

# The Columns

Joseph Stannard  
on avant pop  
polymaths,  
theological  
minimalism, and  
klonking  
instrumentals

## Ducktails

### *St Catherine*

Domino CD/DL/LP

Is it chillwave? Is it hypnagogic? Nah, it's indie rock. As the career of Ducktails' Matt Mondanile (also of Real Estate) has progressed, his music has become ever more conventional. But it's still very listenable. Mondanile has evolved into a more or less classicist songwriter whose dazed idylls are a fairly rewarding way to spend 40 odd minutes, especially if accompanied by sunshine, beer and weed. His vocal is as drippy as they come but it suits the distant drift of the tunes, which remain thematically and sonically tied to vague memories and light romantic misgivings. Like the recent work of Julia Holter, who guests, *St Catherine* departs from the lo-fi meditations of earlier releases to explore a fuller bodied sound environment where structures are tighter and colours less smeared. The best track is "The Laughing Woman", whose slowly unfurling melodies gesture towards Elliott Smith. Harry Nilsson and The Three O'Clock. If this song indicates his future direction, I'll have no complaints.

## Kit Wilmans Fegradoe

### *Issa*

Important CD

This outstanding debut album from 23 year old Bristol based composer Fegradoe is

based around theories regarding the lost years of Christ. Some maintain that during this period of the prophet's life Issa (as he is known in the Middle East) travelled and educated himself in contrasting faiths and philosophies, thereby gaining the wisdom that he would later share among his followers. Fegradoe undertook his own vision quest during the album's making, absorbing theological knowledge via visits to churches and temples. The result is an album of bracing minimalism that moves between moments of calm contemplation and bursts of explosive momentum, mirroring the sensations of the protagonist as his mind brims with new information. Constructed out of a series of improvised studio sessions, *Issa* is unquestionably indebted to Glass, Reich, Adams et al, but feels too personal and soulful to constitute pastiche.

## MXLX

### *I AIM TO UNDERSTAND NOTHING*

Kinda Rad CD/DL

### *Troubleds*

Bulb LP

Since I first stumbled across avant pop polymath Matt Loveridge, performing as Team Brick at Bristol's much missed Venn Festival in 2006, he has become a one man cottage industry, firing out gobs of messy no-fi brilliance at a remarkable rate under various names including Fairhorns, Gnar Hest and, here, MXLX. He's also a member of motorik trio Beak with Portishead's Geoff Barrow. These two new releases under the MXLX monicker are typically bug-eyed and twisted. The four track *I AIM TO UNDERSTAND NOTHING* is a morose electronic noise cycle whose capitalised song titles spell out a doleful resignation ("THIS IS NO PLACE FOR ME", "SO I AM LEAVING", "EVERYTHING BEHIND", "AND ALL WILL BE WELL") and whose sonics range from aggravated kosmische noise to doom-laden choral synthcore. The album *Troubleds* finds Loveridge essaying a fractured campfire songcraft with faint echoes of Swans' Michael Gira and the edgeland oddness of Grumbling Fur. The album also features what would in a perfect world be his first hit single, the deeply lovely "O Faithful Erection".

## Shit & Shine

### *Everybody's A Fuckin' Expert*

Editions Mego CD/DL/LP

With his new album title *Shit & Shine*'s Craig Clouse nails a distinctly modern malaise, namely that nowadays everyone not only has an opinion on everything, they also feel the unstoppable urge to express it via social media. Nowhere is this clearer than in the world of music, where plugged in individuals are perpetually engaged in the retconning of their personal histories in order to incorporate discoveries made not ten minutes ago; and nobody will admit to not having heard of something. Against this tide of fake fuckery, *Shit & Shine* feel like honest allies, fuelled by a boozy righteous anger and determined to counter pomposity with an amplified banality expressed in titles like "Upside Down Cheeseburger" and "Working On My Fitness". This grizzled cynicism has

remained constant as the music has evolved. Where Clouse once attached electrodes to the nipples of The Butthole Surfers' scatological rock, he's now digging deeper into dancefloor electronics, which makes the hook-up with Editions Mego entirely logical. These crusty, klonking instrumentals recall a time when electronic music reflected the eccentricities of its creators rather than an unfortunate hive mind conformism.

