

a studio, but the reception of the collection prompted him to return to old songs, and *Te-Kwaro Alango-Ekuka* is his first studio session. Playing a lukeme – a form of thumb piano, similar to a likembe – that buzzes with the voices of the machachara, *Ekuka* builds precision polyrhythmic melodies as Sirikiti runs the griotism down.

Synthesizing The Silk Roads: Uzbek Disco, Tajik Folktronica, Uyghur Rock & Crimean Tatar Jazz From 1980s Soviet Central Asia

Various

Ostinato DL/2xLP

Further evidence, gathered by Ostinato from archives in Uzbekistan, for the existence of the ABBA Inflection Point: that moment at the beginning of the 1980s when swathes of global dancefloor pop artists started a proxy engagement with disco via *Voulez-Vous*. Collections like these serve to point out very neatly what people thought was worth copying as pop music moved around the world, and ABBA's records were true global hits (after 1977, starting with *ABBA: The Album*, every record was widely issued in the USSR; *Voulez-Vous* remained in print on the Russian state label Melodiya until the collapse of communism). So at least three selections here are “Voulez-Vous” derivatives, and Gulshan featuring Makhfirat Khamrakulova's “Rezaboron” is essentially “Gimme, Gimme, Gimme”. Fascinating.

Zanja All Stars

Cuban Jam Session

Zanja CD/LP

Música de Cubana in the very finest style, recorded in Havana with a hand-picked line-up of contemporary musicians directed by trumpeter Julito Padrón and featuring none lesser than the great Changuito, long of Juan Formell's Los Van Van, on timbales. From blazing descargas (“Papa Boco”) and Mingusian swing (“Shaker Heights”) to modal jazz (“La Serpiente”) via son, bolero and boogaloo, there's not a sonic hair out of place here. The sound is glorious: assembling the Havana studio for the recording was the fruit of a years-long dream by label owner Alex Gonzalez and producer Michael Delanian (once of Gallon Drunk), and the release – the first on the Zanja imprint – is clearly a labour of love.

Jazz & Improv by Phil Freeman

Sophie Agnel/John Edwards/Steve Noble

Three On A Match

Otoroku CD/DL

Unlike a lot of free improv (whether spelled with a capital I or not), this disc does not document a single performance from first sound to last. It was recorded over two nights at London's Cafe Oto in June 2023, and although it's in some ways a highlight reel, it evolves, moving through distinct phases as the three musicians discover each other's hidden desires and limitations. Agnel is a highly exploratory pianist, blending the thunder of Marilyn Crispell with the pings and scrapes of Karin Johansson, and Edwards and Noble are good partners for her. None of that 'Dusting the instruments/Play

audibly? How vulgar!' foolishness – they're thumping, rumbling and scraping, reminding you that music is about hitting things.

Steve Baczkowski

Cheap Fabric

Relative Pitch CD/DL

Solo saxophone albums can take almost any form, because the instrument is so uniquely responsive to its player and there are so many things you can do with or to it. Steve Baczkowski created the 13 tracks on this disc in his living room one November night in 2022, recording them on a friend's Tascam reel-to-reel deck. The longest track, the 12 minute “Threads Of The Warp”, played on some kind of mystery homemade instrument, journeys from valve flutters that sound like a gigantic, furious moth in a jar to squalling drones that almost match Roscoe Mitchell's legendary marathon performance of “Nonaah” for balls-out anti-listener energy. Other pieces, though played on standard tenor or baritone horns, are no more conventional or friendly.

Daniel Carter/Leo Genovese/William Parker/ Francisco Mela

Shine Hear Vol 2

577 CD/DL/LP

Free jazz is a language; if you're reading this, you may not speak it yourself, but you understand it. This second volume of performances by four of the music's most exciting and important modern-day players clearly comes out of New York free jazz history. You get wild (but just as often tender) sax from Daniel Carter, plenty of clanging piano from Leo Genovese, and when he's not blowing gentle flute, bassist William Parker glues it all together as only he can. But Francisco Mela's percussion and vocals are what take this music in unexpected and thrilling directions. His hoarse incantations bring to mind Santería rites, and his rhythms clatter and clave (yes, it's a verb now) more than they swing.

