



Beats Working

Dominic Umile gives you the lowdown on the latest experimental techno, dubstep, hip-hop and bass.

Disparate nuances and textures meet in a distinctive manner on several electronic-oriented records this fall. In an unlikely mesh of lo-fidelity production and gripping headphone playback, HTRK (pronounced "hate rock") explore muddled electro/organic noisepop on *Work (Work, Work)* (Ghostly International). Vocalist Jonnie Standish partly talks, partly sings, with both configurations coded in watery delay on this droning, comely record. She's backed with dub-referencing basslines, old drum machine pops, and fraying guitar. The latter fizzles and peters out often, while the space between shitty beat claps on tracks like "Work That Body" grows miles wider by the second. Closer "Body Double" is crowded with the patter of snares and wafting organs. It's dark, lingering, and beautiful, while Standish, avoiding clarity at all costs, sings only when she feels like it.

Walls have a similar preoccupation with delay pedals. The act's 2010 debut is loaded with blurry, equal doses live and machine-driven moments like HTRK's record, but members Alessio Natalizia and Sam Willis went for blissful techno on *Coracle* (Kompakt) à la Border Community stuff or the forest-rave vibe of Caribou's *Swim*. With a punchy stomp taking shape midway through "Il Tedesco," this tune stuns as a two-parter. It's disorienting and strewn with bits of feedback, while the beatless end of *Coracle* is executed with similar tact. Check "Vacant" for just as colorful an arrangement of swells, soaring guitar fuzz, and a coda that sounds like early Pink Floyd. Elsewhere, potent kicks work to steady a sun-streaked record that feels light enough to dissolve on the turntable.

DJ/producer Max Cooper's tech house cooks gradually with bewitching flourishes. On his *Empirisch* EP (Traum Schallplatten), "Echoes Reality" is layered in chimes, with screeches and an evocative melody that eventually engulfs the track. Its unpredictable flashes and speaker-cycling ticks are matched in "Qualia," if in a bit more clinical fashion. The tones are equally clean on Chris "Tropics" Ward's jazz- and house-tinged jewel *Parodia Flare* (Planet Mu). Twinkling guitars line its cotton edges, dressed in little more than vibrato. The already warm keys on "Going Back" are padded with vocal harmonies, which slip cozily into a mellotron-rife backdrop on "Wear Out." But the record could use more juice on the percussive end. Churning glitch is welcome on "Figures," where even the dense swirl of whispered choruses can't much soften the growl of the engine beneath it.

With no shortage of drum barrages, Martyn nailed it on *Ghost People* (Brainfeeder), a hard but intricate record for Flying Lotus's label. The Dutch producer found an artful home on his *Great Lengths* for techno, dubstep, and more in a way that no one had managed before 2009, at least not on an LP. *Ghost People* isn't as mysterious as its predecessor, but it's rooted in similar ground and is as urgent as his recent *Fabric 50* mix, a series standout. Aimed at the DJ booth, Martyn's sophomore album burns fast. Jungle breaks tunnel under siren synths on "Popgun," while boxcutter-edged chords dart between vocal samples on "We Are You in the Future." None of those ubiquitous, pitched-up MC bits land on these tracks, either. The voices sewn into *Ghost People*'s convulsive party cuts sound like they're coming from behind you on the club floor, as if nearby conversation is competing with the snare shots in the monitors. Fat chance, though—it's doubtful that anyone is going to be talking when this record is on.

Read Dominic Umile's "Beats Working" column at Blurt-online.com