

The Boomerang

New reissues and archive releases

Bad Brains

I Against I

Org CD/DL/LP

When Laina Dawes administered the Invisible Jukebox to the versatile bassist Melvin Gibbs in *The Wire* 418, the first track she played was “Re-Ignition” from Bad Brains’ third studio album *I Against I*. “It’s like there was music before the Brains and there was music after the Brains and that is it,” Gibbs tells her. “You cannot overstate their importance.”

While often mentioned in the same breath as the hardcore punk bands they helped inspire, Bad Brains could play any style of music, from jazz fusion to thrash metal, with unrivalled speed and fluency. The latest instalment in a career-spanning reissue campaign from Org Music, *I Against I* offers an extended glimpse of this astonishing range – from the title track’s tightly wound prog punk to the blazing funk metal of “She’s Calling You”.

The album title reflects the band’s embrace of Rastafarianism, evoking the expression I and I through negation, contrasting the fundamental unity between human beings and Jah with the disunity inherent in a culture where, as HR sings, “Everybody’s only in it for themselves”. An apocalyptic sensibility pervades the lyrics of “Re-Ignition” and “Return To Heaven”, suggesting the possibility of transcending this disunity through cosmic love and an embrace of divine light.

While Bad Brains’ religious vision helped fuel a fiery sense of justice, it also unfortunately contributed to some notorious homophobic episodes, for which HR has since expressed regret. On “Sacred Love”, his virtuosic vocals have a canned quality, occupying a sonic space distinct from the righteous riffs conjured by Earl Hudson, Darryl Jenifer and Gary ‘Dr Know’ Miller. This is because they were recorded over the phone from inside the Washington, DC area jail where HR was serving time for cannabis possession. While this choice was evidently made for pragmatic rather than aesthetic reasons, the effect is poignant, particularly when one considers the racism of policing alongside the sacramental status of ganja for Rastafarians. While the lyrics address a lover, one can also read into “Sacred Love” the relationship between humanity and its holy herbs.

Emily Pothast

Ernest Berk

Diversed Tapes

HCR/NMC 2xCD/DL

Ernest Berk was a mime artist, choreographer and dancer, as well as a composer. He was also a percussionist, keenly interested in non-Western traditions. In its rhythmic versatility

and gestural articulation, his electronic music audibly evokes those other facets of his creative life.

This revelatory release offers a taste of that work, selected from Berk’s prolific output, realised at his own studio in Camden, between 1957–84. Berk was born in Cologne, and studied at Mary Wigman’s legendary school of expressionistic dance before taking refuge in London during the 1930s. Tape recorders were initially a convenient tool, used to provide accompaniment for his own dance classes and productions, but, supplemented with tone generators, filters and modulators, they formed the launchpad for a long series of lively and varied sonic adventures.

Berk’s very first electroacoustic composition, which encapsulates the ambivalent postwar zeitgeist in its title *End Of The World* (or *Where Do We Go From Here?*), combines the ticking of a clock with frenzied percussive flourishes and alarming gong bursts. *Kali Yuga*, from 1962, translates that concern with contemporary history into terms drawn from Hindu cosmology, with the familiar pneumatic tones of a harmonium being sucked into an eerie electronic and percussive vortex. Yet whether Berk’s focus was narrowed to immediate and practical ends, as implied by *Group Dance 1*, or expanded to match apocalyptic visions and imagined vistas, as in *Dirge For A New Sunrise* or his *Moon Crater* pieces, what transmits from his music is unflagging excitement at the distinctive soundworld he was opening up, and fascination with the possibilities offered by this new medium.

Retrieved from an archive in Cologne, and freshly remastered by Richard Scott and Jos Smolders, these 18 tracks of engagingly personalised electroacoustic music retain their vividness and vitality.

Julian Cowley

Broadcast

Spell Blanket: Collected Demos 2006–2009

Warp CD/DL/2xLP

When Trish Keenan died in 2011 the tragedy was compounded by the fact that Broadcast, the band she formed in Birmingham with partner James Cargill in the mid-1990s, were on the cusp of a whole new phase, as signalled by their *Witch Cults Of The Radio Age* collaboration with Ghost Box co-founder Julian House aka The Focus Group and the tour-only disc (since given a wider release by Warp Records) *Mother Is The Milky Way*.

Judging from these previously unreleased demo recordings, this new phase had begun with the duo’s attempts to sketch the follow-up to 2005’s *Tender Buttons*. It’s hard to say to what degree these 36 mostly brief fragments would have been fleshed out, but the spare folkishness that would characterise the songs (rather than the sound) of *Witch Cults* is very much in evidence on

Spell Blanket: Collected Demos 2006–2009, as is the sense that Keenan was engaged in the development of a uniquely personal, at times teasingly inscrutable, lyrical approach, evocative of arcane rites, pantheism and deep connectivity between personhood and environment.

Though clearly labelled as demos, it’s hard not to think of this as a completed work. Cargill’s sequencing is impeccable and the material is compelling throughout. This is no mere collection of odds and sods, but a substantial release from the band that enriches their legacy.

Over the past decade or so a number of groups have drawn from the audiovisual aesthetic Broadcast established early on and continued to refine up to the end. Some of them – like *Vanishing Twin* – are very good. None of them however possess the mossiness and magic conjured by Cargill and Keenan. *Spell Blanket* is – inevitably – a reminder of what was lost. But it also feels like a gift.

Joseph Stannard

In The Beginning There Was Rhythm Various

Soul Jazz DL/LP

Originally released in early 2002, this reissue of Soul Jazz’s first UK post-punk compilation captures a pre-streaming moment when the historical intersection of angular guitars and funk rhythms remained relatively undiscovered. On release, it provided some context for the early 2000s post-punk revival, particularly on the origins of the punk funk sound being revived by the likes of !!!, Liars and The Faint. Now, more than two decades and countless compendiums of the genre later, its tracklisting feels quaint in its brevity – just 11 songs by nine artists! – but every single song represents the thrilling potential of mixing punk with dance music.

Also, every single song absolutely rips. A Certain Ratio’s 1980 cover of Banbarra’s funk classic “Shack Up” opens the album, teasing out the anxiety of the original with its relentless bassline and anti-heteronormative lyrics. There’s a strong showing from the industrial North, with Cabaret Voltaire, Gang Of Four and The Human League – a reminder that any excuse to listen to “Being Boiled” has to be taken. The album’s itchy agit-pop is contrasted with the loose, organic Slits track that the compilation takes its name from, a freewheeling romp through different rhythmic interpretations, both lyrical and musical. The two tracks from industrial funk band 23 Skidoo are arguably the best here, especially the 1984 single “Coupe” which fizzles with ideas, sounds and samples, while still packing in an anthemic, wordless chorus.

The sequencing of two all-time great opening tracks next to each other – Throbbing Gristle’s “20 Jazz Funk Greats” and The Pop Group’s “She Is Beyond Good And Evil” –