

DISCOGRAPHY PART TWO: Post-punk Esoterica

PUBLIC IMAGE LTD AND PUNKY-REGGAE

One measure of Lydon's standing at Virgin was the sheer license given PiL members for silly side projects. Credited to **Don Letts**, **Stratetime Keith**, **Steel Leg**, **Jah Wobble**, the *Steel Leg v the Electric Dread* EP (Virgin, 1978) is comedy-PiL: song titles include 'Haile Unlikely By The Electric Dread' (the dub version is called 'Unlikely Pub') and Steel Leg – most likely Lydon – appears on the cover with his head encased in a pervert's black rubber-mask. **Jah Wobble** also grabbed his chance in 1978 with the solo single 'Dreadlock Don't Deal In Wedlock': a surprisingly convincing roots'n'dub facsimile, over which Wobble gabbles fake patois and snatches of 'The Owl and the Pussycat'. Virgin's advert advised 'snap it up before we reprocess the vinyl', suggesting the release was grudging at best. Much more charmingly wacky is *The Legend Lives On . . . Jah Wobble in 'Betrayal'* (Virgin, 1980), the bassist's first solo album and one reason why he fell out with PiL (the LP features extensive 'versioning' of *Metal Box* backing tracks). Highlights: the single 'Betrayal' (whose loping bassline is one of the few non-PiL grooves), the eerie robo-reggae of 'Tales From Outer Space,' and the reverb-shimmery horns and off-key female vocal of 'Today Is The First Day of the Rest of My Life'. Dubs of some *Legend* tracks appeared on *V.I.E.P.* (Virgin, 1980). After leaving PiL, Wobble – Lydon's opposite when it came to the work ethic – went into overdrive, churning out cassette-only releases with his new group The Human Condition, plus solo records (like the oddly Joy Division-like 'Fading/Nocturnal' on his own Jah label) and numerous collaborative works. Most notable were the enchanting collaborations with his Can

heroes **Holger Czukay** and **Jaki Liebezeit**: *How Much Are They* EP (Island, 1981), *Full Circle* (1981, Spoon), *Invaders of The Heart* EP (Lago, 1983), and *Snake Charmer* EP (Island, 1983), the last two featuring guitar from U2's **The Edge**. In a rare honor for a non-Jamaican artist, Trojan Records have put out a three-CD career survey of Wobble's 28 + years of copious creativity, *I Could Have Been A Contender*.

The other PiL-heads were less industrious. Lydon produced two singles by his little brother Jimmy's band **4 Be 2's** – the engagingly daft, banjo-driven 'Gaelic disco' of 'One of the Lads' (Island, 1980), and 'Frustration', whose sole claim on History is the backing vocals from two future members of Bananarama. Although credited as 'co-producer' Lydon actually had more of a background role (vibe-setter cum benefactor) on **Vivien Goldman's** 'Launderette/ Private Armies' (Window, 1981) a delightful slice of Ladbroke Grove dub recorded in down-time during the *Flowers of Romance* sessions. The single also featured Keith Levene on guitar and bass, contributions from Raincoats violinist Vicky Aspinall and Steve Beresford (on toy piano), and Adrian Sherwood manning the mixing desk. Levene's guitar is also smeared over much of *Threat To Creation* (Cherry Red, 1981) by Sherwood's punky-reggae supergroup **New Age Steppers**. Sherwood's On U Sound label extended the post-punk/roots'n'dub interface into the Eighties and beyond with Tackhead, African Head Charge, et al. An early On U gem is 1982's *Pal Judy* by New York punk chanteuse **Judy Nylon**.

Coming at punky-reggae from the other direction, racially, were **Basement 5**, the all-black outfit fronted by PiL's photographer friend and Gunter Grove regular Dennis Morris. *1965-1980* (Island, 1980) mostly picks up more from the noisy rock aspect of PiL's debut, but *Basement 5 In Dub* (Island, 1980) – produced by reggae fiend **Martin Hannett** – is awash with metallic echo and harshly treated textures. For more studio-as-instrument malarky, *Wild Dub: Dread Meets Punk Rocker Downtown* (Select Cuts, 2003) captures a moment when it was *de rigeur* for Brit bands to put a dub vershan onna B-side. Some of the more bizarre examples here are Stiff Little Fingers and Generation X. You'll also find Basement 5's 'Immigrant Dub,' 4 Be 2's 'One of the Lads,' Goldman's 'Private Armies', plus 'Jah War' by **The Ruts** (a band whose fusion of punk and reggae was more convincingly organic than most) and, inevitably, The Clash, with 'Bankrobber'.

The Clash were post-punk whipping boys all through this period, for their rebel rock heroics and Americanisms. Perhaps because of Levene's

previous connection, or just Punk Messiah rivalry, PiL saw The Clash as their antithesis. 'The Clash is just hideous . . . they're still trying to follow Rock and Roll History,' Lydon ranted in 1980, while Levene spat 'we don't want to be another Clash, making old-fashioned, twelve-bar rock & roll.' Yet Strummer & Co actually matched PiL's white-on-black moves step for step, albeit with a Romantic rock'n'roll guerrilla gloss: roots reggae with 'Bankrobber' (Mikey Dread at the controls), funk with 'The Magnificent Seven,' rap with 'This Is Radio Clash.' The much-derided *Sandinista* (CBS, 1980) is kinda like The Clash's *Metal Box*, stretching rock form to the limit. Nowhere near as good as *Box*, of course, let alone as 'important' – but amid the triple LP excess there's gems like 'The Call Up,' haunting and dub-inflected. Even on their back-to-garageland LP *Combat Rock*, you find 'Overpowered By Funk' and the desolate 'Straight To Hell,' whose offkilter ethnic rhythms could almost fit on The Raincoats' *Odyshape*.

When **Keith Levene** left PiL in circumstances even more acrimonious than his departure from The Clash, he self-released his own version of PiL's work-in-progress *This Is What You Want* and titled it *Commercial Zone*. Some diehard fans regard this slightly-more-interesting take as the true sequel to *Flowers of Romance*.

CLEVELAND–AKRON

For Cleveland's arty proto-punk scene, check **The Electrics Eels** (*God Says Fuck You* (rec. 1975; Homestead/LSR, 1991); **The Styrenes'** *It's Artastic !* (Homestead/LSR, 1991) and *It's Still Artastic* (ROIR, 2002); the awesome raw blast of **Pere Ubu** precursor **Rocket From the Tombs** on the live album *The Day The Earth Met The . . .* (rec. 1975; Smog Veil, 2002); and the compilation *Those Were Different Times – Cleveland 1972–1976* (Scat).

Usually with city-based scenes, a couple of great bands draw attention from outside that less-deserving local groups then benefit from. Devo made Akron a hot spot in 1978 but ironically they're the only group that doesn't appear on Stiff Record's *The Akron Compilation* (Stiff, 1978). Featuring Jane Aire & the Belvederes, The Bizarros, Chia Pig, Rubber City Rebels, Rachel Sweet, etc. this historical-interest-only comp runs along a gamut from power pop to quirky-jerky prog-scented New Wave. Prime example of the later tendency, **Tin Huey** got their own deal in the

wake of Devomania, resulting in *Contents Dislodged During Shipment* (Warner Bros, 1979; reissued Collectors' Choice Music, 2003), a period curio. Best of the rest were Noo Wave funksters **The Waitresses**, beloved for the gawky sass of 'I Know What Boys Like' (*Wasn't Tomorrow Wonderful*, ZE, 1982) and the touching 'Christmas Wrapping' (*I'd Rule the World If I Could Only Get the Parts* EP, (ZE, 1982).

Devo fanatics who think Eno made the debut album too sedate swear by the numerous live bootlegs of group in their 1977 prime, like the one of their 3/8/77 gig at San Francisco's punk club Mabuhay.

David Thomas's post-Ubu work – David Thomas & The Pedestrians, *The Sound of the Sand and Other Songs of The Pedestrian* (Rough Trade, 1981); *Vocal Performances* EP (Rough Trade, 1982); David Thomas and His Legs, *Winter Comes Home* [live] (Re, 1982) – extend the pastoralist and rhythmically three-legged un-rock of *Song of The Bailing Man*.

NEW YORK: NO WAVE

Some consider **Suicide's** second album *Alan Vega and Martin Rev* (ZE, 1980) to be the dilute pop version of the classic 1977 debut, but not me: the glistening stealth of 'Diamonds, Fur Coat, Champagne' and 'Touch Me' easily match 'Cheree' for hymnal grace, while the buzzing tension of 'Harlem' is a thrilling development of 'Frankie Teardrop'. And Suicide were never more unearthly than on 'Dance'. Around this time the band released the 'Dream Baby Dream' single: #1 across the world, in a better universe than this one. Embarking on a solo career, **Alan Vega** dropped electronics for a stripped-down sound of guitar, drum machine, and his own Elvis-like vocals: a retro-nouveau sound that paralleled the mini-revival of rockabilly with groups like The Stray Cats and The Polecats. The terrific *Alan Vega* (ZE/Celluloid, 1980) actually spawned a Top 20 hit in France with 'Jukebox Baby,' where Vega's ultra-stylized rock'n'roll appealed to French sensibilities. Highpoint of the darker *Collision Drive* (Celluloid, 1981) is the brooding 13 minute tour de force 'Viet Vet.' Hooking up again with Ric Ocasek of The Cars (who'd produced the second Suicide LP), Vega made his mainstream bid with the disappointingly mild *Saturn Strip* (Elektra, 1983), whose rockabilly-retooled-for-the-post-Moroder-Eighties veers alarmingly close to Billy Idol's discopunk. Meanwhile **Martin Rev** essentially continued Suicide as an instrumental outfit with *Martin Rev* EP (Infidelity, 1980) and *Clouds of Glory*

(New Rose, 1985). Fine records, especially the first EP, but something was missing . . . something beginning with V.

No Wave or not No Wave? That *is* the question vis-à-vis the clutch of composers-turned-rockers – **Glenn Branca, Rhys Chatham, Jeffrey Lohn** – excluded from Eno’s *No New York*. Having worked with such doyens of drone-minimalism as La Monte Young, Tony Conrad and Charlemagne Palestine, Chatham saw The Ramones early on and embraced the noise potential of massively amplified electric guitars. As well as forming his own rock band, **The Gynecologists**, he started writing pieces like ‘Guitar Trio’, using the clustered overtones generated by strumming a single chord on multiple guitars, each with special tunings. Chatham’s work is exhaustively documented on the 3-CD box-set *An Angel Moves Too Fast to See: Selected Works 1971-1989* (Table of the Elements, 2003). *Theoretical Girls* (rec. 1978-81; Acute, 2002) gathers everything by the band that uneasily included Branca and Lohn. While the anthology doesn’t really make the case for **Theoretical Girls** as grievously neglected, the choppy, keyboard-driven single ‘U.S. Millie’ is a minor classic.

Unlike classically trained Lohn, Branca came up through experimental theater. His abstract pieces for the troupe The Bastard Theater often came with a soundtrack played by the actors on street flotsam – metal pots, broken piano sounding-boards. After *Theoretical Girls* disintegrated, Branca made overwrought art-punk with his girlfriend Barbara Ess as **The Static**, then began composing his own full-blown Works with titles like *Symphony No. 1 (Tonal Plexus)*, based around oddly tuned guitars played extremely loud. Branca has used this ‘punk’ edge to dramatise himself against the effete, coldblooded world of experimental music. Still, there’s a crucial difference between Branca/Chatham’s approach and No Wave. The composers both embraced one aspect of rock (the textures of electric guitar) and jettisoned everything else: not just melody, songs, and the human voice, but the role of the rhythm section. When Chatham’s Meltdown ensemble performed ‘Guitar Trio’ at Max’s Kansas City in 1979, there was no bassist and drums were reduced to a single hi-hat. Rhythm, for Branca/Chatham, was not about appealing to the body or even contorting it in frenzy, but about trance-inducing repetition. Its ultimate effect was intensely cerebral/spiritual, and thus closer in method and intent to the post-John Cage tradition of downtown minimalism. (Mind you, Cage legendarily recoiled from Branca’s bombast, complaining ‘*I don’t want such a power in my life. If*

rip it up and start again

it was something political it would resemble fascism.)'. The studio recordings of Branca's early symphonies – like *Lesson No. 1* and *The Ascension* (both originally released on 99 Records and reissued in 2003/04 by Acute) – are curious surrogates for the 'real thing', given that this music has to be experienced live: the massed monochord thrashing of Branca's 'guitar armies,' blasted through an overdriven sound system, generates phantom harmonies and palimpsest effects (Branca's 'pleromas of sound'). 'It's psychoacoustic,' he's claimed. 'Part of it is the fact the ear is being absolutely overloaded with sound. You start hearing things that aren't there.'

The true candidate for 'greatest lost No Waver' is **Lizzy Mercier Descloux**, a gamine Parisian expat who shared a loft with Patti Smith and Michel Esteban (co-founder, with Michael Zilkha, of ZE Records). All brittle, scurrying percussion and flinty guitarsparks, her band **Rosa Yemen** were – on record at least – something like the Young Marble Giants of No Wave: unsettling in a low key, insidious way, as opposed to Teenage Jesus-like assault. Descloux's first solo album, *Press Color*, resembles its early 1979 counterparts *Queen of Siam* and *Off White* – No Wave turning into Mutant Disco, downtown bohemia making a tentative move towards pop. Covering the hoary old standard 'Fever', she updates the love-sick metaphor by changing the title to 'Tumour' ('you give me tumour, tumour all through the night' . . .). Elsewhere there's a bizarre disco version of Arthur Brown's 'Fire,' a cover of the 'Mission Impossible' theme, and hints of the African high-life and Latin influences explored on her delicious *Mambo Nassau* (see Mutant Disco section). The solo debut plus Rosa Yemen's EP and single are combined for *Press Color* (ZE reissue, 2003).

Alongside ZE, the main local label when it came to documenting No Wave was Charles Ball's Lust/Unlust. Like a modern-day Alan Lomax, Ball obsessively taped live performances, building up a massive archive of 'field recordings' that remain unreleased to this day. He also put out (and often produced) singles by Mars, Teenage Jesus & the Jerks, and Beirut Slump, plus material by ex-Contortions Don Christensen (as impLOG) and Jody Harris (in collaboration with Voidoids guitarist Robert Quine), and records by ex-DNA keyboardist Robin Crutchfield's new band **Dark Day**. The latter's stilted and sombre music is gathered *on Dark Day: Collected 1979-1982* (Daft Records). Most interesting stuff are 'The Exterminations 1-6,' originally the flipside of 1981's 'Trapped' single: Crutchfield took the A-side and created a series of short, drastic

remixes, playing the master tapes backwards, adding speed and reverb effects. The two jewels of the Lust/Unlust back catalogue, though, are **ImpLOG's** 1980 single 'Holland Tunnel Dive' and the **Jody Harris/Robert Quine** LP *Escape*. The former is a wonderfully atmospheric motorik glide through subterranean sound-passages dripping with reverb. *Escape* sees two great guitarists jousting over electronic percussion. With its highpitched (possibly sped-up) lead-riffs, 'Flagpole Jitters' flickers and zings like dragonflies in a cocaine delirium; other tracks are more drowsily ambient, suggesting *On The Corner* slumping into blissful barbiturate stupor.

All-female trio **Ut** *nearly* put a single out on Lust/Unlust. Quite possibly the longest running No Wavers of the lot, they formed in late 1978 (Nina Canal played at the original Artists Space festival, as one of The Gynecologists, and as also briefly in Dark Day), put out the tape *Ut Live* (Out, 1981) and an EP, but only got round to releasing albums in the late Eighties after moving to London. (I recall *In Gut's House*, on Blast First, as being a spectacularly challenging listen). Onstage, they were into swapping instruments after each song.

More No Wave marginalia: The morosely atmospheric soundtrack to *Vortex* (the Beth B and Scott B movie) features Adele Bertei, Lydia Lunch, Pat Place, and John Lurie, amongst others. Post-**Mars**, Sumner Crane convened a supergroup of ex-No Wavers (including Mark Cunningham & Connie Burg plus Ikue Mori & Arto Lindsay from DNA) to create the bizarre noise opera *John Gavanti*, inspired by Mozart's Don Giovanni and blues guitarist Bukka White (released on Cunningham's Hyrax label in 1980; then reissued Atavistic, 1998). Cunningham and 'Lucy Hamilton' (alter-ego for Burg) then formed **Don King**, reputedly even more forbidding and unhinged than Mars. They debuted at Thurston Moore's 1981 Noise Festival and released a few things, gathered on an Atavistic anthology. Mars, at least, were one group who refused to go disco.

BRISTOL

The Pop Group cast a heavy shadow over the Bristol scene. Best of the funk-jazz-dub-punkstas were **Glaxo Babies**, who grabbed John Peel's attention with their 'Christine Keeler' single. *Nine Months To The Disco* (Heartbeat, 1980) ranks alongside ACR's *The Graveyard and The*

Ballroom and Clock DVA's *Thirst* as an avant-funk mini-classic: hot rhythm section, fiery horns, studio-as-instrument antics. Check also the early unreleased, Ubu-tinged tracks on *Put Me On the Guest List* (Heartbeat, 1980). The group's guitarist Dan Katsis also played in Pop Group and went on to form **Maximum Joy** with PG's John Waddington; their one real moment, 'Stretch' (Y, 1981), is scrawny but engaging punk-funk with a positive thinking message, delivered with shrill exuberance by singer Janine Rainforth. Of the other post-PG bands, **Pigbag** kept their jazz side firmly tethered to the funk-groove imperative (*Dr. Heckle and Mr. Jive*, Y, 1982; *Lend An Ear*, Y, 1983), while the more freeform **Rip Rig and Panic** splattered the canvas with dribbles and spurts of sonic pigment. I recall RR&P's neo-beatnik shtick as being vaguely insufferable at the time, but *God* (Virgin, 1981) and to a lesser extent *I Am Cold* (Virgin, 1982) stand up fairly well, largely because of Bruce Smith's always agile and inventive drumming and Sean Oliver's burning bass. Neneh Cherry and Ari Up ululate fervently (albeit bereft of a tune, most of the time) while the mixing-desk tomfoolery has a shall-we-say period charm – like Gong, maybe. Lord knows how Virgin thought they'd ever make any loot from this lot.

