

ELECTRONIC SOUND



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CAN

INSIDE THE KRAUTROCK
KALEIDOSCOPE

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We're heading deep inside the krautrock kaleidoscope with this month's cover stars, the one and only Can. On the eve of his 84th birthday and with Spoon/Mute preparing to unleash a fascinating series of unreleased live recordings, we speak to Irmin Schmidt about the band he created with Michael Karoli, Holger Czukay and Jaki Liebezzeit at the end of the 1960s. As we try to deconstruct their special brand of sonic voodoo, Irmin reveals the inner workings of Can and his own memories of one of the most influential outfits of their era.

Since a hefty chunk of our interview with Irmin is about Can's unique live shows, we thought it would also be interesting to ask our man Kris Needs to write about seeing the band perform on their 1973 UK tour. The gig took place at Aylesbury Friars and it cost 80p to get in. Kris' vivid recollection makes you feel like you might have been there yourself. It's a real service to those of us who didn't have the pleasure of witnessing Can live, evoking the excitement and the peculiarly altering effect that they seemed to generate.

Our cover story prompted a great story in the office from someone who remembered hearing Can for the first time in the mid-1980s. In a place that resembled the flat in 'Withnail & I', with people he'd only met that night, he recalls "an incredible beat and a guy singing about mushrooms" making the room seem to evaporate. It was a mind-expanding trip, without the need for drugs. What he was listening to was the side one of 'Tago Mago', recorded in 1971, but sounding like music from the future. Fifty years later, it still does.

Electronic Sound is all about music that sounds like it's from the future, whether it was made half a century ago or yesterday. So we're delighted to also have Gary Numan, another venerable veteran of tomorrow, in this month's magazine. Elsewhere, Laurie Anderson talks about the making of 'O Superman', Der Plan discuss replacing themselves with robots, and we explore the work of the much-missed starfighter Robert Calvert. The future, it would seem, ain't what it used to be!

Electronically yours
Push and Mark

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CROWD CLOUD

Haneda Airport, Tokyo, Japan

May 2021

Pop music has always had a soft spot for the theme of travel, but it's avant-garde electronics that provide ground for a more conceptual relationship. Pierre Schaeffer's 'Railroad Study' from 1948 gave us some early *musique concrète* by using just the sound of trains. In 1976, Kraftwerk attempted the same while recording 'Trans-Europe Express', but the results were deemed undanceable.

Two years later, in 1978, Brian Eno made 'Music For Airports'. In the liner notes, he said his album would take a new approach to music that would "accommodate many levels of listening attention without enforcing one in particular", and famously, that the music "must be as ignorable as it is interesting".

You can't help but be reminded of Eno's seminal album when listening to Yuri Suzuki's latest sonic sculpture, 'Crowd Cloud'. After all, it is installed at Tokyo's Haneda Airport. Like Eno, Suzuki recognises the airport as an intriguing social space. "The airport is usually a neutral filter between worlds," he says.

These are spaces of transience, environments to be passed through, turning people into anonymous units unsure of their identity. Yet what 'Crowd Cloud' attempts is to alter the meaning of a place through sound. It consists of 100 specially crafted speaker horns clustered together to emit recordings of the five Japanese vowel sounds sung by Japanese composer Miyu Hosoi.

Thanks to each speaker horn being installed with its own unique algorithm, these recordings are played continuously at different tempos, tones and rhythms, and in random orders, generating ever-evolving compositions of "hmms" and "ahhs" and "ohhs".

Part of 'Vision Gate', a series of installations at Tokyo's airports curated by Italian architect Paola Antonelli, the idea for 'Crowd Cloud' came from pondering the mercurial identity of Japan, which Suzuki says is frequently framed in the West as "something curious, something exotic and something different from Western culture".

As well as illuminating cultural overlap (the sounds could be mistaken for English), these vocalic compositions echo around the wide halls, harmonising with voices on tannoy and converging with rolling luggage, transforming Haneda Airport into one big live instrument. Turns out you can do quite a bit with just five simple vowels.





PHOTO: TAKASHI KAWASHIMA

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Can 'Stuttgart 75 Fünf (Excerpt)' / 'Vernal Equinox (Edit)' purple vinyl seven-inch

This month's exclusive seven-inch single features an excerpt from Can's new live album and an edit of an original studio classic

Our latest seven-inch release showcases the two sides of Can – the touring spontaneous composition ensemble and the studio laboratory technicians. The A-side is an excerpt from the band's new live album, 'Stuttgart Live 75', which eschews track titles, opting for anonymous tags that arrange the concert into five numbered pieces – 'Stuttgart 75 Eins', 'Stuttgart 75 Zwei', and so on – of various lengths.

At nine-and-a-half minutes long, 'Stuttgart 75 Fünf' is the shortest cut on the album, but it's an excellent example of how Can would deftly weave snippets and ideas from their studio songs into their live performances. You can detect the DNA of their classic track 'Vernal Equinox' emerging on this excerpt, but it's not a straight live replication of what they did in the studio. Instead, it's a whole new composition that forms part of a wider piece. The AA-side is an edit of the original version of 'Vernal Equinox' and you can compare and contrast these two superb tracks as you flip your purple vinyl disc over.

"The strange thing is, with the good concerts like Stuttgart in 1975, I don't remember much about them," says Irmin Schmidt, the only surviving member of the seminal mid-1970s line-up of Can. "What I remember are the personal experiences with people I met before or after the concerts and how these people made an impression on me. With a good concert, it's a work you have put out into the world, and then you can forget it. The bad concerts are something else. They sort of stay stronger in your memory and the feeling eats at you. With successful work, I always say, 'There is no blood on it anymore', but if there is blood on it, it still hurts.

"We didn't really play 'Vernal Equinox' on this live excerpt. It's a kind of a version. Every time we played tracks from our records, they became something totally different. I remember

a concert in Croydon, for example, a very nice concert where the audience was great. They kept asking for 'You Doo Right' all the time. They were screaming and chanting, 'You! Doo! Right! You! Doo! Right!'. So we played 'You Doo Right', but they didn't recognise it and they continued asking for it even after we had played it!

"We used the atmosphere and certain elements of 'Vernal Equinox' in this live excerpt, but not much. We used them like quotations and then developed a new possibility for what the piece could be. This is how Can performed live. There is another version of 'Vernal Equinox', from a television show I think, which is amazing. The rhythm is very jazzy and Jaki Liebezeit's playing was like a virtuoso. Jaki was one of the greatest drummers ever. He could be incredibly complicated and complex in a jazz sense, but then on the other hand he could deliver such a rock energy like nobody else. He was just extraordinary."

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MODULATE AND EDUCATE

The Moog studio in a cardboard box

Recalling the early days of synth companies, when their most urgent mission was to teach the public about synthesis, North Carolina's finest have come up with a new package they're calling the Moog Sound Studio. It's described as "a new semi-modular synthesiser experience", and this sleight-of-marketing has created two systems – a Mother-32 paired with a DFAM and a DFAM buddied up with a Subharmonicon. Each option comes with an audio mixer and power distribution hub, a two-tier rack mount kit, patch cables and a patch cable organiser. On top of that, you get a patch book, guided exercises, games to inspire experimentation, and custom artwork designed exclusively for Moog Sound Studio owners (stickers and a poster!). It's bound to appeal to a lot of us, but especially organisations and institutions that might want to create a mobile and flexible music-making resource to delight, whether that's for members of the public at an exhibition, or students in schools and universities. Available from your favourite Moog dealer for a little over £1,000. moogmusic.com





PULSE

LEONIDAS & HOBBS

UK duo breaking Balearic borders

WHO THEY?

Leo Stavropoulos and Andrew Richardson make house of the Balearic bent, despite living 400 miles apart. Andrew holds court in Edinburgh where he runs his Hobbes Music label, releasing work from the likes of Glasgow's Auntie Flo and JD Twitch of Optimo. Leo meanwhile is London to the bone. He came up DJing in the 90s around London's Wardour Street, before building his own sound system and starting the audiophilic 'lovetoparty' nights out.

WHY LEONIDAS & HOBBS?

A lifetime of playing records has obviously imbued them with an ear for what makes a crowd move, but a portion of their appeal also boils down to something else entirely. Their 2017 surprise hit EP 'Rags Of Time', which earned re-presses and praise from juggernauts like Andrew Weatherall, was constructed around flamenco guitar, while their new seven-track EP 'Aranath' melts Balearic and techno with more elements that seldom grace a 4/4. Namely this comes via the fingers of featuring artist Riad Abji, whose cello and tanpura (an Indian drone instrument) glide over ambient synths, acid gurgles, tickling hi-hats and thumping bass. It's far from routine, which explains the appetite.

TELL US MORE...

More on Abji, who aside from being a classical maestro and Andrew's brother-in-law was also releasing music on em:t, Ntone and Ninja Tune around the turn of the millennium as part of Paul Frankland's chill-out outfits, Woob, Max & Harvey and Journeyman. And what better word to close on, journeymen being a suitable descriptor for Leonidas & Hobbes, who have earned their musical licence by education, experience and examination. Top marks all round.

ISAAK LEWIS-SMITH

'Aranath' is out now on Hobbes Music

UNDER THE INFLUENCE

James frontman **Tim Booth** reflects on keeping meditation under your hat, Iggy's tail and how Brian Eno knocked some scents into him

INTERVIEW: MATT PARKER

SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL

"I was brought up in a really sterile middle-class household in Clifford, Yorkshire, and my parents were very much about appearances, God bless them. My sister had a record player, though. One of the earliest memories I have, is her playing me Leonard Cohen and telling me that these were great lyrics, which put in my head that poets were better than singers.

"Another early memory is being at my granny's house, and the whole family watching 'Top Of The Pops'. I remember The Rolling Stones coming on and my granny saying, 'I don't like The Rolling Stones', and turning the television off. I didn't like her very much, so I remember kind of making a mental note to check out this band that she thought would be a bad influence on me. I think that was the seed of the profane – of something that had a bit of juice and sparkle!"

MEDITATION

"I was very sick between 12 and 21 with an inherited liver disease. I actually died when I was 21 – I stopped breathing in hospital – so I couldn't do drugs and alcohol. I worked out that all my heroes needed drugs to get into those connected states, but I thought, 'How do you attain that without drugs?'. That became my kind of lifelong search, and probably saved my life.

"I watched lots of band members go down in flames, and I'm sure that would have been me if I could have joined in. But I couldn't. I became part of a meditation group to try and help one of our band members who was having schizophrenic episodes. It didn't work for him, but it did work for me and Jimmy [James' bass player Jim Glennie]. So we were meditating like teenagers wank! It was 16 hours every weekend and two hours every day. For three-and-a-half years, I was celibate, no alcohol, no drugs. James were playing with The Smiths throughout that whole period, and we were keeping it quiet because we realised the rock 'n' roll press might not be so open!"

BIRDLAND

"I went to Shrewsbury School, a boys' boarding school, and it was a bit like a Victorian prison. Fortunately, the kids all had good record collections. I remember Supertramp coming through, and getting the first Queen album.

"One night, I was told that my father would probably die. He'd had two strokes and was having an operation, and they didn't think he'd survive the anaesthetic. I couldn't sleep, so I sneaked into my study after lights-out and I put on Patti Smith's album 'Horses'. I heard 'Birdland' and the opening line is, 'His father died / And left him a little farm in New England / All the long black funeral cars left the scene / And the boy was just standing there alone'.

"I was just taken apart. I sold my whole record collection the next week, and vowed I wouldn't listen to anything else until I could find something as powerful as that again."

SCHOOL OUTINGS

"Patti was connected to punk, and so that's what I threw myself into. Along with two friends, I organised the first school trip to a rock gig. We were 30 public school boys, all dressed in uniform, and we went to Wolverhampton to watch The Clash, The Slits, the Buzzcocks and Subway Sect as part of the 'White Riot' tour. Luckily the punks wore school uniforms too, so nobody could quite work out whether we were being ironic or not.

"Tables and chairs were flying and the school teachers were fucking terrified. We were forced to leave the room for The Slits because they couldn't handle these 16-year-old schoolboys watching it.

"Later on, we persuaded the church organist to drive us to Manchester to watch Iggy Pop. We ditched him, and ran down to the front before he could pull us out. Iggy came on with blood on his chest, with leather pants and a horsehair tail between his legs. It was the sexiest fucking thing I'd ever seen. Just glorious in its debauchery..."





HEAVEN SCENT

"The only person who could ever 'hear' our demos the way we did was Brian Eno. He would sit with headphones on from 9am to 5pm, listening to these howling fucking noise cassettes, making notes, then go, 'I found this gem here...'. He'd play back 30 seconds and a great song would emerge. It would blow us away. He has an amazing mind that just wants to keep on exploring.

"I'd take my kids to meet him and it was like visiting a magician. He'd be working on some music, then he'd take us into a pitch-black room and show us these light boxes, which would start glowing mysteriously with colourful things. And then he'd say, 'Would you like to smell smells that nobody has ever smelled in the history of mankind?'. He'd get these scents made up of the most bonkers fucking things. He'd tell us, 'This one is vanilla and motorcycle tyres!', or 'This one is tomato leaves, seaweed and iron!'. He's just brimming with ideas in all the sensory dimensions you can imagine."

(NOT) THE SAME OLD SONGS

"I read a great article by Martin Amis that influenced me. He was reviewing The Rolling Stones, and said, 'It's the same set every night. The gig in London is no different to the gig in Rome. This is not a living communication anymore'. I remember thinking, 'That's a brilliant observation. And we don't want to do that'.

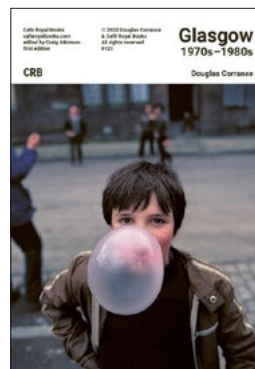
"That's why James changed the set-list every night, not knowing half the songs we were playing, trying to improvise. The audience got that there was a big risk being taken, and how that puts you in the moment. We were meditating, you know, so we were studying being in the moment – a bit of Zen. We wanted to keep shaking up the fucking Etch A Sketch!"

James' new album, 'All The Colours Of You', is released by Virgin Music Label & Artists Services on 4 June

HOT SHOTS

Photo series providing endless inspiration

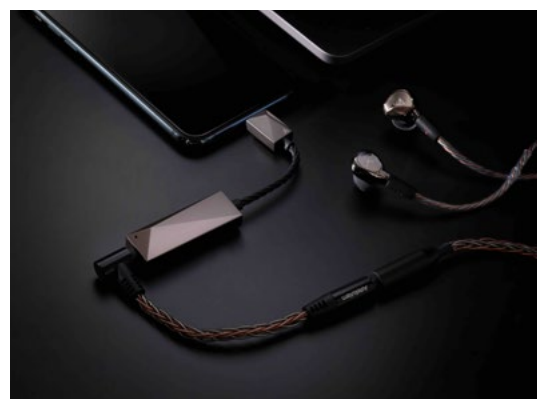
Best described as a one-man photographic factory, Café Royal Books functions as a deep well of inspiring source material for creative types. Run by Craig Atkinson from the Merseyside seaside town of Southport, each weekly publication focuses on a specific photographer and subject. Recent editions include rare snaps of the East End by legendary music photographer Brian Griffin, while burned-out motorbikes, eerie-looking dogs, and John Claridge's 'Monoliths Sculptures Fun And Death', which look rather like holiday snaps from Andrei Tarkovsky's classic 'Stalker' film, are among the other highlights. You can also find Craig Atkinson's own pictures of Brutalist monuments like Trellick Tower, the Barbican and the famed Preston Bus Station. Each issue costs £6.50, but with monthly and annual subscription deals available, you will not be disappointed. Our apologies to your bank account. caferoyalbooks.com



CABLE TIED

DAC hits the spot

British firm Astell&Kern have impressed with their smart audio accessories. And while £109 might seem like a steep price to pay for something that's the size of a packet of chewing gum, they've jammed a lot into their new USB-C Dual DAC cable. You get high-resolution playback up to 384kHz, bespoke capacitors to stop power fluctuations, and a polished metal zinc alloy body to help protect the hardware. If you're sick of lousy listening experiences on your digital devices, this will give you much more bang for your buck. astellkern.co.uk



NEEDS MUST

Freewheeling through time and space, **Kris Needs** continues his adventures in sound. This month: Eleanor Grant's '(I Am Ready) Sexual Healing'



The craze for New York dance radio station recordings sweeping Ladbroke Grove around core maniacs Youth, Alex Paterson and yours truly, had reached a raging peak by Christmas 1982, with anyone visiting the US commanded to fill C90s with the revolutionary mastermixes broadcast on KISS-FM, WBLS and WKTU.

As an early convert and evangelist, The Clash's Mick Jones liked to turn tapes he'd made into little works of art. After a festive fry-up at the legendary Mike's Cafe, he smiled, "Happy Christmas", and pressed one into my palm. Hand-decorated with a dollar sign skyline, Mick called it 'NY Hits!'.

Scooting back to the Ladbroke Grove flat I shared with Youth, the cassette presented a mesmerising taste of cutting-edge electronic dance music, including Marvin Gaye's exquisite, quiet storm, rumpo masterpiece 'Sexual Healing'. Youth and I loved that already, marvelling at the complex tiptoeing 909 drum machine pattern, always finding it hard to resist donning antlers nicked from some house party, sequined jockstraps and silk robes as the song worked its lurve-god spell.

Astonishingly, the track on Mick's tape was cut with a female answer version, giving the lady's retort to Marvin's angel-voiced exhortations, rapping, "I'm wide awake / Oh for heaven's sake..." or singing, "I'm yours just for the asking / Oh baby just ask me", over the song's familiar evocative throb, now bolstered by wah-wah guitar and keening new synth melody.

As usual, I had to find this tune (along with everything else on the tape) and there it was at Soho's Groove Records emporium. Released on South Carolina R&B imprint Catawba, the singer was Eleanor Grant, who issued several gems throughout the 80s. Blessed with a lovely, lilting voice with expressive range, for Marvin's classic she was produced by former 60s Detroit songwriter George Kerr, and Reggie Griffin (about to strike the electro market with Technofunk), mixed by hotshot studio duo Sergio Munzibai and John Morales, and engineered by Bob Blank, suggesting it'd been recorded at his Blank Tapes studio. The eight-minute dub reared as a captivating space-hump gonad-soaper. Rummaging for obscure nuggets for this column, there it was again, battered from many a session but still playable, and still magical.

Finally, 'Babble On An' Ting: Alex Paterson's Incredible Journey Beyond The Ultraworld With The Orb' is out this month. I feel like a corked-up water buffalo allowed to evacuate his bulging bowels after the year-long wait since its completion. Hope you like it!

LOOP GURU

Reinventing old school cassettes

When Chichester-based music tech lecturer Toby Bain popped up on Channel 4's 'Grayson's Art Club', you could hear the collective coo for miles. Toby creates tape loops from field recordings, builds them into cassette casings, and mixes the sounds live on his trusty Fostex 4-track. "The idea came about when one of my students was interested to know how 4-track machines work," explains Toby. "I was demonstrating how to make loops and, as I had taken apart a cassette, I thought I would build something to enter into 'Art Club'." Utilising some forest recordings, it occurred to him that he could mix the four channels to craft a mini audio adventure. What's more, he could also make a vignette of the scene that used the moving parts of the cassette player. 'The Campsite' has a flickering flame campfire and a yacht passes by on the 'The Island'. "My favourite is probably the forest, as it's the original," says Toby. "But I'm most proud of 'The Windmill'. It took days to get the cardboard cogs to work." He says he has a couple more models up his sleeve, after which he will be drawing a line under the project, although he won't be packing the Fostex away any time soon. "I've started making chord-based loops," he explains. "So each fader lets you swap between different chords. It's like a really cheap Mellotron." [instagram.com/tobyclbain](https://www.instagram.com/tobyclbain)



BUZZ FEED

Unearthing Mad Wasp Radio's magical delights

Broadcasting from a studio in a converted Peterborough garage, Mad Wasp Radio is quite the treat. Funded by donations and entirely ad-free, their esoteric output includes the 1970s disco to punk show 'Sequins To Suburbs' and the 1980s hip hop and electro programme 'Old School Boombox'. Chief among its line-up is 'The Magic Window', which has us reaching for our virtual dial each week. "'The Magic Window' is all about getting ears on good music," says host Steven Anderson, aka Letters From Mouse. "I tend to stick to more downtempo electronica with some IDM and experimental stuff creeping in, but it's an hour of properly chilled sounds." Released last year by the Music Is The Devil label, the 'Looking Through The Magic Window' compilation is a great sampler for the show, featuring the likes of Giants Of Discovery, Dogs Vs Shadows and Dohnavür, with all proceeds going to the station. "Mad Wasp have been brilliant," says Anderson. "They're just so good to work with. There's no interference on music selections and no adverts." 'The Magic Window' airs at 9pm on Sundays. madwaspradio.com

Cabaret Voltaire 3 brand new releases

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SCHOOL OF ELECTRONIC MUSIC

Resident archivist **Jack Dangers** disappears down the rabbit hole of soundtracks by Czechoslovakian composer Zdeněk Liška



Back in 1990, I made a track called 'Love Mad' for the first edition of the book/CD series 'Volume', which was the brainchild of Rob Deacon who ran Meat Beat Manifesto's first label, Sweatbox. The dominant theme in the song is a sample from a film called 'The Flat' by avant-garde filmmaker Jan Švankmajer. He created a lot of surreal and disturbing stop-frame animation work, including 'Alice' in 1988, an amazing version of 'Alice In Wonderland'. Around about that time, Channel 4 showed 'The Flat' as part of a season of animation which I videotaped, and I took the sample for 'Love Mad' from that.

The music was by Zdeněk Liška, probably Czechoslovakia's best known film composer. He wrote hundreds of mostly orchestral film scores in his career, but he was also a pioneer of electronic and electroacoustic music in film.

None of Liška's work for Jan Švankmajer has been released, but Andy Votel's label Finders Keepers has released several of his other soundtracks, including the 1963 Czech science fiction movie 'Ikarie XB-1', which was written for a small orchestra and manipulated tape. The music is great, and it's a really good film, too. I think Kubrick must have seen it – you can see the influence in '2001: A Space Odyssey'. Finders Keepers also released Liška's scores for the 1969 surreal serial killer film 'The Cremator', and his orchestral/electronic score of 'The Little Mermaid' from 1976.

Zdeněk Liška was born in what was then Bohemia in 1922, and studied at the Prague Conservatory before joining the film studios of the Baťa shoe company in Zlín in 1945. Zlín had been a company town for decades, and Baťa built department stores, schools, hospitals, blocks of flats and cinemas – and a film studio.

When Liška died in 1983, aged just 61, Jan Švankmajer announced he wouldn't use any other living composer's music for his films, and has used only classical music since.

As a postscript, 10 years after sampling 'The Flat', on a really misty, wintry morning, I was on my way to a small museum in Rotterdam to see a Jan Švankmajer exhibition, and I encountered a Flemish Giant rabbit on the way. They're the biggest rabbits in the world, about the size of a dog, and there was one on the loose. It was such a Jan Švankmajer moment, I couldn't believe it. A truly bizarre experience.

ACID REIGN

Bass synth makes French connection

Another month, another weird analogue mono synth in a box, this time from French firm Norand. Measuring 32cm by 15cm, the simply-named Mono looks like a supercharged black TB-303, coupled with the switching aesthetics of a Jupiter-8. With its analogue signal path, this two-oscillator single-filter machine also features a deep sequencer, a memory that can handle 3,200 parameter automations per project, and storage for 32 projects. Each of these can have a maximum of 64 patterns, and up to 64 notes. But Mono's other special trick is contextual modulation, where every parameter has its own envelope and audio-frequency modulator, allowing for lots of mind-bending modulation madness. You can hear examples on the Norand website. Acid heads looking for some serious bassology will totally love it. Yours for €840. norand.io



SEA SHANTIES

The Scottish audio doc making waves

Rarely have we been so thrilled by a film about fishing. 'Iorram' is a Gaelic language production focused on a small seafaring community in the Outer Hebrides. The footage is beautiful, but it's the sounds that caught our ears. "The sound archive at the heart of this project contains over 30,000 pieces of previously untranslated and largely unheard Scottish Gaelic recordings," explains director Alastair Cole. These recordings, held by the School of Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh, were taken by ethnographers in the 1940s, and Cole has hopes that 'Iorram' will encourage filmmakers to treat bygone sound with the same respect as old footage. "Making documentaries from archive film footage is a long-established practice, but there are also vast riches in sound archives around the world, which are gradually being digitised and restored," he says. After a sneak preview, we think 'Iorram' is likely to be up there with our best films of this year. Head to their website for more information about where you can watch it this summer. iorramfilm.com





EFKTS - YEESAN

The third release on the Expert Sleepers label, Yeesan is an ambient album in the classic Eno tradition - no drones, but a static yet ever-changing texture of interweaving patterns.



expertsleepersltd.bandcamp.com



Ffion : Unfurling

The stunning debut album from Thomas Ragsdale's euphoric electronic project.



PULSE

IV/AN

Croatian minimal synth hotshot

WHO THEY?

Ivan Antunović has operated under various guises (The Fall Guy, Dissident, Narrow, Split Personalities and more) since 1998, but the Zagreb-based virtuoso has been releasing scintillating minimal synth/darkwave music under his own name since 2015. Having grown up with the synthpop/new wave groups of the former Yugoslavia, as well as The Human League, Eurythmics, Throbbing Gristle, Cabaret Voltaire and Swans, it's all loosely distilled throughout his lustrous, pulsating machine rhythms. "‘Love Is A Stranger’ is to me what ‘Teenage Kicks’ was to John Peel," he says.

WHY IV/AN?

Having found a spiritual home at Belfast electronic label, TONN Recordings, his new album 'Sub-object' properly sets out his stall. Exploring the dynamics between sound, image and text, the collaboration between TONN founder/visual artist Mary McIntyre and photographer/writer Frédéric Huska sees Iv/An's resonant electronics take centre stage. Eschewing his own distinctive voice, 'Sub-object' is rooted in gloriously austere and filmic textures. From the haunting 'Tact As In Tactile Sound' to the experimental, Radiophonic Workshop-imbued cut-ups of 'The Promise Of Exposure', and the icy frisson of 'Static Tableaux', channelling early 1980s John Foxx, it's quite the statement.

TELL US MORE...

He's recorded some great cover versions – his 2018 take on The Normal's 'Warm Leatherette' incorporates Nitzer Ebb's 'Join In The Chant' and Depeche Mode's 'I Sometimes Wish I Was Dead' to irresistible effect. And his own 0.5 micro-label, specialising in limited, beautifully designed DIY releases is worthy of further investigation too. Best of all, with a host of further collabs in the pipeline – including Tral Neu, his new virtual supergroup with underground music chums – there's much more to come from this restlessly prolific and thrilling electronic whiz. Watch this space.

VELIMIR ILIC

'Sub-object' is out now on TONN Recordings

MUSIC CUBED

Stylish speaker is all looks and sounds

The Sai speaker is a beautiful bit of kit. Developed by Japanese indie audiophiles Hora Audio, whose recent Coco horn system had us blowing trumpets, this new cube-shaped device is perfect for both the casual and the serious listener. Hora say they pursued “organic sound quality” when designing the speaker, which is equipped with a powerful neodymium magnet to give it some extra oomph and has a pedestal that can be fixed to walls or to ceilings, offering you lots of flexibility to adapt your set-up. Sai is actually the Japanese word for “dice”, which makes sense judging by its suave look. Made from 2mm-thick single-plate oak and finished with beeswax, it comes in black, white, light grey and natural flavours. You’re looking at ¥34,800 for this, which is somewhere around £230. hora-audio.jp



GROOVE ARMADAS

Influence of the foghorn traced in new book

White Rabbit Books should by now be a regular source of good stuff for Electronic Sound readers. When you’re done with ‘Monolithic Undertow’, Harry Sword’s excellent odyssey into the history of drone music, you should turn your attention to ‘The Foghorn’s Lament’, a new book by Jennifer Lucy Allan. It is an exploration into the booming maritime sound, with Allan tracing its influence from Scottish and American coastlines to its industrial heritage, as well as urban myths involving speaker stacks and coastal raves. With high praise coming from the likes of Brian Eno and Cosey Fanni Tutti, get this one on your reading list. whiterabbitbooks.co.uk

TIME MACHINE

In 1980s Madrid, **La Movida Madrileña**, a hedonistic counterculture movement emerged in the wake of Franco’s death. With it came a wave of electronic music that is seeing a reappraisal four decades on...

WORDS: DAVID POLLOCK

After the death of General Francisco Franco in November 1975, during a period when the apparatus of dictatorship he had built in post-Second World War Spain crumbled away, an initial, defiant punk sound was born.

La Movida Madrileña (The Madrid Scene) blew into life in Madrid in 1980 and soon grew throughout the country. Across film, art, photography and music, the young and newly liberated of the Spanish counterculture began recreating the sounds they were hearing elsewhere on the continent, including post-punk, new wave and classic 1980s European electronica. Regrettably, the movement has since been neglected by the wider world in favour of the advances in electronic sound made in the UK, Germany and – later in the decade – the USA.

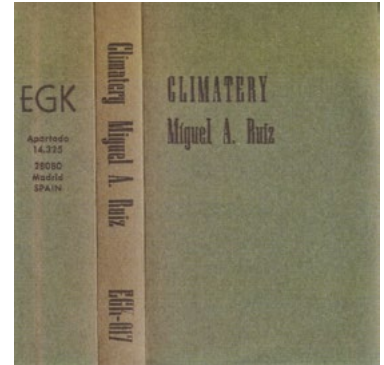
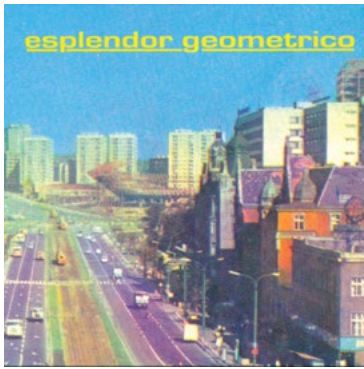
For Loïc Diaz Ronda, a Toulouse-based film and music programmer, the era has always held a particular fascination, especially as the music made during La Movida is largely unexplored outside Spain.