Caroline Davis

Portals Vol 2: Returning

Intakt CD/DL

Saxophonist Caroline Davis's grandmother, Joan 'Lady' Anson-Weber, was a poet and lifestyle inspiration to the young musician. On this second volume of compositions inspired by grief and memory, she keeps the same band as last time (trumpeter Marquis Hill, pianist Julian Shore, bassist Chris Tordini, drummer Allan Mednard) and adds flautist Nicole Mitchell and vocalists Jen Shyu, Nappy Nina, Julia Easterlin and Alexa Barchini. We hear Anson-Weber's voice, pulled from old family videotapes, and her poetry, read by Shyu. The music has the complexity of much recent Brooklyn jazz, but retains more of an improvised element than her peers' often knottily composed work. It even swings sometimes, though Tordini and Mednard can slam out rock-like backbeats when that's called for.

Satoko Fujii & Natsuki Tamura

Aloft

Libra CD/DL

Pianist Satoko Fujii and trumpeter Natsuki Tamura, who are married, have put out about

200 releases between them, ranging from solo discs to orchestral works. Less often than you might think, they record as a duo, as here. The album's six tracks all have titles relating to avian migration (“Migration”, “Wintering”, “Traveling Bird”), and sometimes the music has the grace of a V of geese honking across the landscape, but Tamura is a committed avant gardist who enjoys using the trumpet as a noise-making device, so on “Wintering”, while Fujii is playing gorgeous classically inspired passages, he's hissing and sputtering like an enraged Donald Duck. He also plays tiny finger cymbals and hand-held shakers at times, which gives certain pieces an AACM-ish quality.

Nubya Garcia

Odyssey

Concord CD/DL/LP

London saxophonist Nubya Garcia released her last album mid-pandemic, and has spent the years since touring as hard as possible to make up ground. This follow-up feels thought-out and ambitious. She knows where she wants to be. Her longtime bandmates – keyboardist Joe Armon-Jones, bassist Daniel Casimir, and drummer Sam Jones – return, alongside compatriots like trumpeter Sheila Maurice-Grey and trombonist Rosie Turton, while esperanza spalding, Richie Seivwright and Georgia Anne Muldrow sing, and strings from Chineke! Orchestra give the music a Kamasi Washington-esque combination of lushness and drive. Big piano chords, surging strings and a crushing backbeat all combine to create a perfect spotlight for Garcia's solos, which prize emotional impact and big room showmanship over technical wizardry (the correct choice).

Marquis Hill

Composers Collective: Beyond The Jukebox

Black Unlimited Music Group DL

Trumpeter Marquis Hill loves to include recordings of people talking on his albums. Sometimes we get voicemails from members of his circle, or interviews with jazz legends he used to live with, and on this album we hear the late Wayne Shorter talking about the courage to live one's life on the road not taken, and other folks, too. A slew of amazing players crop up on these gentle, introspective jams, including vibraphonist Joel Ross, bassist Junius Paul, guitarist Jeff Parker and drummer Makaya McCraven. The music, composed by Hill and by many of his friends and peers at his request, is modern jazz in the informed by hip-hop and neo-soul sense, but never mere instrumental R&B with horn solos.

Ayumi Ishito

Wondercult Club

577 CD/DL

Tenor saxophonist Ayumi Ishito has had a relatively steady band since 2011 – bassist Yoshiki Yamada and drummer Carter Bales have been constants, while guitarist Hajime Yoshida was a more recent arrival, and other members have come and gone. On the quintet's third album, and first for 577, second guitarist Yana Davydova joins the action. More than a decade of working together will allow

a group of musicians to develop a strong and cohesive language, and Ishito's compositions are deep but proggy funk rock that lean in the direction of early 1970s Miles one minute, harmolodic Ornette the next. She'll sometimes put down the sax in favour of a squiggly electronic sound not unlike a talk box, but the groove always slaps.

King Llama

Fata Implexis

TTrain DL

It's been eight years since Los Angeles based jazz fusion jam band King Llama released their debut album *Return To Ox*. The group are co-led by guitarist Ryan Bailey and drummer Luis Briones, with second guitarist Billy Paulsen and six-string (I know, I know) bassist Anthony Crawford adding to the busy compositions. A few other guests pop up, including former Brand X bassist Percy Jones and percussionist Nate Werth, who's played with Snarky Puppy. The music has elements of psychedelia, early 1980s King Crimson and Miles Davis (think *We Want Miles*) and more noodling than a pasta shop. There's not a melody here about which someone didn't say, "Yeah, but I think we can make it just a little more complicated."

