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HOMECOMING TRIUMPH / AT HOME WITH IRISH POLYMATH SHAMPAIN & LOTS MORE

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Pic: DENNIS MORRIS



Bashy

Being Poor Is Expensive

Bish Bash Bosh

From adolescence to adulthood

FIFTEEN YEARS on since his debut LP 'Catch Me If You Can', and after a 10-year hiatus from music altogether, Ashley 'Bashy' Thomas re-emerged in April with 'Sweet Boys Turned Sour'. The song is a vivid piece of storytelling, with Bashy juxtaposing the innocence of his childhood world with the complexities and hostilities of the "zones" awaiting him outside his front door. "Where do we come from? North Weezy / At the time growing up wasn't easy, please believe me," he raps over warm melodies and a soul-rattling sub-bass. Soon after, Bashy announced his long-awaited sophomore album, 'Being Poor Is Expensive'.

The 11-track album, executive produced by Toddla T and Bashy himself, is a transportive and beautifully executed experience; it features the sounds of the London Underground, which Bashy recorded on his phone while travelling; North-West London's Haile, Skrapz and Roses Gabor are its only guests; and its samples range from the lovers rock of Dennis Brown and British reggae group Aswad, to UK garage classics courtesy of legends Sticky and Wookie. These elements, seamlessly woven together, create a clear sense of time and place in the way the very best rap albums do — think Kendrick Lamar's 'Good Kid, M.A.A.D City', but instead of Compton it's the London borough of Brent where Bashy's story

unfolds.

Thematically, 'Being Poor Is Expensive' chronicles an adolescence spent living at the edge of poverty and racism. Bashy paints a near-constant spectre of tit-for-tat bloodshed, and into spaces that should be associated with childhood joy: fun fairs, chicken shops, house parties. His impassioned stream of consciousness on the album's title track is abruptly silenced by gunshots, while the chorus of Dennis Brown's 'Let Me Down Easy' continues to spin hauntingly. On 'Lost In Dreams', he continues to reflect on his exposure to youth violence with bars like "It was boys stopping boys from becoming grown men". Roses Gabor sounds like a forlorn angel on the hook here, mourning NW's fallen children.

The violence that punctuates the album is placed in the wider context of structural injustice, from the outset. "A sister giving birth can be fatal," Bashy raps on opener 'The London Borough of Brent', referencing the disparity of maternal mortality for Black women in the UK. He honours his grandparents' perseverance in the face of bigotry, and historic Black resilience more generally on 'Made In Britain', over a sample of Aswad's 'Back To Africa'. The track, which references Darcus Howe and features the voice of dub-poet Linton Kwesi Johnson, is followed by 'How Black Men Lose Their Smile'. Here, Bashy explores

how racism embeds self-hatred in his community, though he remains unbroken: "Traumatised, but full of pride / Hold me down and still I rise". These songs continue the lineage of 'Black Boys' — Bashy's iconic and uplifting 2007 cut. The clearness of thought and honesty in 'Being Poor Is Expensive' is something that could only have been achieved with space and time away from the deeply personal experiences he digs down into. Gone is the brash armour of youth required to navigate the ends as a teenager, now replaced with a fearless, radical honesty: "Keeping it real, I spent most of my teens shook," Bashy admits on 'On The Rise'. And despite 10 years away from the microphone, he hasn't lost a step as an MC. The clarity of delivery that stood out on his early mixtapes remains, though with the passage of time his rapping voice has grown richer and more textured.

On 'Sticky', which samples 'Triplets II' and is recorded on a handheld mic, recreating the rawness of his legendary 2004 Freeze FM birthday set, Bashy conquers the production with a masterful grime-come-rap flow. "Pay respect and pay homage," he demands with his final bar. By delivering an album that belongs alongside 'Hoodies All Summer' as one of UK rap's truly great releases, people will have to do exactly that.

ROBERT KAZANDJIAN



Xylitol
Anemones
Planet Mu
Vivid marine tales

Catherine Backhouse has been honing her brand of zippy experimental electronica since the early noughties. Alongside producing and DJing as Bunnyhausen, and being an authority on Yugoslavian pop culture, she's released sporadically as Xylitol, curating a wide-reaching catalogue of curiosities. Her latest release, 'Anemones', digs into early jungle and garage to represent an early understanding of marine life.

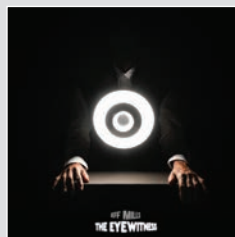
And it works! The flittering beats and subaqueous bleeps of opener 'Rosi' do sound like a bunch of colourful single-celled doodads globbing around the ocean. 'Jelena' is all aerated breaks and swooning synths, a woozy, warped slice of drum & bass that nods to the likes of Rufige Kru or Boymerang, while 'Iskria' harnesses convulsing snares and bolshy bass to build a stone-cold banger.