In 2018, in collaboration with the Zürich record shop and label Bongo Joe, Ronda compiled ‘La Contra Ola – Synth-Wave And Post-Punk From Spain 1980-86’, which collated some of the early work from this period. Digging deeper into the backgrounds of the artists he covered, he’s now following that record up with ‘La Ola Interior (Spanish Ambient & Acid Exoticism 1983-1990)’, which explores a different facet of the post-Movida sound.

“Franco dies, then you have the democratic transition, and culturally and socially there is an explosion after 40 years of dictatorship,” says Ronda. “But la nueva ola [new wave] bands very soon became more commercial. By about 1983, it was obvious the post-punk movement had been drowned by the industry, so some artists went underground.

“The style on the first record was better known in Spain – they were doing pop music with machines – but the second is more experimental. There were some tracks on the first album that didn’t fit, and I realised there was a sound territory in Spanish ambient and what I call acid exoticism that hadn’t been documented. So I began to look for music.”

The tracks he refers to, the ones which set ‘La Ola Interior’ (‘The Inner Wave’) in motion, are truly striking, and give the impression that an overarching scene to rival British industrial or German kosmische was yet to be discovered in 1980s Spain.



The first of these compositions is 'Sheikh' (1988) by Madrid trio Esplendor Geométrico, a surging wave of Aphex Twin-approximating techno-industrial synthesiser rhythms with an Arabic voice chant woven throughout. The second is 'Última Instancia' (1986) by Orfeón Gagarin, an alias of prolific Madrid-based electronic producer Miguel Ángel Ruiz, whose liquid acid beat and trembling ambient synth sustains predate Orbital and pay tribute to Brian Eno. Ruiz, worked at home with synthesisers and drone loops to create music which anticipated Mouse On Mars or the Warp style, and later experimented with oriental sounds.

"The technology was moving fast," says Ronda. "Synthesisers were cheaper and you had good tape reproduction, so young musicians could make their own cassettes. Meanwhile independent labels that were born during the Movida, like DRO (Discos Radioactivos Organizados) and GASA (Grabaciones Accidentales), began to have commercial success and needed good sound engineers, so they hired some musicians that had been marginalised by the movement in the 1970s.

"In 'La Ola Interior' you have these two streams – musicians from the tape underground culture and producers that were working for independent imprints. They shared the same interests in beatless electronic music, in exoticism, in non-Western music."

Among the producers Ronda has selected is Luis Delgado, who created music on his own and with Finis Africae, Juan Alberto Arceche's project, a fusion of ambient electronica and Arabic styles influenced by Jon Hassell's 'Fourth World' albums and the folk music of Spain.

"Delgado worked in the studio at night or during free hours," says Ronda. "He loved non-Western instruments, but he couldn't tell how to play them, so he would focus on the sound they made, adding electronic treatments to make a strange music. Finis Africae was an open workshop – more of a collective than a band. Some of their pieces had a tropical sound, others were longer, beatless, atmospheric tracks."

According to Ronda, the scene in Barcelona – different to elsewhere in Spain at this time – was more influenced by English and American sounds, but was also more experimental. He explains it through the prism of Jaime Gonzalo's book on the music of the period, 'La Ciudad Secreta' ('The Secret

City'). It encompasses the music of Victor Nubla, a former jazz improviser who began sampling Balkan folk music in his work, and the duo Camino Al Desván, whose minimal electronics were complemented by guitar and violin.

Of these artists, Ronda claims only Suso Sáiz has anything like an international public profile, with his music recently re-released on the Music From Memory label.

"He had problems sleeping," explains Ronda, "so he would work at night on guitar loops and synths – he called them 'hypnotics' because he made this music to help him sleep. He had his public work as an avant-garde musician and a classical and minimalist composer, and the work he did at home, which was much more personal and ambient."

A project like this can only begin to scratch the surface of a movement which covered a whole country for almost an entire decade. Ronda explains that when the sounds of 'La Ola Interior' died away, the reasons were universal – greater ease of access to computer and then laptop recording equipment, and the arrival of CDs and the internet. In the UK, when we think of Spanish music at the beginning of the 90s, we think of house music in Ibiza.

"It's a Spanish problem, in a way," says Ronda, rationalising the obscurity of these fine musicians at home and abroad. "A lot of Spaniards overlook their own culture. They think, 'If it's made in Spain, it's not that good', you know? It's also that the United States and the UK are the most productive territories for that kind of music, so maybe they don't look at music made in countries like Spain, they think there's nothing.

"It's a paradox that in countries that weren't very industrialised you still have that futurist movement in modern art and music. In Spain, Italy, Russia – countries where there isn't much technology – you are very interested in it, you want to get it. These musicians should be more famous, even in underground circles."

'La Ola Interior (Spanish Ambient & Acid Exoticism 1983-1990)' is out now on Bongo Joe

The British Library's Save Our Sounds project aims to save UK recordings from extinction. **Andy Linehan**, Curator of Popular Music, digs through the archive's priceless audio treasures. This month: Harry Johnston



Sir Henry Hamilton Johnston was a British colonial administrator who worked extensively in Africa in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Born in London in 1858, he trained as an artist at the Royal Academy and as part of his studies travelled to Tunis in 1879. Inspired by his visit and his interests in botany and zoology, he returned to North Africa three years later where he gained a reputation as an explorer, leading expeditions for the Royal Geographical Society among others.

His early African experiences and his ability to pick up languages and dialects made him a suitable candidate for a colonial career which he started as a vice-consul in Cameroon, going on to play a major role in administering the shameful European colonisation of Africa in the late 19th century. He returned to the UK, where he twice stood, unsuccessfully, for parliament as a Liberal MP, and died in 1927.

Johnston wrote 40 books on aspects of Africa and, unusually for the time, made a number of sound recordings on wax cylinders, which are among the earliest to survive from the continent. Copies of recordings made in Uganda, Kenya, Liberia and Ghana were donated to the British Library's Sound Archive in 1990, and a separate collection of four original cylinders were acquired in the same year.

These include an interview with the then President of Liberia, Arthur Barclay, who talks about the importance of rubber forests for the country's development and denies the existence of cannibals. There is also a speech made in June 1900 by Kasagama, King of the Tooro Kingdom, a Bantu domain in Uganda. Additionally, there are examples of amadinda xylophone playing, Ganda music and of Maasai song.

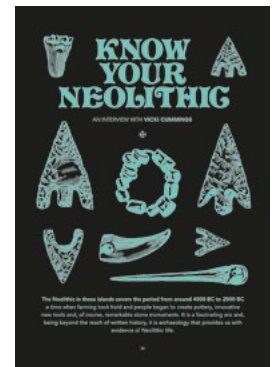
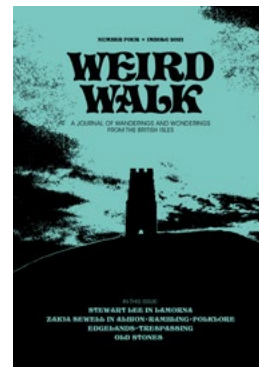
Where possible, the British Library aims to reconnect recordings such as these to the countries and communities from which they originated, and will be exploring the most appropriate way of achieving this now that they have been successfully digitised as part of the Save Our Sounds project.

For more about Save Our Sounds visit bl.uk/save-our-sounds

WALK THIS WAY

Foot-powered publication rambles on

Billed as "a journal of wanderings and wonderings from the British Isles", the hauntological among you will very much appreciate the excellent *Weird Walk*. It really caught our attention, not just for the left-field subject matter, but also because the 48-page A5 zine is lovingly put together with some great photography and illustrations onboard too. Issue Four has landed and we especially enjoyed the regular Boundary Sounds section, which tackles music for lone perambulations (the recommendations include Scanner, Bark Psychosis, Jane Weaver and Burial, if you are curious). Elsewhere, there are superb pieces on land rights and trespass laws (provocatively titled 'How To Trespass'), hilltop magick in Dorset, and an amble round Glastonbury and the Isle of Avalon. Stewart Lee meanwhile gets himself tangled up in the legacy of British surrealist painter and occultist Ithell Colquhoun, and heads for Lamorna in Cornwall in search of artists and ancient sites. The whole thing is a delight. Available along with back issues from their website. weirdwalk.co.uk



CULTURE SHIFT

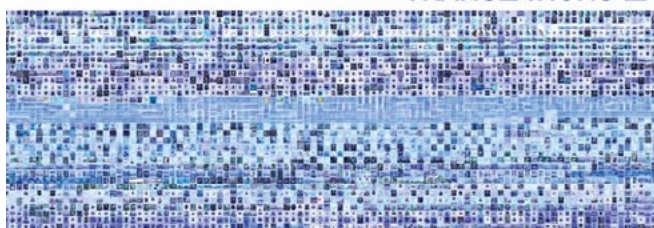
New decolonising production software

While Pro Tools, Logic and other DAWs might feel like blank canvases primed for music production, they ultimately cater to a particularly Western way of making sound. Using one of these softwares in the studio, one generally selects a bpm, a time signature, one of 12 possible key signatures, and off you go. But what about microtones, drones and modes of music that did not develop in the West? Suddenly, these conventional production softwares start to look a bit limited, discouraging a litany of musicians from incorporating types of non-Western musicality into their electronic productions. Enter Apotome, a collaborative software project from Iraqi-British composer Khyam Allami and technology studio Counterpoint which is encouraging a long overdue sea change. Forming part of his PhD research, Allami describes it as "a transcultural browser-based generative music system, focused on using microtonal tuning systems and their subsets [scales and modes]". It essentially enables users to explore different tuning systems using digital technology, something that has never been done before. The programme was introduced at this year's CTM Festival with presentations, panel discussions and artist takeovers featuring Deena Abdelwahed, Faten Kanaan and more. It's available to use for free online. ctm.isartum.net

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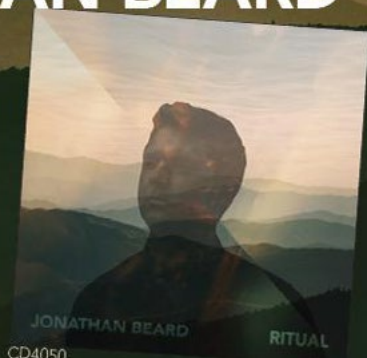
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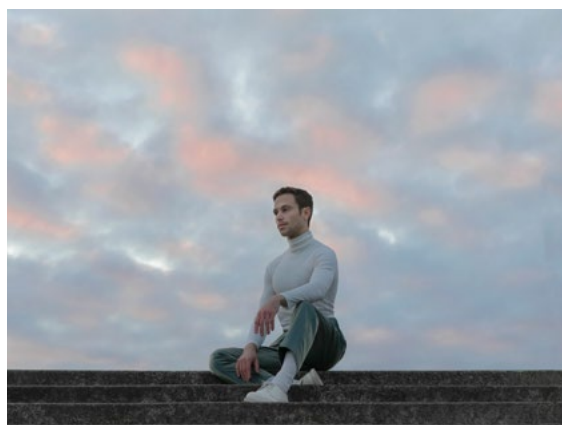
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PULSE

SEMI PRECIOUS

Soundtracker of post-club twilight zone

WHO THEY?

Semi Precious is the alter ego of Tel Aviv-raised, London-based Guy Baron, who holds down a job as a lecturer in sound studies as well as making beatific, thoughtful electronic sounds himself.

WHY SEMI PRECIOUS?

An alumnus of Goldsmiths' progressive Music Studies course, Baron is also a student of London's nightlife. After graduating, he immersed himself in the capital's club scene and set up the Squareglass imprint with Athlete Whippet's Robin Braum and Avi Barath. In 2014, he emerged under the Semi Precious tag with a self-titled EP that offered up a serene, soulful approach to electronic music, given a soothing quality via his enveloping vocal. It was a style that was precisely honed into the deep chill of his debut album, 2016's 'Ultimate Lounge'.

TELL US MORE...

Baron's output is in thrall to dance music's euphoric peaks and troughs, but exists in the strange, interstitial, early hours zone between leaving a club and the following day beginning. With his new album, 'Post-Euphoria', he has isolated that amorphous feeling with a suite of 10 mostly beatless tracks that play with the idea of endorphins and adrenaline ebbing away as the night out retreats into the distance. Key track 'Second Spring' drifts forth with reflective uncertainty, its vocal theme being optimistically focussed on rebirth as club culture prepares to emerge from lockdown hibernation, yet it also leaves a regretful imprint, as if rueing all the nights out that couldn't happen in 2020. 'Post-Euphoria' isn't just a wistful, romantic rumination as it also forms part of Baron's doctorate into the effects of music, making this one perfectly suited to both the learned and the beautifully wasted.

MAT SMITH

'Post-Euphoria' is out now on Squareglass

ART VERSUS CANCER

Great artwork and a worthy cause

Mark Wigan's artwork will be familiar to anybody who went clubbing in the 1980s and 1990s. It appeared on countless baggy T-shirts worn by ravers in the wake of acid house and adorned the walls of places like The Brain and Love Ranch, two London clubs that Wigan founded with Sean McLusky, as well as regularly gracing the pages of i-D, NME, Time Out and other magazines. Wigan continues to create his highly distinctive club-inspired pieces to this day and a selection of both original works and prints are available from his website, with prints starting at a very reasonable £40. At the moment, all proceeds from the site are being donated to a fundraiser for his wife, fellow artist Kerry Baldry, who needs specialist cancer treatment to save her life. Clinical trials for this treatment were stopped by the NHS last year because of the Covid-19 pandemic, so it's currently only available privately. markwigan.com

You can also donate directly to Kerry's fundraiser at gofundme.com/f/funding-kerrys-cancer-treatment



BALEARIC DAWN BY MARK WIGAN

GREEN ENERGY

Wireless charger made from rubbish

While there are constant conversations about the impact of new technology on the planet, Brighton's environmentally-conscious Gomi are helping us to find alternatives. Their Wireless Mag Charger is handmade from 100 per cent recycled plastic waste destined for landfill in the UK. Compatible with all wirelessly chargeable devices (including Apple and Android), it's twice as fast as your regular lightning cable and comes in Blue Ocean, Black Mono or Birthday Cake colour options. Fancy. Shipping worldwide (delivery is free if you live in the UK), one charger will set you back £35, but be quick as they are only available in limited quantities. gomi.design



BLOCK(CHAIN) PARTY

A brief history of the new digital future

In a world where digital formats have almost single-handedly precipitated the economic devaluing of music, it's astounding that non-fungible tokens (NFTs) allegedly raked in nearly \$22 million in February 2021 alone. So what exactly is an NFT? Well, take Wu-Tang Clan's single-copy album 'Once Upon A Time In Shaolin'. It was a one-off double CD in an ornate metal box that would not change its form or lose value if copied. That's what's known as "non-fungible". Call the box "cryptocurrency" and the album inside "the information". Make both digital and you've got the fundamentals of NFTs. They are clearly about uniqueness and scarcity, but because the "information" could take the form of all sorts of things – from tickets to artwork – NFTs are causing something of a stir in the media world. In the last few weeks, Kings Of Leon became the first artist to release an album using the format, while Grimes earned \$6 million for an NFT collection of exclusive songs and art. Even the venerable Aphex Twin has gotten in on the act, selling a piece of artwork with Weircore for £91,000, before donating the proceeds to sustainability projects. To sum up, you're going to be hearing a lot more about NFTs in the coming months. ethereum.org

INITIATE LAUNCH SEQUENCE

All-in-one system gets chemicals flowing

A number of modular companies have offered their own "complete" mounted 3U systems during recent years, but the new Shuttle System from Spanish Eurorack developers Endorphin.es is up there with the very best of them. Available in black or gold, with wacky illustrations of mushrooms and cows being abducted by aliens all over them, it has the functionality you would expect from a £1,959 system and then some. A 16-channel USB-MIDI-CV interface labelled "Shuttle Control" is particularly useful for integration, while the lauded "Furthrrrr Generator" complex oscillator sounds every bit as good as it looks. endorphin.es



LIGHT WORK

New instrument shines bright under our spotlight

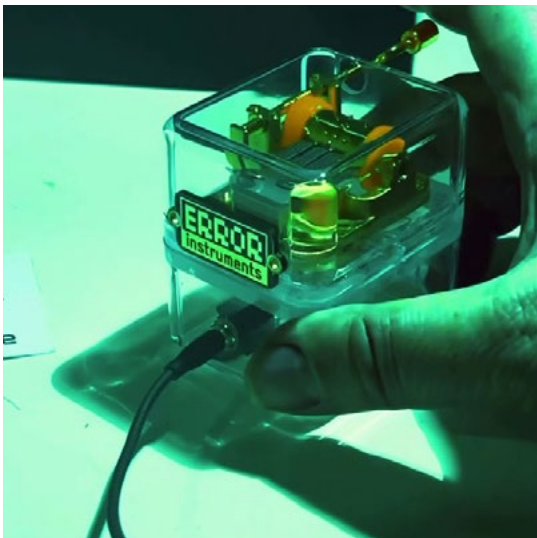
Based in North Essex, CLIP is an organisation that creates programmes and products designed to empower young people to take risks and make exciting new music. It's what we like to hear, but CLIP's first foray into instrument invention isn't just about sound. The Photon Smasher enables users to create electronic music by harnessing the power of light. Aimed at children aged eight and up, what you get is a neatly designed box chock-full of kit, including a speaker, a circuit board, a solar panel and an LED light with a remote. By following the simple assembly guide, you're able to generate sound by shining lights onto the solar panel. That flashing red bike light you own? Techno. A faulty lamp? Speedcore. There's a lot of fun to be had with a Photon Smasher and they're only £45. Sound as a pound. clipsoundandmusic.uk



TINY ERRORS

Music box making all the right/wrong noises

Wildly unpredictable is a good descriptor for Amsterdam's Error Instruments. Its founder and designer Paul Tas is a force of prolific creativity, with Eurorack modules, DIY kits, gestural noise machines, circuit-bent toys and more pouring out of Error HQ, although they still retain a sense of rare boutique value with runs limited to 50, 30, or even just five units. One of their newest inventions is the Pocket Lullaby, a traditional music box mounted on a passive pickup in a transparent chassis, complete with a 1/8-inch jack output. Producing audio that's ripe for effecting, looping and splicing, the passive pickup can output at modular level, meaning you can also use the Pocket Lullaby as a trigger in conjunction with other synths and systems. It's a nice full circle back to the proto-sequencer designs of music boxes and pianola rolls, seamlessly incorporating them into any set-up, be it melodic, noisy, or both. Each device costs €49 and UK customers should email studiopaultas@hotmail.com for enquiries. errorinstruments.com



LOU OTTENS — 1926-2021

An audio pioneer remembered

Lou Ottens, the Dutch engineer who invented the cassette tape, has died at the age of 94. Born in 1926, Ottens lived an amazing life. As a teenager in the German-occupied Netherlands during the Second World War, he constructed a radio to secretly listen to BBC broadcasts from London, avoiding the Nazi jammers by using his own directional antenna. After the war, he was hired by Philips, where he became the head of a department working on new projects and developed the concept for the compact cassette in the early 1960s. Around 100 billion cassettes are believed to have been sold in the years since. Ottens, who was also later heavily involved in the invention of the compact disc, is undoubtedly an unsung hero of audio and Electronic Sound would look very different without him. If you would like to learn more about his life and work, check out Zack Taylor's 2016 film 'Cassette: A Documentary Mixtape', which tells Lou Ottens' story and explores the enduring appeal of the clunky old format in the 21st century. cassettefilm.com

LANDMARKS

Laurie Anderson tells us about the very unassuming way her massive 1981 hit, **'O Superman'**, came to be

INTERVIEW: DAVE SIMPSON

"'O Superman' started from a line in an aria from the 1885 opera 'Le Cid' by Jules Massenet – 'Ô Souverain, ô juge, ô père' ['O Sovereign, o judge, o father']. I'd come across it being performed by a black opera singer called Charles Holland, who a friend of mine played piano for. It was a prayer song addressed to the chief – the boss. I just thought it was really beautiful and interesting... a prayer to authority.

"At the time, we were having a series of disasters in America to do with the never-ending war in the Middle East. Some Iranian students had stormed the US Embassy in Tehran [in 1979] and taken hostages, and the idea was that we Americans would go raging in with helicopters, swoop in and get these guys out.

"The strategy backfired majorly. The helicopters crashed in the desert and it was really shocking to people because we all thought technology was going to save us. Instead, their big plan ended with a burning pile of debris, and the hostages were nowhere to be seen. I just thought, 'I'm going to write a song about the failure of technology'.

"I started writing a few things, and someone said they wanted me to perform it. I was like, 'Oh, it's only like a couple of sentences long...', but the pressure of performance gave me the impetus to finish it.

"The 'ha ha ha' mantra thing is a loop, like a breath. I wanted something basic. I like rhythm, but in a piece like this, drums don't give you enough room in the rest of the song to do much. So the 'ha ha ha' thing is the beat.

"Like a prayer, we don't know who the song is being addressed to. The first words are 'O Superman...', but who is Superman? It's meant to be ghostly, like an invocation. There's a sinister aspect, but it is sinister when you talk to power.

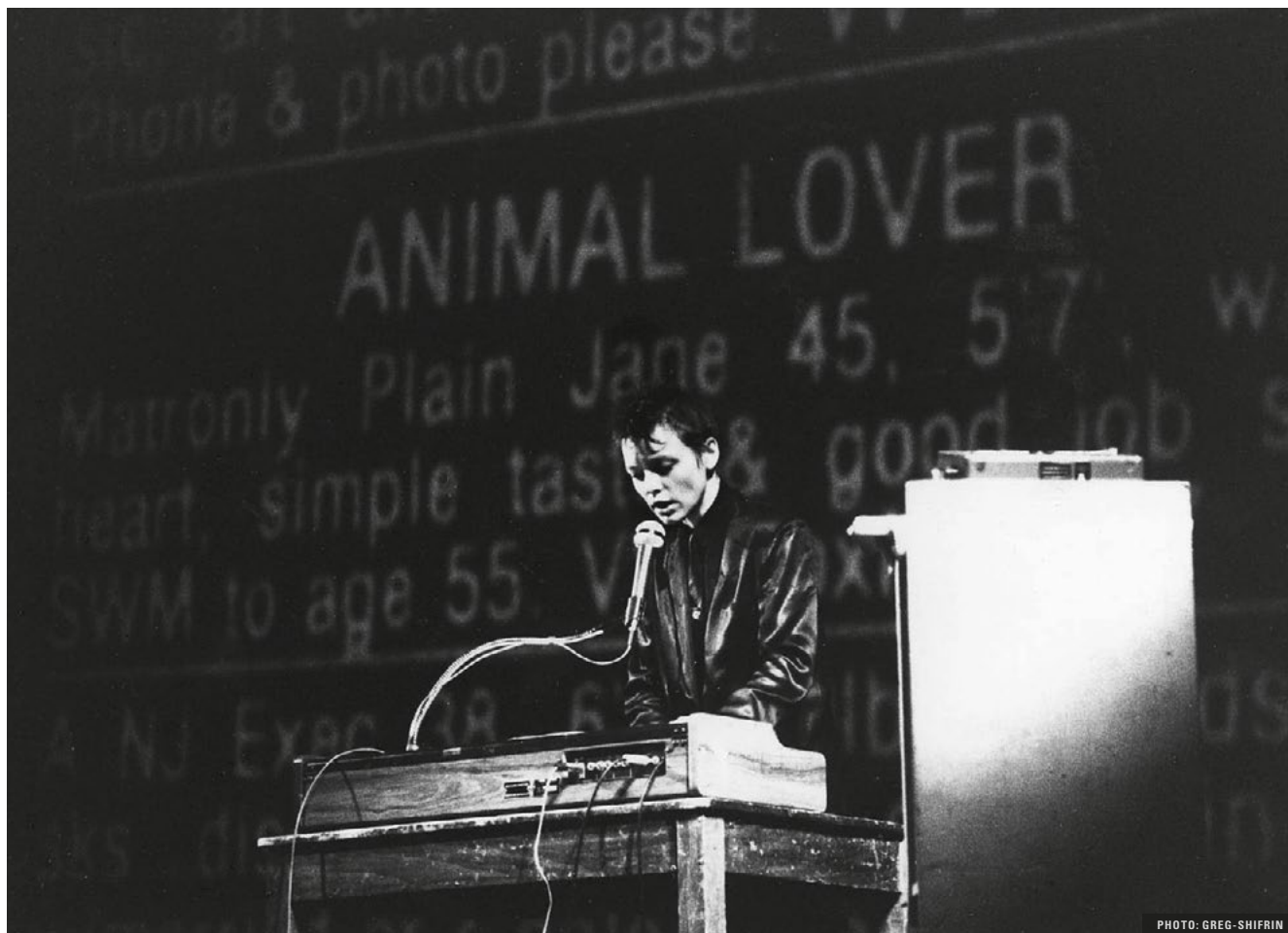


PHOTO: GREG SHIFRIN

"There are a lot of weird things going on in that song, but also really mundane things – 'Smoking or non-smoking?' – which sit alongside each other. It was a deliberate juxtaposition, the same as the sudden shift from motherly 'long arms' to 'your petrochemical arms' and 'your military arms'. I used a vocoder in places so it wouldn't have only one voice. The vocoder was actually originally invented as spy technology and that fits with the sinister vibe.

"The line, 'Neither snow nor rain / Nor gloom of night / Shall stay these couriers / From the swift completion / Of their appointed rounds', came from a postal slogan that is inscribed over the Post Office in New York, because the song is a message, being sent to people.

"After it was finished, a friend of mine [B George of One Ten Records] suggested we should record it. Then we got a \$500 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and put it out [on One Ten, titled 'O Superman (For Massenet)'] as a mail-order project. I think we pressed 1,000 copies, which were sitting in my loft as I was thinking, 'How am I ever going to get rid of these things?'.

"It sounds preposterous now, but we advertised it and people would call up on the phone and order the record. I'd take their name and make a rapid walk to the Post Office to send it to them. I'd just started to think, 'Great, eventually I'll get rid of them all', when I got a call from someone in England who said he wanted to order 40,000 records. And then he said, 'And I'll need 40,000 more next week'. It turned out to be Rough Trade distribution who were interested because John Peel had been playing the record every night on his radio show in the UK. I promised to get them the records, put the phone down and immediately thought, 'What do I do now?'.

"Warner Brothers had been coming to my shows and had wanted to make a record with me, but I'd refused. I was from the art world, and that sort of pop culture didn't interest me. Having turned them down, I called them back and asked, 'Remember when you said you wanted to make a record with me...? Would you just do me a favour and press me 80,000 copies?'. I was told, 'That's not the way we do things here at Warner Brothers'. So I asked them what I needed to do. The next thing I knew I'd signed an eight-album contract. I got so much flak from my artist friends who said I was 'selling out', but within a few months it was called 'crossing over' and everybody wanted to do it.

"Soon after, people started calling me up and asking how it felt to be in the charts. They told me 'O Superman' was at Number Two in the UK. This is going to sound really stupid, but I didn't know what the charts were. Getting something you've never thought about is very different to getting something that you've been dreaming of. So I was happy, but it was strange.

"It was definitely one of the moments that changed my entire life. I was catapulted into a whole new world, but the song that was at Number Two was exactly the same eight-minute home recorded piece that we'd been sending out by mail order. We didn't even remaster it. I was very pleased about that.

"I hadn't played it for a long time, but I'd just started singing it again when 9/11 happened. People said, 'I can't believe you're singing about what's going on right now'. I just told them that it wasn't strange, that things hadn't changed much from when I wrote it – we were still in the same war and the aircraft were still crashing."

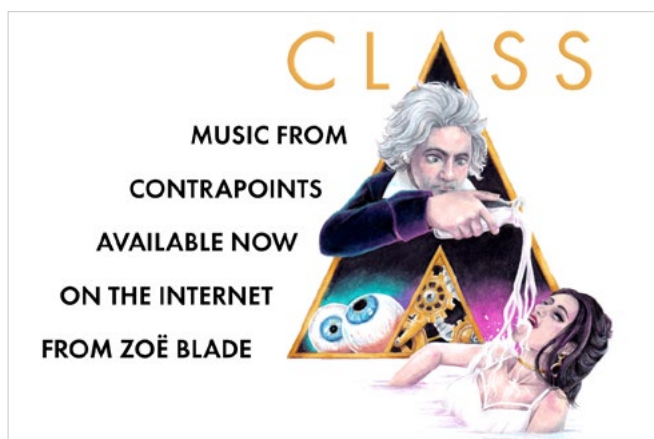
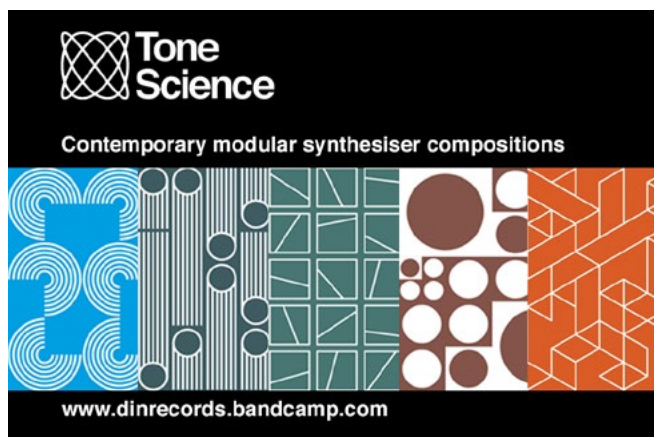
A red vinyl re-release of Laurie Anderson's debut album, 'Big Science', is out now on Nonesuch

LONDON CALLING

Saving the capital's clubs

Two years ago, 'Let Us Dance' would have sounded like the title of a Radio 1 earworm. Nowadays, the words have taken on added meaning, as it's actually the name of a photography project started by Jake Davis and Rob Jones, who say they've been "inspired to create a time capsule of London's clubs and venues in response to the prolonged closure of these institutions due to Covid-19". Over 40 London clubs were shot on medium format at around the time when there would usually be people queuing to get in. From the blue fort of Fabric to the rainbow-splattered doors to Heaven, grab a print of your favourite London haunt for £30 and help club culture while you're at it, with 40 per cent of all profits going to the Night Time Industries Association. khromacollective.co.uk





PULSE

KAMI-O

Trad Indian licks get bass makeover

WHO THEY?

