

“People”). But it is a sombre, barely  
scintillating that growls and shrieks  
and tells stories here.  
padding guitars and bass, the  
drenched in strings conjure  
picture, an oddly familiar  
nevertheless completely  
angular, at times  
a deeply anachronistic record,  
post-rock meets 2017 in a plea  
experimentalism that has  
even though the audience  
identified out of existence. As  
puts it on “Cold & Well-Lit Place”:  
here is broke/No, no one here  
to fear/And while they say that  
things in life are free/Everything  
comes with a fee”.

#### Penguin Cafe

**The Imperfect Sea**  
Cherry Red CD/DL/LP  
You don't usually come in as singular  
as that inherited by Arthur Jeffes.  
of Penguin Cafe Orchestra  
Simon Jeffes, he initially reunited  
his ensemble in 2007 for concerts  
marking the tenth anniversary of Jeffes's  
reluctant to assume the weight  
of a leader's mantle with the  
musicians, he then assembled a  
reformation of the group (including  
trained musicians alongside  
of Suede and Gorillaz), performing  
Jeffes Sr's music and his own  
compositions; *The Imperfect Sea* is the third  
Penguin Cafe album.

though there were no particularly  
ingredients in the bouncy minimalist  
global folk influences and genteel  
Robinson surrealism that made up  
Penguin Cafe Orchestra's sound, over their  
existence it became an instantly  
recognisable signature. Jeffes charts a  
course in his stated aim to continue  
the musical world his father  
created without attempting a direct  
indeed he often seems over-cautious,  
lingering around the dustsheet-shrouded  
of a favourite such as 1987's  
album *Mobile* in album opener *Ricercar*,  
its momentum/stasis pairing of circular  
motif, strummed ukulele and loping  
bass set against a sweet but entirely  
surprising sustained string melody.  
*Paradise* and *Protection* also rely too  
heavily on sweeping violins drawing arcs  
of busy minimalist motifs.

when Jeffes reins in a tendency to  
orchestrate, he shares his father's  
talent for painting delightful scenes with  
limited palettes, as shown by the string-  
driven fourths and muffled, suspended  
of *Control 1 (Interlude)* and the gentle  
medica and Fender Rhodes duet amid a  
rainfall of woodblock strikes on *Half  
Intimacy*. A pleasingly imprecise acoustic  
version of Kraftwerk's “Franz Schubert”  
reclaims the original's dreamy serenity, while  
Penguin Cafe Orchestra's own *Now Nothing*  
reweaves a richly reverberant and emotive  
piano rereading that convinces as its  
own entity, rather than a tribute.

Bliss

#### Ivo Perelman & Matthew Shipp

**The Art Of Perelman-Shipp: Vols 1–7**  
Leo 7×CD

As befits a pair of artists who now record  
on an astronomical – or titanic – scale,  
the titles all come from the names of  
Titans, some of which are more familiar as  
planetary satellites. It's tempting to scan  
down the list and think of this as Perelman's  
and Shipp's personal version of *Interstellar  
Space*. The music is frequently exalted and  
searching, but where John Coltrane and  
Rashied Ali always seemed to be pushing  
at the integrations of harmony and rhythm,  
this extraordinary duo have a much more  
grounded and physical (as opposed to  
metaphysical) aesthetic. Besides, there  
are other voices involved: bassists William  
Parker and Michael Bisio appear on some  
of the discs, drummers Whit Dickey, Bobby  
Kapp and Andrew Cyrille on others.

It's worth remembering that the Titans  
were the offspring of an earth goddess  
and sky god, and there is something of  
that opposition in all the music. It's most  
noticeable on the first volume, where the  
groundedness of Shipp's piano provides the  
centripetal energy that holds the saxophone  
player in a tight orbit round specific key  
centres and melodic ideas. Sometimes it  
works the other way round. As a Brazilian,  
Perelman has always dug into elements  
of his native traditions. Here, on *Tarvos  
(Volume 2)* and *Rhea (Volume 5)* in particular,  
there are ideas that sound remarkably like  
Heitor Villa-Lobos's *Chôros*. But as the  
great man himself said, “I don't use folklore,  
I am the folklore” – it's clear that Perelman  
has shaped these themes himself and  
spontaneously, using a generative grammar  
of harmonic and rhythmic relations and  
displacements to create a rich improvising  
language that sits perfectly alongside  
Shipp's highly personal repositioning of jazz  
piano language.

If at moments on *Hyperion (Volume 4)*  
and *Rhea* again, he alludes to Ellington, or  
to Monk at his most introspective, and if at  
others the attack refers to stride or even  
ragtime techniques, it is not that Shipp  
is trying to create a synoptic language of  
jazz piano, and more that he has rolled all  
this information into a ball that he can then  
propel round the heavens.

With each volume available as a  
standalone release, this seven CD sequence  
takes Perelman's Leo discography to a  
remarkable 50 discs. If that sounds like  
devotion shading into redundancy, or a  
quixotic notion of what a shrinking physical  
disc market might be able to sustain,  
consider what John Coltrane and Bob  
Thiele might have been doing on Impulse! if  
Coltrane had lived on into the CD era, and  
that's by no means improbable. Given how  
we lap up recovered sessions of unreleased  
material, there's no apology to be made for  
an immersive exposure to this contemporary  
master. Titans both, Shipp and Perelman  
are making some of the most exciting jazz based  
music around today.

There's no thematic or programmatic  
connection between these records – the  
titles came later – but to listen to them  
in sequence is to experience two minds

intensely at work and at play across a grand  
field of sound.

