

mentioned alongside the Sebadohs and Pavements of this world in some alternate timeline.

Yet Smith's music is much more than a missed opportunity. Originally released by Feel Good All Over, 1995's *Nothing Else Matters* and 1996's *I So Liked Spring* weave together a number of influences, all stemming from music that Smith loved while growing up – 1960s pop meshes with post-punk, psychedelia and Dylanesque folk to mesmerizing effect. Armed with an eight-track recorder, the songs featured on these two albums sound bigger and lush than her earlier works while retaining their intimate idiosyncrasy.

*Nothing Else Matters* is the more diverse of the two, each of the 13 songs scoffing at the absurdity of daily routines. There is a quirky levity at play, especially evident in the deadpan spoken word of "Only A Moment" and the new wave/synthpop of "Bright Side". Meanwhile, the tape machine enables Smith to realise intricate arrangements, like the meticulous layering of guitar riffs, tambourine snaps and glowing synths on "I'll Never See You Again". Woven around poems by Charlotte Mew, *I So Liked Spring* is in turn a more uniform record, its form dictated by its lyrics, equally gorgeous and punctuated by standout pieces like "The Pedlar" and the folkish, Simon & Garfunkel evoking "Absence".

Antonio Poscic

#### Vile Cherubs

##### *Lysergic Lamentations*

LG LP

Deep within the history of Washington DC hardcore punk lies a thread of admiration for the garage rock predecessors of the 1960s, whether it's Minor Threat covering The Standells' "Sometimes Good Guys Don't Wear White" on their final EP *Salad Days*, or The MC5 inspired frenzy of emo forefathers, Rites Of Spring. Pushing those influences to the forefront in the late 80s were Vile Cherubs, a group of teenagers who married the crude charm found on compilations such as Lenny Kaye's *Nuggets* with the similarly direct invention happening in their local punk scene.

Taken from demo tapes recorded prior to the band's lone 1989 album *Post-Humorous Relief*, *Lysergic Lamentations* bears a resemblance to another DC punk record – *Food For Thought*, the debut release from 1985 by session producer Geoff Turner's post-hardcore unit Gray Matter. Featuring a tripped out rendition of The Beatles' "I Am The Walrus", it was one of the first records from the capital city's assumedly sober punk scene to display a knowledge of 60s psych within its tightly wound Buzzcocks-like song structures. Vile Cherubs' infatuation with the psychedelic past seemed more prominent, even if it didn't appear linear.

On tracks like the opening "Man With The Photograph" and "The Ladder" the thrashy surf rhythms of drummer Ben Wides and future Nation Of Ulysses and Fucking Champs guitarist Tim Green's six-string thuggery warp the brain to imagine a version of The Sonics inspired by first wave American hardcore. Even when they slowed themselves down to

a plod on tracks like "Love You With My" and "Never A Man" it sounds more informed by San Francisco's Flipper or hometown heretics No Trend than any dramatic drips of yore like The Doors – yet another plus.

Despite feeding the subsequent DC scene with members of such important units as Circus Lupus, Capitol City Dusters and the previously mentioned Nation Of Ulysses, Vile Cherubs always seemed like an arcane footnote in the city's punk narrative. Whether that was a conscious effort or not, hopefully *Lysergic Lamentations* will make people more aware of the peculiar significance they had in their hometown.

Tony Rettman

#### Mars Williams & Hamid Drake

##### *I Know You Are But What Am I?*

Corbett Vs Dempsey CD/DL

#### Mars Williams/Darin Gray/Chris Corsano

##### *Elastic*

Corbett Vs Dempsey CD/DL

#### NRG Ensemble

##### *Hold That Thought*

Corbett Vs Dempsey CD/DL

Mars Williams, who died on 20 November 2023 from ampullary cancer, was hardly the only Chicago musician to straddle styles, but no one did it quite like him. A ferociously busy musician, Williams's two most enduring gigs in this century were playing saxophone with post-punk outfit The Psychedelic Furs, whom he first joined in 1983, and an armful of horns and a tableful of little instruments with Extraordinary Popular Delusions, a freely improvising ensemble who still play a weekly, pass the bucket gig. Regardless of its commercial profile, he brought unbridled energy and commitment to every gig.

