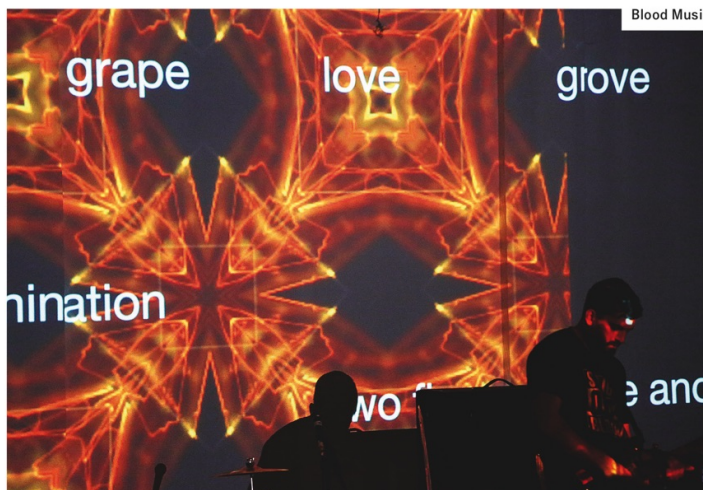




Laura Agnusdei



Two evenings celebrating ten years of **The Tapeworm** label are full of twists and turns. By **Adam Harper**

XWORM: The Tapeworm Tenth Anniversary

Iklectik + Cafe Oto, London, UK

Is Tapeworm really only ten years old? It feels more like three or four decades. Not only does the label boast half a lifetime's worth of absorbing and unique releases, its sundry sonic undertakings have appeared almost exclusively on cassettes, and its catalogue is dotted with veterans like Oren Ambarchi, John Butcher, Fennesz, Sharon Gal, Philip Jeck and Simon Fisher Turner. As such it's a model of underground musical dissemination inherited from the cassette culture of the late 1970s to the 90s, its sermons circulated by post and on merch tables by the faithful in the olden ways. But at the two London concerts Tapeworm held to celebrate its tenth birthday – several artists each night, with a varied cast performers and genres – the collective proves itself younger than ever.

London's Blood Music begins the night at Iklectik with a single, deafening strike on a large taiko drum suspended halfway between the floor and ceiling in a harness of ropes. The martial beat and formless guitar-feedback solo that followed maintain the volume, which in the small South London venue isn't a kindness. With SavFrost – the duo of Edwin Pouncey (aka Savage Pencil) and Barbara Frost – the sheer breadth and depth of the night begins to reveal itself. With his roiling liquid-cartoon characters projected behind him, Pouncey drags an electric guitar across the stage on a chair before scraping it with a bulldog clip and holding it aloft in strange triumph. Frost reads lines from the book the two have collaborated on, *Cuckoo Head Cool Dog*, where drawings and text pieces respond to each other – fierce and witty fantasies of the tables turned and power reclaimed.

Tears|Ov, a trio of performers mixing keys, samples,

cello and voice, suggest the house band of a forgotten surrealist saloon, their plaintive torch songs loose but indomitable, and embellished with the voices of old gentlemen that could have been sampled from the grooves on shards of ancient bakelite. Next is The Howling, a combination of writer and *Wire* contributor Ken Hollings and Howlround, which is sound artist Robin The Fog accompanied by an array of signal processing artefacts. Hollings frantically declaims a list of postmodern absurdities while Howlround reinvents dub as the psychoacoustic byproduct of a series of washing machines at a school disco.

By this point in the evening, avant garde and camp are circling each other like high-strung cats in a back alley, and in bounds Dale Cornish in silver dungarees, promising a "press-the-space-bar medley of pop hits". What follows is a cross between a karaoke act, early Throbbing Gristle and a 2000s electroclash MC, self-referential and scene-referential over Cornish's characteristically gritty and obtuse loops. Having briefly taken aim at the idea of deconstructed club music (one popular term for a recently fashionable form of electronica), Cornish is followed by Zeno van den Broek, who uses a combination of asynchronous bass structures and punchy, randomised beats that has been heard at many a European festival lately. My curiosity is reignited, though, by the ways in which pitch content – drones and overtones – is hidden in the club's crumbling concrete structures.

Two nights later at Cafe Oto, Simon Fisher Turner kicks things off with modal strumming at the piano ensconced in throbbing sinewaves and samples of young people chanting at a climate protest. When slowed rock drum loops join in and Turner begins to hurl tone-clusters from the keyboard, the effect is of a

21st century cover of Pink Floyd's *The Wall*. Turntable materialist Philip Jeck and sound artist Jana Winderen then perform together for the first time in what is one of the high points of the two nights. Layers of sonic particulates fall like pyroclastic snow in the aftermath of a huge conflagration, and are joined by divebombing whistles and the deathly echoes of whatever alert system had heralded the disaster. Zerocrop then reasserts the melodic end of the Tapeworm spectrum with songs whose apparent simplicity belies their emotional complexity and bittersweet roots in folk, post-punk and jungle.

The night then enters a capacious seam of techno and dub: Stefan Goldmann shines searchlights on a cyberpunk undercity resounding with sirens and the scannings of passing drones, and Jay Glass Dubs flings loops that rise into the air like reverse sycamore seeds before building an interdimensional tunnelling machine, urging it on with commands in a soft but sure falsetto. The subsequent performance by Italian composer Laura Agnusdei then wonderfully encapsulates that peculiarly Tapeworm-esque combination of experimental noise and vintage kitsch – her live saxophone is a character dancing smokily amid trains of clicks and squeaks. Marta De Pascalis is last, using analogue synthesizers as if in homage to Terry Riley and all things kosmische, her riff reharmonisations somehow making 80s film company logos continuous with the deepest of psychedelic knowledge. Having been announced that evening as one of the younger artists in the Tapeworm parade, her set nevertheless sits well within a celebration of one of London's greatest underground labels, and the paradoxical union of continuity and history at its heart. □