

the listener in what seem to be clear emotional reactions of plants to stimuli such as touch, movement, simulated weather, temperature and humidity changes. Tests show that plants react to sound – peas grow towards the sound of water and playing music to tomatoes significantly increases yield.

The science is fascinating, but Prime's music also speaks for itself. There are distinct rhythmic patterns that repeat and change tempo, tuneful high frequency tones, low rhythmic thudding like the sound of distant hooves on solid earth. The funghi recordings, which nod towards John Cage's passion for researching mushrooms, provide continuous electronic static textures with little pitch variation, whereas cannabis, as you might expect, generates irregular peaks, long downward swoops and occasional random bursts of sonic energy.

The three CDs are accompanied by a 44 page booklet of Prime's scientific research and the history of bioelectric recordings since Jagdish Bose first demonstrated microwave recordings of plant activity in 1895. The set includes a Blu-ray film of Prime's work.

Jo Hutton

### Kristen Roos

#### *Universal Synthesizer Interface Vol I*

We Are Busy Bodies DL/LP

#### *Universal Synthesizer Interface Vol II*

We Are Busy Bodies DL/LP

Given how hard tech overlords are working on exorcising the artist from art, it's easy to forget that composers like James Tenney, Iannis Xenakis and Laurie Spiegel were among the first to embrace computers as heralds of a new age of expression – a revolutionary means of expanding musicians' creativity. While Vancouver based artist Kristen Roos's first encounter with Spiegel's mouse-controlled sequencer Music Mouse came by chance via an ancient Amiga version listed on eBay, he has since delved into several similar digital instruments, producing contemporary sounding music on ancient gear.

The first *Universal Synthesizer Interface* is the more varied collection, comprising elegant neoclassical ambient and ebullient yet understated electronica made in software like MIDI Draw and Interactive Phrase. Although the tools' technical rules and limitations influence the aesthetic of the music, Roos uses these restrictions to his own advantage, shaping his compositions around the intriguing nature of the technology. Meanwhile, the second volume focuses on Magic Mouse and Frank Baldé's Diablo software, which allows notes to be drawn into a grid, then output as loops. The Diablo tracks thus become circling pieces of IDM, with bubbling, glassy synths and the occasional thumping drum line dancing down a hypnotic spiral. At times, these pointillistic loops grow into lush ephemeral textures. At others, they dress in elliptical steel pan-like expressions, appearing and disappearing in gestures of Balearic loveliness.

In contrast, the Music Mouse cuts swirl slowly, following a more complex and dynamic arrangement of synth patterns. They grow, contract and bounce around, all the while

retaining a sense of bliss and unabashed romanticism. While Roos reached out to the past to find the future, his work – alongside the bleeding edge championed by Zubin Kanga, Thor Magnusson and others – should serve as inspiration for artists reappropriating technology and rediscovering its true creative potential.

Antonio Poscic

### Rose

#### *Please Touch*

Eaux DL/LP

Jon-Paul Villegas's cover art on *Please Touch* is a rather apt rendering of Rose's eroded techno: a fleshy rock presented on a flimsy wooden board, resembling both a natural formation and a rough-hewn sculpture assembled from random objects. Similarly, the solid, bodily elements of 4/4 EDM meet the unresolved tension of ghostly ambient on California born Seth Horvitz's second album as Rose, where tracks with titles like "Rib Cage" and "Spines" exist alongside "Pleasure Vessels" and "The Illuminating Glass".

That sense of grounding and suspension resonates throughout the music, where the slow build of microtonal elevation on "Disappeared" endures for three-plus minutes before growling bass distortion is added to the mix. "Joy Of The Worm" burrows through a tunnel of throbbing reverb and looping rhythms, while "Feeding Time" enacts a sickly simulation of environmental sounds as it sways in a current of synthetic texture.

