

trauma of India and Pakistan's partition, while Vijay Iyer contributes piano. Rooted in India's burgeoning creative diaspora, three cuts – "Underbelly", "Juh" and "Righteous" – collage voicemails from friends à la Gang Starr's "Alright, Chill". Throughout, Heems still boasts in snarky punchlines. "*I'm deranged/My money in Bahrain/Meet me on CNN with Anthony Bourdain*", he declaims on the suitably titled "Bourdain", while Mr Cheeks from 1990s rah-rah crew Lost Boyz makes an unexpected cameo.

Larry June

Doing It For Me

The Freeminded Records/Empire DL

Like innumerable rappers, Larry June strains to impress us that he's already wealthy from street hustling and simply makes music for pleasure. He stands out for his droll, seen-everything voice, honeyed sung harmonies and frequent descriptions of his San Francisco Bay Area home, which allows him to thrive in a smoked out subgenre that also includes Curren\$y, Berner and others. Interest in his work arguably peaked with last year's *The Great Escape*, a collaboration with producer The Alchemist. June's latest, *Doing It For Me*, opens with a benediction from Hunters Point activist Herm Lewis before offering creamy, lush approximations of Bay Area mob music like "Meet Me In Napa" and "Breakfast In Gold Coast". Even a song about doing chores on "Cleaning My Spot" sounds luxurious.

Mavi

Shadowbox

Mavi 4 Mayor Music DL

Mavi belongs to an era of rap lyricism marked by radically introspective self-care. Its corollary could be the post-Black Power, psychotherapy inspired soft rock and mellow soul of the 1970s. "*I just want it all to empty/I just want to bawl into the darkness of the smallness in me*", he raps during a key moment on his third album *Shadowbox*. Recorded after his acclaimed 2022 album *Laughing So Hard, It Hurts* as well as a series of personal struggles – a period he references in titles like "Drunk Prayer" – he imbues this 30 minute gem with the heightened emotions of damaged youth, and



Fatboi Sharif

the sense that every feeling, every twitch, every heartbreak is a matter of life and death. He cloaks his introspective moments in imaginative lines such as "*I'm feeling like my vocabulary is lagging in molasses*".

MESSIAH!

the villain wins!

Noble DL

Charlotte, North Carolina rapper MESSIAH! is best known for his association with Mavi. He has a rougher and more plainspoken lyrical side, though, and boasts how he smokes "*Pepé Le Pew*" and has a "*bond with Benjamin Frank*". On *the villain wins!*, he jarringly shifts between plugg-styled hard rapping and soulful harmonising and back again. "*I've gotta vacuum seal my business, I know what loose lips will do*", he raps on "Our Daily Bread", an example of the former and a collaboration with Mavi. A track like "Dirt Don't Hurt" will cast East Side Charlotte's murder rate as a measure of hardness and survival tactics, while "Song Cry" will cast the same theme as a sign of personal trauma.

Fatboi Sharif & Duncecap

Psychedelics Wrote The Bible

Fused Arrow DL/LP

This ten minute hallucination finds Brooklyn rapper Fatboi Sharif refining his familiar style of deep, guttural broken verse. Duncecap ensures that these tracks are beatless, though the result is less vintage neo-golden era rap than astringent industrial noise in the vein of Neurosis. The words, which are mutated with effects until they're nearly unintelligible, feel less important than the sonics. In an Instagram post, Fatboi wrote all in caps, "BLESSED TO CREATE ART AS FREE AS POSSIBLE BECAUSE I'VE ALWAYS KNEW WHAT [type] OF ARTIST I AM, WHAT I REPRESENT AND WHAT I WANT MY LEGACY TO BE."

Jay Worthy & Dām Funk

Magic Hour

GDF/Empire DL

Throughout his career with Canadian duo LNDN DRGS and as a soloist, Compton based rapper Jay Worthy has often exhibited better taste in collaborators than undeniable skills. He has a style that can fall slightly behind the beat, a familiar technique in modern street rap, and he likes to emphasise his bona fides and connections with Los Angeles's notorious Bloods set. *Magic Hour* reveals his strengths and weaknesses. Dām Funk's full-bodied electro symphonies deserve more robust songwriting, not just random boasts about getting paper. Luckily, the duo also compiled an impressive feature list that includes DJ Quik, Channel Tres, P-Lo, Ty Dolla \$ign, and others.

Jazz & Improv by Stewart Smith

John Blum Quartet featuring Marshall Allen

Deep Space

Astral Spirits DL/LP

It's always a blast to hear Marshall Allen outside The Arkestra, and *Deep Space*, recorded when the great man was a mere 98 years old, does

not disappoint. Pianist John Blum and drummer Chad Taylor are a powerful and supple unit. Add Allen and fellow reedist Elliot Levin, and the door of the cosmos flies wide open. The echoing bloops and burbles of Allen's electronic wind instrument set the scene, followed by Bloom's scurrying clusters, Taylor's flurries and Levin's guttural tenor trills. There's a playful urgency to "Electromagnetism" as the musicians chase each other around an asteroid belt, Levin's buoyant flute lines answered by Allen's acerbic alto squalls.

