed sense of humour, so I find all this hilarious! As long as I know that some people genuinely like the stuff, I'm okay with it."

How do you deal with disappointment?"I take a bath."

What is the worst thing you could be labelled as?

"FAKE."

Tell me about Maria Juur at age 9. What are some of your formative memories?

"Summers at my grandma's place, my dad

I think the people who focus on that need to deal with their own underlying sexual energies

listening to an awful lot of music. I was at school then so probably first dramas involving human relationships. Making friends. I think around then I also fell in love for the first time. It was with my classmate Edgar. In 2011 he is studying to become a doctor. Grandma passed away just recently. My father is still listening to a lot of music."

Maria's current studies are sometimes at war with her creative processes. With a B.A. in Art History already under her belt, she is currently studying towards an M.A. in aural and visual cultures at Goldsmiths. Despite that she's managed to collect and create enough material to release a new album, *Cabaret Cixous*.

"I'm interested to hear what the critics that have not read this interview will say about my 'development', as the tracks on the LP are more like proper songs, even though they were recorded at the same time as the earlier releases. When I got signed, Not Not Fun just wanted to curate and release everything I had done, so probably I'll be feeling pressure with this release. 'Cabaret Cixous' is how it is - material recorded when I did not expect that many people to actually hear it, as it was with the tape ('Tallinn At Dawn'). The latter was received well, so I'm hoping that people will dig the new LP too.

"Cabaret Cixous is very pop, or if you like, avant pop. I'd say it is very accessible, leaving aside the super weird album artwork that I cannot wait for people to see cos it is absolutely insane. I just realized that the majority of the songs have extremely lame love lyrics, the tape was a bit more sophisticated, but yeah, the LP is very much about mental and physical love. However, I have to say, it is more inspired by the history of pop than my own experiences. It is still sincere and it's likely you won't hear the lyrics anyway because of the reverb!

"I think it is more for girls than boys but my audiences are open enough so I shouldn't really say that. The title is a reference to Cabaret Voltaire, Cabaret Derrida (an electronic music festival once held in Estonia) and Helene Cixous, phallogocentrism, dadaism and yaddi yaddi. Yes, I have been in the university system for too long, but I just loved the alliteration too. I think people will remember this."

CD

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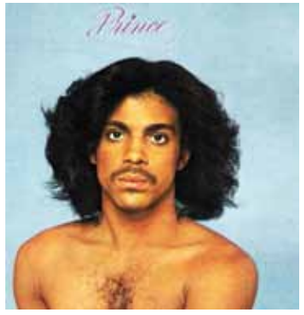
by Donny Benét

Prince – *Prince*
Probably one of my most favourite albums – everything from the photo of the naked Prince riding a horse and his playing of all the instruments on all songs makes this album great. It has inspired me to make sure I play all of the instruments on my recordings and his musicality has

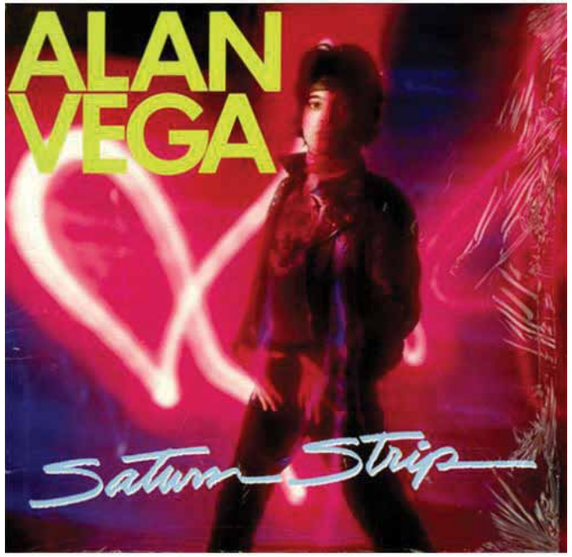


set the bar for me to aspire to. His use of synthesisers shows how effective they can be as colour in a song. As a writer and recording musician I am deeply influenced by this record.

Songs such as 'Sexy Dancer' and 'I Wanna Be Your Lover' are the standouts for me. The extended jam on 'I Wanna Be Your Lover' is basically the backing tracks minus vocals and its presence in the back end of the song is such a tease for the listener. Getting Chaka Khan to cover 'I Feel for You' inspires me to hopefully get another artist to cover some of my songs some day. This album is also a favourite of the Benét family to listen to when we're making sauce on our annual tomato sauce day.

