

Four Tet The Ringer

DOMINO CD/2x12"

Over four tracks and 32 minutes, Kieran Hebden, aka Four Tet, set himself the brief of making "Techno with an Afrobeat/Krautrock sensibility". He's reined in his recent penchant for digressive breakbeats in favour of locked-in Reichian grooves – but not without the odd protest from said penchant.

The opening title track sets off at a brisk, arpeggiated scamper, as if heading someplace far out, but ends up on a short lead, swirling in circles, limited in its scope but dropping melodic pearls from its pockets as it swings round and round. The serenely galactic progress of "Ribbons" is impeded by rhythmic irritations and some hi-hat heckling – it's as if Hebden has set up a Techno system in order for it to be introduced with viruses, messing with its usual circuits. "Swimmer" lingers like a sweet strobe headache, high in the register, before luminous flakes start dropping off it, while "Wing Body Swing" is assailed by polyrhythms and a repressed urge to break out of a Krautrock-style discipline in which the only way is not out but in.

With *The Ringer*, the diverse elements that have always fed into Hebden's music find an unlikely way of working together. This may be a mini-album, but it's so well turned, so successful in completing what it sets out to achieve that, far from marking time in his discography, it could end up being one of his key releases.

DAVID STUBBS

Ellen Fullman & Monique Buzzarté Fluctuations

DEEP LISTENING CD

On first sight, *Fluctuations* might appear forbiddingly ascetic. The titles – the tracks are simply called "Fluctuations" and numbered one to six – give you little to go on, while the instrumentation, featuring just Fullman playing the Long String Instrument she invented, and Buzzarté on trombone, might lead you to expect something spartan. But *Fluctuations* conjures extraordinarily maximalist, epic results from the two instruments. Fullman's Long String Instrument creates a sense of majestic vastness, its lines stretching off towards an implied infinity.

Listening to it, you feel like you are inside some cyclopean subterranean grotto from the imagination of HP Lovecraft, its jewelled walls glistening with an alien lustre. "The cascading overtone production glides over the rooted fundamental tone like a river moving past," Fullman has written of the LSI, "always changing; yet remaining the same." On *Fluctuations*, the LSI sounds less like flowing liquid than something that shimmers, a sound machine whose iridescent shapes bend conventional, pulse based time and impose their own paradoxical temporality, where constant movement teems within a vast stasis.

Merging in and out of Fullman's overtones, Buzzarté's trombone – sometimes serene and stately, sometimes wolf-howl mournful – adds abstract colours to the immense, humming backdrop that the LSI generates. Her sombre poise is the perfect complement to Fullman's playing – together they produce landscapes as Arctic-stark as Nico's *The*

Marble Index. *Fluctuations* is a bracing listen, a palate-cleansing experience whose crystalline austerity provides a rich alternative to the stimulus blitz of vernacular postmodern culture.

MARK FISHER

Carlos Giffoni Eternal Noise

BOTTROP-BOY CD

In interviews, Brooklyn noise head Carlos Giffoni often talks about striving to avoid repetition. So far he's kept his word: while his work has a clear consistency – no one could mistake it for anything but noise – each of his albums is distinct. 2005's *Welcome Home* contains super-detailed electronic pieces, while 2007's *Arrogance*, made on analogue equipment, eschews miniaturism for widescreen sound. *Eternal Noise* is another left turn, offering simple pieces that change gradually and sometimes inaudibly. As the title implies, Giffoni here views noise as a constant stream he can tap into without obstructing its elemental flow. He hasn't crafted these four tracks so much as channelled them, funneling basic tones into lengthy sonic rivers.

The album opens with the title track, 19 minutes of oscillating drone that builds imperceptibly. At first it sounds spacious, then dense and austere, but that shift is likely as much in the listener's mind as it is the music. From there the album becomes increasingly minimal: "III" resembles an artfully administered hearing test, while "IV" sounds like a machine shop converted into ones and zeros. Yet each piece centres on Giffoni's attentive choices, a hallmark of all of his endeavours. *Eternal Noise* may not be Giffoni's best record, but then it's not really intended to be. These tracks are separately made pieces he was unable to find a place for on previous albums. But as former orphans, they fit together well, revealing another side to Giffoni's ever changing aesthetic.

