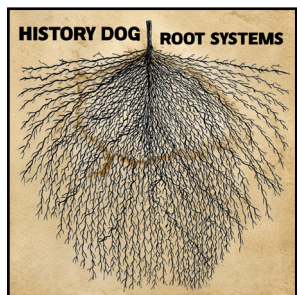


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For more info visit okse.bandcamp.com. Val Jeanty is at Roulette Jun. 3 (with Nicole Mitchell) and Jun. 6 (with Shamanic Principle), both part of Vision Festival. See Calendar.



Root Systems
History Dog (Lesley Mok, Shara Lunon, Chris Williams, Luke Stewart) (Otherly Love)
by Ariella Stok

Although their name History Dog emphasizes an excavation of the past, the collective formed by four of today's most exciting improvisers—Lesley Mok (drums), Chris Williams (trumpet), Luke Stewart (bass) and Shara Lunon (vocals)—is very much a response to the here and now, embodying the present moment in all its complexity.

Root Systems, the group's first record, which they describe as a "family affair," uses the tools of the studio to create a body of work deeply engaged with sociopolitical events, limning the space between resistance and radical existence. On Mother's Day evening last month (May 11), their record release show filled Brooklyn's Union Pool with a rapt crowd, open to the challenging performance the band was putting forth, combining free improv with noise and electroacoustic experimentation, which was abstracted and at times, abrasive.

On the album's opening track, "HE SHE WE", Lunon launches into an extended inquiry into identity, erasure and questions of how power is conferred and taken away through the status of its visibility: "He, she, we, us, they, them...I didn't even see you." The ample use of electronics and extended techniques broadens and blurs the palette of sounds the musicians coax from their instruments, achieving that wonderful effect of not being able to easily tell from whom any particular sound is being generated at a given moment. Eschewing solos to instead focus on novel textures that contribute to a unified group sound, Mok propels across the drum kit with mallets, sticks and hands; Williams' trumpet bleats and signals and Stewart scrapes and rubs his electric bass strings.

The motif of laughter is used to confront the absurdities of oppressive systems on twin tracks "HILARITY" and "HILARIOUS", with Lunon incredulously demanding, "You're so fucking funny... you're just going to take that and say that's yours?" In the live setting, the causticity of this query took on additional depth, its relevance made further pointed by sampling the recent statement by Columbia student and Palestinian activist Mohsen Madawi upon release from a two-week detention. Defiantly addressing his oppressors, he declared: "I am not afraid of you." The track "HONEST" opens on Lunon's susurrating breath joined by a pulsing bass throb, whirring oscillations, the sound of scraped cymbals, a tolling bell and Williams' delay-soaked horn—a dark soundscape that calls to mind a hospital scene or a passage through the bardo—the sound of fighting for one's life.

For more info visit otherlylove.net. Lesley Mok is at Asian Arts Initiative Jun. 7 (with Che Chen) and Roulette Jun. 25 (with Myra Melford's Fire and Water). Luke Stewart is at Vision Festival at Roulette Jun. 3 (with gabby fluke-mogul) and Jun. 6 (with David Murray),

and Ibeam Brooklyn Jun. 29 (with gabby fluke-mogul). See 100 Miles Out and Calendar.



Was It 1984-85?
Angling (Cuneiform)
Live 2019: A Map of Books
Collapsible Shoulder Big Band (Cuneiform)
by Kurt Gottschalk

Sometime in what might be called the second generation of Downtown, following the outsider spirit of Fluxus, but adding a DIY punk sensibility and a propensity for jazz and nonjazz improvisation, there came a band that was destined to be unheard but somehow has now beaten the odds. Few ever heard them. They played two gigs but had three names and it took years, 40 of them, maybe 41 depending on who's counting, for a set of recordings to see the light of computer screens. But here they are in *Was It 1984-85?* and *Live 2019: A Map of Books*.

This brief-moment-in-time of a band was comprised of George Cartwright (soprano), Fred Chalenor (bass), Chris Cochrane (guitar) and Zeena Parkins (harp). The members would go on to play in various configurations of Curlew and No Safety, among other projects over the years. But those were different moments in time.

Angling was the one group that, at length, won out over CCCP and Her Hat, making their way into a studio with drummer-engineer Wharton Tiers (who also recorded Glenn Branca, Sonic Youth, Of Cabbages and Kings and Y Pants) at the board. The eight tracks laid down have since been mastered for release by Elliott Sharp (another Downtown mainstay with a finely-tuned ear) and released as *Was It 1984-85?*, proving the cloudy nature of their brief existence. It's a fun listen, and fortunately this unit cared enough to preserve something. The audio quality is certainly more than acceptable, and as good as many Downtown records of the day. It also holds true to the eclecticism in that era: moments of bluster, occasional bits of Canterbury vibe, strong soloing and a Uruguayan folk song. It also comes off as a bit tenuous, like a set of demos. The pieces are those they would have worked on, developed, brought more life to, but that wasn't to be. For scenesters, though, it's well worth checking out.

Much water has passed under many bridges since then. In 2019, Cochrane introduced a new band at Roulette, which was no longer in a West Broadway loft but housed in a proper theater in Brooklyn. Collapsible Shoulder played two shows (the second in 2020, despite the title), from which the 11 tracks on *A Map of Books* were culled. It's a big band—a total of 20 musicians appeared across the two sets, including older associates: Parkins, Eszter Balint (violin, vocals), Kato Hideki (bass), Jim Pugliese (drums) and Syd Straw (vocals)), and relatively newer names: Gordon Beeferman (keyboards), Gelsey Bell (vocals) and Brian Chase (drums). The songs they played explode off the disc, but what's most notable is the strength of Cochrane's writing. He's long been an intriguing songwriter, but the cuts here—which also includes covers of songs by Fred Frith, Robert Pollard and This Heat—are sensitive, engaging, and, dare I say, refined? Cochrane's not trying to prove anything, or at least it doesn't seem so. He's not trying to be anything with Collapsible Shoulder. The songs get a bit bluesy at times, a bit poppy, even slightly Beatles-esque, but Cochrane's writing has never come off so heartfelt.

For more info cuneiformrecords.com

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