

## Murray Bramwell's Reviews

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*CDs reviewed by Murray Bramwell*

Anyone who knows their polypeptides will tell you that endorphins are a little gift from your brain to you. And because he offers a beguiling equivalent in musical analgesia, electronics composer Eric Chapus, aka Endorphin is well-named. *Skin* (Columbia/Sony) is his second album, after goodly numbers of Australian fans wrapped themselves around his debut work, *Embrace*.

Chapus, born in France and widely travelled, has been based in Kuranda in Northern Queensland before recently relocating to Sydney. He has toured with Massive Attack and Portishead and is slated to appear again in Adelaide later this month, when Moby comes to town.

*Skin* warms up fast with the Cosmix take on *Blue Moon*. Not the Ludwig van Moonlight swoony piano of the single version, but a beaty hook into an album as edible and layered as Rollo's work with Faithless. *Anguish* is a confection of piano cascades, grim and grungy chords and the stained glass vocals of Tammy Brennan offering little drops from the heart. Stella One Eleven singer Cindy Ryan takes *Afterwords* to a less ethereal plane as Chapus surrounds her grainy vocals with nervy rhythms and menacing faux guitars.

*Time* has more than its share of bass and drum moments but the piano garnishes are faithfully Sister Bliss, while *Red*, driven by Charlie McMahon's didgeridoo, *Grey -le couleur de la ville-* a gallic response to Sydney in winter and *Heat*, all tuned drums and Moroccan pipes- not only capture the geography of the skin, they get further under it every time you listen.

Console, the sonic vehicle for Martin Gretschnann, operates far less symphonically lush territory. *Rocket in the Pocket* (Matador/Festival) ruminates on its own little techno syllogisms- worrying themes and repeating them with sparsely hypnotic curiosity. *Gulls Galore* crawls out from short wave radio to set up ratchetty beats. *Pigeon Party* has marimba colourings and *Crabcraft* has- doesn't everything ?- debts to the Elderly Uncles of Kraftwerk.

Gretschmann began with Bavarian band the Notwist and the international release of *Rocket* includes Console's poppy single *14 Zero Zero*. It is clumsy marketing since, for all its catchiness, it is banal and- amongst more intrepid works such as the final suite *Walk Like a Worm*- sticks out like balls on a Pet Shop boy.

Dynomite D's *By the Way* (Trifecta/Festival) is full of scratch but not much sniff. Kid Koala features but the trip-hop beats, the pulses, and the samples have a dulling predictability. *Cold Rock* is undeveloped, while *Bombin Subways* is just old graffiti. *Alki Beach Drive* with seagulls, surf and keyboard wah wah from the days of Zawinul has considerably more appeal- but out there in the ruck Dynomite D need a lot more bang to warrant attention.

Fusebox from Jolly Mukherjee with the Madras Cinematic Orchestra (Palm Pictures/Festival) on the other hand, is seriously intriguing. Film composer and arranger King Jolly is a leading figure in Bollywood, epicentre of the Indian film industry -and with this project -enlisting the aid of mixers such as State of Bengal, The Underwolves, Badmarsh and Shri, and the Madras Musician - has added techno to his trademark lush and spicy sound.

The Underwolves' Bhatiyali has sublime strings gliding over phat saturated beats while Bhairau uses traditional flutes and mandolin with stately orchestrations in a mix of Morricone and John Barry. I leapt on this as major kitsch when I first heard it. But not so now. It is fascinating in its eclecticism. Take home some tandoori and beef korma and give it a good listen.

Senan's Haggart is the self-titled project from Adelaide based Irish fiddle players Tim Whelan and Bartley O'Donnell, formerly of The Counting Room. Joined by bass clarinetist and saxophonist Lauren Pittwood and Luke Plumb on mandola, the band is named for Whelan's late uncle Senan and his haggart ,or house garden, in County Clare.

Featuring two lengthy tracks Senan's Haggart play a modal, trickling music which has a lovely gathering nuance to it. *Sporting Nell* has Plumb's

mandola repetitions underpinned by a haunting clarinet, both lifted and lilted by Whelan and O'Donnell's gently dueling fiddles. The second suite *Sean Ryan's* opens with a familiar Irish air on mandola but , almost immediately, Kronos-like strings take you into altered space.

There is none of that nought to ninety full tilt aspect that leaves much Irish traditional music with nowhere to go but busier and flashier. Plumb has likened the band's music to Terry Riley and Miles Davis and the comparisons are neither pretentious nor misplaced. This music is every bit as interesting and accomplished as the recent Joshua Bell and Edgar Brand excursions. Watch out for Senan's Haggart , they are something special. If you can't find the CD contact them direct at P.O.Box 368, Hindmarsh SA 5007.

