

Maddy. My only gripe with *Long Live The Court* is its 73 minute running time – it would have perhaps worked better if it had shed a few of its 18 songs. But that said, CMPND are accomplished and hungry enough to make the album go the distance, their style never falling into any derivative danger zones.

Dabbla × Illaman × GEAR × Benofficial
Main Man Syndrome

Potent Funk DL
Here's a label family affair bringing together MCs Dabbla, Illaman, GEAR and Benofficial over some nicely constructed production from Forest DLG. The track "Main Man Syndrome" is a public service announcement of sorts, on which Dabbla lines up some unnamed artists in his sights, before addressing their alleged ego issues. It's great to hear all four on a track together, giving us a healthy reminder of the strong output of Potent Funk's roster over the last decade or so.

Femme Deadly Venoms

Femmenomenon
Bandcamp DL
Oakland crew Femme Deadly Venoms' sound channels the same spirit as New York's Native Tongues did back in the 1990s, but from an overtly feminine standpoint. Tracks like "My Body" shine a light on the ever relevant subject of bodily autonomy, while "It's Not Me It's You" focuses on the shifting temperament of certain romantic interests. I don't normally like to divide female rappers into a separate category, but FDV are so steeped in the feminist cause that it deserves to be highlighted. Lateef The Truthspeaker's appearance on "Adulting" is the perfect fit, but the production changes throughout tie *Femmenomenon* together. Indispensable rap music for the current climate.

Galloping Ghosts × Axel Holy

HOLYGHOSTS EP
Village Live DL
Bristol based producer Galloping Ghosts' first official release has been a long time coming. It sees the artist formerly known as Ded Tebiase leaving behind traditional boom-bap pastures and straying into more experimental regions. The union with Axel Holy, an artist inhabiting similar esoteric areas, makes perfect sense. On *HOLYGHOSTS*, the duo carve out their own much needed niche in the UK rap landscape. The inclusion of fellow Bristol rapper Wish Master is a smart move, thanks to his dexterity on the mic and his ability to make any beat his own. In all, *HOLYGHOSTS* proves to be one of the more refreshing projects of the year to date.

GROUP

2
Blah DL/LP
One of UK house label Blah's more elusive acts, GROUP is actually more of a duo teaming Blah founder Lee Scott

with fellow UK vet Jehst on a four track blitzkrieg of effortless lyrical prowess. Both Jehst and Scott have always made rapping seem easy, delivering rhymes that other MCs spend entire careers trying to develop. Slightly abstract in both production and vocals, Coming three years after their first, GROUP's second set 2 stands as one of my favourite releases in a long while.

ShrapKnel

Metal Lung
Backwoodz Studios CD/DL/LP
New York duo ShrapKnel delve deep into their psyches to produce a powerful second album stewarded by producer Steel Tipped Dove with additional work from Olof Melander and Child Actor. ShrapKnel's allure lies in the contrast between PremRock and Curly Castro's respective flows, their forward facing vision and their desire to advance on the innovations of the greats. The highlight is "Mescalito" whose jazzy refrains merge perfectly with our hosts' vocals, while also featuring an uncredited cameo from billy woods. I can see future generations displaying the same level of respect for ShrapKnel that Prem and Castro pay to Cannibal Ox et al, and rightly so.

Sonnyjim & The Purist

White Girl Wasted
Daupe! DL/LP
Connecting with London Brixton hip-hop producer The Purist for *White Girl Wasted*, UK rap impresario Sonnyjim marks his return with what could well be the crowning glory of a prolific run of gems. The album is very much a Sonny focused affair, even if it features a dazzling array of guests, including MF DOOM and Jay Electronica on lead single "Barz Simpson", and Lee Scott adding a typically enjoyable verse on "999". There's also a rare contribution from Madlib. The Purist's luxurious soul-heavy production is the ideal backdrop for Sonny's high-end brand of lyricism.

Vic Spencer & Small Professor

Mudslide
Coalmine CD/DL/LP/MC
Chicago's gritty aesthetic has found the ideal ambassador in Vic Spencer, and this pairing with Philadelphia producer Small Professor captures that vibe in abundance. Small Pro and Spencer both hold an affinity with the late Sean Price, which might go some way to explaining their successful chemistry on *Mudslide*. Spencer is more than capable of holding the floor on his own for an entire album, especially with Small Pro's drums hitting as hard as they do, but the addition of Flee Lord on a couple of tracks lifts the album into even more agreeable territory. Elements of psychedelia make for an intriguing bedfellow for Spencer's guttural flows on an album that resides in the underground rap pantheon while refusing to toe any party line. □

Jazz & Improv by
Stewart Smith

Sarah Bernstein

Veers
New Focus CD/DL
Led by New York composer and violinist Sarah Bernstein, Veer Quartet sit between contemporary chamber music and avant garde jazz. "Frames No 1" is the most recognisably jazzy piece, with Bernstein, violinist Sana Nagano and violist Leonor Falcon playing folky, almost swinging lines over Nick Jozwiak's walking cello. Yet as soon as we get comfortable, Veer lock into a jagged vamp. A further left turn finds the quartet hinting towards stately Baroque dance, before a reprise of the opening theme and some freely improvised passages. "Nightmorning" evokes a liminal state before dawn, as violin glissandi sigh over icy shards. There's a vivid sense of the world coming to life in a largely unaccompanied violin passage, where arco phrases end in bright pizzicato, darkened by Jozwiak's vigorous cello rhythms.

Bi Ba Doom

Graceful Collision
Astral Spirits DL/LP
It's notable how fully the new generation of US free musicians have integrated electronics into their musical language. What's more, it sounds gnarly. The matrix of live drumming and modular synth that Jason Nazary brings to Antelope alongside trumpeter Jaimie Branch can be heard in a freer context on *Graceful Collision*, a New York Brooklyn collaboration with bassist Luke Stewart and alto saxophonist Chris Pitsiokos. On "Skeletal Representation", dub rimshots echo and distort over what could be burbling synth or water-prepared saxophone. Beneath Pitsiokos's altissimo twitters, Stewart rubs and taps the strings of a fuzzed out bass, before chasing after Nazary's galloping snares. The gleeful oscillator frenzy of "Caught The Flicker" recalls Rafael Toral's Space Quartet, while brooding noir becomes an industrial jazz inferno in "Limitless Fascination".

Dee Byrne

Live At Cafe Oto
Luminous DL
UK musician Dee Byrne's solo saxophone set, recorded live at London's Cafe Oto in June 2022, shows a more measured, but no less imaginative, use of electronics. Byrne sends her opening statement through a delay circuit, the echoes rising

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Tenniscoats

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