

will occasionally transform the sound of Clark's piano beyond recognition, Ormiston retains the compositional integrity of their improvisations.

Opening track "U" is a 23 second sketch, yet it acts as an overture for the whole album, with Clark taking a forensic ear to a short phrase, subtly modifying the spaces between notes. Ormiston double-tracks it, then casts the whole piece into a hall of mirrors. On "Bodies Labouring Hands Working" Ormiston goes all out, lowering a kinetic bassline into a mine shaft, and transforming a two-note piano figure into synthesized strings. Pedal and hammer sounds are spatialised in the right channel, while the piano melody is filtered and squished.

Ormiston's interventions on "Anemone As Alien" and "Hold Me" are more subtle, as she enhances Clark's reflective melodies and chordal figures with spatialisation, EQ and reverb. Her amplification of environmental sounds makes the pieces more intimate still. That tenderness and vulnerability extends to the final moments of "Hold Me", where the piano dissolves into fuzzy particles.

Stewart Smith

Ed Palermo Big Band

The Great Un-American Songbook, Volume 3: Run For Your Life

Sky Cat CD/DL

Ed Palermo is a wisecracking reedsman and arranger from New Jersey who, in his teens, bit hard on modern jazz and Frank Zappa – then managed to land a plum gig with Latin jazz maestro Tito Puente. Palermo's big band have been a constant of the New York jazz scene since the mid-1970s, and while album titles like *Take Your Clothes Off When You Dance* and *A Lousy Day In Harlem* imply a rich vein of musical satire, the music tends to smile inwardly rather than laugh in your face.

This third volume of Palermo's *Great Un-American Songbook* is built on the conceit that Donald Trump has so diminished the reputation of America that British pop is the only place left for American jazz musicians to go. Which gives Palermo an excuse to plunder the songbooks of The Beatles, Jethro Tull, The Moody Blues and Procol Harum.

If Palermo's ensemble – staffed by musicians like trumpeter Ronnie Buttacavoli, drummer Ray Marchica and tenor saxophonist Bill Straub – play like well-drilled pros who know their leader's idiom and quirks from the inside, this is because Palermo has maintained a remarkable consistency in personnel over the decades. When he runs Lennon & McCartney's "Come Together" in counterpoint with Zappa's "Chunga's Revenge" – which necessitates a tricky tempo lurch (and a brief reference to The Doors' "Light My Fire") – nobody breaks sweat. "Strawberry Fields Forever" is transformed into a feature for violinist Katie Jacoby, who luxuriates in working improvised lines against Palermo's

plush, citrusy orchestration; the opening track, The Beatles' "Within You Without You", uses an amplified sitar drone to invoke memoirs ofraga rock. The album winds up with Bruce McDaniel's rather straight-laced voice intoning "Nights In White Satin" and everything is immaculately scored and presented, very enjoyable too – but without risking that next level of complete reinvention like Mike Westbrook's *Off Abbey Road*, which yanked well known Beatles pieces apart and invited improvisors to run amok.

Philip Clark

Arash Pandi

Exotic Paradise

Zabte Sote DL/MC

Rojin Sharafi

Zangaar

Zabte Sote DL/MC

Zangaar is the second release from Iranian composer and sound designer Rojin Sharafi on experimental music label Zabte Sote. The album is an exciting hybrid of sound poetry, personal manifesto and storytelling peppered with flavours of folk, ambient and noise musics. There are two distinctive narratives running throughout *Zangaar*: one of human experience and the other an abstracted concept of time. Opening track "Bolor" teams Sharafi's layered vocals with a driving bassline and swooping oscillators, painting a picture of sea waves that part and twist like a magnet manipulating iron filings.

The delicately nuanced instruments and mutating vocals demonstrate Sharafi's skilful musical dexterity. "Ghaaf Kaaf Gaaf" plays with reverberant strings and angular electronic melodies. Skewed drums blur into sawing synths in "Pedarkoshi" while "Choruk" slowly meanders between delicately bowed and crisp pizzicato zithers. "Toom" immerses the audience in a wide-panned multitrack choir. This drifts into an echoing, hollow space, punctuated by the mechanical sound of piano hammers and trilling santors.

Arash Pandi's *Exotic Paradise* is an astute, sociopolitical critique of cultural heritage through both its conceptual narrative and experimental blend of electronic and acoustic sound worlds. Tracks are named after specific Dastgahs – the Iranian system of modes practised as tunes with melodic and rhythmical distinctions. Pandi cleverly blends generative algorithms with composed and improvised materials, creating a cloth woven with Persian rhythms and melodies. "Bayat Isfahan" builds delicate orchestral layers with a breath-like pulse. A synthesizer slowly transforms from subdued tone into an undeniable ecstasy in "Shur (Power Of Patience)" while a frightening corporeality, articulated by every colour of flame and blood, can be heard in the fires of "Dashti". The hyper Irani-pop beats of "Chargah" contrast with "the synthetic sound world of Dogah": chanting crowds, prayer and

radios transforming into an opaque wall of noise.

