

SYNTH MUSIC DIRECT

Magazine 139

Greetings,

By the time you read this the FREE SYSTEM PROJECT concert on the 17th May at The Church of St John the Baptist in Leicester will almost be upon us. If you haven't already purchased your ticket please do so now. See advert at the bottom of this page for further details.

Well it had to happen eventually. During copying the last two pages for magazine 138 my poor old photocopier stopped and came up with an error code of F2. Ringing the company I have a contract with to keep it going they said, 'oooooh, that's preeety bad- we will be right round'. After having had a look at it they said that it had had the copier equivalent of multiple major organ failure. It needed a new heart, brain, liver and big toe. The problem is that it is now obsolete and they no longer make the parts. They did say that they would search through other recently deceased copiers to see if any had been carrying donor cards but that I wasn't to get my hopes up.

I went and got the missing couple of pages for Mag 138 produced by a professional printer but to date there has still been no good news on my poor old machine (sob). The likelihood is therefore that if you are reading a paper version of this magazine which has been sent through the post that it has been copied professionally. I can't justify the cost of a new photocopier as now so few sales come from the 'paper' catalogue route.

For those people who's only possible contact with Synth Music Direct is still via the paper catalogue and who are still regularly buying CDs from us, we will endeavour to send a professionally printed version of the magazine each month (or so) for free. As this costs us three times the cost of producing the magazine ourselves (plus the cost of postage has just gone up yet again) however anyone who still wants to receive a paper catalogue and who rarely purchases from us will have to start paying a fee (of say a fiver) from time to time. I will contact people who are in this position at a later date to give them the choice if they still wish to receive the catalogue on this basis or not. Magazine 139 is free to everyone.

Finally, there have been some exciting CD releases this month including new ones by Rainbow Serpent and Spyra which you will see advertised later in the magazine but don't ignore the lesser known names either as some of the other CDs we have reviewed here are just as amazing.

Thanks for your time,

David Law



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**Rainbow Serpent /
Live @ Liphook 2007**

CD / 7 Tracks / 71.08 mins

Squelchy, almost manic sonic pulses move up and down the audio spectrum then gradually after the initial barrage settle down to wonderful edgy dark textures. 'Le Vant Dans la Plaine' is certainly an inventive track and we are only three minutes into it. Great crashing loping rhythms enter like the steps of a giant. Lovely swirling melodic motifs add a further sense of movement. It's all quite complex but also really beautiful. Throw yourself right into the gentle sonic vortex to get the most out of it. We flow straight into 'Twelve Celli', sampled wordless vocal colouring serenely wafts from the speakers over string pads then solo cello and violin sounds. This is so tranquil and spaced out, having a very Schulze / Tiepold feel to it. A steady rhythm provides structure without damaging the lovely peaceful atmosphere until a more urgent sequence begins to make itself heard. Even so the beautiful cello never becomes the junior partner. The earlier references are now even more obvious. What a wonderful composition this is. Another tinkling sequence starts up as we progress into 'Tangram' (no it's not a cover version!), cosmic twitters launching skyward. A second faster sequence joins the first along with a ticking high hat line. Things are given a little extra oomph as the drums come in. It's a bit like a Broekhuis, Keller and Schonwalder interpretation of Klaus' style (if you know what I mean!!!). Whatever, it's another wonderful bubbling track, just close your eyes and let yourself be taken along with it. 'Calais' is a relatively short piece starting off as quite a dark cosmic number but then developing into a blissful gently melodic track with ethereal wordless vocal colouring. 'En Passant' initially carries through with this mood, introducing just the faintest hint of melancholy. The subtlest of rhythms then a gentle caressing melodic sequence bubble to the surface. A new bass sequence rumbles into position, the original sequence stepping up a gear in response. We get a tranquil interlude in the tenth minute but when the drums re-emerge they come in flourishes and are deeper than before. There is quite a serene feel but with a sort of restless edginess on the fringes. 'Memories' (again not a cover version- thank goodness!) is one of the best tracks on the album; a fantastic short tender gently melodic piece which I wish could have gone on longer. The final track 'Ruckblenden' again starts in an ominous dark cosmic mood but doesn't waste much time deploying the sequences (which have quite a disorientating stereo effect when heard on ear-phones!). Once more, Klaus Schulze is the obvious comparison. Rhythm and a high hat line fall into formation then yet another sequence, this time quite melodic, becomes the main focus. It's really quite complex but not remotely bludgeoning. Mellotron sounds complete a perfect package. An absolutely stunning track and fantastic way to finish off the album. (DL)



