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CD REVIEWS

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HERBERT Scale (IK7) Bringing down the house

If there is in fact a healthy scene of over-the-hill ravers who have traded in their fat pants for tailored suits, ecstasy for fine wine and warehouse parties for chichi jazz clubs, Scale could very well be the perfect album for it. Herbert's bouncy, soulful tech-house of old has matured into a sophisticated tapestry of orchestrated arrangements for strings, brass and woodwinds, with ever-present vocals sounding like contemporary R&B adapted for a Broadway stage. With Scale, director Herbert (aka Matthew Herbert) still casts a range of electronic beats and synth lines, although they're relegated to supporting roles. In doing so, he may have sacrificed palatability for the album's stunning originality. The album plays like the original soundtrack for completing the transition from capricious youth to levelheaded adulthood. Terribly exciting? No. Wonderful background music for a romantic dinner? Absolutely.

As an artistic endeavor, Scale deserves nothing less than admiration. However, after all the soaring instrumentation and sanguine vocal melodies, only a few songs (check out "Down") manage to make a lasting impression. In the end, it becomes like a casual acquaintance from those heady rave days — something to embrace but not truly love. — M. Rovito

ELLEN ALLIEN & APPARAT Orchestra of Bubbles (BPitch control) Berlin's finest at play

This collaboration between Ellen Allien and electro maverick Apparat melds sharp, insistent beats with emotive melodies and piquant strings, creating a compelling album that's dark, emphatic and wonderfully expressive. The chopped-up guitars and driving rhythms may seem all Allien, but Apparat's influence is evident in fractured samples and off-kilter accents. From the subterranean techno of "Floating Points" to the delicate strings and seesaw beats of "Leave Me Alone" and the shattered electro of "Do Not Break," this is music that demands — and rewards — careful listening. — Christine Hsieh

DFA The DFA Remixes, Chapter One (DFA/Astralwerks) Play that funky music, white boys

Production duo James Murphy and Tim Goldsworthy, ringleaders behind DFA Records, compiled The DFA Remixes for your listening pleasure. Indeed, it is a pleasurable listen. This comp is brimming with hard-to-find and out-of-print remixes, including the sexy-as-all-hell "The Boxer" (Chemical Brothers), with its sultry beat and crunchy, metallic synth that

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rumbles and ripples in waves. Also notable is the remix of "Mars, Arizona" (Blues Explosion), featuring a funky bass line and a wacked-out, twisted synth loop. Look for Chapter Two this summer.

— *Lori J. Kennedy*

FILASTINE
Burn It (Soot)
Ruptured and burned

On 2005's *Low Income Tomorrowland*, DJ Rupture eloquently rolled Dead Prez overtop a mesh of laptop and live beats, with the siren calls of a North African oboe instrument called a rhaita. On *Burn It*, Filastine's debut for Rupture's label, one of the multicultural experiments is the dagger-sharp track "Judas Goat." Rupture's worldly field recordings, sound collages and electro burners line a tracklist with concealed explosives that loom in the splitting beats and impending ruin of cuts such as "Splinter Faction Delight," promising paranoid sleeplessness for all in earshot.

— *Dominic Umile*

CHACHI JONES
Dymaxion Daydream (LunaticWorks)
Keepin' it simple

This piece of IDM/glitch-tech supports the idea that limitations are good. Using only Cubase, Reaktor and a circuit-bent device called the Soundmaker, Chachi Jones follows a simple formula. Besides a few instrumental interludes, the tracks push mutating, broken beats to the forefront, with pretty synth pads and arpeggios backing them up. The only vocals come from unintelligible sample stutters that hypnotically become a component of the beat. Although the formula can start to feel stagnant if your mood isn't right, the brightest spots on the album would make Aphex Twin circa 1992 proud.

— *M. Rovito*

KARSH KALE
Broken English (Six Degrees)
Nothing lost in translation

Karsh Kale (pronounced Kursh Kah-Lay) ushers in authentic 21st-century global electronic pop. Flags, borders and languages are swapped, hopped and erased, leaving only dynamic musical fusions. *Broken English* opens with "Manifest," a bombastic rap-bhangra-breaks mixture that reveals traces of producer Kale's New York and London roots. The guitar-speckled dancepop of "Dancing at Sunset," with tabla and Indian strings, follows — a sleek combo suitable for a sports-car ad. Kale takes far-flung roads but ultimately delivers hooky songcraft to the doorstep.

— *Tomas Palermo*

JUANA MOLINA
Son (Domino)
Charla sucia a mi

Spanish is one of the most common languages. But hearing Argentinean producer Juana Molina croon in it is enough to make your knees turn to jelly. On *Son*, Molina relies on sparse guitar pluckings, shuffling percussion and quivering horns to supplement her hollow, throaty utterings. The album shifts easily from hypnotic to frantically disturbed, all in the space of just one track, "Micael." On "Las Culpas," she barely makes a sound but in the process makes you think she is saying all sorts of (hopefully) seductive things. *Son* is enough to make you enroll in a Spanish course.

