

ELECTRONIC SOUND

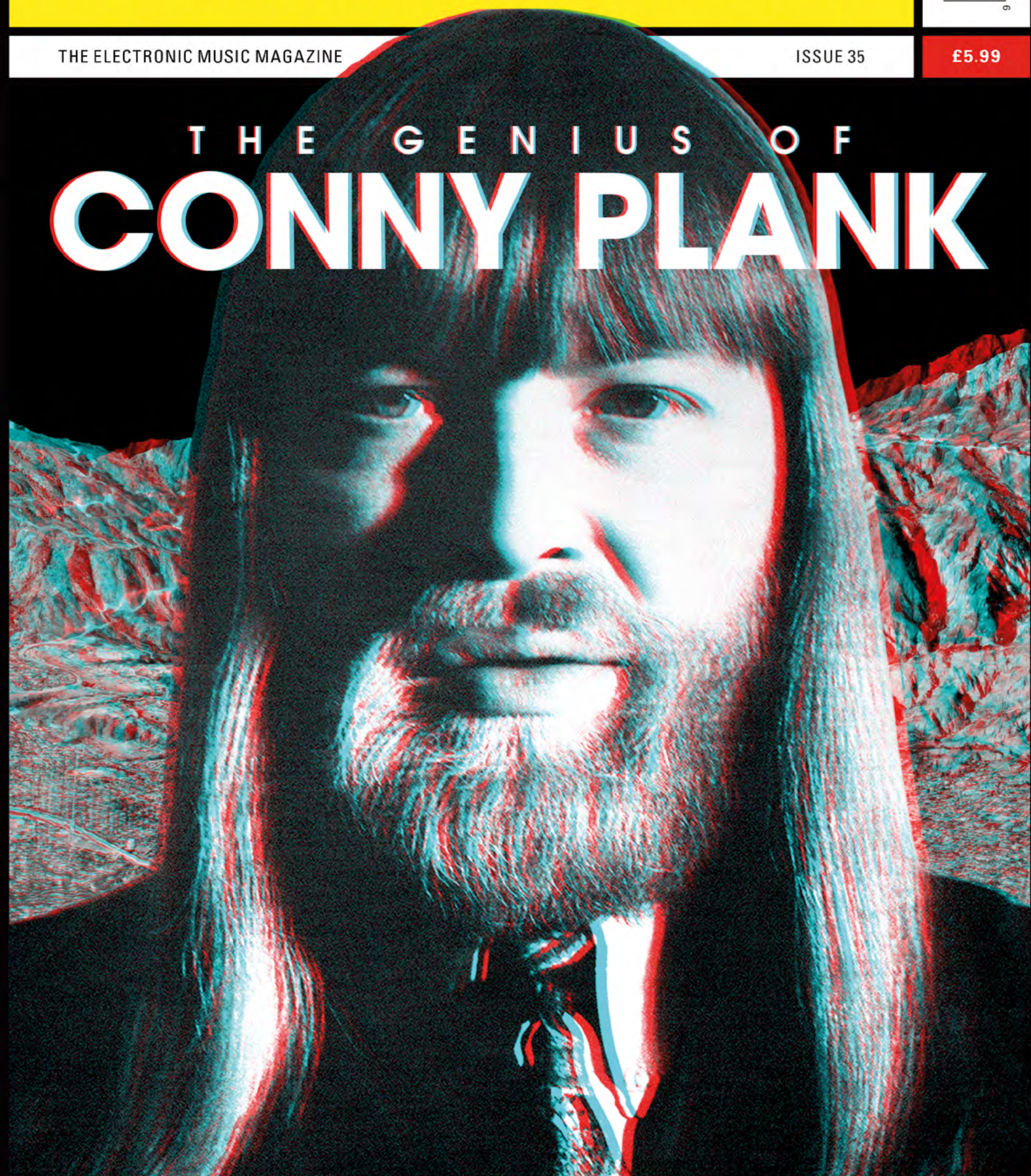


THE ELECTRONIC MUSIC MAGAZINE

ISSUE 35

£5.99

THE GENIUS OF CONNY PLANK



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NOW IN 3D

WELCOME TO ELECTRONIC SOUND 35

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01778 392 462

PUBLISHED BY

PAM COMMUNICATIONS LIMITED

STUDIO 18, CAPITOL HOUSE,
HEIGHAM STREET, NORWICH NR2 4TE,
UNITED KINGDOM

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W

hat is a music producer? Yeah, what does a producer actually do? Is their role that of technical expert, able to place microphones in just the right place? Is it their deep knowledge of EQ and effects and signal-to-noise ratios that qualifies them to be in charge of a recording session? Or are they some kind vibe master who creates the atmosphere needed to coax the finest performances from temperamental artistes? Or are they strangely skilled in the arcane knowledge of The Song, constructing with unerring accuracy the necessary key changes, bridges, until it is a piece of art worthy of pressing into vinyl.

Psychologist, accountant, drug hoover, disciplinarian, visionary, electronics wizard, radical experimenter, experienced parental figure, midwife, hand-holder, host, lover, pal, sound obsessive, music lover, deal maker... Conny Plank was all of the above.

With this issue of Electronic Sound, we wanted to place Conny centrestage and celebrate his work, and we scarcely mention Kraftwerk. Plank's contribution to music is almost immeasurable, and although we've devoted the cover story to him, and talked to several key players in his life, including his son Stephan, whose new documentary about his dad got this month's ball rolling, we feel we've hardly scratched the surface.

In other news, the ES team decamped to the Indulgence Show last month in London, and stumbled about being impressed by the multitude of high-end audio gear on display. We do wonder what Plank would have made of it all. I expect he would, like us, have sat in stunned wonder listening to the surround mixes of Kraftwerk's '3-D The Catalogue'.

Also within these pages for your reading pleasure The Don Of Techno (or should that be the Jack Dee of Techno?) Dave Clarke shoots the breeze with us, we go backstage with Düsseldorf prepared piano outfit Grandbrothers, visit Claire M Singer's 'Organ Reframed' event at Islington's Union Chapel (her thing is the church organ, which is quite a thing and should be used more widely, despite them being bloody huge and generally stuck in churches), we find out all about the wildly popular 'Welcome To Night Vale' podcast, Kevin Godley talks us through the making of Godley & Creme's 'Cry', there's Andrew Hung, one half of 50 per cent of Fuck Buttons, on his splendid solo album, and we talk to Thomas Dolby – at last – about his, frankly, amazing life so far in light of his book making it out in paperback.

All this and so much more. You know what to do.

Electronically yours,
PUSH & MARK

PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING

Eventim Apollo, London
26 October 2017

WORDS: NEIL MASON
PICTURE: SHAUN GORDON

What J Willgoose Esq, Wrigglesworth and co do on record is one thing, what they do live is another beast entirely. Their live shows are a spectacle, with knobs on. Tweed ones at that.

Having released their 'Every Valley' album back in July, they hit the road on a seemingly never-ending tour. Having ticked off Mexico and the US, their October UK tour culminated in this London date at the venue formerly known as the Hammersmith Apollo.

"I feel confident in predicting these will be the best-looking PSB shows to date," tweeted Mr Willgoose and, well, he wasn't wrong. With screens everywhere – two large ones at the back of the stage, six seemingly suspended in thin air – and the lighting cunningly disguised as copper-looking miner's lamps, one of the many highlights was a stomping romp through 'They Gave Me Lamp', featuring the excellent Haiku Salut and PSB's show-stopping brass section. We counted a dozen people on stage, which pales when 'Take Me Home' closes the show with an appearance from the Beaufort Male Choir. A dozen people on stage? Try two dozen.

"We were in the PSB dressing room 10 minutes before the show," our man on the inside told us, "and it was all so relaxed and friendly, no one shouting to clear the space so the band could prepare. The show was great, it had a really nice ensemble vibe, and the crowd went absolutely nuts."

You'd think with that level of rabble-rousing, this was the last live show of what's been a heck of year for the band, but nope, it doesn't end here. With no more than a few days off, they're back on the road kicking off a European tour in Barcelona and winding up in Paris on 29 November. We're booking the Eurostar now.





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ELECTRONIC SOUND READER OFFER

EXCLUSIVE READER-ONLY LIMITED EDITIONS

THIS MONTH: A SPLIT SEVEN-INCH SINGLE, 'THE GENIUS OF CONNY PLANK', IN A 3D COVER FEATURING GERMAN MUSIC LEGENDS HARMONIA AND DAF



HARMONIA 'NOTRE DAME'

Harmonia were something of a krautrock supergroup, formed when Neu!'s Michael Rother joined forces with Dieter Möebius and Hans-Joachim Roedelius, also known as Cluster. The three musicians, in the mid-1970s hippie spirit and the German affinity for communal rural living, gathered at Cluster's studio in Forst on the German/Polish border in 1973 and recorded their debut album, 'Musik Von Harmonia'.

It was released in 1974, after which Rother teamed up with Klaus Dinger once more for the third Neu! album, 'Neu! '75', again produced by Conny Plank. The album marked the end of Neu! for the time being, the fiery Dinger and the more mellow Rother – always a fractious pairing – had exhausted their patience for one another.

Dinger went on to create La Düsseldorf, while Rother, Moebius and Roedelius teamed up again for a second Harmonia album, the luscious 'Deluxe'. It was recorded with Conny's mobile gear at Forst, and mixed at his studio in Wolperath over the summer of 1975. If 'Musik Von Harmonia' was a beautiful ambient work in the Cluster tradition, 'Deluxe' created a delightful blend of their lightness of touch, Rother's celestial guitar and a pulsing rhythmic heart thanks to that other krautrock drum genius, Mani Neumeier.

'Deluxe' is one of the very finest albums of the Conny Plank era of German experimental music. "It's impossible to say something about Neu!, and Harmonia, without mentioning Conny Plank and his contribution," says Michael Rother in the new documentary, 'Conny Plank: The Potential Of Noise'. "There is huge respect worldwide for everything Conny did."

DAF 'DER MUSSOLINI'

It's a testament to Conny Plank's dedication to sound, in particular to the edges of what people found to be acceptable, that in 1981 he was in the studio with a band from Düsseldorf called DAF, producing their first major label album, 'Alles Ist Gut'. The sessions would result in a barnstorming stone-cold electronic music classic, the fearsome stomp of 'Der Mussolini'.

After their debut album in 1979, the band decamped to London in 1980. By being based in the musical capital of the world, they hoped they would create some heat. It worked. They caught the attention of Mute's Daniel Miller, who signed them to the label for the 'Die Kleinen Und Die Bösen' album.

In the new documentary, Miller recounts how DAF told him Plank was going to produce the album: "I got a call from Robert Görl, saying, 'Conny Plank wants to produce our album'," says Miller. "I said, 'Very funny!'. He was this mythological figure. I had no money, how are we going to do it? They said 'Don't worry, Conny says he can do it in three days'. So I said, 'Wow, OK, let's do it!'"

Miller flew to Cologne to see how the sessions were coming along, only to find DAF arguing. "I'd never made an album before and I was sitting next to my hero producer and my band weren't even in the studio, they were in the house arguing or discussing or whatever they fucking did. Conny said, 'Don't worry, it will be fine'."

Nothing happened for the first two days of the three-day session. Miller was getting frantic, but Plank was calm. As Görl says, "Conny left the musicians to their own devices, and then gave their stuff a boost". In the event, half the album was recorded at Conny's, the other half was a live recording. The record was a critical success, and enabled DAF to sign a major label deal with Virgin. Now with a major label budget, who else to get to produce? The great Conny Plank did not disappoint, creating the full-blooded powerhouse sound of DAF. Play loud!

HOW DO I GET THE ELECTRONIC SOUND READER OFFER?

THREE EASY WAYS...

- 1 Buy the latest issue directly from electronicsound.co.uk as a mag and vinyl bundle, so that's the magazine and Reader Offer seven-inch, for just £9.99
- 2 Subscribe to the magazine at electronicsound.co.uk/subscribe and you'll get an early bird email offering you the latest Reader Offer at half-price each month
- 3 Visit electronicsound.co.uk and snap up the single on its own for £5.99. Hurry though, stocks are very limited

(RICHARD AND) JUDY IN DISGUISE

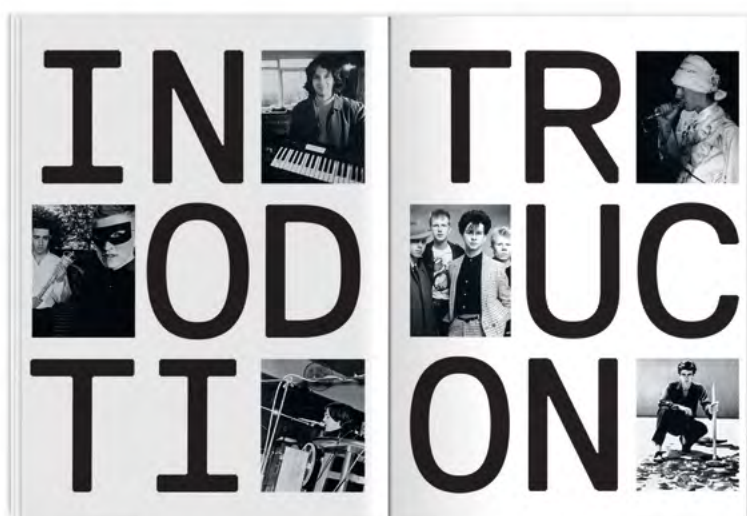
THE BOOK OF THE YEAR HAS ARRIVED

Well, 'Mute: A Visual Document, From 1978 – Tomorrow' is quite the treat. The definitive visual chronicle of Mute, it says here, and isn't it just. You know it's going to be good when on the opening page there's an image of a sheet of Letraset, and right at the bottom, three Mute logos, the distinctive walking man. Nice touch.

The book is the story of Mute Records, written by Terry Burrows with Daniel Miller. It's 320-pages are packed with all sorts of fascinating Mute-y paraphernalia, artwork, flyers, press shots and the like, interwoven with an extensive introduction and commentary by Miller, who curated the visual material in the book. Talk about from the horse's mouth, right? There's a ton of stuff on the main attractions, so the likes of Depeche Mode, Fad Gadget, Yazoo, Nick Cave, Erasure and Goldfrapp, but there's just as much about the Mute artists you might've forgotten. Silicon Teens! Smegma! Non!

The book features comprehensive discographies, a Mute family tree (we got stuck on that page for a while let us tell you) and lots and lots of great stories. There's also contributors from photographers Anton Corbijn and Brian Griffin without whose work Mute simply wouldn't be Mute. If there's one book you need on the old Xmas list this year, make it this one... then again, just over there we've rounded up a bunch of *other* books you should also be asking Santa for.

thamesandhudson.com/mute.com



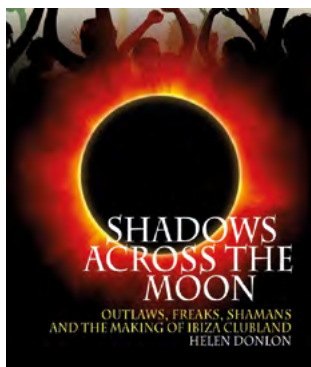
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ELECTRONIC SOUND BOOK CLUB

ROUNDING UP THE YEAR'S OTHER PAGE-TURNING TOMES

FEARLESS: THE MAKING OF POST-ROCK

Jeanette Leech's comprehensive overview of the inventive scene that used the tools rock to create something new. jawbone.com



SHADOWS ACROSS THE MOON

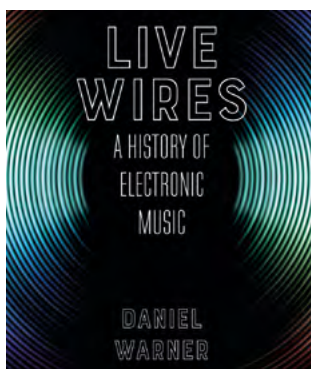
Just what makes The White Isle so special? Let Helen Donlon's fascinating history shed some light on the magic of Ibiza.

jawbone.com

LIVE WIRES

Exploring electronic music's roots through its key technologies, Daniel Warner's compelling book is a must-read for even the most casual of music fan.

jareaktionbooks.co.uk



ABBA: THE COMPLETE RECORDING SESSIONS

In which we discover just how groundbreaking Benny Anderson actually was when it came to synthy goodness in leading ABBA historian Carl Magnus Palm's expanded sessions guide. carlmagnuspalm.com

ART SEX MUSIC

Cosey Fanni Tutti's enlightening autobiography couldn't have been called 'To Hull And Back', but the actual title sums up her life perfectly. An incredible tale, beautifully told. faber.co.uk



THE ART OF SOUND

Terry Burrows' tells the story of recorded sound with many, many properly ravishing pictures of olden days kit. Pwoar.

thamesandhudson.com

CAN'T STAND UP FOR FALLING DOWN

Former Melody Maker/Uncut Editor Allan Jones tells wild stories galore from a career that started in 1974. bloomsbury.com



INTRODUCING...

GULP

WARM, DREAMY SYNTHPOP TEAM-UP

WHO THEY?

Self-described as a "garage space-pop band", Cardiff outfit Gulp is fronted by Lindsey Leven and Super Furry Animal Guto Pryce, and joined by guitarist Gid Gourney and various "friends" on drums including, but not limited to, Stuart Kidd, Kliph Scurlock (The Flaming Lips) and Gwion Llewelyn. Quite a team then.

WHY GULP?

Using their various synths and a mix of acoustic and electric drums, Gulp make fuzzy upbeat synthpop. Their new single 'Morning Velvet Sky' is "a song about dawn", awash in warm arpeggios and Leven's delightfully soft vocals, it was mixed by Norwich's very own Luke Abbot. It's available digitally right now, but it's also getting its own 12-inch release on 1 December through the ELK label, and features remixes by Beyond The Wizards Sleeve's Richard Norris. There's a full-length on the way, expected sometime next year.

TELL US MORE...

Leven is originally from Scotland, and moved to Cardiff where she crossed paths with Pryce at a Christmas "psych party". From there the two of them formed Gulp, with the name of the band coming from combining both of their initials. They toured the UK earlier in the year and played at a bunch of festivals that included Kendal Calling and Liverpool Sound City. Gulp describe their music as "like a road trip; the landscape and events along the way, filmic scenes and melodies". With a line-up as impressive as theirs, we're looking forward to hearing their new album in 2018.

FINLAY MILLIGAN

'Morning Velvet Sky' is out now on ELK

BLOW YOUR OWN FUSE

SPARKS FLY WITH FUSEBOX FROM ANALOGUE SOLUTIONS

British boutique synth builders Analogue Solutions have a new semi-modular hand-built box called Fusebox that looks like a whole heap of fun. With its startling orange fascia, the Fusebox fuses (see what they did there?) the AS analogue sound-making possibilities with some pretty fierce modulation and sequencing cleverness on board. It's a three VCO mono all-analogue synth with an arpeggiator and a "Patternator", a novel CV controlled sequencer/rhythm generator, which will soon see you deep in analogue CV pattern territory (hello Vince Clarke! Guten Tag, DAF!). The only digital tech in sight is the MIDI/CV circuit. Nice sustainably sourced wooden end panels, too. analoguesolutions.com/fusebox



WE ARE THE MIDI MUSIC MAKERS...

SHAKE YOUR MONEY MAKER... WIRELESSLY

Like diddy TV remotes, OWOW's MIDIS 2.0 are a new kind of musical instrument. There's four varieties: wob, wiggle, drum and scan. Each allows you to control sounds and digital effects through body movements. Drum allows you to air drum to your hearts content, wiggle can change a sound with a wave, wob is described as the "theremin's baby brother" and scan can turn your drawings into MIDI. All the settings can be personalised with the OWOW Utility and then everything can be put together to make your very own tune. At \$119 a pop, you'll have to spend big to get the whole set though. owow.io

SAVE OUR SOUNDS

NO 13. A RECORD WITHOUT A HOLE



The British Library's Save Our Sounds project aims to save the UK's recorded sounds from extinction. Some sounds, however, are easier to save than others, as Curator Of Popular Music Andy Linehan explains...

A previous column in this series (Issue 28) highlighted Christian Marclay's 12-inch single 'Record Without A Cover', originally released in 1985, and one of hundreds of unusual and intriguing records by artists in the British Library collection that present a dilemma for the archivist.

In 2011, mining a similar vein, the Brussels-based French artist Yann Leguay released a 7-inch single 'Un Disque Sans Trou' or 'A Record Without A Hole'. The disc has a solid centre with no hole and is unplayable by normal means. Like the Marclay disc, it presents the archivist with a problem. We would like to be able to play the record, but drilling a hole in it hardly accords with archival principles. And we don't want to damage it by sticking it down with tape or glue. The fine minds in our audio studios are still pondering this one. We could acquire a second, sacrificial copy, of course, but they are not actually that easy to track down.

Leguay's disc is not the only record in the Library's collection that was issued without a hole. David Tibet's 1986 collection of historical recordings by occultist Aleister Crowley, known as 'The Hastings Archives', did have a hole, strictly speaking, but it was not punched through. Purchasers had to puncture the paper label in order to play it. Given Crowley's interest in ceremonial sex magick, the intended symbolism seems clear.

On a somewhat less esoteric note, visitors to the Library's current Entrance Hall exhibition 'Listen: 140 Years Of Recorded Sound' can see examples of the cardboard picture discs of various Tamla Motown hits produced by the Topps baseball card company in the late 1960s. These featured a single track on the A-side and instructions on how to play it on the (non-playing) B-side. Purchasers were advised to "Punch out hole in center with a pencil". However, this is further complicated by the variance in size of the spindle at the centre of a turntable, so all in all it is best to provide a disc with a hole in the middle to start with.

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

WANT

THE BIG PICTURE

WHEN FACEBOOK CAT VIDS GO XL

No bigger than a can of Coke and fitted with a world-first 360 degree speaker, the Nebula Capsule is a mini technological marvel in the shape of a portable projector that allows you to view content from a mobile device on a big screen. Here's the science bit for those of you like that sort of thing. It uses advanced Digital Light Processing technology to project a more radiant picture to a whopping 100-inch screen size. You get two and half hours of continuous video out of the battery (which can be charged and used at the same time) and it comes with Android 7.0 built-in so you can download a variety of apps like Netflix and YouTube which means you'll be streaming content instantly. They'll retail at \$349 and are expected on the shelves by the end of the year.

indiegogo.com



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OCTO-CLOCK

EIGHT-LEGGED TIMEPIECE

Looking like something that, if you turned your back on it, could definitely kill you, MB&F's Octopod houses a clock in a crystalline sphere propped up on eight mechanical legs. Inspired by cephalopods, marine chronometers and James Cameron's film 'The Abyss', its frame is made of 309 individual pieces and stands at 11 inches tall when fully extended. Its bulbous head is able to be rotated 360 degrees, so you'll be able to tell the time and gawp at its meticulous clockwork innards from every angle. There's only 50 being made and can be yours for an eye-watering \$36,000. We'll take a couple, thanks very much. mbandf.com



WANT

WILL YOU STILL LOVE ME...

COMMODORE 64'S PINT-SIZED REBOOT

First gracing the scene way back in 1982, the one-time world's bestselling home computer has been given a new lease of life in the form of The C64 Mini. This miniature version is a half-size replica with an HDMI output, classic-style joystick and 64 built-in games, including the likes of 'Uridium', 'Hawkeye' and 'Monty Mole'. There's a save game function, CRT filter and Europe/US display options. It can also be used as a home computer with C64 Basic, although you'll have to plug a USB keyboard in to use it (the Mini's keyboard is non-functional). Due for release next March, it'll set you back £64.99. thec64.com



WANT

THE MEANING OF LIFX

LIGHTING TILES SHED SOME LIGHT ON THE MATTER

As the battle for smart lighting our homes hot up, the new LIFX Tile might tempt if you're in the market for Wi-Fi enabled smart lights. Stick them to the wall and you can flip from warm, white light to psychedelic Pink Floyd live show circa 1967 and all points between from the comfort of your sofa. With 16 million colours, dimming from one per cent to 100 per cent, it's all controlled from your phone or Amazon Alexa, Apple's HomeKit or Google Assistant if you're tooled up in that area. The £245 kit comes with five tiles. uk.lifx.com



PHOTO: AYLIN GUNGOR



INTRODUCING...

KIM KI O

THE SOUND OF DIY DISSENT FROM TURKEY

WHO THEY?

Kim Ki O are a synth and bass guitar duo from Istanbul, Turkey. They're on their fourth album, 'Zan', of dreamy swirling synth anchored by simple drum machine beats and the wooden bass guitar driving the bottom end. They plough their own furrow, rarely veering from the formula, somehow imbuing their songs and avowedly DIY production with a sense of subdued revolt. It's in the understated aggression in the bass playing, and the dramatic turns in the washing synths chords which eddy around the disgruntled vocals.

WHY KIM KI O?

When the opening track is called 'İmam Mikrofonu Açık Unutursa' ('When The Imam Leaves The Mic On'), which features a snippet of an actual event in a city in south west Turkey when three young girls belted out the Turkish version of 'Flashdance... What A Feeling' across the city from a mosque's loudspeakers when the imam accidentally left the mic on, you know you want to hear more. And sure enough, despite the language barrier, you get the idea, drawn into the mood they create with the likes of lead track 'Sanki Hiç Durmadı' and its New Order-esque melancholy.

TELL US MORE

This sweet and simple bedroom synthpop is taking a stand in a country where being a woman, playing music and singing about failure, suppression and suspicion might well get you the kind of attention most of us could do without and never have to deal with. That it's also this good makes it essential listening.