MARC MASTERS

The Golden Oaks Autumn Testament

A SILENT PLACE CD

The North Sea Archaic Spines

A SILENT PLACE CD

Brad Rose, the founder of the *Foxy Digitalis* zine and *Digitalis* record label offshoot, features on both these recordings. The Golden Oaks is his collaboration with Keith Wood, aka Hush Arbors, the Virginia based musician and sometime member of both Six Organs Of Admittance and Current 93. On these five tracks, Rose and Wood weave a delicate fabric of skeletal acoustic patterns and eerie drones. Described on the sleeve as "connected through the organic ruins of a forest once rampant...", *Autumn Testament* manages to sound both organic and structured. The music spreads outwards through gently pulsating drones and provides the sketchiest of outlines through murmured, indecipherable voices and acoustic strumming. But then certain details will suddenly emerge with greater clarity: the flickering, hollow sound of plucked strings; a trebly, distorted keyboard melody. There's a sense of this diffuse, abstract music building up to more definable peaks and then gently subsiding again, like a blurry shadow of the

kind of semi-freestyle intensity associated with Six Organs Of Admittance.

Rose's solo project, The North Sea, strips away any such arrangements and relies solely on bouzouki and occasional vocals. The effect is mesmerising, with Rose playing a series of intense ragas interspersed with shorter but no less vivid pieces. Each echoing chime of the bouzouki hovers briefly in space before being supplanted by its successor, and yet the overall feel is quite substantial, with a primitive, cumulative intensity that peaks with the brittle outpouring of "The Feather'd King, The Bluejay Queen". As an argument for simplicity and purity of intent, it's hard to fault.

TOM RIDGE

Malcolm Goldstein A Sounding Of Sources

NEW WORLD CD

The violin is so historically embedded in various traditions that it rarely acquires a radically distinctive voice unless electronically modified. In performances by Malcolm Goldstein, the unadulterated violin always sounds unique. His playing is physical and rich in gesture, yet within it there's a spectrum of profound awareness encompassing Baroque invention, the still untamed innovation of composers such as Lves and Varèse, folk music ingrained with other ways of life and working, elemental sounds of the natural world. Goldstein's improvising is at once lucid and mysterious, both qualities of its immediacy and commitment to the present tense.

His compositions share to a remarkable extent the dynamic intensity of his improvised pieces. This fascinating CD opens with *Configurations In Darkness* (1995), a violin solo that vividly translates the melody and rhythm of a folksong from Bosnia-Herzegovina into personalised terms of texture and structural tension. A markedly different ensemble version, drawing on several songs from the region, is realised by Goldstein in a fluent shapeshifting quintet that also includes trombonist Radu Malfatti.

Ishi/timechangingspaces (1988), a radio sound work incorporating 1914 wax cylinders of Ishi, last surviving member of the Californian Yahi tribe, is an eerie experience – an irrevocably lost voice snared within a receding perspective of recording technologies and set in sympathetic dialogue with Goldstein's urgent violin soundings. On the concluding solo *Ishi/ 'man waxati'*, his retuned violin invokes the timbres and inflections of Ishi's singing voice. Singular music by a persistent explorer, an American original audibly in touch with the lived world.

JULIAN COWLEY

Barry Guy/Mats Gustafsson/ Raymond Strid Tarfala

MAYA CD

The Tarfala Glacier at the foot of Sweden's highest mountain Kebnekaise is melting at alarming speed. Put it down to global warming, but I like to think that some of the heat generated 600 miles further south in the city of Västerås in 2006 is also to blame. These four mighty slabs of Improv, featuring Mats Gustafsson (tenor and baritone sax and flutophone – the body of a flute with a sax mouthpiece), Barry Guy (bass) and Raymond

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