Noise, Industrial & Beyond by Emily Pothast

Amps Kill

Wretched Inheritance

Bandcamp DL

The soundworld created by Colorado based producer Stephen Bailey on his debut full-length as Amps Kill is viscerally digital, like the rattle of a CGI-heavy thriller in a high end cinema. The searing swirls of album opener "Vermin" give way to the breathy whispers of "Piles Of Flesh". The mood darkens on "The Boatman" as staccato shots stagger through the void. An anxious, high frequency hum gradually evolves into the insectile swarms of "Demoniac". On "Rage/Decay", the implied narrative is made explicit, as an uncanny mechanical voice vividly describes the stages of what happens to the body after death. The last five tracks are remixes of the album material into buzzy dance tracks sure to please

our robot overlords once their annihilation of humanity is accomplished.

Johnny Bell

Field Trips

Aural Canyon DL/MC

The five-string banjo is at the centre of Johnny Bell's *Field Trips*, accompanied by field recordings gathered by the New Mexico artist in the ancient mountains, forests, deserts and coasts of the American Southwest. On the opening "Alligator Juniper", the banjo gallops through a landscape of birds and running water until a reverse effect sends the notes flying back to Bell's fingers. "Forest Floor" incorporates ground hum and ghostly voices channelled through the crackle of radio static. On "Two Paths, Same Point", the mood is melancholy; on "Cloud Shroud", Bell's banjo achieves a jangling, fluttering minimalism. "Re-emergence" places the listener on a rocky beach, the tide rolling in against a reedy drone. Like a long road trip, the closing "Refusing Easy Comfort" is a rolling meditation on transience.

Dame Area

Toda La Verdad Sobre Dame Area

Mannequin/Humo International DL/LP

Like a tell-all biography, the title of this record promises to provide "the whole truth about" Barcelona duo Dame Area. This truth consists of cold, crunchy synths, relentless drumming and punchy, chanted Spanish and Italian vocals often pushed beyond shrieking. This palette is put to use on syncopated high energy stompers like "Si no es hoy cuando es" ("If not today, when?") and "Si no eres nada puedes ser todo" ("If you are nothing you can be everything"). Imagine Toni Basil circa "Hey Mickey" teaming up with Einstürzende Neubauten to lead an aerobics class in a dungeon and you've got a rough estimate of Dame Area's bouncy, blistering appeal.

Kamil Kowalczyk

Radio Transmissions EP

Bandcamp DL

These two long tracks from Edinburgh based artist Kamil Kowalczyk are monumental works of industrial ambience - during my first listen, they blended seamlessly with the motorised hum of a jet engine. The album art suggests interstellar travel, however these

are not the smouldering supernovae of Steve Roach or Tangerine Dream. Instead, Kowalczyk conjures the sound inside the space helmet: the lonesome drone of a jettisoned capsule drifting across an unfathomable Kubrickesque expanse. The title, meanwhile, connotes signals picked up from elsewhere, suggesting the possibility of closing vast distances with communication.

Nonconnah

Nonconnah Vs The Spring Of Deception

Absolutely Kosher DL/LP

The latest from Tennessee duo Nonconnah immerses the listener in a sepia-toned, wood-panelled moment when our current era of hypermediation was still in its infancy: of corduroy couch cushions, analogue gaming consoles and televangelists bleating through nocturnal static. On "An Escape From Doomscroll Valley", a child's voice enthuses about angels. Later, on the lengthy "When They Opened Their Mouths They Sounded Like Shrieking Birds", a woman makes lofty spiritual claims over sombre strings, revealing the poignancy of the desire to transcend fragile human conditions. Album closer "...Like Some Distant Star Collapsing" aestheticises self-erasure: a tone cloaked in distortion so fuzzy it disappears.

Rot Coven

Nightmares Devour The Waking World: Phase I + Phase II

Aesthetic Death 2xCD/DL

There was a time during the Covid-19 pandemic when it seemed as if live music might forever remain a thing of the past. Pennsylvania doom duo Rot Coven were formed during this bleak period, and subsequently recorded this two-phase album in a location known as The Murder Shed. With plodding rhythms, massively reverberant drums, unforgivingly distorted guitars and rasping, sulphuric vocals that leap from the too-hot mix like hisses of hellfire, both these phases of *Nightmares Devour The Waking World* satisfy the desire for a thundering, sludgy experience through the once cutting edge, now quaintly retro miracle of media that is the compact disc. Live music has thankfully resumed, even as it now carries with it the lingering threat of a pandemic that never truly ended. Patiently brutal, the music of

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