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HALLOWEEN 2008

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Editorial



I never really got into *The Simpsons* until Max (10) did about a year ago, but am now a big fan – though I still think Matt Groening should stick to cartoons and rock festivals instead of spouting off about Cage, but anyway – and in honour of that series' time-honoured tradition of the annual Halloween special (my own personal favourite is "Treehouse Of Horror V".. remember "The

Shinning"?), here's a new issue of PT to browse through while you munch your chocolate coffins or pumpkins, or whatever you do at this time of year. There's not much scary music as such covered here – though maybe that depends what you think of Hair Police – but the world is scary enough as it is right now, even if, like 99.999% of the people on the planet, you don't understand the nuances of credit default swaps. (Actually, I'm feeling rather proud of the fact that my cousin Peter, a well-respected economist and former adviser to Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer no less, predicted this market meltdown in his book *Debt And Delusion* a decade ago. It's now back in print, but you'd probably need to sell a few shares of your own to

buy a copy here <http://www.amazon.com/Debt-Delusion-Peter-Warburton/dp/0140277528>. Go Google and read the glowing reviews nonetheless! Support the Warburtons!

Meanwhile, thanks to this month's contributors, especially Lou Sterrett for travelling out to Oberlin Ohio to talk to [Aaron Dilloway](#) and Mark Flaum for risking earthquakes and monsoons to journey to Tokyo for *AMPLIFY 2008: light*. And to Nate Dorward for additional editing, and for forwarding the following mail from the similarly eagle-eyed Martin Davidson at Emanem:

"I've just caught up with your review of *Bare Essentials* in Paris Transatlantic – for which many thanks. One small point: It's wrong to say that [John] Stevens used a conventional kit. The components were roughly equivalent to that of a standard jazz drum kit, but they were all smaller and hence quieter and less resonant. He used to let me play it in informal sessions, and every time one hit something, the sound died instantly. I therefore have extra insight into how great he was to make such music on such an unforgiving kit. His original idea (1967) was to have a kit that would not drown out other unamplified instruments such as guitar and double bass."

Voilà – so now you know. *Bonne lecture.*-DW

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In Concert

Various Artists
AMPLIFY 2008: light
September 19th – 21st 2008, Kid Ailack Art Hall, Tokyo

AMPLIFY 2008: light, the sixth festival in the Erstwhile Records *AMPLIFY* series, took place in the last days of summer in Tokyo's Kid Ailack Art Hall, a black-box style theatre space with no stage and room for an audience of perhaps 40. Co-curated by Erstwhile's Jon Abbey and his wife Yuko Zama, the festival focused on the Japanese scene, with the notable addition of British guitarist and Erstwhile mainstay Keith Rowe. The Tokyo improv scene is one of the major axes of the electro-acoustic improvisation world, and was my personal gateway into this area of music at the beginning of this decade, through the work of Sachiko M and Toshimaru Nakamura. Their ability to draw out intimate, tender sound from such severe sources has been extremely influential on my listening habits, and this isn't the first time I've traveled to hear them perform. The chance to hear them both in their home country, solo and in collaboration with Keith Rowe, one of the elder statesmen of the improvisation world, was too great to pass up, not to mention the bonus of seeing musicians less often encountered outside of Japan: Ami Yoshida, Taku Unami, Mitsuhiro Yoshimura, and Katsura Yamauchi. So I took my first trip to Tokyo,

half expecting some brave new insight into the origins of the Tokyo improv sound. And I did have some interesting listening experiences before arriving at the festival itself – John Cage meets Sun Ra on the stereo of a tiny café, crows calling through the raindrops in the park in Kichijoji, a road crew digging their way through concrete at a dance floor rhythm, a politician crackling with distortion as he addressed a massive crowd in Shinjuku – but nothing that evoked the subtle energy of the music I came to Japan for, and found in Kid Ailack Art Hall.

DAY 1



The first set of the festival was a solo saxophone performance by Katsura Yamauchi, who's been part of the free jazz and improv scene in Japan for a while but has only recently made forays into collaboration with electronic improvisers, including work with the Swiss Signal Quintet and a duo with Mitsuhiro Yoshimura. He started on alto, with long, breathy phrases that allowed pitch to creep in towards the end. The whispery multiphonics combined well with the gentle tones, but after a brief pause he began adding rhythmic valve-stops that turned the piece into a pulsing, chord-cycling sort of Club Med drum circle. He tried a couple of other approaches, including one that began with hard-nosed free jazz bluster, but seemed to realize they weren't leading anywhere and stopped. His second piece took off in a much more satisfying direction, a double-toned drone that resonated throughout the room, vibrating the space and creating a delicate abstract series of pulses in the inner ear. For the last piece, Yamauchi switched over to his sopranino and flurried up to a similar strong drone, which, though just as interesting, seemed somewhat unnecessary, as if he was only continuing so as not to leave the sopranino untouched for the night.

The Keith Rowe / Taku Unami duo that followed was one of the festival highlights. Rowe's work should be well known to most readers here, though it's worth mentioning that he arrived in Tokyo with a new guitar, different from the instrument he used on his latest solo album *The Room*. Unami brought a guitar as well, a weirdly-strung double-necked acoustic monster, and also a mandolin, but his instrument of focus was his computer-controlled set of small motor devices mounted on plywood on the table before him. Rowe focused on scratching and scraping the strings of his guitar with a metal sponge, a butter knife and a hand-held fan, creating sounds full of texture, which he amplified into bursts of noise as the moment required. He also had his laptop onhand, apparently running



Reaktor as a CPU load to start the miked automatic fan, and using the mouse directly on the keyboard to generate sympathy between the sounds. The thick drone foundation, something of a Rowe trademark over the last few years, was nowhere to be heard – interesting because Unami's instrument in some ways assumed that role. Though the control system Taku was using through his laptop was not visible,

he was able to determine when his devices would operate and at what frequency they would spin, and affect the power distribution manually, as well as changing the timbre slightly by adjusting the position of the plywood. The mode of interaction between Rowe's focused scratches and Unami's robotic spinning motors was intriguing, with Taku assembling frames around Keith's noises, then breaking them down into pauses, which Keith built into or crushed through as fit the moment. In addition, Unami occasionally reached down and strummed the guitar or the mandolin to add a touch of color, somewhat similar to what Rowe has done in past performances. Overall, it was a vibrant and surprising set full of challenge and respect.



The final set of the first night was a duo of two Tokyo mainstays, no-input mixing board innovator Toshimaru Nakamura and vocalist Ami Yoshida, and was in fact the first time the two had played together. Yoshida was very much to the forefront, both sonically and physically, and

her focus was impressive, eyes closed with her whole attention devoted to placing her next sound. Working somewhat in spurts, her voice was so fragile it seemed to waver between breaking into a moan and disappearing completely. With each breath she seemed to lose her place in the room, and needed a few moments to find her way back in. Nakamura, on the other hand, was constantly active yet subtle, building through a number of careful drones, some pure tone sinewaves, others fuzzier and more noisy, as if to coax Yoshida gently, spiking up through her silences and warming around her sounds. In a way, it came off as Nakamura playing accompanist to Yoshida, who kept the audience rapt both with her striking sounds and the physicality of her performance.

DAY 2

The second night of the festival was devoted to solos, the first featuring Mitsuhiro Yoshimura. Something of a newcomer on the scene, with only two recordings available on his own (h)ear rings label, his performance consisted of placing a microphone in the room space and manipulating feedback through a pair of headphones. How he did so during this particular set wasn't obvious, since he was performing in near darkness, headphones held low in front, almost motionless. The sounds he created were largely continuous narrow tones of feedback – feeling like a throwback to the early days of so-called onkyo, when sinewaves were the focal point of many performances – which he modulated, releasing bursts and spikes of noise at each transition, as if he had to relinquish control of the sound momentarily in order to change it, before pulling it back into a drone. The tones were pleasing, filling the room precisely or buzzing quietly to themselves, but the spiky transitions between them detracted from the experience for me, and came across more as lapses of concentration rather than conscious decisions.

The second set was one I was most looking forward to: Sachiko M soloing without her mainstay sinewaves. Using just contact mics – four of them and a mixer on a table in the corner



of the performance space – a sound source she'd apparently not touched in some three years, it was very much an exploration, a discovery of exactly what her tools were in performance, moving the microphones carefully around the table to produce pops, scrapes and wheezes, rubbing them with wires and fingers to create gentler sounds, and pressing them against the table top to subtly modulate the background hiss. Every action felt as haphazard as it was necessary, in a performance with all the dramatic tension Yoshimura's set had lacked.



Like his duo with Unami the night before, Keith Rowe's solo performance moved away from the foundation drones that have characterized much of his work. For this show he selected extracts from four pieces of baroque music – the slow movement of a Marcello oboe concerto, two motets by Cassanea de Mondonville, and arias from operas by Rameau and Purcell – which he played from his iPod in a pre-determined order. Even though, as he explained later, the pieces had very specific connotations – one represented profundity, another death – in performance he made no attempt either to interact with or respond to them. Instead they created an environment in which other, separate music occurred. The laptop was now closed, though the steel wool, butter knife, and electric fan still figured prominently, their scrapes and rumbles supplemented by the music and captured radio signals – fiery spikes, careful whispers, erratic rhythms of distant chatter and crosstalk – played from a headphone into the guitar which served as an antenna. It was a unique departure from Rowe's past solo performances – reminiscent perhaps of his duo with Julien Ottavi at *ErstQuake 2* in September 2005, which ended with both musicians walking offstage and classical music playing on quietly on a spotlit radio – and one that also recalled Graham Lambkin's *Salmon Run*, in which the listener is invited to listen as much to the musician as to what the musician is hearing. Making use of recorded music in the context of an improvised music festival might seem slightly subversive, but it provided valuable and subtle insight into the way Rowe himself listens, and the way we listen.

DAY 3



The third night began with the duo of Sachiko M and Keith Rowe, who set to work at once with his scrabbling and scraping, making heavy use of the metal sponge, and doing something with a charcoal pencil that sounded a little like digging through light gravel (resulting in something looking almost architectural on the worksheet he had laid out beneath his guitar). Once more, the laptop remained closed. I was reminded of Jeph Jerman's work with crumbled leaves and branches, though Rowe had no organic material visible on his table. Sachiko returned to her more familiar sinewave generators, working in a vein closer to her *Salon de Sachiko* (IMJ), with pops, spiky beeps, and only occasional extended high frequency tones. She extended her palette of

sounds by loosening the wires between the sine generators and moving the generators themselves around. It was fascinating to see her bring some of the technique she showed with the contact mics to her sinewave performance, something she hadn't done in June last year when I saw her in Houston. The interaction between the performers was intricate, if somewhat oblique, with Rowe's careful textures providing an ideal staging area for Sachiko's sudden sounds. Perhaps the most charming moment of the festival was the moment the two of them made eye contact with the almost simultaneous realization that the set was complete, and broke into broad smiles.

The next set was for me the least successful. Mitsuhiro Yoshimura and Katsura Yamauchi provided the only performance that really set acoustic instruments against electronics. No longer



in the dark, Yoshimura took to the side of the stage to control the feedback from his room microphone. His performance this time was stronger than his solo set, more serene but also more confident, holding the sounds longer and transitioning between them more smoothly and carefully. Yamauchi, on the other hand, did not live up to the set which had opened the festival. Instead of finding a focus and exploring it alongside his playing partner, he seemed merely to run rapidly through his sonic vocabulary, as if searching for the right sound to match Yoshimura's drones. Hurrying through squelchy burbles, breathy half-valved notes and clacky flurries of finger sounds, he ended each phrase with a rushed, loud intake of breath that bookended his sounds in a way that didn't seem at all appropriate. As a display of technique it was interesting, but he didn't stumble upon anything that met Yoshimura's sine tones until the very last moment, when he came up with a gorgeous multiphonic whisper that filled the spaces around the narrow tones with vibrant texture. Unfortunately he elected not to explore that particular sound further, and the set came to a natural end soon after.



The festival concluded with a performance by Keith Rowe and Toshimaru Nakamura, a duo active for much of the past decade. This was their first show together since 2006, and both seemed very excited to be playing together again, picking up at once with high energy and

fierce charge, crashing through noisy bursts, sputtery swirls, and spikes of high and low frequency waves. Rowe clearly demonstrated that his new table of equipment was more than capable of piling up the characteristic thick textured foundational drones, which Nakamura matched with blustery bubbles and pops, sharp high frequency stabs and crunchy drones of his own. It was somehow appropriate that a festival subtitled "light" should close with such heady intensity.

