RECORDS OF THE YEAR

THE MICK 54
As the year was a write-off for writing, which was distinctly off, it’s nice to end the year with two quick issues of the magazine, covering Xmas and now all the reviews I have done. There have been some truly great records by new and old artists alike, and I hereby commend them to the House.

Next year we should be back to normal, with regular issues, which is a relief for me as I have missed it. I doubt you have but will earn back your enthusiasm.

A Happy New Year to you all.

I go now.
I feel it’s important to start the new year off with some real quality and as you’re not going to find a more dedicated, open-minded and knowledgeable couple than Thyssen brothers Thomas and Ralf, the men behind PLS who bring this to you for your own benefit, a 2CD goldmine for the price of one (CD that is, not goldmine) I’d say the quality was pretty obvious.

Shock Therapy fidget spicily through the warm, knowing pop swagger of ‘Pain’ which is corrupted wonderfully by its subtly vicious side, Lucie Cries exhibit odd post-punk nuances through the teeming, bass-whisked ‘Le Talisman De La Muse’ and Twisted Nerve sustain that agile angst in their bristling 2007 take on ‘Séance.’ That same guitar scythe can be heard cutting through Grooving In Green ‘Cat’s Or Devil’s Eyes (2009 Mix)’, so it’s been a steady, consistent mixture of old and new to kick off. Solemn Novena are instantly warmer, romantic and close to purring in the fabulous icy beauty of ‘Faerytale’, previously unreleased. Dream Disciples certainly haven’t dated, because ‘Pray’ sounds like very sly Goth. Love Like Blood sound like older Goth in the bare, pushy ‘Out Of Sight’ and at one point I’ll swear the singer said he releasing a panda? That’s probably my ears, but I noticed that there is a Stanton Hall remix of Voices Of Masada’s lively ‘Looking Back’ which pulses with studied, stylish insistence. The Shallow Graves’ ‘The Field Of Love’ in Jessica’s Ascension remix goes from scowling madness to a steady rattle and has a deliciously catchy upturn.

Benediction’s ‘Crowded Room’ is quite a rare old thing and that punky soreness behind its vivid bustle. Exedra was a new one on me and the nagging, stark ‘Calling In My Head’ grabs the attention with its repetitive, dour desperation. Cancer Barrack’s combustible ‘King Death’ isn’t as interesting, as the sullen vocals seem downturned, but musically it’s as glowering as Every New Dead Ghost’s rickety ‘Visions’ is oddly towering. Screaming Marionettes offer quality preposterous drama in ‘Like Christabel’, Rubella Ballet offer a punky cloak in the furious Banshees-like dawdle of ‘Tangled Web’ with Fangs On Fur entangled hotly in their yelping, clattering ‘Fangs On Fur’ making a fantastic racket. Lichtblick were another new on one me, but interesting. Apart from some unexpectedly normal guitar ‘Intensivstation’ bubbles like post-punk maniacs trapped in a tiny studio, amusing themselves with slippery pop ideas. A 1984 live track closes side one, with Clair Obscur rampaging a little constipated through ‘Toundra.’

CD 2 gets off to a stirring start as Joy Disaster’s ‘Remember The Time’ starts as delicate vocal doom over acoustic but leaves the Sisters template to turn into demanding despondency. Gestalt’s ashén cabaret in ‘Le Sommeil Du Singe’ is bloodless but hypnotic, as L’Enfance Eternelle are over anxious, frilly post-punketeers in ‘Les Larmes De Sang.’ Bass hummingbirds of the 2xT mix of The Eden House’s ‘To Believe In Something’ bathe you in its radiant sobriety. Fliehende Stürme glide seamlessly through the delightful dusk atmosphere of ‘Satellit’, Frustration sound a bit like Action Directe staggering home from the pub in ‘No Trouble’ and then Varsovie burst some veins during the punky humping of ‘Leningrad.’ Charles De Gaul sits back and snarl sardonically through a flickering ‘Décadence’ BFG are a welcome, invigorating surprise with their robust ‘Anonymous’ and The Exploding Boy are an obvious delight with the ragged, cherubic ‘Heart Of Glass.’ There’s supreme Goth prowling from Ikon’s ‘Echoes Of Silence’ then another unreleased track as Pretentious, Moi? Curtsey neatly and fling the respectable, harmonious ‘Malina’ at us, an impeccable success.

This Burning Effigy’s ebullient ‘An Untold Release’ is an inspired inclusion, Little Nemo’s ‘City Lights’ relatively dull in this company, pretty but insipid and although it’s quite charming I also never found Remain In Silence’s ‘Hope In Fear’ dragging me closer.

Ian Boddy’s ‘Living In A Ritual’ comes of well as some left-field dancier misery, Arnaud Lazlaud takes time unwinding the imaginatively moody ‘Les Invisibles’ and For Against’s ‘Amen Yves’ is just as absorbing, highlighting the seemingly ambiguous nature of the compilations range, and yet identifying the central essentials – fluidity of movement, the thoughtful nature of lyrical shadows.

There is virtually nothing here that won’t appeal. They took their time, and have celebrated their tenth anniversary with style.

www.nightmarezone.de
www.myspace.com/pagan_love_songs

THE DAMNED
The Stiff Years 3CD/book

Punk may have been over before some of you were born but it can still inspire, and opinions about it annoy, and as I sometimes enjoying doing that please read avidly and let me really piss some of you off.

My favourite Punk bands were The Adverts and The Damned (The Ants not really producing quality until 1978). Obviously The Sex Pistols and The Clash have greater status than both, but that doesn’t impress me. I saw The Clash loads, eventually, and turned down a couple of chances to see The Pistols. As with anything I want to know something isn’t tainted. Even early on people spoke of The Pistols and Clash as though they were <i>special</i>, which struck me as pretty much missing the entire point. Unless you were spectacularly stupid it
wasn’t like Punk bands were singing about things you didn’t already understand or agree with. You shared the same attitude already, otherwise you simply wouldn’t be interested. As far as I was concerned their had to excite, they had to have something inside their songs. I required that bands be uncorrupted, genuine rather than some effective construct.

You only had to see McLaren talking about his youthful wards in 1976 to realise something was off with them, a well-meaning Vivienne Westwood like somebody from Great Expectations. Why get overly excited by a band of Pantomime Anarchists prepared to be managed by a total toser? Similarly, I fully appreciate Strummer had an epiphany when seeing The Pistols, but we all knew he’d come from Pub Rock, and if anyone else, say a Dr Feelgood member, had tried declaring themselves Punk there’d have been something weird about that. The Clash got better, after two lightweight albums, and a lot of their early songs still sound great, particularly in demo form, but until everything was natural to them (‘London Calling’), and relaxed, they were wobbly, like well read social workers with toothache.

The essentially lazy, partially moronic Sex Pistols were obviously the most important of the original Punk bands, being the catalyst of a movement through the escaping oxygen of publicity, but they, and their management, hadn’t the brains or bottle to stick it out initially, ditching their most important musical member, bringing in someone totally useless, falling apart swiftly, with a woeful trail of hideous joke singles as their epitaph. Their sound had a finesse others lacked, but its central power (a songwriter trade-off of rock vs. pop) was static, compared to the usual hack job. This is just about perfect.

The recordings - demos, studio or live - reflect what was recorded during their time with Stiff, in chronological order. We start with 1976 demos, a clumsy ‘I Fall’ collapsing into ‘See Her Tonite’, where nobody had any right to expect Vanian to be timidly channelling Richard Briers, then they drift saucily through ‘Feel The Pain’, with Vanian suddenly oozing style. ‘New Rose’ pelts past, sonic precision, ‘Help’ is recorded like they all have somewhere else to be, and fast. (Good.)

A heap of treats await from a November 1976 Peel Session, although the staggered, rolling ‘Sub Your Back’ is smeary, ‘Neat Neat Neat’ is skimpy fun and, if we’re being strict, why should anyone be able to afford a cannon? A gleaming ‘New Rose’ starts with “Are we really 65 in the charts?” ‘So Messed Up’ is censored, possessing a veritable bleep. And it is a mess, but ‘I Fall’ knocks it aside, flexible and virtuous. The official ‘Neat Neat Neat’ follows, with its filthy cousins ‘Stab Your Back’ and ‘Neat Neat Neat’ is skimpy fun and, if we’re being strict, why should anyone be able to afford a cannon? A gleaming ‘New Rose’ starts with “Are we really 65 in the charts?” ‘So Messed Up’ is censored, possessing a veritable bleep. And it is a mess, but ‘I Fall’ knobs it aside, flexible and virtuous. The official ‘Neat Neat Neat’ follows, with its filthy cousins ‘Stab Your Back’ and ‘Singalongascabies.’ Mental patients the world over respond well to those.

Remaining album songs then cascade. The wonderfully wilting ‘Fan Club’, the rushing ‘I Fall’, a laidback ‘Born To Kill’, a staunchly outré ‘Feel The Pain’ dripping atmosphere, ‘Fish’ remaining weirdly twerpy to this day. ‘See The (Her) Tonite’ sways, rotates and sounds cute as the guitar seems all but invisible and jangly. ‘1 Of The 2’ pounds and glares with sounds moving left to right, showing they had ideas of a different sort to their contemporaries. ‘So Messed Up’ is a frisky young thing, while ‘I Feel Alright’ is how a Stooges song should be covered, with life, not like the Pistols’ turid effort, although it could have ended better. The first CD then ends with the free single ‘Sick Of
Being Sick’ and I say again, if anyone out there a copy of my recording of them playing those Marquee gigs (the one where Thunders encored?), maybe you could contact me. Ta.

CD2 begins with a Peel Session from May 77 and in ‘Fan Club’ the astonishing revelation they were on as much as twelve quid a week. Sponging workshy dog millionaires! It’s a perfumed, breezily upright version, and ‘Feel The Pain’ is similarly spruce and woozy, like very early Alice. ‘Stretcher Case Baby’ and ‘Sick Of Being Sick’ clip along in this new clean living guise, then we hit a stretch of recordings from a Radio 1 In Concert. A riotous ‘I Feel Alright’ is followed by a guitar-wiggling ‘Born To Kill’ and ‘Sick Of Being Sick’ cruising into a feverish ‘Fan Club’, an oddly tidy ‘Stretcher Case Baby’ and cutely dimpled ‘Help.’ ‘Stab Your Back’ has a fit, fittingly, ‘So Messed Up’ scoots along and once the show’s host belts up they fly though ‘New Rose’ which isn’t great although the drums are vigorous enough.

Back to vinyl we encounter ‘Problem Child’ and find it still sounds like their dullest single, with crunched up vocals, like a wayward Who cover. ‘You Take My Money’ is back onto more abnormal territory, darkly throbby, and the skittish ‘Don’t Cry Wolf’ sounds as good as its pink vinyl once looked, although the production really was all over the shop, wasn’t it?

‘One Way Love’ crashes around blindly with its naff lyrics then we’re into the phase of second album strangeness. (I’m not sure why but the booklet makes no mention of poor Lu!)

‘Politics’ sounds closer to the r’n’b approach of the Rods. ‘Stretcher Case Baby’ is bunched up and clean, the loose, spirited ‘Idiot Box’ is attractive as it mocks old Tommy boy, while ‘Alone’ sags as drums throb and vocals hare off into the distance: the sound itself seems confused, but it’s certainly bustling along in its portly way; a fuller liveliness, as it were. ‘Your Eyes’ is so restrained it doesn’t even seem like them. ‘Creep (You Can’t Fool Me)’ sounds like all their mid-pace songs jumbled together, then we finish with Lol Coxhill’s sax infiltrating the intriguingly blearly ‘You Know.’

The first time I ever became aware of the band was when Sounds did a big piece on the Mont De Marson festival where they sounded like completely deranged, and the bonus CD with this set is from that festival, dated 20.8.76 and it’s not a brilliant recording but who cares? It’s solid enough, and it’s interesting to hear how well they go down. The crowd are really into them.

‘One Of The Two’ is fairly laboured. You can’t even hear the guitar as if Brian James had been locked backstage (and who would bet against that exactly?), but things gradually improve, with ‘New Rose’ combative, ‘Equipment Failure’ a way of explaining everything gets noisy and shouty, before ‘Help’ redresses the natural rampant thrashy order of things, they extricate themselves from ‘Fan Club’, and surge through ‘I Feel Alright.’ ‘Feel The Pain’ trundles harmlessly by, the wavering sound offering no bite, ‘Fish’ jabs and widdles frantically, and ‘See Her Tonite’ sounds as soft and fluffy as any outdoor recording would! It’s actually funny hearing this. By the time they reach ‘I Fall’ Senso’s bass is an errant bee, the guitar seems to have been replaced by a squealing violin and ‘So Messed Up’ is, but it puts up as good fight.

A fantastic little thing, and more than enough reason for me to get hold some of the re-mastered Damned album sets which now exist. Expect more garbage from me later.

www.officialdamned.com

SMOKE FISH
LIFE AIN’T PINK
AF Music

Although the press release optimistically mentions The Pixies by way of a comparison, the truth would be somewhere much milder of mind, but this Shay David chap is certainly interesting and versatile and his trim little album skips from style to style, in a subtle display.

‘Wake Up’ comes on floppy like an irritable Cure, the song poking its nose into the air, the limbs stricken with pins and needles, a chorus fizzing outwards then damping down. ‘Mary Prankster’ is a very New Wave pop collision with a furtive indie angst and it’s a clever marriage, melodic fun turned intense. ‘Cigarettes & Family’ is bleaker and more agitated still, starting as if dancay elektronica dance dominate, then rolling over and writhing in anguish.

With ‘Tango With Jesus’ his influences spread far wider, with a sleepy mariachi cheeriness, frothy organ and frisky guitar. The buzzy ‘Hey! Talk!’ skips but amidst a murky Eastern mystery, as ‘My Eyes’ relaxes with a haunting keyboard and scattered vocals like an entirely orthodox version of Giant Paw. ‘Insane Inside’ is like a carnival pastiche of Blur, which isn’t good, but the thoughtful acoustic ‘Strange Identity Defect’ is very touching and makes up. ‘Manifest Destiny’ starts off rocky, calms, then speeds up with a sullen bass and the slight but satisfying ‘Juvenile’ ends it all with a quiet dignity.
Where does it fit? I have absolutely no idea, nor why it’s so short, or so varied in style, as it doesn’t serve to emphasise how good he can be in any specific area, but it’s a fine indie thing, with metaphorical bells on.

www.myspace.com/smokefish

DVAR
FAYAH!
Art Music

So what are the latest DVAR rumours in Russia then? Somebody must know if they’re genuinely a demented secretive act or whether it’s someone from a well known band, studio or label operating under a pseudonym? It doesn’t bother me either way, as the records are so good, but I do wonder how long such a secret can stay in place? All I can state confidently is that since the entirely bright and cheery ‘Zii’ album General Bee has added 8-bit sampling to his cv, horns have replaced the vibraphone in Bee Warrior’s affections, and Bee Girl has put away childish keyboards and guitar and got herself hooked on theremin.

‘Umba-khu’ starts slowly, the electronic rhythm steady with a few decorative swirls interspersed with gothic gansta. ‘Bedrii Wedrii’ goes a bit lo-fi kasbah, wistful metronomics to the fore. ‘Yagga Yarra’ is squalching fun, the vocals moodier, the music pulling into a dizzy, pretty pop picture, the synth memorable and classy as smaller elements are gradually introduced to ensure things are still kept tense, at times almost robotic. ‘Yaja’ is seedier, like a sci-fi bent with an angry auntie thrown into the mix on added vocal drama. ‘Godoh’ wanders into fairground frolics, then the vocals take a turn for the pterodactyl as a bewitching rhythm starts to appear, the keyboard eventually shifting into a soviet motif. ‘Oyreke Zondege’ is both gloomier, turning dumb and bass, the vocals positively gormless, the tune smartly stark and low. ‘Warrah’ merges the notion of a big band melody with toytown synth and they shimmy together pushed through the softer areas and the richly aromatic/filmic sensibilities of ‘Oh Mariii’ would have people even wondering if this was a perverse band at all, being their most gracious offering ever. ‘Tahaw Vedah’ insinuates itself into your mind with its arse-twitching blend, and it’s only towards the end you notice they have been chirruping away vocally at all! The extra, untitled, track is melancholy ambient worthy of a film score.

It’s one of those albums you can just play over and over, occasionally fastening onto specific moods as your own mood changes. It’s their smoothest album yet, and that side of them is as complex as the weirdest material. Speaking of which, I have five more albums of theirs to review this month because of the compilations and re-releases just unleashed. If you’re not a fan by next month you’re not human.

www.myspace.com/dvarofficial

SPHERE REX
FOR ELECTRONICS AND PIANO
Shadowplay/Monopoly

It’s a member of Cyclotimia doing a limited edition EP (500 copies) of fragrant ambient pieces, and apparently the piano compositions are based on an approach taken by Erik Satie. “This is nice,” observed Lynda, asking who it was and then correcting my pronunciation of Satie. (Don’t you hate it when ambient accidents like that happen?) I should have made her consult the website: “This music is able to calm down and lull to sleep like alpha-wave rhythms or paint weird images guided by the surreal titles of compositions in one’s imagination. For the goals of complete authenticity only analogue devices were used in recordings, as well as tube preamps and compressors from 60s-70s.” Alright, let’s rock!

‘Do Not Forget To Put On Your Silk Hat Before Swimming’ has always struck me as sound advice, as well as good manner, and the gentle trickles and tickles seep out. ‘Lenin is Still Asleep’ strikes me as fighting talk, but there’s no change except a gradual deepening from our introduction to this sound., Things change slowly in this landscape like the shifting of seasons. One minute it’s a normal evening, then the snow comes, then the rain, then some plinky notes.

‘Why No Plasma TV in this Forest?’ they ask, in all seriousness, and I have no real answer to give, as I am listening to this while working on some Flesh For Lulu photos. My attention is split, and I find the deeper questions of life are quite beyond me. I can sat that I intend working for a few more hours, then getting slightly drunk while

www.myspace.com/dvarofficial
watching several episodes of ‘House’ with Lynda. It’s snowing outside and we bought lots of ice cream.

‘It’s been Raining... Just Like Any Other Day’ is wrong, as it hasn’t rained today, that I’m aware, but we have all learned not to rely on records to provide weather reports. Instead we trust them to be occasionally creepy like this. The piano barely whispering while noises shift like the sound of wind outside the house, then drop away into nothingness. Like nothing. More or less, because then it starts again in a healthier tone, the piano curiously confident, but before it swells too greatly there’s a pause then down into a gentler phase, sensitive but never maudlin, and the winds is back, prying at the edges of doors and windows, the bastard!

This leaves ‘Sphere in a Triangle’ which seems to idle along with background cogitation, and foreground pretties. Then it’s gone and while it’s all rather delightful I am confused. Why just an adorable EP and not an exceptional album? Don’t these things work best as a long set of gradual inclines and pools of thought-provoking, mood-enhancing sound?

http://zhb.radionoise.ru/eng/mv-iii.html
http://cyclothemia.com

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Extravaganza!
Monopoly

I thought you’d like this as there’s a free download of the whole compilation available, from the top link at the bottom, and I’ve been banging on about Russian music long enough for some of you to want to take them up on the offer.

Caprice are like an orchestral Kate Bush during ‘Enter Laoris’ offering some sedate and utterly charming court music and at the complete sonic, musical and polar opposite Dvar are like a bacchanalian version of Zig & Zag with their hilariously seedy ‘Jraah Mraah’

Lakissova is another fragrant singer, with another orchestral offering in ‘Maga Minu Lapsuke’ with some deft keyboards offsetting the sorrowful vocals. Apparently Jayne’s debut album is all about dolls. Big Balloon Band aren’t as daft as you’d imagine with some elegance countering the coy humour in ‘Phone Song.’ ‘50B@ /40 are lightly crazed in their ‘87 A<<B@OI59 :07C@8. CABK@L >48=->BG5-AB2>:’ and I gather someone from Theodor Bastard may be involved, so that would make sense.

Cyclothemia do that trancey electronic beauty well throughout ‘Odyssey’ then Otto Dix surprise with a sensitive dance sway in ‘K;L’ after a war-based opening sample, coming on like a James Bond undertow, glamorous but heartfelt. Hex On have a twilight triphe deliciacy in ‘Lilith before the glorious Necro Stellar pulse like stern nutters in the gushing thrills of ‘Only Moon.’ ‘50B@ /40 twirl in an unhinged Cinema Strange In Hell way during the groaning but svelte ‘145=L5 >A. ‘8=>340” A;8H:>< G0AB>.’

Dvar spin gaily through the winsome brainstorm named ‘Kroom Kroom’, Lakissova sound like a small lunatic child in her remarkably pretty but worrying ‘Candy,’ Caprice have an exquisite classical treat in store with the ‘Black Flower’ and the droopy ‘24 Hours of Non-Stop Consumption’ by Cyclothemia is an odd choice to close with as it’s strangely annoying. Maybe it is to leave you feeling slightly glad it’s finished?

That song aside the rest is fantastic so nab one today.

www.monopolyrecords.com/extravaganza/downloads.html
www.caprice-music.com
www.myspace.com/laoris - Caprice
www.myspace.com/jaynelakissova
www.myspace.com/dvarofficial
www.necrostellar.com
www.cyclothemia.com
www.lakissova.com
www.ottodix.ru

THE TRAKWERX COLLECTIVE
LIGHTWERX:
Georges Méliès Trakwerx

A dvd to give Steampunk fans wet dreams this is a 15 film/soundtracks offering of cinematic history with artists paying tribute to one of the most important silent era film pioneers, in case anyone thought it was an obscure George Melly import. I will review this in depth in THE MICK, as I can include more visuals there, but here you get a hint of what is involved, and it’s a fascinating release. While I would normally avoid really ancient films down to the lack of conventional excitement you can only view something like this with total retrospective respect for just what this man was doing at the birth of cinema, like a midwife gone mad.
‘L’Impressionniste Fin De Siecle’ gives a clue to Melies’ past, as he was once a magician, and here we see a man performing tricks, as Jo Gabriel provides gentle fluttering keys which turn briefly jaunty in turn with the crafty visual display. We appear to enter the underworld, complete with gauze-draped ladies and chubby male dancing demons during ‘Le Danse Infernale’, for which Tommy Santee Klaws deems relaxed acoustic and piano as accompaniment in a Buckleyesque style, although how lyrics of love quite fit this story of rumbustuous weirdos I have no idea.

‘Lune A Un Metre’ is mad, where a wizard we have to get used to seeing, accidentally conjures up an angry moon which is forever eating and vomiting things, the magician included. Luckily there’s an angry Margaret Dupont (Groucho fans will know) woman to tell it to fuck off out of it mate, or gestures to that effect. Jackson Del Rey himself, the driving force behind this project having already done new Noesferatu and Battleship Potempkin scores, mixes doomy orchestral synth with a saucy oboe as well as a weird vocal declaration of lurve himself, so I assume it’s catching. Gods Of Electricity go for clattery ambient sounds throughout ‘Mobilier Fidele’ where we set inanimate objects moving, with furniture filling a house unaided. Lynda was on hand to point out to me the sort of things young Georges was doing which hadn’t been encountered before, such as close-ups, perspective, dissolve features etc. I nod dumbly and peer at the screen. (I like to think I do it well.) Clattery ambient they may be, but the Gods Of Electricity also have a cunning percussive rhythm going at times, like an undercover Gene Krupa on manoeuvres.

‘Princess Nicotine’ finds 17 Pygmies plucking and a plunking, with some lighter oboe and delightful keyboards, all of it seriously serene, with just a hint of suspense and unnecessary vocoder as we watch a fatuous oaf smoking a pipe, with the aid of some tiny girls who poke fun at him, and one deliberately flaunts her arse, which must have been way ahead of its time. Then again, it was Paris, I daresay, the capital of filth back then.

Cult With No Name are thoughtfully austere for their handling of ‘Le Melomane’ in which some hot chicks stand by obediently as their conductor removes his head and throws it up repeatedly onto some empty sheet music above him, and there his heads stay, becoming music notes. The tune appears to be God Save The Queen slowed down. Meg Maryatt also keeps things stark with keys and strings, adding jocular, wiggly electronics in ‘La Cornue Infernale Alchimiste Parafaragamus,’ where that annoying wizard creates something unexpected in a laboratory experiment which ends in his death, and here Meg adds some vocal weirdness to match the imagery.

‘Voyage A Travers L’Impossible’ is a mini-epic of a film, and totally mental, as people go off on a voyage of discovery in a train with rockets attached so they can visit the Sun, which eats the train, so the music of Lea Reiss also shifts from swirly synth fun with a hazy female vocal glow, to some serious hip hop rasping bass and Industrial rock guitar, and it’s good to finally hear someone introduce solid modern sounds into their approach, because it doesn’t all need to be chintzy or delicate.

‘L’Eclipse Du Soleil En Pleine Lune’ is also wizard-afflicted, as he teaches dull pupils about the sun and the moon and the stars flit about, in what is the only dull film, in comparative terms, as so much of it takes so long to do anything, sleight of hand replaced with over-sized boxing gloves. Sparkle Girl runs backwards vocals through scattered ambience and film spool noise. ‘L’Artiste Et Le Mannequin’ sees 17 Pygmies pop in for a mellow blend of polite strumming as an artistic temperament snaps and he attacks a woman with a broom. There’s a weird noises alert for Stephan Graham’s appearance, and suddenly The Clangers are among us for ‘Le Diable Noir’, in which a man is
turned insane and thrown out of his apartment having set fire to the bed while chasing out the devil, who he also attacks with a broom, clearly the Edwardian’s weapon of choice. Tommy Santee Klaws opts for slow guitar in a dying light and garbled vocals as the colour-tinted ‘Eruption Volcanique a La Martinique’ goes about its business like a miniature Gerry Anderson landscape, with so much smoke at one point you can barely see anything else.

‘L’homme a La Tete De Caoutchouc’ finds Melies blowing his own head up really big with the aid of some handy bellows, as Kulfi brings us an arthritically throbbing arty-punk mess. Smoldering Ashes have ragged indie charm in mind for ‘Le Locataire Diabolique’, in which some nutter occupies a barren room in a hotel, fills it with furniture and guests from his magic triangular suitcase, and even pops a disgruntled policeman inside a piano.

We close with the well known ‘Le Voyage Dans La Lune’, a veritable Jules in the Vernian crown: judges, wizards, hefty dames, it has it all. Men go to the moon, which they clearly don’t find as exciting as anticipated because they immediately settle down for a good night’s sleep, which Jackson Del Rey (for it is he!) has created electronic snoring for. His soundtrack here relies heavily on static and sonar bleeping but starts with the Apollo 11 countdown that includes the wonderful line from Houston that ‘guidance is internal’ which could be a nerd’s equivalent of silence is golden. We get “the Eagle has landed”, and end with “one small step”, which is entirely fitting for Georges in his overall impact, so music and film work superbly together, modernity and antiquity locked in a heavenly embrace, as the Houston team inadvertently admit to an interest in porn by gasping, ‘you gotta bunch of guys about to turn blue’ which you’d think they might have kept to themselves. Meanwhile on the moon the intrepid explorers turn out to be just what you’d expect, killing the first alien they encounter, and returning to Earth on their rocket, which descends into the sea by parachute. How psychic was he?

The music is rarely intrusive, which is probably the point, and hard to judge in some ways. Without the films it’d be a pretty random compilation, that’s for sure, but with these brilliant glimpses into the past it all hangs together like some suicide pact with a sense of swing and this dvd is not just stunning, but dead cheap, and will prove absorbing to more than just film nuts, I assure you.


13TH CHIME COMPLETE DISCOGRAPHY
Sacred Bones Records

A wonderful testament to a neglected Goth band of great worth and imagination – take a bow Mick Hand, Gary O’Connor, Terry Taylor, Ricky Cook - this CD version of two albums released by Sacred Bones on vinyl (see the link at bottom of review) comes with a lovely booklet laden with excellent photos and a particularly well written biography by Clive O’Grady, containing moving details of a semi-tragic existence and a fantastic bit about the band having coffins made into which PA speakers were fitted.

Before we begin I really should apologise. This office I work from at home is exceedingly small and yet things vanish inexplicably. Gary sent me a 13th Chime CD he’d made available in limited quantities a few years ago and today I have searched the entire room for it, as I was going to compare the contents and be all thorough, and everything. Well, could I find it? Could I arse! I did however locate sixteen Danse Society bootlegs, realised I appeared to have lost my UK Decay at the Pied Bull boot and promptly fell to writing a short story about the police investigating the strange disappearance of a Bauhaus bootleg which turns out to have international implications, so while the day has not gone as originally intended it has not all been to waste.

The doleful bass and damp drums see the spectral ‘Cuts Of Love’ emerge from its small hole, blinking into the welcoming gloom of punky Goth cross-pollination, so named because of the band’s ability to annoy parrots. The washed out grey ‘Coffin Maker’ skips in slow motion, with a fabulous, reaching chorus that sweeps you up, and the bubbly, choppy nature of the song is as good as any early Goth
A diminutive corker! Bigger drums for ‘Cursed’, with thin, hungry guitar and steady bass behind shadowy vocals and Antsish affectation, which is all to the good. ‘Dug Up’ has more salacious post-punk in its jabbing cortex, and with some more Ants vocal manifestations haunting ‘Tinker Man’ we get to enjoy their languid silkiness. ‘Fire’ throws a darker, conspiratorial cloak around its intentionally dramatic style, ‘Hide And Seek’ darts hither and thither to honour its title, ‘Sally Ditch’ is a well spooky track which had spent a little too long stalking Bauhaus, but it’s a great shuffling beast. ‘13th Victim’ is strained and wheezily repetitive, with less impact.

There’s a buzzy pop demo of ‘Radio Man’ which is cute, heralding plenty of impudent fun ahead, which ‘Two As A Couple’ takes as its signal to channel The Who but mainly skimpy jangling energy and stealthy filth. ‘Sarah’s Got A Chainsaw’ backflips to their punky yelping and ‘House Of Laughter’ is like the Ants again but with some growlier guitar. A deeper, danker ‘album’ version of ‘Fire’ rampages stodgily, with ‘Radio Man’ part kooky tinges, part empty-headed padding. ‘Help Me Street’ is strangely confused, with a rocky opening, then some jaunty pop prancing. ‘Keep In Pace’ drifts into sleepy druggy nirvana, there are album versions of ‘Sally Ditch’ and ‘Hide And Seek’ then ‘Pigs’ does a creepy ambient thing to end.

By going for the complete discography there’s a few in there which don’t match the very best offerings but because there are some truly wonderful numbers this is a worthy addition to any serious Goth collection.

www.sacredbonesrecords.com/releases/sbr3003-4
www.myspace.com/13thchime

www.grimm.um.com
www.mp3.de/grimm - freebies.
www.myspace.com/dansemacabregroup
www.carinadejesus.de/home.htm

GRIMM
Kalt Wie Dein Herz
Danse Macabre

To my enfeebled mind there is a very tenuous line between some forms of Industrial Rock and Electro Goth. Where that line is drawn I have no idea, some Mephistophelian artist’s studio no doubt, but it’s down to atmosphere I believe. If it feels stark and somehow obvious it’s IR, no question. Where subtlety intrudes on a regular basis there’s a good chance a jury would acquit on the grounds of EG. (That’s Electro with Goth brains, not plain Electro with puny pop sensibilities.) So it is that Grimm would walk free from court, waving to the crowd, claiming that melody counts. At least that might be what they say. The album’s all in German, so they could be saying anything. There’s a picture of a none too stealthy bomber on the cover, so I’m assuming war themes loom large on what seems an angry album, or perhaps they’re in the military and it isn’t going too well. The language needn’t concern you, as the music will poke your gormless face and the tunes roll your daft head around.

‘Konsumier Mich’ teases you a frilly beginnings then a filthy guitar, seedy vocal and undulating rhythm work alongside an idiotically simple chorus, breaking off for simply enchanting female vocals, then back into the hurly-burly. Synth does a sci-fi striptease in the background as the male vocals snap and lecture. You’ll be singing along like a fucking idiot in no time. ‘Parasit’ shows them tunnelling deeper into the grieving process with a brilliantly tense but imaginative guitar attack, as the vocals are all screamed and dramatic. The chorus seems him go all bellicose and raw while the girl sighs in a disgraceful manner, then they slot straight back into a seamless, writhing noise. ‘Feurio!’ slows as though pulled down and stifled, but the chorus heaves itself aloft like a gigantic vocal sail above the tiniest of craft. This is where they turn some stereotypes on their heads, by having shitty washes of sound in certain areas, or using one element as the key point when least expected. ‘Tanzen’ brings in some doomy piano as they slide around in a dire mood, and this is a harsher but equally well appointed bit of structural architecture, including as it does some hint of futuristic reggae floating ethereally in the rafters.

‘Schön’ churns with some gleaming guitar, ascending holistic backing vocals, illuminating the grumpy foreground rumbles, but even here there is fun in the rhythmical chatter. Think of a torpedo, covered in lace, which is now all tangled up in the steering mechanism, that’s Grimm. ‘Ameisen’ is as cantankerous as it is swanky, maybe even swankerous, the rhythm sharply rising and descending, the synth coming out like a bright night star, as the vocals are caught in the cogs and desperately striving to break free. Carina De Jesus comes in briefly to mop Jan Sörensen’s forehead, as Andreas Hellmanzik plays on, unphased. ‘Prophet’ itches close to conventional modern rock cruise control, with a supremely confident commercial thrust and you’ll find yourself blissfully uncaring as you’re caught in its effusive slipstream. Bizarrely, the chorus reminds of that single by The Craigslist when they were driving along an American highway heading for a crash – remember that? It’s rougher, it’s gruffer, but every bit as good.

‘Energie’ is weedier and here’s the thing, as sleepily seductive as a Bond soundtrack it’s actually not as pretty as their more brutish complexities! It’s still beautiful and troubled, as is ‘Tiefer’, minus any evident troubles, because they pretty much hang around with harmonious intentions. ‘Zuckerkuss’ has some woozy, wonky guitar flopping around the virulent mood of misery, with some strings offering some neo-classical glamour. ‘Liederjan’ opts for a snappier dance finish, male vocals grinding vocal teeth, female polishing theirs, the synth lashing out, chorus aching, leading us to a disguised exit marked entrance, via a false ending, because if you start all over again it really is like a circle.

A great album, and if anyone ever enjoyed Belfegore, it’s like an enhanced modern version of that cunning impact.
attracted Del Rey to do his own modern score for it I have no idea. The Méliès films and Nosferatu I can understand, but this pitiful old tripe?

I can honestly say little of the music throughout because I was stupefied by the experience and simply wasn’t taking much in. Never having read the Tarzan book when young, or enjoyed a single one of the films or TV shows, I expected little of this experience and found even less. One of seven films directed in 1918 by Scott Sidney it’s utterly useless.

Naturally it opens with wildlife, including some bemused rhino, then what I thought was a woman behaving strangely, but this turned out to be an early shot of the young Tarzan. Lord Greystoke, we learn from the onscreen titles, was summoned by the British Government to suppress the Arab slave trade in Africa. His wife wants to go too, but her father says that’s much too dangerous for a mere chit of a thing, as she couldn’t even take her own maid, although no explanation is offered as to why. Off her and hubby go only for their ship to be affected by a mutiny and the captain killed or, as we clearly see, he jumps overboard. A sailor named Binns prevents the Greystokes being harmed, and they all end up ashore, Binns to promptly captured by the Arab Slave traders, the Greystokes to build an impressively large cabin in no time, to have a child and Lady Alice to snuff it. Times was ’ard.

Meanwhile a local ape is bereft at losing her child, so the monkeys sneak in and nick the young baby, and Tarzan grows up respecting Kala as his mother. Synth work drifts in our and out of your consciousness as you struggle to stay awake. Tarzan is a happy boy, while Binn’s spends ten years being savagely treated by the Arabs who don’t seem have grasped the nature of their trade. Unless the simply haven’t found anyone to buy him.

We get some shots of tribal women cooking and their men off in canoes. Tarzan envies their clothes for no apparent reason, and pinches some. He beats his chest, exuberantly, then finds the cabin, containing several skellingtons, the chimps having left their dead baby in the cot, and a book, from which he appears to teach himself basic English with evident ease and glee. He also finds a knife. Kids today, eh?

A gorilla attacks a chimp, only for Tarzan to kill it with his new weapon. Binns meanwhile, back in the area, determines to escape and does so, finds the cabin and its contents and is dismayed. “I wonder if they died thinking old Binney broke ‘is promise to them?” No, I don’t think they did.

Finding an inexplicable handprint of a small boy he vows to locate that child and get him home to England, then collapses, the cap-doffing retard. Tarzan finds him, and the two smelly creatures bond. Binns teaches him to speak and Tarzan brings him some tatty leaves. It’s a fair swap. Cool trembly ambient sounds accompany their friendship.

They set off, homeward bound, the callous Tarzan seemingly untroubled at leaving his monkey family, and they’d have got away with it if it wasn’t for those pesky Arab slave traders, who still haven’t been suppressed. Binns has a cunning plan, telling Tarzan to make himself scarce while he makes it home to England, “to
look up yer folks”! Nicking a canoe he paddles off, and does just that, social climbing berk.

Tarzan becomes a man, taking forever to lumber through the branches, pausing occasionally to beat his chest. Little does he realise that some family friends and scientists are on their way to investigate the tale told by Binns. There’s a doe-eyed brunette who we must assume is Jane, and her maid Esmeralda. The blokes are all dreary.

Kala is killed by a native and a grief-stricken Tarzan tangles with him. The native, seen rubbing a shin ruefully, lopes off, but Tarzan is soon hot on his trail, laboriously picking his way through the branches when simply running after him would have been more efficient. He finds him and strangles him. For days afterwards he peeks, smirking, from bushes as apparently ‘superstitious’ villagers lay out offerings to him, hoping to appease his wrath, which is weird as I don’t recall their being any audience to the killing.

Tarzan has a friendly elephant, who see wrecking a tree, presumably because they filmed him doing it one day, then everyone from England turns up, hoping for a cuppa. Seeing the cabin everyone is convinced Binns told the truth, even a bloke with a very bad moustache, although the scientists aren’t bright enough to differentiate with a monkey skeleton and that of a human baby. Jane and one of the blokes squabbles and Tarzan leans in and gives him a smack.

A lion attacks Jane and Esmeralda but Tarzan deals with it, observed by the party who now know he really exists. Then they all wander about aimlessly and the next thing you know is that the village is deserted, then Tarzan scoots over and sets fire to the village and all ends happily.

The other group all leave, and we see Tarzan offering Jane a life in the treetops, although she seems unconvinced. And not before time.

THE END.

And not before time.

www.trakwerx.com/label.htm#tarzan

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The other group all leave, and we see Tarzan offering Jane a life in the treetops, although she seems unconvinced. 17 Pygmies (the band, not extras) play a soulful indie ballad ‘Stay With Me’ which seems to convince her, and a downcast Tarzan is overjoyed when she calls to him and they embrace.

THE END.

And not before time.

www.trakwerx.com/label.htm#tarzan

DVAR
MADEGIRAH 2009
Shadowplay

The original version of this album on Monopoly Records lasted just twenty tracks, but here the record reaches fifty tracks, and there’s something weird going on.

There always has been something weird going on with Dvar of course, and I have no intention of basically re-reviewing an album I have already covered once before but I do wish to point out that alongside bands like Ataraxia and The Dancing Did, Dvar are one of my all time favourites because they have a unique style. They can be fun or unsettling, breathtakingly imaginative given the brevity of some of their pieces, and audaciously insane with their ideas. Most of all they are melodic as Hell, but just not in the way you’d normally expect.

The story goes back to 1997 when a shadowy figures lurked the stalls of a Moscow market and got people there selling his music on tape, which then led to an official tape of ‘Raii’ in 1998. That much we know, but on this compilation tracks are credited as being ‘inspired by Dvar 1992-1993, and I have absolutely no idea what that means.

In case you haven’t read it before, they have their own language which makes sense, in that you just know they’re not spouting random weird noises. They also created dark settings early on which took various post-punk genres and then plunged their eager heads into a cesspool and semi-drowned them. ‘Hwhy’, the opener will serve as a useful idea. The drone of some kind of bagpipe or replicant synth starts, scary voices promptly emerge, maybe not a goblin but a medieval witch brought in to oversee proceedings, then drums patter in. The vocal shapes create the melody over the rhythm. It’s as minimal as you get, and full of character as the vocals get argumentative and conversational at one point, in an intriguing manner. ‘Laali’ changes abruptly to a brightly engaging synth pulse of a breezy dance track but the same vocals are glowing, bickering screeching around the keys. It’s mad, but brilliantly mad, like prog dance performed inside the small intestine. ‘Hiri Naai’ goes for a saucier, swaying swagger with an even catchier vocal line and turns the comedy amp up to eleven. That’s the way it goes, like The Clangers full tilt on ecstasy, in charge of an orchestra, full of twinkle adventures of extraordinary vision and ability and the most engaging laughter captured on record. Try and find an mp3 of ‘iikh’ if you do nothing else this week.

Flick forward to tracks 21-50 and things an even odder, with ‘D’ogoodah’ like post-ragtime dementia, a spry snare drum and
nimble banjo well to the fore. ‘Tiellah’ sounds like mournful birdsong. Sweet natured idiocy is everywhere, which is delightful as well occasionally quite moving, because they have their melancholy side too. There is much which more orthodox the longer the album chirps on, with some enchanting piano, but that just lets you know how good the musical base of everything they invert is.

www.myspace.com/dvarofficial

THE CULTURAL DECAY
Eight Ways to Start a Day
Sacred Bones

Here’s something unusual. A band which only played fifteen gigs during a short existence from 1980 to 1982 in Belgium (singing in English), leaving behind them a couple of singles. They were Alex – vocals/guitar, Joseph – guitar (and now wistful sleeve notes author), Jean – bass, and Jean-Pierre – drums. This is their tribute, complete with a tidy history in a scrupulously neat booklet. The interesting thing is that for a band described as being cold wave but also having a predominantly post-punk edge, they remind me of the early Factory bands, the bleaker side of indie. In fact as the opener ‘Brave New World’ lopes along, gripped with agitation and a haughty synth, you can quite easily imagine a cross between early Section 25 and Ritual World’ lopes along, gripped with agitation and a haughty synth, you can quite easily imagine a cross between early Section 25 and Ritual

As that guitar saws against the warm, bracing bass in ‘Business Business / Fragile Object’ naughty people would also toss a Joy Division comparison or two in, but that’s missing the eagerness in the sound, and the instantaneous enjoyment to be had. The audience wouldn’t be bouncing against this tension, they’d be embracing it. There’s also some rolling drum shimmers thrown in. They let the vocals fade away and the music takes over, powering through, then back he comes, pained and away they all go again together. ‘Song of Joy’ is stompier, with a surfeit of spoken vocals, and careful you don’t trip over the wobbly sax.

That’s the officially released tracks dealt with, but Sacred Bones have rounded up all other recordings known to exist. ‘Womb’ throbs over smartly, bass lustrous, guitar and drums taking the back seat as the vocals spiral into a wall. Lolling on a bed of damp bass ‘Exit Calls’ is like a louftish version of Zero Le Creche, and exciting but for the over-repetitive vocals. ‘Sink or Swim’ is chunkier in build yet wry of tone, like a punch-drunk Associates. ‘Eight Ways to Start a Day’ is raw and buffed up, but really just an idea trundling lumpily by and it turns fairly doney, but that’s the pros and cons of a compilation like this. You want everything you can get included and that will sometimes include wartiness.

Cute Gawf guitar pushes the weedy ‘Thin Rope’ into the spotlight, and it’s very much flattening Bauhaus at times, but gradually straightens and exudes a dignified distress. ‘Out of Balance’ seems positively asthmatic and in danger of collapse but it’s that very lightness of being which gives their songs a real power, although the vocals are seriously annoying here. ‘Losing Height’ just sounds like the same thing and then we’re into the strange ambivalence of a patient live version of ‘End of the Corridor’ which is quite dreary really, but again that’s the small picture, when the collection hints at the bigger picture.

Apparently ignored by the press at home and with various things never coming off as they’d hoped the band split up early but there’s more than enough here to indicate they could have been really special.

www.myspace.com/theculturaldecay
www.myspace.com/theculturaldeelaylive
www.myspace.com/sacredbonesrecords
www.sacredbonesrecords.com/releases/sbr3002

TERRORIZER #192 / DOMINION #2

No, I haven’t lost it. Dominion, the Goth mag given away free with Terrorizer, is rather good and returns for a second issue, sadly now included within the magazine itself, so you can’t ditch the rest without some effort. Tsk!

See that bloke on the cover, looking like the earnest Anti-Amish nerdy rock salesman for all occasions, maybe even Ricky Gervais going undercover? That’s a former member of Emperor, some legendary Black Metal headcases who were at the heart of the whole church-burning, musician-killing freakfest. Now, not all Black Metal bands instantly became right wing freaks or deluded mystics when they forsook their wargame figures and left the house to experience the real world, but I bet most of them retained crap taste in music. Now happy as a solo musical force this Insahn chap rambles on about saxophones, the Prog Rock Bastard! (For the rockists among you the rest of the magazine revolves around Katatonia, Rotting Christ, Annotations Of An Autopsy, Azaghal, Overkill, a ton of smaller bands (I don’t think I have ever seen aosta & Sweep.)

DOMINION #2 starts

starts

with news of Carl working on a new Nephilim album, Noblesse Oblige and Beati Mortui provide useful small pieces, there’s larger articles on Faith & The Muse and Within Temptation and an interesting beginner’s guide to Medieval Rock (Mittelalter) which isn’t quite as bollocksy as it sounds. There’s also reviews, which certainly aren’t bland, handing out detention for Hussey and Razorblade Kisses. I still
think the ‘Dark Stuff’ section needs to go, even if it might bring in an ad or two, because with the reviews naturally involving bands featured in the features, it reduces the variety of the mini-magazine compared to the host rock mag, which does go to some lengths to cover new talent. Apart from that, an excellent issue.

Oh yes, Terrorizer also includes a CD, which is all I have to say on that score.

www.myspace.com/dominionmagazine
www.myspace.com/terrorizermagazine

GATES OF DAWN
PARASITE
Danse Macabre

Although it’s easy, given the habit of letting choruses rely on jutting vocals over a solid slow riff, to cast Gates Of Dawn into the dungeon marked Goth Metal there is potentially a great deal more to them. The overall temperament of ‘Parasite’ is modern, but the continual reliance on Sebastian Kraus’ guitar as a robust presence when they have the sensitive violin of Tina Thomasberger available is unnecessary. The vocal interplay is strong and interesting, the layers of sound appealing, especially the rhythm filleting of Christoph Sarrach (bass) and Carsten Warkus (drums). ‘Resistant X’ has the same strict cortex, with lighter vocals hitting their target slickly, and the combined vocals of Matthias Abel and Martina Lenz an effective dual limb. This album disappoints as much as it interests but this is a weird work in progress. Their first male singer left the band, causing a shake-up, while they’re still working with him?

‘Chronos Requiem’ starts off with suitable mouldering Goth splendour of ashen vocals and stricken guitar given the preposterous title, but fills the air with an interestingly dense fug of sound instead of just going for some plaintive moaning taken to extremes. Weirdly the vocals retreat simultaneously during a semi-stodgy ‘Heroin(e)’ which successfully moves to an interesting finish because of the vocal character. ‘Revolution’ appears to be the same approach, which is a shame, although they keep it open and relatively breezy.

‘Beautiful Departing’ has a flickering synth behind the rolling drums and gutted gawf male vocals, then the female spread outwards, ‘Shadowplay’ has a forlorn Bowiesque quality, and the strings and keys of ‘Flames’ are far more thoughtful and delicate than the standard Goth Metal it becomes when the riff weighs in, and ‘Fall’ contains some Sisters embers. ‘Terror And Seduction’ is blustery rock nothingness, but the formulaic ‘Dreamers Of Decadence’ works well enough as there’s a lighter force at play, with some space between the morose dreaming, but there’s also a widdly guitar break. ‘When Heaven Falls’ is slow and immaculately catchy so they end on a lowly high, if you get that, and you’re left aware of how good they can be, without being impressed by an album which seems hidebound by traditional artistry rather than ambition.

www.myspace.com/gatesofdawnmusic

THE DAUGHTERS OF BRISTOL
WOMAN AT THE SIDE
Magnolia Recordings

Few people do better traditional Gothic rock these days, with no Metal contaminates, than The Daughters Of Bristol. As you probably know there are so many nods to the past in their sound their necks are permanently in traction but they’re not creaking bores. Now, like watchful sonic gargoyles, they look down from the top of their tower as a new EP emerges.

A chilly synth, simple drum machine tappety-tapping and traipsing bass sees ‘Down The Line’ easing out of the shadows. Guitar decorates and fractures as the trapped vocal sediment starts leaking, romantic agony to the fore, like a shield. ‘Woman At The Side’ is the static one; throbbing bass and guitar both circling on the spot as stricken vocals stretch out. Whoever this woman is she’s waiting, waiting. She’s also circling. Waiting while circling, a fine example of multi-tasking. ‘Of Ash And Wake’ is up and stalking about instantly, a duel to be fought with the outside world, but finding time first for some doleful vocal cogitation, considering love through narrowed, suspicious eyes as the beat stays vigorous, the bass felicitous as down, our singer deciding to stand in the way, somewhere, as the song reaches a faded end with no clear conclusion.

‘Endless Love’ is pretty, the sound stripped back for a lean guitar to lean right over as vocal drama demands to know if we share his feelings, with a touching love declaration, couched in primitive historical terms. ‘In The Midst Of Your Temple’ is flossier, something being done in the name of love, and a journey undertaken in harmonious spirit, but all of this is perfectly sanguine, histrionic yet understandable. Then the real treat. Beautiful piano with additional synth sensitivity enables ‘Alas, My Heart’ to be both serene and troubled, heartfelt with great delicacy. You will be utterly smitten.

www.myspace.com/thedaughtersofbristol
mOss circle
PROMO EP
Own Label

Along similar lines to Dark Dissolve reviewed a few months back (minus any harp), this band might appeal to anyone of a Faery, Pagan, Folky-Goth bent. I have no idea why they spell it mOss circle, unless it is written that once there was a mighty moss circle from which plentiful fauns did multiply, like a maths class au naturel, but I can say that Margot Day (The Plague fans will be delighted) is involved. The album comes later this year, but here’s a short taster.

Her voice drifts sweetly through the worryingly named ‘Lupins’ which makes me think I am entering a saccharine landscape scarcely close to All About Eve at their hippest, but it also has little cute touches percolating constantly. ‘Smoke & Mirrors’ may have skittering fiddle but there’s also a bleaker feel, which is nice, the vocals pinched a la Hazel O’Connor, a salty post-punk, the guitar wrung out, but the chorus is far too repetitive. It is allowed to change the lyrics as you go along, as it keeps things interesting (the feel changes, the words don’t, which is just plain wrong) or simply let the music have a go instead on constantly using the same words. ‘Some Day’ is weirdly quaint and ragged, complete with some unnervingly happy flute, and although it would normally play havoc with my bile ducts I like the way the song gently keeps moving, all skinny and dainty. ‘No Place For Love’ comes on like a post-folk, bubbling Patti Smith oddity, waspish vocals hissing inside the pretty confines, as some mental samples prattle on about a brewing storm.

So there you go – rather commendable variety within four songs, and what seems like placid entreaties turn out to be anything but, once you get past the lupins aspect. I hope I shall bring you the album later, when it’s out.

www.myspace.com/mosscircle

DVAR
PIIRRRAH / TAAI LIIRA
Shadowplay

I’m confused. I gather from various sources that the early Dvar releases go Raii (1998 tape), Taai Liira (2000 4-track CD-R) Hissen Raii (2002), Piirrah (2002), Roah (2003), Rakhilim (2004), Taai Liira (Re-release+bONUS) 2004, and I have that last one, on Irdon. It’s 16 tracks long. This new CD compilation is 21 tracks long and claims tracks 1 – 9 come from Piirrah, 10-11 are from the enticingly rare Raii, and 12-21 previously unavailable.

The 2004 one I have initially has the same running order, suggesting the first nine songs are what was once ‘Piirrah’, an entity I don’t have. Then there’s the two tracks from ‘Raii’, plus five more which must in part have been the original ‘Taai Liira.’ None of this explains why in 2004 it would have been regarded accurately as a ‘Taai Liira’ re-release when the majority of the tracks would have been from ‘Piirrah’! And nothing explains why on the 2009 Shadowplay release they think 12 – 21 are previously unreleased. Then again, I couldn’t find it in their releases list, unless they haven’t updated their site. Gah, the world has gone mad!!!! As proof I offer the news I was tipped off about yesterday that there’s an American football team somewhere nicknamed the Gamecocks, their cheerleaders gleefully holding up large cards towards the crowd which simply say, ‘COCKS!’

Anyway, again I won’t be going track by track on a re-release, but I would like to indicate that with resolute percussion and occasionally atmospheric synth and brass this is a shadier Davr and deeply mysterious, all with an inherently devious melodic attraction, so it’s as though you are stuck in a madly filmic dream and quite ambivalent about whether you wake up or not. They set a mood, which becomes convincing, then you’re locked into the mad groove.

Sometimes it’s a maddening clash of disturbing vocals and harsh ambient backing, other times it’s a thoughtful moodscape with the vocals at the edge of the action. When the rhythm purrs along and then gathers pace it is invariably an exhilarating ghost ride on a par with anything conventional you might be getting from your Electronic or Industrial favourites.

The two earliest tracks present do suggest an interest in conventional forms which they’re deliberately turning I side, like The Eagles having their necks wrung. As weird as it may seem the synth pattern almost seems to be the anti ‘Hotel California’, maybe because they liked the aspect of never being able to leave once trapped, but it also shows early on they were adept at scooting feverishly between grainy sound footage like ultra violet shamen.