Singer-songwriters, those owner-drivers of music, came to the fore in the late sixties and early seventies. In fact the recent compilation *Bleecker Street: Greenwich Village in the 60's* (Astor Place/MRA) is a terrific tribute to the Tims and Toms, Bobs and Erics who wrote and sang so winsomely. The style continues with the likes of Ron Sexsmith, local pretender Ben Lee and the real McCoy talent of that bonny prince of palace, Will Oldham.

But selling a lot more units has been Jeff Buckley. Son of the charismatic Tim whose morning glory was cut short by heroin when he was in his late twenties, Jeff's death was, if anything, even more tragically random-drowning in the Mississippi River on a summer's night in Memphis in 1997 at the age of thirty. By the time he died he had recorded only one studio album, the much praised *Grace* in 1994.

A posthumous collection of demos and outtakes -*Sketches for My Sweetheart the Drunk* (1998) hinted at what the second album might have been and now Buckley's mother Mary Guibert has overseen the release of *Mystery White Boy*, tracks performed live in Europe, the US and in one of his earliest audience strongholds, here in Australia.

It is impossible not to feel melancholy that Buckley and his tightly focused band had so little time to make what would have been the kind of mark on late nineties American suburbs music that Kurt Cobain made five years earlier. His searching, expressive vocals, the diarist lyrics and the carefully managed dishevelment of his garage guitar are all there on these

recovered tracks. But, like the crumbs from the Hendrix vault or the cryonic production of the Lennon vocals on *Free as a Bird*, *Mystery White Boy* reminds us most keenly that, even at his most vivid, Jeff Buckley is no longer present.

Elliot Smith, the Good Will Hunter from Portland, Oregon is, however, alive and well and able to make the kind of moves that make popular music as responsive to cultural ripples as frogs in an ecosystem. *Figure 8* (SKG/Universal) is his latest release and like Beck, particularly on *Mutations*, Smith knows that the past is not just another country but the future as well.

From the perky *Son of Sam*, with its McCartney vocals and Garfunkel harmonies to the Paul Simon sweet-sadness of *Everything Reminds Me of Her* with its George Harrison guitar vibrato I'd have to say of *Figure 8* that everything reminds me of Northern Songs, Pet Sounds and voices leaking from sad cafes. But unlike the image from *Bleecker Street*, these are not shadows touching shadow's hand. Elliot Smith, who is rumoured to be touring in October, has taken the best of pop and made the best of pop.

And speaking of revisitations, Festival have revived their Interfusion label to market a swag of back catalogue jazz, blues, lounge and world music material. When Fantasy records began, now some fifty years ago, Max and Sol Weiss enjoyed early success with the likes of white jazz boys such as Dave Brubeck and Gerry Mulligan. Then the acumen of Saul Zaentz brought later success with Creedence Clearwater Revival. The profits were well invested. Fantasy bought out a number of smaller labels such as Prestige, Milestone and Riverside, taking ownership of the richest back catalogue in jazz.

It is some of this material that Festival is releasing at a pre-GST \$14.95 mid-price. There are some treasures here- Miles Davis with MJQ vibraharpist Milt Jackson and Thelonious Monk on piano, Jackson and his own band playing Ellington live at Ronnie Scott's. Dexter Gordon, recorded with James Moody in New York in the late sixties, Chet Baker crooning in 1958, Andre Previn with Red Mitchell and Shelley Manne, Tony Bennett with Bill Evans. From Fantasy's own vault are recordings of Ali Akbar Khan and Ravi Shankar, the formica cool of Arthur Lyman's Hawaiian vibes and some fine blues - from the early fifties, John Lee Hooker and from the mid-seventies a very robust Joe Turner with Pee Wee Crayton on guitar.

## Coming Up in July

1-20 July. State Theatre South Australia. *How I Learned to Drive* by Paula Vogel. Directed by Rosalba Clemente, design by Dean Hills. Features Lisa Hensley, Marlo Grocke, Nicholas Eadie and Rory Walker. The Space.

from 11 July. *Moscow Stations*. One-hander from Eddy Knight. Bakehouse, Angas Street.

18-29 July. State Theatre with Playbox. *Secret Bridesmaid's Business* by Elizabeth Coleman. Directed by Catherine Hill and designed by Shaun Gurton. Optima Playhouse.

23 July. John Williams. master classical guitarist. Scarlatti, Vivaldi, Albinez, and others. Adelaide Town Hall.

26 July. Moby plays Thebarton. With Endorphin.

27 July- 5 August. Junction Theatre and Leigh Warren Dancers. *Piercing the Skin*. Text, movement, music and video. The Space.