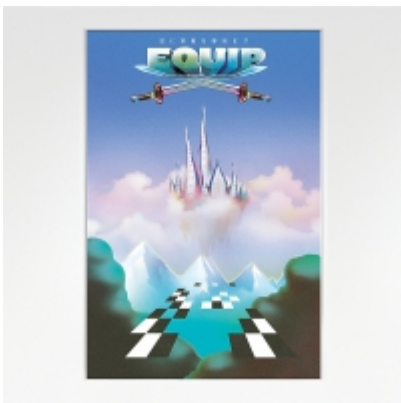


Music | Bittles' Magazine: The music column from the end of the world

With fabulous new records by **Lord Of The Isles**, **Makam**, **Roman Flügel**, **Michael Mayer**, **Gas**, **Loscil**, **Equip**, **Hollis Parker**, and more to be reviewed I'm going to get straight to the grooves. By **JOHN BITTLES**



Over the years **Neil McDonald** has used his **Lord Of The Isles** alias to release some of the most sun-kissed dance music known to man. Records on labels such as *Permanent Vacation*, *ESP Institute* and *Firecracker* have stood out from the crowd by successfully injecting a sense of melodic wonder to many a dance floor. This month he returns to *ESP Institute* with the grandiose shimmer of his brand new LP. *In Waves* is a startlingly beautiful record, which caresses the ears like a cat rubbing against your legs. The opening pairing of *Airgoid Meall* and *Years Away* are gorgeously pastoral, and have the ability to transport the listener far away from whatever urban hellhole they may currently reside in. Next up, *Liobasta* introduces the gentlest of beats into proceedings, its warm melodies and cosy air able to cause acts of spontaneous hugging in even the most bitter of foes. Other picks include the ethereal shuffle of *Offline*, and the mannered house groove of *Plasma Nomad*. Heartfelt and emotionally stirring, *In Waves* is not just a fantastic record, it is a fine retort to anyone who claims that house music has no soul. **9/10**.



London label *Dream Catalogue* have been on great form recently, with almost every release touching on the sublime. This autumn they maintain these high standards with the nostalgia tinged tones of **Equip's** debut LP. *I Dreamed Of A Palace In The Sky* is available now on cassette and download from the label's [Bandcamp](#) page, and is a breathtakingly splendid thing. Apparently inspired by an array of classic game soundtracks, the album features hazy beats, tongue in cheek humour, and melodies galore. After the 70s prog rock tranquillity of the title track, *Equip Menu X (Character Customization)* pairs twinkling harmonies and a gentle beat to pleasing effect. Further in, *Lichen-Encrusted Chamber* merges rich atmospheric with 80s synth pop, *Dungeon's* darkened corridors and ghostly vocals recall the urban bass

melancholia of **Burial**, while *Spherical Floating Gardens* is the sound of a loved one gently blowing in your ear. Romantic, and stunningly realised, *I Dreamed Of A Palace In The Sky* will make the perfect accompaniment to your most cherished 8-bit dreams. **9/10**.



Named after a secluded beach in Thailand, *Than Sadet* is **Makam's** very first full-length for Dutch powerhouse *Dekmantel*. And, what an album it is! Perhaps a little more sedate than regular fans of the artist or label will be expecting, *Than Sadet* is a glorious mixture of sunny Balearica, slow, groovy house, and more. Fans of the labels *Magicwire*, *ESP Institute*, or *Mule* will find themselves enraptured by the record's rich heady beats, slo mo grooves, and smoke-filled air. After a short and slightly annoying intro, *When Light Gives You Hope* gets us off to a captivating start, its swaying melodies and clacking percussion working together splendidly to create a song which relentlessly romances your soul. In a record full of highlights, it almost seems a shame to pick individual tracks for special praise. Yet, the acid swirl of *Resort Abandoned*, the percussive shuffle of *Makarbar*, the slow burn swoon of *Mai Pen Rai*, and the lush house of *Waves Of Than* are all shockingly good. In a fantastic year for dance music, **Makam** has created an album which is as memorable as a slap to the face. **9/10**.