Round about ‘Hissen Raii v.2’ they’re the modern hybrid with a compelling synth landscape which is richly dramatic, and the vocals are just tapered enough to sound like murky, understandably peeved inhabitants. With ‘Vaii Han’ they’re perfecting pervert pop, and the dark mix of ‘Taai Liira’ is lupine techno, while the light mix is more jazzy trip hop, and I am far from convinced the live track which finishes is anything of the sort. Me sceptical.

It’s another great compilation though, darkly enticing and deeply rewarding.

www.myspace.com/dvarofficial
“This is the sound of dreams dying,
This is the sound of everything lying,
This is the sound of dreams dying,
This is the sound of everything lying,
This is the sound of dreams dying,
This is the sound of everyone crying
This is the sound of dreams lying
This is the sound of dreams everything dying.”

Yes, yes, I realise he’s a multi-genre-tasking weirdo, with the post-Industrial ninjadrunkards History Of Guns, the fiendishly electronic Xykogen, even some underground (as in deeply unpopular) Metal band The Meads Of Asphodel, not forgetting the Blue Label indie pop thing, although we can at least try. But most of all wouldn’t he make a great member of the Spooks team? Tariq is having a day off to rest his brain, as he’s far too young to know everything about everything, and as the latest UK-based terrorist-trained CIA operative with Russian sympathies and Muslim tendencies has broken cover, with a brooding Lucas hot on his tail, the news comes in they’ve all been dreading.

Lucas: “I’ve lost him!”
Max (glaring at a bank of computer monitors): “Did you try running?”
Lucas: “With this hair, don’t be fatuous. Urbane, classy, brooding....”
Harry (leaving over Max’s shoulder with just a frisson of tension): “It’s not your fault Lucas, it never is. Watch those cheekbones in this weather, we don’t want you cutting through into the next dimension.”
Max: “That’s ‘Fringe’ ya big nana!”
Harry (no longer interested in the man child): “Quite, well can you patch into the cctv network that all the viewers know doesn’t really exist?”
Max: “Even better!”
(He begins riffling the keyboard the way the viewers know nobody actually ever types, but is the way a pianist might pervily stroke a pigeon.)
Ros: “What is it Max, bearing in mind there could be an unpleasant shag in it for you?”
Max: “I’ve been hand-rearing and training seagulls, each with a tiny camera attached, interlinked on their own network. Less detectable than any drone, I think you’ll find. There! Got him!”
Harry (gleeful): “Incredible work Max! I know I had my doubts, but you’re a genius. Hold on, that’s not him.”
Max: “13 Acacia Avenue, Worthing. There he is, at the very door.”

Harry: “Which means he made pretty quick work of it escaping from Lucas in Holborn five minutes ago. That isn’t even a man, it’s an old woman!”
Max (triumphant, arms folded behind head): “Maybe we’ll have better luck next time. Pub, anyone?”

‘This Is The Sound’ is like Daft Punk with a nosebleed, a bellicose synth and rhythm patter slowly inveigling our senses between whispered threats, it’s lumpy, bumpy and utterly charming. ‘Nothing’ strides around with important places to go, and there’s some swirly synth sounding like imperious guitar. Say what you like about Max, he does have his cheery pop side! Weirdly, you’ll find yourself singing along. ‘Smash It All Up With A Hammer’ explores its headache with a fierce fusion of beats and stream of unconsciousness lyrics which gathers pace, like Max hitching up a Victorian petticoat before tackling a steep staircase.

Naturally ‘World War Three’ is bigger, in a schlock and whore kinda way, bewildered ambient openings shifting into a funny ‘-like you should ever listen to me’ ironic stab, and then whoosh, right into the heavenly bubbling beast where Max becomes a one-man Prodigy, and let’s be fair, it does it better than them most of the time anyway. I could listen to ho him doing this stuff all day. As proof, I have been listening to him for most of the day. But hark, he shifts again, all scenic and world music guru on a bender, before hurling backwards into an even moodier passage. Couldn’t do an hour long mix, concentrating on the energy side of things? That would be a record to treasure. Track 5 slips and slides like a techno-affiliated dog in its own glowing vomit and we’re done.

An magnificent EP you can download now for free, and will be sorely irritated if you don’t possess. Go get one today. The safety of our world is at stake.

www.mrsveerecordings.co.uk/audvee15
www.mrsvee.co.uk
elaborate ambient project given balls through decent rhythmical prowess. It’s not that surprising though, as Todd Loomis was in Velvet Acid Christ. The idea of synthpop and post-punk sensibilities intrigued me. I must say, and it actually does work, with the sweet intoxication of melody rustling the sheets seductively, then into the post-punk angst weds the bed. (Okay, maybe not the best imagery, but you get the idea.) The press release raises the good ghost ship ‘Disintegration’ as a handy comparison, which is indeed close, if The Cure were cohabiting with Radiohead. It has that sort of elongated edge to it.

‘I Am Echo’ labours through a cloud of swirling synth haze before breaking into the sun-bathed chorus, the music sedately inflating, the vocals beautifully sustained. ‘Dead Adults’ is perkier but with a gun behind its back, icicles visible in his hair as he agonises, the escalating spleen-venting distending the song’s stomach impressively, because it allows drama on a basically linear journey, the intensity closing in. Pretty guitar lets ‘The Ice King’ pass the harmonious Goth compatibility test and there’s a lashing melancholia.

We’re in Badalamenti territory for ‘A World We Pretend’, woozily atmospheric pressure spinning everything slowly. ‘A-Wake’ has a comparatively sunnier disposition as it potters along but the memories within are bitter-sweet. A neatly compact ‘Retainer Maintainer’ takes that flow and keeps the mood flowing more openly, then into his knobblier ‘The Puppeteers’ which would certainly appeal to any floating Xymox voters, just as Radiohead fans will like the dimly lit pain trapped within ‘Delusions Of Us.’ A polite sheen somewhat blights ‘Something Beautiful’ in that it seems almost too clear, too obvious, in a calmer state, but then we’re into the moodier thrub of ‘Melancholy Crush’ which is where you also notice he can’t really tense his vocals or achieve any arch grandeur, the music has to do that. He tries towards the end but seems almost retreating through the miasma created, his seamless and attractive vocals wend their way through the song like another instrument. Not that this matters, because it’s an evocative piece which transports totally.

An album that could easily exist on slender means has real strength of purpose and emotional impact.

www.thetwilightgarden.com

FLOWERS IN FLAMES
FLOWERS IN FLAMES
FIF

When the press release revealed members of this band had come from previously well known bands within the Akron and Cleveland area I suddenly thought of Jane Aire’s ‘Yankee Wheels’, which is never a bad thing. Similarly this record, for a debut, is strikingly imaginative, colourful, energetic and at times a melodic emetic when things get gritty. The band admits to fusing Gothic, Post-Punk and Psychedelic elements, although the psychedelic side of things mainly revolves around the guitar having a kind rosy feel in place of Goth prickliness, and there being a touch of the rock chickery about Cynthia’s vocals at times, as though channelling a young Stevie Nicks, or de-wrecked Janis Joplin. They themselves cannot refute the influence of the Velvets, Bowie, The Cure or Bauhaus, and you can hear many other bands in there too, but the result is very much of their own making, which is no mean achievement. To mash together what they wanted, strain out the grot and leave us with pure, bitter delight is a recipe for intrigue, as you can soon imagine you’ve been listening to these songs for years. Maybe those in Ohio already know of David Chavez, Cynthia Dimitroff, Mary Plazo and John Lee. If not they, and everybody else, really should get acquainted.

‘Introspection’ is a wonderful opener, with stratospheric, nerve jangling guitar and morosely marching bass countered by the graceful and at times feathery vocals, with a richly flowing melodic incline. ‘Shadows And Darkness’ opts for the furiously spindly early Christian Death guitar style and bustling male vocals, but keeps things springily open and involving. ‘Third Wave’ is languid indie buffed and polished by subtle guitar with the nervous ‘Terrify Sin’ running like The Cure channelling Christian Death, in an earthy and occasionally capricious manner.

‘All The Glitter’ is a tough post-punk joust, with ‘Last Days’ dropping right out of Bowie’s nose, all hunky dory. The surprise for me came with ‘Cursed With A Flame’ that had a stark, rolling style reminiscent of Breaking Circus an off kilter indie/post-punk style you rarely hear, vocals almost rhythmically repetitive, guitar struggling like it has a phobia. ‘Vesper’ does an eager freefall punky rocky tumble, and stays treat fun with its wiry guitar grip. Is ‘Golden Town’ a bit Pink Floydly to begin with? I’m not well versed in them enough to say but it’ something old, delivered in a classic style, exuding confidence and obscenely catchy. Reverting back to tense post-punk guile ‘Stare At The Stars’ sees us out with, strangely, their least insistent song but it’s too late by then as you’ve been hugely impressed.

The only thing you can really say by way of criticism is that it could all open out more next time they have something produced, to let the individual elements really shine, but as a whole it’s brilliant.

www.myspace.com/flowersinflames

MOTH’S TALES
THREE In Session
Own Label

More exquisite Post-Punk for you, with dainty vocals and guitars laid across threadbare, agitated bass and drums, but a weird album really as it has songs from the previous two albums (Obstinè, Unknown Portrait) where they had a female singer, Caterina Signor. Now she has gone, Michele Rossi, Roberto Battilana and Miguel Gazziero
carry on as a trio, and represent songs here to show how things are now, which is unusual when you think about it. Bands don’t usually do this. You also wouldn’t know they were Italian at all, although the ringing guitar tone is enough to separate them from any run of the mill Post-Punk UK obsessives.

It seems barely a review goes by that The Cure don’t get a mention, and the vocal inflection in ‘Pulled Up’, and elsewhere, is a real giveaway but they’re open about the whole thing overall. They’re also tilted sideways in that whole Comsats kinda way, and even mention Sad Lovers & Giants on their myspace page, and no-one mentions them unless they’re into them, as they were that sort of band. ‘Killing Time’ is like Joy Division with makeup at the beginning, the pretty guitar chastising the bass for being so miserable and the peaky vocals keep them company perfectly over interesting flashy drums. I could even pop in a word for a semi-Zero Le Creche comparison if you wanted it? It has that same sort of faded romantic bloom to it.

‘It Wasn’t Me’ has more of a sorrowful protest about it with some engaging, taut vocal impact and ‘Still’ goes even further into an oblique trance state with the vocals, but then he has ninety-six voices in his head apparently so it’s little wonder he seems glum. A carefree guitar rolls darkly out of the smartly dour ‘White Hill’ and the grand if sedate ‘My Cube’ is classic indie noir in that it could be a song on its death bed, but it raises its head and still looks warily around. ‘Wrong Name’ throws back the tear-stained sheets resuscitated by the drum stomp, and while it’s not exactly a slowly gliding version of ‘Rebel Rebel’ that hopefully gives you a nice picture. ‘Don’t Breathe’ is an arid husk of a song, and again I’d mention ZLC, albeit a gloomy ethereal version, because that’s how god and interesting this band is.

‘Icebound’ lacks the attractions of any of the others because it’s livelier, but soft, so there’s no atmosphere, but then it’s never mediocre either, so allows the album to taper off with dignity in place of ennui overload.

Stirring stuff, stirred slowly.

www.myspace.com/mothstales

‘My Cup’ runneth over with a jaunty synth pattern and the essentially serene vocals kept short and choppy, the chorus all perky and the development carefully sleek to maintain just enough power in the rhythm track to make stop the sweetness being overpowering. The threshing, shadowy pull of ‘Thrifty’ is also good, the mood curiously enigmatic with the vocals a little bit hippy-goth in tone. Then in ‘Summerland’ it’s full blown new agey dreaming, sailing away and home, allegedly, to the Summerland, where a scared grove awaits! A bit like Nephilim fans on a Saga holiday.

‘Because She Is Immortal’ is wan, positively swooning, with a wispily delicious chorus. ‘Serpents & The Tree’ churns like the clubtastic chittering oddity it is. I’m sure in days gone by bands expressing such sentiments did the whole Eves acoustic thing with flowery shirts, but now they tack on a eurodance beat and can actually sing the same way. Goth Metal bands with female singers do something similar, and hope we don’t remember Jennifer Rush. In truth this is a track which loses your interest quickly, because there’s only so much talk about apple trees a person can stand.

‘Split In Two’ is a little darker, but still very polite, like a spruce Inkubus Sukkubus, on about the seasons. ‘Still Here’ is lovely, slightly remote but with an atmospheric flow and subtle details culminating in another gorgeous chorus. ‘Dead Leaves’ is also very pretty, and comparatively brief, luring you in, then leaving you to find your own direction once it vanishes. I like that side to them, a lot.

‘Nothing More’ drifts by with spirit, in many ways a modern take on Faithful Dawn, mellow flair mixing again with a fleeting dance sensibility. ‘Winter Garden’ adds a little weight on the slender frame and keeps the catchy demure quality coming, ‘I Am The Ocean’ is slowly joyous about rocking one’s loved one to sleep. ‘Wake The World’ stands elegantly to one side, a trifle austere and knowing, but what was needed to end the album in a less predictable style.

It’s a very good album, memorable melodies galore, but one for the softer ethereal fan or faery devotee I suspect. I hope next time they need to get more depth to underpin the floatiness because I think it will bring out more of what they hint at here.

WAVES UNDER WATER
SERPENTS AND THE TREE
Calorique

A strange band, Waves Under Water began as a serious, almost morbid looking, duo where they even played a musical saw on the first release, but now they’ve turned those nightgowns upside down to become cheery club-friendly electrolytes, but with quite a winsome ethereal side. This is for the best, really, but means things are now very light.

www.wavesunderwater.com
www.myspace.com/wavesunderwater
CONCRETE LUNG
WASTE OF FLESH EP
Armalyte Industries

When I say this band are well named it should give you a clue as to what we’re dealing with. ‘The New Death Industrial’ they call it, and they have a point, where Industrial Punk meets Death Metal…and beyond! Their myspace page also admits to a personal influence from Pitchshifter, Ministry and Skinny Puppy of which I know, and care, precious little, but it may help you further?

There’s only two of them, which is perhaps just as well, or body would have ears that could cope. Ed_Oxine and William Rioever seethe as they’re sizzling, bickering, brewing and sizzling. ‘Breathe In The Monochrome’ comes onstage with a sci-fi sounding sample, but then the rhythm track slowly grinds into action like a wayward locomotive, the guitar flaring on the front as they set off their great adventure. The vocals are trapped somewhere in the furnace, and they don’t sound happy. What I found interesting is the staccato choppy way they break up the linear thump, so you’re constantly tested, pulled this way and that, and they’ve no guitar overload either, making for an essentially rhythm-driven purge instead of surge. It circles around like a giant metal slug. ‘Recovery Position’ is a sort of Marrs in Hell. Pump up the testicles! This has a lighter touch, the guitar simple and direct, the vocals worming through, the trenchant rhythm relaxed just enough to have the electronics keeping the toxins down.

And yet where there is great mentalness so there is great responsibility, and relentless wrath does nobody any favours, as discovered in many a musical trench over the years. ‘Pyre Burns’ is based on agitation but bathed in a curious beauty, the way Action Directe often mark time inside a polished grandfather clock, and at times this sounds positively restful, before struggling against their bonds in short bursts. As though embarrassed by revealing their softer sound they attack ‘Destructive’ with cudgels we call arms, but forward the bouncing robotic baby bursts, in an engaging style and there’s some slow guitar which is ludicrously attractive. It manages to sound sloppily furious yet at the same time you know it’s rigidity controlled and we’re all swept along like the human rubbish we are. There’s a mad bit of shouting at the end. No idea what that’s about.

The brooding ‘Waste Of Flesh’ didn’t really work for me, its repetitive nature actually locking a simple idea down and regurgitating it. After that there’s remixes entitled ‘Sins Of Flesh’ and ‘Graveyard Recovery’ which are okay but I never find remixes that interesting, they’re just a decent way to make an EP a bit bigger.

An interesting and exciting sound, both attacking and atmospheric.

www.myspace.com/concretelung
www.myspace.com/armalyteindustries

MALEVOLENT ANGEL
DIGITAL S[K]IN EP
Own Label

A solo project of Charlotte (Mourning For Autumn/Action Directe) this came with some fishing line in an envelope as she reckoned it would make a good bird scarer if I didn’t enjoy it. As I employ the local birds to vet my post the element of surprise would have been rather lost. ‘Pain And Absolution’ has a plodding bass line, weird intermittent screaming, whispers and occasionally terse drum machine and giving got your attention it gradually fades away. The scrawny catchy ‘Protect Me’ sounds like scrappy American punky indie for some reason. ‘World Media Murder’ gets hot under the war collar and keeps hammering away with a nippy beat, and plenty of spirit - ‘slaughtered children bloodbath city, CNN sponsored world war monstrosity’ (etc).

The Bowie guitar approach for ‘Digital S[k]in’ is saved by a brackish deportment, ambling shakily forward and there’s some cute plinking backing. It’s actually quite a dramatic sound, despite the antique guitar, and the vocals could do with being less murky, but otherwise this is a very interesting hotch-potch of sound and approaches.

www.malevolentangel.eu
VARIOUS ARTISTS
The Gothic Sounds Of Nightbreed Vol. 5
Nightbreed

Before we start I’d just like to blame my scanner. The cover isn’t yellowy at all, but the colour of bleached snot. I just thought you should know. Other things to know are that any Nightbreed release should interest you. I have always been a fan of their attitude, and they’ve come up with the goods here in bringing together a broad range of styles. The retail price is £6.66 but £3.33 in their eBay shop. Bizarrely cheap for a sampler where most tracks are exclusives.

Understandably head honcho Trev’s own Midnight Configuration kick things off with the grumpy, dense dance of ‘Unholy Beat’, then things turn on a Goth sixpence when Two Witches unleash a brilliant bass-spiked ‘Inner Circle Outsider’ with bristling, incisive guitar and snappy vocals. Ankst are confused in their thudding rawk, telling us in ‘The Wicked’ that we’re all going to drown in a fire. I know I’m not. Lupine’s edit of ‘Broken Wings’ is somewhat lighter, with some elegant sprawl, then Soulscape do a punctilious Goth twirl throughout the stern but pretty ‘End Of Ages.’

NightPorter are interesting, their sound slipping around in the Gallows Mix of ‘Darkling’, the lyrics nicely picturesque in a tale of doom, but with appealing, upturned guitar and some delicacy inherent in the forlorn chorus. 13 Candles seem fairly placid as their winsome ‘Flight Of An Angel’ treads water, and Killer B Movie get over-excited with their moronic rock chat-up in ‘Nothin’ To Lose.’ The Realm have a non-descript but active melodic rock thing in ‘Let Go’ but the SkinFlick remix of Attrition’s ‘Dante’s Kitchen’ brings us back to some urgent cinematic quality with schizoid dance murkiness and mystery. The seedy and quixotic drama of Deadfilmstar’s sedentary ‘Replace’ is also creepily insistent.

Method Cell go for a plain eurobeat with occasional blisters after their dancefloor routine in ‘Blame Me’ but Projekt are made of tougher stuff in ‘Existence’, demanding but brief. Edgegod’s ‘Dirty Women’ is weird, like EMF wanting to bring soap to those who must go without. Or something. Dmeneted dance noodling with insane over the top vocals. Atra Mors’ ‘Luna Cry’ is wafer-thin rock with hazy vocals and a gorgeous guitar display, Cauda Pavonis ‘Juggernaut’ is as big andbouncy as ever, Momento Mori UK’s ‘High Ground’ is positively stately as a crafty singalong. Darkness Falls UK’s ‘Darkness Falls’ sees gutted guttural vocals falling like rotting entrails over the pristine rhythmic dance vinyl underlay. After that the cute dementia of Veil Of Thorns’ ‘Ideological Corpses (Nearer To Hell)’ is both a blessing and an inventive closer, the guitar as delicious as the vocals are vomity, the atmosphere curdled and strange, the picture fading in and out like a weird dream.

Not a classic compilation due to a few pedestrian rock cliches, but at this price who’s complaining?

http://stores.shop.ebay.co.uk/NightbreedRecordings
www.praysilence.org

HEARTS FAIL
MEDALLION
Own Label

Bands are little bastards, always changing their minds. You’ll have Heart’s Fail two nights running and lump it. Originally I reviewed this when it was a demo or download of some type, but now it appears you can get it from them. If you want to get it, contact them. I am shaky on detail.

I also reviewed their album ‘The Dying Season’ as a CD-R, when it appeared tracks from this would be included, but now they have sent me a copy of the album there is not only a slightly different running order but these tracks are nowhere to be seen. So you’ll be getting told about that tomorrow, and will be glad, I assure you.

Astutely world-weary and emotionally askance, Hearts Fail use their words and guitar wisely. ‘Vivisect’ flaps like a corpulent fish stuffed full of musical ideas. Rhythmically languid it lets the guitars trail away or stoke things up, vocals roll away then casually stroll out of nowhere, chewing the lyrics, then letting cute outbursts rise, like the part about not believing in ghosts. It’s a pretty form of indie post-punk with subtle tensions enclosed.

‘Poison’ is dour at heart but with delightfully perky percussive traits, and a boisterous vocal pushiness and sour guitar showiness. ‘Dissuade’ is dead catchy and ends beautifully, so we’ll let them off this one time for weeing on their shoes with a very wet guitar solo, which just leaves the triumphal crunch of ‘Daedelus’, its cleverly naging vocal repetition and clattering whimsy.

Great band, four fine songs.

www.myspace.com/heartsfail
HEARTS FAIL
THE DYING SEASON
Own Label

Anyone should be able to derive great enjoyment from this polished collection of discontent, but those with a penchant for the post-punk era of melodic unrest will get it most. Think Morrissey and REM hatching a great escape while listening to The Chameleons and The Sound and you’re almost there. You’ll be pleased you are.

‘Escape From The Valley Of The Lions’ climbs an irate rope ladder, pausing during the chorus to swing side to side, and sway saucily with a sumptuous charm. The mood is more wired and uneven during the slow flood of ‘Somewhere Else’ and comes vocally from a very Smithsonian institute, but the lightly loping guitar sweetens the pill.

I prefer the approach to ‘For One Moment’ where they sound like people unaffected by others’ work, and so the imploring chorus has far greater impact, and it’s a real beauty, I assure you, elongated, bound for the stratosphere.

Demure and skinnier, the pale ‘Warning’ swims away from you lazily, all shimmery and quietly opulent. ‘Crash Palace #2’ is a shorter, clenched piece, with an esoteric guitar trail. ‘Left Behind’ is a curious thing, blending quiet detachment with a restless intrigue while the itching ‘Wants And Needs’ glows brightly with guitar wafting over the mellow, doleful patterns, eager for some subtle action and so streams along to a precise cliffhanger.

Seamless and ambitious ‘The Glass Blower’ seeps glamorously, beautifully sorrowful, And you get a breather with the instrumental ‘Glowing Orange Smile.’ ‘Willing’ ticks over with agitated resistance, lunging out of character and making a stronger impact because of it. ‘The Dying Season’ keeps that tension revolving, the sound flinty yet purring. ‘Out, Out’ then creates a really creepy close with funereal keyboards and sampled vocal pain. Birth, incarceration or exorcism? A very weird ending!

From start to unexpected finish this is something really classy for you to get your ear-like teeth into.

www.myspace.com/heartsfail

GOTH SOLIDARITY

A scene is worth nothing if it cannot identify itself by identifying with others within it. Support is necessary. Phoenix Marie was a regular poster on my journal until she became ill, and when she began her fundraising effort I did an interview in my magazine but felt a limited edition Goth book might be more effective. She is responding to treatment, which is why it is vital she completes the course, which she must pay for herself - the alternative being the onset of advanced old age and crippling pain.

The GOTH SOLIDARITY book exists to raise money for the PHOENIX MARIE medical fund, to cover her costs fighting/ correct her heart, spine, nerve and brain damage she is suffering, and will remain in print only until her treatment has been completed, along with the immediate after-care. Then the book ceases to be. All profits from the book go to the Phoenix Marie fund.

The 104 page book costs £9.99 (Standard) or £19.99 (A4/US Letter) and contains 100 of my favourite photos from my archive.


Please spread the word about this book yourself in whatever way you can, as it isn’t as easy as you might think to publicise things online, with so many people looking in so many different directions.

For details on Phoenix Marie’s case please visit: http://hachimanwebdesign.com/phoenixmarie.html
To buy the book:
- Standard Edition
  - US Letter Edition
  - A4 Edition
- US Letter Edition
  - A4 Edition
  - US Letter Edition
You’ll need to register with lulu.com before being able to buy the book, which is simple enough. If buying within the US or UK (where they have printers) just use the ordinary postal service offered, and for anyone needing to buy by airmail choose the economy postage (they say it’s untrackable, but that just means it’s conventional airmail).

Okay, here’s the url for the Goth Solidarity book Facebook ‘fan’ page. Please invite all your friends to become a fan of it if you have a Facebook page:

‘Theme For Psydoll #3’ is a positively chunky Industrial stew, all revolving in a sparkly bowl. The rhythm churns, the vocals waft, delicately but almost off-hand and not for the first time I am reminded, in a good way, of a certain band. The difference here is that the guitar is underplayed, the sound surging as a soundscape. ‘Towers’ is playfully throbby and clattery, with a steady vocal line that rides the choppiness well, and it’s got a poppy flair for all the quixotic thump as they like to have plenty of open space in there to allow the melodic intentions to breathe freely. ‘Tokyo A Go-go’ sees the guitar low and offering dirty rawk, of the intelligent variety, but then the mood thickens and amidst a taut atmosphere the guitar ignites on a slow fuse and the vocal flip like shadows, before returning to drift hazily and then chatter pointedly as the song starts to buck and glow with a real sense of style and vision. This is a scenic thing. ‘Kanashii Music’ starts off as a rock trick, the beefy guitar giving way to some curious organ and some kitsch vocal sing-along like a Batman outtake, with some brilliantly chirpy vocals scampering along.

‘Ghosts’ is the opposite of what you’d expect, bright and breezy, and a sturdily serene indie experience. ‘Eden’ is demure initially, the keys gliding and rhythm sliding behind the angelic vocals, before the cloudy guitar moves in and things change. They flick back to the lightness, guitar squalls reappear, and so it bubbles to a fractious close. ‘Black Rain’ is clearly happily warped, a psychedelic element traipsing through, but this is the oddest track as it floats by with the overall mood winning through, instead of energy pulling you in any direction and at times it could be any band.

‘Sky Melody’ is nicely strange, rolling off like a sullen ball of sound with some spirited vocals balanced on top, then it inflates skilfully and takes flight, glittering, swooping and stopping suddenly to switch into something far simpler, with a delicately balanced, piping phase, very stark but pretty. ‘Illudimia’ is quite mad, from a mellow, thoughtful opening, then spreading into some watery sci-fi flow, with epic guitar meandering and dramatic vocal inserts, but somehow modestly inviting too. Then they finish with cutely demented ‘My Birthday’ with rowdy guitar, clomping drums and oblique vocal stabbing, but out of it all comes a ludicrously joyous chorus, and that’s how it goes, the hard rockier elements decorated by a watchful or winsome vocal presence, and jolly avenues opening up unexpectedly.

Imagine if an entirely filmic Daisy Chainsaw had been born in Japan and joined a curious French pop cult. That’s the sort of thing you’ll find here. It’s weird but wonderful.

www.psydoll.com

PSYDOLL
10 SPYGLASSES
Psydoll Products

Well, after their audaciously cheeky and adventurous sampler album, the first and only thing of theirs I’d heard, I could quite easily have taken them for a cheerfully spirited Goth-electropop-Industrial meltdown, their music full of catchy melodies and spiky energy, without anything being swamped by generic waste. With this album those saintly qualities remain, but they have added some more conventional and grand themes while at the same time retaining some totally sweet characteristics. It’s a winner.
through a porous cantankerous percussive trail there are diminutive, fetching arty touches dripping; axiomatic asthma which keeps their songs afloat. ‘Sick Lamborghini’ is like a saxophone-tortured take on ‘The Reflex’, the chorus struggling out and projecting upwards from a writhing base of inter-wrought fidgeting pulses and textured plates of noise. ‘Slit Of The Wolf’ offers another side to their approach because this stays low, like a subterranean Talking Heads descendant, angular in design but with the edges rounded off, and ready to roll around like some demented robot.

In ‘the old days’ labels would be racing to sign them, but of course it’s all different now. We can still, however, expect a classic debut album out of them because, as I indicated at the start, this is brilliant.

www.savagefurs.com/itsalive  
www.myspace.com/savagefurs

PLASTIC PEOPLE  
GOOD AS YOU ARE demo  
Own Label

As part of The Naked Man, who released some stunning records Sébastien Ficagna was a man capable of obscenely invigorating music and melody. When that band went into suspension due to work commitments, he clearly found it necessary to keep purging his soul of these ideas and so a new project is born, a new set of songs are unveiled and, surprise, surprise, the consistency remains ablaze with imagination. Oddly some songs are also co-written with Sandrine Cognet of The Naked Man, so they may even return as a duo later too.

This is a merging of New Wave accessibility and Post-Punk tenacity. ‘Time Desolation’ comes to life where a distant guitar is then slammed right into your face, and a brisk rhythm ensures it’s lively throughout, the lyrics are ultra-bleak, the tune devious and glorious, like The Cure inhabiting old sewers. ‘Candid Soul’ is perkier, and lumpier, but like all deformed pop it has a lopsided charm and a deliriously slippery quality.

‘My Proud’ is more serious, mooching grandly towards the wary listener after imploring to be allowed to die. There’s a real tension there, and some charming brass. Then with swirling synth and feathery ticklish guitar ‘Stonewall 1969’ obviously gets deep. ‘Forgetting Times’ all but celebrates suffering in true Gothly style as skinny guitar wriggles and the vocals pour like cold glue onto the strings. ‘Homesickness’ is a little weirder, a vibrating but picturesque and mournful instrumental.

Frantic pop returns with ‘Dancing In The Air’ choppier over the keys, with a snapping beat and neat turn of overall phrasing. ‘Strange Body’ has a lethal swing as the vocals bounce off the darker underbelly and ricochet over heated guitar and ‘Exciting Unknown’ throbs with a vicious bass probing. ‘Freedom Inside’ is a weird, plinky instrumental, then the equally voiceless ‘Narrow Escape’ wheedles by, a touch more dramatic and furtive, and this creepy underground flair continues in the closer ‘Breaker.’ A bounding beat and vocal clamour create an intrinsic pull on your senses, and the speedy vocal jabber of the chorus whips things up into increasing pleasure.

It’s a great collection of the interesting and vivid, and rumour has it you can get all the tracks free as downloads at the following url (although my myspace never works so I wouldn’t know). Move wisely.

www.myspace.com/plasticpeoplefr

17 PYGMIES  
THE OUTLAW J. D. RAY  
Trakwerx

A typically beautiful release from Trakwerx, this comes in ancient looking industrial card, the colour of 19th century documents, and tells the story of the Outlaw J. D. Ray, who lived when men were men, women wore the most hideous underwear and the only known sweets were varmints. There are some notes from his diary after fleeing the scene of the crime he had nothing to do with, although the entries end where there’s a storm coming and I imagine the record largely takes over.

Restful folky country-tinged Americana ‘Ain’t Gonna Work’ sees him quitting the farm and heading West. It’s a peaceful thing and you sway along, as you have to accept a quieter pace of life. In the sweetly flowing ‘Blackwater, TN’ he ruminates over his position, while his horse says nothing. In ‘Atlas Shrugged Blues’ he believes it must be hard to carry the weight of the world, when actually it isn’t, as I did that once. It’s just tedious, because you can’t do anything else, and the world smells of fish. He also thinks it must be hard to bury the one that you love. (Luckily I haven’t done that.) I think a dog barks, as they strum casually on, although I see no dog credited. A steadfast character the outlaw is determined to make it to the other side. Will he, dear listener?
In ‘Your Smilin’ Eyes’ he’s convinced the stars are smiling at him as
the rusty old tune clip-clops along, and the fish do too, which ties in
with a dream-related entry from his journal. No money for food, but
he still has his drugs! Things take a turn for the sentimental as he’s
thinking of the gal he left behind, but that’s simply poor planning, as
he could presumably have convinced her to join him? With a weeping,
wiry guitar and plaintive harmonica ‘Agua Dulce’ is a very pretty
thing, and ‘Let It Rain The Blues’ is equally gorgeous, as he gets to
time to contemplate nature, the presumably geriatric posse long
behind him, but overall he seems a weepy old character, so Meg
Maryatt sings to him, easing his sorrows. Lovely.

‘I’ll See You In Heaven’ livens up, as he dreads some chill wind, and
is that a mandolin? Quietly jaunty, with Meg snugly content they’ll be
reunited in the future it moves into ‘Captured In Amber’, a bit of a
throwback to track two, Meg taking the reins, then in ‘She’s Gone’
he’s moping some more. Consistency is everything. A summery ‘Half
Moon Bay’ finds him lolling gently among his thoughts, considering
how far he’s come, so he must have escaped the long but useless arm
of the law. Hurrah! Naomi isn’t so happy, as ‘I Know My Train’s A-
Comin’ finds her preparing happily to meet her maker. She’s looking
forward to it in this rose-tinted swirly tune, so we must assume the
bastard still hasn’t written to her, even though he keeps a diary! He
travels the world while she rots in dung. True love!

A delightful album, for all his shabbiness, there remains the matter of
what happened to the horse, and I can find no details mentioned
anywhere. That aside, it is beautifully done throughout, effortlessly
transporting, and not over-long, so you can slip into its gentle embrace
and let it waffle on quite easily. They’re a strange band, aren’t they?

‘Melt’ is tougher, with little rivulets of light through its
central dark bulk and the impressive thing here is how well they keep things
invigorating with their little pulses, because on a
simplistic steady trudge that could be really boring, but
they get you hooked and keep you there. ‘Superficial Bitch’
then scoots off with little bulges and spikes, with the
vocals haughty among the
swarming noise and the way the words in the title end on a rising note
is great. The electronic wheezing seems like a crafty guitar, the rocky
mood is made sleeker because of the electronic seizures. ‘Submission’
isn’t as exciting as the others but that doesn’t really matter because
it’s full of ideas, including more vocal drama than usual, which gives
it as much atmosphere as ‘Melt’ so you have an extended sense of
their sound, no bad thing on an EP.

‘Switch Off The World’ is fantastic, with plainer punky features,
complete with breezy guitar and lilting vocals, running in circles while
complaining about something technological, but cleverly advising
“tune in to me.”

A great sparky record, and there’ll be more tomorrow.

www.myspace.com/resistmusicuk

RESIST
VIOLATED
Psychoelectron

This was always going to be the least interesting of their records for
me, but when you read between the lines you see how their rock
background hasn’t been that predictable at all, which is why they now
have power and a wide-ranging set of musical possibilities. ‘Wake Me
When It’s Over’ starts like a right old bubbly electronic caper, the
vocals shut in a cupboard, the electro-rock all tense and invigorating.
‘Can’t Love You Any More’ is flickering rawk, which was always
going to be one of their most obvious influences, but they still churn
the sound in interesting ways. In ‘Violated’ those tendencies are also
visible, although a heavy bass carpet is thrown over it, then they do a
gentle wispy ‘War’ on piano which is very attractive.
‘Break’ is all rocky hurly burly, stocky drums whisking the murk and ‘Destiny’ revolves on a slow rock spit. ‘Nobody’s Angel’ comes over like a muted metal ballad, with barren lyrics to match. ‘Swallow’ is moodier and more interested – ‘I swallow your heart, though I choke on it every time.’ ‘Rock Bottom’ is a schizoid rock slow motion beast that seemed to be having a reggae nightmare. ‘0898 Girl’ is fun, as it squirms and wiggles about. The lyrics are crap, but you probably suspected that.

The first of the covers then appears, and the first is certainly a surprise, Bowie’s ‘I’m Afraid Of Americans’ which mooches and squelches cutely. Next the sorrowful winebarisms of ‘Wild Horses’, which I actually never knew was a Jagger/Richards thing. I thought The Sundays wrote it!!! It’s a lovely song, and kept fairly emotional here instead of any overblown melodrama. ‘Stand Up, Stand Out’ is not a Specimen cover, it’s their own shotty glory. ‘Destiny Relapse’ is slow, delicate and weirdly dignified for all the spaciousness, before they finish with another cover, ‘Sacrifice’ by a Dutch woman named Anouk, which starts like we’re off into early Kate Bush territory, but swiftly it’s maudlin rock speculations, and you can easily imagine Bryan Adams crashing through the door to lend a solo. Luckily this doesn’t happen.

Interesting, with lots of enjoyable elements, this is definitely one for the more rockily inclined.

www.myspace.com/resistmusicuk

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SMOLDERING ASHES
SONGS IN THE KEY OF MOUNTAIN BIRDS BLUE
Trakwerx

Ha! Today my mind works and so I can reveal clearly that Trakwerx are a worthy left-field lo-fi contemporary of Projekt! Or have I done that before? (I am such a repetitive oaf at times.) Projekt pick up on the eclectic strains of modern music but bring them to the world in precise, almost polished way. Trakwerx also have a fine array of multi-talented individuals and bands but it’s a more carefree artistic blend that wanders happily through cross-media-pollination/pollution, and this band sums it all up perfectly. When I reviewed the ‘Nervous Constellations’ album I found it a touch raggedy indie to my ears and mind, almost like a professorial take on the Go-Betweens. On this Constellations’ album I found it a touch raggedy indie to my ears and this band sums it all up perfectly. When I reviewed the ‘Nervous Constellations’ album I found it a touch raggedy indie to my ears and this band sums it all up perfectly.

‘Home Safari Home’ has a conspiratorial musical touch to the vocals, like we’re being led into a staged story, but it also has a creepy mood, like a picturesque Velvets, if you will and a very trim but stylish opener. ‘Afternoon Cartoon’ is underplayed indie swooning with some delightfully unusual sounds intruding and stirring the sleepy, catchy pot. ‘Birds, No Cage’ manages to pour forth in a fidgety indie slouch but has some grandly arranged musical arrows lodged in its spine. If they wanted to go deeper and moodier they clearly could, but they like keeping things pretty fluid.

And slightly mental. ‘Nick Charles Crosses The Alps’ tells an actual story with disturbing backing vocals and fitting sound effects. ‘Eye of the Phobia’ is more Lancaster than Bacharach but it’s definitely lopsided pop for all its rickety drumming and confidently slapdash vocals. I’m not sure what’s happening in the slowly aching ‘Give Yourself A Push’ but this is their densest and most adventurous music, which also has a poisoned energy that slowly comes after you. Impressive and imaginative.

‘9,000 Year Old Man’ shifts prettily into another area with the vocals like a tiny choir singing of some strange chap as the rhythm taps discreetly away. ‘Shake An Etch-a-Sketch’ gives away their ages, because these are people who have seen The Partridge Family and questioned whether that was an enviable lifestyle. Here they have some buzzy pop-punk of a historical American variety, like an off-centre early Blondie with some gusty guitar. Fans of Groucho Marx will sing along idiotically to ‘Lydia the Tattooed Lady’, as indeed I did, although the circus atmosphere is a bit too casual, the vocals too relaxed. ‘Vera’ wafts and spins like The Kinks caught in a thermal updraught, the drums flying apart with the effort. ‘Le Locataire Diabolique’ has a solemn dignity but a gentle beauty too, as slender and twitchy as it is wheezily wiry, then loping into some chunky strummalong at which point it becomes conventional again, like a Suzanne Vega upgrade.

We end as we came in when ‘Move the Clouds’ drifts into view, capable and glowing vocals at the prow, with an other-worldly quality as it organically bulges out of your speakers, and a sign of their oddness. This album has some broad sweeps, some intricate detail (lyrically rather than musically), and a tantalising air in that you don’t know what to expect next. That makes it indie music of the very best kind. Quite where it all fits I have no idea, but that’s the charm of the outsider. They can do anything, go anywhere.

www.myspace.com/smoldering_ashes
www.trakwerx.com/label.htm
http://trakwerx.blogspot.com

TROUBLE FAIT’
COMET CAMDEN
Rumors It Way

It’s odd how few records have an attitude these days, unless you count the largely pretend dance-anger of Industrial bands. Nobody seems too inclined to illuminate or capture the real world around them so we cannot expect any great energy to the landscapes conjured, but with Trouble Fait’ everything is steeped in tension, no matter how melodic it might also be. I think reality plays a key role and it’s clear time in London had a big effect, as has Punk, because Punks of the UK82 variety are even seen in pictures, as is a platform sign from Tufnell Park tube. The key members are Jícé Letter and Babeth H, but there are many guests, some of which I’ll mention.

‘A Bridge To Nowhere’ swoops and dives into an agile crawl, the music atmospheric, but with a soft, inert rhythm and lightly chiming guitar beneath poetic, addled vocals. ‘Northland’ is equally crafty, the shifting synth being punished by the guitar, which also then leans away for embellishment, while the vocals are all angsty. ‘Nightly Gleams’ is softer, sweeter, bass insinuating, vocals elegantly dramatic. ‘The Walls Have Ears’ is plumper, the sound sharing a direction, making it a harmonious experience, with the vocals almost pushed to one side by the serenely snoring synth and suspicious guitar.
'She Sleeps In A Pain' is prickly, and features weird vocal twinges in its bleak mood, where Federico Iovino (Popoï Sdioh) handles drums. It’s also interesting the way in the booklet some drainpipes against a wall are featured, the way you might normally expect to find a gargoyle on a church had the band been Goths. With ‘Comet Camden’ the guitar patrols coldly, as the vocals get well weird: ‘1907, First hero of Camden, Walter Sickert, will paint the Murder….’ Memories and myths mix in a delightfully tangled jangling song, a bit like a modern take on Gang Of 4, with Sailor from Brotherhood Of Pagans on drums.

‘A Voice Speaks From Nowhere’ has a different view, almost sentimental and open, but someone else has contributed picturesque homely lyrics and so the sound is like a weirder mixture, almost 10cc-ish at times! They tumble into action from the off in ‘Thunderstorm’, Eddy and Fred of Disgrace tipped into the spinning gruel, rattling while we hum. ‘Arrogant Culture’ seems quite humble, in a winning indie display where attitude is replaced by quiet contemplation, then ‘Boys Of The Rain’ sidles away, swaying happily amid skewed art lifestyle lyrics, a cool rhythmic slant and crisply pushy guitar, with the extra music which appears shortly afterwards is ghostly, queasy ambient.

It is Punk, Jim, but not quite as we know it. It is actually many things, shoehorned into affable pointy boots.

www.troublefait.com

MARK STEINER
BROKEN
Stagger

Mark Steiner, if the cover is anything go by, is the sort of bloke even Jim Rockford would be wary of. He looks like he’s either survived a quasi-Qautermass apocalypse, or spent 90% of his adult life behind bars on alcohol-related charges. That may even be how he survives the apocalypse, teaching a respectful audience of cockroaches to form an orchestra, thereby proving that in the future people make their own entertainment. I guess what I’m saying is that in his haunted features and jaded posture we see the characteristics of the fugitive in society, and if you check his various websites you’ll see that not only does he inhabit many countries with active musical buddies across continents, he also recorded this album worldwide, with sixteen participants, himself included. And so, in a fragrant cesspit Mark likes to call a musical pub. “Broken” represents the restful nature of humanity when its woes and passions intermingle, utilising what he openly refers to as swamp rock or lounge noir, so if you tingle with excitement when putting on a Tunnel Of Love album, or digging out some Incas Babies rarity, or just slaming around with Cave, Howard or Harvey then Mark Steiner is going to be your kind of guy and guide.

‘Torn’ is instantly memorable for mangey guitar, equally twangey bass and mouldering piano, like all sounds are weary but have a shabby elegance. I’m not sure who provides the beautiful, rising vocals, but I know it isn’t Mark, so maybe it’s Sofy Perez. The kind of song you assume you have known for ages this makes for a subtle but spellbinding opener. ‘Broken Man’ uncrumples softly, and suggests things weren’t always so morbid, albeit inevitably doomed, strings haunting, or prickling sweetly, and a chorus that sighs. ‘Sea Of Disappointment’ suggests Mark won’t be going speed dating any time soon as he erects a wall of warnings over phlegmatic drums and glistening keys.

‘Beautiful Thief’ find Mark joined by an irate femme fatale which I presume is Sofy again, sounding like a sexy version of Patti Smith, the two bleeding down into the sumptuous piano as gloom envelops us. ‘Catatonia’ is pretty steady, as you’d expect, Mark sharing a dream about a spooky staircase to who knows where, strings diverting and capricious, the song flowering resentfully. ‘Intermission’ has a recurring motif as you get another round in. We then find ‘This World’ lightly feverish, drenching us with vibrant guitar, and tinged with a different type of regret. All instruments and hopes are crushed in ‘Man In The Bar’, optimism ground beneath a sneering heel, as the guitar gets gout, the piano is wincing. It’s wonderfully weird, but bleak as Hell, although the final, ‘oh shit, here he comes’ provides a hint of a happy ending.

Flickering, swollen guitar slumps behind the vocals Susana Melendez as she sings her own lyrics in the occasionally sprightly, looming ‘Divine Whore’ Nothing goes right in the lumpily crazed and creeping ‘Peculiar Girl’ as he cuts his finger shooting himself in the back, having been stung in the dark while collecting lilies, despite already having been bitten by a shark while crossing the river. Ah, the things we do for love! Full of subdued loathing ‘Cain’s Song’ is wonderfully lit, and the gravelly sheen just slides off into the distance.

It’s life’s grot all laid out in a manner which never tries to suffocate you in grimness. There is style and atmosphere here, and if it was a genuine building, and the characters weren’t stupefied we could recognise some and feel comfortable there, as you will at home listening to this magnificent record. Just mind the vomit on your way out.

www.myspace.com/staggerhome
http://stagger-records.com/home - great records live here
You’ll excuse me, I’m sure, if I show the books I have available on my website:

www.mickmercer.com
CATS OF ANARCHY

1984
You couldn’t get further from the gripping mire of Mark Steiner, reviewed yesterday, than this music. Restful Italian sounds that merge all manner of Indie, Baroque, Goth and Classical elements.

Incidentally, the sleeve points out that members of Ashram, Mediavolo, Hexperos and Argine are involved, which may well prove a decent pointer for you.

‘La Quinta Ricerca’ drifts in stylishly over the soft guitar then the vocals of Caterina Pontrandolfo stir things up hotly, before luxurious strings calm us again. It’s heart-warming and heart-tingling. ‘Venti Di Sale’ also proves that even when essentially quiet there is drama to be enjoyed, the sweet piano intro overcome by sweeping strings and the faltering vocal angst of Floriana Cangiano. Deliciously feathery vocals flit between the delightfully spry guitar of ‘Flower Bud’ while ‘Flying’ takes on a more sinewy, darkening mood but still emerges as an elliptical nursery rhyme.

‘Like An Ancient Black And White Movie’ isn’t quite, but it is a mysterious little thing, with magical vocal flickering, then ‘La Città Dagli Occhi Neri’ is fairly conventional indie swooning in an illustrious setting, Caterina again illuminating all the graceful shadows.

‘Nostalgica Avanguardia’ is picturesque and leisurely, ‘The Quality Of Silence’ is a short and suitably sober interlude, with ‘Barrio Gotico’ full of passion and longing (not that I speak Italian, it could all be about sandwiches, but beautifully so!) and ‘Dal Castello Di Avella’ reminds me of a cross between backing music to Trumpton and ‘All Of Me’, which probably is just me. ‘La Gente Che Resta’ then takes off a soars like folky pop, which is a surprise and a total charmer, followed by instrumental closer ‘Piscina Mirabilis’ dripping precision with its succulent guitar.

A totally refreshing album, which cleanses the room.

www.cordeoblique.com
www.myspace.com/cordeobliqueunofficial

As previously stated I won’t be giving lengthy reviews of these retro Dvar re-releases, this particular compilation featuring tracks from the “Taai Liira/Piirrah”, “Roah” and “Rakhilim” albums, but as it’s Dvar you need to know something. So know for starters that the grandly berserk ‘Haya Haya’ makes for an auspicious opener. Horns blaring, bass strolling cockily, vocals up in the branches somewhere howling, and the previously unreleased ‘Matekhiir’ is like a sci-fi waltz, utterly delightful in its mischief. Mischief is their middle name, although that would require Dvar to have a secret surname as well, but you can make that up for yourself.

‘Rakhilim’ is so charming you can imagine chilled operatic types mesmerised by it, ‘Hissen Raii v.2’ id a gripping but pretty seizure of mood, ‘Yar Yar’ a positively purring feast of eastern mystic fun. ‘Ihirrah’ is more relaxed dancey wiggles, ‘Ya Raii Ta Hirrih’ is magically stirring and worth getting the album for by itself, and the wistful ‘Leroh’ is a gloomy orchestral treat.

‘Hora’ has a magisterial pomp to it. The funny thing is that any band I have heard tried to be all underworldly or Tolkienesque with affected vocals always make my feel nothing but pity for them, but this weird gnomish language Dvar have invented just works. It suits them! It feels natural and we are visitors to their warped world, able to sit back, entranced. The feline of the species emerges in ‘Nadrah’, like Kate Bush being dirty. ‘Iih Rah v.2’ does some feverish whirling, ‘Ai-
‘Rakhilim’ but I ask again, do they play live? Wouldn’t that reduce the mystery they clearly like? I’m assuming this winebar-style track is a trick?

A fabulous compilation, again. Another tomorrow, with any luck

www.myspace.com/dvarofficial

DVAR
Highlights Of Lightwave 2
Art Music

Although you might not think so you can tell by some of the song titles that Dvar became a tiny bit more orthodox in recent years, with their sound becoming increasing club friendly, and it would be a club without great big cartoon nails sticking ut of the end of it. Thje vocals became more cheerful and oafish instead of scurrilous, the overall tone one of comic mayhem rather than one of subtle complexity. This compilation plucks songs from their “Hor Hor”, “Oramah Maalhur” and “Jraah Mraah” albums, whereby if you imagine The Magic Roundabout meeting The Shamen you’d clearly be in need of serious help.

‘Hor Hor’ still squiggles and thrashes around with imbecilic glee, as catchy as anything you’d find anywhere, and the previously unavailable ‘Bedril Wedril’ is a twee strum n bass transplant with a raging vocal outburst, like a troll with tourettes. ‘Ya-go’ is dainty twerpiness, ‘Miaahu Piaahu’ dafier and emptier, then the doltish ‘Hishmallin’ sways swiftly, silly but devilishly pretty. ‘Y a-goh’ is dainty twerpiness, ‘Miaahu Piaahu’ dafter and emptier, then the doltish ‘Hishmallin’ sways swiftly, silly but devilishly pretty. ‘Horri’ jabbers and jitters idiotically, in ‘Jraah Mraah’ the podgy bass is offset by some weirdly frilly keyboards, and the deeper ‘Yahshar’ is like the ugliest Elizabethan shanty you have ever heard, which is a good thing.

‘Yoff!’ is a space hoedown, which isn’t necessarily required but the daffy perish stealth of ‘Eraam’, like the old Hamlet cigar advert music, is fine, especially as the vocals are provided by wild monkeys. ‘Oryah’ moves into cute ambient pop territory, where it is sensibly surrounded by wary guards, ‘Mi Haim’ is like a shorter version, then the lightly moody ‘Ah Menahaim’ stretches out languidly, proudly and is a striking, serious caress, which ids where you see the other sort of band they could be (and are, under another guise, as all should admire).

‘Kroom Kroom’ is back with the loopy noises and you can imagine it as backing music for the adventures of plasticene characters. An unreleased, until now, ‘Yagga Yarra’ pulls on some Adidas and wobbles about, while ‘Ko Ki Ki’ allows a smidgeon of vocal oafishness to fraternise with both the school music and dance rhythm, like a hideous but sweet hybrid.

The hauntingly laboured ‘Hannamael’ is more French than Russian, idyllic in its poise, where once again no real madness lurks. ‘Hiyari Naai’ is equally strident and musically a submerged indie frolic, moving well into the light, before they eject us via a revolving door with ‘Oramah Maalhur’, again highly motivated and filmic.

So there you go then, a band with two sides, but about fifty really. What really goes on in their minds God only knows, but we should be thankful they exist.

www.myspace.com/dvarofficial

THE DANCING DID BOOK

It goes without saying there’d be a book on THE DANCING DID in my collection, and this is a book any Did fan will treasure. They may even take to carrying it around, sewn into their clothes like an amulet. I shall not stop them and I wouldn’t advise anyone else to do so.

While I still aim to one day do a vast explorative tome on the band that is some way off and a photo book makes perfect sense for these images resonate with character and also take us back in time, to a land of lost magic. It’s a rum old mixture too, as all should admire.

I go in chronological order, and unlike the other photo books I maintain the simplest of narratives throughout the book, with covers included as signposts of their brief but tantalising existence, and even a reprint of the fabulous picture story The Gay Highwayman that once bedecked my fanzine Panache (once seen, never remembered).

So it’s a book-book, but equally it fast becomes the most soothing visual balm for those with a discerning palate. We start in earnest with an early Moonlight gig in 1981, with Dick Crazies on bass, then move to an interview session in Evesham that year by which time Stuart Dyke (R.I.P.) has joined, plus a few later Moonlight photos with
Stuart playing. There are even photos of me and Joan, and our mate Tony, strolling around Evesham that year, because this book is as much for me as it is for anyone else. Please try to control yourself when I admit that at one point I even remove my shirt. Those were clearly depraved times. There’s also The Shend of The Cravats (the Gay Highwayman mentioned earlier, in heroic tones) joining Tim for a session, and a day trip to Belas Knap by which time Wally is now on bass, and Bod has firmly entered the equation. You can see the remarkable Did gig at the Phoenix Hotel in Malvern, with Finish The Story supporting.

