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Dbkaos / Art of Sacrifice

This is the latest release on Ian Boddy's DiN label. 'Stars Look Down' begins with lush pads and the odd whooshing cosmic effect. In the fourth minute a pleasant rhythmic loop adds structure taking us forward. More loops are gradually introduced as things becoming quite syncopated, especially in the seventh minute when a very deep bass drum sound (not dance) comes in. I could feel it deep in my chest even at low volume. The range of frequencies here are vast, stimulating the senses throughout. In the ninth minute the rhythms depart and we are left with an intriguing dark soup of sounds through which the main rhythmic loop returns, this time accompanied by an even deeper bass rhythm than before. High frequency almost splashing beats fizz over the top. It really is a fantastic opener. We float into 'Mirror 2 Level 4' on a sea of uncluttered little bleeps, all rather strange and mysterious. In the fourth minute a more substantial rhythm starts up along with spooky vocal effects. The track is stripped down in the last minute finishing with an echo to silence. More cool beats get 'After the Migration' underway, nothing too in ye face though. A staccato lead line, almost a rhythmic loop itself, positively bounces along. It's all quite melodic but without any pads and hardly any colouring at all, just one great mass of pulsations. In the fifth minute things get even stranger, the bass beats becoming still deeper, almost growling, before the main melodic loop re-enters, this time with a slightly different rhythmic backing. With four minutes to go an additional lead line is brought in providing the most melodic moment of the album so far and gives proceedings a pleasant lift at just the right time. 'Edelyon Alpha' returns us once more to a collage of eerie sounds. Out of this an echoing melodic loop emerges, initially at quite a low volume though gradually getting louder. Pads swell underneath and whooshing sounds fly over the top. It's rather relaxing and pleasant but still being constructed mainly of looped notes and pulsations. The most effective feature is the sparing use of some bass stabs that add a little excitement to proceedings. Some more very effective shuffling beats are introduced near the end of the seventh minute and the track becomes urgent and stimulating. More little melodic loops come in enhancing an already excellent track still further. This is my favourite number on the CD. 'Hydrosphere' is a very atmospheric track and suitably watery, like listening to sounds whilst swimming in the depths. There are some samples used that I swear are from Klaus Schulze's 'Audentity' album though heavily treated (I am sure someone will tell me if I'm wrong). We finish with the title track following straight on from the last one with the sound of birds bridging both pieces. Dark swirling pads take over like a storm brewing. The noise of the wind comes in powerful gusts. More melodic loops take over but these soon disappear into a collage of sounds out of which a low slow bass rhythm gradually rises. The overall effect is quite menacing becoming more intense all the time, even more so when a faster insistent beat is introduced in the sixth minute, then yet more rhythm, developing into quite a frenzy. This is certainly music of today using a full array of digital sounds very well produced, at times laid back and at others rather intense. If pushed I would say it is ambient trance but at some moments it does much more than would be expected of that category. Recommended, especially if you are already a fan of the DiN label and cutting edge electronica. (DL)

Otarion / Evolution

Otarion's first album 'Es Werde Licht' was very popular amongst SMD customers. The evocative soundscapes were particularly impressive but the rhythms and melodies were also well done. In my opinion though 'Evolution', the second album, moves on from the first to scale new heights, particularly in the rhythm and melody departments. When the final version was submitted to me I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I played it in constant rotation for days, nothing else got a look in and with the quality of releases coming out at that time this was a major accomplishment. Hearing it again to do this review is frustrating. I would much rather listen than write but I hope some of the enthusiasm I have for it comes over because I think what we have here is a classic. Church bells chime over thick atmospheric synth pads. 'Twilight' sets an uneasy faintly haunting scene for the beginning of the album. We then drift into 'Innovation' and POW! A brilliantly infectious rhythm and slashing laser lead line hit home. A sequence starts up and a contrasting lighter melody plays over the top. Yet another lead drives along in the middle. All the melodies are so damned catchy that they will get you playing air keyboard like a lunatic and turning the volume up to neighbor hating proportions. What a belter! We flow into the next part 'Second Step', creating images of being on the highest part of the Earth looking around for hundreds of miles. Then we get a most delicate but stunningly beautiful melody. Swirls of sound take you even higher on the thermals then an exciting sequence starts and drives us onwards. Unbelievably 'Paradise Island' continues to deliver yet more fantastic melodies, loads of them in fact, all woven together over the most delicate sonic backdrop in the way only a true craftsman knows how. I wish it could have gone on longer but we move into the next section 'Fusions' on the back of a jetstream and screaming lead. Where on earth do I go from here? I've run out of superlatives already and we are less than half way through the album. Things quieten down and become very relaxing giving me time to collect my thoughts. A storm starts to brew and out of it flows a gorgeous and delicate high register sequence. Another more urgent one is layered over the top and things reach a sudden climax with a rhythmic flourish then calm down again though the sequences are just as infectious as before. The tension returns and the lead from the beginning of the track comes back but even meaner than before. The rhythm reappears and I just wanted to throw my head back with eyes closed and lose myself in the music. Calm again descends. 'Place of Mystery' is suitably mysterious drifting on a sea of serenity, calming us nicely before 'Transformation'. Another brace of sequences strike up, one bass and the other melodic. It is as if the foot has been put down on the accelerator again as we go hurtling down the road. A lead line and foot tapping rhythm are introduced and we shift into warp drive getting faster all the time then suddenly slow down but this is only a temporary pause. A fantastic lead blasts over the top with an even more devastating one right on its heels slashing through anything that gets in its path, then crash- sudden halt. The waves break on the shore and we move into the title track. Tranquil pads sooth our fevered brow but somewhere in the background the next assault is brewing. A stuttering sequence starts up, followed by another. We then return to a technique that is now becoming common, a rhythmic flourish builds the tension which breaks in explosive style from which the melodies return with fresh vigour to build the tension once again. Rather ironic considering the title of this piece but melodically this is like John Dyson at his very best but more intense. 'Birth of Atmosphere' has a stormy beginning. At three minutes a sequence rumbles forward adding to the feeling still further. The tension builds but there is no release until the final number 'Open End' which is a ball breaking rhythmic tour de force which brings the CD to suitably triumphant conclusion. Now go get yourself a lager and press play again. In the last mag Graham rightly raved about Arcane's 'Future Wreck' being one of the best retro albums ever but with Otarion's 'Evolution' I think we have the best rhythmic / melodic album I have ever heard. Think this review is a little OTT? Well maybe, but just listen to the album and tell me what you think. The first half of 2000 is turning out to be one of my favourite times for EM releases ever. (DL)

Klangwelt / The Age of Numbers

The first CD by Klangwelt 'Weltweit' was a big seller for SMD and this follow up shows that it wasn't just beginners luck. Gerald Arend, the man behind Klangwelt is a class act. The ticking of a clock gets 'Zero' underway. Some half heard vocal samples are added. It isn't long though before a bouncy sequence

starts up along with a beautiful staccato melody. It's a cracking opener which gets even better as more sequences come into play. It reminded me very much of early Jarre. It is tuneful in every department but also very slick, professional and above all accessible. There is even a lovely little moody bit at the end. Stunning. 'Enigma' has a slow rather abstract start. A delicate pulse then provides a little structure through which some nice rather melancholy organ playing emerges. The pulse speeds up a little and more wonderful melodies are introduced but still with that hint of sadness. The mood then lightens slightly with the introduction of a first rate tuneful sequence. This is a wonderfully composed track developing right to the end. Another winner. 'Self Similar' is syncopated right from the off, good vocal samples nestling amongst all the pulsations. Again the Jarre influence is obvious. Throughout we are in sequencer / rhythm driven heaven but never without skilful attention to melody. 'Meander' has a rather atmospheric beginning, even slightly eerie. It isn't long though before a lovely bouncy sequence takes its first tentative steps. This is a thoughtful, delicate piece though, no rhythmic blast, giving us opportunity to relax and catch breath. 'Wheel of Fortune' has more samples at the beginning then a lovely virtual acoustic guitar lead line which calms the soul as well as pleases the mind. A rhythm starts up, then another but it never becomes too forceful instead provides a framework that will get the head gently nodding whilst listening to yet more wonderful melodies. 'Topologique' gets underway with a rather jolly stop start little tuneful motif around which some subtle percussion is added. A flute lead is introduced after the half way mark making things even more pleasant and easy to get on with. Radio chatter acts as initial backdrop to 'Lucky Numbers'. A delicate sequence goes on its playful way but the little melodies that come to surround it are again simply beautiful. More rhythm is added in the third minute giving that little extra drive but somehow without denting the exquisite mood already created. A minute later there is a twist and we get spoken text through which the melodic sequences and drums surge through even more. Yet again Jarre is the obvious comparison. 'Long Distance' is seriously mellow with another plucked string melody and piano as well as very pleasant tinkling sequence. It wouldn't have been out of place on Chris Franke's 'Pacific Coast Highway'. 'Infinity + 1' carries on in similarly tranquil fashion, a slow rhythm providing just a little structure for calm pads. More melody is then introduced but it's still very laidback stuff. 'The Beauty of Numbers' is a track dominated by piano. It starts off ~~har~~ sparse but as things progresses the playing becomes more complex and washes of synth provide bright colouring. So this is an album containing both upbeat numbers, mainly in the first half and mellow tracks, especially as we get closer to the end. Klangwelt is skilful in both styles. (DL)

Ian Boddy & Marcus Reuter & Nigel Mullaney / Triptych

The album opens with 'Sienna Daze', the main theme being electronic rhythmic and stylistically this is reminiscent of elements of Ian's Jodrell Bank set, however it's clear that there is a desire to plot a tangential course to traditional EM avenues. It's primarily the synth voices which distinguish the approach. The sequences, were they to be adorned with traditional synth references, would - dare I say it - be classic 'Berlin School' but here the voices are restrained, clamped down so that they impart rhythm rather than melody. The result is more Node than Schulze, and on this album the fruits of that approach are really starting to become evident. I'm not familiar with the bulk of DiN's back catalogue but I'm told this is a much more accessible work, perhaps the easiest to pin reference points on so you can scale the tracks with a degree of safety rather than risking freefall. The latter portions of the piece are supplemented by guitar and synth riffs, no doubt thanks to the collaborators, indeed without the sleeve notes I'm unsure who is doing what on the album but it's clear that this is a true collaboration and their styles complement each other seamlessly. 'Mstertronic' opens with 5 minutes of atmospheric drones and effects, very well constructed, before an almost stuttering rhythm takes over, fretless bass is then added and a jazz style lead line emerges. I'm not a jazz fan, but there's something familiar ~~and~~ this and suddenly Vangelis's 'Albedo 0.39' comes to mind, 'Main Sequence' to be exact. The title track is split into 4 sections, the opening 10 minutes is moody and dark with long guitar layers, then at the 10 minute mark the sequences emerge and together with the guitar refrains create a pulsating section which is surprisingly "EM friendly"! More, primarily guitar based, effects and textures to finish - this is an excellent piece. Finally we have 'Ionosphere', and again this is an impressive outing ~~via~~ heavy beat, supplementary be sublime weaving synth layers and exemplary guitar detail. Basic message here is that this should appeal to all EM fans, it strikes a perfect balance between new and traditional references and anyone who may have found other DiN releases hard to fathom should have no difficulty whatsoever enjoying this to the full. (GG)