MARK ROLAND

'Zan' is released on Lentonía on 24 November



WANT

DOGWATCH

ROBOT CHUM FOR HOME-ALONE MUTTS

Don't like leaving your four-legged friend home while you chip off to work? CamToy aims to help with Laïka, an interactive companion for your best friend. The small, Roomba-like device is remotely controlled with your smartphone (what isn't these days?) and is equipped with a camera so you can monitor goings-on. It'll notify you if your hound starts barking, can be set on a "self-running" mode and also has a "treat tosser" that can launch a snack at your pet. Its design is also, apparently, "chew-proof". Wonder how much that's been tested? camtoy.fr

WANT

GET BY WITH A LITTLE APP FROM MY FRIENDS

ABBEEY ROAD SERVES UP IOS DOWNLOAD

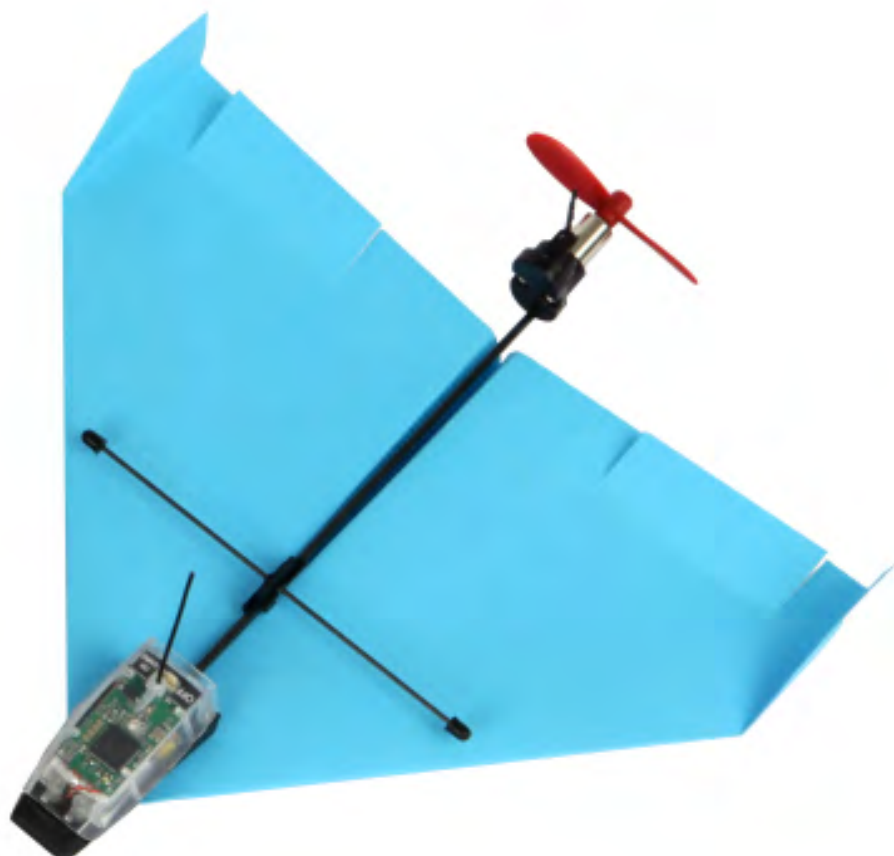
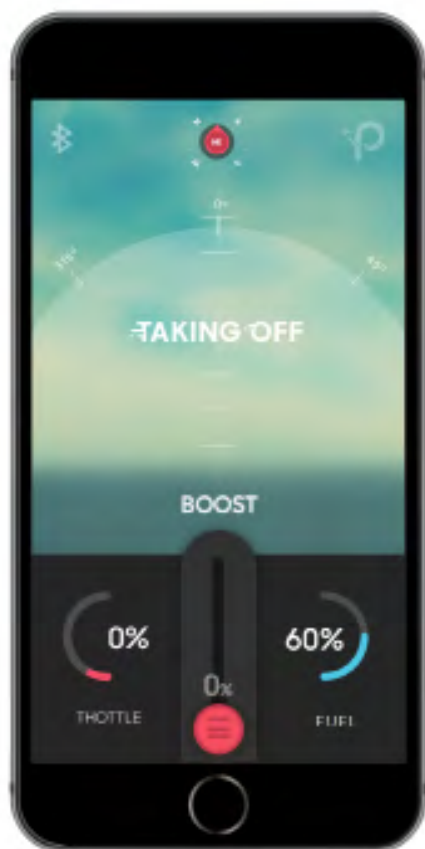
Abbey Road, the nicely appointed recording studios in north London that you may be aware of, has just released an iOS app. Called Toplevel, it's a simple recording app designed for songwriters to capture their ideas for a topline (usually a vocal melody, the one people whistle when it's a hit) with the absolute minimum of fuss. You can import an audio track and then record up to two tracks of audio on top of it. It's uncluttered and easy to use and allows you to invite friend to collaborate, add lyrics and pictures, and it geotags the lot for you. It's also free. abbeyroad.com/apps

WANT

DART OF CLASS

ESSENTIAL PAPER AEROPLANE POWER-UP

There's a reason this gizmo has raised \$1.6 million on Kickstarter. Attach it to a paper aeroplane (template included) and you it can take flight with an app on your phone. You want one, right? The Powerup Dart came about when its inventor was teaching children about aeronautics. He's already delivered two models of the Dart, but this one does acrobatics. Tilt your phone and it'll barrel roll, loop the loop, and do some other airborne tricks we've not heard of. kickstarter.com



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PURE INDULGENCE

AUDIO AND LIFESTYLE EXHIBITION ROUND-UP

Last month, we left the office, and, blinking in the daylight like moles, headed for the second-ever Indulgence Show at the Hammersmith International Centre in London. While we are in no way audiophiles, we do like to hear our music as it was intended. We figure that you might too, so, on your behalf, we headed off to explore our options. Here's the lowdown on what caught our ears.

SPEAKERS

KEF

Hi-fi shows are awash with demonstration rooms, but crikey they don't half play a load of crap. The notoriously over-dubbed 1980 'Eagles Live' is popular, but anything MOR with guitars will do. So few exhibitors played electronic music that were drawn to KEF like moths to a light. Well, their sensational home-issue Dolby Atmos system *was* cranking out Kraftwerk's '3-D: The Catalogue'. Ralf, they told us, is streets ahead when it comes to surround sound. uk.kef.com



DYNAUDIO

The good folk at Dynaudio were sympathetic to our cries for decent electronic music too. Founded in Denmark, their high-end speakers in the demonstration room blew our socks off, but the main attraction was their intelligent wireless music system, speakers that not only look lovely, but can adjust their sound to suit the room with their auto-sensing technology. dynaudio.com

HEADPHONES

AKG

As newbies, we were pleased to discover that quality needn't cost a packet. Seems our trusty (now discontinued) AKG K451s *are* as good as we thought, despite their modest price tag. AKG recently replaced the K451 with the Y50, which we got an ear full of and, at around £60, knocks spots off 'phones twice the price. uk.akg.com



LUZLI

We couldn't resist a swizz at the Roller Mk01 headphones, handmade by Swiss company Luzli. The aluminum and steel headband rolled up like an armadillo when not in use and caught our eye like the magpies we are. luzli.com

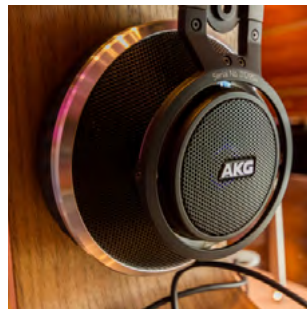
FLARE AUDIO

Once we'd mastered the knack of squeezing and twisting to get the new in-ear Flares Pro headphones to fit, the sound was almighty. Made by Flare Audio, who brought us the fantastic Isolate ear protectors, these in-ears would have us swapping our over-ears in a flash. flareaudio.com

SNUGS

You know how getting in-ear 'phones to stay in can be a bit of a bugger? The future is Snugs, a Devon-based company who use 3-D scanning and printing tech to make custom-fit headphones. The best part is they create the mould to fit with your own choice of driver.

snugs.com



CABLES AND CABINETS

WIRE ON WIRE / 3 SQUARE AUDIO

Eventually we found our way to the top floor (the show was over five floors), where, tucked away in actual hotel rooms we found demo room after demo room. Perched on the frankly gorgeous handmade birch plywood stands and plinths of 3 Square Audio, Wire On Wire's set up, with their tuneable interconnector cables, made our brains dribble. We swapped a krautrock CD compilation for an explanation. Seems you can "tune" these great looking cables by, amazingly, using plastic spacers that change the characteristics to suit your room and your ears. wireonwire.com/3squareaudio.com



ANY OTHER BUSINESS

DACS

The big revelation for us was we've been listening to our music all wrong. We get our tunes delivered in all manner of formats, from low-res streams to vinyl, much of it though is played from a computer and sounds pretty flat. There's a fix for that (beyond not touching MP3s) which, amazingly, doesn't cost the earth. Honourable mention to Chord and Electromod for patiently explaining DACs (digital to analogue converter) to us. More about all this discovery soon.

chordelectronics.com/electromod.com



INTRODUCING...

SOUNDS

DEEP, DARK RUMBLING AURAL COMMUNICATION

WHO HE?

Michael Red, the Vancouver-based producer, Low Indigo label big tomato and one half of experimental dub duo Chambers. Experimental you say? Oh indeed. His new album, 'Aquamarine' isn't exactly troubled by pop songs, but by crikey, a pair of headphones, a quiet corner, a dark night and you're not half away with the sound pixies.

WHY SOUNDS?

'Aquamarine', his debut long-player as a lone ranger, is a rich, deep, throb of a record. Not a beat in sight (although for a moment you think 'Fade To Light' might kick in, but no, it just teases), the whole thing is as dark as night and ebbs and flows like it's alive. Like a firework display waaaaay over there, 'Untouched' positively fizzles, while the wind chime tinkles and mic rustling winds of 'Echos In The Forest (Part 2)' are Blair Witch spooky. 'Sun Inside The Sun' is a twitchy, deep rasp, with shudders and explosions, sounds like, well, a sun inside the sun. Gosh, this stuff is good.

TELL US MORE...

While Red makes more four to the floor material under his own name, he says he started Sounds to "differentiate between dancefloor material and sit down stuff". How does he know? Sounds it seems has been brewing for a while and early doors the difference was "murky", but he says he can work out if a tune is Sounds or not, "no matter how abstract the dancefloor". If this is the sort of sound he puts to tape, imagine what goes on in his head all the time. Marvellous.

NEIL MASON

'Aquamarine' is released by Subtempo on 8 December

HE'S A CONSOLE MAN

LOVE HULTEN STRIKES AGAIN

Because you didn't realise that designing a gaming console that has an integrated digital projector and can store 10,000 retro computer games into a handcrafted wooden box that looks like a portable cassette player was something worth doing, that's exactly what oddball Swedish designer Love Hultén has done. The standard version has the classic D-Pad controllers you'll recognise as inspired by the Nintendo Entertainment System of the 1980s, while the fancier, bigger Arcade Edition looks like a double cassette deck boom box fashioned in dark wood and has a big ol' joystick for your gaming pleasure. Fetishising the tech of the past has never looked so beautiful. lovehulten.com/zettesystem





INTRODUCING...

SHELTER POINT

SLOW AND LOW THAT IS THE TEMPO

WHO THEY?

Nottingham-based duo, Lian Arnold and Robin Herne, have been quietly going about the business of making their downtempo R&B-tinged grooves since 2012. While not exactly prolific, there has been a gentle drip-drip of tracks, the most recent, the twisted gradual built and burn of 'Slow Air', backed with low-slung 'Cut Me Loose' popped up in September.

WHY SHELTER POINT?

They have a vibe whose jib we very much like the cut of. Think Domino's Bob Moses, or Ninja offshoot Counter Records, and the likes of Submotion Orchestra (who remixed 'Cut Me Loose' to great effect), Maribou State and Jono McCleary. It's that sleek urban vibe, and those deep, smooth bass rumbles, that will serve this pair well.

TELL US MORE...

That gentle, but stream of low-key releases this year seems to suggest we're building towards something here. They've recently been working with the multiple Grammy-winning Steve Dub whose credits include Leftfield, The Chemical Brothers, Primal Scream, Beth Orton among others. Bodes well right? A couple of years back, we ran a piece tipping a ton of artists for 2015, 50 for 2015. And one of those artists was Shelter Point. In the piece we mentioned an album was underway, writing for which, we said, began in 2014. With this year's activity, we won't be calling them the new Stereo MCs, but come on chaps.

SAM ROSE

'Cut Me Loose'/'Slow Air' is out now on Armada



WIGAN AND SEAN MCLUSKEY AT THE BRAIN, 1989

TIME MACHINE

OPENING IN THE LATE 80S, THE BRAIN ON LONDON'S WARDOUR STREET CHAMPIONED PRETTY MUCH AN ENTIRE GENERATION OF DJS AND ELECTRONIC LIVE ACTS. CO-FOUNDER **SEAN MCLUSKY** TELLS THE CLUB'S INCREDIBLE TALE

WORDS: **BEN WILLMOTT**

PICTURE: **DAVE SWINDELLS**

As any self-respecting northerner will tell you, London was behind the wave when it came to the acid house revolution. When the capital *did* finally get its first full-time, post-rave electronic music club in early 1989, it'd change the face of clubbing, and live music, forever.

The venue was at 11 Wardour Street, on the edge of Soho, an intensely busy part of the West End close to Leicester Square and just off Chinatown. The Brain ran for seven nights a week, with room for a couple of hundred people, and played host to sets from many artists who would go on to shape numerous subsequent musical revolutions, among them Orbital, Leftfield, Moby, Mixmaster Morris, Norman Cook, Goldie, Graeme Park and Andrew Weatherall.

It was the brainchild (excuse the pun) of two men: Sean McLusky and Mark "Wigan" Williams. McLusky had known Wigan from around the club scene and they had already been putting on nights together at a basement bar on Cork Street in Mayfair.

"Those were the days when you could just walk in off the street to failing clubs in the West End and the owner would let you have Saturday nights to promote your own events," recalls Sean. "The venue we turned into The Brain was one of those. I never used to pass a doorway in Soho without going in to see what was there, I simply saw a sign that said the Apollo Club, went up the stairs and asked the owner if I could do a party there. We put 200 people in there a couple of weeks later for a one-off. I then asked them if we could do it every night, change the name and redecorate."

Sean recalls that the venue was spread over two floors above a restaurant, and both spaces were small. There was a long bar on the first floor, and a dancefloor and small bar on the second floor, with access to a roof garden of sorts. The Brain was a hit from day one, always packed with queues down the road, thanks to a combination of its relatively small capacity and the booming lust for clubbing that was sweeping the capital at the time.

"Its size really helped it to be always heaving," admits Sean, "plus people were going out every night of the week back in 1989. We quickly became the social club of the scene as we were open seven nights a week. It had a members' club feel as we always had regulars there. It was like the Colony Club for the acid house scene."

When it opened, the main offering at The Brain Club was house music, capitalising on the fact that although there were other nights about, it was the only venue synonymous with the sound on a full time basis. But there were exceptions to the rule too.

"The house sound had exploded the year before across London and the Home Counties, but we were the only venue playing house most nights of the week," says Sean. "There was a regular funk/disco night that Roy The Roach headed up when we first started, but house was new and rare groove still ruled in some quarters. We also

did the first retro hip hop night in London. The boys who later became the designers YMC had started importing old stock trainers from the USA and they wanted to build the scene to sell them. We had breakdancers in Adidas Gazelles everywhere."

Thursdays saw Gilles Peterson, the aforementioned Roy The Roach and Patrick Forge fusing funk, disco and jazz with the house template. Saturdays had a more techno feel, as Steve Bicknell and Billy Nasty presented their Exploding Plastic Inevitable night. But perhaps most influential of all was the regular Wednesday night, Live At The Brain, which formed the first roots of the live electronica scene, with Hacienda resident Graeme Park joining a host of live acts.

"I was from a live music background having been in bands in the first half of the 80s," says Sean, who played drums in the chartbusting JoBoxers. "I wanted to program live music, but I wanted to keep it contemporary so I only put on electronic acts. The highlights were people like Orbital, A Guy Called Gerald, Ramjac, Nexus 21, Mr Monday, Audio One, Adamski and my favourite, Sheep On Drugs."

Sean recorded all the live performances and released two live albums on Brainiak Records, interspersed with conversations with punters. Another expansion saw them exporting the club to New York (where they crossed the path of notorious Club Kid killer, Michael Alig) and then to Reykjavik with The Happy Mondays, among others.

"The Mondays' live show in Iceland was a riot," remembers Sean, "but the club night we did on the Friday was closed down by the police, so we broke into a warehouse and kept the party going all night. We did get a new venue for the Saturday night after going on national TV saying we were there to destabilise their government."

Back in London, The Brain became famous enough to attract pop stars and Hollywood royalty like Brigitte Nielson and Matt Dillon.

"George Michael used to come down with his boyfriend and dance with girls to put us off the scent," laughs Sean. "As if we didn't know!"

But he's proud of the fact that it was the club of choice for the scene. The Stone Roses drank there whenever they were in London, and the likes of Bobby Gillespie, Boy George, The Chemical Brothers, Paul Oakenfold, Danny Rampling, Underworld, Bomb The Bass, Neneh Cherry, and Dave Dorrell of M/A/R/R/S all passed through the doors of The Brain.

The club eventually came to an acrimonious end. "We were having too much of a good time and not watching our backs," says Sean, leaving us to read between the lines. One day they received a letter from the owners saying we were no longer welcome. Needless to say, within six months the original Brain had closed altogether.

One chapter in music had closed, but using 11 Wardour Street as their springboard, a myriad of different electronic music styles and innovations were about to fly.

THE SCHOOL OF ELECTRONIC MUSIC

OUR RESIDENT ARCHIVIST PULLS **THOMAS DOLBY'S** 1984 CLASSIC 'THE FLAT EARTH' FROM THE SHELVES OF HIS COLLECTION TO BE ADMIRER ANEW FOR ITS SONG SMITHERY AND ITS CONNECTIONS TO NO WAVE, TELEX AND DAVID BOWIE

WORDS: **JACK DANGERS**

In the late 1970s Thomas Dolby was a huge XTC fan, he would follow them all over the country and would be at the front of the audience every night. Andy Partridge told me that. He then joined Lene Lovich's live band, and was also part of a band called The Fallout Club in 1981.

Apparently he wandered into a synth shop one afternoon and there was a guy testing a synth out in there, and they got chatting and decided to form a band. The drummer was Paul Simon, brother of Ultravox and Magazine's Robin Simon, and the bass player was Matthew Seligman, who was in The Soft Boys with Robyn Hitchcock. He played on 'The Flat Earth' and went on to work with Bowie.

Dolby's first single under his own steam was 'Urges', in 1981, and he got Andy [Partridge] to produce it. They recorded it in a studio on a barge in London. The first thing I heard by him was the follow-up, 'Europa And The Pirate Twins', another great song. Andy played the harmonica on that. When I found out that Andy Partridge was involved, I had to buy it. I think you can hear the XTC influence on Dolby's early stuff.

In 1983, Thomas Dolby produced the American rap band Whodini and wrote the music for their single 'Magic's Wand'. The 12-inch version is something like 11 minutes long, it's really great for mixing in random stuff. The Whodini album had two tracks produced and written by Dolby, and there are two tracks produced by Conny Plank on there too.

But it was 'The Flat Earth' in 1984 that was his masterpiece. It's full of classic tunemanship. The album's best-known track is probably 'Hyperactive!' which was a big hit, and cemented that mad boffin image he had. You can hear the Fairlight all over it, with the slap bass guitar and orchestral hits, but the album is so much more than that.

On the title track, you can hear Soweto guitar, that highlife style, it's pretty subtle, but he was so able at incorporating different musical styles into what he was doing. It's such a soulful song, I thought it was wonderful, and his vocal on it is amazing. His cover of Dan Hicks' 'I Scare Myself' is a high point. Hicks lived near me in Mill Valley until he died last year.

The sound of the whole album is really sharp. It's brilliantly produced. He made it in Belgium with Dan Lacksman of Telex engineering. He went there to record so there would be no distractions. It's got Robyn Hitchcock on it, doing the spoken word part on 'White City', going on about Bedfordshire being flat. Kevin Armstrong's on the album too, he went on to play with Bowie and Iggy Pop. He was part of Tin Machine. In fact, Dolby's band pretty much became Bowie's band when he did Live Aid in 1985. It has to be said, it wasn't Bowie's best performance ever, but still.

Adele Bertei sings on the album too, the amazing vocals on 'Hyperactive!'. She was part of the no wave scene in New York in the late 1970s, she was in James Chance And The Contortions and was Brian Eno's personal assistant while he was living there. She introduced Eno to the no wave scene.

When she signed to Geffen as a solo singer, Dolby produced her first single, 'Build Me A Bridge', in 1983.

To end on an interesting side note, Dolby Labs tried to stop Thomas Dolby using the name Dolby several times. They wrote to him in January 1982 about it, and got heavy in 1986 after he did the music for that awful 'Howard The Duck' film. They wanted to stop his name appearing on the credits for the film 'Gothic', which he'd just finished working on. They didn't succeed in stopping him calling himself Thomas Dolby though, and it cost them \$50,000.

THE FLAT EARTH





PHOTO: STEVE GULLICK

UNDER THE INFLUENCE

EVER WONDERED ABOUT THE INFLUENCES THAT HAVE SHAPED **ALISON MOYET**? WELL, WONDER NO MORE...

WORDS: **MAT SMITH**

NON-MUSICAL INFLUENCES

"I'm not very familiar with anyone's back catalogue. I'm not all that familiar with my own. I don't listen to music. I'm an artist and I don't know any artists. I write poetry and I don't read books. I feel quite separate from popular culture, and yet I know that I will have been surreptitiously influenced by things. You can be just as influenced by things that you despise, as you can by things that you like. My non-musical influences are much more illuminating about who I am."

KEEPING MY ACCENT

"Over the last few decades, I've become very aware of my accent, and very aware that I want to keep it. I grew up in Europe and the only Americanisms that came into our lives were via television. It's one of the reasons that I can't and won't sing 'Invisible' on stage anymore. I don't want American people to think I'm being biased against them, because I'm not, it's just that I think it's disingenuous to project yourself onto a culture that doesn't touch you at all. I should be using the accents that I grew up around. So the language in that song, references to dimes, dead-end streets all those sorts of things, it just doesn't resonate with me today."

STAYING IN, NOT GOING OUT

"The fact of the matter is that I spent many years being, not exactly agoraphobic, but certainly staying in and not going out. I wasn't really connected with the outside world. Even when I was in Yazoo, I wasn't going out and I wasn't hanging out with music people, so I was completely separate from the music industry. In some ways I think that has benefitted me today. I feel really happy when I get credit, but it's not what boosts my self-confidence. I'm quite pleased when it's gone again in a day's time and I can get on with something else. Maybe I can sculpt something, or I can bake my daughter's wedding cake, or I can write or walk and just observe."

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE...

"I'm dyslexic and, while my vocabulary is good and I write poetry, I can't spell and I can't punctuate well. For my mum, who died of Alzheimer's, the last faculty she had, the last area of conversation she would be completely sound on, was punctuation. She'd be completely silent and might not speak for days and then she'd see an apostrophe out of place and vocalise it."

"I remember when I was a child and all the Americanisms were creeping into our lives, especially where the 'u' was dropped. It really mattered to my mother because she ordered her life through spelling and grammar. 'The English U' on my new album is my recognition of that, of wishing that. Even if I can't ever be the person that she wanted me to be in terms of perfect literacy, I can still look out for the 'u' for her, and try to keep it in my words."

... AND BEING BILINGUAL

"I left school without even a CSE in English, but books were always prevalent in our house. My mother always read to me, and so I always heard the spoken word. My mother was English, but my father was French so my language is mostly influenced by nursery rhymes and by the fact that I'm bilingual. When you translate things in your head from French to English, you realise that the French invert sentences. It gives a certain antiquity to my language. It's just that twist: the way I translate from French into inverted sentences."

"Being half French has really influenced me too. My dad left school at 13 and he was a street fighter. He came from a real peasant family, who were completely impoverished. Consequently, the Moyet family is very aggressive. There's a lot of crying happening every day. I'm amazed when families fall apart. We've had our challenges, but there's this solid connection between us, and this wonderful ability to be publicly emotional, to not be embarrassed by outbursts of emotion."

WORKING MANUALLY

"I grew up in a very manual family. The first time my dad told me he was really proud of me was when I was in my mid-30s and I'd rewired the Hoover. These were the kinds of things that were really important in my family. Making something last or fixing something were things to feel really proud about."

"When we were at Southend Tech college, my friend and I ended up working at the Lesney factory that used to make Matchbox cars and toys. There was a night shift, from 11 at night to six in the morning, and God they were harsh in that factory. You got two five-minute tea breaks and one 20-minute lunch break. I had a really shit job too. I had to tie on the little cranes to the tractors, whereas my friend, who was really cute, got to test the electric cars. I was put completely on my own as well doing 2,000 a day. It was terrible, but there is definitely something to be said about making something."

Alison Moyet is on a UK tour until 28 November.
For more details, visit alisonmoyet.com

BANGING ON

A MAN WHO CAN'T UNDERSTAND THAT DISCO BISCUITS
AND CHOCOLATE BISCUITS AREN'T *QUITE* THE SAME THING,
OUR... WHAT'S THAT? HE'S DONE IT AGAIN, HASN'T HE?

WORDS: **FAT ROLAND**

ILLUSTRATION: **JOEL BENJAMIN**

Manchester is about to get a “Madchester” bar, a place dedicated to the heady days of kinky afros, twisted melons and smiley-faced ravers. If you don’t know what Madchester was, it was a three-day period in the 20th century in which the northern English industrial town of Manchester got so off its face it was later found in the trouser aisle of Debenhams mumbling, “Nice one, sorted” while feeding Skittles to a mannequin. By the time you are reading this, the bar may be built: all decked out in black and yellow Hacienda chic, splattered-paint walls in honour of the Stone Roses, Warhol-esque prints of bewigged organ fiddler Clint Boon, and Shaun Ryder’s head on a spike.

I am a child of Madchester, and back in ye olden days I boogied at The Hacienda as it collapsed under the weight of gangs and guns. Thing is, Manchester used to be a tip. Its main bus station was a sunken garden mostly full of dangerous ghouls trying to sell you unlabelled meat. Could you get a skinny soya aubergine latte served on a bed of quinoa and yoga mats? Could you chuffery.

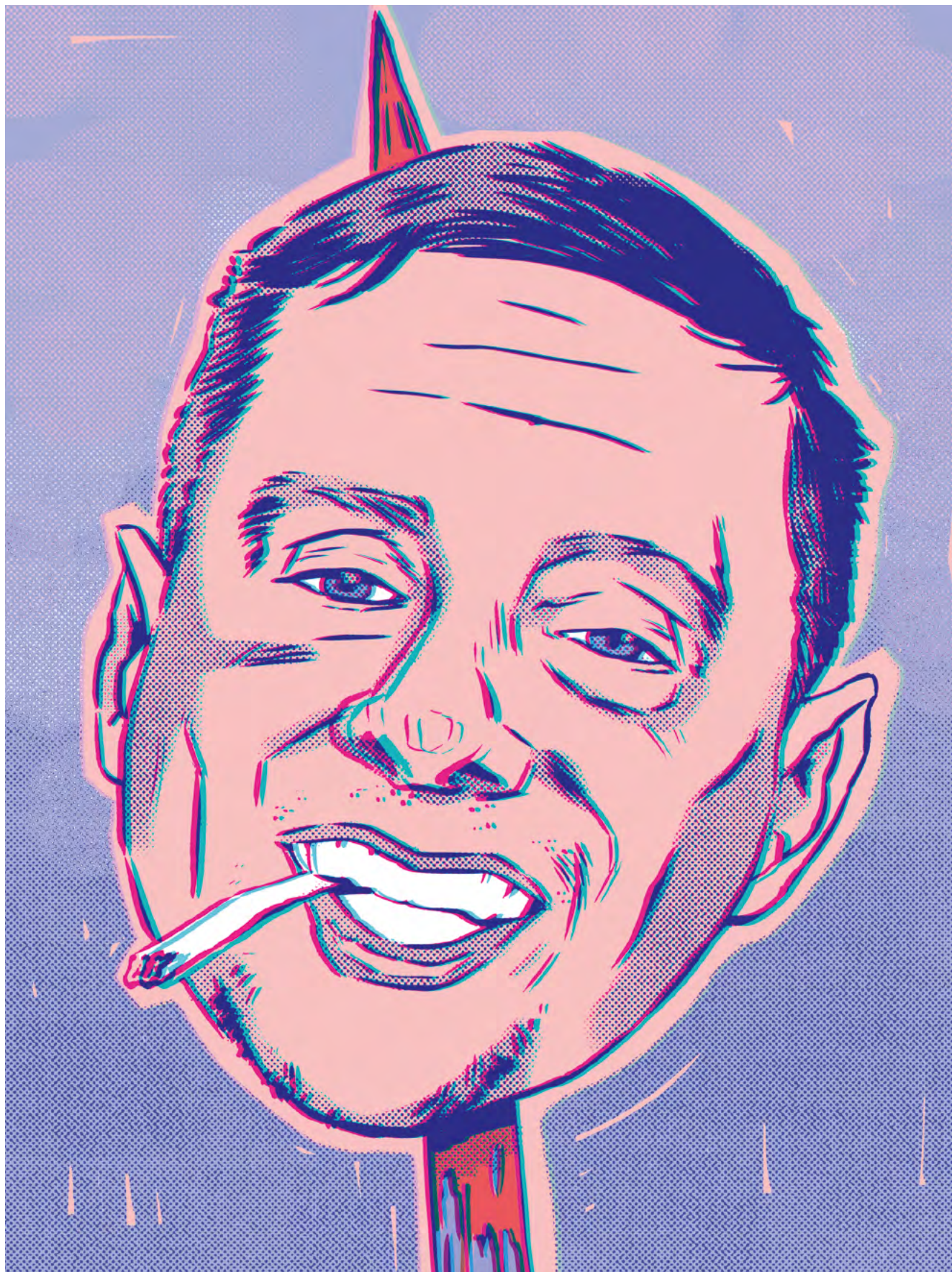
Anyway, the thought of all this commercialised nostalgia makes me choke on my hooded tops – even the ones smeared in kebab juice. If I wanted a novelty Mancunian drinking experience, I’d have a naked Mark E Smith drizzle me in vermouth. Even he is from Bury which, as any proper local shall witheringly tell you, is not flipping Manchester.