If that isn’t enough, and why would it be, we move on to the final phase with Roger on bass. This includes the Windsor Arts Centre gig in 1981, a miserable experience, a sportier Venue show in 1982 and finally (musically) a scandalous Tribe gig in 1983. There is the evidence of Joan’s plaster cast after she broke her wrist dancing to them, and featuring some rather rare Mercer artwork, as well as a brilliant session she did at Tim’s house, showing off his unique decorative style, plus a few other shots of him, looking a bit punkier, pissing about near the Bull & Gate, and some dolls.

Now I ask you, where else will you get a collection of such quality? It’s not just a book worth getting because of them, but because it’s like a novel told in visual form. A very weird book indeed and, therefore, a fitting tribute. People, style, imagination and mystery.

256 pages, 293 photos. The best £12.99 you will ever invest.

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ROB BYRD
MY GHOSTS AND YOURS
Del Chapel

There’s a guy, with a guitar, the other imagery on the attractive gatefold sleeve being essentially churchy, and attractively gloomy. It’s an ambient record, and so strikes terror in my heart. What do you say about records like this?

‘The Lights Before Us’ certainly shimmers like the Northern Lights maybe composed of stars, a muted spectrum of melting shadows, and the louder you play it the more affecting it becomes, as though some invisible sonic force is pushing the synth-based music at you. ‘Lyceum’ doesn’t sound massively different to me, although there was a moment when it seemed he’d slowed down ‘Don’t Cry For Me Argentina’ to a coma basis. Obviously he hasn’t, but the guitar becoming involved, rolling through and backing away, gives it’s a firmer melodic direction.

‘Song Of The Ocean Wraith’ doesn’t give me any special nautical feelings, more that of general huge open spaces, the wash of its soundscape kept ringing by steady guitar current, a bit like being out in the fields, with the hum of power lines overhead, only prettier.

‘Black Coat Reflection’ has a more solidly downcast air to it, although the differences are wafer thin, it just grows out of the air, the echoes of the guitar former, with the synth sparser.

‘Plasma Wing’ brightens sleepily, warmer swells of synth overlapping and slowly ascending, possibly providing the main basis for getting a record like this as it provides a sustained gradually shifting backdrop and gently infiltrates your mind, particularly pleasant when you’re working at a computer. You follow in the oscillating vapour trail of ‘At Otis Grove, Fallen’ noticing it has a fuller allure, the waves of sound emanating powerful from the slowly revolving lump of musical clay. There is something mildly spooky about this piece too, where you can imagine yourself somewhere with mists swirling, but it isn’t depressing or off-putting. ‘Memorial Figures’ returns to a more formal setting, initially fairly static, then assuming a bolder shape through it’s undulating pattern, although it has to be said it doesn’t make for an emphatic end, although it does try by simply stopping neatly. I’d have thought for a collection of this music something needs to trail away gradually but he’s gone for something relatively decisive, although in this climate it remains blissful.

An unusual record for me, and one I’ll play from time to time because it allows me to call on something different from the arsenal.

www.robbyrd.com

IKON
LOVE, HATE AND SORROW
Apollyon

In keeping with recent EPs Ikon’s new album has a lighter, spryer touch than the spiky zeal of the previous ‘Destroying The World To Save It’ album, and yet it’s still something of a gloomfest. In fact it’s easily their best album, because it’s all been simplified somehow so the tension appears smoothed out but without the energy ever draining away.

‘A Line On A Dark Day’ is positively joyous the way it steps out of its dark front door and welcomes the bright new world, like a catchily pulsating slab of Post-Punk pop, with the chorus ambiivalent and picturesque on what could be about war commemoration but how would I know? It might be one person gone.

‘And a million tears are shed
But it won’t bring back the dead,
Hold a picture of a frame

www.robbyrd.com
Rewind and share the blame,
But it’s all too hard to move
For their love can never prove,
Light a candle among friends,
Or alone it never ends.’

Discuss.

The dizzying ‘Before The Dawn’ is more agile and whirling, glittering guitar cutting through the air, their traditionally steadfast vocals striding atop the resolute rhythmical sediment and linear movement, and I like the bass zigzagging down through the finish. ‘Torn Apart’ goes through the agony of separation, although details aren’t clear, the pattering feel and melancholy delivery thoughtful and moving. ‘Memoirs Of A Butterfly’ hints at a very short book and yet this is a limber piece of plaintive yearning, and then we hit serious loss during the strangely chipper drive of ‘Winter Mourning’ which is a litany of heartfelt despair, but despite it all the touch is stirring, the guitar sharp.

I don’t often hear the influences in Ikon’s work that they admit to (unless the flatter rhythmical snap channels New Order occasionally) but in ‘Beautiful Sadness’ the laconic vocal style bring Bowie to mind, albeit briefly as the domineering chorus is nothing like him. ‘Amongst The Runes’ returns to more speculative matters, triumphantly spry for all the doomy protestations. The title track then uncoils spectacularly with its feverish bass and jutting drums, a chorus to die for, and a deceptive vocal flow, like anger undercover, opp the greatest song The Mission never wrote. Quite brilliant. Using that as a springboard ‘Dead Man Tomorrow’ scuttles off into the distance, a brittle, jangling Goth charger, like early Bauhaus learning ballet.

Okay so ‘All Depths Of Despair’ does start off a bit like Joy Division hell-bent on revenge, but then it crouches, sets its vision and that flower becomes a shower of divergent energy, guitar constantly champing at the bit, rhythm sleek and hard, vocals resigned and dazed. ‘Point Of No Return’ seems relatively inert initially but soon reveals itself to be one of the more complex tunes, hammering its point home while the guitar performs aeronautics, with vocals burrowing, then streaming. ‘Driftwood’ then completes a classic album dreamily, sentimentality waved like an enormous tear-sodden flag, which probably isn’t that easy, but that Ikon for you, making the difficult easy, in an album which you can sing along to while its dark contents remain undiminished.

If you can only get the normal album well that’s going to be great enough, but there is a double CD package available with some acoustic versions on it, as well as a few others. There’s a winsome, downturned ‘Hindsight’ (off ‘League Of Nations’), a penitent ‘Amongst The Runes’, and a plainly restless ‘Driftwood.’ There’s a striking and straightforward ‘Broken Windows’, the familiar ache of ‘Calm Before The Storm’, ‘Memoirs Of A Butterfly’ seeming a touch more bitter, while ‘Torn Apart’ is more woefullydecked in this form. I don’t know why but ‘Beautiful Sadness’ seems to go on a little too long, a prim ‘Stalag 13’ is oddly jarring but then we encounter ‘Love, Hate And Soror’ again which makes even more impact second time around, and a perfect ending.

You’d need to be devoid of ears to not want this, and even then I’m not sure that’s a good enough reason.

www.ikondomain.com

LEGION
HEREAFTER
Promo

A little bit of homegrown Goth for you, and in many ways textbook drum-machine late 80’s, even based in Leeds! What more do the traditionalists want? Well, they might ask whoever is sitting on singer Maisey’s chest to get off so he can project a bit more, which would also encourage him to sound less frail or nervous, and some might argue it sounds a bit ropey in places, but that’s just the sound. It’s clearly a basic recording compared to what they might like, and what they’ll require in future, I suspect, for this band has some decent ideas, and tuneful narratives.

Interestingly they begin with the instrumental ‘Spectre’ with some decidedly attractive guitar from Natya growing like a haughty flower out of deep, dark bass earth provided by Sinister, which may not be his real name. ‘Premonition’ is a hotchpotch, starting with some guitar which suggests they might be covering ‘Paint It Black’ but then they throw them selves into a standard Goth rumpus, churning away happily, with Maisey coming on like Steve Rawlings on a treadmill, and the sound gets a bit cavernous and fractured at times, but there’s words galore all keenly regimented, complete with a throwaway Sisters affectation, but the song has reached a natural and quite lovely death only for them to throw in a repeat at the end which was unnecessary. Less is more. Loss is more. Whatever. Still, they kick up a stink, and do it well, after which things get interesting.

We’ve had the handy signposts, but now they change the map and you can get lost in the roomy ‘Queen Of Hearts’ with more wild and wandering guitar which revels in a gorgeous gossamer character. Maisey does one of those big shouty moments, which is odd, as the song doesn’t then go up a gear, but it’s rumbustiously romantic and ends crisply. ‘Lust’ capers with wispy vocals, sturdy bass, the backing vocals and guitar drifting, as sage lyrics add flavour.

Now, some bands do atmosphere well, others don’t. Legion do it very well, as the rhythmically ambitious and initially bristling ‘Hereafter’ proves, and as they negotiate the narrow rope bridge of a song you sway with them, delighted by the introduction of keyboards. Maisey’s sounding happier with the rhythm, the lyrics merit repetition, and the needlepoint guitar and hungry bass both get their moments to shine, creating a fabulous end to an EP you’ll probably be able to flog for a fortune in the future.

www.legion-music.co.uk

BLACK AURA
THE WINTER CARNIVAL
Own Label

Although I’m sure Black Aura have a reputation for being a tad bleak, a touch difficult, here we have some very restful and attractive,
thoughtfully twisted music which is a cross between indie ruminations and ambient decoration. You can also get a limited edition ‘box’ set which involves this and a further CD of ‘experimental’ music wrapped in ‘bloody gauze’ (why that should seem enticing is beyond me) and comes accompanied by a teabag containing wild raspberry herbal tea, which I found fitted in the bin a real treat. (The music I kept.)

‘Indigo Water’ has been around the block a few times, but never sounded better, vocals moping sharply over delightful piano and spewing weird lyrics. ‘A Crystal Curse’ whirs and hisses, something of an artily tumbling post-punk lament. ‘Butterflies In The Encore’ is just a windswept...thing, then a tickling ‘In Every Direction At Once’ burrows into a great heap of sorrow over a soothing but disquieting track, muted and musing.

‘Residue Of Passing Years’ is lovely despite some gruesome lyrical imagery, with an intriguing jangling guitar, which eventually just stops, making for a strange ending. ‘Who’ll Play Christ When The Nazis Come?’, is pretty weird, seemingly stark and simple, but as it goes it smells, bitterness seeping pus-like. ‘Pleasure’ is frustrating, bowling in on some dark, shuffling rhythm only to bleed swiftly out again. ‘Love Interlude’ is another little thingy thing, before we ease into the post-Badalamenti swell and smell of ‘MRSA’ which has Justin Foulkes as getaway driver. ‘Ephemera’ is pretty strange too, but pretty, as it goes from a simple indie strum straight into a doomy loopy close, where the supposed lyrics must have died, and we finish with the demure and enigmatic ‘Winter Moth’ with added vocals by Elizabeth Ware.

It’s an album which may actually consolidate feelings people have of Black Aura as a constipated Projekt style band, because it has that same intellectual veneer, but if you break the surface you find more intellectual torment within, and it’s of a very high quality. There’s also that extra CD of experimental music to consider. Now, you tell me you have some experimental music for me to hear and I’m off and running before you realise what’s going on, hopefully, so I approached this with trepidation.

‘Why?’ goes for the doomy but lovely piano feel again, with some vocals smears, whereupon ‘Carnival’ cuts in, or I assume it does, because it’s all on a one-track CD-R, so you put it on and let it go. There’s either a spacey end to that or to the partial stuttering of ‘The Jackat!’ and its lo-fi drama, like a covert Bauhaus tribute. ‘She Shifted Slightly & Looked Over Expectantly’ is a noodling doodle, and ‘Eclamp Nfeedom’ is apparently abridged but that and ‘Insomnia (epilogue)’ could be in bits as I suddenly don’t know where I am between pools of ambient contemplation. So I just let it drift on, and when it’s finished I have been through a demo of ‘Like So Many Others’, then ‘Poison’, ‘A Crystal Curse Pt 1’, ‘Torn Asunder’, ‘2nd For Her’ and ‘Carnival 2.’ I didn’t feel like playing it again, I must admit.

The album I recommend but these extras are for people with more esoteric tastes than I. I like songs: always have, always bleedin’ will.

www.myspace.com/blackaura
www.last.fm/Black+Aura
www.twitter.com/aruakcalb
www.wintercarnival.webs.com (“Welcome to the official Black Aura Website. Please keep your expectations low.”)
www.facebook.com/pages/Black-Aura/117361634241

PHILIP BUTLER & NATASHA TRANTER
STORIES FOR EMILY
Sawmill/Steelmill

I don’t know if any of you have ever been prompted by one of my reviews to get a record on chance but if not then tonight is the night, or today’s the day, depending on when you see this. (Hopefully tomorrow will be too late.) You may recall I wittered on grandly about Philip Butler’s ‘Trapped At Sea’ album, which rightly nestled near the top of my Albums Of The Year of 2009. Well, here he is again, with his partner Natasha Tranter, likely to do so the same again this year. It is another fine record, but what makes this so special is the care and attention taken in creating a limited edition of just 30 copies which
comes as a hardbound CD-sized book, bound in cloth made from the
dress Natasha is pictured wearing. Inside the book there are
beautifully illustrated lyrics, and even individual photos that have
been stuck in. An extraordinary thing indeed and the url provided at
the bottom shows they have some left, and they’re just seven quid!!!!
If I were you I’d but your copy before even bothering to read the rest
of the review because you shouldn’t want to miss out.

So, the music. Once again it’s modern folk, and more in line with
traditional feelings that you might expect, but having come from an
indie background Butler isn’t subverting the form wildly, he’s
dragging it sideways into places it doesn’t necessarily want to go, but
happy also to be retained in place by the natural elasticity the scene’s
traditions asserts. Homely stories co-exist with sighing, wistful
sounds, just as the harsher atmospheres or odder strains can
accommodate his weirder ideas.

‘Farewell’ is a very easy-going, subtly invigorating piece, couched in
sentimental splendour, lovey-dovey ideals by the seaside. I’m not sure
what’s happening in the calmly balmy ‘Leaves & Twigs’ but going by
the images I suspect someone enchanted is taking a human to live
inside a tree. The age old story! Musically quite drowsy it floats on an
ethereal haze, and you’ll be easily captivated. ‘Emily, Where Have You Gone?’ is gloomier, as our protagonist enrages the listener being seemingly callous when describing the changes in the one-time object of his devotion who has aged terribly over the years, when he’s probably no oil painting himself after decades of gout. The tumbling chorus is jaunty in its own jaded way, and the cheerful finish abruptly suggests there could be a happy ending! (I particularly like the ‘pull yourself together sunshine’ instruction.) There then follows a Camberwick Green on speed instrumental in the giddy ‘A Gift From Dr. Forrest.’

‘Jack The Mommet’ is creepy and slow, telling the story of a scarecrow who snatches women to become his brides, the singer having lost his own love this way. (‘I’ve searched for her, and other maids who’ve lost their way, but all I’ve found are effigies, in gowns of hay.’) It’s beautifully spooky, even allowing for the fact Jack probably wouldn’t need to make effigies as he had the actual women, but we mustn’t let that get in the way of a good story. Also, I have never heard the word mommet before, so that’s good.

‘Goodwin Sands’ is about a flaming ghost ship said to reappear every fifty years (apparently the 1998 anniversary was crap due to mist – google if you don’t believe me) and a ghostly woman who leaves footprints in the sands. A lightly quivering song, you have the trembling vocals, the wheezy accordion and fluttering strings. That remains quite traditional, but it’s ‘The Coaching House’ which is more haunting, fittingly enough, as he recounts the nocturnal supernatural inhabitants. It switches wonderfully from a diminutive, tinny start to a swell of solemn vocals, establishing a queasy mood. Nothing explains why he’s sitting on the floor though, unless these are the notorious chair-eating ghosts of old Malvern? It’s an affecting little song, sweetly handled.

‘No White Rabbit’ finds him lapsing into his sentimental woes, admitting to having nightmares of his love being easily charmed by another. Apparently he struggles with this, trying to wake and phone her, which is simply poor planning, because how welcome would that be? (“I’ve been having nightmares!” “Do you have any idea what time it is? Go back to sleep, you big tart!”) The tune takes a frisky upturn as well, mocking his paranoia.

I’m annoyed I don’t recognise the dimpled notes at the start of ‘A Sorry Tragic Tale’ which is a magnificently dramatic, sweeping tale of two people killed in Snowdonia, the vocals used brilliantly, the atmosphere twisting and escalating, then muting respectfully. The only thing which ruins this is resorting to some la-la-la’s at the close, when that’s the place for a killer verse. ‘To Dream Of Death’ suffers the same fate, its miserable chiming tone reflecting the fate of Mary, the suspected witch. (I wonder if witchfinder-general folk were ever tried for murder when ‘innocent’ people drowned?) This is no place for any la-la-laing either, but it does end with a dark flourish.

A fantastic record overall, and for those who get the limited edition a real work of art. Creativity, in an era of technological blandness. Cause for celebration.

www.philipbutler.co.uk
VARIOUS ARTISTS
UNDER THE WEIGHT OF LIGHT
Projekt 2010

I was put off humour today by the jokey approach Rory McGrath took in his radio documentary when supposedly investigating the Castle Of Otranto, with all the offhand dramatic sensitivity of a children’s show presenter. Luckily I have the press release for this new sampler to hand, with its declaration that, “Curtis Eller proudly displays why he is billed as New York City’s angriest yodelling banjo player.”

It’s a modern mixture we have here, reflecting the label’s resurgence of arty inclinations. Understandably it all kicks off with Black Tape For A Blue Girl lurching through a grubby ‘Sailor Boy’, Weep do a remix of the wonderfully groaning churning ‘Ever Shy’ with its intermingled malign melodic currents which really stumped me, given that’s Doc Hammer who I thought would be murderously intense, but its subtlety is lovely. Makaras Pen apparently grew out of Tearwave and their ‘Currents’ sounds a bit like, well, Tearwave, oat the bluebell bedecked border crossing between Post-Punk and Indie.

Just as I was contemplating the cover and thinking of Sam as Warhol, and the label as The Factory, so Unto Ashes have a trim exclusive track in the delightfully weary and ghostly ‘She Binds Away the Night’ which is a bit like an embalmed Velvets. If you tilt your head a little.

Spiritual Front get archly ironic over a strident bed of indie lettuce called ‘Jesus Died in Las Vegas’, where the winsome piano and brooding vocals sound a lot better than the corny climax of the swiftly annoying chorus. Listening to Rome’s ‘We Who Fell in Love with the Sea’ is like trying to eavesdrop a fascinating conversation as he seems to have some great lyrics on, despite dribbling on about a sculptor being bound to his clay – two songs on one album mentioning binding, just as two mention arrogance! (Maybe I do listen to words too closely?) - but the dark thoughts elude me, yet the mixture of the winsome neo-classical strings and cinematic stasis is further enhanced by the curiously hypnotic backing. The Twilight Garden do the burning angst thing well in a crisply devious ‘Dead Adults’ and it’s brilliant to suddenly be thrown up against the scruffy, catchy charms of Katzenjammer Kabarett’s punky-pop ‘Romance’ which has a hissy fracture here, a keen tumult there. Gorgeous.

Black Tape For A Blue Girl close proceedings with a 2010 remix of ‘Halo Star’ which is a nice surprise as it sounds so weird in a different style it’s like Sam’s succeeded in covering his own material. How strange is that?

This is the most open and wide-ranging sampler Projekt have done yet, which is a sign of how the label refuses to atrophy. Good work that man!


TWENTY SIX TEARS
LET’S SPLIT UP, IT’S SAFER
Own Label

I’ve never heard Reagan Cain before, having little awareness of modern punky things at all, but we have Reagan Kirkbridge here teaming up with former Megaherz man Daniel Caron and Floch who has a mass of experience behind him, having been in Brain damage And Death, Goyasnada and K-Oz Office. In fact they kindly sent a few odd back catalogue items along with this album and I will try and review those and have them up over the weekend.

What we have is a post-punk melange which drifts towards Goth at times, but also has a more tenacious alternative to Industrial overspill, and there’s some direct punk toughness too. Think of maybe a blunt-nosed Black Ice or shadowy Scarlet’s Remains and you getting close to their approach. It’s in that area, stripped down but just as imaginative.

‘Punkhead’ is a gloomily vibrant instrumental, then the doleful ‘Lovely Lovely’ rolls along spreading an icy trail with tactical guitar hovering above the tense beat and allowing the vocals to convey a depressing message, although I amused myself by imagining she was singing ‘lovely lovely cuckoo world’ not ‘lovely lovely cruel cruel world.’ I think my version is more optimistic. That’s good, and bleak, but in ‘Cyanide Baby’ the mean guitar and lean rhythm lends the disguised punk pop heart of the song a fittingly filthy attitude.
I Don’t Know What To Say keeps the punky vocal but there’s a seething synth and brash, thorny guitar, ‘Evil’ has more of a barren, twisted fizz and sneering vocals like a subterranean glow worm familiar with The Cramps. ‘The Drain’ has another desolate lyrical stew simmering as the song fidgets and spins, brooding impressively, calmly assured, but filled with loathsome imagery. Like New York punk trudging ‘Slap Your Face’ sounds like a Johnny Thunders transplant and ‘Real Cool Fucker’ is more of the same, downturned, deadpan and cool. The darkly skittish ‘Hollow Shrimp’ is much livelier in a stark state, and then their schizoid face changes again.

‘Shadows’ is like a warmer strain of coldwave, with bells on, literally and the guitar also rings out brightly, the rhythm and darker sounds really interesting. ‘In The Graveyard’ is fairly sedate and plain, while ‘I Want Your Money’ is weird, a strange merging of American punk and the UK82 scene, a bit like a sullen take on Action Pact with scampering percussive tendencies. Perky synth arrows through the air in the friskier ‘Generation Fright’ where the ideas are sleeker yet more ambitious, so they have depth aplenty.

‘Castle Rock’ is almost upbeat so that sounds weird, but gets intriguing towards the end, which leads naturally into the tapedeer, grim fun (!) of ‘Eating Razorblades.’ A live version of ‘Today’ is good and simple, with gritty but gleaming guitar, a live ‘Nightmare’ inflates with a more rounded shape thanks to a synth mattress. ‘In The Graveyard (Spooky Graveyard)’ is spindly and okay, then they leave us with the oddest track of the lot, the pockmarked ethereal torment of ‘Let’s Split Up It’s Safer.’

A curious record then, and one most of you would get plenty from as they have these different elements to their sound but it really does work as both a cohesive whole, sound wise and naturally as a band. You never think they’ve just cobbled something together, and while I’d have liked some more fractious explosions or some more ambitious, but filled with loathsome imagery. Like New York punk trudging ‘Slap Your Face’ sounds like a Johnny Thunders transplant and ‘Real Cool Fucker’ is more of the same, downturned, deadpan and cool. The darkly skittish ‘Hollow Shrimp’ is much livelier in a stark state, and then their schizoid face changes again.

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‘Iron In The Soul’ sees Ferrari bringing more vocal voodoo into play, having scared me previously with eerie eye movements, as the bass slides and bulges, the sound all softly glazed agony. ‘Reach Out’ is sedately dappled, very shimmery, and this is one song where you’d think they should shake things up a bit, as it could escalate easily, but the mood certainly impresses. ‘Trashed Treasure’ is impassioned and short, ‘Fire For You’ more involved, with Loveday looking like Michael Gambon playing the blues as he looms over the piano, Evi’s vocals seemingly trapped in an elaborately gilded cage. ‘Play Dead’ is sharper, coy subterranean vocals inside some sweeping, surging waves, ‘The Dark Half’ is bracing and snappy, the vocals really allowed to pour forth and that should really have ended the dvd as it has an emphatic zing, but we actually finish with the curtled floatiness of ‘Sin.’

On the covers CD we find ‘Remember (Walking In The Sand)’ first, an arid melodramatic Goth take on the Shangri-Las with Julianne Regan all tiny and feathery, Tallulah Rendall maintains a stealthy lustre throughout ‘Street Spirit’ (Radiohead) and Amandine Ferrari glows on both ‘Play Dead’ (Bjork) and ‘Venus In Furs’ (Velvets), corkscrewing respectfully on the former then a fine ghost during the fragrantly shabby latter, a song I have never really liked, but they manage to make it quite silky. We close with Evi Vine shuddering softly through a desolate ‘Two Thousand Light Years From Home’ (Stones), which has a nice twitchy feel.

Yep, this is an exquisite thing.

THE EDEN HOUSE
THE LOOKING GLASS

Well, this is all rather lovely, and makes for a genuinely intriguing add-on to the album, as you get a 9 song dvd recorded live in a rehearsal studio, then five cover songs on a CD. The dvd is shot in an intimate, decorated setting, although the band often look like waxworks blown by secret breezes, and with hats and smart jackets it all gets a bit Goth Fellas, but for violinist Bob Loveday’s string vest.

Loveday is interesting to watch, as he’s clearly up to God-knows-what throughout the recording, with all manner of subtle touches, and there’s leisurely drums and delicate guitars pushing ‘Gods Pride’ along, with Amandine Ferrari’s nicely sustained vocals, the supple bass also turning brusquely sinister. You should also appreciate the direct approach to filming, where you can see who’s doing what. ‘All My Love’ slithers into Portishead territory as Evi Vine gets with the itchy gloom, a supremely decrepit ache to the song’s bones, and if it wasn’t for the fact you can see what Loveday is doing I’d have thought that was elaborately synthy swells, which is why watching this is revealing. It isn’t a visual feast, by any stretch of the imagination., and you can just sit back and let the sounds fill the room, con fused as you might be with the info-graphic overlays of the whole. It’s all very well shot and considered.

http://26tears.weebly.com
www.myspace.com/twentysextears
repetition to make the song catchy by themselves, as the guitar rubs hungrily against them.

‘Holy Anger’ is equally taut and lean, like Killing Joke on a choke chain, but it has a softer side, like Alien Sex Fiend all caught up and revolving comedy-style in a hammock. Somewhere between them, then, which I think you’ll agree is a good sound, and the laconic ‘Maria Theresa’ even hawks up its lungs in a Bauhaus sprawl. ‘After The Fall’ is good bellicose punk fare, while ‘The Bat In The Belfry’ is a saucy pisstake of Goth, I suspect.

‘Death 2000’ is naturally intense but with space to shift rhythmically like a simple Industrial seizure. ‘Drop The Baby’ takes a more urgent projected style, the vocals and lunging guitar alternating for the spotlight, ‘Narcissistic Jesus In Sodom’ flailing contentedly as a scruffy post-punk axis slowly falls apart, with more delightful guitar flourishes. ‘God Bless The Blind’ mixes the punky rasping with the Bauhaus stiletto attack but the throbby ‘Dignity’ is less dramatic, and more powerful musically as it keeps everything close to its truculent chest, in a bullish post-punk whine.

Chrome flakes fall from the guitar as ‘Flogging The Word’ hares along some secretive gutter, the singer mumbling away, and it’s an exciting chase you find yourself on. ‘No Pain But So Long’ is more open still, the rhythm driving them with bass rumbling, guitar scribbling, vocals controlled, then ‘Twentieth Century’s End’ exits with some finesse, the song starting in even more contrition, as the album continues moving towards a calmer balance, but it still has some striking moments in its arrangement.

An excellent noisy encounter, with the melody always important. Good stuff.

www.myspace.com/kozoffice
www.jamendo.com/te/artist/k-oz_office - ‘Kajoeberock’ album available as free download.
‘Dark Riders’ is positively fantasy, loaded richly into a gun then allowed to ooze out, in a dark tale of a great war long ago, before daylight before daylight was invented. Musically it’s gorgeous, both relaxed and prickly, but the lack of lyrics, and repletion therein, doesn’t serve anybody well, especially given how good their English is. ‘At The Edge Of The World’ is equally good with luscious bass and guitar intertwined lovingly with some enchanting synth and delicate vocal.

Exquisite celestial female vocals introduce ‘Exodus’ which then grumpily goes off with some uncoiling guitar wrath and a balsy rhythmical demeanour, still dramatic, but closer to intense gawf rumbling. ‘Monument’ is weird, to say the least, leisurely describing a fateful meeting between a man and woman where the male ceremoniously cuts off his balls in front of her and flushes them, the romantic fools. The way the describe him sitting there with towels behind his legs you know this band are capable of greatness, particularly as it then spirals away on a cool synth uptick.

‘Morning Sun’ is a remix apparently, but going just on this it’s dreamy, the guitar spinning off into a warm horizon, the vocals mere wisps. ‘Agnosia’ flows steadily, with some wonderfully inventive shading creeping midway through all the sounds, and then as the synth hangs back but remains haunting the guitar riff that pushes ‘Sever’ along, with a steady beat somehow makes for a heady combination. It’s as plain as could be but sounds so right.

After that there’s a very short extra track, or one of the others just gone was in two bits. (I may have got confused by ‘track 0’ being a data track which still showed up as track 1 on my CD player.) Here they close then with closer to indie crooning, which actually wasn’t required at all, no matter how heartfelt.

That last blip aide this is an exceptional record.

www.myspace.com/aeonsable

CLAYTOWN TRouPE
PATIENCE EP DEMOS
Bristol Archive Records

This is interesting, being early pre-majors demos, and it’s is the ‘coming soon’ netherworld over at the brilliant Bristol Archive Records site, but I imagine it’s any day now. (I’ll have to leave my review of Temple’s ‘Seduction’ until they have the details up there as I know nothing at all about them, including the song titles of the CD I was sent.) It shows the band fermenting in both froth and attitude.

The first thing that strikes you about ‘Patience’ is the fact it’s almost a mixture of Southern Death Cult poise and Simple Minds prettiness. The vocals howl stylishly and jabber, the drums gnash, the guitar gleams, and there’s a catchy synth hook. ‘A Good Day To Die’ then features some Native American vocal intro acrobatics, and as that rolls out the bass marches on the spot, the guitar trails off delicately. It’s dramatic bolloks, which sounds great and has a wonderfully itchy passage. ‘Smile 4’ veers back into the wobbly gait of ‘Waterfront’-era Simple Minds though, too slick and measured. ‘Take It On Up’ is an aggravated, occasionally frantic look at drugs, an ambitiously packed song well handled, indicating why they got the big deal eventually. They actually have a few too many things going on here, and it’s too long. ‘Part Of Me Now’ is some sentimental sounding slop, but it’s frisky as well, so you don’t turn away, your face disfigured by loathing, you find yourself bobbing along.

www.myspace.com/claytowntroupe
http://bristolarchiverecords.com/index.html

CULT WITH NO NAME
THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI
Lightwerx / Trakwerx

Now here’s interesting! I am sure you are all now familiar with the concept of ancient films being given a new lick of earpaint through modern soundtracks being applied? It works in all cases I have heard but then it should, really. The film exists, you put what you feel appropriate in place, and there it all is, freshly decorated with the atmosphere hopefully enhanced. It’s also theoretically easy given that the original score would probably sound pretty ropey these days. This time around Cult With No Name have tweaked the rules a bit though which opens out the possibilities, and the film itself, which I had never seen before, certainly deserves its cult and cinema classic status.

You get some pretty keyboards strolling hand in hand with the clunky opening credits, introducing us to Robert Weine, Rudolf Meinert and Erich Pommer’s 1920 creepy adventure, and the first words which fill the screen to introduce the story are quite funny, in that if displayed in a film today half the audience wouldn’t be able to cope with the long words: “A tale of the modern reappearance of an 11th Century myth involving the strange and mysterious influence of a mountebank monk over a somnambulist.”

We start with two blokes having a chat, one claiming to have been driven from his home by spirits. His younger friend, not to be outdone, sees a woman wander by in her nightie and declares, “my betrothed!”, apparently unconcerned by her behaviour. He tells the old codger that he and the future missus have experienced something far stranger. He will tell him all about it...

It seems a travelling fair came to the man’s home town, and this calls for the music to be eerie electronics filled with subtle suspense, including what sounds like the tone of an old phone. With the fair came a mountebank, which I looked up, and it means a quack. The young man, who we shall call Francis, has a friend, who we will name Alan. Alan’s a bad actor and dashes around, out onto the lopsided streets, a famous feature of a film which used perspective in diagonals to increase the spookiness. Alan finds a flyer for the fair, rushes to the town hall seeking a permit to run his stall at the fair, where he declares...
himself a somnambulist causing the head clerk to declare, “Fakir!”, when there had been no warning of such language.

Slinky modern funk bass is heard as generally unappealing folk mingle in public, and vocals concerning dreams come through pertly, and in a way it reminded me of Old Grey Whistle Test where bands would use old footage for their promos! “I get to feel again,” our singer emotes. A strange series of murders begin, words on the screen inform us, starting with the brusque head clerk. That’ll learn ‘im!

At the fair we find Caligari doing his bit. He has under his command a chap named Cesare, who has apparently been asleep for 25 years. The music respectfully retreats as the great spectacle begins. Caligari opens his cabinet, and there’s a bloke inside. Evidently under Caligari’s spell he steps out weirdly when ordered, and the audience are informed that he can tell their future. Alan rushes forward and asks how long he will live. “The time is short,” he is told, “you die at dawn,” which probably wasn’t the answer he was hoping for.

Still, it’s only a bit of fun, although the audience promptly get up and leave. The two men stroll out into the night, meeting the betrothed on their travels, so Alan goes home alone, seemingly unaware the music has turned gloomy and gloopy, but later we see him sitting up in bed terrified, as the silhouetted killer approaches. Ooh, isn’t that Cesare, I thought to myself?

The news reaches Francis from some old dame, as the music becomes gently shuffling electronics, and he rushes off to the police raving about the fair, the keyboards softly supportive in his time of need. Then Francis convinces his beloved’s father to get the police to investigate Caligari, when the killer is suddenly caught trying it again in the street and is nabbed by the rozzers.

That would all make for a fairly short film, so Francis, who is allowed to observe interrogation for some reason, is sceptical once more when the prisoner admits he just tried killing someone, hoping the blame would fall on the mysterious killer in the town. Cult With No Name go in for some charming form of ambient dub around now, creating the sort of music you’d normally hear a female voice accompany, which makes it all the more deftly involving, as the naughty Cesare breaks into the beloved’s house and lugs her away. People give chase, but having saved the girl let him wander off, where he falls down, in a strangely undramatic moment.

She’s convinced it was Cesare who got her, but Francis says this could not be, because while Cult With No Name go a bit Tubular Bells on us, he reveals he’d been snooping on Caligari’s cabinet and Cesare hadn’t stirred at all. So if it’s not him, or The Prisoner, then who? And how audacious of CWNN, as we shall call them just this once, to whisper lyrics relevant to the plot!

Everyone rushes round to Caligari’s mouldy shack and inside the cabinet there’s only a dummy! The Doctor rushes off. Francis in hot pursuit, or so we think. For some reason he goes to the local asylum and demands to know of the staff if there is a patient by the name of Caligari. They tell him that only the head of the Institute can reveal patient details and would he like a meeting? Yes he jolly well would, and in he goes, to meet…Caligari! He rushes out and tells the staff their boss is a nutter working with a travelling fair, and you think that’s him locked up for good, no problem.

Not a bit of it, these were clearly more trustworthy times and they believe him, so the band get all jaunty with their music as the details come out. Caligari, who must be amazingly confident, has promptly gone to bed, while he sleeps the others all bundle into his office and go through his things, finding an old book which refers to the myth of Caligari the monk and his somnambulist Cesare. There are also notes that this latterday Caligari has made upon having a somnambulist bought into his care, who he appears to fondle enthusiastically, although I don’t think there’s anything sexual. For reasons we shall simply never know he decides he must recreate the myth, and asks the all-important question, ‘Can he be made to murder?’ Understandably the music becomes fairly grave around this point.

Caligari goes out on the street and his name appears everywhere, which looks dreadful but must have been pretty impressive at the time. The sleeping Cesare is found dead in the ravine. “The circle is closing in!” Francis rasps at Dr C, as the body of Cesare is brought in. Dr C is shocked, and collapses, then he attacks everyone and is bundled into a straitjacket for his troubles. He writs. It’s not a pretty picture, although a very art nouveau door is closed on his cell.

The music, which had been airy but cold, gives way to a sweet song about dreams with exquisitely spindly keys, as we return to the twosome the film started with. The tale is done, the old man gets and leaves, but wait, what’s this? I don’t know, what is it? It’s Cesare! What’s he doing there, the old bastard? The betrothed seems less delighted by Francis’ close attention than you might otherwise expect, claiming to have royal blood and that’s when it clicks. They’re all bonkers!

Out Caligari strolls, the genuine head of an asylum, and Francis tries having a go at him, immediately led away and slung in his own cell. Caligari realises just who it is that Francis thinks he is, finds it all strangely amusing, and says he knows how he can cure him. A likely story!

So there you go, the first twinkling of psychological thrillers, released ninety years ago and still capable of surprising us now. It looks quite moody, the acting is simply diabolical, but the ideas were adventurous, and Cult With No Name, assisted in a way-I-know-not by Jeff Brenneman, have managed to take a suitably artistic approach to their task, which I think serves the film very well indeed, making it the most successful new soundtrack I have heard.

I hope no-one minds that I didn’t put ‘Spoiler’? That would have spilt it.

www.myspace.com/cwnn
www.maryattmusic.com/
search_results_cd.php?cd=MMG+477
www.trakwerx.com

VARIOUS ARTISTS
INFECTIOUS UNEASE RADIO
Dark Stereo

They’re not wrong when they call this a colossal compilation, with 4 CDs housed in a 4 tray dvd case, but as Gordon Taylor has been faithfully running his radio show in Australia for seventeen years it deserves something special to mark such an effort and this International compilation is certainly very special. He plays pretty much anything on the darker side of independent music, with a clear interest in electronic styles but there’s: Goth, Post-Punk and Industrial hybrids aplenty, making for an absorbing cross-section of what’s happening today. Come and catch something....

MYSTRAL TIDE start things off superbly in ‘The Error’ with the delicate keyboards and softly pattering trip-hop-plus rhythm, which swells according to the vocal murmurings and is very neat. BUNKER SOLDIER do what all soldiers in a bunker do with ‘Infection’, bringing in some female vocals to provide some charm as they gyrate with their spacey dance fusion. This is why World War 1 took so long. (The remixes!) COMPRESSED INFINITY look the unpleasant aspects of the modern world in ‘Wrath For The Shadows Of Injustice’ and proudly say to their children, ‘one day all of this will be yours’, keeping their pulses hazily welcoming, as there’s no real extremes, a bit like Midnight Configuration in a deckchair. Then ANGELSPIT are ‘Making Money’ with their devious lyrical spikes and shifting techtronic plates, oblique and angular fun.
ROUGHHAUSEN offer a remix of ‘[Sic] Fuk’, low and scabby, sickly fluid. CONCEPT 7 are crabber, with terse vocals using sparingly through the electro-stabbing of ‘Functional Concrete’ and I can’t remember who did that elastic beat first, where momentum is constantly monitored, which is annoying me, but they’ve been influenced by someone clever, so it works. JOHN MERRICKS REMAINS are dependably pop noir in ‘Breath’, cool vocals, a snappy chorus, with the all-important sumptuous musical wholeness. A fine song. THE UNSOUNDPROJECT lose me early during ‘Vibrations In Your Mind’ when they suggest having a cup of herbal tea. New Age rave pleasurances aren’t for me.

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Luckily RAZORFADE bustle in with ‘ Liberation’, synth determined to sweep all before it, hopeful vocals eager to catch up. A constantly bubbling tune it throws up a wall of doughty lyrical concerns to accompany the hurly-burly. BLACK ICE wobble in with ‘A Call To Arms’ to keep this tension going, all skeletal and accusatory. I felt at one point the lyrics were ‘I’m nothing but a concrete arse’ but that can’t be right. Matching the vocal threat the song cocoons you easily, then squashes you. FEAR OF DOLLS are cheeky, starting with their own applause before ‘Screaming Inside Her’ quivers with a thoughtful drama and DARKNESS VISIBLE swagger into the dopey wartiness of ‘Flesh’ like some punky goth experiment.

There couldn’t be a greater contrast between that and the twisted, fragrant LUcretia’s Daggers, their ‘ Hate’ capricious and histrionic, with only the guitar requiring psychiatric assessment. It fizzes, then snaps shut, allowing the mighty DOPPELGANGER to run quiet riot as ‘It Breaks Our Souls’ takes early Goth styles of agonised weariness and stokes up the rhythm with consummate ease. EMERGENCY HAND PUPPET ladle disturbing samples over a faltering beat in the slightly idiotic ‘Her Own Lullaby’ which takes us into more experimental territory but, again, nothing too weird, as this is a compilation of songs and bright music really. I suspect this is an example of some of the odder music they sometimes allow to slip through. It’s pretty awful, but MANTICLE at least flicker like bats in the twilight through the ambient miasma of ‘Little Green Ants For Mike’, whoever Mike is. It ends like you’re inside a giant’s stomach. Rumbly.

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INKOMFORT OV KNIVES is an unlikely title for someone making such an undemanding but sweetly addictive electronic sound as ‘Launcestos’ Dawn’, a shimmerly balm. REDZONE are pretty weird, sounding deceptively inane during the plinky pop of ‘Bulletin’ but the sound has its own darkside, turning in and devouering itself. That theme of delicacy betraying inner strength continues with crappily named ELECTRONIKA and the winsome ‘Fall.’ ECHO US have highly stylised soft tones, with a piquant keyboard vibrancy, so ‘Descending From A Dream’ struck me as a dreamy modern version of Japan, the violin a nice touch.

CASSANDRA’S MYTH get crazed in ‘The Coris Dope’ as they wrestle themselves to the ground over a morose but swinging synth with a belloscopic rhythmic swagger and some artistically fractured female vocals trapped below stairs. THE PROCESS VOID grow big sonic-boned during the splendidly warped ‘Social Disease’ which is not unlike early Human League suffering from gout. BASTICH have snickering vocal brawls, frisky keyboard frills and grumpy Industrial guitar riffs all tied up in a mucky bundle called ‘The End’ and ANGUISH IN EXILE descend into a howling Industrial racket with ‘Demise Of Oneself’ before the mood changes again. NOIR CORPS have a keyboard sound straight out of old quiz shows where the prizes would be announced. ‘The Street’ is a cabaret of peculiarities, with intentionally ludicrous vocals spewing filth.

COLOUR KIDS have some well cushioned pop punk melodious cuteness throughout the light ‘Dig Me Out’, then C’EST LA MORT offer more doleful charms in the sleekly filleted ‘Paperships.’ BARBARELLATONES are commendably daft in the truculent ‘Get Your Freak On!’ and LUCID DEMENTIA wiggle and flaunt catchy elements as ‘Ignorance’ boils over efficiently. THE SINS exert a strict control through the willowy ‘Abigail’, ANGUISETTE bewitch in their grandy stretched ‘29 Years’ then DIABLE AMOREUX do something fairly horrible in a quirky folky way with ‘Molly Dear Molly.’

Inside of Australia this epic work will cost thirty Australian dollars, including postage from the url below. That’s about £18/$27. Strongly recommended, as they say. A magnificent work of Art.

VEIL OF THORNS SALON APOCALYPT Inner-X-Musick

This where acid rock and Industrial-triphop fuse, where you try and make easy sense of it all and you lose. Worrringly, it does begin to make more sense the more you listen. The walls close in during ‘Still Bloody Action’ as the rhythm clashes with a set of vocals that make you think someone has woken Merlin. If that’s your sort of thing, read on…

Their collective lungs breathe out metal splinters in a confusing ‘Sleep, Cut And Run’ and I’m assuming that’s none other than Aidan McGoran on guitar, although it may not be, but he’s on here somewhere, and Pandora wheels away like an acid casualty cutting her safety chord on a space walk. There’s a different mood for ‘Intelectual Institutional Object’ as P. Emerson Williams rambles on like the Godchild of William Burroughs channelling Bob Dylan, offering a nice bit about ‘Devil to a half-Devil dissolve.’ Pandora’s got back into the space station and seems suitably contrite.

‘And The Beast Of The Vision Still Roams In Dream’ would appear to be a distantly observed orchestra balanced on an electricity pylon shrouded in fog. ‘Sepulchral Reminder (Tortent Rose)’ brings in a solid beat as our vocal hosts sounds like a deranged headmaster as the sound falls in on itself, thresbinding wildly. (Imagine robots falling down
dance thing. ‘The Play Is The Thing’ appears to be a continuation, the guitar briefly evident before things tick into a slower, oppressive gear then disintegrates into an ambient maelstrom.

‘Nocturne’ is another thing entirely, windswept and ghostly, with some accommodating bass and fuzzy logic, all art dance friendliness. ‘Infinitude’ is a stripped down, pacey alt-rock avalanche, and ‘Seduction’ is a bit of a torch thing with Pandora waving the flaming torch a bit near your face and the music wandering into filmic horror.

‘Windows Blacked Out’ is a snatch of something mental, ambient with mumbled overlay, while ‘The Bell’ could be a rare recording of Vincent Price. ‘Autonomous Anonymous Anomalous’ returns to scuffed-up rock daubs jumbled into a cacophonous sludge. Me, I like a nice tune, so I have no idea what’s going on. ‘The Thing Is In Play’ fidgets and slithers with some dance intention or other. ‘Imagination Thieves’ is a moody vocal scene, ‘Veiled Shadows Glaze’ adding in some more vocal drama and musical swirls, before they come close to something conventional to close with ‘Soul Intervention’ sounding a bit like Red Hot Chilli Peppers spinning upside down on their heads.

We have the other two albums they’ve just released over the next two nights. To infinity and…somewhere else besides.

www.veilofthorns.com
www.myspace.com/veilofthorns

VEIL OF THORNS
MANIFESTATION OBJECTIVE
Foamin’ Bones

This was out a few years ago but has now reappeared in a mini-slew of recent releases, highlighting the more accessible area of their shady swampy sound, for when not disturbing Veil Of Thorns can always offer the generally disturbed. ‘Reproach (Full Of Hope)’ is essentially groaning rock pulling at its own restraints, stretchy, floaty and melodic to the point of being sensitive.

‘My Inner Sanctum’ gets the bovine bass swinging, and with a nimble rhythm and delicate vocals it’s positively catchy in its ghostly silkiness.

‘Exaltation In Ascendancy’ is a slurry or agitated, urgent muted mutant rock and ‘Worship Of Disclosure’ consistently devious in its dipping rhythmic demeanour, with the vocals unusually sparse and lilting. Furtive, light guitar scurries beautifully in the hydraulic ‘Manifestation Objective’ which always threatens to go into freefall.

‘Draw In, Wind Down’ is a dyed-in-the-wool dying dawdle, ‘Dream Shadow’ preferring a blipverting Goth-psyche tangle, agony and ecstasy kicked under the table and left to fight it out. ‘Can’t Stop Laughing (The Beauty Of Drowning)’ gets to its knees threatening to be ‘Goldfinger’ but soon starts to snake around having a gloomy seizure but some spectacularly tingly guitar hauls it up by pointy bootstraps. ‘Undergrowth Silent With Want.’ works as an inflated sort of drone and by the time it’s finished you’re stuck in its addled groove, and the petite circles creating ‘Fated, Cascading, Submerged’ also snag you easily, being a thin veneer of a psychedelia, smeared with rock sighs. Then ‘Extend Inward, Breathe Out’ bewilders, crashing in like an alternate Portishead ending, but slowly disintegrating into ‘The Gathering World Withdrew Its Fury’ which lumbers off bleary, slowly, sore of head and heavy of heart.

www.veilofthorns.com

VEIL OF THORNS
NECROFUTURIST
Inner-X-Musick

Scarified vocals sprawl across the densely packed shuffling ‘Thought Pollution Evolution’ and you can sense there’s an eagerness to be
freshly mangled, the triphop and dark atmospherics come whispering and whistling, not gnashing or self-eviscerating. No ideas what it’s about but the mood is strangely contagious. When ‘Through The Fire’ also limbo dances under the tension-free guitar barbed wire you know we’re in for some fun, and this is another unusual but invigorating track. As our relieved and seemingly addled host guides us through ‘Standing’ it’s light, engaging and gentle. Then we fall into ‘The Vandals Exquisite Corpse’ and it gets a wee bit trickier. That’s a slithery mindwarp of a thing, the sounds clattering and rustling, only for ‘The Lifeless Trio Kept Playing’ to be an idyllic segment, and ‘Wailing In Glass’ warped rockist fare pootling along, gradually dispersing into sub-atomic ambient mulch. So, the whole world is here.

A brief ‘Waltz’ verges on blistered Americana, ‘Pleasure In Nightmare’ keeps circling, bathing in its own perspiration, before an equally intoxicating ‘Giving Ascent’ digs in deftly for some dancey machinations, with a discreet sense of fun rather than flashing the rhythm around. Here we are in fertile dark indie territory, both filmic and mood-enhancing. ‘Dancing Revelation’, of course, moves away sideways, lightly aggrieved instead of inclusive. ‘Let Loose Into That Good Mourning’ is an interestingly gloomy soundscape where the machines seem to have won but find themselves down in the dumps. ‘The Reflection’ is the opposite, a lazily beautiful twilight night sky, with ‘Deny Fascination’ just as inviting, for all the disguised vocal intent. Things have got looser for a while in the VOT world and relaxation does wonders.

They do appear to be dropping slowly into the abyss for the groaning ambient doldrums of ‘The Only One Left’, like whalesong at closing time. In the skittish ‘Die As One’ it’s all very clandestine and chilled, the energy locked down tight as it hustles past on an espionage-fuelled mission. ‘Entertainments Subsume Concern’ sounds like a panel show doomed to failure, and it does appear to sound like a repair man trapped inside a cathedral organ, trying to fight his way out.

We’re into gooier electronic sounds as ‘Head Up Get Out’ wibbles around over a toxic bassline and we’re ushered out by ‘The Dead Channel’ which is more restrained but shadowy fare, vocals unwelcome visitors in an imposing room staffed by jazz-obsessed ghosts.

Definitely one of the weirder Veil Of Thorns offerings, because of its orderly approach, and really quite lovely. www.veilofthorns.com

DOMINION #3 (inside Terrorizer #195)

Still tinkering away on the Golden Apes review so that’ll be tomorrow’s fare. In the meantime let me point out that the third issue of Dominion represents another decent snack for you amongst the marauding moronic metal mush of its host body, in fact Dominion seems positively perky. There’s a tempting Emilie Autumn interview, which simply doesn’t go deep enough, revealing the shortcomings of a short magazine. You can learn about the new Killing Joke album, read about Him playing Finland (other live reviews including Mesh, NMA, Gothminster and Two Witches) look at a voodoo doll, read some reviews. Sarah Jezebel Deva promises a busy decade ahead and there are tiny slivers about Magenta, Grimm, In Isolation, V For Violence, Veil Veil Vanish and Delain, and a longer bit on Dommin. In fact the only crap bit is a page on Goth festivals.

Terrorizer itself came in strangely useful as Lynda and I were decorating the living room and ran out of paper to stand on, so I used the magazine once I’d removed Dominion. Actually I did keep the interview with ‘Horror Metal’ band The Vision Bleak aside to peruse, but it wasn’t particularly useful. I was forced to turn to the freebie CD and listened to their song ‘The Outsider’ which was revealed as nice enough, but basically jaunty bollocks; silvery guitar, precise vocals, pretty keyboards but strangely lacking in atmosphere. The interesting thing about the CD was a track, ‘Molten’ from Tribazik featuring Jaz Coleman, zigzagging back and forth between dreamy and nightmarish.

GOLDEN APES
DENYING THE TOWERS OUR WORDS ARE FALLING FROM…
Echozone

One of the truly consistent bands, Golden Apes have a robust stature but generally come tinged with woe in a mangled majesty whereby Goth misery and dark indie majesty intermingle, and this is a collection as good as anything they’ve done before, with a roomier sense of subtle gloom and an ambitious lyrical adventure I couldn’t begin to fathom.

There is so much detail to enjoy in the seemingly listless ‘Windlands’, from the gentle guitar embroidery of the start, the crestfallen vocals that trickle throughout, and the ghostly glowing keyboards. As the song starts to empty out and firm up so the guitar starts to glide, the keys to tick smartly, and as the words conjure up some fantasy landscape it seems to vibrate then stops.

‘Liberation / Hieros Gamos’ can confuse anyone reading the lyric book, which would be me, as it runs on into itself, but this is limber Goth dusting itself down and heading out for a brisk stroll, sorrowful guitar a pale bedfellow for a relentless rhythm and a raw rock sound diluted for a quiet finish.
This has set us up well for a penitent and picturesque ‘And Thus He Spoke’ where things turn on their head as easily as we learn that ‘a child becomes a lion,’ which I don’t think is biologically accurate. The guitar darts beneath the shrewdly pained vocals and once again the brighter guitar and placid keyboards create a pool of tender lightness in the middle of the song, which makes everything more comfortable against the peculiar mood of the lyrics. Things get deeper and darker lyrically during the lulling sweetness of ‘Digging Towers’ which rolls in a strange, rotting sing-song way, the guitar constantly engaging.

The stately ‘Rays Of Light’ is magnificent, shady strings accentuating the sense of misery and yet providing a hopeful edge to their lament with a poised sound that keeps you transfixed, teetering while they simply saunter, into the stodgier ‘Taming A Dream’ which sticks its chest out and marches proudly, as befits an epic beauty, the finely chiselled vocals, opulent and tingling keys uniting with mesmerising guitar all pulling in the soft folds of the sound to create a beguiling shape. ‘The Mark Of Cain / And From This Heart It Will Rise...’ then adds the icing on the maggoty-filled cake, as this is their most sleekly turbulent song on the album, flighty and fluid. Also, if anyone can get through this without thinking of ‘Pretty In Pink’ I’ll shoot myself. It happens midway as the song takes on a more settled, dignified repose, although with the trickling keys turning into a torrent and the guitar getting punky they flow to a fizzy finish.