**Spyra / Gasoline 91 Octane
CD / 6 Tracks / 66.41 mins**

A deep bass line is punctuated by the most wonderful six-note sequence, getting 'Shirogane' off to a wonderful start. Gorgeous pads swell underneath. There is a strange ticking percussive effect that when you wear headphones sounds like it is coming from behind you- wild! Gentle rhythms take us forward whilst a laser sharp lead line slowly weaves over the top. The overall effect is of a completely blissed out chugger. The combination of sounds here is just superb, emphasising once again just what an outstanding composer Wolfram is. 'Rantum Random' immediately deploys the sequencer again. This time it is more urgent but kept quite low in the mix. Drums and a bass line pick up quite a groove with piano lead skipping amongst the beats and pulsations. It is a little more forceful than the opener but without really letting rip. I would say it is a gentle body mover with quite a melodic hook. With a title like 'Operation PPG' I was expecting some real analogue sounding Berlin School magic. After a traditional atmospheric opening followed by a high register sequence I thought, so far so good but then a quite driving rhythm emerges giving the whole thing a much more contemporary edge- but then again the flutey synth backing sounded decidedly 70s, so it is a real mix of styles. The thing is though, it all works really well together. By the seventh minute the drums seem to be in a constant state of mutation, indeed they sometimes disappear entirely, just leaving the sequence, solar winds and that's about it. Even though great use is made of space there seems to be so much happening. A fresh combination of sounds, rhythm or sequence are experimented with one after another. For the last few minutes we return to a similar feel to the first half of the track but with the addition of a really fantastic sawing lead that will just make you want to punch the air in pure joy. This is the best track on the album so far. 'Treskow Bridge' has the most beautiful piano start. Drums are added, gently chugging along but it is certainly the piano that is the main feature until some lovely breathy pads come in. The piano isn't finished with yet however as it makes a simply stunning return during the last few moments. Ideal for just chilling out to. 'Below 20' is initially in marked contrast, sparse effects mixing with a chilling wind and little bass rumbles. A wonderful sequence starts to form whilst almost ghostly electronic tones shimmer lower in the mix. Mellotron is added and a second sequence emerges- absolutely fantastic! More gentle rhythms are introduced but it is the sequence and delicate lead line which attract the attention most. All rhythms depart in the sixth minute leaving sequence and tron to relax the soul. A bass throb adds tension as the sequence morphs, gaining added oomph as the rhythm returns once more. Another laidback melody meanders through the soundstage then solidifies, becoming more strident. By the eleventh minute things have been stripped right back again to the bass throb with just a little synth embellishments and some very faint chatter which is so low in the mix it can't be made out. Gradu-

ally things rebuild as the individual elements from earlier return. Wolfram hasn't finished with us yet though as it's all change again and we get something of a drum fest before returning to atmospheric to finish. 'Future of the Past EleKtriK' is a short finishing number and is the most commercial track on the album with a bouncy rhythm and melody played on a number of different lead sounds. It's ideal for both air keyboard as well as air drums and I hope it will get your whole body moving as well as leaving a contented smile on the face. I no longer have my copy of the 'Future of the Past' album so I can't check for similarities but it sounds like nothing I remember unless it is a reinterpretation of one of the melodies in a new setting (maybe, maybe not). Wolfram seems to be able to turn his hand to almost any style of music from downright weird, to modern ambient, to Berlin School etc. Here he has produced one of his most accessible, melodic and without doubt on this occasion most relaxed and laidback album so far. (DL)

plucked melody then gorgeous flute put the mind and body in a blissed out state. The same sequence is taken into the title track but now low faint crashing effects can just be heard. These effects become higher in the mix forming part of a steady rhythm which gradually becomes an insistent groove, more guitar touches adding that little extra oomph. 'Edge of Nowhere' is the encore piece. Exquisitely chosen sounds form complex rhythms whilst more spectral wailing imparts a feeling of melancholy. Gradually the drums gain steam but without harming the delicate balance between a dogged determination and deep felt sadness. This album is the ideal combination of power, attitude and ambience. (DL)



