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MUSIC: PLAYLIST; Ominous Rap, Bedroom Pop and Long-Buried Jazz

By NATE CHINEN

Dälek

Ominous, furious and humorless: those are a few adjectives you could pin on Dälek, the underground hip-hop group from Newark. The group's new album, "Abandoned Language" (Ipecac), is a characteristically dark effort and a typically strong one. The only rapper on the album is dälek -- lowercase, to distinguish him from the group -- and he sustains a brooding, apocalyptic intensity throughout. One minute into the first track he plants this mood in a context: "From the scorching country fields to the heart of projects/What we know of history's always marred in violence." Then comes a declaration of faith in the revolutionary power of speech, though it's tempered with wary cynicism. Surrounding dälek's words, and eventually swallowing them, is an ambient wash produced by Oktopus and Joshua Booth. That queasy industrial thrum, supplemented by the turntable scribbles of Motiv and Rob Swift, marks "Abandoned Language" as a sonic descendant of "Loveless," the 1991 alternative-rock epic by My Bloody Valentine. But Dälek, or at least dälek, has ambitions beyond stylish dissonance. So when this album's atmosphere stifles its subversive wordplay, there's no sense of blissful fulfillment -- just more rage.

Shining

Like some other good young Norwegian bands, Shining traffics in archly stylized genre bafflement. On "Grindstone" (Rune Grammofon), the group's fourth album, that impulse yields a jarring but meticulous quasi suite, informed by sources ranging from Franz Schubert to the thrash metal of Sepultura to the soundtrack scramble of John Zorn's Naked City. It's attention-deficit music, jumpy and spasmodic, but it doesn't shy from any species of grandeur. Jorgen Munkeby, who mainly plays guitar and saxophone, leads the group with brazen confidence, and his three band mates decisively match his frenzy. The finishing touches come courtesy of the engineer and producer Kare Chr. Vestheim, and they're most obvious early on, in the delirious transition from "Winterreise" to "Stalemate Longan Runner." It's a completely over-the-top stretch of music, and that seems to be the point.

Rosie Thomas

Unnerved by the aboveground production of her last album, the Seattle-based singer-songwriter Rosie Thomas decided to record some new music in the bedrooms and kitchens of her friends. "These Friends of Mine," on her new label imprint, Sing-a-long, is the charmingly scattershot result. Of course it might have been more scattered and less charming if Ms. Thomas had friends other than Sufjan Stevens, Denison Witmer and Josh Myers, all capable strummers and singers; don't begrudge her good connections. And don't fault her for covering love songs by R.E.M. and Fleetwood Mac, though her sweet-tempered voice sounds better on a custom-made confessional like "I Have Much Further to Go." At a mere 33 minutes "These Friends of Mine" doesn't overstay its welcome, though its dreaminess can still grow cloying, as when "Kite Song" arrives on the heels of "Paper Doll." What saves the album is a genuine sense of intimacy, along with a stealthy proficiency. With friends like these, who needs a band?

Abram Wilson

In the self-defined subgenre known as black British jazz, few musicians have shown more promise or received more recognition than the trumpeter Abram Wilson. A Londoner for only the last five years, Mr. Wilson grew up in New Orleans, an experience that clearly informs his second album, "Ride! Ferris Wheel to the Modern Day Delta" (Dune). Employing a sextet, a blues trio and a group he calls the Londonleas Brass Band, Mr. Wilson has produced a kind of jazz opera, complete with characters and a plot. (In short: A young trumpeter abandons the family business, a jazz club, in favor of a hip-hop-influenced brass outfit. Uh-oh.) The hero, portrayed without strain by Mr. Wilson, announces his intentions in an overture called "I Want More for Me Than This." The album improves as it progresses, but with an elephant in the room: Wynton Marsalis, a still-too-obvious influence on Mr. Wilson as both a trumpeter and a composer. Could the album's symbolic patriarch be a stand-in for Mr. Marsalis? Listen to some of Mr. Wilson's solos -- start with "Why You Guys Laughin'?" -- and decide for yourself.

Frank Foster

Thirty years ago next October, the tenor saxophonist Frank Foster and the drummer Elvin Jones brought their Loud Minority Big Band into a New York studio, recording enough material for an album. For various reasons that album was never released, and the master tapes went into storage. They have now been recovered, restored and newly issued as "Well Water" (Piadrum), a portrait of a sure-footed band during a transitional moment in jazz culture. Mr. Foster, who would later assume full leadership and stewardship of the Loud Minority, applies his formidable arranging skills to six songs, including three of his own. (One halfhearted original, with a jazz-rock groove that Mr. Foster disdainfully describes in the liner notes as "un-swing," reflects some of the era's tensions.) Several of the band's members make memorable solo contributions, none more so than the alto saxophone lead by C. I. Williams on "There'll Be a Time." That is, unless you count the drumming of Mr. Jones, an unmistakable force even in this setting, with so many other forces at play.

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