‘Sober Light’ is a pragmatic frowner, stylishly composed, where ‘The Sea Inside’ crawls lower, still twinkling with a subdued grandeur, so you feel enclosed by the mood which is never less than gracious when it could so easily be drab and claustrophobic. ‘Invidia’ slows to the point of stopping, like an ashen version of U2 in some ways, as the guitar constantly engages. It’s a cheery opener that guides you into a wonderfully witty song against the peculiar mood of the lyrics. Things get deeper and darker lyrically during the lulling sweetness of ‘Digging Towers’ which rolls in a strange, rotting sing-song way, the guitar constantly engaging.

A fretful ‘The Silence (That I Call Speech)’ is blustery with it, which sees us loping on to be confronted finally by ‘Song Of Innocence’ and its mellow macabre flourishes. The story, whatever it is, ends. I sees us loping on to be confronted finally by ‘Song Of Innocence’ and a fretful ‘The Silence (That I Call Speech)’ is blustery with it, which sees us loping on to be confronted finally by ‘Song Of Innocence’ and its mellow macabre flourishes. The story, whatever it is, ends. I

For an album of just twelve songs it’s almost exhausting, which is of course no bad thing. You need to get used to it to be pulled firmly in, but then why get it if you’re not prepared for that? Once you’re in it, you’ll be happily immersed, as it’s an album to treasure.

www.goldenapes.com

THE MEN THAT WILL NOT BE BLAMED FOR NOTHING
NOW THAT’S WHAT I CALL STEAMPUNK! Volume 1
Leather Apron

There were various items I was sent last year that vanished, but this is not a mystery story, so settle down. The items have resurfaced, it’s just the traditional reminder that my life is a jumble. As I consistently throw away things of great personal value when sorting my office out, only to discover later that I have instead kept a box of complete trash (which happens every few years without fail), so I also move bundles of things intended for review somewhere safe, in what is intended as a temporary move, only for them to simply disappear without trace or, as some might suggest, when I have completely forgotten what I have done with them. So it is that I have only recently found a fabulous parcel the talented Myke Amend sent me, which includes a brilliant comic. This will be reviewed in a few days, but in one sequence I can reveal that a cheeky scamp observes to a scandalised pal, ‘Steam-what? Isn’t that just...you know...gluing things to other things? Like sticking gears onto crap and selling it?’ Now I haven’t heard much Steampunk but it appeals immensely, if only as a theory, because the Victorian aspect naturally blends and bleeds into Goth. Somewhere along the way I forgot the fact it’s called Steam-Punk. The Men That Will Not Be Blamed For Nothing, which will provide any Ripperologist with a quiver of excitement, haven’t forgotten at all, although they start like The Cravats channelling Sham 69. Don’t say you haven’t been warned, but the hardened hearty traveller can revel in the fact this album is a joy throughout. Throughout what exactly, I cannot say, just a ludicrous joy.

‘Etiquette’ is pure punk, a puffing steam train intro segueing into some raucous jiggery-pokery that combines a breezy ’77 spirit with a cyclical UK 82 Punk rhythmic clatter, and lyrics about stiff upper lips. It’s a cheery opener that guides you into a wonderfully witty song which has vocal passages that would thrill anyone excited by tonsils. You get a reference to people appearing on five pound notes: ‘One was a novelist, one of the greatest of the English language.’ ‘What, Enid Blyton?’ ‘Even better than Enid Blyton. Less racist.’ So we find ourself plonked into the raucous ‘Step(v)enson’ with it’s confusing chorus:

“Oh Mr Ste(v)phenson,
Robert, George or Robert-Louis?
And if Robert, which one?
(Because there were two.)”

Here we learn much, laugh at even more, and bellow like cantankerous railway guards of the early nineteen hundreds, who certainly liked
their drink. ‘Bedlam’ is like a sub-strand of The Mighty Boosh, you slags. It’s utterly filthy as well as furiously active, jabbering in a capering Dick Van Dyke punk style. ‘Goggles’ comes out fighting the corner of girls who don’t actually require help in that respect. ‘Dainty girls are well and good, but they can’t fix your stuff! A pretty girl is nice, of course, but somehow not enough!’ Rousing carousing assists it to a shaky close. ‘Sewer (live)’ ends Side One, should such things ever exist and it’s a bit like ‘When Father Papered The Parlour’, where the paper in question is toilet paper, for this is a story about a man’s grave being moved to make way for a sewer, with the hope the deceased will haunt any toilet that emerges.

‘Boilerplate Daniel’ is another resurgent punk slice of surging noise which might well confuse the more dreamy Steampunk fan who will be wondering what these absolute louts are up to. What they’ve done is invent a bizarre life story of some poor bugger abandoned in a foundry and raised by the workforce, but when he becomes horribly injured he is repaired with metal. Wandering outside one day, he is aspired by someone who wanted him as a scientific acquisition only for the boat on which he tries to spirit him away to be too weak to bear his weight, and he drowns. Inspired stuff, delivered at a rattling pace, but I’d have preferred a happy ending!

‘Moon’ is gurlier initially before turning into a ragged rock beast, lunging like its lungs are hanging out. Obviously it’s fun. (‘As a precautionary measure Captain Nemo came too, so if we ditched in the sea someone would know what to do.’) It also ends in another classic intentional lyrical letdown, delivered with panache, their heroic journey safely completed their reception is a solitary bemused goat. ‘A Traditional Victorian Gentlemens Boasting Song’ is a punk thrash which does what it says on the oxo tin. ‘I porked Queen Victoria.’ ‘Have you no shame?’ ‘Not any more.’ To make things even better they sound just like Naked Raygun, gone mad.

There is then a joke you see coming, but it’s gone in the blink of an eye, and ‘Blood Red’ starts with a sample of ‘Zulu’, then goes a bit Men Of Harlow instead, a bludgeoning guitar finding itself outdone sonically by the rasping vocals. The drums try dominating in a splattery flash but the vocals just sit on them, spitting out proud but wholly ironic British characteristics. ‘For Glory and Empire we trample the Globe.’ No, it’s not Boris Johnson on a bender, but is even more lusty and bellicose, bringing through a different energy. ‘Charlie’ is the closer, with a swaggering nautical theme, but really a song about Darwin done in a manner unlike any other you’ll have heard. Again you’ll sway and sing along like you’re riding a camel, as the band foam at the mouth, which I believe is purely coincidental.

Bleedin’ gorgeous, that’s what this is. Absolutely wonderful from start to finish and an absolute brute of a thing.

www.myspace.com/blamedfornothing

MARK SINNIS
THE NIGHT’S LAST TOMORROW
9TH Recordings

As satisfying as last year’s darkly compelling ‘A Southern Tale’ this album relaxes in some comfort. Sinnis has achieved a type of decisive bleakness here which means he can do it almost softly, as the Gothic and Country influences melt lazily or hazily together. Where ‘A Southern Tale’ seemed a cloistered collection, as though recorded indoors secretly, trying to keep something out and thoughts locked in, this album seems bathed in cool light, as though recorded outdoors. Never maudlin, while definitely moving on from glass-half-empty to gargling-poison-dismissively, it takes dark moods and lightens the load while you listen.

‘The Night’s Last Tomorrow’ is a wonderfully dippy thing, the delicate balance seemingly suspended from the steel guitar, as quality lyrics also hover, Sinnis’ vocals quivering somewhat but sticking to the point in a masterful display. It lulls you completely, because in

another style it could be deeply depressing but here it’s a curiously blissful opener. In the troubled ‘15 Miles To Hell’s Gate’ he’s like a swashbuckling son of Johnny Cash, swaying and crooning dramatically, then we move towards an almost laconic ‘Your Past May Come Back To Haunt Me’ which unrolls a soothing red carpet beneath twisted, suspicious lyrics all demurely wrapped in a smartly delineated arrangement that harnesses past styles and modern attitudes, allowing menace to mellow. ‘Fallible Friend’ could just as easily go with some mariachi, or frisky acoustic, but it’s a plain and simple song instead, moving at a steady grim pace, like a crotchety Clint Eastwood whistling his own wooden leg. Time slows, it’s that stately. ‘Follow the Line’ is easier on the ear, lilting musically while the vocals threaten to tip over the edge, which is almost out of character in this setting. An unexpected and dignified cover of ‘Nine While Nine’ also works very well with a refined delivery.

We slide down a creepy chute during ‘The Fever’ with some queasy imagery, then skate warily over a playful lilt of doubt in ‘Skeletons’, with its cunning use of organ. ‘Scars’ is odd, like an old Simon & Garfunkel melody squashed flat, a frige over befuddled slaughter, and the traditional ‘St. James Infirmary’ is very strange as well, as befits a song so old the original creator isn’t positively known. This is a melodramatic piece of doom, where the words clash with the properly agonised mood. The protagonist’s love is dead, in the mortuary (I assume) and he’s proudly proclaiming, she’ll never find another man like me.’ Well, how gallant, unless I’m missing something?

We touch down again on a softly sentimental ‘Out of Reach’, and perk up during the fabulous ‘Quiet Change’ which has a rising commercial tug about it, and then during a brilliant ‘Gloomy Sunday’ you get to see what Sinnis can do when coopered up with an unlikely task, like Roy Orbison walking down subterranean corridors, alone in the dark. Rewriting a well known song he tinkers with certain lines and while he actually improves a line completely and there’s not many people can do that, which may explain why on his website lyrics are referred to defiantly as poetry. ‘In Harmony’ will confuse as the churchy feel professes a quiet relief that death is approaching, as a friend, in catchy surroundings, then it all dies slowly away for good with the suitably sensitive ‘When the Light Blinds and You Follow’

A remarkably assured album this, and in many ways it must be quite funny for him, considering his punky past. I bet half his relatives are thinking, he was bound to come to his senses eventually. Mature, melodic and at times as restful as it is haunting, this is really quite
superb and as he’s releasing an album ever year you wonder when he’ll peak, because this is still just the ascent.

www.marksinnis.com

**TEMPLE**  
**SEDUCTION**  
**Bristol Archive Records**

This is great, a Goth band finally cropping up in the Bristol Archive menagerie and not a band I had heard before. Luckily Ian Pirrie provides some detailed memories on their page of the discog section. The songs come from the ‘86/’87 period and here we find Matthew Butler – vocals, Ian Pirrie – bass, John Murray – drums and Adrian Bennett – keyboards and then guitar (who went onto Claytown).

They’ve got a brash confidence about their sound, with the boney bass protruding and the vocals in the tiny ‘Intro’ just an instrument by itself, and so it’s in ‘Book of Dreams’ we can really settle down. Solid but lightly handled drums mingle with a busy, pretty guitar, the song clean and bright as the muted vocals skirt the instruments wisely. ‘Twilight’ is another delicately balanced song with some interestingly sprung vocals, but what we’re talking about here is demo quality, it’s just they have a very full sense of what the songs should sound like, and have a good stab at creating that, leaving you with a weird Goth sound from that era, including some truly mangled, wiry guitar. Rockier than most late 80’s small Goth bands, but adhering to a sensitive core spirit.

‘Cabaret of Death’ was apparently a crowd favourite, although it’s hard to get to grips with. A linear, coping thing, with charismatic cross-woven vocals, it’s almost coy about its charms, although still stylishly sleek. ‘In Our Darkness’ has a bobblier drum beat, some scurry guitar laid low by dominant vocal mess and some lovely bass cappering but bearing the title in mind you wouldn’t automatically think Goth when first hearing it. The brusque count-in on the very demoish ‘Jewell’ is funny, as they chomp like an easily dented bit of acoustic glam, which probably hoped to seem a bit rock and roll. It shuffles off rather cheerfully.

A needle-thin guitar opens the bumptious, slippery ‘Seduction’ and we’re finally into some reptilian Goth; dark vocals draped over some taut, angular shapes, with intermittently frisky passages, agile and thorny. ‘Renewal’ has a nicely peaky flow, guitar on a long, glowing fuse and the vocals ensuring the repetition makes the melody emphatic. ‘Lilith’ manages to concentrate on atmosphere instead, with nagging, torn guitar slivers and sinuous bass intrigue behind vocal drama. ‘Spine’ is a bit of a jangling, schizoid weirdness, heartfelt and nagging, torn guitar slivers and sinuous bass intrigue behind vocal drama. ‘Spine’ is a bit of a jangling, schizoid weirdness, heartfelt and nagging, torn guitar slivers and sinuous bass intrigue behind vocal drama. ‘Spine’ is a bit of a jangling, schizoid weirdness, heartfelt and nagging, torn guitar slivers and sinuous bass intrigue behind vocal drama. ‘Spine’ is a bit of a jangling, schizoid weirdness, heartfelt and nagging, torn guitar slivers and sinuous bass intrigue behind vocal drama. ‘Spine’ is a bit of a jangling, schizoid weirdness, heartfelt and nagging, torn guitar slivers and sinuous bass intrigue behind vocal drama. ‘Spine’ is a bit of a jangling, schizoid weirdness, heartfelt and nagging, torn guitar slivers and sinuous bass intrigue behind vocal drama. ‘Spine’ is a bit of a jangling, schizoid weirdness, heartfelt and nagging, torn guitar slivers and sinuous bass intrigue behind vocal drama. ‘Spine’ is a bit of a jangling, schizoid weirdness, heartfelt and nagging, torn guitar slivers and sinuous bass intrigue behind vocal drama. ‘Spine’ is a bit of a jangling, schizoid weirdness, heartfelt and nagging, torn guitar slivers and sinuous bass intrigue behind vocal drama. ‘Spine’ is a bit of a jangling, schizoid weirdness, heartfelt and nagging, torn guitar slivers and sinuous bass intrigue behind vocal drama. ‘Spine’ is a bit of a jangling, schizoid weirdness, heartfelt and nagging, torn guitar slivers and sinuous bass intrigue behind vocal drama. ‘Spine’ is a bit of a jangling, schizoid weirdness, heartfelt and nagging, torn guitar slivers and sinuous bass intrigue behind vocal drama. ‘Spine’ is a bit of a jangling, schizoid weirdness, heartfelt and nagging, torn guitar slivers and sinuous bass intrigue behind vocal drama.

‘Hypnose’ lurches into action, a rheumatic deportment weighed down by a surly main vocal, but lightened by shadowy backing, and flattened guitar. This mottled introduction allows ‘Identité Variable’ to fill with a warm synth floatiness as the percussive spine is more clearly delineated, and guitar rises to clip the ears of more steadfast singing as a wider melodic horizon is presented calmly. ‘Nom’ is brighter still, the beat urgent, the vocals serenely guiding, almost poppy overall but with a strangely glowing background threat.

‘Des Illusions’ has a wonderfully brisk pulse and gluey bass as the vocals sink down, creating a luscious but lethal atmosphere, which the synth rises from with a pert perfume encouraging the guitar to apply some fine touches. ‘Entre Nous’ then fidgets eagerly around insistent keys and fluffy guitar, a surging tension pushing the song to a peak that ‘Sauvages’ casually rolls away from, relaxed yet roving, bringing us more of their smoothly vascular pop brooding.

‘Le Fil’ is even more open yet very matter of fact about its simple, unflinching hooky approach, linear but undulating. ‘Abrutir’ has almost an electro punk stabbiness to begin, but soon fills out to swell and throb. ‘L’Expérience’ almost slips onto mature pop autopilot, hypnotic and quietly luxurious, soft vocals and balmy vocals supported by curvaceous bass. ‘Canal Historique’ goes off on a more settled, muted journey, vocal fragments in a glossy chamber and so a seemingly undemonstrative album overall comes to a fairly swift close. That’s where they’re unusual, because for all the cleverly understated front it’s packed with unified character.

www.myspace.com/guerrefroide

**GHOSTFIRE**  
**THE LAST STEAMPUNK WALTZ**  
**Own Label**

Their last record was a little darling so it appears they’re working themselves up to a divine debut, because on this CD single there’s another two eclectic entities which swagger with vim and vitality.

‘The Last Steampunk Waltz’ is sedate on one level, meticulous adhering to a plaintive historical arrangement, but there is a dark intrigue in the lyrical tale, demure guitar dripping, bass undulating politely, vocals swaying treacherously, and if I didn’t tell you the song is about x you’d think it was about some dotty dame..
‘Hand Of Glory’ is frisky even when detailing the decomposition of the body of a criminal left on display in a gibbet. He’s dead and he’s not thrilled about it, plotting some future revenge, but there’s frilly guitar, splendid vocal bile and flashy organ played in his honour, so it’s not all bad. Some corpses are just never happy.

Take your partners in crime….

www.ghostfiremusic.com
www.myspace.com/ghostfire

VARIOUS ARTISTS
BRISTOL – THE PUNK EXPLOSION
Bristol Archive Records

This is a highly commendable compilation, as you should expect from this label, with some interesting bands, which is harder to achieve with Punk material than you may realise. Punk compilations tend to be fairly orthodox nowadays, and after a while almost pointless, the same material endlessly regurgitated, but having a regional niche to explore gives this a character of its own, with the timeline aspect fairly unnecessary. It’s a snapshot stretched out over whatever frame you might wish for. Like the wonderful hyped2death releases Bristol Archive continues to intrigue and captivate with their diligent work, so you should enjoy this if you’re an adept at discerning Punk varieties, but also for the newcomer it’s a pretty diverting mixture. Some you will love swiftly, some will make you feel sick. This is all to be expected, and while you could argue some bands deserve more or less space than others, that’s a personal argument. The weirdest part, as with pretty much any Punk compilation, is just how cute it all sounds. There’s also one of the greatest punk songs ever quivering on the autopsy table, which you may be unaware of.

With cuteness under scrutiny The Cortinas are coyly puffing their puny chests out throughout the jingly-jangling ‘Defiant Pose’, which originally felt like a breath of fresh air but now appears to be gerbils covering Dr Feelgood. The voice of rebellion ladies and gentlemen! The Pigs spin into view with ‘National Front’, complete with some shockingly inane lyrics, but then I thought this was doopy old tripe when I first heard it. In fact this was about the only one of the first indie punk singles I didn’t buy, at a time when you bought pretty much everything which came within reach. Even that Clark Kent thing, or Pork Dukes. Luckily Social Security’s ‘I Don’t Want My Heart To Rule My Head’ is made of sterner stuff, albeit determinedly one-dimensional, as agile and chunky guitar disports itself alongside some spirited, ambitious vocals. The Pigs partially redeem themselves with the ironically callous ‘Youthanasia’, complete with a guitar break that wouldn’t exhaust a flea. Social Security could be attempting a cheeky Buzzcocks impersonation in ‘Choc Ice’ but come over as a lopsided version of The Boys, which is okay as their guitar is bright and vivid.

The Posers pound away at the yappingly gumboid ‘Good Advice’ which is a cross between UK Subs and some early hardcore, with neatly slithering bass. It would appear The Media recorded ‘New Blood’ inside a thimble decorated with Gen X posters where they sound tiny, stylishly constricted and a bit demented. It’s bizarre hearing something so oddly recorded it seems to be trapped inside the speakers, and yet it’s fun! The Primates have a live version of ‘Generation Warfare’ and this is a rough and tumble engagingly delivered with punky verve which isn’t squalid or aping others. The X-Certs also blare their way through the jiggling ‘Fight Back’ with some vivacity, at which point we reach The Great Moment.

One of the finest independent punk releases appeared on the ‘4 Alternatives EP’, a song by 48 Hours entitled ‘Back To Ireland.’ I lost my copy a while back but here we have a demo version of it, called ‘A Soldier’ and Ange, whoever he was, is a brilliant lyricist, detailed but direct, with the band, fitfully enough, close in style to Stiff Little Fingers without any hectoring aspect. Passionate but straightforward, this is almost modest in its excitement. I can’t work out all of the words but I felt it necessary to type out what I can, as this is so good compared to most of the dross punk bands used to come up with, especially the ‘have-you-got-10p?’ merchants who were everywhere back then.

In 1969 I was just twelve years of age,
I didn’t know I was sent to act out on Britain’s great stage,
I had six years to go,
To play with my toy Tommy gun,
It took one shot in the leg,
To prove that this isn’t much fun.

This place ain’t far from home,
Though it could be a million miles,
Some people here are friendly,
Some even bother to smile
But when I was watching the advert,
I’m sure it was nothing like this
When my three years is up I can’t stay in this place.

‘Cos they said I’m going to Ireland,
I got to fight for my life
I’ve got to fight for Britain,
Using rifles and knives."

(May have that last line slightly wrong.)

"1975, eighteen years have passed,
Eighteen years I've been here,
I hope this won't be my last.
Standing in long lines with rifles in our hands
I crush them up with my big boots..."

(Can't make these words out properly.)

"Cos they said I'm staying in Ireland, for the next 18 months
A British army corporal
Once signed on at once
Cos they said I'm going to Ireland (etc)."

Guitar spiral off wonderfully in discontent at this point, over
thumping drums, as we hit the best bit.

"How I wish I was back in the office,
Leaving off work at four-thirty
And here I am, in the Lansdowne Road.
I'm cold, I'm wet, I'm dirty.
The army just ain't for me,
Guns and barbed wire is all I see
I've just got to leave this post,
I'll ditch all my stuff
...and I'll run for the coast.

"And now I'm running from Ireland
For the next 50 years
A conscientious objector,
Oh, will you see my tears?"

"Cos they said I'm going to Ireland (etc)

"Oh can't you see
The army
It just ain't for me
Ohhhh cant you see
The army
Just ain't for me

"And I never wanted to come here anyway!"

That final touch of petulant post-Pistolian wit nails the perfect song,
seemingly throwaway but an actual spark of emphatic genius. Bliss.

The Verdict keep the Irish theme going through a bustling ‘IRA Man’
that reminds me strangely of The Pirates as though they have an r’n’b past,
and the carefully emphasised vowels are simply too Rottenesque
to be taken seriously, while the guitarist just wants to go on soloing
forever! The X-Certs do their convincing reggae in ‘Stop The Fussing
And The Fighting’ which has spry touches, and comes over as
soothing. Then it’s none other than Vice Squad who charge off in
‘Resurrection’ and here’s a band we could have done with more of.
They always had a crazed energy about them and like many of the
more exciting bands of that time their energy seemed to have been
poured into a fragile shape you expected to shatter, but somehow
they’d always seem to surf their own slipstream, round and round, up
and down.

That’s the good stuff and then we’re into the bowels of Hell, I’m
afraid. Disorder’s ‘Complete Disorder’ is some form of rakish
shorthand I’m sure, like low level sonic suicide. Mad and bad they
keep the right side of thrash or the plain scrappy, and trail off coldly.
Chaos UK offer a fairly identikit sub-anarcho rant in ‘Four Minute
Warning’ and represent the kind of earnest but dog-eared, dog-tired
Punk I never found remotely exciting or endearing. I suppose they
sound pretty decent when set against Court Martial and their slack

‘Gotta Get Out’ but it’s a close run thing as both bore you senseless.
The Undead want to complain about the world in ‘It’s Corruption’,
as the police and the army are very naughty and apparently corruption
destroys freedom of speech and drives people to do crazy things.
Their drummer is truly awful. Lunatic Fringe ask ‘Who’s In Control?’ and I
think they’re genuinely confused. Chaotic Dischord scamper through
the utterly abysmal ‘Who Killed E.T.? (I Killed The Fucker!)’ and you
have to ask why this garbage was even allowed on the record.
Onslaught think they’re Motorhead and gargoyle through the terminal
‘Thermo Nuclear Devastation Of The Planet Earth’ as I gaze around
the office trying to summon up the enthusiasm to leave this chair. At
least it’s a short song, but that final phase of the record is a weird
thing. Punk started off exciting, developed character and then become
a generic heap of shite. The record reflects that, I guess.

While you should find the majority of the album enjoyable, and can
simply ignore the final tracks, this is a compilation worth buying for
the mighty 48 Hours alone. That’s a total classic and it’s fantastic to
be reunited with it again.

http://bristolarchiverecords.com/index.html

GORGONS
STARING BACK
PRB Music

With a welter of new versions, a few new tracks and some obscure
tracks this makes for a weighty retrospective, in the truest sense, of a
Goth band who clearly consider every aspect of what they do
seriously. Grabbing the chance to revisit and retouch makes perfect
artistic sense and you have to love an album which lists on the sleeve
notes, “all songs written by Gorgons except for track 4 by
Shakespeare, tracks 6, 10 by Emily Bronte and track 13 by Ray
Evans.” They have the makings of a super group there. I can only give
you a partial review for now but hopefully it will be sufficient for you
wish to investigate further.

‘Staring Back’ has a grim atmosphere settling, the drum machine
darkly dextrous, the vocals gaseous and disquieting, drawing you into
the complex but strangely catchy web of words. ‘Garden Of The
Hesperides’ is weirder, backing vocals like mad spirits on the
periphery as a gloomy word vibrates and tinkles slowly in front of
you. ‘100 Year Plague’ retreats to monastic cloisters, with some
added modern drone and sci-fi doldrums incorporated. ‘How strong is
your faith?’ they ask as the beat intensifies, although nobody seems
prepared to answer.

GORGONS
STARING BACK
PRB Music
'Ophelia’ is watery but piquant in its frothy doominess as the gently swelling sound is perfectly inviting, while the vocals prostrate like haunted sentinels. ‘NYX (Edge Of Night)’ manages to start beautifully, then mix things up with a turbine beat and somehow enhance that original sweetness with a deeper mood, all effortlessly bewitching, rather like a locomotive taking a coffee break inside a cathedral, which is no longer the common sight it once was in our high speed era.

I’m assuming there are Bronte words introducing the almost playfully electro-basted ‘Spellbound’, but initially my version sticks and slides so I don’t know what’s going on. Fortunately, while one CD player here is lightweight and problematical, nervous as a kitten, I have another with the heart of a lion which brooks no argument. So it is that I notice Gorgons juggle the svelte and welcoming (keyboards) with the lumpy and off-putting (vocals set to main), and while there are sinister strands the stately loveliness wins out. ‘Ritual’ seems both disembodied and rhythmically trimmer, one simple motif steady during a phase of a song which is, overall, slightly creepy.

‘The Dreaming’ maintains that approach, Debicka’s voice a mutation in the mist, with a recurring pattern like church bells observed furtively. The plainer ‘Beatrix’ ticks over with Daniel singing, and there’s unusual guitar twinges, a floaty high backdrop behind the fug of steely grimness, so the variations keep appearing through the main frame of heavy embroidery. ‘The Silent Grave’ is deliciously eerie, and almost like an Ambient-Industrial fusion, a crisp rhythm delicately shrouded in synth and whispered vocals. A modestly exotic ‘Circle Invidious’ quietly goes about its business, then there’s some screaming and a brisker beat, as the piece moves to a bolder shape.

‘Ocean’ slips back immediately to mystery with odd vocals and a sparse but caressing clattering spine around which distended vocals are clasped, and this is quite a weird sound they’re developing for themselves, with a direct percussive presence in a ghostly landscape. ‘Silver Bells’ may well be a famous Christmas song in the States but I have never heard it before and this quasi almost threatening approach certainly brings something outre-Horror to the mix. No wonder Santa comes but once a year, he’s scared.

‘Narcissus’ has a curdled sing-song start then some sweet echo and a tangle of devotion and accusations. ‘November Eve’ is a maddeningly confused confusion of almost robotic ululation, shunting lumps of sound and some simple silliness. A maddening confusion in fact. Over a rapacious rhythm blood and eyes feature a lot in the quixotic rotation of ‘The Godhead Fires’ which is well moody, then they finish succinctly with the poised prettiness of ‘Veronika Veronese’?

There are a lot of unusual atmospheres created on this record, where intelligent use of surroundings and artistically appointed lyrical imagery is left to detonate at will, making this a fine record who love an intelligent use of surroundings and artistically appointed lyrical imagery is left to detonate at will, making this a fine record who love their Goth imaginative and unpredictable.

www.myspace.com/gorgonsmusic

GÆ BOLG
PETIT TRAITÉ DE GYMNOSOPHIE
Le Cluricaun

Welcome to a world of music not so much turned upside down as inside out. There is everything you wouldn’t expect on a Gae Bolg record, unless you’d heard them before. In their reality booming operatic vocals and ecclesiastical grandiosity can walk hand in hand with spaghetti western brass laments or clattering fairground dementia, but this is not done in any ironic post-punk avant-garde waste of time. These songs make sense, it’s just that instead of a rattling fierce drums or a gutsy guitar salvo you’ll find distressed gentlefolk rampaging through centuries of music, their banners unfurled, their fingers curled, their hair standing on end, as the great musical quest begins. It’s all mad, and breathtakingly so. (Oh and in case you’re wondering, according to Babelfish the title translates as a Small Treaty Of Gymnosophie, and according to wikipedia, ‘Gymnosophy was originally the doctrines of a sect of philosophers who practiced nudity, asceticism and meditation. ’A likely story.)

‘Bonjour Chez Vous’ twirls across the floor, flaunting its darting keyboards, a carousing chorus dashes after them like Cossacks blinded by spring sunlight and with some diverting brass and chesty drums stirred in we have a demented operetta serenade going on. Terse atmospheric guitar plunges into ‘Illusion Référentielle’ then a jaunty organ lifts the spirits as brooding male and headstrong, histrionic female vocals circle one another warily then all unite on a slow surge of staccato steely drama of a surrealistic military bent. ‘Héros De Paille’ is dafter, with some wimsome fluttering vocals straight of Victorian singing lessons led astray by clomping drums and then as the drums become saucier male crooning is like a sardonic Marc Almond all grown up, with female vocals chivvying him along as the song takes on a darker but floater ethic, majestic in spiralling grandeur. ‘Scories’ is an organ caper, with rolling, bursting drums, and the nightmarish freak show/carnival is soon encircling you, with a wiggly, insidious chorus as the music flares outwards with flash and style. ‘Prison’ starts like a tightly pinched eurodance track, with literal bells on, when stern vocals stride in, assisted by ethereal backing, and although pretty overall this becomes a taut bristling piece.

‘Complainte Du Fou’ is a vocal tour de force, although the burnished brass and drowsy drums try to keep things supple, with a wandering flute thing for light relief. ‘Comptes Les Pingouins’ is altogether different, with a sorrowful vocal blight emoting behind as foreground spoken vocal of great determined weirdness. I have no idea what he’s on about, or why the others are so sad, but he gets weirder, and them more distraught, like a gathering of inspirational imbeciles. ‘Danse Des Gymnosophes’ has jangling keys and sweeping vocals, and here in their carnival Hell they’re like disturbed relatives of Astaraxia in their ‘Paris Spleen’ adventure. Bleaker with some damper keyboard mood ‘Miel En Mortadelle’ is misery and meticulous, malign vocals, until churchy female vocals try to sluice the poison out but he pushes on into a strangely regimented close which drags you with it.

‘La Princess Aux Petits Pieds D’Argile’ comes on all perky, like Aqua on acid, with a relentless purging beat and some wonderful keyboard flourishes. After such mayhem the thoughtful and haunting ‘Femme.Îleau.Ètoile.’ makes for a supreme finish, the drums firm, the brass muted but glorious, as though Eastwood is about to leave town having vanquished all evil while dressed as a monk. Graceful and harmonious without being remotely devous this is delicious, while the album overall is for a mouth with a rough tongue and devilish teeth.
A strange band and we are all a lot better off for their strangeness.

www.myspace.com/gaebolg

DDAA PALO ALTO
CINO FAUX NIDS SIX FAUX NEZ
Le Cluricaun

This record is so awful it depressed me. Apparently they are legendary, although I cannot imagine in what landscapes or mindset such a title could be attributed, and I confess I am relieved about this state of affairs. I gather it’s two bands colliding and colluding, or something, but I suspect that doesn’t actually matter. For those of you into ‘dada ethnic’ sounds the fact that Deficit Des Annees Anterieures and Palo Alto have united for this must be quite something. The rest of us should just leave them to it. No fan of the avant-garde, or generally doo-lally preposterous indie-noisenik infantilism, the sound of men impersonating animals or allowing squealing saxophones to exist for more than one tenth of a second has me wishing to introduce laws of sound that must be abided. The only good thing I can say about them is that none appear to have beards. ‘Slow-Fi’ starts relatively calm, guitar lowing like discreet pylon wires humming at twilight, then degenerates totally, although I confess I am perhaps guilty here of ignoring those of you who like listening to people replicating radio interference on guitar and conjuring up a slab of music which sounds like a small child experimenting with an amplifier for the very first time. You must forgive me. ‘Sus Tes Reins Scientifiques’ tries to be some scruffy art-funk, and starts juicy enough but that crazy (s)c at singing soon irritates, and the overlay of sonic manure spoils the rhythm. The spartan beat of the percussively pernicious ‘Fibres Synthetiques’ isn’t so bad, beginning weird and filling patiently, and it’s like an enjoyable musical itch, although the vocals still annoy. Has some bastard got a recorder in the dismally laboured ‘Kingdom Come’? I wouldn’t be at all surprised.

Planting their flag firmly in the foothills of the land known as If Music Shops Could Be Sick All Songs Would Sound Like This ‘Greffe D’Organ’ is interminable and then ‘Voight-Kampfi Test’ sounds like drunken jazz-obsessed piglets assembling a flat-pack desk. They do conjure up a sly rhythm again, like a little choo-choo train happily circumnavigating gigantic cartoon hills in animation werirdoville but this doesn’t alleviate the glowing despair I feel. There is a place for experimentation, and that is on your own, not making CDs, so they would do well to heed the advice of their elders and comparative betters.

Here are three chords, now form a band.

www.myspace.com/paloaltofr

ALICE MOVING UNDER SKIES
CURIOUSER & CURIOUSER
Own Label

What we have here is a seriously impressive debut album from a Goth Electro duo who have an encouraging breadth of musical vision and some twisted lyrical depth which ensures the album keeps you guessing throughout. Imagine a band somewhere between Faithful Dawn and Resist and you’re on the right journey, with no direct destination in sight. What makes them particularly distinctive is that both Penny Dreadful and Mark Dreziehn can hold their own as singers, a real bonus for any duo.

‘Dear Faith’ keeps the pulse direct initially, with a guitar swimming out of its heart as Penny cleverly stays central with little twinges to pull her vocals briefly sideways, and then the guitar spits, the mood glides, and that is what they’re evidently good at. The arrangement is thoughtful, never relying on plain repetition, as graduated change makes a song blossom with varied thorns. The guitar break suggests Mark must have a few rock skeletons in his cupboard but he maintains decorum, which is good.

Possessing all the angsty emotional drama you expect of a Goth song ‘Thirteen Years’ actually concerns their own lives, which is a sweet touch. Mark relieved Penny reappeared after his ‘pointless’ thirteen years. (All together now: Awwww.) While he emotes and then demonstrates relief he has another guitar moment worthy of a good slap, but he produced it, so no-one got to tell him otherwise. Again it’s only a brief lapse, so we can forgive him.

Gloopier electronic sounds heralding a subterranean atmosphere Penny then steers ‘Grit Girl’ down a filthy sewer with panache, like an inverted soul approach, the words constantly rolling out of her mouth. ‘Emerald Goddess’ confesses confusion while brighter and softer in tone, a bit like Inkubus Sukkubus stumbling out of a carwash. It’s got a tense backbeat, some supine guitar glossiness, and floaty lyrical ideas that come close to simpering. ‘And I would walk through fire, would crawl a thousand miles, just to catch a glimmer, from her radiant smile.’ Oh behave!

‘Sweet Little 666teen’ has another gloomy but intense flow, guitar moping heroically, vocals brittle and snide, like a tormented Garbage. ‘Fighting For Strangers’ is odd, bubbling electronically but based on something traditional about a solider who presumably came a cropper during the Napoleonic era, so I guess someone is into re-enactment?
‘Sub-Way’ is tempestuous sludge in a way, the vocals grief-basted wrathful observations, the guitar strangling muted notes, while ‘I’m The One’ does the haughty jabbing thing, vocals slashed and brief. ‘Open’ is a bewitching Easternised romp, a slinky rhythmic exercise percolating neatly beneath some prettily pointed Penny vocals, a kind of Holy City Zouk, and then they finish with an extra track not listed, a cover of Gitane’s mighty ‘Incendiary Lover’ which makes sense, as they bustle wistfully along.

So it’s a fairly short album, but you won’t feel short-changed as this is wide-ranging and stands up very well, indicative of great times ahead, I would hope. Even when they’ve got some tangled trad elements at play the guitar stays fluid, the vocals keep you connected, as nothing is opting for excess, so the songs heave convincingly with a turbulent imagination.

www.queenalice.co.uk
www.myspace.com/alicemovingunderskies

Now I may have loathed the album but the last time I was lucky enough to get a batch of releases from this label I found that a few things on the extreme end of the abstract musical impressionism tested me sorely. I guess it goes with the territory, like unmarked minefields. What makes the label special though is its pride in the forbidding and unusual, and the way they present them. Always artists they believe in, always delightful artwork, and occasionally people who buy from them direct get a free CD of the dinky 3” variety, which are very cute. Here’s one of them, with a lovely ginger cat cover.

Suitably irritating ‘Je Veux Un Sapin!’ has a loyal bass that anchors the song, while a dithering sax wanders blindly around. The song just seems to trudge into a cyclical set of cut up vocal samples as clipped notes gather then fade, like a woodwind section fiddling about. It isn’t as grating as anything on the album, but it still strikes me as strangely pointless. ‘Paradixe Allemand’ is more jittery, some fragrant chiming offset by ugly, agitated vocals and sickened guitar, with ‘La Fusée Du Professeur Brant: 3ème Génération’ sounding like a seagull hellbent on sonic revenge, fighting a wall of interference. I wish it well.

www.myspace.com/paloaltofr
www.lecluricaun.com
I got a bit confused looking at their biog, only realising late on that Sebastian H (aka Tirtet) and Karina S. (aka Deux-Points) have been a duo since 2006, but Sebastian H actually goes way back hence the almost-Oakey hairstyle, for this a man steeped in the lore of the early 80’s, and a faithful replicant in parts of it on this austere synth outing. He’s been releasing material since the late 80’s via La Passion Beatrice, Delusive Indolence, Scoria Head, Laténces Périodiques and now he’s alone again as Lower Synth Department with another record due soon, as well as remixes by what I presume are some of his heroes, which must be unusually exciting. One glimpse at the myspace page will tell you all you need about influences, from Foxx to KaS Product to Vice Versa, with even Sudden Sway as a top friend. Formidable!

‘Science’ takes you right back to the simplistic synth days of yore with a handclap beat and little mossy keys bleeping, while vocals mutter enigmatically about the supposed charms of science. All your buried memories of The Normal will rise to the surface, as they always will, but in ‘Geisha Dance’ warmer entrails leak, a slicker dance beat issuing from the simple higher notes, and brisker whistle of the drum machine beneath male and female vocals.

‘Eclectic Mistress’ fidgets more harmoniously with a fun digi-beat, the sound of the camera shutter, orgasmic female vocals, and the reference to ‘disco lights.’ ‘Sirens’ Nursery’ meoches enticingly, a simple melodic musical wink. ‘Lagging Consumer’ takes a fuller, creepier filmic turn of events, and there’s also a weird threat about the snappily directed ‘Les Signaux De Chasse’ which keeps the muted synth line, but has a busier subplot and carefree vocal shorthand. The spindlier ‘III’ sees some light leaking into his cell as the wispiness segueing seamlessly into a brooding ‘II’ which soon churns until synth gas fills the room, everyone keen to finish him off. It’s a great clamour of sound which breaks dramatically, leaving the man gurgling his contempt, for everyone and everything in an impressively controlled fiery manner.

‘Beware The Sirens’ Song’ has its tinkling charm although the rather weary vocal doesn’t help things. They’re more human than android, but strangely lifeless so nothing plays against the tune. ‘Distant Forget’ is calmer, but more imaginative, giving a remote feel but allowing the piece to be more enjoyable. ‘Echos Marching’ is also on a living antique, quite timeless. A sober display, naturally, but one which manages to be both restful and while a living antique, quite timeless.

www.myspace.com/lowersynthdepartment
www.plasticfrogrecords.com
dappled bass and dimpled synth unite to push ‘VIII’ out serenely onto the waters to join our floating host who is in welcoming mood. ‘What’s the point of killing myself, I’m already dead, and I’ve come down to believe that I’ll never resurrect.’ He goes on to deliver the open paragraph of this review, always looking on the blight side of life, but the keyboards go off on a jolly jazzy run, entirely unconcerned, as it lopes along, until he’s almost optimistic. Almost. Trenchant guitar sweeps him up in the nick of time and carries him away, to live to fight again!

‘IX’ cavorts like a wayward cabaret waltz with blood everywhere. Turns out he’s not quite on the mend yet but the commendably swaying keys and clattering percussion kick up a bigger stink than his worldview, and it all seethes sweetly to the point you’re hoping there is a decent outcome as he’s putting the art into articulating raging self doubt.

‘X’ offers more opulent instrumental enchantment with some celestial female vocals hovering, but then things turn all menacing in ‘XI’ with jagged guitar and boldy postural bass, our hero slumping as he staggers forwards, words dripping from his mouth and decaying in the sound. Concertinaed between higher, oscillating keys and a brazen guitar sound which almost comes off as brass, or possibly is, our wayward singer is a distant distraction in ‘XII.’ Piano to the fore ‘XIII’ glides smoothly for all the vocal relish over the pain felt by another, voice bubbling with slow delight and maybe he’s still fairly pessimistic as he considers love Satan’s favourite trick! Yet what explains the exquisitely mellow keyboards of ‘XIV’ which glisten to the end of a truly gorgeous number?

I’ve listened to this for the best part of the last couple of days and even if I don’t fully understand it yet I have to say its scarily addictive.

www.myspace.com/casimiroperator

ATALAXIA
STRANGE LIGHTS
Shadowplay

This was originally half of “Odos Eis Ouranon - La Via Per Il Cielo”, a 2CD set shared with Autunna et sa Rose, now spruced up, with a dramatically improved artwork, and only available through Russia and former Soviet territories, although anyone can obtain it mailorder, I assume. A special acoustic Ataraxia performance from 2005, this was played in what sounds like a magical atmosphere of large copper masks lit from within with candles, meshing with their mystical musical dreams and ambitions. Where the original came in a misty-icy ethereal package, now the bright outer slipcase gives way to some darkly evocative photographs, beautifully laid out by Nicolas Ramain.

(Do I envy designers, as I am but a clumsy daub merchant.) It looks as a good as it sounds.

‘Shelmerdin’ makes for a good opener as it seems inclined towards the graceful and serene as steady vocals trip firmly across the top of a gentle piano, as light guitar shines beneath then pushes slightly out into the open to rest alongside dawdling piano, but the vocals begin corkscrewing, retreating with murrmor with the percussion as the piano and guitar dies out. This is a different kind of sedate, and is followed smartly by the awesome ‘Bonthrop’, hypnotic with piano like slow waves moving over the guitar, Francesca sharp, then deep within some lines, an unusual sound in itself. Darkly melodic, illuminated by glinting guitar it’s always something special, small spaces suddenly leading to wide passages.

They can also sound starkly dramatically, as exhibited by ‘Tu Es La Force Du Silence’ which may start with a well groomed mature piano but the almost malevolent power of the vocals cuts swiftly through the air, the piano rumbling like it’s afraid of her, which is understandable. ‘Ophélie’ could be any more opposite if it tried. Liquid guitar and restorative flute meld as if in love, but the guitar gets the upper hand, spreading gloriously, with the vocals alighting like a curious bird, a haunting second burst of flute spreading across you like new skin. Vocal flourishes, piano gathering strength then billowing, guitar smoothing out the folds, it all keeps the song glowing as it flows. Exceptional.

One of the thing you can always enjoy with Ataraxia is when Francesca sounds a bit mad, and in ‘Faust In Una Sala Maledata’ she vaults across tumbling piano like someone grandly unhinged, headstrong and almost headless. After such a stirring courtroom drama, the sumptuous ‘Seas of the Moon’ comes solely from guitar, vocals and bells but sounds weighty because of the low base to it all. There’s a beautiful tension, but also a tense beauty throughout, making the sudden end intriguing. ‘Les Tisseuses Lunaires’ is a piquant sprawl, vocals see-sawing over compliant mellow (briefly unainly!) piano and discreetly visiting guitar, and ends with vocals from a ninja nun.

The guitar in ‘Veules Les Roses’ laps amiably at your feet as the vocals rotate in the clouds, rattling percussion creating a strange framework between them. Richly playful piano and lighty vocals collide happily during the opening for ‘Fuga Trionfale’ and suddenly she’s off and running like a dangerous hurdler through Alice In Wonderland territory. The piano returns, reliably astute, before she sets off for another lap. Mental, yes, but breathtakingly so.
The lovely ATARAXIA photos you'll see over the next pages were taken by FLAVIO FURLAN and I am indebted to him, and Alex Daniele, for sending them my way!
‘Oduarpa’ will have you feeling warm all over, it’s such a gorgeous sound, opulently languid with its sweet piano, but tingling too with the vocal sweep and tidy guitar. Drama returns aplenty in the closing ‘Medusa’, created solely by a coyly inviting piano, and vocals bouncing off into space. Together they dazzle and disturb.

It is a stripped down Ataraxia on this album, in plain terms, but such are their ideas it’s fuller than most bands would achieve with an angry orchestra hired to be inventive. Simple, but stunning.

www.ataraxia.net

ATARAXIA
CONCERTO No. 6: A Baroque Plaisanterie
Twilight Records

When they say that this remastered version contains “9 songs taken from the original album + “Orlando, A Female” taken from the out of press “Orlando” EP + an ATARAXIA’s version of Franz Schubert’s Ave Maria” this is all accurate but it misses out one glorious fact. They have ditched the song which scarred the original, a frantic ‘madrigale’ version of ‘Ticket To Ride’ which was even more abysmal than the original, if you can imagine that. It was the only thing they have ever recorded which I loathe and now this vile stain on their record has now been expunged, the slate wiped clean. A world rejoices. Well, I do, and a small coterie of cats smile smugly in support.

The other things missing are ‘I’m Wind’ which is a very weird dramatic thing, but strangely compelling for that very reason, and the small live selection of ‘Lei Morra’, ‘Maybe-O-The Leaves’, ‘Scarletminded Echoes’ and ‘Wide White Wave’, whose removal is one of those mystifying things, but as this is all an exercise in boosting quality I guess they don’t much rate those performances anymore. It also means you can locate the original if you’re a manic collector, for which you also get a booklet for your rewards; the new version, a slick digipack, being ergonomic economy in action. All told, I’m happy, as this makes this new edition very different.

So, to the music. I am no music scholar, so the terminology which litters the sleeve means nothing to me. Larghetto, Notturno, Gagliarda? These are not things for an urchin like me. Let me say instead that it is a record with a clear historical flavour, as you’d expect from the title, and while Baroque music can be brittle and stiff of limb, you don’t get that here. It has a loose way about its varied disciplines. ‘Passagio Lustrale’ plonks you fairly and squarely in some courtly atmosphere, formal keyboards, respectful guitar, all a tad warmer than the original release, and vibrant, the keyboards all but vibrating, the guitar twangier. ‘Scarletminded Echoes’ is fluttery, with vocals sweeping in and oscillating slightly, by turns salty or shrill, the windows rattling until the guitar keeps the song balanced, often delicately. ‘The Winds of Carmini’ is as swift as it is deft, with a masterful guitar display that delights as it streams onwards. ‘Belle Rose Porporine’ has some triumphant brass claws and elegant vocal wings, all fading swiftly, at which point ‘Astore Serotina’ prances into view, the vocals rolling lustily, the music sparse but artistically infused, almost filmic, the little keyboard frills enchanting. ‘Orlando, A Female’ is a trim little blast, a doomier frontage, boomier percussion and a big swooping finale. ‘La Bourgeoise Et La Noble’ slips and twirls with its stylish keyboard pomp, the vocals like a demented opera.

‘Maybe-O-The Leaves’ returns to simmering guitar sensitivity and a nicely flowery vocal display, and you just slip into its embrace so easily, a gorgeous piece. ‘Bleumarine’ is more difficult yet simpler, as the musical mood supports the dreamy vocals which move in two layers. Comparatively harsh with its seriously vocal demeanour ‘Dulcamara’ also has a flighty feel in places, which shows how they were moving into their own territory. We finish with a charming, becalmed ‘Ave Maria’ which is very narrow, enclosed and concentrated.

So there you are, an interesting album which they acknowledge as an important step in their overall development, pinpointing more than just a deepening appreciation of music, revealing a natural ability to immerse and awaken subtleties, rather than forcing their way in. While the post-punkier edges have been rounded away they haven’t been ground own. It’s still refreshingly bumpy here and there, as they have always poured energy into a lot of their upgraded historical sounds, and the real softer sensibilities were yet to come, but you can see how they wear these tones well and blend together to create their own presence.

www.ataraxia.net

MUNDTOT
ENDZEIT
AF-Music

Well, they’re noisy little devils, which is a good start. It’s a heady brew of Gothic anti-rock guitar angst and brevity, which is also good.

‘Intro’ is light and whispery, a tiny possibly pointless moment before we get ‘Endzeit’ stalking around, deadpan vocals and clipped chords worming through the lugubrious plunging piece, where the synth has a spooky sci-fi allure. ‘Gaia’ is downcast, all but forlorn, vocal cinders beneath their feet, then a gnashing, raw chorus rears up resentfully.
‘Wintersturm’ is lovely, with the wiry guitar bounce and casual vocal guile blessed by a bendier Nirvana rasp.
‘Virus Mensch’ is more static, glowering and bulky, a big lump of noise, graceful vocals drizzled over seething synth and bloated guitar scurf. ‘Xenophobia’ is even hungrier, leaner, with frosty feedback, which just leaves ‘Haltet Die Welt An’ to disport itself wonderfully, space and fluid tension its hallmark, the guitar consistently pushy, the vocals stern but brisk, the rhythm surging, clomping and snarling, and even if the very end is microscopically limp instead of crunching this is a fabulous record.

If it’s their debut it’s absurdly good, and we should all look forward to more. They’re tough, sleek without being polished, and melodic with menace.

www.myspace.com/mundtot

ATARAXIA
OS CAVALEIROS DO TEMPLO (Live in Portugal MCMXCVIII)
Dying Art

Now this is very special, a magnificent live show in Lisbon during 1998 presented originally as a video and CD, now tidied up and a dvd/CD pairing. The video has been a rarity for ages now that this is a very welcome reappearance, but it’s limited to only 500 copies and most will have gone so as usual I would advise swift movement on your part.

It comes inside a brown paper wrapping, with a string to wind round two circles to lose it, like old official papers. Inside there is a lovely gatefold dvd-sized digipack. Inside that, besides the discs, are two lovely black and white mini-posters, a label business card and a little badge, and we all like badges. I won’t review the CD, which is a ten track version of the gig, missing the last two numbers. My old version was a bit knackered so I’m well happy.

The band you find onstage is Francesca Nicoli, Vittorio Vandelli and Giovanni Faglieri, with Lorenzo Busi still on dancing duty, and the man who is vital to their general organisation and artistic touches, Livio Bedeschi, also gets some acting roles, because they have kept the original content and not simply cut it down to gig footage. This is good because I love their little acted sequences, even though I don’t necessarily know what’s going on. It’s just part of their enigmatic world.

During ‘Intro’ you see gargoyles and cloisters, setting you instantly at ease and at home among ruins of what seems like unyielding stone. As the plaintive but firm ‘Almourol’ gets into its historic stride we’re indoors watching Francesca, dressed in medieval attire, dozing somewhat, then writing at a desk, with a very obliging black cat in attendance. It cuts to the modern age with our trio at a table, cards being laid out dramatically, and the cat has a good scratch. Twice. It’s a scratch edit! The improvement in the dvd is obvious as the tracking is well nigh perfect, as the video was a little streaky. ‘Omne Datum Optimum’ patters and pops over the lively drums and jingling guitar. Still indoors Busi is waving flags and displaying shields in a somewhat spooky manner, Francesca dancing like a wayward swan, Bedeschi busting in for a quick dance too, and there’s lots of bits all over a table.

A stunning version of ‘Le Ore Rosa Di Mazenderan’ also has sweet imagery, from mirrors to fabric (of time!) and there Francesca stands onstage, emoting while a revolving Busi is behind her, his umbrella of ribbons twirled very slowly. To the sides are Vittorio (seated) and Giovannni (standing), like sombre sentinels. ‘Filava Melis’ slides out after shots of keys on a wall and we know we’re in the modern world as Vittorio is wearing glasses, effortlessly mesmerising with the guitar as we get thumpety drums and synth seepage to move it along, with some flute and recorder adding a silvery flourish. ‘Nossa Senhora Dos Anjos’ is beautifully moody, Busi doing his extended arms bit inside a cape, using sticks to make his wings spread wide as we cut to a cracked statue, and the ghostly serenity is intoxicating.
'Batalha' is harsher, marching out proudly, as we cut for a close-up to the keyboard being played to convince us Giovanni isn’t secretly playing computer games (these being indoor shots means we have to take it all on trust), and there’s a striking series of live shots which show how good this recording is because it’s a simple approach but captures the mood and concentration onstage perfectly as the people involve know what to expect. There’s a minimum of fuss, so the music pours in through you eyes as much as the ears, with the visuals grabbing your attention when required.

We drift back indoors to a see a shell, a tile, and then the sea which brings us to the genteel ‘Aperlae’, with dreamlike imagery as Busi is in his red outfit with the round flat head piece and wider-rimmed base, a cross between Alice In Wonderland and a female condom. They spin a very delicate musical web as the camera goes in close on Vittorio but at a weird angle, suggesting his third finger could rival that of Nosferatu! Fade to indoors and a big door, a wall, and hand. Then hands, moving closer. Say hello ‘Lucrecia’ with rising brass and vocals, Francesca in a remarkable medieval headdress, and the song has, if it isn’t a contradiction, a subtle flamboyance as modern sensibilities are transplanted into the historical flavours, a bit like the Green Party remaking Frankenstein, it all works to a happy ending.

We see the trio inside the basement, the chaps in modern dress, like resistance fighters planning their next attack but wondering why she still has medieval gear on, because that will surely attract the guards, or maybe it’s a diversionary tactic? Ah, clever!