And so came to a close the sixth *AMPLIFY* festival, and the second to take place in Tokyo. The first was back in 2002, subtitled *balance* and documented in an Erstwhile box set. Whereas that event served as a broader encounter between European and Japanese improvisers, and a

showcase for Erstwhile (nearly all of the participants and most of the groupings having already appeared on the label), only one of the duos at *AMPLIFY: light*, Keith Rowe and Toshimaru Nakamura, had recorded previously for Abbey's imprint (on 2001's *Weather Sky*, a live set included in the *AMPLIFY 2002: balance* box and 2005's *between*). Three of the festival's seven participants have yet to appear on Erstwhile. *AMPLIFY: light* was both more focused, and also more speculative – several of the duos are expected to release records in the near future, some with their first recording sessions planned for the week following the festival. One reason for this is that the maturity of the music has permitted a somewhat riskier program, without concern that the musicians won't find the delicate balance of contrast and complement that Jon Abbey has always provided as a label manager and festival curator. And that balance was certainly achieved, if anything more confidently than in the 2002 festival. Additionally, the great understanding of the Tokyo improvisation scene that Yuko Zama added provided this year's festival with a deeper connection with both the musicians and their performance space. The performers seemed quite comfortable with their new partnerships and the risks they were taking, a feeling which crossed over to the audience and provided me with the most intimate and absorbing series of performances I have ever attended. –MF

Thanks to Yuko Zama for permission to use her photographs, though they look a darn site better over at her flickr site unsullied by PhotoShop - DW

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On Another Timbre

***Matt Davis / Matt Milton / Bechir Saade
DUN***

***Esteban Algora / Alessandra Rombolá / Ingar Zach
...DE LAS PIEDRAS***

***Hugh Davies
PERFORMANCES 1969-1977***

***Hugh Davies + Adam Bohman / Lee Patterson / Mark Wastell
FOR HUGH DAVIES***



Dun is an album whose fecundity is inversely proportional to its lean constitution, which at various times takes us back to the early days of EAI when "reductionism" wasn't yet an over-abused definition,



or an outright banality. Trumpeter Davis and bass clarinetist Saade, having already established their improvising personalities through a string of considerable collaborations and projects, are joined here by violinist Matt Milton for a three-way exchange that never strays from the zone where dynamics fluctuate between *p* and *ppp*. Eviscerating the secluded parts of their tools, they wander across godforsaken peripheries of uneven vibrations, liquid fluttering, weakened harmonics and enlightened reclusiveness, with Saade's undulating partials and Davis's reticent-off-the-record statements interspersed with sections where all one perceives is a sound of termites gnawing at the wood of a vacant house, creaking noise and nocturnal movement asphyxiated by the all-pervading murmur of an insuppressible isolation. Milton's approach to the violin, which in part recalls Ernesto Rodrigues' infinitesimal viola inspections, is definitely not extraneous to this threadbare simulacrum of acoustic decay. Davis is also credited with "field recordings", but you'd be hard put to say where the actual playing ends and the pre-recorded sounds begin.

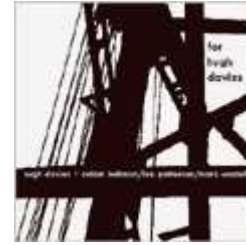
The sound of stones is attractive for many people and there are artists – Stephan Micus comes to mind – who've built a sizeable portion of their fame and fortune upon it. In *...de las piedras*, flautist Alessandra Rombolá, besides gracing the improvisations with her facility on the main instrument, is also heard manoeuvring a "tiles installation" that contributes a relatively physical quality to several sections of an outing which, for its very nature, is possibly the closest thing to certain Pauline Oliveros' Deep Listening-related recordings that Another Timbre has published to date. Accordingly, the fact that Algora mainly offers dissonant swells of accordion bathed in the natural reverb of the Ermita de la Anunciata in Urueña (Spain) – a stone building, if you had any doubts – is not irrelevant to the overall mood, which maintains an aura of inscrutability and suspension across its six tracks. We're at a safe distance from celebrated models of "relaxing music", though; the harsh beating between divergent frequencies occurring throughout the marvellous "Galena" and Zach's earsplitting zings clashing with Algora's low-register moans and Rombolá's well-placed flute stabs represent an ideal display of the musicians' disinclination to abandon a fighting stance – but we're talking martial art rather than trading punches. This is seriously considered, finely executed on-the-spot composition in a truly consecrated environment.



In the brief history of free improvisation, the importance of Hugh Davies' experimentations based on self-built instruments is undeniable, and three years after his death he's celebrated by a pair of releases on Simon Reynell's label. Taken by itself, *Performances 1969-1977* is just an oddity for collectors, especially due to the not exceptional audio quality which furnishes the tracks with a patina of poverty that, in this case at least, affects the importance of the gesture. Although a mid-70s unaccompanied performance at Ronnie Scott's is interesting evidence of how the man managed to sustain, all alone, the attention of relatively unsuspecting spectators, and

everybody should be curious to find out about a duo of "Shozygs" (one of the many peculiar creatures fathered by the protagonist), the only plausible method to accurately assess this archival material would be with the aid of (unfortunately non-existent) footage of Davies in action. Otherwise, the greater part of the substance contained by this limited edition CDR is nearer to scarcely appealing noise – mostly of the metallic variety – than music.

For Hugh Davies, a homage to the English pioneer by Adam Bohman, Lee Patterson and Mark Wastell, is another matter. Manipulating respectively a prepared balalaika, amplified objects and cello, they decided to bring into play the recordings of the abovementioned *Performances*, interacting with portions of the early tapes, respecting the essential concept yet at the same time adding their own sauce. The pieces were



made using all the possible combinations: Wastell is the Chosen One who's featured in a "solo duet" with the original tape, then we have Bohman/Patterson v. Davies and the rest of the tracks feature all three v. the Old Master until the final trio minus Hugh. The record is an exercise in attentive listening, the timbres meshing in ways that don't really surprise but still manage to rub the listener the right way most of the time. A careful sense of spacing and the ever accurate choice of the moments in which the harsh must replace the faint (and vice versa) represent an impartial testimony of the players' admiration for the craft of this resourceful sonic artisan. It's perhaps best experienced at low volume, ears pricked up to catch infinitesimal vibrations and small cracks amidst the umbrae of a cautious materiality. –MR

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On Drag City

Jim O'Rourke
TAMPER

Osorezan
MIMIDOKODESUKA

The Red Krayola
FINGERPOINTING

David Grubbs
AN OPTIMIST NOTES THE DUSK

It's hard to hear Jim O'Rourke's first CD *Tamper* now, 17 years after it was first released and a good 14 years or so since I first encountered it, and try to



recall its immediate context. By wrenching it from the clutches of history through reissue, Drag City are performing a good deed, but they're also stripping the album of surrounding evidence; O'Rourke means differently now, which is why reviewers have been clutching for Wilco parallels instead of discussing *Tamper's* process. While the album is about signification, these days we'd like to think we are much more culturally savvy, having cottoned on to the way the socio-cultural function of music blinds our ears to the "purity" of the sounding of a clarinet, or oboe, or etc. In 1991, O'Rourke's brief was to address this thorny issue by removing instrumental "definition" from sound – in his head, that meant peeling away the instrument's attack and mapping the instruments through cross-fades that remove the moment of instigation from the essence of sounding. This tactic only partly works, though arguably you could only tell "Ascend Through Unspoken Shadow" features violin and cello due to liner notes telling you they're there: your hearing of violin and cello is predicated on textual referents (including instrumentation details in the liners is both O'Rourke's great undoing, and his finest conceptual sleight of hand...). If all you're left with is sound, though, it's a good thing O'Rourke's ear was clearly already well-developed. You're not surprised to see Christoph Heemann and David Jackman's names appear in the thanks section, as O'Rourke's language is that of the more liminal end of early 1990s dronology. HNAS at their coolest, Organum and Morphogenesis all serve as vague reference points, and like O'Rourke, those artists have made great effort to focus on sounding as opposed to playing. Listening now, with the benefit of having heard a little more music since my first encounter with *Tamper* in 1994, I'm wondering how much of this is indebted to Alvin Lucier or James Tenney. The ever-climbing tones of "Ascend Through Unspoken Shadow" feel like an acoustic equivalent of Tenney's *For Ann (Rising)*, while the acoustic alienation effect O'Rourke's aiming for is reminiscent of Lucier: slowly ascending acoustic instrumentation passing through pure tones, the better to map their moments of synchronicity and duality. This broader context helps save *Tamper* from its occasional shortcomings: sometimes O'Rourke's treatments now seem a little dated at times, but in a recent interview with Josh Ronsen, O'Rourke seems resigned to the temporal fixity of the work.

Drag City have also excavated *Mimidokodesuka* by Osorezan, the trio of O'Rourke, Chris Corsano (drums) and Darin Gray (bass). It's especially thrilling for the reappearance of Gray, whose *St Louis Shuffle* solo disc on Family Vineyard is one of the most unfairly underrated improv records of the past ten years or so, but the disc is also a good reminder of O'Rourke's grounding in free improvisation, something we've not really heard him do for some time. Particularly with this level of activity – in this context, I've tended to plump for O'Rourke in collaboration with Günter Müller or Eddie Prévost, players who push him in other directions, but here his playing is spiky and the better for it, erupting occasionally into blasts of feedback that remind you why he was so impressed by Ray Russell. Corsano is on typically fine form, and the trio lock together quickly and graciously. I could do without O'Rourke's stringy, plastic guitar tone at times, but that's a pretty small quibble.

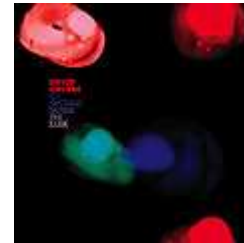




O'Rourke also appears on *Fingerpointing*, the nine-years-coming release of his alternate mix of The Red Krayola's *Fingerpainting*. One of the best in The Red Krayola's 90s run of releases, *Fingerpainting* paid direct tribute to their debut, 1967's *The Parable of Arable Land*, particularly structurally, something reinforced by its titling schema – see the five

"Freeform Freakout"s contained herein. Head Krayola Mayo Thompson rejected O'Rourke's mix back in 1999, and I have to say I understand why; listening to O'Rourke's version is a profoundly dislocating experience, even by Red Krayola standards. This is not to say it's less than an excellent listen; like pretty much every Red Krayola album since Thompson's second wind came through in the early 90s, it's an intriguing web of non-pro pop and free sound. The complex negotiation between Thompson's projected ideal of Krayola noise and the shifting line-up's interpretation of his conceptual parameters makes for a keen tension you can hear in the non-linear development of both the freakouts and the songs. It's cool to hear another version of first-wave Krayola obscurity "Vile Vile Grass", and some of the other songs are particularly potent renderings of Thompson's logically illogical writing process, "There There Betty Betty" being a particularly classy example. Call it purposeful dislocation, if you want, or plotted/planned fragmentation – but the pop-not-pop thinking inherent to Thompson's best creations still makes for a goddamn marvellous blast of non-consensual song-noise shot from the sidelines.–JD

O'Rourke's erstwhile partner in crime (Gastr del Sol, Dexter's Cigar etc.) David Grubbs has cut back on his touring of late – no doubt a teaching position at Brooklyn College and the arrival of little Emmett Bowman-Grubbs are in part responsible – but he's back on top form on *An Optimist Notes The Dusk*. No question of Grubbs either mellowing or whatever the opposite of mellowing is in middle age, for everything he's released since *The Serpentine Similar* has sounded if not exactly middle aged at least grown-up, from the bookish intricacy of his lyrics, invariably printed in the accompanying booklet as poems in their own right, to the carefully voiced, rhythmically free-floating minor ninth and major seventh guitar chords he hangs them on. As a songwriter, Grubbs has always followed (Mayo) Thompson's First Law, namely Any Lyric Can Be Made To Fit With Any Melodic Line, however abstruse the former and angular / unsingable the latter, and "An Optimist Declines" here is an especially fine example of their perverse cohabitation. "Holy Fool Music" gives drummer Michael Evans something more to get stuck into, but Grubbs can't resist sticking spokes in the wheel, inserting pauses like punctuation marks, which eventually derail the song altogether and send it segueing into the luminous chord sequences of the following instrumental, "Storm Sequence". David has always had a soft spot for lowercase improvisers – see his Taku Sugimoto epiphany in the October *Wire* – and after a fruitful collaboration with cellist Nikos Veliotis (*The Harmless Dust*, Headz, 2005), this time it's trumpeter Nate Wooley who's piped aboard the Good Ship Grubbs, to trace fine lines around the singer's black squares on the opening "Gethsemani Night" and add chilly blasts of metal breath on "The Not So Instant", whose austere drones close the album on a more sombre note (is that Wooley at the



four minute mark or are they whistling kettles? I'll have a cup, David). Like all Grubbs albums, *Optimist* doesn't outstay its welcome, clocking in at under 38 minutes, but there's enough here to keep you entertained and enthralled for the rest of the year.—DW

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We Are Not Amused

Various Artists
SMILING THROUGH MY TEETH
Sonic Arts Network



Coming as always in an 18 x 18cm booklet, tastefully illustrated this time with engravings culled from an old medical encyclopaedia, or made to look as though they were (shades of the original Incus edition of *The Topography Of The Lungs*), this latest offering from the Sonic Arts Network is curated by Vicki Bennett, aka People Like Us, and sets out to explore "humour in sound art." Is there something in the Sonic Arts Network contract that forces those curating its albums to include as much music as possible by resorting to snippets from longer works? David Cotner's *Otherness* compilation last year was already bursting at the seams with excerpts, and no fewer than nine of the 32 tracks on *Smiling Through My Teeth* are edits from longer works.

Compilations are by definition wide-ranging, but this one is particularly bitty and frustrating, all the more so because several of its tracks seem to explore the same territory. If the name of the game is playing well-known tunes in which a silly noise – buzzer, bell, burp – is assigned to each pitch of the melody, there doesn't seem to be much point including both Spike Jones's "William Tell Overture", classic though it is, and Paul Lowry's "I Got Rhythm", when the latter does the job much better. But we get not one but two versions of the Rossini overture, the second by the Viennese Seven Singing Sisters. Similarly, do we really need both Ground Zero's "China White" and "Motha Fuck Mitsubishi" by Otomo Yoshihide and Yamantaka Eye (alias DJ Carhouse and MC Hellshit)? Personally, I'd trade them both for the Vomit Lunchs (aka Hironori Murakami) "Total Pointless Guidance Mix (Stock, Hausen and Walkman)", a *tour de force* of mashed-up McCartney and metallic madness. More fun than DJ Brokenwindow / David Chandler's montage of *Dukes of Hazzard* sheriff Rosco P. Coltrane (misspelled Roscoe here) and Kit Clayton's clicks'n'cuts. I guess the heavy emphasis on mix'n'mash was only to be expected, though, given Bennett's own background in plunderphonics. Thankfully, the old school class acts still shine through: John Oswald and Christian Marclay's superbly paced and deliciously witty recontextualisations of Count Basie and Maria Callas

haven't aged a day since they appeared in 1987.

