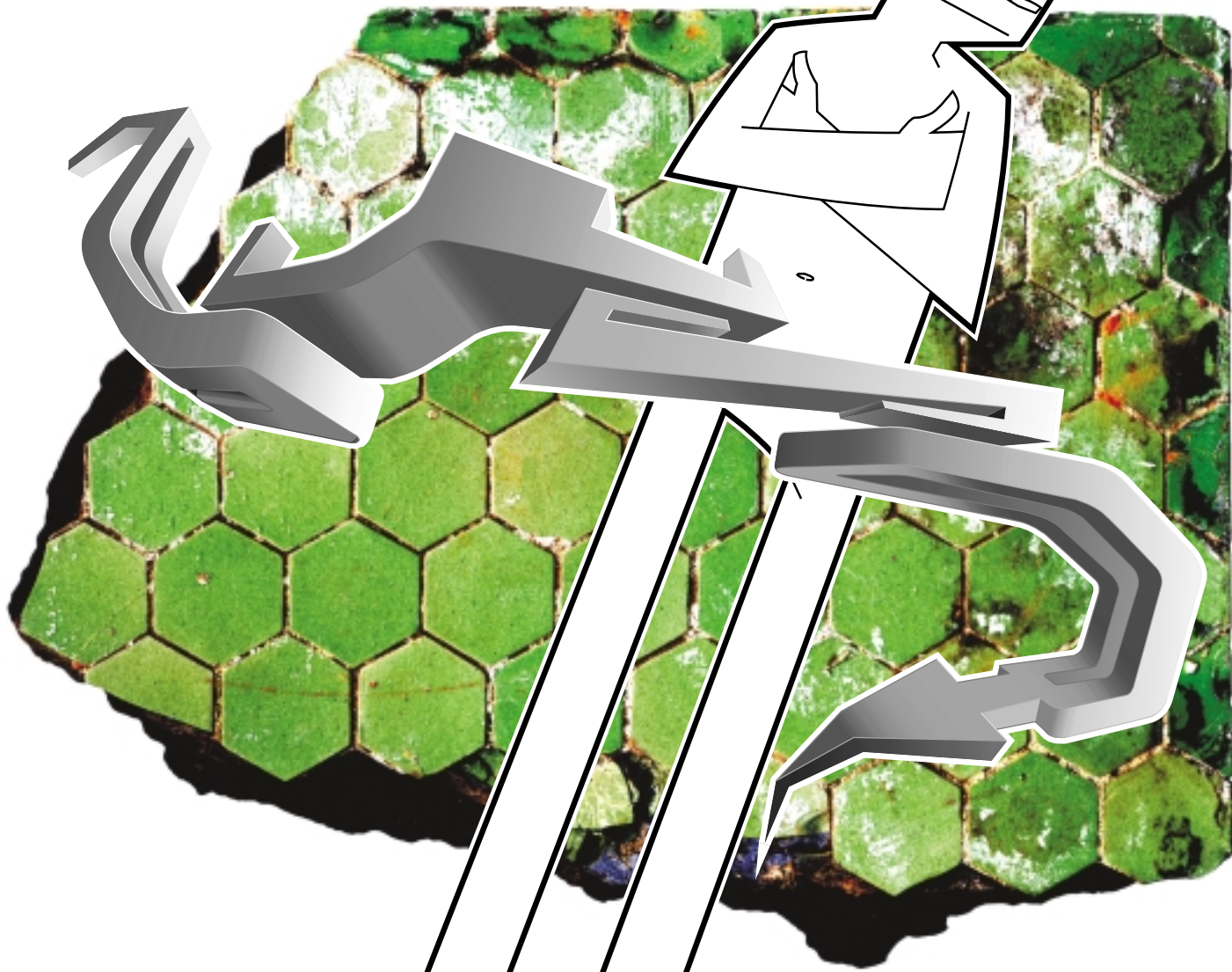


ISSUE

04

**CYCLIC DEFROST**

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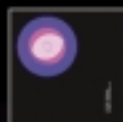
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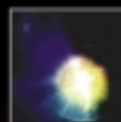
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# CYCLIC DEFROST



## ISSUE 4 CONTENTS

- 4 SHEHAB TARIQ**  
by Dale Harrison and Bob Baker Fish
- 7 CURSE OV DIALECT**  
by Bob Baker Fish
- 10 THE HERD/ELEFANT TRAKS**  
by Georgina O Smith
- 14 FIAM**  
by Bim Ricketson
- 16 UPSHOT**  
by Dale Harrison
- 17 REKINDLE**  
by Vaughan Healey
- 20 FROST**  
by Sebastian Chan
- 22 DSICO**  
by Luke Dearnley
- 24 GODSPEED YOU! BLACK EMPEROR**  
by Dale Harrison
- 26 BARRY'S BOOTLEGS**  
by Chloé Sasson
- 29 REVIEWS**
- 38 SLEEVE REVIEWS**
- 40 CONSCIENCE POP**  
by Andrew Shuter
- 42 DEGRASSI**

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- ▶** Music downloads of featured artists

## ISSUE 4 EXCLUSIVE WEB CONTENT

Additional reviews

Exclusive Set Fire to Flames interview

Exclusive on-line giveaways

MP3s of selected artists

When we started *Cyclic Defrost* back in 1998 in its original zine format it was about offering a space for new things to be written about and music to be promoted. The current incarnation of the magazine started to be pulled together in July 2002, having been conceptualised in the summerhaze of that January. It's nearly a year on now and we've started to grow beyond our expectations... so welcome to the first properly international issue of *Cyclic Defrost*. Perhaps you are reading this all rugged up in Montréal, or at a street-side cafe in Paris, at some crazy music event at Sonar in Barcelona, or surrounded by schoolgirls in Tokyo. Or possibly you're home in Australia, the country that Dubya tells us is 'a lot like Texas'.

Fortunately we have the best in Texan, I mean Australian, audio culture inside. This is our 'mutant pop' issue... and we have inside an interview with Melbourne's hip-hop nutters Curse Ov Dialect whose new album is about to be released by US label Mush. The cover of this issue is supplied by Curse's DJ, Shehab Tariq, who is also a graf-fik designer. Elefant Traks' hip hop breakaways The Herd get written up after a successful start to the year; Rekindle shows us the other side of pop; Bim Ricketson tracks down young Perth producer Fiam who is better known in

Berlin than his home town; Ben Frost explains why it's taken him two years to follow up his amazing debut demo; and we get the lowdown on the infamous Dsico whose mutant pop bootlegs have been exciting us since well before Issue 1. Looking overseas Chloé Sasson has tracked down Barry's Bootlegs and Cassette Boy, whilst my co-editor shook off his fears and spoke to Godspeed You Moving Exclamation Mark.

In the review section we have lots of new and not so new stuff, more sleeve design reviews (did anyone else notice that the *Wire* has started doing this now too?), our favourite Degrassi and a new piece in the vein of Judgement Jukebox simply titled Conscience Pop.

*Cyclic Defrost* has some long days and nights ahead of it as we move towards Issue 5, which will be out around the start of August. And there are already plans for a special cover CD on Issue 6.

As always, we welcome your ideas, feedback and contributions. Maybe you know of someone in your city we should cover, or you want to write for us, or you are in an outfit who wants their music reviewed or the video clip checked out. Make contact. We like it.

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**Distribution**  
Inertia Distribution  
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**Thank You**  
Sharon Pinney at DFAIT Canada and AIR/MMF Music Travel Grants, S1E Montreal, Alain & Lucinda at Mutek, Nick, Ash and Ruby at Inertia, Natalie at Torch Publishing, Giv and Luke at Qbique, Chris Bell at Blueskyhost, all the advertisers.

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**ISSUE 5 DEADLINE JUNE 22, 2003**

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A New Audiences project, assisted by the Australia Council, the Federal Government's art funding and advisory body, through its Audience and Market Development Division.



## 4 Cover Design

Interview with Shehab Tariq

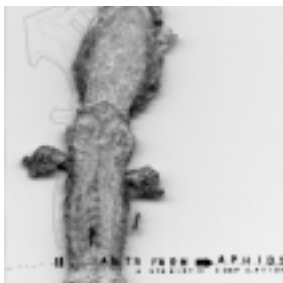
by Dale Harrison (part 1) and Bob Baker Fish (part 2)

# THE BIONIC MAN

### + PART 1 – THE ART

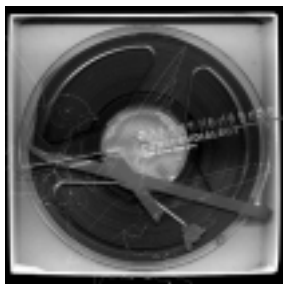
Twenty years on and hip-hop's status in Australia as a legitimate culture is at a high point. State-funded radio is finally catching on to locally produced music, b-boying attracts local government funding, DJing is used to sell burgers and even the much maligned graf writers have claimed some territory back from the status as vandals. This recognition comes at a price, as more of the culture is bled away into mainstream appropriations, hip-hop artists themselves struggle with 'keeping it real' and the definition of 'realness' becomes more and more narrowly defined.

As a DJ and visual artist, Shehab Tariq is representative of these accepted norms on one level and simultaneously at another level he shatters them, all the while he just continues what he has always done, which is to draw and make music.



**Above:** *Ants Farm Aphids* compilation cover

**Below:** *Curse ov Dialect's* forthcoming album on Mush



Despite being heavily imbued with the spirit of hip-hop (and in fact because of that), his music and art manages to steer clear of obvious clichés. As a DJ, his cutting is superlative, and far more interesting musically to many more trick-oriented DJs, his productions avoid the sinking hole of recycling old funk beats, and as a designer, his use of type and graphic elements have their roots in graf culture, yet he manages to translate the subtleties of street art into a studio environment.

Hip-hop had him from a very early age, he explains, 'A kid in my school got *Spray Can Art* and after seeing that I was intrigued by graffiti and started copying pieces out of there. Around the same time my older sister made me a mix tape of rap from the radio which had stuff like Run-DMC, Public Enemy, Beastie Boys etc, which I used to love because it sounded so different to everything else and they used to swear(!) and sample what I thought were boiling kettles in their tracks (turned out to be a horn line). From there on in it all went hip-hop.'

His first memories of making art also stretch back to Primary school 'I remember sitting in the library looking at pictures in books and comics and drawing while everyone else attended religious class (being non-Christian I was exempt).' And his first memories of music were in his room 'making cutup/pause-record collages on the family's dual tape deck.' This intertwining of the two continues to this day on a number of levels. At a lower level, many of the events he does artwork for also feature him in some musical capacity, and at a more conceptual level the two spheres still inform each other: 'For me they are definitely linked. I listen to music while I draw, the programs I use to make music are very visual.'

The cover of this issue of *Cyclic Defrost* is a good example of the way that Shehab takes hip-hop as his first reference. The cover space is taken up with three main elements and some modified type. The background texture of green tiles is probably the least distinctive aspect, although its organic rough edge and lack of right angles is sympathetic to the vector art placed above it, and it seems to be a photograph of a section of a wall or floor. The vector art is in two



sections – a human figure and the three dimensional word 'paso' – both of which are set at striking angles and seem to be in motion. The use of type in a primarily decorative function echoes both graf art and traditional Islamic art, and the figure is in a typical hip-hop pose. These are both distinctive elements in Shehab's artwork, he often uses small sketches or vector art characters to off-set typography, and more subtly introduces 3D type in textural applications. The type at the top of the page is also distinctive in that it has been modified, with rays extending from the title, and parts of the text filled in or extended.

Despite his ever increasing body of work he still doesn't consider himself a designer, 'Being an artist or designer is something I always aspired to, not fully understanding how you get from being a kid sitting in your bedroom drawing to being called a 'real' artist.' This is understandable at one level given the fact that much of his work is done for various projects he's personally involved in, but with a portfolio that includes CD artwork for an international label (*Curse ov Dialect's* new album on Mush), upcoming artwork for a major label (TZU's album will be released later in the year on BMG) and regular poster design for one of Melbourne's biggest clubs (*Revolver Upstairs*).

In fact his work for *Revolver* is what inspired *Cyclic Defrost* to seek him out to do a cover design. One of the most distinctive aspects of Melbourne's street culture is the fact that very few of the gig posters are in colour. Compared to Sydney, where garish spot and full colour art-

REVOLVER UPSTAIRS PRESENTS:  
**NYE31DEC2001**

**MUSICVS**  
**PHYSICS**  
**TZU**  
**SYMBIOTIC**

DJS:  
LKR  
DAN  
JCB  
PASO  
DELISH  
BEATRIX  
3RD DEK



work for the major events compete down out the photocopied artwork of smaller acts, Melbourne prefers straight and stylish black and white. Most of the posters for the larger clubs are large A1 and A0 mono prints, the most distinctive being Revolver Upstairs' large format posters that have a life all of their own. Shehab's work for Revolver Upstairs is simple and effective, relying on big monochrome blocks, uniquely altered sans serif type and quirky character sketches. When I claim that his work is one of the distinctive things about Melbourne for me he's quick to correct me, 'No, that's a pretty big statement. There are other guys that have been doing posters for long before I started, eg. Puzzle (Burn crew), Kano, Merda, Perks etc. who were a

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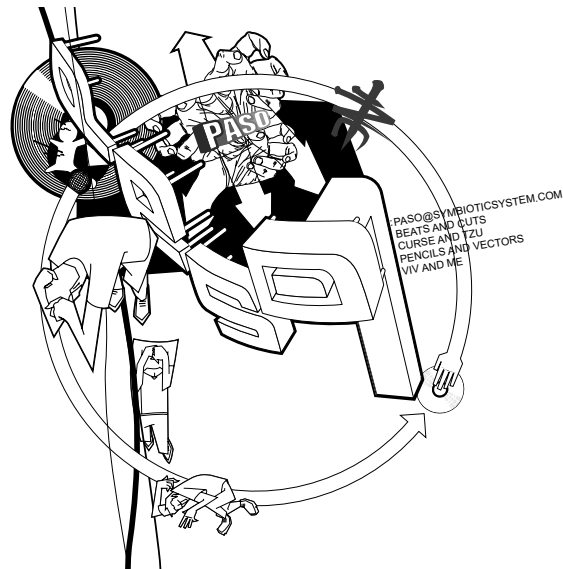
[I never understood] how you get from being a kid sitting in your bedroom drawing to being called a 'real' artist.'

big influence on me and I think they are responsible for a lot of what's happening design-wise on the streets at the moment.'

Apart from his musical commitments with Curse ov Dialect, TZU and Symbiotic Systems, day to day Shehab works at Implant, a CD duplication service run by himself and three others. This brings him into contact with that most dreaded of clients, the pushy customer who has a copy of Photoshop on their PC and thus considers themselves a designer. 'Direction by non-designers is the bane of my life. I especially hate clients who think they know what they want but really don't. I hope to get to a stage where people come to us because they like our style... but at the moment I have to pay the bills.'



*Above: Shehab's distinctive work for Revolver Upstairs*

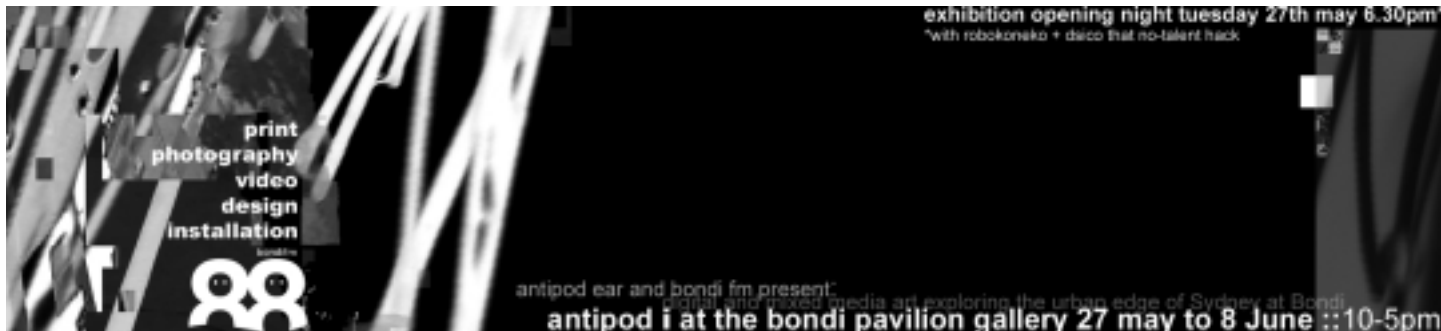


## PART 2 - THE MUSIC

The DJ wearing Adidas, Shehab, AKA Pasobionic, has been a member of Melbourne's Curse ov Dialect since its inception. He is also the man responsible for much of the peculiar, wacked out and dangerously weird sample-based tunes that emanate from beneath Curse's innovative prose. Producing an ever shifting landscape of odd, difficult, yet nonetheless coherent samples torn from their original context, and lovingly reassembled to fit the Curse's distinctive vision of the world, Shehab has drawn much praise for the diversity of his palette and the uniqueness of his approach. Though prior to Curse, diversity wasn't something that even interested him.

'When I was younger I was a total hiphop head and I used to listen to nothing but hiphop,' he laughs over the phone on a lazy Sunday afternoon in Melbourne. 'Anything else I wouldn't even give the time of day. I guess when I met Raceless he sort of opened my mind up to all this other stuff. [He] just made me realise that there's so much more to music than just hiphop. He was really the instigator for all that stuff. I guess yeah,' he laughs again, 'it's all his fault.'

Since the early days, Curse has demonstrated a firm commitment to pushing the boundaries of hip-hop in every way possible. The first







seeds of this can be heard on their debut LP *Hex Ov Intellect*; an album recorded back in 1998 when none of the members had recording equipment and were forced to rely on studio engineers to construct their tunes. 'It was kind've done once removed so we didn't quite have as much control,' remembers Shehab. 'It's kind've hard to get the idea you've got in your head through to the guy who's working the equipment.' Despite its limitations, *Hex Ov Intellect* is an interesting and rewarding document, a lyrically aggressive and sonically varied release that signals future directions for the outfit both in terms of lyrical and musical content. In fact, musically, their approach has varied little even to this day, though the acquisition of equipment has made them self-reliant. 'We're still trying to get as many samples as we can from all over the place, put them together and see what happens,' laughs Shehab. This process is enhanced by each individual's varied tastes and obsessions. Whilst Raceless might offer some experimental CDs, August 2 might record parts from the radio and Atarungi might do some field recording. Shehab, like many DJs, is a second-hand record collector. Regardless of the source, they all go in the pot, and whilst he might have the final veto over a sample, Shehab insists the construction of sounds is a collaborative process.

Like many hip-hop outfits, the music tends to come before the lyrics, and once the collection of samples begins to find form and develops its own unique feel, Curse invent an accompanying narra-

tive which assists in the often unexpected direction of the sounds. 'It's like, "Okay this sample sounds like an African man sitting in the forest playing a violin with an English princess being carried on a chair," so we make up these little stories and make it more and more abstract as the track progresses. We create these weird little atmospheres, little stories, when we make a track, so I guess that's what gives them that unique character.'

For the last few years Shehab has also moonlighted in Melbourne hip-hop outfit TZU. A quartet featuring two MCs, a sampler creating beats and Shehab on the decks, TZU's sounds are much more straight than Curse, allowing Shehab to pursue a funkier and more laidback approach. 'With TZU the main thing, or one of the main things is to get people moving and having a good time,' he reveals. 'Whereas with Curse we're mainly trying to freak people out and get them to think a bit. You could describe it as hip-hop for the everyday person.' Originally forming out of the ashes of local Melbourne mutant-funk outfit Pan, the trio regularly crossed paths with Curse, liked what they heard and invited Shehab onboard. Playing regularly around Melbourne, the outfit have created a buzz outside local incestuous hip-hop circles, secured a record deal on the strength of a demo they recorded in 2001, and are currently in the midst of recording their debut LP. 'I guess it's actually getting a bit darker than the demo now, with more politics creeping in to it,' offers Shehab vaguely. 'I guess it's just the mood of the times.'

As if two full time projects aren't enough, Shehab also finds time to indulge in some solo work under the moniker Paso Bionic. One cut 'Echoes of Blue', a carefully constructed atmospheric, groove-based breakbeat that echoes some of the more emotive works of DJ Shadow, appears on the recently released Symbiotic compilation. 'The solo stuff's more laidback,' he states. 'I don't know how could you say...emotional. It's more from inside me than being a collaboration with other people.' It is however something he is unable to properly focus on due to time commitments. And talking with Shehab you get the sense that he could do with an extra five to ten hours in the day. Between his solo stuff, Curse and TZU he also runs Implant, a CD duplication business during the day, and somehow finds the time to devote to creating artwork, such as that which graces the cover of this issue of *Cyclic*. 'It's good, it keeps me busy. It's what I like to do,' he assures me. 'I don't watch TV or many movies or things like that. I just do what I like, which is music and drawing and stuff. Being creative.'

More of Shehab's work can be seen at [www.implantdesign.com.au](http://www.implantdesign.com.au)



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Interview with Raceless  
by Bob Baker Fish

# OF CURSE, MY DEAR

In the Western suburbs of Melbourne, Sunshine is a large multicultural urban centre populated by a complex mix of peoples, united in the main by their struggle to remain above the breadline. Proudly working class, its large population of unemployed young people has translated into an unfair focus on criminal and welfare issues, eschewing its historical contribution to Melbourne's development. Here you're as likely to see newly arrived migrants, walking down the street passing old diggers as junkies, schoolkids or first time home buyers. In Sunshine anything's possible, and it's fitting that I'm here at the local kebab house to meet with Raceless, MC and focal point of the innovative fringe hip-hop group Curse Ov Dialect, an outfit themselves not all that short on possibilities. Raceless has called Sunshine home for the past couple of years, partly in order 'to keep it real,' possibly due to the cheaper rent that living outside some of the trendier inner urban areas of Melbourne affords, and also to indulge to his self-professed love of absurdity which, in a suburb like Sunshine, you can't escape from.

'With our music, absurdity and sociology go hand in hand,' he offers between mouthfuls of his lamb kebab. 'That's the whole thing, our music was never weird before. It's always been political, but I think the more you bang your head against the wall when it comes to being at odds with other people's minds, the more crazy you get and the more absurd you have to become in your mind, just to know, "God I'm a fucking weirdo. What I do is different to other people." And eventually you become absurd and I think that's what happened to Curse.'

As with all absurdity there is an underlying serious side to Curse, and this is an aspect that Raceless is keen to articulate. 'It's got a lot of socio-political meaning behind it, mixed with the crazy stuff as well,' he suggests. 'It was born from politics. I'd call it sociological avant-garde hip-hop or multicultural experimental hip-hop. Our music, aesthetically, we take from all over the place.'

What separates Curse from their contemporaries, aside from their innovative, and at times

peculiar sounds, is their amazingly energetic and theatrical live show, where the outfit deliver their messages in bizarre and confusing costumes. Creating an upbeat hip-hop pantomime experience, the Curse's show is worlds away from the posturing and image manipulation that contemporary hip-hop suffers from. Forget brand name tracksuits, basketball singlets and baseball caps turned backwards, this is an outfit who are taking hip-hop to a whole other level, taking as much from Faxed Head as Public Enemy. 'You know when you see a traditional hip-hop gig there's two rappers and a DJ most of the time,' suggests Raceless. 'We just thought that's really boring most of the time so let's have more fun with it. It wasn't a conscious gimmicky decision, we just did it to be more fun.'

