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# Musical Space Invaders (Reviews)

By Hari Kunzru

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:Music for Films:

The word 'soundscape' has been a cliché ever since a generation of student hippies lay between the speakers and smoked bongos listening to 'Dark Side of the Moon'. But in 1997 many (most?) music makers and listeners seem to be experiencing not just a sense of spatiality, but of scope, of travel and exoticism. Music as armchair tourism, associative, allusive, hinting at narratives. Music as cinema. Bricolage by Amon Tobin (Ntone ZenCD 29) is an excellent example. It sounds amazing, like *Lift to the Scaffold*, *The Bluebird of Happiness*, *The Aristocats*, *Kwaidan*, *La Jetée* and some of those sixties comedy thrillers where everyone drives around the alps in sportscars. But none of this is because of straight steals or samples. It just sounds like watching a film. Synaesthesia.

:International Language of Electronics

New York-Tokyo-Detroit-London:

Contemporary parlour game: trying to detect national or geographical tendencies in electronic music, which cares so little for place, language or local musical idioms. Byzar's *Gaiatronick vs The Cheap Robots* (Asphodel 0973) could only be from New York. Music for Films period Eno synth washes backed with compressed, rather clinical breakbeats. Typical of what has become called 'illbient', and sometimes spookily atmospheric, like swimming in a cave underwater. Superficially similar to things that come from London, but with a self-conscious 'avant-garde' quality that seems to stem from the New York tradition of experimental music (John Zorn blowing duck whistles into bowls of water at loft performances).

The latest release from Electro pioneers Clear, *The Errornormous World*, by Reflection (Clear CLR432CD), is noticeably Japanese. Its mixture of crunchy synthetic sounds with elements of live jazz, hip-hop and bossa nova could only have come out of the Tokyo scene, where the kids of fifties Jap jazz rebels mix with the new breed of electronica otaku, and no one seems to make generic distinctions between an anime soundtrack and an Alice Coltrane record. The Detroit sound, minimalist, hard, purely electronic, is also instantly recognisable. *The Other Day* (React CD105) a compilation of Jeff Mills's releases on Axis record is beautiful, abstract, and proof that electronics can carry a strong emotional charge. So if not a sense of place, then electronica can at least carry traces of a cultural and musical history.

But what does London sound like? This seems a more difficult question, almost certainly because I live here. Question of resolution. Too close in. One answer might be that it sounds like *Shake The Bones*, a compilation from Hydrogen Dukebox records (Duke 033cd). Most current London tendencies are represented - drum and bass, techno, lager-drinking chemical beats, funk, disco house. All of it has been blended together into some excellent groovy music which doesn't take itself too seriously, while being complex and involving enough for all but the most ardent goatee-stroker.

:More Sounds:

em:t 1197 (Emit)

A compilation from Nottingham ambient extremists Emit. Environmental sounds. Awareness of space. Absolutely no dolphin noises.

Kaffe Matthews CD Ann (Annette Works CD001)

Violin heavily processed through sampling and fx. 'Live' electronica, "made in a particular place at a particular time".

Riviera House Trax (Irma TKTK)

Hard day as a fin de siecle urban cyberintellectual? Why not dance round your monitor to some undemanding Italian house music? Fun! Remember that?

Mause: Teen Riot Gunther Strackture (Morbid CD02)

There is a kind of shared house in the Middle-European psyche occupied by Klaus Wunderlich, Kraftwerk and the Baader Meinhof Gang, where kitsch collides with experimental ultraviolence to make something far stranger than Anglo Saxons can possibly imagine. Think of a New Wave band, a cocktail pianist and a man with a chainsaw.

Sluts'n'Strings and 909: Carrera (Cheap CD3)

Viennese producers Patrick Pulsinger and Ernam Tunakan reference everything from bossa nova to minimalist techno. Their latest big fan is David Bowie, but don't let that put you off, because this music is witty, subtle and very funky.

Kid Loops: TimeQuake (Filter Filt022CD)

Highly-crafted complex breakbeat. As drum and bass becomes increasingly formulaic, this type of compressed clean electronic sound has lost a lot of the fans it made the year before last, which is a shame, as this is great. Everything an LTJ Bukem record isn't.

Hari Kunzru <hari AT metamute.com> writes fiction, journalism and essays about technoculture.