

The Fall

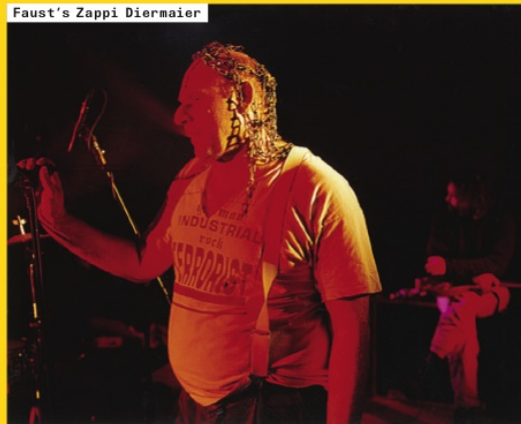
SURREY UNIVERSITY
GUILDFORD, UK 1983

They say nobody's ever quite the same after seeing The Fall for the first time, and while I'm not a diehard by any means – I don't own any Fall albums recorded after 1985, for example, though I think I've heard most of them – no single gig is imprinted quite so heavily on my memory as this one. OK, I could mention Led Zeppelin at Knebworth in 1979 (support: Chas 'N' Dave) but I was a different person then. In fact, my reaction to both gigs was remarkably similar. I remember gasping at the virtuosity on show, in The Fall's case a new kind of post-punk virtuosity that I was still learning how to read, while simultaneously un-learning the trad-rock commandments that had seen me through my early teens. Ever the nerdy muso, I spent the journey home after the gig babbling to my mates about the raw, dazzling double-drum interplay of Karl Burns and Paul Hanley rather than the antics of that curmudgeon's curmudgeon Mark E Smith. I marvelled at how Craig Scanlon's random shards of guitar cut through the grey murk of the sound like shafts of white light. It was one of the first concerts I'd attended in which choreographed routines and flashing lights played absolutely no part, and yet the visual image of the group bashing it out on a tiny stage (I remember Burns having to sit on top of the amp to play the second bassline on "Ludd Gang") is still incredibly vivid. In refusing to conceal the nuts and bolts of the performance, The Fall attained a level of mystery and other-worldliness that I've never seen matched. KEITH MOLINE



The Fall

Faust's Zappi Diermaier



Faust

ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL
LONDON, UK 2001

This, it was suggested by some, would be Faust's last gig. The strain of live performance was beginning to tell on Werner 'Zappi' Diermaier in particular, for whom maintaining a formidable and elaborate and formidable boiler room of percussion was exacerbating his back problems. This was not the first time Faust had played at London's South Bank arts complex – a number of leftfield groups, including Wire, found themselves by this time 'elevated' to the classical respectability of these velvet padded, hushed rooms. But, much as Wire brought with them an ageing but still raucous claque still yearning, more than 20 years on, for them to return to their punk roots, so Faust always towed in the undercurrent of their frozen rivers, a sense of chaos and potential eruption.

It was just a month after the events of 11 September 2001, and while subsequently '9/11' has been grossly overplayed as a signifier, it shouldn't be forgotten that in those days afterwards, a residue of nervousness and tension hung in the air of practically every public gathering. As Faust set forth with a lengthy, looping, pastoral instrumental, it wasn't escapist balm but tacitly ominous. Strange, then, that at this moment, a minor scuffle should break out in the stalls. It looked like something and nothing, something over nothing, the sort of thing that dies down as soon as it erupts. A minute or two passed, however, and from my

vantage point, some rows away, it appeared to be intensifying rather than abating. The torch-wielding, elderly female staff were clearly out of their depth. Fists were flying, blood and glass were now visible elements in the fray. Clearly, this was a spontaneous outburst rather than some staged 'happening' – the members of Faust played on, stunned and rather mechanical, caught in the locked groove of their inappropriately bucolic soundtrack to the alarming brouhaha. Probably, like everyone else, they felt that mixture of acidic nausea and the urge to ogle. Finally, after several minutes, the emergency services arrived and managed to break up and drag away the combatants. It turned out, from later reports, to have been a case of 'Faust Rage'; a fan impatient at someone in front impeding their view or making too much noise.

Whatever, the event apparently had a cathartic impact on Faust, whose performance took on a new and fiery grist. From broadsides of primitive riffing, as if they were creating an idea of Ur-rock from which whole new histories and traditions for the genre might spring, they built, slowly but unrelentingly, to a furious, jamming climax in which David Ball, ex- of Soft Cell, and Ingo Vauk joined them for a frenzied synthesis of rough neo-Acid and 21st century Faustrock. Faust's forays into remixing have not always been successful but on this night, the climax brought a strange relief and would have provided a fitting testimony to their ability, as inspired innocents, to absorb and reuse the noise and chaos around them. DAVID STUBBS

Morton Feldman/Stephen Whittington: Triadic Memories

PERFORMING ARTS TECHNOLOGY UNIT STUDIO
ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA 1998

Morton Feldman's *Triadic Memories* is one of the redoubtable composer's most affecting pieces. His longest composition for piano, it deals with the 'disorientation of memory' by sifting slowly through non-programmatic repetitions of various chords, suspended from concerns of tempo and performed incredibly quietly: much of the piece is in pianississimo, or even lower.

Near silence is now a vogue in underground music, largely thanks to the efforts of lowercase sound artists and quietist improvisors: certainly, the maxim 'it's harder to play soft than loud' has been rendered cliché by the cabal of artists that cluster around figures like Bernhard Günter, Radu Malfatti and Taku Sugimoto. These artists regularly invoke Feldman as an influence, but back in 1998, with little to no context for the obsessively disappearing reiterations of gently struck chords that form the building blocks of *Triadic Memories*, I initially had a hard time processing the information offered by Australian composer and lecturer Stephen Whittington's masterful performance. Perhaps it's harder to *listen* soft than loud, too.

What surprised most about *Triadic Memories*, though, was how much it *brutalised* my head, how close it came at times to sensory deprivation. Sure, it was gorgeous, with Whittington expertly pacing the repetitions, foot holding down the sustain pedal, playing softly, moving between the extreme registers of the keyboard. Sat in a supremely uncomfortable hardback chair for almost 120 minutes, listening to Feldman's work repeatedly dissolve into the room – as Jean-Luc Fafchamps writes, the music is "[reclaimed] by the silence from whence it issues" – I felt as though my entire body had been wrenched from its slumber, beaten by the softest of strikes. JOHN DALE

Fennesz

CAT'S CRADLE
CHAPEL HILL, USA 2000

The annual Transmissions Festival consistently brought forward-looking sounds to rural North Carolina, and its third edition was a laptop-heavy affair. During one stretch on the first night, five consecutive artists stared at glowing pixels. Eventually a few curveballs – including a winding set of electric guitar from John Fahey and a conceptual piece of Donna Summer sampling from Alan Licht – disrupted the digital flow. But by the time Fennesz took the stage late on the second night, he still faced the crowd's growing intolerance for watching performers tap at computer keyboards.

In mere minutes, Fennesz shattered that bubble. His wafting sounds paralysed the room and washed away memories of the previous performers like a thunderstorm flushing out humid air. His warm, liquid noise was dauntingly loud, but never oppressive, more like an aural environment than music. Eventually shards of guitar and synth poked their heads through his billowing clouds, but it was the overwhelming sound envelope that froze the room. Little on Fennesz's previous recordings had prepared me for this dense, colourful fog, and when the impeccable *Endless Summer* was released the next year, its warm figures and melodic noise perfectly evoked the beach-like memories of this unforgettable performance. MARC MASTERS