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Rum Music

Rum Music For January Reviewed By Jennifer Lucy Allan

— Jennifer Lucy Allan , January 30th, 2020 13:09

Jennifer Lucy Allan draws together sounds from the Kiev underground; forgotten synth explorations of a jazz legend and a must-watch of woodblocks and bells by Sarah Hennies in the first Rum Music of 2020



I thought January was going to be a month where I really scraped the barrel for releases, shoving any mediocre 'have Zoom, will collage and upload to Bandcamp' in here just to fill the space. But how wrong I was. The Zone is pretty juicy this month. I wonder if I'm more enthusiastic than I was, or if as things get shitter the music is getting better. I do not believe that one needs to endure hardship in order to make good music but being cross about the absolute state of things does seem to be fuelling a lot of inspired stuff right now, whether directly or indirectly. The feeling from lots of this month's column I will describe with the following scene.

I go to yoga near my home in Southend, in a converted shop front next to a Chinese takeaway. It is a truly joyful experience to hear a meditation in the TOWIE birdsong, and my teacher does this thing where, while we're doing the meditation at the end, she comes round and lays a fuzzy blanket over us, one by one. Reader, I love it so much my mind is completely occupied by listening to her pad around the room, trying to work out with just my ears whether it is my turn to be tucked in. I am worried that one day she will see how excited I get and it'll make me feel like a pervert. I listen so hard in anticipation of the soft blanket I have only a mind on the 'I am breathing in, I am breathing out' mantra.

Lots of the music in this month's column is a bit like this end of yoga session apart from it doesn't make me feel like a pervert.

Listening to a few things in this column, like Crys Cole, or Svitlana Nianio & Oleksandr Yurchenko has actually settled my mind by occupying it, by teasing at loose threads; music that can't be listened to in the background. These things are often for close listening, induced, not sought. It takes all our attention not to stare at the absolute fucked-ness of the present moment, and the reason I have loved these things is because they're not really ambient music, nor are they a distraction.

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They're something else.

Abner Jay – *Man Walked On The Moon*

(Mississippi Records)

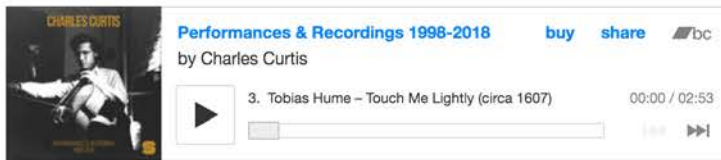


It's so hard to find a positive way to start a year like this. So I'm opening 2020 with praise for what might be your January jam. 'I'm So Depressed' by Abner Jay is an outsider anthem for the lonely, and was his signature song.

Jay was a one-man band of sorts, playing an electric banjo, feet drums and a harmonica, and his plaintive soul sound is not like much else. This latest reissue of his work on Mississippi includes one side of 70s material (which includes his extra-vehicular ballad 'Man Walked On The Moon') and the second side contains his final recordings, released as a 10" on Mississippi in 2011. These are a different kettle of fish – they are more gnarly, played on acoustic guitar and harmonica. His voice is a little faded but he is still able to yelp the blues.

Charles Curtis – *Performances & Recordings 1998-2018*

(Saltern)



A 'best of' (of sorts) collecting performances by the American cellist Charles Curtis on Tashi Wada's Saltern Records. I wish there were more collections like this. It opens with one of Eliane Radigue's Occam pieces (she only allows certain people to play her music) and includes a mix of early music by Tobias Hume, classical pieces by Messiaen and avant-garde compositions. Alison Knowles and Terry Jennings (who was an early TEM member). Many are minimal and grounded in the instrument's body or material construction. The Alison Knowles piece consists of a beating of the body of the instrument that moves on to the strings. Curtis's own pieces have the sort of instrumental drift of Gastr Del Sol – nonchalant guitars and brushes on snares. It is a salve.

Crys Cole – *Beside Myself*

(Students Of Decay)



I have horrible associations and a violent dislike for most instances where texts are spoken over ambient sound. My worst experience of this was having to literally watch a large ice cube melt accompanied by an 'art-text' (cue, nonsensical ontology bollocks) read by Charlotte Rampling (for no apparent reason). Crys Cole's 'In Praise Of Blandness' however, on this new album *Beside Myself*, is all that piece wishes it had been. She reads an extract of a book called *In Praise of Blandness* by Chinese scholar François Julien. Her *sotto voce* reading becomes increasingly distant and muffled, over a loud drone that has troubling frequencies in headphones – to me it almost ghosts a scream. It is not entirely relaxing, and I don't think it's supposed to be. I love it.

