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audiofile
magazine

OCTOBER 1984

NUMBER ONE

THREE-MINUTE SYMPHONIES



By the simple act of its having been released, 1983's *The Elephant Table Album* became something of a landmark, or a cornerstone. And rightly so, for it exposed listeners to bands they may never have known existed—bands that regardless of their noblest aspirations had never before made it to vinyl. The word 'classic' is very nearly used about that album. So popular was it that in 1984 it spawned a follow-up.

Three-Minute Symphonies, as the X-Tract Records sequel, utilizes many of the same components that had given *Elephant Table* its successful formula. Track compiler Dave Henderson of *Sounds Magazine* states it thus: "The broad selection of music is stimulating. The variations in style and approach are heartening too. From the commercially accessible strains [*Don't you believe it!*] of Stratis, the over-the-top aggression of Kill Ugly Pop, the rhythmic excess of Hunting Lodge, the serene melodies of Sema and Conrad Schnitzler, I never knew there was so much in it. Good idea, I thought. I'll get a batch of these bright hopefuls to supply a three minute track (each) and persuade someone to release it as an album. So this is it. Twenty-four diverse talents thrown together..."

Familiar names have submissions here; superior tracks: Die Todliche Doris, DDAA, Hunting Lodge, Schnitzler (whose track "Three Minute Symphony Number One" gave the album its name), Nurse With Wound, Legendary Pink Dots (who I believe are a particular favorite of Henderson's), and Smegma—whose track here "The Breathing Method" stands as a shining example for a listener's introduction to their long career.

Other pieces of special merit come from England's Point of Collapse, Holland's Van Kaye and Ignit, Colin Potter, Japan's Merzbow, and West Germany's Roll Kommando and Asmus Tietchens. Hunting Lodge and Smegma are the two Americans here. Every group except Kill Ugly Pop has provided contact addresses—

this is important, as the idea of these two X-Tract records was never, tacitly anyway, to hear the groups and then run out and **BUY** all of the records—although the groups would no doubt appreciate this—but to reach them for personal contact. This is the manner in which communication is established between Those who Do (specifically the groups) and Those who Do Not, but might perhaps Like To (specifically you, or more specifically me). Word of Mouth gradually defeating Pop Monopoly.

The very idea that all of these musicians, who all work so hard and with such respectably sincere attention to their own individual sounds and statements, are only recognized by wider audiences on freak and occasional compilations (and this situation has analogies throughout the field of art), shows how screwed up the world of recorded music must be. But besides this, limited exposure can be both curse and blessing. On the one hand, borrowing the phrase from the *Bilko* show, most of these bands will 'never get rich' at what they're doing. And on the other, it must be presumed that if only 900 people ever hear of a group, and if only 200 of those ever take any further interest, and if only thirty-five of those people make contact, then they are the ones that the band set out to reach. Those are the ones that a group of performers, without the most popular forms of techno-communication at their ready disposal, having been saving their special comments for.

It was Jean-Pierre Turmel who said it more resolutely, about his publication *Sordide Sentimentale*: "I'm just trying to make evolve a very small number of persons, no more. Because I think for the rest, it's finished! Some say that *Sordide Sentimentale* is elitist. Yes, in a way it's elitist, because we are not trying to give a solution to everybody. We are sending some words here and there, and from time to time there is a good reply. That's all. And I think it's fantastic. For the rest—give me a good reason to do something for these people. What are they doing for me—nothing but trying to make me a slave." [*Re/Search* magazine #6/7, 1983]

The slavery is figurative; the deliberately selective dispersal of information is very real. *Sordide Sentimentale*, as is well known, limits the number of all its issues to, usually, less than 3,000 copies. No one else would care, or need to. But those 3,000, like the thirty-five mentioned earlier, make all the difference in, literally, the world.

And so *Three-Minute Symphonies* exists, in sufficient quantity for all those who seek a different kind of entertainment, or a more personal vehicle of connection, or communication. It isn't necessary to own a record like this, and beyond that, it isn't necessary or even easy to describe much of its music; but the album exists because of a specific need, and if stylistic labels you must have, it's probably best to guide yourself by those bands here whose names you already know.

All those addresses; what they lead to is the establishing of a network of people who together can forge some kind of change in the overblown record industry. This is music without celebrity, and without fan clubs. This is a one-world one-on-one. And that was a waste of a paragraph.

—Carl Howard

DAVID VAN TIEGHEM



There's a group of musicians that has for almost a decade worked with lower Manhattan as a locus, and we all know who they are, because in recent years major rock-music figures have gravitated to them like moths to a flame. I refer to these musicians glibly as "the New York clique," though with every ounce of respect (as opposed to condescension) that I can muster.

And I think it's wonderful how some of these artists have come to their own rewards, without even the slightest hint of 'sellout' on anyone's part. Philip Glass has stormed into success at and for CBS Records (who many years earlier also signed minimalist Terry Riley); Laurie Anderson is one of the unsung success

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stories of the early 1980's at Warner Records; the Brooklyn-based Material (Bill Laswell, Fred Maher, Michael Beinhorn) has jumped from semi-obscurity at Celluloid Records to international respect at Elektra, in addition to being a major power behind Herbie Hancock's pop-triumph. And for some of the others, who haven't made the big recording contracts—I mean folks such as David Moss, Rhys Chatham, John Zorn, Arto Lindsay, Tom Cora and Fred Frith (now paired as Skeleton Crew)—small labels have arisen to take up the slack: OAO Records (run by Laswell and recording studio owner Martin Bisi), Rift Records of lower Manhattan, and Moers Music of West Germany.

And then there's David Van Tieghem, whose rise has been slow and steady since the mid-1970's, when he played at The Kitchen fairly often, as did Chatham and Peter Gordon. Van Tieghem had been building a reputation as a really 'madhouse' type of guy—and it all came to a head I think in April 1982, when he premiered his makeshift cabaret act to the largest audience that had yet seen it: at the Palladium, opening for and then playing with Laurie Anderson, where the audience (judging from its nervous exclamations of hostility) was not yet ready for him. I say not yet.

But Van Tieghem persevered, and when tapped by choreographer Twyla Tharp to follow up David Byrne's gorgeous soundtrack to "The Catherine Wheel," he went to work with some of the people he's performed with all these years and came up with "Fait Accompli," or on record *These Things Happen*.

To run down the list of Van Tieghem's fellow performers is to get an idea of how classy is 'the company he keeps': Richard Landry (of The Philip Glass Ensemble); Ned Sublette; and Peter Gordon, the man with a progressive saxophone anywhere, anytime, it seems. Does this music have the same tone as Van Tieghem has, when he's performing live? No, it's much more somber, or serene, and not slouched off at all. And if "Fait Accompli" looks in performance anything like "The Catherine Wheel," which I've seen on television, does, then this music is perfect for it.

But those shows that Van Tieghem does, those are a space-oddy worth mention as well. I've seen him live twice now, the second time being August 1984 at The Bottom Line, where (to bloat my own importance in the matter) we were mere inches away from each other. The show began with a Sanborn/Fitzgerald video—I forget the name—of Van Tieghem, not rerecorded or anything, drum-sticking merrily along the streets of lower Manhattan one deserted Sunday morning. Edited with marvelous precision, the video becomes one extended piece of music—and yet there's the man (not in real time, either) batting away at the sidewalks, corrugated iron gates, phone booths, fire hydrants, and parked cars of New York. Kind of a Test Department for the New York bourgeoisie. I don't mean that negatively either.

His live act is a phantasmagoria of slides, improvisation, skit-playing (he does an act, all without a word, in a surgical gown in which he removes a teddy bear from an overturned Teflon bowl by Caesarian section), children's toys—in effect, he's built up an incredible repertoire of ways in which to mask what I perceive as an innate shyness in him. The fact that he **erupts** upon a drum kit reinforces this for me, in that it speaks for him. Of course this entire contention may have no basis in reality whatsoever.

Suffice to say however that I've never seen anything else even remotely like his act, and certainly few things that display so openly the wit and personality and affection for craft of the performer. That includes some solo concert recitals I've been to.

The soundtrack LP I described earlier as "somber" and serious, and yet it too is not without its touches of free wit. For example, on the Side One track "The Women," two female vocalists sing "eee-aaa, eee-aaa" and so forth, and this strikes me as a clear parody of Philip Glass' *North Star*. But it isn't a parody like television satire, which needs to be cheap and obvious, but the kind of subtle jesting that one composer gives another in friendship. Again, I could be inventing this out of my hat—there may be no parody involved at all. But it allowed me an interesting comparison.

There is also a remix single of "These Things Happen," stretched out to over seven minutes from the original three-odd; it's perfect Danceteria material. I didn't think much of it at first, only that it seemed a typical remix single, the kind that cares not if it completely loses sight of the form/structure of the original track. Then I saw the live show at The Bottom Line, and my view-flip-flopped; I saw that the remixed version was indeed representative of Van Tieghem's live work. This is why I've been qualifying all of my other suppositions throughout this article—the fact is that there's simply too much about the man which I still don't know. And I've written this article freehand, and it were, without use of the Warner Brothers' release-blurb, which was really terrible.

And so David Van Tieghem becomes the latest of 'the New York Clique' to reach the kind of prominence that the record industry recognizes, with his first LP for a major label. Yet still he remains a New Yorker, working with David Byrne, Laurie Anderson, Peter Anderson, and David Moss, among others (who in their turns also remain New Yorkers). It'll be nice if, several years from now, we in the city will still be able to reflect that there's a core of fine progressive musicians around who call New York their center and their base.

—Carl Howard

METAMORPHOSIS



There are groups in England that work with essentially conventional instruments but whose orientation is not in the three-minute song form. This excludes (in this instance) jazz combos and chamber groups—or does it? Perhaps it could be said of Metamorphosis that what they create is chamber music, in a way. Of their musicians, and I believe there are three in the group, one plays string instruments, another percussive instruments, and another the electric bass guitar. There is the use of 'found instruments,' and of female vocals, but rarely lyrics; as opposed to another group, the labelmate Attrition, that appears to rely upon lyrics. More about Attrition soon.

At any rate, the reason I describe Metamorphosis merely as a nameless three-piece is that the group seems not in the habit of listing individual identities. Take for example the cover of their LP release *Great Babel Gives Birth*, keeping in mind that you won't find many copies of it around these parts. I had believed for some time that the record company, Third Mind Records, may have encountered difficulties in getting the cover printed, for it is an unusual one, with two small, green, post-medieval prints placed on a stark, black gloss background. My assumption turned out to have been correct. Third Mind boss Gary Levermore explained that the release of the record was "over three months delayed, mainly due to the processes the sleeve went through. In the end the printers messed up the carefully screenprinted pictures, so you can't even tell they've been screenprinted." Fortunately these difficulties do not affect the music itself—it possesses a strong enough identity to survive any flaws in the packaging.

