

Music | Bittles' Magazine: The music column from the end of the world

There has been a bit of controversy recently about the amount of reissues clogging up our record stores' shelves. For instance, some have argued, correctly in my opinion, that the glut of re-released albums is harming new music. You only have to pop into your local record emporium, or look at the release list for this year's *Record Store Day* to see how this could be a problem. Yet, the humble reissue does have its place! By **JOHN BITTLES**

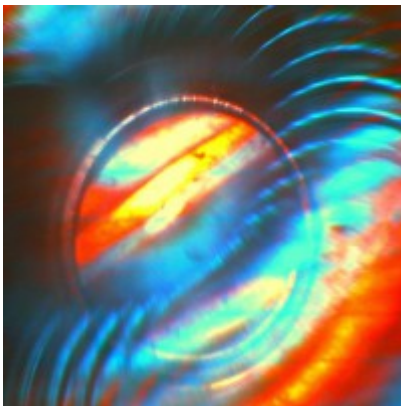
Something this week's album reviews highlight all too well. In-between fantastic new LPs by the likes of **Cullen Omori, Solar Bears, Long Arm, Steve Mason** and **Wareika** are unearthed classics by **Tricky, Third Eye Foundation, Fluxion** and **The (Hypothetical) Prophets**. Of the four only *Pre-Millennium Tension* by **Tricky** has been widely available before. In fact *Around The World With* by **The (Hypothetical) Prophets** is rightly considered a 'lost' classic and has been unavailable for decades. This is what makes reissues worthwhile. They make accessible records which have previously been kept under lock and key and hoarded by dusty collectors, or which sell for hundreds of Euros on *Discogs*.



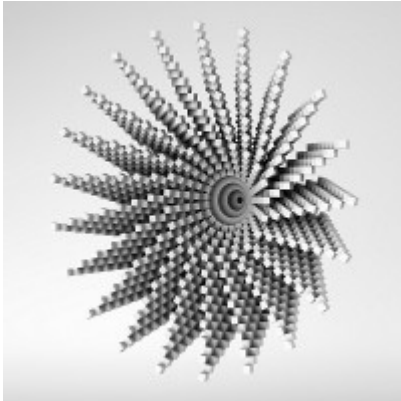
The first of these reissues comes from Bristol heavyweight and trip hop survivor **Tricky**. *Skilled Mechanics* released earlier this year is a furious, righteous and sublime slice of wax. Hot on its heels is *Pre-Millennium Tension*, an album which does a startling job of illustrating exactly why everyone fell in love with **Tricky's** music in the first place. Filled with a sense of alienation and unease, the follow-up to *Maxinquaye* is a dark, disjointed affair. Upon release many condemned its lack of melody and use of fractured beats, yet it only takes a quick listen to confirm that *Pre-Millennium Tension* is more varied and eclectic than its detractors would have you believe. After the bloated static of opener *Vent, Christiansands* is a sleek, sexy downbeat groove. From here, *Tricky Kid* is a cheeky look at celebrity, *Ghetto Youth* is gorgeously trippy, while the ghostly beats and heart-wrecked vocals of **Martina Topley Bird** on *Makes Me Wanna Die* may just be the best thing **Tricky** has ever done. Apart from the spectral sounding *Grass Roots*, the five bonus tracks are somewhat disappointing. Yet, with most of the original eleven songs touching on the divine, this is still a rich and powerful album which sucks you straight into its soul. **9/10**.



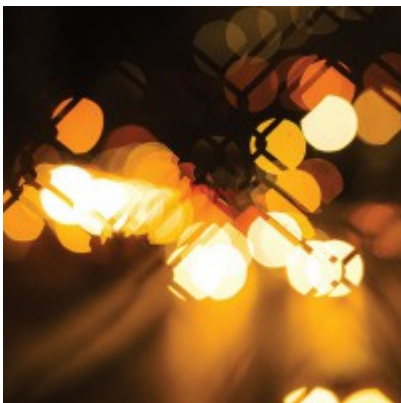
Following the dissolution of the **Smith Westerns** in 2014 front-man **Cullen Omori** found himself at a bit of a loose end. Rather than sitting around feeling sorry for himself though he immersed himself in the redemptive power of music. The elegant and reflective *New Misery* is the result! Mostly written following long shifts working at a medical supply company, the songs which make up **Cullen Omori's** debut solo album are thoughtful, mournful affairs which find the artist questioning his place within the world. Yet, *New Misery* is surprisingly warm and inviting, with songs like *Two Kinds* and *Hey Girl* recalling the wistful nostalgia we resort to when reminiscing about the past. Other highlights include the laid-back 80s funk of *Cinnamon*, the beautifully lovelorn *Synthetic Romanticism* and the hushed majesty of the title track. Simultaneously tear-inducing and uplifting, *New Misery* is the perfect record for dull grey days, nights that never end and when you need a bit of sincerity in your life. In short, it's a keeper! **8/10**.



