

The vocals slip between half-spoken and half-sung cadences as they worm their way into the listener's ear, their tone drawing parallels to the detached air of Montreal's Marie Davison on her 2018 album *Working Class Woman*. Similar to the 2021 Lolina LP *Fast Fashion*, which was recorded on a set of CDJs, Astrova wrings as much out of the hardware as she possibly can, locking the output into an absorbingly minimal framework.

Misha Farrant

Mdou Moctar
Funeral For Justice

Matador CD/DL/LP

Since his early days as a wedding performer, concerts and extensive touring have remained a crucial creative outlet for Nigerien guitarist Mdou Moctar and his band. With the poise of a guitar hero and the shredding chops to back it up, he appears a charismatic figure – part entertainer, part preacher.

Appropriately, his performances have a tendency of becoming sweaty, transcendental communal gatherings, spurred by his sparking fretwork and the tight, repetitive grooves that drummer Souleymane Ibrahim, bassist Mikey Colton and rhythm guitarist Ahmoudou Madassane unleash alongside him, turning the heat up even higher.

The group's overwhelming energy was barely contained by 2021's *Afrique Victime*, while their latest record *Funeral For Justice* comes a step closer to channelling an authentic Mdou Moctar live experience. The title track wastes no time to demonstrate the unfettered power on tap, bursting from silence into a series of electrifying riffs and fervent claps, never letting up. While Moctar has rarely shied away from inspired political messages in his music, *Funeral* feels completely driven by them, the deteriorating sociopolitical situation in Niger providing additional fuel for what was already red hot music.

"Sousoume Tamacheq" confronts the oppression faced by the Tuareg people head on, wrapping a desire for change into blazing rock spirals and rambunctious riffs, while the emphatic anthem "Oh France" throws shade at French colonialism, the group seamlessly shifting into higher gear and further increasing the pressure. "Takoba", "Imajighen" and "Tchinta" are mellower, melodic pieces that find Moctar in a lyrical mood, his sorrow embodied in flowing blues harmonies, psychedelic flourishes and lovely call and response choruses. Meanwhile, the hard edged "Modern Slaves" returns to the album's pointed political themes, making sure they stay with the listener even as the final ricocheting chords fade out.

Antonio Poscic

Elaine Mitchener
Solo Throat

Otoroku DL/LP

Elaine Mitchener is a virtuosic experimental vocalist, movement artist, and archivist of the global Black avant garde. *Solo Throat*, her first solo LP, uses texts by African-American and African-Caribbean poets Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Aimé Césaire, Una Marson and NH Pritchard as catalysts for experiments

in translation – from text to voice, from past to present. Mitchener doesn't just recite these poems; rather, she treats them as sites for encounter ridden with both dangers for semantic breakdown and avenues for new meanings.

Mitchener's vocal dexterity can't be overstated. She toggles masterfully between pure and haunting tones on "black mantle" and "black mantle II", clear and forceful diction on "gyre's galax", howls, sputters and stutters on "stretchedwoundspeaks", and scratchy groans and melismatic whines on "tender as fly agaric". "unknown tongue" might be the most impressive piece of all. Multitracking her vocals, she conjures up a drama of communication beyond language: her two characters seem to meet, argue, scheme, get frustrated, hit an impasse, muddle through, and finally begin to play and harmonise with each other.

At least that's what I hear. Ultimately, making sense of all this is only part of the point. Consider "spittle", the middle piece of a triptych inspired by Aimé Césaire's poem *When In The Heat Of The Day Naked Monks Descend The Himalayas*. The poem's surreal language – "Very powerful monster against monster/Yours whose body is a statue of red woody sap/Whose spittle is fofa urine/Mine whose sweat is a gush of caiman bile" – dissolves in Mitchener's adaptation into a timbral soundscape of breathing, buzzing, growling, teasing.

Is she imitating a mosquito here, a monkey there, a river here, a monster there? Yes and no. I think Mitchener is interested in leaving her source texts opaque, making them resonate without exhausting them.