Klaus Schulze/Virtual Outback CD/2 tracks/ time 79.55 mins

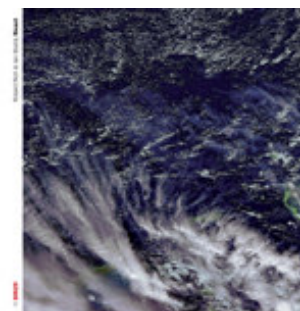
'Virtual Outback' first saw the light of day back in the latter half of 2002 and featured as part of the Schulze 5 disc set 'Contemporary Works 2'. Originally the 'Virtual Outback' CD contained just a single extended

piece from Klaus lasting some sixty five minutes, with this reissue we are presented with the welcome addition of a mightily rare/limited bonus track, making this album package a must have for most any Klaus Schulze collector.

'Virtual Outback' comes to us in the now de facto gatefolded card slipcase together with an accompanying 16 page full colour booklet. There is a very personal write up from Schulze about the making of the album and of the people he worked with on the recording, together with further words of wisdom from Klaus D. Mueller on the back page footnotes.

Recorded circa 2001/2002 'Virtual Outback' features numerous happy musical helpers,(Wolfgang Tiepold being amongst that number). For those of you that have enjoyed the Schulze 'Ballett' series I think you'll get a lot of mileage from 'Virtual Outback', that familiar clique of musicians all re-emerging to produce unyet another musical event with Klaus at the helm.

Track one, 'The Theme: The Rhodes Elegy'(65.00) comes into being with Schulze at a contemplative solitary electric piano. The addition of woodwind is provided by Tobias Becker on English horn as the first of the improvisations get underway. Klaus underpins everything with his super smooth effortless synthetic strings and away we go with some beautifully haunting music. This however is a Schulze album and we can't just settle for slipping gently into some New Agey mediocre take it or leave it muzak. Instead Klaus takes Beckers musical ad-libs and skews them completely using modulated, filtered and morphed effects so that we can't always be sure as to the source of the sound. The music now having lost that sombre edge that purveyed most all of the 'Ballett' series is further pepped up with additional percussion which arrives about six minutes in breaking the serene mood. All said and done this is abit of a shame as the rhythm is abit over fussy and busy for such a lethargic piece.



Robert Rich & Ian Boddy / React CD / 11 Tracks / 63.55 mins

Recorded live in Philadelphia as part of a 30th Anniversary celebration for the Stars End radio show, this is the best collaborative album by these two so far.

Three of the tracks are live versions from their first two albums whilst the other eight are completely new to this project. The opening sounds to 'Depth Charge' are simply awesome, like a cross between swarming insects, the lushest of ethereal drones and cosmic winds. Faint percussive crystalline tones take us into 'Ice Fields'. Things gradually becoming more syncopated as sighing guitar textures weave amongst the ticking pulsations. It's all so delicate and brooding but incredibly effective. Gradually the rhythms become more aggressive, the lovely subtle underlying sonic textures bringing up pictures of spectres rising from their disturbed sleep. Lonesome flute whispers take us to 'Sojourn', like a gentle mist being blown in a morning breeze. Simply gorgeous. A little tinkling reverberating sequence picks up the pace slightly for 'AxD'. A second sequence falls into formation with the first, dark almost growling effects underpinning everything. The pulsations go through a period of deconstruction as we descend into really deep brooding subterranean atmospherics. 'Veiled' sounds like a strange heat hazed jungle as if heard from a fevered dream. A slow pulse rings out giving a rather uneasy feel. 'Slow Hand' introduces sparingly used drums which gradually form into a steady rhythm. Ghostly wailing floats through the air as the rhythms solidify still further. This is a track just dripping in attitude and pent up menace. Absolutely fantastic! 'Messages' returns us to more atmospheric realms but even here there are ominous undercurrents. 'Lithosphere' uses gentle interweaving echoing rhythms as subtle structure over which guitar textures, like the sighing of long dead souls, float skyward. It really is stunningly beautiful stuff. 'Blue Moon' takes over, sequences bubbling very low in the mix. A lovely little

A brief interjection from Kagermann's violin introduces the Cello of Tiepold at around the thirteen minute mark and we can hear Wolfgang playing along tentatively against the threshold of the applied effects almost as if he's trying to avoid triggering them by playing too loudly. All the time Schulze's sequenced backdrop of electric piano and percussion cycles around until the track almost stalls some ten minutes later when things get so stripped back in the mix we are left with nothing but the solo voice of Kagermann. It's not long before the sounds of Cello, Violin and reedy flutes are heard again, all immersed in a deep bath of modulation and filtering.