There's an underlying thrust of mutant eroticism shrouding the heavily processed web of sounds on *Please Touch*. It's certainly a fitting follow-up to Rose's 2019 debut *Hymn To Moisture* with its similarly oblique meanderings between the hypnotic functionality of dancefloor-friendly rhythms and the warm, languorous glow of audio signals that dissolve around the edges.

*Please Touch* melts further into atmospheric abstraction, however. The pounding kicks and hi-hats are relegated to only a handful of beat-heavy numbers. Otherwise, it's the mesmerizing waves of psychoacoustic pressure and agitation that evoke the pleasure of desire and pure sensation.

Steph Kretowicz

### Sexmob

#### *The Hard Way*

Corbett Vs Dempsey DL/LP

For the last few years, the output of New York musician and composer Steve Bernstein has centred around *Community Music*, a series of four releases by his Millennial Territory Orchestra. Usually comprising beautifully reworked versions of American classics, those records don't have the same sideways energy as stuff by Sexmob, his outfit with Tony Scherr, Kenny Wollesen and Briggan Krauss.

*The Hard Way* is Sexmob's first album since 2017's *Cultural Capital* and it's notable for the contributions of producer/mixer Scotty Hard aka Scott Harding (New Kingdom, Medeski, Martin & Wood, Vijay Iyer). On opener "Fletcher Henderson" his influence is immediately obvious – Bernstein and Krauss

toot-warbled brass from in between patches of Wollesen's brisk clatter, while Harding's electronic steam train hiss chugs a speedy groove at the back.

The wonky precision is the same as ever, but here it's delivered with an immediacy and pace which is noticeably increased: "Lawn Mower" sets up a low floor of translucent swirl which churns away beneath the groove, while "Pepper Pot" sets Harding's square percussive rhythms into swift rotations as Bernstein's trumpet kicks it queasily from above. While the electronics are bold, there's no stomping over the Sexmob dynamic; the interaction between Bernstein and Krauss remains compelling and tight, trumpet and saxophone setting up atonal lines of dialogue which are always energetic and sharp.

This sense of precision and flux is strengthened via a range of other contributors. Vijay Iyer's piano on "You Can Take A Myth" is effective but spare, punctuating the atmospheric space already left in the mixture, while the nocturnal organ sweeps which John Medeski adds to "Banacek" transform it from brassy groove into a louchely street-lit roller. The best of these contributions is "Dominion", on which DJ Olive provides turntable and synth, melting like an ice cream in the sun while the brass of Bernstein and Krauss oozes down disintegrating synth and constant electronic drone.

Spenser Tomson

### Ben Sher

#### *Samba For Tarsila*

Zoho CD/DL

It opens, disconcertingly, with cannibalism. That was the cultural subtext of the Antropofagia movement of early Brazilian modernism, most closely associated with Oswald de Andrade, which advocated "eating" – and presumably digesting – Western culture as a means to aesthetic independence. De Andrade's inspiration in turn was the painting of Tarsila de Aguiar do Amaral, who's probably the only Brazilian painter of the period that most Europeans and North Americans know, the way Frida Kahlo has been taken as typical of Mexican art.

Guitarist Ben Sher's tribute to do Amaral is a perfect representation of the cultural imperative it retrospectively promotes. Jazz was always anthropophagous, gnawing on the bones of European art music just as much as it drew from immigrant vernaculars and African diaspora forms. The guitar has always been a transformative instrument, naturalising and domesticating musical forms, and that's very much how Sher seems to conceive it. His "Samba For Tarsila" is both orthodox and otherwise, in the same way as Sher is influenced as much by Wes Montgomery (minus the endless octaves) as by Brazilian masters like Rafael Rabello and Baden Powell. His solo on the opening "Antropofagia" is definitive, mixing jazz intervals and rhythms with something closer to Heitor Villa-Lobos's *Chôros* sequence, which ran from solo guitar to full orchestral.

Sher has a fine group at his back, anchored by veteran pianist Gary Fisher and energised by guest percussionist Vanderlei