Shriekback weren't Bristol-based, but they started out on the Y label and operated in the post-Pop Group/A Certain Ratio avant-funk zone. Formed by ex-Gang of Four bassist Dave Allen, ex-XTC keyboardist Barry Andrews, and guitarist Carl Marsh (formerly of **Out On Blue Six**, John Peel favorites for their angular experimentalism), they started out making a dank, abstruse form of quasi-disco (typical track title: 'Hapax Logomena') as heard on 1982's *Tench* EP and 'Sexthinkone.' . Loosened up by the group's forays into self-realisation therapy, Shriekback's 'polytechnic funk' (Barney Hoskyns) got very nearly groovy on 'My Spine Is The Bassline,' 'Lined Up', and their major label debut *Jam Science* (Arista, 1984).

For more Bristol activity, find (if you can) issues of *The Bristol Recorder* (fanzine-cum-compilation), the Various Artists collection *Avon Calling* (Heartbeat/Cherry Red/Spartan), and *Bristol 1979-1980* (Sugarshack Records), a CD collection of stuff from the Fried Egg label – including whimsical dub-funksters Shoes For Industry, creators of the semi-immortal 'Talk Like A Whelk'.

INDEPENDENT LABELS AND DIY

DIY electronica

After 'Warm Leatherette,' Daniel Miller a.k.a **The Normal** teamed up with **Robert Rental** for *Live At West Runton 6-3-79*, 25 minutes of yammering synthpunk, and then created the 'fake pop group' **Silicon Teens**, whose electronic covers of rock'n'roll classics like 'Memphis, Tennessee' on 1980's *Music For Parties*, were charming but oddly non-radical for the founder of Mute Records.

Meanwhile **Thomas Leer** and **Robert Rental** built *The Bridge* (Industrial, 1979). One side was devoted to song-oriented synthpop; the other explored what the duo called 'heavy metal ambience' – similar to Eno 'but with a rough edge he didn't have', says Leer. Using long tape loops stretched around the room and the hums, whirrs and clicks of domestic appliances (like Rental's ailing fridge) the duo created alternately nerve-jangling and otherworldly noisecapes somewhere between *Metal Machine Music* and *Music For Airports*. Leer regrets the decision to have songs on the first side because it weakened the artistic statement and led to the record never getting the credit it deserves as a pioneering ambient work.

After *The Bridge*, Rental's career dwindled but Leer's blossomed with *4 Movements* EP (Cherry Red, 1981), which shifted to a jazz 'n' soul inflected synthpop of uncommon warmth and fluidity, partly inspired by ZE artists like Kid Creole and Was (Not Was). Because Leer played the drums live on an electronic drum pad kit, tracks like 'Don't' and 'Letter From America' really *swing*. 'Tight As A Drum', a tremulous mirage of glistening electronics, evokes strange indeterminate emotions of the near-future. On Leer's full-length debut *Contradictions* (Cherry Red, 1982) he comes across like John Martyn retooled for a post-Kraftwerk age. You can also find most of the album, plus *4 Movements* and 'Private Plane'/'International', on the indispensable collection *Contradictions* (Cherry Red, 1994).

Fast Product

Good luck trying to dig up *Quality of Life* or *SeXex*, the label's non-musical releases. The odds are better with *Earcom 1* (1979), the first in Fast's series of mini-comps, which features Scottish pre-teen punks The Prats ('we are the Prats/we live in high-rise flats'), Bob Last's girlfriend Hilary Morrison's band The Flowers, The Blank Students, The Products,

and Sheffield experimentalists Graph (whose Ian Burden joined Human League and co-wrote some of their big hits). The maxi-EP came with a two-colour poster and the label slogan “dare to struggle, dare to win”/‘difficult fun’. *Earcom 2* is probably unfindable owing to the collectability factor of its two Joy Division tracks, ‘Autosuggestion’ and ‘From Safety To Where’, meaning you’ll never get to hear Middlesbrough’s intriguingly named Basczax (don’t feel too bad, I haven’t either). A double 7 inch, *Earcom 3* is a mixed bag of San Francisco punk (The Middle Class, Noh Mercy), German experimentalism (DAF), and sundry English nonentities.

Cherry Red

Iain McNay’s label carved out an odd backwater niche for itself apart from the general post-punk flow, thanks largely to eccentric A&R man Mike Alway, whose tastes leaned toward melody, Englishness, and the 1960s. Cherry Red became a home for the dashing, debonair whimsy of **The Monochrome Set**, the mopy bedsit introspection of watery-synth duo **Eyeless in Gaza**, jazzy-folky singer-songwriters **Tracy Thorn** and **Ben Watt**, and the Television/Velvets-descended, plangent splendor of **Felt**. The best taster for the label’s typically pale, frail fare is the classic label sampler *Pillows and Prayers* (1982), which retailed at just 99 pence and made the UK Top Ten. *Pillows* precursor *Perspectives & Distortion* (1981; reissued 2003) includes many non-Cherry Red artists. *Our Brilliant Careers: Cherry Red Rarities 1981-83* (2003) scoops up assorted archival arcana, like low-key but absorbing experimentalists **Five or Six**. Alway went on to mastermind the even more quintessentially ‘English eccentric’ label **el**; Cherry Red gradually transformed into the premier label for punk and post-punk reissues.

Speaking of which, Cherry’s Red anthology for **Television Personalities**, *Part Time Punks: The Very Best of . . .* (rec. 1978 onwards; 1999) gives you everything you really need, including meta-punk classics ‘Where’s Bill Grundy Now?’ and ‘Part Time Punks’. If you want *more* than you need, check the TVP rarities collection *The Boy Who Couldn’t Stop Dreaming* (Vinyl Japan).

Regional compilations

Way too many to list here. Probably the most famous (and least patchy – always a problem with these exercises in city or county boosterism) is *Hicks From the Sticks* (Rockburgh, 1980). As the anti-Metropolitan

defiance of the title suggests, the bands are from the North's industrial heartland – Leeds, Bradford, Halifax, Wakefield, Nottingham, etc. Gems include the fantastic dirge 'I Don't Know' by Sheffield's **I'm So Hollow**, the odd Television-goes-reggae of **They Must Be Russians**' 'Where Have I Seen You', the dreamy 'Choreography' by Liverpool's **Modern Eon**, and 'Them Or Me' by **Medium Medium** (renowned for their punk-funk scorcher 'Hungry, So Angry'). There's also contributions from the fledgling Clock DVA, Section 25, and Wah! Heat.

TALKING HEADS

Coming out of *Remain In Light*, friction in the Heads camp resulted in a spate of side projects. **Tom Tom Club** – Tina Weymouth and Chris Frantz's 'riposte' to *My Life In the Bush of Ghosts* – hit paydirt with two captivating hit singles.

'Wordy Rappinghood' (Island, 1981) reached # 7 in the UK with its frisky bounce-funk and girly vocals (Weymouth and her two sisters). Byrne must have been doubly pissed, first by its higher chart placing than any Talking Heads single to date, and second by the lyric's playful reworking of the 'facts just twist the truth around' quasi-rap section of 'Crosseyed and Painless.' Half dreamy love song and half homage to Frantz & Weymouth's funk heroes (JB, Bootsy, Bohannon), the deliciously squelchy 'Genius of Love' was massive on America's black radio stations and reached #31 on *Billboard*. The album *Tom Tom Club* (Island, 1981) is charming but slight; the 1983 follow up *Close To the Bone* sees TTC outstay their welcome.

David Byrne's own solo debut, *Songs From the Broadway Production of 'The Catherine Wheel'* (Sire, 1981) uses some of the cast of *Remain*: Eno, Jerry Harrison, Adrian Belew's angular, backfiring guitar. But the sound is less cluttered, closer to *Fear of Music's* nervous rhapsodies 'Mind' and 'Cities'. While 'His Wife Refused' and 'Big Blue Plymouth' are songful enough to make the cut on a 'proper' Heads album, the most interesting *Catherine Wheel* tracks suggest where the group could have gone next if they'd tried to take *Remain* further. Featuring *Catherine Wheel* choreographer Twyla Tharp on water pot, the brilliant 'Cloud Chamber' is something like ambient gamelan – Byrne feeding gong-like 'kitchen metals' through digital delays, stretching them out into long ribbons of numinous sound whose pitch undulates and wavers. Made from

Byrne's 'triggered flutes' and percussion from ethnomusicologist buddy John Chernoff, 'Light Bath' lives up to its radiant title.

Let the record show that **Jerry Harrison** also recorded a solo album in 1981, *The Red and The Black*.

Crucial context for *Remain* and *Bush*: the albums made, together and separately, by **Jon Hassell** and **Brian Eno** during this period – Hassell and Eno's *Fourth World Vol. 1: Possible Musics* (EG, 1980), Hassell's *Dream Theory in Malaya: Fourth World Vol. 2* (EG, 1981), Eno's *On Land* (E.G., 1982 – fourth and finest in the Ambient Series), Hassell's *Aka-Darbari-Java (Magic Realism)* (EG, 1983).

WIRE

Wire's pop sensibility – **Colin Newman** & Mike Thorne – picked up where 154 left off (cold-as-marble guitar-textures, songs seemingly constructed using set-squares and protractors) with the singer's excellent solo debut *A-Z* (Beggar's Banquet, 1980). They also brought drummer Robert Gotobed along for added continuity. The desolate dirge 'Alone' sounds like it's hewn out of glacier and would now be deemed a Wire classic if the band had done it. *Not To* (4AD, 1982) pleasingly repeats the formula in slightly subdued form. In between came *Provisionally Entitled The Singing Fish* (4AD, 1981), which seems like Newman's attempt to show **Bruce Gilbert** and **Graham Lewis** that 'hey, I can be experimental too'. In addition to *Dome*, Gilbert & Lewis issued a flood of material under other names, sometimes involving other collaborators like Daniel Miller or Russell Mills: Cupol's 'Like This For Ages/Kluba Cupol' (4AD, 1980), Gilbert & Lewis's *354* (4AD, 1980), Gilbert, Lewis & Mills' *Mzui (Waterloo Gallery)* (Cherry Red, 1982). Duet Emmo's *Or So It Seems* (Mute, 1983), Bruce Gilbert's *This Way* (Mute, 1984), and probably one or two others.

SHEFFIELD

Richard H. Kirk has always been a prolific bugger – to this day he's still spewing forth several CDs of intelligently wrought electronica per annum under a variety of names. During the post-punk period, on top of Cabaret Voltaire's ample discography, he squeezed out two fine solo

albums – *Disposable Half-Truths* (Industrial, 1980) and *Time High Fiction* (Doublevision, 1983). Even more solo material – rarities, demos, out-takes – was excavated for *Earlier/Later* (Mute 2004), a double CD with one disc covering the Seventies and the other stretching into his early Nineties output. Although **Stephen Mallinder** gradually got pushed into the role of vocalist/lyricist during the Cabs’ mid-Eighties conform-to-deform phase, his solo album *Pow-Wow* (Fetish, 1982) shows how much he contributed to the early Cabs’ unique texturhythmic vocabulary. As did **Chris Watson**, who after quitting the Cabs to work as a TV sound-recorderist, formed **The Hafler Trio**: less a musical outfit than a psychoacoustic research unit, although they have produced an extensive discography. The two earliest releases, from 1984 and 1985, were reissued as *Bang! An Open Letter/Walk Gently Through the Gates of Joy* (Mute, 1995).

For a sense of other Sheffield action in this period, consult *Bouquet of Steel* (Aardvark, 1980), which came with a 28 page booklet on the scene. Standout track is ‘Touch’ by **I’m So Hollow**, whose doomy blend of Banshees, PiL, and Sabbath also generated a reputedly superb (five stars from Dave McCullough in *Sounds*) album, *Emotion/Sound/Motion* (Illuminated, 1981). Other gems include **Artery**’s ‘The Slide’, the **Musical Janeens**’ Cabs-like ‘Glen Miller And His Contemporary Intimacies Meets the Musical Janeens Uptown With a Packet of Jellies And a Caribbean Monolith’ (pew!) and ‘Ju Ju Money’ by Comsat Angels.

Named after a Ballard short story, **Comsat Angels** once seemed like Sheffield’s most-likely-contenders. Their classic early singles ‘Total War’ and ‘Independence Day’ (both Polydor, 1980) locate a stark (no cymbals!) dance-rock groove precisely midway between Joy Division and Gang of Four. ‘Total War’ uses the very Go4-like device of depicting a romantic break-up as a military conflict. The song’s eerie extended fade, all guitar harmonics and flickers of synth, is stunningly inventive and betrays a decidedly un-punk level of musicianship (indeed the group started out as a jazz-rock band before going New Wave). Almost as good, ‘Independence Day’ – another personal-as-political trope – rivals ‘Love Like Anthrax’ as an unsentimental take on falling out of love. Debut album *Waiting For A Miracle* built on the singles’ atmospheric power, but in the LP’s very rock strength you could hear the seeds of the conversatism that would later claim the Comsats, as they tried to become a Big Band. 1981’s *Eye of the Lens* EP and *Sleep No More*, plus 1982’s *Fiction*, have their admirers, though.

rip it up and start again

I'm So Hollow's 'I Don't Know' crops up again on the Various Artists EP, *1980: The First Fifteen Minutes*, (Neutron, 1980), alongside tracks by Vice Versa, Clock DVA, and Stunt Kites. **Vice Versa** ran the Neutron label; before mutating into ABC, they specialised in a portentous and agitated brand of electropop somewhere between the Cabs and Human League, as heard on *Music 4* EP (Neutron, 1980) and the arresting 'Stilyagi/Eyes of Christ' (Neutron, 1981). When Clock DVA disintegrated, the non-Adi Newton fragment became **The Box**, whose fiery paroxysms of Beefheartian funkjazz are captured on *The Box* EP, *Secrets Out*, and *Great Moments in Big Slam* (all Go! Discs, 1983-84). With sidekick Judd Turner, Newton meanwhile tried to infect the mainstream with the cinematic New Pop noir of *Advantage* (Polydor, 1983), a phase of **Clock DVA** he now disowns.

MANCHESTER

From Blackpool, **Section 25** joined Factory as proteges of Ian Curtis and JoyDiv manager Rob Gretton. Initially somewhat overpowered by JoyDiv's sound and vision – from the drone-bass and voice-drone to the group's name deriving from the legal procedure required to commit a mentally ill person to the loony bin – Section 25 gradually evolved a more distinctive sound, hypnotic and near-psychedelic. But they still followed in their precursor's footsteps, mirroring New Order's plunge into hi-tech dancepop. Some folk regard S25 as pioneers of techno, on account of club successes like 'Looking From A Hilltop' (co-produced by **BE Music**, a pseudonym for **New Order**). You can track the group's journey across the albums *Always Now* (Factory, 1981; reissued with singles and rarities, LTM 2000), *Key of Dreams* (Factory Benelux, 1982; similarly expanded, LTM), and *From the Hip* (Factory, 1984; expanded version, LTM, 1998). Despite their defenders best efforts, I'll never see **Crispy Ambulance** as much more than JD-clones whose nicely mesmerizing glaze of guitar and bass is fatally weakened by stilted drumming and wispy vocals. LTM's reissue of 1982's *The Plateau Phase* adds the earlier Hannett-produced EP *Live On A Hot August Night* and the title track of 1984's *Sexus* EP. Factory's third also-ran of this era, **Stockholm Monsters**, were also New Order proteges (Peter Hook produced most of their music). *All At Once (Singles 1981 – 1987)* (LTM, 2002), *Alma Mater* (1984; expanded reissue LTM, 2002) and *The Last One Back*

(Archive 1980-1987) [rarities] (LTM, 2002) show a band evolving from jejeune JoyDiv to plaintive, horn-and-keyboard laced indiepop somewhere between *Pelican West* and *Power Corruption and Lies*.

James Nice's label LTM (Les Temps Moderne) – <http://www.ltmpub-freeserve.co.uk/ltmhome.html> – has been an unstinting excavator of Factory's back catalogue, going beyond the bands with Hannett or New Order connections and unearthing really obscure Fac-bands like The Wake, Royal Family and The Poor, and Crawling Chaos. So far the only post-punk-era Factory releases LTM haven't exhumed, as far as I can tell, are pop outfit **The Distractions** and reggae band **X-O-Dus** (possibly because their sole Factory release was the Dennis Bovell-produced 'English Black Boys' 12 inch). (For an exhaustively detailed Factory discography, go here: <http://listen.to/factory/>).

Originally from Liverpool, **Royal Family and the Poor** appeared alongside Blur, Kevin Hewick, and Durutti Column on the now hard-to-find *A Factory Quartet* (1980). On their side of the double-LP comp, tracks like 'Vaneigem Mix' and 'Death Factory' see vocalist Arthur McDonald declaiming excerpts from Situationist texts like *The Revolution of Everyday Life* over crude jams somewhere between Can and Happy Mondays (bassist Nathan McGough went on to manage the latter). Following the 1982 EP *Art Dream Dominion*, the band's debut album *Temple of the 13th Tribe* finally appeared in 1984. A Residents-like enigma, **Crawling Chaos** created 1980's 'Sex Machine' (not the James Brown song but a grotesque fantasy of sexual omnipotence). The single is tacked on at the end of LTM's reissue of 1982's *The Gas Chair*, which flails and throbs somewhere at the intersection of Hawkwind, early Can, and Joy Division at their most heavy metal.

