

ELECTRONIC SOUND



THE ELECTRONIC MUSIC MAGAZINE

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CLOCK DVA POST-PUNK SUBVERSIVES



+
**FUTURAMA
FESTIVAL
1979-1983
REVISITED**

ALAN VEGA / KIM GORDON / JUSTIN ROBERTSON / KEITH SEATMAN / VOKA GENTLE / CURTAIN TWITCHER

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Sheffield has a rich and storied music history, especially when it comes to the electronic and experimental sounds that emerged from the city in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a time of synth obsessions and big ideas. But while Clock DVA are often mentioned in the same breath as Cabaret Voltaire or The Human League, this month's Electronic Sound cover stars are not as widely celebrated as their Steel City contemporaries. So we're doing our bit to put that right.

Clock DVA main man Adi Newton started out as a member of the pre-Human League outfit The Future, alongside Martyn Ware and Ian Craig Marsh. When The Future split and Newton formed DVA, the band went through a string of line-up changes before recording two albums in the space of six months – 'White Souls In Black Suits' (1980) and 'Thirst' (1981) – and releasing them just a few weeks apart. The UK music press loved DVA, with one reviewer saying 'Thirst' was the best album since Joy Division's 'Unknown Pleasures' and another declaring, "They are going to be the best group in the world".

Despite the acclaim, commercial success was never Newton's endgame, as he explains to Neil Mason in our lead story. He was far more interested in freedom of expression and musical shapeshifting, with Clock DVA fearlessly embracing a post-punk melting pot of alt-funk, electronics, free jazz, noise, wilful dissonance and more. Add in endless hours of improvisation, quite a few drugs and some provocative live shows – DVA's first three gigs saw them banned from all three of the venues they played – and the early years of these sonic subversives make for a hugely colourful and thoroughly engrossing tale.

One of Clock DVA's biggest live shows was a slot at the 1980 Futurama festival in Leeds. Running for five years from 1979 to 1983, the Futuramas are the subject of another of our features in this issue, with Electronic Sound editor Push reflecting on his own formative experiences of these events – surrounded by glue sniffers and rubber lovers – as he talks to promoter John Keenan. The long list of artists who appeared at what was essentially an annual post-punk showcase included Public Image Ltd, Siouxsie And The Banshees, Joy Division, Soft Cell, Bauhaus, The Sisters Of Mercy, Simple Minds, Killing Joke and The Fall. No wonder the festival is remembered so fondly by the hardy souls who were there.

Elsewhere this month, Suicide biographer Kris Needs delves into Alan Vega's thrilling late-career flourish, Kim Gordon discusses her sharp-edged 'Play Me' album, and one-time Lionrocker Justin Robertson tells us about the occult-ish vibes of his latest esoteric project. Plus Jimi Tenor, Keith Seatman, Annie Hogan, Voka Gentle and Curtain Twitcher.

The last of these are a fabulous new synth duo from Sheffield. Funny how things come full circle. The Steel City's electronic pulse, it seems, is as strong as ever.

**Electronically yours,
Mark and Velimir**

COVER PHOTO COURTESY OF CLOCK DVA

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EINSTÜRZENDE NEUBAUTEN AT DESOLATION CENTER

Mojave Desert, California

4 MARCH 1984

PICTURE: SCOT ALLEN

WORDS: ISAAK LEWIS-SMITH

In the early 1980s, a young gig promoter from Los Angeles called Stuart Swezey had a novel idea. Frustrated by his punk shows continually getting shut down by the cops, his devious plan was to follow the instincts of a cult leader and host parties so far away from human civilisation that only the coyotes might bother him. And so Desolation Center was born, a "nomadic venue" which trailed around the remote Mojave Desert in California during the mid-1980s.

Though sporadic, early events featured underground favourites such as Savage Republic and Minutemen, with Swezey convincing a local bus company to transport a gaggle of tripping punks to a secret location. In early 1984, Swezey managed to attract the biggest headline act yet, Germany's mighty industrionauts Einstürzende Neubauten, who he'd met a few months before while backpacking across Europe. Several hundred punters actually made the pilgrimage for this one, including photographer Scot Allen.

"We drove for three hours east of Los Angeles to reach Box Canyon near Mecca, just south of Joshua Tree National Park," remembers Allen. "The area was stark and dry, featuring a dramatic cliff face and several slot canyons."

Proceedings began with sound artist Boyd Rice lying on a bed of nails with a miked-up breeze block placed on his stomach – as you do. Then Einstürzende Neubauten bassist Alexander Hacke appeared out of nowhere to whack said breeze block with a sledgehammer – a suitable appetiser for a headline show, which would involve Blixa Bargeld and co aligning their caustic power tools to reverberate industrial anthems across the otherwise deathly quiet desert.

As Allen's photograph attests, the crowd of onlookers appear to be both amused and bemused. But what were these tooloed-up Germans really up to?

"Their entire relationship to destruction served a constructive purpose – to build a new model on the ruins of the old," offers Nicolas Ballet, author of the recently published '*Shock Factor: The Visual Culture Of Industrial Music*'. "They appropriated wastelands as new spaces for creation, questioning the future of post-industrial societies through the development of an aesthetic of urban abandonment.

"They gave material form to countercultural concepts through their awareness of the deleterious effects of the mass media, with the aim of subverting societies of control. In a sense, they were living in the dystopian world portrayed by George Orwell in '1984' and responded to it by staging the demise of the post-industrial system of the 1980s."

It's good to know society got its shit together and turned things around (gulp). I wonder what Scot Allen took from watching EN turn the desert upside down?

"The Desolation Center events certainly inspired me and sent me off on a new artistic tangent," he states. "I thought I knew what music, art and community participation could be. But after seeing this, I learned that there are no limits."

"Going forward, we simply need to remain curious, attentive and receptive," adds Nicolas Ballet.

Hear hear! Just don't forget to bring ear protection.

**'Shock Factor: The Visual Culture Of Industrial Music' is out now,
published by Intellect**





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CLOCK DVA

'4 Hours' / 'Sensorium (DVAtion Rework Edit 2026)'
Silver vinyl seven-inch

This month's Reader Offer features two excellent tracks from Sheffield post-punk and electronic pioneers Clock DVA, one a five-star original classic and the other a previously unreleased update

'4 HOURS'

The A-side of our latest seven-inch is a post-punk diamond. Blending alt-funk, avant-pop and dark electronics, '4 Hours' was the only song to be released as a single from 'Thirst', Clock DVA's acclaimed second album. Nothing else sounded anything remotely like it when it came out in 1981.

"A lot of what Clock DVA did back then came out of improvisations," says Adi Newton, the founder and mainstay of the Sheffield experimentalists. "We used to rehearse a lot and we were always trying ideas that went beyond what other bands were doing, using our instruments in experimental ways and pushing the effects further and further."

The source of many of the wildest noises on '4 Hours' was sax man and free jazz freak Charlie Collins.

"You can't imagine the power of the baritone saxophone when you stick a microphone down it," says Charlie. "There's a huge B flat on the baritone at the start of the track and I used a Memory Man pedal to get different lengths of delay on it. I wanted to make it sound like a synthesiser."

"I guess you would describe '4 Hours' as our signature song," notes Roger Quail, DVA's drummer at the time. "I think a lot of people were intrigued by the lyrics, especially the lines about black suits and black ties. I don't want to second-guess what Adi wanted to put across, but he seemed to have been influenced by some of the black and white movies of the day, such as David Lynch's 'Eraserhead' and Woody Allen's 'Manhattan'."

"There is definitely a noir vibe to the song and a Lynchian thing going on with the black suits stuff," admits Adi. "On the face of it, a suit is a symbol of convention, but you can't always be sure of what's really going on, can you? Sometimes it's interesting to use something that seems conventional as a way to subvert people's assumptions about the world around them."

'SENSORIUM (DVATION REWORK EDIT 2026)'

Another highlight of Clock DVA's 'Thirst' album, 'Sensorium' was the B-side of the original '4 Hours' single, so we're delighted to have it as the second track on our single. And even more delighted that this is a previously unreleased refresh by Adi Newton and his current DVA collaborator Maurizio Martinucci.

"It's great to have these two songs together on a seven-inch again," says Adi. "We decided we'd do extended updates of both of them to include on a reissue of 'Thirst' that's coming out later this year. We're putting them into the live show too. I think they fit in and work well. This version of 'Sensorium' isn't an edit of the extended track, though. It's something we've rebuilt and remixed into an exclusive new reworking for this release."

The 2026 overhaul is more obviously electronic than the 1981 cut and even edges into acid territory in a couple of places. A heavily treated saxophone is again a key element, this time courtesy of Mick Ward from Sheffield jazz-funk outfit Floy Joy.

"Mick was in one of the line-ups of DVA that came after 'Thirst,'" explains Adi. "It didn't work out at that point for whatever reason, but he went on to form Floy Joy and also work with people like Was (Not Was). I've done lots of projects with him over the years and I was pleased to get him involved with these updated tracks. I'm really happy with how they've turned out."

"Adi told the guys in the old band that he wanted to remix a couple of things and we said, 'Sure, just let us have a listen before they go out,'" says Roger Quail. "I think this version of 'Sensorium' is very good and Mick Ward does a brilliant impersonation of Charlie Collins on it. I've always thought the lyrics were some of Adi's best. Listen out for the reference to 'uptown apocalypse', which was also the title of the track that he did with Martyn Ware on the first British Electric Foundation album."

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ECHO SANCTUARY

Mentha Works' spatial explorations

The debut product from Mentha Works is the rather beautiful Monk Echo, a spatial effects unit that promises to "infuse your sound with the character of the human voice". Its reverb and delay signals are shaped by morphing formant filters tuned to the resonant frequencies of the human voice, taking inspiration from Baltic choirs and mystical spaces. But we can't lie – this thing could've sounded like a tractor's clutch failing and we'd have gone for it, such is its steez. Keep wind of the next drop, and put aside £350 in the meantime. mentha.works



PULSE

UFO95

Brutalism goes four-to-the-floor

WHO?

UFO95 is the alias of French techno producer Killian Vaissade who is a resident at Tresor, the fabled Berlin club currently based in the disused wing of a power station. As an artist, either working solo or alongside Hadone in the duo Civic Instruction, Vaissade's techno explores a vintage 1990s/2000s aesthetic that nods to Tresor's roots, combined with a ruthless minimalism.

WHY UFO95?

For his UFO95 live shows, Vaissade's energetic sets are completely improvised, eschewing programmed patches and pre-recorded loops. He released his first album under the UFO95 name in 2020, followed by 'Use Your Difference To Make The Difference' in 2022 and 'A Brutalist Dystopian Society' in 2024.

TELL US MORE...

Now comes 'A Brutalist Dystopian Society – Part 2', the ethos of the album being the rough-edged minimalism of brutalist architecture and the utopian living environments which architects like Le Corbusier promised. The other influence is the rise of autocracy and its corresponding limitations on freedom. Key tracks like 'Meditation 3' or 'Resolution 2' hurtle forward on aggressive, relentless techno rhythms, while also offering sounds and motifs that alternate between attention-grabbing insistence and more contemplative, inquisitive, searching passages. "Brutalist architecture strips everything down to function, mass and material," says Vaissade of the album's inspiration. "Brutalism exposes systems power, control, infrastructures. Especially in techno, the sound becomes architectural – rigid, physical, repetitive, sometimes oppressive. Brutalism doesn't try to be comfortable or human-friendly. It confronts you."

MAT SMITH

'A Brutalist Dystopian Society – Part 2' is released by Mord on 28 February

BANGING ON

More random musings from **Fat Roland**. On his mind this month (as far as we can tell) is **Florence And The Machine**



Do you know the Florence And The Machine song 'Dog Days Are Over'? She sounds like she's caught her finger in a bulldog clip. It's mostly vowels. On the B-side of that 2008 single was 'You've Got The Love', which ended up being more famous than her doggy ditty. The promo video had Florence playing Jenga while dressed as Snorky from 'The Banana Splits'. Probably, I've never seen it.

Florence didn't write 'You've Got The Love'. Neither did her Machine. It was a cover version of 'You Got The Love' by The Source featuring Candi Staton – a stonking big hit in the 1990s, almost as big as 'Doop' by Doop. Note the slightly different title. It's "You" not "You've" because The Source had a lax attitude to auxiliary contractions. For grammar pedants, this is a catpostrophe. Apocastrophe. Catastropostcatrophe?! I'm trying to do catastrophe and apostrophe. Capoctrophe – that'll do.

The distinctive arpeggio in The Source track was sourced (clever) from a 1980s house tune called 'Your Love' by Frankie Knuckles. As you can tell by his name, Frankie Knuckles was a close relative of Mr Fingers, Robert Palmer and Jimmy Nail. Wait, I've got another one. And Pinky Floyd. Bucks Fizzst?? I really should look up facts on Wikipedia before writing anything.

Anyway, on 'Your Love' it sounds like a harp. If you think about it, really think about it, a harp is nothing more than a sideways piano stripped naked. You can stop thinking about that now, you plucky pervert. Harps are only played by angels and Enya and people starting dream sequences. The harp sound in 'Your Love' is made from electronics, but back in the olden days, harp strings were fashioned from the guts of cattle, which is a polite way of saying bulls and cows and that. This makes me queasy because I am still in love with Ermintrude from 'The Magic Roundabout'.

How to explain 'The Magic Roundabout'? Erm... it was a documentary from the 1960s about a funfair visited by a cow, a dog, a snail and a bouncing contraceptive coil. Road junctions in Swindon were later named the "magic roundabouts" because adults lack imagination and should never get to name anything ever. In the BBC programme, the animals were friends with a girl called Florence who hung around at the funfair machines. Hold on, I've just invented a new band name! Florence And The Funfair Machines. Maybe I'll suggest that to Simon Cowell or whoever's in charge of music nowadays.

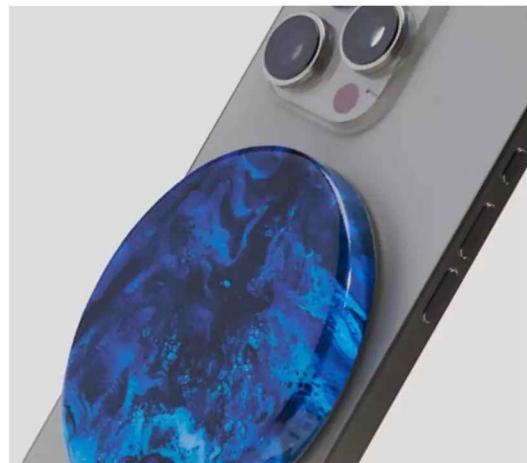
In the words of Snorky from 'The Banana Splits' (probably), history repeats. We can therefore conclude that Florence from 'The Magic Roundabout' is a direct ancestor of Florence And The Machine.

I will not be taking any questions at this time.

TURN YOUR BACK ON

Sleek wireless charger is a keeper

In the ever-changing world of smartphone gizmos, lifestyle company Addition recently pushed things forward with their ALMA charger. This gorgeous oval-shaped gadget attaches magnetically to your phone, giving you an undercover, on-the-go charging point. Ideal for festivals, it's available in a range of colours and styles, or you can even ask them for a custom graphic. Going once, going twice for £63. addition.life



RING THINKER

Save lightbulb moments with finger tech

The intriguing Index 01 is a clever finger ring from smartwatch company Pebble. It comes equipped with a button and a mic, and it's meant to be an external memory for your brain – just press the button, speak your truth, and it'll be recorded and sent to your phone. There's no subscription, no need for an internet connection, and they say the battery lasts for years. It's also completely open source and available for preorder now for £55, ahead of release in March. repebble.com



JUMPER FOR JOY

Brutalist clobber reimaged

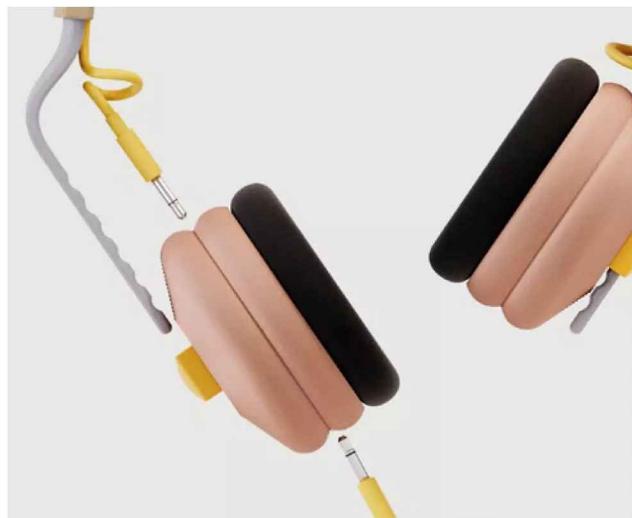
Did you go and see 'The Brutalist' last year? Directed by Brady Corbet, this period drama explored the life of a fictional character named László Tóth, a Hungarian-Jewish Holocaust survivor, and used architecture and design to tell the epic story. Now, rather bizarrely, you can grab a replica jumper worn by the main character during a key scene. Move quickly, because the £450 sweater is strictly limited to 300. brutalistsweater.com



FIX UP, LOOK SHARP

Repairable cans for kids

"No screws, no glue, no fiddly wires" is how Kibu pitch their child-friendly headphones. Made to nurture a more eco-conscious listener, with less focus on audiophilia and more on sustainability, over 70 per cent of each pair is made from plant-based plastic, and the design is modular to allow for easy mending. Available in an array of colours and only £39, Kibu are definitely onto something here. kibu.family



PULSE

CHRONICLES OF THE RESIDUUM

Destruction never sounded so good

WHO?

If you've ever tried to rescue a child from the Shadows Of Illusion by battling space-time monsters in a ruined cathedral, only for your plans to be thwarted by the evil King Ul Agusho Azh Rakhzak after he's lured you into his magical floating sky garden, then *Chronicles Of The Residuum*'s 'The Age Of Destruction' is the album for you.

WHY CHRONICLES OF THE RESIDUUM?

This visionary sci-fi concept project was conceived by UK composer Robert Ratcliffe. The album presents itself as a futuristic soundtrack, with pulsating and cinematic EBM, grizzly jackhammer electro and – as a bed for its dramatic spoken narration – icicle-spiked ambience. Think Front 242 doing 'Jeff Wayne's Musical Version Of War Of The Worlds'. The story is narrated by John Cavanagh, who for many years was a football results announcer for BBC Scotland. After an opening prologue about ancient scriptures, the lead single 'Escape From Port Fallen' sets the scene by introducing us to the plight of key character Unagu. The post-apocalyptic theme "reflects our fears and anxieties about the state of the world," says Ratcliffe.

TELL US MORE...

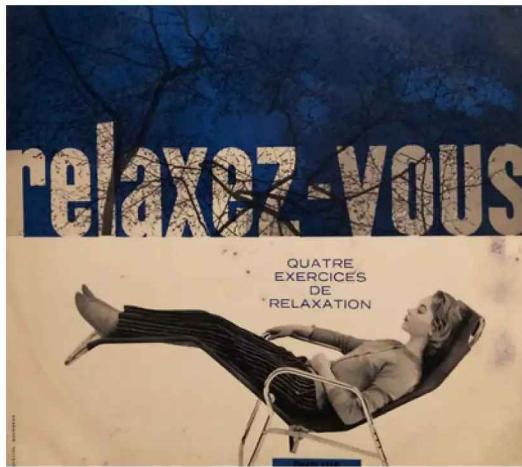
There is serious heft behind this album's ethereal themes. Among the collaborators is David J Peterson, who created the Dothraki and Valyrian languages for the sprawling dragon drama 'Game Of Thrones'. Ratcliffe himself is a renowned composer with a PhD in musicology, and his academic subjects have included sample culture, DJ mashups and a deep analysis of 'Chime' by Orbital. He's spent the best part of a decade crafting this album, but the story is far from over – this is Part One with more episodes to follow. "A long-term goal is for a Netflix or Prime to adapt the story into a film or series," he says.

FAT ROLAND

'The Age Of Destruction' is out now via Bandcamp

SCHOOL OF ELECTRONIC MUSIC

Resident archivist **Jack Dangers** is in a state of ondes Martenot-induced bliss thanks to '**Relaxez-Vous**', a French LP designed to do just that



"This record has been specially created to help you reach a state of relaxation-concentration: 20 minutes a day will restore calm, serenity and many hours of deep sleep."

So say the sleeve notes to '*Relaxez-Vous*', a record I found in a shop in the San Francisco Bay Area. It's basically this guy, Guy Beaujount, talking you into a calm state. Sort of like a yoga record, even though it isn't yoga.

But the reason the record is so good is the music behind it. The ondes Martenot on it is beautiful. I ripped the whole thing into Logic, separated the voice and just listened to the ondes Martenot part on its own. Nelly Caron plays on this one. She only made a couple of records, and I've got the others too, but this is the best one.

I've always found the ondes Martenot more evocative than the theremin, which is so difficult to play. The sound benefits a lot from the whole system of speakers that Maurice Martenot created – they were incredible.

One was a Turkish cymbal that had a transducer on it. You'd send the signal through the cymbal, and it was like a spring reverb but metallic and alive. That one was called the Métallique. Another was the Palme, a wooden resonator shaped like the leaf of a palm tree, almost like an acoustic guitar body, with a sound hole and everything. The third was more like a normal speaker, but all of them were separate from the instrument itself, unlike the built-in, pokey little speaker you get with a theremin.

Maurice Martenot's sister Ginette was a well-known player, but Jeanne Loriod was the most famous of all. She was on loads of recordings – she plays beautifully on the soundtrack to 'Billion Dollar Brain'.

It's a tricky instrument to play – getting the vibrato right – but when someone good plays it, it's incredible. And that is why this odd French relaxation record from 1957 is such a gem – the ondes Martenot on it is just stunning.

There's very little biographical information about Nelly Caron out there (and even less about Guy Beaujount). She was born in 1912 and started out as a writer and journalist before becoming a musicologist and ondiste. In 1960, she founded the Centre for the Study of Oriental Music in France and wrote a lot about Iranian music. Though important in her time, she seems to be a bit of a forgotten figure. She died in 1989.

TEE TIME

Mag shop marks landmark with merch

To celebrate their 10th birthday, London magazine shop magCulture recently released this very limited edition T-shirt. Listing all 1,530 publications the outlet has ever stocked, these are perfect for print enthusiasts (and keep your eyes peeled for a certain electronic music mag). They're long-sleeve, loose and strictly limited to 100, so chop chop, if you're after one. Yours for £40. magculture.com



THE YOUNG ONES

Kids' synth in development

"I built a portable step-sequencer synthesiser for my daughter's third birthday," wrote designer Alastair Roberts in a blog post. "It has four sliders that control four notes in a looping sequence. Slide up = higher pitch, slide down = lower." Simple. If you like the sound of this cute device, with its large, toddlerproof sliders, and AA battery-powered OLED screen, go to Roberts' site to be first in line. bitsnpieces.dev





HERMANN KOPP 'DER GOLEM'

Best known for his "Nekromantik" soundtracks (Dir. Jörg Buttgereit), HERMANN KOPP scores "DER GOLEM", the 1920 silent horror film - a leading example of early German Expressionism directed by Paul Wegener.

The new score adds a contemporary, sometimes noisy edge to the film, whilst not forgetting the esoteric and mysterious components of the Golem myth of Jewish folklore. Set in a ghetto of medieval Prague, the Golem, a clay hulk brought to life by a magic scroll implanted in his chest, is summoned as a protector and avenger.

Hermann Kopp started recording songs on tape in the 70's, combining his violin with a Moog imitation in a very personal and minimal approach to music, with lyrics that bordered on surrealism. After a mini-LP in 1981 and his "Pop" LP of 1983, he became the fifth member of experimental synthesizer band Keine Ahnung.

CD in matt-laminate digipak.

February 2026.

OTHER SOUNDTRACKS AVAILABLE ON COLD SPRING:

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muzak is more than music



DECODER O.S.T. CD

Soft Cell, Einstürzende Neubauten, The The, Genesis P-Orridge. (Dir: KLAUS MAECK)

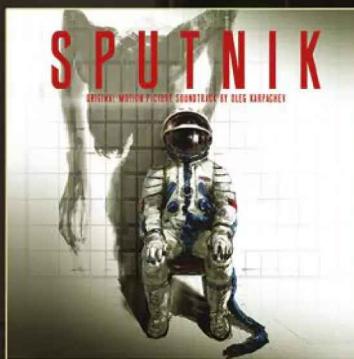
THE COMPANY OF WOLVES



THE COMPANY OF WOLVES O.S.T. LP

George Fenton
(Dir: NEIL JORDAN)

SPUTNIK



SPUTNIK O.S.T. CD

Oleg Karpachev
(Dir: EGOR ABRAMENKO)

I REMEMBER YOU



I REMEMBER YOU O.S.T. CD

"Ég man þig". Frank Hall
(Dir: OSKAR THÓR AXELSSON)

AURA

ORIGINAL MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK

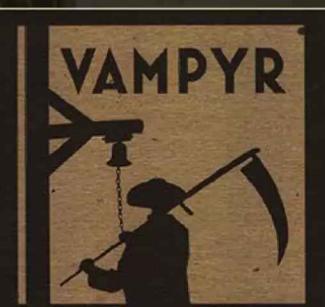
COMPOSED BY NEIL CHANEY



AURA O.S.T. CD

"The Exorcism Of Karen Walker". Neil Chaney
(Dir: STEVE LAWSON)

VAMPYR



VAMPYR CD

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(Dir: CARL THEODOR DREYER)



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Two decades after the fact, we explore **Daft Punk's** totemic pyramid show which changed the face of electronic music forever

WORDS: BEN GILBERT

PICTURE: STEVE JENNINGS

At 11pm on Saturday 29 April 2006, a sequence of five tones was broadcast across California's Coachella Valley and out into space. Two men dressed as robots triggered the melody, but it had actually been composed by John Williams for Steven Spielberg's questing cinematic trip, 'Close Encounters Of The Third Kind'.

For those who haven't seen that landmark 1977 movie, the plot involves a team of scientists led by Frenchman Claude Lacombe (played by François Truffaut) envisioning a new language intended to welcome an alien race, who land their gargantuan mothership at the base of Devils Tower in Wyoming during the film's conclusion. So entranced are these life forms by the music, the vessel reacts in an ecstasy of kaleidoscopic colour before a crowd of agog onlookers.

What Daft Punk did 20 years ago from within their own monolithic pyramid of industrial light is not so different. In the two decades since, the show has become a modern-day legend of electronic music history.

Created to open the 'Alive' world tour, which commenced at the Coachella festival and concluded 18 months later after 48 eye-popping dates, the event is paralleled in the UK press to the dance genre's version of The Beatles' 1964 appearance on 'The Ed Sullivan Show'. To some – for good or ill – it has also been signposted as ground zero for the EDM movement. But how exactly did the concept for this transfixing technicolour tower come about?

The first kernel had emerged 12 months before 2006's Coachella in the promo for Daft Punk's 'Technologic', which featured a horror show robot jerking malignantly inside a considerably smaller, but similarly dimensioned structure. On set at the 2005 video shoot in Los Angeles was British lighting and concert designer, Martin Phillips.

"They already had the pyramid idea," explains Phillips. "They said, 'Could we do something like this for the tour?'. That was the brief. Can we figure out a way to have a pyramid involved in the stage set?

"They were very aware that neither of them was Freddie Mercury, so we needed to create an experience that involved them piloting a spaceship rather than being centre stage as performers. They gave me a bunch of references, including Scanimate, the late 1970s/early 80s computer animation style. They wanted it to look modern but retro."

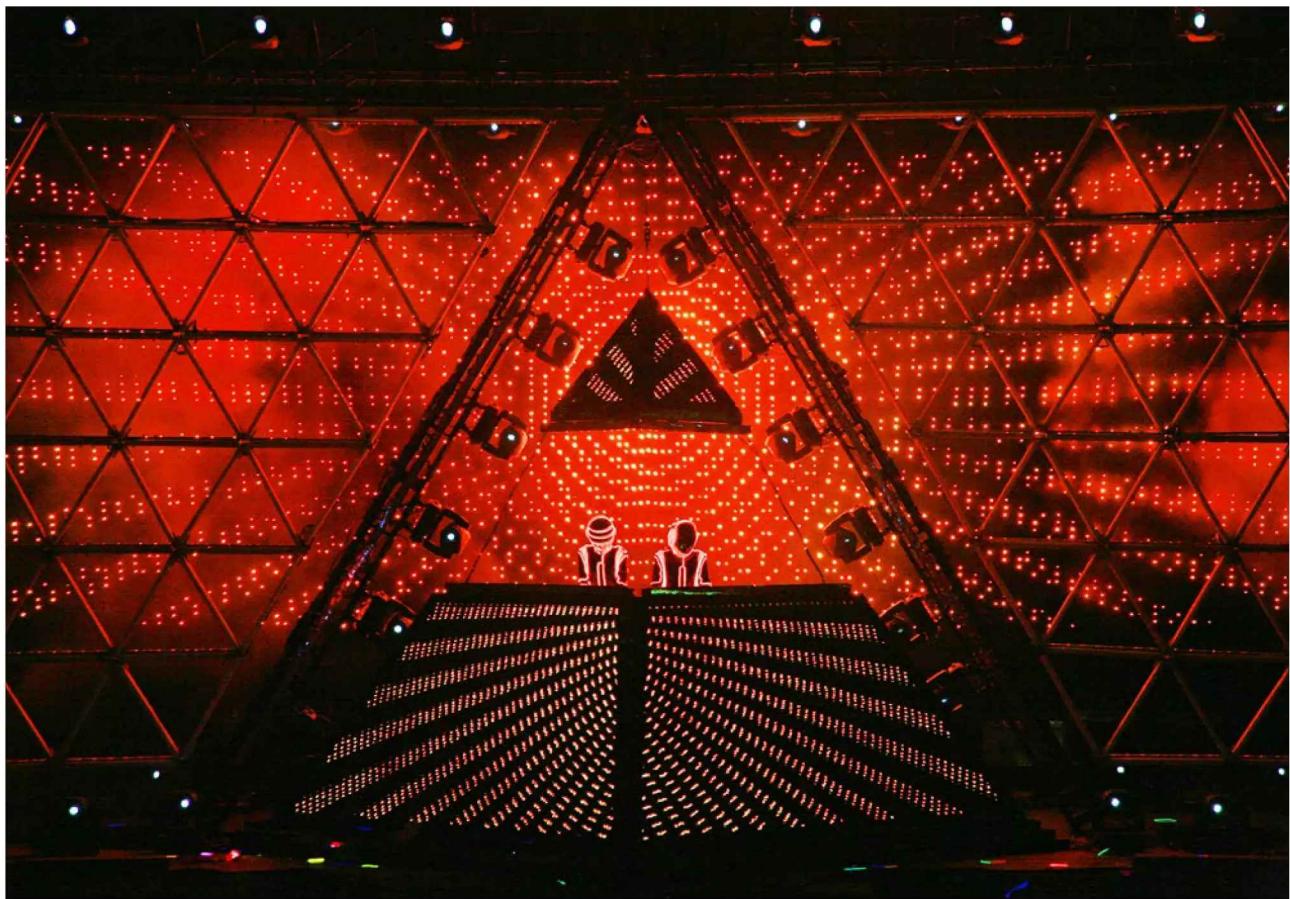
Importantly, Thomas Bangalter and Guy-Manuel De Homem-Christo were also enthralled by the emergent Ableton Live creative software technology, which opened their bionic eyes to the possibilities of something rather more compelling than a pair of French DJs – albeit wearing glittering crash helmets and dressed head-to-toe in leather – playing records on a vast stage inside Coachella's Sahara tent.

"It was very much in its nascent form," says Phillips. "Now it's ubiquitous – certainly in dance music. They were taken with the ability to mash-up and mix-up while playing live. Initially, the show was going to be different every night, but I convinced them to go for a recurring beginning, middle and end instead. My reasoning was, if I know where we're going, I can hit every single beep, pulse and effect."

"That was my big contribution. I persuaded them to do the same show, but they left themselves some room within Ableton and had various layers on top to play with."

Phillips explains how the set was built from a series of orchestrated time codes he programmed "in a darkened room for many days".

"There were infinite differences every night," he says.



The result, captured live in pounding, relentless style on the 'Alive 2007' album from a gig at the Palais Omnisports arena in Paris, was a knockout – an entirely seamless greatest hits megamix of Daft Punk's retro-futurist blend of filtered house, starburst disco and classic pop. As Phillips set the controls from behind the mixing desk, the sound was aligned with a defibrillating fireworks display, looking like the 'Close Encounters' spaceship rebooting its factory settings during a 90-minute NASA MOT.

In the build-up to Coachella, Daft Punk's team went to great lengths to keep the production under wraps, road testing the pyramid in a series of Hollywood rehearsals. Collectively, they conjured "lightning in a bottle", says Phillips. What was the real-world impact?

"The whole field turned into one big rave."

Similar recollections are tattooed onto the retinas of everyone who saw the tour, including DJ Erol Alkan, who was invited to support the duo at Global Gathering on Long Marston Airfield in England later that summer. Before the event, Alkan was in a bad way.

"I contracted tonsillitis that weekend and was on antibiotics," he recalls. "The day before, I couldn't get out of bed. But there was no way I was going to miss it or cancel."

Likening the concert to "a gigantic installation", Alkan had seen Coachella online but was still utterly floored by Daft Punk's set.

"Nobody expected what it was in terms of scale and technology. Looking back, you can see how the production was put together but, at the time, it wasn't something people could have imagined. It's beyond two musicians up onstage, it's as they would want you to believe it to be – two robots. That's how your mind reacted. It would be a disservice to say it was anything else."

However, Alkan believes it was the rolling construction of the soundtrack rather than the visual presentation that trumped all else, pinpointing "the concept of intertwining songs together and the push and pull".

"That inherently is what makes dance music tick, but with an explosive element of rock music and the drama of a rock concert," he asserts.

Phillips agrees.

"The most groundbreaking thing was what they did with the music," he says. "Nobody had done that."

An era of stadium-sized live music spectacle dawned in the slipstream of 'Alive'. In the 2015 documentary, 'Daft Punk Unchained', DJ Jason Bentley called it "the birth of EDM". While Phillips is noncommittal on suggestions he fired the starting gun on the frequently maligned scene, his connections were furthered by high-profile collaborations with the likes of the Canadian producer and DJ, Deadmau5.

"His management came to me having seen Daft Punk and said, 'Can you do that for us?'"

Twenty years on, Phillips understands that the pyramid now lies dormant "somewhere in a warehouse in Los Angeles". With the announcement of their split coming in February 2021, Daft Punk blew everything apart and neither he nor Alkan can foresee a time when Bangalter and De Homem-Christo plug themselves and their electrifying creation back into the mains.

"They've been brilliant in their secrecy," says Alkan, who played alongside Bangalter doing his first DJ set in more than 15 years at the Centre Pompidou in Paris last year. "Nothing I say can distort that."

"There's plenty of people who would love to see it," adds Phillips. "But I think if they've stopped, they've stopped for a reason."



PULSE

DEBBIE SINGS

Steam room techno-gurn, anyone?

WHO?

Want pixelated bubblegum pool party acid and Eurocentric, sugarcoated electroclash? And by the gallon? Then take a peep at Debbie Sings, a Copenhagen native now residing in Berlin. With a growing number of A-list fans (French singer Oklou was seen wearing one of Debbie's handmade T-shirts at Coachella), her upcoming EP, 'Oh My', is a force of nature.

WHY DEBBIE SINGS?

Take the growling, EDM-plated tank rolling into town on 'Sucker Punch', the euphoric, heat-seeking pump of 'Sunny Skies', or the steam room techno-gurn of 'Hotpants'. Her sound is so refreshing, it's like snogging on a randomly discovered Starburst after years of eating handfuls of dead sand. "All in all, the year I wrote the songs was very chaotic," she explains. "I spent a lot of time dancing around listening to music. I love to keep it simple sometimes – to stay very flexible in terms of where I work and when. I guess my vision for Debbie Sings always just sort of changes."

TELL US MORE...

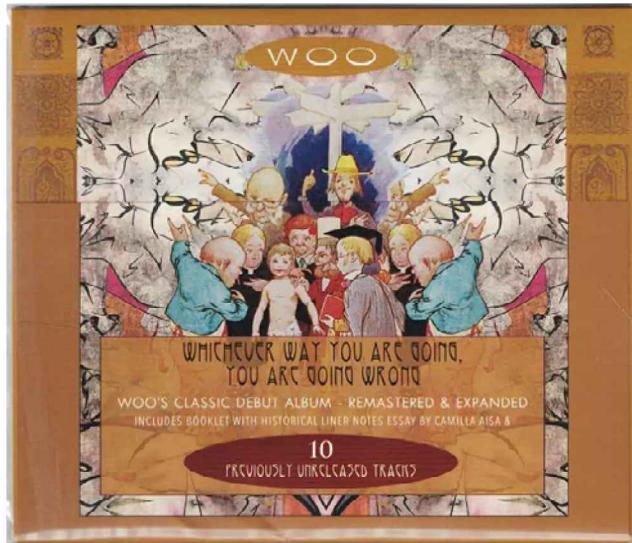
Frivolous, this is not. Debbie packs the most distressing experiences of the human condition into each song, giving you a fascinating juxtaposition – incredible melancholia executed with playful vulnerability. In turn, she is primed to express all of our internal conflicts with Oppenheimer-level existentialism one moment, and a carefree whiff of amyl-nitrite-into-right-nostril the next. "I guess I can feel a bit messy or confused – very happy and sad at the same time," she adds. "I think there is a lot of truth and beauty in contradiction. I like when I feel that a song opens up a little door to another place and you can lose yourself there for a while."