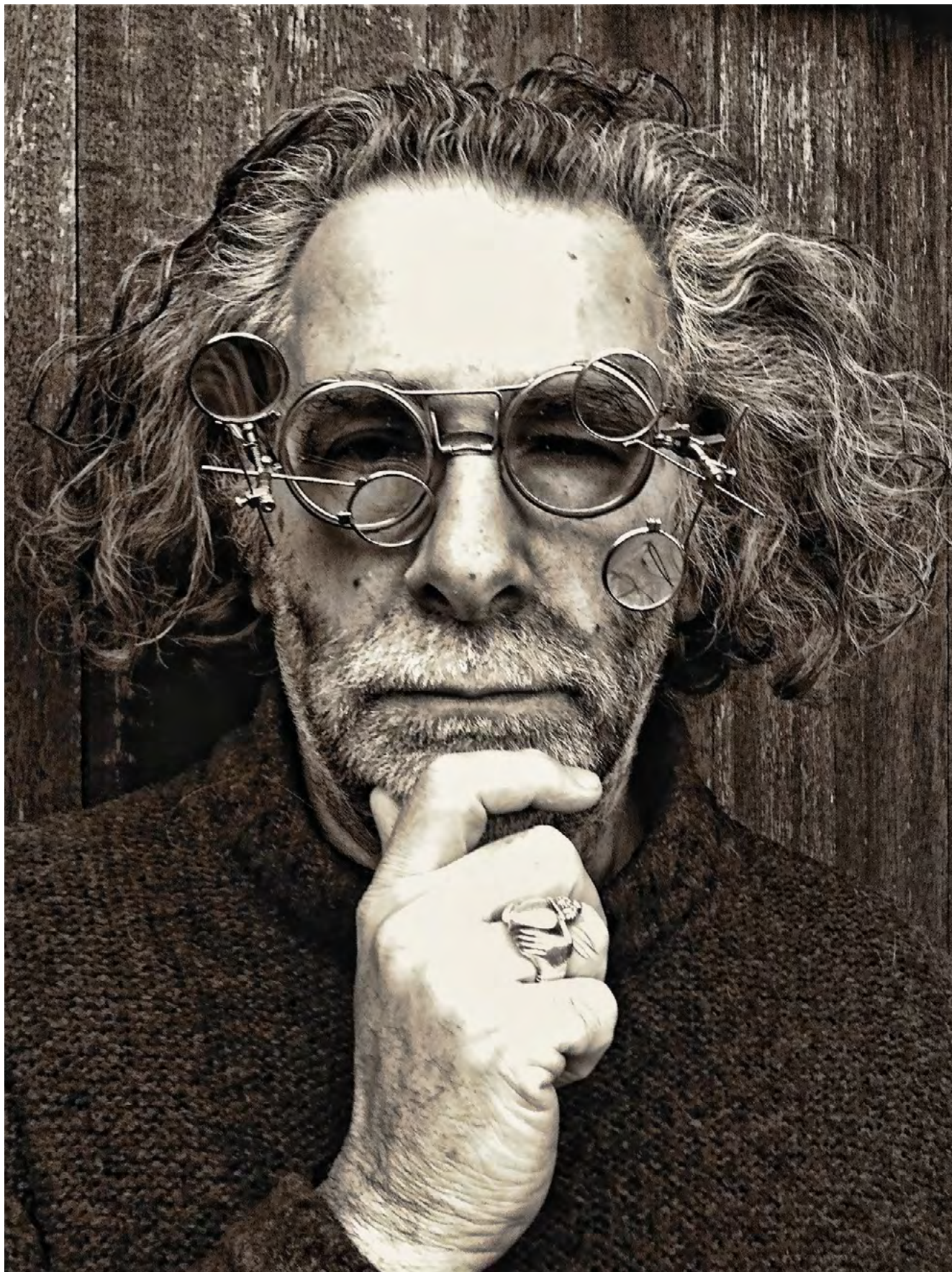
This nostalgia-for-cash isn’t just a Manc problem. I love Liverpool, but I have no desire to go to The Beatles museum to ride a yellow submarine across a zebra crossing – or whatever it is they have there. Glasgow is the best city ever, but the moment they set up a Travis theme bar, I’m bulldozing the place. I’m sure Newcastle’s great, but one whiff of Gazza’s ‘Fog On The Tyne’ and I’m putting on concrete shoes and taking a dive.

I’m sure the south has some musical tropes too, but to my northern brain anything below Stoke is one amorphous mass of silver-spooned posh people where everyone is chums with the Queen. Don’t pretend you don’t know her, everyone from Dartford.

What offends me most about a Madchester theme bar is what it says about my beloved Manchester. My city is a city of Autechre. A city where musicians hacked Game Boys at the Futuresonic Festival. A city which took the anniversary of the humongous 1996 IRA bomb and created D:Percussion, a digital music festival without a single byte of nostalgia. I even ran an experimental DJ night myself, including one where we bugged the room and remixed conversations over beats. Will the Madchester theme bar have a tasteful exhibition stand dedicated to that? Nope.

What I’m saying is, Manchester needs to champion its experimental electronic music history by having a massive statue of me. A huge Fat Roland 20-foot tall, swaying in the wind, made of kebab meat. People would bow daily before Massive Fat Roland. This is a brilliant idea. At 20 quid a view I’d rake it in. Although do me a favour: stick it next to the Madchester bar so I can check out all the old tunes, yeah? Nice one, sorted.





LANDMARKS

KEVIN GODLEY OUTLINES THE HAPPY ACCIDENTS THAT LED TO THE MAKING OF **GODLEY & CREME'S** GROUNDBREAKING 1985 HIT '**CRY**'

WORDS: **JOOLS STONE**

"Lol [Creme] and I were in New York editing the 'Synchronicity Concert' film for when we got word that Trevor Horn was in town. We'd never really crossed paths before, but we started to meet up with him at the Parker Meridien Hotel Bar of an evening and we'd get very silly drinking Long Island Iced Teas together. Being mutual admirers of each other's output, we resolved to work on something together. By that point we hadn't recorded anything for a while, having got more into the video side of things, so this meeting of minds was an interesting prospect.

"We had this concept based around channel hopping on American TV, with a working title of 'Hit The Box'. When we got together back in London, at Sarm Studios in Basing Street, we started to experiment with the idea. At the time, of course, there were only four channels in the UK, so we weren't sure if this media blitz concept would translate all that well. After a while we realised it wasn't going anywhere, but since we had the studio time booked in Trevor said, 'Well, what else have you got?'.

"The only thing we had was this fragment of a song, a 30-second refrain that we'd started writing 15 years earlier... 'You don't know to how to ease my pain/ You don't know', which became the opening verse of 'Cry'. For whatever reason we could never really take it further, but Trevor liked it and wanted to develop it. It was like it had laid there waiting for this moment.

"This was the first time we'd ever worked with another producer. Our expertise with electronic music back then was relatively minimal, but Trevor's knowledge, and that of his team, Steve Lipson and JJ Jeczalik from the Art Of Noise, was far superior. They'd recently got a Synclavier too, which was the Holy Grail of synths at the time.

"Lol and I were sent off to play table tennis while JJ and Steve ingested the tune in their machinery to create something we could work with. It was about making something on the spot without being bound by any sense of what the song should be. We let them construct something that we could react to.

"When we came back a few hours later they had this very nice bassline loop. Lol put some watery guitar chords over the top to set some kind of structure and atmosphere. We wrote down what little fragments of lyrics we already had and expanded them into various phrases, scribbled on pieces of paper, like a kind of cut-up technique. When Trevor sent me into the studio he said, 'Sing what you have, and just see what happens next'.

"Trevor's guys brought something to it which we wouldn't have, this simple, hypnotic quality, which was just what it needed. It lopes and settles like a fog. The falsetto effect that ends the track with a crescendo was Trevor's idea. He used the harmoniser and it just worked. It sounded a little silly to us at the time, but sometimes silly just works. I remember my final note was extended beyond all feasible breathing ability, simply because we could.

"We had the luxury of being in one of the world's best studios with one of the best producers, so we continued along these lines, just experimenting really. The song came together fairly quickly. We didn't want to overcook it, so the whole session only took a few days. Once we'd finished it and played it to the label, we realised it was an obvious single.

We hadn't had a hit since 'Wedding Bells' came out in 1981 and the combination of us working with Trevor was an intriguing proposition. I'm not sure now why we didn't release it as Godley, Crème And Horn, but in the end it was put out under our name, with him co-producing, and it turned out to be quite commercially successful. The video we made certainly helped it along.

"Our first idea was to get Torvill and Dean to skate to the track. For whatever reason they weren't able to do it, so we had to come up with another idea pretty quickly. It felt like the kind of song anyone could sing, it had a universal quality to it, so we thought, 'Well, why don't we get a whole bunch of interesting-looking people into a studio to sing it'.

"We sent tapes out to a load of people we picked from a casting book. We probably ended up choosing around 45, knowing that some would pull it off better than others. We sat them in the studio with a saucepan bolted to the back of a chair to rest their heads in and let them have a few gos at it.

"We weren't entirely sure what to do with the footage, and because we were using an analogue system instead of a digital one, the first few transitions were made from one whole face to another, but after a few attempts we used this device called a wipe. We discovered that by using this effect we'd get a face that didn't actually exist during the transition. So we decided to go down that route with the rest of the filming.

"We just allowed the available technology we had to take things a stage further, which was the magic of the film. I think we captured the hypnotic sound of the song visually, but there's also something fascinating about the human face anyway. It's a very watchable thing.

"Recording 'Cry' was certainly a high point for us. It opened our eyes to working with samplers and devices like the Fairlight. And, like most of our best songs, there was a sense of mutation that gave us something we weren't expecting."

Godley & Creme's 'Body Of Work' boxset is out now on Caroline



SYNTHESISER DAVE'S

WORKSHOP

RESIDENT FIXER OF UNDER THE WEATHER ELECTRONICS

IN FOR REPAIR: BÖHM STATION ONE CREATIVE MUSIC SYSTEM

IN THE WORDS OF INSPECTOR CLOUSEAU, IS THAT A BÖHM?

This is an oddity from my own collection, and I know virtually nothing about it. I came across it about 12 years ago while helping to clear out an abandoned room in a medieval church tower in Norwich which, considering I'm writing this in the run up to Halloween, seems suitably spooky. As far as I can tell it isn't haunted, but it was covered in cobwebs. It came with a wooden box designed to screw to the top of a certain model of Hammond organ, a set of key switches to go under the keyboard of said Hammond, and a "Micro Disc Drive", which is bigger and heavier than the average house brick.

The first thing you notice is the build quality – it's fantastic. Having wiped off years of accumulated muck and washed off the rat droppings, it worked perfectly (well, as far as I know – more about that later...). Which isn't really surprising once you know that Böhm are noted for making high-end console organs, and these days specialise in modern church organs. They delved into producing this kind of equipment for about eight years, starting in the mid-80s. The only reason this one is on the bench is that, after at least 27 years use the back-up battery has worn out, which isn't bad going.

So what is it? Er... well, that's where it gets a bit complicated. There's very little information about them anywhere, and what there is seems to be either in German, Danish or Norwegian. They were made from about 1986 onwards, but the plug-in chip that holds the operating system is labelled 1990. They were modular, and you could just buy the bits you wanted. Inside there is a superbly built rack-mounting system for cards, and the cards themselves have options for changing or adding extra chips. This one has two "Sound Blocks", HDS, which seems to be a sort of advanced phase distortion synthesis, and HFM, a sort of souped-up FM.

It will store up to 800 different voices. There is also the advanced drum module which contains 120 built-in rhythms, each with its own breaks and fills using 128 different drum sounds, which appear to be PCM samples, but I'm not sure. There was also a sampling option, but I don't seem to have that bit, I presume it went in that empty slot. The memory card only has four of its 16 sockets populated, which might need filling up for sampling, and I assume the SCSI hard drive socket is to do with that as well.

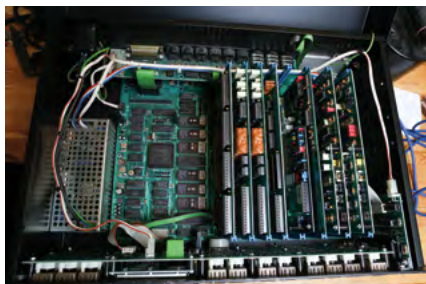
Apart from all that, there's a huge built-in sequencer that can also be used to create your own automatic "styles" (although I've no idea how!), two fully independent MIDI systems, and any voice can be linked to the "magic" button which generates random tunes based on the chords you're playing. There's probably more I've not found yet too.

Well, down to work then. The battery looks like it's a bit of a weird one – being square and decidedly pumpkin coloured. It's a Renata 250-00, obviously the best Swiss-made battery available at the time and now totally obsolete. I was worried that it wasn't just a battery – a lot of these Renata's had decoupling diodes built-in, but it turns out that the "00" at the end means that it doesn't, and inside the plastic casing it's a standard CR2430 button cell, so it's simply a case of soldering a standard battery holder in its place. If you do it yourself, make absolutely sure that the + and – are the right way round. Getting to it involves pulling out two of the cards and taking off the bottom casing to unsolder it. A fairly simple job really.

So, does anyone reading this have one of these? Or perhaps you have a manual that isn't the badly scanned German half-a-manual I found on the interwebs? Or do you know how one works? If so, please do get in touch via the Facebook page, and stop my brain from boggling.

For more, visit facebook.com/synthesisedave

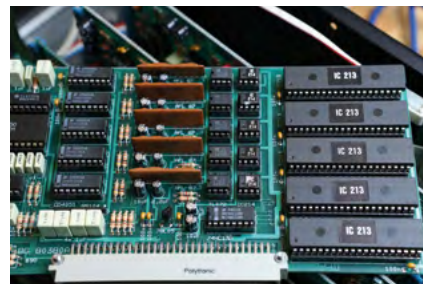




WILL YOU TAKE A LOOK AT THAT PRECISION GERMAN ENGINEERING. WHAT'S NOT TO LIKE?



SWISS, ORANGE, AND OBVIOUSLY BASED ON THE DESIGN FOR INDIVIDUALLY-WRAPPED CHOCOLATES



THERE ARE, IT HAS TO BE SAID, MANY A MYSTERIOUS CHIP LURKING IN THIS BEASTIE



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A 3D anaglyph image featuring a close-up of a man's face on the right side, with long dark hair and a beard. The background on the left is a rugged, mountainous landscape. The entire image is rendered in a red and cyan 3D format. The text 'CONNY PLANK' is enclosed in a white rectangular box in the upper left, and 'TON MEI' is written in large white letters across the middle.

CONNY PLANK

TON MEI



STER

A NEW FILM ABOUT **CONNY PLANK** REVEALS THE PIVOTAL ROLE THE LEGENDARY GERMAN PRODUCER HAD IN SHAPING THE 1970S MUSIC SCENE, INCLUDING HIS PRODUCTION CREDITS FOR KRAFTWERK, NEU! AND CLUSTER. STEPHAN PLANK, CONNY'S SON AND THE FILM'S CO-DIRECTOR, TURNS THE SPOTLIGHT ON HIS FATHER'S LEGACY

WORDS: **MARK ROLAND**

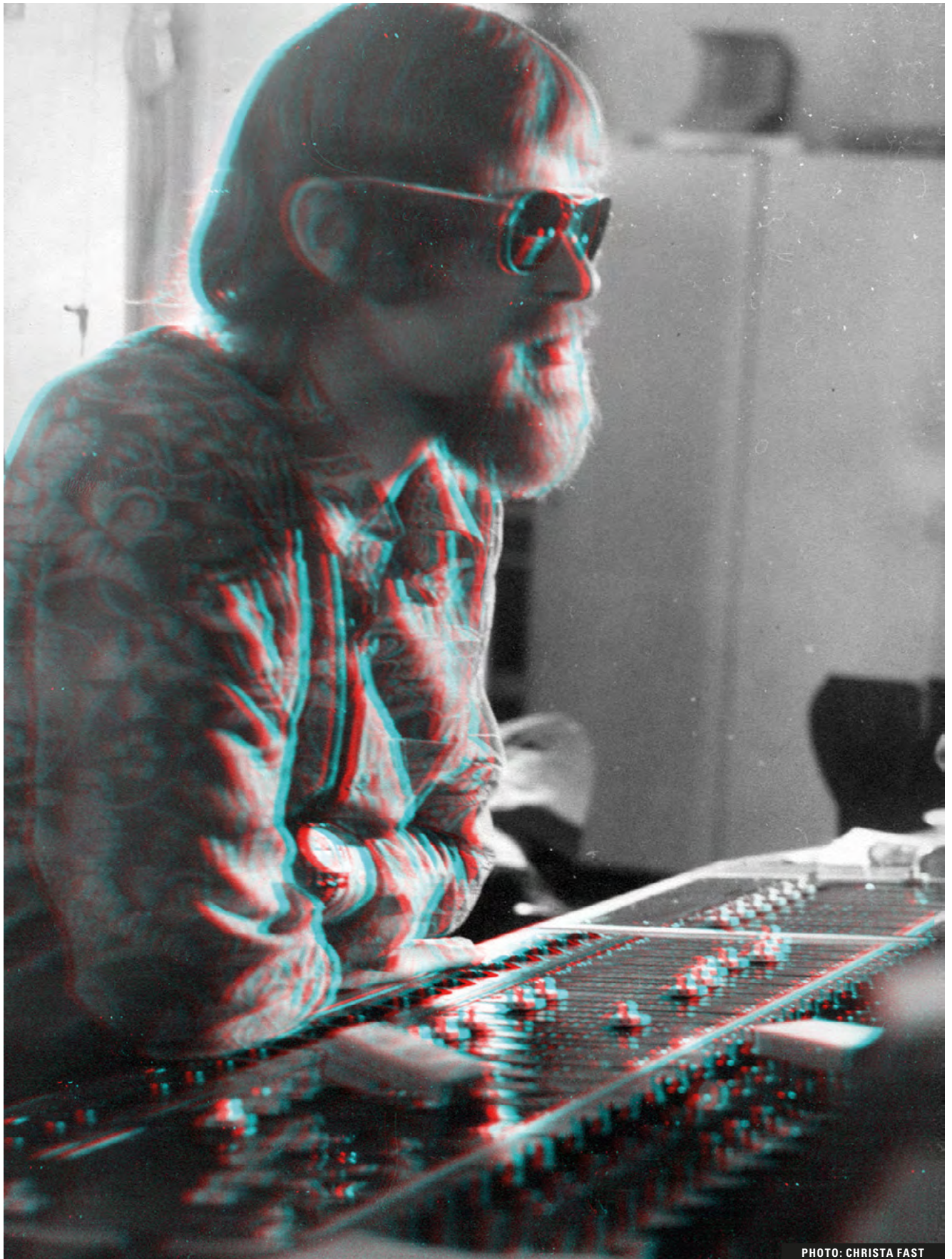


PHOTO: CHRISTA FAST

Tokyo, 1987. It's nighttime and the city is a riot of colour and noise. A large man with a pair of headphones and a recording device roams around the tacky mirrored sci-fi splendour of a pachinko parlour. The air is alive with the constant clacking of silver metal balls and the chiptune blips and blurts from the arcade machines.

Outside, he pulls off the headphones. Bathed in the neon glare of the parlour, he ruminates briefly on his sound safari.

"I'm trying to find with this noise if it's possible to make music out of it," he breaks into a broad, warm grin before he continues. "It's like at the beginning of music. The human being listened to noises of animals. There are noises the human being doesn't like, and other noises he does like, and those he likes he picks up and turns into music. Any noise has the potential to be music if it's liked by a human being."

A few months later, Conny Plank, the man in the video would be dead aged just 47, having finally succumbed to the cancer he had fought off the year before. His son Stephan, who was with him on that Tokyo trip, was 13 years old when he lost his dad, and now, 30 years later, he's doing what he can to ensure Plank's contribution to music is properly understood and celebrated.

Let's talk about legacy. Consider, if you will, that Conny Plank's work with Kraftwerk, Neu! and Cluster was primary source material for the likes of Eno and Bowie, the post-punk scene *and* the electronic music revolution ushered in by Mute Records. As a body of work, that would be enough for most, but Plank didn't start or even stop there. Now a film project, 'Conny Plank: The Potential Of Noise', finally tells the full story.

"In 2006, when my mother Christa died, I was sitting at my computer feeling very sad, googling my father's name," says Stephan, "which was when I found that first scene you see in the film, it was a moment when something clicked."

Stephan knew he needed to make a film about his father's life and chose the Tokyo footage to start what was, at times, an emotional journey of discovery, tracking down and talking to members of the many bands who came into Conny's orbit.

For Stephan, nearly 30 years on, his father had become a "phantom, a blur". To everyone else, Conny Plank was the man behind the beauty and savagery of Neu!'s krautrock blueprint, the technical wizard who helped pave the way for Kraftwerk as they mutated from avant-garde outliers to electronic music superstars.

Before Kraftwerk, Conny had recorded Duke Ellington and worked with Stockhausen. His studio provided Brian Eno with a kind of German finishing school for his own considerable production skills. Eno spent a decent chunk of 1978 at Conny's place producing Devo's 'Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo!', and working on 'After The Heat', his collaboration with Cluster's Dieter Moebius and Joachim Roedelius. Cluster, Guru Guru, La Düsseldorf, The Tourists, Eurythmics, DAF, Killing Joke, Holger Czukay, Harmonia, Scorpions, the embryonic Underworld, and more, all of them were scooped into the warm sonic embrace of Conny Plank.

"Conny was at the centre of it all," says John Foxx, who doesn't appear in the film, with Midge Ure being the chosen Ultravox spokesman. Conny, remember, also produced their chart-shattering 1980 album 'Vienna' long after Foxx had jumped ship. But the 1978 Foxx-led Ultravox sought out Conny when they were looking to make their influential 'Systems Of Romance' album.

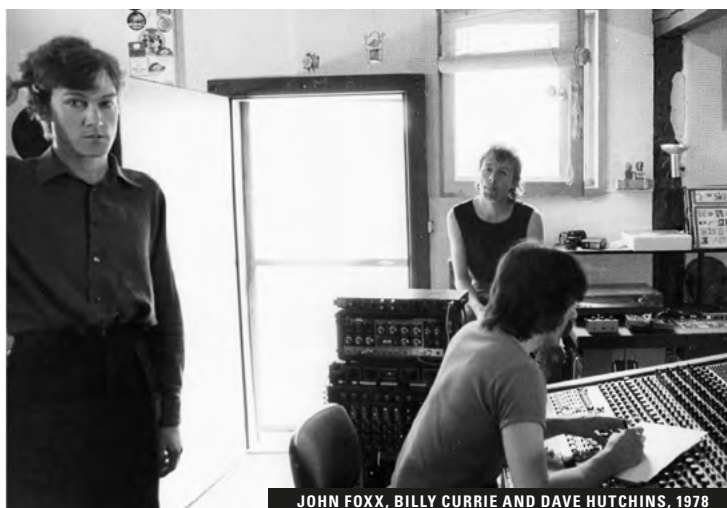
"He was the human crossroad between German electronic music, avant-rock, experimentalism and the remains of the spirit of Brit psychedelia, all the things we loved," adds Foxx. "No other producer in the world was anywhere near all that."

So how did Conny Plank become that catalyst for so much thrilling music? It's the question that Stephan's film tries to answer, while bringing him back into focus for the child who lost his dad all those years ago.

Conny Plank was born in 1940 in Hütschenhausen in south west Germany, and was first turned on to music thanks to broadcasts emanating from the huge American base at Kaisterslautern, aka K-Town. Its transmitter – beaming jazz and, later, rock 'n' roll to homesick US military personnel – was located just 25km from his bedroom. His career as a studio engineer started with West Germany's national broadcaster WDR in the mid 1960s. He worked in the station's studio in Cologne, mostly producing schlager, the middle-of-the-road sentimental jolly pap so adored across swathes of northern Europe.

However, the Cologne Studio For Electronic Music was also located at WDR, where Stockhausen and his students (including Holger Czukay) worked. Czukay recognised a fellow traveller in sound when he met Conny, and introduced him to Stockhausen. Conny's musical world was opening up.

In the late 1960s, he left WDR for the Cologne Rhenus Studio. At Rhenus he worked on a clutch of free jazz albums in 1969. This stuff wasn't easy listening. In the space of a few months he helmed albums by New Jazz Trio, Alexander Von Schlippenbach, and Peter Brötzmann Sextet. The latter's album, 'Nipples', included British guitar abuser Derek Bailey, which might give you an idea of what to expect from those records.



JOHN FOXX, BILLY CURRIE AND DAVE HUTCHINS, 1978



CONNY WITH MIDGE URE | PHOTO: BILLY CURRIE

The Manfred Schoof Sextett were also a part of this Rhenus avant-jazz recording scene. Their drummer was Jaki Liebezzeit, who was just weeks away from joining Can with fellow studio hunters Holger Czukay and Irmin Schmidt. This was all edgy gear, on the cutting edge of what people considered music, which puts what he was about to do with Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider into a context that is usually overlooked.

One session in the middle of all this was more traditional, but a critical moment for Conny Plank. Duke Ellington had booked the studio for a rehearsal and Conny, a huge fan from his obsessive radio listening days, managed to upgrade the rehearsal to a recording session.

"Around the kitchen table, there was always this tale that dad had recorded Duke Ellington," remembers Stephan. "He said that he loved jazz, but wasn't sure about his engineering skills. When Duke Ellington needed a place to rehearse in Cologne, he talked his studio manager into it, and then when the rehearsal was over, my father said, 'Shall we do a recording?'. After the session, Duke Ellington said, 'Son, you're doing good sound'. That's the day my father thought of himself as a recording engineer."

It was 9 July 1970, and the tapes were discovered in the Plank archive and released by Groenland in 2015.

Between 1969 and 1970, Conny also recorded a raft of proto-krautrock outfits, including Andromeda, whose solitary album is now as rare as hen's teeth, Gomorrha (three albums, all bombed, each now worth hundreds of pounds), and Organisation, Ralf and Florian's "other" band, which ran alongside the Kraftwerk project for a few months.

By 1971, Conny was working at Star Studio in Hamburg, where he produced Cluster (the start of probably his most abiding musical relationship), and engineered Manuel Göttsching and Klaus Schulze's project Ash Ra Tempel. It was also there that he produced Guru Guru, Ibliss, Jane, and the debut Kraftwerk album, the first of four they made together. It was while recording 'Kraftwerk' that he met Michael Rother, and within months he and Klaus Dinger made the first Neu! album with Conny at the controls.

Kraftwerk are conspicuous by their absence in the film. They weren't interviewed and no music of theirs appears. Did Stephan try to talk to them for the film?

"Of course."

What did they say?

"They weren't interested in doing an interview."

Ralf and Florian famously cut loose from Conny following the success of 'Autobahn', after which they produced themselves in their secretive Kling Klang studio. John Foxx remembers talking to Conny about Kraftwerk when he recorded with him.

"He said he disliked the direction they were taking with their new image. I think he felt it was all too close to the Germany everyone else was escaping from," he says. "Also the music wasn't fluid or ambiguous enough for him. He felt they were busy constructing some kind of tight prison for themselves."

Conny had produced 'Kraftwerk 2' and 'Ralf And Florian', before embarking on 'Autobahn' in 1974, which was important for all kinds of reasons, not least because it was mixed at Conny's new studio, his own. It was in Wolperath, in the countryside south of Cologne, and it was the place that would be Stephan's childhood home.