Very little information is divulged, merely the record title and artist and numerical listing in the smallest of letters—and this is on the back cover. What of the disc labels? Flat black, and not a word on them. No information; not even an inner groove inscription. This makes it difficult to write about as well, which I think is fine. There is in fact nothing to divert one from the one true focus here: the music.

They may have something there. American records are always brimming with information—track timings, corporate warnings, UPC codes, multiple serial numbers, production notes, addresses...of these things are trivia made. Trivial trivia. Having a hard time spacing out the music in your mind? Unable to stop fidgeting?

Your mind keeps roaming? FINE—I'm as guilty of this as you are; perhaps more so—so here're some numerical tidbits for you: This track was recorded onto a TASCAM 16-track console and a TEAC tape deck using quarter-inch Maxell UD tape at 1½ ips; Dolby noise reduction was employed.

But this is not the music. This is not even a description of the music. And the thing about listening to compact discs is, once you've fixed solely on the fact that what you're really listening to is nothing but a series of reproduced one's and zero's, are you still as interested in the music? So Metamorphosis has the right idea. Mind you, one track of *Great Babel* appeared on the 1983 *Elephant Table Album*, and is familiar as "Muzak From Hawthorne Court," but by the time it reappears on *Babel* it is simply another piece of your listening experience.

Experience it is, for one minute you could be listening to atonal but still rather pleasant improvisations between clarinet and finger bowl (Metamorphosis had first caught my attention when *Sounds* magazine's Dave Henderson—*hiss! boo!*—pointed out that this was the band with the 'weird instruments'), and the next to recordings of surprisingly polytonal shortwave static, heralded by the theme song of Radio Prague. But whereas Orchestral Manoevers in the Dark used this theme song to set up a piece they'd composed previously, and to promote a 'message' of one-world humanity, Metamorphosis concentrates upon the sounds themselves as music. They are musicians sensitive not only to composition, but to its elements; to the potential that sound has to *become* music. This is of course in the tradition of John Cage or Nurse With Wound, as well as of the 'noise' groups of the late 1970's.

So Metamorphosis offers something uncannily like a relaxing, restful, and meditative listening experience without the haughtiness of what intellectuals term "space music." This music contains not only the easy, positive quality of something like Eno work—which tends to announce a sometimes obligatory command of "YOU WILL BE COMFORTABLE"—but also the unsettling undertones that keep you from falling asleep. Meditation on your toes. This kind of music is that which, once on the turntable, you hope will last forever, your needle never having to gloomily retract. 23 Skidoo's *The Culling Is Coming* is also like that to me. It's a very conducive sonic atmosphere that the recordings of *Great Babel Gives Birth* create. Conducive to what is entirely up to you.

—Carl Howard



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TEST DEPARTMENT



From rotted tin cylinders comes the look of thunder, the sound of lightening; the urban attack, the psychic release of exalted violence. Angelic release, coming to the dead hulks of forgotten industry. Ectoplasmic ghost smoke rising from columnic ghost smokestacks.

But Test Department is more than the therapeutic release of old chains, thrown off mightily against a world out of control, just as it is more than a simple allergic reaction to rock n roll, that most outmoded of musical forms: It is in fact Some Bizzare labelmate Matt Johnson, and others, who has moved pop into the space age by performing everything himself and then multitracking, seeing the *traditional band* as irrelevant to the technology of the studio.

Test Department however is a child of the junkheap, the stockyard, the loading dock. It is the sonic and mental barrage that utilizes discarded products of industry to break the stranglehold on man that keeps him from his own dignity. The images of Great Societies past and present flashing on the viewing screen and crumbling to vapor, amid parodies of Utopias with totalitarian dogmatists and demagogues, rust-corroded coal bins, and shrieking machines.

Their video, *Program for Progress*, which highlights their film work from 1982-1984, was featured on America's MTV on August 12 as part of a series of new British artists. It was hoped that those unprepared would feel the sting of permanent scars.

The band toured America for the first time in July 1984, travelling east coast to west coast and back again. At Irving Plaza in New York City on June 30, as at The Ritz on July 19, the stage was cluttered with relics. Spring coils, butane jugs, overturned barrels, waste cans, a car door, iron sheets, long shiny aluminum tubes, industrial cable reels, canvas screens, tape machines, and one huge rusted fuel bin, smoke rising from it as it was pounded upon by angry mallets. A thick black air compressor read, "WARNING— this machine is automatically controlled. It may start at any time." A perfect description of Test Department.

No one understood how the Irving Plaza show could have been squeezed into the Kool Jazz Festival, in a classic piece of juxtaposition; the opening blues band, feeling the heat, checked out *early*. During soundchecks, the small room rang with grinding and grating. It was revealed that all instruments were found on hunts through Cropsy Street in Brooklyn, though one dark barrel read, "57 St. Marks." And down in Soho, an unknown fan scrawled upon a lunch wagon, "Test Dept: The Fear Tool— Use It." Everything was ready to go. The sound was perfect, better than at The Ritz, where a microphone or two failed to function.

Diminutive of stature, the men of Test Department erupt in unison choruses of controlled destruction. Reserved offstage, they explode, once on, in piercing anger and release.

The lights dimmed. I was swept up in gorgeous colors of torment. For too-brief periods I detach from myself and become sublime in the waves of violence. Then, the feeling of my own futility, for I cannot join their ravishing ecstasy. They too felt somewhat isolated in their glorious frenzy, admitting later that they wished the audience could have joined in, in true ritual fashion. I explained to Angus (the man with the trumpet and the close-cropped blonde hair) that all I wanted to do was to bask forever in that feeling of danger, and even to rush the stage to explode in a brilliant fireball. Rejoined Angus, "You should have." No insult was ever intended in that invitation.

And then the band went home. It has been charged, by sources I shan't name, that the 2x45 *Beating the Retreat* is exquisitely packaged and recorded, but compared to their live shows, it is essentially a rich but dead thing. Personally, I don't see that this is a valid assertion. It presupposes that the band, with no intelligence of its own, sat on their asses while record producers shellacked them with money to do whatever they wanted. What I see however is that the band, realizing how differently their work would come across without the central visual element, reworked their material to reflect an emphasis on sound alone. That explains the deliberate use of digital technology; that explains the 2x45 format, which is so rarely used. That also explains why there are pieces like "Cold Witness," that it seems to me would barely

translate to the stage at all. Finally, it explains why to this day the band performs the *original* versions of the pieces onstage, and why the album box included so much visual material. Test Department, and those working with them, know what they are doing.

This is the nature of their magic. Test Department is the vehicle of power. It sears through you like fire forever.

TEST DEPARTMENT IN NEW YORK CITY

Q: You have a postcard with the quote, "The Collective Art of Today is Constructive Life." What is that?

A: It's a well-known quote. We've taken it from the Constructivist movement.

Q: Some people make the argument that this sort of performing is relateable to Antonin Artaud's "Theater of Cruelty." Do you see any of that?

A: I like what he wrote. I think it was incredibly scary stuff. I like the imagery with which he wrote. But we're not intellectuals. Everyone comes with his own set of references, and does things in different ways. You can read into it what you like—the interests just appear to be what people want them to look like.

Q: What's this new video, *Program for Progress*?

A: It's eight separate film and video pieces, basically the last two year's work. Some are films that we use to project over us, and there's some new footage. There were three directors; Brett Turnbull, who wrote some formalized stuff, and another couple of people who worked with us in the studio, with work that was reset to music and film. The idea of the video itself is just image—it's not there as promotion. Some of that was shot on film and only transferred to video later.

Q: It looks like a good service was used—Polygram Video.

A: They were assholes, but they put up the money. They didn't understand what we were doing at all; all they ended up saying was, "It's got energy, and we respect it for that." And they knew they were getting something incredibly good for their money—they got eight films for what they usually spend on one video—plus two years of our work, and everybody here worked three months night and day, doing everything on an incredibly low budget. It's about forty-five minutes long, complete.

Q: On the "Compulsion" single, one side says "Machine Run" and the other "Human Run." Why?

A: One side's got synthesizer. We don't use synthesized effects ourselves.

Q: Do you think the single sold well?

A: No, we withdrew it from the market after two weeks. But it's just been repackaged and rereleased to come out with all our new recordings. The original design was never meant to come out in a gloss—they really fucked it up. Initially in Britain though it sold very fast, in a couple of months; so the interest has been building up. When it comes out again, it'll look much better, much closer to what we wanted.

Q: Have you changed the mix?

A: No; we've done [the] new recordings instead, all on digital.

Q: How do you feel about the single now?

A: We were too close to it. It sounds a lot stronger now, eight months away. I think it stands up really well. We'd spent a hundred hours on it, and it was fairly obsessive because it was the first thing we'd brought out in two years. It was remixed about five times, very extensively. Very expensively, too.

Q: What sort of work went into the new records?

A: Oh, completely different things from the single. We learned on that single. We had the opportunity, after signing with Phonogram, to do a digital recording, where you lost that natural compression that you get with analog—which is fine with normal sorts of instruments, but with our stuff, you want to bring that tone and resonance out.

Q: Do you like to work with or against distortion, or both ways?

A: Both ways. The effect of distortion reflects the way we're used to it.

Q: The big-assed argument when SPK's "Metal Dance" single came out was, "Oh, they've sold out!" How do you guys feel about that single?

A: When the 'metal groups,' as they were called by the press, first came to light there were us, Einstürzende Neubauten, and SPK, and it was as though we were all clumped together in some vague clustering; when really, we had nothing to do with one another. SPK came from Australia, Neubauten from Berlin.

Q: There are a lot of writers in this country that are so cynical that I don't know why they bother.

A: I wouldn't let these people get to us. That's just their lot in life, as far as I'm concerned.

Q: How long have you been playing together?

A: Since October 1981.

Q: How did you all meet?

A: Well, we all come from Southeast London, you see. Not originally, but we all sort of ended up there. I found myself there after having been on the dole. We couldn't afford proper instruments, so we got those there (pointing to the objects onstage). Southeast London is really run down. London is no longer a thriving port—there're acres and acres of dockland that are empty now.

Q: How did you get into this?

A: Lots of different influences. Everybody comes from different backgrounds. We just sort of tried things out, because it was really out of necessity; we didn't have the equipment. We just found lots of things lying around that made really good sound. Gradually we found more and more things that made good sound; originally we were using a lot of bass guitar just to lay a track down.

Q: Do you use it now?

A: No. We used to use the trappings of rock, but we dropped them fast. Eventually that just became totally redundant—we didn't need it. The more stuff we got, the stronger the sound became.

Q: Who have you toured with?

A: Well, this was actually the first time we'd left England, so that presented us with a whole load of new problems—but (until now) we've never played *with* anybody. It's always good to do diverse things with a different audience. There's no point to playing only in Danceteria. Every single group that comes through here has to play Danceteria. We did a string of dates at the end of last year that was like a tour, where we played regular 'rock' venues around the country, and you just feel like this week's attraction, the next thing. It undermines what you do. You have to deal with

the shit in the clubs. But we like to plan everything. Each event, when it's good, is the product of two-three months of planning, solidly. It's got to mean a lot more to the people who come.