Bright, eccentric and awash with activity, Backhouse has hit the sweet spot between introspective listening and itchy dancefloor-filler. **OLIVIA CHEVES**



ESC
Blackbook
Straight Up Breakbeat
Light and shadow

Juha Riipinen (ESC) is a Finnish jungle veteran whose releases via Helsinki's resurgent Straight Up Breakbeat have put him on the map internationally. 'Blackbook' is his debut LP and serves as an ideal entry point to his sound. Contrast is key; ESC finds a persistent, penetrating melancholy in juxtaposing contemplative atmospherics with harsh breakbeats, smooth rolling percussion with shadowy stabs. Across 'Alright', 'Diamond Dust' and 'Belong II', delicate chimes, lush pads and saintly vocals soothe the calamitous crash of Amen breaks, while 'Amuri Dish' dives headfirst into the kind of rich, entrancing, yet ultimately rude jungle techno that Western Lore has perfected. 'Oura' goes deeper still, with dubwise kicks and fathomless bass, and 'Murdoc' matches complex drum programming with a grainy intro that could be ripped from some '70s astronomy show. Though it might not reinvent the wheel, 'Blackbook' certainly refines it; a shining example of how Finland's scene punches well above its weight. **BEN HINDLE**



Jeff Mills
The Eyewitness
Axis
Psychological thriller

Jeff Mills' last album 'The Trip – Enter The Black Hole' was the soundtrack to a 'cosmic opera' designed to simulate being sucked through an interstellar wormhole. Which sounds like a light-hearted laugh compared to the concept behind 'The Eyewitness'; here, the Detroit legend explores another kind of void – the spiritual emptiness of human beings stripped of moral values and belief.

He may be 40 years into his career and one of the world's most in-demand techno DJs, but Mills' studio albums have long left any concern for the dancefloor behind. Take tracks like 'Those Who Work Against Us' or 'In A Traumatized World', which employ the unnerving abstract rhythms and alien synth sounds he's previously used to evoke the vast expanses of outer space. Mills seems increasingly concerned with works that create a claustrophobic sense of being imprisoned inside the mind. **PAUL CLARKE**



Vintage Culture
Promised Land
Virgin
Crossover dance delights

Brazil's Vintage Culture has gone from small-town bedroom producer to hit-making Ibiza and Las Vegas headliner in under five years. All throughout that time, he has said, the notoriously prolific producer was working on 'Promised Land', a debut album that takes him out of club-ready, bass-driven house and into radio-friendly dance territory in spectacular fashion.

This is a meticulously designed record, packed with collaborations. The synth craft is rich, the melodies lavish and the breakdowns fashioned for maximum emotional impact. Each track has a singable top line and hooky refrains that will have universal appeal. Whether in a melancholic mood as on the tender 'Nothing Ever Changes', laying down bumping basslines on 'Weak' or layering in Balearic guitar riffs on the summer-ready 'Love Or Hate', proper songwriting is always at the heart of these impressive crossover cuts. **KRISTAN J CARYL**



DJ Lag

The Rebellion

Platoon

The Second Gqoming

For DJ Lag, the extensive world tour in support of his acclaimed debut album 'Meeting With The King' was an opportunity. The South African producer spent his time collaborating with artists in each country he visited, shaping the future of gqom beyond the borders of KwaMashu. While his peers held to tradition, Lag embraced the genre's globalisation. His sophomore LP is the furthest outside gqom's lexicon he's ever reached. Lag experiments with new local styles like 3-step, while looking toward foreign dialects like drill, cumbia, and even Eurodance to reinvent gqom's vernacular. He executes this with brilliant sophistication, and though this refinement makes for his least abrasive work to date, the producer's signature 'uThayela' still whacks with head-spinning ferocity when it rears. 'The Rebellion' feels like an inflection point — a recognition of gqom as a broad church, by one of its foremost pioneers. **TAZMÉ PILLAY**



KUČKA

Can You Hear Me Dreaming?