RYAN WALKER

'Oh My' is released by Big Oil Recordings on 27 February

NEEDS MUST

Freewheeling through time and space, Kris Needs continues his adventures in sound. This month: Woo



I hope your 2026 is springing nicely into life. So far, mine has been consumed with writing my autobiography, 'It's More Than Rock 'N' Roll: Surviving Seven Decades Of Walking The Wilder Sides of Life & Music'. It's coming along, if slightly in need of editing down from around a quarter of a million words, so I'm sporting a snorkel and a budgie's lederhosen on my head as I surface to burble this first column for the new year.

One of the albums pulsing in the background while I labour has been a recent reissue CD from Bruce Licher's Independent Project Records, expanding 1982's debut set by Ives brothers Mark and Clive trading as Woo (named after their uncle's singing saw). 'Whichever Way You Are Going, You Are Going Wrong' is a mere selection from the musical archive the pair started recording in 1972 in a terraced house in Wimbledon – purely for their own amusement. They never envisioned a career until someone else suggested it, as they didn't believe anyone would be interested.

Sneaking out in '82, this album got enthusiastic reviews in the music press (who likened them to The Durutti Column), the brothers discovering they'd been crafting a groundbreaking electronic and acoustic fusion. Mark played 12-string guitar, bass, percussion, sax and clarinet, while Clive handled keyboards including Roland's SH-3A synth, before the acquisition of a Roland System 100 and its sequencer revolutionised their sound.

Forced to play at low volume so as not to piss off the neighbours, this quietly lo-fi approach, using triangles instead of drums, came to define a sound that's utterly unique. It wafts around its own mysteriously beautiful universe, not giving a flying squirrel's nut bag about commercial restraints or traditional structures.

If the motorik, lyrical bass and subtly soaring textures of the opening track 'Swingtime' evoke 'Ege Bamyasi'-era Can, the comparisons end with 'Wah Bass' and 'The Attic'. Evocative, emotional and supremely chilled, this lavishly repackaged set opens the door to a catalogue initially drawn from 1,500 tracks recorded in their first 10 years before continuing to the present day. Their 1990 album 'Into The Heart Of Love' – blending Native American mythology, Tibetan philosophies and 'Close Encounters' – is considered their masterpiece, but there's a whole lot more, including healing music, trouser-esque mid-90s dance and ambient excursions.

One recurring theme in my memoir is the lifelong thrill of new musical discoveries. It's reassuring that can still continue.

'Whichever Way You Are Going, You Are Going Wrong (Expanded Edition)' is out now on Independent Project

"We are using Packaged Sounds for all our Vinyl Pressing!"

Electronic Sound



Packaged Sounds - The home of UK Vinyl Pressing

STOCKHOLM SYNDROME

Swedish giants release new speaker series

IKEA have joined forces with designer and celebrated colourist Tekla Evelina to deliver a delightful new rendition of SOLSKYDD, their portable Bluetooth speaker. Part of the so-called Teklan line, they only cost £29, but come with some decent features, from the Spotify Tap function, which lets you easily resume your previous listening session, to 24 hours' battery life. This is not a collab to miss out on. ikea.com



POSITIVE FEEDBACK

Ultra-flexible FX routing from Lisbon

Portugal's finest boutique developer, ADDAC System, recently unveiled the Mixology pedal, a "dual effect chain router and feedbacker" offering tremendously flexible effects routing on a single input signal. With two patchable effect loops, each of which comes with their own feedback loops, you can cross-fade between FX1 and FX2, as well as between wet and dry signals. On top of that, the input gain, wet/dry balance and FX mix can all be controlled via external expression pedals. Not at all bad for £190. addacsystem.com



A HARD SELL

Inflatable helmet is a head turner

Ventete (with an emphasis on "tete", in this case) are innovators in the cycling world. The Swiss-engineered ah-1 model might be £270, but then again, not every bike helmet is inflatable. Allow us to explain. Apparently this helmet is 44.1 per cent safer than the standard helmet thanks to its inflatable non-Newtonian polymer shell, which stiffens on impact. Stop sniggering. It can also be folded down in seconds and is less than 4cm thick. ventete.com



UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Hot on the heels of his recent 'Selenites, Selenites!' album, Finnish composer and musician **Jimi Tenor** traces the key inspirations behind his very singular sonic universe

INTERVIEW: JEREMY ALLEN

PICTURE: GEBOREN WUSTMANN

VINTAGE ELECTRONIC MUSIC

"When we were at school, we were introduced to the experimental electronic music that they did in test studios for Finnish radio stations, where they had a lot of people doing tape loops and electroacoustic stuff. I find it really, really interesting. There was Erkki Kurenniemi – a big name in Finnish electronic music – who built his own synthesisers with multisensory devices. He made this touchy-feely synth system as he was into erotic things. It's very cool!"

"Then I discovered Yellow Magic Orchestra through 'Technodelic'. I'd tell you what my favourite track was, but I just checked my streaming platform and all the titles are in Japanese. What I liked though was the 808 drum machine, and I think they'd used some FM synthesis and also a Fairlight. There's a really great interview on YouTube with Ryuichi Sakamoto, where he looks very futuristic, and they're definitely using a Fairlight."

"I met him once. He came to visit Mika Vainio during the Sónar festival around 1998 when we were living in Barcelona. He wanted to check out Mika's gear and went up to his studio, and Mika only had one delay, a small portable mixer and two synths. It was like, 'Oh well, let's go downstairs. I have coffee'."

COFFEE

"I make all of my music under the influence of coffee. I do about 95 per cent of it in the morning, so I get some and then immediately go to write. At that point,

I'm still in a semi-dreamlike state and the coffee is giving me energy. I go into this flow state, and I can do three hours non-stop and then see what's happened. It's great when you can do that, and the coffee is a mild influence.

"I wouldn't describe myself as a coffee snob, but I don't have a cafetière and I don't like filter coffee. I use an Italian coffee machine, but it's not one of the ones that they have in cafes that cost around €2,000, or something. I like Italian brands because I lived in New York for a while, and they had great coffee in the Latin neighbourhoods there too – Cuban El Pico and some of the other Latin American coffee is really good. It's very dark and it tastes good. I always get as many packages as I can when I visit New York, but you have to go to the Latin areas."

HERMETO PASCOAL

"My wife started to listen to a lot of Brazilian music around six or seven years ago and ever since then she's been playing it non-stop. There's an amazing amount of really good music from Brazil and many different genres too, so I'm happy about this."

"I've been a fan of the keyboardist Hermeto Pascoal for a long time – there are lots of horns and percussion in his music that I love. It's quite technical and, in a way, quite European-sounding. I'm into complicated melodies, and Pascoal is the king of that. He's over the top, but after listening to his music



I always feel completely free about doing longer melodies. It's like I don't care what people say anymore.

"He did a lot of records with Aline Morena, and then he made 'Slaves Mass' [1977] which is probably his most famous one outside of Brazil. And he recorded a live album at the Montreux Jazz Festival ['Ao Vivo Montreux Jazz', 1979] which is amazing because he also plays flute and saxophone. He played them both really well. I love his flute and sax! He didn't speak any English – I met him once backstage and I tried to communicate with him but it was impossible [laughs]."

SOUNDTRACKS

"I have a really big interest in [Japanese film score composer] Masaru Sato. He wrote big band music, but he also wrote for Akira Kurosawa's 'Yojimbo' and did the scores for four of the 'Godzilla' films. His themes are normally very simple but they're just amazingly strong, just like [sings ominous, drawn-out notes] 'Brrmm, brrrmm, brrrrmmmm' [laughs]. And his big band music – you can hear the sax and horn, but it doesn't sound like a big band... to me, it sounds very Japanese. I wrote this big band album a couple of years ago [2021's 'Terra Exotica' by Jimi Tenor & UMO Helsinki Jazz Orchestra], and I was purposefully looking for influences that wouldn't sound so big band-y, and he's one of those composers."

"I also love Italian film music, and it's really surprising just how strong the Italian music scene was in the 1960s and 70s. Unbelievable – so much good music. Morricone is the obvious one. But if you think about it, it doesn't seem to be happening that much in Italy now. They had the movies and they had the music and the arts then, and after that, I dunno, maybe TV destroyed it all."

MUSHROOMS

"Foraging for mushrooms is one of my biggest hobbies. I'm always waiting for the mushroom season in Finland, which starts around June and ends in October or November. I love to go and find really good mushrooms in the forest. In Finland, we have a lot of forests and areas untouched by man, so it's the perfect place. I've moved to another neighbourhood in Helsinki now, but where I used to live, in the autumn, I would go every second day at a minimum to find porcini."

"There are many wild mushrooms here, but maybe porcini is the best. And the season before last, I found a matsutake [a highly prized edible mushroom]. We managed to find one in the centre of Finland where my friend lived, and I put it in the freezer. My freezer still smells of it like crazy. It was a mistake – I should have eaten it."

Jimi Tenor Band's 'Selenites, Selenites!' is out now on Bureau B

MIND OVER MATTER

Neuroscience-informed sports shoes from Nike

Nike have recently unveiled their newly developed Mind 001 and 002 footwear, the product of the company's Mind Science Department. Made using brain and body scan data to help perfect the relationship between sensory feedback and an athlete's focus and recovery, they feature 22 foam nodes which map across the soles' sensitive points to deliver the sensations and benefits of being barefoot. Out now, get the 001 for £79.99 and the 002 for £129.99.

nike.com



GROUND CONTROL

Rocket fuel tank speakers are a sound to behold

A collaboration between forward-thinking Japanese companies &Space Project and Nomura, the Debris Rocket Tank Speaker is, well, exactly that. Each cylindrical tank, we're told, serves as a resonance chamber, with drivers mounted at the top and sound deflected through a spherical plate to create an even, room-filling effect. The project's more sober raison d'être is to study how aerospace engineering can be reimagined within the context of acoustic design, demonstrated with a composition by DJ Gonno, featuring field recordings from the spaceport launch site in Taiki, Hokkaido. Safe to say, we'll need a bigger living room if these things ever hit the market. Not that we'd say no, mind you... and-space-project.jp

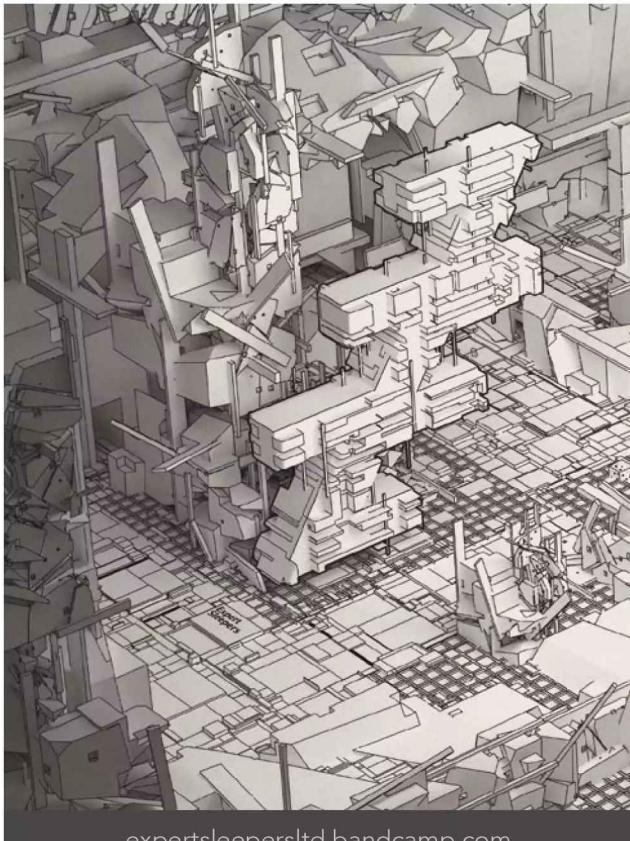


MIND & BODY

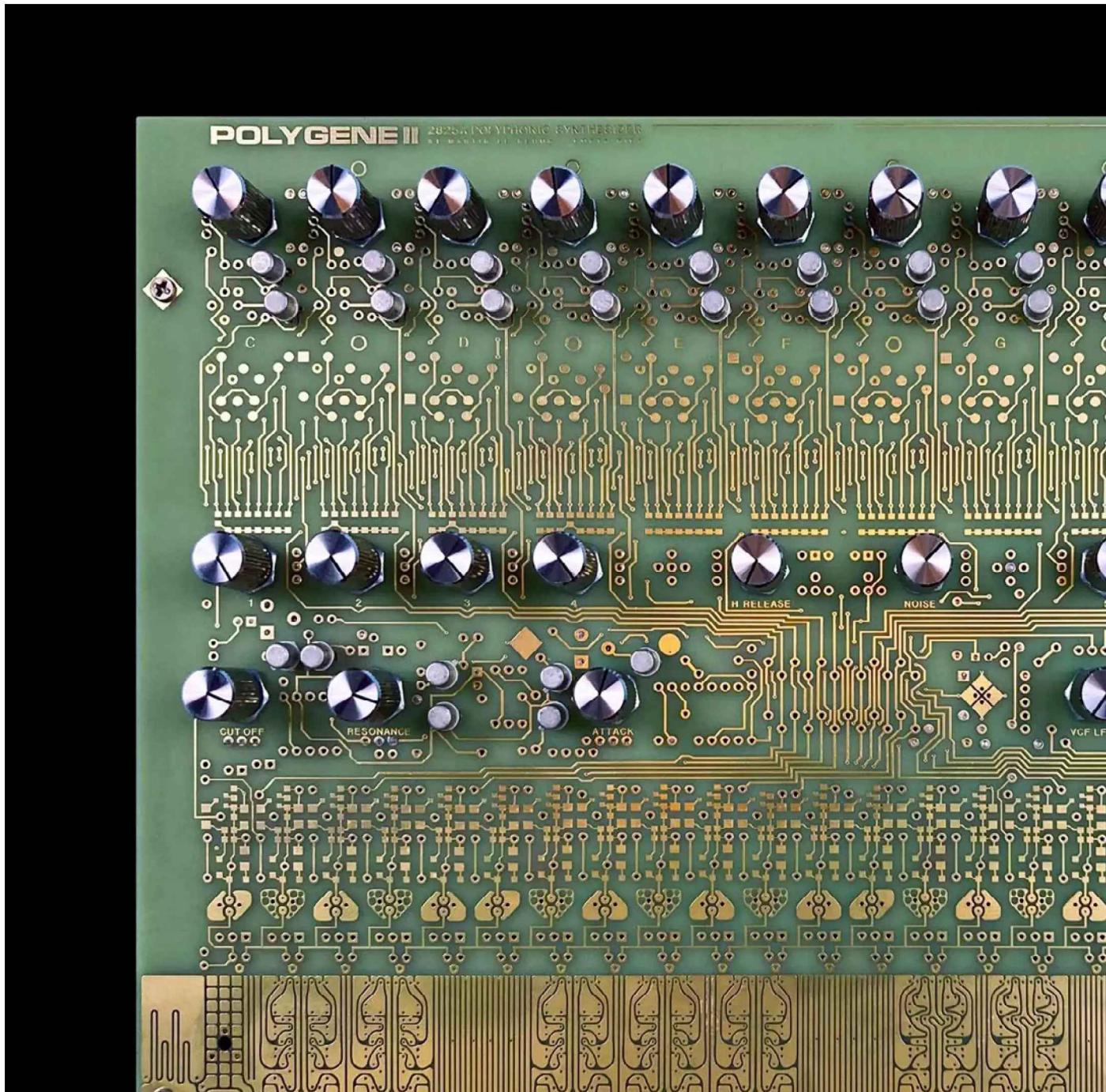
Industry veterans collaborate on new instrument

Polarity | Modular, the latest collaboration between Ian Boddy (boss of the DIN label) and software innovators Sonnicouture, is a dual-layer granular engine loaded with custom waveforms. Created by Boddy in his own electronic music studio, its sound library consists of 250 presets from synths like the Roland System-100M, the Serge Modular and the Buchla Music Easel. This Native Kontrol Standard (NKS)-compatible instrument also allows users to load their own samples into its explorative sonic environment. A genuine dreamscape builder for £129.

sonnicouture.com



electronicsound.co.uk/shop

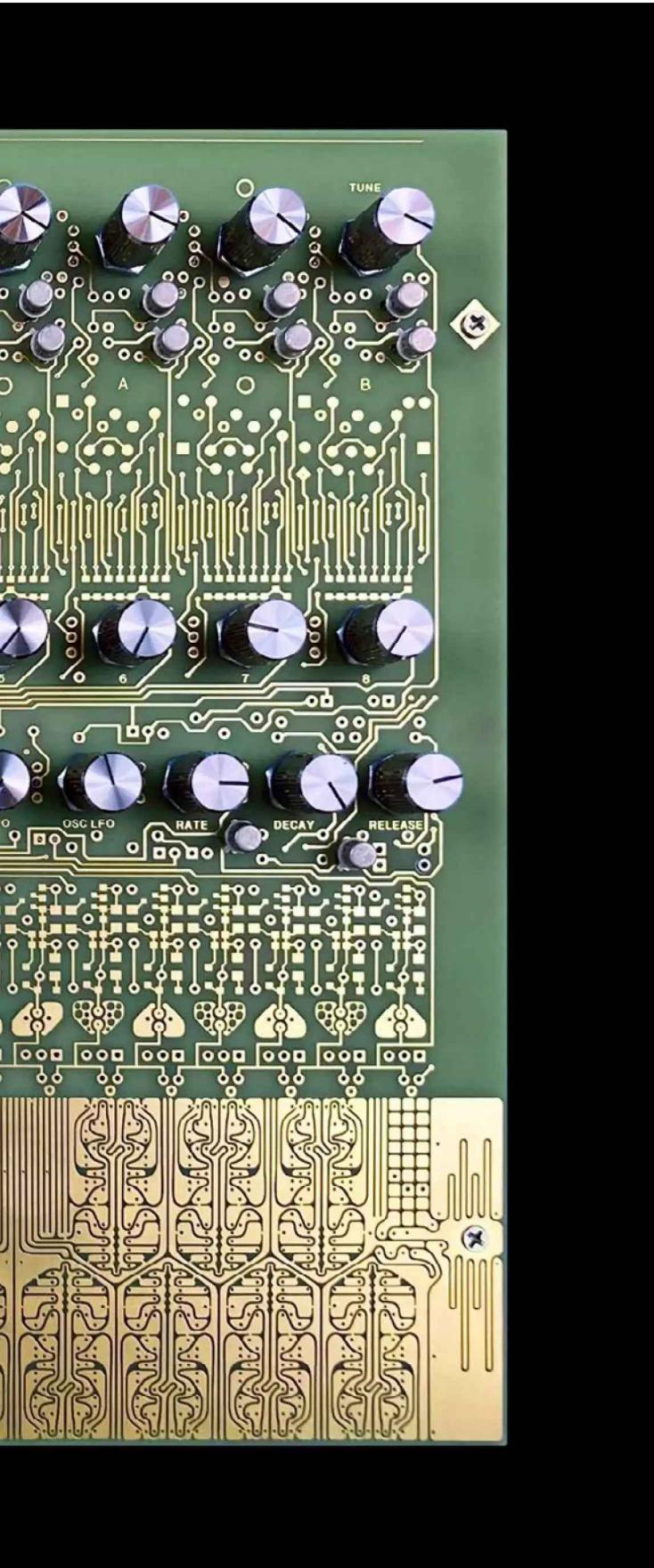


TWIDDLE ME THIS

LA Priest's latest hardware innovation

Remember when we interviewed Sam Eastgate (LA Priest) about his "human drum machine" called GENE? Well, now comes the Polygene, an analogue, stereo polyphonic synth comprised of two "halves". On one side there's an eight-voice, twin VCO polysynth, and on the other, a polysynth that uses the ring modulated output of each pair of oscillators as its signal source. The result is one staggeringly variable sound-sculpting instrument, with optional add-ons, such as a sequencer, to boot.

A mere £1,100 investment stands in your way. genesynths.com

**PULSE****ANNIE LEETH**

Stateside producer does things her way

WHO?

Originally from Richmond, Virginia, producer and violinist Annie Leeth found herself working in the studio of lauded Atlanta producer Ben Allen, who's partnered with everyone from Animal Collective to MIA. "I'd be on writing sessions with him, and the way he trains you is that you need to have things ready before the artist finishes their thought," she explains. "Waiting for an engineer to finish the technical stuff is a big no-no for him. It was intense." Leeth moved on from that internship to do live sound professionally, also working on her own music when time permitted.

WHY ANNIE LEETH?

Her first releases came in 2018, and Leeth has since taken her work from the realm of classical composition to the glitched-out material that laces her 2025 release 'Phantom Limb'. Taking cues from the likes of Laurie Anderson, the 10 tracks wobble and breach the melodic line to form big-time hooks and moments that sound extraterrestrial. The more trad synthpop vibe of 'Games That Match' poses some of life's bigger questions. "It's a lot about mortality and not really being sure where your own life is going," she says.

TELL US MORE...

Leeth boldly takes her material out on the road, frequently performing her work as part of a trio. "Depending on the set-up of the show, we'll have different types of playback," she explains. "With the earlier albums, I always had at least a looper with me. I don't actually play and sing that well at the same time, so the looping kind of started to help me focus on one thing."

JOE SILVA

'Phantom Limb' is out now via Bandcamp

EYE CANDY

World's first autofocus specs

Finnish startup IXI are adamant that their latest gadget represents a genuine evolution in eyewear. Their prototype specs use a combination of liquid-crystal tech and eye-tracking sensors to follow the movement of your eyes so they can adjust the lens' optical power automatically. Smart, eh? Manufactured in Finland and hand-finished in Italy, there's still no news on a release date or price, but if IXI get this right, it really could be a game-changer. ixieyewear.com



FLARE UP

Build your own earphones in five minutes

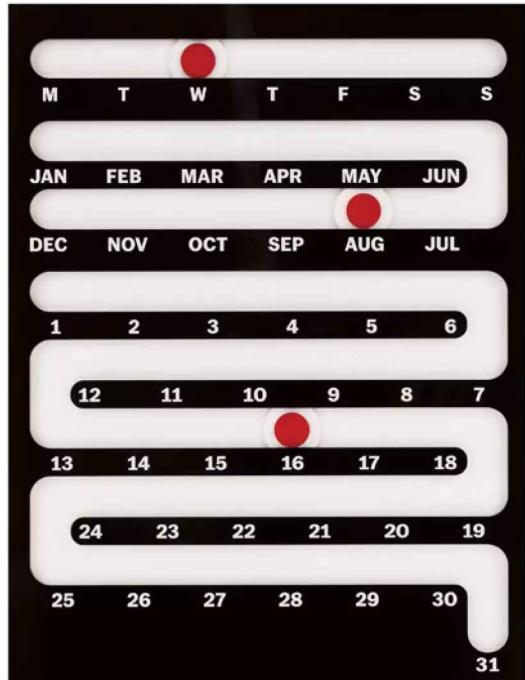
Flare Audio, the brains behind the Calmer stress-reducing "ear tools", have announced a line of fully customisable earphones. The Flare Build, as they're known, promise "a better, cleaner, more empowering way to experience audio", featuring custom caps, three sizes of silicone tips and interchangeable USB-C or 3.5mm connectivity (you can even include your initials). These punch well above their £39.95 price tag, in both sound and feel. flareaudio.com



SLIDER MAN

The only calendar you'll ever need

If you were slow off the mark in buying a calendar for 2026, this perpetual, Bauhaus-inspired one means you'll never have to buy another. Featuring bold typography and a clean sliding panel system, you simply move the red dot to the correct date and Bob's your uncle. On sale now for £57. onshelfdecor.com



ROBO SLOP

Swiss scientists develop fully edible bot

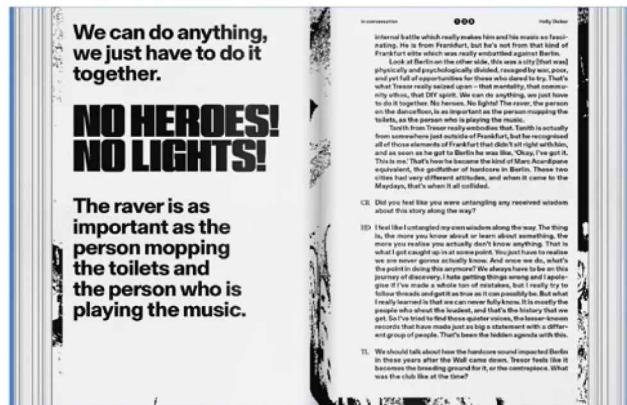
Robots you can eat might not be top of the agenda, but the Intelligent Systems Laboratory at EPFL University, Lausanne did unveil the world's first truly edible droid recently. From its battery, which works by making use of a reaction between citric acid and baking soda, down to its soft gelatine body, this thing is literally a meal on wheels. The adult reason for creating these? To safely deliver medication to dangerous animals. epfl.ch



LOOK MA, NO TAGS

Best of music podcast anthologised

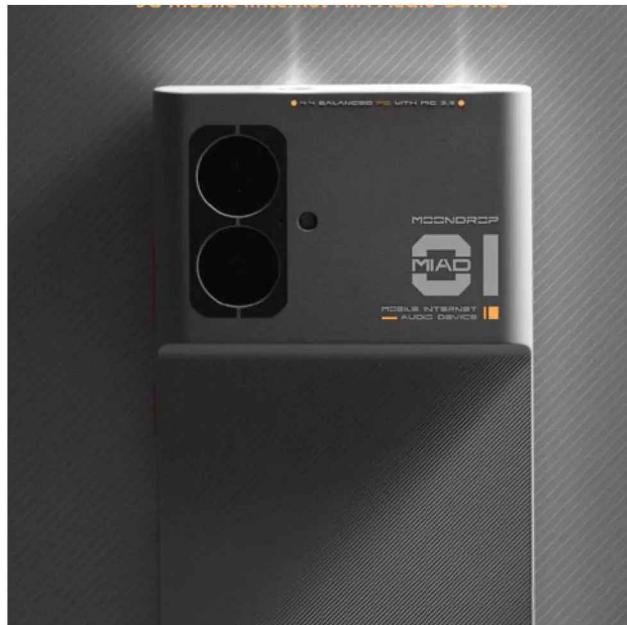
The evergreen No Tags podcast is back in book form, with last year's interviews and conversations on underground music culture now collected in 'Volume 02'. If you've already exhausted last year's episodes, fear not because there are five new and exclusive essays included in this £15 package, covering a range of topics from what makes for the perfect night out to warnings about the AI slopwave flooding streaming platforms. Set in gorgeously bold design by All Purpose Studio too. notagspodcast.myshopify.com



TELEPHONIC REVOLUTION

At long last – hi-fi audio from your phone

If you're bored of having to choose between smartphone compatibility and sound quality for your music, MOONDROP might well be the company for you. Their MIAD01 is a 5G-equipped smartphone with "built-in hi-fi audio" – in other words, a fully shielded audio signal path that can truly reproduce the dynamics of 24-bit mastering with up to 132dB of dynamic range. It has both 4.4mm and 3.5mm jacks, so no more adaptors. moondroplab.com



PULSE

NU VISION

Post-punkers pen debut for EBM pals

WHO?

Nu Vision is a post-punk collective based in Chicago, built around core members Duke Cooper, Jason Letkiewicz and Jonathan D Valdez, with Robert Lane as lead vocalist. They started life when Cooper and Letkiewicz "made four or five barebone ideas for songs" back in autumn 2022, but never found the time to make much progress. In 2023, Valdez joined the fold, prompting that earlier work to be revisited, before Lane was invited to lend his voice in early 2024.

WHY NU VISION?

They aim to present a living continuation of the post-punk, new wave and electronic lineage. In keeping with this ethos, their debut album 'The Seed' functions in part as a tribute to musical icons the band knew personally, including DAF's Gabi Delgado, Nitzer Ebb's Douglas McCarthy and Depeche Mode's Andrew Fletcher. Its actual development began in response to the passing of Sandwell District's Juan Mendez and is steeped in frenetic synthesisers ('Time'), angular basslines ('Somedays') and stark, motorik-inflected percussion ('R U Serious').

TELL US MORE...

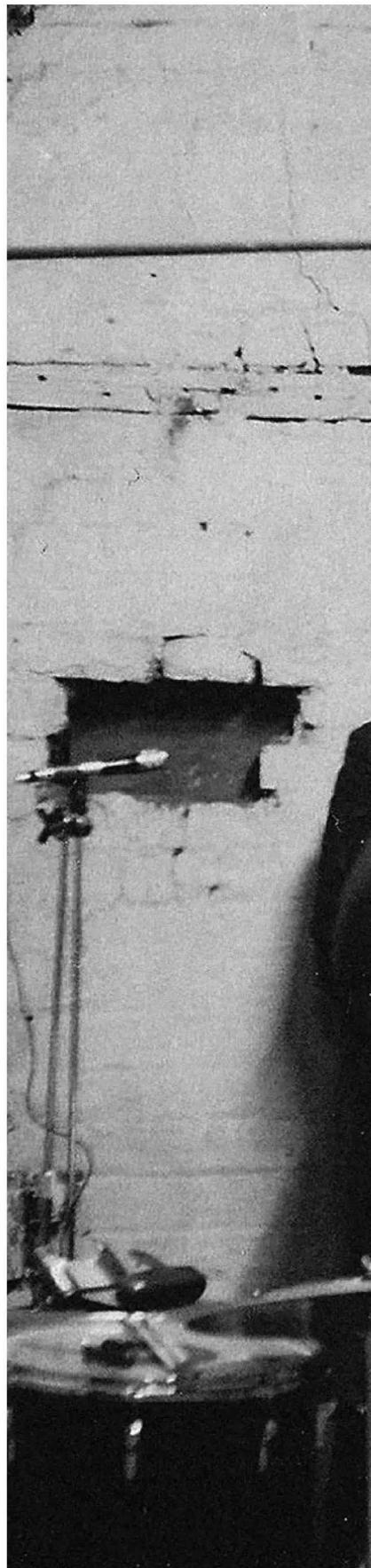
Nu Vision treat visual identity not as an accessory, but as an essential extension of their sound, something confirmed by the fact that 'The Seed' will be accompanied by eight films. Cooper reveals that each of these "presents a creative concept of how the director Todd Sines hears the music to invoke a visual storyline and narrative". The band are clearly not ones to hang about either. With a special limited edition 12-inch announced alongside 'The Seed', and a second album already near completion, Nu Vision enter the musical arena with the momentum of a group knowing exactly what they want to say.

IMOGEN BEBB

'The Seed' is out now on Nation

TICK, TICK, TICK, TICK... BOOM!

THEY'RE OFTEN MENTIONED ALONGSIDE CABARET VOLTAIRE AND THE HUMAN LEAGUE, BUT THEIR STORY ISN'T AS WELL KNOWN AS THOSE OF THEIR SHEFFIELD CONTEMPORARIES. WHICH IS HARD TO FATHOM, AS THIS IS AN EXPLOSIVE TALE OF SUBVERSION AND INNOVATION. THEY MADE GREAT MUSIC ALONG THE WAY TOO, SOMETIMES POST-PUNK, SOMETIMES ELECTRONIC, AND SOMETIMES SOMETHING ELSE ENTIRELY. WELCOME TO THE WEIRD AND WILD WORLD OF **CLOCK DVA**







ADI NEWTON, FUTURAMA FESTIVAL, 1980 - PHOTO: PHILIPPE CARLY - NEWWAVEPHOTOS.COM

Y

ou might be forgiven for thinking Adi Newton is some mythical figure mired in Sheffield musical folklore. The legend surrounding him and the stories about his band Clock DVA are countless and have only grown over the decades.

Of the myriad artists transmitting out of the city as the 1970s turned into the 1980s, Clock DVA are the most controversial, with a reputation as provocative troublemakers tangled up in hard drugs. And yet that reputation also extended to blistering live shows and album releases that garnered five-star reviews.

You join us in Adi's recording studio in deepest, darkest, rainiest Essex to mark the beginning of a remastered reissue programme by The Grey Area Of Mute that kicks off with Clock DVA's 'White Souls In Black Suits' and 'Thirst', two of the most innovative and incredible albums of the post-punk era. It is a rollercoaster chat about the key events that brought these records into the world. Buckle up, it's quite a ride.

In 1973, Sheffield Council funded a theatre group with the aim of getting teenagers from across the city interested in the performing arts. Not only did it engage many young people who would not normally get such an opportunity, it kick-started a musical tidal wave that would shake the pop world to its very foundations.

Run by husband and wife team Chris and Veronica Wilkinson, the group was based in Holly House, an old Department of Education building behind the City Hall. It was called Meatwhistle. The rude name probably helped, but Meatwhistle seemed to hit a nerve with misfit teens of a creative bent. People like Glenn Gregory, later of BEF and Heaven 17 fame, and Paul Bower, who went on to form the band 2.3 and co-found Sheffield's pivotal Gun Rubber fanzine. It's where Martyn Ware met Ian Craig Marsh, a coming together that would eventually lead to the formation of The Human League. Adi Newton was there too.

"I met Glenn at college and we got to be mates," says Adi, settling down for an afternoon of conversation fuelled by tea and salted butter biscuits. "He invited me to come down to Meatwhistle one evening. After that, I started going on a regular basis."

While the main focus there was on theatre arts, no one was discouraged from musical pursuits.

"It was very anarchic," continues Adi. "You could do what you wanted with the facilities they had, which is how Martyn, Ian and I got involved in making some music."

A plethora of makeshift bands formed there, many lasting for just one performance. Most never played outside of Meatwhistle on a Sunday afternoon. But the few escapees included The Dead Daughters, a trio comprising Adi, Martyn and Ian. They made it out of the Holly building to do a gig in Bar 2 at the Sheffield University Students' Union.

"There was a girl having a party there," says Adi. "She wanted some music, so we volunteered to do something."

It seems Adi was already a big fan of experimental music by then. We're talking about the mid-1970s, so obviously no internet, and yet here was a teenager into avant-garde composers such as John Cage, Luciano Berio and David Tudor. Where on earth did he discover these people?

"From the library," he replies. "I don't know who the curators were, but they brought in a lot of interesting work. Graves Art Gallery was upstairs, so I spent a lot of time going to the library, going to the gallery, borrowing books, borrowing LPs..."

With Sheffield Central Library full of this stuff, it's no surprise that Adi wasn't alone in discovering new sounds – and not just avant-garde records either.

"Many of us were into the German electronic groups and Roxy Music was another big influence," he says. "I remember seeing them on 'The Old Grey Whistle Test'. The way they dressed, the sounds they made, Brian Eno with his VCS 3 and Andy Mackay with the processed woodwinds... it was kind of a revelation."

What did this girl imagine she was going to get at her party? Roxy Music?

"God knows," says Adi. "We just improvised with what we had. It wasn't disco, that's for sure."

Using guitars, synths, drums, a bunch of tape loops and a lot of effects, their set reportedly included the 'Doctor Who' theme tune and a version of 'Louie Louie'.

"After that night, we wondered if perhaps we could take this further and do something more with it."

Their next move changed everything. They renamed themselves The Future and undertook a kit upgrade. Martyn bought a Korg 770 and Ian acquired a System 100 on the never-never. Adi took charge of the vocals and the tapes. But since Meatwhistle had fizzled out, they needed somewhere else to go.

B

y the late 1970s, Sheffield's city centre was full of derelict Victorian factory buildings that were once part of the thriving steel industry. Many had been occupied by "little mesters", the local term for the countless numbers of self-employed craftspeople who made cutlery, jewellery, tools, pen knives and other small items in tiny rented workshops in these buildings. Once the mesters started to wane, what could be done with their disused workshops? Who would want a filthy, dilapidated, empty room often without heating or running water or even a toilet, slap bang in the middle of the city?

Well...

Adi and Ian decided that one of the little mesters' places, three floors above a sandwich shop on Devonshire Lane, would be the ideal base for their burgeoning enterprises. As unemployment was on the rise in the area, rents were rock bottom and they moved in on New Year's Eve, 1976.

Devonshire Lane became a hub for a wide variety of creative exploits. Adi was painting and setting up a furniture restoration sideline, while Ian was building synths. The Gun Rubber fanzine was also co-founded there by Paul Bower (editor) and Adi (anti-editor). It was a great place for The Future to rehearse too.

After a few months, The Future had worked up a bunch of tracks and reached the point where they needed some help getting them onto tape. So they turned to Sheffield legend Ken Patten at Studio Electrophonique. For those who are unaware of Ken Patten's swish-sounding studio, it was nothing of the kind.

"When we arrived at Ken's place, we were surprised to find it was a semi-detached house on an estate in Handsworth," says Adi. "He was using the lounge as his control room, which is where we set ourselves up."