Kubusschnitt / The Singularity

We begin with a chaotic collage of sounds and effects out of which emerges an ominous drone and slow pulses. In complete contrast we then get a plucked string type lead line to which is added an absolutely fantastic melodic sequence - one of the best if not the best Kubusschnitt have come up with so far. Not to be outdone in the lead line department in enters a real cracker - again one of their very best. This is such a fantastic track - so full of excitement it just makes you feel like punching the air in pure pleasure. What's more it just gets better, faster and more intense as we progress into the second part with yet more fantastic lead lines. If you want sequencer mayhem with strong melodies you will have it by the avalanche full here. I really can't stress too much just how good this is. We float into the next section on the back of dark atmospherics but in no time at all another sequence emerges - again fast and furious. It is accompanied by a second and we enter Klaus Schulze territory. Nearer the end a subtle electric guitar lead line starts up adding colour to the pulsating brew underneath rather than dominating. Its all change as we move into part four which is basically a short dark cosmic atmospheric piece, a sonar blip being particularly effective. Initially part five takes us out to even deeper space with electronic effects and wooshes of sound making one think of mysterious other worldly phenomena. Out of all this come gorgeous melodic pads. It's as if we are entering a spellbindingly beautiful and yet awesome region of the cosmos. Just close your eyes and let the music take you where it will. For the second half of this part we are brought back to reality with a bump as two more sequences come to life and we now start to move at great speed again. Some lovely floating space guitar plays with the sequences and synth lead. This is both delicate and powerful music, sounds being combined expertly complimenting the sea of pulsations on which they float. The electric guitar does get a little more strident just before we enter the sixth part but not overly so. This section is really a gentle introduction to the even more cosmic part seven. The sound of solar flares fly over some deep pads. In the third minute a rhythm / sequencer combination slowly make their way through a cloud of stellar gasses becoming more strident all the time but never destroying the delicate atmos. Again its all rather Schulzian. To start off with Part eight is another cosmic extravaganza with some lovely floating guitar work. The pulse starts to quicken however as an absolutely brilliant sequence enters around the three minute mark. The guitar disappears and is replaced by synth leads. Things become very 'Sorcerer' ish around the eleven minute mark. The sequence mutates just enough to hold the interest, the atmospherics and use of space around it being simply masterful. The sequences are again fantastic on the final part. As they get into full swing some sympathetic guitar work soars into the ether. The sequences get beefier and beefier as the track progresses - synth leads now replacing the guitar and things work themselves up into quite a frenzy up until the end - but is it? Keep the CD running for a little while and you get atmospheric noises and all sorts of other effects then a really nice mid 70's floating melodic passage and that really is the end honest! Kubusschnitt go from strength to strength proving here that they are one of the very best retro bands around today. (DL)

The Glimmer Room / Tomorrows Tuesday

' Every day I die for Your Body' begins with mournful thick pads. A slow heavyish rhythm brings the track to life then two melodies start up weaving around each other. As the track progresses more melodies come and go. Many of the tracks use a similar formula though all have a unique character of their own. This is fantastic and amazingly infectious music. I will not cover every piece on the album, the original draft of this review did and took up over two pages! I loved every track. Nearly all the numbers will rhythmically get your whole body moving- its impossible to stay still. Rarely have I come across rhythms that are so irresistible.

The lead lines are just as impressive however. You could actually hum or sing along to them, taking the place of where many musicians would put lyrics and yet they somehow say more than lyrics could (except on one track- see later). The whole album is extremely commercial, probably the most commercial Electronic Music I have ever heard and certainly of all the albums on the Neu Harmony label the one which would have most appeal to the mainstream market. Andy C is the musician behind The Glimmer Room and he sent me a demo (with four tracks on I think) after hearing an Asana sound clip on the web site. Up until this release Asana represented the most commercial end of the Neu Harmony label. Unlike Asana however it doesn't come from a dance, chill out or ambient perspective.

Rhythmically it has more in common with music you might have heard during the eighties but being much more inventive and infinitely more powerful than anything you would have heard then. There are no vocals (except on one track), there is no need for them the melodies being so strong. The one exception to the no vocals statement is ' Sweet Smell of Cloves' . This is the only ' song' on the whole of the Neu Harmony label! Usually I avoid them like the plague but amazingly this track is more responsible than any other for Neu Harmony asking Andy for more tracks and ultimately signing The Glimmer Room. It is however only a short track so program it out if you want but what a waste if you do! Its truly inspired, one of the most heartfelt songs I have ever heard. The rest of the album is instrumental. I get complaints from people all the time that EM is in a retro lead rut (no rut as far as I am concerned) and that musicians should start following a new path. My answer is that nearly every ' new path' I hear attempted might be good but it just wouldn't have enough appeal even within Electronic Music circles to make it a viable proposition. Well as far as I am concerned this is the new path which I hope musicians will follow. It should have mass appeal to customers of Synth Music Direct and beyond.

It's not scared of being commercial sounding but at the same time avoids all the bland crap clichés of most pop music. It doesn't try and tag itself onto any other scene in order to gain exposure, it does its own thing. Above all it tries to be enjoyable and exciting - and succeeds. It's a breath of fresh air! (DL)

Under The Dome / Wot No Colin?

This is one hell of a powerful CD! It combines tracks from both the Hampshire Jam 2 and National Space Centre performances played completely live without any pre-recorded backing. There are two new numbers plus the sequencer dominated tracks from ' The Demon Haunted World' and ' Bellerophon' , most of the pieces running into each other without a break. Indeed it is a sequencer fest to end all sequencer fests!

Unfortunately Colin Anderson was not present on either of these recordings (thus the title) therefore the remaining band member Grant Middleton needed some assistance. Paul Nagle, Andy Bloyce (from Kubusschnitt) and Steve Jenkins were drafted in to help and because of the new line ups the tracks have quite a different ' feel' to the album versions. The sequences tend to be ' bigger' , the mood meaner and melodies more intense, sometimes quite markedly so. What you don't get on this CD is drift; it is power EM almost all the way through. An example of the added oomph can be heard straight away with the opener ' Launch' sporting a new and additional rhythm which drives it forward with even more energy than on the original (which was pretty awesome anyway). ' Return' is extended by about 75%. The sounds used on the main melody sound quite a bit different making things seem more joyous and triumphant than before and a completely new more moody ending is added.

FV-T loses the samples including the intro and end. We are straight into a bass sequence and lead melody but the biggest difference is in the guitar parts. The acoustic guitar (and piano for that matter) disappear entirely and electric guitar is given much more bight, almost growling from time to time. Completely devastating!' 57D' on the other hand is without the mournful guitar part of the original and again gets straight into the sequence. It sounds slightly stripped down but more in yer face. We get the first of the new tracks next, ' Dream Sequence' . An almost Morse code type warning sequence slowly increases in intensity. It gradually morphs until a delightful delicate lead chimes up. Indeed this is probably the tenderest moment on the entire album. The sequence carries on regardless providing the perfect backing for the melodies. The following number ' Watch the Skies' is another newy. From a loud dramatic beginning of massed pads a delicate slow melody rings out, each note echoing into the distance. Indeed this track contains some of the best melodies UTD have ever penned. Even so the sequences are just as impressive, a bright one bouncing over the top whilst a lovely slow bass one rumbles underneath. Yet another sequence is added in the middle of the mix as the wow factor is increased still further. Awesome, simply awesome!

Now we get a somewhat condensed version of ' The Aeon' s day' . The initial sequence is one of the deepest most bass laden I have ever heard from UTD. To start with it sounds very different to the original but eventually becomes more recognisable. From the end of this track we rumble seamlessly into ' The Long Rain' . Though all the recognisable elements are there the emphasis of each layer in the mix seems quite a bit different, if anything providing an even more melancholy and brooding effect. Deep, deep sequences get ' The Bridge' underway. This is actually the second more energetic half of the track. Further sequences are added then the guitar enters. It is hardly noticed to start off with just providing part of the underlying rumble but then really let's rip, replacing the traditional lead but fitting with the rest of the ' don't mess with me' feel perfectly. ' Hell' starts up even before the previous track finishes. It condenses the over twenty minute number into just seven. This mix emphasises all the important elements of the original but with added driving rhythm and an even more intense searing lead line. Another slab of brilliance! ' Solar Gravity' is a wonderful swirling mass of throbbing sequences and energetic guitar with that little bit more mayhem (in the best possible sense of the word) than before, ending the set off with that all important explosion. If you are a fan of retro sequencer music this CD is absolutely essential. If you haven't tried Under The Dome before (what is wrong with you!?) it is an excellent place to start. (DL)

Andy Pickford & Paul Nagle (STDM) / Ramayana

This is an incredible album, not least because if it wasn't for Rainbow Serpent having to pull out of their 202 Jodrell Bank concert it would never have happened! For us listeners it goes to show that every cloud has a silver lining. It was very good of Andy and Paul to accept my offer of filling the gap at such short notice. The music is flowing, sometimes gently but at other times like a raging current. There are elements of trance in here but rhythmically much more inventive and the sequences stronger than much of that style. The melodies are also superb, often subtle but always captivating. ' Disinformatsiya Pt 1' begins with soft pads rising out of gentle percussive effects. Its all rather cosmic, that is until a wonderful melodic loop emerges. A slow deep bass line comes in to join it developing all the time, fizzing with awesome energy as we hurtle forwards. The power contrasts with layer after layer of melody which isn't in yer face but never the less gets under the skin. We return to cosmic atmospherics for the transition to ' Part 2' . A deep pulse beats out time as a melancholy lead line weaves a wonderful spell. A sequence joins it as the pulse speeds up. Just in the background distorted vocals can be heard then we shift up a gear. ' Part 3' is initially rather relaxed but with a feeling of pent up energy which is finally released in the form of the most devastating sequence so far. Its all so cool and trance inducing.

' Part 4' begins with Wolfgang Tiepoldesque celloery classy and rather moody. Vocoded vocals can be heard but it is difficult to make out what they are saying and another sequence builds, increasing in intensity through the vocal. Virtual electric guitar then starts to let rip momentarily heightening the excitement still further but just as quickly we enter another atmospheric section heralding ' Ramayana Part 1' . A delicate rhythm emerges from a haunting solar wind. It has a slightly Eastern feel to it which is emphasised still further when the lead line emerges. The rhythm becomes more prominent but still restrained and the melodies just get better and better. By now I'm in complete bliss! s a devastating track, rhythm and melodies fitting together perfectly, the combination of sounds chosen being inspired. We get more virtual cello as we move into ' Part 2' .

A high register sequence drives things forward over a slow bass throb. ' Part 3 initially features a wonderful virtual acoustic guitar- moody, moody stuff! The tranquillity is shattered somewhat by a rotor blade type sequence full of attitude which grabs hold only letting go when we descend into eerie atmospherics at the beginning of ' Part 4' . Gradually the track becomes increasingly rhythmic and just when its worked itself up into quite a bubbling brew yet another excellent lead line is tossed in. It gets even better and intense with more blistering virtual electric guitar before calming down to a gentle finish. ' Laternentrager Part 1' begins with flutey synth, gentle melodic pads and an electronic piano type lead but then the sequences start up and what sequences- powerful and wonderfully melodic. Add rhythm, yet more great vocoded vocals- heaven. ' Part 2' starts with solar winds out of which a slow beat forms. It has real attitude and develops into an infectious groove. An ethereal lead line winds round the pulsations hitting the spot perfectly. A sensitive piano melody can be heard in the background which takes us to the end. (DL)

Syndromeda / The Alien Abduction Phenomenon

There' s no messing about here, we get straight into a forceful rhythmic yet melodic sequence. A moody melody plays alongside it and pads float underneath creating a sense of wonder as thunderous drums join the fray making ' The Chosen One' a highly charged and exciting start to a truly wonderful album. The thing is the track just gets better and better. A fantastic melancholy lead line scythes over the top, the music becomes increasingly more powerful and ends on a flourish of drums. The first half of the nineteen minute ' No More Fear' on the other hand is in complete contrast. A bell chimes out over wonderful thick swirling pads. This is superb atmospheric picture music of the very highest order conjuring up images of desolate alien landscapes. The pads swell and combine together being so dense as to make your whole body vibrate. When the flashing lead line makes its entrance it is just as menacing and brooding. Its given added bite by being backed by a great rolling rhythm - again very bass laden. The pace quickens and we are now hurtling forwards at great speed. Its all extremely exciting stuff.

