

"Unterstratum" is an immersive high point, with hyper articulate production layering distorted modular sequences and static bursts with distant clangs and churning drones that seem to sound from behind and all around. "Unhuman Conditions" teeters on the edge of inertia, but its refusal to overstate is part of the pleasure until harmonic material enters, urgent and animated, drawing the fragmented parts together into something unexpectedly emotive. Here, and across the whole album, it feels like these elements aren't mere sounds but characters, with agency, tension and purpose. Their interactions create narratives, the stereo field becomes a kind of mise en scène.

Leah Kardos

Kayo Dot

Every Rock, Every Half-Truth Under Reason

Prophecy CD/DL/LP

Flummox

Southern Progress

Needlejuice CD/DL/LP/MC

Walking Bombs

Blessings Bestrewn Pt 1

Bandcamp DL

Following the demise of Maudlin Of The Well, Connecticut born multi-instrumentalist Toby Driver formed Kayo Dot and in 2003 released *Choirs Of The Eye*, a deconstructed doom metal record of whispered vocals and guitar textures fluctuating between near silence and cacophonous sludge. On *Every Rock, Every Half-Truth Under Reason*, Driver reunites the band's original line-up to explore ideas around creativity and AI. Opener "Mental Shed" cloaks a whisper-shrieked vocal in graveyard drone, strung-out and reverberant to obscure the narrative.

What follows is equally ambiguous, the spectral textures of "Closet Door In The Room Where She Died" suggesting the presence of something sinister, but the sound is always distant and disjointed so that no clear picture can form. While conjuring the diaphanous guile of material generated by AI, these pieces also characterise Driver's eschewing of expectations and his reticence to be restricted by the traditional boundaries of metal.

Flummox also operate outside comfortable genre definitions. The Nashville, Tennessee five-piece describe themselves as a "band of queers living in the Bible Belt" and *Southern Progress* as their "most obnoxious album yet". Like its predecessor, 2022's *Rephlummoxed*, it's all over the place – in the best way. "What We're In For..." opens with triumphant hair metal riffage which quickly morphs into a queasy rhythm somewhere between Deep South and circus tent, before landing a thrash metal flourish that drifts into a proggy coda. Intended as a critique of America's right wing fundament – the intersection where church meets state meets fascism – the lyrical imagery on tracks such as "Long Pork" ("Hey pa, won't you fry us up some long pork?") is as viscerally provocative as the sound is stylistically eclectic, recalling Frank Zappa in that respect. If this is their most obnoxious record, then it's an attacker's perceived obnoxiousness of his victim when they have the audacity to say "Fuck you!" via righteous metal bangers.

The Wire / Soundcheck / A-Z

Blessings Bestrewn Pt 1 is another fuck you of sorts – exploring self-belief and personal discovery, it's about positivity in the face of the world's many darknesses. It's also stylistically diverse, described by Walking Bombs aka Morgan Y Evans as containing "both Aborym and Spin Doctors influences". "Mirror Mosh" is sleazy and shambling, snotty Jane's Addiction-like guitar countered by roaring vocal affirmations – "We put the wheels in motion! Fuck what you heard!".

Blessings Bestrewn Pt 1 has its quieter moments, such as "The Lonely Petition (Grace Remnants)" and "Lizard Boy", the latter of whose production brings to mind 1990s so-called alternative rock like The Presidents Of The United States Of America. But Evans's lyrical attack is more effective when backed by something strung out and abrasive, the aggressive crunch of "Enby Soul Endogenous" for example deepening the impact of his already affecting vocals.

Spenser Tomson

Benedicte Maurseth

Mirra

Hubro CD/DL/LP

Hardanger fiddle player Benedicte Maurseth grew up amid the mountains of Eidfjord, Norway – an area settled initially by Stone Age reindeer hunters. Today, a pair of antlers form the motif on the regional flag, yet Maurseth has only encountered reindeer in the wild on two occasions. Herds do still roam that rocky, glacial terrain, but human encroachment poses an increasing threat, even in such an inhospitable landscape.