Last year's *Supermigration* by Irish duo **Solar Bears** was something of a downbeat gem. Groovy and ethereal, it highlighted a band more than willing to dance to their very own beat. This March **John Kowalski** and **Rian Trench** follow it with their third long-player, the thoroughly excellent *Advancement*. Heady, melodic and chock-full of emotional electronica, it is a record to immerse yourself in, or which would make the perfect soundtrack for strange, vivid dreams. In an LP best listened to as one continuous whole, some tracks are so good they still stand out. These include *Age Atomic* which utilizes some deep booming beats and yacht rock flourishes to recall *Selected Ambient Works* era **Aphex Twin**. *Vanishing Downstream* meanwhile is a dark, soundtrack-inspired jam, its evocative synths bringing to mind all sorts of visual delights. Other picks include the smike-filled groove of *Scale*, the alien beauty of *Wild Flowers* and the 80s style grandeur of *Separate From The Arc*. Visceral, tranquil and exciting, this is electronic music which exists in a world all of its own. **9/10**.

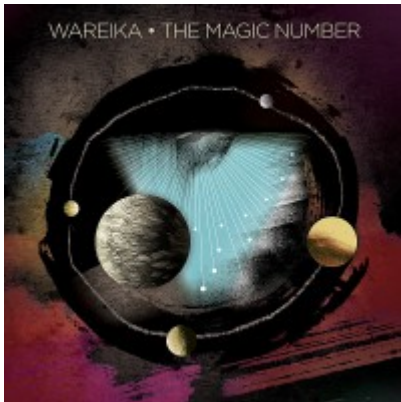


London institution *Houndstooth* have had a stunning run of form since their inception in 2013. Since then it has gone from strength to strength with killer releases by **Throwing Snow**, **Akkord**, **Call Super**, **Marquis Hawkes**, **Aisha Devi** and more. To celebrate the imprint's third birthday the people at the label have lovingly compiled and released the fantastically eclectic *Tessellations*. And it's safe to say that it's a bit of a belter! Across two jam-packed CDs we get new and exclusive tracks from fourteen of the artists who make up the *Houndstooth's* sought after roster. Whether it's bass-infused house, deconstructed R&B, or hybrid techno the quality on show doesn't let up. Opening track *Sheen Saker* by **Aisha Devi** is a deep, thumping piece of atmospheric bass, warming us up nicely for the skewed soul of *Undertow* by **Snow Ghosts** and the fractured hip hop of *Guards* by **18+**. From here the dark ambiance of **Guy Andrews**, a mutated disco groove from **House Of Black Lanterns**, and the mutant jungle of **Special Request** all stand out in a comp which is, by turns strange, eclectic, funky and undoubtedly great. **9/10**.



Next up we have some sublime dub techno soundscapes in the form of the glacial beats and rumbling bass which make up *Vibrant Forms II* by **Fluxion**. Originally released back in 2000 on **Mark Ernestus** and **Moritz Von Oswald's** celebrated *Chain Reaction* imprint, the album has been long unavailable until this timely reissue by the Barcelona-based *Subwax*. Over 19 dense, mesmerising, subdued tracks **Fluxion** explores all areas where the worlds of dub, techno and ambient collide. Reminiscent of the smoke-induced pulses created by the likes of **Deepchord** or **Basic Channel** the record is full of heady musical mirages of stunning aural depth. Those seeking three minute pop ditties should look away now, yet for those in possession of both taste and patience *Vibrant Forms II* is a stunningly immersive listening experience which reveals new details with each and every play. Full of long instrumental grooves which slowly but surely

develop over time, this is an album you will find yourself listening to for weeks on end. **9/10**.

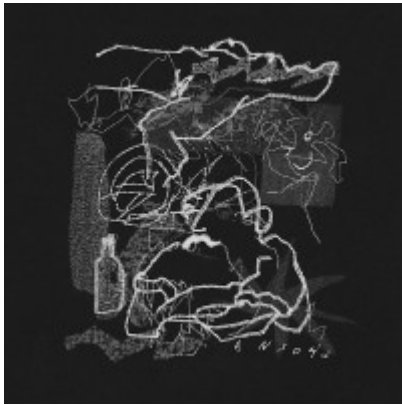


Wareika are a trio formed of **Florian Schirmacher**, **Henrik Raabe** and **Jakob Seidensticker** who, over the last few years, have been making a bit of a name for themselves with their unique blend of deep, melodic house. This March they release *The Magic Number*, the three-piece's third full-length. After a brief intro, *Planet Of Jason* kicks things off with some subdued, yet driving house. Forever building, the track's slow release is like a lover bringing you to the point of climax over and over again. Other highlights include the 15 minute psychedelic odyssey that is *Bolero*, the silky smooth **Larry Heard** style house of *Finding Essence* and the techno punch of the superbly named *Protect Me From What I Want*. Unfortunately, the album's sole vocal track, *Keen To Rebel*, strays the wrong side of cheese, while other tracks seemingly glide by without ever snagging your attention. Yet, overall *The Magic Number* is an immaculately produced house album which will suit club play just as much as home listening. **7/10**.



