

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

The human need for nostalgia has led to some truly awful horrors which should never have been loosened upon the world. By **JOHN BITTLES**

From **Shaun Ryder's** battered voice straining to be heard in the latest **Happy Monday's** reunion, to **Peter Hook** destroying the entire **New Order/Joy Division** catalogue in a tour seemingly motivated by nothing but spite, sometimes it seems that the best thing a revered band can do is stay dead.

Luckily this is not always the case, a fact illustrated by the return of introverted rockers **Slowdive**. This week we'll be reviewing their brand new, much anticipated LP. That's not all though, as we also find time to highlight fantastic albums by **T.Raumschmiere**, **ToiToiToi**, **Perc**, **The Mulholland Free Clinic**, **DJ Hell**, and more.

So, before foppish hair and writing love poetry starts making a comeback, we had better begin...



First up we have the return of shoegaze legends **Slowdive**. Merging electronica and guitars way before the likes of **Primal Scream** and **The Chemical Brothers** made it seem cool, their fourth, self-titled album sees the Reading band return in style. It has been over twenty years since the band's last full-length (1995's *Pygmalion*), yet *Slowdive* sounds almost as if the band have never been away. "It's poppier than I thought it was going to be" admits **Neil Halstead** in the press notes. And, indeed, it does find the band abandoning the ambient-tinged epics of their previous LP, for the more traditional guitar jangles of their underrated debut *Just For A Day*. The results are invigorating and gorgeously dreamy! With a fabulously clean sound which puts the vocals just slightly above the drums and guitars, the record is nothing short of sublime. Opener *Slomo* is filled with the type of unbridled romanticism and longing which hasn't been heard since the brutal strains of Brit Pop foolishly kicked emotions to the kerb. Next, *Star Roving* ups the noise level for a fab stadium anthem tailor made for students discos and pumping your hands in the air. Further in, *Sugar For The Pill* features a bassline to die for, *No Longer Making Time* is a slacker anthem to make you leap off your chair, while downbeat closer *Falling Ashes* is the sound of tears welling up in your soul. Go buy! **9.5/10.**



Cologne institution *Kompakt* and Monstertruckdriving noise maverick **T. Raumschmiere** may not seem like the most likely of bedfellows. Yet, a general perusal of any respected historical journal will lead to the discovery that **Marco Haas** previously graced the label in the early noughties with two rather fine EPs (*Bolzplatz* and *Musick*). The producer makes a welcome return to *Kompakt* this month with the lush house, wonky techno and kitchen sink drama of his new LP. *Heimat* is a record liberally sprinkled with both melody and humour, is immaculately produced, and is guaranteed to stir emotions on even the most jaded of floors. *Zum Monday* opens proceedings with a subtle kick and **Kraftwerk** synths before *Jaguar* slaps you in the face with its epic trance riffs. Other gems include the string-drenched swell of *Wacker*, *Le Fux's* pairing of melancholic piano and rave refrains, and the **Caribou** style emotion rich electronica of closer *Zwerg*. At times startlingly beautiful, *Heimat* is the aural equivalent of gazing up at the sun while trying not to cry. **9/10**.



Next, newcomer **ToiToiToi** returns to London label *Ghost Box* after his *Other Voices* single from 2015 with the esoteric sounds of his new LP. Berlin artist **Sebastian Counts**, music has a playfulness and strangeness, which helps *Im Hag* sit very nicely within the otherworldliness of the *Ghost Box* family. With a rich mixture of acoustic and electronic instrumentation the album sounds a little like **Future Sound Of London** jamming at a colourful pagan festival where flowery dresses and plaits in the hair are the look of the day. There is a distinct air of optimism present in *Im Hag's* eighteen loose, instrumental tracks, which helps lend the record a welcoming air. Picks include the soft 70s cop show strut of *A Travel Agent's Dream*, the dub heavy bass quake of *Mond In Den Ästen*, the tongue in cheek parping of *Tanz Um Den Kopf*, and the **Kid Koala** style jazz-tinged trip hop of *Another Kind Of Reasoning*. Sounding like nothing else around, if you play this to your friends you will probably be greeted with a few 'What the hell?' stares. Yet, don't let that put you off, as *Im Hag* showcases a singular talent who is more than willing to push boundaries, and,

more importantly, is fully prepared to have a little fun. **8/10.**

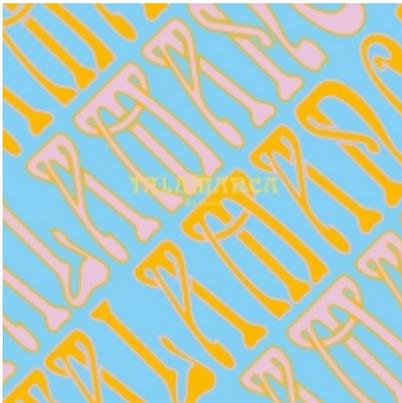


Fans of long, sprawling electronica with a psychedelic touch are in for a real treat this month with **The Mulholland Free Clinic's** debut self-titled LP. While the name may be new to some, the fact that the group consists of *Kunststoff* legend **Move D**, techno primitives **Juju & Jordash**, and **Jonah Sharp** of **Spacetime Continuum** fame means that excellence is pretty much a cert. Constructed from a live set recorded at Berlin's *://about blank* in August 2016, the album is a smorgasbord of ambiance, strange sonic experiments, techno, and new age. Opening track *Vital Signs* does very little over its seventeen minute running time, yet its ever shifting textures and **Pete Namlook** style air make it as hypnotic as watching drunks fight in slow motion. Next track *Boneset* is peculiar and eerie; if it appeared on an episode of *Twin Peaks* it wouldn't sound out of place. *Gone Camping* is a gorgeous Detroit flavoured jam, *The Dawgs Are Alright* brings to mind the lonely acid of **Tin Man**, while *Dr. Leary* and *Pillow Therapy* end things on a spine-tingling high. **8.5/10.**