' Mystic Cave' begins with yet more deep undulating pads. Slow mysterious melodies ooze from the atmospheric backdrop then in the fifth minute thunderous deep rhythms, as from the very depths of the Earth, pound out. They are so deep that they don' t actually sound that loud just vast. A new scintillating lead scorches over the top, its sharpness contrasts the bass rhythm resulting in us having sounds from both extremes of the audible spectrum. It' s a track that is very easy to appreciate and yet extremely inventive at the same time. It' s a balance which many strive for but few pull off. ' After the Abduction' is again darkly brooding. Ghostly noises issue from the speakers. Deep sawing string sounds are added and a melancholy flutey synth lead increases the feeling of loss and hopelessness. Atmospheric music really doesn't get any better than this. ' A New Start' also begins darkly with great cavernous echoing sounds. A slow high register melody strikes up as if a ray of light is shining through the darkness. In the fourth minute an aggressive rhythm develops and then bounds forwards as we go into warp drive. Again its all storming and full of excitement, the lead lines sound triumphant as we move from one glorious high to the next. ' Wavegames' brings the album to a conclusion in equally aggressive and brooding fashion the previous number. Its all so moody and full of almost manic anger as more and more rhythms are gradually piled on top of each other - someone' s for it just hope its not you! This album has it all, some of the best atmospheric passages you could ever ask for but also rhythms and sequences which will shake the foundations. Amazing! (DL)

Paul Nagle / Lore

Paul' s first release on the Neu Harmony label, and hopefully the spelling will clarify that this is not a tribute album to smd' s Dave Law! On 'Lore' Paul Nagle has set out to present the whole body of knowledge and experience he has gained during his EM career. The result is a sensational album which continues, and if anything increases, the momentum he seems to have found after the 'Elemental' series. 4 tracks are presented, all neatly packaged around the 16 minute mark, and as with Paul' s Far From Stars project there are guest musicians aplenty - largely the FFS collective underlined by the opener being 'Chill Factor' which featured on 'Proxima Centauri'. Here the track has been fine tuned to perfection, developing carefully to usher in a seductive rhythm which builds seemingly endless expectation until the awe inspiring piano melody hits home. Delightful synth interplay and reversed effects lead into a sharp vox which mutates from freehand into sequence before violin joins the fray. 'Anachronist' opens with mellotron flute and effects before a completely sensational sequence hits home at the 4 minute mark. It tracks some delicate guitar work before the bass registers start to be progressively introduced. Layer upon layer is added to produce a mouth watering wall of sequencer backing which moves around with the main melody in delightful fashion. The track ebbs and flows, suggesting closure then flying back at you with awesome power. Japanese style detail then bridges into a more robust rhythm which overlays the sequence layers which make a dramatic return. The mid point reached, and already this album has achieved "essential" status. Yet the remaining tracks, if anything, surpass the form of the first two. 'Lore' is based on the most sublime and infectious melody which is picked out on synth voices which bring to mind TD' s 'Poland' in one breath, Neuronium' s 'Chromium Echoes' in the next. Words are superfluous when confronted with such a heartfelt theme. The mid section is a rhythmic delight, and the symphonic ending a peach. 'Cascade' replaces melodic splendour with sequencing from the very highest echelons. I' m not typing much at this stage because I' m enjoying the music too much! For me 'Lore' is by far the most accomplished album Paul Nagle has produced so far. For fans of melody, sequencing, or simply of the highest quality EM, 'Lore' is unique and unmissable. (GG)

Paul Ellis / Appears to Vanish

A lone organ sound gives the beginning of the first part a rather Gothic feel. This is compounded still further when at just over a minute it is replaced by angelic wordless vocal effects. You can just imagine the mist swirling round some abandoned monastery where the echoes of its long dead inhabitants still reverberate from one ruined wall to another. These all disappear before three minutes, the mood well and truly set as a deep note repeatedly resonates from the speakers and an ominous melodic motif makes proceedings seem even more sinister.

At six minutes a gentle sequence can be heard but it is at the eight minute mark when a rumbling bass sequence makes its devastating entrance that the mood turns from being ominous to being aggressive but at the same time exciting. A lead line and even faster sequence comes in as if we are now being chased with menace lurking around every corner. The transition to ' Part 2' is devastating, in full flow from ' Part 1' we quickly put the breaks on. There is a second' s silence then a mysterious swirling melody strikes up. At just over four minutes we are left to a tinkling sequence and atmospheric pads then the sound of a mellotron. Just after the half way mark another brace of sequences develop, one deep bass and the other of a much higher register. We surge forwards once again. This would be great music for a car chase such is the feeling of speed and excitement.

Gothic overtones return for the beginning of ' Part 3' as a bell rings out over an ominous rumbling sequence. The sequence becomes more prominent and goes through various mutations and subtle mood changes, at one moment swelling in intensity and at the next subsiding. Finally we have the twenty five minute ' Mysterious Sketches' . This track in fact started life as an album (as yet unpublished) in its own right which highlighted what a superb composer Paul is. What we have here is a condensed version of that album concentrating on the sequencer based style found on the rest of this CD. Indeed we are straight into sequencer mode accompanied by some fine melodies. One line sort of asking a question with the second supplying the answer. Things calm down slightly but then the sequence becomes even more awesome and bass heavy. There are so many subtle melodies going on weaving in and out of each other that your mind is first yanked in one direction then another but it is the beauty of the whole that captivates most. Actually the track is just as effective when stripped of the main sequence.

At the six minute mark a poignant melody is allowed to drift in the air. At seven minutes we move into another section which brings images of vast caverns, large droplets of water falling from the roof to impact on the floor then spraying in all directions. The mood then swiftly changes again as further mutations

take us to a more mechanical world where strange futuristic machines pulsate away then suddenly stop and we enter a watery scene with strange animal noises. When the sequence arrives it is as if the sun has just broken through sending rays of light bouncing off still pools of water. It all goes to show just how descriptive sequencer music can be when the instruments are placed in the right hands. The final four minutes see yet another change in mood, as if night has returned and evil creatures venture out again to feed on whatever is unfortunate enough to still remain in their domain. In case you have been thinking that you have heard of this artist before but can't quite place him it might help to tell you that he is one half of **Dwell** at the Threshold. The other half, Dave Fulton, recently released a fine album that mainly explored dark ambient realms. Paul on the other hand has come up with a more sequencer based album full of adroit melodies and juxtapositions. Dweller lies somewhere in the middle. (DL)

Arcane / Gather Darkness

On the strength of this amazing album Arcane are set to become one of the truly great Electronic Music bands. If you know and love your sequencer music this album will just blow you away. Much of the music here could be thought of as 'Logos' period TD as far as the lead lines and sequences are concerned but many of the sounds and atmospherics would not have been out of place on 'Encore'.

A lonesome bell rings out and scattered notes increase the feeling of desolation. A flute sound adds to the atmosphere but the first sequence soon makes itself felt. It gathers energy for a few minutes then a second melodic sequence is added over the top. The track grows and grows in classic style. At eleven minutes the first of many blistering lead lines comes to the fore. At ten minutes 'Dystopian Fictions' calms down but then a melodic sequence and fantastic lead line, both of which could have come from an unreleased track from the Logos concert, smash home with a vengeance. If I close my eyes I can see Johannes Schmoelling bopping up and down behind his keyboard, Edgar looking sternly on.

OK, picking jaw up from the floor we move on to 'Gather Darkness'. A slow pulse and flutey synth sound like one of the darker moments from TD's 'Sorcerer' album. The pulse starts to quicken and develops into a sequence, then..... Blast! Awesome deep menacing synth stabs descend. A lead line 'Encore' style plays over the top but we are only just setting the scene. The tension continues to build as even more dynamic lead lines are introduced and the sequence becomes still more menacing. If you thought the first track was amazing this one could kill you, keep the resuscitation equipment handy. This music is best played loud, just for once think of yourself instead of the neighbours.

'Encore' again comes to mind when listening to the atmospherics at the beginning of 'Flight From Time One'. The way the ghostly piano mingles in with analogue synth pads sends shivers down the spine. When the sequence arrives it is intense, thick and almost evil. A more melodic sequence is layered over the top. A lead line strikes like a laser then the sequence quickens in pace as does my heartbeat as I wonder just how much better it is possible for this album to get. Sounds of faint breathing and an almost heard demonic chant get 'Requiem' under way. Crows cry out from on top of church gargoyles. A bass sequence, dripping with menace, rumbles forward intensifying all the time. Keep you local exorcist handy whilst listening to this. At the half way mark the sequence subsides, the atmospherics being left to reap their devastating vengeance. Another sequence, just as menacing as before escapes from the clutches of hell and an almost optimistic lead accompanies it.

This incredible album is brought to an end with 'Time will run Back'. Again we are treated to a dark introduction full of 'Encore' type sounds. I'm in heaven already (looking down on hell) but this beginning and the most devastating sequence on the entire album (yes, it gets even better) takes me to realms never even imagined before.

This album is going to be huge. I can't stress strongly enough just how good it is. I had the privilege of hearing each track as it was carefully crafted and saw the album slowly take shape. I have heard each track many times and with each play I love every one of them more and more. A landmark release. (DL)

Stephan Whitlan / Map Reference

One of the first things which always strikes me about this album is the packaging. It's one of those CDs which almost obliges you to appraise it visually rather than simply bunging it on and hitting the start button. The on-CD graphics are superb, complementing the back cover visuals, and the fold out booklet is a feast of entertainment with great pictures and plenty to read. The opening track is the epic 'The second hand swept away the time that could never be recovered', and at a touch over 20 minutes long this album wastes no time in presenting its credentials. In the previous review I describe it as "one of the most infectiously brilliant tracks you are ever likely to hear" which I still think sums things up perfectly. Usually when presented with such an expansive piece the sequences and rhythms are the feature aspects, and indeed here the sequencing is truly wonderful with a melodic approach which Glyn Lloyd Jones fans will I'm sure revel in. However, the overriding aspect of this track is the wonderful main theme which ebbs and flows constantly, building to a crescendo then descending to gather itself ready for another pass. For melody alone to carry a 20 minute piece takes rare ability and skill - but it's here in buckets. The sequences embrace the main theme almost as one and the whole track really is a triumph of composition and scope which I don't think I'll ever tire of hearing. Four of the remaining pieces still weigh in at around 10 minutes so there's lots more on offer even after the magical opener. 'The Darker It Gets...' contains some very Vangelis-like refrains, while 'Freak of Geometry' again displays Stephan's mastery of sequence and melody. 'The Last Place God Made' features some fine virtuoso piano played with real emotion, while 'Idleness in Monkeys' is not only a great title but also a fine piece of EM. 'Into the Ground' is another melodic delight with (in common with several of the tracks) unmistakable John Dyson references. Time has not taken the gloss of this release in any way, in fact it really does seem to improve with age. The almost unbelievable brilliance of the opener, alone, warrants regular visitations to this CD and the other goodies on show round the package off superbly. Quite simply a craftsman at work. (GG)