— *Lily Moayeri*

MR. NOGATCO
Nogatco Rd. (Insomniac)
Aliens abduct Ultramagnetic MC yet again

Rap shape-shifter Kool Keith feels Madonna's pain — new personas don't just gift-wrap themselves and come delivered to doorsteps postage-paid. Reinvention takes work. Fortunately, in 2006, what's old is new again, and dark-edged sci-fi beats still gravitate toward stream-of-consciousness rhymes.

After a string of disappointing albums, Keith rummages through the



costume closet and emerges as covert-ops alien researcher Mr. Nogatco, outfitted in Dr. Octagon surgical smock and fresh-to-def Black Elvis space gear. As producer IZ-REAL charts course for the eerie extraterrestrial terrain Automator once haunted, Keith waxes galactic about alien autopsies and UFOs, and it's back to the future.

"Dark Space" segues from a retro-futuristic '50s B-movie sample to interstellar travel over menacing, slo-mo scratches; and "Celestial" channels the Dr. Octagon of old with creepy keyboards, rapid-fire laser guns and superscientific rhymes. Keith suppresses his carnal urges and scatological predilections until "Black 37," when he relapses spectacularly in a lyrical orgy of fur bikinis and fetish tapes over a squelching guitar line and rumbling bass piano. Hide your daughters, Keith is back.
— Rob Kirby

MONO
You Are There (Temporary Residence)
Feedback for sensitive souls

Japan's Mono is a dense and powerful band, but save the My Bloody Valentine comparisons for a lesser post — Phil Spector Wall of Sound outfit. The foursome does create Valentine-esque distortion waves, yet 'tis a gentle sea on the group's sixth album. The meticulous restraint is dually realized by Steve Albini's attention to EQ balance and the band's pursuit of melancholy and colorful patchworks. Where Coldplay and Radiohead hint at sonic power, Mono reinvents beautiful noise. Although complex instrumental rock has quickly become its own subgenre, Mono's slant is gracefully novel.
— Tomas Palermo

MURS AND 9TH WONDER
Murray's Revenge (Record Collection)
Indie-rap duo's second coming

On the heels of 2004's *Murs 3:16*, the L.A. everyman MC and indie production wunderkind reconnect for their second foray into lush beats and intelligent rhymes. Swaggering bass and rattling keys propel Murs into cipher mode on "Barbershop," and "Sillygirl" flips a doo-wop hook into carefree flirtation as Murs and Joe Scudda ride the sunny track down hook-ups memory lane. Murs sweet-talks the mic on "Love & Appreciate," while 9th Wonder works old-school magic with a golden-voiced sample and muted synth sustains, moving gracefully like dolphins in calm water.
— Rob Kirby

PEOPLE UNDER THE STAIRS
Stepfather (Basement)
Humorists and scientists

Producer Thes One and MC Double K held it down for L.A. in the indie hip-hop boom of the late '90s, packing shows and garnering coast-to-coast fans through their use of clever rhymes, jazzy breaks and laidback humor. On *Stepfather*, PUTS builds on its sound by adding analog drum machines, chopped and layered samples (check "Pumpin'"), live musicians and studio-wiring experiments. *Stepfather* is one of those rare records that will ultimately turn the heads of the experimental sect and shake up the underground hip-hop aficionados, pleasing both.
— Aaron Schultz

THE PRESETS
Beams (Modular)
Australians aim for pop perfection

Duos don't always impress for lack of interaction in its too-tight symmetry. Australia's The Presets does itself no favors with a name that conjures packaged synth patches. Surprise! Julian Hamilton and Kimberley Moyes' debut delivers pop that crawls under your flesh and hatches goosebumps. These blokes have the spooky swagger of Sparks, Yello or Love and Rockets, plus a Neptunes-tight aesthetic punctuated by distorted synths. Choosing the catchiest track is impossible — better just let Beams play while you focus on dance steps or sexual debauchery.
— Tomas Palermo

PROZACK TURNER
Bangathon (Hunger Strike)
A salty rapper with a sweet sound

Prozack Turner approaches the rap-braggadocio thing with his tongue firmly in cheek. The MC fronts like a baller but also makes fun of himself for being that short, funky redneck who can beat his hip-hop forebears at their own game. With self-deprecating torch songs and an intentionally cheesy love ballad for an Internet porn star, *Bangathon* sets Prozack's cheeky personality against chopped-up symphonic licks, soul-diva hooks and studio effects (mostly cobbled together by Oh No and Quincy Tones). The raps may be rough and salty, but the music is tasteful and clean.

— *Rachel Swan*

ROOTS MANUVA
***Alternatively Deep* (Big Dada)**
Brit hip-hopper gets a tweaking

Rodney Smith, better known as Roots Manuva, seems to do no wrong these days. After delivering one of last year's finest records and single-handedly saving the new Coldcut album, Manuva returns with *Alternatively Deep*, a collection of outtakes, B-sides and remixes from his *Awfully Deep* album. *Alternatively* provides exactly what Manuva fans are craving in between albums — killer tracks that should have made the album ("No Love"), weirdness that couldn't ("Nobody's Dancing") and those dubby remixes that always work so well (Jammer's take on "Colossal Insight"). Get your fix.

