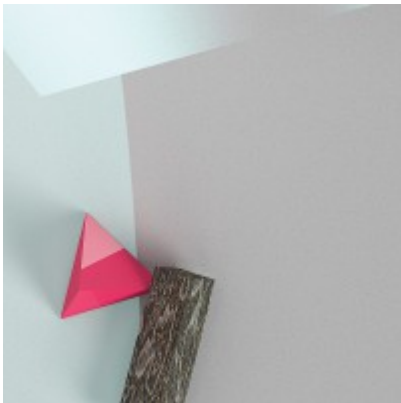


Music | Bittles' Magazine: The music column from the end of the world

This week it's all about that thing which we like to call house! Even though we're only a month in, 2016 already looks like it will be a fab year for those who love their electronic grooves. By **JOHN BITTLES**

January was a great time for the dance floor with killer tracks and remixes by the likes of **DJ Sotofett**, **Designer & Four Tet**, **Mark E**, **Galcher Lustwerk**, and **Peggy Gou** keeping us entertained through the night. If anything, February is looking set to be even better. For instance, inside this article you will find reviews of some fantastic music by the likes of **Letherette**, **Lance Neptune**, **Dovim**, **Agents Of Time**, **Thomas Ragsdale**, **Illum Sphere**, and even a techno cracker from **Perc**. Not all of these are household names. But then again, what better way is there to start a new year than by discovering a few new tunes.



The *Refresh EP* by **Letherette** starts us off in style this month. It is a record which grabs your hand and takes you right back to the glory days of house. With all four tracks recalling the fantastic music originating from Chicago or New York in the mid 90s, there is a timeless quality to be found here which will cause any seasoned raver to get a little misty eyed. *Rayon* opens proceedings with a welcome update of the French touch sound, its lush melodies and funky bassline daring you not to groove. *Look No More* meanwhile is a gorgeously deep jam whose lush house brings to mind the likes of **Frankie Knuckles** or **Larry Heard**. On the flip we have the funky smoothness of *Without You*, which utilizes cut-up vocals over some melancholy synths to create a unique piece of dance music, so good you can't resist playing it on repeat. Final track *Don't Think About Me* is a sublime gospel-infused groove which closes the EP in epic, hair-raising style. With each of the record's four tracks unbelievably strong, this is a twenty minute house odyssey which you will never want to end. **10/10**.



Out mid-February on **Lone's** always surprising *Magic Wire* imprint, **Lance**

Neptune's *Animal Eclipse EP* is full of hazy psychedelia, blissful ambiance, and some damn fine tunes. After the laidback opening of the title-track, *Janus* illustrates perfectly what a singular talent **Lance Neptune** is. A track of two halves, it begins with two minutes of stop/start synth action before suddenly morphing into a sun-kissed Balearic groove. While this could have sounded ridiculous in lesser hands, here it all makes perfect sense. Of the other tracks on offer, *Golden Inferno's* vocal samples, out of key melodies and gently booming bass pads lend the song a seriously tripped-out feel, while *N4* and *Pyxis* are both splendidly calm and sedate. *White Eclipse* closes the EP with some picture perfect ambiance and barely the hint of a beat. Like **Boards Of Canada** after necking a cheeky E, this is experimental and optimistic sounding music which is unbelievably good. **9/10**.



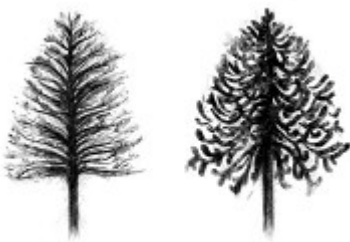
After a well received EP on *MBF Ltd* **Dovim** makes the move to Cologne sister label *Traum* with *Cryo Gemini*, a bumper nine track release. Composed of six original tracks and three remixes, this is both value for money and nothing short of superb. On the original compositions **Dovim** creates a heavily atmospheric and melodic electronic world so vividly realised that it takes the record to end for you to realize it doesn't actually exist. Inspired by ideas of artificial intelligence and science fiction, tracks such as *Frozen Receptors* and *Mare Frigoris* contain a sense of warmth and romanticism which you wouldn't expect to find on a fictional robotic world. Yet, it is the emotional intensity the producer manages to add to his music which makes *Cryo Gemini* such a special mini LP. While the six original tracks on their own are likely to satisfy even the most demanding electronica fan, the remixes are well worth a listen too. Pick of the three for me is the **Inkfish** version of *Frozen Receptors* which adds hushed pads and sparkling keys to create an eight minute journey which is simply sublime. **9/10**.