A producer who is making an impact on Glasgow's small but flourishing underground bass music scene. For a relative newcomer Kami-O's nuanced take on grime, dubstep and left-field dancefloor sounds mark him as a precocious talent, and his first full-length project 'Biren' is brimming with innovative, introspective soundscapes.

WHY KAMI-O?

Inspired by, and dedicated to his late grandfather, 'Biren' is a beautiful, heartfelt record that takes the energy and tempo of grime and laces it with Indian instruments. 'Jayanta' is a striking opener, full of percussive textures, sonic vibrations and a big, attention-grabbing beat, while on 'Yoddha' the strings form a haunting shadow that flits over lurching bass and knotted drum patterns. "I wanted it to sound as authentic and natural as possible, so I tried to keep the samples and instrumentation primarily rooted in traditional Indian music, while still sticking to my usual 140 bpm templates."

TELL US MORE...

"Exploring my Indian heritage through my music was something I'd thought about doing for a while," he continues. "I haven't had the chance to go to India and meet my family over there yet, so this was a way for me to feel closer to that side of myself. The link to my grandpa was what really solidified the concept for me. I was very close to him, and when he passed away in 2015 it hit me quite hard. This album was a good way for me to try to give him the tribute he deserved".

CLAIRE FRANCIS

'Biren' is out now via Bandcamp

WOODEN IT BE GOOD

Top-drawer studio desk is a must

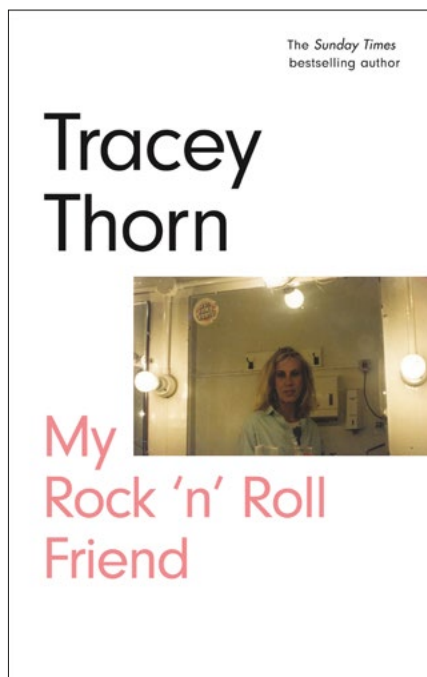
If your home studio set-up lives on a collapsing black particle board horror show purchased from Argos in 1992, then please direct your gaze towards the Compact One, the most beautiful piece of studio furniture we've seen in a long time. Created by Audio Housing, a company based in Barcelona, the Compact One utilises mid-century modern design to create a practical desk fit for the swankiest of pads. This is an aesthetically pleasing piece that knows you need a pull-out tray to accommodate, say, a Juno-6, another one for your computer keyboard and mouse, and a top shelf for monitors and a computer itself, all while providing a neat solution for those trailing four-way extension leads and other wire-related muck in the form of a custom Velcro strap. The desk is made from Finnish birch plywood and comes flat-packed using a clever system that means you can assemble, take apart, and then reassemble the whole thing without fear of damaging it. Reserve yours now for £699 and we reckon you'll never look back. audiohousing.com



EVERYTHING AND THE GIRL

Book sheds light on old chums

Tracey Thorn first encountered Lindy Morrison, then the drummer of The Go-Betweens, backstage at the Lyceum in London in 1983. 'My Rock 'N' Roll Friend' is Thorn's account of the pair's close on 40-year long friendship, chronicling the struggles of being a woman in a band, battling a chauvinist music media, and exploring the bond between two people "who seem to be either complete opposites or mirror images of each other". A fascinating and important document exploring women in music and, no less significantly, female companionship, this one is a definite keeper. Out now on hardback for less than £20. canongate.co.uk



DATA FOR YOUR DIARY

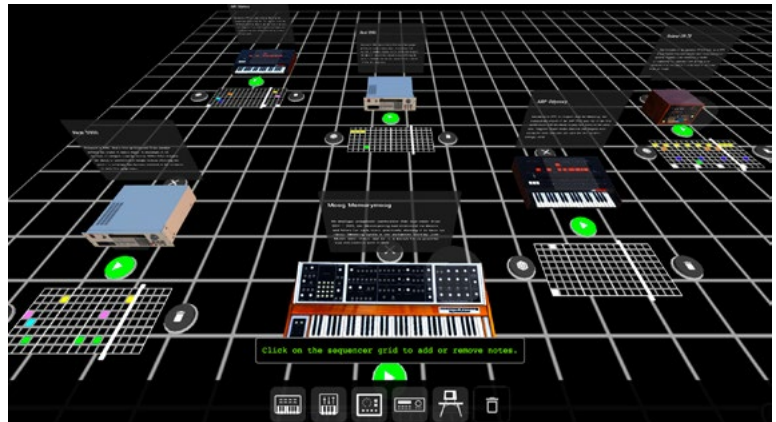
The show to see this summer

After lots of delays and setbacks, Ryoji Ikeda's new exhibition is finally set to open at London's 180 Strand gallery on 20 May. It will be the largest showing of the Japanese artist's work to date and there is plenty to look forward to, not least in the premiere of his 'Data-verse' trilogy. Some two decades in the making, 'Data-verse' presents an immersive triple-screen audiovisual journey of what happened after the Big Bang – from the advent of the tiniest particles up to what has become our universe. There are 11 other works to see too, including 'Test Pattern' and 'Point Of No Return', an intense virtual experience designed to replicate what it's like entering a black hole. Yikes. Tickets are on sale now for £15 with the exhibition running until 1 August. 180thestrands.com

ELECTROSPECTIVE

Virtual electronic music exhibition strikes gold

'Music, Makers And Machines' is an online exhibition curated by Google Arts & Culture and more than 50 partners around the world, from the Melbourne Electronic Sound Studio to the African Artists' Foundation in Lagos, and it's nothing less than extraordinary. Take interactive audio-visual journeys through the story of Thaddeus Cahill's Telharmonium, Can's Cologne studio or Manchester's Factory Records. Learn about a diverse array of innovators, from Daphne Oram to Arca. And if you're a parent or a teacher, you can even download a detailed lesson plan to go with it all. One of the most exciting attractions is a selection of five playable AR versions of iconic electronic instruments – the Memorymoog, ARP Odyssey, Roland CR78, Akai S900 and Fairlight CMI – which come with adorable descriptions such as "This is the ARP Odyssey synthesiser – check out the acid bass!". This might just be the best online exhibition we've ever seen. artsandculture.google.com



COMPETITIVE STREAK

Winners of international instrument competition revealed

The Guthman Musical Instrument competition is an annual bash in Georgia, Atlanta, where inventors show off their latest music-making ideas, hoping to join the likes of previous notables like Teenage Engineering's OP-1. The 2021 competition yielded 29 finalists from 15 countries, with first place going to the Segulharpa, an enclosed circular harp controlled by electromagnetic fields, built over the course of seven years by Icelandic instrument maker Úlfur Hansson. Second place went to Brian Alexander's Synescope, a turntable that converts drawings into sounds, but the People's Choice was the Lego Microtonal Guitar from Turkish father-and-son Tolgahan and Atlas Çogulu, a Lego-based attachment that overrides the fretboard and enables the player to access microtones. guthman.gatech.edu





5 KODAK SAFETY FILM



8 KODAK SAFETY FILM



4 KODAK SAFETY FILM



7 KODAK SAFETY FILM



3 KODAK SAFETY FILM



6 KODAK SAFETY FILM



DEUTSCHLAND 75

A vault of Can live recordings has been jemmied open for a series of exciting new releases, starting with 'Live In Stuttgart 1975'. Irmin Schmidt, the band's instigator and sole surviving core member, talks about the unique onstage experience of Germany's ur-band

WORDS: MARK ROLAND

The abundance of previously unheard Can riches on 2012's 'The Lost Tapes' felt like the last word from the Inner Space archives. But almost 10 years later, having lost both Holger Czukay and Jaki Liebezeit, a new series of Can live recordings is about to be released. It kicks off with 'Live In Stuttgart 1975', a gig that Irmin Schmidt, the only remaining member of the core group of four, can't remember a blind thing about.

"I have no memory of it!" he says. "Even listening to it very often, which I did while working on it, I don't have any image of what the hall looked like, what the audience was like... nothing. It's different with Brighton, for instance. I have a faint memory about the place we played there. It was on this kind of pavilion on the water. Water was under you and around you, so it sort of has an influence. At least I have some positive thoughts about Brighton, but Stuttgart I don't remember at all."

Another live show that Irmin Schmidt has stronger memories of took place in Taunton.

"The audience were just having a party," he chuckles. "After 30 minutes of playing, our roadie came onstage and said, 'Look, they don't care what you play, there are people fucking in dark corners!'. And Michael Karoli said, 'Oh wow! Really fine! Making music for fucking people! That's great!', and for the rest of the gig he played only a really wild rhythm guitar and no solos."

It's a brilliant anecdote, not just because it confirms that early 1970s freak-out concerts were bacchanals of free-loving hippies slipping out of their kaftans and getting naked, but also because it reveals that Can were by no means an insular musical unit, locked into each other and each other alone, the crowd reduced to onlookers at a sonic experiment being conducted before their very ears (or naked bottoms). The wider environment always impacted on how the band played. If music for fucking was required, then they would play music for fucking. Live, Can were a site-specific, ever-shifting, never-the-same-twice musical force of nature.

"We acted very consciously," says Irmin. "People thought what we did was sometimes very contemporary art stuff that needed lots of concentration, but we didn't feel like this. If people were in the mood for partying, we partied with them. If they were sitting in a hall on chairs and concentrating on listening, we made another kind of music. You could be more complicated, more structural, more inviting of the strange and unusual ideas. And if they were in dark corners busy with... [laughs], you made wild rhythms, which was very inspiring for them!"

This is why Can's live performances were a revelation and why they are releasing this bootleg concert recording from

Halloween 1975, tarted up with all the studio whizzery 2021 technology is capable of. The result is a fascinating document and a welcome addition to the Can discography. It's planned as the first of at least four releases of live sets and, if 'Live In Stuttgart 1975' is anything to go by, they're going to provide Can fans with a dense few hours of music that will take years to properly digest.

In September 1975, Can released 'Landed', their sixth studio album. The band's contract with United Artists had expired after 1974's 'Soon Over Babaluma', which had delivered them a surprise not-really-a-hit-but-let's-call-it-a-hit in 'Dizzy Dizzy', and they'd been snapped up by the krautrock enthusiasts at Virgin Records for Europe and Japan. 'Landed' was their second long-player as the primary four-piece made up of Irmin Schmidt, Michael Karoli, Holger Czukay and Jaki Liebezeit. Japanese vocalist and Can shaman Damo Suzuki had left after 'Future Days' in 1973, and while the group tried out various potential fifth members, they released three albums and played over 100 gigs as a foursome. In 1977, they rolled out a new iteration of the band, with two former members of Traffic, bassist Rosko Gee and percussionist Rebop Kwaku Baah.

"The real definition of Can was the four of us," states Irmin. "Sometimes there were singers, and we did wonderful work with them, they were really a part of what we were doing, but it was the four of us that were the seeds. After Damo left, we tried some other singers and we found we didn't need them. We realised we were actually an instrumental group."

Replacing a character like Damo Suzuki was never going to be easy. They'd struck gold with him in the first place. In 1970, in need of a vocalist to replace the recently departed Malcolm Mooney, they discovered Damo busking in a Munich street one afternoon. That same evening, he fronted the band. Can were born again and were soon to enter their imperial phase, even though Damo was a long way from a traditional vocalist.

"Damo didn't actually sing songs," says Irmin. "He sang strange words, using weird syllables and words from English, German and Russian, as well as Japanese, of course. He mixed it all up. It didn't make much sense as lyrics because Damo was really an instrumentalist using his voice. So when he was gone, we realised that we shouldn't look for another singer, that we were an instrumental group, which made us quite different from nearly all the other rock bands. We were more of a contemporary music ensemble. We were four people who created music that had elements of rock and jazz, who used rock as the foundation from which to make music that contained all styles of the 20th century."



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KODACOLOR X

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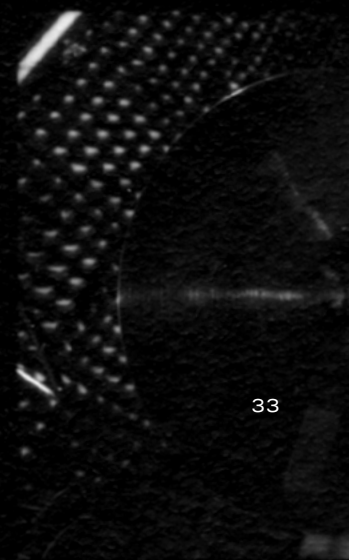
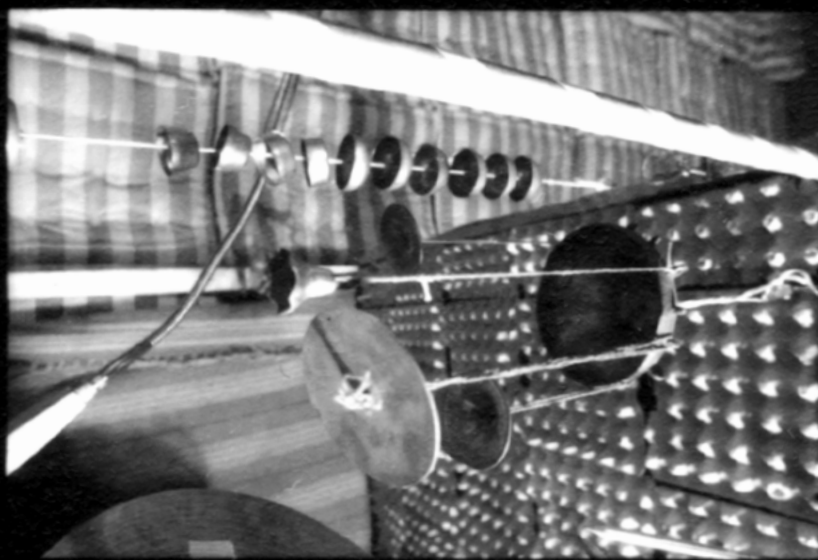
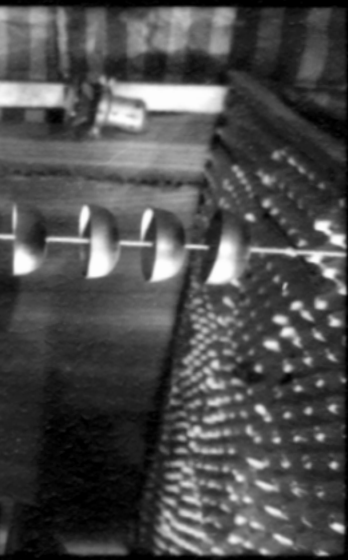
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Rock was Can's Trojan horse, through which they expanded the minds of their fans with the gamut of influences that had formed them, from Stockhausen to jazz, from Ligeti to African drumming. Normal rock bands needed someone out front, but Can were not a normal rock band.

On the few occasions that vocalists were given a trial run, they usually didn't go that well. Magic Michael (aka Michael Cousins), a well-known face on the 1970s London hippy scene, played a few shows with the group in 1976, as did the almost mythical figure of Thaiaga Raj Raja Ratnam, who would seem to have disappeared in a puff of sandalwood smoke since his very brief association with Can. With typically arch fondness, Irmin remembers how a crowd in Paris responded to one of these experiments.

"I really loved the Paris audiences," he notes. "They were incredible because they were unbelievably excited, but at the same time they were extremely critical. They reacted to every single piece in different ways. We tried out one singer at a Paris gig and he wasn't very good. After the first piece he sang – because he didn't sing the whole concert, only single pieces in the first set – the people booed. Then we played a piece without him and they were full of enthusiasm. Then he came onstage again and they booed again. And when he didn't appear in the second part of the concert, they really screamed, 'Yeah!'. You could see they didn't like him, they thought he didn't fit, and they were totally right. A little while later, we played another concert with him in Germany and the people there were just sort of lukewarm."

Three weeks after the Stuttgart gig, the American singer-songwriter Tim Hardin, who wrote 'If I Were A Carpenter', joined Can onstage for a gig at Hatfield Polytechnic. It wasn't a tryout, just a musical get-together.

"Just by chance, Tim was staying in the same hotel as us. We met at the bar and then he came to our room, where he and Michael played together. We were making a little bit of music in the hotel room and then we said, 'Well, tomorrow we are playing, why don't you join us?'. He had nothing to do, so he said that he would. The idea for him to make a guest appearance – not playing the whole concert with us, but a part of the concert – arose very naturally. And that was it. There was no thought of him becoming a member of Can or anything, it was just a spontaneous thing. And it was fun. It was good."

Hardin also guested at the group's London show a couple of nights later. There's a story that there was a big argument

afterwards and the American singer ended up throwing a TV set through a car window. Is that true?

"I don't know," replies Irmin. "Maybe I wasn't present when he did so. He was really nice. I mean, it's known that he was full of drugs..."

Tim Hardin was hopelessly lost to heroin addiction by the time he had moved to the UK in the mid-1970s. He returned to the US in early 1980 and died from an overdose later that year, aged just 39. Not that Can were what you would describe as straight edge either.

"We used quite a lot of drugs," affirms Irmin. "But none of us were real junkies. None of us used heroin excessively. Maybe sometimes, but none of us were dependent on any drug. We swore to each other to avoid it and also not to let anyone be a member of the group who was dependent. We did not discuss the question of whether Tim could join us or not, because it didn't arise."

For those of us who never witnessed a Can gig, 'Live In Stuttgart 1975' is a tantalising glimpse of what we missed. The studio albums left a breadcrumb trail of what they were capable of, some of which stand as examples of the best and most influential of the era. From their 1969 debut 'Monster Movie' ("Made in a castle with better equipment", as their label enigmatically announced, immediately forging an essential Can foundation myth), to the flat-out masterpieces 'Tago Mago' and 'Ege Bamyasi', Can made records that seemed like rock music, but weren't. Sometimes it felt like jazz, but it wasn't that either. Some people called it prog, but they certainly didn't sound anything like the other bands who were classified in that way. It had a sharpness and a clarity about it, which resonated with the post-punk era almost a decade later, and the relentless, hypnotic dance groove they produced often evoked a kind of sci-fi euphoria in listeners.

So what to call this strange futuristic sound? British baby boomer music press hacks, whose fathers had fought in the war, came up with the dismissive and yet enduring genre name krautrock. Rock made by krauts. Yet for all its insensitivity, the krautrock moniker works. It begins and ends with K and it has a modernity about it on the page (as does Kraftwerk). In the 50 years since the term was coined, it has largely shrugged off its negative connotations and is now an enticing name to look out for on handwritten dividers when crate-digging in unfamiliar record emporia.

The point being, Can music is just that – it's Can music. It is dense, fluid, ever-changing, expansive, wild and yet intensely controlled. The virtuosity of its players is so casual that it takes you by surprise. It remains hard to categorise without resorting to the krautrock neologism. The band's studio albums were edited from hours and hours of tapes, a technique so skilfully employed that even the hard-crash edit in 'Mushroom' on their 1971 album 'Tago Mago' sounds like they played it that way. But live, Can were composing this new music on the fly. And it emerged without deliberation or planning.

"We never discussed it, we never said we would do this and that," says Irmin. "I wouldn't call what we did improvising... it was more inventing. Holger always called it instant composing. It was creating on the spot, spontaneously, together, and that was the important thing. It wasn't really like in jazz, where one player after another improvises about the theme of the piece, it was constantly inventing collectively. We came onstage and we didn't have a plan. We just started. What we did was always a reaction to the whole environment – to the sound, to the acoustics, to the crowd, to our mood, and to the moment."

You can hear this process on 'Stuttgart 75 Eins', the opening piece of 'Live In Stuttgart 1975'. Irmin holds a cluster chord on the organ, a signature kosmische Can starburst, which mutates into trilling arpeggios. Michael and Holger find the key and Jaki creates a hissing cymbal wash. The guitar pushes into a distorted thrum and Jaki introduces a beat as the guitar and the keyboard start to create a gorgeous two-note harmony, which is dropped as soon as it appears. This endless motion continues, tunes and riffs eddying around, sometimes coalescing into something that lasts. A middle section featuring Michael's wah-wah guitar and a funk bassline begins to sound like a dark Miles Davis excursion of a similar era, when Miles was into distortion, rage and heroin, until Irmin comes in with a dramatic chord and forces another shift in texture and direction.

"Of course, in Stuttgart in 1975, we'd already had six years of practising this spontaneous invention onstage," says Irmin. "So there was a certain knowledge around thoughts such as, 'What happens if I do this?' or 'How will they respond if I do that?'. We even played games together, surprising each other with something that might not have been expected, maybe by changing the harmony all of a sudden. It was not trying to fool anybody, it was more like ping-pong. You play, you give him a certain harmony, and you find out, 'Oh! What does he do with that?'. So you had to react and that created different forms."

"Every piece had a particular characteristic, so it was not a totally anarchistic, anything-can-happen situation. It's more like where there are very secret and very strange sorts of rules. In this kind of spontaneous invention, the first 30 seconds will create something that will act as a rule for the piece. And then there are certain principles you have to follow, but it's the piece itself that leads the way."

It sounds very risky. It must have gone wrong sometimes?

"Definitely. Not every concert we made was a nice one. Stuttgart was nice. It succeeded. On the recording, in parts, it's really very good, but it came about with this jeopardy, this idea of going onstage and letting it happen. Of course, there were other concerts where it went totally wrong, where it really didn't click between us, and there were concerts where the risk was visible. One astonishing thing, though, was that when it went really wrong and it wasn't good, the audience understood what was going on. They weren't saying, 'Oh shit, what are you doing?'. They tried to be helpful. It happened sometimes that the first set was quite bad, but people weren't hostile to us about it. And the second set – we always played two sets with an intermission – may have had more trust between us and it was perhaps brilliant. So playing this way was full of surprises."

In the break, would you talk about how the first set went? Would you argue?



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→ 12A

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→ 17A



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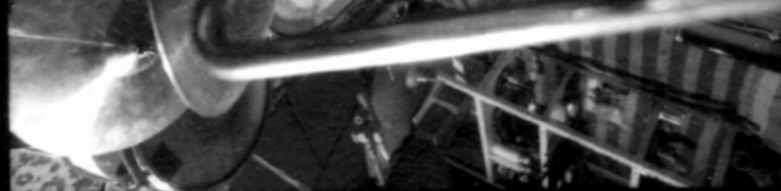
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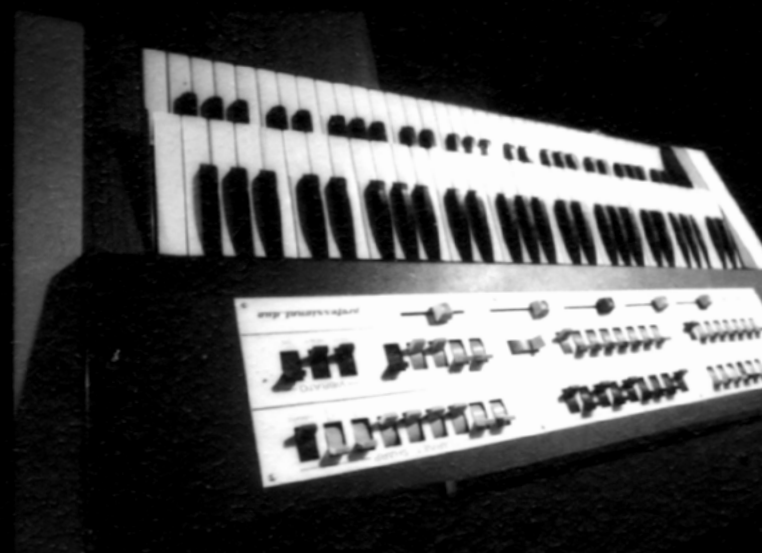


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"Not much. We just tried to concentrate. We didn't let people into the dressing room. And the intermission mood often changed. If the first set was good, we were in a very relaxed mood. If it was bad, we were sort of down. We didn't really argue, but we might try to put our finger on why something went wrong. We never knew definitely what it was anyway and we were conscious of that, so we tried to get rid of the depression and look forward to the second set. Sometimes when it was bad, we had the feeling that the second one would be good, because the audience was fully on our side. We did talk about what we had done much later, but most of the time we knew what had happened anyway."

About four minutes into the second piece on the new album, 'Stuttgart 75 Zwei', fans of The Fall may find their ears pricking up, as a section swirls into focus from the loose and sunny opening movement, with Michael's guitar glistening against Irmin's haunting ambient pads and Holger's inimitable sliding bass figures. It gradually disassembles itself and then there it is – the unmistakable downward progression of The Fall's 'I Am Damo Suzuki' from their 1985 album 'This Nation's Saving Grace'. The drumbeat is the same, as is the rattling guitar riff and the ominously descending bass. It's gone in 30 seconds, but the band circles around it for another couple of minutes before taking off elsewhere and eventually losing themselves in one of Jaki's breathtaking drum storms.

"'I Am Damo Suzuki'... yes, they did that years later," says Irmin. "Maybe they took it. So they were either at the concert, or there was a recording going around. Well, that was not so unusual. We influenced quite a lot of musicians."

As well as The Fall's Mark E Smith, John Lydon was a champion of Can in the early days of Public Image Limited and he places 'Tago Mago' in his Top Five albums of all time. Can are one of the most identifiable influences at play on Pil's 'Metal Box' and you can sense their long shadow in a myriad of other bands since.

"At times you hear it in their work, at other times you don't," says Irmin. "I think it can perhaps be more a kind of mental or spiritual influence. They do something different, but the spirit of what they do comes from having an experience with our music. Sometimes you hear it clearly and sometimes they, well, I wouldn't say they steal... they quote it. Sometimes you can call it sampling and sometimes they pay for this. We earned

quite good money when Kanye West sampled 'Sing Swan Song' [from 1972's 'Ege Bamyasi']. He named the track with the words he could understand from Damo – 'Drunk And Hot Girls'. He sold three million records, so that meant he had to pay, which was very welcome."

he almost extrasensory connection the members of Can appeared to have was the result of years of playing together, as well as the time each of them spent honing their unique skills before joining the band. It all started with a piece of magical musical alchemy at Schloss Nörvenich, a castle near Cologne. This was in 1968, when communal living was all the rage with the counterculture heads and Can seemed like just the kind of group to represent the band-as-commune ideal. How close were they as individuals? Was Can a commune experience?

"From the first days of the band, the four of us spent at least 12 hours together in the studio every day, so we got very close," says Irmin. "We developed a kind of telepathy, even when we had different opinions about musical problems, so we were not just a gang of good friends who all lived in the same style and went to the same parties. It was not a commune. Everybody had their own home. We each had our own life. I had a family. I was the only one with a child, the only one who was married. Holger very rarely was with a girl, well, sometimes he was, but very rarely. Michael always had big love stories, mostly three at the same time. Jaki was with one girlfriend for years."

"Our musical backgrounds were also totally different. I came from a classical education and practice. I was a conductor, I made piano recitals playing Messiaen, Webern, Schoenberg, Brahms and Debussy. Michael was much younger. He had just given up studying law after a year when he joined us. He was from a very cultivated, bourgeois family. So the disparity in our musical backgrounds caused lots of tension, but it was part of the mystery of Can's work. I think that's why it still exists and still has so many fans all over the world, because it holds a kind of richness as a result of these differences – of classical, of contemporary, of jazz from Jaki, of the latest rock records – and it all melted into something that was so full of references. You can discover them over and over again, so that makes something quite special about this music which has kept it alive for the past 50 years."

For both the band themselves and their 1970s fans, Can live was a crucial part of the Can experience. It was where audiences could watch the players exercising their influences in real time. There aren't many groups who have walked the same tightrope, whose gigs were unpredictable, shape-shifting affairs which could be glorious and enigmatic one night and horrible the next, or even one minute to the next. Perhaps The Fall, with its Can-obsessed leader, could stake some claim here. For Can, playing live was every bit as essential as the work they chose to commit to vinyl.

"We did feel that way at the time," says Irmin. "Because of how we appeared onstage and improvised, when it went well, it was very convincing, very explosive, and it created a certain legend. It was totally different from our studio work, because we never tried to play the pieces that we had developed in the studio. On occasion, we sort of quoted parts of it. It sometimes happened in live sets that I played 'Bel Air', for instance, and Holger played the bass riff of 'Vitamin C', while Michael played something totally unknown and Jaki's rhythm was nothing he had ever played before.

"So sometimes various pieces were quoted at the same time, but this created an important part of our work. I think it was at least as important as what we did in the studio. That's why I really found it quite sad that we didn't make proper recordings of many concerts and why we have now said, 'OK, there must be something left', and made an effort to find things again. I already did this, going through the old recordings and the old live performances for 'The Lost Tapes', and it's not my favourite occupation [laughs]. But it had to be done."

You can't listen to 'Live In Stuttgart 1975' and ignore the fact that Irmin Schmidt is the sole surviving member of the group who performed that night.

"Yes, sadly enough," he sighs. "I am still missing them all. It's even hard to talk about it. The closest to me was Michael. He was one of the closest friends I ever had in my life, one of maybe three or four. Even after Can, he lived near me in the South of France. We spent lots and lots of time together and he worked on my two solo records, 'Musk At Dusk' and 'Impossible Holidays'. Most of those records were produced in his studio. Losing him was already horrible, but then Holger

and Jaki both dying one after the other... I mean, Holger and Jaki died within half a year of each other. When I came back from the funeral of Jaki, I got seriously ill. I had a breakdown, really...

"A few weeks before Jaki's death, I was actually planning this idea of making something with prepared piano with him. It's what became my solo piano record, '5 Klavierstücke'. We were at his home in Cologne and we discussed it. At this time, I also had an invitation to go to New York and to Mexico, so we talked about going together, although he was not very keen on travelling anymore. We made plans, but then all of a sudden he was gone. That was very, very hard."

Barring the brief reunion with Malcolm Mooney in 1989, which spawned the one-off long-player 'Rite Time', Can lasted 10 years from 1969 to 1979. They recorded 11 studio albums and performed hundreds of gigs. The music they made influenced later generations in all manner of ways, from the post-punk experimentalists to contemporary megastars like Kanye West. In the intervening decades, Irmin Schmidt has released well over a dozen albums under his own name, produced many other artists, written an opera, and scored countless films and television shows. So where does Can sit in his own estimation of his life's work?

