

*fuck!//The rudder is stuck, my throttle is broken//I'm not accustomed to the atmosphere!//There's giant bacteria".*

What follows this – the opening few moments of “Spasm In The Chasm” – is a tale that blurs high strangeness with strange highness and equally fucks with just who is reporting to whom – are we hearing earthling or alien here? But this being the product of a collaboration between Kool Keith and Nashville powerviolence duo Thetan (aka Chad L'Plattenier and Dan Emery), the tracks are tightly sprung and heavy, with equal parts off-kilter oddness and raw smut, like if *Fortean Times* had a sex advice column. Officer Lola – aka Tennessee's Gangsta Boo – leaves her superior officers unsure of her location, but the listeners quite sure that even if it is an encounter with extraterrestrials, it's pretty damned dirty.

“Hallucinations” sets the tone, Kool Keith's delivery tight but tripped out, lingering on each consonant long enough to ramp up the weirdness with a reptilian hiss. Maybe the album's title is a comparison between spaceship materials and the strange properties of that fabric, or perhaps it's because the hallucination is taking the wearer of a Gore-Tex jacket on some cosmic trip? The ambiguity continues through “Let's Take A Trip” and “Complicated Trip”, which play on the double meaning of the word and offer the album's heaviest moments.

The intersong skits do their job and don't outstay their welcome, pushing things along at a rapid clip. Alongside Gangsta Boo, the record features appearances from Blag Dahlia of Dwarves and Gwar's Casey Orr, who plays a senior officer trying to locate Officer Lola (“*Dispatch, this is Sheriff Tubb Tucker! Just where is Officer Lola?*”). Appearing together on one album for the first time, the presence of Kool Keith's alter egos Dr Octagon, Dr Doom and Black Elvis ensure that the narrative is X-rated and gritty, but it's the involvement of Thetan that slathers muck on every surface. The bass guitar and drums on “In Pursuit Of Vagina Lucy” and “Bad Dreams”, for example, provide the subtlest layer of sludge and a weighty base for Kool Keith's delivery. Spenser Tomson

### C Lavender

#### *Myth Of Equilibrium*

Editions Mego DL/LP

In addition to musical works, New York based C Lavender performs dedicated treatments for individuals and small groups involving gongs, prerecorded sounds, reiki and the like. She also organises sound baths, small scale ritualistic concerts designed for meditation and relaxation.

Lavender was an associate of the late Pauline Oliveros and her work is an impressive extension of the Deep Listening tradition. *Myth Of Equilibrium* was recorded in a geodesic dome in the Western Catskill Mountains of Upstate

New York. Oliveros's classic *Deep Listening* album with Stuart Dempster and Panaiotis was famously recorded inside a 200 foot diameter cistern in Washington State.

But where her mentor's album comprised longform, immersive tracks, Lavender here opts for a suite of shorter vignettes. It's a deft choice, allowing the pieces their own personality as opposed to using the heavily reverberant space to craft endless oceans of sound. It also eschews the documentary feel of a straight recording through adroit editing and layering of timbres highlighting the interaction between electronics and the environment of the dome. The album suggests headphone listening, a wise recommendation given its depth of field and suave stereo manoeuvring.

On “Remedy Potion Extraction”, dense swarms of buzzing electronics kick up a series of almost sprightly sparkles, then the track opens onto a serene plane before sweeping to a dramatic resolution. “Engulf The Mystery” finds Lavender sounding gongs and singing bowls awash in flickering hiss with distant radio voices that feels like an arctic dispatch. The voices carry into “Embrace The Call”, which sets shaking percussion against a dense, see-sawing drone. The final track “Expel The Atrophy” uses the voices to craft a sparse epilogue, with a man issuing the haunting, frustrated statement, “*We don't give a shit about Mother Nature. It's not about Mother Nature right now*”.

The record skilfully avoids potential new age cliches and manages to act as an invitation to engage with it deeply, no matter one's spiritual ethos. The lesson is a useful one and it can't be repeated enough: shut up, slow down and listen.

Matt Krefting

### Klara Lewis

#### *Ingrid*

Editions Mego DL/LP

Klara Lewis's third solo release for Editions Mego offers one distinct self-contained idea, a 20 minute meditation based on a single cello loop as it's slowly torn apart by distortion. On her previous albums for the label the Swedish electronic artist turned found sounds and electronic textures into clapped out rhythms and collapsing edifices. Numbered in Swedish – *Ett, Too* – and housed in black sleeves, those works felt introspective and gloomy, like nuclear shadows made by Andy Stott's H-bomb. *Ingrid* seems immediately more personal and emotional than those records – it has a title for a start.

The movement begins with a cello loop that has already undergone some deconstruction, its buttery strings fused together like chocolate left out in the sun. Lewis applies filters and effects slowly and carefully, so that it's almost impossible to tell how one six second loop is different from the last. Over time, barely there harmonics creep in, louder

and louder, to unbalance the mood. By the final third, the wall of sound seems to shimmer and roar, somewhere between a heat-baked psychedelic mirage and a blood-curdling black metal liturgy.