wEirD / A Different Kind of Normal

The participants in this project are Jens Peschke and Andy Bloyce from Kubusschnitt. The first thing you hear on this album is a rumbling sequence which leaves you in no doubt that the territory to be explored is decidedly retro. There are Tangerine Dream references but they are mixed in equal part with Klaus Schulze and Ashra influences. The opening track title 'Klaus to the Edge' (!) makes the Schulze reference even more obvious. The guitar when used is very subtle giving colour rather than dominating as a lead instrument. The sequence provides the backbone but the accompanying atmospherics and effects are just as effective. Some of the sounds used will make you go weak at the knees. We are just six minutes in to this album and I'm already captivated. Flutey synth introduces 'Schaltzeit Nachtweit' then a guitar picks out a beautiful gentle melody, sounding a little like Manuel Gottsching. At two minutes another perfectly crafted sequence begins to pulsate with supporting sequences brought in to accompany it. '9VFE10M' begins with an exquisite combination of sounds and little melodies but we soon get into the sequences and rhythms. This is like a storm seen from a distance creating havoc as it goes but slowly coming closer and closer. Both power and beauty combined into one. An awesome track. After a short introduction 'Tiefenfluss' treats us to the most bass laden sequence so far. A brighter sequence starts to build over it and the guitar takes the lead threatening to let rip but never quite being allowed to. Of all the tracks on the album the next one 'Manuel Garchange' hardly surprisingly has the greatest Ashra influence (get it Manuel Gottsching?). A version of this track was first released on Gold Tri Vol 1 but here we have the 'La RD Remix'. Cosmic twitters give way to optimistic rhythms and restrained alsthappy guitar licks, close your eyes and images of the master cosmic guitarist will fill your mind. We now move on to the twenty-six minute title track. Slow pulsations and guitar as well as synth melodies set the scene, bubbling along nicely up to the eleven-minute mark when strident sequences join in. At thirteen minutes rhythms are added, at fourteen minutes we move into weird territory and dive into an atmospheric pool. The images created from now on are very dark and ominous, whether the pictures are of deep space or dark subterranean landscapes the one constant is a brooding malevolence which is never far away. At twenty-one

minutes a deep slow rumbling rhythm pounds out as though the devil himself is marking out time on some vast drum as tortured souls do his bidding. ' Ausklang' follows on in similar dark territory then a melancholy piano melody makes an appearance, beautiful in its sadness and takes us to the end. To sum up this is a truly incredible CD mixing many different elements of the "golden era" of Electronic Music. Sequences are used for much of the time but they are never allowed to just run, they come and go and are constantly shape shifting. The guitar at times provides the lead line but just as importantly it adds an extra dimension to the overall sound in just the right places. The music ranges from upbeat and optimistic to dark and hellish particularly on the second half of the title track. Recommended without hesitation. (DL)

Max van Richter / Resurrection

At last the long prophesised album by ex Arcane member Max van Richter is released. The story of how this album came to be is strange indeed, for more details see the footnote to the review. However, in keeping with the Arcane albums, it encapsulates and extends the classic melodic/sequencer style which TD used to perfection in the early 80' s.

The opening title track demonstrates this perfectly, building on a wave of pulsations it produces a massive symphonic melody which sticks in the mind long after the piece ends. In many ways this is another Arcane trait, the infectious nature of the pieces is undeniable and completely irresistible. ' The House of Visual Transference' repeats the recipe, a sumptuous flowing concoction of heavy symphonic themes and low pulsating sequences, topped by robust drum lines. ' The Abduction Syndrome' opens with superb electronic effects and builds the atmosphere superbly. A sequence opens up reminiscent in mood to those on ' Sorcerer' , then more melodic and intricate sequencing takes over. It' s great! Synth themes blend perfectly with the structure, the track changes emphasis and style but never loses its grip. As ' Prophecy' opens up a distinguishing feature starts to emerge from the Arcane material. Max' s own work seems to have a harder perhaps slightly darker and symphonic (but no less melodic) edge. Instead of ' Livemiles' or ' Logos' the style is slightly more towards the melodic/sequential parts of ' Thief' , ' Sorcerer' and ' Firestarter' for example.

' Psychokinetic Hymn' reveals a slightly lighter edged opening with a delightful sequence which builds from simplistic roots into a mesmeric collage. The patterns then fade to leave a silky ambience which invites another sequence to emerge. The lighter stance remains but, oh, the melody. So infectious, it acts almost as a premature close to the album such is the magnificent nature. But no, two more tracks remain. ' The City of Walking Hallucinations' opens in more subdued fashion but soon bursts into a symphonic crescendo, constantly underpinned by superb sequencing. Piano and guitar detail give the piece a slightly modern edge, but it' s still all in keeping with the van Richter sound. Finally ' Last Exit' opens with chugging rhythm and sequence but again the piece builds into a heavyweight piece with massive symphonic chords meshed with guitar style detail.

Debate still occasionally surfaces about the pro' s and con' s of using comparisons in reviews, but when you hear an album like this it is totally appropriate to make comparison with the very best EM ever made. Had Schmoelling or Froese released this as a long lost TD solo work no-one would have batted an eyelid as to its credentials, and it' s stature as one of the best solo albums to emerge from the scene. It is totally magnificent, totally captivating, totally essential. (GG)

Mike Andrews / Time & Science

Mike Andrews is unashamedly influenced by both Vangelis and Jean Michel Jarre. He consciously and unconsciously melds both these styles into his music though as his career progresses he is also developing something of a style of his own. His first ' proper' CD ' Retrospective' showed a highly impressive cross section of his work previously only available through the mp3 format. Here the tracks tend to lean towards the more powerful examples of his style though there are some more delicate numbers as well. All of Mike' s work is highly melodic but it never gets twee. The leads either flash at you like lasers or work on an almost subliminal level going straight for the soul. Most of the tracks here are parts of a piece called ' Tides of Time' but with other tracks inserted here and there flowing as one continues whole. The scene setter ' Tides of Time (Intro)' is a beautiful relaxed way to start the album.

A lovely dreamy lead line floats above windy effects and shimmering drones. A powerful lead melody surges from the speakers over vast pads and explosions. Its extremely exciting almost apocalyptic stuff. Another explosion takes us into ' Genesis' and the pace slows. A lovely little motif hangs in the air as more melodic detail is added here and there. A slow ominous rumbling loop starts up contrasting with lead touches. ' Part 2' is something of a floater but also intense as the sound is multi layered and very dense. ' Part 3' is simply stunning. A slow but purposeful rhythm grabs the attention over which an absolutely devastating lead line combines with an equally melodic sequence. There are relatively few good tunesmiths in EM but compared to any of them melodies just don' t get any better than these. Its one of the most enjoyable tracks I have heard all year. ' Part 4' takes us to very 70s JMJ territory, especially in the melodic sequence department. The lead lines and all sort of other background detail are also dripping with Jarrisms. Its powerful but extremely enjoyable. Couldn' t keep myself still to it. Wonderful stuff! ' Part 5' is quite a contrast. From spooky beginnings we move to a very Vangelis inspired lead line. There is a feeling of pent up power then a rapid roller coaster of a sequence spews from the speakers. Vast ominous pads accompany it, those spooky little effects still in the background. The mood is lightened completely for ' Fantasy' . This is as tender as the album gets. The melodies are just exquisite grabbing hold of the heart. Backing is provided by flutey synth and orchestral pads. It still has an immense epic feel to it however. Wordless vocal touches almost sing over the top as the mood becomes euphoric. I would think that John Dyson would have been proud to have composed it. Power and beauty in perfect harmony. ' Part 6' continues in a similar mood though initially it is much less dense consisting of solo piano. A sort of sawing bass sound is added giving it some attitude then little sequences are allowed to develop lower in the mix. Later in the track the piano disappears and the sequences and drums take over changing the mood completely as we motor forwards. ' Part 7' is initially a little like one of Jarre' s moodier more atmospheric numbers but then another sequence / rhythmic combination takes over and we get into an extremely pleasant body moving groove.

I Have no idea why the next track is called ' Interstellar Jazzcafe' as it doesn' t sound remotely jazzy, just more Jarre in every department. The sequence bounces forth combining with typical sonic touches and lead lines from ' Oxygene' or ' Equinoxe' . ' Part 8' has a mega ' overcooked' organ lead line out of which emerges a blistering sequence. ' Apocalypse' is appropriately titled and almost cinematic. Symphonic pads combine with an appropriate doom laden rhythm. A brighter sequence emerges in the fourth minute but the mood still remains intense ending with the sound of church bells. We finish with ' Part 9' . A slow sequence full of attitude accompanies more symphonic pads. Again the intensity of the lead lines is almost overpowering and as with some of the other tracks has a somewhat end of the world feel. As well as the two musicians already mentioned I think this album would also appeal to fans of Otariou and Andy Pickford as it is music which is both immense in scale as well as melodically superb. (DL)

FSP AirSculpture & Friends / Okefenokee Dreams 2001

OK, a history lesson first. In 2000 Vic Rek organised a meeting of Tangerine Dream fans at the Okefenokee swamp. During the event Free System Project and Dave Brewer improvised a superb set of music. This was released as ' Okefenokee Dreams' . A year later the event was held again but this time Bill Fox as well as John Christian and Pete Ruczynski from AirSculpture joined in with the fun, all the musicians playing together on most of the tracks. What you get here on ' Okefenokee Dreams 2001' is a selection of the best tracks from these sessions.

The appropriately titled ' Wildlife at the Okefenokee' initially features what sounds like heavy breathing even snoring (!) of some large animal. A looped vocal sample then informs us that this is ' a great example of some of the wildlife here at Okefenokee' . It has to be one of the strangest starts to a CD that I can remember. A slow sequence comes to life and we settle down to more familiar territory. The sequence becomes more strident and a nice melodic lead line can be heard. A second excellent rapid sequence comes in mutating beautifully accompanied by spot on tron sounds and electric guitar lead line. Those people who

wondered what the hell was going on at the beginning of the disc will now probably be in retro heaven.- wow! It is hard to think how this combination of sounds and pulsations can be bettered.

We get straight into a nice bass sequence for ' Fiv&Sisters' . It is Very close to the mid 70' s TD sound. The sequence keeps coming and going colour being added by some relaxed guitar licks. ' Swamp Impasse' begins with high register drones to which are added some nice organ sounds. Its as if the track is searching for direction but then some great deep pulsations start to emerge as well as wonderful heavenly tron sounds which hit the spot perfectly. Another sequence comes in and... well er- it just gets better and better. Not exactly an original combination of sounds ' Rubycon' through to ' Encore' Tangerine Dream with even a bit of ' Ages' Edgar Froese all coming to mind but what these guys have done with that sound palette is awesome! If you are into sequencer music and don' t go ape over this then what the h&l s wrong with you!