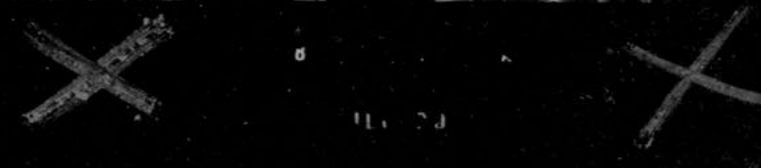
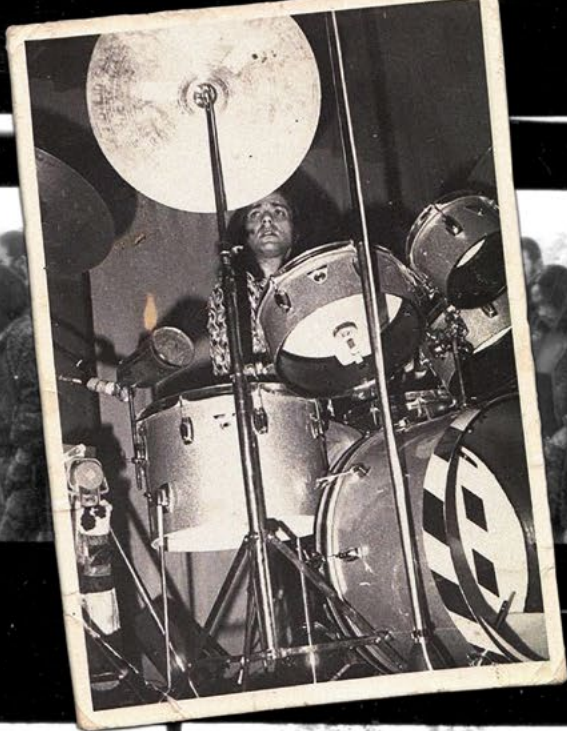
"Those 10 years was a really incredible formative musical experience," he declares. "And it shaped me in a way that has influenced everything I've done since. Whatever I do, Michael, Holger and Jaki are probably my most important teachers, even though I had great teachers before them. My first piano teacher was amazing – I'm a musician because of him – and I studied composition with Ligeti and Stockhausen. But I still insist that Michael, Holger and Jaki were by far the most important. Even considering all the experiences I've had since – my solo work, my symphony work, the opera and the ballet – the foundation of everything I do is Can."

Well, that's a very fitting thought to end our interview, I tell Irmin. He bursts out laughing.

"It sounded like my last words! But it wasn't what I intended. It just came out like that."

'Live In Stuttgart 1975' is released by Spoon/Mute on 28 May





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CAN LIVE: AN EYEWITNESS REPORT

In the 1970s, the legendary Friars Aylesbury club welcomed many of the best and most enduring artists of the day. Among them were Can...

WORDS: KRIS NEEDS

“What do you think if we booked Can?”

By 1973, I had been closely involved with my local rock club Friars Aylesbury for around four years, first as part of the unusually receptive crowd giving early encouragement to David Bowie, Mott The Hoople, Genesis and more, and then later as the designer of its flyers. When promoter David Stopps phoned with details of the latest bookings, he often asked my opinion on potential artists.

I'd been praying for the Can question ever since John Peel started rewiring my internal circuitry with 'Monster Movie' in 1969. I had relished 'Soundtracks', 'Tago Mago' and the mesmerising 'Ege Bamyasi', but I had missed their fleeting UK visit in April 1972, so when the question did come it was all I could do to gibber in the affirmative. With Can duly booked for 24 February 1973, I inked their flyer with immeasurable pleasure and excitement. It would be 80p to get in.

Can were praised as unique sonic pioneers and went on to become part of the very fabric of modern music. So to fully capture the impact of that mind-blowing gig (compounded by another Friars appearance the following year), it's necessary to empty my brain of everything that came after that night – all the catch-up press, books, documentaries, reissues and bonkers fan-driven analysis from subsequent generations.

When Can came to Aylesbury in 1973, most of the audience didn't know what they were in for. Other than John Peel, they

weren't heard on the radio and, with the exception of Melody Maker's Richard Williams and a couple of others, they largely escaped the once powerful music press, although their albums generally got good reviews. For their few rabid fans, Can carried an irresistible alien mystique hot-wired by myths, chiefly that they lived in a medieval castle, where they improvised for hours and then edited their recordings into albums, and their original singer had gone mad before they found his replacement busking on the street.

All I knew was their records sounded like no other band on the planet. And now these mysterious beings were going to be landing on our stage. As I vaulted the concrete steps of the Borough Assembly Hall, which had been Friars' permanent home since 1971, I was so excited I could have feverishly milked the nearest goat. Having seen better days (and Jimi Hendrix in 1967), the venue was a typical dance hall of the time, with frayed red velvet curtains in the bar and wooden floorboards on which progressive rock fans sat cross-legged on their greatcoats, most sporting army surplus and grandad vests, with maybe the odd Pink Floyd T-shirt.

Sandwiched between Mott and Barclay James Harvest, Can's Friars debut attracted a healthy mix of curious regulars, ragged hippies, and a handful of local fans of the band, all of whom witnessed one of the most incredible shows in the club's illustrious history. For me, it was up there with Bowie's unveiling of Ziggy Stardust the previous year.

Irmin Schmidt, Michael Karoli, Holger Czukay, Jaki Liebezit and Damo Suzuki took the stage with little fanfare and eased into the evening's interstellar journey. No set-list, no two shows the same, a slow-burn build-up for their first hour-plus session, then launching the heavy artillery to blast past the outer limits in the epic second half, which Michael had once called "the shameless impact, the wickedness". Watching with ever-dropping jaws, it was a privilege to be witnessing this astonishing spontaneous combustion forged by supernatural telepathy, like experiencing miracle gases coalescing into a new planet, or riding an astral train gawping at the constantly changing scenery (a metaphor often later used to describe Can live).

Due to my memory banks now behaving more like arcane film projectors sparking up surreal movie clips, it's the oddest of details that remain from that magical night. An awesome powerhouse bass drum painted by Jaki in big black and white stripes. Michael moving like a sinuous snake. The ponytailed Irmin karate-chopping his keyboard set-up. Holger wearing thin white gloves to surgically pluck his Fender bass with minimal propulsion. Damo immobile in his Afghan-style sweater, his hair hacked back from the waist-length look I'd seen in photos but still obscuring his face the entire time.

Clearly plugging into the rapturously expectant vibe, Can might have had only a faint idea of where they would be going when they left the launchpad. They glanced at each other every so often while snatches of vocal lines, melodies and rhythms from 'Halleluwah' or 'Spoon' or 'Pinch' or 'Vitamin C' loomed like iridescent ghosts, then quickly flashed past as the roller coaster continued.

Being a massive James Brown fan, I homed in on Holger frequently playing just two notes, which Jaki used as vague markers for his relentless mutant groove exploration, on this

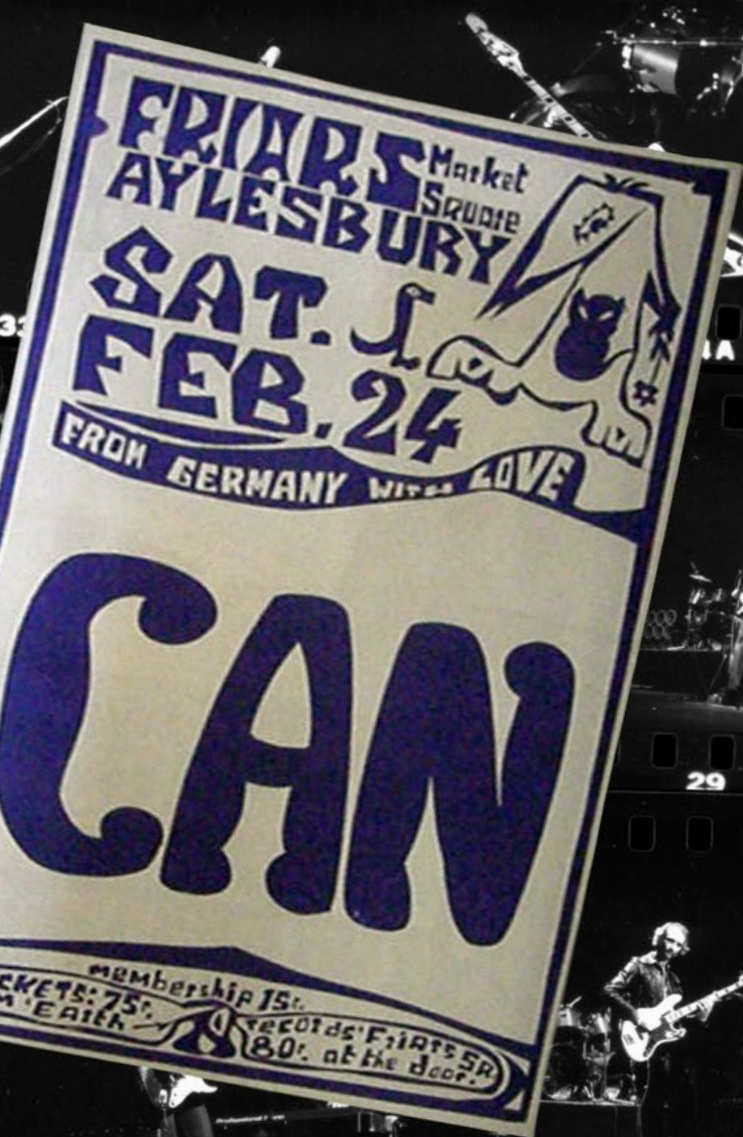
occasion favouring compelling shuffle rhythms and thunderous funk. 'One More Night' was one of the most amazing displays of human drum machine pressure cooker virtuosity I've ever seen (the other was Magma's Christian Vander). Enhancing the jazz impulse, Jaki's complex yet sometimes featherlight polyrhythms were always at the core of Can, riding the flow while simultaneously directing it with intricate precision. And then there was Irmin's keyboards. I've said it many times but, between his flurries of unorthodox classical grandeur, Irmin routinely sounded like a flying saucer taking off.

After hitting a stratospheric peak that threatened to send the old hall into orbit, the kinetic energy and simmering tension became so tightly wound it erupted into one of the cathartic meltdowns they called "godzillas". Watching these wildly diverse oddball scientists at work was monstrously impressive and would sit deep in my soul for life.

Stunned by what I'd experienced, I didn't dare venture up to the dressing room after the show. But when Can suddenly materialised in the auditorium, I couldn't resist bowling up and burbling unfettered fan-gush. Pleasantly humouring this gurgling nutter, they turned out to be nice guys. A year later, when it happened all over again, this time without Damo, they even agreed with my theory about the seasons that the albums were recorded, their set now also traversing 'Future Days' (a summer scorcher).

If you'd told that wide-eyed kid that, 24 years later, he'd be contributing to Can's 'Sacrilege' remix project and appearing in 'Can: The Documentary' as a veteran fan and wizened old fart, let alone attempting to recall the band's first Friars gig for an electronic music magazine 48 years later, he would have guffawed uncontrollably.

The one crystal clear thing that night in 1973 was that Can sounded like the future.





WE ARE THE ROBOTS

Forget Kraftwerk doing it for one song, in the late 1980s, fellow Düsseldorf outfit Der Plan came up with a crackpot scheme to completely replace themselves with robots...

WORDS: JEREMY ALLEN

B

ack in 1955, as the technical revolution was gathering pace, the eminent Hungarian mathematician, scientist and polymath John von Neumann foresaw impending calamity. Two years before his death, he spoke of a dark, dystopian future where automatons designed by humans would surpass the capabilities of their creators.

Von Neumann called it “a maturing crisis of technology”, where artificial intelligence would eventually lead to the rise of a mechanised order, deposing humanity at the top of the hierarchical structure we like to call the animal kingdom. The concept has come to be known as the singularity.

Moritz Reichelt (aka Moritz R®) and Frank Fenstermacher were born in Düsseldorf in October 1955, around the time von Neumann was delivering his apocalyptic warning. Some 30 years later, as members of Der Plan, they would dare to take us dangerously close to that technological tipping point.

Der Plan are, without doubt, North Rhine-Westphalia’s strangest pop group – and this, remember, is the region boasting Kraftwerk as its most famous sons. Formed in 1979 and originally known as Weltaufstandsplan (“World Rebellion Plan”), they were joined in 1982 by Kurt Dahlke (aka Pyrolator, formerly of fellow Neue Deutsche Welle protagonists, DAF).

Over the next eight years they released six ambient dreampop albums bordering on the nightmarish, with unsettling sonic excursions and forays into schlager, often flipping to scary psychedelia. But this is the story of the one that got away.

Originally recorded in 1989, Der Plan’s lost meisterwerk, ‘Save Your Software’, was accidentally rediscovered by Reichelt during a lockdown spring clean at the band’s Ata Tak label headquarters in Düsseldorf.

“I was rearranging my entire studio and I was ready to start throwing things out,” he says over the phone from Berlin. “And then suddenly this cassette fell into my hand.”

As mechanised voices, taut techno and old-skool hip hop beats emanated from the tape via the office stereo, memories flooded over Reichelt like a tidal wave. This was the sound of the Fanuks, a specially assembled trio of robots designed to replace Der Plan’s three humans.

“When I listened to all these mixes of the Fanuk music, I thought, ‘Wow, why did we never pursue this? It’s not so bad!’. But we’d completely forgotten it existed. So I sent it to the others suggesting that we should think about releasing it, and they said, ‘Yeah, why not?’, and the record company also immediately agreed to put it out.”

There are six excavated tracks in all, including the lead single, ‘Copy Copy Machine’. They sound almost commercial, contemporary even, in the obscure and often misunderstood world of Der Plan. Reichelt jokes the album could be the start of a new genre – robot schlager. He’s keen to point out, though, that schlager really just means “hit” in German, and not necessarily the beery, kitsch folk pop we’ve come to associate it with.

“I’m already pretty curious,” he adds. “Will the Fanuks sell better or worse than our last regular album?”

'Save Your Software' is a hybrid of past and future. The six original tracks on the A-side are complemented by three more on the flipside, inspired by the originals and pieced together from incomplete fragments retrieved from the recovered tapes.

These are separated by a 13-minute "documentary" called 'Die Geschichte Der Fanuks' ('The History Of The Fanuks'), a blow-by-blow account of how the project came together. It's a useful synopsis if you happen to speak German, though perhaps a track you might skip if you don't.

The making of 'Save Your Software' is an unbelievable tale. Given it was so long ago, Reichelt admits there may be some blurring of fantasy and fact in its telling, but don't let that put you off. Memory is a fickle mistress and these are post-truth times after all. So buckle up...

The year 1989 saw the old order shift on its axis. Tim Berners-Lee invented the world wide web, Czechoslovakia experienced a Velvet Revolution, and on New Year's Eve David Hasselhoff belted out his German chart-topping 'Looking For Freedom' from a bucket crane over the recently breached Berlin Wall. Little wonder that Francis Fukuyama was writing about "the end of history". Yet if revolution – both political and social – was in the air, then stranger things were afoot right on Der Plan's doorstep.

"Around this time, there was a car that used to park near Ata Tak's headquarters in Düsseldorf," says Reichelt. "It was a yellow Audi with these red letters across the side, spelling the word FANUC. And I always wondered, 'What is FANUC?'. In those days there was no internet, but I managed to discover it was a robot company located at the foot of Mount Fuji, and it became even more of a mystery."

Der Plan had already decided in 1985 – in a vote carried by a slim majority of two to one – to bow to the inevitable and replace themselves with robots as soon as the technology became available. They contacted Second Life Inc, a tech firm that had worked previously with both George Lucas and Kraftwerk, although this was new territory even for a global company spearheading robotic technology.

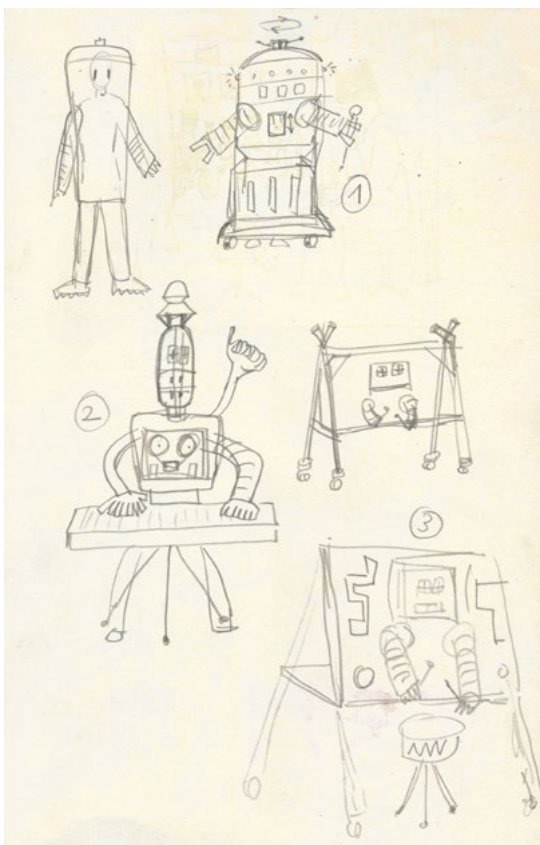
The yellow vehicle outside Ata Tak felt like a sign, and it transpired FANUC had offices in Düsseldorf. A collaboration was soon agreed – at a price, of course. With Der Plan being entertainers first and foremost, they decided to incorporate robots into their next live performance and set about writing music for the stage show. Perhaps aware they might draw comparisons with their compatriots Kraftwerk, they didn't just stop at robots.

"We had this idea for a live show with Der Plan as three different bands," says Reichelt. "One was a tango band featuring an old man singing depressing lyrics, another called Catholic Kitsch was a psychedelic, long-haired hippy group who put candles on the stage, and the third would be the Fanuks with their hard-edged electronics."

For the robots' voices, Der Plan used a speech synthesiser that sounds almost exactly like the online simulator featured on simulationcorner.net.

"It was one of the first programmes to turn text into voice," chuckles Reichelt. "We had to do a lot of editing to make it fit to the rhythms, but we had these very specific robot voices that even Kraftwerk didn't have."

In their dealings with FANUC, Der Plan had an intriguing intermediary – the shadowy figure N Senada, a Bavarian philosopher and musician whose legend precedes him, although a cursory internet search will take you to a Wiki fandom page for the American art collective The Residents.





N Senada occupied the musical surrealists' world for a time, and rumours circulated that he was actually Captain Beefheart in disguise, although how or why remains unclear. I mention this confusion to Reichelt, as well as the fact that, phonetically in Spanish, N Senada means "cove" or "inlet", and *se nada* translates as "I know nothing". What could it all mean?

"People are always wondering where the name came from," he replies, impishly. "There's also Ensenada in Mexico, close to the border, where Californian youths would go at the weekends to take acid."

Under closer scrutiny, Reichelt admits N Senada might be apocryphal and is most probably named after that Baja Californian town where young Americans tripped their faces off.

When Der Plan formed at the tail end of the 1970s, their key influence was undoubtedly The Residents, and their ethos was to push against the worthiness of punk in a way that was both satirical and quietly seditious.

"We were anti-rock 'n' roll, but there's so much good rock 'n' roll that I can't be against it, really. If you think about it, even Kraftwerk would be lost without it."

The catalyst for the band came via a life-changing epiphany in the shape of a lysergic gadabout at Disneyland, California. Do Der Plan critique Disney in their music, I wonder?

"You have these different aspects of Disneyland – it's not just the incredible entertainment, but also this amazing machinery that sucks people in. When you experience it on acid, you see all these different dimensions. Critique is probably the wrong word – you're just able to see all the different parts of the mosaic."

The spectacle?

"Yes! The first time I went, what most impressed me was a statue of Abraham Lincoln as an animatronic, holding a copy of a speech. It was pure propaganda. It's like Stalin as a mechanical puppet. Can you imagine being on acid and seeing that?"

Did Reichelt slyly drop a tab before entering Mickey Mouse mecca, then? "Yeah, it was my first visit to Disneyland – I went there with a friend just after a trip to Ensenada actually." He laughs his head off at this point. "It all came together, you know!"

Sadly the robots didn't come together, mainly because Ata Tak ran out of capital and Der Plan ran out of energy.

"It was too complicated. To make an impressive robot, even as a costume, takes a lot of effort and money and we couldn't do it in time, so we dropped the Fanuks from the concert entirely. In the end, the third band would be Der Plan with typical Der Plan music," he laments. The music for the project was put on the back burner, then swiftly forgotten.

Der Plan may have failed in their mission to set into motion the technological singularity John von Neumann prophesied, but they were never anything but singular in their vision. In the intervening years, we as a species have become dangerously obsessed with technology – First World humanoids attached to smartphones that demand our constant attention, a fusion of man and machine, even if we don't look like cyborgs.

"In these times, people are becoming increasingly like robots – they've become so rational and aren't as crazy anymore," says Moritz Reichelt, sounding disappointed. "And robots are becoming so intelligent that they've developed more and more to be like people."

"On the other hand, our artificial intelligence is developing emotionally. In Stanley Kubrick's '2001: A Space Odyssey', the robot has these human qualities which make everything more appealing to the real human beings on the spaceship. And I think that's happening today. AI is developing rapidly – it will be the number one subject of the future. It's going to change everything so much and in ways we can't even imagine."

'Save Your Software' is out now on Bureau B



DOWN TO EARTH

GARY NUMAN

Gary Numan on the paranoia of parenting, the fear of death, and a planet that may regard humanity as a virus – which just so happens to be the subject of his new album, 'Intruder'

INTERVIEW: MARK ROLAND

O minous images of Mr Gary Numan emerging from inky blackness in his post-apocalypse survival suit, three red slashes down his face... snippets of epic and dark electronic music spreading across social media like, well, a virus... a cosy Zoom chat with Lorraine Kelly on ITV... The evidence is stacking up.

There must be a record on the way. Sure enough, with a release date later this month, the new Numan long-player is upon us.

'Intruder' is another sci-fi concept album, hot on the heels of 2017's chart-busting 'Savage: Songs From A Broken World'. While 'Savage' was about how humans will (or won't) cope with the devastation that climate change might wreak, 'Intruder' contemplates ecological destruction from the perspective of the Earth itself.

"Essentially, it considers humankind to be a virus attacking the planet," explains Numan.

Welp, it's nothing if not a timely creative reaction to the most immense and almost incomprehensible existential threats facing humanity today. It's also every bit as raging and explosive as you'd expect, with Numan's melodic touch bolted firmly to a fierce electronic soundscape. Time then, to catch up with the beloved electronic superstar from his Los Angeles bolthole.

So Gary, how's life been in LA?

"In a pandemic, it's a bit rubbish everywhere. But if you're going to be stuck, here's as good as anywhere. We're very lucky – we've got a pretty big house, the kids have all got their own room and bathroom, and they can do their Zoom schooling in their own space. And we've got a swimming pool too, which has made it far more bearable for us than for most people, so I think we've been very, very fortunate by comparison."

Still, it's been grim, right?

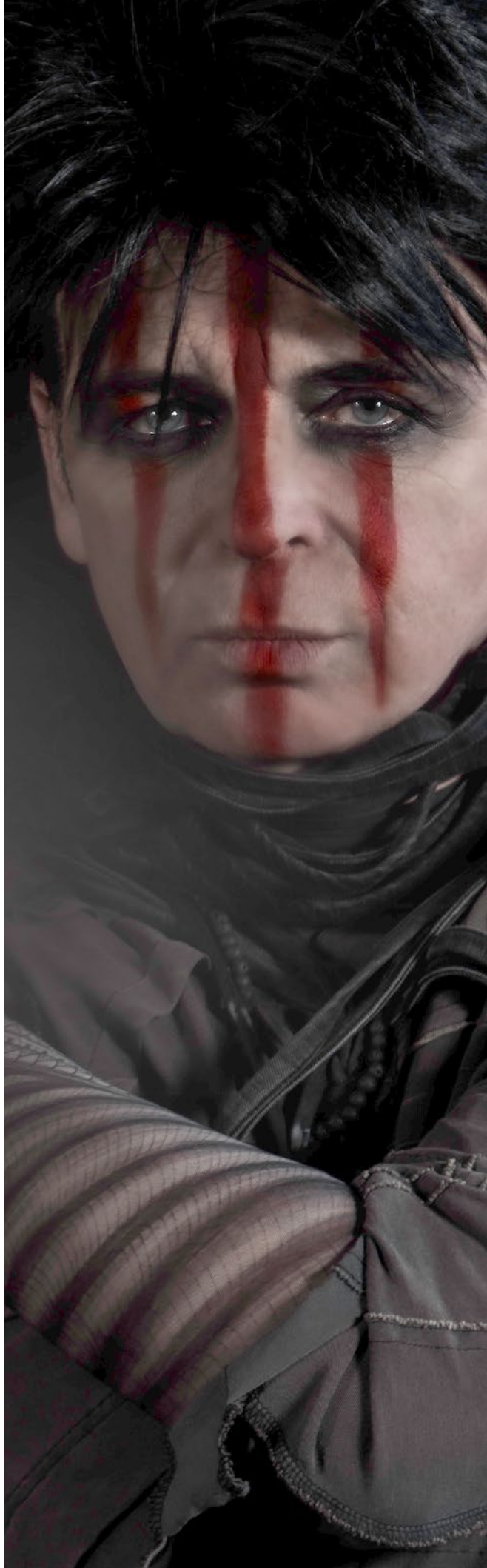
"It's been a long time and it's beginning to take its toll, despite us being relatively comfortable. At the moment, I'm the only one in the family that's doing OK. My wife Gemma's finding it hard, and our three daughters are now struggling with depression, anxiety and all sorts of things needing medication. I feel sorry for them. To be teenagers and to have had a year like this must be incredibly difficult."

'Intruder' links into this, doesn't it? It's not so much sci-fi as sci-fact – the Earth taking its revenge for climate change, humanity cast as a virulent infection.

"The idea isn't so much about revenge, although that does play a part. It's more about if the Earth could speak, how would it express itself? How would it feel about what's going on – disillusioned, disappointed, betrayed, angry? Probably. Most importantly, would it feel the need to fight? So it's less about revenge and more about fighting back and trying to save itself."

Where did the original concept for 'Intruder' come from?

"It was my youngest daughter, Echo – about three years ago, when I was trying to come up with ideas for the new album, she wrote a fantastic poem about the planet called 'Earth'. For an 11-year-old, her understanding and empathy were remarkable. Obviously, it was the work of a child, but it was brilliantly done, and it planted the seed in my head for the new record."





Children today seem far more in tune, sensitive and thoughtful than I was as a kid.

"Yes. The subject of climate change in particular is more out there now. It's a day-to-day topic kids are aware of. It's the sort of thing their pop stars are talking about – your Ariana Grandes and Justin Timberlakes – which makes it a relevant thing for a teenager to be interested in. It's good. My kids are massively bothered about racism and white supremacy, all the things that didn't really come into my consciousness until I was much older."

As a parent, do you feel part of the generation getting the blame for the crisis?

"Not with my kids. Luckily they don't seem to hold me accountable for any of it, which is good [laughs]. It's probably because we talk about this at home, and they know how I feel about the same things that are bothering them, and perhaps part of the reason they feel the way they do is their upbringing. The advice and opinions we've shared with them as they've been growing up reflect good values, I think."

But it's a fine line between protecting them and letting them find their own way.

"It is awkward. It's like when they want to ride down the street on their bicycles. They want to go out of sight, and I can't bear it. It's trying to keep them safe without giving them a sense everything is dangerous and the world is a terrifying place, where every white van has someone in it waiting to grab you. It's difficult for any parent to find the balance, and every concession you make is a risk. So when do you start allowing the risk? It's been my dilemma with all of them."

"Kids push all the time – to go further and to be away longer – and you feel you're becoming this unbearable constraint on the life they want to live, and they're going to resent you for it. So I weaken and go, 'Alright then, you can go to the end of the street'. But then I'll stand out in the middle of it watching them for an hour to make sure they don't go any further! And then they hate it because I'm not giving them the freedom they wanted."

It's a dangerous world but, equally, you can't live in fear.

"My middle daughter, Persia, had a long conversation with me yesterday about how she would deal with any man who came up to her in the mall and tried to grope her. She asked my opinion as to what point she should tase him. What?! Why would she have a Taser in a mall?!"

"But it's my fault because I've got Tasers all over the house [laughs]. I've got six of 'em dotted around in case somebody breaks in. So whenever we go out to drop one of the kids off somewhere and the other two are left behind for 20 minutes, when I get back the Tasers are all out. They're already thinking that way, which isn't a bad thing because it doesn't seem to be freaking them out. They're just aware danger is out there, and they have methods of dealing with it."

'Intruder' seems to fit that theme. It's an emotional album with soul-stirring melodies and some bleak lyrical territory. How do you adjust back from it to normal family life?

"It's never been much of a problem. The things you write aren't necessarily the way you're feeling, or the way you're thinking, or the way your life is going. As a listener, something a bit heavy or sombre can still be a positive experience. You can enjoy listening to music even though it might be a little down and serious. It's the same writing it. I can come up with something pretty sad and without an optimistic or upbeat message, and yet really enjoy the moment because I'm proud of what I'm creating."

Does your state of mind dictate the mood of the material that you produce?

"Since I've been older, I've found the mood I'm in has no bearing on how I write. When I was younger it did. If I was in anxious or a bad mood, I tended not to want to write at all. Writing was a way of dealing with the mood swings which were pretty severe back then, and that's how I got through it as a young man. It doesn't happen now, yet I write the same sort of stuff."

"I remember when I first moved to Los Angeles, lots of fans wrote to me saying, 'Is your music going to be happy now, more like The Beach Boys and sunny and talking about surfing and shit?'. Well, no. My environment makes no difference to what I want to write about. It's the things you're concerned about, the things you feel are important, regardless of your mood. That's where the music comes from these days."





The album could be read as a metaphor for our own inevitable deaths. There's a line that stuck out on 'A Black Sun' – "When I was a child I thought my life was endless..."

"The song is about the way love changes as we get older. When we're young, it's an easy thing. There's no pain attached to it. Our parents are still relatively young, they're going to live forever. We're very young, we're going to live forever. Everything about life is good, it's out there waiting for us, full of opportunities. Then as you get older, it all changes. Love unavoidably has pain attached to it. Ultimately we'll get sick and die, our parents die, our friends die..."

