

of instrumental pop to politically charged documentary montage.

Elsewhere, President Lyndon Johnson encounters Bo Diddley; a backwoods fiddle evokes old, weird America; extra-sensory perception is rendered audible; wild electronics accompany a yoyo champion; a primitive cassette assemblage encapsulates the essence of Fluxus; and a hybrid of blues and lounge music transports Sheff back to his native Texas. Sheff was an acute listener, sensitive also to environmental events and the dynamics of staged action. He had a gift for creative collaboration and an exploratory spirit that pervades this music. Intriguing on first listen, it yields more with each return visit.

Julian Cowley

Miami Sound 2: More Funk & Soul From Miami, Florida 1967-74

Various

Soul Jazz CD/DL/2xLP

Back in the soul/disco days of the 1970s many small labels released big singles. There were Salsoul, Prelude Records and West End Records, all New York brands that provided the soundtracks for dance clubs and car radios across the world. However, as the Florida based TK Records proved during the same era, it wasn't necessary to have offices in the Big Apple to make a difference. With a roster of talent that ranged from the soul sass of Betty White to funky strobe light anthems of KC & The Sunshine Band, TK Records was founded by industry vet Henry Stone and former performer turned producer Steve Alaimo. The label also birthed several subsidiaries (Glades, Alston, Cat and others).

Like Motown and Stax before them, TK artists, session musicians, producers and executives were like family who brought out the best in one another. On the compilation *Miami Soul 2* from Soul Jazz Records, we are provided with a sampling of the TK roster with more than a few gems, including a laidback version of "I Get Lifted", co-written by Harry Wayne Casey (aka KC of Sunshine Band fame), the deep soul mixed with island vibe of Timmy Thomas's sorrowful protest song "Why Can't We Live Together", which Sade famously covered in 1984, Betty Wright's infamous infidelity single "Clean Up Woman" and the boogie bop of T-Connection's "Do What Ya Wanna Do".

As a boy growing up in Harlem, I can recall hearing and enjoying the aforementioned tracks, but there were plenty of other TK acts that never made it past the radio gatekeepers in the North: little known acts like Miami, with heavy percussion "Theme From *Shaft*" rip-off "Party Freaks", and the buttery lite funk instrumental of Raw Soul Express, a group that recalled The Commodores and could've been contenders. Mysteriously TK's biggest act KC & The Sunshine Band, whose debut album *Do It Good* was released in 1974, are missing from this collection.

In keeping with Soul Jazz tradition, the package includes extensive sleevenotes which break down the history of TK alongside vintage photographs (snapped by in-house photographer Larry Warmoth) of the players and the grimy office/studio where the magic happened. *Miami Soul 2* is a stellar anthology

of aural delights that sheds light on a regional label that competed with the big boys and won.

Michael A Gonzales

MTDM

ARCHIV 2005-2006

Zoomin' Night DL/MC

MTDM (Mei Tui De Ma, which translates as Horse Without Legs) is the duo of Jun-Y Ciao and Tao Yi – trailblazers for improvisation in China. While free improvisation and free jazz were played prior to the duo, it had tended to be solo rather than group based. As Zoomin Night's curator Zhu Wenbo writes, before 2008, "Seeing a free jazz group was rare enough. A Chinese free jazz group was unheard of."

Jun-Y Ciao and Tao Yi's collaboration started in Dusseldorf, while the pair were studying painting in the city in 2005. What's collected on *ARCHIV 2005-2006* was recorded in those early years, before they returned to Shanghai in 2008 and became involved in China's improvisation scene. The recordings were made direct to old cassettes, occasional blasts of whatever they were taping over preserved rather than erased for this compilation. The two lengthy sides of fervid, rattling energy are a curious time capsule of an emerging shared practice. The A side sees the pair largely stick to winds, brass and nimbly scattered percussion, moving from twitching squeaks and atonal bleats into surprising fragments of woody melodicism. The most confounding moment comes when Jun-Y Ciao picks up the recorder, a folksy intervention in the skronk and clatter that upends any expectations that may have been forming.

