

Bittles' Magazine | Album Review

You know what! I love January! It's that whole sense of anticipation of what the new year is gonna bring that leads me to look forward to the upcoming year. Sure, no one is playing any gigs, or releasing music! But that just means you have to look that little bit harder to find the hidden gems. By **JOHN BITTLES**

The big artists tend to stay well away from this month which means that less well known acts are able to emerge from the shadows and claim this entire period to themselves. This means great music gets released that might otherwise never have seen the light of day.

Some of these have been so good that I, literally, haven't been able to stop playing them. We've got fantastic new albums from **September Girls, East India Youth, Art Department, Spencer Parker, Groove Armada** and much more. Some of these records are so good you may already start planning your 2014 albums of the year!



First up we have the rather spiffing debut album from Broadsheet poster-boy **East India Youth**. When someone has been getting as much hype as this guy you know you're going to pretty much hate it through over-saturation if nothing else. Thankfully though, *Total Strife Forever* (like the **Foals** pun by the way) more than warrants the praise lavished on its exceedingly pretty head. Indeed, William Doyle's very first LP is nothing less than an engaging, stimulating and fun listen. The album has a distinct electronic feel which combines brilliantly with William's own treated vocals to create something which sounds just as good through repeated plays. All in all the record is more than good enough to illustrate how the nation's self-appointed taste-makers aren't always wrong after all. Oh, and be sure to buy the album from your local independent record shop to get a pretty special bonus disc of the soundtrack to *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. It's well worth the trip into town!



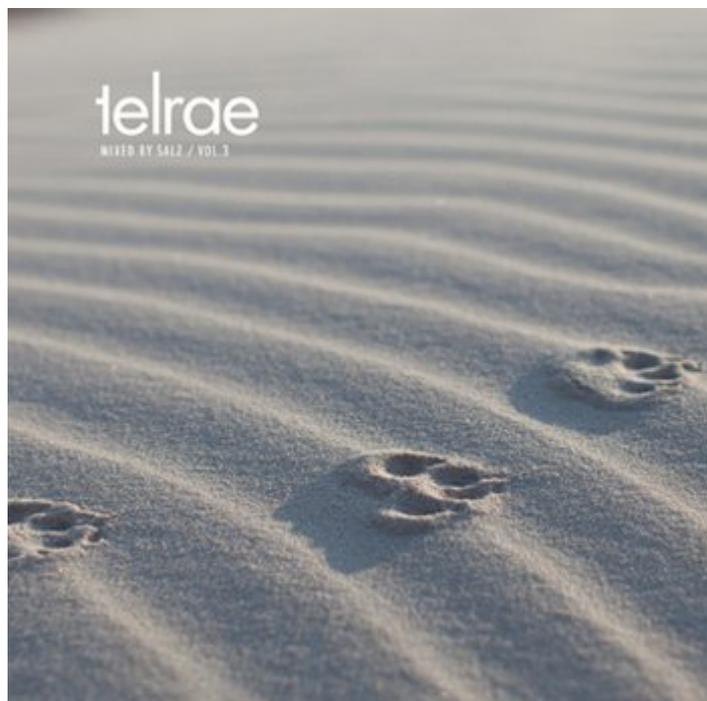
Record label *No Pain In Pop* had a pretty stunning 2013 with fantastic releases by **Ukkonen** and **Karen Gwyer** that took electronic music in interesting and emotional directions. This February sees the release of *Love to Give* by **Halls** which is a huge statement to suggest that 2014 is gonna be just as good. Across the album's nine tracks we get echoes of **Low**, **James Blake**, **The Antlers** and more. That's not to say that the album is derivative in any way though, since **Halls** has a sound that is mournful, yet uplifting, and 100% his own. Introspective lyrics, shoegaze style guitars and a hint of atmospheric electronics work together to create the perfect listening experience for when life is getting you a little down.

Some Tunes To Help Fight Those January Blues!