Like a new chapter electric guitar cuts in on proceedings at the halfway mark adding a rockier element to the track as the other players are subdued and exit the mix completely. By the guitars very nature it sounds like it's leading the way, but lack of variation in the Schulze sequence has our resident guitarist Mickes looking for new improvisational avenues as he strums along rhythmically. Then the moment we've all been waiting for, Klaus takes to the keys! Sorry folks, no rip-roaring Moog solo's here today, that kinda' thing just wouldn't suit the overall feel of the music, instead we revert back to the guitar and Mickes has gotten very esoteric with the guitar effects on full tilt rumbling, droning and whistling his way through the remainder of the track,(and very effective it is too!). Into the last ten minutes and the drums become much more pronounced only tailing off in the last few moments as the guitar rattles and hums its way to a gentle close.

'Chinese Ears'(14.55) is the bonus track here and is about as rare as Schulze rarities get I suppose,(a shorter version was made available to the first three hundred or so customers who originally bought the 'Contemporary Works 2' set). The track has now been extended by four and a half minutes for this release, so let's see what it has to offer the listener.

From the word go the sequencing is straight from out of the Chris Franke book of how to break your step sequencer in sixteen easy steps! There's some nasty little brass stabs throughout the opening barrage of synths leading to a sudden and unexpected break which places us firmly back into a lilting 'Ballett' type of soundscape – soft strings and violin. Two minutes later the heavy duty sequencing returns, the soft strings drifting back in sidling along underneath the rhythmic patterns, the whole composition now making more sense. The tranquil strings, violin and voices return yet again, but that frenetic sequencer is just pressing to be heard in the background as it soon surges to the fore once again. A sudden edit at around the ten minute mark has a 4/4 beat hammering out the time signature and as it progresses I recognise it to be a chunk of the sequencing lifted directly from the 'Are You Sequenced?' performance, ('The Wizard of Doz' I think you'll find). A big Mellotron choir rises up building towards a huge finale, but nothing seems to sound quite right? I almost get the feeling that the Mellotron choir section may also have been lifted from another of Klaus's previous works; to be honest, as endings go, it's all abit disjointed and slapdash?

So, time to conclude on 'Virtual Outback' – I had likened it to the 'Ballett' series, but that still didn't seem to quite

nail it for me; perhaps more akin to 'Crime of Suspense' or 'Vanity of Sounds' as 'The Rhodes Elegy' track didn't appear to want to sit comfortably in the background playing away to itself, moreover it is a piece that commands your attention. Again it's a very collaborative work with six people credited for their assistance in the making of the album, (though I can't say I really heard them all such was the soup of effects pasted all over that big main track). You won't find any great compositional depth here; this has more to do with style over substance, it's all about the improvisations of the various musicians involved. The bonus is always a bonus,(and a much sought after one it was this time around). That last part of the track I just don't get, sounding rushed off, cobbled together call it what you will, for me it just soured an otherwise great little track. Would I buy the album just to get my hands on the bonus track? For me the jury is out on that one, but I've a feeling there are many of you SMDers out there that'll have 'Virtual Outback' on their CD shopping list!!! (B22)



Moonbooter / Under Control
CD / 13 Tracks / 78.05 mins

'Not Real' starts with some sampled speech followed by lovely melody backed by brilliant bouncing sequences. The leads are so infectious they will stay in your head and your feet simply will not