Daniel Glassman

Paul Newland
things that happen again

Another Timbre CD/DL

Nomi Epstein
shades

Another Timbre CD/DL

Marco Baldini
Maniera

Another Timbre CD/DL

Paul Paccione
Distant Musics

Another Timbre CD/DL

The profile of the Another Timbre label has developed so consistently over the past decade that there seems to be a well defined concept underpinning its catalogue. Simon Reynell, its curator, may be reluctant to formulate such a statement of intent, or so narrowly to define the label's orientation, but the identity of Another Timbre is projected not only through the elegant uniformity and typographic precision of its folded card sleeves, but also from the music within, which tends to be quiet, subtle and gradual, inclined to glow rather than glare.

Nonetheless, Another Timbre invariably manages to deliver surprises and revelations within those undemonstrative parameters. This latest batch of releases all exhibit those anticipated qualities of unhurried exposition and finely nuanced restraint, yet the musical content is strikingly varied. Performances are

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almost exclusively by members of Apartment House, that insightful and resourceful ensemble which contributes so much to Reynell's project.

The selection of five small group compositions by New Yorker Paul Paccione date mostly from the 1980s, but their diagrammatic clarity seems to grant them a timeless quality. A Paccione string trio, quartet for violins or duo for flutes may seem on paper to be an exercise in minimalist frugality, but as these realisations illustrate so well, his scores can generate an aura of luminosity, and the sensuousness of his music's harmonic motion far transcends its structural geometry. Marco Baldini's chamber music is often harmonically redolent of Baroque and Renaissance antecedents. A legacy of spacious architecture, slowly evolving patterns and stained-glass echoes are filtered through the Florentine composer's contemporary sensibility, recollections of formative musical experiences, refreshed and energised by his own imagination.

The work of Boston based Nomi Epstein is, on the other hand, almost calligraphic in nature, with intersections of curving glissandi, faint tracteries of undulating lines and wispy glimpses of fleeting gestures. Epstein's scores embrace indeterminacy, yet these three delicately poised pieces share an austere, fragile beauty that clearly arises from her cohesive and firmly coordinated compositional orientation. The music of Londoner Paul Newland is more vibrantly embodied, more openly receptive and involving. Starting with *Monotonous Forest*, scored for piano, cello, vibraphone and cowbells, each of these five pieces unfolds like a sonic meditation on the terms of continuity and change, of being in place and setting in motion. Listening to Newland's music is not a detached activity, but an acceptance of the gentle grip of its structural tensions, and willing entry into an exhilarating condition of interdependence.

Julian Cowley

Normil Hawaiians *Empires Into Sand*

Upset The Rhythm CD/DL/LP

Upset The Rhythm's 2015 reissue of Normil Hawaiians' third album, 1985's *Return Of The Ranters*, highlighted a band curiously out of sync. They chimed with the politics of The Pop Group or even Crass while carrying a spirit of DIY experimentation reminiscent of This Heat. But they landed in a roaming, folk-tinted, occasionally kosmische zone which threaded into longer histories of deviance.

Empires Into Sand marks the collective's first new material in 40 years. Recorded in a remote Scottish village, they've moved even further from their post-punk roots. The bird song and ambient passages sprinkled throughout are occasionally jarringly close to new age pastiche, especially the bombastic flute intro of "Ornament Of The Tribe". But then, the risk in evading (con)temporary notions of taste and sleekness is what makes Normil Hawaiians fascinating.

At its best *Empires Into Sand* is a kaleidoscopic swirl whose fluid songforms

bridge past to present. "Exiles" opens the album with electrical interference that subsides into acoustic shimmer. It accompanies intergenerational refugee testimony from Vilnis Egle (father of Normil Hawaiian Zinta Egle) who fled Soviet occupied Latvia in 1942, and George Bikandy who fled Syria in 2014. Elsewhere, "Where is Living?" is an eerie ballad lamenting polluted waters, a story simultaneously topical and ongoing. Throughout, a strive to defy the grind persists. The lounge funk-ish "We Stand Together" switches between documenting sad isolation and feeling community "even though we're on distant shores". The album's highpoint is "Waterfalls: Bedford 330", whose soaring motorik drives a wistful celebration of "children from the squats, children from the sun" finding liberation on the open road.

On "The Battle Of Stonehenge" from *Return Of The Ranters*, Normil Hawaiians raged against the police's suppression of The Peace Convoy. They're telling new stories now, but sounding solidarities and struggles overlapping eras and styles.

