country house is the bodily trap, the empty inner space as a derelict psyche.
Jon Davies

Steve Reich
Pulse/Quartet
Nonesuch CD/DL
The seductively understated photograph that graces the cover of Steve Reich's *Pulse/Quartet* captures the gradient of a Massachusetts sunset reflected on placid water. A rosy hue fans out both heaven and earthward from the horizon line, suggesting a union of opposites. It's a fitting visual accompaniment for two compositions that capture complementary aspects of the composer's practice, both stylistically and in terms of instrumentation.

Pulse is a work for strings, flutes, clarinets, piano and bass performed by International Contemporary Ensemble, who also premiered the piece at New York Carnegie Hall. It's a sidelong track, with string and woodwind melodies winding around a gridded and minimal pulse with a lilting lyricism. The melodies grow increasingly dissonant and at times over the top, like a theme for a vintage detective drama, but the overall effect remains measured and textural. *Quartet* is performed by Colin Currie Group, an ensemble specialising in Reich's music which also performed this piece's world premiere. The quartet consists of two vibraphones and two pianos – an instrumentation at the core of several of Reich's previous works, including *The Desert Music*, *Three Tales* and *Double Sextet* – but this is his first piece for those instruments alone. The first movement is characterised by jazzy, zigzagging action, percussive and pointillistic. The second moves in long, sustained notes; the vibraphone casting overtones heavenward while the piano rings out on the low end. The third and final movement contains some of the album's most memorable moments. It bounces along like a lively conversation, with complex harmonies clashing and resolving like a spirited dialectic.

Vacillating between subtlety and theatricality, *Pulse/Quartet* doesn't immediately distinguish itself in the context of Reich's celebrated catalogue. But something about its balance between geometric elegance and genuine emotiveness gets at the heart of what makes him a great composer. The playful movement lends a sense of humanity to the structure, and the structure lends rigour to the dance.
Emily Pothast

Akira Sakata & Chikamorachi with Masahiko Satoh
Proton Pump
Family Vineyard CD/DL/LP
In the sleeve notes to his 1967 record *New And Old Gospel* – on which Ornette Coleman plays trumpet – Jackie McLean suggests that Ornette "was never as far out as he first appeared to be to some". With the benefit of hindsight, McLean's provocation is patently true: while Ornette's innovations were initially perceived as bordering on insanity, they were clearly a carefully conceived extension of bop.

There's something similar going on with the longstanding trio of veteran Japanese alto saxophonist Akira Sakata and Chikamorachi – the rhythm section of drummer Chris Corsano and bassist Darin Gray. On one hand, there's no denying they've been responsible for some of the most savage free jazz ever recorded – I'm not entirely proud to admit that, a few years ago, while DJing in a bar in Cork, Ireland, I used the crashing energy and endlessly deferred crescendo of "In Case, Let's Go To Galaxy" from their 2009 album *Friendly Pants* to shoo an unwelcome minor sporting celebrity out of the door. Yet, beneath this slash 'n' burn exterior, clear nods to history are discernible on their latest album.

"Bullet Apoptosis" begins with a fanfaric, upwards gush of alto almost identical to the first seconds of "The Riddle" from Ornette's *At The 'Golden Circle' Vol 2*. While Corsano and Gray seem to reside in a permanent state of frenzied, boiling freefall, they're also constantly teetering on the verge of tipping into the kind of racing, ting-a-ling free-bop that David Izenzon and Charles Moffett provided for Ornette. More phantom allusions are provided by the presence of pianist Masahiko Satoh – another survivor of Tokyo's 60s jazz scene who, almost unbelievably, has never recorded with Sakata before. Most obviously, Satoh is operating out of a post-Cecil Taylor aesthetic characterised by elephantine pounding, manic sprinkles and sudden stops but, on "Voyage Of Eukaryote," as Sakata switches to clarinet and Corsano breaks out the brushes, hints of saloon-bar ragtime and blues tumble out of the piano.

It's perhaps only on "Chemiosmotic Coupling Of Acorn" that we hear something singular enough to break out of the orbit of 60s jazz, as Sakata puts aside his horn and indulges in groaning exhortations and gruff, growling vocalese, coaxing strained arco from the bass, ritualistic bells and blunt, curtailed micro-melodies from the piano. But when Corsano chucks in cheeky rimshots straight out of a mid-60s soul jazz joint you realise: it's never as far out as it first appears to be.
Daniel Spicer

Schnellertollermeier
Rights
Cuneiform CD/DL
"In Switzerland they had 500 years of democracy and peace – and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock," sneered Orson Welles as the loathsome Harry Lime in *The Third Man*. But there is nothing frivolous, fanciful or merely decorative about Swiss power trio Schnellertollermeier. The precision with which bassist Andy Schnellmann, guitarist Manuel Troller and drummer David Meier interlock and animate their equally weighted instrumental voices generates an intensity that is consistently riveting and at times overwhelming. The group name, collapsing and conflating their individual identities into one compact word, catches a sense of the remarkable synergy occurring within their music.