Q: Whose idea was it to come and play in the US?

A: Friends of Stevo's. In our stance as beginners, our booking policy [into Irving Plaza, and later The Ritz] has gotten us into a stink with the powers that be. I admire their courage for doing it.

Q: What sort of stuff were you listening to when you got the band together?

A: [Smiling] Beethoven... lots of classical music. Not much pop stuff. Some soul. Our inspiration I think came more from our own environment than from music.

Q: Where do you see the group building to right now?

A: It continues to diversify from every single angle. We see every element of the organization through, from promoting the band to doing our own artwork, to putting on our own stage show, to designing our own slides and films for that particular show; fetching the equipment for that show, working solidly for three-four weeks getting fit for that show. We're dealing with the press ourselves, and we cover every single aspect. From that point of view, it's a question of continuing to find better and more relevant places for the band. On the records, it's a question of being open to every single possibility. We're just dealing with sound; with sound you can work with any instrument, you can do loops, or something straight, or bring in orchestral pieces. You can throw in anything you want. We're also beginning to work in theater and film soundtracks, which is very recent. So it just continues to move. I don't see that in a commercial sense, however.

Q: Did the Touch people contact you for a track?

A: It was a mutual friend who knew them. They came to us at a gig and said they

were interested.

Q: Did you have any expectations about American audiences?

A: We were pretty confident about it. I think they'd never have seen anything like it before. They didn't know what they were getting, so they would be more open, less fashion orientated; taking it more for what it is. The reaction was more pure. I'm glad that we had the opportunity to play dates first other than Danceteria, where you've written yourself off, really. In terms of sticking out, you're just another part of the business.

Q: In a statement in *Adventures In Reality* magazine, you had something about how rhythms affect the nervous system and the mind. Was that from a book, or did you write that?

A: Bits of that were taken from a book about the battle for the mind, basically the way in which rhythms can actually brainwash you.

Q: What is it about the environment that fosters all of this musical 'unrest'?

A: It is what it is. It's like going out to New Jersey or Brooklyn—there's just barrels and scrapyards and things broken down. I think if we'd done this in America instead of England we wouldn't have been noticed as much, because of the area. It depends also on the way you present yourself, on your potential to get through. When our video went out, on August 12 on MTV, it was such a shock... When you use the mass media, what you're doing should have integrity; and if there is enough difference and originality, it will mean something compared to the rest of the stuff that's on. So instead of adding to what's already there, you're setting up something that's really a solid alternative.

—Questions/Commentary: Carl Howard

—This article previously appeared in slightly different form in *Unsound* magazine.

COIL/CURRENT '93

When Psychic TV cracked in half early in 1984, that band was left a certainly depleted but still functioning unit, as evidenced by the three physical manifestations that have appeared since that time: the magnificent PTV package published by *Sordide Sentimentale*, the live-performance LP from the Berlin Atonal festival which also featured Z'ev, and the recent Temple Records single "Unclean." The *Berlin Atonal Vol. 1* LP informed that the PTV split marked "The end of the first phase, the scalpel cutting deep." With the second phase now in operation, our interest turns for the moment to the half that the scalpel cut away.

It turns out that between them, Peter 'Sleazy' Christopherson and Geff Rushton (or John Balance) have been responsible for about three different bands. Bands? More like minstrel information units. Going back as far as 1982, these two have surfaced in various incarnations as Coil, the earliest version of Current '93, and Zos Kia (is that spelled 20s Kia?). The actual breakdown, as we now know, goes like this: Coil is Christopherson and Balance; Current '93 in 1982 was Balance, David Tibet (the man with the thigh bones), and Fritz Haaman of 23 Skidoo. Zos Kia is or was Balance and a singer named Joan D'Arc.

Each unit has recordings, we also know, that either are or were available. Zos Kia shares a fine cassette with Coil called *Transparent*, from Vienna's Nekrophile Records. Central to this tape's appeal is a recording they use, on the cut "Truth," of Charles Manson—who over a five-minute or so 'speech' proves himself both a fairly intelligent and highly observant man, but one with strong senses of humor and history. He also turns out to be a fine orator, using the infectious rhythms of his voice and words to lend credence to his argument; basically that he was deliberately scapegoated by the American media far above and beyond the necessary.

Current '93 has among their releases (I'm going from least to most available) a cassette that they share with Nurse With Wound on a label called Mi-Mort; there is also work by Tibet and SPK's Sinan Leong on NWW's recent *Ostranenie 1913*. The piece on the Mi-Mort tape is the long yet minimal work of sound art named "Maldoror est Mort" (the piece appears also, of course, on their recent Laylah Records LP). That phrase actually appears on an inner groove of a new NWW recording, and I think primarily because one of the members of that group, Steve Stapleton, is close friends with Tibet, and is actually in the Current '93 line-up now.

A track called "Salt" was released in spring 1983 on the Touch cassette *Meridians One*, and it later resurfaced in a more appropriate context on the Laylah/Crepuscule EP *Lashtal*. Gongs, tapes, and percussion build like Buddhist ceremonial music, only to be cut suddenly to a chorus of Tibet's thigh bones and old recordings of magickal chanting by Aleister Crowley. I'm not at all sure, but I believe that these were roughly the last recordings ever done in England with the sacred human thigh bones, before the 1983 national law suddenly forbade their existence on British shores. Even copies of a PTV videocassette featuring the bones had to be hastily smuggled out of the country to escape confiscation and prosecution for the owners.

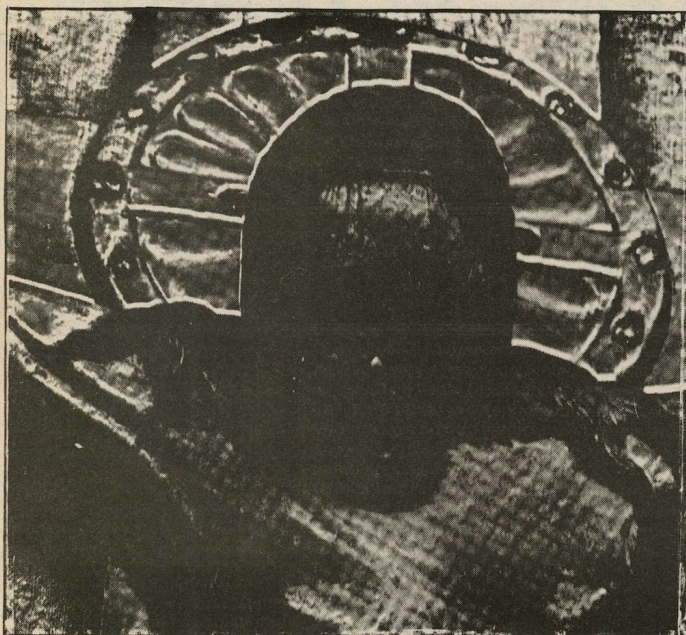
The third and final track of *Lashtal* is a short but meditatively beautiful piece named "Caresse," presumably in tribute to the birth of Genesis P-Orridge's baby daughter.

In 1984, Current '93 has been busy not only with recording but with an expansion of its ranks. A sampler LP on the New European Recordings label called *From Torture to Conscience* features two of their new tracks, "Christ's First Howling" and "Falling Back in Fields of Rape." Literature included with the record discloses that the band's present lineup, or "manifestation," includes Tibet (call him Tibet '93), Fritz Haaman, "A. Anxiety, The Youth, Steve Stapleton, I. Ducasse, J. Murphy," and someone calling himself Christ (unless they mean the Man Himself), along with their recording engineer Nick Rogers. That literature also disclosed for the first time the existence of the new Current '93 LP, *Nature Unveiled*, on Laylah. Here's where the group begins to warrant close scrutiny.

This recording, subtitled "AntiChrist Revealed," contains an elongated and thankfully remixed version of "Maldoror est Mort," with the title in English this time. Side B is devoted to the piece called "The Mystical Body of Christ in Chorazim," a piece that in its own way uses Christian liturgical music to construct new and explicitly spiritual sonic relationships. Of chief interest about this recording, to me, is the fact that it signals an important shift (perhaps evolution would be more accurate) of emphasis from Tibetan ritual—thigh bones are almost absent here—to a kind of crusade in pursuit of the mythological AntiChrist, with the specific intent of exposing him. This is where the figure of Lautremont's Maldoror becomes central,



John Balance/Sleazy Christopherson



Cover, *Nature Unveiled* by Coil

and this is why I. Ducasse is being credited as a band member. It is not, I feel, that a performer is using the pen name of the celebrated French poet/ writer, but that the creator of Maldoror is being considered important enough to the band's words and images to be revitalized by them in spirit. What I can't understand is an ad for the LP that had been included with the New European compilation; it lists nonexistent track titles like "Pale Lord/Pale Lamb/Pale Spirit/Pale Coat," and so on.

I feel it is most important about Current 93's new work that it signals a stretching of the field of interest 'covered' by the PTV/Coil/Tibet/Skidoo crowd. Explicitly, that is. Now on to Coil.

Coil seems to be the name that all future Christopherson/Balance projects will bear. Their first appearance on record was 1983's *Elephant Table* two-disc compilation, with a track called "Sis for Sleep." The track, it has been revealed, was really Balance performing alone. This is an extremely modest track with only bass and some synthesized percussion, and almost nothing about it that could have explained who Coil was, save for a double-exposure photo in the in the cover-sleeve gatefold with a man's face that upon closer inspection turned out to be Balance's; and a contact address that had previously been used as a locus for video and booklet sales (actually, John and Sleazy's London apartment). A much more auspicious release for Coil has been the recent "How To Destroy Angels," also on Laylah (which makes them something like the Label of the Year). A single, seventeen-minute piece, it is the convergence point of ancient gongs and modern tone generators. It can also be called 'sound art,' if one should favor such terminology, one in which the finished product of sounds is to be considered of less importance than its specific effects upon the listener. As the duo explains, the record is to be used "for the accumulation of male sexual energy:

The many varieties of religious music from around the world contain a vast quantity of clues to the way in which sound can affect the physical and mental state of the serious listener, yet many find their associations with the religion itself—the dogmatism of the churches and the obvious shortsightedness of many cult leaders and their followers—too difficult a stigma to overlook in their appreciation of sound and its potential, for its own sake. ... On this record, hopefully the first in a series, we have tried to produce sound which has a real, practical, and beneficial power in this modern Era. Specifically, it is intended as an accumulator of male sexual energy. Although we make neither claims nor rules for its use, we do suggest that for maximum potency it should only be played in circumstances that are exclusively male and/or onanistic in nature. What these are is entirely up to you.

