

course between the clashing rocks of country-rock and braindead MOR. The results, particularly singer Adam Duritz's Eitzel-esque turn on the ultra-melancholic 'Perfect Blue Buildings', should please anybody who thinks American Music Club take too many sun-kissed Caribbean holidays between albums.

■■■■□□
CLARK COLLIS

CRUNT

CRUNT
TRANCE SYNDICATE
Now it's not a name we recommend you drop if you're pissed and trying to chat someone up (or indeed chatting to someone much bigger than you), but Crunt are well worthy of your attention if only because Kat Bjelland, on sabbatical from Babes In Toyland, is their bassist. Also of interest is that her Australian-born husband, Stuart Gray, is also the guitarist/singer in the group - he of Lubricated Goat fame. Of course.

From the title and personnel downwards, we're plainly not dealing with some lovey-dovey familial slush like those Womacks LPs. In keeping with the automotively themed cover art, Stuart's preferred lyrical perspective is (as in the Goat) one of a macho, oil-smothered mechanic, only allowing Kat to bring in one moment of switchblade beauty on 'Unglued'. An ironic reflection on the battle of the sexes. Or just Kat the tomboy playing hard with the lads.

It's pretty mean stuff, the guitars rough, steely and racing throughout. A must for Babes and AmRep fans alike, but don't expect to hear any of it on radio stations bound by the usual laws of decency.

■■■■□□
ANDREW PERRY



The Aphid: in recurring rhythm-free "Who Am I Again?" psycho-trauma

APHEX TWIN Selected Ambient Works Volume II

WARP

There are certain activities it would be foolish to undertake while listening to the new Aphex Twin album.

Operating heavy machinery, for example. Or working as an air-traffic controller.

Remembering your own name could also be a toughie. And dancing. For God's sake, don't start dancing. You will embarrass your family and alienate your friends.

In 1993 the Aphex Twin, aka Richard James, progressed from being a novelty techno prodigal to becoming one of the few genuine stars in the dance firmament. Whether appealing to the club ('Surfing On Sine Waves') or the comedown ('Selected Ambient Works 85-92') he took his audience if not to the promised land, then certainly to an attractive semi next door. As a result, when news broke that he was releasing a follow-up to 'Selected Ambient Works', the age of the Eagerly Awaited Ambient Album had finally arrived.

And ambient it indeed is. Anyone who thinks they know what to expect on the basis of 'Volume I' might care to sit down, have a nice cup of tea and prepare themselves for a shock.

The opening track may begin with a not entirely unfamiliar-sounding swathe of repeating keyboard, punctuated by the odd bit of obligatory high-pitched moaning, but do not be fooled. This time around there will be no cavalry-style bpm rescue to whisk the listener back on to the path of dance righteousness.

What we're talking is two hours of synthesiser explorations interrupted only by a variety of bangings, thumpings and bizarre otherworldly sounds that the dictionary doesn't even have words for yet.

The results range from the soothing to the downright unsettling but, all in all, may be the nearest any of us are likely to get to a hands-on brain massage short of actually breaking out the rubber gloves and hacksaw.

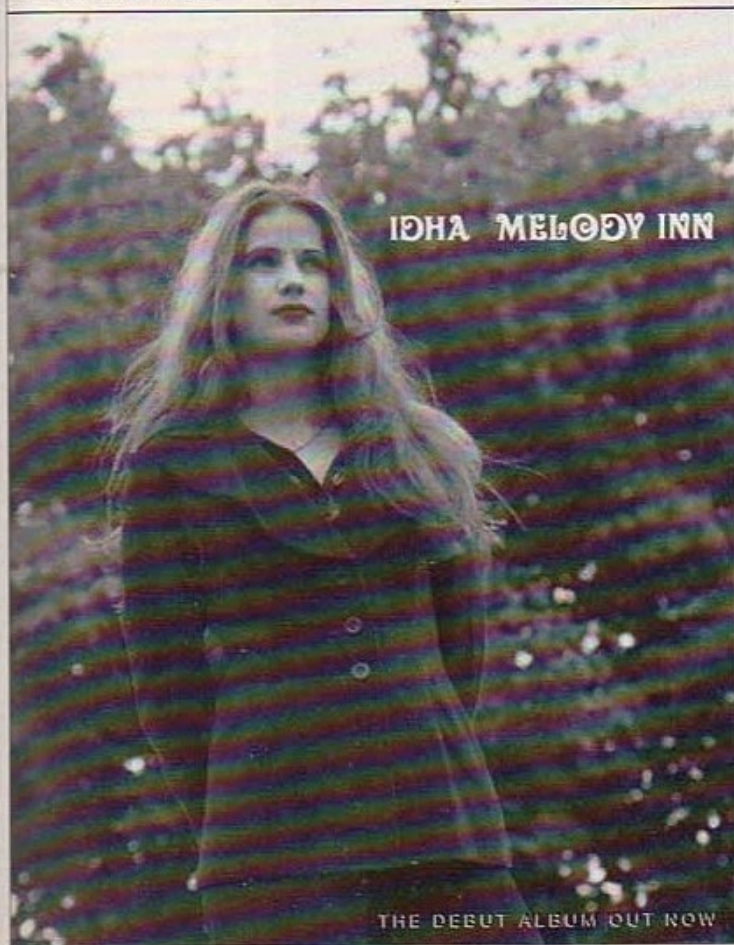
The general atmosphere of "Who am I again?" consciousness induced by 'Selected Ambient Works Volume II' is enhanced by the fact that the tracks don't have names but are represented by obscure pictures on the record's artwork. Thus a discussion of different 'songs' might consist of suggesting that while 'Dark Speckled Thing' on side six is indeed an enchanting mixture of rolling synth throbbings and distant, unearthly mutterings it isn't really in the same league as side two's vibrantly discordant 'Big Thing That Looks Like A Domino'.

As a conventional dance record all this renders 'Volume II' about as useful as the unexpurgated version of 'Donald Sinden Reads Jack Kerouac'. On the other hand, as an album to wallow in at 5am while watching the wallpaper conduct a heated argument with the lightshade, it is indeed the knees of the bees.

Watch out, though, for 'Peculiar Shady Thing That Doesn't Look Like Anything At All'. It's a dog. ■■■■□□
CLARK COLLIS

CREATION RECORDS

IDHA • MELODY INN



IDHA MELODY INN

THE DEBUT ALBUM OUT NOW

smashing pumpkins

the new single

disarm



SMILE

7inch limited edition coloured vinyl contains "siamese dream" unavailable elsewhere

12inch and ed1 contains 2 other previously unreleased tracks "soothe" (demo) and "blew away"

ed2 contains 2 previously unavailable cover versions of "dancin' in the moonlight" (thin lizzy) and "landslide" (fleetwood mae)

Hut
PRODUCTIONS

Music is finding new ways to simulate dream states, the latest being the twilight zone sonic reveries of Richard James, aka **Aphex Twin**. Rob Young investigates

messages

A **Writer's dream** *I am descending upon a distressed landscape of mud and dung. It is a muddled and muffled dream — shapes pushing up through the sodden, shapeless turf, cows' heads, body parts, boxy shapes, sludge and slush, all brown-coloured, embedded in a slurry of shit and mud, rain bucketing down overhead, no visible sky. Very close-up vision, as if I too am being drawn down into the muck. The feeling is not desolate, but promises impending revelation.*

Buried Dreams

I dreamed the above dream nearly a year ago, after a week of solid listening to David Toop & Max Eastley's *Buried Dreams*. Being the first dream I could recall for months, it seemed more than usually significant. With hindsight, it appears to bear some relation to the particular impressionability of the best current music, both foreign and recognisable forms visibly moulding into its fabric. In the early days of recording, taped music consisted of what went on on one occasion in the single room of the studio, now a few square feet can contain all the equipment that's needed to turn the inside of your head into a theatre of complex sonics.

This has much to do with the instruments that now let us generate music from almost any material source (footsteps, pilsnols, wind, TV, a day in the country, light). When music is built from sampled fragments of other musics, and noises bearing no relation to recognisable physical acts, recording's previous relationship to the solid presences of notes and melodies, strings and skins, crumbles. The microphone, stylus, wireless, scanner, aerial, portable DAT: these too have become instruments, nets in the trawl. The process of making today's electronic music mirrors the parallel lives of waking and dreaming: the conscious activity of researching and gathering sounds — the learning part — followed by the retreat into the studio to manufacture the track — the stitching together of fantasy.

This adaptability, this malleability, resonates in other areas. Now that power has melted out of its previous, fixed headquarters to be encoded in the flux and transmission of information — political, monetary, or that which relates to the individual — artists' most effective combative action is to learn the language, join the fray.

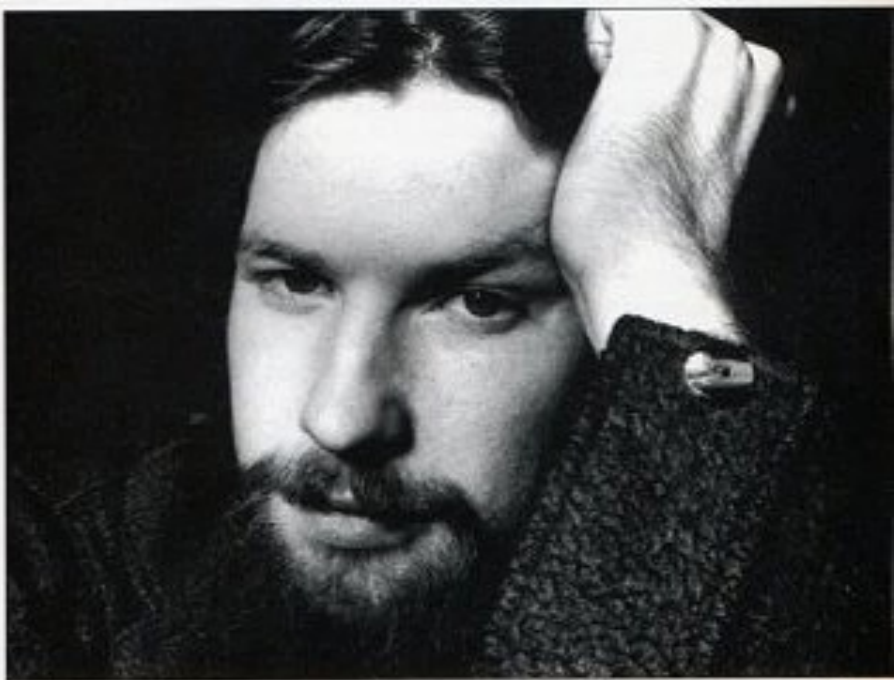
"I think music is more flexible than any political system," says David Toop, "because any political theory accumulates bureaucracy and corruption as soon as it emerges, whereas music can turn on a whisker. It can change with circumstances."

This mobility registers loudly in the music of — to name a handful — Scanner, Bedouin Ascend, Omni Trio, Oval, and perhaps most compellingly, Aphex Twin (who we will meet presently). On the 12 mixes of the Aphex Twin's new "Ventolin" EP,

you can hear the music's armature creaking and complaining; it wheezes and groans like an asthmatic forced to run for his or her life. (Ventolin is, indeed, the drug prescribed for asthma inhalers.) From his early, influential "Didgeridoo" track onwards, Richard James has been combining abstract and familiar elements to hallucinatory effect. His latest releases, "Ventolin" and the ensuing album, *I Care Because You Do*, are packed with incident. The music flickers between synthesized textures and domestically recorded location sounds, while at other times pollutant blasts of distortion seem to blow in and scrage the music's skin like a burst of roadworks through an open window. It's a highly plausible suggestion of the borderline state between dreaming and waking.

Flicker dreams

The first movies were little more than flickbooks of Muybridge stills: in a silent riot of movement, they explored as many physical and physiological phenomena as it was possible to engineer. The static camera recorded whatever stood, walked, danced, fell,



Pastry Taster

by Matt Corwine

APHEX

TWIN

Gracing the pages of every magazine from Details to Better Homes and Gardens this month is electronic musician Richard James, also known as The Aphex Twin and a number of other pseudonyms. James has been making music for himself since he was around fifteen, and first attracted attention with the eerie and (for its time) outrageously fast "Digeridoo," in which homemade electronics emulated the reedy Aboriginal instrument. Partially due to this record, digeridoos popped up in every other record for the next five years. However, this record was only one facet of Richard's musical style. From pistakes like "Tamphex" (which turned an advert for everyone's favorite feminine hygiene product into a warbly mantric chant), acidic madness from the Universal Indicator EPs, the alternately soothing and jarring "Analogue Bubblebath 3," and the most recent outing, the widely available "Selected Ambient Works Vol. 2," it becomes obvious that although a Richard James track is usually recognizable as such, he exhibits variations in style that prevent him from being pigeonholed into any category (although many have tried).

I spoke to Richard James via telephone recently, and I must say that it's an interesting experience. Two interviews were conducted, the sound quality on the first tape being too poor to transcribe. Like his music, James is rather unpredictable. On the first interview he was kind and amiable, talking at length about anything from telephones to radio scanners. But the second interview showed James rather aloof and distracted, answering questions simply and quickly while doing other things. Like banging on the electric heater in his parents' house, listening to his old records, and playing random bits and noises into the telephone. Transcribing a tape filled with banging noises, telephone tones and distorted voices is rather difficult.

As the story is often told, James creates his music using homemade or extensively modified synthesizers, with an Atari ST ("actually loads of shells of them") keeping everything together. However, he has concentrated purely on music instead of electronics now. "I stopped making gear 2 years ago, I just got more into music and less into electronics bit by bit, same way as I got into it but the opposite way around. The only thing is, in about three years time I'm probably going to run out of features on the stuff I've made. I've still got loads of ideas [for gear], but to make things is way beyond my technical expertise. The only way is to get a manufacturer to make them." [sarcastically] *You could always start mass producing gear yourself!* "Fuck that!"

He samples and resamples his own work,

sometimes rendering it unrecognizable even to himself. However, all this is not part of a master plan to make loads of money. He creates music only for himself, and releases it to avoid getting a job. His record deals with Sire and Warp pay the bills as fans from every genre buy up "On" EPs and the new double CD by the truckload all over the US and Europe. He also has his own label, Rephlex, which releases his own material as well as that of his friends, including Kosmik Kommando, Mu-Ziq (Mu as in the greek letter, it's pronounced "music." Imagine going to your local Tower and asking them to special order Music for you.)

The Aphex Twin has become a cult phenomenon, with music that appeals to those hung over from the "rave" hype of the past few years. To his fans, his music represents a maturing of style, a journey back to when techno and acid house were made and heard underground, not on television advertisements and emulated on pop radio. Actually, James' publishers are in the process of suing Reebok for sampling an Aphex Twin track for a shoe commercial. Apparently Shaquille O'Neal is bounding across the screen and performing a slam dunk while "Flap Head" churns away in the background.

His music has become an influence on many artists, but he still feels that very few people have been able to work like he has. "It's totally different, there's no link at all. I see similarities, but the actual process is totally separate. There's only about three people I've ever worked with, and they work reasonably similar to me, but I don't work in one set way anyway, I always vary it. Perhaps I might work the same way they do, but only for a week, then I change it around." He is namechecked by everyone from DJ/producer Francois Kevorkian to Mike Edwards of Jesus Jones, but he still feels completely separate from nearly every musician on earth.

His live shows were also not to be missed, but he recently gave up playing live. The technical work of transporting his studio from venue to venue, as well as the time it took away from making music, became too much, and he is now only touring as a DJ. However, a recent trip to Moscow proved less than enjoyable. "I didn't actually play anything 'cause I got pulled off by the army. I was trying to play some records. I was very drunk on vodka and simultaneously trying to DJ on some decks that didn't even work, and there were 4 Russian DJs trying to pull me off. One of them had their arm around my neck, and then two soldiers came up and started, like, poking guns at me. They didn't like what we were playing. I think it's cause all the clubs are run by the Mafia over there, so they just click their fingers and there's loads of army security that just come running over."

flow, or fought in front of it. Yet the passive recorder also set in motion the closest conscious simulation of a dream, which has steered the imagination of the last 100 years: audiences were fixed in front of a tableau where nothing could deviate (as in the theatre) from the original version; their vision filled with outside images, faces, action, and underwent a symbolic waking as the lights came up at the end. 100 years later, movies are all about noise, Sensurround; the verbiage and wall-to-wall rock of Taramino's world. Or, as in Derek Jarman's *Blue*, sounds alone: memories, whispers, music, noises all billow through the filtering gauze of the screen. Some stick in the mind, others drift out of reach: the choice of what to latch on to is determined by the viewer/listener.



Celia Green

There are recollections of Debussy sitting down at the piano and playing the impression of an ocean wave into the instrument, much as a painter might sketch the scene on the spot in watercolour. Much of the music peculiar to the 20th century, from Debussy and Ravel's chromatic palettes to more open ended forms such as improvisation, have been concerned with the struggle to make the instrument as transparent as possible, so as not to obstruct free expression. Composers such as Scriabin and Debussy extended the overripe, Romantic notion of expressiveness to take into account the mechanics of the instrument and performance, to achieve a kind of gestural music.

Scriabin, unable to perform his own "Black Mass" piano sonata because it gave him nightmares, conceived the first (never performed) large-scale multimedia event, *Mysterium*, a giant orchestral work which was meant to include a flashing, coloured light-wheel and a barrage of smoke and smells. These intuitive attempts to move beyond the technical and temporal limitations of instrument and performance connect with modern electronic music: both bypassing the figures of iconic rock star, existential jazz soloist and hermitic avant garde composer that pepper the mid- to late part of the 20th century.

"The more delicate the constitution of the music, the more risk there is," says David Toop. "When you're doing complex music, which is organised with a kind of principle of a disintegrating skeleton — bones could fly off at the slightest tremor — it's very difficult. Especially when you're dealing with chaotic principles, where the music has a life; the harmonic and electronic variables build and create their own organic substance, with distorting likenesses and rhythmic accidents."

A Singer's dream *She is standing in front of a conveyor belt, on which objects of unrecognisable shape pass along in front of her. These turn out to be component parts of a whole which she must assemble to make up pieces of music. No sense of where they are coming from, or where they go on to if she does not choose them.*

Lucid dreams

"Lack of clarity is always a sign of dishonesty" — Celia Green

Every generation has its dreams and its dream weavers. For most of the century that's now coming to a close, dreams have reflected time-honoured symbols and myths back to us through the work of Carl Jung. But there is a secret history for most things this century, and in the study of dreams it has been manifest in the research into 'lucid dreaming'. Freud called dreams "the royal road to the unconscious", but lucid dreamers occupy that road and set up a toll booth.

In Oxford in 1961, a disillusioned research student called Celia Green founded the

Institute for Psychophysical Research. As she later documented in books such as *The Decline And Fall Of Science* and *Advice To Clever Children*, the Institute devoted itself to the study of experiences that can be perceived, remembered and described afterwards, but which do not tally with established scientific explanations of the workings of the world, such as out-of-body experiences, parapsychology, extra-sensory perception and lucid dreaming. Green's highly single-minded approach was, and remains, pragmatically skeptical of all accepted beliefs and theories, taking nothing on trust, especially the luxury of authority which the scientific establishment has enjoyed for so long.

In 1968 she published *Lucid Dreams*, the first examination of the paradox of consciousness during sleep. Drawing on the 1930s research of psychologists Moers-Messmer and Embury Brown, as well as her own work at the Institute, she expounded, drawing only tentative conclusions, the phenomenon that some subjects who had put their minds to it had discovered and could develop a way of realising that they were dreaming in the midst of a dream, and seize the reins of the dream in order to test out its properties and limits. Subjects reported being able to hear and taste in a more vivid way than in waking life; deaf dreamers heard sounds clearly; the blind 'saw' colours.

David Thompson and Chris Allen, the partners behind Nottingham's Ernt label and long-time admirers of Green's books, established contact with the Institute in 1994. Next month, they plan to release *Lucid Dreams*, a CD of spoken word recordings by Celia Green made especially for the label, set to an electronic soundtrack created in their own dream factory, the Time Studio, which incorporates a 3D digital sound imaging system. On one track, Green offers specific instructions on how anyone can achieve lucid dreaming. For Thompson and Allen, the project demonstrates one way in which music could engage with, confront and detour entrenched belief systems. "Lucid dreams raise questions about perception," says Thompson. "If a person is aware they are dreaming, our definitions of consciousness must be inadequate. Music also raises questions of perception. How does a sequence of notes, patterns and tones, essentially just vibrating air, evoke such complex suggestions? We're encouraged to think of music as 'entertainment', just a diversion, but music can obviously be used to explore and define parts of our psychology which we usually ignore — perhaps at a price."

When You Wake, You're Still In A Dream

The air is thick with fudge, although no one's handing any out. In the adjacent rooms lie the skeletons of redundant camera equipment. Richard James stands impassively having his last few pictures taken. As we leave the fudge factory in search of a cup of tea, Richard, walking at half my pace, stops to peer into a paper shredding factory, kick bags of rubbish, and is pulled up short by the sign above a Chinese take away. "Good Friends?" he scoffs, more with bewilderment than scorn. "What does that mean?"

This is Richard James, Aphex Twin, Polygon Window, Caustic Window, Dice Man; his musical emissions made of pure trace elements and raw materials, where that of most Twinspace is expendable by-product. We enter a quiet cafe, the only one visible on this long East End street, but as soon as I switch on a tape to record our conversation, the air fills up with braying TV sets, a loud radio news bulletin, hammering and Chinese waitresses singing along to pop songs. We are the only customers.

The Aphex Twin's dream *"I was trying to work it out over my cornflakes this morning. I don't reckon it would make any sense if I explained it; it wasn't a story, not like I was here, doing that — it was just conversations with I don't know who? I don't know exactly what was going on, but it was quite fucked up. And there weren't any sounds in it at all."*

Richard James's 1994 album *Selected Ambient Works II* was a sprawling dawnscape whose vista was obscured by gas, mists, distressed textures, smeared lenses. With hardly a guiding beat in earshot, it was a prime example of the lucid dreaming recordings that James had been talking about in interviews. The new Aphex Twin album, *I Care Because You Do*, although recorded 'consciously', has more characteristics of the popular image of a lucid dream than any of James's previous work. The track "Alberto Balsam" magically jumps from its original percussion loop —

Another oft-told anecdote about Richard James is his avoidance of sleep, staying up for days on end making music and often sleeping less than an hour a night. "It's a bit like eating, when your body tells you you're hungry you don't actually need it, you just get into these cycles, where your body gets used to doing something, where come 5:00 every day you get hungry. But you can change it, it's difficult, and you need quite a strong will to do it. You can do it, but it takes a lot of hard work. When I get really tired all sorts of things start happening. After a week it gets quite interesting, with half an hour a night. I do all kinds of strange things when I'm like that. I got up, I'd just had about twenty minutes' sleep, and I woke up really hungry, so I went to pour some cereal into a bowl, and I poured the milk in but it went all over the floor, and I couldn't work out what had happened so I went back to sleep. After I got back up, I saw this saucer, this little saucer on the table and loads of milk and cereal all over the floor! I thought I was getting a bowl out!"

"I'm quite crafty at staying awake. When I'm making tracks or listening to music I can stay awake indefinitely, as long as I'm actually making tracks. As soon as I turn my back on it, I fall asleep. I'll be doing a track and I'll get up to make some tea or something, but as soon as I get up I'll fall asleep, as I'm getting up, which is really strange, I just hit the floor. Or you might just stay where you are, and you get up in some really weird position." Often the ideas for his tracks come from dreams. James claims to be skilled at lucid dreaming, the art of dreaming consciously, able to control what you see and do. He imagines sounds using imaginary equipment, in an imaginary studio or his own, and uses these sounds as the basis for his tracks.

What sort of imaginary gear do you work on?

Whoa (pause) It's really hard to explain, actually. Basically, the easiest way to say it is gear that does anything.

What does it look like?

Anything.

Vegetables?

If you'd like, I've only been doing it for two years. I've never tried anything like that, but I guess if you want a machine that looks like a banana then you've got one

Does the way they look correspond to the way they sound?

Sometimes, it depends on how much control you're in as well. That changes quite a lot. It's really boring when I'm in total control, it's just like when I'm awake.

The "media persona" and the "Aphex Twin Legend"

Do you lie much? I read that you told a tourist you were in Holland to taste pastries for an English baking company. You know, this makes you considerably less trustworthy!

I'm sorry! (pause) Well, that's what I do

You lie?

No, I make pastry!

You make pastry.

Yeah, then I taste other people's.

Could you send us a recipe, then?

No!

Another trade secret?

No, I just can never be bothered to mail anybody anything. I didn't even mail my own mother a birthday card!

I could make up a whole story that instead of music you've been experimenting with pastries since you were fifteen years old

I have!

...and that you build your own customized blenders and mixing bowls to do it.

Yeah, and in my spare time I kill little kids with them as well!

With pastries?

With blenders...

Brain Resonance

What's your favorite frequency?

7 Hz.

That's below the fusion frequency.

What's the fusion frequency?

The lowest frequency at which the human ear can generalize pitch. The fusion frequency is about 20 Hz.

What difference does that make? You can still see the cone moving in and out.

What's the resonant frequency of the brain?

7 Hz.

7 Hz is the resonance frequency of the brain?

Yeah.

So if I play you a 7 Hz tone your brain rattles?

Yeah.

What happens then?

You go into a trance

Astral Projection

I've had one astral projection, it was very short and brief, that was quite mental, it doesn't really prove anything but it's quite nice.

Where did you astral project to?

The corner of the room.

Were you asleep?

No, awake, I was tripping!

That doesn't count then!

Yeah, it's not very good, but it's quite interesting all the same. It's quite a good experience whatever it is...

Could you astral project yourself to the store, or out of the country?

Well you can in a dream.

But then you can go about anywhere in a dream.

Well there you go, you said you couldn't do it!

You're not actually doing it.

Yeah, you are Why do you have to be there?

If you have a dream, and you go to say, Iceland, and you name off a tree, or one of the eight people that live in Iceland, could you physically go there and point them out again?

No, of course you couldn't.

Then would that be astral projection?

Psychics Love The Aphex Twin

Fans of Richard's work often congregate on the IDM list, an Internet mailing list dedicated to progressive electronic music. The exchange of information via this medium has produced a definitive Aphex Twin discography, with catalog numbers, track listings, and BPM counts. (An abbreviated version of the discography is reprinted here for your convenience.) I mention this to James, and he is aware of it, but rather surprised.

I heard about that, someone's produced this massive list of every track I've ever done, with BPMs and track lengths. And it's even got these two EPs where they've got the right track names for the tracks, but I've never published what the track names are! But I knew what they were, and I can't work that out at all. How did he get the track names? I never told anyone what they are! My life's a bit haphazard, but to my knowledge I've never told anybody what they're called.

Maybe he's psychic.

Maybe he is. That's what I thought right away. Maybe he'll publish a discography of everything you'll do in the next three years.

That would be good, I'd get to know him better if he could do that. I'd like to go ahead two years, find out where my studio is, nick loads of DATs and bring 'em back and listen to them all. What about going back in time with all your gear?

Naw, that's not the same. It'd be better to go forward and listen to what I'm going to do, that'd be fucking excellent. But the closest I can get to that is doing loads of tracks quickly, like in a day. Then leaving them be for three weeks then listen to them, because I'd totally forget what they're like. But that's the nearest I can get.

"I was trying to play some records, I was very drunk on vodka and simultaneously trying to DJ on some decks that didn't even work, and there were 4 Russian DJs trying to pull me off. One of them had their arm around my neck, and then two soldiers came up and started, like, poking guns at me."

Abbreviated Discography for Richard D. James aka Aphex Twin, Polygon Window, Caustic Window etc.

Information compiled by Alan M. Parry, flu'id (fluo')

Aphex Twin featuring Schizophrenia - Analogue Bubblebath Vol 1 - Mighty Force Records (MF201)

Aphex Twin featuring Schizophrenia - Analogue Bubblebath Vol 1 -TVT / WaxTrax (TVT 4810)

Q-Chastic EP (2x7" 500 pressed) - Replex Cat 002

The Aphex Twin (12") - R&S Belgium RS9201

The Aphex Twin (UK 12") - R&S Belgium RSUK12

The Aphex Twin (UK CD) - R&S Belgium (RSUK 12CD)

Digeridoo Vol 2 [Analogue Bubblebath Vol 2] - Rabbit City Vol 2

Aphex Twin - Xylem Tube EP (12") - R&S Belgium RS9209

Caustic Window - JoyRex J4 EP - Replex Cat 004

Caustic Window - JoyRex J5 EP (limited white vinyl) - Replex Cat 005

Powerpill: Pac Man EP (limited yellow vinyl) - ffrreedom TABX110 / Pac 1

Powerpill: Pac Man CD - ffrreedom TABCD110

Aphex Twin - Selected Ambient Works 85-92 - R&S Belgium (AMB3922CD/ALP)

Aphex Twin - Analogue Bubblebath Vol 3 (vinyl) - Replex Cat 008

Aphex Twin - Analogue Bubblebath Vol 3 (CD) (limited bubble-wrap) - Replex Cat 008

Polygon Window - Surfing On Sine waves (limited clear vinyl) - Warp WARP LP7

Polygon Window - Guoth (limited clear vinyl) - Warp WAP 33 (WAP 33CD)

Polygon Window - Guoth - Warp WAP 33CD

Caustic Window - JoyRex J9 EP - Replex Cat 009ii

Caustic Window - JoyRex J9 EP (limited 303 picture-disc) - Replex Cat 009i

Aphex Twin - On (part 1 of 2) - Warp WAP39

Aphex Twin - On remixes (part 2 of 2) - Warp WAP39H

Aphex Twin - On (US) - Sire/Warner Bros

Aphex Twin - Selected Ambient Works Volume II (limited brown vinyl) - Warp LP21 / Sire (2-45482-A)

which seems to consist of drums and camera shutter-clicks or snipping hairdresser's scissors — to a passage of percussion on a domestic radiator, then back to the drums again; a split-second leap from the preset world of sequenced rhythms to a hasty, anteaunish tapping on domestic fixtures. At the beginning of the next track, a door slams and James's voice is heard shouting, before the rhythm track kicks in. It's been taped with a portable DAT from bedroom speakers, and you can hear James shuffling around in the room before jacking the desk sound into the mix, so that the music can be heard 'properly'. It's an unsettling alchemy, this constant shifting between machine acoustics and realtime experience.

As suspected, Richard James isn't hugely interested in debating in depth the implications of what he does, although he graciously answers all my questions without hesitation, offering so much information, then stopping. It's a cliché, rarely true, that most of the answers are to be found in the music, but it seems more than usually applicable in this case, especially in the music he says he keeps concealed in his private archive. He claims to operate according to a prickly yet somehow admirable logic, not caring who hears his music, only releasing records and doing the promotional rounds in order to make a living. "The only reason I'm putting records out is to make some money, and I don't reckon people would get into it if I released some of the more unconventional stuff that I do. My friends want to hear things that I've done, and that's cool, but I don't particularly want to hear it again, I just like making new stuff."

We pause and listen to the hammering, and the cars swishing past in the rain outside. Does he hear music all the time, I wonder out loud; is he hearing the street as music? "Yeah." Is that a problem? "Yeah, fucking pisses me off badly, but there's nothing I can really do about it."

The process of creating music electronically could be seen as a correlative of dreaming. The musician creates a mosaic out of sonic fragments, but the mosaic exists in more than two dimensions: sampled snatches of music are snippets of other people's experience; location and environmental recordings hold personal memories, sense-impressions, emotional associations. All these are recombined and arranged in the mixing desk, in the dub (and here we might as well consult the dictionary definition of 'dub': "an alternative soundtrack, esp in a different language").

The secret, for musicians as for lucid dreamers, is in trying to find a balance point between when to control and when to let go: does becoming too aware of what you're doing dispel the magic? "The grade changes," says Richard James. "You'll be on another planet, thinking, What made me get myself here? And those are the best ones when they're in the middle. More interesting, because it's really unexpected. But when you're totally in control it's usually more boring, because nothing really moves around, you don't get all this weird shit going on. It's quite like being awake, and that's not all that interesting."

I ask him if his dreams seem more real than waking life. "I think dreams are a bit more honest, because you don't lie to yourself in dreams. I don't think you have an ego and all this business; it all seems to disappear. The way you are in a day is basically the way you were shaped the night before when you were sleeping; and when you're asleep, that's when all your thoughts are put into order — it's when your brain does all its filing; prepares you for the next conscious day. You could argue that when you sleep that's when all the shit goes down."

Richard James claims never to have heard of Celia Green or her writings; he discovered he could lucid dream "when I was little", and was only able to give it a name after he watched a QED programme about three lucid dreamers meeting up in each other's dreams. Except that you can't help feeling that he's exactly the kind of prodigy Celia Green was addressing in her *Advice To Clever Children*, especially when he answers my parting question: whether he considers himself a mystic. "That's not me at all. I'm much more logical. I'm pretty old school when it comes to things like that. I have to see things before I believe them."

Dreams have traditionally been used to illuminate waking lives, the new Aphex Twin music illuminates the way waking visions can start to spill back into unconscious reveries. Here, as in so many other areas, the borders are fuzzing. The convergence of all these strands at this moment registers a wider conflux of information and global communication; music is taking its own share of this great learning. The lines are converging, focusing, and stretching ahead to their vanishing point. □

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BEING AP

You may know Aphex Twin as Richard D James, the genius and with sandpaper as he is to recording heart-bursting electronica. Dorian Lynskey meets him on the eve of the brilliant Syro, his

RICHARD D JAMES HAS NOT BEEN SLEEPING WELL.

It's not that he's troubled. In fact, everything is "fucking lush" right now. Nor has he been experimenting with the sleep-deprivation techniques that used to help get the music flowing. He just had an unusually heavy time at his 43rd birthday party last weekend.

"Oh, man," he says with a rueful grin. The man known as Aphex Twin is tucked into the corner of an otherwise deserted hotel restaurant in London, drinking a glass of water. He looks exactly as you'd expect: T-shirt, jeans, shoulder-length red hair and a scruffy beard surrounding a broad grin. When he holds his hands up to his face like he's framing a photograph, and makes the grin a touch more manic, he looks like one of his record covers.

"I never take drugs normally," he continues. "But I did, like, Mandy, K, coke – which I've only ever done twice – and mushrooms, and was pissed and stoned, at the same time. So I'm kind of coming down off that." He rubs his beard thoughtfully. "It was nice, but it made you stay up for three days."

This lapse notwithstanding, he thinks all drugs are "pretty shit", except mushrooms, although he'd like to try the hardcore South American psychedelic brew, ayahuasca. "Meet some aliens."

Aliens.

"You can actually meet aliens whenever you want to," he explains helpfully. "You just need to ask, and they'll appear. I know, because I've done it once, and it was totally fucking scary. I'm not ready for that yet. I've got other things to do."

That's how it goes with James. You start out on terra firma and end up in the cosmos, discussing parallel dimensions or the nature of time. The odd thing is that he says everything in the same cheerfully matter-of-fact tone, as if alien encounters were no more remarkable than his childcare routine. He thinks he's on the autistic spectrum because he struggles with the etiquette of eye contact (most of the time he gazes over my shoulder) and feels an affinity with his autistic nephew. He also suspects he has a mild form of epilepsy that manifests itself in intense,

seizure-like head rushes, which he thinks might explain his fondness for disorientating tuning. Then again, he was diagnosed by a bloke in a record shop so he might need a second opinion.

Other than that, like all true eccentrics, he doesn't understand why people think he's eccentric. He chats away amiably for a solid two hours about anything and everything. Now that he lives in a remote Scottish village with his wife and two sons (aged six and eight), while his old friends remain in London or Cornwall, he seems glad of the opportunity.

"I'm pretty isolated," he says. "It's probably why I'm jabbering so much. Ah, someone to talk to!"

This is James's first substantial UK interview in 13 years because he's about to release his first Aphex Twin album in 13 years. It's called *Syro*, after "Syrobonkus", a nonsense word one of his sons blurted while listening to it. It had been rumoured that he had writer's block or had retired without telling anyone. In fact, he's been recording music all this time, tons of it. "I don't really like releasing music," he explains. "I always like making it but I don't like the bit after."

Syro was announced a few weeks ago by idiosyncratic means, both low-profile (a page on the deep web browser Tor) and high (literally so – a green blimp bearing the Aphex Twin logo floated over London). But the presentation of the record itself is an exercise in demystification. The artwork itemises every piece of equipment and every expense involved in making and marketing the album, while the tracks go by the working titles on his hard drive, unwieldy strings of data such as s950txi6wasr10 (earth portal mix). Always contrary, the man revered as an enigma is being as transparent as possible.

He calls *Syro* "my pop album, or as poppy as it's going to get," which means that it contains vocals (performed by himself and members of his family and garbled beyond recognition) and bewitching melodies. It is, nonetheless, a heavy trip; a whirlwind tour of James's inscrutable brain; an unpredictable maze of things that shouldn't make sense together and yet do: blaring rave basslines, poignant electro chords, splintered jazz-fusion riffs, meditative piano, scorching acid splurges, elaborate breakbeat hieroglyphs, abrasive industrial clatter and sheer noise terror. If you're an Aphex

Twin fan, it's both familiar and unfathomably strange – a transmission in a language only one man understands, and even he's not sure.

