

Here are some short reviews of a handful of the new releases that we've been enjoying down here at Tape Op headquarters. Many of these artists are the ones who will be making the cool sounds of tomorrow, so support them! -LC

SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE *Sea From Shore* SoL is David Brewis - of Sunderland, UK, band Field Music - working up his indie-rock styled songs solo, but sounding definitely like a band. This is one of those records that grabs the ear instantly, with crunchy drum sounds and smart arrangements. I asked for some recording notes and I was sent a plethora of info on his recording methods and setup, so I'll share snippets from his letter: "Recorded into a Mac running Logic Express. Our studio basically consists of one room, but there's a corridor and a stairwell outside (and a hall in the same building) which we use a lot to get different ambiances. The ladies' restroom for the building is just underneath our room so I used that as a reverb chamber for all the other reverb on the record (but only when the building is empty). Mics - a couple of Rode NT1s, a Rode valve mic, a cheap ribbon mic and a couple of AKG C1000s." For drums, "a C1000 a foot from the kick, the ribbon above my head, a Rode 2-4 feet away at head height (with the ribbon and the Rode hard-panned) and then either a mic in a box at the other side of the room or another C1000 pointing up at the snare drum. All of the mics go through TL Audio valve preamps. For a few songs, I sampled my own drum sounds and then used izotope iDrum as a sample bank for programming in the beats, some of which I then doubled with live drums. I also used iDrum to create a couple of custom sampled instruments - one made up of plucked notes on a viola and the other consisting of me tapping piano strings with the metal rod from a hi-hat stand. I wasn't shy about using the synth plug-ins in Logic - they can sound pretty good with the right combination of effects. I also quite liked their Wuritzer piano sound and used that on a couple of things (though I also used a real Hohner Pianet when the fake electric piano wasn't cutting it). On one track the real piano was doubled with a sampled piano in Logic, which I added portamento to, which gave a strange but quite appealing sound. The vast majority of the vocals were recorded just with the cheaper Rode mic. I try not to overdo the effects. However I did discover a useful way to simulate a Beatles-style ADT using the tape-echo simulation on Logic, with an unrealistically short delay time and a touch of flutter. I recorded, mixed and mastered the whole shebang myself. For mastering I used izotope Ozone 3. It's the first time I've mastered something myself but it was an interesting experience and I think I've done as good a job on it as anyone's done on our stuff in the past." Some of the Futureheads make guest appearances here as well. It's an interesting record. (www.thrilljockey.com) -LC

IGGY POP *Live in San Fran 1981* So there's this company led by Joe Rees, Target Video, that used to record a lot of SF punk shows back in the '70s and '80s. Here's the audio of their recording of Iggy and his band from 1981 - no venue or date given though it took place November 25, 1981. In fact, there are virtually no liner notes on this CD, not even a mention that there's a DVD of the same show available or a URL! And why anyone would buy this rough live mix instead of the DVD - with vocals nearly inaudible at times and Carlos Alomar's guitar barely there - which instead features one of the other three guitarists (why three?) turned up really loud. There are two "long lost" bonus songs, produced by Ric Ocasek in 1983, that are tacked on here for some reason - and they're pretty goofy with his *Panorama*-style recording sucking the balls out of Iggy's performance. If you wonder what Iggy would be like backed by Clem Burke and Gary Valentine of Blondie, with Carlos Alomar and some other goons, check out the video (also on MVD). If you're a completist you might just buy this anyway. So there. (mvd2b.com) -LC

GRAM PARSONS WITH THE FLYING BURRITO BROTHERS *Live at the Avalon Ballroom 1969* Two discs of two shows (plus two demos) of one of my favorite bands featuring their classic early lineup. Add in great liner notes, photos and the fact that this was put together with love and care by the folks of Amoeba Records and I'm there. These are live soundboard recordings by Owsley "Bear" Stanley - the man who ran sound for the Grateful Dead and manufactured high quality LSD for the SF scene in the '60s. These tapes were found in the Dead's vault, thankfully, and were mastered for CD by Paul Stubblebine. The tracks suffer from typical soundboard levels, i.e.; the vocals are usually just a little too loud. But damn! Given that the music is so fucking good, and I'd never gotten to hear this much quality live material by my favorite Burrito's lineup, I'm absolutely happy to have this artifact and indebted to the folks that made it happen. (amoebarecords.com) -LC

ZOOS OF BERLIN After trudging through overly long albums all day, it's nice for someone to send over a CD (not-R) with only three songs. ZoB features sometimes *Tape Op* contributor Collin Dupuis on drums and recording/co-production/mixing at My House of Trouble Studio. It's also nice to hear something that is a rock band, but not easily pigeonholed. There's some nice Sigur Rós guitar atmospherics, some slightly proggy parts and a vocalist who sounds effortless and charming in a Bowie-esque way. My House of Trouble, which Collin wired up, is the studio of techno producer Carl Craig and his Planet E record label. Collin has worked on tracking and remix sessions (including a Grammy-nominated remix for the Junior Boys) with Carl as well, so you can see the connection. Mastered by Brent Lambert at Kitchen Mastering in Carrboro, NC. Good sounding stuff, and I look forward to more. (www.myspace.com/zoosofberlin) -LC