It may well turn out that the exploded parts of Psychic TV will be or are already greater than the whole. As recording artists, PTV has released fine but heavily criticizable discs, while offering wonderful articles and live performances. For example, some reviewers and writers have indicated that their two studio LP's, *Force the Hand of Chance* and *Dreams Less Sweet*, are exercises largely of self-indulgence, what with the Holophonics and the hired choirs and all. Whether that criticism is valid or not is not up to me to decide. The *Sordide Sentimentale* single however, like the new 12" "Unclean," emphasize pure performance, with the usual assortment of background tapes; they are an economical stripping-down of their recorded style to one of raw energy and essential urgency. Likewise, the band's pulling-away from Stevo and Some Bizzare Records indicates a direction of the austerity that P-Orridge has always (in varying degrees) considered essential.

But terms like 'raw energy,' 'essential urgency,' and 'direction of austerity' are all terms that reviewers use—I don't like them myself. I don't think they mean anything. What I want to say is simply that I look forward to good recorded work from all of the parties in question, Current 93, Coil, and PTV, as well as NWW (who incidentally titled a recent composition, on *Three-Minute Symphonies*, "Antacid Cocamotive 93," so you can tell where their heads have gotten to), and that I hope to see any of these units reach this country soon.

—Carl Howard

What sort of man reads...



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THE ATTRITION OF REASON

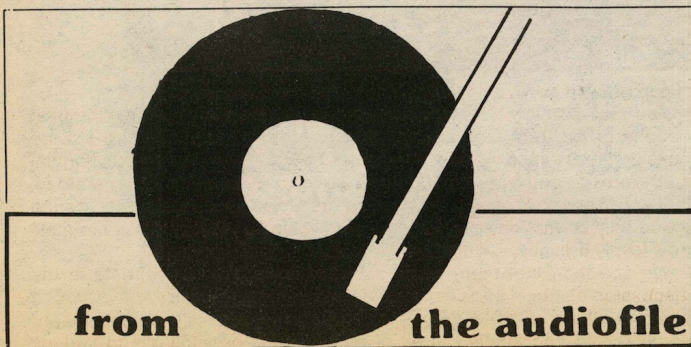
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INSTRUCTIONS ON ARTITUDE—

For it to be said right up front that the purpose of *Artitude—The Audiofile* magazine shall be to discuss the cultural phenomenon of intelligent recorded and live music, and for it to be said that it shall be the aim of this magazine to discuss it intelligently, above and beyond the adolescent teen-trendy writing styles of *Rolling Stone* and other popular rock n roll magazines, with all of their quick condemnations and lofty praises—in short their inability to write and think beyond the fixed and narrow realm of the most heavily judgemental—is going to require some quick elaborations.

For openers, while many of the writers appearing in this monthly magazine are not themselves musicians, they are also not frustrated garage-band teenagers who never made it big, and are now going to wreak their revenge upon those who have. In fact, the aim of this magazine shall be to scrutinize the work of those who by and large haven't made it big, may never make it big, and probably aren't looking to, either, for they harbor other objectives that we feel are even more noteworthy. But we are also not frustrated intellectuals. We are not snobs, and we do not call ourselves connoisseurs of smart music, or better music. What this magazine is setting out to do, primarily, is discuss intelligent attitudes and approaches to sound, and to write about them with a command of the English language befitting their station.



We also do not make the mistake of calling ourselves radicals, or extremists, or political, or even different. We are not here to make statements to everyone. We are not here to prove to people that their listening/buying habits are "wrong;" in fact we realize that the only reason a Ger-sis P-Orridge can make money on a record is that the popular record industry is successful enough to be able to distribute recording technology widely. And this is as it should be; the millions of people who enjoy pop music have all chosen what they have for a reason that is just as valid as another person's, be it one who selects Crass or MDC records, or one who pays \$65 and up for seats in Carnegie Hall or the Winter Garden Theater—they glean something positive from the experience.

Should the question arise, however, "What kind of music? What kind of approach?" then we will have to step back. Shall we first assume that Music is, so we suppose, an Art form; an artistic endeavor. Fine. But first, let's examine this assumption closely. We need to define our terms exactly, with an eye towards determining which is ethnocentric convention, and which is universal constant. If the attempt is to align music within the spectrum of Art, then we should know precisely what we mean by art.

If we dig deep, we find that as much as no definition of Art exists as a universal constant, or concept or construct, no soul worth his weight in sand would even attempt such a lofty and hardy task as creating a 'definition.' Yet we in our sheltered and over-intellectualized West, with all our greatest periods of post-medieval reeducation behind us, seem satisfied enough to set a definition of Art in concrete. It still remains unquestioned by some that there actually *is* something called Art, and that it is a noun, despite all the best efforts by twentieth century art movements to speak for its reinterpretation on a mass scale as a *verb* at least; not a thing frozen in time and mind, but a flowing process of communication and reference—a basic construct in our language, and a frame of mind.

The 'revelation' that art is but a frame of mind that we in the west entertain reminds us of its mortality—its ephemeral nature—and paves the way for new kinds of art forms to be accepted as valid, and to be considered as worthwhile as any other, such as Art Brut, Theater of Cruelty, Dada/ Absurdist art, Surrealism, and moveable and self-destroying sculpture. The nihilist sculpture of Marcel Duchamp, like the more recent work by Los Angeles builder Mark Pauline, not only satirizes the true nature of the so-called "Anti-Art" by deliberately refusing to exist long enough to be studied, but points out our self-destructive reactions against artistic permanence, and returns creative energies to their more primeordial origins in instantaneous experience, ritual, and spectacle, and to their function as spiritual and/or metaphorical release agent; that is, as a catalyst for the simultaneous and spontaneous exaltation of anger or joy.

So, then, Art becomes not as is commonly believed the created thing itself ("a work of Art") but the act or the study of creating—in neither case something to be set in stone as "noun." In this context, the destructive performances of Dada become central; this is the context in which the lines between the acts of creation, destruction, and the combination of the two become at once blurred, and in which both become at once equally valid and nullified. The phrases "All in the name of Art" and "Art for Art's Sake" show how purely extravagant the distinction—Art—can become. This situation also illuminates something of the nature of nihilist art, chiefly that it unconsciously identifies our own confusion in our over-complex culture.

But we have learned that nihilist art, like the 'ultimate Surrealist act' of shooting people in the street at random (from a high building as enacted by Luis Bunuel in his 1974 film *The Phantom of Liberty*) leaves us empty, and in fact the major failure of the Surrealist movement was its inability to inspire pure spectacle and ritual; its inability to act upon its own proclamations. We therefore assume that Art + *verb* is as incomplete a definition as Art + *noun*. For what is the art of Rembrandt but the sum of his works and the aesthetics of his technique and philosophy—collections both, and therefore nouns.

Another distinction frequently made yet rarely questioned becomes visible in headlines and titles such as: "Pablo Picasso--His Life and Art." This distinction seems to me most unsavory; something riddled with pretention. It presupposes that we stop living when we start painting, or sculpting, or writing, and that "real life" resumes when we stop tinkering. To *do* is different than to *be*, and vice versa, and so we assume that creating is something exaltable or instantly discreditable, depending on who you are. And why the high price on Art, anyway? Is it held in universal esteem? Even in New York City in 1984, we hear of pompous pretenders to intellectualism referred to as "arty types" and "artsy-fartsy." Those are the descriptions given to those who insist on bantering technicalities like those being discussed coincidentally in *this* article. In addition, artful nature have traditionally been held in low regard by upper classes. In Jane Austen's *Emma*, written as long ago as 1816, we read several times of people being complemented for their "artless natures" and their "artless splendor," suggesting that artiness was a quality that removed one from the dictates of sheer practicality.

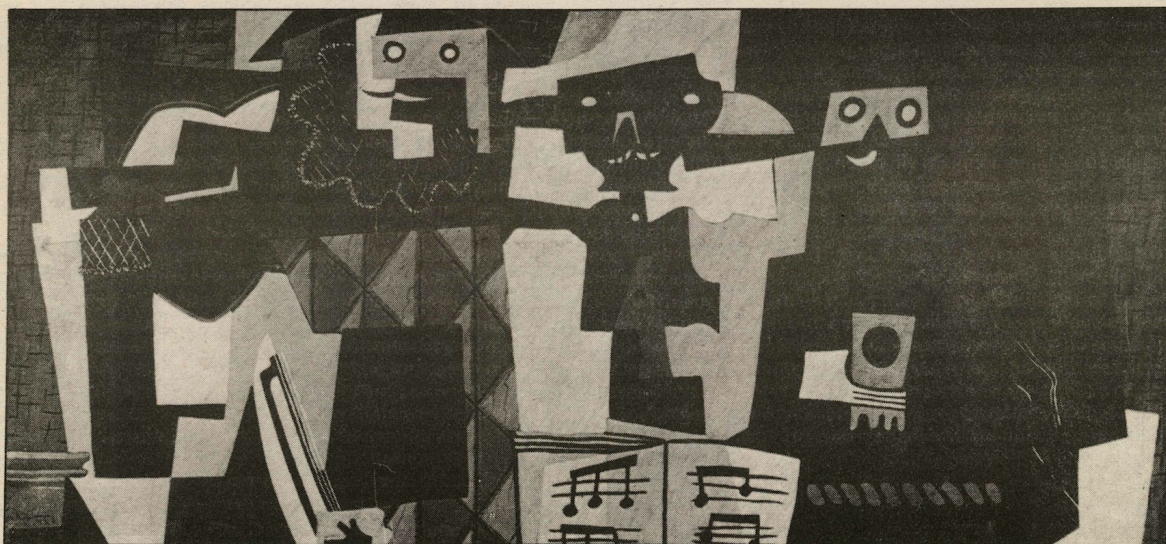
So why is Art so highly prized over all other things, though, granted, only by the Educated? From their origins, creative works served to record society and to freeze it for future generations. That we have been able to completely decode an artifact like the Rosetta Stone is a miraculous testament to the timelessness not of art but of language, of *communication*. We say that works of art are most finely rendered by master artists such as Renoir, and yet we find instances in which history has been more precisely represented and more brilliantly preserved in the crude scrawl of children and the scratching of madmen. Let us not forget either that in the "primitive" societies of tribesmen, the craftsman of a clay head or wooden spirit pole is considered not someone special or different, but on equal footing with the woodcarver, the weaver, the priest, and the maker of medicines. There the crass distinction between Art and Life vanishes, for indeed they are one.

Also, while we ourselves might find nothing particularly 'artistic' about the construction of a brick office building, to a future observer these brick saltboxes would constitute the art of our architecture. And finally, let us remember that the word art stretches not only to artisan and artifact, but to artifice, which we abhor. And to me, considering "What is Art?" inevitably leads to the more narrow-minded question, "What is *not* Art?," an angle that condones needlessly judgemental snobbery and/or dangerous discrimination and prejudice.

