

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

Is it just me, or was *Record Store Day 2017* a tiny bit crap? The last time I was surrounded by that amount of middle-aged, balding men, reeking of sweat, I had walked into a strip-club by mistake. So, rather than relive the horrors of that day, I will dispense with the waffle and dive straight into the reviews. By **JOHN BITTLES**



The electronic musings of **Darren Jordan Cunningham's Actress** project have long been a favourite of those who enjoy a bit of cerebral resonance with their beats. While 2014's *Ghettoville* disappointed, there was more than enough goodwill left over from the dusty grooves of his *R.I.P.* album and his excellent *DJ Kicks* mix to ensure that expectations for a new LP were suitably high. Thankfully the futuristic funk and controlled passion of *AZD* doesn't let us down! Out now on the always reliable *Ninja Tune* label the album is a dense listening experience which makes the ideal soundtrack for lonely dance floors and fevered heads. After the short intro of *Nimbus*, *Untitled 7* gets us off to a stunning start with its deep, steady groove. From here *Fantasyth's* shuffling beats and solitary melody line recall the twisted genius of **Howie B** and *Dancing In The Smoke* deconstructs the ghost of Chicago house and takes it to a gloriously darkened place. Meanwhile *Faure In Chrome* and *There's An Angel In The Shower's* disquieting ambiance are so good you could wallow in them for days. With closer *Visa* ending things on a spine tingling high, *AZD* is a record tailor-made for repeated plays. **9/10**.



**Hector Romero** has long been a vital component of New York's house music scene. With residencies and appearances in clubs such as *Limelight*, *Save The Robots* and *The Roxy* he is

renowned for soul infused, vocal heavy sets. This month sees the release of *Weaving Genres*, his debut mix CD, which contains thirteen new and exclusive cuts and remixes by the likes of **Louie Vega**, **Joi Cardwell**, **David Morales**, **Reboot** and more. The album is out now on *Nervous Records* and is a must buy for anyone who has ever experienced the joys of dance. Seriously, in a time of po faced techno and snooze inducing deep house, it is refreshing to come across a selection of house tracks designed with only one thing in mind: to make your body move. Highlights include **Louie Vega's** string drenched remix of *Bourgie Bourgie* by **John Davis & The Monster Orchestra**, the smudged bass, and deep, heady rush of the *B-Boy Mix* of *Dancing* by **Benji Candelario**, **Hector Romero & Michelle Rivera**, and **David Morales'** gloriously uplifting refit of **Angel Moraes'** *Stand Up*. Every track is a winner though, with **Hector Romero's** mixing superb throughout, on an album which will make your hips swing one minute, your heart soar the next. **9/10**.



Cologne artist **Wolfgang Voigt** resurrects his revered ambient project this month, with the first album of original **GAS** material to surface since *Pop* way back in 2000. Following up the excellent retrospective boxset from last year, his new album *Narkopop* finds the enigmatic producer in majestic form. Recalling the atmospheric soundscapes of **Vangelis**, **Gigi Masin**, or **Global Communication**, the record's ten tracks wash over the listener like a partly formed dream. Take *Narkopop 2* for example, its unsettling synths and evocative air mix perfectly with the ghost of a beat to create a wormhole effect which sucks the listener straight into its warm, yet isolated world. Other picks include, *Narkopop 3*, which seduces with its rich, lethargic air, the spectral bass and cobwebbed melodies of *Narkopop 5*, the gradual swell of *Narkopop 7*, and seventeen minute long closer *Narkopop 10*. While the vinyl version is retailing at a hefty £59.99, putting it out of the price range of most, *Narkopop* is an album which will add a sense of class to any self-respecting downtempo fan's home. **9/10**.



Since its inception back in 2011, the *Air Texture* series of compilations has featured artists such as **Bvdub**, **Loscil**, **Deadbeat**, and **BNJMN**, compiling the freshest selections of lush ambient jams. Out mid-April, *Volume V* sees **Jonah Sharp** of **Spacetime Continuum** fame and **Juju & Jordash** take a disc each to showcase their own unique styles. Starting out with his own *Flux*, Jonah's set takes in the likes of **Move D**, **Patrice Scott**, **I:Cube** and **Claude Young** to give the listener 70 mesmerising minutes of aural gold. Light and airy when it needs to be, his selections make for a welcome alternative to the horror score soundscapes found in the majority of ambient releases today. Sounding like a long lost set from a 90s chill-out room, the faint melodies, drifting synths and stoned beats on offer work superbly to make for one of the most enjoyable albums I have heard in years. On disc two, drone techno duo **Juju & Jordash** serve up a trippier, stranger mix. As great as this is, it is the nostalgic romanticism of **Spacetime Continuum's** set which will live long in the mind. **8.5/10**.