"When you don't know where it's coming from, those are the best ones," he says. "The times when you're almost using the Force, getting to a relaxed state where you can switch your brain off and allow it to flow through you, from wherever it's coming from, that's when it really works."



Primal scream: the videos for *Come To Daddy*, 1997 and *Windowlicker*, 1999 (below).



Richard D James doesn't even walk conventionally. The other day a friend asked him why, when he was walking down the street, he felt compelled to cross over, stroll for a while on the other side, and then cross back. "What are you doing? You're just going there anyway. Why did you have to cross over the road?" >>



Aphex Twin, aka
Richard D James, aka
The Tuss, aka Polygon
Window, Trakside
Studios, East London,
21 August, 2014.

“YOU CAN ACTUALLY MEET ALIENS WHENEVER
YOU WANT TO. YOU JUST NEED TO ASK, AND
THEY’LL APPEAR. I KNOW, BECAUSE I’VE DONE IT.”

"I'm just an erratic kind of personality, I suppose," James says with a happy shrug. "I feel totally stable and normal but I think to other people it appears to be quite twitchy."

Ever since releasing his first EP, 1991's *Analogue Bubblebath Vol I*, James has been crossing the road. When musicians, from Radiohead to Kasabian to Skrillex, say they're influenced by Aphex Twin, they don't necessarily mean his sound so much as his ethos. He represents an idealised vision of life as a musician: dogged independence, refusal to compromise, a necessary dose of defensive cunning and a proud disregard for all the extra-musical temptations that derail creativity.

He began with an avalanche of material under myriad aliases including AFX, Polygon Window, Power-Pill and Bradley Strider. Some of it was daft, some brutal and much of it, especially his miraculous debut album *Selected Ambient Works 85-92*, mysteriously affecting; he considers many of his tracks to be love songs. Struggling to explain this freakish genius who was both heir to Kraftwerk, Eno, Cage and Stockhausen and a geezer who liked a spliff and a laugh, the press tended to portray him as either a madman or a liar, even though most of the things he was assumed to be lying about - making music when he was 13, building his own synthesizers, composing in a hypnagogic state - turned out to be roughly true.

The confoundingly brilliant *Selected Ambient Works Volume II* (1994), his first album for Sheffield label Warp, was a double CD of virtually beatless mood pieces identified by photographs instead of titles. His next two Aphex Twin albums slotted pastoral melodies pretty enough for adverts ("I've done a few things I probably shouldn't have") between frantic blurts of noise. In a perfect illustration of James's highbrow-lowbrow car-crash aesthetic, this period produced both a track that was adapted by Phillip Glass (*1cc2 Hedral*) and a dirty about drinking "from the milkman's wife's tits" (*Milkman*).

On those albums James used his own voice, albeit heavily treated, and his own face, albeit distorted until it resembled some medieval Cornish folk devil, an image inspired by a "terrifying" hallucination he experienced on acid. He shared the terror in the Chris Cunningham-directed videos for his two astonishing late-'90s singles, the machine-punk nightmare *Come To Daddy* and the booty-bass mutant *Windowlicker*. Once seen, the image of his face grafted on to a gang of demonic children and a coterie of bikini-clad dancers cannot be unseen. This tactic, a deliberate riposte to techno's love of anonymity, granted him a strange quasi-celebrity he regrets whenever he's recognised in public.

"I actually really like pop music but it's all the other stuff that goes with it," he says. "I think you have to be mentally ill to be really famous. I'm only partially mentally ill, because I'm semi-famous! But if you're like Madonna, then you're properly mentally ill, basically. Because you have to be. I've hung around with enough famous people to realise that they've got a serious insecurity problem."

So he turned down invitations to work with Madonna and Björk, stopped commissioning videos and released the somewhat indigestible 30-track data dump *Drukqs* in 2001. "Obviously, you can't get into that straight away," he concedes. "My sister said it sounds like



Enigma variations: throwing a drawer of cutlery down the stairs. a conspiracy theorist. And I was like, 'That sounds brilliant!'" friend to aliens and master of disguise.

In the subsequent 13 years he's released (on his own Rephlex label) a single AFX EP, the *Analord* series of vinyl-only analogue techno and one album as The Tuss, credited to non-existent duo Brian and Karen Tregaskin so that people could "hopefully evaluate it without knowing it was me". You could say he blew his chance to infiltrate the mainstream but that would be missing the point. Most musicians' ambitions grow with success. There's always another mountain to climb. But James still wants what he's always wanted: to do exactly what he likes, on his own, while earning enough money to live on.

Hence he spends a lot of time saying no. No to big-name collaborations. "A lot of people want to work with me, but they say, 'Hey, do you want to make a track? I'll email you this and then you'll reply.' And it's like, 'Fuck off, I don't even know who you are.' I'll make music with anyone who I'm mates with."

No to movie soundtracks. "I've realised that will never happen. I'm terrible at instructions. As soon as I've got instructions it's homework, and boring. If it was my job to make music for films, then most of the time I wouldn't do anything because I don't like music in films."

No to touring, although he's performed one-off shows in diverse guises, including tributes to avant-garde composers Steve Reich and Krzysztof Penderecki. He only really enjoys undercover DJ sets at tiny hippy festivals ("a million times better than

THE BEST OF APHEX TWIN

1 DIGERIDOO (*Digeridoo EP*, 1992)
Pummelling tribal rave gives a New Age cliché a hooligan twist.



2 AGEISPOLIS (*Selected Ambient Works 85-92*, 1992)
Dreaming a city: a sci-fi skyline rising above ancient tunnels of bass.



3 ON (single, 1993)
Aphex's infectious, hypnotic Warp debut, with a time-lapse video directed by Jarvis Cocker.

4 WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE? (QUEX-RD) (Saint Etienne remix, 1993)
A typical scorched-earth remix, reducing disco-pop to a single reverberating sigh over softly clanking beats.

5 RHUBARB (*Selected Ambient Works Volume II*, 1994)
Fathomlessly moving highlight of Aphex's arcane ambient opus.



6 ALBERTO BALSALM (*I Care Because You Do*, 1995)
Named after a shampoo, this lonesome, meandering beauty is as warm and inviting as Aphex gets.

7 GIRL/BOY SONG (Richard D James Album, 1996)
A classic balancing act, as morning-bright orchestration meets a frenzied percussive scrawl.



“A THING I PARTICULARLY ENJOY IS WHEN PEOPLE THINK YOU’RE TAKING THE PISS AND YOU’RE ACTUALLY NOT.”

Glastonbury”), because adoration is boring. “I’ve done so many gigs now, I don’t really want to do any more. I’ve done every single variation possible. If you’ve got loads of fans it’s always going to be good. It can never go wrong. It’s a bit too easy.”

And no, almost, to Kanye West, who sampled Drukqs’ pristine piano miniature Avril 14th on his song Blame Game. James thought the version he was sent for approval was “done really badly” and offered to improve it, but Kanye’s camp ignored his offer. “I felt like they tried to stitch me up,” James says, in a solitary burst of anger. “I said to my publisher, ‘Just don’t fucking give it to them.’” But resisting was more trouble than it was worth. And, ultimately, the liner notes for the album where the track appeared, *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*, did acknowledge that Blame Game “contains elements of Avril 14th by Richard James”.

That aside, by holding his refusenik line so firmly that he makes Thom Yorke look like will.i.am, James has managed to concentrate on the reason he chose this life in the first place, something that fills him with visible wonder.

“The best thing about making music is you can do whatever you want, can’t you?” he says, beaming. “Nobody’s going to tell you off. It’s brilliant, because you’re in a life where you have to adhere to so many rules and it’s all a fucking ball-ache, but when you sit down and make something, you’ve basically got a blank canvas. That’s the magic of it.”

A

few years ago, one of James’s older sisters visited a psychoanalyst, who asked what she and her siblings did for a living. She told him she was a linguist, her sister was a lawyer and her brother was a musician. The psychoanalyst said, “Oh, so you all want to be listened to, then?” When James heard this, he thought, “Shit, I never thought of it like that.”

Richard David James was born in Ireland in 1971 but grew up in Cornwall. The cover of his *Girl/Boy* EP depicts the gravestone of his older brother, also called Richard, who was stillborn three years earlier. As a child he was haunted by the awareness of this other Richard, the twin in *Aphex Twin*. “I sort of took his place as if he didn’t exist,” he once said.

The only music he remembers liking from his childhood is a cassette left in the tape deck of a second-hand car: *Snowflakes Are Dancing*, a 1974 album by Japanese electronic music pioneer Isao Tomita. He borrowed his sisters’ Smiths and Jesus & Mary Chain cassettes only in order to tape over them with his own experiments.

“I was definitely readying myself for an electronic dream world,” he says.

There was a piano in the house but it was riddled with woodworm and James sold it to buy a fruit machine that he could dismantle in order to work out how to get free credits at the local arcade. At school, his curiosity about the inner life of machines fused with his desire to cover up how little coursework he’d done and he hacked into the school’s database. Getting caught ended his burgeoning career as a hacker. “I’m just not sensible enough to be good at that job,” he reflects. “I’d get carried away. I thought, ‘No, I’m going to go to jail if I carry on doing that.’”

He was generally “very naughty”, probably because he was clever and understimulated. His mum said he was a pyromaniac. He even set fire to his own house while experimenting with >>

8 BUCEPHALUS BOUNCING BALL

(Come To Daddy EP, 1997)

Fiercish metallic mayhem, sounding like an army of sentient pinball machines on the march.



9 WINDOWLICHER

(Single, 1999)

Playful, disturbing and bizarrely catchy: a pop song garbled in translation.

10 AVRIL 14TH

(Drukqs, 2001)

Crystal-clear piano piece later appropriated by Sofia Coppola and Kanye West.





“WHEN YOU FOLLOW STUFF ON THE INTERNET ABOUT ILLUMINATI, ALIENS... I BELIEVE PRETTY MUCH ALL OF IT.”

home-made flame-throwers. Twice. Fortunately, music proved more compelling than hacking and arson. He started off making tape edits of random sounds. “In the beginning it was like a game, like playing with your cars.” When he was 13, however, he recorded 1, the oldest and shortest track on *Selected Ambient Works 85-92*. “I remember thinking, ‘Hey, where did that come from?’ It’s always a mystery, you know. I suppose it was really simple what I’d done, but I didn’t know I could do it.” Later, his music was “definitely” shaped by hallucinogens. He remembers once taking mushrooms in a field in Cornwall, having “a full-on conversation” with the wind moving through the grass.

After a few years of studying engineering in Cornwall and London, DJing, and stockpiling an extraordinary amount of music, the 20-year-old James finally surfaced with *Analogue Bubblebath Vol 1* in 1991. He immediately knew it would catch on. “I don’t mean it in a big-headed way. I just thought, ‘I can see what I’m doing, and I think it’s good, and I think people will be into it.’”

But he thinks there was another reason why success was guaranteed. Magic.

“I don’t know if you know about sigils?” he says. “Like my logo. You think of something that you want to happen, then you turn it into something that looks like a magic symbol, and then you put that out in the world, and it works. It does. You should try it.”

So that’s what the Aphex Twin logo is?

“It is, yeah. But if you tell anyone what the symbol means, then it will stop working. I’ve got a new one that’s been in development for ages but it’s not quite looking right yet.”

James has a reputation for messing with interviewers for his own amusement, so maybe he’s doing that now. But when I ask him to confirm or deny some of his more outlandish claims in the ‘90s he smirks mischievously. When he talks about the sigils he does not smirk.

It used to be said of Aphex Twin that he lived in a bank and drove a tank. He did indeed inhabit a former branch of HSBC in South London, but the vehicle was actually an armoured car, which is currently parked outside his sister’s house. He never fulfilled his dream of owning a submarine but he’s still considering acquiring an ex-Navy sonic weapon. “They’re only 20 grand. It would be quite fun at gigs.”

He currently lives “in the middle of nowhere”, where he’s got five separate home studios, each devoted to different kinds of hardware, from modular synths to electro-mechanical robots. He used to have a dining room with an idyllic view but he set up a sampler on the dining table and gradually added to it and now the whole room is just a tower of gear with a hole in the middle. “I can’t see anything now,” he says, laughing. “My wife says we live in this place with equipment, with spaces for Pot Noodles.”

He has made some concessions to family life, though. Even though his most creative time is around 2am, it’s hard when he has the school run the next morning. His youngest son has already made his own tracks and posted them on Bandcamp.

“Their music is so fucking weird,” he says proudly. “I’m thinking, ‘Oh my God, what have I done to them?’ I’ll be in the car, playing totally brutal avant-garde noise music at the loudest volume, and they’ll just be looking out of the window. I think three times they’ve said, ‘Oh, can you turn it down a bit, Dad?’”

Brutal avant-garde noise aside, it’s a quiet life. He doesn’t have close friends nearby, nor does he have a

smartphone or use social media. “I hate all that shit.” He doesn’t enjoy novels (“I just read manuals”), TV (“just really clever propaganda”) or films that aren’t documentaries. “I used to be able to suspend disbelief but after watching so much real stuff on the internet, non-real stuff just seems really weird. What’s the point? It’s just some stupid story.”

Even though his career pre-dates widespread access to the worldwide web, James is a creature of the internet age, a geek >>



(Clockwise from left) James gets tanked up, 1995; with composer and Aphex Twin collaborator Philip Glass, 1995; DJing in Paris, 2011.

pioneer obsessed with uncovering secret knowledge. If he were 20 years younger, he'd probably be one of Anonymous's undercover hackers or a cranky Silicon Valley maven who designs a killer app, then sells it for a fortune and disappears because he's bored. In tech parlance, he's a disrupter.

So he gets most of his information from YouTube documentaries. In Aphex world, the division isn't between good and bad or true and false but interesting and boring. He's drawn to prickly, controversial outsiders such as Wikileaks founder Julian Assange ("He must have the biggest balls in the universe"), New Age thinker David Willcock and Alex Jones, the perpetually furious, possibly insane host of conspiracy theorist site Infowars. "He's funny as fuck, that guy. He fucks it up for himself so badly, but he's just totally passionate: he's a total warrior."

Task James to define his own politics.

"Ooh," he exclaims. "Where do you start? The whole world is totally fucked, basically."

James says his stay in London has been marred by the sight of "chemtrails", a term used by conspiracy theorists who believe aircraft contrails are used to spray chemical agents for nefarious reasons. He believes 9/11 was "absolutely" an inside job. "When you follow stuff on the internet about Illuminati, New World Order, aliens, even if none of it's true, it's just a thousand times better than any science-fiction film that's ever been written," he reasons.

But do you...

"Actually believe it? Yeah, I do believe pretty much all of it. You can't only believe things which can be proven. It's boring. Loads of things are unproven, but it doesn't stop you believing them."

Pople who reckon James is a prankster provocateur always mention the time he DJ'd with sandpaper (it was twice, actually, in 1994) but he thinks they've misunderstood his motives. "A thing I particularly enjoy," he says, "is when people think you're taking the piss and you're actually not."

He offers another example. He wants to make an album consisting entirely of different kinds of tape hiss. "If that was my new album people would say, 'Oh you're just taking the fucking piss.' But I would genuinely enjoy listening to tape hiss. And that creates a nice situation, because they're annoyed that they don't understand something, so they naturally assume you're trying to annoy them."

The next Aphex Twin album probably won't consist of tape hiss but there is much more music to come. He's almost finished making three "more experimental" albums and tidying up old material, such as 1995's unreleased *Melodies From Mars*. The problem, he says, is keeping track of it all.

"I'm really crap," he sighs. "I don't sort it out properly, forget things exist and delete things by mistake. The ones you think are brilliant are always the worst ones, and the ones that you forgot you did are the best ones. So it's quite dangerous, because those are the ones you lose."

It's unclear if any of it will appear on Warp because, he says, "There shouldn't be any intellectual copyright at all. It makes everything boring when people are trying to hold on to their ideas. It's generally



**"THERE SHOULDN'T
BE ANY INTELLECTUAL
COPYRIGHT. IT'S
GENERALLY NOT
GOOD FOR HUMANITY
AND CREATIVITY."**


not good for humanity and creativity. The other argument is people need to get paid. They don't, actually."

Says the man who's made enough from copyright to live a nice life.

"Yeah, totally, it's easy for me to say! I'm not the person to say it because I come across as a hypocrite. It's a bit like Russell Brand saying you should have a revolution and he's a multi-millionaire."

This is the kind of extraneous stuff that puts him off releasing records. Another thing is the need to tell a story about his music when really there's only the music. "Music is too abstract for most people," he says loftily. "People need, generally speaking, a narrative. For me and my friends, it's the opposite. We know all about those narratives and things that people sing about and the emotions we've already felt. We want to experience new things."

James warns cheerily that he's going to get "all cosmic on your ass now", because he's getting to the point of the whole thing. He's come to believe that music materially changes the person who makes it and the people who hear it. "If I'm doing my job properly, I'm changing into a different kind of person," he says. "People used to say, 'Do you think you change the world with your music?' And I would have said, 'No' before but now I'd say, 'Absolutely.'" He smiles beatifically. "If you're doing the right thing it's a nicer rearrangement of your brain."

James's taxi has arrived and he needs to venture out, beneath the capital's chemtrailed skies, to continue the distracting business of promoting *Syro*. Then he's free to return to his house full of gear and re-enter his electronic dreamworld. It's anyone's guess when he'll emerge again. Why would he? It's all he ever wanted. 



THE FIRST TIME I MET THE APHEX TWIN WAS IN 1992 AT MAYDAY, A HUGE RAVE HELD IN AN AIRCRAFT HANGER IN COLOGNE, GERMANY. THOUSANDS OF MASKED UP TECHNOKRAUTS JERKED ROBOTICALLY TO HIS KINETIC LIVE SET. AS HIS POUNDING TRIBAL CLASSIC DIGERIDOO SKITTERED OUT OF THE HOME WRECKING SPEAKERS THE SOUND PROMPTLY CUT OUT. IT TURNS OUT THAT RICHARD JAMES (AKA APHEX TWIN, CAUSTIC WINDOW, POLYGON WINDOW ETC) RECEIVED A DANGEROUSLY LARGE ELECTRIC SHOCK FROM HIS HAND BUILT CIRCUITRY AND SYNTHESISERS, CAUSING THE MASSIVE SYSTEM TO PACK IN. LUCKY TO ESCAPE UNSCATHED, HE RECOVERED IN THE BAR AFTERWARDS, WHILST THE CONVULSIVE EXPLOITS OF HIS DANCER PAUL WENT UNNOTICED. IF YOU'VE EVER WITNESSED THIS GUY'S EXPRESSIVE ABSTRACT DANCE YOU'D REALISE WHY NO ONE INTERFERED. PROBLEM WAS, PAUL WASN'T DANCING, HE WAS HAVING A FIT.

My next meeting with the Aphex Twin is in slightly less stressful surroundings. The Whispering Gallery in St. Paul's Cathedral, high above London, is congested with babbling foreign tourists and earnest believers. Richard James pulls a small black plastic object out of his bulging bag. "I've got a scanner now. It's like a mental radio and you can pick up phone conversations and stuff like that. They're illegal to use. You can pick up anything; military, NASA, police, phone conversations, the lot. There's a CD called Scanners and that's all made up of scanned conversation, it's the same way as they got Sarah Ferguson. It's wicked for checking out your local neighbourhood, especially where I live, it's all drug deals in the night. You can get ones which transmit as well, but it'd be too tempting to butt into people's conversations all the time. You can get some mental things. A friend got a suicide message on someone's answering machine; quite grim. I picked up this really mad lesbian conversation, saying goodbye for half an hour. Couples arguing is fucking hilarious. They talk a complete load of bollocks and then start arguing. It makes you realise you're not the saddest person out there."

Richard James' other recent acquisition is an armoured car he wants to eventually drive into the City of London. "It's an armoured car with a machine gun. Someone told me to go and 'see so-and-so in Cornwall and you'll see something you wanna buy'. So I went there, saw it, liked it and bought it. It's unbelievable, in totally mint condition with only 800 miles on the clock. It's not surprising 'cos it only does four miles to the gallon."

The ascent of this idiosyncratic Cornish lad has been extremely well documented; the self made electronic equipment, the early raves on the beach, his deliberate sleep deprivation and the experimental analogue sound journeys that are the fruit of it all. The Aphex Twin has received widespread critical acclaim most notably from the music papers the NME and Melody Maker, who usually reserve their praise for various camp guitar combos. Constant exposure and the dishing out of such labels as 'prodigy', 'Mozart' and 'genius' have made him a reluctant star. Along with The Orb, the Aphex Twin seems to have finally seduced the indie kids and

THE @PHEX

TEXT AND
ORIGINAL PICS BY
DANIEL NEWMAN

TWIN

WHISPERING AT ST. PAULS



stoned students to the appeal of alternative dance, inspiring both papers to lengthen and even inaugurate coverage of the whiter end of the techno, trance and ambient scenes. Why this and why now?

"Because they're sad. Sad people. Missed the boat. I find the attention embarrassing to tell the truth. I've only ever had two ambitions; to make music forever, until I drop dead and to never get a job. If it started working against me then I'd stop because that's the only reason I'm doing it. The whole thing's like a game anyway, I wouldn't take it too seriously. I'm really fussy about what I read. I'll only read something if someone shoves it in my face and says 'look at your ugly face in this one.'"

The Aphex Twin live is a curious affair. He admits to being more interested in hearing his stuff really loud than entertaining the audience, taking delight in adverse reactions. It appears, however, that there might not be any more live shows, "I'm pissed off with it," he says, "it was doing my head in." That's not to say he dislikes touring if his recent jaunt to America is anything to go by. "It was totally mental, the maddest thing I've ever done. From day one we ended up tripping for pretty well the rest of the tour. Every different city we went to we'd get a bombardment of, you know, the local herb.

"It doesn't help making music but it helps touring. I don't like doing loads of interviews. The whole prospect of anything to do with the music business I find embarrassing really. I'm not cut out for it at all. The dope just makes it go by quicker. Plus I was getting a bit of a twat saying 'yeah, I'll only do interviews if you roll us a joint up first.' Joints turned into pipes which turned into bongos by the time we got to San Francisco. Headmashed."

Richard James never uses drugs to make music, only for messing around and having a laugh with his mates. The artificially induced altered state he prefers working under when he creates textured soundscapes, such as his soon to be released triple album *Selected Ambient Works II* on Warp Records, has more to do with the way he sleeps or doesn't as the case may be. "The album is mostly made up from lucid dreaming which is a mental process I dis-

covered about two years ago, and use about 60% of the time.

The whole concept is totally bizarre. I've been able to control my dreams since I was really little and I've always had sounds in my dreams. For the past two years I've been writing tracks in my sleep and then trying to recreate them when I wake up. It didn't work at first because I kept forgetting them in the same way that you forget normal dreams, but with practice I've managed to remember them. A typical scenario is that I can fall asleep for half an hour and write a track that would've taken me half a day and then wake up and do it. It's in dream form so I can get the melodies if there's melodies there, but the sounds you can never recreate. It's like if you have a dream and try and explain it to someone, it seems really weird to you but it comes out really shit because you can't describe in it words."

Does he ever nod off halfway through a track leaving the tape running? "I never fall asleep making music. I can stay awake indefinitely making music as long as it's necessary to finish something off. As soon as I take my mind off music I instantly fall asleep. If I've been up for three days and haven't slept, the minute I look away from making music and go to make a cup of tea, I can fall asleep walking across the room. Your mind goes totally out the window. It's quite mental, I really enjoy it."

Centred on exploring disjointed abstract moods, the new album is a strangely disconcerting affair. The killer track, almost unique in that it has a beat, is a bouncy, distorted and percussive *number* called ...well, it's the third red one. None of the tracks have names, instead different coloured symbols reflect the mood they portray. It's an interesting idea but only emphasises the fact that most of the tracks have little enough personality as it is. Sure, they're spontaneous and evocative but there's little to rival the multi-layered sensuality of *Analogue Bubblebath*.

The same criticism could be directed at the increasing avalanche of clichéd ambient CDs coming from all corners of the globe. How many screeching birds, crashing waves and long lingering chords can the genre stand before it flops under the weight of meaningless crap?

"It's the same as everything else, it becomes a bandwagon for everyone to jump onto. In fact I think it's the best bandwagon so far, because even though there's loads of shit, comparatively there's not half as much as the rest of them. There will be, it's probably only because it's just started up, people are just getting their heads around how to make money. But from a record buyer's point of view, you've got people like Virgin issuing double CD packs of their old stuff. For a big major that's a pretty good purchase."

"I don't like trance stuff, it sounds like really old hat to me. I got bored of it three years ago. The techno underground seemed to go as far as it could and people decided to make trance records again. To me it's an excuse to make boring records. Not all of them, but it's like hardcore, mostly uninvective."

Top tunes chez James include Pete Namlook and a stable of similarly avant garde techno merchants under the banner of his own Replex label. Richard James is still prone to the occasional bout of DJing such as last summer's *Universe Extravaganza*, where he and Mixmaster Morris took alternate turns on the decks slowly frazzling the minds within the chill out tent. "I quite enjoyed it actually. It'd be good if the venue had've been better, really smart. It's the same with most ambient things, one out of five places are good to do it, and the rest are shit; right next to the main room so the bass is always coming through and the floor's soaking wet, it's just a waste of time. It's about time promoters sorted it out. At first it was just, 'oh yea, we need a token chill out room' or whatever, but it'd be good to get it sorted.

"I don't really like going out and sitting in a chill out room anyway because when I go out I wanna go mad. But sometimes it's just nice to have somewhere in a club that's not really fucking loud and you can actually talk to people."

Photos and interview over, we decide to return to a more sensible sea level. Once past a vertigo sufferer blocking up the narrow stairway, the coast is clear. Richard James skids hectically down, deliberately rubbing his coat harshly against the curved stone. The resultant sound is a strained swish of synthetic fibre rubbing against age old stone. It's the Aphex Twin obsession; the never ending exploration of the infinite possibilities of sound. That's the future that is.

Selected Ambient Works II is out now on Warp Records.

CAUSTIC WINDOW

Caustic Window

REPHLEX/YOUTUBE

A classic album slips out of the Aphex Twin archives. Is he taking the piss – or what? *By John Mulvey*



8/10

BACK IN THE days when The Aphex Twin was a sort of pop star, or at least a regular in the pages of *NME*, he would say roughly the same thing in each interview he gave. "I don't like sharing my music with anyone," he claimed, typically, in 2001. "I'd rather not

release it. All these tracks are like your babies, and you have to share them. Suddenly everyone else can listen to them and it's really horrible."

"No-one but you will ever hear all your tracks, will they?" wondered Piets Martin, the journalist.

"Probably not. I don't reckon. Not unless they nick them."

In 2001, Richard D James released *Drukqs*, his last album to date as The Aphex Twin, and told Martin that anyone hacking his computer would only be able to find there a fraction of his unreleased tracks – "A few hundred," he estimated.

Up until this summer, that trifling few hundred included the 15 pieces on *Caustic Window*, a fabled set that James decided not to release in 1994. The Aphex archive of notionally lost albums might provide a techno analogue to the unreleased haul of Neil Young. But, for all of Young's contrariness, it's hard to imagine the likes of *Homegrown* or *Chrome Dreams* emerging the same way as *Caustic Window*.

Earlier this year, a white label of the double album appeared on eBay, and was bought by a consortium of Aphex fans for around £40,000. With the co-operation of James and his label, Rephlex, each fan received a digital copy of *Caustic Window*, and the entire set was posted on YouTube. The physical records have now been auctioned again, for £27,398: their new owner is Markus 'Notch' Persson, creator of the online gaming phenomenon, *Minecraft*.

James' motivations here remain obtuse. It's tempting, as a consequence, to see the whole operation as one more prank, another riddle to engage and infuriate the obsessives poring over 12 inches that might just conceivably be his work (was he *The Tuss* in 2007, for instance?). Perhaps James' longtime refusal to let go of excellent albums like *Caustic Window* frustrates him as well, with only stubborn pride preventing a release by conventional means?

The traditional narrative around James paints him as a mad genius operating in a vacuum, an artist whose radical aesthetic places him outside of the musical continuum. *Caustic Window*, though, tells a slightly different story – of a young musician embedded in the electronica scene of the late '80s and early '90s, putting his own spin on the sound. The embryonically charming "Squidge In The Fridge", for example, features the sort of cheesy piano line that anchored numerous Italo house records at the time, while "Mumbly", with its Dastardly & Muttley samples and cranking breaks, isn't so far from The Prodigy's formative work.



TRACKLIST

- 1 Flutey
- 2 Stomper toimod Detunekik
- 3 Mumbly
- 4 Popeye
- 5 Fingertrips
- 6 Revpok
- 7 AFX Tribal Kik
- 8 Airflow
- 9 Squidge In The Fridge
- 10 Fingry
- 11 Jazphase
- 12 101 Rainbows (Ambient Mix)
- 13 Philips
- 14 Cunt
- 15 Phone Pranks (Part 1)
- 16 Phone Pranks (Part 2)

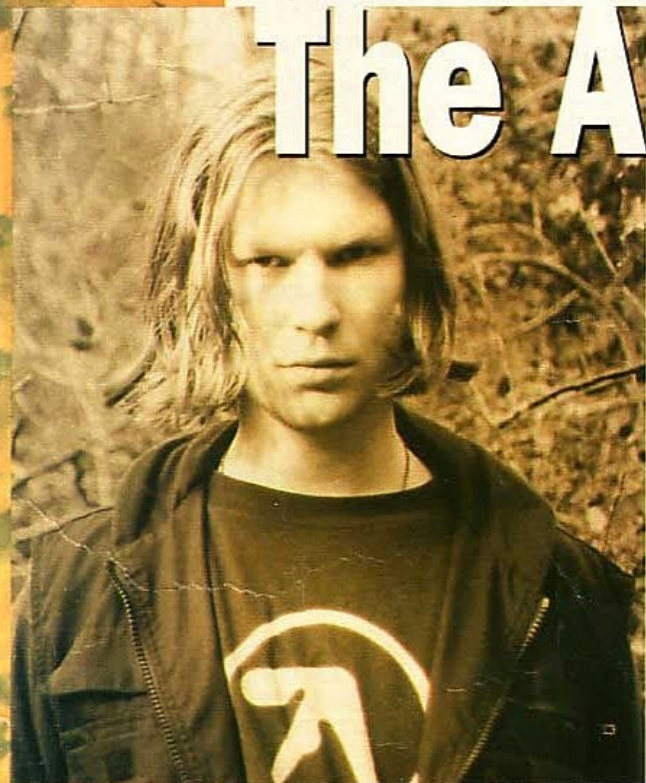
Nevertheless, a more recognisable Aphex Twin emerges on dystopian rave anthems like "Stomper toimod Detunekik" and "Revpok". For all the creepiness of his music and visuals, James' agenda has never really involved anything more sinister than a little light perversity. At a time when he was held up as the exemplar of a genre called Intelligent Dance Music, it was his sense of mischief – not occultism – that debunked chin-stroking theory. So *Caustic Window*, like the *Surfing On Sine Waves* album he released as Polygon Window in 1993, is hyperactive and hedonistic, even as James threads the most serene of melodies through the mélée. That capacity for prettiness peaks on "101 Rainbows (Ambient Mix)", a series of stately arpeggios pitched somewhere between Kraftwerk's "Europe Endless" and Cluster's "Sowiesoso". It is followed, though, by "Philips" and the particularly flavoursome "Cunt", two precursors of the kinetic, malfunctioning agro-acid James would eventually codify as drill'n'bass. Significantly, they are the only two tracks he

released at the time, on compilation albums.

"Cunt" is the last tune on *Caustic Window*, but it's followed by a pair of "Phone Pranks", in which James rings two techno contemporaries simultaneously on two phones. A confused chat between Scanner and Mixmaster Morris is interrupted by James ordering them not to hang up: "If you do do, you'll die." A second, between Cylob and Mike "Muziq" Paradinas, sees James busted.

"Oh it's Richard, is it? Very funny," deadpans Paradinas, with the weariness of a friend perhaps overfamiliar with such larks. For here is a man not averse to playing moderately cruel tricks on his friends. Who told the *NME* in 1997 that releasing music was "too boring", and that he found his fans "pretty fucking amusing". Who has two more unreleased albums – *Analogue Bubblebath 5* (1995) and *Melodies From Mars* (1999) – being auctioned on eBay at time of writing. Whose whole career could be construed, like *Caustic Window*, as an accidental revolution: a private joke that got magnificently out of hand.

GUY BARRETT



The Aphex effect

Aphex Twin Richard James' techno and ambient electro music is raved about. Dave Robinson peeps into the pipeline to see what's next.

Speed restrictions? Who needs 'em! In January '92 The Aphex Twin showed the techno world that his frenetic *Didgeridoo* could smash the 150bpm barrier effortlessly and still keep the punters dancing.

It's taken a few months for his legend to spread, but now Richard James – aka The Aphex Twin, aka Polygon Window, aka AFX, aka God-knows-how-many-other-pseudonyms-he's-got – is being lauded and applauded everywhere. Jesus Jones seem to talk about him in every interview they do; Curve play *Didgeridoo* before their gigs; we've even mentioned in him in three out of the first five issues of *Future Music* (cont). His two recently released albums, *Surfing on Sine Waves* (under the name Polygon Window) and *Selected Ambient Works 85-92* (as the Twin) have shown that he's not just a speed terrorist: he's capable of producing music that's electronic, but always varied, fluid and thoughtful. The general agreement is that Richard and his music are something different in a scene where bands and tracks burn brightly for a few weeks and are then forgotten.

With Richard's rise in reputation have come the stories. Yes, he does build or modify nearly all his gear; yes, he started doing it when he was 12; and yes, he comes from the depths of Cornwall. In '85 and '86

he was writing a style of music that would emerge two years later as Acid House – pretty much a hint of genius in a guy who claims that, at the time, nothing but mainstream music was available to him.

"I didn't have any equipment when I started," Richard recalls. "I used to make tape loops and put them on ghetto-blasters or reel-to-reels that I could get for five quid from junk shops. I did a hell of a lot with those, like creating finished collages of sound that I'd then make, say, five copies of. I'd sync up all the motors and play the tapes back, fluctuating the tape speed to create effects like flanging, chorus and phase-shifting.

"I bought a Roland 100M monosynth when I was 13 – it's like a [SH-101] – but I got really pissed off with it. I started customising my keyboards, then changing the components. When we started secondary school there was an electronics course, so music and electronics went hand in hand. Plus the fact that I didn't have any money! If I wanted to get anything different, I had to change what I had or make something.

"Through customising the stuff I got a working knowledge of the keyboards and the circuitry. I started building little modules, and that's gone on to building whole circuits. I never made these from magazines; I like to do it myself. I just made filters and

remixing, and several major record labels want to talk contracts. And all this without a Top 40 single, too.

The Aphex Twin is happy to talk about his music and his machines, but he's loath to reveal his creations to the world, in order to keep up some sense of mystery about his methods. Most of his kit resides in the Repflex studio in Cornwall, but he's currently working and mastering in London, where his gear includes kit, such as a Roland TB303, a DX7, an old Korg analogue sequencer, an ST and monitor, plus the usual CD player, DAT machine and amplifier. But there are a lot of disfigured synths, open circuits and devices decorated with copious helpings of wire and patch leads.

Bodge and butchery

Very little survives without being butchered to some degree. "The only keyboard I haven't changed is the Korg MS20; I've got three of those," says Richard. "It's a mad keyboard, it's got a great range of sounds and I like it the way it is."

The SH-101 certainly didn't survive the surgeon's screwdriver: "It doesn't look like a 101 anymore – I use the sliders, but for different things," Richard explains. This is typical of how he works: if he hasn't got a sound, he'll build something to make it, using whatever is available.

"A lot of things I make don't respond over a keyboard range – they'll make one sound, which I'll sample. Some stuff I control with triggers and control voltages; I put a lot of control on these so I can alter the sound while they're being triggered.

"I used to spend all my time building the stuff, but now I haven't built anything for ages," he continues. "A lot of my stuff breaks down, so at the moment I'm just a technician repairing things I've built over the years.

"I don't need to make anything new now – I've got everything I need. I know I won't get bored with the things I've got for years to come. It could be five years before I build anything, apart from the odd little

“ I used to write my own sequencing programs on the [Sinclair] Spectrum ”

oscillators and stuff. The biggest thing I built was a sampler – it took about a year as a college project. The teachers didn't know what a sampler was, so it was all down to me. It worked for about eight weeks and then packed up. Half the time it didn't sample, it just made really good noises – mad stuff – so I've got a massive library of sounds from that.

"When it came to getting an act together, I realised that making the stuff and coming up with sounds that no-one else could was my main asset, so I decided to keep working on it."

