

on "Other People"). But it is a sombre, barely lustful masculinity that growls and shrieks and howls and tells stories here.

The slow, padding guitars and bass, the delicate drums, drenched in strings conjure up an anguished picture, an oddly familiar sound that is nevertheless completely idiosyncratic. At times angular, at times swish, this is a deeply anachronistic record, where 90s post-rock meets 2017 in a plea for a backroom experimentalism that has ploughed on, even though the audience has been gentrified out of existence. As Robinson puts it on "Cold & Well-Lit Place": "And no one here is broke/No, no one here has anything to fear/And while they say that the best things in life are free/Everything around here comes with a fee".

Nina Power

Penguin Cafe

The Imperfect Sea

Erased Tapes CD/DL/LP

Legacies don't usually come in as singular a shape as that inherited by Arthur Jeffes. As the son of Penguin Cafe Orchestra founder Simon Jeffes, he initially reunited his father's ensemble in 2007 for concerts marking the tenth anniversary of Jeffes's death. Reluctant to assume the weight of the bandleader's mantle with the original musicians, he then assembled a new incarnation of the group (including classically trained musicians alongside members of Suede and Gorillaz), performing both Jeffes Sr's music and his own compositions; *The Imperfect Sea* is the third such Penguin Cafe album.

Although there were no particularly radical ingredients in the bouncy minimalist quavers, global folk influences and genteel Heath Robinson surrealism that made up Penguin Cafe Orchestra's sound, over their 25 year existence it became an instantly recognisable signature. Jeffes charts a careful course in his stated aim to continue exploring the musical world his father delineated without attempting a direct copy. Indeed he often seems over-cautious, tiptoeing around the dustsheet-shrouded outline of a favourite such as 1987's *Perpetuum Mobile* in album opener *Ricercar*, with its momentum/stasis pairing of circular violin motif, strummed ukulele and loping piano/bass set against a sweet but entirely unsurprising sustained string melody. *Cantorum* and *Protection* also rely too heavily on sweeping violins drawing arcs over busy minimalist motifs.

Yet when Jeffes reins in a tendency to over-orchestrate, he shares his father's talent for painting delightful scenes with limited palettes, as shown by the string-drone fourths and muffled, suspended piano of *Control 1 (Interlude)* and the gentle melodica and Fender Rhodes duet amid a light rainfall of woodblock strikes on *Half Certainty*. A pleasingly exposure acoustic cover of Kraftwerk's "Franz Schubert" retains the original's dreamy serenity, while Penguin Cafe Orchestra's own *Now Nothing* receives a richly reverberant and emotive solo piano rereading that convinces as its own entity, rather than a tribute.

Abi Bliss

Ivo Perelman & Matthew Shipp

The Art Of Perelman-Shipp: Vols 1–7

Leo 7xCD

As befits a pair of artists who now record on an astronomical – or titanic – scale, the titles all come from the names of Titans, some of which are more familiar as planetary satellites. It's tempting to scan down the list and think of this as Perelman's and Shipp's personal version of *Interstellar Space*. The music is frequently exalted and searching, but where John Coltrane and Rashied Ali always seemed to be pushing at the integrations of harmony and rhythm, this extraordinary duo have a much more grounded and physical (as opposed to metaphysical) aesthetic. Besides, there are other voices involved: bassists William Parker and Michael Bisio appear on some of the discs, drummers Whit Dickey, Bobby Kapp and Andrew Cyrille on others.

It's worth remembering that the Titans were the offspring of an earth goddess and sky god, and there is something of that opposition in all the music. It's most noticeable on the first volume, where the groundedness of Shipp's piano provides the centripetal energy that holds the saxophone player in a tight orbit round specific key centres and melodic ideas. Sometimes it works the other way round. As a Brazilian, Perelman has always dug into elements of his native traditions. Here, on *Tarvos (Volume 2)* and *Rhea (Volume 5)* in particular, there are ideas that sound remarkably like Heitor Villa-Lobos's *Chôros*, but as the great man himself said, "I don't use folklore, I am the folklore" – it's clear that Perelman has shaped these themes himself and spontaneously, using a generative grammar of harmonic and rhythmic relations and displacements to create a rich improvising language that sits perfectly alongside Shipp's highly personal repositioning of jazz piano language.

If at moments on *Hyperion (Volume 4)* and *Rhea* again, he alludes to Ellington, or to Monk at his most introspective, and if at others the attack refers to stride or even ragtime techniques, it is not that Shipp is trying to create a synoptic language of jazz piano, and more that he has rolled all this information into a ball that he can then propel round the heavens.

With each volume available as a standalone release, this seven CD sequence takes Perelman's Leo discography to a remarkable 50 discs. If that sounds like devotion shading into redundancy, or a quixotic notion of what a shrinking physical disc market might be able to sustain, consider what John Coltrane and Bob Thiele might have been doing on impulse! If Coltrane had lived on into the CD era, and that's by no means improbable. Given how we lap up recovered sessions of unreleased material, there's no apology to be made for an immersive exposure to this contemporary master. Titans both, Shipp and Perelman are making some of the most exciting jazz based music around today.

There's no thematic or programmatic connection between these records – the titles came later – but to listen to them in sequence is to experience two minds

intensely at work and at play across a grand field of sound.

