

shape. There are curious curves and convolutions, intriguing twists and spirals within this music's space. Straight lines, pointing consistently in a familiar direction are conspicuously absent. The trio fuse as an integrated unit. They churn, flaunting artifice yet sounding organic. Mary Dill's cover art, *Dress Pattern #2*, is a perfect match for the alluring designs, oblique connections and structural ambivalence spontaneously encrypted within each of these seven tracks.

Back in May 1992 Robair, guitarist Myles Boisen and saxophonist Dave Barrett got together in Berkeley, California with Steve Benson, a poet associated with the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E literary axis. Nearly 30 years later that exhilarating encounter has been retrieved and issued for the first time, as a 30 track CD, with a handsomely produced 112 page book.

Outwardly, Benson reading with The Splatter Trio fits squarely within a poetry and jazz tradition established by signal figures such as Kenneth Patchen and Amiri Baraka. Benson reads with real vigour, and the trio, by comparison with Tender Buttons, blaze a relatively straightahead trail. Yet although Benson's thrust may at times arrive, as he writes in one poem, at "the code at the core of the mundane object/translated into teeth and breath", his volatile verbal concoctions fizz and flare in ways far removed from stable, still less stale meaning. The Splatter Trio, adaptable and energetic free improvisors, respond in kind, with muscular effervescence and explosive compression.

Julian Cowley

They Might Be Giants

Book

Idlewild CD/CD+Hbk/DL/LP/MC

The Pamphlet

Idlewild DL

Some might suggest that if the world had its head screwed on right They Might Be Giants (aka John Linnell and John Flansburgh) would be afforded the same level of respect as Sparks, The Residents, Talking Heads, Devo, Jonathan Richman and Pere Ubu – acts who made mischief

They Might Be Giants



with the vocabularies of pop and rock, opening them up to the possibilities of irony, surrealism, ad-speak, squareness, science and, occasionally, wisdom disguised as nonsense.

The world does not, however, have its head screwed on right and in fact TMBG have benefitted from their lack of alternate canonical status. Celebrated by a devoted fanbase, their legacy – fairly hefty as they've been going since 1982 – has never become a millstone. Rather, it's an expanding resource, a body of work alive and in progress.

As such, it's subject to ebb and flow. Between 2004 and 2013 Linnell and Flansburgh released a remarkable run of albums. *The Spine* (2004), *The Else* (2007), *Join Us* (2011) and *Nanobots* (2013) equalled and arguably outdid early landmarks such as 1988's *Lincoln* and 1990's *Flood* in terms of lyrical wit and musical imagination. The horn arrangement of the deceptively simple "When Will You Die" (from *Join Us*) for example is worthy of Zappa or Prince while its merciless lyric positions it as an almighty diss track.

The last few TMBG albums have been more gradual glow than sudden flash. *Book* – available as part of a package with a volume of recent lyrics – is likewise packed with songs that take a few listens to click. Flansburgh remains an acute observer of humanity's pettiest manipulations as well as a shit hot guitarist; Linnell still has one of the most weirdly soulful voices in rock and a feel for poignant absurdity. "I Broke My Own Rule" is a noteworthy example of the latter while "I Lost Thursday" is lush cringe funk with Partridge Family hooks and "Less Than One" closes the album on a brilliantly discomfiting note with Linnell balefully delivering a catalogue of confusions over relentlessly propulsive garage rock.

The Pamphlet is a download-only companion featuring four tracks from the same sessions. It's not essential, but it's seven more minutes of TMBG in the world, which is hard to take issue with.

Joseph Stannard

Trees Speak

Vertigo Of Flaws

Soul Jazz CD/DL/2xLP

Trees Speak make music that sounds like it was recorded in some used vinyl store owner's fantasy idea of 1971, and record it at a rate more akin to the relentless pop production lines of 1965. Not only is *Vertigo Of Flaws* their fourth album in about 12 months, it's 90 minutes long and contains 31 tracks, if you include "Transfiguration" and "Urzeit" on the bonus 7". Ping-ponging between krautrock, deep funk, free jazz and pre-techno synth workouts, they could have easily released it as three short, more coherent LPs; some credit, at least, ought to go to Soul Jazz for indulging them in these spartan times.

