

The Fall

The Light User Syndrome

JET RECORDS JETCD 1012 CD/LP

Eggheads, boneheads, tell me: did you really expect still to be feeling the need to queue? And have you ever found a simple way to explain why we're still queuing, still faithful, to those that pass by, shaking their disbeliever-heads? Is anything harder than trying to say why something's impossibly funny, ludicrously great, when you're faced with someone who wilfully won't get it? (Didn't some sage once describe them as sounding like a bad youth-club band?)

Let's just start with things that forced me to laugh (out loud). The title "DIY Meat". The 'German' that Mark speaks in "Das Vulture Ans Ein Nutter-Wain", and also the tossed little constellation of organ notes that open it. The unveiling of one Mike Bennett as 'new Fall singer' for "Old White Train" (a 'standard', allegedly). Bennett being not only the record's co-producer but also — and this is the real achievement — very nearly as tone-deaf as old MES himself. The fuzzed-out mantra in "Interlude/Chililism" — "*Chiseller, He was a god-damn chiseller*" — or Brix's unexpected line a little further on: "*Pink Floyd are short!*" ("Interlude/Chililism" being a several-act collage-epic in the Fall tradition of "Spectre Vs Rector", say.) The scrambled Industrial loop that several times interrupts "Cheatham Hill" — which seems to be based round the riff of Bowie's "Heroes". (Who let that through?) The chorus — if that's the correct technical term — of "Oxymoron": "*Mr Murder's lair! SCRUFFED-up!*" The vibraphone glide of "Secession Man", with intriguing much-repeated closing phrase, "*Inside outside turn around — other men!*" and homoerotic S&M subtext. (Am I imagining this?)

Later for what any of this might mean: though it's untrue that MES is a wilfully obscure lyric-writer, there's no question it takes time to come at a Fall song from the right angle to be in sync with its peculiar brand of simplicity. If there's a dizzying — not to say disorientating — sense that Smith is finally turning his mind to the interpersonal politics of desire, well, don't quote me on that: who knows what will turn out to be a figure for what, when the riddle clarifies? For now, the elements that grab are all relatively formal: the abstractedly relaxed and louche slur that Mark's formerly iron-hard yell seems to be turning towards, the density of the balance between individual pop and general noise-architecture, a multifold use of variation of textured distance, fiercely vibrational (and sound-filled) soundspace, and consciously ragged unisons, emphasising more than ever the sense that this is a group, not a one-man band; the peculiar marriage between Simon Wolstenholme's hurtling if cranky Techno-riffs and Karl Burns's and Steve Hanley's very human, very physical (very Fall-ish) drums-bounce and bass-kick (the emergence of a 'dance-music' dimension was first noted on *The Infotainment Scan*, to be sure, but it sure didn't gel back then).

The other thing to say is that *The Light User Syndrome* is the record that made me go back and listen to all the others (and to hunt down the ones I'd missed, and worst of all, to download from the Web 124 pages of Fall lyrics as guessed-at and transcribed by another nutcase, in Arizona). I was going to add that of course there was always going to be such a record — until it struck me what a strange remark that would be, if applied to any other group.

MARK SINKER

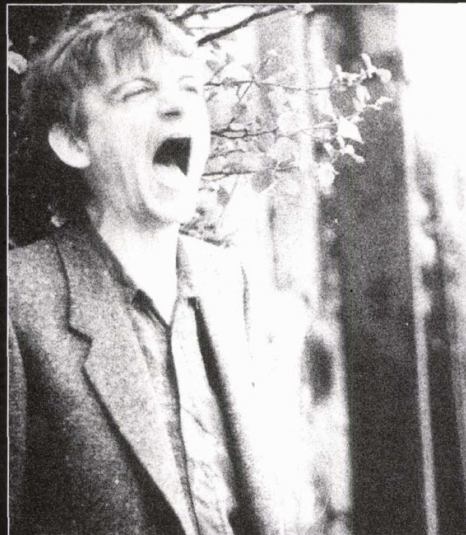


PHOTO: JAYNE HOUGHTON

us that Palestine's change of creative direction was minimalism's greatest loss.
EDWIN PONUCEY

Jeremy Peyton Jones

North South East West

NEW TONE 129806748 CD

Jeremy Peyton Jones is one of a small constellation of British composers who first came to public attention — if not to prominence — in the early 80s by means of their particular assertive approach to music and performance. Jones is a founder member of Regular Music (here present in its second incarnation), an ensemble which took its cues from developments across the Atlantic. It was a group, formed in much the same way as Philip Glass and Steve Reich had instituted their own ensembles, to play their composers' music, and to explore and develop their own divergent current of British minimalism.

North South East West collects six pieces of music which Peyton Jones had written, for voice and ensemble, between 1981 (*Purcell Manoeuvres*, written for, and not surprisingly, The Michael Nyman Band) and 1992 (*The Gazetteer Of World Order*). There is a strong commitment to a sense of drama and movement in his music: no coincidence, perhaps, as much of this has been written with various forms of music theatre in mind. There is, for all Peyton Jones's rumbustious vigour (at times reminiscent of the rude health displayed by Nyman's early Campanello band), a subtlety that only increases over time, in the process achieving a growing cogency. *The Only Winner* (1984) is a bold, sombre work in which soprano Mary Phillips provides the glue for some precariously fast tempi. By the end of the decade, Peyton Jones is experimenting with vocal phasing (taking Reich into a more orchestrated form) and some static vocal lines — soprano Melanie Pappenheim's rendition of *Going Down* (1989) is a high point, managing to convey a growing sense of panic within an intentionally severe melodic line.

But the centrepiece is the title composition. Using lines culled from navigation texts, its surface is simple, and as a way to convey (as the composer says) a sense of "space, insecurity and isolation", it works well. There are some

New York critic Tom Johnson's excellent *The Voice Of New Music*, he is cited as an important performer and eccentric.

One reason Palestine remained a peripheral figure even during minimalism's 60s/70s heyday was because his records, when they appeared at all, were released on obscure labels in tiny editions. Mercifully, the curious can pick up Palestine's recording more easily now they have been reissued on CD. *Strumming*, his great work for the French Shandar label,

has already resurfaced, and now the Dutch Barooni label has reissued the ultra-scarce *Four Manifestations On Six Elements* (originally released on a private art gallery label as a double LP). So rare is the original LP that this re-release could be considered as a new album from Palestine, who has since turned his back on musical composition for a fine arts career. Consisting of two electronic sections — a pair of finely tuned insect drones that nod in the direction of his contemporary LaMonte

Young — and two long piano pieces which glide hypnotically from his beloved Bösendorfer, Palestine produces music that cascades from his keyboard to flood the imagination with hallucinatory tremblings and haunted remembrances.

The manic side of the man, the piano string-busting, cognac-swigging, Iggy Pop-style character described in Johnson's book, never shows its face here. Instead we are left with the subtle electronic roar of *Three Fifths* to remind