Maceo Plex's *Ellum* imprint has been on a stunning run of form recently with a string of top notch EPs which will inject subtlety, melody and depth to any dance floor. This February the label continues its hot run with the release of *Magma* by Italian trio **Agents Of Time**. A-Side *Magma* begins

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with a deep, soundtrack inspired synth line, before gradually building into a club slaying behemoth of a tune. Fans of vintage **Paul Van Dyk**, **Jam & Spoon**, or the melodic dance on labels like *Traum* will find much here to enjoy. On the flip, *Obsidian* is a dark, driving journey which takes the listener down eerie, unfamiliar roads. First aired on **Fur Coat's** celebrated *Essential Mix*, this track has been causing something of a stir in the dance community ever since. Featuring a deep, ever-shifting melody line, underpinned by ominous bass throbs this is the type of tune which you can get lost in for months. House and techno fans take note, the purchase of this 12inch is a must. **9/10**.



Inspired by the death of *The Guardian's* crossword maker **Reverend John Graham** in 2013, *Dear Araucaria* is a sad, poignant, yet spectacularly beautiful affair. Like Bait, his soundtrack album from last year, *Dear Araucaria* finds **Thomas Ragsdale** in stunning form. Composed entirely of treated guitar and piano recordings the record's five tracks are gorgeously bitter-sweet. Like gazing longingly into your loved one's eyes, these recordings seem to make the world, and time itself stand still. Tinged with a sense of loss and heartbreak these tracks combine classical and ambient to create something rich in both emotion and meaning. Released in a specially made cassette package complete with a vintage matchbox containing dried flowers and wrapped in white lace, the EP is a stunningly evocative listen which sucks you right in. Recalling the aural tranquillity of **Nils Frahm** or **Olafur Arnalds**, if you haven't discovered the melancholy delights of **Thomas Ragsdale** yet, then this is the perfect place to begin. **9/10**.



Ninja Tune artist **Illum Sphere's** debut LP *Ghosts Of Then And Now* was a majestically trippy affair. Over the course of its 13 tracks it took the melancholy bass-scapes of **Burial**, pairing them with skittish rhythms and ghostly beats to winning effect. Revealing new details and nuances with each and every play, it highlighted a producer who was at the very top of his game. His new single *Second Sight* takes the trip hop template which epitomised the early *Ninja Tune* sound and adds a fresh dance floor dynamic sure to have any fleet-footed hedonist leaping with glee. The lead track merges cold wave sensibilities with eerie synths and electro beats to create something which sounds like nothing else around. Is it bass music? Footwork? Trap? The only thing we can be certain of is that it is very good! B-Side *Ritual* meanwhile exposes another side of **Illum Sphere**, its gentle pads and contemplative air meaning it wouldn't sound out of place

played at somewhere like *Cafe Del Mar*. Bold, and adventurous, this is dance music which is both funky and strange. **8/10**.



Chloe's Dream by **Panorama Channel** is a solid house EP which contains a lead track that is so good it makes you glad to be alive. Full of heart-wrenching melodies, trance riffs and sumptuous grooves, the highlight of the Russia-based duo's brand new release is a joy to listen to from beginning to end. To put it simply, *Akosua* is a stunning piece of electronica which swirls and enchants over its running time to completely win over both heart and soul. Of the other tracks, *Island Simple Dream* is a deep, hypnotic techno groove which is made squarely for the floor, while, on the flip, *Kompakt* artist **Elijah Simmons** adds a dreamy elegance to his remix of *Akosua* for an eight minute long journey which fully exposes the beauty of the beat. Last, but not least, the dirty throbs and assorted clanks of *Kinly Estellar* completes a fine package which fans of labels like *Kompakt*, *Mule* or *Atomnation* should rush to check. **8/10**.



