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DECEMBER 19,
2013
BY S. VICTOR
AARON

S. Victor Aaron's Best of 2013 (Part 3 of 4, Avant Garde & Experimental Music): Ben Goldberg, Ceramic Dog

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I used to call this the “whack jazz” (or is that “wack” jazz?) list, but I found that term to be too restrictive for what’s being presented below.

The *ahem* “avant garde and experimental music” list sizes up the best of music of 2013 that may or may not be jazz, but it for one reason or another resides on the fringes. That creates an interesting mish-mash of albums that might not belong together under any other circumstances. They’re typically visceral and usually extremely imaginative, the kind of things that are found all too infrequently in the more mainstream styles of music.

I may spend more time delving into this kind of music than any of the others, so I found so many records worthy to put on this list; it’s amazing that there are only sixteen. However, the honorable mentions brought ten more and there were nonetheless some good albums that got left behind altogether. For instance, I listed

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'We start work in June, I think': Ex-Yes frontman Jon Anderson's new band could include Jean-Luc Ponty



'That's never come up': Wings' Denny Laine on the idea of working with Paul McCartney again



'The rest of the day, you're confused': Bruce Springsteen still finds purpose on the stage



'You're hearing it from me: Nope': Steve Perry emphatically denies Journey reunion rumors



'Is this really Queen without Freddie?': Brian May defends tour with Adam Lambert



Across the Great Divide: The Band, "Blind Willie McTell" from Jericho (1993)

one album by Brazilian saxophonist Ivo Perelman on here but he released around six albums (I lost count!), and [five of them were reviewed here](#). Any of those are highly recommended.

Here's the whole list, unranked and unordered. Click on the embedded links to get the complete lowdowns on the winning releases...

ALBUM OF THE YEAR

Harrison Bankhead Quartet – Velvet Blue: Harrison Bankhead has held down the low end for many luminary of the AACM, but his biggest claim to fame was as a member of Fred Anderson's band during this out-jazz giant's last, brilliant burst of activity before his passing in 2010 at 81 years old. After serving as a sideman for decades, Bankhead finally stepped into the leader role the year after Anderson's death. He needed a little coaxing to do it, but once he took the reigns he knew exactly how to ride that horse.

Morning Sun Harvest Moon (2011) was an astounding debut from Harrison. He wrote songs with and pure beauty and unadorned passion, combined these conflicting hues and made them perfectly compatible. And to help carry out his concept, he enlisted guys he was perfectly comfortable with: Ed Wilkerson and Mars Williams on reeds and other odd instruments, and Avreeayl Ra on drums and percussion. Bankhead created a very democratic atmosphere, letting everyone take full flight within the broad confines of his compositions while the new boss did his job holding down the groove and the swing with precision and grace.

Those are the same kind of peculiarities that fit a description for Bankhead's second album, Velvet Blue. Having already established his complexion on the former, he spent the latter expanding on it. "Velvet Blue" is a simple but perfect bass riff, and he and his quartet traverses the range of emotions with it. On the other side of things, "Right On It" is an outpouring of charged rage. But there's more to this record than just the ying and yang of soft jazz/thrash jazz. "Ancestors of the Pharoahs of Nabta Playa" mixes together instruments from Africa, Aboriginal Australia and the West to create strange of pleasing strains that ignores the boundaries between cultures. The hushed "A Sketch of Stravinsky" creates barely perceptible timbres that nearly sidestep the middleman of melody to directly invoke a solemn, morbid mood.

Every song plays a distinct role in building an album that's an inventive montage of styles blended together with no regard for what is "inside" or "outside." As phenomenal as lot of the albums listed below are, none of these do that as well as Velvet Blue. If you hadn't acquainted yourself with Harrison Bankhead yet, it's high time that you do.

THE BEST OF THE REST

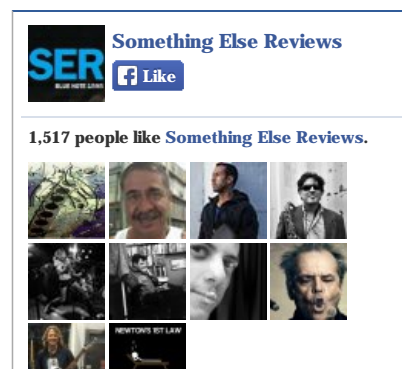
Ben Goldberg – Unfold Ordinary Mind: Goldberg revels in putting together clashing styles that your mind tells you aren't congruent but your heart is demanding your mind to explain why. Also worthwhile checking out is [the companion release](#), Subatomic Particle Homesick Blues.