We observe then that whatever art is—perhaps it is nothing more than man's own manipulation of materials; the things he contrives into structures that play upon our senses of *convention*, in which case it is something as purely unfixed and subjective as ever it would seem to be—it is not something universally upheld or esteemed absolutely, or even considered completely appropriate. So before we attempt to describe music as a subcontext of Art and Art alone, let it be pointed out that music is something of a different matter from art, something that only the modern west has ever linked with art. Music evolved in order to structure the language of our rituals (or so we assume), with rhythms to align chanted sounds to the beating of our hearts, and to the pulsing of our various systems. Not consciously, of course. Music is something more appropriate universally, I would say, than even art. Yet in its 'primitive' form it is also something inextricable from everyday life—and to those among us who enjoy music in daily activity it remains so; the difference is simply that music may come from a radio rather than from our physical selves, even though it would appear that like all creativity the impetus lies in our collective subconscious—the unspoken channel of universal communication that gives us our worldwide unity and similarity of cultural purpose: survival.

But now we return to the idea of redefining our terms. Some consider music a subcategory of Art. Others think differently. Why might this be? A definition of music is called for. Unless we can positively identify music as an Art form, something with precisely the same purpose as Art, we may run

WHAT IT IS AND HOW TO USE IT



Detail, "Three Masked Musicians," Pablo Picasso 1921

into trouble trying to join one to the other. I contend that whatever it is that music is held to be, I can break it down smaller, into more minute units of subject matter, and identifiable any number of ways, together and separately.

In the nineteenth century, it was taken for granted that western music consisted of ordered sequences of pure, preordained tones in structures deliberately aligned with convention. It was not until the 1950's that the general public had even the slightest inkling that music could possibly be any different, but of course by then it was too late—John Cage and others had already exploded this definition from the inside out. Prior to their explorations, it was accepted unquestioningly in the west that if a musician produced upon his instrument the note C—by convention a pure tone with a particular frequency, nothing more—then *that* was making music. But just as in the situation in which "What is Art?" leads to the more dangerous query "What is it not?", were the same note C to be produced on a busy street by the meeting of a squeaky fruit-cart wheel and a car horn, it would no longer be considered music. Why? More prudery of convention. But today, we accept that, for example, recordings of Cage's *Variations IV* and Edgar Varese's "Poeme Electronique" are to be found in the *music* section of a record store, and not down under Sound Effects—regardless of the fact that both pieces can be naively interpreted as explorations of pure sound, alone. This does not make us more enlightened, merely more attuned to the changeable nature of music, to its ability to be different things at the same time. Our modern access to worldwide media phenomena has allowed us to view an entire world's worth of different uses for music, making it universal, whereas the concept of Art, as I've said, is not.

This means that we have at our disposal as many different ways of interpreting whatever it is we hear, as there are ways of using sound. For example if we discuss the effect of inflicting fifteen hours worth of a particular dissonant chord sequence on a retired and conservative community, we are discussing psychology, and perhaps politics as well. So music becomes more appropriate to a psychological categorization than to an artistic one. If we observe the rhythmic chants of an anti-nuclear rally or the slow ballads 1960's peace movements, we have bordered again upon the territory of political science. Our discussions of any particular ethnic musical background can be limited to the sociological. If we discuss the therapeutic or hypnotic aspect of a song, or if we focus upon the high frequency of tendon-snapping by careless breakdancers, our concern may be medical. If I break down our western musical scale to nothing more than a series of printed symbols, with each referring to the production of a specific tone and the lengths of time in which it is to be produced; if I observe the visual and aural alphabets that comprise our musical language, so that each performed musical phrase becomes no more than a decoding in sound of a particular written text, then music has become a subject to be considered under the category of linguistics. Along these lines, we can recognize instantly that the "call and response" format of black gospel music, the follow-the-leader form of a round like "Row Your Boat," or the interwoven textural harmonies of a Bach oratorio are also but creatures of pure intercommunication. However, if I then make the distinction that the language of compact discs, as its signal is decomposed in recording, reduces music to a series of almost arbitrary one's and zero's, then we've entered into the purview of purely scientific discussion. Now music isn't Art at all; it's Science. This was what I'd meant by whatever music is held to be,

"I can break it down smaller."

You may show me how a piece of music exalts itself to our highest notions of Art, but I can say: But art is so changeable. Will it still be considered so tomorrow? It will, however, be worthy of socio-psychological study forever. And I can say: But where such and such a piece originated, there is no notion of an aesthetic called Art. A piece to be performed during a Buddhist cremation ceremony did not evolve to show American tourists how lovely the music sounds.

We see then that there is no one structure more appropriate to the discussion of music and the study of it than *the category of music itself*, a place in which all of its values can be weighed equally, and declared equally valid and studied in all of their various applications to various disciplines—and without worrying whether a piece's structure is in alignment or disalignment with certain subjective conventions of Art. This is the only way in which music can be objectively studied, without having it fall under the vague and vain categorizations of something that is itself in too much constant flux to be able to be pinned down—and that is art. We must break free finally of the notion that Art has the right to order and pattern events for us, and to declare them universally applicable or inapplicable; and that it has the right to force us to accept only those sounds (or images) that appear to it 'Artistic,' and to reject out of hand all of those which do not. Only in this way can we hope to purge the elitism and discrimination from our judgement that only serves to make us seem naive later on, and only in this way can we begin to understand the equal validity of every cultural statement.

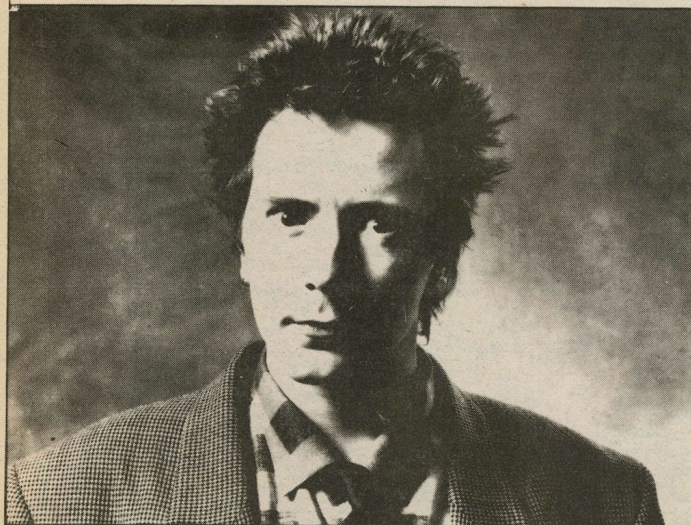
Finally, it appears to me that while Art now feels justified in imposing its most severe demands of quality upon music, history tells us that even this may be viewed as a compromise on its part: We know that there was a time in our not-too-dim past when Art found no use for music at all, when wandering minstrels were as unwanted vagrants in a township. But music has survived as well as predated every prejudice inflicted upon it by western Art; friendly and otherwise. If music is indeed to be aligned with our spectre called Art, then it must be remembered that Art has been and will always be a harsh, untrustworthy, and most fickle mistress.

But I know that music itself is a more careful protector of its own best interests. I see that all elements of music build up to a vocabulary of a language, and that we can accept simple southern Blues guitar as being as expressive and functional as the most awe-arousing symphony. Music, like English or French, may be a language from which we simply expect too much. Just as our most complex form of literature, that of poetry, has often lost sight of the fact that the original function of the linguistic medium was as the carrier of *basic* information, so we also have placed too high our expectations of what music *must* do. It is not that languages *must* do anything, but that they can and will do whatever they want and need to do. This we call practical evolution. If we deem a sound grating or unpleasant or incomprehensible, the answer is not to dismiss them, but to observe them differently. This is the distinction that allows an American of the late twentieth century to call himself not only New Yorker, or American, but a being of the entire world. This is the only perception left that can carry us from prejudice to world survival.

And now you know what *Artitude/Audiophile* would like itself to stand for.

—Carl Howard

JOHNNY ROTTEN



At twenty-seven, Johnny Rotten has become much wiser about the music industry. In a PIL shirt beneath a tweed jacket of soft wool, he answers questions with a perfect blend of sarcasm and wit. Calmly he faces those who have gathered to speak with him, in the offices of Warner Records/New York.

Public Image Limited (PIL) was formed in 1978, two years after the controversial Sex Pistols. Although the band has gone through many personnel changes, founding members Johnny Rotten (or Lydon, depending upon the current legal situation) and Martyn Atkins remain as the foundation. *This is What You Want... This is What You Get* is PIL's sixth album. Even though Keith Levine is no longer with the group, his name crops up in the songwriting credits of five out of the eight cuts.

This album is very different from the group's previous records; but then again this can be said for almost all of the Public Image records. Rotten described *This is What You Want...* as a dual record, with "one side being more PIL'ly and the other being more danceable. The title came out of cynicism, mixed with a little bit of irony and a little bit of humor."

"This is Not a Love Song," on the LP, is a remixed version of the original single. "Even though some might feel that the addition of a brass section takes away some of the cutting edge," remarked the singer, "I felt the old version was a bit slack, and not tight enough."

"1981" is about leaving England," says Rotten, adding however that he also feels that "the lyrics apply more to England now than ever before. It's really become a 1984 type of police-state. I don't want to go back there. Home is where the heart is, according to me; that's why I like to move around so much."

"New York has been my favorite, but there are so many distractions. When I first came here I thought that I would get a lot of work done. I was wrong. In LA there are absolutely no distractions—just that damned sun. Italy was all right for a while."

This man thrives on change. "1981" and "The Pardon" recall "The Flowers of Romance" in mood. Others, such as "Bad Life," "This is Not a Love Song," and "Tie Me to the Length of That" are indeed danceable, yet contain 'pessimistic' lyrics. Musically, these songs move right along with Atkins' kinetic drumming style, while "The Order of Death..." drones on with winding guitars and a hypnotic chant of the album's title.

Q: Is PIL becoming more commercial, or is the public catching up?

A: The public is probably catching up, since I don't go out of my way to sound like everybody else—which is what the word commercial implies. There's nothing wrong with being accessible. But the term 'commercial' implies that you're going out of your way to be accessible. No two albums I've done sound quite the same; I like to flirt with all kinds of styles, shapes, and forms of music. That's what I have been doing and will continue to do.

Q: This record seems like the most danceable one you've ever done.

A: I consider all of my work to be danceable, even if you happen to be a geriatric. The basic message that I want to get across to people is entertainment. I am not negative, even though everybody may think I am. I think it's very positive to go out and look for change. I'm fairly serious about the kind of music I do. I work to the best of my ability; amusement is part of it. I wouldn't make music to torture myself.

I have not and will not compromise my values. I would rather not make a record than make a compromise. I've lost many record contracts on account of that, but I'm still here. Elektra [UK] has signed me to do three records without any rush. They seem to be much more open than all the other major labels.

The only way I've been able to last so long is through sheer persistence. I will not go away. I'll win eventually, even if I have to drag you all into submission. I'm not looking to be Number One; I'm quite happy to be somewhere inbetween. Major success tends to destroy people very quickly. It's so easy to be corrupted by success.

Q: What kind of support do you get in England?

A: I get no support whatsoever from the English press. The media and the press have a definite grudge against me. People have been my biggest supporters.

Q: Has your opinion of the record industry changed at all since signing to a major label?