What began with a clown wig or a stupid assortment of similarly ridiculous outfits for a 'serious' hip-hop outfit to wear, soon developed into more elaborate guises for the Curse. They also began to see a link between the costumes and their internal philosophies. 'Recently it's worked well with our aesthetics,' reports Raceless, 'because one of the rappers in Curse, Vulk Mackadonski, wears the Macedonian folk costume when he performs on stage. It's becoming more like our costumes signify ethnic diversity and influences, like the whole literal meaning of wearing your influence on your sleeve.'

Ethnic diversity is integral to Curse's message and line-up. Current members of the quintet include Raceless, Vulk Mackadonski, their DJ Paso Bionic, Atarungi, (who's name not only is the Maori word for witchdoctor but wants it known that he believes that all humans are just energy, not necessarily the products of ethnicity), and August 2 (the date of World Anglo Indian Day), who apparently keeps changing his name. Not only is there a large degree of significance in the names of each member and the associated underlying meanings, but each name also tends to reflect each members own particular obsessions that manifests itself in their raps. Each member, as Raceless will say repeatedly during our discussion, is very much on his own trip. 'Atarungi and August 2 are more poets, while me and Vulk are more rappers,' reports Raceless.



'Those guys even sing and vocalise in other ways. It's four vocalists and all of them do different things. And our DJ wears Adidas clothes so he's got the hip-hop.'

Despite their crazed, energetic and at times seemingly out of control live show, Raceless is cautious about how Curse are perceived, concerned that the humour and weirdness of their live shows may dilute their message in some people's eyes. For him it's important to stress that not only does Curse have a deep and profound love of hip-hop, but their approach, which has evolved over the years, initially came from within, with little consideration as to how the band are perceived. 'It's people who are just free and they want to let themselves go, and if it happens to be scary then what can you do,' he offers. 'We're not doing it purposely to be scary. We're just being ourselves. Because I'm the only one who really does that. The rest of the guys pretty much do their thing. I'm the one that ends up stripping naked. It's not very hip-hop I know that...' He laughs for a moment before reconsidering. 'I reckon it's hip-hop. I reckon people should start doing it. Breaking out the chains of what hip-hop is supposed to be about.'

'I think Australia's got a pretty conservative music scene as well,' he continues. 'And when we get up there we're looking at the whole world



and the whole normality of the world. Everyone's so straight so we let ourselves go. It just comes out. It's not premeditated. It's like therapy. Social therapy. As long as people understand the message. I hate when people only focus on the performance.'

Though occasionally it's hard not to. A few nights earlier at the Empress of India Hotel, before a set by legendary Melbourne free jazz outfit Buckettrider, Raceless was on stage in a different guise. Under the moniker of Slesmr Tape and Videotape, he and a few others blended together an interesting concoction of live-for-the-moment improvised hip-hop. Featuring piano, flute, drums, samples and three MCs, their sounds were a crazed mash of beats, chaos and wails amidst peculiar moments of unexpected cohesiveness. As always Raceless was in fine form, producing frantic streams of unconsciousness rapping and spasming through numerous schizophrenic personalities within the one sentence. Samples clashed, percussion and flute struggled valiantly to catch up as Raceless and fellow Curse member Vulk Mackadonski strutted and wailed around stage. 'You thought Curse Ov Dialect was weird,' Raceless laughs at one point, before launching into the next track where he takes off his shoes, socks, and pants to hit a small oil drum in time with the beat. He then puts his jeans back on inside out; wearing them so low he bares his ass. Later he wanders out into the crowd in his underwear. 'We never rehearsed once,' he brags before the music illustrates his point by stopping mid-sentence and leaving him hanging. 'Don't you ever do that to me again cunt,' he begins an over exaggerated ocker tirade against Atarungi, the sample operator before turning his attention to the audience. 'I'll fucken take ya, I wanna see some fighting. We'll take any fucken cunt here.' He puts his arm around Vulk Mackadonski. 'This cunt's from Altona Meadows and I'm from Sunshine. We're proud of our working class heritage.' When they finish he stumbles off stage. His first words are 'I don't know what we just did.'

'We feel that Curse Ov Dialect is becoming too mellow for us,' confesses Raceless by way of explanation, 'and we want to do something that is a bit more out there and heaps more experimental. Just to break it up, to make things more interesting, to tackle different aesthetics. Curse is definitely a hip-hop project but Videotape is just all of us going bananas, screaming, opera singers, flute players, hip-hop MCs and everything all mixed together.'

Born out of a desire to perform when Curse can't due to other commitments, Slesmr Tape and Videotape first debuted at the Make It Up Club, a regular improvisational night at the Planet Cafe, populated in the main by jazz artists. 'We thought, why can't we just improvise with hip-hop? It's the aesthetic that they're practising with jazz done with hip-hop – improvising with beats, with the rapping.

I guess it's just that hip-hop has come to the point, like other types of music, where a lot of things have been done and we're trying to get heaps free with it.'

The artists who joined them on stage playing the flute, piano and drums of course had little idea what to expect having met the Curse only a week earlier, though compared to an audience schooled on avant garde jazz, they possessed at least a vague idea. 'It did shake up the people,' he laughs. 'I live out here in the West and a lot of the people were from Brighton or something, saying,' he continues with a mock English accent, "Oh, a bit of art," and we just came on and went, "Aaah." And they were like "Darling, what happened?" which was funny. That stuff brings back the days of old with Curse when we were heaps more crazy. We used to throw dog shit at the audience and stuff like that – which is in the past. We don't want to bring it back. It would land in wine glasses and stuff. It was fucking funny.'

Regularly through our discussion Raceless bemoans the fact that the Curse are a little too out-there to find a comfortable place in the local hip-hop scene. Whether it's their politics or bizarre stage activity, it seems the straight up hip-hop kids experience a little difficulty when trying to place the Curse. Interestingly their debut album *Hex Ov Intellect* did find acclaim in local hip-hop culture, though it seems the costumes may have altered perception somewhat. These days you'd be more likely to see the Curse sharing the bill with local DJs or electronic artists than hip-hop outfits. Without doubt their sounds do owe much to hip-hop traditions, however it's their willingness to push outside the square in a genre not known for its experimentation that makes them outcasts. In light of this the Curse have looked abroad for a home to release their latest album, amongst like-minded individuals such as Bay Area collective Anticon, Buck 65 and Aesop Rock at Mush records. Thanks to the strength and innovative character of their roster Mush might seem like an obvious label for Curse. Raceless reports that they took some convincing to even listen to the album. Sending off their demo they received no response. But that's where the dwarf comes into the picture.

'I like the label because the artists who they release are doing hip-hop that's different and these are the sorts of people who I want to be associated with,' he offers passionately. 'We thought, let's get beyond Australia this time. So I started emailing the label. "Did you hear the CD yet?" Everyday for about a month, "Did you hear it, did you hear it?" They were just like, "This guy's insane." And I left the most bizarre messages: "If you don't listen to the CD then a little dwarf is going to touch you on the head at night," stuff like that. And eventually they listened to it and they liked it and decided they



wanted to release something new from Curse.'

'We just really, really wanted to be heard because we feel like we don't belong anywhere,' continues Raceless. 'We're so different from other people when it comes to the genre so we thought if we're that different, we're even more different than the Americans, so they've got to like it. Or they better like it, I don't know, I'm just passionate about my music and we want to get it out there. But they really dug the new album.'

Having never seen Curse perform live you get the sense that Mush are in for a rude but pleasant shock, though it's also gratifying for Curse to be judged solely on their sounds. Their new album, tentatively slotted for a release in June sometime, has only recently been completed, much to the excitement of Raceless. Thus far feedback has suggested Public Enemy meets world music with some John Cage thrown in, or the early Avalanches crossed with the Boredoms. As always, it seems like an eclectic affair, the diversity of their ideology being evident in their palette, refusing to close their mind to the possibilities of any sound that crosses their path.

'It doesn't have to be funk or jazz,' offers Raceless enthusiastically. 'It can be rare groove backwards, it could be Spanish women digging holes in Madagascar with a frog sample. Why limit yourself to funk and jazz when there's at least 200 years of recorded music? Stuff from the 60s, psychedelic

\*\*\*\*

I think the more you bang your head against the wall when it comes to being at odds with other people's minds, the more crazy you get and the more absurd you have to become in your mind

stuff, or Dada from the 20s or just stuff you hear when you walk outside on the street. There's so much going on and hip-hop,' he corrects himself, 'no, sample based music, can never die because there are no limits. And we can have fun forever because we can always find something new to sample. That's the thing about hip-hop.'

*Curse ov Dialect's new album, Lost in the Real Sky, will be out on Mush in June. See [www.dirtyloop.com](http://www.dirtyloop.com) for details*

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Interview with The Herd  
by Georgina O Smith

# MULTI-TUSKING

✦ **Less than two months after the release of The Herd's second album, *An Elefant Never Forgets*, phenomenal sales have forced it into a second pressing. The album has even been touted as one of the best Aussie releases, hip-hop or otherwise, of 2003. And it's only May.**

It may only be May, but this has been a mammoth year for independent record label, Elefant Traks and its corollary crew, The Herd. The Herdest workin' band in Aussie hip-hop have already toured Melbourne twice, played sell-out shows in Sydney, Brissie and Newie, with Adelaide next in line, they continue hosting a community radio show, hit high rotation on Triple J, cracked the number one spot on Triple J's Net 50, made two music videos, have thrown and played nary a benefit gig, protest and party, and still found time to run the Elefant Traks label. How the hell do they do it?

Organised chaos is perhaps the best description of the Elefant Traks experience. The Herd, whose members run the label, are an exceptional group of music makers. They are also an impossibly shabby and chronically chaotic bunch of beings. The Herd live the freestyling philosophy to its fullest: they freestyle rhymes, freestyle beats online courtesy of Elefant Traks' founder Kenny Sabir's DASE Real Time Internet Jamming software (Go to [www.soundbyte.org](http://www.soundbyte.org) for a proper gander at the DASE story), and adopt a freestyle management policy. The cunning combination of music, friends, food and freebies is the strength of Elefant Traks.

The label began back in 1998 with a mixtape (well technically a mix CD, but for the sake of hip-hop let's call it a mixtape) for a friend leaving the country and Elefant Traks hasn't stopped creating music for friends. The plan always was, and still is, about creating and releasing the music they love. They are about being a tight unit, not about shifting units.

There are, at any given time, at least five producers, four MCs, a bass player, guest vocalists, b-boys and turntablists in The Herd. This can get very confusing. Add to this already potent musical melange other Elefant incarnations such as

Bass Elefant (basically The Herd sans laptops), Dase Team 5000 (the Herd precursor) and solo pursuits of the various members and things get very messy. A live show is no different. No wonder The Herd has won some of the choicest international supports including Blackalicious, Sage Francis and Grandmaster Flash. According to Kenny, when you book The Herd, you can expect '10 members, give or take 0.5 people' on stage at any one time. With that many able and cabled-up bodies on the one stage, you know you are about to witness something interesting. Cramped, but interesting. These dynamic live shows are The Herd's trademark; their rotating member line-up guarantees confounding and astounding performances.

So many members are bound to cause confusion, so one of the producers in Elefant Traks, Snapsuit, explains how they all came together: 'I introduced Kenny to the rest of the cats, so I'm the kingpin. I went to school with Byron. Then I met Kenny, no, Kenny met me. We were both studying at UTS. Then I introduced him to Byron. Byron went to UNSW and met Shannon, Dale and Kaho. Then through Kenny I meet Simon and Monkfly. Simon met Mark at Canberra Uni. Then through gigs and flatmates and things, Kenny met Tim and Sulo, and then he met Alex, and Matt Flax. Shit, have I forgotten anyone?'

Back in 1998, all these friends were dabbling with musical production across many genres, some were taking their tentative steps towards hip-hop, others were dabbling in dub, jazz and drum n bass. They were also trying their hands at home music software like Fruity Loops, Fastracker, Acid, Cubase and the legendary Hammerhead program. Upon the instigation of Kenny, tracks were put together for inclusion on the compilation CD that was to be *Cursive Writing*. With music compiled and mastered, friends with CD burners were enlisted. Friends with access to cheap printing were recruited. Friends with friends with access to venues were exploited. Friends with friends with friends with media contacts were co-opted. And *Cursive Writing*, Elefant Traks' first release, was born.



Elefant Traks' origins can also be attributed to the music DIY-production revolution. Many members attest that Elefant Traks came about because of the ease with which CDs could be reproduced. In the mid-90s, CD burners and production prices came down markedly, and this inspired Elefant Traks' first compilation album. (Technological advances have certainly influenced the Elefant Traks sound and capacity. Whereas beats were once played off a DAT or heavy PCs in the case of Elefant Traks first Sound Summit gig, Herd producers now play through networked laptops using DASE software.)

With the modicum of money made from the unexpected success of *Cursive Writing*, a second Elefant Traks' compilation, *Food to Eat Music By* was compiled and released, to further local acclaim. This was followed up by releases from Ubin, the Pilferators, Explanetary and eventually by the Elefant's pet project, The Herd. As Snapsuit explains, 'After the release of *Food*, we thought, let's not do compilations because there is a glut of them around. Then, after some solo releases, we thought let's just keep it in-house and come up with a band: The Herd. We already had Dase Team, but the idea was really for an album that was more collaborative. We weren't just cashing in, you know!'

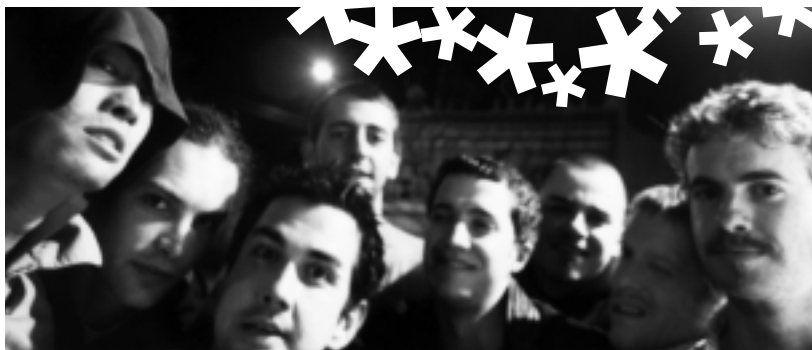
In the infancy of the label, establishing a sound reputation, and a reputation for a wicked sound, was swiftly achieved through a defiantly grassroots approach, not just to music production and distribution, but also to promotion and the media. For the launch of *Food to Eat Music By*, there was many clandestine stickering, poster-

ing and stenciling missions, a promotional tactic that was resumed in the lead up to the launch of *An Elephant Never Forgets*. It is this unorthodox promotional approach that distinguishes the label and led directly to a solid media presence, including a regular show, 'The Peanut Spell' on Sydney's 2SER community radio station.

Elefant Traks members are also quick to attribute the achievements of the label to the direction and entrepreneurial flair of their co-founder, Kenny Sabir. Kenny has been variously described by his pachydermal peers: 'Kenny is an organised mind in a disorganised person'; 'Kenny makes me feel like one of Charlie's Angels'; and 'Kenny has a knack of charming his way into fast-food eateries.'

Ever unassuming, Kenny himself attributes the successes of the label to the clever division of labour amongst members of the core. Kenny's absence (he's currently in South America) has also forced members to 'get smarter about how to work together. Everyone has their domain. Kaho's web, I'm accounts. Alex has taken on clip stuff, Shannon and Simon do gigs, Dale does the design,' explains Snapsuit.

Elefant Traks' strength is also that they make music that is intelligent and relevant and they do it all with arse-shaking irreverence. As Snapsuit says: "We prove that you really can have party music with a bit of substance. You just have to pick your



audience.' The latest release from the Elefant Traks stable is proof that party and politics can be successfully combined. *An Elephant Never Forgets* traverses racism, fair trade, globalisation, xenophobia, neo-liberalism and environmentalism.

*An Elephant Never Forgets* or 'Herd 2' as it has been affectionately and imaginatively nicknamed by the crew, is the musical culmination of months and months of mastering and remastering, mixing down and mixing up across Sydney in makeshift home studios. An elephant may have the longest gestation period of all land mammals but even this can't explain the delays and long waits, hiccups and her-

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'The music of The Herd is informed very much by politics. The Herd does not make it their aim to a shock or upset, but they do discuss issues that they feel strongly about.'

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that ‘while we seem to currently orbit around hiphop beats, our influences are many and this new album, like all Elephant Traks releases, is also chocked full of folk, drum n bass, jazz and dub.’

Whilst Elephant Traks’ culinary integrity may be in doubt from within, their political integrity is not. Like Celine Dion, Elephant Traks’ best side is their left side. As Alejandro has affirmed, ‘The music of The Herd is informed very much by politics. The Herd does not make it their aim to a shock or upset, but they do discuss issues that they feel strongly about.’ The Herd has courted controversy with their most recent two singles, ‘Burn Down the Parliament’ and ‘77% (Tampa Tantrum)’, but it’s not controversy for controversy’s sake. The Herd aren’t about talking out of their trunks, they practice what their MCs – Ozi Batla, Urthboy, Bezerketron and Toefu – preach. They also challenge, teach, and mobilise with their beats. Truly, an elephant never sits on the fence. The label is very active and outspoken on many issues.

There have been Greens benefits, Trade Union benefits, anti-globalisation rallies, Reclaim the Streets and the legendary S 11 protests at Crown Casino in Melbourne in 2001. A gig that many members single-out as the most rewarding yet was a performance organised by Alejandro last August at the Villawood detention centre. Describing the gig, Switchit says, ‘Everyone was sitting down, then as we went on they got less shy. Some kids just started playing my drum kit. (Ozi) Batla threw in some raps about Howard and got everyone chanting: “Howard showers with Colin Powell. And when Bush comes in Howard flicks his towels.” There were also some great freestyles about Philip Ruddock and whenever we mentioned his name everyone laughed. It was a pretty amazing experience.’

What is consistently amazing about Elephant Traks is their ability to continuously rouse, inflame and create. Elephant Traks is already working towards their next release, the debut album from Hermitude, a duo born from the ashes of Explanetary. Elephant Traks are already flogging its virgin wax release, Hermitude’s *Imaginary Friends* EP and will be releasing their debut long player in coming months. It is also suggested that individual Herd members are working on solo material in anticipation of Kenny’s return. But before then east coast punters can expect gigs a plenty.

As gigs go, there’s no such thing as an elephant non-event, the Elephant Traks organised Club Keeno Nights of 2001 and 2002 are evidence of that. Each time a release is launched you can be sure something interesting will occur. February’s launch of *An Elephant Never Forgets* at the Gaelic Club in Sydney is bound to go down in local history as one of the most exciting and mystifying evenings in local hiphop memory, with the hiphop pagan-pageantry of Curse Ov Dialect, the hiphop-hacktivism of The

dles that plagued The Herd’s sophomore release.

With their Elephant chief overseas, Herd members were prompted to step in to finish half-completed track and as a result, the album is a lot more collaborative than its predecessor. Kenny puts it aptly, ‘It’s no fun to make the same sound as Herd one over again. CD burners do that trick.’

As Snapsuit explains, ‘We all worked on “Parliament”. There are fewer tracks that only one person worked on. It was really about wanting to work with other people. Basically, I’m bored of doing stuff by myself.’ The result? *An Elephant Never Forgets* is a much more cohesive release, yet thankfully, none of the spontaneity or electronic eclecticism of their debut album is missing. Flamenco guitar, dubbed-up electro and dancehall booty sit track by track and track within track. From the pyro-maniac dub beats of ‘Burn Down The Parliament’ to the freaked out glitch-hop of ‘The Afterparty Brigade’, this is an album that’s confident in every respect. Full of furious tunes, irregular tempos, kickin’ basslines and their signature straight-talkin’-outspoken-lyrical-vandalism, Herd 2 is slick production meets DIY fanaticism. And it’s a combination that is winning The Herd new respect, confirming old respect, allaying detractors and attracting new admirers. This is no mean feat for the jaded old Sydney scene.

Elephant Traks and The Herd are certainly renowned about Sydney town for their musical and culinary integrity. What profile of Elephant Traks wouldn’t be complete without reference to that chart bound single, ‘Scallops’, the Triple J single picked up from The Herd’s self-titled album? The controversial track had The Herd branded ‘Falafel Rappers’ (i.e. sensitive vegetarians) and accused of being a flavour of the month by hitching a ride on hiphop’s jeep. Whilst agreeing that ‘a scallop burger is a wack food to rap about,’ Alejandro points out



New Pollutants and the skip hop spantics of an 18 member all-female jump rope team. The launch of *Food To Eat Music By* was a similar success with a record turnout of 600 patrons at Newtown’s Globe, which remains a long-standing Frigid record.

There you have it, a trunkated history of Elephant Traks. Elephant Traks is a label; it’s also an enclosure of friends, a democratic, collaborative corporation. Make that a co-corporation. Perhaps Alejandro, one of Elephant Traks’ many producers, puts it best, ‘We’re just a big bunch of mates with some good ideas and great peeps around us.’ Elephant Traks has remained true to this genesis. In the spirit of keeping everything in-house and cheap, Elephant Traks continues to handle its own production, media, A&R, design, and until 2001 even dealt with their own store-direct distribution. Inertia now looks after distribution Australia-wide for the label because, as an unnamed Herd producer explained, Inertia has a great dental plan. With as many members as Elephant Traks boasts, tusks must be cared for, after all. This ‘serious hobby’ of a record label has always been about collaboration and that isn’t going to change any time soon. That this independent label has been around for five years, that all members are still on speaking terms, and that their music continues to light a fire under the Sydney hiphop scene, is testament to style and integrity with which the Elephant Traks label has been run. To paraphrase Herd member, Switchfillet, Elephant Traks have what Wu Tang want. Herd to your mutha.

*The Herd’s An Elephant Never Forgets is out now on Elephant Traks. See [www.elephanttraks.com](http://www.elephanttraks.com) for more details*



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Interview with Harry Hohnen  
by Bim Ricketson

# TEEN SCENE



With a track on Traum's *Interkontinental* compilation, a collaborative EP on Background Records, and a rucksack of new tunes in the hard drive, humble Perth teenager Harry Hohnen, aka Fiam, is floating towards big things in a bubble of mini-beat bliss.

'I don't really deserve this interview – there's only been a couple of releases,' begins Hohnen doubtfully. 'I've always played around with instruments,' Hohnen continues, 'and told people that I can play, but didn't really start making anything I thought was original and okay enough to show my family and pet dogs until maybe early last year.'

'I got into this style of electronic music first when I heard a friend, Joseph "J-Lo" London, DJ at the fashion launch of the great label Mien (which our sisters created). I think he played stuff by Farben, Herbert, Process and Laurie Anderson amongst others.'

'I was also mad about the Beastie Boys (and still am) and always thought about how they made and put together their sounds. They are the money.'