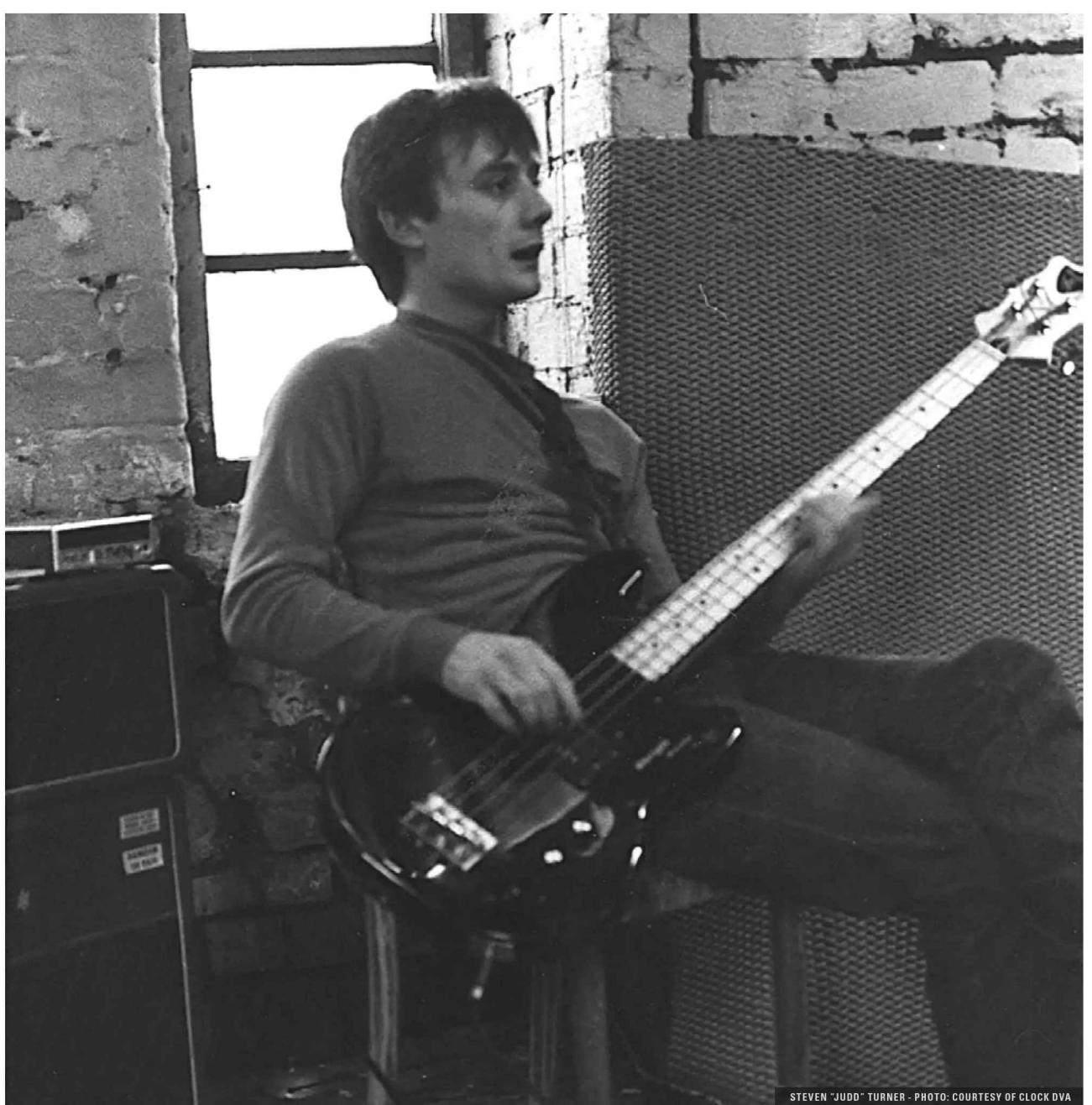
While Ken might have been more used to recording bands with instruments that had strings, he rolled his sleeves up and got on with laying down The Future.

"He was very open to our ideas," recalls Adi. "He might not have understood where we were coming from, but he was instrumental in helping us to get those ideas onto a tape and then to mix them into tracks."

The band were very clear about what they wanted to do with the results.

"We wrote a letter to all the record companies, inviting them to make appointments for us to come to London and play them our demo tape," explains Adi.

The thinking was that a hand-delivered demo would at least ensure the tracks got heard.



"The A&R guys were very polite – 'Thanks for coming in, we'll have a chat about it...' – but we didn't get much of a response."

Wholesale rejection wasn't what they'd had in mind, so it prompted a bit of a rethink.

"Martyn and Ian wanted to take things in a more accessible direction," explains Adi. "Pop music rather than the avant-garde stuff we'd been doing. I really didn't want to get into making pop music, though."

That would soon be a decision that was taken out of Adi's hands.

"I arrived at Devonshire Lane one day to find they'd taken all their equipment and left a note."

What did it say?

"It was fairly short. Something like, 'We've made a decision to... blah blah blah, whatever... and you're out of the band'. But the act of removing the equipment and just leaving a note, that annoyed me more than anything."

Martyn Ware claims the note read, "We're in The Raven, come and see us", and they were there to tell Adi that it was the end of the line for him. They had fellow Meatwhistle alumnus Paul Civico with them to act as a heavy if Adi kicked off. So there was no chat in the pub?

"No," says Adi. "That's what I got annoyed about. We could have spoken about it. We could have talked about how we felt, our various directions, what I wanted to do, what they wanted to do, and how that could work."

That almost exactly the same thing happened to Martyn when he was fired by The Human League, the band he formed after The Future, won't be lost on anyone. The Sheffield story really is the gift that keeps on giving.

"So I got on with what I was going to do anyway," says Adi with a shrug. "I thought, 'I'll start my own thing then'."

Adi's own thing initially involved a bit of shopping. Top of the list was an EMS Synthi E suitcase synthesiser, which he bought with a loan from his parents.

"That was the first electronic instrument I had," he says. "I wanted a modular system that I could use for external processing, so anything you could mic or that had an output could be patched through it. You'd record the results and then feed that back in again, which meant you could build up a lot of texture."

After a spell of experimentation with this new kit, he decided it was time to bring in other people, beginning with Steven James Turner on bass. Judd, as everyone called him, was a soul boy, a pal of Cabaret Voltaire's Richard H Kirk who Adi had got to know from drinking in the multitude of pubs and bars dotted around the Devonshire Lane area.

A

The addition of synth player Joseph Hurst in late 1977 was the start of Clock DVA. The following year, they self-released a cassette called 'The Texas Chainsaw Massacre', featuring treated extracts from the gorefest horror film. Several more cassettes followed quickly and these early recordings appear on 'Horology', a three-volume collection issued by Vinyl On Demand in 2021.

The trio made their live debut gig supporting The Human League at The Limit in Sheffield in July 1978, an event that throws up more questions than it answers. Clock DVA supporting Adi's one-time bandmates from The Future, who by now had recruited Phil Oakey on vocals? Yup. By all accounts, the DVA show was chaos.

"There was a bit of violence and destruction, the set was haphazard, and the band was banned from The Limit," wrote Martin Lilleker in his fine book, 'Beats Working For A Living – Sheffield Popular Music 1973-1984'. Martyn Ware referred to it as "the most god-awful racket I'd ever heard in my life". Considering the history, that must have pleased Adi enormously.

Joseph Hurst was replaced by Simon Mark Elliot-Kemp shortly afterwards. Judd had met Simon at a party and got him along to the gig at The Limit, which amazingly hadn't put him off. Quite the opposite. He was another outsider – he'd sold his motorbike to buy his synth – and very much liked the idea of joining a band who went out of their way to annoy people. He was also charged with providing rhythms on his keyboard, as a drummer – or even a drum machine – was still a way off.

Clock DVA played their next show at another Sheffield club, The Penthouse on Dixon Lane, in the September of 1978. This also descended into disorder, with the band smashing lots of working fluorescent tubes to pieces while giving the security staff the run-around. According to one fanzine review, the set was "80 per cent undiscernible" and "intense in the extreme". DVA were banned from a second venue.

They made it three in a row when they turned up to play the Now Society at Bar 2 a couple of months later. It was their first show with guitarist David Hammond, who'd arrived from Nottingham to study law. David was a friend of Judd's, which the band would discover meant they shared the same excesses. The finale of the set, lit only by strobe, saw Adi pick up a speaker cabinet and launch it into the crowd. Quite the ruse, as it turned out to be made of polystyrene and was filled with feathers, which went absolutely everywhere. So that was ban number three.

The gigs continued in this vein for some time. When they forayed outside of Sheffield, to a Halifax nightspot owned by the wrestler Big Daddy, the show ended in a huge brawl after 10 minutes. It kicked off when someone poured beer on one of the synths in the belief that DVA were, as Adi puts it, "Tangerine Dream wimps". Judd was so drunk he decided to take on the entire room, smashing his bass to pieces and damaging a fair few punters in the process.

There was blood everywhere. Some years later Simon revealed, "I think it was my beer and I think it was Judd who knocked it over". Minor details.

Despite the gale-force mayhem that followed them wherever they went, Clock DVA were rehearsing frequently and regularly. The opinion of the local fanzine writers was that they'd come on immeasurably since The Limit and were creating their own highly distinctive sound. The next major shift in the band's trajectory came in April 1979, when Adi, Judd and David went to see Bristol punk-funkers The Pop Group.

"They had a big impact on me," acknowledges Adi. "I became very interested in pursuing that kind of sound, with the funk and the jazz elements. I was also getting interested in the improvisation side of things and thought we could work well in that mode."

That being the case, they would need a drummer. And if they were going for a funk and jazz sound, some horns wouldn't go amiss. Step forward Roger Quail and Charlie Collins.

"I was still at school, playing drums in a band with some mates," says Roger Quail, speaking from his home in Ireland. "I was also friends with a Sheffield punk group called The Stunt Kites, who knew Adi and Judd from various pubs around the city. Adi had a Revox, which gave you huge currency back then, and he offered to produce a Stunt Kites demo at his flat in Nether Edge. I think their drummer was borrowing my kit, so I trooped over to the flat with them."

It wasn't long before Roger received word via The Stunt Kites that Clock DVA were looking for a drummer and Adi was wondering if he'd be interested. He certainly was.

"Adi gave me some cassettes to get a feel for what they were doing," continues Roger. "He used to make his own tape inlays and one of these was a montage of very hairy vaginas. It was brilliantly done, but I remember going home on the bus thinking, 'If my mum sees this, she's going to kill me', so I took the inlay out and stuffed it down the side of the bus seat. That was my introduction to this dark and sexual world of Clock DVA."

A dark world indeed. Around the same time, one of the fanzines ran a story that Judd had ended up in hospital after overdosing on heroin. It had happened before and it would happen again.

Roger's first recording with Clock DVA was in September 1979.

"We went to Western Works, where Cabaret Voltaire produced a four-track demo for us. The line-up would have been Adi, David, Judd, Simon and me. Charlie joined a couple of weeks later."

"I used to work with a Spanish dancer and performance artist called Luz Cordera," says saxophonist and percussionist Charlie Collins down the line from his home in Sheffield. "Luz knew Clock DVA, she used to drink with them, and I'd loaned them my Revox."

Hold on. Is this the same Revox that Adi had?

"My mum and dad asked me what I wanted for my 21st birthday and I said, 'Oh, a Revox recorder,'" continues Charlie. "I loaned it to Adi and he must have had it for a year or maybe 18 months. So, yeah, all the early DVA stuff was recorded on my Revox."

The cheek of it. Anyway...

"There was no discussion about me joining the band," says Charlie of his call-up, his experience on the improv scene marking

him out as useful way beyond owning a Revox. "I recorded a few things with them and it evolved from there. I was just there working with them, getting more and more involved by adding saxophone and treating it with effects units."

Charlie was older than the others and had a good deal more experience as a musician.

"I also played as a percussionist in soul and R&B bands. I was in a couple of groups doing cover versions of early 70s soul songs – Curtis Mayfield-style stuff. There was a pub called The Broadfield that we'd play every Friday night and it was always packed."

It was Charlie who introduced DVA to American free jazz, avant-funk and no wave artists – the likes of the Art Ensemble Of Chicago, James "Blood" Ulmer and James Chance – who would feed into the band's sound. And as far as the intoxicants go, Charlie had been there, done that, and got a couple of T-shirts on his way home. He didn't do drugs now, though. He also didn't drink.

"Prior to joining the band, I was an alcoholic," he says. "I was close to Joe Mlongo, who owned the Rare & Racy record shop, and Joe and I never stopped drinking. We decided to pack it in together and that was when music became more serious for me."

"The rest of the guys seemed very grown-up compared to me," remembers Roger. "There was a lot of drugs around, which scared me a bit, but Charlie wasn't interested in that, so I sort of gravitated towards him. As well as being older than everybody else, Charlie was this fountain of musical knowledge – he'd seen The Doors play at The Roundhouse – and I very much found myself under his protection."

"We had audiences starting to go crazy for DVA, but people shied away from us because of the drugs," says Charlie. "Judd and David were the junkies in the band. They were really hardcore. There were far more drugs involved than in any of the other bands. Far more. And I'd seen drugs devour people."

So Clock DVA were seen as edgy?

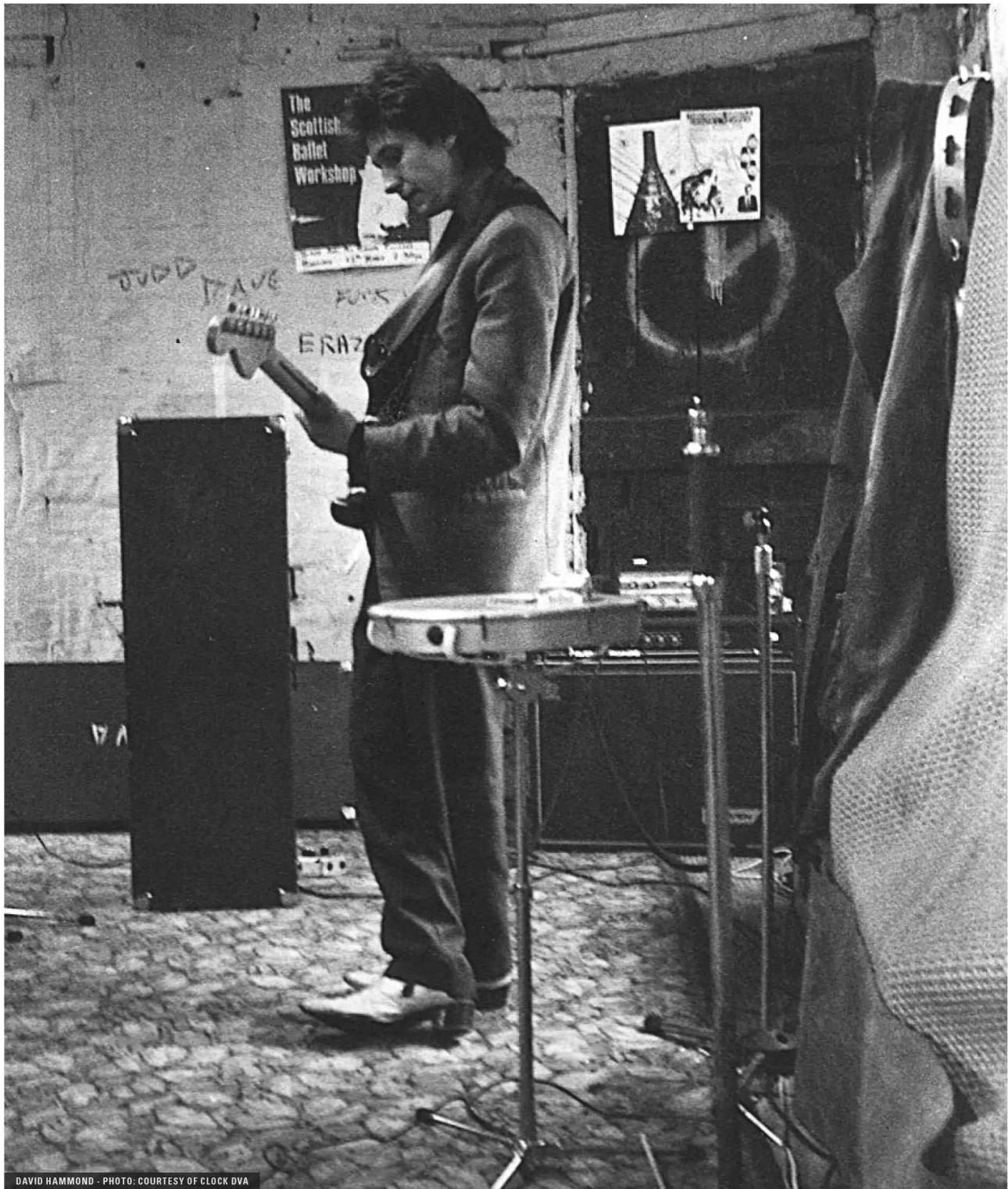
"Very much so," affirms Charlie. "I don't think we considered how we looked to everybody else. We were just getting on with our lives and doing what we enjoyed."

In April 1980, with a string of cassettes to their name by this point, Clock DVA felt ready to record their debut album proper. And being DVA, they did it their own way – 'White Souls In Black Suits' was entirely improvised. The band, which now had a settled line-up of Adi, Judd, David, Charlie and Roger, recorded the eight tracks at their dedicated rehearsal space on West Street, next door to The Limit. It was another little mester's place, just around the corner from their original home on Devonshire Lane.

"It was very Dickensian," remembers Roger. "It was like Fagin's den in 'Oliver!'. You went through an iron gate, which you had to unlock with a key, through a courtyard, up some wooden ladders, across a roof, up another set of wooden ladders, and then into a room. It was extremely cold and it leaked when it rained, but it was cheap."

And you had to carry your equipment up these ladders?

"It was interesting when you came back from a gig in London and you had to do it in the dark," says Charlie with a laugh.



DAVID HAMMOND - PHOTO: COURTESY OF CLOCK DVA



Whereas the Revox had been perfect for their early material, they brought in an 8-track portable studio and a sound engineer for 'White Souls' – a portable studio that the engineer had to carry up two sets of wooden ladders and across a roof.

"The actual recording was one day," says Roger. "My diary says Saturday 26 April. I think we started at lunchtime and then, again going back to my diary, we were in the pub by eight o'clock."

"It was done pretty quickly," agrees Adi. "I find it very emotional when I listen to it now. I remember the guys and how everything was improvised, how we caught those moments, how it fell in place. That session produced the whole of the 'White Souls' album and it was all done in a day, in one session or maybe two."

How would Adi describe the results?

"It's a bit like the third stream idea in jazz, where you get different elements coming together and pushing in different ways. There's electronic stuff, there's jazz and funk, there's a kind of pop, there's even rock, so it's a hybrid. Listening to it again after 40-odd years was incredible. On the remastered version, I could hear all the details. I was amazed by the playing, the sounds, the coincidental things that happened and the really nice moments when it comes together perfectly."

A month after 'White Souls In Black Suits' was recorded, David Hammond left the band. His guitar work, effectively rudimentary and heavily treated, was a big part of the early DVA sound, but he was in thrall to the drugs and they were making him unreliable. While Judd seemed able to hoover up heroin and still turn up, David didn't. The others would phone him to find out where he was. "I'm on my way," he'd say, only for him to still not show up.

David was replaced by Paul Widger from They Must Be Russians, whose first gig with DVA was at the ICA, London, in June 1980. And the support act that night? They Must Be Russians. Paul played two sets, with a haircut in between. Adi decided Paul's locks were too long for DVA, so his hairdresser girlfriend gave him a trim in the dressing room before he took to the stage with his new band. The change in guitarist also shifted the DVA sound.

"Dave had a kind of heavy metal approach," says Charlie. "There was screaming feedback, sustained notes and solos when Dave was playing, but Paul was more into New York new wave music. It was more chuk-chuk-chuk-chuk-chuk with Paul."

David Hammond went to ground after leaving Clock DVA, with many suspecting that drugs had got the better of him. But 10 years later, someone spotted him on the telly. Much to the amazement of his old acquaintances back in Sheffield, he was leading the singing on a 'Songs Of Praise' special from Spain.

"I was Judd's partner-in-arms when it came to the excess side of things," concedes David in an email. "Eventually I was forced to retreat back to Nottingham to get myself together. I worked in various jobs for a couple of years before heading off to the Canary Islands and a career in tourism."

He became the area manager for Costa Blanca at a large holiday operator, where he was regarded as a safe pair of hands when it came to dealing with television and the press.

"When 'Songs Of Praise' contacted them looking for a suitable location for an overseas special, they sent them my way."

Which is how he came to be interviewed and singing hymns on 'Songs Of Praise' in Benidorm.

"You have to remember that there was no email or mobile communication then, and I only spent a month a year back in the UK," he explains. "So I was blissfully unaware that I was the talk of Sheffield until a few years later!"

he band were finding some momentum now, but Adi didn't try to chase down a record deal. He was still feeling he'd been burned by his experience of A&R departments with The Future.

"I had this philosophy that, well, if someone was interested, they'd find us," he says.

In the event, it was through an existing connection with Throbbing Gristle's Genesis P-Orridge that 'White Souls In Black Suits' found a home for its release.

"I knew Gen's work through publications like Performance magazine," says Adi. "I'd read a couple of features where he was talking about William Burroughs, Aleister Crowley, Austin Spare and other artists I was already into. So I started to write to him at Martello Street and eventually went to London to meet him and the other guys."

It wasn't long before Clock DVA found themselves sharing live bills with Throbbing Gristle. One such gig was at The Fan Club in Leeds in February 1980, with both bands subsequently releasing tapes of their sets that night. Among those who were impressed by DVA's performance was Fan Club promoter John Keenan, who had put on the first Futurama festival in the city several months earlier and was starting to think about who he might want to book for the second event later in the year.

Given their close association with DVA, it was no surprise when TG offered to put out 'White Souls' on their Industrial imprint. It was also through TG that DVA hooked up with Rod Pearce from Fetish Records.

"I met Rod just after 'White Souls' was finished," says Adi. "He'd put out Throbbing Gristle's 'The Second Annual Report' album on his label. He was looking to do more and Gen recommended us."

So with 'White Souls' not yet released, a deal for the follow-up was already in the bag. From there, the situation snowballed quickly. The band's second album, 'Thirst', was written and fully rehearsed by the time Clock DVA took to the stage at Futurama 2 in Leeds in September 1980. Of the eight songs they performed that day, seven were from 'Thirst'. Most of them they'd never tried live before.

Futurama took place over two days in the enormous Queens Hall in the city centre. DVA appeared on the Saturday at around 6pm, which turned out to be the perfect slot. The venue had been half-empty for much of the afternoon, but was now at its capacity crowd of 5,000. When the band walked out and the spotlights came on, it sent a bristle through the room before they'd even played a note.

"All I remember about Futurama was being awestruck by the number of people," says Charlie. "Even though I'd played lots of gigs, I'd never played anything that big."

DVA opened their set with the churning 'North Loop', moving on to tracks like the jerky, speedy, dazzling 'Sensorium' and the gloomy yet somehow slinky 'Blue Tone'. The highlight was probably '4 Hours', often described later as the band's signature song, with Charlie's wild sax squalls grabbing everybody's attention right from the off.

"Nobody played saxophone – it was the most uncool instrument in the world," jokes Charlie. "But what I was doing with the sax was very experimental. I was playing it in a way that stemmed from free improv, from free jazz."

Two weeks after *Futurama*, Clock DVA headed to Jacob's Studio in Surrey to record the tracks for 'Thirst'. Housed within a beautiful Georgian farmhouse on the outskirts of Farnham, Jacob's was a definite leap up from the West Street rehearsal space where they'd recorded 'White Souls'.

"Jacob's was a proper 16-track recording studio," explains Roger. "It was residential and we had catering. We found it astonishing that people would ask us what we wanted for dinner and then bring it to us. We did 'Thirst' in a week, starting on 28 September. We got there late on the Sunday night, recorded from Monday to Saturday, and that was it."

DVA were also using a producer for the first time, Ken Thomas, who went on to helm the likes of The Damned, The Sugarcubes and Dave Gahan.

"Ken Thomas completely got what it was we were trying to do," says Roger. "Everybody was on the same page, everybody was working together towards a common goal, and it was a fantastically creative time. It really was very special."

'Thirst' is a very different record to 'White Souls'. For one thing, it's composed and structured rather than improvised. With these tracks, these songs, you can really start to hear what Clock DVA were capable of.

C

lock DVA now had two albums in the can and the release dates were set. 'White Souls In Black Suits' came out as a tape on Industrial in December 1980. 'Thirst', their vinyl debut, followed on Fetish in January 1981.

Recorded six months apart and issued only a few weeks apart, the experience of hearing the two albums back-to-back must have been a real treat. It's almost as if the last track on 'White Souls' – the squally, random tape mashup of 'Anti-Chance', a Burroughs-esque cut-up collaboration with Cabaret Voltaire – was made to segue into the seven-minute 'Uncertain', the opening track of 'Thirst', which slowly dissolves into what is perhaps DVA's most discernibly post-punk material.

Dave McCullough reviewed 'White Souls' and 'Thirst' together in *Sounds*, notes Roger. "He gave 'Thirst' five stars and said it was the best album he'd heard since Joy Division's 'Unknown Pleasures'. We were like, 'OK, we're onto something here.'"

Praise for the band's live shows was also fulsome. In February 1981, DVA played a Fetish Records showcase at The Lyceum in London alongside Cabaret Voltaire, Throbbing Gristle and Z'EV. Gavin Martin was nonplussed in his review for the *NME* – until they came on.

"The revelation of the evening, possibly a lifetime, are Clock DVA," he wrote. "They are going to be the best group in the world."

"That review is the sort of thing that would turn your head a bit," says Roger. "There was a sense that we were really going places."

But this being Clock DVA, under the surface, or in Adi's mind at least, exactly the opposite was happening.

"It's great to have critical acclaim," he says, in such a way that you suspect a "but" is coming. "It's good to read that stuff. It's a reinforcement of your thinking, so it's a positive thing, but ultimately it doesn't matter."

And there it is. Adi had already moved on.

"We played a show with Bauhaus at Heaven in London," he goes on. "I remember everybody being incredibly tight. It was very good and it made me think, 'Well, maybe we should change things'. Seeing Bauhaus was a spark for me. I didn't want to be like them. I realised it was time to do something new."

"I remember that night really well," says Charlie. "That was the first time I had the feeling that Adi wanted to take DVA somewhere else. I was sitting in the dressing room listening to what he was saying, and I remember thinking, 'He's going to split this band up'."

"We could have done another 'Thirst'," says Adi. "We were working on new tracks and we'd played a couple of them, like 'The Opening' and 'Remain, Remain' at the Lyceum show. I think they were already formalised. We were in danger of carrying on just because we'd had success with this album. We could have done another one and another one. I saw it being like a finished painting. You could repaint it, or you start something new."

It's a bold move to fly in the face of critical acclaim, not to mention a well-founded reputation as a formidable live act. The final show for the 'Thirst' line-up was in Leeds, once again at The Fan Club, on 7 May 1981.

"We arrived at the rehearsal as usual the next night and the very first thing Adi said was, 'I'm breaking the band up,'" recalls Charlie. "He said there were other things he wanted to do and that was it."

"It wasn't like there were warring factions in the band, but Adi and Judd always had different interests to the rest of us," notes Roger. "They were modern art, avant-garde films and John Cage. The way I saw it, the constructivists sacked the cricket fans."

"Paul, Roger and I left the rehearsal and went straight next door to The Limit," continues Charlie. "We got a beer and I said, 'My mate Terry Todd isn't doing anything at the moment, shall we give him a call and just keep going?'. It was as simple as that. Within 15 minutes of Adi chucking us out, we'd already got a new band. That's how we formed The Box."

The Box went on to make two splendid albums for Go! Discs, with further releases on Cabaret Voltaire's Doublevision label. And if the three former DVA members felt any animosity towards Adi about the split, that's long since dissipated.

"I've always thought of Adi as the captain of a ship called Clock DVA, so he's the one who ultimately chooses who is in the crew and what the ports of call are going to be," offers Roger. "But you need to talk to him about this, because I'm sure he has his own take on it."

Adi?

"It's like the way that Miles Davis worked," he says. "He'd seek out interesting musicians and bring them together into a unit to create a particular sound for a few recordings. But he'd develop another idea and move forward with a new set of musicians. I'm not comparing myself to Miles Davis, but I saw myself a bit like that, in the sense of introducing different elements from different people, different players, and trying to bring them together to make music."

Not many bands could survive such a dramatic split. Nine times out of 10, that would have been that. Thank you and good night. But the story was a long way from over. On 9 May, the very next day after the expulsions, Clock DVA played a show at Brighton Polytechnic with an all-new line-up.

Alongside Adi and Judd, there were two new members – guitarist John Valentine Carruthers and saxophonist Paul Browne – plus a drum machine. The fact that Adi had a new line-up ready to roll suggests the change in personnel was much more of a process than the event it might have seemed to the axed trio. Where were DVA heading now? The answer would come with the 'Advantage' album in 1983, but there was still a third act for this phase of Clock DVA.

T

he aim of the rebooted Clock DVA was to step up, be more professional, be more polished. There was a merry-go-round of musicians until the line-up was settled, but the message coming back from the new members was that Judd really wasn't up to the job and they needed to bring in someone more accomplished on bass.



CHARLIE COLLINS - PHOTO: COURTESY OF CLOCK DVA



"There was a pressure from the other guys to replace Judd," says Adi. "Judd was an intuitive player, he played how he felt, which was fantastic, but the others wanted a slicker bass sound."

There's also the fact that Judd was still deep into heroin. He was the same high-functioning addict he'd always been, but it wasn't a good look when ambitions were lofty.

So Adi fired Judd. His best friend. And then, on 26 August 1981, Judd died from an overdose, alone at his flat in the Broomhall area of Sheffield. He was 24 years old.

The cause of death was methadone, the powerful synthetic opioid that's used to treat heroin dependence. While some addicts do use methadone to help them withdraw, to change, to get off the horse, others use a free prescription for the medication as a heroin alternative with no intention of giving up. And there are those who believe that Adi kicking Judd out of the band contributed to his death. One of them is Charlie Collins.

"Adi knows what I think about it," says Charlie, who's always taken a strong line on Judd's death. "The band was the only thing he had."

Heroin addicts are generally not very nice people. It's not their fault, they're in the throes of a very powerful addiction and they'll do anything to service it. Judd doesn't sound as if he was like that, though. Everyone – absolutely everyone – talks about him with incredible warmth.

"Judd was one of the loveliest people I've ever met," says Charlie. "He was so open and friendly and easy-going."

"It's really easy to romanticise people who die young, but he was wonderful," says Roger. "He walked the high-wire between fearless and reckless. I only knew him for two years, but he made a deep impression on me. Actually, he still pops into my head most days. Small stone, long ripple."

It's impossible to know what really happened, of course, but could Judd's exit from Clock DVA have actually been a beginning rather than an end?

"He was trying to wean himself off the heroin," explains Adi. "He was given this so-called cure and it killed him."

You believe he was trying to change?

"Yeah, I do, because I know he was," answers Adi. "I know he'd got tired of his addiction."

So Judd had things to look forward to?

"We'd been planning to do The Anti-Group," says Adi. "So it really wasn't the end. I didn't want to finish working with him or to stop being his friend. I wanted it to transform into something else we could do together. I didn't have any intention of my time being totally exclusive with DVA, I wanted to do more, especially more experimentation, which is what The Anti-Group would be all about."

You can understand his thinking. Clock DVA is the mainstream outfit and The Anti-Group is the innovative side project with his old pal. Perfect.

"That was exactly the intention. Judd was so full of life, he was so vibrant, he had so much energy. It was always great being around him, always brilliant being together, you know?"

Adi pauses. He takes a moment before carrying on.

"When it happened, it was completely devastating," he admits. "To this day, I've never forgotten it. I have these moments when I can feel he's there. And then there are all the old recordings that still carry his energy..."

He trails off. This is clearly hard for him to talk about, even after all these years.

"For weeks afterwards, I was expecting him to come over on his motorbike, just kind of turn up and hang out. But then it would hit me again. He wasn't coming."

Where does Adi think it would have gone, Judd and him, if Judd hadn't died?

"If we'd been able to do The Anti-Group, we'd have done bigger and more interesting things. I think he would have loved that."

'T

hirst' had been a resounding success. Sales of over 80,000 and great reviews across the board had the major labels queuing up. After lengthy negotiations, Clock DVA signed a multi-album deal with Polydor Records in early 1982, but it was several months before they started putting together 'Advantage', the much-anticipated follow-up to 'Thirst'.

Adi still had John Valentine Carruthers and Paul Browse in the band, with the line-up completed by bassist Dean Dennis and Nick Sanderson on drums. They recorded 'Advantage' at Wales' Rockfield Studios with producer Hugh Jones, who came fresh from working on Echo & The Bunnymen's 'Heaven Up Here'.

"We were looking at the new romantics and those acts with a little bit of a jazz element, people like Blue Rondo À La Turk and Animal Nightlife," says Adi. "I wanted to do an album like that, but with some subversive elements, with a sleazy aspect to it, with a twist to it."

'Advantage' is a big, bold, noir-influenced production, certainly subversive and very electronic, with lots of bright guitar and lots of brass. The two singles, 'Resistance' and 'Breakdown', are belters, the sort of thing the UK charts were awash with in 1983, but success evaded Clock DVA. The major label dream wasn't what Adi had it cut out to be either. Yes, there were big budgets, but with them came sizeable expectations. It was Adi who eventually drew a line under it.

"Polydor were pushing us up to be a stadium band," he says.

"I was getting depressed, because that really wasn't what I wanted to do. We were playing these huge festivals. We did one in Europe somewhere. I was at the side of the stage and Big Country came on, these Scottish lads playing their guitars and jumping about. I just thought, 'I can't take this anymore'."

At the same, there was also trouble brewing internally. In fact, the whole thing was falling apart.

"People's egos were coming to the fore and it was causing dissent in the group," says Adi. "Some of them wanted it to go in another direction, and I think there was a bit of resentment of me being the frontman. It turned out that John had been approached to replace John McGeoch as the guitarist in Siouxsie And The Banshees, but he didn't say anything until the last minute. We had an event in Paris where it all came to a head. It was there that everything collapsed."

How did he feel about that?

"I was very relieved," he replies with a laugh. "I didn't mind the change, although it did feel like another of those situations where people don't talk, but then they do something like The Future where you find the equipment has gone and you've been left a note."

Adi went to stay with a friend in the Netherlands, where he began work in earnest on The Anti-Group, initially on his own, making more experimental pieces and getting more involved with computers. Freer. Happier. Focused.

It wouldn't be the end of Clock DVA, but it was the end for now.

'White Souls In Black Suits' is out now on **The Grey Area Of Mute**.
'Thirst' follows in June and the Clock DVA remastered reissue programme continues after that



TEN DAYS IN A BLACK HOLE

FUTURAMA WAS THE ULTIMATE GATHERING OF THE CLANS. THE BRAINCHILD OF LEEDS LIVE PROMOTER JOHN KEENAN, THE LEGENDARY POST-PUNK FESTIVAL RAN OVER TWO DAYS EVERY YEAR FROM 1979 TO 1983, WITH PUNKS, GOTHS, FUTURISTS AND MORE WITNESSING AROUND 40 BANDS AT A TIME... AND QUITE OFTEN CHUCKING STUFF AT THEM

WORDS: PUSH

So much to take in.

So many sounds and sights and smells. So much to remember. So much to forget.

The figure on the left of the stage has a bushy beard and a big brass instrument. It looks like it's a saxophone, but the noise that it makes is from another dimension - a sharp, shrill, piercing and deeply unsettling squeak-cum-screech that rides the primitive, nagging, lead-heavy yet strangely skipping mech-funk rhythm forged by the guitar, bass and drums. The resulting racket reverberates around the cavernous hall.

The guy at the front is wearing a long, shapeless, grey coat, a sort of bastardised priest's cassock, and has a deep, gruff, gritty voice. When the song breaks down to just the guitar and the beat, he wallops a solitary drum perched on a stand with a stick, while he jabbers about black suits, black ties and black cases. The lines "A piano falls from above / It smashes in front of me" spark the sax and the mech-funk up again.

And all the time that I'm watching, I keep getting wafts of something that sometimes smells a bit like petrol, sometimes more like diesel, sometimes possibly both mixed together.

This is Clock DVA playing '4 Hours' at the second Futurama festival in Leeds on 13 September 1980. Certain situations – not only hearing the track, but also walking through dark and echoey spaces, or filling my car up at the garage, or the mention of the word "piano" – bring it back to me as though it was only yesterday, instantly slamming this craggy and cranky current version of me into reverse and unceremoniously dumping me alongside my 19-year-old self on that long-gone day.

"You look older," says the teenager with a stupid grin.
"We're all older," I snap at him.