' Road to Nowhere' initially sounds a little like early Klaus Schulze, that is until Bill starts up with a gorgeous soft guitar line nestling in the middle of the mix. The whole track is extremely relaxed. We finish with an atmospheric passage which could be some missing moments from ' Encore' . ' Tannic Tonic' is another laid back one beginning with a swirling mesh of electronics trying to drown out piano sounds. The piano ends up winning providing one of the more melodic moments on the CD. The last proper track is ' Southern Sunset' . Various lines of pulsations come and go until a high register one becomes the main line of attack- organ sounds over the top. Please note in the seventh minute there is the sound of Bill plugging in his guitar- this is not a fault on the CD! ' Feedback' closes the album in light hearted fashion as it is just a few seconds of chat picked up on a microphone which was accidentally left on. As with last year' s Okefenokee this is a seriously good album. (DL)

Ashok Prema / Stranger in a Strange Land

Ashok's previous release 'Of Times & Places' was a bright uptempo offering which he described as "East 'n Synth". After a couple of minutes of his latest album I fully expected more in the same vein but suddenly 2 minutes into the opening track 'Unicorn' a sensational "classic" sequence bursts onto the scene backed superbly by tabla percussion. It fades after a few minutes then returns for a brief reprise - and all this packed into a smidgen under 5 minutes. It's an opening which I didn't expect and now I'm fascinated to hear what comes next. 'Searcher of Souls' opens with foreboding chords then breaks into a soulful motif. Excellent sequencing then re-emerges accompanied by a poised melody which fits the rhythm perfectly. The sequences constantly ebb and flow as complimentary themes weave a skilful thread. At the five minute mark guitar also emerges from the mists - again this track really does pack in the content and style. 'Dancing Dust' opens with syncopating effects which then lead to a plucked guitar theme very reminiscent of John Dyson. The approach is measured rather than powerful and again the piece twists and turns until another delightful sequence emerges at the 5 minute mark. 'Triangular Succession' combines a heavy drum beat and various synth lines to create a very unusual piece. Equally unusual is the title of track 5 - 'Artists Palette at Wai O Tapu'. The opening refrains are symphonic in nature, somewhat reminiscent of Tomita in places. Enter a short burst of vocal effects closely followed by pulsing sequences and again we have a top notch outing. The rhythmic are superbly judged and there are some choice melodic on show too. 'Letters from Here and There' opens brightly and, yes you've guessed it, another storming sequence then hits home - and what a corker, possibly the best so far as it follows the melodic in classic fashion. 'Messenger of Malicious Truths' is yet another superb outing, airing measured themes before strange effects and echoed guitar take centre stage. Finally we have 'To Turn and Turn' and yet again Ashok Prema produces a magnificent slab of pulsing electronics and beguiling themes - and do I detect a sniff of Kraftwerk in there? This is a gem of an album. Wavestar style sequencing, Dysonesque melodic, and Ashok's own unique style. Highly recommended. (GG)

Kubusschnitt / The Cube

This is their second album, not to be confused with the first 'The Case'. 'The Cube' is a stonking sequencer fest developing and improving on their already very popular first effort. The almost twenty five minute opener 'Cube' gets straight into an awesomely powerful sequence leaving no doubt that this will be a million mile an hour blistering journey so fasten your seat belts. At just over four minutes a superb lead line weaves its gentle way through the pulsating storm providing excellent contrast and adding depth.

At eight minutes the sequence starts to wind down and we enter a much needed relaxed passage. Flutey synth takes us to some gorgeous melodic synth pads. Two leads provide the main focus one being very deep and the other of a higher register. They combine beautifully. No way is this mindless drift, it grabs your attention and sucks you in, revitalising every nerve in the body. It all becomes very cosmic and a new sequence starts to develop, fast moving but low in the mix. It has a sort of shimmering quality to it which fits in with the cosmic references perfectly. 'Wormhole' begins with a spoken sample about alien threats then it is straight into an ominous slow sequence, another sequence is brought in over the top then a brilliant rhythm, all combining together to form a fantastic groove. A gentle melody starts up then at just under six minutes there is a second long pause after which a laser sharp lead line runs its devastating path over the top, brilliant!

'Ra' begins with the sounds of distant explosions over which is a heavily vocoded message. The pads bring up images of being out in deep space, the atmospheres created are dark and eerie. This is very descriptive music reminding me a little of Klaus Schulze's 'Picture Music' or 'Cyborg'. 'Alpha Three' is a twenty seven minute epic. It starts with the sound of a storm, melodic pads swelling underneath. A melancholy lead line strikes up but close on its heels is a 'tinkling' sequence which quickly becomes more strident as the storm fades into the distance. Another beefier sequence is chucked into the brew and we really start motor, pump up the volume! More sequential detail is added. A synth lead comes in at nine and a half minutes and adds a further dimension to a track which already has so much. At sixteen minutes things calm down and become rather ethereal. By eighteen and a half minutes the sequences start up and again they are just wonderful with a lead line which we have come to expect by now is spot on.

'Hypercube' is an even more powerful version of 'Cube' and it is here for the first time that the guitar plays any significant role. A heavier rhythm is also used, its the sort of thing that would make a great encore and as such is also a good way of finishing off the album. I wish it could have gone on much longer than the five minutes we have here. An amazing CD! (DL)

Syndromeda / In Touch With the Stars

What we have here is Syndromeda' s performance at Jodrell Bank earlier this year. Its all new material recorded especially for the concert and what a gig it was. If you weren' t there listening to this CD is the next best thing. The dark rumbling drones created for the beginning of the opener ' So SaifAway' are so deep they got a pile of CDs I had placed near a speaker to fall over. They were ideal for the cosmic setting of this performance, it was like being near some star about to go super nova. There is so much power here and yet at the same time a sort of peacefulness.

A relaxing melancholy lead line gently drifts in the midst of these awesome sounds. A distorted whispered voice is saying something low in the mix. I doubt you will be able to make it out but the words are printed in the artwork for you anyway- spaced out man! Just as the words echo away in comes the first sequence gradually gaining energy. More dark menacing stabs are added- this is a track oozing attitude. Another playful sequence bounces over the top, then another. Superb effect are also brought into play and then a brilliant lead scorches through everything. There is so much going on here, the power emitted from the speakers is breath taking. We stay at max for a few minutes then return to the dark cosmic pads and whispered voice again to finish. ' The Last Influence' deploys the sequencer straight away then in come some great mellotron sounds which will make you feel as if you are levitating towards some source of power

provided by a sinister dark bass drum line. The sound of spectres can be heard taunting you- its so wonderfully brooding and menacing and yet as with most of the album so powerful. After the half way mark vast melodic pads can be heard, acting more like a lead line increasing the feeling of awe still further. A fast metallic sequence gets ' No Way Back' underway. More tron sounds are added then a deep bass melody issues forth. Yet again this is a powerful track but with a relaxing edge, especially when the second beautiful lead line comes in during the third minute. ' Phaedron' has an atmospheric beginning. Cosmic effects shimmer from the speakers and the pads swirl as if drawing you whirlpool like into a black hole. The drones get even darker and siren type noises can be heard. Is there danger ahead? Yup! A ballsey sequence rumbles as alien crafts swing into view. Another sequence crackles into life- let battle commence. The leads are particularly brazen, no hiding in the mix here as they hit you right between the ears. ' Slow Heat' starts with more warning sounds. The underlying pads are again extremely thick and dark. At the four minute mark a slow sequence starts up but it basically plays a supporting role to the wonderful atmospheric and sublime lead line. ' Conjunction Area' makes use of a couple of bouncy sequences to provide one of the lighter moments on the album. The lead melody compliments it nicely. Its as if watching an alien take its first few clumsy steps. The mood then gradually changes and becomes more confident as if striding out and looking at the night sky in wonder. The interplay between lead lines and accompanying pads and effects is extremely well done conjuring up fantastic pictures in the mind. ' The End of the Circle' starts off with some exquisite atmospheric but then becomes a torrent of sequences and rhythms topped off with the most amazing laser sharp lead line, the drums becoming fairly thunderous near the end finishing things off on a real high. This album has some of the meanest deepest atmospheric as well as awesome sequences and rhythms. It should give the speakers a real work out - play loud! (DL)

Frank Specht / Sebastian Im Traum

Frank is one half of the awesome Rainbow Serpent. Here we have his first solo album and as with Gerd Wienekamp's (the other half of Rainbow Serpent) album 'Kontakt' what we get is a mixture of very recognisable Serpent characteristics as well as a different angle identifying the individuality of each member. This is something of a concept album following the passage of a series of dreams. Cosmic shimmers act as a gentle introduction to 'Traum 1' but then a great whoosh of sound descends on us like a tidal wave. A gorgeous shimmering lead line then grabs the focus and a bass beat forms a solid structure on which a sequence starts to emerge and another brighter rhythm is layered over the top. An energetic driving number providing a splendid start. Each track runs into each other so we move straight into 'Traum 2' a very melodic piano lead piece. 'Traum 3' is a marked contrast to the previous number as we are immediately treated to dark synth drones. A delicate echoing motif is repeated and each time left to hang in the air until it fades away. A sequence emerges out of the dark but just acts as the backbone to a rather sleepy but hypnotic section. It is only after seven minutes that things start to take off and we get more umph! 'Traum 4' introduces a superb heavy rhythm over which floats a sublime melody. For the final minute and a bit we return to the world of shifting images. 'Traum 5' uses a faintly tribal rhythm, flute and didgeridoo. The didg is an instrument I don't usually like on EM albums but here it fits perfectly. At two minutes the rhythm becomes rather manic then fades back again to allow Gothic chants to be heard, it all works superbly. I know some of you will be put off by the description of this track, don't be it is extremely inventive, effective and not remotely cliched. We then return to the watery shifting thoughts of background sleep. 'Traum 6' retains the flute sound from before but then a sequence takes its first descriptively mellow steps. Another higher register one is layered over the top then more and more until I lose count of all the different lines involved. Superb stuff! More cosmic bleeps and twitters take us into 'Traum 7'. From atmospheric beginnings a bass (non dance) rhythm very slowly unfolds then we get a steam train making its stately progress down the line. More atmospheric pads are used as the backdrop to a melodic sequence. This is a beautiful track and for me is the standout number on the album. We flow from one stunning melodic sequence to the next and the underpinning pads are just heavenly. Now on to the final Traum. The sequences are now menacing but are added to by a more playful one at around the four minute mark. We are dreaming again but this seems like a disturbed and unsettled sleep from which we will be pleased to wake. So to sum up this album has sequences a plenty but don't expect them to be of the thunderous earthquake or a million mile an hour variety. What you have here is quite an emotional album but in the best sense and not remotely twee. (DL)

Ian Boddy / Phoenix

This is a re-issue of his third vinyl album and is the last to make its way onto CD. As with the other CD re-issues we have a superb bonus track not available on the original. Depending on who you talk to ' Phoenix' has the reputation of being either the best or worst of Ian's early releases. The title track starts with a lush bank of synths underpinned by some great church organ. Drums come in after a couple of minutes and the main theme makes itself heard, creating a very strong melody that chugs along with the rhythm. The second track again starts with that great organ sound, a lovely tinkling melody follows and a female voice (not singing) adds some colour. The melody takes turns with the female vocal to be the lead. ' Your Eyes' initially comprises of a metallic piano sound and saxophone that weave yet more superb melodies that I found myself humming whilst writing this, the pace quickens as the drums are introduced, we have a short pause for breath and then things take off at break neck speed again. ' Gavotte' (which I think was an ancient dance) is the real fun piece on the album. Superb rhythm and male vocal stabs provide structure for the playful lead line. Yes, you could dance to it but I'm sure you wouldn't retain your liberty for too long. The final track on the original album was called ' The Necromancer' . It starts off in suitably dark brooding fashion, the chief wizard enters, the pace quickens and everyone in the vicinity takes cover. The melody could very well represent spells being cast as it has a rather mysterious and very slightly Eastern feel. The track slows down again and a tranquil mood is created with washes of synth before the rhythm returns and takes the track to its close. The bonus track ' The Purcell Set (Parts 4)' was recorded live at The Purcell Rooms, Queen Elizabeth Hall in 1986. Being contemporary with ' Phoenix' , it fits in with the mood of the album perfectly. An underwater sonar type sound is joined by ghostly bells and sonic shimmers as a slow sequence adds to the atmosphere accompanied by one melody after another. Everything fades away and more synth washes help to clear the mind and relaxation deepens as a piano can be heard low in the mix. A few minutes it's all change again and we are introduced to a moderately fast piece to close. (DL)