LUCKYME®

Don't sleep

Having covered PJ Harvey and t.A.T.u, as well as providing vocals on Machinedrum's recent LP, since 2021's debut album 'Wrestling', Laura Jane Lowther seemingly sits at the centre of a web of idiosyncratic influences. The artist weaves those threads of pop nous and cutting-edge electronics through her own solo productions, as well as work with artists like Kendrick Lamar, A\$AP Rocky and Flume. The latter gives 'Communal Reverie' some wobble, yet otherwise 'Can You Hear Me Dreaming?' is very much Lowther's solo show, wrapping synth-pop, R&B and even a lick of lightweight D&B into short and sweet packages, polished with studio gloss and airy vocals. Her covers and collaborations prove what Lowther can do with other people's work, but tracks like 'Cry Cry Cry' and 'Not There' show she can write future karaoke classics of her own. **PAUL CLARKE**



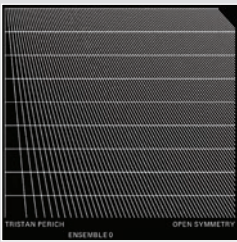
Hakushi Hasegawa

Mahōgakkō

Brainfeeder

Anarchist's cookbook

Hakushi Hasegawa's music should be approached with an open mind. Protective goggles and a fire extinguisher might also be advisable. The mix of breakcore, jazz and pop that marked the Japanese artist's previous records like 2019's 'Air Ni Ni' was both cute and combustible; their new LP also has as many heart-in-the-mouth moments as watching a baby with a blowtorch. With Hasegawa's vocals floating above a relentless pneumatic rhythm, opening tracks 'Departed' and 'Gone' sound like The Sugarcubes digging up the road, while 'KYÖFUNOHOSHI' resembles a Hollywood show band being fed into an industrial crusher. These sonic riots make the odd moments of relative tranquillity — such as 'The Blossom and the Thunder's' pastoral strings and guitar — pretty disorientating in contrast, particularly the classical piano of 'Forbidden Thing (Kimmotsu)', which feels as weird as Phillip Glass turning up at a gabba rave. **PAUL CLARKE**



Tristan Perich

Open Symmetry

Erased Tapes

Serious vibraphone vibes

New York-based composer Tristan Perich enjoys the experimental approach, having released the self-explanatory 'Noise Patterns' on a circuit board and created an album purely of stripped-down, 1-bit electronics. But as rad as '1-Bit Symphony' was in its own kooky way, 'Open Symmetry' is a leap forwards, theoretically and sonically. A work for three vibraphones, 20 speakers and — naturally — 1-bit electronics, it's a beautiful, enriching record. Those three vibraphones work damn hard, creating layered worlds of rhythms, melodies and percussion, yet always sounding gentle and effortless. It's more accessible and immediate than previous releases, yet feels far deeper and utterly hypnotic. It's futile to pick out individual 'tracks' (though 'Section 4' is something of a banger), just listen to it all the way through to get the most from it. If you enjoyed Pantha du Prince's glorious collaboration with The Bell Laboratory, 'Elements of Light', you'll lap this up. **TRISTAN PARKER**



Nonkeen

All good?

LEITER

Falls a little flat

Nonkeen is the ongoing project of three childhood friends — Frederic Gmeiner, Sebastian Singwald and contemporary-classical heavyweight, Nils Frahm. Starting as a school band, the group has spent much of its life on hiatus, drifting in and out of existence over the years, before releasing two albums in 2016, 'The Gamble' and its (arguably better) follow-up offering 'Oddments of the Gamble'. If you were hoping for a follow-up to those two releases, you will likely be disappointed.

Gone are the hypnotic, stoner-friendly noodlings, oddball electronics, eruptive percussion and whimsical pseudo-jazz trills. On 'All good?' the prevailing vibe is, well, Nils Frahm. Gmeiner and Singwald have helped add extra weight to the compositions, and there's a nice hit of resonant percussion, beefy bass riffs and meandering synth melodies. But for the most part, the energy flatlines and the music is largely forgettable. **OLIVIA CHEVES**



Floorplan

The Master's Plan

Classic Music Company

Divine house music

Early house music always took influence from faith and worship and no act has continued that tradition up to the present day with the same authenticity of Floorplan. The father-daughter duo of Robert and Lyric Hood continually tap into divine sources when crafting big, bold, loopy tracks that are as emotionally powerful as they are physically moving.

