

Bittles' Magazine | Record Review

You have to be very brave to release an album of new material in December! Any money that people have is being spent on presents, protection money to Santa, or on getting as drunk as humanely possible. So let us raise a glass and give a warm round of applause to those who have brought out new records in this most festive, yet culturally void of months. By **JOHN BITTLES**

The Smashing Pumpkins are back with the traditional American rock sound of *Monuments to An Elegy*, **Baaz** has shown how to make a great house album with the gorgeously deep *Red Souvenirs* and **Lawrence** gives us sunshine-infused ambience with *A Day In The Life*. Oh, and pop puppets **Take That** may or may not have a new LP out. But really, for depressive weirdos, and grunge survivors everywhere we can begin with only one band.

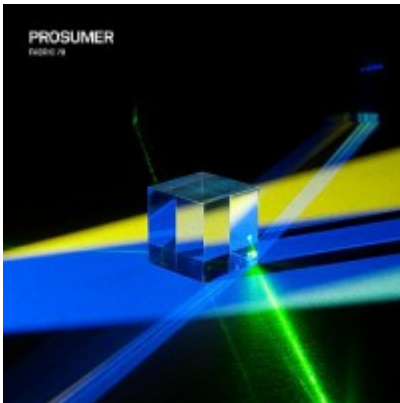


After the reissue of *Adore* earlier this year allowed us all to recall just how great a band **The Smashing Pumpkins** are, this month sees Billy Corgan and co return with some brand new sounds. *Monuments to An Elegy* may sound like the title of an old **Muse** cast-off, yet it is actually the second part of the terrifying pretentiously named *Teargarden by Kaleidyscope* series. Stung by criticism of the first part, 2012's sprawling *Oceania*, *Monuments* sees the **Pumpkins** return to the short, sharp three minute rock song format so beloved by skinny jean wearing bores everywhere. The album is short at 32 minutes, and during some of the songs you really get the impression that Billy Corgan's heart just isn't in it. Now I don't know about you, but I like my tortured geniuses to be constantly pushing themselves, while also dragging the listener ever deeper into their paranoid and increasingly fucked-up world. What I don't want is them bowing to public opinion and giving us a simplified, watered down version of the sounds that we came to love them for. Sure, there are some rare gems (*Tiberius*, *Anaise*, *Anti-Hero*) to be found here, but too much proves to be limp and uninspired. And for a band that have previously hit the glorious heights **The Smashing Pumpkins** have, that simply isn't good enough.

What Hip Reindeer Will Be Playing This Christmas!



Much better, and coming out on LA's ever-wonderful *Not Not Fun* label this December is the delightfully spooky-sounding and strangely titled *Avrokosm* by soundtrack obsessive **Antoni Maiowvi**. Containing six tracks of sinister synth action which sounds like a lost **Goblin** score, this is the ideal album for those who love to listen to music with their mind open and their eyes closed. Opener, *The Lovers* sounds gorgeously futuristic and positively shimmers with a dramatic sense of romanticism. But that is only the beginning of the tale, as from here, the listener is treated to the 90s IDM of *Ignite*, the disco gone bad soundscapes of *Temple*, the heartfelt yearning of *Afternoon Youth*, and so much more. Also out now on the same label, and well worth tracking down, is the stunningly crazed *Finding The Floor* by **Profligate**.



London institution *Fabric* have been on quite a run this year with their long established and highly respected mix series. Previous editions by the likes of **Illum Sphere**, **Raresh Erol Alkan** and **Deetron** have helped breath new life into the tired mix-CD format. And this December it falls to *Berghain* resident and house music advocate **Prosumer** to finish 2014 off with a flourish. Starting out with some classic Chicago and New York house sounds, the mix constantly shifts and changes while maintaining a consistent high quality that simply commands that the listener gets down and grooves. *I Believe* by **A Black Man, A Black Man And Another Black Man**, *Dance* by **Earth People**, *The Search* by **I-F** and *Carden Eden* by **Tuff City Kids** all stand out in a set that oozes quality from beginning to end. A special mention must also go to *Fantastic Piano* by **Axel Boman** which helps bring the set to a beautifully ecstatic-sounding close. Who said big clubs don't do quality underground music anymore?

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A little more sedate but no less wonderful is this month's essential ambient album, the beatless majesty of *A Day In The Life* by *Dial Records* main-man and house hero **Lawrence**. Out now on the always mind-expanding *Mule Musiq*, the record contains twelve short tracks, or sketches even, that impose such a sense of calmness and tranquilly upon the listener that it is impossible not to get sucked in. Best consumed as a whole, the album has a wonderfully real sense of place and mood. The definition of music to take you on a trip, this is warm and furry and as far removed from new age nonsense as it is possible to get! Seriously, if you have had a long and stressful day at work stick this on and feel your worries and your petty grievances simply drift away.