'I don't even know what electronica is, everyone seems to have a different definition...The electronic music scene in Perth is a rich and diverse one, thanks mainly to legends of the scene like (Ben) Stinga at Complex Records and some DJs (radio and club) who are enthusiastic and passionate about the cool and interesting music that's coming out. There are a lot of producers and musicians that are making some wicked music of a quality on par with that of a lot of international stuff – Paul Fiocco, Dave Miller, Dimitri Kapetas, Manuel Bonrod and many others. Electronic music is just part of a more general scene which includes all kind of styles – jazz, hip hop, techno, soul – the only prerequisite is that it be of quality.'

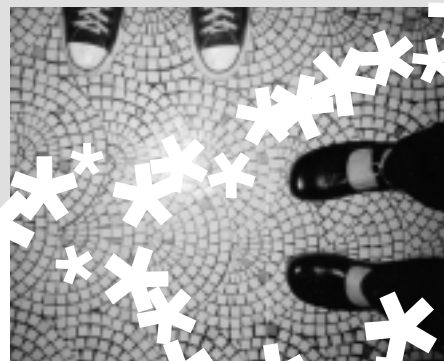
With encouragement from friends, Hohnen sent off three tracks to German label Traum last year, including 'Lumiere', which made it on last year's *Elektronische Musik Interkontinental 2* compilation. The Cologne-based label, dedicated to publishing new electronic music from around the world, deemed the track of sufficient quality

to sit amongst such international minimalist all-stars as Anton Kubikov, Akufen, M.R.I. and Process. Harry modestly describes the track as 'old' and 'pretty average'.

With a wide-eyed view of the world, always drawing inspiration from new sources, it's not a wonder 'old' tracks feel so dated to Hohnen – he has already moved on. 'The music I make changes pretty much everyday,' agrees Harry. 'It depends on how I feel and also what films and music I've seen and heard lately. Recent excursions have been instrumental but cutup – similar to Herbert I guess but no so housey. It's usually for films in my head or interpretations of things I've heard. All pretty selfish reasons really. Hopefully the mood that is expressed is happy and sad at the same time – a feeling well captured by Paul Thomas Anderson's new film *Punch Drunk Love*.

'Lately I've been inspired by the soundtrack to the film *Talk to Her*, hip-hop being released on the Stones Throw label, the Donna Regina album on Karaoke Kalk, Herbert and artists on his labels, Leonard Cohen and Jesus Rodriguez, jazz by Charlie Byrd and stuff with piano accordion, the clothes that my sister makes, my family in general, my friends and Melbourne City women.'

Before leaving Perth for Melbourne, Hohnen was invited by Dave Miller to collaborate on an EP for Background records. Their collaboration, entitled *Miller and Fiam – The Other West Coast* is a cosy adventure inside a bass amp in a club on the moon. With an elegant warmth that Jan Jelinek would warm his toes to, and rhythms that range from spiderweb delicate to Chicago strength funk, the EP, released in April, is already receiving acclaim. *De:bug Magazine* describes it as 'Four extremely cool tracks made up of sounds that are so light yet crunchy that one can't really grasp the music. Instead of just staying with one nice sequence and adding/removing parts, the pair have some well thought out arrangements which make it impossible to categorize the music as microhouse, Detroit sound, ambient or any one style in particular. Instead one can just listen forever, observing the warm and compact scenery made up of beautiful sounds and grooves. Perfect.'



Acclaim like this should help when the next project is sent off. 'When I finish this mini LP I will send it away I think. Carpark records, Hefty records, Karaoke Kalk, Accidental and Cheap are where it's at currently for me.' Entitled *Fiam et Zeev Estel*, it differs from the other material in its incorporation of live jazz instrumentation. 'I recorded instruments and started composing with a vague idea of what I wanted. The instrumentation was all played by me and friends, mainly recorded at Dimitri Kapetas' place, where he has an impressively large and pointless collection of great instruments, old and new. I don't really like using the computer but it's inevitable in this crazy century where people use "electronic mail". I want to play in a band and record in one session. The sound and vibe you get in jam sessions is impossible to repeat or create synthetically.'

With equal parts ambition and ambivalence, Hohnen's future holds any number of possibilities. 'I want to live in the US for a few months and study at the New York Film Academy either later this year or early next year. But I'm going to Europe before then to just work and hang out. I'm not that fussed (which label I get signed to). It sounds selfish but I make the music for my own projects and it's not like you get paid a lot of money when you have a release. The incentive, perhaps, is hearing sounds you've made on that beautiful vinyl, which adds a whole new dimension, and of course having the opportunity to play in different countries if all goes well.'

'I guess the aim would be to reach that certain level where Herbert's at, where he can tour with a band and gets invited to obscure and great venues like the Pompidou Centre in Paris and the Le Corbusier buildings in the south of France.'

*Fiam's collaborative EP with David Miller, The Other West Coast is out now on Background Records, Germany*



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Interview with Paul Johanneson  
by Dale Harrison

# SHOT HOT

With the rise of the DJ and dance culture in the late 90s, live music went through a downward spiral. Venues closed, people stopped going out to see live music, and musicians were left, like laid-off middle-aged men, without a sense of purpose or belonging. The eternally optimistic kept at it, playing to empty rooms full of empty people; and the pessimists simply stopped trying and faded into obscurity. Between these poles, however, were those who attempted to incorporate the sounds and attitudes of dance music into a live music situation. This spawned both the sublime and the ridiculous, from the live drum n bass stylings of the Hive and the subtle glisten of Multiball, who took their cues from the structures and arrangements of dance music, to shithop bands like 28 Days, who seemed to incorporate raps and scratches as a fashionable adjunct to their sub-metal yahooping.

Thankfully, Upshot are firmly placed in the sublime half of this dichotomy. A fact that Paul Johanneson, keyboard player for Upshot, is pleased with when I catch up with him in his Sydney home. Upshot avoided the pitfalls of some of their ridiculous forebears by remaining honest to themselves and their music. 'For me music – correction, all art – is about honesty' Paul says, 'through honesty, one can hit on some kind of universal truth, that someone else will understand, and that connection is the ultimate, but it all starts with honesty.'

A five piece backline including drums, bass, saxophone, keyboards and scratching, is augmented by a stanza of MCs and the occasional singer. Their particular take on playing live hip-hop is very much grounded in a respect for the loop-based structures inherent in the form, and they display remarkable restraint in letting the music speak for itself above any concerns for individual virtuosity. Upshot was borne of frustration at the burgeoning DJ culture and its cult of personality, as Paul explains "We were all fed up with seeing DJs and sampling musicians getting such religious followings by our contemporaries. People without any kind of musical grounding just ripping off old records and gaining some kind of demi-god status, whilst all our

jazz muso friends were playing to 10 people in some side show alley, making \$50 a gig..."

Uninspired by straight up jazz, the core unit of Upshot sought musical direction elsewhere and ended up following the paths hewn by acts such as the Roots and Common in an attempt to blur the line between live band and sampled, produced music. As Paul states, 'contemporary production values, but with our own chords, our own beats and our own melodies'. This blurred line is displayed in their debut EP, released on vinyl by Melbourne's Obese record label. The four tracks and two instrumental versions are at first unremarkable, but this is their great asset – they allow space for the MCs while creating a unique atmosphere, both rhythmically and harmonically. It's only when listening to the instrumentals that the subtleties of the tracks are fully highlighted.

From the start MCs were a big part of the Upshot experience. Originally they were fronted by the renowned Sleeping Monk, his silky smooth flows complementing the bevelled edges of Upshot's instrumentation. Though he has now parted ways with the band, his legacy remains in the form of three tracks collected on the EP, including the brilliant '\$'. Though releasing an EP with vocalist no longer in the band may seem strange, Paul remains pragmatic, 'They're good tracks, and we weren't going to let them rot. The opportunity arose and we took it.' Sleeping Monk has now been replaced by a number of different MCs who feature in guest spots; Quro being the mainstay, and Serreck and Brass from Celsius, and Urthboy from the Herd, chipping in for the odd track.

Although on stage the relationships between the MCs and the musicians seem to flow with ease, the difference in culture and musical training is brought out in the rehearsal studio, with the MCs sometimes falling foul of the 'just-so' nature of the musicians. 'They probably think we're all a bunch of cunts at first,' explains Paul 'but then they start to see the detail that we put into our music. I grew up playing classical piano, and constantly had my work torn to shreds by examiners and teachers, and it just became part of the process. Bedroom MCs seem to have all



grown up with their mates singing their praises, so when we get critical it's really foreign to these guys.' He is quick to add, though, that the MCs they work with are an integrated part of the group, and provide the essential link between band and audience.

This has its ultimate expression in the distilled precision of their live shows, in which each measure is accounted for, and each pause is militarily precise. Though the MCs bring some aspect of chaos to the equation, some may criticise this almost clinical approach as lacking in soul or spirit, and the trade off between musical virtuosity and expression is one that Paul is all too aware of 'It's treading between the intellect and the primal, the rehearsed and the improvisatory, the refined and the raw. The baggage of being classically trained leaves me more on the intellectual side of things, but as I get older I'm learning to cast that off and just try and find the most pure expression I can, regardless of technical value.'

When I ask whether he feels constrained by the pressures imposed by sticking so closely to a genre, he smiles and explains, 'I've never felt constricted in this band. The simplicity is what we love, it's what we set out to do. It allows for more freedom, and less introspection, and makes for a really focussed sound.'

*Upshot launch their EP on  
Obese records at Über in  
Sydney on May 31*



Interview with Murray Rekindle  
by Vaughan Healey

# THRILL A SECOND

Rekindle steps out onto the rich grass and it cracks under intricate boots. The sun is bright and saturates everything with light and colour. Manicured greenery and flat concrete pathways lead down to the vivid blue Pacific Ocean. This is the world that Rekindle lives in, a Howard Arkley painting overdosed on artificial sweeteners. Topography links Sydney and London and contour lines run through Minneapolis, New York, Detroit, Washington. The compass points towards 'F' for Funk. It is a picturesque and processed, clean digital reality where the organic is synthetic and love is pure.

Rekindle tracks dazzle with their stories of love and the kinds of truth you can only get out of pop music. Sugary love, catchy melodies and sculptured lyrics: not the sorts of things you usually read about in IDM magazines. When was the last time you had a song stuck in your head? Rekindle tracks do that – you will be whistling tunes for days afterwards and you will be singing lyrics about ice skating girls, caught up in their winter world. Love is cool, it's at the centre of this universe. In a place like this, love makes the world go around. And the world isn't lonely, it's just you and me.

'Traditionally I've thought of Love as what happens at the end of the story, true love as redemption, you fall in love with someone and then everything's OK,' Rekindle muses on Love. 'I guess I'm the consummate lapsed Catholic in that regard. The lyric in "Candy Girl" by New Edition goes, "Candy girl, you are my world," – how religious is that! She's the World, the Everything, he's dissolved in her. Probably, like a lot of people, I've lived my life waiting for that to happen. Some clichéd line, "Baby you're all that I need," is a cliché because it's true, people really think like that, I think like that! For the secular, the idealised love assumes the proportions of metaphysical rapture. That aspect of pop music is fascinating and transcendent to me and I wanted to examine my own idealism and expectations about things like "true love" and "the girl" by trying to execute my own version of this classical form. That's what "Ice Skating Girl" is about. While it's an attempt to comment on the form,

it's also a totally relevant matter of discussion for me personally.'

'Ice Skating Girl' appears on the new compilation *Channel Two* on London's Output label. On paper, Rekindle might share some tenuous common ground with the other music on the compilation – a thread of that electro, punky funky sound with groups like The Rapture and LCD Soundsystem. Listen to the LP though, and you will hear that Rekindle exists in a world like nothing else. Listen to those lyrics. 'Are you a simile or metaphor / Now what exactly does the ice stand for?' Check 'Tonight Might Never End' – an 80bpm ballad with tumbling arpeggios and Rekindle singing falsetto. The vocals are arresting, to put it mildly. 'The biggest issue with vocalists is probably the cultural one. From my experience it would be difficult to over-emphasise the cultural expectations people seem to have regarding which kind of vocal goes with which kind of music, or their ideas of what a hip hop artist is supposed to look like, or what an r n b artist is supposed to look like, or what Detroit bass is or isn't supposed to contain or whatever. It would seem a lot of people only listen to music to reinforce their worldview, to confirm what they already know.

'I want it to be a thrill a second.' This is where Rekindle unsettles – it's just what you didn't expect. 'I've never liked that kind of group model where you have like, two producers, who are supposed to be boring and the prescription vocalist, like a subtle jazzy diva or something out front, or the idea of "band as collective" or any of that Massive Attack nonsense, or doing an album with nine instrumentals and three tracks with token vocals, or electronic acts with the guest vocal by someone from a rock band. I think that was what people that were in the position to offer us things expected us to become, and we weren't going out like that. I'm more inspired by someone like Sly Stone or Robert Foster, a kind of self-defining DIY approach. There isn't really time to conform to the world's expectations if you feel you have a mission.'

The Rekindle mission stretches back to the early 1990s. The fossil record includes a collaborative group with long-time crony Ra. 'We had a



group called Stepchild around 1993-94 that was a pretty conventional hip-hop group with MCs, kinda like Fu-Schnikins or Leaders Of The New School. Stepchild sort of disintegrated but the production was working so we just continued making beats.' Pre-history begins in earnest with Raised By Wolves: 'in around 1994-95, people came around to the idea of instrumental hip-hop, so there was interest in what we were doing. I was inspired by music like Ryuichi Sakamoto and Talk Talk and the soundtrack to *The Last Temptation of Christ*. I would write the sort of music you could have a séance to. Some of that stuff fitted in with the other things that were happening in music, so labels wanted to put some of it out. Drum n bass was also exciting around 1994 and 1995 so it was impossible for us as drum programmers not to get swept up in it. We did more shows and did some remixes and released some more tracks. We were pretty much just into slaying PAs at that point, with Ra on front of house and some of the dope MCs we got to work with, it was cool. There were a lot of great nights at clubs like Basscode or in the bass-room at some of the Freaky Loops parties. Some of the other angels were a bit sickening though, record companies would ask us to do remixes that were "a bit like the Chemical Brothers" or "a bit like the Prodigy", and we did endless shows

# REKINDLE'S POP FUNK PRIMER

Play hopscotch while listening to these...

## 1. TOM TOM CLUB – ‘GENIUS OF LOVE’

The rhythm section from Talking Heads became the Tom Tom Club and brought art school sensibilities and unprecedented charm and inventiveness to a bounce, rock, skate style block party groove. Dub inspired effects and Adrian Belew's abstract guitar coupled with Tina Weymouth's iconoclastic vocal and lyrics make this a classic. Sounds like the kind of thing kids sing while skipping rope.

## 2. SCRITTI POLITTI – ‘ABSOLUTE’

Everything on their classic *Cupid and Psyche 85* album is incredible. Pristine sonic perfection cradles Green's unique vocal and lyrical approach, offset by the era's best backing vocal lineup of BJ Nelson, Tawatha Agee and Fonzi Thornton. ‘Absolute’ and ‘Wood Beez’ were overseen by super producer Arif Mardin and featured the epoch defining drum sound of Steve Ferrone, responsible for the beats on Chaka Khan's formidable ‘I Feel for You’.

## 3. MARY JANE GIRLS – ‘ALL NIGHT LONG’

Rick James protégés, The Mary Jane Girls, ‘give it to you’ on his production of this effortlessly bouncy and melodic tune. Sounds like a young Michael Jackson when sped up and used in LL Cool J's equally charming ‘Around the Way Girl’.

## 4. CAMEO – ‘CANDY’

Cameo followed up their career defining statement of intent ‘Word up’ with this high sheen paean to flirtatious upwardly mobile urban sophistication. They masterfully recast their signature drum sounds, harmonies and Larry Blackmon's trademark vocal inflections into a high gloss yet breezy love song. Great guitar solo too.

## 5. SOUL FOR REAL – ‘CANDY RAIN’ / ‘EVERY LITTLE THING’

Mid 90s vocal quartet Soul For Real, top of the class scholars of the traditional Jackson 5 ‘ABC’ school show their mastery of the form with ‘Candy Rain’: ‘my love, do you ever dream of candy coated rain drops?’ Dispensing with Candy Rain's jazz funk samples, ‘Every Little Thing I Do’ is a sublimely focused distillation of the medium. Heavy D reduces the prerequisite middle eight rap to quasi-abstraction.

## 6. PRINCE – ‘GOOD LOVE’

Relatively obscure cartoonish masterpiece performed in Prince's Vari-Speeded Camille persona. Ultra complex and agile arrangement and programming propel hyper-playful lyrics like ‘Gustov Mahler Number 3, jamming on the box, I'll have another glass of you, this time on the rocks’.

## 7. TEENA MARIE – ‘IT MUST BE MAGIC’

Teena's voice soars with laser-guided precision on this P-Funk influenced tour de force, complete with ecstatic references to tilting pinball machines. You could rollerskate to this, no question.

## 8. MICHAEL JACKSON – ‘PYT’

Perhaps defining the parameters of the idiom as a child, MJ returns with his patented high energy vocal to pop funk lyrical orthodoxy on *Thriller's* ‘PYT’. He wrote the book on this approach and every movement is executed to perfection.

## 9. CARLY SIMON – ‘WHY’

Produced and performed by Chic's Nile Rodgers and Bernard Edwards, this is maybe better known as the backing track to the remix of A Tribe Called Quest's ‘Bonita Applebum’. Rodgers and Edwards riff on reggae in winsome yet precise fashion to devastatingly melodic effect.

## 10. THE JETS – ‘CRUSH ON YOU’

Irresistible synth-laden confection inspired by 1983's version of the Minneapolis Sound. Suitably junior high lyrical concerns unfold amidst synth stabs and Lynn Drums, a kind of sped up, adolescent version of the SOS Band minus the angst.

## FURTHER LISTENING...

11. Nu Shooz – ‘I Can't Wait’
12. Jordan Knight – ‘Give It to You’
13. New Edition – ‘Candy Girl’
14. Sandii and the Sunsetz – ‘Sticky Music’
15. Prince – ‘Private Joy’
16. Diana Ross – ‘Upsidedown’
17. Bobby Brown – ‘Every Little Step’
18. Nile Rodgers – ‘All in Your Hands’
19. The Pointer Sisters – ‘Automatic’
20. Al B. Sure – ‘Nite and Day’
21. MC Lyte – ‘Ice Cream Dreams’
22. Stephanie Mills – ‘Pilot Error’
23. 3LW – ‘No More (Baby I'ma Do Right)’
24. Another Bad Creation – ‘Aisha’
25. Breakfast Club – ‘Right On Track’

supporting people like the Wiseguys or the Propellorheads that were, to be perfectly honest, beneath us.’

Look up some of those 1990s local electronic compilations; those chronicles of music, and more than likely you will find a Raised by Wolves track. Tracks like ‘Sunlight’ or ‘Rock For You’ shared a dynamic that extended beyond the confines of the idiom. They were also tracks that would slice straight through you as easily as be your friend. ‘Back then there was space to move and do interesting things while being free of the limitations that a vocal imposes on you. We could programme beats all day, anyway we wanted to. Both Ra and I had worked really hard learning how to programme and pull sounds, but once you add a vocal it has a very polarising affect on people: if someone doesn't like your vocal it doesn't matter how dope your kick drum sounds. We avoided that whole problem by doing instrumentals.’

Not any more. There is no each-way bet with Rekindle. ‘Rekindle is essentially just me so it's a lot more idiosyncratic than Raised by Wolves. People seem to either love it or hate it, which I think hinges mainly on their reaction to my voice. I could write songs for other people to sing but that doesn't seem right for me at the moment. It's a “kinda live by the sword, die by the sword” thing. Raised by Wolves survives though, I just had to do Rekindle as well. It was important to me to do something with lyrics, which I've always written. But we still work together, Ra's mixed a lot of Rekindle tracks which is lucky for me, because the guy's a laser, he's a murderer.’

The apprenticeship has paid off with tracks that bounce in the club with razor sharp beats; meticulous colours and timbres cast for maximum boom effect. The benchmark has been lifted into a clear starry stratosphere – accomplished, manicured and polished. ‘I often want the music to sound like fairy floss and merry-go-rounds, to be sweet. But I'm fighting a war on a few fronts – there's many styles.’ This is a place where you half expect Prince to cruise by on his big purple chopper, or maybe humanoid Gary Numan to speed past in his TVG. ‘The people I admire are those that do something distinctive, that find a new way to shuffle the cards. Back when I was doing a lot of drum n bass I had a manifesto where I was trying to make (what used to be called) tech step that sounded like Controversy by Prince. So, it was new wave funk at 200bpm with drum'n'bass arrangements and dynamics. That early Minneapolis sound has always been something I've been trying to incorporate into my aesthetic but without it being just retro. Hopefully people will become more tuned into that style and pick up on the subtleties within the genre, to know their Jesse Johnson from their Ready For The Worlds, so they know what's going on when I flip something from that milieu.’



In 2003, there is a deep schism in the administration of kudos. You don't have to look very hard to find self-appointed gatekeepers clutching the keys and keeping it real. Far-away armchair masters upholding the accepted codes, guaranteeing histories and lore. At the root of all this earnest parochialism is a profound mistrust of pop music, that somehow writing songs with a pop narrative and structure is more prescribed than music from other idioms. Isn't pop music contrived? 'Of course, any act of volition is a contrivance isn't it?' Radical scepticism. But what can Rekindle achieve that you can't do by producing straight hiphop or drum n bass? 'Personal satisfaction hopefully. I listen to lots of new hiphop, maybe more than anything else, but I think it'd be refreshing to hear hiphop from a non-urban perspective. I think the whole concept of "urban" is so limited. I draw a distinction between the music and that attitude. I'm cool with it but there needs to be other options too. I don't think it's an issue of race or culture or economics, it's a marketing device, it's a section in Tower Records, a look for the video. There needs to be room for playfulness, or romance or weakness, or say, the kind of art school thing that Tom Tom Club represent. The urban thing is so cynical and leaves so little room for people to play these other roles. Missy or Busta Rhymes obviously present a kind of cartoonish playfulness that's refreshing and entertaining, but that's "buggin out" and a prescribed alternative to being a tough guy, but it's still permeated by a deep cynicism. I don't think that's enough of a range of personas. I can't imagine a scene like that producing a Sly Stone, a Prince, a Kate Bush or a David Sylvian. Certainly it doesn't represent enough of a range to include the type of person I am, or the type of person I'd like to be and, being geographically from outside of that culture anyway, I think that pretty much rules out anything I do ever being considered relevant to hiphop apart from in a parochial sense, and I'm not down with being the Australian version of anything, the Australian version of hiphop, or the English version of r n b or whatever. Why define yourself on someone else's terms?



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'Traditionally I've thought of Love as what happens at the end of the story, true love as redemption, you fall in love with someone and then everything's OK...I guess I'm the consummate lapsed Catholic in that regard.'

Taking that approach is losing before you even start, people support that the way they support a charity.'