It's immediately apparent that Richard is a determined bloke. But his sense of purpose – impatience, even – has now taken him to a point where he can practically do what he likes: he's inundated with offers of

Aphex audience exciter

The Twin tells of the trouble with playing live: "The biggest pain at the moment is taking my stuff out live, 'cos it keeps breaking down. It's very difficult to trigger stuff live, but that's why I like it. I always take DAT back-ups in case something blows up, but so far nothing has.

"It would be easy to turn up with a DAT and play it and no-one would say anything, but then it would just be like doing a job. I don't see music as a job – I do it 'cos I want to do it, and earning money out of it is a bonus."

Keeping an equipment checklist is a must for Mr Aphex: "If we fly to LA and I forget one thing, the whole thing's fucked up and they've just wasted four grand. So I'm under a lot of stress, which I like – I see it as a challenge. And a lot of the boxes are about bomb size, so I'm sure we're going to get stopped at customs one day!"

Burble in the sand

Didgeridoo was originally written to finish people off after a hard night's raving on the moonlit beaches of Cornwall. "All the sounds are home-made – four different sounds that go in and out and change all the way through," Richard relates. "They come out of little boxes that I made for that track, with a digital drum track over the top."

The frightening news is that *Didgeridoo* was just one of six techno-death pieces that were used to close the night. If he released the rest, just think of the damage he could do...



♦ One of Richard's home-made devices – being a secretive chappie, he wouldn't say what it is.

thing to fill a gap. I've got too many possibilities to mess around with."

To ensure that these possibilities are fully explored, Richard has come to a decision over the last few months: to use only his own inventions in his music-making, and to leave conventional synths and drum machines alone. "I really hate the idea of using other people's equipment – I've just got a bit obsessed, I suppose," he admits. "I don't want to use pre-programmed drum sounds. I've used modified [Roland TR-]808 sounds on *Ambient Works*, but that's because the tracks are around four to five years old. And the Polygon Window tracks use updated 808 sounds because the original recording quality is so abysmal.

"I'm surprised the ambient stuff came out as well as it did. Someone phoned up to ask how we got the quality so good; I thought 'What are they talking about? It's shit!'"

The recordings do seem a tad rough in places on the *Ambient Works* album, as though they were recorded on just a four-track at home. But the truth is even stranger.

"Everything was originally mastered on standard tape on a hi-fi cassette deck. I've only had a DAT for just over a year," Richard reveals. And considering that the tracks were selected by his friends in Cornwall, who were listening to the tapes on car stereos and Walkmans, some of those masters have seen the wear of around 50 cassette players, so he reckons. "With the first track [*Xtal on Ambient Works*], the tape had chewed in about seven places."

Richard resisted the temptation to edit the tracks for the album. "Not much has been EQ'd. It would have been easy to edit out the glitches digitally, but it's a retrospective look, and the tape munching was all part of the stuff I was doing, so I've left it in."

The sampler – a Casio FZ10 with custom filters tacked on – is used on a surprising 80% of Richard's tracks. Samples either come from home-made electronic sounds, or from an afternoon spent in a scrapyard with beaters and hammers – *Quoth on Surfing on Sine Waves* uses such rattling "found

sounds." In keeping with his ideals, Richard is opposed to using samples from others – though Julie Andrews and Gene Wilder do make the occasional appearance...

"I don't sample records I buy," he says. This must be difficult to resist when you're buying about several dozen techno records each fortnight. "That's not the way I work. I mean, a lot of the BBC sci-fi sound effects records are wicked. Some of them are like ambient tracks – I don't know whether they realised they were writing music or just doing it for people in theatres! I like to listen to it, but I won't sample it. I generally only sample sounds I've made. I've got three DATs' worth of breaks that I've made over the years."

The FZ10 is a MIDI sampler, so maybe synth communication is not all triggers and CVs, then? "Some of the old stuff is converted or triggered. I've bought a few MIDI-to-CV converters; some are good and some not so good. I've never made my own. I've messed around with ones I've bought. I like some of the converters, but I think they're a bit expensive for what they do, 'cos they're quite easy to make. I don't think they put enough controls on them for things like cut-off frequencies."

Sequential style

There's far more sequencing in Richard's work than the sometimes improvisatory-style suggests too. "It's 99% sequenced," he says. "Strings I'll play, but everything else has to be accurate. Music that's out of time does my head in.

"I used to write my own sequencing programs on the [Sinclair] Spectrum, believe it or not. I then used the Atari stuff live, but it kept overheating and crashing. So I've built another sequencer; I write something on the ST, then transfer the data down to my sequencer for live work. I really like the Korg analogue sequencers 'cos you can control every note and change all the frequencies. It's a different approach."

So with all these wonderful toys at his disposal, how does he compose?

"Sometimes I have a plan that I've got to get out from start to finish. Other times I've got no pre-set ideas: I just sit down in front of the stuff and see what happens."

"I never keep sounds on disk," he adds, dropping another bombshell. "This does record companies' heads in 'cos they like you to remix, but I just don't like to do it. Sometimes I might spend three or four days to get the sounds together, then do a track with them. The next time I work on something, if I have a wicked idea for a melody and I'm feeling lazy, it would be too easy to

use a disk of drums that I'd used before. That's why I don't save anything, because I like everything to be different."

Remixing is something the Aphex Twin is keen on. And he reckons he can turn his hand to most things remixable.

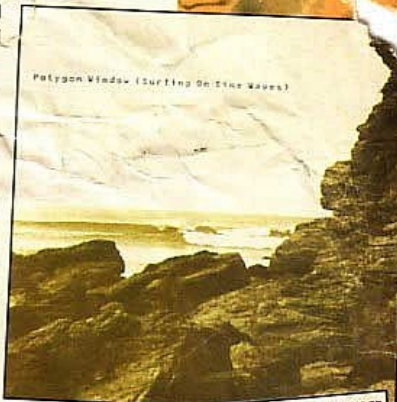
"I don't have to like the band or the music to remix something. I get more satisfaction making something good out of something that's shit. If something's good in the first place, it's not too hard to make it as good; I prefer to work on something I don't like and then turn it into something I do – it's more fun that way.

"I listen to the track and pick out the bits I like, then get the engineer to put it down on DAT. Originally, remixing meant just making it ten seconds longer, or adding a different drum track, but now you have to rewrite, which is exactly what I want."

But Richard sees another cause begging for his talents.

"I want to get into film scoring. Soundtracks have been stuck in a groove for so long – I think people are pissed off with bad filter sounds in scary films, and Tangerine Dream type soundtracks. What they lacked was a beat, which is where my new stuff comes in."

Ask if he's heard the soundtracks of John Carpenter, Richard answers: "Like most things, it's not essential for me to know what other people do. I know what I want to do." And let nothing get in his way. **FM**



♦ Richard's two albums, *Surfing on Sine Waves* and *Selected Ambient Works 85-92*. Incidentally, don't try surfing on sine waves – they keep riding up your crotch.

Didgography

Richard James has recorded under umpteen different names, mainly for contractual reasons. Here's everything he's released, as far as we know. You'll have to go to specialist dance and import shops to get a lot of it. And some of it is changing hands for huge sums now...

Title	Label	Release
As the Aphex Twin:		
Aphex Twin EP	Mighty Force	Sep '91
AFX / Analogue Bubblebath	Mighty Force	Sep '91
Analogue Bubblebath Vol 2	Rabbit City	Dec '91
Didgeridoo EP	R&S	Jan '92
Didgeridoo	Outer Rhythm	Jan '92
Metapharstic (one track)	Mayday import compilation	May '92
Xylem Tube EP	R&S	June '92
Ambient Works 85-92	R&S	Nov '92
Mindstream (remix for Meat Beat Manifesto)	Play It Again Sam	Jan '93
and a promo remix for Curve and two remixes for St Etienne		
Plus:		
Joyrex J4 & J5 EPs (as Caustic Window)	Rephlex	July '92
PCP (Mescalum remix)	R&S	July '92
Artificial Intelligence compilation (one track as Polygon Window)	Warp	Aug '92
Tracks as Blue Calx, Soit-PP and Q-Chastic	Rephlex/Art compilation	
Surfing on Sine Waves (as Polygon Window)	Warp	Oct '92
Analogue Bubblebath Vol 3 (as AFX)	Rephlex	Jan '93
Quoth 12" (as Polygon Window)	Warp	Feb '93

Released and deleted on 22 March

(Thanks to Sara at Warp for these details)



♦ Richard James in classic 'moody photo in the street' pose. "I'll keep making music until I drop dead!" he says. Now there's commitment.

Digitaldoo

The Aphex Twin's sound always comes across as though there's only analogue technology behind it, but those DX7 brass sounds are almost unmistakable on *Ambient Works*. So has he dabbled much in digital?

"I like some of the digital stuff 'cos it's really accurate, but I prefer analogue synths because of the way you can change the sounds. Analogue is more instant. When you change sounds with digital sounds, it doesn't sound smooth – it's too harsh compared to analogue. But you can use that to advantage as well when creating sounds. I've modified some of my digital stuff with filters, but that's about all you can do."

APHEX TWIN

Strawberry Blonde

Text: John Burgess

Photography: Richard D James

There was a time after The Aphex Twin's last album, 2001's *Drukqs*, when it seemed like Richard D James had stopped making music. Then, in 2005, James returned, releasing over 40 tracks in 12 vinyl-only installments using his AFX moniker. Inspired by DeAgostini part-works, the first release came with a leather effect binder to house what became known as the *Analord* series. With typical perversity, James began the sequence with number ten, followed by number one and culminating with 11 (a move almost certainly designed to provoke his obsessive fans). Recently, ten highlights from the *Analord* series were released as a not-very-rare CD, *Chosen Lords*. While not a proper follow-up to *Drukqs*, the acidic, analogue pieces are a return to form, not to mention a return to the sound of his earlier work. How long we will have to wait for a proper Aphex Twin album remains to be seen, although it seems that it might feature a collaboration with Mark E Smith, possibly the only musician in the UK weirder than James, or, if James' dad gets his way, Kate Bush. But James doesn't like talking about the music, so instead I ask him about Mick Hucknall, happy slappers and gak.

Why did you choose Frank Sidebottom to represent you on the telly recently?

"I originally asked for Anna Friel to sing my thoughts in the nude, but she wouldn't do it. But then she'd had botox, so I'm glad she didn't in the end because I didn't like her new lips. I missed Frank. He's never on TV any more."

Your mate Cornish DJ Tom Middleton says that the tin in the Cornish air makes the kids buzz. Do you miss the tin? Or is Tom's tin story tosh?

"It's more likely to be the radon in the air. One percent of Cornish properties are considered too dangerous to live in because of a build-up of radioactive gas. I've just realised that in the Kraftwerk song *Radioactivity* the lyrics go: 'Discovered by Madame Curie.' I never listen much to lyrics."

If you had to appear on *Celebrity Big Brother*, what would you do to keep yourself occupied?

"The whole show irritates me too much now because it could be really good but actually it's fucking bogus. I would try and get whoever was in there to help me totally demolish the set. I'm sure you could get those walls to cave in. They look quite wobbly. If a couple of you just twatted into them they'd go. Invite me, please!"

As a 'strawberry blonde' gentleman, do you agree with Mick Hucknall that poking fun at gingers is a form of racism?

"Ha, wicked! You mean Smelly? That's what we call him. I love it when people take the piss out of me, for whatever reason. It's when people really expose their own insecurities. It's ace."

Is it true that Warp Records founder Steve Beckett once wanted to watch you have sex with some Japanese girls?

"Good question. Yes, it is. Sorry Steve! It was in exchange for some johnnies."

The presence of Maximo Park on Warp seems to infuriate the label's purist fans, who wish it would stick to electronic music. What do you think of the band?

"I've never heard them. I haven't got anything against any instrument though."

How would you fend off a gang of happy slappers?

"Hmmm... Talking about computers. Maybe that would work."

In his book *Glamorama*, Bret Easton Ellis wrote that "one of

the guys from The Aphex Twin" was at a party. What would you like to say/do to Bret?

"Oh, did he? That's interesting. Hi Bret, drop me an e-mail, chief."

If you were a superhero, what magical powers would you like to possess?

"Being able to see with controllable multi camera angles."

If you were going to make an album featuring lots of guest vocalists, like Massive Attack, who would they be?

"Joan La Barbara would be quite nice. And Kate Bush because my dad always says I should do a track with her."

If everyone except you was invisible for a day, what would you do?

"It would be better if it was the other way around. If it was the other way around, I'd go into my favourite musicians studios and watch them."

What's the best moment sonically on a pop record?

"The 624 vocal overdubs in the 10CC track *I'm Not In Love*. Read about it here <http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/jun05/articles/classictricks.htm> That's one cool thing about doing email interviews - posting links."

If Intel wanted you to record a new jingle, what would you submit?

"*We Are The Champions* by Queen and *Come To Daddy* by Aphex Twin."

Why do you and your mates always use the word 'lush'?

"Think of sitting on top of a cliff watching the sun rise over the sea after a night raving on a beach, and then try and come up with a better word."

I've got the theme from *Dad's Army* stuck in my head today. Have you had any music stuck in your head recently?

"No, not really. Just the voices."

Have you received any strange requests from the Japanese for Aphex-related merchandise? Analogue bubble bath? That kind of thing.

"I did get a request to record and market brain rhythms I had while making tracks. I also got asked by Korg to contribute some ideas for a sampling drum machine, which I'd love to do, but only if they let me design the whole thing."

Are you still a fan of The Fall? Did you buy the last album?

"No, but my mate did, and he said it was lush. I bumped into Mark E Smith the other day and we talked about working together, which I'd love to do, but we're both hard to pin down, I think."

Were you doing gak when you recorded GAK as GAK in 1995?

"I'd better not answer this. Look what happened to Kate..."

I've got a copy of GAK that I don't play anymore. What reserve price would you advise I put down for it on eBay?

"I wouldn't put it on eBay. Why don't you bury it in the garden as a pleasant surprise for some future archeologist."

Did you have to give Luke Vibert anything for nicking the name Analord?

"We swap loads of things. But not girlfriends."

True or false? The Aphex Twin lives just around the corner from the Ministry Of Sound nightclub in London. He's so close that on some nights the queue stretches right up to his house and he and his friends throw projectiles at the unsuspecting punters.

"True. We invited a whole load of girls back last night. Can I e-mail some of the pics? They get quite messy."

What are you going to do now?

"I'm going to eat some Japanese fish'n'chips from my local sushi yard."

Aphex Twin's new album, Chosen Lords as AFX, is out now on Rephlex. www.rephlex.com

The total eclipse excitement hit Cornwall on August 11th, 1999. Where were you then, and what did you do? Did you have fun with it?

This is lent a lie(know that if you usually start a sentence off like that it usually means the opposite) but I actually REALLY wanted to masturbate and have my orgasm the moment of the eclipse,which I timed more or less perfectly ,I was lying outside in a field in cornwall.

Could you describe what kind of place you live in right now?

well I bought this silver structure in the middle of a busy roundabout in the centre of london from the council.

the entrance to my house is so cool,its from the underground subway.

My impression is that "DRUGKS" is straightforward, sentimental or without pretending to be bad. At the same time, for this album you seem to imagine one-to-one communication with listeners. Was it your intention?

I wish it was straight forward to make,I sweated years of very hard work over it.

Ive no intention of communicating anything with listeners,just myself,obviously it will say things to

people but its not my plan.

What was the main reason for you that this album had to have 30 tracks? Is it because what you are trying to express needs this kind of length or percedure?

because i lost my mp3 player which had 202 unreleased tracks of mine on it and 83 unreleased squarepusher tracks and I thought it would get on the internet so I thought I would release a big chunk of them,(I was going to do more but it is too much work cutting and listening/checking 12 cds+loads of vinyls afterwards to see if its ok.

You once declared that you wouldn't make albums anymore. Was that because you couldn't be interested in communicating with unspecified number of people through these "CD" vehicles?

I think i was just trying to get some attention. Listening to "DRUGKS", I suppose you might not have motives to do live-performance or DJ anymore. But if it is not the case, what kind motives would make you want to do live-performance or DJ?

im playing at the next electroglide festival in japan as a dj.

+maybe a few live trx.

If so, did you ever feel like your works might have drifted away from yourself these years? ah?

Were you, at any point, tired of people trying to set you up as some sort of trickster?

no,I am.

my mum used to call me tricky dicky.

I also feel an element of folk music in this album. Is it conscious or unconscious for you?

I think now people can make music on a laptop and be in more places than just a studio it is like folk music which I think is amazing that its come around full circle after so long.

Furthremore, with this music I actually pictured St.Michael's Mount or Land's End - which I only have seen in photos and films. that tracks was written on both the islands and in a car/train/aeroplane/bedroom/beach. it is funny making a track in the car with a tape convertor for the laptop while my girlfriend was driving,I was sampling the sunroof opening and closing and then playing beats to try and put nannou off.

Titles of your tracks are often humorous,

and codes into the hard beats, you can express true melancholia and sadness - did you have this angle?

If I dont express as deep emotion in me as possible I wont be happy with the result and feel like ive failed which happens about 70 % of the time with me,im hardly ever satisfied.

Of all your works, we can read your origins from "DRUGKS" most. Could you think of any reason?

no,but im glad you can,I KNOW I am getting better at what I do,my music affects me more than it used to and I AM TOTALLY committed to making it for the rest of my life and improving it everytime,I find it hard to believe anyone could be more passionate about creating than me,even though I know there are humans out there which are.

Maybe it is too easy but I couldn't help feeling nostalgia or distant memories from the folk-music type of piano melodies, prepared piano, pedal organs and pipe organs. Did you have the same feeling too?

oh yes.
makes me cry.

The voice saying "Happy Birthday to my little

son, Richard" in "LORNADEREK" - is it actually the voice of your mother?

my mother and father.

This title "DRUGKS" could mean to many people simply as "DRUGS". Was it your intention too?

it doesnt have anything to do with drugs I leave it up to you to decide,whoever you are?

Have you ever listened to the double album "Fragile" of an American artist Nine Inch Nails? If you have, do you think it has some similarities with "DRUGKS"? Because I felt so even though the sounds are completely different.

dont know it sorry,
pierre bastien is amazing!!

If I describe "DRUGKS" in another way, it has a feeling as if it's collecting things which got separated or lost back together. Or even mourning. How do you think about this impression?

yes its true.

Your last album "Richard D. James" felt personal too - it had a photo of your brother's grave as cover. But somehow I feel more of "yourself" with this album. Have you ever felt

like dead people who once were close to you are watching you now?

Im convinced my brother is with me and living his life through me.....hes here now.

I have read somewhere that some of Autechre's secret-code like titles could remind Celtic languages. Also Jamie Ried, a graphic designer for KLF and Sex Pistols, referred to Celtic culture in more obvious ways. How do you see the fact that "Celtic" might have connotations of underground or resistance in UK?

confield is their best work and the only one I can actually get into.

My roots are walesh parents, irish beth and brought up in Cornwall.

If you refer to Celtic culture, you being from Cornwall could be convincing. Actually some of your new album's tracks have Celtic-like titles, but was it consciously decided or more spontaneously happened?

both

The female voice used in "MT.SAINT MICHEL MIX+ST.MICHAELS MOUNT" suggests that this track is really special to you?

You japanese really are so much better at

random or meaningless. But now I feel they might have some Celtic side to them - correct or incorrect?

correct

The Celts were taken their land away, and the Cornish language was taken over by English language in 1777. How do you see this history?

no research in god you can be bothered to find this info out,most joumes over here wouldnt...

Im not upset or anything all good things come to an end sometime.

I love the cornish language and celtic,its my roots.

The tracks using piano or prepared piano almost decide this album's overall impression. Could you think of any reason why those tracks occupied more than a half of all tracks?

Well because I love them ,I have done more complicated ones using more methods and styles but I wanted to release my first work that I did with my piano.

I love my piano he's my special friend that I go and talk to in the middle of the night and early

morning to get things off my chest.

Does the instrument "piano" mean anything special to you?

yes,it is in my opinion apart from the computer and the lenix synton synthesizer my favourite instrument.

Or does "prepared piano" mean anything special to you?

yes,well its so hands on, you can easily set up complicated harmonics to make music with and record reverberation.

In your memory, what is "piano" associated with most directly?

emotion.

The concept "ambient" means "you can or don't have to be listening." Is it a similar attitude with what you expect from the communication with the others?

I dont give a monkeys.

But that attitude could be seen as most earnest need for communication too - how do you respond to this opinion?

above.

This album has a lot to do with drum'n base/drill'n base. What is the reason you still feel possibilities for those styles of music?

At the last of "ZIGGOMATIC V17", you put the words "Thank you for your attention. Bye."

What were you feeling by saying so?

because it so complicated and if you really made it that far you deserve to be congratulated, im communicating here.

The last track "NANNOU2" - how does it relate to "NANNOU" which was included "Windowlicker EP"?

well I dont really want to say at the moment.

If you translate this word "NANNOU" in different words or metaphors, how would you do it?

my most special human.

If there is any kind of hope in this album, which part do you think it is?

all of it.

If you have any influence from John Cage, what is it?

well he was a brilliant theorist but his actual music doesnt do anything for me,there are a few tracks which I think are beautiful but thats all.

I see John Cage as a person who keeps asking himself "what is music?" - such as "04'33"" and prepared piano. Have you ever felt like you inherited his intention and kept

I love it mainly for nostalgia and because it sounds fucking MENTAL when you play it loud at a party.

and because jungle and ardcore are the most exciting genres of music ever invented!!!!

If drum'n base/drill'n base style fits to express some kind of emotion, what do you think it is?

excitement and getting totally buzzed up and off your phase!

This world is filled with cheezy pop songs, ignoring the promise that "music is a form of personal communications." Does your sound have any intention to separate people who truly need your music from people who don't?

I do wish humans would listen to better music in the mass media but its not all that bad,i think having so much mediocre shit around makes truly good music so much more enjoyable as it acts as an antidote aswell as being lush.

In other words, pop music is filled with pop songs which bargain typecasted emotions, and pop world is filled with people who are satisfied with those songs. In this situation, only by seeping calm, melancholic melodies

going forward?

in some ways but I need to feel something from music not just think.

As the collaboration with Philip Glass, you seem to be aware of your relationship with the history of music. If so, how do you place "DRUCKS" in your record shelf? Between what 2 records?

nice question.

ummm well I think I would have to get the separate pieces of vinyl and put one next to sals one next to marvellous calm,one next to pierre bastien one next to confidant one next to squarepusher one next to amnesia,one next to 808state lost trx from 88 and one next to Parmegani.

Could you tell us now what your arrow-like symbol really mean?

A

Thank you very much!!
cheers japanese human it was a very good set of questions which is why I bothered to answer them.

richard.d.james

working things out compared to other journalists,yes it is VERY special it is the 12 year old sister of nannou my girlfriend and she sang it when we all together in the most perfect of situations EVER.

"GWAREK2" is most peculiar track in this album. Why did you need to create this kind of space?

It is part of a trilogy of trax the other 2 are not completed yet about the house I lived in,that one is about my girlfriend and my bank vaults.

The exceptionally English titled tracks "FATHER" and "TAKING CONTROL" make a sequence - does this mean anything?

my dad really likes the trx father and I just want to say " IM TAKING CONTROL OF THE DRUM MACHINE"

What was your intention when you sampled voices for "TAKING CONTROL" ?

yea

In "ZIGGOMATIC V17", I could briefly hear house beat-like kick-drum sound. Doesn't it mean anything special to you?

I love early chicago records like mr fingers-amnesia,derrick may,reesse,etc they were massive inspirations.

Double trouble

He's a wild ravin' boffin who makes all his own instruments. He's THE APHEX TWIN and he's Techno's first maverick genius. According to ANDREW SMITH, who's sharing his bubblebath.

WHEN his schoolmates were experimenting with guitars and forming bands, THE APHEX TWIN was learning to take apart and reassemble synthesizers and discovering Kraftwerk. He never uses samples.

"That was a conscious decision. I don't want to nick someone else's ideas. I don't take anything from anyone. Some people can shed new light on an old tune by sampling it, but that's not what I'm into at all: I want to create things that are original. I get so much more satisfaction out of sounds I've made up myself."

We thought this unfashionably pure attitude to the creative process had died away years ago, before this particular electroniker could even vote, but the proof of the pudding is in the eating and in these knowing, market-led times, the Twin's "Digeridoo" EP tastes doubly good. Released this month through legendary Belgian label R&S via Outer Rhythm, the title track is already a rave

staple, wild end-of-evening Techno which takes its name from the fact that punters used to chant for it (identifying with its digeridoo-like bass line) during the Aphex set.

The truly startling tune, though, is called "Analogue Bubblebath 1". This is a beautifully shifting ambient workout, so out of step with current club fashion that the original white labels, which so impressed DJs like Colin Faver, now change hands for up to £90. It's on the strength of this that The Twin, aka Richard James, is being hailed as Techno's first maverick genius. The clarity and uniqueness of



The Twin: Digeridooing it for the kids

James' sound, like that of his older German mentors, stems, at least partly, from the fact that he manufactures his own instruments.

"Yeah, when I was about 13, I started ripping stuff apart, getting a feel for how these instruments work and toying around with customising them. When I was 15 or 16, I began putting my own together. Now I've got circuits everywhere.

"My music comes about in different ways. You don't spend your whole life in clubs, you want things you can take with you to other areas of your life. If I'm making a hardcore or a mad

House tune, I'm simply thinking about what I'd like to dance to. With something like "Analogue Bubblebath", I'll just have a tune in my head and be trying to express it in as pure a way as possible. Obviously, you can dance to it as well."

In fact, ravers tend to stand and sway – confused but delighted.

"The last few months have been really terrible as far as the UK is concerned, nothing coming up at all, but there's some great stuff coming out of Belgium and particularly Germany at the moment.

Techno's coming round again. The Euro scene is really, really healthy, with styles like Acid being explored again. The older Acid tunes – a lot of the stuff on Trax especially – are still among my all-time favourites.

Over the next few months, there'll be a lot of good Acid-influenced tracks coming out – people are much more advanced in the way they approach rhythm and melody now than they were in 1988."

The Aphex Twin has just finished making an ambient album, a collection of pieces he's been working on since as far back as 1985.

Is it difficult to make a synthesizer?

"Well, not once you know what you're doing, and I've been doing it for years."

And he's only 20. "Keep an eye on this one" is my advice.

Whoa!

APHEX TWIN

APHEX Twin is dead.

Flat on his back in the middle of Hyde Park, Richard James, the electronic music maverick known as not only Aphex Twin, but Polygon Window, Blue Calx, AFX et bloodycetera, hasn't slept for over 48 hours. He yawns every few seconds to prove it. He is, however, in good spirits. Especially when it comes to talking about the Midi Circus tour.

"It's high time underground dance acts were promoted in a gig format," he says, propping himself up on an elbow. "I know there's The Orb, but they're not really a techno group. I think it's brilliant that Orbital and The Drum Club and the others are breaking out of the clubs. I can't see how this tour can fail."

Richard is himself no stranger to the live circuit. He's lost count of the gigs he's played and the countries he's visited since Aphex Twin's debut show at the legendary Tressor Club in Berlin 18 months ago.

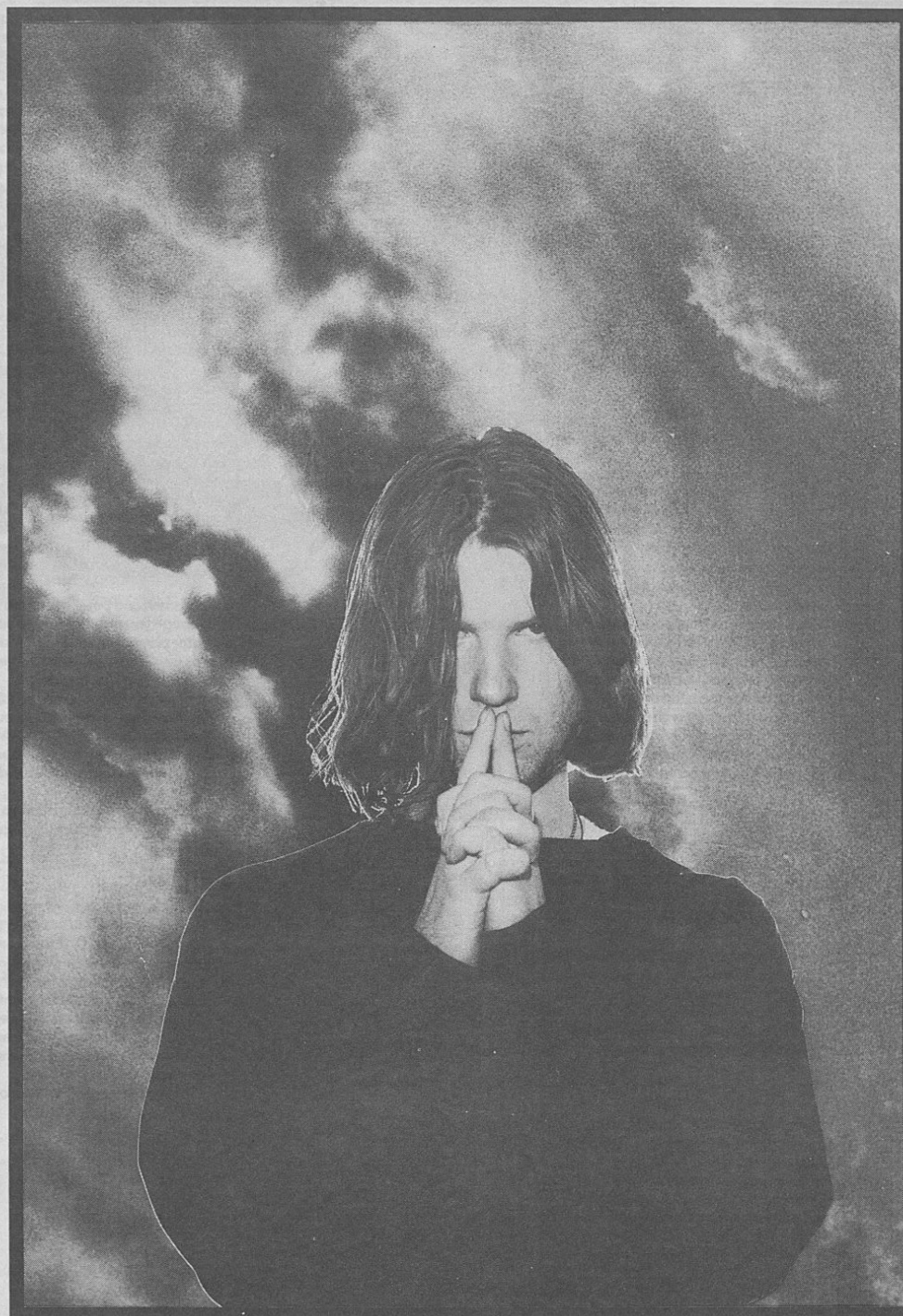
Onstage, he is surrounded by racks of sequencers, samplers, FX units and other technological jiggery-pokery, all made by his own fair hands. Wires go in all directions. There is, he says, no DAT player. An Aphex gig is a *real* live show.

"The only big problem I've had was when I electrocuted myself in front of 17,000 mad Germans at the Mayday techno festival," he tells me. "I put my finger on a live terminal. I kept thinking, 'When will it blow, when will it trip... F***... Frying tonight...' My finger just started to sizzle when it blew. I was thrown off the keyboard and all the power for the rave went down."

Aphex Twin's performances aren't normally so visually explosive. There's little to see apart from the top of Richard's head and a lot of furious knob-twiddling.

"So? I don't want people to stand there staring at me. I want them to dance. What's so good about watching a guy bouncing around with a guitar? I'm too busy to bounce around. I usually forget that I'm doing a gig. It's as if I'm at home."

IT'S two years since Richard James came to London from Cornwall, to study electronics at college. It was here that he began to build the weird and wonderful instruments heard on Aphex Twin's "Selected Ambient Works 85-92" and Polygon Window's "Surfing On Sine Waves" albums. By the end of the second term, there wasn't enough space in his room for his



bed. He dumped it in somebody's garden. And left college soon afterwards. Although he is now living in a much bigger flat, this too is starting to look like a Dixons repair shop. Richard says he can't bear to be away from his music-making facilities for more

than a couple of days at a time and that he has no interest in the outside world.

All of which might help explain why he is wearing a Mel & Kim T-shirt underneath his black jumper.

"I'm not worried about looking cool," he says. "I never worry

about what people think of me, or my music. I don't give a shit if my records don't sell; I'm just into making tunes. If it wasn't for my mates wanting to DJ with them, I might not have ever even thought of putting out any records. Music is therapy for me. I'd rather work

than sleep. That's why I'm so tired today. I just have to get all these ideas out of my head. It's like having high blood pressure. So what if I'm self-indulgent? It's much better to have your head up your own arse than up somebody else's."

RICHARD'S music isn't easy to pigeon hole. One minute he's crafting something which Eno or Phillip Glass would be proud of, the next he's making enough racket to give Butthole Surfers a migraine. Some tracks have a Kraftwerk feel, while others are like German trance. Aphex Twin is the Midi Circus' trapeze artist.

Two new Aphex Twin records will be in the shops over the next couple of months. First there's "Phlegm", an EP of "noisy, fast and dirty" tracks and Richard's last release on R&S, the Belgian label which launched him on an unsuspecting world. Then there's a second volume of "Ambient Works", this time on Warp. It could be a triple album. Perhaps even a quadruple.

Also in the pipeline is a new Caustic Window EP and the long-awaited release of Polygon Window's "Surfin' On Sine Waves" LP in the US. It will appear on Wax Trax, Al Jourgenson's former label. Following this, Richard will be signing to Sire for the purposes of America and Japan.

On top of all this, Richard is rapidly earning himself a cool reputation as a remixer. Having (literally) turned over Curve, Saint Etienne and Meat Beat Manifesto, he has now given the Twin treatment to the new Jesus Jones single, "Zeroes And Ones".

"No matter how much money was involved, I'd refuse to hand a remix over if I wasn't happy with it," he says before I get the chance to ask him the obvious. "I've had complaints that my remixes are nothing like the originals, but all of the sounds come from the tape that I've been given. And in some cases it's nothing like the original because if it had been I wouldn't have given it back because it would have been crap."

THE key to Richard James' music, whatever name he's using at the time, is his fascination for the textures of sounds. He doesn't so much make tracks as sculptures. It's as if the melodies and the beats have a physical presence.

"That's exactly it!" he beams. "I mean, some of the tracks I've recorded for 'Ambient Works 2' consist of just one sound. I'm trying to make music which surrounds you, which fills the room. I love the idea of the record ending and leaving a huge gap in your head."

"It's a shame that people don't really listen to what goes on around them. Everyday sounds, like the sounds in a supermarket, are blanked out, because you've heard them so many times before. But if you take a microphone to the supermarket, as I often do, and play the tape back at home, it's f***ing brilliant."

Blimey. Whatever would Richard do if he suddenly went deaf?

"That would be a nightmare. I could hack being blind, but not deaf. I'd have to commit suicide. Or spend the rest of my life sitting on my speakers, feeling the vibrations of the bass."

A nightmare indeed. Especially for Richard's neighbours. Long may his ears function. And long may they burn.

Long live Aphex Twin.

'Phlegm' and 'Ambient Works Vol 2' will be available soon on, respectively, R&S and Warp

Continued over



Rich: "What's up with you, Mike? You didn't used to talk this much. I suppose the fame must have affected your personality."

Mike: "No, I was just always quiet with you because you try to play games with people's heads. You're like a bully. And what you do with bullies is ignore them so they go away."

Rich: "But it doesn't work. The bully ends up kicking the shit out of you even more. Or, in my case, it makes me want to play more mind games with you."

Quality control – I don't care because you do

Rich: "I think your quality control is worse than mine."

Mike: "Bullshit! Mine might have been slack for 'In Pine Effect', but all the tracks I didn't like at the time are growing on me now. I can't understand why you think my crappiest tunes are the best ones. And you don't like my best stuff, so I can't win."

Rich: "I get my friends to select what goes on my albums because I'm not bothered about winning. I don't really care what gets released, I'm just interested in making the music in the first place. I make music for myself and I only sell it in order to make a living. I'm not even bothered if everybody hates it. I'm not like you. You get really worried about what people think of your music."

Mike: "I don't. Anyway, I thought 'Caustic Window', that track of yours on the UK advert for Nike, was crap."

Rich: "It was a worldwide advert actually, Mike!"

Mike: "Whatever, if I'd been choosing the tracks for you, that one wouldn't have made it. Which is why it doesn't always work getting people to select the tracks for your albums. Other people aren't always right."

Rich: "You're certainly not!"

Board games

Mike: "I like Connect 4 and Downfall. I bought them for my girlfriend, Jess, who's about to have a baby. I've got really good at them. I always win. Unless I'm playing Jess. Then I let her win."

Rich: "I once invented a war game with an incredibly boring friend of mine. We also had

a customised version of Monopoly, with interest rates and mortgage rates to make it as complicated as we could."

Mike: "I had Monopoly when I was a kid, but it was all in Spanish."

Rich: "I used to make bombs as well. And start fires. I was into that risk factor."

Mike: "Mickey Mann from Pressure Of Speech is always playing Risk. He told me that he played you at chess and you pretended you couldn't play."