Fiends for **Martin Hannett** as auteur-producer can start with the Rabid/TJM label's *Punk Singles Collection*, back when he went by the punky alias Martin Zero. The collection includes local legends Slaughter & The Dogs, The Nosebleeds (featuring Viny Reilly sounding not the least bit ethereal), and Frantic Elevators (Mick Hucknall from Simply Red's first band), plus Rabid's two big stars, Jilted John and John Cooper Clarke. **Jilted John** (drama student Graham Fellows) reached #4 with 'Jilted John,' a hilarious slice of comedy-Buzzcocks whose chant 'Gordon is a moron' rang through schoolyards across the land in 1978. The fine album, *True Love Stories* (EMI) followed. After his Rabid debut *Ou Est La Maison de Fromage?*, **John Cooper Clarke** signed to CBS for a series of albums – *Disguise In Love* (1978), *Snap*, *Crackle [♣] Bop*

(1980, and *Zip Style Method* (1982) – on which his mordant words were beautifully supported by **The Invisible Girls**, a band centered around Hannett and keyboardist Steve Hopkins and featuring a cast of celeb guests like Pete Shelley and Bill Nelson. Clarke's whole image was modelled on Dylan circa 1966 and on the classic *Snap, Crackle [♣] Bop*, 'Beasley Street' is his attempt at a Mancunian 'Desolation Row'. All dream-drifty tufts of texture, The Invisible Girls' backdrop is incongruously idyllic for Clarke's poetry – a phantasmagoria of deprivation, delapidation and moral dry rot that, depressingly, is as topical today as it originally was at the dawn of the Thatcher era. Check also **Pauline Murray and The Invisible Girls** self-titled album (Illusive, 1980), on which the group's lighter-than-air sound is perfect for the piercing vocal purity of the ex-Penetration singer.

Manchester Musicians Collective was the focus for much of the non-Factory post-punk activity in the city. Of the fifteen desperately obscure (Vibrant Thighs!) bands on the MMC compilation *Unzipping the Abstract* (MMC, 1980) only one went on to achieve any impact – **Dislocation Dance**, whose trumpet-powered quirkfunk on the maxi-EP *Slip That Disc!* and *Music Music Music* (both New Hormones, 1981) made them John Peel regulars. Singer/trumpeter Andy Diagram also fronted another MMC band, **The Diagram Brothers** for *We Are All Animals* (New Hormones, 1980), *Some Marvels of Modern Science + Singles* (New Hormones, 1981), and *Discordo 45* EP (New Hormones, 1982).

An earlier MMC-linked compilation – also featuring Vibrant Thighs! – called *A Manchester Collection* came out in 1979 on

Object Music, the label run by **Spherical Objects**. The latter were one of the city's post-punk enigmas, as hinted by titles like *Elliptical Optimism* (Object, 1979) and *Further Ellipses* (Object, 1980), plus the fact that singer Steve Solamar changed genders. On early records like *Past and Parcel* (Object, 1978) they play an odd English form of garage punk, skeletal to the point of translucence – imagine a watercolor Fall, or a Stranglers drained of all testosterone. *Further Ellipses* goes 'dance', then *No Man's Land* (Object, 1981) reverts to the Sixties influences. In addition to early material by **The Passage**, Object released a host of Spherical offshoots: The Noyes Brothers, Alternomen Unlimited, and guitarist John Bissett-Smith's **Grow Up** whose 'Beefheart for softies' (Morley) is reputedly excellent.

Despite being admired by famous peers like Wire and the Banshees, the early incarnation of **Manicured Noise**, led by Frank Owen, is undocumented. More's the pity judging by Owen's description of their sound:

‘military beats, over which we’d recite poetry by Mayakovsky’, combined with film soundtrack elements and primitive funk learned by copying Chic singles played at 33 rpm. After Owen was ousted, guitarist Steve Walsh (formerly of Flowers of Romance, which included Viv Albertine and Sid Vicious) led the group in a more accessible pop-funk direction, as captured on two likeable if Talking Heads-indebted singles: ‘Metronome’ (Pre, 1980) and ‘Faith’ (Pre, 1980).

The name ‘Manicured Noise’ came from a Buzzcocks single designed by Linder Sterling, featuring the slogan ‘manicured noise and cosmetic metal music’. Sterling’s own band **Ludus** are the great lost Manchester band of the era. Their output for New Hormones – *The Visit* (1980), *Pickpocket* (1981), *The Seduction* (1982), *Danger Came Smiling* (1982), plus the singles ‘Mother’s Hour’ and ‘Anatomy Is Not Destiny’ – have been comprehensively reissued by, you guessed it, LTM. The music ranges from gloriously poppy tumbles frisked along by Linder’s euphoric warble and Ian Devine’s radiant, sometimes Edge-like guitar, through jazzy suaveness, to vocal noise freakouts like ‘Mouthpiece’ and ‘Mistresspiece’ which bear comparison with such extremists of the human voice as Yoko Ono, Annette Peacock, Cathy Berberian, and Norma Winstone (all heroines of Linder’s). *The Damage* (rec. 1979-1983; LTM anthology, 2002) provides a good survey of the group’s body of work and includes the taboo-tweaking menstruation ditty ‘My Cherry Is In Sherry’. The group’s finest hour might be a legendary November 1982 performance at The Hacienda: Linder appeared in a dress made from cuts of meat and chicken giblets, which she whipped off during the last song to reveal a gigantic black dildo; on each table in the venue, Linder’s accomplices the Crones had deposited a plate with a bloody-red tampon on it. Linder’s ‘Cunt Power’ brand of feminism plus the idiosyncratic, schizo nature of the music meant that Ludus didn’t make much impact in their own time, though. Feeling the Hacienda performance was hard to top, Sterling gradually shifted away from music to concentrate on her career as an artist and photographer.

New Hormones released a virtually unfindable cassette-only audio-magazine *Northern Lights*. On it appear **Biting Tongues**, a Manchester industrial band somewhere in the vicinity of the Cabs and Skidoo – percussion, back projected slides and Super-8 films, recitation of cut-up texts, heavily-effected guitar, mute trumpet squall. *After the Click: Retrospective 1980-89* (LTM, 2003) documents their powerful if somewhat generic avant-funk output.

Biting Tongues' main man Graham Massey went on to be the musical lynchpin of 808 State.

THE LONDON VANGUARD, JOHN PEEL and THE DIY/ CASSETTE BOOM

London Musicians Collective

For a sense of staple fare at LMC, check out **Alterations**, the improv quartet involving David Toop and Steve Beresford: *Alterations* (Bead, 1978), *Up Your Sleeve* (Quartz, 1980), *My Favourite Animals* (Nato, 1984), *Voila Enough!* (Atavaistic, 2000), and, probably most reflective, *Alterations Live* (rec. 1980-83; Intuitive). Toop identified the group's spirit as 'cooperative confrontation' (anything was allowed, no matter what the others were playing at that precise moment) while member Terry Day talked of a shared passion for 'irreverent musical collisions.' You can glean something of its flavor from the collective's instrumental palette, which, along with the more obvious tools of the improv trade, included 'nylon string guitar', euphonium, toy electric guitar, crackle box, water whistles, 'snapits' and 'decoys'. Drawing on similarly quirky instrumentation but sounding closer to post-punk as commonly known: Toop/Beresford's 'band' **General Strike**, whose lovely *Danger In Paradise* was recorded between 1979 and 1982 but only released in 1985 (CD reissue on David Cunningham's Piano label, 1995). Highlights include dinky dub-inflected covers of Sun Ra tunes 'We Travel The Spaceways' and 'Interplanetary Music'. The **49 Americans** was a LMC supergroup mixing improvisers (Toop, Beresford, Lol Coxhill, Max Eastley) with post-punkers (Viv Albertine and Goldman). But the results on *Too Young To Be Ideal* (Quartz, 1980) and *We Know Nonsense* (Quartz, 1982) err on the side of faux-naive whimsy.

Of the LMC-affiliated post-punks, **The Door and the Window's** kept whimsoid inconsequentiality at bay most of the time thanks to a combination of savage intent and cackhanded non-proficiency. The great part of the group's output is on *Detailed Twang* (Overground Records, 2003), which includes the 1980 album of the same name and EPS *Don't Kill Colin* and *Production Line*. Likewise, **Lemon Kittens**, where Karl Blake's demons and Danielle Dax's imp of the perverse combine for an authentic derangement. Roots in prog and heavy rock (Sabbath/Soft Machine/Gong/Atomic Rooster) clash with Devo/This Heat/Ubu/Residents influences on *Spoonfed + Writhing EP* (Biter of Thorpe, 1979),

We Buy A Hammer For Daddy (United Dairies, 1980), and *Cake Beast EP*. Blake mangles his guitar with effects and conjures all kinds of grotesque noises from his own throat. *Hammer for Daddy* received favorable comparisons to Art Ensemble of Chicago and Can in John Gill's five-star *Sounds* review, but by Lemon Kittens' second full-length *Those That Bite The Hand That Feeds Them Must Sooner or Later Meet . . . The Big Dentist* (United Dairies, 1982), the culture had moved on and tolerance for wilful weirdness was in short supply. Thereafter Blake formed The Shock-Headed Peters while **Danielle Dax** pursued a more approachable brand of solo quirkery with *Pop Eyes* (Initial, 1983) – which splits the difference between Kate Bush's *The Dreaming* and PiL's *Flowers of Romance* – and *Jesus Egg That Wept* (Awesome, 1984), which has the distinction of being my first freebie EVER when it arrived through the letterbox thanks to the zine I co-founded, *Monitor*.

Rough Trade

Kicked out of the fabulous X Ray Spex, where the braying insolence of her sax vied for the spotlight with Poly Styrene's foghorn roar, **Lora Logic** formed her own band **Essential Logic**. After the debut single 'Aerosol Burns' (Cell, 1978) and an eponymous EP (Virgin, 1979), the group joined the Rough family, where its nimble, inventive brand of jazzpunk found congenial company in the form of The Raincoats and The Red Crayola. Definitely an acquired taste, Logic's high-pitched warble is at its most fetching on the jittery suave-funk of 'Fanfare In the Garden' and the stretched-out, peaky, uppermost-register melody of 'Martian Man.' Most of the group's output – along with stuff from Logic's solo album *Pedigree Charm*, the Logic-sung Red Crayola single 'Born In Flames,' but *not*, annoyingly, the Greil Marcus-praised Virgin EP – can be found on *Fanfare in the Garden: An Essential Logic Collection* (Kill Rock Stars, 2003). This double CD convincingly argues for Essential Logic as one of the great overlooked post-punk outfits. Kill Rock Stars also gave the double-CD anthology treatment to another great Rough Trade act: **Kleenex** (soon obliged to change their name to the non-trade-mark infringing **LiLiPUT**), a Swiss all-woman trio who evolved from a spirited Delta 5-like dancepunk to a spiny, brambly sound that's something like a Slits rooted in funk rather than reggae.

Esteemed in the Rough Trade circle for his work with Soft Machine and Matching Mole plus brilliant solo albums like *Rock Bottom*, **Robert Wyatt** was coaxed out of retirement in 1979 by Geoff Travis to record a

superb series of four singles for the label, subsequently gathered as the album *Nothing Can Stop Us* (Rough Trade, 1982). A dedicated (but not dogmatic) Communist, Wyatt covered 'The Red Flag' and Latin American revolutionary songs 'Caimanera' and 'Arauco', the WW2-era we-love-our-Soviet-allies ditty 'Stalin Wasn't Stallin', lynching lament 'Strange Fruit', and 'Trade Union' by Dishari, a Bengali workers collective from East London. Most startlingly, he offered a plaintive reading of 'At Last I Am Free,' a beautiful Chic ballad, and a tabla-driven version of 'Grass,' Ivor Cutler's darkly funny allegory about authoritarianism. The sole Wyatt composition, 'Born Again Cretin' (which also appeared on *C81*, the NME/Rough Trade cassette) is a withering parody of a right-wing curmudgeon, draped in ecstatic scat vocalese that sounds like a chorus of bliss-drunk bullfrogs. Later in 1982, Wyatt's melancholy rendition of 'Shipbuilding' (an oblique anti-Falklands War protest penned by Elvis Costello) reached #35 in the UK charts.

After Young Marble Giants' premature end, Stuart Moxham formed **The Gist** while Alison Statton joined the jazz-pop outfit **Weekend**, but neither the former's *Embrace The Herd* (Rough Trade, 1983) nor the latter's *La Variete* (Rough Trade, 1982) come within miles of *Colossal Youth*.

John Peel Bands

Peel's show wasn't non-stop post-punk – all through the period he played straight punk (like Vice Squad) and pop-punk (his faves The Undertones). If my John Peel Top Ten was more objective, it would include **The Modettes'** 'White Mice' (Rough Trade, 1979) which lies somewhere between The Slits and Blondie; the goofy funk of **The Higsons'** 'I Don't Want to Live with Monkeys (Romans in Britain, 1981); 'Warm Girls/Getting Nowhere Fast' (Record Records, 1980) by the wondrously exuberant **Girls At Our Best!**, and a fair few others.

Of the groups on my chart, *Spizz History* (Rough Trade, 1981) scoops up all the good **Spizz**-stuff ('Kirk', 'Soldier Soldier', 'Spock's Missing'). Along with the title song *There Goes Concorde Again . . .* (Mr Music, 2001) contains a generous amount of . . . **Native Hipsters'** initially endearing, rapidly wearing brand of mimsy-whimsy. Same applies to **Family Fodder**: the discography is extensive but *Savoir Faire: The Best of* (Dark Beloved Cloud, 1998) will sate most appetites. Your best hope of finding **The Cravats'** 'Precinct' and **Fatal Microbes'** 'Violence Grows' is the Small Wonder label compilation *The Punk Singles Collection*

(Anagram/Cherry Red, 1994) where the songs nestle next to 'Flares and Slippers' by Oi! ruffians The Cockney Rejects and DIY-punk singer-songwriter **Patrik Fitzgerald's** 'Safety Pin Stuck In My Heart'. Check out also the Cravats *In Toytown* (Small Wonder, 1980). **The Prefects** anthology *Amateur Wankers* (Acute) includes 'Faults', 'Going Through The Motions' and 'Bristol Road Leads to Dachau,' but not their live tour de force: an 8 second version of 'Bohemian Rhapsody'.

West London-based fellow travellers with the Rough trade/Scritti set, **pragVEC** did no less than three sessions for the Peel Show. The group had a very cool name and a charismatic attitudinous singer in Sue Gogan. But apart from the great 'Existensial' (which shows a heavy trace of pre-punk chops from guitarist John Studholme), on record pragVEC never moved too far beyond their roots in the 'Trotskyist pub rock' band The Derelicts. On the debut *Bits* EP (whence 'Existensial' hails) (Spec, 1978) and 'Expert/The Follower' (Spec, 1979), the sound is punk rock with a few angular jags thrown in: X Ray Spex meets Beefheart, as one reviewer put it. *Spec Records present No Cowboys* (Spec, 1980) collects various pragVEC collaborations, and includes Jim 'Foetus' Thirlwell on Wasp synth and Ian Penman on horns!

Somewhere in the Peel-zone, the following deserve mention:

Blurt (*In Berlin*, Armageddon, 1981; *Blurt*, Red Flame, 1982; *Bullets For You* (Divine, 1984), close at times to a British Contortions thanks to Ted Milton's primal screeching on sax and voice, although his overall vision/thang owes as much to Spike Milligan as Albert Ayler; the impressively oppressive, Ubu-meets-Neu! heaviness of **Metaboliste's** *Hansten Klork* (Dromm Records); and Worcestershire folk-punk magic realists **The Dancing Did**, whose 'pastoral Edwardian rockabilly' (Barney Hoskyns), was captured on singles like 'The Haunted Tea Rooms/Squashed Things on the Road' (Fruit & Veg, 1980) and the long-player *And Did Those Feet* (Kamera, 1982).

DIY and the Cassette Scene

Beyond Scrits, Maps, and Desps lies the vast hinterland of UK do-it-yourself. For some years now, archivists and cult-builders have been mining this terrain. An offshoot of a long-running punk rarity series, *Killed By Death - British DIY* (Redrum) led the way, exhuming the likes of **Hornsey At War**. It's since been eclipsed by the *Messthetics* CD-R compilations (hyped2death.com), on which unknowns (**Nigel Simpkins**, **Tea**

Set, **Thin Yoghurts**) jostle with formative efforts by later luminaries such as 23 Skidoo. While Green-influenced outfits like **Stepping Talk** a.k.a **Methodishca Tune** actually fit ‘messthetics’ in the Scrit sense, most of the groups lean more to cheerfully scrappy punky-pop. (Compiler Chuck Warner has done a similar series for American DIY-punk, called *Homework*, which is even less post-punk vanguard oriented). Also notable in this field is *I Hate the Pop Group* (Vertical Slum, 2000) which features great tracks like **AK Process**’ ‘Post-Town,’ **File Under Pop**’s ‘Heathrow’ (partly recorded at the airport), and **Storm Bugs**’ ‘Cash Wash’. For more of the Storm Bugs’ enjoyably disorienting cacophony, check out *Let’s Go Outside* and *Get It Over* (Snatch Tapes, rec. 1978-81, reissued 2001) and *Up the Middle Down the Sides* (Fusetron, rec. 1978-80, reissued 2004). Generally speaking with this stuff, though, for every fascinating slice of arcana, the DIY hunter-collectors dredge up several specimens of weirdness-for-weirdness’-sake and failed experimentalism, such that you start to see Green’s point when he disowned DIY as ‘a lost cause’.