A: No, my opinions are the same. Record companies tend to support you after becoming a success, rather than before. It's still very difficult for new bands.

Q: How do you feel about the punk movement?

A: I think that it's quite bad in a way. It's like the *National Enquirer*. Hardcore is an imitation of what has been done a long time ago in the right environment. It's bad to

see middle-class kids trying to be working-class. Why bother? Be what you are; that should be good enough. The tragedy is that they all tend to wear the same leather jackets—they might as well be in the army! It's just a uniform; no identity. All these rebels are nothing more than mass conformists. Originally, the punk movement was about individuality. Unfortunately people have treated it like a bandwagon.

Musical barriers should be broken down; things are too clearly defined. You really can't tell the difference between the music of Black Flag and heavy metal. Only the hairstyles are different. These bands are just preaching to themselves.

Q: Do you feel that music can change things?

A: Music has changed things very little, except in fashion. You can't expect you Van Halen records to change your life.

I'll win eventually, even if I have to drag you all into submission.

Johnny Rotten, 1984

Q: What ever happened to the film you starred in?

A: *Corrupt* was poorly promoted. In Europe it was treated as a video, and did even worse. "The Order of Death" was to be the theme for *Corrupt* but the Italians didn't like it. I thought the soundtrack was dreadful. It was a very difficult experience. When you're doing a film you can't work a twelve-hour schedule seven days a week and then go to the studio to record, run all the business, and sort out record contracts besides.

Q: Why did Jah Wobble leave the band?

A: He left because he wanted to play jazz. It was a mutual parting with no hard feelings. He's made quite a few good records and he's happy doing what he's doing.

Q: What do you think about Martyn Atkins' band Brian Brain?

A: They're like the Monty Pythons of music. I don't like his stuff very much. But we're a liberal organization; he can do his own stuff.

Q: What type of processes do you go through to prepare for an album?

A: Some songs I write before I go into the studio, while others are obvious studio productions. "Tie Me to the Length of That" had to be a studio piece. Sometimes I start a song by fiddling around with a new piece of equipment. I come up with a little ditty and then do layers on top of that. That's the way I prefer to do it. When a song is manufactured before I go into the studio, a lot is lost. The vocals are added before the layering process.

I really do like studio recording. The less you know about the equipment the better. The difficult thing is that you tend to run out of money about halfway through these wonderful ego trips. Recording costs are far too high in America. It's cheaper for me to fly the band to London and stay in a swank hotel for four months.

When I'm working on an album I like to start with a target-number of songs. If it goes over, we plan for a double record. Anything that isn't used is kept in storage until the next album. "1981" is from the old master tapes. If there are too many tracks, it's worthwhile bringing in your mates, and to get their opinions.

—Commentary/some questions: Carol Anastasio

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leave. A white pigeon appeared and at the hunter's request flew away and returned with a knife enabling the hunter to cut the snake out of his pants. The hunter then captured the pigeon despite the favor. A little cricket came to the rescue by jumping into the eye of the hunter, forcing the hunter to release the pigeon. The pigeon turned around and ate the cricket.

Moral: Good deeds are often returned by bad deeds.

Such straightforward genius, such subtlety of wit is not to be found in our own fables. Strangest of all perhaps is what we discover of the work of the Tumi people: "All Tumi men are harp-lute players and the women are specialists in clitorrectomy. Due to their highly specialized occupations, Tumi families settle in villages of other ethnic populations." This is the music and these are the people of the grasslands of Upper Volta, and we extend to them also the hope that their living heritages may remain intact. Next record:



An Island Carnival

□ **Music of the West Indies.** First, you should see this record's liner notes. You could make a fairly-sized dime novel out of them. Tens of thousands of words to look at, and all of them interesting. The works here were recorded from 1969 to 1973 in the Lesser Antilles, and released originally in Sweden in 1977. Again, unfortunately, the pieces are prevented from extending their durations to longer than five minutes, courtesy of early fadeouts; and as a result it is possible for it to take longer to read the notes for a piece than to hear it.

What comes across more than anything else is the international flavor of this

music. Read some more liner notes:

For over half a millenium, the region has been lost to a continuous ebb and flow of human migration that has left in its wake a kaleidoscope of cultural hybrids... The centuries of colonization that followed [Columbus' arrival on the island in 1492] saw Spanish, French, British, Dutch, Portuguese, Danish, Swedish, and other European nations vying for influence in the region... The musical mix embraces traditions with strong African characterizations in instrumentation, musical organization, and social function, others deriving directly from British song and dance pieces such as the jig, reel, and quadrille, others of a more syncretic hybrid (calypso and steel drum, for example), and in Trinidad, musics transplanted from the Orient.

Yet the music for all of this retains the 'simpleness' and the wholesomeness of folk music, being frequently performed upon home-made instruments, with different kinds of drums, guitars, flutes, and other string instruments. On some pieces the tint is distinctly Hispanic, while others are far more 'tribal'-sounding in nature, and by that I mean African. One piece, a children's song from St. Vincent, is recited during a marriage/kissing game, in English: "Somebody, ah mouchay, somebody mentioned marry-o/Somebody, ah mouchay, somebody said that *she* can go..." The game is played by children in a ring, and the person that *she* is chosen to be goes around the ring selecting a kissee to her kisser. In a song of the La Rose Society of St. Lucia, a woman singing to the accompaniment of a man and his ukelele, sounds like a young Bob Dylan, really, so help me.

For all of the joyous festivity of the pieces of the first side, it is the second side that is the more interesting, and the more intense. It begins with a vibrant chant to Shango, the thunder god of Trinidad's Yoruba people. This is followed by a recording in a Baptist church on the same island. The question-answer relationship between the congregation leader and his assembled is strikingly familiar to us, with our own Southern Baptist and Gospel churches. Indeed, all that these particular Baptists are missing is the obligatory Hammond organ.

Swinging wildly, this is followed on the record by a Hindu (!) epic song of Guadeloupe, and by straight drum music from, again, Trinidad. Finally, we hear from Tobago a distinctly Africanized version of a Scottish reel. We read that this dance has come to be associated with local traditions, with the ghost (or spirit) dance.

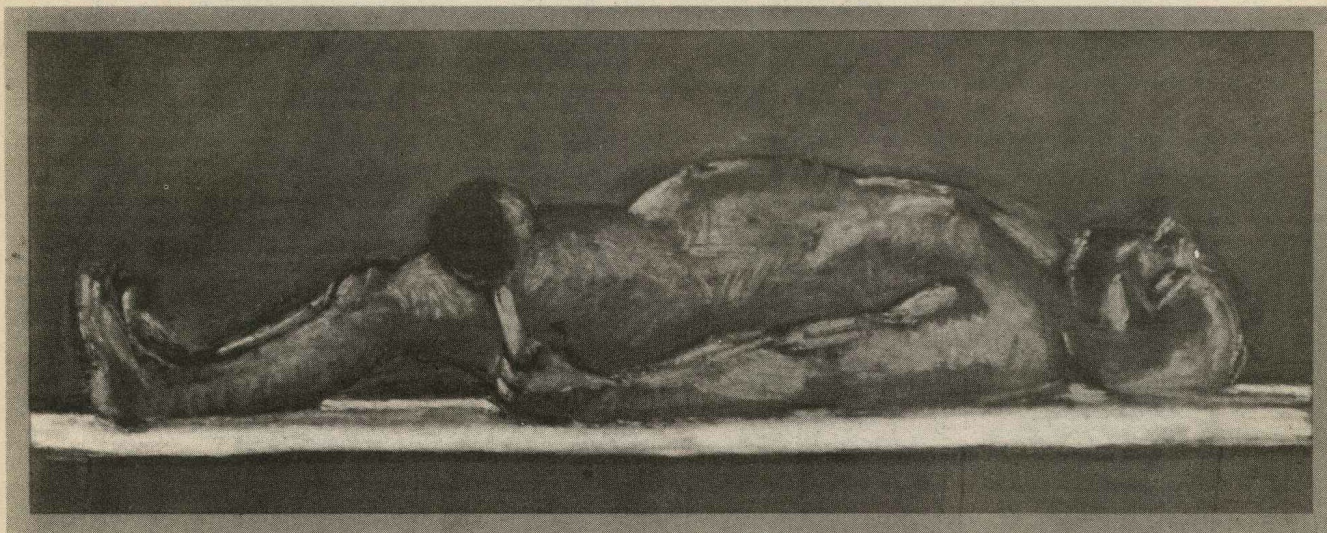
The sophistication and subtlety with which the European song has melded with the African, in this folk music, is quite surprising; so much so, I would say, that as compared to the attempts of American and British popular musics to integrate international styles, our own come off as something at once naive and embarrassing, and anyway glaringly obvious. Perhaps what we need is a few hundred years more to practice.

The newest Explorer record to be released, in September 1984 to be exact, is *Samul-Nori: Drums and Voices of Korea*. Since 1978, the ensemble Samul-Nori has specialized in the performance of Korean folk music, and their success has been something like unprecedented. Not immediately available for review by this magazine, it shall be —hopefully— in a subsequent issue. From a blurb I have on it (and no, I won't reprint *that*, too), it really looks interesting.

Let this article suffice as your long-winded introduction to what is quite an exciting series of recordings. The wide range of selections, the quality of them, the great availability of them, and their inexpensive cost make them worth the while of anyone with both the interest and the money. And without the money, I'm sure a library card can make them available as well. Either way, the experience of listening to music like this can be most assuredly, for shut-in city folk like us, fantastic in all the senses of the word.

—Carl Howard

SKELETON CREW



How many groups can Fred Frith be said to have been in? Let's see—there's The Art Bears, The Golden Palominos, Massacre, Material, Henry Cow... Endless list.

In some groups he sings, in others not. In some he uses the now-popular technique of real-time improvisation, in others not. His latest collaborative work is with Tom Cora, a fine progressive cellist from the New York City area (where else?) whose work includes a recording with David Moss on Rift Records. The Frith/Cora duo, called Skeleton Crew, did a show last summer in Greenwich Village, with Arto

Lindsay's Ubiquitous Lovers and James Blood Ulmer— a fantastic show that apparently every interested party but myself saw. Ouch. (Ouch city.)

This performance was only one show in a tour that spanned, literally, the globe (I didn't see any of *those* shows, either). It would be nice if all that work and commitment could have something at least as semi-permanent as vinyl to show for it. But lo! This it does! Skeleton Crew's *Learn to Talk*, recorded in Switzerland, is a Rift/Recommended coproduction, so you know that Chris Cutler has to be

NONESUCH EXPLORER



How fortunate for you that you have selected this article; having done so means that you may have just come to your last hour of ignorance of a superior collection of records called the Explorer Series, by Nonesuch. If you're familiar with any of these discs, you might be aware that they are part of a marvelous line of ethnic-music LP's that began in the mid-1960's with *The Soul of Flamenco*—Spanish, obviously, and most of the Explorer releases since then have thankfully featured more esoteric musical styles. I say thankfully, for the surveying ear of Explorer now reaches the entire world, with the (curious) exception of North America—an area vastly covered however by the tape recorders of Folkways and New World Records, two labels which also feature fine ethnic collections.