Ambient aficionados, and those who know their electronic music tend to speak about **Wolfgang Voigt's Gas** project with a hushed, almost reverential air. Between 1995 and 2000 he released a flurry of albums and EPs which came to redefine and expand upon what ambient music could be. This month Cologne label *Kompakt* collect together and re-release some of the highlights of his discography with the snappily titled package *Box*. Containing the albums *Zauberberg*, *Königsforst*, and *Pop*, together with the *Oktember* 12inch, *Box* is available now as a 10LP and 4CD set. While it may set you back upward of a £100, if there is anyone in your life who likes their music hushed, ethereal and deep this would make a Christmas present sure to put you in their good books for life. Or, if you have immaculate taste and money to burn, you could simply treat yourself to a piece of art you will happily listen to for months! Lovingly packaged,

and delicately remastered, this is a fantastic set to accompany lazy days and nights. **9/10**.



Further ambient delights can be found within the dusty shimmer of *Monument Builders*, **Loscil's** engrossing new LP. Out now on the always excellent *Kranky* (just listen to the wonderful **MJ Guider** album from earlier this year to hear them at their best), the album sees composer **Scott Morgan** explore themes of loss, helplessness and mortality over seven sonically adventurous tracks. *Drained Lake* gets things off to a great start, its eerie synths and gentle pianos reflecting its title by hinting at something hiding just beneath the surface. Next track, *Red Tide* pairs melancholic atmospheric with a bubbling synth line to craft a song which sounds like **John Carpenter** scoring a **Nicolas Sparks** movie (in a good way though!). Other picks include the spectral elegance of the title track, the nostalgia tinged strains of *Deceiver*, and the rumbling bass and hushed electronics of *Anthropocene*. Vividly realised from the off, *Monument Builders* weaves a rich aural tapestry which you could happily lose yourself in for weeks. **8/10**.



When someone says the word *Kompakt* the first name likely to spring to mind is label head **Michael Mayer**. His celebrated melodic *Immer* mixes, fabulous DJ sets, and every single release seem to define all that is great about the Cologne institution. Therefore it was a bit of a surprise when it was announced that his new album was being released on German label *!K7*. *&* is out now, and finds the artist collaborating with a string of acts over twelve, mostly dance floor focused tracks. Opener, *We Like To Party*, created with **Roman Flügel**, is a great piece of mid-paced techno which seems to have the ghosts of rave burning at its very core. Other songs to check include *State Of The Nation*, which utilizes **Gui Boratto's** signature trance riffs on a goose-bump inducing club bomb, *For You* which features **Joe Goddard's** vocals on a bittersweet gem, while the melodic house tones of **Agoria** collab *Blackbird Has Spoken* is an *Innervisions* style delight. As it can be with this type of album, not all of the collaborations work. Yet, *&* still manages to be an emotionally involving record which will have all but the most committed of techno-phobe coming back for more. **8/10**.



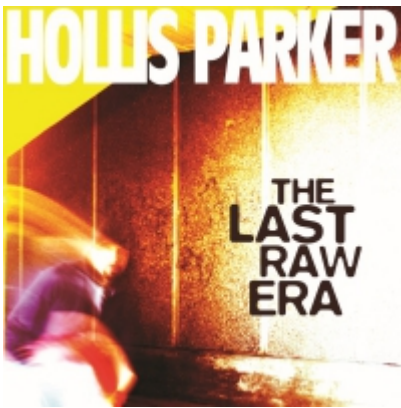
After the club-based thump of the *Monday Brain* EP on *Hypercolour*, **Roman Flügel** makes a welcome return to his spiritual home *Dial* for the lush ambiance and dreamy house of his brand new album. The fetchingly named *All The Right Noises* is out now, and sees the producer follow the excellent *Happiness Is Happening* long-player by exploring the concept of 'non spaces' (airports, hotel rooms etc) over ten tracks which are by turns melodic, dissonant, or barely even there. Sounding not unlike **Brian Eno's** celebrated *Music For Airports*, (but with a few more beats), the record's warm house grooves, and polite tones mean *Dial* fans will discover much here to enjoy. Those anticipating another *Geht's Noch* may find themselves somewhat disappointed in the subdued pace, cool atmospherics, and twinkling melodies which make up the majority of the LP. Yet, for the rest of us, *All The Right Noises* is a beautiful and sedate house album which sits nicely between the realms of dance and sleep. **8/10**.



Back in the mid noughties the label *Get Physical* were considered the coolest guys in the game! Their melodic take on the minimal genre caused more than a few packed dance floors to swoon, while epic productions by the likes of **Booka Shade**, **DJ T**, **Thomas Schumacher**, and **M.A.N.D.Y.** showcased the rich intensity of their sound. These last couple of years have seen the label rediscover old glories with releases by **Eagles & Butterflies**, **Pezzner**, **System Of Survival** and **DJ Pierre** as good as anything from back in the day. This form continues with the release of *Double Fantasy*, *Get Physical* founders **M.A.N.D.Y.'s** new booty shakin' LP. Composed of 13 tracks and a bonus continuous mix on digital download, the album takes in smooth ambiance, funk-strewn rap, fidgety tech house and more. The Detroit style chimes of *Rabbit Mountain*, and the deep house pulse of *Friends Kiss* are highlights in a record which is never content to stand still. An unnecessary update of *Body Language* ends things on a frustrating low, but overall this is an album full of ideas, and oozing style. **7/10**.