Brian Morton

The Residents

The Ghost Of Hope

Cherry Red CD/DL/LP

What good timing for The Residents to return with this concept album inspired by US newspaper cuttings about late 19th and early 20th century railroad crashes, and stories that are typically delirious and bizarre. How about the howling harmonium dirge "Killed At A Crossing", about a couple killed by a self-powered rail car? Or "Train Vs Elephant", where a vengeful elephant charges a train, with chillout tribal techno inflections and gratuitous animal sound effects?

The titular *Ghost* makes its appearance in "The Crash At Crush" with its tankard-swinging, string-swooping seasick shanty remembrance of the hapless promoter who organised a sort of railroad demolition derby that ended up in a fireball, shrapnel killing unlucky panicking spectators. Crowd noises and explosions are all recalled here, cinematically layered beneath a vocal like a radio sportscaster's play-by-play, before "The Ghost Of Hope said no". Only in America.

The Residents, with Eric Drew Feldman, tell these shaggy dog tales that are too weird not to be true, and stud them with effects ranging from squealing brakes to crackling fires, chirping crickets set against arpeggiated synths; and so many strings, cranking the pathos to 11. The album never quite wallows in gross out carnage or tragedy or blame (though these are here, for sure), but spins these yarns, perverse detail at a time, with the laconic humour of a short story by Richard Brautigan or Thomas Pynchon, stopping just short of mockery. "Horrors Of The Night" reels off a catalogue of crash injuries in a voice sung – spoken in a matter of fact twang, like a shrug, a campfire tale. "Life is a lonely train", they sing, "wrecked by God".

Recent political events being what they are, it's hard not to imagine this album as topical commentary. So much of American history can be described as a circus or a trainwreck, equal parts catastrophic and opportunistic, comic and grotesque; but if there's any consolation here, it's that it was ever thus. And as this creaking train judders along, pieces falling off along the way, watching these guys offering their droll sonic commentary from the side of the tracks can keep you sane.

Emily Bick

Alex Rex

Vermillion

Tin Angel CD/DL/LP

There's no shortage of ideas in *Vermillion*, the debut solo album from Alex Neilson. The English-raised adopted Glaswegian has been the go-to drummer and percussionist for a swathe of contemporary alternative noteworthies over the past dozen or more years, most recently Trembling Bells, but also including Richard Youngs, Jandek, David Keenan, Will Oldham and Alasdair Roberts. Neilson's broad musical

influences – from The Watsons to, apparently, mystic 12th century composer and writer Hildegard von Bingen – have been captured in many an interview. So maybe it shouldn't be a surprise that a similarly wide array of influences are melded here, albeit in a brew that's as surprising for its festival-friendly musical hooks as it is for its wondrously strange subversion of folk music expectations.

Some of those offbeat moments are musical. Neilson, gravel-voiced like fellow singing drummer Levon Helm, nasal-voiced intoning like Dylan and country harmonising like a Bakerville Boy, is an unlikely charm, but the rustic harmonies, eerie dissonance, folk and baroque chord changes and perky swirling 1960s sounds that alternate throughout are a cloud-dwelling carousel compared to the lyrics. The lyrics were apparently inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, and in "Song For Dora" he does indeed transform into a bird, but the touchstones are more like medieval epics, the macabre and old-time religion, or simply, Dante's Hell and voodoo New Orleans brought to Alexander Trocchi's Glasgow.

Images of eeriness leap out, the "dead bird in the stomach of another dead bird" of the waltzing "Please Make Me God (But Not Yet)", the repeated refrain of "and it's horror heaped on horror" in the cavernous spooky polyphony of "The Screaming Cathedral", the "pounding on my grave" in insistent midnight party rocker "Song For Dora", or the "rosethorn in my throat" in "Lucy", a country song of love and betrayal about London. But Neilson's as likely to shift gear into provocative sarcasm – "I once knew a girl in Glasgow, who was a festering sore" he sings wryly on "Adam Had No Navel" – or even ludicrous sauciness. In the song "The Life Of A Wave", when the sparse midtempo roots rock soars into frenzied lyrical declaiming, the line "And I'm thinking of you now with your delicious tits that dashed me against the rocks of Oxford" biales like a gleeful contender for *Literary Review's* Bad Sex award. Who knows where Neilson's solo transformation is going, but the impish rascal is worth keeping a eye on.

Katrina Dixon

Karriem Riggins

Headnod Suite

Stones Throw CD/DL/2xLP

Drummer and producer Karriem Riggins was certainly everywhere in 2016, with the production of Common's *Black America Again* capping a year that saw him put in work with Kanye West, Kaytranada and The Roots, among others. But Detroit born Riggins is no newcomer; as a veteran rap producer and in-demand jazz drummer, with a catalogue that stretches back some two decades, he has produced far more music for far more people than you'd think.

The son of jazz keyboardist Emmanuel Riggins, Karriem cut his teeth as part of Jay Dee's inner circle in the late 1990s, flexing production chops on Common's *One Day It'll All Make Sense* and the Dilla-steered *Like Water For Chocolate* albums, and playing drums on Dilla's 2001 *Welcome 2 Detroit*; he would later executive produce