Makoto Kawashima

Zoe

Black Editions DL/LP

A master of negative space, Makoto Kawashima extends the Japanese solo saxophone tradition of Kaoru Abe, Tamio Shiraishi and Masayoshi Urabe. His music is full of charged silences and shocking eruptions of vibrato. As harsh as his tone can be, there's a deeply reflective, even vulnerable quality to Kawashima's improvisations. The stark intimacy of the recording – his first in a studio – is captivating, with the mics picking up every breath and footstep. You can feel the sweat dripping from his forehead as he contemplates his next move, before his screams rip through the air, the rawness offset by a beautiful post-Ayler melodicism.

Janel Leppin/Ensemble Volcanic Ash

To March Is To Love

Cuneiform CD/DL

The second album from Washington, DC cellist and composer Janel Leppin's Ensemble Volcanic Ash opens with a tribute to one of her cello heroes, Abdul Wadud, whose influence can be heard throughout the set. Both "Tennessee's A Drag" and "Union Art" ride syncopated cello motifs, with nagging chromatic themes and killer solos from saxophonist Brian Settles, bassist Luke Stewart and guitarist Anthony Pirog. This is contemporary chamber jazz via DC post-hardcore, with riffs that would do Fugazi or Lungfish proud. The two-part "To March Is To Love" is a stirring call to political action, with through-composed sections framing thrilling group improvisation. The waltzing "Sateatime" and Leppin's solo piano tribute to Pablo Casals offer graceful contrast.

LopezLopez

Citizenship

Flag Day CD/DL

Citizenship is the fourth release from the riveting electroacoustic duo of Cecilia Lopez and Brandon Lopez. Her approach is to process his acoustic bass live, while running filters and independent synthesizers alongside it. This creates a third element they can both shape, as heard on the closing "Notice Of Action". Lopez's arco strokes sit in the centre of the mix, flanked by their distorted echo on the left and warbling sine tones on the right. On "I-130", grinding arco bass and synth drones meet sine tones that pucker and sigh over a layer of white noise. Its coda "I-130A" is more frenetic, as Lopez answers the bassist's percussive spiccato with ray gun blasts and groaning pulses.

Lux Quartet

Tomorrowland

Enja CD/DL

Co-led by pianist Myra Melford and drummer Allison Miller, with Scott Colley on bass and Danya Stephens on saxophones, Lux Quartet are a classy proposition combining melodic warmth with sophisticated composition. The knotty chromaticism of Melford's "Intricate Drift" nods towards Andrew Hill, while "The Wayward Line" moves in and out of tempo, setting up fabulously inventive interplay between piano and bass. The energetic post-bop of Miller's "Congratulations And Condolences" recalls McCoy Tyner's early 1970s bands, with Stephens's soprano sax soaring over Melford's vivid comping, while "Deeply Us" is an unapologetically luscious ballad. Stephen's "23 Januarys" conjures a noir-ish air of mystery out of Messiaen's modes of limited transposition, while Colley's "Tomorrowland" is an elegant yet surprisingly dark take on Americana.

Matt Mitchell Trio

Zealous Angles

Pi CD/DL

With each new Matt Mitchell project comes an ingenious compositional gambit. *Zealous Angles* emerges from the pianist's interest in the simultaneous use of polymetric and polyrhythmic music in a group context. The musicians – Mitchell, bassist Chris Tordini and drummer Dan Weiss – play phrases of different lengths at the same time, giving the music a delightfully wayward sense of rhythm, as parts overlap and interlock in unexpected ways. It's as if a classic piano trio has been fed through the algorithms of a Max-MSP patch, recombining familiar elements in mind-boggling ways. And yet as intricate as this music is, it genuinely swings, testament to the sensitivity and flair with which the trio handle Mitchell's concepts.

Nicole Mitchell/Ballake Sissoko

*Bamako*Chicago Sound System*

FPE CD/DL

Instigated in 2014 and recorded three years later, *Bamako*Chicago Sound System* brings three musicians from Mali – kora master Ballaké Sissoko, balafonist Fassery Diabete and vocalist Fatim Kouyaté – together with Chicago based flautist Nicole Mitchell's Black Earth Ensemble: guitarist Jeff Parker, vocalist Mankwe Ndosí, bassist Joshua Abrams and percussionist JoVía Armstrong. Luscious and melodic, the music is an inspired dialogue between the West African griot tradition, the AACM and the blues, woven together by Sissoko's glistening strings. Mitchell and Parker both take inventive solos that lean into avant garde vocabulary, matched by Sissoko's innovative use of guitar patterns on the kora and Diabete's thrilling balafon runs.