be able to remain still. Every element is spot on. A brilliant composition. 'Arped Obsession' initially slows things down with some wonderful moody atmospherics before a lovely lead cries out over soaring pads. There's something of an anthemic feel to it all. A bass sequence rumbles forth then gradually more sequencer lines come to join it before a heavy rhythm kicks in. The lead hangs delicately above the heaving backing as things become more euphoric by the second. If you are reading this review on our web page please listen to the sound sample now. I think it's absolutely awesome! If you are reading the review from the paper catalogue- well words can't do justice to how good this is. Clanging bells get 'String Theory' underway. A vocoded introduction gives way to rumbling bass line, providing a foundation for lovely little looped melodies then beautiful piano lead line. There's a real feel of Andy Pickford's solo work about this. Subtlety, melody and intense excitement are all melded together in one perfect whole. Another slab of pure brilliance. Slow crashing stabs provide a rather ominous start to 'Silence de la Nuit'. Fairly heavy rhythms kick in juxtapositioned wonderfully by sighing wordless female vocal colouring. Despite the track title this is really driving stuff that would get you motoring far too fast if you were in the car. 'Progression' immediately gets into a foot tapping and head-nodding groove. Another ideal one for the autobahn. 'Mellowman' brings back the sequences but then quickly develops into a gentle dance number. 'Said Goodbye' and 'Last Contact (4 am)' really change the mood as on both soft floating pads create a tranquil relaxed atmosphere, a delicate piano lead taking centre stage. There is a gentle rhythm but really these are ones to

just lie back and chill out to, though the latter of the two does have a bit more bight than the former. 'End Splice Anthem' cranks up the pace again as in ye face rhythms let rip. It's the sort of track you could really let yourself go ape to. There are also some lovely little lead lines which are ideal for air keyboard playing while you jump up and down like a crazy thing- I know I did (which doesn't half make it difficult to type!). Another absolute belter. A lovely two note bass sequence hops along at the beginning of 'Em da Phunk'. Excellent virtual guitar skips through the pulsations as the drums whip up a storm, slow leads floating over the top. It's a real feel good track that will make you want to punch the air with pure joy. Yet another stunner. 'Cold Sun' is a gentle chugger that should get the head pleasantly nodding to the beats. There's also a lovely little solo echoing piano interlude in the middle. 'Gapless Time' uses multi layered sequences to create a bubbling base over which first an acoustic guitar lead then more conventional melodic synth loops take turns grabbing the attention. At times I was reminded of Otariou. '3 months and 3 weeks' finishes the album off in blistering form and again reminded me a little of Andy Pickford. It's a track with many a section. Some will get the whole body moving, others will get you closing your eyes, taking in the wonderful melodies whilst others will leave you gently tapping out time on the table- there is also a little humour in there. In other words it sums up the whole album. If you like intelligent upbeat music then you really need this in your collection. Simply a fantastic album. (DL)



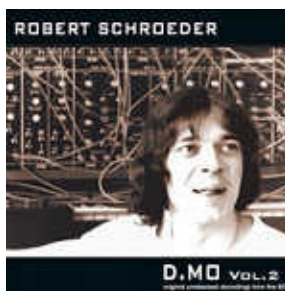
Exposed / Dive Master 08
CDR / 15 Tracks / 72.22 mins

Reverberating tones then strange sampled vocals provide quite a spooky start to 'Anticipation'. An excellent sequence momentarily materialises then fades away. A new quite robust sequence takes

over then a two note melodic motif hangs in the air before echoing into the distance. An exquisite lead line shines above the rhythms and pulsations like sunlight refracted through a crystal. What a lovely start. An incredibly rapid sequence gets 'Journey' underway. Unbelievably an even faster one falls into formation with the first. A devastating rhythm then adds to the wonderful mayhem. 'Encounter' calms things down a little as little water droplet type notes gently drip from the speakers. A steady rhythm and soft pads take things forward then a lovely lead line soothes the senses still further. A second lead adds extra bite as its laser sharp melody flashes forth. Rapid sequences return for 'Strength' as yet another searing lead line solos above the pulsations. There is something of a Michael Garrison feel to proceedings. Subtle it ain't but excellent nevertheless. 'Child' has a suitably bright and playful melody which is complimented well by a steady rhythm and contrasting, almost melancholy lead line. A really lovely track. 'Setback' actually isn't too dissimilar in mood to the previous number but this time lead duties are provided by virtual guitar and very effective it is too. Sequences are cranked up a further

