

## Duane Pitre

### *Free*

Important CD/DL/LP

### Portraits

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Many of the tuning militants profiled in Philip Clark's *Primer (The Wire 332)* were called to arms out of the frustration of having to fight to be heard. Indeed, as recently as the mid-1990s their work was so hard to find that you could fairly call it a suppressed history. But in a time when Rhys Chatham's music has been sampled for a Chrysler commercial that aired during the Super Bowl and when it's possible to carpet your room not just with the sound of drone but actual drone CDs, the need to fight seems less pressing. Certainly neither of these efforts feels like a battle cry.

The only things Duane Pitre wants to overcome on *Feel Free* are his own ingrained work habits and the mandates of his material. This 38 minute suite steps away from the rigidity that so many composers who work with equal temperament rely upon to keep their music from turning into a morass of clashing tones. The title says it all. Pitre invited his five accompanists (who play hammered dulcimer, harp, cello, double bass and violin) to depart from his written score at any point, and he introduced a further level of uncertainty by placing computer-randomised guitar harmonics at the centre of the sound field. However, in the event, either the players really liked what he wrote, or they improvised highly consonant melodies; either way, the music proceeds without conflict into a three-dimensional fractal framework of curved contours and bright, pulsating nodes. Remaining poised and infinitely deep throughout, it's gorgeous stuff.

*Portraits* is more like a celebration of community and shared taste. The nine musicians involved includes the complete membership of Barn Owl, Higuma, Date Palms, and the Root Strata Records management team, as well as most of the group Tarentel. Together they constitute a San Francisco scene responsible for countless atmospheric records released in small numbers, as well as the splendid On Land festival. But now that many of the players have either relocated to Europe or gone on extended walkabouts, that scene's persistence is in doubt; *Portraits* is a picture of something that may no longer exist. Many of the musicians involved also appeared on *The Headlands*, the recent effort by Barn Owl And The Infinite String Ensemble, and there's a similar interest in making a texturally sumptuous sound stretch to towards the horizon. This is especially evident on the side-long "D", whose swirling mix of tambura and guitars wheels with the deceptively relaxed stateliness of a storm system viewed from an orbiting weather satellite. The LP's flipside has a more spiritual vibe. The massed chanting that glides over the billowing strings on "Sa", and the ringing percussion on "Gong" evoke Himalayan vistas.

Bill Meyer

## Francis Plagne

### *Tenth Volume Of Maps*

Lost And Lonesome LP

On the face of it, Francis Plagne's third release is a wistful bedroom pop collection: his light voice supported by bass, drums and a lush viola/cello string section. But moments of floating anomie betray its origins among Australia's avant garde, and Plagne and his comrades may be found elsewhere performing Christian Wolff or ultra-minimalist Wandelweiser composers. "Oranges" features beautiful prepared piano by improviser Anthony Pateras, while the jaunty "Cilio" is named for Neapolitan holy minimalist composer Luciano Cilio.

Considered simply as pop, Plagne's songs have a wide-eyed quality. Rhythms plod but the sound is acoustically rich; Belle & Sebastian or The High Llamas come to mind, but Plagne is innocent of any know-it-all slickness. And his lyrics are a dada garden of nonsequiturs, although it feels like not enough production time has been devoted to the vocals. Plagne's tuning could be firmer and his delicate voice, not a million miles from Sufjan Stevens, needs beefing up in the studio.

But on the album's B side Plagne starts fool around more. "Yesterday Sponge" drifts from dreamy location recording to cello and percussion drone, and finally into the song "Stops at the giraffes/Yes sir, blue were their eyes/Like the fairy-flax was white." "Features" has a lovely melody, and for the closer "Two Fishing Civilians" the group let their hair down for a doo-wop swing. Something of a latterday Van Dyke Parks, Francis Plagne convinces most when he lets his experimental side roam.

Clive Bell

## Olaf Rupp

### *AuldLangSyne*

Dromos/Gligg CD-R

While many of his fellow Berliners seem to have taken Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe at his word (or rather, Robert Browning's) – less more – guitarist Olaf Rupp has consistently adopted the opposite tack, combating the acoustic instrument's inherent lack of sustain by producing intense hyperactive flurries of notes that derive more from flamenco rasgueados and Chinese pipa technique (Rupp holds his guitar upright like the Chinese lute) than from traditional jazz fingerpicking.

But on three of the nine tracks on *AuldLangSyne* – which you'll find tucked into a crack in the vaguely coffin-shaped hexagonal leather pouch along with an original engraving by Antonio Poppe, whose artwork also adorns the cover – Rupp also plays electric guitar, and the volume pedal allows him breathing space to skirt around the raw edges of feedback and explore ringing harmonics and variations in dynamics. Even in the acoustic pieces, there are occasional pools of calm in the storm of fluttery strumming that reveal an acute ear for melodic line, a sense of clear harmonic forethought and a feel for large-scale form often lacking in the in-the-moment frenzy of his earlier work.

Dan Warburton