ANJULA Anjula Marlowe Stern, whom I'd met and hung out with at various TapeOpCons, sent me this fine CD he recorded of Anjula Prasad singing traditional Indian devotional chants. Marlowe played acoustic guitar, along with tabla, tamboura and percussion. It's a trance-inducing listen and not surprisingly is recommended for use during yoga sessions at CD Baby. Mixing was by our pal Peter Katis (#31) at his Tarquin Studios, with assistance from Greg Giorgio, and luckily he avoids the digital reverb wash that lesser mortals have ruined some world music albums with - instead bringing the vocals close to the listener and presenting a nice sound field to get lost in. A great late night listen, and an excellent job of tracking and mixing. (anjulaprasad.com) -LC

A.K.A.C.O.D. *Happiness* In issue 62 we interviewed Tom Dube, who'd worked at High-N-Dry Studio in Cambridge, MA. Though Tom wasn't involved, A.K.A.C.O.D.'s CD was recorded there, and was produced by Morphine saxophonist Dana Colley. Dana is also a member of this band, but the focal point is ex-Bourbon Princess' Monique Ortiz, whose bass playing and vocals drive the songs. Think something sultry, moody and dark. It's not unlike PJ Harvey, and with Dana's unique sax playing and sympathetic production it all sits well. The CD was mostly engineered and mixed by Dan Cardinal, though Paul Q. Kolderie (#22) and Ian Kennedy did a bit of work here too - at Camp St. and New Alliance East respectively. Mastered by our pal Jeff Lipton (#34) with help from Jessica Thompson at Peerless Mastering. (www.akacod.com) -LC

THE CAR TEST: There's nothing like forcing music to pass the car test. What's the car test? Putting in random CDs while hurtling down the road and anyone in the car can veto the CD within a few seconds of the first song. Most of the music I'm talking about this month passed a car test in the SE Arizona desert. The CDs you aren't reading about were the ones that would have been tossed out the window at 80 mph in less enlightened times. Why were the others vetoed? How about: Overly repetitive and simple choruses. Mush-mouthed lead singers who seemed to be stringing together random words. Parts of songs that seemed to drag on and on forever with no goal in mind. Dumb lyrics. You'll notice that no CD was tossed due to the recording quality - yet possibly heavy-handed "production" could have helped in some cases. Then again, should production be propping up artists who don't have the ingredients to make a compelling CD in the first place? That's a whole other topic... -LC

DAVID ROTHENBERG *Whale Music* We get a lot of CDs sent in by readers doing fine work, but this one really stood out from the usual suspects playing drums and guitars and, to paraphrase Joe Boyd, singing in English. On *Whale Music*, Mr. Rothenberg collaborates with and records with whales from belugas to killers to humpbacks. At first it seems kind of like, well, noise. But, as Rothenberg joins in on clarinet, it becomes quite beautiful and musical. It's all pretty sparse and ambient with some treatments and some occasional help from a violin or guitar. If you think getting a good drum sound is tricky, try tracking live with whales! Mr. Rothenberg shared some whale recording tips with us: "The basic technical question is of course: how do you make music LIVE with a whale, especially if you as a human want to stay dry, on the boat, playing something like a clarinet. Well it turns out the clarinet has a good range and tone for getting humpback whales interested, as heard on track two, 'Never Satisfied'. Previously, underwater speakers used to be big, heavy, fairly expensive affairs. But I found that inexpensive ones from ESunPride.com worked just fine. Their top of the line JH001 model is about \$75. Finding a good battery powered amplifier for it is harder. This speaker takes an amp up to 40 Watts, and I used the mysterious Sonic Impact T-Amp which cost only \$25, runs on 8 AA batteries, and got amazing reviews all over the web. But then that one died, so this season I'm going to try the generation 2 T-Amp, which is supposed to be a bit more robust and still only costs \$60. Also in Hawaii we did alright with a modified Roland Canister amplifier, with its own internal speaker disconnected. In general I was surprised that there are not more battery powered amplifiers available that put out 20-40 Watts of power. Sound travels five times faster in water than in air, and much farther, so this rather modest technical setup carried the clarinet far into the realm of the whales' audio world. I picked up the whole interaction using hydrophones from Aquarian Audio and Cetacean Research, plugged directly into a Sony MZ-M10 Hi-MD Minidisc Recorder, which I'm happy to say continues to work for hours on a single AA battery even after being splashed by a whale and a storm more than once. Some of the background underwater noise on the resulting recordings was removed using Bias SoundSoap Pro noise reduction software, which was able to take out most background sounds and still keep the whale and clarinet tones intact. A bit of compression was sometimes necessary to bring the various sounds to the same level, and the clarinet/orca duet proved to be so high and shriek-y that I transposed the whole thing using Ableton Live to be able to enjoy listening to it!" www.thousandmilesong.com. -JB

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