September 1979. So much to take in. Police leaflets about the Yorkshire Ripper at the railway station. Punks, skins, bikers, hippies. A pitch black hole, an enormous place, packed with moving shadows. Unidentified flying objects aimed in the direction of PiL. John Lydon is furious and Jah Wobble is oblivious. Mad lasers while Hawkwind play 'Silver Machine'. Ian Curtis staring and writhing. His shiny shirt looks like it's alive. Glue sniffers clutching their stinky bags. The rest of us have to make do with the stench of petrol and diesel, both of which are soaked into every inch of the floor.

ohn Keenan is annoyed with himself.

"What was their drummer's name? He never said much. A very quiet guy. Very nice guy. What was he called? It's in my head somewhere, but it won't come out."

J

I can't help him. It won't come out of my head either. But then I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed here, zipping through the past while trying to keep up with John Keenan jumping from this band and that musician to another band and another musician as he talks about Futurama, the post-punk festival he ran for five years between 1979 and 1983, plus a one-off sixth event in 1989.

Keenan has been a promoter for many decades, working with countless artists during that time, but his recall of people, places and dates is truly astonishing. This is the only point in our lengthy conversation that his memory fails him – and it turns out to be a temporary glitch.

"Steve Morris!" he suddenly exclaims.
Of course. Steve Morris. Absolutely.

"Did you see 'Control', the film about Joy Division?" continues Keenan without a pause. "I thought Sam Riley, you know, the actor who played Ian Curtis, was much more like Steve Morris actually."

We're chatting about some of the artists at the first Futurama festival, which took place at Queens Hall in Leeds over two days in September 1979. Built at the turn of the 20th century and originally

the Swinegate Tram Depot, the 5,000-capacity Queens Hall had been an occasional music venue for maybe 20 years or so, but most of the time it was a giant bus park, with second-hand car sales at the weekends and flea markets a few times a year.

Public Image Ltd headlined the Saturday night, with John Lydon spending the bulk of the set with his back to the audience. Space rock giants Hawkwind, then in one of their more electronic phases, topped the bill on the Sunday. Many of the other acts performing over the weekend were relative newcomers. The Fall had released 'Live At The Witch Trials' a few months earlier, but outfits such as Cabaret Voltaire, Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark, The Teardrop Explodes, A Certain Ratio and Scritti Politti had barely amassed a handful of singles between them.

The biggest buzz was undoubtedly around the appearance of Joy Division. For pretty much everyone inside Queens Hall, 'Unknown Pleasures' had been the album of the summer. And the Manchester quartet did not disappoint. "The final build-up and resolution of 'Shadowplay', 'She's Lost Control' and 'Atrocity Exhibition' is quite magnificent," declared Andy Gill in a two-page NME review of the festival titled "Set The Controls For The Squalor Of Leeds".

"I had already put Joy Division on at my club a few times," says Keenan. "Peter Hook was the one that I got on with the best. Barney Sumner always seemed a bit off-ish and Ian was, well, he wasn't how everyone thinks he was. He wasn't this cool and moody guy, he wasn't deep and introspective... he was basically a young lad who liked messing about. He was the type of kid who would push you and then turn around and pretend he didn't do it. He had that kind of energy to him."

"When I saw them at the club, I could tell they'd got something, but they never seemed to be entirely gelling. It was only when they did Futurama, playing on a big stage in this black hole, that I heard them properly for the first time. I remember thinking, 'Wow, they're not a club band, they're a stadium band... these guys are going to be huge'. But unfortunately it wasn't meant to be. It was only a few months later that Ian topped himself."

T

he first gig John Keenan put on was John Mayall's Bluesbreakers at the Moulin Rouge in Ainsdale, a Merseyside town not far from Southport. It was 1965 and he was 16 years old.

"I was at Southport Art College," he says. "I was two years younger than most of them there, but my dad pulled some strings to get me in. I was dead keen on music – I'd been to The Cavern a few times – so I got voted in as the social secretary. Eric Clapton was supposed to have been on guitar with the Bluesbreakers, but they had Peter Green instead. I said to John Mayall, 'People will want their money back'. He said, 'Nobody will do that once they've seen this guy'. He was right, of course."

In May 1967, Keenan was involved in bringing Pink Floyd to the same venue. The gig was four days after the band had headlined the infamous 14 Hour Technicolor Dream concert at the Alexandra Palace in London. But despite these intoxicating early forays into promoting live music, it was another decade before he repeated the experience. By this point, he'd been living in Leeds for nine years, working for Yorkshire Television for most of that time. He booked the suitably named Grand Theatre in the centre of Leeds and made enquiries about Lou Reed and Iggy Pop. Only to end up with Alan Price, of 'Simon Smith And His Amazing Dancing Bear' fame.

"I thought, 'Well, he's popular, so that'll do OK'. I lost £300."

Keenan was bloodied but unbowed. Following a handful of other gigs during the spring of 1977, a couple at Leeds Polytechnic and a couple at Unity Hall in nearby Wakefield, his friend Graham Cardy told him he could get the Common Room at the Polytechnic for the summer, while the students were away. This was the beginning of Stars Of Today, a weekly club that focused on the rapidly expanding

punk and new wave scene. The Damned, The Slits, The Adverts, Slaughter & The Dogs, The Police and XTC were just some of the bands who played there in the next three months or so.

When the Poly pulled the plug on Stars Of Today at the start of the autumn term, Keenan distributed a flyer declaring "Let's get the F out of here!" and moved what quickly became known as The F Club to The Ace Of Clubs, not far from Leeds University. Two more moves followed over the next year, first to Roots in Chapeltown and then to Brannigans in the city centre, with a name change to The Fan Club along the way, but the quality of the bands Keenan booked was consistently high. Joy Division, Suicide, Cabaret Voltaire, The Human League, Siouxsie & The Banshees, Ultravox, The Fall, Wire and Magazine had all played by the end of 1978, generally to crowds of around 300 people.

"I had lots of great artists at the club, but I didn't feel enough was being done for the smaller northern bands," says Keenan. "That's how Futurama started. It was basically meant to be a showcase for all the new bands coming through, with some better-known acts to get a crowd in. I thought it would be like a normal gig, but sort of scaled up. I really hadn't got a clue. The idea popped into my head and I said to myself, 'Yeah, I'm going to do this'. So I did it."

September 1980. So much to take in. Still lots of punks and plenty of skins. A few futurists now as well. They love Classix Nouveaux. Groups of lads in dead men's suits and girls in granny dresses too. Clock DVA totally killing it. Vini Reilly pitching up at the back of the hall to play a few tunes through a portable amp. The giant, free-standing plastic logo behind U2. Snoozing to Robert Fripp's new band. Siouxsie in a white leather jacket, complete with tassles. Pyramids of empty beer cans that get bigger by the hour.

K

eenan's inaugural event was actually called The World's First Science Fiction Music Festival, but he started to worry that was a bit of a mouthful so he added "Futurama 1979" on the flyers and the posters. When the second festival took place in September 1980, once again at Queens Hall in Leeds, it was billed as Futurama 2. Like the previous year, the acts performed on two stages set up side by side.

"I was thinking, 'How am I going to get through all these bands?', so I came up with the idea of splitting a very long stage in half and having two mixing desks," says Keenan. "I don't think that had ever been done before. I talked it over with Entec, who did the sound for me, and we placed a double stack in the middle, separating the two stages, and then stacks on either side. When one band was playing, the next one would be line checking on the other stage. As soon as a band came off, we could go straight to the next one."

I've interviewed John Keenan three times over the years (1993, 2015 and 2026) and he always cites the 1980 festival as his favourite Futurama. The line-up was extraordinary, with Siouxsie And The Banshees as the Saturday headliners and the other top spots going to Echo & The Bunnymen, The Psychedelic Furs, Athletico Spizz 80, Hazel O'Connor and The League Of Gentlemen, Robert Fripp's short-lived project with Barry Andrews from XTC, Altered Images, The Durutti Column, Classix Nouveaux and Young Marble Giants played further down the bill. So did U2, who were then still a couple of months away from the release of their debut album.

Almost 40 acts played at Futurama 2. And as he did every year, Keenan pulled everything together in around six weeks.

"I'm one of those people who leaves everything to the very last minute," he explains. "I think it's because I need an adrenaline fix. I seem to need it to start me up."



IAN CURTIS - PHOTO: KEVIN CUMMINS



SIOUXSIE SIOUX - PHOTO: PHILIPPE CARLY - NEWWAVEPHOTOS.COM

True to the spirit of his original idea for the festival, the majority of the smaller artists came from the north of England. The Sheffield contingent was particularly strong. As well as Clock DVA – hands down the high point of my weekend, despite blistering shows from both Siouxsie and The Bunnymen – the city's representatives also included Artery, I'm So Hollow and Vice Versa. It was Vice Versa's last gig before they added Martin Fry to the line-up and changed their name to ABC.

"Vice Versa were quite young and they were managed by one of their mums, so all my dealings were with her," remembers Keenan. "She was a shrewd woman."

Vice Versa took to the stage at around 2pm on the Sunday, with the place still a long way from full. The day before, a similarly lowly spot had gone to Leeds duo Soft Cell. It was only the third time they had ever played live.

"Marc Almond was a student in Leeds and he used to come to The Fan Club," says Keenan. "When he didn't have any money he'd say, 'Will you let me in if I help hump in the equipment?'. I'd always let a few of them in for free like that. Anyway, I bumped into Marc a little while before Futurama 2 and he gave me a tape of his band with Dave Ball, but I had already compiled the bill. He was like, 'Oh, John, can you get us in somewhere please?'. So I said, 'OK, I'll find a way to fit you in'.

Soft Cell got so much coverage from that gig. We had lots of European journalists at Futurama 2 and they went down really well with those guys. I could understand that because they were doing something a bit different. Soft Cell were playing electronic music, but they weren't like, say, Cabaret Voltaire. They had much stronger melodies and a pop feel and a theatrical frontman. It wasn't long before I had Stevo on the phone to me about them and he ended up putting them on his 'Some Bizzare Album' compilation."

September 1981. So much to take in. Mohicans and flat tops. White socks and black canvas slip-ons. The Sisters Of Mercy covering The Stooges' '1969'. Their drum machine is great. Pity there is almost nobody here when they play. But here's to Switch Higson with his metal bin and his drumstick. Gang Of Four in their collars and ties. Magic mushrooms for the Saturday night. Pete Murphy seems even more skeletal than usual. Selling fanzines out of a carrier bag between bands. Should have brought more than 20. They all go on the first day.

Futurama 3 had a totally different vibe to the first two events, mainly because it wasn't in Leeds. It was held in Stafford, precisely 100 miles away.

Keenan wasn't happy with the venue swap, but he felt he didn't have any choice. When he went to book Queens Hall for his usual September slot, he discovered that London promoter John Curd had snagged it for his own two-day festival. What's more, Curd was putting on exactly the sort of post-punk and electronic outfits you'd expect to see at Futurama. To add insult to injury, he was calling his event Daze Of Future Past.

"I looked around for an alternative place in Leeds, but I couldn't find anywhere big enough," says Keenan. "You have to remember it was a lot more difficult to organise anything in those days. We didn't have mobile phones or emails. We were just using landlines and sending letters. You had to wait several days to get a response to your letters and it took ages to sort out the artist contracts. Then there was the artwork for the posters and the flyers every year, all of which I did myself. I even did the tickets myself, numbering them by hand. I can do a poster on a computer in half an hour now, but it took a bit longer using Letraset."

Leeds Queens Hall was hardly a comfortable place to spend a weekend – dark, dilapidated and stinky, with frequently flooded toilets and a dub-like echo to the sound – but it had character and was actually kind of perfect for Futurama. Stafford Bingley Hall, on the other hand, was a drab slab of concrete with a tin roof on the Staffordshire County Showground. It was popular with superstar rock acts – I had seen The Who there in 1979 – but better suited to tractor shows than gigs. The roof rattled with each and every beat.

Despite the problems that Keenan faced in sorting the venue for Futurama 3, it didn't stop him putting together a splendid line-up, once again featuring roughly 40 acts. Gang Of Four and Bauhaus were the top draws on the Saturday, with heavy support from the likes of Theatre Of Hate, The Sound, 23 Skidoo and The Sisters Of Mercy. The latter were still largely unknown and were among the first artists to perform that day. Andrew Eldritch had only recently stopped playing drums in the band so he could concentrate on his vocals. They didn't even get their name on the festival poster.

Sunday's acts were less interesting by comparison – gold stars for Bow Wow Wow, B-Movie, Ludus and The Higsons, mind – but The Virgin Prunes provoked a mixture of alarm and awe by making a raucous din dressed in loincloths and then refusing to leave the stage when their allotted time was up. Keenan pulled the plug on them in the end, but it didn't stop them banging on anything and everything they could get hold of until they were finally escorted off by bouncers.

"I had to tell Doll By Doll they couldn't play because of them," sighs Keenan. "It was a terrible shame, but the venue was putting us under a lot of pressure to stick to the schedule. I loved Doll By Doll frontman Jackie Leven, he was an incredibly talented guy, so I really regretted having to do that."

The final group of the weekend were Simple Minds. They had released their 'Sons And Fascination' / 'Sister Feelings Call' double album just two days earlier and were in terrific form, but the main talking point of the set was vocalist Jim Kerr being sick behind the drum riser midway through.

"I think he might have told people afterwards that it was food poisoning, but it was his nerves," says Keenan. "He was always very nervous when they played live and that was a big gig for them. But he kept on singing and it was a really good performance."

September 1982. So much to take in. A white vest for Barney Sumner. Eagle feathers for Ian Astbury. There's as many pixie boots as there are DMs this year, but the mohicans are hammering the goths on the football pitch behind the venue. And the Sunday night chants of "We want The Damned" go on and on and on. Dead Or Alive's 'Misty Circles' lasts an eternity too. About 50 fanzines sold over the weekend. That's £15, all in silver bits. Jingling pockets. No pissing in gardens or walking over cars, though. We did you proud, Mr Keenan.

A
nother year, another Futurama. To everybody's complete surprise, Keenan settled on the small town of Queensferry in North Wales – population approximately 2,000 – as the venue for the 1982 festival. The nearest major city was Liverpool, roughly 30 miles away.

"I lived near Queensferry for a while when I was growing up," he explains. "There was this big sports complex there and I noticed that it was putting on gigs, so I thought maybe I should give it a try. I remember most of the local councillors were against the idea of the festival to start with. I went to a council meeting and they were saying, 'Oh, people will be pissing in our gardens and walking over our cars'. I stood up and said, 'I've done this event several times

before and I can assure you that none of them have been like that'. Anyway, despite a lot of antagonism towards it, they finally agreed and passed the licence."

Built in around 1970, Deeside Leisure Centre had been used for live concerts for three or four years. The Clash had played there twice. Gary Numan was among the other acts to tread the boards and for some reason it was a particularly popular venue with heavy metal bands. But standing at a gig for an evening wasn't the same as a two-day festival, which inevitably involved spells of sitting on the floor. An extremely cold floor, I might add, the reason for which quickly became obvious to those of us who lifted up the gigantic carpet tiles.

"Yes, well, I didn't appreciate the place was also an ice rink when I booked it," admits Keenan.

An Olympic-sized ice hockey rink at that. But while 5,000 frozen arses was certainly a topic of conversation, it did not detract from the long list of excellent artists Keenan had once again put together. New Order's Saturday headlining show was a gloriously uplifting experience, with the likes of 'Temptation' and 'Everything's Gone Green' pointing to where the group would be heading later in the decade. It was a world away from the dark energy of Joy Division three years earlier.

Nico, Blancmange and Southern Death Cult were three of the other highlights of Futurama 4. The one-time Velvet Underground collaborator had her harmonium with her and was backed by The Invisible Girls, Martin Hannett's in-house band. Her songs include 'All Tomorrow's Parties', 'Femme Fatale' and 'Waiting For The Man'. Blancmange had released 'Feel Me' as a single a couple of months earlier and they played immediately before New Order, much to the delight of the electronic fans in the crowd. Bradford boys Southern Death Cult hadn't put out any records yet, but there was an almost feverish excitement about them. As frontman Ian Astbury stomped around the stage to Aki Nawaz's epic tribal drumming, it was easy to understand why.

"Ian was part of my crew for the gigs I did at Tiffany's in Leeds, so that's how I heard about Southern Death Cult," notes Keenan. "I knew Aki pretty well too. I put them on as the support to Theatre Of Hate at Unity Hall in Wakefield a few months before Futurama, which was when Ian and Billy Duffy met for the first time. Billy later joined Ian in Death Cult, of course."

And then there was Dead Or Alive, fronted by the legendary Pete Burns and with former Invisible Girl and future Sisters Of Mercy and Mission man Wayne Hussey now in the ranks. The Liverpool outfit came on just ahead of The Damned, Sunday night's main attraction, and the army of rowdy punks at the front gave them a tough time from the off. Not that Burns appeared overly bothered, dodging the beer cans with ease while leading Dead Or Alive through what was perhaps the most entertaining set of the weekend.

"Pete Burns had played with his band Nightmares In Wax at the first Futurama," says Keenan. "He always put on a great show. He was always good value. He was a really handsome guy too. I've no idea why he had to go and spoil his looks by shoving all that plastic into his face."

September 1983. So much to take in. The rubber couple sharing around their bottle of amyl nitrate. She is in a hooded catsuit and he is in handcuffs. Everybody else is frantically backcombing. Never mind the poppers - and the petrol, of course - just smell the patchouli oil. Leeds is Goth Central now. The sounds here are as mixed as always, though. The Comsat Angels' 'Monkey Pilot'. The Armoury Show's 'Castles In Spain'. The Box's 'Old Style Drop Down'. We have Killing Joke to conduct the last rites too. Wardancing to the bitter end.

One of the interesting things about the Futuramas was the way that Keenan's bills brilliantly mapped the contortions and distortions of the post-punk scene during the early 1980s, with the audiences reflecting the resulting shifts in affiliation of the youth culture tribes. It's something that's become especially notable with the benefit of many years' hindsight. So while a fair few of the groups at The World's First Science Fiction Music Festival were barely out of bondage trousers, the artists that followed embraced coldwave, darkwave, alt-funk, synthpop, goth rock, industrial, new psychedelia, experimental electronica, positive punk, mutant disco and plenty more.

Much of this was in evidence at Futurama 5 in 1983, which saw Keenan returning to the festival's spiritual home of Leeds Queens Hall. Killing Joke were the heavy hitters – "They have always been one of my favourite bands," declares Keenan. "They were totally different to everybody else" – and there was also a leading role for Death Cult, Ian Astbury's stepping stone from Southern Death Cult to stadium goth rockers The Cult. Both bands were superb.

Several artists that had been listed in the initial adverts for this year's festival pulled out before the event, most disappointingly for me Clock DVA, although only Adi Newton now remained from the group I'd seen at Futurama 2. In fact, three-fifths of the 1980 DVA line-up – Paul Widger, Charlie Collins and Roger Quail – were now three-fifths of The Box, who played during the Sunday afternoon of Futurama 5. With their caustic tunes and jerky rhythms, they were wilfully and wonderfully chaotic and intense.

Another of the cancellations were The Smiths. They were still an untested entity, with one single under their belts. I'd seen them at a tiny venue in Norwich the previous month and I hadn't liked them much. I never got round to liking them much, to be honest.

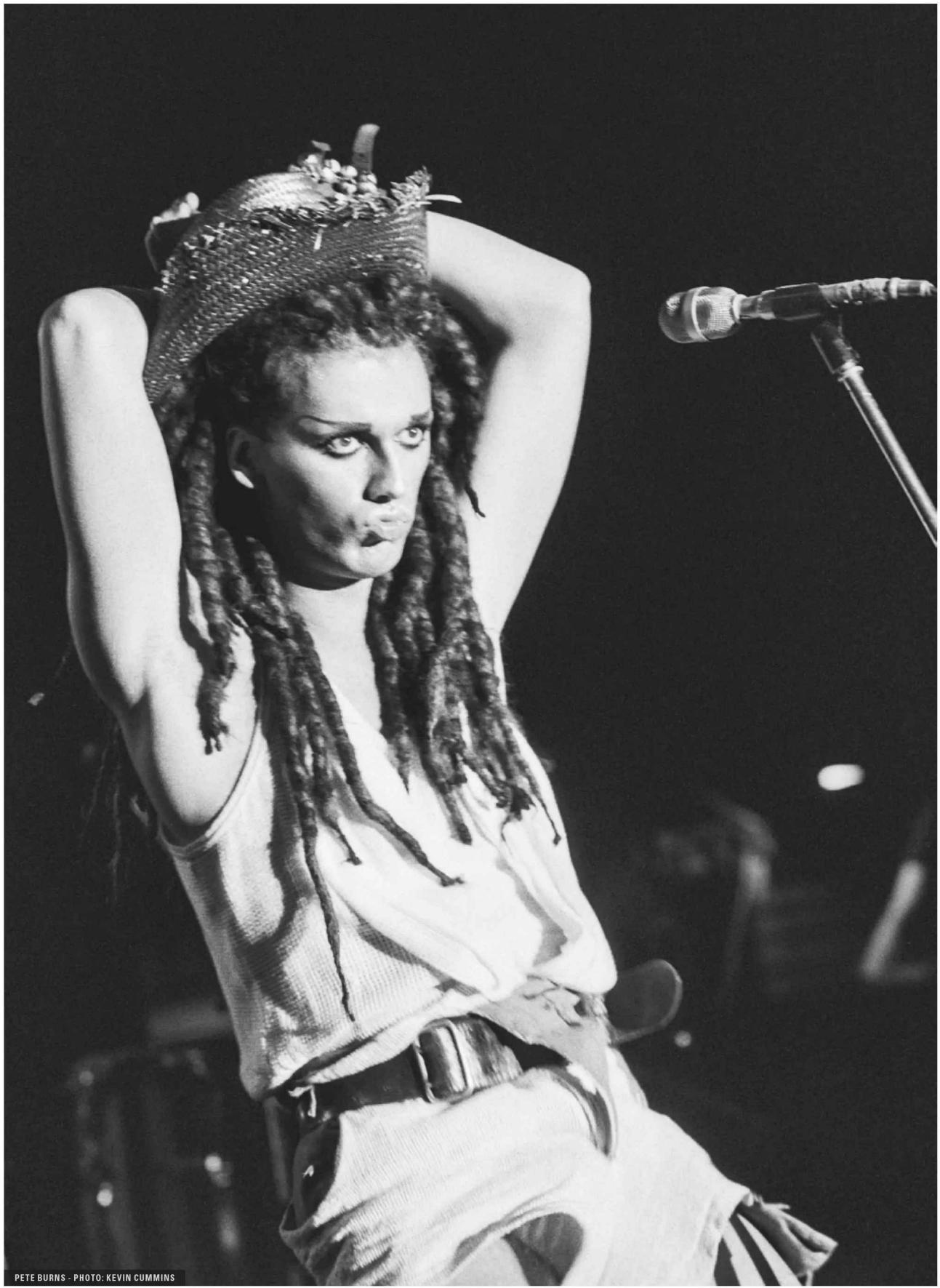
"The line-ups of the Futuramas often changed on the day," says Keenan. "Because there were so many acts, there would always be one or two who weren't able to make it in the end. With The Smiths, I had agreed to paying them £400, even though they were basically just another northern band then. Nobody complained when they didn't play. Absolutely nobody. I don't know whether they used this as an excuse because they weren't ready to do such a big gig yet, but they told me they didn't want to play on the same bill as the Bay City Rollers."

Yes, you read that right. As well as the likes of The Chameleons, The Comsat Angels, The Mekons and The Armoury Show, which saw Skids frontman Richard Jobson team up with former Magazine and Banshees guitarist John McGeoch, the Bay City Rollers were indeed also on the menu at Futurama 5. Believe it or not, they were the closing act on the Saturday.

"I just wanted something that would put a smile on everybody's face," explains Keenan, who had procured Gary Glitter to fulfil a similar role at Futurama 2, this being many years before Glitter's arrest and conviction for child sexual abuse. "I expected the Rollers to come out and do some of their sing-along hits, but they played lots of new songs. They also had a female vocalist as well as Les McKeown, which was bizarre. People started booing and chucking stuff at them, and Les picked up a half-filled can and threw it back, hitting a girl in the audience on the forehead. So what was meant to have been a bit of fun, turned out to be not much fun at all."

The Futurama faithful were often an unforgiving bunch, that's for sure, and could be a tough crowd for even the hippest bands, let alone someone like the Rollers. But it added to the edgy vibe of the festivals and I had an awesome time at each and every one of them, even if it did sometimes feel like an endurance test.

So despite having had another ace weekend and feeling chuffed about clocking up five Futuramas out of five, I remember getting home and thinking that perhaps this might have been my last one. As it happens, that's what John Keenan was thinking too.



PETE BURNS - PHOTO: KEVIN CUMMINS

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FUTURAMA 2
Queens Hall — Leeds 1980

Saturday 13th September
noon onwards



In 1989, 10 years after The World's First Science Fiction Music Festival and five years following on from Futurama 5, Leeds City Council announced they were planning to knock Queens Hall down. Probably not before time.

"The Yorkshire Evening Post asked its readers what they'd like to see as a last event before the bulldozers moved in and loads of people said they wanted another Futurama," says Keenan. "So I thought about it and put a bill together, but it turned out that the Queens Hall's music licence had expired and the council refused to grant another one."

Undeterred, Keenan moved what became Futurama 6 to nearby Bradford, with two days at Rock Palace and one at the university. The bigger groups included The Fall, Primal Scream, James and Cud, so it was rather different to the original post-punk gatherings. It was also the final Futurama. By this point, Keenan's chief focus was on booking acts at The Duchess in the centre of Leeds, where he remained for 12 years, further cementing his sterling reputation for supporting up-and-coming artists with early shows by Nirvana, Radiohead and Oasis, to name just three.

Now in his late 70s, John Keenan has continued to promote live music in Leeds to this day, using several different venues across the city. His tribute nights at Brudenell Social Club in the Hyde Park area always attract enthusiastic crowds. In the six decades since he put on John Mayall's Bluesbreakers in 1965, he has done pretty much everything by himself. He's never had a financial backer of any sort. And for a significant chunk of that period, including all the years he was running the Futurama festivals, he was also working full-time at Yorkshire Television.

"I was in television for 18 years," he says. "I did lots of different jobs at YTV, most of them on contracts. I had jobs on scenes and in wardrobe. I was an assistant floor manager and also an assistant editor. One of the first programmes I worked on was 'With A Little Help From My Friends', which was a tribute to George Martin. I had to look after Ringo Starr and Spike Milligan for that. I also worked on 'The Wilson Interviews', which was two interviews David Frost did with Harold Wilson when he was the Prime Minister. I was on 'Emmerdale' for a while too."

It seems crazy to think that someone who played such a key role in the development of so many great bands was also involved with the not-exactly-cool 'Emmerdale', one of the UK's longest-running soap operas.

"Not to me," insists Keenan. "I loved being out in the Yorkshire countryside for 'Emmerdale'. But I am lucky, because I've always done what I've enjoyed doing. It's that old maxim, 'If you can find a job you enjoy, you will never have to work a day in your life'. I think I heard John Lennon say that. And Mark Twain said it before him. And maybe Confucius before that. But it's true. I've never been able to make lots of money, I haven't had any huge reward for what I've done, but I was never in it for that."

"You know, they lost millions building the Humber Bridge, but the bridge is still there many years later and the cars are still going across it. That's the kind of logic I applied to the Futuramas. I just said to myself, 'Well, if I lose money, then I lose money'. But now I can look back at the festivals and at the gigs that I've promoted and think, 'I made that happen, I made all those bands happen, I made all those venues happen'."

"I never got to be the guy who sits behind his big desk ordering people around, but then I never wanted to be. I wanted to be with the lads, to be in the thick of it. I wanted to be a sergeant major not a general, so I'm quite happy with what I've achieved. And as well as my own memories, I've been able to make memories for others too. I get loads of emails and messages from people saying this or that festival was one of the best weekends of their life. That's quite special, isn't it?"

THE ART OF NOISE



KIM GORDON'S THIRD SOLO OFFERING IS A SHARP-EDGED JOLT OF HIP HOP, KRAUTROCK AND FRACTURED ELECTRONICS, LACED WITH DARK HUMOUR AND POETIC UNEASE – ONE HECK OF A SONIC MELTING POT

WORDS: SIÂN PATTENDEN

PICTURES: MONI HAWORTH

t's a cold winter's day in central London, and Kim Gordon cuts a tiny figure in the gilded surrounds of the hotel she is staying in. Dressed in a bomber jacket and jogging pants, she orders a green tea and a bottle of still water before sinking into an armchair. She is tired, she says, but there's a keen spark behind the eyes.

The release of Gordon's third solo album, 'Play Me', is imminent. And while she knows it comes with the territory, she has never been especially keen to talk about herself. She smiles, coolly. For Kim Gordon has built an alt-rock empire – whether she likes it or not – on being the epitome of cool. A cosmic ambassador of cool, sipping green tea in the absolute coolest way possible.

She and Sonic Youth co-founder Thurston Moore once went to their record company and demanded they change the band name to Washing Machine (it became the title of their 1995 album instead) which is the definition of don't-give-a-flying-fuck cool. Furthermore, each record Gordon releases uses the foundations of the last to push technology, expression and musical inversion further and further into industrial, hip hop and even pure pop elements.

A clear step on from 2024's Grammy-nominated 'The Collective', 'Play Me' is genuinely wonderful. Inventive, strange, funny, visceral, sensuous, angry and all things in between. The first thing I tell her is that I love the record, and she replies with a polite "Thank you". It's at this point I realise that she is used to platitudes. Insincere air kisses, disingenuous superlatives. I want to follow up with, "But I'm British – I am being genuine! I think your album's fuckin' great and I really, really don't have to say that!". But I remain silent. I am trying to be cool.

Producer Justin Raisen, who has worked with John Cale, Charli XCX, Lil Yachty, Yves Tumor and Sky Ferreira, has also worked with Gordon on each of her solo releases. Why make a third record, and why now?

"I don't know," ponders Gordon. "Just something to do."

What would you be doing otherwise?

"Making some art... but Justin was ready to go, and he kinda pushed me to do it."

You've previously said that making art and making music are very different. Is that true?

"I mean, they're just different forms of expression," she states. "The art I mainly do by myself, but I have done some collaborative things with people. It's just the way it's presented, you know – it's different. Music is more of a popular genre, it has reach. Even if it's experimental music, there is a community for that."

How do you work with Justin?

"We text ideas and notes to each other. But usually he'll make different beats and then send them over. With this record, we agreed we wanted to make short songs."

Is there anything over three minutes?

"I don't think so. I'll see if I'm inspired, and I'll write some lyrics and go in. But often I improvise guitar sounds and guitar parts, and then vocals. It can be very spontaneous."

Much of 'Play Me' feels like a cut-up stream of consciousness. The lyrics on the title track are taken from the names of Spotify playlists. "Rich popular girl / Villain mode / Jazz in the background / Chillin' after work."

"They just struck me as funny," says Gordon. "And, oh, I hate Spotify. I hate the whole convenience culture. I was trying to think of different ways of coming up with lyrics or finding a concept, and in that way music is like art to me – a conceptual process."

The album is a conceptual art piece, full of glottal stops and detuned guitars – statements, questions, grunt and brain. It's massively hip hop too – the rhythms, the song construction, the general looseness. 'The Collective' was far more industrial – angrier, poleaxed and confused.

"Yeah, I wanted this album to feel like hip hop," explains Gordon. "I mean, industrial music I never really cared about. So people read some of the music that way, but it's just sounds to me, you know?"

While 'The Collective' is a furious record, 'Play Me' comes across as a general plosive, a submission to absolute confusion and the overwhelm of the modern world. The cover photo on 'Play Me' features a crotch and thighs with the album's title scrawled on them. Is it you?

"I was playing off the Stones' 'Sticky Fingers,'" replies Gordon. "But there are certain controversies around the way women use their bodies on record covers, so I just thought it would be funny."

There's a song called 'Dirty Tech' which delves into the world of AI. Have you heard AI music? Would you use tech like that yourself?



"I hate AI," she replies. "Of course it's useful for some things, for medical things, but translations are often inaccurate and what it does to streaming services is add a lot more music, which means everyone gets less money. For 40,000 plays a month on Spotify, I get \$2.25."

Fucking hell. That's unbelievable.

"I'm in an ongoing conversation about it with the people at my label and why it's necessary. But what really hurts Spotify is if people stop their subscriptions, more than musicians taking their music off. Because there is always gonna be more music – there is so much music. Spotify stocks actually went down when people started taking down their subscriptions."

That's a good point.

"Dirty Tech" is about people's love of technology and who's in charge. AI is the super-intelligence that all the tech oligarchs want. It's already kind of out of control. AI knows how to lie and recreate itself."

I have friends who use ChatGPT to talk about their problems, giving all this emotional information away.

"I think ChatGPT should be fed reality TV shows so it has this extreme, soap opera idea of what human emotions are," reasons Gordon. "It's pretty serious – it's gonna create the next generation. Kids in school are gonna be taught to use AI and they're going to be the generation that's not gonna know anything."

Does your daughter listen to your music? And what does she think of it?

"She likes the new record," says Gordon. "She and her girlfriend, I don't know what they listen to. A lot of kids hear things on TV shows. I remember when my daughter was 13 or 14, watching 'Grey's Anatomy' – she would hear songs on that. Radio used to be big, but we don't have so much serious radio now. There's public radio, but they are having their funding cut by Trump."

So how do you hear new music?

"Word of mouth, I guess. Someone told me about this new band everyone's going gaga for, called Geese – they're from Brooklyn. I haven't actually heard them yet, but there's a real excitement about them."

Do you go to record shops?

"No, never. I've spent so many hours in them, waiting for Thurston, but he's a record collector... and I'm not."

Sonic Youth was, of course, the beacon of arty alt-rock. Post-no wave but pre-grunge, the band was experimental and visionary within the confines of guitar rock, yet photogenic enough to get MTV coverage and become laconic press darlings. They played with the formula and were a genuine global presence.

Kim Gordon still doesn't see herself as a musician, rather as an artist who makes music, in her own words.

"But making art is harder for me than making music because I know more about it," she says. "It can affect the way you work."

So you are more self-critical than if you're doing music?

"Yeah."

What's your favourite art movement?

"I like Surrealism a lot, the ZERO group and Arte Povera. I saw the Christopher Wool exhibition while I was here. I wanted to see Kerry James Marshall at the Royal Academy."

Do you paint when you're here though?

"Oh god, no. I'm not really that kind of artist."

I was imagining you having a sketchbook, just for ideas.

"Sometimes I take pictures and then I mark them up. I've made art that way. I have a Flung Clothes series of hotel bedrooms and then I print them on canvas."

One of the tracks on 'Play Me', 'Busy Bee', features a sample of you talking with your Free Kitten bandmate Julia Cafritz in the 1990s. Does the album focus on memory as well?

"It's not so much about memory," says Gordon. "I thought, 'Why not write about something that happened in the 90s?'. People are

obsessed with that era, maybe because it was before the internet really had a stronghold and before everybody took photos all the time. Things had more of a mystique around them."

Do you ever feel nostalgia for the 80s and 90s?

"I don't know... I feel nostalgic sometimes for the 80s in New York," she muses. "Not that it was fun – it was very bleak and we were always struggling with money – but there were certain aspects to the city that I miss. Now it's just so corporate-looking and clean. People used to put up flyers and that's how you found out about shows – things like that."

s an album, 'Play Me' seems to be about alienation but it's also visceral. The way you use your voice is very physical, almost sensual.

"Oh, that's interesting," replies Gordon, sipping her tea. "There's a lot about the body. Maybe that's why I decided to put the thighs on the cover."

And there's 'ByeBye25!', reworked from the track 'Bye Bye' on 'The Collective'. The lyrics are drawn from Donald Trump's banned words list – terms range from "they/them", "climate change" and "uterus" to "bird flu", "peanut allergy" and "tile drainage".

"Yeah. There are other words on his list, but I was trying to find the ones that would create a theme."

Interestingly, Gordon doesn't play bass on the record, just guitar. Was it in open tuning, or standard?

"It was standard. Last time I played bass? With the Nirvana boys at the FireAid concert [January 2025]. Doing a Nirvana song was fun. Bass is too hard on the arms though – it's a big fucking thing. I got tendonitis from years of playing bass."

Do you miss being in a band for that "us against the world" sort of feeling?

"Not really. When I play live with the girls in my band I kind of feel like that. I always say, 'Take no prisoners – just give it everything'."

Did you ever look at all-female bands and feel envious?

"There were definitely female bands that I liked – The Slits and The Raincoats. Free Kitten was all-female except for Mark Ibold from Pavement. I had a project band with Lydia Lunch once, but I didn't like working with all women in that situation. They were just much cruder, the way they talked and stuff – there was too much female energy."

Thinking about Sonic Youth, associated labels like Sub Pop and the 80s "pigfuck" scene, where is the underground now? How does that rise up in a culture where Spotify is so dominant?

"Maybe not everything is meant to rise up, you know?" says Gordon, astutely. "It's like this whole idea of success. It would be nice to make a living from playing music, but when you look at blues or jazz musicians, it was a lifestyle. I know lots of people who play electronic or noise music and it's like that for them. Just kind of eking out some existence."