Witty, yes. You certainly can't say that of Rank Sinatra's death metal karaoke revamp of A-Ha's "Take On Me", which is easily as hideous as the original, or M.A. Numminen, Tommi Parko and Pekka Kujanpää's "Eleitä Kolmelle Röyhtäilijälle", whose offering (as indigestible as its title) consists of little more than belches. Sorry, but I'm well past the age where listening to someone fart or burp out the National Anthem (or any melody you care to mention) makes me giggle. Same goes for Gwilly Edmondez screaming "cock!" and the track that follows it, entitled "Spaz", by someone called, umm, Spaz.

Hearing other people laughing isn't always all that funny, either. The extract from *9.11 (Desperation Is The Mother of Laughter)* – title's not exactly amusing for starters – a 58-minute work by Thomas Liljenberg and Leif Elggren (Swedish conceptual artist and reigning monarch of the Kingdoms of Elgaland-Vargaland) is strangely



disturbing. And if you think there's something hilarious about Justice Yeldham (photo, right), whose performances consist of squashing his face into an amplified piece of plate glass until it breaks and showers the audience with blood, you're one sick puppy. Nor am I falling off my chair listening to Runzelstirn & Gurgelstøck's "Eel Dog Rap Mix", but then again I never find much to enjoy in all that Shimpfluch actionist stuff, to be honest. Maybe Vicki Bennett doesn't either, and has included the track, along with the resolutely unfunny Nihilist Spasm Band rant that follows it, merely as a warning to artists not to take themselves too seriously. The NSB's "Going Too Far" certainly sounds daft in context, bookended as it is by Mark "Zatumba" Gillespie's dreadfully inept gargling and Bennett's own magnificent "Air Hostess" (with Ergo Phizmix), an utterly irresistible slab of lounge pop plunderphonics featuring Nelson Riddle's "Lolita" and Bing Crosby's "Shadow Waltz" riding some killer mambo grooves. There's more delightfully twisted lounge in "Dark Days Bright Nights" by The Freddy McGuire Show, a West Coast trio featuring Anne McGuire, Don Joyce and Jon Leidecker, who also goes by the name Wobbly, which is a pretty good description of their offering here.

Vitaly Komar, Alex Melamid and Dave Soldier's search to write the world's "most unwanted song" (about which you can read more at <http://blog.wired.com/music/2008/04/a-scientific-at.html>) was an obvious choice, but the two brief edits included here, complete with *de rigueur* bagpipes, tubas, rapping opera singers and duelling banjos, though predictably awful, just don't make me laugh. There's something oddly clinical about the whole exercise, in fact. I suppose Vicki finds it funny, though. Fair enough – it'd be a pretty bloody miserable world if we all shared the same sense of humour after all, wouldn't it? – but it's still hard for me to figure out what led her to select some of the material on offer here. You could be forgiven for thinking that the excerpt from Nurse With Wound's "You Walrus Hurt



The One You Love" had been chosen only for its title – quite why Bennett chose this particular minute from *The Sylvie and Babs Hi-Fi Companion* when there are many funnier moments elsewhere on the album (the piece on the B side's called "Great Balls of Fur", by the way) is something of a mystery. Elsewhere, there's plenty of hot air

around, with some serious raspberry blowing on Adachi Tomomi's "Lipp" (fortunately, more interesting examples of his work with

Waiswysz-like tilt sensors are on offer on YouTube), balloon blowing on Bill Morrison's "Single Breath Blow" (a reminder that just because something's weird doesn't necessarily mean it's funny), and bellowing blather from Christian Bok, whose "Ubu Hubbub" is far too smart for the assembled company, but the album eventually runs well and truly out of steam with Xper. Xr.'s "Ride On Time" – someone please tell me what's supposed to be funny here – and the seemingly interminable nine minutes of Richard Lair and Dave Soldier's "Thai Elephant Orchestra Perform Beethoven's Pastorale Symphony First Movement." This tries ever so hard to follow in the footsteps of the late, great Portsmouth Sinfonia (a word of advice: don't) with a flaccid brass band reading of the Beethoven chestnut plus, yes, elephants playing Lair's specially designed instruments. It raises an occasional smile, but little more.

Different strokes for different folks, I guess. *Smiling Through My Teeth* is entertaining enough, but only scratches the surface of a deep and complex subject. What about Gerard Hoffnung, P.D.Q. Bach, Haydn's string quartets, Luc Ferrari's *Music Promenade*, John Cage's *Credo in US*, Erik Satie's parodies of Chopin, Mozart's *Musical Joke*, Mauricio Kagel (RIP)'s *Ludwig Van*, Alterations, Eugene Chadbourne, John Zorn's *Morricone* and Misha Mengelberg's *Monk*? Or what about some of the pieces Kembrew McLeod mentions in his rather stodgy accompanying essay and which don't appear on the disc (something from William Shatner's *The Transformed Man*, Yngwie Malmsteen's *Prophet of Doom*, or the Nirvana / Destiny's Child "marriage made in hell", *Smells Like Teen Booty*)? There's plenty of scope for a sequel, in any case, and with the proliferation of cheap music software and ever easier filesharing facilities on offer, you could probably make your own humour-in-music compilation without much difficulty. Have a go: I bet you could come up with something as funny as this.–DW

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ON DVD

Olivia Block / Sandra Gibson / Luis Recoder
UNTITLED
SoSEDITIONS

Lee Hangjun / Hong Chulki
EXPANDED CELLULOID, EXTENDED PHONOGRAPH
Balloon & Needle

The problem with watching experimental cinema on DVD is quite simply that the screen's too small, as I said once before [here](#). With a "normal" movie, we suspend disbelief, get "into it", and tune out the visual distractions of the outside world – the plant pot on top of the telly, the family photos on the wall behind, the colour and pattern of

the wallpaper, and so forth. But with the more abstract world of experimental video, with no visual or aural narrative element to draw us in, we become more aware of our surroundings. It's a bit like the near silence of the Malfatti school (I think Radu would now grudgingly accept he's started a "school" of sorts, even if he didn't back in 2001), which raises sound events in the outside world to the same level of perceptual importance as the music itself. The images on these two fine DVDs are beautiful, impressive and at times genuinely moving, in a mysterious way, but one senses that the work of filmmakers Sandra Gibson, Luis Recoder and Lee Hangjun is best appreciated on a big screen in a gallery space. Gibson and Recoder, either working individually or in collaboration under the name of Presstapes, are especially sensitive to site-specific considerations, and I have no doubt that, on the other side of the planet, Lee Hangjun is too. But the fact they've all consented to allow their work to appear in DVD format is not to be overlooked. So, unless you're lucky enough to catch their work live one day, these discs will have to do.



Gibson and Recoder's *Untitled* is a 42-minute black-and-white film consisting of a white rectangle (set in a grey frame which drifts in and out of focus during the first half of the film) on a black background, gradually bombarded by specks of light that appear to originate behind the frame but which soon break out of its confines, before eventually blurring and fading into darkness. The rectangle itself is not uniformly white, but morphs constantly into dappled, quivering blotches that sometimes suggest a film being projected somewhere behind a translucent window pane (or maybe that's just me playing at Hermann Rorschach). Watching it is a pleasant if not exactly mindbending experience – though as a Bridget Riley fan I do appreciate the way the frame appears to move forwards and backwards, giving the illusion it's hovering somewhere between the viewer and the screen – sensitively complemented by the elegant drones and processed field recordings of Olivia Block's music. And that's the problem: the music and the image work so well together, evolving at the same stately pace and changing at the same moment – the arrival of the flying specks occurs roughly halfway through and is accompanied by a crescendo of crackles, and both music and image fade out hand in hand at the end – that there's little sense of the friction between media that I expect from a collaborative venture. It's all very consensual, very accomplished, but one longs for one or two moments of real surprise, a sudden shift of focus or emphasis to throw the whole structure into relief. Needless to say, Block's music is splendid – and like Toshi Nakamura's soundtrack to 2006's *AVVA* with Billy Roisz (see above) it could easily stand as an album in its own right – and I could happily sit in silence in a cinematheque and watch Gibson / Recoder videos all night, but, it seems to me, the thrill of mixed media work is how it exposes and explores the cracks between the different perceptual mechanisms involved. Film and music both play with notions of time and rhythm, but very differently: there's a very strong sense of rhythm to a film like Béla Tarr's *Sátántangó*, for example, both on the macro and micro level, but a piece of music structured according to the same durational scheme – seven hours divided into twelve long sections, each subdivided into "shots" of about two minutes' duration – would be tedious in the extreme.

Long-haul musical works like the Rowe / Nakamura / Otomo / Sachiko four-hour concert from AMPLIFY 2004 (ErstLive 005) are far more subtle and ambiguous. Don't get me wrong here: there's nothing frustrating or unsatisfying about *Untitled* (the only frustration I feel is not being able to assemble the packaging correctly: the disc comes with three pieces of pre-folded stiff brown card that most normal human beings of average intelligence should be able to assemble into a cute little box, but I'll be buggered if I can do it) – but in terms of what can be done with the DVD medium I think it's just scratching the surface.

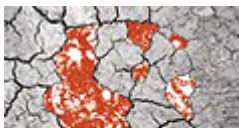
Scratching the surface is what Lee Hangjun and Hong Chulki do very well, the former playing with degraded, scuffed and generally fucked-up film stock (shades of the Cellule d'Intervention Metamkine), the latter with his turntables. *Expanded Celluloid, Extended Phonograph* features two half hour pieces, *The Cracked Share* and *Metaphysics of Sound*, plus footage of a live performance in February this year (well you don't actually see Hong Chulki manhandling his gear but you get some idea of what the event might have looked like from the back of the gallery), and comes with a beautifully produced 20-page booklet complete with still photographs and stillborn (though well translated, it seems) text courtesy filmmaker Kim Gok. Lee Hangjun's films split the screen into two, drawing the eye inevitably to the vertical line that separates left and right, as images scatter and splatter on either side. Most of them are abstract, rips, gashes, holes, burns and all manner of corroded degradations flying past at high speed, but from time to time recognisable images – cars, faces, clouds – appear. Hong Chulki's ferocious turntablism, itself a corrosive mix of feedback squeals and disturbing crunches and scratches (Otomo fans will love it) makes no attempt to follow the film (how could it?), even when the images take an occasional break – *Metaphysics* falls into distinct chapters – leaving more room for viewers / listeners to make the connections themselves. Which is as it should be.–DW



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(POST-?)ROCK

Hair Police
CERTAINTY OF SWARMS
No Fun



To be honest I don't know what this review is doing in "(Post-?)Rock" or post anything, except perhaps post mortem, which is probably what anyone weaned



on "classic rock" – now there's a stupid term for you – will need after this latest splendid offering from Messrs Beatty, Connelly and Tremaine. But as David Keenan in a full page pullout in *The Wire* – no less – makes a mighty persuasive case for *Certainty Of Swarms* as a potential kick in the ass for rock (though as far as I'm concerned it's been dead for well over a decade, maybe two), here it is. Well, I couldn't really put it alongside Arek Gulbenkoglou now, could I? (Might make more sense though than alongside Lars Hollmer and Steven Brown, but never mind, such is the joy of alphabetical order..) Keenan's argument is quite convincing, not least because Hair Police actually play real instruments, like guitars and drums. Well, in the same way that Genesis P.Orridge plays guitar, you might say. Funnily enough, Throbbing Gristle have an odd habit of popping up whenever Hair Police are mentioned – understandable maybe since the lyrics of Kentucky's finest are, apparently (I can't confirm this because I can't honestly make many of them out) concerned with the same kind of dark matter as TG, and titles like "Intrinsic To The Execution" and "Freezing Alone" should give you some clue as what to expect. And there is a real sense of pulse in tracks like "Mangled Earth" – nothing you could get down and boogie to, but certainly something that could help a serious workout in the gym – but it's almost entirely buried alive, along with just about everything else, under layers of toxic noise. There are nods to various kinds of metal, from death to stoner to molten to rusty, and the slower tracks recall the Swans' murkier moments, but "On a Hinge" makes "Raping A Slave" sound like Leonard Cohen. Classic rock, indeed.–DW

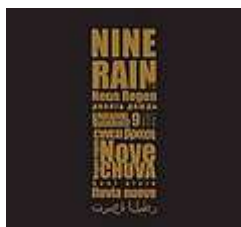
Lars Hollmer
VIANDRA
Cuneiform

One of this writer's wet dreams, in all likelihood destined never to be realized, is a DVD containing footage of the 1992-93 version of Lars Hollmer's Looping Home Orchestra, with Olle Sundin, Lars Krantz, Eino Haapala, Jean Derome and Fred Frith. At least that band was immortalized on *Door Floor Something Window* (Victo), which is among the most rewarding live records I've ever heard (get yourself a copy). The originator of Samla Mamma's Manna is an artist with incontestable transparency of intent, and *Viandra*, arriving eight years after the unspectacular *Utsikter* (Krax), is great; perhaps not on the masterwork level of the above-mentioned live album or 1997's *Andetag* (Krax), but pretty close. Hollmer's aesthetic remains consistent: childish candor enhanced by a harmonic sagacity equally indebted to Bach and Scandinavian folk music, boosted by the intricacy that made SMM stalwarts of Rock In Opposition. The compositions on *Viandra* unleash a Wonderfalls-like series of surprises via cuddly melodies and intricate counterpoint which make your day without necessarily eliciting cheeriness: Hollmer knows how to astonish through dissonant activity on the periphery of apparently innocuous lullabies. The music is finely rendered by Hollmer, Michel Berckmans, Santiago Jimenez and Andreas Tengberg, as well as occasional participants such as original Samla guitarist Coste Apetrea



on mandolin and a trio of little ladies (presumably nieces, given that two of three are named Hollmer) tenderly delivering a sing-along of sorts in "Lilla Bye" and "Alice". Best of all is the superb triptych of "Påztema", "Prozesscirk" and "Konstig (Strange)" at the CD's midpoint: prototypical specimens of the Swede's craft, these pieces alternate mystifying compositional devices (with Berckmans adding pinches of UniversZero-esque, bassoon-fueled mystery) and sudden openings onto poised consciousness, a poignant backwards look toward an unrepeatable, long-gone merriment.—MR

