

Kitchen House Blend: Anthony Coleman, Daniel Bernard Roumain and Lois V Vierk

The Kitchen; Thu 2-Sat 4

A good house band makes for a happy house. Vonda Shepard's bar group in *Ally McBeal* tends toward ingratiating ballads or strident soul classics; this musical equivalent of a power suit is a good enough fit for the *Ally McBeal* crew. In the late-night comedy ring, Paul Schaffer gives David Letterman the circus calls he needs—or deserves. But a house band stimulating enough for enterprising contemporary composers has to be especially full-bodied.

Some find that strength and breadth in the Kitchen House Blend, a ten-piece experimental chamber orchestra that draws its players from jazz (reedist Sam Furnace, trumpeter Ravi Best), contemporary classical (percussionist Jim Pugliese, pianist Kathleen Supové) and rock (drummer Tony Lewis). Curator John King then commissions three composers from equally far-flung backgrounds to write for the ensemble, which performs the pieces over three nights.

Throughout the '90s, music critics discussed the implications of genre combinations and new takes on the

improvisation/composition divide. Meanwhile, in universities and post-modern pagodas such as the Kitchen, musicians had already assumed these approaches as a lingua franca. This sixth installment of the series features some of the better syncretists to take that musical vocabulary into the 21st century. Edgy composer Lois V Vierk will premiere "In Memory" and is sure to exercise the group at Olympic capacity. Anthony Coleman's "Lapidation" is bound to be reference-rich, with good humor mellowing the acidity of his cultural critiques (check the avant-klezmer of his Selfhaters Orchestra on Tzadik). Daniel Bernard Roumain is a virtuoso violinist who has used hip-hop to lure his students into concert music; his "Voodoo for Violin and Chamber Orchestra" could pull from Hendrix and Bartok without missing one phat pizzicato beat.

Supported by musicians of the Kitchen House Blend's caliber, the composers will want to highlight individual players' sounds, and if the writing does call for full-ensemble swells, it'll feel like a catharsis. Whatever the evening turns up, this house band has the experience and expedition to jolt us with the stops and starts of pure experimentation.—Michelle Mercer

Sigh + Thrones + Khanate Northslx; Thu 2

Three decades after its inception, heavy metal has become as vague and insufficient a tag as "world music" or "dance music." Performances in NYC over the past few days have offered potent testimony to the realm's teeming diversity, from Gwar's gleeful Guignol to Motörhead's biker machismo, from Morbid Angel's guitar super-herosics to Down's opiated angst. Now, the extraordinary Japanese trio Sigh will stretch the genre to its breaking point in its first-ever local appearance.

Founded by bassist-keyboardist Mirai Kawashima and drummer Satoshi Fujinami in 1989, Sigh began life as a straightforward black-metal trio, complementing its crows and corpse-paint with a dash of samurai iconography for local flavor. Joined by guitarist Shinichi Ishikawa in 1993, the band was groomed for excess by the late Mayhem guitarist Euronymous, the central figure in the Norwegian black-metal scene, who issued the band's debut album prior to his untimely death that same year.

From the beginning, however, Kawashima's classical training, allegiance to the '80s melodic thrash of Celtic Frost and Venom, and taste for mind-altering substances led him to deviate from black-metal orthodoxy. On 1997's *Hail Horror Hail* and 1999's *Scenario IV: Dead Dreams* (both on Cacophonous), Kawashima incorporated psychedelic flourishes, synthesized orchestrations and ghostly female choirs into his increasingly baroque construc-



Sigh

tions, and dabbled in both serialism and free jazz.

Remarkably, the sometimes hide-bound metal audience has followed Sigh down those oblique byways. Last year's *Imaginary Somicscape* (Century Media), an ambitious release that veers from heroic glam-slam to cocktail-lounge fusion, rubbery reggae and Mr. Roboto vocoder vocals—often within a single tune—was hailed by metal cognoscenti as one of the best releases of 2001.