"The day I wrote that song, I was lying in bed looking at Gemma before she woke, and I was really frightened. There was this MS scare hanging over her for a while, which thankfully hasn't come to anything. But I was thinking about if it did happen, or how it's going to be for her when I go, and about the cruel inescapability of it for all of us, and that was when it struck me how love changes. When I was a little boy looking at my mum, I had no fears or worries or anxieties about the passing of time and what would come. So in the lyrics I was trying to tie it all in with the planet – the way the Earth has loved us has changed because we've now become something creating an awful lot of pain for it."

Do these bleak songs get an emotional reaction from the people closest to you?

"My wife struggles with them. I started to play something a little while ago, I think we were working on an edit for radio, and she lost it almost instantly. I had to stop playing it as she got really upset. It triggered something. She's heard it all before. In a selfish kind of way, I'm quietly proud it provokes that kind of reaction. But the intention is never to upset – it's always to entertain or to give people room for thought. I don't think I'd even know how to deliberately upset. But I suppose I can write a pretty sad melody."

It's definitely a skill you have.

"Ha ha!"

What's the status of your plans for touring this album?

"Playing live accounts for 80 per cent of my income, but it's impossible to plan at the moment. No one really knows what's going to go on. There are lots of optimistic predictions about when vaccinations will be at a level where herd immunity kicks in. There's talk of opening venues at 25 per cent capacity to begin with, but it's never going to work – no one's going to make any money at 25 per cent capacity."

"I had a tour booked for June, which has been cancelled. There were festivals throughout August, but whether they actually happen or not is a very different thing. One of them has been put back to September, which feels slightly more optimistic. I've also got a tour of North America booked for October and November, so that's looking possible. There might even be a handful of British shows around September or early October. They're talking maybe a remix EP coming out to give the album another little shot in the arm, but the main touring will be in May next year as far as Britain's concerned."

'Intruder' is released by BMG on 21 May



BAND OF BROTHERS

An ode to growing up in a working-class Dublin suburb, a story of life, love and a devastating loss, For Those I Love's debut album will stop you in your tracks

WORDS: NEIL MASON

That was some sneaky trickery from me," laughs For Those I Love's David Balfe. "I was the first of my friends to learn how to drive. Somebody in my family passed away and I ended up inheriting a 2001 Renault Clio. I passed my test and that was it, all of us in the car, going splits on petrol and driving around for the night."

He'd make mix CDs, slipping his own fledging productions among the bangers to see how his mates responded.

"Their approval meant that I was onto something," he says.

They must've twigged at some point?

"For sure," he beams. "They'd say, 'What is *this*?' and I'd be like, 'I don't know'. 'Well, you put it on the fucking CD, obviously you do know, so come on, tell us'."

The result of this covert activity is his eponymous debut album as For Those I Love. It's an attention-grabber of a record. In his spoken word Dublin brogue, Balfe tells tales of growing up and of deep-rooted friendships mashed up against some huge tunes, from proper arms-in-the-air floorfillers to atmospheric soul-searchers. It feels as fresh and original as hearing The Streets' 'Original Pirate Material' for the first time. Once you start listening, and you will listen repeatedly, you realise things aren't what they seem. At the heart of the work is a grief that is still tangible.

David Balfe grew up in the north Dublin suburbs, Donaghmede to be precise, with family roots in neighbouring Coolock. Coming from a working-class household, he knew his family didn't have much. "Slim pickings" he calls it. While still quite young, he was well aware of the gulf between his parents and the more affluent members of his family.

"You could see a clear distinction, economically and culturally," says Balfe.

But while there might not have been much money, there was a lot of love. And a lot of art. Enter Uncle Darren.

"Darren is one of the great blessings in my life," says Balfe. "He facilitated my interest in the arts, starting when I was maybe four or five. I remember him giving me oil pastels and a load of paper, and sitting in my nanny's porch, drawing. It's my first memory of actively trying to make a piece of art."

And Uncle Darren kept it coming. When his nephew was nine he bought him a guitar (Balfe readily admits it was years before he learned how to play it), and acted as a personal musical filter.

"He was extremely non-judgemental," says Balfe, "which is a really beautiful thing to have, especially when the majority of the stuff you were into was embarrassing shite. He'd say, 'So if you're into Sum 41 maybe we could see where they came from... have you ever heard Hüsker Dü?'."

In his first week at secondary school, Chanel College in Coolock, Balfe met Paul Curran, an At The Drive-In badge on his bag sealing their fate. The pair hit it off straight away.

"It was game over," says Balfe. "The two of us were just interconnected from that point onwards. It was a very intense friendship because we had a lot of similar, difficult life experiences. We were both trying to make sense of those experiences through the art."

As the gang grew, they were precociously hungry for books, music, films, poetry... whatever. They hoovered up everything they could. As Balfe says in the album's opener 'I Have A Love', "Sharing books at big break / With the two of us, and Barry and Craig / Talking tunes and poems with too much weight for our age".

A like-minded friendship group and an arty, uncle-shaped guiding hand sounds like the dream ticket, but it wasn't all plain sailing.

"In my early teens, things started to go astray and I was getting into a bit of trouble," he says. "My peers were already going down much darker, fatalistic avenues. My parents saw that and were fearful of where it was all going for me."

His folks decided it was time to intervene and the solution they hit upon was inspired.

"We didn't have a whole lot," says Balfe. "But my parents took a gamble. They knew I was interested in drawing, painting and music and they said, 'We're going to build a shed in the back garden, and if you and your friends use that for making art or making music, we'll leave you alone and you can do whatever you want there'."

They built you a shed?

"Yeah, I know," he says. "It doesn't seem like a lot, but it gave us a way out during the times that it mattered the most. It came at a cost though. Everything my parents had went on the shed. They never went out, didn't buy anything for themselves, we didn't go on holidays."

While the sacrifice might have been absolute, it worked. The friends made full use of the facility in Balfe's back garden and a DIY ethos began to flourish.



B alfe's own music-making adventure can be traced back to one notable moment. Aged 15, he found himself in Dublin record shop, All City, where a live beat-making masterclass from early Hudson Mohawke collaborator Oddisee proved an eye-opener. He watched as the producer invited people to dig through the racks and pull out records. He began sampling sounds from the discs and put together, as Balfe describes it, "a bit of a jaunty little track".

"It was a total moment of crystallisation," he admits.

Again, Uncle Darren was ahead of the game. A computer that was being thrown out at his work was procured for his nephew to muck about with. It arrived in the shed with a hooky version of audio editing software Cool Edit Pro. As Balfe didn't have a means to record live music, he started working with the tools at his disposal and began chopping up songs that were already on the machine.

"I wanted to feel like I was involved with the creation of music in some way," he says. "Before I saw Oddisee, I was unaware that what he was doing, and what I was doing, was a legitimate form of creation. It blew my mind."

Bands inevitably came and went. Spells in metalcore outfits gelled in the melodic angst rock of multimedia collective, Burnt Out. Paul Curran was fast gaining a reputation as a spoken word poet and, as the frontman, it's his vitriolic lyrics that are much in evidence on the band's two singles. Released in 2016, 'Dear James' and 'Joyrider' came with videos shot by Balfe.

As the band began to attract attention, Balfe had also started working on a solo project in the shed at night. Computer to the fore, sonically it couldn't be further removed from the abrasive leanings of Burnt Out. It would be an ode to friendship, a thank you, an acknowledgement to those closest to him for the love they had given and the sacrifices they'd made. Slowly but surely, with tracks being regularly demo-ed in the Renault Clio, it began to take shape.

"For my friends, the art was the thing that unified us. For my family, the art was the result of love and acceptance and building that little wooden shed out the back."

On the face of it, things were good. With an album on the way, the band were building momentum. Curran's reputation was gathering pace, while Balfe's nocturnal activity was shaping up. And then in early 2018, completely out of the blue, Paul Curran took his own life.

"Yeah," says Balfe, before taking a long pause. A very long pause. "It was a Thursday, I was with him on the Tuesday night. We were supposed to go see Lorenzo Senni on the Saturday. I would have seen Paul on the Thursday anyway..."

Balfe says that trying to understand his best friend's death was almost a comfort. He talks about downloading their entire Facebook chat log – 10 years of messages.

"You do a word count and it's like 'War And Peace' five times over," says Balfe. "The answer is there if you need to convince yourself the answer is there. I'd experienced tragedy before, but nothing on that scale. It's easy to try and read signs in every interaction, every lyric, every poem, and try and make some spider web of sense out of it. But there is very little benefit in that because you don't know what happens in those moments. A whole life comes down to a 10-minute window, and nobody is ever going to know what happened."

He tails off. Pauses again. Understandably. Balfe has real warmth, he speaks openly and honestly about himself and the event that turned his world inside out. He's told this story before, many times, but he is still lost for words.

"So yeah, I don't know," he says. "It's just..."

A fter a loss like that, there are two ways to go. You can plunge down into the darkness yourself or you can throw everything you've got into whatever gets you through. Except, of course, it's never going to be that straightforward.

"For the first couple of months, we were all just so broken," he says. "I felt such an obligation to making sure everyone else was OK that I didn't allow myself to feel anything at all. It meant I didn't have to deal with the terror I faced. And then, predictably, a couple months later it all caught up with me and I totally went off the rails."

As well as crashing and burning, he talks about being stripped of the understanding of his own identity following Curran's death. But just as he was looking out for the people around him, they were also looking out for him.

"The way they helped me to find that identity again was to push me back towards the art," he says. "Initially, I didn't want to continue to work on the project at all, but I had a lot of encouragement from my family and friends. Actually, it was more of a demand. They were like, 'You know you need to keep doing this, right?'."

Over the months that followed, his album changed tack. It was still about marking a period in the lives of this tight-knit group, still a celebration of their bond, but it became much more an immortalisation of Paul and their collective relationship with him. Beyond Balfe's vocals, many other voices are featured – from WhatsApp voice recordings, audio from videos, sections of Burnt Out interviews. They're all Paul Curran.

"I also buried a bunch of his performances, his poems, in the tracks," says Balfe. "I don't think you can hear them, but there are additional vocals deep in the mix. A lot of the fabric of Paul's character is built into that record."

Once he'd finished 'For Those I Love', Balfe pressed just 25 copies so he could share it with those it was most important to, who it resonated with the most. Job done, right?

"That's what the record was for," he says. "It took a lot of encouragement from my family and friends to pursue a full release. It wasn't something I felt I wanted to do, but I'm glad that there will remain copies that are very much just for the people that I made the record for."

If you'd like a roll call, it's all there on 'You Live / No One Like You'.

'For Those I Love' is an album thick with samples. "Dense" is how Balfe describes it. Some of them are as clear as a bell – Smokey Robinson's 'The Tracks Of My Tears' on the gorgeous 'The Shape Of You', and on 'To Have You' a refrain from 'Everything I Own' by Bread, but sampled and helium-ed to buggery from the 1972 soul-fuelled Barbara Mason version.

There are some really great lifts – the rare groove of Sonya Spence's 'Let Love Flow On', the brilliant 80s disco of 'There's Never Been (No One Like You)' by Kenix, even Irish folk outfit The Clancy Brothers get a look-in. There are contemporary borrows too, chief among them a piano motif from '(No One Knows Me) Like The Piano' by Sampha, a similarly crushing record about the death of his mother.

Taking pride of place though, in the emotional final track 'Leave Me Not Love', is the influential 60s US folkie Jackson C Frank, whose vocal from 'Cryin' Like A Baby' closes the album. "Crying like a baby / In my momma's arms / The day they came to tell me / You were gone", it goes. Both Balfe and Curran were huge fans.

As you will no doubt have gathered by now, this is a deeply, deeply personal record. And yet here it is, out in the wild for anyone to hear. How does that make him feel?

"It's very complicated," he allows. "I feel a tremendous amount of guilt about releasing this record. It must seem as if I'm massively benefitting from this tragedy that happened to my greatest friend. The label keep talking about a second album. Brilliant, I'll take the fucking money from the second record, but with this one I have spent the entire budget and all the publishing on clearing the samples, so that the record can come out the same way that I gave it to my family and friends."

Which, you'd imagine, was expensive and no mean feat. Was it worth it? Most certainly. You can't believe for one moment that his label, his family and friends, or a new-found audience, are going to let him just ride off into the distance after this. Is there a second album up his sleeve?

"I have started writing," he concedes. "But I'm a firm believer that if you talk about what you're going to do, it lets you off the hook from actually doing it. It actualises the thought, makes it seem like it's already out there in the world. Discussing it also seems to solidify ideas when they're in their infancy and doesn't give them room to expand. So if I start talking about a second album, I'm afraid that I won't be able to let it form into anything else."

But there will be a second one?

"I think so," he says. "Let's see."

'For Those I Love' is out now on September Recordings

THE HILLS ARE ALIVE



A sacred mountain on the Korean border, a pilgrimage to meet Linda Ronstadt, a 13th century Welsh prince and an obsession with the work of Klaus Dinger... welcome to the world of Gruff Rhys

WORDS: BOB FISCHER

"It's a very important mountain, especially for the Korean people," says Gruff Rhys, thoughtfully. Although, to be honest, everything he says is pretty damned thoughtful. "Their origin and culture are tied to it, so I'm overstating as much as I can that the album is about an imaginary Mount Paektu of the mind. It's pretty abstract."

Notebooks out, class, pay attention! Paektu is an active volcano on the border between China and North Korea. It's sacred to both Korean states as the birthplace of Dangun, the semi-mythical founder of Gojoseon, the first Korean kingdom. Rhys has never actually been there, but was intrigued by the name in a book, which lit the spark of inspiration for his new long-player, 'Seeking New Gods'.

It's complex stuff to be discussing at 10am on a Tuesday morning with this softly spoken Welsh polymath, but he's characteristically patient and polite.

"I really didn't want to make an offensive Orientalist record," he explains. "But Paektu is what inspired me. I then applied it to people – imagining them as mountains, I suppose – and it became more personal. I wrote some songs with Mount Paektu in them, dropping in references to historical characters and dates, but they just sounded awful, a bit ill-fitting. Once I realised that, I relaxed and stopped feeling any pressure to have a narrative. I don't want anyone to notice there's a theme to the album, really. The songs can exist without the concept."

We're talking on the phone. Rhys had sounded surprised and a little cautious when he answered, but reassured me he was expecting the call ("I always sound like that") before embarking on a genial conversational meander gently reflecting the early hour. It's an unhurried breakfast of an interview, courteous and contemplative, and he does seem endearingly concerned that 'Seeking New Gods' might be misinterpreted as an act of cultural appropriation.

"I didn't want to make a quasi-mystical record," he insists. "I grew up in a mountainous area, so mountains are very real for me."

Rhys' love of the distinctly windswept seems slightly incongruous amid the giddy urban circus of the music world, but it's wholly authentic. In February 2020, as part of a tour of intimate rural venues, he played the Parochial Hall in the picturesque North Yorkshire village of Great Ayton. The day before the gig, during an interview I did with him for the local radio station, he expressed an interest in scaling Roseberry Topping, the mini-Matterhorn of the North York Moors.

This wasn't just idle radio banter. The morning after the show, he actually did it. He genuinely spent his day off on a fairly strenuous climb of this iconic local landmark, alongside support act Elaine Palmer, her husband Jake, and Robert Nichols – lead singer of Teesside post-punk legends Shrug. Nichols later told me they'd passed much of the ascent discussing Great Ayton's most famous resident, one Captain Cook, who reputedly found his taste for adventure exploring the same slopes as a boy.

"When I'm on tour, I just want to see everything," laughs Rhys. "You meet local people and get exposed to things you wouldn't normally ever get to experience, like local TV or radio shows... and record shops, especially! Number one would be a good local record shop. Number two would be a mountain."

He laughs again and tells me about the piles of seven-inch singles he accumulates on tour – "I always look out for Mediterranean disco or Malaysian pop" – but the mountains draw us back. A love of high places, it seems, is a family trait. His late father, Ioan Bowen Rees, was an enthusiastic climber whose profound connection to the local Welsh peaks is reflected in his own work as a poet and in the 1987 compendium he edited, entitled 'The Mountains Of Wales: An Anthology In Verse & Prose'.

"Yeah, he was obsessed by it," agrees Rhys.

His mother, Margaret Wynn Meredith, was also an accomplished poet. It's a touching connection. Did they spend a lot of time walking in the hills together?

"Every weekend, more or less. And I'd mess around with my friends on the

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mountains or in the old quarries in the foothills. I'm from Bethesda in North Wales, and the mountain range is the Carneddau. In the 13th century it was the equivalent of the Tora Bora in Afghanistan. After the Norman invasion, that's where the Welsh princes went into hiding. Prince Dafydd was found there – a bit like Saddam in Iraq – holed up in a little cave just above Bethesda.

"There's industrial history as well. The mountains were mined for slate. The local slate quarry used to be the biggest in the world, so it's not overly idyllic, either. It was a well-balanced place to grow up."

And is Prince Dafydd's cave still there?

"Yeah," he laughs. "But it's behind a farmhouse, not on public land. There should be a massive Brutalist sculpture or something there. Fifty foot tall and made of concrete."

Most of 'Seeking New Gods' was recorded in the Mojave Desert – "like something out of the 'The Flintstones'" – at the climax of a 2019 American tour that, by all accounts, became a profound bonding experience for all involved. Yet, tellingly, Rhys kept the mountainous origins of the album a secret from his fellow musicians.

"I didn't want to over-romanticise it for them," he says. "We'd been touring for a few weeks, listening to mad long jams on the stereo – a lot of mid-1970s Miles Davis. We were doing 12-hour drives between gigs and your sense of time changes, so you can listen to 15-minute songs and they're over in a flash."

"We'd been listening to the same music as each other for weeks, and we'd rehearsed the new songs in soundchecks. We were primed. The new tracks became more 'jammy'."

"When we'd finished them, we'd just carry on playing. So I didn't want to overcomplicate a good thing. We were in a spiritual enough place without messing it up with mysticism and romanticism. I hadn't booked a studio, but then a place called Rancho De La Luna in Joshua Tree came up. We did a gig in Los Angeles, then drove out there."

By now I'm picturing a 'Fear And Loathing'-style road trip into the desert.

"It was intense," he concedes. "Osian, our piano player, was in trouble. He was seriously ill and should have been in hospital, but nobody realised. Then Kliph, the drummer, who's a lifelong Linda Ronstadt fan, found out she was giving a talk in Reno, Nevada on the day we arrived in Joshua Tree. So he went off in the van with all the gear, and got to meet her."

Which was lucky, in that it turned out to be Ronstadt's last ever public appearance, but slightly less good news for the rest of the band, who were now holed up in the studio without their gear.

"On the first day, it wasn't working. Nobody could understand what was wrong with the desk. And it sounds daft, but there's a lot of bleed on the record. The drum sound comes through the piano mic, stuff like that, which makes it feel a bit 'live'. But there's no humidity out there, so it's not a damp-sounding album. The sound travels faster to the mics. Although when we overdubbed it all in Bristol, that introduced some dampness."

If the interview is a breakfast, by this point we've finished the toast and knocked back a bucket of black coffee. The conversation becomes supercharged, particularly when discussing the vintage synth that provides 'Seeking New Gods' with a unifying background drone. It doesn't sound damp. It sounds great.

"The Solina!" he exclaims. "It's a 1970s synth I put through a big old phaser. I'm into that whole period of mid-1970s experimentation. I love Harmonia, and anything Michael Rother or Klaus Dinger were involved with after Neu!. I read a book called 'Electri_City' by Rudi Esch, about the electronic music of Düsseldorf, all anecdotes from the people who were there, and it's hilarious. I was obsessed with mid-70s ambient music – Brian Eno, Haruomi Hosono and Laurie Spiegel – that really evocative sound, still played by actual people."

Despite this talk of Düsseldorf experimentalism, 'Seeking New Gods' remains a breezy, West Coast-influenced pop album at heart. Lead single 'Loan Your Loneliness' even concludes with a two-minute guitar solo worthy of Steely Dan. This effortless combination of disparate influences has come to define Rhys' solo oeuvre, just as it forged the career of the band that made his name.

"The Super Furry records..." he ponders. "We were always experimenting with electronics, largely through Cian Ciarán, our main keyboard player. He'd have a second studio room set up with samplers, so we could take things from a live setting for him to deconstruct in there. He did amazing stuff. It was a really interesting mix of production styles."

While Rhys is keen to stress his respect for his fellow Super Furry Animals, he's been a solo artist for longer than he's been with the band. To those of us whose adult music tastes were forged in the maelstrom of the 1990s, that feels slightly mind-boggling. When I bring this up, he pauses for a long time.

"I suppose what was amazing about the Super Furies was the intensity," he muses. "We released nine albums in 13 years. It was an insane roller-coaster ride, totally non-stop, with nothing else in our lives. A really different way of working, and harder to keep up."





Does he sometimes miss the intensity?

"It's just a different part of my life," he explains. "I've got kids now. When you spend six months in a studio, uninterrupted... It wasn't a sacrifice at the time, by any means. It was amazing. But it would be harder for me to do now."

Rhys is, nevertheless, still clearly compelled to explore, both geographically and artistically. 'Seeking New Gods' is his third solo album in as many years, and 2020 saw the publication of a "selective memoir", 'Resist Phony Encores!'.

As one Beatles obsessive speaking to another, I was intrigued by an onstage encounter it mentions – a 2012 Africa Express showcase in London, where he joined organiser Damon Albarn to provide backing vocals for surprise guest Paul McCartney.

During the set, the pair held up the whimsical placards that have become a staple of a Gruff Rhys live shows. "APPLAUSE", "LOUDER" and "APESHIT" elicited the intended responses, but the accidentally displayed "TAX THE RICH" prompted a bemused glance from McCartney, which was immortalised on camera. Rhys still seems embarrassed by it all.

"I'll have to send him a copy of the book," he says. "I feel a bit bad. I sort of positioned myself in it as a McCartney troll, but I'm more respectful of him. The Super Furry Friends met him at an awards ceremony in 1999 when we were hammered. Cian started hustling him, saying, 'I want to remix your stuff! Send me some tapes!'. We were really on at him, but he reacted well and within a week he'd sent over some Beatles' master tapes to be remixed – with a heavy reminder not to bootleg them! It was completely insane. So I'd come across him before and he seemed pretty grounded."

The conversation drifts affably from on-the-record interview to off-the-record appreciation for McCartney's musical genius and good-humoured largesse. This is the Beatle, remember, who recorded himself chomping carrots for the 2001 Super Furry Friends album 'Rings Around The World'. We swap podcast recommendations (Adam Buxton versus Andrew Loog Oldham), and Rhys reassures me that his keyboard player Osian is now fully recovered from his illness.

"Fit as a fiddle," he insists.

So what's next? Gruff Rhys is predictably modest.

"I've got things on the go, but I'm not sure what I'll finish first," he says. "And sometimes things just don't get finished..."

After an hour, our metaphorical breakfast has drawn to a conclusion, and the softly spoken polymath seems distinctly fired up to return to his ever-expanding to-do list. Because – to paraphrase generations of intrepid mountaineers – it's there.

FREQ OUT

It would seem that the solo output of Hawkwind's visionary frontman Robert Calvert is something of a best-kept secret. We reveal the untold story of his maverick work as an electronic pioneer

WORDS: JOE BANKS



Ask any Hawkwind fan and they'll tell you Robert Calvert was a genius. The space-age poet who co-wrote 'Silver Machine', conceived their ground-breaking Space Ritual tour and thrilled audiences with his electrifying stage presence was absolutely key to the band's classic 1970s output.

Yet beyond this fanbase, Calvert has been relegated to cult-hero status at best. While comparable in many ways to figures such as Peter Hammill, Brian Eno, Bowie even, his musical legacy remains largely unheralded. This is especially true of his post-Hawkwind pivot towards electronic music in the 1980s, which produced some of his finest songs, but which has rarely been highlighted, let alone celebrated.

Things changed earlier this year, however, with the release of 'The Last Star Fighter', an album of his solo work remixed by a new generation of electronic musicians, including Xeno & Oaklander, Sixth June, Xiu Xiu, Antoni Maiorvi and The KVB.

Reworking tracks from 'Hype' (1981), 'Freq' (1984) and 'Test-Tube Conceived' (1986) as well as some of the demos he left behind, it reveals him as ahead of the curve in combining stark, minimal synth arrangements with brilliant melody lines and lyrics that capture the dawning of the digital age.

Calvert's involvement with electronica began a long time before the 1980s. Hawkwind established a unique position in the UK underground by augmenting their metronomic, post-psychedelic riffage with raw frequencies produced by signal testing equipment and an EMS VCS 3. Against a backdrop of unearthly drones and eerie whooshes, Calvert would recite poems such as 'The Awakening' and '10 Seconds Of Forever' before delivering the shuddering, howling tour de force of 'Sonic Attack'.

Temporarily leaving the band at the end of 1973, he recorded two solo albums, which featured further electronic experimentation. 'Captain Lockheed And The Starfighters' (1974) was enlivened by the presence of Brian Eno, who used his EMS Synthi to manipulate the voice of guest singer Arthur Brown on 'The Song Of The Gremlin', an eccentric slice of electro-punk also featuring Adrian Wagner on synth.

While Eno subsequently produced 'Lucky Leif And The Longships' (1975), Wagner proved the more enduring and

important collaborator. In 1974 he released one of Britain's first all-electronic albums, 'Distances Between Us', on which Calvert guests, most significantly on 'Steppenwolf'. A track bearing this lyric and melody would appear on Hawkwind's 'Astounding Sounds, Amazing Music' from 1976, but the harsh, synthetic rumble of this version anticipates Calvert's later work.

He also sang on Wagner's cosmic 1979 disco cash-in album 'Disco Dream And The Androids'. The most significant exchange between the two men, though, was technological – Wagner was the co-designer of the Wasp, the cheap digital synth that inspired a legion of bedroom electronic musicians, and it wasn't long before Calvert got his hands on one.

After leaving Hawkwind for good in 1979, Calvert wrote the novel 'Hype', a pulpy takedown of the music business that led to an album of the same name. Ostensibly the songs of protagonist Tom Mahler, it's a collection of well-turned, catchy powerpop, but with a few proto-electronic tunes too, most notably the moody synth noir of 'Flight 105' and the spiky urban paranoia of 'The Luminous Green Glow Of The Dials On The Dashboard (At Night)', which could be Chrome, early Ultravox or – as remixer Antoni Maiorvi says – "Devo meets Cybotron".

Hype' was also the project that brought Calvert together with his next significant collaborator, ex-High Tide bass player and cellist Pete Pavli. They bonded over a shared interest in Futurism and the avant-garde. The fact that the early synthpop acts were being called "Futurists" caught Calvert's ear.

"They were outraging the public with music that hadn't been done before, just like the Italian Futurists in 1912," says Pavli. "I love electronica and I think we were both influenced by what was going on at the time. Synths weren't a new thing, but they were now being used in a different way, becoming the main focus of the song."

Calvert invited Pavli to take part in a series of shows at Theatrespace, a fringe venue in Covent Garden, London. Billed as Kränkschaft Cabaret, it featured songs, skits and poems.

"We had loads of fun – it was an absolute hoot from start to finish," remembers Pavli, who now comprises one half of the shoegaze/electropop duo Strata Florida, alongside ex-Swallow vocalist Louise Trehay.

Kränschaft Cabaret also set the template for Calvert's next project, 'The Kid From Silicon Gulch', a self-described "electronic musical". Featuring his wife Jill and Pavli, it was both a send-up of Sam Spade-style private eye movies and a prescient cybercrime caper, with Calvert as Brad Spark investigating a series of murders apparently committed by home computers. The songs for the play were written and recorded in just two weeks.

"We set up a little studio in his front room," says Pavli. "Revex, Wasp, bass, guitar and a drum machine – that was all we needed. Bob had an extraordinary way of composing. He'd get the Wasp, this little touch-sensitive thing with only a dozen keys on it, and record a riff for a song, then just press one note for the chord. We were on this Futurist kick, so we wanted to make it quite jagged, atonal and a bit robotic. Recording to a 2-track Revex also meant it had to be succinct and minimalist."

Performed for one week only at Theatrespace in February 1981, it was a sell-out each night. A rough recording on YouTube shows a ridiculously basic stage set, with the cast just singing to the Revex backing track, but Calvert's intense charisma and personality held it together. The music is also striking in its wired, synthetic attack, with tracks such as 'Silicon Tronic Blues', 'On The Case' and 'A Day Called X' all thumping mechanical beats, buzzing Wasp bass and piercing electronic toelines. Without any thought to posterity, not a single one of these tracks was recorded for release. Calvert and Pavli performed another series of Kränschaft shows in June 1981, but it would be the last time they worked with each other.

"Bob had a lot of mental health problems during his life," explains Pavli. "He was OK up to the last couple of days of the show, but then he got quite agitated and started shouting at people. On the second last day, we had a big row. We got through the performances fine – he was very professional –

but there was a bit of bad feeling when we'd finished. So we packed up, I went off, and that was pretty much it. I'm really sorry we fell out, as we'd become good friends and had a lot of fun. But he just moved on."

Steve Pond first met Calvert while browsing the science fiction section of Compendium Books in Camden, north London. But the two became properly acquainted through Inner City Unit, the space-punk band that was formed by ex-Hawkwind saxophonist Nik Turner that Pond was slowly edging his way into.

Calvert began to sporadically appear live with ICU, performing old Hawkwind tracks along with his own material. Pictures from the time show him dressed in tweeds, with a megaphone and hammer in his hands.

"He had his Wasp on a flight case next to him and a hammer to hit it with," Pond remembers. "He couldn't really make a noise that way, but it didn't stop him."

Pond also had his own band, The Three Laws, a trio consisting of two Wasp players and a female singer. Despite being managed by Wham! supremo Simon Napier-Bell and playing gigs with the nascent Depeche Mode through their contacts with Mute's Daniel Miller, they failed to be signed. Coincidentally, Calvert had a Mute connection after appearing as the Titanic's captain in the video for Silicon Teens' version of 'Memphis Tennessee' – much to the amusement of Miller, who had been a Hawkwind fan as a teenager.