Hands again, fruit, plates, then into a ravishing ‘Oduarpa’ with the witchy vocals, Busi being mysterious inside a backlit sheet. After shots of bulbous bottles ‘Charola’ is very dainty, and ‘Nossa Senhora Dos Anjos’ is the encore, the synth floating as Busi does the great arm thing again. It’s a captivating sight. At times with Francesca standing in front his arm movements mimic hers, but he also looks like a huge white bat, based on medieval principles, because the head gear looks part statue part insect. Occasionally he appears to be sending weird semaphore signals, but then his arm/wings open wide, she stands closer and he enfolds her. She disappears. It’s brilliant.

Cut back to indoors, and hands placed treasured items inside a small casket, which is then closed. Roll credits.

The band had fun. “The Portuguese experience was a revelation: Mosteiro dos Jeronimos, Alcobaca, Batalha, Tomar are all passages to get illumination. It’s amazing to perceive these places so full of sacredness, places that have managed to transmit knowledge all over the centuries, still breathe. From this voyage we have come back changed and enriched. We return music for what we have received from silence. The voyage goes on...”

You’ll have fun too. It’s a real must-have item, because the visual experience will transport you as much as the music.

www.ataraxia.net

(((S)))

PHANTOM
t&e/AF

Well he’s done it again, if you don’t mind me shattering any suspense. After last year’s extraordinary ‘Ghost’ (((S))) is back with another mesmerising and weird collection, in that he has several styles but they all seem to fit like a shape-shifting glove. Also, he has a totally instinctive voice, which always helps. He isn’t weary, it’s some kind of irradiated wispiness, as though before recording he is kept pressed between the pages of an enormous book, and then when everyone is ready they heave it open and out he slips.

‘A Crying Shame’ just easels beautifully into the space between your eras and within ten seconds you’re dangling on its little hook, with another spacious yet honed chorus, post-punk and pop dusty dancing rather than anything truly dirty. Catchy, dreamy, but potent. The vocals dominate, but there’s lithe guitar and prominent synth tumbling about and when you find ‘Lonely Is The Lighthouse’ towering over you this is harder hitting still, but politely so. Here the vocals are...
clipped but ergonomically entreating amid plunking bass, clattery drums and some keyhole guitar surgery. It actually bulges with activity but is clearly very simple, a strikingly direct pop song doused in character and also some subtle lyrical imagery.

I could say I just can’t see the appeal of ‘Invisible Man’ but someone might take me seriously. Here we move into an edgier space, bass sullen, guitar prickly and deep, vocals cunning and suspicious and we get a brisk guitar buffeting towards the close which works beautifully with the craftily rising, breathy chorus. With crosscut guitars jangling and ambling ‘We’re In The Wind’ is instantly calming like a bath in warm vodka, the vocals hesitant but wheezily optimistic, contemplating the end of the world but romance too. That’s optimism! A cheerily crumbling song.

‘Autumnhead’ is mental, a Carnaby Street ba-baa-bub-bub-bub-baab throwback, piano thunking away, and ridiculously infectious, which is no doubt the point of catchy things: under your skin, into the subconscious. (What would House say?) It gathers and bustles, pushing towards the finish like astronauts on drugs climbing a narrow staircase, unphased by the disappearance of their rocket. He’s cutting off and throwing his autumn head, but surely that then gives way to a wintry head? (I admit I may have been misled by the jollity of the music and missed the point.) The grandly atmospheric ‘Walk’ with its ornate guitar and stark direction switches us back into a moody avenue and the threat of going for a walk with him, forever, which seems impossibly tiring and ill-conceived. Diminutive backing vocals and reflective keyboards start to protrude from the sleek surface as it reaches a strangely inconclusive end.

‘Addicted To My Dreams’ is almost a merging of all we’ve heard, pert post-punk mooshing about with a decisive melodic thrust, this time with some taut, trembling tremolo and introspective warbling, controlled by a relaxing but delicious style, with mad touches, like suddenly thickened brief snatches of vocals, and then ‘A Handful Of Dust’ oozes and shines, compressed but linear and quietly delightful as it is dignified. ‘Tired Hangs The Head’ ticks over nimbly, almost as though he’s declared he’s in with the in-crowd (sealing himself in an iron maiden) as tears apparently hum in his head, and if you look at the album overall this is a mirror image of ‘Lonely Is The Lighthouse’, ringing couplets, supple ringlets flicking and a vivid sense of unease. We exit accompanied by ‘Hole In My Heart’ which is the weakest song here as it’s a little too familiar and busy, some of the vocals a bit twee, but there’s a ghostly apparition in the title track appearing uncredited almost immediately, nourishing with its luscious emptiness.

“I’m deep in the dry spell, welcome to my Hell,” he sings across spidery guitar and subterranean synth, and we should thank him for this invite to an oddly comforting and frequently brilliant album.

www.myspace.com/fustydk
www.af-music.de

ATARAXIA
LLYR
Prikosnovenie

“Llyr (Lyr) is the name of the instrument of the Bards and the Greek lyrical poets; a sacred musical instrument visually inspired by the grace and nobleness of the swans.”

This is magical, and once again finds the band creating an unexpected mood, roving knee-high through a new ethereal field where percussion stirs around them, where synth and guitar weave through the air and the vocals create a strange, sometimes sinister canopy above. Although only ten songs long it takes you on a weird journey, plucking you up, then depositing you, mystified but strangely refreshed. Delicate and muted compared to most of their previous works it nevertheless remains full and vibrant, the air humming, and doubtlessly slightly scared.

‘Siqillat’ comes out of the mist, distant bells and the percussive sense of insects giving way to insistent synth, downcast guitar and a bright orb of vocals. Although it is a work of intrinsic beauty it’s also downright eerie, but you appreciate both in its balanced impact. Now the album apparently revolves around the travels through time of a shaman named Siqillat, and the music reflects first a spell of equanimity, then a feminine spell, on into a male/female schism, creating a break from any link with nature, then through a ‘healing’ mantra we’re ushered back towards an optimistic state. That’s the theory, and a suitably artistic one for them, so how come they cover ‘Scarborough Fair’?

Well, it’s what they do with it. It’s instantly recognisable in suitably supine form, but the vocals are dreamy instead of a plain folky concoction, and then the drums start to create ripples, the music as important as the vocal interplay, guitar swelling, drums pushing forwards, synth shadows gluing them together. Gloomy keyboards find the initially moping ‘Quintaluna’ seeping out until male and female vocals begin to coalesce, at times light and really catchy but also richly dramatic and disturbing when it inches forwards and voices unite, similar in effect to the theme of The Omen.

‘Llyr’ is simply beautiful, guitar and strings trickling into supple percussion and lifting vocals, down into a quiet dip, then easing back into a lively, deep stroll to a gentle guitar close. ‘Elddamaaar’ is weird, the first of two parts, a slender but invigorating thrum of a song, the vocals and wonderful drums poking through its gauzy fabric. ‘Envysien’ is equally enchanting, the guitar and softly curling synth casually hypnotic, the flute leading us out of dreamy stasis and into a deeper entrancement. This restful state continues with ‘Klepsydra’ which chimes graciously along with winsome vocals wisps caressing your lulled ears, the ultimate Ataraxia sorbet. ‘Elddamaaar’ is doomier, sterner vocals gliding over harsh drums until a flute or recorder introduces entices contemplative vocals, then suspenseful synth descends with a tangle of sonorous vocals and murky guitar before a space opens for genteel vocals that fracture, dark but coy, all very mysterious.

‘Gayatry Mantra’ perplexes further with a style that merges Indian with the monastic; music held back, vibrating slowly as the vocals take centre stage, female leading, male and female repeating phrases. The stillness is reassuring, but it’s oppressive too, the threat slowly passing as its natural gentleness takes us out, calm again. Into ‘BoreaI’, an exquisite song on which to finish, with the vocals pushing up like jubilant orchids through softly delineated musical foliage, the music doing a favourite Ataraxia thing of melting into the sound of the sea.
By the end of it you’ll be charmed, your ears aglow, having been transfixed and transported which is what they’re all about, but the fact they manage to do it different time and time again is what keeps you wanting more. This record is an absolute joy, and yet still quite strange, rooted in their world, yet somehow other-worldly. Grab your passport.

www.ataraxia.net
www.prikosnovenie.com

TERRORIZER #197 / DOMINION #4

Look at this bunch of fucking idiots! Watain, is that Elven for Wank Stain?

For a laugh I listened to the free CD, briefly as Watain start it off with something called ‘Malfeitor’ and I am expecting great things, because this is a band the readers regard as providing the third greatest album of the decade. Like pisspoor Industrial Metal rejects, with poorly remixed gargling vocals sandwiched in the mix, only the guitar is be appointed, and it’s basically a gurly take on death metal. I didn’t listen to anything else, and while avoiding a band called Skat Injector may be my loss I feel no great concern.

I then turned to the matter in hand, the fourth issue of the Goth/Darkwave/Industrial magazine included within the main mag, but no longer occupying the centre pages. Is that accidental or intentional? I liked the fact you could remove it and chuck the rest away. Now there has been tearing of pages.

Dominion 4 is a letdown. The sight of a debonair IAMX gracing the cover didn’t grab me, and the four items in the closing ‘Dark Stuff’ page are total shite, so I perused the contest with foreboding. It’s okay as you plunge into the scanty news, with details of a charity CD for World Goth Day – http://www.worldgothday.com – and then there’s tiny bits on Elysion, Luxury Stranger, Romance and The Mariana Hollow, with the medium bits being what makes the issue worthwhile, covering Novakill, Pretentious Moi?, Lacrimas Profundere, and Two Witches. There’s nothing remarkable in the record reviews, the live section gives us bland coverage of Theatre Of Tragedy, Suicide Commando, Anne Marie Hurst, Assemblage 23 and The Eden House. IAMX isn’t particularly interesting but there’s an article on the return of Nitzer Ebb which makes up for that.

A bit dull, unfortunately. It even looks a bit drab. Hopefully the next will be vibrant and garish.

www.myspace.com/dominionmagazine

VARIOUS ARTISTS
HOPE (Sophie Lancaster Foundation)
Download

An excellent idea, spawned from a chat between Martin Oldgoth and Andi Sexgang, after they’d finished discussing their weird surnames, and a record anyone involved with Goth in this country should buy. All proceeds go to the Sophie Lancaster Foundation which is pushing for changes in hate crime legislation and also does work in schools, hopefully making chavs use what passes for a brain before it’s too late.

“The CD features unreleased material and tracks written especially for the foundation. Every track has been kindly donated free of charge by the artist and it will be released on May 22nd (World Goth Day), it will retail at £8.00.”

Bleak inspiration comes through Joolz’s beautiful ‘The Prophet of Calgary’ spoken over light ambience provided by Justin Sullivan, then we shift sideways with Andi Sex Gang’s ‘Salamun Child’ like a topsy-turvy spaghetti western, an eating spaghetti with your vest on sort of thing, scuttling drama of the type he does so well. Autumn Cannibals is Jeff Dieham of TLD and his gloomy, restless ‘Monument to Shame’ was written specifically because of this record, rising and throbbing. Gene Loves Jezebel’s ‘Who Wants To Go To Heaven?’ is almost the alt version of Robbie Williams, a sweeter idea than you might expect, just as The Eden House’s ‘All My Love’ is the Goth alternate take on Portishead spectral vibration, and really spookily adorable.

Collide burn coldly through a quietly bulging ‘Euphoria’, Alien Sex Fiend are tied up and giving off rigid sparks in their wriggling ‘Gotta Have It’, like a musical drill, before the pottering Andi Sex Gang & Marc Almond duet of ‘The Hungry Years’ makes a curious return, always a welcome skinny thing. A club mix of UK Decay’s ‘Battle of the Elements’ is interesting, giving it a lingering harmonious appeal, The Last Dance do a good swirly proddy ‘Cages’ and another exclusive pops up with Anne Marie Hurst’s choppily rocky, trim ‘I
Have Changed.’ New Model Army pirouette through a lightly
tempestuous ‘Dawn’, The Mission’s unveiling of ‘She’s Gone Away’
comes with some fascinatingly filthy imagery in its peaky and
picturesque doldrums

The pained ballad ‘Death of an Angel’ by Uninvited Guest returns us
to what actually happened, and why this record has, unfortunately,
happened. Delicate but hotly passionate it also tries to find some
optimism in the embers of anger. Faith and the Muse’s ‘To Be
Continued’ makes for a grand close, succinct but oblique musically,
open-ended.

A fine cross-section, and an important cause. I am sure you’ll be
interested.

www.stayindie.com/Hope
www.sophielancasterfoundation.com

UNSCENE #8 - £3.50

Here we go then. You should know by now it will be good, and it’s
pretty much up standard, with the obvious advantage of having an
interview with a clearly sanguine Carl McCoy, although I think the
Pretentious, Moi? interview is easily the more interesting. Even the DJ
spotlight with DJ De’ath is good, as he shows a very healthy attitude
as well as an impressive knowledge of alcohol.

There’s an article by Amaranth anyone thinking of starting their own
business might like to consider, as she sifts the minds and expertise of
Ingela Lordsdotter (Veil Of Visions), Julia Goodall (The Gothic Shop)
and Sally Leonard (Leonard Of London). Even now I am trying to
work out what my USP might be. But that’s not all…. Spucktute are here, as are Seize, who I confess I’d completely
forgotten about, and Mesh, so the variety is good. You can enjoy a
club profile on The Charnel House, models Madaley Selket and
Wanderlust, there’s a very nicely detailed piece about Novakill, a
surprisingly jolly Assemblage 23, the sharply direct Bak XIII, and
very cute, sizeable encounters with Last July and The Beauty Of
Gemina. It reads well

The only bad bit is the age of the live reviews. It seems weird reading
a magazine now which has content going back to before last Summer,
but there’s the treacherous waters a magazine faces these days. Things
come and go, ebb and flow.

The freebie CD gets off to a great start with the crunchy dark electro
machinations of 19ninetynine’s ‘Welcome To The Freakshow’ and
Pretentious, Moi? giving it fulsome Goth creaking and sparkling with
‘Living Dead And Undecided.’ The Beauty Of Gemina nimbly crawl
through the shadows of a thinly lit bit of self-doubt in ‘Narcotica’ and
then

Bak XIII bubble in a convivial seething manner through ‘We Are
Alive.’ Uberbyte do the dancey Industrial muzak thing in ‘If
Something Gets Hard (Fuck It)’ which uses a naughty word to make up
for it’s fairly pasty waste-of-spaceness. I didn’t realise they would
be so…slight. Rikky, what are you playing at? Fun tune, sure, but
where’s the power?

Maybe I am just made of granite tonight, but Pro-jekt also seem
positively gentrified in their charming ‘Hallucinating’ and there’s a
plaintive pop side to Ex-Voto’s ‘Masquerade.’ Rhombus are made of
sterner stuff with the frisky ‘4472’ and Spucktute surprise no-one but
the dimmest by being a bit mental, ‘Drop The Bombs’ like Long John
Silver throwing a party at sea. Stomp, stomp, stomp. Novakill bobble
about gasping about the rage, the fury, the blood in ‘Demonizer’,
unintentionally amusing, whereas John Merrick’s Remains also plod,
plonk and plink but they manage to make it sound believable in ‘The
Haunting’ while Shiraya’s Dream sound fucking horrible in ‘The
Lady’ like an operatic fetish hybrid. I just want it to stop.

The Last Cry wash that foulness away with their bright, tough
‘Haunting Me’; Glass step cautiously in the commercial angst of ‘This
Odyssey’ and Last July’s ‘Nothing Else But You’ has interesting
depth after its plain start, slowly inflating into a neat, stark landscape.

All in all, pretty damn good.

www.animespresso.com/unscene
I do wonder sometimes, where the information goes and now suspect it must be that freedom of information act, allowing it to just leak out everywhere so that when you need some it’s gone, on holiday, with its own right to roam. Who is in Spucktute beyond Max Rael? I have absolutely no fucking idea and I have just spent 30 minutes looking. Okay, I could have messaged Max but I prefer to be diligent. I have checked the booklet and discovered certain vocalists exist. I have learned that “Spucktute are on the cutting edge of Electro/Industrial Music,” which is the only place to be because God knows the main body of such music is rounded off, facile and repetitive. Only those who make it fun or shocking have any right to be taken seriously. Spucktute are fun, having their indignant messages too, and a name which is strangely clumsy to say. Try it. Say it aloud, in public. People will think you are from the Balkans seeking directions to a pet shop, I bet you.

Right, music then. Attenshun!

Allow me to inform you that on the first two songs there are vocals by Debs@SystermFX and Falguni Clarkson. I didn’t read that, I simply sensed it. Now retracting my antennae I concentrate on the sound. ‘Going Nowhere’ is like the old SMASH mashed potato ad with a streak of vengeance thrown in, the robots having finished laughing at us getting stuck into the studio. A rattling good yarn it pulses like a lonesome nutter dropped in a scrap yard, a glaring synth and cantering rhythm offering more ups and downs than any simple pulse. While that is ungainly, ‘Drop The Bombs’ is gainliness itself, a simple thump rising and slumping, with a workable motif and the notion of shock and awe as a ratings winner, with viewer voting involvement for the next target and it all gets quite exciting, although it also goes on a bit vocally without enough variety.

I have no actual idea who Jeremy Kyle is, but I think he’s the male Tricia, yes? I never watched her either. She was the female Jerry Springer, I know that much. He was Esther Rantzen in drag. ‘Jeremy Kyle Nation’ is, as you may have guessed, about TV-inspired inertia and also the sort of crazy people who believe what they see and hear. It has a slower pulse, a thromboid echo, and makes no mention of ‘Bargain Hunt’ as the protagonist is ranting at people on his screen in a disturbing fashion, needing more meds to get through Deal Or No Deal. I think we can all identify with that, but for him it’s his life. It makes me feel all posh and superior too, because I have Radio 4 as my dripfeed.

‘Life After Death’ is buzzier with its gloriously urging and questions about belief in crystal meth and there’s stellar vocals from Robyn Bright, making it seem like a crestfallen but questioning Blondie instead of the Prodigy comparison you might be expecting! This grace mixing minishly in with their usual geyser of geezerish profound profanity is another weapon in their arsey arsenal, which seems pertinent as they close with the pounding, metallic brainwashing of ‘Go To War’, bleak, bleary and jaunty in a bloodless fashion, the beat uplifting, the vocals dejected so that we end quite serious, a tad gloomy, having learnt that war isn’t a good laugh after all.

So yes, you can guess from song titles what it’s all about in advance, but it’s the way they do it, just as it’s the ways that they do it, whoever they actually are. You can nab it for free if you’re quick. I provide an url per song below.

www.spucktute.net ~ http://twitter.com/MaxRael
http://en-gb.facebook.com/pages/Spucktute/238659922974
www.myspace.com/spucktute
www.lineoutrecords.com/downloads/Spucktute_GoToWar
http://lineoutrecords.livejournal.com/176863.html

ALL LIVING FEAR
TWENTY NINE POINT NINE
Download

Some trad Goth for you here which trundles along with a directness that has similarities with a certain linear punky approach, and it’s
slightly different to previous All Living Fear material in that Matthew North finally taking sole control of vocals on a song. He handles it very well too, not afraid to verge on the light or high, and investing the tale of financial misprudence, or plain stupidity, with feeling ('Robert Johnson sold his song, Nobody knew him till he was gone') but no lecturing contempt. I’m not sure who played as the band has changed somewhat and details are somewhat brief. The synth is particularly sweet, the bass plunky, the guitar wispy, and this being the modern age where everyone expects things for free, this is a free download. It comes with an extended version and an instrumental, which does take us back to the initial Punk era when twelve inches were just that, so we’ve gone full circle, and people still fall for the same financial cons covered in the song. Nothing ever changes then, but for a band that are reliably non-flossy or dreamy that’s a good thing. Goth could do with more reality.

The thing about the extra versions isn’t that it’s filling things out, although that may be partially the intention. You actually get a really good feeling off the sound, especially the keyboards, and this holds true for the instrumental. It has a quiet, internal moodiness which is very attractive.

Album soonish then? It’s been a few years.

http://alllivingfear.bandcamp.com – download for free here
(Widow’s Blame available for a minimum of £3.99, Fifteen Years After – 29 songs – minimum £4.99)
www.alllivingfear.co.uk

I don’t mean to insult Rhombus but I wasn’t expecting an album like this from them, not yet. They’ve been consistently moving away from their softer side of Goth Lite as records go by, acquiring tenacity and creating a vocal virus through brutally realistic lyrics, but this time round they’ve stopped having different sounds on a record. They could go from unsettled to perky before, which would pitch you from side to side. With an unified flow on this record the atmosphere and sensitivity gets ramped up a notch, and really impresses throughout.

In ‘Lighting Strikes Twice’ a guitar wanders in out of the storm and a protective bass glides around, female vocal searchlights light up the sky, as male vocals then drift solidly forward in a forlorn fashion. Classy Goth, this also has a tight little tune and a brief, prodding chorus and for an opener it’s an engaging ear-pummeller. Then they keep close to the floor and fly by with ‘4472’, sticking to the same melodic delivery, in fact it’s practically the same song, but the keys lighten the shady nature.

‘Open The Sky’ starts with a great line ‘cometh the hour, no sign of the man’ across a flashier intro, and much churniness, allied to throbbiness, sees it push off grandly. ‘Addiction FFS’ then takes that thrust and bears it aloft with a svelte bass wolfishness, then dual vocals cavorting like a cheerier March Violets and the recurring bass surge will keep you enthralled. Strings and lush keys bring a dewy-eyed soft sheen to ‘Almost Everything’, a spot of portly Goth which remains light on its feet with another coyly dovetailed, lovely chorus. Utterly gorgeous.

A more plaintive female vocal through ‘Denied’ is closer to a smouldering folky essence, then ‘One Day ,More’ hunches into its own drama, skittery drums and nibbling guitars ensuring business beneath the shivery vocal arrows. ‘Leave You To Burn’ starts a tad syrupy and acoustic but suddenly snaps to alert with strict guitar energy waiting vocals into the heat. ‘Anywhere’ also refuses to hang about, its eager chorus rising out of dark synth and swarming glinting guitar, after which they finish with the sentimental sigh of ‘Into The Rain.’

Mature, ultra-melodic Gothic Rock, this is only partially let down by the brevity of the lyrics. They frequently have great lines conjuring up visual impact, but they simply don’t keep it going through songs, so there’s a cosy repetition emerging, meaning that halfway through each song you pretty much know what you’re getting and I think they can develop that area and impress till further. It’s actually what most bands do, but the ability to constantly surprise is what makes a band great, so this leaves them something to aim for. Apart from that this is a fabulous record.

www.rhombus.org.uk

God I’m good sometimes! We will come back to this arrogant claim shortly but for now let’s backtrack and remember a time of comparative imbecility, as I failed to correctly take into account what was involved in playing a vinyl album. As ‘Erazerdrone’ sped by I was thinking to myself, ‘Well, I’ve heard dronier!’ and when we hit track two Pinky or Perky hit the mike. Ahem, 45rpm! Having made the relevant changes I settled back and reconsidered everything.
It’s anything but. Crackle appears on what might seem destined to be sedate or seemly. Musical idealist, and with a raft of talented mates to call upon, some Champion you already know what Gary Conisbee is capable of, but if you recall Galley Slaves, Slugger O’Toole or Heavyweight Mark Sinnis, this is something you’ll really delight in.

Like the mind-tingling Philip Butler, or the grave country power of weirdly astute country, done like a merging of skiffle and scuffed indie, you can download an album you’ll be playing for years to come. It’s have a lot to get through here and then for an outrageously cheap price should be soundly beaten if you can’t appreciate it? Good, because we.

Interested in something slightly off a beaten track, on which you're interested? Alright then. Follow me.

So there you go. I’ve always enjoyed Alien Sex Fiend albums and through the years they have introduced many different electronic styles and moods, from harsh to trancey, and then an assortment approach through the years they have introduced many different electronic styles and moods, from harsh to trancey, and then an assortment approach.

You remember how ‘Maximum Security’ surprised everyone after their first two earthquakes? This record has the same effect and it’s the best record they’ve made since the 80’s.

Also, don’t be scared when you see the photo behind the cut. They have an explanation. In fact just don’t be scared. True, the opening wriggly rockabilly of ‘The Unjustified Reverence Blues’ does start with the lines, “gonna cruise around my home town, on a scooter, I see an ex girlfriend, I might shoot her,” but this is no Cumbrian-related happenstance as it’s swiftly followed by, “an admiring look, that she might see. But I’m not quite over her, well, she’s not over me. Well, not yet.” I actually listened to the CD I burnt off for the first time the day after the slaughter and both Lynda and I did a double take in the car a la, ‘what did he say????’ (One of us even laughed.)

It gets sweeter.

Detail almost disguised as brevity, you have to love that, with a tumbling double bass too! Our protagonist then meets a weasel of a politician out canvassing, smarming for his vote, turning the table smartly, kissing his baby on its head and sleeping with his wife. So, are you interested? Alright then. Follow me.

Remember what I said. Don’t be scared, and if you are it’s perfectly natural.

Gary Conisbee writes sings and plays guitar, and even credits himself with ‘percuSSION’ because he gets to tap a beer bottle at one point. Julian Marshall also writes and his cv runs to guitar, vocals, mandolin, clarinet, box, harmonica, ebow, bass guitar, so I guess they don’t really need much of a band. A friend of Gary’s set this pair up on a Blind Lemon date, sensing their styles were compatible, and the next thing you know they’re knocking out Hank Williams and Willie Nelson covers for fun, but then they laid out the rules. If they went to open mic nights for a laugh and did covers they could only do them once. These have included (and I select these from a list of 120 Gary sent) ‘Another Girl Another Planet’, ‘Do You Know The Way To San José?’, ‘Fisherman’s Blues’, ‘Folsom Prison Blues’, ‘Levi Stubbs’ Tears’, ‘Shipbuilding’ and the one we’re glad we’ll never hear, ‘Wuthering Heights.’

The fact they both write music and lyrics makes it even better with Julian’s ‘Dear James’ elegantly circling on acoustic, but this enigma is politely malicious. The glazed luminosity of a slow motion ‘Stay With Me’, with Dermot O’Neil back on discreet double bass, amplifies the downtrodden romanticism at its core. Then things get really weird in ‘Ghosts Of The Cousins’ (which I swear was ‘Go To South Dakota’ initially!) as Dinos Laftsids’ sax darts beneath what is apparently the

If you recall Galley Slaves, Slugger O’Toole or Heavyweight Champion you already know what Gary Conisbee is capable of, but now he’s teamed up with Julian Marshall, a like-minded left of centre musical idealist, and with a raft of talented mates to call upon, some working outside their normal area but getting the entire point, a real crackle appears on what might seem destined to be sedate or seemly. It’s anything but.

www.asf-13thmoon.demon.co.uk

HANK’S CAFÉ
NOTHING WILL EVER COME BETWEEN US
Download album

Interested in something slightly off a beaten track, on which you should be soundly beaten if you can’t appreciate it? Good, because we have a lot to get through here and then for an outrageously cheap price you can download an album you’ll be playing for years to come. It’s weirdly astute country, done like a merging of skiffle and scuffed indie rock ‘n’ roll and so good that whether you’re into a new folk hybrid like the mind-tingling Philip Butler, or the grave country power of Mark Sinnis, this is something you’ll really delight in.

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It gets sweeter.

“’I’m driving in a Buick, Convertible car
Well I don’t know where the front ends,
I can’t see that far.”

Detail almost disguised as brevity, you have to love that, with a tumbling double bass too! Our protagonist then meets a weasel of a politician out canvassing, smarming for his vote, turning the table smartly, kissing his baby on its head and sleeping with his wife. So, are you interested? Alright then. Follow me.

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imagined depiction of a pissed Dylan wandering lustily through a folk club in London during the swinging sixties, made all the weirder by their hiphop producer stepping out to play one part of a folk purist outraged by electricity! The simpler ‘Red Dress’, with Linda Hayes adding gracious vocals and the light resonance of her Irish Harp, also demonstrates the wonderfully visual sense of storytelling these chaps have. “She watched the luggage carousel, her bag went round and round again, knowing when her hand gripped the strap, there was no going back…” Like a better version of The Beautiful South. Regret and sadness, gliding away….

Jauntier is the daft ‘Patsy’s Waltz’ about a dream Gary had where he found he could fly quite easily, and yet people didn’t react around him, which he claims he found surprising, but I think he’s caught out in a lie because he then admits that’s the way it is around where he lives; “no-one talks on the tube at all and if someone flies by well you just ignore it,” so why the surprise, huh? Admittedly the drugs confession which follows probably explains that one. With more harp shimmering ‘Billie Sue Valentine’ sidles into view, casting a pall over one woman’s character, and the weight of sleepy country opinion seems that she’s seriously bad news. It’s a cliché, in one sense, but beautifully done and teasingly twisting other clichés around and holding them up to the light like a freshly polished glass.

Now apparently, and I never knew this, Johnny Cash used to weave a dollar bill through his guitar strings to achieve a certain sound, which Julian replicates during ‘I Prayed For You’, not that I’d recognise it. There’s a muted strum on a capricious tune, then jangling electric, either of which could have the financial tug going. ‘California, During The Goldrush’ is odd as it seems longer than it actually is, so much happening musically within subtle gradients and the main words used are wonderfully hypnotic. A curiously moving piece, Kieran Nagi adds tabla on this, leading to Gary admitting, “We accidentally invented Country and Eastern,” but I’m sure Peter Singh has a few outtakes which could stamp a prior claim on that trophy.

They leave us with the standard lurching of ‘Talk To Someone’ on a recording enlivened by their mates surging back from a pub session and joining in. Wise advice served up by carousing lunatics, softly sincere for all the rabble! That’s no shock either. The romanticism I expected, which avoids dewy-eyed sentimental twaddle, and the stripped down sounds means all contributions are so lively. It’s just a treat throughout.

But, the photos, which have to be negotiated. Obviously, I did ask if the Village People goes Country look was intentional and Gary’s legal team drafted this reply for him to read.

“Unfortunately we are quite scary. I’ve seen the best doctors in Switzerland and there’s nothing they can do for me. As for the fancy dress, there is a reason. We went to see Mariachi El Bronx and the whole 8/9 piece band had matching mariachi suits in black and white. Jaws dropped and we made a drunken vow that something would have to be done. I put the ‘m’ word into eBay everyday for the next month and found nothing that could be worn in public by gentlemen of a certain age. Then one day this suit showed up in California. Not my usual colour, but it had ‘J + G’ on the back!!
“I conversed with the seller whilst trying not to appear like someone who has one hour access to a padded laptop in his institution. Picked it up for 30 bangers and took it to a tailor to ‘loosen’ the waist. I did ask the history of the suit. Who were the previous ‘J+G’ s? Did they come from Mexico or the US? By this time she had stopped replying to my notes, so it remains a mystery.”

How much of this you believe is down to you. What remains beyond doubt is that this is a fantastic record available for download for “the price of a pint (or more if you’re feeling generous).” I was more generous and I’m sure you will be too, and intoxication of the musical kind can follow.

www.hankscafe.co.uk

THE STUNS
LIFE AFTER THE BLACK BOX
New Fear

No, nothing to do with Stun, this is very much a conventional modern rock band who sent this in, and admit to a spread of influences from Punk to 80’s Electro, with some grunge and indie rock thrown in, which leaves them as an odd hybrid that at times made me think of a cross between Jesus Jones and Big Country, for the way the chorus rise and the guitar does sometimes does a little bright twirl of its own.

Their myspace is a bit weird, announcing this as a new album, when I think they mean their first album, but then they are a bit weird. One of them is also in a covers band, The Sparks, seemingly unable to sit still.

Here we go then.

‘Time Can Kill’ really does burst out like Big Country, maybe crossed with a bit of Cultish activity, the bass mean and low beneath deliberately drawn vocals, that then find themselves poured into a U2-style chorus or gently cossed angst. That sounds far clunkier than it is, as there’s an agile lightness of musical being, as well as some thoughtful lyrics. ‘Beyond My Reach’ gets a vocal clamour going, and plenty of vigorous drum touches to keep it perky although I didn’t find myself feeling involved. In this modern rock swirl there is the same problem I found with the 80’s exponents, in that if the vocals aren’t sharp and upfront I find it all like a presentation of some sort.

‘Good Thing’ chops around some more, which is indeed good, as the bass is quite thuddy, and the guitar sprawls happily, keeping it lively but while it goes off as if deranged it’s actually very controlled, and addressing someone in a song as ‘Girl’ just seems so sterile and dated.

The vocals in ‘New Fear’s Resolution’ mooch around as the music turns some slinky moves, and their rhythmic fluidity does spark well, the vocals trailing away with charm as they whisk up a more subtle mood here. The slower, sensitive ‘Lights’ is more interesting, although the opening lines are unintentionally amusing (‘I need more time alone, to shine my secret stone’). This delicacy is quite becoming, and less predictable, allowing them to stretch and stand the song upright with a dignified poise, along with a solemn guitar break. ‘Out Of My Hands’ is capable catchy wibbling, but didn’t interest me, while the scampering ‘Dance With The Devil’ is much more fun, as there’s great drama spouting up through a far more active chorus, and ‘Tell Me What I Know’ also cajoles you into following it’s clever mazy jinks and twists. ‘Here We Are Again’ fidgets with a swaying motif as the vocals stream directly onwards, which I liked more than the emotional aggravations of ‘With Or Without It’ although the rebuild with naggng guitar and loping drums is nice. It also ends unusually timid with the plaintive self-doubting ‘Life’ which very gentle, very trim.

Although this really isn’t my sort of thing but it’s pretty good, commendably free of bombast and isn’t actually stuck on aping any of the names I have mentioned, it’s just in that bracket of virtuous rock. Repeated exposure has left me clear on the fact they can write touching songs very well, and knock out some fine ideas, but they need to weed out a few lyrical clichés and, most importantly, should get more life into the production. It seems like they’re being held back.

www.myspace.com/thestuns

DYONISIS
INTOXICATED
Singed Records

Taking up pretty much where the delightful debut left off this record pitches you into a deliciously stylish sound laying in wait for the emotionally susceptible, so you sink, then submerge in a quite admirable fashion, as ‘We Are...’ does the rocky inclined ethereal thing, with unexpected space and clarity and a sudden stop. Having entered their space you know you’re in for a highly accomplished display, but there’s also great elegance and eloquent depth to encounter.

‘Of The Fear’ has surprising power in between the sumptuous vocals and sighing sounds in the background, vocals and guitar surging into the chorus, then tapering off into a warbley dark staggered spiral. Lighter with beautiful strings ‘Inside Out’ is mesmerising with the subtle vibration on the vocals and the slow, steady push of the song’s energy, and not for the first time you’ll be thinking this is like a
HEX FILES: Resurrection update

I have deleted the earlier post because people have asked for more specific details of contents so behind the cut of this update you can see how many photos have been added, and of whom, which should prove easily enough why this is the biggest book ever published on Goth, with the American and UK sections now individually bigger than the original book was.

To recap, HEX FILES: Resurrection is the new version of my Hex Files book originally published in 1996, when we were well into the fourth wave of Goth and this covered the International scene, which I’d wanted to do since my second book. There was a groundswell of interest in other elements, which is why Vampire, Pagan and Fetish content was also included, and this book had been out of print for well over a decade. The reason my Author’s Edition becomes the biggest book on Goth ever published is because what was once originally 192 pages, containing 231 photos is now a vast 664 pages, with 793 specifically devoted to bands, people who were only written about in this particular book. (I have some stellar piano subtlety, which seems spread out and beaten thin, but the more you play it the larger it looms. The initially demure and relaxed ‘Aches’ reveals itself as a crestfallen winsome oddity, floating and then descending, without any strong rise apart from some glowing guitar. ‘Lunatic’ then takes us out with some extended doominess, although you can also see it as a steely determination.

It’s an absorbing, frequently fascinating record, in that it has the same attractions as the more obviously striking debut, but much more complexity within, as the denser character starts to expand. Exciting stuff!

http://Dyonisis.info

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Greece - The Drops (3), Flowers Of Romance, The Renaissance Dance

Netherlands – Gitane (2), Gotterdammerung, Goyasnada, Rob Brautigam

Italy – Artica (4), Ataraxia (7), Blooding Mask (3), Building 777, Camerata Mediolanense, Cat Fud (2), Dawn Fades, Deviate Ladies, Fear Of The Storm (3), The Frozen Autumn, Holy Lore (2), Limbo, Mystery Plays, Nazedzduha (2), Simon Dreams In Violet (3), Spiritual Bats (5), Thanatos (2), Thelema, Votiva Lux (3), Wasteland (2), Christina Simonelli, Unknown Italian bands (6)

Lithuania – Mano Juodoji Sesuo (5)

Norway – Gotham Nights (4), Morendoes (2), Red Harvest (2)

Portugal – Martyrium (2)

Spain – Ancient Tales (2), Gothic Sex (10), Messiah Pj Pain

Sweden – Dark Side Cowboys (3), The Equinox Of The Gods (5), Funhouse, Malaise (2)

Switzerland - After Darkness (2), Is This Sickness?, Lacrimosa (3), The Moon Lay Hidden Beneath A Cloud, Mordor, 1Alone, Sadness (2)


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www.lulu.com/product/paperback/hex-files-resurrection/11280439

If you want to benefit from combined postage feel free to check out my other books too:

http://stores.lulu.com/mickmercer

They’re one of the great modern post-punk bands but I generally think of them as pretty cool and relaxed, settling into a self-propelled atmosphere. Not this time, where it’s no messing, just out with the whippet-thin bass anditchy guitar as ‘Brutal Killing’ bares its teeth. This is wilder, undulating carefully but especially tenacious and clattery, almost sneering and ugly and there’s a raucoius anti-chorus, a bit like Killing Joke being interrupted at breakfast. Dirty low guitar gas fills the garage that is their maudlin ‘La Foule Sage’, all bitter and tense, but then fading slightly to let grizzling guitar gather its strength as the vocals slither around in despond, guitar the ascending and gyrating in pain. It’s quite strange. The moods on this record are varying degrees of isolation and emptiness.

Spindly guitar light sees ‘Noomo De Xut’ shabbily cavort like a burning scarecrow of sound, as some sax stays just the right side of discordant, and they thump and trudge dramatically. The mood then shifts deliberiously in ‘Irreelle’, with an exotic breeze sneaking through the noir decadence, and the hint of enigmatic torrent. There is stylish lolling around a lugubrious ‘Distance Du Silence’ and before you know it they’ve squeezed themselves into a cover of ‘She’s Lost Control’, softened and almost pretty by being warm instead of tinny, subtly supple but still direct at heart.

Then it all starts to softly depart. The pert ‘Your White Face With The Red Lips’ is curious, bobbing about happily, but there’s some veiled accusations among the weird vocals that slant off the musical page, and ‘Miroirs Underground’ is even more relaxed without being too
downbeat, sidling off having made some vague point, with ‘The Last Day Of Joy’ staring weirdly, like an ambient recording of a café, then unwinding into a despondent moody piece, in which they sound seriously miserable apart from the bit that lashes around after a fade-in.

A curious slow-burn record, full of gloominess that simmers, and not what I was expecting.

www.no-tears.com
www.s8lshop.com – ltd edition (of 300) vinyl LP + CD

ACTION DIRECTE
JUCHE DANCE / SINGING FOR THE CLAMPDOWN

I have some wonderful albums and some odd items coming up over the next week but I thought today I’d whack this up as it arrived just today, and it’s quite odd, Action Directe’s very own unofficial ‘North Korean World Cup anthem’ or, to be accurate, a sort of Scars-on-45 regurgitation of their entire existence. (Pak Doo Ik, we still remember your name. Weirdly on wikipedia I learned this: ‘an Italian urban legend that persisted for a long time in the press had it that Pak was a dentist’?! What’s that got to do with anything?) This is what happens when the lower classes get their hands on technology, it was always bound to end in trouble. File under: if Crass liked football. There’s a new song, in the champing ‘Singing For The Clampdown’ which sadly isn’t anything post-Clash (Korea Opportunities?) but is querulous linear punk with a repetitive peaky bit, and that’s fine by me.

www.actiondirecte.co.uk/juche.htm - download the tracks for free
www.yob-goth.com

INDIE GIGGERY

After the Goth and Punk titles, now comes INDIE GIGGERY, weighing it at 488 pages, containing a ton of ravishing live reviews I did for Record Mirror, my fanzine (Panache) and Melody Maker, covering truly classic indie bands during a golden era, as well as 772 photos, the vast majority previously unpublished.

It’s only £14.99. You need to register with Lulu.com before buying, and should choose flatrate inland postage with the UK or US, and economy airmail if living elsewhere. Full details of content – reviews and photos – are behind the cut.

INDIE GIGGERY contains reviews of:


There are photos of:


www.lulu.com/product/paperback/indie-giggery/11391153

WHISPERS IN THE SHADOW
THE ETERNAL ARCANE
Echozone

Off on a fantasy spree somewhere, where ashen skylines do nothing to banish omnipresent fears, the lyrics always bring great drama and doomy atmosphere to Whispers In The Shadow’s songs and they’re hang on form here with alarming tendencies that upset the Goth applicent whenever you’re getting settled. So the album starts with the sharp and short ‘Haloes At Dawn’ which has pretty birdsong, although that won’t last. Apparently we can reach for the stars but cannot hide any longer, so I assume there’s a deadline looming. Strings slant off sideways as a compressed vocal hints at urgency required. The grand but cleverly underplayed ‘If Uriel Falls’ then asks what if time was to stop? Well, we wouldn’t need watches, if that helps at all? In a way this reminds me of The March Violets heading straight into the ground at high speed, cutting a deep groove. Imagine that happening in slow motion, with powerful ranting vocals and shimmering guitar shivers.

‘The Lost Souls’ is chunkier and free flowing, with some wonderfully opulent guitar from singing madman Ashley Dayour, and constantly robust bass from the intriguingly named Fork. The song crashes along but it has these open spaces as they hustle us through it, and the bass keeps pace, the sternest sentinel. ‘Clouds Without Water’ has some mellifluous monastic mood music sighing in the background, with bells on before Curt Benes brings the drumming dexterity into play, which always gives them an advantage on anyone relying on programming, underpinning everything with such vivid depth.
‘The Wheel Of Pain’ lurches morosely, angrily boiling over but of course ‘The Eternal Arcane’ gets Martin Acid all contemplative on his keyboards, elegantly uplifting for we must have hope, if raising in the dead while blind is your idea of hope, that is. Disturbing imagery is tied in with some ideas of one Algernon Blackwood (yes, I read through the beautiful CD booklet), and so we end with a tightly enclosed spectacular, straining fit to burst, a bit like ‘Space Oddity’ in a black hole.

Great record, no idea what they’re on about. I sense an interview coming on.

www.noizeart.com
www.myspace.com/whispersintheshadow

ALTERRED
BIND UNTIL IT BREAKS
Red Electric

They took their time getting this debut out, but they’ve also ensured it’s good. You can get a proper CD at their shows, otherwise it’s available digitally pretty much everywhere, allowing you to wonder at this strange beast, with its luxurious vocal sprawl and pop quagmire.

‘Fleshbind’ undermines the Electro Industrial tag at once by striding along like some emotional virus on a catwalk, pulse and twinkles seamlessly powering the haughty vocal legs. It’s a body of shiny electronic pop but with a sour glower. ‘Broken Glass’ is even purrier with chattering synth cadence and genuflecting sanguine vocal commercial charm. Singing proudly out over the synth balustrade our host dominates ‘Amphetamine Chic’ and it’s more lightly chomping, romping pop. Things get a little deeper in ‘The Patient’ as the rhythm sags intentionally, then it shrivels artfully, slapping itself back vertically and closing with some a creepily demanding question. The EP finishes with a ‘Dried Flesh Mix’ of ‘Fleshbind which makes them sound a bit like Seal’s ‘Killer’ until it all goes mental!

They’re weird.

www.alterred.co.uk
www.myspace.com/dustheads

MISS FD
Monsters In The Industry
Quantum

And Lo, she steps out of the shadows. The artist formerly known as Frightdoll has always made good records, that’s never been at issue.

The personality within has always been shrouded by a pseudo-electronic-Industrial fug, through which the central character struggles to emerge, leaving you with songs that sound like they’ve been deliberately twisted in an intellectually skewed remix. Well, no more! Having severed relationships with her old label, for the sake of her sanity, Miss FD is bright, upbeat and clear as a strangely commercial bell. Where appropriate.

‘Break Your Control’ does a fizzy electro thing which operates on a multi-layered rhythmic mission and easily proves itself to be master of the dancefloor, sandwiched somewhere between Madonna and Kylie, dripping diluted venom. The unburdening continues in the darker streaked ‘Disgrace’ which has a lighter chorus, like a dove in a trench coat. It’s also on roller skates, tight circles of activity spinning out from the supine form. She is missing a digithec and through the gloopy stomp of ‘Monsters In The Industry’ keeps demanding, ‘I want my digitech back, I want my digitech…’ which I commend to you as hugely enjoyable, even though I’m about to says the words Aqua and Deelite. Squish those two in a blender and this is the result. It’s demented fun and if you’re a DJ you should be playing this even though it may bemuse.

‘Wanderer’, ‘Elements Off Time’ and ‘Rebel Apprentice’ all moves into more open territory, the angst easing into theory, and a strangely similar set of lyrics about losing direction, as simply beats pulse and vocals sigh, staring stretched and abrasive, then getting some stark jitters. Then ‘Dream Door’ opens like an easy going macabre mood piece, the rhythm swishing, the vocals wheeling away capriciously and it all works like…well yes, like a dream. ‘Enter The Void’ is less voidlike and more seamless club silk, and although an effortless balm this is where she’s gone almost too far the other way. What was once complicated has been revealed as having a vivid purpose, but when you get to this stage you can sense blandness encroaching. ‘Realigned’ is scratchier optimisms, or so it seems, and the record’s crying out for some sign of rebirth, having battled the forces of industry darkness she is cleansed, and ready to fight the virtuous fight. ‘Thunder In The Blood’ isn’t exactly that, being spacey, lean and fidgeting in a semi-sunny disposition, then we do get to sneak off relatively cheered by ‘When The Sun Sets’ and she embraces the shadows. This is beautifully poetic and restrained, in a well calibrated filmic bout of heartfelt repetition.

So there we go, a lovely record, which could have done with one of the first three tracks placed later on, to shift the dynamics around, but it’s consistently impressive, as is the holding back of utter rage, as that would have been too predictable.

www.missfd.com
FLIPRON
THE COOLEST NAMES IN SHOWBIZ
Tiny Dog

Just the one song, as a promo for a single released on July 26th, with some US dates set for September, so they’re having a calm summer, including a ten day residency at Edinburgh and are probably even now off their faces at Glastonbury.

The press release warns that this is like, “Madness playing the Grange Hill theme” and they’re not wrong. The opening sequence is deeply disturbing and a little sick-making, although that eases with familiarity, but then sneaky organ slides into place behind the busy vocals, and they pour into a swirly chorus. It sounds a bit weird with full on united vocals, but they tiptoe out as the ghosts of Tucker and Zammo muscle back in. The theme is one of being happy doing fine, with no need to bust a fatuous gut, accompanied by a sort of bowlegged James Bond guitar as it gathers its possessions which are sprawled everywhere and slips out through a rapidly diminishing exit circle.

Cute!

www.myspace.com/flipron
www.tinydog.co.uk

WAVE GOTIK TREFFEN 2010 Pfingstbote
Offizielles Programmbuch

To call this extraordinary item an ‘official programme’ is a bit like calling the English football team amoebae-by-proxy, because it doesn’t come close to hinting at the truth. Michael Johnson of nemesis_to_go and http://www.nemesis.to kindly sent me his spare copy, and it has to be reviewed because it is an iconic item, a true representation of how an all-encompassing artistic approach to music in a scene, plus scenes-within-scenes, and historical antecedents, come together in a lavish, stylish creation that pretty much beggars belief. I have never seen anything as stunning as this connected to music.

The festival naturally has a fine reputation, where some Goth festivals are really just an efficient event, the Goth version of a Metal equivalent, or a dance festival, etc. WGT is something which takes on a life of its own, with a satellite system of events, all revolving around a central idea, a Goth-friendly universe where alien incursion is encouraged, to hold sterility at bay. Holding artistic principles high it then overlaps with other art forms and organisations so that people run their own events to coincide with the festival which makes sense but is also a mark of serious respect. To have a book celebrating this with heady artistic content is inspiring to say the least.

It must cost them a fortune!

Look at the cover. It’s a rubberised white finish with embossed classical figures, and inside are 198 colour gloss pages, with the photographs almost appearing to be stamped into the pages, for when you hold it at an angle they appear to stand slightly in relief. Luxury beyond all laws of common sense.

It would appear this level is normal to them. Michael also sent me his tickets to demonstrate this, and they are pretty opulent. The book comes free with the ‘Obsorge Karte’ ticket, which is one that includes free bus and tram travel around Leipzig itself so is presumably the costliest version? Apparently the book can also be purchased on its own at the festival, and it would be interesting to know how much it costs.

I wouldn’t want to be the designer working on this given that it’s based around the artists and events in the festival and subject to change as the deadline looms, but it exudes quality at every turn. I also don’t read German, but I can pretty much follow what’s being set out at least, although the opening page with it’s classical section kicking off with a philharmonic orchestra and choir doing something called ‘Gothic Christ IX’ is pretty intriguing, as the section then streams on into Mozart, Renaissance music, and modern artists covering the likes of Bach, Grieg, Schubert and Ravel, with the venues and musicians pictured. This high brow end of the art spectrum, while not naturally some stand alone Gothic element, is harmonious in selecting mood and setting.

There’s a museum exhibition included, the Leipzig ballet company handling some classics alongside modern dance teams, and Opera. Pft! There’s nothing I don’t know about opera. (Clue: it’s basically distraught bollocks!) Would such behaviour happen in the UK with
ballet companies and orchestras of high repute working alongside modern music in this way? They’d rather wet themselves, I suspect.

There’s a couple of pages of moody myth stuff, which must represent brooding orchestral fare, and then the clash of titans, in a migraine manner, as Wagner is on at a hall one night, Diamanada Galas fumigating the place the next evening. There’s art exhibitions, photography and the music.

The bulk of the book covers the music by venues or events, with artists of many styles often coalescing and cohabiting. I know it’s not like me to say such a thing but it actually makes me want to go. What’s this weird Spiegelpalast? It looks like a restaurant from a fairy tale.

It doesn’t all appeal. There looks to be modern composers I wouldn’t take to, and somersaulty dance displays. There’s films, which looks cool, sci-fi gone weird. Then the next pages you find it’s another classical display, unless those guys in the bow ties are simply the world’s most over-qualified bouncers.

An advert for the mega-shite SAW film series is a rather garish inclusion, but they have to pay for the book somehow! Then there’s an absinthe section which I didn’t understand at all, which sets you up nicely for the middle section. A twenty-nine page lunar calendar. What the Hell is that doing there? I gather this is beloved by regular attendees, but does it mean people use it? Gast. Flabbered.

Conventional maps and venues details are plentiful, as are cute details, such as there’s kindergarten, a talk by Dunja Brill, who is well worth listening to, and the inevitable pervy fetish bit for people who like the idea of pouring hot wax over themselves, and yes, cold wax doesn’t work. Club nights, DJs and more bands. Always more bands. So many bands you look at them and wonder who they all are, and why you
thought some had split up. I have been working my way through some on myspace and youtube since receiving this and there’s a rum old mixture. Michael made a good point that has been raised before, of how UK bands don’t usually match their counterparts on mainland Europe in terms of the quality of their promotional material, like such matters are an after-thought rather than a modern necessity.

There isn’t actually a lot of UK and Irish involvement, which doesn’t come as much of a surprise, although the appearance of Bollock Brothers does, the musical equivalent of a lunar calendar any day of the decade. How did they seem relevant? The Deep Eynde, in suits! I never thought I’d see the day Nude look insufferable, Gitane has her bottom on display, which I think must be another tradition, Kitty In A Casket has the best hair, Ghoultown appear to have lost all their visual style, now resembling grunge roadies, and there’s Ataraxia in there too, which finishes it in style.

Reading between lines I don’t completely understand it looks like the design may be by Thomas Görnert and Stephan Hunniger. If so, we should doff our hats and bow low, for this is surely unlike anything else which is out there, apart from the ones published in previous years and I’m sure people collect these religiously, which is fitting as it feels chunky, sufficiently like a Bible for people to stand on street corners, thumping it impressively as indie kids troop oafishly by.

A modern artefact that shows what can come out of the underground, running overground with a distinct self assurance and self-reliance which then impresses, influences and motivates others. Now how rare is that?

www.wave-gotik-treffen.de/english

VARIOUS ARTISTS
AVON CALLING 2
Bristol Archive

This has been compiled by Simon Edwards, the man behind Heartbeat Records who gave the world the first AC comp, and if this doesn’t quite match that brilliant offering in terms of overall quality this will interest any Punk or Post-Punk fan because these are all unreleased beauties. It’s full of stylistic surprises, starting with SOCIAL SECURITY clearly a bit confused by their punk status during the dinky fun of ‘Self Confession’ where the singer reveals he is living for rock ‘n’ roll, and if you’ve ever wanted to hear a fey version of The Who covering ‘Rebel Rebel’ you’re in luck, because here’s EUROPEANS and their ‘The Only One.’