'The Master's Plan' is their fourth long-player and another one packed with rapturous dancefloor sermons. Vamping piano stabs, thudding kicks and a gospel vocal sample are all they need to get a crowd of any size to believe in a higher purpose. From florid cuts like 'No Ones Ready' to steamy and exultant bangers like 'Don't You Doubt It' via the unbridled celebratory joy of 'We Stand In Need', this is another irresistible body of work. **KRISTAN J CARYL**



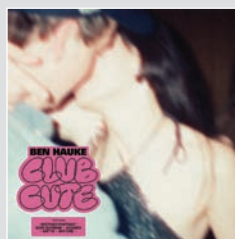
Jesse Bru

Sea to Sky

Oath

A little of a lot

Canadian producer Jesse Bru has always seemed happiest when veering between different sonic territories, but his latest release 'Sea To Sky' goes all-in on that front. Electro, garage, hip-hop and ambient all make appearances, but things always circle back to Bru's guiding light — melodic house — in some format. As with previous records, '90s-style sampling runs deep through 'Sea To Sky' ('Movin On' is a love letter to golden era hip-hop), giving the patchwork of sounds a nostalgic glow, but with enough contemporary club references and moods to keep things current. 'Go Somewhere' channels warm, funky, 2-step, while 'Mnajdra' is a sunny, deep house trip. A few tracks end up meandering a little too much, but are balanced by bigger, punchier numbers, the punchiest of which is album closer 'The Drip', launching into a frenetic — but soulful — jungle journey, providing a suitably eclectic finish. **TRISTAN PARKER**



Ben Hauke

Club Cute

Touching Bass

A playful and polished paean

After ten years cutting his teeth in the London underground, Ben Hauke has finally released his debut album 'Club Cute' — lucky for you, your name's down and you're coming in. Running the gamut of UK dance, 'Club Cute' is a "love letter to club culture", and the culmination of Hauke's seasoned production chops, resulting in a debut that's admirably self-assured in its vision.

There's an insatiable elasticity to 'MOOOOOD', an ode to UK funky, whilst 'HEYYYYY' pairs shuffling broken beat with an elegant saxophone that croons in the background. Hauke also makes sure to give the listener pause with smooth, sophisticated cuts like the gorgeous and garage 'MADE TO MEASURE' (featuring none other than Katy B), or the surprisingly contemplative jungle breaks on 'ANOTHER GHOST'. There's something for everybody here: chill out, booty bump, and bring a friend to Club Cute. **ALEX RIGOTTI**



Pic: BEN CANNON



The Streets

fabric presents The Streets

fabric

Raving under the Skinfluence

PEOPLE DON'T OFTEN TALK ABOUT MIKE SKINNER THE DJ,

even though just about anyone who's been to a British festival or nightclub in the last ten years has seen him behind the decks at least once. For most of the 2010s he was there, on many lineups, clad in a customary all-black outfit that he must have bought at Burton just before it went bust. His selections were always broad — garage, rap, house, maybe some bassline — but invariably he'd keep it UK, punctuating the music by picking up a mic and saying funny things like "Has anyone got any charlie?". Occasionally he'd play something like, but not necessarily, 'Fit But You Know It'.

"Being a DJ is just being cold and tired, most of the time," said Skinner on BBC Breakfast last year, promoting his first feature film, *The Darker the Shadow The Brighter the Light*, a quasi-autobiographical story about the mundanities of life as a touring disc jockey. In the same interview the 45-year-old noted that in most of the clubs he plays he's usually twice the age of the clientele.

It's fair to say he's fit a lot into those four and a half decades. Having entered public consciousness in his early twenties

as The Streets, a one-man band, bedroom garage producer and rapper, he spent the 2000s charming NME critics and scooping pop awards. Lazy commentators labelled him a "geezer rapper" (or worse — a chav!), but it was only in recent years that he earned a sort of retrospective embrace from the UK rap scene. This fabric mix might be his crowning achievement as a DJ, arriving on the club's 25th birthday (which makes fabric more than half Skinner's age, ie. ancient).

"I've spent many nights wasted but not wasted any nights in fabric over the years," reads a typically elegiac Skinner quote in this CD's press materials. His mix is full of club gems, the likes of which you could only really tie together if you'd had your ear pressed to the UK underground's bass transducers long into middle age. He opens with the new and exclusive Streets single 'No Better Than Chance', a half-time garage track complete with a Skinnerian narrative about making a Matrix-style choice between a pinger and a placebo. It's quietly profound in that streetwise way of his, even if he recites each bar in the slightly drab, staccato style he's become

accustomed to in his later years, delivering lines like Joe Biden reading from an autocue. From then onwards the mixing is quick, as Skinner races through the wealth of music in his library, frequently landing on gold, like Hamdi and Cesco's electric dubstep tune 'Swing King'. Mixes this big might be just what the imminent dubstep revival needs, and it's years since the wub has sounded as good as on Coki and Leotrix's rumbling 'DIY', especially with Flowdan's subwoofer voice on the beat. Skinner then reminds us that he's not actually from London with a decidedly un-trendy (but good) bit of bassline in the form of Tentendo and mustbejohn's 'Motive', before moving into a sort of deep garage phase with tracks like Interplanetary Criminal's remix of Dusky 'Eros'. There's more slightly disappointing new Streets music in the middle, but Skinner earns his money with a rollicking back end. Obscurities like bullet tooth's remix of Icarus' 'Change', nineteen97's 'Outdablu' and Medicine Place's utterly wild remix of ENiGMA Dubz and Snowy's 'Lost It' are what raving in the UK is all about. Long live Skinner the DJ. **SAM DAVIES**