Nine Rain
VI
Independent Recordings



The bewilderment caused by probably the most bizarre Nine Rain recording to date panics the flailing critic into suggesting comparisons to Ives, Cage, Lee Scratch Perry and that "Bali Ha'i" moment in South Pacific... Their sixth album is dominated by the systems-music-inspired electronics of notional leader Steven Brown's collaborator Nikolaus Klau. While the Central American folk themes of percussionist Alejandro Herrera and guitarist José Luis Domínguez remain, this is more reminiscent of Brown's transgressional gem *Half Out* than the spooked Latinisms of earlier Nine Rain. Klau's electronics conjure up Cabaret Voltaire car wrecks, crazy gamelan, Tuxedomoon theatrics, *Forbidden Planet* sound effects, even Kurt Weill-like lurching waltzes. Brown concentrates on Surman-like reeds, and we get to hear little of his ravishing Ellingtonian acoustic piano. Outrageously, on "Gordon Blue", they actually attempt a piano-heavy dubbed-up bluebeat/rocksteady reggae tune reminiscent of the *Tighten Up* compilations of the 1960s. And succeed. On "Resurrection", with its louche rhumba and wailing female choir, they conjure up "Bali Ha'i", the *Road To...* movies, and maybe even the original *King Kong*. (We should also remember that Brown sang Claire Trevor's "Moanin' Low", from John Huston's *Key Largo*, on *Half Out*.) "Serbia" is possibly the key to this recording. Brown wouldn't come clean with the truth about his composerly intentions even if you jabbed him with a cattle prod, but the tsunami of counterpointed themes in this piece has Charles Ives written all over it. You can't dance to it, but it's just possibly Nine Rain's cleverest outing yet. Slip the CD into a computer and the view-list menu reveals a host of multimedia works, including a series of videos featuring footage of terrifying events from the shortlived people's republic of Oaxaca (Brown lives there, and was involved in the uprising). A stunning short film shows Mexican artist Gabriela León, an iconic diva clad in rubber and a barbed-wire necklace, single-handedly confronting a line of shield-wielding riot cops as her enraged response to state brutality.—JG

Irmin Schmidt & Kumo
AXOLOTL EYES
Spoon Records

This pairing of former Can keyboard player Irmin Schmidt and electronics maverick Kumo (aka Jono Podmore) debuted live in Britain at the Can Solo Projects event at the South Bank Centre in London in 1999, where they fought an exhilarating and funny improvising duel between keyboards and electronics. For anyone mourning the passing of Can (and, in 2001, Can guitarist Micky Karoli) or too young to have caught them live, this duo is perhaps the nearest you'll get to the spirit of classic Can – or more specifically, on this follow-up to their 2001 debut *Masters of Confusion*, to the era of 1974's *Soon Over Babaluma*. While *Axolotl Eyes* is firmly based in electronica, the exquisite trumpet of Australian Ian Dixon places it in the jazz-ambient zone of Jon Hassell and Nils-Petter Molv er, though it's far superior to Molv er's hippy post-Miles noodlings; indeed, Dixon's crystalline peeling tone is more reminiscent of Kenny Wheeler or Lester Bowie. And unlike Molv er, the music plumbs great dark depths of weird post-Stockhausen operatic grandeur, while also remaining compulsively funky. Which, in a way, describes classic Can. The CD also comes with a complementary 112-minute DVD of the duo's 2001 multimedia installation at the Barbican Centre in London, *Flies, Guys and Choirs*, which is simply the weirdest music film I have seen since The Residents' cult classic *Whatever Happened to "Vileness Fats"?* As Renaldo and the Loaf memorably misquoted Sinatra, songs for swinging larvae indeed.–JG



Scorces
I TURN INTO YOU
Not Not Fun



Scorces are the duo of Christina Carter and Heather Leigh Murray, who share between them pedal steel, electric guitar and voices. Some may know Carter as one half of long-serving American outfit Charalambides, and may also recall Murray's tenure during one of the group's brief phases as a trio, around the time of the *Joy Shapes* and *Unknown Spin* albums. (There were also some neat CD-Rs, like *CHT* and *Live Hand Held*, which are worth hunting down.) Murray's history is a little more all over the shop – starting in Ash Castles Of The Ghost Coast with her then-partner Shawn MacMillen, she briefly retired from performance (except for time in a Gamelan orchestra), returning with a breathtaking solo album *Cuatro/Vocal Recordings*. After doing time with Charalambides, she relocated to Glasgow and started playing in Taurpis Tula with David Keenan and Alex Neilson, and continued recording and performing solo. Carter has also released scores of solo CD-Rs on her Many Breaths Press, and sometimes records with Andrew MacGregor as The Bastard Wing. Charalambides made some of their greatest formal leaps when Murray was part of the group – their *Joy Shapes* album is unparalleled both within Charalambides' body of work, and perhaps within the last ten years of underground activity in America. Heavy with electricity, dense and emotionally draining, *Joy Shapes's* strongest suit was the way it pushed the playing of the trio (also including Tom Carter) far from their early, song-based craft; here was a glimpse of another way of working which respected the

skeletal structure that props up song while simultaneously negotiating new terrain for six-string/pedal steel improvisation. Listening again to *Joy Shapes* recently, it struck me that it's in some ways closer to the microtonal attention to detail of some modern composition, combined with the non-idiomatic anarchy of the best improvisation currently extant – all wrapped up with the heft and grunt of great free rock. *I Turn Into You* apparently has been sitting on the shelf for a while – I'm not sure exactly when it was recorded, but from correspondence with main players I'd gather it's been awaiting release for a few years. It feels correct, then, to suggest it's the long-awaited successor to *Joy Shapes*, for within *I Turn Into You*, Carter and Murray tap into the same near-religious/eschatological fervour that marked the earlier album's most intense rides into the sun. But more importantly, here Carter and Murray flip that simplistic, still-circling equation that volume/activity equals intensity – most of *I Turn Into You* is relatively minimal; there are stretches of near-silence, or periods where Carter and Murray worry over the same clutch of notes for minutes, near-obsessively, the better to unlock every nuance from their interactions. There is a point, near the end of "Coming To A Forgotten Part", where they stay "still", one member plotting two repetitive pitches, while the other works over a clutch of notes, the two patterns slipping in and out of relation – it's an exceptionally evocative moment, as though you're watching the players cleave in and out of each other's orbit, their bodies winding together, limbs reaching for points just beyond their grasp.

The durational aspect is significant: because Scorces allow their (non-)songs to unfold over extended periods, they can deal with whole different ratios, different dynamics. A rupture in volume is all the more startling for its emergence from a few minutes of quiet, determined, low-level playing, and when vocals appear, they're often intensely surprising, even as they sometimes seem to slide unbidden from their creators' mouths – in this context, the figures singing are flashes in landscapes, not centre foreground. While this isn't exactly a new thing, what I'm impressed by here is the relative erasure of hierarchy in most of these performances – in instrumental music, one instrument often takes pride of place, is fetishised (Keiji Haino's voice, Toshimaru Nakamura's mixing board, uh, Gene Simmons's ass), but it's harder to make those kinds of claims about instrumental priority in Scorces' music. This is important because, although you *can* tell who's on pedal steel and who's on electric guitar (largely due to liner notes, mind), both the effects of duration and the nature of the playing ultimately mean you're no longer listening for those referents. But neither does this music mesh or blur into a sea of indistinct noise. If this seems confusing, that's because it *is* – countless listens later and I'm still figuring out what's going on the four sides of this double album, exactly how everything *works*, even as giving in to its access of a "semiotic world" becomes near-irresistible. And when you can trace the lyrics, as on "Romance Is Not A Thing Of The Past", which is perhaps the record's fulcrum, their content – personal relations, physicality, the psychology of sensation, the dissolution of the self into the other – somehow lock perfectly with the record's overarching approaches. Murray's vocal performance on this track is seriously zoned, and Carter's playing on the pedal steel staggering, all ricocheting drops into the void, stretched and strained tonal action, and weightless, centre-less, reverberating buzz and sigh. This is one of the few recordings I've heard this year that has dared to advance the possibility of unique ways for humans to interact through

music. Unrelentingly heavy, but not oppressively so, it's one of the most demanding listening experiences of the year, and one of the most richly rewarding. Its one fundamental leap is all-important: whether entirely successful or not (and I would say it is), *I Turn Into You* suggests there could be yet another approach to the language of communication via sound, though that approach will always be in flux, in process, hard to pin down. It's overwhelming, yet intensely human, and in its own odd way – and this is the clincher for me, the thing that really elevates *I Turn Into You* – actually quite humble, and humbling.–JD

Mark Stewart
EDIT
Crippled Dick Hot Wax!

For those of us blessed to have been around to have caught them live, The Pop Group and their singer Mark Stewart were, along with This Heat, the ultimate example of the thrilling possibilities that post-punk offered, and the likes of Simon Reynolds, in his excellent *Rip It Up and Start Again*, agree. Nearly thirty years on, the solo Stewart – here releasing his first recording in twelve years – is just as wild, inspired, and angry as ever, and the politics of *As the Veneer of Democracy Starts to Fade* don't seem to have mellowed that much. He's still up to his old tricks: smeared and scratched dub workouts, police sirens, TV samples and *musique concrète*, Ballardian or Burroughsian apocalyptic pronouncements, and plenty of down-and-dirty funk that just begs to be compared to James Brown, Sly Stone or Parliament/Funkadelic (no surprise when you remember that Stewart fell in with the Sugarhill Gang's Keith LeBlanc, Skip McDonald and Doug Wimbish – rap's answer to Sly and Robbie, and the powerhouse trio behind "The Message" and "White Lines (Don't Do It)" and, later, On-U Sound's Adrian Sherwood – back when The Pop Group played the New York No Wave scene – and they all appear in Tøni Schifer's documentary, *ON/OFF: Mark Stewart, from The Pop Group to The Maffia*, singing his praises). All, of course, "edited" through Stewart's radical vision of sound manipulation and how to mess up a dance beat with a storm of howling noise, including some amusing examples of what Brian Eno called "antique Minimoog" sounds. The politics are still there too; not least the rants about world poverty ("27 million people enslaved across the globe today") on "Strange Cargo" – actually the name of an anti-slavery campaign he got involved with, and nothing to do with the Frank Borzage movie – a dizzying mix of high life, calypso and dub. Strangest of all, however, is the cover of The Yardbirds' "Mr. You're a Better Man Than I", when you'd think he'd have gone for "For Your Love". And all of it Mouli'd in a kitchen Stewart shares with the ghost of John Cage. He always was a weird kid.–JG



Walter & Sabrina
JUNG AHH FLEISCH
Danny Dark

Walter & Sabrina / Dietrich Eichmann Ensemble
DEMONS!
Danny Dark

I set out to shed some light on Walter Cardew and Sabrina (Stephen) Moore, but I hereby declare myself trounced by the intricacy of their subplots. A solitary, apparently unconnected consideration, more literary than musical, grazes this listener's mind when attempting to hook up the different parts of the conundrum: the cryptic essays decorating every item churned out by multimedia artist and psychoacoustic sonic researcher Andrew McKenzie, better known as Hafler Trio. Unlike McKenzie's calculated circumventions of normalcy, Moore's merciless lyrics offer the audience a quest for the reasons for human helplessness, a lookout for hope of sorts. Still, when trying to focus the attention on the words' cultivated sleaze it's easy to get sidetracked by the exceptional quality of the instrumental material, since, unlike Hafler Trio, Walter & Sabrina dress words with something more than drones. Their output is expertly designed to disturb the disturbed and stymie those searching for the missing link between the music and their ignorance. Forget the sordid pictures adorning the sleeves of the duo's releases and the fact that all human beings must every once in a while come to terms with ungovernable impulses, especially sexual. Everything else causes perplexity, too: the duo's façade actually hides a chamber group; the porn elements coexist with some of the most notable playing of the last twenty years; and the lyrics are frequently submerged by the music, or slashed by ruthless, stabbing noise. What are we looking for, besides being aware that *Jung Ahh Fleisch* and *Demons!* are the second and third part of a trilogy that began with *We Sing for the Future*?



In *Jung Ahh Fleisch*'s liners, there's a partial answer: "We are lonely, don't want to be; we need to give people clues, ways into our art." The only discernible clues are to be found in the extraordinary complexity of the music, scored for reeds, brass, strings (including guitar and double bass), piano and percussion, and including vocal parts for two counter-tenors (Peter Crawford and Samuel Penkett), a soprano (Celia Lu) and a contralto doubling on cello (Ayanna Witter-Johnson) plus Moore and Gunnar Brandt. Sections where the orchestration is confined to a three-semitone span suddenly open out into marvelously stern counterpoint, on a par with the sharpest offerings by Art Bears or Thinking Plague, yet the dissonant idiom makes this much harder to take. An urge for redemption underscores the entire CD, intellectualism partially forgotten in favour of a systematic rejection of whatever logical explanation one might try and find. "Kat's Fitting In", the strongest track, is a superbly designed if distressing patchwork, a blend of virtuosic theatre and unforgiving reality – picture a cross of early Art Zoyd and Motor Totemist Guild – that will upset any pitiable listener eager for a lazy Sunday morning. The record is tough as nails, the final tracks "HP" and "Is That Nice?" (both featuring the Dietrich Eichmann Ensemble - more about that later) dealing with not-so-secret relationships via devastating clangor and raving desperation.