"I don't think electronic music was a 100 per cent stylistic choice," says Pond of Calvert. "It was more out of necessity. He loved the technology, but he wanted to get things done now. He wasn't going to buy a Prophet-5 and learn how to use it – he was going to stick with his Wasp and little 4-track recorder he understood and squeeze as many ideas out as possible."



PHOTO: STEVE POND ARCHIVE



ROBERT CALVERT

"He didn't pay much attention to modern music because he was making it. His head was so alive with ideas, and he had so many things going on all the time that there was no space for consumption – he was too busy producing."

For the next couple of years, Calvert holed up in his Ramsgate home, writing and making demos.

"His entire studio rig lived on a large wooden table in the kitchen," recalls ICU keyboardist Phillip "Dead Fred" Reeves. "Bob did all his writing in a rickety shed down at the bottom of the garden. A battery cassette recorder was on hand, ready to capture any words or tunes that came his way. There was a complete absence of vinyl records or tapes in his home. In fact, the only piece of modern tech I saw was a VHS video machine hooked up to the TV – he'd record news and science programmes for post-midnight viewing."

The fruits of this labour emerged in late 1984 with the release of 'Freq', Calvert's most electronic album. Recorded almost entirely alone, with assistance from just his wife Jill and local guitarist friend PG Martin, 'Freq' is a visionary work that marries a minimal aesthetic to sophisticated songcraft.

Lyrically, it continues Calvert's obsession with how we relate to technology, both in our work and personal lives, and was particularly informed by the miners' strike of the day, with vérité news and field recordings included throughout.

Mythical wrecker of machinery Ned Ludd is celebrated through acid bass, Simmons drums and random tone bursts – form and function in perfect unison. The clanking, skipping beat and creepy melody of 'Acid Rain' conjure an oppressive,

gothic atmosphere. 'Work Song' is like a blue-collar take on Kraftwerk's modernism – England endures rather than Europe endless, but similarly affecting nonetheless. Shortly after the album's release, Calvert knocked on Martin Holdcroft's door.

"I was just a young kid living in a small town," says Holdcroft. "I had no idea who he was. He said, 'I hear you play guitar'. I said, 'I'm the shittest guitarist in the world'. And he replied, 'That doesn't matter, because I've read your poetry' – stuff I used to publish in local fanzines. So we got talking, and he said he wanted to make a record and do a tour."

"Robert would get out his Casiotone – a tiny, basic monophonic keyboard – and jab at the notes and say, 'This is an idea for a song'. It was like his sketchbook, the electronic equivalent of a bodhrán drum, the foundation upon which a song can be sung. He was a big fan of folk, which is usually quite simple, and 'Ned Ludd' was a classic folk song about politics, class and revolution. His music was minimalist because he didn't want to complicate it."

They travelled to Welshpool to the legendary Foel Studio – run by ex-Hawkwind bassist Dave Anderson – to record what would be Calvert's last album, 'Test-Tube Conceived'. While still overtly electronic and deliberately stark, some tracks returned to a more rock dynamic, such as the ESP-referencing 'Telekinesis' and paean to early hacker culture 'On Line'. 'In Vitro Breed', which flags Calvert's concerns with genetic engineering, is almost anthemic, but there's a disturbing, nightmarish quality to the slow-burning 'I Hear Voices' and 'Thanks To The Scientists'.

The atmosphere in the studio was similarly anxious, particularly for the inexperienced Holdcroft.



PHOTO: STEVE POND ARCHIVE

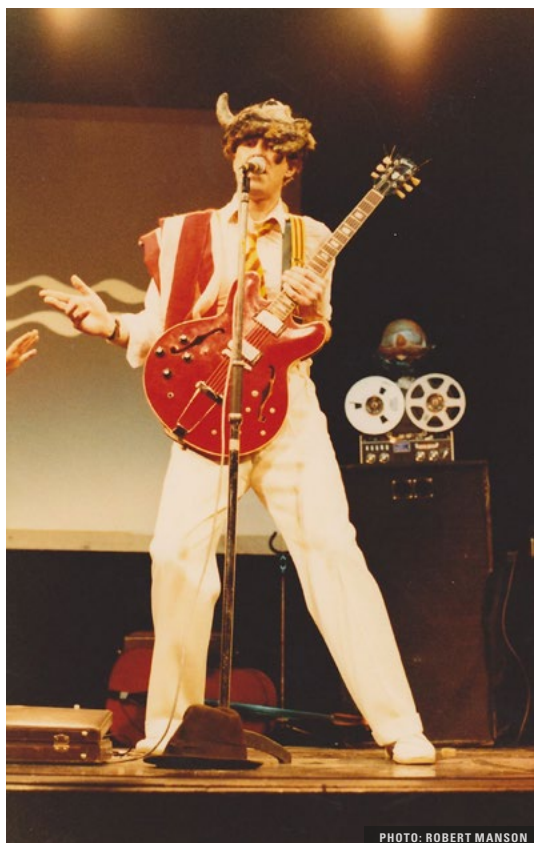


PHOTO: ROBERT MANSON



PHOTO: PIKNIK

"During the recording, it got weird, as Robert was quite fragile," he recalls. "He was overexcited, didn't sleep for five days and lost his voice through talking. He drove everyone mad because he was so intense. He was a lovely man, but so fickle. I'd say, 'Robert, these songs are quite slow and ponderous', and he'd say, 'Yeah, you're right'. Then half an hour later he'd make them even slower."

'Test-Tube Conceived' was released in April 1986, with a short promotional tour which Holdcroft describes as "ramshackle and chaotic". A particularly low point came when Calvert was hospitalised for two days following a toxic reaction to the band's smoke machine.

But in a reversal of fortune, Calvert was overjoyed to receive an invite to perform at the Queen Elizabeth Hall on London's South Bank. With Pond and Reeves as his backing band, they were billed as Krankschaft. The concert was put together on a shoestring, with arrangements exchanged on cassette and rehearsed just two days before the show in October 1986.

"We used a Roland TR-707 drum machine live, and that triggered an SH-101 sequencer which I had to load between songs," remembers Pond. "My set-list would have titles, then a string of numbers and letters which I had to put in and pray to god I'd not missed one."

With the concert a major success, a follow-up tour was booked – the band now going out as The Maximum Effect.

"Some of the shows were brilliant, some of them were embarrassingly empty," says Pond. "In Carlisle, we turned up and said, 'How many tickets have you sold?', and the promoter said, 'Seven. But don't worry, lads, we had Nazareth last week and they only sold three'."

For all that, morale remained high, with Calvert performing dressed all in white.

"He'd got hold of a Pollard Syndrum, which he would hit with gusto to help out the TR-707 and humanise the beats," recalls Reeves. "I consider this line-up to be an augmented electronics band due to the 707 being at the heart of it. We were doing an early form of EDM five years before it became a thing."

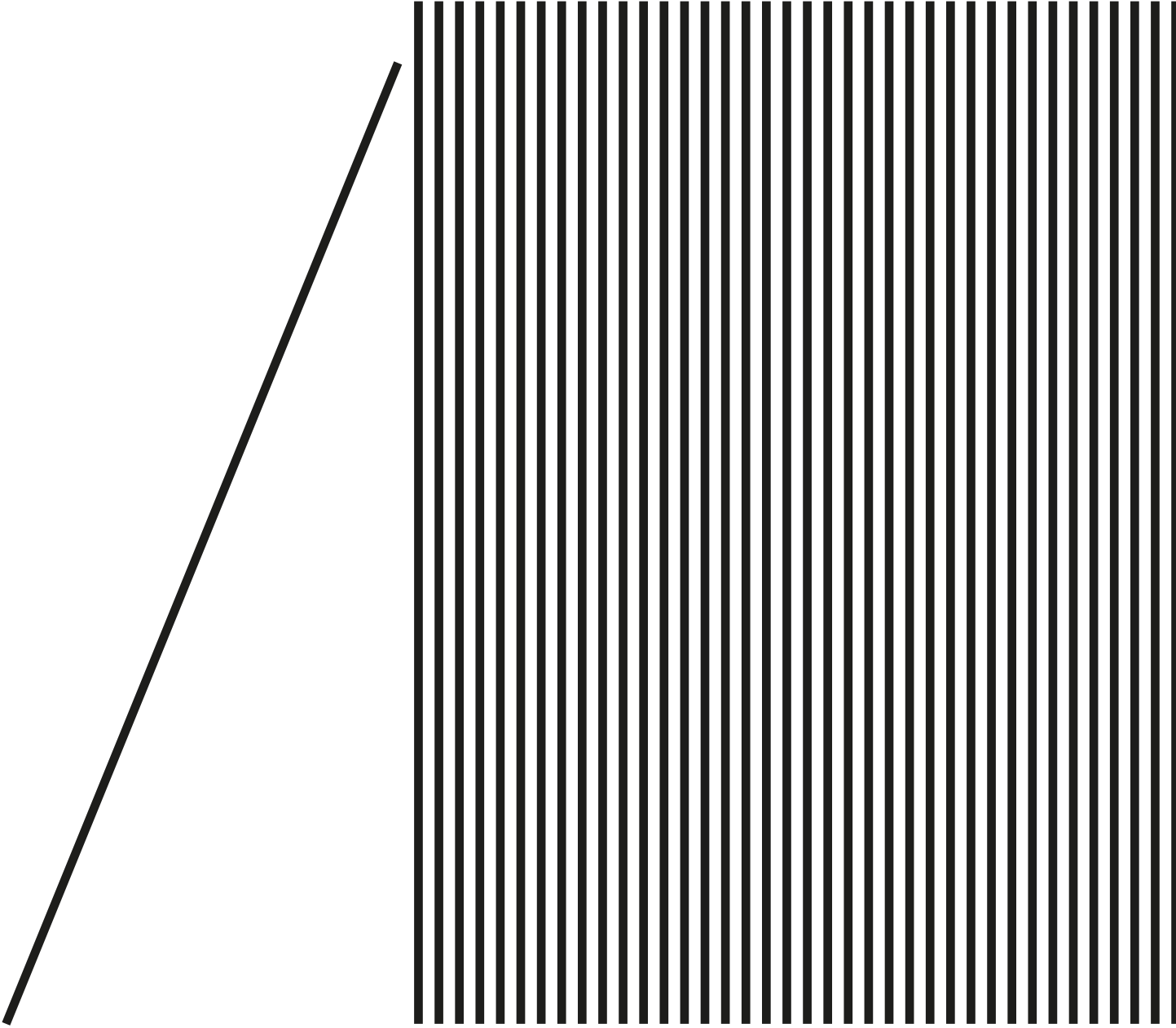
On 14 August 1988, Calvert died of a heart attack. He was just 43 years old. The demos he left behind were by turns poppier and more political. 'Over The Moon' and 'Three Gentle Words From A Fool' were love songs, while 'Working Down A Diamond Mine' and 'White Dynasty' addressed Calvert's South African heritage. Liz Wendelbo of Xeno & Oaklander describes 'Hidden Persuasion', a song about subliminal advertising, as "magical – as if it has been excavated in some off-planet mine".

Pond and Reeves reunited as Krankschaft for a memorial concert in 2008 and subsequently recorded 'The Flame Red Superstar', which features versions of tracks from Calvert's previous three albums. Pond continues to lead Krankschaft, while Phillip Reeves now plays with the Hawklords. As for Robert Calvert's legacy, ask any Hawkwind fan.

"Robert was a genius," says Steve Pond. "Incredibly funny, with his finger in everything – exactly what you hoped he'd be."

'The Last Star Fighter' is out now on Cleopatra

With thanks and acknowledgement to Nick Calvert and Knut Gerwers' online resource, Spirit Of The P/age





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OPEN UP

HATTIE COOKE

Bliss Land

CASTLES IN SPACE

It's been the most ironic contradiction of the last 12 months – where to find stillness in a world that has ceased to move forward. Even in the enforced seclusion of lockdown, life has been a hurly-burly waltzer ride of emotions. Thwarted ambitions, ruined relationships and – for the truly unfortunate – an overwhelming sense of tragedy and grief.

We pressed the pause button on life, but there's no pausing the often overwhelming experience of simply being human. 'Bliss Land', the third album by Brighton singer-songwriter Hattie Cooke, is perhaps the perfect distillation of that paradox, where intensely personal confessions bubble beneath a veneer of glacial, synthpop sangfroid.

"It's about that liminal space between the past and the future, when you're on the threshold of something," says Cooke. She's describing one track in particular, the tentative 'One Foot Out The Door', but it's a maxim that works perfectly for the whole album. This is a collection that could only be borne from the global limbo between pre- and post-Covid existence.

Opener, 'I Get By', is an immaculate evocation of the silent, traffic-free void of early lockdown. "I go for a walk / I wait until it's late / Wait until it's quiet" she sings, with studied indifference. "The whole world's sitting still / Like summer days upon the hill". There's a Zen-like quality to her lyrics – minimal and intuitive, they arrive like soporific cruise missiles. Concentrated torpor, delivered with devastating accuracy.

'Bliss Land' feels like a breakthrough album. Cooke's self-titled 2016 debut added thrift shop synths to the impassioned strumming and vulnerable vocals of the traditional acoustic singer-songwriter. Winsome and reflective, it reeked of coffee shop gigs and soul-destroying pub backrooms. 'The Sleepers', from 2019, was a curveball, an instrumental electronic soundtrack to an imagined movie, the dystopian tale of – wait for it – a global pandemic tangled up in sinister conspiracy theories. 'Bliss Land', impressively, is a natural marriage of the two, and Cooke has honed her ice-cold, cinematic soundscapes into economic shards of pop. Only one track here exceeds the four-minute mark, and all but the instrumental 'Fantasies' are topped by vocals that are unmistakably more mature than on that endearingly lo-fi debut.

Ah yes, that old bugbear. Maturity. "To tell the truth, I miss my youth / Those long-lost days I cling to" she sings with an audible sigh on 'Youth'. "Go and get drunk / Falling in love with everyone I talk to". It's the timeless lament of the freshly turned 30-something, helpless as the blissful wreckage of adolescence drifts silently away. But it's given an extra frisson by the stasis of early 2021 – Cooke turned 30 in January this year. And what's the point of being on that threshold when there's currently nothing on the other side? With nowhere to turn, she looks inward and wistfully picks over the bones of failed relationships on 'Lovers Game' – "Couldn't keep each other apart / Now I won't even walk past your door".

There's a contemporary sheen to the music, a stainless-steel sparkle that never quite masks the influences of her upbringing. Growing up on a 1990s Sussex council estate with a vinyl-obsessed father, the dwindling synthpop of the previous decade clearly seeped into her subconscious. 'Cars' boasts chiming guitars and a wash of synths, like Furniture doing battle with the Cocteau Twins, while 'Invisible Lines' carries faint echoes of early Human League. But these are no retro affectations; she's not one of the geeky boys, tinkering with vintage patches to get the perfect Korg 700 sound. Like the lyrics, it's instinctive and economic, and the polished shimmer never detracts from the personal confessions housed within. Still, if she wants mainstream success, she might just find it. At least half the tracks here have daytime Radio 6 Music written all over them.

"I know I should be doing something different" intones Cooke on album closer 'Summer Time', a track steeped in heartbreaking poignancy. "I spend my days walking round town / A glass of red in the afternoon to wash my medication down". To paraphrase Alan Bennett, she's not happy, but she's not unhappy about it. And in that, perhaps, she actually *finds* stillness.

It's a moment that at least offers reassurance to those of us who feel similarly marooned, and maybe that's the best we can really wish for. Brighter days, one hopes, will come for us all. And not least, perhaps, for Hattie Cooke. The sleeve of 'Bliss Land' shows her hovering nervously beside a symbolically open door, and this hugely accomplished album suggests her own personal threshold is waiting patiently to be crossed.

BOB FISCHER





JOSEPH SHABASON

The Fellowship

WESTERN VINYL

Much like 2018's 'Anne', Joseph Shabason's tribute to his departed mother, 'The Fellowship' centres its attention on the Toronto saxophonist's personal life. This time, gentle sax and supporting electronics focus on his religious upbringing as both Islamic and Jewish. Pieces like 'Escape From North York' carry levity but also a tension, with beatific horns offset by questioning keyboard passages that recall Beverly Glenn-Copeland. On 'Comparative World Religions', the tension finally snaps, as 1980s synths set to maximum vibrato deliver a subtle, epiphanic unity. **MS**

DEAD LEG

Two Extended Architectural Concepts

MIRACLE POND

Doncaster experimental doomsters Dead Leg with a release that deals in "open space and the ruins left behind after an evil power has been extinguished". Inspired by philosopher Paul Virilio's 'Bunker Archeology' book about the nature of war and existence, these two 10-minute tracks are so minimal it's best not to listen with the window open. A low atmospheric buzz rumbles across both tracks. 'A Series Of Embrasureson' is like a detuned radio at the end of the garden, while 'Different Solutions To The Problems Of An Open Facade' almost gets musical, punctuated by a very distant trumpet. Disco isn't. **NM**

ROEDELIUS / CZJZEK

Weites Land

BUREAU B

An exploratory partnership between Hans-Joachim Roedelius and saxophonist Alexander Czjzek, this 1987 gem gets a very welcome re-release. While the kosmische lounge jazz is led by Czjzek's improvised sax lines, Roedelius adds subtle colour with patchworks of his ambient 'Selbstportrait' albums and the mournful piano compositions of 1981's 'Lustwandel'. It works a treat. 'Sonniger Morgen' is a sublime fusion of Cluster-esque hues and more organic jazz, and Czjzek's sax leads a merry jig over piano and accordion on the mournful 'Ballade'. **JT**

FERAL

The End

UNO

Feral (aka Massachusetts-based Caleb Halter) drops his debut via UNO, the NYC imprint responsible for inaugural releases from Arca and Fatima Al Qadiri. Halter's music runs in a similar experimental vein to his label compatriots, with 'The End' blending atmospheric electronica with bursts of big room sounds. 'The Ecstasy' and 'Checker Plate' make a sedate opening combo before 'Cherry Bomb' upends things with knife-sharpening synths and bone-crushing static, while curveballs like the piano-led 'This Bird In Flight' reveal Halter's multifaceted sonic vision. **CF**



SONIC BOOM

Almost Nothing Is Nearly Enough

CARPARK

Pete Kember's subtle remix of 2020's 'All Things Being Equal' exists in the same drunken bubble, hippy-hugged and woozy, with almost the same instrumental structure. A director's cut rather than a remix? The soporific vocals bubble and flex more, while the modular thrum of 'I Can See Light Bend' now has religious zeal. The title track – one of two exclusive Japan-only tracks added here – is a powerfully claustrophobic mantra. A similar boozy trip to the original, but the drinks are stronger. **FR**

SHEEP, DOG & WOLF

Two-Minds

APHRODITE

After his award-winning 2013 debut album, 'Egospect', Daniel McBride found himself bed-bound by a chronic illness, his mental health rapidly deteriorating. It's the reason why 'Two-Minds' has been eight years in the making, and as you'd imagine, it's packed with emotion. McBride's honest evaluation of himself is striking, as details of relationships and being young and sick are revealed through stark lyrics and a voice that veers between sadness and hope. From the lilting, neo-folk 'Could've', which nods to Sufjan Stevens, to the stricken avant-pop harmonies of 'Fine', it's quite a journey. **ILS**

LIONEL BOY

Lionel Boy

INNOVATIVE LEISURE

Hawaiian-born, Long Beach-dwelling Lionel Deguzman does a very neat line in mellow synthpop. Following a couple of tasters in the shape of his 'Are You Happy Yet' single and the 'Who Is Dovey?' EP last year comes this, his debut full-length. It reminds us of Sir Was or BC Camplight, it has a very easy-going, press play, sit back and enjoy kind of sound to it. The opener 'So Early' has a lovely John Grant feel, while the infectious pure pop of 'I'm Not Afraid' is a little Hot Chip-y. As we head towards the summer, it's one you'll be happy to let drift out of an open window. **NM**

THE GERMAN OCEAN

The German Ocean

SUBMARINE BROADCASTING COMPANY

The debut collaboration between Sinnen's Darren J Holloway and Sussex-based graphic/visual artist Gavin Martin, 'The German Ocean' sinks into a world of isolated despair. It depicts the lonely smallness of life aboard a Great War-era submarine through waves of static, ghost-like phases and far-off echoes. Sitting at the fault line of ambient and post-rock, the sense of isolation on these eight mesmeric tracks is almost crushing, as the chants and cascade of guitar feedback on 'Mairidh Bròn' and the chiming ambience on 'The Paths Of Exile' take different routes to the seismic sound of the deep. **JT**



PARA ONE **Spectre: Machines** **Of Loving Grace**

ANIMAL63

French electronic artist Para One's latest project has been seven years in the making, such is the breadth and ambition of 'Machines Of Loving Grace', the first part of his new multidisciplinary 'Spectre' trilogy. The veteran producer excavates sounds that have shaped his musical sensibility, from Japanese anime scores and Indonesian gamelan to Bulgarian folk, Steve Reich minimalism and Detroit techno. Highlights include the propulsive neo-funk of opener 'Vertigo', the cinematic warmth of 'Sundial' and the percussive heft of 'Silicon Jungle', featuring immense Balinese ensemble, Suar Agung. **CF**

ROB ST JOHN **Surface Tension** BLACKFORD HILL

One of the UK's most innovative composers, Lancashire's Rob St John takes field recording a step further. Released in 2015 and now reissued on limited vinyl for the first time, 'Surface Tension' is a continuous study of east London's Lea Valley. Shifting from the very gentle evocation of the countryside (featuring cello, piano, samples of birdsong, flowing water and cursing Sunday league footballers) to the surging, synthesised motorik of the city's heart, it's some journey – quite literally. **DP**

MECÁNICA **CLÁSICA** **Mar Interior** ABSTRAKCE

With a motorik haze that recalls Cluster's 'Zuckerzeit', Valencia's Mecánica Clásica focus their minimalist electronics on the ancient cultures and civilisations of the Mediterranean, and 'Mar Interior' – translated as 'Inland Sea' – is just as lush and evocative as you might expect. 'Columnas De Agua' moves mysterious shapes through translucent blues, like an octopus spied through shimmering waves, while 'Dunas De Posidonia' evokes the sound of coastal exploration, as cavernous tones reverberate around glistening electronic textures. Dive right in, the water's lovely. **ST**

NAINITA DESAI **The Reason I Jump OST** MERCURY KX

Quick catch up. Streatham girl Nainita Desai began her career working as a sound designer for the likes of Herzog and Bertolucci and a sound engineer for Peter Gabriel. As a film and TV composer for two decades, her IMDB entry is nuts. Pick a standout? Try 'For Sama'. Anyway, 'The Reason I Jump' is based on Naoki Higashida's book about his experience as a non-speaking autistic child and the soundtrack is as magical as the film. It moves from the euphoric strings of 'I, Too, Exist' to the beautiful musical box-isms of 'The Sensory World'. Like all the best soundtracks, it more than stands up on its own. **NM**

JOHN DUNCAN & STEFANO PILIA



JOHN DUNCAN & STEFANO PILIA

Try Again

MAPLE DEATH

'Try Again' is the product of an electroacoustic collaboration between American artist and musician John Duncan and Italian composer Stefano Pilia. In combination, the former's dreamlike vocals are sharpened by the latter's swirling ambient textures, elevating the tracks here to something ethereal and almost spiritual in nature. This effect is most acute on 'The Sellout' and 'Fare Forward', where Duncan's voice rises with piercing clarity from its tumultuous drone, like the utterances of some beatific being. **ST**

RAS

RAS III

BOTNISS

Exploring the wider world is a pipe dream right now. Thankfully, the third album by Berlin-based RAS opens up the possibility from your armchair. Originally from Tel Aviv, their heady blend of Eastern European and Arabic pop, Balearic beats, digital funk, disco and 1980s R&B is a truly global concoction. Sung in Hebrew, a whole other instrument in itself, the trio's extended and unashamedly nostalgic summery grooves really resonate – 'Ta'avir Takadur' shakes like full-on Prince, while 'Switz' has an appealing Turkish flavour to its sultry slow jam. **JT**

AMONGST THE PIGEONS

Silence Will Be Assumed As Acceptance

PEACE & FEATHERS

"The time to act is now" intones a voice at the start of Daniel Parsons' fourth ATP album, and across a series of 12 activist electronica cuts, the pigeon-masked producer duly tackles racism, mental health, climate change and Dominic Cummings. Comprehending the jumble of ideas on 'Can You Manage? Do You Understand?' is like trying to untangle humanity's sundry self-tied knots, while the urgent beats of 'Holding My Breath' are offset by Tiger Mendoza and Charis Cooper's soulful vocals. Important stuff from the birdman of Sussex. **MS**

SOILED

Blistered And Patched

WORMHOLE WORLD

Jagged guitars over tootling chord organs, spectral voices and the white noise crackle of untuned radios. The windswept weirdness of the Cleveland Hills infuses this darkly affecting sixth album by north east England-based Marcus H, but it's a journey into his tangled mindset, too. '100 Souls Whispers' is the recreation of imaginary childhood voices in his head, 'Itching Stone Twitching Stone' the sound of a haunted wireless once owned by his sister. Eschewing bombast for creeping disquiet, it's a gently unsettling triumph. **BF**



MAXWELL STERLING

Turn Of Phrase

AD 93

As the son of celebrated British artist Linder and pop writer Michael Bracewell, 31-year-old Maxwell Sterling was exposed to a cavalcade of artistry as a youngster, from punk to Kraftwerk via jazz outliers like Jaco Pastorius. It's this hungry eclecticism that's at the heart of his third album, 'Turn Of Phrase'. Opener 'Eris', named after the Greek goddess of chaos, ushers in a controlled sonic disorder – approachable but always just slightly out of reach, while 'Decay Time' adds a noir-ish quality to the widescreen electronic mise-en-scene. **JA**

ANN MARGARET HOGAN

Funeral Cargo

DOWNWARDS

Ann Margaret Hogan, Anni to her friends, presents eight improvised piano pieces, based on the Viking heritage of the view from her studio window in Oxton, on the Wirral. This is solo piano work but not as we know it, as Hogan injects plenty of oomph into what can be a plaintive and rather timid musical form. The way she ominously hammers the bass keys on the title track is spellbinding, while even more sensitive moments like 'Mesto' and 'Fragile Elements' sparkle with a melodic mischievousness that's rare in the field. **BW**

ORCA, ATTACK

CMSO (Learning By Listening Vol 1)

STRATEGIC TAPE RESERVE

A real sonic oddity, this. Crafted by New Orleans-based musicians and academics Elizabeth Joan Kelly and David Rodriguez, this "educational" learning device – take that with a pinch of salt – is inspired by library music and Raymond Scott's experimental electronics. Hypnotic and unsettling compositions are permeated by processed spoken word and oscillating, celestial vocals, but 'Ethical Approval' is a real standout – all warped exotica, cascading harps and fiery jazz horns. Whether you learn anything or not, this splendid curio is well worth experiencing. **JT**

THEO ALEXANDER

Sunbathing Through A Glass Screen

ARTS & CRAFTS

Theo Alexander's fifth long-player is about "excess in a time of crisis", so for all the melancholy that pervades the Londoner's neoclassical timbres, 'Sunbathing Through A Glass Screen' dumps a welcome load of fury onto the genre. Red-hot it is, too. As a multi-instrumentalist, Alexander creates drama and poignancy with very little ammo – a piano, a tape loop, cello swipes and a throb of double bass. 'Bright-Eyed Hunger', a Reichian spin on Joe Hisaishi's soundtrack for 1993 yakuza film 'Sonatine', is a case in point. **ILS**



SAD MAN

SAD MAN
The Man From SAD
 BANDCAMP

From the title alone, 'The Man From SAD' could easily be some kind of wacky homage to a long-forgotten spy show from 1966 – but only if the soundtrack to that programme sounded like a jazz cuckoo clock coming to life in a chill-out room. Sad Man – prolific artist and musician Andrew Spackman to his chums – pushes his sound even further into wonky territory on tracks such as 'Finny Foot' and 'The Green Opal'. Thoroughly enjoyable. **ST**

WILLIAM S BURROUGHS & BRION GYSIN

William S Burroughs & Brion Gysin
 COLD SPRING

This pressing of the renowned beat generation greats is unmissable. It includes a live 1982 Liverpool performance of infamous junkie ("I am not an addict, I am the addict") and 'Naked Lunch' author Burroughs, and the singularly talented though lesser-known Gysin, who expounds his pioneering collage-style approach on 'Cut-Ups Self-Explained', recorded in the early 1960s. Gysin has influenced many, including Ghost Box man Julian House, and this rare collection will surely add to the pair's enduring legacies. **CG**

LOW ALTITUDE
Skyward
 MUCH BIGLY!