APARTMENT are impressively moody with ‘Broken Glass’, stirred by murky drums and bass as the guitar drips away from the grim vocals. PRIVATE DICKS are like a hyper version of The Members in ‘You Got It’ and the consistently aggravated X-CERTS surge bitterly through ‘People Of Today’, while a skimpily ESSENTIAL BOP do a lifting but seedily grazed ‘Audition Room.’ APARTMENT spin slowly through a chunky ‘Retrospect’ and they’re an interesting band as they led to The Escape but then on to the depressingly dire White Hotel. SNEAK PREVIEW also have an off-kilter jaunty punk spirit rubbing alongside the organ-based pop of ‘Mr Magoo.’ JOE PUBLIC come on like breezy punk mods in ‘Letters In My Desk’ then the urgently tawdry 48 HOURS get worked up over ‘Train To Brighton.’ (Imagine a more tuneful ATV.)
DIRECTORS further the mod cause with indie guile during the softly burnished ‘Showcase’ as PRIVATE DICKS drift in a becoming fashion through ‘Want Some Fun’ with some slow commercial smears encouraging nicely narrow punk tension. SNEAK PREVIEW bring us some intentionally perverse Play School reggae during ‘I Can’t Get Out’ and STEREO MODELS not only believe they’re in with the in-crowd, but have a thing for Cockney Rebels ‘Middle Of No Where’ disports itself in a genteel manner.

Who are THE PHONE? Their prickly ‘Any Takers’ sits up and deserves a pat on the head, and SEAN RYAN’s shaky ‘Suicide Man’ is also intriguingly forlorn early indie with guitar edge. JOE PUBLIC go a bit soppy in the well meaning but limp ‘Faster’ TVI’S get strangely dramatic in ‘Dancer’ then go seriously off the boil and DIRECTORS sound you’re your parents impersonating The Carpettes throughout ‘Empty Promise.’ That just saw us dip down quite a lot but we finish with UNKNOWN and ‘You Might As Well Enjoy Yourself’ which is another fascinating hybrids of punky angst and a fuller melodic sense of muted drama with catchy tendrils wrapping round the singers throat.

It’s a fantastic compilation, available in August, and of some historical importance to people obsessed with that 1978-1980 period.

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www.bristolarchiverecords.com

VARIOUS ARTISTS
INDUSTRIAL PUNK’S NOT DEAD!
Oktober

You have to admire such cheeky wit as most people don’t even know the genre exists, defending the cause of a movement which has yet to find its feet, let alone flex any actual muscle. Is it any good? Does this compilation merit the recession-busting price of £2? Read on, gentle ones, read on…. Was it really five years ago that the first volume came out? Now that does seem bizarre, but I do recall being in Selsey at that time, and can still picture myself sitting at my office window in the eaves of a weird building, the sea breeze wafting in, as band noise breezily wafted out, causing a mass exodus from the town.

PHALLUS UBER ALLES sounds like the sort of names some electro-noodling knobheads might employ, but ‘Nur Ein Bisschen’ is actually a cool combination of scrappy, punk energy and scrabbling rhythmical pulses with differing degrees of charismatic calamity. Max Rael is currently in half the known bands worldwide, but his main volatile foxhole remains HISTORY OF GUNS and the plinking, surging

‘Kicking Down The Doors’ is quite strange, the lighter clipped motif making the music more capricious as well as exposing Del as a mental vocal assassin, given the song’s slimline centrifugality. THE VOLATILE GENTLEMEN sound good in ‘Broadmoor’ too, like a rockier version of History Of Guns and Action Directe combined, living in a ditch full of sick. It charges along with a nicely nasty spirit. GLOBAL NOISE ATTACK sound like fairly traditional Industrial-electro, cascading nimbly, but ‘Pin’ has some decent bass, and a haunting melodic undercurrent, but Punk? Nope. DIGICORE do shrieky electro-thrash in ‘No Rest (For The Rebels)’ a bit like Crass being locked in the Radiophonic workshop. XYKOGEN are more exciting in ‘U.R.X. (Sparklemotion Mix)’ as the tension is all over the sleek but filthy surface, and this really reminds me of a modern version of what the first electronic bands did just after Punk. The compressed and scuttling ‘Death Of Decency’ by FLESH EATING FOUNDATION exists to one side of this, being electronics with attitude, but not necessarily fused to punk body politic, more like an avant-garde dance music on an anger management course.

I think SPUCKTUTE come over too lightweight musically for ‘We Are All Prostitutes (Live In Session)’ to work as the lyrical vitriol then seems a touch weird. The Pop Group were always a strange band but they rammed the force through, where Spuckland’s approach spreads it around as though across your mental windscreen. I wasn’t overly keen on DEATH BY ELECTRO GIANTS with ‘The Sound Of The Dial Tone’ because I hate songs with phones in, and I doubt I’m alone in that. The jiggling guitar is good, but the rasping generic vocals are also a bit dreary. It’s tough, but someone ranting like a bad Rage Against The Machine pastiche, ‘fuck you, bitch..’ simply isn’t punk-related. The demo of ACTION DIRECTE’s ‘Blood & Feathers’ is almost the anti-‘Sweet Dreams Are Made Of This’ and there you go.

A few missed the mark for me if this is seriously intended as a Punk item, but as a general noisy collection it’s varied, interesting and rewarding.

www.thisisindustrialpunk.com

VIDI AQUAM
THE WORLD DIES
Rosa Selvaggia Obscure Label

It seems amazing that a band formed in 1994 is only just releasing what it regards as its debut album. That isn’t quite the case, as there’s been the ‘Apocalypse’ record back in 2002, but the releases from this
band, led throughout by mainstay Nikita, has been more than sporadic, yet always interesting, never sloppy, and if that’s what it takes to maintain quality then so be it. Interestingly Nikita wants this CD to be seen as an old fashioned vinyl album, with one side post-punk, one moodier and more Goth-like.

‘The World Dies’ has an oblique rhythmical insistence, over which Daniele Viola’s rousing guitar rushes as Fabio Degiorgi’s robust bass stands staunchly guarded beneath. Nikita reaches out vocally, sour and tetchy. The mood remains severe but builds cleverly, and given a respect for the past and awareness of modern developments, I doubt they’ll be disappointed if I liken the stern nature of this to Theatre Of Hate, minus the intrinsic histrionics. Beginning with a bleak bell tolling ‘Stone Mask’ slithers engagingly, the bass active, guitar sawing neatly, vocals almost rhythmically pushing, the tinny drum machine loping heroically, and four its dour sensibilities it keeps moving, the bell returning to add a forlorn but jaunty air alongside passionate vocals, although the end slumps.

‘In Perverse Dusk’ is fairly straightforward but tenacious, a sombre guitar and sullen dipping rhythm shadowing the strident or stretching vocal menace. Circumspect and orderly with its muted guitar strain there is nevertheless a lightly spooky atmosphere to ‘New Religion’ thanks to some synth tinkering, with the song revealing increasing strength as it shuffles along. ‘Suicide Girl’ rejoices in a more eager guitar and bubbling dark bass, the vocals pirouetting into a punky chorus clinch.

As the mood is ready to switch down a gear ‘Radio Tuxedo’ begins with a wash of radio static and then ticks slowly, bass prowling, guitar subtly nuanced and vocals secretive as some glorious trumpet played by Goj comes in like a shining ghost, mournful and mesmerising. ‘Magic Door’ is beautiful, the bell chiming in a whispering gloom, the bass exuding a solemn splendour, the vocals reduced to poison gas status. ‘Talk Talk’ appears mired in grief, but as the rhythm is bolstered by firmer drums and the occasional clanging metal, the vocals wheel away in agony suffused in the sound until exposed right at the end.

The trumpet returns in ‘Beyond The Limit’, co-written between the band and Goj, and there’s a wonderful balance as the guitar is mobile and hovering, the brass decorative but keenly exploratory, while the bass circles warily and peevish vocals gnaw on their energy. The subtlety is maintained throughout the song which really stamps its authority as the closer, and I hope that having created something like this they can use it as a standard and inspiration to releases records more regularly in future, because they have now established a character of their own.

A fine record.

www.myspace.com/vidiaquam
www.rosaselvaggia.com/homeva.htm

DPERD
10 SONO UN ERRORE
My Kingdom

What I like about dPerd is their semi-quaint oddness because here again they bring us an exquisite album but it’s a bit like starting over, as they’re never quite the same as you remember them. It’s a loose amalgam of Goth and Indie that they have going for them, with the mood shifting song by song, so you’re always ready to swivelled around. (I could also say this seems closer to ‘3Non’ than ‘Regalero Il Mio Tempo’ if you’ve been following their albums.) I say semi-quaint because there’s nothing tew about what they do, this is clearly just how they want it and in the wrong hands it would all fall apart, just as there’s not many people really mixing up styles they way they do. The feelings, the musical spirit and drama, have such gliding power, accompanied by a rickety rhythmical fragility, a ravishing painting displayed on a easel made from match sticks.

‘Don’t Forget The Mobile’ comes out of the wall across your senses, the bass earnest, the beat tottery, warm tingly and naggingly memorable guitar following close behind, with wilting organ as a late arrival giving way to piano at the last moment. ‘Non Mi Tradirei Mai’ moves onwards from their, introducing vocals and creating a central pool of languid angst, guitar seesawing slowly with penitent keys. If the Cocteaus had ever been given a good shake, told to drop the hippy bollocks and grow up, they might have sounded this good. It manages to be both artistically raw and subtly flamboyant. ‘Ho Paura Sai’ slides over its own basic frisson, sounding emotionally fraught or frantic, and French, but we’ve been there before: dPerd sound strange vocally, which is a blessing. It’s getting worked up in pleasing
surroundings, the guitar discreetly pretty, the drums deftly doomed, the vocals staggering across the top of the song like parrots with migraine.

‘Inverno’ is a touch simpler but suspenseful, male vocals leading, female tucked in and supportive, keyboards a delight, then ‘Travel Song’ hints at a gloomier under swell, the dreamy vocals a tad morose, but the constantly revolving keyboards keep things spry and inviting, encouraging the vocals to perk up, just a bit. It’s a gloriously subdued affair and ‘In Giorni Lontani’ is quite gorgeous, like a bizarre collision between Black Tape For a Blue Girl and Ataraxia with its plunging keyboards and harsh vocals, gradually easing out onto ghostly solemnity.

‘Ogni Volta’ has more striking keyboards, with a rhythm bravely pottering along with winsome vocals hovering and I suspect I may have mentioned this when reviewing them before but fans of the band Furniture would definitely get dperd, no problem. ‘Cold Song’ has more of a snap to it, with some enchanting singing, although melancholy seems ever present it’s got such a wide sense of space with sounds bouncing in then trailing off you’re quietly mesmerised. By contrast the more immediately sublime ‘Kinshasa’ seems uncommonly brisk about its business, yet still has enough time to impress with its luxury blend of lyrical foreboding but entrancing vocal.

With a lightly wheeling organ and bony bass ‘Democrazia E Dittatura’ comes over like Joy Division on uppers, the gawfiest song on the album and cracking closer, albeit with slightly garbled backing vocals which don’t really work and that’s about as close I get to expressing anything negative about an album which is absolutely fantastic. Actually I take that back. I do have a grievance. For some one like me who likes to be able to saunter through the lyrics from time to time this was a real struggle. The CD comes in an attractively dour dvd digipack but the booklet is printed so darkly you think you’re in a Dan Brown novel figuring out secret codes.

A band that has sumptuous melodic ideas, emotional and lyrical depth, and yet still has an organic musical heart rather any bland electronic coating: what’s not to adore?

www.dperd.com
www.myspace.com/dperd

THE SILENCE KIT
DISLOCATIONS
Aztec Care

This is a very interesting band. On their last album, the wonderful ‘A Strange Labor’ their influences protruded brazenly, like they were some perverted musical armadillo out on the town, but this time round the collective feel is more circumspect, the songs no less engaging, but the band are leaner. Antagonism is still a major theme but fans of any one of a dozen of early post-Punk bands will be thrilled by this. They can also be seen as an attractively dour dperd but the booklet is printed so darkly you think you’re in a Dan Brown novel figuring out secret codes.

‘Let There Be No Hurt’ is a glorious opener with its deceptively weedy frame. It seems to be held back, the vocals discreetly tucked between damp but phosphorous guitar and loose but targeted drums. It gives them a fluid, shadowy form and means they can come closer, then fade briskly before whipping back in, as though you are being taunted by crows. You think it’s ended abruptly, but winds immediately back round you and squeezees. Brilliant.

‘Five Seconds’ is equally relaxed antagonism with ragged guitar and bass fumes, with some crafty and cunning lyrics (“I’ve got five seconds to figure out, what went wrong and how to fix it…””) which soon pull you into the deranged drama. (“You’ve got your reasons you consider me a guest, I’ll keep my distance, ‘cos you are just a mess…””) Brusque sonic eddies turn out to be perfectly edifying as keyboards swarm in at ground level as the bass starts painting the isolation chamber. Solid but glinting smoky ‘Fire Escapes’ starts off like a righteous lecture, then starts to shake itself apart and leads us to an eventual chorus come jangly verse, given it an intriguing form.

‘Make Your Time’ has a leisurely delivery the bass laying over similarly dark bass, drums splashing noisily as the agonising vocalist goes through a period of self-deception. The sever solemnity of ‘Bad Months’ keeps you guessing whether this is accusatory of about estrangement, vocals looming over a dawdling rhythm, slow-draining synth and pretty guitar. ‘Spent Too Long Waiting’ creeps along wispily, bemoaning people living way too fast, then it crashes into incisive action, all demonstrative singing and demonc guitar surgery. ‘The Magician’ is far more relaxed and poppy, loping along breezily, ‘We Are Frozen’ picks up from that upright brightness and then surges along gloriously, the vocals keenly surfing the strict rhythm, a flickering passion enlivening the second half. ‘Your Mistakes’ returns to hot, irate action, bowling along with a seething undercurrent, topped by sighing, luxurious guitar. ‘I’ll Always Bring You Down’ acts us our hungry closer, storming off, trigger cocked, heads held high.

A great record. A moody thing with fire in its belly and a melodic heart lacerated by intriguing barbs.

www.thesilencekit.com

MURNAU’S PLAYHOUSE
SANITY SHOW
Spider In A Matchbox

A fabulous debut, this isn’t just a great Goth/Post-Punk hybrid, filled with a clashing but cultured angst like a modern take on an early Rozz Williams/Killing Joke meltdown, but it also comes wrapped in beautiful artwork by Teppo Jäntti and I always like a record that looks as good as it sounds.

‘Showreel’ bowls in with spindly but brutal guitar and drums, acting as a sour tourniquet, with fleeting bass force and crotchety but lilting vocals and together they roll and swagger along, the lyrics understandably picturesque, and the only thing confusing me is I don’t hear much by the way of keyboards. ‘Sister Violence’ is less fraught,
more considered and you start to really appreciate the relaxed and stylish vocals, the dovetailed bass and drums, the jangling, tingling guitar.

‘Her Next Twin’ is bravely rheumatic, with traces of the old Psy Furs to it, murkily mesmerising, while the grubbier, bulkier ‘Panopticon’ is upright and feverish, ‘The Blight’ could even be UK Decay turned upside down. In ‘White Noise White Light’ they flatten out, a moody creation with a more human touch coming from the strong vocal, the music pulling back into an orderly froth, with a terse end.

Initially ‘Bloodstopper’ seems quite normal and you want a touch more variety in the vocals, but then they skid sideways with some vocal guitar interplay and the rhythm is whisked up to match the viscous charge of what becomes a bellicose romp. The slightly droney ‘Smoke & Mirrors’ isn’t perhaps the strongest song with which to finish but it’s a broody and very catchy slab of sound on which you can speculate happily about their potency for here is a band whose influences come from a distinct but exciting period, and they only now need to slap their own character more firmly on top. A superb start.

www.myspace.com/murnausplayhouse

THE MESCALINE BABIES
UNLISTENABLE EP
Free Download

Deathrock does occasionally makes sense when you appreciate it’s basically welding together the spirit of Goth and Punk together. It’s also worth remembering we’re not talking about the original punk style but more what some called UK82 where there was a crisp bounce to what the bands were doing, in direct opposition to the furious frenzy of the Crass bands. The Mescaline Babies have that punk sound wrenching the heart of their sound around, with the added vocal vigour working well. While Punk band were bellowing messages Deathrock bands handle lyrical concerns that are the same as Goth bands, whether deep or frivolous, but they come over with greater urgency. That doesn’t mean I necessarily know what this young Italian band (singing in excellent English) are blathering on about, I’m just setting things in context.

Okay, the details They formed late last year, kicked off by Sydney Mars (Suicideathome, Broken Time Structure) and Kalle (Enkil’s Eye, Sleepy Crowd), swiftly joined by Daniele (bass) and Luca (drums). The first limited edition EP, “The Mescaline Babies EP” sold out and they also now have “There Will Come Soft Rains” available, with this free download being an intermediary step with two tracks off the first and demos of the next.

‘Self-Pretending Whore’ is a scalded little thing, cheeky vocals snappy at the front in two phases, as the chorus bends in on itself, with some added salty backing. The guitar chops then streams, and the rhythm is simple but effective and lively as Hell. Slower, warmer and intrinsically dramatic ‘Winter and Spring’ shows their other side and abilities, occasionally brashy but hugely ambitious which is always good to hear. Bass pushes ‘Skeleton Kids’ out into the light where it thrashes around like a whipper-snapping descendant of Sex Gang, guitar needlepoint decorating its lurching bulk. An almost grunge-like bassline then sets ‘The Wall’ in motion with more distinct vocals and an itchy rhythm, the guitar initially discreet, then they all glide around imperiously but the feeling is humane and demanding.

Another impressive bunch! The world is overflowing with talent these days.

www.myspace.com/themescalinebabies
http://themescalinebabies.wordpress.com

AUTUMN TENEBRE
LAMENTO DE GEA
Download

Originally a limited EP of just 100 copies this is Mexican Gothic Metal from a band formed in Monterrey in 2005, following on from their eponymous demo last year.

“Nightmare In The Autumn’s Embrace” is a pretty instrumental of piano and solemn synth strings beneath the sound of a storm, then it’s into the dramatic sludge of “Profanum Death” with a low rhythm as Carlos Diablerie keeps the drums stark and metal in their grim tension and Arturo’s whisked riffing hovers beneath the gentle celestial vocals of Cecy Autumn running along the bowel displacement of bassist Alex Tenebrarum’s doomy vocal rumbling.
“Nostalgia Perpetua” glides by in a similar fashion but with more fragrant keyboards included, which adds a touch of real atmospheric grace bfore rash guitar outbreak, but that’s Gothic Metal for you.

Although “Anima On Darkness” ramps up the bubbling effects the pretty keys can’t disguise this is just a jittery remodelling of the earlier ideas, but at least in “Lamento De Gea” they introduce some jumpier rhythmic emphasis and move the vocals and a guitar around.

The prettier elements I liked, the rest is too Metal for me.

www.myspace.com/automntenebre

ELEGIA
ELEGIA
Airplaine Of Noise

The third album “E3” is out later this year but here we revisit their 2000 debut, as they kindly sent me this alongside “Underworld” (from 2004 which will be reviewed on Wednesday), and what we have here is Brazilian Goth, sung in English, of the highest quality. ‘Sublime Perversion’ twinkles deceptively at the start with a gentle guitar wave, the bass soon prodding in, the vocals hazily corkscrewing through the middle and the song develops beautifully with a very spry sense of fluid charm, but with the bass and occasionally downcast guitar providing a nice depth of mood. ‘8trix’ is fuller yet has a distant vocal quality and discreet guitar opulence, insinuating subtle emotional drama.

‘Spell In The Cathedral’ jangles more, with some instruments starkly exposed in an attractive fashion, the vocals archly decorous, all together like a velvety version of Bauhaus. ‘Light’ actually is, and while its somewhat hesitant sensitivities doesn’t carry the same clout it adds to the album overall on repeat listens. Similarly the friskier punk styling of ‘Midnight Train’ is a slice of yelping, glistening fun. A modest yet stately ‘Anais’ is interesting with serene vocals and rangey guitar. ‘Pop Defect’ sashays along engagingly, muted and fluttering, the slender ‘Blind Looking Glass’ gently howls and the loping, grazed ‘The Typhoon Eye’ has magnificent guitar stitching. ‘Creepers’ is quite creepy lyrically, nicely offset by its bright surface sheen, and then ‘Pride’ confuses by coming on like a soft but determined Radiohead type thing, then do something like a drunken nursery rhyme for a hidden extra track.

Nicely varied, well nuanced and stylish. A great start.

www.myspace.com/3legia
www.twitter.com/3legia

ELEGIA
UNDERWORLD
13 Records

For their second album Elegia start with a classic Goth song title, ‘Crossing The Rubicon’, and but for the roaming, mild bass it’s got quite a ‘Dreamtime’-era Cult feel to it, especially the wide-scale guitar architecture and the vocals, somewhat buried seem to be singing ’crossed the woebegone’!

Deliciously sly guitar tickles ‘The Trap And The Mirror’ into being, then transforms into a brutish thing lashing out proudly. Bold drumming encompasses the gloomy spiciness along with desperate vocals and scurrilous scrawled guitar effusions.

‘Farewell’ is smaller with a quiet mood, yet more involved and the sorrowful string intro to ‘Medieval’ being enhanced by a guitar massage shows nice variety. ‘Night Ride’ swings back into a tough dark groove with snappy drums, and has a catchy clatter about it. ‘Amnesia’ is cute and a touch weird, with a jazzy dream state to start, and some scary lyrics in the guitar-stirred story of murder. ‘Black Rain’ is a precise, patterning bout of streamlinied drums, cajoling bass, wilting vocals and guitar caresses. A doomier ache pervades ‘Mudsong’, spiralling down weary but ‘Escravos’ is well chipper with a fidgety rhythm and flickering guitar, and ‘Some Melody In The Hazy Sound’ has an elegant harmonious optimism, so the variety has kept going throughout. ‘Underworld’ closes with insistent artistic decorum and ghostliness, and then the bonus track quickly follows with some electronic cut-up atmosphere and abstract style which is incredibly effective. Another meticulous album, then, full of character and confidently avoiding making anything too obvious, which I always like.

www.myspace.com/3legia
HOW TO DESTROY ANGELS
HOW TO DESTROY ANGELS
Own Label

Dark Indie Electronica, this is a strangely attractive, addictive thing.

With a good balance between a stark rhythm and sparse atmospherics ‘The Space In-Between’ seems a hollowed out, cautious brooding piece but the subtle vocal trepidation grows in strength as billowy synth reacts to a brightening of the mood. ‘Parasite’ seems to be starting with God Save The Queen on feedback alone but then a gruncho beat starts with some sly haughty bass and garbled vocals, the synth’s rhythmical crispness being flayed and spread out so it’s got an electronic snap and rasp. It seems orderly, but keep retains a potent raw streak.

‘Fur-Lined’ is poppier, the cutie-pie vocal style coquettish and alien, clipped over a sideways dance sway, and the mood changes cleverly to open out with supple synth colour, alongside a sinuous bass sweetness. Not for the first time I am reminded of a really, really slow motion Garbage for some reason and the winsome clomp of ‘BBB’ (Big Black Boots, apparently) does little to dispel this notion.

Squidgey electronics returns to the fore in ‘The Believers’ with whispered vocal seductions clashing with what sounds like a corrupted video game soundtrack, then ‘A Drowning’ finishes us off, the emotional lyrics from clearer vocals making an impact as they’ve been skulking so far, as we find the sound swelling gently into a conventional shape aided by desolate piano.

www.howtodestroyangels.com
http://twitter.com/destroyangels
www.facebook.com/howtodestroyangels
www.myspace.com/howtodestroyangels

GRAVEDIGGER
GRAVEDIGGER 69
Yesnowave

Anyone know anything this Indonesian Deathrock band? This is a 2007 download single from 2007, and all the info I see there is the singer Febri Last used to be with Noise For Violence, and the other three members seem to include two drummers, which can’t be right. It’s a weird, ragged song, with staggered sci-fi effects twinkling then swaying throughout, over a brash chugging rhythm, beset by basic punk bass and post-punk dirginess with its thin, weasely guitar. The shouty chorus works rather well, and the soggy synth starbursts add a quirkiness that is just odd.

http://yesnowave.com/?p=11

BLIND FAITH AND ENVY
INTO THE CALM
Free Download

With so few records coming my way currently I continue sifting through various downloads on offer and this rousing although only vaguely Goth-lite electronic duo are pretty good.

‘In A Crash’ has big warm keys embedded in a bed of distorted effects nettles, the music provided by the imaginative dexterity of Daniel Guenther and the dreamy, wounded vocals of Charlene April who grows dignified agitation as the songs inflates and surges madly, naggingly catchy. ‘So Someone I Love Can Fly’ is somewhere close to Kate Bush territory, wilting vocals bathing in the piano thermals. ‘Hold Me Like Ya Mean It’ is harmlessly bouncy pop droppings, which is positively smooching with commercial crossover appeal, and ‘Never Ever Go Away’ is far more touching, the keyboards and muffled, frayed beats creating an interesting backdrop for the sparkling, sorrowful vocals. ‘Enemy’ is the really interesting one, where ambient and electronica cross-fade, sumptuous keyboards and sighing synth clouds accentuating the dreamy imagery in the softly-spun lyrics.

www.myspace.com/blindfaithandenvy
www.blindfaithandenvy.com

ESCARLATINA OBSESSIVA
ENDEMIC
Download/Zorch Factory

Karolina and Zaf make great records and it’s a chilling prospect for music overall that a band who’d have sold x thousands of records in the 1980’s with ease may struggle to sell hundreds, as everyone relies lazily on downloads. Maybe someone will make selling music illegal in future? Of course only those who really need to create will do so in future, which will guarantee quality, but it’s still harsh on the bands.
Melodic post-punks they have some central, sharp vocals conjuring up the melody in ‘Guillotine’ as buzzy synth tones and fuzzy guitar seep around them. ‘Pandemic’ has more shadow in the light, somewhat akin to the Banshees discovering Russian Goth. Equally flowery of tone, but just as concise ‘Androids’ beetles along with a sense of the hectic but a straight back, purposeful with delicate gestures, the guitar thin and drizzled, the synth pungent. Scurrilously skittish this is gorgeous.

‘Paranormal’ is the orderly version of pell mell with brisk snappy drums and thing, teeming guitar, slippery bass hinted at behind strict quavery vocals, and the action just flashes by until the guitar stops and shows off smarmily. The twiddly keys and hectic vocal wispsiness ensures ‘Depressurization’ grabs attention swiftly, then they squeeze themselves into a slender, tight, alluring, almost a contortionist’s exercise in a slinky manner. Filled with some delightful touches and charismatic vocals this one hops nimbly from phase to phase, ending with rolling keys and a shimmying rhythm.

Not a long record then but fabulous throughout.

www.zorchfactoryrecords.com/releases/item/89-escarlatina-obsessiva-endemic.html - where you can also nab the “Pandemic” album
www.myspace.com/escarlatinaobsessiva

ACID BATS
DEMO
Download/Zorch Factory

This is an old demo from 2007 available for free download and it’s well worth grabbing, because it’s trim but powerful Gawf from Mexico. I notice the myspace page has changed url and the line-up is down from four to two. We still have Johny Witch on guitar and Edy on vocals but steely Acid Gregor on bass and keyboardist Oswalk no longer get a mention.

Brief opener ‘Intro Bat Cave Presenta’ has a very dumpy drum passage then they speed up and sound more comfortable, the thin spidery guitar hectic and impressive when circling then the bass gets prominent, hoiking the rhythmical delivery up to gloomy heights, the guitar providing atmospheric drama. ‘Suplica’ is deeper and broader, making for a huge channel of sound in which the vocals seem somewhat lost but it’s impressive overall because it’s gone from a static start to a pounding morass with more deceptive guitar, merging delicacy with a mean eye for the onsla8ght and the scalded sub-Rozz vocals do embed well after a while, particularly when the guitar bucks and glows.

We continue in a filleted Christian Death style throughout the compressed and mildly flailing ‘Esclavos.’ ‘Mi Ataud’ is growlier, with slighter and increasingly unusual guitar touches carrying even bigger impact, as the burly bass and drums surge beneath. It’s an interesting blend. ‘Parasitos’ belts along with some keyboards finally blurring the background but this is a more ordinary song by their standards. ‘Hipnosis’ then throws us out by throwing itself away with squealing noise and a capering rhythm in a carnivalesque meltdown.

Ace band. More on Friday.

www.myspace.com/acid-bats
www.zorchfactoryrecords.com/other-releases/itemlist/category/22-acid-bats.html

THIRTEEN BATS
DUST
Download Zorch Factory

So there’s Batbones on vocals and something called an omnichord and Corvus playing absolutely everything else, and they’re solid Gothic citizens from Brisbane with a love of both Gothic classics and the newer Deathrock sensibilities.

‘The Cry’ is fairly dry, the vocals almost pressed into the dirt bed of the flyblown rhythm and trenchant, roving guitar but after a while you appreciate there’s a catchy delivery going on in noisy surrounds, with ‘Portent Of A Monster’ like a dilapidated musical corpse wearing an exuberant guitar ruff. Again the vocals are held back leaving the more confident guitar to run rigs around the listener, but I think as Batbones becomes more assured there’ll be some real weight coming off their sounds. The rhythm again is a relaxed dimly lit affair but the shuffling, engaging guitar will keep you delighted throughout.
Clicking percussion opening ‘Lillies’ heralds something different as wonderfully seductive bass casually saunters into view. This is wonderful and the spoken vocal style allows greater natural expression in one of the sweetest things I have heard all year. Title track ‘Dust’ flickers in a cantankerous manner, like a wounded Bauhaus being operated on without anaesthetic, their punky rasp jabbing outwards, the guitar subtly hemming everything sensibly in.

Definitely an intriguing start.

www.myspace.com/thirteenbatsband

ACID BATS
Exhumacion
Download/Zorch Factory

More Mexican mayhem, released in 2008 but yours to download gratis, and well worth having if your tastes move towards upright, glaring Gawp with brusque Deathrock tensions

‘Catarsis’ is very Christian Death, sizzling darkly but for the viscous guitar glint, but for the sudden jerky punky end phase. An unainly ‘Decadencia’ is more interesting, with higher, lighter and twisted sounds fused into a restless whole. The vocal approach is still like a bit Rozz covered in salt, but without such a narrow musical trajectory there’s more life in all areas of the proceedings, and I feel Sex Gang fans would get a lot out of this.

The instrumental ‘Let’s Go Bats’ is jaunter and daft without once appearing throwaway, with the lusty ‘Madre Morte’ shuffle more punky than Goth, nicely fluted guitar lifting it out the darker puddles and into harshly lit angst. ‘Paranoia’ seems slightly constipated, the vocals sticking closely to the rhythm when the lyrics cry out for greater projection, but the strict linear development with constant guitar activity actually doesn’t give much room for vocal explosions.

‘Possession’ is a bit dull as it rattles and rants along, but when it hits a slower, empty spell it sounds dead cool, rebuilding with staunch guitar and falling away again into a some forlorn beauty and the overall passion remains compelling. ‘Quiero Ser Santa’ rolls out of bed heroically and I’d like some rhythmical weight behind the reliably confident guitar, as the bass is like a whisper. The vocals are well drawn out and carry more clout as the guitar is effectively behind them, with a hint of keyboards coming through, and this balance suits them better, allowing a spiky chorus to strike home delightfully and then the song to turn away coyly, before charging back impudently.

‘R.I.P.’ is the liveliest racket, somersaulting gleefully with ricocheting guitar and sullen bass grace, showing they can move quite some distance from the simple trad style of the opener.

A fascinating band, methinks. I want to hear more.

www.zorchfactoryrecords.com/other-releases/item/41-acid-bats-exhumacion.html

VARIOUS ARTISTS
DE L’AUTRE COTE DU MIROIR
Toadstool Mycena Records download

The great thing about a fascinating cover version compilation like this is how the songs come through, often in entirely unexpected ways. Punk, Post-Punk, Synthpop all get drawn slowly through a colourful blender and everyone will have an interesting time listening to this.

Befrost (Techy-Call X) start things off as they mean to proceed with Joy Division’s ‘Day of the Lords’ given a rough Industrial Metal treatment, pulsating like an indignant bison and this handling of
Curtis vocals is quite unlike anything I have heard people attempt before. Les Modules Etranges almost come up through the middle of a panic-stricken ‘Gloomy Sunday’ and there’s no doubt Gitane Demone would approve because it’s a beautiful but corrupted.

I’m afraid if I ever heard Minimal Compact’s ‘Statik Dancin’’ it hasn’t stuck so Do You Believe In The Curse Of The Golden Vampire? may have done anything with this, I just have no idea. It’s pretty spartan, with female vocals moving along the top like crows on a sexy washing line, and fun. That’s the other thing about a compilation like this. Providing the songs chosen have a reputation for being good it’s all going to be of interest. That said, Castrati’s take on Abba’s old classic, now retitled ‘Dancing Queen’ so as to add it sounds like Christian Death in a passport photo booth. Les Modules Etranges restore normality with a wonderfully aromatic and respectfully atmospheric handling of the Banshees’ ‘Nightshift’, the flashes of anger and the inverted delicacy all included. Stolearm throb gracefully through The Cure’s ‘Last Dance’, the music steady, the classy vocals dignified. An Orange Car, Crashed nip about smartly in the cutely dimpled ‘Third Uncle’ (Bauhaus/Brian Eno) which sounds more like ‘Lust For Life’ than you may expect and I ask you to imagine Peter Murphy in a Plastic Bertrand tribute.

The Montreal Nintendo Orkestar blink briefly during a straight ‘(A Taste Of) Radioactivity’, channelling Kraftwerk, and then Thee Virginal Brides version of ‘Girls Just Wanna Have Fun’ (the magnificent Cyndi Lauper) sounds like the kind of thing paranormal investigators hope to find on their tapes in the morning. I’ve listened to it a few times and remain nonplussed. Berlin Wall Lovers are interestingly wired and hollowed out while tackling Suicide’s ‘Ghost Rider’ while the unexpectedly deranged punk Deny Me and Be Doomed offer is like a more proficient Suckdog as they ransack PIL’s ‘This Is Not A Love Song.’ Les Modules Etranges vs TeenageSinTaste potter winsomely through a diminutive ‘Photographic’ by Depeche Mode although I prefer this vocal approach to the original. Similarly I like the more straightforward and less glossy vocal treatment The Saintcyr give Cocteau Twins’ ‘Shallow Than A Halo’, but not the singing itself, if you get my drift. I’ve always wanted to hear a less sappy-hippy Cocteaus and this is a good attempt.

Bitterness Theory are lovely and their stylish pop version of Modern English’s ‘I Melt With You’ floors you by being so gentle and dreamily melodic. I don’t know what Follow Me Not have done with Stephan Eicher’s ‘Two People In A Room’ having never heard the original, or anything by him. A sweetly drab, doleful song like an Anti-Bill Pritchard. Malaise Rouge quiver strangely and prettily in Numan’s ‘Down In The Park’ but, mysteriously, this version also reminds of a Who song which I can’t place, just as the original always did. (A strange influence for Numan perhaps, but I think that’s what happened.) Finally it’s delightful to encounter Electric Press Kit again, covering Depeche’s ‘Somebody’ and they’re reliably artistic when doing it, giving it an austere but touching mood that seems slightly off kilter, which is what I’d have expected.

A richly varied compilation then, full of brilliant songs, given some unusual and stirring treatments, which makes it a rather rare beast indeed. Fantastic stuff.

www.myspace.com/dronetcx - Befrost
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GENERAL DECAY
DEMO
Download/Zorch Factory

A demo from 2009 from a fascinating Italian Post-Punk duo this gives you tense songs with attitude that exactly matches the original early 80’s intensity but with the modern flair for shifting melodic emphasis in way bands didn’t consider much back then.

‘To Fall Apart’ swaggers past with a terrible headache, the vocals angrily place down low in the mix with brackish bass and frosty guitar doing battle inside some overall flickering cloud of noise. It’s openly accessible with a hint of left-field distraction. ‘Pyramid’ is brighter with juicy guitar ringing over staggered, imploring vocals and with the cool guitar dominating the bass gets to backflip because the rhythm is a flat linear accompaniment with some clappy replication. The vocals snap back in then they are consumed by a fog of weird noises. ‘Das Kapital’ kicks off like The Danse Society at 78rpm, then slows down appreciably, with tumbling guitar and agitated vocals surviving in a rarefied atmosphere of gloom, and gradually it gets sonically smeared all over the place, vibrant and relatively decisive.

Noise with a hint of mystery. Can’t be bad.

www.myspace.com/generaldk
www.zorchfactoryrecords.com/other-releases/item/49-
general-decay-demo.html

THE RED CRAYON ARISTOCRAT CLUB
The Red Crayon Aristocrat Club EP
Download/Zorch Factory

I did briefly review them before but as I find myself drawn further into the cavernous ongoing archive that is Zorch Factory, there’s three TRCAC EPs that need reviewing, so keep a look out for the other two shortly. This first one dates back to 2008.

Young Hugo Zombie is a fascinating chap, possibly on the most interesting individuals of recent years. If there was one band this
decade whose splitting astonished me then that band was Naughty Zombies, as they had the potential to cross many genres and get really big. It was Hugo cranking up rapacious guitar in that band, but he also done his own tantalising solo EP, which I hope wasn’t just a one-off, and he works with The Rockin’ Pneumonias and, more noticeably, Los Carniceros del Norte. Away from these dishevelled sculptures he also does this, with Hélène (and programmable drummer Gorka). This is Post-Punk Pop. Proper poppiness, with downcast early 80’s roots.

‘Lone Lines’ is gorgeous with a plonking bass pattern and brash, brisk beat, over which the real mood comes from a synth pouring slowly, into which Hélène’s classy vocals march then spin. A divinely catchy chorus shows impresses at once, because this band is as good as some indiepop bands are a duff disappointment. (Post-Punk only means something to people who understand it, as the majority getting pop thrown at them still reside in the intransigent quicksand of Indie.) ‘Jule’s Memories’ is sharper, rattier, a closer fit. The technology has some attitude, the mood is darker, but the vocals are perky as some guitar also breaks from cover and wriggles around joyfully. ‘Fear’ is more electro-inclined, with firm layers of melodic pulses, decorative key streaks and stripped down, incisive vocals, like The Cardigans on sci-fi speed. ‘Heartbreak’ bounces with a kitscher punk spirit, and is more touching as its friskier, with darting guitar and snappier vocals.

They close with one of the most charming Clash songs ever, ‘Stay Free’, with female vocals (just like the original, arf!). The beat is boomer, the synth adds a curious buzzy undertow element, and the guitar is respectful. Vocally it’s all cool and occasionally odd, as they don’t know what to do about the word Streatham. (For anyone other non UK bands planning a cover it’s an area of London, pronounced Strettum.)

So, spirit, historical familiarity, invention and great tunes. Bliss.

GROTESQUE SEXUALITY
COLLAGE
Download Zorch Factory

This is the first official single from this Russian all-purpose quasi-Post-Punk band. Two songs. ‘Collage’ is well weird. You have opening rocky punk chords, with almost recalcitrant rhythmical gravity as though they’re letting the song slip through their fingers with the abstract presence of Pall Nattsol’s arty vocals that operate in a detached manner. Quite what is happening around the mainly spoken intro to ‘Sometimes We Wanna Be New Batcave Stars’ I have no idea but then Nikita Guseha’s skinny guitar icicles and gently weeping bass tuck in behind some fruity, crawling singing and when it starts to clip sweetly along it will really remind some of the very early releases by The Danse Society. Gorgeous, yet weird.

The other release available via download on Zorch Factory is their 2009 four song ‘Demo’ which is harder to get through as it’s real work-in-progress time. They start with ‘Little Girl’, evidently a well known Complot Bronswick song, assuming you know of the band. It’s a squiggly, neurotic post-punk thing, like a casual Section 25. ‘Mr Aa The Antiphilosopher’ ambles past with some hypnotically slow guitar and drawled vocals, gradually getting wilder and strangely unkempt, like a schizoid Joy Division.

‘Razrusa Moshenie’ is the most interesting song on this first demo, with a light rustling beat, pale guitar and budding bass folding around a fairly loud melodic skeleton. It starts to gyrate in an angular fashion, the vocals dropping dramatically, and although it has a slapdash feel towards the end, ruining the early promise it’s got a cute, slyly feel. ‘A Spell By Laugh’ is the most forthright song, as the rhythmic power of Sergey Solo’s drums and Andre Baargeld’s bass actually make a point of pushing forwards in unison, with some tastefully scuffed guitar and knowing vocals alternating smartly, it just ends too soon without enough dynamic emphasis.

ESPEJOS MUERTOS
ESPEJOS MUERTOS EP
Download/Zorch Factory

AWESOME BAND ALERT!!! And I really do mean awesome as this is utterly FANTASTIC. A Chilean band apparently possessing a dramatic live ability even when doing acoustic shows (their photos certainly indicate visual style and wit) and playing what they refer to as “Rock de Cementerios” they’re a strange amalgam of post-punk, goth and hardcore, with an extraordinary guitar feel, and gorgeously atmospheric songs. This first EP, available on CD in Chile only, was released last year and there’s an album planned for this, which has to be worth keeping eyes and ears out for.

www.myspace.com/grotesquesexuality
www.zorchfactoryrecords.com/official-releases/itemlist/category/12-grotesque-sexuality.html
www.myspace.com/complotbronswick

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ESPEJOS MUERTOS
ESPEJOS MUERTOS EP
Download/Zorch Factory

AWESOME BAND ALERT!!! And I really do mean awesome as this is utterly FANTASTIC. A Chilean band apparently possessing a dramatic live ability even when doing acoustic shows (their photos certainly indicate visual style and wit) and playing what they refer to as “Rock de Cementerios” they’re a strange amalgam of post-punk, goth and hardcore, with an extraordinary guitar feel, and gorgeously atmospheric songs. This first EP, available on CD in Chile only, was released last year and there’s an album planned for this, which has to be worth keeping eyes and ears out for.

www.myspace.com/grotesquesexuality
www.zorchfactoryrecords.com/official-releases/itemlist/category/12-grotesque-sexuality.html
www.myspace.com/complotbronswick
‘El Jardín De Los Suicidas’ sprawls mischievously, the vocals out front and grazed, imploring over the raw guitar and punky thrust then they switch to a mini break with spoken vocals, whereupon backing vocals work coolly alongside tingling, delicate guitar, the same instrument then dominates cleverly as the rest fall back and it jangles and hammer to a close. It’s brilliant and not unlike a Gothly version of Naked Raygun, which is actually an irresistible combination.

More deft guitar detonations send ‘El Es Una Maquina’ out into a cold world with more orderly vocals from Casimiro de las Calaveras (who also plays guitar), Nathalie Carmín’s bobbling bass and crisply craft drums courtesy of Graciela Rosanegra, with a catchy refrain enlivening a slightly morose direction, and there’s plenty more guitar energy. The jagged but artistically compressed ‘Bilis Negra’ has melodic vocals to the fore, and relentless drum impact with traces elements of Nirvana in the bitter brew.

Being a trio they have that extra power normal bands lack. The drums get more room, Nathalie’s bass gets to turn and glow and in ‘Se Que Mañana’ Graciela also throws in magnificent backing vocals as Casimiro displays his most discreet guitar touches while pushing his vocals through in the most powerful and yet relaxed manner.

Four songs brimming with vitality and variety. All of it quite brilliant.

www.myspace.com/espejosmuertos
www.zorchfactoryrecords.com/official-releases/item/75-espejos-muertos-ep.html

THE RED CRAYON ARISTOCRAT CLUB
STORIES OF CRUELTY AND BEAUTY EP
Download/Zorch Factory

So here’s the second EP, released last year, by Hugo and Hélène and they’re moving even more boldly into pop territory, although the muted intro to ‘Another One 09’ is a false start. Once it kicks in it’s as catchy a piece of melodic droll lolling as you could wish for, with winsome vocals and a terse beat encircled by slick synth. ‘After Dark’ has a quivering mood but an equally forthright commercial undertow, the tune and vocals embroiled in cool shadows. ‘Breakdown’ gets boppier, with a joyful poppy punk insouciance. ‘Until The End’ is a gloomier filmic but just as drowsily hypnotic, with the extra picturesque mental twang, and then they continue what is clearly a habit of theirs by having a cover to close an EP. This time it’s ‘Painful Reminder’ which is by SNFU, who I know little of. It’s a little more subdued but still interesting.
mySpace the link has been blocked so you’ll have to message them or look for the relevant blog entry.

www.myspace.com/theredcrayon
www.zorchfactoryrecords.com/official-releases/item/8-not-for-this-world-ep.html

HORROR VACUII
TODOS LOS COLORES DE LA OSCURIDAD EP
Download/Zorch Factory

A release from earlier in the year by this Spanish post-punk band it’s packed with eager spirit.

‘Todos Los Colores De La Oscuridad’ levitates swiftly with willowy percussive wings courtesy of Dr Kevorkian, a steely dramatic vocal, rumbling bass and ninja mosquito guitar. There’s a simple and effective melodic backbone, with interestingly scaly skin provided by Miguel M. Madrid’s absorbing guitar. ‘Con Las Manos Vacías’ is committed from the word, smacking beats and scowling, incisive guitar following the casual but charismatic vocals. ‘Los Espejos Viven’ is altogether more mellow yet quite jaunty, then ‘El Acto’ limbers up. Bass and guitar fence a while, the vocals conspiratorial, Dani’s bass bubbling up and itching to get into kitsch horror mode. Further tinkling keyboards spice up the mood as all the instruments and vocals dip in and out of the central drum patter to whip the delightful song up, then stir it around.

Dark yet essentially light, and good company.

www.myspace.com/horrorvacuii
www.zorchfactoryrecords.com/other-releases/item/70-horror-vacuii-todos-los-colores-de-la-oscuridad-ep.html

ANEMIC CINEMA
WE ALL DREAM WE ALL DIE DEMO
Download/Zorch Factory

A bit of ‘experimental’ Gothic from Barcelona, first released in 2008, this certainly sets a nice all-purpose atmosphere. All the work of one M. Anémic he lists influences as The Cure, Bauhaus, Sopor, Rozz Williams and Les Enfants de l’O,mbre, so you can guess roughly where it lies if I say sedate, bordering on sedated.

‘Take My Hand’ could almost be a rigid form of ambient, the guitar squiggling across pale keys and a firm if troublesome drum machine beat. In ‘Born To Die’ there are vocals smears and whispers as the guitar crawls with confidence, everything muted but decaying prettily.

A lowing synth with darker bass beneath keeps ‘The World After Your Eyes’ on an even, misery-ridden keel, murmuring vocals giving it a hint of life and dignity. ‘The Dream Lays Dying In A Box’ is the sweetest, dreamlike sub-drone with ‘(I Hope) She Dreams’ grim and roomy, and sort of just drifting off into nothingness.

Interesting stuff without ever getting gripping, and I gather there’s a 2009 release too?

www.myspace.com/cinemanemic
www.zorchfactoryrecords.com/other-releases/item/42-anemic-cinema-we-all-dream-we-all-die-demo.html

BERLIN WALL LOVERS
MONDRIAN IN MOTION EP
Download/Zorch Factory

Released this year, here’s a classy download EP you’ll be happy you acquired, even if the suggestion they’re ‘New Wave Electro’ is a bit off.

Maybe ‘Fast Times At Disco High’ does come on briefly like a playtime New Order but actually the burly guitar of Aurélien Chevalier and rasping, raw vocals of fellow guitarist Johnny Northridge conjures up some stiffer indie resolve. It seeps magnificently along with the doir but hungry words, the mellifluous melody prodded along by Stephen Andersen on bass and keys, the overall effect that of a giant toad off and swaggering around town.

‘Circles’ is moodier, the vocals lost in their own reverie as though the Velvet Underground crashed to earth with a fuller sound, and then it’s one for Action Directe fans with the pottering, crashing friskiness of ‘Moonwalking In The Streets.’ ‘Baby Sister’ is a dimpled pop cutie with a rolling rhythm and some staccato beats, with ‘Out Of Mind’ bending in a sinister fashion, bass burbling hautly, guitar high,
You keep expecting vocals to be splashed about but they never are for an instrumental piece it’s a captivating track that soon has you entangled in its sinuous atmosphere and keeps you snagged to the end.

An unusual band, for sure, and one almost mired in dark style.  
www.myspace.com/berlinwalllovers  

ESPEJOS MUERTOS  
LA DANZA DE LOS PERDIDOS  
Free download single

One juicy track from this fabulous band, there’s something really weird going on because as it grinds and unwinds the male/female vocal effect and sleazy guitar undertow reminds me of a lower octane Junior Manson Slags, and you probably know how good they were.  This is great from the opening guitar wriggling and drum smashes to the invisible and sudden end.

It’s stays steady throughout but gyrates saucily with vocal guidance over the guitar motif, as the rhythm keeps to the linear formation and the vocals give you a catchy refrain that hangs on and on and on…. on.  Brilliant stuff and free, so follow below.

www.mediafire.com/?8cmsjg3lmp84pke

NAUGHTY ZOMBIES  
LOST SONGS  
Download Zorch Factory

It was a crying shame this band split up in 2008 as they had the potential to become really big, like Lucrate Milk (with better vocals, meets The Cramps, which is something most bands can no longer imagine these days. A perfect fusion of bristling catchy music and sensational visuals, they had it all, but suddenly pfft... gone. Now you can grab the final songs they’d recorded for free and it’s exciting stuff.

‘Vas a ser mi Esclavo’ is their effusive punk side, rising in the oven with some synth yeast, and dashing off with rhythmical verve, scalded vocals, escalating drum bursts and neatly etched guitar.

‘El Baile de la Muerte’ is even more delish in its terse intensity and like a modern transplant of the UK82 Punk sound, synth whooshing in the background like pogoing cybermen. (I kid you not.) ‘Hospital’ drops down a gear and gets into a glistening Link Wray crouch, the vocals still cling to the rafters, but the guitar is filthy and low.

A streamlined and brief ‘I Hate You’ is starker punk with a bracing synth push and jabbing chorus like a version of Blondie from Hell.  ‘Psiquiatrico’ has more weight in musical thought, offering mood in place of mischief, sensitive synth touches, vocals held off the throttle and a slicker beat. ‘Absolution’ starts tiny and tinny, but soon foams over with delicate but insistent guitar and some calmer vocal style. This is a more ‘mature’ sound and chunky, but without being fusty.  ‘Nuclear’ starts with dour and noble bass, a smattering of splattering drums, tingly guitar and fiendish vocal finesse, and they’re done!

Great songs but sad to hear as well.

www.zorchfactoryrecords.com/official-releases/item/96-naughty-zombies-lost-songs.html  
www.myspace.com/naughtyzombies

MAILUNA  
THE BEGINNING OF THE END demo  
Download/Zorch Factory

Originally released in 2009, now yours for free. Although the band now is solely composed of one Tetsuya I gather the demo is the work of a large band.

‘Murder Suicide’ is a piquant slice of melodic indie fraternisation with Post-Punk gloom with cool, clear introspective vocal reflections bathing amidst spindly or widely spread guitar and an intricate rhythmical mattress. The guitar is barbed, the vocals tunnelling through ‘She’s Still Suffering’ which has an interestingly crumbly but sore texture. The vocals are quite soothing in ‘All Out Of Love’ where the synth bubbles over its own wash, and unless I’m a bit mental there appears to be a lyrical thread linking these songs, unless he’s just got a bleak worldview.

‘Discontent And Misery’ rocks in an inverted grunge way. Imagine Cobain spinning on his head, subtle sparks flying, including gargled, extended vocals over
‘Wrong Again’ sees dance beats skidding through as chunky guitar tries to establish a grip, then vocals nosedive in another grungey spiral as the songs remains wiry and catchy with neatly rampant bass. ‘No Signs Of Aging’ is really sweet, the low burbling bass and scuzzy spidery guitar nudged by a squeaky synth and toneless vocals. This is the real Post-Punk deal with a hint of early Goth despondency, only let down by the sampled vocals sex grunting or whatever it is. Still an interesting and weirdly trucculent climax to an excellent set of songs.

www.zorchfactoryrecords.com/official-releases/item/24-mailuna-the-beginning-of-the-end-demo.html
www.myspace.com/mailuna1
www.mailuna.com

‘No Me Parece Ni Bien Ni Mal’ is grey and washed out but furious at heart, the guitar particularly nimble, downcast and malevolent just as the keys are high and brittle, the vocals steadfast in their drama. ‘La Escalera’ is winsomely weird, playful vocals and flitting, fluttering keys mingling with gurgling, burbling bass and pottering percussion, the frisky guitar as frilly as the changing mood, where the bustle drops away into a nicely eerie passage of wispy guitar and demure keys that is quite magical in its own warped way as you always expecting them to come crashing back. When they do with loping bass and demented vocals the stumbling drum finish is quite welcome.

‘Prohibido Suicidarse en Primavera’ is much lighter but twice as spiritedly, the vocals presiding over the quixotic brew skilfully, as cute guitar spills out, delicate keys accentuate and the bass is the central cortex. They remain mental malcontents during the charming, unravelling ‘Vida Telequinética’ which is like a Steampunk version of The Mighty Boosh struggling in reverse. Tremulous guitar follows a beautiful shape as the rhythm glides in supreme detachment as vocals waft and dive happily, until they all crash.

Reliably strange, I’m happy to say.

www.myspace.com/lapestenegra
ALIEN SEX FIEND

1984
1985
LEGION
A FLEETING GLIMPSE
AFMusic

Look at them all grown up there! They’ve even changed their names slightly. Maisey is now Robert Maisey, Shelley is Charles Shelley – they both sound like Queens Counsel! Natya is Natasha, and Charlie Grocott has ditched the ‘Sinister’ moniker, unless there he’s a replacement for someone genuinely called Sinister, in which I apologise (and change the locks).

‘Crystal’ is calmly elegant Goth, the guitar fluttering mature lashes, the bass a corset of control. I’m not sure what the perilous vocals are telling us exactly, about what isn’t dead and where specifically the passion resides, but it has a fleshy, frosted beauty.

‘Love & Violence’ starts with exquisite keyboards then rather lapses sideways into a pretentious trudge, with the lovelorn vocals somewhat stranded as the guitar wafts sweetly because they’re more waxy than lyrical. It grows in a stealthy manner and you’ll find yourself following in their shaky steps quick enough.