gear on 'Descent', spewing way too many pulsations to count. The lead lines are in marked contrast however being slow and thoughtful, some excellent sounds being chosen. 'Life' is initially completely devoid of structure, just soft pads floating into the distance but eventually a slow cool relaxed rhythm enters along with an equally as blissed out meandering lead. Just chill out. 'Joy' returns us to helter-skelter sequencing and flashing leads. It is well titled, as it was so full of energy and happiness. There was even a little Jarre in there I think. Gregorian Chants get 'Change' underway and as they depart the inevitable sequence takes centre stage. The gothic feeling is emphasised by organ then female wordless vocal pads. What a wonderful piece. Not for the first time I thought of some of Ian Boddy's earlier pre DiN works. 'Equal' is another real belter, notes coming thick and fast. 'Rise' is completely different as an excellent acoustic guitar melody soars above gentle melodic synth backing. What a wonderfully gorgeous track and a welcome contrast to the rest of the album. 'Aspiration' returns us to bubbling sequences but the stunning quality of the melodies is, if anything, even better than on the previous number – Ultravox or OMD without the vocals maybe! Whatever the comparison, it is quite exceptional. 'Riot' is as playful as 'Child' - but faster in the sequence department- and those lead lines- anthemic or what! Bet it would be brilliant live. 'Return' is very different, certainly the moodiest track on the album. The pace quickens at around the half way mark but there is still a feeling of restraint found on very few others tracks here. Maybe it's the artist's way of proving to us that he can also turn his hand to subtle.

If exciting melodic sequencer driven music is your thing then you really must try this out. All the tracks are in three to six minute range and tightly composed. It is an ideal demonstration of how sequences can be used outside the Berlin School setting but still pack quite a punch. Exposed is a new name to me and one of my own personal favourite discoveries this year. (DL)



Robert Schroeder / D.MO Vol 2
CD / 11 Tracks / 70.36 mins

All the pieces here are previously unreleased and from the years 1980 to 1983. Vocodered speech introduces 'Hallo' and keeps coming back from time to time, mixing well with the excellent main melodies. A lovely combination of little rhythms and melodic motifs are even more effective creating a lovely infectious track and positive start to the album. 'The Nomad Theme 2' begins with a good high register sequence. In classic fashion a second sequence falls into formation as little electronic wailing effects, almost like gentle virtual guitar touches, fly over the top. Ethereal pads add that extra class. Rhythmically and percussively 'Door to Heaven' is a rather quirky track, the backing acting as the perfect foil to the curious lead line consisting of a series of single notes played slowly one after the other, each fading gradually

into the distance. At about the fourth minute however things are cranked up a little and the melody is played with much more gusto. 'Starlights' is another excellent track with good sequence backed by tron as well as massed swelling pads. The rhythms are given just the right emphasis and the lead lines quite searing. Excitement builds throughout the tracks duration. 'Wired Systems' is, if anything, even better than the previous number, the bouncy sequence being just Heavenly. Various relaxed solos create a contrasting moodiness. 'The Nomad Theme 2' is much heavier and in ye face than the first part. A repeated seven bass note pattern forms a very sturdy structure around which weaves rather delicate synth colouring. I think the best way to describe it would be a slow plodder with attitude! 'Synth Waves' starts with the best sequence on the album so far and so classic of the 1980 period from whence it came. It seems to get faster as does the rhythm that accompanies it but it is this rhythm that to me is a problem as it seems to fit slightly uncomfortably against its partner and quite frankly it all seems to degenerate into a bit of a mess. 'Modulations' has some really nice electronic backing over which rhythms and lead create a rather optimistic mood. I bet it would have been pretty good at the time but it does sound quite dated now though there is still some nostalgic charm to it. 'Springtime' surges forward with real oomph. Sure, again the drums do sound a little dated but this really ain't a bad track at all. 'Analogue Vibes' continues on the return to form with another super sequence and this time the rhythms work well alongside the pulsations, as does the lovely moody lead line. This really is a super track and one of the best on the album. 'Protones' sounds a little like video game music to me, quite bleepy and fairly simplistic. The sound quality on this release seems far superior to 'DMO Vol 1'. As for the tracks, it is a real mixture of ones that are well deserving a release at last, to those we could have lived without but do still possess a historical interest, to a couple that in my opinion maybe shouldn't have been included. Maybe a fifty minute album would have been a better idea than stretching it to seventy but then again I could always programme out those tracks I didn't care for so what the Hell. I still think there is enough here to make it a worthwhile purchase for Schroeder fans. (DL)



**Star Sounds Orchestra /
Kosmophonon**
CDR / 6 Tracks / 57.05 mins

Star Sounds Orchestra comprise Steve Schroyder (remember him from Tangerine Dream in the early 70s?) and Jens Zygar. Intense exciting metallic drones give way to effects and samples of a rocket taking off for the appropriately titled 'Launch'. A rapid sequence starts up that will get the pulse racing over a quite dynamic swirling backing. High register lead lines combine anticipation with slight anxiety. 'Lago Di Luna [Moon]' introduces a bass sequence and excellent rhythmic loop, keeping the excitement level high as we storm towards our next stellar object, a sighing softness imparting a feeling of wonder. 'Ritual