It has not been uncommon for it to be reported to me that an Explorer record has uplifted a listener into a fantastic state, whether the record be Sufi music from Pakistan or *Music for the Balinese Shadow Play*—all the records are so well produced and recorded as to drift the listener into a kind of effortless state of audition, one in which the noisier and intellectualizing quadrants of the mind become relaxed and at peace. It is also not uncommon for the sentiment to be voiced, after hearing one of the almost one hundred recordings of this series, that "There is simply no reason to ever own any other record." Such sentiments are slightly tongue in cheek, of course.

Like to tell you about three of these records, the most recent of the line:

Spring Night on a Moonlit River

□ **Music of the Chinese Zither**, Professor Louis Chen (Chen Lei-shi), Gu Zheng. The music contained here literally covers a time span of about fifteen hundred years, as performed gorgeously in New York City in March 1982 by Professor Chen. That the untrained ear (either of mine) can ascertain no distinct changes of style during these fifteen hundred years stands as a testament to the timelessness of China's traditions. Certainly, or at least hopefully, even the ear untrained to the music of the west could discern the difference between a gregorian chant and a hard-rock song. Surprisingly, the first piece on the record, "Hungry Horse/Jingling Bells," is not ancient and traditional at all, but composed by the Cantonese He Liutang in the 1920's. And, we are told, "This piece has been popular among communities of Cantonese people in cities like Canton, Hong Kong, Taipei, and the Chinatowns of North America." The remainder of the pieces on the disc are more traditional.

The liner notes on Explorer records are almost as a rule fascinating. Those of *Spring Night on a Moonlit River*, by Ted Lipman (a real Chinese name) and Ton Kin-Woon are fantastically illuminating. One needs but to quote:

The Chinese character "gu" means ancient, while that for "zheng" can be translated as zither, which in China is known to have between thirteen and twenty-five strings... The Gu Zheng developed as a folk instrument, rather than one patronized only by the feudal gentry... The different styles of playing [determined by locality] were presented in various forms of notation, traditionally based on the use of Chinese to represent different notes. The diversity of styles and notation, some dating to before the Tang Dynasty, and the fact that there was no "official" unified form of writing down the music, suggest that the Gu Zheng was a widespread and popular folk instrument with a long and rich history.

The Gu Zheng itself is one with a resonant and airy tone, flowing with a relaxing beauty rather than the more ghostly quality we sometimes associate with the Japanese koto. Many of the song titles echo that sense of the beauty of nature so particularly Chinese: "Autumn Moon in the High Palace;" "High Mountains and Running Water;" "The Crow Playing on Winter River;" "Deep Midnight." Chen executes the pieces magnificently—as befits an international performer of his caliber—lending to the instrument a kind of back-country sense, the stream always babbling down the mountainside, and plucking the strings with a pristine eloquence. How strange it is to occasionally hear note-slurs like those we associate with folk-blues, banjo and guitar! It's that *twang* that suddenly gains a universality, and it's a most unusual feeling.

The only conceivable flaw in listening to these records, with their typically perfect pressings, comes when the last note of the last piece has been sounded, and your needle hits the wall of the inner groove and/or RETRACTS. This is jarring, but only because it reminds us that we've been listening to a record—the performers haven't been sitting three feet away. Kind of shatters the fantasy, but certainly, given the quality of the discs as a whole it's perfectly "forgivable"—that is assuming you're usually inclined to hold a grudge against these things.

The liner notes to *Spring Night* close on a highly disturbing note:

...the '60's and '70's were...times of rapid economic growth in both Taiwan and Hong Kong and, as is typical during such periods of rapid absorption of Western technology and economic systems, the traditional culture, music in particular, gave way to Western tastes newly acquired by the younger generation... Therefore, the music recorded on this album represents an art which is being maintained by literally a handful of old masters, like Professor Louis Chen.

As it happens, while copying that section I was listening to some 'modern' Indian

music on the radio: bass guitar, trumpet, Simmons drum smash, and synth keyboard. If this is the future, the sound of one-world music, then our tastes and technologies have done the world a grave injustice, in making available a culture that perhaps shouldn't have been made so available. Music's ethnicity must not be allowed to die so easily, and especially not in favor of this kind of sound.



Rhythms of the Grasslands

□ **Music of the Upper Volta, Volume II**. Trek we now half way across the surface of the globe, without having ever left our chair (sit down). What is obvious is that in the move from the Orient to Africa there will be an immediate exchange of instruments from the 'sophisticated' to the 'primitive'—that is, it's drums that are primary to the language of traditional music on the African continent. There are exceptions to this, of course.

Certainly the Chinese zither is an instrument to be played before a large gathering, whether it be as small as would be indicated by its apparent folk origin, or as large as that which would fill a modern concert hall; but these African instruments beat out the stirring rhythms of tribal rituals, and may therefore be called more communal. For the most part it is communal gatherings that are recorded here. The rhythms and instruments, and indeed the ceremonies themselves (all recorded for Nonesuch about eleven years ago) are unmistakably African, and yet there are in the inflections of the vocalists the subtle, quarter-tone shifts that we consider principally Arabic. This is unusual as well.

The musicians heard on the record are respected performers, but they are far from international *virtuosi* in the sense of Louis Chen. They are known rather within their own sphere, and called on to perform during such festive (or otherwise) occasions as manifest themselves during the course of an ordinary year. Then also, some of the musicians are simply townspeople, performing for recreation. The range of instruments used is wide and delightful and it is but a shame that each cut lasts no longer than four minutes. Again, the fantasy is slightly shattered; I could see giving ten to fifteen minutes for each performance, all of which are riveting and quite accessible to our own musical world of rhythm (indeed, the debt we owe is so great, and growing greater all the time).

Once again we find fascinating liner notes:

...Musical traditions [of the region] reflect both the indigenous religious contexts and the court music sustaining the prestige of prominent political lineages.

Musically speaking, this area is strong in drumming traditions, including cylindrical wood and spherical gourd and pressure drums... solo lute and fiddle music also occur, as do ensembles of oblique flutes. Xylophones are found in the western Voltaic cultural area.

In the northern Sahel region the music traditions of nomadic herding groups, such as the Fulani, Bella, and Toureg are heard... drums are rarely found here. The music reflects Islamic influences from North Africa carried across the Sahara with the trade caravans.

Some of the ceremonies heard here are fairly unusual, even for their culture. We hear for example the enthroning of a new county chief, in May 1975, in which the attending crowd numbered in the thousands. In another circumstance, thirteen Samo girls dance and perform a song with a melody that is the same as that of "Do the Locomotion" (no, I don't think they realize it...!) During a strange Mossi funeral ritual for a local chief, as we read: "To provide refuge for [the spirits of all villages who died during the reign of the chief] during the funeral, many small huts of woven grass were placed in a nearby field. The Mossi believe that a dog should accompany his master into the afterlife; thus the dog's head with an egg in its mouth...the egg represents the cock which was sacrificed at the time of the actual death." And there, for all non-believers to see, is a photo of that dog's head—skewered on a stick, eyes rolled back, and egg in its mouth.

There is also a piece here for voice and one-string fiddle called "Song of Ingratitude." We read that this is the performer's favorite fable; perhaps reading an account of the fable itself will show us why:

One day while in the forest, a hunter encountered a snake who asked him for some fire. The hunter had fire in his sack but the snake refused to enter. Instead the snake climbed into the hunter's pants. Soon after, the hunter decided to rid himself of the snake, but the snake refused to

somewhere in all of this.

The Skeleton Crew Frith is the one that sings and that does not perform upon the tabletop—this being not far from the Frith which produced *Cheap at Half the Price*, which a WKCR DJ told me was deliberately pissed out in a huff at Ralph Records, who were holding a contractual obligation or something at him. I don't mind this Frith especially, but it is not my favorite version of the man.

But that is of no consequence. Most rock writers base their criticism not upon actual analysis, but upon personal prejudice. I dislike that—I find it shallow. To me, if you're going to have an opinion, have it; but don't thrust it forward and call that analysis. Saying "the play was boring—I fell asleep" is not the same as doing your homework on the play, as a journalist. But I digress (as usual).

Frith's lyrics, though, can be witty at times (if you can suffer them—but that's my prejudice again); and his singing voice is harsh but improved. An example of these lyrics comes from the title cut: "Learn to talk/Your friends will be amazed!" Now, there is to this not only a cheery kind of *naïveté* but a deeper implication that defeats the surface image, and this is political. In fact, taken as a whole, Skeleton Crew is deeply political; almost a smooth-talking MDC (Millions of Dead Children—Independent Hardcore from Los Angeles).

How are they political? Well, for one, a quick scan at the cities in which Skeleton Crew has played indicates a preference for 'collegiate' audiences (ie, young, left, and liberal). But to be even more obvious, check some of *Learn to Talk's* track titles: "Victoryville;" "Los Colitos;" "Life at the Top;" "The Washington Post;" "Zach's Flag;" and "We're Still Free." Even the fact of the record's being on the not-for-profit (and therefore highly controversial) Rift label is a political gesture.

Yet for the most part, they manage to work without mushy, bleeding-heart sentiment—the notable exception (to me) being "Factory Song," an assembly-line worker's lament. "Work work work!" bemoans Frith; but no, I can't quite Frith's stature as a musician of international acclaim, one who works not because he has to, but because he wants to. So in strict reviewer's terms, I feel the performance there is "unconvincing." But again, that's only my opinion. Don't take that to be record criticism; all it tells you about is myself. REMEMBER THAT! (Um-ahem.)

And yet the record has so much going for it. Is it any accident that Columbia University radio played excerpts from it (for all the songs are linked two- and three together) every weeknight for at least two weeks?

Cora for his part plays violincello, bass guitar, Casio, "home-made drums and contraptions," as the sleeve puts it, and does some singing, although where I can't tell. His work here is also less improvisational than it has been, for example, with Moss and Cargo Cult Revival. What he does provide however is a firm musical base for Frith's various departures into the absurd.

The absurd is something far from unknown to the people who've been recording for Rift, and Skeleton Crew is therefore right at home with, John Zorn and *Locus Solus*, Phil Minton (the man with the loony loony voice) and *Voice of America*, and Bob Ostertag and *Getting A Head*. The spirit of this label's music, or at least of *Learn to Talk*, can be expressed by this statement upon the LP's sleeve: "You may hear unidentified voices at various moments. This is a mistake; please take no notice of them." Now, Rift may be political by nature, but they're not overtly so. As a business dealing in recorded culture, they know better. So they exercise their sense of humor. Is *Learn to Talk* dogmatic? No; it knows what to do with the absurdist statement related above: It wears it on its sleeve.