Down on the waterfront there is a convenience store and Rekindle is buying Coca-Cola and confectionary. He weighs up various wrapper designs and eventually settles for some sugar coated chocolate M&Ms. There is something faintly absurd about all this: a narcissist non-conformist writing candy pop music. Stained with Catholic confessionality? Moving from some relatively obscure forms to a position pretty outside the whole argument of genre. 'It's important for me that anything I do works in purely musical terms. I want the tracks to catch you in the smash. That's the most important thing. Stylistically, I like the same things as a lot of people: Timbaland, The Neptunes, Mannie Fresh etc. These have been the most innovative things in

the last five years. I might be inspired by their work, or inspired by Jody Watley or Scritti Politti or whoever, but I try to focus on what's unique about my situation rather than what's the same.' And what is that? It's the truth of love songs, filtered through a saturated colour scheme of Pacific blue and liquid funk. 'To me, making records shouldn't be about making imitations, it should be about making shocks. To have a context is important but if you have nothing to add to that I don't see the point. I want to be the best in the world at what I'm doing or I don't want to do it.'

*Rekindle's track Ice Skating Girl appears on the Output compilation Channel Two and his album is out on Output in late 2003*

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# THE NEW POLLUTANTS

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Interview with Ben Frost  
by Sebastian Chan

# THE SAD CHILD RETURNS

Curiously there are two Ben Frosts rising to prominence in Australia at the moment. The first is the young Australian visual artist, and the second is the laptop guitarist who holds the record for 'the most demo CD sales at a new music festival'. Adding to the confusion, both are based in Melbourne. The latter Ben came to our attention at Sound Summit 2001 where his *Music For Sad Children EP* was a surprise hit. Melancholy piano and musty slow beats, that early demo EP was equal parts bleak isolationism in the vein of Mick Harris' Scorn project, and the reminiscent pastoralism of Boards Of Canada. Even as just a first demo it was an excellent piece of work that managed to wring surprising emotion out of such a minimalist setup. Since 2001 though, there has been very little new visible output from Frost other than a 7" of a few tracks from that demo EP on Japanese/Australian label Inventing Zero.

While working with Not Drowning, Waving's David Bridie in Melbourne, Frost relocated from Adelaide. He explains, 'Melbourne has always been my home – I was born here. There is just something about these cold old lonely streets, it is a beautiful city, it makes me want to cry walking around the place, it is like a fragile old lady. Climatically Adelaide and I just didn't mix...I just love winter, my head just works better and I make better art. In the beginning Adelaide was really good to me and gave me some great opportunities to try out my ideas and it's not a big town, which makes it relatively easy to get noticed in if you're doing something interesting, but at the same time it is incredibly small and conservative – anyone who lives there will tell you that...Also, I had a lot of logistical excuses to move over here. David Bridie was flying me over here every other week to work on his record...although in the end the whole record we were doing got shelved and he started again, and the record in the shops now is not the record I signed on for. I still have the rough mixes at home as a reminder of what a beautiful record it could've been.'

Since the Bridie experience, Frost has been busy recording and two different albums are due



out by July. The first is tentatively titled *School Of Emotional Engineering* and will be out on Sydney's soft-spoken indie rock label Quietly Suburban. The other is an improvised guitar record titled *Steel Wound* on Brisbane's experimental label Room:40.

'I began working on *School Of Emotional Engineering* this time last year. I had some basic kind of programming and simple phrasing down on tape that got into the hands of producer Tony Espie (Avalanches) and he was into tracking the record with me. I wanted to build an environment that would be overwhelmingly powerful, but also kind of understated too. Tony really understood what I was trying to do and so all the instrumentation was recorded in such way that it could only really sound like me. We recorded in a couple of big studios in Melbourne — tracking drums (from Richard Andrew formerly of Crow), harp, piano, double bass, some vocals, and lots of guitars. Everything was just room mics, flooded with reverb and atmosphere, everything was about just finding the emotion in all of it...everyone in the studio was really patient with me when I'd tell them it didn't sound big enough, or that it was too normal...I walked out at the end of it with somewhere in the vicinity of 70 gigabytes of data, much of which I'm still sourcing sounds from now.'

Having toured and played support for Sydney indie band Sea Life Park for the past two years,

Frost is close to the band, and singer Lee Hillam supplies vocals on one of the tracks on *School*. 'Recording Lee was really challenging. I had given her the track months before we got her down to Melbourne to record, and much of what she had done in the original demos ended up in the recording – just her kind of finding and feeling her way through the song. She is so beautifully shy and nervous, we had to put her in complete darkness to get her to feel comfortable and just let her go with the recording. There is a fragility and imperfection that just worked so well in what I was trying to do...completely saturated in emotion, completely self-conscious. As far as "vocal" tracks go, it's exactly what I could have hoped for'.

It was a long process. Ben continues, '*School of Emotional Engineering* took about two months of sorting, assembling and programming it all together at my studio. I made some mixes to go out to labels we were talking to and it was during that time that *Steel Wound* came into being. After the kind of grand scale that everything had come together on in emotional engineering, I wanted to do something intimate and more spontaneous. Lawrence English at Room:40 and I started talking about the idea of doing a 'guitar' record...an album essentially devoted to wall-of-sound atmospherics. If I was going to do it then the whole record had to be recorded in one sitting; if I had months on end,

it would take forever and it wouldn't have the cohesive thread I wanted.

In January and February the space appeared for this guitar record, now titled *Steel Wound*, to be made. 'I had finished a long string of work and found some time to do it so I rented a house just off the Great Ocean Road at Johanna beach. I packed up my studio and set up there for a week. I really didn't know what it was I going to come up with, I hadn't written anything, I was going in cold. I was in a house in the middle of nowhere, no phone, and nobody for miles — I didn't speak a word to anyone for four days. I was isolated so there wouldn't be any volume restrictions or considerations. I set up room mics in all rooms of the house, and different guitar and amp setups all over the place. I made so much fucking noise. I had never recorded at those kind of volumes before...deafening, excruciating even. At one point I was setting up out on the porch and standing inside with the doors closed, with earplugs in. It made me approach the instrument in a different way. The guitar takes on a life of its own at that kind of volume and becomes a living, breathing organism. It becomes very uncontrollable, and it does what it wants...walking into the whole process blind was the most frightening and liberating thing I have done to date'.

Now all recorded and with both albums awaiting imminent release, Frost has been assembling and rehearsing a band to tour the work. Previously a laptop musician using Abelson Live, Frost, like

many others, has found the move to real musicians both exciting and difficult. 'The band thing is something I feel compelled towards, I think once people hear *School Of Emotional Engineering* they will understand why I have struggled so much with the pigeonhole of electronic music. I'm using the same tools as electronic music, but it's all channeling my influences. The biggest influences on what I am doing are far more visual than anything musical — Hal Hartley, Darren Aronofsky (*Pi*, *Requiem For A Dream*). Musically, *Dynamite* by Stina Nordenstam is a reference point, Gorecki's work also, and Nine Inch Nails (I know that saying that it will peg me for the closet goth that I probably am but...) There is also the now extinct Australian band called Two Litre Dolby. They were the best band this country ever produced. These are definitely the benchmarks sonically for what I am trying to achieve with the band. From a purely logistical point of view it is a nightmare, click tracks, extra gear, rehearsals...I guess more than anything I am pursuing it because it allows me to present my work in the aesthetic it was conceived. I'm still not sure how I feel about presenting these songs on stage with just a laptop, it feels dishonest, how can I convey that kind of power through a laptop? The power in music delivered by a band as a singular organism can be overwhelming and the first time we played as a band on stage was at The Corner Hotel (Melbourne) on an enormous PA. The

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'walking into the whole process blind was the most frightening and liberating thing I have done to date'

result was almost too much — it was the first time, since making music in the capacity I do now, that I felt completely satisfied with a show'.

By July, Frost's live show will be heading around the country and hopefully overseas to play in Europe with invitations from Italy and, curiously, Iceland. Listening to *Steel Wound* as I write this up, its guitar drones slowly unravelling, drawing links to Robert Hampton's Main and the seasonal cycle drones of Coil, Iceland seems a perfect and logical isolationist destination.

*School For Emotional Engineering* is out on Quietly Suburban and *Steel Wound* is out soon on Room:40.

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Interview with Luke Collison  
by Luke Dearnley

# DSIC, MAAATE!

So there I sat on the black leather couch in his lounge room with, as it turned out later, my fly undone, trying to glean, from snatches of conversation slotted hurriedly into the commercial breaks of an episode of *Angel* and through the increasing vodka-induced haze, exactly why Dsico does all the bizarre things that he does. Turns out I still have no idea, but this is what later tumbled out of my laptop.

With stagnation in musical styles in recent years people have been seeking out what they enjoyed in the past, retro essentially, and we have seen this take several popular forms: electroclash was a defibrillator shock to the cold dead heart of androgynous 80s pop, albeit more fashion obsessed, but it wasn't long before the flatline returned. Bootlegs are another example of this gazing back down the timeline of musical enjoyment. The old becomes new again by virtue of combination. It is staggering to think about how many possible bootlegs there must be.

'Electro kids get into the electro cover versions I've made but they overlook the other stuff – like the DSP kids who love my drill n bass versions of pop songs, and then there is the bootleg crowd...' explains Dsico, AKA Luke Collison, hinting at the fact that despite gaining his fame via bootlegs he is far more diverse.

Inspired at first by geek punk tracks like Kid606's NWA remix, Dsico dabbled in DSP fuck-ups of hiphop and pop rnb tracks before getting distracted by bootlegs – the art of mashing together the vocal of one track over the backing of another.

'I've developed a much finer appreciation for pop music over the past year after screwing with it. Some pop songs are just pure gold even in a digital mess. I often feel like a bit of a vulture. But in the long run you know a straight Justin Timberlake track will never be played by the sort of deejays who will play my remix of it,' he ventures. 'With the cut-up crap, part of the fun is poking fun at the whole IDM crowd with their glitched-up beats and shit. I just do that but base it on pop music, which is usually not acceptable. I like to make the electronic masses listen to Nelly.'

Dsico points out that his creative output can be divided into three separate categories. 'They're all conceptually linked but the end products of my excursions of playing around with pop generate a diverse range of outputs in so far as the sonic aesthetics are concerned,' Dsico explains.

There are the bootlegs, where typically a vocal from one song is laid, in-sync, over another song or its instrumental. These are also called mash-ups. One of the earliest boots he made and probably his most well known is 'Love Will Freak Us' which combines the vocal of Missy Elliott's 'Get U'r Freak On' with Joy Division's 'Love Will Tear Us Apart'.

Then there are the cut-up tracks where a pop tune gets run through some hand-made software effects processors and chopped up and re-edited together to produce a tortured, glitched, stretched and twisted remix. Probably Dsico's best known work here is 'Flash In Herre', a total overhaul of Nelly's 'Hot In Herre'. Starting normally the track quickly transmutes into time-stretched stuttering DSP madness finally ending in a chunk of Moroder's 'Flashdance Theme'. The lyrics of this ending 'maniac, maniac, she's dancing like she's never danced before' seem to be taunting anyone on the dancefloor for actually dancing to a top 40 r n b song. Dsico believes that 'cut-ups should be an obviously violated rendition of the original pop tune while still working as a dance floor item.'

More recently Dsico has been producing a third form of output: bizarre cover versions of pop tunes done in a totally different style to the original. His own voice is used and the fact that he cannot sing is disguised via a vocoder. On occasion he has managed to press visiting singers into laying down the rather odd vocal for these types of tracks. Ruth Wilson from Adelaide's Toby1 and Kevin Blechdom have been recent victims. His 'Smells Like Electro' cover of grunge pioneers Nirvana's most well known tune is a prime example of this style. 'One of the advantages of doing a diverse variety of tracks is that there is at least something in my wide selection that appeals to most people,' Dsico claims.

The lines are starting to blur and some tracks



at first appear to be bootlegs but then also have DSP mangling going on. Furthermore some tracks are almost a bootleg but the instrumental is an original track fashioned by Dsico, such as his dancehall remix of Eminem's 'Lose Yourself'. Then there is the tongue-in-cheek electro-clash style number 'Berlin' which boasts having vocals by Chloe Sevigny. Of course these vocals are ripped off from interviews found on the internet and are totally unauthorised.

This vein of illegality seems to run through all his work as a common theme. As does the obsession with celebrity – if its not mashing two pop tunes together or remixing them almost to oblivion he is sampling movie stars to get vocals.

What motivates Dsico is not some nostalgic retro trip – on the whole his bootlegs and cut up tracks feature current pop or r n b top 40 hits. 'It is recontextualizing popular culture which gets shoved down our throats or ears. Since we can't help but be subjected to Kylie or Nelly it is an influence on me as an artist, and it's fun – I listen to it afterwards and say, "Wow, this used to be that nice clean pop track and now it's like a crack-addled version," and when you play it out the crowd reaction can be really crazy. It allows the crowd to enjoy pop music without feeling bad about it'.

And on top of playing with copyright violation he says he cannot see how bootlegs and cut-up remixes could have a negative impact on record sales for the majors, rather considering them as being free publicity for them, often in areas where they could not get their latest product played anyway.

‘A hell of a lot of pop music involves poaching music anyhow. Lately I’ve been noticing it more and more. You listen closely to some very pop tracks and there are often whole sections that are ripped off; there are, for example, similarities between the melody of Shakira’s ‘Underneath my Clothes’ and The Bangles ‘Eternal Flame’, or say Whitney Houston’s ‘I Will Always Love You’ and Pachabel’s ‘Canon’. There was even that statement by Aitken, or someone from Stock, Aitken and Waterman, about them ripping off melody from classical works for half their pop tracks.’ One of his recent tracks ‘Heart Of E’ points out Missy Elliott’s use of a chunk of ‘Heart Of Glass’ by Blondie in her ‘Work It’ track.

For a guy who has no product, no manager nor press agent and who has barely done any gigs, he is attracting strangely large amounts of press — recently a Melbourne newspaper organized a photo shoot for him, all dressed up in Mooks gear, images from which accompanied a double page story in a pull out entertainment section. The cover of the section contained a full-page photo of him. The same story and photos were reprinted in a Sydney paper the next week. He gets asked onto radio shows regularly and has been interviewed on several internationally renowned websites. He has even appeared on the television show *The Panel*.

His first-ever live performance was in the Australian backwater town of Newcastle at the This Is Not Art festival. UK music-geek chin-strokers’ bible *The Wire* ran a very positive write-up that was meant to be a story covering the entire five day festival, but spent nearly half the column talking about how great Dsico was. According to the reviewer he even overshadowed V/VM.

‘I haven’t really released anything yet and I’ve been mentioned in a lot of mainstream press. I assume the internet played a role in that.’ He has however recently started selling burned CDs of compilations of his work via his website. ‘I started selling CDs mostly because some people don’t have broadband and or can’t be bothered to download all the tracks, and I thought it would help with promotion to have a defined product. I never thought I’d sell as many as I have — if I had known I would have pressed up a bunch and probably made a heap more dough. At the moment I don’t really make anything from the sales. The postage costs are high and I sell them pretty cheap.’

And now Spasticated Recordings has come into being to release his output. Apparently being run by the curiously named John De Spastic (who was not present at the interview), the next release is the

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‘A hell of a lot of pop music involves poaching music anyhow. Lately I’ve been noticing it more and more. You listen closely to some very pop tracks and there are often whole sections that are ripped off;

label’s first properly pressed CD, a compilation of ‘various pop DSP buggery’. Called *Ministry Of Shit – The 2003 Anus*, it will contain tracks by locals and overseas artists including Mark N, Skkatter, Wobbly, Kevin Blechdom with Knifehandchop, V/VM, Toecutter, DJ Smallcock, Ascdii and many more. It will also feature a videoclip by Dither that is cut-up, DSP mangled and combines two pop artists, bootleg style, just like the track it accompanies. Dsico is not sure, but this could be the first ever bootleg/glitch videoclip.

From a technical standpoint, the tools he uses are highly advanced and specialized. He builds ensembles in patching software Reaktor by Native Instruments, which are specifically designed to facilitate his work. He has created patches that can be used to correct the timing in tracks where humans have played the drums and thus the tempo drifts. This was an experiment to help with making bootlegs. ‘I prefer to call it DSP wankery. Some of the mash-up stuff was an attempt to make a point about pop music, but also as an institution it’s fair game,’ he explains. Other patches he has built are purposefully destructive to the original sound and he now has quite an array of tools to mangle sound, thus lending a new digital aesthetic to the pop source material put in one end of the machine.

‘I do still try to write “dance music” so I guess you need a bit of a beat there. So I usually leave it together, plus the crowd needs to understand what the original track was so you can’t destroy it completely. Maybe I’m just not conceptual enough...’ he ponders. When asked if he considers what he is doing to be art he responds, ‘No. Or yes. I guess it depends who you are trying to get into bed.’

This constant practice and experimentation with patching software applied to various tasks has resulted in him becoming a bit of an expert. With a few other folks he has started a patching strand for 2003’s Electrofringe festival that builds on a workshop from the previous year’s conference.

Even before Dsico, Collison was using Reaktor for work with his band, laptop duo Cindii. He explains, ‘the experience over the years has been rather help-

ful. Fucked around with lots of crap... I like writing drum n bass sometimes cause it’s fast and stupid but generally I hate the shit. Lately we’ve been working on some deep house and trying to take some of the fuckup/glitch stuff into that.’

Cindii have often performed with video DSP mangler Dither in a way so that tempo, timing and song elements can be used to influence the video output. This is spawning yet another act, as yet unnamed, who do ‘5.1 AV, formless noodling: improvised sound art with emphasis on computer aided interactivity — passing data over a local network with each person having some control over each aspect of the output, not a traditional jam, rather it is about building environments to allow the computers to jam with each other...’

With all this publicity and all this violating copyright, surely it is just a matter of time before the majors catch up with him and start serving writs. Oddly though he has been contacted numerous times by major labels here and overseas, but rather than requesting he cease and desist, they are requesting he make bootlegs for them or compile mash-up style mix discs for them.

So is this the future? Legal bootlegs released by the labels that own the extensive back catalogues? Or cut-up remixes being released as well as the schmaltzy originals in an attempt to cater for all tastes — in this way the majors maintain control. There really is no way they will be able to stop copyright bastardisation so why not control its production and cash in as a bonus? Will it actually happen? It would be strange — but then again Jive Bunny or the ‘Hooked On’ series must have seemed like particularly odd concepts at the time.

And if the success of the Karaoke DSP night at Frigid that he hosted with Bunny Attack was anything to go by, strange is the new pop.

*Ministry Of Shit – The 2003 Anus*  
is out very soon

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Interview with Efrim Menuck  
by Dale Harrison

# ROCK ON

A droned arpeggio groans into the foreground and is joined by a quick-speaking male, ranting against the government, prompted by a calm male. As the frantic male tells his story, a tale of abusing a judge over a minor infringement, the background swells up in volume and suddenly there is a chord change. Bliss. Even in the first few moments of 'Blaise Bailey Finnegan III', on the *Slow Riot for New Zero Kanada* EP, my expectations of what guitar music could be were being challenged. Though I was interested in guitarists like KK Null, Jim Plotkin and Justin Broadrick and their use of delay and drone to create atmospheres, I was unprepared for the anthemic parade of sound that was surrounding me. A music that seemed to enter directly into that part of your chest that aches when missing a loved one, a music that seemed to move like time trial cyclists – holding patterns back pedalling until, with immense strength, it burst forth in a flurry of measured energy and power. The first time I heard *Godspeed You! Black Emperor* I was held in thrall – unable to move, the final notes died away in a squall of analogue delay and were replaced by a stringed creep that swirled formlessly for minutes. I shut my mouth manually, wiped my chin and turned the record over...

Godspeed You! Black Emperor are an immutable force that appeared on the musical horizon like a proverbial wild west lone stranger just a few short years back. In that time they have played and recorded some of the most powerful and moving music yet released, almost single-handedly rescuing rock from its own self-aggrandizing self-indulgence. And like some lone stranger they have remained reticent to explain their motives, causes and desires except through their actions, leaving them open to being scorned and reproached for being 'difficult' and or 'precious', but also increasing the mystique and charm of the whole collective.

This mystique runs deep, from their peculiar and sometimes perverse liner notes to their mistrust of the music industry, to the insistence on being rarely photographed, they appear to be the very definition of precious artists. This seems to be a misconception though, as much of their perceived difficult nature is simply a by-product of attempting to remain as normal as possible, to retain the special qualities that first existed when

they came together in a Montreal devoid of places to play and with a struggling arts community. As Efrim Menuck, guitarist with the nine piece band states, 'when we started playing music together in the city there weren't any venues that presented new music in any way and there weren't any labels that put out anything interesting, it was a dead scene. That forced us and a whole bunch of musicians to figure out how to get things off the ground without any assistance. It forced us all to find our own pathways right from the very beginning.'

This also involved finding ways for the band members to communicate with each other musically. Though the band's sprawling epics have plenty of freedom in their structure, co-ordinating nine people means having a set of outlines as well as each of the members engaging sympathetically with each other. Writing becomes an issue because of the disparate nature of each member's backgrounds, Efrim explains, 'there are some people in the band whose understanding of music is based on an understanding of musical theory and there are a lot of people in the band who don't know musical theory, so finding words that we all agree on to describe certain sections of a piece or harmonic relationships can be a challenge.' This is compounded by the fact that with nine people it's sometimes difficult to prise apart the elements of a particular piece, especially after the fact. Efrim continues, 'Sometimes there's a sort of dominant throb that will end up happening that sounds really great and then you try it again and there's a piece missing. Trying to find out what that piece

is can be difficult.' Obviously with time these issues have become less problematic, with the group developing an unstated sonic understanding, but like any relationship familiarity can be the harbinger of doom, with bad habits resulting, but as Efrim says; 'it works, it's like a family. That's the only analogy I can think of, we're like a big confused arguing family but that's a sweet thing for me.'

Montréal has become a musical hub for experimental rock, due in no small part to the efforts of the various members of the Godspeed family creating suitable environments. Apart from the band itself, this took the function of creating spaces and venues outside of the established norms, and forming a studio – the now semi-legendary Hotel 2 Tango, a huge loft space that backs on to a train line in Montréal's Mile End district. This not only serves as residence, rehearsal and performance space, it is also where all of the Godspeed albums as well as much of the output of Constellation records – including the side projects like Hangedup's *Kicker in Tow*, the fragile beauty of A Silver Mount Zion's debut and Exhaust's strange but effecting music – were recorded. This attempt at wresting the means of production (and promotion) away from commercial studios and venues was borne out of desperation, but also out of Godspeed's almost maniacal resistance to the forces of capitalism and the music industry in general. The back cover of their latest album *Yanqui UXO*, features a hand drawn flow chart detailing the interdigitated nature of the four major music labels and the US war machine with regard to shareholdings. They



also pour scorn on the musician/pawns who play the game according to the music industry's rules, 'People get into playing music for a lot of different reasons. Some people get into music because they want to see their faces on television, they want to see their faces on magazines and because they want to make money. Or they want to get laid. If you're living in a city where none of these things are an option where you're not going to be the next super-huge-mega-band then I think immediately you know that anyone you're playing with is not gonna have these terrible boring daydreams. That's a good starting point, everyone's starting at the same page. In Canada no-one gives a shit about Montréal.'

