

member of Cyrille's Maono group in the late 70s and early 80s.

This album, Cyrille's third as a leader or co-leader for ECM in the past decade, was meant to be a sequel to 2014's *The Declaration Of Musical Independence* and feature the same personnel – guitarist Bill Frisell, synth player Richard Teitelbaum and bassist Ben Street. When Teitelbaum had to bow out due to health issues, pianist David Virelles stepped in. The music retains the spacious and at times otherworldly quality of *Declaration*, but there are some surprising moments. On a version of Adegoke Steve Colson's "Leaving East Of Java," Frisell and Virelles create a shimmering, slippery cloud of harmonies that lean toward 50s exotica, while Cyrille does nothing but dance on the cymbals. As the piece progresses, though, the energy level ramps up gradually, from a Latin groove to an erupting free piano solo.

On the title track, Cyrille lays a newspaper across the snare drum and plays it with brushes, while his bandmates create eerie atmospheres around him. But the opening "Mountain" and the closing "With You In Mind" are conventionally beautiful ballads, setting a wistful and romantic mood that frames the adventurous journey between.

Phil Freeman

#### **Damu The Fudgemunk** ***Conversation Peace***

Def Pressé Editions CD/DL/LP

Damu The Fudgemunk is a fascinating choice to kick off KPM Crate Diggers, a producer showcase that makes ample use of sounds from the famed British library music company. He emerged in the late 2000s, when rap critics largely ignored the so-called backpacker style of hip-hop he specialised in. Yet his impact has lingered. Through numerous releases on his label Redefinition Records, he helped pioneer the introspective style known and sometimes-derided as lo-fi/study beats (along with Nujabes, Fat Jon and, of course, J Dilla). His 2007 album as Y Society with Boston rapper/producer Insight, *Travel At Your Own Pace*, is recognised in some quarters as a classic.

On *Conversation Peace*, Damu organises nine tracks into a familiar template. The beats hark back to the wizened melancholy of late 1960s sunshine pop. He utilises soft yet insistent drums – a key distinction between lo-fi and the harder boom-bap drums typical of instrumental hip-hop at the turn of the century – and musical variations are largely signified by shifts in tempo, not melody.

The guest performances vary in quality. On "Power Of The Mind" Insight stuffs his tracks with so many rhymes that he falls off-beat, but it's fun to hear him shout out underrated Black heroes like Ernest Everett. Nitty Scott's lusty verse on "Four Better Or Worse (Pt 1)" feels too short and abrupt. Blu can't quite get on point

with "God Speed" but acquits himself much better with the slower pace of "Four Better Or Worse (Pt 2)". Damu also takes a turn at the mic. On "Reporting" he comes off as didactic, but he sounds gawky yet heartfelt when he harmonises over "Four Better Or Worse (Pt 4)."

*Conversation Peace* doesn't feel like a major statement comparable to *Ocean Bridges*, Damu's impressive 2020 project with Raw Poetic and jazz saxophonist Archie Shepp. But if it introduces more people to this underheard producer, all the better.

Mosi Reeves

#### **Sarah Davachi** ***Antiphonals***

Late Music CD/DL/MC

On *Antiphonals*, medieval harmonies and ruminative melodies meet celestial textures, venturing from darkness to light and back again. This is well-travelled territory for composer and multi-instrumentalist Sarah Davachi, who regularly showcases her delicate timbral understanding with mesmerizing results. Early music themes and contemporary influences have long blended in her music; on *Antiphonals*, the push and pull between styles feels even more present.

For this album, Davachi picked the same basic instrumentation she drew on for 2018's *Let Night Come On Bells End The Day* – a keyboard quartet of Mellotron, electric organ, piano and synthesizer, with additional violin, voice, pipe organ, acoustic guitar and more. The combination allows her to slip easily between styles and generate textural interplay. The opening "Chorus Scene" is centred around a nasal, medieval-style melody, with echoes of this sound also audible in the serene chord at the end of "Abeyant" and the tonality of "Magdalena". Davachi's ideas find their greatest coalescence however on "Gradual Of Image", which puts many of the instruments she's gathered together on display at once. The song hums like a thousand year old lullaby, its airy acoustic guitar floating above a lush bed of winds and electronics.

Much of *Antiphonals* is engaged in solemn introspection – there's melancholy hiding behind each gentle phrase – but on "Rushes Recede" the heavens open and every fuzzy, distorted sound drops out to reveal a spellbinding, resolute ringing, until Davachi swallows all those filmy textures with a final heartbeat. For the most part, however, throughout its undulating ride, *Antiphonals* transfixes and immerses, transporting the listener deep into their own psyche.

Vanessa Ague

#### **Mr Diagonal** ***North Pacific***

Bandcamp CD/DL/Message In A Bottle

"You don't reach Serendib by plotting a course for it. You have to set out in good faith for elsewhere and lose your bearings, serendipitously," said John

Barth in his 1991 novel *The Last Voyage Of Somebody The Sailor*. Dan Barbenel aka Mr Diagonal set sail from Glasgow and on this fifth album has reached the Indian Ocean and North Pacific.