Favorites of the cult-building archivist set: **The Homosexuals**, a band virtually unknown in their own time despite churning out a nutty number of releases under their own name (1981’s *The Homosexuals* EP, 1982’s *ICI La Bas* EP, 1983’s *Vencerwemos* cassette, 1984’s *The Homosexuals Record*) and via pseudonyms (Nancy Sesay and the Melodaires, George Harassment), not forgetting solo side projects by bassist L. Voag. The 81 songs on the three CD box set *Astral Glamour* (Hyped2Death, 2004) include substantial amounts of unreleased material. Listening, you can see why the cult grew in the first place: the melodic gifts and offhand musicality clash with an impulse towards the fragmentary and deliberately half-finished. But there’s also a vein of neo-psychedelic wackiness running through **The Homosexuals** that connects them to Andy Partridge and Robin Hitchcock as much as Swell Maps. No coincidence that the canonizing push around the band started in America, where XTC and **The Soft Boys** are college radio and indie-zine icons.

Despite the perishable nature of the source recordings, even the cassette-only releases of the DIY sub-underground are being resurrected: the CDR label Waterden reissued the compilations *We Couldn’t Agree On A Title* (originally ICR, 1981), *No Platform For Heels* (originally Tender Hooks Records, 1982), and *Love and Devotion* (originally Deleted/Fuck Off, 1982). A good source for the esoterica in this and other sections of the discography is the distributor Fusetron,

<http://www.fusetronsound.com/>. As yet un-reissued, the double EP *Angst In My Pants* (Street Level, 1979) was hailed the second finest compilation in music history by post-punk cultist Johan Kugelberg, whose voluminous survey of British DIY survey is at <http://www.hyped2death.com/Kugelberg100.html>. One group he doesn't mention is the all-female Ladbroke Grove outfit **Androids of Mu**, whose *Blood Robot* (Fuck Off) won five stars in *Sounds*. Which means he thinks it's crap or, more likely, that UK do-it-yourself is simply a bottomless well that people will be plumbing for decades to come.

INDUSTRIAL

Entire books could – and have – been written about industrial music. For a survey of how far the meme had propagated by the end of the period covered in this book, consult Dave Henderson's 'Wild Planet', originally published in *Sounds*, May 7th 1983, available on the web at <http://media.hyperreal.org/zines/est/articles/wplanet.html>.

And for an unstintingly thorough account of just one sector of British industrial culture – the Nurse With Wound/Current 93/Coil nexus – turn to David Keenan's *England's Hidden Reverse: A Secret History of the Esoteric Underground* (SAF Publishing, 2003). Here I'll confine myself to just a few notable strands.

After TG split, Cosey Fanni Tutti and Chris Carter (who'd already released a 1981 solo album, *The Space Between*, on Industrial) continued working together as **Chris & Cosey**, building on TG's electropop noir side ('Hot On the Heels of Love,' 'Distant Dreams', etc) and combining icy synths and breathy vocals for an atmosphere of cold kinky sexuality, as heard on *Heartbeat* (Rough Trade, 1981), *Trance* (Rough Trade, 1982), *Songs of Love + Lust* (Rough Trade, 1984).

The Newcastle outfit variously spelt **:zoviet*france:**, **:SOVIET:FRANCE:**, and plain old **Zoviet France**, took one of the most interesting journeys out of industrial, conjuring alternately absurd and ecstatic atmospheres across albums like *Hessian* (Red Rhino, 1982), *Garista* (Red Rhino, 1982), *Norsch* (Red Rhino, 1983), *Mohnomische* (Red Rhino, 1983) and *Eostre* (Red Rhino, 1984). (All the above available as CD reissues on the group's own Charrm label). At different points, they recall a diffuse, unshackled-from-the-groove Cabaret Voltaire, a Nurse With Wound if they weren't so Faust-fixated, and Eno's *On Land* with a

impish Dadaist streak. The gaseous drifts of quasi-primitive music often seem like exercises in ethnological forgery, as if the group were trying to recreate the music of Polynesian tribes based entirely on reading anthropology texts or looking at *National Geographic* pictures.

Post-punk's cardinal flaw – or at least its ever-present potential for downfall – lay in the way it gave discourse equal status with musicality. To put it blunter: you could get surprisingly far if you could talk a good game. Laden with content, freighted with intent, and framed with all manner of pre- and post-rationalisations, industrial music took this tendency to the limit. One good example is **Boyd Rice** a.k.a **Non**, whose stature owes at least as much to his beliefs (liberal-baiting libertarianism) and record-collecting (a perverse passion for squeaky-clean Sixties girl-pop and Martin Denny-style exotica) as to his actual music. In live performances, Rice assaulted audiences with abstract noise played at ear-gouging volume, generated with devices like a shoe-polishing machine and a mutated guitar with an electric fan welded to the fretboard. The resulting tsunami of structureless sound was intended to work as a 'deindoctrination rite': scrambling thought-patterns by subverting the listener's expectation of musical pattern. Yeah, *right*. The recordings are equally shapeless but more subdued. Made from tape-loops seemingly derived from orchestrated mood-music, the tracks on *The Black Album* (originally recorded and released in a miniscule pressing in 1977; re-released Mute, 1981) range in effect from queasy ethereality to stylus-stuck-in-groove irritation. Non's *Pagan Muzak* (a 7 inch album!) is if nothing else a conceptual tour de force: it consists of 17 locked grooves playable (like the *Black* tracks) at any speed. Rice personally drilled extra holes in the label to increase the range of playback possibilities. See also Rice/Non's *Terra Incognita: Ambient Works 1975 Present* (Mute, 2004).

Also fitting the 'good talker' syndrome: **SPK**. At the core of the group was the idea of madness-as-truth and schizophrenic-as-seer. Founder Graeme Revell drew inspiration from his experiences as a nurse in an Australian mental hospital and his parallel studies of Art Brut, anti-psychiatry (Foucault, Guattari, etc), and poststructuralist theory. At various points in the group's career SPK has stood for Surgical Penis Klinik, System Planning Korporation, SoliPsiK, and SePpuKU, but in the beginning it came from

Socialistisches Patienten Kollektiv: a bunch of German loony-bin inmates who emulated the Baader-Meinhof and started their own terrorist group, rallying to the slogan 'Kill Kill Kill For Inner Peace and Mental

Health'. Along with the interest in *un*-sane states of consciousness, another crucial influence was Revell's precocious reading (long before it was translated into English) of Jacques Attali's seminal treatise *Noise*. As you might expect, SPK's discography encompasses a fair amount of banging and screaming, augmented with guitar feedback and tortured synths. Hard going at first (*Information Overload Unit*, Side Effects, 1980), it gets progressively more listenable and interesting across *Leichenschrei* (Thermidor, 1982), *Dekompositions* (Side Effekts, 1983) and *Auto-Da-Fe* (Walter Ulbricht, 1983) as elements of structure, atmosphere, and even electro-influenced danceability creep in. SPK then pulled their own conform-to-deform move, signing to a major label and attempting a metal-bashing/electropop crossover sound on 1983's risible 'Metal Dance' and *Machine Age Voodoo* (WEA, 1984).

Elements of the industrial diaspora – especially the drift toward magic, ritual and ceremony, and the interest in world musics like gamelan – are documented on the series of strikingly designed cassette/magazines issued by the **Touch** organisation from 1982 onwards, such as *Meridians One*, *Islands Inbetween* and *Ritual: Magnetic North*. On the *Meridians 2* cassette, for instance, you find Nocturnal Emissions and 400 Blows rubbing shoulders with TG fellow traveller Derek Jarman.

SAN FRANCISCO

And it's Touch who were responsible for the gorgeously packaged fetish object that is *1968-1990: One Foot In the Grave* (1991), a double CD plus lengthy illustrated booklet documenting the output of Z'ev in all his manifold alter-egos. Other SF industrialists like **Survival Research Laboratories** and **Monte Cazazza** have left less of a spoor in terms of documentation, although the latter did release three things on Industrial (1979's 'To Mom On Mother's Day' and 1980's 'Something For Nobody,' plus a 1980 live cassette) and also collaborated with Factrix on *California Babylon* (Subterranean, 1982).

The **Ralph** roster was crammed with kooks, many not from San Francisco but British: wonky-sounding guitarist **Snakefinger** (1980's *Chewing Hides The Sound*, 1981's *Greener Postures*, 1982's *Manual of Errors*); weirdo-duo **Renaldo & The Loaf** (1979's *Songs For Swinging Larvae*, 1983's *Arabic Yodelling* and *Title in Limbo* – the latter a collaboration with **The Residents**), who had a touch of Flying Lizards/LMC

about them (their instrumentation included metal comb, pickle jar and scalpel); ex-Henry Cow/Art Bears uber-prog guitar virtuoso **Fred Frith** (1980's *Gravity*, 1981's *Speechless*, 1983's *Cheap At Half The Price*). Migrating from their hometown Bloomington, Indiana to San Francisco, **MX-80 Sound** released two albums on Ralph. They were basically metal-tinged proggers who'd got somehow swept up with punk (hence their one album for Island, 1977's *Hard Attack*). Guitarist Bruce Anderson's penchant for the lead mode on one memorable occasion prompted a Frisco punkette to hurl a coat over his axe mid-solo, as if such self-indulgence was *obscene*. But if you like tasty licks and unusual chords delivered with iron-fisted force, you'll enjoy *Out of the Tunnel* (Ralph, 1980) and *Crowd Control* (Ralph, 1981) which lie somewhere between Blue Oyster Cult and Mission of Burma.

More Frisco strangeness can be found on the **Subterranean** compilations *Red Spot* (featuring electronic rocker **Minimal Man** plus Fried Abortions, Research Library, Woundz, Animal Things etc); *Club Foot* ('neo beatnik meets modern jazz meets bizarroid pop meets twisted funk meets demented Stravinsky,' according to the Subterranean catalogue); and *Live At Target* (featuring Flipper, Nervous Gender, Factrix, Uns). An abrasive, crazy-funny synth-punk outfit in the mold of The Screamers (see Los Angeles section) **Nervous Gender** made a great album for Subterranean, *Music From Hell* – 'electronic music with testicles' sez the catalogue, and indeed it's like Flipper's spirit grafted into DAF's physique. Factrix/Tuxedomoon instrument-maker **Tommy Tadlock** also put out an odd little single 'Body AD/Poker Keno.'

THE SKA AND MOD REVIVALS

Like other epoch-defining labels, **2-Tone** quickly came a cropper because the better bands didn't want to lose their identity within the label brand, and the roster soon got crowded with duffers. *The 2-Tone Collection* (Chrysalis, 1993) is accordingly hard to recommend unreservedly: the 44 tracks across two discs includes all the obvious classics but also a superfluity of second-division ska and sundry retro-pastichery from **The Bodysnatchers**, **The Swinging Cats**, **The Apollinaires**, and their like.

A word for **UB40**, the Birmingham mixed-race reggae band. At one point mooted as a 2-Tone signing, they opted for another indie, Graduate, scoring huge hits in 1980 with a series of Top 10 singles and

the massive *Signing Off* album. Then they started their own label DEP International and were even more successful. Generally dismissed as either drably sanctimonious protest-mongerers (on account of anti-unemployment protest ditties like 'One In Ten') or derivative pop-reggae diluters (for covers like 'Red Red Wine'), UB40 deserve a smidgeon of respect for the anti-racist imploring of 'King', the chilling post-nuclear scene-setting of 'The Earth Dies Screaming', and shouting down the Queen of Babylon (a.k.a Maggie T) on the convincingly dubbed-up 'Madame Medusa'.

The Jam

A pop institution, The Jam were a presence through the entire post-punk period. For a time the group's singles all seemed to go straight in at Number One. The Jam were never really 'punk', but that didn't mean they were precisely 'post-punk' either: mod not modernist, they were too steeped in traditional Britpop values (The Who's maximum R&B, The Beatles' songcraft and arrangements). But even though they followed their own path, The Jam still intersected with almost all of the UK trends of this era.

– **post-punk:** circa *Sound Affects* (Polydor, 1980), Paul Weller expressed admiration for Joy Division and Gang of Four, something you can hear in the spartan sound and jabbing bass-riffs of 'Pretty Green,' a terrific tune whose stark lyrics offer a pared-down Go4-style critique of money. There's even an echo of *Entertainment!* in the title if not music of 'That's Entertainment', while the foreboding clangour of 'Funeral Pyre,' the next single after *Sound Affects*, could be off the Bunnymen's *Heaven Up Here*.

– **2-Tone and the Soul Revival:** The Jam nearly pre-empted the ska revival when they tried to cover Prince Buster's 'Rough Rider' for 1978's *All Mod Cons* (they gave up when they couldn't get the feel right). But between their 1979 version of Martha & The Vandella's 'Heat Wave' and the Tamla-Xeroxing 'Town Called Malice' in '81, The Jam joined in the general rediscovery of Motown and Stax: The Beat covering 'Tears of A Clown', Elvis Costello remaking Sam & Dave's 'Can't Stand Up For Falling Down,' Secret Affair and Dexy's . . .

– **New Pop and New Funk:** Morose ballad 'The Bitterest Pill' came draped in *Lexicon of Love*-style strings, while the stilted funk of 'Precious' was influenced, for added third-handedness, by Pigbag!

rip it up and start again

Towards the end of The Jam's life, Weller launched a label, **Respond**, modeled on Motown and dedicated to developing an 'English soul' through proteges like **Tracie** and faux-funkateers **The Questions**. His next band, **The Style Council**, adapted/updated the mod philosophy by bringing it into line with that mid-Eighties 'anything and everything except rock is cool' sensibility touted by style bibles like *The Face*. Like the original Sixties mods, Weller propounded an aesthetic of hip consumption (hence the Council's album *Our Favourite Shop*) that prized the music and style of Black America and Europe. Overwhelmingly, though, it was bygone Black Americana and non-contemporary European stuff that got the Council's stamp of approval: hence the Left Bank chic and cool jazz neuterings of *Café Bleu* and *A Paris*, complete with cringe-inducingly hep sleevenotes by The Cappuccino Kid. In an *NME* Consumer Guide, Weller placed words like 'dirty', 'rock'n'roll', and 'out of it' under the heading 'No Style and Square', while 'clean', 'classical', and 'symmetry' got the thumbs up. In another interview, he declared that black people were 'the only people making any good music, like they've always been'. Mostly downgrading guitar (an instrument whose rockism now embarrassed Weller) in favor of keyboards (played by Mick Talbot, formerly of mod-revivalists The Merton Parkas), The Style Council's palette of pastiche ran across the decades: Blue Note, Georgie Fame, Curtis Mayfield, and, now and then, the Eighties ('Long Hot Summer' was a good stab at the succulent 'juicy fruit' synth sound of modern R&B like Mtume). The 'anything and everything except rock' era died the day Julien Temple's movie of Colin MacInnes's *Absolute Beginners* (a project the London style media had a huge amount invested in, emotionally) came out and proved embarrassingly bad. The Style Council, naturally, were all over the soundtrack.

SYNTHPOP

Essential background to this era: **Giorgio Moroder's** electrodisco productions for **Donna Summer** ('I Feel Love'; the glistening, rhapsodic 'Now I Need You/Working the Midnight Shift' song-suite on side two of 1977's *Once Upon A Time*; 'Sunset People' on 1979's *Bad Girls*) and for **Sparks** (1979's 'The Number One Song In Heaven' and 'Beat The Clock' – go for the 12 inch versions); soundtracks for *Midnight Express* (especially 'Chase') and *American Gigolo*; solo albums *From Here To Eternity*

(Casablanca, 1977) and *E = MC2* (1979). (This is just a fraction of his oeuvre: for an exhaustive discography, <http://demetz.net/Moroder-Summer/tribute2.html>). Given the catalytic effect the Summer/Moroder sound had on Human League, there's a poetic righteousness to Giorgio Moroder and **Phil Oakey** teaming up for 'Together In Electric Dreams' (Virgin, 1984) but this Top 3 smash is actually kinda bland. Sylvester-producer and Hi-NRG pioneer **Patrick Cowley**'s brilliant 1982 remix of 'I Feel Love' illustrates the revolutionary impact the song had on gay club sounds – from Divine to **Bronski Beat** (who covered it) to Chicago house.

Yellow Magic Orchestra really exist outside this book's narrative. Personally I've always been kinda underwhelmed by the electronic progzak of records like 1979's *Solid State Survivor*, while suspecting the Japanese group had as much real influence on synthpop as, say, Jean-Michel Jarre (whose all-electronic 'Oxygene Part IV' was a massive hit around the same time as 'I Feel Love'). **Ryuichi Sakamoto**'s partnership with David Sylvian, however, yielded the fabulous 'Bamboo Music/Bamboo Houses' (Virgin, 1982), with its stumbling, asymmetric beats and calligraphic daubs of synth-colour. This single was essentially an extension of Sakamoto's fantastically advanced *B-2 Unit* (Island, 1980), whose tangled rain forest of lurid textures and off-kilter rhythm (especially on the single 'Riot In Lagos') anticipated the techno and drum'n'bass beatscapes conjured by 808 State and A Guy Called Gerald. His next album *The Left Handed Dream* contains a few good'n'weird bits but isn't quite so amazing. Thereafter Sakamoto divided his energies between soundtracks (like *Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence*, which produced the shatteringly poignant Sylvian collaboration 'Forbidden Colours') and solo albums based around a 'Neo-Geo' hybrid-pop idea that owed quite a bit to Jon Hassell's 4th World concept. The gaseous wooze of Hassell's treated trumpet drifts through **David Sylvian**'s solo debut *Brilliant Trees* (Virgin, 1984), alongside contributions from Sakamoto and Holger Czukay. The album largely abandons electronics for jazz and ambient, though: it's Sylvian's secession from pop (synth or otherwise) in search of a more timeless, less fashion-bound form of songcraft.