Mirra takes its name from a dialect word that refers to the animals' habit of running together, galloping in circles, for warmth and security from predators. Maurseth's music is a celebration of the physical beauty, resourcefulness and behavioural idiosyncrasies of those elusive creatures, but it also rings an alarm bell, drawing attention to their endangered status.

The voice of her instrument, although increasingly familiar to listeners outside of Norway, remains a sonic distillation of the locality. Those inimitable Hardanger tones ring with emotional attachment to the land and its history, and Maurseth's integration into this carefully crafted composition of the natural sounds of not only reindeer, but also other northern European wildlife now under threat, including snowy owl and Lapland bunting, is deeply involving, rather than simply evocative. The pacing and patterning of *Mirra* have been designed to draw us in, as well as to represent the cyclical phases of animal life.

Maurseth's roots in folk tradition reverberate through her communicative melodic phrasing, but on *Mirra*, with bassist Mats Eilertsen, keyboard player Morten Qvenild and percussionist Håkon Stene, she undertakes a journey into realms beyond categorisation. Surprises arise throughout, but a particular highlight is the blissful dance of "Sommarbeite", where the shamanic spirit of Terry Riley seems to have alighted on the Hardangervidda plateau, guiding the group in their pursuit of the evasive herd.

Julian Cowley

Merzbow

Sedonis

Signal Noise DL/LP

Merzbow's career has been so bountiful that he has become an embodiment of noise aesthetics, achieving notoriety even outside of experimental circles. That recognition comes accompanied by a reflex to reduce his music to a parody of itself, a 'just noise' epithet that acknowledges only the harsher expressions while discounting the nuanced works in his oeuvre, like the free jazz collaborations with Balázs Pándi and the ambient soundscapes made with Vanity Productions.

Sedonis ventures even further astray. Comparable to Room40's recent reissue of 1996's *The Prosperity Of Vice*, *The Misfortune Of Virtue*, the new album captures Merzbow at his most dynamic and diverse, with four pieces that rarely need to go full blast to fry neural pathways. Instead, they are stretched by gradations in volume and texture, fluttering and revolving, growing and subsiding. Though it all seems spontaneous, the composition of sounds remains meticulously coherent from start to finish.

On "Sedonis A" the sputter of a misfiring car engine transforms into a cascade of bowed koto, while mellower and harder segments sway back and forth like the bewildering ruckus of construction work outside your bedroom window at 6am. "Sedonis B" is an atmospheric intro to an infernal big beat that never drops, though wobbling basslines and suspicious bleeps sneak in, carried by feedback and static. "Sedonis C" is borderline pointillist, with a patter of acid rain that devolves into pure abstraction. Here, a swarm of angry mosquitoes lies in wait, armed with crunching drum machines, ready to avenge all their swatted comrades.

Meanwhile, "Monolith 4" is an exercise in ambience building, modulating and sloshing closely controlled clouds of granulated sound in some vast container. Even in its more concrete form, Merzbow's music remains a blank canvas, capable of producing countless possible experiences.

Antonio Poscic

Motherfuckers JMB & Co

Music Excitement Action Beauty

Via Parigi DL/LP

A Washington, DC based supergroup of sorts: the J stands for Jim Thomson (formerly Hans Orifice of GWAR) on drums; M is for Marc Minsker (Third Eye Lounge) on bass, guitar and harmonium; B is Brian Weitz (aka Geologist of Animal Collective) on hurdy-gurdy. *Music Excitement Action Beauty* is the result of an improvised session captured in a single afternoon, later edited by Weitz into this seven track debut album.

The result is an occasionally thrilling, often frustrating collection of instrumental jams that flirt with motorik, ritualistic drone and psychedelic freakout. There are moments where the trio really lock into immersive, head-nodding zone-out acid rock excursions. There are also meandering detours into noise and chaos that come across more like the residue of jamming than the evidence of telepathic ensemble chemistry. Does the