

Soundcheck A-Z

New CDs, vinyl, downloads, streams etc

"A" Trio + AMM

AAMM

Unrock LP

Awareness focused in the fingertips; close attention extended through the hand's grip and its versatile movements, pressure of the prehensile thumb, flexing of the wrist. Percussionist Eddie Prévost and pianist John Tilbury transmit tactile sensitivity through their music, and sensations of touch evidently feed back into their acoustic imagination, prompting creative response. In the resonant space of Berlin's St Elisabeth Church in August 2015, this vastly experienced AMM duo got together with three younger musicians from Beirut. The "A" Trio is trumpeter Mazen Kerbaj, double bassist Raed Yassin and Sharif Sehnaoui on acoustic guitar. They too make music that is physically involving, direct and sometimes raw in its vibrational immediacy, yet highly refined in terms of neural alertness.

In the hands of Kerbaj the trumpet becomes a frictive implement, a rasping, bubbling, stridulating extension of his body's own flows and sensations. Yassin and Sehnaoui both share that capacity to convey vital organic process through shades of opacity, sonic texture, density and weight. With almost feline tact and precision Tilbury nurtures points of luminosity, meticulously accented phrases, junctures of articulation. Prévost scrapes, bows and strikes, animating inert materials with consummate delicacy and fine detail. As a group these five closely attuned musicians envelop or burrow within one another's playing, without extraneous constraint or obstruction.

Not only does this music-making embody involvement, it also actively enfolds its audience, extending through vibration to rub against and within the receptive listening body. Some music projects and represents, illustrates an idea or relays a vision. *AAMM* on the other hand is involute; it embraces and wraps around. Film theorist Laura Marks has made a case for haptic visuality, for cinema in which imagery "evades the distanced view" so that in effect the eyes may function as organs of touch and proprioception. This recording comparably invites haptic listening, its appeal is at once auditory and tactile. Precluding the distanced view, an isolating sense of separation and detachment, it draws its audience in close, as active participants in the experience, engaged in the elaboration of a sounding world.

Julian Cowley

Maryanne Amacher

Petra

Blank Forms CD/LP

While American sound artist Maryanne Amacher (1938–2009) compiled two CDs

of electronic music for John Zorn's Tzadik label, much of her work was uniquely ill suited for recording. To reproduce her engulfing sonic environments you would need not just the electronic sounds she composed, but also access to the places they were designed to activate. In 1980 she turned a temporarily donated home into a multi-room installation full of hidden speakers broadcasting loud sounds which teased out the unique acoustic character of each space within the building. The contents of her CDs were aimed at smaller spaces; played at high volume, they instigate otoacoustic events in the listener's inner ear that change with each turn of the head.

Most of Amacher's work involved her active presence to assess and respond to locations, as well as access to the locations themselves. Thus it has been hard to present her work since her death. But in 1991 Amacher turned her attention to something more portable and flexible. *Petra*, first commissioned by ISCM World Music Days in Switzerland, was a response to the acoustics of a church in Boswil, Switzerland, played by Amacher and Marianne Schroeder on two pianos. Notes revising the piece were discovered after her death, and they constitute the score for this 2017 performance by Schroeder and former student Stefan Tcherepnin at another church in New York City.

The most immediately apparent aspect of *Petra* is how musical it is compared to her studio releases, which feel more like organised sonic expressions of physical phenomena than actual music. The pianos sound out the acoustic qualities of St Peter's Chelsea, striking widely spaced intervals that soon fall into more narrowly bound, creeping melody. Each note seems as though it was selected to alert you to the space, guiding a listener's ears towards the walls and back again, and while this effect survives the transfer to a recorded medium, it's not all that the music has to offer. The pianists pare those first notes back to silence, then return with another theme, and then another, building to a four-fisted crescendo that may not shake the building, but likely rattled a few stained glass windows. *Petra* serves not only to keep the work of a nonpareil artist alive after her death; it's a splendid sonic trip unto itself.

Bill Meyer

Amnesia Scanner & Bill Kouligas

Lexachast

Pan DL/LP

Helm

Chemical Flowers

Pan CD/DL/LP

"Dark euphoria" is a phrase that Ville Haimala and Martti Kalliala, who form the Berlin based duo Amnesia Scanner,

have used to describe their music's sensibility: a psychic cloudspace where free-floating abstract anxieties conflict with a capitalist narrative of tech-utopia. In the same way that the Pan label's tagging of Amnesia Scanner as "avant-EDM" sounds suspiciously like this generation's intelligent dance music, it's debatable how novel this emotional state is to the 2010s: one only has to recall the popular 19th century diagnosis of neurasthenia among urban dwellers pained by the intolerable pace of modern life with its steam trains and telegraphy. Nevertheless, as with IDM, dark euphoria is a useful enough shorthand for the mood discernible in both these Pan releases.