An inveterate road dog, Williams stockpiled live recordings that he edited, but never got around to releasing; the first three volumes of the Mars Archive were recorded in 1996 and 2012, but have finally been released three months after his death.

*I Know You Are But What Am I?* is a time capsule from back when the Empty Bottle bar became Chicago's creative collision. Williams and drummer Hamid Drake were both already established on the scene, but hadn't played much together (their joint tenure in Peter Brötzmann's Chicago Octet/Tentet was still in the future), and they spend this set exploring options. The boxy recording quality muffles Drake's drums, but it doesn't blunt Williams's big sound, nor obscure his fleet-footed manoeuvrability. With each change of horns (he played soprano, soprano, alto and tenor saxophones, Bb clarinet, and tárogató) comes a change in attack, from ersatz eastern snake charming to twin-horned R&B honking à la Rahsaan Roland Kirk.

The NRG Ensemble were originally led by Hal Russell, a journeyman drummer who took up free jazz in mid-life. When Russell died, Williams took over the band and brought in Ken Vandermark. *Hold That Thought* was professionally recorded in Utrecht, and NRG's road-honed, ultra-tight execution of intricate and sometimes comedic originals tops the studio albums that they made around that time. This is a band worth remembering.

Recorded 16 years later at the titular venue, *Elastic* testifies to Williams's unflagging energy and improvisational flexibility. Bassist Darin Gray and drummer Chris Corsano, jointly known as Chikamorachi, had made a great record in Chicago some years previously with Akira Sakata, and returned to see if they could repeat the trick with Williams. While the action starts out with a massive blast of free jazz blammo, it dives deep into laminal explorations of timbre and delicate hand-percussion exchanges before resurfacing for an explosive finale.

Bill Meyer

#### Bernie Worrell

##### *Wave From The WOOiverse*

Org 2xLP

#### Bernie Worrell/Cindy Blackman Santana/

##### John King

##### *Spherical*

Infrequent Seams DL/LP

When keyboardist Bernie Worrell died in 2016, he left behind an impressive and diverse legacy. Originally coming to prominence as co-founder and key driver of Parliament-Funkadelic, he went on to work extensively with Talking Heads in the 1980s and collaborated with scores of musicians as both musician and producer. He also left behind a lot of unfinished music.

On *Wave From The WOOiverse*, a host of past collaborators and friends have been tasked with completing some of his sonic sketches. For the most part, they sound like later Funkadelic tunes – languid, heavy on the downbeat and presented with a bright, queasy electronic production sheen. Some funk big-hitters add a sense of authenticity and continuity: Bootsy Collins croons and slaps the bass with arch relish, and Fred Wesley unfurls one of his instantly recognisable trombone solos. Talking Heads' Jerry Harrison features on the four-square squelch of "Distant Star".

There are some less obvious outliers too – from Mike Watt to Marc Ribot – with Fred Schneider of The B-52s pretty much stealing the show with a delightfully camp rap. The standout track, though, is the previously unheard Funkadelic tune "Contusion" which reaches right back to the band's early days as a psychedelic funk rock outfit, with Worrell stabbing some righteously monstrous Hammond organ.

The trio date *Spherical* was recorded in 1994 and lost for three decades until recently rediscovered by guitarist John King. Here, the emphasis is on largely improvised instrumental jams that meld funk, rock and blues. At its best, it channels some of the malevolently hurtling energy of *Dark Magus* era Miles Davis, with King unleashing stinging wah-wah heavy solos and Worrell interrupting proceedings to deliver ethereal synth meditations. There's even a track that summons the lumbering threat of Last Exit, with Worrell spinning a wig-lifting Minimoog solo.

All too often, though, he's disappointingly buried in the mix, thanks in no small part to drummer Cindy Blackman Santana's determined lack of subtlety. She sounds like she never met a drum she didn't want to beat to death. Come on guys, give the organist some.

Daniel Spicer