The one thing they don’t have is the most sumptuous rhythmical guile, as Charlie can’t be expected to carry it alone, and the gap between an automatic beat and the charm of the guitar is a bit telling at this pace. ‘Collapse’ works better on that score because it’s zippiest, harking back to the previous EP.

There seems a continuing lyrical thread over pensive emotions, and it’s all over briskly yet containing what seems present in all their work, a very subtle but genuine character. A gentle sense of mystery, which is certainly a good thing.

A rather lovely little thing, all in all.

www.legion-music.co.uk

MELANCOHOLICOS
ATAUD MATRIMONIAL EP
Download/Zorch Factory

They’re mental, this lot and there’s so much going on in this 2009 EP you’ll be exhausted by the end, a frail husk of the vital gorgon you once were.

‘Ataud Matrimonial’ is the wedding march beset by time travelling zombies, as it lurches with a historical bouncing organ and scamping beat, a cross between Flipron and The Monkees, but with a heaving scathing vocal presence. Argentina’s answer to The Kinks on acid, in a way.

The gently twiddly guitar starting ‘Parte Del Paisaje’ sets you in a reflective mood as the drums then click into slick action, but they chop back into sub-Doorsian melancholy, as the vocals writhe as keys waft like intrinsic musical perfume in the fetid landscape. They’re moping but in a beautifully catchy fashion, vocals fluctuating into crazed optimism, then soothing as the rhythm undulates coquetishly and the guitar and keys exude class.

‘Desequilibristas’ does the circus fanfare and with spiralling bass and frothing keys it’s a gurgling mass of capricious jollity, the vocals archly dramatic and demented, the backing rumbustuous but clearly delineated as a garage romp, complete with bouncy drums.

You know what’s scary about ‘Muere Rapido, Vive Joven’? It reminded me that Chris De Burgh once recorded a good album. Long before he became the eyebrows from Hell infatuated with red ladies De Burgh was something of an Old Grey Whistle Test favourite, and his ‘Spanish Train And Other Stories’ is actually a very good record. Tired of trying he turned to slop and the rest is history, but guess what else is scary? He was born in Argentina. I don’t know what any of that means but synchronicity like that unsettles me. (I had forgotten the album name and looked on wikipedia, which is how I found out where he was born!)

They end with a cover of The Electric Prunes’ ‘I Had Too Much To Dream (Last Night)’ with it’s eerie echoes of ‘Paint It Black’ (which
band ripped the other off who can say as both were clearly written in the same year?), and they handle it in a sensitive manner, the light melody positively engaging, where some bands hack and maul the song and go off on a psychedelic bender. It’s a strange choice, but it’s a strange song and they’re a strange band, so maybe not.

Fascinating record.

www.myspace.com/melancoholicos

THE CEMETARY GIRLZ
THE CEMETARY GIRLZ DEMO
Download/Zorch Factory

Another online freebie, recorded in 2007, this is raw Goth with post-punk tremors. ‘Death Has Tasted Blood’ has that wholly authentic early Goth bass grumpiness with sour guitar drizzled over the slumped vocal presence. ‘Shimmer’ clips along, whisked by a firm beat, quivering, wavering vocals and rounded, hollow guitar frivolity. ‘Trash Spirit’ goes deeper with rolling dips and vocal peaks; a muted splendour. ‘Broken Teeth’ is a milder yelp, with a portly rhythmical haughtiness. Off it drifts, enigmatically and there’s also firm melodic pleasurtries in ‘Got You’ as relaxed as the doleful vocals, etched beautifully in shadow.

www.zorchfactoryrecords.com/official-releases/item/11-the-cemetary-girlz-demo.html
www.myspace.com/thecemetarygirlz

IGREJA DO SEXO
HALL DA ESCORIA EP
Download/Zorch Factory

Having trouble downloading big files right now, so I’ll stick with EPs while I try and sort out my computer, and here’s something very bracing indeed from earlier this year, courtesy of a Gothy Punk trio from Brazil.

‘Igreja Do Sexo’ leans out of the darkness wildly, with yearning ashen vocals from Sonâmbulo (who also handles bass and guitar, as does PinHead) and great credit goes to Rasputina for her inventive rolling rhythm and the gushing organ which flow beautifully together. The guitar has sedate wiry quality, the bass a punky sentinel’s nobility, the song inflated by a swelling choral backing and a doomy but fun uplifting sense of gloom. The keyboards are also a stirring factor in ‘O Crânio Do Urubu’ with more crisp drum currents, to the extent where the vocals melt away. It’s superbly effective.

‘A Dança Das Caveiras’ is less stylish, casually jumpy, a purry Goth gargle, pertly upturned through more dashing drums, although some wiggly guitar sounds a bit of a mess. ‘Surf Aliens’ does what it says on the hairspray tin, but again the guitar is poor, like a rank garage offcast. Luckily the dual vocal interplay dispels the doubts. They finish with a cover of TSOL’s ‘Walk Alone’, respectfully but a touch light and hesitant.

Interesting bunch.

www.myspace.com/igrejadosexo

MAV
Enter EP
Download/Zorch Factory

This is a fantastically imaginative dark 2009 release from a mercurial Italian dark indie band who cross-fertilise Goth and Electro territories and jumble them together to create a fascinating landscape, now available as a free download.

It took me a while to work out they’re a four piece, as the myspace is one of those arty ones but we have what seem initially like very prim rhythmical ideas from Alfredo on drums that allow ‘Akynetik’ to crawl enigmatically along with Deneb’s aggrieved vocals dominating proceedings and sounding peeved and having to do so, but that’s just half the story as Francesco’s synth has a major part to play in proceedings and Federico’s guitar can’t be overlooked. ‘Lamento’ is a slowkey affair, the guitar scuffed and downturned, the mood luscious as the vocals skate across, icy, dignified synth. A kind of post-Cure wilderness, and very pretty, into which you fall and fall, then fall some more.

‘Il Crepuscolo Della Conscienza’ is plainer, the synth radiant, the vocals sonorous and slowly developing into something passionate as the drums percolate and agitate. They then show even more sweet melodic concerns in the perfumed zest of a sing-songy ‘Vuoto’, guitar relaxed and curly, the bass bowed but buoyant as the synth runs a
gentle riot of its own and the treated vocals scoot wisely around to the back of a bulging, infectious tune.

‘Insana Insonnia’ is slightly mental, as urgently muffled as it is ruffled to begin with, beats slapping, bass streaming, synth evaporating with vocal tension flowing and in insane dance break like a post-punk Bronski Beat! The deadened husk that is ‘In My Brain’ is further variety from an intoxicatingly unpredictable band. It is as still as can be but still escalates to a dramatic peak midway. The piano/synth doldrums of ‘Diane’s Dream’ is a gorgeous way to close and as an instrumental another shock.

Beautiful record, beguiling sounds.

www.myspace.com/bandmav

These scary noises come from a gathering of Jeremy Long (guitar), John Krausbauer (guitar/bass), Ian Hawk (bass), Matt McDowell (percussion), Bob Bellerue (electronics), with a one time member called GkDs (electronics), and it’s really hard work. Bleak and bulky, with more of a drone temperament than lighter ambient tendencies it’s not what you’d normally lob into an Experimental or Noise backwater and over and around you it would make more sense to cast your mind back to the early 90’s and imagine a band in Twin Peaks forming. That same brooding sense of mystery, the same ghostly lightness of touch.

‘Anniversary Circle’ has supple bass, slivers of hovering guitar, bruised vocals and a morose but fluid synth pattern and I might have a whinge it’s that I can’t find lyrics anywhere online when there’s a story hinted at which I’d quite like to follow. Arse!

‘Saturated Feathers’ has more of that Julee Cruse with a shotgun ambience, male and female vocals caught momentarily in the light as the murky sounds seep. ‘Understand’ has more spirit caught in its nagging grooves and undulates strangely to its unexpected end.

A great record, and you owe it to yourself to find out more.

www.myspace.com/tecumseh00

www.myspace.com/anniversarycircle
www.anniversarycircle.com
SOCIOPHOBIA
LOVE IS/NONSENSE EPs
Downloads/Zorch Factory

Here’s a cool Ukrainian Deathrock entity, formed in 2008 with two EPs available on Zorch Factory which I will review together.

This year’s “Love Is” kicks off with ‘Intro Death Of Romance’ that certainly has a pleasing rhythmical swagger and otherwise genteel guitar and synth etching with vocals merely hinted at like a downmarket Dvar. ‘One Truth’ finds Nightchild A (for it is he, responsible for everything in this solo project) singing with a piercing, scathing but melodic style. The watchful song gestates angrily but with a warty pop sensibility which I like a lot, this song showcasing his understanding of the earliest Post-Punk merging of hostility and tuneful antecedents.

A touch more scampering in the underbelly of ‘Virtual Girl’ an agonised spirit pulses throughout, the vocals firmly committed, the music thick, dark and hungry. ‘Love Is’ cuts itself in half like Andi Sex Gang on a psychiatric ward but the music still builds on clear ergonomic principles, and rolls along with concise rhythmical prowess, the song opened out and billowing coolly. For his cover of ‘Love Will Tear Us Apart’ the bass is high, the synth simmering, the vocals radiantly coy, knowingly camp. It’s fun

The “Nonsense EP” comes from 2009 and in ‘Waxworks’ you can detect a punkier itch, the drum machine almost weeping at its own weakness, but the vocals keep it all together, joyously commercial and leanly cantankerous. ‘Nonsense’ is certainly moodier but still bustles along and throws off some convivial catchy sparks. ‘Lies’ dips down deeper, with a clattery swell, a piquant vocal drama delivered sedately. The vocals in ‘Ambivalence’ rather go awry as the pace hots up, but this time the music keeps it buoyant and alive. ‘Let Him Fight By Himself’ is interesting, some clashing elements jumbling up in a positive manner, the vocals almost casually dominating the stirring punk bravado, which also includes a contrite, haunting passage.

Finishing again with a cover, this the mighty Doppelganger’s ‘Vivo’, Nightchild A (not the greatest name incidentally, I’m sure the one he was born with would be far more fitting) goes for a gracious take, tapering off the surging edges to give a well mannered display. It’s an awesome song anyway and comes over, somewhat ironically, like a disguised Manic Street Preachers here.

Brilliant EPs then, both available for free download at the urls below, and there’s an album (“What’s The News?”) out now which I will survey shortly, because I’m dutiful like that.

www.myspace.com/sociophobiaua

BLACK AND SHADOWS
POSZUKAJ SWOJEGO CIENIA
Bat-Cave Productions

This is a fascinating and worthy tribute to an early 90’s Polish post-punk band with a Gothy heart (or vice versa), being a re-release of their main public work. Roma (bass/vocals) and Viher (guitar/vocals) create a spiky but robustly rhythmical sound that will initially beguile with its bass lustre, sharp shiny guitar and fiercely static energy where everything is bursting politely at the seams. Gradually the intensity leaks out and transfixes.

‘Uciekam’ is really light on its vicious feet, the vocals moody but mellow when hemmed in by a quizzical flock of guitar notes and wily bass control. Think early 4AD releases and you have the Post-Punk
clarity right there. ‘Sny O Potdez’ could be a skinny cousin to ‘Wardance’-era Killing Joke, the guitar running in streams like burning fuel. With little in the way of vocal intentions a surprisingly agile drum machine, stylish bass and imposing guitar architecture keeps the song unfolding and, ultimately, towering.

They seem fresher and less intense during ‘Obcy Krajobraz’ with busy but buoyant percussive ideas wending throughout, as that rhythmical cortex again throbs with life allowing the milder vocal direction and tunefully discreet guitar to wilt happily alongside a noble and nagging bass. ‘Horror’ is almost looping in a dark haze, but with nothing slack or dreamy, the extended nuances instilling more character.

‘Shadow Of Smoke’ conjures up that early 80’s era of Goth artistry where people let the flow take them interesting places while retaining the Post-Punk tenacity instead of going for polished sonic aplomb. If you can picture a male version of Xmal, with brighter vocals you can grasp this sound easily. The synthiness and rolling beats are joined by sharper feline vocal snappiness, and there’s a jaunty air about ‘Zimny Pokoj’ even though it sounds agitated and tearful, the guitar torn away from the song’s wounded lumbering journey. Guitar and bass twist and nod in dual torment until it’s all frittered away. ‘Purpurowe Ptaki’ is like a robot assassin skating for fun in its time off, the proto-Industrial throb is coolly enjoyable, the guitar lunging playfully, the bass swaying, vocals studiously furious. Think Gang Of 4 in a time machine accident and we’re on the money yet again and there’s a raw, carousing feel in the slinky rhythm and deftly scoured guitar.

They end with the chunky ‘Słowa’ which darts straight ahead with a corkscrew bass lazily insinuated through guitar skree and faded vocals, in the style of true dilapidated post-punk atmospherics, and while there is nothing particularly striking about this song you are steeped in their sound by now and move with it on instinct. That’s a sign of their quality, as is the fact that for a band who admitted to Cure influences they sound absolutely nothing like them, which is rare, as they must have been back then.

I hope that this magnificent record existing again helps bring them some recognition in their own scene and homeland among a new audience, just as I’m sure their reputation is well respected by the old school.

www.myspace.com/blackandshadows
www.myspace.com/batcavemailorder

HYOSCYAMUS NIGER

CZAS

Baticve Productions

It’s funny how some people can just grab your interest straight away. The opening to ‘Sen’ is a simple pulse beat with a hint of sonar, a crunching gear shift with a pretty synth line and you’re in, as gracefully sprawled vocals roll over the developing synth adventure returns and recoils as vocal drama increases. The vocals do rather loom out, exposed and brash with the electronics holding back dutifully, but the tune is something of a lupine beauty.

‘Mechaniczne Mokradla’ is all buttoned up against the cold, vocals from one Tomasz Sokolowski either guarded and dignified or hotly declaiming, the rhythm slow and terse as the synth ensures the sculpting of gentle melodic gradients. ‘Wizolauci’ is all wiggly and declaiming, the rhythm slow and terse as the synth ensures the listener of musical mystery worldwide. I will, over the next few days, be unveiling the A4

A4 Book - £19.99, Download - £5.00

As I discount the idea cretins would ever visit my pages I know that you are all well aware The Cravats and their later offspring remain, collectively, one of the most creative and unruly forces that ever dared shatter the hips of Britain when breaking free from the geographical constraints of the birth process, spreading their message of musical mystery worldwide. I will, over the next few days, be unveiling the A4 gloss books done in their honour, but we start with their filthy and svelte soul brethren, THE VERY THINGS. From the ebullient fluid soul energy of ‘Motortown’ to their surreal dark spaces of ‘The Bushes Scream While My Daddy Prunes’ THE VERY THINGS were an intriguing band. Trapped within these demure pages you will find mind-expanding interviews, luscious photos and scraps of essential

www.hniger.info

THE VERY THINGS
critics as, “possibly the greatest book ever published” it includes some record reviews from back in the day, a discography, Peel Session details and three rather gorgeous interviews, done during the 1980s by myself, for Melody Maker, ZigZag and NME.

The 104 black and white photos were done to accompany the ZigZag interview, where the band took on the characteristic of various car components (trust me, it does make sense), and will evoke strong memories for anyone who ever worked in EC1 as they’re from round the back of the old ZigZag offices, near Gray’s Inn Road and Hatton Garden, including a few in the old chip shop. (I wonder if that’s still there?) It has been remarked by unnamed ecclesiastical sources that these images will speak to the very epicentre of your soul.

The Melody Maker interview sees them shifting away from the experimental, to experiment with soulful discipline. For the NME interview I try to catch them unawares by asking them the selfsame questions Elvis once faced at a 1960 press conference. They are not phased. Not for a moment. Once read this will always be on your mind.

You need to register with Lulu (which is easily done when you click the url below) before being able to buy, and for postage I recommend economy airmail (or you’ll pay courier rates) and flat rate inland domestic postage. They don’t just send books out in bubblewrap envelopes, they package books well so postage on a single book can be a few quid, but when you buy several the combined postage is as good as you’ll find anywhere. If you want to save on postage visit my furtive online lair at http://www.mickmercer.com and go through the various Punk, Gothic or Indie sections until you find a few books you want to buy. Alternatively you may wish to get more and pay less, by acquiring the download versions, as all of my books are now available as downloads too. For the full up to date list head straight to http://stores.lulu.com/mickmercer

In this heavy gloss 72 page book - 8.26” x 11.69”, perfect binding (flat spine), white interior paper (80# weight), full-colour interior ink, white exterior paper (90# weight), full-colour exterior ink - you will find 74 charismatic shots, alongside three interviews from those notorious publications Zigzag, Melody Maker and Punk Lives wherein I plied my trade and the band, ironically, traded pliers.

The rest you know.

You need to register with Lulu (which is easily done when you click the url below) before being able to buy, and for postage I recommend economy airmail (or you’ll pay courier rates) and flat rate inland domestic postage. They don’t just send books out in bubblewrap envelopes, they package books well so postage on a single book can be a few quid, but when you buy several the combined postage is as good as you’ll find anywhere. If you want to save on postage visit my furtive online lair at http://www.mickmercer.com and go through the various Punk, Gothic or Indie sections until you find a few books you want to buy. Alternatively you may wish to get more and pay less, by acquiring the download versions, as all of my books are now available as downloads too. For the full up to date list head straight to http://stores.lulu.com/mickmercer

www.lulu.com/product/paperback/dadacravatslaboratory/ 12795778

SOCIOPHOBIA
WHAT’S THE NEWS?
Own Label

If you fancy a wonderful free album infused with Gothic and Post-Punk currents and charismas then look no further than this download.

‘Intro, Radio Mob’ scans the airwaves initially with a frightening millisecond of The Eagles before the bubbling dark strand of noise gets going, swiftly replaced by the joyously Goth-Glam spikiness of ‘Elections’, cheekily triumphal. ‘Whose Cock Is Bigger’, which may be about an agricultural contest, has deeper marks etched into its quizzical face, the lightly blinking synth tunnelling into a dour and bruised surface, accentuating the plunging rhythm.

‘Zombie Girl’ sees the keys like a dipping garage organ as it chatters and chunters away, peaking with a censoriously-toned chorus but exuberantly devious throughout. ‘Lies’ is as tuneful and nagging but in a more interesting and piquant post-punk style, reminiscent of early
Psy Furs, wonderfully vivid vocals from Nightchild A, with some diligently sweet guitar and puffy keys.

‘Paranoia’ is another corker, with the guitar and mood shifts cutting across the vocals, as the guitar runs and runs, revealing the only drawback of this one man project, the sound sometimes isn’t strong enough, due to understandable production limitations, but that isn’t the fault of the songs which stand up, hearty and resilient.

With more understated and lovely keyboards the demanding vocal display in ‘Game Of Passion’ draws you closer to its pulsating hunger, and the similarly wrecked but tinnily tumultuous ‘Antireligion’ also pulls you around with some subtle bass perfume and whirling synth background clamour. ‘Buried By Days’ has a punkier edge and fabulously furtive keyboards, glowing in an almost regal Russian manner, the melodic impact discreet but long lasting. That urgent agitation continues in the slightly barmy ‘Animal Farm’ which has the punkiest friskiness yet and ends the album on a slightly crazed high.

After the two previous EPs I reviewed recently I’ll happily pronounce this chap a fascinating artist. The album encapsulates what was good about the style of his songwriting and adds intriguing touches and a confident energy because he does it all, and he does it all with imagination and solid, exciting results. I await further develops with great interest.

www.4shared.com/file/128489761/bca31ac2/2009-Whats_the_news_.html - download here

PEIBOL
VIAJES AL FIN DE LA NOCHE
Download/Zorch Factory

Punk Electronica, apparently, from a Spanish chap named Piebol and available for a free download right now. This came out this year and tomorrow we’ll have a look at the 2008 album Mundo Digital if that’s alright with you?

It’s bright and breezy. ‘Marinero De Los Mares Del Destino’ sets up the blueprint, with lightly scowly but well projected stark vocals that remain circumspect and work within the arrangement, with subdued guitar allowing a simple rhythm to cajole, and pretty keyboards to enchant. The punky vocals are then joined by unruly guitar in a slightly haphazard ‘Hongos Magicos’, a bit like the spirit of UK82 punk gone poppy. Some of the vocals are truly awful but it’s curiously enjoyable in an idiotically scrawled way. (Maybe I’m just feeling nostalgic as I was working on Action Pact and Dead Man’s Shadow books today?)

‘Olvidare Los Sueños’ gets some gloomy atmosphere going with an ominous pulse and diminutive vocals provide some gentility until the guitar cannot bear further restraint and crashes in and with high synth it blares roughly, which is fun. ‘En El Medio’ has bumptier drums but rustling guitar and swelling keys, with the most sensitive vocal performance to date so this has the feel of simmering (not simpering) emotions, and it has a lovely chorus, with an infectiously listless feel that hovers. Definitely the standout. A cutely jumbled EP then vanishes in the form of the stiffly stalking ‘Viejas Al Fin De La Noche’, a restless punk entity with sweeping synth squalls, itchy guitar and fretful vocal spleen. It’s a perfect choice to end with as they’ve slowly gone up, then cooled down but leave you wanting more with this mood. The synth winks in a consumptive manner, the rhythm is solid, the vocal presence positioned well and it’s only the guitar which is weird, as the song dribbles to a spacey end. That could have been pricklier, I guess.

So another intriguing solo arsenal then, following on from Nightchild A in Sociophobia. One man, plenty of ideas, and some cool songs. It does have a genuine punky heart so the sideways shunt into synth tactics and results is an interesting one.

www.myspace.com/peibolmusic
www.zorchfactoryrecords.com/official-releases/item/77-peibol-viajes-al-fin-de-la-noche.html

CATS OF ANARCHY BOOK - £19.99 Download £5.00

Some of you will doubtless remember Kill Your Pet Puppy fanzine, and some may even be aware the people responsible lived in the Back Sheep Housing Co-op. Well, these are their cats, the brains behind the operation(s). 87 photos of the cats who secretly ran everything. Photos also include members of the KYPP crew.

76 heavy gloss A4 pages, 87 photos, perfect binding (flat spine), white interior paper (80#
weight), full-colour interior ink, white exterior paper (90# weight), full-colour exterior ink.

www.lulu.com/product/paperback/anarchy-cats/12918891

ANARCHY IN ACTION - A4 BOOK

This book of 96 heavy gloss pages containing 188 photos, 20 of them in colour, goes back to the blighted but inspirational era of Thatcher’s Britain when Punk became a real lifestyle rather than just a mental approach. It includes the Kill Your Pet Puppy fanzine crew, relaxing at home, living the dream, or dreaming the life. (Plenty of juggling going on for some reason.) Then there are some indescribably bad Hagar The Womb photos (but they’re rare, so that’s excusable) with good live photos of The Mob and excellent shots from two Rubella Ballet gigs. All in all a lovely piece of work, capturing committed individuals at work and play.

To investigate all of my exclusive Punk, Gothic and Indie books – the biggest collection anywhere - please visit my website: www.mickmercer.com or scroll down the most up to date list: http://stores.lulu.com/mickmercer - where you can select books or downloads.


The concluding part of my tribute to THE WIGS this A4 gloss book is 100 pages, covers included, featuring 135 photos, 92 of them in colour, taking in Bull & Gate gigs from 1988, 1989 and 1990. There are also 25 flyers and/or bits of gig-related ephemera, 7 live reviews, one short interview and the special six page issue of Panache given away at their final gig. A masterclass in Wigs dementia.

For details of all my exclusive books please visit my website: www.mickmercer.com – with its various sections on Goth, Punk and Indie. For titles added during the past two weeks please visit http://stores.lulu.com/mickmercer for books or downloads.

This book is 8.26” x 11.69”, perfect binding (flat spine), white interior paper (80# weight), full-colour interior ink, white exterior paper (90# weight), full-colour exterior ink. You need to register with Lulu (which is easily done when you click the url below) before being able to buy, and for postage I recommend economy airmail (or you’ll pay courier rates) and flat rate inland domestic postage. They don’t just send books out in bubblewrap envelopes, they package books well so postage on a single book can be a few quid, but when you buy several the combined postage is as good as you’ll find anywhere.


PEIBOL
MUNDO DIGITAL
Download/Zorch Factory

The other day we perused Peibol’s “Viajes Al Fin De La Noche” EP, with all its electronic pop punkery, but here’s his 2008 album. Astute listeners may also like to visit his myspace page where there also
downloads of “Creando Desde La Sombra” (2007) and “Canciones Perdidas En Mi Habitación” (2006).

‘No Solo Mi Boca’ manages to frolic darkly, a soothing synth gliding over a restless beat and quickening vocals. ‘La Prision En La Libertad’ is an elegantly scrummy pop thing, with a bleated rhythm and some wiry guitar solidity. As ‘La Cuenta Atras’ limbers up it’s like an off kilter europop sweetheart. I don’t know if the name Spagna still means anything to anyone but we’re in that sort of territory, just a wee bit trudgingly. ‘Sincero’ whirls further back to early Human League mini-electronics, ‘Cataratas Emocionales’ has a cooler clatter, a glowering mood propped up by a whirling column of guitar and arresting background sub-Industrial steel.

‘Lo Que Podria’ has low key jaunty vocals over the linear blipfest, ‘Sectarios’ finally develops ideas by letting power wash up and over through a more truculent sound, which is the first departure from a simple template, then he tears through the tuneful punk ‘Mundo Digit@l!’ and dashing madness of a frenzied but frilly ‘Sangrar Contigo.’ Closer ‘Mi Fantasma De La Locura’ has pretty much everything he’ll flaunt these days with a settled pattern of interesting trouble, the bass tone undulating softly, the vocals imporing and well honed, the synth drowsy, the beat insistent but also retreating to keep the song humbly demanding.

Nothing stunning, it has to be said, but there is a definite cohesive pull which makes it a satisfying experience throughout. It’s just that it’s clearly a pointer to better things.


BULL & GATE: The Timebox 1986 / 1987

When my Bull & Gate series starts, covering ten years spent photographing bands at The Timebox, Hype, Cube, Pop Club, Butterfly Evolution, Interspace and C2010, the books will be black and white and on matt paper to make them affordable as they will all be hefty tomes, including comments, memories and opinions of dozens of people who attended regularly or played there. However I do wish to issue colour books on gloss paper, although of a smaller size due to costs.

The first of these is a 100 page gloss A4 book (8.26” x 11.69”, perfect binding, white interior paper (80# weight), full-colour exterior ink, white exterior paper (90# weight), full-colour exterior ink) devoted to The Timebox during 1986 and 1987. This includes 37 colour flyers. 48 black and white photos, 255 colour photos and 29 venue-related documents. As well as crowd shots and faces within the scene you will also find:

And All Because The Lady Loves…. Anonymes, The Ashes, Baby Trio, Bible For Dogs, Black Cillas, Brian, Electric Dog Sex, Fat Lady Sings, Giant International, Jim Jiminez, Josi Without Colours, Junior Manson Slags, Kitsch, Laughing Mothers, Lean Steel, Millions Of Brazilians, Mute Drivers, Primitives, Romeo Suspect, Sex Bitch Goddess, Shoot, Soho, The Timebox ‘No Talent’ contest and Tragic Venus.

It’s a perfect snapshot of the times, capped by a great photo of Jon Beast on the cover (and a small vomiting punk on the rear).

You’ll need to register with Lulu.com before you can buy the book, which is easy, and I recommend going with ordinary flatrate inland mail. (The express version seems pointless.) If buying from outside the UK go with economy postage as that’s normal airmail, with their other options being at courier rates. They package books well, unlike some firms which send books out in bubblewrap, so you might want to visit my website to check out other books as the combined postage they offer is as good as you’ll find anywhere: http://www.mickmercer.com


CREAMING JESUS A4 Book

Hell, with Andy’s glasses they can claim to be Steampunk before the term had even been invented. Creaming Jesus bestrode the stages of the capital like vicious throbbing cut throats. This was a strange mutant brew of Goth and pre-Grunge rock of a genuinely alternative variety, and they were an odd looking bunch too, which seems only fitting. Watch them fitting from gigs at the Marquee in 1988 and 1989, Powerhaus (including some admittedly grotty shots as I was reduced to using really cheap film) and Astoria in 1989, and Splash in 1994. Remember, these people are still out there, somewhere. Be vigilant! PLEASE NOTE: This book contains colour and black and white images.

88 gloss pages (8.26” x 11.69”, perfect binding, white interior paper (80# weight), full-colour interior ink, white exterior paper (90# weight), full-colour exterior ink) plus covers, 139 photos. [Marquee 1988 (18 black and white), Marquee 1989 (16 colour), Powerhaus 1989 (17 colour), Astoria 1989 (21 colour), Splash 1994 (57 black and white)]


http://stores.lulu.com/mickmercer - scroll down

VARIOUS SOMETHING OR OTHER

National Trust: The Album - Time To Think NT

Jarvis Cocker is credited as producer of this album for the National Trust, assembling a compilation of ambient recordings intended to invoke an all-purpose atmospheric reminder of the gorgeous tranquillity and Olde World Charm mixed with Modern Awareness. Contrast, Illustration, harmony in action.

Well, it may seem a bit twee, but then it’s no different in its elements to many ambient offerings from Ethereal Goth bands, but it is a) too short, at well under half an hour, and a bit too basic, offset by a free download being available.

‘Belton House; Walking On Gravel And Birds’ is an understandable opener, as you’re approaching a building, and taking in the natural sounds of birdlife, but then ‘Belton House; Birdsong’ is the same, and I wasn’t even aware we’d blended in to ‘Brownsea Island; Waves Lapping Along The Shore’

‘Ham House; Footsteps Through The House’ is languid noises on wood, as is ‘Chartwell; Creaking Staircase’, with ‘Upton House; The
Billiards Room’ a charming diversion, although it has to be said it’s a bit dull. ‘Lanhydrock; Old Music Box’ does exactly what it says on the ornate wooden casing. Tinkle, tinkle, winsome prettiness. ‘Quarry Bank Hill; Murmurs Of Children In School House’ is the discreet murmuring of kids with not one cry of, ‘I’m bored!’ or rustling of crisp packets. That doesn’t stop it being a non-event though as it could be anywhere.

‘Fountains Abbey; Birds In Water Garden’ returns to plaintive twittering and then Industrial fans take heart, for you are not forgotten. ‘Patterson’s Spade Mill; Strap Press’ needs a lot of volume Twittering and then Industrial fans take heart, for you are not forgotten. ‘Patterson’s Spade Mill; Strap Press’ needs a lot of volume Twittering and then Industrial fans take heart, for you are not forgotten. ‘Patterson’s Spade Mill; Strap Press’ needs a lot of volume Twittering and then Industrial fans take heart, for you are not forgotten. ‘Patterson’s Spade Mill; Strap Press’ needs a lot of volume Twittering and then Industrial fans take heart, for you are not forgotten. ‘Patterson’s Spade Mill; Strap Press’ needs a lot of volume Twittering and then Industrial fans take heart, for you are not forgotten.

As background gentility it certainly works, even if Lynda did suggest she thought Blickling Hall was the washing machine (!??), but it’s too short and limited. I can’t actually suggest what else might have made her think Blickling Hall was the washing machine (!??), but it’s too short and limited. I can’t actually suggest what else might have made her think Blickling Hall was the washing machine (!??), but it’s too short and limited. I can’t actually suggest what else might have made her think Blickling Hall was the washing machine (!??), but it’s too short and limited. I can’t actually suggest what else might have made her think Blickling Hall was the washing machine (!??), but it’s too short and limited. I can’t actually suggest what else might have made her think Blickling Hall was the washing machine (!??), but it’s too short and limited. I can’t actually suggest what else might have made her think Blickling Hall was the washing machine (!??), but it’s too short and limited. I can’t actually suggest what else might have made her think Blickling Hall was the washing machine (!??), but it’s too short and limited. I can’t actually suggest what else might have made her think Blickling Hall was the washing machine (!??), but it’s too short and limited. I can’t actually suggest what else might have made her think Blickling Hall was the washing machine (!??), but it’s too short and limited. I can’t actually suggest what else might have made her think Blickling Hall was the washing machine (!??), but it’s too short and limited. I can’t actually suggest what else might have made her think Blickling Hall was the washing machine (!??), but it’s too short and limited. I can’t actually suggest what else might have made her think Blickling Hall was the washing machine (!??), but it’s too short and limited.

www.uniquefacilities.com/files/nationaltrust.htm - free zip download, or individual tracks.

NEMESIS TO GO – New Issue (#9) online

What is in the latest issue of the UK finest online zine? Well, exactly what you’d expect.

The crux, as always, is the live fare. There’s an epic WGT piece covering what seems like less bands than usual but in greater detail.

You’ll thrill to, or recoil from, Mona Mur And En Esch, Dark Diamonds, Genitorturers, Conjure One, Kirlian Camera, Brendan Perry, Los Carniceros Del Norte, Christ Vs Warhol, Twisted Nerve, Catastrophe Ballet, Jabberwock, Cobra Killer, Schnewittchen, Endless, Indica, The Crystelles, The LoveCrave, Big Boy, Faith And The Muse, Diary Of Dreams, Lacrimosa, Alien Sex Fiend, Zeraphine, Kommunity FK, Gitane Demone, Job Karma and Nurse With Wound.

The other live reviews do what Michael does best, capturing the familiar, the legendary, the surprise reappearances and the current milieu. All hurled in together are cover Angie Bowie, Ann Marie Hurst, Biig Sexy Noise, Blindness, Dogbones (galore), Emilie Autumn (in Bournemouth of all places), GobSau Sage (what an awful name!), Iggy & The Stooges, KASMs, Kid Congo And The Pink Monkey Birds, Lillies And Remains, Martin Rev, Pere Ubu, a truly bizarre Peter Murphy gig, PIL, Psychic TV, Screaming Banshee Airc rew, Specimen, The Adicts (a surprise!), Factory Floor, These New Puritans, Vertical Smile and Vile Imbeciles, plus support bands galore, with photos of just about everybody.

Only oe interview, in a brisk Nola Jesus encounter, and she’s an unusual woman, finding an intrinsic similarity in soul and industrial, but on the record review front things have hotted up this time around: AlterRed (Bind Until It Breaks), Amanda Palmer (Performs The Popular Hits Of Radiohead On Her Magical Ukelele), Atomizer (Cult Of Europa), Big Sexy Noise (Big Sexy Noise), Bitter Ruin (Hung, Drawn And Quartered), Blindness (Confessions EP), Capital X (Number One Fight Star), Choking Susan (Detroit Punk), Cobra Killer (Uppers And Downers), Concrete Lung (Waste Of Flesh), Cristiane (Amerika), Deathline (Sixtynine).

Guilty Strangers (Keepsake EP), Jabberwock (Sweet Limbo), Kim Acrylic & The Northern Drones (Fanfare Meltdown), Kommunity FK (La Santisima Muerte), Noblesse Oblige (Malady), Pretentious, Moi? (Pretentious, Moi?), Risqué (Tie Me Up, Tie Me Down), The Adicts (Life Goes On), The Dogbones (galore), Emilie Autumn (in Bournemouth of all places), Gob$au$age (what an awful name!), Iggy & The Stooges, KASMs, Kid Congo And The Pink Monkey Birds, Lillies And Remains, Martin Rev, Pere Ubu, a truly bizarre Peter Murphy gig, PIL, Psychic TV, Screaming Banshee Airc rew, Specimen, The Adicts (a surprise!), Factory Floor, These New Puritans, Vertical Smile and Vile Imbeciles, plus support bands galore, with photos of just about everybody.

A fantastic issue which I am still picking my way through (it always takes a few days to devour fully), plus that classic photo archive. Hopefully an inspiration to others too – because this is how it should be done.

www.nemesis.to
www.myspace.com/nemesis_to_go
http://nemesis-to-go.livejournal.com

LAST JULY
NOTHING ELSE BUT YOU
Own Label

The more UK Goth the better, I’m sure you’ll agree and here we find Dvae (synth/prog) who runs Sacrilege in Cambridge with Alix (vocals) and they have none other than Nevla on guitar, the little devil! Not that he appears to be on this, mind.

‘Nothing Else But You’ has a catchy little motif stalking the politely edgy sound. They have a light turbulence about the rhythmical deportment, but the calming vocal yearning keeps them in a settled, mottled stance. There’s nothing actually hard here. It is a gracious sound, close in spirit to a lowing Eves.

‘Autumn’ bubbles and bumbles with swanky electronic pop, a gentle synth balm countered a sterner vocal cadence. ‘Muses’ is muted euroclub dance in its insidious jiggliness, the synth bells expanding
grandly, the vocals again instilling a steely determination, keeping fluffy possibilities at bay ‘Alone Afraid’ is a starker yet succulent entity, beautifully controlled and realised, the lyrical picture of personal woe complemented by stabby synth pulses but also decorous keyboard contemplation. Staunch emotional confidence makes a lovely change in ‘Journeys’ an equally thoughtful song but it’s actually too plain and therefore a bit of a trudge, sending the EP off weakly.

The overall impression is one of subtle melodic strength, so definitely a band to look out for.

www.myspace.com/lastjulyuk
http://lastjuly.co.uk - EP only a fiver (playing The Shambles, Whitby Oct 30th)
www.myspace.com/g0th1c
www.myspace.com/alixandreamoryn
www.myspace.com/sacrilegeclub

BULL & GATE - HYPE 1988 A4 Book + download

There’s no denying the Bull & Gate has been a special venue seemingly forever, with its own social scene gathering around it in a way most small venues never achieve. This book captures the post-Timebox club Jon Beast started, HYPE, at its fulsome best. You will find many glories in these 100 gloss full colour pages (8.26” x 11.69”, perfect binding, white interior paper (80# weight), full-colour interior ink, white exterior paper (90# weight), full-colour exterior ink), including 26 Hype documents, 42 flyers, 79 black and white photos and 120 colour photos, including scene luminaries, but concentrating on bands. Ah, and such bands! Some of my all-time Indie favourites lurk here.

2 Lost Sons, And All Because The Lady Loves..., Anonyms, The Arguments, Big Sur, Destroy The Boy, Deth Banana Icecube, Driscolls, Fini Tribe, Furore, Galley Slaves, Kitsch, Mancubs, Maryen, Mega City 4, Millions Of Brazilians, Mute Drivers, Nearly Virgin, No Corridor, Parachute Men, The Popinjays, Riotous Assembly, Shoot, Soho, Thrilled Skinny, The Wigs and Yes Men.

You need to register at Lulu.com before buying, which is perfectly straightforward. As they wrap their books properly one title can have a one-off hefty postage charge. Scan down the list of my other books - http://stores.lulu.com/mickmercer - if you’re thinking of buying any others because they combined postage they offer is as good as you’ll find anywhere.


CHRIST vs. WARHOL
Dissent
ZVOOK

Everyone will be crucified for fifteen minutes? The Last Soup Can? I don’t know what the name suggests, you can make your own mind up on that score, but the compellingly moody and energetic mind music will win you over. Given the pedigree of those involved this is no surprise. Eveghost - vocals, Steven James – guitar, Marzia Rangel - bass, Geoff Bruce – drums. Interested? Of course you are.

‘A New Model Of The Universe’ is like a post-Banshees twilight swirl of an instrumental, then the brittle but determined ‘Cross Of Lorraine’ is a viciously bright paean to resistance.

‘Paper Dolls’ is more chunky post-punk briskness, high rollicking vocals above, fluid real drums beneath, guitar and bass waltzing in space in what can be seen fairly accurately as a punkier Lene Lovich. ‘Dissent’ is a rough and spidery punk tumble that zings along with a wonderfully burly rhythmical weight, but we shift sideways with ‘At Exactly The Right Time’ as the vocals are left totally and brilliantly exposed. Striking is An understatement. A stellar performance with diligently dramatic lyrics.

‘Secret’ pours back into the vibrant punky struggle and coming all wobbly and catchy in their warm rolling frenzy then we’re thrown aside again in giddy fashion but the spectacularly winsome ‘Fade’ with a successful sub-James Bond soundtrack style with slickly and subtle depth charges. ‘And If You Forget’ continues this impressive feat by spilling out like a streamlined upgrade of those early 80’s post-punk Legal Weapon, viscous but enticingly swaying with a melodic tilt. A wilfully capricious concoction ‘The Trigger’ moves with a swinging purpose and feels great but doesn’t do much for me, and reading the lyrics I wasn’t surprised given its theoretical premise. An unusual thing, for sure, but I find the more direct lyrics carry more impact.
‘The End Is Nigh’ switches to male vocals is unexpected and works well as the minimalist deadpanned tones work with the bucking guitar and surly motion, in a coolly understated song. ‘Fool’s Gold’ has more skillfully silky guitar and slickly twisting rhythmical slippage as the vocals weave through the crafty carnage and the prolonged pull of the slow motion tumultuous ‘Transmission’ is just as impressive, then it all ends with a mental but delicate ‘Robin Hood In Reverse’ where the chorus is a bit too obvious and there isn’t enough of an emphatic surge of power, which they evidently have in spades send the album crashing to a close. In a way it doesn’t need to, because it’s so good, but it would have been nice for it to smash its way to its own oblivion. Gloriously mercurial.

www.myspace.com/christvswarholmusic

HYPE 1989 Book

This book chronicles the final original year of Hype (there is a brief return in the 90’s) as it turned to Fresh under a new promoter. The final pages contain the first issue of Jon Beast’s ‘Communion’ manifesto and the next book in the series will cover Defiance!, a club Jon ran upstairs at the Tally Ho! Pub directly opposite the Bull & Gate. So….apart from Gem Archer of Oasis fame being on the cover with Jeff Bastard (a fellow member of that awesome band The Contenders, when they were House and Stage manager(s) respectively, we have 100 colour pages (although some photos remain black and white, naturally) containing 18 venue documents, 4 flyers, 67 black and white photos, and 98 colour photos. There are the usual shots of the highly desirable venue staff, and a plethora of fascinating bands - 11th International Dental Convention, 30 Lashes, Andy Ross & Jesus Jones, The Arguments, B.C., Bedrock Trio, Cathal Coughlan, The Contenders, Crowd Scene, Das Tor, Destroy The Boy, Edith Strategy, Faith Over Reason, Fra, Galley Slaves, God & The Crazy Lesbians From Hell, GT Jesus & Crawling Asylum, Mega City 4, Meraloono Daddies, Mossbacks, PA.R.A. (People’s Army Rhythm Aces?), Panny Candles, Pits, Poke It With a Stick, The Popinjays, Reformation, The Ryecatchers, Shoot The Joker, Shoot, Shout, Snuff, Spam Charles, Spam Nun, Spam Vera Lynn, The Wigs, Tim London & Associates, Trashcan Soul, Wish, Woman and Wurlitzer One.


DEFIANCE 1989

In 1989 when Hype closed at the Bull & Gate, replaced by something odious named Fresh, a group of like-minded individuals, including myself, set about putting Defiance together directly over the road and above a pub called the Tally Ho. Jon Beast remained the garrulous host, with Jeff Bastard and Gem Archer organising things at ground level. Freaky, Leeson O’Keefe, Steve Lamacq and myself agreed to cover any financial losses and off it went. It only ran for a couple of months before it became obvious the lack of soundproofing was to be its demise, with complaints far too numerous for the landlord to ignore.

During its short lifespan there were gigs involving Carter USM, The Shout, Destroy The Boy, The Arguments, Screeming Custard, Mike Painter as Spam Vera Lynn, Beef, Madonna Kebab, Odd Eccentric, Hallelujah Trail, My Father and Vicious Kiss, photos of which are all included in here along with club regulars. 237 colour photos in all. Glorious memories, although I confess I couldn’t remember which band was My Father or Hallelujah Trail, so may have labelled those wrong due to an unfortunate negatives mix-up. Put it down to senility, a vital ingredient in any nostalgic haze.

You must register with Lulu first before buying. They package books properly so postage on one title is a few pounds, but buy more than one and their combined postage is very good. For details of all my books please visit http://stores.lulu.com/mickmercer

NOVEMBER

THE CUBE CLUB 1990 – A4 Book + Download

All of the club nights run at the Bull & Gate have been different, with their own character and musical tastes but The Cube is unusual in that it had an unerring knack of finding big bands early, and for a club running in the midweek slot achieving a reputation is no easy thing, but they did it. It only ran at the Bull & Gate for just under a year but as you look through the evidence of their gigs they have a record to be truly proud of.


POP CLUB 1990

Yes, it’s like Christmas come early, and for anyone looking for Xmas presents a bundle of these Bull & Gate books for the Indie enthusiast of great taste would be just the thing. (Other titles in the Bull & Gate series are Timebox 1986/1987, Hype 1988, Hype 1989, Defiance 1989, Cube Club 1990.)

The Pop Club ran for three years at the Bull & Gate and became the very epicentre of meticulously melodic mania, a delightful place to be, full of characters and band with character. In this first of three glossy 100 page A4 colour books devoted to the Pop Club you will certainly find photos of club regulars but it’s mainly a welter of inspiring welterweight talent which deserves to be remembered. You will also see 22 venue documents, 22 flyers, and then 91 black and white photos, and 287 colour photos.

Who is that on the cover, you ask? Tommy (R.I.P.) was a true legend in the Kentish Town area. Employed regularly as Pot Man (glass collector to you) he was virtually incomprehensible, continually asked, “Busy tonight?”, clapped you reassuringly on the shoulder, not easy given his diminutive stature, before walking away, laughing contentedly. He also had a stunning knack of spilling an empty glass on the lip of the stage and wandering over to collect it just as some pretentiously arty singer might be reaching the climax of some wildly optimistic song. They would open their eyes, ready to absorb the anticipated surge of artistic approval from a grateful audience, to find Tommy staring back at them.


VARIOUS ARTISTS

SCREAMS FOR THE CHARNEL HOUSE Volume 1

It’s good, and natural for clubs to do this, as they’re fine tuning what is good as they develop month by month, so you’ll appreciate it’s full of good things.

Amid fluttery sizzling shadows DYONISIS instil emotional grace in the steady, sorrowful ‘Abyss.’ THE GHOST OF LEMORA have a demure but knowing form of playful indie which runs parallel to anything Gothy, and ‘Lady Lemora’ tinkles dreamily. Similarly the rock thrown casually around but hitting targets easily by THE
Though the road may lead to nowhere… I’ll follow you.

Many paths are left to wander… and I’ll follow you.

I will wait till the moment’s over, and the sirensong is through, out my name

And when every crossroads seem the same, and the wind is calling

“This is the sound of our hearts breaking, this is the thrill of the fray, and this is the sound of the world shaking… you’re holding me close but it feels like I’m slipping away!” she sings in ‘Catch Me’, the music brighter, but still it seems nothing can be done, as the singer is always wrong footed. Hardly the most optimistic chap, clearly, but these offhand gestures are on a massive scale, with brilliantly swaying choruses, in that they sway you; the words like lyrical handcuffs once you're in place. ‘In Flames’ is less dramatic, as there’s no tug of love, no more-consternation as guitar exhales deeply. ‘Why Run’ is just as things calmer, but doubts still wrangle as they’ll never be the same again, even if the worst is over. Synth tiptoes away in case it causes further consternation as guitar exhales deeply. ‘Why Run’ is just as good, but weirder because the notions are simple enough but superbly absurd lyrics do all they can to tip people into chaos, ‘Tongue Tied’ has some guitars drying slowly in the sun so you know the emotional arsonist will be along shortly, and here he comes now! ‘How will I ever get through…and carry on?’ Chin up, old chap!

‘Turn Away’ starts well as bass gnaws at the synths ropes which tie it together. “This is the crossroads of our lives, this is the flickering in disguise, and we could turn the other way or light a fire inside. This is the breaking of our bonds, a revelation ringing true, that we can finally stand a chance, and it’s clear this chance we do, and we could see it through as long as we don’t turn away…” Well, what an opening line for a speed date! Good luck with that. There’s less inherent drama in this, more of an open linear flow, so it’s also nice when the relative serenity of ‘Pieces’ bathes itself in light although there’s a bit too much guitar for me there, before we have sensitive vocals dominating the skyline again. ‘Embers’ then departs the way ‘Spark’ entered and we’re done. It’s a slightly crestfallen close but the majority of this is fantastic, epic emotional fails flown like inspiring self-deprecating flags. Waving, not drowning.

Good God, it’s a Goth record! Batten down the hatches. If you’re wondering whether this might be any good, you should be pleasantly reassured by Tim Chandler being at the musical helm, with a fellow Manuskript mainstay Mike Uwins overseeing production and a spot of bass, with extra guitar contributions from Matt Herlm, Christian Tonkin and Gordon Young. And who’s that on female vocals? Rachel
‘Malina’ starts to evoke weird thoughts of Celtic trappings in my mind with deftly intricate guitar touches, and it’s a curious beast, low down and skimming the surface. ‘The Hunting’ is harder, bordering on dark spirit, clipped energy and elaborate lyrical bleakness. Goth, you see. As it circles around it tightens the grip and elevates the catchiness, airborne melodic plague. (If you like Rome Burns you’ll love this.) ‘Faith And Reason Part Company’ suggests Tim was a reaver in a former life, a dowdy but rolling sing-song approach with traces of pipes held in its light grasp. Enigmatic, curiously dry while historically plump, it’s a lovely oddness here.

‘Chase Is On’ is modern gloopy electronics, but this establishes the icy tink on which he twirls dementedly with his word-heavy forlorn considerations and obsessions, guitar pensive, rhythm cowed in this paranoiac twilight. I have no idea what he’s burbling on about in a semi-claustrophobic setting but that’s the stylish profundity for you, as two decades of Goth sensibilities wrestle and fuse and actually finish with an optimistic upturn. ‘Sense In Segments’ has a dappled dance gait and a wicked vocal poise matching the sharp rhythm to drag you behind its steaming prancing. A sedate chorus rides the invigoration, and words froth in dainty declarations: “And how dare you look so well, when I cast so many curses, And how dare you look so proud, in a trail of petty corpses.” ‘Now And Again’ is a calmer affair, because an affair has calmed, or has it? Hard to tell, again, yet there’s a cause gone rotten but still remaining, sorrow and desperation caught in the wheels of inspiration.

‘Astrid’ skips along, our crumpled lyrical host wrecked by doubts, delusions and woe. No conclusion, but plenty of wild musing. ‘Overdoom’ has more electronic pulses driving it steadily forward and having a plainer emotional unity the song actually lacks the impact of the gloomier songs. ‘Living Dead And Undecided’ lets the guitar flex and breathe as the grim claims gush so it’s a clean, winsome world of concave horror. ‘One Last Wish’ swarms to a gracious close, questions flying from its palpitating vocal heart, drums stamping, guitar edifying in their downturned sweetness and glycerine spread, seeing us safely out with more melodic mystery. Whether prolonged exposure unlocks any of the lyrical secrets I greatly doubt, but as an all-enveloping experience this is all of huge merit, and deeply enjoyable.
In a tepid indie world where bands are scared of their own shadows it’s cheering to find a band who scared their own shadows away ages ago. The tunefully fuzzy Dogbones have crafted a short, shapeshifting album which carries the best post-grunge tendencies of 90’s Indie through into a naughty noughties realm where everybody should enjoy a good rampage.

‘The Whole World Is Weird’ drips glossy guitar alongside confident sneering vocals which offer a ray of hope: ‘Is it you or is them, after all it’s hard to comprehend, nobody is on your side, it will stay that way until you die.’ Nice. After such retrained knowing they opt for full tilt scalded punk snot in a shrill, ravaged set of ‘All Your Friends (Are Going To Kill You)’ knuckledusters.

‘Never Gonna Get Us’ is a low-strung mooching thing, inching forward with a creamy vocal layer on its scrabbling body and a scruffy pop heart elopes with rock ‘n’ roll legs during a dainty ‘Hey Chihuahua’ twirl. ‘Sell Your Soul’ comes on like a leering subterranean Johnny Thunders outtake were it not for female vocals burrowing their way through the guitar-laced cocoon.

‘It Was A Lie’ could almost been an under-the-bridge Nirvana moment except the guitar intricacies are brighter, and the bucking rhythm sweetened by a howling vocal twist. Gas sweeps the enclosure as they kick back against the robust core of the song to trail away then turn back and savagely start hacking. ‘Give Us A Kiss’ has a spindly balance, with a splintering reach, and some unctuous lyrical spin going
on, while ‘This Particular Hole’ has a gentler yet naggier flow and in keeping with ‘Here They Come For The Money’ these brash hustling songs sound like future contenders for Tarantino soundtrack.

‘Auerin (Ley Line)’ keeps gnawing at its own ropes until some delightful jiggly guitar starts ringing out, the vocals start vomiting heat and then they slip into very much a wild thing, known as ‘I Want Alcohol’ with some amusing druggy vocals which directly rhymes weed with aced. It sounds like the backing for a Dr Who nightmare, which deserves top marks. Then the closer ‘Dead Key Crow’ with a clipped, clopping motion, alternating between plaintive gurly charm and furious, gargling venom, their physical shape wobbling in an eternal seizure.

A fantastically fun album it’s like a brain just exploded out of your speakers.

www.myspace.com/thedogbonesuk
www.twitter.com/TheDogbones

THE PROOF

GALERIA ZLUDZEN

Batcave

The all-encompassing global ambient reflections of ‘Galeria’ have vocal whispers circling ululations so you don’t know what to expect initially, but the firmly grumpy rhythm of ‘Dowód’ claws at you with a balletic Gothy grace, as Post-Punk vocals reach out from behind heavy gloomy curtains. I don’t know what they’re on about it but it feels comfortably oppressive and impressively detailed, fluid as poison. The playful creepiness of ‘Nikt’ is deliciously murky, pottering with character and courteous guitar spiralling away from a chunky beat and skinny vocal drama.