Daryl Worthington

Mary Ocher *Your Guide To The Revolution*

Underground Institute DL

"I am the owner of two passports, both of which I'm ashamed of," sighs Mary Ocher, glancing back to the lands of her birth and childhood (the USSR and Israel respectively) in a short essay accompanying last November's *Approaching Singularity: Music For The End Of Time*. This LP is a sequel to that one, drawn from the same sessions, extending its spiral of anger, resistance and complicity. Ocher takes on the role of a grim tour guide, plugging in a Minimoog and stepping into the circles of our shared hell - war, climate meltdown, migrant crises, consumerism - like some cyborg Virgil.

Her title's a red herring - this isn't the soundtrack to a revolution at all. The companion essay takes the form of a "guide book to survival in modern day capitalism" this time around. And instead of recipes for Molotov cocktails, Ocher gathers lifehacks for urban living on a budget: visit restaurants outside popular hours, snaffle cheap cinema tickets on Mondays, and so on. There's a similar ambivalence to the tunes. At times, her voice is as grippingly human as ever: "For All We Know (The World May End Tomorrow)" is a gut-punch of a ballad that could have been drawn from Yoko Ono's *Season Of Glass*. Elsewhere, Ocher wryly buries herself in the mix, warping vocals with Auto-Tune, at one point joking that technology will "Tune your life/And make it sooooo much better".

She's winking, but *Your Guide To The Revolution* does seem to be drawn to a kind of mock-spiritual bliss. The set's longest jam - "When God Held My Hand" - is also its thinnest, a deliberately ethereal fragment that feels like falling asleep to the looping sounds of a DVD chapter menu. This whisper of orientalism blooms into the luxurious "Rubaiyat Medley", lifting from Edward Fitzgerald's famously dodgy 1850s translation (he preferred to call it a "transmogrification") of Persian poetry into Victorian English.

Murmuring these bastardised rhymes, pointing a finger vaguely eastwards, Ocher falls into a late capitalist snooze.

Rob Turner

Pollution Opera *Pollution Opera*

Danse Noire DL/LP

Nadah El Shazly and Elvin Brandhi's Pollution Opera began on a tandem motorbike ride through the former's home city of Cairo, the pair shouting and singing along to the city's noise pollution. Those instinctive responses, developed in the studio and live over several years, evolved into this album. It's a record of odd companions. Triumphant uninged electronics charge through grandiose changes in mood and rhythm, while the duo's vocals find common ground between poppy melodicism and growling, screaming, glossolalic extremes.

On opener "Pollution Bold", El Shazly is Auto-Tuned into a cyborg angel as Brandhi squeals feral shards in peculiar accompaniment. Mangled beats and air sucking bass drop, presaging an off-kilter groove. On "Attention" they're joined by Lil Baba to charge through guttural growls into a space bordering drill and death metal.

They keep exploring these strange entanglements, leaning into ornate operatic grandeur while never escaping the sense they're channelling a fundamentally inornate environment. On "CR! Me A River", one of the pair's voices is hushed beneath widescreen reverb, suspended bass and fidgety beats. After she says "Whisper in my ear", a bark and a squeak arrive in response. Seconds later, El Shazly's vocals soar over horror movie synths and screams.

On the record's finale "Crisp Heart", El Shazly locks into glowing ballad mode over lifting beats and violin from Ocen James. Manic glitches sabotage the slowburn anthem, propelling sweetness into a swarm of febrile energy. It encapsulates the joyful disorientation that makes the record so thrilling. Their music is the opposite of cocooning yourself from the din - Brandhi and El Shazly ride full speed through cosmopolitan cacophony and scream back in unison. If opera uses music to amplify romance and tragedy, this duo amplify the life and mayhem of bustling surroundings, making their own bliss from messy collisions and weird interactions.

Daryl Worthington

Vince Pope *True Detective: Night Country (Soundtrack From The HBO Original Series)*

Watertower DL

The recently aired fourth season of HBO crime series *True Detective* was not met with unanimous acclaim. The first season to not directly involve creator and writer Nic Pizzolatto, its reins were instead handed to writer/director Issa López, whose magic realist thriller *Tigers Are Not Afraid* gained positive attention on its 2017 release. With a cast headed by Jodie Foster and Kali Reis, and a focus on indigenous rights and environmental issues - well, kind of - *True Detective: Night*