Which lyrics are you most proud of?

"With 'Nail Biter' [from 'Play Me'], I came up with lyrics on the spot. I was talking about anxiety with Justin, and how I sometimes feel the electrical currents through me. It's also an astrological Uranus thing that I have in my chart. Sometimes when I have anxiety, I'll just go on the internet and buy something."

Who have you got on speed dial?

"My daughter, although she doesn't call me back very often, and my best friend who lives on the East Coast."

You're someone who seems to be very much in charge of everything and to have a clear vision of what you want – does it always feel that way?

"No, it never feels that way," says Gordon. "I'm fairly intuitive about stuff. I think that after you live a long time, it's easier to just say no. And maybe that's a good thing."

'Play Me' is released by Matador on 13 March

VEGA VOLTAGE

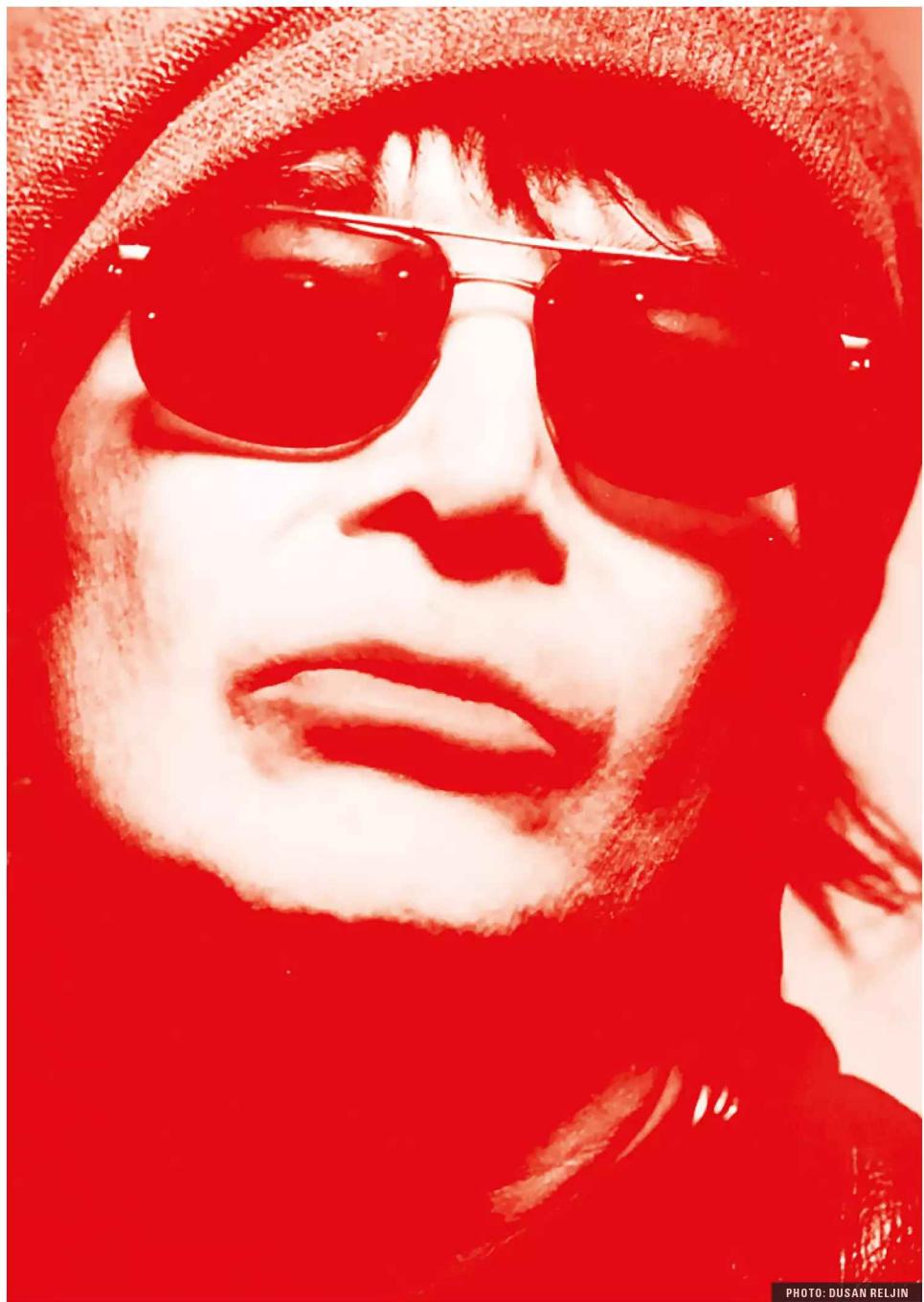


PHOTO: DUSAN RELJIN

**ALMOST 10 YEARS AFTER ALAN VEGA'S DEATH,
WE REVISIT SUICIDE'S INCENDIARY FRONTMAN AS
A RADICAL SOLO ARTIST – HIS UNCOMPROMISING
VISION NEWLY ILLUMINATED BY REISSUES OF HIS
FIRST TWO ELECTRIFYING ALBUMS**

ALAN VEGA

WORDS: KRIS NEEDS

Ten years after Suicide's confrontational entrance in 1970 as the cacophonous embodiment of New York City's seething rage at the Vietnam War, Alan Vega and Martin Rev entered the 1980s in upbeat mood, confident that their buffed-up second album would gloriously consolidate their gestating breakthrough as pioneers of the electronic genre.

But despite being told they had made "the 'Sgt Pepper' of electronic music" (on spanning new synths enabled by their deal with ZE Records), 'Suicide: Alan Vega & Martin Rev' came up against distribution problems and media ignorance, and the pair temporarily parted company to explore solo careers that were already underway. Consequently, both released a self-titled debut album in 1980.

Vega's astonishing solo evolution constructed a startling parallel universe, affirming one of electronic music's fearless and underrated trailblazers. Having said that, his recently reissued solo debut actually bucks the synthpop sea change that Suicide launched by stripping back to the primal rockabilly that excited him in the 1950s.

Producing the LP himself, Vega started the project during the sessions for the second Suicide album, explaining he had "always wanted to do a rockabilly record".

The concept intensified after meeting blond-quiffed Texan guitarist Phil Hawk at a party (Vega described him as a "blond Elvis Presley"). Initially, the pair recorded 'Jukebox Babe', with its irresistible fusion of Vega's Elvis-charged vocal and Hawk's juddering riff.

Released as a single by ZE, it took off in Europe – including a Top Five chart placing in France – clinching the album.

Recorded at New York's Skyline Studios, 'Alan Vega' still sounds remarkably unique 45 years on – intimate and microscopic, like rocket-propelled chamber rockabilly on the uptempo 'Fireball', 'Kung Foo Cowboy' and 'Speedway', while 'Bye Bye Bayou' has

dubbed-up 'Frankie Teardrop' screams closest to Suicide (the bonus demos on the recent reissue include a more extreme nine-minute version).

Vega had not yet been heard venting through ballads until the pleading 'Love Cry' and the desolate 'Lonely' unveiled his unearthly croon, and the understated magic of 'Suicide' outtake 'Ice Drummer' revealed a skeletal new strain of Manhattan-fried American roots music. Reviewing the album at the time, I might have named a trend by calling it "psychobilly".

Buoyed by critical success, Vega formed his first rock 'n' roll band when 1981's 'Collision Drive' was recorded at Skyline, recruiting guitarist Mark Kuch along with drummer Sesu Coleman and bassist Larry Chaplan from Mercer Arts Center buddies, Magic Tramps.

"It was a thrill," remembers Coleman. "Alan wanted to put a band together that reflected his rockabilly influence. He loved Elvis, Buddy Holly and Gene Vincent – we were both raised on this style of music. He explained he wanted to keep it basic and real, allowing him to dig deep into his soul and make it personal. With Alan knowing us from the Magic Tramps, it worked perfectly."

Along with spirited tear-ups through 'Outlaw', the Buddy Holly-inspired 'Raver', 'Rebel' and 'Magdalena 82' (enjoying a 12-inch remix from ZE producer August Darnell), 'Collision Drive' also added rockabilly vibes to Suicide's 'Ghost Rider' and Gene Vincent's 'Be-Bop-A-Lula', while slow gospel ballad 'I Believe' reached an impassioned screaming peak.

"Recording 'Collision Drive' in New York City was a spiritual and magical project for me," says Coleman. "Mark Kuch was an instant fit, and I stripped my drums down to a basic set. Alan said, 'Keep it simple, solid and strong. Keep us on track'. It's basic and to the point. Remaking 'Ghost Rider' was bold, yet it has its own personality and strength."



MARTIN REV AND ALAN VEGA, 1978 - PHOTO: PETER NOBLE

Though often overlooked, the 13-minute 'Viet Vet' ranks alongside 'Frankie Teardrop' as Vega's other great epic, and its bleak, claustrophobic heave perfectly framed Vega's desperate veteran – despised, ignored or spat on by the country he gave his arm and any settled life for. Hollering "You owe me a debt!" in livid, frustrated rage, it's a remarkable performance, even by Vega's standards.

Coleman recalls recording the track live in the dimly lit studio.

"We gave it a Vietnam-Cambodian jungle feel," he says. "We were all in one musical moment and living the song, about a soldier returning from the horrors of war with a bloody stump for an arm, trying to adjust to civilian life, never to be the same. The story, along with Alan's howls, groans and screams of pain, was so real. It was the most emotional recording I've ever done."

Ironically, when Vega took his band on the road, he got heckled for appearing with rock musicians and not doing Suicide songs. For his third album, he intended to work with Was (Not Was) in Detroit until ZE folded. Co-honcho Michael Zilkha's parting shot was to facilitate a deal with Elektra Records, and so Vega's A&R man became Howard Thompson, Suicide's first UK music biz champion, who'd signed them to Bronze Records in 1978 and enabled infamous tours supporting Elvis Costello and The Clash.

Still using his band coated in shiny-era production tropes, 1983's 'Saturn Strip' was recorded at The Cars' Boston studio with Ric Ocasek producing and joining Ministry's Al Jourjensen on keyboards.

Heralded by electro-throbbing single 'Video Babe', 'Wipeout Beat' and 'Kid Congo' continue the high-tech neon upgrade of Vega's original rockabilly blueprint, including an unlikely version of Hot Chocolate's 'Every 1's A Winner' and twinkling balcony ballad 'Je T'Adore'.

"At first, I wanted to make where I was coming from – my roots – that much clearer," explained Vega. "Now, I want to expand on that. I'm trying to fuse Suicide with that traditional rock 'n' roll. My new album represents what I think music will be like. It's going to the future through the past."

While Martin Rev continued his ongoing personal journey through doo-wop, avant experimentalism and neoclassical music, Vega found himself in an alien world of record company boardrooms, limos and promotional campaigns.

With its manicured cover photo, 1985's 'Just A Million Dreams' was generally lambasted after Vega started recording with Ric Ocasek, but The Cars' escalating global stardom left Elektra looking for another producer before settling on veteran muso Chris Lord-Alge, who splattered tracks such as 'Hot Fox' and 'Cry Fire' with wriggling guitars and booming drums.

Happily, this low point in Vega's career ignited a high point in his life after he met his future wife and lifelong collaborator Liz Lamere at the launch party for 'Just A Million Dreams'. Hailing from the Boston suburbs, Liz had studied law at university

by day, while playing drums in local punk bands at night. Starting at a high-octane Wall Street law firm, she became a CBGB regular, but had never heard of Alan Vega or Suicide when Mark Kuch's sister invited her to the launch at New York's Palladium.

Lamere was struck by "an immediate visceral reaction" when the two were introduced, and that blossomed when Vega returned from touring after being dropped by Elektra. The couple quickly became inseparable.

Holed up at the Gramercy Park Hotel, Vega reclaimed his creative soul by noisily revisiting his circuit-gouging roots with electronic junk, and Lamere became his studio collaborator.

"Alan had these various guitar pedals and rhythm machines jerry-rigged together," she recalls. "He was just making sounds. You could never be off-key because there were no keys or notes. I would be mesmerised for hours by the hypnotic linear soundscapes he concocted."

"Eventually, he asked me if I'd go into the studio with him to take it to the next level. I suggested working at this place called 6/8 [in New York] because my band rehearsed nearby."

Clicking with engineer Perkin Barnes, Vega and Lamere recorded at his downtown studio for the next 30 years, producing an astonishing string of albums. Alas, space doesn't permit his parallel collaborations, soundtracks or side projects, conducted along with the returning Suicide.

Reissues of 'Alan Vega' and 'Collision Drive' are out now on Sacred Bones

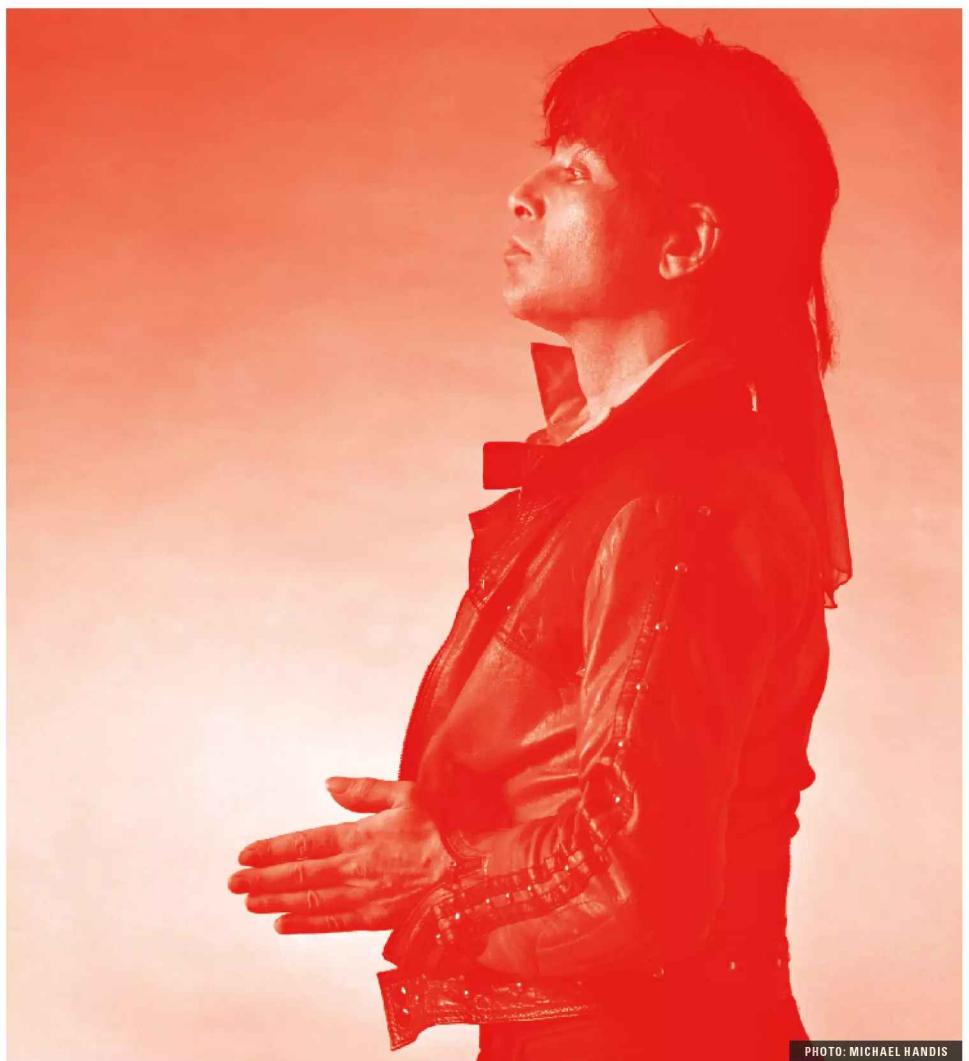
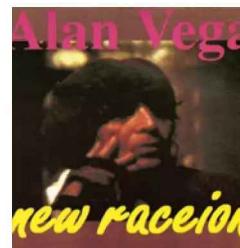
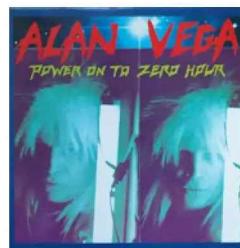
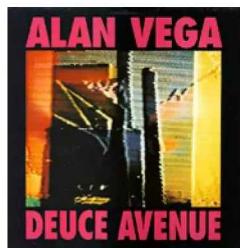


PHOTO: MICHAEL HANDIS

ALAN VEGA: THE FINAL FLOURISH

While Alan Vega's early solo albums lit the fuse, his later works reflect a lifetime of sonic risk-taking, ferocious invention and urban dread

WORDS: KRIS NEEDS



Deuce Avenue

MUSIDISC, 1990

Setting future templates and gestating for three years before being released on French label Musidisc, 'Deuce Avenue' catches Vega napalming post-Elektra stress and recording live in the studio he used for the rest of his life with Liz Lamere and Perkin Barnes. Angular basslines, sampled guitar shards, punishing machines and Lamere's treated drums provide a taut urban bedrock for Vega's vocal extrapolations on 'Body Bop Jive' and 'Sneaker Gun Fire', with 'La La Bola' evoking NY disco. "We didn't plan to release a record," recalls Lamere. "It was Alan rediscovering sound and getting back to pure experimentation... he'd just keep revisiting the same thing, literally recording over tracks on the tape."

Power On To Zero Hour

MUSIDISC, 1991

On a roll, 'Power On To Zero Hour' reared from this ongoing creative surge, its wired city funk joined by electro beats on 'Fear', 'Doomo Dance' and 'Jungle Justice'. "'Power' came quickly because we hadn't stopped working," recalls Lamere. "We did a bit of sampling and looping. Alan's sample sources would be stuff off the TV or sounds in the street – open the window and throw out a mic, put that through effects and loop it. Perkin would buy a new machine and let Alan loose on it. He was like the director of sound."

New Raceion

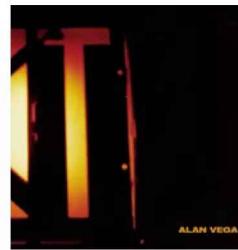
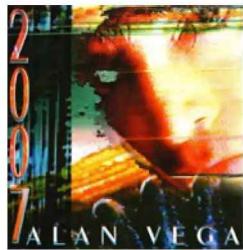
MUSIDISC, 1993

In addition to the usual dissonant electronics, futuristic pop, sprawling poetic segments and even Caribbean rhythms (on 'How Many Lifetimes'), Vega's seventh studio album aimed to reflect America's multi-ethnic society with different musical styles, including heavy metal and hard rock. "That album was a little different because now people wanted to come in and play, so we had guitars," says Lamere. Contributing guitarists included Mark Kuch, Cie Vega, Ric Ocasek and Roger Greenawalt.

Dujang Prang

MUSIDISC, 1995

With Perkin Barnes not available, 'Dujang Prang' was recorded at NY's Dessau Studio. Vega was influenced by hip hop ("the true spirit of rock 'n' roll"), railing against mayor Rudy Giuliani's artist-stifling clean-up of Manhattan over heavyweight rhythm cauldrons such as 'Flowers', 'Candles', 'Crucifixes' and 'Hammered'. "It was a more focused attempt to make an album in a specific time period," says Lamere. "The music would all be done and mixed, then Alan would literally lay down vocals for the entire thing, with one-take performances existing purely in the moment."

**2007****DOUBLE T MUSIC, 1999**

Beginning life as the posthumously released 'Mutator' before Vega moved on, '2007' was his most ominously coruscating work yet, unfolding through black clouds of machine-generated ectoplasm, anchored by the mutant electro beats of 'Meth 13 Psychodreem' and 'This Is City'. Vega and Lamere's son Dante Miguel Angel had recently been born too. "The tone of the album was really dark," recalls Lamere. "Alan was very reflective, having premonitions about the world Dante was entering and visions of 9/11 reflected in his sculptures."

Station**BLAST FIRST, 2007**

"I achieved a good thing on 'Station,'" Vega told me. "The songs really took me into a new place." Pushing limits of mental derailment with inner-city psychosis, Vega delivers his brutally unsettling torrent of vein-busting rage at 21st century life over radio static and shadowy motifs, like 'Metal Machine Music' with jackhammer beats. On 'Psychopatha', he sobs, cackles and shrieks with chilling malevolence as voices chant "psychopath" and Dante cries "mummy". About to celebrate his 70th birthday, Vega described '13 Crosses, 16 Blazin' Skulls' as his extreme breakthrough on the last album released in his lifetime.

It**FADER, 2017**

Recorded between 2010 and 2016, 'It' appeared as a double album a year after Vega's body quit keeping up with his relentless spirit. He intended 'It' as his last epic statement, almost completing it with Lamere before 2012's near-fatal stroke/heart attack. Over grinding machine beats and intense loops, Vega freestyles lyrics inspired by global news or late-night walks near the family home, including a violent mugging revisited on 'Prophecy', the self-explanatory 'Motorcycle Explodes' and the transcendent 'Stars'. Unveiling 'It' at 2015's final Barbican show, Vega still blazed with righteous passion on this, his last towering inferno.

Mutator**SACRED BONES, 2021**

Fashioned from Vega's colossal vault of outtakes, demos and forgotten tracks, 'Mutator' was shaped and mixed by Lamere and Vega Vault collaborator/archivist Jared Artaud. On riveting form, Vega expertly wrangles seething synth abuse, street sounds and hot-wired hip hop beats on 'Fist', 'Filthy', 'Breathe' and the doo-wop ascension of 'Samurai'. "When we were listening to the tracks, we literally felt Alan's presence," says Lamere. "We got chills hearing how timely it felt, both sonically and lyrically. Dante gave his input as someone who had been in the recording studio and toured with his dad since 1999."

Insurrection**IN THE RED, 2024**

Lamere and Artaud's second Vault exhumation draws from 1997-98, when Vega feared for the world and the city Dante would be entering. The chilling maelstrom of 'Murder One' and the apocalyptic dance missile that is 'Invasion' join scathing tracks such as 'Sewer', 'Crash' and 'Genocide', while 'Fireballer Fever' is almost impenetrable in its unfettered intensity. Emotionally addressing suffering innocents, 'Mercy' deploys free jazz, shattered piano and treated string bass, invoking Vega's innate eternal optimism, still raising the bar for electronic subterfuge from beyond the grave.

MAGIK MOMENTS



**ESTEEMED DJ/PRODUCER JUSTIN ROBERTSON RETURNS
WITH THE SECOND INSTALMENT OF HIS FIVE GREEN MOONS
PROJECT – AN ESOTERIC WHIRL OF “PASTORAL DUB”,
POST-PUNK AND HAUNTOLOGY, SHOT THROUGH WITH QUIETLY
OCCULT-ISH UNDERTONES. HEADY STUFF IT IS, TOO**

WORDS: BEN MURPHY

“Dub still feels very weird and alien to me,” says Justin Robertson, rhapsodising about the music that underpins his second volume of work as Five Green Moons. “When I hear those early dub records, it’s like they’re from another dimension, making such an interesting sound out of very little. I like the spaciousness of it. It has this sort of echoing density that’s like nothing else on Earth. It can still surprise you.”

Justin Robertson is a true creative polymath. Although he is best known as a DJ whose sets weave disparate genres into danceable tapestries, he’s also a remixer of some repute, having created club tracks for everyone from Talk Talk and New Order to Björk and Daniel Avery.

Robertson’s discography stretches well over three decades, and his musical projects are manifold – from his early material as Lionrock, which ranged from dub-dipped progressive house and sampledelic breakbeat, to the spiky disco-punk of The Deadstock 33s and the straight-up acid of Revtone, alongside Mark Ralph.

On top of all this, he is also the acclaimed author of occult and science-fiction novels ‘The Tangle’ and ‘The Trial Of Jonah’, as well as a visual artist whose work has graced the walls of London’s Tate Modern and the Saatchi Gallery.

His latest endeavour takes him back to one of his earliest musical loves. Five Green Moons is deeply inspired by dub, both the original 1970s dub reggae classics crafted by Jamaican producers like King Tubby, Joe Gibbs and Lee “Scratch” Perry, and the weird post-punk iteration that emerged in the UK in the 1980s. Robertson cites The Pop Group, Basement 5 and The Flying Lizards’ ‘The Secret Dub Life Of’ curio as influences, in particular their compelling blend of noise and heavy, low-end rhythms.

“I just like that angular sound of post-punk with the techniques of dub,” he says. “It made it even more otherworldly and kind of smooth and jagged at the same time. That contrast was really interesting – a contradiction that works very well.”

Today, Robertson looks as dapper as ever, wearing a stylish green cardigan, collarless blue shirt, cord trousers, black woolly hat, glasses and a gold pendant that resembles a tooth. Book shelves loom behind him, on which a copy of James Ellroy’s ‘American Tabloid’ is visible. A great interviewee full of anecdotes and wry observations, he’s all too happy to open up about Five Green Moons and beyond.

“[Linton Kwesi Johnson’s] ‘Lkj In Dub’ was one of the very first things I found, in a Chalfont St Peter church fair,” says Robertson, remembering his introduction to dub as a teenager. “I used to sit at home with the windows open, blaring it out to my neighbours as they were mowing the lawn. Trying to appear countercultural in Buckinghamshire was pretty tricky.”

Robertson’s own take on the genre is strange, spiky and not a little unearthly. His first album as Five Green Moons, ‘Moon 1’ (2024), featured supremely eerie cuts like ‘One Lost Moon’, with disembodied voices floating above languid bass and fractured

rhythms like an apparition. ‘Moon 2’, released via his own label, Solitary Cyclist, is without doubt one of the best things he’s made to date.

More far-out than its predecessor, its unfurling basslines are reminiscent of Jah Wobble’s work with both Primal Scream and PiL, with echo-deck effects spiralling off into the void. The spoken word lyrics that appear on many tracks are delivered by Robertson himself and are drawn mostly from his novels, both those published and another that is forthcoming.

‘The First Tower Of Babel’ is like an interdimensional transmission, with Robertson intoning his words over hazy vortices of synth noise. ‘This Chant Is God Voice’ offers moody, post-punk guitar and an almost industrial edge, nodding to Adrian Sherwood’s work with African Head Charge.

Recorded at his home in Shepperton, Surrey, ‘Moon 2’ sees Robertson not only playing the bass and guitar parts himself but also constructing the live-sounding drums on his computer.

“My lovely dog, Harry, broke my finger a couple of years ago, so my pretensions for guitar virtuosity were dealt a fatal blow,” says Robertson, laughing. “I’m not a particularly good guitarist, but I can certainly play enough to get a good 16 or 32-bar section.”

An important presence on ‘Moon 2’ is Brix Smith, erstwhile member of The Fall, who lends her vocals on two tracks. She was introduced to Robertson by the late Andrew Weatherall and his then-partner Lizzie Walker, and the two first worked together on The Deadstock 33s’ ‘Brix Goes Tubular’ EP in 2022, after which they struck up a lasting friendship. Robertson is still bowled over that he got to work with one of his musical heroes.

“My teenage self is very pleased with that outcome!” he beams. “Brix is very easy to get on with – she’s just so full of enthusiasm, energy and a desire to make music. I sent her over some backing tracks – the two that are on the record – and she came back almost immediately, literally in about two days. I thought it was just going to be sketches, but they were fully formed songs. She’s teeming with ideas – it’s really stimulating to work with someone who gets what you’re doing.”

Another vital part of Five Green Moons is its keen sense of the uncanny. Robertson is obsessed with folk horror, the weirder reaches of science fiction and the experimentalism of bands like Current 93 and Coil. All of these find some expression across ‘Moon 2’, but so does the weirdness of the Surrey suburbs where he lives. Pointing out that dystopian author JG Ballard lived right around the corner, Robertson says that suburbia is so creatively inspiring because of what lurks just out of sight.

“I don’t know if it’s the suburban life I’ve returned to, where you live in this world of what in trendy parlance might be called a liminal space between town and country,” he muses. “It throws up these weird images. It’s really no surprise that a lot of punk and post-punk groups came from the suburbs. That kind of slight uneasiness, what goes on behind the twitching curtains, those little woodlands... I live quite near the river. It feels like there are nefarious goings-on just out of sight. I was trying to touch on that – a little bit of the atmosphere and mystery.”



Justin Robertson was born in Walton-on-Thames in Surrey, not very far from where he lives now. Growing up in the village of Chalfont St Peter, he was a voracious reader of sci-fi and fantasy books and a big fan of Tangerine Dream, Gong and Hawkwind ("I described Hawkwind in 'The Trial Of Jonah' as the sound of a burning barricade – it's full of paranoia and dystopian references").

Later, punk and dub came into the picture. Robertson went to Manchester University in 1986 to study philosophy, and ended up staying, drawn in by the city's burgeoning acid house club culture. As well as working behind the counter at Manchester's famous Eastern Bloc record shop, he started DJing and running the club night Spice in 1989 with Greg Fenton (where the Chemical Brothers found early inspiration) and another event, called Most Excellent, which followed in 1991.

Robertson got a reputation as a skilful DJ, known for his taste, mixing and curveball track selections. He started doing remixes, then launched his Lionrock outfit (named after an album by reggae group Culture) with Mark Stagg and MC Buzz B. The early 1990s singles 'Lion Rock' and 'Packet Of Peace' were sizeable progressive house hits before Robertson decided to turn Lionrock into more of a live band, releasing the album 'An Instinct For Detection' in 1996, dabbling in hip hop and downtempo beats with the addition of Mandy Wigby on keyboards and Paddy Steer on bass. Moving to London in 2003, Robertson changed tack with his genre-mashing Deadstock 33s project. Whereas before he would always work with others, in recent years he's mostly created music solo.

"You haven't got those other sets of ears to bounce off, or those extra skills to call on," he says. "You make mistakes, which is how you create interesting art, really – by sort of leaning into them, exploiting adversity and exploiting what you don't have. Some of the greatest records are made with very few bits of equipment, often cobbled together, repaired and barely understood. I think that's really essential."

"Misuse of equipment and not really knowing what you're doing... it's like a cyborg entity is created between potentialities and a machine, sometimes hidden, not in the manual. And then a faulty human being who doesn't really know what they're doing puts those things together – that's when magic happens."

Although he's garnered acclaim for his recent novels, Robertson has always enjoyed writing. He started out penning articles for the university newspaper and wrote "a very unwieldy science fiction book which will never see the light of day".

He's a prolific reader, and when I ask what he has enjoyed lately, he reels off a list that includes titles such as Anna Kavan's 'Asylum Piece', Keith Roberts' 'Pavane', Stef Macbeth's 'Folk' and Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh's 'Night – A Philosophy Of The After-Dark'. For Robertson, his creativity merges into one, and he doesn't make a distinction between different disciplines. It's notable that Five Green Moons is named after a 1961 short story by science fiction author Jane Aiken.

"I think art, writing and music are the same thing – they're not separate strands," he posits. "That weird hauntological scene of the suburbs feeds into the music, and I guess that feeds into the books I write as well. So it's definitely the same kind of atmosphere in the novels as there is on the record."

When it comes to writing, Robertson says it boils down to a very simple process.

"You've got to start somewhere, so I usually say to people, 'Just write anything down'. The form will reveal itself eventually, because when you come to editing you'll probably get rid of it anyway. But once you've started the story or the narrative or what you're trying to impart to people, it will take shape. I think that once you realise that, it's the same with making music."

Robertson also runs two shows on Soho Radio – Temple Of Wonders, which spans dub, garage punk and ambient, and is "broadly psychedelic", and The Rotating Institute, which tends more towards electronic music and dancefloor stuff.

"I compartmentalise them in the sense that one's probably slightly easier to dance to," he explains. "A sort of psychedelic swirl is what I'm trying to create. I don't think about things with too many boundaries, you know? With a good tune, it doesn't really matter what genre it's from."

It's safe to say that Justin Robertson is in a good place. His novels have been praised by his literary idols Michael Moorcock and David Keenan, and with Five Green Moons, he reckons he's been able to capture the sound he's been chasing all his life.

"Five Green Moons feels like a distillation of the music making experiences of the last few decades, and all that's gone into it," he says. "It was a very cathartic experience, almost like an exorcism, making those records. I'm really pleased with them."

He has come to realise that he no longer feels any pressure to conform to other people's expectations.

"You don't need to worry about it at all – just do what feels good, what you enjoy and what lights you up."

His next book, 'The Mineral Tail' – due out in April this year – is about a megalithic stone and two dogs making the best album ever after the extinction of humanity.

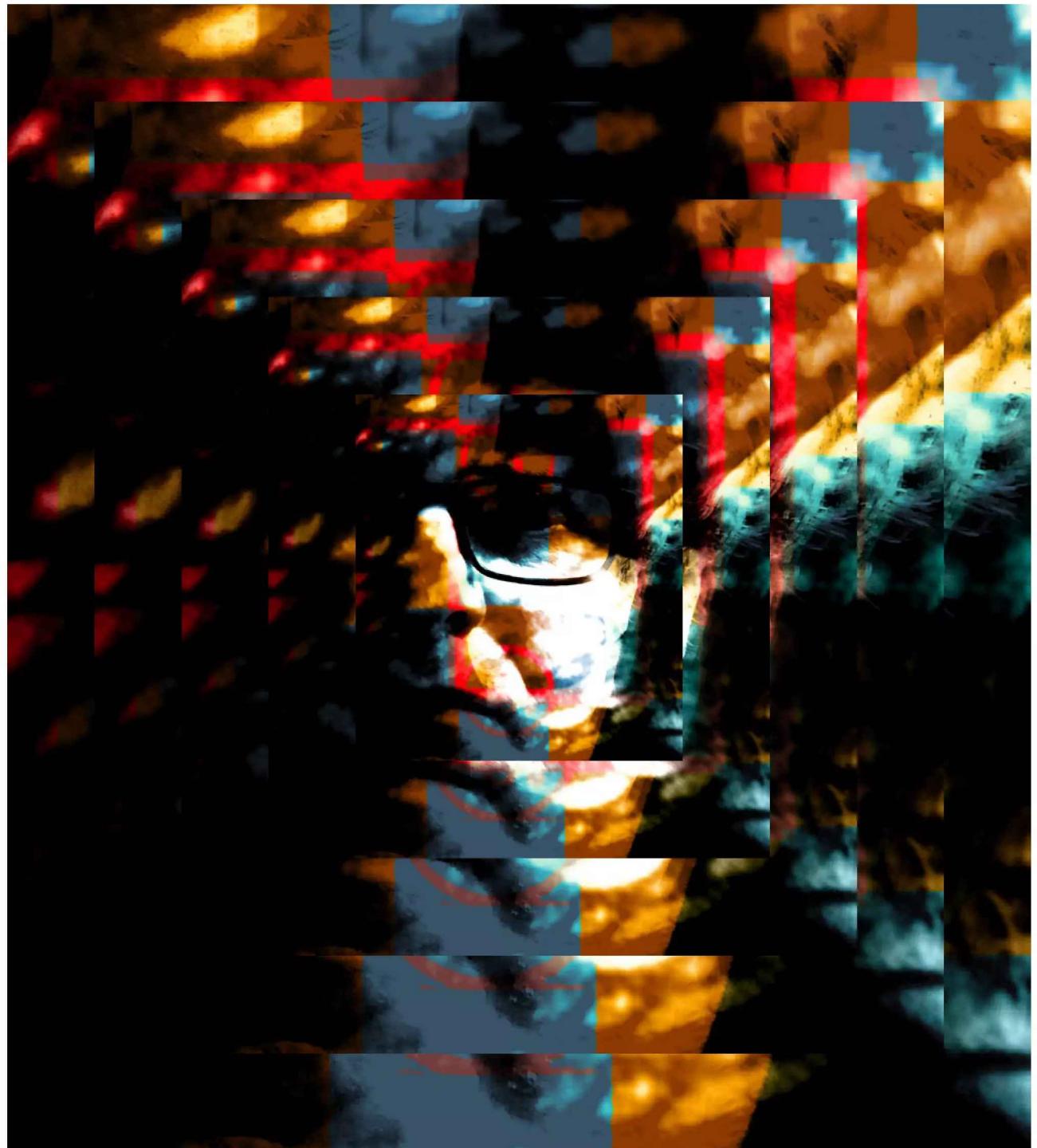
"Guaranteed airport bestseller!" says Robertson, grinning.

There will also be a soundtrack created alongside Matthew Shaw from Stone Club, a hub for stone enthusiasts to "muse and stomp to stones". He's already started work on 'Moon 3', and Brix Smith will feature once again. Robertson says he wants to write five albums to complete the series, but may make more. Creating is what he loves most, and he has no intention of stopping any time soon.

"I enjoy doing what I do," he concludes. "I can't imagine ever retiring because I don't really feel like I'm at work in the first place. It's all very pleasurable. I'm going to keep on doing things until I'm incapable of doing them."

'Moon 2' by Five Green Moons is out now on Solitary Cyclist

OUTSIDE THE BOX



HE'S THE PSYCHEDELIC ALCHEMIST SLOWLY BUILDING HIS OWN WORLD OF SEPIA-TINTED WEIRDNESS. SO WHAT CAN WE SEE THROUGH KEITH SEATMAN'S WINDOW TODAY?