Demons! is a longer project – 116 minutes on two CDs – and the words are mostly delivered this time by Moore himself, his often hysterical yet polished recitation a challenge for those hoping to discover



new sources of post-Henry Cow methodological complication. Dietrich Eichmann – composer, musicologist, pedagogue and founder of the Oaksmus label, who has studied with Alexander Von Schlippenbach, Frederic Rzewski, Garrett List and Walter Zimmermann – would appear a most unlikely partner for W&S's tales of human failure, even though the members of his ensemble, Gunnar Brandt-Sigursson, Michael Griener, Alexander Frangenheim and Christian Weber, are no slouches themselves in highlighting this kind of obsessed response through sheer procedural brilliance. The soundtrack to Moore's performance includes autistic repetitiveness, expressive hostility, neurotic patterns, percussion whenever a hole becomes available and a pair of magnificent double basses rumbling in the crucial moments. Make no mistake, this is as uneasy listening as it comes, and Walter & Sabrina caution that the digital distortion disfiguring the voices and instruments "shouldn't be mistaken for faults". Funny, then, that during the first playback, a power shortage in my house caused the disc to fizzle in the player and grind to a halt with an error message. Fiendish stuff, indeed! Lovers of avant-garde theatricality, or those who still revisit the spoken segments of Zappa's *200 Motels*, will have no problem with this, but greenhorns may find it tests their endurance.



So, we're back to square one. Distortion eats chunks of text in *Demons!*, and the instruments are often louder than the singers in *Jung Ahh Fleisch*'s mix. Does this mean that the artists prefer us to be acquainted with just a fraction of the story? Are we supposed to pick up on the available clues and formulate a private narrative? Should we listen to the music watching a silent hardcore movie for enhanced comprehension? Is this just a big hoax? Words, I'm convinced, are a deception, incapable of bridging the millions of conflicting points-of-view of human existence. These two CDs, results of a collision between spiteful malice and craving for salvation, are in any case nourishing fare for the attentive listener. –MR

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JAZZ & IMPROV

**Paolo Angeli / Evan Parker / Ned Rothenberg
FREE ZONE APPLEBY 2007
Psi**



The 2007 Appleby Jazz Festival must have been a pretty cheerless sight, coming as it did amidst massive rain and flooding, and it's even more dispiriting to hear that that disaster plus funding problems have caused the 18-year-old festival to fold. So *Free Zone Appleby 2007* is the last recorded example of the series that Parker has curated at

Appleby every year. Past FZAs have mostly been in the vein of Parker's latterday enthusiasm for large-ensemble improv, but in 2007 he convened an untypically small group: just himself, Ned Rothenberg on alto sax and clarinets, and (a new name to me) the guitarist Paolo Angeli. Angeli plays a modified Sardinian guitar that doubles as a cello, getting a rich, raspy bowed sound that wouldn't be out of place in a Renaissance viol consort; he also uses it as a resonator for percussion, and occasionally adds a bit of rock'n'roll distortion and Keith Rowe-style airwave-sampling. From the open Angeli-Rothenberg duo, which falls into a bustling lockstep (not quite a groove), it's clear that an overt rhythmic drive, an emotional briskness and alertness, and a sense of droll humour are important elements of this music. The following Parker/Rothenberg duo confirms this: yes, there's the expected whirligig intricacy, but Rothenberg's shrewd, slightly sardonic tone pulls Parker towards a greater immediacy and bite than usual nowadays. The trio performances that follow are exciting, excitable stuff – the scrambling sense of mutual oneupmanship on "Shield (Blue) Trio 2" has a comic timing so perfect it'd grace a 1930s screwball comedy, and there's a marvellous sense of grotesquerie on "Trio 3", as Parker's soprano mock-laments confront Rothenberg's tonguewagging bass clarinet and Angeli does a one-man-band routine that ends in a feedback hailstorm. This isn't improvised "dialogue" – it's far more visceral stuff that gets at the whole of your body: like any good comedy, it's got room for everything from absurdist wit to funny walks and abject pratfalls. Whoever braved the inclement weather witnessed some damn fine music, and the result is one of the best (and most unexpected) items in the Psi catalogue to date.–ND

Ab Baars Trio & Ken Vandermark
GOOFY JUNE BUG
Wig

Ab Baars' trio with Wilbert De Joode and drummer Martin van Duynhoven teamed up a few years back with trombonist Joost Buis for the stellar *Kinda Dukish*; on *Goofy June Bug* the guest this time is the indefatigable Ken Vandermark, and the music is correspondingly more in the vein of Vandermark's rather parched clockwork reconstructions of free-jazz tradition. The two reedsman are quite closely matched in terms of sound – especially their comparably frowsy, greyish tone on the tenor sax – and Buis's trombone is rather missed as a result: at times the music falls victim to the drabness that dragged down Baars' last disc, *Stof*, though the diverse set of compositions by both hands considerably helps matters. There are a couple of longish, understated tone-poems which have just enough going on to keep from sagging (the rhythm section really do great work keeping "Memory Moves Forward", er, moving forward beneath Baars's wispy threads of shakuhachi), some two-tenor blowouts and loose-limbed swingers, and a few unclassifiable items like "Prince of Venosa" (constructed around a short fragment from Gesualdo[!]). Baars' title-track is the most memorable and most joyous piece here, an oddball groove pulled between the curiously hushed, secretive melody that circles around among the horns and bass and the faster



currents of van Duynhoven's drums, and Vandermark's trademark squared-off riffing gives it an extra rhythmic layer. Still, it's hard to feel the disc plays consistently to either hornman's strengths: De Joode is wonderful as always (getting the most vocalized sound out of a wooden instrument this side of a daxophone), and Duynhoven also discreetly lifts some of the tracks, but Vandermark sounds better with the outlandish excess that's the speciality of his Scandinavian buddies like Paal Nilsson-Love, and Baars needs to brighten up a little.—*ND*

Bik Bent Braam
EXTREMEN
BBB



Pianist Michiel Braam runs a big band with an unmistakable Dutch accent, as its mock-phonetic bandname suggests. The music's a galloping mix of swing and Monk and neoclassicism and complete insanity, liberally seasoned with a spry sense of humour, yet somehow it sounds completely unlike the venerable (and similarly-inclined) ICP and Breuker ensembles. Like Misha Mengelberg, Braam is constitutionally averse to "leading" the band in any usual sense of the word, but he's too sunny a character to go in for Misha's stubborn perversity. Instead, he's developed a genial musical philosophy – "system", if you like, though that sounds starchy – which he calls "bonsai". Tunes are assigned to each member of the 13-piece band (to call whenever they like – even in the middle of another piece!) and there's also a large menu of miscellaneous cues to pick from. In this way, everyone gets to be a conductor and instant composer/arranger. There are parallels to Braxton's collages and Zorn's game pieces, but BBB doesn't sound like them either: best to think of bonsai as the logical conclusion of Shelly Manne's dictum that a jazz musician is someone who "never plays the same thing once".

Extremen catches the bik bent in typically rumbustious and unpredictable form, in a concert at Amsterdam's Bimhuis. Pieces like "Michaelx" and "Erix" make conventional swing sound like you've never heard it before, reinventing it from chorus to chorus, and Braam's compositional ingenuity is evident in pieces like "Frankx", in which, as he remarks in the liners, "something like 10 different metres are played simultaneously." The players seem to take the CD's title to heart with some genuinely ferocious playing: saxophonist-clarinetist Frank Gratkowski is in particularly fiery form – listen to him tear dementedly through the south-of-the-border fantasia "Franxs" in the company of trumpeter Angelo Verploegen – and Wilbert De Joode is as always a dab hand at drawing forth elegant grotesques from his bass, taking a completely off-the-wall solo on "Wilx" that sets it alternately squealing and feebly muttering. My favourite moment, though, is saxophonist Bart van der Putten's feature, "Puttex": on the surface, the piece is a conventionally lush, emotive ballad, but the band turns it inside out, until the atmosphere becomes oppressively thick and dangerous. And though Braam might be diffident about the limelight ("apart from the fact that I make the announcements you can hardly tell I am the band leader at all"), his stamp is all over the music, not least his ability to suggest the champagne sparkle of 1930s pianists like Teddy Wilson even when he's on a rampage at the keyboard. It's a

pity that Braam has never done an Anthony Braxton and put out a box set of Bik Bent Braam's performances: it'd be fascinating to hear how this most mercurial of bands refashions the material over a series of concerts. —ND

Jeb Bishop / Harris Eisenstadt / Jason Roebke
TIEBREAKER
Not Two

Live from the Re Club in Krakow comes this fine, carefree set of music by a trio of American musician-globetrotters; drummer Harris Eisenstadt in particular has a taste for popping up in good but unexpected company in all parts of the world, from his earlier studies in West Africa to his more recent perpetually zigzagging itinerary through Canada, the States and Europe. Trombonist Jeb Bishop's playing is wonderfully various throughout this freeboppish set of originals (four by him, two by Eisenstadt, one by bassist Jason Roebke): his steep doubletime lines, precisely interlocking chains of ideas and snappy articulation on the opening "Round Two" would do a bebopper proud, while on the soft rubato ballad "How Are You Dear" he draws on an expressionist language of growls and mutterings. Whatever the exact idiom of the moment, there's always a strong sense of balance to what he's doing; his playing is never overtidy or stiff, but it has an air of alert, slightly muted self-dialogue that's at some remove from the loop-de-loop swagger of a Ray Anderson or Roswell Rudd. Roebke and Eisenstadt similarly combine intensity and clarity of purpose, and they make these grooves really zip and pop, from the bad-news blues of "Double Dog" to a jovial Ornettified revisiting of that old bebop chestnut "I Got Rhythm" on the closer, "Piggly Wiggly." —ND



Lucio Capece / Sergio Merce
CASA
Organized Music from Thessaloniki



Recorded in Sergio Merce's casa in Merlo, Argentina, in February this year, this latest offering from Kostis Kilymis's OMT imprint consists of two tracks: "Vivar, vivar", on which Merce plays a four-track portastudio without tape and Lucio Capece a Sruti box (handheld miniature harmonium) and filter, and "Vieja Casa Nueva", which features Capece on bass clarinet and Merce on tenor sax. "Vivar, vivar" is a curiously enthralling 29 minute piece, with Capece's dry drones deliberately forward in the mix as if to place Merce's squeaks, squelches, gurgles and flutters tantalisingly out of reach, like a shortwave station you never quite manage to tune in. The ear is drawn into the acoustic background, but in trying to concentrate on what Merce is up to it also discovers a wealth of detail in Capece's seemingly static dyads and trichords: phantom melodies, rich overtones and complex interlocking pulses. The all too brief "Vieja Casa Nueva" intersperses long pianissimo tones with silence; there's no flashy circular breathing on display here – each tone lasts the

length of a breath – but both musicians reveal some impressive multiphonic technique, often giving the illusion there are at least two other reed players hiding out in Merce's house. It's a shame they couldn't have kept it up longer than seven and a half minutes; four times as long and it would have made a splendid counterbalance for the first track. As it is, it comes across as something of an afterthought, albeit a very pleasant one.–DW

Rhodri Davies / David Lacey / Dennis McNulty
POOR TRADE
Cathnor

"In September 2006 a Welshman, Rhodri Davies, travelled to Ireland to play harp with two Irishmen, David Lacey and Dennis McNulty," writes Richard Pinnell on his Cathnor label website, "as children played in the school playground next door and roadworkers went about their business along the road." Makes it sound very homely, doesn't it, like, OK lads we'll just run through "The Bells of Aberdovey" and "Where The River Shannon Flows" and nip off for a pint of Guinness next door, but there's nothing specifically Gaelic about these three extended tracks of topnotch EAI, splendidly recorded by David Reid (yes, you can hear the kids outside if you listen carefully!), and beautifully packaged in Cathnor's typically elegant oversize digipak. Dublin-based David Lacey (percussion and electronics), has, in collaboration with his frequent playing partner Paul Vogel, been at the forefront of the burgeoning Irish free improv scene for a while now – PT readers will no doubt recall Richard Pinnell's review of the [i and e festival last year](#) – and has signed a number of fine releases with Vogel in the company of visiting notables including Annette Krebs, Martin Küchen, Keith Rowe and Mark Wastell. In the company of laptopper Dennis McNulty and harpist Davies he's signed probably his strongest release to date (though last year's *Chip Shop Music* was pretty solid too). As genres go, EAI isn't known for being overly dramatic – internal conflict and stress is crystallised and sublimated long before it gets a chance to bubble up to the surface – but there's considerable tension and power here, a wealth of detailed interplay between the three musicians, and a real feel for structure at both micro and macro level. Dark, rich, mature and satisfying – the music, that is, not the Guinness, though I do hope they treated themselves to a few well-deserved pints of the black stuff after recording this little gem.–DW



Arek Gulbenkoglou / Adam Süßmann
UNTITLED
The Rhizome Label

I've just thought of a great marketing idea to rid the world of those damned mobile phones: the Arek Gulbenkoglou Ringtone! I can't resist quoting Brian Olewnick's *Just Outside* blog on this one (and neither can Rhizome main man Jon Dale): "76 minutes of next to nothing, very beautiful. I get the feeling they found Taku's *Live in Australia* too in

your face, took the idea and toned it down a few notches." I'm listening to it through headphones at *ferociously* high volume, hoping and praying that neither musician actually plays anything louder than a *pianissimo* because it'd blow my bloody eardrums out. A plane passes by... someone slams a door... there's a curious rustling (er, no, sorry that's the sound of my cigarette burning in the ashtray)... all very pretty but I've got quite a few albums of distant traffic noise already thanks, and my favourite remains Sugimoto / Totsuka / Mattin's *Training Thoughts*, which compared to this sounds like Gare Saint Lazare on Saturday afternoon. That said, there are plenty of wonderful sounds to listen to here, and you don't need any musicians getting in their way by playing very much. And, so as not to disappoint you, they don't. "Whoo, yeah!" someone cries shortly after the 21-minute mark (that's probably Jon a mile and a half away digging his Scorces album), and three minutes later there's the clink of what could be empty glasses being cleared away. *Time, gentlemen, please.*—DW

Greg Kelley
RELIGIOUS ELECTRONICS
No Fun
SELF-HATE INDEX
Semata

THIS IS NOT A JAZZ RECORD, proclaim the good people at No Fun. Not that I think many Louis Armstrong fans wandered into Carlos Giffoni's Knitting Factory moshpit last May by mistake.. Nor, I imagine, do many people consider Greg Kelley a jazz trumpeter, even though he has displayed some impressive chops in earlier outings with Paul Flaherty (is *he* a jazz saxophonist? discuss). But as *Self-Hate Index* is sourced in Kelley's trumpet playing, *Religious Electronics* has ended up in PT's Jazz / Improv section too as part of a double header. Well, what the hell, Hair Police made it to Post-Rock, go figure. I prefer to leave it others to worry about what to file it under; I'm more interested in listening to the music. And mighty fine it is too. Kelley describes his equipment on *Religious Electronics* as "just a 'pedal chain' or 'feedback loop' or 'no input mixing board' system with a ring modulator, distortion pedal, delay and four channel mixer. As all of those terms have some bad associations, I think I'd choose 'feedback system', which is also kind of pretentious." The music isn't, though – it's characteristically uncompromising stuff, another thrilling assault on that flimsy wall separating EAI and Noise (ach, I've started pigeonholing again, forgive me). The A-side, "Despair is Sin" – title courtesy Kierkegaard – was previously available as a limited edition ("20 or 30 of them") CDR given away at No Fun in 2005. At Giffoni's request, Kelley cooked up a longer B-side to join it, "O Lord the Star Torments Me", whose title is a quotation from a Thomas Bernhard poem "written in the heights of tormented agnosticism." Tormented it certainly is – Kelley gives his "feedback system" one hell of a workout here – but, unlike a few noise albums I could mention, there's a rock-solid structure under the ferocious surface, and it makes all the difference.



