

The Ed Palermo Big Band

The Adventures Of Zodd Zundgren

Cuneiform CD/DL

New Jersey jazz session man, arranger and big band leader Ed Palermo's fascination with the music of Frank Zappa has resulted in a series of cover albums and performances that started in 1994. With the release of *The Ed Palermo Big Band Play The Music Of Frank Zappa* (1997) and *Take Your Clothes Off When You Dance* (2006), Palermo has now turned his attention to Todd Rundgren – an artist whose music he believes has much in common with that of Zappa.

Here, he racks cover versions of the artists' various works alongside each other in an attempt to show that they are creatively matched. While Zappa was the snarling cynic, Rundgren is the hopelessly eccentric romantic – but both share a sense of the absurd and an appreciation of complex composition arrangements, and it is this link that Palermo uses to fuse their music together. Drawing from their collected songbooks, the saxophonist chooses pieces for his Big Band that are immediately familiar, together with some that are more obscure. Kicking off with a sprightly "Peaches En Regalia" from Zappa's *Hot Rats* (1969), this folds almost seamlessly into Rundgren's "Influenza", a Steely Dan styled boogie number plucked from his *The Ever Popular Tortured Artist Effect* (1982), into which Palermo has spliced various classical and Zappa musical motifs.

Elsewhere he uncovers an obscurity from Zappa's *200 Motels* film score with "Janet's Big Dance Number", letting loose a dark and haunting blast of free jazz squealing. Another obscurity is a song from Rundgren's early Nazzy period, a raw piece of skittering blues rock with vocals from EPBB member Bruce McDaniel – while further along ex-Mother Napoleon Murphy Brock duets with McDaniel on a Rundgren Gilbert & Sullivan pastiche called "Emperor Of The Highway". These unexpected diversions prevent the album from falling into a greatest hits hole, and even the diehard Zappa or Rundgren admirer will be seduced by Palermo's adventurous labour of love.

Edwin Pouncey

Nicola Ratti

The Collection

Room40 CD/DL

Jake Meginsky

Gates And Variations

Open Mouth LP

An obsession with constraint and rigour in electronic or electroacoustic music has forced a whole swathe of recent artists into making beats, sometimes as if by accident. Often modular synthesizers – set-ups that encourage regular pulses to provide some kind of fixed reference point – are part of the equation, as in the case of Robert Aiki Aubrey Lowe and Ben Vida. In other cases, a conceptual engagement with rhythm as an idea – sometimes following in the footsteps of Mark Fell – pushes electronic musicians into progressively more austere or esoteric games with kicks and snares. Tracks on both of these new albums by Nicola Ratti and Jake Meginsky are named after some sort of

code – alphanumeric motifs for the former and either a "Variation" or "Gate" with the latter – which underlines they're not so much breaking beats as splitting atoms.

Ratti, like close collaborator Giuseppe Ielasi, is part of the experimental Milan scene discussed by Robert Barry in *The Wire* 391, and both have moved in recent years towards working almost exclusively with beats and rhythms. *The Collection*, like Ielasi's work as Inventing Masks, sounds like some distant cousin of hip-hop, its hypnotic, elliptical loops and close air of omnipresent dread making it the most improbably funky music to emerge from Milan since Simone Trabucchi's mutant dancehall project Still.

The new album by Massachusetts musician Jake Meginsky emerges on the impressively consistent label of Bill Nace, also an occasional collaborator. Its insectile clicks, grayscale whirrs, hovering drones and racing, almost subconscious palpitations immediately click your senses into high alert, like the sudden hiss of escaping gas or spark of a loose wire. Both these records use their austere palette to forge a deep sense of discipline and engagement with rhythm – the heart murmur playing a blast beat on "Second Gate", or a tropical forest of raindrops on "L4" – and forge sounds your body hasn't experienced before.

Derek Walmsley

Marcelo Dos Reis

Cascas

Cipsela CD/DL

Marcelo Dos Reis & Eve Risser

Timeless

Jacc CD/DL

In a few short years Marcelo Dos Reis has carved out a unique space on the Portuguese avant jazz scene, playing in the groups Fail Better!, Chamber 4 and Staub Quartet, and running the Cipsela label. A subtle electric player, he really comes into his own on acoustic, combining folk idioms with extended technique and preparations. *Cascas* is a solo outing for "unprepared and prepared" nylon string guitar. "Sónica" pivots between vigorous palm-muted strums and an earthy folk-blues riff.

He gradually blends the two, releasing the tension with semi-quaver runs and high end glisses over sympathetic open strings. "Molusco" is all resonant pings and rippling figures, before morphing into a folk melody reminiscent of Minutemen's punk-flamenco sketch "Cohesion" while "Crina" is a beautifully modulated exercise in bowed string harmonics. "Bostik Azul" sees Reis slowing moving a tool up behind the frets with his left hand while delicately fingerpicking an open chord with his right. Ringing chordal patterns slowly dissipate into deadened, bristly tones. The folk lamentations "Ceifa (To Alzira Francisca)" and "Corvo (To Manuel Francisco)" have a beautiful clarity, recalling Jack Rose's most reflective moments.