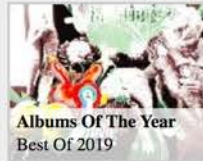
The other side, 'The Nonsuch' has moments that call to mind a scene from Michaelangelo



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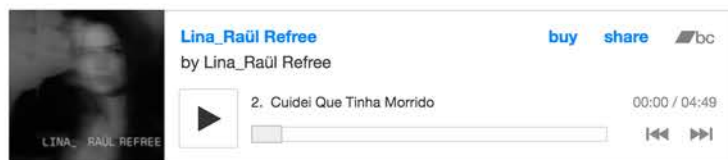
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Antonioni's *The Passenger*, Maria Schneider and Jack Nicholson stop at a roadside cafe, there is heat, dust, plastic tables and lukewarm drinks. The hum and shush of a nearby road, perhaps some machinery. They talk, but the camera watches from behind a section of a glass divider, and the conversation is muffled, lost, fragmented. We, the audience, cannot make out much of what they're saying. 'The Nonsuch' on this album has that exact feel, of the slow drift of time in hot places, of air conditioners, the way white painted walls reflect the voices of people passing without their words being comprehensible. That is to say, I really appreciate the subtlety in these pieces.

It's not up for streaming yet but the Bandcamp is here.

LinaRaül Refree – LinaRaül Refree

(Glitterbeat)



Fado is a type of traditional Portuguese singing, steeped in melancholy. [Hat tip to Phil Freeman over at Bandcamp Daily](#), which is where I picked up on this, and who said it "floats in a cloud of saudade" – a Portuguese word that means an overwhelming sorrow and loss.

The way in which Refree has 'updated' Lina's traditional fado with drones and pensive electronics has such a light touch, and often feels translucent, as if he is the vellum on which the illuminated manuscript of her singing can be written, her words curling, ornamented with feeling.

Sarah Hennies – Falsetto

(Vimeo)



[Sarah Hennies: Falsetto from EMPAC @ Rensselaer on Vimeo.](#)

Not technically a release traditionally speaking but in The Year Of Our Lord 2020 I am ready to broaden my ideas of releases as requiring what we would call 'an album'. I picked up on this because Hennies herself tweeted about how pleased she was with the recording, and damn, if there isn't some great sound recording here. Check out the woodblock clacks! I remember them clearly from primary school music lessons and have not set eyes on one since, and seeing them gives me a hit of nostalgia.

Some music is just made to be watched, not only listened to, and *Falsetto* is one of those pieces. As an aside, this might be why I find so much improv hard to listen to at home – I want to see what's happening to the instrument to really feel the thrill of its impulses and transgressions. On here, the piece becomes increasingly difficult to perform – there is humour and lightness as Hennies scrambles around. More bells! More mallets!

Muhai Richard Abrams – Celestial Birds

(Karlrecords)

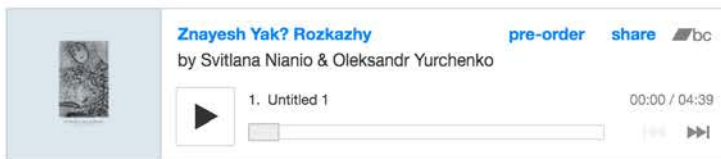


I love a mailout that does away with selling me something and instead concerns itself with telling me something. Muhal Richard Abrams was a founder of the AACM, and a jazz pianist. (The AACM is a collective of black jazz and avant-garde musicians in Chicago, who have included Anthony Braxton, Henry Threadgill, Nicole Mitchell, Jack DeJohnette and loads more among their number.) Abrams played jazz but was also interested in broader avant garde explorations. However, instruments had become associated with a sort of authenticity within Abrams' scene, and so Abrams 'hid' his electronic music on the B-sides of his records. This album gathers them together.