Rich: "That's true! I was tripping on acid at the time. I beat him in the Arizona desert."

Mike: "I like games with knobs."

Rich: "Listen to Mr Impregnator! Actually, I've been thinking about calling an album 'There Goes My Knob'. I also like knobs, you see. I like to have all my favourite ones in front of me."

Mike: "I'm really not sure what you are talking about, Rich."

Rich: "I remember playing Orbital your stuff years ago... And look at you now. Just look at you. A heap of rotting shit. A pile of decomposing faeces..."

Mike: "Go on, go on. I've taken worse than that in my time!"

Babies

Mike: "They smell nice. They've got little buttocks and little fingers."

Rich: "I like the way they do your head in when they cry."

Mike: "The way they get to you when they cry is a wonder of evolution. You simply can't ignore them."

"Vodka"

Mike: "It's the title of one of the tracks on 'Famous Knob Twiddlers'. We recorded it after drinking loads of vodka. Surprisingly enough." ➤

"Remember those really boring kids who never had a laugh at school? They'd probably make really boring music. I often hear records and think, 'He must have been a boring fucker at school!'"

FROM
THE
VAULTS

Prankster

tripping

NME, 8 January 1994

Shortly before the release of his second album, Richard James, the techno rascal better known as Aphex Twin, let Ted Kessler into his bizarre world - though not, sadly, his tank
Photo: Stefan De Batselier

First impressions: something's gone terribly wrong. The stage is filled with smoke, the lights are flashing violently out of sync and the whole venue is charged with a horrible metallic sound: grrrchhrunchhhhl! This isn't an evening of industrial angst or a headbangers' ball; this is supposed to be the climax of five hours of everybody-in-the-place-say-unity! raving. What on earth is going on?

Suddenly, a lone, muscular figure darts out from the smoke. He stands tautly at the front of the stage, head shaved, stripped to the waist, chopping the air with his hands and throwing his bald head from side to side. He looks like he just disconnected himself from the mains.

Then, as the deafening pipe-gnashing crashes straight into a fuzzy drum machine at 200bpm, he jerks himself violently backwards, forwards, sideways and then right across the stage until it looks like he might throw himself off, just pulling back from the edge in time. In that instant you're able to catch a glimpse of his features: his huge black pupils, clenched teeth, furrowed brow and entirely expressionless mouth. It's as if he's been possessed by the

strange, filthy noise enveloping the disco. It's very spooky.

The mellow techno vibes of a few minutes earlier are instantly smashed by this Grade-A weirdness and the majority of previously ecstatic young ravers are sent scurrying towards overcrowded chill-out rooms. Only the genuinely inquisitive and visitors to acid hell stay close to the stage and try to keep up.

"Is that The Aphex Twin?" asks one incredulous retreating raver.

His mate shrugs. They've heard 'Selected Ambient Works 85-92' and 'Digeridoo', they've heard about The Aphex Twin's exploits as raider of the new techno frontier and pioneer of '90s electronic ambience. They know he's pretty sci-fi, but, well, they thought that meant 2001: A Space Odyssey, not *Alien*.

But peer through the smoke towards the back of the stage and yes, you can see a stocky figure with shoulder-length hair hunched over racks of mangled, wired equipment, hitting out at various buttons, sending his dancer shooting demonically across the stage. Richard D. James, aka The Aphex Twin. Get close enough and you can just about make out his face. He's staring right back at you and laughing out loud.

"OH YEAH, I remember that show," says James, surveying London from the top of St Paul's six months later. He's laughing again.

"It was fucking decent, wasn't it? Everyone just walked away because they couldn't handle

us. Brilliant. I thought that might happen when I played there again, but everyone tried dancing and stuff. Bit disappointing really. I like it when people get freaked out by my music, it's a good laugh. Still, it won't happen again."

Why not?

"Because I'm never playing live again."

Whaaaat?

"Nah. I've had enough of that. I used to want to do PAs and tours and now I've done it, I don't want to do it again. I don't want to do something twice. Well, not unless I get offered a huge amount of cash."

So where does that leave his dancer? James shrugs, turns around and makes for the stairs. "Up shit alley."

Richard James, 22 ("I fucking hate it. Who wants to be this old?"), is fast developing a reputation as a difficult maverick sod/genius to rank alongside the likes of John Lydon, Kevin Rowland and Mark E Smith. He claims to hate

every aspect of the music business, from making records to doing interviews, and he'd quit tomorrow if he could afford to. All he's interested in is making music, not because he really wants to but because he has to. He gets sounds stuck in his head,

and if he doesn't get them out he goes crazy.

That's how it started down in Cornwall where he grew up. He was always interested in electronics and new sounds, so he started making his own instruments out of bits of old computers and keyboards and eventually he found a way of translating the noises floating inside him onto tape, noises that no-one can

"I like it when people get freaked out"
Richard James

"Like standing in
a power station.
On acid": Richard
James at work



The rest of the year is hazily mapped out for James: he's going to take some recreational drugs; he's going to record a lot of tracks; and he wants to drive his tank through central London and into the City.

"Can you imagine? They'd freak because it's nearly fully operational. The machine gun works! I reckon there's tanks parked all over London that we don't know about and they'd all come out to blow me up. Maybe I should film it for a video..."

This is the sort of thing that Richard James likes to do with his time off. He doesn't go to the pictures, he doesn't follow sport other than laser-gun fighting, and reading books would be alright if they didn't take

ever copy because James has made them up.

That's his genius. He doesn't know where the sounds come from, but listen to his work as The Aphex Twin, Polygon Window, Blue Calx or any of his other aliases and it's obvious that this isn't someone following trends but a genuine innovator. He makes records that sound as if you're floating through space with a broken control panel; records full of unease, wonder, majesty, discomfort and occasionally breathtaking beauty.

He's Brian Eno crossed with Alex from *A Clockwork Orange* crossed with someone who smokes too much dope; an innovator of new sounds. He doesn't give a monkey's about anything other than his music, his girlfriend, family, some of his friends and the tank he bought earlier this year, which is now parked outside his ancestral home back in Cornwall.

"I don't make tracks for anyone other than myself," he says. "I'd be making tracks if I didn't have a record deal or anyone to listen to my tracks. Totally. I don't take any pleasure out of the work I do, I just like making music. Doing things like this, making records and playing gigs are all done for the same cause – and that's so I don't have to get a job and so that, in the long term, I'll have more time to make tracks.

"That's why I like it when people get freaked out by my shows. I'm not an entertainer or a pop star. I find the whole thing embarrassing. I get photos taken of me and so get recognised, but the whole thing about doing it for other people makes me cringe. I've just got to get the sounds out of me, that's my only priority.

"In America I had a backlog of 60 tracks floating in my head but, because I was playing gigs, I couldn't get them out. But by the time

"My tank is nearly fully operational. The machine gun works!"

Richard James

I got back to England I knew I had to clear them out because the new ideas were coming in and getting mucked up by the old ones. It was like a logjam up there," he says, pointing to his head.

This is what marks Richard out as truly unique in the pop biz. He genuinely appears not to be powered by any of the normal lusts of the budding pop empire, ie money, fame or ego-massage. The only reason he makes music is because he can't hear the sounds inside him anywhere else. And that's more punk rock than a thousand New Waves Of New Waves.

"I don't take any pleasure out of the work. If I could stop tomorrow I would," he repeats.

"Sometimes I think that if I had a 16-hour-a-day job I'd get more time to make tracks than I do now. That's why I don't sleep for more than two hours a night if possible, so that I do all the crap I've got to do for the biz during normal hours, but when everyone else goes to sleep, I go into my studio."

It also means that he has a huge backlog of material ready to be released. Some of that will come to light when *Selected Ambient Works Volume II* comes out in February 1994.

"But even that's over a year old," he snorts. "I've had so many arguments with cunts over the business side this

year, people trying to rip me off, that it took a while to get it sorted out. Not trying to rip me off over ideas – I don't mind that, because I think music should be in the public domain – but money. I find it really amusing how sad people are in this business.

"The new ambient album is going to be a triple album. I wanted it to be five albums but that's a bit too long probably. What does it sound like? Like standing in a power station. On acid."

so long. He sometimes plays chess, but only when he's tripping. Indeed he's just finished an evening of LSD enlightenment on the morning we meet. He spent most of this time, however, doing his accounts, because he claims to have a firmer grip on numbers when on acid. He's either a liar or a complete freak.

"I suppose I've just got a different set of priorities to most people. I don't give a fuck what you write in this article, except if you call me a cunt it would give me an excuse to stop doing interviews. That's all. I've certainly got a different outlook from most other musicians. Like, when I met St Etienne in the street one day they all had long faces and I thought something terrible must have happened, but they said, 'Oh, we're really upset because we got a bad review in the *NME* today.' I couldn't believe it! If you're not doing it because the music is inside you, then why bother?"

And with that James heads home to sleep off the previous night's exertions. But before he hits the sack he'll step into his studio. He's got a new keyboard pattern stuck in his brain, see, and unless he squeezes it out soon it'll mess up his head for the rest of the weekend. It seems there really is no rest for the wicked. ■

What happened next?

Well, things just kept getting weirder...

BATH TIME

Continuing his tactic of employing pseudonyms for different releases, James released the fourth EP in his 'Analogue Bubblybath' series under the name AFX. A reissue of the EP would include a track made up of a mangled snippet of beloved '70s motorbike stunt daredevil Evil Knievel's press conference after he failed to jump over Snake River Canyon.

MORE AMBIENCE

A sequel to 'Selected Ambient Works 85-92', entitled 'Selected Ambient Works Volume II' emerged in 1994, with each untitled track represented by a corresponding image, including mould, curtains and rhubarb. James claimed the sounds of the tracks were inspired by his lucid dreams.

COMPUTER WORLD

James' last album recorded on analogue equipment, '... I Care Because You Do', was released in 1995. For the rest of the decade he would pioneer the use of computers and software synthesizers for composing music, as on 1996's acclaimed 'Richard D James Album', many tracks from which were used on adverts.



The Aphex Twin with something he made earlier

right cheat. My whole philosophy in life is getting something for nothing really.

Slut: That's a rubbish approach to life. It's not rocket science to know that if everyone did it the world would fall apart.

Twin: Yeah, but everyone doesn't. If they did then I wouldn't be like that.

Slut: Then what would you do? Get an office job?

Twin: Yeah, that would be interesting. I've thought about getting a job in McDonald's. I don't know why.

Slut: That's just a prank isn't it?

Twin: No, really. I miss doing things I don't have to do. I've made my life now so that I don't have to do anything I don't want to. I thought

Slut: Do you maintain respect for conventional musicians?

Twin: Oh yeah, I think they're mental because they can play thing differently every time which is fucking hard to do with a computer. The randomness is what makes real music really lush. I've been trying to find out ways to do it with computers and I reckon in the next couple of years I'll have something sorted out.

The thing at the moment is that everyone is trying to make jungle sound like real music. And that's really bizarre because the reason people made it originally was because it didn't sound like real music. This is because they all got bored of listening to the same thing and wanted that random element back. So it's understandable it's just that everyone's going about it the wrong way.

"I still want to do a free gig in the house. The first night of the tour. It would be brilliant. Though I think the house might collapse. I might get someone to check the structure and then just pay the landlord for any damages."

Aphex attempting to keep up good relations with his neighbours

that would be lush but I was wrong because you don't look forward to doing the things you really like so much.

Slut: I think that's really bourgeois.

Twin: What's that mean?

Slut: I mean you putting yourself in the position of getting a shitty job because you choose to rather than out of necessity. It makes a hell of a difference (Though having said this I almost believe him).

An interesting thing you notice about Richard is the way he refers to non-electronic music as real music. Most people in the business of making electronic music would recoil at the thought of not being real. It seems almost like an insult. There's no reason why though. Aphex music sounds totally synthetic.

Slut: But Aphex music thrives on the simplicity particularly with the melody lines?

Twin: I do like to make things as simple as possible. I like the sound of pure things. I don't like it when things get too cluttered so you can't hear everything. My aim is to make music that sounds as simple as possible but is really complicated underneath. I've only just started to do that so

things are going to get well hectic over the next few years.

Slut: Do you love your technology?

Twin: I love it if it's used right. I love to talk about new technology. I love the people who are into it and talk about all day. The people who are really anal about it.

Slut: Are you sure?

Twin: Yup, I love them. And I love to look at them.

Slut: Mmm

Twin: It's because people like that think like fuck and you can have brilliant conversations with them.

Slut: Does this mean the computer nerd is now a myth?

Twin: No, it's just that they're all really famous now like me.

Slut: Is this the revenge of the nerds?

Twin: Yeah, and it's wicked ■



much to write about the technology involved. You putting your brother on the sleeve is really expressing something personally meaningful. 'Donkey Rhubarb' on the other hand isn't. So those are the things I want to talk about. Do you think this shows a shift in your ability to express yourself?

Twain: Maybe, but I'm not sure if it's a development because I've always liked music without meaning. It's really lush. In fact that's what attracted me to electronic music instead of music with lyrics and stuff.

Slut: Because of its absence of meaning?

Twain: Because it's abstract. I like that you can interpret things in different ways. Abstract things are more flexible. I get more enjoyment out of them.

Slut: Because it's a blank canvas situation?

Twain: Yeah, sort of. But saying all that I like music with meaning in it as well. In a way I've come full circle. I used to be really narrow minded; anything with meaning used to get on my nerves. But now I've had enough of that and I think so has the rest of the world, or at least anyone who's been into electronic music from the start.

The Aphex Twin insists that boredom is one of the strangest things to him. That strangeness is 'not doing anything' as he puts it. It certainly would make a nice coda to those rubbish 'Love is...' cartoons that were in newspapers in the 70s and 80s.

Twain: If I say someone is strange it means that they just don't do anything with their lives. I find people who are the same as everyone else really strange too.

Slut: Maybe, but I don't believe you actually feel like that. I mean, you don't walk down the street and think 'I'm in an alien environment' do you? It's just an intellectual pretence you have adopted.

Twain: I do actually. Like supermarkets. I find them well fucking strange.

Slut: I still think that's a pretence. You're not that far outside a culture that finds supermarkets relatively normal.

Twain: I think going to a supermarket is stranger than going up in a helicopter.

Slut: Have you thought this all your life about supermarkets?

Twain: Supermarkets are well trippy.

Slut: Do you take many narcotics?

Twain: Not really.

Slut: Do you smoke drugs?

Twain: Yeah, but not too much at the moment. I did when I was younger.

Slut: Is pot bad for getting work done?

Twain: Yeah.

Slut: So the myth of the creativity of pot smoking is just that, a myth?

Twain: I don't know anybody who says that.

Slut: You could call it the Sgt. Pepper legacy.

Twain: I suppose so, but it's a myth put about by crap people who've never taken drugs. All I know is that all my mates bar one like to be straight when they make music. But having said that I think drugs are fucking sorted basically, because you have the time of your life on them. I reckon if they halved your life span I'd still do them.

Slut: I've never had a bad time on acid.

Twain: Nor have I. If you're pretty sorted then you're going to be sorted. I've had some pretty hectic times when I thought I was never going to come back but I love it when my brain is fucked up. If I'm having a bad time (even if it's not to do with drugs) I have this perverse nature whereby I'll hate it for the first five minutes and then I'll begin to love it. It's really lush.

Slut: That shows a remarkable strength of character (not to mention optimism).

Twain: I suppose so.

His parents weren't loaded and his background isn't musical. Some reference to a traumatic period spent in a brass band is made but that's a thinner image if left to the mind to picture. Well, I think it is anyway.

Twain: I think regimented people are cool because for a start they get things done. But I'm also glad that other people work so I don't have to.

"I think going to a supermarket is stranger than going up in a helicopter. Supermarkets are well trippy."

Aphex on Sainsbury's and co.

The strange thing about the Aphex Twin is that he is obviously a hard worker. It's just that he doesn't regard making his music as work.

Twain: I only call remixing work. If I don't want to do it, I turned down a Beck remix the other day for £5,000 because it was doing my head in. I've given tracks to friends to remix but it's never worked out. If I liked it I'll put my name to it though. It would be a ▶

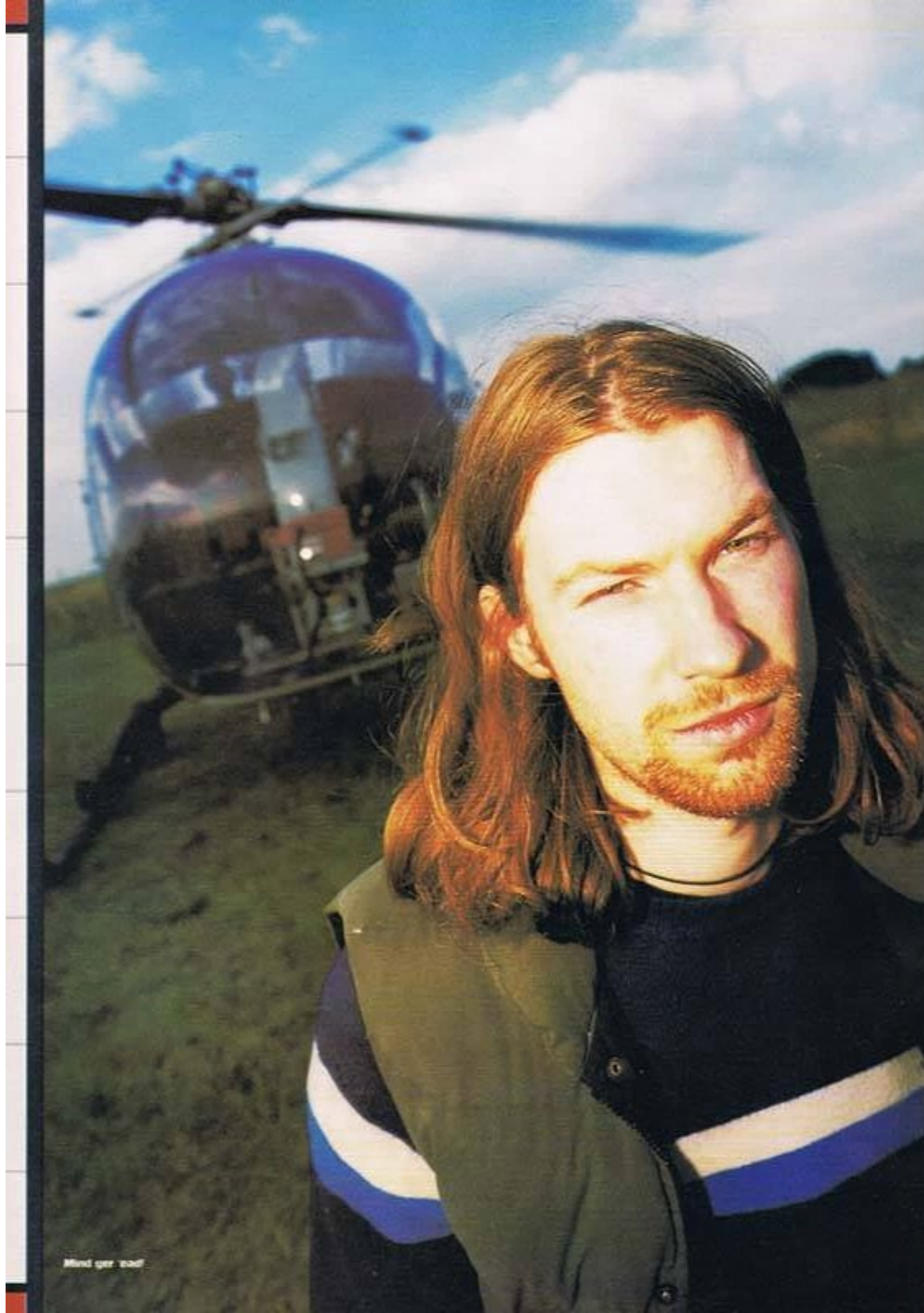
CHOPPER 'EM

OUT!

Is the Apex Twin completely mad? Well he has a new album out named after his dead brother. His neighbors in London are waging a hate campaign against him because he's so noisy. He finds supermarkets tricky and his record company suggested he do the interview in a helicopter.

Richard Hector Jones went head to head with the electronic punk. Patrick Henry got his chopper out





Mind your own

Silence at 3,000ft. It would have taken a long time for the pin to drop but I bet you could have heard it.

The rest of the afternoon was spent in a pub on the A57 west of Manchester near Irlam. If it's any consolation the pub had 'airport' in its name so it still counts.

Slut: What is the appeal of a helicopter? Is it a step up from a tank?

Twin: Well, it wasn't actually my idea.

Slut: Oh.

Twin: But it's the sort of thing I'd think of. It's lush.

Slut: So it was just the opportunity to do it that appealed to you?

Twin: Yeah...though I had to pay for half of it. Riding in it was pretty fucking stylish though. I can't think of any mode of transport more stylish. In fact I'm thinking of getting one. They're quite cheap. Compared to a plane anyway.

Slut: Could you afford one?

Twin: Yeah, but I don't think people who play computer games should be allowed to do things like fly a helicopter. Or drive a car. I'm learning to drive at the moment and every time I get in I treat it like a computer game. I think 'This must be the old grannie crossing the zebra crossing' bit or 'The man with the trolley' bit and it's minus 20 or 25 points for that. I'm not exaggerating, that's what I'm thinking. It'd be the same with a helicopter.

Slut: Flying with a joystick can't help matters.

Twin: No. When you play the latest computer game you take it to the extreme which is what I'd want to do with one of these. But you can't so it would be really boring. I mean, if you clip off the blades you're dead. That's why I liked tanks. You can turn around afterwards and look at all the destruction you've made. Flying a plane's good too.

Slut: Have you got a licence?

Twin: No, I wouldn't want to get one. I just wanted to try it out. I'd been at this party all night doing speed and stunts. So me and my mates went to this little airfield. The bloke who took me up had a bright red nose and smelt of alcohol. And it was a really sketchy plane with loads of holes in the floor. I reckon he was a total alcoholic!

Slut: What's going on with your neighbours and the noise at the moment? (A recent report in one of the weekly papers stated that Richard's neighbours had a 'taste' campaign out on him because of the racket he makes.)

Twin: Oh, they don't even complain to us they just go straight around to environmental health. They're scared of us. We've had loads of run-ins with them at parties and they've smashed our windows too!

Slut: Would you regard yourself as unreasonable?

Twin: Yeah, we are really unreasonable I reckon. But I also reckon breaking someone's windows is unreasonable too: I still want to do a free gig in the house. The first night of the tour. It would be brilliant. Though I think the house might collapse. I might get someone to check the structure and then just pay the landlord for any damages.

Slut: You get a lot of press attention for someone who doesn't seem to court it?

Twin: I suppose so.

Slut: Which strikes me as surprising as there are so many aggressive self-publicists around in music. So how's that happened?

Twin: Err... I don't know. I always get really confused when I think of things like that. It makes me feel uncomfortable although it is becoming increasingly the norm

for electronic bods like myself. I suppose it's amusing but I don't think it's meant to be like this. Maybe it's for the generation after. I mean, people like me didn't mean to be famous so it all feels weird - but it's a fucking sorted way of living so it's all right by me.

The cover of the single 'Boy/Girl' is a picture of Richard's brother's grave. It is an interesting and inherently controversial move to make for a myriad of reasons. It will at the very least provoke a reaction. And obviously someone who makes such a statement is not going to be too precious about talking on the subject.

Slut: What do you think people are going to think about you putting a picture of your brother's grave on the sleeve of your record?

Twin: I don't know. I haven't got a clue.

Slut: Do you think it will be greeted with cries of tastelessness

from the chatterers?

Twin: Probably. Maybe. They'll probably think all sorts of things.

Slut: Does the response of people not interest you?

Twin: No, not really.

Slut: So you did it because...?

Twin: As a tribute mainly.

Slut: You never met your brother because he died before you were born?

Twin: Yeah. He has the same name as me. It's not like I have a big hang-up about it or anything. I just think it's tight because my mum was so upset about it when he died that she kept his name on but forgot about him, thinking 'The next boy I have, that'll be him'. So I sort of took his place as if he didn't exist. That's why I feel tight.

Slut: I suppose that is quite strange because most people make

"I mean, people like me didn't mean to be famous so it all feels weird - but it's a fucking sorted way of living so it's all right by me."

themselves...

Twin: But it's quite understandable.

Slut: ...happier by keeping a spirit alive. And yeah, it is understandable.

Twin: What spirit?

Slut: Well okay then, a memory.

Twin: Like I say, I've always felt tight because all there is to remember him by is this photo of his grave in Canada. I don't even know where it is. This is my way of not blocking it out: to make it more known.

Slut: So what did your mum think about it?

Twin: She thought it was really cool. She thought it was a nice thing to do. Actually she thought it was a bit weird... no not weird, just a bit odd when she first heard about it and she said 'Let me think about it'. Then she said she thought it was really nice.

Slut: Do you want to go over to Canada and pay your respects?

Twin: Yeah, I have thought about it as long as it's still there and there's not a Sainsbury's on it. Then I'd have to put some flowers on the baked bean shelf.

Slut: Is there any part of you that is courting controversy over this?

Twin: What do you mean?

Slut: I mean some people are going to think you're just being sick, and the respect of your message will be lost.

Twin: When you make a record you've got to put something decent on the sleeve and I think this is a decent thing to put on the sleeve. So that's just as much a reason for doing it as well. I reckon the main thing is that I'm indebted to my brother because I reckon he helps me out. You might think I'm weird but I always, well not always, feel this really strong presence around me which I can only attribute to that.

Slut: But you're not a religious person?

Twin: No.

"I don't think people who play computer games should be allowed to do things like fly a helicopter or drive a car. I'm learning to drive at the moment and every time I get in I treat it like a computer game. I think 'This must be the old grannie crossing the zebra crossing' bit or 'The man with the trolley' bit and it's minus 20 or 25 points for that."

Slut: It's just that you called me up when I used the word spirit earlier on. Yet now you're referring to a spiritual presence.

Twin: Yeah.

Slut: So in a sense you are religious.

This is interesting because it is precisely the unwillingness to talk about things to do with death that's going to lead people to misinterpret what is, make no mistake, a very sincere gesture of Richard D. James towards Richard D. James.

Twin: I'm not afraid to talk about it. It's just that I don't know you. This is an artificial environment. I have no problem talking about it with people I know.

Slut: But I don't just want to talk about music and I don't care ▶

Everyone's got an opinion about Richard D. James. To some he is without doubt the most talented electronic composer of his generation, to others he's a crackpot with a flair for ingenuity and to some he simply doesn't mean a thing - he's just up his own arse if you'll pardon the expression. And if the truth be told it doesn't matter any which way, it certainly doesn't matter to the Aphex Twin himself. Not one little bit. In fact if I've learnt anything about Richard James it is that all the confused perceptions of him might even tickle him. But don't count on it.

What I did find most interesting about the Aphex Twin is that very little actually matters to him: on the music front at any rate. The Wire might want him to be the champion of intelligence in new music, and NME might want him to be a spokesman for the techno generation. Truth is, if his record label dropped him tomorrow (highly unlikely as it isn't he probably wouldn't mind that much, cheques aside, for the pure and simple reason that once the music is finished and out of his hands he genuinely doesn't care what you do with it. You can press it into a record if you want to, it doesn't matter. What

"What's the name of your band?"

"The Aphex Twin."

"Where's the twin?"

"He's dead."

Richard James making small talk with Captain Geoff Dodd.

matters is that he's made it for himself. You can sling it or praise it to the ceiling. Again it doesn't matter. You could even tape over it.

Somebody who genuinely thinks on that level is such a scarce commodity that the music

world doesn't know what the fuck to think of him. From a business point of view he is a ball of confusion. He has a commodity, a daring and beautiful music, and he pumps it out like there's no tomorrow. He's not precious about it, he doesn't call it art, he's not even telling you how good it is. He's just making it. For himself. And we are only hearing it because he is selling it so he can have a nice life. A genuinely bizarre proposition in a music industry filled to the brim with over-sensitive egomaniacs craving our acceptance.

His new album, his fourth, is called 'Richard D. James'. It's more than just his name. More about that later. It's a very lean album; no excess fat to speak of. That the whole album weighs in at 32 minutes (and that's with ten tracks) is something of an achievement in itself given that techno (in the most general sense of the word) is the genre of music where 'sprawling' is often no longer the dirty word it should be. It is also his most accessible album to date. That's not to say it's compromised; moreover it shows an economy of expression, and a very deceptive simplicity. The first track '4' sets the tone for the album with its minutely detailed junglist rhythms pinned down by melody of near childlike naivety. Elsewhere as on 'To Cure a Weakling Child' the simplicity is reconfirmed, albeit with

I remember when it was all mine around here.



a sense of malaise, with children's voices repeating the phrase 'My feet, my arms, my ears. And your feet' while Aphex creates a tight snare led track underneath; half new school, half play school air with all the double edged fun of 'Ring O' Ring O' Roses'. Elsewhere he settles into the lush orchestral arrangement of 'Goongumpian', the new single 'Girl/Boy Song', the wiggled out funk of 'Cornish Acid' or the ZX Spectrum sampling 'Peek 824542.01' bringing his childhood memories of home computers - the things that probably got most of the electronic music folk hooked in the first place. It's rewarding and peculiar listening experience. Anyway, enough about the music.

When moves were made to set up a meeting for an interview with Richard to tie in with the release of his new single and album 'Richard D. James' the message came back that he wanted to do the interview in a place that was of special significance to him - the graveyard that is the last resting place of his dead brother, also called Richard D. James. From a personal point of view I didn't feel too sure about this so we tried to come



Is this Sega or Nintendo?

with something else. It was only subsequently that we were informed that the graveyard was in Canada anyway so, as it happened, it would have been a nice break. Up to a point.

In the end a helicopter ride was planned. Don't ask why the switch. It's probably just because The Aphex Twin thought it would be a lark. As it turned out flying over Manchester doing an interview was totally unfeasible: it's just too damn noisy up there. So instead we just went for a ride. Richard, the photographer, Captain Geoff Dodd, and myself.

The Aphex Twin remained fairly silent the whole journey, possibly due to hangover, which made the whole circus seem all the more absurd. Aside from switching the engine off at 3,500ft and scaring the bejesus out of one and all, (it interested Richard as to whether you can glide helicopters) the only interaction was from the captain who made polite conversation asking the Aphex Twin what he did.

"I make music" came the reply.
"What sort of music?"
"Computer music."

"I'd been at this party all night doing speed and spliffs. So me and my mates went to this little airfield. The bloke who took me up in the plane had a bright red nose and smelt of alcohol. As was a really sketchy plane with loads of holes in the floor. I reckon he was a total alcoholic!"

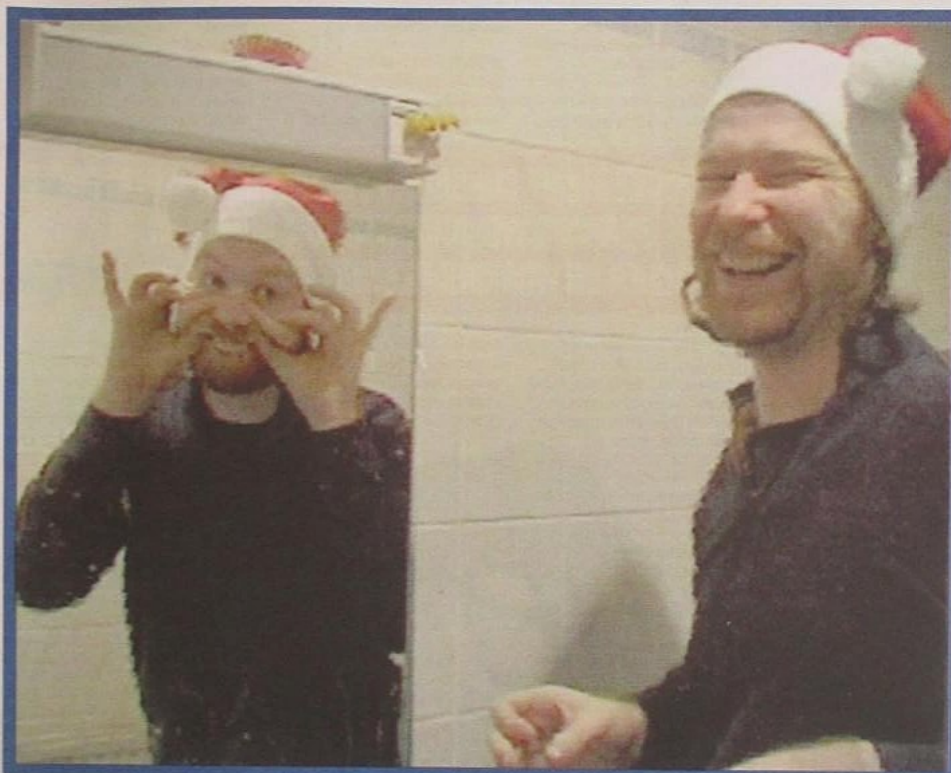
Richard on post club entertainment Aphex style

"Like Jean Michel Jarre?"
"Yeah, sort of."
"What's the name of your band?"
"The Aphex Twin."
"Where's the twin?"
"He's dead."

and now...



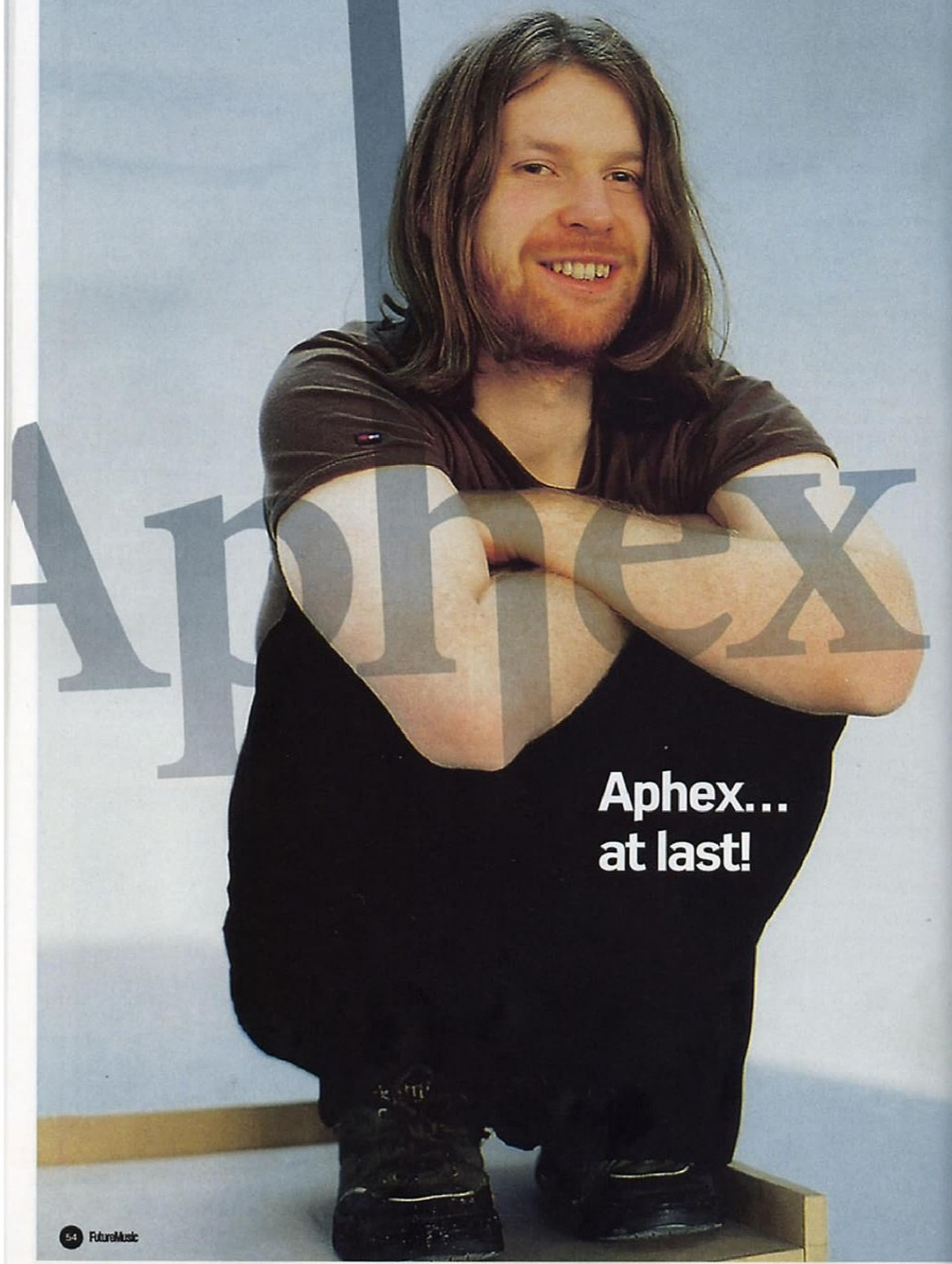
APHEX TWIN'S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE



I'm afraid Christmas doesn't mean anything to me, or the millennium. Apart from the opportunity to have a party and have a good laugh with my family and friends and celebrate I'm alive and happy. Christmas is the biggest con known to humankind. It doesn't mean anything apart from a celebration to help warm up the winter in this hemisphere.