Next up, we have the funk strewn disco house of New York duo **Soul Clap's** edition of *Fabric's* long-running mix series. *Fabric 93* is available in all good record shops now, and contains a total of 34 smooth tracks mixed together as only **Eli Goldstein** and **Charles Levine** know how. Fans of their *Dancing In The Charles* sets will find much to enjoy in *Fabric 93's* smooth, disco infused jams. After a gentle, sun-kissed beginning, the beats glide their way into the mix with the **Hidden Spheres** remix of *Gem* by **Jesse Futerman & I-Robots** and *Early Werk Feat. Carlos Mena* by **Ancient Deep**. From here the likes of **Tom Trago**, **Château Flight**, **Youandewan**, **Joakim**, and **Soul Clap** themselves all feature in a set which may seem overly polite to some, but which is still an awful lot of fun. Keeping the best to last, the triple blast of *Maajo* by **Maajo**, *Path To Wisdom* by **Jimi Tenor & Tony Allen** and the shiver-inducing piano refrain of *Bittersweet Stipped* by the irresistible **Scott Grooves** ends things on a spectacular high. While, not as barrier breaking as some of the recent *Fabric* mixes, this will find favour with any house disciple looking to get lost in a groove. **8/10**.



If you are anything like me, you will have celebrated your 25<sup>th</sup> birthday with one too many drinks in a bar wondering where all your friends have gotten to, and if that drunk is going to punch you, or offer to buy you a drink. Not so Scottish techno institution *Soma*! Instead, they gathered together luminaries such as **Robert Hood**, **Jeff Mills**, **Daft Punk**, **Josh Wink**, **Deepchord**, label heads **Slam**, and loads more for a five record boxset of tough, rugged beats. While some tracks on *Soma 25* can cause repetitive strain injuries to your ears with a series of functional and insistent thumps, there are more than enough gems to be found here to make tracking this down worthy of any techno fan's time. **Jeff Mills' A Tale From The Parallel Universe** is gloriously trippy, its dense electro recalling **Drexciya** at their very best. Other picks include the shadowy acid of *S.O.M.A 25* by **Andrew Weatherall's The Woodleigh Research Facility** project, the heady thump of **Vril's** refit of *X Track* by **Percy X**, the vintage techno stylings of *808 Planet* by **Funk D'Void**, and **Deepchord's** stunning remixes of *Cry* and *BeeBear* by **Joe Stawarz**. Not perfect then! But, then again, who is? **7/10**.



A special mention must also go to: *Flight* by **HCMJ** - London label *Dream Catalogue* strike gold yet again with an album of epic ambiance, ominous drones, and moments of heart-wrenching beauty to warm your very soul, **9/10**, *Birds Flying High* by **Mollono.Bass & Ava Asante** - *3000Grad* label heads **Mollono.Bass** team up with vocalist and violinist **Ava Asante** for a record of chilled textures, exotic beats and melodic house grooves, **8.5/10**, *Lost Days* by **Greg Gow** - Having been a big part of the Toronto techno scene since the 1990s, the producer steps up with the rich, Detroit rhythms and tough, focused beats of his debut LP, **7/10**, *Still Life* by **Little Cub** - South London trio **Little Cub** make soft, electronic influenced indie which nods towards **Heaven 17**, **OMD**, and, er, **Keane**. With thoughtful lyrics, and a delightfully downbeat air, *Still Life* will make the perfect accompaniment to sitting alone in your bedroom staring out at the rain, **7/10**, *S/W* by **Second Woman** - If you can ignore the too cool for school cover and

overly ironic track titles, then you'll find an album of deconstructed techno and inspired ambient grooves, **8/10**, and *Skryptöm: 10 Years* by **V/A** - French label *Skryptöm* celebrate 10 years in the game with a bumper collection of tough techno gems from the likes of **Laurent Garnier**, **Inigo Kennedy**, **Maxime Dangles**, **Scan X** and more, **8.5/10**.



And let's not forget: *Where The Light Shines Through 1981-2017* by **Sad Lovers & Giants** - With hints of **Soft Cell**, **The Cure**, **House Of Love**, **Magazine** and more it seems strange that Watford band **Sad Lovers & Giants** never gained the following their brand of experimental indie deserved. This welcome retrospective compiles singles, oddities and more in a jam-packed five CD boxset. Trust me when I tell you that this isn't just for hardcore fans, **9/10**, *Auto* by **Chmmr - Even Brenden** arrives on **Prins Thomas' Full Pupp** label with the hazy Italo and breezy Balearica of his debut LP, **8/10**, *Loop-Finding-Jazz-Records* by **Jan Jelinek** - Now available on vinyl for the first time since its initial release sixteen years ago, **Jan Jelinek's** jazz encrusted classic is a master class in dusty dub textures and soft-focus electronica, **8/10**, *Kindisch Stories presented by Dance Spirit - Get Physical* offshoot *Kindisch* continue their *Presents* series with a slow burning collection of mid-paced house grooves, **8/10**, *Collected Pieces* by **Mary Littimore** - Out now on *Ghostly International*, the six glacial soundscapes which make up the harpist's new release are perfect for closing your eyes and allowing the world to gently drift away, **7/10**, and *Unseen Forces* by **Justin Walter** - Since its inception in 1993 American label *Kranky* have unleashed some of the richest, most rewarding downtempo music to tickle a kitten's behind. A perfect example is Michigan trumpeter **Justin Walter's** atmospheric and melancholy drenched new LP, **8/10**.

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