

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

With much of the world in lockdown, news headlines seemingly taken from a bad sci-fi flick, and many of us experiencing some form of anxiety, right now we need a sense of calm more than ever. Ambient music can get a bad press but, when done right, it can transport the listener to a far better place. By **JOHN BITTLES** .

Battling with nervousness and feelings of unease, I have found myself seeking refuge within the world of ambient sounds these last few weeks. With an abundance of great recent releases and the rise of specialist labels such as *A Strangely Isolated Place*, *...txt*, *Neotantra* and *Carpe Sonum*, lovers of all things downbeat have never had it so good. In this article I will be writing about some albums which have become like old friends to me.

So, take a deep breath, embrace the calm, and let us begin...

Mirror by Leafar Legov (Giegling)



One half of acclaimed *Giegling* duo **Kettenkarussell**, **Leafar Legov** has been busy these last few years making a name on his own. After two wonderfully melancholic EPs (2016's *Talk* and 2017's *Family*), the artist cements his own vision with the ghostly jazz interludes of his debut LP. *Mirror* is out now on the always mysterious *Giegling* label and features twelve crackly tracks which combine the dusty ambiance of **Dwig** with the fractured dub of **Pole**. After the new age pulse of *Into*, the record moves gracefully into *Wave*'s mournful jazz. Further in, the ominous trip hop shimmer of *Fade*, the **Burial** style dubscaapes of *Hidden Treasure*, *Hydde*'s contemplative piano shuffle and the heart-wrenchingly beautiful *The Slip* all tug at the soul. Sounding, at times, like a more downbeat **St. Germain**, *Mirror* is a record which you owe it to yourself to hear. With the original vinyl run now sold out, you can still get your hands on a download version by making a donation on the *Giegling* website below.

<https://www.giegling.net/>

Northwest Passage by Merrin Karras (A Strangely Isolated Place)



Glacial and contemplative, **Merrin Karras'** *Northwest Passage* is an album made to be listened to alone at night. Made up of lonely synths and isolated textures, **Brendan Gregoriy's** latest already sounds like a modern ambient classic, standing out even amongst the rarefied output of celebrated US label *A Strangely Isolated Place*. The dense electronic tones of *The Gate* get things off to a stunning start. With a low synth line droning ominously in the background, aural flourishes add to the mood. Next up, *Passage* continues this theme. Sounding like the last ray of light is disappearing off into the horizon, listening to it, at times, you have to reach out to your loved ones, just to be sure they are still there. Of the album's other tracks, the pensive and brooding *Meridian* takes the breath away, while *Crevasse* adds some **John Carpenter** synths into proceedings with stunning effect. Beautifully beguiling, *Northwest Passage* is full of ambitious dreams.

<https://astrangelyisolatedplace.bandcamp.com/album/northwest-passage>

Beautiful You by Khotin (Khotin Industries)



After a limited cassette run, Vancouver artist **Khotin's** *Beautiful You* was finally reissued onto vinyl in April last year. As anyone who has had the pleasure of being enraptured by the album's sonic wonder will attest, this is a marvellous thing. **Dylan Khotin-Foote** has been making sun-kissed ambiance and beats since 2014, with the warm atmospheric house of *New Tab* still a firm favourite of mine. Yet, somehow, the aural hug of *Beautiful You* is even better, the production crisper, the textures oozing with warmth. Have a listen and it is easy to hear why. *Water Soaked In Forever* is gently moving, a congenial feeling of warmth washing over you as it plays. Even better is the woozy delirium of *Levi's Synth*. Gorgeously unhurried, this really does make time appear to stand still. Also worth checking are the soft-focus beats and hushed percussion of *Alla's Scans*, the tripped-out bass and keys of *Merged Host*, and the soothing calm of

closer *Planet B*. Recalling the type of tunes you would hear in a quality chillout room in the 90s, *Beautiful You* is an album any open minded music fan will love.

<https://heart.bandcamp.com/album/beautiful-you>

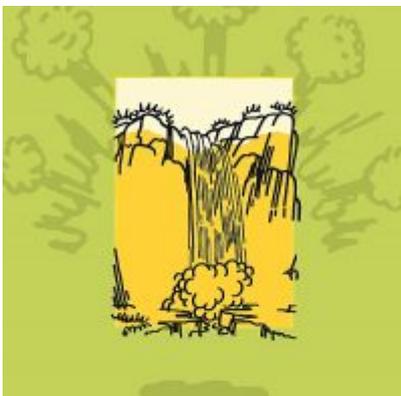
A Clear Horizon by Motionfield (...txt Recordings)



UK label *...txt Recordings* have long been specialising in the type of deep soundscapes that could have any classic electronica fanatic thinking they had stepped into a wormhole and ended up back in the 'good old days'. Albums by the likes of **Confluent Phase**, **Joel Tammik**, **Aythar** and **Si Matthews** are just about as good as modern ambient music gets, conjuring a plethora of atmospheres to enhance your waking moods. The LP I keep coming back to though is one which, when listened to on headphones, makes any task or journey seem as though they are part of a surreal dream. *A Clear Horizon* by **Motionfield** came out in August of last year and is available digitally or, if you're lucky enough to still find one, CD. The album finds producer **Petter Friberg** in stunning form. The spacious ambiance of the title track and the deep introspection of *Ominous* are gorgeously atmospheric, a true trip for the mind. Thoughtful and pensive, *A Clear Horizon* forms a whole universe entirely its own.

