

Low Leaf

Red Moon

Leaving DL/LP/MC

Arushi Jain

Delight

Leaving DL/LP/MC

QOA

Sauco

Leaving DL/LP/MC

Sam Gendel & Sam Wilkes

The Doober

Leaving DL/LP/MC

Sam Wilkes/Craig Weinrib/Dylan Day

Sam Wilkes, Craig Weinrib & Dylan Day

Leaving DL/LP/MC

A new batch from Leaving Records, the Los Angeles label now in its 15th year. First up is *Delight* from Delhi born, New York based musician and composer Arushi Jain. Inspired by *Raga Bageshri* – a Carnatic raga intended to convey the longing felt when waiting to be reunited with a lover – Jain finds an inviting languidity via the shimmering vocals and fluttering flute of “Infinite Delight” and “You Are Irresistible”, which rise together in warm and expectant plateaus.

Sams Gendel and Wilkes deploy something similarly sultry with a slightly odder character. Initially, the smoky saxophone of “Ben Hur” and the laidback percussion of “Milton Suite” feel straightforwardly nocturnal, like dimly lit excursions taken through some louche nightscape. However on further listens the odd mixture of languorous instrumentation and slightly off-kilter melodic snippets begins to leak a particularly characterful and idiosyncratic feel, like the theme to a British television detective series if it was performed by Kenny Graham & His Satellites.

Wilkes also appears in trio formation alongside Dylan Day and Craig Weinrib, and without the grasping exploratory tendrils of Gendel’s saxophone, this self-titled collection of seven pieces generally finds a tighter, straighter groove. Opens “Standing In The Door” and “Too Young To Go Steady” both set up slow-moving riffs, the melodic gaps probed and explored. However, the space and warmth in the mixture ensures that things remain on the meditative side of jazzy.

The pair of releases from QOA and Low Leaf – aka Argentinian musician Nina Corti and Los Angeles multi-instrumentalist Angelica-Marie Lopez respectively – initially seem similar. The former’s *Sauco* opens with its title track, a soothing palette of birdsong and synthetic verdant greens slowly shifting across the soundscape, while *Red Moon* begins with a shimmering and beatific version of Alice Coltrane’s “Blue Nile”, both delivering a type of new age soothe. However, as *Red Moon* moves on to the remaining two pieces, it’s clear that something weirder is at play.

As “Innersound Oddity” begins, a voice wryly advises, “Strap in, kids”, before a cycle of spaced-out electronics ploughs through the middle of the mix. Above this, the combination of Mekala Session’s frenetic drumming and probing bursts of Bryan Baker’s saxophone pushes the sound even further out. Slightly less frenetic, but equally cosmic is “How To Open A Portal”, a hazy mirage of melting electronics and reclining jazzy textures that’s not dissimilar

to *Sauco*. QOA achieves a similar sound via more grounded ecological themes, naming tracks such as “Muitu” and “Lippia Alba” after organisms native to Argentina. The result is a set of nature-infused ambient washes which are highly evocative of the landscape and which exude an intoxicating serenity.

Spenser Tomson

Raymond MacDonald

Desire Lines

multi.modal CD

Glasgow’s Raymond MacDonald takes the collaborative spirit of improvisation and supercharges it with theories, psychological research and innovative working practices, all in the spirit of bringing people together. He’s a key part of regular free music gathering The Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra, and during the pandemic, facilitated a series of virtual performances which launched a groundbreaking study into the psychological value of collaborating online. This disc is a rare solo outing for the saxophonist, but it carries his usual fraternal spirit, with neighbour Richard Youngs on production duties.

Desire Lines slots into the concept of the multi.modal CD series by incorporating MacDonald’s painting into the album artwork. His colourful, bold abstracts – inspired in part by working with AI – set the tone for an album of three expressive freeform solos, each played from the heart and following an idea to see where it goes, just like the dirt tracks formed by wandering feet of the title. After starting on alto, *Desire Lines* hits its stride when MacDonald moves to soprano. On the smaller instrument, the flow of air through the tubes and chambers is faster and more fluid, with an almost flute-like purity to the modulation of sound. MacDonald flexes his circular breathing on these lengthy improvisations, and considered next to Evan Parker’s trailblazing work in the medium, the Glaswegian shows a distinctive, punchy lyricism.