This album-length version of *Lexachast* is the latest incarnation of a collaboration between Amnesia Scanner, Pan founder Bill Kouligas and the artist Harm van den Dorpel that developed from an initial performance at London's ICA, through a freestanding website, into a longer show. Generated using photos and artworks algorithmically collaged from Flickr and DeviantArt, van den Dorpel's visuals present a slow-dissolve slideshow of anonymous business suited people, acts of violence, random animals, fetish fantasies and other imagery probably intended to provoke jaded despair, but which I found an absorbing watch, at least in the 15 minute online version.

Whether similar algorithms are at work in the sonic counterpart is unclear; if not, then there's a deliberate mimicry of the choppy non-sequiturs of bot aesthetics in its abrupt shifts of pitch and texture, more distanced from pop structures than Amnesia Scanner's previous releases. True to the fitting attention spans cultivated by its source material, it's perhaps most striking when experienced in short bursts: the strangled, inhumanly quantised vocals set against a stentorian brass ensemble of "Lexachast IV"; the stadium EDM synth build of "Lexachast IX", warping and building to a drop that never comes; the opening few minutes' regurgitation of an unidentified MC's rap as sputtering ultra-bass.

For anyone familiar with Luke Younger's back catalogue, it sounds contrary to suggest that there's more emphasis on the euphoria than the darkness in his latest release as Helm. His ability to manipulate sounds of urban bleakness into piss-stained musique concrète is as present as ever, from bass that booms like mourning gasometers to choking metallic smog ambience. Yet Younger's skill lies not as yet another artist soundtracking urban decay but in enticing and confounding with sounds that straddle the uncanny valley. In "Capital Crisis (New City Loop)" the promise of running water leads to a waterfall of intangible

electroacoustic droplets. "Lizard In Fear" opens with a scene of nearby insects and distant traffic before a swarm of synthetic bees casts doubt on its veracity. Throughout, such sonic ambiguity suggests not paralysis but a tentative freedom. Whether that will be for humans or for whatever succeeds them is anyone's guess.

Abi Bliss

Andersen/Bell/Wastell

Tales Of Hackney

Confront CD/DL

Laid down in the studio in the days following a well-received London performance at Cafe Oto in September 2017, *Tales Of Hackney* brings together Swedish bassist Arild Andersen, multi-instrumentalist *Wire* contributor Clive Bell and Mark Wastell on percussion. Fully improvised, the nine tracks here tune into Japanese and Vietnamese traditions, with Bell playing a range of Asian woodwind instruments. Andersen's electronically processed double bass tilts towards the Fourth World, but there's a tactile quality to his sound that grounds the music.

There's a courtly dance quality to the short opening piece, with Bell's khene (Thai mouth organ) performing an elegant pas de deux with Andersen's confident, full-toned bass figures. Wastell provides subtle support with pattering hand drums and crisp cymbal textures. "II" is longer and more exploratory, with the khene joined by arco bass and shruti box in a vista of shimmering drone. Switching to plucked strings, Anderson picks out forms in the ether, guiding the piece to its conclusion with a bassline that does not so much walk as steadily row towards the lake shore. The khene returns on "VIII", its sharp chords cutting across a terrain of percussive ripples and dunts.

An astringent wash of metallics opens "III" as Wastell slices a drumstick across his cymbals while Bell conjures avian caws and warbles from his shakuhachi. Andersen enters into a dialogue with Bell, exchanging arco flourishes with airborne flutters. On "IV" wisps of shakuhachi emerge from a silver mist of strings. Ominous drones and a distant rumble of percussion underpin it all, as Andersen sets up a graceful bass figure for Bell to soar over. Bell's tone and phrasing are exquisite, as he accents grace notes with an extra surge of breath, and delivers the high notes with a piercing clarity. His playing of the lower toned pi saw (Thai flute) on "V" evokes sighing geese and melancholy cattle, offset by Andersen's inquisitive glissando chords and Wastell's delicate cymbals. There's a beautiful sense of space and form to this music, like light glancing off water and bodies in motion.

Stewart Smith

Cucina Povera

Zoom

Night School DL/LP

Ela Orleans

Movies For Ears: An Introduction To Ela Orleans

Night School CD/DL/LP

Patience

Dizzy Spells

Night School/Winona CD/DL/LP

Three discretely glorious albums surface on Glasgow's Night School label: two gleaming oddities illuminate dark corners with strange pop and folk sounds; a third beams with Italo disco good vibes. The label, started in 2011, is evidence of the very healthy, broad DIY scene in the city – currently the subject of a botched working class fetishisation in the cliché-pocked, country music fairytale film *Wild Rose* (which stars no Glasgow based female singers, although Julie Walters and Janey Godley make typically great appearances).

