

art by ex-copper Hjuler, featuring condoms and passport photos of the musicians. This live show from East London's Cafe Oto is an undergrowth of noise texture, quietly mesmeric once the multiple radio voices start. Bohman's scrapings and homages to frogs sit well with the more ominous lo-fi electronics from the rest of the quintet.

There's plenty of screaming and DIY performance mayhem on side two, as Hjuler and his Frau (Mama Baer) cut loose at Faust's Avantgarde Festival in 2010. Graham is along for this one too, but the spotlight is on Baer's ethereal voice, floating across an echoey minimal beat. You can only guess at what's being enacted, but the one-note flute palls pretty quickly, eventually climaxing in frustrated roaring. Musically crude, it's a document of an anarchic ritual. The title translates as *No Direct Explanations For Closed Organisms In Fluxus-Music*. Clive Bell

### Amir ElSaffar Rivers Of Sound Orchestra

#### Not Two

New Amsterdam CD/DL/2xLP

"When the mind becomes muddled in dualistic thinking, think 'not two', and all will become clear." These words from Zen master Kongo Langlois Roshi underpin Amir ElSaffar's musical vision. As the Iraqi-American trumpeter and composer notes, in Middle Eastern maqam, the highest ideal is to reach a state of tarab, or musical ecstasy, which emerges from the dissolving of boundaries between the self and the other. As he writes, "Sounds flow into one another, overtones interact, as we come closer to a universal human sound." On *Not Two* ElSaffar continues to develop his musical language, expanding his Two Rivers sextet into the 17-piece Rivers Of Sound Orchestra, a transcultural outfit featuring musicians from the US, the Middle East and Southern India. The results are stunning.

George Ziadeh's oud, Tareq Abboushi's buzuq and Jason Adasiewicz's retuned vibraphone play central roles, creating bright, shimmering textures that give the music a sense of movement and space. Their thrumming sets up the modal brass fanfare of "Iftitah", which falls away to feature Mohammed Saleh's serpentine oboe over Carlos Derosa's double bass drones. There are further passes at the theme, with the rhythms gradually moving from Middle Eastern polyrhythms to driving hard bop. The beautiful "Ya Ibni, Ya Ibni (My Son, My Son)" has the feel of an orchestral ballad from 1950s Baghdad, with Saleh playing oboe in a pinched, duduk-like tone, complemented by Dena ElSaffar's elegant viola and Tim Moore's hand percussion. The musicians continue to coax Middle Eastern tones from Western instruments, with Amir ElSaffar's muted trumpet solo followed by a dazzling Craig Taborn prepared piano feature, where his rapid-fire arpeggiations are given a metallic microtonal twang.

"Hijaz 21/8" lays a Latin shuffle under an intricate Arabic melody in 12/8, but the sounds are carefully integrated, never sounding like a self-conscious fusion. The 16 minute "Shards Of Memory/B Half

Flat Fantasy" is the album's masterpiece, bringing together galloping oud passages, spiralling saxophone exchanges and melismatic vocals. It all builds to an ecstatic free jazz climax, with an inspired coda of early music.

Stewart Smith

### The Folklore Of Plants Vol 1

#### Various

Folklore Tapes LP+Pbk

Fresh from their residency at the Witchcraft Museum in Boscastle, Cornwall, Ian Humberstone and David Chatton Barker present their latest probe into British myth and arcana. Since 2011 their Folklore Tapes label has packaged a mix of research and musical experiment into eccentrically desirable items – the first was a cassette within a hollowed out hardback, and recently they've been exploring 'industrial folklore', with recordings of spring manufacturing in Rochdale.

This time it's an investigation of herbal lore, from the foxglove to the Hottentot-fig (also known as Pigface). The vinyl has brief tracks by 31 artists, but there's also a tiny envelope of seeds, a pamphlet about the plants, illustrated by herbalist Zoe Naylor, and an essay booklet by Jez Winship. All in all it's a striking contribution to the current wave of what writer Robert Macfarlane calls English eerie, the irruption of the uncanny past into our present. Scraps of folksong appear: Ghost Box's Belbury Poly uses vintage synths to craft a delightful take on "Queen Of The May", in honour of the hawthorn. Magpahi, aka Lancashire singer Alison Cooper, hymns the mugwort over a snarling keyboard. Broadside ballad specialist Jennifer Reid tackles "A Sprig Of Thyme". And film maker Mary Stark conjures a distant call of lavender for sale – perhaps London's most persistent street cry, recorded as late as 1958.

Elsewhere the instrumental approaches vary, with on the one hand linocut printmaker James Green's glowing chordscape (false shamrock) and on the other film maker and maverick guitarist Hugh Metcalfe expelling an agitated ode to that "legendary aphrodisiac" jasmine. Kelly Jayne Jones (of Part Wild Horses Mane On Both Sides) is powerfully concise about the chasteberry, while Joshua Bonnetta reveals the contact-mixed sound of a jumping cholla cactus in the Arizona desert. We also get a link to Chatton Barker's film *Patterns Of Light*. This is ecstatic, a silent monochrome rhapsody about plant life and the vulnerability of film itself. There's some influence from Metcalfe's films, but this looks like Soviet pioneer Dziga Vertov doing the gardening.

*The Folklore Of Plants* is a rich and bewildering collection, with no clear entry or exit. Like those Cornish gardens in Heligan, there's a risk of getting lost and the project is all the better for it.