If not Yellow Magic Orchestra, then **Yello** certainly provided crucial grist to the electro-dance mill throughout this period, with club hits like 'Bostich,' 'Pinball Cha Cha,' 'Vicious Games,' and 'I Love You'. On *Solid Pleasure* (Mercury, 1980), *Claro Que Si* (Ralph, 1981) and *You Gotta Say Yes To Another Excess* (Mercury, 1983), Boris Blank's cine-

matic electronics backdrop the strange belching baritone of Dieter Meier. The latter's inherited fortune allowed him to devote his life to art and golf, Dadaist mischief and dressing like a 1920s aristocrat. The Swiss duo's division of labour (singer/lyricist + machine operator/arranger) runs right through synthpop: Suicide, Soft Cell, OMD, Eurythmics, Blancmange, Pet Shop Boys. Indeed it's one of the things that made rockists uneasy: as the gang-structure of the classic rock band gets replaced by a same-sex 'couple,' homosociality gets converted into homo-eroticism. Exceptions: girl/boy duos like Eurythmics and **Yazoo**. Alf Moyet and Vince (formerly of Depeche Mode) Clarke's soul+synth/fire+ice combo always felt a tad pat to me, but Yazoo's 'Don't Go' does sear, I suppose, while 'Only You' and 'Nobody's Diary' (all Mute, 1982-83) are sweetly sad.

Some overlooked electropop auteurs. Most known for the vocoder-vocalled 'Moskow Diskow', Belgium's **Telex** released a bunch of albums – *Looking For Saint-Tropez* (Sire, 1979), *Neurovision* (Sire, 1980), *Sex* (Sire, 1981) – whose contents haven't aged especially well. Syn-drum wizard **Richard Burgess** produced Spandau Ballet's electronics-oriented debut *Journeys To Glory*. He also formed the short-lived outfit Shock with Visage's Rusty Egan, and, as drummer of his own ex-fusion band **Landscape** scored the electropop novelty hit 'Einstein A Go-Go' (RCA, 1981). Performance artist and Leeds Poly contemporary of Soft Cell, **Fad Gadget** pioneered an unique brand of sinister, dissonant Electro-Goth on Mute with singles like 'Ricky's Hand' and albums *Fireside Favorites* (1980), *Incontinent* (1981), *Under The Flag* (1982), and *Gag* (1984). The second disc of *The Best of Fad Gadget* (Mute, 2001) contains the original 12 inch mixes of mini-classics like 'Collapsing New People'.

SCOTLAND

Postcard's #3 group **Aztec Camera** went on to become one of the more boring bands of the last 20 years but in the beginning they created a couple of gems: debut single 'Just Like Gold' (and touching flipside 'We Could Send Letters') and the follow-up 'Mattress of Wire' (both Postcard, 1981). Morley tagged 16 year old singer Roddy Frame as smack dab 'between Vic Godard and Cliff Richard.' By 1983's 'Oblivious' and *High Land, Hard Rain* (Rough Trade), Aztec were too winsome by half, though.

Postcard's #4 group **The Go-Betweens** went on to become one of the most over-rated (by rock critics, anyway) bands of the last 20 years but early on they had a certain wintry enchantment. For 'I Need Two Heads' (Postcard, 1980), *Send Me A Lullaby* (Rough Trade, 1982), and *Before Hollywood* (Rough Trade, 1983) imagine a dry, denuded *Talking Heads* 77, an anorexic *Marquee Moon* pruned of solos. (They're not actually Scottish of course, but Aussies).

Scotland's group-most-likely-who-in-fact-didn't: **The Scars**, who went from the spiky thrills of 'Adultery/Horrorshow' (Fast Product, 1978) to the would-be New Pop mainstream bid of *Author! Author!* (PRE, 1981), glossier but still full of punk-pop exuberance. The failure of glorious single 'All About You' to go the way of Altered Images' 'Happy Birthday' suggests something's fundamentally awry in the constitution of the cosmos. Another highly touted North of the Border band: **Positive Noise**. Amid much Magazine-induced murk and turgor, they shone for a moment with 'Give Me Passion' (Statik, 1981). Like 'Tears Are Not Enough,' it read like a New Pop manifesto even if it was just a love song. Singer Ross Middleton then abandoned his band and went New Pop as the ghastly **Leisure Process**.

NEW POP

There's a case for saying the true heralds of New Pop were M's 'Pop Muzik' (#2 in May 1979) and **The Buggles**' 'Video Killed The Radio Star' (#1 October 1979). Both song embraced the possibilities of new technology; both were exercises in hyper-production and insane catchiness; both exploited the video form to the hilt. Crucially, both were exercises in meta, pop about pop. The Buggles, it's true, came from outside the post-punk narrative (Trevor Horn hated the Pistols and briefly joined Yes when Buggles' career went down the drain), but M have a more than tenuous connection: singer/conceptualist Robin Scott was an old art school buddy of Malcolm McLaren's.

Sub-trend #1 within New Pop was 'Funk'. Basslines, percussion, and horn sections suddenly became very crucial indeed. Dropping their synths for all three, **Spandau Ballet** produced the almost-great 'Chant #1' (several minus points though for the 'rap' mid-song about clubbing at New Romantic nightspots like Le Beat Route). Their ghastly second LP *Diamond* (Chrysalis, 1982) came packaged as four 45 rpm 12 inch sin-

gles (one better than *Metal Box!*), with five of the eight tracks remixed for dancefloor action. Despite making a better go of dance music than Spandau, posh boys **Funkapolitan** got flak for not fitting the W/C soul-boy template. Black Britfunkers **Linx** and **Junior Giscombe** were ultrahip, but other mainstays of the real working class dance underground, such as **Beggar & Co** and **Light of the World**, never quite shook off the taint of jazz-funk. Fashion-world operator **Perry Haines** (style adviser to Duran Duran and Visage, co-editor of *iD*, etc) caught the moment with his single 'What's Funk?' (Fetish, 1982), featuring his own weedy attempt to chant James Brown style. You can find a version of it, 'What's What,' on *Sex Sweat & Blood* (Beggar's Banquet, 1982), a very Zeitgeist-attuned comp (subtitle: 'The New Danceability') featuring everyone from punk-funkers Maximum Joy, Medium Medium, and 23 Skidoo to future Scritti member **David Gamson** to Zeitgeist-attuned New York band **The Dance** (of 'In Lust' semi-fame) to Chicago's very own New Romantics **Ministry**. Nothing by **Stimulin**, the band Haines managed, though. They were one of those classic UK music press phantom groups, virtually a figment of discourse. Trigger/pretext for yet another classic New Pop manifesto from Morley, Stimulin released nary a disc.

Sub-trend #2 within New Pop: 'Salsa', shorthand for Latin rhythms in general, in vogue off the back of Kid Creole & The Coconuts. Zoot suit troupe **Blue Rondo A La Turk** were the big hype, but it was **Modern Romance** (formerly punk jesters The Leighton Buzzards) who scored with heinous hits like 'Everybody Salsa' and 'Ay Ay Ay Ay Moosey.'

Contemplating the Second British Invasion in 1984, rockcrit Robert Christgau wondered how on Earth you could tell which Billboard-storming Brit-bands were gonna be durable like the Beatles and Stones, and which would turn out be equivalent to Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick & Tich? Most people even then would've lumped **Kajagoogoo** in the 'Herman's Hermits' category. But hey, the phuturistic jazz-funk shimmy of the intro and middle eight to 'Too Shy' (#1 in early 1983) is kinda groovy (and revealed the band's secret muso side – they wanted to be Level 42), while the next hit 'Oooh To Be Ah' was downright weird (*Sounds*' Dave McCullough compared it to James Joyce!). **Haysi Fantayzee**'s daft composite of cajun, Appalachia, high-life, skank, and assorted whatnot, on *Battle Hymns For Children Singing*, (Regard, 1983) is both edifying historically (as a snapshot of UK pop trends at a particular point) and surprisingly entertaining, especially on the UK hits 'John Wayne is Big Leggy' and 'Shiny Shiny'.

MUTANT DISCO era NEW YORK (and its satellites)

Pulsallama might have been a ‘joke band’ but there’s many deadly serious post-punk outfits who never got close to making a record as strange and wonderful as ‘The Devil Lives In My Husband’s Body’ (Y, 1982), a rolling and tumbling calvacade of percussion topped with a hilarious voice-over about a housewife whose seemingly-possessed hubby starts making alarming bestial noises in the basement (‘our friends can’t come over, anymore!’ she wails). Turns out he’s got Tourette’s – a pretty arcane condition to know about, back in ’82. Another all-girl outfit who played at Club 57 (amongst other places), **Y Pants** pursued a different, dinkier brand of whimsy with a sound mostly based around toy piano and ukelele. Their self-titled EP (99 Records, 1980) and *Beat It Down* (on Glenn Branca’s Neutral label, 1982) are gathered on *Y Pants* (Periodic Document).

August Darnell was an unlikely icon for the UK music press. He came from completely outside the post-punk/New Pop narrative: as lyricist of Dr Buzzard’s Original Savannah Band he’d tried to bring to disco the sort of panache and sophistication last seen in popular music during the 1940s, while as bandleader/frontman of **Kid Creole & The Coconuts** he dreamed of getting his songs on Broadway. *Off The Coast Of Me* (ZE, 1980) and *Fresh Fruit In Foreign Places* (ZE, 1981) proposed a kind of big band sound renovated for the multiculturalist Eighties, blending rhythms from salsa, funk, calypso, rumba, reggae, etc, with witty song-writing that harked back to Hollywood musicals and 42nd Street. Accordingly, for a year or two in the early Eighties, Darnell was the toast of the anti-rockist set. I remember really rooting for Coconut sideman **Coati Mundi’s** ‘Me No Pop I’ (wonderful Latin rhythms plus ‘rapping’ from Mundi aka Andy Hernandez) which crawled in agonizing increments towards the edge of the Top 30 before stopping just short of a TOTP appearance. When success finally came for Creole & Co it was with the more funk-oriented, straightforward *Tropical Gangsters* (ZE, 1982).

Darnell’s first involvement with ZE was working on records by **Cristina**. Theatre critic/Zilkha girlfriend turned irony-clad disco chanteuse, she released a series of progressively more cynical singles: the satirical ‘Disco Clone’ (featuring a cameo vocal from Kevin Cline), a cover of Leiber & Stoller’s ‘Is That All There Is?’ (withdrawn at the song publisher’s insistence because the words were changed to be even more

jaded), and the fabulous despair of 'Things Fall Apart' (which appeared on ZE's Yuletide compilation *The Christmas Album [Special 1982 Edition]*). Both of her albums, *Cristina* (1980) and *Sleep It Off* (1984) were reissued in 2005.

With its metal guitar and nihilistic lyrics, 'Things Fall Apart' resembles the better stuff on **Was (Not Was)**'s self-titled 1981 debut – 'Wheel Me Out,' the jazz-weird 'Oh, Mr Friction' and 'It's An Attack.' The other, more straightforwardly funky tunes like 'Out Come The Freaks' and 'Tell Me That I'm Dreaming' suffer from the huge reverse shadow cast by the group's inane mid-Eighties crossover hit 'Walk That Dinosaur'.

Before Was (Not Was), ZE made an early stab at disco-noir with 1979's *Spooks In Space* by **Aural Exciters**. Musically directed by producer/engineer Bob Blank, this post-No Wave supergroup (the cast included James Chance, Pat Place, and Coati Mundi) whipped up lavishly appointed, faux-decadent whimsy like 'Emile (night rate)' (a disco fiend's love song to amyl, geddit?). Best of ZE's post-No Wave output by a fair distance, though, is **Lizzy Mercier Descloux**'s *Mambo Nassau* (1981). Wonderfully frisky, flirty, feisty, fizzy, its hi-tech hybrid of African highlife, Latin rhythms, and French artpop sounds like a precise fusion of Tom Tom Club and *My Life In the Bush of Ghosts*, or the missing link between Bow Wow Wow and Grace Jones.

Speaking of whom, although not on ZE, **Grace Jones** played a crucial role in the mutual romance between New York and England in the early Eighties. A Jamaican expat turned New York fashion model/disco diva, after three albums Jones finally found her sound when Island Records hooked her up with legendary riddim section Sly & Robbie and a coterie of players and writers based around the Compass Point Studio in Nassau (two of whom, Wally Badarou and Steve Stanley also worked on *Mambo Nassau* and the Tom Tom Club album). *Warm Leatherette* (Island, 1980) applied this dub-funk sound to a bunch of covers, including three explicit nods towards post-punk: the title track by The Normal, Joy Division's 'She's Lost Control,' and The Pretenders' 'Private Life'. *Nightclubbing*, featuring similar treatments of songs by Iggy Pop and The Police, was NME's Album of the Year for 1981, and deservedly so. *Private Life: The Compass Point Sessions* (Island, 1998) has the 12 inch versions of all the Jones club classics like 'Pull Up To the Bumper' and 'Feel Up'.

Also benefiting from Britain's Manhattan-ophilia: James Blood Ulmer and **Defunkt**. The latter, formed by trombonist/vocalist Joe Bowie out of

a discarded James Chance horn section, got hailed thus in *NME*: ‘Defunkt are to funk in 1981 what the Pistols were to rock in 1977.’ The self-titled debut (Hannibal, 1980) isn’t *quite* that incendiary but the combination of hard funkjazz (NOT jazz-funk) and bleak lyrics *sears* on tracks like ‘Make Them Dance’, ‘Strangling Me With Your Love’ and the subverted Chic of ‘In The Good Times.’ ‘The Razor’s Edge’ and *Thermonuclear Sweat* (Hannibal, 1982) were more of the same, only less so. Guitarist **James Blood Ulmer**’s blazing brand of jazzpunkfunkblues drew on his mentor Ornette Coleman’s abstruse harmolodic theories but hit with supremely swingin’ and visceral force. *Are You Glad To Be In America?* (1980) got picked up by Rough Trade for UK release and its raging, ecstatic mission-statement ‘Jazz Is The Teacher, Funk Is The Preacher’ was a highlight of *C81*. *Tales of Captain Black* (Artists House, 1979), *Free Lancing* (Columbia, 1981), *Black Rock* (Columbia, 1982) are all excellent, while Ulmer’s collective Music Revelation Ensemble released a reputedly impenetrable album in 1980 actually called *No Wave*.

Talking of black No Wave – a tiny taste of Basquiat’s group **Gray** can be found on the compilation *Anti NY* (Gomma, 2002). ‘Drum Mode’ is the only extant recording made by the group – a shame as it’s a remarkable piece made of stealthy, crepuscular percussion and weird noise-tendrils.

Also on *Anti NY*: **The Del/Byzanteens**, a moody, cinematic outfit fronted by Jim Jarmusch (their 1981 *Del-Byzanteens* EP includes a strikingly ominous cover of The Supremes’ ‘My World Is Empty’); **Konk**, a seven-piece whose horn propelled and hand-percussion percolated funk made them something like New York’s own Pigbag, as also heard on *The Sound of Konk* anthology (Soul Jazz, 2004); **Ike Yard**, whose baleful, restlessly chattering tunes at their best sound like some dream merger of *Metal Box* and DAF (check their 1981 *Night After Night* EP on Les Disques Du Crepuscule and 1982’s *A Fact A Second* on Factory America, due for reissue on Troubleman United in 2005).

Ike Yard’s Stuart Argabright went on to make the classic electro track ‘The Dominatrix Sleeps Tonight’ (Street Wise, 1984) under the name **Dominatrix**, co-written with the track’s producer Ken Lockie. You can find the track on Volume 2 of *The Perfect Beats* (Timber/Tommy Boy, 1998), a splendid survey across four CDs of New York’s club culture between 1980 and 1985: electro, synth-funk, postdisco, punk-funk, Latin freestyle, early rap. Local stuff (Shannon’s ‘Let The Music Play’, Peech Boys’ ‘Don’t Make Me Wait’, Strafe’s ‘Set It Off’, C-Bank’s ‘One

rip it up and start again

More Shot', **Man Parrish's** 'Hip Hop Be-Bop' – this last = best electro track EVER) jostles with Euro imports (Kraftwerk, New Order, Italodisco doyens Klein & MBO, etc). For more crucial background on this era: **Shep Pettibone's** *KISS Master Mixes* (Prelude, 1982) and the 3 CD *Absolutely Very Best Of Prelude Records* (Deep, 1997); the canon-defining *Classic Electro Mastercuts Volume 1* (Mastercuts) and more obscurantist *Beat Classic* (DC Recordings) which features **Rammelzee's** Basquiat-produced and well weird 'Beat Bop'; *Disco Not Disco* (Strut, 2000), which covers the more Paradise Garage end of the spectrum, everything from Liquid Liquid and Material to Steve Miller Band and Yoko Ono, along with no less than three different alter-egos of Arthur Russell.