WORDS: BOB FISCHER

PICTURES: KEITH SEATMAN

“think a lot about the last day of school term,” says Keith Seatman. “Everyone used to bring their games in, and they all seemed to be better than mine. There was one called Bermuda Triangle that had a plastic cloud going round the board scooping up all your little ships. And it had a really action-packed picture on the box. That was a *great* box.

“I also had a really crap magic set. There was a little cricket bat with three holes that you put a pin through, and when you turned it around the pin was sticking through a different hole. I was there on Christmas Day in my paper hat saying, ‘Wow, it’s magic!', but I could see the desperation in the family’s faces. ‘Oh no, he’s doing another magic trick – God almighty, have another sherry.’ But again, the artwork on the box was phenomenal.”

Keith Seatman is thinking outside the box. Or rather, about the luridly vibrant pictures on the boxes of his favourite childhood games. But it’s never quite that straightforward with the electronic world’s most loveable psychedelic eccentric, is it? It’s been four years since his last Castles In Space record, ‘Sad Old Tatty Bunting’, took inspiration from the faded decor outside a boarded-up pub and turned it into a concept album about melancholy scarecrows leading a parade of bearded alchemists through a gated community of garden gnomes. So while his new collection, ‘Counting To Ten Then Back Again’, might have started with a few idle musings about vintage KerPlunk packaging, that surely can’t be the whole story – can it?

“I definitely wanted to do something based around all that stuff,” he ponders. “Games, magic sets – and fireworks! Firework boxes looked incredible. On fireworks night, my dad would scoop up all the duff ones that hadn’t gone off properly, then just chuck them into the fire he’d started in an old metal dustbin. Then him and my uncle would stand there watching with a beer and a fag.”

The sheer strangeness of 1970s Britain seeps into the very pores of the Seatman oeuvre. His albums are a piping-hot Vesta curry of jumbled childhood memories – a giddy rollercoaster ride through tootling fairground organs and wibbly clockwork synths played by grinning jesters in harlequin suits. Even the titles are redolent of this ochre-tinted wonderland. ‘Molly Dolly Stain Glass?’ Surely a wasp-coated window display of porcelain-faced Hambles. ‘A Posh Hat And Timepiece?’ The musty-smelling uncle who pretended to steal your nose with his thumb. ‘Clip Clop To The Shop?’ A straw-boatered donkey tethered outside a... shop.

“Oh, it’s mostly just daft wordplay,” insists Keith. “Although ‘Clip Clop To The Shop’ was inspired by my dad. He’d send me to the newsagents to get his fags – ‘They’re for me dad, he’ll square up with you at the end of the week’. He’d be down to his last one, so it was urgent, but I’d just be dawdling along, looking in the shop windows. For some reason, I’d always stop at a phone box and read the graffiti too. Then I’d dawdle back even slower. While all around me everything was going like *this...*”

He wobbles his hands around his head, and surely we all know the feeling he’s evoking. Our formative relationship with time was fascinating, wasn’t it? Most days, we operated our own internal chronology, Childhood Mean Time (CMT). One foot hovering over speeding, proto-digital modernity, the other stuck in the mire of austere Victoriana that pervaded British life until at least the late 1970s. That latter feeling, I suggest, is a massive influence on the ever-expanding boundaries of Seatmanworld.

“What was that awful programme my mum and dad used to watch?” he muses. “With the music hall acts?”

‘The Good Old Days’

“Yes! Me and my sister would sit there thinking, ‘What the hell is this?’. But we were watching people in the audience who had been born in 1900. They’d been through two world wars and the Great Depression. I read something about music hall a while ago – you know how they used to tell jokes by repeating the lines? ‘My dog’s got no nose!’ ‘Your dog’s got no nose?’. They did that because they had no microphones and they wanted to make sure that everybody at the back could hear properly. I hope that’s true, because I think it’s brilliant.”

A disclaimer – I loved ‘The Good Old Days’. I have nothing but fond memories of my long-departed grandma singing along to ‘Down At The Old Bull And Bush’ with a glass of sweet sherry in her hand. And I’m fascinated by the fact that even in the age of punk rock and Space Invaders, you’d still get Arthur Askey singing ‘The Bee Song’ on primetime TV at least three times a week.

“I’ve been talking with a friend about similar things,” says Keith. “He said, ‘The 1970s were just like the 1930s, but with tellies’ – and he’s right. I was watching an old episode of ‘The Sweeney’ recently, and there were still bomb sites everywhere.”

Did growing up in a coastal town contribute to this lingering sense of history, I wonder? His home remains the Hampshire resort of Southsea. The birthplace of Peter Sellers, the town’s historic pier was turned into a raging inferno during the filming of Ken Russell’s 1975 opus, ‘Tommy’. The glow could be seen from the Seatman family’s back garden. If anywhere is steeped in ancient weirdness, surely it’s seaside towns – all those creaking variety theatres with faded posters of Mike and Bernie Winters.

“Yeah, we’ve always had the Kings Theatre,” says Keith. “My mum and dad took me to see Morecambe and Wise there when I was 10, and we queued round the back to meet them afterwards. Eric Morecambe ruffled my hair! We went to see Frankie Howard as well, and everyone was wetting themselves when he told a story about a woman who goes to the greengrocer’s to buy a cucumber. I just remember thinking, ‘Why is everyone laughing? Cucumbers taste horrible’.

“But... I grew up in an old Victorian terrace, and my dad did everything he possibly could to make it look like a modern 1970s house. He boarded up all the walls, and it wasn’t until after he died that we pulled the hardboard off and discovered beautiful Victorian panelling underneath. And I remember the day he smashed up the plaster cornices hanging down from the ceiling. He just went up there with a lump hammer because he wanted to wallpaper it all.”

I'm intrigued to know what Keith Seatman was like as a kid. An eccentric outsider? Or just an experienced dawdler with a passing interest in phone box graffiti?

"My teachers described me as 'very strange,'" he concedes. "I didn't fit in. My first solo album, from 2011, was called 'Consistently Mediocre And Daydreams'. That was a line from one of my old school reports. It said, 'He's always looking out of the window'. I thought, 'What's wrong with that?'. Then, for my last two years at school, I was put into a special class."

Why?

"My general attention, behaviour and reading. I wouldn't read at school, but that was only because I thought the books were crap. I always read at home. All my 'Doctor Who' books were brilliant, and I also read 'The Exorcist' and 'Dracula'. I got into gothic stuff at a very early age. But I wasn't interested in the stuff they gave me – there are only so many times you can read 'Brighton Rock'. It just didn't capture my imagination at all.

"There was one really good teacher – I used to hang around after lessons and chat to him. I can't remember his name, but he had little round glasses and a centre parting like Han Solo. But the rest of them were just, 'Nah, he can't read. Put him in a special class'."

Salvation, he says, came in 1976 when the punk rock shockwave impacted on the south coast.

"It was really exciting," he recalls. "I remember one Friday night at my friend Warren's house, he got a record out and said, 'Listen to this'. And it was an import version of 'Anarchy In The UK'. It was just, '*What the hell is this?*'. Suddenly I was going to record shops and buying anything that fell under the punk banner. It was new! And the quirkier it got, the more it appealed to me.

"I loved the earliest Human League stuff. I can remember hearing 'Being Boiled' on John Peel's show and thinking, 'I need this'. I bought a spate of them – 'Being Boiled', The Normal's 'Warm Leatherette' and Throbbing Gristle's 'United'. Once the three-chord punk thing was over, I just splintered off completely into post-punk. Devo! I had to know everything about Devo – I read every interview. All those things came together, and the quirkiness gave an edge to it all."

L et's drop the H-bomb. Or rather, the H-word – hauntology. Keith's passions coalesced into a 1980s band, The Psylons, whose dark psychedelic soundscapes gained them a coveted Peel Session. When that outfit drifted apart, Keith turned to electronic beats as part of a trio called Seatman Separator. By the 1990s, he was on nodding terms with the future Ghost Box co-founder Jim Jupp, who was, at the time, a student at Portsmouth Polytechnic.

"Ha, yeah – the H-word!" he smiles. "I suppose that people like labels, and I've been lumped in with that. I don't mind. But it's not an intentional thing, of me wanting to be part of something."

What marks out his take on hauntology, I tell him, is a subtle sense of sadness that I find really affecting. For years, I deluded myself that my fascination with 1970s pop culture was purely academic and that I was, in essence, a happy 21st century camper. But now I'm fat and over 50, I'll happily admit that it's a more profound longing than that.

Essentially, I'm intensely sad that I'm not a child any more, that I'll never again open a 'Star Wars' toy on Christmas morning and say a mumbled "thank you" to my dad. And I'm forever grateful that my parents moved heaven and earth to make my childhood feel incredibly special and secure.

Keith is nodding.

"To us, at the time, everything was great," he says. "'Hooray, Action Man for Christmas!'. But when my sister and I were clearing out the cupboards after my dad died, we found an old tin of paying-in books. My parents had just bought everything on hire purchase, and they were paying it all off monthly. We suddenly thought, 'Oh yeah, we got all our stuff, but they were really not that well off'. To my parents, the 1970s were probably worrying times.

"So, like you, I remember feeling quite safe. I'd sit in my bedroom, reading and playing odd records. But for others it probably wasn't that great."

Afternoon shadows have gathered, and we're both now staring wistfully through the window. Come on Keith, let's end on a high note. A joyous parade of porcelain-faced Hambles and boggle-eyed uncles in posh hats are marching raggle-taggle towards Southsea pier, checking every smashed-up phone box for graffiti along the way. We're the keepers of the flame, you and me, aren't we? Young people sit agog at our feet, desperate to hear stories of Catherine wheels in burning bins, of playing Bermuda Triangle with a plastic cloud on the last day of term before the Christmas holidays. Keith Seatman, I beseech thee – give us one final tale of 70s weirdness to send us all off with a bang.

"Go on then!" he laughs. "I was round a friend's flat recently, chatting about school, and his grown-up kids couldn't believe our stories. I've got a scar on my hand from a woodwork lesson – me and my mate Steve found a box of brand new chisels and we were playing 'Star Wars' lightsabers, swishing them around really fast. He went 'Ssshhhoo...'... and it just opened up my hand. Blood everywhere. These days, it'd be chaos with ambulances called, but I was just given an old rag to wrap around it. Then the teacher walked me to a bus stop, put me on a bus and said, 'Don't forget to get off at the hospital'.

"The bus driver said, 'You're not going to make a mess on my bus, are you?'. I got to the hospital, my dad turned up two hours later, and that was it. From that day onwards, I was banned from using chisels in woodwork lessons."

'Counting To Ten Then Back Again' is released by Castles In Space on 27 February



DOMESTIC UNREST

FEARLESSLY UNPREDICTABLE, MERCURIAL TRIO **VOKA GENTLE** BLEND LEFT-FIELD POP, FOLK AND EXPERIMENTAL SOUNDS TO SPARKLING EFFECT

WORDS: MAT SMITH
PICTURE: LOUISE MASON

'Domestic Bliss' is the third album from Voka Gentle, made up of twins Ellie and Imogen Mason and Imogen's husband William Stokes. Ellie is the London-based engineer for Mute's in-house studio, while sound artist Imogen (her debut solo album as Sm^sher was released in 2024) and producer/music journalist William live in Stroud. Three distinct perspectives converge in a band who thrive on unpredictability. One moment they're delivering low-slung, mid-90s lo-fi rock, and the next they're offering up sinewy electronic sequences that weave in field recordings, character narratives and wry observations on everyday life along the way.

"We're three individual songwriters thinking intensely about the whole picture," says Imogen.

That observation neatly sums up everything Voka Gentle represent and the creative nucleus at the heart of 'Domestic Bliss'.

Voka Gentle originally thought of themselves as a folk band. If folk music can be understood as an art rooted in immediate surroundings and lived experiences, then their focus on the everyday more than qualifies, with lyrics drawn from the minutiae of daily life and chance field recordings captured in the exact moments and places they occur. In this sense, folk becomes less of a genre and more a method of paying attention.

The trick is that Voka Gentle are able to isolate the elasticity of any genre, stretching and pulling it in many directions at once to create something wholly individual.

Sounds that should exist in instrumental music sit next to oblique lyrics, and catchy, left-field pop songs sit next to extreme experimentation.

"I think that's why we've been quite hard to place for a lot of people," suggests William. "There are many out there who are not interested in that at all and who find it confusing."

Undeterred, with 'Domestic Bliss' the band have stretched things yet further. The album was recorded with drummer Oliver Middleton and mixed by Sam Petts-Davies. Both Middleton and Petts-Davies worked on The Smile's 2024 'Cutouts' album, led by another purveyor of extreme genre manipulation, Thom Yorke.

Although the songs on 'Domestic Bliss' took almost three years to come to fruition, significant chunks of the album were recorded at City University in London, where Voka Gentle offered classes in experimental sound art in exchange for using the establishment's performance rooms.

"The jumping-off point for our writing is collecting sounds," states Ellie. "Those could be sounds we've stumbled across when we're playing around with different instruments or textures. One person usually builds a sketch individually, and then we all collaborate with it. The songwriting develops through this process. It's then about collaging things together."

"Often, it does start from an aesthetic place," chimes in William. "Something piques your interest. All of our songs start pretty abstractly, and then together we figure out where they go from there. The MO in our



workflow is that once you take an idea to the rest of the band, whether it's at a really early or really late stage, you let go of all autocracy over it."

For 'Domestic Bliss', the accumulation of sounds and ideas happened in multiple studios, shifting settings and under different circumstances.

"It was a long process of collecting material and then trying to find the time to actually be together," says Imogen. "It was recorded in lots of intermittent sessions, because we weren't able to be in the same place for an extended period of time."

William describes 'Domestic Bliss' as the band's most mature work to date.

"Part of that maturing process is about letting go of the way you think you should or could make songs," he says. "Each time we put something out, we feel like we learn more about how to create good music."

"We are really curious about discovering new sounds and trying new stuff, but for many of these songs, we were doing a lot of things for the first time," adds Ellie. "It feels like we were really committing to the sonic identity of each piece."

"We used broken equipment and recorded Imogen singing through an iPhone – she wasn't even in the same room as us. She was in Edinburgh and we were in London. We played two pianos and recorded them in a way that we've never done before."

One area of departure – most evident on 'Battle Sequence' – is driven by a relentless synth progression formed by Ellie while experimenting in the studio.

"That was one of our main inspirations for this album – not to be afraid of the hypnotic element of repeating," she explains. "I took that synth sequence and simply added a few complementary guitar notes. It just went on and on, and none of us got tired of it. We decided to write 'Battle Sequence' around that and keep the whole thing going. Those sounds literally could go on forever."

A critical framing device for the songs on 'Domestic Bliss' is the use of various characters, something that Ellie acknowledges isn't necessarily obvious until you know they're there.

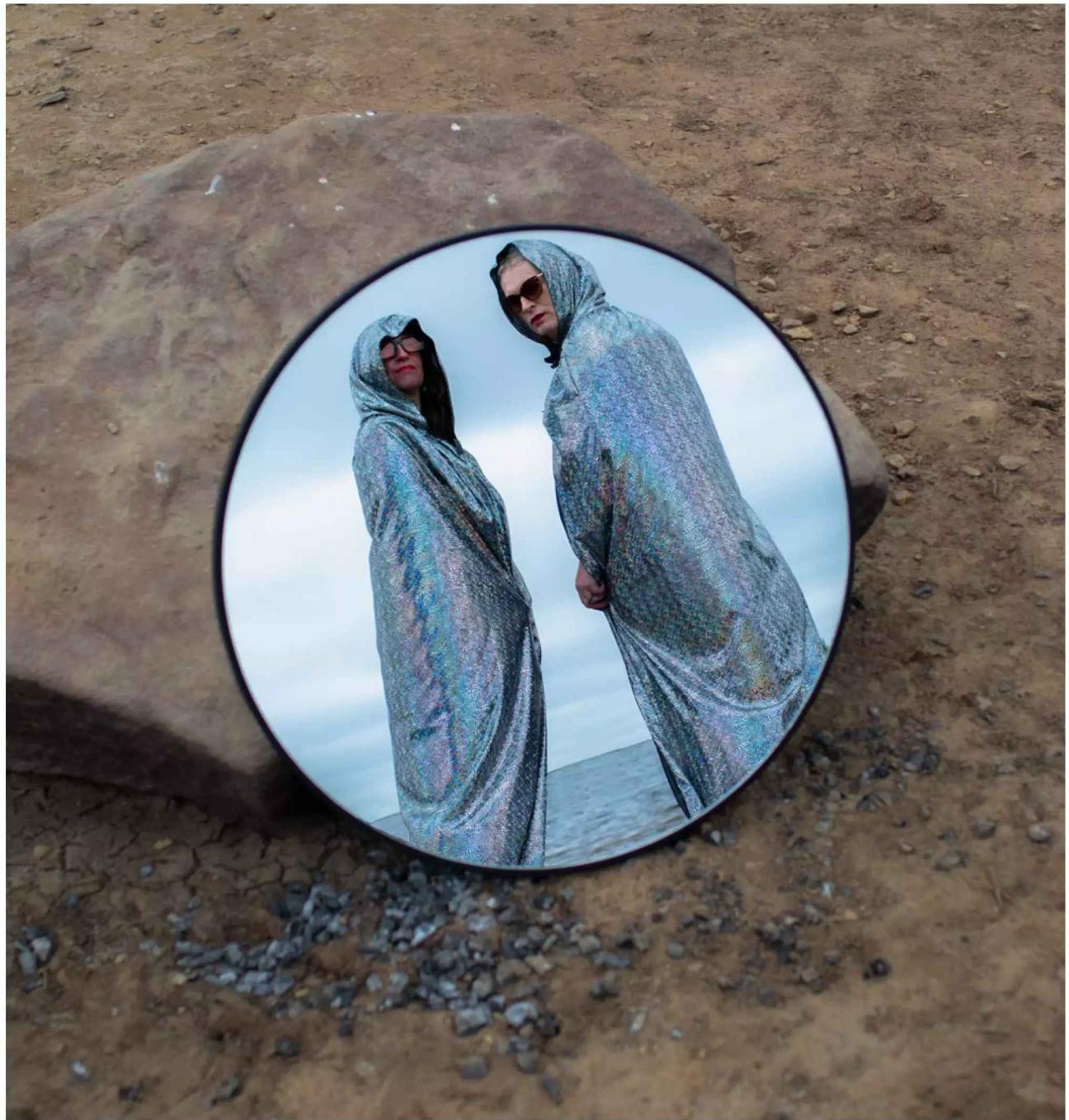
The opening track, 'Cheddar Man', features two narrators and the protagonist of the song. On the joyful 'Torpedo Mike', someone is having an offbeat conversation with the track's titular figure. The subtle 'Ultra Aura Flow' has a character acting as compere for the song. And the glam stomp highlight 'Creon I' uses the first-person perspective of the brother-in-law of Oedipus.

One particularly harsh critic took the album's stylistically restless ideas as proof – unfairly – that the band have the attention span of a gnat.

"In our minds, we do have quite fixed parameters of what Voka Gentle is," counters Imogen. "Songs with lyrics is very much one of them. But we're also equally drawn to sound design, experimental music and pop songs – that's the foundation of all our albums. It's how we're always going to be, and we like it that way."

'Domestic Bliss' is out now on State51

PEEP SHOW



MEET THE APPEALINGLY ANALOGUE AND QUIRKILY KOSMISCHE FEMALE DUO CURTAIN TWITCHER – THE NEW SYNTH-TOTING SOUND OF SHEFFIELD

WORDS: BEN WILLMOTT
PICTURE: STEPH ROSS

S

heffield has certainly had its share of iconic music venues. There's the world-famous Leadmill, which hosted Pulp, The Chemical Brothers, Suede plus scores of other legends, and The Limit, a favourite haunt of The Human League in their early days.

Even the somewhat humbler Take Two, located in the suburb of Intake, found its own place in music history when one John Cooper Clarke saw a fledgling indie band called Arctic Monkeys there and agreed to help them with their lyric writing.

One place you don't hear mentioned nearly as often though is Club 60. Tucked away in Shalesmoor, just north of the city centre, it has worn two very different guises. In the 1960s, it was a go-to live venue, hosting the likes of Screaming Lord Sutch, The Faces and local lad Joe Cocker. Then in 2004, it was granted a second lease of life when a group of Sheffield musicians got together to reopen it as an analogue recording studio and underground speakeasy – underground in the most literal sense.

"It was basically our version of The Cavern," recalls Sophie Toes of Sheffield electronic duo Curtain Twitcher. "It was a series of underground tunnels in the basement of a disused pub. We couldn't get a licence, so it was all invite-only, but it was a real hotchpotch of ideas – a real collaborative space."

"It was a very community-spirited sort of place," adds Grace Griffin, her opposite number – both are speaking from their respective homes in south Sheffield.

"We would be together, but I've got a stinking cold and I don't want to give it to Grace," insists Sophie.

Sadly, a change of the building's ownership meant that Club 60 was forced to move out in 2017.

"Nothing has really replaced it," laments Sophie. "Unfortunately, the place is full of cement now."

Tragic, for sure, but we can continue to enjoy one partnership that Club 60's buzzing musical community forged, at least.

Curtain Twitcher first appeared at Sheffield's No Bounds festival in the summer of 2025, creating the track 'Underground Genius' as the score to an installation commemorating the city's iconic Tinsley Towers – two cooling towers that had loomed over the M1 exit for decades – being demolished back in 2008.

And now comes 'Leap The Dips', their seven-track debut album and a sheer sonic delight. From the chugging bassline and cheeky analogue euphoria of its opener 'Migration', right through to the interstellar closing anthem 'The Fourth Door', it's an exercise in how human, tactile and lovable electronic music can be in the right hands. Modular and classic vintage synths are involved, but it's the total opposite of a nerdy academic exercise. Instead, they go for big, gorgeous, uplifting melodies and an overall sense of joy that seeps out of every pore.

Both were drawn to Sheffield by music, but not as you might expect by its storied electronic heritage. They'd got a taste for it beforehand, mind. Sophie would sneak into her local Worcester nightclub Zig Zag as a teenager, impressed by the fact it housed an alternative night and an acid house club in the same building. Growing up in York, Grace also gravitated to alternative nights ("I had no interest whatsoever in anything else") but noted the late 1980s arrival of sample-wielding indie acts like Pop Will Eat Itself with interest.

For Grace, who's a live sound engineer by trade, Sheffield's cheap rent and central location appealed. Sophie, on the other hand, moved there after studying in Leeds, initially for a TV job developing a music show. When that stalled at the pilot stage, she began working in local record stores and before long was on speaking terms with most of the city's music movers and shakers.

"There's this very collaborative thing here that's driven by art rather than money," she says. "I met Phil Oakey because I was in a band with his bass player. I see him in Waitrose and he says hello – that's so Sheffield. Like with Grace, if you're into music you meet people and you end up collaborating... it's unique like that. It's not driven by commerce and goes across all different kinds of music, whether it's indie, rock, house, or whatever. Musically, me and Grace have lots of influences, but I think what we make is a marriage of all that electronic music influence from living here."

"It was completely inevitable that we were going to end up making music together," says Grace, laughing. "Electronic music gets into you here by osmosis, really. It's not like we're all walking about saying, 'Oh, I'm really into Cabaret Voltaire' – it's everywhere. And you meet those people – they're still around."

While the early techno experiments of Warp had a clear link to the city's heavy industrial vibe ("The sound of drop hammers in the Don Valley echoing at three in the morning," as Grace describes it), Curtain Twitcher's sound seems more closely aligned with the city's open spaces and sweeping vistas.

"We're influenced by Sheffield's unique landscape – the hills, the beautiful Peak District and nature," explains Sophie. "There's something about being on top of a hill and being able to see to the other side of the city. That is unique to Sheffield's geography and its landscape."

The pair believe in the magic that two close friends improvising together can bring, and all but one of the tracks on the album are edited down from lengthier jam sessions. One was done in a single take – but they'd rather we listen to it all ourselves and guess which one that is.

After a big recent launch gig in Sheffield, there are further UK live shows in the pipeline, to be announced shortly.

"I'm not sure it's exactly an underground scene anymore," says Grace of the country's growing network of experimental electronic music. "It's more... bubbling under."

Not that global success is paramount.

"We're not in this to be pop stars," insists Sophie. "We want to make good art and hopefully people will get to hear it."

"You can only do what you believe in," concludes Grace. "And we definitely believe in what we do."

'Leap The Dips' is out now on Curtain Twitcher

SOMETHING IN THE AIR

NATHAN FAKE

Evaporator

INFINE

Nathan Fake may be deeply attached to the East of England environment where he grew up and has since returned to, but he's something of an electronic journeyman whose career has taken him to plenty of other interesting places, too.

Back in 2004, he joined James Holden's Border Community and soon had his first viral hit with his new boss' remix of 'The Sky Was Pink', a game-changer both for him and for the style of subterranean techno he'd been making. Other labels along the timeline have included Ninja Tune, Cologne minimal techno specialists Traum Schallplatten, and his own – Cambria Instruments – which he's used exclusively to deliver his last two albums.

Now, this mainstay English electronic musician has joined the excellent French avant-pop label Infiné, adding to a roster that includes Murcof, Lucie Antunes, Uto and O'o, to name but a few. Putting out music via a Parisian label might seem counterintuitive, though InFiné's nurturing, hands-off approach with its artists will suit Fake, given that he seems happiest when left to his own devices.

His first album for the label certainly won't disappoint his new paymasters either. 'Evaporator' comes off the back of two of his best – 2020's 'Blizzards', that caught the mood of the worldwide lockdown like a comforting squeeze on the shoulder, and the more intricate and mercurial 'Crystal Vision' from 2023, which includes the mesmeric 'The Grass', featuring Wizard Apprentice.

'Evaporator' is named after an industrial device that turns water into vapour. His seventh long-player, it sees this artist going from strength to strength as he shapeshifts his way through the elements. While it is still unmistakably Fake, it's different from the last album, which was more quixotic. 'Evaporator' is more simplistic – in the nicest possible way.

These atmospheric songs are often built on four-chord tricks, assembled like homes built to withstand the changing seasons around them. 'Aiwa' loops throughout on four drawn-out chords, each imbuing in the listener a nuanced change of feeling as the music that surrounds it progresses. Beneath come skittering drum patterns, while discordant drones form a wild patina on top. The bass bleeds and the track threatens to spiral out of control like an unkempt garden. That things might unravel is an illusion though, with Fake seemingly testing the limits and yet always somehow managing to pull back from the precipice.

The same can be said of 'Hypercube', an emphatically danceable track, slipping into the red with the mixing desk sliders but never quite turning into a didactic floor punisher. It sustains a tension that threatens to go over the top throughout, hinting that a riser or kick drum could be around the corner any minute. To his credit though, the track simmers without ever reaching a predictable apotheosis.

'Hypercube' could be a remix away from becoming one of the club bangers of 2026, though that's not Fake's objective here. Rather, his job is to see how far he can stretch the elastic without it snapping.

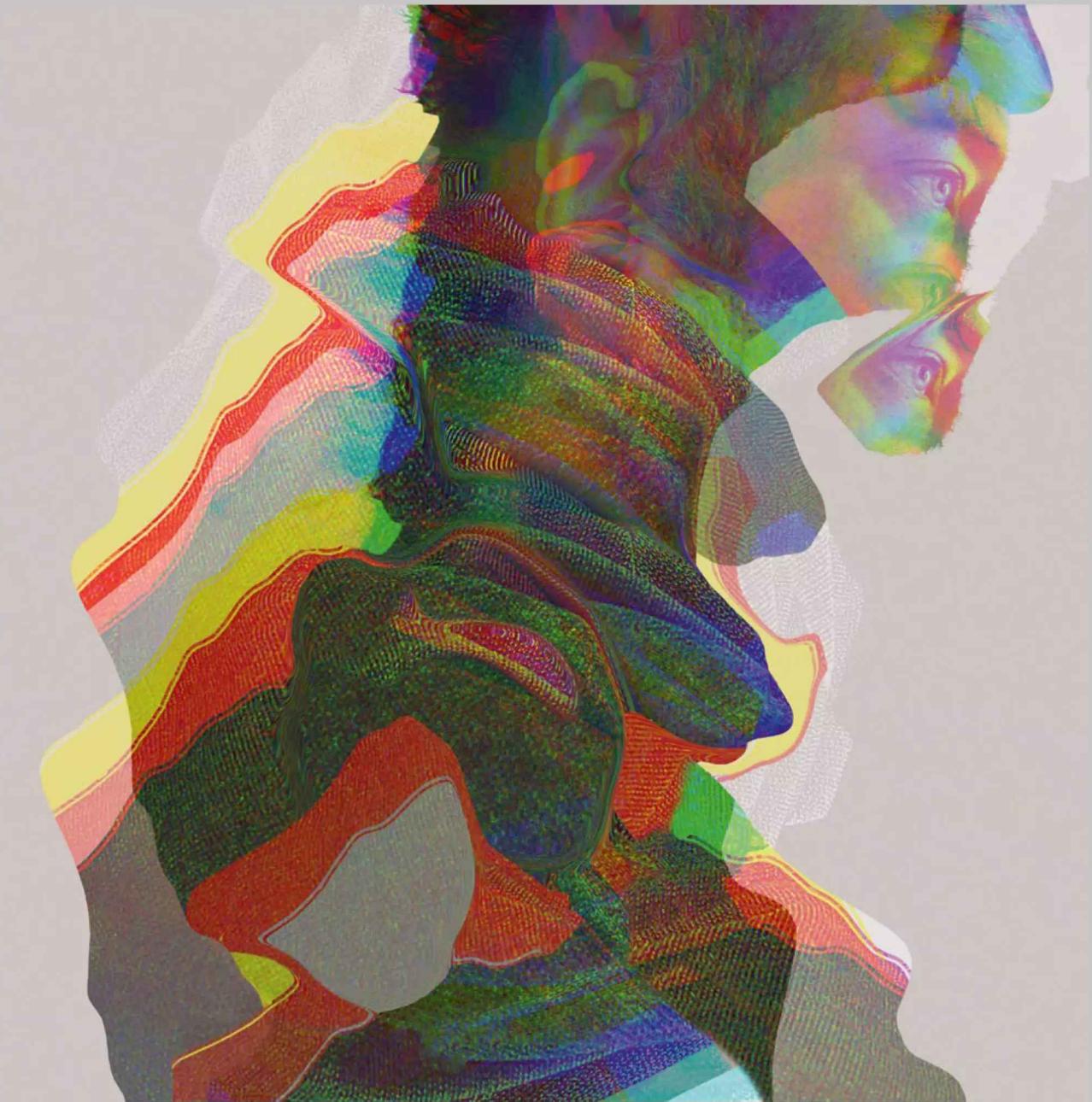
'Bialystok' too, named after the north-eastern Polish city, is predicated on four simple chords and a bright 2-step beat, allowing for the movement of luminous textures to shift organically as the track evolves. Up next, 'The Ice House' is a little more baroque in its patterns and interchangeable in its structure of eight looped bars, though it still follows some elementary triplets that could just about be described as arpeggios if you were being generous. Fake seems fascinated by no frills minimalism here, suggesting an artist in a comfortable place, unpanicked by perspicuity and clearly confident in his own powers.

An affable loner, many of Fake's finest moments arise in collaboration. On 'Evaporator', he hooks up with two artists for the album's most experimental pieces. Fellow Border Community veteran Dextro appears on the ambient, tactile 'Baltasound' (named after a village in the Shetland Islands). The track envelops the listener in an ambrosial sonic ice cloud, before everything fades away and we're left with delicate harmonics plucked from the atmosphere like snowflakes. And his old pal Chris Clark – who made an appearance on 'Crystal Vision' – also features, bringing some slightly off-colour gongs to the brief disruptor that is 'Orbiting Meadows'.

This acts as a prelude to the album's standout moment – the elongated, synapse-snapping acid-funk of 'Slow Yamaha'. Inhabiting a similar terrain to latter-day Mark Pritchard, it still maintains the inimitable identity of the artist himself.

Nathan Fake is clearly in a good place right now, working his magic from his Norfolk home while reaching across borders to make human connections through music. Moreover, it all appears to be quite effortless.

