

101

earplug



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August 16 - 29

Earplug is a twice-monthly email magazine, delivering a handpicked selection of news, sounds, videos, and original features to the international electronic-music community.

This being Issue 101, you'd expect Earplug to take an educational slant; appropriately enough, even we are feeling schooled by the variety within the multifarious beast called "electronic music" on offer. London's M.I.A. is back with a new album, proving her mélange of hip-hop, dancehall, funk carioca, and genres further afield was no fluke, while our feature subjects, Al Haca — whose new album is so good, we couldn't resist plugging them twice in one issue — take a similarly roundabout path to bass supremacy. In our News section, we catch up with International Pony, a group that deserves far more exposure for its curious approaches to electronic soul, while saying a sad farewell to one of modern music's original headmasters, Tony Wilson. And with Matthew Dear's labelmate Osborn locking down the old guard, it's Booka Shade who lead off our Listen section, with one of the tightest selections of new-school house and techno you'll find in any dance-floor classroom.

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REVIEW: Campfire Sounds 2007

Aug 3-5

Wave Farm: Acra, New York

www.free103point9.org/event.php?eventID=1167

Lightning strikes close, flashing rigid blue and white lines above the black treetops; like a sanctuary in the center of the storm, free103point9's Wave Farm in upstate New York remains dry. It's well above Woodstock, looking toward the Catskills, and on Friday evening the roving Brooklyn-based radio station's getaway near the town of Cairo (pronounced "kay-row" by locals) is an abstract grouping of shadows swaying to the flickering of fires and the frantic gurgle of frogs.

In the morning, it's a veritable summer camp, with rolling woods, muddy ponds, open fields, and the sloping wooden bones of a massive two-story porch — really, an event center in progress — that doubles as the weekend festival's main stage. DJ Dizzy ushers in the early afternoon with ambient sounds and subtle abstractions before Silent Records founder Kim Cascone takes the stage, dropping heavy drones under obtuse laptop electronics. Avoiding the heavy summer sun, a handful of onlookers perches under the porch's overhang, watching Cascone from behind as his fingers guide the scraping crackles to a sonorous peak.

When the time comes to wander, the music does too. Consummate airwave adventurers, the fest's organizers have set battery-powered radios throughout the woods (even in the porta-potty), and the sound of a looped, stuttering George Bush emerges from the landscape as naturally as a cawing cicada. With tones emerging from all directions, it's easy to swing back in a hammock, listening in surround-sound as weirdo-beardos Sunburned Hand of the Man begin to conjure wild psychedelic mischief in the distance.

Upon closer inspection, one finds the band huddled close on the sunny stage, its singer moaning deeply as he stares through the tiny eye slits of a white kabuki mask at an ornately framed owl portrait held in his hands. Like its brethren, a stuffed raccoon (who, in a cruel bit of artful juxtaposition, is sporting a coonskin cap), the stage prop is never adequately explained — it's just another part of the trip, man.

Later, similarly minded New Weird Americanists MV & EE coax in the evening with an otherworldly haze of abstract avant-folk. When the sun finally shrinks away, a small campfire-side stage bedecked in candles and tiki torches is set, the fire is lit, marshmallows emerge, and the Dust Dive Flash's Laura Ortman greets the darkness with the sweet bowing of violin and the tinkling of pre-processed guitar.

Ortman's songs, and, later, those of her band, wash across the late hours as the fire continues to burn, and things grow a bit groggy. Finally, as the mirth approaches midnight, longhairs and late-'30s parents alike begin to slink to their tents, burrowing deep into sleeping bags as the resonating sounds of whispery avant-folkers Latitude/Longitude softly rock them to sleep. (AP)