The bond that ties the band is more than just a shared city, it's a shared set of values and beliefs, and also a shared sense of history. Speaking about the formative times, Efrim, who had moved from his birthplace Toronto, says 'all the excitement just came from the fact that we'd all found each other and that were working to build something, not just a band but a performance space and a studio and all the rest of the stuff trying to make the stuff out of odds and ends. It was like "Shit, we've got a group of people here who are willing to work to try to build something," rather than making all these idle plans and never following through on any of it.' He explains, 'I think one commonality we have as a band is that we all came of age scared shitless. Most of us did way too many drugs when we were young and had very paranoid fucked up adolescences living in bad cities wandering around with a head full of drugs and the only thing we had to cling to was music. And that stuff still informs us and that's where the daydream lies. Personally speaking, I still have all the daydreams I had when I was seventeen years old and I'm still as scared as I was when I was seventeen years old; that for me is the big thing that we're still always struggling to find a way to express.'

This notion of being 'scared' is important to Godspeed's music – as they seem to alternate between a quiet melancholia and a sort of frantic terror. A track like 'Rockets Fall on Rocket Falls' from their latest album *Yanqui UXO* is a case in point. Quivering strings and distorted guitar arpeggios gradually grow in stature from a mess of chattering teeth into an uplifting freedom ride of guitar and splash cymbals. They differ from their rock brethren in that much of the rest of the rock *oeuvre* is based on a will to power, whereas they seem far more interested in empowerment than domination. Though their music is still loud it never seems aggressive – though it may elicit images of destruction and dissolution it doesn't seem to encourage the responding physical acts of violence. It is this sublime feeling of being at once terrified but also in awe and uplifted that makes Godspeed You! Black Emperor so appealing. 'I think rock and the word



sublime should be synonymous. That's the point of big loud amplifiers and all the rest of it,' states Efrim, although he is quick to point out that he wouldn't use the term sublime to describe the band. 'There's an ideal in the stuff we love – we're always reaching for something that we haven't quite grasped yet. We truly believe that whether it's rock or punk rock or any of it we believe in the clamour that drums and loud guitars and basses make together along with violins and pianos and cellos and all the rest of it.

'That stuff is holy for us and a real embarrassingly earnest way. We embrace the idea of rock and that's so square regardless of whatever is happening now with all these new rock bands.' It is precisely this earnestness that leads to the redemptive feel of much of Godspeed's music. Their pieces seem to flow like a fire and brimstone preacher in his utmost moment of passion, spittle and red faced leering at the crowd filling them with the spirit. But the spirit of rock is also in decay: 'It's become an orthodoxy. It doesn't have to be this way; the orthodoxy of rock, the industry of rock, what gets sold as rock, the fact that you can't even say the word "rock" without feeling self-conscious are all bad things, and that's what we have a problem with. It's even more heartbreaking for me that you can't even say "punk rock" without cringing a bit'

When I speak to Efrim he's in the process of getting ready for another tour, no doubt raising the dying spirit of rock along the way. With their horizons expanded from playing intimate shows in their own performance space to playing sold out shows across the Atlantic, the band is only now coming to terms with their level of notoriety, 'we were really


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'We truly believe that whether it's rock or punk rock or any of it we believe in the clamour that drums and loud guitars and basses make together along with violins and pianos and cellos and all the rest of it'

surprised the first time we went to Europe and people came to our shows' Efrim crackles down the phone line 'It wasn't really like an epiphany, it actually scared us more than anything.' The irony of being a big touring band is not lost on him either 'The things I end up doing to get ready for a tour are ridiculous, road cases are my kick this week, I'm obsessed about the fact that I'm obsessed about road cases, and that's weird. But road cases are good – they keep your stuff from getting broken. It's a stupid industry that we're all engaged in and I think that's important to keep in mind.'

*Yanqui UXO is out now on Constellation through Inertia*





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**Inertia**

Interview with Barry Bootleg  
by Chloé Sasson

# BOOTLEGGING WITH BARRY

Occasionally an album will be released that captures the ears and minds of an underground generation. Last year it was the obscure *Parker Tapes* by UK outfit Cassetteboy. With its Jamie Oliver cutups and soundbyte collages, the monster mash of pop-culture-meets-chainsaw was a refreshing aural offering in a year when the seriousness of maudlin laptoptonica continued to plod along. Released on the Barry's Bootlegs label, the album that allegedly took seven years to come to fruition, came at a time when the bootleg phenomenon was building pace, and the craze of cut and mashed up tracks was as popular as the latest Neptunes remix.

The man behind the label is Barry Bootleg (not his real name). Apparently he does everything except make the music.

Barry's Bootlegs debuted with the release of Cassetteboy's first single 'Di & Dodidodie', a touching tribute to the late Princess Diana. 'The boys weren't convinced,' explains Barry about the lead up to the release, 'so in the end I had to nick the tape off them and just get it pressed up. They first found out about it when I showed them reviews in magazines.'

A well-deserved year off followed the stellar success of the single. A subsequent comeback ensued when Barry 'decided to jump on the "slap-and-a capella over an instrumental" bandwagon,' and released Picasso's 'Play Once Then Destroy' single closely followed by the Christmas carol cutup of Cassetteboy's 'Festive Christmas'.

Things then got serious with two album releases. The now infamous *Parker Tapes* was followed by *The Armageddon Sessions* by fellow bootlegger, MC DJ Rubbish.

All these were released at a time when, in the UK at least, the bootlegging phenomenon was continuing to gather momentum: mashups with BBC airplay, major label backed releases (2 Many Djs), Barry takes time to theorise: 'When you've got a situation where turntables are outselling guitars, and every other school kid's ambition is to be a DJ, coupled with the fact that the vast majority of music producers are not making anything remotely innovate, you've got a bootleg time-bomb waiting to go off. So recycling other

people's records is these kids equivalent of writing songs. My personal take is that it was a good, fun, creative thing for about six months, but then it got ridiculous and boring. Can't anyone do anything really new?'

So then Barry, tell me, what are the legal ramifications of what you are doing?

'Ask a lawyer...'

And your own thoughts and opinions on copy-right control in the music industry?

'Couldn't give a fuck.'

And what was that about a prison sentence?

Ouch.

'It was a long time ago alright?' comes the defensive reply. 'I had this idea that if I could get into a relationship with an up and coming pop star, I could get a decent "kiss and tell" story for the tabloids to net me a nice lump sum. So I was spending a lot of time outside the...drama school. I was just starting to get some results when...Well, let's just say it kinda blew up in my face and yeah, I had to do a short stretch. Didn't do me any harm though, I learnt a lot of good stuff in there.'

These artists are lucky to have someone like Barry.

Cassetteboy were the first to come under his caring wing. As Barry remembers it, 'I picked them up at the beach in Blackpool eating ice cream when they were eight years old, and over the next decade moulded them to do what they do now.'

Seye (one half of the group), fills in the blanks about the group's past:

'We met at school and became partners about ten years later. Blackpool is not the easiest place to grow up in at the best of times and the fact that we are gay obviously makes it even harder. Let's just say that being outwardly gay in Blackpool is about as safe as prancing around the taxi rank in Blacktown at 1a.m. on a Saturday wearing a fairy dress shouting, "I hate Australians." We then sensibly moved south to London where the culture's a little more diverse.'

While the release of the *Parker Tapes* has done wonders for the duo, Seye doesn't hide the agitation he feels about the seven years it took for the album to be released. 'He [Barry] released our

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'It was completely freestyle because frankly I don't have time to sit down and think about what I'm saying. I'm terrified of doing things more than once.'

first single and subsequently promised to release our album soon after. Then he did an 18-month stint in prison and didn't end up releasing the record for five years! Now that's what I call efficient management. We are now trapped in a contract with the fucker for the next album. We are not particularly keen on having anything to do with Barry anymore as he is basically a thug. When we've done our next album, we're out of there.'

What are your comments on this matter Barry?

'Well I did advise them to seek legal advice while my mate Boris was dangling them over the edge of a tall building, but they seemed very happy to sign at the time. If they have any problems they can always talk to me on one of my many phone numbers. As for being a thug, I mean we've all done silly things in our time haven't we? Let's just hope I don't do one again next time I see them...'

So there is no animosity with the boys then Barry? 'Not at all, those boys are like my sons. The one's who disappeared in 1983.'

Would you agree Seye?

'I don't think that he harbours any bad feeling towards us, I just think that he doesn't have any feelings regarding us, or anyone, for that matter. He is kinda macho and very business like. Having said that, he is extremely difficult to contact and never answers any of his many telephone numbers and the only way we've managed to liase with him in the last three months is via email. We have no idea where he lives or what

he does when he's not dealing with us (which is most of the time I expect). But judging by the fact that he drives a nice car and is always in a rush and also his general demeanour, we reckon he probably shifts a lot of cocaine.'

Time to move on. Quickly.

So what of the other member of the bootleg brigade. Shaun Pubis is the unaptnly named MC who calls himself DJ Rubbish. Interestingly, he was also 'found' by Barry when 'he put a gun in my mouth and said, "sign this or I'll blow your fucking head off." Next thing I knew I was releasing his album.'

The album in question is *The Armageddon Sessions*, a raw mix of Rubbish lyrics shouted over other people's beats. With production quality about the level of an old cassette tape, it's the demo-like output and raw energy of the mix that makes it such a unique release.

In the odd press release that gets sent out, Barry has described the work of Rubbish as being 'like a political, improvised version of The Streets ranting over other people's instrumentals.' Shaun's version is that it was a scam that he and Barry somehow pulled off.

Scam or not, Shaun has been feeling the Rubbish of his alter ego since birth. He explains, 'I think I've always been DJ Rubbish. It's always deep inside of

me and the last few years have been a voyage of discovery in that respect.'

Having witnessed Rubbish in a pub in Camden in the UK, what I saw was a non-stop freestyle session that had the crowd all shouting 'Rubbish!!' His release *The Armageddon Sessions* is very raw, and essentially very much like his live set. He explains about the album: 'It was completely freestyle because frankly I don't have time to sit down and think about what I'm saying. I'm terrified of doing things more than once.' Once the confidence hits, there are plans for a studio-produced album of original work.

With lyrics like Rubbish's 'Osama Bin Ladin and his evil lair'; 'I was talking about the difficulties of being posh and what a stupid culture we've got,' the work of both of Barry's artists is obviously overly political. Could this be because of the evil workings of Barry?

'Yes, I bribe them with individual parts of a huge "mega bush-gun" I've invented. So each time they come up with some clever new bit of satire I give them a piece and they have to work out where it goes.'

As Rubbish explains, 'I'm not a student of politics by qualification and I do say what I feel, but I've read some books which have deeply informed what I think. I think [expressing political thoughts

through music] can be extremely effective. In a culture where we have a "soundtrack to our lives" you would also want a "soundtrack to the revolution" – something to smash McDonalds to. In a politicised climate it can have huge significance.'

And Cassette Boy: 'I think we're more commenting on what we've read and what we read every day in the papers. Check your local *Daily Telegraph* for good evidence of the rubbish we try to fight. Gee that's such a bad paper. It makes *The Sydney Morning Herald* look good. The *Telegraph* is as classic a piece of Nazi paraphernalia as you'll see, I reckon.'

Politics, carol cutups and thuggery. How much longer can the Barry Bootleg empire rule? Perhaps not for long, as Barry has found that he certainly can't live off it. These days he supplements royalty cheques by working daylight hours as a security guard.

Oh one more thing Seye, what do you really think of Jamie Oliver?

'He did a book signing near us recently. We went and got a book signed by him. He was alright. I don't have any strong feelings against him, though he has got funny old lips hasn't he.'

*Parker Tapes by Cassetteboy and DJ Rubbish's The Armageddon Sessions are available now*

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Spasticated Records presents **MINISTRY of SHIT**

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# REVIEWS

## LOCAL RELEASES

### Various Artists

#### *Ants Farm Aphids*

(Symbiotic)

The compilation is the first release on the Symbiotic label out of Melbourne, and features productions related to the members of Tzu, Curse Ov Dialect, Music vs Physics and their many side projects. Like the Music vs Physics album of late 2001, there are echoes of the more successful records from MoWax and Pussyfoot in the mid 90s, and tracks like Pitch Bureau's 'Left Handed', Pasobionic's 'Echoes Of Blue', Guitarkus' 'Balance Of Nature', LKK's 'Listen', and Echo's 'Foetus' opt for epic spacious strings, piano or blurred voice arrangements over loping breaks – ideas that were explored in the mid to late 90s period. Others betray the hip-hop fascinations of their producers, Dengar's 'Arch Nemesis' is an instrumental awaiting bold MC, whilst the two tracks with MCs, Curse Ov Dialect's 'House Of Clocks' and Beatrix's 'Porcupine' with Vulk and Raceless from Curse, carry the weird freak hop tropes you would expect from Curse – nursery rhyme nonsensical rhymes and an over abundance of odd voices. The standout track of the compilation is the dark and bleak Dusted from Melbourne's Terminal Sound System that marries sub 80bpm crunching breaks with some evil rinsing bass drops that would not be out of place coming from Tipper. It's a simple track with an atmosphere carried by a hollow synth like a wind through a graveyard and a piano couplet out of a horror film. **Sebastian Chan**

### Darren Ziesing

#### *Liife*

(Geometrik)

Darren Ziesing will be known to some of us for his Stalker alias, under which he releases note-perfect Basic Channel style minimal house. On his new release, *Liife*, he takes a new tack bringing gorgeously produced, up-to-the-minute IDM. The rhythms are primarily breakbeats, and everything is heavily DSP-processed. Tracks are mostly 7-10 minutes long, developing in a way that recalls the inventiveness of an Autechre or Aphex Twin – multi-part creations with no regard for standard song structures. Indeed, Autechre and their Gescom side-project are conjured up in everything *Liife* does, but that's no put-down: this is just too good to be considered imitation, although perhaps homage would do. Bola, and perhaps Boards of Canada on the outskirts, are also evoked in the analogue synths and in the beat programming, but granular processing is never far

away from the mix. Ziesing has a superb sense of atmosphere, with stereo imaging of clicking beats, bleeps and blurts as well as a fine use of reverb (occasionally perhaps used to excess) displaying an enormous talent. It's hard to make completely electronic music sound organic, and Ziesing succeeds with the best of them. The many highlights (there are no track titles) include the beats coalescing from a cloud of noise a couple of minutes into track 5; the beginning of track 6's filmic orchestral sample emerging from the gloom, only to submerge again. The last track, in which a floating chord pattern redolent of Bola's outer-space mutant insects gradual becomes discernable from squelchy rhythmic digital processing is fantastic. **Peter Hollo**

### Two Up

#### *Tastes Like Chicken*

(Village Idiot)

This hip-hop trio from boondock suburbia have made quite a splash; at least according to the idiots at Triple J. This six track EP is chest beating provincial hip-hop. Their moment of glory 'Why Do I Try So Hard' tells the story of some tracksuited new Australians hanging at a shopping centre, which is about as exciting as it gets at Castle Hill. The massive try-hard irony is that Maccy D and Breaker J try as hard as the rest of us: you, me, the guys with the lowered Civic and subwoofer. But they're 'just Aussie guys / spreading ladiback vibes' who 'Focus on the local so they're bound for glory' which is exactly why Two Up are so popular. These guys might not have the freshest rhymes, the fastest cuts or dopest production, but they're talking about the mundane shit that concerns the average suburbanite: it's no hold barred lowest common denominator. *Tastes Like Chicken* has no convoluted concepts or abstract beatz: just verse/chorus singalong quality. No wonder the kids in the suburbs love it, and no wonder and the labels that predate the whole tech-house shebang, inner city cliques get overlooked when it comes to record sales or airplay. The question of resurgent nationalism is another matter and not for a record review, but if John Howard listened to hip-hop, the Commonwealth cars would be boomin' to this CD. **Vaughan Healey**

### Various Artists

#### *Vile Techniques*

(Killing Sheep)

The Newcastle-based Killing Sheep label first came to our attention through the demos of Aussie break-core act Epsilon. It was good stuff – dark, energetic and interesting. This new compilation is an impressive compilation of hard dark drum and bass and breakbeat tunes with contributions in roughly equal parts from Aussies, Europeans and Americans. The first track is an absolute killer by DJ Hidden straight outta the Netherlands. The track seethes with dark brooding evil and has an amazing tearing lead sound and pounding slightly distorted breaks. Venturing into almost normal drum n bass territory is The Future, courtesy of Perth based junglist extraordinaire Paul Blackout. It features some crankin' manic clockwork breaks with scary doom-hoover basslines. Still on the Aussie acts, Epsilon delivers a track in his unique distorted breaks crossover style. Bloody Fist label boss Mark N as Overcast brings another moody nasty track that surprisingly features strings and amen breaks. And Guyver, also, from BloodyFist offers 'Lyrics To Breakbeats' with that gritty tracker sound, layered breaks, dropping back to half speed breaks occasionally and sampled tuff MC vocals. French crew Rotator supply us with a fast, hard and crunchy-noisy track that wouldn't be out of place in the more extreme moments of a dj /rupture set. There are many more great tracks on here, some harsher, some harder, some darker, and for those into breakcore and drum & bass this is an excellent introduction into some of the fine sounds being produced around Australia. **Luke Dearnley**

### Various Artists

#### *Please Don't Tell Me That's Your Remix*

(Aural Industries)

Remix albums are sometimes a mixed bag of diverse styles and expressions, but not in this case. The tracks on this album are remixes from the Adelaide artist's second full-length album *Please Don't Tell Me That's Your Volvo* (his first album *Isolated Rhythm Chock* was released by his alter-ego Thug). This album works surprisingly well as a coherent selection of tracks, while featuring distinctive sounds that reveal the individual merits of each artist. New Zealander (now Melbourne) Jet Jaguar begins the album with subtle loops which later become a groovy, multi-layered dub piece. Proem (who also did the cover art) from the U.S. leads us down a path of dark syncopated beats. From the Australian establish-

# REVIEWS

ment comes a stand-out track from Bloq. His remix of ‘Sudafed x2’ cruises in with a superb keyboard melody line that effortlessly slides along with the beats, its sweetness juxtaposed with the ever-growing crunchy beats. Later sounds hint at scratching as a rocking bass line kicks in. Sydney boy Disjunction Reunion hits us with some rock beats and twanging keyboard polyphonics. This man expertly balances swelling bass-lines with delicate melodies. Quark Kent comes along to do the only remix of ‘Binoce’ with all of his usual stylishness. Raven creates some beautiful sounds from processing a cello and is somehow able to meld them with wild drum-programming noisiness. Coffee Table offsets ‘Boybie Socks’ original swing drum loop with industrial beats and a moog-like melody to elegantly end the album in a style akin to a melodramatic symphony. Tim Koch knows how to write great melodies, and this is displayed by the fact that many of Tim’s original melody lines have been retained in the remixes. With its pleasing flow it’s nice to hear a remix album that stands in its own right, as the artists all seem to be aiming towards the same place. **Angela Stengel**

## Various Artists

### *Electricity*

(Blatant Propaganda)

Spread over a double CD *Electricity* attempts to showcase the rhythms and beats emerging from our nation’s capital. As you’d expect from such a venture the results are diverse, and while not lending themselves to a cohesive listen, do offer up many entertaining moments. Not restricting itself to Canberra residents *Electricity* opens itself up to past inhabitants, meaning some familiar names pop up. Groovescooter, Meem, Combat Wombat, Artificial vs DJ Toupee, Dark Network, EYE, Chris Fresh and Nash T (to name a few) all appear adding their particular capital beat. On the music front expect a smorgasbord of styles. From dance-beat acid growls reminiscent of early Clan Analogue rumblings to house styles of all persuasions (including funky), progressive trance-tinged anthems to industrial drum n’ bass roars alongside glitchy ambience and noise. Everything pretty much gets a look in. While some keep to a loose song structure and are able to stand alone you get the impression other tracks are better suited to a DJ mix. Which is really the problem here, some of the tracks are worlds apart and just don’t sit well side by side. Despite this *Electricity* is an excellent and engaging introduction to Canberra’s electronic music community. **Tim Colman**

## Tepid

### *Tepid Studies*

(self-released)

Get ready for fun and adventure in a very chilled out way. Prepare yourself for solid, hooky beats and metallic tainted bedroom synths. With *Tepid Studies* by Melbourne’s Tepid we have all these ingredients combined with sugary harmonic progressions and understated sexiness. This is exemplified by ‘Cosmetic Surgery’ which specialises in a 21st century retro approach to the 80s, don’t endeavour to engage in close analysis just get sucked in by the tight beats and the catchy hooks. Opening track, ‘The Rich Pageant’ features the type of pitch wavering that takes you back to home-made movies and black and white pictures. The beats are understated and whilst it makes a good introduction to Tepid it’s more detached than some of the other tracks. The fat bass of ‘Focus’ is a contrast to the preceding austerity of ‘Closing’ but both contain Tepid’s signature, strong harmonic progression. ‘First’ is totally chilled out and totally cool. The addictive metallic sounds that make this album attractive are combined with string mutterings and beat development. Finally with ‘Difficult’ we get a sense of the filmic effect the artist is aiming for but it’s probably a bit late to make the album concept convincing and it still strays from his goal of inspiring ‘images in your mind of tense or unpleasant scenes in movies’. It’s sophisticated but over-anesthetised. Then again, there’s no denying the addictive quality of harmonic progression. Bach got it and Tepid copies nicely with his 21st century electronica. **Serena Armstrong**

## Terminal Sound System

### *RH-8SB*

(Release)

Terminal Sound System inhabits a terrain somewhere between the slow moving glaciers of mid-term Autechre and the gravelly aftermath of a Mick Harris/Scorn bassquake. Dressed in squalls of dirty sleet and grime, it’s the sonic equivalent of tundra and highland scrub; drab, desolate and uninviting. Though once acclimatised, a subtle beauty of structure, poise and elegance is revealed, and the seemingly monochromatic wheezes, tics, burps and crackles suddenly appear to be significant parts of a greater whole – a kind of gestalt lushness. Throughout the eight long pieces and two interludes, there is a constant juxtaposition between the skein of delicate chordal synth pads, the crackle surface of the sound and the heavily cratered holes opening into deep dark caverns of bass. The melan-

cholic drift of ‘Whine’ is beset by a steady yet off-kilter beat and a throbbing undertow that seems to stretch to unknown depths, the slowly evolving synth clouds of ‘Pulse’ are held together by the scratchy rhythm and snare delays, and ‘Ash’ barely announces itself at all, stalling in a cloud of ether and backward percussion. Based in Melbourne, Terminal Sound System is also a member of the superlative (and sprawling) Symbiotic System crew, and though they differ sonically the two projects are aesthetically similar in the way their pieces develop gracefully without a sense of haste. **DH**

## Hinterlandt

t[raumdeutung]

(CUE Records)

