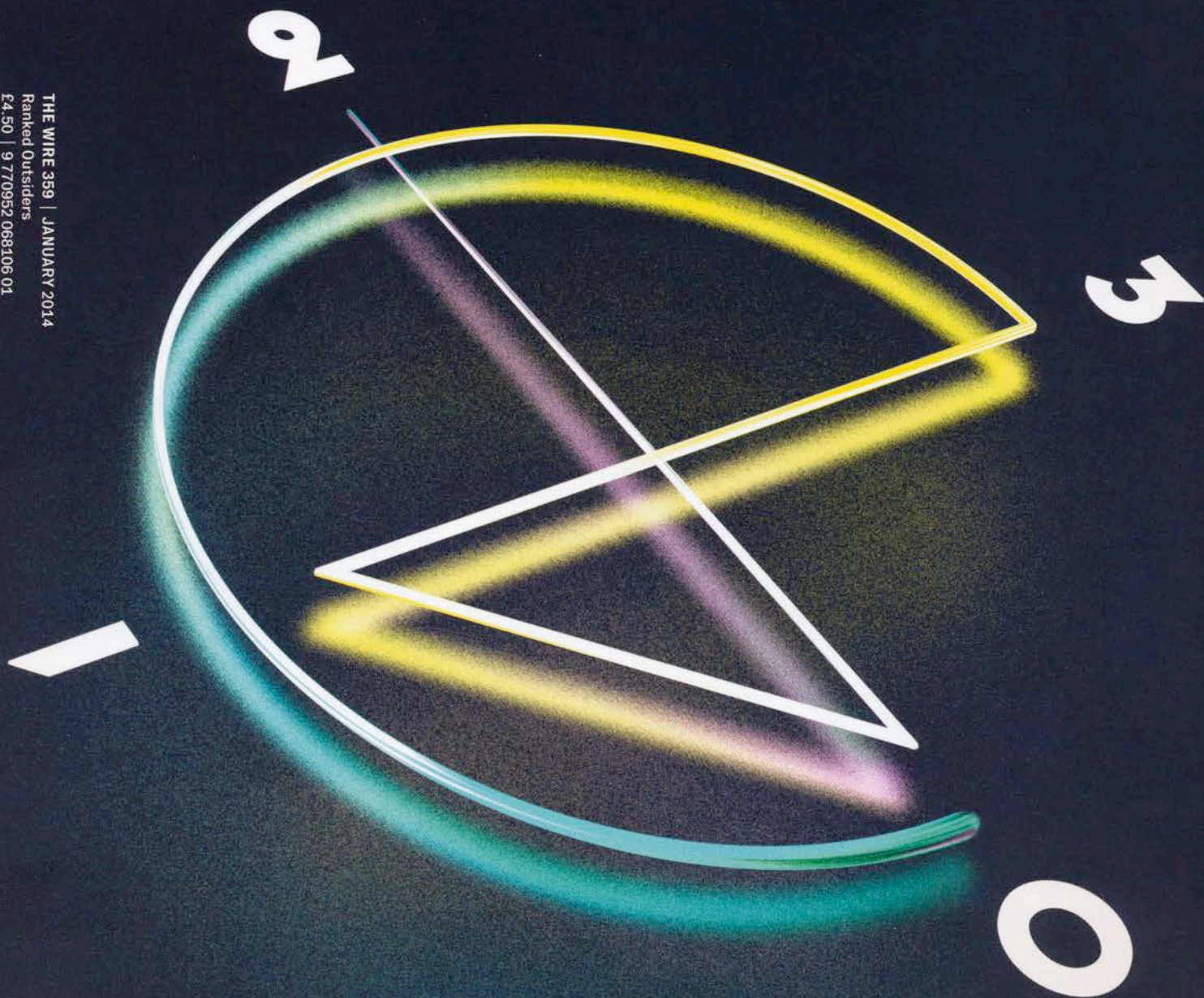


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THE WIRE 359 | JANUARY 2014
Ranked Outsiders
£4.50 | 9770952 068106 01