JEREMY ALLEN





GLOK / TIMOTHY CLERKIN

Alliance Remixed

BYTES

A musical alliance between Ride and Oasis sonic adventurer GLOK (Andy Bell) and Amsterdam producer Timothy Clerkin resulted in 2024's much-exalted 'Alliance' album. So loved was this collaboration that the two are doing it again, this time with guest artists stepping in to mix things up. Most startling is the French production duo Froid Dub's muscular dubification of the signature track 'Empyrean', while Bdrrmm give 'AmigA' a leg up with emphatic breakbeats and Clerkin imbues the same track with the jungle treatment. An inspired and wholly worthwhile revisit. JA

GAUTE GRANLI

Rosacea

NASHAZPHONE

Norwegian experimental composer and musician Gaute Granli pops up on Cairo's Nashazphone imprint with an album of brilliantly off-kilter, emotionally addled electronic pop. It's worth investigating for the title track alone, a heady, baroque-leaning fusion of guitar twangs, synth blasts and haunted vocal incantations that brings Wild Beasts' art rock bombast to mind. Elsewhere, the psychedelic churn of 'Deep In The Ocean' and the distorted soul jazz freakout 'This Is Never Ending' provide further proof of Granli's perplexing but irresistible talent. CF

FRANKIE & KELMAN DURAN

McArthur

KUBORAUM EDITIONS

Following production duties on Beyoncé's 'Renaissance' album in 2022, Dominican-American artist Kelman Duran joined up with Berlin vocalist and composer Franziska Aigner (FRANKIE) to create music that could only be called R&B if that stood for "rattles & bones". Their debut album has a definite sepulchral quality, with Aigner's strings scraping over what might be mechanical ravens and the sound of opening graves on 'No Gods', while her voice is pitched up to the wail of the damned and machine gun beats volley through 'Bitch I'm Scared'. You will be, too. PC

ANDREAS VOELK & SCOTT MONTEITH

And All The Clocks Ran Dry

ROOM40

Created in one improvised session in Andreas Voelk's Berlin studio, 'And All The Clocks Ran Dry' is separated into two pieces, each technically ambient, but in reality quite powerful, dark instrumentals. 'Part 1' creeps up on you slowly but surely, a single note that grows and grows before church organ-like keys and Vangelis-style synths add their own slant, and refracted melodies finally emerge. 'Part 2' is more spacious and makes greater use of Monteith's Rhodes piano playing, its tones distorted and misshapen by effects. Both pieces are equally impressive. BW



DOGS VERSUS SHADOWS

Safezone

BLACK PYLON

Black Pylon, the joint project of Nicholas Langley and Lee Thompson of Dogs Versus Shadows, is a new cassette offshoot of Langley's own Third Kind label. Thompson's Dogs Versus Shadows alias takes the more spacious, ambient end of industrial music as its launch point for a fevered, lysergic odyssey into a twilight world of uncertain shape. 'Admit The Worst' is beltingly disorienting, with sampled voices spitting fissile derangements into dirty nuclear substation electronics. 'Glutton For' is outstanding, throwing spectral subterranean energies against deconstructed sci-fi junglism. Lethal stuff. **CG**

BOROKOV BOROKOV

World War Too

MAGNETRON MUSIC

Borokov Borokov are Belgian duo Boris Van Den Eynden and Noah Melis. Working with a bunch of collaborators, 'World War Too' is a wonderfully indefinable stew of lo-fi synthpop and wonky vocal electro. 'The Gist' (with Personal Trainer) shuffles nervously between awkward funk, wriggly acid and cryptic lyrical motifs, 'Rayban' (with Marie Klock) is a blissful ode to sunglasses, and 'Hidden Hand' (with Tim Vanhamel) is a persuasive dancefloor banger with overtones of DAF. A surreal inversion of an electronic pop album. **MS**

PURELINK

Live

KUDZU AUDIO

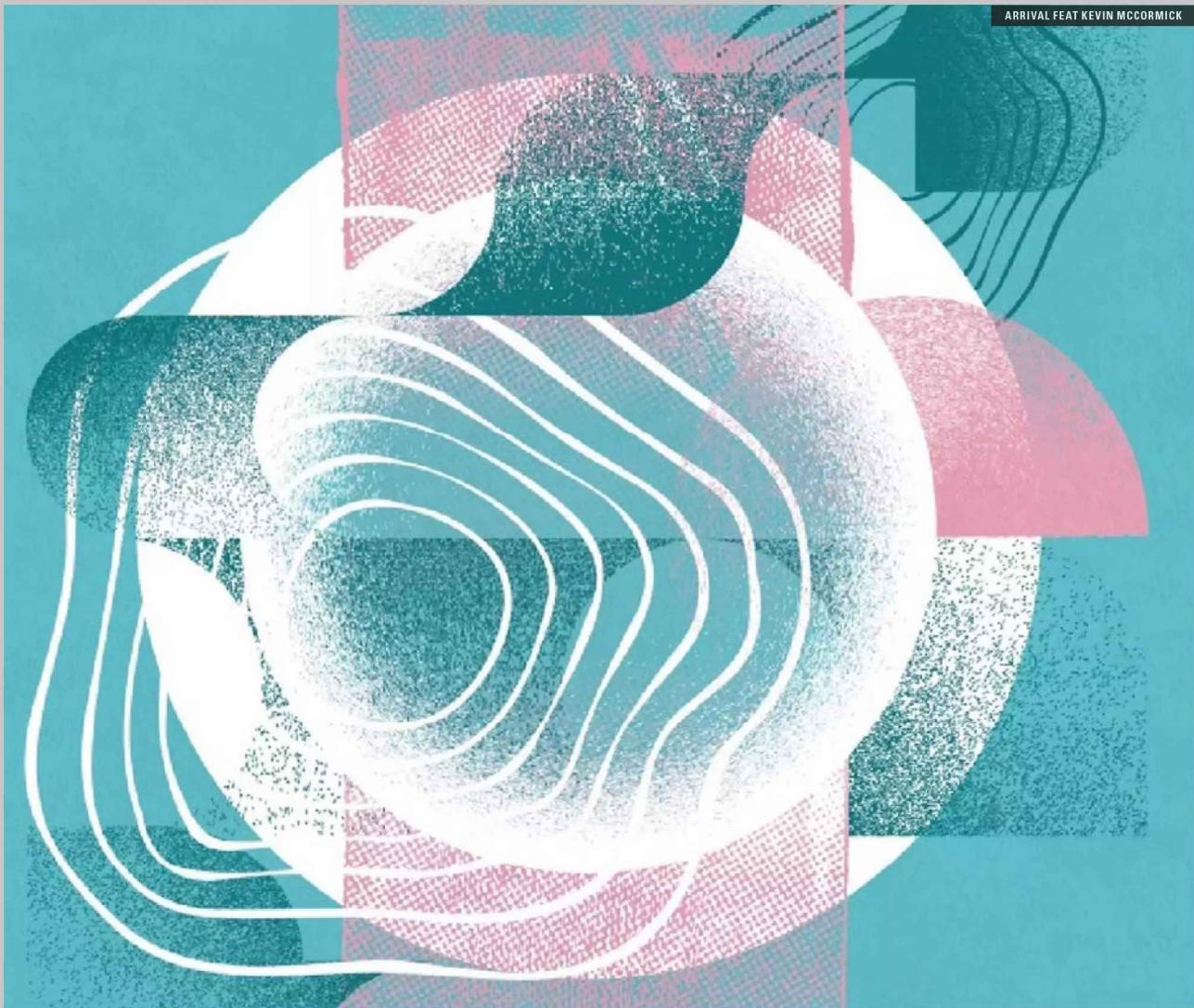
Here, Chicago trio Purelink source recordings from various gigs in 2024 to create two titleless tracks, both running to over 30 minutes. Side A touches on moments from their debut album 'Signs', featuring warm ambient gushes before some hilarious stoner samples and an understated, head-nodding beat that eventually spirits matters to their end. 'Side B', meanwhile, sees new material taking form, coaxed along by nicely fidgeting rhythms and truly exquisite sound design. Firsthand proof of why Akeem Asani, Tommy Paslaski and Ben Paulson are a must-see electronic act right now. **BW**

BRAD ROSE

The Sound Leaves

ROOM40

'The Sound Leaves' began life as an installation piece, performed by Tulsa sound artist Brad Rose at Oklahoma's Philbrook Museum of Art in 2023. But the simple power of its experiments with the sound of autumn leaves as a metaphor for human impact, trod-through then amplified, processed and mixed live, evolved into this beguilingly immersive suite. Rustles and crunches are transformed into the complex and beautiful ambient textures of the title track, but are then treated more radically on the startling 'In Collapse'. Quietly stirring. **CG**



**ARRIVAL FEAT
KEVIN MCCORMICK**
One
BEFORE I DIE

From the bustling bars of Stockport's thriving Underbank quarter come Gordon Milson and Mark Rayner, whose impressive debut mini-album as Arrival sees veteran Manchester guitar maestro Kevin McCormick adding immaculate fretwork to their smooth ambient textures. The opening track, 'One (Underbank Mix)', is the perfect introduction, mixing Balearic beats with the kind of exquisite noodling that should delight Durutti Column fans, while 'Common Place' adds appropriately rainswept hums and grumbles. It's a scene they're already calling "skambient". **BF**

BRIAN D'SOUZA
Sunflowers
MUSIC TO WATCH SEEDS GROW BY

Green-fingered Scottish producer Brian D'Souza, also known as Auntie Flo, has become synonymous with biosonification under his Plants Can Dance live alias. For the latest instalment in the Music To Watch Seeds Grow By series, he's cultivated a collection of luminous ambient pieces celebrating the cheerful sunflower. The resonant tones and glassy modular bleeps of 'Stand Tall' and 'Germination' evoke hidden life flourishing under the soil, while the radiant closer 'Hector's Sunflower' is as joyful as catching sight of the blooms themselves. **CF**

LAMISI
Let Us Clap
REAL WORLD

In Zebilla, Ghana, clapping is at the rhythmic core of women's traditional music and dance. Lamisi cements this ancient African art form in something more futuristic. The joyful tradition and its customary instrumentation meet fresh studio enhancements that crystallise the organic nature of communal jamming. Her voice receives a soulful vocoding, electrifying the already tingly 'Zane Ya Kinkin'. The clean tapping of xylophone and drums collaborate in 'Come', where Lamisi upholds her position as a feminist champion of young voices. The energy is magical. **JB**

WE'RE IN THE WATER
The Steeple
OK MUSIC

'The Steeple' is Part One of a three-album, 36-song cycle in which DJ, producer and Nag Nag Nag club co-founder Fil OK explores his neurodivergence. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the record swims in fractured styles, shifting genres and moods like a dopamine-seeking synapse switch. 'Impaired' is an overwhelm of spongey bass, jittering beats and glistening keys, while 'Compassionless' is a detuned confessional over deliriously anxious percussion. Throughout, disparate sounds are held together by gorgeous, whispered melodies. **MJ**

**ERIK HALL****Solo Three**

WESTERN VINYL

Michigan multi-instrumentalist Erik Hall is known for taking on large-ensemble contemporary classical pieces, David and Goliath-like, and recording every part himself. His solitude and limitations, however, peel back the intricacies of these hulking instrumental masses. Guaranteed you've never heard Glenn Branca played this softly over organ and prepared piano, or Steve Reich so taut, or Charlemagne Palestine's 'Strumming Music' rippling through lapping dynamics, despite lasting for only a quarter of the original's runtime. **BMW**

ENTRACTE**Imbalance**

TINY GLOBAL PRODUCTIONS

Their 40 year-old sound adheres to the daring originality of post-punk, but it's a mystery how Manchester group Entracte have remained unearthing until now. 'Imbalance' puts brooding in a beach-like setting with exotic influences, making very sunny numbers out of 'Thai Bridge (Revisited)' and 'So Seductively'. The momentum from these looping melodies is entrancing, but the mood is soon flipped on its head elsewhere. Better production quality would only taint this window into a time of tireless creativity. What else lies waiting to be discovered? **JB**

VOKA GENTLE**Domestic Bliss**

STATE51

The latest album from Voka Gentle is refreshingly energetic, verbally dexterous and delightfully idealistic. Take 'Cheddar Man', the bass-heavy opener which commences with a Bulgarian choir and bursts into a song named after Britain's oldest cadaver. Somewhat ingeniously, prehistory is linked to our ominous near future where the West Country disappears under rising tides, making the personal political. It will take you on a journey that's both circulatory and thrilling, a bombardment of really great tunes, hypnotic beats and fascinating ideas from a trio of altitudinous thinkers. **JA**

LOS SARA FONTAN**Consuelo**

ALLOUD MUSIC

Boasting a DIY ethic that's more punk than Crass assembling a flat pack wardrobe, the second album from Barcelona duo Sara Fontan and Edi Pou channels their rage at global politics through violins and an arsenal of electronics. The live wire drum 'n' bass rhythm of 'Elektra' and the abrupt turn from eerie violin section to malevolent industrial techno on 'Mecanisme D'Obediència' capture the feeling of heading to hell in a handcart with rickety wheels, although the ecclesiastical organ sounds of 'Salomé' seem to offer the faint hope of a final reprieve. **PC**

**PASSEPARTOUT DUO****Pieces From Places**

BANDCAMP

On 'Pieces From Places', pianist Nicoletta Favari and percussionist Christopher Salvito transform a decade of globetrotting into a series of intimate sonic postcards. The opener, 'From Taipei', catches your attention from the off, brimming with dynamic, syncopated rhythms that twist and curl around one another. Elsewhere, tracks such as 'From Tokyo' and 'From Nicosia' lean into warmth and spatial depth, rewarding close listening as their delicate, slowly evolving textures unfold. A stunning journey around the globe, and one you can take without ever having to worry about where you put your passport. **IB**

SHARDLOWE**Vision**

BANDCAMP

Like The Prodigy soundtracking the Blitz club, or Depeche Mode if they had been hardcore ravers, Derby's Shardlowe produces music that mainlines 1990s rave through the neurons of 80s synthpop. From the widescreen majesty of 'Jet Stream' to the euphoria of 'Lightspeed', 'Vision' offers a multi-hued rush of pulsing beats, thrusting basslines, twisting synth melodies and waves of hands-in-the-air ambience that nestle just the right side of epic. Nineties revival vibes, anyone? Yes please. **MJ**

MOON WIRING CLUB**Gruesome Shrewd**

GECOPHONIC AUDIO SYSTEMS

Emerging once again from his magical moorland cabinet, Ian Hodgson presents a woozy soundtrack to what he calls "a 1983 phantom package holiday from a two-week fever dream hallucination". As ever, it's a captivating two-hour dreamscape. The likes of 'Design Irregularity' and 'Sardonic Companion' are textbook MWC – all fractured beats and narcoleptic synths – while the magnificent 'Tourists In The Ghost House' feels like the jazzy theme to some early 1980s ITV afternoon show, where Doris Stokes genially guides bored housewives through the intricacies of necromancy. **BF**

THE PRE NEW**Jodrell Atomic:****The Original Soundtrack**

ARTEXIT

The "successor band" to Earl Brutus return with a soundtrack to James Fry's novel, set in the titular Cheshire suburb best known for that huge telescope. It's an album that's as reassuringly bonkers as ever. There is eerie, spoken word electronica ('Yoga Retreat Hangover'), a hilarious, internet-sourced cut-up ('Radio Mini Pops') and sleek technopop ('Canadian Data'). Then there are the covers – 'I Can't Stand The Rain', Joe Meek's 'I Hear A New World' and Hot Chocolate's 'Put Your Love In Me' – by turns snarling, lugubrious and, at times, quite touching. **WS**

**NOÉMI BÜCHI**

Exuvie
DUS

Swiss/French composer and sound artist Noémie Büchi finds inspiration in Francis Bacon's fluid, painterly approach to structure on this latest full-length. With the track titles even forming a sliced-up sentence when joined together, disconnection from a once-united source informs the instrumentals here. Büchi's post-industrial *sturm und drang* is punctured into further trypophobic abstraction, with choice cuts like 'I Suppose' and 'Structure Undone' asphyxiating their rich analogue arpeggios, to make those longer melodic gulps feel even more valuable. **BMW**

D'VOXX

Herzog: A Retrospective
DiN

The third album from D'Voxx on the DiN imprint sees Nino Auricchio and Paul Borg presenting musical interpretations of five films directed by German filmmaker Werner Herzog between 1972 and 1987, all featuring Klaus Kinski. The actor's volatility echoes throughout tense, cinematic pieces like 'Phantom (Nosferatu The Vampyre)' and 'Blood & Gold (Cobra Verde)'. Rich in atmosphere, drama and genre-defying ambition, this is one of D'Voxx's most evocative releases to date. **IB**

THE ODES

Déjeuner Sous L'Herbe
NOT APPLICABLE

The Odes is a collaboration between avant-garde electronics master Sam Britton (Isambard Khroustaliov) and poet/alto saxophonist Ted Milton (from Blurt), who first began working together in 2001. The title track finds Milton's oblique French observations interacting with some of Britton's heaviest rhythmic pulses and sounds. When Milton's sax appears, it's like he's tearing a hole through the fabric of the track. 'O Look!' rides forth on an intensely phased motorik beat, as Milton's emphatic exclamations mirror his wild and unpredictable saxophone wrangling. **MS**

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Steve Mason Presents The Romance Of Unknowing
TWO PIERS

Or the romance of being free of the algorithm, you could add. For this is a rare treat in 2026, a mix tape in the old-fashioned sense of the word, as Beta Band man Steve Mason shares the more obscure corners of his record collection. There's northern soul, electronic pop, snotty punk, Demis Roussos doing a disco number, The Staple Singers covering Talking Heads, and The Prodigy's brilliant mix of Method Man's 'Release Yo' Delf'. And when isn't it a pleasure to hear Sailor's 'A Glass Of Champagne'? All in all, an utter delight. **WS**



TROIS-QUARTS TAXI SYSTEM

Scarecrow

MALOCA

This Parisian DJ and sound artist (real name Eloi Petillon) is part of a proudly genre-fluid, post-Covid crop of musicians, his weightless, dubby techno bending further into electroacoustic textures this time around. While nods to stalwart dancefloor rhythms are present throughout, the album's strongest (and strangest) moments arise from the swamp of ambient bleeps and foggy reverb manipulation set adrift on the likes of 'Rose Amère I', or the collapsing closer 'Straw And Bodies'. **BMW**

SLOW DANCING SOCIETY

The Disappearing Collective Vol II

PAST INSIDE THE PRESENT

Drew Sullivan hails from Spokane, Washington and makes music that carries a tinge of poignant but elusive nostalgia. This emerges most clearly on 'Ephemeras'. Here, delicate half-melodies interface with earthy drones and a rhythm that sounds like a ticking clock, the whole track getting more distorted and fragmented as it goes on. That same evocation of a clear memory becoming increasingly less certain appears again within the haunted gracefulness of 'Tenshi'. A gentle, but powerful, rumination on the notion that all things must pass. **MS**

PLACID ANGLES

Canada

OATH

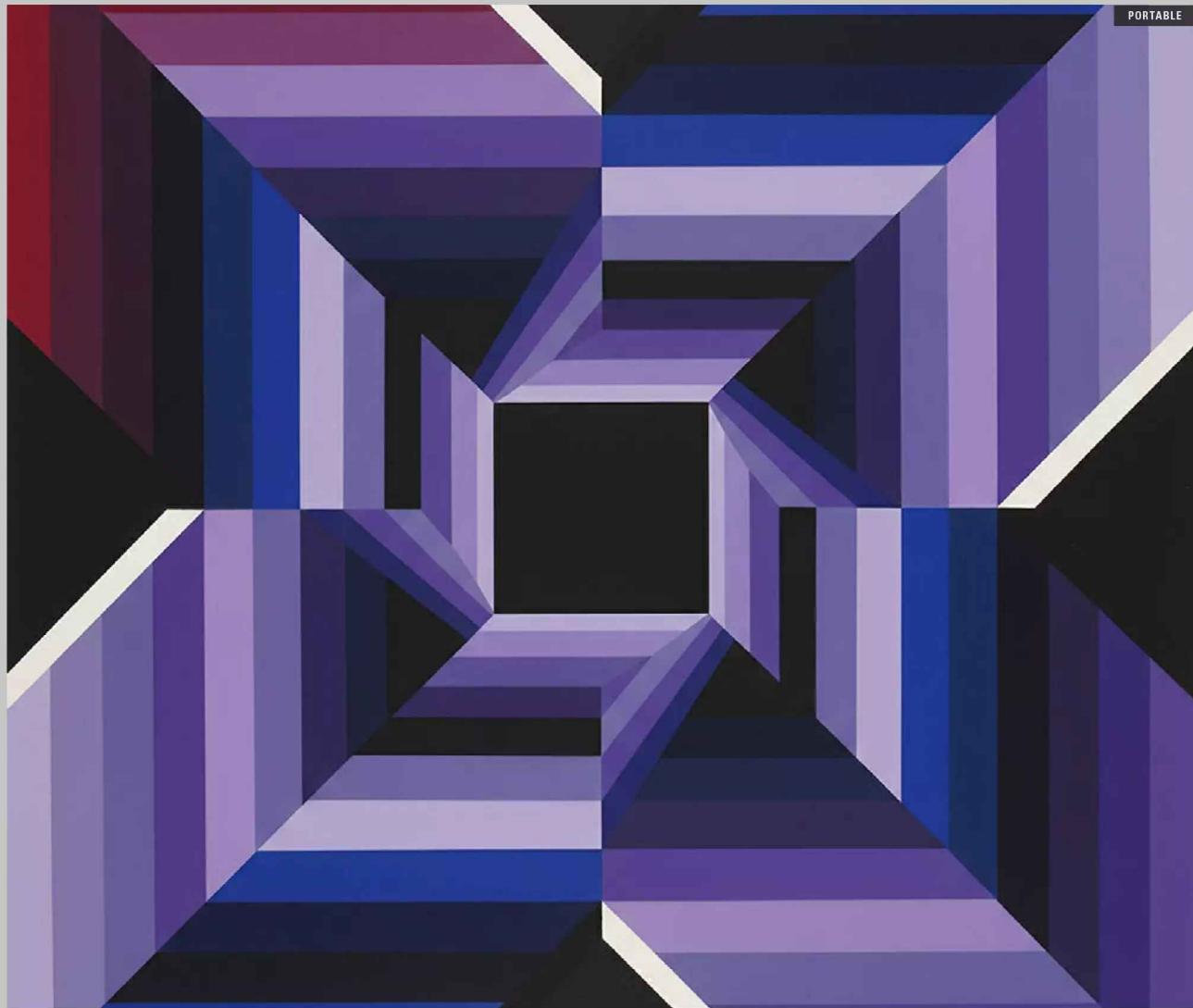
Michigan's John Beltran has been releasing records since the early 1990s, but his latest album under the Placid Angles banner feels like gulping a lungful of fresh air on a cold, bright day. Titled after he spent time travelling in the country, 'Canada' will give older listeners a nostalgic glow, as tracks like 'Sun' and 'I Want What I Want' (with Sophia Stell) juxtapose busy breakbeat techno with ambient adornments. For home listening rather than the dancefloor, it's a comforting album – one to snuggle up to in front of a fire this winter. **WS**

DRONING CATS WITH NRV

Cartography Of Sleep

SEE BLUE AUDIO

This sublime listening experience leads us through the mysterious realms of sleep. It comes courtesy of Brussels duo Droning Cats (Jan Delannoy and Christophe Calis) along with renowned Japanese electronicist NRV. While we drift on the calm waters of 'When Two Longitudes Overlap' or 'Slumbering On A Swing', we may dream that Steve Hillage and Brian Eno are our captains. Deeper in, 'Dorian Tapestry' personifies that more cosmically abstract, amorphous slumber stage that will always remain an enigma. Pure hypnosis. **CG**

**PORTABLE**

African Ambient Live At Funkhaus CIRCUS COMPANY

While South African styles like kwaito, gqom and amapiano have conquered global clubland, the country's more experimental music hasn't had the same international exposure. Likewise, Alan Abrahams' Portable project is better known for techno than avant-garde electronica. This 2024 live set recorded at Berlin's Funkhaus sees the Paris-based artist break free of both preconceptions and the dancefloor, through a thicket of gelatinous drones and weightless synths inspired by his upbringing in Cape Town. That said, tracks like 'Sidebone' make you suspect he might actually come from closer to Alpha Centauri. **PC**

EL HEATH

Snailbeach Mines Trust (Extended Reissue)
WAYSIDE & WOODLAND

The Shropshire village of Snailbeach was once home to one of England's largest lead mines. And, indeed, to Eric Loveland Heath, whose 2010 homage to the mine's abandoned pits and shafts has been expanded, remastered and reissued. The likes of 'Black Tom Shaft' and 'Perkins Level' fill the darkened hollows with haunting synth soundscapes, while 'Tragedy At George's Shaft' is an exquisite Nick Drake-style lament for the miners who lost their lives in an 1895 accident. Heath has done their memory proud. **BF**

PDQB

Mutations, Modifications, And Other Alterations
SYNAPTIC CLIFFS

Electro is the central spine that runs through these remixes of Berlin's PDQB, but there's plenty of variety to be had. Dutch producer Lloyd Stellar goes for Kraftwerk-style vocoders and chunky basslines on 'Verquerer Weise', while Electro Nation hitches funkiness to radioactive acid swirls on 'Pseudoliparis Swirei' and on 'Hypothermia (34.8)', Silicon Scally opts for a darker vibe. The most techno-leaning re-rubs are G-Man's 'Sixfold Radianz' and the thunderous kicks of Annie Hall's 'Mäckchen' – both are real highlights here, as is Hardfloor's majestically brooding acid/electro hybrid version of 'Frontera Extraterrestre'. **BW**

TANGERINE DREAM

50 Years Of Phaedra: At The Barbican
KSCOPE

This new album from kosmische overlords Tangerine Dream is a mesmerising, live reimagining of their 1974 classic 'Phaedra'. The hypnotic 'Sequent C' opens and flows into cinematic tracks like 'Movements Of A Visionary', the performance fusing lush synth textures with intricate rhythms, achieving a precision that the original album couldn't with the technology of the time. Alongside renditions of fan favourites like 'Dolphin Dance' and 'Raum', these recordings capture their visionary sound, proving the Tangs' influence remains as potent as ever. **IB**



GARY LE STRANGE

GARY LE STRANGE**Chromium Dockyard****BANDCAMP**

"I trudged wearily down the endless, dank, musty corridor to the photocopying machine..." So begins 'All The Intros, All At Once', the self-referential 11-minute opener to Gary Le Strange's fourth (possibly fifth, he's not sure) album. In a parallel universe, Le Strange was the king of Neo-Regency-Face-Warrior futurism until the controversial 2006 opus 'Beef Scarecrow' ended his career prematurely.

In reality, Le Strange is the deluded creation of the Perrier Award-winning comedian Waen Shepherd, and his comeback album remains an immaculately observed pastiche of portentous early 1980s synthpop. "Norman, I've dropped my cup of tea," he chants on 'Norman (I've Dropped My Cup Of Tea)'. "Suck the tea off the carpet / Then glue the cup back together / And spit the tea back into it / Then remove your spit from the tea." It's mercilessly savage throughout, yet retains a clear love for the days when men with wedge haircuts forged the future while nodding balloons around the 'Top Of The Pops' dancefloor. **BF**

SHAPE NAVIGATOR**Journal****COASTAL ELECTRONAUTS**

Peter Coyte's debut album, 'Journal', sounds like a Craven Faults record might if, rather than being produced in an old mill in Yorkshire, it was instead made on one of the Maunsell World War Two sea forts in the Thames estuary. 'Journal' was actually recorded in the closest place on dry land – Coyte's hometown of Whitstable, where he founded a series of live electronic music events which expanded into the Coastal Electronauts community and label. However, while the sea forts were designed to repel a German invasion, the track 'Sternenabfall', which resembles Neu! riding a North Sea gale, shows Coyte welcoming krautrock influences with open arms.

Compiled from excerpts of live performances, soundtrack commissions and studio improvs, 'Journal' is very much an album shaped by its environment. Not just in the samples of an old Thames barge on 'Greta (Estuary Waves)', but in the wide synthesised horizons of 'Suspicion', or the droning undercurrents and unexpected riptides in both 'Margate – Blue Lights' and 'Detachment = Devastation', which reflect the emotional turbulence Coyte experienced during the album's creation. **PC**

UFO95**A Brutalist Dystopian Society – Part 2****MORD**

A series of records (this being the follow-up to 2024's first instalment) inspired by brutalist architecture might sound about as much fun as a stubbed toe, but this French producer's skill is in taking the most austere and chilliest end of techno and breathing funk and soul into it. Fans of Jeff Mills, Surgeon and Sandwell District will be familiar with the minimal instrumentation and pounding beats here, but there's an addictively frisky syncopation at play throughout that's very much his alone.

'Pulsation 2' boasts a prodding, one-note bassline, sonar bleeps and crackling intercom vocals, and 'Fight Against Yourself' plays crispy, crackling snares off against shimmering seas of echo. 'Paradoxe Du Silence', the album's closing track proper, is pure coiled tension that never eases its grip, but possibly best of all is the boisterous and bouncy 'Uncall'. Overall, this is a really well-constructed, sturdy edifice of an album – which seems only right. **BW**

**KMRU****Kin**

EDITIONS MEGO

Kenyan-born Joseph Kamaru's latest collection as KMRU is a spectral successor of sorts to his acclaimed 2020 long-player, 'Peel'. Early in this new album's gestation, Kamaru emphasised his unwillingness to simply copy and paste the successes of 'Peel'. Instead, the billowing pads and time-slip drones that populate numerous KMRU releases are pushed into new realms of distortion.

Partly a reaction to the untimely passing of friend and fellow sound explorer Peter Rehberg, partly the influence of glitch luminary Fennesz (who co-writes and produces 'Blurred' here), Kamaru's timbres seem to rebel against their monotone trappings. 'Blurred' and tracks like 'They Are Here' writhe in feedback, with squealing decays weaving into awe-inspiring curtains of noise. As seems customary with Kamaru's output, time is loosely defined. The monolithic closer, 'By Absence', slowly unspools its machine-death buzz over 20 minutes, becoming more synaptic than ever to Kamaru's beloved field recordings, patiently manipulated and overlapping as erratically as the wind. A slow-burning triumph. **BMW**

SARAH NIXEY**Sea Fever**

BLACK LEAD

'Sea Fever' sees Black Box Recorder vocalist Sarah Nixey venturing into solo territory for the first time since 2018, and it's a record that leans as much into textural experimentation as it does finely etched melodies. Her trademark crystalline vocals remain firmly centre stage, and here they are set against arrangements that feel stark and windswept – quite unlike the synth-infused sound of her previous outing 'Night Walks'.

Tracks like 'Winter Solstice' and 'Pleasure Bay' embrace an unadorned spaciousness, subtle layers of guitar and percussion drifting in and out like gently shifting tides. It's when the album's sound becomes fuller, however, as on richer moments like 'England's On Fire' or 'Mudlarks', that Nixey is at her best, her voice cutting through the denser arrangements with a poise and authority that the sparser tracks only hint at. Perhaps not her finest hour, but the high points still showcase an artist capable of evoking a striking, singular beauty. **IB**

THE HOME CURRENT**A Point Blank Dream**

SUBEXOTIC

Danish producer-in-exile Martin Jensen has apparently spent the last two years wandering around his local woodland indulging a lifelong passion for ornithology, but anyone expecting a pastoral concept album about the migration habits of the European goldfinch may be sorely disappointed. The once-prolific Jensen has returned from this rare hiatus with all beats blazing. 'High Priests Of Nothing' adds mournful Morricone harmonica to a filthy funk shuffle, while 'Chew Unseen' is a throbbing tribute to early 1980s hip hop and should come with a trigger warning for anyone who ever cricked their neck while breakdancing on the bathroom mat.

Jensen's comeback certainly boasts an irresistibly gritty tone. The highlight, 'Dexter', is deliciously squelchy and sleazy, and it's hard to hear the likes of 'All Them Sewers' and 'Once Upon A Ziplock' without imagining Mads Mikkelsen beneath a flickering neon sign, pulling up the collar of his trenchcoat and chasing a Eurasian blue tit down a seedy back alleyway. **BF**



MOMOKO GILL - PHOTO: MANUEL VASQUEZ

MOMOKO GILL

Momoko

STRUT

'Momoko' is the debut album from London jazz musician Momoko Gill, who seems determined to breathe fresh air into a style that's over 100 years old. While there are a small number of tracks that might be described as traditional in their framing, what we hear across 'Momoko' is the breadth of her vision.

'Rewind/Remind' shuffles out on a spare trip hop beat arrested in motion by the interjection of a determined stab of flutes. Gill's vocal has a quiet fragility, delivered with a gentle, enveloping, understated soulful edge, which carries through into 'Shadowboxing'. This track is what might happen if Massive Attack tackled the blues. In it, a hardening, electronically processed rhythm suggests a late-night otherworldliness. Elsewhere, 'Test A Small Area' is pure sonic adventuring, all twisted, scratchy loops, fuzzy, distorted tones and unpredictable vocal hiccups and tics. The effects are briefly removed, revealing a few bars of traditional jazz structure and a nod to the scene from which this captivating artist emerged. **MS**

POLYPORES

Hungry Vortex

FERAL CHILD

Moustache twitching and cloak flapping in the breeze, intrepid Lancashire adventurer Stephen James Buckley plunges ever-deeper into the delights of 1970s prog. There are four extended modular workouts here, all firmly rooted in the days when keyboard players dressed like Gandalf and boldly set forth across the Shire to make field recordings of actual dragons.

The quest begins with 'The Body Is The Spaceship', a hypnotic, 11-minute psychedelic wig-out with a whiff of Terry Riley. 'Wizards!' is even longer, an otherworldly showcase for Buckley's increasing obsession with all things polyrhythmic. But it's the title track itself that takes us firmly into the fantastical, a glorious haze of psychedelic synth-flutes accompanying an army of marching bleeps, before the closing number 'Void High' sends ambient pipe smoke floating over the elf-woods. Ever idiosyncratic, Buckley continues to operate in his own uniquely magical realm. **BF**

KEITH SEATMAN

Counting To Ten Then Back Again

CASTLES IN SPACE

In recent years, this ex-member of psych/noise band The Psylons has cornered the market at the perkier end of what we still have to call hauntology – all wibbly, whooshing analogue synths and quirky track titles. This latest album has a very loose theme. According to Seatman, it's inspired by the artwork of old skool board games, fireworks packaging and the sort of magic sets that were the staple of many a kid's Christmas stocking in the 1970s and 80s.

These hazy memories have been transformed into 10 tracks, which range from the wonkiness of 'Clip Clop To The Shop' to the nightmarish 'Smoke And Mirrors', which sounds like one of the Cadbury's Smash robots having a panic attack. It's all instrumental, apart from a few murmured samples on the phased psychedelia of 'Another Strange Thing', and heard in one go it veers between the endearingly daft and the downright sinister – often in the same track. Seatman's work is utterly unique and is alive with a warm fuzziness of a time less harsh than our present one. **WS**



KAYLA PAINTER

Tectonic Particles

QUIET DETAILS

Captivating minimalism ponders big themes

"Is music organised sound, or is music just happening anyway?" The question Kayla Painter asks in 'Ears To The Ground' – Ben Murphy's book about field recordings in electronic music – is one she has been pondering her entire career. This is most obvious in her ongoing 'Ambient Owl Core' series, based on recordings of the titular bird taken around her home in Bristol, but also in earlier releases like 2022's 'Balloons In The Arcade', where the sound of waves evoke endless childhood summers.

Painter's modus operandi overlaps well with that of the Quiet Details label, which commissions artists to produce albums based on their interpretation of the label's name. Strikingly though, her focus is as much on the macro level of the universe as the micro level of individual sounds.

'Tectonic Particles' is inspired by processes such as life evolving from collapsing stars or geographical erosion that occurs over millennia and which have led her to create her most abstract music to date. Whereas 2024's 'Fractures' was constructed around dancefloor-friendly rhythms and 'Ambient Owl Core' still contains recognisable melodies and harmonic structures, on 'Tectonic Particles' these collapse down to a sparse minimalism akin to Kirk Barley's work.

Much like looking at the forest floor that gives the first track its name, there's plenty happening when you pay attention. The simple cyclical piano motif is interrupted by bleeps like Morse code from the mycelium network, with electronic glitches introducing an element of entropy. Things appear to sink deeper underground on 'All Things As A Whole' – as simultaneously placid and dark as a subterranean lake – while the crackling electrical drone of 'Pure White Stalactite' seems to reverberate through the bowels of the Earth.

Painter's preoccupations reach beyond the material world. Exploring her Fijian heritage, as she did on 2018's 'Cannibals At Sea', 'Lesu Mai' (a Fijian phrase which roughly translates as 'To Return') places sombre woodwind amid a drifting soundscape tinged with mourning.

It gets even more metaphysical on 'Anicca' and 'Ontology'. Based on the Buddhist concept of impermanence, the former's metronomic techno pulse makes it, almost ironically, the most solid-sounding track on the piece. In keeping with its title, the amorphous textures of 'Ontology' suggest Painter is now pondering not just what constitutes music, but much bigger philosophical conundrums, on an album that conveys all the ineffable lightness of being.

PAUL CLARKE

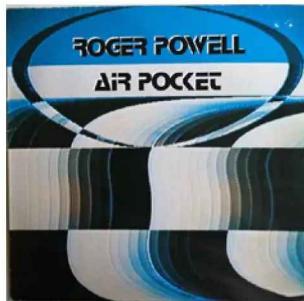
The Best Of...



Kayla Painter bares all

- What's the best day of the week?** "Thursday."
- Way to start the day?** "Radio, cup of tea, cats."
- Record label?** "Warp."
- Album artwork?** "'Stealers Wheel' by John Patrick Byrne."
- Style of architecture?** "Deconstructivism."
- Type of tea?** "Yorkshire. Or fresh peppermint."
- Walking spot?** "Stoke Park."
- Word in a foreign language?** "Isa Lei, a Fijian farewell expression."
- Ice cream flavour?** "Mint choc chip."
- Place to go swimming?** "Portishead Lido."
- Way to relax?** "Climbing."
- Emoji? 😊**
- Ambient album of all time?** "It has to be Brian Eno's 'Music For Airports'."
- Music format?** "CD."
- Museum to visit?** "Jodrell Bank, not a museum..."
- Holiday destination?** "Bali."
- Record shop?** "Spillers in Cardiff."
- Thing about being alive in 2025?** "Parkrun."
- Book on your shelf?** "'Love's Executioner And Other Tales Of Psychotherapy' by Irvin D Yalom."
- TV series?** "'Friends'."
- Film you've seen recently?** "'Weapons'."
- Hot drink?** "Tea – always."
- Cold drink?** "Lemonade or lager."
- Way to get out of a creative rut?** "Go for a run or a climb."
- Midnight snack?** "Plain salted tortilla crisps."
- Mode of transport?** "Walking."
- Visual artist of the 20th century?** "Salvador Dalí."
- Country?** "Wales."
- City?** "Bristol."
- Town?** "Whitby."
- Song for driving to?** "'If You Want Me To Stay' by Sly & The Family Stone."
- Cultural landmark you've visited?** "Hagar Qim, Malta, 3600-3200 BC."
- Philosophy movement?** "Post-structuralist – Derrida, Baudrillard."
- Travel souvenir?** "A tiny porcelain cat from Japan, the size of a bean."
- Bowie album?** "'Low'."
- Sound not made by an instrument?** "Herbie's purr, on the breath in."
- Advice to live by?** "'The way you get to know yourself is by the expressions on other people's faces because that's the only thing that you can see' – Gil Scott-Heron."
- Music genre?** "Rock/pop."
- Smell?** "The husk of fresh corn on the cob."
- Species of owl?** "Eurasian Eagle... but all of them, really."
- Concert you've ever been to?** "Laurie Anderson, Barbican, 2023."
- Musical instrument?** "Bass guitar."
- Room in your house?** "Lounge."

Buried Treasure



ROGER POWELL

Air Pocket

BEARSVILLE, 1980

The window is about 20 years, more or less. That's the point where that obscure band you loved is mostly forgotten about, with no one jostling you at the record fair to beat you to a first pressing. Such was the case, some would say, with the group Todd Rundgren's Utopia – a good idea whose output largely became lower-tier chart filler, no matter how catchy or well produced the tunes were. Todd had surrounded himself with heavy hitters, but neither his fan base nor their major label affiliations could help them shake their League One status.

By 1975, sitting behind the keyboards of Utopia was Roger Powell, a pianist and studio rat who eventually parlayed his interest in synthesis into doing promotional clinics for both ARP synthesisers and Moog in the early 70s. His solo electronic debut 'Cosmic Furnace' had much rock media praise heaped upon it when it appeared in 1973, and eventually his name reached Rundgren's ears when he was on a quest to pare Utopia's three keyboard players down to one.

It was at that point that Powell and his Bob Moog-customised gear joined a band that was just about to exit the prog-sphere and gently brush up against the skinny tie groups of new wave. Powell was a "good get" for Utopia. And when he wasn't helping them along with their reinvention, he ploughed much of his experience into his sophomore release, a taut modern electronic pop affair titled 'Air Pocket'.

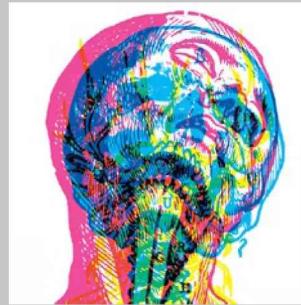
Recorded mostly during 1976, the original release sat around until his label opted to have a flutter on Powell's cover of the surf classic 'Pipeline' in 1978. Potentially nothing more than a novelty exercise, the piece comes across as something that should have soundtracked 'Blake's 7' or the original 'Battlestar Galactica'. With the single tickling the US charts, an additional 10 tracks were finally freed from the vault in 1980.