Pandi has infiltrated new artistic territory, reminiscent of Xenakis's polytopes, where the site-specific location is a cultural heritage accessed through an experienced synthetic sound world. Relaying a story of natural beauty, a devastating virus, political oppression and brutal violence, *Exotic Paradise* is absolutely stunning.

Mariam Rezaei

Ashley Paul

Ray

Slip DL/LP

In the notes accompanying *Ray*, Ashley Paul shares her experiences of lockdown. To cancel out the grim news happening outside, she'd reach for albums full of melody and humour. *Ray* reflects that need, with the songs capturing the joy of exploring the garden with her child, and the pain of missing friends and family. Back in May, Paul released *Window Flower*, a short album of playtime jams with her daughter Cora and partner Ben. Made under lockdown, it's a gem of DIY pop and kitchen sink groove. Some of its spirit and methodology seeps into *Ray*, which combines the vulnerability and openness of 2018's *Lost In Shadows* with a newfound warmth and playfulness.

Ray was recorded remotely, with Paul sending tracks to trusted collaborators Yoni Silver and Otto Willberg. The overdubbed arrangements are inspired, with Paul and Silver interweaving contrapuntal lines on alto saxophone and bass clarinet, anchored by Willberg's woody bass. The trio further spice the broth with extended techniques. The opening instrumental "Star Over Sand" sets a modal jazz band loose in the garden, the bass clarinet snuffing in the bushes while the alto sax climbs a tree. It's all underpinned by the wonky funk of Paul's percussion, her groove closer to hip-hop than jazz. "Garden Walk" explores similar territory, its jazzy rambles moving to an ambulatory beat.

On "Blue Skies Green Trees", Paul's multitracked vocal melody is cushioned by clarinets and saxophones. The lyric juxtaposes haiku-like observations of her immediate environment with longing for absent friends. "Little Butterfly" is a disarmingly tender garden sketch, with Willberg's prepared bass clunks the grit in the oyster. By contrast, the stark voice and guitar of "Choices" sounds like The Pastels playing Nico. A gorgeous album, occupying a sweet spot between song and free improvisation.

Stewart Smith

J Pavone String Ensemble

Lost And Found

Astral Spirits CD/DL

Normally, a string quartet consists of two violins, a viola and a cello. The group heard on violinist and composer Jessica Pavone's latest album is not a traditional

string quartet, though. Rather, it is a four-piece string ensemble consisting of violinists Erica Dicker and Angela Morris, and Pavone and Abby Swidler (replacing Joanna Mattrey, who appeared on the group's 2019 debut *Brick And Mortar*) on violas.

The album's four pieces, all of which have similar titles – "Rise And Fall", "Nice And Easy", "Lost And Found", "Pros And Cons" – don't so much unfold as roll out like a heavy carpet gently pushed. "Rise And Fall" begins with one violin and one viola playing slow, complementary seesaw lines; when the third and fourth instruments join, they initially harmonise with the first two like feedback or an echo. The melodies have the simplicity of something a child might hum to themselves, alone in their room, and there's little elaboration; the long middle section of "Rise And Fall" is a series of steady sinewave-like tones, almost as if the instrumentalists are simultaneously tuning up and testing the strength of the strings by holding single notes for as long as possible.

The beginning of "Nice And Easy" has a strange hesitancy, like the players are nervous that they've played the wrong note; their bows seem to rise nervously off the strings, creating a fraying effect. As the piece goes on, the tones become even more uncertain and wavering, somewhere between whale song and "Maybe there's something wrong with your turntable...?" It certainly doesn't live up to its title – listening to it is almost nerve-racking, as it seems to be dissolving moment by moment.

The title piece, which closes the album, is also the longest on the record. Yet listening to it feels at first like entering a room in which time stands still; harmonics hover around you like clouds. At six minutes, though, there's a brief but consequential pause, as though the musicians lost their place and needed to regroup. Everything after is somehow richer and even more dreamlike.

Phil Freeman

Tristan Perich

Drift Multiply

New Amsterdam/Nonesuch CD/DL

The hum that opens the eighth section of Tristan Perich's *Drift Multiply* sounds like a recording of an electricity substation in a maritime location. Tidal wash ebbs and flows in the background. Dip into the following section, and you might think you were listening to an orchestral piece by John Adams. More frequently in the course of this ten-part work, the chamber ensemble music of Philip Glass and Steve Reich springs to mind. New Yorker Perich grew up listening to those composers and in his own music he shows no reluctance to acknowledge their influence upon his own taste and judgement. Such blatant echoes of precursors may deter some listeners, but Perich approaches composition from an angle that sets him apart. *Drift Multiply*