Next up we have an album of aggravated techno music from aural visionary **Perc**. If you like your beats beautiful yet tough, and you haven't managed to listen to his earlier LPs *Wicker & Steel* or *The Power And The Glory* yet, then feel free to hang your head in shame. Out mid May on his own *Perc Trax* imprint, London producer **Ali Wells** adds to his considerable arsenal of outstanding releases with an album which punishes, yet never feels monotonous or strained. A careful merging of the personal and the political, *Bitter Music's* ten tracks (eight on vinyl) come across as a form of sonic architecture, stunning to behold. After the melancholic static of opener *Exit*, *Unelected* is a brutal confrontation which hits the listener

like a stream of spittle angling towards the face. From here, *Chatter* is like a brutal back-alley fuck with a loving kiss at the end, *I Just Can't Win* sounds like **Sleaford Mods** on strange drugs, *Spit* is so vicious I don't know if I can listen to it again, while *Look What Your Love Has Done To Me* sounds like electroclash on speed. Okay, so it's not exactly easy listening, but *Bitter Music* is as thrilling as it's possible for two slabs of wax to get. **8.5/10**.



This week we'll finish with the sun-dappled chimes and groove-laden house of **Talamanca System's** eponymous debut album. For those of you who have been leading sheltered lives lately, let me explain that **Talamanca System** is a house music supergroup composed of none other than **Gerd Janson, Mark Barrott, and Philip Lauer**. And, with that big shiny yellow thing in the sky finally gracing us with its presence, now is the perfect time to immerse yourself in the trio's rose-scented, classic house sounds. Opener, *Transatlantique* pairs vintage house style pianos, cheeky samples and relaxed beats to bring to mind a lost **Marshall Jefferson** tune from back in the day. Disco disciples meanwhile should make a beeline for the deep bassline swoon of *Ancona Ancona*. Also, be sure to check *Ocean Grill's* ode to the summer, and the jack-tastic *Experc*, a song all but guaranteed to make ravers of a certain age get a little misty-eyed. While not everything here works, *Talamanca System* is a mighty fine album which is equal parts chill and groove. **7.5/10**.



A special mention must also go to: *Zukunftsmusik* by **DJ Hell** - Out mid May on his own *International DeeJay Gigolo Records*, the techno pioneer's new LP mixes elements of ambient, techno, krautrock and more to create a gorgeously immersive aural stew, **9/10**, *Techno City* by **DJ Wild** - Inspired by "a long winter spent playing dark and murky club rooms around the world", this is house music made for making feet move, **8/10**, *Ankhor* by **Liz Aku** - Belgian artist **Liz Aku** arrives on **Jazzanova's Sonar Kollektiv** imprint with a slow, sultry collection of soul-infused songs, **7/10**, *Pfunk* by **Haramia Tapes** - *Apollo* turn up trumps yet again with a short, but funky seven track LP from **Laurine Frost**, **7.5/10**, *The Great*

Annihilator/Drainland by **Swans** - Two classic albums by rock n' roll nosieniks **Swans** receive a welcome reissue this month, and will make perfect listening for anyone who thinks modern music is too nice and polite, **8/10**, *Three Years Of Decay - Mixed By Pezzner* - Californian DJ/producer **Pezzner** helps celebrate **Daive Zeta's Decay Records'** third birthday with a selection of impeccably mixed dance floor tunes, **7/10**, *Her Empty Eyes* by **Maelstrom** - Tough, percussive techno is the order of the day on an album which slowly but surely wins you over to its angular ways, **7/10**, and *Bleu* by **Micko Roche** - Having already received support from chill-out legends **Jose Padilla** and **Pete Gooding**, the future is looking good for Irish native **Micko Roche**. Just listen to the gentle Balearica and hazy house which make up his debut LP to hear exactly why he is held in such high esteem, **8.5/10**.



And let's not forget: *WILD* by **Nuage** □ Recorded in St. Petersburg and influenced by »the sun, sea and tropics«, **Nuage's** new album for the always reliable *Project Mooncircle* is an aural delight from beginning to end, **9/10**, *The Arc Of Tension* by **Oliver Koletzki** □ The *Stil Vor Talent* label head brings a sensitive touch to dance floors everywhere with the lush, melodic grooves found on his sixth LP, **8/10**, *Balabushka* by **Mad Rey** □ Fabulous double EP of smooth yet funky house music which combines the soulful bounce of **Omar S** with the jazzy chords of **St. Germain**, **8.5/10**, *Electric Lines* by **Joe Goddard** □ The **Hot Chip** and **Two Bears** member somehow finds time to release a solo album of sweet soulful pop with a gentle house touch, **8/10**, *Nektyr* by **Demem** □ Mysterious Stockholm artist **Irma Orm** debuts on *Kranky* with a haunting and spectral album whose gothic torch songs recall the emotive majesty of **The Cocteau Twins**, **Grouper**, and more, **8/10**, *Fit For Purpose* by **400PPM** - New York native **Shawn O'Sullivan** returns to the *Avian* imprint with a tightly coiled collection of psychedelic techno sounds, **7.5/10**, *Systema* by **Marco Shuttle** □ These eight dense and eerily hypnotic tracks sit perfectly on **Donato Dozzy** and **Neel's Spazio Disponibile** imprint and will work wonders on the brain, **7/10**, *Markak* by **Aitor Etxebarria** □ Heartfelt, and evocative, the artist best known as **El_Txef_A** soundtracks a documentary on the 80th anniversary of the bombing of Gernika with ten tracks that gently tug upon the soul, **8.5/10**.