Hinterlandt is the “kraut-noise” project of Jochen Gutsch, a German living in Sydney released on a Japanese label. This CD is a very low-budget release, but the packaging belies the contents, which are very thoughtfully put together and not lo-fi at all. The 26:42 CD is split into 5 “scenes”. The first – “a bit awkward (first encounter)” begins with processed electric guitar tones, which are joined by organ and then chimes. Gradually a 4/4 beat fades in but is taken over by a lopsided rhythm. It’s actually not at all surprising to hear music like this on a Japanese label. “the embryo questions the old woman” features vocal samples pitched up and down in perhaps over-simplistic imitation of the scene’s protagonists, but much of the track is taken over by scraping noises and atonal noodlings – make of it what you will. Scene 3, in which “our protagonist strolls the markets”, begins with shouted voices in an unidentified language, which begin panning and then get chopped up into a stuttering rhythm of pitch-shifted vocal samples. It’s as if an early Steve Reich tape-loop piece meets early  $\mu$ -ziq, but gradually it moves into more Krautrocky territory. Finally, the marketplace reasserts itself, once again devolving into choppy rhythms. Very tasty. Scene 4 (“farewell on the rain train”) overlays distorted vocal samples with jazz saxophone and gamelan-like loops. It’s surprisingly evocative, as the sax’s expressive musicality offsets the musique concrète of the background. Finally, “back home: drifting thoughts on the front veranda” is the most ambient, with wind chimes, crunches and sine tones jostling for attention in an expressionist wash of sound. Although it wears its experimental credentials on its sleeve, t[raumdeutung] is an eminently listenable release and deserves your attention if you can manage to find it. **Peter Hollo**



# DEMOS

with the Peanut Spell, 2SER 107.3 from 12 until 2pm Mondays

## Mixertap

### *Untitled*

This Adelaide duo recently supported Andrew Pekler (~scape) when he played down in the city of churches. To my ears their debut 3 track demo is heavily influenced by Tortoise, Dylan Group, and perhaps the light touch rhythms of laptop electronic pop of Berlin's Morr label. It opens with Radon, a lovely melancholy track carried along by floating synths, and a haunting voice/string sound that has a shimmer effect added so it comes on like Mixmaster Morris's 'ecstasy wobble'. Vanish has a stumbling laptop skank a Toshinori Kondo horn and thumb piano but its stop-start jerkiness doesn't allow it to develop as it should with too much going on at once. The final track, Ivory, is better and features a similar jerkiness with a drum break that has been chopped up and never gets to properly loop, but is complemented by a suitably restrained oriental sequence. A very promising demo and with good reports of their live shows, Mixertap should be worth checking out if you can. **Sebastian Chan**

## Tung Tyde

### *The Embryo*

Hailing from WA, Tung Tyde is the baby of Chris Archibald, and what an odd little child it is. The first track had me thinking that he was influenced by the same sunny climes and strange aspects as co-habitants The Ku-Ling Brothers, with its achy breaks and change-ups, but I was soon to find out that Tung Tyde was more than a one trick pony. The second track, 'Scientific Dreams' was like mid-80s Models if Trent Reznor replaced Sean Kelly on vocals, which ain't a bad thing, though the lyrics were kinda kooky, and the rest of the demo charted many territories including deep-ish house and detroit-ish techno. With a number of organic elements, including Chris' idiosyncratic vocals and an emphasis on vocal samples, The Embryo has a warmth that much home recorded output lacks. Where it fails is the sequenced sounds, particularly the percussion, which lack depth and presence (and sound suspiciously like presets). **DH**

## Send Demos to:

The Peanut Spell  
PO Box 470  
Surry Hills  
NSW 2010

## OK Tokyo

### *Staples & Glue*

It's been a strange batch of demos this issue, and OK Tokyo's Staples & Glue is no exception. Coming on like early Hunters & Collectors with club-footed funk and massed horns 'Jazz up your life' is nothing if not quirky, with the whispered/throaty vocals of lead singer Matt Roesner sitting high in the mix and high on life (or some such substance). With every peak a trough must follow, and the enigmatic bass pedal and string pads of 'Broadcast 2020' is a perfect obverse. Two other tracks round out the CD, one rolling percussion and synth bass, the other setting its controls for the heart of Pink Floyd in Pompeii. Despite some nifty electronic percussion and the odd DSP effect this could have been recorded (and composed) at a dozen different times over the past 30 years, which is probably its greatest asset as well as its greatest liability. **DH**

## Ionic

### *Science Funkshuns*

Hailing from Newcastle and openly conceding their influences (Shadow, Avalanches), Ionic work around the kick and snare bed of hiphop, and bring instrumental and vocal samples, scratches and synths to the party. To their credit and detriment some of these tracks feel very much like you're listening to an Avalanches tune (and some don't at all!) but they should be congratulated on the high standard of composition involved. We've seen the uncompromising style of music on offer from Newcastle, particularly the harder edged hiphop and Bloody Fist beats, but Ionic show that there's a fair level of diversity brewing in the mighty 'Castle and their down-tempo and percussive beats comprise catchy vocal hooks whilst still holding onto gritty crunchy snares and drums. I'm left thinking about the mix and how the sounds could be brought out and shaped more but all in all, a superb demo that offers another sound full of potential. **Tim Levinson**

# FRIGID

**Hopetoun Hotel,  
416 Bourke Street  
Surry Hills, Sydney  
Sundays, 5pm to 10pm  
Usually \$5**

Frigid is a long running weekly Sydney club night established in 1996. Originally a downtown and experimental electronic night, it has mutated into a weekly event which oscillates wildly from genre to genre, IDM to hip hop, postrock to glitch house, bootlegs to reggae. Each week features live acts and resident DJs Sub Bass Snarl, Sir Robbo, Prince Valium, Sleepy Robot, Kid Calmdown, Clark Nova and Olio.



Each month Frigid also has an in-club shop run by

Couchblip Distribution that features import and local CDs from artists and labels you might hear regularly at Frigid, sold direct to you at lower-than-store prices.

## COMING UP:

check [snarl.org](http://snarl.org) for details  
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# REVIEWS

## INTERNATIONAL RELEASES

### Dorine Muraille

*Mani*

(Fat Cat)

The sounds of 25 year old Frenchman Julien Locquet could almost be considered jazz or folk, if not for the fact that they are then digitally reprocessed and reconstructed through the laptop. The result tends to owe much to the gentle melodic washes of sound that Mego stalwart Fennesz has been experimenting in recent times, though Locquet is also dabbling with vocals and song structures. It's an endearing, giddy mash of double bass, guitar, piano and vocals that struggles valiantly onward as various blips and skips and other digital material attempt to impede its journey. It's all assembled rather haphazardly, with the collision of shifting ill-fitting textures producing a busy yet intimate wash of sounds. Whilst he seems to have attacked structures from the inside out, Locquet's work is notable in its ability to retain some of the intimacy and emotion of the analogue material. Abstract and at times quite surreal, Mani never comes close to the level of carnage often associated with other laptop composers, being quite restrained and literally bubbling with emotion. **Bob Baker Fish**

### Various Artists

*Pop Ambient*

(Kompakt)

We've had pop punk, pop rock and pop electro, so surely it was probably only a matter of time before pop ambient showed up. This is the third volume in the series from the Köln based label and initial hopes that it would comprise of three minute ambient ditties are immediately dashed thanks to the opener 'Milk & Honey' from Klimek, a gorgeously restrained warbling tome that clocks in at just over eight and a half minutes. The remainder of the album featuring the likes of Markus Guentner, Ulf Lohman, Triola and Leonardo Fresco, is everything you'd expect. Warm hues, deep melodic pulses, subtle progressions and the kind of drifting tranquillity that seeps through the speakers and wrestles you lethargically to the floor. The Orb pops up with 'Dilmmun', a lush exploration of soft and warm textures, whilst the other highlight is Peter Grummich's 'Kimono', which feels like the audio equivalent of the ocean, fragile swells of washed out sounds lapping gently over the listener, sounds that threaten to drag you into deeper water before slowly ebbing away. **Bob Baker Fish**

### Panoptica

*The Tijuana Remixes*

(Certificate 18)

Panoptica aka Robert Mendoza is an electronic artist at the forefront of Nortec, a collective of North Mexican musicians and designers. Perhaps eager to escape gringo cliché, Panoptica has left the vacant Wild Bunch gestures to the likes of Calexico and instead been influenced by more European or Detroit styled electronics – though he has constructed his sounds with a distinctively Mexican (or perhaps personal) sensibility. So whilst on the surface you may feel like you've heard it all before, Panoptica's temperament and approach is all it's own. The remixes, all created by fellow Mexican producers, vary between gentle shimmering house, smooth minimal tech and the odd dose of breaks, all infused with swirls of ethereal atmosphere and gentle yet precise electronics. In fact it's all quite smooth, verging on downtempo, with artists of the likes of Bostich, Hyperboreal and Fussible producing pleasant if not earth shattering tracks. The highlights here are left to the creator, the new cut 'Ocaso', an odd yet comforting Detroit dub amalgam and the Bahaus mix of 'She's in Fiestas' in which Panoptica creates one of the smoothest dreamy house cuts you'll ever come across – North or South of the border. **Bob Baker Fish**

### Whitehouse

*Birdseed*

(Susan Lawley/Synaesthesia)

Whitehouse's method is to bludgeon to death all feelings of goodwill you may have previously felt, and torment and abuse you both mentally and physically with one of the most vicious, unrelenting and unrepentant assaults in recent memory. Possessing an aggressive and brutal sound, their noise would almost be tolerable if not for the antagonistic sermonising of William Bennett, a man whose approach is to screech his mind like an insane tyrant. Pounding shards of electronics, harsh high pitched drones, vicious piercing lines of synth and rumbling sub atomic groans all compete for space inside the unsettling tracks. Though ultimately it's all about perspective, because even this is relatively easy to cope with compared to the title track, which doesn't even feature any music or vocals. Produced by Steve Albini, 'Birdseed' clocks in at around 15 minutes and is a montage of various victims of rape torture and abuse, including children and parents of children who have been murdered or abused, detail-

ing their accounts of the horrific crimes inflicted upon them. Obviously listening to people's misery makes for some particularly grim listening, which is further compounded by the lack of clarity around its purpose on the album. There are no clear statements of intent; just vague, controversial unpolitically correct lyrics, which leave the listener with a sour taste in the mouth. One thing's for sure however Whitehouse are operating on the raw edge of the razor blade. Everything is sharper, deeper, bloodier and infinitely more painful. A complex and disturbing work. **Bob Baker Fish**

### Tujiko Noriko

*Make Me Hard*

(Mego)

Austria's premier experimental electronic label Mego, best known for the beautiful noise of such artists as Fennesz and Farmers Manual, here take a turn into more melodic waters. This could almost be called pop music, although approached as pop music it's pretty out there. This is Noriko's second album on Mego, after 2001's *Shojo Toshi*, and weirdly it fits the Mego bill more than the first one's kooky Japanese pop did. There's plenty of processing and glitchy textures going around in the background. Many tracks have no beats, but Noriko's always bright and tuneful singing holds everything together. Think a Japanese Björk with even less concern for mainstream tastes and you won't be too far wrong. There are some very catchy highlights here which will surprise you with their staying-power. Enjoyable on a first listen as much for its distinct oddness as anything else, *Make Me Hard* gives up a whole lot of careful detail as the songs themselves become more familiar. Little samples of noise and carefully-EQ'd concrete sounds combine with organ and guitar in a style reminiscent of Mouse on Mars or our own Qua. The ridiculous collage artwork is fun, but belies a depth to this music well worth exploring. **Peter Hollo**

### Mira Calix

*Skimskitta*

(Warp)

Chantal Passamonte's earlier work, including collaborations with Seefeel/Disjecta's Mark Clifford, wore the influence of My Bloody Valentine on its sleeve, with submerged vocals and sweeping guitar textures. *Skimskitta* is her second album for Warp. It certainly has a sound all of its own, and it's not for everyone. Others will no doubt get more out of it than I did. There are some lovely minimalist piano

pieces here ('Pousou'), and some nice enough organic beats, but much of the album floats along in ambient fashion, creating pleasing environments without holding one's attention. Things aren't helped by tracks such as 'Schadenfreude', with its insistent synth strings overpowering the vocals and other textures. The following track's little sampled vocal snippets are more successful, but fade into fuzzily distorted organ all too soon. More unforgiving synths in 'You Open Always' are offset to good effect by a weird, loping beat and processed vocals, but then we're back to dark, aimless textures. With its frequent track segues, *Skimskitta* is clearly meant to be listened to as a whole journey. The first few tracks, and a few more along the way, are certainly successful, but whether the whole album is worth the trouble is arguable. **Peter Hollo**

#### **Nobukazu Takemura**

*10th*

(Thrill Jockey)

Nobukazu Takemura's fourth release for Thrill Jockey is a deeply colourful work, which incorporates the entire spectrum of techniques that this Kyoto-based producer has explored across his various recording personas. The playful melodies, acoustic instrumentation and abstract minimalism are all given ample representation, however if it were not for Takemura's decision to focus more than ever before on vocals, then this incorporation of all things good may have lead to *10th* suffering from a lack of focus. Utilising the range and variety of human voice to extend the compositional palate of modern electronica is a fascinating idea, and one that reminds me of jazz musicians speaking through their horns when their instruments could not find right, or enough, notes. ether. The voices, though similar, do gain the distinct musical identities that one suspects Takemura always intended for them, and provide a strong cohesiveness to the extraordinary compositional range occurring on this album. The abundant samples and loops of acoustic instruments, albeit muted, paint a world in pastel instead of neon, offer nostalgia over sentimentality and choose awkwardness in preference to synchronicity. A world where strange robots perform unintelligible scats ('Lost Treasure') and the 4/4 beat ('Wandering') continues to be the strongest force that drives people on to the dance floor. *10th* finishes off with such a deep space extravaganza ('At Lake Logo') that the listener is left in no doubt that Nobukazu is a prodigious talent who wants to communicate clearly with his listeners... even if that means using a robot for a mouthpiece. **Sean Rabin**

#### **Thomas Köner**

*Zyklop*

(Mille Plateaux)

German sound artist Thomas Köner's minimal drone works are the epitome of dissolved borders. Seamless, eventless, formless; the music evolves, dissolves and reflects. CD 1 contains just the one track, 'Une Topographie Sonore: Col de Vence'. The work is involved with the notion of resonant landscape. It explores the resonance of the map yet the presence of the map itself marks the work, embodying both emptiness and immensity. Musically this translates itself to lines of drones, atmospheric sounds that amplify the miniscule. The work is skilfully paced, gentle evolution and exploration. It's fabulous stuff, entirely engrossing and requiring utmost concentration. CD 2 gives a more complete picture of Köner's creative presence. With 'Des Rives' Köner gives an aural picture of speed and confusion that reflects the isolating experience of the individual in the industrial world. 'Tu, Sempre' returns to spacious sounds that slowly release their power. *Zyklop* is a brilliant, innovative work that is skilfully put together. Be prepared to work hard to get into it and take the time to acclimatise to Köner's sound palette. The result is immense sounds, electrified anticipation and time-space directed opportunity for external and introspective reflection. **Serena Armstrong**

#### **Léna**

*Lane*

(Quatermass)

Austerely laced with reggae beats, Mathias Delplanque, under the guise of Léna, presents us with chilled out electronic dub. It's beat driven but relaxed; there are dub roots but on a par with this passion is a fascination with sound experimentation. A spare hand with the ingredients means it's all very transparent – just make sure you're listening through a decent stereo so that you can hear the entire spectrum of what is created, from reverberant bass through to delicate specks of static noise. 'Lane' features luscious watery sounds, using a contrasting metallic timbre both for variation and to direct the structure. 'Entmodub' is a stalk into the jungle, it's like stepping into an aural realisation of Melbourne Zoo's Butterfly House – tiny, insect-like sounds fill out the composition's frame. Léna uses rhythm rather than melody to create hooks, the harmonic progression being secondary to the percussive drive. *Lane* is all about pacing of the produced sounds. Fabulously integrated, deep, booming bass

sounds never take away from the static attention to detail that occupies the top end of the aural spectrum. **Serena Armstrong**

#### **Giddy Motors**

*Make It Pop*

(Fat Cat)

First of all, this isn't fun. It isn't chilled, it isn't music to macramé with nana by. It is taut and intense music stripped back to its barest elements – not purely theoretical elements either, but the raw, the bleeding and the unloved. The drumroll launching 'Magmanic' is straight enough to ease you in, but the resemblance to order stops there. Recorded and mixed by the white noise doctor himself, Steve Albini, *Make It Pop* is a devil's shriek of a debut. In 'Hit Car' Manu Ros' insistent drumming underpins the clanky metallic ring of Gaverick de Vis' struck strings, yet the guest sax squiggles squirted through by Nigel Buckner add an unsettled misadventure element. By 'Bottle Opener' London's Giddy Motors are exhibiting signs of the unhinged broodings those familiar with the tapped and seedy world of bZARK would recognise, overlaid with some very early Jane's Addiction style song structure assemblage. Much is currently being made of the 'return to rock roots' witnessed in your Vines, White Stripes, Strokes et al, but Giddy Motors shows just how polished these acts in fact are. Ragged rather than remote, there is an immediacy that beguiles. Things pare back a tad when the corrugated drums, warm bass and jazzy guitar lines of 'Cranium Crux' arrives but even here the serpentine Einsturzende Neubauten vocal performance unsettles. All notions of sociability dissipate with 'Sassy and 'Dog Hands', regressing to a primal tilt. The outrageously beautiful 'Venus Medallist' usurps all before, an acoustic cloud ride girded by bowed cello. A haunting mellifluousness is so out of place it is perfect.

**Benjamin Millar**

#### **Frankie Sparo**

*Welcome Crummy Mystics*

(Constellation)

Frankie Sparo's third release shows a great progression from his earlier works. Despite his superb song writing skills in his first release *My Red Scare*, the album was so severely under produced that it probably should only have been distributed as a demo. *Welcome Crummy Mystics* opens with 'Hospitalville', a melancholy song with powerful drums and passionate strings that allows his voice to sit unassumingly low in the mix. 'My Sistr' is the most beautiful track on the album. Frankie's voice

# REVIEWS

fights against the moody and raw lounge piano for attention, while a mellow pizzicato bass line evokes a smoky bar. ‘City As Might Have Been’ has a dominant string section that just grows bigger and bigger as the song progresses. The texture created by combining these strings with tablas and a second voice makes this track one of the most intense on the album. *Welcome Crummy Mystics* still has all of the intimate lo-fi qualities which his previous releases had, but with the advantage of having beautiful string and piano arrangements to beef up the pieces. **Angela Stengel**

## Alek Stark

*Highway To Disko*  
(Disco B)

On the sleeve, Madrid-based Alek Stark looks like George Michael doing a Luke Slater in Freek Funk era overalls. As he strides purposefully across painted tarmac, he clutches his Linn Drum machine, just as he holds close his musical references on the record. With music this derivative it’s hard not to mention the influences. Giorgio Moroder, Kraftwerk and Arthur Baker are all here, even down to individual tracks – spot the reworking of Jonzun Crew’s ‘Pac Jam’. Recent influences also abound, with Miss Kittin-style vocals peppering the album with spiky attitude. More a collection of tracks than an album, it’s highly proficient in its vocoder (sorry, ‘Digitalker’ as the studio list puts it) laden electro-funk density. All the sounds have passed through a filter of the last 20 years – the kicks are bigger and harder, the sound crisper and more contemporary club sound system-orientated than a lot of the originals he takes as his source material. The Kraftwerk nods (‘24h. sin Nikki’ is directly descended from ‘Man Machine’) extend to the lyrics – ‘we are the robots’ he claims on ‘We Love You’. Bloody regurgitating robots, we reckon. While there’s not an original second on this record, its claustrophobic electronics have a certain allure. Uncompromising, intense, unrelenting, and perfect for those old-school/nu skool electro sets that can either totally go off or just sound off, depending on your mood. **Olo**

## Robin Guthrie

*Imperial*  
(Bella Union)

Beautiful interlocking lush guitars bathed in delay and reverb. Robin Guthrie revisits the quieter moments of his Cocteau Twins days in what could have been a shimmering mist of his trademark guitar sound. But he never allows the subtleties the space to really breathe, except perhaps on the open-

ing track ‘Imperial’. In the same way that some contemporary soul/r’n’b singers have a tendency to sing so many notes it’s hard to keep track of the melody, Guthrie sounds like he is trying to make up for a lack of substance. A lack that was filled by Liz Fraser’s vocals, perhaps. But he doesn’t need to fill all the space with his simple minor-key melodies, to these ears anyway. In music this atmospheric it is the subtleties of elongated decay that are engaging. While these inoffensive mood pieces are asking for use on a soundtrack, it might just be that of a yoga class rather than film. The ear strains to listen to the faint and elongated guitar wail that makes up much of the background texture rather than to the melodies that sit above them, because like much of the record the melodies are almost-but-not-quite engaging. The Cocteau Twins scaled great heights of beauty in their music, and 23 Envelope echoed this in their groundbreaking sleeve artwork. Here we get a naked female form as landscape, accompanied by some humdrum typography. Considering Bella Union is his own label (co-founded in 1997 with fellow Twin Simon Raymonde), it’s a mystery how he could not see the vast gap in design quality. Perhaps there’s a link between pubs, a silicon nipple and a voiceless Cocteau Twins that isn’t obvious. Either way, the open mind that entered this record leaves disappointed. **Olo**

## Philip Jeck

*Stoke*

(Touch)

This record mainly consists of edits of live performances from England, Japan and Vienna, and Philip Jeck’s main instruments are turntables. Not in the sense of a turntablist, but the arts venue version, where intellectual stimulation parallels the audio. The prose text on the back of the CD sleeve is suitably obtuse, sounding like it should make sense but it’s more of an impression. The opening track ‘Above’ is underlain with looping bells and drones as distressed, scratchy wails come and go. The wowing effect of a hand-spun turntable adds an eerie thread to these textural outings, which quickly take up and leave behind their themes. These tracks play with the edges of the abstract, offering glimpses of the familiar before removing or burying them. Use of filters creates connections with electronic music but the overall impression is organic. Elsewhere ‘Pax’ manages to bring together sounds that are both haunting and reassuring. The sludgy melancholy of a vastly slowed blues-like vocal conjures the feeling of emerging from home with a hangover on a crystal clear sunny day, aware of but

not quite able to fully appreciate its beauty. It’s almost like a lighter Lynch soundtrack without the squidgy synths of Badalamenti. “Open” confounds the beat-seeker by stuttering its loops on the most explicitly rhythmic track of the album. The more abstract work of Muslinggauze is a reference point for “Close” although the eastern sources are several thousand miles apart. Jeck’s Casio keyboard creates some of the melodic content but it’s always integrated and therefore hard to identify. One of the strengths of this record is that the interesting techniques used to create it are entirely outweighed by the sounds created. **Olo**

## Geoff White & Stewart Walker

*Discord*

(Force Inc)

There’s little discordant at all about this nice little ‘versus’ release from Force Inc. Both North American producers, Walker has worked previously with Sutekh and Swayzak and on Discord both trade almost track for track in a seamless pro-tools mix of new material. On the whole it’s a fare of minimal techno, stripped back mid-tempo beats with microsound glitches, and sometimes its difficult to understand where this sort of music fits. It’s a bit too frenetic for the lounge room, and too detailed and subdued for the club, so I have a feeling that this becomes the perfect workaholic music for desk-bound designers and computer slaves with expensive headphones. Surprisingly, given Walker’s more prolific output it is the moments from Geoff White that make some tracks stand out. The slight guitar edits that play against the flow of the synth pads on Towards Another the opener from White before the jacking beats of Walker’s reply; White’s ‘Endus’ with its minor concrete interjections, and the almost Herbert-styled piano motif in the final part of the cloud trio, ‘Cumulus Bloom’ with its ultra-tightly edited syncopated glitch high hats.