Recorded live at Coimbra's Jazz ao Centro, Reis's duo with Eve Risser foregrounds prepared strings, with the French pianist spending the majority of the set inside her instrument, manipulating the strings with bolts, E-bows and wind-up

toys. Each track is named after a timepiece, evoking mechanical parts and atmospheric conditions. "Sundial" brings to mind Ian Hamilton Finlay's garden furniture inscription "dividing the light, I disclose the hour", with Reis's darkly muted crotchets cutting like a gnomon through Risser's glimmering e-bow tones. "Waterclock" glistens with precipitation, as Risser plays impressionist ripples while Reis picks out chordal patterns and rubs a tool against the grain of the strings.

Risser gradually reduces her key strokes to a repeated bass note, giving Reis space to scabble and twang, before she tosses ball bearings onto the strings and taps at the piano frame. Cicada-like chitters become castanets and stomping feet, as Reis breaks into hearty flamenco rhythms. An inspired meeting.

Stewart Smith

Scanner

Fibolae

Pomperipossa DL/LP

Scanner's *Fibolae* is heavy with the weight of its own history. As the first solo album release under Robin Rimbaud's best known moniker since 2009's *Rockets, Unto The Edges Of Edges*, it comes as close as you can get to bringing his career and private life full circle. It's named after a word with no meaning that came to the eminent musician and multimedia artist in a dream, and opens with the ghosts of loved ones lost, his entire family included. Mother, brother, grandmother; Jhonn Balance of Coil, John Everall and DJ Tom de Weert appear in album opener "Inhale" as voice messages. They're a poignant throwback to the work Rimbaud is best known for, music made from the intercepted phone calls of unidentified strangers.

This time, though, the people being eavesdropped on by the audience are those he knows best, the earlier banality of others is now replaced with the deeply personal commonplace of those he knew intimately. The rest of the track sets the tone for *Fibolae* as a whole, where a melancholy mood underscores overlaid snippets of these precious in-between moments before rising into a desperate drum epic. "Inhale" then drops out into double bass and violin, faintly undulating through the soft swell of grief.

It seems appropriate Rimbaud should release a recording of this nature on ethereal prog folk organist Anna von Hausswolff's Pomperipossa label, his introspective album roaming depths of emotion through a refined range of textures. The ten tracks act almost like a score, as a vivid audio tableau creates a series of interior settings. "Nothing Happens Because Of A Single Thing" is an intricate composition of several moving elements, a delicate staccato followed by eclectic beats woven around vocal samples that have been cut and twisted into unrecognisability. "Reformed" rumbles around the buzz and signal of fading transmissions, as well as echoes of everyday conversation. "Eyout" opens with a sample of a maternal conversation. Coming from an unspecified source, supported by a mournful piano and

strings, it melts into the white noise and decay of memory's fade.

Stéph Kretowicz

Nadah El Shazly

Ahwar

Nawa DL/LP

Nadah El Shazly's rich, complex debut album *Ahwar* (the title is Arabic for *Marshlands*) prompts semi-lucid visions of the mythic, beatific and weird through layered, multi-instrumental, off-kilter compositions juxtaposed against her enigmatic Arabic prose. In the opening moments of "Afqid Adh-Dhakira (I Lose Memory)" you hear a modulating and mutilated vocal line, mournful double bass, sparse slide guitar and what sounds like an orchestra warming up. Just as it begins to feel as though it might be embarking on an exercise in noise (of which *Ahwar* does have traces) El Shazly emphatically intones, in Arabic: "I lose memory/I lift the future and walk beneath it/ To drown in a sea of the saliva of lunatics".

El Shazly is as an artist capable of blending improvisational methods pulled from classical Arabic music and contemporary free jazz abstraction. With exception of two tracks – "Barzakh (Limen)" co-written by contemporary poet Alia Ayman and "Ana 'Ishiq (I Once Loved)" originally composed by Sayed Darwish (1892–1923) with lyrics by Younes Al Qadhi (1888–1969) – El Shazly composed, wrote and produced "Ahwar" herself in collaboration with The Dwarfs Of East Agouza's Maurice Louca and Sam Shalabi, who contributed to the compositions and arrangements. Two years in the making, she produced the album between Canada and Egypt, recording most of the tracks in 2016 with players from Montreal's contemporary and improvised music scene, many members of Shalabi's own Land Of Kush ensemble.

With the album's closing track "Mahmiya (Protectorate)" you enter into a lullaby trance, with delicate musical phrases played out on a transcendental saz luring us into dreamland. But just past the midway mark of the song (like many on the album), the trajectory of the track jarringly changes, the uncanny orchestral musings suggesting that the protectorate might never have been worth protecting in the first place.

The album is full of ideas regarding temporality, memory and disillusionment, expressed through free improvised instrumentation, electronics and powerful vocalisation, making *Ahwar* an utterly unpredictable listen from start to finish.

Maha ElNabawi

The Telescopes

Stone Tape

Yard Theory DL/LP

Stone tape theory was put forward by Thomas Charles Lethbridge in 1961. The author, explorer and parapsychologist hypothesised that the energy expended by humans in a particular place may be recorded into any surrounding matter. These objects and surfaces – the walls of a building or standing stones in a field – may then behave like the magnetic tape of a cassette, decanting information when the conditions are correct. It's probable that