

múm

History Of Silence

Morr CD/DL/LP

“Home” by Edward Sharpe & The Magnetic Zeros, a staple of the stomp-clap-hey indie folk subgenre that dominated the charts in 2010, is currently causing a stir on the internet. Is its twee sincerity, a new generation of listeners reflect, honest or stupid? And is that tweeness making a comeback? This feels relevant to Icelandic band mún’s latest record *History Of Silence* – their first since 2013’s whimsical *Smilewound* – because of how unlikely it seems that a band should disappear for 12 of the most deranged years in world history, to pick up a palette that is more or less unchanged. *History Of Silence* sounds distinctly of the early 2010s, which is almost reassuring; perhaps reassurance is the order of the day.

There is nothing unpleasant about the album’s extended texture play, but its points of interest are thinly dispersed among a mass of electronic sounds and breathy, wavering vocals that seem to strive for depth or provocation or beauty without expressing much faith in any of them. “A Dry Heart Needs No Winding” flirts intriguingly with a familiarly ominous opening figure from Rachmaninoff’s *Prelude In C Minor* as though forewarning a dark transformation – but the interpolation ultimately hangs in isolation, undeveloped. “Kill The Light” begins with beautiful glass harmonica style swirls, killed off by a plinky piano that traps the track in music box territory, turning sweetly, going nowhere. “Our Love Is Distorting” promises a challenge, but the lovely off-kilter tack piano opening evaporates in a big anemic chorus that feels inserted rather than earned. There is also the track title “Only Songbirds Have A Sweet Tooth” – do they?

History Of Silence has some compelling moments, but a prevailing fear of commitment thins out its connective tissue, rendering its surface a bit enfeebling. Some listeners may find escapism in its flights of fancy; to these ears it sounds like a strong gust could blow it off course.

Lucy Thraves

The Necks

Disquiet

Northern Spy 3xCD/DL

The Necks may play instrumental music, but words still matter. The title of the Australian trio’s last album *Bleed* can be taken as an allusion to the draining of any evidence of a live process across its 42 minutes, which did not sound like the work of three people in real time, but represented the durational decay of their sounds.

Disquiet acknowledges an ingredient that keyboardist Chris Abrahams, double bassist Lloyd Swanton and percussionist/guitarist Tony Buck apply sparingly. Their music, which scrutinises melody and pulse as intensely as timbre, texture and dynamics, tends to be more approachable than most freely improvising ensembles. Even when it spreads out, as it does at set length in concert and compact disc duration on this triple CD, it is willing to be user friendly.

But not on “Ghost Net”, which uses the layered approach that The Necks take in the studio to court imbalance. It opens with the not quite synchronous combination of two separate tracks of organ, bass and drums that defy the efforts of pattern-seeking brains to fit them into a groove. While one patiently trudges, the other churns; when one instrument drops out, its replacement further complicates the metre. It’s the uneasiest thing that The Necks have done in years, and its duration of 74 minutes is long enough to wear down both resistance and acceptance.

The other disc-long performance, “Rapid Eye Movement”, is far more approachable. Swelling organ chords dappled with spare, plush electric piano notes flow smoothly over bass pedal points and spare drums. It builds patiently but inevitably, like a dream intent upon giving its dreamer just what they wish for. The 32 minute “Warm Running Sunlight” traverses similar terrain, but rewards deep listeners with subliminal dissonances and a simultaneously spare and intricate cymbal sequence that defies efforts at decoding.

Meanwhile “Causeway” makes good on its titular promise of traversal by spanning several realisations of swirling action before settling on an unabashedly ardent, gospel-steeped testimony.

Bill Meyer

New Chance

A Rock Unsteady

We Are Time DL/LP

Vic Cheong aka New Chance has been a force in Toronto’s music community for nearly two decades, and her latest album marks a recent exploration of dream states and cosmic spaces. *A Rock Unsteady* is inspired by the ancient Greek concept of Metakosmios, a mystical realm between worlds. There is a sense of lull and interruption throughout, sections where the songs slip into techno-inflected rhythms of fever dreams, trance or REM sleep, where found sounds and lost conversations emerge suddenly with fateful meaning. Throughout, Cheong herself emerges as a chameleonic figure, continuously shifting her sound and aesthetic approach, never fully settling into one definable mode.

Some tracks waltz out of vampiric, campy drama and quickly collapse into comforting R&B or well placed dissonance. Others are layered, synthesized pop songs. Polyphonic textures shape the album significantly, shifting frequently and unpredictably – the vocal arrangements of the haunting and layered “Phasis” for instance incorporate Toronto vocalists Isla Craig, Robin Dann and Felicity Williams. Dissonant and haunting, their choral harmonies bring to mind sacred jazz and avant garde hymns; this record moves the spirit in unexpected directions.

Greek mythology is widely instrumentalised in psychological discourse because it was developed as cultural lore to explain unusual natural phenomena. In that sense it is also an example of how a dream becomes reality through the interpretation of collective will. In the act of believing, characters meant to embody paradoxes

become real actors that shape the future. Throughout the album, there is a palpable sense of cosmic manifestation and a sense of continuity that’s hard to describe. *A Rock Unsteady* is a thoughtful and ambitious record that involves collaborations with numerous other musicians, including Jen Castle, Johnny Spence, Brodie West and Evan Cartwright, but really it’s all Cheong.

Xenia Benivolski

Hatis Noit

Aura Reworks

Erased Tapes DL/LP

Inspired by a transformational teenage encounter with a solo Buddhist nun chanting in the Nepalese countryside, London based, Shiretoko, Hokkaido born Hatis Noit’s name translates as The Stem Of The Lotus Flower, signalling a spirituality that manifests itself throughout her self-taught vocal-led electronic music.

Noit’s voice has the crystal tonal purity of closed-throat classical singing, twisted off-kilter by the rasping, open-throat breathiness of traditional Japanese influences and subtle electronic treatments. In this reworking of her 2022 album *Aura*, inspired by the writings of Walter Benjamin, Noit’s collaborators include Matthew Herbert, Jin, William Basinski, Alex Somers and Laraaji. The album explores traditional gagaku, Bulgarian, Gregorian and Arabic chants and vocal styles, its cathedralesque reverb enriching layers of vocals, electronically granulated and cycled over intense throbbing bass.

The title track features Laraaji’s rich floating synth bed upon which he and Noit exchange floating vocals, laughter and soaring simulated bird calls. Matthew Herbert’s remix of “Thor” sets a pounding, shamanic bass drum as the basis for Noit’s chants, decorated with elements of shimmering ambient techno. The percussive acoustic piano of William Baskin’s “Inori” rework anchors the expressive freedom of her sustained choral textures, based on a field recording of the ocean one kilometre from Fukushima, in memory of those who lost their lives in the 2011 tsunami. US producer Preservation’s take on “Jomon” establishes a hypnotic pulse of vocal bursts alongside an urgent anti-violence rapped poem by billy woods and Elucid aka Armand Hammer. “Angelus Novus” combines close whispering with expansive choral vocals over warm distant organ.

Throughout the set, Noit’s extraordinary voice eases the listener into a magical world where trance, techno, grime meet sparse electronics, occidental religious chants and the spiritual healing of gagaku.

Jo Hutton

Aki Onda

In The Depth Of Illusion: A Soundtrack For Nervous Magic Lantern

Room40 DL/LP

Aki Onda’s new album begins with a recorded conversation, grounding the listener in the moment before dissolving. Synthetic tones give way to Onda’s signature static, drawing on his ongoing exploration of radio interference as a medium to evoke ghosts and hidden