Otarion / Creator

This doesn't fit into any particular category. It takes the best elements from retro, modern rhythmic, atmospheric- everything really and puts them together to form one of the most enjoyable albums I have ever heard. ' Evolution' was a triumph but on ' Creator' the sound is even bigger, the hooks even stronger and there is so much of that mysterious factor that is hard to put your finger on that just makes you want to shout out in pleasure. Even the artwork created by Marcus Hildebrandt and put together by Gary Hall is stunning. Tinkling cosmic effects give way to the sound of the wind and big thunder claps. From this dramatic beginning ' Places Without Traces' settles down to some gorgeous tranquil pads with faint melodic detail over the top. By any measure this is beautiful stuff. Then in comes the most awesome combination of sequences, rhythms and above all stunning lead lines, each melodic perfection. This surely will be one of those tracks that would be on nearly everyone's homemade ' best of' collection. Just throw your head back and take it all in! Electronic Music just doesn't get much better than this. We make a smooth transition into ' Select' on the back of a plucked strings sequence, beautiful thick almost orchestral pads lifting the spirit. Already in something of a state of euphoria we start to motor ahead with a steady rhythm. Yet more lead lines, some of them delicate, others powerful combine to create a perfect combination of beauty and excitement. Unbelievably this track is just as awesome as the first. ' First Mystery' has another delicate beginning with ethereal pads and piano colouring- again beautiful. If you were already stunned by the quality of the first two tracks as I was just wait till you hear the plucked string melody which is now introduced- my God its so emotional. Then we speed things up and the melodies though still retaining great beauty become very exciting. ' Revival' continues melodically where the previous track left off but with a slight twist of menace. Then umph, as again the pace

is quickened. Rapid sequencer runs follow on from each other almost like one asking the question and the other answering. Its powerful and yet at the same time delicate and emotional stuff. I have no idea how Rainer manages to accomplish all this at the same time. He probably doesn't know how he does it either he has the talent and with each release is learning better how to wield it. 'Elements' deploys a melodic sequence right from the off then we get powerful stabs of sound. The sequence becomes faster and faster and a laser sharp lead flashes over the top. Your pulse will race as the excitement builds, the melodies will seep into your mind, your feet will move on their own accord and your hands will be playing air keyboard. Yes its another slice of Otarian magic. We are then allowed to relax a little floating on majestic pads with a slow lead calming the heart. We drift into 'Breath of Eternity' on suitably breathy / windy sounds, familiar melodies returning but re-worked. They hang in the air, wafting from the speakers to caress the soul. On 'Strength of Life' wordless vocals contrast with a swirling rotor blade type sound. Dark drones give things a rather ominous feeling. A large bell rings out then in comes an excellent sequence which again will get your whole body moving. Now I'm in trouble as yet more fantastic lead lines with the most wonderful hooks are deployed but I have no more words in my vocabulary to describe them. The thing is, it isn't just their individual quality its the way it is all put together that is so impressive. This couldn't be taught in any book its the sort of thing which is in the heart and mind of the best true musicians. We now bounce along with 'Ways of Creation'. Its very happy infectious stuff and another highlight in an album which has so many. Just when you think things can't get any better the mood is somehow changed, a tenseness creeps in but then the melodies and rhythms re-group building to a triumphant conclusion. The album finishes on yet another amazing high with 'Destination' which sort of acts like a culmination of all that has gone before, excitement and emotion walking together hand in hand. And that's a rather good way to sum up the album. OK, I'm biased as this CD's on the Neu Harmony label but I would think that when we look back at 2002 it will be one of the key albums. It is certainly one that I am extremely proud to have released. (DL)

Arcane / Future Wreck

For me, Arcane's debut album 'Gather Darkness' was striking for the magnificence of the opening track, with infectious melodic and sequencing to match Schmoelling and Franke at their best. If the TD's 'Logos' was for you, then it's a "must buy" album on the strength of that track alone. All subsequent tracks on '...Darkness' charted an earlier period, the pounding sequences sounding sensational but I craved for more of that magical infectious music. On 'Future Wreck' my prayers have been answered, with 3 of the 4 tracks delivering exactly that. That's not to play down the opening title track which charts more mid 70's territory with gripping sequencer runs sandwiching a delicious middle section where mellotron timbres flourish. The second sequence run especially is a corker with drum lines rampant in an orgy of electronic rhythmic, all topped of with searing synth lines from the very top drawer. Yes, it is a sensational opener which would be the high point of most EM albums worth their salt. But, for me, what transcends Arcane to almost unbelievable heights is spelled out in tracks 2, 3 and 4. To start with 'The Plastic Eaters' does not sound overtly different in style to the opener, with brooding mellotron over a throbbing, resonating backdrop. Then the main sequence lines start to build and things start to escalate very quickly. Where shall I start? The melody? It's gripping, sumptuous, scintillating and above all infectious. The sequencing? It's completely magical. A mixture of low bass lines and high register detail which has me lost for words. Then the drums kick in. Wow! At 6:50 the track soothes its grip and subtly familiar elements infuse through the music. 'Livemiles Part 2' (closing section) was always one of my favourite TD pieces, and here the chord progressions and voicings bring the spirit of that piece flooding back. It is, quite simply, sensational. At 10:30 the track resumes it's own magnificent agenda, as an ominous air takes over and the track gradually fades to close. Track 3 'The Visible Empty Man' opens with eerie tones which bring to mind the opening credits of the original Alien film. The track gradually builds, as stabbing punctuations around the 4 min mark start to set the scene for the glories to come. The mellotron trumpet vox cuts a swathe with a delicious riff, then syncopating sequences have your eyes widening in delight. Can this brilliance continue? At 7:45 the sequencing gets into a groove and the synth riffs really go to work. It's unbelievable that this isn't Schmoelling, such is the quality, and when the chord changes hit home to inject even more melodicism it's time for me to stop typing and just sit back and listen..... I'm back, and it's still the same track. It just mention the fantastic end section, a melancholic delight to match anything I've heard in a long time. Track 4 'Planet of the Blind' will have sequencer fans jumping for joy. Everything is right, with rattling half note patterns breaking through at the 6:30 mark accompanied by more delicious thematic progressions. Special mention also for the fantastic sleeve design, great fun and very cleverly put together. You can't sum this album up in a single sentence, read the whole review to get the merest glimpse of how fantastic it is. I'll simply say that, in my book, EM just doesn't get any better than this. The whole album just left me with a huge smile on my face. (GG)

AirSculpture / Fjord Transit

Recorded at AirSculpture's Eurosonic festival gig in Sweden. Everything AirSculpture plays is improvised, this is 100% unique music inspired by the moment not just live versions of already available material. In fact there is very little difference between an AirSculpture studio album and a live one. The music is created spontaneously whether it is in front of an audience or not. Many people including other musicians refuse to believe this however such in the quality of the music and almost telepathic understanding between the three band members. AirSculpture create a music that is inspired by the mid to late seventies analogue sequencer pioneers but this is not copyist, there is a big difference between being influenced by something and plagiarism. The title track drifts into your consciousness and images are created of a cold sun rising above the mountains to shine on mist covered water. For AirSculpture this is extremely delicate stuff more beautiful than dark, probably inspired by the location of the gig, an island in the middle of a lake. At three and a half minutes more typical AirSculpture type cosmic effects start to bubble to the surface but peace and tranquillity are still the dominant images. A gossamer melody warbles forth at the seven minute mark. The first sequence begins to build and rumbles forward, the underlying sounds would not have been out of place on 'Sorcerer' or 'Encore'. From the delicate start we are now moving into darker territory. The sequence mutates and distorts. The lead lines compliment the sequences superbly becoming very mean and menacing. Another absolutely brilliant sequence is thrown in to the brew. There now seems to be three sequences side by side - brilliant, just bloody brilliant! Things then quieten down and you will think we are winding down towards the end but no, the sequences come back for more only dying away as the track fades out. The Sculpture boys' sense of humour strikes again for 'Traditional Folk Music', as we are instantly plunged into a vast grating metallic hiss at top volume accompanied by all sorts of industrial sounds. Things then calm down amongst a backdrop of well out there cosmic effects. This is very descriptive space music but in their region of the cosmos we don't get gentle floating pads, oh no! Solar flares, explosions and plasma storms are more the order of the day. When some semblance of order does appear the music that results reminded me very much of TD's 'Alpha Centauri', the organ sound being particularly effective but not over used. Just when you think that this is going to be one of AirSculpture's atmospheric interludes up steps a high register sequence and as usual it really hits the spot, twisting and turning all the time. If this is traditional folk music then I think I'll take up Morris Dancing. 'Gloria Mundi' wastes no time in getting into a slow deep bass sequence, very moody stuff. The temptation to clutter things with layer after layer of atmospherics is resisted and plenty of space is given, making the melodies and carefully chosen effects stand out even more and giving them greater impact that would otherwise have been the case. Drums are introduced at six minutes but mutate into a snapping sequence only to go through more metamorphosis to change back into a drum sound. The sequence / drum keeps changing between the two sounds and very effective it all is too. Things are then stripped down to a very moody rhythm which fades into a swamp of drones and vicious effects which get even moodier right up to the end. My favourite AirSculpture album ever. The sequences are of course superb but the lead lines that accompany them are better than ever before and the atmospherics reach new heights of descriptive power. Absolutely fantastic. (DL)

Paul Nagle / Red Book / Blue Book

The two CDs we have here have very different characters. You very well might like one disc when you are in a particular mood but then at another time you might prefer the other. 'Blue Book' is basically a feast of Sequences sounding very retro but with fantastically strong melodies where as 'Red Book' was inspired by a holiday Paul spent in China. He took recording equipment with him capturing the atmosphere of the places he visited through the sounds around him.

Looking at 'Red Book' first, 'Multitude' begins with some of those recordings which disappear after a few seconds as a very fast sequence sizzles from the speakers over a high register lead line. A bass beat is added to the brew nestling in the middle of the mix. It is very deep but not dance sounding. At three mins the fast sequence dies away and various slow melodies weave round each other creating a slightly ominous feel, the transition from one mood to the other being handled effortlessly. This is gorgeous and captivating stuff. Allow yourself to be drawn in and wallow in the beauty. The pace starts to quicken then momentarily slows as a heavy beat can again be heard. The mood is constantly changing as the track twists and turns. It's a great way to start the CD. We drift into 'Tomb in Darkness' on the back of more of the field recordings. This is an incredibly atmospheric track with piano initially providing the main lead. It's all rather sad but beautiful at the same time. We then get another fast high register sequence which takes us to the end. More recordings, then 'Sack of Money, Buddah'. It begins slowly with the sound of a bell then we get a superb heavy sequence / rhythm combination and things really start to rock! Its powerful stuff- my favourite bit of the album so far. 'A Night at the Opera' begins with huge ominous dark chords over which we get tapping rhythms and manic effects. More rhythms are added then a fast sequence with 'Rubycon' mellotron type effects in the background. 'Chant & Deliver' is effectively a Berlin School sequencer romp featuring superb deep sequences over a tron background - fantastic stuff. In the middle we descend to some more of the recordings from China which provide an almost shocking contrast to what has gone on before. The sequences try to make it back to the surface but are swamped by the Chinese effects.