Nearly as subversive are the two acts traveling with Sigh, tortured doomcore quartet Khanate—featuring Sunn O)))'s Stephen O'Malley and former O.L.D. members James Plotkin and Alan Dubin—and Thrones, a.k.a. former Earth and Melvins bassist Joe Preston in his one-man-Thunder God guise. Don't expect to see too many hands held up in devil-horn salutes—they'll be too busy scratching heads.—Steve Smith

Album reviews



Pedro the Lion

Control (Jade Tree)

David Bazan issues statements that essentially say, "people are awful, but you must persevere." Released under the name Pedro the Lion, the Seattle-based songwriter's slow-burning records have found their way into the hearts and minds of emo kids and heart-broken postcollegiates alike. Carried by Bazan's brusque-but-defeated voice and long, loping guitar lines, some argue that Pedro reached its apotheosis with 2000's *Winners Never Quit*, a deft examination of everything wrong about everything we do. A devout Christian, Bazan took to examining failings like a fish to water, but to his credit, he's mostly left Jesus out of his musical proceedings. Instead, he's taken to acting as a fly on the walls of the

wicked and exposing their skeletons with a few sentences in a Raymond Carver-like flash.

But whichever side of the fence you're on regarding Bazan's emo-Christian deal, eventually everyone has to face the fact that this music is openly judgmental of people and their morals; the songs' characters *deserve* to get screwed to the wall. These people—archetypes, really—are the scum of the earth, philanderers, fakes and phonies one and all.

Viewed in that light, *Control* is the first album I know of that directly addresses why the rest of the world hates Americans. Within our puritanical roots, Bazan sees a naturally occurring cancer that pits the economically and sociologically strong against the weak—and guess who wins every time? When he says, "If it's not making dollars, it's not making sense" in "Penetration," you want to hate the cliché, but as he rattles off lines about cigarette ads and sports cars, it becomes clear he's working in rock's us-against-them tradition. And so the album becomes not a sadcore exposé of the evils of mankind, but something very punk—a refutation, a taunt. That last-ditch sarcasm will cause you to either love *Control* or hate yourself. Bazan, being the demanding songwriter that he is, would probably prefer both.

—Joey Sweeney

Pedro the Lion plays Bowery Ballroom Sun 5.

Also this week

Papa Wemba

(S.O.B.'s, Fri 3) Congolese fashion plate Papa Wemba doesn't always travel with the full-size version of his ace *soukous* band Viva la Musica, so consider this jam a special occasion. Just in case you've forgotten, his is the remarkable tenor that helped turn Congolese rumba into buoyant *soukous* several decades ago, as he fronted a band called Zaike Langa Langa. And people are still talking about Wemba's surprise gig at the Lion's Den last summer.

World/Inferno Friendship Society

(Bowery Ballroom, Fri 3) The World/Inferno Friendship Society's bizarre goulash of a sound can energize brave souls and frighten the shit out of weak ones. The local nine-piece, which pairs horns and accordion with punk spirit and old-world style, celebrates the release of its second album, *Just the Best Party* (Gern Blandsten).

Kristin Hersh

(Knitting Factory, Sat 4) You'd think that after all these years of exorcising her demons with dark, disturbing, arty pop songs, Kristin Hersh would be rid of them by now. You'd think wrong. Despite the title of her fifth solo effort, *Sunny Border Blue* (4AD), the former Throwing Muses leader sounds as bitter as ever. Aside from her scary voice, Hersh's biggest gift is her ability to turn a phrase, and here she effortlessly tosses off evocative images and ace one-liners.

David Sylvian

(Town Hall, Sun 5) This is David Sylvian's first NYC appearance in 14 years. His former band, Japan, built its reputation on misty-tinted reverie and Eastern atmospherics. After Japan's demise in 1982, Sylvian launched a fascinating solo career built around moody introspection, inventive instrumentation and forward-thinking production. It's good to have him back.

Lemon Juice Quartet

(Tonic, Wed 8) A pretty substantial percentage of the jazz scene is currently trying to rock out or catch a groove, but what makes this quartet special is that it actually does both. *Peasant Songs* (Pladrum), LIQ's new disc, is considerably less noisy than previous outings, but the newfound quiet suits both its repertoire (pieces by Satie and Bartók) and its fine trumpet-guitar front line. And don't worry, the Juicers haven't lost their Ornette-ish streak.

Princess Superstar + DJ Spooky + Jean Grae + Mr. Len

(Bowery Ballroom, Thu 9) That these artists can make up a coherent bill is testament to hip-hop's inclusiveness. Princess Superstar's blond ambition results in a fun and funky good time on her latest album, *Princess Superstar Is* (Studio IK7). The multifaceted Spooky remains out there a ways, searching for who knows what. Jean Grae is an MC you'll get to know in 2002. She's spit ferocious rhymes on a bunch of other people's jams and is set to release her debut this summer. Former Company Flow DJ Mr. Len kicks it all off in style.

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