## Sebastian Chan

## Fourtet

*Rounds*

(Spunk)

Sensibly finding a local release from Spunk, Fourtet’s third solo album is a gem. With each album Keiran Hebden has been moving towards a more coherent vision of a mutant folk 70s jazz, glitch hybrid, and on *Rounds* each track glitens and sparkles with lutes, harps, Chinese strings, piano, and dusty beats that shuffle easily between time signatures. Think of a micro orchestra of music boxes, Alice Coltrane and Art Ensemble Of Chicago



and Nick Drake in a computerised post-hip hop world. Although the computer processing and digital editing that lurks behind the production making it all possible is audible, like Manitoba's latest, it sounds unnaturally natural – as if it was meant to be there. Thus the discordant stabs that intrude on the otherwise lilting first single 'She Moves She' do no more than hint at Hebden's interest in UK garage, and the backwards drum edits throughout the album are used as textures more than samples. Then there is the endless back and forth of 'Unpoken' – a simple piano, a lumbering beat that goes on forever but all the while builds towards a crashing free jazz moment akin to those on his debut album *Dialogue*, but it never really comes. Listened to as a companion for Manitoba's *Up In Flames* (with whom Fourtet is touring) *Rounds* is comparatively minimal and far less chaotic, and a sound world where simplicity rules. **Sebastian Chan**

### The Bug

*Pressure*

(Rephlex/Tigerbeat6)

Kevin Martin has been hammering away for well over a decade with his obsessions with intense music – the echo space of dub, the visceral and primal blurts of free jazz, and the industrial density of art metal and noise. Apart from his early work as God, his recent Techno Animal album with his regular collaborative project with fellow explorer Justin Broadrick formerly a Napalm Death guitarist, explored an immensely hard post-apocalyptic view of hip hop. Naturally the MCs of choice here were drawn largely from the Def Jux stable. Now Martin has turned to dancehall. Dancehall has been having an increasing influence beyond Jamaica of late most obviously in mainstream pop and 'urban' r&b/rap. Timbaland and the Neptunes have plundered the rhythms of dancehall for their own but at the same time dancehall rhythms have been plundering those very same productions for inspiration and the circular time between inspiration and rip-off is getting shorter and shorter. At the same time, lyrically, dancehall is not exactly always palatable. Neither is the raw dog-eat-dog capitalism that fuels the Jamaican (and also the US) 'urban music industry'. And there's the rub. In Martin's hands the bleakness that hides behind the shimmering bling-bling chatter, the detritus of pre-millennial Old Testament religious bigotry, combined with the effects of the corporate imperialist pillage of globalisation is drawn out in sound form. The riddims are appropriately harsh, industrial, and the lyrics from New

Flesh's Toastie Taylor, superfast MC Daddy Freddy amongst others rile against new millennium globalisation spitting out rhymes with venom as Martin pushes the drilling beats and bass drops. But it's not all noise, indeed it is nothing of the sort, with Martin carving out meticulously cold icy echoes in the gaps between beats and the production is far from lo-fi. On the slower tracks Roger Rogerson takes things down a notch and comes on like Linton Kwesi Johnston – righteous and intense – and with the texture of a gravely preacher. Nothing like what you might hear played by dancehall fetishists here in Australia, and almost the polar opposite of the cavernous and inviting dub space that Maurizio's Rhythm & Sound project explores, The Bug is all fire and brimstone with an aesthetic to match.

**Sebastian Chan**

### Red Snapper

*self-titled*

(Lo Recordings)

Red Snapper seem to be making quite a few appearances post-mortem these days, and UK based Lo Recordings exhume another (almost) album's worth of material from the now defunct trio. The LP is a mixture of unreleased tracks scattered amongst live recordings and remixes of, and by the mighty trio. 'Regrettable' kicks things off with a very sinister spy-movie gone amiss feel, complete with surging brass section and all the dips and dives that make a good spy theme. 'Mountains and Valleys' lumbers along in hypnotic fashion with its chiming guitar and climbing double-bass line, almost a direct continuation of the movement and feel of 'Regrettable'. 'Ultraviolet' and 'Heavy Petting' appear to be remixes of mountains and valleys, maybe even by the band themselves. Nevertheless they both add some house flavour to the more memorable motifs of the original. Andrew Weatherall's Sabres of Paradise mix of 'Hot Flush' from the mid 90s shuffles along pleasantly with wavering retro waveform leads and effective use of hypnotic repetition. 'Odd Man Out' and 'The Quiet One' complete the quotient of new material on the album, and with their subtle cinematic charm once again prove that Red Snapper were an act of great diversity and dynamics. The final two tracks are recent live recordings, and show that the band posses the same raw and tense energy in live performance as that found on their recordings. Complete with lovingly handcrafted clothing label stitched into the albums cover, if this album were a T-shirt I would wear it gladly. **Barry Handler**

### Freeform

*Condensed*

(Nonplace)

Simon Pyke hails from the UK, and has been cruising along side such well-known acts as Autechre and Boards of Canada from the birth of Warp Records influenced 'Artificial Intelligence' electronic movement the good part of ten years ago. Condensed, as the title suggests, is an album's worth of Pyke's more memorable moments that have been collated and re-assembled into a flowing mix by none other than Burnt Friedman on his own Nonplace label, similar to what Burnt did with Atom Heart's Rather Interesting catalogue. Pyke's music has always been challenging in the sense that he incorporates elements of expected 'electronica' traits, but then merges them with unconventional time signatures and all sorts of wonderful pseudo-jazz experimentation. His self-coined 'junk-funk' is represented on this retrospective equally with his more subdued and subtle tendencies. Craving for Grey and Foil clatter along and are indeed junky and funky with their burbling kazoo leads and lazy pulsating progressions. 'Sopping Wet' and 'Munchogram (phwoaar)' delve into more drenched arrangements, and emphasize just how much Mr Freeform loves his swing-time. Having recently ventured to South East Asia, Pyke has incorporated all manner of found sounds into his more recent material, and 'Phu Quoc' and 'Lijiang' utilise large portions of recorded traditional Asian instruments and performance to startling effect. *Condensed* succeeds in showcasing Simon Pyke as a talented and accomplished sound sculptor of electronic music, whose strength lies in his courage to dabble confidently in different styles even to the detriment of his reputation with hardened electronica types. Condensed is a brave and wonderful introduction to the world of Freeform. **Barry Handler**

### Various Artists

*Channel Two*

(Output)

In a few short years London's Output label has radically changed focus. Run by Playgroup's Trevor Jackson, the early releases on the label included Fridge and Fourtet, but Output is now better known for its licensing of New York's DFA artists The Rapture and LCD Soundsystem and its recent 80s punk-funk fetish. "I hear that you and your band have sold your guitars and bought turntables..." Think that's tuff? I sold my turntables and bought a ticket to London in 2000 and saw the Emperors New Clothes. The 1980s are back in fashion and

# REVIEWS

loud stripes, punky electropop and nuclear weapons all back in vogue. Of all the broad pen strokes who are mining the seams for that sound, or 'borrowed nostalgia for the unremembered 80s', this compilation is a good collection of some of the new electronic punky pop from the New York/London axis of retro. There are a enough strong tracks to lift it out of the mire of other compilations: the Rapture and DK7's acid house throwback, the electronic southern gothic of Blackstrobe, and of course the LCD Soundsystem one joke punchline 'I'm Loosing my Edge'. Our 'Own Little Rekindle' is on there as well, and his 'Ice Skating Girl' muse sticks out by a mile. Altogether, a valid chronicle of contemporary pop music: and a million times better than most of the other compilations out there. I like it. **Blumen Hesonthal**

## Boom Bip

From Left To Right 12"  
(Lex)

On Lex comes the long awaited remix EP, *From Left To Right*, which brings reworkings of selected tracks on Boom Bip's *From Seed To Sun* LP. Boards Of Canada take 'Last Walk Around Mirror Lake' and add their Vaseline lens pastoral treatment, looping the a simple keyboard refrain over a stumbling sub 90bpm break and off-kilter synth. Venetian Snares, for such a warm relaxed producer like Boom Bip, seems an odd choice but his remix of 'The Unthinkable' turns Buck65's rap into an evil timestretched hoax caller with a mutilated break... 'where did all the children go?' . . . it's nasty. The last mix comes courtesy of cLOUDDEAD – soft whispers and Eno-like cocoon ambience evolve slowly into a wash akin to My Bloody Valentine. **Sebastian Chan**

## Various Artists/Plaid

*Parts In the Post*  
(Peacefrog)

Plaid have been churning out bubbly big melody music, a kind of sometimes latin-tinged, sometimes spikey Duplo electro for well over ten years now. First as the trio Black Dog on GPR and Warp, and then as a duo before working and touring with Bjork including a brief visit to Australia with her in 1998. Like many artists of the their age (Aphex Twin, Herbert and later Kruder & Dorfmeister, and Jazzanova) who were called upon by all and sundry during the 'great remixing period' of the early to mid 90s, Plaid had the sense to retain some ownership of their output so as to be able to release a compilation of their remixes. So *Parts In the Post* gathers up a twenty of their mixes including

Nicolette, Atom Heart (as Dropshadow Disease), Herbert, Grandmaster Flash, and Bjork plus a swag of rarer cuts like Studio Pressure on Certificate 18, Gregory Fleckner from the now defunct Clear label, Funki Porcini's excellent 'King Ashabanapal' on Ninja Tune, and Tao from the Language imprint. The trouble with remixes is that often, if you aren't as haphazard as Aphex Twin, you are pretty much restrained by the quality of the original source material, and this compilation could have been edited down to half its length. **Sebastian Chan**

## Various Artists

*Lexoleum*  
(Lex)

Lex Records began life as a hip hop affiliate of Warp, much like Big Dada's relationship to Ninja Tune. The first releases were a trilogy of multi-artist EPs which have been conveniently compiled into a single CD which comes lavishly packaged in a die-cut and custom-stamped fold-out specially made digipack. It features a well selected lineup of backpack hip hop – Sage Francis, Edan, Tes, Anticon's Why? & Doseone and Jel's Subtle project, Boom Bip, Madlib and J-Zone – along with some oddities like Peaches and Jamie Lidell which seem to fit with the overall quirky brief of the label. Listening to this compilation makes it clear that few of these artists really have much to do at all with the traditional notion of 'hip hop as urban commentary' or Chuck D's overused misquote of rap as a 'Black CNN', and whilst some of these artists do tell stories of the world around them most are content to tell intimate stories about themselves or create psychedelic fairytale sound collages for faraway imaginary places. Certainly this is a more honest endeavour than most of what has been going on in the hyperreal world of big money rap for the last decade but on solo albums it can become self-indulgent, so compiles like this do a good job of paring it down with a spiffing sleeve to match. **Sebastian Chan**

## Venetian Snares

*Find Candace*  
(Hymen)

In an age where bratty punks and insecure rappers sing about alienation and growing up in single parent families, it's been a little disappointing that it's been such a while since there has been some good horrible electronic music. Not horrible like DJ Sammy 'Boys Of Summer' or faux angst of The Prodigy, but proper dark gruesome music. Venetian Snares has done some promising work since his 1999 child killer-themed EP for Hymen called *Doll Doll Doll* but most has lacked the creepy horror of

that seminal EP. But in a very prolific 18 months which has seen the release of at least 4 albums, he has finally brought out two new records that fulfil the promise of *Doll Doll Doll*. One is the sequel to *Doll Doll Doll*, another EP dedicated to child murderers and our society's obsession with the 'murder of innocents'. Find Candace, again on the Hymen label, features a child's body in a plastic bag on the cover and brings with it a real aural brutality. Splattercore breakbeats pummel away emerging suddenly from eerie ambient interludes like a mugger with a baseball bat leaping out with ten of his mates, or, a snatch and grab outside a kindergarten... random senseless violence. **Sebastian Chan**

## Prefuse73

*One Word Extinguisher*  
(Warp)

Scott Herron has been very busy – recently there has been the reissue of one of Herron's early works the *Crush The Sightseers* mini album as Delarosa & Asora and also a recent EP as Savatah & Savalas, both on Hefty. Now the second Prefuse73 is here. Since the last album a lot of other producers have tried their hand (with varying degrees of success) at 'glitch hop'. Most notably on the Merck there is Machine Drum and Kristuit Salu/Morris Nightingale whose tracks emphasise a rigid mechanical rhythm, Funkstörung's classic vocal messups, most of the Chocolate Industries crews who travel more and more down straight indie hip hop paths, and Herron's own protégé Dabrye who steers down a more classic mid-90s hip hop path sounding close at times to NY's DJ Smash. *One Word Extinguisher* continues to keep Herron one step ahead of those who follow behind largely because Herron has continued to move down a track that has him aligned with indie hip hop rather than simply developing 'mad dsp effects'. Of course such effects are still evident but where others use a cold mechanical hand, Prefuse maintains a lighter touch managing to keep a semblance of funk in his beat manipulations and using his guest MCs (Diverse, Mr Lif, Daedelus) and producers (Dabrye, Tommy Guerrero) wisely. Unlike *Vocal Studies & Uprock Narratives* the new record leaves the MCs pretty much intact and opts for shorter tracks (21 main titles plus two bonus tracks) each clocking in around 2 minutes with plenty of interludes. Short attention span hip hop? Maybe, but as many other commentators have argued, *One Word Extinguisher* is a proper 'new millennium' hip hop record trying hard to resuscitate the ancient cut&paste plunderphonics and sound science of true old-skool hiphop. **Sebastian Chan**



### Soundmurderer

*Wired For Sound*

(Violent Turd)

Violent Turd is Kid606's label for material that needs to be released in a relatively low-key manner. Thus the unauthorised Missy Elliott remix/bootlegs, and 606's own take on bootlegs, and now this, Soundmurderer's triple punch mix-tape recalling the halcyon days of jungle. Detroit native, Soundmurderer runs the intermittent label Rewind Records whose 12"s over the last three years have captured and distilled the essence of dancehall and ragga jungle circa 1994, making retro-labels like Congo Natty instantly obsolete and backward sounding. Check his 'Limb By Limb' and Call Tha Police 12"s for a start. Interestingly this 60 track (in 60 minutes) mix album doesn't feature any of his own releases and instead opts for a trip through some of the lesser known classics of the period from Remarc, Bizzy B, Shy FX, Prizna, X-Project, Krome & Time, Kenny Ken, Marvellous Cain, L Double, Hype, Tek9 as well as throwing in a few of those nerdy 'jungle-influenced' tracks by Plug (aka Luke Vibert), 2Player, and Squarepusher. In the context of the rest these once 'experimental' tracks sound

far less innovative than the sounds they were trying to capture. The mixing is excellent and the listener is taken from peak to peak in a relentless pursuit of the hottest part of each track. What small respite from crashing amens there is comes in the form of rough and sweet reggae and dancehall vocal breakdowns – the ever-sampled Cutty Ranks and Barrington Levy and also Cobra, Dennis Brown, and others. What ever happened to the rhythmic invention of this period I'll never know – certainly some spilled over into UK garage and into US 'urban' – but *Wired For Sound* is a timely reminder of how energetic and exciting jungle was for that short period between 1993-1995 before it split into faux 'jazzy-ambient' and stripped back sci-fi strains. It also is rudely apparent how stupefyingly dull drum & bass is at the moment – Brazilian renaissance or not. Rewind selectah!

**Sebastian Chan**

### Sylvain Chauveau

*Un Autre Decembre*

(130701/Inertia)

12 short pieces for piano stretching just on 24 minutes, at first glance it may seem that this is the equivalent of those little books of hokey wisdom in which each page is devoted to a pithy little saying, but after having one's heart wrenched and soul stirred in the space of less than the time it takes to watch a sitcom one realises that this is far from an excursion in triviality or kitsch. It's just that each piece appears like an elegantly constructed sentence, complete with witty allusions, asides and delightful vocabulary, but it is soon evident that the nuance and subtlety conveyed would challenge even the most deft of poets, and perhaps allude all but the masters of Haiku. Chauveau strips away any hint of filigree or embellishment in his playing, letting arpeggiated chords sound until they decay, and single notes to drift and intermingle like curlies of smoke. He also shows bravery in being unafraid to overlap with snatches of musique concrete, crackles and electric folds and a foreboding hiss that accompanies each of the pieces. *Un Autre Decembre* is one of those drifting pieces of ephemera in the ocean of sound that make life worthwhile. **DH**

## DVD RELEASES

### Various Artists

*Visual Niches*

(E-Motion/Inertia)

When I was a spritely teenager I would set the video recorder to tape the overnight weekly back-to-back clip show Rage on public broadcaster ABC, and then wake up the next morning and fast forward through to find the best video clips of the previous night. Each time I moved house I would uncover the box of VHS tapes with my track listings on the sleeve of clips and wonder what might have happened to the original broadcast tapes. Sadly, having found the truth that the ABC just doesn't have storage space for these video artefacts huge swathes of Australian (and world) video clip history particularly probably languish on rotting media in the attics of their producers or long defunct band members. Now that music television is big business the independent clips, the weird clips, and those that stretch beyond the 3 minute limit of the pop song have been banished from broadcast TV, or worse, severely edited. The net provides some access to good clips but the bandwidth intensity is often too

much for all but the biggest portal sites, who, again to pay the bills, fall back on keeping only the most popular.

So this DVD from German label E-Motion is the first in a series of releases aimed at showcasing some of the best European clips of the moment together with a few 'classics'. On this volume there are the well known clips for Roysopp's Eple with its never ending camera zoom out, the UK version of the Avalanches' 'Frontier Psychiatrist', and Sigur Ros' 'Svefn-g-englar', alongside FSOL's now ageing 1996 3D morphing 'My Kingdom', Coldcut's also dated 1997 release 'Timber', and the surprisingly least dated-looking 1983 clip Herbie Hancock's 'Rockit'. Of the newer work the standout is the clip for Sensorama's 'Star Escalator', an animated ballet of roll-a-doors to a clickhouse production from Flugel & Wuttke (Alter Ego, Acid Jesus etc), where stop-motion footage of roll-a-doors becomes as visually engaging as any nature documentary. Elsewhere there are lots of clips never aired in Australia from Little Computer People (with appropriately 8-bit graphics), Señor Coconut, Super\_collider, Mouse on

Mars and Jake Mandell (Flash-styled vector-glitch), which are most interesting for their musical rather than visual content. Unfortunately this is the main problem with *Visual Niches*. There is no apparent logic or structure that connects the sequence of clips, or for that matter, the artist choices despite excellent liner notes. Island Records offshoot Palm Pictures has started to release directorial retrospectives first by Hype Williams (Missy Elliot, Busta Rhymes etc), Chirs Cunningham (Aphex Twin, Squarepusher, Madonna) and Michel Gondry (Bjork, Chemical Brothers), and there is certainly a niche for lesser known directors' works to be compiled in a more logical manner. Despite this, and with the help of the skip button, *Visual Niches* has some solid and rare content that makes it worth a look and listen. **Sebastian Chan**

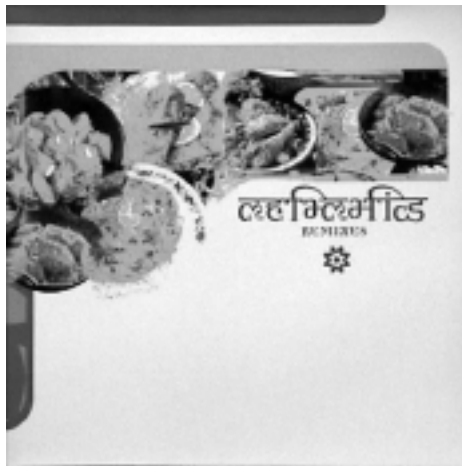


# SLEEVE REVIEWS

## The Vinyl Countdown

Sleeve Design by Alex Crowfoot

This issue mainly features a few vinyl series. Worthy of mention is the Pulver series of twelves from Germany. There's a consistent identity here, with quite a sophisticated and a well thought-through aesthetic. It's familiar in that it sits within a dance music frame of design reference, but there are enough original twists and turns to make the series compelling. All the vinyl comes in a generic recycled board outer sleeve, embossed with the Pulver logo and then die cut with a blunted rectangle through which the inner sleeve appears. It's on this nicely contrasting inner sleeve that each release is given its individual character, with an unusual use of colour, somewhere between muted and dirty and highly saturated primaries. Lots of line work, vignettes, and a nice suite of individual artist logos too. Check out their website ([www.pulver-rec.com](http://www.pulver-rec.com)).



### DELICATESSEN RECORDS 10' SERIES

Drawing a line between music and food, and no doubt inspired by the label's name, these tasty morsels all reference food and drink packaging. Avoiding the more obvious route of straight pastiche, it's all been through the gee.oh.dee design blender. All of them include weight of the product (191g) which I suspect this is the weight of the vinyl – a nice touch, as is the naming of the series: *Delicatessen Records Plate 1, Plate 2* and so on. Most of these releases use very distinctive type-faces, some of which were very popular in the mid-nineties. This can make them appear a little dated, if you're aware of that kind of thing, and is perhaps the only let-down.

#### Crunch

*Crunch (Plate 2)*

(Delicatessen Records 2001)

Format: 10" vinyl

Designer: Pablo & Javier ia. gee.oh.dee.

The front of this sleeve is a bastardised ice-cream tub lid, with typography that directly references the packaging vernacular, specifically that of the heavily branded and contrived frozen desserts (think Cadbury chocolate-bars-as-ice-cream). Perhaps the closest in feel of these series to actual packaging, it features the title of the 10" in typical mass-produced food style, with images 'sampled' from packaging – scoops of ice cream and a heavily sauced pudding. Their visual sources are revealed in a black band on the back of the sleeve where they incorporate a shot of an actual ice-cream tub. The ingredients also feature, although it's the scanned-in ingredients of the ice cream, not a jokey ingredients of the record. Also included is a litter disposal symbol and a recycling symbol. The label features a reiteration of the Crunch 'logo' on one side, and creamy swirl on the other. Unfussy typography for the credits on both the sleeve and the labels keeps the overall feel clean, the visual equivalent of keeping it just this side of being oversweetened. After this, the frazzled glitchy hip-hop of the vinyl is unexpected.

**Above left:** *Metamatics cover*

**Left:** *Detail of Lilienthal's Anti-Matter*

**Right:** *Crunch*



#### Metamatics

*Remixes (Plate 3)*

(Delicatessen Records)

Format: 10" vinyl

Designer: Pablo & Javier ia. gee.oh.dee.