'Tomb in Darkness Pt 2' is a great dark moody track. A child can be heard in the mix adding to the atmosphere. 'The Goddess of Democracy' is a very short track which Paul likes and on which we agreed to differ. 'Strange Times' on the other hand is just gob smacking. We get twittering electronic effects then the first of a number of stonking sequences all combining together to form an exciting pulsating mix. A delicate highly melodic lead provides quite a contrast but boy it works so well! Even my little lad was bopping up and down in his car seat to it. 'From Space' changes the sequence but keeps up in similar blistering form to the previous number. This is no floater as the title might suggest. Instead we get sequence after sequence layered on top of each other. 'Red Book' ends with 'Shanghai Surprise'. It's a highly rhythmic track full of infectious riffs and great melodies. Just try keeping your body still to it. It's the sort of number which would make a great encore piece leaving any audience on a real high- probably the best track on a great disc. On to 'Blue Book'. For people who like pounding or infectious sequences this disc is for you and will be worth the asking price alone. 'Power Haus' takes less than a minute for the first bass sequence to rumble forwards over which all manner of melodies are played. Each melody is exquisite - no meandering aimless lead lines here. The track builds and builds, the sequence is cranked up further - superb rhythms are added - absolutely magnificent! We flow straight into 'Wasnixe' on vast waves of sound. Things then become somewhat cosmic and out of the ether come a couple of minutes of the most exquisite piano melody, it rather reminded me of a track from 'Ages'. After this short interlude we move into 'Xyzy' on the back of great crashing drums from which emerges a melodic sequence and then another wonderful lead line - it really doesn't get much better than this. The sequences mutate perfectly as the melodies grab you, not letting you go. If you don't like this track let me know and I will arrange your medication. To me its got everything. 'Fugsamkeit' grows into life with the deepest, meanest sequence so far. A triumphant lead flashes over the top, then its foot full down on the accelerator time as the drums enter - turn up the volume and go with the avalanche. 'Abstimmen' begins with a swirling concoction of sounds. Its all dark eerie stuff out of which slow deep pulsations rise relentlessly. More sequences come in over further tron effects. The basic pattern is set around which melodies and sequences are allowed to mutate until we move into the final cut 'Erfierung'. Here a slow rhythmic loop provides structure backed by gentle pads and a melancholy melody. At two minutes more rhythms and sequences are added and now we move forwards with a real no nonsense attitude like a tank rolling over anything that stands in its way. The leads, as throughout this disc, are fantastic but its really the rhythms and sequences which grab the attention most combining together to give one hell of a powerful conclusion. What a fantastic album! (DL)

Alpha Wave Movement / Cosmology

This is my favourite AWM CD so far. It has a bit of everything from the Berlin School through to melodic upbeat numbers and even hypnotic chilled out tracks. A lovely deep reverberating drone and massed string pads, punctuated by whooshing cosmic effects give the opener 'Prologue Sequence' something of an epic feel. The said sequence makes an entrance within the second minute, fizzing along at one hundred miles an hour. Things are given even greater oomph with the introduction of a steady rhythm which fits alongside the morphing sequence superbly. The lead line then comes in- great for air keyboard solos! 'Teutonic Voyage' progresses from very spacey beginnings with lovely deep pads mix with little sonic shimmers and celestial flute. It's a bit like a mix of early Deuter and Michael Neil. The mood changes completely in the fifth minute however when a rumbling sequence bounds through the mix. This is softened a little by a delicate water droplet type melody. Another sequence now joins the first, quite a tuneful one it is too. What a wonderful track which gets even better as a rhythm forms, getting my feet tapping to it and hands beating out time on the table. Things reach a climax just before the end with some searing virtual guitar. 'Sailing Orion' on the other hand is a very mellow piece with soft drones and delicate little melodies. It's an ideal sunny afternoon number, perfect for simply relaxing to. A sequence does come in just before the half way mark but it is a sedate one, providing a little additional interest rather than energy. 'Celestial Mechanics', after a short atmospheric beginning, wakes us up again as we surge forward on the back of a steady rhythm which gains even more power as we progress. A great track for driving far too fast to! 'Rendezvous' is another dreamy piece having a similar feel to 'Sailing Orion'. 'Deep Outpost' however is, to start off with, much moodier with ominous dark drones and eerie pulses of sound. Things then become much more contemporary sounding with a shimmering melodic loop providing the main feature. It is then joined by another equally tuneful plucked string pattern. Gorgeous stuff. 'Astral Navigator' commences with some sampled text over an ethereal piano lead and bass line. The pace quickens a little without ever becoming exactly blistering and things turn increasingly melodic as we journey through to 'Distant Edens'. The sound of birdsong and shimmering drones create images of a rainforest. All is calm and tranquil. 'The Far Side of I.O.' winds things up in moody symphonic manner and as with the opener has something of a movie soundtrack feel to it. Unfortunately all the booklets I have for this album are slightly creased so to compensate I have reduced the price. (DL)

AirSculpture / Quark Soup

The first CD of this double was taken from their E-Live festival performance in October 1999. As usual the music is improvised and is therefore unique. All AirSculpture's music is effectively live. Some is live in the studio where as in this case it is in front of an audience. We begin with cosmic drones, twitters and effects blended perfectly to create one of their best atmospheric passages ever. A faintly melodic lead line is then introduced. A few minutes later a rapid high register sequence starts up- and what a corker it is too! It develops and becomes increasingly complex but also more powerful all the time and yet they keep it tightly under control making it mutate to fit their every whim. Its all so tight that its incredible that it is improvised. The second track begins with soft swirling pads. A lonesome melancholy lead strikes up floating in the middle of the mix. This is AirSculpture showing a rare tender, even serious, side to their nature. Metallic crashes punctuate some tron sounds and things get moodier and moodier. Its music for post apocalyptic landscapes. The mood then lightens as a delicate sequence starts up, its as if a gentle rain has started to fall. Another beefier sequence is added but initially stays in the background. Its only when the lead lines start to flash over the top that it really cranks up and we start to motor.

Next we have a mammoth twenty seven minuter. From a tranquil beginning a slow melodic sequence starts. Initially it enhances the relaxed mood set up by the initial section but it gains pace and additional sequencer lines are added. At the eleven minute mark the sequences depart and we are immersed in ghostly cosmic effects. This is another superb atmospheric section. Its the sort of thing that early 70's TD or any of the pioneers might have come up with if they had had the technology available. Its full of twitters, vast metallic drones and vaguely vocal sounding noises (both human and animal) very low in the mix so that you can't make up your mind if you are imagining them or not but adding an effective sinister element. With eight minutes to go we enter another structured section and a no nonsense sequence enters. A lead line playfully bounces over the top. More sequences are added and the band work themselves up to a blistering finale. The audience demand more and AirSculpture get straight into a dynamic five minute sequencer romp. Subtlety is thrown out of the window and they just let rip- superb!

Apart from the encore the entire second disc is taken up with one track which has four distinct sections. The first is AirSculpture at their most cosmic, it's then bright sequencing time, we then get an ominous brooding section and finally (lasting half an hour!) we have the best sequencer bash I have ever heard them do - the audience went crazy! But I'm getting a bit ahead of myself here. Soft pads and note droplets are left to hang in the air as the mind wanders through vast uncharted areas of space. The occasional lonesome lead line provides some focus and from time to time we get other cosmic effects but for the most part this is pure float. At twelve minutes we enter the second section where the first sequence makes an entrance, a rather fast bright one that could probably have done with being slightly lower in the mix but that is only a small quibble. As this sequence dies away the pads become darker sounding. Then we get a very slow, very deep bass rumble / sequence and the darkness of the piece intensifies considerably sending chills down the spine. The accompanying crashing effects and slabs of chaotic sound fit the mood created by ' the throb' perfectly.

It is the final section of this track that most people will remember however. This sequencing just has to be heard to be believed. The sounds used are some of the thickest and most thunderous I have ever heard spewing from a sequencer. It is as if we are in the middle of a thunderstorm with one rumble being replaced by another with hardly any gap in between. The scorching lead lines are like flashes of lightning whilst others sound as if the clouds themselves form some demonic figure which is crying out above the thunder. The physical battering taken by the first three rows of the audience as tidal waves of sound relentlessly broke onto them must have been amazing. What's more everything is in a constant state of shift. I am not exaggerating when I say that for fans of heavy sequencing this will probably be the best half hour of music you will have ever heard. So its encore time and really its pretty much more of the same with a sequence blasting from the speakers. What you can't tell by listening to this however is that after about half way through Pete and John leave the stage leaving Adrian to play everything - remember AirSculpture don't use tape. Its just unbelievably well done and he is very clearly enjoying himself immensely! This double album is priced so that even if you already have the ' rough' version of their Jodrell Bank performance taken from last year's ' official bootleg' multi artist set you are still getting good value for money. (DL)

Jim Kirkwood / Tower of Darkness

After 11 home produced tapes Jim has donned his CD trunks and now dips his toe into ' The Big Pool' . ' Tower of Darkness' is a fair representation of Jim Kirkwood's work eerie, Gothic, atmospheric and powerful all at once. The album opens with ' The Mad God' , a piece based on Michael Moorcock's book ' The Mad God's Amulet' . Jim uses Moorcock as a great source of inspiration and ideas based on his writings cover the span of his work. The piece opens with crashing drums and strident strings over an ominous soundscape, building slowly as a mischievous synth toys with the atmospherics. Layer after layer of sequences are introduced as the track's foreboding nature expands, and Jim's use of basic 4/5 note riffs to create a compelling sound is masterful, the main theme being reminiscent of Schmoelling's compulsive simplicity. A superb start! ' Perilous Ground' is an altogether stranger piece, sounding like an alien swampland and acting as a bridging piece into the next track - although at only 1:45 I felt it needed a little more development. ' Timestream' gallops in on a typically fast, rocky beat and again utilises a simple but very effective reed theme over a driving synth. Add to this a Pandora's box of strange samples and synth solos and it creates a scorching track! ' Requiem for an Immortal' a strange oxymoron which Jim explains by saying he had a vampire in mind - the Undead who have yet been killed to life! (He's just too clever by half!) The track opens very darkly with breathing synths and an ominous swathe of atmospherics punctuated by a funeral drum. The scene slowly set, enter a defiant dirge which stands proudly against it's dark counterpart bringing to mind some of TD's darker soundtrack work as it grows in malevolence. ' Legion of Dawn' again starts very darkly with slow malignant percussion and a weird synth loop, soon joined by a TD style sequence. Unfortunately, to my mind, the scene is then spoiled by an unimaginative drum beat which taints the whole ethos of the piece - a great pity because there are some wonderful synth passages on show. Like Jim, you may feel it fits perfectly - suck it and see! ' Forgotten Remains' is a welcome breather after its hectic predecessor, and they don't get much more malevolent than this! Resonant voices, strange ' calls' and noises over a darkly ambient moaning wind - scary stuff indeed! Finally, to ' The Dreaming Lord' which must rank the album's strongest track. A beautiful trickle of bells is assaulted by all forms of dark percussion. A powerful, slow sequence then introduces another mischievous theme as other instruments join in the dance conveying perfectly the slow descent into REM sleep. Jim's use of percussion is masterful, at times using one of his trademarks a beaten anvil, with more ' industrial' noises and compulsive synth ruling over a now uptempo pace. The track rounds off with a combined assault of all the Dream's swags before coming to an abrupt ending. I feel that with ' Tower of Darkness' Jim has now defined his own ' sound' and no one I know is playing such an effective mixture of powerful, dark, Gothic, orchestrated synth like this. Maybe at times the album could have done with a little more production and tidier bridging work (an extra week in the studio perhaps?) however this is just nit picking. Here we have a worthy challenger to the British synth crown who is armed with originality. Dyson is going to have to leave his safe seat to pick up this gauntlet. Do yourself a favour, click into Kirkwood! (Stuart J. Harris)

Klangwelt / Weltweit

' Connect' begins with a series of vocal samples which permeate excellent deep dark swirling pads. Then in comes a very good sequence / rhythm combination soon to be followed by a jaunty optimistic lead line. Its perfect music for motorway driving. The melodies get better and better. It should be liked by anyone into the more commercial side of EM, say Andy Pickford or T Bass UK. Though not sounding exactly like these acts it has the same upbeat tuneful appeal..

