

Music | Bittles' Magazine: The music column from the end of the world: August/September New albums reviewed Part 1

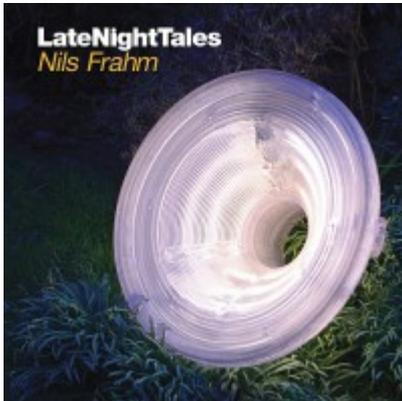
Music doesn't challenge anymore! It doesn't ask questions, or stimulate. Institutions like the *X-Factor*, *Spotify*, *EDM* and landfill pop chameleons are dominating an important area of culture by churning out identikit pop clones with nothing of substance to say. Opinion is not only frowned upon, it is taboo! By **JOHN BITTLES**

This is why we need musicians like **The Black Dog**, people who make angry, bitter compositions, highlighting inequality and how fucked we really are. Their new album *Neither/Neither* is a sonically dense and thrilling listen, capturing the brutal erosion of individuality in an increasingly technological and state-controlled world. In doing so they have somehow created one of the most mesmerising and important albums of the year.

Music isn't just about challenging the system though. Great music comes in a wide variety of formats. Something proven all too well in the rest of the albums reviewed this month. For instance, we also have the experimental pop of **Georgia**, the hazy chill-out of **Nils Frahm**, the **Vangelis**-style urban futurism of **Auscultation**, the dense electronica of **Mueller Roedelius**, the deep house grooves of **Seb Wildblood** and lots, lots more.



Somehow though, it seems only fitting to start with the chilling reflection on the modern day systems of state control that is the latest work by UK electronic veterans **The Black Dog**. Their new album has, seemingly, been created in an attempt to give the dispossessed and repressed the knowledge of who and what the enemy is so they may arm themselves and fight back. But this is much more than a simple cry into the night as *Neither/Neither* finds the trio exploring rich IDM, dark ambient and booming techno with aplomb. Of the many highlights the title-track merges ominous synths with a haunting melody to devastating effect, *Control Needs Time* resembles a horror soundtrack with a cerebral edge, *Them (Everyone Is A Liar But)* practically drips bitter salt-filled tears, while *Hollow Stories*, *Hollow Head* is as good a piece of tough, dystopian techno as you are likely to hear. Moving seamlessly from resignation to anger, *Neither/Neither* is a beautiful but rare thing: a modern record with something to say. **10/10**.



If all that seems a bit too much for you, then the new mix CD by composer **Nils Frahm** might be just what you need. Taking in all manner of down-tempo delights and sluggish grooves, the album sees **Nils Frahm** confidently compile and blend the latest in the long-running *Late Night Tales* mix series. With both skill and intelligence he massages and gently mutates each track until it resembles a peaceful and atmospheric aural stew. Modern electronica sits next to old soul, blues and classical so successfully that genres matter little, and decades even less. A slowed-down *In A Beautiful Place Out In The Country* by **Boards Of Canada** is an early highlight, and pitched down to 75bpm it is even more mesmerising than before. Further stand-outs come from **Miles Davis**, **Four Tet**, **Rhythm & Sound**, **Nina Simone** and **Dub Tractor** in a set which grabs your senses and refuses to let go. Like all the best mixes, it seems pretty pointless to pick out individual tracks when you can allow your mind to float within **Nils Frahm's** exquisitely evocative world. **9/10**.



Cologne institution *Kompakt* hit number 15 in their yearly compilation series this month with the bulging sack of goodness that is *Total 15*. With the series running since 1999 it really is a pleasant surprise to find that not one single track on this packed double CD collection sounds dated or tired. This is even more remarkable when you consider that the *Kompakt* remit of quality melodic and emotional house music hasn't actually changed much over the years. *DerDieDas* by **Kölsch** starts us off in stunning form, while the likes of *Dem Howl* by **Audion**, *Baptême* by **Agoria**, *22* by **Gui Boratto**, *Jupiter George* by **Dauwd** and *Sicko* by **Rex The Dog** will be remembered with fondness by anyone who has visited a dance floor in 2015. Full of euphoric house crescendos, techno bombs and emotional peaks that stir your soul, this is exactly the type of club music we need to protect us from the scourge of EDM. **9/10**.



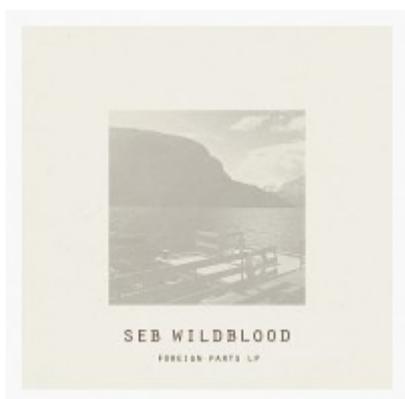
Georgia Barnes is the former drummer for intellectual musical mavericks **KWES** and **Kate Tempest**, and this summer the percussionist releases her debut album upon an unsuspecting world. Her self-titled LP sees **Georgia** use her own voice like an instrument by pitching it, shifting it and, pretty much, fucking it up. Although her vocals aren't the most technically accomplished the results are strangely beguiling all the same. **Georgia** pairs her vocals with the type of electronic beats that move from sinister pop to hip hop to trap to electronic noise with unbridled glee. Make no mistake, this is pop music, but not as we know it: adventurous, fragmented and at times bone-crushingly dense. Songs like *Kombine*, *Be Ache* and *Tell Me About It* mark the daughter of **Leftfield's Neil Barnes** as a true pop adventurer of note. **8/10**.