Bye!

pilchard.e.vlayhmes



**Aphex...
at last!**



much. I think people should start demanding re-cuts if their pressings are too noisy/scratchy until they get it right!

To my ears, vinyl or tape is better than digital – even if the quality isn't as good – for the simple fact it always sounds different, and no two copies are the same. The emphasis on recording perfection is idiotic. When we hear natural sounds like people speaking, they're never the same. So why should our music be? This isn't to say the quest for perfect recordings is a waste of time – it isn't. It has its place and suits a lot of music. As they say, variety is the spice of life but the emphasis should be on character not specifications.

One day there won't be much place for recording mediums as we'll be able to download another musician's experiences and perceptions directly into our brains and experience it in as many different

What do you think about so many people, seemingly, making music like you?

If you plan to be good at anything, it has to happen using your own ideas. It's inevitable. It's exactly like natural selection.

Are they all really you anyway?

Some of them...

What do you think of the whole unsigned music upload thing? Is it a music revolution handing over the power to the kids? Or too much bandwidth taken up by too much bad music?

I like to think it's a bit of both. Like all things that change, there are certain pros and cons and I'd say it's definitely better than it was – it's much more fun, anyway! Most of it isn't copyrighted, so that's the biggest plus for me.

You've said that some of your own heroes have lost their way musically. Who did you mean? Early Chicago People. It's really upsetting. Mr Fingers, what happened mate? Get your old equipment back for fuck's sake.

How many tracks do you think you have in your unreleased archives?

Literally thousands... it's out of control...

What do you think will happen to them?

Some will come out, I'm sure. I'd like to do some big old comps, but the time it takes me to do one comp, I could make almost the same amount of newies.

Is there anywhere musically that you haven't explored yet?

Yeah, almost everywhere. I feel like, "OK, I've just started and got the feel for this shit now – let's fucking have it!"

In the studio

In the history of *Future Music*, the interview we've been asked for most was one on you and your studio. Why do you think we were asked so much?

Because I'm brilliant.

So why do you always say no?

Because I'd rather do a track.

Would we be disappointed because the myth has gone so far beyond the reality?

No, not if you saw one of my studios!

Should our readers stop asking (and what can we do to stop them)?!

Well, I might do a proper, face-to-face interview next time.

What's the most ridiculous thing you've ever heard about your gear?

That I never made any of it.

And, thinking about it,

what's the most ridiculous thing you've ever heard about yourself?

That I'm not a nice person.

What would you like to invent or see invented gear-wise?

It's one of my ultimate aims for Korg, Yamaha or someone who is capable to let me design an electronic/hybrid instrument – but really let me be the boss and not take over half way through.

Come on, please! I'll make you the best fucking box that has ever been created, I promise: it will totally own everything.

You've obviously gone back to analogue with this album. Does that mean you've turned your back on a more digital computer route?

I'm always working with different set-ups, side by side. I can't keep the same set-up for more than a few

What pisses me off most about the current music scene, is that there are too many sheep and not enough shepherds...

ways as we like. Digital is just easier than finding the right tape or record. We're just lazy bastards.

The web

Unsigned musicians uploading music to get feedback is huge but, frankly, a lot of what we hear seems to be influenced by either you or Boards Of Canada. Have you ever been tempted to upload your own tunes anonymously to, say, MySpace, and say 'influenced by Aphex Twin'? Not on MySpace, that's just for networking. I don't do networking but that site is probably very good for some people to get a shag!

I've put my music around anonymously though! Actually I entered the Luke Vibert *Future Music* competition under the name 'Tahnaiya Russell'!

I think I got runner up or something [he actually won but we gave it to someone else in the end when we found out! – Ed.]. It was fun reading the review.

What pisses you off most about the current music scene?

Too many sheep and not enough shepherds. Let's all sit back and have a long hard think, then make something different! We can all do it, surely?

And what do you like about it?

www.ubu.com [an independent website dedicated to the avant-garde, ethnopoetics, and "outsider arts"]

Me and my music

Who do you currently admire musically?

Just off the top of my head: Kraftwerk, Guy Called Gerald, Derrick May, Mr Fingers, 808 State, Lil Louis, Lidell Townsend, Bass Master Warriors, Noel Williams, Martin Hannett, Jay Dilla, Sten Hanson, Xenakis, Piero Umiliani, Brian Bennett, Squarepusher, AE, Grace Jones' *Pull Up To The Bumper*... I could go on for ages.

tracks, I wish I could. I take it all down and start again, and right now have four studios on the go.

Have you, like most of us, ever been tempted to do everything musically on a laptop?

Yes.

Did you regret it?

No. The worst thing is monitoring. Even with the best headphones in the world you can't compete with real monitors. My fave laptop/portable monitoring is Epytomic Research in-ear things.

What do you think of computers running everything musically?

It can be nice sometimes, but my fave music is music with the most depth and if it's all coming out of one box, you're not going to get it. It's good for demos of equipment – "This is what this soundcard sounds like" or "This is this program." I'm not saying it can't be good. Limiting yourself is nice but it's like eating the same meal everyday.

Multiple soundcard support would be a gigantic improvement. Then you could have a whole array of soundcards from cheap to plush. I'd love to have eight different soundcards running, having different elements coming out each one. You wouldn't have to throw your old cards out either, as you'd find a use for them, like, "I really like this soundcard for hihats," and so on.

Everyone raves about software like Ableton Live. Have you used it?

Yes, two innovative things about it are one-handed mouse navigation of waveforms, and the EZ browsing/auditioning of stuff. Oh, and recording

your live fiddling into an arrangement. The beat stretching, although fun, doesn't sound as good as if you had cut something up by hand manually. It can be good for a bit and to try things out, but to put everything through it is a bad move. Nice try. I don't use it. I find that *Liveslice VST* is better, another program for that kind of thing.

I like trying programs out even if I never use them, just to see how people are thinking about music. *Live's* simplicity is its downfall for me. The programming is slicker than just about anything else though, so respect...

What software do you use?

UPIC by Xenakis puts almost everything else to shame. It's under 1MB and it shits on everyone.

Have you made provisions for your studio secrets to be kept under wraps after you depart this mortal coil?

No but other people probably will.

What would you swap a boxed set of Chosen Lords for and why: A dusty old Minimog, a laptop stuffed to the gills with the latest software and plug-in synths, a complete set of *Future Music* issues 1 to 177 or some ammunition for your tank or sub?

Definitely submarine ammo as it's almost impossible to get.

We're sure everyone would love to know what's in your studio. Can you give us a kit list?

Sure. Raveolution 309, the Raven Max, MC-909 limited edition, Quasimidi Van Helden, MAM Freebass 383, Roland DJ-70, E-15, SP-808, Akai S3200, Behringer MX602A and all the Behringer effects that copy other things.

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Email us at futuremusic@futurenet.co.uk

Those rumours: true or false?

We've had a look into those rumours and have come up with our own ideas...

He owns a tank
Yep, sort of true. It's actually an armoured car for you military buffs. But he does also own a sub too, bought from Russia.

He builds his own gear
Yes, also true. He was pictured in *FM* years back with a home-made sampler and also claims to have produced sound from a ZX81 by messing with it's machine code. Cool!

He programs his own software
Almost definitely. He hints at it in the interview and was a very early user of NI software when it was hard to use!

He has thousands of unreleased tracks
Oh, yes...

He lies in every interview
Hmm... Probably! There are one or two possible half truths even in our interview, although it is a fact that he did enter – and win – that remix comp!

He uses some kind of lucid dreaming when composing
Oh that's what they call it, nudge nudge... No idea, but he's as prolific as they come so you'd think he'd have to do a lot of work while asleep, simply to have created so much unreleased material!

Mr. Richard D. James,
ladies and gentlemen...



Y

ou could say that *Future Music's* attempts to track down Richard D. James (aka Aphex Twin, AFX, Gak, Power Pill and countless others) over the years have been comparable to

George Bush's antics over Bin Laden, but maybe that's stretching the truth just a bit. We haven't invaded anywhere to get to him. Yet (although we thought about Cornwall as a target when James lived there). But if you were to ask any of his press people, they'd testify that the monthly phone call they dreaded most was the one from our offices in Bath requesting a chat with this most enigmatic of people.

We actually talked face to face with him in issue 36 (October 1995) of the magazine, but for the last decade he's gone to ground, rarely talking to anyone, anywhere. And with that silence – as with Kraftwerk – comes the rumours. They say he makes his own hardware, that he plays sandpaper records at gigs, and that he programs his own software...



Before, during and after shots of Richard's stint on *10 Years Younger*...

pieces every now and then). But every time something comes out under whatever alias, you can guarantee that, enjoy it or not (and the former is usually the case), it's always – and I mean always – very clever, well produced, witty and powerful stuff.

And so to the interview efforts. The last time he appeared in the mag it was nearly a decade ago alongside Philip Glass. It was a phone interview. I made the call, and I had to shout "Richard!" down

before I even get a reply, but this time things are different! "You could try emailing some questions over," is the rather hushed response. Now I think back to that awful 'Glass episode'. Can I put together a set of questions slightly better than those this time round? I fire some off not knowing what the outcome will be – a swift "Fuck off," probably. Time passes, and then an email pops through my inbox. I'm a bit shocked to say the least...

After a decade of trying, **Andy Jones** finally tracks down Richard D. James for his most insightful interview yet. It turns out he hasn't been avoiding us after all; he's just been too busy entering our remix competitions...

Then there's the well-known 'fact' that he drives around London in a tank, that he has 1,000 unreleased tracks and writes music in his sleep. You name it, everything has been said about him, which means it's inevitable that an Aphex Twin interview is the one we're asked for more than any other.

But the gossip and rumours aren't the only reasons you guys keep bugging us for an interview – there's the small matter of his music too.

My first experience of James was, like so many others, listening to *Selected Ambient Works*, a record so fine, so naïve and so glorious that it still occupies a top ten slot in my 'albums of all time'. Since then there's been true ambience, true acid, true innovation, the hardest techno and (if I'm totally honest, some truly unlistenable bits and

an answerphone for about five minutes before he picked up. It didn't get much better after that. Young (OK, younger) and wet behind the ears, I was armed with some of the lamest questions you could ask and they received the answers they deserved. (Me: "Philip Glass describes you as 'quite a nice young man', how would you describe him?" James: "Philip Glass is quite a nice old man.")

So nearly a decade on and it's around the time of the release of his *Chosen Lords* album, a best of his *Analords* vinyl releases which have sold like hot cakes in their flash limited edition cases the world over. As with every other release over the last decade, I ring up the press people and ask, "does he fancy an interview?" Normally the words, "okay, I just thought I'd ask," tumble out of my mouth

Do you remember the bloke you met who was dressed in a nappy holding a copy of *Future Music* and had his picture taken with you in order to win one of our competitions?

Ha! Yeah I do, that was classic.

What were you thinking when he showed up? And, more to the point, what was he thinking?

He was pretty nervous; a nice bloke. I liked it: out of the ordinary and good fun.

We were slightly proud. Q readers would never have done it. Can you believe the only thing he won was a bit of [albeit very good – thanks, Focusrite – Ed.] Focusrite outboard?

Aw, not bad I think for a quick bit of nappy wearing. You could have stipulated he was to be pushed in a pram as well.

So, on to the *Chosen Lords* set of vinyl. The original collection is changing hands for a fortune on eBay now. What do you think about that, and do you have any left that I can have?

I planned that and it is flattering. I have all the white labels, different test cuts, alternative version tests and all that. Many, many boxes, and maybe two finished sets left with binders. I gave the rest away to my friends.

I was very strict about the quality and almost caused Rephlex Master Control a nervous breakdown. We hassled different pressing plants until it sounded near perfect. It was shit loads of work. Vinyl has the capability to sound better than CD with good equipment, and if the pressing is done properly, but because most music these days is so loud, people don't notice the poor vinyl quality as

» but I've put filters on it. There's not a lot you can do to digital keyboards. If you get a DX7, all you can really do is change things on the output. Because it's all chips, you can't really get inside it. I'm very interested in digital noise, but it's not as *apparent* as analogue customising, so I've only scratched the surface. I mean, I will record onto DAT and then fuck the tape up in different ways – like put a hair dryer on the tape, or sprinkle stuff onto it, or crease and fold the tape. You can get really mad sounds doing that.

"I remember reading in *Music Technology* about DAT machines, before I had one, and it said turning the recording level up too high gives you a digital distortion which is horrible and unusable. And I thought, that's a terrible thing to say, like you can't use that medium in that way... I took it as a challenge, to use that horrible and unusable effect in some way. Everything has got a good sound. I could get a good sound out of any keyboard, even a five quid thing with one preset. I don't get snobby about other people's equipment – like, 'you couldn't possibly get anything good out of gear like that.' You get demo tapes, and you think you know what it will sound like from the equipment list... OK, 90% of the time you'll be right, but for the other 10% they'll do something completely unexpected."

Indeed. Some of *Demo Takes*' best offerings have the shortest equipment lists. But, in the absence of any clearly identifiable products in Richard's audio laboratory, what characterises a unit that has been salvaged from his electric surgery?

"Sometimes it will respond over a range, sometimes it will make just one sound and I'll have to sample it, and use it that way. A lot of stuff is voltage controlled. I'm really into accurate control, which you don't really get with a lot of gear. MIDI gives you control, but there's always the problem of MIDI and old keyboards. Also a lot of digital keyboards don't respond instantly, it's too quantised. Sometimes you can use that to your advantage, but in general I prefer the analogue stuff because the transitions are so much smoother. But then obviously you need good interfaces, and that's what I've been trying to work out recently. You can buy CV/gates, and Kenton's is probably the best one I've seen, but they still don't give you enough control, so you can control loads of different parts of the keyboard and not just when the notes come on and off. Things are coming around – like there's this MIDI controlled analogue sequencer which I really want to look into, all in one box..." [see page 46, *Richard... Ed*]

"I've worked with Ataris, and little sequencers and things, and I've been quite happy to work with them. I mean, I first started with a Spectrum – I re-wrote all the software for the interface I bought – and I really liked it because I sat down and made it do exactly what I wanted it to. But obviously, being a Spectrum, it's got a lot of restrictions. I've used Ataris for live stuff, but they do crash a lot. So mostly I use a sequencer that I made myself. Sometimes I record on the Atari, transfer it to my own sequencer, and take that out on the road."

This is a hardware sequencer that Richard has built, not a program... "I'm still working on my own sequencer program for the Atari. It'll be really good when I've finished it, but I don't know when that will be... I'm simultaneously doing about 30 things every day, and I've given up sleep – I sleep about an hour a day, if I'm lucky."

Although associated with dance events, Richard is much more than a product of fashion. "The stuff I've released is not even one per cent of the stuff I've



made. A lot of it is not what you'd call a conventional track; it's collages of sound. I could start anywhere, not just rhythms. Sometimes I get really inspired by sounds, and sometimes I'll get a good idea for a track." This means a sound-inspired piece will concentrate on the nature of that sound, resulting in a highly open and 'ambient' track, while the "good idea for a track" numbers tend to be more rhythmically or melodically structured. "Then I'll use sounds that I've previously saved onto DAT, or whatever, or I'll go about keeping that idea in my head and making sounds specifically for it."

"I've always really wanted to make my own music, and at first I wasn't bothered about making my own keyboards. But it just turned out that way – it became apparent that that was the way I was going to do it. I'm really obsessive about control; being in a band never excited me at all. I prefer to do everything myself because it's quicker and more satisfying. Apart from compiling sounds on DAT, I don't like travelling to make up tracks – ie, going to a big studio. I want everything at arm's reach. Same with visuals, in the future – I won't get involved in visuals unless I can do everything without getting out of the chair."

Thus spake the Nintendo generation. But don't get the impression that Richard is lazy – how many insomniacs can be described as lazy? The thing is, if you're obsessive about something, you don't want things getting in the way of expressing it. That's always been my excuse for not doing the washing up, anyway. But Richard has other concerns...

"I'm into things that make life easier – that's why I'm into technology. It's just a thousand times easier to write some music using technology than it is to form a band. You can do it all yourself. I've seen people in bands, and the whole idea of it is just embarrassing. I like to work on my own, and I don't like people watching me... not even my girlfriend." »

Cagey, Can!

Some people aren't content with just wiring a plug onto a new synth. Some people make brilliantly original ambient electronic music. Some people are Richard James, the Aphex Twin...

Interview by
Phil Ward

“I buy about £200 worth of records a week. At the moment it's mostly '70s electronic stuff like Can – I've just got Popol Vuh's last album. I've been in Cornwall so long without any money, or any record shops, I've been making up for lost time.” So says

Richard James, who's got a bit more purchasing power now that he's moved to London, his pseudonym Aphex Twin has caught the imagination of the music press, and ambient music – of which he is one of the country's leading exponents – is threatening to be The Next Big Thing.

He buys his music on vinyl, as a DJ in regular demand throughout blissed out clubland, and he especially buys ambient material, with a bias towards early and obscure ventures in the genre that hopefully are free of bass and drums entirely, allowing premium live remix potential. Counting his own friends as the best DJs he's heard, he is typically blasé about his own increasing status, and about mixing – if you'll pardon the expression – with the big names. “I was writing stuff before I'd heard any Derrick May material, anyway, so while I've got a lot of respect for him, especially his early stuff, I wouldn't say he's an influence. I'm a bit of a veteran, now...”

Quite. At 21, Richard's getting a bit long in the tooth. Just because it's less than two years since his official recording debut 'Analogue Bubblebath' on local label Mighty Force, don't imagine he's an absolute beginner at this lark. He was barely a teenager when he first started dismantling synthesisers, and first started cobbling together instrumental and ambient tracks with sticky-back plastic, dubbin, and used Fairy Liquid bottles. Some of these works survived onto last year's *Selected Ambient Works 85-92*, a debut double album on Belgium's R&S Records.

“There is stuff that goes back to when I was 12. I just used to do stuff with tape, really limited equipment, but when I listen to it now it still inspires me. When you create sounds without any kind of keyboard, you get something which is a lot more interesting. As soon as you start working with a keyboard or synthesiser, you're limiting yourself already to a certain set of sounds.”

His friend Mixmaster Morris is his “walking information machine” in the hunt for new (or rather, old) records. “I'll listen to about 30 albums non-stop, get totally wasted and try and remember everything I've listened to. It's quite difficult. You can't listen to records in second-hand shops, but you can look at the grooves and usually see if there's any dodgy drums or basslines in them – and avoid all that stuff.”

These are records to listen to – purely educational, of course – not to sample. Richard won't waste time trying to beat a filched loop into shape when there are so many original sounds of his own that he's scarcely begun to work on. It's a question of time. His prolific output has already led to more record contracts than most people see in a lifetime, and by choice each product is farmed out to each label under a different name. That way, the company only gets the rights to one name. Nothing is marketed as Richard D. James, because Richard D. James is his own man.

“But I've had to sort it out, recently. What it will probably boil down to is Aphex Twin, on my own label Rephlex, so I can put out anything I want on Rephlex. Probably licensed through Warp; they're not like a record company, they're friends, so I'm quite happy to accept less money and work with my mates. I hate this idea of talking to someone behind a desk about music.”

Contrary to myth, the name Aphex Twin has nothing whatsoever to do with the EQ-boosting studio apparatus that glories in the title Aphex Aural Exciter. “Just a coincidence,” claims Richard. “I'll probably get sued or sponsored by them sooner or later, I suppose.” In fact, it goes back to Richard's first musical partner Tom – they were born within ten minutes of each other, hence ‘Twin’ – and the acid house collaborations they created with an irrational predilection for the ‘ph’ consonant in the title. Aphex was just one of many words invented at the time, and it stuck. But it has a vaguely elemental and Greek flavour to it, in common with ‘Heliosphan’, ‘Tha’, ‘Phec’ and other track titles. Somehow the timeless Cornish landscape and the stark hieroglyphics of the school chemistry lab have combined in Richard's vivid imagination.

“I sample all the time, but I don't sample other people's music. Not because they might recognise it, or anything like that, but because I'd get less satisfaction out of making the track. There are millions of things I'd love to sample, but I don't because I prefer to create the sounds myself. Even if I'm inspired by a ‘found’ sound, quite often I'll then go about making my own version of it. I certainly don't want to use sounds that some Japanese bloke has programmed into a drum machine. I've used them in the past, but now the idea just turns me right off – I don't want to use them, so I won't.”

Echoing Meat Beat Manifesto's purchasing habits, Richard has recently bought a Roland 100M modular synth system. But not for the same reason. “I've been buying a lot of synths and keyboards, but only because I'm interested in the electronics side of it. I've bought ARPs and things like that, but I've taken them all apart straight away. With the 100M, I started taking some screws out before I got sidetracked into something else, but I'll get back to it. Everything just comes apart straight away, because I really like to see how people put these things together. I don't use them as instruments; I want to see the electronics.”

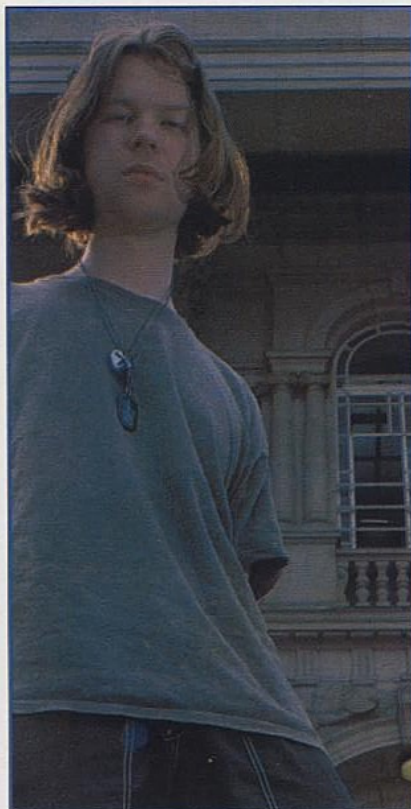
So you won't actually *hear* a 100M, for instance, on an Aphex Twin album. “I'll probably use some bits of their modules, and incorporate them into my own. So that's half of it. The other half is taking them apart just to see how they did it...”

And he hasn't even got round to workstations, yet. It takes a lot to impress Richard James. When you can come up with an album like *Surfing On Sine Waves* without recourse to any preset hardware, let alone preset sounds, it's perhaps natural to greet most factory product with a supercilious air. “You're just that much more likely to come up with something original, which really matters to me. It doesn't seem to matter much to other people, but...”

“I've never built a keyboard as such – I'm not into carpentry or anything. But I do use keyboards. I use bits of other keyboards all the time – for the sliders, the case, the keys. But I don't use the actual sounds. Although I have made a box about the size of a packet of fags which has got everything from a TB303 in it except the sequencer. Synthesisers are too big, they get on my nerves. Things like ARPs – they're excellent but they're so big. The sliders are massive. And you can't fine tune – they seem to cover all the wrong ranges.”

“Of my music that's actually been released so far, the early stuff is a combination of standard equipment and my own equipment, but I haven't used any standard equipment on anything in the last year, apart from the computer and monitor. I made a sampler, but it's broken just now, so I've been using a Casio one. I've been trying to fix the sampler again...”

“The nearest thing I've got to an untampered, intact piece of gear is the sampler, ►►



**Aphex
armoury**

Despite what others may try to tell you, Richard is quite secretive about his equipment. "If I did an equipment list," he says, "it would be, like, 'module A', 'B', 'C', 'D'... '3', '4', '5'... they haven't really got names. Well, some of them I've nick-named, like teddy bears, but it wouldn't mean much to anyone." So, apart from the obvious Atari, the DATman, the 100M, the Casio sampler and an anonymous second-hand mixer, we can only assume a collection of hybrid analogue modules and modified samplers which would probably make the likes of Akai, Roland and Yamaha choke on their business lunches. And as Richard says, you can't always pre-judge what the music is going to sound like from an itinerary. We recommend buying the albums and giving them a listen...

» than a snare. I like not to do the obvious."

Neither is Richard concerned about connecting a sound with its original source, to give it a 'subject matter' or context in reality. In fact, reality has somewhat disintegrated in his sampler... "When I started analysing sounds, I was kind of disappointed. I always thought a bird was a bird, and a car was a car, and these were sounds to be explored. But you can reduce a bird to a sine wave when you sample it, and to me that was a shock. All sounds break down into really simple things. You'd think a sine wave is a sine wave, and a bird is a bird, but they're not: they're the same sound, but controlled differently. Once I'd got that idea into my head, that a lot of sounds are pretty fundamental, I could concentrate on the subtle differences.

"In daily life you get used to blanking out sounds, you get out of the habit of listening, and only listen when you sit down and make the decision to turn your tape deck on. Like, when you turn it off, you stop listening. It's difficult to be alert to sounds all the time. When I've got the DAT in a supermarket, I'm not thinking 'this ambience sounds really wild', but when I get home and listen back to it, especially if it's underneath a track, it sounds great. Even my Mum will say it sounds good. It's just impressive. And when she's in the supermarket, she's not impressed by it at all. That's strange. It's to do with placing it in a different context."

The ambient boom could well culminate in a free event in Hyde Park, at which Richard, Mixmaster Morris and Alex Paterson would chill out thousands of stressed cityfolk in an echo of a previous era's emblematic show featuring some rock band from Surrey and a load of butterflies. That, at least, is Richard's dream. Meanwhile, we wish him luck in his quest to record and transform the whole world.

"I need to spend several weeks making tracks right now. I've built so much stuff, collected so many sounds, I'm going to be busy for a long time. Till I drop dead, actually. I'll be doing music till then, and it still won't be long enough." ■



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► “I do like playing live, though. But there are certain things I don’t like. Such as people trying to steal your equipment for souvenirs... And loads of transpotters, watching your every move. That gets a bit difficult, when you haven’t got loads of roadies and security. When I go abroad, there’s only three of us – me, my girlfriend, and my dancer – who also designed the Aphex logo. But I’m the technical crew; I’m the only person who can wire my stuff up. People can’t understand why it’s me that sets it all up and takes it down, but I have to be really careful, especially at the bigger events I’m playing at now. If I just walk off stage when I’ve finished, you get these hairy apes rushing on, ripping all my stuff apart and chucking it in a corner... They think they’re doing you a favour, and they bust all the equipment. I enjoy setting up the gear, anyway...”

The crossover between musician and DJ forms a dividing line that’s becoming more and more obscure. For Richard, the blurring of roles presents its own problems and its own unique opportunities.

“At gigs, it’s OK to take about an hour to set up and soundcheck. But at raves and clubs, people don’t understand what you’re doing, they expect you to be just ready to go, so you’ve got to be really quick. But I’ve developed a technique of soundchecking about four or five times after the club has opened: mixing stuff over the top through the club sound system, which is quite fun. You can get something perfectly in time with the records, and you can slowly bring it in and out, so it fucks up the DJs when they’re trying to mix ‘cause they don’t know what’s going on.”

“I always know when something’s going to go wrong at a gig – call it telepathy, I just get a bad feeling about it – and when that happens I take loads of backup with me. And almost always I’m proved right, and I need that backup... but if I’m confident about it, I take minimum gear, and that’s all I need. Weird.”

“I’ve usually got four (home-made) sequencers, with different things going from each one, and I can compare things as I’m going along. But I’ve made something that I couldn’t imagine gigging without as well, because I can control everything from it: it’s a sequencer, which can store samples, trigger filters, trigger bits of equipment, turn filters on and off. Sometimes it’s all twiddling, everything sequenced...”

And what is Richard’s generic name for this wonder device? “Dunno... er, master control box. I’ve also got a small mixer on stage. I don’t know why, but I’m anti-big mixers, for some reason. The mixer I record with at home is only about so big; it’s 8-channel, and I’ve got a 16-channel one which is even smaller. I don’t know what it is. It’s got no writing on it – I found it in a second-hand shop... I think it was home-made, and some of the pots were a bit dodgy, so I’ve changed it around.”

What a surprise. You’d think he had Japanese ancestry, such is his concern for miniaturisation and inventing his own presets.

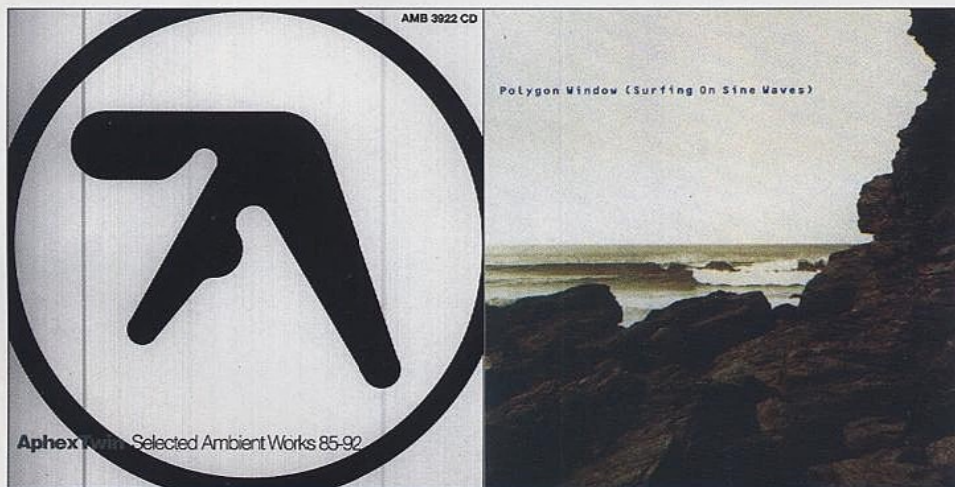
“I just really like small things. Big mixers are a rip-off. I can’t imagine spending £100,000 on a mixer for 20dB less hiss. Turn the treble down at the output and you’ve saved yourself a hundred grand. You have extra features, but the sheer size outweighs those advantages. You can’t reach everything. And I don’t like going into studios because if you start playing with something, the engineer has a fit because it’s been set up a certain way for 15 years. Plus the effects units are probably in another room...”

“I want everything in front of me, so I can do

stuff as it’s happening. I’m not into multitracking, I like things to be live. I record everything live, and I’m not bothered about saving sounds. In fact, I erase them on purpose. I have a library of stuff, but it’s stuff I haven’t used yet. Once I’ve used it, I wipe it so I don’t use it again. For instance, if I have a DAT with 500 clonks on it, and I use 20 of them, erasing those 20 means I’ve whittled that backlog down to 480. Just as when you’re DJing, you’ll put the records you’ve already played to one side, so you don’t have to look through them again.

“And also I don’t want to use a sound I’ve used before. There’s an infinite number of sounds in the world, and it’s a waste to use the same sound twice.”

Sony DATman? – don’t leave home without it. There’s many a modern musician to be found on the streets, following in Cage’s footsteps with a microphone pointing at the ‘environment’. But Richard sets himself unusually thorough tasks. “One session is enough to last a long time. I’ve already got too many possibilities to work with. My biggest buzz is taking a sound and turning it into something new. Or taking anything and making it into something specific. Like, I had a competition with some friends to make a string sound from any source – even a fart. Things like that. So if I get a 9lb sledgehammer and smash it into a galvanised plate, I can make a string sound from it, rather ►►



On record

In September 1991, Cornish independent Mighty Force Records mysteriously put out two singles: ‘Analogue Bubblebath’ by Aphex Twin, and ‘Analogue Bubblebath Volume 1’ credited to AFX. It’s the same recording, but the Aphex Twin single is now very rare. ‘Analogue Bubblebath Volume 2’, subtitled ‘Aboriginal Mix’, surfaced as a single on Rabbit City Records in December.

1992 saw a rash of one-off deals and pseudonyms, as Richard peppered the club charts with his prolific output. In January, an Aphex Twin EP *Digeridoo* was released on the Belgian dance-oriented label R&S (licensed with a different tracklisting through Outer Rhythm in the UK), while ‘Metapharstic’ by Aphex Twin appeared on a Mayday Records compilation album in May. The ensuing three months saw another Aphex Twin EP on R&S (*Xylem Tube*), two EPs on Richard’s own label Rephlex (*Joyrex J4* and *Joyrex J5*, both by Caustic Window), and a track ‘Polygon Window’ on Warp Records’ *Artificial Intelligence* sampler – as Diecman. Another compilation album, entitled *Philosophy Of Sound And Machine* and released on ART Records in October, features tracks ‘Blue Calx’ by Blue Calx and ‘N.I.A.S.P.’ by Soit PP – which are both Richard. His first complete album followed in November – *Selected Ambient Works 85-92* on R&S – a recording which has done more than any other to raise the profile of Aphex Twin.

1993 began with an AFX single ‘Analogue Bubblebath Volume 3’ on Rephlex, and an album as Polygon Window – on Warp – titled *Surfing On Sine Waves*. With March came a Polygon Window single ‘Quoth’ which was released and deleted by those funsters at Warp on the same day. The latest releases, both from June, are another Caustic Window EP on Rephlex, called *Joyrex J9*, and an Aphex Twin EP on R&S called, rather unpleasantly, *Phlegm*. Consolidating his position (and persona) on Warp, a new Aphex Twin single is planned for August, culled from recently recorded material, followed by a further retrospective album in September, *Selected Ambient Works Volume 2*.

To sum up: the Analogue Bubblebath series is (mainly) by AFX; the Joyrex series on Rephlex is the work of Caustic Window; the Polygon Window identity on Warp is complemented by Aphex Twin on R&S; and the rest is frankly arbitrary one-off daftness. Because of the original cult success of ‘Analogue Bubblebath’, and the more mainstream achievements of ‘Digeridoo’ (No.55, May ’92) and *Selected Ambient Works 85-92*, it seems Aphex Twin is the name that will stick, while Warp is the label set to try and, er, stick it.

Album checklist

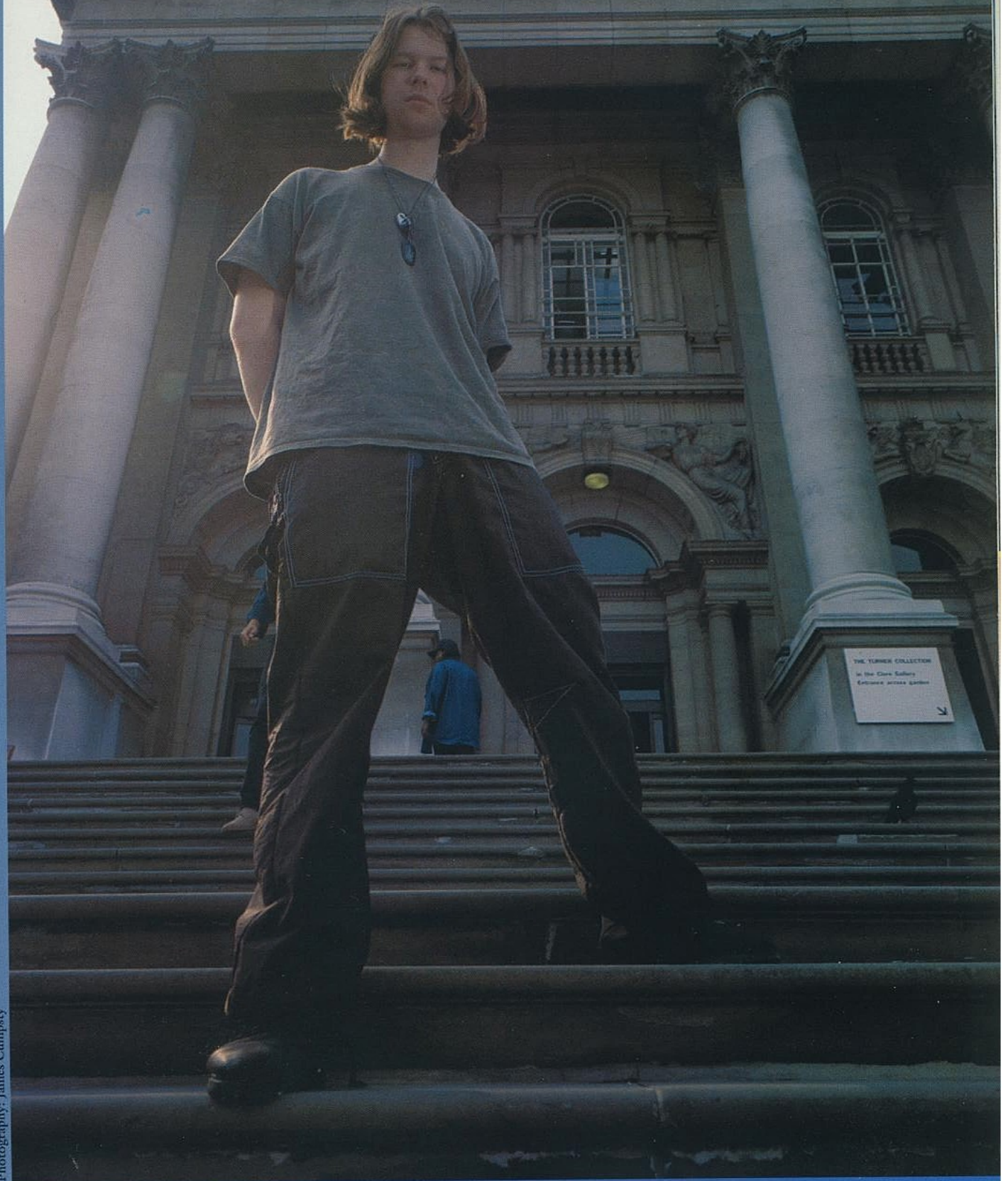
(...Or “shopping list”, as Richard prefers to call it.)