On the B side guitar and vocalisations enter alongside more prominent (non)percussion. The melodic moments are rarer, replaced with a growing exploration of space, dynamics and structure. Evading simple patterns of call and response, their playing feels tethered together despite rarely making the connections explicit, a peculiar equilibrium where centripetal and centrifugal forces bounce off each other. More than a historic document of European free improvisation's migration *ARCHIV 2005-2006* captures its mutation, as MTDM developed their own idiosyncratic rules of interaction.

Daryl Worthington

Tony Oxley Quintet

Angular Apron

Corbett Vs Dempsey CD/DL

In the 1970s Angular Apron was both the name of Tony Oxley's group and a piece that they played. Although it has only been recorded once before, on Anthony Braxton's *Seven Compositions (Trio) 1989*, the composition had the longer legs, as it was still in play in 1992 when Oxley put together this remarkable multi-national quintet to play it at the Ruhr Jazz Festival in Bochum, Germany. Patchy documentation plagued the drummer, composer and improviser throughout his career, which explains why a group with Larry Stabbins on saxophones, Manfred Schoof on trumpet, Pat Thomas on piano and electronics, Sirone on bass and Oxley on drums and electronics could sit on the shelf for 32 years.

The blame certainly can't be laid on the music, which is adequately recorded (albeit

a little grainy at times) and played with commitment and empathy by all involved. Among England's early free improvisors, Oxley was the one who understood that free play could benefit from being compositionally framed, and this performance sustains interest throughout its 64 minute duration. Clearly planned events, such as the long horn tones that clear the air in the piece's early minutes, terminate and commence moments that showcase a particular player and intense, full-band exchanges. The selected personnel ensures intriguing stylistic contrasts, such as the exchange between the British saxophonist's grainy, interrupted lines and the American bassist's tightly knotted configurations, or the moment when Schoof waxes hot and lyrical in the face of a Stockhausen-like wall of sound.

It also lays the groundwork for a collective sound that doesn't cater to national stereotypes regarding improvisational temperament. Instead, the dense, detailed drumming and multi-hued dynamics of the electronics result in something best described simply as Tony Oxley music.

Bill Meyer

Thinking Fellers Union Local 282

The Funeral Pudding

Bulbous Monocle DL/LP

Bulbous Monocle is now four records into its campaign to restore the Thinking Fellers Union Local 282 catalogue to vinyl. *The Funeral Pudding* is an outlier in the San Francisco quintet's discography. Although the band was still working with Matador Records, it was released first on Brinkman/Normal for a European tour and then on Ajax in the States. Its contents were likewise brief, but atypical.

Bassist Anne Eickelberg, whose vocal turns were usually a change of pace, is the principal lead singer; her moments represent the Fellers at their most broadly appealing. Stuttering guitar and banjo interjections can't knock her high, winsome lead and swooning strings off course on "Heavy Head". The way her wayward pitch leapfrogs over fuzz bass and plucked violin conveys authentic dismay at the social immobility already dragging down anyone not aligned with San Francisco's burgeoning business successes, even as the song's Rube Goldberg groove lodges in your brain. Guitarist Hugh Swarts, who rarely stepped up to the microphone, gets a turn on the the zig-zagging, blues-tinted prog construction "23 Kings Crossing". And the surfy instrumental "Flames UP" unabashedly foregrounds the band's penchant for wackiness.

While those tracks tilt the balance heavily towards Fellers-brand songcraft, others weigh just as heavily in the direction of confusion. Five of the 30 minute album's tracks are rehearsal room jams. Some catch the ensemble stumbling upon a potentially catchy song fragment, while others lurch to and fro like a hooked fish that's too big to land. Instead of turning these pieces into songs, the Fellers gleefully sacrificed them on the altar of fucking around. By presenting these polar opposites, *The Funeral Pudding* gives a complete measure of the quintet's potential.

Bill Meyer