This solo recording is just one facet of MacDonald’s varied zones of activity. *Here Is A Big Place*, another project with Youngs, is an unfolding site-specific performance visiting sites of biographical or aesthetic significance, from each other’s houses to Glencoe in the Highlands. The book *Conversations With Chimère* chronicles a dialogue between MacDonald and an AI whose prompts give potential scores for new improvisations. MacDonald’s practice is complex, but the goal is simple and always same: to use music to make the world a better place.

Derek Walmsley

Rob Mazurek & Exploding Star Orchestra/

Small Unit

Spectral Fiction

Corbett Vs Dempsey CD/DL

Rob Mazurek

Milan

Clean Feed CD/DL

Star Splitter

Medea

We Insist! DL/LP

Over more than three decades veteran trumpeter Rob Mazurek has never stopped adding tools and methods to

his improvisational practice, relentlessly stretching an early investment in post-bop fundamentals. Over the years he’s added electronics, keyboards and even voice to his arsenal, and along the way he’s forged a kind of modular approach within an ever-expanding array of ensembles so that new concepts and compositions can bleed into or swap out of any given group, rigorously transformed by the personnel within those outfits.

Spectral Fiction was created by a scaled-down sextet version of his long running Exploding Star Orchestra, recorded live in Chicago the day after the full band had performed a special concert in support of last year’s *Lightning Dreamers*. Over the course of two lengthy new pieces Mazurek directed the killer group – cellist Tomeka Reid, bassist Ingebrigt Håker Flaten, drummer Chad Taylor, pianist Angelica Sanchez and vocalist Damon Locks – within organically flowing, improvisation driven sequences loosely related to themes carved out by the larger unit. Channeling the groove orientated sound worlds of early 1970s Miles Davis, the sextet surges and recedes around the futuristic freedom-seeking texts of Locks, clinging to and cleaving form in the most organic fashion. The daytime performance seems charged by the energy of the preceding night’s set, with a palpable internal rapport marked by sublime intuition, as phrases and colors merge and divide like cellular matter.

Milan is the latest transmission of solo work focusing on Mazurek’s long-time obsession with sound projection, creating richly saturated sonic canvases. Performed as a live radio broadcast in the titular city, the musician used piano as a resonating device, feeding all of the sounds through the keyboard. With the sustain pedal fully depressed throughout the concert, Mazurek shepherds a dense sonic weave, whether contemplative or ecstatic, blowing tart, inherently melodic trumpet lines over thundering lower register piano chords, unleashing primal vocal howls while triggering various bells and shakers, or melding electronic beats with noh ensemble samples. The music flows continually, casting a ritualistic spell.

Star Splitter is Mazurek’s duo with Italian trumpeter Gabriele Mitelli – something of a stylistic disciple – and on their second album, the pair function like hall of mirror refractions of one another across a single work. The duo juggle trumpets, electronics, and raw vocalizing in a shapeshifting sound quilt that veers from spacious deliberation to densely raucous rapture. Despite the shared instrumentation, the musicians blend disparate aesthetic tendencies, sometimes coalescing but more often generating a visceral friction through differences that push and pull.

Peter Margasak

The Messthetics & James Brandon Lewis

The Messthetics & James Brandon Lewis

Impulse! CD/DL/LP

Janel & Anthony

New Moon In The Evil Age

Cuneiform 2xCD/DL/2xLP

Although fusion’s gaudier variants have received delightful contemporary

reimaginings by Nonlocal Forecast, Euglossine and others, jazz rock's muscular shapes remain conspicuously missing in action, except as far as The Messthetics are concerned. Formed by Fugazi bassist and drummer Joe Lally and Brendan Canty with guitarist Anthony Pirog, the group's mixture of scintillating jazz rock, post-hardcore energy and experimentalism is utterly stimulating. The addition of saxophonist James Brandon Lewis on this latest album further cements their appeal.

Right from the lavish opener "L'Orso" Lewis is on fire, sounding right at home with the trio. His purring Archie Shepp-like tone lays down dense textures on top of jangling rhythmic patterns, then prances over syncopations into soaring vamps. Meanwhile, Pirog's riffs shift from heavy fuzz to smooth, elongated licks reminiscent of the fluid figures of fusion stalwarts John Scofield and David Fiuczynski. The music teeters between balladry and pure rock mannerisms, but remains dynamic throughout, culminating with the anthemic "Boatly", which Lewis fractures with a stunning lyrical solo – one of the best you'll hear all year.