Brian Morton

#### The Residents

##### *The Ghost Of Hope*

Cherry Red CD/DL/LP

What good timing for The Residents to  
return with this concept album inspired  
by US newspaper cuttings about late 19th  
and early 20th century railroad crashes,  
and stories that are typically delirious and  
bizarre. How about the howling harmonium  
dirge “Killed At A Crossing”, about a couple  
killed by a self-powered rail car? Or “Train  
Vs Elephant”, where a vengeful elephant  
charges a train, with chillout tribal techno  
inflections and gratuitous animal sound  
effects?

The titular *Ghost* makes its appearance  
in “The Crash At Crush” with its tankard-  
swinging, string-swooping seasick shanty  
remembrance of the hapless promoter who  
organised a sort of railroad demolition  
derby that ended up in a fireball, shrapnel  
killing unlucky panicking spectators. Crowd  
noises and explosions are all recalled here,  
cinematically layered beneath a vocal like a  
radio sportscaster's play-by-play, before  
“*The Ghost Of Hope said no*”. Only in America.

The Residents, with Eric Drew Feldman,  
tell these shaggy dog tales that are too  
weird not to be true, and stud them with  
effects ranging from squealing brakes to  
crackling fires, chirping crickets set against  
aggregated synths; and so many strings,  
cranking the pathos to 11. The album never  
quite wallows in gross out carnage or tragedy  
or blame (though these are here, for sure),  
but spins these yarns, perverse detail at a  
time, with the laconic humour of a short story  
by Richard Brautigan or Thomas Pynchon,  
stopping just short of mockery. “Horrors Of  
The Night” reels off a catalogue of crash  
injuries in a voice sung-spoken in a matter  
of fact twang, like a shrug, a campfire tale.  
“*Life is a lonely train*”, they sing, “*wrecked  
by God*”.

Recent political events being what they  
are, it's hard not to imagine this album as  
topical commentary. So much of American  
history can be described as a circus or a  
trainwreck, equal parts catastrophic and  
opportunistic, comic and grotesque; but if  
there's any consolation here, it's that it was  
ever thus. And as this creaking train judders  
along, pieces falling off along the way,  
watching these guys offering their droll sonic  
commentary from the side of the tracks can  
keep you sane.

Emily Bick

#### Alex Rex

##### *Vermillion*

Tin Angel CD/DL/LP

There's no shortage of ideas in *Vermillion*,  
the debut solo album from Alex Neilson. The  
English-raised adopted Glaswegian has  
been the go-to drummer and percussionist  
for a swathe of contemporary alternative  
noteworthies over the past dozen or  
more years, most recently Trembling  
Bells, but also including Richard Youngs,  
Jandek, David Keenan, Will Oldham and  
Alasdair Roberts. Neilson's broad musical

influences – from The Watsons to,  
apparently, mystic 12th century composer  
and writer Hildegard von Bingen – have been  
captured in many an interview. So maybe  
it shouldn't be a surprise that a similarly  
wide array of influences are melded here,  
albeit in a brew that's as surprising for its  
festival-friendly musical hooks as it is for its  
wondrously strange subversion of folk music  
expectations.

Some of those offbeat moments are  
musical. Neilson, gravel-voiced like fellow  
singing drummer Levon Helm, nasal-voiced  
intoning like Dylan and country harmonising  
like a Bakerville Boy, is an unlikely charm,  
but the rustic harmonies, eerie dissonance,  
folk and baroque chord changes and  
perky swirling 1960s sounds that  
alternate throughout are a cloud-dwelling  
carousel compared to the lyrics. The  
lyrics were apparently inspired by Ovid's  
*Metamorphosis*, and in “Song For Dora”  
he does indeed transform into a bird, but  
the touchstones are more like medieval  
epics, the macabre and old-time religion, or  
simply, Dante's Hell and voodoo New Orleans  
brought to Alexander Trocchi's Glasgow.

Images of eeriness leap out, the “*dead  
bird in the stomach of another dead bird*” of  
the waltzing “Please Make Me God (But Not  
Yet)”, the repeated refrain of “*and it's horror  
heaped on horror*” in the cavernous spooky  
polyphony of “The Screaming Cathedral”,  
the “*pounding on my grave*” in insistent  
midnight party rocker “Song For Dora”, or  
the “*rosethorn in my throat*” in “Lucy”, a  
country song of love and betrayal about  
London. But Neilson's as likely to shift gear  
into provocative sarcasm – “*I once knew a  
girl in Glasgow, who was a festering sore*” he  
sings wryly on “Adam Had No Navel” – or even  
ludicrous sauciness. In the song “The Life Of  
A Wave”, when the sparse midtempo roots  
rock soars into frenzied lyrical declaiming,  
the line “*And I'm thinking of you now with  
your delicious tits that dashed me against  
the rocks of Oxford*” blares like a gleeful  
contender for *Literary Review's* Bad Sex  
award. Who knows where Neilson's solo  
transformation is going, but the impish rascal  
is worth keeping a eye on.

Katrina Dixon

#### Karriem Riggins

##### *Headnod Suite*

Stones Throw CD/DL/2×LP

Drummer and producer Karriem Riggins  
was certainly everywhere in 2016, with the  
production of Common's *Black America  
Again* capping a year that saw him put in  
work with Kanye West, Kaytranada and  
The Roots, among others. But Detroit born  
Riggins is no newcomer; as a veteran rap  
producer and in-demand jazz drummer, with  
a catalogue that stretches back some two  
decades, he has produced far more music for  
far more people than you'd think.

The son of jazz keyboardist Emmanuel  
Riggins, Karriem cut his teeth as part of Jay  
Dee's inner circle in the late 1990s, flexing  
production chops on Common's *One Day  
It'll All Make Sense* and the Dilla-steered  
*Like Water For Chocolate* albums, and  
playing drums on Dilla's 2001 *Welcome 2  
Detroit*; he would later executive produce