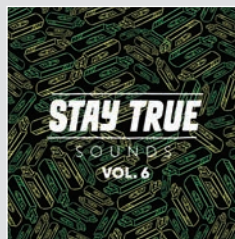
V/A

Flex005

Early Reflex

Flamboyantly, discombobulated left-field

Turin label Early Reflex has been a cosmopolitan incubator for leftfield techno and avant-garde club music since 2020. On 'Flex005' — 2024's edition of the imprint's annual showcase — a globe-trotting fleet transmutes techno, jungle, bass, dubstep, breakbeat and ambient frequencies in a way that beckons intrepid ravers worldwide. Head honcho Alec Pace riles with gallivanting fervour, ricocheting whirrs on jungle-inflected opener 'Fingernail', before Sha Ru's trademark distorted vocals, grungy synths and lurching basslines overtake on 'Pressure'. Emerging international artists like New York's No Sir, Dublin's Small Crab and Berlin-based Seta Loto offer sleek, mercurial productions that hold their own next to more familiar names, like Cairene trailblazer Zuli and Detroit UKG lover Young Muscle. Tenacious right up until the last seconds of Ninja Exotic Machine's closer, this compilation meets listeners at the bleeding edge of contemporary club music. **AKILI VIVECA LEE**



V/A

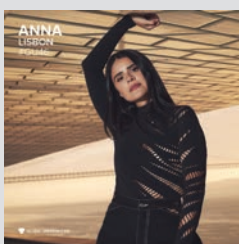
Stay True Sounds Vol. 6

Stay True Sounds

SA deep house benchmark

Run by Kid Fonque, Stay True Sounds is a champion of the deeper ends of the South African underground. 'Stay True Sounds Vol. 6', the latest edition of their yearly compilation series, captures everything the label does well. With fan favourites (e.g. China Charameleon, Sio, Nastic Groove) handling the tunes, the record feels like a homecoming: lush melodies, swung percussion, and the occasional 3-step kick pattern percolate across the record.

Tiyani's 'Show Me Your Move' starts with fizzled synths before bubbling into a groove that has hints of broken beat to it. The always reliable beatsbyhand goes for peak time with his amapiano contribution, while Tea White offers ambient electronica that wouldn't sound out of place at a Low End Theory party. 'Stay True Sounds Vol. 6' is another benchmark compilation from a vital node of South Africa's house scene. **HENRY IVRY**



ANNA

GU46: Lisbon

Global Underground

Dynamic and moving mix

Brazilian DJ/producer ANNA pays homage to her adopted home for the latest Global Underground compilation series instalment. 'GU46: Lisbon' is an emotional tribute to the city's vibrant and welcoming character. We're eased into side one with the percussive trills of Rival Consoles' 'Recovery'. ANNA traces dreamy house, future garage, ambient techno and more, weaving together some of electronic music's sharpest minds (Jacques Greene, TSHA, Bicep, Daniel Avery). Side two is better suited to nighttime peaks. Melodic techno, progressive house and trance make for a meatier affair, dotted with fresh ANNA contributions (see her collaboration with Rebūke, 'Ignite'). Tracks written for 'GU46: Lisbon' such as Tao Andra's 'Dream On' precede the Wehbba exclusive 'Symmetry'. The track nicely bookends the mix with an ambient outro that still burrs with energy, much like the restlessness of the Portuguese city itself. **CHARLOTTE KROL**



Anja Schneider

Reworks and Remixes

SOUS

Heavyweight remixes

For over two decades, Anja Schneider has been putting out some of the most reliable, stripped back techno and house out there. She got her start spinning the sort of tech-house you'd want to hear outside with something carbonated in your hand, but over the past few years she's been leaning towards harder-hitting techno. 'Reworks & Remixes' is a jam-packed LP that collects the best of Schneider's career with remixes from a who's who of clubland.

What's nice about the record is how different producers remix the same songs. Paramida and E-Talking's version of 'Rancho Relaxo' builds to a progressive climax while Radio Slave's is a dramatic slice of disco house. Schneider polishes up the minimal groove of 2008's 'Belize', which contrasts with Leafor Leagov's reimagining of the track as a jazzier and dubbier comedown classic. A welcome victory lap for a producer two decades deep. **HENRY IVRY**