Aphex Twin: *Selected Ambient Works 85-92* (R&S, 1992)

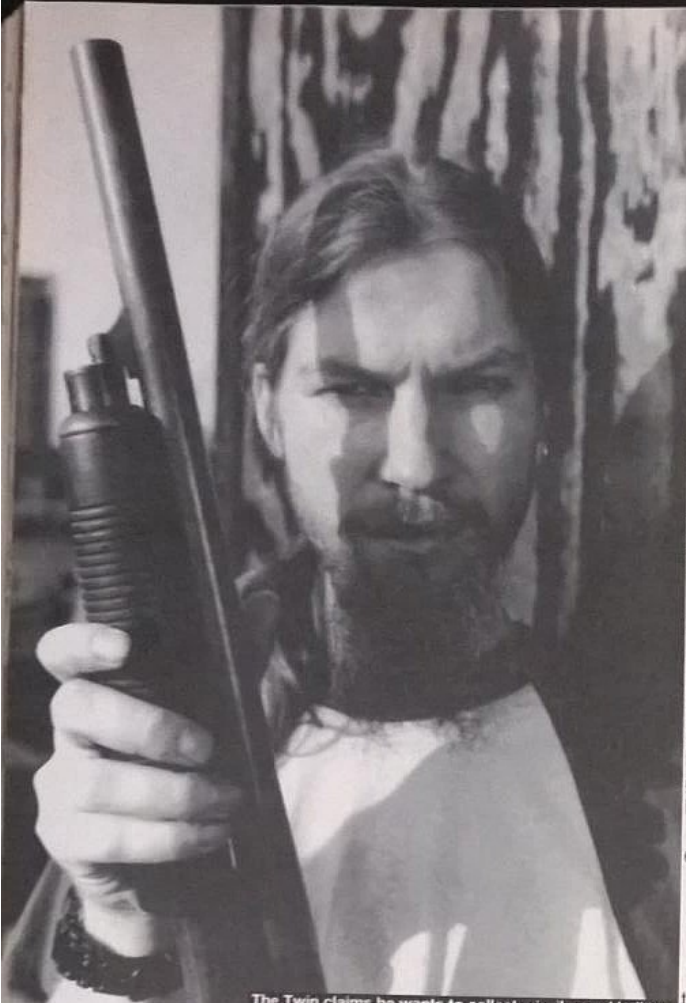
Polygon Window: *Surfing On Sine Waves* (Warp, 1993)

Thanks to Sara at Warp and Grant at Rephlex.

ny & Krafty



Photography: James Cumpaty



The Twin claims he wants to collect missiles and bullets

from glue-sniffer to total prodigy, are extraordinary enough by themselves.

INTERVIEWED last year Richard talked about 'lucid dreaming', sleep deprivation and how he tried to transfer his subconscious visions onto vinyl. It sounded like more Aphex or just another way to avoid the rock n' roll thing of talking about your music and explaining away its mystery.

"I used to think the lucid dreaming thing was a totally different way of doing things but I don't think it is at all now. You get stuff from your subconscious anyway."

As if he was saying don't ask me what my music means, I was asleep when I made it. Compare that to the story of his first record deal when he seemed to say don't blame me I was off my face when I joined the record business. Because Aphex will give you so much bullshit but he'll never bullshit you about what his tracks are actually about. He'll sell you a million stories, a fistful of lies but the actual tracks go unexplained. He won't even give them titles, preferring to use meaningless words, numbers, colours or anagrams of his own name on the new LP. Push him really hard and he'll tell you sweet FA.

Do you see yourself as someone really talented, like with a gift or something?

"Not really no."

You don't think you're talented then?

"No. I don't think so."

What are you then?

"I don't know, I get different thoughts about things like that."

You find it scary or embarrassing?

"I definitely don't want to think about it, it's a bit weird."

It does feel like Aphex maintains an open line to his subconscious or somewhere strange. Standout tracks on the new LP like 'Acrid Avid Jamshed' and 'Alberto Balsam' are truly haunting, twisted and different. But even as their harmonies seem to have seeped through from some alternate reality there's a lot going on that's totally conscious. Like using sounds that could be cardoors slamming, a wardrobe being dragged across the floor, people shouting in the street, a crappy tin whistle and artfully distorted kickdrums.

"It's not conscious," insists Aphex, "like I say, I don't think about anything like that when I make tracks. Anything that comes out is totally subconscious. I think you get beautiful music but that's only one aspect of it though, to make it really appealing. I don't think of beautiful music as being pretty or ambient. It could be but some totally fucking hardcore noise situation could just as well be beautiful. I don't know."

Sometimes 'I Care Because You Do' sounds like noise sprayed graffiti style over pretty ambience. Perhaps he's just trying to update his sound by adding some new beats and ideas. Or maybe he's doing his best to make sure his records are so different that they can't fit into categories like trip hop, ambient, house or techno. Even when he makes a dancefloor track like 'Come On You Slags' it's pure chemical thunder but weirder than anything Maurizio, Jeff Mills or Underworld have produced.

"I don't know," says Aphex, "I don't really see myself fitting in anywhere really. I mean when I used to first listen to house music and stuff I didn't think that that fitted in anywhere either really. That's probably why I used to like it."

HE finds it easier to talk about the machinery and sounds used to make music. He still claims to be using his own customised synthesizers but explains that he's not as purist as he was. He doesn't mind using other people's sounds and pre-sets now.

"Mike Paradinas (who records as u-ziq) got me into the

idea of using crap sounds. He uses crap sounds because he can't be bothered to make a sound up."

He tells me that he's working on tracks using 'toy' instruments like the kazoo. He's also bought himself a super-scanner that picks up everything from mobile phone conversations to street sounds filtered through someone's hearing aid.

"You can pick up anything on it, it's mental. You can pick up all your equipment on it and tune into the frequencies of your computer. If you were playing music you can hear it inside the machine."

And he's making tracks by tuning his scanner into his machines and taping the results.

"You can listen in on people's houses if they've got baby alarms. Basically I reckon about 99.9% of the stuff is people arguing. It gets quite depressing after a while. But when you get people talking naturally it's loads more interesting than sampling a film or something. Some people sing little tunes when they talk, Welsh people do it quite a lot more than any others. I've done some stuff using the notes people make when they're laughing. It's not a totally original thing, Steve Reich has done some stuff like that but it was a bit boring."

Steve Reich is a revered avant garde and electronic composer. Calling him boring is typical of Aphex at his most fuck-off, irreverent and arrogant. Aphex at his most teenage, youthful and twisted. Aphex at his most full of it. But that's what rock n' roll is all about: lying, living large, pretending to suffer and just talking, talking and talking until people buy both the bull and the tunes. At least Aphex only bullshits you about the stuff that doesn't matter.

He might be a glue-sniffing pimp who has a near death experience every six weeks and he might not. It really doesn't matter unless you want to sell records. So he does what he has to do and goes as far as he can without following Richie Manic into the abyss. But when it comes to the music he's deathly quiet. So what does that tell us? Bullshit artist or real artist? Like most popstars he's probably both, hovering inbetween interviews and the studio and using both as an excuse to generate fantasy. And to the last minutes we spend together he still insists that he can't remember what any of his tracks are about. This is one mystery he refuses to solve.

"When you do so many as I do," he declares, "like four a day or something then after a few months it's hard to remember or distinguish what was going on when you made them. Sometimes you remember certain tracks for certain reasons, like you were pissed out of your head and fell through a window. Basically I can usually remember where I was when I did a track but that's about it."

Pissed and falling out of a window and making music? You lying bastard.

'I Care Because You Do' is out now on Warp

True Or False?

Things the Aphex Twin would have us believe

He was a pimp.

He was a labourer.

His dad worked in a tin mine and gave out LSD

He used to only sleep two hours a night so he could get more work done.

He organised a rave in a shed.

He made 'Digeridoo' to clear travellers out of the clubs he used to organise in Cornwall.

He was inspired to make 'Digeridoo' because travellers used to sit at the back of his club nights in Cornwall playing digeridoos.

He used a Black & Decker Sander on a stylus during a DJ gig and later, a microphone and a food blender.

He's had over 100 near death experiences and been involved in 15 serious car accidents.

He used to indulge in lucid dreaming - sleeping intermittently to 'dream' tracks he could later produce.

He has enough stored material to produce over 200 albums.

He did American press interviews on acid to liven up the boredom.



The Aphex Twin and interviews - a shotgun wedding

"I've always been an acid man really. I was really scared that if I took E I was going to put on some white gloves and stand in front of a lazer or something."

muses. "I've heard the Ministry Of Defence are selling off some of their bunkers. Maybe I'll buy a couple of huge bunkers and live down there for about 20 years. And I'm looking forward to the day when I can get a 10K sound system in my front room, that'll be a good day."

THIS is a mirror image to the picture of Aphex as the tortured young artist: the boy who claimed he had these sounds inside his head and had to build the machines to get them out. Instead this is the fuck-off Aphex, the snarling, blunt adolescent who can't really believe the world wants to hear what he has to say. So he gives them something they won't be able to handle. Like the track he released on last year's 'Analogue Bubblebath 4' EP where he just screamed over a drum machine. Or his beard, which like Jim Morrison's, seems deliberately calculated to make him look ugly.

Many would insist that Richard wasn't much to look at in the first place, but rumours suggest he's had his fair share of groupies. And then there was the time he turned up to DJ at arty London club Disobey with disks of sandpaper instead of records.

"I was doing loads of stupid things because there were loads of trainspotters there," he says. "There were all these kids watching thinking I'm serious."

It's hard to know when Aphex is being serious. The last time I saw him out in London he was puffing on a cigar at the easy listening club Indigo. Not only has he signed the highly kitsch, cocktail-jazz influenced band The Gentle People to his Rephlex label, but he's remixed their debut single 'Journey'. And then he starts to hint at records he's made, under other names that nobody knows about. Like the 'Pacman' rave tune he released for frrr that was nearly his first Top 40 hit.

"I find it really difficult to make a track that doesn't sound like me," counters Aphex, "but that's what I try to do quite often. It doesn't matter whether it's poppy or experimental, I just get into that vibe. I'm quite into stuff being released where people would guess it's by me."

He insists that he's regularly releasing stuff for different labels, from majors to independents. He keeps it quiet by having others front his music. I ask him if

there's anyone who's built an entire career out of Aphex's tracks.

"Yeah," he replies, "but I'm not going to say any more because I don't want you to guess."

It's possible that one of the artists working with his Rephlex label isn't real. That someone like Mike Dred or Luke Vibert is just one of Richard's mates pretending, doing interviews, having a laugh. Aphex won't say anything else but I ask him if he's talking about a chart or an underground act.

"Well," he pauses, "both."

He's certainly recorded enough music to spare a few tracks. He reckons he's got 45 four hour DAT tapes and 15 C90 cassettes of unreleased tracks. If you reckon that the average album is one hour long that's enough music for 225 LPs. But, I'll have to say it again, especially about the chart stuff: you lying bastard.

IF you believe all of the above then yet another image of Aphex beings to emerge. Alongside the boy genius and the fuck-off adolescent there's also Aphex as the sussed business head and the wise media manipulator.

For starters it's a shock to discover that he doesn't have a manager. Yet he's negotiated record deals with Warp in the UK, R&S in Belgium, heavyweights like major label Sire in America or a multinational like Pirelli tyres - and has carved out a unique position for himself in the music business where his records are released all over the world but he's not obliged to tour to support them.

"I don't have a manager," he confirms, "I do it myself. I don't trust anyone and it's not as if it saves you any time. I'd be into it if it saved me time but because a manager has still got to ask you about everything they do, you've still got to engage your brain so you may as well engage it yourself."

And there's the story that's passed round as a record industry rumour. Before he was famous Richard used to work with a kid called Tom Middleton, now half of Reload and Global Communications. Middleton is said to have suggested that he and Aphex mapped out a scam, planned a set of things to do and say to become famous. Like talk about customising their synthesizers or hiding behind strange names and multiple identities.

"No," says Aphex. "I would do that now, definitely, but I wouldn't have done it then. In the days that me and him used to do tracks, nobody was famous for doing techno. I wouldn't even have thought about it. I never thought the stuff we were doing would come out on record never mind be really popular."

But right at the beginning of his career he sent his first demos, the demos of his furious 'Didjeridoo', inside a drainpipe. Aphex knows how to make waves. So buying, driving and being photographed in your little tank, as he did in 1993, wasn't a PR stunt?

"I just bought it because I fucking wanted it," he retorts, "it might have seemed that way but it wasn't at all."

Maybe he was just having a laugh and he goes into detail discussing how he'd like to buy some bullets and maybe some guided missiles. He's quite happy to pose on a Central London rooftop with a pump action shotgun for these photos. "I don't give a shit," he grins. But sometimes when he speaks it's hard to believe he's telling the truth. Like when he talks about drugs, some of it's real but it doesn't sound quite right.

"I've never taken ecstasy ever," insists Richard, "I smoked it, someone rolled some into a joint so I smoked it a couple of times. But I've always been an acid man really. I was really scared that if I took E I was going to put on some white gloves and stand in front of a lazer or something."

So far so credible until he tells me that he did most of his American interviews on acid.

"You have to talk to all these people," he explains, "and it got to be a bit boring. So I started doing things like being a different person for interviews and having a laugh just to make it a bit more interesting."

More bullshit? Or worse, this is the truth and this is the way Aphex handles interviews. Each meeting with a journalist is another game with identity and image. Another chance to spin out some tales and have some fun. Like when he starts to talk about his early drug experiences.

"When I was quite young, at 13 my friends' sister had some and we thought it would be a good laugh. I used to get off my head quite a lot anyway then, I used to snort petrol and gas and glue so I was on that vibe anyway. Acid was just something different that lasted longer."

YEAH right Aphex go sniff some Tippex. Maybe he's just a radical kid or perhaps he just gets embarrassed talking about himself and his music. When he started making tracks techno producers weren't famous and he wasn't interviewed. It's easy to forget how faceless and invisible the early rave producers were. But in the few years people have signed record deals, made money and been forced to explain themselves in the media. They've been asked to behave like rock n' roll artists, come out with a whole load of bullshit about how music and lives interact.

Meanwhile the rock industry is demanding more and more from its stars. Kurt Cobain's suicide apparently sparked six copycat deaths in England. The disappearance and presumed death of Manic Street Preachers' guitarist Richey Manic, who was suffering from depression, has readers writing into the rock week talking about cutting themselves, about suffering mental illnesses, about how much they relate to. This all sells music papers and it sells records. How do pop stars have to go these days to convince 'they mean it maan'?

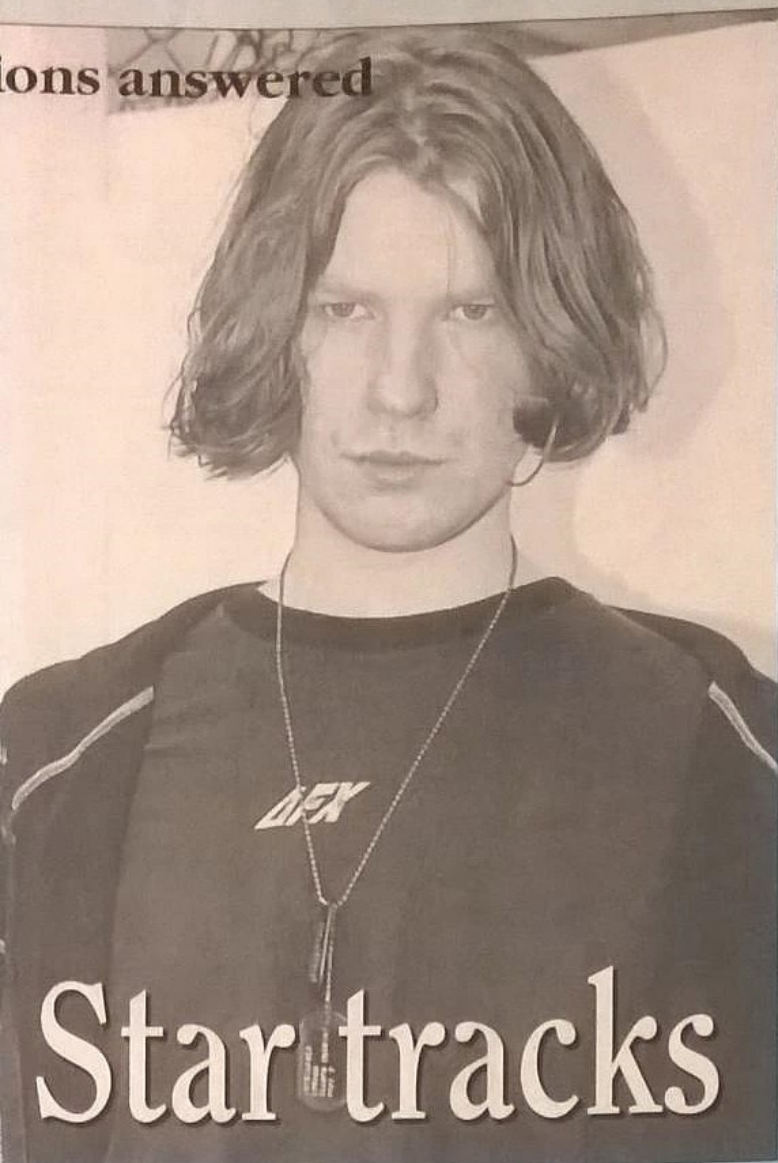
No wonder Aphex doesn't want to play ball. He doesn't have that much respect for the media when they called him a genius. "It should make some kind of impact on me but it doesn't. You feel it should get freaked out but to me there's actually no interference between someone saying you're a genius and you're totally shit. It's so far removed from reality that I don't even begin to think about it."

What Aphex does, he insists, is make tracks out of any truth in his twisted little heart that's where the fun is. But when it comes to talking about himself or his music he insists on talking about his records in a very matter of fact way.

So that first LP, 'Selected Ambient Works 85-92' was one that became an underground 'Dark Side of the Moon' and was hailed as a classic is somewhat almost bores him.

"They were just tracks that my mates selected," he explains, "ones that they'd like to chill out to. They weren't the tracks I would have selected. They were more lightweight ones. When I chill out I go to a different level basically. Chilling out for me

ions answered



Star tracks

Q I would like to try my hand at remixing. I have the necessary equipment but I was wondering how I can get hold of some vocal tracks or some parts from, say, an old Edwin Starr track. Taking into account that this is for domestic use only, what can I do? I cannot be alone in this situation.

Edward Davis, Yeovil

A What you are really asking for is some established artist to hand over the multi-track tapes of their recordings for you to experiment on. In fact, given that you probably don't own

• Richard 'Aphex Twin' James established his remix credentials by becoming a renowned recording artist in his own right.

a two-inch 24-track tape machine (size of a large fridge costing upwards of £5,000) what you really need is a DAT of all the tracks separated out for your convenience. Unless you happen to be Andrew Weatherall or some other highly rated remix maestro, this just isn't going to happen. Most remixers either gain their experience through sound engineering in studios, then becoming producers which leads on to remix work. This includes the likes of Flood, Steve Osbourne and the above-mentioned Mr Weatherall, or they are established artists in their own right with a well-developed reputation; people like Jack Dangers (MBM), The bAphex Twin and Youth.

The art of remixing is not that different from putting together something from scratch (the same principles of sampling, sequencing and arranging apply). Why don't you hone down those skills and, when you're ready, approach local artists and offer to remix their work? You might be surprised at how willing they are. And remember, the only difference will be that they are not famous. Yet.

If you are determined to remix someone well known, get a copy of the Shamen's *Prog-ery* LP which supplies all the loops and pieces to create your own remix. Or you could always do what Mike Paradinas of μ -ziq did: remix a track, then present it to the original artist and wait for the reaction. That's what he did with his remix of Aphex Twin's *On...*

STILL HACKING AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

By Greg Rule || *Keyboard*, April 1997



He's one of the most brilliant (and bizarre) electronic musicmakers on the planet. But how in the world does Richard "Aphex Twin" James find time to record, tour, and build his own instruments? Filterboxes, drum machines, custom keyboard modifications, and even a sampler—there isn't much he hasn't tried. "When it worked," he said of the latter in May '94 [see "Sampling Nation," page 104], "I reckon it pissed on just about any manufactured sampler." And nearly three years later, we're happy to report he hasn't changed a bit. Richard is still a tinkering maniac, but now his focus has shifted from hardware to software.

"I've got three Macs," he tells us, "two laptops and a PowerPC. I use all the sequencers on the market, but at the moment I've been solely using my own program to create new algorithms." And not with Opcode's Max. He's been building the algorithms from scratch. "It's like using a programming language. A bit like Pascal. I've been doing it for about three months, so it's all quite primitive, but it's looking really interesting.

This language . . . you can bring in your own samples and mess around with them. And it's got DSP functions you can't get anywhere else, but you have to program it in. There's no fancy sliders, although they're easy to construct. I've made loads of graphical interfaces for things.

"It was pretty interesting watching people dance to my algorithm."

—APHEX TWIN

"The algorithm I just finished," he continues, "is a percussion thing that lets you swap and change the sounds. It does bass, as well, but it's really acidic. You can leave it on for, like, an hour, and it really comes up with some mad shit. I made it learn to gradually change [the music] over time." While he doesn't plan to market his software, he has been showing it off at recent gigs. "I just finished a tour, and I used it for one of the tracks. It was pretty interesting watching people dance to my algorithm."

His touring rig consists of, get this, "One laptop computer, a little mixer, and an effects unit. But soon I'll be eradicating the mixer and effects. So basically it'll be one computer. It does everything I did before with live samples and sequences. I've put every element down on a digital track [in Digidesign's Pro Tools], so I can mix between tracks."

Speaking of Pro Tools, "It's wicked," he enthuses. "You don't notice it's there, which is what you want with computers. It doesn't get in your way." While he's purchased most of the third-party plug-ins for it, Richard, true to his tinkering image, has also created one from scratch. "Within about two weeks I came up with one with this programming language I've been using. It's really, really cool. You can loop between sections, and loop individual tracks the same way you could with a sequencer. And I've got this thing on there so you can re-synthesize each track, change its pitch . . ."

Talking to Richard about his homemade software almost derailed us from the main purpose of the interview: to discuss his new self-titled album on Sire. *Richard D. James* is like nothing we've heard before, and frankly, we're still not sure whether we love it or loathe it. It's a bizarre 15-song blend of feeble synth sounds and jagged jungle loops. "Most

of the album was done on my Mac, basically. Even the keyboard sounds were all pretty much computer-generated. Native audio." And when Richard sings, the sound gets even weirder. Give "Milkman" a spin, for example. "That was modulated on the computer," he says of the twisted vocal track.

Richard's drum programming is particularly impressive—rife with triplets and unpredictable stops and starts. "I think the main influence is Luke from Wagon Christ. He really inspired me to get into it more. I used to do lots of crazy triplets and stuff at a slower pace, but he really got me into doing it at a faster pace. He gave me the spark to do it faster, but now I'm trying to take it to all extremes, basically."

Richard's jungle influence comes from "any of the drum 'n' bass and breakbeat artists. It's nothing new to me. I've been into breakbeat culture ever since it started, through hip-hop, hardcore, and jungle. So I've always been into nicking other things, recycling 'em, basically mashing 'em up and making something different. I just like to mash things up a bit more than most people, that's all."

One of his favorite mashing tools is Steinberg's ReCycle. "Yeah, it's quite a wicked program. The most useful thing about it is it creates a bank on your sampler and gives it loads of sample names. And that saves you an hour, at least. You can cut something up into, like, 90 samples, and transfer it over SCSI in a minute. That would take two hours normally."

And not just for breakbeats—Richard uses ReCycle for melodic material, as well. "I might play a violin or a trumpet scale into Pro Tools—every note I can think of—and then bang it into ReCycle, chop it up into little bits, bang it into the sampler, and you've got a complete bank of sounds in your sampler in about five minutes."

Richard and his laptop are currently on tour in the U.K., but he hopes to circle the States sometime later this year. "This is the next step for me," he says of his strange new sound. "It's like the first step for a much bigger step that I hope to take later on."

**THE APHEX TWIN BRAVES
THE NME INQUISITION TO ANSWER
ALL THOSE NASTY QUESTIONS
WE'RE NORMALLY FAR TOO
POLITE TO ASK.**



THE APHEX TWIN

YOUR CURRENT DJ 'SET' CONSISTS OF YOU MESSING ABOUT WITH SANDPAPER AND FOOD-MIXERS. IT'S NOT BIG, IT'S NOT CLEVER... IN FACT, IT'S BLOODY STUPID. ISN'T IT?

"ER, YEAH. It's not like a new set or anything, it was just a favour for a club. I thought it would be a bit conventional to just play records so I did that instead. Pointless? Well, it probably would've been if it was my stylus but they paid for it. I didn't lose anything and I got paid to do it, which sounds like a good deal to me.

"I really liked it actually, it sounds really mental. I did it again in New York and there were people there who danced to it. I think they thought it was death metal or something. I suppose people might feel a bit ripped off if they paid to see me. Do I care? Erm, I don't know really. Most people seem to be into it, which is a bit disappointing really. I'd rather do it down Ritz's on a Friday night and get people really mad."

RECORD WISE, YOU'LL JUST PUT ANY OLD RUBBISH OUT, WON'T YOU? DON'T THE WORDS 'QUALITY CONTROL' MEAN ANYTHING TO YOU?

"I SUPPOSE I haven't got any quality control... No, I think I'm alright, actually. I've never put anything out that I'm embarrassed about, but then again I never really reject anything that I write. There's only about one track in 20 that I think is... well, it won't be shit, but I won't use it. It'll only be alright. Maybe one track in 40 actually is shit, but I probably won't bother finishing those ones.

"I don't think I put too much stuff out. In fact, I often think I don't put out enough. Can I give The Stone Roses lessons? Erm, well, I'd quite like to disappear like them, actually - but I'd do it forever 'cos I don't really like making records. My two ambitions are to make music forever and to never get a job. This record caper allows me to do exactly that."

"YOUR MUSIC IS JUST PROG ROCK FOR THE '90S, OR PUT ANOTHER WAY, NOODLY OLD HIPPIE SHIT WITH NO GRIP ON REALITY." DISCUSS.

"I'VE NOT really heard any of those prog rock bands though I know Tangerine Dream - a lot of their early records are totally excellent. I feel more like a punk really, 'cos when I started I wanted to clear all the shit techno records out of the shops.

"It's me and my friends who are trying to clear out the old boring c---s. We're not the boring old c--- ourselves, no way. When a band like Oasis say they hate dance music, I don't really understand it. I mean, they're dance music aren't they?

"I didn't agree with all the techno bands who said rock was dead either. I like rock music. Oasis are pretty good, they're like a modified version of old music like The Beatles. That's OK. I mean, I suppose my ambient stuff is just a modified version of Brian Eno. The

difference is, I never heard any Brian Eno before I started making records."

MUCKING ABOUT WITH COMPUTERS IN YOUR BEDROOM IS STRICTLY FOR NERDS, SURELY?

"YEAH, I'M a nerd. I'm proud of it, definitely. But I go out as well and do the same as everyone else, get f---ed up, annoy people, look for nice birds. I used to play sport. I did! But I can't get into it in London, it's all too expensive. I've always been in my bedroom doing things but I've also always had loads of mates and got into fights and stuff as well. I just go to my studio after everyone else has gone to bed. I don't miss out on anything."

ALL THAT STUFF ABOUT YOU NEVER GOING TO SLEEP IS JUST BOLLOCKS, ISN'T IT?

"WELL, I go through phases. Sometimes I sleep, sometimes I don't. For a while I only ever got about three hours of sleep a week. Then that fizzled out to about two hours a night and now I'm pretty normal I think.

"It's really difficult to go a week without sleep. I need to be doing the music 'cos that's the only thing that keeps me awake. If you go over four days, it gets really trippy and you start losing it. You can't think properly. But you sort of get through that and then it's just like being stoned. It's alright once you get used to it. If people don't believe me... sorted."

YOU'RE STILL JUST A FACELESS CHARISMA-FREE BOFFIN THOUGH, AREN'T YOU?

"THAT'S A bit of a stupid question. I can't be faceless 'cos I've done loads of press and I've had my photo taken loads of times. I mean, I get recognised in the street, I get people coming up to me and talking. I don't know if that's the same as it is for rock stars, but then I don't know any rock stars. I've never been on *Top Of The Pops* or anything but I think I've got natural charisma, everyone has. I don't really know what a star is, but there's a big difference between me and the people dancing to my music, definitely."

YEAH, BUT YOU'RE NEVER GOING TO GALL AS MUCH TO THE KIDS AS DAMON ALBARN/LIAM GALLAGHER/THE BASS PLAYER FROM RUPTURED DOG, ARE YOU?

"HA! THAT'S wicked. Nah, I know people put Richard James posters on their wall. It's embarrassing, but they do it. I guess that's what pop is all about.

"I don't know if my music says as much to people as Blur's, but I think having lyrics in songs is a bit shit, really. I prefer things to be abstract. A song with lyrics always seems to be saying something specific so you can't interpret it in many different ways. That's why I like electronic music more than any other form of music, 'cos people get different reactions from it. The same track can make different people feel upset, aggressive or euphoric. But I wouldn't want to be

spokesman for a generation or anything. People want to know what I think about stuff, but I don't want to tell them. I can't be bothered."

RICHARD JAMES, A TUNE. A TUNE, RICHARD JAMES. YOU HAVEN'T MET BEFORE, HAVE YOU?

"BOLLOCKS! TOTAL bollocks! That's all I can say to that. I do write tunes you can whistle. Goddammit, I've done songs with *whistling on them* so you must be able to. But music doesn't have to have tunes to be music. I can listen to a single drum beat for hours sometimes and just get into rhythms and things. I mean, not all of my stuff has a tune, some of it is just sounds. It's sounds that I'm obsessed with and the tune comes later, if it comes at all.

"I already have written catchy pop songs with big choruses and they've already been successful. I'm not telling you which songs they were. They were by famous people. I'm not saying who, no. It's a secret. They were Top 40 hits and everything, which I've never had with my own stuff, but I'm not that bothered, really. Maybe I'll do a song like that myself one day, but you have to choose the best way for a song to come out."

REMIXING: AT BEST, MONEY FOR OLD ROPE; AT WORST, THE COMPLETE RUINATION OF A ONCE HALF-DECENT SONG. HOW DO YOU PLEAD?

"I ADMIT that sometimes I don't put any work into remixing at all. Sometimes I just give them an old, completely different track and say, 'Yeah, there's your remix'. I did that with The Lemonheads. I couldn't be bothered to do their track 'cos it was so shit. I don't know if they noticed or not 'cos I never bothered talking to any of them.

"Basically, I was supposed to do it but I forgot the courier was coming that day. The doorbell rang and I realised I'd forgotten so I just told him '15 minutes', went upstairs, found an old track, taped it off and gave it to him. I got paid four grand for that - a nice day's work. I've done that a few times, but I don't always do it.

"A few people do complain that I've ruined their song but that doesn't bother me. Shit happens. They're only using me to get credibility anyway, so they deserve everything they get, the f---ing bastards."

BY THE WAY, YOUR BEARD IS COMPLETELY HORRIBLE...

"IT IS a bit, isn't it? But I get girls stroking it all the time so that's a bonus. I don't know why I grew it, I don't suppose it's very fashionable. I got the full-on beard 'cos I couldn't be bothered to shave but then my mate bought some hairclippers so I chopped a few bits out of it and grew the tuft really long.

"Most of my mates have beards as well, so it doesn't really bother me. I can't believe I'm sat here discussing my beard! I'm going to keep it now, until it grows down to my toes. Rip Van Aphex!"

● The Apex Twin stood accused by Mark Sutherland.

REBELLIOUS JUKEBOX

APHEX TWIN
twiddles his bits
to produce the hits
that make him cry

1 LIONEL RICHIE

"Hello" (The Aphex mixes)
(White label)
"WHAT did I like about the original? Nothing. Only the fact that you can drop in the 'Hello' when you're DJing. That's all. So I did some mixes of it about a year ago. I added just the typical amusing nonsense that I do. He's f***ing weird, Lionel Richie. His face freaks me out."

2 TOM MIDDLETON

"The Freelander EP"
(Receding)
"I DON'T know who Tom Middleton is. I just found it. It sounds like loads of nicked ideas off loads of people. I don't think there's actually anything sampled, it just sounds like styles and ideas nicked. There's as many different styles as you can think of. What I like about it is it's got no original ideas of its own at all. I think that's funny. And I like to laugh. He merges them all together in one big pile of shit. I heard it first about five years ago. I was drawing money out of a cashpoint and I heard it on a stereo of a Cabriolet XR3i. Convertible, of course."

3 TOM JENKINSON

"Breakfast Rownd Set"
(White label)
"WE'VE just pressed it up. It was Squarepusher's set at Glastonbury. I think there's only four copies. It was wicked. It was the best set I've ever seen him do. He basically slagged everyone off in the audience. He was telling people they should dance because they're f***ing c***s and things like that. He was saying, 'Anyone who hasn't been up all night can f*** off', and 'This track's going out for the mud.' And he was pissed out of his head when he was doing it. 'He was using a DAT and the batteries ran out half way through and he was dancing down the front and the bloke was on the mic going, 'Yeah, your battery's run out on the DAT, mate' and he was going, 'Well, f***ing change it, prick.' It was pretty funny, I reckon. The crowd was half confused and half probably understood. 'I copied that, actually. I played in Norway the day before yesterday and I got f***ing pissed out of my head more than ever and I did pretty much the same thing. I whispered obscenities over the mic, because it was on national radio, it got the crowd going, as well. They were well into it. They were f***ing mental. The Viking posse. They were my descendants."

4 THE RAVE COLONEL
"Acid March"
(Fats Tenperes)
"THE Rave Colonel is me. That one, I'm not going to say anything about that at all, if that's OK with you. You shouldn't have to tell people everything all the time."

5 AFX

"Animal Bloodbath EP"
(White Labia)
"THAT'S me again. That came out the same time as my first ever record. It was called 'Analogue Bubblebath', but my local paper put 'Animal Bloodbath'. I thought that was good so I did another record and called it that. They're



Aphex Twin: Into 'Wrecked 'Em' records

got a huge nose and a weird wrinkled nob and it makes this really weird noise while it's licking this girl's tits. It looks like a cross between an anteater and a cow.

A tapir? Yeah, that's it. I did 'Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush' once and I sent it to Bomb Ballerina and they didn't release it. I'd still be into releasing it if Timmy Mallet sang on it."

6 HOMER'S EGG SHELL
"Hugh Janus EP"

(Wrecked 'Em Records)
"THAT'S by my mate called Matt James. He won't release it because it's got noises of him having sex with his girlfriend and we're trying to press it up on whites and release it on Rephlex,

but he's got another record coming out. He recorded it in a caravan when he was shagging a bird in Cornwall and it's really f***ing dodgy quality but it's lush. It's sort of rocky. It's got a lush drum beat on it. It's like ESG. They're a lush American band. They do mental chunky beats. Matt's from Cornwall as well."

7 CONTOUR REGARD
"Kumbaya EP"

(White Label)
"I DON'T know who this is, I just found it in Music And Video Exchange a few years ago. All the best records I just found there. I take my portable record player, pick out loads of records and then go through them quickly. And if something grabs me, I get it. It's got Welsh choirs on it over a hardcore Nineties style breakbeat. It's rough, basically. It's like Blade."

10 WEEN

"Fluffy" (Flying Nun)
"I'D like to see Ween at Phoenix. They'd be really good but they're not going to play, sadly. I love the vibes they get on their tunes. They're quite trippy, totally out-



Ween

there vibes. This is about Fluffy the dog sitting on a porch. It's f***ing demented. I like it because they write demented tracks but they put lush emotions in them. Even though they're a total pisstake, they still hit you in the right spot every time you hear them. They're not just funny. The songs are well twisted. They hit you in two senses. I haven't done any country, but I'd be well into it after hearing this. I'd like to make a C&W album."

all remixes of the first one I did. It reminds me of the days when my balls were up in their sockets, before they'd dropped. I was making up words and making up my own language. "The paper was the West Britain And Cornwall. A local paper. They said they liked the record. It was a f***ing lush article, though, because it was one of the first things that I did and the headline was 'Richard Knocks On Door Of Disc Dreamland'. And no one in Cornwall knows what records even are. And they would only put me in the paper if I was either playing my keyboards or holding up two of my records. So I had to play my keyboards in a really static way. It was funny, I think."