[Earth]' begins with insect type effects and the sound of what could be a spacecraft landing. Ethnic type rhythms then mix with an organ sound giving quite a primeval feeling that reaches deep inside as we are carried along on the insistent groove. Things get even better as a really superb flute lead line soars over the top. 'New Lyra [Mercury]' brings things down to dark depths, a bass gong creating deep reverberations through the ether. A sequence can be heard forming low in the mix. Piano lead line changes the mood completely scattering percussive notes like a beautiful soft rain. Gentle pads create a feeling of peace and wonder. What a really lovely track. 'Ironman [Mars]' is much moodier at first then gets into a really intense rhythmic section reaching almost rave proportions! There are the occasional softer interlude but basically this is high-energy stuff. Completely crazed- not for the faint hearted! 'Plutonia [Pluto]' has a really mean forceful rhythmic backing with ominous cosmic whooshes and effects flying over the top. There is a real mean edginess here that paints the vividest picture music of a Hellish realm full of evil natives and victims for sacrifice. 'Hippios [Neptune]' uses massed string pads to create a feeling of grandeur. A fragile but beautiful little melody shines out before all descends to extremely deep rumbles with the most delicate of sonic washes over the top. The melody keeps returning forming a marked, though very effective, contrast with the backing. For the most part this is a really lovely album balancing beautiful subtle melodies with intelligent rhythms- but then there is 'Ironman [Mars]' which is something else entirely! (DL)



Sonic Ambience / Images II
CDR / 11 Tracks / 55.52 mins

Sonic Ambience create a beautifully laid back style of music that would settle in the more relaxed and melodic end of the Synth Music Direct spectrum though there are the occasional tracks which do have a little more oomph. Think of some of Peter Dinklage's Prudence recordings or even a slightly more upbeat G.E.N.E. It most certainly isn't 'ambient music' in the traditional Brian Eno sense. 'Caravane' starts with effects of a hot landscape with little twittery insects. Rhythm and didgeridoo type sounds bring up images of Australia but it isn't all 'ethnically' inspired stuff, as more conventional and quite beautiful Western melodies weave a lovely spell over the gently syncopated backing. 'Tom Walk # 8' uses subtle tom tom rhythms around little percussive effects over which the most gorgeous of swelling melodies float. Lovely stuff. 'China Street' starts with tinkling wind chime type effects and chugging rhythms. More beautiful melodies, this time on flute and other ethnic instruments, sooth the soul. 'Don't let your Dreams let you Down' slows the pace still further whilst slightly melancholy pads drift through the air. Delicate piano and plucked string leads take turns to be the dominant feature, sometimes combining in unison. 'Sciencefaction' uses a really nice melding of sounds before getting into the heaviest and meanest rhythm

on the album so far- a really infectious shuffling groove. From a jungle waterfall backdrop 'Take Off' develops into the best track on the album, a real foot tapping, hook laden (the main melody really is sublime) perfectly composed infectious piece of music- absolutely fantastic!

'Villefranche' and 'Lines' are fairly similar. Like most of the tracks here, they have a simple beauty, the melodies being uncluttered but exquisitely composed, just being allowed to create their own spell. 'Oriental Experiment' begins with quirky percussion and progresses to give us a super relaxed gently chugging five minutes of pure chill. 'Sound of Waves' has a rather appealing cello beginning, giving it a rather classical feel, emphasised still further by piano melody but all set in a sort of haze, as if heard from the edge of a dream.

