Ernest Dawkins New Horizons Ensemble
featuring Vijay Iyer

Transient Tones
Dawn Upshaw

Alto and tenor saxophonist Ernest Dawkins, bassist Janus Paul and drummer Ishay Spencer are joined by pianist Vijay Iyer, giving a largely improvised day in the studio – the pieces appear in the order they were tracked; this is a document more than a carefully shaped artistic statement. Nevertheless, it has a cohesion that comes from a shared language. Much of the time, this is bluesy, shoulder-swinging Chicago jazz, with Dawkins playing out long honking phrases atop booming, strutting rhythms from Paul and Spencer; all Iyer has to do to fit in is strike some two-fisted chords and take equally energetic solos. There are also passages of shrieking post-Ayer free jazz, which the pianist is equally capable of handling; he gets his Bobby Few on without hesitation.

Dead Neanderthals

Consulting Sounds CD/CDL

The Dutch sax/drum duo Dead Neanderthals have evolved a lot since their early digital-only EPs, which were heavily indebted to the blast beats and screeches of John Zorn’s Painkiller. Crocodiles, like their 2015 epic Endless Void, is an exploration of ominous atmospheres and extreme high and low frequencies. Guest bassist Maxime Petiet is the dominant instrumental voice, with his squawking chords and tom-toms of feedback and distortion. Saxophonist Otto Kekke seems to be working through electronics, as he’s barely discernible from the rumble, crashes and piercing siren-like tones drumer René Aquarius (who barely touches the kit here) is creating via synths. This single 36-minute track rolls over your skull like a tank, leaving you breathless and unsettled but wildly euphoric when it finally ends.

Chris Greene Quartet

Boundary Issues
Single Mat CD/CDL

Chicago based saxophonist Chris Greene’s quartet have been together since 2005, with only one line-up change. Their music ranges from hardcore post-bop blowouts to genre-crossing mutations (their version of Horace Silver’s “Nica’s Dream” somehow survives being set to a reggae beat). They also interpret the Duke Ellington ballad “Day Dream”, Kenny Kirkland’s “Diada”, and “Summer Song” by smooth fusion act The Yellowjackets, but their originals give the strongest sense of them as creative voices. Drummer Steve Coley takes a restrained but still house rocking solo on the forceful “Thunder Snow”; on “Blues For Dr Fear” bassist Marc Pano switches to electric, and guest guitarist Isaiah Sharkey adds a barroom sting, as Greene walks the bar with swagger and an audible grin.

Daniel Herskedal

The Roc
Edition CD/CDL

This Norwegian quintet make unique, energetic music, far from the restrained chamber jazz their country is known for. Herskedal plays tuba and bass trumpet, and is joined by violinist Bergund Wial Skalski, cellist Svarte Høyness, pianist Eyolf Dale and percussionist (not drummer) Helge Andreas Nørbakken. Herskedal’s horn work on the title track has a fluttering breathiness that almost brings to mind Arve Henriksen, but behind him the strings are surging, with the tuba’s percussive whisper of handclaps and small slapping drums, almost North African in its trance-like feel. Dale’s piano moves to the fore on the slower pieces like “Eternal Sunshine Creates A Desert”, adding lyricism and melancholy. Skalski’s solo on “Kurd, Bayat, Nahawand To Kurd” has an exotic romanticism, while the tuba burps out bass.

Theo Hill

Prometheus
Post-Tone CD/CDL

Pianist Theo Hill entered the Post-Tone Records universe as a member of trombonist David Grisman’s band. Now he’s making his studio debut as a leader, with Yasushi Nakamura on bass and Mark Whitfield Jr on drums. It’s a cautious effort, paying homage to many of his influences, but its inclusion of tunes by Duke Pearson, Herbie Hancock, Kenny Kirkland (who gets the nod twice), Chick Corea and Bobby Timmons. The only original piece “The Process” comes at the disc’s exact midpoint, and it’s a burner, allowing Whitfield in particular to go wild and striking heavy left hand chords and erupts in right hand extrapolations that recall McCoy Tyner and Vince Guaraldi in equal measure. Here’s hoping he writes more of the music next time.

Tetrapych

Tetrapych
Red Dots CD/CDL

A tetrapych is a set of four paintings, exhibited together though each panel could stand on its own. It’s a decent metaphor for a jazz quartet, and pianist Bert Seager, tenor saxophonist Hery Paz, bassist Max Illsley and drummer Dor Jerkovic |Ks frequently leave each other entirely alone to work in parallel rather than together. But these men have found a way to maintain cohesion while constantly embarking on individual journeys. Paz more than others demands that traditional quartet dynamics be observed. His solos have an intensity reminiscent of Coltrane in 1964, but a bite (particularly on the ballad intro to “Star Wise”) that can recall Ayler’s work from the same year.