8 XB4 ACID
"HP11 EP"

(K7)
"I DON'T know who it is. I just found it in a junk shop. I got it in about '89. It's just mental acid. Four tracks of the most unbelievable acid that isn't on a 303. And it pisses over any other acid record ever. It was an inspiration to me, because I wanted



Lionel Richie

to create the ultimate acid riff after that. But you never do. You're striving for the ultimate acid riff whenever you're doing an acid track. If you're not thinking like that, then you've got the wrong approach to doing acid tunes. This is the closest to the ultimate acid riff. I'm going to write a book about acid riffs one day."

9 SALMON VALLEY

"Daft Spunk Remixes"
(Firing Blank)
"IT'S Salmon Valley, who are on Rephlex, and they got Daft Punk to remix their tracks. They're from Japan. They're very nice people. There's two of them. They've got an album just about to come out of nursery rhymes, half in Japanese and half in English. The best one is 'Georgie Porgie'. It's f***ing weird shit. They just sing it and it's very disturbing. It's rubbish beats but that fact makes it good. It's just very strange. "It's probably the only record I thought was strange when I heard it first. They do 'The Cow Jumps Over The Moon' and do animal noises and stuff. It's wicked. "I use an animal noise out of the 'Animal Farm' porno video. It's

DOUBLE EXPOSURE

Richard James, aka **THE APHEX TWIN**, has to date released around 14 records under different names and been sampled countless times. Many famous musicians – Curve, St Etienne and Jesus Jones included – would die for his haunting music. Who is he? Where does he come from? Why does he refer to himself in the plural? **ANDREW SMITH** attempts to answer some of these questions, while **MATT BRIGHT** shutters down

I MAGINE A KID WHO, FROM THE AGE OF 13, when his mates could think of nothing better to do than run around playing football or chasing after girls (some of us can still think of nothing better to do...), would hole himself up in his parents' garage in Cornwall pulling apart synthesizers and putting them back together. They wouldn't recreate the sounds he found echoing through his mind, so he changed them and, between three and seven in the morning, he made music.

To this day, Richard James, aka The Aphex Twin, reckons to average two hours sleep a night. The man's obsessed with sound.

"I don't really think of what I do as 'Techno'," he'll say lightly. What is it, then?

"Just electronic music." Yeah, "just electronic music," as in Kraftwerk (who also designed their own instruments), as in gorgeous, hauntingly ethereal melodies and rhythms that float and drift like swallows in the wind. True, the record that brought him to prominence, "Digeridoo", was a strange slab of mutant hardcore, so named because punters at West Country raves would chant for it, identifying with the primal, aboriginal throb at its heart.

Mike Edwards of Jesus Jones and Bob Stanley of St Etienne both checked the tune in these very pages, putting it in their Top 10 Records Of All Time. Curve played it before they went on stage.

The really startling track, however, appeared on the B-side of "Digeridoo"; a lovely ambient piece, cryptically called "Analogue Bubblebath".

This served as a harbinger for a double album, "Selected Ambient Works 85-92", which appeared on the Belgian R&S/

Apollo label as an import towards the end of last year. Some unscrupulous record shops were flogging copies for up to 50 quid. Early in January, "Ambient Works" was given a full UK release and it's been in the Maker Top 10 Independent Albums ever since.

So, happening into 4AD superno Ivo Watts-Russell's office last week, what do you think I found in his CD deck? Surprising? No, it makes perfect sense.

THE APHEX TWIN'S FIVE POINT GUIDE TO RELEASING AN UNDERGROUND RECORD

- 1) "Make a great tune – a lot of people forget about that part!"
- 2) "Find someone to press up white labels cheaply. If you ring around, you can usually get a good deal. With 'Digeridoo', we got 3,000 copies for around £800."
- 3) "Drive them round to as many specialist record shops as you can reach. If they like the track, they'll buy it, but usually they'll take them on sale-or-return basis anyway."
- 4) "Give them to DJs in your area. Send them to as many others as you can think of. And journalists, of course."
- 5) "Try a few record companies – if it's any good, send it to us and we'll put it out for you on our new label, RePhlex."

different labels last year. Another LP, "Surfing On Sine Waves", is about to appear on Warp, under the moniker Polygon Window. He comes to this interview direct from working with Curve. Right now, everyone wants a piece of The Aphex Twin. In addition to the official releases, the number of tracks flying about with Aphex samples on them is immense. He tries to track them all down, assembling them as a kind of aural scrapbook, but it's hard to keep up.

As far as his own music goes, the Twin doesn't go in for sampling, seeing no need for it.

DESPITE the fact the Twin grew up listening to his sister's Echo & The Bunnymen records, Kraftwerk, John Peel and little else (his father worked in the Cornish mining industry), James is no fan of indie music. When he received a call from Curve's Garcia and Halliday to remix "Falling Free", he'd never even heard of them.

Did you appreciate what you heard?

"Well, it was the same as with a lot of indie music – I really liked aspects of it, but I didn't like the overall effect. My main love is sounds, new sounds, and most indie stuff isn't really about that, though I think bands like Curve still manage to get some interesting effects out of guitars."

The original plan was to sling it out as a remix of the song, but Curve like it so much that they've decided to issue it as a limited edition white label and let it grow from there. The Aphex mix bears so little relation to the original composition that there's even talk of making it a joint release. Curve's Dean Garcia describes how this collaboration came about.

"When we toured in the States," he tells me, "the crowd would often go wild when 'Digeridoo' came up over the sound system before our shows. It was brilliant! That was what made us want to work with him. 'Digeridoo' is a masterpiece of work. I was shocked and inspired by it."

"What seems to be special is the way he hears sound. Have you heard what he did with our track, 'Falling Free'? He's taken one little bit of it – we can't work out where he got it from – and made it into this kind of choral thing. It's really spaced-out and very, very sparse, very womb-like: it's actually inspired us in the way we work, and sparked off other ideas."

WITH the proliferation of sampling technology, it's easy for electronic music to end up spiralling downwards in ever-decreasing, plagiaristic circles, as everyone copies everyone else. There are very few originals. The Aphex Twin is one.

'Selected Ambient Works 85-92' is out now on R+S



“It’s not exactly a tank. It’s actually classed as an amphibious armoured car. That way, you can take it on the roads. Anything bigger just churns the tarmac up.”

WITH HIS lank, ginger hair and his boho hobo appearance, The Aphex Twin is anything but tweedy, and yet the reputation of a boffin precedes him, chiefly because of his penchant for hardware manipulation and “what happens if I plug this in here?” curiosity which has come on apace since the days of anti-social piano re-structuring.

“I’m not very mechanical, but I don’t use any conventional equipment. What I tend to do is break things. I take them apart and then can’t put them together again. Everything I have is fucked up. I forget how I’ve made things. I don’t keep plans or circuits. I suppose I should really. My studio is full of old keyboards and bits of TV screens. I don’t sample any more because I’m obsessed with getting original sounds. I’m a bit of a sound snob.”

Many have feared for the Twin’s sanity on reading that he carries at any one time some 60 partly realised tunes in his head, each clamouring to be put down on tape. He’s on record as saying that this log jam can feel like it’s going to drive him insane. What if these compelling internal voices started saying something else? Go into Dolcis with a sawn-off shotgun, for instance?

“I don’t mean that I’ll literally go insane,” he winces. “I mean that I can’t function and do normal things as long as I have these things in my head. I can’t turn off my ears. Right now, sitting in the cafe, I’m listening to the sounds and making tunes. It can piss me off. But at the same time it’s brilliant. It’s a bit like having high blood pressure and cutting your arm open to let it out. It’s such a release and relief.”

This month sees the release of a new, triple-

length set, *Selected Ambient Recordings Vol. 2*, through Sheffield’s pioneering Warp Records and his own Rephlex label. It will bear the name of The Aphex Twin as will most new material as part of a pseudonym-pruning manoeuvre. There is still the small matter of the other Aphex Twin, however. What is the dark Elvis/Jesse scenario?

“Nothing. There isn’t another Aphex Twin. There is a bloke I used to work with who’s now in a band called Reload and we discovered that we were born on the same day at the same minute but that’s just coincidence. I’d already been working as The Aphex Twin before that.”

The Aphex Twin has, for the time being, given up playing live. “I’ve toured America. It was totally brilliant. What do I want to do it again for?” His skills are sought after in any number of capacities. He is, for instance, an in-demand remixer, although those on whom he bestows his favours should be warned that this involves no vote of artistic confidence.

“For me to do a remix, the song usually has to be shit. If I like it already, why would I remix it? I’ll just listen to it the way it is. The Lemonheads just asked me to do something but I’ve never heard them. They’re supposed to be quite good, aren’t they? But it doesn’t matter. If I hate something, that appeals to me. It’s a challenge to make it into something I like . . . which is quite a challenge with a Jesus Jones song.”

Unsurprisingly, film work too looms on the horizon. “I’m doing a couple of things that are mainly experimental films. I’ve had big mainstream offers but they got lost in the pipeline. I can’t remember

the names of the films, I just remember big company names floating around. It would be a laugh to do a big Hollywood film except I can’t see them letting me get away with the mad stuff I do with remixes.”

The Aphex Twin pushes aside his plate with a sigh. “I don’t enjoy making records. If I could, I’d stay in my studio for ever and never come out and make music all the time. But actually making records and putting them out, I don’t enjoy at all. Except doing the artwork. But it’s like doing this interview. No offence, but I have to do interviews to sell the records I make so I can keep on making music. It’s a way of putting off getting a job. But apart from being on my own making tracks, there’s actually very little else I enjoy. Performing is so embarrassing.”

He pauses. “I do like to shoot people with paint sometimes.”

Which rather brings us back to the, um . . .

“I’m not actually insured yet, so I shouldn’t be telling you this, but we were in Cornwall and the video recorder broke so we had to go and get another one and I thought, Oh, sod it, I’ll take the tank. So I drove the half-mile down the road and picked it up and then realised that I couldn’t turn round. I was really struggling to do a three-point turn when I thought, Hang on, I’m in a tank. I can just knock the wall down if I want to! There are people who owe me money and if they don’t pay me, I’ll just go and drive it through their houses.”

Fine. And any other purchases in the offing? He takes a sip of cappuccino and answers earnestly.

“Hmm, well, a submarine would be nice.”

AND BY their conspicuous celebrity consumption you shall know them. When Rick Wakeman entered rock's upper echelon, he armed himself with a fleet of Rolls-Royces. With Alice Cooper it was golf clubs and whisky. For McCartney, sheep and vast tracts of the Scottish countryside. For Daltry, trout. When The Aphex Twin first saw the fiscal fruits of his endeavours, he bought himself a tank.

"Well, no it's not exactly a tank," he demurs over a cheese omelette swimming in ketchup here in one of the West End's most select greasy spoon cafes. "It's actually classed as an armoured car. An amphibious armoured car. That way, you can actually take it on the roads. Anything bigger just chums the tarmac up."

But... but... why?

He frowns. "Well, it's got a working machine gun on top. I suppose I thought it might come in handy."

So should your Cornish holiday ever be interrupted by the rumbling of caterpillar tracks and the spray of automatic fire backed by some of today's most attractive techno-sounds, you may well be in the vicinity of Richard James, aka The Aphex Twin, aka Polygon Window, aka The Discman, aka Blue Calx. At least Richard has the alibis to go with his new-found interest in the buying and selling of military hardware. But it's as The Aphex Twin that most know him, and under that sobriquet that he's become the hottest (or rather coolest) property in the burgeoning sphere of ambient techno—though "original electronic music" is how the Twin himself would prefer to label his efforts. It's a strange, other-worldly hybrid: part dancefloor techno, part impressionistic sound mirroring its creator's roots in club DJing and idiosyncratic experimentalism. It is also icy hip.

From the rock weeklies to the Sunday supplements, a bad Aphex Twin review is as thin on the ground as a monogamous cabinet minister these days. Rightly so: his Selected Ambient Recordings 1985-'92 was acknowledged as one of the records of last year in these pages also.

RICHARD JAMES is 22. He grew up in a small village outside Truro. At an age when most primary school children are immersed in Janet And John, he was, albeit unknowingly, more attuned to John Cage.

"My family is completely non-musical. My dad listens to jazz about twice a week and my sister used to listen to horrible indie music. I had no interest in any of that so I grew up with no influences really. But I'd always pissed everyone off by making noises and banging on things. We had a piano that I turned to face the wall and then spent my time inside it detuning the wires and things. I just got shoved in a corner of the house and was allowed to get on with it. No-one really made any comment, though there were times when it must have got on everyone's nerves. Course, I knew nothing about Stockhausen and Cage then."

By the age of 12, he had graduated to buying old tape machines and recording his own experimental ventures. "Originally, I wasn't interested in record-

Armed And Fairly Dangerous

They're calling 22-year-old Richard James, aka The Aphex Twin, the Mozart of Ambient. And as befits any emergent superstar nutter genius with the dance world in the palm of his hand, he's spending all his money on tanks. Stuart Maconie dons the tin hat.

ing, but I was pissing about all day making these noises so I thought I might as well listen to them."

For roughly five years he continued in this vein until the acid house explosion of the late '80s made its reverberations felt even in the sleepy Southwest. "One day I heard something acidic and realised it was similar to what I'd been doing. It came as a bit of a shock to realise that there were other people doing this stuff." Soon, he graduated to DJing, slipping in the odd track of his own "just to hear it played loud really. No-one realised that they weren't actually records, just stuff I'd been putting on tape." One of these tracks was the unearthly and intriguing Diggerdoo, the piece that more than any other made his name.

He paints an idyllic picture of the dance scene of the day. "It was the best scene I've ever been involved with. We'd put on parties on the beach and people would pay in grass. There was dope around but no-one had any money. Fantastic times. You could trust 10 car-loads of people to shift your gear and all your records and you knew that no-one was going to drive off with it. It's all changed now," he adds ruefully.

Egged on by his mates, who insisted that if he didn't do anything about his tapes himself, they would be forced to tout them for him, his work finally came to the attention of an Exeter-based label, who released a four-track EP. And so we now picture the touching scene as the young Cornishman is waved off by kith and kin as he goes to make his fortune amongst the grockles of Big Town. Sort of.

"I moved to London and suddenly caught up with all the stuff I'd been isolated from in Cornwall where, for one thing, there aren't any record shops. (Pre-emptive note to the managers of WH Smiths, Penzance, St Ives etc: we think he means a different kind of record shop) I bought thousands of records. When I was DJing, I'd become quite narrow-minded in that I would only listen to techno. Now I was hearing avant-garde stuff, German experimental rock, dub. I spent far too much money."

At this point, he first encountered music that remains important to him to this day. "Kraftwerk's weirder stuff, Wendy Carlos, Terry Riley, Steve Reich. I probably like Steve Reich best. But this is music I enjoy. Not influences. I hate the idea of being influenced. The thought of putting bits of other people's music into my own makes me sick."

"The other day I realised something very disturbing. For about three years I've been erasing a lot of stuff immediately when I realise that I know the tune, that it's somebody else's melody or whatever. The other day I had this tune in my head that I really liked and I taped it, even though I knew it was someone else. But when I came to play it to people, no-one had ever heard of it. I reckon that all those tunes have been my own and I hear them banging around in my head so much that I start to think they're other people's. Maybe they are, but I've got a nasty feeling that none of them are and I've been chucking away really good stuff for years."

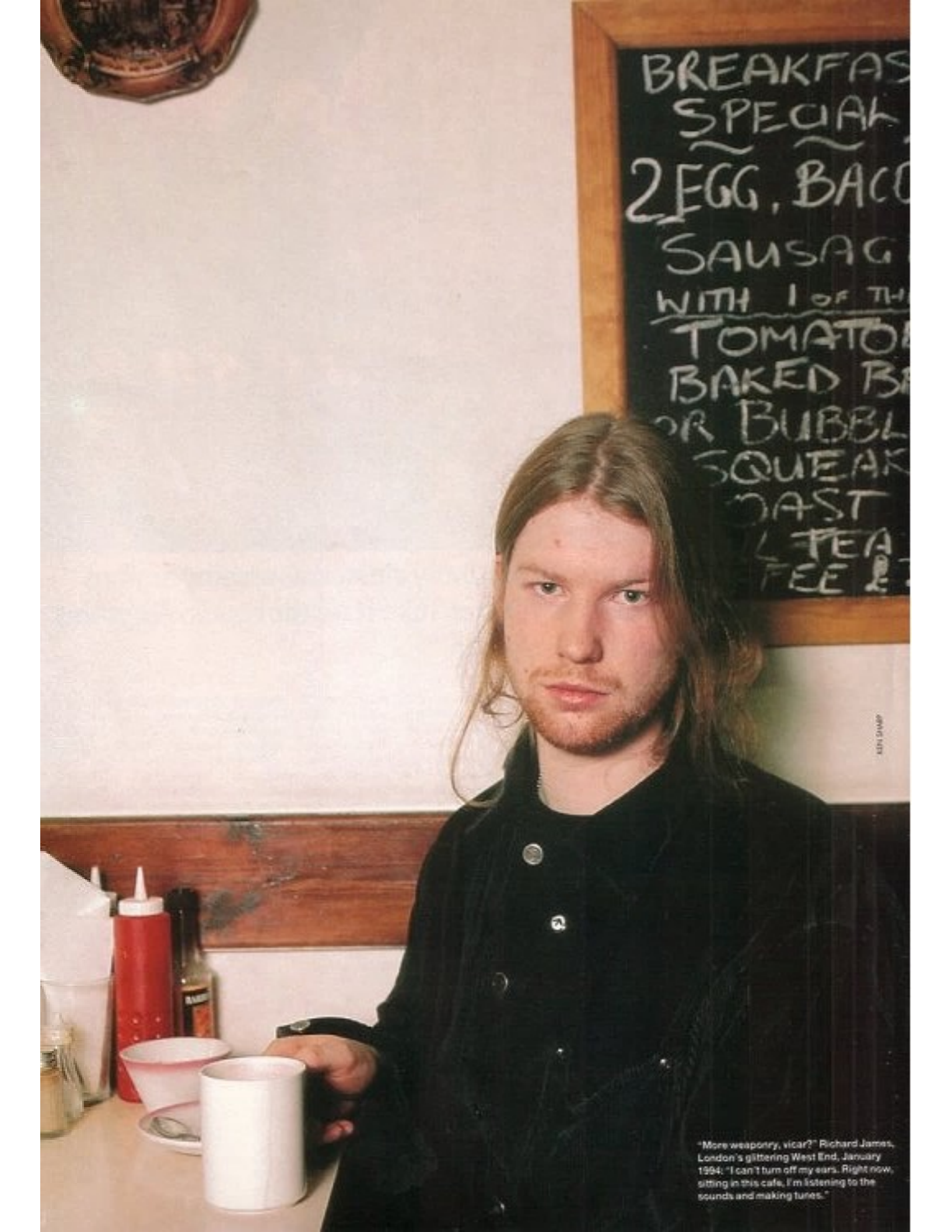
So, having discounted the possibility of wholesale theft, where is this stuff coming from? Your honour, Q suggests drugs.

"No. Drugs don't make any difference 'cos I'm never under the influence when I'm doing tracks. The only time I do acid is when I'm listening to other people's music. I'm not tripping for a laugh. I do it so I can enjoy other people's music without constantly breaking it down and analysing it. Plus, when I first started making music, I had no idea about drugs."

Indeed, the Twin seems even more sheepish about disclosing his real sources. "This is going to sound really weird but... well, I'm a lucid dreamer, you see. I can control my dreams. I make tracks in my dreams. Sometimes I'm in my own studio and sometimes in an imaginary studio and sometimes in my real studio but with imaginary equipment. It used to be a real struggle to remember the tunes when I woke up. But I'm training myself to do it. I reckon I get about 70 per cent of my stuff that way now."

"It's a mad idea but it works. I mean, it's like telling someone else your dream. It doesn't always come out quite as you remember it but I can get melodies very clearly that way now. I've thought about really analysing where it all comes from, plotting charts and graphs and so on, but I'm afraid that I'll find out something I don't want to know."

"I've thought about analysing where my tunes come from, plotting charts and graphs and so on, but I'm afraid I'll find out something I don't want to know."



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"More weaporty, vicar?" Richard James, London's glittering West End, January 1994: "I can't turn off my ears. Right now, sitting in this cafe, I'm listening to the sounds and making tunes."

FMCD

 TRACK
 02

Richard on Philip

Why did you decide to contact Philip Glass in the first place?

"I wanted someone to orchestrate the track *Icehedral*. I had quite a few of his records and stuff – about ten – so I thought I'd get in contact with him."

How fruitful was the project?

"I'm very happy with it. The only criticism I had was that the way they record music from real people is different from me. I'd record all the scrapings of the string from a violin, say, and the non-musical sounds. They'd try their best to avoid that and end up getting something 'perfect' that sounds like it comes out of a sampler."

How did the actual process work? Who did what?

"I sent him a tape and he got someone to score the music and then he added some extra parts. It all worked really well, and maybe we'll work together again."

Are there any other composers would you like to work with?

"I did a mix of Gavin Briers at the same time. He's another classical artist and he's incorporated a lot of what I did into his live performances."

Does this signify a move away from working with dance/techno/'modern' artists?

"Not really. I do get sick of working on other people's music, but it goes in stages. As long as I get something interesting to work on, then it's great"

Does the idea of making a musical pilgrimage into African or Asian musical traditions, as Glass previously has done, interest you? Or do you see your own work as being part of a different inner journey?

"No, not in the same way. I just like to find my own path and don't like to seek inspiration from other people."

"This is a guy who conceptualises music. He hears it. That's what makes his music interesting, that's what makes him interesting. What I heard in his music was the intention to discover a different mode of expression." That's Phil on you. What would you say about the way Glass approaches music?



"The only thing that springs to mind is that he composes the actual notes the traditional way. I'll compose in my studio or in my head and try and hold it as long as possible."

"Richard James is quite a nice young man," is another quote. How would you describe Philip?

"Philip Glass is quite a nice old man."

In, say, 20-odd years time, could you see yourself occupying the same position that Philip does now, playing prestigious concert halls and being a respected, if eccentric, establishment figure?

"I never try and predict what's going to happen in the future. All I can say is that I'll be making music until I drop dead!"

What are your next projects?

"I'm doing some ads for Sun, Moon and Stars, which is an Elizabeth Arden perfume! It probably seems that I try to do things to shock, but I've al-


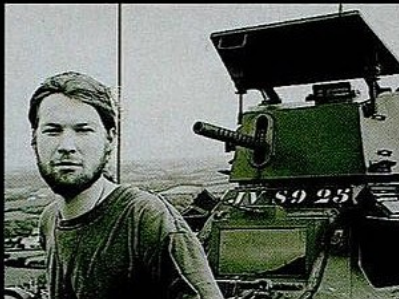
ways wanted to do ads because I've liked them ever since I was little.

"There's also a new record – a weird jungle thing – on Warp. It's not conventional Aphex jungle. And then there's an album of reworked children's TV theme tunes."

Just what you'd expect really...

Richard James, aka Aphex Twin, is no stranger to collaborations. He's remixed many people and been known to give artists the odd old recording of his own works under the pretence that they are new remixes. His methods are often as unconventional as Glass' and his anti-establishment philosophy has stretched to giving one or two bizarre interviews in the past. He never talks about gear but prefers to let his own brand of distorted techno music do the talking. Andy Jones managed to squeeze these words from the young pretender...

Dear Phil,
 We got this track right and I wonder if you could like get some people to sort of play it on real instruments and that, while I stand next to you telling you what bits are to push yours hopefully

Music for films

Glass came to even greater prominence via his collaboration with Godfrey Reggio on the latter's stunning 1983 movie *Koyaanisqatsi* (it's a Hopi Indian word that means 'life out of balance'). Reggio's film, a shifting kaleidoscope of city ways, highways, buildings and milling people, beautifully reflects the sentiment of the title while providing the perfect visual counterpoint to Glass's score. *Powaqqatsi*, released in 1989, was created much along the same lines, and once again presented Glass with an opportunity to turn the accepted notion of scoring a movie on its head.

"There were times when the music preceded the film and times when the film preceded the music," he recalls. "In one case, for the beginning of *Powaqqatsi*, I wrote ten minutes of music and the cameraman listened to it while he was filming. That's an extreme example, but there were times

when Godfrey would give me twenty minutes of film and say, 'This is 20 minutes now but its going to come down to ten so if you write a piece of music that's ten minutes long, I'll cut it to that.' In the end the film was always cut to the music."

Not surprisingly, Glass has little truck with the conventional approach and holds Hollywood in pretty much open contempt.

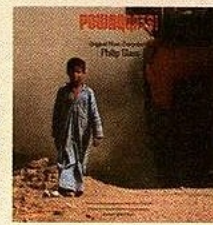
"It's been quite a long time since there was any aesthetic idealism in Hollywood," he says matter of factly. "It simply doesn't exist - it's not even seriously discussed. You'd be considered a fool to even talk about it."

And it's not hard to see why he now refuses to work on mainstream movies - even though they regularly pilfer his music without license and only pay for it when the damage is done. "If I get calls from an industry film person, they say, 'We've been thinking of you to write the music for *Return To The Bridge Over The River Kwai*,' for example. I

say, 'When are you filming it?' They say, 'Oh, we filmed it already we - need the score in three weeks. You know, it's silly. Why even bother with that? It's just nonsense.

"There have been some atrocious films that I have done the music for. I wanted to be like all the other composers who have done music for atrocious films," he laughs, "so I'm in a class with Shostakovich and Prokofiev and other great composers... Great composers," he says, chuckling at his own conceit.

A third film in the *Powaqqatsi* sequence is being planned, and Glass is currently working on a stage production of *Cocteau's Les Enfants Terribles*.



to discover a different mode of expression. Whether he reads music or studied at the conservatory isn't important. Richard's a guy who began by building his own synthesizers when he was a boy, putting odds and ends together - pieces of junk practically - making sounds then taking those sounds and turning them into music. That's interesting. I have some friends who go to the Berkley School of Music - it's a very good school - but there you learn the craft of popular songwriting. Basically, you're learning how to make hits. If you're lucky you have enough talent to do it; but it's about formulation, it's about the recycling of ideas. It's not about building a synthesizer at home and making it burp and twerp and then seeing how it builds into a piece of music. He has a way of thinking that's simplistic, and it's interesting for me. I'm twice his age and more - I like meeting young people and seeing what they're doing."

Glass denies that he is particularly drawn to house or trance music, even though it is tempting to identify parallels between them and his own music - far too glib an analysis for Glass.

"What I'm interested in is an innovative way of thinking," he says. "It comes out in this music because this is what that guy was thinking. It could just as easily come out as something else."

So he doesn't think that it's necessarily dependent on technology? "No. No, because you can do it on the piano, too. You have to realise," he says with emphasis, "that I'm looking at music from a very different point of view; I come from a very traditional background. The historical continuum of the language of music is something that I'm trained in, and a lot of these guys aren't. They don't think that way: they don't think about that at all. But, on the other hand, I don't think about it all the time either."

When Glass discusses his own musical background, you get a sense of just how broad and accommodatingly creative his mind is. I wonder if he ever envies the naivety of some of his collaborators - Aphex, in particular.

"No, not particularly," he replies without pause. "No, I've never found knowledge a burden. But it's important to say that I do come to music through this way, that's my way of doing it, and I don't regret it at all. It's made it possible for me to do what I've done. A friend of mine, a Brazilian songwriter, gave me three songs recently and I'm going to write arrangements for them. I can do that because I've got the chops. It's not going to be hard for me, and it means I can enter his world in a way that I would

have been unable to had I been a guy who knew only three chords, or a guy like Richard. Richard would probably not be able to do piano arrangements for this guy. He can do what he does, and he'd find his own way of doing it."

What sets Philip Glass apart from his contemporaries is that where as they have an equal ability to extend themselves into different musical areas, they sniffily refuse to exercise it. Glass is in no doubt as to why.

"They're a bunch of chickenshits, aren't they?" he grins. "They worry about what they're colleagues think and about being looked down upon and whether they've got a university job.

It's looking at culture from a very narrow perspective, but I don't pay any attention to them. When I did *Einstein On The Beach* a lot of people were shocked and revolted by it. My activities are still considered revolting by some people, but those are responses driven by fear..." and, Glass thinks, the over-zealous protection of their 'high culture'.

"Culture is everything: culture is the shirt you're wearing, culture is the food you eat, culture is the newspapers that you read. Culture is any product of the collective mind and of the individual mind. It's all interesting, it's all valuable. I mean, culture is what human beings do. Someone like Richard is a very interesting young man - he didn't have the benefit of a classical education so he makes up for it in other ways. He makes up for it in ingenuity, in his ability to

dream and imagine. To think that he needs to take a course in harmony to write music is an absurd idea. Paul Simon can't read music," he says referring to another of his sojourns into pop. "Now you tell me, who do you think is more important: some professor of music at Yale University or Paul Simon?" **FM**

"He didn't have the benefit of a classical education so he makes up for it in other ways"



On the FMCD

This is the Aphex Twin/ Philip Glass adaptation of the track *Icct Hedra*, which originally appears on Aphex's *I Care Because You Do* album. This version can only be found elsewhere on the *Donkey Rhubarb* single, a superb bouncy and upbeat track showing a melodic return to form for Mr James.

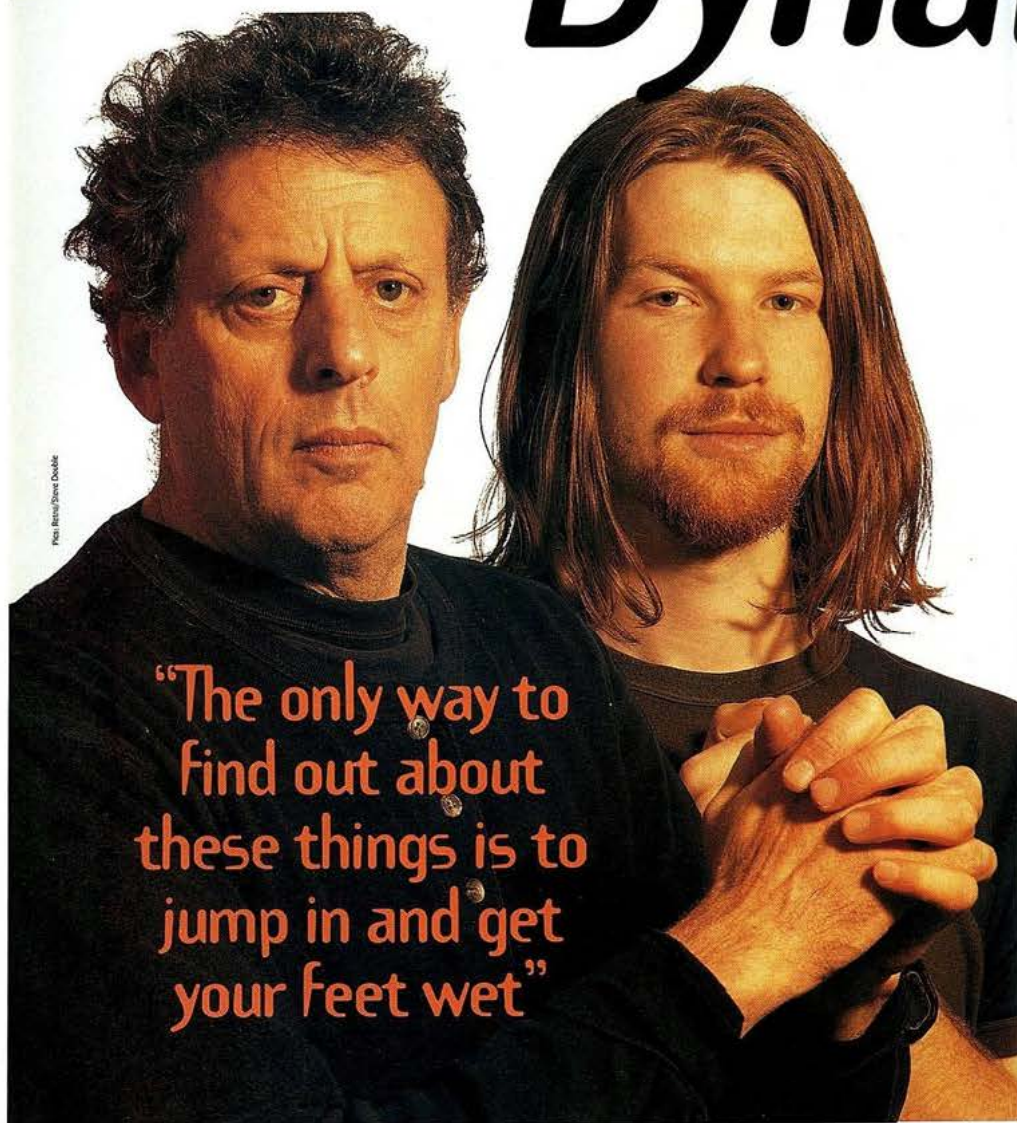
© 1995 Warp Records. Written by Richard D James/Philip Glass (Chrysalis Music/ Durnegen Music Publishers Inc ASCAP) Produced by Kurt Munkasci and Michael Reisman.





Dynamic duo

Philip Glass is a living legend among classical and contemporary musicians and Richard James, aka Aphex Twin, has become a legend in the technology-using community. Richard Blaine asks what happens when two gods from these musical worlds collide?



"The only way to find out about these things is to jump in and get your feet wet"

AT 57, IT MIGHT be a stretch to describe Philip Glass as an enfant terrible, but he still has the power to enflame the stuffed shirts of the classical music establishment. Quite distinct from his exquisitely formulaic composition style, his movie scores and confounding performance pieces are his regular dalliances with the lower orders. Collaborations with pop performers ranging from Linda Rondstadt and Paul Simon to Mark Moore of S-Express and, most recently, Aphex Twin, are all projects guaranteed to get the hackles of the Juilliard set rising. His extensive use of electronic instruments in compositions and live, mixed media performances has further enhanced his reputation as a maverick.

Glass was born in Baltimore on 31 January 1937 and underwent a varied upbringing that's reflected in his music. He studied flute at the university of Chicago, composition in New York and Paris (under the legendary teacher Nadia Boulanger) and subsequently moved to India, where he studied extensively with Ravi Shankar. "That was enormously helpful," he remembers. "Had I not done that I would not have been able to solve some of the large-scale musical problems that came up in *Einstein On The Beach*," (Glass' 'opera' that elicited critical acclaim, outrage and

stunned amazement in roughly equal proportion when it was staged at New York's Metropolitan Opera House). In Morocco he absorbed the arcane modalities of North African melodies, which inform his own mesmerising use of melodic repetition. Eventually settling in New York, he initially found few outlets for his craft and was reduced to supporting himself with menial jobs. He formed associations with modern painters and sculptors who shared his objective of maximum effect with the minimum of means, and he became a close friend and associate of Steve Reich, himself no stranger to the power of repetitive phrasing.

Pop's here

For Glass, far more rewarding dips into popular culture have occurred in the company of contemporary pop performers. His latest bed fellow is the Aphex Twin which, in light of recent work with Mark Moore of S-Express, seems a less bizarre meeting of minds than it might have. That's not to say it's not an intriguing mix; typically, Glass is unwilling to acknowledge the dichotomy.

"He got in touch and wondered if I was interested in doing a remix with him," he states, as if it were a request from his brother-in-law to help paint the spare room, "and I said I would." Glass appears slightly bemused over how the project happened in the first place. "I'm not sure," he says airily. "He evidently knew my music. I didn't know him; he's quite a young guy... Richard James is quite a nice young man," he says, suddenly becoming focused – as if James' 'niceness' is significant in some way – "and I think someone suggested he call me." James actually wrote Glass an endearingly forthright letter that began 'Dear Phil' but the outcome was the same.

"I didn't know his work," says Glass. "Oh yes, they sent me a tape and I listened to it. But I would have done it anyway because I was interested in him. The only way to find out about these things is to jump in and get your feet wet. You can't theoretically understand them: you have to get involved. That's the way I work." But was there something musically that caught his imagination? "There was as a matter of fact. I heard the music and thought, 'Yes I can do something with this.' What was that? 'Just a kind of intelligence and musicality – basic stuff like that.'"

The duo worked at Glass' studio in New York, with Glass writing much of the music on the spot. "He [James] liked it – he seemed to enjoy it and it was fun to do." Glass appears to view the liaison as an entertaining but brief interlude. It did, however, furnish him with a lasting impression of Mr Twin.

"This is a guy who conceptualises music," he says. "He hears it. That's what makes his music interesting, that's what makes him interesting. What I heard in his music was the intention >>>

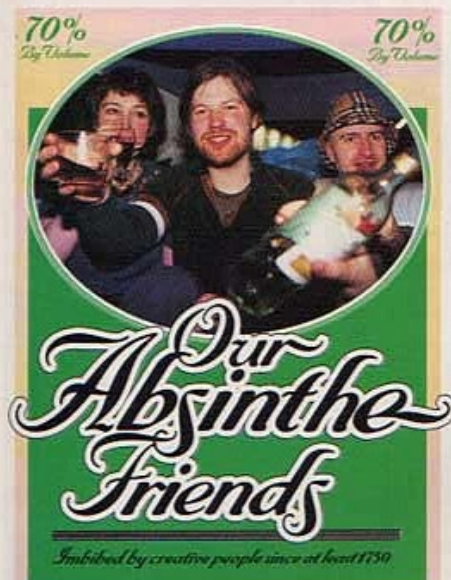
Instruments old and new



"If I wasn't playing the piano I wouldn't be writing the music," Glass states. "I like the piano. They still haven't figured out a better instrument."