' Nice 2 CU' is straight into more extremely enjoyable melodies and happy rhythms. Completely untaxing but very well put together. Actually on this one Pickford most certainly did come to mind. For some, the lead lines might be a little sweet but for others they will be spot on. On the title track more very easy to get on with melodies bounce over a chugging train like rhythm and sequence. One of the sequences is even a little Jarreish. There's plenty a twist and turn but always enjoyable. One of the later melodies even sounded a little like Vangelis. ' In Balance' is a slower more thoughtful number the lead sounds being mainly flute and bells then plucked strings. Vangelis again comes to mind as well as some of the more romantic Frank Van Bogaert. A little sweet for my tastes but still a good track.

This quieter tranquil pace is continued through to ' Ground Zero' . With a title like that obvious images come to mind. Mostly it is a collage of soft pads and half heard vocal samples. A tranquil brass line can be heard fairly low in the mix then a more strident one (again sounding a little Pickfordish) takes over.

' Schattentanz' begins with piano, a snare drum is added and things become increasingly syncopated as we progress- nice enough I suppose but for me not a highlight. ' Nordland' begins with acoustic guitar. We bob along on the back of a relaxed rhythm to which more and more melodies using a variety of different sounds are added. Its extremely happy and tuneful, again bordering on the ' sweet' but certainly a very pleasant track.

We make a windy transition to ' Gobi' . Ethereal pads and a slow deep beat are added. More rhythm and a sequence come in and we chug along very joyfully, the melodies as ever being spot on. Its a lovely track. ' Metallino' lives up to its name by having a rather metallic almost steel drum lead line. In no way is this Caribbean sounding though it does give a rather bright structure around which other rhythms and sequences play. Its extremely tuneful but somehow with a hint of melancholy.

' Horizont' continues this faintly sad feeling as we begin with a mournful piano melody. Its a very delicate track but just too ' twee' for me. ' Different Colours' is the longest track at over eighteen minutes. It has a rather atmospheric beginning out of which a bright lead line, slow sequence and rhythm emerge. More sequences are added but the mood is still fairly tranquil. The pace starts to quicken in the third minute. An excellent mean sequence comes in just before the six minute mark and its foot down on the accelerator time again. This is fantastic stuff! The sequence really means business but also melodically its a delight. Three minutes later we calm down to a lovely ethereal section, a sequence still going in the background ready to propel the track forward again. The pads swell, more lovely melodies are added and an excellent rhythm comes in, an anthemic lead line flashing over the top. By the twelfth minute the tender side of Klangwelt comes to the surface again and yet it provides one of the highlights of the album- beautiful in a thoughtful way rather than slushy. I heard of Klangwelt through the excellent track that was donated to the ' Syntonic Waves Vol 8' compilation I reviewed a few months ago. The first and last roughly twenty minutes each provided pretty much what I would have expected given that offering but the rest, the filling to the sandwich if you like, showed a much softer side to the artist. It is almost as if we had two different albums but throughout its all extremely melodic and accessible. (DL)

Subsonic Experience / Praposition

This is an excellent CD; the best non Ian Boddy related release on the DiN label so far. Actually next to ' Radio Sptnik' and ' Outpost' it is probably my favourite. An infectious and rather cool groove gets the opener ' The Regained Paradise' underway. Slow blissful lead lines float over the top but really it's the beats that get under the skin which have the greatest effect. As with this entire CD the combination of sounds chosen are excellent. As the track goes on the leads become faster but remain in the middle of the mix. A mellotron / organ combination is particularly effective.

' Throne in the Background' is a very different affair. Distorted gong / percussion sounds ring out as if from the depths. Dark drones mix with other effects forming an eerie sonic montage. A bass loop starts up being so low it is felt as much as heard. From time to time it does become inaudible actually but somehow it still seems to be there. A sequence rumbles forth at the beginning of ' Strengthening the Volatile Part 1' . It's a big thick one but relatively quiet. Initially it stands almost in isolation but as it becomes more strident in the second minute a beautiful delicate lead line can just be heard low in the mix. The sequence continues to develop gaining a certain moody ' attitude' . Another excellent organ sound can be heard in the background giving things a tremendous depth- this really is superb stuff!

' In the Shadow of Possibilities' is a drifter making use of both windy and shimmering pads. It becomes spookier as it progresses with what could very well be spectres flying over the top. Strange gurgling / echoing animal noises can be heard near the end giving things an even darker twist. ' Treasures of the World' begins with yet another cool organ sound, this time a little softer than before. A percussive loop starts up to which another is added and as with the opener we get into an excellent groove though somewhat more restrained this time. There is quite a change in the third minute as a dark rumble comes in along with another fantastic organ sounding like something from TD's ' Alpha Centauri' or even ' Atem' albums. The loops disappear in time and it is then that these sounds can be heard to full awesome effect.

' Masked Woman' uses a combination of twittering sounds and more deep dronal backing to form a dense sonic carpet. This is a track all about atmospheres, again becoming increasingly spooky in the second half. We get yet more fantastic organ at the beginning of ' Strengthening the Volatile Part 2' and it isn't long before a rapid sequence starts up. This subsides at around the half way mark as we return to more atmospherics to close. Attention seems to be paid to every minute detail on every track. For those who like both modern atmospheric and rhythmic music this could go down as something of a classic. (DL)

Various / Beyond Me

The sleeve notes read like a veritable "who's who" of current synth artists: Paul Ellis, Nemesis, Free System Projekt, Robert Carty, Rudy Adrian, Kubusschnitt, Dave Fulton, Synthetic Block, Paul Nagle, Arcane, John Christian (from AirSculpture) and Ramp. This project was borne from the internet chat group "beyond_em", a thriving source of news, information and general gossip which has hundreds of subscribers, including the artists here and many more. As Paul Ellis, the co-ordinator and "guy to blame", as he describes himself, says on the sleeve ".....I was surprised by the number of other musos on the list and the high quality of their work. I threw out an idea where one musician would pick up the musical thread of the previous musician and make an album that way....."

' Beyond Me' is the result, a real embarrassment of riches. There is so much tempting music on this album you really won't know where to start. The majority of tracks are new, only the Arcane piece has appeared previously on the ' Alterstill' CDR, and Paul Nagle's track has appeared in mixed form on ' Blue Book' . Just before I dive into the tracks, one mention for the sleeve graphics especially the inside cover featuring cartoon cameos of all the artists - it's very cleverly done.

Fittingly Paul Ellis gets the show on the road with a fantastic piece called ' Into the Liquid Unknown' (8.19). It features magnificent sequence contortions which are sometimes left to twist and mutate in isolation, at other times accompanied by perfectly judged silken pads. Next up is ' Nemesis' with ' Silopart' (7.25). A punchy beat underpins expert sequencing and some classic mellotron sounds. Again it's a top notch synth outing, and blends perfectly with the former piece, and the next track for that matter - ' Pharos' (5.27) from ' Free System Projekt. This does bring to mind mid 70's EM with mellotron timbres painting a patchwork of sound which could be straight from ' Phaedra' . Half way through the piece those trademark FSP pulsations start up and we are on another roller coaster of rampant moog style sequences and epic synth textures.

Robert Carty contributes ' Outside Influences' (5.10) which opens with strange alien utterings before a slow but mammoth beat appears around which all manner of electronic detail is layered. It sounds slightly tribal, Aztec culture comes to mind, such as the more atmospheric work of Richard Burmer. Next it's Rudy Adrian with ' Secrets in Sahara Sands' (6.42) which carries on the atmosphere and style perfectly, yet stamps a very different interpretation with a choppy sequence and ethereal synth layers. Kubusschnitt's ' Vantage Trick' (6.18) will surprise (and disappoint) one, being a classic slab of retro sequencing with electric guitar angst pitched perfectly in the mix. Dave Fulton's ' Falling Away' (5.32) takes the baton, a strangely beguiling collection of electronic throbs and drones while ' Flash of Attention' (1.45) by Synthetic Block is a brief but perfectly formed cameo which features syncopating oscillations.

Paul Nagle's ' Adventure' (8.37) opens with a marvellous peevish sequence and an infectious melody. John Hickey contributes foreboding words before "the cave closes" to allow Arcane's ' Alterstill part 3' (6.00) to be unleashed. If by some twist of fate you haven't got this track, the situation needs to be fixed immediately. First aired at Jodrell Bank, this is possibly the only track which has ever left myself and Dave Law speechless at the same time.

' Heathkit Interociter' (4.12) by John Christian is a fascinating and quite unique sequence based track wonderfully inventive in construction, very melodic and hugely entertaining. Finally Ramp serve up ' Rapture of the Deep' (6.21) and this has to be heard to be believed atmospheric from the Gods.

What an album! No matter what your taste in EM this has it all, in one cohesive high quality package. Buy without hesitation. (GG)

Under The Dome / Bellerophon

Deep analogue sounds abound on ' Liquid Sky' . Even though atmospheric it literally fizzes with pent up energy. Solar winds blow through the ether. The scene is set for ' Launch'a sequencer driven stormer. And what sequences! A bass laden one thunders forth while a bubbly melodic one bounces over the top at 100 miles an hour. It's a track which works on every level, even the lead line is sensational. We are now in space, ' Drift' taking us on a beautiful relaxing journey through the cosmos. Darker drones take over on ' The Long Rain' . A little melodic tinkling sequence starts up as do yet more deep bass pulsations which make

the floor shake. The tension is incredible but the pace sedate. I constantly expected things to explode but the awesome energy is kept on a tight leash. Vast pads swell like a wave swamping the sequences before they spontaneously combust. We finish on a more tranquil footing. Swirling atmospherics dominate the short ' Sun Dome' acting like a bridge to the melodically beautiful ' Return' . A rapid ' sequence' , sounding like a lead line in its own right pulls at the heartstrings as does the stunning main melody. The sounds swell becoming rather euphoric before fading away to silence out of which the deepest and most awesome bass sequence emerges- could this have been responsible for the recent earthquakes in Manchester? More majestic lead lines are then brought in and I found myself pumping up the volume. Calmness returns for ' Nightfall' . Soft pads are punctuated by water droplet piano notes. More bass rumbles get ' Event Horizon' underway. It' s like feeling the aftershock of some cosmic detonation. A massive wave of sound hits then slowly fades the distance. Another bass sequence starts up then descends to almost below hearing though you will still feel its power. It momentarily disappears only to return with added vigour accompanied by yet another sequence just as uncompromising as the first. This track oozes malevolent power more than any other I have heard - it' s quite an experience and not for the faint hearted but boy is it exciting!

' 57D' is again melodic. This time it' s an electric guitar which creates the melody. Another fantastic sequence joins the game and the lead is taken over by conventional synth. The sound chosen is exquisite overflowing with power but also emotion as it builds to epic proportions. It' s really something of an anthem which is sure to be the highlight of every live performance they do from now on. ' Atair IV' swirls with sci fi type effects as if a spacecraft is landing followed by sounds of a strange planet. You can easily imagine the scene on the front cover. We finish with another sequencer romp ' Solar Gravity' . Actually on much of this album to call what you hear as sequences is so inadequate. It' s as if Under the Dome are literally able to control thunder putting devastating power into every note, shifting it this way and that, obeying their every whim. As for the lead line- it' s another corker. There isn' t one meandering moment on the album. Each lead is exquisitely constructed, scorching, menacing or even very occasionally tender. It' s as if the Gods themselves are hurtling bolts of pure energy. Inevitably the CD finishes with a massive explosion as the album goes super nova.

This is a stunning album. It contains those trademark UTD style sequences as found on their first but it also shows a great deal of maturity, light and shade if you like. Equal attention is paid to the atmospheres and textures which balance the stormers. It also comes over as something of a concept album, right down to the early sci fi imagery of the artwork (think of Forbidden Planet). To get the most out of this album when you first get it keep it on constant rotation, playing it time after time- if your woofers are up to it that is. There is greater depth to the sound here than I have ever heard before. (DL)