Like August Darnell, **Arthur Russell** can't really be called 'post-punk'. Okay, he almost joined Talking Heads early-on, and later wrote words for a Jah Wobble song. But as a post-John Cage minimalist with hippie-mystic tendencies, who studied Indian raga and then fell in love with disco, he couldn't have been less influenced by punk. Still, if anything deserves the term 'mutant disco' it's astonishing records like 'Go Bang' (dub-sluced absurdist funk made under the name **Dinosaur L**) or the cosmic dance of 'In the Light of the Miracle'. At New York gay club The Gallery, Russell was blown away by the engulfing quality of music transmitted over a massive sound system and literally entranced by disco's use of repetition. He began collaborating with New York's leading DJ/remixers like Walter Gibbons and Larry Levan on a series of releases via Sleeping Bag (the label Russell co-founded with Will Socolov). The key tracks are on *The World of Arthur Russell* (Soul Jazz, 2003), while an extensive reissue program is under way through the Audika label. You might also search out the Dinosaur L album *24-24 Music* (Sleeping Bag, 1982). Alongside his percussadelic, oceanic disco, Russell recorded avant-garde composition (1983's *The Tower of Meaning* on downtown minimalist label Chatham Square) and other stuff that at a push you could call 'singer-songwriter': effects-treated cello, acoustic guitar, and Russell's bleary, beatific mumble of a voice – a gorgeous fuzzy cloud of longing and langour that seems to enfold you in its gaseous embrace. Songs of this ilk written between 1980-86 saw release as *World of Echo* (Rough Trade, 1986)

For more on Factory's love affair with the club sounds of New York, check the compilations *Cool As Ice* and *Twice As Nice* (LTM, 2004), which document the dance productions by **BE Music** (a.k.a New Order)

and DoJo (A Certain Ratio drummer Donald Johnson). Pick of this variable litter (Anna Domino, Marcel King, Thick Pigeon, Nyam Nyam . . .) is black Mancunian outfit **52nd Street**. Produced by Johnson, featuring synth programming by Barney Sumner, and remixed by Funhouse DJ Jellybean Benitez, their 1983 'Cool As Ice' is a delicious shimmer of electrofunk that lives up to its title. Also showing the New York/Manchester thang was fully reciprocal: Anglo-Dutch outfit **Quando Quango**, who feature heavily on *Cool As Ice* and *Twice As Nice* and whose percussively chuntering Fac/Hac trax 'Love Tempo' and 'Atom Rock' were huge in the New York clubs. After an album, *Pigs + Battleships* (Factory, 1985), QQ's Mike Pickering became a top Hacienda DJ and led M People, while Hillegonda Rietveld wrote an academic treatise on house music.

Sonic Youth really lie outside this section's remit, but although they spearheaded the back-to-No Wave/anti-Mutant Disco backlash, their first self-titled EP (Neutral, 1982) shows significant PiL death-disco damage (back then their drummer was Richard Edson, who also played in Konk). *Confusion Is Sex* (Neutral, 1983; the Geffen reissue includes the *Kill Yr. Idols* EP) brings the noise; likewise the early-days live document *Sonic Death* (Ecstatic Peace/Blast First, 1988).

GOTH AND THE PUNK RESURGENCE

For background on the second-wave of U.K. punk, consult Ian Glasper's *Burning Britain: A History of UK Punk 1980-1984* (Cherry Red), while Stewart Home's *Cranked Up Really High* (CodeX) offers a provocative defence of Oi!'real punk' as the True Way, starting with the premise that the Sex Pistols weren't actually a punk band (too slow, too pretentious, too stuck-up . . .)

Anarcho-punk really deserves its own history. **Crass** and co's literalist reading of 'Anarchy In the U.K.' represented a misguided path for most post-punkers. Yet along with rudimentary rants in the mold of 'Do They Owe Us A Living,' Crass's records such as the epochal *Stations of The Crass* (Crass, 1979) also included forays into experimentalism and sound collage. The records got increasingly musically sophisticated and concept-album-like with *Penis Envy* (1981), *Christ-The Album* (1982), and *Yes Sir, I Will* (1983). Also faintly prog-redolent was the extent to which Crass's appeal lay in the packaging as much as the music: the eight

rip it up and start again

sided fold-out sleeves, covered with striking artwork, lyrics, and text ranging from political info to well-researched articles. Alongside *Stations*, the singles anthology *Best Before* is the best way into Crass. Other notable Crass-affiliated anarcho-punk: the increasingly experimental **Flux of Pink Indians** (1981's *Neu Smell* EP, 1982's *Strive To Survive Causing Least Suffering Possible*, 1984's *The Fucking Pricks Treat Us Like Cunts/The Fucking Cunts Treat Us Like Pricks*); the feminist, Vi Subversa fronted **Poison Girls** (1979's *Hex*, 1980's *Chappaquiddick Bridge*, 1981's *Total Exposure*, 1982's *Where's The Pleasure*, 1984's *7 Year Scratch*); **Rudimentary Peni**, blending turn-on-a-dime precision and foaming fury in almost American hardcore style on 1981's self-titled debut EP, 1982's *Farce* EP, and 1983's *Death Church*.

The unspoken argument of the Dark Things chapter is that the groups who inspired Goth were far superior to the Goth bands themselves. Somewhere on the cusp between proto-Goth and the dark thing itself, **UK Decay** were a powerful live band (I saw them support Killing Joke) with a sound rooted in the Banshees of 'Icon' and 'Playground Twist' (frostburn flanged guitar, twisting tom-rolls) plus a hint of PiL circa 'Religion'. Today, though, UK Decay's records – *For Madmen Only* (Fresh, 1981), *Rising From the Dread* EP (Corpus Christi, 1982) – sound rather thinly produced and theatrical. Mannered vocals and hammy dramatics are a general genre downside. On **Sex Gang Children's** *Song and Legend* and the early EPs collected on *Beasts* (both *Illuminated*, 1983) glam-rock genes emerge deformed by Goth's imperative to contrived strangeness: the results sound like T. Rex gone grisly, often spiced with cavernous echo and dub FX à la 'Bela Lugosi's Dead'. **Alien Sex Fiend** stand out from the Goth pack both for their less po-faced approach and more inventive music. On *Who's Been Sleeping In My Brain* (Relativity, 1983) and *Acid Bath* (Epitaph, 1984), the combination of frenetic drum machine beats, synths, twangy rockabilly guitar, and *Psychotronic!* *Incredibly Strange* B-movie lyrics makes them something like Suicide meets The Cramps. Also drum machine based (as were their early label-mates Sisters of Mercy) **March Violets** had problems shaking off the influence of Joy Division on *Religious As Hell* EP (Merciful Release, 1982) and *Natural History* (Rebirth, 1984). And **Gene Loves Jezebel** mash glam and psychedelia into enjoyably wild'n'doomy Romanticism on *Promise* (Situation Two, 1983) before heading pop-wards on *Immigrant* (Beggar's Banquet, 1984).

The early home of Bauhaus and The Birthday Party, **4AD** also put out

the excellent *Wheel In The Roses* EP (1980) by **Rema Rema**. Who might feel slurred by being tagged ‘proto-Goth’ given the experimental tendencies of some of their songs and their use of synth, but whose howling, hacking guitars certainly invite comparison with Bauhaus. Lead guitarist Marco Pirroni went on to join the Goth Nation’s first love Adam & The Ants, albeit to initiate their ‘turncoat’ New Pop phase. By 1983, the year of Positive Punk, 4AD was more identified with the ethereal sound I’ve dubbed Goth-Lite (no malice or demeaning intent – I prefer it to Goth-Heavy, actually). This subgenre took as its launch pad Banshees circa *A Kiss In The Dreamhouse* as opposed to *Join Hands*. Liz Frazer initially sounds like a virginal Sioux, Robin Guthrie like the missing link between John McGeoch and Vini Reilly. Across *Garlands* and *Lullabies* (both 1982) **Cocteau Twins** gradually shake off their influences and the band reaches its *sui generis* prime with *Head Over Heels* (I remember Peel playing both sides of the album in a single show and me initially thinking it vaporous drivel, then later falling, yes, heads over heels for it, and *in* it) and the exquisite *Sunburst and Snowblind* EP (both 1983), followed swiftly by the exquisiter still *Pearly Dewdrops Drop* EP (1984). But *Treasure* (4AD, 1984) is a bit too frou-frou and pre-Raphaelite for me. The first disc of *BBC Sessions* (rec. 1982-1996; Rykodisc/Bella Union, 1999) is a useful sweep through first-phase Cocteau. **Dead Can Dance** are Goth goes 4th World: Medievalism mingles with Middle Eastern, Celtic, and other forms of ethnic exotica, resulting in the ultimate ‘escape the modern world’ mood-music, with Lisa Gerrard’s monumental voice set against non-mundane instruments like the Chinese hammered dulcimer. The 1984 self-titled debut is monochrome Gothick but that same year’s *Garden of the Arcane Delights* EP and *Spleen and Ideal* (1985) blossom into gorgeous colour. The lavishly designed 1981-1998 box set (Rhino/4AD, 2001) captures Dead Can Dance’s journey towards a kind of Medievalist New Age.

A word for the Banshees side-projects. Siouxsie & Budgie’s voice + percussion duo **The Creatures** made some excitingly *rampant* records – *Wild Things* EP (Wonderland, 1981), *Feast* and ‘Right Now’ (both Wonderland, 1983) – and at one point enjoyed better chart placings than the Banshees. But *Blue Sunshine* (Wonderland/Polydor, 1983) by **The Glove** (Steve Severin + Robert Smith) is a daft byproduct of the Banshees’ acid phase (the LP gets its name from a famous brand of LSD).

Was **Toyah** a Goth? Probably not, but between 1979’s indie fave ‘Sheep Farming In Barnet’ and 1981’s pop hit ‘I Want To Be Free’ she

exactly mirrored Adam Ant's trajectory from tribalistic cult to heroics-for-teenyboppers, without ever making a record as good as 'Zerox' or 'Stand and Deliver'.

LIVERPOOL

Street To Street: A Liverpool Album (Open Eye Records, 1979) features an early Echo & The Bunnymen track, The Id (who turned into Orchestral Manoeuvres), the quite-good Modern Eon, Big In Japan, plus a bunch of scally no-marks.

Most money would have been on Jayne Casey to be the **Big In Japan** member certain to become a star. It never quite happened. Her band **Pink Military Stands Alone** were one of the very few Liverpool examples of post-punk as understood in the rest of the U.K. But *Do Animals Believe in God?* (Eric's/Virgin, 1980) hedges its bets between experimental impulses (as heard on the earlier *Blood and Lipstick* EP) and Casey's cabaret penchant, ending up sounding uncomfortably close to (shudder) Hazel O'Connor. **Pink Industry**, her next group, veered back to the margins with the studio-weirded *Is This The End* EP (Zulu, 1982), *Low Technology* and *Who Told You You Were Naked* (both Zulu, 1983).

Wah! Heat's main gift to post-punk culture was the term 'rockism'. Musically, though, they traded in rousing, as-rock-as-it-gets anthems like '7 Minutes To Midnight' and 'Better Screem' which you wouldn't be slandering by calling the missing link between The Clash and U2 (there's definite shades of Liverpool/The Edge favorites Television in Wah!'s ringing guitars). This incarnation of Wah! can be heard on *Nah=Poo – The Art of Bluff* (Eternal, 1981) and *The Maverick Years '80-'81* (Wonderful World, 1982). Pete Wylie then took Wah! in a sort-of-New-Pop/'young soul rebel' direction with the string-swept bluster of 'The Story of The Blues' (Eternal, 1982) which got to #3 in early 1983. There's a similar vaguely populist quasi-political vibe to two other Liverpool records of this time: **Echo & The Bunnymen**'s 'Never Stop' (Korova, 1983), intended as an anthem of working class defiance in the face of Thatcher's re-election, and 'Revolutionary Spirit' (Zoo, 1982) by **The Wild Swans**, the group formed by ex-Teardrop Explodes organist Paul Simpson. Some regard 'Revolutionary Spirit' as *the* great lost Liverpool classic of the era. Around this time a whole bunch of 'passionate,' windy-and-wet groups were coming out of the city, like The Icicle Works and The Pale Fountains.

Another erstwhile Teardrop, Alan Gill (co-writer of 'Reward'), was the main man behind **Dalek I Love You**, purveyors of moistly melodious synthopop on *Compass Kum'pass* (Phonogram, 1980) and *Dalek I Love You* (Korova, 1983). Like **Orchestral Manoeuvres**, the group came from Wirral: a peninsula of land on the over side of the Mersey from Liverpool, a haven of middle class suburbia. According to Paul Du Noyer, the Wirral synth boys were seen as 'grammar school boys, a bit earnest, swots.' OMD's love of keyboards came as much from prog as from Kraftwerk. A conceptual bent ran through their songs from 'Enola Gay' to their bizarre Joan of Arc obsession to lofty-sounding album titles like *Organisation* and *Architecture & Morality*. But so also did their sense of pop economy and beguiling, bittersweet melody: 'Electricity', 'Talking Loud and Clear'.

LOS ANGELES and HARDCORE

From the original Hollywood punk scene, the group that got closest to post-punk were **The Screamers**. Rooted in the same sort of radical gay theater that shaped Tuxedomoon, The Screamers' instrumental line-up – a synth and an electric keyboard, no guitars or bass – looks futuristic. But the drumming was human (and wildly rocking), and the keyboards, fed through a distortion box, were used in a hard-riffing, surrogate-guitar way. Ultimately The Screamers were closer to Sixties garage punk than, say, Human League. Their manic, stark-staring frontman, Tomata Du Plenty, seemed like a star in waiting, but The Screamers never released any records – they were holding out for the video laserdisc revolution! Bootlegs exist of various demo tapes and livestuff; there's a semi-legal video collecting live performance footage, and another of the low budget science fiction movie *Population One*, which starred Tomata and featured the band's music.

A scaled-down canon/beginner's guide for hardcore, minus the SST stuff: **Angry Samoans**, *Back From Samoa* (Bad Trip, 1982); **Bad Brains**, *Banned in D.C.: Bad Brains Greatest Riffs* (Caroline, 2003); **Circle Jerks**, *Group Sex* (Frontier, 1980); **The Descendents**, *Milo Goes To College* (SST, 1982); **D.O.A.**, *War on 45* (Alternative Tentacles, 1982), **Minor Threat**, *Complete* (Dischord, 1988); **Negative Approach**, *Tied Down* (Touch & Go, 1983), Various Artists, *Let Them Eat Jellybeans* (Alternative Tentacles, 1981).

rip it up and start again

Best of Los Angeles's punk rockers gone rootsy: **The Gun Club**, whose hoodoo-blues-abilly shtick convinces on *Fire of Love* (Ruby, 1981) and the superb *Miami* (Animal, 1982) thanks to Jeffrey Lee Pierce's conviction plus the banshee edge that came from his odd habit of singing everything sharp. **The Flesh Eaters** also have their fans: *Forced Exposure's* Byron Coley, for instance, believes 1981's *A Minute To Pray, A Second To Die* is the best rock recording EVER. (Me, I'd said it scrapes into the Top 7000, maybe). Transplanted New Yorkers **The Cramps** wore out their back-from-the-grave ghoulabilly shtick real quick but not before unleashing two excitingly jagged and quite noisy albums, *Songs The Lord Taught Us* (Illegal/IRS, 1980) and *Psychedelic Jungle* (IRS, 1981). **Blood On the Saddle's** selftitled debut (New Alliance, 1984) is as good as 'cowpunk' got, which was pretty darn good: '(I Wish I Was A) Single Girl (Again)' is a thrilling sprint.

LA's way marginal post-punk scene: **Savage Republic's** exploits in the tunnels and the desert sound amazing, but for me the records never quite escape the 'kinda interesting but . . . ' category. *Tragic Figures* (Independent Project, 1982) sounds a bit like A Certain Ratio if they'd been into world music rather than funk. (The album was originally recorded under the name Africa Corps, a moniker seemingly inspired by the way ACR *dressed*). The **Los Angeles Free Music Society** is exhaustively documented on the fabulously packaged 10 CD box set *The Lowest Form of Music* (Corti). The contents run the gamut from chaotic drone-rock (**Airway** could be Amon Duul 3, kosmische Krauts transplanted to the Mojave and stumbling wasted and sundazed through the dunes) to whimsical synth-doodles and tape experiments (**Le Forte Four**) to seriously accomplished and atmospheric *musique concrete* (Tom Recchion). There's a fair amount of plain faffing about, and even the most ear-catching stuff has an air of inconsequentiality. The cult-builders, of course, love the legend of this amorphous collective who were barely known in their own time. Copious as it is, *The Lowest Form of Music* includes only a small portion of the LAFMS's discography. Other LA post-punk initiatives of semi-note: **The Poetics**, a band formed by now-renowned artists Mike Kelley and Tony Oursler while studying at Cal Arts, get *thoroughly* documented on the three-CD box set *Poetics: Remixes of Recordings 1977-1983* (Compound Annex). California's answer to Spherical Objects, the Fall-influenced but thinner-sounding **100 Flowers** are comprehensively anthologized on *100 Years of Pulchritude*, and likewise their punkier precursor band **Urinals** with

Negative Capability . . . Check It Out! (both Happy Squid). Finally, despite a dearth of documentation, **Psi-Com** are just barely of note as Perry Farrell of Jane's Addiction's first band. They were part of an LA Goth scene that included the Anglo-post-punk influenced, reputedly rather good **Kommunity FK** and the frightful **Christian Death**.

ZTT

For examples of Futurist sound-poetry (including Marinetti reciting *La Battaglia di Adrianopoli*) and Futurist music (including sound samples of Intonarumori, Russolo's noise-making machines), check *Musica Futurista: The Art of Noises* (Salon/LTM, 2004).