Nick Cain on bleak seaside recordings, glacially arcing echo chamber drones, and a giddy robot fantasia

Dave Clarkson

A Red Guide To The Coastal Quicksteps Of The British Isles
Linear Observational Recordings CD

The primary source material for each of this album’s five tracks is field recordings from coastal areas and beaches around the UK – the Wirral, Morecambe Bay and Land’s End among others. It’s safe to assume that the recordings were made in bleak, wind swept conditions rather than at the start of the holiday season, given the register of unease and disquiet which dominates. Their sense of location is diluted, however, through processing and counterpoint with instrumental detailing.

Kymatik & Midwicht Cuckoos

Anthropological Constants
Paradigm LP

A pleasingly cryptic backwards glance from loose North London collective Kymatik, though it remains unclear what Midwicht Cuckoos are or what their relationship to Kymatik might be. The 19 minute “Dentists For Mice” first appeared on the Dar-An-Suh Volume 2 CD (Paradigm, 2001) and initially blends electronics and processed field recordings into a hazy backdrop. The piece becomes more structured as it proceeds, inexorably building a churning rhythmic momentum. “Ardléche Morning” is a bafflingly pleasant interlude, an apparently straightforward field recording of a rural idyll. Elsewhere is found non-specifically liltted activity, extended abstraction, serrated electronic noise and throbbing frequencies.

Nickolos Mohanna

Chronos
Kaleidoscope DULP

New York based composer Nickolas Mohanna’s Chronos packs plenty of action and not a little a bombastic into a running time of not much over half an hour. Interspersed across its eight tracks are a sequence of widescreen fennec-like cacophonies, which bury melodies in multiple layers of distortion and distraction to then reveal their latent chromatic richness through gradually mutating textural contrast. Certain tracks segue neatly together to generate structural connections – the shuddering phased rhythms of “Blue Curve” absorb tone skree and upper-register drone, elements that “Mask I” blends together into a dense barrage.

Muayyassar Kardi

Live In Berlin
Pan Y Rosas Discos DL

This digital release documents a concise though unmemorable Berlin gig from the New York based improviser. Kardi’s practice would seem to be based at least partly in performance, and minus any physical or visual contact with the crowd. Live in Berlin is about flat. Kardi favours 1960s vintage electronic effects with a pronounced analogue patina. She combines a steady sequence of cross-sections of frequency switches, whooshing oscillations and blustery abstractions to intermittent bursts of vocalizations, snippets of text and vaguely ritualistic howls and chants. The piece matures as Kardi introduces a degree of electronic layering and counterpoint, but eventually sputters out, leaving the impression that she has more to offer than this.

Omit

Negative Pulse Logic
End Of The Alphabet Du/MC

Like many Omit releases, Negative Pulse Logic is based on a clearly modular scheme. A finite number of core sounds are forced to share space: glacially arcing echo chamber drones are counterpointed with slow, stuttering rhythmic patterns. These elements co-exist uneasily, giving a slightly shying away from direct contact, as though propelled by a force of reverse magnetism. Structure and text come in change subtly and variations on this theme and its balance of power are methodically explored. Rogue features sporadically appear and then make a hastily exit. Negative Pulse Logic opens itself to the possibilities of rhythmic interplay, though as its title implies, these are desaturated, etiolated rhythms, drained of any real impetus to movement.

Yatta

Spirit Sold Out! (Deluxe Edition)
Puzzle Tape Pedigree DL/AMC

Yatta Zoker is based in New York, but grew up in Houston, Texas, and is of Sierra Leonean descent. This debut offers a clutch of her “digipoes” – free-associative songforms that address themselves to both modern and perennial: belonging and exile, independence and digital connection. Zoker’s almost ballad-like vocal delivery set against unpredictable arrangements, which bulge exc excitingly with sudden instrumental incident – bursts of percussion, shards of guitar, flashes of violin – and shot off in unexpected directions. Characterful interludes punctuate proceedings – a giddy robot fantasia (“Cyborg”), a respectful rendering of “Ain’t Misbehavin’”, and “We Never Went To Church”, which finds space for noisy industrial blasts and chorale vocals. Also included is a recording of a February live performance, which finds Zoker appropriate to the music and extrapolating adventurously to the accompaniment of vocal and rhythmic loops.