Auscultation is usually a term for listening to the internal sounds of the body, but it is also the alias of one **Joel Shenahan** who has released dreamy house music for labels like *1080p*. The Oregon-based producer drops his stunning second LP this August for retro house imprint *100% Silk*. The result is *L'Étreinte Imaginaire*, an album full of ghostly melodies, spectral flourishes, muted bass and the type of house music which worms its way steadily into both heart and soul. *Promise You'll Haunt Me* and *Drop Off* open proceedings in fine style; piano lines drifting slowly through the air while beats and bass pulses build and disappear. Like a pastoral fairy tale where you are never quite sure what is going on, *L'Étreinte Imaginaire* is an album that sticks with you long after it has come to an end. Highly recommended! **10/10**.



Imagori is the gorgeously sedate new album of haunting electronica by the dream pairing of **Hans-Joachim Roedelius** of **Cluster** & **Harmonia** fame and the **Gotan Project's** **Christoph H. Müller**. Utilizing the alias **Mueller Roedelius**, the duo have created a mesmerising body of work which will be available in shops and download stores this September. The record contains ten tracks of stunning depth, detail and melodic resonance, some of which recall the electronic splendour and melodic ambiance of vintage **Autechre** or **Global Communications**. It is no exaggeration to say that *Imagori* is an album to get lost in for hours, if not days. Best listened to in one long, bleep-fuelled haze, the record conjures up all manner of spacious images of futures past. **Brian Eno** joins the duo on *About Tape* to increase the skill set even more, but this is not an album of egos, more a dense, personal journey into a strangely unsettling yet thrilling aural world. **9/10**.



You know that an album is good when the only complaint you have is that it's too bloody short! While it may be a mere seven tracks long, *Foreign Parts*, the debut LP by Church-affiliate **Seb Wildblood** makes up for its brevity by being one hell of a ride. Full of deep, sophisticated house grooves that perfectly illustrate just what a talented producer **Seb Wildblood** is, *Foreign Parts* is a ,proper house' fan's wet dream. Much of the music ably recalls the output of seminal 90s house labels like *Paper DiY*, *Glasgow Underground* and *Toko*, but it never sounds derivative or forced. Detailed, mid-paced and moody, tracks like *Mooir*, *Sondag* and *Moodlight* are the type of tunes you would expect to hear in a warm-up set at Glasgow bastion of all things deep and groovy *The Sub Club*. And surely there is no better praise than that! **9/10**.



Matt Mondanile's band **Real Estate** have long dealt in the kind of pastoral pop which is so good it could give even the most devoted of metal-heads the horn. *St. Catherine*, his new LP under his solo **Ducktails** alias deals with the same sense of nostalgic yearning which made the likes of *Days* such a success. After the understated instrumentation of the superbly titled *The Disney Afternoon* the album begins properly with the pensive pop and thoughtful air of *Headbanging In The Mirror*. From here, songs such as *Into The Sky*, the title-track *Surreal Exposure* and the electro pop of *Church* appear to long for a faraway place from a time long passed. To this listener the whole album manages to capture a sense of being that makes you recall more innocent times when you honestly believed everything would turn out okay. While not as essential as **Matt's** work with **Real Estate**, *St. Catherine* will be a hit with big-hearted romantics and those who secretly still play with their old toys. **8/10**.



Berlin-based racketeers **Fenster** created a very pretty noise on last year's *The Pink Caves* LP. The band return this September with a „soundtrack to an adventure film created by and starring the band“. Luckily the resulting album, *Emocean*, isn't quite as po-faced and pretentious as that may sound. In fact, after a couple of listens you might even come to the conclusion that it is really quite good. Be advised to skip the as-annoying-as-**Robbie Williams**-on-helium *Mental Blues* and you will find yourself in the 60s funk strut of *Samson's Theme*. I have no idea who this Samson might be, but if this is his theme tune then he must be someone worthy of sharing a bag on *Monster Munch* with every now and again. From here the album touches on cosmic lounge, wistful odes and the types of sounds that would be suicide in lesser hands. While more throwaway than their previous output, there is more than enough here to delight those who like their pop and rock music a little bit weird. **6/10**,



A special mention must also go to: *Fractals* by **Silkie** - Dubstep, funk, electronica and more combine in a kaleidoscopic trip which is as playful as it is deep, **7/10**, *Minecraft Volume Alpha* by **C418** - A surprisingly evocative and haunting soundtrack to the pixelated game by German composer **Daniel Rosenfeld**. Full of melancholic melodies, this is ambient music at its very best, **9/10**, *Junk* by **Jesse Hackett** - A collection of soulful punk-funk stomps out now on **Peanut Butter Wolf's Circle Star Records**, **6/10**, *Brace The Waves* by **Lou Barlow** - The **Sebadoh** and **Dinosaur Jr.** member releases his first solo album in six years! And while it's hardly a career highlight, there is still enough here to keep long-term fans appeased, **6/10**, *Instrumentals* by **Flying Saucer Attack** - Less of an album than a series of sketches, these 15 tracks still manage to conjure a widescreen atmosphere that recalls the soundtrack work of **Ry Cooder**, **7/10**, *The Making Of* by **The Bohicas** - Rock music may well be gasping for breath while struggling on life-support, but the pop swagger of these young Essex delinquents may just keep hope alive, **7/10**, and *Compost 500 - Freshly Composted* - Celebrating 20 years in the service of music, 2015 sees Munich label *Compost* present a compilation of brand new tunes. Full of quality house, broken beat and soul, the comp is worth the price of admission for the sublime **Mark E** version of *Deep Into Neon* by **DJ Tennis & Flowers And Sea Creatures** alone, **8/10**.

| [JOHN BITTLES](#)