## Thighpaulsandra

### *The Golden Communion*

Editions Mego 2×CD/3×LP

Flamboyant keyboard maestro

Thighpaulsandra is well known for his work with Coil and Julian Cope, less so for his excellent contributions to The Waterboys or for his solo work. Which is a shame, as his new album demonstrates at considerable length that he's a highly accomplished songwriter and soundcrafter. The appearance of his late muckers Peter Christopherson (credited with rhythmic interference) and Jhonn Balance (vocals) on the terrifically catchy electro-pop banger "Did He Fall?" (a distant cousin to Kate Bush's "Experiment IV") deepens the chill of a collection seemingly designed to extract beauty from the most disquieting of dreams. "The Foot Garden" is a good example of the night terrors on offer. Thighpaulsandra's tremulous, melodramatic vocals are an acquired taste, being reminiscent of Marillion's Steve Hogarth and Porcupine Tree's Steven Wilson. In fact there's a distinct neo-prog flavour to *The Golden Communion*, detectable in the extended songforms and the project's overall sense of grandiosity and high seriousness. This (along with Cyclobe/Coil man Stephen Thrower's love of Yes) fuels the suspicion that England's hidden reverse draws on musical as well as social taboos.

## Wilco

### *Star Wars*

dBpm CD/DL/LP

Following the experimental Americana of *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* and *A Ghost Is Born* Chicago outfit Wilco's sixth album *Sky Blue Sky* seemed to signal a group unexpectedly content to settle into an MOR rut. Turns out it was more of a pause for breath than a harbinger of imminent obsolescence. *Wilco (The Album)* and 2011's *The Whole Love* found Tweedy and comrades adopting a carefree approach to the well established building blocks of their sound. Their latest album's method of dissemination (it was initially knocked out as a free download via the group's website) reflects the lack of preciousness that makes their current music so easy to enjoy. There's a neat reversal of the traditional rock career trajectory at play here. Whereas early Wilco could be a slog (whole stretches of the excessively praised 1996 double opus *Being There* tend towards the enervating) their current incarnation has an almost puppyish energy and optimism which makes the album's 34 minutes – covering considerable ground from the Frippish pseudo prog of "EKG" to the thumping, hip-hop-like "Cold Slope" – seem even shorter and more repeatable. □

## Joe Muggs on

Technicolor bass  
weightlessness,  
impolite society  
music, and "Tour  
De France"  
diverted via  
*Tetsuo*

## Anti-G

### *Kush In Da Sound*

Rwina 12"

Coming from Delft, Netherlands, but powered by the Latin-Caribbean rhythms of Suriname and the Antilles, Anti-G has made precisely no musical progression since *Presents Kentje'sz Beatsz*, his 2011 compilation on Planet Mu – which is very much for the best. Every one of the six tracks here utilises the same bashment-carnival clatter drenched in metallic reverb, underpinned by oppressive sub-bass kicks, and scrawled all over with the portamentoed screech of hyper-mainstream dirty Dutch electro house synths. It makes for a bizarre kind of interzone, producing an entirely different set of Black Atlantic connections than the UK/US/Jamaica (and more recently West African) triangulations familiar in bassbin culture. Confronted by the slower stutter and liquifying wall of sound on the climactic "What The Fack!", the sudden untethering from expectations makes for quite a ride.

## Atom™

### *Riding The Void*

Raster-Noton 12"

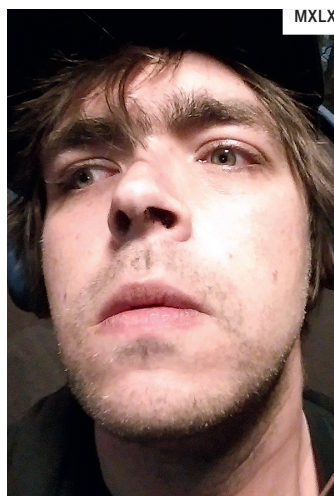
When he's not goofing off, Uwe Schmidt remains the class act he has always been. The original track here is just as thrilling as it was when it first came out on his *HD* album in 2013 – its tricks with the linearity of Berlin-centric dark basement grooves makes for an existential rollercoaster, particularly when a huge bass tone acts out the title, sliding down into nothingness before reappearing. Scuba acquits himself well on his "Pulse Remix", simplifying but energising the track, while Hanno Leichtmann's "Consumed Remix" brings a Nitzer Ebb-ish disciplinary eroticism into play. But Schmidt's own "Nought Remix" eclipses them, preparing you with six minutes of acid throb so that by the time the climactic high drone hits, you feel you've been waiting for it all your life.

## Joe Farr & Martyn Hare

### *Mode*

Leyla 12"

Anyone who saw Dave Tarrida or Tobias Schmidt play back in the day knows that



MXLX