Night School's releases reflect a Glasgow music scene that does weird, radical and fun very well, often at the same time (see the recent Counterflows festival, go to a Weirido Warehouse queer party, browse Buzzcut's year-round programme for simultaneously joyful, experimental happenings). Night School is also proof of that elusive and magical thing so sought after by neoliberal business heads striving to disingenuously hothouse then monetise a city's cultural buzz. It draws from a genuinely interconnected and self-supporting arts scene that thrives very well – thank you very much – at grassroots level, often with minimum encouragement or cash from the top down.

Label founder Michael Kasparis pays himself no salary to run the label, on top of day jobs. He's worked in record shops for years and makes music in hardcore punk bands Anxiety and The Lowest Form,

as well as his solo electronic pop project Apostille. At the risk of sounding like a hammy arts funding application, playing bullshit bingo with buzzwords, it's "very Glasgow" that Kasparis can be found dancing in white leggings with friends including synthpop duo Free Love in his video for "Feel Bad" in the same year that he reissued Rose McDowall's 1993 industrial folk opus *Under The Yew Possessed* from Sorrow (Kasparis is an avowed admirer of the Glaswegian ex-Strawberry Switchblade vocalist and Current 93 collaborator).

But on to Night School's more recent releases. Ela Orleans has been making music for two decades now and *Movies For Ears* is a retrospective of her work as previously issued by various small DIY labels. Born in Poland, Orleans worked in New York and Warsaw before settling in Glasgow. Her wonky collages of scrambled electronics and melancholy bossa beats sound a bit like Joe Meek convening with The Space Lady for a spectral jam. Orleans's low, deadpan voice has a fuzzy warmth to it, crackling below layers of lo-fi hiss or languishing with a dead-eyed ennui that sounds extra unsettling against her jaunty synthesizer rhythms.

With its ghostly and noirish take on girl group harmonies *Movies For Ears: An Introduction To Ela Orleans* focuses on the poppier strains of her back catalogue – distinct from the whispered Lynchian ditties of 2016's *Circles Of Upper And Lower Hell* and the otherworldly electronics of 2015's *Upper Hell*. Between them the tracks here conjure holographic, time travelling projections of lovers wooing one another with itchy moves on 1950s dancefloors or weeping disconsolately in some European arthouse cinema.

By contrast Maria Rossi aka Cucina Povera draws on a minimal palette for a music that is based around recordings of her voice. *Zoom* follows last year's *Hilja*

but the material predates the debut album, being comprised of the recordings Rossi initially sent to Kasparis. The tracks are given numbers instead of titles – in reference to the wav files generated by her titular Zoom recorder – and her stripped back, reedy a cappella harmonies are looped to create soothing experiments in song. Sibillant sounds are played around with on "ZOOM0005" where Rossi blows over an empty cola bottle to make a stark shakuhachi flute sound, and there is a churchly, echoing silence around her plaintively beautiful sleep-talking on "ZOOM0014".

Dreamlike blurs of Slavic folklore or pagan spiritualism drift through these spare compositions, sung in Finnish or Rossi's own invented language; this is perhaps influenced by her roots in Finnish Karelia, the region that spans the border of Finland and Russia. The project is named after an Italian style of cooking on a shoestring and fittingly there is an economy of means to Rossi's haunting folk sound to match the mystic energy of her voice.

Dizzy Spells on the other hand could soundtrack sun-kissed road trips as adeptly as Portland, Oregon group Chromatics did the neon-lit night scenes in Nicolas Winding Refn's 2011 film *Drive*. The familiar tropes of 80s pop throb throughout this debut from Patience aka Roxanne Clifford (formerly of the C86-inspired indie pop quartet Veronica Falls who stopped making music in 2014). The bouncy yet deadpan Italo energy of first single "The Girls Are Chewing Gum" sets the tone, with cosmic blasts and ray gun bleeps lending variation to the subsequent tracks. Clifford (a former flatmate of Kasparis) wrote the album while living in Los Angeles and namechecks Robyn as an influence; these factors, along with a few echoes of the Italians Do It Better label (such as the use of French language lyrics on "Moral Damage") make for an engaging hybrid. □

Three new albums on Glasgow's **Night School** label gesture at the city's undimmed capacity for skewed avant pop.
By **Claire Sawers**



Apt pupil: Ela Orleans