John Maus – *Love is Real*
Maus is a genius. I would love to see John Maus play at an Italian wedding one day. I would love invite him over to Donnyland studios for a special collaboration and some of my mother's lasagne. We can only dream.
When I first heard *Love is Real* I was totally blown away by how subtle the songs were, especially the instrumentation and production. 'Heaven is Real' and 'The Silent Chorus' are the standouts for me. All of the songs are really great but these are the ones for me. The "sound" of *Heaven is Real*, especially the bass, is amazing for my ears. His use of synthesisers is just masterful, the degree of subtlety is something to aspire to. 'The Silent Chorus' makes me conjure up images of an elated and sad Vangelis recording music in his studio the night after handing over his daughter to his future son-in-law. Very powerful. Keep pushing on John.

Alan Vega – *Saturn Strip*
'Every 1's A Winner'. This is the one song that motivates me more than listening to any of Tony Robbins' motivational tapes. I think it's great how he views self-development and improvement.



Laurenz Pike of PVT layed this on me when we were driving north to do a gig at a smallgoods function. It totally blew my mind. We could both visualise Alan dressed in a tracksuit that he'd been wearing for 3 days punching the air while recording this song. Definitely done in one take. Kirin J Callinan introduced me to Suicide amongst many other things. For that I am deeply indebted to him.

Tonetta777 –*777*
Tonetta was a beautiful accidental discovery for me. I think I read an article about him in The Vine while having my morning espresso. One hour later and 30+ YouTube clips I was hooked on his genius. The clips alone are so confronting! I love how most of the songs have an identical drum beat and guitar/bass pattern. His lyrics are masterful and he is a man in full control of his emotions. It's so hard for me to pick a favourite track - 'My Bro', 'Red White and Blue', 'God Treats You Right', 'You Got Too Much' and 'Believe Me People' are standout tracks for me. The rest are just as amazing.
It would be so fantastic for Tonetta to one day record a Donny Benét song, a real dream.

Prince – *Dirty Mind/1999/Controversy*
These albums seldom leave the CD player. As shown in my love for Prince, I'm a huge fan of his music. *Dirty Mind* is so raucous and sexy, as a listener I can't turn away whenever this is on. My father and I fight over this album - he thinks it

crosses the line lyrically and whenever we play it doing our workout sessions he has to leave the room. I guess there's only so much a 1950s Italian man can take! Personal favourites from this album are 'Uptown' and 'Do It All Night'.