Although a grand piano is the only instrument Glass has in the house, his studio is stuffed with the ratters with electronic keyboards and gadgetry – he is, after all, also renowned for embracing modern electronics for many of his works. His choice of instruments, though, is determined largely by the demands of the project. "For example," he says, "with *La Belle Et La Bête* (Glass' operatic adaptation of the Jean Cocteau movie), which I've just been touring with, that is based on sound design, on music programs that have been designed for that piece, and there are three synthesizers involved in it. But the opera I'm doing at the moment, that's all acoustic. The interesting thing about the piano is that, for the performer, it's the most responsive equipment. I can control the piano; I can control the sound. On an individual level I can shape the performance on the piano in a live situation better than I can with a synthesizer."

In that sense is he more comfortable with the piano than with electronics? "I think I am, although I've done a lot of synthesizer playing over the years. I guess the piano is a fundamental musical instrument in terms of my own technique, but I'm often in situations where the synthesizer is better. There's a kind of swing between the hi-tech world of modern synthesizers and going back to musical instruments. I really travel between the two and I do it very rapidly. Within the course of a year I'll do it two or three times."



Our Absinthe Friends

Imbibed by creative people since at least 1750

Another brave artiste takes on the 70 per cent proof viscous green spirit best known for making 19th century artistic French types wittier and more attractive, while gradually pickling their brains.

This month: Aphex Twin

Drinkers-in-the-limo: Richard 'Aphex Twin' James, Cylob, Mike 'Kosmik Kommando' Dred, Matt Jones, Bogdan, Ed DMX (all Rephlex recording artistes)

Richard: "The last time I was in a limo, the engine totally seized, so we stopped at this garage and steam started pouring out of the bonnet. Where are we going? I'd be into driving around this roundabout for ten minutes. We could go to the 'Boy/Girl' off-licence in Stoke Newington - the bloke who works there we used to think was a girl. Let's stop at one of those international phone places, hang out there for a bit. They're really vibey.



Windowlickers Ed DMX and Bogdan get fresh



Pour performance: Twin and pals get in the limo scene



"There's 'The Field Of Hope'. It's a Marie Curie thing, the most depressing bit of greenery in the whole world. You can go in and read if you want. There's an enormous generator next to it they lock up so the tramps can't get in and electrocute themselves. There's the absinthe, sitting ominously in the bucket. I'll have one. Ugh, this stuff's poisonous and warm." Cylob: "All alcohol is poisonous."

R: "Rots your guts. Is it any different from the days of old? Does the wormwood still make you go insane? The last time we had absinthe we fucking caned it. I was in a coma. We were DJ-ing at Cream and we mixed it with sparkling wine, fucking evil. Out to lunch we were. The limo in 'Windowlicker' was similar-ish to this one. The limo bits were gross, so horrible. Basically Chris Cunningham got this other bloke to direct some of it because he was embarrassed, I reckon. This bloke was going 'more arse, more tits, more whatever'."

"All the out-takes are a lot more scary, they couldn't be screened basically. They were going for cellulite. The one with the goofy teeth, we were trying to make her be sexy. All the girls were a really good laugh actually.

"Oh no! Mary Anne Hobbs on the radio! I hate this woman. Her voice. The way she introduced Squarepusher DJ-ing, all breathy. When I heard it first I thought he was in all sorts of trouble, but listen to it pissed and it sounds lush. Zoe Ball as well, I can't stand her. I got offered to go in a limo to some bollocks awards ceremony with her once, but it would have been totally irritating so I didn't."

Jones: "I've never heard anyone as cool as the Jones machine! Have you ever seen anyone that can drink that much booze? Never anyone ever, oh my god!"



Cylob forces it down as Mike and Jones whoop their approval



Rephlex reaction: the Twin before (left) and after (above)

Ed DMX: "You sad prick that everybody hates. Aaaaah! Big up St Paul's cathedral!"

R: "I played pool with The Geto Boys in America, in this hotel lobby, once. They looked a bit scary but they were alright actually.

Bushwick Bill was funny. One of their mates was larging it up so badly, puffing his chest out, but he mis-cued every shot.

"I saw my mate Johnny Hawk the other day. He's pretending to be normal but it doesn't fool me. He's tried to kill me, like, twice. He kicked my door in once, foaming at the mouth. I was fighting him on this bunk bed, and I kicked him off so he started jabbing this nine-inch screwdriver up through the fucking mattress. And he stabbed me in the arm with a pencil. There's a light show in here, on the roof. The gayest thing I've ever seen."

● **Absinthe Residue:** All drunk in about five minutes, leading to grumpy demands from Aphex and crew for more booze and a stop-off at the 'Boy/Girl' off-licence.

● **State of crew:** Screaming, quite literally, and eating a conspicuous amount of sweets and crisps. Cylob crashes out and Jones recounts how he once saw *The Charlats* drinking banana-flavoured beer. Richard, on the other hand, doesn't seem very different from normal...



Here's Cerys with Marjory, the fantastic monkey she's sponsoring under the London Zoo's 'Adopt An Animal' programme. Ranging from £25 for a gerbil to £6000 for an elephant - or a more manageable £35 for a portion of any animal - you get an adoption certificate, a photo, a year's subscription to their *Lifewatch* magazine and your name on a special 'Thank you' board. So ring 0171 449 6262 now and call a hippopotamus your brother.

SMALLTALK

● **Stereophonics'** recent signing session at the Cardiff launch of 'Performance And Cocktails' lasted a little longer than intended. The Virgin Megastore opened its doors at midnight - as it had done with the release of 'Word Gets Around' - only this time Kelly, Stuart and Richard were still penning



tributes gone Sam. Officially the nicest men in rock? Yes indeed.

● Continuing her bid to encompass all aspects of rock wifery, Meg Mathews recently demanded that her taxi stop en route to Harvey Nichols to allow her to rescue an injured seagull lying on the pavement. Carefully

picking up the ailing creature in her pricey overcoat, Meg asked her driver to divert to the animal hospital in Victoria where she personally handed over the patient. How does she fit it all in?

● An American academic is suing Smashing Pumpkins and Virgin Records for a cool \$15,000 (£10,000), claiming to have lost his hearing after attending one

of their shows - his first ever rock concert - back in January 1997.

● Despite its empirical unfunnyness, *Babes In The Wood* has been picked up by an American network. Unbelievably, execs are 'impressed' with Denise Van Outen's performance and are hoping she'll reprise her role for a US audience. Oh god.

"Pretty good. Who am I to say?"

Sexiest pop video you've seen?
"(Derek) Jarman's Smiths videos."

What's on your shagging tape?
"Side two of Bowie's 'Low'."

Ever had a homosexual experience?
"Many."

What turns you off?
"Bodily hair."

Do you get groupies?
"Not as yet."

Favourite sexual fantasy?
"The Mile High Club."

Who's your ideal man?
"River Phoenix, Mark from Ride..."

Second thing you look for in a man?
"Post sex conversation."

Do you use a condom?
"When it's needed, yes."

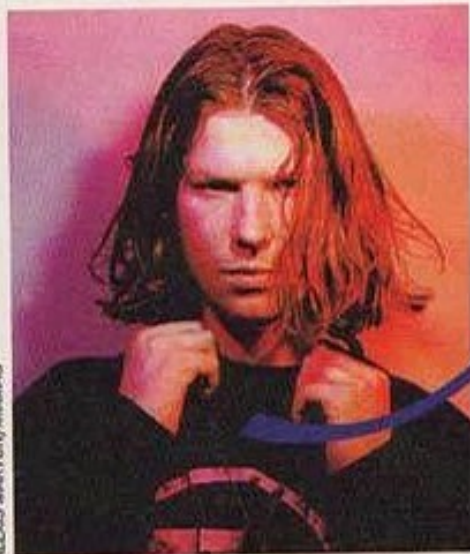
Who's the most famous person you've had sex with?
"Myself, last night."

Weirdest place you've had sex?
"On the top of a double decker bus at 8.30 in the morning on the way to a YTS course."

Have you ever paid for sex?
"Mentally I'm still paying for some."

Have you ever used the Pinch Method?
"I nicked something from Woolworth's once..."

Who did you fancy when younger?
"Paul Simonon (*The Clash*)."



ALEXEI MARCOVICI/ADMAG

phex twin

THE BOFFIN SUPERSTAR ELECT

Would you shag to your own records?
"Yeah. I do. All the time. I always get people telling me that they shag to my records as well, which is flattering. But it has to be a good tape. Some of my albums are shit for it, because they go from really slow to really fast and back again – which isn't ideal. So it's best to prepare some tapes in advance. Otherwise you'd be all over the place."

First sexual experience?
"It was good, and it was shared with about six other people. In a tent. In a field near my house in Cornwall. I was about 14 or 15, and me and my mates arranged to meet some girls, and took them back to this tent. Everyone had a good time. It wasn't a big tent – only a two-man."

Most intense erotic experience?
"Shagging two girls at the same time."

How do you rate yourself sexually?
"If I was to say *excellent* then that would be fairly boring. But I think I'll

just have to be boring."

What's the sexiest film you've seen?
"*Fantasia* – not the Disney version. It's like a compilation porn video one of my friends was given by his mum. That's sick, isn't it?"

Ever had a homosexual experience?
"No. And I wouldn't want one."

What turns you off?
"People who are *supposed* to be sexy. Like Cleo Rocos. And Jimmy Tarbuck."

Do you get groupies?
"I get loads in Germany – a lot of girls. In this country it's more people in glasses who write things down."

Do you use a condom?
"Yeah, but not all the time. I don't like them – they stink."

Most regrettable sexual experience?
"At a party when I was at school, I got totally off my face, and I woke up to

find this elephantine girl sitting on top of me. She was doing things I didn't want her to do. I couldn't get away. I didn't have the energy to get her off, and the door was locked. All I could do was shout, and my friends came in through the window and rescued me."

Most famous person you've shagged?
"My village carnival queen."

What is a pervert? Are you one?
"The most perverted people are those who get sexually excited about computer games, graphics and things. They're really sad bastards. Am I one? No. But I think everyone's perverted in their own minds. It's just that real perverts carry it into reality."

Where do you draw the line?
"Eating shit. I saw a video with that in the other day. I wouldn't do that."

Ever used the Pinch Method?
"No, but other people have on me. So, yes."

Fact!



The Aphex Twin

Acid house ale-fun with RDJ and loyal retainer

Venue: The Albion, Stoke Newington, London N17.
Drinkers: Richard D James (Guinness, vodka and orange), Ian Harrison (bitter), Jake Curtis (Irish Mist), Cylob (lager).
RD James: "It's a fucking top laugh in our house. I could

move, but I'm too fussy about where I'd move into. I want somewhere to drive my tank into. My tank's for utilitarian purposes. It's got a gun and six flare-launchers on it. I've got a helmet to go with it with built-in headphones and a mic, but it must have been meant for a little kid, because it's really small. I met Jimmy Cauty at Disobey with his tank. I was totally dissing it because it didn't have any guns on it, but I was just jealous because it had a 10-K sound system stuck in the back.

"Our neighbours have been complaining to the Environmental Health because of the noise. There's this sheet that's been pinned up in our road, saying: 'We don't have our own lives anymore, these people must be stopped.' Johnny from my house, this bloke who lives near us waved a machete round in front of him for two and a half hours while he assessed the situation. We were watching from a top window, it was quite wicked.

"The problem is, that old man is off his head. He's totally racist as well; he was having a go at Victor saying, 'Go back to fucking Iraq and play your boom-boom-boom music there.' And Vic says: 'I'm from Yorkshire, mate.' So he goes: 'We should have fucking killed you the first time round, you lot.' He is quite



Pool's cool for this hirsute prestidigitator

hardcore, but he probably wasn't even in the war. I reckon he was one of those types who hid away.

"I've been in his house in



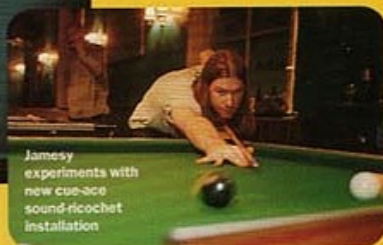
Cylob (left): quietly sinister presence

my dream actually, it's like a *Silence Of The Lambs* sort of thing, but less organised. He's probably got a pit where he's making a dog out of loads of other bits of dogs. His dogs are his wife and kids, he has full-on conversations with them, beats them up when they bark and shouts: 'You little fucking c**s, you bastards' and puts out this ammonia stuff – and then he gets all sorry and starts apologising. We told him we had respect for him, but he said, 'You're always taking the piss

out of me when I'm Hoovering my lawn.' Johnny said the police wouldn't think too much of him for waving this machete around, and he goes: 'I don't fucking care, I'll chop their heads off with it as well.' A well hardcore bloke, we have to admit.

"You want to see Cylob when he's pissed, he's well psycho. We were in New York once and there was this free musician thing in this bar where people came in and did whatever they wanted. He went on the mic for about 20 minutes just doing stupid noises. All these New York people clapped him as well. Then he threw a glass at my head. Hours and hours later we found him asleep in this doorway in the snow. He would've fuckin' had it, but he didn't care.

"Bacon Frazzles are wicked actually; you can still taste them three days later when you



Jamesy experiments with new cue-ace sound-ricochet installation

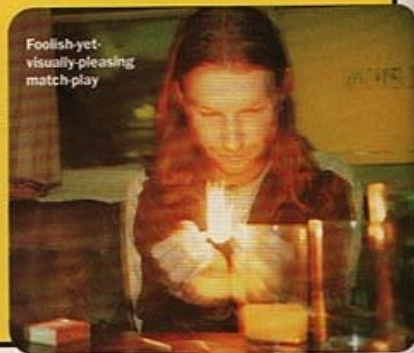
burp. Do you want to see 'Grandad's Last Erection'? (Does match-trick where the burning embers point upwards in a sick parody of said phenomenon) Sulphur's hardcore."

Total consumed: eight pints bitter, five pints lager, six vodka and orange, two pints Guinness, two Cokes, five Irish Mists.
IAN HARRISON

JAKE CURTIS



The lads: unafraid to swill



Foolish-yet-visually-pleasing match-play

Steve Samacq's



PACK OF LIES

MONTHLY SCURRI- FROM THE MAN WHO KNOWS!

There aren't many job vacancies for semi-famous pop groups once they've passed their sell-by date, are there? It's not like in soccer where you can just take up a second career in management, or better still land yourself a job as a media pundit. Mind you, there's a thought. Could the appalling *Chart Show* be livened up by having Shaun Ryder as the studio expert, complete with freeze-frame video and magic pen. Alternatively now that *Sportsnight* has bitten the dust, you could have a midweek music show with highlights from the night's gigs and a studio panel made up of Des Lynam, with Noel Gallagher (as Alan Hansen) and Ed from the Chemical Brothers (as Trevor Brooking).

Talking of TV, we had the *Top Of The Pops* experience again this month – which was nice. My neighbour 'Honest' Clive told me recently that he used to do some building work for a TV company and was once offered tickets to

TOTP, but: "We all turned them down because it's rubbish." You always get an honest opinion from Clive, but to tell the truth *Top Of The Pops* has improved immeasurably under the guidance of producer Ric Blaxill, a man who isn't duped by the dull workings of the music industry.

The *Top Of The Pops* experience starts for me and Jo "What do I sound like now?" Whitley at about 2pm, when we turn up at the Elstree studios and a security guard – quite rightly – says: "Never heard of you, what band are you with?" Then we rehearse some links, which you have to hone down to precise timings, and then it's the first run-through which allows people to forget their lines and the camera crew to adjust their 'angles'. That's followed by a second run-through, where Gina G and co. emerge in full dress-rehearsal mode, and then you get a break for an hour and a bit



Des: magic pen

which signals a quick visit to the bar for some Dutch courage and an agonising five minutes working out which one of the two T-shirts you've brought you're going to wear.

I can guarantee that I had some vivid dreams as a small boy, but I never once dreamt that one day I'd end up trying to fix my Walkman in a dressing room opposite the Spice Girls. Or end up sitting five feet away from various *EastEnders* (that Ricky bloke looks as vacant in real life as he does on the show, though he did smile at the Spice troupe and they waved back. It's all quite showbiz, as you might imagine).

Then, about 7pm the audience are wheeled in and warmed up by two top pros. Your palms start sweating; and a cheery man hands you a huge gold microphone. The

floor manager makes some strange signals at you with her hands, indicating how long there is left before the camera focuses in on you, and you're underway. There were some technical hitches this time round, but otherwise not a bad show (have you noticed how effortless Suede look on TV now? They make the *TOTP* thing look so easy. The bastards!). Finally, you retreat to the bar – in this case



Power: rattles off

just in time to catch Cast before they travelled through the night back to Liverpool for two days off. I always wondered whether bands get blasé after being on *TOTP*, but Cast seem to have retained their enthusiasm – not to mention an instant recall of all their appearances. John Power just rattles them off:

"Fine Time", that was top. 'Alright' we weren't very good. 'Sandstorm' I enjoyed..." etc etc.

I don't know if it's just me, but I still get a little thrill when a band gets on *The Pops*. Here's hoping the Casts and Garbage will be followed next year by Kenickie, Tiger, Sebadoh (how good would that be?) and the Fun Lovin' Criminals, who I saw play last night and were as cool as you like. Here's a band so laidback that even playing a Polish prison didn't phase them. Not only that, but later that night there was the Alabama 3 gig in London, which I must confess brought a tear to my eye. Not the kind of thing that happens to many people as they go about their business...



Suede: "the bastards"

FLAVOUR OF THE MONTH ALABAMA 3

Where are they from?

South London

Line-up: Larry Love (vocals), Reverend D Wayne Love (vocals), Mountain Of Love (mouth organ and sampling genius), Congaman Love (congas), Little Boy Love (guitar), Guitar Love (guitar) and Spirit Of Love (keyboards).

What's the story?

Met in rehab where they were visited by "a man with golden skin", who rechristened them and sent them on a mission to "spread the light of love". Sounds like a funny sort of

rehab to me. Back in Brixton squatland, they started fusing blues, techno and gospel and played a string of wild parties populated by south London's hippest acid house/country converts. Signed to



The clearly innumerate 3

Elemental here and then landed a deal with Geffen in the States, despite running up a bar bill the size of the Empire State Building at their first meeting. Debut single is the gorgeous punk Gospel track 'Ain't Going To Goa', backed with the pumping (yes, it's pumping) 'Mao Tse Tung Said'.

Chances of being the Next Big Thing?

Good. They look like the average contents of a Magistrates Court waiting room. There's a new single early next year. Praise be.

Other bands to look out for?

The Peccadilloes, who have a new double A-side single out which is moody and broody and recommended by Donna from Elastica; and two of Alan McGee's recent discoveries, Arnold and Wireless. Not the best names, but proof that McGee is still on a roll.

ANOTHER MAN: Where are you at the moment?

APHEX TWIN: I'm chilling with some mates in Scotland; someone is preparing a smoke and the other is playing some tunes.

AM: What was the first thing you thought of today?

AT: I dreamt the world was ending as we know it... again. And had to pull myself out of that, it feels too big to change but I don't give up hope, never will.

AM: What do you like to listen to in the morning?

AT: Sometimes I put the radio on, usually because it's rubbish and it makes me want to do something good. Or I resist the temptation to put something on – again to make me do my own thing. If I check my emails I put on some brain floss like extreme noise things.

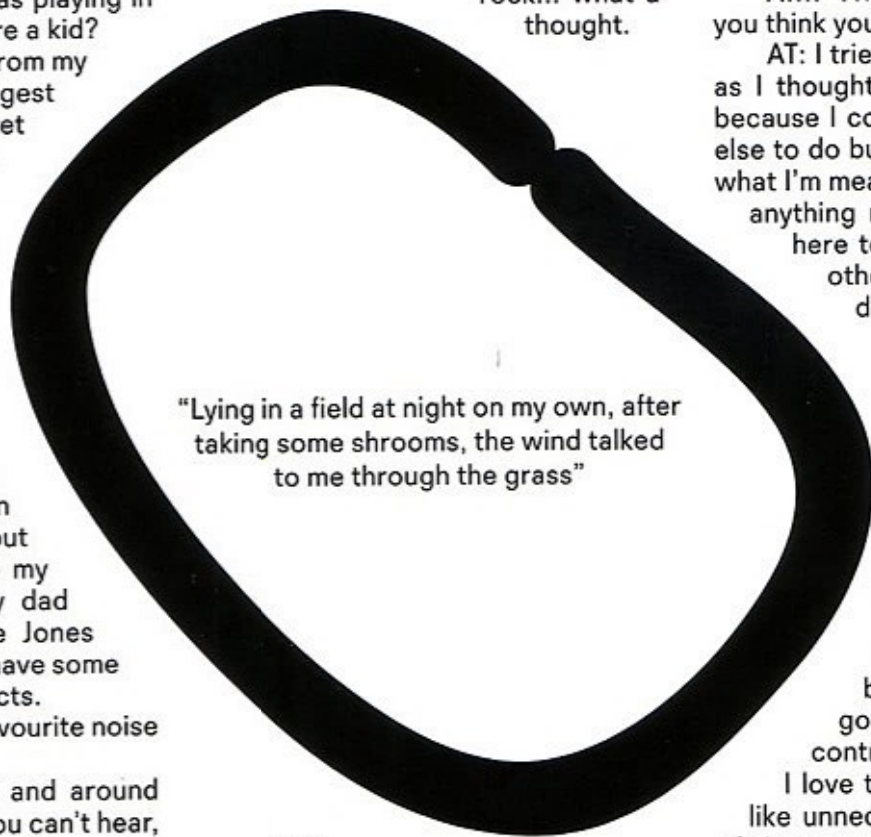
AM: What music was playing in the house when you were a kid?

AT: Mainly Radio 3 from my parents. From my youngest sister: The Smiths, Velvet Underground, Foetus, The Jesus and the Mary Chain... I don't think I liked any of it. Some of it, like The Smiths, I've grown to like in a nostalgic way. When I think about Morrissey it always puts a smile on my face, I like listening to him talk more than listening to his music but he's a unique voice so my sis had that right. My dad used to like old Spike Jones records as well, which have some of the earliest tape effects.

AM: What's your favourite noise at the moment?

AT: Wind, through and around things – as wind itself you can't hear, only feel. I had an extremely moving, enlightening experience when I was 17 after taking some shrooms: lying in a field at night on my own, the wind talked to me through the grass. I find wind incredible; it can be the darkest of dark, totally ancient. It is completely alive but that hasn't been discovered by mainstream science yet. I could also hear sounds before they happened, they had a kind of reversed delay with the pitches

rising, which got louder until the event happened – that completely changed my perception of time and made me realise that we perceive time in just one way, which is maybe useful to our species but is in no way universal. I also love the sound of mine shafts when you chuck rocks down them, I think because my dad was a miner. I liked the deepest ones best and used to imagine that the rock would keep going down to the centre of the world. He showed me some old mines when I was a kid, when I used to go exploring with him. I was pleased to discover some in Scotland – I've just moved back up here again after a few years in Cornwall and London. I love thinking that man has apparently only drilled about six miles down into the earth but it's approximately 4,000 miles to the middle. All that rock... what a thought.



"Lying in a field at night on my own, after taking some shrooms, the wind talked to me through the grass"

AM: Describe your music in one word?

AT: dflaghaozoushiduqwd.

AM: What can we expect from your next album?

AT: I've got six completed. Two are very non-commercial, abstract, modular-synthesis, field recordings – those I finished four years ago. Another one is *Melodies from Mars*, which I redid about three years ago.

There's one of stuff I won't go into a comp of old tracks which is never really finished and always changing and then one I'm working on now. There are also loads of tracks which don't belong anywhere.

AM: Who is your music for?

AT: On the surface it really is just me. I have noticed that my music does speak to a lot of people and does influence people directly and indirectly; we are all one, so that is obvious I suppose. I'm not an island and I am the result of everything around me like everything else on this planet. I don't set out for it to be for anyone else but I know it will be heard by a lot of people. I make it mostly to change things and not support things that already exist but this isn't always the case; sometimes things may have to be reinforced first before you can go elsewhere.

AM: Without music where do you think you'd be?

AT: I tried not making it for ages as I thought maybe I was doing it because I couldn't think of anything else to do but soon realised that it's what I'm meant to do. I love to make anything really, it's what we are here to do – either help each other or create – it's our divine gift.

AM: Describe your pre-gig ritual and your performance..

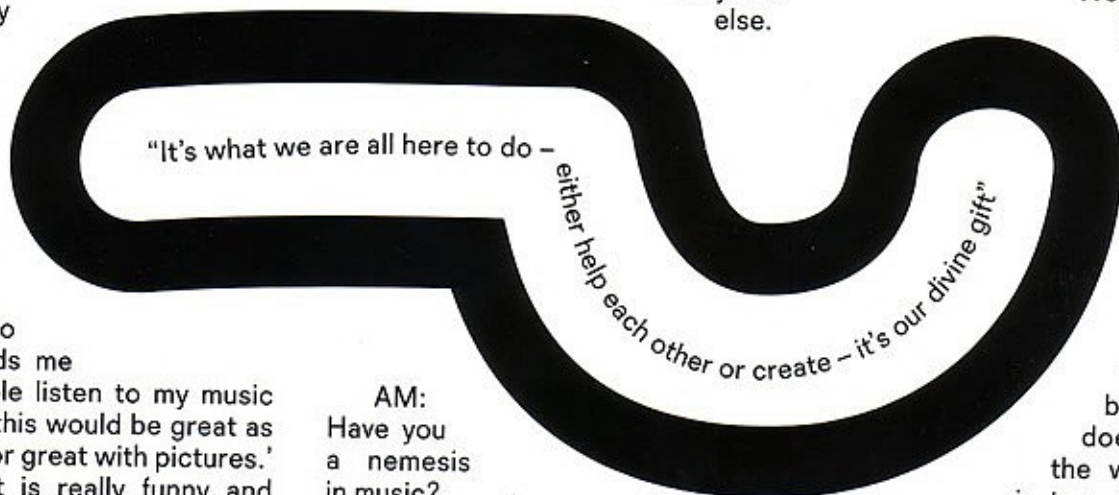
AT: A beer or two maybe before and not too much dinner – got to stay a bit hungry. I try to be as normal as possible and continue whatever I am feeling because inevitably it goes wrong and I lose control and get nervous but I love that – it's a rush. I don't like unnecessary performances – it's just so embarrassing – but most 'sheople' need to be told what to do and how to react. What I do with current tools takes concentration and I'm not going to pretend it doesn't; jumping around like a prick trying to make people think what you're doing is better than it actually is, is dumb. My concentration would suffer. If you get into it and jump around, great – the thing is most people pretend they're into it or con

themselves into thinking it's good. I love the fact that if you are very still, which I usually am, it's much, much harder to get everyone dancing and going mental, because they look to you for how they should react. If people do go mental I know it's only because of the music. If I suddenly got on the mic and jumped around, people would get into it immediately but that's just too easy and false. This is because many people find the music on its own way too abstract, they need something else visual and need to be told what to feel. It reminds me of when people listen to my music and say, 'Oh, this would be great as a soundtrack or great with pictures.' Ahhhh! - that is really funny and annoying; deprived frozen souls. A lot of acts are just too insecure to just play their music and shut the fuck up, they feel the need to tell people what they should be doing, like, 'Make some noise,' 'Put your hands in the air.' Why? If I want to put my hands in the fucking air I will, I don't need some fuckstick telling me what to do - I get enough of that outside a gig. When I hear people on stage saying things like, 'Do you want some more?' I would pay good money for the whole crowd to shout back, 'Maybe, we'll let you know a bit later on, let's see how the show progresses first.' I also don't want to give people the satisfaction of seeing me move, why should I? They're lucky that I'm even visible.

AM: Are you superstitious?

AT: Anything considered bad luck I turn into meaning good luck: for example, I make a point of walking under ladders. You believe what you want to believe, simple as that. If you want to believe that something is bad luck, it just means that you want your life to get worse but you don't want to admit it. You make your own luck from what you believe and you can pretty much change it to whatever you like; you just have to really believe it - that's

the hard bit. I know all of us have the potential to do almost anything we want but we aren't encouraged and that is no accident: the human spirit is kept down, and mostly by the media. Education should not be about remembering facts someone else thinks important but how to think and how to be encouraged to do whatever we want - as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else.



AM: Have you a nemesis in music?

AT: I think if you have an enemy in art you need to rethink why you are doing it. It's not a competition. It's about adding flavours into the earth-mix, which were not there before.

AM: Is there a song you wish you'd written?

AT: I've never felt like that, but loads of music immediately makes me want to make my own. It is easy to confuse pushing yourself further creatively with competition; creating should not be about that, it's not about being better than anyone else - it's about doing what other people are not doing. We shouldn't see that as competition, it's just something good that enriches our lives and makes our consciousness evolve. Our society encourages us to compete with each other; it's terrible and very hard to break free from. We could all win and be much happier as a result... need to get rid of this money stuff first though.

AM: Where are you happiest?

AT: Creating or being around important people in my life.

AM: What band - past or present - would you like to be in?

AT: I'm in the world band: we have six billion members, we're loud and have written so many songs.

AM: What scares you most?

AT: My own mind when it's not making music. Like a lot of people who love making things, if I stop, it can be destructive.

AM: What's the oddest thing you've read about yourself?

AT: That I'm weird. Being called weird is a weird thing because... can you feel weird if you're doing what you want to do? I don't think so.

Weird is when people aren't doing what they are meant to do, you know, or aren't doing anything creative or caring - that is weird because that doesn't benefit the whole, which in turn won't benefit you, that's fucking weird!

AM: What reaction do you want your music to provoke?

AT: To make people make their own paths through life and to not follow too closely ones others have left. I quite often get people who can be pretty confrontational with me, people I've never met before but at the same time they're happy to meet me, which is really odd, and kind of impossible to get used to.

AM: What do you believe in? And is it worth dying for?

AT: In not being controlled by other people. Yes, it's worth dying for but we don't really die, though, do we? Especially those who died for a good cause. We as humans love to control because we love to create but controlling people is a form of creativity gone wrong. Hitler was apparently a failed artist, which makes a lot of sense to me; he sought artistic appraisal and didn't get it or wasn't encouraged or told practice makes perfect, possibly. All of us are constructions - not products - of our environment.

AM: What song do you want played at your funeral?

AT: Is that a threat? I'll DJ at your funeral for free, if someone reminds me when you're dead.

THE BACKBEAT BAND Music From The Motion Picture Backbeat

VIRGIN
It's no surprise that someone should want to make a film about Stu Sutcliffe. But for him, the story goes, The Beatles wouldn't have washed that Teddy Boy grease away for years, and Lennon would never have got into Pop Art. So, we await *Backbeat* (the movie) with something approaching interest.

The problem with 'Backbeat' (the soundtrack) is that the Hamburg years were musically the least interesting of the Best Pop Group Ever. No one in their right mind would want to listen to 'Long Tall Sally' when they could be listening to 'Revolver' or 'The White Album'. And even if they did, surely they'd want to listen to the sodding Beatles doing it.

Still, spirited evocations and all that from an all-star band featuring Thurston Moore, Mike Mills, Dave Grohl, Don Fleming and Greg Dulli (under the auspices of producer Don Was), but a worrying doubt remains. Namely that The Beatles were English. ■■■□□

STUART MACONIE

BANCO DE GAIA Maya

PLANET DOG
Loosely connected with the Megadog collective, Banco De Gaia were responsible for last year's rather fine 'Desert Wind' single. Sadly, this debut album reveals

them as 'ambient' in the most long-haired, spiffed-out sense of the word.

It's all gentle flecks of guitar and dodgy eastern and Arabic samples over repetitive, predictably tribal rhythm tracks. Crucially, it lacks the contrasting light and shade required for a gripping ambient piece of the standard of Sven Våth's 'Accident In Paradise'.

'Maya' is typical of the arse end of the current dance explosion. While the rock world time travels back to punk, too many of those with their hands on contemporary technology want to regress further and become bloody hippies. Ambient, so much to answer for. ■■■□□

GARETH GRUNDY

BOY GEORGE The Devil In Sister George EP

VIRGIN
In case you've been living in a cardboard box in the Outer Hebrides for the last few years, you should be aware that Boy George is now completely reconstructed as an all-round hipster and on-the-case DJ.

Thus we find him releasing a set of new remixes of his material from the last five years. The results are excellent. Ramp furnish two makeovers in their traditionally cheery style for 'Generations Of Love' and 'Miss Me Blind'. 'Love Hurts' is regenerated as a full-on disco record, replete with hissing hi-hats, precipitous strings, horn stabs and piano fills, while the sparse

Metal Bird mix of 'Am I Losing Control' sees all the vocals stripped away and replaced with isolated whoops and that funny keyboard noise familiar to anyone who's ever heard a C&C Music Factory tune.

Only ragga mixers to the stars Maffia & Fluxy draw a blank, with their attempts to squeeze anything remotely entertaining from the sorry slice of processed sentimentality that is 'Everything I Own'. Otherwise, corking stuff. ■■■■□

ADAM HIGGINBOTHAM

THE CHARLATANS Up To Our Hips

BEGGARS BANQUET
Long ago, in a time that fashion forgot, there wheezed a scene of dodgy-looking minstrels from The North, and they made sounds that were remarked upon as "of bag". Soon after, most of these urchins went down the time-honoured pan.

Except The Charlatans, that is. This is their third album now, and it starts where the last, 'Between 10th & 11th', left off: cheezy organ embellishment, guitar solos alternately on flange and wah-wah, whiney vocals, etc. And it's actually not half bad.

'Can't Get Out Of Bed' is a cracking lead single that collides nicely with the riff-rock revival. While there's nothing else quite as cool and compact here (the album was produced by Steve Hillage, after all), the songs slide by in a most agreeable post-Manchester haze - the most pop-mungus being 'Jesus Hairdo' and 'Up To Our Hips'.

But the real question has to be: are there any songs about Rob Collins' spell in chokey? Can we guess from the lyrics that Martin Blunt is a nutter? And are there any

telling us what Tim Burgess' favourite colour is? No! Damnation. Have to keep listening, I suppose. ■■■□□

SIÂN PATTENOEN

ALEX CHILTON Clichés

NEW ROSE
Anyone who's loved anything by him (the '60s soul-pop Box Tops, the wiry, explosive Big Star, even his smooth, jazzy '80s stuff) knows for certain that Alex Chilton shouldn't be making an LP full of dreary old show tunes wily crooned and strummed on acoustic guitar.

Unfortunately, that's exactly what he's done. After all the admittedly patchy promise of his recent Big Star reunion and his team-up with Teenage Fanclub, it must be Chilton's sworn intention to ditch both his new Creation-type fans and his long-suffering devotees.

For whatever reason he made 'Clichés' (contractual obligation, maybe?), that frosty title cannot excuse such crimes as singing Mel Torme's sickeningly wholesome 'Christmas Song' (you know it: 'Chestnuts roasting on an open fire', etc) without the least hint of irony. It's just cack. Alex, you've inflicted your worst ever album on your audience. Nice one. ■□□□□

ANDREW PERRY

ELVIS COSTELLO Brutal Youth

WEA
'Brutal Youth' is the album Costello's fans have been begging him to make for years. Out goes the poetry readings, the brass bands and the beard that made him look not a day over 173. In comes The

Attractions, bassist Nick Lowe and a collection of pared-down songs designed to show that, in the Angry Young Troubadour stakes, Elv is still a contender.

Of course, he isn't, but that doesn't stop the man having a damned fine try. One by one 'Brutal Youth' runs through the elements that made Costello's name in the first place. 'Kinder Street' and 'Clown Strike' demonstrate that he can still cut it in the acidic couplet stakes. 'My Science Fiction Twin', meanwhile, somehow finds a direct energy line back to his New Wave 'My Alm Is True' origins. Only the occasional lapse into Radio 2 sweater-wearing easy listening on tracks like 'Too Soon To Know' let slip that this man is someone now more used to hanging out with Paul McCartney than Captain Sensible.

By the way, word has it that the beard is currently busy writing Wendy James' next album. ■■■■□□

CLARK COLLIS

COUNTING CROWS August And Everything Else

GEFFEN
When bands start ripping off Ralph Steadman for their cover art it's a fair bet they mean business. The scratchy logo. The big ugly blotches. Either the album is going to contain a canon of finely wrought angst or there's been one almighty balls-up at the designer's.

In the case of Counting Crows, who're currently cutting it big back home in America, the art department can rest easy. Whether re-writing Dylan with 'Mr Jones' or declining the temptation to rock-out on 'Omaha', the San Franciscan five-piece plot a steady bitter-sweet

THE CRANBERRIES

the cranberries



everybody else is doing it, so why can't we?

CD • CASSETTE • LP
Includes the hit single 'Linger'