2013 REWIND

THE YEAR IN UNDERGROUND MUSIC

Charts | Reflections | Analyses

s closing title piece, more atmospheric space, short, slightly variegated and stun gun squeals as objects short barrages. Free metal will likely be those who only seek whatever form it may take, apting, if comparatively low

s, over six previous though continually shifting self have explored a that has sat on the cusp of improvisation, beginning reductionism's inspection of and expanding outwards member's own interests each musician has found outside of the group, so out how to progress have resulting in departures, sion to the music. tcher's exit from the quartet Dafeldecker, cellist and percussionists Burkhard Brandlmayr. For *Traces* p explicitly harness the s of its membership to try work together.

iece "Adapt/Oppose" y the musicians react Moser seems more the music evolves and repetition, stretching and material, while Dafeldecker s the confrontation and a field recording of storm. These compositions d and developed at so allowing each to al mark on the work and usic to take on a group

as a result of the ner's sax, *Traces Of* hetically closer to r music and further from any of the ensemble's outings. Conversely, ng certainly sounds all also sounds like an ienced ensemble coming usic of four different up's voice seems to composer second, the ween musicians really *Traces Of Wood* is best ation of the history and cs of a longstanding lbum taken in isolation.

ic, uh, field is chronically any are seduced by high ecorders into taping

their locale or their travels without much thought as to why or who might listen. The number of field recordings released dwarfs their relatively modest listenership, and while ecological or political reasons are sometimes advanced for preserving sounds for posterity, these are often vague, opened appeals to future listenership. Field recordings are more usually offered with relatively little comment – the modesty is refreshing, but the steady flow of CDs and downloads are much like the amateur watercolour landscapes that clog up local art galleries. This obsessive desire to preserve real life often serves only to highlight our distance from it.

Adrian Rew's *Slot Machine Music* is one of the rare recordings with a precise polemical thrust, an eloquent constellation of supporting ideas, and like Ernst Karel's work, a laser beam focus on the strangest corners of the modern world. The subject in this case is casinos in the American Midwest, environments that are every bit as precisely calibrated as the Harvard science labs of Karel's *Heard Laboratories*.

They're also some of the most secure. On the disc's second track, recorded at the Horseshoe casino in Hammond, Indiana, you can hear Rew being warned about taking photos; no surprise, then, that these recordings were captured by a recorder stashed deep inside his coat. Once Rew is in what he calls the zone, you get to hear an endlessly hypnotic symphony of chiming slot machines – as he observes, all tuned by manufacturers to the same key in order to maximise their cumulative effect – punctuated by the satisfying metal on metal play off of coins being dispensed. The depth of sound is astonishing, given that these are simply untreated recordings, which is eloquent testament to the power of industrial sound design tied with exploitative capitalism.

Rew's sleevenotes also detail what you can't see: mesmerizing lights, perfectly conditioned air, and carefully calibrated flows of punters in and out. And they conclude with the inevitable pay off: Rew himself got sucked into losing a bunch of money in the process of making his recordings. "The disc in your hands," he concludes as a note to the unwitting, "represents my endeavour to bring you the zone experience without the harsh comedown of its unfortunate reality."

Derek Walmsley

Jocelyn Robert

Cycloïdes

GD Stereo CD

With hindsight, Quebec artist Jocelyn Robert's debut *Stat Live Moniteur*, issued in 1988 by Chris Cutler's Recommended Records, placed him ahead of the game. Its unpredictable audio montage integrated found sounds and field recordings with instrumental and spoken sequences, ditching purist or doctrinaire musical values and accepting the journal-like immediacy that comes with raw and low grade elements. Robert, formally trained in both pharmacology and architecture, has subsequently pursued his conceptual

leanings through a broad variety of methods and contexts, including installations, group improvisation, performance art, mail art, sculptural activity and radio work.

Cycloïdes extends a surprising vector within Robert's creativity: his sporadic ventures into piano music, which have included a collaboration with Michael Snow. This interest seems to run counter to his otherwise unconventional trajectory, but Robert, who describes his own playing ability as below average, approaches the instrument as a medium for testing and elaborating an idea. In his early 1990s piece *Le Piano Flou*, specially written software magnified inaccuracies and hesitations in Robert's keyboard execution. The Disklavier used for *Cycloïdes* again latches onto his errors, compelling him to accept them as springboards for his ongoing improvisation, and locking his intended progress into accidental patterning.