We reach the conclusion this week with *Surface Tension*, an album which sees celebrated composer **Francesco Tristano** join forces with Detroit techno legend **Derrick May** on a groove heavy, yet pleasingly melodic LP. Opener, *Sakamoto - Merry Christm... No Rework* has a gentle piano refrain and smooth house shuffle, which immediately grabs the listener's attention and leaves them wanting more. Next up, *The Mentor* is a lot more techno in pace and feel; a rising synth line pairing with clattering percussion on a track which dares you not to groove. In other words, it's exactly the type of tune to remind us why it was we all fell in love with the futuristic sounds emanating from Detroit in the first place. Other gems include, *Pacific FM*, a steady slice of 90s tinged piano house, *Infinite Rise*, a lush deep techno dirge, while *Xokolad* is a trippy Chicago house jam. Star of the show though is the classic **Derrick May** keys of *In Da Minor*, a track which is likely to have you believing in the presence of a divine being. Out now on *Transmat*, this is one for the heads. **8/10**.



A special mention must also go to: *The Last Raw Era* by **Hollis Parker** - Created as "a vinyl-only love-letter to New York", this is a killer album of soulful house music with a sample heavy twist. Shockingly good!, **9/10**, *A Beat Of Silence* by **Rayon** - **Notwist** singer and guitarist **Markus Acher** returns to his **Rayon** alias with a gorgeous collection of ambient instrumentals best listened to curled up next to a loved one in front of a glowing fire, **8/10**, *Future Boy: The Complete Works* by **Cicero** - Those of us who remember the 80s will undoubtedly have a soft spot for **Cicero's** synth pop tones. Sounding not unlike the **Pet Shop Boys**, this has aged surprisingly well, **8/10**, *Appropriation Stories* by **Shifted** - Dense and mesmeric, just the way techno should be, **8/10**, *Heart-Headed* by **Liset Alea** - The **Nouvelle Vague** singer goes it alone with a record of slow, sultry pop, **8/10**, *Imaginary Lines* by **Jonathan Fitoussi** - Inspired by a quote from **Rebecca Solnit**, the French synth wizard follows up his LP for *Versatile* with a relaxed record full of wide-eyed wonder, **8/10**, and *Factory Photographs* by **Hexa** - Created as a 'sonic response' to **David Lynch's** photographs on display in *Brisbane's Gallery Of Modern Art*, this is a strange, unsettling listen. Or, in other words, the perfect accompaniment to the auteur's work, **7/10**.



Let's not forget: *The Untold Way* by **Monoloc** - Nocturnal techno and eerie ambiance combine in a record which sucks you right into its heady world, **9/10**, *You Forget This* by **Sangam** - The rain filled nights of a future northern England are reflected in an album of lonesome atmospheric and regret-hued tones, **8/10**, *Flash Point* by **Far** - Ominous and hypnotic, **Far** follows the the well received *Inevitable Collapse* with nine tracks of darkened soundscapes, **8/10**, *The Path* by **DJ Werd** - **DJ Cam** fans, or those with a passion for vintage *Ninja Tune* will find much to enjoy in these ten downtempo trip hop gems, **8/10**, *Future Disco 10: Complete. Repeat. A Disco Drama* by **V/A** - The *Future Disco* series returns with a sassy collection of groove filled deep house from the likes of **Tiger & Woods**, **DJ Koze**, and **Marquis Hawkes**, **8/10**, *Body, Soul & Other Things* by **David Herrero** - An album of chunky house goodness which recalls the classic grooves of **Mood II Swing** and **Murk**, **7/10**, *Ecologies II: Ecosystems Of Excess* by **J.G. Biberkopf** - An intriguing and enjoyable record of ambient atmospheric from the hotly tipped Lithuanian artist, **7/10**, and *Soul Clap* by **Soul Clap** - The 2nd album from the Boston funk disciples is a loose, soulful affair which, occasionally sounds like it has been unearthed from the vaults of **Prince**, **7/10**.

| [JOHN BITTLES](#)