Manchester's Bruce Magill uses the notable limitations of the Moog Subharmonicon for an amber-hued cluster of analogue ambience. Tight loops give these gently deflecting bleeps little space for manoeuvre, but their edges are so fuzzy that nothing feels rushed. 'Floating In A Tin Can' is especially blissed out as overlapping harmonics swell across an organic lake of synth serenity. Gorgeous. Nothing flashy here, despite feeling like we're being pulled by a slow-blinking light on a distant horizon. **FR**

SIMON KLEE
Mandragora
 WOODFORD HALSE

The Mandragora plant is both toxic and therapeutic, with hallucinogenic properties, and this beat-driven album by London-based producer Klee brings suitably dreamlike qualities to memories of his family's lockdown rambles. Recalling "thin muddy paths wending their way, determined, to the wide expanse of brother Thames", he creates a soundscape that is equally purposeful. 'As Evening Falls' combines crepuscular synths with resolute rhythms, 'Phantom Energy' hums with the magic of the night, and the closing title track is a wonderful throbbing mass of electronic psychedelia. **BF**

**GLÜME****The Internet**

ITALIANS DO IT BETTER

Yet another goodie from the dependable Italians Do It Better. Channelling the distinctive look and spirit of Marilyn Monroe, the debut album from LA's self-proclaimed "Walmart Marilyn" is steeped in a sort of dreamlike, 'Twin Peaks'-inspired take on Hollywood glamour. Opening track 'Arthur Miller' (what else?) sets the tone with Glüme's ethereal vocal atop melancholic, high-sheen synthpop, while 'What Is A Feeling' continues the theme, drifting along in an appealing Julee Cruise stylee. One to watch. **VI**

ARTHUR KING**Changing Landscapes
(Isle of Eigg)**

AKP

The 'Changing Landscapes' series by Los Angeles-based experimental collective Arthur King weaves field recordings and improvised performance from locations that include Death Valley and a catamaran on the Pacific Ocean. This latest piece (also a film and exhibition) was recorded with Jason Lytle of Grandaddy on the Scottish Isle of Eigg. Over 30 minutes, we travel through the mysterious synthesiser trembles and looping islander conversations of 'An Sgurr', the snarls of reverberating electric guitar on 'Eigg Electric' and the surges of birdsong-woven ambient sound on 'St Franny'. Captivating. **DP**

**CARLOS NIÑO
& FRIENDS****More Energy Fields, Current**

INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM

Top-drawer transcendence from Carlos Niño and co. This album is all about high-grade musical cross-pollination and comes crammed with spiritual jazz from the ebullient Laraaji, the sought-after Jamael Dean on keys, The Postal Service's James Scott Tamborello, and exciting multi-instrumentalist Sam Gendel. Niño produces the lot and his appetite for jingle-jangling cymbals recalls Alice Coltrane in full psych regalia, before saxophonist and Sons Of Kemet man Shabaka Hutchings jumps on final track 'Please, Wake Up' for a celestial call to arms. **ILS**

ZIÚR**Antifate**

PAN

On her third album, Berlin-based producer Ziúr constructs a world of zeitgeisty electronic music that resists categorisation or sentimentality. On her last record 'ATØ', Ziúr's own vocals took centre-stage. On 'Antifate', she chooses to let crunchy textures and intrepid song structures do the talking. From the cacophonous bass and spectral voices of opener 'Alive, Unless?', to the rhythmic clattering of 'Orange Cream Drip' and the slowed-down, spaced out 'Gravity's Gravity, Clout Is Clout', 'Antifate' is packed with experimental sounds that hit hard but feel euphoric rather than alienating. **CF**

LEA BERTUCCI



LEA BERTUCCI

A Visible Length Of Light

CIBACHROME EDITIONS

As panoramic soundscapes go, this one by New York-based experimental composer Lea Bertucci delivers in spades. Deploying an array of wind instruments, tape manipulations and field recordings, it's a highly enchanting, dizzying and occasionally apocalyptic aural adventure that reflects on the uncertain world around her. Most potent is the meditative 'To Bridge The Chasm Of Experience', as swathes of playful alto sax, gaping reverb and resonant drone effects (think Tony Conrad or Phill Niblock) combine to deliciously mesmeric effect. Magnificent. **VI**

YARNI

Boro

KLASSIFIED

Slotting in somewhere between disco, jazz and deep house, Sheffield-based producer Yarni's style is dreamy and gently groovy. Tracks like 'Kako', with its easy listening swirls and vintage synths, could have been made any time in the last 50 years but sounds surprisingly fresh. The entire album is big on variety and invention – the garage-like 'Shibori' is blessed with zithers, xylophones and lush, unexpected sonics, but the slow, luxuriant hip hop and understated sax of 'Purezento' is particularly easy to love. **BW**

RÓISÍN MURPHY

Crooked Machine

SKINT

As Crooked Man, Sheffield's DJ Parrot turns in an entire remix of last year's 'Róisín Machine', which he also produced. Inspired by the likes of 'Love And Dancing', where 'Dare' producer Martin Rushent reworked The Human League's masterpiece, it's intended to run as one long track, with Parrot skilfully building the peaks and troughs in the mix. Highlights include the hypnotically thumping 'Incapable' rework 'Capable Rhythm', and 'Jealousy', which as the brilliant 'Hardcore Jealousy' comes rattling at you straight out of 1988. It's total genius. Crooked Man knows the score. **NM**

BASIC RHYTHM

Electronic Labyrinth

PLANET MU

East Londoner Anthony Hart makes minimalist mutant beat structures with residues of hardcore, drum 'n' bass and grime. His fourth album, 'Electronic Labyrinth', never descends into nostalgia – so while 'Acid Track' might suggest classics from Phuture or Dillinja in its title, it merges ambient washes, kettledrums and squelches into something weirder. Elsewhere, 'Palace Of The Peacock' has ghostly synth melodies rolling over a propulsive techno beat. Very much radiating an experimental strangeness, 'Electronic Labyrinth' is haunting and original. **BM**



APOLOGIST

Air Foundry

FREQUENCY DOMAIN

Brendan Nelson cut his teeth as a DJ playing at the fabled Megatripolis London club nights, before releasing an unlikely dub version of BBC sitcom theme 'Sorry!' in 2006 that acquired cult status. This debut album continues his quest into cavernous atmospheres, mining that particularly rich seam where ambient, downtempo beats and dub intersect. 'Shadowspace' is blissfully melodic and spacious, while the fluttering synth and meandering bass of 'Zonal Prospect' suggests a somnambulant B12. Quietly masterful, all told. **BM**

PIXEL GRIP

Arena

FEELTRIP

The second album from Chicago trio Pixel Grip will surely evoke a touch of nostalgia for readers of a certain age, who remember the days pumping electro and unabated sleaze went hand in rubber-gloved hand. There's certainly an amount of entertaining filth and sexual politics going on in the lyrics to 'Alphapussy' among others, and the industrial edge to the grooves is reassuringly solid. But it's the more musically transcendent end to the album, via 'Alibi' and 'Double Vision', that proves to be most satisfying. **BW**

DREW MULHOLLAND

Warminster UFO Club

CASTLES IN SPACE

As Britain descended into 1960s psychedelia, the Wiltshire town of Warminster became a hotbed of UFO sightings. It fired the imagination of Glaswegian schoolboy Drew Mulholland, who later collaborated with Portishead's Adrian Utley on 1999's 'Warminster', a captivating opus of hypnotic beats and throbbing radiophonics. The track is reissued here alongside some of Mulholland's considerably darker new recordings. 'The Incident At Five Ash Lane' sets the tone, with eyewitness accounts woven into sound collages and manipulated field recordings. Deliciously chilling. **BF**

PAPIRO

La Finestra Dentata

MARIONETTE

Marco Papiro is a Swiss-Italian musician, teacher and graphic designer who has been releasing albums since the 1990s. 'La Finestra Dentata' ('The Toothed Window') is a tapestry of studio and live tracks recorded over the past four years. The cute and determined arpeggios of 'Barbadura' have the kinetic wiggle and sparkle of an educational science documentary, while tracks such as the electro-tropicalia of 'Odilon' and the enveloping warm glow of 'Geisterstube' are so assuredly optimistic that nurses should play them while administering your Covid vaccine shot. **MS**

ELSA HEWITT

**ELSA HEWITT****Lupa**

ERH

'Lupa' starts with an R&B loop lost in dense fog, but from that point, the headiness barely breaks. Like its prequel EP 'Ghostcats', the breathy vocals of London-based, experimental artist Hewitt remind us of an earthier Julianna Barwick, only this time there are beats so untethered, it's as if someone switched the gravity off in the production suite. The brilliantly beguiling 'Higher Bear' seems inverted into a new reality, like a J Dilla manifesto being rewritten before our ears. And breathe. **FR**

VARIOUS ARTISTS**All The Bleeps**

FUN IN THE MURKY

Compiled by Bleep Radio host Trevor Wilkes to coincide with the 500th episode of his weekly wonky techno broadcasts, 'All The Bleeps' does what you'd expect. Transmitting from his techno bunker in Canada since 2003, the show focuses on the off-kilter end of the genre and is, therefore, right up our street. Wilkes compiles playlist stats each year, and it's from these he's drawn the featured tracks. Neil Landstrumm and Jerome Hill are far and away his most played artists and are represented here with 'Cleo Satan' and 'League Against Jazz' respectively. Great to see Luke's Anger's 'Sloth Father' in there too. Clearly a show worth checking out. **NM**

GROWING**Diptych**

SILVER CURRENT

"Big amp ambient" is Growing's wonderfully descriptive USP, and it's a sound that's showcased here across two lengthy, slow-moving tracks. The gorgeous hum and crackle of the amp is part of what makes their meditational arsenal so powerful, particularly on 'Variable Speeds', with its legion of refractions spinning off one note, and the more harmonic and feedback-based 'Down + Distance'. Fans of Earth, Stars Of The Lid and Spiritualized will know the form, but rarely will they have heard it being done with such enticing warmth and pulsating beauty. **BW**

J FOERSTER**/ N KRAMER****Habitat**

LEAVING

Ambient meets architecture in this debut from percussionist Joda Foerster and Berlin-based composer Niklas Kramer. 'Habitat' is inspired by the drawings of late Italian modernist architect Ettore Sottsass, each track representing a room in an imaginary building while following the sonic blueprints of re-popularised 1980s Japanese environmental music. From 'Entrance' to the closing 'Levitation Room', melodic kalimba and vibraphone gets looped and warped by ping-ponging modular synthesis, while African log drums are knocked sporadically. A pleasure from the moment you take off your shoes. **ILS**



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Foundations

DEEWEE

As Soulwax and 2manydjs, David and Stephen Dewaele have created quite a legacy as electro/rock/dance experimentalists and go-to remixers. But the backbone of the brothers' activity over the last few years has been their Deewee record label and studio in Ghent, Belgium, with the Dewaeles overseeing all the music from their exciting roster of artists.

'Foundations', the first proper compilation of all things Deewee and the label's 50th release, duly delves into the back catalogue. It's a timely reminder of just how thrilling Deewee's electronically-hued output has been, and the tracks here fizz and thrum with intent, beckoning you into their small-hours groove.

The sleek, disco-y vibes of Charlotte Adigéry's 'Bear With Me (And I'll Stand Bare Before You)' and the suave, low-slung electro of Soulwax's 'Heaven Scent' (featuring Chloë Sevigny) both stand out, but it's all pretty much killer – a snapshot of an essential label in very rude health. Bring on the next 50. **VI**

LITTLE SNAKE

A Fragmented Love Story, Written By The Infinite Helix Architect

BRAINFEEDEER

With a handful of highly individual, totally uncompromising EPs, Canada's Gino Serpentine, aka Little Snake, has really been catching the attention. It doesn't take long listening to 'A Fragmented Love Story...' to establish there's no prospect of him slowing, watering or dumbing down his approach having reached the milestone of a debut album.

Likewise, he has enticed a selection of guest contributors (Brainfeeder boss Flying Lotus and veteran beat wizard Amon Tobin among them) onto the LP, but at no stage does that seem to affect his bewilderingly hyperactive trademark style. Tracks like 'The Machine', 'Decimation Of Movement Over Time' and 'In My Head' are gnarly, glitchy meltdowns with a mixture of punk rock and free jazz attitude.

Moments of form do emerge, whether it's an acid line, a hip hop beat, or a piano riff, and while they sound divine, they're always short lived before we're plunged back into the hyper-edited furnace. Genuinely new and original, if you can handle it. **BW**

BEAM WEAPONS

Beam Weapons III

DO IT THISEN

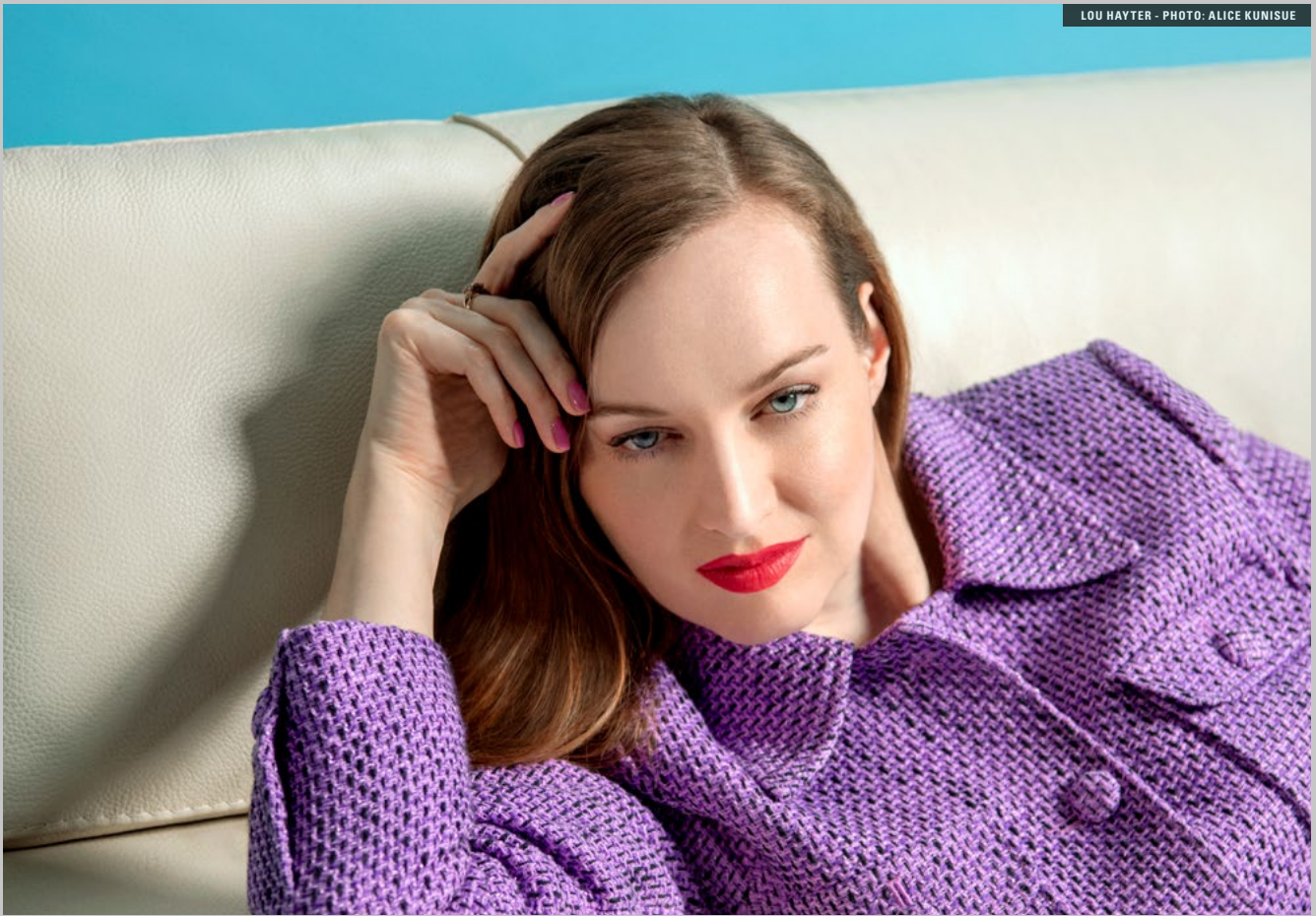
The previous offering from Doncaster's Beam Weapons came in June last year. The two-track 'Uterirdischko' single was described as "disco music for caves, caverns and other void and cavities", which surprisingly, it pretty much was.

Beam Weapons' thing is the sound of the world around us, unsettled with off-world blips and beats. This, their third release, is a six-track outing inspired by a 1980s flexidisc that came with Puzzle Monthly entitled '45 Sounds For You To Guess!'. We've checked and it is actually a real thing. How time would fly in the 80s.

As you'd expect, Beam Weapons turn the idea on its head with some subversive sound manipulation. There's old school video games in the 'Creative Urges', 'An Injection' is kind of subterranean boiler room Chic, while the nearly funky 'Vibrating Hole' sounds like it was recorded in the wind rattling across a moor.

Unlike with the quiz mag, there are no answers here, so heaven knows what the sounds actually are. One thing we do know is Dada is very much alive and well in South Yorkshire. **NM**

LOU HAYTER - PHOTO: ALICE KUNISUE

**LOU HAYTER****Private Sunshine**

SKINT

Catching the new rave zeitgeist with their Mercury-nominated 2007 debut album 'Fantastic Playroom', New Young Pony Club had largely dissolved by 2013's third album 'NYPC'.

Keyboard player Lou Hayter moved on to diverse but largely unheralded projects such as the musical directorship of the British Fashion Awards and electropop duo Tomorrow's World, with Air's Jean-Benoît Dunckel. Seemingly out of nowhere, then, comes this debut solo album.

Hayter excels at emotive and convincing retro electronic sounds, from the Jam & Lewis soul of 'My Baby Just Cares For Me' to the moody, saxophone-heavy disco balladry of 'Telephone' and her sleek, exciting cover of Steely Dan's 'Time Out Of Mind'. It's like a record collection in one album, with the bouncing rave beat and glistening synth arcs of 'This City' calling to mind the Pet Shop Boys, while the surging, epic electric piano of the closing 'Pinball' sits somewhere between Stevie Wonder and 10cc. A surprising delight. **DP**

ANDY FOSBERRY**Anthology Of The Dark**

SPUN OUT OF CONTROL

Does Andy Fosberry ever sleep? Staggeringly prolific, he composed three film scores between September and December of last year, effortlessly shaming those of us who spend decades pondering whether to redecorate the bathroom.

The triumvirate of flicks in question – 'The Hatched', 'Prototype' and 'Rats Reborn' – all veer towards the horrific, so these collected cues see Fosberry combining his typically explosive percussion with a selection of sinister string arrangements that wouldn't feel out of place in a creepy Hitchcock potboiler. Truly, he is the Hampshire Herrmann.

Opener 'Pursuit' might throb like a pounding hangover, but Fosberry is flexing his musical muscle to impressive effect these days. 'Science And Nature' combines pulsing Berlin School rhythms with an icy orchestral sheen, whereas 'Death And Birth' is doomed, piano-led romanticism. And while 'It's All Falling Apart' is a soothing, Vangelis-like swirl that lists into darkness, 'Fight!' provides a visceral buzzsaw clatter that sounds like the pubs kicking out in Southampton. Restlessly inventive, Fosberry is proving to be a stirringly versatile composer. **BF**

VERYAN**Here**

CUE DOT

Veryan is an illusive electronic producer based in Scotland, and 'Here' presents the fifth instalment of Cue Dot's intriguing and engaging series of interlinked releases, forming a narrative tapestry which will only be fully appreciated when the whole project is completed.

Following two self-released works last year, 'Hiraeth' and 'Ebb & Flow', Veryan's latest is a sonic rumination on specific locations and their emotional responses, while also reflecting on the ravages of climate change.

'Here' is full of widescreen, filmic pieces like 'Loss', 'Embrace' and 'Outsiders' that evoke the naturalistic awe of staring out across dramatic, turbulent vistas. Veryan's crisp melodies are subtle, memorable and emphatic, full of purpose yet delivered with a delicate elegance, while rhythms are presented with a stentorian immediacy that masks the complex detail with which they're constructed.

This is a powerful, life-affirming addition to the Cue Dot series, and one that reminds you to treasure the precious things in life. **MS**



HERRMANN KRISTOFFERSEN

Gone Gold

BYTES

What's on your car stereo when racing at 200 kph through a computerised city, pixelated pedal to the floor? You'd not go wrong with this follow-up to German/Danish duo Herrmann Kristoffersen's self-titled 2020 debut. A tribute to the classic Electronic Arts video game 'Need For Speed', this is a beatier, meatier affair that loses none of the disconsolate loops of their last album.

Unsurprisingly for something released on Bytes – named after The Black Dog's legendary debut album – there's more than a hint of Warp's 'Artificial Intelligence' series here. The nostalgia works: cue a montage of PlayStations, Game Boys and blocky Designers Republic geometrics.

Their track titles are nods to gamer culture – apparently, 'Mud' stands for Multi-User Dungeon. But this is no brainiac geek-out. Fire up that cybernetic Chevrolet and slipstream to cuboid Harmonic 313 techno or saturated Schnaussian electronica. There is widescreen emotion on 'Gone Gold', with wistful IDM washes as filmic as any modern cutscene. **FR**

THE CENTRAL OFFICE OF INFORMATION

Private Issue Synthetic Music 2010-2020

WOODFORD HALSE

The vision on Alex Cargill's The Central Office Of Information albums – 2019's self-titled debut and last year's 'Treedom', the latter reflecting the complex underground network of trees and plants – was so singular that a number of tracks didn't fit. Here Woodford Halse gives these outtakes a home, alongside other early pieces that had been laying dormant.

Despite the variations in style, Cargill's disparate productions flow seamlessly, resulting in dark but playful electronics that pay homage to the dusty public information films presented by COI's namesake, the now-defunct government communications agency.

'TransPennine Express' reworks Kraftwerk's 'Trans-Europe Express' with a figurative doffed cap to the rolling hills of the English north, a sheen of quaintness added to the robotic chug, while 'The Wood Wide Web (Kites and Pylons Field Trip)' alludes to some of the organic warmth on 'Treedom'. Almost by accident, Cargill has crafted another coherent work, a great primer to his world of warped, hauntological electronica. **JT**

POLYPORES

Shpongos

BEHIND THE SKY

It's testament to the talent of Polypores' Stephen Buckley that he can consider the mysterious world of fungi and their vast, barely-knowable underground mycelial networks, and translate them here into such an ethereal work of beguiling interpretive electronica.

Named from the ancient Greek for mushrooms, 'Shpongos' is a warmly organic, gently unfolding modular synth tour de force. It offers us a window into the nebulous underground micro-universe that's central to the turning wheel of life, and which may yet show us the way to a better future through its miraculously sustaining, healing and curative powers.

The subtle complexity of the title track mirrors the invisible realms beneath the forest floor, while 'Fairy Rings' is full of wide-eyed wonder and magic. In contrast though, the restrained pace of 'Slow Fruiting' allows us a glimpse of timescales barely perceptible to human minds.

Tune in, and let Polypores connect you to the wood-wide web. **CG**



RODDY WOOMBLE

Lo! Soul

A MODERN WAY

Synth-fuelled swerve reaps rewards

Across his 25-year career, Roddy Woomble has finely honed his songwriting craft, whether sculpting angular rock anthems as the frontman of indie rock group Idlewild or penning the heartfelt folk fare that characterised his solo work.

In 1995, 19-year-old Woomble founded Idlewild, who nine studio albums later have become one of Scotland's most beloved bands. His acclaimed debut solo album, 2006's homespun 'My Secret Is My Silence', reached Number One in the UK Folk Charts, and was followed by three more full-length releases between 2011 to 2017.

Then there was last year's explorative 'Everyday Sun' EP, which featured incantatory spoken word pieces over ambient, cinematic soundscapes, and simple electronic drumbeats. It's this extensive song-crafting prowess that brings us to new album 'Lo! Soul', which is a true delight. As enchanting as the remote yet beautiful Hebridean islands that Woomble calls home, its biggest curveball is the bold new palette of undulating synths and electronic rhythms.

'Take It To The Street' draws on soul and smooth jazz, with flourishes of disco strings, and the irresistible 'Architecture In LA' is woozy, loose electro-funk, bathed in a kind of beatific Laurel Canyon glow. But it's Scotland's wild landscapes that have always been a key strand of inspiration in Woomble's music, and on 'Atlantic Photography' his warming Scottish accent flows poetically across a bedrock of piano chimes and foaming synths, invoking the landscape as a companion.

'Lo! Soul' was written and recorded remotely between the Hebrides, Glasgow and Dundee, which makes it a lockdown album of sorts. And yet it finds comfort in collective melancholy. 'Secret Show' speaks of isolation, but its cosy rhythm and winding bass feel close and intimate. The mood is frequently soul-stirring, as on the slinking, sparkly electropop ballad 'Return To Disappear', and the dreamy piano-driven closer 'Dead Of The Moon'. Throughout, Woomble's elegiac lyrics and rich, mellifluous vocals act like a guiding light out of the darkness.

According to the man himself this is "the most unusual record I have made, and made in the most unusual way". And, lo and behold, it might well be his finest, most unique work yet.

CLAIRE FRANCIS

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

Roddy Woomble takes a seat as we plug in the quick-fire question machine and press the "Go" button



Hello Roddy, where are you right now and what can you see?

"I am sitting at my kitchen table. It is old, wooden and very worn. To my right, out of the window, I can see the Atlantic Ocean. It's raining."

You live in the Hebrides. Is it the sort of place you didn't notice lockdown?

"I didn't leave the island for six months, and usually I leave it every few weeks, but it's almost exactly the same here in or out of lockdown. There are no restaurants, theatres or nightclubs here, and the only pub was shut. Otherwise the cycles of life went on as they always do."

You say the new album is "the most unusual record I have made", how so?

"I've never recorded an album where I wasn't in the room with the people I was making it with. The remoteness and isolation we all felt from each other was a big influence on the overall sound. Musically too, it's almost all made up of keyboards, beats, bass and vocals."

That's something of a change in direction for you, right?

"For the last 25 years I've been associated with either folk-tinged solo albums, or making rock music with Idlewild, so 'Lo! Soul' is quite a different sound and feel. Last year's 'Everyday Sun' EP was an indication I was making songs without guitars and speaking as much as I was singing. 'Lo! Soul' is a continuation of that, although it's probably more melodic than the EP."

You were sharing ideas with producer/bandmate Andrew Mitchell in Dundee, while collaborator Danny Grant was sending you tracks from Glasgow?

"We were just swapping ideas back and forward as lockdown begun and they seemed to be turning into songs. We realised we were making a record in a strange, isolated, collaborative way. Another friend Luciano Rossi was also involved on a few songs from his home studio in Hackney."

We know Andrew's work as Andrew Waslylyk, but Danny Grant is new to us...

"He's a Glaswegian musician and director. He makes very cool music videos. We've worked together on and off for the last 10 years. Danny was involved in my last album 'The Deluder'. A talented man, and excellent company."

The 'Slow Focus' mixtapes on NTS Radio and 'Night Tracks' on Radio 3 acted as influences on the record didn't they?

"I drift in and out of them in the best possible way. They provide a very subtle, cosmic soundtrack to the day or evening. They're particularly good when cooking, cleaning, or procrastinating. Which are my three main occupations when not working on songs."

You've mentioned before that you see electronic music "a bit like jazz in that I have no idea how you make it". Are you any clearer now?

"No, and I'm glad about that. There is a freshness and a mystery to electronic music for me, and I hope I never learn how to make it properly."

Do you have a synth of your own? Toying with the idea of getting one now?

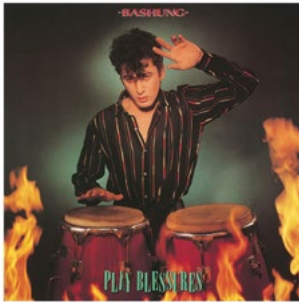
"The only instrument I have in my house is a 3/4 size acoustic guitar, which I've had for about six years and I'm still not very good at playing it. I wouldn't know where to start with synths."

As the album has turned out rather well, is this the beginning of an all-new electronic Roddy?

"I guess I'll see how much people enjoy 'Lo! Soul' and then decide..."

BURIED TREASURE

Unearthing electronic gold



BASHUNG

Play Blessures

PHILIPS, 1982

Alain Bashung is a tough enigma to crack. There's little of the playfulness of Gainsbourg, the directness of Brel, or the universality of French Touch that we rosbifs can hang on to. Despite his apparent abstruseness, he's revered by French artists and the public alike, although the parts they like can be wildly divergent.

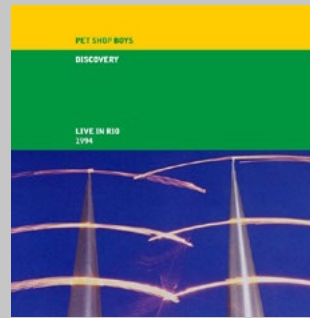
Bashung spent much of the 1970s releasing singles that bombed, writing chansons for Dick Rivers and playing the murderous revolutionary Robespierre in a rock opera. It was the early 80s while in his mid-30s that he made his breakthrough, with the Dylanesque 'Gaby Oh! Gaby' and a follow-up Number One album called 'Pizza'. Bashung realised after many years in the wilderness that fame wasn't all it was cracked up to be, and decided to take a left-field turn.

On its 1982 release, 'Play Blessures' was regarded as an act of self-sabotage. 'C'est Comment Qu'on Freine' and 'Scènes De Manager' would certainly sound odd to casual record buyers hoping for more AOR. Moreover, Bashung wrote it with his drinking pal Serge Gainsbourg, right at the peak of the latter's hell raising days. Lyrically, there are fewer of the *jeu de mots* one might expect, making for a dark, often abstract listen, accentuated by the Breton-born singer's gravelly delivery.

Latterly 'Play Blessures' has been reclaimed as a cult classic, making many all-time lists across the Channel, and it sounds magnificent to receptive ears some 40 years into the future. Originally it was meant to be called 'Apocalypse', but Bashung was beaten to the title by The Motels. Therefore 'Play Blessures' ('Playing Injuries') was lifted from a lyric in the song 'Lavabo', which complements the artwork that had already been shot, featuring the generously-coiffed singer beating bongos as flames lick up the sides.

It was this image that caught my eye while rifling through crates at Superfly Records in the 3rd arrondissement in Paris a few years back. Bashung, who died in 2009 from lung cancer, largely remains an enigma to me but what makes 'Play Blessures' such a joy is that it's an album that glorifies in being misunderstood. If you can find a way in then you're behind Bashung's own proverbial velvet rope, a place he hoped not everybody would follow.

JEREMY ALLEN



NEW ORDER

**Education Entertainment Recreation
(Live At Alexandra Palace)**

RHINO

PET SHOP BOYS

Discovery: Live In Rio 1994

PARLOPHONE

Something old and new live masterclass

The cliché has it that electronic music isn't a natural fit for the concert stage – two of the UK's most notable synth-driven bands, Pet Shop Boys and New Order, would beg to differ.

New Order's 'Education Entertainment Recreation' documents a 2018 live show at London's Alexandra Palace, and it's indecently good. Over two CDs (there's also a concert film in the boxset version), it takes in many classics, fan favourites and newer songs. Throughout, Bernard Sumner's voice is in fine form, and their bassist since 2011, Tom Chapman, sounds easily as good as Peter Hook ever did.

'Blue Monday' is especially strong, with the famous drums and disco bass pump punching through. 'Low-Life' gem 'Sub-Culture' is given an extended intro of spiralling arpeggios, and when its unmistakable riff comes in, there's a huge roar. It's gloriously gloomy, yet utterly danceable. Comeback corker 'Crystal' starts with shimmering synths, while 'Singularity', from 2015's 'Music Complete', fits right in with its rain-soaked guitar. On his brief interjections between songs, Sumner sounds like he's enjoying himself, and 'Bizarre Love Triangle' and 'Temptation' are rattled through with relish before a Joy Division coda makes everyone melt with emotion.