Geoff Dugan, who runs the GD Stereo imprint, says this is the first in a series of recordings exploring relationships between music and architecture. Not immediately evident, but something to ponder as you listen to Robert's faltering flow of notes, suspended between direction and drift as firm departures coincide with unexpected arrivals.

Julian Cowley

Sadat & Alaa Fifty Cent

The Best Of

Generation Bass DL

Mahraganat (which translates as festival music) is an exhilarating post-hiphop club music that can be heard widely on the post-revolutionary streets of Cairo: blasting out of taxi cabs; from the party boats that sail out into the Nile every evening; and at weddings, where the performers make their money. Although the sound has received considerable international attention in recent months, it has remained a mostly local phenomenon, passed around on mobile phones and USB sticks, YouTube videos and social media. This release, made by global bass blog and label Generation Bass, and curated by Joost of the dubiously named but enterprising Dutch bass crew The Cairo Liberation Front, is the first official release of the music outside Egypt, with all proceeds reportedly going direct to the artists.

Mahraganat has its origins in the poor neighbourhoods that surround metropolitan Cairo, specifically Salam City, where a group of young hip-hop fans, including the pioneering figures DJ Figo and Amr 7a7a (pronounced 'haha') and MC/singers like Sadat and Alaa Fifty Cent and the equally popular duo Oka & Ortega started putting tracks together around 2009. Although the style has its roots in the working class Egyptian folk/wedding/party music known as shaabi, and retains the shuffling midtempo beats associated with that sound, it is emphatically electronic, loop based, and usually built around dazzlingly Auto-Tuned duo vocal call and responses that build into ever more dizzying, ecstatic melodic climaxes.

Foreign commentators have often

claimed that mahraganat is the sound of the Egyptian revolution. Although the music had little or nothing to do with the actual protests in Tahrir Square that toppled the military government, the lyrics of some of Sadat's hits are political in a very hip-hop inflected way, focusing on the conditions of everyday life for the urban/suburban poor. His biggest hit "Five Pounds Credit" proclaims: "*The people want something new [to think about]/The people want five pounds' phone credit/The people want to topple the regime/But the people are so damn tired*". Perhaps given Egypt's current descent into counter-revolutionary militarist crackdown, the pessimism of the lyric is as prophetic as the exuberant iconoclasm of the music, in which a cheesy synth performance of the Egyptian national anthem is interrupted by shattering glass and a powerful party starting beat.

Marcus Boon

Domenico Sciajno

Sonic Shuffle

Bowindo USB

Ignore the clumsy title – this project brings into question not only how music is presented to its audience, but the very relationship between composer and listener. Loaded onto a USB memory card, *Sonic Shuffle* is an interactive sequencing programme that, when installed onto a computer presents 48 sound files, each a separate response to a graphic score written by Domenico Sciajno, with one file each recorded by a large ensemble of mostly electronics wielding musicians, with names involved ranging from Phill Niblock and Alvin Curran to Axel Dörner and Toshimaru Nakamura. One option open to the listener, and one I selected frequently, is to just press play and let the programme randomly choose eight of the sound files to play together, replacing them with eight more at their conclusion and continuing thus for as long as you desire. The software allows far more, though, and the option is there to pick and choose from the different musicians' soundfiles, and alter attack, volume and various other settings. There's also the option of taking up the composer's baton by conducting an electroacoustic orchestra of established names, and given that there is also an option to be able to upload your own sound files to combine into the mix, and a copy of Sciajno's score is included on the memory card, you can even join in the performance as one of the musicians.

The sound files vary dramatically. There are soft and harsh sounds, beautiful and ugly. All of the ingredients, then, for fine music, but the recipe is realised either by the vagaries of chance or by your own volition. For me, this is an unnerving release that challenges my own personal comfort zone as a critical listener that has never had the courage to pick up an instrument for myself. You can't just put it into the CD player and sit back and make a judgment on it. Each time you press play it sounds different. If you want it to sound a certain way, you have to roll up your sleeves and do it yourself. While it is intended as a chance to interact