GERMANY

In 1981 DAF's Gabi Delgado declared of West Germany, 'three years ago it was a really boring country with nothing going on, completely safe. Now it's like an explosion, not only in music but in everything.' You can certainly make a case for Deutschland as the #2 post-punk nation, just ahead of America. If *Rip It Up and Start Again* is the tale of five thousand (just a guesstimate) of the most pretentious people to ever walk the Earth ('pretentious' = good thing, in my book, if you hadn't noticed), well let's just say Germany led the world for per capita pretentiousness productivity. Punk was almost completely an art school phenomenon in that country, and therefore lacked the class war aspects of UK punk. The scene's links to the art world (gigs in galleries, etc) explains why German bands went 'post-punk' so quickly, typically abandoning rock for highly conceptual approaches. It was that ilk of band – Throbbing Gristle, Wire, Flying Lizards, No Wave – that German groups found inspiring. They could also draw on a native tradition of electronics (Kraftwerk, Tangerine Dream, Klaus Schulze) and avant-rock (Neu!, Cluster, Faust, Can, Ashra Tempel etc). The reflex to reject American influences ran deep. So rich was the German post-punk moment, it warrants a book in itself. And it's got one: Jurgen Teipel's *Verschwende Deine Jugend: Punk Und New Wave in Deutschland* (1977-83) (Suhrkamp Taschenbuch). Apparently this oral history is very good. Unfortunately it's in German. But the accompanying double-

CD compilation of the same title (Ata Tak/Universal, 2002) is a great introductory survey.

Unofficial sister-town to Cleveland and Sheffield, industrial heartland city Dusseldorf was the first major centre of Deutch post-punk. The Ostrich Girls mutated into **Mittagspause** (two Neu!-gone-punk tracks by them kick off *Verschwende Deine Jugend*). Mittagspause then split into two important bands: **DAF**, who started noisy with 1979's *Ein Produkt Der D.A.F.* and the brilliant electronic chaos of 1980's *Die Kleinen und die Bosen* before stripping down to their famous hard electrodisco; and **Fehlfarben**, more conventionally guitar-oriented but fronted by the charismatic Peter Hein (check 1980's *Maarchie und Alltag*). DAF, in turn, spawned a bunch of offshoots. Early member Kurt Dahlke made a series of amazing electronic records as **Pyrolator**, while also joining the wonderfully quirky Der Plan. *Inland* (Warning, 1979) is a bit rigid and harsh but the second Pyrolator album *Ausland* (Ata Tak, 1981; reissued 2003 with numerous and excellent bonus tracks) develops a fantastically lithe and sinuous synth-funk from which all kinds of electro-Latin and phuture-jazz tangents spiral off. **Der Plan**'s two early albums *Geri Reig* and *Normalette Surprise* (available on a single Ata Tak CD) resemble a cross between The Residents and DAF: cutesy-quirky electronic toy-musik woven out of threads from Muzak, jingles, incidental music, and exotica, at once blithely anodyne and insidiously creepy.

The third DAF offshoot was formed by Chrislo Haas, who left after *Die Kleinen* and teamed up with Beate Bartel and Krishna Goineau to create **Liaisons Dangereuses**. The group's eroto-electrodisco parallels DAF's stripped and taut Eurofunk but has a slinky coquettish gait all its own, enhanced by Goineau's singing in sultry tongues like French and Spanish. The 1981 self-titled debut (reissued on Hit Thing) is great but the all-time classic is its single 'Los Ninos Del Parque' – snaking electro topped with strange gasps and squeaks that serve as backing vocals. 'Los Ninos' was a big track on the nascent techno/house scene in Detroit and Chicago.

Beate Bartel was originally from the all-girl trio **Mania D**. The other two members, Bettina Koster and Gudrun Gut, then formed Berlin's great **Malaria!**. Both art students, they also played in an early incarnation of **Einsturzende Neubauten**. Based around clipped guitar, sour sax, baleful deep female vocals, and strict rhythms, Malaria!'s music exuded a vibe of Teutonic starkness and harsh sensuality (songs like 'Thrash Me' flirt with feedback and S/M), as heard on *Malaria!* EP (Marat/Zensor,

1981), *Weisses Wasser* (Les Disques Du Crepuscule, 1982), *Emotion* (Moabit, 1982), and the definitive *Compiled* (Moabit, 2001). Imagine a Brecht & Weil infatuated Banshees, or Bauhaus if they'd been actually influenced by the Bauhaus (as opposed to German expressionism, their real crush). As Malaria's music evolved, a proto-techno feel emerged, anticipating Gudrun Gut's future as a key player in German rave culture. The group's most famous song 'Kaltes Klares Wasser' translates as 'Cold Clear Water' and extols a clarity of vision and purpose that's achieved through purification. The all-female group's forbidding, ice-queen, Weimar-redolent image – monochrome clothes, hair pulled back – went down a storm in New York, where they became cult stars in the clubs. For a while there was a mutual love affair between Berlin and Manhattan – virtual city-states cut-off from the mainland of their countries, little islands of decadence and 24 hour night life, Meccas for freaks from across their respective nations, and from the whole world too. (For a good survey of the Berlin underground in this period, see the Zensor compilation *Als Die Partisanen Kamen*).

Named after a stately government building in Bonn, **Palais Schaumburg** were one of the best bands of the era. A Hamburg Art Academy student called Thomas Fehlmann decided to form a group after meeting his hero Robert Fripp, whom he'd invited to perform at the college. Having rushed out and bought a synth, Fehlmann teamed up with vocalist/instrumentalist Holger Hiller and rhythm section Timo Blunck and Ralf Hertwig. The concept was 'experimental weird ideas with dance grooves'. Fehlmann emits parched parps of trumpet and blurts n'smeas of synth-noise; Blunck and Hertwig funk punkly; Hiller's distraught and nerve-jangled moans and mutterings are wonderfully off-beat, and the lyrics are apparently brilliant if you're Deutsch-fluent. Early singles like 'Macht Mich Gluecklich Wie Nie', 'Telephon', and 'Rote Lichter', plus the debut LP *Palais Schaumburg* (Phonogram 1981; Tapete 2002) make me think of the weirder Associates of *Fourth Drawer Down*. Another reference point is 'mutant disco'. Appropriately, for their second album *Lupa* (1982), Palais enlisted ZE's Coati Mundi to produce. (The first record was produced by David Cunningham – for a further taste of the Flying Lizards influence in Germany, check Gomma's quirkastic *Teutonic Disaster* compilation of 'obscure German New Wave funk, Trashdisco & Hobbyrock'). Before the second Palais album, **Holger Hiller** quit to embark on a fascinatingly wayward solo trajectory which took in a 1982 video opera composed with another Deutsch post-

rip it up and start again

punker **Andreas Doraus**, the **Tranenivasion** single ‘Sentimental/Herzmuskel’, and the pioneering sampling-based solo debut *Ein Bündel Fäulnis in der Grube* (Ata Tak, 1984). It’s also worth pursuing Hiller’s earlier 1980 five track EP on Ata Tak, to hear acid house and techno appearing way ahead of schedule on ‘Ein Ganz Normaler Kuss’. Fehlmann meanwhile led Palais in a sophisto-pop direction with 1984’s *Parlez Von Schaumburg* before evolving into a Berlin techno player alongside his friend/ally Gudrun Gut.

I’ve only scratched the surface here. Also notable are: **S.Y.P.H.**, initially punky but steadily more experimental and impressively atmospheric (1980’s *PST!*, 1981’s *S.Y.P.H.*, both reissued by Captain Trip); Berlin’s mischievous Dada noiseniks **Die Todliche Doris** (whose cassette-only late 70s/early 80s releases have been thoroughly reissued by the Vinyl On Demand label); Birthday Party and Lydia Lunch buddies/collaborators **Die Haut**; sardonic punks **Abwärts**; quirky Peel faves **Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle**; 4AD Goth-lite goddesses **Xmal Deutschland**; ‘Pale Blue Eyes’-covering **Die Hornissen**; industrialists **Pr6D4** . . .

POST-PUNK IN THE REST OF EUROPE

Holland

The fertile Netherlands post-punk scene was fostered by labels like Plurex, publications like *Vinyl* (roughly equivalent to *NME* or Germany’s crucial *Spex* magazine), the Peel-like radio shows Spleen and RadioNome, and a strong squatland culture. Out of this emerged a bustling DIY cassette network and an extreme electronic music movement called **Ultra**. Probably the best, and certainly the best-known, of Holland’s post-punks are **Minsky Pops**. Named after their Korg rhythm box, the group started out as a drummer-less trio and initially sounded something like a cross between Wire and Young Marble Giants. The group’s leader Wally van Middendorp (also founder of the Plurex label) told *NME* their goal was ‘really mechanical music with weird noises in it: scratching guitars, very simple vocals, and a simple bass line reinforcing the drum-machine beat.’ Also redolent of Wire was the group’s penchant for stylized stage movements. At early gigs Minsky Pops confounded audiences by leaving a minute-long fissure of pure silence between each song – the band just stood there frozen, arms folded. This abrasive spirit of rigour was captured in the title of their 1979 debut,

Drastic Measures, *Drastic Movement* (a post-punk classic, recently made available again by LTM, with copious rare bonus material). Middendorp described *DM*, *DM* as 'background music which you can't ignore, new muzak.' Minny Pops then hooked up with Factory for a series of singles, starting with the great Martin Hannett produced 'Dolphin's Spurt/Goddess', and the 1982 album *Sparks In a Dark Room* – more polished and diffident than *Drastic Measures*. *Sparks* has been reissued by LTM, who've also put out the singles/rarities comp *Secret Stories*. More Dutch post-punk units worth checking: **Nasmak**, whose lustrous chrome guitarsound, neurotic bass, and robotic drums start from 'She's Lost Control' and the 'funky' parts of *Heaven Up Here* but go somewhere pretty unique (*Bodance* EP, Zick Zack, 1981; *four clicks*, Plurex, 1982; Nasmak side project **+ Instruments**, who are enjoyably nagging and dissonant on *Februari-April '81* (Kremlin, 1982); squatland guitar collective **Morzelpronk**; the Pere Ubu-influenced **The Young Lions**; **Interior** with their 'James White meets Motorhead' style of 'bizarre disco'; the Zappa/Talking Heads damaged **The Tapes**; **Mekanik Kommando** (check their fine *Snake Is Queen* album from 1982) and many others. Useful, if hard to find, compilations of the Dutch scene: *Ultra* (LeBeL PeRIOD, 1981) and *Dokument* (Vinyl Records/Roadrunner, 1982).

Belgium

A real stronghold, largely because of two Brussels labels, Crepuscule and Crammed. Founded and run by aesthete-entrepreneurs, the two labels served as havens not just for arty Belgian groups, but for a small horde of British and American post-punkers – Paul Haig, Tuxedomoon, Alan Rankine, Linda Sterling – some of whom actually exiled themselves to Brussels for a period in the Eighties. As such Belgian post-punk mirrored the country's tradition of internationalism and pan-Europeanism – itself a byproduct of geography (existing at the intersection of France, Germany and Holland) and history (a small country divided by the Flemish/Walloon fissure in language and culture).

It wouldn't be slandering **Les Disques Du Crepuscule** to describe them as Factory wannabes. The label was started by journalist Michel Duval and Annik Honoré (who you'll remember as Ian Curtis' lover) and was connected to the Plan K club, where the pair promoted a series of post-punk events, starting with a triple bill of Joy Divison, Cabaret Voltaire, and William Burroughs. The first records they put out – A

Certain Ratio's 'Shack Up' and The Durutti Column's 'Lips That Would Kiss' – were joint releases by **Factory Benelux**/Les Disques Du Crepuscule. Duval and Honore were as infatuated with Factory's design sense as the music. Like ACR's *The Graveyard and the Ballroom* cassette, which came in a clear green plastic pouch with gold-leaf lettering, the first proper Crepuscule release, the cassette compilation *From Brussels With Love*, came housed in a transparent PVC wallet and accompanied with a 16 page booklet. The line-up was eclectic and arty-as-fuck: minimalists Gavin Bryars and Harold Budd; Factory bods Martin Hannett (a rare solo track), ACR, and Vini Reilly; assorted pre-tentious Brits – tracks by John Foxx and Gilbert & Lewis, an interview with Eno. *From Brussels* was the first of a series of exquisitely designed (Benoit Hennebert served as Crepuscule's Peter Saville) compilations, such as *The Fruit Of The Original Sin*, wherein DNA, Arthur Russell and Winston Tong jostled with Belgian talent and an interviewed Marguerite Duras.

Not exactly your common or garden rock label then. Indeed, Crepuscule put out a 7 inch single by then-unknown systems music composer **Michael Nyman**, while their publishing wing issued a book of poetry by ex-Skids singer **Richard Jobson**. Closer to the world of pop, Crepuscule formed a deal with Island to jointly release *Rhythm Of Life*, the electronic and dance-oriented solo debut by **Paul Haig**; they put out one of the best **Cabaret Voltaire** records, the *Three Crepuscule Tracks* EP, and stuff by **Ike Yard**. Crepuscule's most notable domestic signings were **The Names**, whose 1981 single 'Nightshift' and 1982 *Swimming*, both produced by Martin Hannett, sound like a glossy, brittle version of Magazine; and **Marine**, whose sleek and fleet funk on the *Life In Reverse* EP was highly regarded at the time (and still sound fetching on the 'complete works' anthology *Life In Reverse*, LTM, 2004). Before making a proper album, Marine split, with the poppier side of the group turning into **Allez Allez** and recording the excellent *African Queen* (Virgin, 1982). The title track paid homage to Grace Jones, and indeed traces of *Nightclubbing* can be heard across the record. The rest of Marine mutated into the Birthday Party-influenced **La Muerte**.

Crammed Discs began as an extension of **Aksak Maboul**, self-described as 'deconstructionist avant-garde' although their output seems closer in spirit to Can's idea of 'ethnological forgery' and The Lounge Lizards' 'fake jazz'. Aksak had a tangled relationship with **The Honeymoon Killers** (Crammed co-founder Marc Hollander played in both groups), whose

classic 1981 debut *Les Tuers De La Lune* Miel put the label on the post-punk map. Alternately sung by two great vocalists, Yvon Vromann and Veronique Vincent, the Killers' nubile songs blend menace and sensuality in a way that suggests a piquant merger of Serge Gainsbourg and James White. There's a definite No Wave influence audible in the Pat Place-style slide guitar, serpentine keyboard shimmers, and frenetic funk bass. **Minimal Compact**, another Crammed outfit who fit post-punk parameters, were Israelis who'd exiled themselves to France. Their forte was sombre and minimal dance-rock, etched with drony subtleties, and often capturing oblique, in-between emotional states – as with the superb 'To Get Inside' off their 1981 self-titled debut EP, and much of 1983's *One By One*. Later they forged a connection with Colin Newman, who produced 1984's *Deadly Weapons*, used them as his backing band on *Commercial Suicide*, and married the group's Malka Spigel.

The Aksak/4th World leanings resurfaced with projects like **Zazou Bikaye** – a collaboration between Congolese singer Bony Bikaye, French composer Hector Zazou, and computer music freaks CYI that *Melody Maker* classed up there with *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*. In 1984 Crammed launched its **Made To Measure** series of composerly works, many by post-punk types: Lounge Lizard **John Lurie's** soundtracks for Jim Jarmusch movies, side projects by **Peter Principle** and **Blaine L. Reininger** of **Tuxedomoon** (who'd signed to Crammed after releasing one album on Crepuscule).

France

Not as much of a stronghold as you'd think. *Anarchy In Paris!* (Acute, 2003) gathers the entire *oeuvre* of **Metal Urbain** – punk rockers who used a beat box, and the first group released on Rough Trade, remember? Great, but closer to post-punk as commonly understood is the Urbain sequel outfit **Metal Boys**. Featuring cool vocals from a girl called China, *Tokio Airport* (Acute, 2004) ranges from Suicide-like synth-psalms to electrodiscometal (think Chrome meets The Normal), from bop-a-long ditties like 'Paranoia Carnival' to stuff that weirdly anticipates Daft Punk. Another Urbain side project, **Doctor Mix and the Remix**, saw mainman Eric Debris covering proto-punk classics like The Stooges' 'No Fun', Velvets' 'Sister Ray', Kinks' 'You Really Got Me,' Troggs' 'I Can't Control Myself.' Literally covering them – in a drenching downpour of feedback. 1979's *Wall of Noise* (again reissued by Acute, 2004) is where Jesus & Mary Chain nicked their basic concept

from. So in that sense Debris' promise about 'exploring the sound of the '60s to reinvent the sound of the '80s' came true.

So Young But So Cold: Underground French Music 1977-1983 (Tigersushi 2004) showcases the archly moderne style of Gallic synthpop known there as Novo. There's gems by **Mathematiques Moderne**, **The (Hypothetical) Prophets**, and **Kas Product** (whose 'So Young But So Cold' sounds like Siouxsie over 'Warm Leatherette' played at 78 rpm). But the case for French post-punk is weakened by the fact that some of the best tracks are by proggers like Tim Blake (a *Brit* who played in Egg, Gong and Clearlight), Richard Pinhas (of the electro-prog pioneers Heldon) and Bernard Szajner. In other words, they have more to do with Jean-Michel Jarre than Human League.

Iceland

More of a stronghold than you'd imagine. There's a bizarre thread of connection to UK post-punk: during one loony episode of Killing Joke, Jaz Coleman flipped out and exiled himself to Iceland; The Fall recorded *Hex Enduction Hour* there; the Bunnymen did the video for 'The Cutter' and *Porcupine's* cover art in Iceland. In terms of native output, the tiny nation spawned **Bjork**, arguably the longest surviving (with credibility intact, at least) post-punker of them all.

She started out in an all-girl punk band Spit & Snot when still in her early teens (a reaction against being an 11 year old pop star). As in Germany, Icelandic punk wasn't fuelled by political rage (the country has no class system, claims Bjork) but by an impulse to overthrow Anglo-American pop imperialism. Before punk, the only live bands were cover bands singing in English. Icelandic punk saw an explosion of proud-to-sing-my-native-tongue groups. Bjork and pals started an import record store because it was incredibly hard to get hold of the latest post-punkery. And she played in a whole bunch of bands (including 'happy punk' outfit Tappi Tikarrass – which translates as 'as smooth as a cork in a bitch's arsehole'. I'm told.)