"It was an old farmhouse and the studio was in the barn," remembers Foxx. "It wasn't modified with tons of soundproofing and acoustic work, Conny wanted a natural, realistic sound and the walls were timber and plaster and pretty uneven, so he knew it would make a reliable recording environment, certainly much truer than most London studios we'd used."

In 1978, just as Devo were finishing off their hotly anticipated debut album, Ultravox arrived to record 'Systems Of Romance' and found a creative hub unlike any other.

"I remember Brian [Eno] working on Devo's first album," says Foxx. "I used to chat to them in the courtyard when we were taking a break. There were other buildings set up for recording and editing around the cobbled courtyard and some workshops where a few guys came in to modify and build equipment that Conny had ideas for."

"At any one time there might be several sets of people working there. We used to drop in when we were on tour. At various times, we found Eno working with Devo, and Holger working with Conny, painstakingly editing together his 'Movies' album."

As the workload at Conny's studio increased, Eno helped recruit a house engineer in 1977. Dave Hutchins was working at Island Records' studio in west London and had engineered 'Before And After Science' (and would later work on 'Music For Airports' at Conny's studio). Eno introduced Hutchins to Conny, and by December he'd upped sticks and relocated to Germany.

"Conny was very experimental," Hutchins told me when I interviewed him in 2014, "and I was more conventional, it was a good combination. He would go out on a limb and do some very bizarre stuff."

Hutchins, who died suddenly last year, remembered Bowie visiting the studio, still intending to produce Devo's debut which ended up as yet another Eno-at-Conny's production.



CONNY AND STEPHAN | PHOTO: CHRISTA FAST



"They were not easy sessions," said Hutchins about Devo. "They had some expectations that were pretty... inflexible. Eno, like Conny, was experimental, and would try off-the-wall ideas. I was never sure if it wasn't off-the-wall enough for the band or too off-the-wall."

If Conny wasn't entirely at ease with the sessions, he would melt away, leaving Hutchins to take charge.

"I wasn't really doing shifts with Conny, but we split the work," he told me. "The feeling I had was that he did a bit of work with Devo and then felt it wasn't for him, and that's why I ended up taking over the helm at the desk. If Conny was keen on something he would get stuck in and he was king of the show. That was his nature."

The relationship between Eno and Conny was key to both of them. It's clear that when Eno and Bowie discovered the German music that shifted Bowie's axis from his LA plastic soul phase to his exploration of austere European electronics, it was Conny's work with Neu! and Cluster in particular they had in mind. Bowie even tried (and failed) to recruit Neu!'s Michael Rother for the Berlin sessions. In the film, Rother wastes no time in spelling out just how critical Conny Plank was to Neu!'s achievements.

"It's impossible to talk about my music," Rother tells Stephan in the film, "without mentioning Conny Plank. When you've got loads of great stuff in your record collection with his name on it, you'd be right to suspect the man must have been amazing."

And Eno knew exactly what he was doing when he immersed himself in Germany's new music. He went straight to the source, to Conny Plank.

"I have very fond memories of Brian," says Stephan. "He was such a good friend to my father. I think they had great respect for each other, there were no hard feelings. He was a very good friend to my mother as well. Brian tried to get my father working with U2 for 'The Joshua Tree', but my father couldn't work it out with Mr Bono. Brian did, but he first tried to give it to Conny."

Conny is famously supposed to have said, "I cannot work with this singer..." and that was that.

When Conny died on 18 December 1987, the studio was heavily in debt. Business, most people agree, was not his strong suit. His wife, Christa, took over the running of the operation, and later Stephan became studio manager. He also started managing German singer and "punk godmother" Nina Hagen. In 2006, when Christa died, the studio was still in debt, to the tune of €400,000. Stephan shut up shop, and set about archiving what needed saving, and junking the rest. The mixing desk was sold to Dave Allen, the London-based producer and engineer known for his work with The Human League (he engineered their 'Dare' album) and The Cure, among many others.

In 2010, Stephan's daughter was born, and he decided to take time out of his management duties and focus his energies on securing his father's legacy with the film and releasing some of his archive material.

First there was the four CD boxset, 'Who's That Man', released by Groenland in early 2013. It spanned Conny's career, with highlights like 'Broken Head' from the 1978 Eno, Moebius and Roedelius album 'After



MICHAEL ROTHER

The Heat', obscure gems like Psychotic Tanks' 'Let's Have A Party' from their cassette-only album 'Studio', and big hitters DAF, Neu!, Eurythmics and La Düsseldorf. The krautrock supergroup Harmonia (Michael Rother with Moebius and Roedelius) were missing, but there are plenty of excellent Conny Plank collaborations on board, and an extraordinary 14 minutes from Ibliss, a band put together by a couple of former members of the pre-Kraftwerk band Organisation, whose solitary 1972 album 'Supernova'

is a collector's item of truly berserk value. Its Clangers-meets-krautrock cosmic freakout is quite the trip. And most recently there's been the spectacular DAF boxset.

"It's everything we could find in the archive," says Stephan of the DAF collection. "We digitised it all from the original 24-track two-inch tapes, which was quite a challenge. You have to bake the tape at certain temperatures to remove the humidity so it isn't destroyed the first time you play it after 30 years."

There's no Devo in the archive, so the multitrack tapes that apparently featured layers of unused Eno synth work and even Bowie backing vocals remain lost.

There's a poignant moment in the film when Stephan is speaking to Holger Czukay, now also sadly no longer with us. He tells Stephan that he is "very much Christa's son", that Conny didn't have much time for Stephan and would shoo him from the studio. How did hearing that make him feel?

"To be honest, this is the perception of a musician who was working a lot with my father," says Stephan. "I didn't have the feeling that my father was so absent, but then again when you grow up, whatever your dad does is normal. I didn't feel unappreciated by him, it was more like, what a great dad to have. The fathers of my friends went away in the morning and came back at five o'clock and were tired from work. I could go to the studio whenever I liked and talk to my father. He would rush me out after a time, but he was a great dad to have."

'Conny Plank: The Potential Of Noise' is seeking UK distribution. Get in touch if you can help

THE PLANK CONNY'S MIXING DESK

Was this unique mixing desk built in time to mix 'Autobahn' and 'Neu! '75'? Is this the desk used for bits of Eno's 'Before And After Science' and 'Music For Films' and the Cluster & Eno album? Was Harmonia's exquisite 'Deluxe' recorded through it? La Düsseldorf? 'Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo!', Ultravox's 'Systems Of Romance' and 'Vienna'?

One thing's for sure, this desk was designed and built by Conny in the 1970s, and when his Studio in Wolperath was closed, it was put up for sale. Rather than see a piece of music history mothballed in a museum or worse, it was snapped up by two British producers, David M Allen and Mark Ralph.

Allen engineered The Human League's 'Dare' with Martin Rushent and has since produced dozens of bands, including The Cure, and Mark Ralph was a session guitarist for the likes of Ringo Starr and Pet Shop Boys before becoming a producer. He soon put the desk to good use, using it for Franz Ferdinand's 'Right Thought, Right Words, Right Action', Years & Years' 'Communion' album and 'In Our Heads' and 'Why Make Sense' by Hot Chip.

The desk, aka The Plank, was designed by Conny in 1970, and built and modified over the next 14 years with the help of German engineers Peter Lang and Michael Zahl. It's an extraordinary beast. Everything about it is handmade, from the cherrywood laminate (according to legend, the wood was sourced from a cherry tree in Conny's garden) to the unique custom-built parametric EQ built into each of its 56 channels and the hand-wound pre-amps and rare germanium transistors.

The desk lives in Studio 7 in London, which is available for production, recording and mixing services by appointment. If you'd like to record with Conny's desk, email studio7music@gmail.com for more information





WEIRD SCIENCE

IF WE HAD OUR WAY, **THOMAS DOLBY'S** BIOGRAPHY WOULD BE AN ESSENTIAL TEXT FOR MUSIC FANS EVERYWHERE. BOOK TOKENS AT THE READY FOLKS, YOU'LL NEED THEM AFTER OUR WHISTLE-STOP TOUR THROUGH HIS LIFE LESS ORDINARY...

WORDS: **JO KENDALL**

Sex, drugs and rock'n'roll are the usual elements in any great music biography, but what about synths, ducks and specialist software? That's the gist of 'The Speed Of Sound: Breaking The Barriers Between Music And Technology', the biography of Thomas Dolby, which has recently appeared in paperback for the first time. Dolby, whose real name is Thomas Robertson, was the art-punk upstart who became a global popstar before pioneering audio software and, eventually, mobile phone technology, all in just over two decades.

"Originally, a publisher approached me to write a sort of music business, tech guru type of guide," Dolby says during an early morning call from his New York base. "That didn't appeal to me much, but it did prompt me to go through some old drawers and dig out my ancient Filofaxes, PalmPilots and meeting notes."

Scanning years of memoirs, it struck him his life could make a pretty good read. Bizarrely, he'd never thought of it in those terms until the project had been suggested.

"At the time, I didn't see the big picture, I just blundered my way through it all," he says. "It was interesting to read journal entries. It made the story sort of compelling."

"Sort of compelling" is an understatement. Split into two parts, 'The Speed Of Sound...' begins with Dolby's pop years, during which a career path quickly develops for the 22-year old after teaming up with Lene Lovich (he wrote 'New Toy' for her 1981 EP of the same name). Soon he's an in-demand synth player, songwriter and arranger, headhunted by increasingly impressive figures, from Foreigner to Michael Jackson, and the Live Aid organisation.

The second part of the book details another remarkable trajectory: Dolby tries his hand at technology, becoming a start-up maverick in Silicon Valley and, eventually, landing a key role in the dominance of Nokia.

A married father of three and a practicing professor at John Hopkins University, Baltimore, Dolby has never been content to stand still. Now he has his eye on the next tech prize: virtual and augmented reality.



'The Speed Of Sound...' is a fairly modest volume, clocking in at 288 pages, but it's packed with information. How long did it take you to put together?

"It was about a year and a half. I had my journal entries and meeting notes, then in addition there were points of reference I could get from the internet, or from old newspaper or magazine articles. Putting a timeline together wasn't too hard, and in many cases I had to get in touch with people from my past and see what *their* memories were. It's interesting how people's memories get blurred on the same event that you were at."

You were a teenager living in London in the late 70s. What a time to be around youth culture and music, and what a time to live next door to the EMS synthesiser shop...

"London was a real melting pot at the end of the 70s. There was a strong rebellious streak brought about by politics and the economy, and its embodiment was punk rock and new wave, which were reacting to how rock had become quite corporate. But whereas punk was very much, 'Buy a cheap guitar, plug it in and turn it up to 11', electronic music was studious and quite rarefied. The machines were expensive, hard to programme and unreliable, but it had so much promise. It was the first time that pop music had been made entirely with knobs and dials, as opposed to guitars and drums, which had ruled for several decades already."

Were you always into science and tech?

"I think so. I liked getting my hands on something that nobody else had, and then finding a novel use for it. From quite early on, I imagined a role for myself in this sort of dystopian, parallel universe where I was the distant, underground, broadcaster-inventor type. It was the perfect era to be doing that. The new wave was grabbing the headlines and yet there was this undercurrent of people trying to make pure electronic pop. It took a few years before people like Gary Numan, The Human League and Soft Cell really crossed over to 'Top Of The Pops'. For a long period, it had this sort of DIY ethic to it, which was really thrilling."





Back then, the nation would get a dose of science immediately before 'Top Of The Pops', thanks to 'Tomorrow's World'. Was that an influence on you?

"Yes, it was. There were some seminal moments, such as when they first showed the Fairlight sampler. Another time, waveforms were drawn on the screen; the same waveforms that eventually became the famous Joy Division album cover. Then there was the idea that you could play tunes with a sheep's bleat and take samples of actual sounds and use them as rubber stamps for creating whole new types of music. That was very, very novel."

What was the appeal of playing a synthesiser over being in a regular rock band?

"I'm really a hermit with a very slim exhibitionist streak and composing on a synth is less of a social thing than being in a band. Bands are like, 'Let's all pile in the back of a transit van and head off to London for a gig' kind of thing. Electronic music is a lot more isolated. And then there's the fact that electronic instruments have no knowledge of each other. You don't programme a drum kit and the bass part responds to it naturally and organically in a room. You don't get that interaction. All the component pieces have no knowledge of each other beyond the tempo that they're running at, so it's up to the programmer to be the master of the universe, which suits somebody as introverted as I am."

Everything happened quite quickly once you were signed. You built up your "boffin adventurer" character, but you were restless with the early success around 'The Golden Age Of Wireless' and started looking at music production and other pursuits...

"I'm just very easily distracted. I could sense the frustration of the A&R men and managers around me who would have rather I'd hunkered down and trotted out another dozen or so cookie-cutter versions of 'She Blinded Me With Science' or 'Hyperactive'. That's very much the industry formula; once you breakthrough, you distill that pop formula, get yourself well-established with half a dozen simple variations on a theme before you start indulging yourself in organic, atmospheric solo albums about rainforests and things."

So you produced Prefab Sprout, wrote songs for other people, became an arranger... most notably for David Bowie at Live Aid.

"I wasn't one to hang around. It was a bit like Monopoly; every square you land on you buy into it. So if I got an offer to go and meet Michael Jackson, or go and jam with Stevie Wonder or David Bowie then, you know, I was on the first flight out. Many of these people are my heroes and I was fascinated with the fact that they saw something in me that was unusual. These were all people who had their ear to the ground. I think I tended to get drawn to people like that, who wanted to spark something off me. I found it stimulating; it drew on my creative resources to find an intersection of musical styles with a given person in a room."

You found a home in the US, stepped off the performance treadmill and ventured into composing film soundtracks, such as George Lucas' 'Howard The Duck', and scores for video games...

"'Hyperactive', which had been a huge hit in the UK, was a massive flop in the States. Things had conspired against me in the way they sometimes do in the music industry, and I was comfortable with the fact that I was one more pawn. I'd never really set out to be a commercial artist to begin with. I'd always felt I was a marginal, avant-garde fringe artist. I had to move on and find the next field that stimulated me and got my creative juices flowing. And that turned out not to be the music industry at all. It was the emerging internet and the world of software programming."

We listen to sound all the time through our devices now, but in the 80s, computers were set up to silently compute. As the 90s dawned, you had an idea to change that...

"Most computer companies didn't want to have speakers in their products because they felt that sound would annoy the guy in the next cubicle. I felt that when the web came along it needed to combine the best of television with the best of computing. Sound was a big part of it because sound is where the warmth and the human connection come in. So I was trying to sell this idea to technology companies who had never dealt with sound before. Early on it was very hard. It only started to get easier at the point when so much prospective hype was going on around the web, that no stone was left unturned. People were willing to invest in any wacky idea that might turn out to bear fruit. By the mid-90s, if you could jot down a business plan on the back of a paper napkin at a lunch, you could get an investor to write you a cheque. I took advantage of that and set up my company, Headspace, to explore the possibilities."

You developed a music plug-in for web browsers called Beatnik. Your aim was to "songify" the web...

"It was effectively a sort of music HTML, where you could 'songify' pages using tiny samples and real-time MIDI commands that would trigger samples. It never really caught on in a big way, probably because it took too much skill to make it sound good. Completely by accident we created the most efficient software synthesiser in existence. It so happened that a company called Nokia needed a software synthesiser to make polyphonic ringtones in their phones. That was the first time my company ever came up with a business strategy that had some revenue."

And so the boom in buying ringtones began and you and Nokia were kings...

"For years we'd been struggling with the fact that nobody on the internet wanted to pay for anything, yet in the mobile phone world there were people who were willing to pay for their minutes and wallpapers and SMS and ringtones. Record companies couldn't get young people to pay for downloadable music, but they'd be willing to pay for these bleepy versions of songs. We knew how to do business in that kind of environment."

With 1992's, 'Astronauts & Heretics' and 2011's, 'A Map Of The Floating City', you've always kept your hand in. Are you up to anything at the moment, music-wise?

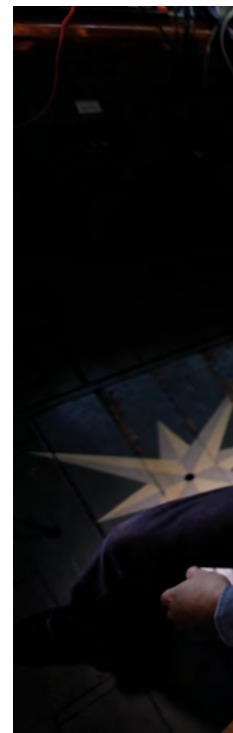
"There's a stable of musicians that I've worked with and we still stay in touch. Every now and then I'll do a gig, especially if it's an unusual situation. Recently I performed at the March For Science in Washington DC, facing the White House with a bunch of scientists who were pleading with the administration to make science-based decisions. I played with a house band, headed by Jon Batiste, the brilliant New Orleans pianist and MD for 'The Late Show With Stephen Colbert'. He's a completely different generation of musician, but I was delighted to find out he was aware of me and loved my stuff. On another occasion I had Buzz Aldrin guesting with me on stage, so I have these moments when it's irresistible. I also get offers to do 1980s retro gigs all the time and I generally respond with what I call the 'fuck off price'. And occasionally they don't fuck off, in which case I have to do it. But I only do a couple of those a year."

Will there be any new material in the future?

"I'd love to say there was. People ask me that all the time, but actually I'm so wrapped up in the stuff that I'm doing now, and with my teaching, that I haven't really had time to do anything new."

You're clearly no nostalgist, but what points in your music career stand out for you?

"Getting invited to join Lene Lovich's band as a keyboard player and writing a song for her. Then there's my first appearance on 'Top Of The Pops', playing 'Windpower'. I was nominated for several Grammys in 1985 and I got to jam on stage with Stevie Wonder, Herbie Hancock, and Howard Jones, that was quite a highlight. Then of course Live Aid with Bowie, and playing 'The Wall' with Roger Waters in Berlin."





What's next on your technology to-do list?

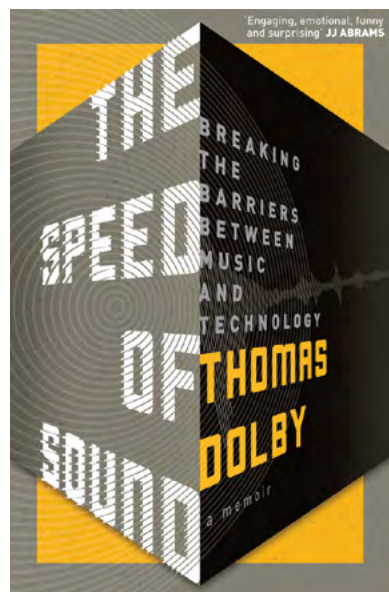
"What I'm working on at the moment is music that revolves around virtual reality, augmented reality, games and artificial intelligence. I'm working out ways that a composer's craft can come into play in the new entertainment platforms."

Fashions move on, and so do phones. Now they are really smart, aren't they?

"There's a very interesting convergence going with games and VR, as some of the latest headsets allow you to slot your smartphone in and use that. The smartphone already has a high-quality display, stereo audio, and tracking built-in to know which way you're facing. So what you're going to see very soon is a sort of augmented reality where you can point your smartphone camera at anything and see an overlay of data. Slot it into a headset and that will place you in the thick of the action. Using the front-facing camera on your phone, you can have any mixture of the real world with the virtual world. When I first got involved in virtual reality in the early 90s, it was on a completely different divergent path from mainstream media; it was very esoteric. Now it's absolutely converging. If you look at the players who are racing for a market share in this space, it's Microsoft, Google, Sony, Apple. It's absolutely on a trajectory at this point to go mainstream. I find that very exciting."

How about breaking a new sound barrier with augmented reality?

"Music and sounds are a part of this, but the fascinating thing is to ask, 'What's the right application of audio in virtual reality?'. Do you use it to add to the realism in terms of sound effects and ambience? Or, as in film and TV, do you use music to tell people how to feel and how to react? And if there's an orchestra playing, does it respond to what you do, and does it emanate from a fixed point like an orchestra pit, or is it convoluted all around you as you move through space? All of these are questions that have yet to be answered, if there is an answer. If you can get creative in your search, you'll hopefully come up with some amazing accidental events along the way."



'The Speed Of Sound: Breaking The Barriers Between Music And Technology: A Memoir' is now out in paperback via Flatiron. For more see thomasdolby.com

THINGS THAT

GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT

IT'S THE TWICE-MONTHLY PODCAST THAT EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT: FEATURING OFF-THE-WALL UPDATES FROM A FICTIONAL BACKWATER COMMUNITY, IT'S TIME TO SAY HELLO TO **'WELCOME TO NIGHT VALE'**

WORDS: MAT SMITH

"YOUR EXISTENCE IS NOT IMPOSSIBLE, BUT IT'S ALSO NOT VERY LIKELY. WELCOME... TO NIGHT VALE"

'WELCOME TO NIGHT VALE': EPISODE 16, 'THE PHONE CALL'

"We call it Weirtdown, USA," says Jeffrey Cranor, the co-creator of cult podcast 'Welcome To Night Vale'. The fabricated American Southwestern desert town of Night Vale is by no means the first Weirtdown, USA; satire has Springfield and South Park, while the Washington town of David Lynch's 'Twin Peaks' ushered in some fantastically freaky TV moments.

Night Vale is a place fraught with danger, where clouds are something to fear, yet in certain vague circumstances can be elected into public office. The home of demonised librarians; where the existence of angels is evident yet denied; where unspeakable danger lurks in seemingly innocuous public places; where wheat and wheat by-products kill everyone, and where a solitary community radio announcer makes everything sound just as quotidian as where you live.

"CECIL PALMER SPOKE OF THE HORRORS OF EVERYDAY LIFE. NEARLY EVERY BROADCAST TOLD A STORY OF IMPENDING DOOM OR DEATH, OR WORSE: A LONG LIFE LIVED IN FRUITLESS FEAR OF DOOM OR DEATH"

'WELCOME TO NIGHT VALE: A NOVEL' (2015)

Like so many great pairings – Lou Reed and John Cale, Alan Vega and Martin Rev, Bert and Ernie – Cranor and Night Vale co-founder Joseph Fink met in New York. In their case, it was at the twilight end of the 2000s, through a left-field Manhattan performance art collective called The Neo-Futurists.

"We did a weekly show where we'd have a constantly changing collection of 30 short plays, where all the titles would be on pieces of paper hung on a clothesline," says Cranor. "When we'd finish one, the audience would shout out a number and we'd perform the one they'd picked."


Cranor was already a member when Fink began volunteering, and the pair developed an appreciation of each other's writing. They ended up meeting every two weeks to write over beer.

"One day Joseph said, 'We should do a podcast,'" says Cranor. "It was just one of those random ideas we talked about. Then out of the blue he emailed me a file and it was the complete pilot episode for 'Welcome To Night Vale'."

Launched in 2012, the podcast took the form of a community radio broadcast presented by Cecil Palmer, played wonderfully by fellow Neo-Futurist, Cecil Baldwin. The format of the twice-monthly podcast has never changed; it's still Cecil, talking about local news, safety warnings and his love life.

"It's a restrictive format, but that's good," says Cranor. "Having a single narrator forces you to say, 'What can he see? How does he know what's happening? How does he receive information?'"



A close-up portrait of a man with a steampunk aesthetic. He has a large, circular, brass-colored eye patch with a mesh screen over his right eye. He has a mustache and is smiling slightly, showing his teeth. He is holding a vintage-style, silver, ribbed microphone up to his mouth. He is wearing a dark shirt and a yellow and black plaid jacket. The background is dark and out of focus.

"YOUR EXISTENCE
IS NOT
IMPOSSIBLE,
BUT IT'S ALSO
NOT VERY LIKELY.
WELCOME...
TO NIGHT VALE"



"AND NOW, THE WEATHER"

"LIFE IN NIGHT VALE IS MORE STRESSFUL. THERE ARE THINGS LURKING IN THE SHADOWS. NOT THE PROJECTIONS OF A WORRIED MIND, BUT LITERAL THINGS, LURKING, LITERALLY, IN SHADOWS"

'WELCOME TO NIGHT VALE: A NOVEL' (2015)

"We both sort of grew up in suburban cities," says Cranor. "I grew up on the periphery of Dallas in a town called Mesquite, and I listened to a community radio station all the time. Joseph grew up on the eastern edge of the desert in the Californian city of Camarillo. We were both on opposite ends of the American Southwest that we write about."

The inspiration for their own Weirddown, USA came from things like 'The Twilight Zone' and 'Alice's Adventures In Wonderland'.

"I like the idea that things can either be normal, or terrifying," says Cranor. "When a character responds to something with horror, then that makes us empathetically terrified. But when a character responds to something weird as if it's normal, that's actually more horrifying. I also grew up reading absurd observational things about the world. Balancing the weird and the horrible with pithy humour is something I've always been interested in."

Despite its wry moments, there is also a more sinister, Orwellian edge to the goings-on in Night Vale. The local government is oppressive and Cecil Palmer is its unsuspecting public advocate. There's a sense of constant surveillance, of restricted freedoms (including a full ban on pencils and paper), and yet Cecil will also mention things like Facebook or air travel, all of which seem incongruent with the town's totalitarian ringfence.

"Joseph's original concept for the show was a place where every conspiracy theory is true," explains Cranor. "In Night Vale, there's the idea of a government that's both covertly, and overtly, authoritarian. At the heart of many conspiracies is the underground, the secret police, and yet here they're out in the open and Cecil's like, 'Well of course we have secret police. Who else is going to coordinate everything to make our lives safe?'"

"AND NOW, THE WEATHER"

CECIL PALMER, EVERY 'WELCOME TO NIGHT VALE' PODCAST EPISODE

Music is central to the strange, unsettling atmosphere of Cecil's daily broadcasts. Just behind his words, right on the cusp of audibility, are compositions by the New York electronic musician Disparation (Jon Bernstein) whose 'Ballad Of Fiedler & Munt' also forms the ghostly title tune. His pieces are often wonky, nightmarishly haunting or even twee, but you can never quite hear them properly. It's the art of wilful obfuscation, a trick that means you once again never really know what's going on.

Another musical constant in every 'Night Vale' broadcast is the moment when Cecil announces the nightly weather forecast, which turns out to be a song rather than a traditional bulletin – and one that's never got anything to do with meteorological matters. The first weather forecast was performed by co-founder Fink, but since then a host of mostly unknown artists have had their songs featured in the podcast, which gives rise to the kind of profile-raising that is nigh-on impossible to achieve in music today. In one week, the podcast was downloaded 150,000 times. Every song, ranging from Dylan-esque folk to assbackwards hip hop, is hand-picked by the pair.

One of the artists whose music appeared on the weather was Mary Epworth, who was subsequently invited to supply the music for Cranor's Night Vale spin-off podcast, 'Within The Wires', where she also voices characters on occasion. 'Within The Wires' takes Night Vale's oddness and transfers it to what purports to be an unearthed treasure trove of tapes, including narrated tours of an exhibition at London's Tate Modern, some 29 years before it was actually a museum.

Fink also has his own spin-off, 'I Only Listen To The Mountain Goats', and there are several other shows and ideas in the stable. As well as a number of books, including 'Welcome To Night Vale: A Novel', our conversation took place at the end of a sell-out European tour, complete with Cecil delivering broadcasts to the audience and live accompaniment from Disparation.

"For me it's always been about creating cool stuff and doing it independently," reflects Cranor, musing on how successful the Night Vale enterprise has become.

"I have to accept that this is my full-time job now. I couldn't be happier, and I literally can't think of anything more fun to do. Now maybe if you ask me on a different day when something's super stressful I'll be like, 'Ah man, I really miss my old data-entry job'."