—Carl Howard

FRONT 242



ENDLESS RIDDANCE

There's an outfit in Chicago called Wax Trax, a record store/label operation, that has made no small announcements about the fact that they've released a three-track single called "Endless Riddance" by the group Front 242. Well, this interests me; I know that single. I know its tracks, "Controversy Between," "Take One," and "Sample D" fairly well. One cut uses old *Star Trek* noises behind an attractive-sounding synthesizer and machine beat, and another sounds like a dub version to which the usual non-dub "7" never appeared. But I enjoy the single. And so, apparently, do the DJ's at FM station WNYU, who play it somewhat often (or so I hear).

What escapes me is why it's been released by someone in Chicago. Front 242 (or F242) works, I believe, out of Belgium. This single was first issued on the Belgian Himalaya label, in 1983! Also, the group has a label that it releases (or perhaps used to release) on regularly—New Dance Records of Brussels. I enjoy the group's work in general (which I will elaborate upon shortly); but for myself and for someone else

whom I've spoken to about this—a man who operates a record store/label of his own in New York City—Wax Trax may make a couple of dollars selling this single generally obscure to America, but for the most part it's an ill-founded gesture.

Still, I like to see that Front 242 isn't completely unknown to the US. It was "Endless Riddance" that I'd heard first, as an import, followed by work that sounds as if it were recorded earlier, all on the New D label: Two early singles, "Ethics/U-Men" and "Principles/Body to Body" were joined last year onto a limited edition four-track 12" (that's record lingo, son) called "Two In One." I think "U-Men" is my favorite of these, the one that I get the most out of, what with its peculiar aping of pop-dance rhythms and its refrain of "I think you're dangerous!"

There's also an LP, *Geography*, that reveals more about them, and about what they're doing. For starters, this group seems trilingual. In addition to being French-speakers, the majority of the songs are performed in English (heavily accented though they are), and the closing LP cut, "Kampfbereit," is even performed in German. Now, I don't understand German, but there seems to be some reference to Albert Einstein in there. Actually, upon closer study, many of Front 242's songs have something to do with different branches of academic science (geography being the obvious example).

"U-Men" resurfaces on the album's first side, within a mixture of vocal songs and "instrumentals" (I hate the term 'instrumental.' It makes it sound as if all non-vocal music is strange somehow, and classifiable as some kind of minority. I don't like the other labels that rock has for songs, either. All slow rock songs are called 'ballads.' How? Is every song performed in a slow meter with acoustic instruments necessarily a ballad? What about *serenade*? Gigue? Shanty? Everybody's mind has been twisted by "The Ballad of MacArthur Park," which is as much a ballad as are any six of your toes. Will Twisted Sister or Krokus perform a ballad for me today? Instrumentals, indeed!)

The limited technology of Front 242 appeals to me. It's gotten a bit better now, as evidenced by "Endless Riddance," but on *Geography* and "Two In One" it's essentially Drumatix drums, a synth or two, guitar, and voice onto four- and eight-track tape. I like the sound of limited-tech. Nothing on these recordings sounds as if it were paid several thousand dollars for. And F242 uses this technology well. This is in addition of course to tape effects, of which they have a-plenty. So they get the most out of their four/eight tracks.

I could mention other things about *Geography*, like how cohesive the band sounds as a unit, or how those lyrics that I can understand have this strange quality of painful vulnerability about them, or how inventive they are in general; or I could furnish some of the record's highlights, like the songs "Geography I and II," and "Least Inking," which begins Side Two, or "Operating Tracks," a song early in Side One that partially goes something like: "...Enclosed by fences/smothered by wounds/Who stands behind the shadows of the trees," and "irrelevant questions with queer responses and double meanings..."

Yes, I could mention these things (as if I didn't just do it), but what it comes down to for me is that there's something in the music of Front 242 itself that I enjoy but can't properly identify; for like the singer's English many things are obscured by the mixes. So given the choice of either coping out or writing something sterile, I'd rather just cop out. Theoretically, if someone chose to rise to my defense in the matter (which won't happen because it's ultimately unimportant), they could say that I'm keeping the unidentifiable quality as elusive in the article as it is in the music, so that in tone I'm being compatible/sympathetic. But as I said, they won't do that. And so...

Just to close, *The International Discography of the New Wave* had this to say about Front 242, in 1982: Formerly called Prothese (or something), the band consists of singer Daniel Prothese, Dirk Bergen, Patrick Codenys, and Jean-Luc de Mayer. I have many questions that I'd like to ask this group, and perhaps if they should write to me now...well, who knows? I'll be really interested to see what they do next.

P.S.—Front 242 played in New York, probably for the first time, on October 13, 1984. They performed at The Ritz, opening for Ministry and APB. I couldn't get in to see them. Why? The security there was as tight as a wino, and I, damn me, I had a tape recorder and no car to lock it up in. So no go. The questions I have, questions they remain. Thanx, Ritz guys. Now I'll have to mail away to Belgium.

I'll bet that no one else in the entire Ritz audience even gave a shit, and I, who could have possibly brightened the band's day a bit (what with my witty conversation and all), I had to stay out. Yes, that's right, I'm bitter. And why shouldn't I be? God-bdamned Ritz!

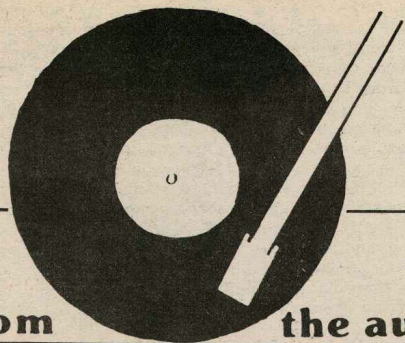
—Carl Howard

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CLASSICAL RECORDINGS

BRAHMS Serenade in D Major

Nonesuch Digital 79065-1/Gerard Schwarz, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra: Despite the great popularity of Johannes Brahms' orchestral music, his two serenades, Opuses 11 and 16, remain relatively obscure. Regular readers of my reviews will probably remark, "Here he goes with another one of his endless complaints about 'unjustly neglected music' and 'hackneyed programming'." Well, you're right. At least Nonesuch has released this fine new recording of the Opus 11, and I feel quite grateful. This is delightful music; it is melodious, fresh, and enragiating.

I became familiar with the serenade when I played some years ago in an orchestra; I remember my exhaustion after playing the very taxing first horn part as well as my pleasant surprise in encountering such wonderful and little-known music.

Brahms originally wrote the D Major Serenade in the 1850's as a nonet for strings and winds, later scoring it for full orchestra. The work is in six movements; the outer ones consisting of a sonata movement and a final rondo, with a central adagio. Two scherzos and a minuet make up the rest. The orchestral textures are much more airy and light than is the rest of Brahms' orchestral music; throughout the mood is carefree, sunny, and bucolic. Although clearly a youthful work, the serenade is already a mature and characteristic work of the composer.

There have not been very many recordings of the work despite the fact that each month seems to bring a new set of either the four Brahms symphonies or the concertos. Thus, Gerard Schwarz's performance would be welcome even if the performance were less than first rate. Thankfully it is of the highest caliber. The Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra plays superbly, and the relatively small forces used lend an appealingly clear and intimate quality to the reading, although the serenade sounds equally persuasive with a full orchestra—as the versions by Bernard Haitink and the Concertgebouw (on Philips Records) and the late, lamented Istvan Kertesz and the London Symphony (on London) demonstrate.

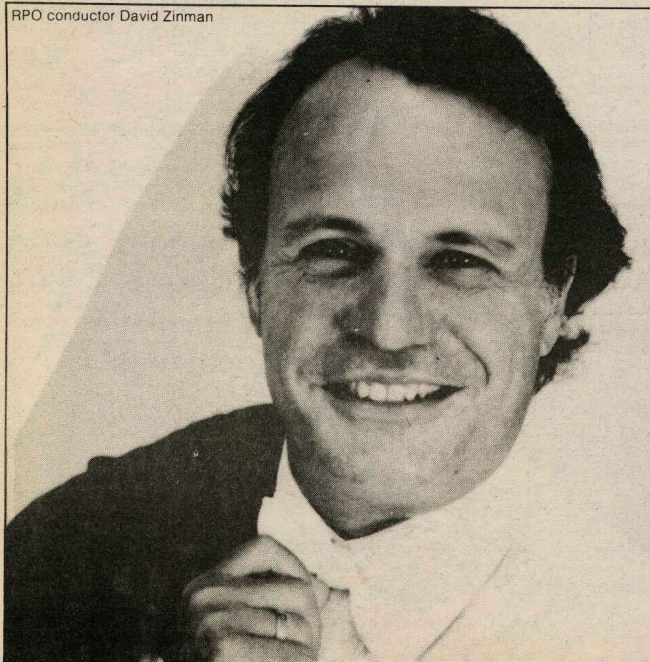
The talented and very busy Gerard Schwarz leads in a buoyantly affectionate, relaxed, and yet lively manner. The digital sonics are clear and rather close-up. The performance however is of such a quality that one can overlook the lack of bloom and spaciousness in the sound. Perhaps Schwarz and the LA Chamber Orchestra will follow up and give us a recording of the A Major serenade for small orchestra, the equally enjoyable companion piece to the D Major serenade.

—Robert Berger



Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra

RPO conductor David Zinman



DVORAK LEGENDS, Opus 59

Nonesuch Digital 79066-1/David Zinman, Rochester Philharmonic: Here is more delectably obscure music, from Anton Dvorak. Although the reputation of Brahms is built on a relatively large and representative selection of his works, that of Dvorak, to whom he gave such generous support and advice in compositional matters, is based upon a mere handful of works. Do you ever hear any of his operas, early symphonies, tone poems, concert overtures, or choral works other than the "New World" symphony, the cello concerto, and a few other works? If not, I suggest that you seek out the Czech master's less familiar works—many of which are available on recordings. Your efforts to find such out-of-the-way repertoire will be rewarded with many hours of listening pleasure. You may well wonder where this music has been all of your life...

The ten brief orchestral pieces known as his "Legends" Opus 59 are a typical example of what has just been mentioned. Each one is a gem. Like the more familiar "Slavonic Dances," the "Legends" were first written in a version for piano two hands. Lacking specific programmatic content, they seem to evoke a quaint, fairy-tale atmosphere.

They are more subdued and reflective than the infectiously exuberant Slavonic Dances, but they are no less irresistibly melodious, and all are orchestrated in Dvorak's uniquely glowing manner.

These charming, unpretentious miniatures are certainly welcome returns to the Schwann catalogue of music, now that the excellent versions by Raymond Leppard and Rafael Kubelik—Dvorak's great countryman and exponent—have both been deleted. David Zinman and the Rochester Philharmonic do not disappoint here after their triumphant appearance at Colden Center this past spring. Zinman shows a real affinity for Dvorak, and leads with care and affection, and the Rochester Orchestra plays with the singing tone that is so essential for the music.

The digital sound on this recording has a plummy richness that caresses the ears, with none of the unpleasant hardness which record reviewers have complained about in many articles.

—Robert Berger