Ada Rave

In Search Of A Real World

Relative Pitch CD/DL

Argentinian saxophonist Ada Rave relocated to Amsterdam in 2013, becoming a serious force in the European improvisation scene. *In Search Of A Real World* continues her solo

exploration of the tenor saxophone, her dark tone complemented by extended techniques and objects. On the title track, Rave builds on a two-note figure, turning soft breaths into ragged wheezes. Her notes come with frayed edges, a lid on the bell causing friction when she blows hard. It's all done with great sensitivity and control: check out the way she morphs unpitched mouthpiece flutters into the lowing tones of "transformation, regeneration", or brings a bell-like resonance to the pneumatic stutter of "el jardin del poeta".

Elliott Sharp/Sally Gates/Tashi Dorji

Ere Guitar

Intakt CD/DL

This inter-generational guitar summit is a sequel to 2017's *Err Guitar*, where Downtown stalwart Elliott Sharp was joined by Mary Halvorson and Marc Ribot. Amped up and freely improvised, *Ere Guitar* is a different beast to its predecessor. Leader of jazz metal group Titan To Tachyons, Sally Gates is active in New York's improvised music community. Her abstracted shredding complements Sharp's processed tones and Tashi Dorji's punky gnarl. Sending metallic shards flying, "Wildlife" is a suitably frenetic opener, while the queasily atmospheric "Seven Seize" is all swelling harmonics and melting clusters. The shift from the percussive scrabble of "The Moment" to the lunar notes of "Unfinished Conversation" is particularly satisfying.

Modern Composition by Julian Cowley

Kate Carr

Midsummer, London

Persistence Of Sound CD/DL

During the summer of 1998, Resonance FM broadcast *Your Favourite London Sounds*, a benchmark documentary project curated by Peter Cusack. It picked out elements of the incessant urban soundscape with special appeal for a representative selection of Londoners. Kate Carr's approach to the sounds of the city is significantly different. *Midsummer, London* features recordings made at the 2023 summer solstice, on a trek that started at sunrise on a bus to Clapham Junction and arrived, by late evening, in the southeastern suburb of Slade Green. Carr's assemblage suspends a myriad of acoustic details within a carefully composed and cohesive solution. Her ambient enhancements are sometimes barely perceptible, yet they register her presence and involvement, personalising this metropolitan journey, filtering the day's raw data through an individual's consciousness that is not only receptive but also responsive.

Leo Chadburn

The Primordial Pieces

Library Of Nothing CD/DL

His taste for irony and tendency towards tangential thinking have repeatedly enabled Leo Chadburn to spot potential in unlikely sources. These five "primordial pieces" are developed from sketches made more than 20 years ago, during his studies at London's

Guildhall School of Music. Chadburn revisits relatively simple and unadorned material that on paper seems to offer little. Realised in performance by sympathetic instrumentalists, however, the basic constituents of these compositions grow less obvious and become tinged with oddity: oblique wavering trails emanate from unapologetically pedestrian progressions along a piano keyboard; unexpected tensions arise from the seemingly casual overlay of violin trills and drones.

Bruno Duplant

Écouter Les Fantômes

Crónica CD/DL

Du Silence Des Anges

Moving Furniture CD/DL

French sound artist Bruno Duplant continues to chart his own elusive course, encountering phantoms and angels en route. Clearly defined features melt away, or merge and morph within these atmospherically saturated ambient dreamscapes. Field recordings linger fleetingly; the iconography of a world that is no longer graspable. On *Écouter Les Fantômes* fragmentary vocal refrains, musical phrases, even a slammed door dissolve within discomfortingly woody swirls. On *Du Silence Des Anges* thunderclaps, rainfall, warbling and screeching birds are subsumed within expanses of reverberant hollowness and metallic resonance. Duplant's domain is a threshold zone, an uncanny acoustic space where the nebulous and unknown have already begun to seep through and transform recognisable realities.

Mark Haney featuring Meaghan Williams

Placentia Bay: Summer Of 1941

Bandcamp DL/LP

The final instalment of a narrative trilogy, *Placentia Bay* is an imposing concerto with a solo role assigned to double bass. Haney is himself an accomplished bassist, but for this recording the instrument is entrusted to the extremely reliable hands of fellow Vancouver resident Meaghan Williams. The underlying story centres on a meeting between Churchill and Roosevelt that led to the forging of a British-American alliance. That occasion is evoked through overt allusions to nationalistic music and, more pervasively, through a range of stylistic tropes that effectively represent cross-cultural dialogue and an eventual harmonisation of perspectives. The theme is topical, given current anxieties in the West. Beyond that this recording is notable for the rare space and scope it allocates to the double bass, and for the remarkable agility and strength of Williams's playing.

Lisa Illean

arcing, stilling, bending, gathering

NMC CD/DL

Born in Australia, now UK based, Lisa Illean has rightly been praised for her delicate constructions and translucent textures. Her composition *arcing, stilling, bending, gathering* is scored for piano, string ensemble and prerecorded electronic sound. An unconventional tuning system is used, not for superficial coloration, but for structural enactment of subtle processes