Find 'Welcome To Night Vale' at nightvalepresents.com

ON SONG

WITH HIS FUCK BUTTONS PARTNER CUTTING A RUG ON HIS OWN AS BLANCK MASS, IT'S HIGH TIME **ANDREW HUNG** SHOWED US WHAT HE'S MADE OF. AND IT ISN'T WHAT YOU MIGHT THINK

WORDS: **FAT ROLAND**

A queue of school children snakes down a corridor, a writhing line of untucked shirts and scuffed shoes. One by one, they stand in front of their teacher who is sat jabbing single notes on a piano. Each kid replies by singing the same notes back. Middle C. The G above middle C. Something a couple of octaves higher. The piano's notes fill the hall in the colourless way that only school music lessons do. Some kids are pitch-perfect, sending heavenly cherubim into a harp-plucking frenzy. Some are sweetly tuneless, yet their mothers will still ruffle their hair for a job well done.

After a few attempts, each child is sent back to class and another one is brought forward. Andrew Hung reaches the front of the queue. The teacher stabs a note: middle C. Hung lets out a flat drone. If the noise he produced was an animal, it would have crawled out of his mouth and died. Undeterred, the teacher plays a different note. He lets out the same drone again, identical to the last, and somewhere in heaven a cherub tosses its harp in the nearest bin. A third note. The same flat drone. As Andrew Hung walks away from the audition, his future career in the school choir lies in ruins. He will never sing again. Until now.

"I've only started singing in the last year," says Hung when I ask him about the rawness of his vocals on 'Realisationship', his debut solo long-player. If you were to believe the press blurb, it's a record that forges a "new relationship with the inner infinite". No, me neither. What the album is definitely about, however, is self-realisation, and a vulnerability that also shows during this interview. Hung has a lot of questions: about himself, about his working methods, and even about the journalist interviewing him. I tell him I've been singing in public myself recently.

"How are you finding it?", he asks. "I'm still figuring out what my strengths and weaknesses are."

I didn't expect such well-spoken politeness from a member of Fuck Buttons, whose blistering instrumentals have blown away everyone from journos at The Observer to crowds at All Tomorrow's Parties. Think Underworld's 'Rez' for a millennial generation – a comparison that was solidified during the London Olympic Games opening ceremony in 2012, when 'Surf Solar' and 'Olympians' sat alongside a soaring score from Underworld's Rick Smith. Imagine creating music so immense it was used to soundtrack the Danny Boyle-directed history of the British Isles.

More recently, Benjamin John Power, the "Fuck" to Andrew's "Buttons", has blazed a solo trail as the full-fat industrial noise outfit Blanck Mass. We're talking everything cranked up to 11, with chords so lardy they'll grease anything that stands in their way. With that all done, it's now Andrew's turn to flex his autonomy.

'Realisationship' steers clear of the full-fat; it feels more nuanced, more post-rock than hard-as-stone. And instead of heading the songs with a raft of guest vocalists, Hung has stepped up to the mic to face the terror of singing in front of other people. He can certainly hold a tune (which may surprise his old school teacher) and he has a voice that changes throughout the album.

Listen to the melodic whimsy of 'Say What You Want', or the rawness of 'Animal' with its seething refrain, "You don't know what I will do to you / I'm an animal, animal". Hung could have gone to a vocal coach and learned to project from his diaphragm and all that, but his singing seems almost instinctive.

"I just don't practise. When I realised I had to sing 'Animal' angrily, it was a eureka moment; being angry comes naturally to me. Once I knew I had to perform to find the character of the songs," he says, emphasising the word "perform" with a capital "P". "It became an eye-opening process."

ANDREW HUNG



PHOTO: ZOE DAVIS



I t's impossible to pin Andrew Hung down to the moment he decided to stand in front of a mic, rather than remain mute behind racks of tangled wires. There's little in his Fuck Buttons history that suggests a move in that direction. However, he has worked with a couple of notable vocalists in recent years, including the totemic new age laser-wrangler, Jean-Michel Jarre. Fuck Buttons collaborated on the track 'Immortals' on Jarre's 2015 'Electronica 1: The Time Machine' collection. The song, with its Ulrich Schnauss-style airiness, was an album highlight even when listed alongside heavyweights such as Pete Townshend, Vince Clarke, Tangerine Dream and John Carpenter.

"Jarre's an interesting bugger," says Hung with a smile in his voice. "I'm not sure if this is derogatory, but he's really French! He's so cool. Is that a French trend? I dunno. I was in awe of him."

Hung was also responsible for co-producing Beth Orton's electronic resurgence on her 2016 album, 'Kidsticks'. This saw the folk trip hopper shoving her acoustic guitar back in the cupboard and embracing loops. In a way, it recalled her 1990s dalliances with the likes of William Orbit and The Chemical Brothers. The critics loved it.

"Beth is so clever," he says. "You can feel the weight of her experience. I feel like I'm building up my tool shed and she gave me a lot of tools to use. We were writing that record for two years and we didn't really know what we were doing. The naivety is part and parcel of that. I still want to approach every project like a child. I just want it to be exciting, otherwise there's no real point to it."

Childishness is a trope Hung is used to. Fuck Buttons staked their reputation on abusing Casiotone home keyboards and Fisher Price karaoke sets to make some deliciously noisy sounds. A brief solo experiment in 2015 gave us the 'Rave Cave' EPs, which were built from rewired Nintendo Game Boy consoles. Yet, as playful as his processes seem, there is so much more to Andrew Hung.

We get to talking about collaboration, and whether going it alone has removed a safety net for him. It's useful being accountable to someone else, so when you've only got yourself to answer to, then what? Funnily enough, this is a thought that has been bothering him.

"I couldn't sleep last night, because I need to start organising my output," he says. "I need a structure to know how much I can experiment and how much I can fail, otherwise it just becomes chaotic. Working with other people is easier because you find a natural boundary. It's like when you speak to someone for the first time; you're not going to start talking to them about their sex life straight away. There are certain boundaries. When you're on your own, it is more difficult. As a child we had toys that we'd have to put away at the end of the day. That's what I want to incorporate into my routine; having a way to tidy up, which is boring but necessary."

Hung says he gets involved with stuff because it feels good, and he's trying hard not to stop and think about it all too much. If that means suddenly finding himself taking lead vocal duties, then so be it. Naivety as process perhaps. Indeed, this is probably why, when we spoke, he was rediscovering the first two albums by The Cranberries. "There's a simplicity to those guys that's really enjoyable to listen to," he says. He's slightly embarrassed at this and is quick to point out that he's been listening to Robert Wyatt too.

With an increasingly busy schedule and one project after another, it's inevitable something will slip. He's meant to be working with Emmy The Great, but "we haven't seen each other for a year probably, but we're both enthusiastic about working together still". And with their respective sidelines underway, we shouldn't expect new Fuck Buttons material any time soon.

"We've got our sights on a new album," says Hung, "but the logistics are creating a barrier. I don't know when that's going to happen, to be honest with you."

A question remains. Was he really that bad at singing when he was a kid? Was there a reason he let his teacher suffer those flat notes?

"I'd just arrived at school so I wanted to be friends with people," admits Hung. "This kid behind me said, 'Don't do the choir'. So I said 'Alright'. I sabotaged my audition for the school choir. That was the only time I did any sort of singing. I'm not sure I really consider myself a singer now though. I'm generally quite down on myself; I don't really consider myself a musician either, even though I obviously am."

With a tour approaching, he's been forced to practise daily to toughen up his vocal chords. The good news is, with a live band around him, his new-found independence will see him become collaborative again.

"I've got my best friends in my band," he explains. "They're so good at riffing off each other. Milly [Blue], who I've known since I was 15, plays bass and synths. When she turned up with only two days to practise, she said, 'Totally, it'll be fine'. In retrospect, I'm not sure if she was just doing that to reassure herself."

Throughout the interview, Hung has been intelligently reserved. He's careful to formulate his replies, and quick to deflect with counter questions. However, when we talk about his band, he gushes. He's clearly excited, like a kid who's just arrived home from school, wonky-tied and scuff-shoed, giddily raving about his day.

"I was thinking about the live band this morning," he says. "I want them to be around all the time. I want them to be my family. When you've got four people around you who want to bring the best out of each other, it is incredible. It does feel like school again."

'Realisationship' is out now on Lex. For more, see andrewhung.co.uk

A FINE SET OF PIPES



PHOTO: DANIELA SBRISNY

ORGANS BELONG IN COLD CHURCHES BOOMING OUT 'ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS', RIGHT? WITH HER **ORGAN REFRAMED** FESTIVAL AT LONDON'S UNION CHAPEL, CLAIRE M SINGER HAS A BETTER USE FOR THESE GRAND OLD INSTRUMENTS

WORDS: BEN MURPHY

A mist of dry ice evaporates into the purple and blue lights of the hushed church hall. Ornate arches loom either side and the ceiling rises to a dome in the huge empty space. In the pews, metres from the stage, a quiet reverence descends as people filter in and take their seats. The lights lower and an orchestra tunes up while the organist takes his seat out of sight. What we hear as the performance begins though is not the sound of a genteel recital, the accompaniment to a psalm, or a classical performance. It's an experimental piece of new music that bears a closer resemblance to some lost 1980s synthpop soundtrack.

The historic Union Chapel in Islington, London, is the venue for this organ and orchestra performance. It might be the last place you'd expect to hear a quasi-electronic experiment, but for a second year, the famous site plays host to the Organ Reframed festival, a celebration of the storied, yet rarely-used instrument.

Invention of musician and composer Claire M Singer (Musical Director of the organ at Union Chapel), the festival aims to make the organ a vital part of modern music, placing it in the context of the avant-garde, neo-classical and electronic scenes.

"It's an amazing instrument and it should be at the forefront of new music today," says Singer. "I want to change people's minds about what this instrument is capable of."

Tonight's performance features specially commissioned pieces written by artists at the forefront of electronics. In addition to existing pieces by Philip Glass and Sufjan Stevens, classical/ambient alchemists Mira Calix and Emily Hall, sound sculptor Tim Hecker and Washington synthseer Kaitlyn Aurelia Smith are some of the starry names who've created works especially for the show.

"I look for artists who are really pushing the boundaries of the fields that they're working in," says Singer of her selection process. "That attracts me to commission them, because I feel they can do the same with the organ. It's exciting to get those artists working in a different way."

For Mira Calix, who's released albums on Warp and composed works for theatre, opera and art installations, being asked to write a brand-new piece for the festival offered a chance to fuse her electronic and classical backgrounds in a fresh style.

"It was an unusual opportunity," says Calix. "I write a lot for ensembles and I've worked with the London Contemporary Orchestra before, but to work with the organ is not a common thing for any modern composer. The way I approached it was looking at the idea of frequencies, which is more what you think about when you write electronic pieces."

The London Contemporary Orchestra performs alongside organist James McVinnie at Organ Reframed tonight. Though these recitals are entirely acoustic (bar a few effects), the sound is very much skewed towards the sensibilities of electronic music. This combination of classical and electronics is the background of festival creator Singer, who has created and performed works for the Tate Modern, and galleries and venues across the USA, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands and UK.

"I did a music degree and focused on the cello, then I did a Master's where I focused more on electronic composition," she says. "I played in bands as well; orchestras; a really varied background. I don't really come from one angle. I was asked to write my first organ piece about 12 years ago for the Sound Festival in Aberdeen."

Back then, Singer was struck by the adaptability of the instrument, and over time, the concept for a new application of the organ occurred to her, fusing her dual musical disciplines.

"When I encountered the instrument I couldn't believe how amazing it was, and how versatile," she says. "I wanted to start this festival since I wrote my first organ piece. It's the world's first synthesiser. I have been working with it this long and I'm still learning what it can do. It produces the colours you would get from an orchestra; you have that at your fingertips."



CLAIRE M SINGER



PHOTO: DANIELA SBRISNY

The first performance tonight is Emily Hall's 'Passing Through'. Initially a minimal piece reminiscent of Steve Reich, it builds into a melancholy and beautiful sliver of synthpop, which wouldn't be out of place on the 'Stranger Things' soundtrack. The complex layering of woodwinds and strings, harp and upright bass create a lattice around the central organ figure. On a projector screen mounted above the stage, we see McVinnie's fingers dance across the keys. It's a mesmerising arrangement, which is followed by the 23-minute long drone of Phill Niblock's 'Thinking Slowly'.

The sequencing of the music reinforces the sense that the organ, which underpins each piece, can be played in diverse ways. Mira Calix's creation is especially arresting and dramatic. It ranges from sub drones to high-pitched flutes, before launching into a thrilling orchestral manoeuvre. Her piece takes advantage of the sonic possibilities of the organ – the things it can do that other acoustic instruments can't.

"I've milked the sub bass on the organ; I'm using the bottom end," says Calix, with a smile. "There's no other instrument that can do that, except for electronics. You can write for an organ and it sounds really full bodied, but I was really interested in the idea of not making it full bodied, taking the middle out. Maybe in a way it sounds more

like a synth, unlike the other pieces where [organist] James is playing things that are more musical."

Calix's piece, '#DeHFO' (or 'The Department For How To Fuck Ourselves'), is particularly subversive. The artist, who has recently explored politics in her work, and the idea of social media as a virtual space, uses the organ – that instrument associated with history, churches and remnants of old England – to pass comment on the Brexit divide, and the state of the nation. The high and low tones that take turns in the composition represent the different viewpoints of leave and remain.

"It's symbolic and conceptual because I've gone, 'This is a great big Brexit divide', there's no mid-range or middle ground," she reasons. "You tend to be leave or remain; it's like Marmite. There are not many who can be reasonable, in the middle. I'm not one of them! And that's the way I've used the instruments."

Tim Hecker's 'Heatwave!', despite its acoustic basis, is closer to the contorted electronic melodies of Boards Of Canada, inspired, Hecker says, by the scorching temperatures and wildfires of the past Californian summer. Here, distorted organ drones meld with beautiful orchestral passages.



MIRA CALIX



Taken as a whole, *Organ Reframed* is a remarkably successful experiment, though according to Singer, it hasn't been easy trying to get people interested in the idea. This instrument has an image problem.

"I find when you mention the word 'organ', a lot of people tend to switch off. They've made their minds up," she admits. "When I was thinking about the name for the festival, I thought, 'Do I include organ, or not? Will it put people off?'. But I'm proud of it; I wanted it to be in the title. That was the whole idea of getting the design right, with bright colours, to draw people in."

In addition to the concert of the first night, over the weekend there's a live show from Low and a silent film set to organ music, plus a sound installation, with each attracting a slightly different audience. All these elements are designed to counter the perception of the pipe organ as a rather fusty old device.

"It shouldn't be put in that box," says Singer. "I'm trying to attract as many people as I can by having such a varied programme. There are organ lovers who are into going to recitals and classical concerts, and they're open to seeing what can be done with it in a new light. There are also the artists who've composed for this weekend, who will bring their own following, the people who are into electronic and experimental music, and there's also a sound installation, so we get the art world coming as well."

Nonetheless, Singer admits that a big reason why the organ is absent from so much contemporary music is its inaccessibility. Even those who'd like to use it generally can't.

"They are usually housed in a church or a concert hall and access can be tricky," says Singer. "You obviously can't take an organ home and learn it. With the festival, that's the whole point. It's about giving these composers time with the organ to get to know it. The only way you're going to create innovative work is if you spend time with the instrument, rather than spending time at home looking at an orchestration book and saying, 'That's what the organ can do.'"

"I would do more work with the organ, especially now I've learnt a bit more," adds Calix. "Working with people like Claire and James, there's so much to discover. But what are the chances? They're slim, because there's only a handful of organists or places that would want composers writing for them."

One of the most impressive pieces of the night is Sufjan Stevens' 'The Year Of Our Lord', a secular hymn that really shows how spiritual the organ can sound, even when shorn of its religious overtones. Similarly, Kaitlyn Aurelia Smith's beautiful closer, 'Action Of Inaction', is akin to one of her winding, chlorophyll-hued synth songs, which instead implores us to revere nature and organic processes rather than lofty theological ideas.

For Calix, the main draw of *Organ Reframed* is so people can hear this churchy yet versatile instrument rendered anew.

"For an audience, it's getting to hear people like Tim Hecker write an organ piece," she enthuses. "We associate the sound with Bach or Elgar or these liturgical Sunday hymns. It's a chance to hear it without that association, which I think is really interesting. It gives an audience a new opportunity to hear what is an exciting instrument, because it fills a room."

Union Chapel is the ideal home for *Organ Reframed*. Not only does the venue have the splendid acoustics and the natural reverb of a church, it houses a particularly remarkable organ too.

"It's a very special organ," says Singer. "It's unique in that it's the only one in England with water hydraulic power, you can switch between electric and water hydraulics. It was built by Henry Willis and is one of the finest pieces of his work. The organ is referred to as the Rolls-Royce of organs, so it is up there. Even if I wasn't Musical Director, I would still choose this organ."

Calix reckons that the current popularity of classical/electronic fusionists such as Nils Frahm and Ólafur Arnalds has opened up the possibilities for this kind of event.

"There's so many people who either come from my route, from electronic into classical, or from classical, like Anna Meredith, into electronics," she says. "There's a whole genre that has no name. I can see people who love Warp, especially the early stuff, would love everything here tonight."

Looking at the rapt attention of the crowd, and the applause at the end of the concert, Singer's ambition to reframe the organ is fulfilled. It's spectacular, and bodes well for next year's instalment.

"The organ in particular is having more of a spotlight moment," concludes Singer. "More people are starting to use it, so I can only see that growing. I'm just trying to do what I can."

ART OF DARKNESS

HE'S JUST RELEASED HIS FIRST ALBUM IN 14 YEARS AND IT'S A TECH NOIR CORKER, BLACK TO THE CORE AND ALL THE WAY BACK.

DAVE CLARKE TALKS GOTHIC ELECTRONICA, PUNK ROCK, SILVER CABLES, LEGO GUITARS, PORCUPINES, HEDGEHOGS, SUZI QUATRO AND DEPARTMENT S. SAY, IS VIC THERE?

WORDS: **PUSH**

PHOTOS: **MARILYN CLARK**

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ff the top of your head, without thinking about it too much, what five words do you think best describe you?

"Honest. Passionate. Uncompromising."

Dave Clarke pauses, but not for long.

"Integrity. I'd like to think I'm someone that has integrity."

Four down, one to go.

"Difficult," he says. "I can't deny that. I know I can be difficult."

It takes Dave Clarke less than 15 seconds to answer my opening question. Easily less than 15 seconds. But it takes him more than 15 minutes to answer my next one, which centres on the fact that he's released just three studio albums and a 12-inch, 'I Like John' (on XL under the name Hardcore), over the course of a recording career that goes right back to 1990. What on earth has he been doing?

In his response, Clarke jumps from one subject to another, talking about his DJing, his studio, the different hardware and software he's used over the years, how he struggles to begin work on a new track ("I fucking hate starting tracks. I will procrastinate my arse off") and his move from the UK to Amsterdam, where he has lived for the last decade. He talks about his OCD too.

"My OCD can get ridiculous," he reveals. "But aside from when I clean the house, the only place I allow it to come through is in the studio, or when it's something connected to the studio. There was one time when I wanted some new cables, so I spoke to a few different cable manufacturers, and I ended up going to Japan to buy these cables that were made out of medical grade silver. But then on the plane on the way back, I couldn't stop thinking about one particular cable. I couldn't sleep, I couldn't eat, I couldn't think about anything else but this cable. Just this one cable. So, yeah, it can be that ridiculous."

There's tons of interesting stuff in his lengthy and rambling answer, some of which we might return to later on. For now, what's perhaps most telling is not what Clarke says, it's how he says it. I first met him in the mid-1990s and our paths have crossed several times since, and I know he can sometimes be a bit sullen and a bit prickly. You don't see many pictures of him smiling. Today, however, he's visibly relaxed. He's chatty and he's cheery. He's not at all difficult. Not yet anyway.







"IT IS
DARK,
IT IS
GOTHIC,
IT IS
GRUNGY"

Dave Clarke's recently released third album is called 'The Desecration Of Desire' and it comes 14 years on from 'Devil's Advocate' and 22 years after his 'Archive One' debut. The latter included several cuts taken from his acclaimed 'Red' series; three 12-inch singles that stand as shining examples of first generation UK techno, particularly the simultaneously euphoric and malevolent 'Wisdom To The Wise' from 'Red 2'. John Peel was an early supporter of Clarke's work, dubbing the young Brighton producer and DJ The Baron Of Techno, a name that has stuck with him to this day.

But despite the accolades heaped on both 'Archive One' and 'Devil's Advocate' at the time of their release, Clarke is quite dismissive of both records now. He says he views them as collections of tracks rather than as purposely designed and fully-rounded albums in their own right.

"Half the tracks on 'Archive One' were on the 'Red' singles and the rest were quite underdeveloped," he notes. "'Devil's Advocate' was a more mature record and I'm happy with some of the stuff on there, like the stuff with Chicks On Speed, but it still wasn't where I wanted it to be. David Bowie once said that, as an artist, you should always be uncomfortable. Well, I don't know about that, but you certainly shouldn't be comfortable either, and I think what happened with 'Devil's Advocate' was I ended up doing a sort of pastiche of myself.

"It feels very different with 'The Desecration Of Desire'. To me, this is my first proper album. When I started, I decided I wanted to write it as if it was a book, writing everything in order, writing tracks like they were chapters. So once I committed to a track and it was going to be track three, then track three was what it was. And then once that was done, I'd think about how track three ended to help me come up with an idea for track four. I wanted everything to flow, everything to be in the right place. I realised how important that was after seeing a documentary about Carole King's 'Tapestry' and how they spent six months working on the running order of the album, because having all those beautiful songs on there wasn't enough."

For some people, the people who only know Clarke for his 'Red' slates or the fact that he's been one of the most sought-after techno DJs in the world, playing to massive audiences across the globe pretty much every weekend, 'The Desecration Of Desire' will come as a surprise. For one thing, it's not a techno record. Not as most folk would define it.

"No, it isn't techno," agrees Clarke. "I expect there'll be a lot of people going, 'Hang on, where's the techno? What the hell's going on here?'"

The sound throughout is crunchy and heavy and dark. Pitch black, in fact. Exquisitely so. I remind Clarke that he used the phrase "gothic electronica" to describe a remix he did of The Neon Judgement a couple of years ago. Is this more gothic electronica, then?

"Sort of. The other phrase that I've used on a few tweets is 'tech noir'. It doesn't have anything to do with the film genre, the original 'Blade Runner' and things like that, but this music is obviously based on technology and it is dark, it is gothic, it is grungy, if I dare use that word. Of course, I hope that it doesn't fit into any category at all, but every artist says crap like that, don't they? All I know is that it's just me and I feel comfortable with what it represents. But if we are going to put a label on it, then I think tech noir makes a lot of sense."

I f you've been paying attention to Clarke's career, you'll be aware that his musical interests have always stretched far beyond techno. He's a lifelong fan of punk and post-punk music, which is why Hardcore's 'I Like John' sampled PiL's 'This Is Not A Love Song' and why he borrowed heavily from Bauhaus' 'She's In Parties' for 'What Was Her Name?' on 'Devil's Advocate'. When it comes to remixes, his credits includes Placebo, I Am Kloot and The Amazing Snakeheads, as well as the likes of New Order, Depeche Mode and John Foxx. When it comes to his DJ sets, keep your ears open for Devo, DAF, The Sisters Of Mercy, Talking Heads, Rammstein and even The Knack alongside the newest tunes in his box.

All of which leads us back to 'The Desecration Of Desire'. One of the highlights of the album is a startling cover of 'Is Vic There?', a one-off hit for Department S in 1981. The vocals are by Louisahhh, the hotly tipped New York-born, Paris-based producer and DJ. It turns out that Louisahhh is rather partial to the old new wave herself.

"The funny thing was, I'd totally forgotten about 'Is Vic There?'," says Clarke. "I have all my classics on my iPod, but I also have lots of vinyl records from when I was growing up, and this was one of those. I heard it out of the blue while I was in the studio one day preparing to begin work on the album. I got goosebumps straight away and I remembered being entranced by it as a kid. I saw Department S play it on 'Top Of The Pops' and I was blown away by how weird it was. I probably danced around in front of the telly waving a guitar I'd made out of Lego. I usually did that when 'Top Of The Pops' was on. And then, much to the chagrin of my parents, I'd smash the guitar up on the ceramic fireplace.

"So anyway, I decided to do a cover of 'Is Vic There?', but I didn't take the music, I just took the lyrics. I'd spent some time with Louisahhh in Paris, going to museums and hanging out, and I'd worked with her on a few things before, I thought she'd be great for it. I wanted her to talk the words, not sing them, and her voice was

perfect for it. She has a really sassy voice, sassy in the way that I always thought Suzi Quatro's voice was. Whenever I hear Suzi Quatro sing or talk, I always think, 'She's cool, she's smart, very independent, very secure', and it makes me want to latch on to her because of that. And I get the same vibe from Louisahhh's voice. It was really quick to record the song with her too. Three or four takes and we were done."

There are several other noteworthy contributors to 'The Desecration Of Desire', including Gazelle Twin, Keith Tenniswood from Two Lone Swordsmen, and Madonna remixer Mt Sims. The most noteworthy is perhaps gritty crooner Mark Lanegan of Screaming Trees, and Queens Of The Stone Age fame. Lanegan appears on two tracks, 'Charcoal Eyes (Glass Tears)' and 'Monochrome Sun', the former featuring tiny fragments of lyrics from the likes of Joy Division, Patti Smith, The Adverts and the Au Pairs.

"It was fun to throw those little references in there, things that old farts like you and me will pick up on," grins Clarke.

The two Lanegan cuts sit side-by-side and form a pivotal point for the whole album. 'Charcoal Eyes' is a relentlessly building dystopian trip, while the brooding 'Monochrome Sun' is up there with the awesome 'Black River', a song Lanegan recorded with Tim Simenon from Bomb The Bass this time last decade.

"I've always loved Mark's vocals and I knew he'd worked with Tim, so I dropped him a quick email and I got an instant reply," says Clarke. "I sent him the two tracks, just instrumentals, rough sketches, but again he came back to me quickly. He said, 'Oh, I love those, I really feel we can do something. Do you have any lyrics you can send me?'. This was the crunch for me. So I sent him what I'd got and I have to say I was feeling very exposed at this point. He responded with something like, 'Hey brother, they're really strong'. And I was like, 'Fuck, they're the first lyrics I've ever written'. And he said, 'Well, they're good'. I was delighted by that. He came over to Amsterdam to start recording with me about 10 days later."

DAVE CLARKE WITH MARK LANEGAN



"I'M NOT
DIPLO-
MATIC,
I'M NOT
CLEVER
ABOUT
THAT, AND
I CAN BE
BRUTAL"

Whatever you want to call it, tech noir or gothic electronica, or something else, 'The Desecration Of Desire' is a triumph on all sorts of different levels for Dave Clarke. I reckon it's a terrific record. It's coming in late, but it's a very strong contender for my favourite album of 2017.

It's unlikely to satisfy Clarke's most vociferous detractors, though. The scores of people who contributed to the "What's wrong with Dave Clarke?" discussion group on Discogs a few years ago, for example. We're talking fuckwitted internet trolls here, of course, but it's interesting that a recurring complaint about him is that he's grumpy and spiky. Which, as I said, he sometimes is. He's apparently arrogant too.

"I think I can be perceived as arrogant," he says. "On the other hand, I've never had any desire to be famous and I think I am also quite self-effacing. I have a dry sense of humour, so if I say something like, 'Well, X and Y happened and that's obviously because I'm an incredible talent', that would be tongue-in-cheek in a massive, massive, massive way. I don't believe that about myself at all. But my delivery is very flat – as well as The Baron Of Techno, I've also been called The Jack Dee Of Techno – and if you're not attuned to that or my sense of humour, you could get hold of the wrong end of the stick.

"The porcupine thing, the hedgehog thing, yes, that is there with me. It's a defence mechanism. I can be introspective, but I think most artists can be. I'm not introspective when I'm in a comfortable environment or I'm with my friends, but it does take me a while to warm to people. The flip side of that is you might never warm to some people because you're being hedgehoggy and porcupiney, because you've already put your spikes out, so you're asking them to have to try harder with you, which isn't really very fair."