Spencer Parker should be a name that creates a Pavlov's dog effect in any house music fan having given the world some stunning music over the years. Over the last 18 months he has been using the alias **It's Now Over** to release a series of twelve inches so good that fights have broken out in record shops when stock was running low. Luckily from the 27th of January everyone will be able to get their hands on some of these tunes through the release of a double disc collection of some of the finer moments so far. Disc one contains the highlights with tracks such as *Late at Night*, *Grand River* and *Brotherhood* ably demonstrating what all the fuss is about. Disc two meanwhile features remixes, alternative versions and new tracks *Instant Heart Attack* and *3000E*. The bassline on *Belle Ville* alone should be enough to make you fall in love with this album! If not then maybe you should turn your hearing aid up!

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Also rather special and sure to enchant all those who enjoy beats of the electronic variety is *Telrae Mix vol 3* by deep space warrior **Salz**. Fans of dub techno, or spacey electronica should probably wear nappies upon first listening to this as you will be quite likely to cream your pants. Beautifully put together, this is the epitome of the mix as a journey. Tracks by **Minilogue**, **Stefan Gubatz** and **Salz** himself stand out while tugging at your feet, heart and mind. The mix works together stunningly to send shivers up and down the spine each time the next click and boom of a bassline seeps in. If ever an album was made for headphones it was this one, and at 87 minutes it never once feels laboured or dull. So what are you waiting for people? Go pester your local record shop or download site for it now!

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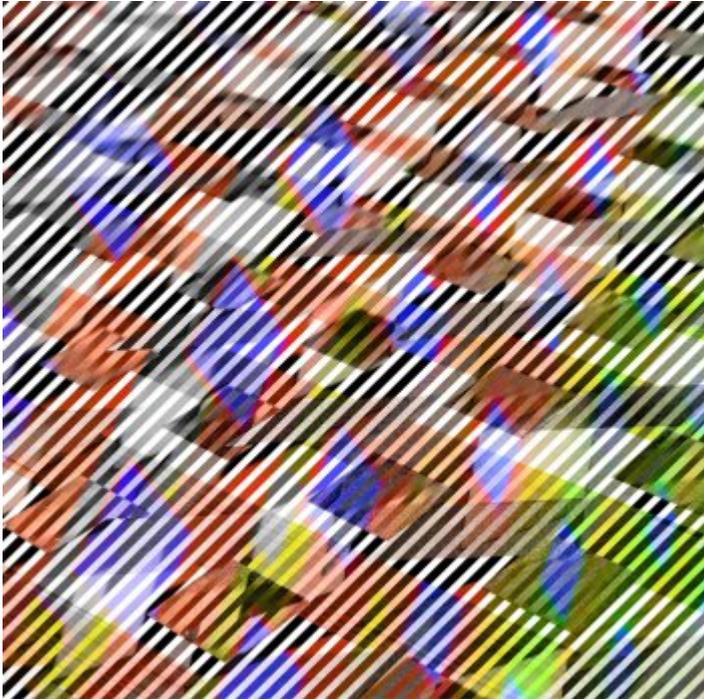
I tell ya, fans of house music are being properly spoiled this month. While most artists use January to compose and reflect, it seems that those of a more electronic persuasion are busier than ever. **Art Department** is a name to make even the most level-headed dance music fan go weak at the knees. The reason for this is skilfully demonstrated by the rather snappily titled *BPM001*, their mix for Mexican festival organisers *BPM*. Two tracks by **Oskar Offerman** open proceedings in a distinctly deep and trippy way. From here the flow builds and builds until you simply can't help but fling your hands in the air and move the dining table aside so you can have a good dance. With tracks by **Deetron**, **TenWalls** and **Art Department** themselves the mood is decidedly deep, funk-filled and sounds absolutely glorious to those who love bass.