The moody ‘Twarz’ sort of clambers up out of a manhole behind you, watchfully inert and then the vocals start wailing accusingly as a walled-up guitar collapses behind them. ‘Usta’ opts for a stealthier sound, vocals and cool bass sliding through the middle of a sensual shimmer. ‘Znaki’ creates another interesting atmosphere of roving clandestine quality, suspense at every turn, the rhythm pulled back, the music moving seriously behind the swirling vocal pain, almost as if Dvar were playing it straight.

‘Ludzie’ is a restless free and frisky spirit with some brass embellishment, soothing but there’s subtle spikes around. The measured but excitable ‘Ulice’ seems quite French and unwinds with a soupcon of hysteria, like a satellite broken away from the back of Andi Sex Gang’s head with quietly mesmeric ‘Liscie’ is also engaging like a melodramatic cousin of The Cure but taking us in a grand lusty direction.

A curious mixture then, of Post-Punk and Goth, delivered with very much their own sensibilities and yet close enough to things we already understand sufficiently that you shouldn’t any trouble warming to them. Here be loveliness.

www.theproof.pl

LES MODULES ETRANGES

ANOTHER VERSION

LME

If you ever responded in a positive manner to Scarlet’s Remains or Black Ice you’ll definitely get Les Modules Etranges, as they also have tough female vocals strung out over musical barbed wire, and it’s an interesting test for these old ears. As you age it’s a bemusing but inescapable fact that you find harsher sounds, em…harsher. When you notice that you then need to confront your encroaching feebleness and with bands like this it’s a rewarding experience, doleful and tuneful.

‘Liberate Tute Me Ex Infernis’ has some enigmatic bleakness to scatter on the ground initially but it soon whips up the static sound of
broody bass and aloof wiry guitar with discreet electronic wash to match the intensity of Azia’s little-wraith-lost vocals. ‘In Silence’ the wailing words amuse, ‘All I want is a thousand things, but all I get is frustration’ with a truculent bass and an ankle-breaking low wall of guitar as steadfast back-up. ‘Trust’ has a discombobulated alien arrangement, sparse elements crashing together behind intentionally gloomy vocals, then ‘Disease’ does a post-Siouxsie lament, a clinical guitar and thunking bassy presence crawling alongside the uneasy vocals.

‘Breakdown’ takes that feel and stance then oscillates outwards, a wider feel encompassing shimmery guitar and a dipping rhythm, with ‘The Runaway’ a comparatively corporeal instrumental, prettier yet just as intrinsically atmospheric. Their creepy ‘No Mercy’ is the star of the show as it crash lands spectacularly with bracing bass and wonderfully addled vocals hanging in the frosty air.

‘Loner’ swills around with slow motion nightmare twinges and words of fragile resistance, ‘Bent’ snapping with terminal despondency: ‘But in the dark the war is calling, the age of violence and hate beginning, now we have to hide our love, or else I’ll find your blood on my hands.’ Grimness transports you and ‘Clear’ lifts up and wafts away with a shorter burst of activity that heralds a disdainful bout of virtuous defiance.

A strange album this, it sits there a bit like a gargoyle coming to life, not strictly attractive but catching your attention while trying to submerge into your thoughts and become a mixture of upfront urgency and beguiling background noise for a sombre soundscape.

PHILIP BUTLER
IVY BEHIND THE PLATE GLASS
Download

It appears there was to be an EP during the summer but plans went awry and this is the only track currently available, as a free download, and highly recommended for people with taste. You may already have cottoned on to this character’s intriguingly post-punk take on folk music, so I should point out that “Stories For Emily” and “Trapped At Sea”, two of my favourite albums of the past two years, can be had from his online shop. The first limited edition pressing of “Stories” has sold out, but the second run of the fabric-wrapped book version (different fabric, different photos inside) is now available. It’s an exceptional item, and only £6.

http://sites.google.com/site/philipbutlermusic/home/
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www.philipbutler.co.uk

MOTH’S TALES
BURYING OPHelia
Label Unknown

Stricken stems, cloudy water, fading blooms in a dying light, that is their opening ethos here, and it’s quite beautiful. Slender, tender post-punk sensibilities have a warmer drag on their slow pulse because we can enjoy real drums here, courtesy of Miguel Gazziero, so nothing has a rigid discipline, instead swaying and shuffling, as Michele Rossi’s guitar chimes slowly and softly as Roberto Battilana’s bass creates puddles on the floor. Later things hot up, but still within restrained borders, in which the strain is showing well, for this is a band with a measured stride, even when their limbs are cramped, and a cool lyrical eye, even when plugged by arrows.

‘The Fire’ will appeal to anyone with a passing interest in Joy Division and early indie bands of that ilk, just as it’s inevitable I’ll mention The Cure now but leave it at that as influences are far less marked this time round. Classic historical antecedents, those are but natural ingredients in a dense, dry cake of their own making. It seems delicate but there is a rich strength behind everything, just as there’s antique design principles with a daguerreotype for the cover, but they’re a totally modern thing. ‘Pulled Up’ traipses with a subtle melancholy, with a trim internal ache. ‘Expression Of Youth’ is constantly pushed by the drums, guitar brightly alternating with
Rossi’s charming vocals, the song poppy but engagingly rough at times, cautiously moving, edging forward deliciously as the vocals glide in gloomy contemplation.

‘Nursery Rhyme’ is a short piquant piece with a childlike female vocal, a music box ambience for guide. ‘Burying Ophelia’ is much cheerier in tone, despite mystifyingly opaque lyrics, sung in English and constantly enigmatic, with a chunkier loping rhythm behind accusatory lines. A luxuriously drifting ‘Le Corbillard’ with burnished bass and glinting guitar layers is stunningly attractive as though the spirit of Chris Isaak had been filtered through indie noir.

‘Icebound’ is curious. It’s got unsettling lyrics in their dedicated questioning imagery, yet the song is open, limbering up with some gracious guitar and demure drums, assuming a winsome sound and shape, with oddly scrunched guitar touches. Then it just keeps getting better. ‘Colour Over Colour’ has the same easy open-ended hospitality so you wander into the radiant hall of simple sounds, the ripe bass exposed, the vocals twisting and changing the mood at will, the song ending politely abrupt. ‘Subway Airflow’ has warmer clumps of guitar rising up over the diligent linear flow, ‘Cloudcover’ settles back and swims lazily, with a recurrent guitar drizzle as captivating as anything The Sound did when de-stressed, or And Also The Trees do minus distress, it’s that good. Equally compelling with catchy swoony entreaties ‘Unknown’ will ease over you like an army of intellectual earwigs, marching to the sound of a distinguished drum.

‘Catch The Blur’ makes for the perfect closer as it has a grand and deeper shiver to its fleshy flourishes, the mood calm but probing, the tune mellow but at times cantankerous. The album which started shy and stooped over grows in confidence and saunters proudly off into the distance having utterly beguiled you with its class. A superb experience.

www.mothstales.com

MAX EIDER
DISAFFECTION
Tundraducks

We’re back in Max’s comfortable world of reassuringly comforting indie, where the lyrics waft social unease and disease into the room without warning.

‘Nice Guy’ seems breezy in its upright way of unfolding but this is the downturned tale of a passing bigot and a even balmier ‘East End Boy’ finds the passage of time softly curdled. At which time the gaily flitting ‘Evolution’ will hit you with one of the most deliciously pop ditties of the year. Drums brushed, vocals skittish as any colt, then sweeping through some taut curves, June Miles Kingston sauntering in with exquisite backing vocals.

‘Tooth And Claw’ returns to beautiful but painfully slow music with queasy lyrical imagery to match, ‘The Black Dog’ ruminates idly, with wit in gentrified pensive territory. ‘Analgesia’ is a word so rarely used in songs but here it has the twisted shape of an old-fashioned barley sugar, as does the taste of the tune. ‘My World’ peers across a piano in a posh bar and purrs politely, then gets very weird in a short space of time.

‘Those Who Work Together’ continues in a vein that will make Baby Bird fans happy, but you’re soon awash in more scary lyrics, which is the oddness he has. With ‘Dancing With Andromeda’ you’ll be sensing the ghosts of Carole King and Dr Hook, which is almost uncanny, as in certain circles Max is known fondly as Dr King! Capering like a squiffy character from an old John Mills movie Max sways through the mildly, lightly jazztastic ‘Can’t Touch Me Now.’ I could swear he says the sound of breaking wind is calming him during ‘Spittal Beach’, which doesn’t sound the perfect location for anything but he’s forlornly nostalgic, it seems, and possibly suicidal.

A quietly enthralling album, masking some grim notions which you wouldn’t necessarily notice immediately if you hadn’t got a press release in your crafty hands but you’ll be aware throughout that all is not what it seems. As it’s a seamless delight you won’t mind that a bit.

www.maxeider.com

CULT WITH NO NAME
ADRENALIN
Trakwerx

There are some bands that aren’t like others, which is why you can summon up their sound at will. The piquant vocal character of Cult With No Name draped over sombre, succulent keys, or saucily suicidal in a pop cliff top dive they have an endless array or gorgeous melodic weapons in their arsenal, with little if any safety catches. What you get is what you often least expect, yet all designed meticulously, all gloriously harmonious, often mesmerisingly mournful. Like the wilfully winsome Flipron or darkly despotie Rohan Kriwaczek they are out their on their own, although as they’re a duo not quite alone. Erik Stein and Jon Boux, ladies and gentlemen, come to cleanse your room with the smartly intoxicating nature of the music.
‘This Time (Or Any Other)’ is pretty typical, the doomed vocals not quite gloomy because the keyboards are trimly tremulous and inviting. As soon as you’re into it, they’ve stopped! Then they do a Donna Summer meets Portishead in the opening of the lolloping drag of ‘Adrenalin’, which shows how they’ve slinked through development stages. The debut album ‘Paper Wraps Rock’ was perhaps the most obscenely pretty collection of emotionally turbulent and perplexing ideas you’ll encounter, then the music inflated during ‘Careful What You Wish For’ as their commercial complexities swelled. ‘I’m not addicted to love, I’m addicted to pain,’ they go, making it seem quite logical. ‘Give thanks for adrenalin.’

‘Lies-And-Lies-All-Lies’ moves away from their self-professed ‘post-punk electronic balladeers’ status into a freely flowing, enchantingly gaseous pop malaise, the music well to the fore. ‘The Way You’re Looking At Me’ finds the vocals well to the floor, in a haunting bout of speculation. ‘Youlogy’ has an ambient wash over simple acoustic and questing vocals.

During the lightly shady, bubbly ‘The All Dead Burlesque Show’ he sings, ‘Tease but tell me it’s art,’ and I initially thought that was, ‘don’t tell me to fart’ which confused me, and the imagery now lingers. (He also doesn’t want to know about her eight inch waist.) ‘Gone’ is another strikingly attractive piece, mellow and stark but with a rising, glowing sentimentality. ‘Breathing’ gets a spacey dance tingle, and is their most openly easy piece, rhythmically steady and soft-focus allure, then the terror strikes!

‘7’ disturbs deeply when you hear yourself mumbling the words ‘Mercedes Benz’ to yourself because it actually starts like a bit like ‘Hotel California’!!! It’s obviously an accidental similarity but a frisson of fear is released into the atmosphere every time I hear it. ‘7’ banishes those ghosts promptly, in a leisurely instrumental of great beauty with Catherine Morgan’s lonely trumpet passing through swiftly synth and plaintive piano doldrums, as we head into a demurely doleful close.

‘Make A List!’ is a crisply dampened pop piece where time seems to stand proudly still, and ‘Generation That’s’ another subtly bleached post-dance tune with sinuous percussive niceties which leaves you feeling slightly crestfallen when it’s done because this definitely feels like it’s their shortest album, but it’s stuffed full of peculiar incident and more than the others a sense of mysterious lyrical splinters you can only hope constant exposure will bring to the surface.

If you haven’t yet encountered them you really are missing out, with the advantage being that when you succumb you have a raft of ravishing encounters ahead of outrageously good quality!

www.culturwithnoname.com
www.trakwerx.com

MONICA’S LAST PRAYER
THE BURIED LIFE
No Idea

Things disappear in this house, I’ll swear. When reviewing an album by someone whose work I collect I like to play the previous few records to examine the changes that bring us to the newest release. Well, I found the miscreant ‘Another Time’ eventually, and already had ‘Transparent’ cockily swanning about, but ‘Prayerbook’ has gone missing. Interestingly so has one of my Cyndi Lauper Christmas CDs, so maybe they’ve eloped? In the end I don’t think it matters, or would have helped, because this mini album takes us almost back to the start. I have no idea whether the influence of recent sessions working on a new Earth Calling Angel album prompted such influences bubbling up again in Paul Broome’s head, but I doubt they dampened down any such vigorous ardour. Recorded during October and November, with Paul doing everything except the backing vocals on one song, this is a lean, mean songwriting machine.

‘Lost The Battle’ is a flat, linear bout of crankiness, the mood clamped, with a little stretchy chorus and making a really strong impact and it’s full of striking lyrical touches: ‘Practice breeds resentment, praxis to exhort, the blind man follows you now, the dead man can’t be brought.’ ‘Dollface’ has the lyrical flair as well, with a more gliding gloom and a craftily swishing chorus as well as Mrs Broome on backing vocals. As snappy as it is catchy.

In keeping with that return to the earliest broody energy ‘The Buried Life’ is apparently based on a Matthew Arnold poem which provided the band name. A solidly soiled trudger it manages to have some of the most touching vocal presence. ‘Pure Reason’ fidgets and twitches then eases out with faded post-punk élan, Goth intonations on the vocals. Bass boldly stalks ‘Vladek Sheybal’ as spectral guitar shivers brightly, and it’s all brought to a swift conclusion, whereupon ‘Wow & Flutter’ is flightier, proudly thrashing you with words.

So that’s exciting and I’ll have the two Autumn download EPs for you in a couple of days.

http://monicaslaster.prayer.bandcamp.com – free download

MRS BROOME
UPDATE GEOMETRY
Download

Mrs Broome Was previously known as Heather Slater/Pale Heather and you might have caught her odd ‘Movie Theatre’ indie concept or the post-punk wonder of ‘In The Wendy House’ on CD. Now we get a largely jolly punk affair, which is unusual as so many get it wrong. You need to be brisk, jabby and poppy to catch the original punk flavour and she does it, right from the start.

‘Nine Nine Nine’ has a wiggly guitar line, lolloping drums and chanty vocals. ‘The Lights’ has playfully spooky bass, weedy jangling guitar and catches that whole Raincoats feel, with ‘Sharp Scratch’ closer to a creamy Delta 5, or And All Because The Lady Loves if you’re looking for an exact comparison. People capable of create exacting melodies can occasionally do this, where the Riot Grrrl bands tried and failed. It can still be relaxed, almost loose, but if there isn’t an intrinsic cool appreciation of a spirited romp no amount of effort will pull it off.

‘Extras’ is perkier and dippier, like a polite Action Pact outtake. It’s naff, but nicely so. ‘Stitch’ inches along with dopily insistent vocals, looping guitar and a sedately comfy rhythm.
‘Orbit’ is altogether more opulent, with decorous synth, but it doesn’t really go anywhere, just wafts about enigmatically. ‘Hal-9000’ is as soppy sci-fi pop as you could hope for, like a usurped version of Visage and ‘She’s A Robot’ carries the same idea on with the simple synth motif. Think early Fast Records.

‘Archie Alexander’ is a dirty chancer, or so we are told, in a cutely creepy song with genuflecting guitar, although there’s precious little details about his crimes! It wouldn’t stand up in a court of law, like a sleeping meerkat. ‘Electricity’ is rougher, starkly prancing. The clashing blare and coy winking of ‘Magnetic Resonance Imaging’ is unexpected. ‘Your Enemy’ then saunters away with plump keys and angular guitar, fought over by the ghosts of early Alice Cooper (you’ll just have to trust me on that one) and The Slits until the abrupt scrappy end.

Great fun!

http://mrsbroome.bandcamp.com
http://paleheather.bandcamp.com

ALL LIVING FEAR
BROKEN DREAM EP
Download

Well the new line-up aren’t hanging around, and here’s another good EP for download. A lovely, slow spreading ‘Broken Dream’ is hypnotically catchy, ‘Dark Out Here (New And Old)’ delicate but moody. With a firmer vocal push, more vibrant rhythmical sense and frillier guitar ‘Destiny’ looms larger, and Matthew wanders off into a lugubrious 80’s guitar break which then fades. Chunky bass and a pattering rhythm sees ‘Wait For Yesterday’ moving through an interesting rumbling, tumbling jumble.

http://alllivingfear.bandcamp.com
www.alllivingfear.co.uk
www.facebook.com/alllivingfear

MATTHEW NORTH
BROKEN STRINGS EP
Download

Obviously this material with differ greatly from Matthew’s work in All Living Fear and I’m expecting to be thrown somewhat. Sincere acoustic musing in ‘Fortunes Light’ the vocal expression is naturally greater and there’s some curious lyrics. ‘Drowning’ manages to be jauntier and but for the lyrical direction which holds your interest quite gloomy in tone. ‘Feel’ appears to be a finger-waging at Reality TV/talent show exercise and was therefore too plain for me to take to my heart but it’s interesting seeing the other side of someone’s song writing.

http://matthewnorth.bandcamp.com

MONICA’S LAST PRAYER
ONE MAN’S ISOLATION EPICS EP
Download

Lost songs apparently, from between ‘Transparent’ and ‘Prayerbook’ this decade, which is odd as I swear I can hear these. Found songs, surely? “Look!” he trumpets triumphantly while investigating his
sodden garage, “a song!” And that’s the delightfully willowy ‘Angel Rain’ with genteel crooning, humming bass and percussion pebbledash and a finely wrought, hardening drama. ‘Clouds Move In’ is a brittle slope decorated by further synth skree behind detached, devoted vocals with some saucy bass. Squiggly and pulsing ‘Sighs & Blows’ is a multi-faceted number with warm guitar ringlets over an imperious anodyne electronic visage, including a good Velvets joke.

‘Fear’ is a twinkly, crumpled oddity, while there is a more measured oblique departure during ‘The Valley (A Teardrop Forms)’ with the guitar ushering in woozy vocals over a shifty beat and somehow settling into a rheumy indie paddling pool of splashy percussion and stodgily shimmering guitar. Nimbly picked and with a hungry bass tendency ‘Brother Fear’ is a weirdo, big vocals lading out picturesque lyrics, and the whole thing is deeply engaging for all the strange variety.

‘Psalm Of Woe’ has discreet guitar behind the central lyrical plea of ‘Psalm Of Hell’ is like a gathering of metal insects, a painfully slow bleached guitar crawling around him. The post-ambient clamour of ‘Psalm Of Hell’ is like a gathering of metal insects, a painfully slow ‘Psalm Of Woe’ has discreet guitar behind the central lyrical plea of oblivion.

Things move up into some balmy pre-rock ‘n’ roll crooning in ‘Psalm Of Eulogy’, so it’s like downcast Doo-wop I guess, with a smattering of luminous guitar. It’s also subtitled ‘The Death Of Christoph Mueller’ as that’s the man responsible for their artwork I’d be a touch worried if I were him. (“It doesn’t matter that Mueller is still with us. Time’s a relative bastard, and since Mueller’s left more of a mark, a broader target on which to focus our sorrows, than most dead folks, I didn’t see any point in waiting until his body lay rotting in the ground to celebrate his life’s work.”) ‘Psalm Of Warmth’ patiently details a vile death of an innocent at the hand of an angry mob. ‘Psalm 138’ is presumably pretty much open for use by anyone deserving of the promise/threat enclosed. It ticks by, and into the equally peculiar, sighing, mumbling ‘Psalm Of Slumber’ and so an enthralling album drifts off, allowing you respite from the gloom with this open-ended ending. If you register at the band website you can also claim several free mp3 files, which is the graciously bitter ‘O Daughter Of Babylon’, ‘Psalm Of Solitude + Atonement (Version)’ is interestingly more lively and hangs in the air ominously, with ‘The Visitant Waub’ like a damp ethereal cloud. I should also point out the e-mail notification I received of my account being ready for activation ran thusly:

“You pleaded for sanctuary and we kicked those doors wide open. Just to make sure you aren’t some diabolical robot intent on enacting Satan’s will on earth, please follow the following link. Once you click that link, your account will be activated, your name will be written in that Heavenly tome and we can whisper the shadowy secrets of the human soul into your upturned ear.”

Zebulon Whatley, for he is the Sons, with an occasional guest in tow, has even started popping videos on Youtube because, and I quote, “I’m not one to be stingy with the misery.” He even sings off from messages as, ‘Your morose companion in the dark.’ So it’s back to the wordplay I mentioned earlier because everything he does is carefully considered and finely honed. Let me quote you a few bits, paraphrasing diligently (some might even say superbly), which
indicate why darker strains of country music make perfect sense, as already exhibited by Those Poor Bastards and Mark Sinnis with emotions nailed firmly to the lyrical mast instead of the sentimental slop of Country & Western.

“I’m sometimes asked why I gravitate toward the moribund, always obsessing over the macabre. This is usually, though not by any means always, in regards to music. I usually shrug off the question, because frankly, it’s nobody’s goddamn business.

“First and foremost, it’s just what I do and what I’ve done for a good chunk of my life. I’ve played music since I was 15, and started recording a year later. I attempted writing other kinds of songs when I was first starting down that road of music self-expression. They were wretched, insincere things that I quickly choked out; the exact opposite of expression. This lack of sincerity was disrespectful of human emotion. There’s a reason pop music is vapid and forgettable: it’s entirely 2-dimensional. It’s emotional rape: you will feel this way.

“Dark music can just as easily fall into the trap of being flat and meaningless. If it’s insincere, it’s obvious (to some people, at least). Forcing yourself to live and work entirely within a narrow range of the dial is theater, regardless of which side of the dial you’ve chosen. I don’t care for theater: This is why I don’t sleep in a coffin, or spend my days crying incessantly and reading gothic poetry. That being said, I fully admit that I usually listen to depressing music, read sad books and watch dour movies. While this isn’t my exclusive media diet, I spend more time than most subjecting myself to it, ruminating on its themes and wallowing in its stifling atmosphere.

“Without contrast, however, you can only take this so far. If you only listen to extreme music, it ceases to be extreme. Another reason I work on music is out of respect for the grieving, depressed and moribund.

“The lack of legitimate grief music is appalling. While listening to black metal when you’re already on shaky emotional ground may send you hurtling over the brink, so too might the pop diva of the day. It may help to amplify rage (which can be a useful thing), but it won’t always soothe you when you’re wounded. This is because what’s considered dark music isn’t always applicable to every dark mood, given that we’re dealing with an emotional spectrum, not a singularity. So basically, I’m doing my part to fill what I perceive are gaps in grief music. While I don’t see myself as a therapist, I can partly be called an interested party. As such, I do what I do.

Your sallow friend,

Zebulon Whatley”

Classic!

www.sonsofperdition.com – register to claim your free songs.
www.muellersjournal.com - Christoph Mueller artwork

MOSS CIRCLE
MOSS CIRCLE
Own Label

‘Smoke & Mirrors’ has quite a post-punk toughness about it but there’s a quaintly inviting chorus, as punch and caress combine with Margot Day in fine throaty form which at times reminds me a little of Guesch Patti, always a good thing. ‘A Lifetime In A Day’ has a purry, punky slither about it, and the organic recording really has you feeling you’re sandwiched into a studio with them. ‘Lonely Peacock’ sounds like a folky appropriation of Hendrix, or a relative of Curved Air and with male vocals featuring in ‘Chalice Well’ they slip sideways into historical rock, loose guitar slipping behind capering singing.

‘Lupines’ is more dramatic, high vocals waft and relaxed, ridiculously catchy, with ‘Carni Babies’ pitching bass and flute into an understandably fruity mix. Then it’s back to an early New Wave clamour for ‘Ride The Dragon’ with scruffily spirited guitar and clattery drums. It’s swiftly back to a plaintive, earthy ‘Not Goodbye’, the angel-based ‘No Place For Love’ is another curious amalgam as they cross genres and eras, somehow fusing the spirit of Blondie and Fleetwood Mac with a well appointed vocal roving through the mottled, mellow rocky undertow.

‘Rory To The Hills’ threatens to be some trad folk but it lopes off with jaw jutting punky finesse interspersed among the dreamier elements. I’m not sure why, as it would have worked either way, but clearly merging styles is their thing. ‘March On Spotted Salamanders’ is another curiously sprawled dark punky item, ‘Someday’ a lighter pop oddity and ‘Tween Worlds’ sees us out, flute fluttering in mildly rock probing and shuffling with lyrics tying up previous threads, then into the secret extra track which is deliciously light twittry pop fun with the best vocal performance of the lot.

They’re odd, aren’t they?

www.mosscircle.com

LOS CARNICEROS DEL NORTE
SANGRE EP
Zorch Factory download

When this EP of ‘Latin Deathrock’ inspired by Horror films form Italy, Spain and Mexico kicks of its rigid early Goth tenure is revealed, but if you’ve already had their ‘Poe’ EP you’ll know this is righteous, vigorous stuff.

‘La Maldición de la Llorona’ starts with round the toms drumming, with simple cymbal punctuation, doomy bass and tight, minimalist crawling guitar behind clipped, emphatic vocal, unified in their terse linear austerity, with a sweet unfolding chorus. ‘Amanantes de Ultratumba’ puts post-punkier skates on and circles joyously, although it’s still nimibly nibbling gawf guitar that retains a noble shape behind the filthily scrabbling vocals, and a pulsating eager rhythmical energy that moves with involved vocal huffing to inflate and move over you like a murderous balloon.
‘Gritos en la Noche’ is a groovier little bugger, salted vocals thrown over frisky guitar and a spirited but careful romp, while a slower atmospheric ‘Rojo Profundo’ brings in a different element, with some sumptuous character which is ripped apart by slippery Buzzcockian guitar friction. You also get a club mix of ‘Amantes de Ultratumba’ to finish which means it humps and bumps around like in a steamroom.

Download now people, for some intriguing noise.

www.zorchfactoryrecords.com/releases/item/107-los-carniceros-del-norte-sangre-ep.html - download
www.myspace.com/loscarnicerosdelnorte

THE MEN THAT WILL NOT BE BLAMED FOR NOTHING
A VERY STEAMPUNK CHRISTMAS EP
Leather Apron 7”

It’s on vinyl, but I am reviewing the mp3s sent, not that makes any difference to you. So shut it, while the songs play. It’s still Christmas, just settle back for some alternative zest.

‘Ebenezer’s Carol’ is a typically charismatic outing, not unlike Wizzard and The Pogues arguing over the cheapest of booze, and Scrooge is using Christmas as a way to make money, falsifying accounts of visiting spectres, and if I hear correctly kill people? Or someone does, with a blade named Tiny Tim. I haven’t quite grasped that part but you can sing along to its lusty chorus. They throw in some scrappy punk mayhem with a brisk ‘God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen’, played straight, and Lady Carol remains dignified in the opening before crunching industrious rock sludge of ‘Silent Night’ gyrates, with German lyrics and not a trace of football in the trenches. There is much ringing of guitar and celebratory dark energy in a howling monstrosity, terminated by the bass.

The best track is the finishing ‘Fox’ in which a fox which has been pursued by hunting cunts, from the country into the town, even onto the tube, has ended up in a bloke’s house and they become best mates even though his friends don’t like the fox as it shits indoors and never gets its round in. The fox puts this down to racism.

www.myspace.com/blamedfornothing
www.facebook.com/blamedfornothing

SILVER LADY
INCLUS CONCENTRÉ DE GÉNIE AVEC MORCEAUX DEDANS
Le Cluricaun CL 009

So it’s been called Gae Bolg and Dr Sin before but on this CD simply exposed as Eric Roger alone, and it’s fairly unpredictable stuff, even once you’re inside the belly of the addled indie beast.

‘My Name Is’ is a weird pop soup in which his singing head bobs up and down telling us how sexy he is. The slowly sprinkled twinkling ‘Opéra Pas Mal (Part 1)’ is impressively huge in tone while retaining a simple shape, the vast vocal umbrella shielding a tiny little set of keyboards and a twisty beat. ‘Alexia’ takes an equally impressively arty sweep of grand vocals with shimmery synth backing and a trilling flute, like a devious Operatic or Theatrical adventure, which is quite transporting.

www.myspace.com/lecluricaun

‘Oumba Oumba’ is a bit like a fiendish version of dozy pop a la Aqua, but with doleful vocals and a synth seizure. A heartfelt and emotional ‘Romance’ is absolutely beautiful even though I don’t understand the lyrics. ‘Silver Lady’ is unnecessarily silly, and although ‘Ich Bin Müde’ is pretty weird it’s got a weird bit of bombast going on in the background to counter the playful percussion. ‘My (Clean)’ is strangely strained with a shift into a garbled dance beat thing but it’s a curious piece.

‘Pop Song’ is of course anything but, with winsome, weedy synth and a bit of clanging.

‘Loverats’ is poppier, in a dangerously demented clomping cabaret sense, and there’s some highly diverting layered musical fidgeting throughout ‘Dentaku N’Gaku’, leaving only ‘Silver Lady (Instrumental À La Bouche)’ to withstand and actually in the midst of the burbling is something very attractive.

This lacks the surreal genre-mashing of Gae Bolg, but isn’t as frequently annoying as the Ptose re-release, because it isn’t that self-mocking as artists who lurk in the skirting boards of the indie scene. It is, however, so left-field as to have almost embedded its head in a fence.

SILVER LADY
BONUS
Le Cluricaun

A four song EP, this kicks off with ‘Dance On Your Grave’ doing the channelling Spagna thing, ‘My (Original Mix)’ is reliably perilous, ‘La Marionette’ great fun with a dour beat, quavering vocals and some skittish brass. ‘20 Years Of Fame’ is totally mad, but in a good way, like Dvar singing in the street Happy Birthday in the street.

GAE BOLG
LA GYMNOSOPHIE EN 7 LECONS
Le Cluricaun

This is one the weeny 3 inch bonus CDs the label pops in when people order a certain number of releases. A spectacularly robust and stern ‘In Taberna’ is celebrated by a wild crowd live, ‘Miel En Mortadelle’ is equally portly, historically tuneful and otherworldly, with the dance tang of ‘Héros De Paile’ stinking the place out brilliantly.

www.myspace.com/lecluricaun
Oh Gawd! A respected French experimental poppy band from the early 80s with a penchant for primitive electronics which they produced on a series of tapes, this is doubtless a treasure trove of memories for the collecto6s of such things but doesn’t do much for me.

The CD is divided between two old tapes, and we start with 1983’s ‘Poisson Soluble.’ I think anyone with fish in their titles is bound to be a bit peculiar and opener ‘Eat Your Fish’ has a tinny, tinkling spine with some fairly mad male vocals at the top end. ‘Boule (Viens Ici)’ then finds male and female vocals alternating, or is it just a male doing odd sound-twisting things? There’s some cool bass synth purpose and the demented vocals are charming, and given the instruments available back then it almost inevitably sounds a tad like KaS Product, but a slightly loopy version.

‘Waiting For My Soul’ teems along in a toytown battle between a strict drum machine and elaborate, taut guitar and grief-stricken vocals. ‘Our Only Food’ is a cute and silly post-Batman go-go pop sizzle and ‘Smelly Tongues’ sounds serious, moping along with brightly buzzing guitar.

The music gets quite intricate and briefly dazzling during ‘The Big Chief’ but the crazed vocals undermine such notions. ‘Ecraser La Vermine!’ gets madder still and starts to grate, although the boom-tchk of ‘Cartilages Et Os Longs’ at least has some decently dark guitar among the xylophone ‘W Rap (Live)’ tries hard but the vocals seem to be deliberately daft enough to send me to a psychiatric unit. ‘Boule Viens Ici! (Live)’ draws the first tape to a semi-dignified end, working well in the live setting despite the “singing” but I await the next songs with dread.

The second tape, offering a further ten tracks is ‘Moxysyle N.’ from 1981, so if you remember that or fancy more wayward sounds from a bygone era where DIY bands like this put the mental experimentalism I’m sure you’ll be delirious. I just detached myself gently and wandered away.

DEUS VULT
DEUS VULT
Own Label

Here’s a record that’s going to appeal to certain people within the Goth area that crosses into Metal, but that’s not all they bring to a nervous, highly polished table, because you’ll have to go a very long way indeed to find a more beautiful guitar instrumental than opener ‘La LLave De Plata’, as enchanting a way to start as any imaginable. Then they stick their manly chests out and grapple with guitars intensely in ‘Ritual’ where the vocals clearly come from a melodramatic rock background, which they control admirably, with only an extended guitar testing my lovely patience.

‘El Amanecer’ is bulging with expressive guitar but also has a catchy character, as the ‘Tierra De Tormenta’ bucks and flashes a wicked smile while dancing with a manic confidence, like The Cult on speed. They’re all busy. Fran J. García digs in deep with the bass, Rubén N. Martín flays the drums and the sprucely and spiky guitars come from F. Alejandro Quiles, who is also vocalist, and Juan M. Mendoza. Together they push the mighty ‘Lágrimas (De Fuego)’ up the hill of dogmatic effort, then let it go into freefall, with a zigzagging rock scar across its grizzled face.

‘Eterna’ is moodier but still angsty and passionate with eager vivid guitar shoving them towards a lyrical precipice. They then cruise through a palpitating ‘Oráculo’ which ends with a brief laugh and it’s all really impressive, produced immaculately in that everything accentuates the melodic power, and the variety in the songs slowly brings you in. They hadn’t got a song to end it with an emphatic difference but that’s more relevant with an album, and this is a stirring debut.

www.myspace.com/deusvultgoth
www.reverbnation.com/deusvult

MIDNIGHT CONFIGURATION
THE UNQUIET VOID
Nighthread

In which Sir Trevor Bamford becomes an Apostle of Turbulence...

It’s interesting the way their sound has been shape-shifting over time, from starker to fuller, narrow to wider, hoarse to sharp. Now finally the vocals are starting to be revealed without seeing any downturn in musical menace and it really suits them, the sound, our ears. While a lot of Industrial-friendly music has a dance or electronic fusion thing
going for it, Midnight Configuration also have the Goth tendrils flapping around in the foreground, and that’s always to their advantage. With this album it’s like clomping Goth Frankensteins have built their own club.

‘Psychic’ is the expected gnashing, clashing brew, but the chorus, battered and mutilated as it may seem, is quite brilliant. It’s like a high point in disguise. The rhythm is all hurly burly, until some Eastern grace is pitched in and churned around, but for all the fermented fury there’s a point to it all. ‘Unholy Beat’ maintains their reputation for bucolic dance stomp mania, like a hidden Doctor Who soundtrack. ‘Cauldron Of Madness’ keeps waddling forward on burning feet with immensely cultured guitar wings spread intelligently and occasionally clenched in vibration. We should expect nothing less.

‘Unexplained Phenomena’ is a glaring, blaring row, after a quote from a famous poem, then they’re continuing their relentless assault on a volcano summit forever just out of reach. ‘This Girl’s Like Radiation’ has more curvaceous bass present, and a skilfully filleted rhythm pulse, but still attacks. Let’s face it, it all attacks! ‘Souls Carnival’ is an old-fashioned spooky sampled snapshot. ‘Something About England’ has a joyous sway to it for all the gloomy winds whipping around it, the electronic whirl, the guitar froth; it all works.

‘The Watching Others’ is a madly oscillating, jangly compress, ‘Cold Pantomime’ a looser but angrier murky moodster and ‘The Shallow Hand Of Fate’ a standard MidConfig threshing machine. ‘Carnival Of Souls’ is another dank cinematic snippet, ‘Interzone’ a frantic throb but actually comparatively restrained where once it might gone insane. Then we see older styles returning as harsher vocals roam through ‘Tesla’ and there’s a bubblier dance dip in a wildly cavorting ‘The Sirens Of Time’, just as ‘The Winds Of Limbo’ sees the older squelchier treated vocal rasp which I’m not so keen on.

‘Neverwhere’ throttles back, calmer vocals hemmed happily in by guitar skidding and zipping like its a fast-forward Nephilim track, which is certainly unexpected, but there are subtle changes on this record that leaves the band sounding very fresh. And noisy. Always so noisy!

www.myspace.com/nightbreedrecordings
http://twitter.com/darklord1
www.praysilence.org
It’s rare for me to find an old interview I’d done and forgotten about, but when one crops up I can do little but dust it down and present it for your, hopeful, pleasure.

‘What have I got this for?’, I wondered, having found the first issue of that gorgeous Volume series of CD-sized magazines, sadly lacking the CD which should be tucked inside the back cover. Upon riffling through the beautifully designed pages I soon found why I had retained it, as it featured an interview I did with that most stunning of bands, which you can now read about should you so choose.

In Mervyn Peake’s magnificent monstrosity Gormenghast there exists an unforgettable scene where unruly children actively enjoy leaving their classroom, countless storeys up, via an open window – leaping out into mid-air, swinging 360 degrees around on a provocative branch and hopefully catapulting their flailing bodies back into the arms of their vicious peers. They do it because they feel they have nothing else to do.

Some, funnily enough, never complete the return leg.

The four who survived, however, appear to have formed a band. Politely mischievous, earnestly flummoxed, the group that is Daisy Chainsaw surround me inside a visibly quivering pub in Waterloo looking like they wouldn’t say boo to a ghost, though one of them might eat it. Yet onstage there is nothing but a brilliance of melodic light, highlighting the delirium of pop displayed and squeezed like Satan’s erection. And this is only the soundcheck.

A small oasis of intuition and modesty in a building full of prematurely plump businessmen, they cause a frisson of disgust which even drummer Vince’s camel-flavoured crisps cannot assuage. Bassist Richard plays with his floppy fringe, apparently unconcerned. Guitarist Crispin sinks lower into his seat, evidently shocked by the simplest of questions, and vocalist Katie is a mass of nerves. Manager Rick at least has it sussed. When Katie needs to powder her nose (gunpowder!) he has her cover the gauze remains of her dress with her coat.

They couldn’t look more out of place if they were glue-sniffing nuns enjoying a quiet Saturday on Chelsea’s Shed end. But that’s them and this is the Music Scene, where they also stick out like rigid flamingos, for there is nothing studied or opportunistic about them. Just mortal flames and a tornado for breakfast.

“Get your witty head on, quick!” urges Richard, as Crispin gasps for air once more when asked to justify his existence.
“Lust for life,” chirps Katie, describing the onstage experience as “the ultimate euphoria.” If she doesn’t get this she finds it necessary to privately torture Crispin.

The band have the instant appeal of Beadle going through a rusty combine harvester and the madness that is Katie to embed images in your ravaged minds. It almost looks like she’s going through Hell up there.

“I used to be frightened of it,” she admits. “But now I love it because I know what’s coming next. 15 minutes afterwards my mind is a blank and I have had a release, or gone through an action I need to go through, and then I calm down a little and become something that will fit into society … to live and converse with someone on a level that is acceptable to society, anyway. I need an outlet in life and this is what gives it to me.”

“Sure, absolutely,” agrees Crispin. “But there’s a lot of outlets in life, and you wouldn’t need an audience…”

“Yeah, sure,” she shrugs, as we go deeper into her claim to be solely self-motivated onstage, all thoughts of entertaining expunged. “I can get an outlet by battering you around, but this way I don’t actually physically hurt anyone.

“I still do it if there’s no-one there. It’s a very selfish thing I do, it is. And it is for me, and that’s it. That’s not cool with current thinking, but that’s true. Oh, I’m sounding wanky now…”

Her head drops.

“I’ve gone wrong somewhere…”

“You’re not completely self-sufficient,” says Crispin.

“I am,” she retorts. “No! I’m completely insufficient.”

Does being in the band generally, just day to day, assume equal importance?

“It’s a real security for me,” she adds. “Because I know I’ve got something for the first time in my life which I really love and can see a future in. Because all through my childhood and teenage years I had no connection with anything that was going on around me and I just hated everything. I’ve found something that gives me a reason for being. I know that sounds sad, but it’s true.”

Vince and Crispin still work. Vince is finding the experience tough.

“We’ve had 14 days off and it was really strange. Up every day, on the Victoria line with all these moody people, having trouble concentrating at work. Three days ago I went to the office and seeing Rick is like seeing the psychiatrist!”

Musically, Crispin starts the songs off, guarding them like a precious cargo but then forced to watch, horrified, as the other people pillage his belongings.

“Maybe I’ve got to ease up a bit,” he says, tense as the present.

“There was one drumbeat I was doing,” says Vince, “something very basic and Crispin said, ‘Oh, I don’t like that!’ and I said, ‘Hang on, I haven’t finished, I’m still playing with it!’”

“Was that ‘Hope All Your Dreams Come True’?” asks Richard, referring to one of the best slow songs so far available in 1991. “Like, he comes up with the best drum line I’ve ever heard in my entire life! Quite easy to write a sexy bassline over the top. That’s usually how we work. We slap Vince round the head quite a lot.”

Perhaps unusually, perhaps not, Crispin also writes the lyrics – which presumably intensifies Katie’s problems?

“If I were to sing them they wouldn’t sound the same at all,” Crispin admits. “They wouldn’t be alive for a start.”

“He’s a really sympathetic writer,” says Katie. “We’ve argued about this, this is quite a sore point, ‘cos I’ll interpret something he’s written in a completely different way. ‘Right, we’ll drop that fucking song now if that’s what you think I’m saying?’

“We spend hours and hours just talking, and he’ll come up stairs and show me a new set and there’ll be a lot of what we’ve been talking about the night before written down, and then we argue about it.”

Crispin: “And I tell her it’s not what we’ve been talking about.”

Later still, the band visit him in Intensive Care.

On the subject of lyrical impact they are divided again. Crispin is determined to point out that, “We’re not saying this is the way it should be. I don’t know how the fuck it should be.”

Katie suggests, “No, I think we are in a way.”

They agree, finally, that they concentrate on “utter sympathy with human emotions.”

“It’s aggressive,” says Vince, happily.

“We’re aggressive in our sympathy,” trills Katie.

So look, just imagine the best things in life served up as songs and visions, and that’s Daisy Chainsaw.
CHRISTMAS PAST: What are your abiding memories of Christmas, and what fills you with the greatest joy, or trepidation?

Pete Finnemore: My dad spending decades opening presents so that he could re use the paper, then me receiving the same paper the year after without fail.

Christian - My wicked (as in brilliant) step-mother’s sloe gin, at 9am before we open our presents in Cornwall. It’s impossible to feel disappointed after a few of those in the morning!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT: What is the best or worst present you ever remember receiving?

Pete Finnemore: At 16 and being the fact that I only wore black receiving an electric blue ribbed jumper, with red white and green stripes round the sleeves and torso. The said jumper was also sized to fit a ten year old.

Tim - A colouring-in set – I was 14

Christian - Castle Lego opened up whole new worlds for me, building it listening to All About Eve’s second album which had just been released.

CHRISTMAS FUTURE (as the issue will be up before the 25th): What are you plans for Christmas?

Pete Finnemore: To survive it in tact ready for the new year

Tim - Back to the ancestral homeland of Sheffield, where clogs are not just for New Model Army fans and puddings are savoury.

Christian - Staying in London, working, feigning tuberculosis

GHOST STORY: Please share the creepiest experience(s) you have ever encountered.

Pete Finnemore: Entering a house where there were two dark marks on the floor. Told the host that I felt uneasy and it was really hot in the room where these marks were. Found out later from the host that they were where a maid had dropped a kerosene lamp and had burned to death. He was a tad freaked out.

Christian - Something nasty in the woodshed!

Tim - ‘Twas the night before Christmas (really) and a couple of mates and I were having a few beers before going to the pub; we had managed to kick over a bowl of Bombay mix about three times already, so upon leaving we placed the bowl in the middle of the floor very carefully and with much ceremony before locking up the house and quite drunkenly, but carefully going out. Upon our considerably more drunkenly returning we unlocked the still empty house to find the bowl had been kicked across the room and the house covered in Bombay mix. Blood-curdling terror from beyond the grave? Physical proof of life beyond the veil of death and it’s hatred for Indian snack-food? We may never know....but could possibly hazard a guess. Tune in next week folks for such chilling tales such as ‘the falling down stairs horror’ and ‘the case of the disappearing pint.’
RAZORFADE

THIS CLEAR SHINING

Alfa Matrix

Here we go then. Martk Tansley (Suspiria/Intyra-Venus) and Clifford Ennis (Subterfuge/Jerusalem Syndrome/Ikon) do their debut album thing, and the obvious point is that you will be reassured this is a high calibre pairing and also that each adds to the other, with Mark gaining some august weight, Clifford finding svelte joy.

It's the lightly noir shade of club sounds, spanning a few decades now. 'The Razor Fades' could be a chunky 80's dance muse with 90's guitar precision in a cool synth holding pattern, with wholly modern lyrical mystery. Determinedly bouncy 'Chemical Distraction' has some great words to provide an alternative to oblique drug references: 'Once an active mind is now creatively bereft, everybody has deserted, you have no-one left.'

I'm not sure what specific religious imagery is relevant during the chattery 'Shout Down' but it streams past happily and 'Clear Shining' manages to sound gloomy when based around optimism, with a smooth chorus that is so easy on the ear you may miss how diligently difficult the lyrics are.

'Burning' does a good job of broadening out the cajoling synth lines with a doomier profundity and there's more space and atmosphere in 'Hiding My Demons' with an agonized protagonist who sounds like he just needs to calm down a little, but then I have a very simplistic worldview.

'Horizon' has another musical approach with a dreamier edge, although resolute and rigorously itchy, and no vocals. 'Breathe' swoons then spins with a neat line in advice. 'Fear Is Rising' is bleakly enfolding, 'Walking On Water' invigorating as it hooks into your pulse easily enough but also intensifies by degrees and the same goes for the confidently dismissive missive 'Fooled Again.' It's only with the generic frost of 'Cold As Night' that I felt they'd mildewed out, but it finishes with the piquant 'A Push Away From Falling (Version)' which has a calming effect.

It's an excellent record, although you'd need to be in the mood. It isn't going to change your mood, being so constantly active, so needs to match it.

www.razorfade.com

THE STRIPPER PROJECT

BRILLIANT LIFE

Headspin

I wondered why things had gone quiet. Two excellent singles came out in 2008 when Neil Ash and Kyle Whipp had been joined by Hannah Neech. Hannah then left and the lads started working on this during the summer and now here it is, cheekily chirpy and yours for a mere fiver. A sensible acquisition.

'The Back Of The Cemetery' is shifty and gregariously daft, as though Blink 182 had relatives in Hastings. The words will have you laughing, the guitar niggles into your brain on first playing. Chunky, blustery and fun, that's a good opening, and then there's a creamy indie feel about 'Princess', so we have variety. Jim, 'I'm Ebola' is pungent, 'Misanthrope, with the heart of a valentine, you be Israel and I'll be Palestine' just one of many delightful couplets, and the thing is they're so lyrically perky they can also make you believe anything, including something about a three-handed child near Dungeness growing extra toes! (Trust me.) 'Wondergirl' is exquisitely light, ergonomically diminutive and hilarious, the precocious sub-disco ruminants! 'Nightsurfing' seems to be suspended and billowing weirdly, and 'My Brilliant Life' is shrilly demanding and rhythmically shredded. 'Fistful Of Flowers' has a semi-funkoid bass and nicely curt manner, 'I Am Twisted Bird' lean and eager, guitar raw and inviting, with the madly spouting 'Autumn Leaves' peculiarly warped, and making you listen harder every time you hear it. I still don't understand it. The same could also be said of the 'I Destroy Japan' with its corrupted pop boundary and odd lyrical imagery.

You'll be happy to work on this for months before you understand it to the best of anyone's ability because it's crafty cheer masks so many layers of ideas. It's fun yet absorbing too, a great collection of entralling, lively songs with frequently unexpected surprises and some truly classy lyrics.

www.myspace.com/thestripperproject
www.facebook.com/pages/The-Stripper-Project/8616043722
http://thestripperproject.myshopify.com

DOPPELGANGER

VOYAGE OF THE HOMELESS SPIES

Nightingale Moon

'About A Pinkman' is at once wiry and watchfully dark punk in tone, with some lighter rhetorical touches and the nagging 'Alabama
Vamps’ is the perspective of disenchanted, uncaring characters as moping guitar hangs back, the drums pushing right through the middle. Things pick up like a yearning Bauhaus during a soft ‘Salamander’ with more gently solemn vocals, weird imagery of kings hanging upside down, and subtle rhythmical touches.

Luscious guitar haunts ‘Movie About Homeless Spies’ with a fractious bass and drums, the vocals giving us some gross visuals of people filming hanging corpses. A leisurely, lovely ‘Like A Radio’ is like a serenely swaying Velvets, with the hungry and agile ‘Why You Don’t Wanna Shoot Me’ a teasing, jabbing tale of opposites once attracted and now driven far, far apart.

Another wonderfully slow song, ‘Spaceship Like Coffin’ has all the instruments blessed by clarity and traipsing contentedly in another eerie story of dead bodies on a dead spaceship having long left a planet which no longer exists; the sounds as desolate as the imagery. I have no idea what ‘Ganymede’ is, but they’re roaming the cosmos as the sound is stripped down and that brief song moves into ‘Empress Of Unicorn’ which appears to be keeping the space age link going, with a steady bass presence, regular drum punctuation, discreetly agitated vocals and some grey, whisked guitar.

‘Asteroid #41’ has a slow elastic bass, laconic vocals and spindly, etched guitar shadows over reliably loping drums. The guitar develops prettily and the song is sprucely enjoyable as many of these woe-stricken numbers are, which is an odd contrast.

‘Alchemy Game’ might almost be a paen to sci-fi mystery, brilliantly cool guitar wrapped around a brisk beat and mischievous misery, then they switch tack in the warmly peculiar ‘Among The Graves’ where a young girl is promised companionship for the first time in her brief life, by the occupants of the graveyard. Back to a reality, of sorts, with a crisp delivery and a mellow, marbled tune.

‘Voyage’ is an instrumental closer, and its dignified musical repose makes for a fitting finish to an unusual and often inspiring record.

Doppelganger have consistently gone through changes in sound and approach so it’s no surprise this album is different to their others in one respect, and that’s worth of respect. It’s tied in with Gothic and Post-Punk sensibilities with its shadowy themes but they’re offering something else now, which is lighter and more mysterious.

www.doppelganger.ru
www.myspace.com/doppelgangerband

NINTH HOUSE
11 CEMETERY & WESTERN CLASSICS
9th Recordings

This is interesting as Mark Sinnis has blended together the approach of Ninth House with a furtive post-punky edge that shares empathy with his own wholehearted dark country laments, and actually whip through some songs on his solo albums. ‘15 Miles To Hell’s Gate’ purrs along, swinging through the air with a terse jangle. ‘Funeral For Your Mind’ is ludicrously catchy with smart vocal interplay and a slow motion rollercoaster of guitar cresting a swooping rhythm.

‘Fallible Friend’ mooches with a haughty mariachi drama, the sort of thing which stalks the dreams of Tarantino. Their cover of Hank Williams’ ‘Lost Highway’ is a breezy caper. ‘Down Beneath’ a haunting Ballard really, stylish crooning and polished guitar interwoven. ‘In Harmony’ starts on skittish drums and runny guitar, a classic skinny singalong treat. ‘Your Past May Come Back To Haunt Me’ is equally joyous in the way it sweeps you up and stuffs you into a big soft melody and clamorous chorus that makes for a classic chassis. Johnny Cash’s ‘Blue Train’ is a perfectly straightforward, toe-nodding, head-tapping exercise, The Room Filled Beyond Your Door’ goes deeper, but still keenly liberating. A moodier, demanding ‘When The Light Blinds And You Follow’ is starkly dark and uplifting. ‘100 Years From Now’ is a celebratory take on considering one’s own demise.

Faultless!

www.ninthhousemusic.com
www.myspace.com/ninthhouse
www.marksinnis.com
www.myspace.com/9threcordings
TOP 30 of 2010

1. THE MEN THAT WILL NOT BE BLAMED FOR NOTHING Now That’s What I Call Steampunk! Volume 1
2. ATARAXIA Llyr
3. MARK SINNIS The Night’s Last Tomorrow
4. MARK STEINER Broken
5. PRETENTIOUS, MOI? Pretentious, Moi?
6. ALICE MOVING UNDER SKIES Curiouser & Curiouser
7. HANK’S CAFÉ Nothing Will Ever Come Between Us
8. CULT WITH NO NAME Adrenalin
9. PHILIP BUTLER & NATASHA TRANTER Stories For Emily
10. ALIEN SEX FIEND Death Trip
11. NINTH HOUSE 11 Cemetery & Western Classics
12. ((() Phantom
13. DYONISIS Intoxicated
14. IKON Love, Hate And Sorrow
15. MOTH’S TALES Burying Ophelia
16. RHOMBUS Open The Sky
17. RICCARDO PRENCIPE’S CORDE OBLIQUE The Stones Of Naples
18. ANNIVERSARY CIRCLE Saturated Feathers
19. NAUGHTY ZOMBIES Lost Songs
20. THE STRIPPER PROJECT Brilliant Life
21. SONS OF PERDITION Psalms For The Spiritually Dead
22. DOPPELGANGER Voyage Of The Homeless Spies
23. THE DOGBONES The Dogbones
24. REDEMPTION (bound) Unwept
25. CHRIST vs. WARHOL Dissent
26. VIDI AQUAM The World Dies
27. GOLDEN APES Denying The Towers Our Words Are Falling From…
28. WHISPERS IN THE SHADOW The Eternal Arcane
29. SMOLDERING ASHES Songs In The Key Of Mountain Birds Blue
30. FLOWERS IN FLAMES Flowers In Flames

Best EP:
ESPEJOS MUERTOS Espejos Muertos EP

Best compilation:
VARIOUS ARTISTS Infectious Unease Radio

Best remastered re-release:
CD: ATARAXIA Concerto No. 6: A Baroque Plaisanterie
dvd/CD ATARAXIA Os Cavaleiros Do Templo (Live in Portugal MCMXCVIII)
Happy New Year!