<https://txtrecordings.bandcamp.com/album/a-clear-horizon>

Cape Cira by K-Lone (Wisdom Teeth)



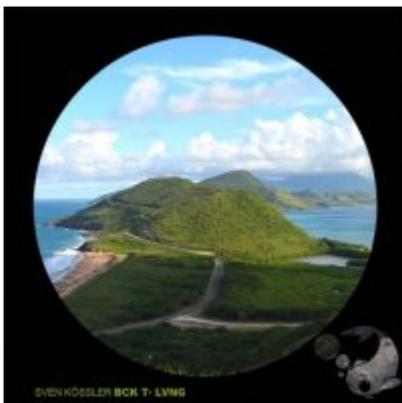
Better known for his club based 'bangers', last winter UK artist **K-Lone** decamped to his studio with the warm glow of summer in mind. Capturing the full essence of the season, the

resulting album *Cape Cira* is full of sun-kissed melodies, twinkling percussion and soft house beats. Each of the album's eight tracks work together beautifully to form a body of work so immersive you can almost hear the gentle crash of the waves. Opener *Yelli* begins with some hushed percussion and a lullaby style melody, before finally settling into a silky house groove. Soft and reflective, it is almost impossible to listen to the track's seven-minute run-time without being lulled into a deep sense of calm. From here, *Cocoa* recalls the lush house majesty of **Larry Heard**, *Palmas* pairs flickering rhythms with almost there beats, while the slow build wonder of *Bluefin* is quite simply divine. Even if stuck inside, *Cape Cira* brings the Balearic Isles into your home. <https://wisdomteethuk.bandcamp.com/album/k-lone-cape-cira-lp>

Currents Of Space by Urban Meditation (Fantasy Enhancing)

Another UK label doing more than most to push the joys of ambient into the world is *Fantasy Enhancing*. Specialising in deep electronic pulses and glitchy IDM, the imprint's CDs are a thing of beauty in themselves. Released in January 2019, **Urban Meditation's** *Currents Of Space* is a deeply immersive 2 CD set which you never want to end. Wonderfully produced throughout, the album is that rarest of things, a concept album which isn't overly pretentious or as boring as golf. Recalling the classic sound of the *Warp Artificial Intelligence* series one minute, the unhurried atmospheres of **Pete Namlook** the next, *Currents Of Space* ably creates an all-consuming aural world full of electronic joys. See also the companion remix album *Recurrence Of Space* and the already fully-formed debut *20 Years In Space*. <https://urbanmeditation.bandcamp.com/album/currents-of-space-2>

Bck T• Lvng by Sven Kössler (Carpe Sonum Records)



Formed of two CDs, the first containing originals, the second remixes by electronica luminaries such as **Off Land**, **Faex Optim**, and **Si Matthews**, German producer **Sven Kössler's** *Bck T• Lvng* is a fully realised listening delight. Released back in November, the album's richly textured IDM conjures 90s heavyweights **Biosphere**, **Higher Intelligence Agency** and more within its meticulously constructed grooves. Of the originals, picks include the shuffling beatscapes and evocative synth lines of *Kibo*, the grand ambiance of *A(i) (2019 Version)* and the hushed acid swoon of *The Pathway*. On CD 2 **Urban Meditation's** epic take on the snappily titled *C•ntmplt•n{1}*, **Faex Optim's** **Boards of Canada** style *East Lothian Woods Remix* of *Eks Makhina* and **Sven Kössler & Si Matthews'** melancholy acid laced take on *A(i)* all stand out. As tends to be the way with great ambient music though, *Bck T• Lvng* is best experienced as a

whole.

<https://svenkoessler.bandcamp.com/album/bck-t-lvng>

Planet Hearth by Calibre (Signature Recordings)



Recorded after the untimely death of a close friend, Belfast artist **Calibre's** *Planet Hearth* finds the producer exploring a mournful, contemplative sound. Best known for his drum n' bass rhythms, *Planet Hearth* sees him hush the drums and reduce the pace. Conjuring images of empty urban landscapes and afternoons spent alone, there is a twinge of hope audible throughout the album which always leaves me wanting more. Introspective and sombre, the record's thirteen tracks present an abundance of textures and moods. The deeply pensive *Hills* initiates proceedings with a looped piano refrain and some elegiac keys. *Colby Park* is quietly moving, adding muted strings and lush vocal samples into the mix. From here, the acoustic *Eratik* recalls the anguished soul-searching of **Radiohead**, the sedated trip hop groove of *Walking In Circles* could make even your tough uncle cry, while *Thought Field* sounds like sunshine after a storm. Thoughtful, nuanced, and with meticulous sound design throughout, *Planet Hearth* sounds just as good in pleasant company as it does alone.

<https://calibre.bandcamp.com/album/planet-hearth>

| [JOHN BITTLES](#)