Clive Bell

### Fossil Aerosol Mining Project

#### The Unlistening Place

The Helen Scarsdale Agency CD

Fossil Aerosol Mining Project have been active since the 1980s and their raw

materials are found sound sources including old reel-to-reel tapes and ancient film stock. The idea of degraded recording media is intrinsically fascinating, as it takes on a character it was never envisaged as having, and that is changed further when it is looped, combined and otherwise manipulated to musical ends.

"Songs of enhanced decay and faked resurrection" is one of the snappy terms that they use to describe their work. It really feels like the revenants of an older technological time have been reanimated from their rest. There is an odd, uneasy romance about it, like the emotions evoked while walking around a ruined or abandoned building. And it feels like the crumbling, mildewed tapes and playback equipment of the avant soundscaper now share a similar status to the battered guitars and amps of the rock 'n' roller.

But all that wouldn't mean a thing if it didn't yield such compelling music. On "Unlistening Place" you find sonic strata of trebly and sibilant sound sources over unidentifiable rubbings, scrapings and exhalations, and unencryptable messages sent across humming powerlines. Human voices make their entrance, edited down and programmed into syllabic chatter on "Silent Time". But there are some odd moments of beauty like the glowing sunrise of loops in "Unlistening Place 2". The particularly spartan "Unlistening Place 3" has an implied rhythm from runout groove clicks and crackles, but no momentum, while on "Tar Prodigy" the eerily backgrounded tones that sound like a choir almost certainly aren't.

The music reminds of the inscrutable looped forms of :zoviet\*france: and The Hafler Trio, while Nurse With Wound joins the list of kindred spirits on "A Resolute Nothing", a 17 minute litany of mangled dialogue, including a hellfire preacher declaiming "*But your enemy... and the power of the air... and against wicked spirits*". This gives some emotional traction before human voices are slowed down into ugly amphibial croaks, with one utterance repeating throughout the rest of the track. But after first listening you stop thinking about how it was put together and become immersed in the sonic narrative, for no matter how strange and unsettling *The Unlistening Place* might be at times, it's always poetic. Mike Barnes

### Ben Frost

#### The Centre Cannot Hold

Mute CD/DL/LP

A full moon over Iceland. Ben Frost kneels to the ground and scoops up a handful of snow. He rubs it into his face and beard, savouring the icy rush. "Good hunting tonight, Fenrisúlfr," he says, running a hand through his pet wolf's fur. "I shall channel this primal experience into my next composition. But tonight we rest. Let us retire to our cabin and feast on reindeer."

It might be a bit cheap to caricature Ben Frost as some hyperborean noise-bro, but he doesn't half invite it. The Iceland based Australian enjoys hiking to the edge of volcanoes, has track titles like "Carpathians", and performs live in complete

darkness. His music is colossal, with cold waves of digital distortion crashing against post-metal riffs and gleaming EDM synths. Unlike his sometime collaborator Tim Hecker, there is no sub-Reichian prettiness to temper the noise. Frost's champions rave about his sound design, and while the producer certainly knows his way around the stereo field, there's none of the ambiguity or disassociation you get with, say, David Lynch and Dean Hurley's remarkable work on *Twin Peaks: The Return*. As a composer, Frost displays little harmonic or rhythmic invention. Underneath the bombast lie essentially banal musical ideas.

For 2014's *Aurora*, Frost recruited percussionists Shahzad Ismaily, Greg Fox and Thor Harris, bringing a degree of rhythmic interest to his music. *The Centre Cannot Hold* is just Frost alone in Steve Albini's studio with his guitars and his machines. He borrows elements of club music, but strips them of any dancefloor functionality or social context. "A Sharp Blow In Passing" nabs Burial's signature half-step and submerged synths, but undoes any sense of melancholy with corny horror movie harpsichord motifs. "Threshold Of Faith" takes the notion of electronic body music quite literally, with a thudding pulse that's clearly meant to evoke slow motion images of a fist pounding a hanging animal carcass. Edgy. On tracks like "Eurydice's Heel (Hades)" and "Ionia", Frost aims for a darkly romantic transcendentalism in his synth motifs, but they end up sounding like bad imitations of Brad Fiedel's *Terminator* soundtracks. To run with the cinematic analogies, I'd suggest that Frost is the musical equivalent of Nicolas Winding Refn, all neon lit brutality and state of the art emptiness.

Stewart Smith

### Lee Gamble

#### Mnestic Pressure

Hyperdub CD/DL/LP

On first listening to Lee Gamble's fifth album, it's easy to be fooled by how mundane it seems. Where such previous releases as *Koch* and *Diversions 1994-1996* were dominated by interference or warped by the aural equivalent of lens flare, most of *Mnestic Pressure* feels uncannily crisp and distinct. Any sufficiently advanced UK garage album would be indistinguishable from the twisting, obtuse, stark percussion hits and crunchy sample layers that make up most of the instrumental palette. Where last year's *Chain Kinematics* EP felt of a part with the body of work Gamble described in an interview as emerging "in a way from an interest in neurology", from the "stuff that's left over" from mental processes, *Mnestic Pressure* can seem at times to represent the bright, controlled, brittle core of egoic thinking. Mnestic refers to memory, so that the title conjures the idea of music working through the stresses on contemporary memory – technological, social, psychic – with compensatory rhythmic pressures of its own. It's no radical departure, but Gamble nonetheless conjures a new and unsettling sense of richness from differently focused materials.