This Metamatics release gets the pre-prepared Indian dinner treatment. A feast of dishes appears on about a third of the cover, perhaps reflecting the selection of remixes. All these meals have been given a similar colour treatment that makes them look as if the chef had bought a job lot of saffron and wanted to use it up fast. This visual gluttony is nicely contrasted with a large area of white space that moderates its intensity. An Indian-inspired logotype completes the recipe (how many more bloody food references can I use, it's getting distinctly cheesy. There I go again.) The green and yellow reverse of the sleeve uses more food imagery, some as a subtle transparency, some in its full saffron glory. Areas of flat colour again achieve a nice balance, and a little flower emblem is repeated from the front of the sleeve. This also appears on the label, which introduces an orange colour. The reverse of the label repeats this, to incorporate it into an orange, white and green design that references the Indian flag. There's the depth in the design, although there are no traces of this distinct culture in any of the music on the actual record. I'm beginning to wonder if the choice of food or drink is related to a favourite of the artist concerned, but it's impossible to tell from the sleeve.

## Funckarma

*Bourbon Sounds (Plate 4)*

(Delicatessen Records)

Format: 10" vinyl

Designer: Pablo & Javier ia. gee.oh.dee.

It's whisky-au-go-go for Funckarma with a sleeve that doesn't look so much derived from whisky packaging as inspired by the drink itself. A close up of a glass of the stuff lays beneath some almost Wallpaper-esque graphics. The whole sleeve is an intense layering of red, oranges and rusts. It incorporates a claim of being '40 proof' and '100% single lowland Dutch whisky'. And that's where this sleeve's packaging references lie, in the descriptions of it contents rather than in graphic form. It uses some similar graphic shapes to the Metamatics release: rectangles with two or more rounded corners. The back of the sleeve uses a flat, intense red, a glass of whisky and a bottle laying on its side. Plate 4 is 'Distilled & aged in Holland, bottled in Germany.' The vinyl is referred to as the 'Single Side' and the 'Maltd Side.' One side of the label features an atmospheric shot of a glass of – guess what – whisky, a very slick one though, so probably scanned from an ad. The other side repeats the graphic shapes and colours from the sleeve.

## Lilienthal

*Anti-Matter (Plate 5)*

(Delicatessen Records)

Format: 10" vinyl

Designer: Pablo & Javier ia. gee.oh.dee.

A more graceful garbling of the vernacular here, this time using an unfamiliar brand of tea on a predominantly black sleeve. Fragments of the actual packaging are layered with elegantly unreadable type, reminiscent of Vaughan Oliver's style. A scanned juggler teabag sits above and eye-shaped crop of what looks like the row of tea bags from the box they have visually sampled. A Lilenthal logo with a dragon emblem creates an instant mock-heritage, a device often used by packaging designers (the 'heritage' of 1970s invention Bailey's Irish Cream being a familiar example). The rear of the sleeve is again mainly black, and repeats the script typeface, with an 'S' appearing as the swirl of steam from a strange little teacup on a wood-effect saucer, which again looks like it has been scanned from some packaging. It also includes the diagrammatic instructions for making tea. As an aside, how many people don't know what to do with a teabag? Who ensures that the water they pour over it is exactly 95°C? The record contains a cute touch – on one side is the teabag, it's string disappearing through the hole in the vinyl. Turn over and you find the string emerging, attached to the tag. Overall this design is better resolved than the other sleeves, and achieves its deconstructive aim more effectively.



*Above: Doll Doll Doll cover detail and centre label*

## HYMEN RECORDS 12" SERIES

The Hymen Records twelves use a simple generic sleeve of grey recycled card printed with black. The black is contained in a strip down one side of the sleeve, opposite to the open end. On the front is the Hymen Records logo, at top left, reversed out of the black. Their logo appears to be a large single sperm in the middle of...well let's say it looks like the shape of a sheepskin rug. The reverse features the logo at bottom right plus their slogan 'technoid noises for collapsing people' and their '¥' symbol. So what's to review? Philately. Each release has its own design postage stamp, stuck by hand onto every single copy in a different array. The stamps also contain the artist information and title, and the 'value' of the stamp is the catalogue number in Yen (¥033 for example). Cost-wise this idea must be very effective, allowing them to print the generic sleeves in bulk and therefore use the budget for the illustrations used on the stamps.

## Venetian Snares

*Doll Doll Doll*

(Hymen Records 2001)

Format: 12" vinyl

Pictures: Trevor Brown

Again a set of four stamps, three on the front, one on the back. The dolls they feature would be cute if they weren't surgically distressed, bruised, battered and mutated. One is semi-bandaged, has pigtailed tied with polka dotted ribbon, and is sucking on a surgical drip. The next is distinctly diseased, a spotted little creature having her temperature taken by a human as she lies under a bedspread covered in Japanese-cute pandas – which, incidentally, also crop up on the label. The third has her arm in a sling, a bandaged thumb, a black eye and strap under her chin supporting her head. The last is a triple-headed see-no-evil-hear-no-evil-speak-no-evil mutant with bandaged mouth, ears and eyes respectively. All are drawn in a highly detailed, uncanny style by an illustrator with phenomenal talent. Trevor Brown has also done sleeves for Coil, among others. Check out [www.pileup.com/babyart](http://www.pileup.com/babyart) for more.



## Beefcake

*In Medias Res*

(Hymen Records 2000)

Format: 12" vinyl

Designer: Uncredited

Three stamps appear in a row on the front of this sleeve, each containing a slightly different photograph of the same thing. It could be an insect trapped in a bubbly liquid, or a bit of bark in a cup of tea...I can't tell. The stamp on the back, another shot of the same thing, doesn't really offer any more information, except it could be that someone dehydrated has taken a camera into the toilet with them...Design-wise, this earlier release doesn't quite have the refinement of the Venetian Snares releases featured below. The typography isn't quite as well resolved – it's a little clunky, and uses an early 1990s 'dance music' favourite font, the name of which is lost in my early 90s blur of a memory.

## Venetian Snares

*Find Candace*

(Hymen Records 2003)

Format: 12" vinyl

Pictures: Trevor Brown

Just the one stamp on this release, repeated; four on the front, one on the back. This time, an almost doll-like pre-teen girl is encased in a body bag...or is that the bag she has been suffocated in? She certainly looks dead. Very dark and unpleasant, but with a beautiful aesthetic. It's almost like a new gothic style, hyper-real, slick and commercial, with disturbing image content, which of course matches the fucked-up tracks on the vinyl perfectly. The label features an equally fucked up flower, with petals encircling a skull. This is also used on their promotional stickers, which come in black and silver. The typography on the record label is minimal and tiny, and lets the images do the talking.

*As usual, our design guru Alex Crowfoot has outdone himself, and you can find more reviews on the website, including Jay Alansky and Red Snapper along with colour illustrations of the sleeves.*



# 40 CONSCIENCE POP

THE HIDDEN POLITICAL HISTORY OF  
POP SONGS YOU THOUGHT WERE TRIPE

By Andrew Chuter

**Much music in the underground electronic scene is judged, at least partially, not just on its intrinsic musical qualities but also on its underground cred – its politics. If you've got that right, the arbiters of taste — the reviewers, DJs, label people and so on — give your music a few column inches, and thereby some much needed attention from the consumers, possibly irrespective of the music's quality, which let's face it, is pretty difficult to describe.**

Meanwhile, in the pop field, which most underground dance listeners largely choose to ignore, much political activism and deep philosophical speculation goes on beneath the sensory radars. I'll seek to redress the balance in this article with a few examples from music in the last 25 years.

## MICHAEL JACKSON – 'DON'T STOP 'TIL YOU GET ENOUGH'

Michael Jackson, the king of pop, is a good place to start. His 1978 solo album *Off the Wall* was far from your conventional post-disco outing. Calling on the production talents of jazz great Quincy Jones who was fresh from scoring the soundtrack to the award winning TV series *Roots*, a history of African-Americans from slavery to the present, Michael took black music to the top of the charts while remaining true to its heritage.

Unfortunately, white audiences had placed a dichotomy between 'serious' music and dance music, believing that it was not possible to dance and think at the same time. The results of this way of thinking were seen in the superficial egoist dance-strut of John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever*, and ultimately led to the spectre of Nazism manifested as record burnings and anti-disco rallies.

Meanwhile, black audiences, capable of both dancing and thinking, were willing and able to groove on the dancefloor while analysing the lyrics and engaging in metaphysical whimsy.

'Don't Stop 'til you get Enough' is the first track on *Off the Wall*. Prior to the familiar 'Whooh!' followed by the rich orchestral violin arpeggios, is Michael's whispered voice, 'the force, it's a powerful thing, and sometimes it makes me feel like...' This part is often edited out by radio DJs but contains the key to a proper understanding of the song's meaning. A year after the initial release of *Star Wars*, Michael is referring to George Lucas' concept of 'the force'. Far fetched? Not really, at this time 'the force' had entered the vernacular to the point where fans would proudly sport chest pins pro-

claiming 'May the force be with you.' Further, Jackson was of the age and inclination where Obi-Wan's explanation of 'the force' would have great resonance with the idealistic pop star. Later, and repeatedly, the chorus: 'Keep on, with the force don't stop, don't stop 'til you get enough.'

In the first verse, Jackson makes the startling connection about the true nature of the force: 'This is love power.' Lucas, through Obi-Wan, has told us that 'the force surrounds us and binds us together', now Jackson reveals to us that it is one and the same as love, and that we should use it as a personal motivating principle until we are completely sated.

By making this cosmic connection between love and 'the force', Jackson and Quincy Jones' music contributes to the rich tradition of, in Kodwo Eshun's words, black science fiction: Sun Ra's claim to have come from Saturn, George Clinton's mothership, Juan Atkin's UFOs and Drexciya's advanced undersea civilizations. After this, Jackson tried to collaborate with futurist proto-techno stars Kraftwerk, but the German group declined, to the regret of excommunicated member Wolfgang Flur.

## MADONNA'S MUSIC AND MUSIC

Madonna's *Music* is a mature work by a workaholic musical non-conformist of Marxist persuasion all set to a punchy, grinding electro beat. It continues Madonna's crusading for the working class, which has been apparent since the start of her rise to stardom. Furthermore, stylistically it came soon after the underground resurgence of electro beats within the electronic dance scene, first led by Drexciya, then DMX Krew, Aux 88, Keith Tucker, Ectomorph, Anthony Rother and I-F, unlike many lesser dance artists busy at the time trying to associate their music with jazz and self-consciously acoustic sounds.

Madonna grew up in Detroit with a strict Italian Catholic father. Detroit and Chicago, two of the world's most heavily industrialized cities have long histories of labour movements. May Day, or International Worker's Day is actually a commemoration of May 1, 1899, when Chicago police shot dead a group of striking workers. After the Civil War, countless black families migrated from the south to Detroit and Chicago looking for work and a better life.

Detroit has been drenched in African-American sounds for the last century: Funkadelic, Motown and techno started there. White artists from Detroit have also helped to create some of the late 20th Century's most original pop music, and rock icons like Iggy Pop and Kiss call Detroit home too.

Working class, Marxist, and feminist themes abound in Madonna's music. 'Papa Don't Preach' is an anti-patriarchal song about teenage pregnancy. 'Holiday' campaigns for better working conditions 'all across the world, in every nation'. More philosophically 'Material Girl', enthuses 'we are living in a material world': this is Marx's basic contention, contrary to Hegel's Idealism, that it is the material and economic circumstances of people that determine their quality of life. 'Express Yourself' brought feminism right into the bedroom, exhorting both men and women to escape the chains on their love lives, through open and honest discussion of our innermost thoughts and desires. This is truly liberatory, Dionysian music, as feminist author Camille Paglia has noted in several essays.

Madonna never made us feel ashamed of sex, like the conservatives, or feminist Andrea Dworkin, who claimed that 'all sex is rape.' She also married director Sean Penn, left-wing campaigner for peace in Iraq and Afghanistan. She mocked greedy Hollywood stars such as Kevin Costner, while stressing that her oeuvre be treated as art and not just product. 'Justify My Love,' with Public Enemy sampled rhythms, William Orbit's minor key synth washes and Madonna's whispered sex talk, remains sublime and years ahead of trip-hop. She also implored us to be more open minded, multicultural and less snobby on the dance floor, so that we might 'fall in love with a beautiful stranger'.

Her long career continues still with similar concerns. 'Music,' a meta-song and homage to her craft, claims 'music makes the people come together... music makes the bourgeoisie wanna rebel.' This is clearly indicating that music has the power to unite the masses against the ruling class. Thus we can look back on Madonna's contribution to music through the 80s and 90s as a significant contribution to the raising of class-consciousness in an era riddled with individualism and greed.

## JOHN FARNHAM – AGE OF REASON

By the mid-eighties, the Australian public had relegated one-time plumber John Farnham to the dustbin of musical history, along with Johnny Young and Barry Crocker. Farnham took a break and turned within, meditating on the spirit of the times, and listened to his quiet inner voice. The result was Australian rock's biggest selling album of all time *Whispering Jack*. It featured the hit song 'You're the Voice', about our ability 'turn the pages over' and write a new page of history. He asked us to find a peaceful resolution of our differences: 'How long can we look at each other; down the barrel of a gun?'

'A Touch of Paradise' celebrates the joy and goodness of human love between the sexes and the sense of inner fulfilment and harmony with nature that arises from such love. In this respect it bears comparison to the Bible's Song of Songs, a secular love poem from the period of King Solomon. In this and many other of Farnham's songs, he uses allusions to the natural world to great affect, something Professor E. O. Wilson, drawing on evolutionary psychology, describes as biophilia.

This was followed two years later in 1988 with the *Age of Reason* album, again a massive success. Farnham won Australian of the Year and the following year was invited to the Soviet Union to release the Greenpeace album *Rainbow Warriors*. Against the prevailing tide of Reaganomics and Thatcherism



*Johnny gets his gun*

supported tacitly by the confusing smokescreen of postmodernist jargon, Farnham called us back to the Enlightenment period of Newton, Francis Bacon, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine and others, referring to 'our fathers' in the lyric, an allusion to the founding fathers of the American Revolution.

Farnham expresses respect for past accumulated wisdom, in the same way that Newton maintained that 'if I have been able to see further, it was only because I stood on the shoulders of giants'. This is in marked contrast to the 'poststructuralist vanguard',

a phrase coined by Berkeley English professor Frederick Crews: 'Real harm is being done to the cause of empirical rationality, which has been tacitly devalued by many poststructuralists and explicitly condemned as oppressive by some others.'

Rhetorically, *Age of Reason* questions whether human altruism has a biological foundation, lost through contemporary ignorance: 'is kindness an ancient skill buried by our blindness'. John Farnham powerfully asked us to re-invigorate the spirit of the enlightenment and use it to 'carry us forward to a new age'.

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# DEAR DEGRASSI

A REGULAR DOSE OF  
IRREGULAR POP CULTURE

*Dear Degrassi*

*I'm starting to realise that writing articles for magazines that will be printed at an unspecified time in the future is somewhat like international travel. An article emerges for public consumption somewhat dated and therefore a little rougher than when it set off on its long, arduous journey from brain wave to printed page. Still, with a 23 hour journey back home awaiting me, this time for the long term, I'm kind of wishing I was a word...and if I could be a word, I'd like to be 'segue'.*

*Dear Degrassi,*

*My cynical and surly older sister told me I looked like a Solid Gold Dancer when I caught up with her at the last family gathering. What on earth does she mean?*

*Fäh-shon Ficktum*

Yeah, well you young folk might think that you invented leg warmers, neon coloured string vests and head bands with feathers hanging from them, but I've got news for you. It's been done before – and better... by the SGDs, no less! And let me tell you that there's absolutely nothing in the world that makes you feel older than seeing the clothes you once wore being worn by people who are the age you were when you first wore them. Hand me my anti-wrinkle cream.

You see, it may be difficult for you to believe, but human civilisation existed for an extremely long period of time without the music video, let alone entire channels devoted to them. I know it is difficult to comprehend, but work with me here. While the SGDs were truly amazing, they were not the first to flex and gyrate in the absence of a visual accompaniment to the latest pop hits. *Top of the Pops* had Pan's People, a troupe of sexy young vixens that used to shake their thangs to illustrate a song that was lacking the band to come into the studio to mime. Imagine Chrissy and Jo from *Man About the House*...times three. They could be incredibly cheesy though. I can vividly recall the choreography for Carly Simon's 'You're So Vain' – they did the same moves as the kids in *The Sound of Music* did for 'Tea, a drink with jam and bread' when Carly sang 'Clouds in my coffee'. Gorgonzola extravaganza! There were, however, occasions where it would have been better for the wholesome Pan's People to have danced a little jig rather than letting the musicians perform lewd, vile acts on stage, such as the time David Bowie went down on Mick Ronson's guitar.

As the 70s progressed and censors were forced to relax their morals, an antidote to the squeaky clean

(yet still incredibly spunky) Pan's People came in the form of the 'naughty' Hot Gossip who appeared on the *Kenny Everett Video Show*. They were kind of like Pan's People meets the Rocky Horror Show. In 1978 they decided to cash in on the phenomenal success of *Star Wars* and recorded 'I Lost My Heart to a Starship Trooper', with Sarah Brightman fronting on vocals, because, after all, Hot Gossip were DANCERS.

And who can forget (or for that matter, remember) the erstwhile *Countdown* Dancers. Molly Meldrum spotted 'funny lady' Tania Lacy, then a *Countdown* dancer. One thing led to another and she got a spot on *The Factory* (along with Alex Papps and Daddo clone number 2, Andrew) and ironically, became the host of the resurrected *Countdown Revolution* in the late 80s. Unfortunately Auntie ABC didn't take too kindly to Tania and Mark Little's (aka Joe Mangle, and now UK panto superstar) integrity and axed them from the pretty lame show. (No Revolutionary dancers, you see.)



*Solid Gold* hit TV in 1980 and survived numerous hosts including Dionne Warwick (who impressively successfully rallied for more air time for black artists on the show) and the now departed Andy Gibb. Perhaps the scariest aspect of *Solid Gold* was the presence of Madame – a puppet that uncannily resembled Phyllis Diller. What was all that about? Another gripe I had with SG was the way all the songs were cut short, just like the 'Exclusive Remixes' on *Deep Heat* compilations.

When it came to the SGDs, however, there were no complaints. They had a hectic work schedule, counting down the Top 10, interpreting songs due to the absence of actual performers and even performing with those who bothered to show up to mime. Except when it came to Culture Club – Boy George, the philistine, wouldn't have them anywhere near him during their performance. And you thought writing 'Taboo' was his only crime!

The SGDs certainly wore outfits that made Puritan colonised America blush and shift around

uneasily in their arm chairs. Plunging necklines and bikini lines reaching to just below the armpit kept some professional waxers very happy, as well as some keen-eyed viewers who copped an eyeful in those days before fashion tape become widely used. Despite this smorgasbord of flesh, they declined *Playboy's* invitation for a photo shoot. But what they lacked in cloth, they more than made up for in hair product.

Now over the years, many a SGD came and went, so there simply isn't time to mention them all individually. And as troupe, I feel it's important not to praise isolated members, but rather recognise their collective efforts. Actually, my research has shown that SGDs rarely approached new ventures alone and their solidarity carried on well into the 90s.

Collective film credits include *A Chorus Line*, *Xanadu*, *Night Shift*, *Staying Alive* (woeful sequel to *Saturday Night Fever*), *Breakdance*, *Breakdance 2: Electric Boogaloo*, *Footloose*, *Annie*, *Deadly Dancer* (also featuring Shabba Doo), *Running Man*, *Commando*, *Grease*, *Grease 2* and *Showgirls*. Top notch TV credits include *Mork and Mindy*, *Fantasy Island*, *Fame*, *Matlock* and *The Love Boat*. (Why no one got Emmies, I'll never know.)

As far as choreography goes, some were responsible for Was (Not Was)'s 'Everybody Walk the Dinosaur', Michael Jackson's epic 'Captain E-O' and the cringingly painful hat and cane dance sequence in the Haime/Feldman Corey-fest that was 'Dream A Little Dream'. One brash fellow even claimed to have taught Jacko the Moonwalk, although he called it the 'Backslide'. Many appeared in classic video clips (does anyone else see the irony?) such as 'Thriller', 'Beat It', 'Girls on Film' and various Lionel Richie songs. And let's not forget fitness videos! Needless to say there was the obligatory *Solid Gold 5 Day Workout*, however an SGD did choreograph Lou Ferrigno's *Body Perfection*. (That was the guy that played The Hulk in the 80s TV series.)

They haven't just reached lofty heights in their professional lives, as one has become a born-again Christian, establishing a ministry and marrying a member of The Temptations, another married Rick Springfield's drummer, another married Scott Bakula (*Quantum Leap*), and yet another married a cast member of *The Young and the Restless* and was already the daughter of James Best (better known as Sheriff Rosco P. Coltrane in *The Dukes of Hazzard*).

*Degrassi is back in town and will be doing a series of book signings in malls and shopping centres*



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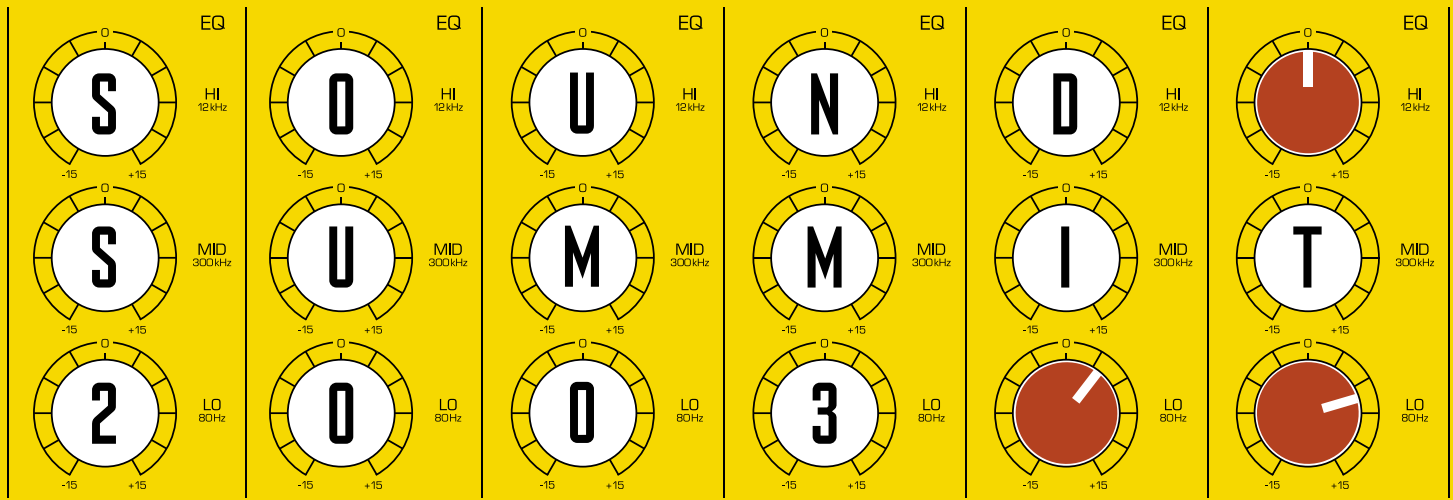
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