Slobber Pup – Black Aces: They managed to capture the essence of a time when lines between rock, blues, funk and jazz were blurry and musicians were good enough to tackle it all at once. Slobber Pup is more than good enough.

Ceramic Dog – Your Turn: A boatload of fun, even when they're angry at something

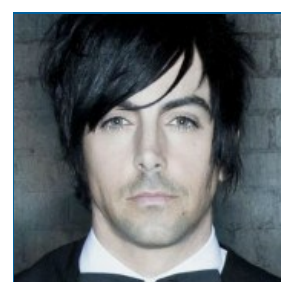


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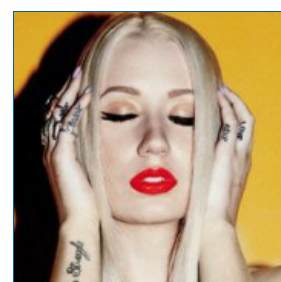


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New Music to Watch for in April

or someone or themselves. And within this left-field punk rock aesthetic, it's surprisingly diverse.

Curtis Hasselbring – Number Stations: Number Stations is Hasselbring at his most enterprising. Like a good novel, each song is a chapter that thickens the plot and goes off in an unexpected directions

Ivo Perelman with the Matthew Shipp Trio – The Edge: Perelman's meeting with Shipp's full trio is one of the most satisfying of his recent collaborations with Shipp, because both leader and trio have leveraged each others strengths very effectively.

Ches Smith and These Arches – Hammered: This is as good as it should be, the real discovery from this record is about its mastermind. Ches Smith has become as legitimate in the leader and composer roles as he's long achieved as a bandmember.

Mike Pride – Drummer's Corpse: the relentlessness, the noise piece of the half hour title track is hypnotic; like a train wreck, it's a sonic spectacle that's too spectacular to turn away from.

Gunnelpumpers – Montana Fix: A lot of avant-garde bands will toss a bunch of disparate stuff together in hopes that they come up with exotic combinations that work. The Gunnelpumpers do that, too, but the difference with these guys is that just about everything they try actually does work.

Brutal Truth / Bastard Noise – The Axiom of Post Inhumanity: A Battle of the Bands in a contest to indiscriminently assault your senses. When Mark Saleski is featuring it on WTF Wednesday, you know it's way beyond the pale.

TOTEM> – Voices of Grain: On the other hand, TOTEM> favors a discriminating assault on the senses. Impactful, yes, but abundant in the details not commonly found in power trios.

Matthew Shipp – Piano Sutras: With all the solo piano records being made today, it's fair to ask if there are more than enough of such recordings. When it comes to Matthew Shipp, there are never enough of them.

Edward Ricart/Nick Millevoi Quartet – Haitian Rail: This summit meeting of experimental rock-free jazz masters is the freak fest you'd expect, but also with the detailed give-and-take that only advanced musicians such as these do so effortlessly.

The Claudia Quintet – September: Performing leader John Hollenbeck's elaborate compositions by ear, September continues the Quintet's ability to amaze in new ways.

Rhys Chatham – Harmonie du soir: Like a lot of Chatham's work, it's a clever hybrid of rock music infused with classical/new music ideas. Tough to pin down, but endlessly rewarding.

David Dominique – Ritual: Given Dominique's experience with theater, and combined with a love for Charles Mingus and Eric Dolphy, this goes a way toward understanding the gripping dramatics and unexpected twists packed into his new release.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Black Host – Life in the Sugar Candle Mines

Rob Mazurek Octet – Skull Sesisons

Edward Ricart Quartet+Paul Dunmall – Chamaeleon

Tiger Hatchery – Sun Worship

Amir ElSaffar – Alchemy

Bryan and the Haggards feat. Eugene Chadbourne – Merles Just Want To Have Fun




Erik Friedlander – Claws and Wings

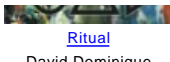

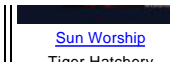






Zevious – Passing Through The Wall

Kaze – Tornado

Samuel Blaser Consort In Motion A Mirror To Machaut

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2. [S. Victor Aaron's Half-Year List of Top Albums for 2012, Part 3 of 4: Whack Jazz](#) If

you happened to peruse the Half-Year List of Top Albums for 2012 for Modern and Mainstream Jazz before this list and you've been keeping up with the latest jazz...

3. [S. Victor Aaron's Top Albums for 2011, Part 4 of 4: Whack Jazz](#) For the uninitiated here, "whack jazz" is a term of endearment. It's jazz that is endearing to me because it's brave, daring and breaks all the rules about what jazz...

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