Pet Shop Boys similarly shine in the live arena, and 'Discovery' (also accompanied by a concert DVD) finds them at their exuberant best in Rio de Janeiro in 1994. While their ultra-camp reading of 'Always On My Mind' gets some additional samba percussion and the crowd sing back the lyrics with passion, it's the other songs that really make it. The disco chug and dubby bass of 'Paninaro' have a Latin American feel, while the awesome electro-stabs of 'Domino Dancing' fuse wonderfully with Neil Tennant's poignant vocal. Then there's an assured 'West End Girls', the intro eliciting screams from the audience – it's easily as good as the studio version. 'It's A Sin' is brilliant too, the hard-hitting lyrics emphasised by nods to Gloria Gaynor's 'I Will Survive', while closer 'Being Boring' has such a moving chorus, you can almost imagine New Order playing it.

Listening to these two shows side by side, there's a certain Englishness communicated by the melancholy, hopefulness and emotional heft in the songs. Both sets, especially New Order's, are more than worthy of your attention.

BEN MURPHY

MATT ROBERTSON - PHOTO: ANNIE FORREST



MATT ROBERTSON

Enveleau

SUBTEMPO

If you think you haven't heard composer, producer, and musical director Matt Robertson, then think again. The British-born, Canadian-based musician has worked behind the scenes with Björk, Cinematic Orchestra, Arca, and Anohni for starters, as well as on soundtracks with the likes of Daniel Pemberton.

'Enveleau' is his third album, following a three-year gap from 2018's 'Entology' and as listens go it's as comforting as slipping into a warm bed. 'Syntropic' is a great example of what Robertson does so well – starting with single-note atmospheres, it gradually and imperceptibly builds into something much grander and melodically monumental.

Drama? It has shedloads of the stuff. The more rhythm-based moments, like 'Bees' or the throbbing pulses and clapping cross rhythms of 'Post Truth', are obvious standout moments, but the stillness and calm of much of the rest (see 'Enoughness' or closing tune 'Want') is really what makes them work so well. **BW**

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Made To Measure Vol. 1

CRAMMED DISCS

Crammed Discs is celebrating its 40th birthday this year, and looking back over the Belgian label's vast and varied back catalogue, there's much to commemorate. Their excellent 'Made To Measure' series featured disparate artists making instrumental music and avant-sounds for films, stage productions and art installations – Hector Zazou, Harold Budd and John Lurie all contributed – and this inaugural 1984 compilation kickstarts a programme of selected re-releases.

'Vol. 1' showcases a label that at the time was becoming known for its eclectic, abstract digressions in electronica and neoclassical chamber music. Israeli art-rockers Minimal Compact delve into their score for Pierre Droulers' 'Pieces For Nothing' ballet, with hypnotic waltz 'Immer Vorbei' a standout. Aksak Maboul (featuring label boss Marc Hollander) contribute two magnificent soundtracks, while Liège-born electronic composer Benjamin Lew brings spooky atmospherics to 'A La Recherche De B.' It's a divine hotchpotch that embodies Crammed Discs' skewed creativity, a raison d'être that's as true now as it was then. **JA**

EVERYDAY DUST

Black Water

CASTLES IN SPACE

What's that rising from the murky depths? Why, a perfectly-formed synth homage to the Loch Ness monster, of course. And, in particular, that peculiarly 1970s obsession with claiming this elusive beastie in the name of science. So Scottish producer RJ McConnell uses every analogue trick in the book to evoke an era when whiskery marine biologists in kipper ties would speak earnestly to 'Nationwide' viewers about the latest blurry photographs of distant humps and flippers.

Opening track 'The Black Loch' sets the tone perfectly, with the kind of sinister Radiophonic swoops and swirls that once made Tom Baker glance nervously over his shoulder. 'Sonar Sweep' and 'Strange Readings' add the ominous bleeps and rhythms of anomalous results on flickering monitors, and 'Something In The Murk' completes the descent into full-on, vintage 'Doctor Who'-style terror. An engrossing follow-up to January's 'The Vale' soundtrack, it's an album likely to rekindle troublesome childhood memories of 'Arthur C Clarke's Mysterious World'. **BF**



IAN BODDY & MARKUS REUTER

Outland

VARIOUS ARTISTS

**Tone Science Module No. 5 Integers
And Quotients**

DIN

Two scintillating albums here from Sunderland's dependable DiN label and its Tone Science imprint. 'Outland' finds arch-synthesist and label founder Ian Boddy rekindling his collaboration with German musician and composer, Markus Reuter. There's a definite compositional feel to these six ambient soundscapes, as measured and methodical synth patterns combine with evocative guitar to great effect, most potently on the towering 'Citadel' and the churning drones of 'Brood'.

Tone Science, meanwhile, continues to shine a light on more contemporary modular synthesists with its fifth compilation, 'Integers And Quotients'. H       Vogelsinger's 'Incantation' is a rising spiral of tense synth lines, combining the drama of John Carpenter with the cosmic scale of early Tangerine Dream. With more engaging pieces throughout – 'Clocks, Unravelling' by Polypores and Stephan Whitlan's 'Waving And Drowning' are particularly noteworthy.

A perfect entry point to the absorbing work of these intrepid sonic explorers. **ST**

DREAM DIVISION

Legend Of Lizard Lake

LIBRARY OF THE OCCULT

Holidaying in Spain with his grandparents at the turn of the millennium, the young Tom McDowell discovered a shop groaning with battered 'Choose Your Own Adventure' gamebooks. From there, his imagination ran riot, vacating the expat haven of Alicante for worlds populated by terrifying, outlandish monsters and goblets filled with noxious potions. Which, admittedly, might not seem like much of a departure.

Nevertheless, he's distilled these memories into an album brimming with fantastical delights. McDowell is an old hand at evoking the textures and melodies of vintage Hammer horror, and the likes of 'Church Of The Lizard Folk' and 'Spiral Of Lost Souls' spill over with vamped-up church organs and mellotrons. It's all a bit prog, all a bit straight-to-VHS 1980s fantasy, and it's all great fun throughout.

If you want to embark on the 'Mystic Quest', turn to track three. If you're interested in 'Gathan's Revival', turn to track six. Otherwise, just immerse yourself in the whole giddy escapade. **BF**

SIMPLE SYMMETRY

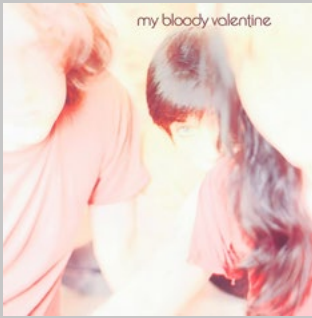
Sorry! We Did Something Wrong

NEW EARS

As these uncertain times drag on, a mood boost is definitely in order, and Moscow's Simple Symmetry are just the tonic. Simple Symmetry are siblings Sasha and Sergey Lipsky. With a penchant for electronic psychedelia and tribal rhythms, they spent three years cooking up this vibrant, irreverent debut, which piles on cello, synths, sitar, guitars, percussion (and a few special guest vocals) to arrive at a joyful juncture of music made for blowing away the cobwebs.

On one side of the coin, there's a Syd Barrett pastoral playfulness to 'End Of Days', while 'Octopus' is a delightful electro-folk ode to ocean molluscs. 'Out Of Body Experience' is a rave jam akin to the guitar-driven electronica of Red Axes. Simple Symmetry share a close affiliation with Red Axes' collaborator Abr  o who appears on the skipping, mystical 'Sim Sim Sim'.

To top it off, there are serious hip-shakers in 'Che Che' and the totally kooky 'Koko The Gorilla', the latter crafting dancefloor magic out of snake charmer melodies, stomping beats and some mighty roars. **CF**



MY BLOODY VALENTINE

**Isn't Anything / Loveless / EPs 1988-1991
And Rare Tracks / MBV**

DOMINO

Much excitement over MBV reissue flurry

These days Kevin Shields is well-known for his tardiness, but it wasn't always the case. Between 1988 and 1991, My Bloody Valentine were engagingly prolific and seemingly channelling the otherworldly. Freshly signed to Alan McGee's Creation Records, the Anglo-Irish four-piece didn't so much have a creative spurt as presided over a creative torrent so effusive that it almost defies explanation.

'Isn't Anything' and 'Loveless' are getting the re-release treatment from Domino – a fitting new home for the band – while 'EPs 1988-1991 And Rare Tracks' makes it onto vinyl for the first time after a CD release eight years ago; 'MBV', which was started during this glorious era but didn't see the light of day until 2013, is also available. Crucially all of these recordings are now on streaming services. Like Kraftwerk, the band appears fully formed online, with no juvenile digressions or rookie mistakes leading up to the moment where everything went right.

Emerging out of the jangly guitar scene of the mid-80s, their material wasn't even assured enough to feature on the fabled 'C86' cassette given away with NME. Two years later, in what looks like a Mephistophelian bargain, they turned the world upside down with music as audacious as it was original. The subsequent evolution can be heard on the EPs: 'You Made Me Realise' from 1988 consolidates noise rock and dream pop; 'Glider' from 1990 is so sonically disorientating and kaleidoscopic it deserves the kind of reverence normally reserved for The Velvet Underground.

Shields' growing fascination with the studio, the recruitment of Debbie Googe on bass, mastery of manipulating feedback and turning it into something beautiful with the deft glide of a Jazzmaster tremolo... these all played their part in the band's elevation. The jump from 'Isn't Anything' to 'Loveless' is pronounced too: the former provides capricious excitement and a lysergic rush, the latter is a multi-layered and accomplished beast that epitomises the inimitable sound of the band on tracks like 'Only Shallow'. 'MBV' is less fluid than its predecessor, but also takes a departure into avant-pop territory with welcome songs like 'New You'.

With the promise of more material to come, there's no better time to be a My Bloody Valentine fan – old or new.

JEREMY ALLEN

LABEL PROFILE



Label: Submarine Broadcasting Company

Location: Newbury, UK

Est: 2017

Potted History: "I was inspired by the Digital Dizzy label to create a benefit album for the Syria Relief charity," explains label big chief Rob Mellor. "But there was a twist, all the tracks would feature a home-made instrument or household object. The album was released as 'One String Inspiration' and sold surprisingly well." The 28-track compilation featured Beltism, Rob's musical alter ego, who he'd been peddling to various labels with little luck. "The solution was obvious," he says, "leverage the momentum of 'One String Inspiration' to create a label to promote my own music. Thus the Submarine Broadcasting Company was born. Of course I'm now so busy with the label that I don't get the chance to make my own music, so everyone wins!"

Mission Statement: "Our strapline is 'For the beauty,'" explains Rob. "That should be the motivation. Our work doesn't need to make money, it doesn't need to make sense, doesn't need to last forever, it just needs to contain an act or a moment of beauty. And yes, this artistic vision does get eroded by the reality of pressing and duplication costs, but it does act as a useful reminder sometimes of why we do what we do."

Key Artists & Releases: "Like every parent we love all our children equally, but it's particularly gratifying when something left field unexpectedly gains traction. GOATS' second album 'Far Out' did well – 40-minute single-song acid folk field recording experimental ambient funk mash-ups have traditionally been a tough sell, but this one really cut through. We're very lucky to have The Glove Of Bones on our staff. He's instrumental in driving some of our visual aesthetic. In return we're able to offer a safe space where he can deliver projects like 'Kafou In Avalonia', a collaboration with Cousin Silas. It was a cassette presented in a wax-sealed sleeve, packaged in a gris-gris bag complete with bones and a shrunken head. That's not your usual record deal."

Future Plans: "I'd really like an SBC radio show, but it's a saturated market and I wouldn't want to launch anything unless I thought it was doing something new or reaching an under-served audience."

Any Other Business?: "What would success look like for the label? If we got a reputation for reliably releasing something interesting, that would do me fine. It seems to me the big thing in this business is perseverance. You have to hang on in there. Good things can happen, but the competition for people's ears has never been greater, so finding the right ears for your music is going to take some time."

For more, visit submarinebroadcastingco.bandcamp.com

FIRST AND LAST AND ALWAYS



Squid's **Louis Borlase** reveals the first and last albums he bought and the one he turns to in an emergency

FIRST

BRIGHT EYES

Digital Ash In A Digital Urn

SADDLE CREAK, 2005



"It's hard to know the first album I bought and didn't stealthily nick from my sister who had more CDs. She still has, and she was old enough to go to gigs when I was still in Year 7. I got this in HMV on College Green in Bristol, next door to the music shop I'd later work in. This is the first time I'd loved a record because of how angsty it felt. I love the messy, hard panned drums and glitchy sequencers throughout."

LAST

SUZANNE CIANI

A Sonic Womb: Live Buchla Performance At Lapsus

LAPSUS, 2020



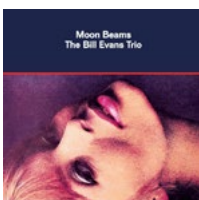
"Suzanne Ciani is one of the great improvisers. This album feels very live, both literally and figuratively. It punches into different corners of expression with moments that make you feel like you're on the dancefloor, then suddenly on a mountain top. The sequences on her Buchla 200e synthesiser are made up of such distinct pulses and their mesmerising qualities are unique to her own soundworld."

ALWAYS

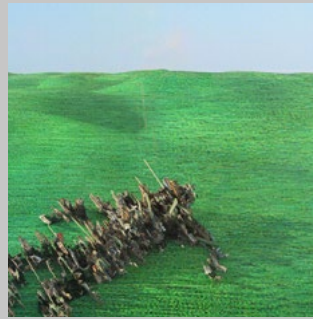
BILL EVANS TRIO

Moon Beams

RIVERSIDE, 1962



"This was recorded just after the death of bassist Scott LaFaro in 1962 and you can hear Bill's mourning on every single track. Strangely, I heard this album for the first time around the time my good friend Henry passed away when we had just left Bristol. I was devastated and ever since I come back to this album at times of transition. As I get older, the music sounds comfortably frozen in time."



SQUID

Bright Green Field

WARP

Your new favourite post-punk outfit...

When the revered Warp label signs a promising British five-piece, you know it's time to pay attention.

Formed in 2017 by Louis Borlase in Brighton, Squid have been patiently garnering a significant cross-generational reputation over the past few years. In equal measure, they've been thrilling the eager youth with electrifying live performances – most notably their three sets at Glastonbury 2019 – but also pricking the ears of more seasoned audiophiles with their potent and exploratory post-punk sound. Add in all the industry and 6 Music-fuelled hype, and as far as 2021's eagerly awaited debut albums go, this is surely right up there.

A brace of singles, 2019's ubiquitous 'Houseplants' and 2020's widely lauded 'Sludge/Broadcaster', certainly whetted the appetite for this long-player, but just a year down the line, Squid have evolved. As soon as second track 'GSK' takes hold, you can hear a band exerting even further control of their towering vision. Its bass-driven, fractured funk groove builds to a whirlwind peak, before you're blindsided by a beautifully poised alt-jazz cameo from talented multi-instrumentalist Emma-Jean Thackray. It's properly thrilling stuff.

Lead single 'Narrator' is stupefying, too. A swirling maelstrom of squalling synths, rousing intensity and high ambition, it's held together by the tight motorik drumming of vocalist Ollie Judge. His fervent, half-bawled voice is a stark counterpoint to the exceptionally controlled primal scream of experimental London singer Martha Skye Murphy, whose spellbinding guest delivery is fired with righteous fury as she strives to break free from the song's dominating narrative.

There's even more to revel in, from the propulsive underground art rock of 'Boy Racers' and the episodic, future-jazz founded 'Documentary Filmmaker', all the way through to breathtaking, Neu!-channelling closer 'Pamphlets'. And while you might occasionally pick up one or two of the band's other influences, such as Wire or This Heat, there's absolutely nothing in thrall about a single note of 'Bright Green Field'. High on concept and substance and cleverly maintaining an elusive, abstract take on the zeitgeist, this is a very fine album indeed. Dazzling, uncompromising, intricately balanced and in a field entirely of its own.

CARL GRIFFIN

LUWTEN - PHOTO: EDDO HARTMANN

**LUWTEN****Draft**

GLASSNOTE

Luwten follows up her self-titled 2017 debut album with an assured second release, the tentative-sounding 'Draft'. There's nothing diffident about it, though – Amsterdam-based singer and producer Tessa Douwstra has carved out her own sleek, intimate world underscored with melancholy, and this album offers a crepuscular kind of pop that demands more from the listener than simply just liking it. A sophisticated sheen of crisp electronica belies the emotional heft of songs like 'Airport', with its up-close vocal and glacial, broken beat accompaniment.

With modern production values, there's something of the nocturnal chanteuse about Douwstra's delivery, calling to mind the mid-noughties majesty of Feist, whether intentional or otherwise. Laurie Anderson's 'O Superman' also springs to mind on opener 'The Thought Of You', with its circular vocal sample. Overall, there's a solitude and yearning to 'Draft' that chimes with recent events – proof, if it were needed, that great art really can emerge from lockdown. **JA**

P!OFF?**P!Off?**

BUREAU B

The DAF-inspired punks of Munich's P!Off? released their only album in 1982 as part of a mass artist buy-up by a bandwagon-chasing record company. Sadly for P!Off? – short for *Piss Off Orkesstr* – this was after the 99 luftballons of the underground Neue Deutsche Welle scene began to pop. However, like a well-pumped balloon, this remastered re-release is airtight, full to bursting with new wave energy – cleaner than FSK and leagues chirpier than the aforementioned DAF.

A perky drum machine leads the Moog march in a balance of low-tech functionality and German language wit, with song titles translating to 'I Don't Know French' and 'Watch Out!'. In 1982, the lead single was 'Mein Walkman Ist Kaputt' (should've gone to Radio Rentals), but there are bigger tunes found in the energetic pop drama of 'Starker Bruder', or the organ-swept 'Schau Dich Doch An' and its, dare I say, new romantic leanings. **FR**

ALAN VEGA**Mutator**

SACRED BONES

While fans will delight in this lost album, you don't need to be a die-hard fan of the late Suicide frontman to appreciate the many riches of 'Mutator'. Rather than a collection of off-cuts, it's a complete album recorded in New York 25 years ago by Vega with his wife and long-time collaborator Liz Lamere, and marks the first in a series of archival releases from the wealth of material dubbed the "Vega Vault".

Vega was approaching 60 when the album was recorded, but 'Mutator' captures his still-flaming intensity and incessant drive for experimentation, imbued with the energy of NYC life. 'Nike Soldier' revels in murky proto-grooves à la Cabaret Voltaire, 'Filthy' is a stomping industrial dance machine, and on the swirling, heavenly 'Breathe' Vega's voice matches late-career John Cale in depth and gravitas.

The production by Lamere and Jared Artaud of The Vacant Lots is crystal clear, but it still retains Vega's inimitable grit, making 'Mutator' a glorious unearthed treasure that demands repeated listening. **CF**



MATT BERRY

The Blue Elephant

ACID JAZZ

Matt Berry seems to have something of a Midas touch. As much as he's a brilliantly intuitive and ever more watchable comedy actor, he's also an accomplished songwriter and musician who gets progressively better and more adventurous with each new album. It's no surprise, then, that 'The Blue Elephant' – marking Berry's 10th year with Acid Jazz – continues his positive sonic trajectory.

With your man singing and playing all synths, keyboards, guitars and bass (he even painted the 'Elephant Man'-inspired cover art), the album finds him moving on from the stripped-back, troubadour-ish feel of last year's well-received 'Phantom Birds' in favour of a swirling and much more expansive psych/prog/glam vibe.

'Blues Inside Me' references Syd Barrett-era Pink Floyd and the propulsive krautrock of early 1970s Can in one fell swoop, while the shimmering 'Safer Passage' evokes a sort of woozy, lysergic summer's day. Rich in melody, big on groove and gloriously disorientating in places, 'The Blue Elephant' is a sonic tour de force, and easily Berry's most engaging album to date. **VI**

A MAN CALLED ADAM

Love Forgotten Oddities & Rarities Part 2

OTHER

With immortal songs like 'Barefoot In The Head' and 'Estelle', Sally Rodgers and Steve Jones, aka A Man Called Adam, helped define breezy Balearic house and chill-out, but these tracks offer only a glimpse of their consistent and varied output. After returning with the acclaimed 'Farmarama' album in 2019, the duo have been more active again, and this second collection of oddments features collaborations, alternate versions and remixes from some of the greatest names in the business.

With its strummed indie rock guitar, titanic synth and the vocals of South African singer Brenda Fassie, the beautiful 'Hurricane Brenda' has a poignant feel. The crepuscular 'This Is London', featuring Chris Coco, has dusty hip hop drums. And the late Andrew Weatherall's remix of 'CPI' generates drama with its epic riffery and percussive arrangement. Then there's the joy of 'Someone Else' from their Beachflea side project – a lovely Mr Fingers-style deep house caper. For horizontal ravers, it's essential. **BM**

METRONOMY

The English Riviera (10th Anniversary)

BECAUSE MUSIC

Formed as a solo bedroom experiment by teenage musician/producer Joseph Mount in Devon in the late 1990s, and built upon as a full band in Brighton throughout the 2000s, Metronomy's third album, 2011's 'The English Riviera', was the point at which creative intention and commercial recognition began to overlap.

A concept album reflecting life on the south coast of England, it washes in on aching violins and the distant cry of seagulls, before exploring the tense, church organ groove of 'The Look' and the French pop-ish 'Everything Goes My Way'. The bolder, more expansive synthpop of the album's second half is reflected in six previously unreleased songs included here. None would have improved the record first time round, but the proggy analogue waves of 'Friends' and the downbeat, Joy Division-go-jazz groove of 'Picking Up For You' are satisfying experiments.

Made at a time when the internet opened up the sounds of an older generation for reinterpretation, 10 years down the line the march of time has only strengthened this album's potent effect. **DP**



LEON VYNEHALL

Rare, Forever

NINJA TUNE

Man of the moment's soul-searching opus

There's a tendency with contemporary electronic musicians used to the instinctive and non-verbal milieu of club DJ life to explain their work in terms of a meaning only apparent to them. For his second full-length album on Ninja Tune, the press blurb for London-based Leon Vynehall's 'Rare, Forever' finds him referring to "an album about my own psyche" and "investigating who he is as a person".

None of this is apparent from the music, although Vynehall has previous with sculpting a contemporary electronic work into a wider-reaching narrative. For 2018's full-length debut 'Nothing Is Still', accompanying short films and self-written text expanded the record into a concept work about his grandparents' migration from Southampton to New York in the 1960s.

With no such context here, the listener fills in the gaps. Opener 'Ecce! Ego!' is a slow and icy synth groove, perhaps a tongue-in-cheek reference to the fact that the artist's creative process has involved a lot of alone time. It gives way to minute-long interlude 'In>Pin', where indistinct male and female voices appear to discuss the loss of being self-involved in the creative process, of being "pinned like a moth".

The following track, 'Mothra', the album's lead cut and standout track, fuses a bouncing, itchy-footed techno rhythm, swirling, Vangelis-like synthesised strings and a moody UK garage riff. While some moments would undoubtedly cause uproar in a club (for example, the surging 'Snakeskin □ Has-Been' and the jerking rave atmosphere of 'Dumbo'), the record finds its real power in the contemplative train-track rhythm of 'An Exhale', the bass-heavy ambient journey 'Farewell! Magnus Gabbro' and Vynehall's poetic spoken outro to 'All I See is You, Velvet Brown'.

What we're left with is a work that is thoroughly – possibly unintentionally – of its time in this era of Covid, precisely activating the listener's isolated, intimate response to it, with Vynehall's organic intention masked and mediated by the technology used in its creation. If that sounds dystopian, then the sheer emotive power still carried by the music marks 'Rare, Forever' as a very human – and very good – record.

DAVID POLLOCK



MOBY

Reprise

DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON

Old wigouts get x-large orchestral rejig

Described as an "orchestral greatest hits" album, 'Reprise' finds Moby – along with a raft of special guests – reimagining some of his finest moments with stately, haunting arrangements, each one loaded with towering symphonic or acoustic grandeur. The effect is to draw out and lay bare the poignant essence in his music that was all too often *felt* rather than *heard*.

An obvious case in point is the emotional re-reading of 'Extreme Ways', from his 2002 album, '18'. The new arrangement carries a rueful acceptance that's as moving as Johnny Cash tackling Nine Inch Nails' 'Hurt', with Moby's voice taking on a cracked, regretful tone reminiscent of the Man In Black's final recordings. The same effect is found on the harrowing version of 'The Lonely Night' performed by Mark Lanegan and Kris Kristofferson, whose duetting voices are so uniformly gravely that they sound like thwarted souls making a slow final walk along the path to heaven.

A track like 'We Are All Made Of Stars', again from 2002's '18', always had a central mellifluousness – somewhat masked by the electronic palette that Moby wound up using on the original, but more apparent in this warmer reworked version. Pieces like that, or 1995's 'God Moving Over The Face Of The Waters', soar with vertiginous grace in the manner that one can imagine Moby always intended. A strident new version of 'Natural Blues', featuring Gregory Porter and Amythyst Kiah, is respectfully freed from its dependency on Alan Lomax's scratchy archival recording of Alabama folk singer Vera Hall. In the hands of Porter and Kiah, the song is given a ferocious and commanding gospel transcendence.

But it's the arrangement of David Bowie's 'Heroes', fronted by Mindy Jones, that gives 'Reprise' its resplendent, grandiose pivot. With Jones' fragile voice, a thin electronic organ pattern and bold, sweeping strings, this is the moment where the hairs on your neck suddenly stand to attention. Spanning 30 years, Moby's music has always had a soul-displacing capacity, so it's perhaps strange that it takes a cover of someone else's song to remind us of the fact. But identifying that stirring, devastating effect is what makes 'Reprise' a mature album of exquisite, necessary, career-defining beauty.

MAT SMITH

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**Strand Records
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ROUGH TRADE
roughtrade.com

The big daddy of independent record shops, a visit never disappoints. Take your pick from London (East or West), Nottingham, Bristol and NYC.



NOISE KITCHEN
noise.kitchen

As well as selling ES, Prague-based Noise Kitchen is a synth treasure trove stocking everything from modular and DIY kits to samplers and sequencers.



LA BIBLIOTEKA
labiblioteka.co

This Sheffield-based indie books and mags shop has served us well online during lockdown, but you can't beat a browse in shops this good.



MAGALLERIA
magalleria.co.uk

Daniel McCabe's Bath-based magazine emporium really is the kind of place where a good rummage will reap rewards. See website for opening times.



NORMAN RECORDS
normanrecords.com

Leeds' "brutalist Argos for vinyl records" isn't a shop where you can go to browse, but it does run a great click and collect service if you're in the area.



THE BOOK & RECORD BAR
bookandrecordbar.co.uk

This West Norwood shop hasn't been the same without you. Tell them we sent you. Don't forget their wnbclondon radio station if you're still WFH.



MATÉRIA PRIMA
materiaprima.pt

We dream of holidays. What we'd give for a trip to this Porto-based record, book, mag and zine store. Check their website for leisurely opening times.



MAGCULTURE
magculture.com

The London HQ of indie mag champ Jeremy Leslie is a proper treasure trove, do not pass up visiting if you're in the 'hood. See online for opening times.



VOD MUSIC
vodmusic.co.uk

Based in Mold, the UK's smallest record shop sees a cautious return to browsing. Open Thurs-Sat as we type. See their website for more.

BANGING ON

Big place, America. So big that if our so-called columnist ever visited he could easily get lost, say in a swamp or maybe a desert. Which would give him something to write about, for a change

WORDS AND PICTURES: FAT ROLAND

The United States of America is a really big place, somewhere between the size of Cardiff and the size of several Cardiffs taped together. I know two facts about America. One: it was founded by Oprah Winfrey in 1492. Two: the USA invented the hot dog. You can tell this because they have star spaniel banners. Oprah only listens to Meat Loaf, or Insane Clown Posse when she's depressed. This explains why America is not famous for electronic music. Barack Obama once accidentally bought Erasure's 'Love To Hate You' on pink vinyl, but that doesn't count.

Synthesiser music is well established here in the UK, and you can find enthusiastic clubbers in places like Manchester or Stockport or Berghain, which is a fast-food shop just outside of Stockport. It's different in the States. If they're not busy shooting apple pies in their pick-up trucks to the sound of country and western, they're hollowing out cheerleading raccoons and filling them with smores. Probably.

Americans smother everything in squeezy cheese, and that really clogs up the buttons on a Roland SH-101. I think. Look, I might just be relying on confused stereotypes here. I'm so badly travelled, I might as well be cemented into a pavement which Americans call sidle-walkings. I once pinged my microwave buttons to the rhythm of 'Acid Tracks' when cooking a Chicago Town frozen pizza, which is the closest I've ever got to American electronic music.

I was watching a documentary the other day, and they said in New York people supersize their keyboards like they supersize their fries and there's a bloke with a synthesiser the length of Manhattan. They said George Washington was bang into 2 Unlimited's 'No Limit'. And way up in the Rocky

Mountains, if the wind whistles in a particular direction, you can pick out a few notes of Brian Eno's 'Another Green World'. In rural Montana, there's a grizzly bear who's a whizz on the electric violin, but all he can play is a monophonic 'Roygbiv' by Boards Of Canada, which sounds cool but very much is not. Now I come to think of it, I'm certain that iconic US author Stephen King once wrote a novel about a haunted TB-303 where the red

lights turned out to be ghosts and, um, all the other knobs turned out to be ghosts. It wasn't one of his best.

Also, er, hold on, let me think of something else. Got it! I once read that Texas is the natural home of complicated breakcore. I can't keep this up. This is all lies. In the same way that I have a surprising number of traffic cones dressed up like Sigue Sigue Sputnik, I own lots of US electronic music. I'd be nowhere musically without Carl Craig or Rhythm Is Rhythm. I suppose a responsible journalist would have researched their record collection before writing this column instead of scribbling down a load of wild speculation while sat on the toilet, or McToilet as it's known in America.

The damage is done. Can we all just agree that everything on this page is 100 per cent accurate and can be cited as a reference on

Wikipedia? It's in print so it must be true. Dubstep was invented in Utah. The Hacienda was built in Alaska, then sent over to Britain on a raft. Abe Lincoln once wrote a three-star review of 'Moon Safari'. Dammit. I'm speculating again. I am so sorry, the United States of America, or as they call it in the United States of America, the United States of America.





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