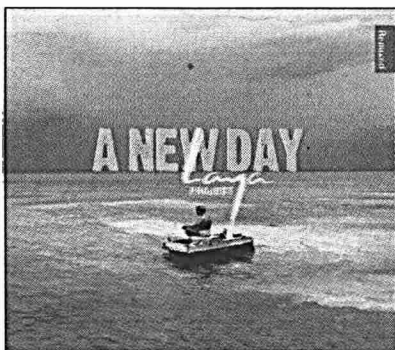
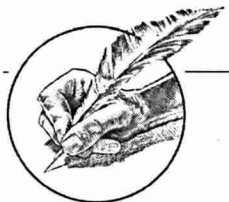




cd reviews



VARIOUS ARTISTS

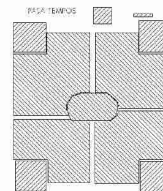
A New Day Laya Project

Remixed (White Swan)

In the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami in South Asia, one of the largest global humanitarian-aid efforts took place in the region. Representatives from the Chennai-based “world-music” production company Earthsync

traveled throughout India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Myanmar, Maldives, and Thailand with sound equipment and a film crew to document the devastation and record the folk-music traditions of communities affected by the disaster. The result was *Laya Project*, a stirring documentary film and companion music compilation created as a “tribute to the resilience of the people of South Asia.” It also served as a small but priceless nugget of ethnomusicology that, while hardly academic, lent poetic truth to the notion that a picture (and even a song) can be worth a thousand words. With this follow-up compilation of 22 remixes that hit store shelves and download sites on Aug. 17, the label divides tracks onto two discs, one titled *Embrace*, the other *Union*. *Embrace* is a mellow offering with an emphasis on subtle rhythmic and vocal enhancements. *Union*, however, is a dance-floor lover’s dream, serving up plenty of driving techno and hip-hop beats and contemporary synth and sequencing embellishments poured over musical styles ranging from Punjabi *bhangra* and Sufi to Burmese harp composition and Sri Lankan Buddhist chant. •

The original CDs lost much of their context for people who had not seen the film first, while the remixes stand on their own as an unusual collection of tracks that could be considered either a nightclub-ready sampler or a cultural mash up that continues to pay tribute to the unsinkable perseverance of the people of South Asia. — Rob DeWalt





ETHEL Oshtali:

Music for String Quartet

(Azica) Arts programs for young people may be under widespread duress, but apparently not in the Chickasaw Nation in Oklahoma, where a summer arts academy provides training and encouragement for composers ages 8 to 18. Some results of the program's sixth installment, in 2009, are documented on this CD of 16 string-quartet compositions by 11 teenagers. (The disc's title, *Oshtali*, means "to quarter" in Chickasaw.) All are performed with utter commitment by the barrier-breaking string quartet Ethel, and Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate served as a composer-mentor. These developing composers don't write invertible counterpoint or double fugues, but they do all have something to express in tones, and with the help of their musical guides, they've figured out how to put across their ideas cogently. Some pieces are stronger than others, but each is an impressive achievement. Why would this CD interest

you as a music lover, apart from the fact that it represents what should be going on everywhere? One of the principles these composers have learned is that it pays to keep things simple.

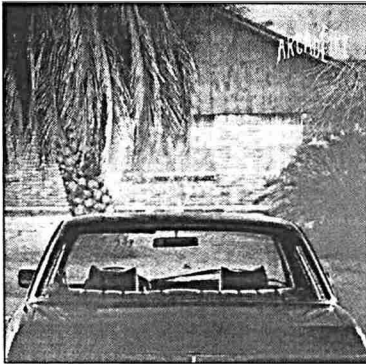
The pieces are short — only three exceed five minutes — and they manipulate limited musical materials within structures that are easily grasped. They invite listeners to follow the unrolling of a composition in a way that will pay dividends when hearing more complicated creations — say by Bartók, who would seem to be a favorite among these young composers. —James M. Keller





ARCADE FIRE *The Suburbs* (Merge Records) When I heard that the new Arcade Fire album was titled *The Suburbs*, my first response was “Uh-oh.” The soul-sucking uniformity of suburbia is a subject well mined in pop culture, often to middling, obvious results. Arcade Fire explored it with a sense of Spielbergian whimsy on its celebrated debut, *Funeral*; this, the group’s third album, is more like the work of director Sam Mendes (*Revolutionary Road*): slightly mean-spirited but ultimately vacuous, with overused sophomoric signifiers of big themes. *The Suburbs* aims for grand statement — the extensive running time may exemplify the tedious excess of sprawl better than the lyrical content — but it doesn’t cover much new ground. Only on the biting “Rococo” and the wise “City With No Children” does Arcade Fire sound human and not like a band engaging in paint-by-numbers angst. It all plays out as a grinding, midtempo dirge with some eclectic touches: a jaunty piano here, a disco beat and keyboard funk there. But maybe I’m too old for this album. As a teen, I’d have loved this sneering assault on all things mundane. Now I’m more comfortable with people choosing to live in ways that I find dull, I can easily avoid sprawl if I want to, and when I’m angry, I have much bigger machines to rage against.

— Robert B. Ker

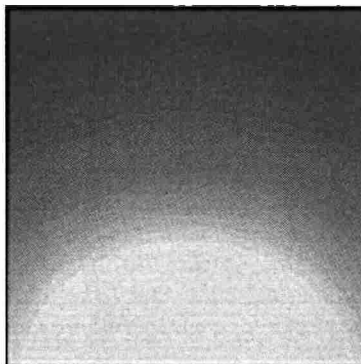




JAMES BLACKSHAW *All Is Falling* (Young God Records)

All Is Falling falls into a musical category that has been inhabited most famously by the likes of John Fahey, Robbie Basho, and Glenn Jones. The young British phenom guitarist James Blackshaw, according to his MySpace page, also relates to Steve Reich, Terry Riley, Meredith Monk, Claude Debussy, and Albert Ayler. Most of Blackshaw's recorded music has been on his own albums, one exception being his role on last year's *Aleph at Hallucinatory Mountain* by the ridiculously eclectic collective Current 93. On *All Is Falling* Blackshaw plays electric 12-string guitar and piano, with support from violinists Charlotte Glasson and Fran Bury and cellist Daniel Madav. The eight-part suite opens with beautiful, complex improvisations over a repeating, six-note pattern on the piano. "Part 2" is melodic and spare, not unlike medieval music, and then, toward the end, Blackshaw thickens the stew, creating a sheet of sound by means of a repetitive fingerpicking technique. Most of the disc is occupied by hypnotic, ringing patterns, the guitar and violins intertwining melodic figures. But the orchestral character is relaxed during the unfolding of "Part 7," as the violins engage in overlapping, downward slurs, and Blackshaw ultimately joins in the super-trippy glissandi fest. He continues in the "electric" vein for the suite's final section, as fuzzy sustains and vibrato and feedback effects are in the fore. This is an album for daydreaming.

— Paul Weideman



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