— *Aaron Schultz*

THE STREETS
***The Hardest Way to Make an Easy Living* (Vice)**
Worn too thin

British hip-hop phenomenon and The Streets' mouthpiece, Mike Skinner, turned MCing about mundane observations into an art form. Talking about the life of the average teenager the world over on his first album, he moved on to talking about the life of a chap in his early 20s for his second. On his third, *Hardest Way*, he lost the thread. Disconnecting with his fellow man, Skinner whines about his career. The average Joe will not find Skinner's complaints about managers, promotion, showcases, television and radio appearances the least bit relatable. Even when he is discussing current topics, such as camera phones on "When You Wasn't Famous," it's in relation to how he can't do drugs in the presence of them because he's too famous (e.g.: Kate Moss).

Skinner's sense of humor is intact as most of his grumbles are poking fun at himself, but that's not enough to save *Hardest Way*. The lo-fi and sparse musical accompaniment, which was charming before, has become increasingly unoriginal. Treated as an afterthought, the minimalist bedroom-style beats, plinking pianos and cheesy synths are, in turn, rehashed and disposable. Time to go back to square one.

— *Lily Moayeri*

SPANK ROCK
***YOYOYOYOYO* (Big Dada)**
Bmore Boys Club

Coarse language and thick beat programming pepper a remarkable debut from Baltimore native MC Spank Rock and producer Armani XXXChange. *YOYOYOYOYO* revels in party hip-hop, with beats rooted in Bmore-club and spastic, techy rhythms. Spank rides a buzzing assembly of whirs and cooling engine clicks on opener "Backyard Betty," highlighting a club hottie's gyrating nether regions. XXXChange's beats are just as charged as his boy's zany flow, shining in the tumble-clap and tiger roars of "Touch Me," and lazing only momentarily in the seven-beer limp of "Coke & Wet."

— *Dominic Umile*

THIEVERY CORPORATION
***Versions* (ESL)**
The song remains the same

Thievery Corporation's sound has become too identifiable. Whether it's reworkings of Nouvelle Vague, Herb Alpert or The Doors, on *Versions*, the duo's second collection of remixes, the blanket of soporific dub wraps every element. Another smothering cover on those lulling bedclothes is a reliance on world music, be it Middle Eastern brass or South American strings. Every singer is exceptional, but the fact that each number has

been retouched by the Corporation makes the entire thing play like one long song that sounds the same the whole way through.

— *Lily Moayeri*

T.I.
King (Grand Hustle/Atlantic)
Rap royalty reclaims his throne

T.I. is back with a fresh batch of Southern-fried selections that are sure to rattle trunks all through the bottom states and beyond. The 808 snares of the organ-driven lead single, "What You Know About That," serve as the perfect backdrop for T.I. to warn any haters thinking about challenging his throne. Meanwhile, the orchestral strings of "Told You So" add a dramatic feel, and the heavy bass line of the UGK remake, "Front and Back," gives Southern hip-hop fans a taste of nostalgia. Start to finish, T.I. shows that he has no plans of relinquishing his crown anytime soon.

— *Anthony Roberts*

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Compost Black Label Series Vol. 1 (Compost)
Black heats up

Compost hardly turns out anything that's not sharp and smartly edited, and that's precisely what makes their Black Label offshoot so delicious. Packed with scuzzy bass lines, dirty beats and hazy ambience, this comp takes Compost's pristine production ethos to the dancefloor and musses it up. Minus 8's "Solaris" gets a healthy rubdown and emerges as a gritty electro number; Tyree Cooper & Matt Flores turn out deep, techy house with "Close Life Off;" and Phreek Plus One drops head-nodding funk with "Boogie Beat." Sexy, yet subtle.

— *Christine Hsieh*

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Holocene Music: Remix Comp. Vol. 1 (Holocene)
Overcast with hoppy beats

Portland's reputable Holocene club has served indie, electronic and really hoppy beers since 2003. *Holocene Music* dishes up local acts in mostly likable blends. Salient guitar is swapped for a velvet drape of fuzz in Dizzy Starhouse's chop-work of Point Juncture, Washington's "The Siesta Movement;" and singer/drummer Amanda Spring's kit is yanked out, leaving ample reverb and glitchy beats. The Thermals get a noisier whoopin', their garage punk reduced to prickly guitar blips, overhauled by Ovian's frantic stutter-beat treatment.

— *Dominic Umile*

VOOM VOOM
Peng Peng (!K7)
Three's a good crowd

Voom Voom features three of the brightest stars coming out of the Austrian/German left-field dance scene — Peter Kruder (Kruder & Dorfmeister), Roland Appel and Christian Prommer (of Truby Trio and Fauna Flash). Breaking out of the guys' downtempo and nu-jazz mold, *Peng Peng* is packed with analog dancefloor bangers ("Baby"), atmospheric electronics ("Vampir Song") and vocoded funk ("Roger"). It's a well-programmed record that delivers equally at home and on massive club systems. While purists will whine about the new direction, in this case, evolution is a positive thing.

— *Aaron Schultz*

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