"Rights", the first of the four tracks on the trio's latest release, opens with the polyrhythmic ticking of muted strings and builds incrementally through repeated motifs and steadily expanding timbres. As the patterning grows more complex, their music also gathers momentum and opens out tonally into turbocharged filigree work that may bring to mind King Crimson during their *Discipline* phase at the start of the 1980s. Beyond that Schnellertollermeier might be classified as postminimalism fruitfully revisited, combining the kind of sonic marquetry favoured by Mikel Rouse and his Broken Consort with the clangourous energy and forcefulness of Rhys Chatham or Glenn Branca.

Springy rhythmic figures launch "Piccadilly Sources" with intricacy and taut coordination that suggest influences drawn from African music, although before its culmination this piece has taken on the metallic urgency and drive of hard rock. "Praise/Eleven" develops through peals of chiming harmonics towards a barrage of dissonant chords, while the closing track "Round" combines angular motifs, swift acceleration and heavy metal ecstasy before ending in a blizzard of apocalyptic noise.

At their most convoluted, and even at their brashest and most aggressive Schnellmann, Troller and Meier still manage to maintain a level of clarity in their execution that suggests telepathic magic as well as long and close familiarity with each other's playing. Alan Benz, who engineered the session in Lucerne in July 2016, deserves full credit for managing to capture Schnellertollermeier with such lucid definition and without sacrificing the impact of their awesome power.
Julian Cowley

Susana Santos Silva
All The Rivers: Live At The Panteão Nacional
Clean Feed CD
This album was recorded in Santa Engrácia Church in Lisbon, Portugal's national pantheon, which means that Susana Santos Silva must have been standing, with her trumpet, tin whistle and bells, not far from the tomb of Amália Rodrigues, the Queen of Fado, who died in 1999. There might on the surface little in common between Amália's mournful narratives of the sea and the city poor, and the marmoreal richness and declamatory joy of *All The Rivers,* but the same stoical intensity, the spirit of saudade, resides in both.

A single, 42 minute solo trumpet needs to be something special to hold attention over repeated hearings. A slight figure with closely cropped hair, Susana is not an overtly dramatic performer. Her stillness is audible in the music, which proceeds very slowly, in short bursts of melodic narrative that are allowed to reverberate through the church's complex marble interior, creating layers of overtones. It bears little resemblance to the solo work of Bill Dixon or Wadada Leo Smith, and is closer, perhaps, to the work of her near contemporary and fellow European Arve Henriksen.

There are a few episodes when she might be altering the sound of the instrument with a mute, squelching out half-valved notes, tongued effects and near toneless sounds, but for the most part the trumpet plays in its traditional register, high and clean and with a direct attack, allowing the slow acoustic return of the architecture to complete the music in what sound like distant thunder rolls. When she uses bells a few minutes in, it is almost as if the air has been broken into tiny shards by the echo. The penny whistle sounds huge in the space.

No explanation of the title is offered, nor is there any overt programmatic structure, but it's clear that the music is highly personal. The cover shows what is presumably the infant Santos in the arms of the grandmother to whom the music is dedicated. As it echoes among the tombs and down the generations you have to ask, with Amália, if there is pity in this music, who is it for? Not Santos herself; she seems far too strong for that.
Brian Morton

Slomo
Super Individual: Collective Ritual
Trilithon 2×CD/DL
For their latest release Slomo (aka Sheffield/Hebden Bridge duo Chris 'Holy' McGrail and Howard Marsden) invited artists of their choosing to rework "Super-Individual" – the centrepiece of their 2017 album *Transits* and an engrossingly heavy drone drawn out from the repetition of a single pulsating note. Reinterpreting that single note – and a 23 minute long synth/guitar epic to boot – might seem a difficult concept to respond to imaginatively. But the artists gathered on *Super Individual: Collective Ritual* express subtle divergences in what they each hone in on and respond to in McGrail and Marsden's original piece.

Working within new restrictions has had a positive influence on the palette of Gnod, for example, who tap into the expansiveness of the track, enveloping the listener in binaural synth pulses that expand and contract at a glacial pace. It builds on some of the atmospheres Gnod worked on with Anthony Child on 2016's *Behind The Lids* but to greater effect. Other contributors, like Andrew Liles, restructure Slomo's track around industrial and rock rhythms, completely dismantling the pulse. Liles's piece recalls in places the work of his comrades Nurse With Wound, particularly when it gives way around the halfway mark to a macabre spoken word interval. Simon Pyke's interpretation is less suggestively ominous and provokes an immediate heart in mouth response, his take an angsty sounding wall of noise and mechanical hum.

There's a wealth of interesting material to be found on *Super Individual: Collective Ritual* but overall the compilation doesn't have the flow to make it suited to a single sitting, it being simpler and more agreeable to pick out isolated tracks. By comparison Slomo's original *Transits* is holistic and well structured, its introductory piece "Concerning The Explorers" naturally transitioning into "Super-Individual" at the rate of slow respiration.
Lottie Brazier

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