There is a great, scattered history of established jazz performers getting their hands on synths and drum machines – Alvin Curran's MIDI jazz; Pekka Airaksinen's outsider Buddhist jams. It is sometimes so concerned with the transliterations between jazz playing as applied to drum machines and MIDI synths it forgets that the sounds these machines make are sometimes very uncool. I think it might be my favourite type of music.

Svitlana Nianio & Oleksandr Yurchenko – *Znayesh Yak? Rozkazhi*

(Night School/Skire)

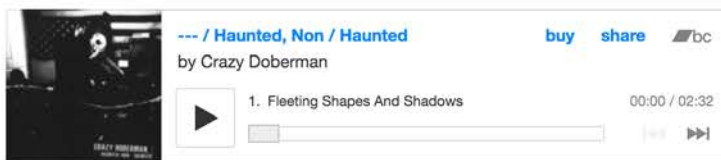


This lo-fi and eerie beauty from the 90s Kiev underground is part Flaming Tunes, part Księżyc. The title translates to *Know How? Tell Me*.

Svitlana Nainio's vocals are all about stripping back and reassembling Ukrainian folk music. Oleksandr Yurchenko's accompaniment is sometimes almost more like sound design than anything else – anxious hammered dulcimer, Casios, rattles, organs and strings that could be right out of an inspired Giallo playbook.

Crazy Doberman – *---/haunted, non/haunted*

(Torn Light)



This lot have been churning out pretty good cassettes of whacked-out jams for a while, I think of them as a sort of Midwest noise-punk and picket-fence basement grunge version of Vox Populi. It's all ragged edges, synths and saxes and noise boxes, and a load of other stuff. It all has the whiff of Wolf Eyes, but a bit more ketamine-y. If you don't think all that sounds great I don't know why you're reading this column.

Unfortunately this is \$1,000 digitally from their own Bandcamp page, but is on vinyl and digital at normal human prices over at Torn Light.

Brunhild Ferrari & Jim O'Rourke – *Le Piano Englouti*

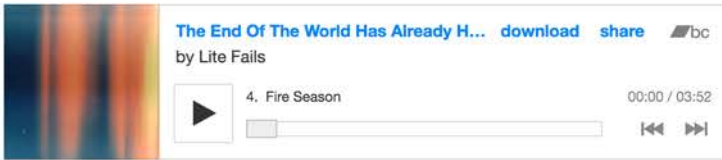
(Black Truffle)



Brunhild Ferrari is a lesser-known hero. She is a composer and artist, who made radio plays and studied with Pierre Schaefer, and was the partner of Luc Ferrari with whom she made a lot of work. To have her working with Jim O'Rourke is a fairly big deal in my book, and here it's largely her tape compositions that we can hear, as I understand it. I've only just got around to listening to this one, and I'm still getting stuck in to its whirrs, crackles and echoes, of which there are many. It carries the crinkles of low bit-rate audio, crashing waves made into sweeps of sandpaper, footsteps into tin foil, with O'Rourke on the buttons in Steamroom mode.

Lite Falls – *The End Of The World Has Already Happened*

(Flaming Pines)



The Australian bushfires have exhibited something called 'pyro-cumulonimbus events' – huge thunderstorm clouds that form over the fires. They don't rain but do generate lightning, which can start more fires. They are accompanied by winds of up to 100mph. These firestorms also happened in Hiroshima.

Lite Falls is Henry Reese, who researches Australian soundscapes in the period of its colonisation, and made this as the bush fires were raging. Kate Carr who runs the label, is Australian, so this is close to her heart and home. Reese says in the liner notes: "Researching the cultural history of sound recording, I am constantly struck by the comparisons that early Australian listeners made between fire and the surface noise of phonograph cylinder records. In the 1890s and 1900s, the pops, crackles and imperfections of the new medium struck early listeners as similar to the daily presence of fire, heat and power. Tamed fire and tamed sound were hallmarks of progress and modernity. But now the land roars like a freight train and the people can't breathe."

Other news:

Reines d'Angleterre, the collaboration between Ghédalia Tazartès, Jo Tanz and Èlg is up on [Bandcamp](#). [Hundebliss](#) has a free DL going via a link on its Instagram – glitched-out edits of kuduru and the like. [This record of ghazals by Indian singer and musician Andaleeb M. Wasif on Little Axe has been hollowed out by decay, but still shines.](#)

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