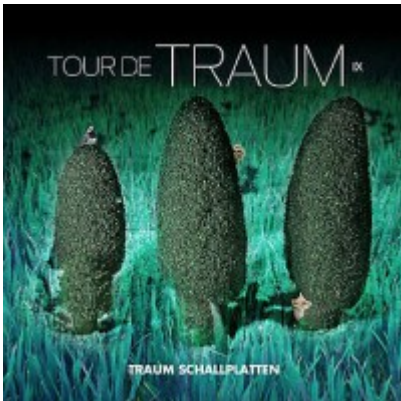


Max Cooper is one of those supremely talented producers who never seem to get the props and sales that their music deserves. Hopefully, the *Human* LP, which came out in March of this year will help change that. For those who need even more persuasion though, those nice people at *Traum* have pulled together the highlights from Max's previous EPs into one handy full-length compilation. Featuring fifteen tracks of sublime electronica and the type of emotional house that could bring a tear to even the driest of eyes, *Traum Collection* is a real beacon within a world of bland corporate house. Working best with the sedate pace of tracks like *Sea Of Sound (Ambient Rework)*, *Gravity Well* or *Enveloped* this may not be an essential purchase but you will find lots to enjoy here all the same.

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Switzerland-based group **Schwarz** are one of those bands who make dark as night pop music that throbs with quiet intensity within a strong electronic pulse. Like **Zola Jesus**, **Purity Ring** and **Fever Ray** before them, the music **Schwarz** create is absolutely perfect for staring forlornly out a darkened window, or for bringing out your inner goth. The album opens with the eerie whistles and synth pulse of *Intronaut*, before the brooding *Lullaby* introduces the listener to a lonely and desolate world where the sun no longer shines. The band are more than a one trick pony though, as from here we get the vampire disco of *Cracks & Dust*, the widescreen rock of *Sighs*, the wall of sound of *Concrete Blocks* and all manner of sinister pop delights in-between. Out since early November this is far too good an album to be ignored!



Top value release of the month has got to go to the bulging, yet excellent package that makes up label comp *Tour De Traum IX*. As if over three hours of music spread over two long, deep and groovy mixes wasn't enough, the digital version of this also includes each individual track for all your DJing needs. What this means is that with one purchase you will have enough quality electronic music to keep you happy, literally, for months. The annual *Tour De Traum* series has long been a highlight of my year, and has become a must-buy for any self-respecting dance music fan. With part nine mixed as ever by label head **Riley Reinhold**, it contains only the lushest house, the grooviest techno, the smoothest electronica and the most spine-tingling trance you are ever likely to hear. Quality, and quantity! What's not to like?

What Hip Reindeer Will Be Playing This Christmas!



Dropping out of Berlin based *Office Recordings* this month, and sure to be a firm favourite for those who like their house music deep and groovy is *Red Souvenirs*, the fantastic debut album by **Baaz**. If you're not sure what to expect then I can heartily recommend you have a listen to the shimmering keys of *Endori* which is so good it will make a firm believer of you. The dub techno of *Spacehub*, the skewed beats of *Pressyn* and the lush ambience of *Everyone* are also top notch. For me though, it is the house tracks which are the real star of the show here, with *Tweeny Tea*, *Glass Voice* and *What If...* stunning the listener into submission with their immaculately deep grooves. With music this good I think it's fair to say that **Baaz** is going to have quite a career.



Fans of quality techno are also in for a treat this December with the release of *Fernweh*, the new eight track LP from techno luminary **Heiko Laux**. While a lot of techno can be perfectly summed-up with the phrase »bang, bang, bang, doff,« **Heiko Laux** has always maintained a touch of subtlety, together with a hint of melody within his hard as nails tracks. *Brace* opens proceedings with a calm, yet strangely unsettling air, paving the way for *Hexagon* and the stunning title track to introduce the beats that will move a dance floor. The later is a deliciously deep groover, while final tune *Align* is a special tune indeed. Maybe not essential home listening, yet for those who like their beats tough there is much to get excited about here.



This month we finish with *MadTech 01*, a compilation of highlights from **Kerri Chandler's MadTech Records**. This label has had quite a run since its inception in 2012 with releases from the likes of **Mia Dora**, **No Artificial Colours** and **Josh Butler** delighting those who like their house music techy and deep. Featuring fourteen exclusive tracks that will be aural seduction for the nation's cooler basement clubs, this is a club based selection that is, actually, a whole lot of fun. The low-slung funk of *Hundred Monsters* by **Artifact**, the slo-mo house of *Yablolo* by **Eros Blanka** and the furiously funky *Ever Before* by **Kocleo** are all Viagra for the feet. And while some tracks really don't work and loop themselves into a world of tedium this is a solid comp for house-heads everywhere.



A special mention must also go to: *Faith In Strangers* by **Andy Stott** - Dub-inflected electronic music with enough bass and depth to fill the odd ocean or two, *Inner Pocket Moves Vol 2* mixed by **Pavel Petrov** - A great mix of tracks from Cologne's *Trapez* label that manages to be deep, groovy and damned exciting too, *A Retrospective Of One* by *Vitalik Recordings* - Featuring tracks and remixes by the likes of **Gerd**, **Mark Henning** and **Appleblim**, this is a cool as... compilation of quality house, *Power Of Anonymity* by **Steffi** - A stunning sophomore album of quality IDM style electronica, old school electro and booming house, out now on *Ostgut Ton*.

| [JOHN BITTLES](#)