So completely undemanding and fairly relaxed stuff, ideal for just chilling out to at the end of a hectic day. I have chosen the second volume of the three Images albums to review because it was my favourite (just) but if you like this you are also bound to like the other two. (DL)



Harald Grosskopf / World of Quetzal
CDR / 9 Tracks / 55.27 mins

Twangy ethnic percussion effects, all rather strange they are too, solidify into a quite intense rhythmic groove. A gorgeous lead line comes in and now it all seems to make sense as 'Coatlucue' unravels into a quite infectious body mover, motoring along nicely. An excellent opener. Musical Box type tinkling percussives then a Japanese melodic motif get 'Titlaucacan' underway. Wordless sighing vocals and a blistering rhythm carry things forward. It's a track that covers all ends of the spectrum from subtlety and lovely melodies to pounding drums. 'Tetzcatlipoca' has a crazed beginning with manic utterances in some strange language I don't understand (or made up) before the drums come in and along with a squelchy looped effect create quite a mesmerizing swirling brew. The chanting keeps coming back however and to me it spoiled the track a little. 'Tonatiuh' brings us back to normality but in a rather dark brooding way. Slow moody pads slowly build in intensity then subside once more. It's the sort of track Jim Kirkwood would have done in one of his more atmospheric moments. A bass line picks up the pace just a little for 'Quetzalcoatl'. Tabla type drums start a relaxed rhythm. For the first four minutes things remain quite laidback but then the rhythms become a little more forceful and a mean stabbing lead line adds real attitude to proceedings. An excellent track. 'Ixtililton' is formed around quirky little percussive loops, quite tuneful in their own way. A strange droney, slightly ethnic sounding lead line wails over it all. 'Mixcoatl' carries on in similar fashion but this time the lead lines have a much more Western feel to them, the pads flourishing to become quite euphoric at times. 'Tlalocan' has a similar feel to 'Tonatiuh' but if anything even darker- or should that by mysterious, as there is nothing really sinister sound-

ing here- just lovely moody stuff. Harald finishes with a reprise of 'Coatlucue'. Again the rhythm is quite infectious and should get the hands beating out time on the table, whilst the melodies are lovely. Harald Grosskopf is a drummer, his solo albums however range from being almost completely devoid of drums to heavily rhythmic. This album shows his skills as a drummer to their full. (DL)



Uwe Reckzeh / Part of Time
CDR / 11 Tracks / 71.56 mins

The tracks from this album originate from some mid 90s projects unavailable on any of his current five other in print albums. They are all upbeat and either rhythmic or sequencer based (often both). Twangy pulses then a cracking rhythm propel 'Rising Star' forward in a wonderfully energetic manor. A stabbing bass line and staccato melodies add to the excitement making it hard to keep the body still. The title track deploys a steady bass rhythm over which a simple piano melody starts to form mutating into an infectious loop then subsiding in a sea of brooding atmospherics before emerging once more with renewed vigour. 'The Hall of Visions' brings a lovely sequence to play right from the first instant. Steady drums take things forward whilst lovely slow melodies float from the speakers giving a faintly Schulzian feel to proceedings. Things settle into a rather laid back pattern and I just closed my eyes and let myself be taken along with it all. 'Elementary Voices' keeps the sequencer in action; all very melodic the pulsations are too, morphing this way and that through the tracks duration. 'Silent Moves' has a gorgeous rather cosmic start with loads of soft sighing pads. A simply exquisite tuneful loop provides one of the real highlights on the album. Drums and sonic stabs create a syncopated wall whilst slow tuneful pads add a little softness. A lovely track. 'Mirror of Infinity' is initially all rather sinister until a wonderful rapid lead line strikes up changing the mood completely. I couldn't keep my hands still as they wanted to play air keyboard along with the music. Things do keep returning to moodier realms but this just gives the whole thing added depth. Yet another winner. Wistful little melodies provide a quite beautiful and tranquil start to 'Universal Avenue'. A high-hat line ups the tempo preparing the way for a spot on bass sequence and lovely combination of melodies, one rapid and the other silken. All these elements combine to create a euphoric head of steam. 'Watching Behind' starts with the sound of someone walking then a heartbeat before thunder and a breaking storm. A slow tinkling sequence is joined by a second meatier one, combining wonderfully to form a deep feeling of sadness. Lovely little lead lines add to this feeling as does an acoustic guitar refrain nearer the end. Yet another exquisite piece. 'Listen to the Whales' begins with the sound of said beasts before a heartfelt slow lead line comes in. It is really quite beautiful but I think the whale song could have been faded out earlier leaving the gorgeous sequences and lead lines more space to do their wonderful thing. 'Visit the Quit Zone' is a laid back gently pulsating meandering track ideal to chill out to. A piano lead line gets 'Sirius' underway which is then replaced by militaristic type drums and a throbbing bass line. We go through one melodic twist after another then the piano returns with added gusto providing a very enjoyable finish. (DL)

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