Self-Hate Index on a cursory listen might not sound



all that dissimilar if you're a jazz fan, but scrape off the grimy layers of distortion and you'll find a trumpet in there. It spends quite a lot of time hiding in caverns of gritty reverb, but from time to time a note of pristine beauty emerges from the gloom. What's refreshing about this is its raw energy and sense of drama, present as much in the quieter tracks as in the more abrasive ones – far too many solo trumpet outings of recent years have remained within a world of tiny pops, puffs and gurgles, and haven't aged that well (Kelley's own *Trumpet* being a notable exception, as I realise now eight years down the road). The upper register explorations in "Accumulating Errors (What Is Peripheral?)" will have you sweating as much as Kelley was when he recorded it – that's the rumble of an air conditioner you can hear in the background. The album title, he informs us "refers to psychological evaluations of potential suicides" – but don't let that put you off. True, "Anxious Drift" might not be the most appropriate muzak to play in your analyst's waiting room, but from where I'm sitting it sounds fuckin' wonderful. –DW

Byard Lancaster
PERSONAL TESTIMONY (THEN AND NOW)
Porter

Multi-instrumentalist Byard Lancaster is a good fit for the recently arrived Porter Records. Among others, the label has reissued rare sides by trumpeter Ted Daniel, Finnish pianist-composer Heikki Sarmanto, and Boston blues-rock outfit Natural Food, as well as releasing new material by Philly hip-hop group Mised Children and Andrew McGraw's South Asian collages.



Lancaster (whose *Live at Macalester College* was also reissued by Porter) has long held to his motto "from a Love Supreme to the Sex Machine," integrating funk, free improvisation, Afro-Caribbean rhythms, and gospel into his musical approach. *Personal Testimony* is a solo record, featuring Lancaster on flutes, bass clarinet, saxophones, piano, percussion and voice, often overdubbed. It was issued originally on his own Concert Artists label in 1979; like many Porter reissues, this CD contains a postscript of material recorded in 2007.

As its title promises, the journey here is often very personal and autobiographical. The album opens with the piano-and-voice improvisation "Miss Nikki", which sets Lancaster's his keening rasp over a garden of arpeggios (check "Global Key" for the update), while the low, woody bass clarinets on "Brotherman" build upon the work laid down thirteen years earlier with Marzette Watts on the latter's ESP session. The opener's preaching is recalled on "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," a brief alto solo that might have been saccharine if it weren't for its utter simplicity and workmanlike air, not to mention Lancaster's commanding projection. It segues into "Marianne and Alicia," which seems to be the same alto improvisation with overdubbed soprano and reverb. It's startling and odd, something like a soul-inflected Lol Coxhill experiment. The characteristic banshee wail is coupled with Konitz-like runs on "Brian," but in "Mind Exercise" Lancaster lets the squalling multiphonics splay out

completely, in the pure sound approach that he assimilated from working with Sunny Murray and Bill Dixon.

As for *Now*, Lancaster's raspy vocal bleeds into split tones on the West African-tinged "Prayer Cry"; on the second half, a field of Lancaster voices (or is it field recordings?) are added alongside flute and congas. The contrast between sessions is often striking, as for instance the very different uses of overdubbed flutes on "Dogtown" (Then) and "Afro-Ville" (Now); certainly the multi-instrumental orchestration of "Tribalize Lancaster" - purring flute, shakers, slide whistle, djembe and vocals - is far from the bedroom studio of yore. The original LP's lo-fi, documentary charm made it a remarkable oddity in the pantheon, and perhaps the sessions could have simply been released on different discs; still, it's a pleasure to have this range of material available.-CA

Thomas Lehn / Marcus Schmickler
NAVIGATION IM HYPERTEXT
A-Musik

KÖLNER KRANZ
A-Musik



Bart, Thomas Lehn and Marcus Schmickler's debut duo disc on Erstwhile from 2000, always felt like one of the last words in dueling electronics/synth /cracked-circuit improvisations. Like other greats in the field (*Voice_Crack*, Furt, Shaking Ray Levis), their music is a disorienting experience - down for them is up, high and low frequencies bisect in maddening ways, improvisations crackle and fizz with hyperactivity. The chaos is faux, though, as the more you disappear into Lehn and Schmickler's madness the more you concede to their peculiar logic. *Navigation Im Hypertext*, Frankensteined from live performances, fits this logic insofar as it's exactly not what you'd expect - looking for Looney Tunes electroacoustics, instead you're handed instead exotic, paced micro-incidents. It's very considered, as though Lehn and Schmickler want you to focus on each noise's constituent parts, and its episodic structure, whereby short snippets represent consecutive ideas at their most refined, lends the album the feel of an index or notebook. Even longer pieces, like the thirteen-minute fifteenth track, are quite cautious - here, glorious peals of sizzling tones lock together and sit in the air like a spun toffee halo, while bass lollops around in a daze, trying to find its way out from under the blanket. *Navigation Im Hypertext* is process oriented, and perhaps that's why it's so appealing: it invites a slightly different approach to listening than other synth- or electronics/improv sets.

Kölner Kranz is the flipside to *Navigation's* precision. Featuring two side-long, maximal performances, it plays out as though Lehn and Schmickler are trying to corkscrew every move possible on their combined digital and analogue kits into one uncontrollable fantasia for noise detritus. There are times where the magnesium flammability of it all overwhelms, and your only response is supine submission. Much like *Bart*, though, its chaos is sculpted (if not scripted): this isn't a



"blowout." Lehn and Schmickler are attentive to detail, something that's reflected in their responsiveness when improvising – lightning fast, they're still masters of the appropriate. An excellent double set, actually – well worth it to be able to hear two contrasting approaches to more-or-less the same thing.–*JD*

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MORE JAZZ & IMPROV

Denman Maroney / Reuben Radding / Ned Rothenberg / Michael Sarin
GAGA
Nuscope



It's great when musicians are choosy about what they release – god knows there are far too many folks happy to give their every passing whim permanent digital form – but, face it, it's not a good strategy for conquering the jazz world, if that's what you're looking to do. *Gaga* features a quartet of musicians who've all in their way emphasized getting things just right rather than getting ahead, assembling meaningful canons rather than just "documentation." More power to them! Leader Denman Maroney is a fine pianist with an undeservedly low profile, up to now most frequently encountered in the company of bassist Mark Dresser. He calls his approach "hyperpiano," which usually refers to his particular brand of inside-piano playing, but here involves a carefully conceptualized take on a "straight" jazz idiom in which rhythms are stacked up at exactly calibrated ratios. Don't sweat the details – basically, think of it as a (relaxed) version of a Conlon Nancarrow canon, or as an extension of Monk at his most perversely logical. The opening "Fowler's Blues" sounds like "Misterioso" heading off in four different directions at once, while "Detach & Retain" is a nod toward the genre Monk more or less invented, harmonically wandering midtempo tunes in no particular key. Indeed, the overt Monkishness of several pieces is a bit distracting to this ear, but fortunately the melody of "Detach & Retain" owes more to Andrew Hill in the way its theme that seems to treat metrical changes as cadential formulas. The musicians joining Maroney are all less-is-more players, content to let the music's complexities grow clearly and organically; Ned Rothenberg's work on saxes and clarinets is tart and pared down, and bassist Reuben Radding and drummer Michael Sarin deal beautifully with the pianist's multilayered structures, taking advantage of the staggered rhythms to create lots of push-pull harmonic interest, occasionally turning the tracks into explorations of a bumpy kind of bitonality. The 20-minute title track's my favourite, a piece that gets further away from conventional jazz territory, turning a slinky quasi-tango into a hypnotic, abstracted weave of stop-start

cross-rhythms.—ND

**Chris McGregor's Brotherhood of Breath
ECLIPSE AT DAWN
Cuneiform**

At the start of this live recording made in Berlin in 1971, emcee Ronnie Scott introduces the band with his usual deadpan wit: "Most of the guys in the band come from England; and the rest of them come from South Africa, which is a wonderful place... to come from." Pianist Chris McGregor's Brotherhood of Breath transmuted that experience of cultural exile into a wild and woolly mix of bighearted Africanized Ellingtonia and rowdy collectivist free jazz that teeters between joyousness, anger and sorrow. This latest archival discovery was recorded between the group's first and second studio albums for RCA – now available in handsome CD reissues on Fledg'ling Records – though the music is considerably more unhinged than either of them. It's roughedged, excitable stuff, with several wilfully chaotic moments when the sectionwork comes unglued. There's bristlingly hot playing by saxophonists Alan Skidmore, Mike Osborne, Dudu Pukwana and Gary Windo (a Warne Marsh protégé, though you'd never guess it from his playing here), and bassist Harry Miller and drummer Louis Moholo whip things along with amazing recklessness: Miller slashes viciously through the ensembles, while Moholo's drumming constantly trends towards thrashing, unpredictably pulsed doubletime. Trumpeter Mongezi Feza is AWOL, unfortunately, though the admirable Harry Beckett and Marc Charig bring an immaculate touch and slippery gift for melodic invention to a brass section also featuring trombonists Malcolm Griffiths and Nick Evans. McGregor himself has a duff piano to work with, which probably explains why halfway through the concert he migrates towards an organ, though not before he's graced the rattling "Take the 'A' Train"-goes-to-space piece "Restless" with a volatile, note-scattering solo. Most of the charts are built around terse, shouting riffs – dance rhythms delivered with such monolithic force they become hymns – which collapse into truly epic freeform blowing. Familiar pieces from the band's book make an appearance, from "Nick Tete" to the closing "Funky Boots March", but the title track is a rarity: an arrangement of a piece by fellow South African pianist Abdullah Ibrahim/Dollar Brand. It's like a scorched-earth version of an Ellington ballad, graced by swelling horn charts and Evans' aching trombone. There's none of Duke's Olympian majesty and grace on Eclipse at Dawn, though, not even any catharsis – the passages of frenzy and violence rarely suggest at their end that their energies and emotional contradictions have been resolved in any way – but the Brotherhood's music nonetheless achieves its own harrowing kind of beauty.—ND



**Michael Moore
FRAGILE
Ramboy**

HOLOCENE
Rambo



American ex-pat Michael Moore always seemed the subtlest ironist in the much-missed Clusone 3, but good luck detecting anything but the sincerest intentions in *Fragile*, a modern-mainstream quartet outing on his Rambo imprint. Pianist Harmen Fraanje and bassist Clemens van der Veen are a little smooth'n'silky for these tastes, but Moore's emotional honesty and tendency towards understatement means that the pretty stuff never cloys. Drummer Michael Vatcher keeps to a discreet volume level but works his usual mischief, introducing little hitches and sidesteps into the music's otherwise even flow, and Ab Baars drops by for two haiku-like miniatures. Moore is at his most Konitzian on "The Troubadors" (a slowed-down "Giant Steps" variant) and the rubato ballads are alert enough to keep away from ECM-style drift; the shadows fall at the album's end with a pair of impressionist mood-pieces, "The Smell of Novato" and "Upside-Down Man".