I guess we're edging into "Difficult" Dave territory here. As it goes, on the occasions I've spent some time with him, I can't recall a single instance when I didn't enjoy his company. In fact, I'd say that he's one of the most intriguing characters in electronic music. What I like best about him is he's not afraid to be who he is, whatever anyone might think about that, and he never makes any attempt to be anything other than who he is.

"I sometimes wish I could bring it down a notch, be a bit more nonchalant, but I can't. Honesty has been a very tricky thing for me throughout the whole of my life. I'm not diplomatic, I'm not clever about that, and I can be brutal. I will talk about the elephant in the room. It's got me into trouble over the years, but I still do it. And I'm too long in the tooth to change now. Of all the things that are important to me, honesty comes first. Honesty is imperative."

'The Desecration Of Desire' is out now on Skint

KEY NOTES

IF OVATIONS ARE THE BAROMETER, THE HIGHLIGHT OF BERLIN'S POP-KULTUR FESTIVAL 2017 WAS DÜSSELDORF'S PREPARED PIANO DUO **GRANDBROTHERS**. FOLLOWING THEIR RAPTUROUSLY RECEIVED SHOW, WE CAUGHT UP WITH THEM BACKSTAGE...

WORDS: **CARL GRIFFIN**

PICTURES: **JANTO ROESSNER**

F aust's Jochen Irmeler once told me that his search for "exactly the right sound", tones he'd been imagining in his head since childhood, but he'd yet to hear for real, only came to an end once he'd built his first proto synth/organ back in the late 1960s. It's easy to imagine that the Düsseldorf pairing and university music faculty pals Erol Sarp (piano) and Lukas Vogel (electronics) have been on a similar journey. For they, as prepared piano outfit Grandbrothers, do something very interesting with the grand old Joanna.

While this whole prepared piano business might well have started back in the 1940s with John Cage, and his Henry Cowell and Schoenberg-influenced innovations, Sarp and Vogel interpret the template very differently. Their compositional approach is uniquely democratic; emotionally rich, cinematic, rhythmically complex and free of anything that drifts too close to the avant-garde. Instead it's suffused with the influence of Roedelius-like ambience, cyclical patterns reminiscent of Steve Reich, and even Philadelphia house music.

Sarp's treated piano strings are morphed and manipulated endlessly by Vogel's clever electronic interventions, which – especially as a live experience – expand the grand piano's musical potential exponentially.

The elaborate mechanics that transform its sound are all down to Vogel's innate skills as an engineer and software designer. His homemade apparatus physically affects both the piano's strings and body. Sarp's notes are then live-sampled and fed into a specially adapted computer.

We're backstage with the pair after their astonishing show at Pop-Kultur festival in the old East Berlin district of Prenzlauer Berg. The event is being held at a wonderful arts hub called the Kulturbrauerei – a cathedral-like, redbrick industrial wonder; part-factory, part Teutonic fantasy castle, and once the world's largest brewery.

Looking drained, but clearly elated after delivering the goods to a palpably expectant audience, Grandbrothers are an affable, softly spoken pair of early 30-somethings who seem rather surprised at all this new-found attention.

"We're just working on this project. It's something we started at university and we are still exploring it, so it's nice that other people enjoy it too," says Vogel, with a general self-effacement that they both appear to share.

"We were both always connected to the piano and had lessons from an early age. At university back in 2007, we agreed that we'd both take on this project," offers Sarp.







They received encouragement from one of their tutors to find new ways of expression.

"We weren't sure where to go or even what to do at first," says Sarp, "but we knew we had to find sounds that were different. We began knocking on the wood and tweaking the strings, in a way that people like Hauschka, and back in the beginning, John Cage had already been doing.

"But then, after time, these little ideas came out and we started thinking about how we could still 'play' the piano without necessarily sitting in front of it. So instead we looked at feeding notes through the computer, letting sounds generate themselves. And that's really where we began this journey of experimentation and exploration that now seems as though it will be continuous."

The first show they gave at university was a great success, giving them the courage to continue with their investigations instead of taking a more conventional approach.

"But truly," insists Sarp, "we had no ambitions to be commercially successful."

"We were given complete freedom at college," remembers Vogel. "We could access the grand pianos anytime, and were always encouraged to take our time, and take risks. We could even buy new equipment, as long as we could argue our case."

The first breakthrough they made was with live sampling techniques, and layering effects of programmed loops and delay.

"It really surprised us how great this relatively simple treatment sounded," says Vogel. "This development gave rise to the idea of not using any electronic instruments. All the sounds we made had to emanate directly from the piano."

"Yes!" exclaims Sarp, chipping in with his own memory of their early epiphany. "These restrictions meant that we had to find our own solutions to these challenges, instead of taking the easy options like introducing a drum machine."

Which brings us neatly to the beats. They wanted to include rhythmic elements not ordinarily associated with the piano. And so, determined not to use any kind of percussive instruments, they landed on the bright idea of directly beating the piano's strings.

"We didn't want to use bass or snare drums," says Sarp, "but discovered we could make a beat that sounds very much like a hi-hat by reaching inside and physically engaging with this very large instrument."

And so the treatments and preparations all developed from there with bespoke, hand-soldered string hammers, metal bows and complex wiring that looks not unlike giant squid-ink spaghetti.





"Some of the main mechanical elements remain constant," says Vogel. "But now we can use more powerful effects like distortion and bitcrushing, so the sound becomes denser. Maybe the biggest recent change is the introduction of the bows. They oscillate the strings without touching them by using an electromagnetic field."

All of this is writ large on new album, 'Open' and, as if to validate their mission to create this multiplicity of sound and pattern, it is all laid out before our very eyes in the Kesselhaus concert hall, once the boiler room of this vast brewhouse.

The performance was singled out for special Commissioned Work status at Pop-Kultur by festival director Christian Morin, who, along with his colleague Martin Hossbach, has driven the curation of the event since its inception two years ago.

He earmarked Grandbrothers after putting on a show with them at the city's Volksbühne (People's Theatre) venue last year, following the release of their much-lauded 2015 debut long-player, 'Dilation'. The Volksbühne show sold out, and it was there that Morin saw the potential for a Grandbrothers appearance to become, in his words, "more than just a performance".

Morin's background in theatre and drama is one of the driving factors behind Pop-Kultur's success and its growing reputation.

"Our aim was always to get away from the music festival 'norm' and incorporate more of the artist's vision into performances here," says Morin, an amiable, native Berliner. "When you work closely with artists of any discipline you realise there are so many ideas out there that are separate from their day-to-day obligations. Often it's a question of time, inclination or just experience, in order for them to bring these ideas to reality."

Which is where the commissioned work comes in. Each year the festival, supported by funding from both the capital and the EU, targets a select number of artists and provides an additional production budget that allows them to focus more specifically on maximising the performance aspect. The hope is then that the show will become as much about, as Morin puts it, "the art and the artist", thus creating something of a one-off spectacle for the festival.

For their commissioned piece, 'White Nights – A Theatre Of Light', Grandbrothers have been paired with Berlin's renowned audio-visual design agency Bureau Mario Lombardo to stunning effect.

The performance opens with real drama. Lombardo's use of blinding white light, dark shadows, tunnels of mist and extraordinary dry ice pyramids turns the show into a transportative, captivating experience.

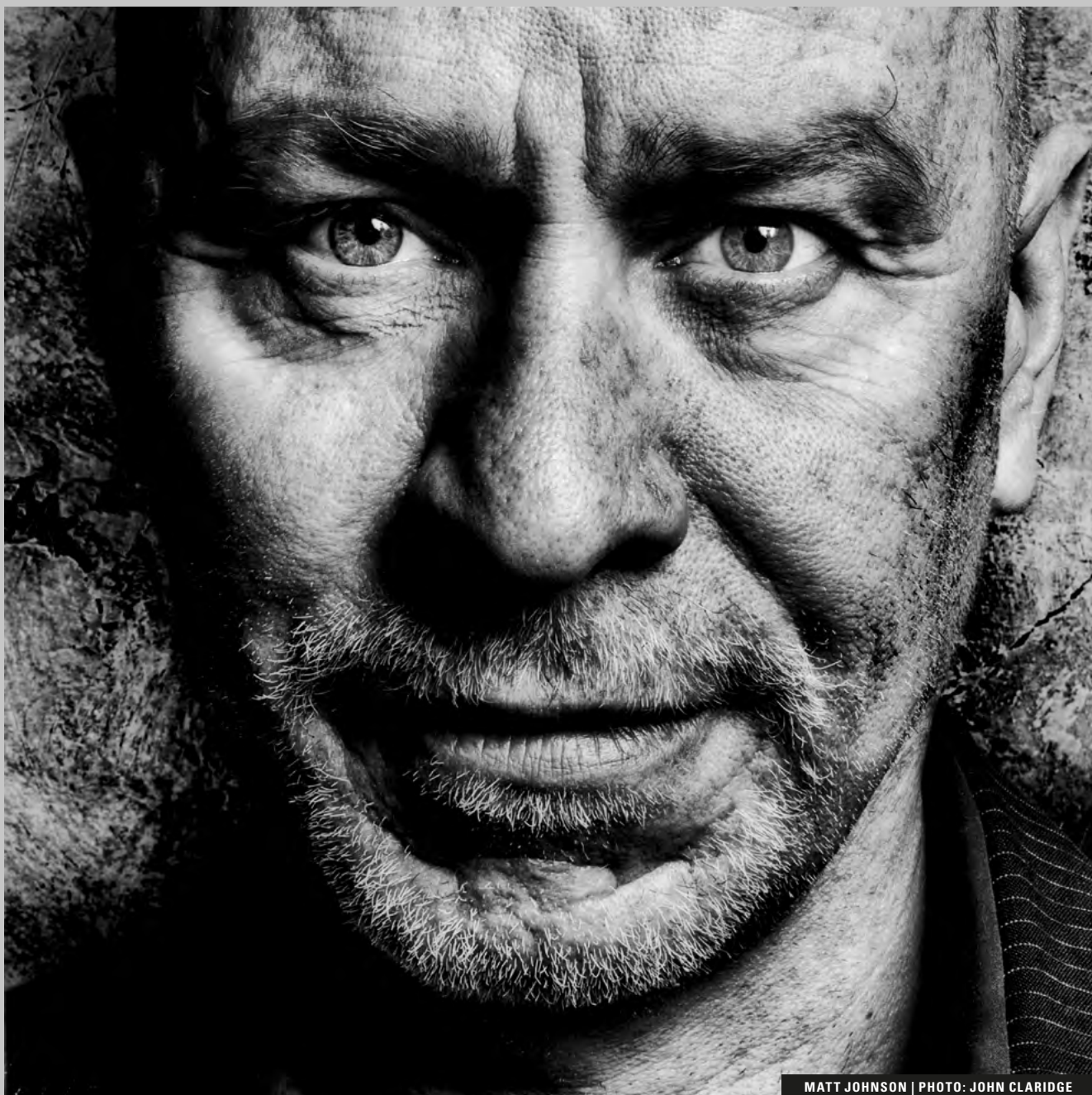
Sarp's grand piano strings, heavily treated after a long day of preparation, are initially plucked, beaten and hammered directly. It's hardly a work of gentle neo-classical exploration, which some here seem to be anticipating. But just as expectations are readjusted, the show becomes something else. Sarp gently caresses the ivories, playing with studied delicacy and delighting us with strings that sound dulcimer-like, while Vogel counters with basso profundo digital thrums. You barely see that coming.

The same goes for the hands-in-the-air house moment we are unexpectedly plunged into minutes later. Keyboards build and build and are looped and arpeggiated, filling the space with tangible euphoria.

In between numbers they offer a charming line in disarming humility, which only adds to the warmth and intimacy of their set. The audience, appreciative of the spectacle they've just witnessed, show their appreciation at the close with the lengthiest ovation of the whole festival. And rightly so.

'Open' is out now on City Slang. Grandbrothers play the Rich Mix, London, on 21 November

THE NIGHTFLY



MATT JOHNSON | PHOTO: JOHN CLARIDGE

THE THE

Radio Cineola: Trilogy
Cineola

It was the sleeve of 'The Nightfly', the 1982 debut solo album by Steely Dan's Donald Fagen, that made me buy it. It features Fagen as a late night jazz DJ, rolled-up shirt sleeves, loose tie, Chesterfield smouldering as he waxes lyrical into an old RCA mic. The time on the clock, 4.09am, Sonny Rollins on the turntable. On the back cover, there's a house at night with a solitary light on in an upstairs window, the sound of Sonny Rollins drifting in on the late night air no doubt.

Talk to almost anyone of a certain age and these are evocative images indeed. You'll hear stories about transistor radios under pillows, snagging sounds drifting in on the night air as the dial is slowly tuned... Radios Caroline, London or Luxembourg, Peel on Radio 1, pop from distant German stations passing in and out in the dead of the night, avant-garde Dutch stations jabbering away, French jazz, Donald Fagen.

Turns out The The's Matt Johnson has a thing about the wireless too. This three-disc collection, 'Radio Cineola: Trilogy', "a broadcast by The The", is his own radio station in a boxset. It's an idea he's been brewing for a while.

From his east London base, he's been serving up radio shows since 2010. There's a whole bunch online at thethe.com, a series of ongoing broadcasts, 15 minutes long, featuring music and chatter from Johnson and a raft of friends and collaborators.

This set starts with 'The End Of The Day – Cineola Volume 4'. Wondering where Volumes 1-3 got to? Well, they're all soundtrack albums. Volume 1, 'Tony', appeared in 2010 and is the score to the film of the same name directed by Gerard Johnson, his little brother. Volume 2 is 2012's 'Moonbug', the music from a film by Nichola Bruce that, along with photographer Steve Pyke, tracks down the surviving Apollo astronauts, while 'Volume 3' is the soundtrack to another Gerard film 'Hyena'. They all come as hardback CD books, which, along with this new set, build into quite the collection.

So anyway, 'Vol 4' reminded me of 'The Nightfly'. It's very much a moody, late night listening set, a collection of The The covers by friends old and new. Beyond Thomas Leer, Elysian Fields and maybe Gillian Glover (her dad, Roger, you may recall played bass in Rainbow and Deep Purple), you'd be hard pressed to recognise the guests, which is to Johnson's credit, I'm sure there's no shortage of "big names" wanting in. And unless you're a die-hard fan, you'll notice the songs they've re-imagined aren't exactly his greatest hits. That said, it does open with 'This Is The Day' by Thomas Feiner, which is a gorgeous, slow, stripped back gravelly version of the 'Soul Mining' cut.

The other two discs are where things really get interesting. 'The Inertia Variations – Cineola Volume 5' is where Radio Cineola spreads its wings with Johnson's soothing tones tackling John Tottenham's poem of the same name. Even if you don't know 'The Inertia Variations', you will almost instantly recognise the theme of procrastination and general time wasting. The opening lines are gloriously Matt Johnson. "You would think by now that people would know better/Than to ask me what I have been doing with my time". Funny, moving and thought-provoking, the poem is backed by a The The soundtrack, taken from a film based around the broadcast. The 85-minute documentary, also called 'The Inertia Variations', debuted at the Edinburgh Film Festival in June and sees Johnson examine his "troubled relationship with celebrity and the creative process".

Better still is 'Midnight To Midnight – Cineola Volume 6', which is a redux of a 12-hour broadcast Johnson made during the 2015 UK General Election. The marathon show had a loose theme of democracy and this abridged version features music and snippets of interviews conducted during the broadcast with activists, analysts, scholars, philosophers, journalists and broadcasters from all over the world. It's thoughtful, inventive, but most of all it's a real sonic treat, an ambient piece on its own that bears repeated listens.

Matt Johnson remains as enigmatic today as he was when you first clapped eyes on him as the 80s pop star. Discovering he's getting up to stuff like this is a treat. That we have people like him in our world, creating his own world, with little need for encouragement or endorsement, is the very real pleasure of this set.

That he's going large next year with the first The The live shows in 16 years is a typical Johnson curveball. He sold out the Royal Albert Hall, Brixton Academy and the Troxy in a blink. It will, no doubt, put him and The The firmly back in the limelight, which in turn will, no doubt, make him shift uncomfortably, but it will fill up the old bank account and please many old fans. Which version of The The you prefer is up to you. We know which one we like. And we like it a lot.

NEIL MASON



APARDE

APARDE

Glass
Ki

Created by Berlin's Paul Camillo Rachel (aka Aparde), glass becomes symbolic on this record, a concept album centred around the see-through substance. It also appears physically in the music, as Aparde samples the sounds made by the material and mixes them with other acoustic sources to invoke dense clouds of synth noise. On the title track, Aparde's vocals cut through the delicate two-step beat and sculpted IDM machine buzz, while 'Shiver' is a bristling techno piece. Gloomy but compelling. **BM**

VARIOUS ARTISTS

The Quietened Cosmologists
A Year In The Country

Another issue, another release from the ever excellent A Year In The Country label and their year-long themed series of compilations. This one, 'The Quietened Cosmologists' reflects on "space explorations that have been abandoned and/or were never realised". Again, they enlists some great guests, with Howlround's 'Night Call, Collect', Keith Seatman's '093A-Prospero' and Time Attendant's 'Adrift' among the doozies. But it's the intriguing Vic Mars, with the delicious Vangelis-a-like Yamaha CS-80 swoops and sweeps of 'X-3', who steals the show. **NM**

THE HACKER

Le Théâtre Des Opérations
Dark Entries

Michel Amato first caused a stir when, back in 1997, he teamed up with singer/producer Miss Kittin and dragged the retro futurism of electro back into the world of techno. Some 20 years on and he's returning to his purely analogue roots across eight tracks, one ('Time X') featuring his former musical partner, and all inhabiting that fertile territory between, say, Cabaret Voltaire and Jeff Mills. The simple but playful 'Dark Neon' is arguably best, but it's all pretty compulsive stuff. **BW**

PATRICK COWLEY

Afternooners
Dark Entries

After he spit-polished Sylvester's 'You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)' into a disco anthem, San Francisco synth twiddler Patrick Cowley embraced gay porn, an oscillator manhandling his compositions to match the on-screen, er, shots. This third collection of smut soundtracks, recorded between 1979 and 1982, comprises 12 tracks of pleasantly moist disco funk. It all seems too perky for poking someone with your pecker, but with bouncy analogue earworms like 'Surfside Sex', I'll take electronica over erotica any day. **FR**



SUN ROSE

SUN ROSE

The Essential Luxury
Last Night From Glasgow

Everyone has a book in them, but what about a song? If that song was 'Smirk' by the Glaswegian trio of Gus Wemyss, Calum Muir and Albert Kawmi, you'd be pretty pleased with yourself. It builds across the decades, a 70s 'I'm Not In Love' opening, 80s pop vocal and funky guitar chorus, 90s choppy rave piano... the 20 second outro alone, with euphoric horn section, is outrageously good. The rest? Reminds us of the downtempo beats of The Beloved, which is no bad thing. **SR**

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Visions Of Darkness
Cold Spring

A pretty mad compilation, 'Visions Of Darkness' collates the best of industrial, ambient and drone music from Iran. With dance music understandably struggling to thrive in a country that prohibits men and women dancing together, a flourishing experimental scene reflects the mood of the artists included here. Whether it's the surreal whine of Limen's 'Wherefore The Worm Universe' or the dark, chasmic groan of idft's 'DT', this is a treasure trove that really should be explored by all connoisseurs of electronic music. **FM**

BÈNNÍ

I & II
Goner

You've gotta love an album whose opening track fades up. Benny Divine, who calls New Orleans home, serves up a debut album from his alter ego, Bènní, who, apparently, needed new music to listen to while driving his spacecraft long distances. You can imagine what lies within. 'Ard'rain's Theme' is a kind of back alley 'Blade Runner' love theme, while the rasping arpeggios of 'Night Theme Reprise' is 'Knight Rider' with ABBA behind the wheel. Hugely enjoyable stuff. **SR**

BLAINE L REININGER

Night Air
Les Disques Du Crépuscule

Some electro noir from the ever reliable Les Disques? Oh yes please. Reininger, who hails from Colorado, made this with a bunch of pals in Brussels in 1983 shortly after he left the day job in Tuxedomoon. There's all sorts in here – eastern vibes, smoky saxophones, clattering bright drums and tiptoes keys. There's a Psychedelic Furs vibe about it, a splash of early Soft Cell maybe, a dash of big suit Bowie vocals. 'L'Entrée De L'Hierophante', with its hectic dancing violin is as mad as squirrels. Nice job. **NM**



TUSKS

TUSKS

Dissolve
One Little Indian

Tusks, otherwise known as London-based artist and songwriter Emily Underhill, gives us a debut album full of icy soundscapes and silky-soft vocals. 'Dissolve' gets its name from how Underhill was feeling during the making of the record, "the word really described what was going on in my life at the time," she says. It gets a little twee in places, but Underhill's voice is hard to resist, as on the raw, vocal-driven 'Ivy'. Definitely one to watch. **FM**

ROSS BLAKE

Pretty En Rose – Original
Soundtrack
Horse Arm

The striking leotard-sporting space-blonde on the sleeve is Parisian fashion diva Fifi Chachnil, whose story is told in underground auteur Angélique Bosio's documentary 'Pretty En Rose'. Blake's soundtrack presents an evocative blend of ethereal ripples that weave classic French pop tones into richly textured dreamscapes, enhanced by swooping vocal flocks from The Drink's Dearbhla Minogue and Lone Taxidermist's Natalie Sharp. Imagine Angelo Badalamenti recreating Kate Bush's 'The Dreaming' at a 1960s Parisian after-hours niterie. **KN**

AN GELLA

Perma
Anyines

Aske Zidore plays with the Danish band that gave us 'The Bridge' theme tune, but this is no Scandi crime miserablism. His debut as An Gella is like my brain, all broken and restless. Digital shards stumble over vocal punches, beatless rave meets fractal stutters and, on 'Ur Not Alone', there's even some Spanish guitar. Arca fans take note. There's also access to a "protected archive of brain scans" with every purchase. No, really there is. If it's my brain, I won't be surprised. **FR**

DANNY MULHERN

Reflections On A Dead Sea
1631

Recorded in collaboration with the London Contemporary Orchestra, 'Reflections On A Dead Sea' is the debut album from British composer Danny Mulhern. Cinematic in scope, the record is an "augmented, evolved and extended" version of a score he composed for a short film 'The Dead Sea'. Mulhern takes us on a sonic journey, weaving strings, samples and electronics into breathtaking atmosphere. 'In The Hands Of Strangers' is four minutes of pure neoclassical brilliance. There's certainly nothing dead here. **FM**



GREGG KOWALSKY



MATT BERRY



VISIONIST | PHOTO: DANIEL SANNWALD



JONTI | PHOTO: THEO JEMISON

GREGG KOWALSKY

L'Orange L'Orange
Mexican Smoke

Qualified synth boffin Gregg Kowalsky (he has the certificate from Oakland's Mills College electronic music program to prove it) wrote the all-analogue 'L'Orange L'Orange' in tribute to the sunny climes of his native Florida and his adopted home of California. This is music of the serenest ambient order, at least on the surface, yet the restless sonic interplay of pieces like 'Tuned To Monochrome' and 'Pattern Haze' are just as volatile as the Sun's violent brilliance. **MS**

MATT BERRY

Night Terrors
Acid Jazz

This clutch of remixes, outtakes and alternative versions from Berry's 2016 album 'The Small Hours' is a singular mix of mangled electronic folk and 1970s English prog. This is perhaps best understood via his cover of Pink Floyd's 'Any Colour You Like', which sounds like Jean-Michel Jarre jamming with Gilmour and gang after a dose of the brown acid. Both Saint Etienne and Clark remix the title track, the first a kitsch lounge affair, Clark's a monstrous limping beast of vintage synths from Melbourne's MESS collection. **MR**

VISIONIST

Value
Big Dada

London-based Louis Carnell lands up on the excellent Big Dada label for this, his second long-player. While the first, 2015's 'Safe', found the experimental composer realising his anxiety attacks in sound, here he explores strength and vulnerability. The 10 tracks are compact and to the point. Veering from the light, airy string stabs of 'Homme' to the sweet vocal meets sledgehammers of sharp synths on 'No Idols', it's not easy listening, but it does demand your attention. **NM**

JONTI

Tokorats
Stones Throw

Growing up in South Africa, living in New York and LA and settling near Sydney, it's fitting that the music Jonti makes is a composite. His third album is inspired by French fantasy illustrator, Moebius. It's a meld of Cornelius, Beck and The Avalanches, with a little more hip hop in the recipe. The title track mixes a chugging funk rhythm, West Coast harmonies and synth dreaminess. It sums up the mood of this psychedelic, sunny record. **BM**



FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

Welcome To The Pleasuredome
ZTT/BMG

No matter how many times this gets repackaged since its original release in 1984, it's hard to tire of what lies within. Part of BMG's 'Art Of The Album' reissue programme, this deluxe offering (on 180g vinyl, natch, or hardback CD book) is what an album should be. Back in the day, one look at the beastly orgy illustration on the original gatefold (animal tits, holes, tongues and cocks everywhere... sadly this is the "fig leaf" version) and a generation of kids would never the same again. And that was before they'd heard the music.

Flawed as it was, the ambition within was admirable. FGTH essentially had three good songs, the monster hits, 'Relax', 'Two Tribes' and 'The Power Of Love', which wasn't enough to fill an EP let alone a double album, but hey, why let that get in the way? The result, padded out with all sorts including cover versions of 'Born To Run', 'Do You Know The Way To San Jose' and 'Ferry Cross The Mersey' is a total hoot. The highlight, still, is the epic title track which filled the entire first side. Thrilling stuff. **NM**

SNAPPED ANKLES

Come Play The Trees
The Leaf Label

Mystique is an underrated virtue today; for Snapped Ankles it is what affords them their impenetrable, playful Residents-y anonymity. On their sublime debut 'Come Play The Trees' you hear the group proffering buzzing drones, the kind of ritualistic psychedelia that future pagans will whirl round sacrificial bonfires to. 'Jonny Guitar Calling Gosta Berlin' is like David Bowie jamming with Neu! with the nihilistic impenetrability, sinewy synth lines gleefully vying with clattering percussion, and a general sense of a group channeling dark impulses through psychic rifts known only to a select few.

Yet here you will also find a shrouded poignancy – 'I Want My Minutes Back' might sound like a blistering sonic putsch of a track, but it speaks volumes about our terrifying corporeal impermanence. Key track 'The Invisible Real That Hurts' feels like Mark E Smith fronting an MGMT that never was while singing about the ubiquity of IKEA furniture. **MS**

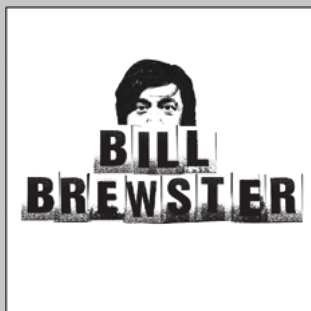
VARIOUS ARTISTS

Partials Vol 1
Frequency Domain

It's not often you encounter a label proudly using the word "head-wrecking" as part of its mission statement, but this description – or warning might be appropriate – is entirely apt in the case of this cassette-only 16-track collection of all new, undiluted ambient and unconventional techno tracks from London label Frequency Domain.

Psychedelic is the word, from the gently fried, oscillating acid of Trappist's untitled opening track, to the full on drone dimensions of Ali Wade's 'Imago', echoing the meditational glories of Spiritualized's 'Pure Phase Tones' experiments.