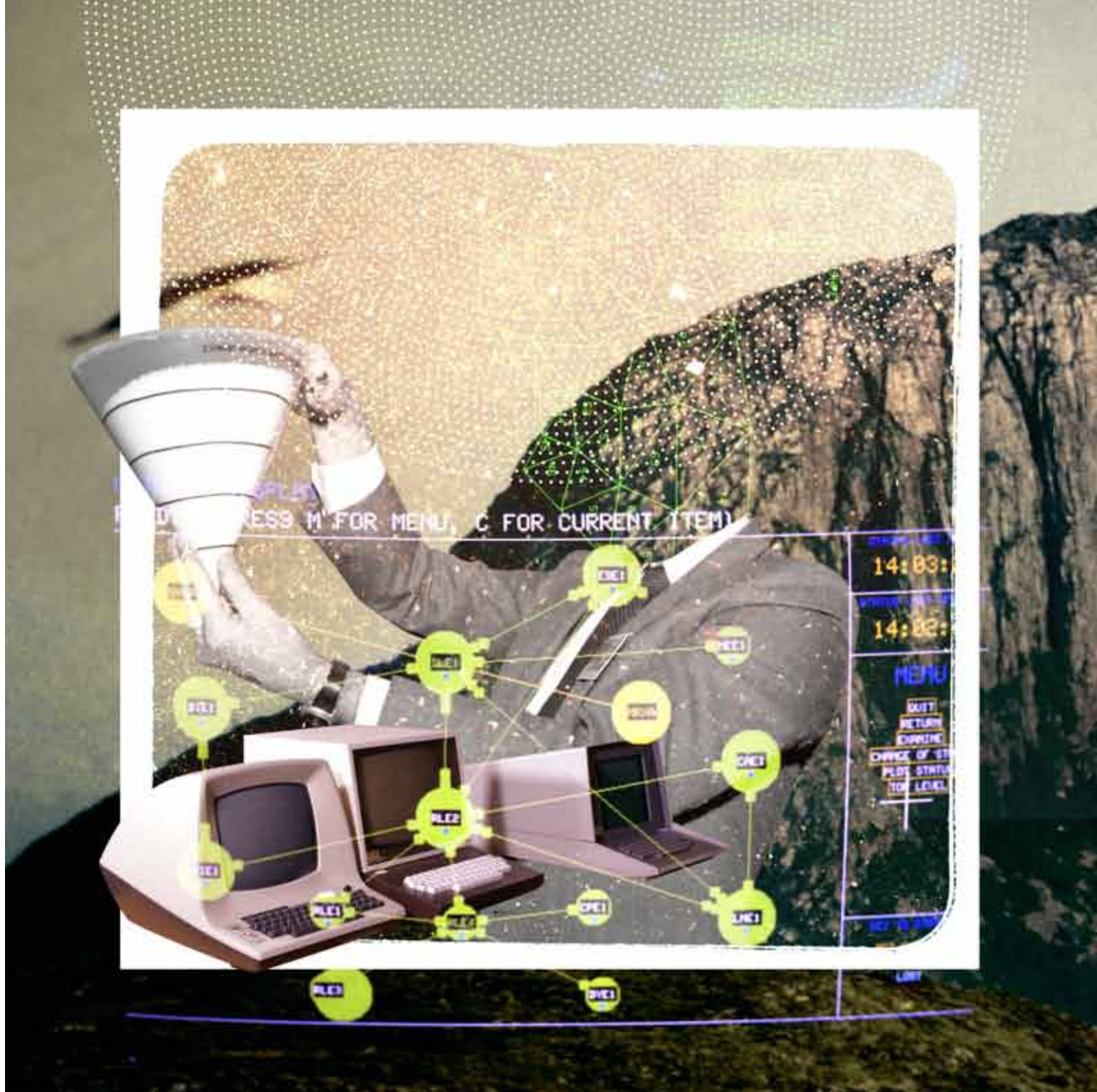
1999 is an incredible album from a production point of view. This album influenced my decision to buy the Sequential Circuits DrumTraks drum computer. The use of synthesisers in this album blows me away. My dad is a huge fan of this album also. We're working on re-recording it at the moment as a karaoke tape for my mother's 60th birthday party.

Controversy is also a huge favourite amongst the Benét family. I just love the attitude of the songs, not to mention the excellence in production. 'Private Joy' is the one for me.

Phil Collins – *No Jacket Required*
Whenever things get too hectic in life, 'One More Night' gets played straight away. I'm soon blissing out upon the song touching my ears. It's like taking a walk on the beach but without being there.
Phil Collins is an inspiration as he's proof that a man with a thinning head of hair can make it in this tough business.
'Sussudio' is such a classic. I'd love to cover this song in the future. As a singer, 'Don't Lose My Number' has a punch that is well appreciated in my family. This is one of my Nonno's favourite songs, although he sings it as "You dona lose my number".

Giorgio Moroder – *Scarface soundtrack*
This album is a favourite of mine as it was one of the first recording sessions my father did for Giorgio Moroder. They'd been friends since childhood but this was after Giorgio stopped playing the Italian club circuits in the early 70s. Dad was really excited as he got to meet Al Pacino during the test screenings. Dad took him fishing a few times and taught him how to make the perfect espresso. As kids, whenever dad had a bit too much to drink he'd play this album with his headphones on and sob quietly in his den.

Ariel Pink's Haunted Graffi – *Before Today*
Fantastic album, Dave Miller and Laurenz Pike of PVT layed this on me. We also went to the Sydney gig together, it was really good. If Ariel Pink is ever considered mainstream pop music then the world will be an even more amazing place! The songs, production and individual performances from the musicians blow me away ever time I listen to it. 'Reminiscences' is the dark horse for me on this album. Even though I'm totally wrong, I can just visualise the old 1970s studio musicians recording this song for some kind of infomercial about tropical gardening products. I'd love to get Ariel to re-record one of my dad's early songs that never quite made it. I think his warmth and musicality would reinvigorate the song. What an artist!

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