That darker mood carries over to *Holocene*, a trio date with Moore (mostly on clarinet), accordionist Guy Klucevsek and cellist Erik Friedlander. This kind of folksy minimalist chamber-jazz was a breath of fresh air in the 1990s in the hands of players like Marty Ehrlich and Dave Douglas, getting away from the cliches of conventional jazz instrumentation and showing what you could do at a lower volume level. Moore's version is thinner, more downbeat in texture, its pallid beauty free of peppy tango or klezmer inflections; Klucevsek's accordion is often used for soft, abstract church-organ chords. What's missing, unfortunately, is the kind of passion and smouldering drama that would make these small pieces seem larger. **-ND**



Evan Parker
CONIC SECTIONS
Psi



Psi's series of reissues of Evan Parker's solo soprano sax albums is now virtually complete with the release of *Conic Sections*, originally released on Ah Um in 1993 (but recorded in 1989). Parker's liner notes credit the lively acoustic environment of Oxford's Holywell Music Room, England's first concert hall, constructed in 1742, for the way he plays on this date: frequently it's as if he's playing the room itself, testing out the way it responds to different tonal colorations and positionings, and he's occasionally tempted into some unusual moments of luxurious near-stasis. The disc continues the trend of 1986's *The Snake Decides* away from the terrifying bleakness of his earliest solo LPs, towards an incredibly ornate drone music in which volleying counterrhythms are constructed out of a fixed set of notes. The eardrum-ravaging skirls of *Monoceros* (1978) often threatened the listener with sonic white-out; here, they're just one element in the larger texture, swooping like seagulls over the onslaught of coruscating trills and slower, step-by-step diatonic sequences. For

better or worse this album marks the logical endpoint to Parker's solo music--he didn't record another until *Lines Burnt in Light* (2001), which just sounds like a footnote to this one – but it's still one of his most perfectly realized creations. The long "Conic Section 3" in particular has some wonderful episodes, including some slippery chromatic runs near the start, a flowing midsection so emphatically tonal it verges on Philip Glass territory, and a slightly ludicrous sequence where the music constantly gets sucked back into inane burbling.–ND

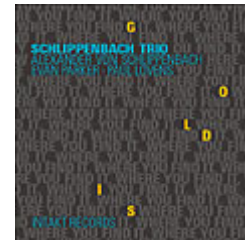
Schlippenbach Trio
GOLD IS WHERE YOU FIND IT
Intakt

Let's just get this out of the way: the Schlippenbach Trio is one of the longest-active groups in improvised music, formed in 1970 and working and recording fairly regularly over the last thirty-eight years.

Recordings like *Pakistani Pomade* (FMP, 1972) were full of a combination of fierce acrobatics and serious brawn that was a far cry from the contemporary Brötzmann/Van Hove/Bennink trio, much less

anything else on that side of the pond. But in the years since "With Forks and Hope," certainly things have changed in the trio's approach. On *Gold Is Where You Find It*, the trio's newest disc and its first for the Intakt label, saxophonist Evan Parker sticks to tenor, and his gruff sound gives the set a solid, foot-down consistency, even as it's carried along by drummer Paul Lovens' pulsing detail. The opening improvisation, "Z.D.W.A." begins with slap tongue and damped percussive rattle; Schlippenbach's chords are gauzy, light and almost hesitant, extrapolating a singsong progression, piano-roll fragments and Monkishness erupting as Parker and Lovens apply daubs around him. Unaccompanied low rumbles build into Jelly Roll Morton four minutes in, then kaleidoscope into Indent-era Cecil Taylorisms as Lovens enters with coppery thrash. It's a delicate elision of stylistic approaches that's natural and almost seamless. Sure, the pounding rhythm-field is still there, but Schlippenbach's integration of instrumental history into a free, collective context is more audible than ever.

There's long been a push-pull between longer pieces and bagatelles in the group's repertoire; indeed, pieces like "Range" (recorded at the 1974 Moers Festival, partially issued on *Three Nails Left*, FMP) were far too long to fit on an LP side. Yet the abovementioned *Pakistani Pomade* included very short pieces, ditto the "Fuels" series on *Complete Combustion* (FMP, 1998). This latest set includes six pieces around the five-minute mark or under, valuable encapsulations of the detail – there's that word again – in their music that range from the playful tone rows of "Slightly Flapping" and the clicks and pops of "K.SP" to the title track's miniature concerto. Some of these short pieces sound almost like they're extracted from a larger whole: it's a demonstration of their ability to instantly locate moments of complete empathy, within the briefest span. A rare thing, indeed.–CA



SLW
SLW
Formed



Googling around for the group name I came across Silver Wheaton Corporation, Sisters of the Living World, Stefano Lubiana Wines, Securities Litigation Watch (rather appropriate perhaps for these troubled times), Shift Left Word, Second Language Writing, and even, according to urbandictionary.com, "slw: some1 ppl f*ck randomly on the street", but in fact the name is short for *Sound Like Water*. This refers to a concert originally scheduled to take place in a disaffected swimming pool at the end of a brief residence in Brussels in late 2006, which included several studio sessions and a live performance in which the audience was surrounded by – immersed in might be more appropriate – the music of Burkhard Beins

(percussion, objects), Lucio Capece (soprano sax, bass clarinet and preparations), Rhodri Davies (harp, electroacoustic devices), and Toshimaru Nakamura (no-input mixing board). This uninterrupted 56-minute span of music should be played loud, but even at high volume it takes a while to get into; one senses the musicians too are sounding each other out for most of the first quarter of an hour. Things really get cooking about halfway through, with some ominous low end rumbles and thuds (Davies? Nakamura?) that send Beins into pulse mode, scraping stones and polystyrene around his drumheads, and tease out some gritty multiphonics from Capece's bass clarinet, building to a genuine climax (yes! complete with cymbal crashes!) five or so minutes later. Eventually the music retreats into more typically inscrutable EAI territory – pale eBowed sine tones lightly dusted with static drizzle, huffs, puffs, ticks and clicks – but it remains somehow scarred by the memory of the earlier explosion, like a conversation between four friends all studiously avoiding the elephant in the room. Eventually it picks up again five minutes or so before the end, coalescing around an obstinate mid-register drone (I think Davies is responsible for this one, but Nakamura's work in recent times has been so wide-ranging and unpredictable, I wouldn't be surprised if it was him), but fades out before it gets into any more trouble.

Though each of the four musicians has been loosely associated with so-called reductionism – though Capece freely admits he doesn't know "what reductionism is or means" – what's particularly exciting about this release is how full and rich the music is. "We didn't want the music to be identified with silence or quietness," he writes, "but with the organization of the material. The volume was quite high, though I wouldn't say it was extremely high or that the music could be identified with 'noise' as a genre or attitude." The activity level is high too, and it's fascinating to follow individual trains of thought as they veer into sidings or disappear into tunnels along the way. Capece describes the group's approach as one of "relating sounds in a simultaneous and immediately successive way without developing ideas. Ending and re-developing. The idea was to use different material but as one idea, keeping the tension." As descriptions go, that strikes me as being pretty close to the "in the moment" aesthetic associated with an earlier generation of improvisers. Indeed, those who prefer their improv more "old school" might be pleasantly surprised by SLW. It's convincing proof that EAI has matured enough

to acknowledge the value of the music it originally sought to distance itself from. What the world needs now, I'm told, is more liquidity – Sound Like Water is my idea of a liquid asset.–DW

Fred Van Hove
JOURNEY
Psi

I'm often leery of published statements about a musician's "influences", but I'll make an exception in this case: it's genuinely illuminating to read in the liner notes to *Journey* that one of Fred Van Hove's earliest musical inspirations was the bells from the carillon of the Antwerp cathedral. Like many of his solo recordings, this is a sustained, nearly hour-long improvisation, the pianist developing particular zones of activity with great patience, spending minutes at a time homing in on a narrow band of the keyboard or working variations on a single technique. Van Hove has developed something like a pianistic version of change ringing, as he piles up crisscrossing waves of sound that keep revealing new resonances and internal patternings. There's a sense of both musician and listener being entirely "inside" the music – which is to say the experience is less like listening to piano than to a church organ (one of the few musical experiences where you are, in a sense, actually *inside* the instrument). *Psi* has usefully inserted an index marker halfway through the piece, reflecting the sharp stylistic turn that occurs halfway through. The opening 30 minutes develop out of a series of gracefully broken glisses and giddy smears, which slowly coalesce into a hammered-out chordal rainstorm that teeters on the verge of full-blown Romantic agony. Part 2 begins with some inside-the-piano string-bending before plunging into a churning, pedal-down exploration of the instrument's lower registers; contrasting flickers of activity run like seams through this dark, trembling backdrop. This half is perhaps less exhilarating than the tipsy arabesques of part 1, but it's still a fine example of the kind of resonant quasi-architectural space that Van Hove can construct. *Journey* is a reminder of how sheerly beautiful dissonance can be, the nimbus of clashing notes and harmonics virtually floating free from the turbulent activity beneath; the results are strikingly different from the general run of free-ish solo piano discs, occupying a halfway point between Liszt and Muhai Richard Abrams's *Vision Towards Essence*.–ND



Carlos Zíngaro / Wilbert De Joode / Dominique Regef
SPECTRUM
Clean Feed



Spectrum is the work of a pan-European string trio that brings together Portuguese violinist Carlos Zíngaro, Dutch bassist Wilbert De Joode and French hurdy-gurdy player Dominique Regef. They take a different approach from similarly constituted groups like the String Trio of New York or the Kent Carter String Trio: no composed pieces or programmatic

music, no bagatelles or dance pieces here – this is unruly, rough-and-tumble free music. Another thing that sets the group apart is the use of the hurdy-gurdy, a Renaissance wheel violin which allows the player to accompany his melodies with a constant drone, much like a bagpipe. Early-music instruments rarely make their way into contemporary music, much less free improvisation, so *Spectrum's* unique palette is something of a treat for weird bowed-instrument loyalists.

The set begins with Zíngaro and de Joode's broad arco sashays, bolstered underneath by Regef's slight scrabble. These movements soon become tighter, detailed, less tonal, and the space occupied ever narrower through *ponticello*, massive bass clusters, and peals of metallic hurdy-gurdy scrape. Then, quickly and almost imperceptibly, the trio recedes into darting, hushed sounds and terse plucks in an array of sparse gestures and solid blocks. The final third of "Spectra 01" offers one of those "how did they get here" moments, Regef finding a nasty little low phrase to repeat and anchor a swarming line, subsuming de Joode's throaty pizzicato and teasing scuttled mimicry from Zíngaro's extended ballets before a unison hum closes it out. The second improvisation begins with Regef snipping away at the East European-flavoured violin-bass interplay, before a more resolute drone emerges to act as a launching pad for Zíngaro's stark song. Nearly a half-hour in length, "Spectra 02" offers a peek at the cranked facility of Regef's handiwork on an instrument that may seem almost primitive; his contributions flit within a narrow range, and are fleshed out by subtle sonic heaves. *Spectrum* is nasty, vicious and rhapsodic music, altogether an extraordinary addition to the improvised string-music pantheon.–CA

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CONTEMPORARY

Bernard Bonnier
CASSE-TÊTE
Oral



Recorded back in 1979, originally released in 1984 on the composer's own Amaryllis label and long OOP (though of course you can find it available for free download within seconds if you try), *Casse-Tête* is, to the best of my knowledge, the only album Montréal-born musique concrète composer Bernard Bonnier released in an all-too-short life – he died in 1994 aged 41. Surfing around a bit, I read that the empreintes DIGITALes label was supposed to release an audio DVD of Bonnier's complete work a couple of years ago, but the project seems to have been shelved. Maybe this long overdue reissue will kickstart it back into life. It ought to, as *Casse-Tête* is a blast. Bernard Bonnier (is

that him on the album cover? he looks rather like Gyro Captain in *Mad Max 2*) worked as assistant to Pierre Henry between 1970 and 1975 – *Soldier Boy* (of which more later) was realised in Henry's Apsome studios – and was no doubt familiar with *le maître's* famous 1967 genre-bending collaboration with Michel Colombier, *Messe Pour Le Temps Présent*. But whereas that sounds dated and stilted 41 years on, the seven tracks on *Casse-Tête* remain extraordinarily fresh, and seem to anticipate later developments in both musique concrète (Ned Bouhalassa's *Aérosol* is a not-so-distant cousin) and leftfield techno (*Vero-la-Toto* sounds like Aphex Twin in the schoolyard). Not so much mass for the present as mess for the future. Concrète purists might frown at Bonnier's over-reliance on irregularly overlapping loops, and technoheads might sniff at his rather rudimentary backbeats and primitive synth patches (not that that ever mattered to Richard D. James), but who cares when they're combined to thrilling effect in tracks like "Blue Marine"? *Soldier Boy* takes a snatch of Elvis Presley's song of the same name and mangles it just as well as Jim Tenney did "Blue Suede Shoes" in his celebrated *Collage #1* (1961). You can just tell Bonnier was having a ball with Henry's gear, looping The King to death and then digging him up and slicing up the royal cadaver some more. Sure, he gets a bit carried away, and the piece ends up collapsing under its own weight, but it takes risks and is fun to listen to. Nice to see this out and about again.–DW

Michael Byron
DREAMERS OF PEARL
New World

Dreamers of Pearl is a 53-minute work for solo piano in three movements, individually entitled "Enchanting the Stars", "A Bird Revealing the Unknown to the Sky" and "It is the Night and Dawn of Constellations Irradiated". If those titles tempt you to load up the convertible with plastic pyramids and gaudy crystals and drive out to Pahrump Nevada to await the arrival of the Martians (don't take any doves along), think



again. Michael Byron might be associated with the second wave of California minimalism – moving away from strict process-based music towards what I once described [elsewhere](#) as "solid state" – and much of his earlier work was luminously tonal, but *Dreamers of Pearl* is about as close to New Age ear candy as those "funny looking little critters" in *Mars Attacks* were to being ambassadors of interplanetary peace and love. The work's roots in minimalism are evident enough though, especially in the second movement, which moves through its clearly defined harmonic fields as patiently as Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians*, but the actual surface of the music is constantly changing, rhythmically irregular, and often tough and angular. Byron's music is fully notated, and the handsome 20-page booklet contains numerous extracts from the score which reveal its considerable metrical and harmonic intricacies (particularly in the first movement, in which the pianist has to negotiate a different key signature for each hand!), but sounds fresh enough to have been created in real time – one wonders at times whether he's hit upon a way of getting his music software to transcribe and print out a recording of an improvisation, so naturally do the notes lie under the fingers. As such, Scelsi's solo piano music

comes to mind, as does La Monte Young's *Well Tuned Piano*, a transcribed score of which wouldn't look all that different from *Dreamers of Pearl* in places. One wonders also whether Joseph Kubera, whose performance of the work is absolutely stunning, has learnt the piece by heart – which would be quite a feat – as it seems well nigh impossible to commit any of its myriad local details to long-term memory. But you could probably say that of the Ligeti *Etudes* too, come to think of it – and Byron's music, like Ligeti's, is instantly recognisable, perceptually challenging, beautifully proportioned and deeply satisfying. Check it out.–DW