With Barbenel's band Black Light Orchestra on what he describes as "permanent vacation", he's been a wanton prisoner of the tides, dreaming of large scale musical comedies, kinky stage shows and slowly putting together the songs that make up *North Pacific*. Barbenel's songcraft – though it's too random and associative really to use that term – is often compared to the likes of The Divine Comedy and Kevin Ayers, and while the music often reflects the latter's suspiciously precise "I'm sober, really!" diction, it has nothing of the former's Betjemanesque quality. A better comparison would be Mike Cooper's musical Gauguins, especially on pieces like the opening "Bannerghatta" and "Serendipity House".

But while Cooper always has a blues tinge hovering, Barbenel casts every track in a different guitar tuning which, as he admits, will make it a "bugger" to play live. With Yannick Dupont on percussion and Moog and Quentin Manfroy doing the surf on rocks stuff on contrabassoon and bass flute as well as bass guitar, plus guest string quartet and a guitar solo from Ben Carmona on "Red Lighthouse", it's not so much a nailed-on orchestral pop album and "more of a beach orchestra on walkabout".

The image he projects is cleverly pitched. Some of the artwork has him in standard beach-bum gear, cradling the tiny Bolivian guitar that dominates the sound, backed by palm trees, perfect skies. Pan down, though, and you see that Barbenel is seated on a bank of launderette machines, for this is a voyage of the mind. Like Barth's novel, it's poetic navigation by star and dead reckoning. The treasure map that comes with the message in a bottle version of the album is the clinching metaphor, for the X that marks the spot is only an algebraic placemaker. Next time you look, it will point somewhere else entirely.

Brian Morton

#### **Tim Finn & Phil Manzanera** ***Caught By The Heart***

Expression CD/DL

Over 40 years since they last worked together on 1978's *K-Scope*, Split Enz founder Tim Finn and former Roxy Music guitarist Phil Manzanera have joined forces to create a new album, working remotely from their homes on different sides of the planet. *Caught By The Heart* draws from a variety of global styles and features a handful of guest contributions, from João Mello (saxophone), Frank Portuondo (bass) and British-Bahraini flugelhorn player Yazz Ahmed, among others. Finn's daughter Elliot also makes an appearance, contributing the occasional backing vocal.

The album opens with the Latin inspired "Mambo Salsa!...", playful and relaxed with a distinct cargo shorts and sandals, BBQ dad energy that continues with the reggae groove of "The Cry Of The Earth". The mood turns fragrant and shifty with "La Ruleta De La Fortuna", the first of two Spanish language songs. The other, a delicately acoustic "Bajo Luz Distinta", is probably the most impressive sounding piece on the album. A suitably dramatic coda is provided by the mysterious and lavish "La Musica Del Tiempo", whose fragile vocals and soaring lead lines are underscored by pulsing chamber orchestra figures.

Manzanera's production is clean and balanced, but it doesn't always blend in a satisfying way. This can be blamed on the programmed drums (a necessary lockdown compromise), the tell-tale Logic synth presets and effects, and the incongruous tone colours and environmental ambiances of the remotely recorded parts. These details betray the way the album was made – piecemeal, Dropbox volleyed between home studios. Certainly, the strangest and most airless sounding cuts on the album, "Malecón" and "Galleon Of Stars", would work a lot better if they could be performed by musicians with the luxury of rehearsing and tracking in the same room. That said, Finn's close-miked action is enjoyable for its conspiratorial proximity. He sings these songs like a man recording a voice note in a house full of sleeping people.

Altogether, this grab-bag of tunes might not be fully self-aware, but it nonetheless possesses a playful elegance in its generosity. One can sense these old friends are genuinely finding some joy here, and that is enough to make *Caught By The Heart* endearing.

Leah Kardos

#### **Steve Gunn** ***Other You***

Matador CD/DL/2×LP

True ambidextrousness is very rare, seen in about one percent of the population. Typically, one hand dominates. While the percentage of musicians who can effectively play multiple instruments is probably much greater, there's still likely to be one that they play most effectively.

For the decade and a half that Steve Gunn's been singing and playing guitar on records, his guitar has undeniably held the upper hand. On "New Decline", the standout blues from 2013's *Time Off*, his picking strains ahead of the choogling beat while his voice hangs behind; on "New Moon", from 2019's *The Unseen In Between*, the singing is more graceful, but his strumming is still what makes it fly. And with the splendid Gunn-Truscinski Duo he never opens his yap, managing to evoke Sandy Bull, Jimi Hendrix and Tom Verlaine, often in the same song, without ever failing to sound like himself.

*Other You* presents Steve Gunn, singer. Producer Rob Schnapf (Elliott Smith,