Superbly arranged and well recorded, the record instantly betrays just how savvy the 30-year-old Powell had become when it came to crafting and positioning sounds. The basslines are muscular, and the ambient tones are often wonderfully ethereal. The title track is a total electronic earworm and despite the unnecessary 'Dune' reference, 'Sands Of Arrakis' is a multidimensional soundscape that should have been rush-shipped to David Lynch.

Powell would often claim he wasn't much of a singer, but the harmonies he maintained within Utopia and on his own work show that he was more than competent. And if you can look past the silly titles, like 'March Of The Dragonslayers', what is laid out across these tracks is criminally overlooked.

Hardcore Bowie fans will know that Powell was eventually drafted in to help bring the 'Station To Station' album to the stage but, otherwise, copies of this worthwhile platter largely sit idle in bargain bins, awaiting recognition from the synth cognoscenti.

JOE SILVA



MANDY, INDIANA

URGH

SACRED BONES

Excoriating soundtrack for a crazy world

Mandy, Indiana, the quartet of vocalist Valentine Caulfield, guitarist and producer Scott Fair, synth player Simon Catling and drummer Alex Macdougall have compiled an astonishing second album. Built on the knife-edge of the unexpected rather than the pre-digested, pseudo-individualism of the standard song, it offers up a set of mood pieces that exist through the brutal art of creative violence.

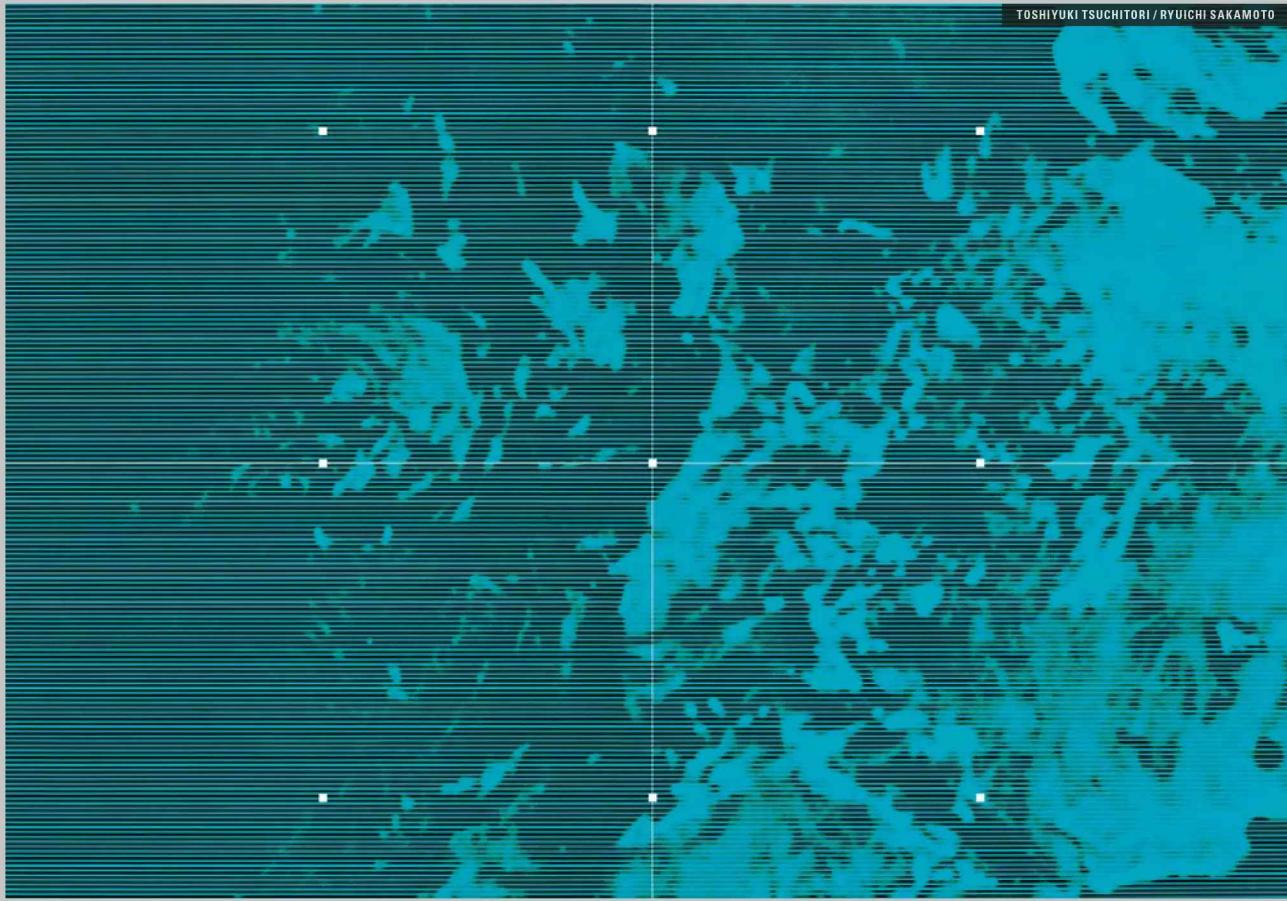
At once a call to arms and an exercise in transcendent primalism, 'URGH' comes in like sonic torture with nails-down-a-blackboard ambience, pounding distorted bass and ranted French language vocals. It's the sound of a strobe light in a claustrophobia-inducing room. 'Magazine' keeps the breathless, anxious, oppressive energy as it shifts from dominating bass pulse, and drum and cowbells beats to smashed cymbals, pounding toms and screamed refrains. By the time the broken timpani, jarring samples and rhythmical vocal tirade of 'Try Saying' kicks in you can feel yourself gasping for air and light.

There are huge similarities to the US group Xiu Xiu in Mandy, Indiana's approach to extreme textures. This is most apparent on 'A Brighter Tomorrow', where melodic vocals play counterpoint to shards of guitar ambience and funereal drums. Elsewhere though the band has the essence of subterranean club culture running through its veins. 'Cursive' brings an energy of the abrasively dark underground techno clubs of late 90s Berlin. 'Sicko!' is all industrial S&M with distorted bass, police-siren synths and twisted rap by Billy Woods. 'Dodecahedron' offers a jumping, militaristic bed of beats to Caulfield's taunting, half-spoken, half-snared vocals, before haunted bells rush in like an inferno.

Throughout the album, Caulfield's vocal delivery challenges the notion that the French language is deeply beautiful. In her mouth those words sound harsh, urgent – ugly, even. A narrative where nothing is quite as expected. Like the most visceral, air-sucking Francis Bacon painting, an ASMR hell.

'URGH' may just be the most powerful soundtrack to the chokingly oppressive times we live in. It's a brilliant album that could only have been created in the tinderbox suffocation of extreme technological acceleration, overt totalitarianism, violent anti-intellectualism and encroaching fiscal collapse.

MARTIN JAMES



TOSHIYUKI TSUCHITORI / RYUICHI SAKAMOTO

Disappointment-Hateruma

WEWANTSOUNDS

When the legendary Ryuichi Sakamoto left us in 2023, nearly all of his music was celebrated, from the audacious vintage electronica of Yellow Magic Orchestra to the towering soundtracks he made as one of Hollywood's most sought-after composers. Missing from the chatter, however, was the origin story. 'Disappointment-Hateruma', Sakamoto's first recording made with the percussionist Toshiyuki Tsuchitoru while still at university, has been extremely rare until now. We Want Sounds' recent reissue makes the piece available to the world for the first time since its limited release in Japan in 1976.

A word of caution, at this point. Anyone hoping for 'Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence' or even 'Tong Poo' or 'Technopolis' is likely to be nonplussed by this early experimental jazz offering. The energy and fearlessness on tracks like the 20-minute '綾 (Aya)' is a thing to behold, though, exploring new frontiers with the use of prepared piano and alacritous rhythm making. Elsewhere, 'A / φ (Musique Differenciel 1°)' is the most coherent and conventional piece, and will quietly lull you into a false sense of security. JA

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Mastery Quantum Sound

HOUNDSTOOTH

London sound studio Mastery's ongoing mission to reinvent meditation via music, bypassing the discipline's sometimes intimidating rules, began with installations and live experiences and now continues with this name-packed long-player. Jon Hopkins (with help from narrator Fearne Cotton, no less) gently casts off with 'Embodiment Breathing'. It's an epic 22-minutes-plus breathwork piece set to a sedately based modular throb, and synths that sound like waves crashing in slow motion before breaking down to simple, single notes.

Elsewhere, Djrum's 'Come Find Me' sidesteps the clichés of ambient with oscillating clusters of sweet melody, and Hannah Holland offers us the pure simplicity of the beatless 'Ambient Chronolight 1', as well as the low-key, drone-meets-lazy-lumbering-bass of 'A Door To Who Knows'. Meanwhile, NIN synth wiz Alessandro Cortini's 'IV' slowly sears and burns away, while Silent Shadow's 'Red World' evokes the clarity of Brian Eno's ghostly, early ambient classics. Serve extremely chilled. BW

SHACKLETON

Euphoria Bound

AD 93

It's easy, if perhaps a little lazy, to assume that the keys to electronic music's kingdom are now firmly with the most conformative and instant attention-seeking miscreants on the market. So it's also fitting to stand corrected by Shackleton. This English electronic producer, whose name invokes the famed Anglo-Irish Antarctic explorer, boasts an oeuvre that always sounds like adventures in the unknown, even if his sonic motifs provide breadcrumbs to ensure that some of us find our way home.

On his debut solo album for AD 93, following last year's joint effort with Holy Tongue, things are also deceptively warm and wonderfully dense. Textured, dubby tribalism with immersive effects slowly seep into our innermost receptors. The flutter of filtered strings on the subtly uplifting 'Crushing Realities', mysterious wood percussion and refrains on 'Buried And Irretrievable' and the strange choral sample and chime on 'Elemental Dream' are exemplars of the atmosphere, which is somehow opiate, yet also imposingly direct. MGH



COLLAPSING TAPE: EXPERIMENTS IN RUPTURE & REPAIR

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Collapsing Tape: Experiments In Rupture & Repair
COLLAPSING DRUMS

This often rollicking travelogue to the outer limits of radical experimentalism offers a giddy array of rewards to the open-minded. The collection takes in explorations across all manner of fringe subgenres, from mutant, fractured junglism, non-linear hip hop and irreverent dub-house, through haunted post-tropicalia to free-noise improvisation and offbeat, tangential percussive excursions. There's so much here that you simply won't find anywhere else.

The 23 tracks represent and celebrate five years of the essential Collapsing Drums imprint, in a considered progression through what the label bills as "a textured, intentional movement through rupture, mess, humour and repair". The inventive sound of prolific UK electronicist Luke Sanger's analgesic opener 'Road To Somewhere' readies your mind for the sometimes crazed, often brain-frying riches that follow. Highlights include 'Celestial Symphony In D', The Jonny Halifax Invocation's mesmerising drum 'n' bass/jazz deconstruction, while Rojin Sharafi's stunner 'Boloor' is nothing short of a spectre-summoning, black magic Arabic spell. Get among it. **CG**

PLANET NEIL

Influencer
BANDCAMP

Where previously the Norwich producer has drawn heavily on UK electropop, Planet Neil's third album finds him in the fidgety electro-funk territory of a lo-fi Arif Mardin, laying his trademark deadpan melodies and sharply observed lyricism over a British take on the US-centric, mid-1980s sound. In other words, on 'Influencer' there is more than an echo of 'Cupid & Psyche'-era Scritti Politti minus the saccharine soul-boy vibes.

His is an intricate weave of patchwork synth flavours, tones and timbres in which basslines and multiple keyboard hooks snake through and around each other. 'Physical', 'Pocket' and 'Extension' offer points at hand. Electronic riffs drop in and out as rapidly as hi-hats, while various melodic grooves and motifs are picked, plucked and interlocked. The effect is simultaneously unnerving and comforting – late-night, neon funk with a beating core that's hard to pinpoint. **MJ**

CIRO VITIELLO

Notes From The Air
STROOM

If Ciro Vitiello was a place, tired travel tropes about contrasts would spring to mind. Known for experiments with analogue synths, distortion, compression, field recordings and embracing technology, the Italian data scientist-cum-producer's latest invitation to aurally submerge seems coherent. An exercise in patient, minimalist, alt-guitar mood setting. Actually, it fits a lot into that soundscape.

'Notes From The Air' is certainly unrrushed but also organic and bound to relentless evolution. Here, things grow. Recorded at Auditorium Novecento, a Naples studio and performance space which has undergone its own scientific transformation (as the birthplace of Italy's oldest label, Phonotype), Vitiello invites us to float effortlessly, even with all the angular moments. Two attempts at a description of his sound might be granular garage guitar noise ('+days', 'Airbus, 2021') and joyous grunge-gaze ('Miles Of Silence' featuring Antonina Nowacka, and 'The Lighthouse Ghost' with Martyna Basta & Heith). The lush, jazzy, chill-something bits ('Slices Of Wind') which counterbalance this stunning destination would be the third. A genuine gem. **MGH**



NATURAL MAGIC

II
OPTIMO MUSIC

Cosmic vibes from a key Optimo release

If the follow-up to Portland party throwers and musicians Michael McKinnon and Matthew Quiet's now decade-old, eponymous cassette debut album has an added poignancy, it's not the type that anyone would have hoped for. Because 'II' is the final vinyl release that Keith McIvor of Optimo put into production before he passed away in late 2025. It is, suggest the Natural Magic duo, his parting gift to the world.

Given that he's now rejoined the cosmos, it's perhaps apt that there's a definite interstellar feel to the selection here. Space rock and krautrock are clear musical inspirations (the very 1970s-looking prog-style cover does not lie), but the truth is that they're closer to starting blocks for the ensuing adventures than rigid templates to be stuck to.

So, while the opening track 'Galaxy Builder' is a proper kosmische chugger, McKinnon's drumming and Quiet's bass providing the backdrop for some spectacular vintage synth fireworks, 'Don't Look Back' shifts gear right down to slow motion, with soaring, treated guitar and decaying dub echoes.

Likewise, 'Distant Bells' is nearer to the warm, organic sound of the first two Kraftwerk albums, with melodies moving in and out of focus, gliding over a gentle drum machine beat. It feels blissfully stoned and inactive, but in reality it's always shifting slowly to the kind of occasional glorious peak where everything comes into focus.

'Skyward Eye' seems lighter, as live drums pick up a little more momentum and shimmering, echo-enhanced Rhodes piano takes centre stage, subtly taking to the air two-thirds of the way through as a neat bassline lifts it off the ground and a mounting euphoria takes hold. It's utterly gorgeous. 'Get It Right' comes next, an exercise in delirious ambient dub, topped off again with ecstatic effects-heavy guitar, followed by the shuffling beat of 'Ride', where the guitar is set to a purer twang, instantly evoking the endless highways of the American Midwest.

The album proper floats off to its end with the wistful yet nevertheless beautiful beatless effort 'Chugsby's Theme', but the digital format includes the perky 'Another Club Another Banger'. It's yet one more slow-building, rock-solid bass/drum arrangement leaving space for sparingly applied celestial effects, fusing the krautrock drive to their more tactile funkiness. A top live track, doubtless, and – like the rest of this very easy-to-love album – simply oozing with good vibes.

Thank you, Keith – we'll miss you.

BEN WILLMOTT

Label Profile



Label: Collapsing Drums

Location: London/Bristol

Est: 2020

Potted History: "In 2020, as lockdown kicked in, my freelance design work temporarily collapsed, so I released three pandemic-themed albums on cassette, giving all the profits to various charities," explains label founder Charlie Behrens. "I ended up archiving the first two, realising that they were just the soundtracks to my learning curve, but I was surprised by how well-received the third, 'Uneasing', was."

"Initially the label was a vehicle for self-releases, but in 2024 I decided it was time to start putting out other people's music, as my own began to feel less important than some of the incredible things I was hearing out and about."

Mission Statement: "Genre-wise, the label is broadly experimental and politics is important. It's about platforming artists who are not only really good at what they do, but who have a certain shared progressive value system – open, inclusive and ethically grounded. There is a certain warmth to the releases. Something might be really heavy, but in that case it should be urgent rather than overly dark. There's a strong Bristol arc to the label now, although it isn't exclusively Bristolian."

Key Artists & Releases: "The latest release is 'Collapsing Tape', a 24-track compilation that spans the breadth of what the label can bring. Mariam Rezaei and Dali De Saint Paul produced a mind-melting collab track, all breakbeats and wild vocal noise. There are appearances from drummer Dan Johnson, DJ Marcelle, Valentina Magaletti & Fanny Chiarello, Robyn Rocket, Rojin Sharifi, Aparapara, Elaine Mitchener and Luke Sanger, among many others."

"Bristol art rock outfit Ex Agent did a killer EP last year – probably the only thing so far with mainstream potential. Paul Nataraj and Masimba Hwati delivered a long-form ambient/turntablist gem, and Mr AKA Amazing did a seven-inch of incredibly strange and vulnerable lo-fi hip hop."

Future Plans: "Next up is an utterly off-the-hook release from LISA – Anastasia Freygang with Koichi Yamanoha, aka Grimm Grimm," explains Behrens. "Also coming is a frankly incredible Gaza fundraiser, compiled by Dan Nicholls, featuring Loto Retina, Nicolini, Amir Ashkar + Ayed Fadel, Content Provider and others. There will be a live set from Cafe OTO of Gate Loops, the tape loop and loop pedal project I facilitate. Dan Johnson and Monika Badly have a powerhouse live set recorded at Bristol's Strange Brew, and I am also finally working on another solo release."

Any Other Business? "The sibling label just dropped! Collapsing Shelf is the DIY project for live recordings, lo-fi sketches and other strangeness. It is a riposte to the perfectionism that goes into polishing Collapsing Drums releases, where tapes are home-dubbed and rushed out for £6. Despite this ethos they still have a collectable feel."

For more, visit collapsingdrums.bandcamp.com

First And Last And Always



San Antonio synth-punk artist **Night Ritualz** on his first and last albums, and an all-time favourite

FIRST

DEFTONES

White Pony

MAVERICK, 2000



"The first album I ever bought with my own money was 'White Pony' by Deftones. I used to sneak into my uncle's room and swipe his CDs, and that one just looked so damn cool that I had to have it. I remember having about 20 bucks with me while I was out with my grandma and just convincing her to buy it for me. It was the first one I really purchased myself, not a gift or a hand-me-down, and that felt huge at the time."

LAST

HIGH VIS

No Sense No Feeling

VENN, 2019



"I wasn't super-familiar with High Vis at first, but I caught them live and was instantly blown away by the frontman's energy. After that show, I really tuned into the lyrics and that whole hardcore yet melodic vibe they've got going on. It was super-dope, and I just thought, 'You know what, I want to support these guys and grab the record'. Especially since they're not from the US, it felt like a cool find."

ALWAYS

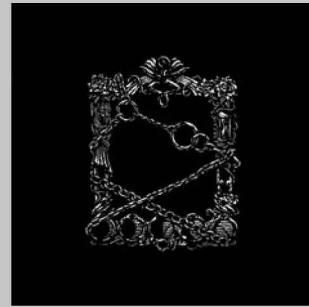
MADVILLAIN

Madvillainy

STONES THROW, 2004



"If I had to pick just one album I always have to have, it's 'Madvillainy'. That record is like two geniuses colliding – MF DOOM and Madlib made something that opened my mind to being experimental while still keeping that underground energy. It's a masterpiece that I didn't fully get on first listen, but every year I find something new in it. Whenever I see a copy, no matter if I've sold or traded it before, I just have to get it again. It's everything I love about music in one album."



TVAM

Ruins

INVADA

Magical duality from Manchester musician

"What is comfort anyway?" sings Joseph Oxley on 'Winter Rose', a key track on his third album, 'Ruins'. It's an instructive enquiry, and one delivered over an array of sounds – guitar, synths and drums – that are presented in a slightly uncomfortable way. Not that they're not well-produced. Far from it. The 11 tracks here are all exceptional.

All possess a captivating, uniform energy in the way they've been crafted, while Oxley's vocal is delivered with an aching tone. What makes his enquiry so precise are the dirty, distorted fringes that he applies to his sounds, giving these songs a deliberate roughness – an arresting, dark and discomforting edge. Perhaps this is due to his origins – creating the songs on his debut album (2018's 'Psychic Data') in his Wigan bedroom – but it's more likely a reflection of the ruined world we inhabit.

'Winter Rose' sits among a sequence of tracks that occupy the centre of 'Ruins'. It displays a frantic, dramatic urgency, with relentless drums underpinning fuzzy guitars and a pitch-bent synth hook Oxley is continually wrestling with, to stop it writhing out of his hands.

The intense heat of 'Winter Rose' follows the gritty 'Follow Me Home', whose sub-bassline positively snarls with grim intent. Oxley's constant repetition of the title could, in different circumstances, feel like a mantra, but here it feels threatening, predatory and laced with danger. 'Real Life' is another of the album's many signature moments. Infused with a kind of melodic melancholy, it finds Oxley at his most reassuring, even if the framing of the song tries its best to detract from his warmest vocal performance.

'Ruins' closes with 'The Haunted', a track dominated by a murky and impenetrable low-end through which he manages to tease one of his most euphoric melodies. It takes us back to the enquiry at the beginning. If you only listen to those melodies, this is one of the sweetest, most enveloping and enlivening of all the songs on 'Ruins'. Listen only to the bassline and it feels as if the world might be ending. Heard altogether, as a whole track, it highlights a singular, understated musical talent capable of playing utter havoc with your emotions.

MAT SMITH



BEVERLY GLENN-COPELAND

Laughter In Summer

TRANSGRESSIVE

Beverly Glenn-Copeland's story shows that some things are never totally forgotten. Unheralded for most of his career, the American-born artist finally reached the audience he deserved in his 70s, when in 2017, his overlooked 1986 album 'Keyboard Fantasies' was rediscovered and then reissued by Invisible City Editions. Sadly, this late success, and a further artistic renaissance with albums such as 2023's 'The Ones Ahead', was accompanied by the onset of dementia.

Accompanied by his wife Elizabeth, 'Laughter In Summer' finds Glenn-Copeland striving to preserve both old songs and the joys of their decades-long relationship through new creations. Consisting mainly of mellifluous piano, and his and Elizabeth's vocals, songs like 'Harbour' and the title track are imbued with both childlike wonder and serene wisdom, while the choir on the two movements of 'Let Us Dance' takes things into the realms of the spiritual. Deeply poignant and often unbearably moving, 'Laughter In Summer' is the sound of memories burnished rather than dulled by the years. **PC**

NIGHT RITUALZ

Time Is A Thief

METROPOLIS

The second album from San Antonio artist Night Ritualz (Vincent Guerrero IV) continues to blur darkwave, synthpunk, EBM and post-punk into a sound the artist himself proudly dubs "fuckwave". Of all the 10 songs on 'Time Is A Thief', the most worthy of such an unapologetic moniker is the second single 'Whoreish', an industrial-infused freakout featuring gritty synths and electronic percussion that packs a serious punch.

It'd be misleading, however, to say that this aggressive tone is retained throughout the album. While Guerrero's vocals are always delivered with an air of menace and defiance and his lyrics are often raw and confrontational (see 'Cupid Is A Cuck' and 'Living In This Bed'), musically, many of the tracks here are centred around an air of brooding introspection, favouring haunting synths and mournful melodies. The result is an album that feels, in the best way possible, like a precarious balancing act between visceral intensity and emotional vulnerability. **IB**

RAFAEL ANTON IRISARRI

Points Of Inaccessibility

BLACK KNOLL EDITIONS

This is a high-concept, deeply philosophical piece that conjures the profound contradictions of our algorithmically driven world. We're so completely and brilliantly connected, yet are we ever more isolated? The great beauty and elegance inherent in 'Points Of Inaccessibility' renders the album anything but inaccessible. Recorded in the studios of Dutch media artist Jaco Schilp's Uncloud Collective in a former Utrecht psychiatric prison, dense acoustics and natural reverb provide the album's raw architectural foundations. Irisarri and Schilp worked together to make compositional sense of those previously mentioned contradictions, and of their common interest in how technology shapes perception.

The results are frankly awesome – a beautiful blend of classical strings, digital precision and the analogue soulfulness of Moog bass and Prophet-5 synths. 'Faded Ghosts Of Clouds' initially leads a stately procession of elegiac bowed strings and amorphous soundscapes, before Abul Mogard arrives with an unexpectedly explosive intervention that introduces an elemental vastness. Further along, 'Signals From A Distant Afterglow' forms into a cinematic masterclass in intensity and is as affecting as they come. **CG**



PHEW AND DANIELLE DE PICCIOTTO

Paper Masks

MUTE

This collaboration between Japanese avant-garde composer Phew and poet, artist and musician Danielle De Picciotto began over five years ago, as an experiment. Assembled by Phew in Japan in response to the vocals that De Picciotto sent her from Berlin, the sounds were created without listening to the lyrics, only the tone. The effect is to isolate the timbres and stresses of the voice, resulting in the creation of oblique sonic worlds and atmospheres around De Picciotto's words.

'Der Verpasste Kaffee' ('The Missed Coffee') finds De Picciotto framed by sounds that ebb and flow between quiet texture, howling winds of electronics, bubbling bass frequencies and springy synth sequences. The effect is both unsettling and engaging – something that all of these tracks play with. 'Amnesia' ('Amnesia') ratchets up the discomfort, with De Picciotto's emphatic, distorted verse offset by a choir of wordless vocals and distant, ominous, machine-like rhythms. A brilliant melding of inputs and ideas by two seasoned collaborators. **MS**

ANNIE HOGAN

Tongues In My Head

DOWNTOWNS

The original goth poster girl, Annie Hogan is a British musician best known as Marc Almond's long-time collaborator, shaping the sound of projects like Marc And The Mambas alongside Almond and The The's Matt Johnson. Hogan was instrumental in helping to define the look and feel of the early goth scene via a storied list of collaborators, including Budgie of Siouxsie And The Banshees and Barry Adamson. Despite her considerable influence, she remains something of an unsung hero – quietly foundational, but not always given the full credit she deserves.

Following recent instrumental albums on Regis' Downwards label, 'Tongues In My Head' puts Hogan's songwriting brilliance back in the spotlight. Rarely does goth sound as beguiling as it does here. From the minor-key gloom of 'Death Rituals' emerges a gorgeously macabre lullaby, her voice as deadly and entrancing as a siren's call. 'Alles Ist Verloren' weaves an incantation from static-doused vocals, and while piano and strings lend a Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds-like gravitas, the steady drum machine adds a reassuring warmth. The only complaint? At five tracks, it's all over far too soon. **CF**

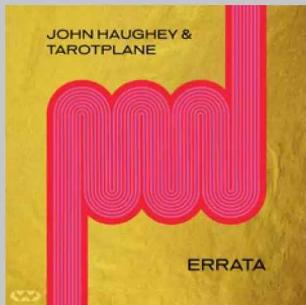
BIBI CLUB

Amaro

SECRET CITY

A big deal in their native Canada where their last album 'Feu De Grande' was nominated for the Polaris Prize (Canada's version of the Mercury), this Montreal duo – guitarist Nicolas Basque and Adèle Trottier-Rivard on vocals/ keyboards – will be hoping for similar luck on their third album. 'Amaro' sees the pair attempt to locate the sweet spot between baroque pop and post-punk, with plenty of echoing guitar riffs, minor key stylings and motorik beats.

Sung partly in French and partly in English, much of 'Amaro' consists of the sort of nocturnal meanderings that have been clumped together as darkwave. On 'George Sand', a saxophone adds a dash of free jazz, while guest Helena Deland provides some actorly vocals on 'A Different Light'. Those dark figures you can hear lurking in the shadows of this album are The Cure, early New Order, and The Velvet Underground who 'La Bête En Colère' seems particularly indebted to. Like them, 'Amaro' manages to capture a mood of wan, grey skies and elegantly poised sorrow. **WS**



JOHN HAUGHEY AND TAROTPLANE

Errata

WOODFORD HALSE

Magnificent electroacoustic ambience

If you prefer your electronic music on the organic side, then look no further than an album that seemingly begins with PJ "Tarotplane" Dorsey shutting his front door and tramping slowly up the stairs of his Baltimore home. And then? An impeccable spot of Bert Jansch fingerpicking on his acoustic guitar, slowly surrendering to the swelling synths of Northern Irish producer John Haughey before the clicks and thwicks of unhurried beats take us somewhere else entirely.

Such is the enchanting evolution of the opener, 'Previous Iterations'. And that "somewhere else"? The beguiling sweet spot between traditional music and electronic soundscapes, that dappled woodland glade where brambles snake around burr-covered MIDI keyboards and ivy vines tangle between the legs of gleaming laptop stands. It's a place where Mat Handley's Woodford Halse label has frequently set up camp, and as we head into the title track of this latest offering, it feels like the copse is coming alive, a gentle sunrise of beatific rhythms and bass pulses drifting softly around the tree stumps.

The duo cite Michael Rother's 1970s albums as an influence, but there are also hints of later attempts at marrying the synthetic to the organic. 'Errata' and 'Impossible Vistas' feel like welcome sidesteps from 'The Orb's Adventures Beyond The Ultraworld', weaving old skool synths and chiming guitars around delicious, dub-influenced basslines. 'Magical Interval' is a morning slumber of hazy Boards Of Canada throbs – until, that is, howling fretwork arrives from nowhere and takes us into unexpected stadium territory. Suddenly it's less woodland campfire, more 'The Unforgettable Fire', but it's an audaciously joyous move.

Dorsey's playing – on both guitar and bass – is immaculate throughout, and Haughey provides pristine sonic habitats for his musical partner to flourish. It all ends with the blissful beats of 'Orange Promise' (think The Edge with his feet on a table at the Café Del Mar) leading us gently into the chilled-out bongos and chattering guitars of 'Perennial Want'. The only slight disappointment is that the album doesn't conclude with a field recording of Dorsey putting down his guitar and trudging back downstairs to make a nice cup of tea.

BOB FISCHER



CATERINA BARBIERI AND BENDIK GISKE

At Source

LIGHT-YEARS

Machines and sax make a heavenly match

Collaboration is a word that has been sullied in recent years by pop's "featured artist" epidemic – all too often a cynical exercise in extending market reach. But look away from the charts, into the world of contemporary electronic music, and you'll see that the purity of collaboration lives on. And when it works, it works beautifully.

Caterina Barbieri and Bendik Giske are two musicians who excel in their own disciplines. She is the artistic director of the Venice Music Biennale and works largely with synths, he is a Norwegian saxophonist who is at ease slipping between the worlds of art and techno (he says his 2019 debut album 'Surrender' was inspired by a visit to Berghain).

'At Source' comprises four long-form tracks, each with head-scratching punctuated titles. The opener, 'Intuition, Nimbus', starts with Giske's sax fluttering like a bird preparing to fly the nest while Barbieri's ghostly synths gather like clouds in the background. As the track progresses, the two dance around each other to create something rhythmic and gently entralling.

On 'Alignment, Orbita', the electronic pulses circle around each other as the saxophone picks up and joins in the movement, revolving and spinning. It slinks into the background and then re-emerges to join the keyboards in a crescendo, before dying once more, to leave a simple percussive coda. It's mesmerising.

The 11-minute 'Impatience, Magma' opens with a single, long sax note. Gradually the synth moves to centre stage with one repeated, echoing figure, before morphing into a bouncy, almost jaunty refrain. At the six-minute mark, Giske re-enters the scene, gently sauntering, while Barbieri's synths tumble and twirl like wisps above it.

Finally, on the closing track 'Persistence, Buds', the two instruments slowly unfurl and gradually entwine themselves around each other, gathering in intensity. Giske plays single notes into the blare of Barbieri's flotilla of electronics, before they turn and fade into the distance.

'At Source' is more than the sum of its parts – it's the sound of two musicians coming together to produce something that neither could have done alone. There are no rough edges here. Barbieri and Giske complement each other beautifully to create a work of art that's engaging, accessible and yes, pure.

WILL SIMPSON

REVIEWS BY
JEREMY ALLEN,
IMOGEN BEBB,
JESS BRETT,
PAUL CLARKE,
BOB FISCHER,
CLAIRE FRANCIS,
CARL GRIFFIN,
MARTIN GUTTRIDGE-
HEWITT,
MARTIN JAMES,
JOE SILVA,
WILL SIMPSON,
MAT SMITH,
BEAU M WADDELL,
BEN WILLMOTT

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

Composer, musician and “Queen Goth” **Annie Hogan** takes on this month’s quick-fire question machine

INTERVIEW: NEIL MASON

PHOTO: STUDIO BLUE HQ



Hello Annie. Where are you now and what can you see?

“I am in my Studio Blue, at the garden/piano end of the room, sitting between the two pianos – my German 1930s baby grand and my 1880s English upright. I’m watching the crazy squirrels racing about the garden on a very noir-filtered day – rainy grey skies increasing in volume by the minute.”

How would you describe yourself and what you do? I called you Queen Goth the other day, which I rather liked!

“My fans do call me The Queen. Ha! I’m a musician, a driven artist. I must make music – which I have done professionally for the last four-plus decades, enjoying success throughout the 1980s with Marc Almond in various guises. More recently, I’ve been manifesting the magic here in my own Studio Blue on the Wirral. I’ve been releasing on Downwards since 2018, and I regularly collaborate with the label owner and artist, Regis.”

It’s high time you were Dame Annie for services after nightfall. If the Palace called, would you accept the gong?

“I hope it’s like the Rank Organisation gong – the cinema one. I’d accept that and play it immediately.”

‘Tongues In My Head’ is your first songs-based album since ‘Lost In Blue’ on Cold Spring in 2019. Your recent releases have been experimental or instrumental piano works. Have you deliberately shied away from songs?

“I always have stuff going on somewhere in my head and I need to explore other compositional realms. I gravitated towards field recordings and solo piano, and Regis loved everything I sent him and wanted to release them. Something like the long-form ‘Destress Of Permanence’ was extremely cathartic – it was just mind music, in the zone and that released a lot of tensions. So did my residency at Bidston Observatory, which was a unique opportunity that allowed me to immerse myself in the experience, expand my compositional techniques, to grow as an artist in general and develop and release my inner powers, as it were.”

What brought you back to songwriting?

“The same kind of push to explore and expand my own abilities and also remind myself what I can really do. It was a very natural progression, a real need to interpret what was inhabiting my head and driving my artistic emotions.”

Some bright spark has said this is your pop record, but it really is, isn’t it?

“I think the summoning of the darkness is oddly illuminated by my very catchy melodies. It’s strong songwriting in my opinion and the production lets all the music shine.”

That said, it concerns itself with “ritual, sacrifice and ceremony, and expressing the inner turmoil”. Dark stuff

“I’m interested in how people invoke their inner beliefs, and access the beauty of the darkness, magic and alternate states. You know, pagan rituals, worshipping the elements, mysterious incantations, cosmic vibes, witches, spells, calling on the gods – the inner turmoil. We all have it – mine is immersed in the fabric of each song.”

You say that the record came together as “organically as anything I have ever done in my life”. Sometimes the way art happens is like magic, isn’t it?

“I was sort of possessed by this album, the songs seemed to write themselves. I had no doubts in what I was doing and felt free as a bird to explore rituals of life and death in my own very personal way. Singing felt like I was summoning spells or gathering the elements, lighting fires and sending them out into the universe. I went into an almost trance-like state, setting a spot near the front windows, the sun often streaming in, immersing myself in the ritual of the song.”

The making of it does sound magical. Four months, spring and summer, writing every day, totally immersed – no news or social media – all recorded live in the same room. Bliss, eh?

“Total bliss. It really was. The main difference is now I have my sound engineer, Dan. Previously it

was me recording on my own. My new freedom, to just be in the music zone and have no technical issues to deal with, is extremely liberating!”

In what way?

“I could feel and write the songs in a progressive, natural way. I would play the piano and could hear stuff to add. Sometimes, I had it prepared in my head overnight, but mainly it was a ‘there and then’ kind of vibe. I had the same sort of mystical inspiration with the vocals. It was a beautiful and organic, almost supernatural, experience, recording and haunting the studio in those sunnier months, with the darkness of the music resonating in the confines of one room with particularly great acoustics. Every day was full-on, inspiring and fun.”

You did allow yourself “a couple of LPs on my record player at night”. Which artists?

“Leonard Cohen’s first three LPs, Nico ‘Live In Tokyo’, ‘Below The Salt’ by Steeleye Span, Nancy & Lee, and The Velvet Underground were the main sonics soothing my exhausted but wildly ignited brain on a nightly basis. They gave me inspiration and helped me switch off, so I’m sure their residue is dripping all over ‘Tongues In My Head’.”

What’s your favourite track on the album?

“Every track has a little something special about it, but they all belong together. I do love ‘Safe Hands’ – it’s so beautiful. Regis wrote the lyrics. ‘Alles Ist Verloren’ became an outright, end-of-the-world epic, and ‘The Conjuring’ is very special.”

You wrote ‘The Conjuring’ on guitar and did an impromptu performance of it for a special anniversary – you old smoothie

“I wrote it on my lovely blue acoustic guitar for my partner one evening, for our anniversary in the summer. It was a special moment and inspired me to try the piece out in the studio the next day. I opened the doors and played live with the garden ambience. It came very naturally and it was a satisfying last track to finish with.”

‘Tongues In My Head’ is out now on Downwards

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