Trees Speak are the duo of Daniel

Martin Diaz and Damian Diaz from Tucson, Arizona. Here they enlist other local musicians (including Giant Sand's Gabriel Sullivan) where necessary. "Opticks", with its tricky Can groove and snaky saxophone, sounds like the product of a band format. As does "Transfiguration" with free jazz into free folk type percussion and a rare case of vocals (which might be their Art Ensemble Of Chicago homage – although without specific song credits it's largely guesswork). Moments that were likely created by the duo without hired hands, like the keenly observed Tangerine Dream moves of "Cybernetic Dream" or the proto-electro patterns of "Imaginary Forces", provide many of the album's highlights. Moments that recall Broadcast or Trans Am are rarely unwelcome, either.

Something like "Hidden Machine" is where, for all one's tacit approval of profligacy, you start asking why this album is so long. There's the germ of a breakbeat here, a nice organ tone, but it all feels makeweight. Most of Trees Speak's favourite bands generated outtakes for days, quite literally; would inspection of the Diaz hard drive suggest similarly ruthless self-editing?

Noel Gardner

Christian Wallumrød

Speaksome

Hubro CD/DL/LP

Norwegian keyboardist and composer Christian Wallumrød has routinely tweaked his sound, following his curiosity to new places. His long-running ensemble has increasingly veered toward contemporary music over its two decade run, and simultaneously he's delved head-first into electronics in Brutter, his scrappy groove versus abstraction duo with his brother Fredrick on drums, with echoes of his early contributions to Close Erase, the experimental fusion trio he co-led in the 1990s.

Wallumrød's new solo album *Speaksome* arrives as a rustic response to that work – stripped down, contemplative and handmade (the beautiful opening piece "Self Volk" was literally recorded at home, with creaks and ambient noise intact). There's a self-assurance and grace to these pieces, some of which complement his acoustic playing with judicious electronics. On "Speakless" low end pings and a damped, guitar-like two pattern phrase tattoo his pointillistic prepared piano chatter, with a dialogue between patience and frustration.

The pianist's abiding love for ECM associated pianists like Keith Jarrett and Paul Bley is plainly reflected by a piece like "Nölen And Laden", but Wallumrød's chords reflect an aesthetic all his own, a bucolic sustain hanging from each iteration of the theme and every stark accent. It's a mostly acoustic piece, but his masterful use of the piano's pedals bathes the performance in a lovely ambience, and there is a ghostly overdub

of distant sounding clusters in the background. There's a rollicking country feel to "Gitar", whose characteristic left-handed figure churns like a steam engine supporting his generous, unfussy right hand improvisations, while the title track is accented by washed out strums of an autoharp.

Wallumrød harnesses a familiar sound that suits such an unstable, taxing time – it all feels like a salve – while nonchalantly fine-tuning the moods with an ambiguous air of portent.

Peter Margasak

Peter Zummo

Second Spring OST

7K! DL

From composer and trombonist Peter Zummo, best known for his work with Sound Russell, comes this affecting soundtrack to Andy Kelleher's *Second Spring* – a movie about a woman experiencing strange awakenings as her degenerative brain condition develops. The soundtrack is structured around recurrent leitmotifs that are simple and haunting, sloping trombone slides and didgeridoo drones offset by pointillistic vibraphone and glockenspiel, Bill Ruyle's hammered dulcimer treading the line between sensuality and agitation. A couple of slinky, jazzy grooves insert some momentum into what is mostly a minimal score – fizzing brushed cymbals across warm bass and gurgling trombone solos.

Zummo's cues are a good match to Cathy Naden's central performance as Kathy, underscoring the character's experiences with a sense of psychological realism and pervasive strangeness. For Kathy, her condition is a mystery, and the music dramatises this enigmatic element, giving it presence. As the cues progress, so grows a sense of subtly emerging chaos and disquiet; musical elements detach from the ensemble, instrumental voices become smothered in filters, delays and distortion. The sinking trombone figure heard throughout the film is, by the end, transformed into something sounding like a distant divebombing aircraft, a large animal wailing above claustrophobic static.

The presentation and production of the soundtrack also bear the marks of process. Track names are identified by leitmotif only, differentiated by versions, tweaks and dates. The sound has a noticeable noise floor which emerges as the master compression releases to reveal tactile rustling noises and hiss, a roughness that adds a sense of realism.

In the end, the music, like the film, paints an uneasy and humane psych-emotional landscape, without lapsing into melodrama or sentimentality. As a standalone listening experience *Second Spring* satisfyingly coheres as an engaging collection of atmospheric themes and supple variations, brimming with Zummo's characteristically graceful drama.

Leah Kardos

Sherwin Lainez