Next up we have some growling techno in the form of **Perc's** new record *Ma*. His *Wicker & Steel* LP from 2011 was both bone-crushingly brutal and beautifully sublime, its merging of rich atmospherics and punishing industrial thumps both a delight and assault on the ears. This month **Alistair Wells** returns to his **Perc** moniker with three tracks that further explore the darkest realms of techno. Opener *The Death Of Rebirth* combines a bass heavy beat with rattling percussion to disorientatingly hypnotic effect. It doesn't do much over its six minute running time, yet, as ever with this type of music, this is hardly the point. *Negative Space* has a similar dynamic, but adds some disquieting strings. The star of the show though is the twelve minute horror soundtrack menace of *Ma*. Beginners beware, this is not for the faint of heart. Bursts of sound and ominous clanks seemingly leap out of nowhere in an unsettling listen which constantly keeps you on your toes. As uncompromising as ever, **Perc** somehow, still manages to create beauty from abrasive noise. **7/10**.

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In the track *Anyimo* kologo artist **King Ayisoba** joins *Crosstown Rebels* stalwart **Djuma Soundsystem** for a delicate slab of house. Consisting of one slow build-up of tension, the song mixes spiritual elements with electro flourishes to create a mid-paced jam which will sit nicely in any warm-up set. While the original is solid, it is the remixes on offer which completely steal the show! *Ibadan Records* don **Jerome Sydenham** turns in a pair of boompity grooves which add subtle dance floor dynamics and a sense of warmth to proceedings. His *Deepstrumental* version is a truly gorgeous thing, utilizing stirring string sequences, loose-limbed percussion and an epic scale to create a wonderful slice of music which will stir both feet and soul. The package is completed by an eight minute technoid banger courtesy of **Johnny Aux** of **Paranoid London** fame. His trademark acid is all over his refit, taking the track to a dirty basement club where he shows it the time of its life. Whether you like your house music tough, smooth or tribal, there will be something here for you. **8/10**.



A special mention must also go to: *Opium* by **Slow Porn** - A killer quartet of sleazy disco grooves. Sounding like a sexually frustrated **Chromatics**, the melancholy vocals and deep bassline on *Soldier* are nothing short of sublime, **9/10**, *Saladin EP* by **Innellea** - Six tracks of atmospheric house from the Munich-based duo. The mid-paced groove of the title-track will give any *Innervisions* fan the horn, **8/10**, *Chapter II* by **A Sacred Geometry** - Three tracks of rich, atmospheric techno which never forget the importance of depth and space, **8/10**, *Malificent EP* by **Claire Ripley** - A fine EP of club-based tunes with the gloriously funky bass on the title tracks standing out for me, **7/10**, *Mechanical Sparrow* by **Atella Feat. O. Martin** - With the original being a little too sugary for my taste, it's the gorgeous slo mo house of the **Man Power** remix which makes this a must, **7/10**, *Another Thing* by **Monoloc** - Out mid February on *Hotflush*, these three deeply atmospheric jams are deliciously dark, **7/10**, *Basilica Strahov* by **Ashwin Khosa & Artur Nikolaev** - Head straight for the lead track, a beautifully subdued piece of dance floor funk, perfect for getting you in the mood, **8/10**, and *The Awakening EP* by **Washerman** - As ever with the label *Drumpoet Community* what we get is melody-rich deep house so good you want to tell the world, **8/10**.

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And let's not forget: *Portraits Outtakes* by **Maribou State** - Featuring three tracks omitted from their debut LP, it's the uplifting electronica of *November Nights* which make this truly worthwhile, **7/10**, *The Jam Therapy EP* by **OBI** - A solid EP of UK garage which will bring back sweet memories for some, while introducing a new groove to others, **6/10**, *We Can Talk* by **Satin Jackets Feat. Emma Brammer** - Head straight for the deep, driving techno of the *Larse Dub Mix* which totally removes the vocals, introducing the original to the joys of the dark, **7/10**, *They Say Remixes* by **Alessio Ragliaroli Feat. Jinado** - A welcome re-release for the 2015 deep house hit with a trio of remixes by up and coming talent sure to make any house fan smile, **8/10**, *Freefall* by **Francesca Lombardo** - Out on the 20th February, this two-track affair will create arousal in anyone who likes their house music melodic and deep, **8/10**, *Dead Men Tell No Tales* by **Echologist** - Four tracks of powerful dub heavy techno with the slow menace of the **Deepbass** remix being the pick for me, **7/10**, and *Speechless* by **Trans AM** - A double jolt of bass heavy house music, with the dubstep wobble and crisp beats of the a-side working best for me, **6/10**.

| [JOHN BITTLES](#)