Around The World With by **The (Hypothetical) Prophets** is a welcome reissue of a lost new wave classic by early electronic space cadets **Bernard Szajner** and **Karel Beer**. The former may be familiar due to the re-release of the *Visions Of Dune* album, also on *Infine*, which came out late last year. While *Visions Of Dune* was a largely instrumental mood piece, *Around The World With* is a warped take on pop. It was originally conceived as a Soviet-themed concept album, and is a strange, unsettling, yet beautiful beast. *Back To The Burner* is an early highlight, a tense, throbbing piece of mid-paced electro which hasn't dated one bit. Also worth a mention is the loose bass twang and deranged lyrics of *I Like Lead*, the surreal head-trip of *Person To Person*, the alien jazz of *Wallenberg (French Version)* and the epic electronica of

bonus track *Budapest 45*. While some songs may not have withstood the test of time, this is still a great experimental album which perfectly illustrates just how boring and staid modern pop has become. Oh, and it's also guaranteed to impress all your hipster friends. **8/10**.



Inhabiting a twilight world where fear and horror lurk around every corner **Ansome's** debut LP *Stowaway* is something of a brutal, uneasy listen. Out mid-March on *Perc Trax*, its ominous bass eruptions, brutalist beats and horror movie atmospherics combine in an album which successfully puts the D in Dark. *Chemical Kenny* is a great title and opens the album with some creepy ambiance and low end pulses to deliver one of the record's best tracks. Next tune, *Blackwater* introduces the tough, ear-bleed techno which becomes the signature sound for much of the rest of the LP. Don't stop reading just yet though, as *The Pain Train's* epic feel recalls **Underworld's** *Dark And Long*, (admittedly if played at 100 miles an hour), *Back Alley Sally* is a dirty, sleazy ghost of a groove, while *Bad Blood* is as tough as **Robocop** with a grudge. Yet, with many tracks unrelenting in their vicious assault, listening to *Stowaway* in its entirety may be hard to endure. **6/10**.



After over thirty years in the music business house music legend **Louie Vega** finally gets round to releasing his debut solo LP. *Starring...XXVIII* is a double-CD, 25 track opus filled with uplifting vocals, jazzy flourishes and supple house beats. As demonstrated in a stunning live show at London's *Phonica Records* store earlier this month, fans of Louie's celebrated **Masters At Work** output with partner in crime **Kenny 'Dope' Gonzalez** will be in seventh heaven here. In a collaboration-heavy album guests including **Adeva, Caron Wheeler, Jocelyn Brown, Bryon Stingily** and more add their vocal talents to the

producer's smooth, Latin-inspired beats. Make no mistake though, this is about as far away from the 'underground' as dance music can get. Instead of po-faced techno and obscure sampling, the album is filled with splashes of gospel, heart-fluttering melodies, big room choruses and sunshine-filled grooves. While the music on *Starring...* will never give the London taste-makers or Berlin hipsters the horn, it is still an awful lot of fun. And isn't that what great dance music is supposed to be? **7/10**.



A special mention must also go to: *X* by **Various** - To celebrate 10 years in the business *Kontra-Musik Records* release a triple vinyl compilation which features some sublime acid from **TM404**, funk-drenched techno from **Luke Hess**, the gorgeous deep house of **Jonsson & Alter**, and lots more, **9/10**, *Drafts & Lost Tracks (2010-2014)* by **Long Arm** - A compilation of intimate and dreamy previously unreleased tracks out late March on *Project Mooncircle*. One listen will have any fan of emotion-rich electronica grinning for days, **9/10**, *Trust The Guide And Glide* by **Matthewdavid's Mindflight** - Containing six long ambient pieces with a new age air, this is music for daydream landscapers and idle philosophers alike, **6/10**, *Luneworks* by **Mmoths** - Tranquil and trippy, the debut album from Dublin-based musician **Jack Colleran** conjures moments of quiet reflection and dark lonely streets, **8/10**, and *Detachment* by **Simone Gatto** - An album of cerebral dance music which is gorgeously deep and packed full of steadfast grooves, **8/10**.



And let's not forget: *Semtex* by **Third Eye Foundation** - With a glut of bonus material, the dancefloor classic receives a welcome reissue, and sounds as strange, disorientating and majestic as ever, **8/10**, *Hollowed* by **Ital Tek** - Drone-inspired electronica which is not for the faint of heart, out mid-March on *Planet Mu*, **6/10**, *Before A Million Universes* by **Big Ups** - American punk band **Big Ups** return with

an album full of intelligent noise, **7/10**, *Visions Of Us On The Land* by **Damien Jurado** - The final part of a trilogy, the singer-songwriter's third album is a pleasant yet underwhelming affair, **6/10**, *A Man Alive* by **Thao & The Get Down Stay Down** - Offbeat pop with a squelchy, electro air from the talented yet eccentric San Francisco band, **6/10**, *Unintended* by **Post Industrial Boys** - An album of electronica-based pop which invites the listener to close their eyes, relax and allow the music to take them away, **8/10**, and *Meet The Humans* by **Steve Mason** - Full of warm and cuddly pop songs, the one time **Beta Band** member's new record finds him re-energised, re-vitalised, and creating one of his best albums in years, **8/10**.

| [JOHN BITTLES](#)