Aside from playing with The Messthetics, Pirog is a versatile multi-instrumentalist whose background in creative music surfaces through various other projects, one of which is a duo with his partner Janel Leppin, a cellist and mercurial musician in her own right. On the first half of *New Moon*, the pair engage in a series of cinematic, predominantly cello-guitar duets whose cloudy atmospheres evoke Mogwai's soundtrack for the French TV series *Les Revenants*. Wistful expressions are drawn from folk, post-rock and ambient music, then adorned with poignant arpeggios and sinuous glissandi. The emotional weight becomes particularly intense in the sombre lines of "jaimie's Song", dedicated to the memory of the late trumpeter jaimie branch.

The second half turns the tables dramatically, featuring nine overcast, sensuous pop pieces led by Leppin's yearning voice awash with drum machines and humming synths. While the change in tone appears stark at first, further listening reveals a complementary aesthetic and shared soul – an indivisible whole formed by the album's two sides.

Antonio Poscic

Annelies Monseré

I Sigh, I Resign

Horn Of Plenty DL/LP

Belgium based composer Annelies Monseré's albums carry a phantasmagorical quality through combinations of early music, folk and spooky synthesizers. 2018's *Happiness Is Within Sight* and 2023's *Mares* trigger auditory illusions, surreal, apparitional states where ancient musical forms remerge in the present. New record *I Sigh, I Resign* brings greater lucidity to these strange visions, richer instrumentation making her songs sound ever more like shifting, paranormal, history-warping anomalies.

The opening title track commences with the boom of a distant, martial drum, as though a marauding army is marching across the valley separating the history books and your speakers. When gloaming organ enters, Monseré sings a weary song about fate and personal frustration. On "Salt" the insistent drum machines and sinister synths sound like Broadcast gone medieval. Through the ominously vibrant arrangement, her lyrics bridge the geological and the personal. The foreboding keys and creeping bass of "Simple Fractures" give the impression of being ferried to Hades. Yet the song's words remain rooted in worldly concerns. The simultaneously lush and nocturnal moods Monseré builds throughout have a peculiar effect. Her music sounds like a Renaissance overlapping a Dark Age, their boundaries melting into one.

The cover contains sketches by Monseré referencing female Dutch painters from the 17th century. These artists, such as Judith Leyster, Maria Van Oosterwijck and Margaretha Haverman, were well known in their day but, Monseré suggests, have been written out of history in favour of their male contemporaries. *I Sigh, I Resign* isn't necessarily about those artists directly, but this detail of the cover reinforces the music's phantasmagorical effect. Past and present, personal and historic, dreamlike and mundane merge into flickering yet coherent constellations. Monseré's music creates spaces where everything haunts everything else. A place where the past doesn't disappear but leaks into the present. That might sound disorientating, but her songs render it eerily gorgeous.

Daryl Worthington

Michael Morley & Joachim Nordwall

An Island Is An Island

Stoned To Death CD/DL

Michael Morley

Pushed Streets

Thin Wrist DL/LP

The Righteous Yeah

Here Comes The Rain

Bandcamp DL

Killer Apps

Bandcamp DL

JL 1969

Bandcamp DL

Pushed Streets might have The Dead C's Michael Morley on acoustic guitar, but it's not troubadour album. The label notes suggest Skip Spence, Bill Fay, Loren Connors, but I don't hear that – acoustic Jandek is closer to the mark. Morley's listening might have drawn him closer to the acoustic guitar (he's been collecting thrift store classical guitar and flamenco records) but once fed through his songs and singing, all that's left is a trace element of drama, submerged in mordancy – these songs have a biting quality. The overall mood, though, is lonely dejection, and in that respect, there's a clear through line from earlier solo material as Gate – amplify some of these songs, and they'd slot onto Gate's masterwork, *The Dew Line*.

Morley's collaboration with Joachim Nordwall (Organ Of Corti, Alvars Orkester, Skull Defects) is more quixotic yet. Hazy loops are inscribed, unceremoniously, across the stereo spectrum; everything takes on a slurred, dazed quality. I recall, many years ago, being perplexed by the seemingly blank, undemonstrative mood of some of Morley's synth work, for his solo set *The Pavilion Of Fools*, for example. This album picks up that thread. It's hard to make music that feels monochrome but has enough subtle, nuanced development to keep you listening, and Morley and Nordwall get that balance right across the two parts of the title (and only) track here. It's bleak and tough, and appealingly unyielding in spirit.

Morley seems to use Bandcamp in diaristic form, uploading material that can feel more like research than finalised product. In that respect he's not so different from numerous other artists, who've embraced the platform's fluidity, and these three Righteous Yeah

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