Also worthy of mention are 'Happiness' by Pelican Daughters, with its ghostly anti-rhythms and sonorous saxophone, the Weatherall-like delays and drum machine firepower of 'Skutsybno 0000' by Telpor Nexus and electrical torture chamber eeriness of Linnley's 'Simmer'. But it should really be heard in its entirety to fully appreciate, what is ultimately, the sound of artists let loose to create something new and unconcerned with fitting in elsewhere. **BW**



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Bill Brewster
Presents Tribal Rites
Eskimo

MAN ON A MISSION SETS THE TONE WITH THREE-DISC AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ROMP

For three decades Bill Brewster has been on dance music's frontline; spinning, releasing, co-writing definitive chronicles such as 'Last Night A DJ Saved My Life' or archiving it through DJhistory.com. This "autobiography of my musical life" consists of prized trophies from his obsessive record gathering habits that started some 40 years ago.

Some may be surprised to find the first disc is a riot of post-punk mayhem, funk-up dub and camp leftfield oddness. Starting with the psychedelic conscious-funk of Agape's 'Rejoice', then slamming into Brent Dowe's reggae version of Manu Dibango's 'Soul Makossa' and the Apatchi Band invoking Santana with 'Issmak',. There's also the indie-dub assimilations of General Strike, Ruts DC and The Raincoats, German disco, cosmic funk, Peter Accident's no wave junkie disco and Oz singer/cabaret performer Jeff Duff with a camp rendition of Lou Reed's 'Walk On The Wild Side'. Debora & The Puerto Ricans sound like Arthur Russell in Loose Joints mode, but is actually Deborah Evans-Stickland, the upper crust voice on Flying Lizards' 'Money'.

Bill plunders his "Balearic" box for second disc, although "yacht rock" seems more applicable after Bobbie Gentry slinks through 'Thunder In The Afternoon' and Nashville Rhythm Section banjo through Hall & Oates' 'I Can't Go For That'. The set's fun-packed roller coaster careers through mid-80s Italo-disco, kung fu panthers, shuddering electronic boogie and startling obscurities like Sweet Potato Pie's 'Hot Disco Night (Are You Ready?)', which is all skeletal funky drums and Latin MC in a stew of pharmaceuticals. Also coated in hallucinogenic disco drizzle, Dooley Silverspoon's 'Mr Deluxe' and Floyd Beck's magnificent 'Party Is The Solution' maintain the high until the closing German sleaze-out of Ströer's 'Don't Stay For Breakfast'.

The third and final disc is devoted to the house music that's been Bill's recent lifeblood. It's deep and groovy rather than big room, as names such as Brendan McCarthy, Charles Webster and Larry Heard are joined by bass-heavy Brit-house from Swag and Chicken Lips. The other-worldly shimmer of Maurizio's 'M-4 (A)' coming before the euphoric closing peak of Kate-Olivia Martinez' 'Fire Walk With Me' is a masterstroke.

All unashamed fun with no great message other than follow your own musical passions and make sure it packs a life-affirming wallop.

KRIS NEEDS



BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

THE DJING, BOOK-WRITING, CHEFING, GRIMSBY TOWN SUPPORTING BILL BREWSTER FACES UP TO THE QUICK FIRE QUESTION MACHINE

Hello Bill. Where to start in such a brief chat with you... what would be your opening gambit to yourself?

If you could only have Grimsby Town OR music, which would you choose? Unfortunately, I have no answer for this.

Can you describe what 'Tribal Rites' is in a sentence?

An alternative story of my life told through the medium of music.

For a man so immersed in music, we're surprised you managed to limit it to just three CDs! How tough was that?

The difficult thing is starting off with your dream tracklist, then gradually having it eroded because you can't find the license holders or the label has gone out of business or the artist doesn't want to license to you.

Your musical adventure got off to quite a start didn't it? The first record you bought was...

Ha ha. Well, it was Benny Hill's 'Ernie (The Fastest Milkman In The West)'. My taste did improve, though, at least a little bit.

What was the last record you bought?

Shintaro Sakamoto's 'Love If Possible' LP.

Says here that you're a Michelin-starred chef...

As a chef, you never personally have stars, you are only part of a team or "equipe". I was lucky enough to work in some really good places, including doing my training at the Berkeley Hotel in Knightsbridge, where Marcus Wareing is now head chef, and also in Switzerland, at Le Richemond in Geneva, both of which have Michelin stars.

We love your 1970s Saturday record shopping ritual that took in London's finest emporiums – Virgin, Rock On Records, Small Wonder, Rough Trade, and Beggars Banquet. Can you pick a favourite from that lot?

I have the most affection for Small Wonder, I think, because it was in a very unfashionable area, Walthamstow is still fairly unfashionable 40 years down the line. Small Wonder was also unusually friendly for a record store, unlike, say, Rock On, which was manned by a terrifying Shane MacGowan.

If you had to pick a shop today that has the spirit of the old places...

Although it's on a bigger scale, Rough Trade East carries the same attitude as those old record stores did, with enthusiasm and knowledgeable staff (but a namecheck for Love Vinyl and Phonica, too, both ace stores).

Strikes us there's a big difference between a record collector and a music fan. Which one are you? Can you be both?

I'm a music fan. I'm not interested in buying every release on Strictly Rhythm or everything by The Beatles. I'm interested in finding music that is new to me, which often means buying stuff by artists I've never heard of, like the Shintaro Sakamoto I mentioned earlier. I'd never heard of him before last week, but it was playing in the store when I walked in. I also own thousands of CDs, which I love. I prefer albums on CDs, although the shitty jewel case designs need sorting out.

Best of luck with the record. It's a proper voyage of discovery.

Thanks for having me. Up the Mariners!



BURIED TREASURE

UNEARTHING ELECTRONIC GOLD

VIC TWENTY

Electrostaticist
Lucky Pierre (2005)

I first came upon Vic Twenty when they supported Erasure at Leicester's De Montford Hall in 2003 and I was prepared to be disappointed. I'd seen some stinkers of support acts, and their billing as a synth duo, supporting a synth duo, and named after an early Commodore home computer, didn't exactly fill me with confidence.

Of course, I was wrong. The duo of Angela Penhaligon (Piney Gir) and Adrian Morris were brilliant, both had a lot of stage presence (rare for a synth duo!), and their short songs were utterly in thrall to the earliest synthpop, while also having a fun, worldly edge that hinted at politics, contemporary culture and the troubling issues of the day. They also used a Casio VL-Tone. I'd bought one of the pocket synths a few years earlier for £5, and a synth musician later encouraged me to sell it based on prevailing eBay price. I barely broke even when I actually sold it. Not bitter at all.

To coincide with this Erasure support slot, Mute founder Daniel Miller – who'd just sold his label to EMI – set up a new independent imprint under the awful moniker Credible Sexy Units to release Vic Twenty's 'Text Message' single. It would prove to be CSU's only release. Piney Gir left to pursue a solo career, and Adrian Morris set about recording a Vic Twenty album.

I got to know Adrian a little around this time and he told me that the working title for the album was 'Music For Adverts', then 'How Art Thou Rocker?', and finally 'Electrostaticist'. The album contained some songs familiar from the 2013 tour like the fizzy '8-Bit Hit' and also some new tracks, including the perfectly cynical single 'I Sold Your Heart On eBay'. Hopefully he made more than I did flogging my Casio.

'Electrostaticist' was exactly what I needed in 2005; the songs were wonderfully pop, almost exclusively electronic, and it deserved to be a success. Sadly, it wasn't, and it probably didn't help that Daniel Miller himself described it as "too 1981".

What I came to like about the album was that I didn't have to think about it too much, and this shouldn't be read as a criticism: I found it to be the perfect soundtrack for my daily commute to London in the wake of having been stuck underground during the 7/7 bombings, one unusual short-term consequence of which was that I was suddenly unable to focus on music.

A few years later, I asked Adrian if he would allow me to use one of the unreleased Vic Twenty tracks on a compilation I was assembling. It felt like a fitting way to give his frustratingly overlooked music some exposure, as well as offering me a small way of saying thanks for an album that helped me through a period of dread and anxiety.

MAT SMITH



EROL ALKAN
Reworks Volume 1
Phantasy

GENRE-BUSTING REMIX COLLECTION BLOWS THE DOORS OFF THE DANCE/INDIE HINGES

Is he the grooviest man in indie, or the most indie man in dance? It really doesn't matter of course, except that Erol Alkan, who you will know round these parts as one half of Beyond The Wizards Sleeve, has long occupied a unique position in the demilitarised zone between the two genres. Whether running club nights (he brought us London's legendary Trash night back in the 90s) to remixing anyone and everyone, to playing eclectic DJ sets, he manages to not so much straddle the divide, but make it seem utterly meaningless.

And that's completely what it feels like listening to this collection of his remixes from the past two decades. There's absolutely no shortage of the coolest names, from both the electronic and indie worlds, queuing up to get the Alkan treatment, from Metronomy to Hot Chip, and, er, Todd Rundgren. Well, why not?

If Alkan has a distinctive style, then it's probably most clearly illustrated on his re-fix of Justice's shit-kicking 'Waters Of Nazareth'. It's warm and fuzzy (there are moments when you feel you might be listening to an early Warp tune through a broken speaker) and powered along by raw, untreated drum machine or live drums.

Listening to Death From Above 1979's enthusiastically thrashy 'Romantic Rights', you see why he opts for the word 'Reworks' in this collection's title. These have the rough and ready vibe of the re-edit rather than the more traditional remix. The same goes for one of the album's stone-cold highlights, the addictive rebuilding of Franz Ferdinand's 'Do You Want To'. With a sideways nod to The Fall, Alkan's 'Glam Racket' version strips it down to its barest elements. Thrilling, impulsive and anarchic, all without suffering a single casualty on the dancefloor.

Not that Alkan is a one trick pony. Given the wonderfully rigid Daft Punk sound to play with, and he turns 'The Brainwasher' into a churning, polyrhythmic delight worthy of Plaid or Kirk Degiorgio, at times fusing the fidgety French disco sound with beautiful, soaring chords with their roots in Detroit techno.

All in all, this is an exhaustive but never exhausting representation of nearly 20 years spent reimagining the hippest grooves around. On this evidence, it was time very well spent.

BEN WILLMOTT



STEVE COBBY

STEVE COBBY

Hemidemisemiquaver
Déclassé

It's been over 25 years since we first heard the beats of Hull's Steve Cobby, the man of a gazillion aliases and even more releases. Perhaps best known for his collaborations, especially as Fila Brazillia with Dave McSherry, Cobby has more recently been serving up an abundance of solo releases, the latest of which is 'Hemidemisemiquaver' marking his umpteenth record to date.

Written and produced in the "Shedio" (his studio at the bottom of his garden), 'Hemidemisemiquaver' draws on Cobby's extensive experience and array of influences to deliver a buoyant and vivacious musical cruise. Whether it's the funk-laden grooves of 'Jenkem', the spaced-out, soothing twang of 'Fixing The Shadows' or the uptempo Balearic house beat of 'The Canyons Of Lower Manhattan', 'Hemidemisemiquaver' never puts a note wrong and shows that Cobby is still a master of his craft after all these years. **FM**

ERLAND DAHLEN

Clocks
Hubro

Before entering Oslo Klang studios, super-prolific Norwegian jazz-rock-experimental drummer Erland Dahlen (he's played on over 300 albums of all strains) assembled a sonic arsenal that saw Mellotron, drum machines, xylophone, drone boxes and various stringed instruments joining an exotic percussive smorgasbord, which included blossom bells, marbles and 1930's drum kit components.

With the kind of electronic microsurgery that's become a Hubro trademark, Erland set about constructing the six dreamy apparitions presented here. One of the album's deft strengths is the way he can unashamedly evoke Tangerine Dream on 'Bear', or even Peter Gabriel mood pieces on 'Ship' before wheeling off on subtly executed trajectories hatched from his own idiosyncratic visions. While 'Lizard', remixed by Hallvard W Hagen, sees pulsing clouds flow with earthly melodic pulses, it's often impressive how Dahlen can sculpt a weightless drift like 'Glas' or the chiming, rustling sirens call of 'Wood' largely from objects employed in making beats. **KN**

AB2088

TX0
Central Processing Unit

Chris Smith, the visionary behind rising Sheffield imprint CPU, was first inspired by another Steel City label: Warp. The same experimental dance spirit haunts the CPU mainframe, though Smith's focus is on electro, from frozen Kraftwerkian synthpop to abstract brain-dance and 808 drum machine workouts. Everything he puts out is good, and Andy Brown aka AB2088's new record (his second after 'Sagittarius' for the sub label Computer Club) is excellent.

Brown's version of electro is pristine and cold, possessed of the frosty bass melodies of Drexciya and sci-fi evocations of Model 500, but with an injection of new ideas too. 'RWORM' is motored by shattered stop-start beats, suggesting an appreciation for dubstep or R&B, yet the robotic riffs circle menacingly like sentinels. 'Voices' closes the record in electro-funk style, with crisp beats, frosty synth pads and a squelchy bass riff. If you're looking to delve into the electro revival, here's a good place to start. **BM**



HOLOGRAM TEEN

Between The Funk And The Fear
Polytechnic Youth

Hologram Teen is ex-Stereolab keyboardist Morgane Lhote and, like I Speak Machine's 'Zombies 1985', her debut solo outing 'Between The Funk And The Fear' is a love letter to the era of trashy Euro horror film music. This peculiar cartoon-spook soundtrack is 11 tracks which veer between poppy, fun synth bounce to whacked-out weirdness, often, as in 'Tracksuit Minotaur', in the same track. One second you're bopping to the skipping beat of the cheap and cheerful drum machine, the next you're hiding behind the sofa.

It's the same deal with the lavish 'God(d) Of Thunder Vs Sukia', a collaboration with old Stereolab touring pals Sukia (whose Ross Harris was a child actor in 'CHiPs' and 'Little House On The Prairie', trivia fans). The track titles are worth entry price alone, 'Roller Lover Doppelgänger' and 'Lesbian Death Drums' anyone? And excuse us while we polish our medals, but the album title was lifted from an Electronic Sound headline. **MR**

SUZANNE CIANI

Help, Help, The Globolinks!
Finders Keepers

Composed for the 1980 reworking of Gian Carlo Menotti's opera, the 'Help, Help, The Globolinks!' score, by Italian American electronic music pioneer Ciani, is immediately weird and playful, like a game of Connect Four with a poltergeist. Beeps and chirps seem to keep their own time, moving together and then falling apart, their own miniature dramas resolving and dissolving into the next movement. Removed here from that original operatic context, the synthetic squirts and spirals are redolent of microscopic lifeforms, dividing and reproducing under the false colour of an electron microscope.

Often overlooked, Ciani's reputation in electronic music has rightfully grown in recent times – due in part to the work of Finders Keepers who have released her work with the enthusiasm and devotion of genuine fans. Her style has a unique balance and lightness of touch not easily found in similar artists and, for those unfamiliar with her work, these two pieces of almost 10 minutes each are an excellent place to begin. **ST**

REGINALD OMAS MAMODE IV

Children Of Nu
Five Easy Pieces

From his name you'd be forgiven for thinking south London left field funk cadet Reginald Omas Mamode IV was a full paid up, monocle-sporting member of the aristocracy. The reality is much more interesting, although if he carries on making music as individual and waywardly unconventional as this, we'd wager he'll be joining the ranks of electronic music royalty pretty soon.

For the uninitiated, his speciality is short but extremely catchy songs (20 of them in all on 'Children Of Nu') that take the stoned funk vibe of Sly & The Family Stone and their ilk and relocates it in a world of lo-fi, bedroom production adventures. Tracks like 'Do Right' and 'Poor Man' have a positive lyrical message, delivered in impeccably rich vocal tones and coated in dislocated, Afro-tinged rhythms. It's kind of crazy, but there's always some solid gold pop magic lurking somewhere beneath the layers of scratchy samples and jangling percussion. **BW**



COUPLER

COUPLER

Gifts From The Ebb Tide
YK

Quite the done thing isn't it, to have one of those side projects. They're all at it and some of them are even pretty good; like Gorillaz, or Blancmange man Neil Arthur's Fader. Plenty fall by the wayside too of course. Anyone remember former Arctic Monkey Andy Nicholson's Mongrel?

So here's Lambchop's Ryan Norris with a offshoot that includes crack percussion and treatment explorers Rodrigo Avendaño and Rollum Haas. And if you're less inclined to soulful alt-country impressionism than you are to pulsating electronic abstraction, then meet Coupler.

Atmosphere-laden, lush and addictively escapist, here is an album that blazes with the deft, esoteric inclinations of these tour-and-studio-hardened pros. The Korg, Mellotron and treated celestial vocals of mesmeric opener 'Dreams Of Strange Continents' sets its sights on some utopian crystal peak, and the rest, including the exhilaratingly epic 20-minute closer 'Silenzio', is faultless. Electronic experimentalism at its very finest. **CG**

SPACESHIP

Fields 2: From The Sea To The Moor
Via The Forest And The Stones
Forged River

Recorded entirely on location, 'Fields 2' follows last year's 'Fields: Churches & Rivers' and finds Spaceship's Mark Williamson and his portable field recording set-up (an iPad, speaker and alto recorder, all captured on a Zoom H4n) travelling to Co. Wexford, Kent, East Mersea, West Yorkshire and, naturally, a home gig at favourite haunt, Epping Forest.

The whole thing, a peaceful, shimmering ambient drone prickled with bird song, distant chatter and the occasional aeroplane, is the gift that keeps on giving. Each track tells a story, which starts with the nine numbered images that accompany the CD so you can see where each was captured. Track five, 'Sarah Wrench Was Not A Witch', recorded at the grave of the 15-year-old who died in 1848, is as haunting as Sarah's story. Buried in St Edmund King & Martyr Church, East Mersea, her grave is, unusually, covered with a mortsafe, a cage used in Scotland to prevent grave robbers. You can see where that tale is going. All this and more on just one CD. Who knew? **SR**

ZAZOU/BIKAYE/CY1

Noir Et Blanc
Crammed Discs

Dubbed by Melody Maker on its 1983 release as among the most innovative albums of that year, this long-unavailable cult beauty gets the expanded remaster treatment here, and will delight the Afro electronica-philis.

Congolese musician/vocalist Bony Bikaye recorded this staggering slab of thrills with experimental electronicists CY1 and Hector Zazou, with Vincent Kenis behind the mixing desk, who'd later go on to create and produce the brilliant Congotronics series.

So whether you're into the vintage funk-psych of William Onyeabor or indeed the more contemporary electro-tribal grooves of the likes of Congotronics, then you'll definitely find this a milestone gem to treasure. Tracks like 'Mangungu' marry Congolese rhythms with cutting edge French experimentation in a way that still startles, and is typical of those free-thinking pre-house days; its woozy lysergic rhythms taking their hypnotic time. In real contrast, the coldwave sangfroid of 'Lamuka' is much harder hitting and would fill any dancefloor anywhere, anytime. **CG**



SCANNER

The Great Crater
Glacial Movements

Like many others I'd suspect, I'm still haunted by the surveillance recordings of Scanner's earliest work – the intimate police-scanned phone chats fretting about anorexia, drugs and sheep castration. Here, 25 years later, this album for the ambient arctic label Glacial Movements feels like Scanner has taken his mics and shoved them into the bowels of the Earth itself.

The great crater Robin Rimbaud evokes is a colossal ice well discovered by scientists in Antarctica last year. This is plate-shifting ambient music that shudders and rumbles, and you can feel the cracks of the ice sheets. A highlight is the piercing suspended strings of 'Lakes Under Lakes', and the rumbling epic 'Exposure, Collapse' which sets out Rimbaud's vision clearer than any track here – to intimately surveil the very core of a dying Earth. The tragedy of climate disintegration gives this album potency, and it deserves a listen without distraction. Less sheep castration, but perhaps more heart. **FR**

BIBIO

Phantom Brickworks
Warp

With 'Phantom Brickworks', Wolverhampton's Stephen Wilkinson, working as Bibio, pushes ever closer to a perfect rural hauntology. Where some of his Warp labelmates might err towards an underlying sense of melliflence, these nine mainly improvised tracks are bound in heavy autumnal sunlight. Melodies rise through babbling streams and continue upwards, past falling leaves before they disappear among the branches.

They are then much closer in feel to the work of Epic45 or Eluvium; rather than using nostalgia as a sinister undertone, Wilkinson uses it as a warmth, a bittersweet journey over disappearing landscapes. The tracks 'Capel Ceyln' and 'Branch Line' seem to refer directly to this sense of loss – the former being a Welsh community flooded for English drinking water. While his peers often focus on change from the inside looking out, Bibio takes us into the landscape as he evokes a time where all this was just fields. **ST**

TWINS NATALIA

The Destiny Room
Lavender Sweep

'The Destiny Room' was originally released in 2014, but it could just as easily have been released 30 years ago given how reminiscent it is of early 80s synthpop in its presentation. Even the name, with its nod to the Thompson Twins, feels like a familiar joke given that neither of the two female singers here are called Natalia. With the two girl/one boy vocal line-up, there's an inevitable comparison to be drawn with The Human League, and the urgent 'I Avoid Strangers' sounds like it should have been on The League's overlooked 2001 'Secrets' album.

Receiving a reissue to mark last month's Cassette Store Day, a mere 62 lucky owners get the chance to hear beyond the familiarity of the concept here. Those select few will get to appreciate what is mostly a thoroughly unknown, period-authentic contemporary electronic pop album, full of appealing melancholia, analogue synth warmth and nice three-way vocal harmonies. **MS**



IN THE NURSERY

1961
ITN Corporation

STEEL CITY TWINS SERVE UP SOUNDTRACK TO THE BEGINNING OF THEIR LIVES, LITERALLY

Just so you know, 1961 is a strobogrammatic number (it reads the same when rotated through 180 degrees). It's also the birth year of the multi-instrumentalist Humberstone twins Nigel and Klive, aka In The Nursery.

The pair have been a significant part of the Sheffield scene for decades. Since the early 90s, their dramatic compositions, often orchestral but incorporating much in the way of electronic treatment and rock interventions in the modern neo-classical sense, have appeared on some famously great films and TV shows such as 'Interview With A Vampire' and 'Game Of Thrones', while they've also composed some impressively heavyweight re-scores for classic silent movies like 'The Fall Of The House Of Usher' and 'The Cabinet Of Doctor Caligari'.

Why they've chosen to commemorate their birth year 56 years on is anyone's guess, but we'll let it go because the quality of the music, and thematic story that pulls it all together, makes it a mostly – barring the overblown, goth-edged 'Grand Corridor' – excusable indulgence.

It all resonates throughout with deep personal, historic and literary meaning; an audiological memoir almost, but centred on that one specific year. And so from the engine hum of a 1961 Ford Consul (which, fact fans, when idling resonates at the frequency of 65 Hz – the note of C) that adds a deep bass drone to the funereal 'Consul', to the arrestingly powerful sample of Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin's voice on 'The Earth Was Blue', such weighty reference points add heft and poignancy to ITN's signature grandiose sonic vistas.

As ever with ITN, it's the guest contributors that make the difference. The most noteworthy appearance here is a string quartet courtesy of the Up North Session Orchestra. Their contribution to 'Torschlusspanik' (a Germany expression, meaning time is running out) makes for a standout. It's a darkly thrilling depiction of the construction of the Berlin Wall and all that signified (and continues to mean for those that lived in its shadow of course), and conjures up its own filmic Cold War mind's eye feature.

And if you think all of that sounds ambitious, you'd be right. But those twins, they don't half pull it off.

CARL GRIFFIN



WORRIED ABOUTSATAN

Blank Tape

STEFAN BACHMEIER

Anomaly On
Meadow Lane
Spun Out Of Control

CASSETTE LABEL SETS HIGH STANDARDS WITH DOUBLE BILL OF SYNTHY GOODNESS

There's never a dull moment with cassette specialist label Spun Out Of Control. They've blessed us with analogue synth maestro Maine, soundtrack guru Wojciech Golczewski and the creeping electronic mastery of Correlations. And now they've got a brace of equally dazzling releases, enter worriedaboutsatan and Stefan Bachmeier.

Bradford-based duo worriedaboutsatan have been making music since 2006. Starting out as a project from their Yorkshire bedrooms, they've gone on to share stages with the likes of Underworld, 65daysofstatic and HEALTH, as well as providing music for filmmaker Adam Curtis' documentary 'HyperNormalisation' alongside Brian Eno, Nine Inch Nails and Burial. Not a bad resumé.

First released last November, this cassette version of 'Blank Tape' features an additional mix and is an album full of billowing electronic atmospherics and echoing club-driven beats. worriedaboutsatan have blended their own brand of electronica here, best represented in tracks like 'Forward Into Night', whose dark swirling ambience builds into rhythmic, percussive electronics. Then there's 'From A Dead Man (Part II)', where minimalist stylings transform into uptempo danceable tune.

And so to shadowy German author and synth composer Stefan Bachmeier, whose whereabouts are currently unknown and who may or may not have anything to do with electronic musician Polypores' Stephen Buckley. "Painstakingly restored and remastered" from old tapes, 'Anomaly On Meadow Lane' harks back to the science fiction soundtracks of the 1980s, heavily Tangerine Dream-inspired and utterly gorgeous. 'Boltzmann Brain' is all bleeps overlaid on growling synths, 'Phosphorescence' shimmers against squealing, fuzzing electronics and the title track is a haunting jaunt through a cacophony of alien analogue synthesis.

Looks like Spun Out Of Control can add two stellar releases to their already spectacular line-up of cassette-based offerings. Be it something soundtrack-inspired, 80s-inflected or more contemporary stylings, anyone interested in high quality, synth-driven electronic music is doing themselves an injustice if they've not given this label a look yet. Let 'Blank Tape' or 'Anomaly On Meadow Lane' be your gateway, but let it be known that we take no responsibility for how far down the analogue rabbit hole you go.

FINLAY MILLIGAN



CALL SUPER | PHOTO: GEORGE NEBIERIDZE

CALL SUPER

Arpo
Houndstooth

Imagine 808 State staggering out of a club at four in the morning, crusted eyes straining at the streetlights. In a rainforest. Welcome to 'Arpo'. As with his 2014 debut 'Suzi Ecto', Berlin-based Joe Seaton yet again steps away from the dancefloor, which was very much evident on EPs like 'Migrant'. Paddy bass drums and camera click snares punctuate digital chimes and chirrups. Despite the head-nodder earthiness of 'Korals', we're floating among the trees here. Post-club, but not as we know it. **FR**

NSRD

The Workshop For The
Restoration Of Unfelt Feelings
Stroom

NSRD stands for Nebijušu Sajūtu Restaurēšanas Darbnīca or The Workshop For The Restoration Of Unfelt Feelings. Formed in Riga, Latvia, in 1982, this art collective created music by whatever means available – which was largely DIY and an embracing of the "outsider" aesthetic. Here are 12 pieces cherry-picked from various albums released before their demise in 1989. It is a thing of astonishing brilliance, ranging in tone from garden shed Vangelis ('Decembra Sesija Part 2') to an Eastern European Suicide ('Pļava'). **ST**

BRZZVLL

Waiho
Sdban Ultra

Belgian seven-piece BRZZVLL (pronounced Brazzaville) operate at the funkier end of jazz, developing accessible pieces with a smooth sheen and taut rhythm section. The title track of this, their seventh album, recollects Talking Heads circa 'Remain In Light', complete with unpredictable dubby electronic interventions and heavily clipped guitar lines. Then there's the squelchy synth hook of the unfortunately-named 'Whizzly Whop', which could have been co-opted from Herbie Hancock in the 1980s. All in all, an album of genuinely memorable riffs on jazz's essential spirit. **MS**

OFF WORLD

2
Constellation

Toronto's Sandro Perri has an interesting line when it comes to explaining his excursions as Off World. It is, he says, "alien electronics played humanly". Yup. 'Scrubdown' has a Weatherall/Walsh quality to it, a solid backing track chugs away over all manner of theremin-type shimmers, wobbles, cracks and pops. While some of the tracks, 'Memory Drip' for example, sound like an attempt to communicate with other worlds, when the melodies and beats align, like on 'The Mask', this is a warm, rich funk of a record. **SR**



THE BELBURY CIRCLE
Outward Journeys
Ghost Box

FUTURE-FACING RETROIST MORE THAN GET BY WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS

From the Ghost Box myth factory comes the second release from The Belbury Circle, another featuring John Foxx, whose own electronic psychedelic tendencies mesh rather neatly with the Ghost Box world of wonky Brit dystopadelia. It's a world rooted in childhood days off school in the 1970s, dosed up on medicines, vaguely hallucinating through BBC's daytime TV for schools with their abstract Radiophonic theme tunes.