The disintegrating melancholia of William Basinski is the most obvious touchstone, but there's a resemblance to the sublime dirges of Sarah Davachi, another young but accomplished sound artist who often works with acoustic sources like strings, piano and organ. Less obviously, Sunn O))) devotees will feel right at home with *Ingrid's* gritty textures and sludgy, ceremonial pace. The difference, perhaps, is that any of those artists would think of a 20 minute track as merely the A side – but Lewis's decision to let *Ingrid* stand alone reflects the significance of this small but perfectly formed release, as an intriguing diversion from her work so far.

Chal Ravens

### Mako Sica/Hamid Drake

#### *Balancing Tear*

Astral Spirits DL/LP

### Linda Cameron/Tom Carter/Ingebrigt Håker Flaten

#### *Tau Ceti*

Astral Spirits DL/MC

*Balancing Tear* is Chicago avant rock group Mako Sica's second outing with master drummer Hamid Drake following 2018's double LP *Ronda*. Drake is the perfect foil for the trio, giving direction and shape to their exploratory jams. Rolling waves of cymbal usher in the hazy jazz fusion of “Trapeze” with Przemyslaw Kryszewski's reverb streaked trumpet gliding across Chaetan Newell's hazy electric piano chords. There's a silvery fleck of danger to Drake's trumpet, which Drake picks up on and amplifies through his tension-building tom strokes. With characteristic subtlety, Drake creates a stately momentum while keeping the groove wide open. There are no ecstatic climaxes here, just a fine balance of tension and drift.

There's a strong whiff of Ennio Morricone to Mako Sica's jams, as if they're soundtracking a psychedelic Western. “The Unknown” opens with a flourish of classical guitar, over which Brent Fuscaldo sings like a tripped out Italian crooner. A minimalist piano figure gestures towards The Necks before Drake steps forward with a prowling tango. Switching between piano and upright bass, Newell doubles Fuscaldo's electric bass riff and adds sinister bowed accents. Trumpet, harmonica and electric guitar shimmer in and out of focus, with the riff taking on the hypnotic intensity of a Japanese psych jam on its final rounds.

Desert atmospherics loom large on *Tau Ceti*, which finds Tom Carter, Linda Cameron and Ingebrigt Håker Flaten contemplating the cosmos from Rob Halverson's Austin, Texas studio. The tape is split into acoustic and electric sides, the understated “Chronosphere”

and “SETI” setting us up for the acid spitting fuzz of “Daath (The Abyss)”. On the former, Håker Flaten's tremulous bass steers the trio through the desert nightscape, while Carter feels out the space with behind the bridge jangles and a shiver of slide. Cameron follows, dragging metal objects across her drum skins and a ridged stick against the frame. For several minutes, the piece maintains its amorphous form, with Cameron finally sketching out the faintest of snare patterns. There's a touch of reflective Americana to Håker Flaten's basslines on “We Are Not Alone”, with Carter finally stepping on the fuzz in its simmering second half. A homage to Tokyo's PSF label, “Daath (The Abyss)” sees Carter's guitar go up in curling flames of fuzz and wah, building to a total whiteout over Cameron's steady canter. Stewart Smith

### Stephen Malkmus

#### *Traditional Techniques*

Matador CD/LP/DL

The video for “Shadowbanned”, the first single off *Traditional Techniques*, was apparently inspired by a news story about Iranian women musicians being photoshopped out of group pictures on album covers. Parts of Malkmus's own career have been similarly airbrushed. It's been 20 years since he was in Pavement, but it remains his default headline identity, even though recent work, notably the wildly different *Groove Denied* from last year, on which he played all the instruments, has pointed at diverse interests and ambitions.

The former Pavement man always seemed to recognise that the unrepeatable energy of their debut *Slanted And Enchanted*, still probably the best indie rock album ever, couldn't easily be replicated, but instead of going off in lots of other directions, he simply got down to making songs, unself-consciously and without elaborate market repositionings.

*Groove Denied* had apparently been on the stocks for years, its hard electronic stylings deemed, for a while at least, unmarketable under Malkmus's name. *Traditional Techniques* was conceived while its group orientated predecessor *Sparkle Hard* was being finished, as a kind of exercise in self-denial. Dispensing largely with a band, but for Matt Sweeney's guitar, it builds a set of folk rockish songs round his own 12-string, which means that every other intro sounds like something by The Byrds or Tim Buckley until Malkmus's nasal voice – not full-on adenoidal like Lou Reed, but sometimes close to it – comes in. It's the lyrics, enigmatic, suspicious or wry, that lift the music out of familiarity, even the somewhat obvious punchline of “Juliefuckingette”.

There are jangles of Sterling Morrison guitar from Sweeney on “Xian Man”, the rockiest thing on the disc, and the perfect Stephen Malkmus line of all on “The