Luc Ferrari
TUCHAN CHANTAL
Room40



"It's all in French, naturellement, my fluency in which is so poor that they could be talking about Sunday bus timetables in lower south east Perpignan and I'd be none the wiser," writes Nick Cain in his write-up of this in the November *Wire*. (Good job I was with him recently to act as live interpreter for his interview with Ghedalia Tazartès!) Quite frankly, he should have left it well alone, and so should you if your French listening comprehension isn't up to it. *Tuchan Chantal*, or *Tuchan, Portrait of a villager* as it's described on Ferrari's Wikipedia page, is an exercise in what the French would call *racler les fonds du tiroir*, or scraping the bottom of the barrel. It's a mini-hörspiel recorded in the village of Tuchan in the Corbières region in 1977, consisting basically of interviews Ferrari and his wife Brunhild conducted with a local 22-year-old woman, Chantal. As an example of homespun wisdom (she discusses everything from extra-marital sex to politics to Picasso) it's moderately interesting – I like her line "la propriété pourrit les gens".. "owning [your own house] makes people rotten" – but as a piece of music it's negligible. The interviews are interspersed with fragments of guitar music (sounds at times like a kind of octatonic Flamenco version of Monk's "Misterioso") and a little – not enough – of the rural soundscape (crickets, church bells, the usual stuff). Ferrari completists will no doubt lap it up, but unless they're fluent in French they're wasting their money.–DW

Gordon Mumma
MUSIC FOR SOLO PIANO 1960 – 2001
New World

Those of you who know Gordon Mumma only for his pioneering 1960s work with electronics – from the earwax-melting *Dresden Interleaf 13 February 1945* and *Megaton For Wm. Burroughs* to the raw cybersonics of *Hornpipe* – ought to know that, prior to his groundbreaking work with the Sonic Arts Union he did in fact study "traditional" composition and performance in the 1950s with Ross Lee Finney in Ann Arbor and George Exon at Interlochen. A talented pianist, he's well



versed not only in the contemporary repertoire – performing much of it in a duo with Robert Ashley back in the 60s – but also in Bach, Scarlatti, Haydn, Schoenberg, Webern and Bartók. This fine twofer from New World, beautifully produced and complete as ever with informative liner notes, may be entitled *Music For Solo Piano 1960 – 2001*, but only two of the works it contains date from the early 60s – the *Suite for Piano* (1960) and *Large Size Mograph* (1962) – even if seeds of the later piano music, notably 1997's *Jardin*, were planted back in the composer's formative years. The music is intimate, introspective and condensed – which could, once more, come as something as a surprise to those who only know of Mumma's work from the period of the ONCE Festival and the Sonic Arts Union – and reveals a remarkable ear for pitch and fondness for time-honoured contrapuntal techniques. But this is no exercise in neoclassical nostalgia: Mumma's take on serialism is as fresh in the *Eleven Note Pieces & Decimal Passacaglia* (1978) as it is in the thorny *Suite*, and when he chooses an extant work as a model – the Minuet from Haydn's *Symphony No. 47* in the second piece of 1996's *Threesome* – there's not an inkling of postmodern irony. There's enough set theory in the *Sushihorizontals* (1986 – 96) to keep a graduate class busy for several months, and, best of all, you can really hear how it works. Dean Vandewalle's performances are terrific, at one and the same time meticulous in their exploration of dynamics and timbre and *touchingly lyrical*. Now there are two words I bet you never thought of using to describe the music of Gordon Mumma.. get yourself a copy of this posthaste and think again.–DW

Eliane Radigue
NALDJORLAK
Shiin



A piece by Eliane Radigue for cello? Can't be done. So I thought when I was first told of this project while preparing an article on Radigue for *The Wire* three years ago. How could the composer of some of the most exquisite subtly evolving electronic music ever created forsake her trusty ARP synthesizer and write a piece for a solo stringed instrument? Then she told me it was for Charles Curtis, and I understood. With several splendid readings of Feldman (*Patterns In A Chromatic Field* (Tzadik), with pianist Alec Karis) and Lucier (if your collection doesn't include the double CD set with clarinetist Anthony Burr on *Antiopic*, do something about it) under his belt, and having worked extensively with La Monte Young (we're still waiting for his reading of Young's *Trio for Strings* – any news on that?), Curtis was evidently the man for the job. I can do no better than quote his excellent and informative liners: "*Naldjorlak* is structured around a tuning of the cello which seeks to consolidate, as nearly as possible, all of the resonating parts of the instrument. The reference for the tuning is found in the instrument itself: the so-called wolf tone. This refers to a particular note which stands out from all others as a jagged or excessively-resonant frequency; most string instruments have one such note. It results from a piling-up of wood and string frequencies relative to tautness, and is generally considered a blemish on an instrument's sound. For *Naldjorlak* I proposed focusing on the wolf tone because of

its instability and extraordinary spectral complexity. When tuning the entire cello to the wolf tone, the wolf frequency moves. One can never tune exactly to it, and the result is a tuning that spans a narrow range of frequencies, something like a small semitone. This small semitone became the foreground pitch material of the *Naldjorlak*, and can be followed through every section of the piece. Three of the four strings are tuned as closely as possible to the wolf tone, and a fourth string is tuned to a string tension which will cause the tailpiece to also resonate at the pitch of the wolf tone. The endpin is likewise tuned to the same pitch, by the length to which it is drawn out. Every adjustment of a single element causes changes in the other elements, but over time it is possible to reach a consensus tuning, which could be expressed as unison-plus-small-semitone."

Tuning the strings down to the wolf tone means they're slacker than they normally are when tuned to their traditional pitches of C, G, D and A, and anyone who's ever tried to play on slacker strings will be acutely aware of their sensitivity: the slightest increase in bow pressure results in a raising of pitch, which in turn creates numerous rich disturbances in the upper partials. Curtis's performance is truly stunning – not only in his ability to change bows almost imperceptibly (a real bugger for anyone playing sustained tones on a string instrument) but also, in the transitional sections, to move from one string to another, via a doublestop. The harmonic richness of the piece is simply staggering – it's easily as subtle and multilayered as in any of Radigue's tape works – and, far from being static ("an hour-long cello piece using one note? gimme a break") the music is constantly on the move, the tiniest change in finger and bow pressure opening up new avenues of complexity, not only in the domain of timbre, but also, curiously enough, rhythm, as the acoustic beats beloved of Lucier appear and disappear as Curtis zooms in on the wolf frequency with awesome precision. The later sections of the piece, when Curtis bows the tailpiece and even the endpin of the instrument, beggar belief. It all goes to make *Naldjorlak* one of the most exciting releases of recent times. And the good news is it's not alone: Radigue has already finished *Naldjorlak II* for Carole Robinson and Bruno Martinez, and *Naldjorlak III*, a trio for Robinson, Martinez and Curtis, is in the works. *Naldjorlak II* is scored for two basset horns, by the way. A piece by Eliane Radigue for two basset horns? Can't be done. Yes, it can. –DW

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ELECTRONICA

*Cristal
RE-UPS
Flingco Sound System*

It's nice to see an ex-member of Labradford stepping

into the relatively harsh glare of limited-to-500 culture. As part of Cristal, Bobby Donne, alongside Richmond, VA's Jimmy Anthony and Greg Darden, potters around in the not terribly under-populated area of computers/electronics and in predictable fashion, though it's no less pleasurable for being so. Like a lot of recumbent laptop composition, *Re-Ups* makes virtues of minimalism and temporal dissolution; the opening "Rimescolisi" slowly bubbles and wanes, like candles about out to snuff, and the following "Stars, Hide Your Fires" sets a hollowed-out drone, pegged at both ends of the audio spectrum (low rumble and high-pitch whine), rolling against flickering incidentals. Most of the album sits nicely within these parameters, though the hefty, asphalt blocks of noise the trio gruffly manhandle on "Left Of Swept" flag a significant, though under-explored shift in attention: indeed, more of this abrasion would have been welcome, to level out the more predictable dark ambient tendencies of some of the other tracks. *Re-Ups* often recalls something Touch might have released about fifteen years ago (the decisively edited, appealing blankness of Indicate's *Whelm* comes to mind), recalibrated for the modern laptop context. If you were a fan of the isolationist movement from way back when, this makes a lot of sense: it's all about subliminal movement, implied tension, and encroaching (rather than supplicating) ambience. If pushed, I'd ask for more risk taking, a little less featureless horizontal sprawl, and for Cristal to work towards standing out both from the current pack of faceless digitisers and from history's cold clutches. But I like *Re-Ups* fine and for a second album it's a strong intervention. Next time, though, more blood. -JD

John Levack Drever
CATTLE GRIDS OF DARTMOOR
Pataphonic

John Levack Drever, acoustic ecologist and co-founder of UK Soundscape, hails from Edinburgh, but completed his doctoral studies at Dartington, down in deepest Devon, hence the Dartmoor connection. In any case, there certainly aren't many cattle grids to be found near Goldsmiths College in London, where he currently lectures in composition. That said, it's hard to discern what's actually composed here, though there's probably some Ferrari-esque *Presque Rien* sleight-of-hand I'm not aware of: to all intents and purposes what we have is a 71-minute field recording of cars (and the occasional horse) crossing, umm, the cattle grids of Dartmoor. Since Drever, as the name of his label implies, is an enthusiastic student of the science of imaginary solutions, 'pataphysics (his work previously came to my attention on the Sonic Arts Network '[Pataphysics compilation](#)) I'd like imagine there's some deep structure to it all, some hidden level of meaning involved, but I sure as hell can't work out what it is. Maybe he loaded his mixfiles into ProTools and juggled them around so that each passage over the cattle grid occurs at a time precisely determined by some obscure numerological system derived from the cattle grids' precise map reference; maybe his Audio Technica AT815ST stereo shotgun microphone (gee, thanks for telling



us, that makes all the difference) was specially positioned in a gesture of prayer to face the cemetery in Bagneux where Alfred Jarry was buried on November 2nd 1907. Who knows? But I probably shouldn't take the piss – it's clear people down in Devon take their cattle grids seriously. Have a read at this: http://www.legendarydartmoor.co.uk/chagford_grids.htm –DW

Peter Rehberg
WORK FOR GV 2004-2008
Editions Mego



Many praise him as one of the most eloquent computer musicians of our time, but Peter Rehberg's ascent to Laptop Mountain's pinnacle still smacks a little of intelligent positioning. While his mutability is admirable, he's been quick to throw his lot in with the metal-not-metal hordes, and while I don't doubt it's down to genuine interest, there's something overly cosy about this meeting of extremities. And while as a navigator of the nether regions of electronics, Rehberg's cachet is undeniable, sometimes his work is underwhelming – if some of the tracks on *Work For GV 2004-2008* slipped out into the world under a different name, they'd be marked as tedious dark ambient. For what it's worth, those tracks are still tedious dark ambient, though I'll admit the production is of a higher cut than that of a bedroom gothic. There's a very fine line between truly oppressive sound design and mildly diverting mood piece, and too much of *Work For GV 2004-2008* fits the latter description, though this is possibly due to their functional design – they were created for puppeteer and choreographer Gisèle Vienne. Some of them feature author Dennis Cooper reading his work, which will please fans of his texts of transgression. Cooper's appearances are successful because the difference between the texts (psychosexual, obsessive portraits) and the delivery (lugubrious, detached) enacts a very real tension that's hard to map: it's probably the most provocative thing about *Work For GV 2004-2008*. Cooper's writings have always been admirable for their starkness and economy, their refusal to explain. When Rehberg's productions move into similar areas, they're more successful. "Slow Investigation"'s stalking, bruised melody winds from the speakers like a possessed, drugged serpent. It navigates unbearable melancholy and emotional distance in an inexplicable manner – particularly as these things aren't readily reconcilable. If anything, "Slow Investigation" recalls the monolithic slabs of synth that haunt Prurient's *Pleasure Ground*, which makes some critics' dismissal of Prurient and veneration of Rehberg amusing – if anything, Prurient's the more affecting and inventive of the two. "Boxes & Angels" is the other gem on here, an eleven-minute exploration of a gorgeous, shuddering loop. Much like Rehberg's artistic pinnacle, the third track from *Get Out*, its strength lies in both its accumulative and its affective properties. When it disappears briefly at seven minutes to make way for glass-bell drones, the latter are somehow rendered more gorgeous through this juxtaposition. Rehberg excels at these moments of uncomfortable beauty, and more of them would be very welcome. –JD

**Zilverhill
EOTVOS
Adeptsound**

Though this fine slab of dark ambient inaugurates a new label based in "the world's most isolated city", Perth in Western Australia, the roots of the project, like the roots of just about anything dark in Australia's brief history, can be traced back across the water in England. Zilverhill is a collaborative venture between Tim Bayes, aka Schuster, a veteran of 80s Industrial cassette culture (go a-googling and explore the murky connections between Schuster and Nottingham-based Dieter Müh and, surprise, you'll eventually unearth a Nurse With Wound connection via Colin Potter) and pRESENT dAY bUNA, about whom I've been able to find precious little except that his name is Paul and he's currently located in Sheffield. But whoever and wherever they are, they've signed a terrific release here, 70 minutes of beautifully structured electronica based on transformed loops of everything from disembodied answerphone messages and radio broadcasts to oppressive synthesizers and crunching machinery. There appears to be a clue as to what some of these field recordings might be over at Cyclic Defrost ("the sound of a gas rig thudding and grinding underwater off the far north coast..") but most of them remain fascinatingly inscrutable. Unlike many similar albums that find their way here, this one had me listening all the way through, three times in a row; it's rare to come across a disc that sustains interest without flagging for an hour and ten minutes, but this one does it just fine. Whether the album title has anything to do with Hungarian-born composer and conductor Péter Eötvös I couldn't say. Add that to the list of unanswered questions raised by this splendid debut outing. *-DW*



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