

Terribilis

Interlude Music

Quantum Natives DL

Yikii

Gentle Nightmare

Quantum Natives DL

Brood Ma

The Hangover II

Bandcamp DL

Each of these three new releases from the universe of synaesthetic net-sprawlers Quantum Natives (profiled in *The Wire* 406) opens a telescoping portal into a distinctive netherworld of blurred edges, fragmented futurisms and dark, twisted turns. *Interlude Music* by 20 year old London based producer Terribilis starts out with a much more soothing vibe than that artist's name implies – although the opening track title “needle dreams” hints at a synthetic spectre behind this façade of tranquility. The featherlight “a paraphilic place” is a nearly ten minute opus of ambient synths and reedy vocal samples played like a pipe organ. Then “deal with the beast” probes both heaven and earthward with its searing, giallo-esque string patch and deep, rumbling bass tones. The track “neat death!” pushes into more melodically complex territory, with its pulsing lyricism and wandering, purgatorial negotiation of light and darkness.

Death is also a recurring theme on *Gentle Nightmare*, the first release for the label from Yikii (aka Yikii Tong) who is also the vocalist of the Chinese ‘fairy tale’ band anemone. This 14 track album plays like a songbook of haunted lullabies in which Yikii’s childlike voice crawls across percolating electronics, dulcet music box tones and warped, chugging rhythms. This album’s download folder comes with a lyric sheet and also a ‘song key’ of poetic explications in both Chinese and English. “This is a time-shattered nation” she writes in her notes for the song “Time Warp Usagi”. Here, “the present and the future co-exist with the past. It brings me happiness that everything becomes meaningless”. On the infectiously unsubtle “kill me”, Yikii softly sings the song’s title in her neotenous coo until she is drowned out by a menacing electronic roar. There’s a video for this song in which impressionistic digital paintings are stacked to create a stop-motion animation. The resulting aesthetic is both saccharinely

precious and almost absurdly bleak, like a robot baby that cries real tears.

Finally, Quantum Natives co-founder Brood Ma (aka James Stringer) plunges a 3D-rendered knife into the heart of hypermasculine culture on *The Hangover II*, a characteristically lighthearted yet dense assemblage of disparate sound sources and textures replete with bro-tastic track titles like “Viagra”, “TVR” and “Jagerbomb”. The aptly named “Raging Bull” sends sonic shards flying in a digital china shop, but in general, Stringer’s compositions bound across vast and unexpected terrains with an agility more evocative of a cybernetic gazelle than anything bovine (or Robert De Niro for that matter). “Vodka Redbull” is a goofily self-aware party jam that brings together wobbling bass, dull thuds, canned snare and corporate marimba, while “Cough Candy High” sounds like exactly that; a druggy haze casting distorted ripples through a bruised stretch of time.

Emily Pothast

Territoire

Alix

Humo CD/DL/LP/MC

At the time of writing there’s a Twitter meme in which people post pictures of themselves from 2012 and 2018. You could do a similar before and after exercise with Olivier Arson’s project Territoire. The 2012 album *Mandorle* sketched out ambient drifts and drones largely with the tools of post-rock: organs, guitars, and so forth. Cut to 2018 and Arson – joined by guitarist David Sergeant, tuba player David Herrington, clarinetist Greg Gobel plus audiovisual artist Tasio on metal and percussion, and Oscar Mulero on beats – has gone full dark ambient: the drones remain but the lights have gone out.

Alix commits fully to the metamorphosis: there are distinct echoes of Lustmord, :zoviet*france: and The Hæfler Trio, and you can picture the head to toe black and sharply shaved undercuts. Arson has understood and reproduced precisely the tensions that power the subgenre, chiefly that it’s an ambient form that aims to disturb and discomfit, to terrorise rather than soothe, in which button after button is pressed to convey fear or threat, while stasis, as drones or magma-slow tempos,

suggests nothing other than paralysis.

This is nowhere clearer than in *Alix*’s discreet use of vocals. When the history of distortion in music is written, it will show that the countercultural charge of the fuzz pedal, and its ability to transport the listener through overdrive, expired pretty fast. The distortion of the human voice meanwhile retains its power to perturb – shown nowhere more clearly than in black metal, where the guitar wreckage is like a comfort blanket compared to the shredded wretching of its vocal tradition. Territoire’s vocals creep in intermittently and at the margins, but they haunt the mix like a prison: malnourished, raging, abject, trapped.

Sam Davies

Wei Zhongle

The Operators

Self Sabotage LP/DL

That time when certain members of Talking Heads were allegedly conspiring to oust frontman David Byrne and replace him with stunt guitarist/vocalist Adrian Belew? Wei Zhongle’s latest album *The Operators* what could have happened had that hypothetical configuration evolved through to about 1986 or so, then blasted over to our own timestream.

Lead singer, guitarist and songwriter Rob Jacobs’s voice combines Belew’s languor and Arto Lindsay’s trembly emotional breaks, withholding a phrase like he’s holding his breath. The rest is funky and fluid. I’d be surprised if Jacobs didn’t have some kind of technical or programming job on the side, because he weaves melodic lines into mathematical trance grooves, elegant as filigree lathe work. Or maybe it’s the US Midwest’s long affinity for math rock kicking in, like something in the water. The element of control balances the squelch and squiggle – Pat Keen’s fretless bass is not sloppy, but a measured swoon.

There is a slippery, metallic, honking angularity to the proceedings and the final track “Mute” is the best of the lot. But what really makes *The Operators* is the chameleonic playing by electronic clarinet player John McCowen (a student of Roscoe Mitchell, his solo album *Solo Contra* on International Anthem label, also based in Chicago, is well worth a listen). He adds a

host of bleeps and whoops and slides, and who knows what he is actually doing with his instrument, or even what instrument it really is half the time, but he’s conjuring an alien zoo and putting it to work.

Emily Bick

Jenny Wilson

Exorcism

Gold Medal CD/DL/LP

For Swedish vocalist and producer Jenny Wilson, bravery is less a mere attribute and more of a *modus operandi* – The Knife/Robyn collaborator’s 2013 album *Demand The Impossible* was a fearless look at her diagnosis with breast cancer and subsequent recovery. *Exorcism* addresses a similarly uncomfortable subject, her sexual assault in 2016 and what it means to be a survivor of trauma.

That Wilson can turn such trauma into vibrant, addictive pop music is testament to her abilities within strict limitations – the entirety of *Exorcism* was crafted on a Prophet 6 synthesizer – but *Exorcism* is unafraid not just of its subject matter but of occupying an intrinsically ambiguous place for the listener. It leaves you simultaneously enraptured by the sound and unsettled by the lyrics which, though the title of the album implies catharsis, suggest something deeper and more complex: that the incidents and feelings outlined in the record are never totally dealt with, rather return unbidden, simmer, linger, and that this is the true lasting legacy of violence, a debt that can never be paid.

Opener “Rapin” puts you firmly in Wilson’s headspace, where you remain for the duration. Although the subject matter is horrendous tracks like “Disrespect Is Universal” and “The Prediction” touch on the habitual way human beings build themselves back up after trauma, cope and carry on.

The album closer “Forever Is A Long Time” faintly offers closure, but is smart and sumptuous and searingly honest enough to apprehend the irresolvability and disturbance that Wilson’s experience has put in her world. Throughout *Exorcism*, the hooks are massive and the emotional power unending. For women, an album that could be a touchstone. For me, and for men, another reason to shut the fuck up and listen for once.

Neil Kulkarni

Jean Derome

Résistances



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