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A little bit more sedate are the haunted space station sounds of *Konstellaatio* by electronic visionary **Ø**, or **Mika Vainio** as he is sometimes known. Time stands still while pulses of melody and noise wash over you and gently force your eyes closed before taking you to the most outlandish places you can possibly imagine. There is a real depth to the production on this record that lifts it high unto the realms of greatness. Strange dreams will be had should you put this on before you go to sleep, while playing it during the daily commute makes for extremely interesting results. Sonic explorers should look no further than this album even if beginners should beware!

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Out early February on the ever excellent *My Favorite Robot Records*, *Huitlacoche* is the strangely named but excellent fourth album by men of many sounds **Pink Skull**. The album's 13 tracks explore a wealth of electronic textures with the use of minimal equipment that lends the LP a rough and rugged sound. Elements of acid, Detroit, Chicago, footwork and more combine thrillingly to create a feel-good record that sounds just as good at home as rocking a club. The title track squelches to infinity and beyond, *Abalone* is tough jacking techno with a melody to win over your heart while *Invijt* is beautiful acid with a killer groove. Dirty, tracky house music of the highest order!

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For those of you seeking some fuzzy indie-pop *Cursing the Sea* by Dublin based **September Girls** may just be the album of your dreams. Sounding like it was recorded in a broom cupboard actually works to the record's advantage, lending it a naïve charm that is hard to resist. Songs such as *Another Love Song* and *Heartbeats* soar in an **MBV** style while the vocals are recorded way down in the mix to resemble a lost *C86* treasure. The tunes have a hazy, stoned like quality perfect for daydreaming away your time. Yet there is also enough of a rock like thump here to get the blood pressure flowing and make you believe that all is good with the world. A quality album for sensitive souls everywhere!

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Although most of us may have experienced over-exposure at the time, there can be no denying that *At The River* by **Groove Armada** is one of the most emotional and sublime pieces of house music ever. *Northern Soul*, the album in which it featured was no slouch either! And now, fifteen years after it was first released we are being presented with a lovingly restored, remastered and re-released version. That it also includes a bonus disc of singles from that era should be enough to tell you just how much of a must-buy this record is. The album itself is an eccentric sample-heavy affair with a relaxed air and an overlying spirit of fun. For revisiting old memories, or for discovering one of the greatest dance acts of our time we should all be a little thankful for having this excellent album back in our lives.

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Anyone seeking a bit of deep relaxation this month should check out *Pop Ambient 2014*, *Kompakt's* annual compilation of all things chilled and sedate. Tracks from **Cologne Tape**, **The Field** and **Thomas Fehlmann** sound so horizontal that it is hard not to just allow yourself to drift off into sleep. Not that these tunes are boring though! In fact listening to the whole thing feels like you are both opening and exercising your mind. If all that sounds like too much new-age bullshit then perhaps you should skip this review and move on to the next. For those that are fans of the ambient movement though this album is a quietly beautiful thing that will bewitch and enchant with ease.

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Marsen Jules
Beautyfear

Fans of beatless vibes should also be ecstatic with *Beautyfear*, the otherworldly new album from ambient mainstay **Marsen Jules**. Recorded during a stay at a theatre workspace on the hills above Lisbon, the album is a melding of ambient and classical creating a piece of art that really does feel like it is stirring the soul! The set opens with *Beautyfear I* a piece of outstanding beauty that makes the heart yearn for more. For those moments of quiet reflection, joy or heartbreak this set is the soundtrack to it all!



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So that's it for this month! And to think we never had time for *Warpaint* by **Warpaint**; responsible for sending ripples of excitement up and down the spine, *Rave Tapes* by **Mogwai**; electronic elements are incorporated into their usual sublime instrumental sounds, the rather thumping *Fabriclive 73* mixed by **Pangaea**; perfect if you want to turn your bedroom into a club, and *After the Disco* by **Broken Bells** which is probably just as good as their debut.

| JOHN BITTLES