There are two Foxx collaborations here, 'Forgotten Town', an anxious, twitchy four minutes of swirling synthetic strings punctured by the jumpy synths which showcases a classic Ultravox-style synth solo as it plays out. The other is 'Trees', a spacious and melancholy interlude that seems to be a rumination on perception, or lack of it. They both bear Foxx's unmistakable stamp, elegiac electronic torch songs that act as steadying walls to lean against when the rest of the album's psychic engineering makes you a little dizzy.

Guilty parties here are 'Cloudburst Five', its carefully chosen sounds feeling like they have been unearthed in some kind of sonic archeological process, scraped out of a long-forgotten TV theme. Similarly, the upbeat 'Transports', takes the squelching synth and propulsive drive of library music churned out with synths in the late 1970s and polishes it, making a virtue of what was once its terminal unlistenable naughtiness, while 'Light Industry' uses Vangelis/'Blade Runner' fanfares to communicate its imagined corporate mission.

Ghost Box is famously the home of hauntology, a genre named by the writer Simon Reynolds. It's all about the idea of the past haunting the present. It is, perhaps a peculiarly British experience that has the fug of a charity shop about it, where you inhale the lives of the owners of the endless boxes of weird vinyl albums, forgetting that, one day, your gear is more than likely going to end up here too.

Listening to 'Outward Journeys' is like living in the world as created on the cover of the first Black Sabbath album, in a dislocated state of 1970s medieval credulity. Perhaps, then, the soundtrack to post-Brexit Britain.

MARK ROLAND

LABEL PROFILE

THE INDIE IMPRINTS CATCHING OUR EARS



LABEL: Hubro
LOCATION: Haugesund, Norway
EST: 2009

POTTED HISTORY: Back in 2009, while working as a label manager for Grappa Musikkforlag, one of the Norway's biggest independent record companies, Hubro founder Andreas Meland had a pang. "It was a great job," he says, "but I was longing for the days when I ran a bedroom label in the 90s, releasing strange electronic, rock and improvised music." Andreas had been discussing with his boss the need a sub label for jazz and improvised music. He said yes and that was the start of Hubro. "Looking back it's pretty clear that I misled my boss since Hubro has at no point been a jazz label," he laughs. "But it often releases albums that are quite unclassifiable and certainly operates between genres."

MISSION STATEMENT: "It all starts with the scene I guess," explains Andreas. "There is just so much creative music coming out of Norway. My aim has been to help musicians reach a broader audience. The more selfish motivation is that I simply felt the urge to work more directly with artists again and to be involved in the whole process from before the artists goes into the studio until the album is released."

KEY ARTISTS & RELEASES

You'll have seen many of Hubro's releases reviewed on these very pages, the likes of Building Instrument, Møster!, Geir Sundstøl, Erik Honoré, Mats Eilertsen, Jessica Sligter, Nils Økland and the trio 1982 have all graced the imprint. "I don't dislike singers or lyrics, but I clearly have a thing for instrumental music," smiles Andreas. "I think the piano trio Splashgirl's album 'Pressure' in 2011 helped attract attention both from listeners and press in Europe. Seeing the idiosyncratic 12-piece band Skadedyr perform at the main stage Norway's biggest rock festival Øya in Oslo this summer also felt like a benchmark for the label."

FUTURE PLANS

"The plan is to keep reaching out for all the big ears that could like the music we release," offers Andreas. "It feels like the label has had a slow but steady development since day one, and I want that to continue as long as possible. My A&R policy is very simple: I want to release unique and interesting music. And the people behind the music have to be nice people that I want to collaborate with. We have to like each other."

ANY OTHER BUSINESS?

"There are artists that I work with who still believe I live in Oslo, more than seven years after I moved. I actually live in the small town of Haugesund on the west coast. Do I have any advice about running a label? You should do it the way you feel it should be done, not the way anyone else is telling you how it should be done."

For more visit hubromusic.com

FIRST AND LAST AND ALWAYS



TRAILBLAZING DRUM 'N' BASS MAESTRO **RONI SIZE** PICKS OUT THE FIRST AND LAST RECORD HE BOUGHT AND THE ONE HE ALWAYS TURNS TO IN EMERGENCIES...

FIRST

KURTIS BLOW

The Breaks
Mercury (1980)

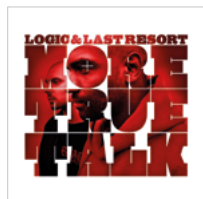


I was 11, and I remember having £3 and I went straight to Virgin Records with one thing on my mind. I can still remember the smell of the shop to this day. This was one of the first sample-free hip hop records ever made. Kurtis was one of the first rap artists to sign to a major record deal and I, funnily enough, was one of the first drum 'n' bass artists to sign to a major label 16 years later.

LAST

LOGIC & LAST RESORT

More True Talk
Overstand (2013)



The last record I bought was very recent. I was driving around Bristol one evening, listening to Charlie Sloth doing his BBC show and I heard him playing this, by Logic & Last Resort. It's always good to hear UK hip hop done so well, because there's really not enough of it around these days.

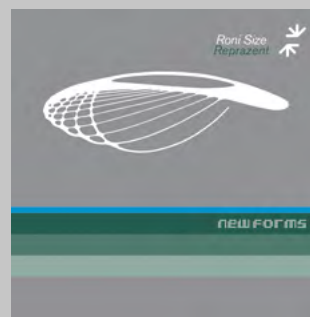
ALWAYS

NERD

In Search Of...
Virgin (2001)



There are many unsung heroes in music and in the case of NERD, featuring Pharrell Williams, Chad Hugo and Shay Haley there is one member who makes it complete. The unsung hero is Chad Hugo. This is the record I wish I made. The chords and progression represent a vibe I can feel and listen to when searching for inspiration. I'm looking forward to finding another record like this one day.



RONI SIZE /REPRAZENT

New Forms

Mercury/Universal

SPECIAL EDITION MARKS 20 YEARS SINCE BRISTOL COLLECTIVE SHOOK UP DANCEFLOOR

With drum 'n' bass at the height of its popularity, 'New Forms' won the 1997 Mercury Music Prize and made its creator Roni Size a household name. With his collective Reprazent, Size went on to play massive festival stages across the land (and beyond) before drum 'n' bass took a nosedive. No longer flavour of the month, it retreated to the underground, but 'New Forms' remains one of the few drum 'n' bass long-players to make an impact on the mainstream. It's intriguing to think how much more highly this record would be rated today if it wasn't for drum 'n' bass' fall from grace.

To mark its 20th anniversary, 'New Forms' has been reissued in a bumper four-disc package, and beyond the added value of additional remixes and live versions, the most striking thing is how beautifully it has aged.

From his earliest releases, tracks such as 'Music Box' with DJ Die or 'It's A Jazz Thing', Roni Size brought something fresh to the genre. Merging the twin influences of dub reggae sound systems and hip hop culture he'd heard growing up in Bristol, his take was that of the expert sample hunter. He spliced together breakbeats from forgotten rock and funk records, and added a spacey spiritual jazz component with drifts Rhodes keys, echoing double bass, and pummelling sub bass. It's an idea that he refined on 'New Forms', with an expanded range of influences and new collaborators.

'Railing' is a hell of an opener, with Dynamite MC nimbly navigating a luminous, low-end splurge and rapid-fire drum hits. On the ubiquitous 'Brown Paper Bag', Roni incorporates a fluid upright bass and jazz guitar, but as with all his material, it's built for the dancefloor, with stepping breaks and sinuous rhythms eliminating the thought this could ever be "coffee table music".

The title track itself is perhaps the best fusion of US rap (courtesy of the subtle Bahamadia) and UK bass culture, while 'Destination' nabs a horn snippet from Everything But The Girl's 'Each And Everyone', and flips it into a sun-kissed low-rider beat. Every track contains wonders. 'New Forms', now more than ever, is an electronic classic.

BEN MURPHY



MAUNO

MAUNO

Tuning
Tin Angel

On the face of it, Nova Scotia four-piece Mauno are your standard issue guitar outfit, and yet underneath beats a pure experimental heart. Last year's debut 'Rough Master' LP had us curious, but this sophomore outing is a belter. There's something very pleasing about their clean, bright sound and the way they tinker with it. Maybe it's that live, electrical hum of the room throughout, or the flurry of found sounds and outtakes scattered around, the instant thrill of the motorik 'Com' or the chiming church bell peels of 'PS'. If you buy one record by a guitar band this year, make it this. **NM**

ERIK HONORÉ

Unrest
Hubro

Oslo-based Erik co-organises Norway's Punkt Festival, where live remix shows attract the likes of Eno and Laurie Anderson to its gatherings. He follows 2014's 'Heliographs' album with an astonishing refinement of the collages he produces by embroidering Punkt-derived live samples with shadowy synths and contributions from fellow improvisers such as trumpeter Arve Henriksen, guitarist Eivind Aarset and, particularly here, singer Sidsel Endresen. Microtonal frozen warnings such as the haunting 'Abandoned Home' sound unlike anything else around today. **KN**

CHET DOXAS

Rich In Symbols
Ropeadope

New York saxophonist Chet Doxas wanted 'Rich In Symbols' to evoke the spirit of Manhattan's Lower East Side cultural melting pot during the punk years, with compositions that bravely cross the rock/jazz frontier. Doxas and Liam O'Neil lay down bold synth strokes on tracks like 'Starcrossings' and 'We Made A Lie Together' that give these pieces a resonant poignancy, with opener 'While You Were Sleeping' sounding like Interpol covering Joy Division with krautrock flourishes. **MS**

ANDREW HEATH

Soundings
Disco Gecko

Andrew Heath has an impressive ambient music CV. Since 1995 he's put out albums as Aqueous (with Felix Jay), collaborated with Cluster's Hans Joachim-Roedelius and released five solo records (including 'Found . Assemble' in 2017). 'Soundings' is a further exploration of his core concerns: enveloping atmospheres, found sounds, and fragile melody. The nostalgic 'Days In-Between' pairs a plangent bell with piano notes and distant voices, while 'Happenstance' creates magic with guitar lines and synth washes. Eno fans will go ape. **BM**



GOLDEN TEACHER

Imagine !!!'s Nic Offer impersonating Simple Minds' Jim Kerr circa 'New Gold Dream' over a nagging disco-house-acid groove. Only then do you get close to the intense hedonistic qualities of 'Spiratron', one of the choice cuts from the debut album by this Glaswegian collective. Politics, post-punk, punk-funk, dub, electro, odes to shuttered nightspots, prowling Grace Jones-isms – they're all here on this bold, head-turning gem of an album, one that's best consumed in a converted Manhattan factory circa 1987. **MS**

SNOW PALMS

Conceived as an outlet for creating music with mallet instruments, *Snow Palms* is the project of Londoner and multi-instrumentalist David Sheppard. Debuting in 2012 with 'Intervals', this follow-up builds on its predecessor using all manner of glockenspiels, marimbas and metallophones. It's a polyrhythmic, avant-garde delight, all twinkling percussion with a dream-like ambience. Sounds interesting? You should make the slow-build melancholy of 'Everything That Happened' your first port of call. **FM**

PENNY RIMBAUD

To mark the centenary of The Great War, and counter any jingoistic claptrap that might come our way as 2018 approaches, here's a show-stopping reading of war poet Wilfred Owen's devastating commentary on man's inhumanity to man. The gravelled tones of Crass co-founder and anarcho-pacifist agitator Rimbaud feel perfect here, as does the intensity of the accompanying music; a raw avant-jazz treatise delivered by cellist Kate Short and pianist Liam Noble. Beautiful. **CG**

MARTYN HEYNE

This is a suite of atmospheric minimalist pieces using guitar and piano. The opener 'Carry', in the tradition of Robert Fripp's Frippertronics, processes the guitar with carefully attenuated delays and filtering, producing new textures and cross-rhythms. With the piano-led pieces ('Luxury', '2400') the sound of the keys being pressed and the mechanics of the hammers provide a kind of grammatical counterpoint to the melody. It's all very still, occasionally recalling the drifting heights scaled by post-rock pioneers Labradford. **MR**



GÖKÇEN KAYNATAN

GÖKÇEN KAYNATAN

Gökçen Kaynatan
Finders Keepers

The name Gökçen Kaynatan is relatively unknown; a builder of stringed instruments and in-house composer for Turkish television, this release comprises of his early (and massively influential) electronic pieces. Dating from as early as 1968, tracks such as 'Sihirbaz' and 'Clearway' are Anatolian in feel, but also unmistakably Kaynatan. Lo-fi Bontempi beats bind with rubber band guitar riffs – imagine the proto-chiptune soundtrack to a documentary about the Ottoman empire, and you won't be far off. **ST**

NECRO DEATHMORT

Overland
Profound Lore

Anyone who heard the gobsmacking aural assault of last year's 'The Capsule' will be bracing themselves as the smooth warm chords of opener 'Poliz' ripple and coo. You're expecting the whole thing to go off like fox in a hen house, but the London-based duo of AJ Cookson and Matthew Rozeik have other ideas. This is a rich noir brew, which really takes off with the insistent, swollen sweeps of '80,000' and doesn't touch down from thereon in. Like they say, this beat is Necrotronic. Really excellent stuff. **NM**

SIINAI

Sykli
Svart

Finnish outfit Siinai return from a hiatus to deliver a concept album (their third full-length to date) based around the cyclical nature of life. Their strength lies in the friction between live and programmed textures across the five expansive tracks here, often neatly interwoven so the joins are barely perceptible. Steve Reich-esque keyboards frolic with metronomic live guitar playing on the title track, but probably the liveliest offering is the slowly evolving krautrock workout 'Ananda'. **BW**

JABU

Sleep Heavy
Blackest Ever Black

Born out of Bristol's Young Echo collective, Jabu are a trio consisting of vocalists and lyricists Alex Rendall and Jasmine Butt and producer Amos Childs. Their debut LP 'Sleep Heavy' is 11 tracks of brooding electronics and soulful, downtempo R&B. Think The xx but less pop and with an edge of James Blake. 'Wounds' has a haunting ambience about it, while 'Get To You' harmonises Rendall and Butt over crackly, echoing electronics. A strong debut that puts the three of them on the right track. **FM**



MATIAS AGUAYO & THE DESDEMONAS | PHOTO: MARCEL OSETTON

MATIAS AGUAYO & THE DESDEMONAS

Sofarnopolis
Crammed Discs

Chilean-born Berlin-based techno bod, Aguayo has discovered a new way of working that summons the spirit of post-punk with a delicious On-U vibe for good measure. Deep, buried grooves weave their way through his imagined city of Sofarnopolis, where life is rosy, bands are super cool and venues are packed. You can imagine tracks like the infectious, tribal dub of 'Boogie Drums' lifting the lid at The Rabbit Hole. The amazing 'Nervous', a swirling snake charmer of tune, is woefully short at just eight minutes long. **SR**

FUTURE BEAT ALLIANCE

Collected Works 1996-2017
FBA

After three years working on the latest UNKLE album, Matthew Puffett re-establishes his Future Beat Alliance moniker with a retrospective including one new track, the light but lively shuffling techno exercise 'Chemical Cloud'. His alias is borrowed from an Afrika Bambaataa record sleeve, and although tracks like the throbbing 'Almost Human' and 'Dark Passenger' are definitely more techno than electro, the off-kilter rhythms from his first musical love are always on hand to keep interest levels high. **BW**

BARRY ADAMSON + PAN SONIC + THE HAFLER TRIO

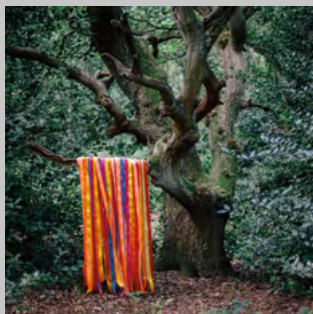
The Hymn Of The 7th Illusion
Cold Spring

We don't review 12-inches as a rule (made myself laugh there), but we had to cover this. Originally released in 2001 by Icelandic label Kitchen Motors, these two tracks – Pan Sonic performing an Adamson score with the Icelandic Hljomeyki Choir and Jóhann Jóhannsson helping on production duties and a reworking by The Hafler Trio – make a vinyl debut. Side one marries menacing Orff-like chorals with dark synth throbs, while the flip finds The Haflers' staggering remix as frightening as it is thrilling. **NM**

SOLO COLLECTIVE

Part One
Nonostar

Don't be fooled by all the talk of chamber musicians in connection with this debut release. The German duo of Alex Stolze (violin), Anne Müller (cello) and Brit producer/pianist Sebastian Reynolds take turns in the spotlight on this engrossing, deliciously unpredictable collection. Shifting from Reynolds' dark, warm string meets synth drone of 'Ascension' to Stolze's 'Don't Try To Be' and its surprising Talk Talk-ish vocal to Müller's choppy, infectious 'Cell To Cell', it's a record that is worthy of your ear time. **SR**



JAMES HOLDEN & THE ANIMAL SPIRITS

The Animal Spirits
Border Community

SUPER-CHARGED FOLK-TRANCE REINVENTION IN FULL SWING FOR MAVERICK MUSIC MAKER

This isn't the first time James Holden has reinvented himself. At the turn of the millennium, he dropped his debut 'Horizons', a way-out-west trance track with its squinting eyes set on a Balaeric skyline. But then he turned away from such Chicane-ry – ahem, sorry – on his first album 'The Idiots Are Winning'. The 'Windowlicker' funk of that release foreshadowed the sort of crumbling analogue hypnotics that were later brought to his Border Community label by the likes of Luke Abbott.

Now it's 2017, and Holden's 'The Animal Spirits' re-invention owes as much to jazz fusion as to electronica. It was rather a surprise to unwrap this from its gold foil to discover cornets, recorders and saxophones – lots of them. From an opening mournful choir, we crescendo through freestyle drumming until we climax with a cacophony of lazy brass on 'Pass Through The Fire'.

The album stretches out in the middle with the almost mystical 'Thunder Moon Gathering'. Each improvised work finds its groove – a spiralling organ, a shimmering synth line – to allow the layers of instruments to spaghetti around each other. Listen too for the discordant muted trumpet on the title track, or the scrappy wash on 'Each Moment Like The First'. It's these slight misfires and lack of post-edits that make the album shimmer with human interaction.

Each play reveals new details. "What you hear is us making it up as we go along, playing melodies I hadn't written yet," says Holden. This is so un-Apex, I can imagine a folk band jamming it; hat doff to the light touch of drummer Tom Page. Despite all that, those hankering for Holden's old analogue hypnotics won't be disappointed. 'The Animal Spirits' swells and snarls in all the right places – New Holden is quite in touch with Old Holden, almost supernaturally so.

A few years ago, he hung out with Maalem Mahmoud Guinia, the Moroccan musician whose Gnawa music was inspired by ancient African rhythms. Guinia performed in a hypnotic state as his vocals ebbed through heavy rhythms. His inspiration is evident here as we see Holden returning to a truer form of trance.

FAT ROLAND



SIMIAN MOBILE DISCO

Attack Decay
Sustain Release/
ADSR Expansion/
Anthology: 10 Years
Of SMD
Wichita

10TH ANNIVERSARY RELEASE TSUNAMI FROM FLOOR-FILLING SHAPESHIFTING LONDON DUO

"We're quite contrary," Simian Mobile Disco's James Ford told Electronic Sound back in 2014. "If something seems to be going well, we definitely want to go in the opposite direction."

In 2002, the electronic rock band Simian released their second album, 'We Are Your Friends'. It yielded some memorable moments that their somewhat directionless debut 'Chemistry Is What We Are' had only hinted at a year earlier. The reaction to this slow start was for half the group, drummer Ford and synth player Jas Shaw, to split off and focus on what had been, up to that point,

a convenient DJ side project. Simian split in 2005, with its Mobile Disco offshoot releasing the thrilling 'Attack Delay Sustain Release' after a clutch of singles in 2007.

Re-released to mark its 10th anniversary, with the obligatory B-sides and remixes set, the debut SMD album remains something of an enigma. It is on one level a frantic, urgent beast of an album. One that is pure hedonism, where tracks like 'Tits & Acid' and 'Hotdog' carry a hyperactive retaliation against the slower gyrations of minimalism and a faithful nod to early club music, where the beats are relentless and where Ford and Shaw feel like they are barely able to hold the synths in check. Slower tracks like 'I Believe', with vocals from their old Simian pal Simon Lord, showcased the pair's instinct for working with guest vocalists, something which they would explore in greater depth on 2009's 'Temporary Pleasure' with the likes of Beth Ditto, Jamie Liddell and Yeasayer's Chris Keating.

True to form, despite that second album's pop/dance nous, they railed against its success by eschewing vocalists completely on 'Unpatterns', railed against *that* with the all-modular, vaguely proggy-smelling 'Whorl', and finally railed against *that* with 2016's wonky techno opus 'Welcome To Sideways'. That constant reaction against whatever they'd been doing (well) before inevitably makes the career-surveying 'Anthology' something of a challenging and uneven listen. The only conclusion you can draw from it is that Simian Mobile Disco remain as unfathomably idiosyncratic as they were when 'Attack Decay Sustain Release' was released 10 long years ago.

MAT SMITH

REVIEWS BY
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NEEDS MUST

WHOAH, RIGHT? WHAT'S GOING ON HERE THEN? WELL, WE'VE UNLEASHED OUR ESTEEMED COLUMNIST, FREED HIM FROM REGULAR REVIEWING DUTIES AND HE'S NOW GOING TO BE RIDING TO WORK ON A SMORGASBOARD OF INTERESTING STUFF. VIVA THE ELECTRONIC CELEBRATION!

WORDS: KRIS NEEDS

OVERSHADOWED BY JFK'S ASSASSINATION

While still bearing in mind that this column is often a rare outlet for the deluge of electronic singles and EPs released each month, it's going to take a different shape from now on; maybe a whole dispatch devoted to one monumental album, or perhaps a particular event, a story, or record that's popped up out of my mental toaster.

As this is the new-look column's maiden voyage, I thought I'd look back at some other firsts from my 50 years of active service in the electro-cultural trenches. It started when the galactic frizz of The Tornados' 'Telstar', created by Joe Meek, had a seismic impact in August 1962 when I was eight years old. It was compounded by the mind-blowing theme to 'Doctor Who' when it first went out in November the following year. It was somewhat overshadowed by JFK's assassination, but it had an impact that sends the same shudders every time I hear the BBC Radiophonic Workshop's other-worldly theme.



ALCHEMICALLY BENDING ELECTRICITY

Already a Rolling Stones fan, The Who's feedback in 1965 then the dawn of psychedelia in 1966 instilled my life-long love of electronically hot-wired noise, which was consolidated when Hendrix came crashing out of the TV that December, followed by the Velvet Underground's scabrous speed-racket which ignited my New York obsession and Pink Floyd uncorking the spaced-up electronic keyboard flights of 'See Emily Play'. Then came the deluge of new electronic sounds that crystallised when the Moog made one of its first appearance on The Zodiac's 'Cosmic Sounds' and then everything was taken further by the sinister rituals of The United States Of America album and Silver Apples' self-titled debut.

The first time I witnessed an exotic being alchemically bending electricity to their own ends was Hendrix at the Royal Albert Hall in February 1969, but my first experience of proper electronic gadgetry deployed live beyond King Crimson's Mellotron was when the fledgling Hawkwind appeared at my local club, Friars Aylesbury, a year later. The blurb marked the first time I'd seen any act touted as "an electronic music band" and press ads declared "Hawkwind play electronic interstellar frequencies". As it turned out, the band chugged through their basic space-riffing on tracks such as 'Be Yourself' over which Dik Mik let fly a volley of very similar whirrs and screees from his primitive oscillator set-up. Though unbelievably primitive, it still sounded alien at the time and was destined to mushroom, as evidenced when the band returned with its 'Space Ritual' a few years later.

GLAMOROUS SYNTH-WIELDING EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL BOFFIN

In 1971, I encountered my first drum machine (after the malevolent beat-box on Sly Stone's 'There's A Riot Goin' On') when God Of Hellfire, Arthur Brown, brought his new band Kingdom Come to that year's Friars Christmas party with a Bentley Rhythm Ace supplying the rhythms and getting suitable star treatment. Having a machine for a drummer was a real novelty and it took care of all the beats on the band's 1973 album 'Journey' (which pipped Kraftwerk's mechanical rhythm box beats from a preset organ on 'Ralf Und Florian' later that year).

If my first futuristic sci-fi concept production came with Bowie choosing to unveil Ziggy Stardust at our club in January 1972 (sealing his fate and my future), Roxy Music's debut that August was the first time I saw glamorous synth-wielding extra-terrestrial boffin Brian Eno flounce on the stage, decked out in black feathers and pose his way into 'Virginia Plain' before Bryan Ferry loomed to the front.



CAN AT FRIARS AYLESBURY, 1973

The first time I saw electronically-generated sound presented as a core driving element was when Can debuted at our club in February 1973 and played for three hours, at one point transforming the old hall into one giant, pulsating flying saucer disco. Holger wore white gloves, as the photos I snapped attest. Some months later I saw Magma at Oxford Polytechnic and feared I would never see anything as intense as their total onslaught again, and I was right.



IN THE PRESENCE OF DETROIT ROYALTY

These are all crucial events that have never left me when I encounter reissues or retrospective projects today. Back then it was all new, virgin territory; the sound of a future that, in the case of Can or Suicide (who I first witnessed braving bottles and abuse in 1978) is still coming true. As regards DJing, that started with me playing Can at college lunchtimes in 1970 and then dub reggae during punk before it became the profession I took up in earnest in 1990. Although that was directly inspired by witnessing Andrew Weatherall play a blinding, multi-hued set after Jah Wobble's Invaders Of The Heart at an Islington pub, my DJing career was also the result of two more firsts, both when I lived in New York in the late 80s.

One was standing open-mouthed next to Red Alert as he demolished a party crowd with two hours of dazzling cutting and scratching using hip-hop's electronic beats, the second was going to the ecstasy-drenched Limelight Club on 6th Avenue and seeing Underground Resistance for the first time. Their MC was Robert Hood, trading as the masked The Vision, alongside DJ Jeff Mills, who came on after Lenny Dee's breakneck rave set and proceeded to demolish the converted church with the most pyrotechnic DJ set I've ever witnessed. Standing behind him I watched Jeff turn hip hop spinning into a new techno art form, sometimes only playing 30 seconds of a track before hurling the disc into the growing vinyl pile at his feet then moving on to the next bombardment.

The crowd was boggle-eyed and whooping, probably not knowing they were in the presence of Detroit royalty birthing something that would be shaking their country and the world within a short time. Sometimes I wonder if I had witnessed the birth of the American monster now known as EDM. But then, look at what had already happened with Arthur Brown's drum machine!

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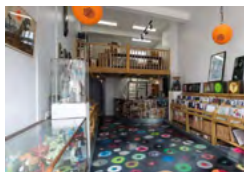
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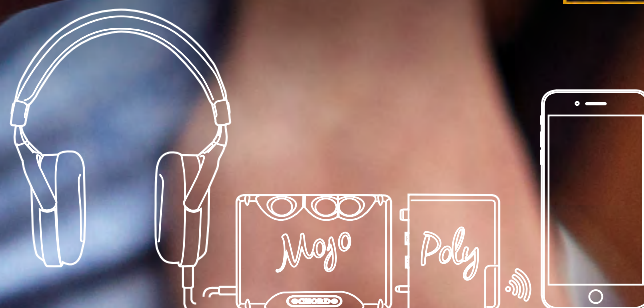
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