Most crucial of these was **Kukl**, which also included future Sugarcubes Einar Orn and Siggi Baldurson. 'People described Kukl as 'prog punk' and it was more complex than most punk,' Bjork told me. 'We wouldn't write anything in 4/4 or use major keys, because we considered that 'cheap'. Kukl was pretty noisy and dark – really grim chords'. The band recorded two albums *The Eye* and *Holidays In Europe* for Crass's label (a connection that continued with Bjork's relationship with **One Little**

Indian, the label started by **Flux of Pink Indians**). Rather than anarcho-punk, though, Kukl were on a primal pagan magick trip (Kukl translates as 'sorcery') somewhere between Goth and industrial: think Birthday Party, Einstürzende Neubauten, Virgin Prunes. 'Einar would wind the mic' cord around his neck and pull it until he fainted. Jump into the crowd and get bones broke. I still meet people who say Kukl was like a religious experience. Either that, or the worst thing they ever saw'.

Kukl formed a sort of Dada-influenced 'cultural terrorism' milieu with the artist & poets collective Medusa. Out of this absinthe-swigging scene evolved both the publisher/record label Bad Taste Ltd and **The Sugarcubes**. Whose career takes us outside this book's timeframe, although I'll briefly note how their music veered from Cocteau Twins-meets-jazzpunk to B-52s-style zany. Compared to Kukl, though, Bjork calls them 'a joke band . . . something we did to play at parties.'

AUSTRALIA

When you think of Australian underground rock of the late Seventies/early Eighties, what tends to come to mind is the raw power and snarled vocals of bands influenced by Detroit or garage punk: Radio Birdman, The Saints, Hoodoo Gurus, The Scientists, The Sputniks, The Psycho Surgeons.

In overground terms, you might recall all that Australian New Wave dance-rock – INXS, Midnight Oil, Icehouse. But Australia actually had a vital post-punk scene, teeming with avant-primitivists, lo-fi electronics, and bands who regarded 'difficult' as a positive value, a *goal*. Mostly concentrated in Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane, this incestuous scene was characterised by bands splintering into new projects, side groups, and one-off ensembles (a selfconscious strategy enshrined as the 'Little Band' movement). If they were lucky, these bands put out a few singles or EPs, maybe an album. Others were only documented through cassette releases; many have left only a few tapes of live shows, rehearsals, and demos.

In recent years, Australian afterpunk has begun to be excavated in earnest, with figures like scene veteran Phil Turnbull dredging up tapes and curating the post-punk website No Night Sweats [http://www.users.-bigpond.com/pturnbul/nns_reissues.htm](http://www.users.bigpond.com/pturnbul/nns_reissues.htm).

The Chapter Music label (chapter@corduroy.com.au) also played a crucial role: in 2002 they reissued *Sonic Investigations (Of the Trivial)*

by the great experimental unit **Essendon Airport** and pulled together the pivotal compilation *Can't Stop It!: Australian Post-Punk 1978-82*. A few of the groups on *Can't Stop It* went on to achieve a measure of renown in the Anglo-American music scene: Birthday Party acolytes **The Moodists** moved to London and were briefly the toast of the crits, spindly Postcard-style group **The Apartments** appealed to the same folk wowed by the Go-Betweens. But most of the groups were completely unknown outside Australia. To our loss, judging by the Raincoats/John Cale-style violin-laced drone-rock of **The Tame Omearas**, absurd primitivists **The Slugfuckers**, primitive absurdists **People with Chairs Up Their Noses**, and, *Can't Stop*'s piece de resistance, 'The Dumb Waiters' by **(Makers Of) The Dead Travel Fast**, which sounds like Kraftwerk crossed with the early quirky-not-Dionysian Birthday Party.

Poor Gallileo, He Has Gone Mad is the mysterious title of another marvellous collection, this time assembled by Phil Turnbull and concentrating on Sydney's post-punk scene. The comp reveals the stronger-than-you'd-think impact on Australian music of import singles (especially those by The Normal, Essential Logic and The Raincoats, I'd wager) and copies of *NME* (which arrived months out of date via surface mail). The plaintive folkpunk vocals and sidling rhythm gait of 'The Pirate Song' by **The Goat That Went Om** are odd enough for *Odyshape*, while **Seems Twice**'s *Non-Plussed* EP, included on the comp in its entirety, fits 12 *Pink Flag*-like sprints into six minutes.

Turnbull's own band **Voigt/465** were one of the key Sydney bands. Judging solely by their track on *Can't Stop It* – the shrill, herky 'Voices A Drama' – they were one of the few pragVEC influenced groups in the world. But the fractured riffs, needling synth-noise, and auto-disintegrating drum patterns of the three Voigt tracks on *Poor Gallileo* suggest that This Heat was the group's real Damascus revelation. Third inclusion 'Whinchsoul' comes from their own LP, *Slights Unspoken*. Turnbull then went on to play in the slightly more accessible **Wild West**, whose offkilter funk was punctuated by squits of electronic noise and draped with eccentric vocal harmonies. As of writing, the great Sydney band **Slugfuckers**, has just received the double-CD reissue treatment with *Cacophony 1979-1981* (Harbinger Sound). The group's motor-spirit of impudence comes through in their oozy, lurching noisescapes and humorous song titles – 'Deaf Disco', 'Artificial Slits', 'Obbligato Necroplasm'. Ditto their side project **Rhythmyx Chymx**, whose *No Vowels No Bowels* LP features tracks like 'Bretonian Overcoat', 'Pogo

Au Go Go' and 'Bung In A Banana.' *No Vowels* was the Rhythmx Chymx side of a split LP with **Severed Heads**, another cool Sydney post-punk outfit. Although they later evolved into a slick industrial-dance band, the early Severed Heads material is coming from the same eerie atmospherics zone as the young Cabaret Voltaire's attic tapes. The word 'tape' is the constant. Severed Heads' primary instrument/technique was tape recorders and tape manipulation (although they also used drum machines, televisions, turntables and the odd bit of guitar), while the early music was only released as cassettes, via their own Terse Tapes label. *Ear Bitten*, their half of the 1980 LP with Rhythmx Chymx, was their solitary excursion into vinyl until Red Flame put out their *Since The Accident* album in 1983.

Melbourne gets on the rock map as the birthplace of **The Boys Next Door**, the arty New Wave band that mutated into the monstrous **Birthday Party**, while the bohemian area of Melbourne in which groups like excellent post-punkers **Primitive Calculators** lived also served as inspiration for *Dogs In Space* – one of the few rock'n'roll movies not to totally get it wrong. Melbourne also sheltered an experimental music scene based around the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre, which was roughly equivalent to The Kitchen in New York – a haven for radical work in sound art, video, and performance. The Centre's coordinator, David Chesworth, was one half of the remarkable **Essendon Airport**, whose cat's cradle skeins of glistening guitar and placid keyboards suggest a Young Marble Giants if they'd ever formally studied composition. In tandem with another musician, Philip Brophy, Chesworth also ran the **Innocent** label, who put out two 1982 compilations, *New Music 1978/79* and *New Music 1980*, documenting the Clifton Hill milieu. As with the London Musicians Collective, rock was unravelled and stretched until unrecognisable, thanks to influences from post-John Cage minimalism and improv. Brophy's own band – represented by an unprintable glyph – had a structuralist approach to music, releasing conceptual EPs like *Nice Noise* and 'disco deconstruction' via the alter-ego **Asphyxiation**.

Australia's third post-punk city, Brisbane, was home to **The Go-Betweens**, **The Apartments**, and most significantly, the great punk band **The Saints**. When they split in 1978, guitarist Ed Kuepper formed the equally-great **Laughing Clowns**, who were definitely a post-punk proposition. Alternating between ramshackle frenzy and sickly despair, the Clowns plied a unique jazzpunk sound, with Kuepper's shaky vocals

buffeted like a rag-doll by the hardswinging drums and double bass, the hot'n'sour sax, and his own stinging rhythm guitar. The self-titled mini-LP debut (*Missing Link*, 1979) and the EPs *Sometimes . . . the Fire Dance* (Prince Melon, 1980) and *Three* (1981) build towards the masterpiece, *Mr. Uddich Schmuddich Goes To Town* (Prince Melon, 1982). The hectic stuff is great, but even better is the languid moroseness of 'Come One, Come All' and 'A Knife In the Head'. There's something deliciously delapidated and yellowing about the Laughing Clowns sound, something seductively seedy and sordid about Kuepper's ennui. Other fine records followed like *Everything That Flies* EP (1982), *Laughter Around The Table* (1983), and *Law of Nature* (1984), but *Uddich* is the Clowns' peak.

I've only scratched the surface of Australian after-punk. There's scores more, enough to have filled three months worth of *NME's* Garageland column: *Sekret Sekret*, *Laughing Hands*, *You Peghead You*, *Maestros and Dipsos*, *Moral Fibro*, *Ya Ya Choral*, *Scapa Flow*, *Prod*, *Hope Is A New Coat*, *A Volatile T-Shirt*, *A Cloakroom Assembly*, *Systematics*, *Via Veneto*, *Height-Dismay*, *Brrr Cold*, *Pel Mel*, *Tactics . . . the M Squared* label whose compilations *A Selection* and *Growing Pains* are reputedly crucial (but a wild goose chase of a search) . . . Alongside *No Night Sweats* (the name of a third Turnbull band as well as a website), another useful resource is <http://members.ol.com.au/rgriffin/postpunk/>.

Finally, a word for New Zealand. The scene that famously blossomed in the mid-to-late Eighties was only in its infancy during this book's time-frame. But the Dunedin label **Flying Nun** started in 1981 (its debut release being **The Clean's** 'Tally Ho' single) and other bands from that city like **The Chills** and **The Verlaines** were embarking on their first recordings in the early Eighties. Whether you call the NZ style post-punk or 'indiepop' is a moot point. But it should be noted that **The Fall** actually got in NZ's Top Ten pop chart with 'Totally Wired', while **Flying Nun** released the *Fall In A Hole* live bootleg.

POST-PUNK OR NOT POST-PUNK

Genres are fuzzy things. At every edge of its terrain, post-punk overlaps with other categories – New Wave, college rock, indie, the yucky American radio terms 'dance-oriented-rock' (DOR) and 'modern rock'. All these terms mean *something*, otherwise people wouldn't find them

useful enough to use. But who goes where is always arguable, subject to adjustment and renegotiation. In this section I look at groups whom some might consider 'post-punk' but I don't – not *really*.

It's tricky to convey the difference between New Wave and post-punk. Partly that's because the meaning of New Wave fluctuated throughout this period. (To add to the confusion, in America 'New Wave' is often used to describe everything from The Pretenders and Joe Jackson to what Brits would call New Pop – i.e. the MTV British Invasion bands like Duran). Initially New Wave as a term was kind of cool: indeed some embraced it as an alternative to punk, seeing it as more open-ended and less lumpen on account of its evocations of the French avant-garde. But soon New Wave became a negative term, referring to the middlebrow soft option: bands who weren't confrontational or aggressive like punk, but who were also too steeped in trad pop values (usually of Sixties provenance) to be regarded as experimental or modern a la post-punk. At its narrowest and most pejorative, New Wave came to connote

something quite particular: skinny-tie bands with choppy rhythm guitars and often a keyboard (played Sixties organ style as opposed to like a synth). This specificity further cemented the defining paradox of New Wave: musically, it wasn't really *that new*. All that said, the energy, pop concision, and stripped-down sound of New Wave contributed to the era's excitement, the sense of 'all change!'. If they generally failed to push the musical envelope, New Wave bands were often innovative or unusual on the level of persona, performance, and lyrical content. And it was New Wave acts who penetrated the pop charts, far more than the post-punk groups did, and who therefore made the late Seventies a golden age for the 7 inch single, for radio and *Top of the Pops*.

Probably the best way to define New Wave is through listing some classic instances of it. The jumpy energy and angular choruses of **The Vapors'** 'Turning Japanese' is archetypal New Wave. So is the chugging rhythm guitar feel (chords chopped against damped strings) of groups like **The Cars**. Then there's **The Boomtown Rats**, who took Springsteen-style romping keyboards and busy arrangements and added just enough of a punk edge to seem contemporary. There's the oddball female contingent, with shrill operatic voices and sing-song melodies: **Lene Lovich**, **Nina Hagen**. And the oddball male contingent, often ex-proggers of a theatrical bent, originally fans of Hammill/Crimson/Gabriel-era Genesis but who'd been turned around by Ubu/Devo/XTC, and embraced the mannered, high-pitched vocals and stop-starty structures: **Punishment of**

Luxury, Human Sexual Response (on prog label Passport, a dead giveaway).

What about borderline cases?

XTC: In the beginning they'd get placed alongside Talking Heads. Musically, they had the same twitchy rhythms and shrieky-geeky vocals, while content-wise, XTC, like Byrne, avoided love songs in favour of unusual topics ('Roads Girdle The Globe') or satirical social comment like 'Generals and Majors' and the great 'Making Plans For Nigel'. The early XTC of *3D EP*, *White Music* and *Go 2* felt radical to many listeners, on account of the frenziedly fractured structures. Things like the bonus mini-LP of dub versions that came with *Go 2*, or the record's demystification sleeve covered in text ('this is the album cover') and accompanying adverts, all seemed pretty much in line with the post-punk programme. But after *Drums and Wires*, XTC got steadily more English and whimsical, harking back to The Kinks and Beatles and the lighter side of psychedelia.

Elvis Costello: Like Paul Weller, Elvis seemed too beholden to trad rock virtues; in his case, too readily placed in a lineage of Dylan, Lennon & McCartney, etc. That said, like The Jam, Costello overlapped with many of post-punk's stylistic phases and shared many of its obsessions when it came to content. Punky-reggae, with 'Watching The Detectives'. Personal politics, with *Armed Forces* (original title: Emotional Fascism). Language as a force of oppression and spiritual corruption: throughout the oeuvre, but especially pronounced on *Trust* ('Pretty Words' and 'Lovers Walk' parallel 'The Sweetest Girl' and *Lexicon of Love*) and the logorrhea-ic *Imperial Bedroom*. When 2-Tone took off, Costello was an early supporter: he produced the Specials' debut and, between labels, very nearly released his single 'Can't Stand Up For Falling Down' via 2-Tone. The accompanying album *Get Happy!* intersected with the mod revival's rediscovery of Sixties soul. Modelled on Booker T & the MGs, the sound was dominated by Steve Nieve's organ; Costello's guitar stayed small and Steve Cropper-like. The whole vibe was redolent of a smoky Carnaby Street cellar in 1963, mods grooving to Georgie Fame. Like a Motown best-of, 10 tracks were crammed onto each side. A few years later, circa Dexy's and New Pop, Costello went soul again, with the horn-blasting *Punch The Clock*.

The Police. Such a monstrously huge band it's easy to forget how they partook of the punky-reggae vibe of the period, or how their sound (guitar-as-texture, drums as third instrumental voice not mere backbeat, bass as melody) conformed to post-punk precepts. Later Sting discovered Arthur Koestler and the Police went prog, but let's not forget 'Message In A Bottle,' the subtle radicalism of the sublime 'Walking on the Moon', or the baleful ambient fog of Northern Ireland-protesting #1 'Invisible Sun'.

Blondie. Another group so ubiquitous they ascend beyond categories into sheer Superpop. But 'Heart of Glass' is Moroderized discopunk and the video for 'Rapture' (which features the first white rapping in the chart ever, albeit really dire) takes a snapshot of Mutant Disco Manhattan, with Jean-Michel Basquiat and Fab 5 Freddy doing graf in the background.

Other groups on the cusp. **The Psychedelic Furs** quickly revealed themselves to be reactionary rockists but for a moment early on songs like 'Sister Europe' and 'We Love You' were Peel faves on account of their haunting, hypnotic, sax-soured atmospherics plus the perfectly-poised-midway-tween-Rotten-and-Bowie sneer of Butler Rep (as he then called himself, ludicrously). **Romeo Void:** like Pylon, audibly Gang of Four influenced in their reduction of funk to tense, unyielding bass-riffs. **The Passions:** the glassy guitars of 'I'm In Love With a German Film Star', almost worthy of Vini Reilly. **The Feelies:** *Crazy Rhythms* is a great album, but to me they're the bridge between that Modern Lovers/Velvets fast-strum sound and the totally white-out sound of post-REM college rock.

One last subcategory: prog-rockers who tried to go Post-punk/New Wave:

– Be Bop Deluxe's **Bill Nelson** reinvented himself as **Red Noise** with 1979's 'Furniture Music' and *Sound-On-Sound*.

– **Robert Fripp**, after a period of withdrawal from the rock biz, returned in 1979 with short hair, a suit, and, yes, a skinny tie. He also came bearing a solo album *Exposure* – first instalment in what he called the 'Drive to 1981'. His next album *Under Heavy Manners/God Save the Queen*

rip it up and start again

showcased his new tape-delay systems, Frippertronics and Discotronics; David Byrne guested on one vocal. Later he formed the League of Gentlemen with ex-XTC/future-Shriekback keyboardist Barry Andrews.

– **Peter Gabriel.** For his third self-titled album in 1980, Gabriel hired producer Steve Lillywhite; banned the use of hi-hat and cymbals at the sessions to achieve that stark Joy Div/Comsat Angels sound; sang songs of tension, paranoia, and unease.

– **Tom Robinson:** strictly speaking, not prog, but certainly a poignant example of attempted career auto-salvage via post-punktification. Stung by the brutal backlash against the second TRB album, he reinvented himself with **Sector 27**: lyrics that were still political but less literal, plus a self-consciously ‘modern’ sound. In interviews, Robinson earnestly enthused about being inspired by Gang of Four, Scritti, Joy Division. The makeover didn’t convince anybody though.